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Of Linkage and Separation: The Semiotics of Borders in Graphic Narratives

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Abstract: The traditional panel structure of comics, *The Adventures of Tintin* or the *Amar Chitra Katha* books, expects the reader to read each page in a particular sequential pattern of left to right, and top to bottom. The distribution of the panel boxes in the space of the page thus influences the narratorial interpretation, indicating a dependency between sequentiality and spatial distribution in comic narratives. In this context, the spaces left within the borders of two panels, their possible representations, and their interplay with the plot interpretation become relevant. On the contrary, graphic novels like *Palestine*, or *Bhimayana* hold an alternative structure of a flowing image narrative, without this distinction of panel borders, and a fundamental thematic change in their plot from that of the publications above. Again, in *Drawn to Berlin* although there are no panel lines drawn on most pages, the eyes of the reader tend to follow the traditional pattern of reading comics. Thus, a relationship between the thematic shift of the comics narrative, and the intact, interrupted, or completely dissolved panel borders can be identified, bringing attention to creative expressions in a transmedia language. This paper will investigate how the semiotic system of such a language works, and whether the breach of the traditional comics borders aligns with a thematic shift of borders within the text. In this context, the aforementioned works of Hergé, Joe Sacco, Ali Fitzgerald, Subhash Vyam, and relevant others will be discussed under a comparative lens, to understand how illustrative and textual borders of comics contribute to meaning-making. The intersected relationship between temporality and space, text narrative and image sequence, and border representation of different media in both Western and Indian contexts will be traced.

Keywords: *Graphic narratives; Borders; Transmedia language; Meaning-making; Narrative sequence.*

Literary narratives are weaved with a certain ordering of events along temporal threads. These threads can run linear, can create loops or knots, and each time resulting in a different possibility of narratorial expression from the same set of events. In the process, the narrative is organized, and infused with certain thematological, genological or historiographic elements. It is the literary components[1] of both the content and structure of the narrative, along with the physicality of the book covers, or the enclosing lines of poems, the endnotes and footnotes and such other 'paratexts', as termed by Gerard Genette (Berlatsky 164), that mould the events, turn the 'plot' into a 'tale'[2], and simultaneously, create a verbatim or metaphorical frame around it that distinguishes a representation from reality. Thus, the frame of the text does not only operate as an ornamentation to highlight its existence but also carries the characteristics of borders. A bordered space can be understood as a territory, that has selective elements within it that created the requirement for drawing the border and has necessarily excluded other elements while doing so. The border can be associated with 'restriction', a division between two entities, and simultaneously a space to invade, to cross. The frame that borders a literary text not only creates an inside world of the author-reader interaction but also marks the outside, as 'outside', a space not to be frequented by the text. This outside can be imagined as a dark contrast, against which the text illuminates the selected content. Georg Simmel notes the urge of artwork to be whole for itself, separated from the world around where the events flow multi-directionally and multi-dimensionally by its acquired autonomy (Simmel 11). Translating such understanding in the case of literary texts, the bordered space would convey a curated self-sufficiency, an autonomous structure. Within this structure, Simmel (11) argues, the threads of the artwork seem to run back to its own centre within the frame, thus in the case of literary texts, the movement of the temporal threads creates the order of text-specific

[1] My use of the term 'literary' is in terms of what Jauss argued to be internal to the literary process itself, not dependent on other systems for their dynamics (Chanda iii).

[2] Plot and Tale are to be understood as content categories of the thematological method of textual analyses (Bandyopadhyay 10). The rearrangement of the timeline of events and the formation of the narrative timeline is referred to here.

