

TRAUMA EXPRESSED THROUGH SPACE, FRAMES, AND COLOR IN FRANCO-ARAB
GRAPHIC NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Johnny Youssef Francis: Trauma Expressed through Space, Frames and Color in Franco-Arab Graphic Novels
(Under the direction of Hassan Melehy)

This paper examines the effectiveness of five particular graphic novels, written by Zeina Abirached, and Riad Sattouf, at evoking an experienced trauma beyond simply using a combination of words and images. Both authors in this analysis employ methodical border and spatial techniques that allow for a more vivid and unique illustration of their endured, personal trauma that goes beyond other traditional literary genres. The border and spatial techniques analyzed include framing frequency, frame size and angle, and color found throughout the graphic novels in question. The strategic employment of these techniques permits a more refined expression of the character's relationships to their trauma: child-Zeina with the Lebanese Civil War, and child-Riad with the relationship to his father.

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Introduction

When examining nonfiction literature involving traumatic experiences, the notions of narrator reliability and memory fidelity remain a question that must be addressed: have the narrator's words accurately captured the minute details from the past, or has the traumatic event influenced his memory over time? In recent years, authors have used graphic novels as a tool in conveying their previously experienced trauma, employing both textual narration in tandem with graphic illustrations to synthesize a more holistic image of their trauma. The choice of the graphic novel allows authors the freedom to express themselves visually through their use of space on each page, how and where their text is written, and the exact positioning of the frames on each page, among many other illustrative choices.

Border and spatial choices made by authors of graphic novels are particularly significant because framing frequency and irregular framing reflects the irregularity of the narration, which can indicate a turbulent past of the author. Other border and spatial choices include frame size and angle, where the author can use the extra background space to subtly include other informative illustrations. The use of color or lack thereof can also help the author create a holistic experience of their trauma for the reader. Certain colors, their juxtaposition, and the saturation of those colors can add a great deal to the reader's interpretation of the events in the graphic novel. All of these stylistic choices beyond just the words and images themselves make the graphic novel a highly complex outlet for the expression of traumatic events. Furthermore,

these choices add many dimensions to be examined for their additions to the overall message of the work and intention of the author.

In this thesis, I will analyze how the spatial and border choices made by the authors of several autobiographical graphic novels — Zeina Abirached's *Je me souviens Beyrouth* and *Mourir partir revenir: Le jeu des hirondelles* and Riad Sattouf's three volumes of *L'Arabe du futur* — further evoke the main characters' relationships to trauma (the former stemming from the Lebanese Civil War, the latter from child-Riad's relationship with Abdel-Razak, his Syrian father) beyond simply the words and illustrations that make up the graphic novels. In this analysis, I will undertake a number of tasks. First, I will situate the graphic novel as a form of literature and its relationship to notions of trauma. Secondly, I will discuss key historical and political background necessary to the reader's understanding of how trauma is operating in these graphic novels, particularly as it relates to Abirached's works since her source of trauma is the Lebanese Civil War. Upon completion of historical background, I will briefly discuss the choice of titles and their significance for the graphic novels in question. I then delve into how spatial and border choices made by the two authors more clearly elicit relationships with trauma including: framing frequency, followed by frame angle and zoom, and lastly the use of color in their graphic novels.

Trauma and the Graphic Novel

In order to discuss trauma effectively in the form of the graphic novel, I turn to Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma: "The pathology consists [. . .] in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (Caruth, 4). The reader witnesses this possession in both Abirached's and

Sattouf's graphic novels. The character of young Zeina Abirached is possessed by the Lebanese Civil War. In her graphic novel *Mourir Partir Revenir le jeu des hirondelles*, child-Zeina and her neighbors are forced to find various ways to distract themselves from the destruction of the war on a night of particularly heavy bombing. The trauma of the war can only be momentarily forgotten as the group partakes in baking sweets, telling stories, and looking at old photos, only to be brought back to their traumatic reality by the sounds of falling bombs, the radio alerts of the day's death toll, and the gut-wrenching anxiety about their parents not yet having returned home safely. *Mourir Partir Revenir* shows the extent to which the Lebanese Civil War has repeatedly possessed the characters in the span of one evening. The reader witnesses an extension and prolonging of the war's trauma in *Je me souviens Beyrouth* as Abirached recounts various key memories of her childhood but also discusses a part of her life after the end of the war, and the weight of that trauma that continues to linger over her following its termination. Even after its conclusion, when she is living in Paris, she continues to be overcome by the trauma and anxiety of even the possibility of a war starting again near her family in Lebanon.

In the case of the character of Riad Sattouf as a child, his source of trauma and anxiety is Abdel-Razak, his father, who literally possesses and directs his life throughout the graphic novel. Whether it be the several unexpected relocation choices made by Abdel-Razak, his extreme violent outbursts, or his role in allowing a convicted murderer to walk free, Abdel-Razak clearly serves a source of trauma for child-Riad. His fear and belated possession become more evident throughout each graphic novel and throughout the volume in general as he becomes repeatedly haunted by the bull statue his father always carries around with him as his good luck charm to signify the safety of home. Throughout the *L'arabe du futur* volume the Taurus becomes the key signifier of Abdel-Razak for child-Riad and through his malignant encounters with the Taurus in

dreams and in imagination, the reader becomes increasingly cognizant of the trauma between father and son. As the child, he cannot physically nor mentally avoid being controlled by his father.

It is important to consider why these authors chose graphic novels to recount their traumatic stories in lieu of other literary forms. Trauma has long since been depicted in other literary genres such as memoirs, poems, and autobiographies; however, it has a relatively new presence through the form of the graphic novel. Typically, trauma impacts individuals at a personal level because it can become internalized and follow those affected through the rest of their lives, as in the case of the graphic novels that I analyze.

Evidence of the way that traumatic events lend themselves to being illustrated through the graphic novel is present in Hillary Chute's book, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, where she notes the emergence of contemporary authors who "now more than ever, offer powerful nonfiction narratives in comics form" (Chute, 2). Chute continues later in the book by saying that "personal event memories particularly have a core imagistic component" (Chute, 133). Because, by Caruth's definition, trauma relates directly to either an image or event experienced personally, to then recount this trauma through carefully constructed images alongside text in a graphic novel seems particularly appropriate (Caruth, 4). Their illustrative nature can more accurately and easily describe a past traumatic event than words alone ever could. Myriem El Maizi, states in her work, *Bande Dessinee, Autobiographie, et Guerre au Liban*, that "Il semblerait ainsi que la bande dessinée, de par sa dimension visuelle, puisse offrir un mode privilégié pour l'expression de la mémoire traumatique" (El Maizi, 250). Through the graphic novel, the reader can more intimately share in the emotions of the author because along with their thoughts, we see specifically what the author wants us to see. Moreover,

authors of graphic novels have a plethora of available spatial and border options – including framing frequency, frame angle and size, and color – in which they can not only develop their own unique, desired style, but further use that style to help convey trauma in novel ways.

