

Graphic Novels of Lebanon: Shaping the Identity for a New Generation

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Para Silvan. Nunca dejes de creer.

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Note on transliteration and translation

I studied philology, so the names of authors and titles are provided in Arabic. Authors' names are either transliterated according to the scheme below or written in the way that the authors write their own names in Latin script. I did this to enhance readability and on the assumption that those who read Arabic will be able to find authors and works faster. The titles of works and long quotes are written in Arabic script, transliteration (marked with (round) brackets), and English translation (marked with [square] brackets). If the title of a magazine or comic appears several times, the transliterated version is usually given. Since Arabic is written from right to left, I have arranged the pages to achieve the most readability.

The only exception made is in the bibliography used or footnotes and where I have written the Arabic name and the transliteration as follows in this Table and letter-to-letter.

The table below shows the transliteration scheme used in this thesis, which follows that of *Arabica Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*.

Arabic letter	Latin transliteration
ء	ʾ
ب	b
ت	t
ث	ṭ
ج	ǧ
ح	ḥ
خ	ḫ
د	d
ذ	ḏ
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	š
ص	ṣ

Arabic letter	Latin transliteration
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	ʿ
غ	ġ
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ي	y

Introduction

I. Origin and research inquiry

My initial interest behind this research was to discover why, at this point in history, comics in the Arab region are being published so much. Comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels are some of the most effective and versatile narrative forms in contemporary media culture. This dissertation will contribute to the discussion about comics in the Arabic cultural arena, specifically in Lebanon, and the relationship, in the communication function schematized by Jakobson, between sender and receiver. In this model, there are four further functions: context, message, channel, and code.

This study aims to further academic research: to highlight the role that comics play in disseminating new ideas to a specific audience and in contributing to cultural and intellectual development; to contribute to a historical and critical corpus on comics and comic research in Lebanon; to expose the richness and creativity of non-canonical writing practices; to show the connections of contemporary Lebanese comics on the one hand to the traditional cultural heritage and on the other hand to western comics; to underline the interdisciplinary nature of comic books in a way that unifies aesthetics, literature, intellect, and social activities; and finally, to offer key information on Lebanese graphic narration and its ultimate expression: the graphic novel.

The artistic quality of the comic strip has long been controversial but is now widely recognized as a “ninth art form”. Since the beginning of modern comics in the nineteenth century, sequential art has gained in importance and influence and has established itself both in academia and publishing. But there is a lack of analysis under the sender-receiver approach. The reading of a comic book is an act of aesthetic perception and intellectual reception in which the aesthetic regime of pictures (perspective, color, lines) and the literary system merge. With linguistic and iconic codes, authors of graphic novels announce their world visions. This combination of different codes places the reader in the “here and now” of the writer’s thoughts. By using a hybrid of coded text and images, broader interpretations are offered of more meaningful connections than traditional narrative forms.

II. Research questions

The picture presents itself as a potent medium of transmission and reception. Semiotic studies on artistic expressions are becoming increasingly important in academia. Although the study of comics and graphic novels is also gaining importance, there is a gap to be filled as such studies are lacking in interdisciplinary perspectives. There are few theoretical works on the literary characteristics of the medium. The present work could also help to close a gap in the area of comic research and to provide theoretical impulses that go beyond the boundaries of a local study. I set out to study Lebanese comic books in relation to the generation of artists that were mainly born in the Lebanese Civil War years by asking the following:

1. Which historical perspectives should be analyzed in a variety of texts to arrive at contemporary Lebanese comics?
2. What are the peculiarities of Lebanese comics, specifically as seen in the magazine *Samandal*? How did graphic narration/illustration eventually develop into graphic novels?
3. How do illustration, drawing style, color scheme, sequence, movement, human forms, and body language contribute to creating meaning, as well as the organization within the page and the panels in the page? How are time and space handled and what is the relationship of text-image: iconic conventions, metonym, visual metaphors, onomatopoeia, speech balloons, and lines? These characteristic aspects of comic books are necessary in conveying the content and messages of the author.
4. Why have comics in Lebanon transitioned from kiosks to art galleries and what are the implications of this thesis among the intellectual elite? How has the comic medium promoted ideals of modernity and exchange and positioned Lebanon on the world map of comics?

Examined through the lens of modernity and innovation, this doctoral thesis exposes a consistent and clear image of what constitutes a contemporary practice of expression, namely, the comic book. From the little readers of yesterday came the authors and drawers of today. The authors of the new graphic novels combine the stylistic characteristics of the most famous caricaturists with contemporary literature. In their aesthetic expression, these authors are also characterized by children's magazines. Lebanese graphic novels are not a peripheral phenomenon; their development takes place due to political circumstances in the region, which are much more volatile compared to the West.¹ But before the narrative part of comics became more complex, the authors started to publish in magazines. It is difficult

to present an exhaustive and detailed list of all the predecessors in the Lebanese graphic narrative, because it would include not only Lebanon but many other countries from the late nineteenth century to the present. However, the fact that some illustrators and conventions are preserved and cherished to this day, not to mention the chosen authors/illustrators in this study, proves that the aspects of the graphic narrative create a lasting bond with an imagined (or real) Lebanese identity and the intentions of the author with the visions of his readers.

The advent of graphic novels, most notably after 2006, shows us that all these forms are related in one way or another to the political context of the moment. One of the main points the graphic novels have in common is not their visual aesthetic, but the topic they deal with: the embodiment of personal narratives. The events are personal and stem from memories of the Lebanese Civil War and the 2006 War, particularly traumatic events for the author, society, and even simply for critics and satirists of modern Lebanese society. The recounting of personal events is a recurring topic in the Arabic narrative; what is new is the format. Why is it so important now to develop new mediums for expressing life narratives, especially focusing on such complex and controversial topics?

III. Research methodology

Undertaking this research required that I become acquainted with other fields of study, some directly related to literature, and others important for tracing developments, such as (visual) cultural studies, graphic design, and book illustration. My first readings and sources of investigation were children's magazines bought during my time at university and subsequently while traveling through the Middle East. Cartoons and caricatures featured in Arabic printed newspapers were also a source. But it was when the translation of *Metro* fell into my hands that I started to dig into graphic narratives from Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. While looking for more sources and examples, I came across *Samandal* magazine, which I consider to be the seminal point in the development of the comic scene in Lebanon, since all artists published in the magazine have accomplished longer and solo works.

I used social media as a complementary source, as it plays a decisive role in the development and dissemination of comics in the region through its potential for networking and exchange, allowing me to find a larger number of authors. I also had to familiarize myself with the visual and structural conventions of the magazines, books, and their authors. In addition, reading literature on comic book theories, visiting exhibitions in various European

cities and in Beirut, and attending symposiums on diverse fields (mainly on comic books, but also on visual cultural studies), proved instrumental in training my eyes to look critically at Arabic comic books.

In my first research visit to Beirut in March 2016, I realized that Lebanese comics had a place in bookstore shelves, where I could purchase comic books for an adult audience, and in libraries, but also in other places less common for Europeans, such as coffee shops, bistros, and art galleries. I undertook field research by visiting and mapping these sites, mainly in Beirut and the Mount Lebanon region. In other visits to Lebanon, I conducted this field research in other major Lebanese cities: Tripoli, in the north; Saida and Sour (Tyre), in the south; and in the Rachaiya district in the Bekaa Valley. Finding out that comic books were not always sold in bookstores made me realize that these books, in comparison to Europe, were different on the level of sale points, but that their target audience was very similar. At this point in the research, my primary sources started to grow.

In 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2020, I was also able to access the archive of the Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and its special loan at the university's Nami Jafet Memorial Library. This gave me the chance to comprehensively view sources on cartoons, children's magazines, and illustration, as well as primary sources which were difficult to find in store, such as the JAD workshop materials and other books published before 2006. Through this archival research, I was able to gain insight into other primary source materials. Through photographing and scanning, collecting, and examining old and modern comics, I could place them in chronological order. This work gave me a sense of the visual characteristics of each author, as well as the topics they deal with and the importance that collectives have in Lebanon.

The second part of the research proved to be more complex. Looking at comics as a cultural artifact expanded my area of inquiry into art history, publishing, media, and social studies. I needed to chart authors and their influences, their development in parallel with socio-political transformations, and the implications that their work could have had. From this point onwards, my research method included the use of various sources simultaneously. A few published works have provided me with the initial broad lines. The history of Lebanese comics is closely linked with the socio-political context of the Middle East. Caricatures, daily strips in newspapers, children's magazines, comics, and graphic novels are all related in one capacity or another to the political context of the moment. This graphic narrative started in Egypt and later spread to Lebanon. As Etmüller pointed out in 2012, the Egyptian caricature *Abū Naẓẓāra* by Yaqub Sanu was the first Arabic-language magazine to print caricatures with inscriptions in French and Arabic and the first to use Egyptian Arabic,

spreading to other countries after its inception in 1878.² Its natural development was the daily strips in newspapers.³

For Malti-Douglas (1995), the creation of children's magazines offers interesting insights into social developments in the Arab countries.⁴ They were and still are an important way to eradicate illiteracy among young readers. For this reason, Dünkers (2011) considers that children's magazines have been promoted by various governmental and non-governmental parties, and have become very important since they provide education and entertainment at the same time (Dünkers 2011).⁵ The first comic publications were translations from English and French, such as *Tintin*, *Aste-rix*, or *Lucky Luke* at دار المعارف (Dār al-Ma'ārif) [Knowledge Publishing House] in Egypt and Lebanon. They were highly successful and influential in Egypt. Now they are regarded as immortal cultural icons, not only in western countries but also in Arab countries (Grünwald 2000, Malti-Douglas 1995). These translations of foreign comics soon took on their own cultural elements, which led to the appropriation and naturalization of comics in their specific cultural context. Mickey Mouse began to appear in مجلة سمير (Mağallat Samīr) [Samir Magazine] in 1958; between 1959 and 2003, his magazine مجلة ميكي (Mağallat Mīkī) [Mickey Magazine] was issued by دار الهلال (Dār al-Hilāl) [Crescent Moon Publishing House], and since 2004, it has been published monthly by دار النهضة مصر (Dār al-Nahḍa Miṣr) [Renaissance Publishing House Egypt]. Mickey no longer celebrated Christmas, instead celebrating Ramadan. The Egyptianization of the characters, the Arabization of the games, the allusion to the pharaonic past, and the inclusion of other cultural and religious references are remarkable.

In addition to these translations, homemade productions were increasingly released. Since 1956, *Samīr* has appeared in Egypt, which was the first magazine to print comics. Further examples are الدين علاء (Alā' al-Dīn) [Aladdin], الندى قطرة (Qaṭrat al-Nadā) [Dew Drop] by the poet Muḥammad Said, and زمزم (Zamzam), a magazine for children between five and seven years sponsored by the High Council for Islamic Affairs Cairo. In Lebanon, فراس (Firās) and توتة توتة (Tūta Tūta) are published; in Tunisia, عرفان (Irfān), a magazine for young people, and شهلول (Šahlūl) for pre-schoolers. Further examples include: in Syria, الطليعة (al-Taḥi'a) [Vanguard] and أسامة (Usāma) by Zakaria Tamer, which was sponsored by the Baath Party; in the Emirates, ماجد (Māğid); in Kuwait, الصغير العربي (al-ʿArabī l-Šağīr) [The Little Arab], as a newspaper supplement sold separately since 1986; and in Saudi Arabia, باسم (Bāsim). All of the abovementioned titles are easily found throughout the Middle East and are not restricted to their countries of origin.

IV. State of the art

Since the publication in 1994 of the first systematic study of Arab comics, *Arab Comic Strips: Politics of an Emerging Mass Culture* by the scholars Allen Douglas and Fedwa Malti-Douglas,⁶ significant research has been undertaken; however, there is still a gap to be filled. This title would foreshadow what was about to come, that is, the development of a new form of literature—graphic art—and a way to convey the generational turn with its most relevant expression: the Arab Spring. One of the most recently published books on the topic from 2017, *The New Generation: Arab Comics Today*, underlines this idea of a new generation creating new ways of expression.

We will first conduct a critical overview of Arabic comics in academia, reviewing books and articles. Secondly, we will reflect on the reason for comic studies. In this analysis, we will leave aside research on superhero comics and cartoons, thus distinguishing between the different expressions of comic books. The focus of this study is books targeted at an adult audience; as cartoons are published on a daily or at least regular basis, they tend to feature in newspapers, while the target audience for superhero comics is mainly children. We will analyze the importance of supporting institutions for book publishing, critics, and research, and we will open up new research areas, such as the exhibitions of Arabic comics and cartoon strips in museums and exhibitions and the impact that other factors may have on the distribution, creation, and publication of new works. Such factors include editorials, distribution channels, and access to the works; the role of private initiatives in contrast to the once state-controlled publishing; and censorship. Finally, I will summarize the importance of a new point of view regarding the study of graphic novels.

As mentioned above, the first academic research on Arabic strips was *Arab Comic Strips: Politics of an Emerging Mass Culture*. The scope of the book was to analyze the political meanings of comic books and comic strips, based on the link between popular culture and politics. In this book, the central analysis is based on two primary sources: children's strips and magazines—both secular and religious—and political strips, on the one hand those supportive of the regimes or propagandistic, and on the other hand, those critical and satirical of the Arab regimes. These political strips might be aimed at youngsters or adults. The authors show the importance of comics within the political socialization of young readers. Adults and children enjoy and learn from the strips.

Douglas and Malti-Douglas try to cover the whole production of Arab comics, both thematically and ideologically: “Yet Arab comic strips are a flourishing genre with an

enormous readership and a political and ideological range extending from leftist and other secular modernist to Islamic religious perspectives” (p.1). They are also geographically comprehensive, covering comics produced in the Gulf through to Egypt and the rest of North Africa, as well as by Arabs in Europe or in other languages such as French. The book states that the first comic strips were published in Egypt in the early 1960s with Mickey Mouse. Soon after, they were “arabized”: the characters wore local robes, or they adopted local manners and customs. After the success of these Mickey Mouse booklets, the Egyptian president Nasser is represented in comics as a (super)hero by telling the story of the Egyptian leader. In contrast, the life of Saddam Hussein is relayed as an adventure, with the aim of celebrating the national hero and exalting the values of the Ba’ath Party. The first editorial cartoon analyzed in the book is that of the Egyptian Ahmad Hegazi, who delivered harsh critiques and political satire in the newspapers of the time.

In *Arab Comic Strips: Politics of an Emerging Mass Culture*, Chapter Six is dedicated to Islamic comic strips. The aim of these was to educate their audience about Islamic values through moral tales. Syria exemplifies, for Douglas and Malti-Douglas, the “state- and party-dominated comic strips (...). In fact, nowhere in the Arab world does a government so effectively control comic strips as in the Syrian Arab Republic” (p.110). Through different examples, Syrian comic strips sum up the entertainment of the first Mickey Mouse comics: the aggrandizement of the political leader Hafez al-Assad and his political party, as with their counterparts in Egypt and Iraq, and the inculcation of moral values, as with the Islamic comic strips. In Chapter Eight, comics from Tunisia are under analysis, since it was from Tunisia that magazines were distributed across the whole of North Africa. Special attention is paid to the role of women in history; the strips also try to spread the social and national project. The following chapter is about the children’s magazine from Abu Dhabi, *Māǧid*, which remains a success to this day, and which is available across the Middle East because its target reader is Arab, or, as Malti-Douglas wrote: “Majid’s world only hints at universality. Its true locus is Arabism” (p. 173). The next two chapters center on comic strips from Algeria and from the Arab diaspora. Both chapters demonstrate the pressures faced by Arabs in Europe and how this was represented in comics.

This book provided a first insight into Arab comics and the importance of the studies into popular culture, as applied to the Middle East. While the comics examined have a European influence, they tend to differ from the western ones; all of the books, cartoons, and booklets are trying to educate or to spread the values of the newly created Arab republics. It is noteworthy that the works discussed were mainly published in the 1980s. In *Arab Comic Strips*, the publications discussed are Arab; that is, they are written not only in

Arabic, but in French or English as well. The oldest source mentioned is from 1946 and is not an Arab strip, but Belgian: *Tintin: Le Lotus Bleu*; the newest, besides *Maus* from 1991, is the manga *Akira Book 4* from 1992 (Malti-Douglas 1994:248-250). Within the authors' extensive research, the first Arabic source is from 1973, جمال عبد الناصر [Gamal Abdel Nasser] and, of the last ones, one is in English from 1988, *A Day in the Life of the Muslim Child* [in Cairo] by Ahmad Abd al Aziz (p.248), and another from 1989, الدكتاتورية (*al-Diktātūriyya*) [The Dictatorship] (...) of Bahjat. (ibid.). New research has shown that cartoons are older, according to Göçek (1998:6): "In the late nineteenth century Europe, the increasing intervention of the nation-state into the lives of its citizens and the surfacing social divides based on race, gender and class further enhanced the significance of political cartoons as a site of resistance. Political cartoons also did not remain a medium particular to Europe (...) The non-Western world, including the Middle East, promptly started to employ this medium."⁷ She further states that children's magazines were already being published in the second half of the nineteenth century.

We have to wait from 1994 until 2017 for the publication of two books dealing with Arab comics and cartoons: *Nouvelle génération : La Bande Dessinée Arabe aujourd'hui* = *New Generation : Arab Comics Today*,⁸ and *50 artistes de caricature et de bande dessinée arabes*,⁹ and until 2018 for the publication of the anthology *La Nouvelle bande dessinée arabe: Short*.¹⁰ One anthology was published in the United States in 2015: *Muqtatafat: A Comics Anthology* featuring artists from the Middle East Region.¹¹ Comic books from the Middle East, and not only Lebanon, have also found a place in western markets and in the Angoulême International Comics Festival (considered to be one of the most important comic festivals in Europe), as well as in other exhibitions and initiatives around Europe (vid. infra).

New Generation: Arab Comics Today was the official catalogue of the homonymous exhibition held at the Cité Internationale de la Bande Dessinée et de l'Image, in cooperation with AUB and the Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Comics Initiative.¹² This catalogue comprises three essays: the first is written by Georges Khoury; the next article, "The Trace of the City in Contemporary Arabic Comics", is written by Enrique Klaus (pp. 23- 29). Here, the author analyzes the "sociological profile-type of comic book artists" (p.23): the time span in which they were born (between 1975 and 1999), and their city origins, or the "shared urbanities" (ibid.). Klaus affirms urban scenery as an "inexhaustible source of characters and scenarios" (p.25). His analysis mostly employs serials or graphic novels set in Casablanca (SkefKef), Algiers (Fatma N'parali), and Tunis (Lab619), as well as some examples from Cairo (in *Tok-Tok* as a gentile version of Gotham City) and Beirut (as a changing and disillusioning city in *Beirut Rewind* by Barack Rima (2017)).¹³ Beirut also features as a war scenario in *Mourir*,

partir, revenir. Le jeu des hirondelles by Zeina Abirached (2007),¹⁴ and in *Beirut Won't Cry* by Mazen Kerbaj (2016) as the city that witnesses his feelings during the 2006 War.¹⁵

The following article, “From behind the doors into the streets: Women in Comics from the Arab World”, is written by Lina Ghaibeh (pp. 31-39). Firstly, she lists children’s comic magazines and argues that the target reader is a young boy, even though there were/are some exceptions within the pages of the magazines, and it is possible to find girls playing key roles in the comics. Beirut and Lebanon played a prominent role in the development of comics in the region: on the one hand due to “the accessible francophone culture in Beirut, open to the intense and exciting movement of European adult comics and the establishment of the 9th art at the time” (p.31); on the other hand, the creation of a comic program at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) by Michèle Standjofsky (ibid.). Ghaibeh says, too, that troubled times—i.e., Lebanese Civil War, the 2006 War, or the Egyptian revolution—are “often accompanied by a rise in alternative artistic expressions” (p.31) and that it is a fertile ground for the flourishing of superheroes, like the Lebanese Malak: Angel of Peace or the Egyptian *Qahera*. As for the personal narratives, many of them are written by women, in addition to the fact that many of the collectives were born in the course of the revolutions.

Ghaibeh also remarks that, in terms of personal narratives, many women took the opportunity to express themselves in comic format, either to denounce gender discrimination, or to publicize intimate situations, sexual harassment, and violence. In this way, the most important comics dealing with this gender perspective are listed and analyzed. The conclusion is: “In the woman’s approach, the style and voice tends to be far more sober, realistic and dark, as opposed to the more humorous, action based and cartoon-like style of their male counterparts” (p. 37). Women participate in political activism, as shown by Jana Traboulsi, Lena Merhej, and Rawand Issa in Lebanon, or Hanan Alkarargy in Egypt. The conclusion made in this essay is that women are important in comics: “women both consciously or unconsciously open up the medium to varied experiences and voices, and contribute to the medium as a hub allowing for a more inclusive conversation” (p.39).

The section entitled “Going Underground: Online Comics Evade Censorship” (pp. 126-143) explores how comics published online illustrate the evasion of censorship, with materials from Syria, Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco. The next section concerns “The Solo Artists” (p. 144-203), represented in Egypt by Magdy El Shafee, Hanan Alkarargy, and Sherif Adel; in Lebanon by Mazen Kerbaj, Zeina Abirached, Barrack Rima, Lena Merhej, and Jorj Abou Mhaya; and in Morocco by Mohammed El Bellaoui, Omar Ennaciri, and Brahim Raïs. Other solo artists discussed include Othman Selmi and Seif Eddine Nechi (from Tunisia);

Nawel Louerrad and Mahmoud Benameur (from Algeria); Abdulrazzak Alsanhani (from Syria); Amer Shomali (from Palestine); and Hassan Manasrah (from Jordan). Overall, this book demonstrates the growth of comics in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and emphasizes the idea of a new generation that believes in change and equally enhances local identities, hence the name given to the collectives being in the language used in the comics.

50 artistes de caricature et de bande dessinée arabes presents a French translation of fifty artists who were already published in Arabic in the first five issues of the magazine ToshFesh, in order to “témoigne de la vitalité de la création contemporaine en caricature et bande dessinée en Tunisie, Égypte, Liban, Jordanie, Palestine, Syrie, Irak, Koweït, Arabie Saoudite, Yémen, Bahreïn et Soudan” (dust jacket). In the editorial pages, Mu’taz al-Sawwaf, as director of ToshFesh, explains that the aim is to repay to European readers and European comic artists the debt of Arab caricaturists, namely the love of comics in Arab countries: “Ils nous ont donnée l’envie de nous livrer corps et âme à cet art, d’y exceller et d’en apporter le meilleur en Europe” (p.7). ToshFesh in vernacular Lebanese Arabic means “whatever!”,¹⁶ and is the name given to the non-profit organization to promote artists and to help them to publish and publicize their work.

Lena Merhej writes in the introduction that it was important to show that, in Arab countries, they can also caricature personal situations (funny or touching), with the aim of changing the idea of a violent Middle East: “Autant d’expressions bien différentes de ce que les mass médias véhiculent habituellement comme images sanglantes, violentes et stéréotypées de la région” (p.8). She also sweeps the history of comics in the region and stresses the importance of exchange with Europe and among the different comics collectives (vid. supra), as well as through exhibitions and other activities. She explains how, over a long time, the cartoonists Mahmoud Kahil, Pierre Sadek, and Stavro have drawn the complexities of the political situation in Lebanon and the war and post-war nonsense: “(...) ont quant à eux dessiné, pendant de longues années, les imbroglios de la politique au Liban et l’absurdité de la guerre et de l’après-guerre” (p. 9).

After listing the authors featured in the book, Lena Merhej firstly highlights the stylistic differences between the artists included in the anthology: from Japanese manga to the Franco-Belgian comic tradition to graffiti and American superhero aesthetics, i.e., a heterogeneous style. Secondly, she emphasizes how all caricaturists focus their stories on the living conditions in their countries, from family issues to the political situation to international politics, such as the protests in Egypt or Tunisia. The book is divided into three parts: “Caricaturist Les Classiques” (pp. 12-61); “Caricature” (pp. 62-151), which focuses on

the new generation of caricaturists in the region; and lastly “Bande Dessinée” (pp. 152-221), which focuses on comic book artists from the region. As with the other book, the editors initially outline the different artists before detailing some examples of their work. *50 artistes de caricature et de bande dessinée arabes* provides a good and comprehensive outline of artists in the region.

La Nouvelle bande dessinée arabe: Short is introduced by Mohamed Bouabdallah, as director of the Institut Français in Egypt, and Elke Kaschl Mohni, director of the Goethe-Institut in Cairo. They focus on the common ethos of young comic artists in the region: they publish in fanzines or self-publish, indicating how collectives and exhibitions have grown, with the political situation giving rise to new creations and new ways of expression; additionally, they prefer to express themselves in vernacular Arabic or in street language, rather than in classical Arabic, because this reflects above all the desire for freedom and political commitment or, as they write: “l’envie de liberté (...) et reliant les principales problématiques qui traversent aujourd’hui ces sociétés, l’ambition artistique n’abdique jamais devant l’engagement politique” (p. 5). The aim of the publication is to make almost thirty authors from eight countries known to French and German readers, and to encourage readers to visit the websites to discover other materials and artists.

In *Les enfants d’Ellabbad font de la BD: Regard sur quarante ans d’illustration en Égypte et dans le monde arabe* [The Children of Ellabbad Make Comics: a Look at Forty Years of Illustration in Egypt and the Arab World] by Mathilde Chèvre, the author outlines the history of illustration in Arab countries. She pays special attention to the Egyptian children book illustrator Mohieddin Ellabbad (1940-2010), as he searched during the 1970s for an “image arabe” (p.12) that has come to influence today’s generation: “puisque la production des années 1970 pose les salons thématiques et graphiques qui influent et inspirent les illustrateurs d’aujourd’hui” (ibid.). But Ellabbad was himself influenced by the visual heritage of pharaonic Egypt, as well as handicrafts, henna tattoos, and embroidery, amongst other things. In *En première ligne: La bande dessinée à l’heure du monde arabe* by Jonathan Guyer, the importance lies in the originality of the new artists, through language, through themes, and through the comic art in the form chosen. This makes these comics provocative in both aesthetic and content, and in having “le mérite d’avoir brisé la barrière de la peur” (p.21), challenge censorship. The last article, “Bande originale”, is an interview with Algerian artist Rym Mokhtari, Egyptian artist Shennawy, and Lebanese artist Mazen Kerbaj led by Tewfik Hakem, who remarks on the importance of exchange with the authors for a better understanding in Europe, as well as the significance of their varied influences and the internet for developing and exchanging. One point clarified is that the three artists

come from similar backgrounds: “Soit une fille, deux garçons, trois auteurs de la même génération et de ce même milieu social qui permet à ses enfants de faire des études de beaux-arts” (p.28); furthermore, all are fluent in more than one language. The questions posed are: 1) how they came to make comics; 2) the influence that the political protests have had in choosing comic as a form of expression; 3) how important it is for them to experiment with narration forms and break with their predecessors; 4) what characterizes the new Arabic comics; 5) if they understand comics as a renewal of pan-Arabism; and 6) which comics they have in their libraries. It is an exciting discussion about their careers, the narrative strategies of Arab comic art, and the links between the events of the so-called Arab Spring and contemporary comic art. After these initial insights into comic books and their origins in the Middle East, 27 other works are presented.

The aim of the anthology *Muqtatafat: A Comics Anthology* featuring artists from the Middle East Region is to showcase comic production from the Middle East to the American reader. The introduction, “New Comics in the Arab Countries”, written by Lena Merhej, traverses the history of comics in the region, from children's magazines and cartoons to, finally, comics aimed at an adult audience. Here, the importance lies with collectives and networking, as well as festivals and publishers specialized in comics. The form of comics is outlined too: the relevance of global comic traditions, with some authors influenced by the Franco-Belgian tradition, others by Japanese manga, and others by the superheroes from Marvel or DC; the tensions between image and text, and even poetry—as rhythmic repetitions or paronomasia, or as visual poetry; and the revision made by some artists to comic conventions, such as the space between panels or the movement of characters.

Merhej also addresses the role of war and the description of its elements (tanks, warplanes, people) by some artists: “These stories are about war, protests and revolutions, and they are about domestic and civil conflicts” (p.10). In conclusion, she writes: “To tell their stories, artists draw on traditional legacies, but also new strategies: creating tension between image and text, poetry and cynicism” (ibid.). The stories included in the book are presented with a short biography of the artists, followed by comics mostly already published; out of the 14 comics featured, nine were originally written in English or French.

With these secondary sources—mainly the academic works of Lena Merhej, Lina Ghaibeh, Georges Khoury (JAD), the *ToshFesh* magazine, and the Mahmoud Kahil Award and its publications—I was able to begin the final stage of my research. I selected a limited number of artists in the categories of cartoon and illustration and, through systematic study of the *Samandal* magazine and graphic novel authors, arrived at the conclusion that the role of the comic book has changed from a low-culture to a high-culture agent. I avoided making

direct comparisons between western comic book history and design conventions, except as in the introduction to chart the graphic narrative and illustration as a global phenomenon that had already started in the eighteenth century with the press.

V. Overview of the chapters

This is the first extended academic work that charts the authors and their contexts and centers them as cultural agents. It also sheds light on the key role played by individuals, editors, sale points, and the design of books, and their implications in shaping a different mode of expression.

In Chapter One, we will define how a comic stands as a final product. Chapter Two gives an overview of cartoonists in Lebanon as they are key to understanding the origins of comics. Chapter Three details children's book illustrators, without whom it would be difficult to explain the new aesthetics of books. Chapter Four deals with two main topics: the magazine *Samandal* and four Lebanese graphic novelists. Finally, Chapter Five explores the edition of comics in Lebanon, sales points, publishing houses, universities and comics, prizes, and the influence of censorship.

¹ In the 1970s, the first comic books for adults in the US had already appeared. *A Contract with God* is considered the first graphic novel, while *Maus* and *Persepolis* were a success, the first because it is a graphic novel about sad events, i.e., the Holocaust; the second, because it can be considered the first graphic novel about childhood memoirs.

² Ettmüller, Eliane Ursula. 2012. *The Construct of Egypt's National-Self in James Sanua's Early Satire and Caricature*. 1. Aufl. Bd. 22. Studien Zum Modernen Orient. Berlin: Schwarz.

³ We will discuss the implications of censorship later in this work.

⁴ Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. 1995. "Children's Books and Cartoons" In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* Band 1, Herausgegeben von John L. Esposito S. 277-78 Oxford: Oxford University Press

⁵ Düngers, Petra. 2011. Arabic Children's Literature Today: Determining Factor Tendencies *PMLA* Vol. 126: 1, S. 170- 181 New York: Modern Language Association

⁶ Douglas, Allen, and Fedwa Malti-Douglas. 1994. *Arab Comic Strips: Politics of an Emerging Mass Culture*. Bd. 831. A Midland Book. Bloomington [u.a.]: Indiana Univ. Press.

⁷ Göçek, Fatma Müge (ed.)1998. *Political cartoons in the Middle East*. Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers.

⁸ Ghaibah, Linah, and Mercier, Jean-Pierre (eds.) 2017. *Nouvelle génération : la bande dessinée arabe aujourd'hui = New generation : Arab comics today*. Beirut,Marseille:ToshFesh, Alifabata

⁹ Al Sawwaf, Mu'taz. 2017. *50 artistes de caricature et de bande dessinée arabes* Beirut,Marseille:ToshFesh, Alifabata

¹⁰ Shennawy, Mohamed. 2018. *La Nouvelle bande dessinée arabe : Short*. Arles : Actes Sud BD

¹¹ Lewis, A. David, Anna Mudd, and Paul Beran. 2015. *Muqtatafat: a comics anthology featuring artists from the Middle East region*. Arlington: Ninth Art Press

¹² <http://www.citebd.org/spip.php?article9174>, <https://www.aub.edu.lb/articles/Pages/comics-exhibition.aspx> [last accessed 27th August 2019]

¹³ Rima, Barrack. 2017. *Beyrouth: La Trilogie*. Marseille: Alifbata
All works included in this introduction will further be discussed.

¹⁴ Abirached, Zeina. 2007. *Mourir, partir, revenir. Le jeu des hirondelles*. Paris: Cambourakis.

¹⁵ Kerbaj, Mazen. 2016. 2006 بروت لن تبكي: يوميات حرب تمّوز (Bayrūt Lan Tabkī: Yawmīyāt Ḥarb Tammūz 2006). Beirut: Editions Snoubar Beirut

¹⁶ طش فش (*tuš fiš*) means “no difference”, “no problem”, or “not important”. The name probably implies that they do not care what someone might say about cartoons; they just want to make a caricature of reality and, through humor, to bring awareness to the problems and realities of daily life.

Chapter One: The comic as a product: from creation to bookshelves

The art of comics

In this chapter, we will look at the process that leads from the artist's idea to the final product as a book. The artist's intention is reflected in the different models of creation. In the analysis, we will examine key elements of both the image and the text. Finally, we will consider the paratextual elements that are important in the comic as a book. For a better understanding of this chapter, figures are included in Appendix 1.

I. What do we understand by comics?

This question generates controversy in comics research. Even though Eisner's definition (2008) of comics as "sequential art" is almost unanimously agreed upon, some problems arise in its practical application. The term "sequential art" can certainly include other forms of artistic expression that, on closer examination, have nothing to do with comics (e.g., ancient representations of image sequences as found in ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, or the Maya). Eisner describes the comic as a sequence of two or more images arranged in such a way that the viewer links them together and thereby arrives at the resolution (closure) of the story. This resolution is made possible by the narrative plot. It forms the "thread" that helps the viewer to close the gap between one sequence of images and the next. This process forms the prerequisite for the development from a mere stringing together of images to a meaningful sequence of images. A narrative opens up; the viewer becomes the reader. For Eisner, the mental activity of the reader is a fundamental element: "The format of comics presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretative skills".¹ Scott McCloud, building on Eisner's definition, defines the comic as "[j]uxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer".²

The sequential component of the comic implies the chronological arrangement of the narrative. The narrative thereby builds up in a largely linear temporal sequence, as is also found in other narrative art forms such as literature or cinema. However, the comic requires its reader to perform the act of disintegration, which distinguishes it from other visual art forms. This is a process that is not automatic in comics as, for example, in cinema. The author's arrangement of the images must allow the reader, through active participation, to put them together in a way that makes sense. The new Lebanese comic has developed forms of representation that raise the active participation of the reader to a new level; authors such as Lamia Ziadé and Mazen Kerbaj are particularly worthy of mention here.

As with all narrative art forms, a distinction can be made in comics between works with a fictional character, i.e., depictions that stem mainly from the author's imagination, and those with a non-fictional character, which interpret real events. Within the comic genre—and this is especially true for Lebanese comics—there are more and more authors who stand out through innovation, be it through autobiographical (record) drawings, testimonies with a family connection, or journalistic reportage/chronicles. Autobiography in particular moves between reality and fiction due to its subjective narrative style. The author has little more than his or her own experience as proof of what happened. Of course, this can only be thought of as including all the limitations of selective choice and manipulation that the artistic processing of memory entails.

Will Eisner (2008) intended to examine in his book *Comics and Sequential Art* “the unique aesthetics of sequential art as a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures and images and words to narrate a story or dramatize one idea.”³ In this sentence, there is much more than only a statement of what the reader of his famous handbook about graphic narratives should expect. It summarizes the new approaches to the term comics.

When we talk about “comics”, we must face the fact that we are dealing with a medium, with a form of art, and with narrative. Comics are not only a combination of drawings with speech balloons, as we usually think; this is not a deep analysis of comics. As a collective communication outlet, we can name the terminus a medium; as it includes drawings combined in an aesthetic way with text, it might be seen as an artistic form, and as it tells us something, it is also a narrative form.

Eisner also wrote: “The format of the comic books presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art (e.g., perspective, symmetry brush stroke) and the regimens of literature (e.g., grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other. The reading

of a comic book is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit.”⁴ As some comic theorists, such as Stein and Thon,⁵ emphasize, comics might be seen under the new paradigms of contemporary narrative, e.g., contextualist narratology,⁶ cognitive narratology,⁷ and “transgeneric” and “intermedial approaches”,⁸ because “the field of graphic narrative offers a promising ‘test case’ for the project of a ‘transmedial narratology’”. For Smith, the importance of comics lies in the fact that: “Comics are daunting not only because of their long histories but also because of their complex, multimodal expression. Comics combine the arts of drawing and painting (in all their various forms, from caricature to abstraction to photorealism), the layout elements of print media, the verbal tropes of literature, the visual narrative language of film, and the storytelling of serials, and then they transform these shared elements into something different from their uses in other media.”⁹

Cognitive narratology offers a transmedial outlook because it encloses narrative and mind. As Herman (2009:31) states: “Cognitive narratology can be defined as the study of mind-relevant aspects of storytelling practices, wherever—and by whatever means—those practices occur.”¹⁰ The questions for cognitive narratology are: “What cognitive processes support narrative understanding, allowing readers, viewers, or listeners to construct mental models of the worlds evoked by stories? How do they use medium-specific cues to build in the basis of the discourse or subject a chronology for events, or fabula (what happened when, or in what order?); a broader temporal and spatial environment for those events (when in history did these events occur, and where geographically?); an inventory of the characters involved; and a working model of what it was like for these characters to experience the more or less disruptive or non-canonical events that constitute a core feature of narrative representations?”

Eisner writes: “Comics are essentially a visual medium composed of images. While words are a vital component, the major dependence for description and narration is on universally understood images, crafted with the intention of imitating or exaggerating reality. The result is often a preoccupation with graphic elements.”¹¹ Because comics exist, comics are a medium. The medium of comics has developed from its humorous beginnings (political caricatures and comic strips in newspapers) and formats for children and young people (children's magazines and especially Franco-Belgian comic books such as *Tintin* or *Asterix*)¹² into a form of expression for artists, graphic designers, and followers of youth subcultures. This process of maturation into a means of expression and communication aimed at an adult audience is, on the one hand, closely related to the literary quality of the texts. On the other hand, the development of new artistic positions strengthens the narrative complexity of these works and multiplies the possibilities of a dialogue between text and

image. This also opened up the possibility of the medium of comics “coming of age”, especially with regard to the content-related themes that comic authors deal with. Compared to the simpler thematic repertoire of the early days, it is now possible to develop much more complex content. This has led to the fact that nowadays in sequential art, among other things, existential questions and everyday philosophical problems are also negotiated in their contemporary historical context. In this sense, the conquest of an explicitly non-fictional terrain by the comic has contributed to its upgrading in the perception of critics and audiences.¹³ Once regarded with disdain as a qualitatively inferior form of light entertainment, the comic has now established itself as a medium that is trusted with enough artistic expressiveness to reflect and engage with reality.

The inclusion of the character’s dialogue in the panel is the great difference between cartoon and comic. In the first newspapers intended for children, the artists tried to make their strips understandable without the written content on the caption. That way, textless stories were born. Those true graphic stories are still alive, with their undoubtable expressive strength, but also with inevitable limitations. However, at the same time, these first expressions were reborn with an incredible potential: visual poetry.

By the second quarter of the century, the first cartoonists appeared, even though they were still not referred to as such. They were the ones who wrote the captions. Those captions kept on growing, becoming packs of block letters that covered even more than ten lines because they wanted to tell everything and considered the artist an illustrator of their literary stories. That was the way in which the dialogue jumped into the panel or into the shot, as it is commonly known in cinematography. Since then, what was born as a timid essay, as an onomatopoeia, as a muffled exclamation, developed gradually into one of the fundamental elements of today’s comic: the dialogue in balloons.

Those balloons are a testament to the true collaboration between text and image, and from that moment, they got even closer until they merged into something inseparable. Captions are still used in some strips that are meant for children still learning how to write. But they have completely disappeared elsewhere, and the dialogue, onomatopoeias, and supporting texts have come into the panel and the shots as means to explain parts of the argument, changes of setting and linking, and to tell time.

This is, roughly, the history of the development of comics. It is a short story, but that is also the reason why it has so much of a future ahead of it. Thanks to this new means of storytelling, some of the books we will be studying have traveled around the world and reached corners where they would have never arrived otherwise.

The reading of comics implies the use of different senses;¹⁴ it also implies multimodality and the use of varied ways through history and even various codes. It is an intermedium too. Comics have a communicative role, but they are also an act of communication.¹⁵ It can be easy to distinguish under saussurian terms between *langue*—as the specific relationship between drawings and words—and *parole*—separate from the structure and system of a language. Frahm wrote with a view to this: “Comics integrieren Schrift und Bild auf der Ebene der Parole, des Sprachakts, der auch ein Akt des Zeichnens von Bild und Schrift und ihrer materiellen Reproduktion sein kann. Es bräuchte also keinen Zeichentheorie der Comics, sondern eine Sprachakttheorie(...)”.¹⁶

The definition is complex and the subject of ongoing academic debate. Although it is undeniable that the interest and importance accorded to the subject is growing in the academic world, a simple and uniform definition for the term “comic” does not seem possible at the present time. Groensteen, one of the most distinguished experts on the medium, speaks of an “impossible definition”.¹⁷

II. Making comics: how is a comic created?

Before a comic can be created, there are several stages to consider. The first step is the script. The writing, the text, is just one possible means of expression. If the graphism, the image, can in some ways be a substitute, or even enhance the result, why should we discard it categorically? In any case, the image would never be capable of completely substituting words, written or spoken, in the field of ideas. Proof of that is that the comic is made following the indications made on a script. That script is not, as some seem to think, a mere literary outline to guide their creators. That script is a true story, tale, or novel where the author marks what should be translated into an image (setting, scenarios, characters, action) and what should remain written due to its purely literary condition (dialogues, onomatopoeias, and explanatory texts).

II. I. The graphic script

A graphic script is a story written with the intention of translating it into a comic strip. The graphic script has some characteristics that differentiate it from other storytelling methods. First of all, as is the case with other types of scripts (cinematographic, radiophonic, television, or even for theater), it needs to become the desired artistic product, and the manuscript is just what we would consider the seed of it.

The graphic script (as also with cinematographic, radiophonic, television, or theater scripts) needs to be worked upon. It becomes a comic (as other scripts become movies, broadcasts, plays, etc.) thanks to the mediation of the artist. This is a crucial characteristic because the script will be duplicated in two different ways, as we will reflect on in the future, by the author: it will disappear, develop into images, have a visual aspect, and be in a literary form that will be meant to be read. The graphic script occupies part of the text in explaining to the artist the way the content should be undertaken. This is similar to other types of scripts that contain comments, notes for the framing, camera pans, microphone locations, character acting, mimics, and other aspects.

These explanations should be very specific and detailed and avoid long phrasing. Their objective is to be a guide for the drawing phase so that they can be used as a tool. On the other hand, with the written aspect that is kept for the reader to read, the author, following the guidelines that we will explore later on, will try to depurate the pureness in their style, carefully choosing which words to use. These words, being scarce, should accomplish their mission with accuracy and precision.

The graphic script is divided into two parts: the first one will be a guideline to be used for the visual realization. The second part will state the parts that are meant to be read once the comic is ready. The first part is simply a guideline for drawing, whether the writer and the artist are the same person or not. The second part is meant to be kept as is, with its virtues and defects, for the audience to read. However, even though the part of the text that has to be appropriately transformed doesn't need to have literary qualities, it does have to clearly describe the drawing that will be required as a replacement. That drawing must serve the story in a fundamental way and constitute an inextricable complement to the text; it cannot be a mere illustrative and reiterative ornament, because in that case, it would not be a true graphic script.

Another of the graphic script's characteristics is that it is completed prior to the final product. In this way, the graphic script is similar to other kinds of scripts, such as for cinema, radio, television, and theater, and marks a contrast to the traditional literary story (i.e. a novel or tale). As such, the script of a comic brings it closer to a broad definition of the entertainment industry, rather than the literary one.

II. I. I. Elements of the script

The first element of the script is the effects that the author is counting on being accomplished at a later stage, when a third person might intervene to refine the product. It is possible to trace a relationship between comics and cinema: the cinematographic script and the comic's

graphic script share the most characteristics concerning their preparation and elaboration. If we think of the eye of the artist as the lens of a camera, we can have an approximate idea of the similarities. Many terms used in the graphic script come from cinematography, such as 'shot', 'voice-over', and 'visual field'. The comic can also be similar to the silent movies with their cards. However, comics were not born from cinema; rather, they are siblings, both born from images. It is important, though, to remark on the fundamental difference between them: the comic has a different rhythm in the use of images. In cinematography, the images appear step by step. In comic format, the images stride away.

Cinematography decomposes the action in shots or frames in the same way that a comic does, but there is less distance between shots with the former. That slow pace is a consequence of its quickness and the impossibility of turning back for the audience. The audience is not able to take pleasure in contemplating every single detail that appears on screen because there is not enough time to do so. The reader, on the other hand, can take all the time they want to contemplate the panel, examine it carefully, read the text, and go back to the previous one if they think they might have missed or misinterpreted something. A cinematographic shot is made of many stills (even if we consider each camera setting a single still), which is why a change in the cinematographic script does not greatly advance the action, as it would in a comic.

The difference between the change from one panel to the next in a graphic script is ten times more powerful than the shot change in a cinematographic script. In this sense, 600 shots in cinema would correspond to 60 in a comic. These calculations are approximate, dependent on an infinity of factors, but they can be used to exemplify the argumental synthesis that shows a graphic script compared to a cinematographic one. Finally, another essential characteristic of the graphic script is its influence on the action. The dynamism, the constant movement of the characters, the change in background or environment, or the changes effected in them by nature—all of these imply a more or less accelerated movement by the protagonists and inspire the plot of the script.

II. I. II. The plot

The comic field is so broad that, in general, all kinds of plots are susceptible to being developed in this art form. The more mundane events, the most grandiose epics, the masterpieces of literature, the biographies of famous men and women, the most important events in history or in the modern age, the most audacious fantasies ... every story that can be told can be transformed into a graphic script and then into a comic. However, due to the broadness of this scope, a systematization is necessary, a method that can be used as

orientation. First of all, whenever the writer begins writing a script, the intention that motivates the work must be known.

II. I. III. The intention

Depending on the intention that drives the writer, we can divide the plot into four different kinds: formative, recreative, commercial, and publicity

- Formative plots are those that convey a thesis that is religious, moral, political, pedagogical, etc. The plot has the intention to teach the audience the concept written by the writer. It tries to mold or shape the audience through the teachings gathered in the comic.
- Recreational plots are those that, with no thesis at all, still have a certain desire to influence the conscience of the reader.
- Commercial plots are those that solely intend to gain the public's favor by any means necessary.
- Publicity plots are those that try to praise, in a veiled way or not, trademarks, products or activities associate with a particular company.

Once the writer has examined the intention behind the plot, the focus will be shifted towards the desired audience for the comic.

II. I. IV. The audience

We can divide the plot according to the reading audience's age: children, young adults, adults, and all publics. The comics targeted at children are for children between five or six years old (when they begin to learn how to read) to eleven or twelve years old. With this kind of comic, which covers a six-year margin approximately, young adult comics are targeted at teenagers from twelve to eighteen years old, and there is a shift in the way the subjects are treated.

Adult comics are, evidently, those where the public target is 18 years old and above. Most comic magazines give an indication of the recommended reading age. The plots for all publics are those that are of interest for people of all ages. They are meant to be enjoyed by every member of the family simply by watching the plot develop itself.

II. I. V. The style

Once the author's intention and the audience of the comic have been decided, the only thing left for the writer is to decide which style the work will follow. Two common styles have imposed themselves on comic works: the comedic style and the dramatic style. The comedic

style is what was used in Anglo-Saxon languages to name this literary work: comic books. With this style, a laugh, a chuckle, or, at the very least, a smile is the main objective.

The dramatic style wants to make the audience feel different emotions. These emotions can vary considerably: the anguish of danger, horror, admiration, the exaltation of heroism, etc. Once the style of the plot has been chosen, the writer must choose the subject.

II. I. VI. The script planning

We define “script planning” as adjusting the plot to the number of panels decided beforehand. Once the subject has been determined, the writer starts the planning and decomposes the story into the number of scenes or drawings necessary. The number of panels is usually marked beforehand by the editor. In most cases, the script has been decided already, dependent on the number of panels that are needed. The novelist sometimes marks the number of pages or words with their editor, but there is a margin of several pages or chapters. This is not the case for the graphic writer; there is no possibility of a margin. The available space is established, and cannot be changed in any way. For this reason, the writer will have to make the calculations, by hand, of the approximate number of panels that are required for the chosen plot to see if it fits within the accepted measurements. Stretching or reducing is nothing new in the history of literature. Novels, comedies, and cinema scripts have been mutilated or elongated to unknown lengths.

II. II. Length of comics

There are four fundamental lengths that can be differentiated in a comic: the strip, the page, the floppy, and the book.

II. II. I. The strip

The strip is a comic formed by three to five or six panels set correlatively. They might be set from left to right or from right to left depending on the language used for the piece (in the case of Arabic, from right to left). They should be juxtaposed side by side, forming a line or band. It is usually published as entertainment for readers, often in newspapers.

The strip is the shortest form of comic work there is. There have been rare cases where two panels have been enough; the minimum quantity for the story to exist. A single unit would simply be considered a cartoon. The cartoon is a still, a flash of humor, that shows a unique situation, a little dialogue, and a piece of static. The comic is a dynamic story, a narration, with a beginning, middle, and end. There has to be a shift, a change, an evolution,

a before and an after. This is the reason why at least two scenes are needed to plan and resolve the plot.

The plot of the strip is necessarily short. Sometimes it is just a contrast of time or place. But it creates in the reader, in every panel, the emotion of a different moment, a mutation. If we removed this characteristic, the strip would not have a plot.

Due to the conciseness of the plot, strips are usually humorous. They tend to show an anecdote, a funny story; strips can be silent and confined only to images, but that does not preclude the need for a writer. When movies were silent, they also needed a script. Dramatic strips require longer plots, and therefore they are shown as chapters of a story, an installment or a *puntata*, as they would say in Italy. Dramatic strips are followed by the words 'To be continued' and leave the reader expecting more in a turning point of the narration that makes them wait avidly to read the next strip. That turning point or suspense marks the end of each installment, of each chapter, of each script.

The other possible comic length to consider is the page. A page is a comic made by at least six panels and a maximum of twenty panels. They are set in groups of two, three, or four panels in each line, and in several rows, one under the other. They are meant to fill a page in a magazine or in a graphic floppy. There are more potential divisions than the strip and the page, for example the double or triple strip, the half page or quarter page, the double spread, etc.

II. II. II. The book

The book is a graphic book that contains a minimum of eight pages. The book can contain one or several complete stories. A floppy, on the other hand, is shorter in length. It contains a complete episode in a cycle corresponding to the protagonists. It is a complete narration in itself, but it should end on a turning point after the episode has been resolved. Both lengths of compilation can be a group of comics, for example in the case of Samandal or TukTuk.

II. III. The panel

The shot can be defined as the unit of measurement for the graphic script and the comic. A graphic script and a comic are not synonyms, as already established. The graphic script is the shoot of a comic. The comic is the script once it has been completed. However, both for the writer and for the producer, the shot is the unit of measurement.

We apply the term shot, drawing, or panel to each and any of the successive scenes into which the comic is divided. These scenes or shots can be differentiated using

cinematographic terminology according to the proximity of the objects or characters in the frame.

II. III. I. Types of shots

An extreme close-up is a shot that captures every detail and, at the very least, a part of only one object or a small part of the body of any of the creatures or characters that intervene in the action.

A close-up is the kind of shot where only the heads and necks of the characters are shown. It can also be an entire object framed from a close distance. A medium close-up is where the characters are shown from the chest up, like talking busts. Medium shots show the characters from the waist up. The American shot shows the characters from the knees up, leaving out only the legs. Full shots show the character from a very close perspective, but still show the whole body. A long shot is usually a landscape; the environment is as important as the figures, which are probably shown from a distance so the reader can appreciate the place where the action occurs. Extreme long shots are exclusively panoramic, and the characters are tiny or non-visible. The wide shot is generally a bigger shot than usual and covers more space than a regular wide shot.

There are no rules for choosing one type of shot over another in each scene of the story. We will not analyze each story shot by shot; we will just note some shots due to their importance or their original usage. This originality can be distinguished by description of the scene, the dialogue, or the psychological analysis. It seems that the close-up, the medium close-up, the medium shot, and the American shot are used when the dialogue is more relevant. The full shot and the long shot are used when the action is the most important element. The extreme long shot and the wide shot are used to create an atmosphere or to reduce the tension when it is excessive. Specifically, the wide shot is used to confer some power to the situation. These ideas are vague; however, different authors use different kinds of shots. What we can assert is that different kinds of shots, besides having their own intrinsic function, play another role as a part of the unit they belong to. It is important to take into account that travel does not exist in comics. The means of getting closer or further from the visual camp has to be undertaken in several steps, using intermediate shots.

II. III. II. Linking the shots

Which rule should be followed to link the shots? What distance in time and space should reflect a shot with respect to the one before and the one after? The secret of the comic hides precisely in that white space, that paper wall that separates shots or panels, the gutter. What

is the agglutinant, the union, that makes the shots stick together? What is the maximum distance and time that the action can jump? What is the minimum distance it can move without risking being too slow or too repetitive? What is the link that ties the shots together? There is just one: the interest.

The interest

The reader's interest is what drives the jumps between one panel and the next. The interest creates the desire to move forward, the desire to know what is going to happen. Every shot should inspire in the reader-spectator that desire to jump and penetrate the next panel, flying over the unavoidable rough patch marked by the gutter. After the reader has been forced to jump from the shot before towards the one they will fall into, the new shot has to embrace the reader's interest and help them 'fall' comfortably, assuring them that the next shot will be as smooth as this one.

For this reason, if the author jumps too far in time or space, the reader will end up disoriented and disconcerted. If the jump is too short, the reader will feel like there is no movement, constantly in the same spot. The interest sends the reader from one shot to the next. The reader therefore has to fill in the action with their own imagination, in what is known as a montage. There are two montage or linking techniques: the short one and the long one.

The montage

A short montage is the decomposition of the action in moments that are quite close together. A long montage, on the other hand, is the division of the action in moments far from each other in time or space. Therefore, a short montage will end up with a far greater number of shots than a long one, as it captures more moments.

Using a short montage, stopping at every detail, and focusing on every particularity makes the story progress more slowly in the comic. On the other hand, using a long montage, describing superficially, and not stopping at episodic anecdotes and leaving markers in the main story makes the story progress faster in the comic. In any case, it is important to take into account that an excessively short montage stops the action. Likewise, an excessively long montage makes the story hazy and incomprehensible.

The suspense

The suspense is an unexpected, sudden, abrupt event that interrupts the storyline when it is about to keep going with the action. This event creates a peak in interest that helps maintain tension until the story is resumed. The suspense is necessarily abrupt, sudden, and unexpected. It must be a shocking event. Just by being shocking, will it capture the reader's interest? The motivation behind it is to interrupt the storyline.

The suspense is also distinguished by the format in which the comic is published: the suspense of the strip, the page, or the magazine. The suspense of the strip corresponds to a strip published by newspapers. It is the hardest to create. The author will have just three or four different shots to create the suspense and to solve it. Taking into account that suspense implies a pattern and a sudden break, there is very little space to develop the story itself.

However, the suspense of the strip has an advantage: it need not be too violent because there is only one day between that strip and the next one. The suspense of the page is that which is set at the end of the page, be this page a whole chapter of a comic or a completed work published in a magazine. The suspense of the page has to be more energetic when the page is published separately, weekly, or monthly, unlike a whole chapter published in a magazine.¹⁸ In the first case, the tension has to be maintained across days or weeks or even months. In the second case, the tension only needs to last for the time necessary to turn the page. That turning of the page is the smallest possible suspense moment. The suspense of the floppy is, lastly, that which is found at the end of the floppy, where the whole episode has been compiled. This kind of suspense is different from the suspense of the page, where the event must occur by the end of the page. The suspense of the floppy links an episode that has come to an end with the one following it. After all of the conflicts within that episode have been untangled by the end of the publication, the suspense of the floppy should not be marked by a new entanglement of the same type. This suspense is, in fact, the beginning of the next episode. It should be considered as a glance at the next episode, a suggestive teaser, an idea so intriguing that it makes the reader want to know it in whole.

Types of suspense

All that is left now is to establish through some examples the different types of suspense according to the emotion that they produce in the reader-spectator.

- Enigma suspense: This makes the reader feel uncertainty and confusion, and bases itself in doubt and intrigue. An example would be a crime investigation: there are several paths we could follow; the classic fork in the road. Other suspects enter the scene. There is a sudden change in the psychology of the character.
- Horror suspense: This makes the reader fear an immediate danger of any kind (e.g., a bridge falling down, a rope that breaks mid-way...).
- Surprise suspense: This provokes amazement in the reader (e.g., a horse that starts talking, a house that elevates itself and flies away...).

- Laughing surprise: This event provokes a sudden burst of laughter, giving a grotesque turn to the seriousness of the storyline (e.g., a judge comes walking into court, steps on a banana peel and slips).
- Mistake suspense: This is a mistake in the pace of the story that the reader wants to fix (e.g., the protagonist takes the wrong plane).

The suspense can include the whole event, as explained above, or just the beginning. In that case, the protagonist will not be aware yet of what is going to happen even though the reader already knows. Some examples include:

- Enigma suspense: the car has not reached the fork in the road yet, but the reader has already seen it.
- Enigma suspense: the car has not reached the fork in the road yet, but the reader has already seen it.
- Horror suspense: we know that a rope in the bridge is about to break, but the protagonist is starting to cross it inadvertently.
- Surprise suspense: the horse starts in a monologue before the human gets close enough to listen to its voice.
- Laughing suspense: a child throws a banana peel at the same moment that the judge walks into court. - Mistake suspense: the protagonist comments that the flight is going to a certain city, but at the boarding gate the name shown is not the one that the protagonist is meant to go to.

Solving the suspense

The suspense that has only been hinted at and initiated is often more powerful than the suspense that has already been fully exposed. It also has the advantage of the possibility to be resolved more easily. The suspense on hold can be solved by a mere feint; a misunderstanding that can disappear by the beginning of the next strip, page, or magazine.

The resolution of the suspense holds as much importance as the storyline does. The tension of the interest, maintained over this much time, strikes like a lightning bolt over the shot where the story is resumed. The suspense has to be solved naturally, simply, and in a convincing way. For this purpose, the author has to look at the story from the perspective of the reader and consider whether, in that situation, they would be satisfied with the planned resolution.

II. IV. The text of the script

The narrative level of many comics is determined by the genre's inherent hybrid nature of language and drawing. Words, like pictures, are signs with symbolic meaning (*icons*) that serve to represent aspects of the real world. Words, however, are primarily purely abstract, and even their graphic representation (writing) does not usually influence their content. There is no predetermined connection between a word and its meaning (the content it represents).¹⁹ In contrast, drawings that aim at recognition always rely in their representation on more or less pronounced similarities with the content they represent and communicate.²⁰ Therefore, the manner of representation and the format (more or less iconic, more or less realistic) may well have an influence on the meaning of the content conveyed. The degree of abstraction, richness of detail, attention to detail or exaggerated realism, clear or blurred lines, and choice of colors—all of these influences the aesthetic reception by the viewer.

As a consequence, it can be stated that a comic does not offer a true-to-life representation of reality. By simplifying the graphic representation of stereotypes, it is easier for the reader to empathize with the characters and understand their situation.²¹ On the other hand, the abstraction of the comic also promotes the effect of generalization, through which each sketched figure loses its individuality in favor of a global symbolic meaning. The persons depicted become archetypes.

The text of the comic has two parts: the hidden text and the present text.

II. IV. I. The hidden and the present texts

The hidden text gets translated into images when the reader-spectator sets their eyes on the finished work. The present text arrives to the reader as it was planned by the writer, with no other intermediation than the printed letter or the written one (*vid. infra*).

The hidden text, the potential image, does not have more subdivisions than the images themselves, the shots we established before (*vid. supra*). In the present text, on the other hand, the subdivision is necessary between two types of text containers that we can find in any comic: the text inside the shot and outside the shot. The text outside the shot appears in the outer part of the panel, outside of it, or as a panel that can be used as a heading, inserted text, or ending.

II. IV. II. The heading

The heading is the sign with the title of the comic, the names of the writer and the artist, the number and subtitle of the issue or episode and, if necessary, a summary of what happened in publications issued previously so that the reader can get in line with the story.

The length and placement of the heading depend on the length of the publication. Strips tend to have the smallest possible headings. Only the title and names appear; a summary is never included. In pages, the heading has more importance. If the pages are episodic and serialized, the summary becomes essential. In the floppy, it is less important because its function is fully covered by the frontispiece.

II. IV. III. The summary

For a summary to be correct, it requires three qualities: brevity, clarity, and density. At first glance, synthesizing the action from the last few chapters or issues in several lines seems easy enough. But when the summary starts taking up too much space, the secret is to take the unimportant parts out of the text and leave the fundamental thread of the narration and situations that can still be exploited. The storylines that have been resolved already are left out of the summary. Alongside brevity, it is important to have clarity.

Verbal density is the third important quality: each word must express the maximum. In its last sentence, the summary should include the suspense or supposed rough patch from the issue published before, describing in synthesis the event that will be solved during this publication or in the first shots that the reader-spectator has before them.