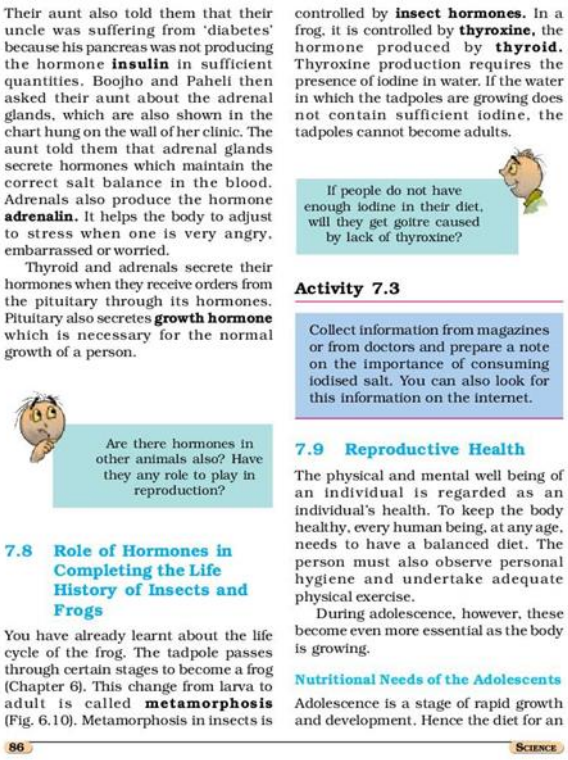
sequentiality, causal relationships among events, and an overall narratorial flow - birthing the "stoff" from the "rostoff' (Bandyopadhyay 10). Hence the text, if imagined as a sovereign entity with a systemized distribution of a centre and a periphery, of power and common, analogous to a state, the politics of both its territory as well as inner society becomes relevant. This centre is new and can be synonymous or antithetical to its contemporary centre of the outside reality, thus holding a possibility of creating a critical dialogue with the latter.

However, the border, as mentioned above, becomes the gateway of distinction/interaction between the intra-textual and outer elements. In this metaphor, the border or framing of paratexts, ink marks of boxes or lines in a book page, or other kinds indicate not only what the text addresses, but also the inevitability of 'absentia' within the text. For any literary text to be formed, for any event to be represented (for any experience to turn into a recorded event within the text), a deleted, unchosen and unvoiced set of events are left outside the border, for otherwise, it will be impossible to create any order, detect patterns, and weave a 'tale' as a thematological content category (Bandyopadhyay 10). To question the text, to critically understand that it is indeed separate from the whole of reality, and a 'representation' with specific politics, and not the lived experiences themselves, it is extremely important to search outside the border. Thus, at this point of the current discussion, in the case of the reader, two tensions can be recognized; the act of reading is necessarily a critical activity in the context of reality, as the border marks the literary text as a self-governing structure itself, and here, especially the fiction provides a guard[3] with the veil of fantasy; and secondly, the border of the literary text confines or challenges the readers' horizons of expectations for the particular text, and asks to identify the new centre within it, and how the threads of events are running from or toward that centre. Thus, the reading experience of a literary text becomes not only a task of exploring the framed perimeter but also recognising the absentia, which is left out to highlight the text-specific prioritization. This priority cannot be understood

[3] I use 'guard' not only in terms of the presence of the physical framing, but as a shelter that nurtures resistance.

as only an authorial decision, to meet or subvert the horizon of expectation, but the criticality of the frame itself, its physical and inferred characteristics and its impact must be taken into account.

As mentioned above, these framings of texts, literary or extra-literary, can be manifested through the physicality of the paratexts, the book covers, or the margins of pages as well. It may look like straight or curvy ink markings, that directly instruct the reader to deal with the words inside the marking as separated from outside, or it may look like spatial distances in between sentence(s). for example, in school textbooks, often there are sections in pages titled 'Did you know?' or 'Activity' and others printed in a separate box.



Their aunt also told them that their uncle was suffering from 'diabetes' because his pancreas was not producing the hormone **insulin** in sufficient quantities. Boojho and Paheli then asked their aunt about the adrenal glands, which are also shown in the chart hung on the wall of her clinic. The aunt told them that adrenal glands secrete hormones which maintain the correct salt balance in the blood. Adrenals also produce the hormone **adrenalin.** It helps the body to adjust to stress when one is very angry, embarrassed or worried.

Thyroid and adrenals secrete their hormones when they receive orders from the pituitary through its hormones. Pituitary also secretes **growth hormone** which is necessary for the normal growth of a person.

Are there hormones in other animals also? Have they any role to play in reproduction?

7.8 Role of Hormones in Completing the Life History of Insects and Frogs

You have already learnt about the life cycle of the frog. The tadpole passes through certain stages to become a frog (Chapter 6). This change from larva to adult is called **metamorphosis** (Fig. 6.10). Metamorphosis in insects is controlled by **insect hormones.** In a frog, it is controlled by **thyroxine,** the hormone produced by **thyroid.** Thyroxine production requires the presence of iodine in water. If the water in which the tadpoles are growing does not contain sufficient iodine, the tadpoles cannot become adults.