Historical Context

Since it is the source of child-Zeina’s trauma, it is crucial to understand the historical significance and physical and emotional impact of the Lebanese Civil War, not only on those who lived in Beirut, but on the country as a whole. One of the reasons the trauma has never really been resolved is because following the end of the war “many Lebanese have evaded an open discussion of the conflict, leading a prominent Lebanese scholar, Samir Khalaf, to speak of a ‘collective amnesia’ in this respect” (Barak, 50). In his article “‘Don’t Mention the War?’: The Politics of Remembrance and Forgetfulness in Postwar Lebanon” Oren Barak attempts to understand the nature of the “collective amnesia” that permeated all facets of daily Lebanese life following the official end of the war in 1990. He claims that while the government “endorsed the massive construction projects carried out by SOLIDERE, the private firm owned by Rafiq Hariri (Lebanon’s Prime Minister in 1992-98 and 2000-04) ...it refrained from building a memorial for the Civil War”. Barak adds that most state officials have chosen to “remain silent with regard to the conflict” (Barak, 52). Reconstruction of buildings, without a state-issued memorial site indicates a government desire for city life to return to “normal” as it was before the violence of the war, while also encouraging a climate of forgetfulness of the traumatic events. With the lack of a memorial comes the lack of closure from citizens who experienced the war first hand; the buildings have been rebuilt, but their families have not. Christians and Muslims experienced tremendous amounts of loss and trauma; however, again it was the government’s attempt to circumnavigate detailed discussions of the violence and trauma which only further perpetuated it

in the eyes of citizens. Stemming from the governmental literal and symbolic silence about the horrors of the war, Barak claims that “the state and the political society in Lebanon have both refrained from dealing with the war and with the question of who did what to whom in its course” which ultimately allows the climate of collective amnesia to seep into quotidian life. (Barak, 53).

Even more frustrating to those who experienced the Lebanese Civil War is the Ta’if Accord, which officially brought the war to an end. This “resolution” failed to accomplish many other things, allowing for the proliferation of a shared national trauma. In his book *War and Memory in Lebanon*, Sune Haugbolle emphasizes that “the Ta’if Accord succeeded in ending the civil war but offered no solution to several of the contentions that led to the war and fueled it. It was a halfhearted resolution, most importantly in the sense that it shelved the Syrian issue and failed to address the fate of the Palestinian camps and the Israeli occupation” (Haugbolle, 67). By shelving the conflicting topics of the surrounding countries, the Lebanese government not only showed a lack of interest in those affairs, but also ultimately failed to discuss the subjects that initially ignited the civil war. This essentially erases the opportunity for the country to learn from its history and avoid similar future trauma. Moreover, because the Ta’if Accord did not operate at an efficient pace, “the disarmament of the militias, the stabilization of the economy and the restoration of the battered state institutions took years to achieve. As a consequence, many Lebanese continued to feel that they were living the war even though peace had been declared” (Haugbolle, 66). While it is normal for trauma to linger after any war, the trauma associated with the Lebanese Civil War is even further perpetuated due to the “collective amnesia” of the people and government, and the inefficiency of the Ta’if Accord, which contributed to an enduring sense of war, loss and trauma.

Reflecting on Caruth's aforementioned definition of trauma, it becomes very clear why the slow-paced Ta'if Accord, coupled with the notion of "collective amnesia," was conducive to a potent traumatic atmosphere. Caruth reminds us that "the [traumatic] event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belated in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth, 4). As a result of its slow pace, the Ta'if Accord prolonged the entire nation's exposure to the trauma the Accord was attempting to erase, allowing for the trauma to repeatedly possess its subjects. For the nation as a whole, due to intention to erase all signs of painful trauma and its failure to do so properly, the Ta'if Accord represents a scar that has never quite properly healed.

As Caruth describes the "belated, repeated possession" of trauma, the reader directly perceives this sense of lingering trauma in *Je me souviens*. Abirached illustrates an enormous cliff gap that takes up the entire frame to represent the distance between her life in Paris, and the lives of her mother and father who stayed in Lebanon, and how she continues to experience trauma through them: "Je me souviens de juillet 2006. Je suis à Paris, ils sont tous là-bas. Il y a vingt ans déjà, ma plus grande angoisse était de les perdre. Je me souviens que ma mère m'envoyait plusieurs textos par jour pour me rassurer. Mais je sais que ce qu'ils ont vécu est dans tous les textos qu'elle ne m'a pas envoyés" (Abirached). These excerpts indicate to the reader that although the narrator has left the country, she continues to be possessed by her initial and prolonged traumatic war experience. Additionally, now that there exists this large distance between herself and her family, Abirached – and a majority of the Lebanese diasporic population – experiences another type of trauma based on anxiety that the country would return to a state similar to the time of the war. At the very least, she was able to stay in close proximity to her

family during the war. However, being so distant from them now, she experiences a constant traumatic anxiety of a similar conflict flaring back up without her there to be with her family.

Moreover, it is not just child-Zeina traumatized by the Lebanese Civil War, but evidently the entire country. In Abirached's graphic novel *Mourir Partir Revenir le jeu des hirondelles* the reader is presented with various characters – neighbors who come to her parent's apartment to avoid damage caused by the bombings – who each must deal with their traumatic reality in the ways that they know how. Particularly interesting to this analysis, especially when considering the aforementioned idea of “collective amnesia,” is the short conversation between Chucri (the young handy-man in the apartment complex and taxi driver whose father died at a checkpoint during the war) and Anhala (the grandmother-like figure in the apartment complex). Upon talking about the duration of the war, Chucri responds to Anhala's claim that it would continue for several more years by saying “Mais nooon...voyons, Anhala, dans un an maximum, c'est fini, on n'en parle plus, et on recommence à vivre comme avant. Je ne dis pas que ça va être facile, hein. C'est vrai, il faudra quelques années pour tout reconstruire, pour relancer l'économie...et oublier. L'essentiel, d'ici là, c'est de continuer à vivre” (Abirached, 52). Most striking about Chucri's words is his insistence on the war's quick termination followed by a silence and a forgetting of the trauma that the entire city and country had experienced. Revisiting Oren Barak's discussion of “collective amnesia”, he advocates that the nationwide forgetting that occurred after the Lebanese war was induced by the government's refusal to acknowledge the trauma experienced by all Lebanese people involved by declining open conversations with the public and never building any sort of monument as they rebuilt the destroyed city of Beirut. However, with Chucri's words, the reader witnesses an example of the initial roots for a “collective amnesia” stemming from the people, and not from the government as Barak has

argued. Chucri, who has already violently lost his father to the war's violence, sees an escape to his traumatic reality through the termination of the war followed by silence. Forgetting is currently his best solution to escaping the trauma that he has experienced so far.