II. IV. IV. The inserted text

Another kind of text that is included outside the panels is the inserted text, the one that is introduced between two panels as a wedge. It is inserted between two panels in the white space that results from compressing or stretching the size of the panels before and after the text. This is extremely helpful for the writer when preparing a long montage because it can be a link between two shots that are very distant and would be practically incomprehensible if there was nothing to link them. The purpose of this kind of text is to clarify the bigger jumps for the reader.

The primary objective for the inserted text is to establish a change, a mutation in the course of the story. This mutation can be place- or time-related. We can differentiate between place-inserted text or time-inserted text.

The time- and place-inserted text

The time-inserted text serves as a skip in time when the time is longer than usual (e.g., “20 years later”, “Some hours later...”). The skip in time can be towards the future or towards the past. The place-inserted text changes the landscape. It prepares a mutation, a change of scenery, without altering the timeframe. It is usually used to jump to other actions that occur simultaneously (e.g., “Meanwhile ...”). There is also an inserted text that mixes both

time and place. In these kinds of texts, there is a double skip: it moves ahead or back in time, and also changes the environment (e.g., “1975, Paris”).

The closure

The final type of caption used outside of the panel is the closure text. The closure is the final text of the comic; it can be long or short, and it is placed under or after the panel where the comic ends. The closure text gives, literally, the finishing touches to the ending, and its length varies depending on the style and characteristics of the comic itself. Strips and chapters usually add the words: “To be continued”. In the page and the floppy, the closure text is used to reinforce the suspense. But the closure text is most important as the text unravelling the ending of the comic, where it can simply comprise the words “The end”.

II. IV. V. The text inside the frame

We will now focus on the text that appears inside the frame of the panel, inserted within the drawing, remarked for better clarity and artistically disposed not to affect the beauty and harmony of the whole. These texts inside the panel consist of the following types: narration blocks, balloons, and onomatopoeias.

The narration blocks or boxes

There may be text in the upper or lower part of the panel. There is no difference in name depending on the position it has inside the panel; every text shown in this manner is considered a narration box. These boxes can adopt diverse shapes: circular, rectangular, and square. They are usually located in the top left corner for the Latin alphabet or the top right corner for Arabic text. If they are in the lower part of the panel, they are usually located to the left or right, depending on the reading direction. They can be framed or not, in a different color, or left blank. One of the characteristics of narration blocks is that they appear over the drawing and cover or seem to cover a part of the drawing.

When placed in the top corner, due to the placement, the text must anticipate and prepare the reader to understand the text better. When placed in the bottom corner, leaving the panel, it must comment, note, or clarify some detail that cannot be gauged by contemplating or reading the panel. This could be due to it being too subtle or the image being too small, or other reasons. Sometimes, when the text in the panel is too long and cannot be reduced without the final product's clarity suffering, writers tend to divide it into two pieces: the first will be placed in the top corner and will end in suspension points, and the second will be placed in the bottom corner and start with the same suspension points. In some cases, the text is decomposed using suspension points during two or more successive panels in the top corner where they will hold the whole text. The narration boxes

are short narrative annotations and should not be the most important text inside the panel. The most important text inside the panel is the balloon.

The speech balloon

The balloon was a notable advancement in comic techniques (vid. infra.: Children Magazines). This text presented the dialogue, the colloquial speech of every character, and the way they express their ideas and feelings. The balloon jumped into the image and got fused with it, beginning a collaboration that created a true symbiosis between the text and the image.

A possible definition of the balloon would be a speech or longer or shorter part of a dialogue or monologue corresponding to one of the characters of the comic and composed or written in the interior of the panel, which graphically describes the person speaking.

The placement of the speech balloon

The balloon can be placed in any part of the panel and can take on very different shapes as long as it complies with the following rules:

1. It must be composed or written over a white background, without any drawings behind.
The balloon, as it happens with the narration box, appears to be 'stuck' over the drawing and cover a part of it.
2. The shape should vaguely resemble a bubble, and it should have a tail with a pointed end towards the speaker.
3. It should comply with certain conventions.
4. It should have a precedence order with the rest of the balloons in the same panel.

The white background is not mandatory. In colored comics, the balloon can adopt any color as long as the lettering stands out and is easy and pleasant to read.

The bubble shape—in other words, the line that encloses the lettering—is not mandatory either. There are bubbles, like there are narration boxes, enclosed geometrically. However, the tail of the balloon is essential. It should point towards the character from any point in its border. The principal conventions that the balloon requires in its external configuration are the consequence of the different ways of speaking that the characters have. We can differentiate the following types of balloons depending on their configuration:

Types of balloons

- The bubble balloon: this has a normal structure, in a bubble shape with a tail either on top or on the lower left or right part to indicate who is speaking. It is commonly used for regular dialogues.

- The synthetic balloon: this suppresses the bubble, and only underlines the lettering with a straight line cut by a V shape that serves as a tail. It is commonly used for short sentences in comics.
- The humoristic balloon: its bubble adopts a grotesque shape, and the tail is substituted with any other element, for example a hand with a finger pointing towards the character.
- The electric balloon: its shape is surrounded by a zigzag line, and the tail is shaped like a lightning bolt. It represents an amplified human voice, reproduced through a mechanic or electronic device such as a megaphone, speaker, television, or telephone. It may also be used for the voices of characters that are not expected to talk, such as a robot or a rock.
- The cloud balloon: this has a wavy shape that encapsulates the text completely. Instead of a tail, there are some bubbles that seem to escape the cloud and grow smaller while getting closer to the head or mouth of the character. They are used to express the hidden thoughts of the character or a partial soliloquy or the impossibility to emit any voice. It is often used in combination with the bubble balloon for the same character so that the reader can perceive the contrast between thoughts and what is said out loud.
- The dashed balloon: this only differs from the bubble balloon in its dashed stroke line. It is used to mark a dialogue in a low or whispered voice or one that will not reach the ears of the other characters even though they are in the same panel.
- The voiceover balloon: this differs from the bubble balloon in that its tail points towards the edge of the panel and is never ending. It suggests that it might be closed in the gutter, outside the panel. It is used for the voices of characters that are not in the panel or are partially shown and whose faces or heads are not visible. The voiceover balloon can also be similar to a cloud balloon when it expresses the thoughts of a character that is not visible instead of their words. In this case, the bubble row will also go towards the edge of the panel and be interrupted by the frame, conveying the idea that the last few smaller bubbles would be outside the panel.
- The spike balloon: this is a bubble balloon with many tails. It is used to mark the unanimity of a multitude or a crowded group, for example in demonstrations or rallies.
- Double, triple, quadruple bubble: this refers to two or more bubble balloons in a row and linked by a tail that seems to go through all of them like a skewer, and closes in a tail pointing towards the character's head, as though it was the same tail for all of the balloons. It is used when the same character produces several sentences in the same panel with a pause between them. It is commonly used for cut or fast dialogues between two characters and intertwines both speakers' multiple balloons like a zipper or a cog

would be intertwined. This way, the reader will read the first balloon of each of the characters, then the second, and so on until the dialogue is finished.

These are the most common conventions within the balloon technique. However, we can assert that the innovative character of Samandal sometimes ignores these conventions.

The order of precedence

The order of precedence for the positioning of the speech balloons needs to be established when there are several inside the same panel. In a dialogue written in a novel, this order of precedence is marked automatically; however, a dialogue created over an illustration, inside the panel, does not have an obvious order of precedence. The reader-spectator faces a square or rectangular shape with a series of figures they have to contemplate and a series of sentences or groups of sentences to be read. If the balloons are situated in the same position as the characters are, the answer might be read before the question it is answering. The order of the figures does not correlate with the order of their respective balloons. To place the balloons, the artist will adhere to the following rule: the bubbles should appear in successive order, i.e. from left to right when the Latin alphabet is used, and from right to left when the Arabic alphabet is used.

Rules

The balloons, depending on their position inside the panel, are read in a particular order based on an existing rule, as with a literary text. The novel reader will read one line after another in a vertical formation; the comic reader, however, will not read line by line. Instead, they will jump from one bubble to the next if the lines are at the same height. For the comic reader, each speech balloon is a whole unit, a pack of text, that should be read first before reading the next one, even though the text sits further down the panel than other letters present in different bubbles. Due to this singularity, the aspect that marks the order of precedence of the balloons is its position as a whole, not its length or width. Where the first letter is placed is what signifies the order of precedence of each speech bubble. This first letter might be enlarged or colored differently by the artist to make it more visible.

With this in mind, we can note two rules:

- If there are two or more balloons that start at the same level, the first one to be read should be set in the top left or right depending on the reading direction. The last one should be placed in the opposite side of the panel.
- If there are two or more balloons that start at a different level, the balloons should be vertically ordered, with the first one to be read being the upper bubble and the last one, the lower one.

At times, artists situate figures and speech balloons as they please and then place the necessary crossing and pointing for the figures and speech to match.

The crossing of the balloons

There is a crossing in the tails of the balloons when they form an X shape. This indicates that the speech bubbles are in the opposite part of the panel from the characters that have produced them. For example, to solve a problem, we follow the logical reading order. The only rule to be applied is that the tail that should be on top is that of the bubble that should be read first.

The signs

The last type of text in a panel to consider that is not the onomatopoeia is the sign. The sign is not responsible for the titles or subtitles, which are already marked in the heading. The sign serves the action in a direct mode, naming a scenario or an environment. Some common signs could be “Hotel” or “Bank”. They can also mark a situation or circumstance that is necessary to understand the storyline. Some common examples include a poster with the text “Wanted” or “No trespassing”, a letter, or a document. The signs inside the panel are simply meant to be read and not take more attention. They may also have a lettering design that marks a period of time.

The onomatopoeia and the sound effects

The use of onomatopoeia is a phenomenon that does not occur in every comic. It includes cries of pain, exclamations of admiration, rage sounds, interjections, and other kinds of sounds and noises. In many cases, onomatopoeias and sound effects are even more important than the text included in the speech bubbles.

The objective of the onomatopoeia

As a possible objective to use onomatopoeia and sound effects in comics we can think of the influence of cinema, radio and its special effects, or television—mediums that have always combined images and sound. The comic is not born from cinema or television; however, it is another means of expression. The comic can be seen and heard. The dialogue in the speech bubble produces ideas, feelings, and emotions in the reader, but not sounds or noises. As such, we need onomatopoeia and sound effects to sonarize the comic.

Onomatopoeia can be defined as the graphical representation of everything that produces a sound and is not an idea or a mental representation. It tries to imitate that sound in the most accurate way possible. This is the reason why we speak about onomatopoeia and sound effects in a very broad way when we refer to comics. An onomatopoeia is any voice or group of voices that imitates a sound of any kind. In comics, expressions of pain, dreams, tiredness, exclamations, interjections, coughs, sneezes, yawns, and anything that

can be heard and is emitted through a mouth is an onomatopoeia. If the sound comes from a different place or part of the body, it can also be named a sound effect.

Classification of the onomatopoeia

We can classify an onomatopoeia depending on who or what produces it: human, animal, plant, technical, or mixed. Human onomatopoeias imitate any inarticulate sound emitted by a human being, whether it is done with the vocal tract (e.g., “ouch” for pain; “yawn” for a yawn), or other parts of the body (e.g., “clap” for clapping; “pow” for a punch), or movements at any pace (e.g., “fiuu” for a quick movement or running; “pas-pas” for slow steps). Animal onomatopoeias are those that simulate sounds emitted by every mammal other than a human being. These include their cries (e.g., “quack” for a duck), their songs (e.g., “cock-a-doodle-do” for a cock), the sound of their feet (e.g., “clop” for a horse), and their movement (e.g., “buzz” for an insect), etc.

Plant onomatopoeias are the sounds emitted by the plant kingdom, such as leaves falling from the trees, branches being broken, knocking on a door with knuckles, and cutting a flower with scissors. Natural sounds correspond to the imitation of sounds and noises in nature that are not produced by plants or animals. These include onomatopoeias of the mineral kingdom, the elements, forces of nature, and natural phenomena, such as rocks falling from a cliff or the sound of a water drop.

Technical onomatopoeias reproduce the sounds or noises of objects, appliances, or machines created and manufactured by humans, from musical instruments to working tools, weapons, vehicles, telephones, etc.

The above classifications can include any onomatopoeia or sound effect imaginable, although we must also take into account the existence of mixed onomatopoeias. These aim to imitate the sound or noise produced by two or more agents of the same or a different category when combining or mixing their respective sounds. One example of this type of sound effect would be the saw (technical onomatopoeia) cutting the wood (plant onomatopoeia).

Characteristics of the onomatopoeia

The characteristics of the onomatopoeia considered as a text in the panel are as follows:

- Onomatopoeias are seldom encapsulated in any kind of box, bubble, or narration boxes; the voice or voices of onomatopoeias are usually lettered directly over the drawing, without any kind of background or color.
- They are always handwritten, rather than in printed case letters, as sometimes happens with bubbles, boxes, or narration boxes.
- The lettering for the onomatopoeia is usually done by the penciller, not the letterer.

- Onomatopoeias are placed in the spot where the imitated sound is being produced. They can also point towards it if the speech bubbles partially cover the place where the sound originates.
- The size of the lettering should be proportional to the intensity of the sound imitated.
- Onomatopoeias are fixed: that is, they already exist in each language. The author cannot ignore pre-existing onomatopoeias or invent new ones.

III. Production

At this point, we will explain the different techniques that come into play during the production of a comic: the drawing, the different possible styles, the preparation, the production, and, finally, the printing.

III. I. The style

In general, the style can be divided into two types: cartoonish or realistic. These styles do not necessarily match the comedic or dramatic tone we identified when referring to the audience. But we cannot deny that the comedic artist tends to distort their art in some ways, while the dramatic artist tends to reflect reality in a more realistic manner. However, a comic piece can use a realistic style, the same way as a dramatic one can be cartoonish. There are artists who are known for using both styles, but usually they lean more towards one of them.

III. II. Getting ready

The first step in the process is to sketch the characters, making them distinguishable. The inspiration, talent, and persistence of the artist will enable the characters to be differentiated by age, physiognomy, or clothing. The comic character is rarely overloaded with defining features; quite the opposite—drawing means simplifying. A single detail can be enough to distinguish a character: a strand of hair over the forehead, a birthmark.

After the sketching process, the illustrator studies the different possible postures (facing front, both sides, foreshortening...). They also proceed to investigate the locations, architecture, fauna, flora, furniture, and objects for the time and place in which the action will occur. They will take pictures of what is considered useful and interesting for the process instead of just drawing from memory or by ear.

With these sketches and notes, the artist begins sketching the comic. From the beginning, the editor has set the format and the measurements. Then, the framing and the

marks of the panels to be illustrated will be drawn. To fit the frame of the panels, the script must be followed. At this point, these marks must be evenly distributed to fit the inserts. Panel frames are usually of rectangular shape, which can be widened or elongated as needed. Sometimes they are bigger, for example in panoramic scenes or scenes where many characters are shown.

These frames can be square shaped or even narrower. In this case, their height will be greater than their width. This option is commonly used for close-ups and medium shots where a single character is shown. This helps give more space to the panel before or after in the event that it is needed for the scene. The gutter can be moved according to the requirements of each panel. The artist may also avoid the framing to embellish the composition.

III. III. The production

Once the comic has been sketched and located, the penciller draws everything with a pencil. Panel by panel, the script is born into the scenes. The cinematographic eye will compel the penciller to copy what their imagination produces; the artist and producer have to see before they draw. The first things drawn are the closer figures and objects. The texts are also sketched (narration boxes, bubbles, etc.). Even though creating the speech balloons is the job of the inkers and letterers, rather than the penciller's, the penciller is the one who situates them in their exact place and size. After drawing the characters and fundamental elements in the panel, marking the shadows, and striping the black areas, the penciller will move to the backgrounds, objects, and subjects that are not shown in the first term. The final phase of production is the inking process.

III. IV. The printing

The printing process of the comic greatly influences the inking process. If the story is going to be printed as a photogravure, it can be done by water coloring, with a brush. In this case, the intermediate colors will be brighter and will help the drawings look more like cinematographic photograms. For the burin engraving, with or without a grid, the most common method is to draw with a fountain pen and India ink, using black and white. If the comic is printed in color, the artist will suppress most of the black shades. The color will play a very important role in the contrast between lights and shadows and will take the place of most blacks that tend to simulate other colors.

III. V. Rules

Comic drawing is dynamic: it captures an image of an action. A static design is not a comic strip, but an illustration. The image and the text complement each other. What is said in the text should not be reiterated in the image. Both mediums serve a common objective in different ways. The design will never make a bad script better; it can make it more attractive superficially, but it will not be capable of exciting the interest—and if there is no interest, there is no comic. A bad design can ruin a good script. This can happen if the quality is insufficient, or if difficulties are faced during the production process. Comic drawings require a learning process that is fulfilled by the artist the more that they draw. The best comic drawing is not the most perfect, but the one that is able to extract every possibility from the script.

III. VI. Lettering

The last step of the artistic process is the lettering. This work is often also realized by the illustrator or inker. In contexts such as Arab culture, where calligraphy is a common plastic expression, the lettering has a particular importance. The lettering can be done by hand or in block lettering; however, the latter risks being monotonous for the reader. The lettering has to be undertaken with care: it must be easy to read, proportionate, and well placed. In other words, it has to be artistic. The artist can carry out this task if they have good penmanship; in some cases, a letterer will take care of it. However, we seldom find a letterer in any of the works reviewed.

The lettering

Once the sketch, the script, and the drawings are ready, the lettering process starts. In this phase, the texts are to be included in their corresponding spaces. If there is not enough space, the text will need to be changed. If there is too much space, the letterer will have to consider if filling the air inside the bubble is artistically necessary. This is the phase where the speech balloons are closed, but the tails and forms have already been set by the artist in the previous step. Once the lettering task is completed, the comic is reviewed one last time by the artist. At this moment, the final product will be compared with the script and the backgrounds will be completed, or the figures that require a few finishing touches.

The kinetic lines

The kinetic lines provide a sense of action and speed to the scenes. These are lines, shapes, forms, clouds, or stars that mark the path followed by a subject or object that is moving inside the same panel. Sometimes, onomatopoeias are also added to the kinetic lines.

The image balloon

We consider image balloons as those that include a figure or scene instead of a text, for example using a lightbulb to represent an idea.

Multiple figures

Multiple figures refers to when an object or subject appears in several different postures in the same panel. In this kind of drawing, the characters, or a part of them, are shown several times in different positions.

III. VII. The finishing touches

Once the artist is sure that nothing remains to be done, they will consider it finished and the process will be complete. The product will then be sent to the editor.

Paratextual elements

The comic is a tangible object, a physical object, so it makes sense to analyze comic books in this way too. The comic book or booklet contains, in addition to the story told as a sequence of images, certain paratextual elements, such as the cover with its cover image, title, and subtitles. According to Genette, the paratext determines how a text is transformed into a book; that is, into a product intended for sale and consumption by an audience.²²

¹ Eisner 2008, 2.

² Scott McCloud 1994, 9.

³ Eisner 2008, xi.

⁴ Eisner 2001a, 8.

⁵ Stein, Thon 2015, 1.

⁶ Meister (2009: 340) on contextualist narratology: “relates the phenomena encountered in narrative to specific cultural, historical, thematic, and ideological contexts”

⁷ Meister (2009: 340) on *cognitive narratology*: “focuses on the human intellectual and emotional processing of narrative”

⁸ Meister (2009: 340) on *transgeneric* and intermedial approaches: explore the relevance of narratological concepts for the study of genres and media outside the traditional domain of text-based literary narrative. There are not only transmedial dimensions of narrative but also intermedial and intermedial studies.

⁹ Smith 211, 112.

¹⁰ Herman 2009, 30.

¹¹ Eisner 2001b, xi.

¹² Douglas and Malt-Douglas 1994, 9-26

¹³ “Far removed from official circles and traditional commercial distribution, which is furthermore highly different from country to country, these authors evoke everyday city life using Arabic dialects rather than classical Arabic adopting an implicitly political approach. They also explore tales of intimacy with an audacity that we could not imagine. To depict emotions, to reveal sensuality, is also to take risks, these artists experiment with the form, mixing the tradition of Arabic drawing with the aesthetics of western comics [...]”; Ghaibeh and Mercier 2017, 10.

¹⁴ See McCloud 2000 (p. 2): “Through their still images using only one sense, comics represents all the senses, and through the character of the lines themselves, comics represents the invisible world of emotion.”

¹⁵ Cohn, Neil. "Un-Defining 'Comics.'" International Journal of Comic Art, Vol. 7 (2). October 2005.

¹⁶ Frahm 2010, 13.

¹⁷ Groensteen 2007, 12.

¹⁸ This is the case of the stories published as chapters in *Samandal*. There are some examples that we analyze in greater detail, such as Jam and Yoghurt or Antoine. But in the first issues of the magazine, there are many stories divided into chapters, such as The Educator by Fouad R. Mezher (from the first issue to the sixth), Salon Tariq al-Kharafy by Omar Khouri, or Nap Before Noon by Barrack Rima.

¹⁹ Exceptions to this are onomatopoeia, e.g., words like ‘bang’, ‘roar’, and ‘peck’, where the sound imitates the content, or the written sound representations popular in comics à la Peng! Boom! Zack! Whoosh!

²⁰ Here, too, there are exceptions, such as the majority of road signs, whose illustration does not make it clear from the outset what they stand for, or written auxiliary signs such as ?! which regularly appear in comics outside the speech bubbles in the picture, as well as some hand signs (e.g., fist with raised thumb, palm stretched out in front).

²¹ McCloud 1994, 36.

²² Genette 2001.

Chapter Two: Political and editorial cartooning

Cartooning for a modern Lebanon

In the following pages, we will approach comics from a perspective that is fundamental to understanding the nature and formation of the language of comics. Applying a historical approach, we will examine comics in their earliest format: the political and editorial cartoon. In their origins, graphic stories were conceived as a set of cartoons intended for journalistic publications, in many cases with a satirical-humoristic purpose. In this work, the two fundamental characteristics of the comic medium are the double articulation of language—in image and text—and its sequential nature. Therefore, a single cartoon, although it is difficult to form a sequential narrative on its own, shares with the comic the double articulation of language.

I. What do we mean by political and editorial cartooning?

We understand “political and editorial cartooning” as a single panel or drawing published in a daily newspaper with the aim of satirizing a political event. These graphics focus on violence, political corruption, and other social ills. The artists present the characters in a hyperbolic way, that is, as caricatures. They combine artistic skills, hyperbole and satire, and mostly make the reader laugh. “Eines Bildes zu einem cartoon - ist sicherlich einer Form von ‘Betonung durch Vereinfachung’ unterstellt, die auf der Überlegung fußt, daß ‘Reduktion’ nicht unbedingt nur den ‘Anschluß von Informationen’, sondern auch die Konzentration auf bestimmte Details zur Folge haben kann”, in the words of Frank Brinkmann.¹ Rolf T. Wigand defines cartoons as follows: “A cartoon is a pictorial representation or caricature of a person, idea, or situation that is designed to influence public opinion.”² Political cartoons can generate change, and “also provide a rare public glimpse into the thoughts and opinions of the people in the Middle East, specially to those living in societies dominated by the state”, as noted by Fatma Müge Göçek.³

For studying political and editorial cartooning, the magazine *ToshFesh* helps us to form an overview of cartooning in the Middle East, from the first examples to the newest artists. Edited by Mutaz Sawwaf, the aim is to “promote and advance the field of comics is held, encouraging the publication of artistic and scholarly works on comics in the region.”⁴ Since 2011, they have published 12 books, and since 2019, they have published one journal. The books are available in both the main bookstores in Beirut and on their web page. The journals are provided with the newspaper الشرق (*al-Šarq*) [The East], published in Beirut since 1926. To assist future research, a table of artists who have appeared in the *ToshFesh* volumes can be found in Appendix 2.

II. Which are the first examples in the Arab press of political and editorial cartooning?

The political cartoon was created in Europe, but by the end of the nineteenth century, it had spread widely to countries colonized by the Europeans. Hans Harder, as editor of a volume dealing with the British magazine *Punch* (founded in London in 1841 as a satirical and humorous magazine) states that political cartoons spread to all colonies of the British Empire.⁵ The importance of *Punch* magazine lies in the fact that the art of comics began with such magazines, as Aaron Meskin (2007) explained.⁶ Although the connection between the first Arabic *Punch*, *The Cairo Punch*, and the British original is difficult to track, its emerging influence could be seen in the magazines *Abu Nazzara* and *Al Arghul*.⁷ In this way, by the end of the century, political cartoons were being used in the Middle East to make fun of western rulers by deriding and delegitimizing them. According to Göçek, the first cartoons in the Middle East “coincided with the rise of Western influence”.⁸ This is not to be understood as a copy from the western models or cultural imperialism but, as Douglas and Malti-Douglas have observed, the process had more interaction: myths and local folktales, as well as the aesthetic of the local visual culture, from stories by Yuha or Nasreddin Hoca to the shadow plays, were integrated into these productions.⁹

Eliane Ursula Ettmueller, in her paper “Abū Nazzāra's journey from the Victorious Egypt to the Splendorous Paris: The Making of an Arabic *Punch*”,¹⁰ explains the history of the satirical magazine أبو نظارة الزرقاء (*Abū Naẓẓāra l-Zarqā*) [The Man with the Blue Glasses], published in Egypt in 1878 by James Sanua and considered the very first example of a political cartoon in the Middle East. The aim of Sanua was to inform and to “activate the minds” and emphasizes the importance of humor in achieving this goal. Sanua also used

caricature to spread his political message to the illiterate.¹¹ In addition to this, Etmüller affirms that Sanua “adapted the European journalistic satirical genre to his texts, as well as to his drawings.”¹²

In the volume dedicated to the *Asian Punches*, Marilyn Booth published an article entitled “What’s in a Name? Branding Punch in Cairo, 1908” where she analyses the satire in the Egyptian magazine *السياسة المصورة* (*al-Siyāsa l-Muṣawwara* [Politics Illustrated]), as a “journal that was visually and thematically a culmination of the earliest period of political caricature in Arab media culture.”¹³ One of the remarkable characteristics of this magazine was the fact that its visual language of political satire spread to other Arab countries and used the classical Arabic instead of the vernacular: “Although since their emergence cartoons in the Arab world have tended to be associated with colloquial forms, and to offer colloquial captions, this newspaper used a simplified (...) idiom, derived from classical Arabic”,¹⁴ as well as translations of the captions into English and French, which “suggests multiple audiences.”¹⁵ After analyzing some examples of the *Cairo Punch*, the author concludes that the combination of a local (political) vision with transnational satirical meanings of the cartoons, in addition to the use of three languages in the texts, signifies that the audience were not necessarily only Egyptian or Arab readers, but “readers positioned differently in terms both of cultural and political outlook: Arabic was literally central, but those who read English and French were also summoned to partake”.¹⁶

Al-Siyāsa l-muṣawwara likely did not have a large influence on cartoons subsequently produced in Lebanon, but two aspects can be observed across contemporary political cartoons: the use of classical Arabic in some, and the use of other languages, such as French and English, to increase readership or due to the use of these languages in certain locations in local newspapers, such as *L’Orient- Le Jour*. The fact that cartooning in the Middle East is not a genuine Arabic art form does not automatically make it a direct copy of European models, as the artists soon enough established significant differences with them.

III. Pioneers of cartoon in Lebanon: Elias Michel Haddad, Diran Agémian, and Pierre Sadek

The first works of cartoon and caricature in Lebanon were those of Elias Michel Haddad and Diran Agemian. They share the title of pioneers with Pierre Sadek, who has been a trailblazer since the beginning of his career in the 1950s and may have been one of the most influential authors in cartoon publishing in Lebanon.

III. I. Elias Michel Haddad — الياس ميشال حداد

Deir al Kamar, 1914

Elias Michel Haddad (الياس ميشال حداد) is considered the father of the Lebanese caricature, followed by Pierre Sadek. Born in 1914 in Deir al Kamar, he studied dental surgery at the Saint-Joseph University in Beirut and was an autodidactic caricaturist, cartoonist, and miniaturist. When he was 29, Lebanon gained independence, at which point Haddad showed his critical and humorous charm. Because of the influence he had, one of his teachers nicknamed him “Le Daumier du Liban” in reference to the French printmaker, caricaturist, painter, and sculptor Honoré Daumier, whose many works offer commentary on social and political life in France in the nineteenth century. In 2018, his son Robert Elias Haddad published the book *Elias Michel Haddad: un pionnier de la caricature au Liban entre 1942-1962*.¹⁷ The former alumni of Dental Medicine at Saint-Joseph University published an article in number 5 of the magazine *Newsletter Des Anciens: Publication Officielle de l'Association des Anciens de la Faculté Medecine Dentaire de L'Université Saint-Joseph*.¹⁸ In this article, written because of the publication of the book, it is affirmed on page 13: “Dans ses caricatures, Elias a véritablement représenté l'anatomie faciale de ses sujets de mémoire dans leurs minuscules mouvements musculaires tout en révélant soigneusement leurs caractères réels.” [In his caricatures, Elias truly represented the facial anatomy from his memory of the subjects in their tiny muscular movements while carefully revealing their real characters.] Because of this anatomical realism, he influenced other caricaturists of his time, and he was the first to publish in Lebanese daily newspapers of the time, such as *الحديث* (*al-Hadīth*), *الأمل* (*al-Amal*),¹⁹ *الأنباء* (*al-Anbā' de Joumblatt*), *الدبور* (*al-Dabbūr*),²⁰ *الصحافة* (*al-Ṣahāfa*), *صباح الخير* (*Ṣabāḥ al-Ḥayr*), and *العهد الجديد* (*al-ʿAḥad al-Ġadīd*).²¹ He broke taboos, but he always respected the rules, particularly those relating to the presidency; however, “Mais il trouva les moyens de contourner ces tabous et de dire en caricature ce que les

autres pensaient tout bas” [he found a way to get around these taboos and to say in caricature what the others thought quietly.]²²

In the introduction to the collection of Haddad's caricatures and drawings, the importance of caricature as a historiographic source is underlined: “Elle cherche à capter les déficiences, à inspecter les insuffisances et à grossir les défauts et les tares qui apparaissent dans tous les domaines de la vie. (...) La caricature a une étroite connexion avec l'histoire. Celle-ci intègre l'iconographie dans la panoplie de ses sources, et la caricature acquiert une rhétorique éloquente aussi expressive que l'écrit. Elle sert comme de document.” [It seeks to capture the deficiencies, to inspect the insufficiencies and to magnify the shortcomings and defects that appear in all fields of life (...) The cartoon has a close connection to history. This integrates iconography into the panoply of its sources, and the caricature acquires an eloquent rhetoric as expressive as the story. It serves as a document.]²³

The tenure of the first Lebanese post-independence president, Béchara El Khoury, provided Haddad with enough material for drawing portraits of politicians of all ranks and sizes. One of the most remarkable characteristics of these caricatures was that “Le spectateur perçoit derrière les corps personnels figurés la catégorie sociale, l'institution, le parti politique auxquels ils se rattachent. Le langage du corps se conjugue parfaitement avec le verbe allégorique.” [The spectator perceives, behind the figured personal bodies, the social class, the institution, and the political party to which they belong. Body language combines perfectly with the allegorical verb.]²⁴



Fig. 1: Elias Michel Haddad

Fig. 1: On the pot: *المفاوضات الاقتصادية (al-Mufāwaḍāt al-Iqtisādiyya)* [Economic Negotiations]
 Caption: *وزير المال: حاجي تنفخو وتحركو .. طبخة بحص ! (Wazīr al-Māl: ḥājī tanfuḥū wa-tuḥarrikū .. ṭabḥat baḥṣ!)*
 [Finance Minister: Hajj, blow and stir ... Cooking with stones!]
 It is meant that the negotiations are for nothing, as though they were cooking with stones.



Fig. 2: Cartoon by Elias Michel Haddad

Fig. 2: On the pot: طبخة الوزارة (*Ṭabḥat al-Wizāra*) [The Ministry's Cooking]

In the left-hand corner: كان ناقص هالفورة بتنجانة (*Kāna nāqis hal-qūra batinġāna*) [We took out the inside of the aubergine to put another one in]. This is a Lebanese proverb meaning that something bad was replaced with something worse.

III. II. Diran Agémian — ديران عجميان

Aleppo, 1904

Diran Agémian (ديران عجميان) was a caricaturist and is also considered a pioneer of cartooning in Lebanon. He was born in Aleppo to a family of Armenian origin in 1904, and died at the age of 87 in 1991. In the 1930s he moved to Lebanon, where he worked for almost 30 years for the magazine *al-Dabbūr* and other newspapers such as *L'Orient-Le Jour*, *La Revue de Liban*, and *Le Soir*.²⁵ He published in Arabic, French, and Armenian. He created the characters أبو طنوس (*Abū Ṭanūs*) [Abu Tanous] and غنطوس (*Ġanṭūs*) [Ghantous]. Abu Tanous was characterized by being a political commentator, famous for his wisdom, while Ghantous was the adventurer. Both characters were witnesses of Lebanon's independence and the pre-war years. Agémian is considered as having established cartoons as an independent form of art.²⁶ At the same time, Achod Papasian²⁷ interprets Agémian's cartoons as follows: "les caricatures de Diran constituent un témoignage précieux sur l'histoire politique et culturulle du Liban et de l'intelligentsia arménienne de Beyrouth." According to Papasian, the influences of Agémian were Wilhelm Busch and Louis Forton: "de par son esthétique et sa fibre satirique, l'œuvre de Diran rappelle celle de Louis Forton" [by its aesthetics and its satirical fiber, Diran's work recalls that of Louis Forton], as well as Jean Sennep.



Fig. 3: Cartoon by Diran Agémian

Fig. 3: Agémian representing the "good Aryans" as Adolf Hitler, Hermann Göring, Rudolf Hess, Joseph Goebbels, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Heinrich Himmler, Hjalmar Schacht, and Franz von Papen. All of them were politicians with a leading function during the Third Reich in Germany.²⁸

III. III. Pierre Sadek — بيار صادق

Zahlé, 1938

Pierre Sadek (بيار صادق) was born in Zahlé in 1938 and died in Beirut in 2013. He studied at the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts and, along with Diran Agémian, soon became a pioneer of political cartoons and caricatures in Lebanon. In the late 1950s, he started publishing in the newspaper النهار (*al-Nahār*) [The Day or The Morning], in which he published an eight-panel comic on the last page of the newspaper. He worked there for almost 20 years, from 1958 until 1978²⁹ or from 1960 until 1975,³⁰ depending on the source consulted. The editorial content of *al-Nahār*, written by its editor-in-chief Ghassan Tueini, provided the context of the humorous cartoons of Sadek. He worked for other Arab newspapers and was politically neutral: “even though he has always worked for politically-orientated media, he never adhered to any political party and his only concern was to maintain his independence”.³¹ On the contrary, in her book on political posters of the Lebanese Civil War, Zeina Maasri argues that Sadek was “a vehement advocate of Lebanese nationalism, has volunteered his skills for numerous posters promoting the Lebanese army. He also contributed a considerable number of posters for the Lebanese Kataeb Party and its affiliated military organization, the Lebanese Forces (LF) (...). Sadek describes his political posters as a tribute to a leader [Bashir Gemayel] he greatly admired, ‘whose vision of Lebanon coincides with my own aspirations’.”³² On 12th May 1986, the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, or LBC, broadcasted the first Pierre Sadek caricatures and cartoons, continuing for the next 16 years.

He created the character Touma, who represented the average Lebanese citizen for the reader. The name is also a reference to Jesus’ disciple Thomas, who had to touch the wound of Jesus to assure himself that his master was risen from death. Zaaroura describes it as: “Sadek’s portrayal of this skeptical citizen [the Lebanese], always making fun of politicians and doubting their promises.”³³ Rajeh El Khoury wrote in the catalogue of the exhibition in Museum Sursok, Beirut entitled *Pierre Sadek: Picturing History* that Touma “was a clear embodiment of an everyman Lebanese citizen: honest, decent, simple, wholesome, and humble, a respectable working class person.”³⁴ The character Touma is a white-haired man who wears a traditional *labbade* (a kind of headdress in red and white) and black *sherwal* (wide trousers or baggy pants), both of which are worn by country people mainly in Mount Lebanon, combined with a western-style blue shirt and a white waistband.

His shoes are black slippers. He also has a mustache, which is common among Lebanese mountaineers.



Fig. 4: Pierre Sadek's character Touma

After his death in 2013, the Pierre Sadek Foundation³⁵ was founded with the aim of preserving the works of the cartoonist and promoting his work through publications, scholarly research, and exhibitions. The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) also has an archive of Pierre Sadek's works. As we will reflect on later, the foundation is of remarkable importance to the establishment of cartoons and comics as a high cultural product (vid. infra).

IV. The second cartoonist generation: Mahmoud Kahil, Habib Haddad, and Stavro Jabra

This second generation is the hinge between the pioneers and the more modern cartoonists, although Habib Haddad is still active. They are also similar in that they were all artists who worked during the Civil War period.

IV. I. Mahmoud Kahil — محمود كحيل

Mina, Tripoli, 1936

Mahmoud Kahil (محمود كحيل) was born in 1936 in Mina, Tripoli, and died in 2006 in London, where he moved during the Lebanese Civil War. He began to study at the American University of Beirut, but he did not finish his studies and went on to work as a graphic designer. In 1961, he joined the weekly magazine *الاسبوع العربي* (*al-Usbū‘ al-‘Arabī*) [The Arab Week], and in 1963 he started to draw for the children’s magazine *شهرزاد* (*Šahrazād*) [Scheherazade], for which he created the series *بساط الريح* (*Bisāṭ al-Rīḥ*) [The Flying Carpet]. His first political cartoons appeared in 1966 in the oldest Lebanese daily newspaper, *لسان الحال* (*Lisān al-Hāl*) [The Mouthpiece]. However, it was during the early 1970s when he started to dedicate himself completely to drawing editorial cartoons.³⁶ He worked for the English-language magazine *Monday Morning*, as well as for the newspaper *The Daily Star*. In 1979, he moved to London, where he worked for *الشرق الأوسط* (*al-Šarq al-Awsaṭ*) [The Middle East], *Arab News*, and *المجلة* (*al-Mağalla*) [The Magazine]. Kahil also became the chief cartoonist for the monthly English-language journal *Middle East International*.

Despite moving his residence, Kahil retained an interest in Middle Eastern and world politics.³⁷ He kept the balance between both sides, criticizing and applauding both as he best saw fit. His works were simple, perhaps intentionally, in order to reach a wide audience. His cartoons contain very little text and are generally in English. He incorporates widely recognizable symbols of association, such as the Star of David for Israel, a cowboy hat for Bush, and the cedar tree for Lebanon. His daughter Dana Kahil Trometer said to Meris Lutz (2014) in an interview for *The Daily Star* newspaper for the launch of the book *According to Kahil*: “The cause that was most important for my Dad was the Palestinian cause and, freedom of expression (...) Political cartoons were a weapon ... He knew that his art would be jeopardized if he stayed as a political cartoonist in Lebanon.”³⁸ Because of their timeliness and visual simplicity, Kahil’s works afford westerners critical insight into Arab

public opinion. The crow was his symbol and a kind of signature of his drawings. This bird symbolizes the volatile character of Arab politics and diplomacy, but he stopped drawing it during the 1990s. This author is the namesake of the Mahmoud Kahil Award, a prize awarded at the American University of Beirut each year to comic artists from the MENA region. Detailed information about the award is given later in this study. A selection of Kahil's works was published in 2014 in Beirut.³⁹

IV. II. Habib Haddad — حبيب حداد

Tripoli, 1940

Habib Haddad (حبيب حداد) was born in 1940 in Lebanon and for the past three decades has been the editorial cartoonist for the Lebanese newspaper *الحياة* (*al-Hayāt*) [Life]. He moved to France at the beginning of the Civil War. His drawing style has won him 17 awards, including the Arab Journalism Award for Comics (Dubai 2002) and the St-Just-le-Martel Award 2009 (Limoges, France). He is committed to the Palestinian cause and fears tensions in the Lebanese situation, as Mutaz Sawwaf wrote.⁴⁰

IV. III. Stavro Jabra — ستافرو جبرا

Beirut, 1947

Stavro Jabra (ستافرو جبرا) was born in 1947⁴¹ in Beirut and died in 2017. He started to publish his drawings in Arab and international magazines and newspapers in 1967, in which he depicted the Arab, Lebanese, and world politics of the moment. He was known under the signature STAVRO. He was the author of at least 20 books, four of them of photographs, and not only focused on cartoons. His photographs of war-torn Lebanon capture moments of brutality and the devastation of the armed conflict, taken between 1975 and 1982. He wrote: "it's a feeling, a war photographer has to be like a soldier going to war, who instead of using a gun, uses a camera."⁴²



Fig. 5: Stavro Jabra, a war photographer.

Fig. 5: Screenshot from his website stavrotoons.com

V. The new generation

We will now consider the major newspapers in Lebanon: first, those that publish in Arabic language and then those that publish in English and French. Following this, we will consider other famous cartoonists from Lebanon, many of whom published in the magazine *al-Dabbūr* (but not solely). الأخبار (*al-Aḥbār*) [The News] is an Arabic weekly newspaper that started to be distributed in 2006. It publishes cartoons in its supplement, but these are taken from cartoonists all over the world; they are not directly related to Lebanon or the Middle East region, but to a current topic, such as consumerism or capitalism. Many of them are signed by the Mexican surreal cartoonist Ángel Boligan; others are by Arcadio Esquivel (on 23rd December 2019, *al-Aḥbār* published a cartoon dated 19th August 2015)⁴³ and Dario Castillejos. The *La Plume de Pierre* winner, Mohammad Nohad Alameddine, has published his cartoons in the newspaper as well. He told *al-Nahār* newspaper: “I will raise my voice through my illustrations in places that need me the most, despite my family’s fear of my work getting censored.”⁴⁴ Since the protests began in Beirut in October 2019, Alameddine, known as Nougat, has been drawing a long-nosed politician as a fictional leader to criticize the traditional ruling class in Lebanon and sticking up cartoons throughout the streets of Beirut.⁴⁵

Al-Nahār newspaper divides the results of its search machine into categories, such as human rights, concerns of the citizen, and corruption, among others, or by countries, such as Palestine, Libya, and Iraq.⁴⁶ The most prolific cartoonist is علي خليل [Ali Khalil], who casts a sharp eye on political issues within the Middle East region and Lebanon. البناء (*al-Bināʾ*) [The Building] and الجمهورية (*al-Ġumhūrīya*) [The Republic] do not have regular cartoonists or caricaturists. اللواء (*al-Liwāʾ*) [The Flag] features some cartoons that make fun of daily issues such as the weather, though they are not signed.⁴⁷

The English-language newspaper *The Daily Star* used to publish cartoons from STAVRO and Mahmoud Kahil. Currently, حسن بليبل [Hassan Bleibel], ارمان حمصي [Arman Homsī], and أنطوان غانم [Antoine Ghanem] are common signatures of the newspaper, among other tabloids. The French-language newspaper *L’Orient Le-Jour* works together with the Lebanese artist Bernard Hage, known under the signature *The Art of Boo*, and publishes his cartoons weekly. With simple drawings, sometimes closer to a matchstick man than a realist drawing, he commits to portraying the Lebanese reality.

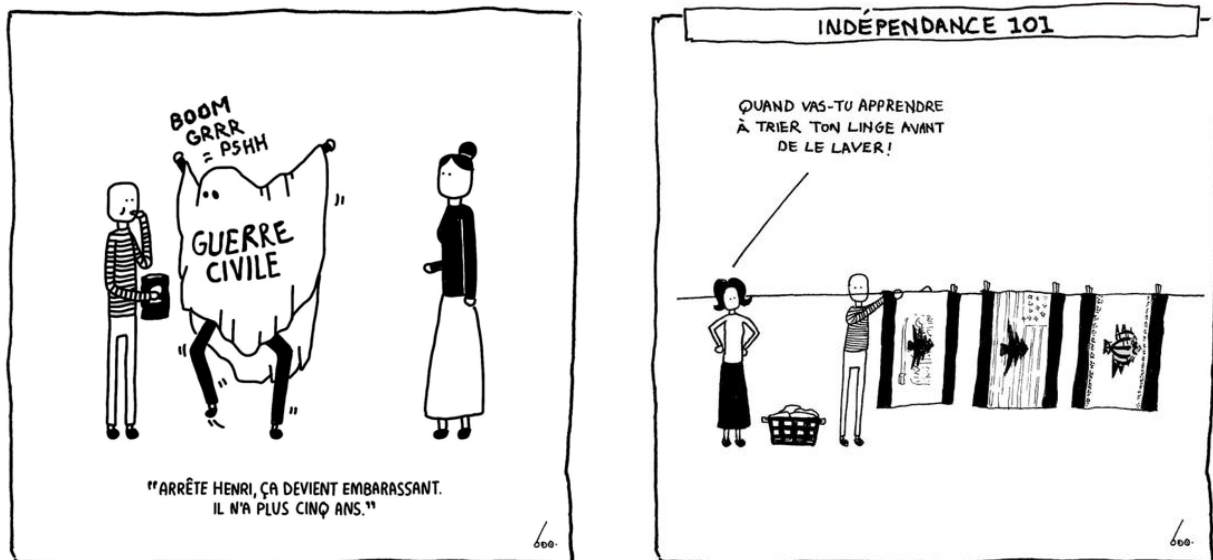


Fig. 6: Cartoons by The Art of Boo

Fig. 6: On the left: Cartoon published in *L'Orient-Le Jour* on 30th November 2019. The mother tells the father: "Stop, Henri, this is getting embarrassing. He is not five anymore". The father is dressed up like a ghost with the words "Civil War" on the bedsheets. On the right is the cartoon dated 24th November 2018. A woman tells a man: "When will you learn to sort your laundry prior to washing!" In the caption: "Independence 101". A man hanging up the washing: three Lebanese flags, one with the flag of Iran, the middle one with the US flag, and the last one with the flag of Saudi Arabia.⁴⁸

Other renowned Lebanese cartoonists include إيلي صليبا [Elie Saliba]. He was born in Beirut in 1967, and his pen name is Eliot. He created the Senior Citizen, a character wearing traditional Lebanese clothes who is an expert in many topics and, because of his age, he does not mince his words. This character exemplifies the average old Lebanese man, who has gone through many points of Lebanese history. As Sawwaf writes: هو اليافع (مواليد بيروت ١٩١٧) الذي تخرج من الحرب اللبنانية (*Huwwa al-yāfi' (mawālīd Bayrūt 1917) alladī taḥarraḡa min al-ḥarb al-lubnāniyya*) [He is a young man (born in Beirut in 1917) who graduated from the Lebanese War].⁴⁹ On the *ToshFesh* website we read: "His cartoons often include political celebrities drawn with great detail especially around the area of the face and its features; they always express a state of mind or position."⁵⁰

VI. Conclusion: the importance of political and editorial cartooning in the development of comics

A preliminary examination of the history of sequential and graphic narrative has served to see which visual references would influence the authors of comics and graphic novels in the region. It is also important to point out that by publishing in the daily press, the authors of comic strips are recognized and appreciated by a wide public. In other words, the concept of comics is materialized for the population. In Arabic, they use the word كاريكاتور (*kārīkāṭūr*) [caricature] for all forms of drawings aimed at an adult audience. Another important element, which develops in parallel, is the contribution of these authors as a historiographical source. In this sense, there is a need for further research. Newspaper strips and caricatures have been the beginning of conflicts—for example, those of Charlie Hebdo; *The New York Times* also decided to suppress cartoons because of the controversy caused by a cartoon depicting the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, as a guide dog and the US president, Donald Trump, as its blind owner, wearing a kippa—but they are the ultimate form of freedom of expression, signifying free journalism, humor, and critical spirit.



Fig. 7: Cartoon by António Moreira Antunes

Fig. 7: *The New York Times*' international edition cartoon on 25th April 2019

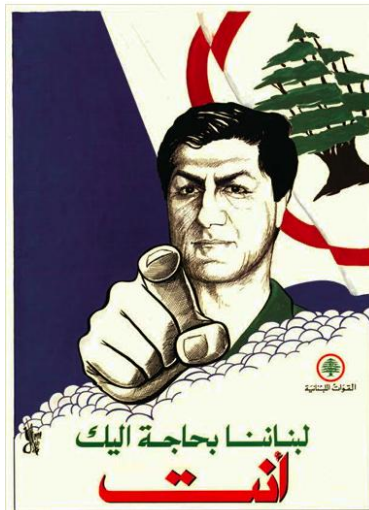


Fig. 8: President Bachir Gemayel by Stravro on the left and by Pierre Sadek in the center; on the right: photogram from the film *Waltz with Bashir*. Gemayel by Pierre Sadek published in *al-Amal* newspaper in 1979.

Fig. 8: Bachir Gemayel drawn by different artists.



Fig. 9: The “Lebanese” citizen

Fig. 9: The “Lebanese” citizen, depicted by Mahjoob in *al-Quds al-‘Arabī* and by Elie Saliba (Eliot) in *al-Dabbūr* magazine.



Fig. 10: Egyptian President Nasser drawn by Pierre Sadek.

Fig. 10: Nasser by Pierre Sadek. In this cartoon published in 1965, Sadek portrays Nasser and mocks the 99.99 % of votes obtained in the presidential candidacy referendum.

¹ Brinkmann 1999, 68.

² Wigand 1986, 28.

³ Fatma Müge Göçek 1997, 1.

⁴ <https://www.toshfesh.com/about.php> [last accessed 20th July]

⁵ Harder 2013, 3.

⁶ Meskin 2007.

⁷ Harder, op. cit.

⁸ Göçek, op.cit., 6

⁹ Douglas and Malt-Douglas 1994.

¹⁰ Etmüller 2013, 219-44 .

¹¹ Etmüller op.cit., 220-221

¹² Etmüller op. cit., 243.

¹³ Booth 2013, 271.

¹⁴ Booth, op. cit., 278.

¹⁵ Booth, op. cit., 275.

¹⁶ Booth, op. cit. 302-3

¹⁷ Haddad 2018

¹⁸ <http://alumniusj.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/USJ-Newsletter-2018.pdf> [last accessed 25th July 2021]

¹⁹ *Al-Amal* is a political periodical belonging to the Kataeb Lebanese political party.

²⁰ According to Björn Zimprich, الدَّبُّور (*al-Dabbūr*) [The Hornet] was a satirical magazine which started in 1922. It was founded by Youssef Moukarzel, influenced by the Egyptian *Nahda*. The aim of the magazine was to establish a framework for freedom of expression as first step towards democracy. Closed during the Civil War in 1977, it was launched again in 2000 and since February 2020, it has been published only as an online version. The editor-in-chief is Joseph Moukarzel, nephew of its original publisher (Zimprich 2014). The magazine has been digitized at USEK, Holy Spirit University Kaslik.
<https://www.usek.edu.lb/library/ddc/achievements> [last accessed 27th July 2021]

²¹ Haddad op.cit., 14.

²² Haddad op.cit.,13.

²³ P. Karam Rizk in Haddad op.cit.,13

²⁴ ibid, 15.

²⁵ Davidian 2017

²⁶ *ToshFesh* 7: 77

²⁷ Papasian 2018

²⁸ Agémian 2017: 40.

²⁹ <https://www.toshfesh.com/articledetails.php?id=383> [last accessed 27th July 2021]

³⁰ Zaaroura 2014c

³¹ <https://www.toshfesh.com/articledetails.php?id=383> [last accessed 27th July 2021]

³² Maasri (2009:46), Zeina. 2009. *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War / Zeina Maasri*. Tauris.

³³ Zaaroura, op. cit.

³⁴ El Khoury 2018, 4.

The exhibition catalogue is available online, both in English
https://sursock.museum/sites/default/files/pierre_sadek-exhibition_guide-en-web_version.pdf and in Arabic
https://sursock.museum/sites/default/files/pierre_sadek-exhibition_guide-ar-web_version.pdf [last accessed 27th July 2021]. It is interesting that this catalogue was originally written in Arabic and translated by Lina Mounzer. The drawings presented in both are different.

³⁵ <https://pierresadekfoundation.org> [last accessed 27th December 2019]

³⁶ <http://mahmoudkahil.com/about> [last accessed 27th December 2019]

³⁷ *ToshFesh*#1, p.6

وظل محمود كحيل حتى غيابه في ١٢ شباط ٢٠٠٣ الأقدر على رؤية الأحداث العربية والإقليمية ، من لندن ، كونه تحرر من عقدة الضغوطات أكثر وأطل على هموم الواقع العربي
(Wa-ḡalla Maḥmūd Kaḥīl ḥattā ḡiyābi-hi fī 12th February 2003 al-aqdar ‘alā ru’yat al-aḥdāṭ al-‘arabiyya wa-l-iqlīmiyya, min Lundun, kawna-hu taḥarrara min ‘uqdat al-duḡūṭāt akṭar wa-aṭall ‘alā humūm al-wāqī’ al-‘arabī) [Until his death on 12th February 2003, Mahmoud Kahil remained at the forefront in his ability to understand Arab and regional events. Living in London, he was freed from the complexity of certain pressures and could observe the concerns of the Arab reality.]

³⁸ Lutz, Meris. (2014) Book and prizes to honor cartoonist Mahmoud Kahil. *The Daily Star* print edition 11-6-2014.

³⁹ Kaḥīl, Maḥmūd, Dessy Ponkitos, and Zakī Maḥfūd. 2014. *Hakaḍā Rasama Kaḥīl: Muḥtārāt Min Rusūm Al-kārīkātir* ; 1980 -2000 = According to Kahil : A Selection of Editorial Cartoons. Beirut: Nazdā.

⁴⁰ Sawwaf 2012, 8-9.

⁴¹ Jabra, Stavro (?) <http://www.stavrotoons.com/chronology.asp> [last accessed 27th December 2019]

⁴² http://www.stavrotoons.com/lebanese_war/default.asp [last accessed 27th December 2019]

⁴³ <https://www.al-akhbar.com/Capital/281538/كاريكاتو> [last accessed 29th December 2019]

⁴⁴ Geha 2019

- ⁴⁵ Agence France Presse-Beirut (2019) 'Laugh at what's hurting you': Lebanon cartoonists stir debate. 7th December 2019. Available under:
<https://www.france24.com/en/20191207-laugh-at-what-s-hurting-you-lebanon-cartoonists-stir-debate> [last accessed 29th December 2019] Heckman, Alice, Agence France Presse (2019) Lebanon cartoonists stir debate. Print edition of The Daily Star Lebanon 9th December 2019, p. 8. Available under:
<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Arts-and-Ent/Culture/2019/Dec-09/497037-lebanon-cartoonists-stir-debate.ashx> [last accessed 29th December 2019]
- ⁴⁶ <https://www.annahar.com/archives/search.php?q=كاريكاتور> [last accessed 29th December 2019]
- ⁴⁷ <http://aliwaa.com.lb/بحث/?q=كاريكاتور> [last accessed 29th December 2019]
- ⁴⁸ From the Instagram Account The Art of Boo. <https://www.instagram.com/the.art.of.boo/> [last accessed 27th July 2021]
- ⁴⁹ Sawwaf 2011, 26.
- ⁵⁰ <https://www.toshfesh.com/articledetails.php?id=369> [last accessed 29th December 2019]

Chapter Three: Drawing for the future: children's magazines and illustrators as game changers

From childhood to adulthood: growing up with children's magazines and illustration

The editorial development of comics in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt and later in Lebanon, during the early years of the century was conditioned by a parasitic relationship with newspaper publications. Comic strips were inscribed within the general framework of the newspaper and/or magazine alongside other entertainment elements and sections (literary narratives, jokes, illustrations, hieroglyphics, crossword puzzles, etc.). The personality of the new discursive model was limited in almost all its facets: the themes moved in the territory of the costumbrista anecdote (the less audacious it was, the less problems it caused for the publication that included it); the combination of the two languages was still very much influenced by the weight of the explanatory captions at the foot of the cartoon, so that in many cases the image functioned as a simple illustration of the text. Even so, there is an evident intention to 'tell' in a sequential way, seeking narrative continuity between one vignette and the next. The establishment of the speech bubble as a regular feature in Arab magazines took several decades, although there are numerous scattered testimonies from quite early on. The introduction of the panel was more successful and became a regular feature in the illustrations of children's magazines.

In this chapter, we will aim to outline a few artists and illustrators whose drawings and pictures contemporary artists have grown up with. The aesthetics of books have been an object of experimentation. Books, not only for children but for adults too, have been undergoing the experience of reading and seeing, text and image. Illustrated books are aimed at children, but this does not mean that the design of books for adults does not work under the same principle: an aesthetically beautiful poetry book, novel, or essay, will surely catch the attention of more potential readers when the illustrations are catchy. The visual literacy¹ is not only formed by the book's typography, layout design, binding, and size; the

cover page makes an outstanding contribution. This chapter compiles a list of the artists that have played an important role in the design of covers and contributed to visual literacy, while working for the publishing houses that revolutionized this concept, namely دار المعارف (*Dār al-Ma‘ārif*) [Knowledge Publishing House] in Egypt and دار الفتى العربي (*Dār al-Fatā l-‘Arabī*) [Arab Youth Publishing House], a publishing house belonging to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) based in Beirut.

The line differentiating artists as adult or children’s illustrators is blurred. Some of the artists below are both artists for children’s magazines and for books, some are illustrators for comic magazine pages that originated in Arab countries, and some are important to understanding the development of graphic design and therefore visual culture, since they still have an imprint on contemporary Lebanese comic makers. At the end of this chapter, two unique examples from Lebanon will be underscored: the situation of children’s magazines during the Lebanese Civil War based on the study by Yasmine Younes, and the first Lebanese superhero *Malaak*, by Joumana Medlej (see Chapter Six, “*Malaak*—The App”).

What are the influences of illustrators of children’s magazines and book design in contemporary comics, and what role does visual literacy play in the development of comics in Lebanon? Which transfers have been made from the West into post-colonial design?

I. Children’s magazines

The importance of children’s literature as an educational tool or the advantages of reading is not the issue at hand here. However, both books and magazines served to consolidate visual culture and visual literacy, and it was also in children’s magazines that the text balloon was used for the first time; that is, comics were born from children’s publications. For Reuven Snir, the importance of studying what he labels as “non-canonized” texts for both children and adults is still a missing field in scholarship on modern Arabic literature; however: “On the contrary, the study of non-canonized texts and their relationships with canonized texts becomes absolutely essential if we want to arrive at an adequate understanding of the historical development of Arabic literature.”² He considers texts not published in literary or classical Arabic/MSA (الفصحى (*al-fuṣḥā*)), but rather in dialectal Arabic (العامية (*al-‘āmīya*)) to be “subliterary”.³ In this category, he lists popular prose and poetry, love stories, spy thrillers, monster and science fiction, love stories, erotic, sexual, and pornographic literature for adults, as well as comic books, which he claims are addressed at children.⁴ One assertion

that we cannot dispute is that: "Comics have been used for political and social criticism and to make political statements."⁵

The first documented children's magazine was the British *The Lilliputian Magazine* (1751-1752), which contained texts with moral lessons, short stories, fables, songs, jokes, and riddles, as well as wood engravings. Since then, this concept started to expand to other European countries. These children's magazines are crucial to understanding the later development of comic magazines and books. Whereas in the United States, the first comic strips for a child audience were published in the daily newspapers and in Europe, as albums, in Arab media, the first comics for children were published in children's magazines that already existed.

The first children's magazine was published in Egypt in the 1870s, according to Heidi Morrison.⁶ Its title was *المصرية (Rawḍāt al-Madāris al-Miṣriyya)* [Garden of the Egyptian Schools] and it was edited by Rifa'a al-Tahtawi. It was without illustrations, and explained school curricula contents because it was "produced by the government and distributed freely in schools".⁷ Then we have to wait almost twenty years: the first illustrated children's magazine in Arabic, *المدرسة (al-Madrasa)* [The School], was created in Egypt in 1893, but with a more educational than playful orientation. According to Ziad Fahmy, it was a monthly student magazine, published and edited by Mustafa Kamil,⁸ that included dialogues between a teacher and his pupils, as well as nationalistic chants.⁹ This magazine most probably had a very limited readership of those who belonged to a social class whose children were able to go to school and therefore could read. Moreover, by the end of the nineteenth century, the illiteracy rate was very high, not only in the Arab countries but in Europe too. Such magazines reproduce the ideology of the bourgeois whose children are addressed, contributing to their education under a recreational disguise. For Morrison (op.cit.: 49): "It was not until the 1960s that the children's press reached underprivileged children, who were illiterate but could follow the illustrations."

This type of magazine, such as *al-Madrasa*, was reproduced in different Arab countries, but no strips or speech bubbles for the dialogue appeared; moreover, *al-Madrasa* depended on an institution. The Cairo-based magazine *الاولاد (al-Awlād)* [The Boys] published in 1923, was in words of Heidi Morrison: "(...) a historical event because it was the first time that an Egyptian magazine had been published independently by a publishing house and not under the patronage of an educational institution. It was the first magazine published for children aged 6-13. Published weekly, on Thursdays, it contained humor, entertainment, and contests."¹⁰ It was the very first magazine to attempt the publication of comic strips for children.