If people do not have enough iodine in their diet, will they get goitre caused by lack of thyroxine?

Activity 7.3

Collect information from magazines or from doctors and prepare a note on the importance of consuming iodised salt. You can also look for this information on the internet.

7.9 Reproductive Health

The physical and mental well being of an individual is regarded as an individual's health. To keep the body healthy, every human being, at any age, needs to have a balanced diet. The person must also observe personal hygiene and undertake adequate physical exercise.

During adolescence, however, these become even more essential as the body is growing.

Nutritional Needs of the Adolescents

Adolescence is a stage of rapid growth and development. Hence the diet for an

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Figure 1: Page of NCERT Class 7 Science Book (NCERT)

In Figure 1, the blue box in the right column is distinguished from the rest of the texts printed on the page with its heading 'Activity', the blue colour, and the box shape, asking the reader to engage in an act different from reading the rest of the page. The two columns of the page, however, are separated with a blank

space in between, instructing the reader to complete the left column first from top to bottom, and then proceed to the right column. Interestingly, the eye of the reader is trained to inevitably go from left to right first, stop if there is an infringement in the continuity of printed words, and then continue reading from top to bottom of the text, when reading languages whose scripts are written in left-to-right direction[4]. This system of reading adheres from textbooks to newspapers, leisure reading, and in case of graphic narratives as well. The whole of the page, distinguished from the physicality of the outer world, is not perceived all at once, but in a predetermined directional way of trained reading or seeing the images. In comic books, the text within a panel box, and all the panel boxes in the space of the page are read in the same fashion. In this paper, I am interested in understanding how the two elements of distinction, the literary components of the text and the ink markings of the panels interact with each other, in support or criticality. What they leave behind, and what falls in between the panel boxes, is erased by the white space of the paper is also to be investigated. The following is an attempt to understand the politics of panel boxes or their absence in comic pages, by comparing multiple English (original or translated) graphic narrative texts.

Fights Inside the Border

Tintin the reporter has travelled deep in the sea, through deadly snow mountains, conquered high waves, and even went to the moon. The comic started publishing in various magazines in January 1929 and came out as the first book format in 1930 (Sarkar 88). Hergé created the mega narrative of Tintin, a reporter with quirky friends and a pet dog, who travelled over six continents, more than twenty countries, and at least four imaginary terrains (Sarkar 88). Yet, the author did not clarify any specific place as the home of the reporter; comic issues like *The Seven Crystal Balls* may indicate Tintin lives in England, as he says of returning to London to Professor Calculus at Marlinspike in the beginning (Hergé, *The Seven*

[4] For other languages with different order of writing, the eye is preprogrammed accordingly, for example, Japanese Manga, even in translation is read from back to front, and from right to left.

Crystal Balls [Adventures of Tintin] 3). However, no publications of the comic series mention a home address for Tintin, which provokes the reader to think of him as belonging everywhere, to every nation and beyond borders. Hergé kept the element of journalism as his profession, thus binding him to the search for news, having access to multiple forbidden places, and his goodwill bringing him favour from police or other state authorities. With permission to carry a pistol, brave Tintin would investigate suspicious events, till he discovers an answer which he believes to be the truth. Here, at this point, the critical readership of the comics may raise two questions; one is regarding the construction and nature of this investigated 'truth', and secondly, the sociopolitical position of Tintin in these narratives.

A European white-skinned reporter when investigating in America, Congo or Peru, encounters with 'Red Indians', African natives, or the Incas, is turned into their saviour. Zorrino, the orange seller in Peru, while guiding Tintin, Snowy and Haddock to the Sun Temple, mentions repeatedly how Tintin is saving his life in forests, over rivers, or mountains (Hergé, *Prisoners of the Sun [Adventures of Tintin]* 26). Tintin is not from the land of the Incas, while Zorrino knows the route toward the Sun temple, the hooks and dangers on the way, the animals of the forest, and the tide of the rivers, and yet, Tintin is necessarily the one who saves Zorrino. In Congo, he prescribes Quinine for malaria to the tribe and becomes their figure to worship. In the narratives, thus he elevates from the horizontal plane of his fellow characters to a distinctive hierarchy, creating a radical binary between the white-skinned educated urban reporter and the locals. The 20th-century context of the contemporality of the publication of the Tintin books further strengthens this argument. In the documentary *Tintin and I.- Interview with Hergé*, the author of the comics claimed that he did no pro-German propaganda, he didn't have any German friends, but on the other hand, researchers like Jan Bucquoy wrote that Hergé used to draw antisemitic cartoons in a Nazi newspaper entitled 'Brusseler Zeitung', and when he went to the archive to find some of the copies of the newspaper, he found the cartoon pages had been