Therefore, there exists a discrepancy between where the source of "collective amnesia" originated, as the reader clearly witnesses a desire in *Mourir Partir Revenir le jeu des hirondelles* by Chucri to decline discussing the war and even an attempt to forget about the trauma entirely. Conversely, Oren Barak blames the prolonged trauma of the Lebanese Civil War and the propagation of the notion of "collective amnesia" on the various actions, or lack thereof, by the Lebanese administration upon the war's termination. It is important to note, however, that while Chucri's statements do offer a valuable point of view, he makes the statements while still being situated within his traumatic reality, as opposed to outside of it following the end of the war. It is only after the lived trauma has passed can individuals reflect, comprehend, and productively move forward, and it is here where Oren Barak's argument about governmental choices leading to a "collective amnesia" differ from Chucri's desire to forget. Whereas Chucri's character expresses desires to forget this traumatic period, he is evidently still *currently* in the process of freshly experiencing it every day. By suppressing the people's will to discuss the trauma *after* the war ended, the government truly spread the notion of "collective amnesia" in Lebanese everyday life.

Oddly enough the two authors of the autobiographical graphic novels in question were born only two years apart – Abirached in 1980 and Sattouf in 1978. Abirached was born in Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War, a topic that requires a profound understanding before the reader can truly comprehend the trauma experienced by child-Zeina. Since child-Zeina's narration does not explicitly explore the complicated intricacies involved with the Lebanese Civil

War – because she is a child – I found it useful and necessary to include a brief description of the war and the influence of its trauma in order to more fully understand how spatial and framing choices made by Abirached further elicit the war’s trauma.

In the case of Sattouf and child-Riad, the case is slightly different. He grew up between France and Syria (albeit they had their own historical contexts and problems), and not in a deadly war. His trauma does not come from a collective historical event, but rather a very intimate source in Abdel-Razak, his father. Therefore, the reader of Sattouf’s volume does not necessarily need the same amount of background knowledge required for Abirached’s graphic novels in order to understand the trauma child-Riad is faced with. Although, since Abdel-Razak does have his doctoral degree in history, the reader is able to historically and politically contextualize events (such as the 6-day war) and people (such as Hafaz Al-Assad) as he reads the graphic novel. Abdel-Razak’s accurate and lengthy description of the Saudi Arabian creation in the beginning of *L’arabe du futur 3* proves to be very significant on the last page of the book, when he unexpectedly announces to the family that they are moving to Saudi Arabia, a country that he himself described as extremely strict, yet exceptionally lucrative. Whereas nobody is explaining the Lebanese Civil War to child-Zeina – because it is the collective source of the nation’s trauma – child-Riad and the reader have his father – the source of his trauma – to accurately explain the historical and political contexts of various countries and government leaders.

Titles and Their Significance

Sattouf’s volume of *L’arabe du futur* retains its same title along all three graphic novels leading to the question: who is this “Arab of the future”? The first graphic novel in the volume opens with a detailed history of Abdel-Razak, his interaction with child-Riad’s mother Clementine, and ultimately the fact that his father came from a very poor family, got his PhD in

history from the Sorbonne. Therefore, initially the “Arab of the future” is Abdel-Razak. However, as the volume proceeds the reader’s notions of Abdel-Razak being the “Arab of the future” becomes more and more ironic. It becomes clear that he is racist when he openly mocks Africans on television in front of his wife and son. He visibly ignores his wife on several occasions and becomes violently angry at the thought of having a daughter and not another son. He continually forces child-Riad to side with him on matters involving debates (that he initiates) about what country/language is superior Syria/Arabic or France/French. He claims that “l’arabe du futur, il va à l’école!” (p. 157) but then becomes angry when his wife tries to teach child-Riad French, claiming that he should only be learning Arabic. By the end of the volume, Abdel-Razak clearly cannot be the actual symbol for the “Arab of the future”. In fact, he ironically becomes the antithesis of Sattouf’s title. Is there a character that lives up to the title? One could speculate that it is child-Riad due to enduring Abdel-Razak as his father, and resisting (so far) an evolution into his father, however since the reader has not witnessed Riad mature further, it is not entirely clear if he is the “Arab of the future”.

Abirached’s decision to name her first (in this study) graphic novel *Mourir Partir Revenir le jeu des hirondelles* is not necessarily clear until the reader has finished it. This differs from her newer graphic novel *Je me souviens Beyrouth*, where she begins nearly every page with the phrase “je me souviens...” or “I remember...”. The title *Je me souviens Beyrouth* serves to clearly illuminate from the beginning of the graphic novel that the author delves into the notions of memory and trauma as it results to the Beirut and the Lebanese Civil War. Contrarily, it is not until page 170 that the title of her other graphic novel becomes clear. The reader observes a frame, that is in fact a photo taken of a wall in Beirut with the words “MOURIR PARTIR REVENIR C’EST LE JEU DES HIRONDELLES. FLORIAN.” graffitied on it. This frame is

situated right before the family leaves Beirut, only to return when the traumatic violence had ceased momentarily. Therefore, the family “died” under the bomb that struck the apartment, left, and returned. Like swallows, this was the cycle of the family’s life.

Framing Frequency

Since Abirached’s graphic novel is told through her memories – through the phrase: “je me souviens”, or “I remember” – most of the text appears through past-tense, first-person narration. In contrast, Sattouf undergoes a reentry into his childhood, and therefore uses more present-tense conversation via dialogue bubbles between characters, along with occasional past-tense narrations. By embodying his former child-self Sattouf is able to construct a more fluid and continuous narrative, and this is made evident by his decision to include fairly regular framing which allows for a progressive narration. The notion of regular framing in the context of the graphic novel includes purposefully placing the same number of clearly defined frames – in Sattouf’s case, 9 frames per page – while maintaining a roughly consistent frame size as well. The effect that regular framing has on the pace of narration is augmented throughout the graphic novel as the author repeats this consistency. Generally, the result of regular framing throughout the comic (size and frequency of frames) is an overall smooth narration, without an increased number of narrative interruptions.

In her book *Reading bande dessinée: Critical Approaches to French-language Comic Strip*, Ann Miller analyzes several aspects of spatial organization, including frame frequency and the potential effect it may have on the graphic novel’s narrative rhythm. She claims that “there may be a conspicuous break in time or space within the fictional world, either between sequences or during a sequence, or, conversely, the break may be smoothed over by an impression of continuity” (Miller, 85). When analyzing Sattouf’s entire three-part volume, the reader witnesses

Miller's impression of continuity not merely in each individual piece, but from graphic novel to graphic novel due to Sattouf's procedural decision to maintain a consistent framing frequency. Further complimenting his framing regularity, and augmenting the overall "impression of continuity" is the seamless temporal transition between his graphic novels. Sattouf provides the years that each graphic novel spans as a part of each title: *L'arabe du futur* (1978-1984) followed by *L'arabe du futur 2* (1984-1985), and finally *L'arabe du futur 3* (1985-1987). The inclusion of these dates was no coincidence, but rather it further amplified the narrative consistency that Sattouf was also attempting to evoke via his consistent framing regularity found in all three parts of his volume. Miller goes on to emphasize the role of framing, claiming that "if the narrative dimension dominates, the result will either be 'conventional' (a regular grid of frames), or 'rhetorical' (frame sizes and shapes dictated by the demands of the narrative). The conventional grid is sometimes referred to as a gaufrier, or waffle-maker" (Miller, 87). By including this systematic "waffle-maker" pattern in his graphic novels, Sattouf adds regularity to his storyline.