The autonomy of comics in the Arab world was achieved, relatively speaking, with the publication of certain magazines aimed at a child audience in the second decade of the twentieth century. The prominent position of the new urban bourgeoisie (a region-wide phenomenon), as well as the growth of education and literacy levels, generated an unprecedented demand for print media. The target of these publications included an upper-middle-class children's readership with free time to read and a certain purchasing power. The new press was aimed at entertainment rather than moralizing instruction, which was already an obvious novelty compared to previous publications. Egypt was again the pioneer when publishing the magazine *سندباد* (*Sindibād*) [Sinbad] in 1952, whose editor was Hussein Bicar. Although speech bubbles were not introduced until several issues in, it is considered the first comic magazine in the Arab world. As George Khoury (J AD) wrote: "SINDIBAD started as the first young magazine to publish comics within its pages, at a rate of 2 pages in every issue that became 5 pages at a later stage."¹¹ Some of the Egyptian cartoonists who would mark that time such as Hijazi or Mohieddine El Labbad published their first drawings in this magazine. The *Sindibād* stories soon emerged from other competitors, including the Egyptian *سمير* (*Mağallat Samīr*) [Samir Magazine] (1955) that followed the same model of a children's magazine and has stayed in the market until today. The content is a sum of comics in the form of comics, especially by Arab authors, but also includes informative texts, illustrated stories, word puzzles, word-search games, adapted historical and religious lessons, etc. In the 1960s and 1970s, other magazines following a similar scheme appeared from other parts of the Arab world, such as the Syrian *مجلة أسامة* (*Mağallat Usāma*) [Usama Magazine] with a socialist background, or the Lebanese *بساط الريح* (*Bisāṭ al-Rīḥ*) [The Flying Carpet]. The line opened up by *Samīr* and *Sindibād* made it easier to broaden the spectrum of readers targeted by this type of press. Soon, comic magazines began to be published at a low editorial cost, aimed at a public with limited purchasing power.

The artists' styles, which are important for understanding the background of the actual artistic production, could be summarized in the following Egyptian artists. It is also important to mention that most of these artists were not exclusively working for children's magazines, but were also painters, sculptors, graphic artists, and muralists. As Nassereddine wrote of artists for children's magazines and books: "a few artists and designers whose drawings and pictures we had seen on the covers of books we grew up with."¹² They also "stroved to replace the western visual influences by exploring their own culture developing a visual language based on traditional elements such as arabesque, Islamic miniature paintings, Arabic calligraphy, local religious icons, Arabic folk tales, and Pharaonic art, while employing a

contemporary approach.”¹³ As such, these artists were significant in creating, developing, and establishing an “Arab” way to design and make illustrations. There is no doubt that other artists profited from their influence later.

II. Laying the foundations of comics

The next three illustrators and artists help us to understand the development of comics. Through their work, the comic conventions (use of speech balloon, gutters) were established in the Middle East. This began in Egypt in the 1950s, but already in the 1960s it was possible to find the first Lebanese examples.

II. I. Hussein Bicar — حسين أمين بیکار

Alexandria, 1913



Fig. 11: Hussein Bicar on his Doodle on Google

Fig. 11: Doodle on Google for the 104th Birthday of Hussein Bicar. The emphasis is not only on his role as a painter but also on his role as a musician.

We start with Hussein Bicar because he was most probably the first artist to make comic strips for children in Arabic. He was born in Alexandria in 1913 and studied oil painting with the prominent Egyptian portrait painter أحمد صبري [Ahmad Sabri], graduating in 1933 from the Cairo Higher School of Fine Arts. After that, he started to work as a teacher in Upper Egypt. He then moved to the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco, to Tetouan, where he illustrated books for learning Spanish.¹⁴ He saw that the children engaged more effectively with simple drawings and the potential to reach the children in this way.

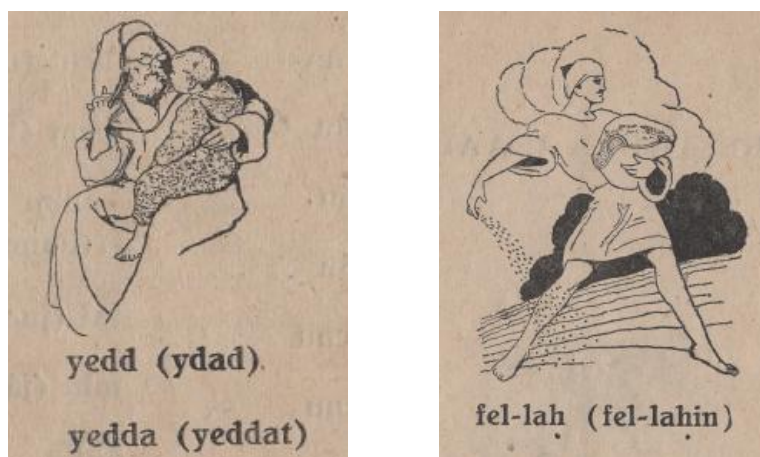


Fig. 12: Hussein Bicar's drawings for school books

Fig. 12: Drawing of a grandfather and a farmer in *Método de Árabe Dialectal Marroquí* (pp. 66 and 94)

Bicar worked for many of the children's magazines published from the 1940s, including *Sindibād*. His style reflects his skills in oil painting, illustration, and shading. His importance is also related to the fact that all subsequent cartoonists were instructed or influenced by it. He shaped and transformed the Arabic children's book, partly because he started to use drawings as breaks between paragraphs and chapters, and partly because he translated the texts into illustrations. As Nassereddine (2010:177) cited: "the book was no longer a display for text but a display for all its aesthetics (...) Form was no longer an external aspect but a fundamental part of the book itself."¹⁵

Bicar was the first illustrator of the pioneering magazine *Sindibād*, launched on 3rd January 1952, and distributed by Dār al-Ma'ārif.¹⁶ According to الموسوعة مجلات الأطفال في العالم (Mawsū'at Mağallat al-Aṭfāl fī l-Ālam al-ʿArabī) [Encyclopedia of Children's Magazines in the Arab World], published by the Arab Council for Children and Development and the General Secretariat the Arab League, the magazine editor and founder was محمد سعيد العريان [Mohammed Saeed al-Arian].¹⁷ Bicar illustrated the covers of *Sindibād* and the series شداد واؤد (Šaddād wa-Awwad) [Chaddad & Awwad], for which he followed the tradition of the French 'Épinal' prints, characterized by a naïve representation of reality, displaying only the positive aspects, and underlaying text to the picture. Another important series in the magazine was *The Adventures of ZouZou*, drawn by the Italian Mario Morelli di Popolo. George Khoury (JAD) writes that in *The Adventures of ZouZou*, Bicar "had already appropriated the techniques of sequential framing 'vignettes', of 'Balloon labels', and mastered the use of the equation of space to time."¹⁸ In spite of the weakness of the drawings, and the static stands of the characters, these pages could be labeled the first

comics to be published, acquiring the fundamental elements of graphic narration in time.”¹⁹ The character Sinbad the sailor from *A Thousand and One Nights*, who travelled the whole world, represents the magazine’s aim of exposing children to different countries and cultures; the issues also used to feature translations of foreign literature. The magazine was distributed to all Arab countries and sold in Lebanon for 25 Lebanese piasters, making the magazine a huge success.



Fig. 13: Sindibād Magazine covers

Fig. 13: First cover of *Sindibād* Magazine, dated 3rd January 1952. In the middle, the cover is dated 8th May 1952. On the left, one cover claimed to be drawn by Morelli di Popolo, according to his son.²⁰

In addition, Bicar illustrated the Dār al-Ma‘ārif book series *الطفل السعيد* (*al-Ṭifl al-Sa‘īd*) [The Happy Child] in the 1950s, which can be considered another attempt to create children’s books by Arab artists. However, despite the innovations made by Bicar, such as speech bubbles and labels, and the findings that children had increased concentration and higher learning success when drawings accompanied the text, illustrated children’s books were not treated as a serious pedagogical tool by Arabic publishers. This awareness first surfaced with Mohieddin El Labbad, as explained below.

II. II. Mohieddin El Labbad — محيي الدين اللباد

Cairo, 1940

Mohieddin El Labbad was born in Cairo Old Town and studied from 1957 to 1962 in the Arts Academy in Cairo. He started to work as an illustrator for newspapers and magazines. His first job was for *Sindibād* magazine and he published his first book with Dār al-Maʿārif publishing house. After 1962 he worked for other magazines, as is written in the German edition of his book كشكول الرسام (*Kaškūl al-Rassām*) [The Illustrator's Notebook] (2017:30).²¹ For El Labbad, Arabic writing is an integral part to the Arabic pictorial tradition, as he also emphasized in his book نظرو! (*Naẓar!*) [Look!].²² He encourages young artists to find inspiration in the world around them.

The importance of El Labbad in outlining Arabic comics lies in the fact that he was able to imprint the local style of Egyptian caricature to the drawings, as well as the movement of the characters, even if his drawing style was distinguished by a minimalist approach, the simplicity of features and decors, and the absence of the third dimension, differently from other authors which used many elements to cover the weakness of the narrative plot. This said, El Labbad will always be considered an innovator of the juvenile Arabic comic strip, having influenced many illustrators in the field of children's books and publications.²³

El Labbad also worked for Dār al-Fatā l-ʿArabī, a Beirut-based publishing house founded in 1971 by Nabil Shaath. It is considered one of the first publishing houses for children in the Arab world to present historical and scientific topics in an age-appropriate manner. Their publications also addressed political themes, such as the Arab defeat in 1967, and had a markedly pro-Palestinian character because the publishing house depended on the PLO's cultural program. As Zeina Maasri pointed out in her article in the book *Cosmopolitan Radicalism: the Visual Politics of Beirut's Global Sixties*, the importance of the publishing house in our context is that Beirut was a liminal space, a place of transition and transformation during the (long) 1960s, and a node of transnationality among Arab artists, intellectuals, and writers who sought a revolutionary change in the Arab world: "Transnational solidarity was expressed in, and carried through, the flow of revolutionaries, associated media cultures and ensuing aesthetics. (...) Dar al-Fata al-Arabi was yet another node in which transnational circuits of solidarity converged."²⁴

El Labbad was able to create a kind of visual manifesto in his works, both politically and aesthetically. In a political sense, because he belonged to the anti-colonial Arab nationalists and socialists and rejected the hegemony of the Walt Disney and therefore

American aesthetics, as well as classical and bourgeois European children's literature; he thus "aimed to decolonize children's literature in terms of knowledge and imagination and to instill a revolutionary consciousness articulated along a panarab subjectivity."²⁵ In an aesthetic sense, and linked to his political ideas, because he drew the everyday reality of Arab children (Fig. 14: Cats!) and made his readers aware of the influence of Europe (for example, when he realized that the color "flesh" did not match with his hands (Fig. 14: Colors) or the differences between the direction of reading (Fig. 14: Left-Right!)). He said in an interview: "We got rid of Mickey Mouse and Tom and Jerry type drawings. The idea was to present a new 'rough' aesthetic that was at the same time visually powerful and artistically complete—something that was local and that rejected the sentimental and bourgeois nature of the dominant form of illustration at the time."²⁶

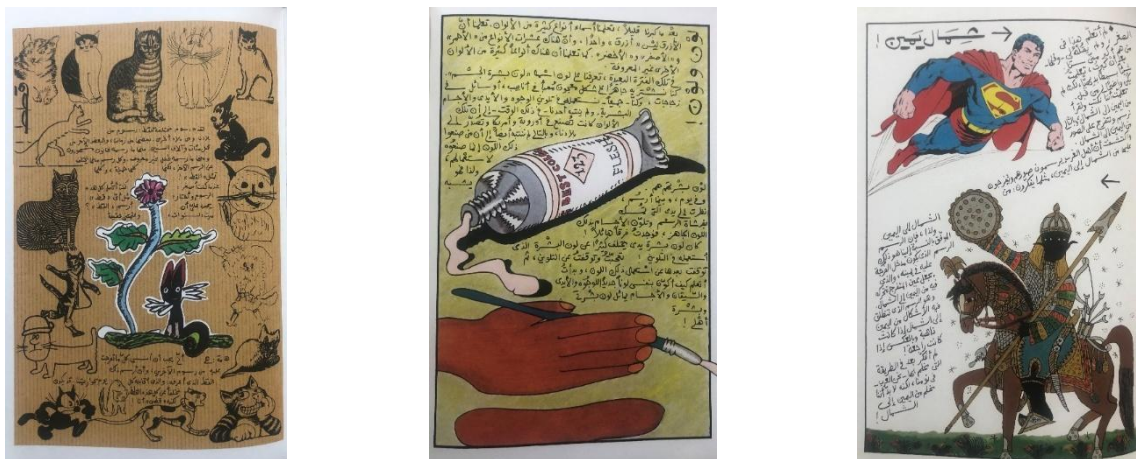


Fig. 14: Mohieddine El Labbad drawings

Fig. 14: From left to right: قِطَط (Qīṭat) [Cats], لَوْن وَلَوْن (Lawn wa-Lawn) [Colors], and يَمِين شَمَال (Yamīn Šimāl) [Left Right].

In Cats we read: اَرَسَمُ ذَلِكَ الْقِطَطَ الَّذِي كُلَّ يَوْمٍ أَقَابِلُهُ (Arsum ḍalika l-qīṭṭ alladī uqābilu-hu kull yawm) [I draw the cat that I meet every day]

In Colors we read: كَانَتْ تُصْنَعُ فِي أَوْرُوبَةِ وَأَمْرِيكََا وَتُصَدَّرُ إِلَى بِلَادِنَا (Kānat tuṣna‘ fī Urūba wa-Amrīkā wa-tuṣaddar ilā bilādi-nā) [They were pigmented in Europe or America and brought to our country]

And in Left-Right: نَكْتُبُ وَنَقْرَأُ مِنَ الْيَمِينِ إِلَى الشَّمَالِ، وَبِالنَّالِي نَرَسُمُ وَنَنْقَرُجُ عَلَى الصُّورِ مِنَ الْيَمِينِ إِلَى الشَّمَالِ (Naktub wa-naqra‘ min al-yamīn ilā l-šimāl, wa-bi-l-tālī narsum wa-natafarraḡ ‘alā l-ṣuwwar min al-yamīn ilā l-šimāl) [We write and read from the right to the left, and then we draw and watch pictures from right to left]. In this drawing, we also see the Arab hero عَنْتَرَةُ (‘Antara) [Antarah]²⁷ in opposition with Superman.

After leaving Beirut in 1976, El Labbad continued working as an illustrator, initiating a project in Cairo, The Arab Workshop for Children's Books. He worked for the Emirati magazine *Māḡid* in the 1980s, a magazine that is still widely available in Arab countries. He also worked throughout his life as a painter and designer for newspapers, magazines, books, and cultural publications for young people and adults in Egypt.

II. III. Ahmed Hijazi — أحمد إبراهيم حجازي

Alexandria, 1936

Ahmed Ibrahim Hijazi was born in Alexandria in 1936 and studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Cairo University. He started illustrating for magazines in 1954. In 1965, he began working for the magazine *Samīr* and he contributed to the funding of *Māğid* the series تنابلة الصبيان (*Tanābilat al-Šibyān*) [The Lazy Boys], whose first appearance was in the late 1960s. In 2020, the Egyptian artist Shennawy republished the more than 450 pages of the stories of the three boys,²⁸ although in the 1980s an attempt was made by دار الهلال (*Dār al-Hilāl*) [Crescent Moon Publishing House] to compile the series. This series is also important since the characters broke the mold of obedient children and instructional stories. Moreover, the depiction of Egypt is not the usual one: the crowded buses, the diligent farmers under the control and oppression of landowners, police and politics, scenes of imprisonment, arrest, and investigation, the obedience of TV presenters, the policies of the US in the Middle East, etc... As Douglas and Malti-Douglas wrote in the chapter *Radicalism in Strips*, focused on Hijazi: “(...) he extends his analysis to less widely accepted positions: a critique of nationalism and even patriotism, hostility to militarism, the state, and all other forms of authority and hierarchy.”²⁹ According to Shenawy,³⁰ the author modified some pages, such as the ones related to suicide, which prompts the question as to whether the topic was banned as the magazine was aimed at children or if it was a matter of censorship. In any case, the series are moralizing: the three boys only eat and sleep and never work, a behavior that Hijazi does not support, and political as well, since this assumption has a socialist slant.

Hijazi also worked for the Mickey Mouse magazine. In the 1980s, he worked simultaneously for *Māğid*, علاء الدين (*Alā l-Dīn*) [Aladdin], and for جريدة العربي (*Ġarīdat al-‘Arabī*) [Al Arabi Newspaper]. The style of Hijazi remains that of Spirou or Tintin, based on separating outlines and text in black and white and then coloring them, proper of the European tradition. He depicts the peasants and their daily lives, the daily hard work of the readers who were buying the magazines, breaking the taboo and reflecting his strong sense of social awareness. He reduced to the minimum the function of the picture, limiting the drawing to support of the narration, making very simplified illustrations, and setting an Egyptian comic style, for the drawings of Hijazi reached a large public. As observed by George Khoury (JAD): “The simplified graphics was already more accessible to readers comfortable with the caricature style.”³¹

Hijazi laterally retired himself from public life, returning to his hometown and stopping drawing. He died at the age of 75,³² suffering from schizophrenia and a depression partly motivated by the 1967 events: “Les évènements tragiques de juin 1967 affectent les illustrations d’Hijazi sur lesquelles souffle un vent de dépression et de frustration: la schizophrénie et les contradictions remplissent ses cadres et ses personnages.”³³ The significance of Hijazi lies not only in that Arab comics reached maturity in the *Samīr* and *Māğid* magazines, but because his style left its imprint on the collective visual memory of the contemporary generation.

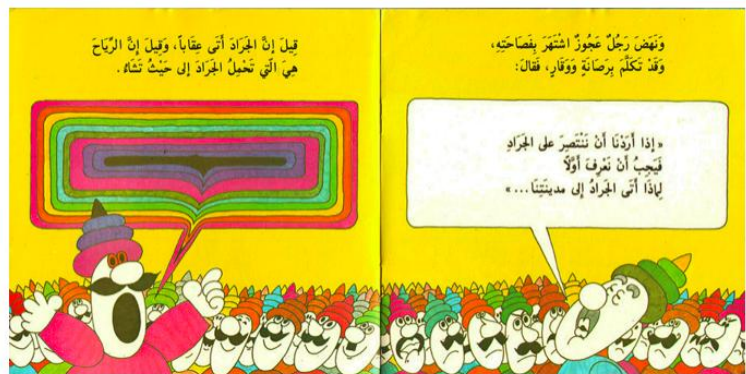


Fig. 15: Books by Hijazi

Fig. 15: Cover and illustrations by Hijazi of the book by Zakariyya Tamer *al-Ġarād fī l-Madīna* [Locusts in the City], published by Dār al-Fatā l-‘Arabī, first edition in 1975 and second edition in 1977.³⁴ Basic colors, clean black lines, and stereotyped characters made in few hand movements, but full of meaning.



Fig. 16: Cover of Samir Magazine drawn by Hijazi.

Fig. 16: The characters شملول (*Šamlūl*) [cheerful, but also means clever in Egyptian Arabic]; بهلول (*Bahlūl*) [clown, funny]; and تمبول (*Tambūl*) [idiot, lazy], all of which are words from the Egyptian dialect, with their characteristic colors for each one: red, yellow, and blue. Cover page of *Samīr* number 593. The joke in the speech balloon reflects the humor and characterization of the three boys: مفيش مركب في حمام السباحة بدل ما نتعب ونعوم (*Mafīš markab fī ḥammām al-sibāḥa badal mā nat'ab wa-na'ūm*) [Isn't there a little boat in the swimming pool instead of getting tired and swimming?]

period that the number of translated magazines reached its peak, according to Yasmine Younes in her Master Thesis (2018: 41 and 48-49):³⁶

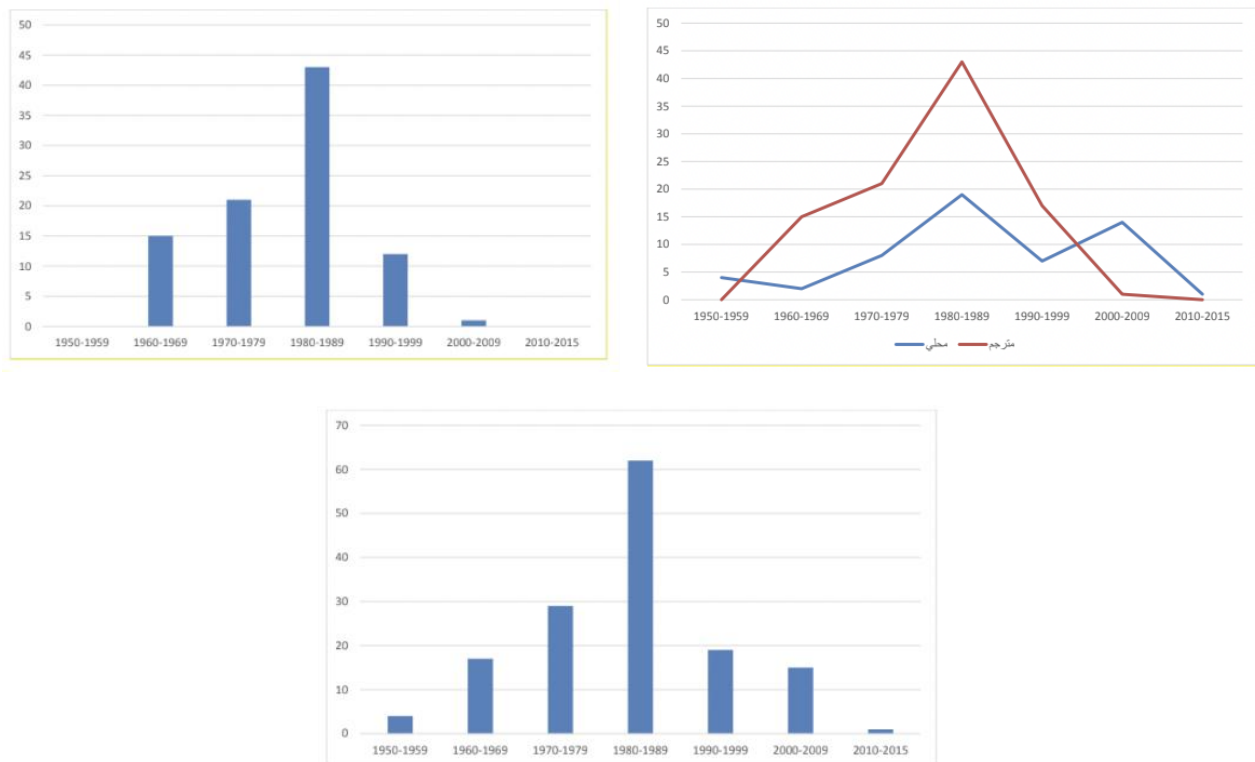


Fig. 17: Comic magazines published in Lebanon between the 1950s and 2015

Fig. 17: On the left: number of translated comics in Lebanon from the 1960s to the 2010s. On the right, a graphic showing the number of locally produced comics (blue line) and translations (red line). Below: total number of comic magazines published in Lebanon from the 1950s until 2015.

[Taken from the MA thesis of Yasmine Younes with her kind permission.]

According to this graphic, the Civil War period was prolific in terms of the number of publications. It was during this turbulent era that experimentation began, as we will later observe, and the first adult comics appeared in Beirut. In addition, the different conflicting factions and parties during the war began to publish their own children's magazines.

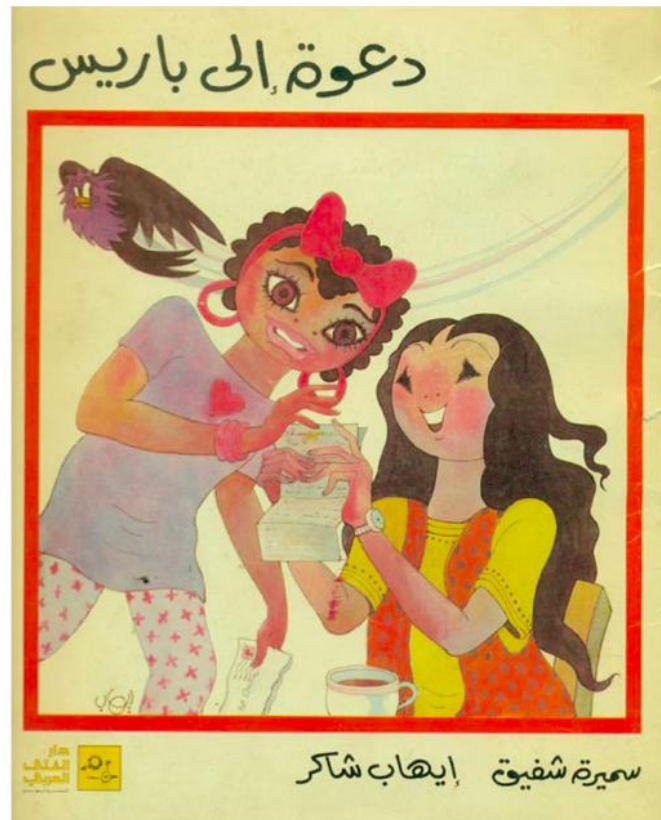


Fig. 18: Ihab Shaker and Samira Safic pages

Fig. 18: *Shamsa and Dahna*: Invitation to Paris by Samira Safic and Ihab Shaker. The comic is completely established.

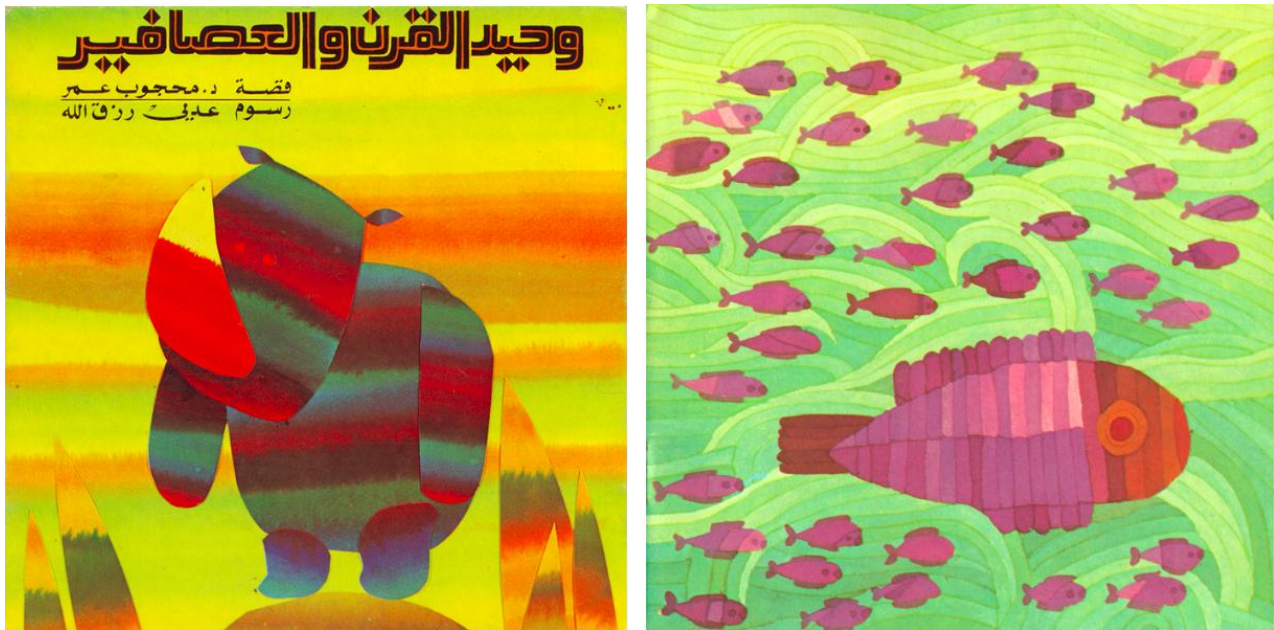


Fig. 19: Illustrations by Adli Rizkallah. Early 1980s.

Fig. 19: On the left: *The Rhino and the Birds* by Mahjoub Omar; on the right: *The White Pigeon* by Zakaria Tamer, illustrated by Adli Rizkallah in the early 1980s.

III. Illustrators

Through the following two illustrators, we will see how they established their own unique design and how they all included elements of the visual culture of other arts, reminiscent, for example, goldsmithing, decorative calligraphy, or embroidery. In addition, these artists and/or the publishers they worked for passed through Beirut. In this way, these illustrators also created synergies and contributed to establishing a new book design.

III. I. Helmi El-Touni — حلمي التوني

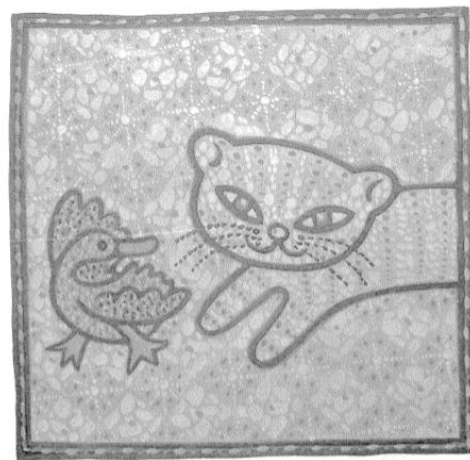
Middle Egypt, 1934

Helmi El-Touni³⁷ was born in Middle Egypt in 1934. He graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts in 1958, specializing in stage décor from Helwan University. He started to work at Dār al-Hilāl publishing house³⁸ during his studies. Dār al-Hilāl issues the children's magazines *Samīr* and *Mickey*, pioneering magazines in the publishing of comics for children. Until he left Egypt, El-Touni also held the position of art director at Dār al-Hilāl. He worked as an illustrator of book covers and children's books and magazines, in which he included natural themes, human bodies, and animals in an idiosyncratic way, but with emphasis on the visual heritage. El-Touni is among the most famous designers and illustrators of Arabic books, and is considered to have significantly influenced this field.

El-Touni moved to Beirut in 1973 and stayed there until 1983. In the Lebanese capital, he joined المؤسسة العربية للدراسات والنشر *al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Našr* [The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing]. He belonged to “an emerging collective concerned with developing illustrated Arabic books”,³⁹ and worked for Dār al-Fatā al-'Arabī, collaborating with El Labbad there and subsequently. In his combination of illustration, storytelling, and complex ideas—such as the relevance of education or the importance of depicting the reality children live, rather than the “ideal-world” of the city—he “employs the narrative conventions of comic strips to tell a story combining wit, humour and tenderness.”⁴⁰

For the Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, he illustrated a series on Islamic folk tales and a series on Arab and Islamic history⁴¹ in 1978 in Beirut, and in Cairo for دار الشروق (*Dār al-Šurūq*) [Sunrise Publishing House]⁴² and several other major Arab publishers. He illustrated all kinds of children's literature, including history books from the 1980s to the present⁴³ for prominent Arab publishers. In 1982, he was winner of the bronze medal at the 1982 International Leipzig Book Fair; in 2004, he was nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration.⁴⁴ He also designed a series of books for UNICEF. This all

serves to demonstrate the international acknowledgment that his work and achievements received.



قاف



وَالْقَافُ مِثْلُ «قَفَّه» • جَرَتْ وَرَاءَ بَطَّة

Fig. 20: Illustration by Hilmi El-Touni

Fig. 20: Cat illustration for the letter *qāf* in the visual transliteration of أشعار وصور الحروف (*Aš'ār wa-Ṣuwwar al-Ḥurūf*) [Poems and Images of the Letters [of the Alphabet]]. Translation of the poem: “And [the letter] *qāf*, as in a cat running behind a duck.” It is possible here to appreciate some of the characteristic features of El-Touni, such as the repetition of patterns and the simplicity of the drawings.

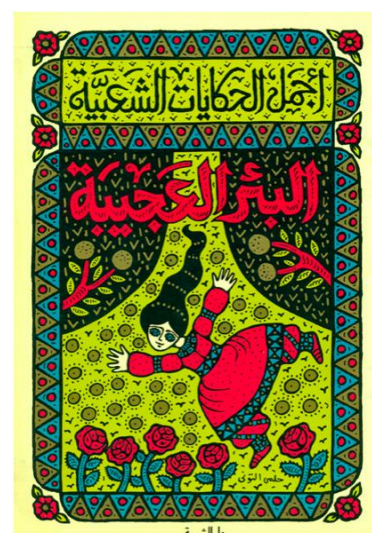
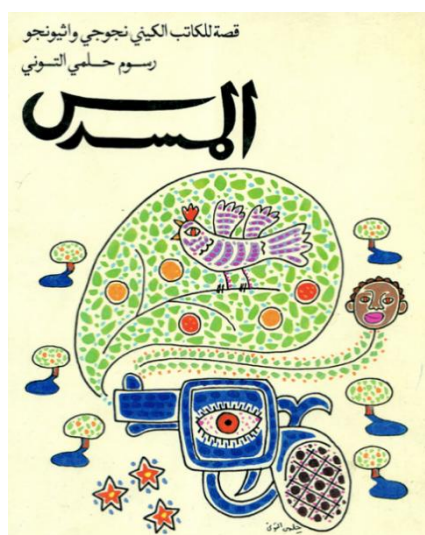


Fig. 21: Book covers by Hilmi El-Touni

Fig. 21: On the right, the cover of the tale البئر العجيبة (*al-Bi'r al-ʿAġība*) [The Wonder Well] (1983) in the stories illustrated by Helmi El-Touni for Dār al-Šurūq. On the left, المسدس (*al-Musaddas*) [The Gun], published in 1989 by Dār al-Fatā al-ʿArabī.

III. II. Burhan Karkoutly — برهان الدين كركوتلي

Damascus, 1932

Burhan Ad-Din Karkoutly was born in Damascus in 1932. He studied photography in Cairo and moved to Berlin in 1958. He died in Bonn, Germany in 2003. His drawings were limited to black and white, characterized by thick lines and ornamental arabesques, juxtaposed and combined with miniatures and calligraphy in a way shaped by the influence of political posters. Karkoutly is distinguished by his talent for combining elements of the inherited visual culture in his illustrations and graphic pictures. In the words of Hussein Nassereddine: “a local idiosyncrasy that veers far from the folkloric and oriental facets of art.”⁴⁵ He was influenced by Moroccan folk art and Mexican murals, as well as by German modernists such as Gerd Arntz⁴⁶ and East German artists Walter Womacka⁴⁷ and Arno Mohr,⁴⁸ with whom he studied at the Weißensee Academy of Art Berlin.⁴⁹ In an interview in 1979, he said on this subject: “die moderne arabische politische Kunst (...) hat eine alte Tradition, nicht in den Museen, aber eine, die noch auf den Straßen lebendig ist. Natürlich gibt es in unserer modernen realistischen Kunst Einflüsse aus Perioden moderner europäischer Kunst. (...) Wir können und müssen Einflüsse von überall her verarbeiten.”⁵⁰

He called his art رسوم المواقيل (*rusūm al-mawāwīl*), a term difficult to translate, but which could mean “drawings of *Mawwal* poetry/music”, as an expression of his folk art and illustrations “charged with rage and rooted in place”.⁵¹ We observe the convergence of traditional arts and classical poetry and their tropes with modernity: the heroic figure of the *Mawwal* is now the common peasant, combining myth and fantasy with the contemporary reality. A resemblance with contemporary poetry can also be identified, as the term evokes the poem of نزار قباني [Nizar Qabbani], الرسم بالكلمات (*al-Rasm bi-l-Kalimāt*) [Drawing with Words] from 1966.⁵² The influence of the shadow theater character design known as خيال الظل (*Ḥayāl al-Zill*) [Shadow Fiction] or as كراكوز و عيواظ (Arabic: *Karākūz wa-‘Īwāḏ*) [Karaköz and Hacivat] is also present in the way the figures are cut out and filled in with black, a play of light and shadow.

The importance of Karkoutly lies in the way in which he combined elements from the naive arts with a high political message, and the impact that he had on the graphic visuality of books, book covers, and design. In addition, through his training and the influence of German realist graphic designers, his combination of different visualities made him a pioneering artist and a master in graphic storytelling in single panels.

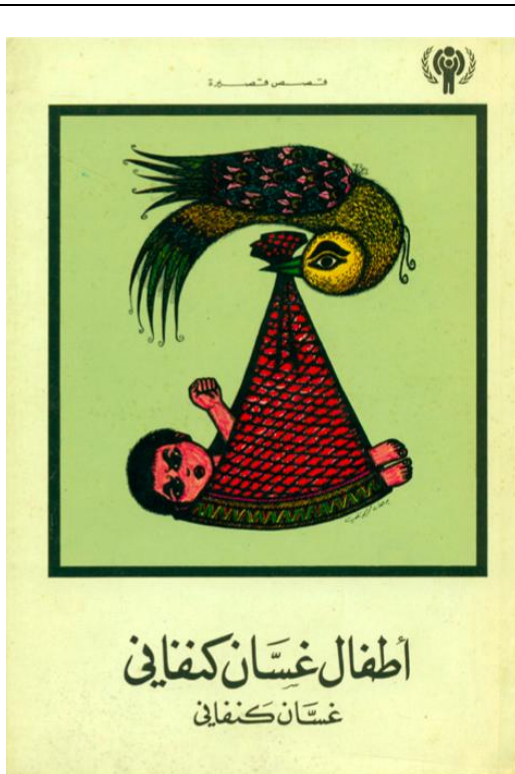


Fig. 22: Book cover by Burhan Karkoutli



Fig. 23: Drawing by Burhan Karkoutli

Fig. 22: Book cover of أطفال غسان كنفاني (*Aṭfāl Ġassān Kanafānī*) [Ghassan Kanafani's Children], illustrated in 1977 and used for the book edition in the mid-1980s, in which the original printing is colored.

Fig. 23: "Remembrance of the Village" from 1980. In both pictures, we appreciate the visuality of Karkoutly: the thick black lines in contrast to the white spaces, the depiction of traditional embroidery and ceramics, the Arab city with domes, arches, and flat roofs, and the inclusion of calligraphy in the drawing, as well as the use of arabesques and filigree.

IV. Conclusion

From the above, it can be deduced that, for many years, the publication of comics followed similar approaches: a strip made up of several cartoons or one page that was integrated into the format of a newspaper or, as in the Spanish and European cases, newspapers aimed at a child audience, made up of several pages of comics. In all cases, comics were subordinated to foreign editorial supports and mechanisms (those of the press), proving incapable of generating their own formats to adapt to their expressive needs. The publishing system was an obvious constraint—spatially and thematically—when it came to allowing the evolution of comics as an artistic vehicle. The importance that Arab and Lebanese publishers are beginning to ascribe to illustration has made the consolidation of comics in the region possible.

¹ By “visual literacy”, we understand the binding and size, as well as the typography, layout, design, and drawings: “The basic definition of visual literacy is the ability to read, write and create visual images. It is a concept that relates to art and design but it also has much wider applications. Visual literacy is about language, communication and interaction.” from:

<https://visualliteracytoday.org/what-is-visual-literacy/> [last accessed 28th July 2021].

² Snir 2018, 3.

³ *ibid.*, 65.

⁴ *ibid.*, 68.

⁵ *ibid.*, 84.

⁶ Morrison 2015, 49-50.

⁷ *ibid.*, 49.

⁸ Fritz Steppat wrote about this magazine: “Am I. Ša‘bān 1310 (18. Februar 1893) erschien die erste Nummer seiner „erzieherisch-wissenschaftlichen Monatsschrift“ (*ğarīda ‘ilmīya tahqībīya*) *al-Madrassa* (Die Schule), deren Hauptzweck die Verbreitung des patriotischen Geistes unter der Schuljugend war.” Steppat, 1956, 246.

⁹ Fahmy 2011, 67.

¹⁰ Morrison, *op. cit.*, 50.

¹¹ Khoury 2007.

¹² Nassereddine 2019, 173.

¹³ Taan 2014, 21.

¹⁴ Valderrama 1951.

As Francisco Moscoso wrote, the interest in the study of the Moroccan Arabic during the Spanish Protectorate (1912-1956) was motivated by “[interés] comercial, religioso y estratégico. Pero a estos, añadiremos uno más que, por ser tan evidente, rara vez se trae a colación. Nos referimos al placer por el estudio de una lengua que estos autores veían como un vehículo de comunicación y de conocimiento de la cultura del otro.” [...commercial, religious and strategic [interest]. But to these, we will add one more that, because it is so obvious, it is rarely brought up. We are referring to the pleasure of studying a language that these authors saw as a vehicle for communication and knowledge of the culture of others.] In Moscoso 2012.

- ¹⁵ Nassereddine, Hussein, op.cit. cf. Bicar, Hussein (1999) *Colors and Shadows* Akhbar al-Yawm Publications, first edition.
- ¹⁶ Dār al-Maʿārif was established in 1890 in Cairo as a commercial printing house. This printing house influenced Arabic literature as it was the publisher of the works of Taha Hussein, Tawfiq Al-Hakim, and others.
- ¹⁷ Various 2005, 92.
- ¹⁸ Khoury op. cit.
- ¹⁹ ibid.
- ²⁰ Morilli di Popolo, Emilio, e-mail message to author, 1st November 2020.
- ²¹ Ellabbad 2017, 30. There is also an Arabic edition of the book from 2003, which is indeed a reprint of the book published in دار الفتى العربى (Dār al Fatā l-ʿArabī) [Arab Youth Publishing House] in the late 1970s. This book has been translated into English and French, pointing to the importance of this author.
- ²² Ellabbad 2012.
- ²³ Khoury, op.cit.
- ²⁴ Maasri 2020, 222-3.
- ²⁵ Maasri, op.cit.: 227.
- ²⁶ Khan 2009.
- ²⁷ The pre-Islamic knight and poet عنتر (ʿAntara) [Antarah], known for his adventurous life.
- ²⁸ Shennawy 2020
- ²⁹ Douglas, Malti-Douglas 1994, 62.
- ³⁰ <https://www.toktokmag.com/product-page/الصبيان-تأبلة> [last accessed 28th July 2021]
- ³¹ Khoury, op. cit.
- ³² See *ToshFesh* 2012, from page 23 to 31.
- ³³ Şawwāf and Merhej 2017, 14.
- ³⁴ Available under: <https://foulabook.com/ar/read/المدينة-في-الجراد-pdf> [last accessed 14th March 2020]
- ³⁵ Matthews 2010, 9-19. The encyclopedia includes the cover art and a synopsis of every single known comic book series published in Lebanon — both local comics and foreign comics that were translated into Arabic.
- ³⁶ Younes 2018, 41 and 48-9
- ³⁷ The name is often Romanized as Hilmi Al-Tuni.
- ³⁸ Dār Al-Hilāl was established in 1892 by the writer and intellectual جرجي زيدان [Jurji Zaydan]. He was a leading contributor of the Nahda/Renaissance movement. This period in Arabic literature aimed to renew Arabic literature and culture, taking place during the second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. The Nahda pioneers introduced western literary genres previously unknown to the Arabic language. These included theater, essays, short stories, and novels, inspired by translations and adaptations by European authors. Journalism during the Nahda played an important role in the renewal of the Arabic language. Writers who published in newspapers created a nationalist, reformist, and literary press as they published short stories and novels in serialized form and required a suitable language for the publication of contemporary information.
- They introduced new terms and ideas to the vocabulary of the cultured Arabic language by borrowing from foreign languages and Arabic dialects. The aim was to present an accurate sense of history and politics in a way that was entertaining and accessible to all readers.
- ³⁹ Taan op. cit., 21.
- ⁴⁰ ibid., 28.

⁴¹ To mention some of them, he illuminated the folk tale *عذراء قریش* (*ʿAḍrāʾ Qurayš*) [The Virgin of Quraysh]; from Arab history, the story of Saladin in the book *صلاح الدين الأيوبي* (*Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī*) or *المملوك الشارد* (*al-Mamlūk al-Šārid*) [The Wandering Mamluk]; and from Islamic History, the life of *الحسين بن علي* (*Al-Ḥusayn bin ʿAlī*) [Husayn ibn Ali] and *عثمان بن عفان* (*ʿUṯmān bin ʿAffān*) [Uthman Ibn Affan], among others.

⁴² Dār al-Šurūq is one of the most important Arab publishing houses for children's books and graphic art books, as well as the largest publishing house for children's literature. See: <https://www.shorouk.com/about/> [last accessed 28th July 2021]

⁴³ Some examples are *أجمل الحكايات الشعبية* (*Ağmal al-Hikāyāt al-Šaʿbiyya*) [The Finest Folk Tales], published and republished from the early 1980s to 2000s; *أحسن الحكايات* (*Aḥsan al-Hikāyāt*) [The Best Stories], telling tales from the Quran; and the design and illustration of *اشعار وصور الحروف* (*Aṣʿār wa-Ṣuwwar al-Ḥurūf*) [Poems and Images of the Letters] by the author *محمد الهراوي* [Muhammed Al-Harrawi] (1885- 1939), one of the pioneers of poetry for children, ranging from songs and chants to educational poetry and skits. Topics and objectives vary between entertainment, pleasure, education, and the development of national and religious awareness among children.

⁴⁴ <https://www.ibby.org/subnavigation/archives/hans-christian-andersen-awards/2004> [last accessed 28th July 2021]

⁴⁵ Nassereddine, op.cit, 18.

⁴⁶ Arntz is renowned for his black-and-white woodcuts and as a graphic designer. He collaborated with Otto Neurath in the design of pictograms. The isotype is a universal approach to a visual language based on pictograms, repeated figures, and other ideas. It aimed at easy explanation through the standardization of icons (vid. Müller 2019). The works of Zeina Abirached resemble the style of Arntz.

⁴⁷ Womacka is known for his socialist realism style. He was rector of the Weißensee Academy of Art Berlin, an art school that continued with the tradition of the Bauhaus. He designed large public artworks, showing the socialist ideal of common life and people, such as the *Haus des Lehrers* in Berlin Alexanderplatz.

⁴⁸ Mohr was a famous painter and graphic artist; he also made woodcuts and etchings in the GDR. His illustrations show a reductionist view of everyday life. He was a teacher at the Weißensee Academy of Art Berlin.

⁴⁹ At the Weißensee Academy of Art Berlin "erfuhr der Stil von Karkoutly eine wesentliche Prägung in den Diskussionen um die Gestaltung einer sozialistischen Kunst zwischen dem Optimismus eines gesellschaftlichen Aufbaus, der Orientierung an Volkskunst, eingängigen Ornamenten und Traditionen, in Verbindung mit einem kommunistischen Menschenbild der Zukunft und der Integration antiimperialistischer Debatten und antikolonialer Positionen." in: Ströter-Bender 2012, 10.

⁵⁰ Karkoutli, Burhan. 1981. *Grafik der Revolution: Burhan Karkutli, ein palästinensischer Künstler*. Frankfurt (Main): Fischer.

⁵¹ Nassereddine, op.cit. p. 181.

⁵² *فمك المطيب: لا يحلّ قضيتي* (*Famu-ki l-muṭayyib lā yaḥall qaḍīyatī*) [Your sweet mouth doesn't solve my case:]

فقضيتي في دفترتي ودواتي (*qaḍīyatī fī daftarī wa-dawātī*) [my problem is in my notebook and my inkwell.]

كل الدروب أمامنا مسدودة (*Kull al-durūb amāma-nā masdūda*) [All paths between us are closed:]

وخلصنا في الرسم بالكلمات (*wa-ḥalāṣu-nā fī l-rasm bi-l-kalimāt*) [our salvation is to draw with words.]

Chapter Four: The graphic novel in Lebanon post-2006

Consolidating the future

As Stephen E. Tabachnick explains, the term “graphic novel” can be understood as “an extended comic book, freed of commercial constrictions, written by adults for adults, and able to tackle complex and sophisticated issues using all of the tools available to the best artists and writers.”¹ This chapter will explain the most important contributions to the medium from Lebanon, divided into two main sections: analysis of the periodical *Samandal*, and a deep analysis of four Lebanese authors.

The characteristics of graphic novels can be recapped as follows:

- Graphic novels are comics in book form.
- Graphic literature is addressed to adults.
- Literary aspiration.
- Not serialized, fictive, or fictive narration.
- Experimentation within the combination of text and drawings.
- Rupture with the typical layout of pages from comic books, as well as the position of panels, its design, and forms.
- Not distributed in kiosks.

The relationship between comics and their historical development has been discussed in the previous chapters. Since the beginnings of the medium, authors have not hesitated to use more or less specific historical moments as a setting for narration, both in cartoons and in comics addressed to children. In addition to this, many contemporary authors have found in comics a perfect medium for the dissemination of history, and the creation of these works contributes to the dissemination of historical culture. Specifically in Lebanon, this phenomenon can be seen post-2006. In this year, the so-called “July War” or the 2006 Lebanon War took place. Other tensions in Lebanon have been reflected in the graphic novel, such as the 2006-2008 protests, the 2011 Lebanese protests, the 2015-2016 protests, and the 2019-2021 Lebanese protests or “October Revolutions”. But there is a reason that makes us take the year 2006 as the moment of the birth of the graphic novel in

Lebanon. During the war, new forms of expression were sought, such as blogs, which culminated in the creation of the periodical *Samandal* in 2007.

I. *Samandal*: a turning point in Lebanese comics

Samandal [Salamander] is a magazine that was born in 2007 in Beirut. The name comes from the parallelism between the amphibian that can live in water and on land and the comic, which combines image and text. Its editors explain it as follows: “*Samandal* comics thrive between two worlds; image and text, entertainment and substance, the low brow and the raised brow, the experimental and the traditional.”² Its founders are Omar Khouri, Hatem Imam, Lena Merhej, the Fdz, and Tarek Naba'a, but it has also collaborated with almost 150 artists (see Appendix 4 and Table 1-5). For this reason, their magazines are published in various different languages. The members of this collective come from the field of illustration, animation, and graphic design, and they understand comics as a valid medium for exploring art, society, and politics. The collective is committed to giving a voice to young artists who respond to its call for comic submissions, not only from Lebanon but from all over the world.

George Khoury (JAD), who was the first author to publish the first comic for adults in Lebanon in 1980 (*Carnaval*)³ wrote an article in *New Generation: Arab Comics Today (From Cairo to Casablanca, from Beirut to Baghdad: The Collectives as Capitals of Comics)*⁴ entitled “Rebellion Resuscitated: The Youth’s Will Against History”. In it, he highlighted:

1. The importance of artistic collectives for creating and exchanging comics in the region, and the similarities between them (often self-published or in cooperation with private initiatives).
2. The differences between the collectives, for example the language chosen for the publication (*Samandal* comics are published in at least six different languages; *TokTok* chooses Arabic, both classical and dialectal). This is seen by the author as a strength of the different identities in the Middle East: “At the heart of this revival of the Arab comic is the recurring question of language, which has relaunched the debate on the multiplicity of identities. If classical Arabic has traditionally dominated the literary sphere, (...) dialects have progressively gained ground” (p. 15). Another commonality is that the titles chosen for these collective publications all emphasize local identities: *TokTok* gets its name from the Egyptian rickshaws, a transport used in Cairo; *Samandal* gets its name from the ability of salamanders to adapt living in water or on the ground, “a nod to the diversity of linguistic and cultural adaptability of its content” (p.15).

All of these collectives made it possible to break taboos, or, as George Khoury writes: “They have used their publications to explore subjects long considered taboo in Arab societies, particularly linked to sex, religion and social traditions”,⁵ and they offer a place for the authors to both experiment and develop expertise. Finally, he mentions the importance of the internet as a way of disclosing these works and as a rebellious way to counterattack censorship, for example *Comics4Syria* documenting the war on Syrian soil.

The book *New Generation: Arab Comics Today*⁶ also deals with collectives from different countries, explaining their origins and exemplifying each publication with some pages made by the most relevant authors in the serials, such as the aforementioned *TokTok*, *Samandal*, *SkefKef*, and *Lab619*, as well as *Garage* from Egypt, *Masaha* from Iraq, and *Habka* from Libya. For *Samandal*’s analysis, we have taken the following statistics from the sixteen issues published as magazines and the six special issues: authors (contributors, countries of origin of authors, language used, gender) and *Samandal* as a book (format, editors, covers, flipping pages, supporters).

II. *Samandal*’s Authors

II. I. Contributors in *Samandal*

Since its launch in 2007, more than 200 authors have contributed to *Samandal* by responding to the open call for submissions. Many of the authors started publishing in *Samandal* or had their first publication in its pages. Other authors were already successful before publishing in *Samandal*, such as Zeina Abirached; others increased their readership and the opportunity to reach new readers thanks to the journal, such as Barrack Rima. In addition, *Samandal* has independently published books that have been previously published as chapters in its pages, as with *Jam and Yoghurt*, and has even started publishing graphic novels independently, as with *Antoine*.

The call for submissions is open to authors and collectives that aim to publish in the form of serialized comics (comics that span more than one issue) or the one-shot comic, understood as an entire comic with finalized artwork. For illustrators without a script to work from, the editors search for an appropriate writer to collaborate with, taking into consideration the style and preferences of the illustrator. This is the same for authors looking for an illustrator. Thus, *Samandal* has become a platform to search for and find collaborators from different fields. A full list of *Samandal* contributors can be found in Appendix 4.

II. II. Authors' countries of origin

The global character of the journal is particularly evident in the large volume of countries represented in its issues. To retain the clarity of the graphs presented, special issues are provided in separate tables. The group is a non-profit association, and through collaboration with authors from abroad, new visions and synergies are created. Comic strips also have the advantage of reaching a larger and younger audience than traditional graphic humor and are not yet stigmatized like political cartoons.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the data: the majority of authors within issues 1 to 16 of *Samandal* are from Lebanon (see Table 1), and this is the case with the special issues too (see Table 3). Authors from other non-Arab countries outnumber authors from Arab countries. Egypt is the most represented Arab country after Lebanon. The data shows that the number of artists from outside the Arab world is almost equal to the number of contributors to the journal from the MENA region. The total number of authors from other Arab countries is significantly lower than the number of Lebanese authors (see Table 2). Sorted by journal number, we see an increasing trend towards contributors from Arab countries. The increase is particularly noticeable in number 16 (see Table 4 and Table 5). From Table 5, we can also appreciate the increasing number of authors.

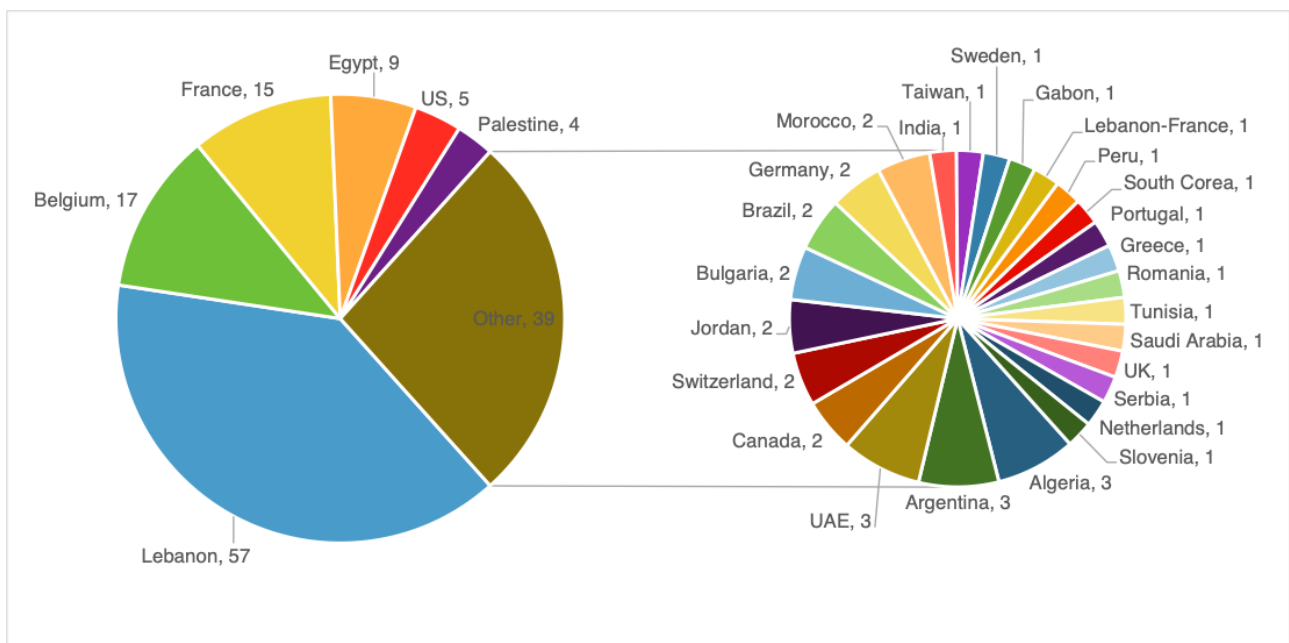


Table 1: Authors in *Samandal* 1-16 by country

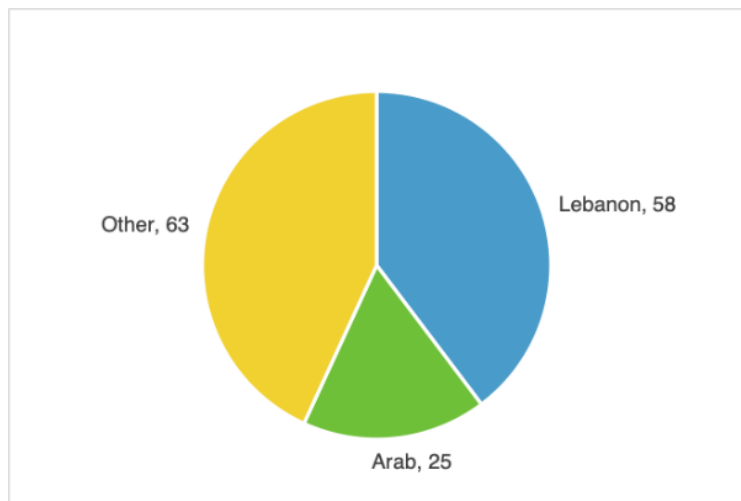


Table 2: Authors in *Samandal* 1-16 by origin

Table 2: Total number of authors by origin, distinguishing Lebanese, Arab and other countries.