cut out (Sarkar 63). Again, in 1944, when the Allied forces occupied Belgium, 144 names of traitors were distributed in leaflets, which included Hergé among other Germans (Sarkar 65). In other places, it has also been claimed that Hergé wrote Tintin in a certain way under the Nazi regiment to keep publishing the books, but again, Hergé himself has admitted that he drew Africans in the pure spirit of paternalism that was prevalent in those days (*The Economic Times*). This paternalism, the assumed colonial gaze of the author was transferred to the text, banishing any narratorial possibility that may create an obstacle for the white European inside the borders- that of the panels, or the content categories. Tintin is the centrepiece within the panel boxes; the speech bubbles and other words must defend his cause with such confidence, that the narratorial truth becomes his.

In *Tintin in America*, when Bobby Smiles meet the 'Redskins' (Figure 2), a distinct shift between the language of the latter from the former can be easily observed. The Sachem of the natives calls themselves 'Blackfeet', is easily manipulated by the white-skinned Bobby, and is stupid enough to forget where they have hidden the hatchet after fighting (Hergé, *Tintin in America [Adventures of Tintin]* 11). The panel borders do not remain ink marks anymore but turn into boundaries within which only the dominant narrative of the power is uttered from the mouth of both the powerful and oppressed. The possibility of an alternative voice of the marginalised slips in the spaces between successive panel boxes. At the end of the book, when Tintin defends the natives by claiming the oil pit as part of their land (29), he again elevates to the position of the saviour, and the rejected voice of the marginalized renders into a deafening silence. They do not get their rightful authority over the land, and the comic narrative escapes the racist discriminatory blame by deploying this strategy. Since this point, the 'Redskins' vanish from the story and the thematic threads again converge on the success of Tintin as the rescuer of Chicago.

Figure 2: A page from *Tintin in America* (*The Adventures of Tintin* by Hergé)

The border does not always operate in such clarity but often creates an illusionary liminality, a space for transaction. Zorrino, in *Prisoners of the Sun*, resides in such a juncture through whom the hierarchy operates, subjectifying the natives of all land as those who need to be saved. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon notes:

> They picked out promising adolescents, they branded them, as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture, they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words, that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country, they were sent home, whitewashed (Fanon 7).

This branding is subtle in Tintin's narratives, veiled under the childish humorous representations, and thankfulness of Tintin as a character trait. The appearance of

Tintin with a round face of innocence, and his affectionate relation with Snowy makes it easier to plot. Again, it is not only the colonial agenda that deepens the border blackness but in the Indian comic series *Amar Chitra Katha* by Anant Pai, a homogenous narrative of hegemony, rather than Indian heritage can be observed to become dominant. In *Soordas* (Bharati), the tale of a 16th-century Hindu poet, no dark-skinned character can be found, and contradictorily, in *The Churning of the Ocean*, which narrates the fight between deities and demons, the latter is portrayed in dark skin, and in fact, it features the highest number of dark-skinned characters in the *Amar Chitra Katha* series (Parameswaran and Cardoza 23). The argument of racism, or colourism becomes further strengthened as in *Akbar* (Patel and Kavadi), again no dark-skinned character can be found, thus potentially associating a darker skin tone with demons and the residents of Southern India, while simultaneously highlighting the North Indian hegemony of hierarchy over them. Further, Parameswaran and Cardoza (24) note, that 35% of all men characters in the series are dark-skinned, and only 15% of the women are so.