Moreover, when Sattouf strays away from this normative pattern, it serves to increasingly attract the reader's attention. The last page (158) of his first graphic novel directly serves this purpose because it is one of the very few instances of framing irregularity, where one frame occupies the entire page. It is at this moment when child-Riad shockingly realizes that, to his deepest chagrin, he was being taken back to Syria. His small stature and shocked face in the foreground is juxtaposed with the enormous commercial airliner in the background, with the source of his trauma – his father – positioned directly in between them. By maintaining a regularity in his frame sizes, Sattouf makes this exceptionally different page even more significant to the reader. He emphasizes child-Riad's traumatic realization by diverging from his

stylistically regular framing in order to dedicate an entire massive frame for the child's visible emotional pain.

Throughout his three-part volume of *L'arabe du futur*, Sattouf strategically limits the number of times he deviates from his established, consistent framing, providing the moments where he does diverge with added significance. Even the moments of diversion are consistent, however, as each of the graphic novels in question end with one large frame on the final page that serves to convey a moment of traumatic shock or realization for child-Riad, induced by his father. The final page of *L'arabe du futur 2* depicts at its center a Sattouf family member who had been convicted of murdering his half-daughter after realizing she was pregnant out of wedlock. This time Sattouf doesn't place child-Riad as the center of the frame, but instead places him and his horrified mother as part of the background staring in shock at a convicted murderer freely roaming the streets. In contrast, child-Riad's father – who was ultimately part of the group of men who decided upon the release of the murderer, deeming it a “crime of honor” – can be seen in the background avoiding any eye-contact with either the murderer or with the rest of his mortified family. The decision to emphasize this last frame through a diversion from Sattouf's established regular framing helps depict the traumatic shock experienced not only by child-Riad, but also by his mother as they realize Abdel-Razak was part of the decision to allow the murderer to be released from prison after three months because of the “honor” associated with his crime. To augment their trauma and make matters worse for child-Riad and his mother, a male villager is passing by the murderer in the center of the frame offering him genuine peace and health from God. Again, by deviating from his normal framing frequency, Sattouf directs added attention to frames like these.

Finally, *L'arabe du futur 3* has increased instances of Sattouf diverging from his established framing to highlight certain key moments in the graphic novel along with his patented large, single frame on the last page. One such scene demonstrating Sattouf's increased divergence from his steady framing frequency takes place midway through *L'arabe du futur 3*, with a strategically placed frame that takes up three quarters of the page. It follows a very key scene where Abdel-Razak abruptly loses his patience with his mother who, throughout the graphic novel, had been making small, but pestering comments about her son's lack of faith and Islamic practice. This last straw involves a discussion about having child-Riad circumcised, and if Abdel-Razak did not believe the procedure should happen then the whole family was [jokingly] damned – her use of the French “*on va tous en enfer*” signifies that the collective group was going to hell. In a wild moment of frustration Abdel-Razak hurls a flurry of insults at his mother claiming that her ignorance had spoiled his life, wished her a swift death, and finished by renouncing and cursing *her* God.

This sequence of events dies down as quickly as it flares up, all on one page (81). The reader then follows child-Riad who left in search of his father to the next page where Sattouf places his divergent, large frame with Abdel-Razak lying on the ground orally repeating “*pardonnez ce que j'ai dit mon Dieu*” much like a school-kid punishment. In fact Sattouf has Abdel-Razak repeat the line sixteen times in one textbox, specifically with the words “*mon Dieu*” which contrasts directly with how he cursed his mother's God saying “*Je maudis ton Dieu*” (Sattouf, 81). Furthermore, this framing divergence marks the point where the reader witnesses Abdel-Razak become increasingly more interested in at least appearing religious, if not truly becoming a more devout Muslim. Therefore, in this case, the larger frame helps to indicate a shift in character development.

The reader notices a similar departure from Sattouf's framing frequency with the birth of child-Riad's youngest brother, Fadi. By highlighting Fadi's birth through this framing irregularity, Sattouf directs the reader's attention to a potential upcoming change, following the pattern that his previous framing departures have taken in the past. Over the next three pages, the importance of Fadi's birth soon becomes apparent to the reader because it ultimately reopens the conversation of circumcision among all three of the brothers, which will become a very traumatic experience for child-Riad, strongly emphasized by his father.

The final instance of frame frequency deviation comes unsurprisingly on the last page of Sattouf's final graphic novel. Throughout *L'arabe du futur 3* the importance of money for Abdel-Razak increases dramatically, almost to the point of obsession. Sattouf includes a scene where Abdel-Razak seems to go on a tangent explaining the history and various lifestyles of Saudi Arabia, spanning about seven entire pages (23-30). In his rant he highlights the pros and cons of life in Saudi Arabia, placing tremendous value on the pro: a wealthy lifestyle. He repeats sentences showing his obsession with money such as "y a pas mieux que les dollars...vive les dollars !" and "tout passe toujours mieux avec des dollars", while softening the hardships of life in Saudi Arabia: "mais c'est un pays islamique...c'est comme ça...c'est la tradition musulmane...c'est pas très différent de la vie au village, en un peu plus strict...mais avec des dollars !" (Sattouf, 27). Abdel-Razak makes it very clear that given the chance he could and would easily look past the strict laws and inequalities between various individuals for what is most important to him: a bigger paycheck.

With Abdel-Razak's long discussion with child-Riad about the (clearly huge) pros and the (seemingly minor) cons of life in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia is not mentioned again for the rest of the graphic novel, save one extremely brief interaction between child-Riad and his

friends. However, in the graphic novel's last frame, coming as a surprise to the family and to the reader, Abdel-Razak announces that the whole family is moving to Saudi Arabia for a new university job, while being sure to mention how much he will be making as well: "le salaire est de 6000 dollars par mois!" (Sattouf, 150). Again, Sattouf takes advantage of his established framing to deviate from it here on the last page and include the vividly horrified faces of child-Riad, his mother, and his younger brother. Furthermore, Sattouf uses the extra space of the large frame to include child-Riad's incredibly troubled thought bubble filled with his image being decapitated by a Saudi officer with a sword just like his father said happened in the country's history. This variation of Sattouf's established framing frequency, draws further attention to the trauma experienced by child-Riad – and the rest of the family – toward Abdel-Razak and his extreme decisions and choices.