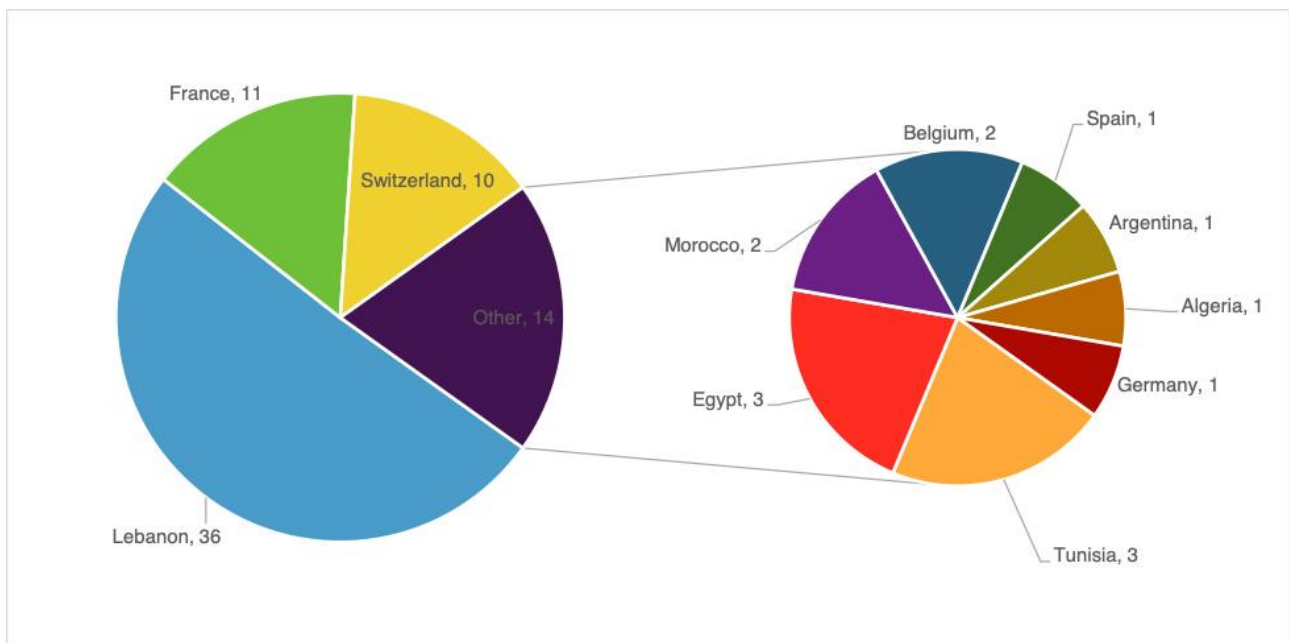


Table 3: Authors in *Samandal* by country in the special issues

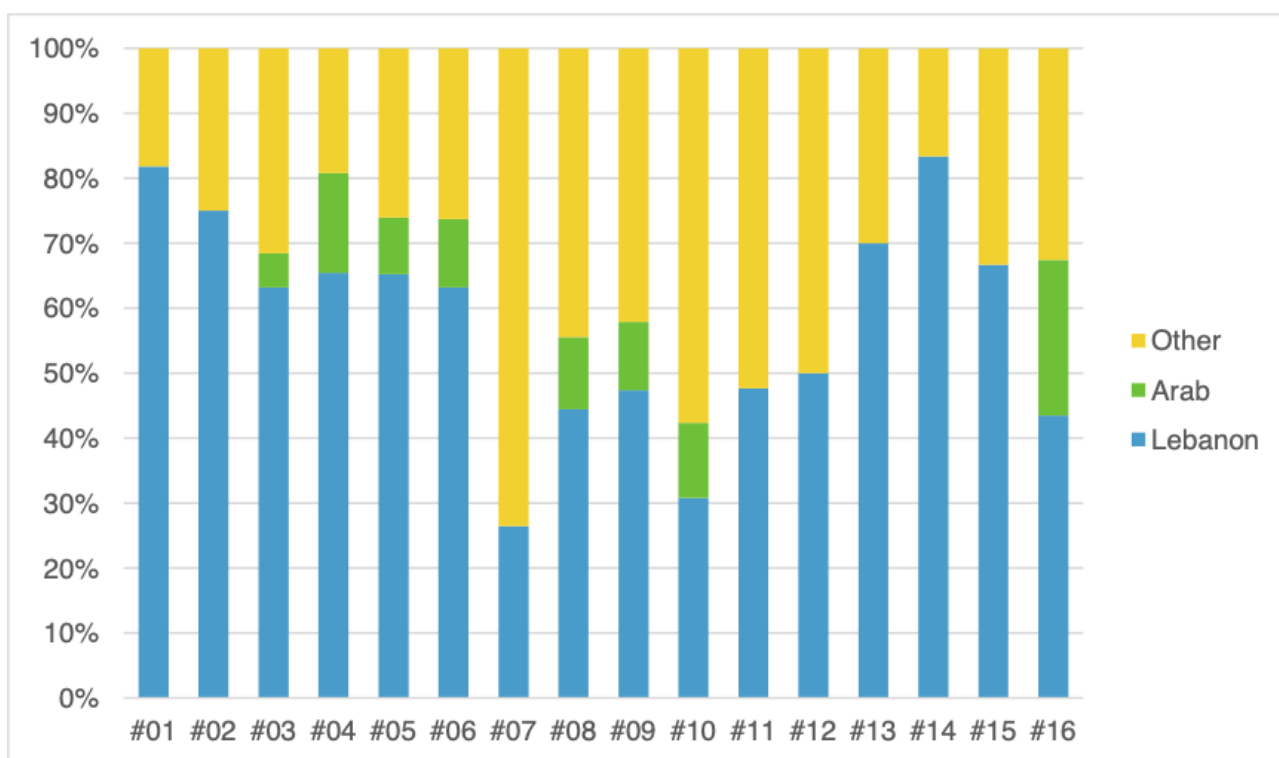


Table 4: Origin of authors in issues 1-16 by percentage

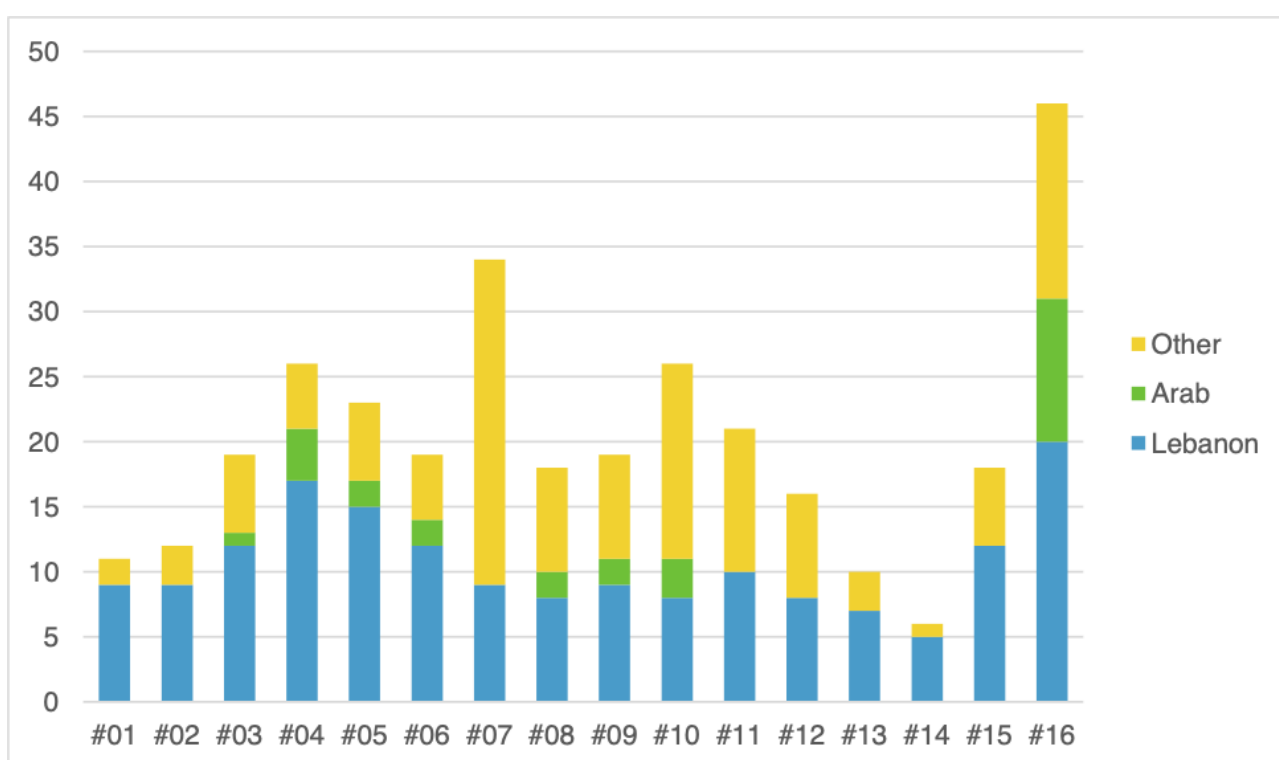


Table 5: Origin of authors in Samandal by total numbers

II. III. Language

Lebanon is a multilingual country, so it is no surprise that the editors of the journal accept contributions in the three main languages of Lebanon, i.e., Arabic, French, and English. In addition to these languages, however, there are also contributions in other languages, albeit much less represented. The use of more than one language also reflects a reality in Lebanon, where conversation is code-switched depending on the interlocutor or the topic of conversation, for example.

Another remarkable observation is the high number of mute contributions. There are two possible reasons for this: either the abovementioned experimental nature of the periodical or because language is not required to understand the content. This would also explain why there are comics written in languages such as Spanish or Slovenian, that is, languages that the reader of the magazine is not expected to understand. This is illustrated by Table 6. By sorting the data in total numbers, as in Table 7, we observe an increase in the number of graphic narratives without text, marked as mute. This can be explained by the fact that the magazine is becoming progressively experimental and innovative. Finally, if we sort the data by the origin of the author and the language used, we see that a significant percentage of contributors from outside the Arab world use French, as they are authors from French-speaking regions (in addition to France, Belgium, and Switzerland). Authors of Arab origin use French more than English, similarly reflected in works by authors of Lebanese origin. At the outset of the journal, which we have already seen had a greater number of Lebanese contributors, there was a balance between the number of pages published in Arabic and in foreign languages. However, due to Arabic also being used by Lebanese authors, which increased in the later issues, the percentage of Arabic equals the percentage of English and French. We also note that more authors of Lebanese origin write in dialect than authors from other Arab countries.

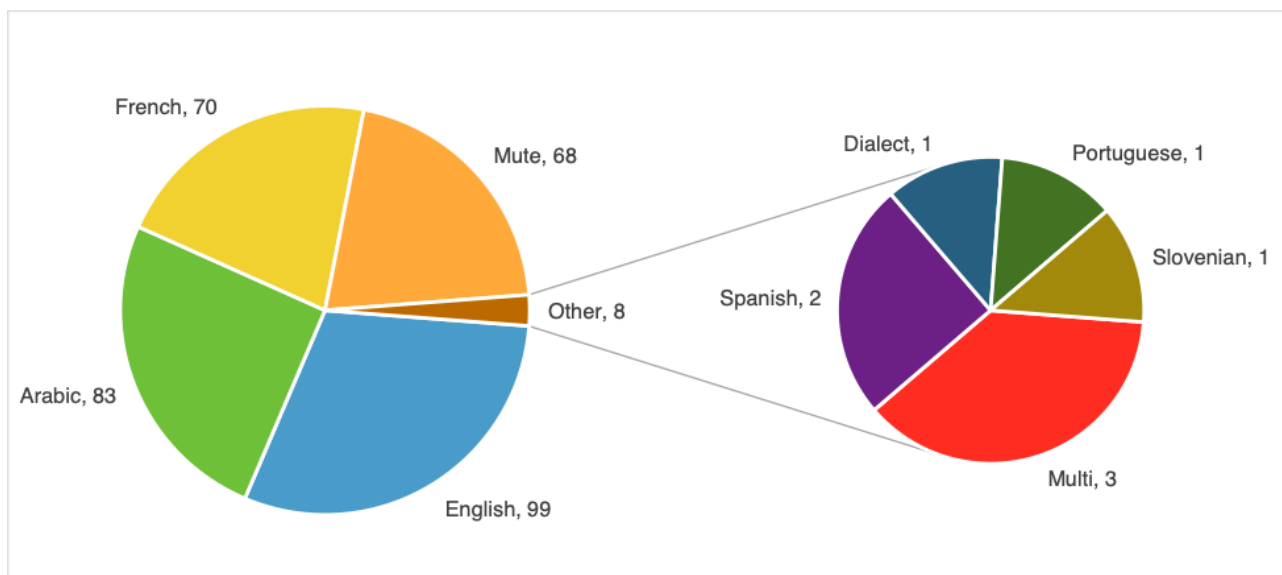


Table 6: Total number of comics by language published in *Samandal* 1-16

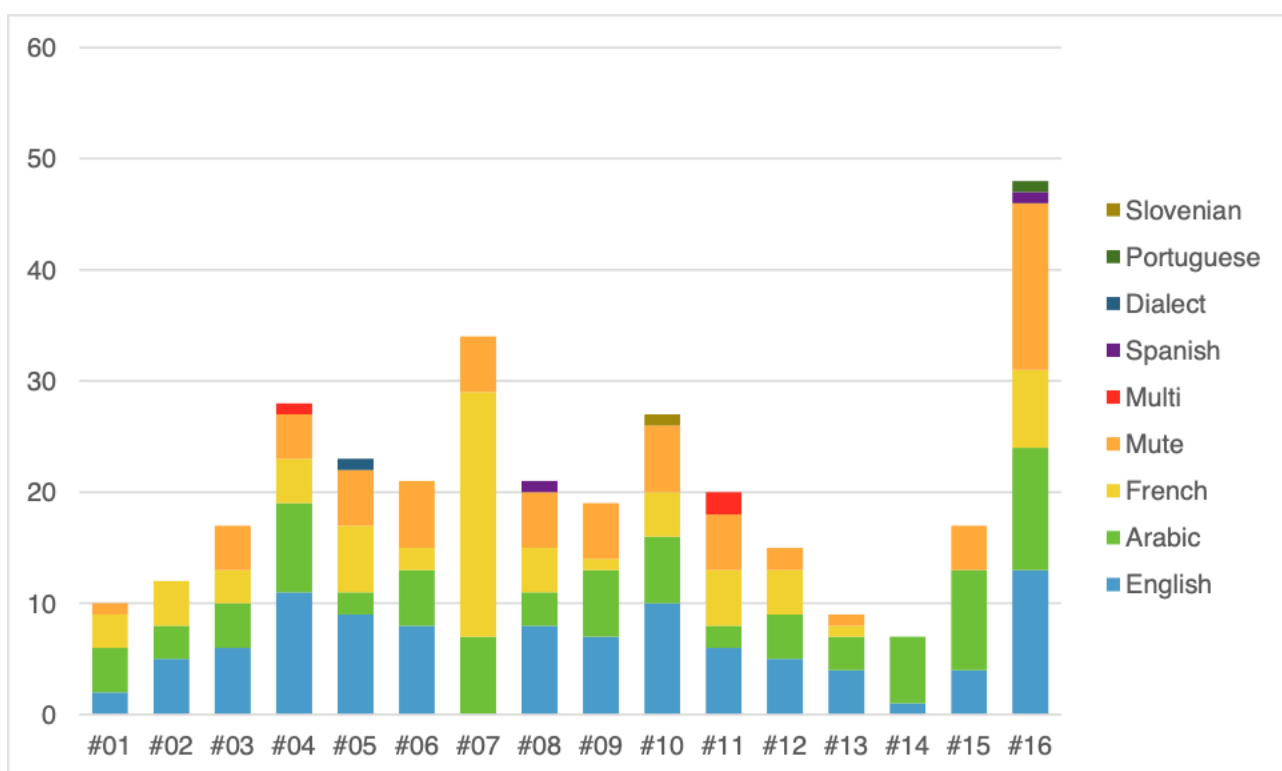


Table 7: Language used in comics per issue in total numbers

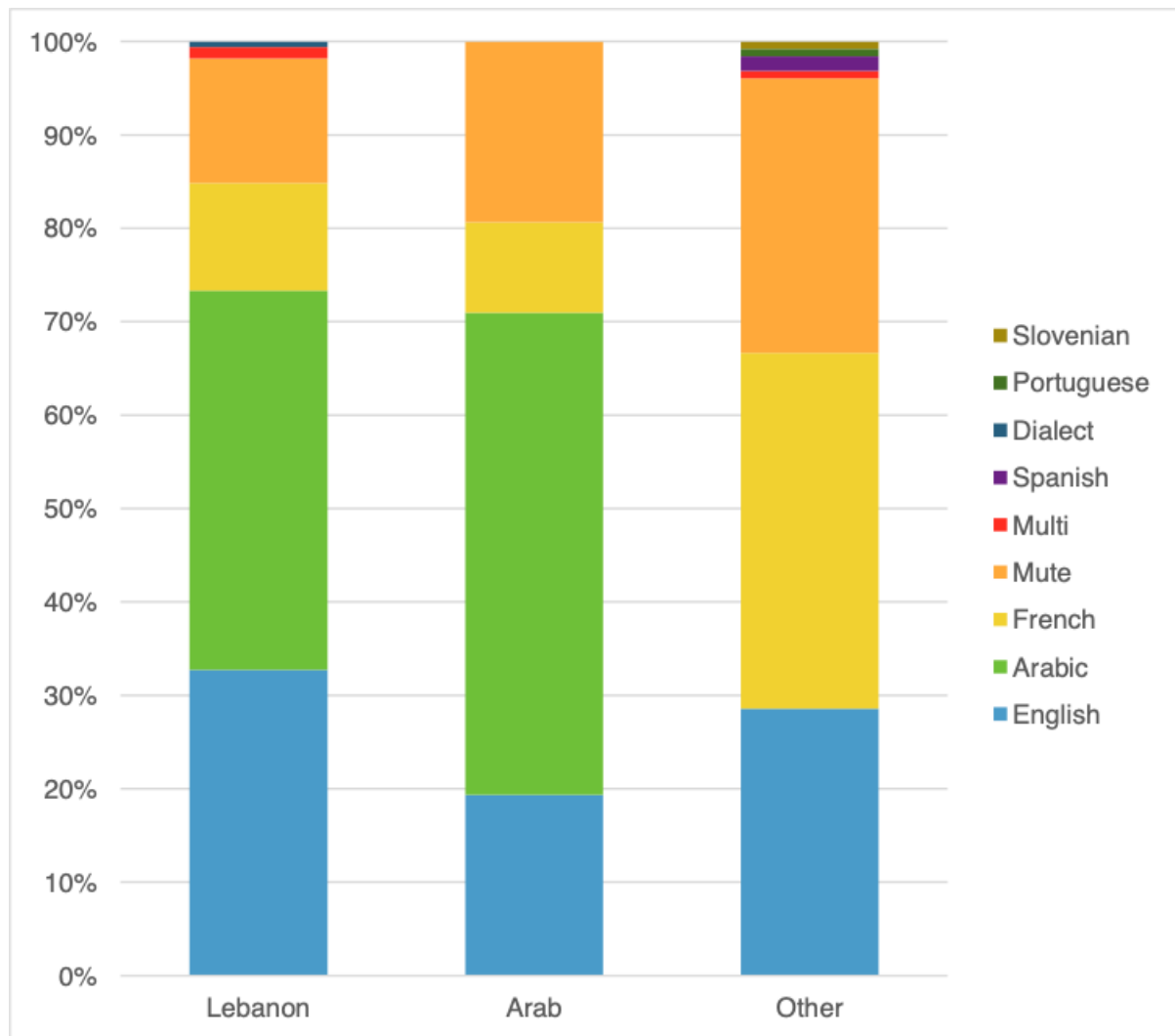


Table 8: Language used in comics by authors' origins

II. IV. Female authors

In recent years, the lack of representation of female illustrators in nominations for international awards, such as the Grand Prix d'Angoulême, has been the subject of controversy, highlighting the sexism that exists in the world of comics at an international level.^{7,8} However, this pattern within the European comics industry is not strongly represented in Lebanon. The context in which the *Samandal* collective was born has led to a significant proliferation of female illustrators of comics and graphic novels, from children's and young people's literature, but also from graphic design. Jean-Pierre Mercier, curator of the exhibition "Nouvelle génération, la bande dessinée arabe aujourd'hui en Angoulême"⁹ confirmed the proliferation of female comic artists to the newspaper *Libération*:¹⁰ "Ce qui est très frappant aussi, c'est de voir le nombre de femmes qui participent à ces collectifs. Ça remet bien en question les clichés que l'on peut avoir sur certains de ces pays. Alors qu'ici, en France, on est en train de se questionner sans arrêt sur la parité, quand on regarde cette nouvelle génération de la bande dessinée arabe, il y a au moins autant de femmes que d'hommes." [What is also very striking is seeing the number of women who participate in these collectives. It calls into question the clichés that we may have about some of these countries. Whereas here, in France, we are constantly wondering about parity, when we look at this new generation of Arab comics, there are at least as many women as men.] In this respect, *Samandal* proposes alternative narratives to the traditional image of women as passive subjects, offering a new vision that dissolves gender stereotypes.

In several of her works, but more specifically in her paper "From Behind the Doors into the Streets...", Lina Ghaibeh highlights one of the most striking characteristics of the work of a significant number of female comic illustrators: the use of autobiographical stories to address social issues that affect them directly, whether they have to do with gender inequality, armed conflict, or the experience of being displaced as refugees. She also notes differences in the use of humor in female illustrators' comics, which is less overt and more subtle than in the works of their male counterparts. This last observation can be interpreted as reclaiming a space for women's representation, offering new themes, and, above all, creating their own image and voice. Moreover, in general, Lebanese women authors use a seemingly simple drawing style, a narrative strategy of the artists to invite readerly empathy: through iconization, the private is meant to be assumed as a universal subject.

Hillary Chute¹¹ proposed the hypothesis that graphic novels are the ideal vehicle for presenting traumatic events and extreme circumstances, which strengthens our point of view. By employing different strategies, such as autobiographical comics, the choice of

female protagonists, non-stereotypical representations of women, and the tendency to use an apparently simple style, the illustrators display a grounded feminism connected to modernity, confronting through their art a community that questions their choices, as we will consider in the works by Lena Merhej and Zeina Abirached.

As far as *Samandal* is concerned, we can see in Table 9 that in issues 1 to 16 there are more male authors than female. This observation can also be found in Table 10, where male and female authors are distinguished in the special issues. However, looking at Table 11, which reviews the gender ratio in each issue of the journal, we can see that the number of women is increasing up until the last issue of the journal, in which there is parity in the number of men and women. If we count the authors by their origins—Arab, Lebanese, and other countries—we see that in Lebanon there are practically the same number of female authors as male, which is not the case with *Samandal* authors originating from other Arab countries and also other (non-Arab) countries. It is also interesting to compare the percentage of women in cartoons, according to data extracted from *ToshFesh* magazine, as we see in total numbers in Table 13 and sorted by male and female authors and by countries in Table 14. The inner circle of the graph displays the total number of women, and the outer circle, men, where Lebanon and Egypt show a higher presence. However, the ratio for Lebanon is 4 out of 11, and for Egypt, 3 out of 27.

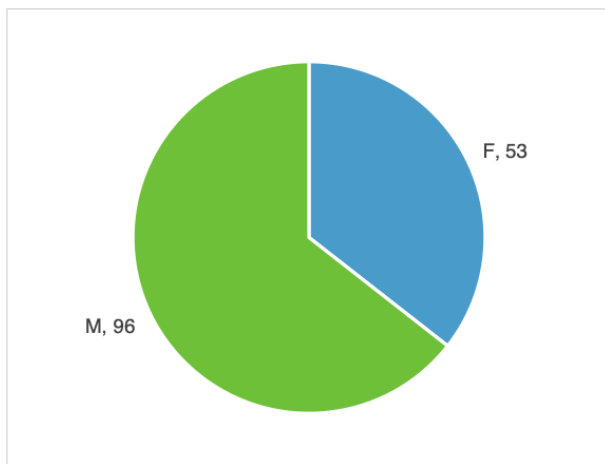


Table 9: Male and female authors in *Samandal* 1-16

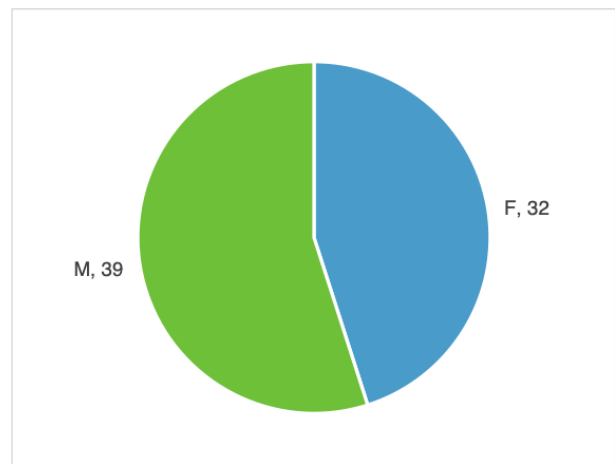


Table 10: Male and female authors in *Samandal* special issues

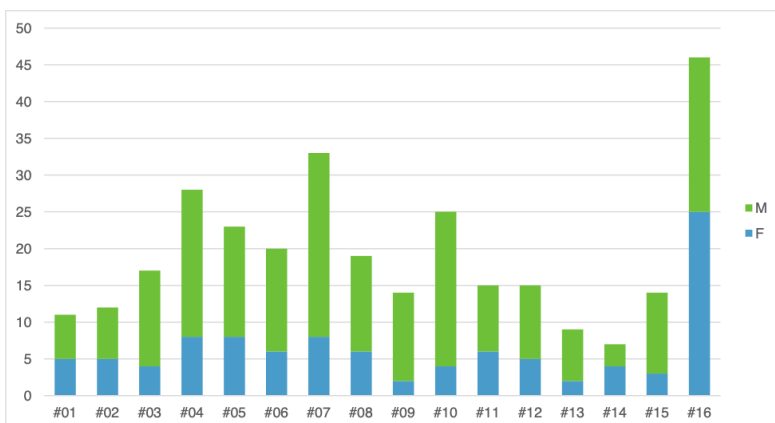


Table 11: Quantity of male and female authors by issue number

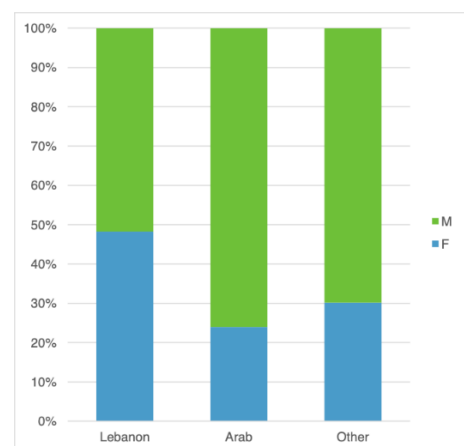


Table 12: Percentage of male and female authors by origin

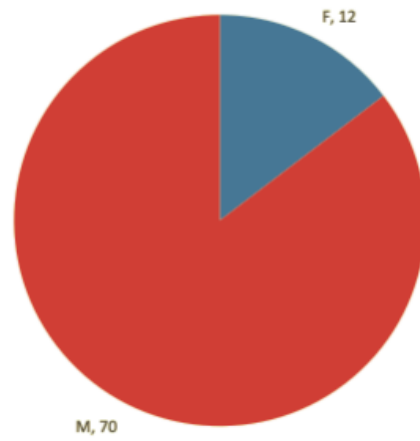


Table 13: Male and Female Cartoonists presented in *ToshFesh*

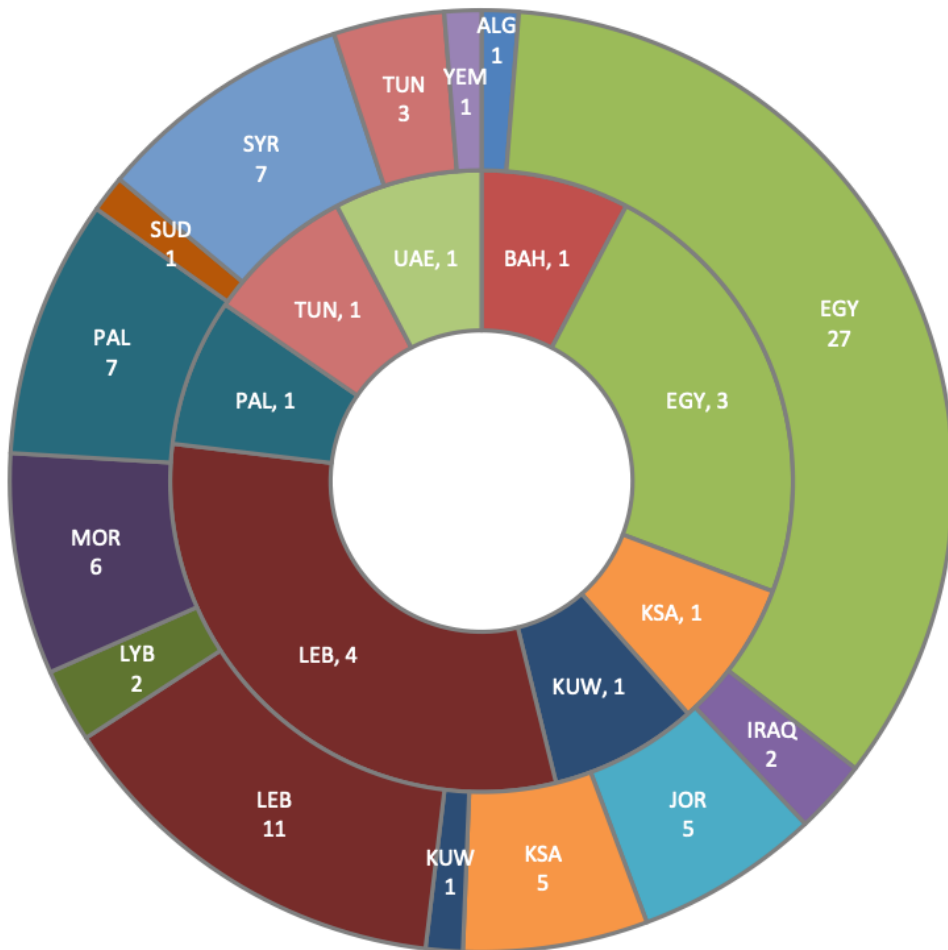


Table 14: Authors represented in *ToshFesh* by country. In the interior circle women

III. *Samandal* as a book

The first publication of *Samandal* took place in 2008. The following issues of the periodical were published more or less quarterly until March 2013 (issue 15). Since 2014, it has been an annual publication. These special issues are also evolving and collaborations with different institutions are becoming more important. However, issue 14, produced in collaboration with the Arab Image Foundation, presents a single subject. Issue 15 contains graphic stories by several authors, as is the case with issue 16, released in February 2019—the last issue published to date (July 2021). The size of the magazine also changes: while issues 1 to 16 measure 234 x 166 mm, special issues are larger, as can be seen in Table 15. Another characteristic of the magazine that changes is the language: while issues 1 to 16 are mainly written in Arabic, English, and French, translations are carried out in different ways: sometimes at the end of the book, sometimes in the central pages, other times just after the graphic story, and even in an accompanying extra booklet with the translations. From the *Topia* volume onwards or in *Hunna*, three editions of the book exist or are planned in Arabic, French, and English.

It is also interesting that the same book has two covers depending on the direction of reading: one if it is to be read from right to left, that is, in Arabic, and another if it is to be read from left to right. Another creative solution found by the magazine's editors is that the same cover can be read in different ways. Since stories written in Arabic are interspersed with narratives in other languages, the reader is alerted to turn the book around. This is what the editors call “flippies”. The first example can be found in the first issue of *Samandal* (see Fig. 24).



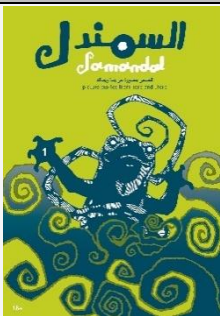
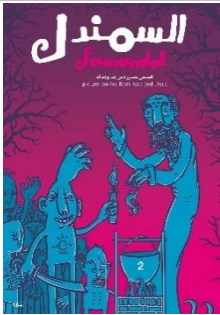
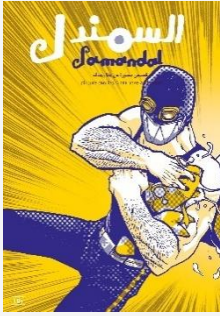
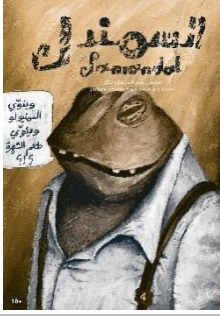
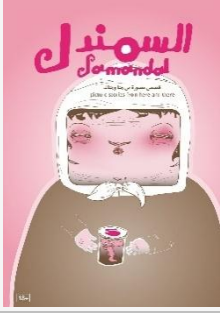
Fig. 24: Turn page in *Samandal* 1, p. 66

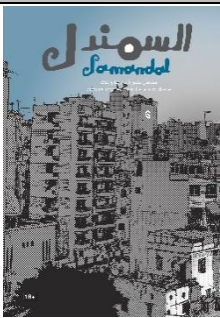
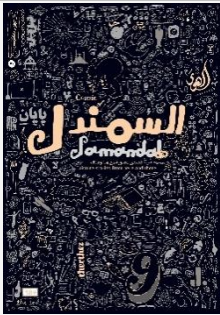
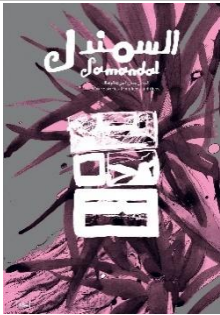
The themes included in *Samandal* are not exempt from political critique (authoritarianism) and social critique (e.g., the situation of women), but there is also room for other themes, such as personal, autobiographical, or biographical narratives, as well as a significant amount of visual poetry. Political criticism and criticism of authoritarianism has already been noted by Jacob Høglit¹² with regard to the graphic stories published in chapters of Fouad Mezher's *The Educator* and Omar Khouri's story صالون طارق الخرافي (*Ṣālūn Tāriq al-Ḥurāfi*) [Tareq al-Khuraḥi's Salon]. The latter had its second part published in the online newspaper *Al-Rai* between 2009 and 2010 and was published as a stand-alone book in 2017 under the title يوتوبيا (Yūtūbīyā) [Utopia]¹³ in *Samandal*. The city as a place of memory has also been exposed in the pages of *Samandal*. It should not be forgotten that this is a Beirut collective, and the city plays an important role in where the stories take place. In this respect, Enrique Klaus (2017:29) wrote: "the comic book art is essentially inspired by the urban element, by the city as backdrop as much as by the city as a lived space."

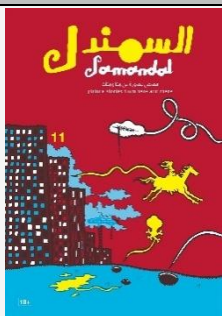
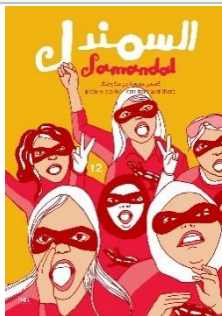
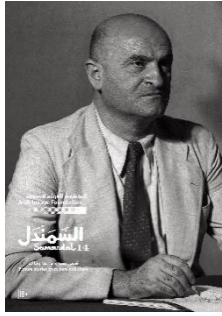
The special issues are dedicated to a specific theme: *Généalogie* (2014) is a compilation of stories and authors of different generations from various places: "here" meaning Lebanon, and "there" meaning the rest of the world.¹⁴ It attempts to link their art, beyond cultural borders, through an aesthetic and horizontal genealogy based on the specific visual and narrative language of comics. *Géographie* (2015) goes through narrative images from different places—near, far, or even imaginary. The aim here is to highlight as well as to appreciate the component of place in the comic format and to search for its narrative potential.¹⁵ *Ça restera entre nous* (2016) was a collaboration between twenty-six authors¹⁶ on the topics of youth, sexuality, and poetry, speaking openly about experiences and identifications, exploring aesthetics other than the established ones. *Topia* (2017) gathers sixteen authors¹⁷ around the topic of utopia. It offers some areas of debate on the principles of utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia and their derivative subjects. *Experimentation* (2018) is, as its name suggests, an experiment, a test. From four scripts, the authors had to transform the story into an eight-page sequential narrative. Thus, the same story is told in four different ways: one in Arabic, one in English, one in French, and one without text. The scenarios were written by four authors,¹⁸ two unrelated to the field of comics, with drawings by seventeen different artists.¹⁹ *Hunna* (2019)²⁰ contains eight stories of Arab women that have played a decisive role in the development of their communities. This book is part of the project "Manarat" initiated by Oxfam, which promotes the archives of women from Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, Mauritania, Syria, Palestine, and Tunis. The women portrayed are May Moustafa Echo (a pioneer in Mauritanian art), Habiba Ghribi (an athlete from Tunisia),

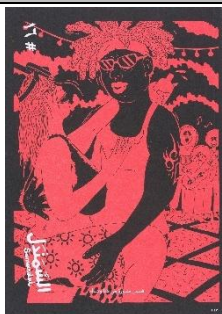
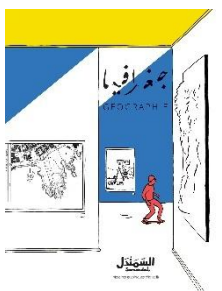
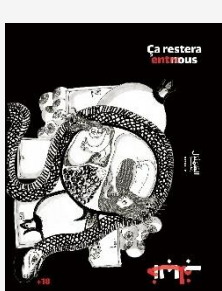
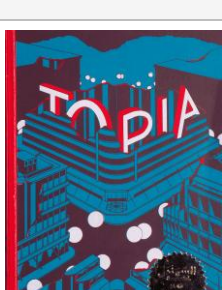
Mahienour el-Masry (an Egyptian human rights lawyer), Safaa Tamish (an activist for the liberation of Palestinian women), Samia Kamel Al-Hakim (Lebanon's first anesthesiologist), Samira Khalil (a Syrian author), Alya Al-Harazy (a mountain climber from Yemen), and Marina Jaber (an Iraqi artist). *Samandal 3000* (2019) is set in the year 3000, and through sci-fi brings together artists from various fields.

Samandal has been made possible through the support of several different private or semi-public initiatives, such as the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), the Institut Français du Liban, the Swiss Embassy in Lebanon, Goethe Institut Beirut, the Lebanese American University (LAU), the French Ministry of Culture, the Bureau du Livre of Beirut, the former newspaper *As-Safir*, the Lebanese Ministry of Culture and its associated project Beirut World Book Capital. For a detailed list, see Table 15.

	Publishing date	Cover	Cover drawn by	Supported by	Size (mm)
Samandal 1	March 2008		the fdz	Mu'taz Sawwaf	234 x 166
Samandal 2	August 2008		Andy Warner	السفير - As-Safir	234 x 166
Samandal 3	December 2008		FLAB	السفير - As-Safir	234 x 166
Samandal 4	April 2009		Ghassan Halwany	BIDOUN السفير - As-Safir	234 x 166
Samandal 5	June 2009		Omar Zo'bi	Lebanese Ministry of Culture Beirut Book Capital السفير - As-Safir	234 x 166

	Publishing date	Cover	Cover drawn by	Supported by	Size (mm)
Samandal 6	September 2009		Omar Khouri	Lebanese Ministry of Culture Beirut Book Capital As-Safir - السفير	234 x 166
Samandal 7	December 2009		May Ghaibeh and Hatem Imam	Beirut World Book Capital Lebanese French Embassy As-Safir - السفير	234 x 166
Samandal 8	March 2010		Fouad Mezher	Beirut World Book Capital Goethe Institute Beirut Art Centre As-Safir - السفير	234 x 166
Samandal 9	August 2010		Jana Traboulsi	European Union Let's comics As-Safir - السفير	234 x 166
Samandal 10	December 2010		Hatem Imam	As-Safir - السفير Foundation for Arts Initiatives - FfAI	234 x 166

	Publishing date	Cover	Cover drawn by	Supported by	Size (mm)
Samandal 11	August 2011		Alex Baladi	As-Safir - السفير Foundation for Arts Initiatives - FfAI	234 x 166
Samandal 12	April 2012		Lena Mehrej	Young Arab Theater Fund As-Safir - السفير Foundation for Arts Initiatives - FfAI	234 x 166
Samandal 13	August 2012		Mazen Kerbaj	Young Arab Theater Fund As-Safir - السفير Foundation for Arts Initiatives - FfAI	234 x 166
Samandal 14	December 2012		Karl Bassil, Ahmad Gharbieh, Hatem Imam	Institut Français AFAC Al Safir Arab Image Foundation	234 x 166
Samandal 15	January 2013		Barrack Rima	As-Safir - السفير	234 x 166

	Publishing date	Cover	Cover drawn by	Supported by	Size (mm)
Samandal 16	2019		Juliette Bensimon-Marchina		234 x 166
Samandal Généalogie	2014		Paula Bulling	Institut Français Liban AFAC Georges SCHEHADE	299 x 231
Samandal Géographie	2015		Joseph Kai	Institut Français Liban Embassy Switzerland Libanon Georges SCHEHADE	260 x 202
Ça restera entre nous [This is just between us] خلف الباب [Behind the doors]	2016		Samara Sallam	Institut Français Liban Goethe Institut LAU School of architecture and design Gallerie Tanit (BEYRUTH). Georges SCHEHADE	260 x 202
Topie Topia توبيا	2017		Jerome Dubois	AFAC Institut Français Liban Goethe Institut and German Federal Foreign Office. Georges SCHEHADE.	260 x 190

	Publishing date	Cover	Cover drawn by	Supported by	Size (mm)
Experimentation تجريب	2018		Sandra Ghosn and Helge Reumann	Institut Français Liban Embassy Switzerland Libanon Georges SCHEHADE	260 x 190
Hunna هُنَّا	March 2019		Tracy Chahwan	Oxfam	250 x 180
Samandal 3000	2019		Joseph Kai	AFAC Institut Français Liban. Georges SCHEHADE	260 x 190

Table 15: Samandal over the time

IV. Four authors reviewed in further detail

Of all the authors published in *Samandal*, four have been chosen for a more in-depth analysis, with the aim of covering a broad spectrum of artists, techniques, narratives, and so on. These four artists share the international presence of their work, their university education in Fine Arts (although this is typical of artists from the region), and the illustration of children's books and/or the publication of cartoons in newspapers. We will focus on stylistic devices such as the use of the author's own name and self-portrait, the first-person narration, the narrator's intervention in the action, the drawing style, and paratextual elements (title, subtitle, cover, and cover image). Secondly, we will examine more closely the visual components of the comic, those elements that reinforce personal representation and self-revelation.

The experimental nature of its narrative manifests itself in various ways: either through the creation of visual poetry or by breaking with the conventions of reading. The book is also considered as a physical object through its presentation, physical format, and distribution and point of sale, often restricted to art galleries or numbered editions of publications. The four authors we shall review are Mazen Kerbaj (1975), Barrack Rima (1977), Lena Merhej (1977), and Zeina Abirached (1981).

IV. I. Mazen Kerbaj — مازن كرجاج

Beirut, 1975

Mazen Kerbaj completed his baccalaureate at the Lycée Franco Libanais in Beirut and studied at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux Arts (ALBA) for a degree in graphic arts and advertising with specialism in illustration, being first in the class of 1994-1999. He began publishing illustrations in magazines for teenagers during his formative years, such as in *Safari* (1994-1995) and *Epsilon* (1989-1990), as well as in *L'Orient-Express*, a monthly political and social magazine (1997-1998). In 1999, he published *Djoudjou... et les autres* with Layali Publishing; his first recorded publication is *Journal 1999*. Kerbaj went on to publish cartoons and comics in newspapers and magazines such as *La Revue du Liban* and *Le Commerce du Levant*, as well as illustrations for children's stories (released in summer 2004 by Lebanese publisher *Samir*, he illustrated the story *Suffit la bagarre!* by Lelia Major (2012); the book was translated into Arabic as سئمتُ العراق (Sa'imtu l-'Irāk) [Enough Fight] and translated into the Spanish regional language Catalan as *Un sant Jordi molt tossut*).²¹ In addition to Lebanese newspapers and magazines, he has published in a number of

international anthologies,²² journals, and magazines, and his works have been translated into ten languages. His art has been exhibited in galleries, museums, and art markets around the world.²³

Moreover, in addition to his work as a cartoonist, illustrator, and comic artist, Kerbaj is considered one of the founders of improvised and experimental music. Together with Sharif Shehnawi, he is a co-founder of ارتجال (*Irtiğāl*) [Irtijal/Improvisation], the oldest music festival in Beirut for experimental music, free jazz, free improvisation, contemporary music, noise, and free rock, as well as other forms of innovative music making. He is also a co-founder of المسلخ (*al-Maslah*) [Slaughterhouse], the first experimental music label in the region.²⁴ His art is heavily influenced by musical improvisation, such as in the four hand drawings made with the artist Laure Ghorayeb. He plays the trumpet and during the 2006 War, one of his works became famous when he played at the same time as bombs were falling on Beirut. According to El Kadi (2015:6): “Kerbaj began to develop an interest in collecting sounds of the Lebanese Civil War (such as the rifle shots and bomb explosions) in order to improvise alongside them in a recording studio”. He is also the author of theater plays, such as the *Borborygmus*,²⁵ co-written with Lina Majdalanie and Rabih Mroué, the short film *Mazen Kerbaj: the Musical*,²⁶ and the new radio drama *Mein Vater ist nicht Adolf Hitler*.²⁷

Kerbaj has authored more than 15 books, some self-published by the label Headache Comics, others published by *Samandal* or by other international publishers. Kerbaj’s work on comics can be divided into three categories: his narrative in the form of diaries; his comics which are mixed with cartoons in that he deals with current events and Foundation for Arts Initiatives (FfAIs), but consist of more than three panels; and lastly, his comic strips and illustrations as defining examples of his style. His latest work, *Antoine*, deserves special mention and will be analyzed in greater detail.

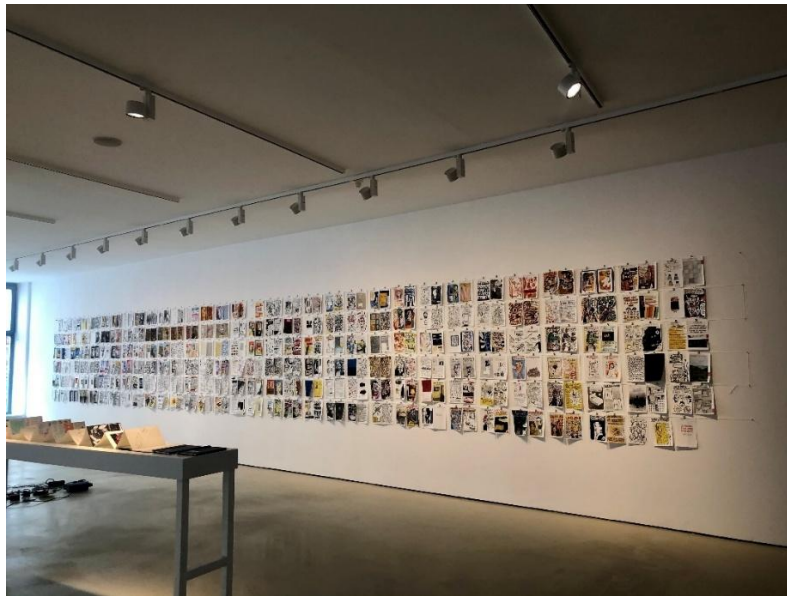


Fig. 25: View of the exhibition In the Presence/Absence of Mazen Kerbaj in Berlin

Fig. 25: Exhibition in the Presence/Absence of Mazen Kerbaj in Berlin. Picture taken by the present author in July 2020.

IV. I. I. Mazen Kerbaj's Diaries

*Journal 1999 (2000)*²⁸ was restricted to 300 copies, with each one signed by the author. This was Kerbaj's final degree work for the ALBA and was self-published. Although the style that characterizes Kerbaj's drawing is not yet defined in this work, and the text is very extensive in some of its pages, themes that would be repeated in his work do appear. As he writes on the first page: "A partir d'aujourd'hui je vais essayer de tenir un journal 'bédéesque' (...) Il va surtout me permettre d'expérimenter toutes sortes de techniques graphiques, tout en m'obligeant à produire quelque chose (...)." [From now on I'm going to try to keep a 'cartoonish' journal (...) It will allow me to experiment with all sorts of graphic techniques, while forcing me to produce something (...)](Kerbaj 2000: I). Kerbaj not only experiments with techniques, he also experiments with the themes he deals with: the exposed intimacy of his work (marriage, day to day life), the reading and influences that permeate his work, such as cinema and music; his mother as a visual artist who has had a great influence on him and his artistic style; his reflections on politics (international), art, museums, the importance of improvisation; and not least his self-portraits and sketches, employing different techniques such as watercolor, pen, pencil, or BIC pen. It is a germinal work; while experimental, it acts as a basis for the artist's later works and helps us to understand his trajectory.

*Une semaine sans la voix de Samir (2005)*²⁹ is also a self-published work. The print run was 10,000 copies, of which 3,000 were distributed at commemorative events in honor

of Samir Kassir and the remaining 7,000 together with a newspaper. The AUB archive also holds a copy. In its pages—sometimes written in Arabic, sometimes in French—Kerbaj narrates the week since the assassination of Samir Kassir on 2nd June 2005. Leftist journalist Kassir began at *l'Orient-le-Jour*, wrote for *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and then founded the supplement *l'Orient-Express* on which Kerbaj collaborated. A prominent figure of the protest, his disappearance is part of a black year for Lebanon, which saw the emergence of protests violently erased by a series of car bomb deaths. From this tragic story, Kerbaj wanted to testify to his attachment to the man, his friend. Mourning has a temporality here: the day of the news and the week that follows. He recounts all the feelings that run through him: the news, the description of the place of the attack, the crowding outside the offices of the daily newspaper *al-Nahār*, the memories of how they met, the burial. The sadness is evoked by mixing graphic narration with pages from his diary without illustrations, portraits of the Lebanese intellectual, and scenes witnessed by the author, changing to a more realistic and less cartoonish style, as well as correspondence, pages of Kassir's book *La guerre du Liban: de la dissension nationale au conflit* [The War in Lebanon: From National Dissension to Regional Conflict], and the implications of the attack on Lebanese politics. Kerbaj attempts to answer the question: "... et ce n'est pas dur de grandir dans un pays en guerre?" [and is it not hard to grow up in a country at war?] (p. 25, panel 1), reflecting: "il y a une semaine, jour pour jour, heure pour heure, je rentrais dormir en pensant que guerre était finie..." [A week ago, day by day, hour by hour, I went home to sleep thinking the war was over...] (p. 25, last caption); the answer is given by Kassir and the silence of the muted voice: "je pense ... donc je ne suis plus" [I think ... therefore I am no longer] (pp. 26-27).

Samir Kassir would appear in other works by Kerbaj, mainly in publications commemorating the anniversary of his assassination in the newspaper *L'Orient-Express* and other magazines, in which he either depicts the black humor that they shared or takes on a more serious tone due to the effects of the passing of time. From this experience, Kerbaj creates the prototype of the assassinated Lebanese intellectual.



Fig. 26: The Lebanese Intellectual according to Kerbaj

Fig. 26: Two versions of the last page of *Une semaine sans la voix de Samir*. On the left is the original published in 2005; on the right is the 2015 version. The 2015 version is also the front and back cover of the book *Politique*.

*War's Kerblog*³⁰ was a project by Kerbaj born out of the July 2006 war. It soon achieved a certain international resonance, as several international media outlets paid attention to the blog and later made it possible for it to be published as a book. The first post is dated 14th July 2006 and Kerbaj continued the project until 27th August 2006, although some blog entries relating to the launch of the book were added to the blog. The first edition is the French edition *Beyrouth, Juillet-Août 2006*,³¹ as it was the French-speaking public in which the blog found the widest circulation. It is then followed in 2016 by the Arabic edition 2006 بيروت لن تبكي: يوميات حرب تموز (*Bayrūt lan tabkī: yawmīyāt ḥarb tammūz 2006*) [Beirut Won't Cry: Diaries of the July 2006 War]³² and the English edition *Beirut Won't Cry. Lebanon's July War: A Visual Diary* (2017),³³ with a foreword by fellow graphic narrative author Joe Sacco. Sacco specializes in the so-called 'documentary comic'—comics with a journalistic and informative intent—and has covered various conflicts in the Middle East and the Balkans as a reporter. To make this text more fluent, we will mostly use English text, as it is the original language in which the Kerbaj's blog entries were published and to respect the translations made by Kerbaj. However, in this case, it is difficult to speak of three translations of the work, since, as we shall see below, the illustrations in question were originally published in all three languages: Arabic (Lebanese and MSA), French, and English.

In *Beirut Won't Cry*, we find the 174 drawings Kerbaj made after war broke out in Lebanon in 2006, drawn every day from 14th July to 27th August for his blog. The drawings are mostly in black and white, but some are in color: namely, the drawings that were made together with his son Evan (days 9th to 10th August), the drawing chosen for the book cover of the French edition (23rd July), and the drawings towards the end of the war (from the 17th

August to the 26th August). Color can be understood as the innocence of childhood and the hope and joy of the end of the war. Topics are chosen from Kerbaj's daily life and the issues he is confronted with: everyday problems caused by the war (water and electricity cuts, lack of supplies in supermarkets, lack of petrol); the uncertainties he feels (what to carry in a bag if there is an evacuation); the lack of international media coverage of war-related news; criticism of international politics (US, Europe, also the Iraq War); the war victims; and, on a more intimate note, his friends and his family (the evacuation of his sister to Canada, his mother and his son, his intimate relations with his wife), showing that life goes on even during wartime. It is also important to mention that Beirut is at the heart of the conflict, featuring and showing it.

The author's style is defined by characteristic traits, observation texts, and questions about his identity. It is a mix between philosophical questions and sociological observations of the situation. An obsession returns here in the question of how to live in the time of war, already addressed in *Une semaine sans la voix de Samir*. The form of the diary, with the date fixed at the top of the page, causes each page to stop time. Readers also find themselves living this conflict, since they see it from the inside. Yet *Beirut Won't Cry* is not, in fact, a dramatic work: its pages are full of irony and hints of humor, relaxing its readers, while the text depicts the Lebanese sense of humor.

The language varies according to the images: the most intimate passages are written in Arabic; only the first day of the conflict, described over several hours, is written in French. Since the drawings in the blog were often used on social media networks to bear witness to the situation and alert the media of the "real news from Beirut", English is also used. From the start, Kerbaj encouraged internet users in a post to share them. For example, on July 18 he wrote: "Please note that there is no copyright on any of the drawings on this blog. Please publish, photocopy, print, and distribute, all the drawings everywhere if you can", because "[to all Lebanese bloggers] we are writing our future's collective memory" (20th July).

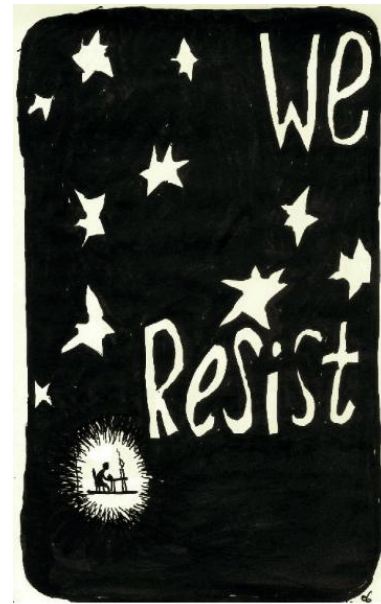


Fig. 27: Beirut Won't Cry

Fig. 27: On the left, post of 20th July; on the right, post of 18th July showing the artist striking back the only way he can: by drawing.

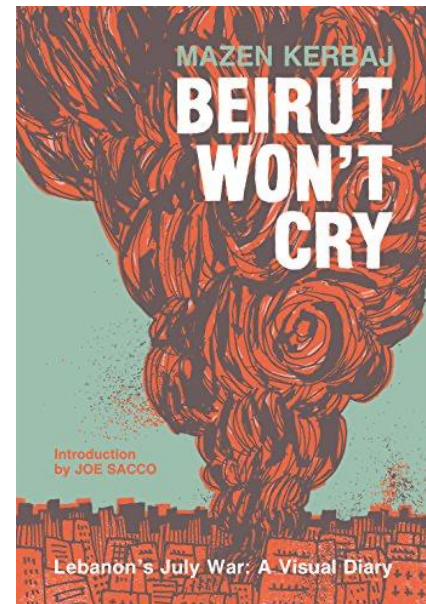
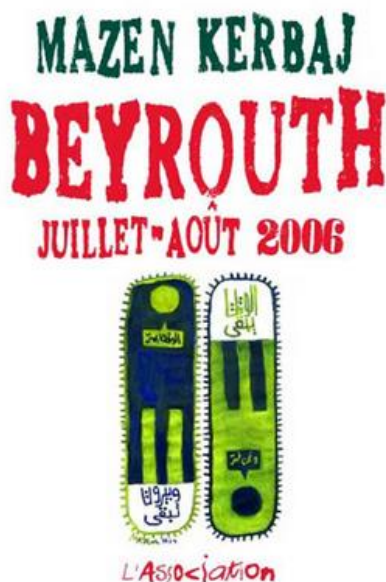
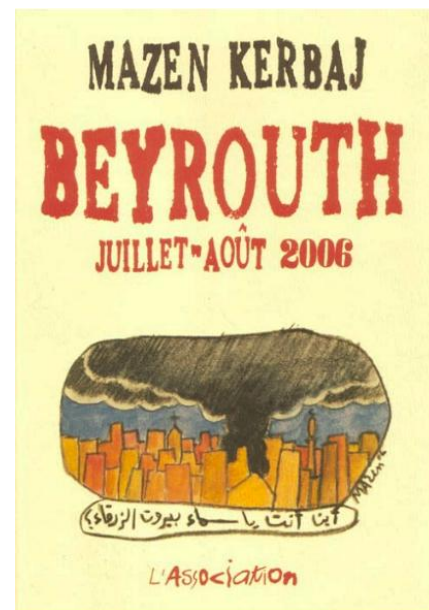
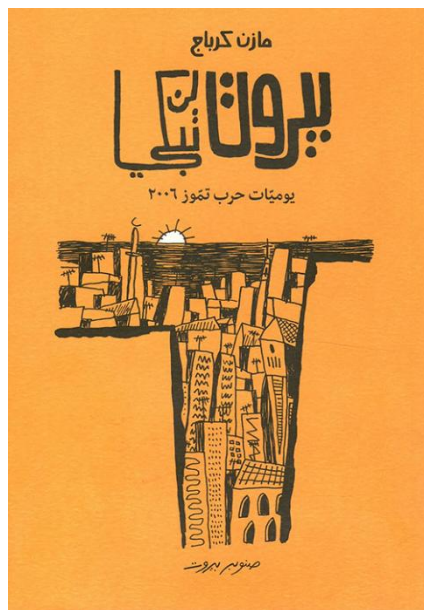


Fig. 28: Different covers of *Beirut Won't Cry* editions

Fig. 28: From left to right and from top to bottom, the covers of the different editions of the same work. In the Arabic edition, the cover is the entry from 4th August. The French edition has two covers: one sold in France and the second a print trial. In the French edition, there is a fragment of the drawing from 23rd July, on which it is written: “أين أنت يا سماء بيروت الزرقاء؟” (*Ayna anta yā samā' Bayrūt al-zarqā'?*) [Where are you, blue sky of Beirut?]. In the trial version, the illustration corresponds to the day 17th August and reads: “الوقت يبقى و نحن نمّر / الوقت يمرّ و بيروت تبقى” (*Al-waqt yabqā wa-naḥnu namurr/ al-waqt yamurr wa-Bayrūt tabqā*) [Time remains and we pass. Time passes and Beirut remains]. Finally, the English edition, which does not include text, is the entry from 16th July. The speech balloon ‘how can I show sound in a drawing’, originally written in English, is deleted and the drawing is colored. It is important to include these four covers because the illustrations convey different feelings: while in the Arabic edition, more attention is paid to Beirut as a city, in the French and English editions, the illustration concentrates on the war, on the smoke caused by the bombs. In the trial edition, the illustration chosen pays more attention on the one hand to the fact that it is written in Arabic and, on the other hand, to Beirut as a city that is resisting.

Un an: journal d'une année comme les autres (2014)³⁴ uses the form of the diary as an exercise; it was published by Tamyras, a Lebanese and French publisher. This is the work that has been exhibited in European galleries, for example in Berlin (vid. supra). Its themes include love, music, the war in Gaza, and fatherhood. From page to page, the author reveals an element of his day: a date, a loving thought, going out with friends, illness, music... the story is depicted in a true, intimate, routine way. The stylized drawing pulls the reader closer: even if certain events can only belong to the author's life, the story is not very distant from that of the reader. The choice of self-portrait mixed with newspaper creates an unfiltered, sincere impression. Here, it is important to note that he gives testimony of his time, both private life and international—one of the FfAlrs.

Other diaries by Kerbaj include *Learning Deutsch* (2018), a diary published via Instagram, in which a new German word and a related self-portrait were published. It was made as a “new year's resolution”: learning a new German word every day and drawing every day. The words drawn by Kerbaj are difficult German words for learners and compound nouns. They always betray a humorous intention, highlighting that the words are very long and often hard to translate. For example, he draws himself as *Rotkäppchen* (Redhood) or suffering under *Flugangst* (fear of flying).



Fig. 29: Learning Deutsch by Mazen Kerbaj

Fig. 29: Instagram posts of *Learning Deutsch*. On the left: “Ohrwurm” [catchy tune], posted on 3rd March 2018; “Königsfamilie” [Royal Family] (5th April 2018); “Rotkäppchen” (29th July); “Flugangst” (7th August), from the artist’s Instagram account.

In the *Corona Diaries* (2020), Kerbaj produced almost 100 illustrations in which he jokingly dealt with topics such as fatherhood, lockdown, travel restrictions, the reopening of borders, and quarantine. He was also able to make people laugh with issues such as positive Covid-19 tests and isolation or the uncertainty of knowing how the pandemic was going to progress in the world. This diary is not published in book form and can only be

accessed via a blog created for this purpose³⁵ or the artist's Instagram account. These diaries demonstrate the importance of social networks for disseminating such work and as a form of communication between artist and reader.

IV. I. II. Mazen Kerbaj's comics

IV. I. II. I. Political and satirical cartoons

This section will analyze Mazen Kerbaj's newspaper strips, in which the autobiographical character is not completely absent, and undertake an in-depth analysis of Lebanese society from the artist's point of view. The first, *Cette histoire se passe* (2011),³⁶ comprises illustrations that appeared in the Lebanese newspaper لأخبار (*al-Aḥbār*) [The News] between 9th August 2008 and 22nd January 2010—the period which witnessed the election of Barack Obama, the first African-American president of the United States, Israel's war on Gaza, the Iranian Green Revolution, and the world economic crisis. In Lebanon, three years had passed since the assassination of Rafic Hariri, and two years since the 2006 War. On this occasion, we will be citing from the *al-Aḥbār* website and the French edition, due to the difficulty of finding the Arabic edition of the book in European libraries.

A copy of هذه القصة تجري أو لا تجري تلك هي المسألة (*Haḍiḥi al-qīṣṣa tağrī aw lā tağrī tilka hiyya l-mas'ala*) [Is this story happening or not, that is the question],³⁷ published in 2010 by دار الآداب (*Dār al-Ādāb*) [House of Literature], is located in the archives of AUB. The translation and adaptation of the work were carried out by Kerbaj himself, which also indicates that there is interest in France—and by extension, in Europe—in Arabic comic strips and the Lebanese audience. In *Cette histoire se passe*, we find almost 270 strips in which recurring characters, present-day characters, and timeless ones appear, portraying the Lebanese society of the time. The structure of each page is always the same: a first strip in which the “classic contemporary artist” asks himself a philosophical question, in a soliloquy that is not lacking in irony and criticism of part of the cultural elite.

هذه القصة تجري...



Fig. 30: Detail of one of the first strips of *Cette histoire se passe*

Fig. 30: Detail of one of the first strips of *Cette histoire*.

We read in it the caption *في دماغ فنان كلاسيكي معاصر* (*fī dimāḡ fannān klāsīkī mu‘āsir*), translated as “in the head of a contemporary classical artist”, although the more accurate translation of *دماغ* (*dimāḡ*) is brain. In this strip, the question is whether he is Arab or Phoenician, or both of them, or neither of them.³⁸ The translation in the French edition can be found on page 76. This is also a self-portrait of the artist himself.