Figure 3: *Shankuntala* from *Amar Chitra Katha* (Doongaji and Lavangia 7)

Books like *Shakuntala* in the series paint women in an objectified and 'desirable' tone (Figure 3), thus labelling them with feminine performativity, which strongly aligns with their spoken words or activities. It evokes the 'male gaze' (Mulvey) among the reader-subconscious, and as a grandiose part of Indian childhood readings, the series successfully reinforces a man/woman,

dark/light, god/demon, caste-based, religion-based and class-based canonized narrative of homogeneity. Again, this discriminatory politics is subtle and strategic, for the series also includes publications like *Brave Women of India: 5 in 1*, or *Karna*.

The new centre created within the panel borders thus magnifies a dominant narrative of its contemporary sociopolitics and often resembles the state centres of reality. Even with the possibility of countering the latter, it does not attempt to rupture, but further constructs a border around itself to be safe, from the screams of the excluded voices trapped in the absentia of the white spaces between those borders, and from criticism of the readership with the shield of being literary, childish or fictional. But these borders are built by agencies of the centralised power, and it is inevitable for the unheard voices or silences to overrun the inter-panel space, slip through and attack the borders. It can be questioned whether such an intention and invasion would result in decentralizing the semiotics of comic narratives entirely, or rather simply create another matrix with a new centre and periphery.

The High Tides of Absentia

The complete dissolution of the panel borders in graphic narratives does not only imply the removal of the ink marks on the pages but also a destabilization of the thematic character of the text. As literary frameworks, the panel borders contribute to turning 'Rostoff' into a sequential 'tale', thus directly participating in the formation of the semiotic code, distinguishing the textuality from the non-textual[5]. In the last section, it has been discussed in detail how this non-textual often resides in conscious absentia, doomed and cast outside the panel boxes, by the politics of the textual. When in graphic narratives, such absents and unfits dare to cross the border of the panel (or the political border between the textual

[5] Here, I differentiate between the 'textual' and the 'non-textual' on a restrictive and literal basis; the former indicating what has been selected and thus included within the text, and the latter referring to those experiences/events excluded from the text.

and non-textual/the literary and extra-literary[6]), the temporal threads of the narrative, knotted with each other creating a chronology of the 'tale', bursts and breaks apart, giving rise to chaos in the semiotic system of images, words, and narratives. The artwork and the words interact with each other, not only within single panel boxes but overall the pages, thus indicating two areas of concern: firstly, whether these interactions happen instantaneously, as soon as the panel borders open, or is there a pattern of ongoing and chronic communication, and secondly, if such interactions and rupturing of the panel borders decentralise the semiotics and textuality, including the non-textual and co-existing with it in a horizontal plane, or simply a structural change occurs. In other words, it is to be investigated if the syntagmatic shift on the pages of the graphic narratives deploys a paradigmatic shift in both the narrative and the artwork.

The 2015 refugee crisis in Europe, caused by the excessive and rapid increase in the flow of migrating Syrians, Iraqis, Libyans, Afghans and others (Peters et al.) creates the context for Ali Fitzgerald's *Drawn to Berlin: Comic Workshops in Refugee Shelters and Other Stories from a New Europe*. As a comic artist and author, Fitzgerald recognizes the visual potential of images and their possibility of invading sociopolitical biases and structures. The novel is a collage of multiple fragmented imaginations and lived experiences, tangled with each other, of passing refugees in Berlin. Living on the outskirts of Paris, Fitzgerald recognizes her privileged position and the vertical gap between herself and the refugees, which makes her question her action of turning the refugee experience and events into a comic book whether it is voicing the oppressed, or mocking and hence recolonizing the already-colonized (Murel). This questioning by the author of the authorial decision to mark the boundary between textuality and non-textuality breaches borders- the refugee life, with all its pain and endurance, lores and screams pour hard into each other, destabilising the centre/periphery binary. A new narrative, fragmented and scattered, analogous to the migration of millions,

[6] The literary and the extra-literary are differentiated based on various intrinsic properties and politics, and yet they share a very porous differentiating membrane in-between. Thus, the active transport between these two broad textual categories becomes relevant here.

rises and finally, revolts to break down the homogenising labelling, criminalization, and systematic exclusion. The ones who are not included within the security of state borders, flood and bleed on Fitzgerald's comic pages, repeatedly triggering the initial quest of reading the non-text within the readership. The author notes to explain the second half of the book title,

New Europe was a shifting kaleidoscope, alternately dark and uplifting (Burrows 98). This spirality of the dual, the restlessness is mirrored in the novel, but also in the self-questioning of the author, which reminds of the same in Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, recognized by Edward Said as an attempt to give Palestinians a narrative (Sacco iii).