In contrast to Sattouf, the inconsistency of Abirached's frames' positioning accurately reflects the turbulence of her narrative. The opening scene of her graphic novel *Je me souviens Beyrouth* consists of a single, dark frame that stretches over the entire first page (the use of dark versus light as well as color will be specifically addressed in a subsequent section of this analysis). The following two pages, however, assume what appears to be a more regular layout, similar to Sattouf's "waffle-maker" style. Immediately, however, she returns to a single large frame that covers the whole page, never allowing for continuous regularity to exist in her graphic novel. Abirached even includes frames that extend over two neighboring pages, appearing as one large image for the reader. A similar effect is achieved when she places two nearly identical, page-filling frames adjacent to each other. She draws the reader's eyes via this doubling effect. Therefore, although the reader is following along and comprehending new information, her inconsistent framing gives the initial impression that – concurring with the title – the author is in

fact remembering various childhood images, activities, and people in no particular order. Due to the fact that each page begins with the heading “je me souviens” or in English “I remember”, Abirached strays away from a traditional, chronological plot narration, instead focusing on what she remembers, its significance to her, and how the trauma of the war affected her memories. Her inconsistent framing complements her unconventional narration to accurately create the impression of an honest recollection of her unfiltered, child-hood, war-time memories.

Abirached does not hesitate from implementing unconventional framing choices early on in her graphic novel *Je me souviens Beyrouth*. She places two nearly identical, full sized frames on adjacent pages revealing child-Zeina and her brother partaking in a common, but significant child past-time: watching her favorite childhood cartoon, Grindayzer. The fact that she not only remembers the name of the cartoon, but also provides a detailed illustration of the character Grindayzer, demonstrates the significance it had on her as a child. In the very next frame when the power goes out, due to the poor infrastructure of the war-torn country, the children are only preoccupied with missing their cartoon and what Grindayzer was going to do next, while the adults have much graver concerns with the all too common electricity shortage. This inconsistency of frame positioning reflects her memory of the nation’s overall collective trauma – the Lebanese Civil War – juxtaposing her point of view as a child with the thoughts of the adults around her.

While *Je me souviens Beyrouth* follows no strict narrative path, the memories included toward the first half of the graphic novel are memories from the earlier part of Abirached’s life where she may have been too young to understand the extent of the traumatic reality, such as this particular scene with the cartoon. However, as time and the graphic novel go along, the reader witnesses child-Zeina experiencing more anxiety and becoming more fully cognizant of the

trauma in which she lived. Myriem El Maizi offers the following explanation of how Abirached's irregular framing frequency reflects the seemingly non-linear narrative plot she follows in order to create a holistic image of her memories involving Beirut and the Civil War:

“Je me souviens. Beyrouth suit une structure temporelle fragmentaire et fragmentée, reproduisant sur l'espace de la page le mouvement et les aléas de la mémoire... les souvenirs de guerre évoqués ne suivent aucun ordre chronologique, figuré par l'absence de numérotation des pages de l'album. Abirached évoque ainsi son enfance par fragments et dans une chronologie éclaté, l'absence de structure linéaire stabilisante renvoyant à la conception de l'écriture autobiographique comme mode de restitution d'un soi qui échappe à toute prédéfiniion ” (El Maizi, 261).

El Maizi supports the idea that through methodological choices involving the irregularity of her framing, Abirached achieves a lack of continuity in her narration. She recalls extraordinary details about her childhood life during the Lebanese Civil War, without particularly ordering them which demonstrates the trauma and disorder associated with that part of her life. At the same time, she does this purposefully, mimicking the instability of her childhood, so that a potential rearranging of the frames would not impede on the overall narrative. This also reflects her decision to omit page numbers altogether.

There is an instance in Abirached's *Je me souviens* of inconsistent frame positioning that draws more attention than her other irregular choices when she tells the reader “je me souviens de tous les lieux où nous nous sommes réfugiés pendant la guerre” (Abirached, 42).

Complementing the notion of her family assuming refugee status and migrating away from the horrors of the war, Abirached includes an illustration of a fictional board game. The narrator assigns each member of the family a role as a game piece trying to make it around the spaces of the board game, with each space representing a place they have been forced to move, stretching from 1981 to 1989. In fact, she demonstrates a total of twenty-one moves due to the war, in this eight year period, through the use of this board game in one huge frame spanning two pages. By

creating a swirling path for her family – the game pieces – to follow, Abirached allows the reader to visually follow each and every step during this period of refugee status. Her decision to extend this frame over two separate pages allows the board game path to reflect the true length of the family’s actual refugee path. Furthermore, the visual board game path on page 43 is not confined to any frame and in fact even goes off the page to demonstrate the twisting and lengthy reality of their trauma induced diaspora. Abirached’s visual path off the frame and page is a breach of the “gutter,” a term used by Ann Miller in her analysis of framing decisions. Miller employs the term “gutter” which “refers to the space visible both outside the hypercadre... and between the frames...the gutter may be invaded by speech balloons, which will tend to break up the impression of geometrical regularity and introduce an element of disharmony” (86). As Miller describes it, in this frame there is an invasion of the gutter by the board game which reflects the disharmony associated with repeated, trauma-induced migration.

Upon further examination of this fictional game board scenario the reader observes a family member’s face on each of the game pieces presented by Abirached, all with very worried and anxious faces. There exists a juxtaposition between the trauma of being a family of refugees and the childlike representation of that migration through the invention of a fictional board game, which is juxtaposed a final time with the visibly upset faces of each of the board game pieces. Therefore, even as a child, the narrator who was unable to fully understand the gravity of her refugee status, choosing to represent that part of her life as a board game, was still aware of an overall feeling of despair, recognizable by the traumatized faces of the game pieces. Child-Zeina was aware that this was no happy board game. El Maizi claims that the use of the board game by child-Zeina serves not only to fully demonstrate the lengths that the family was forced to go in order to escape the violence of the war, but also to issue some needed separation between Zeina

Abirached the author and child-Zeina the narrator. By inserting the child-made imaginary board game that stretches over two pages, the reader understands what and how *child-Zeina* felt during the time of migration. El Maizi states that “L’usage d’un jeu d’enfant pour représenter ces diverses migrations qui les ont menés aussi loin que Chypre ou le Koweït, pourrait aussi bien s’inscrire dans la lignée de la vision enfantine que l’album cherche à réactualiser que constituer un commentaire plus acerbe de la part de l’auteur adulte, mettant ainsi en avant la victimisation de sa famille dans le « jeu » de la guerre” (El Maizi, 264). This extreme irregularity in framing highlights one of the more traumatic parts of the war for child-Zeina due to the many moves she had to endure, while still representing it as a game, and not as the true trauma associated with their refugee status. The use of a childlike board game also creates separation between child-Zeina as the voice of narration from Zeina Abirached the author.