Each page is then divided into four more strips, in turn divided into four panels. In the first panel, the reader is placed in a specific place and time, but without being given definite spatio-temporal coordinates. The gallery of archetypal characters describes and mocks a “Lebanese spirit”. Social injustice, corruption, violence, the bourgeoisie, poverty, alcohol, and drugs are portrayed in the work, demanding the reader’s reflection and calling for change, through the following characters:

Character	Spatio-temporal coordinates	Highlights	Drawing
Posh women	Café Najjagh (مقهى نجاج)	Situation of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon and <i>kafala</i> System	
Mother / Son	A rented apartment in Beirut (sometimes in Tripoli, Tehran, Tel Aviv)	Young people’s lack of knowledge of what happened in the civil war or history	

Character	Spatio-temporal coordinates	Highlights	Drawing
Two young boys	Gemmayzeh	Lack of interest in the situation in the country by young people Alcohol consumption	
Taxi driver	Taxi-service	Economic crisis	
Phenicians	4000 years ago	Corruption as an intrinsic and inherent feature of the ruling class in Lebanon	
Sky	Sky over Lebanon, Israel, Iran	Situation of the Middle East	
Palestinians	Palestinian refugee camp	Situation of Palestinians in Lebanon and neighboring countries	
	On the telephone	Western perception of Palestinians	

Character	Spatio-temporal coordinates	Highlights	Drawing
Mini-market vendor	Mini market 'Abou Coco'	Global situation Economic situation of Lebanon Poverty	
Beach posers	Beach	Critique of the bourgeoisie	
Television	Livingroom	Comment of the "real" Lebanese on the daily news	

Table 16: Characters of Mazen Kerbaj's *Cette histoire se passe*

Table 16: Characters of Mazen Kerbaj's *Cette histoire se passe*³⁹

This caricatured characterization, due to its exaggeration and aim of making the reader laugh and self-reflect, would be maintained by Kerbaj in other works for newspapers; some were recollected in the collection *Politique*.⁴⁰ The main difference between *Politique* and *Cette histoire se passe* lies in the page layout; the first page is not always divided into strips, mainly because the book contains drawings and strips published in different media, such as newspapers, magazines, and online. The design of the book, which includes, for example, quizzes and advertisements, conveys the idea that the book is a magazine. Owing to the time period of the drawings and illustrations included, Kerbaj also deals with topics such as the war in Syria or the election of a president in Lebanon. The "Histoires vraies de réfugiés syriens inventées par Mazen Kerbaj" have been translated into German and distributed free of charge. The characters of Kerbaj's political strips became recurrent, such as the posh women who provoked a case of censorship in the newspaper *L'Orient Littéraire*, in which he was mocking the bourgeoisie in 2010 (v. infra). Moreover, the artist is aware that he may face censorship issues or troubles with the Internal Security Forces, as in the following strip, in which we read:

عزيزي القارئ: إذا تمكنت من قراءة هذا الشريط، ستربح معنا جائزة قيمة. الرجاء إرسال فوراً اسمك وعنوانك إلى الجريدة (أو إلى قوى الأمن الداخلي لتسريع المعاملة)

(‘Azīzī l-qārī’ idā tamakkanta min qirā’at haḍā l-šarīṭ, sa-tarbaḥ ma’-na ḡā’iza qayyima. Al-riḡā’ irsāl fawran ismi-ka wa-’unwāni-ka ilā l-ḡarīda (aw ilā quwwā l-amn al-dāḥilī li-tasrī’ al-mu’āmalā))[Dear reader, if you can decipher the bubbles above, send your answer, name and address to the newspaper immediately to win a great gift (you can also send it directly to the Internal Security Forces - General Intelligence section, to receive your gift even faster)]. Kerbaj does not want to reach an audience that understands Hebrew; he wants to mock the situation of a lack of dialogue with Israelis. This joking warning also appears on a page of *Politique*, entitled “Version (trop) originale”.



Fig. 31: Detail of *Cette histoire se passe*

Fig. 31: Detail of the page published on 12th June 2009.⁴¹

IV. I. II. II. Other works

Other works by Kerbaj showing his multifaceted style and the experimentation that characterizes him are those published in *Headache Comics*. *Headache Comics* is the title of Kerbaj’s self-published works, which consists of three volumes. The first volume, entitled *My Cloud*,⁴² was drawn in the “Grandpapier 24 Hours Comics Challenge”⁴³ in 2012 and was published in the book *Lettre à la mère* by L’Apocalypse in 2013.⁴⁴ The second volume, entitled *Letter to the Mother*, contains three short stories: *Letter to the Mother*, a story originally published in *Le Monde Diplomatique in Bande Dessinée*;⁴⁵ *People Who Talk*, which also originated in the “Grandpapier 24 Hours Comics Challenge” in 2010; and finally, *Boats*, which was published in the French magazine *Lapin*.⁴⁶ The third volume, *Cola*, also includes three stories: *Flap Flap Blues*, drawn in the “Grandpapier 24 Hours Comics challenge” in 2010; *Flap Flap Blues Revisited*, drawn in 2011 and published in the American anthology *World War III Illustrated*⁴⁷ in 2011; and *Cola*, the last strip in the booklet and the title of the volume, first published in 2010 in the French anthology *Le Tour du monde en bande dessinée*. These three short stories were published in the album *Lettre à la mère*

mentioned above. The translations from French into English were undertaken by the author himself in collaboration with Ahmad Gharbieh. The fact that the short stories are translated into English and that they have also appeared outside the anthologies reveals the author's own interest in spreading and promoting his work, although the three volumes are limited editions made in Fabriano offset paper—paper made from cotton and used for watercolor painting.

My Cloud (translation of *Mon Nuage*) can be classified as visual poetry. Across its 24 pages, a cloud represents the artistic talent of the author: he has had it from birth, and through practice, has managed to develop it to represent the world and to tell stories. The story also speaks to us of inspiration, as it is a self-reflection on the artistic practice. The cloud is made with the technique of color spots and in the final pages, when Kerbaj states: "But with practice I managed to fix stars" (Kerbaj 2016: 14), the paint spots are filled in with figures of faces and people. The change of perspective, characteristic of Cubism—of which one of its greatest representatives is Pablo Picasso—shows that Kerbaj openly distances himself from naturalistic representation; that is, from the principle of imitating nature as the ultimate goal of art. This makes him an Avantgarde artist in the truest sense of the word.

Letter to the Mother is a tribute to the city of Beirut, also in the form of visual poetry. In its 36 pages, the author bids farewell to Beirut, a city he sees as his mother. The first sentence is a quote from Albert Camus: "Mother died today", taken from the book *The Stranger*. Kerbaj, like Meursault, the protagonist of Camus's work, seems indifferent to reality as absurd and unapproachable. Through a dialogue with Beirut, in which the literary self walks through its buildings and monuments, he addresses the issue of the lack of participation in the collective decisions that affect the urban landscape of the city and that make him, like Meursault, a foreigner in what should be his own environment. Many buildings bear scars from the war, but still stand, reminding the author of the years he has spent trying to understand the city: "Thirty-five years / Thirty-five years I spent seeking you finding you avoiding you" (Kerbaj 2016:3). Yet despite the changes that appear in its skyline, rejuvenating the city, Beirut will remain a city hated and loved in equal part. The buildings featured are the cinema called "The Egg", the Holiday Inn hotel, Burj El Murr, Beit Beirut, and the Electricité du Liban building, as well as tourist attractions and landmarks in the Lebanese capital such as the Pigeon Rocks, the Martyrs' Monument, St. George Cathedral, and the Mohammad Al-Amin Mosque.

The second story in the volume is entitled *Boats*, in which text and drawing become visual poetry. It features drawings of refined lines, made in a mixed technique of watercolor, ink, and felt-tip pen in black and white, in which a boat appears on the horizon. The text

accompanying the vignettes explains the drawings. The third story, *People Who Talk*, is a critique of the tendency to talk and not listen, printed in blue, white, and black.

The final volume is *Cola*, in which the short stories *Flap Flap Blues* and *Flap Flap Blues Revisited* are interspersed with the story *Cola*. The two *Flap Flap Blues* create musicality in the text through the repetition of the onomatopoeia “flap-flap” and alliteration, confirming that this is visual poetry—not only because of the rhyme of the text, but also because of the use of poetic resources. The drawings, rendered in ink, are representative of Kerbaj’s work; the influence of Laure Ghoraybe and other artists who, through filigree drawing, almost fill the entire space, leaving few blank spaces, can be seen. *Cola*, drawn and colored with crayons, and referencing a text by Khaled Saghie, is a critique of the influence of the West on the Arab world.

Other books published by Kerbaj include *L’Abécédaire*, a four-hand work made together with his mother in which fourteen letters of the alphabet are illustrated through words beginning with that letter. *24 Poèmes* (2004)⁴⁸ contains drawings inspired by the poet Fernando Pessoa.

IV. I. III. Mazen Kerbaj’s *Antoine*

The story of *Antoine* is that of the Lebanese actor Antoine Kerbaj, father of Mazen Kerbaj. The story is, until now, divided into three chapters: chapter one, *Le destin arabe* [The Arab Destiny] (2019);⁴⁹ chapter two, *Rue Hamra* [Hamra Street] (2019);⁵⁰ and chapter three, *Les Évènements* [The Events] (2020).⁵¹ Through key events in the life of Antoine Kerbaj, the art scene in Beirut is revised, while putting into perspective Mazen Kerbaj’s own life and the life of his father. The first chapter was published in January 2019, the second chapter in July 2019, and the third chapter in January 2020. Each book was published by *Samandal*, has 28 pages, and was supervised by the comics artist Joseph Kai. They had the support of the Centre National du Livre (CNL) and AFAC. All the chapters are printed in one color (blue and white) and the covers are in red, green, and yellow respectively; its measurements are 18 cm x 25 cm.



Fig. 32: Covers of *Antoine*

The cover of the book is drawn in blue. If we were to divide the cover into four parts horizontally, the first quarter includes the author's name, the title *Antoine*, the chapter number, and its subtitle. Below in the center is the *Samandal* logo in the same color as the title, creating an aesthetic composition. On the cover of the first chapter, *Le Destin Arabe*, we see a man in his underwear and wearing a tie. He is smoking and next to him is a suitcase. In the top left we find graffiti on the wall reading لا للإمبريالية (*Lā li-l-imbiriyāliyya*) [No to imperialism], a poster with Nasser's portrait, and, below that, another piece of graffiti with the iconic حنظلة (*Hanẓala*) [Handala]. Behind the main character, parts of the slogan بترول للعرب (*Bitrūl al-'arabī li-l-'Arab*) are seen, and in the upper right corner, another piece of graffiti on the wall shows the name Assaf, a heart with an arrow, and the name Rania. The inside of the front cover is the stage on which the play *The Arab Marseillaise*, written by the Syrian author محمد الماغوط [Mohammad Maghout] was to be performed. A meta-reference to other works by Mazen Kerbaj is that he places the street in front of Abou Coco's mini market, a character who already appeared in *Cette histoire se passe*.

In the second chapter, entitled *Rue Hamra*, the poster announcing the performance is copied on the cover: in the central part, it reads: "Antoine Kerbaj in the Arab Marseillaise", and on the right-hand side it states it has been performed at the Théâtre Orly⁵² since 18th February 1975. The lower left-hand side of the poster gives information about the authors of the music and the play's set. As this is a close-up of the poster, it is not possible to read all the information. Finally, on the right, we see a portrait of Antoine Kerbaj wearing a hat, a sailor's shirt, and a tie, with a shoe in his hand and a suitcase in the other hand. On the inside of the front cover, numerous text balloons are superimposed, many of which are

peaked to represent screams, with only scribbles and the onomatopoeia “BROUHAHA” in the center. On the inside of the back cover, we see the text balloon phrases coming out of a café called *The Horseshoe*⁵³ and the protagonist running away, recognizable by the kinetic lines drawn and the onomatopoeia “CLOP CLOP CLOP CLOP”. The last cover to date is the cover of the third chapter, *Les Évènements*, which shows the bus that was attacked by the Phalangist/Kataeb party and considered to be the event that triggered the Lebanese Civil War. On the back cover, the front page of the Monday 14th April 1975 edition of the newspaper *L'Orient Le Jour* is reproduced, with a photograph of the bus in Aïn el-Remmaneh⁵⁴ and a map showing the location of the town. In addition, we find the headline “31 morts hier à Aïn el-Remmaneh dans un grave incident Kataëb-Résistance” and the statements of Joumblatt (“Joumblatt réclame l'exclusion des ministres phalangistes”) and Gemayel (“C'est un complot”).

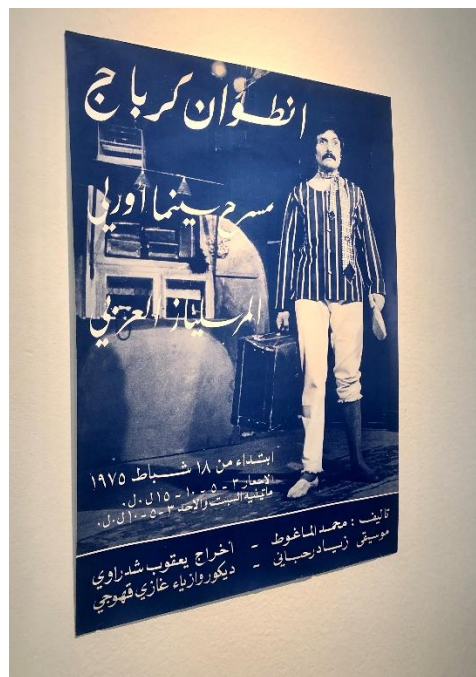


Fig. 33: Poster of the Theater play *The Arab Marseillaise*

The covers of the three chapters and the back cover condense the story that is contained in the following pages. Thus, the first chapter is the last performance of the play *The Arab Marseillaise*, which took place on 13th April 1975, and this is indicated in the caption on the first page, placing the reader in the historical context. On the first page, we read the annotations of the written text of the play, which only specifies that “Si l’on versait tous les villes et les villages arabes dans un enorme batteur à œufs, qu’on les mélangeait pendant une année entière, puis en prélevait un échantillon, on obtiendrait la «ville» dans laquelle se déroulent les événements de cette histoire” [If we poured all Arab towns and

villages into a huge egg beater, mixed them together for a whole year and took a sample, we would get the city in which the events of this play take place] (p.1), meaning that the place where the play is set is indeterminate and could be any Arab town or village, a place where people are decomposing and dizzy—like eggs.

In the next pages, the reader is the spectator of the first scene of the play in which the situation of the Arab world at the time is represented in a comical way. The text narrates the conversation of the main character, a man who wants to go to another country but encounters a giant—the Arab destiny—which does not let him pass. When he tries to cross the gate on his way to “El Dorado”, a giant with a mustache, a tank top, hair on his chest, patched trousers, a *masbaha* in his pocket, and horse’s legs (or perhaps on stilts) blocks him from crossing the gate.

The protagonist claims that: “Eh bien, mon cher Monsieur, je fuis les Arabes!” [Well, my dear Sir, I am running away from the Arabs!] (p. 9, panel 6), and then lists what he considers to be “Arabness”, which is a sum of antitheses of concepts, such as pan-Arabism and unity, peaceful solution and military solution, and Christian holidays and Islamic holidays. The Arab destiny tries to convince him to stay because “La bataille ultime!” [The last battle [has not yet been fought]] (p.13, panel 1), and makes him look at the graffiti on the walls, which displays slogans such as *كلنا للمعركة* (*Kullunā li-l-ma‘raka*) [All for battle], *النصر لنا* (*La-nā l-naṣr*) [Victory will be ours], and *الكفاح المسلح طريقنا إلى النصر* (*Al-kifāḥ al-musallaḥ ṭarīqunā ilā l-naṣr*) [Armed struggle is our way to victory]. The protagonist does not change his mind, but he does not consider himself a traitor as he has always remained an Arab wherever he has been, and he bears the wounds of the Arab fate. The scene and the book end with the curtain coming down and the protagonist saying: “Et alors? Alors—que Dieu me maudisse! —j’ai écouté ma conscience et je suis revenue au pays...” [What’s wrong with that? So—may God damn me!—I listened to my conscience and returned to my country...] (p.27).

The interpretation of this work, which is not included in Al-Maghout’s complete works and has never even been published, and of which only a handwritten copy has survived, is that the author has no trust in the possibility of progress in the Arab countries. Like other works by Al-Maghout, the play is explicitly political⁵⁵ and, in this first scene, the disenchantment and sense of defeat felt by a group of Arab intellectuals is already expressed. Moreover, the date chosen for the setting of the work is a warning that Lebanon will succumb to the same errors that have been described in the chapter.

The second chapter, *Rue Hamra*, depicts Hamra Street in the 1970s. In its cafés, *The Horseshoe* or *Modca*—a sidewalk coffeeshop and one of the most frequented coffeeshops

in Hamra Street—the young clientele has not yet heard what has happened in Aïn el-Remmaneh and make plans for the night, for the children's future, for the summer. Someone—whom we come to learn is the Lebanese actor نبيه أبو الحسن [Nabieh Abu El Hasan], who gives them the latest news—cuts into the conversations by asking if people have heard the news. Antoine Kerbaj and his wife Laure Ghorayeb, pregnant and four months from giving birth, are also sitting in *The Horseshoe* with a group of friends. Their conversation is interrupted when, like the others, they hear: “Vous savez ce qu'il s'est passé à Aïn el Remmaneh?” (pp. 4, 8, 16). The intelligible conversations are mixed with the conversation of Antoine and Laure, who have to decide how to get home to attend to their children and what to do about the afternoon session of the play. When they try to return home, they come across a checkpoint and a member of the Palestinian resistance will not let them pass because they want to reach the majority-Christian Achrafieh neighborhood, shouting “Halte!” [Stop!] (p. 24, panel 2, p. 25, panel 7). These are the same words with which the Arab destiny refused to let the traveler in the previous chapter's play pass. Antoine steps on the accelerator and manages to cross. The last page is the poster of the play, with the message that the performance is cancelled.

In this chapter, Hamra Street is described through illuminated billboards, as well as by transmitting the flair of its famous bars and coffee shops. By setting the narration of the different stories at the same time—on 13th April in the early afternoon—the message is that the war begins while people go about their daily lives and their plans. The way in which the Palestinians are drawn is noteworthy: while the rest of the characters are drawn in great detail, the armed men are drawn in quick pen strokes, faceless and unrecognizable.

The third chapter begins with the front page of the newspaper *L'Orient-Le Jour* on 14th April 1975 and the subsequent outbreak of violence that shakes the Lebanese capital. Yet, page after page, people go on with their lives, creating situations that, in the narrator's words, are “tragi-comic”: “(...) donner des signes de vie parfois tragi-comiques. Et, petit à petit, nous avons tous recommencé à vivre comme si rien ne s'était passé.” [sometimes giving tragi-comic signs of life. And, little by little, we all went back to living as if nothing had happened] (p. 9, panel 2 and 3). From this point on, the pages of the book contain news of deaths and attacks, mixed with advertisements, banal news, and headlines of cultural life. From page 18, we know that the narrator of this chapter is the mother, Laure Ghorayeb, who with her husband manages to reunite with her children before going to the mountains in Deir al-Qamar with her mother. They decide that the best thing to do is to stay there for the summer and suspend the play. When they begin to miss Beirut, but without the situation calming, the mother goes into labor on 23rd August, and Mazen is born on 24th August.

On the penultimate page, a page from Laure's diary is copied. On the last page, the announcement of the birth is reproduced, along with what the narrator sees as the moment when the war moves into its fourth round, which is to last 15 years: "Une dispute autour d'un flipper, qui finira par déclencher ce quatrième round tant annoncé, et qui allait durer 15 ans." [An argument over a pinball machine, which would trigger that long-awaited fourth round, and which would last 15 years] (p. 26, last panel). In this chapter, there is a first-person narrator, one who is witness to what is happening but is not the protagonist. To add credibility to the narrative, newspaper front pages and headlines are copied throughout. In *Les Événements*, the reader witnesses a mother's conversation with her son.

Antoine is presented not only as a tribute to a father figure but also as a reference to the author's life. It represents a refined narrative, made up of both words and graphic references to Lebanese history and culture at the time, along with meta-references between chapters, creating a narrative that, although that of a particular person, is relatable to other witnesses of the war. In the first chapter, the story is placed in historical context; in the second chapter, it describes how the war—which could be any war—begins unexpectedly. The third chapter shows how, despite the war and the uncertainties of armed conflict, people continue to experience moments of joy, such as the birth of a child.

IV. I. IV. Importance of Mazen Kerbaj

As we have explored, Kerbaj's work can be summarized in the following points: on the plastic and artistic level, his work often uses clean strokes, but he also masters drawing with India ink. He mainly uses this in two situations: in his works that could be categorized as visual poetry, and in his works that are born out of immediacy, out of the need to draw reality quickly. At times his drawings are simpler, and at times they are full of detail, such as in the four-handed drawings. On the narrative level, we see that his motivation is to recount his own life experience and memory, but also the memory of Lebanon, of Beirut, and of the war, which is why he always uses stereotyped Lebanese characters such as those in *Cette histoire se passe*: the self-portrait and the Lebanese intellectual. His work is shaped by the memory of war, but also by a childhood that, despite the war, was a happy one for him thanks to his parents, both of whom came from the artistic milieu of the golden years of Beirut. However, the traumatic experiences lived in his young adulthood are also present in his work, as well as music and musicality. Through his humor and philosophical questions, he makes his readers witness the moment and leads them to reflection.

IV. II. Barrack Rima — بَرّاق رِيما

Tripoli, 1972

At 18 years old, Barrack Rima left Lebanon to study in Brussels, where she obtained her degree at the Académie de Beaux-Arts and attended the evening school Académie des Arts de Watermael-Boitsfort, at which Louis Joos was one of the teachers. Rima then studied for a degree in Cinema and Television Production at the Institut des Arts de Diffusion in Louvain-la-Neuve. Her first work was *Beyrouth*, published in a very small edition in Belgium in 1995 (50 copies in digital printing with silkscreen cover); it was re-edited in 2013 and reissued as an edition limited to 300 copies in 2015, both by Plan BEY.⁵⁶ The work was not intended to be continued, but in 2015 the title *Beyrouth Bye Bye...* was published by Plan BEY as a limited edition. The third and last chapter of this trilogy, *Beyrouth Rewind*, was published in 2017 by Plan BEY, and as a complete book entitled *Beyrouth: La trilogie* by Alif-Bata. Between these publications, in 1998 she published *Le conteur du Caire* in the editorial La Cafetière. Rima joined the *Samandal* collective in 2013, where قِيلُولَة قَبْلَ الظَّهْرِ (*Qaylūla Qabla l-Zāhr*) [Nap Before Noon] and parts of *Dans le Taxi* have been published as chapters, as well as single short stories. Rima has also published in various newspapers, such as in the strip *De Brusselmansen* in Belgian newspaper *Brussel Deze Week* between 1998 and 2003, and in the series سوسِيُولُوجِيَا (*Sūsiyūlūġiyā*) [Sociology] in Lebanese newspaper *al-Aḥbār* between 2014 and 2015.

IV. II. I. *Sociology* – سوسِيُولُوجِيَا

In the series *Sociology*, the author offers a piercing analysis of the Lebanese society with sharp criticism and a sarcastic sense of humor. This is a compelling example of the relationship Lebanese artists form between cartoon and comic: the pages are halfway between cartoon—understood here as an analysis of daily current events—and comic, as the author uses more than one panel and speech balloons. The structure of the 17 pages is always the same: the heading of the series shows the title, a close-up of hands drawing, and two seated men commenting on the day's news, which are then drawn by the author, and in the central part below the title, an explanation with the words: “or it should be called...”. Each episode has a subtitle. The current Foundation for Arts Initiatives (FfAIs) focus on topics such as women's rights, war and violence in the Middle East, LGBT rights, and sectarianism in Lebanon, among others.



Fig. 34: Heading of the series Sociology

Fig. 34: Detail of the heading of the *Sociology* series, where we see the drawing hands and the speech bubble with “أو كان الممكن أن يكون عنوانها” (*Aw kānna l-mumkin an yakūn ‘unwānu-hā*) [Or it should be called...], which expresses the point of view of the series author. In this example, taken from the first page published, we read العبودية (*al-‘Ubūdiyya*) [Slavery].

In this series, Rima writes: “لا أظن أن الرؤية التي أريد صوغها في عملي المفترض كصدى السوسيولوجيا” (*Lā aẓunn anna l-ru’ya allatī urid sauḡa-hā fī ‘amalī l-muftaraḍ ka-ṣaḍā l-sūsiyūlūḡiyā bi-imkāni-hā an tatafādā l-siyāsa*) [I don’t think that the vision I want to develop in my work —supposed to be an echo of Sociology—can avoid politics] (*Sociology #1*).⁵⁷ This statement has become a constant in the rest of his work, since on many occasions his publications have a marked political critique and are never exempt from comment on the political situation of the country. In this series, in accordance with the author’s style, where collage is often used as a form of artistic expression, we recognize photographs and drawings that will appear in other works, for example the skyscrapers of Beirut (they appear in *Sociology #11* and in the second chapter of *Beyrouth, La trilogie*).

IV. II. II. *Le conteur du Caire*

The next work, *Le conteur du Caire*,⁵⁸ published in 1998 by the Belgian-French publisher La Cafetière,⁵⁹ tells of her meeting with the Egyptian filmmaker Youssef Chahine.⁶⁰ It is also an album of his memories of Egypt, in which, from the title itself, she reveals one of her recurring themes: the figure of the storyteller or *حكاوي* (*Hakawātī*). Both Chahine and Rima are heirs to the tradition of storytellers, one through cinema, the second through graphic novels. On page 48, Chahine tells Rima how he started in film, relating that he emigrated too. Emigration is a recurring theme in Rima’s work, as well as choosing the form of storytelling, which can also be through drawn stories.

The story is composed of several scenes with an open ending. In these scenes, the reader is introduced to elements of Egyptian culture on the one hand, and to a series of characters on the other, such as the taxi driver, the street vendor, and an amnesic poet. In addition, characters such as the president Gamal Abdel Nasser, the singer أم كلثوم [Umm Kulthum], and the belly dancer and actress تحية كاريوكا [Tahiya Carioca] have a voice in this

story, acting as narrators of these fragmented tales that take place between Alexandria and Cairo. The work raises issues such as image, representation, and its relationship with reality.

IV. II. III. *Beyrouth La Trilogie*

*Beyrouth La Trilogie*⁶¹ is composed of three independent books, which in the trilogy work as chapters: *Beyrouth*, *Beyrouth Bye Bye...*, and *Beyrouth Rewind*. They have since been reissued and reprinted; the first was originally published in Belgium and, years later, in Beirut. In the introduction to the Lebanese edition of *Beyrouth*, Rima explains that in 1995, when the work was published, “où tout était possible” (introduction, line 5). In 2013, the year of its reissue, Beirut has become a city where “les promoteurs immobiliers nourris aux pétrodollars et les marchands d’illusion ont terminé de saccager la ville” [petrodollar-fueled real estate promoters and illusion merchants have finished trashing the city] (introduction, lines 9-10). With this work, as we will see, Rima aims to give voice to Beirut and its inhabitants who are not listened to, conveying a strong political position and calling for political activism. The three titles of this trilogy express the author’s attachment to her native Lebanon through a polyphonic narrative that mixes documentary and dream, showing the reader the labyrinth of her memory and the city, a city condemned by real estate, corruption, and censorship, in a journey through the city from the 1960s to the present day, to answer the question of why the dreams and the ideals of the protest movements have turned into disenchantment.

The first chapter is made up of different kaleidoscopic scene that try to reflect different points of view of the same reality, of the same theme: the emotional attachment Beiruti inhabitants feel towards the Lebanese capital that prevents them from wanting to leave, and the on-going damage to the essence and memory of the city by the new urban development plans. The characters who appear and who will be given a voice, divided across ten different scenes, are described below:

- The traditional houses of Beirut are threatened by the expansion of urban speculation and the large-scale construction of new buildings. The question is raised as to who these houses belong to, whether it be the collective memory of Beirut or a single person or company.
- A street vendor talks to the developers, depicted as the Ninja Turtles. The latter dominate the city economically; Beirutis know the city, which those who sell it to the petrodollars will never be capable of.
- On a bus, two passengers talk about the protests of the 1960s: one from the perspective of the fighter, the other from the perspective of the bourgeois. The role played by Beirut

in the 1960s and the disenchantment of the youth protesting in the streets following the defeat of 1967 are emphasized.

- The streets of Beirut, labyrinthine streets used to hide treasures.
- The sky and the stars of the city, contrasting the skyscrapers with the traditional houses. In a city made of tall blocks of flats, good neighborliness will be lost; neighbors will not know each other while listening to Fairuz's song حبيبي بدو القمر (*Ḥabībī Baddū l-Qamar*) [My Darling Wants the Moon].⁶²
- Umm Kulthum will talk to the daughter of a journalist. The criticism is against the media who create people's opinions, exemplified by the urban legend that Umm Kulthum carried drugs in the tissue she held in her hand while singing.
- Beirut's last Jew explains why he did not leave in 1948 or 1982: because he is from the city and no one can ask him nor force him to leave.
- Handala represents the Palestinian refugees. For those who were expelled from the territory that became the State of Israel—to whom the author refers as “the Palestinians of Haifa” (p.24)—are the ones who cannot leave Lebanon because they have nowhere to go.
- An *Almaza* beer represents the relaxed atmosphere of the Beirut people, their *savoir vivre*, and their enjoyment of things.

The story closes with two storytellers: one who tells the love story between Qais and Leila, known in Arabic as مجنون ليلى (*Mağnūn Laylā*) [Layla's Mad Lover], and one who tells stories of his life, of his memory. It can be said that the first chapter is a plea for the preservation of the traditional Beirut in order to maintain its memory and personality.

The second chapter, *Beyrouth Bye Bye...*, is set in January 2016. A couple (the author and her elder sister), accompanied by a two or three-year-old girl, walk along the Corniche, but the pleasant walk has ناعمة (*Nā'ima*) [Naameh – landfill for Beirut] as its destination. On the way, they encounter various people and scenes. In Rauché, they meet a refugee. At that moment they realize that there are cement blocks behind them. They get into a taxi with the word “*Ḥakawātī*” on the roof. The taxi driver tells them that the city is disappearing. In the taxi, they see three scenes: some women dressed all in black saying “*Cette ville est le cercueil de la liberté*” [This town is the tomb of freedom]; a group of armed men; and, on a double page, they see from the taxi with a number plate saying زمن الجاهلية (*Zaman al-Ġāhiliyya*) [Time of Ignorance] a group of hooded men—resembling Ku Klux Klan members or Catholic penitents—burning issues of the magazine *Samandal: Généalogie and Revenge*, co-published with the Belgian collective *Employé du Moi*.



Fig. 35: Detail of *Beyrouth La Trilogie*

Fig. 35: This double page (pp. 39-40 or pp. 16-17) can be understood as a reference to the Lena Merhej cartoon that caused so much controversy in Lebanon; it refers to the *Samandal* trial (2009- 2015) (vid. infra) as the men are preparing a “recipe for revenge à la Lebanese”, i.e., burning anything that could be dangerous or interpreted as against the self, and censorship.

On the taxi radio, they are listening to the news that “crocodiles et tortues se sont barricadés dans leurs quartiers et ont redivisé la ville” [crocodiles and turtles have barricaded themselves in their headquarters and divided the city again], where the “turtles” are meant as the real estate developers. “Crocodiles” refer to the political class, as seen in the poster below (see Fig. 36).



Fig. 36: Poster in Ras Beirut

Fig. 36: Picture of a poster in Beirut in March 2016. The text reads علمنا التمساح التمسحة (*Allamnā l-timsāḥ al-tamsaḥa*) [We taught the crocodile how to “crocodilize”]. The verb “crocodilize” evidently exists only in the spoken language, and refers to Lebanese having thick skins like crocodiles, i.e., they do not react or get angry even despite the dire situation in the country and all they have gone through, and that they were even able to teach the crocodile how to be like that. (Picture taken by the author in Ras Beirut).

A few hours later they arrive at Naameh, the largest garbage dump in the Beirut and Mount Lebanon area. In 2015, this temporary dump was closed, but the government was without a rubbish collection plan and the company contracted to collect the rubbish initially stopped collection and, after a few weeks, started to leave the rubbish in other places, such as under bridges or in open fields in the Beirut area. In 2015-16, there were a series of protests about this issue, which also triggered protests on sectarianism, corruption, political dysfunction, unemployment, energy shortages, etc. These protests have been considered an aftermath of the Arab Spring due to the involvement of civil society groups and were characterized by their comic chants and satirical slogans. They are also seen as the premise of the 2019 revolution.

From Naameh, they take a taxi to the airport to say goodbye to the city. A rubbish collector with a large cart waves them off. The story is a pessimistic one; as they say on the last page (pp. 45-46 or pp. 22-23): “- C'est pas un peu exagéré cette histoire? - Je n'arrive plus à voir Beyrouth autrement...” [- Isn't this story a bit exaggerated? - I can't see Beirut any other way...]. It is a story that speaks of a goodbye, a farewell, and the author's lack of hope that the situation can change.

In the last chapter, *Beyrouth Rewind*, the author comes back to Beirut. Again, Rima takes a taxi with the “*Hakawātī*” sign, but the taxi driver will not tell “les légendes d'amour de Qaiss et Leila... Ni les histoires de «Beyrouth, perle de l'Orient» ou «cœur battant du panarabisme»... ou encore «berceau de révolutions»” [the love stories of Qais and Leila ... Nor the stories of ‘Beirut, pearl of the Orient’ or ‘beating heart of pan-Arabism’... or even ‘cradle of revolutions’] (pp. 57-59); only current stories. The number plates of the cars refer to what the taxi driver says in the speech bubbles: the pearl of the Orient and the heart of pan-Arabism are “ÉGARÉS” [lost] and “ÉPARPILLÉS” [scattered]; the cradle of the revolution is “AHURIS” [dumbfounded] (ibid.). Passing through Martyr’s Square, recognizable by the Egg building and the Cathedral of St. Elias and St. Gregory and the Mohammad al-Amin Mosque, there is a demonstration heading in the direction of several government buildings, including the Lebanese Parliament. On the car’s number plate we read: “الآن” (*al-ān*) [now] (pp. 58-59, double page).

Rima arrives at the vernissage of his book *Beyrouth Bye Bye...* and, at the book launch, his mother returns ten years after her death. Together, they go to her mother’s university in 1967. Through the frames, a portrait of the Beirut of the 1960s is visible: its fashion, cars, the Beirut of the cabarets, and cinemas such as the Rivoli, with posters for the film لمسة الحنان (*Lamsat al-Ḥanān*) [A Touch of Tenderness], a romantic comedy from 1971 featuring شادية [Shadiya]⁶³ as the main actress, and the photo of Gamal Abdel Nasser. At the Beirut Arab University, they arrive at a demonstration; her mother wears the Palestinian flag as a dress, recognizable even though the drawing is in black and white. The mother talks about her involvement in politics and her beliefs: socialism, Arab unity, anti-imperialism, the liberation of Palestine. She explains that she believes in all these because of the promises of unity: “plus de distinction entre les classes et les religions, ni entre les femmes et les hommes. Sublime objectives.” [without distinction between classes and religions, nor between women and men. Sublime objectives] (p. 68). While watching the demonstrations, Rima wonders if the mother’s and the author’s story is the same.

A book vendor arrives at the demonstration and takes the protagonist to the present and the past through books. Together, they can see the '67 war, the Aïn el-Remmaneh bus that symbolizes the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War, the Beirut siege of '82, Syria, the Cedar Revolution, the July war, the Arab revolutions . . . but the result of all this is people seeking refuge—refugees from Palestine, Iraq, and Syria, in the past and nowadays. On a double page we see the same scene of refugees, some from '48 and others from modern times. Noteworthy are the books that are displayed: *Utopia* by Omar Khouri, issues of *Samandal*, *33 Jours* by Laure Ghoraybeb, *Je me souviens Beyrouth* by Zeina Abirached,

Beyrouth Juillet Août 2006 by Mazen Kerbaj, مربّى ولين (*Murabbā wa-Laban*) [Jam and Yoghurt] by Lena Merhej, and Naji al-Ali's Handala, highlighting the importance of graphic narration for recalling and telling history, as well as novels (e.g., *Memory for Forgetfulness* by Mahmoud Darwish or *Fou de Beyrouth* by Sélim Nassib) and imaginary essays (*Les tentacules de Solidere* or *La guerre du Liban*).

They reach August 2015 and the following pages illustrate the demonstrations provoked by the garbage crisis, which are explained as such: “Les rassemblements se multiplient pour protester contre l'incompétence du gouvernement” (...) et à l'incurie générale de la classe politique de tous bords” and as “une contestation nouvelle dans son genre; elle n'est pas concernée par les tendances confessionnelles, ni par les puissances régionales, ni par les luttes idéologiques classiques (...)” [The gatherings multiply to protest against the incompetence of the government (...) and the general carelessness of the political class of all stripes (...) a new protest of its kind; it is not concerned by confessional tendencies, neither by regional powers nor by classic ideological struggles (...)] (p. 83), stressing that the union of the protesters is its strength. On page 81, the woman carrying the “You stink” banner appears to be Rima's mother.

Again in a taxi, with the detail of a sign saying “خلص” (*ḥalaṣ*),⁶⁴ the main character goes through other protests, such as for the rights of foreign workers, gender equality, civil marriage, decriminalization of homosexuality, and a laic alternative—that is, demanding more social justice and an alternative to the Lebanese sectarianism.⁶⁵ The taxi is stopped by an elderly woman,⁶⁶ seemingly the mother again (p.87), but she wants to leave the demonstrations to go to a literary salon. There, they meet other people and talk about politics; they read the poem by Bertolt Brecht, *Die Lösung*.⁶⁷ The solution for the protagonist and the interlocutors is rebellion, civil disobedience, and non-violent resistance, calling for revolution. Finally, the protagonist is picked up by a little girl. The artist's mission is to draw the trajectory of his mother's life, because she was able to transform and combine opposites (love and pain; motherhood and conflict): “[ma mere] c'est la source de ses idéaux et aussi de ma désillusion.” [(my mother) is the source of her ideals and also of my delusion] (p. 95).

IV. II. IV. Dans le taxi

In her latest published book, *Dans le taxi* (2021),⁶⁸ Rima explores the self in the context of a trip to the port of Tripoli in a shared taxi. This trip combines the dreamlike and the real; the starting point is a dream and the destination is the unfulfilled need to unravel it. The different characters who appear on the journey become narrators and spectators, not only of the plot of the story—finding an explanation for the dream—but also of the life of the protagonist.

Dans le taxi is the return of Rima to the hometown, to find roots and to answer the questions that life poses, with many references to culture, literature, and the history of Lebanon, using the concept of the literary trope *theatrum mundi*.⁶⁹

After a short introduction, where the author places the history of Tripoli in context, the different characters are presented to the (theater) audience. They are all an audience to the life and dreams of the main character. At the end of the trip, Rima reaches the destination of the family home, allowing her to finally find quiet and inner peace. The book is divided as follows: the introduction, the dream, the passengers of the taxi, the theater, and an epilogue with answers to the questions. The themes and topics dealt with in the introduction to *Dans le taxi* (pp. 5-17) always focus on the city of Tripoli and its inhabitants: for example, on page 10, the covers of books by Tripolitan writers such as خالد زيادة [Khaled Ziadé], ريار دبليز [Riad Dabliz], and جان عبدالله توما [Jean Abdallah Touma] illustrate the cultural importance of the city. These authors, especially the former in his work يوم الجمعة يوم الأحد (*Yawm al-Ġum'a Yawm al-Aḥad*) [Fridays and Sundays],⁷⁰ have traced the biography of the city from a literary perspective, but without neglecting sociological analysis. The following pages deal with the history of the city, from its foundation to the modern transformation of the city, emphasizing the role of the city, as if it had a life of its own, of the various revolts that have taken place there. The revolution of 17th October 2019 occupies two panels of three on page 13, describing a “ville insoumise et rebelle, fer la lance de la révolution du 17 octobre 2019”, as well as the revolts of 1958 and the flood of 1955. Another theme is the social and economic transformation of a city that has never abandoned its traditions, for example the acrobats or the Sufi brotherhoods of *Malawis*. The people of Tripoli are portrayed on pages 16 and 17, the people who take the shared taxi.

The following pages (pp. 18-21) describe a recurring dream in which Rima as a child visits her mother, possibly in a psychiatric hospital, and an adult Rima meets her father in the kitchen of the family home and wants to wash his feet. This dream, or the interpretation of it, makes the protagonist pack her suitcase and want to leave. She then waits for a taxi before getting in. With the first passengers in the taxi, the conversation centers on politics and emigration. One of them has got her visa to leave Lebanon. Here, the author reflects on what it means to leave one's homeland; to be a foreigner in the country of destination or—even more painful—to be a foreigner in the country of origin. The following passengers ask questions about exile, voluntary or forced. The next passenger is the father who appears in the dream. The protagonist transforms into a child in heels. After an argument with her father—in which she dares to confront him—she appears on a fashion catwalk. On the next double page, the child is an adult and, while still wearing the high heels that annoy her father

so much, she appears on stage at a theater. The passengers in the taxi are both actors in the play and spectators.

Childhood memories make the protagonist reflect on the “mise en scène de la vie, de la naissance et la filiation” [staging of life, birth and filiation] (p. 53). The authoritarian father stifles the feeling of contradiction, who in the childish play cannot distinguish between masculine and feminine (e.g., page 51: “Je joue à Barbie avec mes cousines” [I play Barbie with my cousins], or page 52: “T’es une fille ou un garçon?” [Are you a girl or a boy?]). Her mother also experiences this contradiction, represented between tradition and modernity on page 57: “Ma soif de liberté et ma volonté de femme rebelle m’int coûte cher dans cette société machiste.” [My thirst for freedom and my will as a rebellious woman is costing me dearly in this macho society.] These words of the mother are accompanied by a drawing of Michelangelo’s David and Botticelli’s Venus and, in the middle, a taxi. The father’s formula to overcome the contradiction is “J’ai développé une soif de pouvoir et tenté de combler ce qui m’a manqué... bouffer, baiser” [I developed a thirst for power and tried to fill what I missed ... to eat, to kiss] (p.58)—i.e., to satisfy the primary needs.⁷¹ For Rima, kissing is also dancing, which in turn is the transformation of images and symbols, like being a comic artist.

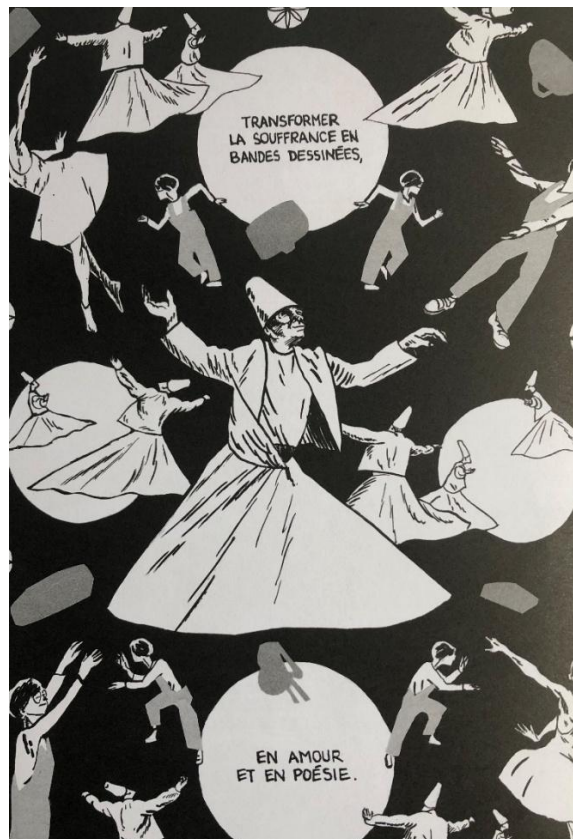


Fig. 37: Detail of *Dans Le Taxi*

Fig. 37: page 60: “Transformer la souffrance en bandes dessinées, en amour et en poésie.” [Transform suffering into comics, love and poetry.]

The next two last passengers in the taxi reveal the taxi driver's real profession: poet and professor of literature at the Lebanese University. The taxi driver first takes out Abu Nuwas' book *Le vin, la vent, la vie* and, during the reading of some verses, the main character and the new passenger start kissing each other. With the reading of the رباعيات (Rubā'īyyāt) [Rubaiyat] by رومی [Rumi],⁷² the girl joins the romantic scene of the other two passengers. When they fall asleep, the little Rima gets into the car to tell the taxi driver the end of the dream, which coincides with the end of the taxi ride. The dream ends with the protagonist as an adult on the balcony of the house in Al Mina.⁷³ The inheritance left over is the roots of a tree that can fly. The last caption of this epilogue reads: "un arbre qui l'emporte «comme les dormants de la caverne, jusque'au plus haut du ciel»" [a tree that carries her 'like the sleepers in the cave, just as far up in the sky'] (p.92).

The literary references in this work are many and come from the aforementioned Tripolitan authors, as well as أبو نواس [Abu Nuwas] recited by the taxi driver ("Écoutez cette merveille de la langue arabe" [Listen to this marvel of the Arabic language] (p. 67)), but instead of reading in Arabic, he reads it in French. The *Rubaiyat* by Rumi are also a translation from a library in Brussels (p.71). Rumi also appears on pages 15 and 60 as a dervish. The psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung⁷⁴ is also cited, particularly the book *L'analyse des rêves* [Dream Analysis], and in one of the illustrations a spectator reads the graphic novel by Louis Joos⁷⁵ *Le Colaxa*,⁷⁶ as well as *Généalogie* by the *Samandal* collective. The historical character Sultan Qalawun is mentioned (p. 12 and p. 48), who is also a member of the theater's audience. In addition, one of the critics of the play could be identified as Karl Marx.

The taxi's number plates change, making it easier to understand how the parts into which the narration is divided also change: the first is "ENCORE" (again), the second is "TOUJOURS" (always), the third is "LE CHEMIN" (the path) and the last is "FIN" (The end). During the taxi ride, the main character falls asleep. The first dream that is narrated is marked in the story by a black background, which is repeated in the theater scene and on arrival at the final destination, and in the scene in which the passengers prepare coffee with the traditional *rakwa*.⁷⁷ However, as we can see, the reading of this work is much more complex than it seems at first. It is not only the story of a citizen; it is the story of a city and of what one takes in one's suitcase when emigrating.

IV. II. V. Importance of Barrack Rima

As we have observed, Barrack Rima's work can be summarized in the following points. On the plastic and artistic level, her work often uses the collage technique; sometimes her

drawings are simpler, and sometimes they are full of detail. It cannot be denied that there is an evolution in the execution of his drawings. On the narrative level, we see that her motivation is to tell small stories which together form memory, but also particularly the memory of Lebanon, Beirut, and Tripoli, which is why Rima always uses characters such as the taxi driver, the street vendor, and historical or artistic figures who have traced the history of the region. Her political criticism is motivated by the disenchantment of his generation, by the unfulfilled dreams that lead to emigration and leaving the country (as in the author's case), defending the uprisings be they past, contemporary, or future upheaval. For this reason, Rima aims to stir consciences so that generational aspirations can be realized. The oneiric world—the mixture of reality and dream, wakefulness and fantasy—is a continuum in her work.

IV. III. Lena Merhej — لينا مرهج

Beirut, 1977

Lena Merhej was born in 1977. She was co-founder and a member of the comics collective *Samandal*.⁷⁸ She studied graphic design at AUB and received a Masters of fine arts in design and technology from the Parsons School of Design in New York. She completed her doctoral thesis at Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany with the title “Analysis of Graphic Narratives: War in Lebanese Comics”. She teaches at AUB and founded the Story Center in Beirut, which offers professional training in comic books.⁷⁹ Merhej has illustrated more than 25 children’s books, written several articles related to comics in the Arab world and Lebanon, is a contributor to *ToshFesh*, and is an academic. Her comics have appeared in *Samandal* magazine, of which she is one of the editors and founders. Other examples of her publications include the fanzine *L’homme reussi* [The Successful Man] from a Grandpapier 24 Hours Comics Challenge (also published in *Samandal* #11); *Là où il y a la vie, il y a l’amour* [Where There is Life, There is Love] by Solidarités International; and *Manarat* [Lighthouse] by Oxfam. To analyze her work, we will examine her first published book *أعتقد أننا سنكون هادئين في الحرب المقبلة* (*A ‘taqid anna-na Sa-Nakūn Hādi’īn fī l-Ḥarb al-Muqbila*) [I Think We Will Be Calmer in the Next War], then her most ambitious work *مرجى ولبن — أو كيف أصبحت أمي لبنانية* (*Murabbā wa-Laban—aw kayfa aṣbaḥat ummī lubnāniyya*) [Jam and Yoghurt — or how my mother became Lebanese], and finally her latest work *سلام* (*Salām*) [Peace], allowing us to see the evolution of her drawing and her narrative.

In addition to *Jam and Yoghurt*, other works by Merhej have appeared in *Samandal*, for example in volume 6, in which there is a comic by herself and *سحر مندور* [Sahar Mandour] entitled *تفاصيل جحيم* (*Tafāṣīl Ġaḥīm*) [Inferno Details]. It starts with the headline from the newspaper *As-Safir* on 17th September 2009, which reads: *تفاصيل جحيم عاشته بيروت بين ٣ حزيران و٢٢ أيلول ١٩٨٢: "السفير"* (*Tafāṣīl ġaḥīm ‘āṣat-hu Bayrūt bayna 3 ḥazīrān wa 22 aylūl 1982: “al-Safir” tarwī yawmiyyāt al-madīna llatī saqatat wa-lam tarfa ‘ al-‘alām al-bayḍā’*) [Details of a hell lived in Beirut between 3rd June and 22nd September 1982: The Ambassador chronicles the city that fell but did not raise its white flag]. This *Samandal* volume was supported by *As-Safir* newspaper, among others.

IV. III. I. *I Think We Will Be Calmer in the Next War* – أعتقد أننا سنكون هادئين في الحرب المقبلة

This book was published in Beirut in 2007 by Dar Onbuz Publishers;⁸⁰ according to *ToshFesh* (2017: 174), it was: “livre le plus vendu au Liban en 2007”. Merhej tells us in this work about her feelings and thoughts during the 2006 War and how her daily life was affected by it. In this graphic narration, she describes her feelings caused by the war; as a form of therapy, she recounts them in order to relieve the mental pressure she feels. The natural reactions of fear are transformed by Merhej into resignation, hoping that her family and friends will come out of the war in the best possible way. The cover shows Merhej and her siblings: she is drawing, one of her brothers is watching TV, one is smoking, and her sister is eating sunflower seeds. All are doing things that soothe them. The back cover is the four characters seen from behind. Interestingly, the book is dedicated to the birds of paradise.

The idea that suffering, loss, and anguish are shared by all those who are living through the war is also repeated. The pages feature 11 memories and moments of the war:

- The first story is how she found out that a war had started and what she did next, which is to call her friends to ask them if they have heard the news. She also recounts how she turns on the television to find out the news, but that makes her afraid, so she decides to turn it off.
- The second story is the reflection she makes while taking a walk about how practical it would be to wear a veil to protect her hair and to hide dirt.
- The third story is how evenings become candlelit evenings and how these moments can create good memories of war.
- The fourth story illustrates rubbish bags. At this point, she describes the feeling of calm and joy she gets from seeing children playing and how this feeling turns to sadness at the sight of bags containing dead bodies.
- The fifth story is about how she and her brother think it is best to stockpile in order to survive the state of emergency. It contrasts two types of people: the practical person and the person overcome by fear. While the brother wants to store water and fuel, she wants to store food. She makes a list of what supplies she needs.
- The sixth story is about the lack of electricity.
- The seventh story portrays different people in Nasma Learning Centre.
- The eighth story is about the contrast between banal and superficial things, like wearing a new dress or thinking about the next excursion, and on the other hand, receiving news of the casualties caused by the war.

- She then explains how drawing for the people she loves helps her get through the day. The book was accompanied by extra stickers with these drawings.
- The next vignettes draw on two jokes that were told during the war.
- Finally, her mother's calm attitude is contrasted with her own and that of her siblings. The parents have not lost their minds during the war because they lived through the fifteen years of the Civil War. Thus, she knows that in the next war they will remain calm.



Fig. 38: Detail of *I think we will be calmer in the next war*



Fig. 39: Stickers page

مرهجي ولبن — أو كيف — **Jam and Yoghurt (or how my mother became Lebanese)** – أصبحت أمي لبنانية

Jam and Yoghurt was written by Merhej and published by *Samandal* as a whole book in 2011. It narrates the story of the author's mother and the difficulties she faced being an "occidental woman" in the "Orient", but also the role the author's mother played in her life, her influence on the author's world vision, and her ability to describe perceptions and their surroundings despite the wars in Lebanon. The book is divided into eight chapters: the introduction; "How my mother came to Lebanon"; "How my mother became Lebanese" (1 and 2); "How my mother tells stories"; "How my mother read her story"; "How my mother became a person with special needs"; and "Family Echo". The characters and topics are as follows:

المقدمة (*al-Muqadimma*) [Introduction]: The first chapter begins on page 6 and continues to page 11. On page 3, 7 panels show the neighborhood of Ras Beirut.⁸¹ In the drawings, it is possible to appreciate the religious and cultural diversity that is common in this neighborhood. Likewise, in the drawings we observe modernity and tradition through houses and people: we see three libraries in three of the panels (panel 2, 4 and 5), the Goethe-Institut with a poster of the magazine *Samandal*, a record store, and a coffee house.

People drawn represent various ages and fashions. A centrally placed woman wears a headscarf and has a copy of *Samandal*; a little girl is reading *Lou Lou*, a famous children's magazine with comic books inside. On page 5, we see a portrait of a woman in 6 panels; however, we cannot see her face. This page has a disparate style from the others (charcoal drawings instead of pencil-ink).

The introduction includes medical objects such as a stethoscope and a tongue depressor. Over the lettering, we see *The Little Prince*, holding his sword and wearing a cape. The following two pages are situated in *ضهور الشوير* [Dhour el Choueir] in July 1982. This is a small town in Mount Lebanon⁸² that was central to the front line during the Lebanese Civil War. In these panels, the mother is angry because of the bombings. The following three pages are set in modern times, depicting a conversation between mother and daughter. The mother appears angry when there are too many questions, but she enjoys telling stories to the daughter.

مرّبي ولبن — أو كيف أتت أمي إلى لبنان (*Murabbā wa-Laban aw kayfa atat ummī ilā Lubnān*) [Jam and Yoghurt or how my mother came to Lebanon]: page 12 to page 31. This chapter begins with a diagram or outline of the origins of the mother, from Vienna 1920 to Beirut 1982. On page 13, there is a portrait of the mother as a doctor with a dog. This drawing is more realistic, using a different technique. On page 14, the 6 panels portray the mother with her children and as a doctor at a kindergarten. Behind them are sandbags, two house scenes, and the mother as a doting wife. From page 15 to page 17, another stage in the mother's life is outlined, this time in Berlin in 1960, where she fell in love and began to learn Arabic. She then goes to Vienna to study medicine, then again to Lebanon from 1970 to 2010 in Dhour el Choueir. The next four pages (pp. 18-21) narrate the childhood home of the author, describing how her mother met her first husband and how she decided to stay in Beirut. On page 22, the author explains that Lena, her name, comes from her grandmother. This is followed by tales of the friendships and relationships of the mother until page 24.

The first panel caption on page 25 reads: "حاولت جدياً أن أفهم ما الذي يقصده أبي عندما يقول: " (Hāwaltu ġiddiyan an afham mā llaḍī yaqsidu-hu abī 'indamā yaqūl) [I tried hard to understand what my father meant when he said]. In the speech balloon, the father says: "لازم أتذكّر أنني لم أتزوج من امرأة شرقية" (Lāzim ataḍakkar annī lam atazawwaġ min imra'a šarqiyya) [I should not forget that I married an occidental woman]. From page 25 to page 26, the author asks herself what the meaning of being an oriental woman is and how her mother and she tried to copy the Lebanese look. The last three pages of this chapter (pp. 27-29) show the daily routine of her mother then and today.

The transition to the next chapter is made by presenting two recipes: on the right page (p.31) are 11 panels with instructions on how to cook *Apfelstrudel* (apple cake), and on the left page, how to cook rice with curry. These two pages combine, or marry, these two worlds: the occidental, represented by a German recipe, and the oriental, represented with a Lebanese recipe. It links to the beginning of the next chapter.

لبنانية مربى ولبن — أو كيف أصبحت أمي لبنانية (*Murabbā wa-Laban aw kayfa aşbaḥat ummī lubnāniyya*) [Jam and Yoghurt or how my mother became Lebanese (1)]: page 32 to page 50. On the first page, the author presents mothers she has drawn for children's books. This could be understood as a statement that this book is not conceived as a children's book. In this chapter, the author responds to the question as to how her mother avoided boredom. On page 33, on the second panel, we read in the caption: "وكلما قلت لها أنني ضجرائة" (*Wa-kullamā qultu la-hā annī ḍağrāna*) [And when I would tell her that I didn't know what to do] and in the speech balloon: "زهاني" (*zahānī*) [I am bored]. On the third panel (p. 33), the captions reads: "تسألني" (*tas'alu-nī*) [she would ask]: "شو هالأفكار؟" (*šū hal-afkār?*) [what are these ideas?]. Her mother did handicrafts and she read. She read as well when someone close to her died: "وأن التاريخ يمدها بنظرة أوسع إلى وجودها" (*wa-anna l-tārīḥ yamuddu-hā bi-naḥra awsa' ilā wuğūdi-hā*) [because history provided her a broader view of her existence] (p.34). She also "فتتغلب على" (*Fa-tatağallab 'alā ḥuzni-hā min ḥilāl muqāranati-hi bi-ḥuzn šu'ūb al-'ālam allatī šunnat 'alā arḍi-hā l-ḥurūb*) [Overcame her grief by comparing it with the sorrow of people in the world who have had wars waged against them]. Their children learned to forget sorrow by reading and by playing with war. (p. 34).

During her life, her mother was a pediatrician and had a nursery. One of her duties was working with people with disabilities and accompanying them or their carers on their travels. She traveled too to bury her dead (her first husband and then her mother). From 1977 to 1986 she could not travel, and her family could not visit her. In 1986, she traveled with her children to Germany by the Orient Express—the same as in Agatha Christie books: "القطار الذي حلمت أمي به منذ قرأت قصة أغاتا كريستي" (*Al-qīṭār alladī ḥalamat ummī bi-hi munḍu qara'at qišṣat Agātā Krīstī*) [The train my mother had dreamed of since she read the book by Agatha Christie].

The main topic in this chapter is the activities of her mother, and all are linked to books: histories and atlases (p.34), educational books (p.35), Rudolf Steiner (p.39), and detective stories (p. 38): "في كثير كتب بالمكتبة. ذلك كان الدواء للكثير من مشاكلها" (*Fī katīr kutub bi-l-maktaba. Ḍalika kāna l-dawā' li-l-kaṭīr min mašākili-hā*) [There are many books in the library. That was the medicine for many of her problems] (p. 33).

The transition to the next chapter is on page 48, comprised of four panels showing the mother in a classroom, in a car, on a street, and drinking coffee. From each panel grows a pointer or tail that creates a large speech balloon with 6 panels inside. The first panel shows the mother with her five children apparently arriving at an airport and being welcomed by three other people; panel 2 shows the same man from the airport and most likely the same two other people offering fruit to the four children who are thinking of cake; panel 3 shows a ship departing from Europe; panel 4 shows the ship arriving in Istanbul; panel 5 is somewhere in Istanbul, and fruit is on the floor; and panel 6 shows the children eating fruit. On the left side of the panel, a speech balloon orders the children to wash the food. On page 49, the author explains that her mother told a particular anecdote many times: the children didn't like the fruit in Germany, so after one month away, as they arrived in Turkey, they ate the fruit without washing it. On page 50, six drawings show a fridge and the mother eating grapes. These food drawings show a different technique.

مرّبي ولبن — أو كيف أصبحت أمّي لبنانية (*Murabbā wa-Laban aw kayfa aṣḥaḥat ummī lubnāniyya*) [Jam and Yoghurt or how my mother became Lebanese (2)]: page 51 to page 64. This chapter is about memory and the Lebanese Civil War. On page 51, we read: ذاكرتي تبدأ بعائلتي، وتحديداً معي أمّي. وعلمي هذا "مرّبي ولبن"، هو بحث مبني على الترابط بين ذكريات تأتي من حيث لا أدري حيناً، "وبعود إليّ بعد حدث أو من فكرة تشغلني في حين آخر" (*Dākiratī tabda' bi-'ā'ilatī wa-taḥdīdan ma' ummī. Wa-'amalī haḡā "Murabbā wa-Laban" huwwa baḡṭ mabnī 'alā l-tarābuṭ bayna dīkrayāt ta'tī min ḡayṭu lā adrī ḡīnan wa-ta'ūd ilayy ba'da ḡadaṭ aw min fikra taṣḡal-nī fī ḡīn āḡar*) [My memory begins with my family, more specifically with my mother. This work, *Jam and Yoghurt*, is a study based on the interdependence between memories of which I don't know where they came from, and other memories that came to my mind after a particular event or thought]. Merhej tries to answer the question of why her mother, being German, stayed in Lebanon and how she could live under what she calls on page 52: "التوافق السلمي بين المتناقضات" (*al-tawāfuq al-silmī bayna l-tanāquḡāt*) [peaceful compatibility between contradictions]. The book's title refers to when the author saw her mother eating yoghurt with marmalade because she was used to eating sweet yoghurt, not salted. Pages 53 and 54 are a link between the war in Lebanon and in Gaza in the hospitals. On the second panel, we see one a sign in a demonstration with "We are all Gaza" written on it.