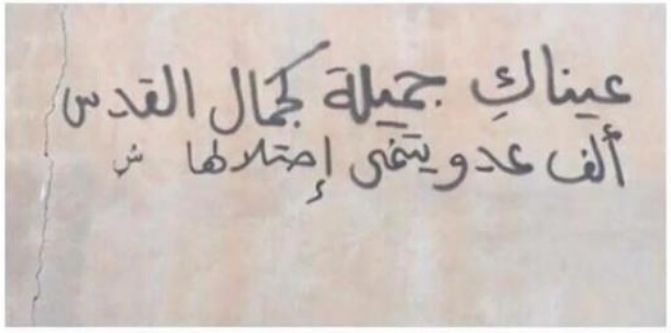

Figure 4: "Walls of Palestine" (*art.of.resistance*)

The politics of amnesia propagates a dehistoricization of the existence of the state from the sea to the river, eradicating the memories and extant of the people. Said notes that, unlike the superhuman comics of the American mainstream, Sacco's text does not deal with the winner, the hero who is physically and politically able to save himself and the people, but it captures the lives of 'history's losers' (Sacco v). They hold neither organization nor willpower, they get erased by Israeli bombing, in the real and literary space of the novel. Yet *Palestine* recognizes two things: firstly, when the war-torn walls of occupied lands read "Your eyes are as beautiful as Jerusalem, a thousand enemies wish to occupy it (Figure 4)," in contemporary reality, the textual spreads and engulfs the

non-textual, poetry and struggle becomes synonymous; and secondly, the self-questioning of the author through words and images regarding their possibility of recreating hierarchy in the name of voicing the silenced encourages critical reading. Sacco does not mask anything and certainly does not attempt to disregard or decline the existence of a vertical distance between the privileged and marginalized, but amplifies the suppressed voices, passing on the microphone whenever necessary. His politics of collecting information and the methodology of hearing out both Palestine and Israel become an extremely important and relevant part of the narrative.

In this positioning of self within the narrative, Sacco transparently shows his emotional refutes to the 'uncivilised', the 'uncultured' people of the streets. Sacco refused to give the kids in the Valley of Kidron money, they almost stole it from him, and when he returned to Jerusalem's old city, he despised the street hawkers (Sacco 24). He spoke in his mind:

> "They get me sick. Their big, sad eyes…Their empty pockets…I want to kick them (Sacco 24)."

The artwork portrays him in light of rich snobbery, his face turned from the people, and the people as intruding in his way with their hands and 'big, sad eyes', reminding and hammering him repeatedly not only about his privilege but how the privilege of one costs the rights of others, and how it is indeed the responsibility of the powerful, the central to subvert the dominant systematized narrative. Further, this subversive portrayal of Sacco aligns with Fitzgerald, and they locate themselves in a sensitized sphere of identifying the structure of both sociopolitical and economic oppression, and how the thematic-temporal threads may create an antithesis to the dominant reality. Such self-portrayal of the authors can be read as a reverse of Fanon's 'branding' or 'whitewashing' the colonised as part of colonial strategy. In other words, I propose that the borders can be used as a liminal space for resistance or manipulation. While the latter is what Fanon and the postcolonial arguments convey, regarding the former, the oppressed cross the border revolting against the powerful, and the powerful, if sensitized enough,

perhaps in a utopic imagination (yet not fantasy), visit the border and find themselves in confusion and vulnerable to the possibility that the oppressed may stop conceiving the border as absolute or static.

Figure 5: A page from *Palestine* (Sacco 24)

The entirety of *Palestine* is not without the panel borders, but it strongly creates confusion as even the bordered panel boxes interfere with each other. *Drawn to Berlin* creates a similar impact by not having any panel borders and pages full of block images. The predetermined habit of the reader to read in a certain (trained) direction lingers, but whether it is necessary, or whether the chronology of the narrative as set by the author is the only possibility haunts such existing horizons of expectations. Again, these attempts at words and artwork raise the next question of textuality and reading: how to

include/represent/textualize/read the inner and the world, the self and the outer, the psychological fancies and compromised reality in the same body of a text.