Zeina Abirached’s other graphic novel, *Mourir Partir Revenir le jeu des hirondelles*, consists of a framing frequency that lies in-between Sattouf’s conventional gaufrier framing and the highly irregular and dynamic framing frequency of *Je me souviens Beyrouth*. Contrary to *Je me souviens Beyrouth*, Abirached’s previous graphic novel follows a fairly linear plot narration, which regulates the unpredictability of her framing frequency, but still permits her to deviate frequently from an overly conventional style. Whereas *Je me souviens Beyrouth* delves into child-Zeina’s memories associated with life in Lebanon during the Civil War, the plot of *Mourir Partir Revenir* takes place in a much shorter amount of time – one evening. It is an evening of heavy bombing in Beirut, and child-Zeina’s apartment level is the safest one in the entire building, specifically with the foyer of the apartment as the most structurally sound, void of any fragile windows. Her parents are out for the evening but expected to soon return, and one by one the residents of the apartment sense the danger in remaining in their less secure, higher

apartments and begin to make their way to child-Zeina's apartment. As characters interact with one another, Abirached situates their interactions within a more regular framing frequency to allow the reader to comprehensively follow the dialogue. This differs from *Je me souviens Beyrouth* since most of the dialogue between characters is limited to quick text bubbles from one character to another, alongside her quick transition between memories.

When Abirached does stray away from character dialogue in *Mourir Partir Revenir le jeu des hirondelles*, she returns to a much more fluid and dynamic framing frequency, directly juxtaposing extremely small frames with extremely large ones on adjacent or even the same pages. Furthermore, pages devoid of dialogue between characters (such as 107), contain several uneven frames: one tall, thin frame on the left, one short, wide frame along the top of the page and the rest divided among variously sized rectangular frames. By alternating frequently between regular and irregular framing Abirached creates moments of flashback and contemplation to less traumatic times before the start of the war, or even to exceptionally happy moments during the war, only to aggressively pull the reader back into the very real violence to a night of heavy bombings in a Beirut apartment.

One such example is when Farah is describing her recent wedding to child-Zeina and Madame Linda. The descriptions of the wedding preparations transport the reader to an alternative, exciting time where guests seemed to forget about the war, if just for one day, to celebrate the affair. Farah describes how she and all the guests had to quite literally run from the ceremony to the reception to avoid sniper fire. The description reaches its climax when Abirached dedicates two full adjacent pages to portray the dark Beirut skyline with the large white letters "BRRAAAAM" written across both pages, and a small building window showing the wedding goers still celebrating despite their traumatic realities. These letters across both

pages signify bombings across the entire city, juxtaposed with an ongoing wedding reception. On the very next page, Abirached snaps the reader back into the present, trauma-filled evening using regular framing to a sobering phone call between Anhala and child-Zeina's grandmother, where the characters learn that their parents left to return home over an hour ago. Through her continually fluctuating framing choices, Abirached highlights the trauma of the Lebanese Civil War, contrasting it with flashbacks to happier, less traumatic times.

While it is evident that Sattouf's volume *L'arabe du futur* has regular framing that matches his conventional, linear narrative style, there are instances of narrative fragmentation that appear in all the graphic novels in this study. In *Graphic Women*, Chute supports this notion: "Images in comics appear in fragments, just as they do in actual recollection; this fragmentation, in particular, is a prominent feature of traumatic memory" (Chute, 4). While the argument could be made that this quote applies most directly to Abirached's graphic novel *Je me souviens*, due to its narration based on the narrator's strongest memories, it can also apply to Sattouf's volume as well. While there is a more direct continuous narration when compared to *Je me souviens*, it is important to note that child-Riad depicts and narrates a specific scene from his childhood, creates a fragmentation or pause, and then moves on to the next notable scene that he is able to remember.

One such example of this type of narrative fragmentation occurs midway through *L'Arabe du futur* where the reader observes child-Riad's first moment of fear and anxiety stemming directly from his father's actions. As he and his father are walking around in some open fields by an old school, in the background of a couple of the frames are three Syrian boys quietly throwing remarks at child-Riad, mocking his "flowery French", his blond hair, and throwing insults at him such as "yahudi" the Arabic word for "Jew". His father allows this to

persist for the length of a full page, until he snaps into an intense rage and uses his shoe to spank all three Syrian boys. Child-Riad reacts to this violent display by saying “voir ces enfants qui se moquaient de moi se faire frapper me procura un immense plaisir...mais au bout d’un moment, j’ai eu une sensation bizarre. En fait j’avais peur que ça m’arrive” (Sattouf, 95). That particular memory ends there, along with his train of thought and on the very next frame on page 96 the narration transports the reader to a random field somewhere else, completely unrelated with the previous memory.

Analyzing that scene in more detail, the reader recognizes a thematic series of events taking place, involving child-Riad and the trauma he experiences from his father. There exists a duality with his relationship to his father. Initially, it is his father who liberates him from the Syrian boys’ mockery. However, the way he does it, via rage and violence, traumatizes child-Riad and causes him to be fearful of his father, and afraid that he might one day be next. Therefore, his father is a symbol of both guardian and of destroyer, and it his father’s unstable actions and words that create him as a source of trauma for the narrator. The reader witnessed this dichotomy of guardian and destroyer earlier in the book, when child-Riad has the terrible nightmare with his father’s bulls surrounding him in the hallway. Here the father, via the figure of the bull is the destroyer. However, again it is the father assuming the role of guardian as well, when his almighty hand plucks child-Riad out of danger, and pulls him to safety. I will also discuss the role that frame angle and zoom play in this scene later in my analysis. These examples demonstrate the source of child-Riad’s trauma.

Furthermore, there exists a scene in Sattouf’s *L’arabe du futur 3* where child-Riad undergoes a similar dream in which he is stuck in a labyrinth and is once again surrounded by two bulls – the symbolic representation of his father because of his Taurus statue. Again, a hand

swoops in from the top of the frame to save him just as he was about to be crushed between the two raging bulls, only this time it is the hand of Goldorak, the giant toy figurine that he desired from the specialty shop. It should be noted that this dream happens immediately following child-Riad's return to Syria where his father has now made amends with his mother, and the news is broken to child-Riad that he (along with his two brothers) were going to be circumcised in accordance with the Muslim faith. Evidently, child-Riad is visibly displeased with this declaration, primarily because he has no choice in the matter, but also because it was Abdel-Razak who had screamed at his own mother because of her persistence to get the boys circumcised. In a change of faith, he had changed positions and was personally insisting on their circumcision to inwardly appease his mother, but publicly to please God.

It appears that Abdel-Razak is aware that he has once again breached his son's trust by deciding for him that he was to undergo this operation. Therefore, to make up for the breached trust, he promises child-Riad his choice of gift upon completion of his "rite of passage into manhood." With very little contemplation, child-Riad has his heart set on the very large, very expensive Goldorak he had seen long ago in the specialty shop, to which Abdel-Razak begrudgingly agrees. It comes as no surprise then that child-Riad visualizes Goldorak as his savior from the two bulls who represent the trauma associated with Abdel-Razak. These two mirror-like scenes of child-Riad being saved by an omnipotent hand demonstrate how over the years, Abdel-Razak's traumatic actions and choices have lost him the status of guardian and destroyer in the eyes of his child-Riad, and now he is only the destroyer. Being saved by a material desire that is Goldorak comes at a price however. The reader witnesses that Goldorak has child-Riad's penis in his other hand while he apologizes to him saying that he was obliged to take it. This dream emphasizes the repeated possession that his father has on him, via the bulls,

and it emphasizes the distrust that child-Riad has toward his father's promise to purchase Goldorak, since it comes at the price of literally losing a part of himself.