The choice of living in Lebanon was not made as a one-off decision: "إنما مجموعة من" (*innamā maḡmū'a min al-qarārāt tatarākam yawmiyan wa-taḡid ummī li-nafsi-hā makānan fī-hā*) [but as a set of daily decisions in which my mother finds a place for herself] (p. 55), represented in the book as Lebanese objects (e.g., Paschal candles or a residence permit), as German objects (e.g., books or an advent calendar), and

as objects related to her medical profession, as well as the places in Lebanon where she went on excursions. The mother “لقد استغلت الاستثناء في الحرب، وجعلت منه تقليداً” (*la-qad istağallat al-istiṭnā' fī l-ḥarb wa-ḡa'alat min-hu taqlīdan*) [used the exception of the war to make it tradition] (p. 59).

As in Chapter 2, the question of what being a foreigner in Lebanon is is answered on page 63.

مرَبِّي ولبن — أو كيف أخبرت أمي القصص (*Murabbā wa-Laban aw kayfa aḥbarat ummī l-qīṣaṣ*) [Jam and Yoghurt or how my mother tells stories]: page 65 to page 80. This chapter details the influence that Merhej's mother had on her imagination, the way to tell stories and reality. It begins by recounting the animals that they had at home and the stories that the mother invented about the neighborhood cats. This leads the author to ask herself how imagination works and the role her mother played in the way she imagines the world: "خلال قراءتي، تذكرت كيف أتخيل في صغري العالم من حولي. وأروي مثلها، القصص بأدق تفاصيلها." (*Ḥilāl qirā'tī, taḍakkartu kayfa ataḥayyal fī siḡarī l-ʿālam min ḥawlī. Wa-arwī miṭla-hā, al-qīṣaṣ bi-adaqq tafāṣīli-hā*) [While I was reading, I remembered how I imagined the world around me as a child. And I would tell stories like my mother, very detailed] (p.70). Reading also expanded the imagination: the mother is “The Little Princess”, in reference to the book written by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. On page 75, the mother lives the story of *The Little Prince*: “هي الأميرة الصغيرة. جاءت إلى لبنان تاركةً: “وراءها كوكباً وزهرة” (*Hiyya l-amīra l-ṣaḡīra. Ġāʿat ilā Lubnān tārikatan warāʿ-hā kawkaban wa-zahra*) [She is The Little Princess. She came to Lebanon leaving behind her a planet and a flower]. This imagination was important for viewing the world from another perspective, especially the lack of water or beauty in daily life. But this fertile imagination produces too many images of war: “منذ تموز ٢٠٠٦، أرى أحياناً و فجأة الشارع يتحول إلى ساحة معركة حرب أهلية” (*Mundū tammūz 2006, arā aḥyānan wa-faḡʿatan al-šārīʿ yataḥawwal ilā sāḥat maʿrakat ḥarb ahliyya*) [Since July 2006, I sometimes see the street turn into the battleground of a civil war] (p.77).



Fig. 40: What is being a foreigner in Lebanon. *Jam and Yoghurt*, page 63.

It is noteworthy that throughout the whole book, neither the mother's given name nor surname is revealed. On page 74, the children ask, but no answer is given.

مرّبي و لين — أو كيف قرأت أمي قصتها (*Murabbā wa-Laban aw kayfa qara'at ummī qışşata-hā*) [Jam and Yoghurt or how my mother read her story]: page 81 to page 89. This short chapter deals with the emotional support the mother gives when the daughter (and author) experiences a bad psychological period in her life.

مرّبي و لين — أو كيف أصبحت أمي من ذوي الحاجات الخاصة (*Murabbā wa-Laban aw kayfa aşbaḥat ummī min dawī l-ḥāḡāt al-ḥāṣa*) [Jam and Yoghurt or how my mother became a person with special needs]: page 90 to page 100. On page 91, there is no text or caption; we can only suppose that the drawn photographs on the wall portray the mother's family, because we already know that the mother was married twice; on page 101, we see the same page structure, but with the siblings of the author. One fear of the mother that can be linked with

this lies in the secret that Mona, Lena's sister, revealed to her: "قالت لي منى أن سرّ أمي هو خوفها" (*Qālat lī Munā anna sirr ummī huwwa ḥawfu-hā l-šadīd min fikrat mawt ahli-hā, 'indamā kānat ṣagīra fī l-sinn*) [Mona told me a secret about my mother. When she was a child, she was scared that someone in her family would die] (p.94). The "special needs" of the mother are the fear of loss and the loss of vision that she suffered. Yet the mother is portrayed as a strong woman, despite her disabilities: "خلال عملها في الطب و التدريس، شددت أمي على ضرورة استخدام كلمة "معوق" بدلاً من "معاق"، ولاحقاً، اعتمدت تعبير "نوي الحاجات" (Hilāl 'amali-hā fī l-ṭibb wa-l-tadrīs, šaddadat ummī 'alā ḍarūrat istiḥdām kalimat "mu'awwaq" badalan min "mu'āq" wa-lāhiqan, i'tamadat ta'bīr "dawī l-ḥāḡāt al-ḥāṣa" badalan min "mu'awwaq") [During her work in medicine and teaching, my mother stressed the need to use the word 'disabled' instead of 'handicapped', and later the term 'people with special needs' instead of 'disabled'] (p.90).

Murabbā wa-Laban — 'ā'ilat šadā) [Jam and Yoghurt— Family Echo]: page 101 to page 120. This final chapter is about the decision made by the mother to live in Lebanon and her fears. Parallels are made between Germany during the Second World War and Lebanon: "كان ذلك في أثناء الحرب العالمية الثانية. عندما دمر القصف ٤٠ في المئة مدينتها" (*Kāna ḍalika fī l-ḥarb al-'alamiyya l-tāniyya. 'Indamā dammara l-qaṣf 40 fī l-mi'a madīnata-hā Hānūfir. Aḥbartu Munā anī aḍkur ḥawfan raḥīban wa-ḡubāran sabbaba-humā qanbala min qanābil ḥarb 'Awn fī l-ā'm 1989*) [It was during Second World War, when the bombing destroyed 40% of her city, Hannover. I told Mona then that I recall the intense fear and dust caused by one of the bombs in the Aoun war of 1989] (p. 105). The chapter addresses the mother's experiences in Europe in 1945, again in Beirut in 1982 (pp. 106-107), and the resemblances of both wars (pp. 108-109). The mother decided to stay in Beirut despite everything; this decision shaped both her life and her children's lives. However, there is a need to reveal secrets in order to move forward: "أسرار العائلات تتراكم عبر الأجيال و تتراكم معها الأمراض النفسية إن لم يرصدها أحد الأجيال، و يدرسها" (*Asrār al-'ā'ilāt tatarākam 'abr al-aḡyāl wa-tatarākam ma'-hā l-amrāḍ al-nafsiyya in lam yarṣud-hā aḥad al-aḡyāl wa-lam yadrus-hā wa-yafham-hā*) [Family secrets, if not observed, studied and comprehended, accumulate over generations and, with that, mental illness] (p.104).

Published in paperback, only the cover of the book is rendered in color. We see a blond woman putting a *tabbouleh* salad on a table. On the table, we find different Lebanese dishes and two bottles, one of arak and one of water. By unfolding the cover, we see five children helping to set the table and one man. Behind the seven figures is the sea and the skyline of a city, most probably Beirut. On the cover, we find the title, the subtitle written in

brackets, and the author's name. In the middle, "قصة مصوّرة" (*qiṣṣa muṣawwara*) [pictured story] is written, a term commonly used for comics. On the dust jacket, information about the author is given. The half-title contains the title and the dedication. The book has 120 pages, all of which are in black and white.

Jam and Yoghurt was published as short stories in the magazine *Samandal*⁸³ between 2007 and 2010, as the publisher data states.⁸⁴ Some chapters are published in *Samandal* issues 1, 2, 4, and 7, while pages 65 to 80 were published in *Samandal* issue 5. Some pages were added to *Samandal* original publications, such as page 13, which shows a portrait of the mother; page 14, with six panels portraying the mother as a doctor on the right and as a mother on the left; page 30, with the recipe for *Apfelstrudel*; and page 31, with the recipe for rice with curry. Page 46 shows one panel originally part of a page; page 48 is added to the original publication (vid. supra). Only in *Samandal* issue 4 does the lettering differ from that of the book. These new pages make the transition between chapters.



Fig. 41: Detail of *Jam and Yoghurt*

Fig. 41: *Jam and Yoghurt*, page 88. Release of emotional ballast.

IV. III. III. *Salam* — سلام

Salam [Peace] is the latest book published by Merhej (also featured in *Samandal* in 2019), with the collaboration of AFAC.⁸⁵ The book begins with a poem, on the left page in Arabic and on the right page in French translation. The poem is the only written expression in the

whole book, making its pages visual poetry. It focuses on the experience of war, which was everywhere in the author's life. Peace is always in danger: she finally knows peace at the age of 13, but at 18, the Qana massacre takes place;⁸⁶ at 24, 9/11 in New York; at 29, the 2006 War. She only really knew peace when she looked out over the Mediterranean Sea from Marseilles, which transported her in her imagination to a hopeful Beirut. But that sea of hope is the same sea that every year drowns people trying to reach Europe in search of peace, whom she calls "أولاد بحري المتوسط" — *des infants de ma méditerranée* (sic.) [children of my Mediterranean].

The work is not limited to personal experience: the sea and the city, war and peace, the individual and the community also appear as antithetical and central elements. *Salam* is a reflection on war in an indefinite time. Past and present, references to current events and history are illustrated, for example in the pages dedicated to the Crusades or the pages in which she imagines the child Aylan Kurdi⁸⁷ getting up from the beach and walking. Refugees, walls—the Great Wall of China, the Berlin Wall, the wall dividing Israel from the Palestinian Territories or the wall separating Mexico from the United States—and illustrations of cities that have suffered war are the elements that make up this work.

The fine, curved lines, typical of Merhej's style—sometimes in a surreal and dreamlike manner—follow one after the other like thoughts in the author's head. The pages can be read in any direction: from right to left, from left to right, or from top to bottom, conveying the idea of disorientation. The blue color, which reminds us of the sea, in contrast to the black-and-white illustration, is an antithesis between the hope that the sea represents and the dangers that it also holds.

IV. III. IV. Importance of Lena Merhej

Lena Merhej uses the graphic novel as a method of therapy for herself as well as a kind of group therapy for her entire generation. This is evident in her autobiographical works. But the stories can be extrapolated to other people's lives, highlighting the importance of mental health and confronting trauma. Merhej also uses graphic storytelling to raise awareness about different topics, especially feminist issues and current events, such as refugees, war, or her active role in the 2019 Revolution. She has been using the social network Instagram to publish several illustrations whose protagonists, whom she calls *بطل-بطلة من الثورة* (*baṭal – baṭala min al-ṭawra*) [hero/heroine of the revolution] portray the essence of the 2019 Revolution: the frustration of the common people with the Lebanese ruling class.

Merhej is committed to the development of comics in the region and has organized and led several meetings for the diffusion of comics. She also appears to be well connected with non-governmental institutions, such as Oxfam.

IV. IV. Zeina Abirached — زينة أبي راشد

Beirut, 1981

Zeina Abirached studied graphic design at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA), before moving to Paris at the age of 23 to study at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs.⁸⁸ Since 2004, she has lived and worked in Paris. Abirached employs various artistic methods in her comics that allow her works to be classified as non-fictional autobiographical narrative. Her comics succeeded in creating an independent autobiographical perspective. She has published four graphic novels by Cambourakis: *[Beyrouth] Catharsis* (2006), *38, Rue Youssef Semaani* (2006), *Mourir Partir Revenir. Le jeu des hirondelles* (2007), and *Je me souviens. Beyrouth* (2008); and two graphic novels by Castermann *Le Piano Oriental* (2015) and *Prendre refuge* (2018). She has illustrated the anthology *Douze écrivains libanais* (2007),⁸⁹ the soap novel *Agatha de Beyrouth* (2011), children's books such as *Mouton* (2013), and cookbooks including *Manger libanais* (2017)⁹⁰ and *Les recettes culte - Istanbul* (2018). For analysis of her work, we will consider her first published books, *[Beyrouth] Catharsis* and *38, Rue Youssef Semaani*, then her most acclaimed works, *Mourir Partir Revenir. Le jeu des hirondelles* and *Je me souviens. Beyrouth*, translated into multiple languages, and finally her two latest works, *Le Piano Oriental* and *Prendre refuge*, as well as the illustrations of some of her books, allowing us to trace the evolution of her drawing and her narrative.⁹¹

IV. IV. I. Abirached's first works

[Beyrouth] Catharsis was designed and published as part of the project "Chez Moi, Chez Toi" at the ALBA atelier research workshop in 2002 and reissued in 2006 in Paris by Cambourakis. Within its pages, Abirached describes the impasse into which she was born. Her street is a dead-end, because at the end of her street ran the so-called "Green Line" that divided Beirut into east Beirut and west Beirut. We encounter the salesman Halim, the seamstress Baron, the baker Samira, and she tells what she remembers of them: the sweets, the sound of the violin, the thyme bread . . . One day, her helium balloon crosses the Green Line. At this moment, the author says that she knew that there was a war, but that she could only imagine it as in a cowboys and Indians film. When the dividing wall disappeared, she could make the whole city her own, not just her street, and she could stop believing in cowboys and Indians movies. This is the first example of one of the characteristics of Abirached's work: the small childhood memories centered on her street in

Beirut—as we will see in the following work—and that because she did not understand the war due to her age, she transformed it into a game.

Despite its brevity, *38, Rue Youssef Semaani* is profound and rich in allusions. The characters represent archetypes of everyday life in a Beirut neighborhood. The scenes depicted are interwoven and juxtaposed. Each individual person bears typical physical features but is also represented by certain psychological traits. These are expressed through their gestures, little hints, and quirky idiosyncrasies, as well as personal preferences for which the respective person is known in the street they live in. In describing each character, the author repeatedly uses the verbs *aimer*, *aimer pas*, or *adorer*. Most of the characters also appear in her later works. The characters are an old lady who watches what is happening in the street through the window; the caretaker Oscar Daoud; a woman who is unhappily in love with one of the neighbors; a ladies' hairdresser; and Ernst Chalita, an elegant man who suffers from complexes because of the dandruff that falls out of his hair and remains on his Sunday suit: “Son grand problème, c'est ses pellicules qui lui pourrissent la vie et ruinent son costume du dimanche qu'il porte tous les jours” (p.3). The daily routine of the apartment building is portrayed through the actions of the individuals: a neighbor plays the same tune on the piano over and over again, getting on the neighbors' nerves; another neighbor hangs her laundry on the line, getting the other housemates' belongings wet; a woman invites the neighbors over for coffee; a man makes clattering noises as he walks, which can be heard throughout the building. Animals, such as a bird or a cat, also find their place in the description. All the characters who live in the same building are connected to each other in one way or another through everyday stories and anecdotes.

Three other figures appear in the text: a secretary, an old-fashioned telephone with a dial—which also has feelings—and Désiré Aflatone, the secretary's boss. He is portrayed without eyes and only dimly as a black shadow. What business he is in is not further explained in the texts, but he seems to be an estate agent. He is a modern person, talks on an ultra-modern mobile phone, and speaks in a language that no one understands. When he laughs, the whole building shakes. In this way, real estate speculation—a major problem in Beirut—is symbolized. In recent years, speculators have deliberately demolished many buildings, especially in Achrafieh (east Beirut), in order to build new, modern apartment buildings. This has led to the loss of historic buildings and thus to the transformation of the old Beirut cityscape. The name Aflatone⁹² could also be a reference to Plato (in Arabic أفلاطون (*Aflāṭūn*)). For Plato, the mind is the only way to know reality. But the mind is of no use if one does not understand the language of the other person. The fact that the figure of

Aflatone is only drawn schematically could also be a reference to Plato's allegory of the cave.

It remains open as to what time the individual episodes of the comic are set. The characters seem to have come from a bygone era. Their clothes and the painted objects, such as the telephone, seem old-fashioned. When exactly the action takes place is secondary. The street scene of 38, *Youssef Semaani* is nowadays completely different from the one drawn by Abirached.

This book traces everyday life in Beirut in small episodes. The author thus manages to create a sociological portrait based on a microcosm. Because there is no clear temporal line of action, Abirached succeeds in thematizing fragmentary memory. The deliberate construction and reconstruction of childhood memories is used here as an aesthetic device. In this booklet, special attention is paid to the paratextual elements. The book's drawings are black and white with clear, carefully drawn lines. The cover of the book shows a street, the setting of the story. In this street, low family houses in traditional construction appear in front and modern high-rise buildings in the second row. On the horizon, an open, homogeneous surface can be seen, presumably the sea. The houses in the foreground show the typical local architecture found in many neighborhoods of Beirut: houses with and without pointed roofs, with rectangular windows with arches, latticework on the ground floor, and wooden shutters. In front of the house are facades with plants in flowerpots and fruit trees (a fig tree, vines, a citrus tree); fruits of an aubergine tree dangle from the roof of a house, in between clotheslines with laundry hung out to dry. Some of the plants are planted in canisters or tin cans.

The comic reaches the reader in an envelope. This suggests that the content is something very personal, intimate or private—like a letter addressed to the reader. The cover of the comic itself shows a close-up of a row of houses, while the back cover shows another row of houses with further details, such as a cat on the roof, windows with curtains, and so on. Opening the cover reveals that the comic has the format of a triptych. On the inside page, the view zooms in on a part of the streetscape: a tree standing between two houses. To its left you see a window, to its right a palm tree, a bird, and the typical windows with arches. Between the buildings and behind the tree, the sea appears again. Since the booklet has the format of a triptych, one has to open it to read it—similar to a letter—and then close it again.



Fig. 42: Rue Youssef Semaani

Fig. 42: View of Rue Youssef Semaani and view of the building. Picture taken by the author in February 2020.

IV. IV. II. Internationally acclaimed books and the Lebanese Civil War

The title *Mourir, partir, revenir. Le jeu des hirondelles* (2007) refers to a piece of graffiti to be found in the book.⁹³ The book tells the story of an evening in the Abiracheds' house at the time of the civil war, when the children were alone. Their parents have left to visit their grandmother, who lives on the other side of the demarcation line ("Green Line") that separates the territories of the opposing Christian and Muslim militias during the civil war. Due to the bombardment of Beirut, the parents are stuck in the grandmother's house and cannot return to the children. The narrator and her brother are looked after by the neighbor and play children's games, oblivious to what is happening around them. In the story, several neighbors gradually come into the flat and relate what they experienced before and during the war. On the one hand, the whole story is about the restrictions that the war brought on people's lives, but on the other hand, it is about the hopes and aspirations of the friends and neighbors. After an indeterminate time, the parents also return. The book ends with the departure of Zeina and her family into exile. On the last pages, we see how the letters of Zeina's name turn into the silhouette of a sailing boat.

In *Mourir, partir, revenir. Le jeu des hirondelles*, the cover is again in black and white. It shows a group of people and cars in the background and the horizon of the city. In the center of the picture is the narrator's mother, who puts her arm around the author's shoulder as a young girl. On the right is the brother in a t-shirt with a character from Charles M. Schulz's *The Peanuts*, with the father behind him. It is worth mentioning that the respective editions of the book have different covers depending on the country of publication. The English, Spanish, and Italian editions use a colored cover: the first two are yellow, the latter is pink. The covers also differ: the Spanish and Italian editions show only the nuclear family. In the Italian edition, the parents have a happy expression on their faces, whereas in the Spanish edition they look worried (see Fig. 43).

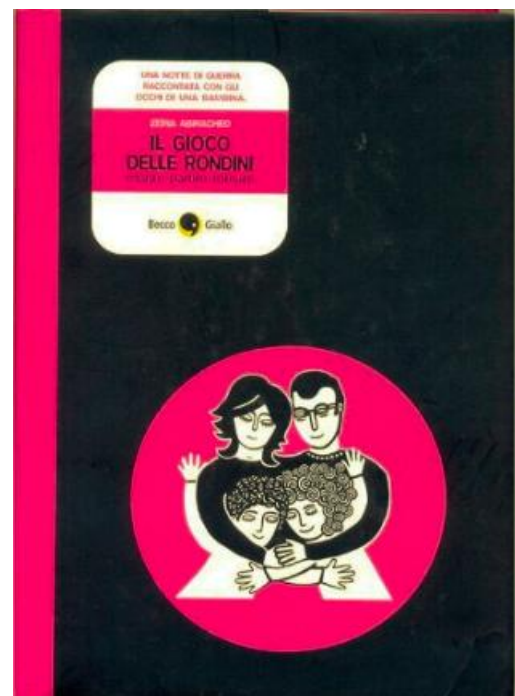
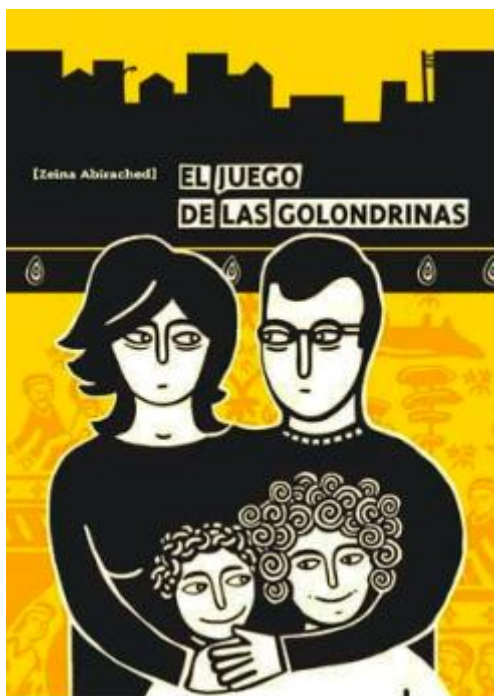
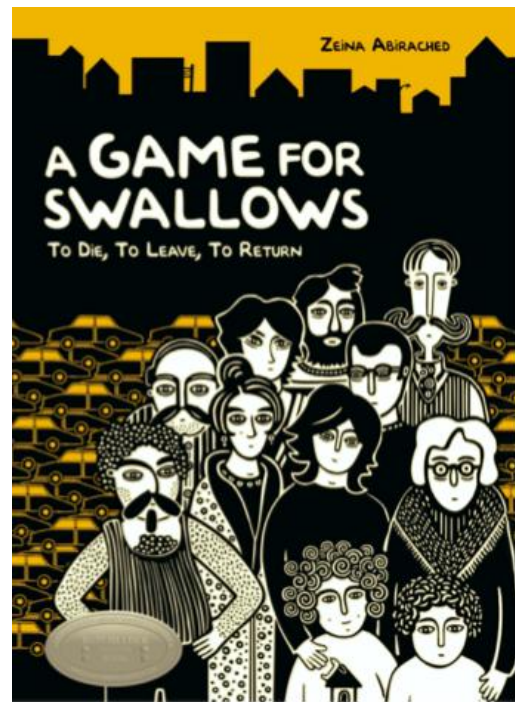
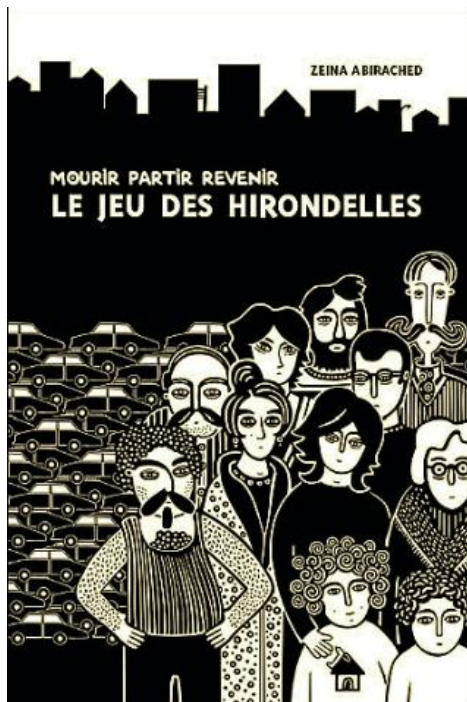


Fig. 43: Different covers of *Le Jeu des Hirondelles*

The 95 pages of *Je me souviens. Beyrouth* (2008) consist of three parts. Pages 7 to 49 are devoted to memories of childhood during the time of the armed conflict. Pages 50 and 51 are black. The pictures on pages 52 to 55 have a completely different style: they are drawn in white ink on a black background. From page 56 to page 82, the memories of exile and the rediscovery of the city after the war are recounted. In the last part, two white pages (pp. 83-84) introduce Zeina's departure for France. The feelings that the war triggered in 2006 are described. A board represents the exile, followed by black pages. These force the reader to pause their reading and elicit reflection on leaving home. The childlike images convey the authenticity of the feelings processed in the work; they are likely real images of the author from her childhood. The structure of the book allows readers to read interactively and non-linearly. One can open the book on any page, as each memory is unconnected to the others.

Je me souviens. Beyrouth presents a self-portrait of the author, who can be seen on the cover, at the bottom right of the page. She is in the middle of a crowd of people walking through the streets of a city full of construction cranes. The people have different faces: some are drawn with eyes and mouths, others remain shadowy. Some of the characters with detailed faces are already known by the reader from *Le jeu des hirondelles*, such as Choukri, Khaled, Monsieur Chalita, and the old lady Anhalá. More characters with drawn faces are introduced further on in the book. On closer inspection, the faces of the Beatles can also be spotted in the crowd rolling through the city—presumably Beirut. They are joined by figures from the Japanese series *Mazinger Z* and the likeness of the French author Georges Perec (1936-1982). That the author of *W or Childhood Memory* appears here is certainly no coincidence: Perec, like Abirached, reveals [reconstructed] fragments of his own childhood memories. The memory contents gathered here appear tragic due to the state of the city. At the same time, they are happy moments in which the author is able to forget the war. The tension between a hostile and threatening outside world and the memories of her childhood house—her home—as a place of intimacy and protective security is palpable. The author creates a panorama of her (happy) memories in individual images.

In both books, Abirached develops a retrospective story. The narrator reports on a significant moment in the context of the civil war and the attempt to live normally despite the circumstances.

IV. IV. III. The last two published books

Le Piano Oriental (2015) tells the story of Abdalah Kamanja, based on Abirached's great grandfather Abdalah Chahine, a music lover, who between the 1950s and 1960s built a

piano that is capable of combining the semitones of western music with the quarter tones of Arabic music, an “oriental piano”. It is an achievement that obsesses him, for which he travels to Vienna to market it and make it known to the whole world. The setting for this story is the city of Beirut in its golden age, with its inhabitants, its customs, and its landscapes. At the same time, the autobiographical touch is strengthened by the parallel presentation of the experiences of the young Zeina Abirached: her childhood, her family, her learning Arabic and French, and her departure to Europe. She exchanges Lebanon for Paris, leaving her home and family at the age of 23 and experiencing culture shock at firsthand.

The author portrays Lebanon before the war and her attempts to be a bridge between West and East, using the history of her family through the metaphor of the piano. Abirached tries to be an “oriental piano”, feeling Lebanese and French and not wanting to give up any of her identities or languages. The author constructs a story that does not directly address political ideas, but does not avoid mentioning war or the clash of cultures.

In this book, the drawing creates meaning as much as the text, allowing even the reader to perceive a difference between text and drawing. The composition of the book also succeeds in creating meaning: for example, pages 134 and 135 show a close-up of hands playing the piano. These pages open up, allowing the reader to “play” the piano and to listen to it. The use of onomatopoeia is remarkable, and because the theme of *Le Piano Oriental* is music, the continuous presence of sounds and small noises of everyday life forms a kind of soundtrack that accompanies the reader throughout the book and seems to draw the sounds (see Fig. 44). Also portrayed are “tous les grands musiciens du monde arabe”, such as Mohammed Abdel Wahab, Sabah, the Rahbani brothers, and Fairuz, among others who want to see Abdallah Kamanja's piano (pp. 174-176).

Zeina Abirached's last published work, *Prendre Refuge* (2018), was scripted by the writer Mathias Énard. In this graphic novel, two stories intertwine: on the one hand, the story of Karsten, a German architect who falls in love with the Syrian refugee Neyla in Berlin in 2016, and on the other hand, the lesbian love story between writers Annemarie Schwarzenbach and Ella Maillart in Afghanistan in 1939, at the statues of the Buddhas of Bamiyan—Buddhas that were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. Neyla, arriving from Aleppo, has left Syria because of the war and has no news on her family; Annemarie and Ella have left Europe just as the Second World War is about to start. Neyla's story is about the difficulties for a foreigner arriving in Germany, her problems with the language and the German bureaucracy, as well as the memories she has of her hometown and the nightmares she has of the war in Syria. It is also about the impossibility of maintaining a romantic

relationship in a city like Berlin, where she has come in search of refuge, but does not feel at home.

The two writers meet the archaeologists Ria and Joseph Hackim in Bragan, and they fall in love with each other. However, they hear on the radio that Germany has invaded Poland, and although they do not know what France and Britain will do, they have to leave for Kabul. The two stories are linked not only by the theme of refuge but also by the design of the book. Karsten reads a book called *Prendre Refuge* that tells the story of Annemaria and Ella. Neyla is an astronomer and Annemarie and Ella look at the constellations Orion and Scorpio. Both stories are based on issues of complicated love in turbulent times, as well as refugees, war, pain, anguish, loneliness, tolerance, destruction, and reconstruction.

In addition to the reference to one of the episodes narrated by Ella Maillart in *La Voie Cruelle* (*The Cruel Way* in English), the text contains parts of a poem by Nizar Qabbani,⁹⁴ which Neyla recites and teaches to Karsten.



Fig. 44: Detail of *Le Piano Oriental*

Fig. 44: In this double page (96-97), we see a self-portrait of Zeina Abirached knitting a scarf made of Arabic letters and letters of the Latin alphabet. The caption reads: “Je tricote depuis l'enfance une langue faite de deux fils fragiles et précieux” [I knit from childhood a language made from two fragile and precious yarns]. The entire background is filled with the onomatopoeia “clic-clic-clic”, imitating the sound of knitting needles.

IV. IV. IV. Importance of Zeina Abirached

Using an elementary stroke technique, Zeina Abirached tries to reinforce the sense of spontaneity. Moreover, the use of black and white in the narrative reinforces the subjective power of these symbolic approximations of reality. In addition to these stylistic features, other formal resources are associated with the textual order.

The panels and their arrangement determine the grammar of the narrative. The complexity of the relationships between the panels keeps the reader thinking. The layout, the text panels, the size, their arrangement, the thickness of the lines between the panels or their absence, and the temporal relationship (scene-to-scene, action-to-action, ellipsis, etc.) are parameters that determine the structure of the comic. In Abirached's works, where the aim is to provide a detailed and informative story, the narrative structure is rigid, progressing quickly. The detailed narrative varies with large panels or peculiar shapes at moments of particular emotional intensity, always accompanied by other senses, such as hearing, smell, and taste.

V. Conclusion

The narrative level of all the graphic narrations explored in this chapter is determined by the genre's inherent hybrid nature of language and drawing; with the aim of illustrating this, *Samandal* was born. Words, like pictures, are signs with symbolic meaning (icons) that serve to represent aspects of the real world. Words, however, are primarily purely abstract and even their graphic representation (writing) does not usually influence their content. There is no predetermined connection between a word and its meaning (the content it represents). In contrast, drawings that aim at recognition always rely on their representation,⁹⁵ on more or less pronounced similarities with the content they represent and communicate.⁹⁶ Therefore, the manner of representation and the format (more or less iconic, more or less realistic) may have an influence on the meaning of the content conveyed. The degree of abstraction, richness of detail, attention to detail or exaggerated realism, clear or blurred lines, and the choice of colors all influence the aesthetic reception by the viewer.

As a consequence, it can be stated that a comic does not offer a true-to-life representation of reality. By simplifying the graphic representation of stereotypes, it is easier for the reader to empathize with the characters and understand their situation.⁹⁷ On the other hand, the abstraction of the comic also promotes the effect of generalization, through which each sketched figure loses its individuality in favor of a global symbolic meaning, as may be seen in the examples of visual poetry published in *Samandal*. Additionally, the persons

depicted become archetypes. In contrast to photography, the comic draws the private tragedy as a universal one that concerns each of us. As can be seen through the example of these four Lebanese authors, a simple style can have deeper meaning and many different sources and relations.

Mazen Kerbaj, Barrack Rima, Lena Merhej, and Zeina Abirached use various forms of artistic expression, setting themselves apart from their predecessors while still being influenced by them. In Lebanese comics, a connection has been established between visual art and adult themes as well as a certain literary style. This has led to a fruitful outcome in which an appropriation of autobiographical subject matter takes place through the narrative technique of comics. The comic allows the authors to tell everyday stories with an unusual intensity in its narrative sequences. Their confidential messages gradually assemble into an intimate self-portrait. This is reinforced by the authors' ability to create icons and prototypes of Lebanese society in their works. They achieve this through a simplification of style, allowing the reader to slip into the skin of the protagonists so that reading these (foreign) memories becomes a vivid experience. This visual and direct access to a foreign life reality transforms the reader's private and, at the same time, distanced perspective into an immediate entry point to the story. The autobiographical level makes it possible to tell historical events through the eyes of contemporary witnesses.

The effect is intensified by the graphic representation in the drawings, whether they are longer works or comic strips. The plot of the comics takes place in the context of Lebanon and the Lebanese. Historical events are told from an individual, local point of view. Their aim is not a balanced, external, factual global historiography of what happened, but rather a subjective, limited, and thus all the more personal and sincere version of history. All four of these authors succeed in appearing in international anthologies, are translated into different languages, and contribute to the fact that what happens in Lebanon is not only being talked about within Lebanon's borders, but that individual fragments of the Mediterranean country's history are also becoming known beyond it.

¹ Tabachnick 2017, 1.

² <https://samandalcomics.org/about/> [last accessed 28th July 2021]

³ Khoury -Jad 1980

⁴ Ghaibeh and Mercier (eds.) 2017, 12-21.

⁵ *ibid*, 17.

⁶ *ibid*, 40 to 125.

⁷ <https://publishingperspectives.com/2016/02/women-in-comics/> [last accessed 28th July 2021]

⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35240858> [last accessed 28th July 2021]

⁹ The Angoulême International Comics Festival is a comics festival—a meeting of authors, publishers, and comic book readers—in the French city of Angoulême. It constitutes an important reference for Franco-Belgian, European, and world comics. It is the third biggest comics festival in the world. In 2018, this festival hosted the exhibition ‘Nouvelle génération, la bande dessinée arabe aujourd’hui’.
<http://www.citebd.org/spip.php?article9174> [last accessed 28th July 2021]

¹⁰ https://www.libe.ma/La-bande-dessinee-arabe-fait-peau-neuve_a94716.html [last accessed 28th July 2021]

¹¹ Chute 2010.

¹² Høigilt 2019.

¹³ Khouri 2017.

¹⁴ Authors in *Généalogie* are: from “here” (Lebanon): Jana Traboulsi, Nawal Abboud, Hatem Imam, Laure Ghorayeb, Mazen Kerbaj, Lena Merhej, Barrack Rima, Akram Zaatari, Joseph Kai, Ghadi Ghosn and Zeina Abirached. From “there”: Migo and Shennawy from Egypt, Alex Baladi (Switzerland), Ahmed Bouanani and Zineb Benjellou (Morocco), Paula Bulling (Germany), Frank Vega (Argentina), Golo and Baudoin (France), Nawel Rentrad (Algeria), Louis Joos (Belgium).

¹⁵ With Michèle Standjofski (LB) / Paul Rey (FR) / Barrack Rima (LB) / Joseph Kai (LB) / Gregory Buchakjian (LB) / Zeina Bassil (LB) / Raphaëlle Macaron (LB) / Vincent Longhi (FR) / Alex Baladi (CH) / Jonathan Blezard (BE) / Cynthia Merhej (LB) / Karen Keyrouz (LB) / Lena Merhej (LB) / Migo (EG) / Hatem Imam (LB) / Jana Traboulsi (LB).

¹⁶ Thomas Azuélou (FR) / Zineb Benjelloun (MA) / Jonathan Blezard (BE) / Paula Bulling (DE) / Jen- nifer Camper (USA) / Mery Cuesta (ESP) / Hélène Georges (FR) / Ghadi Ghosn (LB) / Noha Habai- eb (TN) / Abir Gasmi (TN) / Kamal Hakim (LB) / Nour Hifawi Fakhouri (LB) / Joseph Kai (LB) / Karen Keyrouz (LB) / Omar Khouri (LB) / Mai Korayem (EG) / Mohamad Kraytem (LB) / Raphaëlle Macaron (LB) / Lisa Mandel (FR) / Lena Merhej (LB) / Helena Nehme (LB) / Manuel Maria Almereyda Perrone (CH) / Hashem Reslan (LB) / Barrack Rima (LB) / Othman Selmi (TN) / Lara Tabet (LB) / Jana Traboulsi (LB) / Ala Wazni Fai (LB)

¹⁷ Joseph Kai (LB) / Barrack Rima (LB) / Raphaëlle Macaron (LB) / Lena Merhej (LB) / Alex Baladi (CH) / Edmond Baudoin (FR) / Carla Habib (LB) / Tracy Chahwan (LB) / Fouad Mezher (LB) / Ghadi Ghosn (LB) / Hatem Imam (LB) / Mazen Kerbaj (LB) / Omar Khouri (LB) / Vincent Longhi (FR) / Charles Nogier (FR) / Martin Sztajman (FR) / Paul Rey (FR)

¹⁸ Adeline Rosenstein (CH) / Alex Baladi (CH) / Samir Youssef (LB) / Abir Gasmi (TN).

¹⁹ Cécile Koepfli (CH) / Maurane Mazars / JM Bertoyas / Pierre Schilling / Nour Hifaoui (LB) / Mo- hamad Koraytem (LB) / Raphaëlle Macaron (LB) / Jana Traboulsi (LB) / Lena Merhej (LB) / Tracy Chahwan (LB) / Joseph Kai (LB) / Ghadi Ghosn (LB) / Aude Barrio de Sousa / Andreas Kündig + Ibn al Rabin / Karen Keyrouz (LB) / Alex Chauvel (FR).

²⁰ *Hunna* was written and drawn by Lena Merhej and inked by Karen Keyrouz, Nour Hifaoui, Lena Merhej, and Azza Abo Rabieh, with the participation of Tracy Chahwan and Joseph Kai.

²¹ Major and Kerbaj 2018

²² Further to the aforementioned work *La Bande Dessinée Arabe Aujourd’hui*, in which the experimental approach of Kerbaj’s comics is highlighted, we can mention *My Cloud*; his sarcastic humor is represented in *Cola*; and the intimacy he presents in some of his works is represented in *Lettre à la mère*. These three works present an accurate summary of the author’s approach to these subjects.

The anthology *La Nouvelle Bande Dessinée Arabe: Short* focuses on the author’s style, publishing two of his works: the filigree style used in collaboration with his mother, the artist Laure Ghorayeb, in *Demain ne viendra pas*, originally published in *Samandal Généalogie* (2014); and his cartoonish style, as in *Histoires vraies de réfugiés syriens*, originally published in *Strapazin* 2017 and in *Politique*. (Shennawy, Mohamed (2018): *La Nouvelle Bande Dessinée Arabe: Short*. Arles: Actes Sud BD)

In *Don’t panic, I’m Islamic*, as it is a publication aiming to use humor to break stereotypes in the West about the Arab Muslim world, the chosen work is three panels of *Cola*. (Gaspard 2017)

²³ We can mention exhibitions at the Sursock Museum, such as the exhibition in 2019, 'Laure et Mazen: Correspondance(s)', also with Laure Ghorayeb. In 2009, they were winners of the Jury Prize of the Salon d'Automme (cf. von Maltzahn, Nadia "Guiding the artist and the public? The Salon d'Automme at Beirut's Sursock Museum" (p. 277) in Maltzahn, Nadia von, and Monique Bellan (2020) *The Art Salon in the Arab Region: Politics of Taste Making*. Baden-Baden: Ergon Verlag). The last exhibition took place in Berlin at the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, from 28th February to 16th August 2020, which focused on Kerbaj's diaries and his latest work, *Antoine*.

²⁴ المسلخ هو صحن طائر ألف لنشر ما لا يُنشر على الساحة الفنية اللبنانية
(*Al-Maslah huwwa ṣaḥn ṭā'ir ullifa li-naṣr mā lā yunṣar 'alā l-sāḥa l-fanniyya l-lubnāniyya*) [The slaughterhouse is a flying saucer created to spread what is not published on the Lebanese art scene]
<https://almaslakh.bandcamp.com> [last accessed 17th June 2021]

²⁵ The piece straddles the line between performance, theater, and video art. The play is named after the growling sound in the stomach caused by gas and flowing through the body; it appears to be about disappointment and failure, about three people who have succumbed to the sad reality of our time. Yet the piece is actually an attempt to grasp failure and, as a form of resistance, to take it to an extreme, demonstrating the state of today's world.
Borborygmus was shown at the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt am Main on the 22nd and 23rd May 2019 and I had the opportunity to attend as an audience member. The premiere took place at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (USA) and it has been shown in Berlin and in Vienna. It was a co-production between the Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin) and the Walker Art Center.

²⁶ A short film directed by the author himself about one imaginary day in the life of Mazen Kerbaj, a musician and trumpet player, presented as a work for the Counterflow Festival. This festival is based in Glasgow (UK) and promotes experimental music. Further information can be found at:
<https://counterflows.com/commission/mazen-kerbaj-the-musical/> [last accessed 17th June 2021]

²⁷ *Mein Vater ist nicht Adolf Hitler* was a collaboration between Deutschland Funkkultur and the Swiss comic magazine *Strapazin*, aired in June 2021. The idea was to make a radio drama out of comics, such as with Barrack Rima's *Die Höllenfahrt*. In *Mein Vater ist nicht Adolf Hitler*, Kerbaj deals with the parallel between Beirut and both his father's life and his own. The play begins with the Lebanese national anthem and then explains that in the 1980s the country and its symbols were still respected. In April 2021, Kerbaj returns to Lebanon and spends two weeks at his parents' place to work on his the archive of his father, Antoine Kerbaj. It is a text in which he emphasizes the admiration he feels for his father and how the archive reactivates the memory that takes him back to his childhood, considered as a happy one, but marked by the war. One of the roles played by Antoine Kerbaj was Hitler's role in Bertolt Brecht's *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui*. As a child and an adult, Mazen considers that his father's voice makes it impossible for Antoine to perform his role as Adolf Hitler well, although he admired the way his father played the role, for which Antoine was inspired more by Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* than by the historical character. The father now suffers from memory loss and has forgotten his success, as has the city of Beirut. Mazen can help neither his father nor his city and all he can do is preserve his memory, for it is the memory of the famous actor and the memory of the city.

²⁸ Kerbaj 2000

²⁹ Kerbaj 2005

³⁰ Kerbaj 2006

³¹ Kerbaj 2007

³² Kerbaj 2017

³³ Kerbaj 2019

³⁴ Kerbaj 2014

³⁵ Available at <https://kerbajdiaries.com> [last accessed 28th June 2021]

³⁶ Kerbaj 2011

³⁷ Kerbaj 2010

³⁸ Strip available under: https://al-akhbar.com/Last_Page/119088 [last accessed 28th June 2021]

³⁹ *Posh women* taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/145018/تجر-القصة-هذه Cartoon published 20th February 2009
Mother and son taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Last_Page/119088 Cartoon published 8th January 2009
Two young boys taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/160444/تجر-القصة-هذه Published 23rd August 2008
Taxi driver taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/154941/تجر-القصة-هذه Published 24th October 2008
Phoenicians taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/138284/تجر-القصة-هذه Published 3rd April 2009
Sky taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/133823/تجر-القصة-هذه Cartoon published on 10th June 2009
Palestinians taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Last_Page/119088 Cartoon published on 8th January 2010
Palestinian taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/139416/تجر-القصة-هذه Published 17th April 2009
Mini Market Vendor taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/145018/تجر-القصة-هذه Published 20th February 2009
Beach posers taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/153050/تجر-القصة-هذه Published 3rd October 2008
Television taken from: https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/136630/تجر-القصة-هذه Published 15th May 2009
[All links last accessed 28th June 2021]

⁴⁰ Kerbaj 2019

⁴¹ https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_People/133823/تجر-القصة-هذه [last accessed 28th June 2021]. In the French version, we find this strip on page 50. On page 48, where the posh women are talking about Israeli spies, the last speech bubble contains some Hebrew letters and a footnote explaining: “Remarque à l'intention des Forces de Sécurité Intérieure (section Renseignements Généraux): L'écriture hébraïque ci-dessus a été copié d'Internet. Le dessinateur tient à préciser qu'il ne connaît cette langue ni de près ni de loin.” [Note to the Internal Security Forces (General Intelligence section): the above Hebrew script was copied from the internet. The designer wishes to make it clear that he does not know this language by any means.] (Kerbaj 2011:48)

⁴² Kerbaj 2016

⁴³ Grandpapier is a project by L'employé du moi, a comic publisher based in Brussels (Belgium), which collaborated with *Samandal* on volume 7. As a result of a “24 Hours Comics Challenge”, a 24-page comic has to be written, drawn, and completed. These challenges serve to bring together different graphics and narratives, and are a pretext to gather individual or collective experiences.

⁴⁴ Kerbaj 2013

⁴⁵ Choi and Barou 2010.

⁴⁶ *Lapin* is one of the journals of L'Association, a French publisher of alternative comics. Between 2000 and 2003, it published *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, an autobiographical black-and-white comic book series about the author's childhood in Iran, and is nowadays recognized by the general public.

⁴⁷ World War III Illustrated is an American comics anthology magazine known for its left-wing political stance. Each issue has a topic. Issue number 42, in which Flap Flap Blues Revisited was published, is entitled Tahrir: Liberation from the Mideast to the Midwest and was dedicated to the Arab Spring. (Tobacman 2011).

⁴⁸ Kerbaj, Mazen. 2004. *24 poèmes*. Beirut: La CD-Thèque.

⁴⁹ Kerbaj, Mazen. 2019. *Antoine: Chapitre 1: Le Destin Arabe*. [Beirut]: *Samandal*.

⁵⁰ Kerbaj, Mazen. 2019. *Antoine: Chapitre 2: Rue Hamra*. [Beirut]: *Samandal*.

⁵¹ Kerbaj, Mazen. 2020. *Antoine: Chapitre 3: Les Évènements*. [Beirut]: *Samandal*.

⁵² Orly's audience was mainly young adults and AUB students. Its billboard mostly displayed comedies and performances, such as plays with music composed by Ziad Rahbani.

⁵³ According to Imad Kozem (2017:104): “The Horseshoe, [was] a rallying point of the ‘bohemian’ crowd. Art connoisseurs, intellectuals, and young adults formed the main clientele of this American diner-style cafe. A group of artists created a circle called the ‘Artists of the Horseshoe Café’; they gathered there and discussed of current art and artistic techniques.” Kozem 2017,104.

⁵⁴ The Ain el-Remmaneh bus incident happened four hours after the assassination attempt of Lebanese Phalangist/Kataeb party leader Pierre Gemayel and the murder of four Christians. Kataeb party militias attacked a bus whose passengers were residents of the Tel al-Zaatar Palestinian refugee camp. 28 people were killed in the attack. This attack and the bus, which has become a symbol of the start of the civil war, is depicted in other works, such as Barrack Rima's *Beyrouth Bye Bye* and *Bye Bye Babylon* by Lamia Ziadé. It has also appeared in cinema, including in the film *West Beirut* (1998) by director Ziad Doueiri.

⁵⁵ Al-Maghout (1934-2006) is known for the revolution he instigated in Arabic poetry by using free verse. In the words of Kamal Abu-Deeb: "al-Māghūt has also published fiction, drama and essays, all possessed by the same spirit: a tireless search for freedom, a cutting wit, a sharp eye for detail and dark— at times surrealist— yet humorous vision of reality"

Meisami 2010, 488.

⁵⁶ Rima 2013

Rima 2015

Both editions are printed on Splendorgel Ivory 140 gr. paper with screen-printed covers on Old Mill 350 gr. cardboard.

⁵⁷ The whole series is available under: <https://drawingthetimes.com/story/sociologia-2/> [last accessed 22nd March 2021]

⁵⁸ Rima 1998

⁵⁹ Specifically in the collection *Corazón*, whose aim is to publish less commercial albums and alternative works, as well as fanzines.

⁶⁰ يوسف شاهين [Youssef Chahine] (1996-2008) was an Egyptian filmmaker known for films like *Cairo Station* (1958), a classic of Egyptian cinema.

⁶¹ Rima 2017

⁶² This song is about illusions (reaching the moon with one's hands) and reality (the impossibility of doing so). فيروز [Fairuz] sings to take the moon for her lover, but she is afraid that a stranger in the neighborhood can do that. She talks about a desire which cannot be fulfilled because the moon cannot be reached. By the end of the song, it becomes clear that her darling and she share the same desire. Strangers can take over the traditional neighborhoods and build new skyscrapers as high as they want, but they will never reach the moon, i.e., they will never fulfill that desire.

Christopher Stone (2008: 139-169) claims that Fairuz embodies the metaphor for the nation and a key role in the nation-building process, as she summarizes the role of gender in that process, citing other scholars. (vid. Stone 2008).

⁶³ فاطمة أحمد كمال شاکر [Fatma Ahmed Kamal Shaker], known as Shadia, was an iconic actress and singer from Egypt, famous for her roles in light comedies and dramas in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁶⁴ An expression meaning "stop" or "enough". It is very common to hear and say it in the Middle East, not only in Lebanon.

⁶⁵ In one of the banners, we can see the logo of the political party *Beirut Madinati* [Beirut My City], a political party born for the 2016 municipal elections in Beirut. They had a volunteer-led campaign and obtained almost 40% of the votes. For further reading, visit: <https://civilsociety-centre.org/party/beirut-madinati> [last accessed 1st April 2021] or its webpage: <https://beirut-madinati.com> [last accessed 1st April 2021].

⁶⁶ The taxi is a "service", i.e. a shared taxi service.

⁶⁷ This is a famous poem by the German poet Bertolt Brecht. It was written after the protest in the former GDR on 17th June 1953. It is highly critical of the government and is considered a satirical poem. The original text in German and its translation into English are:

“(…)Auf denen zu lesen war, daß das Volk
Das Vertrauen der Regierung verscherzt habe

Und es nur durch verdoppelte Arbeit
zurückerobern könne. Wäre es da

Nicht doch einfacher, die Regierung
Löste das Volk auf und
Wählte ein anderes?”

*Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the
[government
And could only win it back
By increased work quotas. Would it not in that
[case be simpler
for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?*

[Author's own translation. The poem is taken from: Brecht, Bertolt, and Jan Knopf. 1986. *Bertolt Brechts Buckower Elegien*. 1. Edition. Edition Suhrkamp ; 1397 = N.F., 397. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.]

⁶⁸ Rima 2020

⁶⁹ *Theatrum mundi* or the ‘great theater of the world’ is a metaphorical concept developed in the Ancient Greece and used in both European and Eastern literature. Its peak was achieved in the Baroque period in England, for example by William Shakespeare and refined in Spain by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. The Persian scholar Omar Khayyam understands the world as a chess game, with every person playing a different (social) role. *El gran teatro del mundo* by Calderón de la Barca has a marked Christian aftertaste, expressed in the relation of God to humanity, but this metaphor became less theological in the twentieth century.

⁷⁰ *Yawm al-Ġum’a Yawm al-Aḥad* was published by Dar al-Nahar in 1994 and translated into Spanish. The edition used of this book is Ziyadah & Paradela 1996. Both Ziyadah and Rima see a link between the 1958 protests and the 1955 floods associated with the reshaping of the city (pp. 16-17 in *Viernes y domingos* and in p. 14 in *Dans le Taxi*).

In the context of this study, the two authors’ memories of their relationship with comic magazines is also interesting. Ziyadah recalls the following scene: “En la tienda del shajj Hasan había todo tipo de libros, cientos de raros y valiosos volúmenes (...) Cuando se hizo viejo tuvo que resignarse a vender cuentos y revistas a los chicos del barrio, o a prestar tebeos -por una semana y a precios de ganga- a los estudiantes de los colegios más próximos a su librería.” [In Sheikh Hasan’s shop there were all kinds of books, hundreds of rare and valuable volumes (...) When he grew old he had to resign himself to selling stories and magazines to the neighborhood kids or to lending comic books—for a week and at bargain prices—to the students of the schools closest to his bookshop] (p. 117).

On his relationship with comics, Rima draws on Loubna: “J’achète la revue de BD «Samer» à Loubna, la libraire” [I buy the comic magazine *Samir* from Loubna, the bookseller] (p.52). On the cover of the *Samir* magazine that the young Rima holds in his hands, we see a man who might be Mohieddine El-Labbad, recognizable by his round glasses and thin mustache.

⁷¹ This idea is reinforced by the choice of the verb “baiser”, which can be translated as “to kiss” or “to have sexual intercourse” (in a rude way). In the following speech bubble, the verb “baiser” appears in its primary meaning, i.e., to kiss, but in the next pages, it might be used in its crude sense.

⁷² جلال الدين محمد رومی [Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi] (d. 1273) was a well-known Sufi poet. The use of poetry, music, and dance as a way of reaching God is frequently dealt with in his writings.

⁷³ Al-Mina, often written as El Mina or the Harbor, is a neighborhood in Tripoli. It is located in the old Phoenician city of Tripoli.

⁷⁴ Carl Gustav Jung is significant for his contributions to analytical psychology or depth psychology. His methodology incorporates notions of anthropology, dream interpretation, art, and mythology, among others. He also created the concept of archetypes, patterns, and images that derive from the collective unconscious and that shape cultural manifestations.

⁷⁵ Louis Joos is an important underground Belgian comics artist and illustrator. He was a teacher of Barrack Rima and the book *Dans le taxi* is dedicated to him.

⁷⁶ Joos 1982

⁷⁷ *Rakwa* is a copper pot with a long handle used to make Arabic coffee in Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries.

⁷⁸ Ghaibeh 2017

⁷⁹ Al Sawwaf 2017

⁸⁰ Merhej 2007

⁸¹ رأس بيروت [Ras Beirut] is a residential neighborhood in west Beirut, and comprises well known streets such as Bliss Street, the Corniche (Paris Street), General de Gaulle Street, Clemenceau Street, and Hamra Street. The famous tourist attraction صخرة الروشة [the Pigeon Rocks] are situated there, as well as the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Lebanese American University (LAU). Traditionally, the cafés of Ras Beirut are frequented by the educated Lebanese elite.

⁸² This was أنطون سعادة Antoun Saadé's native village. He was the founder of the Syrian Socialist National Party. Franck Salameh points out that the general proximity of Dhour el Choueir to بكفيا [Bikfaya], the hometown of the founder of the Kataeb party, بيار الجميل [Pierre Gemayel], could be one reason why this area was on the front line during the Lebanese Civil War: "After all, both towns were the birthplaces of the founders of two of Lebanon's largest ultra-nationalist political parties, the SSNP, and the Phalanges." Salameh 2010, 131.

⁸³ Samandal #1: 96-116 [12-29]; Samandal #2: 8-22 [32-47]; Samandal #4: 21- 34 [51- 64]; Samandal #9: 18-26 [81-89]

⁸⁴ مربى ولين p. 2

⁸⁵ Merhej 20190

⁸⁶ The Qana Massacre took place in April 1996, when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) fired at a United Nations (UN) compound in Qana, in the south of Lebanon. Lebanese civilians had taken refuge at the UN facility during military attacks by the IDF in Operation Grapes of Wrath. 106 people were killed and around 120 people were injured.

⁸⁷ Aylan Kurdi was a three-year-old boy who drowned on the beaches of the Turkish tourist town of Bodrum while trying to reach the Greek coast. The photograph caused great shock as it showed the little boy lying dead on the beach.

⁸⁸ A first version of this section was published in Kiyanrad et. al. 2020

⁸⁹ Centre national du livre (France) 2007.

⁹⁰ Mouzawak 2017.

⁹¹ Abirached, 2006, 2007, 2008.

⁹² Cf. Corazón Rural, Álvaro 2018

⁹³ Abirached 2007, 166-167.

⁹⁴ الحب، يا حبيبتي (Al-ḥubb, ya ḥabībati) [Love, oh my darling]

قصيدة جميلة (qaṣīda ḡamīla) [is a beautiful poem]

مكتوبة على القمر (maktūba 'alā l-qamar) [written on the moon.]

(Excerpt from *Book of Love*, 1970). However, Neyla does not recite the whole poem; instead, she completes the poem with other fragments from the same book.

⁹⁵ Exceptions to this are onomatopoeia.

⁹⁶ Here, too, there are exceptions, such as the majority of road signs, whose illustration does not make it clear from the outset what they stand for, or written auxiliary signs such as "?! " which regularly appear in comics outside the speech bubbles in the picture, as well as some hand signs (e.g., fist with raised thumb, palm stretched out in front).

⁹⁷ McCloud 1994, 36.

Chapter Five: The edition of comics in Lebanon

From kiosks to art galleries

After reviewing the history of Lebanese sequential art, it is not hard to imagine that the channel used to distribute and buy comics in Lebanon was the kiosk, be it as cartoons in the newspaper or as magazines for children, as well as bookstores.

The importance of this chapter lies in the distinct dimensions to comics in Lebanon. These are firstly its distribution channels (that is, bookshops), and second, its publishers, where a dividing line can be drawn between comics published by Lebanese publishers on the one hand and by Franco-Belgian publishers on the other, but which share the characteristic of being publishers that could be categorized as alternative. Third, the dissemination that could be achieved thanks to online editions and digital or digitalized comics, and fourth, the importance of price in the distribution of comics. Fifth, we must mention the role of Lebanese universities in establishing a comics culture, either through initiatives that promote the creation of comics or through the creation of comics-related curricula. Moreover, the creation of archives and the digitization of the history of graphic storytelling in Lebanon and neighboring countries leads us to believe that the comic/comic strip/children's magazine can serve as a historiographical source, as well as occupying a place in the panorama of museum exhibitions, given that the comic strip is also part of art history. Sixth, and closely related to the idea of comics in universities, the awarding of prizes to Lebanese national cartoonists and prizes awarded at the regional level. Finally, and again referring to the specificity of comics in Lebanon, we will address the issue of censorship.

The abovementioned aspects are important to understanding the dichotomy that occurs in Lebanon in the cultural field: the French influence and the local and Arab contribution to this panorama, which is not free of French or European influence. In addition, considering these aspects helps us to understand the context in which these works were born. It is important to study them in detail because the conditions of production, distribution, and the act of creation reveal to us the reading public. Without these aspects, it is impossible to comprehend the context in which these works appear; Lebanese comics are aimed at a type of public far removed from the mainstream, which seeks rebellious content and its own,

local style. In this chapter, we will look for the strongest point of connection between readers and authors. That point of connection is found in the conditions of production, distribution, and feedback between artist and reader, which takes place in bookshops, art galleries, through publishers, the digital world, and in the university as a public place of exchange. Without exploring these relationships, the content and style of comics cannot be fully understood.

I. Sales points of comics

In attempting to answer the question “Where it is possible to find comics in Lebanon?”, we must first turn our attention to bookstores. While there are well-established distribution channels in the Lebanese market, such as chain retailers, there are two other types of bookshops: bookshops with cafés, which aim to create a new model of “art salon”,¹ adapted to current times and which seem to follow a global trend, oriented towards a young public and creating a space for intellectual exchange, in addition to art galleries and museums which contain comics. As we will see throughout this chapter, this may be due to the perception of comics as an artistic object and not simply as a book. Moreover, these art galleries and museums also play an important role among the Lebanese cultural elite. Finally, we will mention the case of antiquarian bookshops and those specializing in almost exclusive sale of comics because they help us to understand the phenomenon of comics in the Lebanese capital and give us an idea of the distribution channels of comics.

On the one hand, there is a market for European comics, especially French *bande dessinée* (BD), which is aimed at a French-speaking children's audience, and for Japanese manga, aimed at a teenage audience. Both, because of the location of the bookshops and the format, are oriented towards a middle or affluent class. However, comics whose authors are Lebanese and who write for the Lebanese are difficult to find in these bookshops, except for the works of authors who have had a major impact on foreign markets. These books are found in the second type of bookshop. On the map below, we locate the bookshops in Beirut. We can see that there is a concentration around the two largest universities in the Lebanese capital—the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Lebanese American University (LAU)—and in Achrafieh, especially in the Gemmayzeh area.