Memories of All that Did Not Happen

Published in 1985, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* deals with the dystopic setting of Gilead, a state with military dictatorship and religious orthodoxy, dominated by interpretations of the Old Testament. The narrative belongs to Offred, a handmaid in the household of Commander Fred (thus, Of-Fred), who talks about her lived experiences of the 'Ceremony', a ritualistic rape impersonating the story of Rachel and Bilhah, of childbirth, and of mundane horror of extreme physical and psychological oppression. The illustrated version of the novel was published in 2019, and here, through the artwork and the words, the distribution and interactions of thoughts and experiences can be observed. It raises the question of what constitutes an experience, whether it is only the physical-environmental palpable events or the intimate intra-personal thought strings as well; and secondly, the question of public and private in the history-making course.

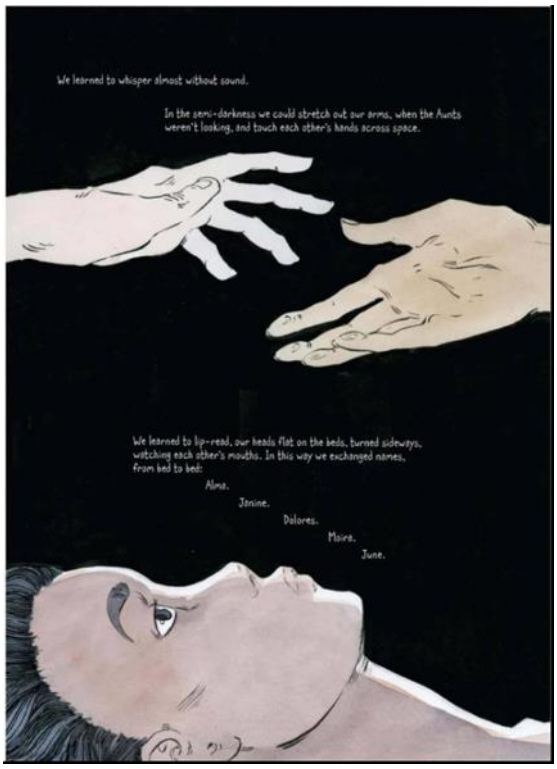

Figure 6: At the Red Centre (Atwood and Nault 7)

Gilead is a fictional state, governed by existing religious and political possible extremities, and the text discusses its making and ruling through the voice of a handmaid, one of the lowest classes, most peripheral and dismissed identities in such a state. In the Red Centre, during her training as a handmaid, June recalls how she learned to lipread, to communicate without words, in silence. In Figure 6, her name appears at the very bottom of a staircase structure of names of her fellow handmaids (Atwood and Nault 7); the staircase can be read from top to bottom, delivering a sense of dystopia and bleakness, as she finds herself lowest in the list, or in contrary, if the page is read from bottom to the top, with her name building the first step, then Moira, Dolores, Janine, and finally, at the top of the page, an indication of solidarity, of the names becoming comrades. Here, not only the panel borders are broken down, but the spatial distribution of artwork and words on the page directly claims a change in the reading approach, a syntagmatic shift, altering the predetermined directional reading of graphic narratives. The dystopic numbness of mind is poured out in the blackened background, and in resilience, the hands come closer, although unable to hold each other.

In her room at the commander's house, June aka Offred found a scratching behind the walls of the closet, which read, 'Nolite te bastardes carborundorum' (in English translation, 'Don't let the bastards grind you down') (Atwood and Nault 50, Figure 7). This screaming of the previous handmaid has remained doomed and dusty in the inner corner of a closet, never came out, and did not align with whatever happened to her, and perhaps will never align with whatever happens to handmaids in Gilead. But with this discovery of Offred, as her hands touch the fierce revolt of another nameless, the private becomes as important as the public in history-making. Antionette Burton notes how the home has always been disconnected from the historical discourses due to the absence of the public witness (Burton), and thus, the graphic narrative of Reneē Nault and Atwood substantially subverts and extends the boundaries of what to be included

in historical discourse, what should we talk about when narrating the history of a country.