Frame Angle and Zoom

In addition to the positioning of frames on the page, the angle and zoom of the frame can juxtapose a character with his source of trauma for example, or allow background images that hint at a potential traumatic tension to become visible in relation to the frame's primary focus. In order to more fully understand the role that frame angle and zoom play in the reader's comprehensive understanding of a graphic novel as it relates to trauma, I revisit Ann Miller explanation that "framing may widen to include elements that were not previously visible, or narrow to give the reader more detailed information... The angle of vision of a bande dessinée panel is likely to be noticeable if it is high or low...Markedly high or low angles of vision may correspond to the ocular viewpoint of a character" (Miller, 91,94). The last frame of *L'arabe du futur* on page 15 and the first on page 16, both clearly focus on child-Riad. However, the frame is wide enough to include background details as well, including the comparatively enormous hand of child-Riad's father that is sweeping in from above to save him from the two sizeable bulls. The angle of the frame allows the "divine" hand coming into the frame to seem like it is coming in from the sky and the contrastingly small stature of child-Riad represents how he feels compared to his father, in size and in thought. This frame size and angle help to represent his trauma with his father. Child-Riad feels a lack of control when around his father, whose bulls surround him. By having his father's hand save him, Sattouf elicits the trauma associated with the love-hate relationship child-Riad feels toward his father.

Child-Riad doesn't speak much, keeping his observing thoughts to himself, contrasting directly with the out-spoken, opinionated personality of his father. By literally and symbolically looking up to his father, the observant child-Riad notices many of Abdel-Razak's traits – notably

his faults – and often remains silent so as to not displease his father, even though the reader is well aware of child-Riad’s conflicting thoughts. By keeping child-Riad’s thoughts to himself, many of Sattouf’s frame angles demonstrate the boy’s face in a bottom corner of the frame, looking *up* at his father who physically and mentally looms over him. On page 30 of *L’arabe du futur 3* the reader observes a prime example this frame angle with child-Riad’s thoughts at the top of the frame. He contemplates his father’s looming posture, noticing his slouching shoulders, and his feeble curved back. Child-Riad’s thoughts then regress in the next slide as he continues to stare up at his father when he says, “pourtant, j’étais certain qu’une grande force était cachée en lui” (Sattouf, 30). Through Sattouf’s methodological choice in framing angle and zoom, he further establishes Abdel-Razak as a physical and mental looming source of trauma on child-Riad.

In *L’arabe du futur 3* page 141 and 142 mark a rare scene where child-Riad does honestly speak his mind in front of his father and one of his associates. The associate, Tamer asks child-Riad the playful but loaded question: “which of your parents do you like more?” Child-Riad responds bluntly “ben euh...ma mère” to which both Abdel-Razak and Tamer are extremely shocked and displeased. On the other hand, the reader has witnessed numerous occasions throughout the volume that highlight the turbulent relationship between Abdel-Razak and his son, and therefore there was never any doubt to the true answer. The only shock to the reader perhaps was child-Riad choosing to answer truthfully in front of his father and his acquaintance. The father exclaims to child-Riad that Syrian boys always prefer their fathers, and that even if it wasn’t true, he should lie when questioned by other adults. In this rare scene where child-Riad openly speaks his mind in the presence of his father, Sattouf angles the frame so that both father and son are sitting in a bus at eye level with one another. Abdel-Razak is not looming

over child-Riad, nor is child-Riad in a corner of the frame. The equal frame angle reflects child-Riad challenging his source of trauma by freely speaking his mind. However, once they exit the bus, the angle soon changes, placing the boy in the corner of the frame and Abdel-Razak's anxious face in the center. It is during this frame that child-Riad thinks to himself, "je sentais que, pour mon père, il était temps que je devienne un homme" (Sattouf, 142). He reverts back to keeping his personal thoughts to himself, and the frame angle reflects that change immediately.

The reader witnesses a similar phenomenon taking place involving the size of frames to include background details that interact with the focus of the frame to elicit past trauma in Abirached's *Je me souviens*. In one of the frames, Zeina says "je me souviens que pendant la guerre, mon père avait pris l'habitude d'écouter de la musique très fort...Je me souviens que j'ai toujours pensé que s'il écoutait sa musique si fort, c'était pour couvrir le chaos de l'extérieur" (Abirached). What is most staggering about these frames is that Abirached places her father as the frame's focus, and behind him she includes images of bombs and helicopters littering the skies directly outside the window behind his head. In this way child-Zeina experiences and recalls the violence of the war through memories of her father. Through a widened frame angle, the reader is able to understand that child-Zeina's memories of her intimate family members are tainted in various ways by the war. She does not remember her father listening to loud music because he liked loud music. She remembers him listening to loud music because of the war. On the following page, she illustrates her father, now with a smile and new headphones on in the foreground, with a blank, dark background replacing the previous war images. The new headphones provide the father with increased tranquility amidst the war's daily violence. The angle and zoom of this framing are crucial in initially demonstrating an aspect of trauma, and then showing how that trauma was dealt with by one of her closest family members.

As the narrator in *Je me souviens* grows older, the war eventually ends, and she moves to Paris. However, there still exists a visible trauma that remains with her, as the reader observes the frame when in 2008 she is frightened by the sounds of a thunderstorm. The frame again has a window in the background, but this time rather than bombs and helicopters, it is merely rain and thunder that forces her to recall her violent days in war-torn Lebanon. The representation of framing ties the violence that she experienced in her childhood, with the trauma that still possesses her when she is older. Caruth's definition of a belated trauma that repeatedly possesses its victims holds true in this frame. Therefore, like many Lebanese citizens, she cannot separate herself from the trauma of the civil war.

In Abirached's graphic novel *Mourir Partir Revenir le jeu des hirondelles* frame angle and zoom continue to play a large role in the reader's comprehension of child-Zeina's traumatic reality. Early in her graphic novel the author explains that the only truly safe room in the apartment was the foyer, which had evolved into a room for everything, include pillows, mattresses, tables and chairs. Child-Zeina also stressed the importance of the large mural hanging in the foyer, depicting Moses leading the Hebrew people out of Egypt. It belonged to her paternal grandfather – who she never met – and she states that with the mural hanging on the wall of the foyer, nothing bad could happen to them. Therefore, not only does the mural serve a sense of security for child-Zeina, but when noticed in the background by the reader due to widened frame angles, it helps to indicate that the setting is the secure foyer.