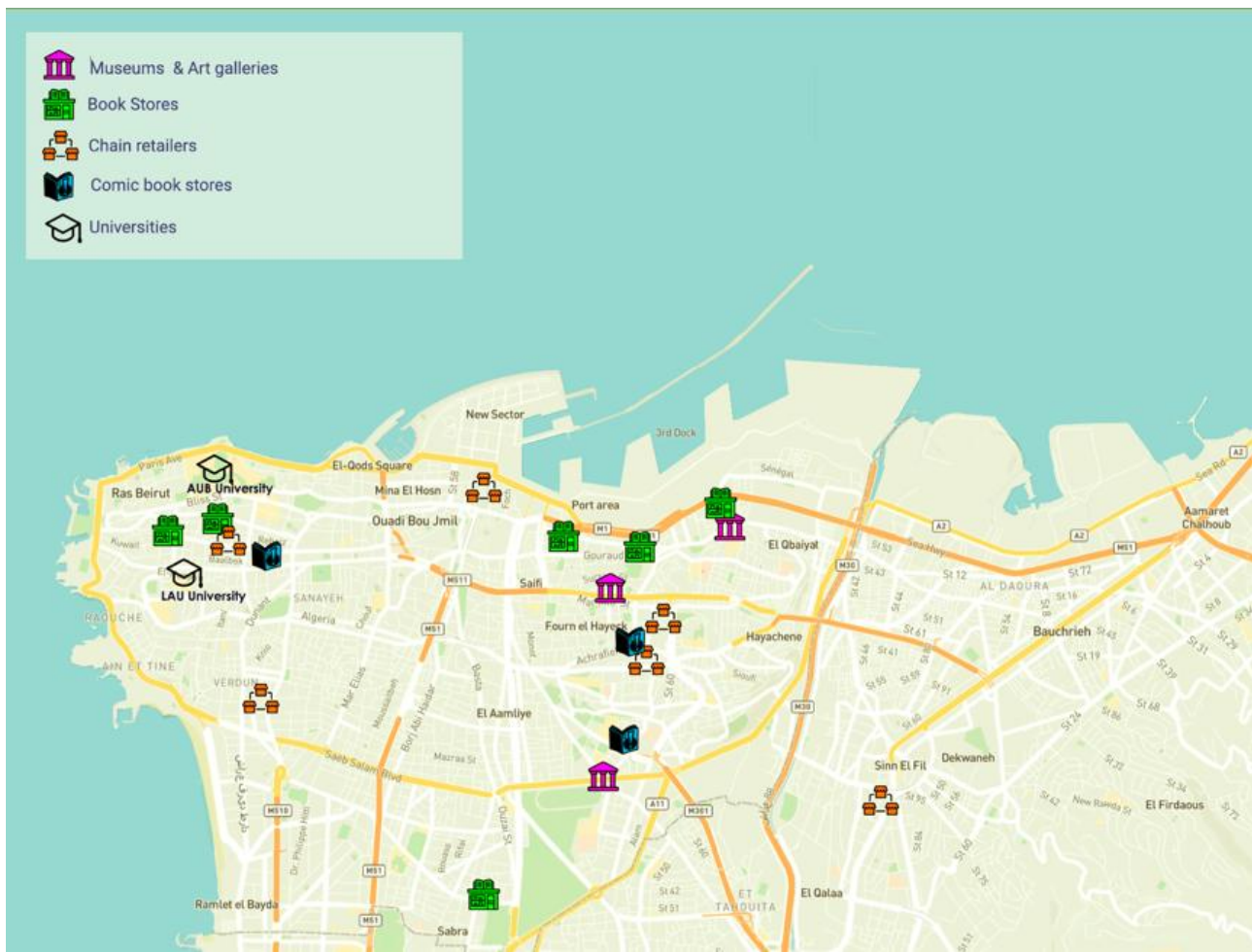


Fig. 45: Map of sale points of comics in Beirut

Fig. 45: Map of sale point of comics in the Beirut area discussed in this section

I. I. Chain retailers

For those interested in buying comics, all big chain warehouses have a section dedicated to them. One of these stores is the *Librairie Antoine*, one of the most successful bookstores in Lebanon. Founded in 1933 by Antoine Naufal, there are now 15 stores in Lebanon, most of them located in Beirut, Dbayeh (north of Beirut), Ghazir-Kasserwan (north of Beirut), Hazmieh (south of Beirut, neighborhood with many embassies), Verdun, Sin El Fil, Achrafieh, and downtown Beirut. All of these neighborhoods are known as middle and upper class. The only store located outside of Beirut is in a shopping mall in Tripoli. They have a catalogue with almost 3000 different titles under the rubric BD, most of them imported from France, but also from other European countries. The catalogue for manga reaches almost 1000 books. Under the rubric “Caricature” they have listed over 600 books, but in the “Erotic” section it is possible to find caricaturists works.² In the BD and caricature sections, but more in the caricature, a wide range of comic books written and drawn by Arab and Lebanese artists is available.

Another retail chain with an extensive catalogue of comics is the *Virgin Megastore*, which opened at Martyrs Square in Beirut in 2001. The company was born in the United Kingdom and is specialized in the retail of entertainment and books. It mostly has American (superhero) comics, French and Belgian BD and pictorial books, and coffee table books. As in the case of *Librairie Antoine*, it also sells Lebanese comics. *Virgin Megastore* has five additional shops in Lebanon, all of which are in the Beirut area. As it has a shop at Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport, it makes the production of Lebanese comics visible to foreign visitors, who likely will not have visited bookstores while staying in Lebanon but will spend some time in the duty-free shops of the airport.

I. II. Trendy bookstores

In this section, we refer to alternative bookshops, in which it is of course possible to find both bestsellers and classical literature, but which also have sections for comics and other titles of local production on their shelves. The economic situation in Lebanon makes it difficult for many bookshop owners to maintain their business. As explained by Danah Kaouri and Hala Mezher (2020): “Local businesses have been suffering as a result of spiraling economic conditions in Lebanon. Small scale bookshops are among the businesses that were hit the hardest given rising costs and the lack of awareness about these bookshops.”³ Some of the places where it is possible to find a wide number of alternative comics and books are not only bookshops, but also have a coffee shop or small bistro. They serve as a meeting point for both artists and readers. دواوين (Dawāwīn) [Collections] was one such place, born with the aim to work as a cultural center for performing arts, sound, and film. Located in the Gemmayzeh area, it had bookshelves defining the space, and their catalog was centered on arts, particularly on images. It opened in June 2013 and closed its doors in 2017.

Close to it, and following the same concept of a bookstore with a café, *Aaliyah's Books* was opened in 2016. It has independent English books and, on top of that, Lebanese authors writing in English, selling both used and new versions. The integration of a coffee shop was aimed at creating a literary atmosphere. *Papercup* (Mar Mikhail area) was opened in 2009, as the owner realized that there was a lack of curated cultural shops in Beirut. It has a vast catalog of arts, photography, culture, and fashion books, paying special attention to magazines. As of February 2023, the store was closed. In Hamra, another bookshop is *Dar Bistro*. It opened in 2011 and, after the measures imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, it closed its doors in 2020. The bookshop was separated from its small restaurant. It had a broad catalog of visual arts, mostly in Arabic, and special attention was paid to women—as

authors or as work cooperatives for handicrafts—and to Syrian refugees. It sold the entire catalog of *ToshFesh* and *Samandal*. The sale of handicrafts and artisanal goods made in Lebanon, such as pottery, embroidery, and soap, was also notable. In addition, *Dar Bistro* had the rubrics LGBT and Palestine, and they had banned books in Lebanon. It organized reading nights, meet-the-author events, and book-signings and launches, bringing together authors and readers, as well as raising awareness about traditional and artisanal work. It also cooperated with دار المصوّر (*Dar al-Muṣawwir*) [The Photographer's House] a hub for photography training programs, equipment, exhibitions, lectures, and everything else related to photography.



Fig. 46: Pictures of the bookstore Dar Bistro Bookshop

Fig. 46: Interior of *Dar Bistro* bookshop. In the third picture, detail of the comic books section. Picture taken by the author in Feb. 2020.

Other traditional bookstores which could also be considered as having a catalog with this alternative flair include *The Little Bookshop*, which is located in Hamra. It opened in 2014 and it has fiction, non-fiction, and local publications, such as the magazine *Rusted Radishes: Beirut Literary and Art Journal* published by AUB. They also have an adult comic book section. Bookshelves are organized according to sections on contemporary fiction, classics, twentieth-century literature, non-fiction, and human sciences, such as psychology and philosophy. A shelf near the window holds an extensive collection of poetry. The owner's aim was to offer different books, away from the mainstream and for an English-speaking clientele, since the store is located between the universities AUB and LAU. In this store, the

owner paid special attention to making the books aesthetically pleasing in their presentation. More traditional, and with a mix of second-hand and new books, *Halabi Bookshop* opened in 1958 in Hamra. It is close to the Palestinian refugee camp Chatila. Its aim is to spread the culture of reading and, like all the stores listed above, it possesses a trilingual catalog: Arabic, French, and English. The store started as a grocery shop that sold newspapers, weekly magazines, and periodicals. By the 1990s, it was already a bookstore. Nostalgia fills the bookshelves, and it has a huge number of children's magazines from the 1960s to the present day. Its book presentations and readings are aimed more towards a younger audience, but it is not a specialized children's bookstore.

Located in Hamra, the books and stationery retailer *Diabco* has a special section for comic books. Divided into two floors, it mainly sells office supplies and art and painting materials. As seen in the picture, they have a shelf with graphic narratives from all over the Arab world, especially periodicals such as *Lab619* and الشكجية (*al-Šakmaġiyya*) [The Jewelry Box],⁴ and obviously Lebanese ones, such as *ToshFesh* and *Samandal*. They have the contribution and support of Mrs. Lina Ghaibeh of AUB.



Fig. 47: Detail of the comic books section in a store

Fig. 47: Interior of *Diabco*. Detail of the comic books section, entitled قصص و شرائط مصورة من العالم العربي (*Qīṣaṣ wa-Šarā'it Muṣawwara min al-Ālam al-ʿArabī*) [Illustrated Stories and Strips from the Arab World]. Picture taken in Feb. 2020.

Another noteworthy bookstore in Beirut, also located in Hamra, is الفرات (*al-Furāt*) [Euphrates], which is additionally a publishing house. It has an incredible number of magazines starting from the 1920s. Under the فنون (*Funūn*) [Arts] category, it has a living

archive, with books that are rare to find elsewhere, even in libraries. It holds works by authors such as Helmi El-Touni, Mohieddine Al Labbad, and Lena Mehrej. The store has digitized a large part of its catalogue, and the archives of Abboudi Abou Jaoudé are particularly known for their film posters and posters of Lebanese artists, singers, concerts, and festivals. As stated on its website: “We collect, store, and progressively build a database of Arabic works which we make most of it available on our website. Currently, our database consists of 120.000 Arabic titles including authors, distributors, publishers, a short description and a cover image. We are also particularly specialized in rare Arabic books, magazines, manuscripts, prints, posters.”⁵ Abou Jaoudé is known for his efforts in collecting “ephemeral material”, as Nélida Nassar called it,⁶ referring to cinema posters, but the term could be also applied to children's magazines, cartoons, and magazines.

I. III. Secondhand bookstores

In the area called Ras Beirut, a walking distance from two of the most renowned Lebanese universities, many small or bigger secondhand bookstores are located. Comics can be found here, but the customer will mainly be understood by asking for “caricature”. They often do not follow any order on the shelves. This kind of bookstore can be found in Tripoli, where it is also possible to see street vendors selling used books.

I. IV. Comic bookstores

Finally, we are going to deal with the bookstores that specifically offer comics. As seen with other bookstores, they are (or sadly, were) located in the Achrafieh area. The first one is *Librairie Stephan*. Being a French-language bookstore, it opened its doors in 1956; it does not stock many Arabic-language comics or graphic novels, and is specialized in French BD and manga. The entire top floor is dedicated to French publishers and manga, as they explain on their website: “Le point de vente d’Achrafieh inauguré en 1998 est généraliste, couvre tous types d’ouvrages (romans, essais, beaux livres, jeunesse, bandes dessinées...), et est spécialement réputé pour son étage entier dédié à la bande dessinée ainsi que pour le très large rayon de livres de jeunesse.”⁷ All titles are meticulously organized by publisher.



Fig. 48: Interior of Librairie Stephan

Fig. 48: Interior of *Librairie Stephan*. The second picture is a detail of the Lebanese Comic Books section. Picture taken in Feb. 2020.

The bookstore *The Comic Stash*, located in Hamra, opened its doors in 2017. At the beginning of their entrepreneurial venture, Anthony and his partner Ben started to sell mostly at garage sales and open-air markets, centering on vintage superhero materials, old comics and some new, retro video games and consoles, and vinyl records, predominantly from the US and European markets. As Anthony explained: “It’s a very under-served market, we’re the first ones to directly appeal to comic book readers. There are a lot more comic book fans here than people think. The response to our initiative [*The Comic Stash*] has been very positive.”⁸ In response to whether they work with Lebanese comics, he said: “I’m not an expert on Lebanese comics. We specialize in classic Marvel and DC comic books. It’s all western.” The shop also has merchandise and other products related to the world of comics, in the purest style of American series comic shops.

One last example of comic book shops was the *Otaku Manga Store*, which was located in Achrafieh. It was a bookstore specialized in manga (Japanese comics) and anime (hand drawings and computer animation originating from Japan), as well as merchandise and figurines. It had a café where they served hot beverages and light food, such as noodle cups and sandwiches. It closed its doors only two years after opening.



Fig. 49: Map of Ras Beirut's Bookshops

Fig. 49: Map of Ras Beirut's New, Old & Ghosts of Bookshops Past. Idea from the collective Rusted Radishes: Beirut Literary and Art Journal. Courtesy of Lina Ghaibeh.

I. V. Museums and art galleries

The last places we will mention that illustrate the sale of comics in Lebanon are art galleries and museums. In the first place, it should come as no surprise that museum gift shops, such as those of the National Museum of Beirut and the Sursock Museum, sell comics produced and edited by Lebanese individuals. At the Sursock Museum, there have been exhibitions of Lebanese caricaturists and cartoonists (vid. *Infra*), which speaks to the distinctive feature of the museum being modern and contemporary art. At the museum shop, books about art, artistic practice, and the history of art can be found, with special attention paid to Lebanese artists. The National Museum of Beirut is the most important archaeology museum in Lebanon and offers a large variety of items for sale at its store, including jewelry, books, gifts, and various artisanal items inspired by the museum's collections and designed and manufactured by local artists and artisans; in this sense, they also sell locally produced comics and books.

It is also worth mentioning the example of Plan BEY, founded in 2010. With two locations in Beirut within the Gemmayzeh area (Achrafieh), Plan BEY is a retailer that collaborates closely with artists to create, publish, and manufacture products in limited quantities. As they described themselves on their website: “Plan BEY is an artisan-publisher of artists' multiples, books and prints. Plan BEY is based in Beirut and consists of a design and production workshop as well as two exhibition and retail spaces. Plan BEY is not an art gallery. We don't exhibit or sell unique pieces or originals.”⁹ They have a catalog of around 6 comic books, mostly from the artists Barrack Rima, Mazen Kerbaj, and Jana Traboulsi, with limited editions of 300 copies.

It should be noted that the bookshops referenced are the only ones in which you can find comic strips and where their location is significantly relevant. The selection described concerning chain bookstores is the same, with a few variations in stock from one shop to another. Overall, we can affirm that the comic strip finds only a weak presence in Beirut. If one does manage to find books at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) in Byblos, or copies of *Samandal* in Tripoli, their presence is not as significant as it is in Beirut. The same is true for the large cities of the South: Saïda and Tyre have beautiful bookshops, but these are specialized in different fields (particularly school materials) and leave no room for the comic strip—only for children's magazines. It is also interesting to see that comic books are only found in the central areas of Beirut, be it Ras Beirut and Hamra or Gemmayzeh and other parts of Achrafieh. The comic strip thus finds a place in very specific locations within the capital.

It is the presence of the comic strip in some bookshops that is revealing; one cannot criticize its absence from most cultural sales outlets, as its place in the local publishing market is weak. Putting the comic strip in the limelight means putting forward a genre coming from the West. Without claiming a vision of the book, it is a way for booksellers to create a specific characterization arising from this genre. The fact that booksellers have new releases in French or English language within a limited period of time helps to reduce the cultural distance between the different poles. Having comic books, even if it is not the most profitable category, creates the illusion that the bookshop is a globalized space, similar to Lebanon, France, and the United States. The difference between local chains and independent bookshops in comic book selection is implemented at the level of the choice made by the booksellers. The smaller the bookshop, the more the selection fits the reader's expectations and the more the Lebanese comic strip is taken into account and highlighted. In addition, the fact that comic books are sold in museums suggests the more artistic and less literary character that comics have acquired within the sales scene in Lebanon.

II. Publishing houses

Another important insight into Lebanese comics is the publishing houses. We can divide them into three major groups: Lebanese publishers, French publishers, and, finally, those from other western countries. Each of the publishers has a different approach, an editorial line, which we will see below. In general terms, we can say that each publisher addresses a specific public and has different commercial objectives. It is also interesting to note that NGOs and other non-profit organizations are involved in the publishing of comics, as well as agencies (e.g., UNESCO), public undertakings (e.g., Institut Français, the Goethe-Institut), and newspapers, as we will see with *Samandal*.

II. I. Lebanese publishing houses

According to نقابة اتحاد الناشرين في لبنان (*Niqābat Ittiḥād al-Nāširīn fī Lubnān*) [Syndicate of Publishers Union in Lebanon], there are around 700 publishing houses in Lebanon, and although the editorial landscape has changed in recent years due to regional events, the Lebanese publishers turn out around 3000 new titles per year, including translated works. Lebanon's share of the total number of new titles published per year exceeds 30%, according to the Syndicate of Publishers Union in Lebanon.¹⁰

II. I. I. Dar Al Adab – دار الآداب (Beirut)

This publishing house is one of the oldest in the Middle East. It was founded in 1954 by سهيل إدريس [Souheil Idriss], a Lebanese journalist and novelist who studied in France and, after returning to Lebanon, founded the literary magazine *al-Ādāb*. This publishing house is focused on novels written in Arabic or in other languages. As they write on their website: “For Arab Fiction, the list is endless: Classical and modern novelists, from all Arab countries, many of whom have been awarded international and Arab literary prizes, many of whom struggle to be published in this city called Beirut.”¹¹ As Monica Ruocco (2007) states: “Dār al-Ādāb (...) would soon become one of the most important [publishing houses] in its field.”¹² Comics and graphic novels are found under the category فنون ومسرح [Arts and Theater].¹³ They have collaborated with *ToshFesh*, most likely because: “Al-Ādāb has consistently played a pioneering role, moulding opinion and encouraging the exploration of new forms of literary invention”, in the words of Ruocco.¹⁴

II. I. II. Alifbata (Beirut and Marseille)

This publishing house was born in 2015. The name is a reference to the first three letters of the Arabic alphabet. This is because it is an association that aims to promote the Arabic language and cultural exchange in the Mediterranean area, and to explore and recognize the comics of the Arab world. As is explained on their website: “Mais aussi et surtout, Alifbata se lance dans l’exploration du roman graphique et de la bande dessinée en langue arabe. Faire connaître les productions littéraires de ces genres en plein essor, créer un fonds bibliographique, inviter les auteurs, promouvoir leur traduction, leur publication et leur diffusion...”¹⁵ Its catalogue includes adaptations into the ninth art, such as الخبز الحافي (*al-Hubz al-Hāfī*) [For Bread Alone; French: *Le Pain Nu*]; the autobiography of محمد شكري [Mohammed Choukri], adapted and illustrated by Abdelaziz Mouride; translated works from Algeria and Lebanon; works originally written in French by Lebanese authors such as Barrack Rima; reissues from the JAD Workshop in Beirut in 1989; and, on top of that, two books on comic research (vid. supra).

II. I. III. ALBA – Publications de l’Université de Balamand

Created in 1996, the aim of the publishing house of the ALBA is to publish the research of its teaching staff and the individual and collective works of its students. As written on their website: “La richesse de la formation pluridisciplinaire de l’Alba se reflète dans la diversité des sujets abordés : architecture, urbanisme, graphisme, bande dessinée, photographie, peinture, esthétique...”¹⁶ The catalog has over 90 titles¹⁷ and contains Masters projects on illustration and comics, the latest one *Flux et Reflux* (published in 2018, originally submitted in 2015) by Karen Keyoruz, and the oldest one *La Savonnerie*, a collective work by 23 students of graphic arts and advertising under the direction of Poppy Arnold and Michele Standjofski. It has also published research works on the illustration programs of the university, like *Les chroniques illustrées de l’ALBA, 1937-2012* by Ralph Doumit, a work that explores the history of the institution drawn in comic strip format. Most of the catalog is in French, since the university offers its teaching programs in French, but it also contains books in Arabic and trilingual ones in Arabic, French, and English.

II. I. IV. Dar al-Kotob – 53Dots (Beirut)

This printing house was established in 1953 and provides printing services for books and magazines. Dar al-Kotob is an on-demand publishing house, meaning that it does not decide what it publishes. Its customers include major Lebanese universities, such as Saint-Joseph, LAU, AUB, and the Beirut Arab University (BAU), as well as books from editors that do not

have a printer, such as school books, English-Arabic dictionaries by دار العلم للملايين (*Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn*) [House of Knowledge for Millions], and French educational materials by Samir Éditeur. They also have experience printing glossy magazines¹⁸ and high-end books.¹⁹

II. I. V. Éditions Antoine – Hachette

This is a publishing house equally co-owned by the French company Hachette and *Librairie Antoine*. It was established in 2010 and publishes fiction and non-fiction books in Arabic. These books include Arabic classics, as well as modern works by contemporary authors and translations, and they sell all over the MENA region. The catalog is divided into five categories: نوافل (*Nawfal*) [Literary Works in Arabic]; حياتيات (*Ḥayātiyyāt*) [Lifestyle]; how-to books and cooking books; أطفال (*Aṭfāl*) [Children's Books], in which they publish, alongside all varieties of children's literature, licensed books, e.g., from Disney; مراجع (*Kutub Marāḡi*) [Reference Books], including grammar books, history, or self-help books; and, lastly, تربية (*Tarbīya*) [Educational Books].²⁰ Among the titles published by this publishing house are, for example: مكسيموم ماكس: على قمة الجبل السحري (*Maksīmūm Māks: ʿalā Qimmat al-Ġabal al-Siḥrī*) [Maximum Max: On the Top of the Magic Mountain]; drawings by Tony Abou Jaoudé which were scripted by Rabih Haddad and also published in French and in English; and يا ليل يا عين: القاهرة بيروت دمشق القدس (*Yā Layl Yā ʿAyn: al-Qāhira, Bayrūt, Dimašq, al-Quds*) [O Night, O My Eyes: Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem] by Lamia Ziadé.

II. I. VI. Dar Onbuz – دار قنبز

This press was founded in 2006 by Nadine Touma and Sivine Ariss, along with the graphic designer Raya Khalaf, to make Arabic books for children and young adults, as well as for adults, more attractive. The Arabic word “قنبز” (*qunbuz*) can be translated as bird food or hemp seed, which are fried and eaten by children. The logotype is an orange bird, so this could be interpreted as the books serving as little grains feeding the readers. All the materials have in common that they are books you can play with, build with, or color in. The books in its adult catalog also follow this concept, for example, with maps or glossaries. Also noteworthy is its emphasis on publishing in colloquial Arabic instead of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). One representative example is يا ريتني عصفور: أغاني وأشعار (*Yā Raytnī ʿUṣfūr: Aġānī wa-Aṣʿār*) [I Wish I Was a Bird: Songs and Poems],²¹ a poetry book for children written in Lebanese dialect and accompanied by a CD of sung poems. As Touma said in an interview with Snaije: “it lessens the dichotomy that kids feel”,²² in reference to the difficulty

for children to imagine animals or other characters speaking classical Arabic instead of the language that they use in their daily interactions.²³

This publishing house condenses the professional and personal trajectory of Touma and her interest in Arab culture in text and language. She belongs to a group of contemporary artists based in Beirut who want to unite art—the critical message—and to make the cultural manifestations of a small and wealthy elite accessible to all, with special attention to children. The catalog of this publishing house is playful, colorful, and open to discovery, even by addressing topics such as human rights or femininity. Each issue of the magazine مجلة قنبز (*Mağallat Qunbuz*) [Onbuz Magazine] “has one theme, addressed through science, games, stories, comics, architecture, archeology, Arabic calligraphy, cinematography, art history, folktales, info graphics, paper sculptures and more”,²⁴ and imparts the spirit of Dar Onbuz.

Other publishing houses include L’Echo des Cedres, which used to have a section for cartoons called “Cartoonz”, but the publishing house closed and the research conducted into it has not yielded results. What is particularly striking is that it published cartoons written in the Lebanese vernacular in the Latin alphabet. The Foundation Gebran Tuéni published a comic book as a biography of Gebran Tuéni. The objectives of this foundation are to support socio-cultural initiatives and to promote the ideals of the *al-Nahār* newspaper editor, such as freedom of speech.²⁵ This comic was drawn by Ralph Doumit, and the main idea was to “attract people from all ages, even the elderly.”²⁶ In this category of publishing, we should also mention *Headache Comics*, the self-published short stories by Mazen Kerbaj.

II. II. Franco-Belgian publishing houses

II. II. I. Cambourakis (Paris, France) and Casterman (Tournai, Belgium)

Cambourakis is a Parisian publishing house founded in 2006, specializing in *bande dessinée* (BD). It is the publishing house of Zeina Abirached, in which she has published six works. All of them are available in the Lebanese market in the major chain retailers, and worldwide more than 15,000 copies of *Mourir, Partir, Revenir, Le jeu des hirondelles* have been sold. Abirached published her latest graphic novels, *Prende Refuge* and *Le Piano Oriental* with Tournai-based publishing house Casterman. This publishing house is also specialized in BD, as it publishes comics by Hergé, *The Adventures of Tintin*, and children’s literature. Another Lebanese author published by Casterman is Joseph Safieddine (*Je n’ai jamais connu la guerre*), whose album *Yallah, bye* was translated into Arabic by the

publisher *Nool Books*, a Franco-Egyptian cooperation to promote the comics market in the Arab region.²⁷

Finally, we must mention two more French publishing houses: Marabulles and Des ronds dans l'O, both of which are specialized in the publication of graphic novels and have published works by ALBA graduates—Tracy Chahwan by the former and Michèle Standfoski by the latter. No direct relationship between them can be observed, but it is striking that both *Beirut*, *Bloody Beirut* and *Toutes les mers* are works written and drawn by women and published in French. Moreover, we did not encounter either of these two works in the Lebanese market, although we do not doubt that they are available in Lebanon.

In the category of comic studies or comic strips and cartoons, both *Antoine* and Presses de l'Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik have shown interest in publishing such books. With the exception of the ALBA, which does have a vast catalog, it seems that the other publishers only publish comics in isolation and do not have a section in their catalog for comics, comic strips, and even less for graphic novels; if they do have one, it is because of the French influence. As we have seen in the bookstore section, there is no lack of interest in this medium, but if the publication and distribution of these works is deficient, it is very difficult for them to reach the public.

III. Online and digital comics

III. I. *Rusumat* – رسومات

Rusumat is an application for mobile phones and tablets launched in 2015 that provides digital independent comics, anthologies, graphic novels, and children's books from the Middle East and the United Kingdom. The company that operates and provides the services of *Rusumat* is UK-based Gravity Issues Limited, created by British-Lebanese comic book collector Ismail Farhat with the aim of making comics from the Middle East region more accessible.²⁸ Comics are available in Arabic, English, and French, but they are not translated. The books are sorted by genres: comedy, thriller, science fiction, horror, fantasy, superheroes, and manga. The application has the possibility to search comics by name, by region (Middle East or Europe), or by children's books. As an advantage, the comics can be read from panel to panel or as full pages. It is also possible to zoom in and zoom out, as well to read without an internet connection (offline mode). Some titles are free, while others require a fee, ranging from USD 0.99 to USD 3.99. It is also possible to earn reward points by inviting friends to register with the application, which might be seen as an incentive to

read and spread awareness of comics. The following issues, ordered by country, are available on *Rusumat*:

Egypt

- *TokTok*: available from issues 1 to 10 (except for issue 6), this is a light-hearted comic book that addresses societal topics.
- *Redemption* by Tarek Shahin (2017): published by Al-Khan Comics and released on *Rusumat* on 31st March 2020. The subtitle is *An Egyptian Story* and it presents an illustrated history of Egypt in 1967, following the Six-Day War and its consequences.²⁹
- العصابة (*al-‘Aṣaba*) [The League] by John Maher: depicts a team of Egyptian superheroes from different backgrounds tasked with defending Egypt against corruption and injustice.
- بكرة فوت علينا (*Bukra Fūt ‘Alay-nā*) [Pass By Tomorrow] by Sharif Adel: a satirical sci-fi comedy taking place in Egypt in the year 3014, when aliens invade Egypt. In response to why it is set 1000 years later, the author said in an interview: “during the past few years and—in my experience at least—we’ve been slowly realizing that nothing major is actually changing. Corruption, misbehavior, harassment, bad traffic, political indifference, and pretty much everything is settling back into place” (Lynx Qualey: 2014).³⁰ In *Rusumat*, issues 1 to 7 are available; i.e., it was a serialized comic magazine turned book. Six issues were published from November 2014 to September 2015. In February 2016, a collective volume was released including all the published issues plus two new chapters.
- القناص (*al-Qannāṣ*) [The Sniper]: collaborative work by various artists from 2014. It was originally published by *ComicsGate*, an internet portal specialized in publicizing and supporting comics from the Arab world. It offers the possibility to publish comics and thus popularize comics for Arabic readers. It also translates comics into Arabic, mainly superhero comics, and functions as a forum for exchange of information between users.³¹ The comic was published in paperback in 2018. In *al-Qannāṣ*, the story centers on Saber Radi, an Egyptian citizen who decided, after many years of patience and acceptance, to rise up to all kinds of injustice and oppression around him.
- روح خالتو (*Rūḥ Ḥāltū*) [Aunty’s Spirit] by Mohamed El Hagrasy: also published by *ComicsGate* in 2015. In Egypt, the statues have started to move and change their places. The main character, Ezat Basha, starts an investigation to find out what is happening.
- حروب الجن (*Ḥurūb al-Ġinn*) [Wars of the Jinn]: created from a *ComicsGate* (2015) epic fantasy by a collaboration of manga artists. The manga “ghoul” and the ghoul of science fiction novels, such as *Lovecraft*, and video games, such as *Warhammer* and *Warcraft*, where the ghoul is a kind of non-dead monster that feeds on human flesh, is swapped

for the *jinn*. The غول (*gūl*) [ghoul] is a demon-like creature in the pre-Islamic religion of Arabia, and hence, part of folk tales from the region.

- حكاية الرسام (*Hikāyat al-Rassām*) [The Painter's Tale] by Maha Al-Najjar and Hamid Barham (2015): also published by ComicsGate, this is a humorous story drawn in manga style of a painter who wants to win a door-painting contest, but is faced with an unexpected event.
- كاتريزما (*Kātrīzmā*) [Katrizma] by Mohammad Abed Al-Khalek: created for Illusion Comics (2018). The aim of Illusion Comics is to produce graphic stories that carry the Egyptian identity and the pharaonic civilization. It was established in 2013 under the auspices of شركة السفينة للفنون والثقافة (*Širkat al-Safīna li-l-Funūn wa-l-Ṭaqāfa*) [Al Safina Company for Arts and Culture] to produce illustrated stories suitable for young people and to present them with topics from public life and stories taking place in a virtual world that encompasses habits, characters, and myths. *Kātrīzmā* was first published in 2017 and has been on *Rusumat* since 2018. It centers on a team of archeologists and a reporter investigating an ancient war.
- العمارة (*al-ʿImāra*) [Architecture] by Shadi Said Atab (2016): published by Ophois Studios, a publishing house that claims to be the first comic publisher established in Egypt.³² The story features Sami Salem who, while looking for an apartment, learns that some buildings are inhabited by creatures that represent the human fears. This comic series of two books can be categorized as terror comics.
- Hope by Mustafa Zaki (2015): published by Ophois Studios, this is a short story with no words about a girl who wants to fight her fears. It is drawn in manga style.
- صندوق ميّ (*Šundūq Mayy*) [Mai's Box] by Mai Koraiem (2016): published by Ophois Studios, this is a collection of daily-life stories by the author. In this instance, they travel to Gdańsk (Poland) and give impressions of the city. The paper used for the pages is from an old book.
- سبب مجهول (*Sabab Mağhūl*) [Unknown Reason] by Farid Nagy (2016): published by Ophois Studios, is the story of a school pupil whose exam is destroyed by several people. When he goes to talk to the head of the school, the other teachers end up with his life for an unknown reason. It is an allegory of frustration.
- بجانيبي دائما (*Bi-Ġānibī Dāʿiman*) [Always By My Side] by Mohammed Al Badawi (2016): published by Ophois Studios, this is the story of a man who kills a woman. Every time he listens to the sound of a clock ticking, he remembers his crime.
- العلبة (*al-ʿUlba*) [The Can] by Alia Ali (2016): published by Ophois Studios, it centers on an artist who explains his failure in his job despite his talent.

- *Dānī* (داني) [Dany] by Kareem Ahmed (2016): published by Koshk Comics. Dany is a superhero comic set in the year 2066 in a world story that explores human nature and behavior and the battle of man's dependence on technology or the battle between good and evil. Technology and artifacts of all kinds play an important role in the creation of a new world order on planet Earth as part of this story in which dramatic events, action, and romance come to an end.
- *Lamīs* (لميس) [Soft to touch (can also mean a woman soft to touch)] by Safia Baraka (2016): a story about a superpowered drug dealer who grew up suffering from all types of childhood abuse. Through the comics series, she tells of her adventures in the dark world of drugs and manipulating human nature.³³
- *Ġarāch* (جراج) [Garage]: an experimental comic magazine from Egypt. Its first issue was released in 2014 by the publisher كوكب الرسامين (*Kawkab al-Rassāmīn*) [Painter's Planet], designed as a project by Twins Cartoon (the brothers Mohamed and Haitham Rafaat) to bring together different artists with an openly pan-Arab spirit and to give them the opportunity to display their work in the form of a printed magazine. The magazines showcase numerous Egyptian and Arab artists, such as Farid Nagyi, John Maher, and others.
- *al-Naḥla Hallūzī* (النحلة هلّوزي) [The Hallucinating Bee] by Sara Naaman (2018): a collection of nine strips, published daily by the artist, containing situations from daily life as seen by a bee. The publisher is Rusumat Digital.
- *Metro* by Magdy El Shafee: published in its English translation.

Lebanon

- From *Samandal*: عاصية (Āṣiyya) [Disobedient] by Rawand Issa; أو كيف أصبحت (Murabbā wa-Laban aw kayfa aṣbaḥat ummī lubnāniyya) by Lena Merhej; Georges by Joseph Kai; and *Quixotelixir* by Raphaele Macaron.
- *Šiṣ Bīṣ* (شيش بيش) [Backgammon]: a digitized magazine first published in 1995. In the *Rusumat* app, it claims to be “the first Arabic comic magazine for adults, supposed to be for the young (talking about 8 to 88 years only) and should be funny.”³⁴ In the first issue, we recognize the artist Ziad Rahbani drawn by Syrian artist حسن أدلبي [Hassan Edalby], known for his experimentation with caricature.

Libya

- *Habka* (حبكة) [Plot]: short stories in manga style, published in 2015 by Khaled Bader, Zoha Trabelsi, Mansor El Duffani, and Abdullah Hadia.³⁵ Four issues are available, with

issues 3 and 4 translated into English. Despite having chosen the Japanese art of manga, the magazine aims to preserve the Libyan identity.

Tunisia

- Lab619 is an experimental comics art collective formed in 2013. This platform makes it possible to find and discover comics, cartoons, and graphic novels from various countries, bringing together diverse styles, countries, and topics. It is also a way for artists to display their work. At this point, it is also necessary to note the importance of social media, such as Facebook and Instagram —American photo- and video-sharing platforms—where uploading single pictures of drawn works is very easy, and where the interaction between illustrators or artists and their public goes beyond the “like” button function. Networking among artists also serves as a feedback loop, facilitating the production and discovery of comics by using hashtags (a metadata tag).

Although the *Rusumat* app does not feature every available comic, does not allow navigation in Arabic, and leaves some space for improvement, it is a worthy initiative.

III. II. The app *Malaak*

Another example of applications for comics from the Middle East, and more specifically Lebanon, is the app of the Lebanese superhero *Malaak: Angel of Peace* by the Lebanese artist Joumana Medlej.³⁶ Launched in 2006, it was originally created as a webcomic. Following this, it was created as an application for tablets and other mobile devices, being printed and available in Lebanon. Born from a cedar (the Lebanese national emblem), Malaak fights against crime in a war scenario. Aimed at a teenage audience, the message of the comic book remains clear: only by fighting their fears together will the Lebanese manage to build a new Lebanon. Additionally, the fact that Malaak is a good-looking girl and not a boy, like in many other superhero comic books, opens a window for engaging women in contributing to the peace process.

Despite her high heels, while being disguised as a superheroine Malaak represents the importance of the involvement of women in avoiding a second civil war in Lebanon. Choosing a girl (rather than a boy) as the main character for the only Lebanese comic book hero underscores the issue of gender representation, firstly because its educational purpose can easily reach both female and male readership, and, secondly, because it places great importance on women in Lebanese society. The superhero genre is aimed at a young audience. Creating a superhero who synthesizes national values and myths, the author of *Malaak* is looking for the re-establishment of unity—namely, Lebanese unity. Reading the

comic, children will probably not perceive a deeper lesson and interpretation of the text. They desire to be like the superhero; Malaak fights against crime, but she fights against fear too. Children may be drawn to Malaak not just because of her powers but also because of the behavior she promotes. By talking about the fears of war, which many children experienced in 2006 during the bombing campaign, children might also be ready to talk about the civil war, which is usually a taboo topic among Lebanese. Felix Lang interviewed Joumana Medlej, the author of *Malaak*, in 2011: “The war was incomprehensible, nothing to understand. People went mad, they wanted to fight”. She recalled the impression she got from her parents who never attempted to explain what was happening: “it was just: we’re going to the shelter” (Lang, 2016:146).³⁷ This comic book is for a generation of young readers who did not experience the civil war themselves, but grew up in a society that is still suffering from war trauma 20 years on from the peace treaty. The use of authentic war photographs as background images in the comic book, mixed with drawings, connects the present aspect of the city of Beirut with the message of the book. Even today while walking through the streets of Beirut, one comes across many buildings that carry traces of the war, with bullet holes and splitters on their walls. Lang (2016:177) sees the use of photographs in the following way: “In the context of the Lebanese literary field, with the commitment of its players to the preservation of memory, (...) take on a special significance as a way of reconstructing a (historically) coherent urban space.”³⁸

Murray (2010: 672) points out that: “Comics have long been deeply implicated in presenting military themes (...) This association between war and comics should not come as a surprise, given the close historical association of comics with politics and propaganda. After all, comics excel at presenting caricatures and at celebrating mythological heroes and exaggerated villains, which make them an ideal medium for propaganda.”³⁹ But “emphasizing superheroes’ prosocial behavior may help better prepare children to recognize the difference between positive and negative influences in other contexts.”⁴⁰

Every sincere effort to help children cope with trauma should be paid respect. Through the language of comic books, adults will probably reach children in a less complicated and more amusing way than through traditional educational methods. The stimulus to talk about sensitive topics with children, such as war, through the visual language of comics, without representation of explicit violent scenes, makes *Malaak* a good example of the use of comic books to cope with trauma. Due to the price and the lack of access of many children to the internet or to devices where an app can be installed, the book will probably not reach all the audiences that could profit from its message. However, the attempt itself is worthy of attention, since it paves the way for using superhero comics to

deal with tabooed traumatic issues or with the (mixed) feelings of children, for example concerning the Port of Beirut incidents; talking about them could be key to normalizing the situation. Part of the proceeds from the sale of the printed books were donated to an organization that helps children to recover from war trauma.⁴¹

IV. Price

The prices of comics differ considerably: magazines like *Samandal* cost around USD 3-4 for the first issues, as they were published every 4 months, to USD 15-20 for the annual issues. The price of Lebanese graphic novels is ranges from EUR 10-40. In Lebanese pounds, using the official exchange of USD 1 = LBP 1,500, this means that a calculated average price of USD 15 was equivalent to about LBP 22,500. These were the prices before the economic crisis that started in 2019,⁴² the Covid-19 global pandemic in 2020, and the events that happened at the Port of Beirut in August 2020, which resulted in the collapse of the Lebanese pound, and of the cultured Lebanese middle class who could pay these prices for the books. With the growth of an informal currency market, the Lebanese pound exchange rate is now a minimum of LBP 7,900 and a maximum of LBP 9,000 for one US dollar. With one US dollar now worth LBP 8,000, it costs roughly LBP 120,000 to buy the same paperback. On a once-decent government salary of around LBP 2,280,000 (roughly USD 1,500) per month, it would now cost 20% of this income to buy one graphic novel.

V. University and comics

V. I. American University of Beirut

Since 2015, AUB has held an annual symposium on Arabic comics through The Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative. The topics have comprised: "Personal Narratives and Memoir" (2015),⁴³ "Framing War and Conflict in Comics" (2017),⁴⁴ "Guerilla Grafix: Comics and Activism" (2018),⁴⁵ and "Displacement and Seeking Refuge As Seen Through Comics" (2019).⁴⁶ It is important to point out that this is the first academic initiative to study comics from the Arab countries, and the symposium's aim is to bring together scholars and artists. All of them are available on AUB's YouTube channel.⁴⁷

Personal Narratives and Memoir (2015)	Personal narrative of war: Reshaping of an identity GEORGE KHOURY JAD	Making Death Visible: War in Lebanese Graphic Memoir NADIM DAMLOUJ I	How I became a Lebanese Comics Artist LENA MERHEJ	The Arab of the Future, or the Future of Arab Comics JONATHAN GUYER	Preserving Palestinian History Through Graphic Memoir LEILA ABDEL RAZAQ	Testifying, a new form of personal narrative in Comics OLIVIER KOCH	In the backstage of an Egyptian graphic novel - Metro MAGDY EL SHAFEE	Drawing the street SHENNA WY
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Framing War and Conflict in Comics (2017)	Panel 1: Historiographies of War and Conflict in Comics	Tales from the Trenches JUSTIN WADLOW	Toutes Les Mers MICHELE STANDJOFSKY	Arabic Comics and Conflicts: Ideological Indoctrination vs. Individual need of change GEORGES KHOURY JAD	
	Panel 2: Revolutions and Generational Conflict	Telling Graphic Stories of the Region LINA GHAI BEH	Comics and the Challenge to Patriarcal Authoritarianism JACOB HOIGILT	Nationalism for Kids: How Egyptian Comics teach conflict JONATHAN GUYER	
	Panel 3: Comics Journalism: Alternative Narratives of Conflict and People in Crisis	The Cartoonist as Correspondent: Comics Journalism and Conflict ANDY WARNER	Threads from the Refugee Crisis KATE EVANS	"Meantime": a Graphic Novel presenting an alternative view of the Syrian Refugees LENA MERHEJ KAMAL EL HAKIM	
Guerilla Grafix: Comics and Activism (2018)	Panel 1: Politics of Identity, Gender & Environment	Drawing the Political Imaginary JANA TRABOULSI	Not from Mars: Documenting Her Own History RAWAND ISSA	God Save Casablanca MOHAMAD BELLAOUI	Feminism and Censorship in Arab Comics ZAINAB FAKISI
	Panel 2: Drawing Humanity: Displacement, Gender and Human Rights	Feminism Through the Eyes of Art: Challenges and Opportunities FATMA MANSOUR	Migration or Displacement? TWINS CARTOON	Commitment Kills Art SEIFEDDINE NECHI	The image of the Woman in Arab & Egyptian Editorial Cartoons DOAA' EL ADL
	Panel 3: Comics as counter narrative: Education, Research & History	The Consequence of Place: Imagining the Future in Arab Comics	The Making of Lissa: Notes on Collaborating in Ethnographic Comics	Education and Activism BAHIA SHEHAB	Abdelaziz Mouride and Moroccan Comics Dedicated to the

		IMAM HUMAM	MARC PARENTEAU		National Counter-Narrative ENRIQUE KLAUS
Displacement and Seeking Refuge As Seen Through Comics (2019)	Panel 1: The Landscape and Impact of Graphic Narratives of Displacement and Exile	Displaced Region: Graphic Narratives and Untold Stories GEORGES KHOURY	Escaping Wars and Waves: Encounters with Syrian Refugees OLIVIER KUGLER	Graphically Narrating Displacement MALU HALASA	The Drama of Exile JONATHAN GUYER
	Round Table 2: Severe Circumstances and Violent Encounters: Reasons for Leaving and the Perils of the Journey	Eternal Refuge MIGO	Migration ABIR GASMI	The Last Journey KAMAL ZAKOUR	The Hoopoe TWINS CARTOON
	Panel 3: Comics of Displacement as a Critical Tool in Teaching, Research Dissemination and Challenging Gender Norms	Histories of Migration Through Comics in the Classroom BEETA BAGHOOLIZADEH	A drop in the Ocean DIALA BRISLY	Somoud: Using Comics To Disseminate Evidence-Based Research on Coping To Children and Adolescents Affected by War and Conflict TANIA BOSQUI	Tracing Gendered Migrations Through Comics MYRA EL-MIR
	Round Table 3: The Host Country: Discrimination, Legal Issues and Opportunities	Visitors of The Exile NOUR HIFAQUI	An Ingo Worker Walks into a Refugee Camp YAZAN SAADI	Being Illegal is Unbearable RAWAND ISSA	Home is Where One Starts From DIALA BRISLI

Table 17: Annual conferences on Arabic comics at AUB

Table 17: Annual conferences on Arabic comics at AUB: Annual conferences on Arabic comics in the Department of Architecture and Design at AUB. In blue, researchers; in green, comic artists, visual artists, and authors; in yellow, both researchers and artists.

Here, we see that the number of panels presented has increased significantly, from eight papers presented in the first edition to 16 in the last. The number of scholars compared to artists has also changed: from five and eight respectively in the first edition to six and ten in the last. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was not possible to hold the 2020 annual conference. The award was streamed online.

Other events at AUB and The Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative include an annual exhibition. The topic of the 2016 exhibition was "Arab Comics in the Curriculum: The AUB Libraries Collection". The aim was to show the AUB comics collection while offering a survey of Arab comics across geographic locations, time, formats, subjects, media, etc., and to encourage the integration of comics into liberal arts college curricula across different disciplines. As written in the introductory panel: "comics have indeed become a very serious matter. They are now broadly integrated into academia across Europe and North America, and are gaining following in the academic and scholarly Arab world as well" (West Hall Malhas Common Room, AUB; from a picture taken by the author). The exhibition was divided into seven sections: "The Rise of the Ninth Art"; "Surveying the Field of Arab Comics"; "Cultural Studies"; "Arab Comics in the Curriculum"; "Politics, Ideology, and Nationalism"; "Gender Studies"; and "The City as Dystopia/Utopia". Each section was focused on different issues. "Surveying the Field of Arab Comics" was divided into early comics and juvenile literature, two early jewels from Egypt (*Samīr* and *Sindibād*) and Arab comics and translation (*Lulu*, *Mickey*, and *Tintin*). The "Cultural Studies" section was subdivided into "The Self and the Other: Biography and Personal Narratives", with examples of the graphic novels *Baddawi*, *Metro*, and *I Remember Beirut*; the hero and the villain as Samir fought with James Bond; consumerism, with comic pages making fun of the dream of unhappiness being solved by buying specific goods, and the counter-cultural implications; and graphic medicine—that is, using comics to intersect the discourse on healthcare, public health and social science, as well as narrative medicine-writing with visual representations of physical and emotional symptoms to forge a new path in medical education.

"Arab Comics in the Curriculum" explored meanings through a variety of perspectives. "Politics, Ideology, and Nationalism" dealt with contents touching on current (at the time they were written) affairs and dealing with complex ideological and nationalistic politics and social issues. This section was divided into marketing state policies, such as the High Dam and the Nubians in Egypt; war, subdivided into Iraq and Syria; and the respective regimes' perspective on wars, taking examples from the Iraqi magazine *al-Mitmar* and the Syrian magazine *Usāma*. Both magazines contributed iconic images (soldiers, leaders...), all at the service of a carefully tailored discourse. Thus, the 1973 War in Egypt was seen as a war of the "ordinary man". The section on war also featured examples of popular struggle, Palestine, and the image of the leader. Here, attention was given to the constant interchange of communally relevant facts, symbols, and emotions that attempted to appeal to and to mobilize different groups. In this sense, comics helped to frame, reinforce, and create new

ways of seeing “the Arab Leader”: firm, paternal, and down to earth. Saddam Hussein is represented as the father of the Iraqi children, and Abdel Nasser as the hero of Arab nationalism. Palestine and Protest and Contention was also displayed.

The last two sections were “Gender Studies” and “The City as Dystopia/Utopia”. In the first, gender and nation concerned the notion of the Mother Nation and the Father Leader; bodies in public spaces concerned harassment in the street and how comics deal with it. In “The City as Dystopia/Utopia”, the interaction that exists between comics and the urban space, seen as the embodiment as well as the center of modern culture and life, was highlighted. Two cities were portrayed: Beirut as a trope of Arab modernities and Cairo as *Umm al-Dunya* [Mother of the World]. This exhibition was made with titles from the AUB comic books archives. It summed up the history of Arab comics and called attention to the need for more and deeper research, opening up new areas of inquiry such as the times Palestinians are represented in children's magazines, and the importance—or lack thereof—of independent publishers.

The annual exhibition of 2018 was entitled “ولاد كازا: الشريط المصور المغربي الملتزم” (*Wlād Kāzā: al-Šarīṭ al-Muṣawwar al-Maġribī l-Multazim*) [Wled Caza: Engaged Moroccan Comics and Street Art]. In this exposition, the Moroccan artist collective SkefSkef was invited to present its pieces on urban culture. They work across different disciplines with comics, urban and street art, and music. The collective is involved in the artistic and cultural scene of their country, forming part of the youth movement there. This exhibition displayed selected works from numerous talented artists, echoing a deliberate locality through the language and dialects of the comics (Moroccan dialect and Amazigh), the urban environment of their city, and its subcultures, while also tackling issues of identity, representation, and censorship, among others. The 2019 exhibition was entitled “In-Transit Exhibition: Displacement and Seeking Refuge as Seen Through Comics”. This exhibition was held in بيت بيروت [Beit Beirut – Museum and Urban Cultural Center] and not in the AUB Art Gallery as usual. The topic was directly related to the symposium of that year. The aim was to show the meanings of demographic shift, refugees, and displacement through graphic narratives. The works selected were from different countries, and, as the curator expressed: “The visual and textual narrative quality of Comics, set in an emotive plot and graphic context, helps develop a more personal relationship with the content, that powerfully reveals the human cost of the tragedy, while still providing information and context.”⁴⁸

V. II. Archives and other initiatives — historiographical sources

Finally, The Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative and AUB are running a special loan initiative at the university's Nami Jafet Memorial Library. They made a guide to starting research on comic books of the Arab region, not only by archiving hundreds of book titles but also by highlighting the concepts and historical aspects of comic books, as well as drawing and cartooning techniques.⁴⁹ The archive endeavors to compile comic books, comic strips and graphic novels, especially all children's magazines published between the 1950s and 1980s, such as *Samīr* and *Sindibād*, as well as new publications, photographs of launch events, and posters. Two Masters theses are deposited: “Charlie Hebdo and the French myth of sameness race and gender in the French secular imagination” by Alissar George Daher (2018), and “فن الكومكس في لبنان: إنتاجه وحفظه وتوثيقه” (*Fann al-Kūmiks fī Lubnān: Intāḡu-hu wa-Hifẓu-hu wa-Tawṭīqu-hu*) [Comic Art in Lebanon: Production, Preservation and Documentation] by Yasmine Younes (2018) as a requirement for her Masters degree in library and information management.



Fig. 50: Comic's Archives at the AUB

Fig. 50: Inside the Nami Jafet archives at AUB.

The books are conserved with a special light, the temperature must always be between 18 and 20 degrees Celsius, and the humidity should be in a range of 45 to 55 Celsius. It is also crucial that the lace is made of cotton. All this is in an effort to preserve the books for as long as possible, in the best possible conditions.

V. III. The USEK archives

Another initiative is that created by the Pierre Sadek Foundation. After his death in 2013, this foundation⁵⁰ was established with the aim of preserving the works of the cartoonist and promoting his work through publications, scholarly research, and exhibitions. The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) also has an archive of Sadek's works. As mentioned above, from 8th February to 30th April 2018 the Sursock Museum in Beirut held the exhibition "Pierre Sadek: Picturing History".⁵¹ The exhibition had over 350 plates of his drawings and 500 animated cartoons, spanning from the late 1950s and early 1960s until his death in 2013. A documentary film with testimonies of Sadek was also shown. It paid special attention to the fact that these drawings recorded the history of Lebanon and the region, documenting politics, daily life, and events. In the words of El Khoury: "Sadek is not an artist who merely represents faces and shapes; he is rather a commentator, writer, critic, teacher, and political and social analyst with his own signature style and singular language: (...) caricature" (op. cit., p.5). El Khoury also affirms: "Over half a century of the history of Lebanese politics, its main players and events, its painful and hopeful developments, its happy times and sad times, its successive and interrelated crises. Pierre's drawings capture Lebanon" (op.cit., p.7).

Sadek was committed to freedom of expression, and, according to Patricia Khoder:⁵² "était surtout un homme libre qui n'a jamais caché ses opinions politiques, même si cela lui a causé des ennuis, notamment des menaces de la part du deuxième bureau (service de renseignements de l'armée) durant les années soixante, de Jamil Sayyed durant le mandat Émile Lahoud, qui ont été la cause de son départ de la LBCI pour la Future TV, ou encore de la part du Hezbollah qui ne voulait pas que l'artiste représente son secrétaire général Hassan Nasrallah en dessin." [(he) was above all a free man who never hid his political opinions, even if this caused him problems, including threats from the Second Office (army intelligence service) during the sixties, from Jamil Sayyed during the mandate of Émile Lahoud, who were the cause of his departure from the LBCI (for Future TV), or even on the part of Hezbollah who did not want the artist to represent its secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah in drawings.]

Other exhibitions have been held at the François-Mitterrand National Library in Paris in March 2018, at the 5e Biennale du dessin de presse à la BnF [Fifth Biennial of Press Cartooning at the BnF], under the title “Le dessin de presse au Moyen-Orient: le Liban”. The Pierre Sadek Foundation was represented not only by the artist but also by his daughter Ghada Sadek Abela, president of the foundation, and Luce Mondor. In Bucharest, Romania, Sadek’s work was presented at the Salon d’Humour Francophone. The exhibition was on view at the National Theatre of Bucharest from 19th to 31st March 2019.

VI. Prizes

VI. I. La Plume de Pierre

Every year, the Pierre Sadek Foundation issues the prize La Plume de Pierre Sadek,⁵³ in cooperation with the ALBA and the École supérieure Estienne-Paris. It rewards Lebanese students of arts, animation, design, architecture, and audiovisuals, as well as independent artists. Each year, the foundation chooses a topic: 2020 was The Greater Lebanon (1920-2020), 2019 was freedom in all its aspects, and 2017 was an event of the past year. The jury members of 2017 were Jean Plantureux-Plantu, cartoonist at *Le Monde*; the writer May Menassa; Tarek Mitri, former minister in four successive governments from 2005 to 2011; Chadia Tueni, from the executive committee of the Sursock Museum; Gaby Nasr, journalist at *L’Orient- Le Jour*; Omar Sadek, expert in multiple communication fields; and Philippe Abi Akl, journalist and member of the *Lebanese Press Council*. The jury was formed in 2018 again by Jean Plantureux-Plantu, Luce Mondor, and Tarek Mitri; new members were Ali Jaber, Dean of the Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Communication at the American University in Dubai; Nizar Daher, head of the Lebanese plastic artists; Armand Homsy, cartoonist; Scarlett Haddad, journalist; Elie Khoury, media specialist; and Omar Sadek, expert in multiple communication fields. The jury of the 2019 trophy were Melhem Antoun Riachy, former Minister of Information; Gisele Azzi Khoury, president of the Samir Kassir Foundation; Rabih El Chaer, lawyer; Michel Hajji Georgiou, journalist and human rights activist; Daniel Georr, creator and brand builder in the MENA region; and Ivan Debs, illustrator. Luce Mondor was a jury member for the third time; Eli Khoury and Omar Sadek for the second time.

Winners of La Plume de Pierre, an award shaped like the character Touma with a fountain pen in his hand, were as follows:

	Independent Award	Student Award: 1st Place	Student Award: 2nd Place	Student Award: 3rd Place
2019	Mukhallad Habib	Nour Awad- LIU Bekaa	Nour Ahmad- AUST	Bernard Abou Assi- Alba
2018	Anas El Lakkis	Mohamad Nohad Alameddine- Alba	Pauline Njeim - LU Branch 2	Taha Al Hadi - BAU Debbiyeh
2017		Priscilla Bassil- USEK	Anas El-Lakkis - LU Branch 1	Sally Alaaeldine

Table 18: Winners of La Plume de Pierre

VI. II. The Mahmoud Kahil Award

Under the auspices of the Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative at AUB, جائزة محمود كحيل (*Ġā'izat Maḥmūd Kaḥīl*) [the Mahmoud Kahil Award] has been presented every year since 2015. The motivations of Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf (2016:3) were "honouring his genius by establishing the Mahmoud Kahil Award to allow a younger generation of cartoonists and comic artists to glow and be recognized while alive."⁵⁴ The aim of the prize is to promote comics, editorial cartoons, and illustrations in the Arab world, "to honour and perpetuate the legacy of the late Mahmoud Kahil, one of the leading cartoonists and caricaturists of the Arab World, and a former AUB graduate" (ibid.:4). The award's categories are editorial cartoons, graphic novels (defined as a book format with more than 30 pages), comic strips, graphic illustrations, and children's book illustrations. Two honorary awards are also conferred: The Lifetime Achievement Hall of Fame, which recognizes at least 25 years of work in the field of comics, illustration, and editorial cartooning; and the Comics Guardian Award, whose winners have supported comics and cartoons in the Arab world.

The works are evaluated by prominent comics researchers or artists. In the first year of the Mahmoud Kahil Award, the jury members were Patrick Chappatte, Lebanese-Swiss graphic journalist and editorial cartoonist; Habib Haddad, Lebanese cartoonist and illustrator; Emad Hajjaj, Palestinian-Jordanian political cartoonist; Jihad El Khazen, Lebanese writer, journalist, and editor of *al-Hayat*, an internationally circulated Arabic-language daily published in London; George Khoury, Lebanese comics artist and critic; Magdy El-Shafee, Egyptian comics artist; and Michele Standjofski, comics artist and illustrator.⁵⁵ The second Mahmoud Kahil Award jury was formed by Andrew Warner, American comics artist and author; Armand Homsy, editorial cartoonist publishing in *al-Nahār*; Bahia Shehab, Egyptian artist, designer, and art historian; Mohammad Shennawy,

graphic designer and artist; Jean-Pierre Mercier; scientific advisor at the International City of Comics and Image in Angouleme, France; and, once again, George Khoury.⁵⁶

The jury for the third year was composed of Louise Larsen, art historian from Copenhagen; Ali Mandalawi, Iraqi illustrator and artist, working for *Asharq Al-Awsat*; Lena Merhej, comics artist and expert in graphic narration; Martin Rowson, British editorial cartoonist and writer; Rym Mokhtari, Algerian comics artist; and George Khoury.⁵⁷ The jury for the fourth year comprised Mazen Kerbaj, Lebanese comics artist and visual artist; Joan Baz, Lebanese graphic designer; Chedly Belkhamsa, Tunisian editorial cartoonist for *La Presse de Tunisie*, French daily newspaper and art educator; Simona Gabrieli, researcher and founder of publishing house Alifbata; Steve Bell, English political cartoonist, working for the newspaper *The Guardian* since 1981; and George Khoury.⁵⁸ The jury for the fifth year was made up of Doaa El-Adel, Egyptian political cartoonist currently working for the *Al-Masry Al-Youm* newspaper;⁵⁹ Matt Sidaly, associate professor and chair of the MFA in Comics Program at California College of Arts; Seif Eddine Nechi, Tunisian comics artist and illustrator; Walid Taher, Egyptian author and illustrator; Valerio Bindi, professor, cartoonist and director of Crack! Fumetti Dirompenti festival in Rome, Italy; and George Khoury.⁶⁰ In the latest award, the sixth year, the jury was composed of Mathieu Diez, director of Lyon BD, France; again, the Jordanian cartoonist Emad Hajjaj and George Khoury (JAD) from Lebanon; and Olivier Kugler, comics artist from Germany.⁶¹

	1st Mahmoud Kahil Award March 2016	2nd Mahmoud Kahil Award March 2017	3rd Mahmoud Kahil Award March 2018	4th Mahmoud Kahil Award March 2019	5th Mahmoud Kahil Award March 2020	6th Mahmoud Kahil Award April 2021
Editorial Cartoon	Amjad Rami — Jordan	Doaa Al Adl — Egypt	Sherif Arafa — Egypt	Mohamed Afefa — Palestine	Sara Qaed— Bahrain	Mowafaq Katt—Syria
Graphic Novels	Ahmad Nady — Egypt	Fouad Mez- her — Lebanon	Seif Eddine Nechi — Tunisia	Twins Cartoon— Egypt	Lena Merhej— Lebanon	Mai Koraïem— Egypt
Comic Strips	Mohammad ElMu'ti — Jordan	Othman Selmi — Tunisia	Mohamed Salah — Egypt	Kamal Zakour— Algeria	Hussein Adil —Iraq	Migo — Egypt
Graphic Illustration	Bahij Jaroudi — Lebanon	Muhammad Mustafa — Egypt	Tracy Chahwan — Lebanon	Sandra Ghosn — Lebanon	Hassan Manasrah— Jordan	Michael Jabareen— Palestine
Children's Book Illustration	Azza Hussein — Lebanon / Canada	Maya Fidawi — Lebanon	Walid Taher — Egypt	Hani Saleh — Egypt	Mohamed Taha— Egypt	Diala Brisly— Syria
Life Time Achieve- ment Hall of Fame Award	Lujaina Assil —Syria	Habib Haddad — Lebanon	Naji Al-Ali — Palestine	Hilmi El Tuni — Egypt	George Khoury (JAD)— Lebanon	Ibrahim L'Mhadi — Morocco
Comics Guardian Award	Tok Tok Magazine — Egypt	Cairo Comix Festival — Egypt	Festival International de la Bande Dessinée d'Alger— Algeria	Samandal— Lebanon	Lab 619— Tunisia	Master of Illustration and Comics at ALBA — Lebanon

Table 19: Winners of the Mahmoud Kahil Award between the years 2015-2020

Table 19: Winners of the Mahmoud Kahil Award between the years 2015-2020

Source: Compiled by the author based on the books published after the award ceremony, except for the 2020 and 2021 editions, which did not take place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Website <http://mahmoudkahil-award.com>, under "The Award— MK 2020 and MK 2021"; and the website for The Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative at AUB, under "Mahmoud Kahil Award" (<https://www.aub.edu.lb/saci/Pages/default.aspx>)

Comparing this data, we see that the jury members are prominent figures in the comics scene and research, either because they published in well-known newspapers or because they work at leading universities. They come not only from the Middle East but from Europe and the US as well. It is worth noting that Mahmoud Kahil winners became jury members in the following years. The Comics Guardian Award has been awarded three times to magazines that compile independent comics and twice to festivals, one in Egypt and one in Algeria.