Figure 7: 'Don't let the bastards grind you down' (Atwood and Nault 50)

The book does not eliminate panel borders, but it deconstructs the interpretation of borders, they are reduced to permeable membranes through which communication, or the absence of it, becomes a choice, not imposition. What did not happen, becomes an alternative to what did, and to access such alternatives, the transparency of intra-personal and psychological searches and findings becomes necessary for the readers.

In the place of the membrane metaphor, on the other hand, *Bhimayana: Incidents in the Life of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar* turns the borders into communicative pipelines, running through the images and words on the pages of the graphic narrative. Using the Pardhan Gond art, the Digna patterns and the colours become imageries of resistance possibilities. For example, in Figure 8, the narration reads Ambedkar's speech in Mahad, and the artistic imagination

portrays the microphones as water sources, raining the rightful sprinkles on the audience (Vyam et al. 48). These audiences will later follow Babasaheb into an organized Dalit movement, continuing to this day with the vision of Ambedkar. The speech bubbles throughout the book have been drawn and categorized based on the tone and speaker of the words, for example, the 'bird speech bubble' belongs to those whose speeches are soft and who are victimized, 'the thought bubble' is indicated with a line of eyes, representing the sight of the mind, and others (Vyam et al. 100).

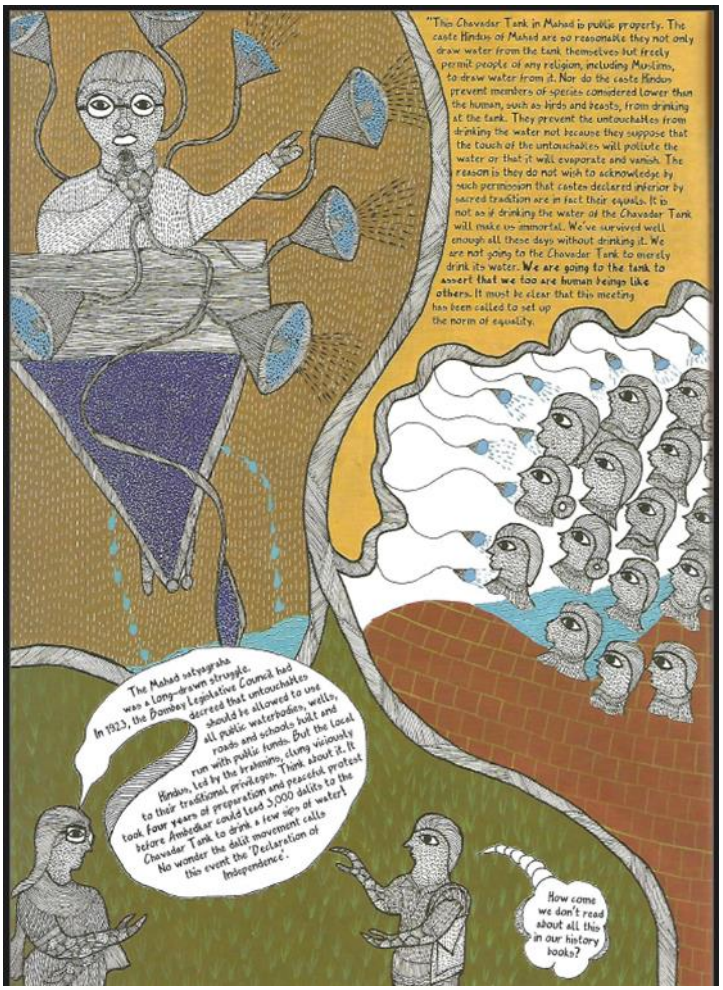

Figure 8: The Mahad Speech (Vyam et al. 48)

There can be further arguments made regarding the responsibility of the readership and how the reading methodology can be constructed or deconstructed in the case of graphic narratives and comic books, but it is evident that the

author/artist of the narratives must inspire such reading exercises. Graphic narratives are important not only because of the visual elements but for the images interact with the lexical, developing a new, conglomerated semiotics on the narratorial spatiotemporality. These semiotics hint at the presence of the non-textual, not in absentia, but as alternatives. The textual centre, when decentralised, opens up heterogeneous possibilities of multiplicity, the context becomes a textual (literary) extension (to the extra-literary). Such rhythmic resilient linkages within imposed separations must strive hard to prevail.

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