On page 43 child-Zeina and her younger brother are making *sfouf* – a low preparation baked good – with their neighbor elderly Anhala. The framing angle allows the reader to see mural in the background, indicating that the three of them are diligently working in the foyer, a place of security. However, on the next page, Anhala enters the kitchen alone to place the *sfouf*

into the oven, leaving the two children by themselves in the foyer. Abirached intentionally zooms out to show only the table, the two children looking anxiously over at the kitchen (which is never shown), and the mural, now all very small, swallowed up by the darkness that fills up the rest of the empty frame. The significant zoom out of this frame demonstrates how alone the two children feel in their safe zone while Anhala works momentarily in the potentially life-threatening kitchen. It also shows how alienated they feel in their own home due to the dangers of the Lebanese Civil War. Regular frame zoom is only restored when child-Zeina starts to sing a song to reassure her younger brother. When Anhala returns with their neighbor Chucri, the frame angle shows the mural indicating that they are back in the safe zone of the foyer.

The Use of Color

The use of color in graphic novels can send a powerful message about trauma to readers. In Abirached's *Je me souviens*, there is an absence of color with only black and white throughout the graphic novel, which in itself holds meaning, but I will turn first to the color schemes found in Sattouf's *L'arabe du futur*. Sattouf purposefully implements a primary color scheme during various parts of his graphic novels that correspond with the current country in which child-Riad's family lives. The blue represents France, the yellow Libya, and the red Syria, all of which reflect the respective nation's predominant flag colors. The colors used for the covers of his three graphic novels are the colors of the Syrian flag: red, white, green and black.

However, the shading and intensity of the color used in a frame also insinuate meaning. For example, the traumatic scene of the father violently raging against the Syrian boys has text boxes marked in deep, intense red surrounding profane Arabic cursing. Therefore, even if the reader does not read Arabic, they are able to discern a general sentiment of fury. Therein lies one scene where profound color has served as a marker of trauma. In a similar scene the father

encounters his old “friend,” Tamer. After watching his son fail to understand Tamer’s Arabic, the father shockingly begins hissing like a snake, to which Tamer responds with a traumatic collapse. His text boxes fill with his screams surrounded again with a deeper, more intense red. While Tamer represents only a minor character, he is another example of how intense color can be and is often associated with trauma (119). The importance of color saturation is most clearly observed during the aforementioned scene from *L’arabe du futur 3* where Abdel-Razak violently and shockingly lashes out at his mother cursing her and her God. The entire sequence features about 7 frames filled with a blood red hue very different from the softer red used when the setting is in Syria. In this case, the color saturation elicits his violent snap at his mother, who faints and crumples to the ground, clearly traumatized by her son’s extreme words and actions. It is clear to see how Sattouf employs color and color saturation to further elicit moments of Abdel-Razak’s trauma.

While Abirached does not employ colors quite in the same sense as Sattouf, there is a significance to the amount of dark or light shading she uses in particular frames. There is a unique moment in *Je me souviens Beyrouth* where Abirached includes no gutter, no real frame, no text, and no narration. The pages are black, and have thin stenciled drawings of normal everyday things that children might enjoy: a swing, flowers, a picnic, etc. These few pages are introduced directly after the board game that is made up to represent the traumatic refugee migrations her family had to take due to the war. They are specifically dark to represent a dark and uncertain distressing time in her life, while the drawn images serve to comfort and relieve her from her traumatic situation. El Maizi remarks that “les dessins d’enfant représentent quant à eux l’imaginaire où se réfugiait la petite Zeina... Le trauma du départ renouvelé est ainsi suggéré, certes dans l’impossibilité de représentation qu’expriment les pages noires, mais aussi et

surtout dans le décalage entre un album dont la tâche, clairement affichée, est de témoigner d'une réalité' passée, et cet imaginaire enfantin qui émerge du fond de la mémoire comme un espace alternatif" (El Maizi, 265). Therefore, according to El Maizi, the two completely dark, void pages serve to function as an inexpressible representation of the trauma associated with the family's refugee status.

What is most interesting is Abirached's decision to invert the use of dark and light. I mean to say that typically a drawing consists of black charcoal pencil drawn onto a white background. These dark pages in *Je me souviens Beyrouth* have been purposefully inverted from a typical child drawing to allow the darkness to represent a void of uncertainty and bleakness, reflecting her traumatic reality growing up during the Lebanese Civil War. However, emerging from this uncertain dark void are images of a bright future to come one day through the friendly child-hood images the narrator draws for the reader. A swing, flowers, a small shop, a picnic, a small chicken farm, and a well all demonstrate a bright future free of the overwhelming darkness that is the Lebanese Civil War.

In *Mourir Partir Revenir le jeu des hirondelles*, after the bombing landed in the apartment building Abirached illustrates the cityscape of Beirut first all in darkness, with the dragon from the mural disappearing off frame into the distance (166). On the next page, she shows the same cityscape (without the dragon), except this time it is now illustrated in lightness (167). In fact, it is an exact negative image – all that was dark in the first frame is now light in the second frame and vice versa. The amount of dark and light Abirached employs in any given frame helps dictate our understanding through notions of hope and future, and present and dark despair. Clearly color – even just black and white – can serve as an indication of experienced trauma in graphic novels.

Conclusion

In this analysis of five graphic novels, Riad Sattouf's three-part volume of *L'arabe du futur* and Zeina Abirached's graphic novels *Je me souviens Beyrouth*, and *Mourir Partir Revenir le jeu des hirondelles*, I hope to have demonstrated the benefits of the graphic novel as a literary tool in clearly and effectively expressing trauma. It is the methodological employment of border and spatial options conducted by their authors that allow graphic novels to stand out in an examination of trauma. The border and spatial choices that are available via the graphic novel allow the author to uniquely and more vividly evoke the trauma that they endured. What the graphic novel allows an author to express using these border and spatial choices, goes beyond other traditional literary genres. This expression can be both cathartic for the author, as well as illuminating for the reader, increasing the value of the graphic novel over other genres, particularly as it relates to the discussion and expression of trauma. It is clear through this analysis that the graphic novel is the most powerful vehicle by which to express trauma in literature because of all of these possibilities regarding its pictorial, written, and structural aspects.

I examined framing frequency and irregular framing that serve as a reflection of the irregularity of the graphic novel's narration, which can be an indication of a traumatized and turbulent past of the authors of these autobiographical graphic novels. A second element included in my analysis of border and spatial choices involves the angle and zoom of frames which could situate characters with respect to one another, or provide further information located in the background or foreground of a frame. Finally, I investigated the role that color played in allowing the authors to more clearly elicit their desired relationships to traumatic events. The numerous ways that trauma can be reflected by creating a graphic novel instead of other literary

genres makes it a literary medium of the future. The various advantages are evident via the recent increase in number of graphic novels and bande dessinée published, not only in Lebanon with relation to the war, but in all areas experiencing times of trauma. All of these methodological border and spatial choices go beyond just words and pictures on a page. Due to all of these avenues for representing trauma, the graphic novel makes a very attractive literary option for both writers and readers of this topic. They allow the graphic novel to be a carefully constructed medium for authors to express their relationship to a source of trauma.

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