The 2020 award, scheduled for November 2020, did not take place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Neither the conference nor the exhibition could be held in person; however, these events were hosted online.⁶²



Fig. 51: Mahmud Kahil Award on a shelf at AUB

VII. Censorship

VII. I. What is censorship?

We understand the term *censorship* as the act of suppressing or removing anything that might be considered objectionable from an artistic work, whether words, ideas, images, or anything that could be offensive or entail political or moral value. Censorship can either be practiced by the author—so-called self-censorship—or it can be imposed externally by a bureaucratic instrument. An initial review of the media in the region indicates a lack of freedom and that censorship or self-censorship is still practiced in Lebanon. As a result, important Lebanese media outlets have established their headquarters in alternative locations outside of the country, mainly in London or Cyprus, to mitigate the controls to which they are subjected. In the case of comic books, many are published in France or Belgium.

There are several indicators that freedom of expression is in danger in the country under discussion. To demonstrate this phenomenon, three of the most renowned international NGOs for freedom of press—Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House, and Transparency International—have concluded that freedom of expression is severely limited in Lebanon. Reporters Without Borders is a French organization founded in 1985 that conducts annual analysis of press freedom worldwide with an 87-item questionnaire, and is considered a good barometer for press freedom. Some of the items evaluated are “pluralism, media independence, media environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, and the quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information”.⁶³ US-based Freedom House, founded in 1941, analyzes its data based on expert consultations and annually publishes the *Freedom in the World* report, which is produced “by a team of in-house and external analysts and expert advisers from the academic, think tank, and human rights communities. (...) The analysts (...) use a broad range of sources, including news articles, academic analyses, reports from nongovernmental organizations, individual professional contacts, and on-the-ground research.”⁶⁴

Transparency International was born in 1993 in Berlin, Germany. It measures perceived corruption and its index “does capture the informed views of analysts, businesspeople and experts in countries around the world”.⁶⁵ It developed the so-called Corruption Perceptions Index, which “scores countries on a scale from zero to ten, with zero indicating high levels of perceived corruption and ten indicating low levels of perceived corruption.”⁶⁶ Evaluations carried out by these organizations are used by the scientific

community and enjoy high levels of trust among academics. These three institutions conclude that the freedom of speech in Lebanon has “noticeable problems”.

In 2019, Reporters Without Borders ranked Lebanon 101 out of 180 countries in its World Press Freedom Index.⁶⁷ Freedom House classified Lebanon as a partly free country, with a score of 43/100 points in its 2019 *Freedom in the World* report;⁶⁸ and Transparency International ranked Lebanon 138 of out of 180 countries in its 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index.⁶⁹

Freedom and Corruption in Lebanon

	World Press Freedom Index according to Reporters Without Borders (the higher the score, the less freedom; in parentheses, the total number of countries analyzed)	Freedom Index according to Freedom House (the higher the score, the less freedom)	Corruption Perceptions Index according to Transparency International (the lower the score, the higher the corruption; in parentheses, its rank among countries analyzed)
2021	34,93 (107)	43/100	
2020	33,19 (102)	44/100	25/100 (149)
2019	32,44 (101)	4,5 (45/100)	28/100 (137)
2018	31,15 (100)	5 (43/100)	28/100 (138)
2010	20,50 (78)	4 (40/100)	2,5/10 (127)
2006	27 (107)	4,5 (45/100)	3,6/10 (63)

Table 20: Freedom and corruption in Lebanon

Table 20: Freedom and corruption in Lebanon according to major NGOs.

Source: Prepared by the author on the basis of data provided by Reporters Without Borders,⁷⁰ Freedom House,⁷¹ and Transparency International.⁷²

Data provided by these organizations shows that many authors practice self-censorship, especially in the field of cartoons, which typically have a major satirical component. These numbers indicate a worsening situation concerning freedom of speech and freedom of press. To compare the numbers in the region, Reporters without Borders gave Egypt a score of 56,47 (163) in 2019 and 43,25 (133) in 2006; in 2019, Freedom House classified Egypt as a “not free country” with 6 points,⁷³ and in 2006, during the Mubarak regime, gave it a score of 5,5.⁷⁴ Finally, Transparency International placed Egypt’s corruption levels in 2018 at 35 (on a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 as a highly corrupt country and 100 as highly transparent), while in 2006 it rated it 3,3 (on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0

indicating high levels of perceived corruption and 10 indicating low levels of perceived corruption.)⁷⁵

Lebanese NGOs working on civil rights activism, as well as civil rights activists and Lebanese civil society active in the area of freedom of speech and press, also perceive an issue with freedom of speech. The NGO March was founded in 2011 for “fighting against censorship and advocating for equal rights for all Lebanese communities.”⁷⁶ They advocate for a reform of the press law in Lebanon: “legislative recommendations and reforms (that) would help move away from preemptive censorship”.⁷⁷ They also run the Virtual Museum of Censorship,⁷⁸ where they explain which books, movies, and other artistic works have been censored, when, and why. In the category of books, this virtual museum lists 53 books due to their sexual, religious, or political content, but the list is most probably incomplete.

To illustrate this, examples of books banned by the General Security in Lebanon include the children’s book *Princess Nina*⁷⁹ for homosexuality, as well as *Sesame Street: Grover’s Eight Nights of Light*⁸⁰ for containing Jewish traditions. Two graphic novels are listed under this category on the website: *Persepolis* for being “offensive to Iran”, thus banned by the General Security for political reasons, and *Wonder Woman: The Deluxe Junior Novel*⁸¹ because the Israeli actress Gal Gadot appears on the cover. Other noticeable books on the list of banned books are *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank and the novel by the Lebanese author Layla Baalbakki أنا أحيا (*Ana Aḥyā*) [I Live] (1958) for being unethical.⁸² On this website, 14 works in the category “visual arts” are listed.⁸³ One is by the artist Mazen Kerbaj for mocking the Lebanese bourgeois.⁸⁴ Sadly, this caricature was censored in the magazine *L’Orient-Littéraire* in an issue dedicated to critic censorship in Lebanon.⁸⁵

Another NGO worth mentioning is the Samir Kassir Foundation. Samir Kassir was a journalist and scholar who died in a car bombing in 2005. This organization was founded in Lebanon to preserve the work of Kassir and to “promote cultural freedom and free thought (...)”,⁸⁶ among other activities. It annually confers the Samir Kassir Award for freedom of press to journalists, and this prize is partially funded by the European Union (EU). Mazen Kerbaj, mentioned above, published the book *Une Semaine Sans La Voix De Samir* in 2005,⁸⁷ in which the author recollects in a combination of diary and sketchbook all the feelings that crossed his mind: the moment of the news, the memories, the burial, and also remembers the friend and the man that Samir Kassir was for him.⁸⁸

All the abovementioned organizations share the common aim of denouncing and fighting against censorship, as well as opposing the disregard for and violation of the fundamental human rights of freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

VII. II. What is the basis for free expression in Lebanon?

Lebanon is considered one of the most liberal countries in the MENA region in terms of freedom of speech and expression. The level of freedom of expression in a country is a strong indicator when determining its democratic values. According to García-Marín (2017:231): “there can be no real democracy without freedom of expression, or freedom of expression without free media.”⁸⁹ In the MENA region, there is a strong lack of freedom of expression, specifically in Lebanon. Although there are no laws or regulations explicitly mentioning censorship, it is still a common practice. This is not only in the media, but in artistic creation too: a form of self-censorship. This situation is described by Reporters Without Borders as a “laissez-faire” attitude: “Lebanon’s media landscape appears tightly aligned with domestic and foreign powers vying for control. Key political groups but also wealthy family clans benefit from a weak or dysfunctional legal framework that reflects an overall laissez-faire attitude.”⁹⁰ Even though there are written laws, it is still not clear at all what should be published and what should not.

VII. III. Why should we care about censorship? – Examples

Samandal volume 7 has the subtitle الثأر (*al- Ta’r*) [Revenge]. In this book, each comic made a pun out of the topic of revenge. Two of the 35 authors who published their comics in the volume were subsequently arrested and taken to the Lebanese General Security: Lebanese author Lena Merhej and French author Valfred. Both comics were presented by the General Security to the editor of the magazine. The comic وصفات لبنانية للانتقام (*Waṣafāt Lubnāniyya li-l-Intiqām*) [Lebanese Recipes for Revenge] resulted in *Samandal* being charged with “inciting sectarian strife, denigrating religion, publishing false news and defamation and slander”⁹¹ by a Lebanese court in 2010. In 2015, the editors Omar Khouri, Hatem Imam, and Fadi Baki were fined USD 20,000. On the page taken to the court, some curses in the Levantine vernacular were illustrated. One of them was حرق الدين (*Haraqā l-dīn*) [May [God] burn your religion], an expression generally used to express exasperation, rather than being a sectarian affront. The drawings show a petrol can and matchsticks, used to burn a priest and an imam. At the end of the page, five people ask in speech balloons about other religions: one asking about الرقابة (*al-raqāba*) [the censors] in a scream, one asking about the Jews in a whisper, and the other three asking about the Druze, the Buddhists and the vegetarians.

In the censorship statement released by the editors of *Samandal*, they wrote: “The comics themselves address religion only tangentially and deal satirically with completely

different subjects. However, a handful of panels were selectively taken out of context as proof of blasphemy (akin to indicting a publisher for having a character in a book use the name of the lord in vain.)”⁹²



Fig. 52: *Samandal* 7, p. 83

Fig. 52: *Samandal* Volume 7, Page 83: Lebanese Recipes for Revenge

Following this, a crowdfunding campaign was launched, reaching the amount of USD 31,106.⁹³ This campaign made it possible for the magazine to continue publishing on a yearly basis. In 2015, Lena Merhej published the volume of *Samandal* جغرافيا (*Ġuġrāfiyā*) [Geographie, Geography]. Page 184 to page 191 featured an explanation of the case entitled *الذي حصل* (*Allaḍī Ḥaṣala*) [What Happened], in which the author explains the ways that regular swearwords are being used in Lebanon. On page 189, she writes: “كان لابد من ذكر” (*Kāna lā budda min ḍikr haḍihi l-ṣatīma li-u‘abbir ‘an haḍā l-iḥsās al-‘amīq li-“ta‘ibtu”*) [It was necessary to draw this swearword to express the deep feeling of ‘I’m exhausted’]. On the third panel in the speech balloon, we read: “وكيف” (*Wa-kayfa yumkin rasm haḍā l-ta‘bīr min dūni ḥarq šay’ dū šila bi-l-dīn?*) [How can we draw this expression without burning something related to religion?] In the following pages (pp. 190-191), the author reflects this question, concluding that the drawings were isolated from their context: “قطع أو حذف (أو فهم) صورة من قصة” (*Qaṭ‘ aw ḥaḍf (aw fahm) ṣūra min qišṣat kūmiks yusāwī qaṭ‘*

kalima min naṣṣ) [Cutting or removing (or interpreting) a picture from a comic story is equivalent to cutting a word from a text] (p. 191, 6th panel). The comic finishes with a joke related to the garbage crisis in Beirut: “ المهم ألا تكتبوا عن الدين مهما حصل.. و إذا احترق *** لسبب أو لآخر، ” (*Al-muhimm a-lā taktubū ‘an al-dīn mahmā ḥaṣala wa-idā iḥtaraqa *** li-sabab aw li-āḥar, irsumū kīs zubāla*) [It is important not to write about religion... and if the *** burns for one reason or another, draw a garbage bag] (p. 191, 9th panel).

The comic *Ecce Homo*, authored by the French artist Valfret and published⁹⁴ in *Samandal* volume 7 in 2009, was presented by the General Security at the prosecution to *Samandal* editor Baki for the same reason ascribed to Merhej’s work.⁹⁵ From page 258 to page 266, the comic shows a Roman centurion coming late to a stoning, where he meets a Roman legionary. Both start drinking and get drunk. The legionary goes to the house of the centurion and they have sex. Because the centurion does not want the officers to know that he is homosexual, he kills the legionary. The principal suspects are Christians: “Bon les gars, les principaux suspects sont de la nouvelle secte. Attention! Les individus sont peut-être armés!! On va rentrer dans leur...” [Good guys, the main suspects are from the new sect. Warning! Individuals may be armed!! We will go back to their...] (p.263, panel 1). The Roman troops attack and kill some people. At the end, the centurion picks one man, puts him on a cross, and says: “C’est toi qui est PD” [You are the one that is queer] (p.266).

These are not the only examples of caricatures or comics facing issues with censorship. The strip in the Saudi newspaper *Ashraq al-Awsat* published on 1st April 2016 by Amjad Rasmi depicts the Lebanese state as an April Fools’ joke. The cartoon was later removed from the website without explanation. The joke was more likely to be a critique of the difficulties of governing Lebanon, rather than depicting the Lebanese state as a failure; even so, the offices of the newspaper were attacked.



Fig. 53: Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi

Fig. 53: كذبة نيسان - دولة لبنان (*Kidbat Nisān – Dawlat Lubnān*) [April Fools – the State of Lebanon]

In July 2019, censorship spread its tentacles not only, as we have seen, to books, comics, daily strips, and caricatures, but to music too. The globally renowned Lebanese rock group Mashrou' Leila, whose singer has openly declared his homosexuality, were prevented from playing at the Byblos International Festival after the Maronite Catholic Eparchy of Byblos stated that the musicians “offend religious and human values and insult Christian beliefs”.⁹⁶ This has been perceived as an indicator of Lebanon’s onward march for freedom of expression. As Nisrine Mansour (2017:197) wrote: “in the last 20 years, a growing queer subculture has elbowed its way through Lebanon’s postwar public mosaic.”⁹⁷ This band was also banned in Jordan due to intolerance of the queer and homosexual community in the country.⁹⁸

An invasive, far-reaching censorship is also an attempt to control and “purify” the national culture by the state bureaucracy. Although this attempt in the end proves illusory, it implies a great amount of force and coercion and can even lead to institutionalized violence. For that reason, it is important to be aware of the general mechanisms behind it.⁹⁹

VIII. Perception of the comic as culture

The comic is gaining space and more of a presence. The variety existing in the market today indicates that the collective prejudices in the collective imaginary, which see comics as a medium aimed at children and young audiences, are no longer valid, and comics are being claimed as a space for cultural thought and expression. Comics reflect the reality of their time and the society in which they are created. They are used as an instrument of reflection, which is as valid as any other medium. Over the next pages, we will see how important it is to depict socio-political events as a part of the so-called “historical memory”, and how Lebanese comics vindicate these topics more strongly.

There has been and there is the production and consumption of comics for children, or comics that may be banal or stereotyped. But in the current panorama in Lebanon, the production of avant-garde, revolutionary, or rebel speeches is a reality. The distribution channels—although they are not as wide as they could be—are not closed to anyone, and anyone with an interest can get a copy of a comic. Under an apparently superficial layer, comics have been used to articulate speeches and concerns and to transmit messages on segregation, excessive corporate ambition, speculation, social awareness, etc.

The number of female authors coincides with a moment of feminist vindication. Even if women are still underrepresented worldwide, the authors who are translated into other languages, have won awards, and have published longer works are women. In addition to

the recognition of women, it also highlights the stream of demarginalization and separation from the hegemonic male discourse. The increase in published women authors is accompanied by the increase of women readers and therefore the influence they have in publishing houses and editorials when they plan their catalogs.

This all adds to the way in which the social and institutional perception of comics in Lebanon is placed, similar to the path taken in European countries, especially after the publication of *Maus: a Survivor's Tale* (1992) and *Persepolis* (2000). The competition they have with other media for leisure time, the divergence from popular prices, and the tenuousness of the industry could condemn Lebanese comics to a cultural elite. However, the support they receive—both through private individuals and institutions—as well as the eruption of graphic novels could reverse this situation, not only commercially, but also by contributing to the cultural legitimation of the medium.

The contrast of the graphic novel as a cultured, adult author's product, carrying literary and artistic aspirations, with the comic as a medium aimed at children, or as light reading, escapist, and childish, might be seen as a reaction to justify the cultural (de)legitimation of the comic previously produced or outside this label. The cultural legitimacy and influence on popular culture of comics have also provided the opportunity to create new cultural expressions designed for different ages, tastes, and sensibilities. The necessary diversification of these products makes them able to reach even wider audiences. The normalization of reading comics is a valid option to consider new waves and modes of thinking, breaking with the traditions imposed by "high culture", namely, literature. The commitment of the graphic novel has been positive in terms of the entry of new readers, publishing houses, book stores, and other actors linked traditionally to the book industry; yet more than a decade after its commercial introduction, it is still aimed at a specific type of reader. Works framed as graphic novels are usually unitary and without a continuity solution.

The industry is lacking, but not the talent. As we have seen, a significant number of Lebanese authors working for foreign markets, who are obtaining recognition and awards, are now important products in Lebanon: books are so much more expensive than if they were locally produced. Moreover, authors living in Lebanon cannot afford to live on products created and commercialized in Lebanon, and so they are working in other fields. The initiatives can be seen as an economic engine in these artistic manifestations, stimulating production, distribution, and recognition. Since, ultimately, the comic is another artistic manifestation, and is thus part of the cultural heritage of society.

¹ By “art salon”, we understand the definition given by Nadia von Maltzahn: “(...) a group exhibition of art that takes place on a regular basis. (...) The Arab region has had a long tradition of scholarly, social or literary gatherings (majlis, pl. majalis) that have been referred to as salons. Art salons showed similarities to these earlier gatherings, and constituted a (regulated) public sphere in which debates took place, styles were circulated, and a shared tradition was established.” in Maltzahn, Nadia von, und Monique Bellan, Hrsg. (2018) *The Art Salon in the Arab Region: Politics of Taste Making*. Bd. Band 132. Beirut Texts and Studies. Baden-Baden: Ergon Verlag.

² In the spring of 2016, I bought a book from the Palestinian cartoonist Naji Al-Ali in the Erotique-Département Livres Arabes on one of the benches in Hamra. It could be that it was wrongly put there, since the book has nothing to do with the topic, and rather more with drawings depicting and bringing awareness of the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon, as well as the Lebanese Civil War. On the cover, the child Handala climbs up to exchange the Israeli flag for a Lebanese one.

https://www.antoineonline.com/Book_الكاريكاتير by العلي ناجي 9789953008837.aspx?productCode=0009789953008837 [last accessed 14th June 2020]

³ Kaouri 2020.

⁴ Boraie 2014.

⁵ <https://alfurat.com/books?category=31&page=18#content> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

⁶ Nassar 2016.

⁷ <https://www.librairiestephan.com/la-librairie/> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

⁸ Sargon, Anthony, email message to author, 8th March 2017

⁹ <https://www.plan-bey.com> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

¹⁰ See: <http://publishersunionlb.sslogistics.com/ar/index.php/hiring/119-be-involved>: [last accessed 15th September 2020]:

دور النشر في لبنان: يبلغ عدد دور النشر في لبنان حوالي ٦٥٠ دار نشر مسجلين لدي النقابة. ان لبنان يمتاز بوجود اكبر عدد من دور النشر مقارنة بحجمه (*Dūr al-našr fī Lubnān: yabluḡ ‘adad dūr al-našr fī Lubnān ḥawālī 650 dār našr musaḡḡalīn ladā l-niqāba. Inna Lubnān yamtāz bi-wuḡūd akbar ‘adad min dūr al-našr muqāranatan bi-ḥaḡmi-hi*) [Publishing houses in Lebanon: The number of publishing houses in Lebanon is about 650, as registered with the syndicate. Lebanon is distinguished for having the largest number of publishing houses in relation to its size].

¹¹ <https://daraladab.com/text.php?id=69> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

¹² Ruocco

¹³ For an incomplete overview, see: <https://daraladab.com/category.php?id=7> [last accessed 24st May 2021]

¹⁴ Ruocco, *ibid*.

¹⁵ <https://alifbata.fr/qui-sommes-nous/> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

¹⁶ <https://alba.edu.lb/french/Editions-ALBA> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

¹⁷ *ibid*.

¹⁸ One of these magazines is *Plastik*: “plastik* is an independent, award-winning visual, culture and arts magazine dedicated to new creative talents around the world, with a reputation for ground-breaking photography, fashion and editorial.” <https://www.plastikmagazine.com/about> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

¹⁹ <https://www.53dots.com> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

²⁰ The webpage is available under: <https://www.hachette-antoine.com> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

²¹ نجلا جريصاتي خوري (Yā Raytnī ‘Uṣfūr: Aḡānī wa-Aṣ‘ār) by يا ريتني عصفور: أغاني وأشعار Khoury], (Dar Onbuz: Beirut, 2016). In MSA, the title would be يا ليتني عصفور (Yā Laytanī ‘Uṣfūr).

²² Snaije 2018

²³ On the topic of not publishing in MSA but in colloquial Arabic, Reem Makhoul, the editor of the publishing house قصص (Qīṣas) [Ossass/Stories], who is a Palestinian descendent from Galilee and the author of two published books—البنت التي ضيّعت خيالها (al-Bint illī Ḍayya ‘at Ḥayyal-hā) [The Girl Who Lost Her Imagination] and وين بدي أتخبي؟ (Wayn Baddī Ataḥabbā?) [Where Should I Hide?], illustrated by the Lebanese artist Fouad Mezher—said in an interview with ArabLit: “The demand for our books there is based on the fact that they sound more authentic - children in our books talk like children actually talk, not like lawyers and accountants.” (“Founder of New Publishing Project: Writing and Reading in Colloquial Arabic ‘Is Possible and Fun’” ArabLit 8th November 2016. <https://arablit.org/2016/11/08/founder-of-new-publishing-project-writing-and-reading-in-colloquial-arabic-is-possible-and-fun/> [last accessed 21st May 2021]).

This discussion opens a new research question, i.e. the importance of the diglossia present in the Arabic language among children and the path opened up by publishing in dialect, which could be helpful by promoting reading. This could be particularly significant for children in the diaspora, who have the difficulty of learning their mother tongue in an environment where it is not spoken, added to the difficulty that diglossia imposes on children's literacy in their mother tongue.

²⁴ <http://majalletonboz.com> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

²⁵ جبران تويني [Gebran Tueni] died in 2005 as the first victim of a series of bomb attacks directed at journalists (Samir Kassir, May Chidiac) and politicians (Rafic Hariri, Elias Murr), among others. The assassination of Hariri is considered the trigger event of the so-called “Cedar Revolution”, which resulted in Syrian troops withdrawing from Lebanese territory.

²⁶ <http://www.gebrantuenifoundation.com/events/15/book-gebran-tueni-a-life-in-comics> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

²⁷ <https://www.noolbooks.com/contact/> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

²⁸ <https://rusumat.co/blog/what-is-rusumat> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

²⁹ There is a printed version of the book:
Shahin 2018

³⁰ Lynx Qualey 2014

³¹ Information from the site: <https://www.comicsgate.net/home/aboutus/> [last accessed 15th September 2020]

³² <https://www.facebook.com/Ophois.Studios/about> [last accessed 15th September 2020]

“ستوديوهات أوفيس هي أول ستديوهات لانتاج الكوميكس في مصر والشرق الأوسط” (Stūdiyūhāt Ūfiyūs hiyya awaal stūdiyūhāt li-intāḡ al-kūmīks fī Miṣr wa-l-Šarq al-Awsaṭ) [Studio Ophois is the first comic production studio in Egypt and the Middle East]. As it was founded in 2015, this information is not entirely correct, at least as far as the Middle East is concerned.

³³ Diaa 2016.

³⁴ Rusumat App

³⁵ عبدالله هدية [Abdullah Hadia] is the author of one of the first manga works from the region: أرض اللاشيء (Arḍ al-Lāšay’) [The Land of the Nothing].

³⁶ Medlej 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015

³⁷ Lang 2016

³⁸ Lang op. cit.

³⁹ Murray 2010

⁴⁰ Martin 2007

⁴¹ Malaak, vol. I, p. 7

⁴² The Banque du Liban (BDL) defaulted in March 2020 on 90 billion dollars of sovereign debt obligations. The banks in Lebanon imposed capital controls limiting the amount of US dollars that customers could withdraw, and transfers abroad and from foreign countries were not permitted.

⁴³ <https://www.aub.edu.lb/saci/Pages/Annual-Conference-16.aspx> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

⁴⁴ <https://www.aub.edu.lb/saci/Pages/Annual-Conference-17.aspx> [last accessed 21st May 2021]

- ⁴⁵ <https://www.aub.edu.lb/saci/Pages/Annual-Conference.aspx> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁴⁶ <https://www.aub.edu.lb/saci/Pages/Annual-Conference-2019.aspx> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/user/AUBatLebanon/featured> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁴⁸ <https://www.aub.edu.lb/saci/Pages/Annual-Exhibition-2019.aspx> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁴⁹ <http://aub.edu.lb/libguides.com/c.php?g=276541&p=1842935> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁵⁰ <https://pierresadekfoundation.org> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁵¹ <https://sursock.museum/content/pierre-sadek-picturing-history> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁵² Khoder 2018
- ⁵³ Abi Akl 2019
- ⁵⁴ The Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative. 2016.
- ⁵⁵ *ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ The Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative. 2017.
- ⁵⁷ The Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative. 2018.
- ⁵⁸ The Mu'taz and Rada Sawwaf Arabic Comics Initiative. 2019.
- ⁵⁹ Olivia Stravinsky considers her as “Egypt’s most famous female cartoonist” Stransky 2013
- ⁶⁰ <http://mahmoudkahilaward.com/jury-2019/> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁶¹ <https://mahmoudkahilaward.com/mk-2021/?lang=ar> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁶² Under the website <https://mahmoudkahilaward.com/mahmoud-kahil-virtal-gallery/> available [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁶³ <https://rsf.org/en/detailed-methodology> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁶⁴ https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Methodology_FIW_2018_for_website.pdf [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁶⁵ <https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/overview> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁶⁶ https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2006/0 [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁶⁷ <https://rsf.org/en/lebanon> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁶⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-world/2019> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁶⁹ <https://www.transparency.org/country/LBN> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁷⁰ For 2021: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2021>
 for 2020: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2020>
 for 2019: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2019>
 for 2018: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2018>
 for 2010: <https://rsf.org/en/world-press-freedom-index-2010>
 for 2006: <https://rsf.org/en/worldwide-press-freedom-index-2006>
 [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁷¹ For 2021: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-world/2021>
 for 2020: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-world/2020>
 for 2019: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-world/2019>
 for 2018: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-world/2018>
 for the 2010 and older reports, see: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world> (under “Comparative and Historical Data Files”)
 [last accessed 21st May 2021]

- ⁷² For 2020: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020>
for 2019: <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2019>
for 2018: <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>
for 2010: <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2010/results>;
for 2006: https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2006/0
[last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁷³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-world/2019> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁷⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world> (under “Comparative and Historical Data Files”) [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁷⁵ Just to compare these numbers in a global context: among the European Union (EU) countries, Finland was the highest ranked in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index, with a score of 7,90, as well as being the second highest ranked globally; Bulgaria was the lowest ranked with a score of 29,74 (and globally placed at 111). In the 2019 Freedom in the World report, Finland was ranked as the most free country in the EU, while Hungary, scoring 3,0 points, was designated a “partly free country”. In the 2018 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, the highest scoring EU country was Denmark with 88 out of 100 points, while the lowest was Bulgaria with 42 points. (See footnote 71)
- ⁷⁶ <https://www.marchlebanon.org/about-us/> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁷⁷ <https://www.marchlebanon.org/project/you-have-the-right-not-to-remain-silent/> [last accessed 21st May 2021]
- ⁷⁸ <http://censorshiplebanon.org> [last accessed 24th June 2019] (reference rot)
- ⁷⁹ <http://censorshiplebanon.org/product/princess-nina> [last accessed 24th June 2019] (reference rot)
- ⁸⁰ <http://censorshiplebanon.org/product/grovers-eight-nights-of-light/> [last accessed 24th June 2019] (reference rot)
- ⁸¹ <http://censorshiplebanon.org/product/wonder-woman-the-deluxe-junior-novel/> [last accessed 24th June 2019] (reference rot)
- ⁸² For the importance of this novel, I recommend reading Sfeir, George N. “The Contemporary Arabic Novel.” *Daedalus* 95, no. 4 (1966): 941-60 or Aghacy, Samira. “Contemporary Lebanese Fiction: Modernization without Modernity.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 4 (2006): 561-80.
- ⁸³ <http://censorshiplebanon.org/product-category/visual-arts/> [last accessed 24th June 2019]
- ⁸⁴ <http://censorshiplebanon.org/product/pendant-ce-temps-au-cafe-mazen-kerbaj/> [last accessed 24th June 2019]
- ⁸⁵ Abi Saab 2010
- ⁸⁶ <http://samirkassirfoundation.org/en/Samir-Kassir-Foundation/About-Us/Mission> [last accessed 24th June 2019]
- ⁸⁷ Kerbaj 2005
- ⁸⁸ See Chapter 4, Mazen Kerbaj’s Diaries
- ⁸⁹ García-Marín 2017.
- ⁹⁰ <https://rsf.org/en/news/lebanese-media-family-affair> [last accessed 24th June 2019]
- ⁹¹ <http://www.samandalcomics.org> [last accessed 24th June 2019]
- ⁹² *ibid.*
- ⁹³ <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/the-people-vs-samandal-comics--2#/> (Accessed 4th October 2018)
- ⁹⁴ <https://grandpapier.org/valfred/ecce-homo> [last accessed 24th June 2019]
- ⁹⁵ Muhanna 2015
- ⁹⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/31/lebanon-festival-cancels-mashrou-leila-concert> [last accessed 24th June 2019]

⁹⁷ Mansour, N. (2017). Visualising the (In) visible. Arab Subcultures: Transformations in Theory and Practice, 196-221.

⁹⁸ <http://jordantimes.com/news/local/mashrouV-leilaVs-concert-ban-draws-controversy> [last accessed 24th June 2019]

⁹⁹ In the last years, some cases of court proceedings and sentences for attacking religious sentiments were observed in Spain. In 2018, a court condemned a 24-year-old man for photoshopping his face onto a figure of Christ (See: https://elpais.com/politica/2018/02/07/diario_de_espana/1518019966_395726.html [last accessed 24th June 2019]). Later that year, a renowned Spanish actor faced a trial because he posted colloquial expressions on Facebook which were considered offensive. (See: https://elpais.com/politica/2018/09/26/actualidad/1537951653_491787.html?rel=mas [last accessed 24th June 2019])

Conclusions: from Beirut to the world

It is not only paintings that contribute to representing the world through images; visual expression can be incredibly varied, encompassing comic books, cinema, posters, graffiti, advertisement, photography, and so on. All of these embody collective notions of shared cultural values in a way that the image, and therefore the visual, occupies the central core of the communication between sender and receiver—as defined by the classic structural linguist and semioticians—or between artist and consumer. In the 2013 book *Visual Culture in the Modern Middle East: Rhetoric of the Image*,¹ editors Christiane Gruber and Sune Haugbolle focused on the idea that visual culture is a multidisciplinary field, analyzing it as media for distributing power and speaking with viewers. They state in the introduction that: “cultural production (and its various iterations, including visual ones) has become increasingly important to the national, ethnic, religious and political ethnographers of discursive communities in contemporary Middle East societies.”

An initial approach to the history of the sequential and graphic narrative has served to identify which visual references influence the authors of comics and graphic novels in the region. The terms that have been discussed in this work are all in the category *visual culture*, since we need our visual perception to interpret them; they are also *countercultural*, since they are alternative to the cultural conventionalism of the majority, that is, prose, the novel; they take elements of *pop culture* to make them recognizable and interpretable; and they are *subcultural* since, among the wide range of cultural practices, they constitute a niche.

The abovementioned terms are fairly intuitive in their meaning; all these terms and concepts are fluid, and there is no clear-cut definition that separates one exactly from the other. We have defined comic books as *visual* artifacts and the difference between the various expressions (cartoon, caricature, comic book, graphic novel); why they are *countercultural* (and the need for finding a means of expression outside the traditional channels); which elements they take from *pop culture*; and the reasons why they could be considered as *subcultural* productions. These terms are studied by many different disciplines, from art history to philosophy to anthropology. Our aim here was to interpret the concepts and to explain the first research question: what do we mean by the title of this PhD thesis?

The importance of visual culture reflects the importance of the image and its relationship with the viewer. Visual culture influences us when it comes to understanding the world, creating a series of references for everything that surrounds us. Comics use images to tell a part of the story; they seek to stimulate a certain sensation or interpretation in the viewer or reader. Comics focus not only on the written word, but also on the visual event, which is the interaction between the visual sign—and here it is possible that it might be a written word or a drawing—and the viewer. Comics as visual culture seek originality: they try to innovate, impress, and attract the attention of the viewer, so that they remember the images. Today, visual culture and comics in Lebanon are composed of two sub-lines: image and artistic heritage. These sub-lines focus on the image as an object of study and as a source of information for the evolutionary knowledge of artistic-visual culture.

For Mirzoeff (2009: 6),² the key answers to the question “What is visual culture?” in relation to comics are:

1. While print culture is certainly not going to disappear, the fascination with the visual and its effects, which was a key feature of modernism, has engendered a postmodern culture that is at its most postmodern when it is visual (p.4).
2. Visual culture does not depend on pictures but on this modern tendency to picture or visualize existence.

Another important element, which develops in parallel, is the contribution of the authors we have considered in detail as a historiographical source, whether they deal with current events (cartoon) or history (comics and graphic novels). From the very beginning, the press strip became one of the typical formats of graphic narration. A detailed analysis of the hundreds of series (developed both in the Sunday pages and in the daily strips) that have populated the Lebanese and Arab press since the first decade of the twentieth century would help us to understand the evolution of the medium and the Lebanese/Arab socio-political context. Further research in this field is needed, seeing as it was not the scope of this thesis to conduct an in-depth study of cartoon strips, but to draw a panorama of their historical development. Their preservation, study, and analysis serve to understand historical facts, and it is important to catalog and preserve them before it is too late. They are a reflection of society at a particular time.

All authors studied in this work use recognizable visual patterns, possibly established through simplicity and caricature, which will be familiar to the reader. These graphic and visual references depict the vast cultural heritage of Lebanon and its neighboring countries, such as the Fatima’s Hand, the blue eye, and politicians, but they also depict Lebanon and

more specifically Beirut, such as Hamra Street, Ashrafieh, and Tripoli. Lebanese and Arab culture is also represented by the references to literature and other aspects of culture (music) and popular culture (Abou El Abed).

Codes are also established to recognize reality, such as the iconisation of Beirut, examples of politicians (specifically Nasser), Naji Al-Ali's Handala, and so on. The characteristics of each of the representations become a pattern, sometimes even iconic. All Lebanese graphic novelists studied here encourage criticism and critical thinking; they disseminate ideas. Graphic narration helps us to understand the reality of the time by combining image and text. Humor and satire help to better "digest" difficult events and cope with biographical trauma and trauma integration, while proving a helpful outlet and express feelings. The importance of Beirut in the development of a visual culture in children's magazines and the possible influence of contemporary Lebanese comic authors is summarized in the article "De la Suisse orientale au Hanoi arabe, une ville en quête de rôles" by Fawwaz Traboulsi,³ as well as in Zeina Maasri's *Cosmopolitan Radicalism: the Visual Politics of Beirut's Global Sixties*.⁴ Beirut has been a place of exchange, at the crossroads of West and East. Nonetheless, the Lebanese capital has been searching for its role. It was known as "the Switzerland of the Middle East" for its tourist economy and banking secrecy and activities linked to this, but also for the luxury, glamour, and freedom experienced since the time in which Lebanon was an emerging nation-state until the end of the 1960s. Beirut then turned into "the Paris of the Middle East", not only for the reasons relating to its comparison with Switzerland and its cosmopolitanism and openness, but also for the influence of the events of 1968 in France on French-speaking Lebanese student groups.

The Lebanese student groups made an important intellectual effort, and after the Arab defeat in the 1967 War, with the fall of Nasser as the Arab leader, a change from Cairo to Beirut was made in the political discourse. After the relocation of the PLO to Beirut from 1970 to 1982, and with the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War, the city transformed itself into the "Arab Hanoi". As the capital of Vietnam, Hanoi featured in the imaginary as the capital of the revolution. These labels overlap with one another, but the "Beirut long Sixties" enabled Beirut to turn into a transnational artistic encounter between Arabs and Europeans, and subsequently with the inspiration of the revolution in the "Third World" Countries (Cuba, Vietnam). This artistic experimentation and intellectual debate was possible because Beirut was the meeting point for the cultural elite throughout the entire Middle East. Now, in a time in which Lebanon is suffering from political and economic crisis, the chaos produced by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Port of Beirut blast, it seems that it has become "the Caracas

of the Middle East”—the pearl city that has lost all its shine. We see that graphic novelists are giving voice to a particular generation: a generation marked by being born during the Civil War, and growing up in a country witness to continuous protest.

It is critical to analyze the subject from several angles in order to form a complete picture; thus, an analysis that includes a historical perspective, a linguistic perspective, and a visual cultural studies perspective is necessary. If only examined from one perspective, information and important details on the development of the graphic novel in Lebanon are lost. Lebanon is a small but complex country in which different cultures have coexisted; it has a complicated history with historical lines that sometimes clash, which are reflected in the formation and reformulation of space and also the minds and bodies of its inhabitants. Because all these levels are intertwined, one cannot be understood without the other. Through analysis of the works of Mazen Kerbaj, Barrack Rima, Lena Merhej, and Zeina Abirached, we have seen that they represent a specific generation and that it is not only their voices that we hear, but those of other young people too.

Within this study, we have explored where the graphic novel comes from and where it is heading. Comic strips in Lebanon show us that cartoon and illustration characteristics come together, because they are as thought-provoking and critical as newspaper strips, and that the format was established through children's illustration, which is where the first visual references for artists, in terms of format, originated.

The future

There are artists who will become professional and make a living from what they do, and artists who do not treat graphic storytelling as a product for mass consumption, but as a product aimed at a cultural elite, as we have seen in Chapter Five.

Professional artists will relocate to other markets because that is where they will find more commercial publishers willing to publish their work. It is also where the purchasing power of readers makes it more viable for a market to exist. However, this has not and will not prevent there from being a market in Beirut for their works.

There will be a democratization of comics in the sense that semi-professional authors will find a place of expression, which is why public or semi-private initiatives such as the Goethe-Institut are important. In addition, social networks will continue to contribute to exchange and dissemination: through platforms such as Instagram, many places in the world can be reached very quickly.



¹ Gruber, Haugebolle 2013

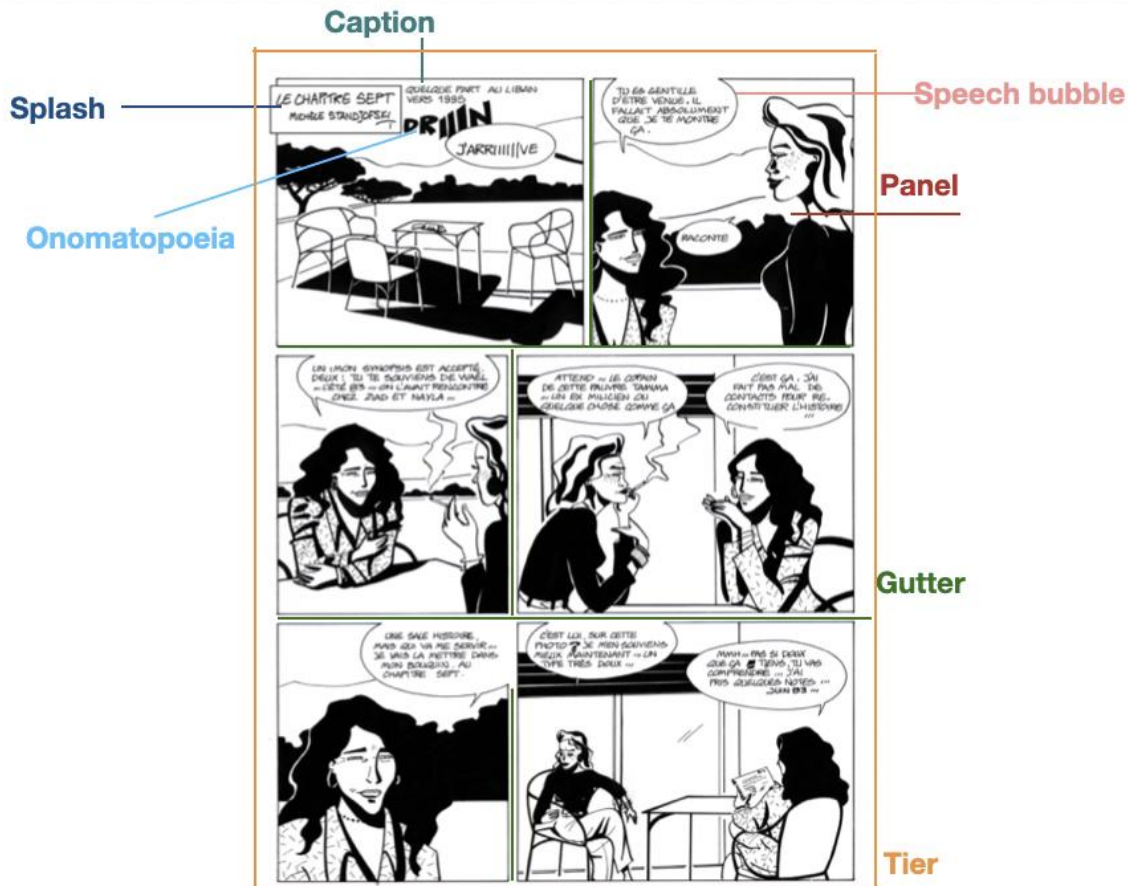
² Mirzoeff 2009.

³ Traboulsi 2001.

⁴ Maasri 2020.

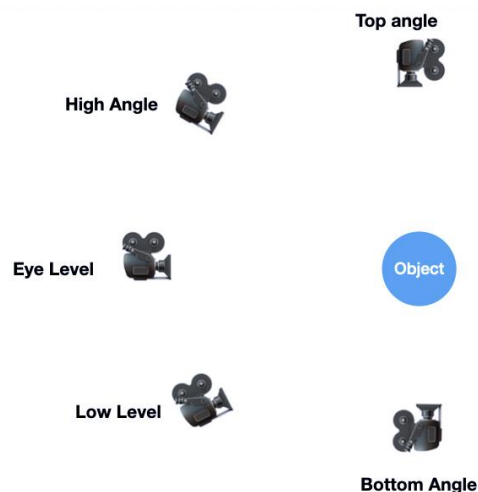
Appendix 1: Comics terminology

Layout



Samandal 5, p. 122
Le Chapitre Sept by Michelle Standjofski

Point of view



Angles

Top Angle or Overhead Shot	
Point of View-High Angle Shot	
Eye Level	
Low Angle Shot	
Bottom Angle or Nadir	

Images taken from *Samandal 3*, pp. 95- 105. *The Preceptor* by The Flab

Shots (taken from *Kissas Muthawara*: pp. 9-19)

Wide Shot: Often but not always used as an establishing shot.
The point of this shot is to show the subject surroundings



Long Shot: a shot which shows all or most of a fairly large subject (for example, a person) and usually much of the surroundings



Medium Shot: Waist to head



Two Medium Shot: similar to Medium Shot, but with two people



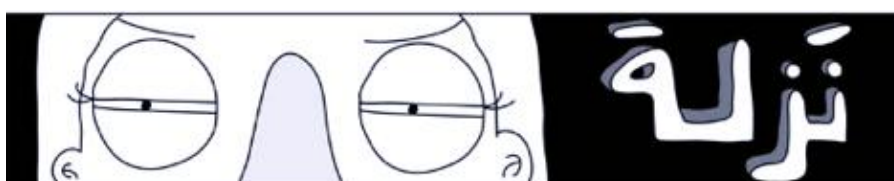
Medium Close Up: Head and shoulders



Close Up: Shows a character's face. Used to show emotion

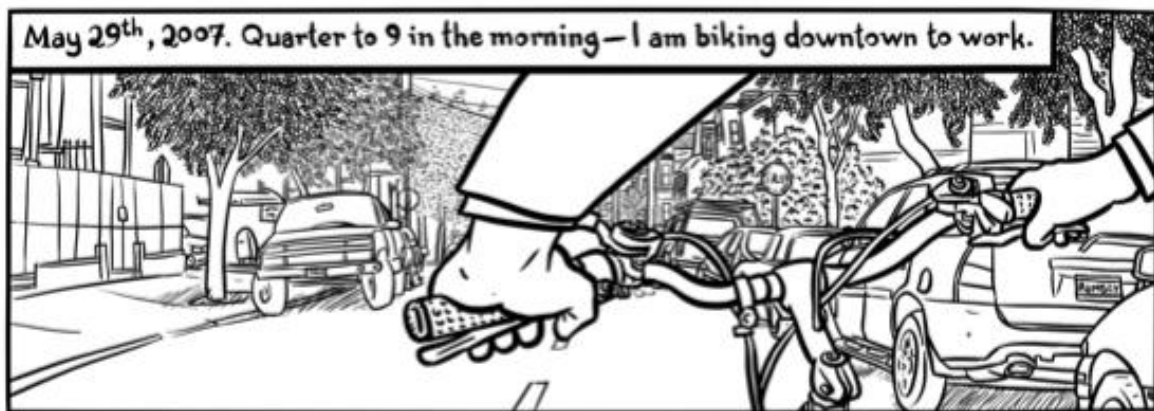


Extreme Close Up: A very tight shot, for example someone's eye



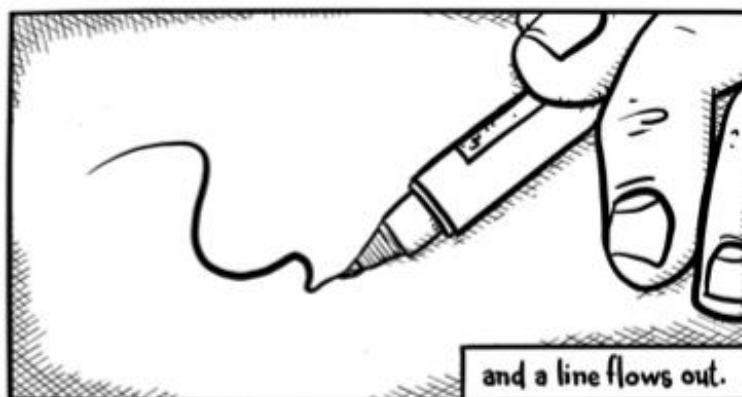
The text inside the panel

Top corner



Samandal 3, p. 115
A Tough Break by Andy Warner

Down corner



Samandal 3, p. 121
A Tough Break by Andy Warner

Both corners



Samandal 3, p. 98 El perceptor by Flab

Multiple tales or pointers (spike balloon)



Balloon expressing an idea



Balloon expressing other type of voice



Balloon and onomatopoeia



Appendix 2: List of cartoonists published in *ToshFesh*

The aim of this list is to assist further research.

Country	Date of Birth	Author	Arabic Name	Publication	
Lebanon					
	1904-1991	Diran Agemian	ديران عجميان	ToshFesh 7	
	1936-2003	Mahmoud Kahil	محمود كحيل	ToshFesh 1	
	1938-2013	Pierre Sadek	بيار صادق	ToshFesh 2	
	1940	Habib Haddad	حبيب حداد	ToshFesh 2	
	1947-2017	Stavro Jabra	ستافرو جبيرا	ToshFesh 1	
	1950	Mu'taz al Sawwaf	معتز الصواف	ToshFesh 1	
	1963-2003	Edgar Aho	إدغار آحو	ToshFesh 1	
	1966	Antoine Ghanem	أنطوان غانم	ToshFesh 8	
	1967	Elie Saliba	إيلي صليبا	ToshFesh 1	
	1979	Jana Traboulsi	جني طرابلسي	ToshFesh 3	
	1984	Ghadi Ghosn	غادي غصن	ToshFesh 3	
	1991	Leila Charafedinne	ليلي شرف الدين	ToshFesh 7	♀
	1993	Ivan Debs	إيفان دبس	ToshFesh 8	
	NN	Sareen Akharjalian	سارين أخرجليان	ToshFesh 4	♀
Egypt					
	1898-1977	Alexander Saroukhan	الكسندر صاروخان	ToshFesh 3	
	1926	Ahmad Toughan	احمد طوغان	ToshFesh 5	
	1929-1998	Hassan Hakem	حسن حاكم	ToshFesh 5	
	1930-1986	Salah Jahin	صلاح جاهين	ToshFesh 5	
	1932	George Bahjour	جورج البهجوري	ToshFesh 3	
	1935-2014	Mustafa Hussein	مصطفى حسين	ToshFesh 1	
	1936-2011	Ahmad Hijjazi	أحمد حجازي	ToshFesh 2	

Country	Date of Birth	Author	Arabic Name	Publication	
	1965	Rania Ameen	رانيا أمين	ToshFesh 3	♀
	1971	Magdy el Shafee	مجدي الشافعي	ToshFesh 4	
	1976	Maher Rashwan	ماهر رشوان	ToshFesh 8	
	1978	Farid Nagy	فريد ناجي	ToshFesh 7	
	1978	Hatem Fathy Aly	حاتم علي	ToshFesh 5	
	1978	Shennawy	شناوي	ToshFesh 4	
	1979	Doaa al Adl	دعاء العدل	ToshFesh 6	♀
	1980	Bassem Yousry	باسم يسري	ToshFesh 4	
	1981	Ahmad Nady	أحمد نادي	ToshFesh 5	
	1983	Mohamed Salah	محمد صلاح	ToshFesh 8	
	1983	Mohammed Tawfik	محمد توفيق	ToshFesh 5	
	1986	Twins Cartoon	توينز كارتون	ToshFesh 6	
	1987	Mokhtar Zein	مختار زين	ToshFesh 7	
	1992	Ahmed Tawfiq	أحمد توفيق	ToshFesh 6	
	1995	Deena Mohamed	دينا محمد	ToshFesh 8	♀
	NN	Hicham Rahma	هشام رحمة	ToshFesh 5	
	NN	Islam Ragab	اسلام رجب	ToshFesh 6	
	NN	Sherif Adel	شريف عادل	ToshFesh 5	
Palestine					
	1938-1987	Naji Al Ali	ناجي العلي	ToshFesh 2	
	1946-2012	Jalal Al Rifai	جلال الرفاعي	ToshFesh 2	
	1967	Emad Hajjaj	عماد حجاج	ToshFesh 1	
	1972	Mohammed Afefa	محمد عفيفة	ToshFesh 5	
	1972	Omayya Joha	أمية جحا	ToshFesh 2	♀
	1979	Mohammad Sabaaneh	محمد سباعنة	ToshFesh 8	
	NN	Mohammed Thalab	محمد ثلاب	ToshFesh 2	
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia					
	1977	Talal Fahd Al Shaashaa	طلال فهد الشعشاع	ToshFesh 5	
	NN	Abdullah Sayel	عبدالله الصايل	ToshFesh 3	

Country	Date of Birth	Author	Arabic Name	Publication	
	NN	Fahid Khamisi	فهد خميسي	ToshFesh 4	
	NN	Manal Mohamad	منال محمد	ToshFesh 4	♀
	NN	Mohammed Khneifer	محمد خنيفر	ToshFesh 3	
	NN	Mohammed Rayies	محمد الرّيس	ToshFesh 6	
Syria					
	1963	Fares Garabet	فارس غرابيت	ToshFesh 8	
	1963	Hassan Edalbi	حسن أدليبي	ToshFesh 1	
	1975	Salam Al Hassan	سلام الحسن	ToshFesh 5	
	1977	Hani Abbas	هاني عباس	ToshFesh 7	
	1977	Yasser Ahmad	ياسر احمد	ToshFesh 5	
	1982	Dijwar Ibrahim	دجوار إبراهيم	ToshFesh 7	
Morocco					
	1970	Abdellah Derkaui	عبدالله درقاوي	ToshFesh 6	
	1973	Abdul Ghani Dahdouh	عبد الغني الدهدوه	ToshFesh 7	
	1979	Imad Sanouni	عماد السنوني	ToshFesh 7	
	1981	Brahim Rais	ابراهيم رايس	ToshFesh 6	
	1983	Omar Ennaciri	عمر الناصري	ToshFesh 6	
Tunisia					
	1959	Tawfiq Omrane	توفيق عمران	ToshFesh 7	
	1974	Seif Eddine Nachi	سيف الدّين ناشي	ToshFesh 6	
	1977	Othman Selmi	عثمان سلمّي	ToshFesh 3	
	1983	Noha Habaeib	نهى الحبيب	ToshFesh 7	♀
Jordan					
	1974	Amjad Rasmi	أمجد رسمي	ToshFesh 4	
	1980	Hassan Manasrah	حسن مناصرة	ToshFesh 8	
	1985	Ahmad Rahma	أحمد رحمة	ToshFesh 8	
	NN	Mohammad Al Mu'ti	محمد المعطي	ToshFesh 6	
Iraq					
	1951	Abdul Raheem Yassir	عبد الرحيم ياسر	ToshFesh 2	

Country	Date of Birth	Author	Arabic Name	Publication	
	1955	Khudair Al Himyari	خضير الحميري	ToshFesh 5	
Kuwait					
	1972	Naif al Mutawa	نايف المطاوع	ToshFesh 4	
	1990	Diala Brisly	ديالا برصلي	ToshFesh 6	
Libya					
	1936-2011	Mohammad Zwawe	محمد الزواوي	ToshFesh 8	
	1990	Abdullah Hadia	عبدالله هدية	ToshFesh 7	
Algeria					
	1980	Kamal Zakour	كمال زكور	ToshFesh 7	
Bahrein					
	1990	Sara Qaed	سارة قائد	ToshFesh 5	♀
Sudan					
	NN	Hashem Karoury	هاشم كاروري	ToshFesh 3	
United Arab Emirates					
	NN	Amina Al Himadi	آمنة الحمادي	ToshFesh 6	♀
Yemen					
	1975	Rashad Al Samii	راشد السامعي	ToshFesh 5	

Appendix 3: Classic Cartoon

according to *ToshFesh*

This list shows all the cartoonists categorized as “Classic Cartoon” in *ToshFesh*. It should help further research.

Date of Birth	Author	Arabic Name	Country	Country 2
1898	Alexander Saroukhan	الكسندر صاروخان	Egypt	Armenia
1904	Diran Agemian	ديران عجميان	Lebanon	
1926	Ahmad Toughan	احمد طوغان	Egypt	
1929	Hassan Hakem	حسن حاكم	Egypt	Sudan
1930	Salah Jahin	صلاح جاهين	Egypt	
1932	George Bahjouri	جورج البهجوري	Egypt	
1935	Mustafa Hussein	مصطفى حسين	Egypt	
1936	Mahmoud Kahil	محمود كحيل	Lebanon	
1936	Mohammad Zwawe	محمد الزواوي	Libya	
1938	Naji Al Ali	ناجي العلي	Palestine	
1938	Pierre Sadek	بيار صادق	Lebanon	
1946	Jalal Al Rifai	جلال الرفاعي	Palestine	Jordan
1947	Stavro Jabra	ستافرو جبيرا	Lebanon	

Appendix 4: Authors in *Samandal*

This list shows all authors included in the different tables made for the section dealing with *Samandal*.

Country	Artist Name
Algeria	Kamal Zakour
	Nawel Louerrad
	Salim Zerrouki
	Sid-Ali Dekar
Argentina	Frank Vega
	Julian D'Angiolillo
	Lautaro Fiszman
Belgium	Alexandre de Moté
	Antoine Houcke
	Bert
	Bertrand Léonard
	Big Ben
	Carl Roosens
	Deborah Kempczynski
	Grisfx
	Guillaume Balance
	Jean Serbe
	Johan Massez
	Jonathan Blezard
	Louis Joos
	Max de Radigués
	Monsieur Pimpant
	Nicolas Chalupa - Chanic
	Popcube
	Sacha Goerg
	Valfred
Brazil	Edgar Franco
	Fábio Vermelho

Country	Artist Name
Bulgaria	Boris Pramatarov
	Milena Simeonova
Canada	Ariane Dénommé
	Julie Delporte
Egypt	Ahmed Naji
	Essam Abdallah
	George Azmy
	Hicham Rahma
	Magdy El Shafee
	Mai Korayem
	Migo
	Mohammed Shennawy
	Nour Elchami
	Sharif Shami
	Twins Cartoon
France	Agathe Monnier
	Céline Guirchard
	Charles Nogier
	Edmond Baudoin
	Emilie Plateau
	Flab
	Gilles Rochier
	Golo
	Hélène Georges
	Isabelle Boinot
	Jérémy Piningre
	Julien Lauber
	Juliette Bensimon-Marchina

Country	Artist Name
	Léo Quiévreux
	Lisa Mandel
	Martin Sztajman
	Olive Booger
	Pascal Tessier
	Paul Rey
	Pierre Gregori
	Pierre- Henry Gomont- Peer Lipo
	Pierre Marty
	Thomas Azuéllos
	Thomas Depuis- Otto T.
	Vincent Longhi
Gabon	Maya Mihindou
Germany	Krimi
	Patu
	Paula Bulling
Greece	Maison Beton
India	Poorva Goel
Jordan	Ahmad Qatato
	Shereen M. Qardan
Lebanon	Ahmad Adel Beiruty
	Akram Zaatari
	Ala Wazni Faïl
	Ali Dirani
	Barrack Rima
	Carla Aouad
	Carla Habib
	Chaghig Arzoumanian
	Christophe Katrib
	Cynthia Merhej
	David Habchy
	Diala Gemayel
	Elie Chemaly

Country	Artist Name
	Ely Dagher
	Elyse Tabet
	Farah Nehme
	Firas El Hallak
	Fouad Mezher
	Ghadi Ghosn
	Ghassan Halwani
	Ghassan Salhab
	Gregory Buchakjian
Lebanon	Hachem Reslan
	Hassan Zahreddine
	Hatem Imam
	Héléna Nehmé
	Huda Terki
	Jana Traboulsi
	Jennifer Camper
	Jo Baaklini
	Joseph Kai
	Kamal Hakim
	Karen Keyrouz
	Lara Tabet
	Laure Ghorayeb
	Lea Kradokian
	Lena Merhej
	Lucciana Baradhi
	Mariam Yakan
	Maya Moumneh
	Maya Zbib
	Mazen Kerbaj
	Mélissa Chalhoub
	Michel Azar
	Michèle Standjofski
	Michelle Keserwany

Country	Artist Name
	Mira Choukeir
	Mohamad Kraytem
	Mu'taz al Sawwaf
	Myriam Boulos
	Nawal Abboud
	Nour Hifaoui Fakhoury
	Omar Khouri
	Omar Naim
	Pascale Ghazaly
	Rafic H. Saab
Lebanon	Ralph Doumit
	Rami Tannous
	Raphaelle Macaron
	Sahar Mandour
	Sandra Ghosn
	Sarah Merhej
	Sarah Saroufim
	Serge Manouguian
	Shakeeb Abu Hamdan
	Tania El Khoury
	Tarek Nabaa
	The Art of Boo
	The fdz
	Tracy Chahwan
	Twstdtwn
	Wael Saeiby
	Walim Shqir
	Wassim Maouad
	Yasmine Nachabe Taan
	Zeina Abirached
	Zeina Bassil
Lebanon-France	Roger Féghali
Morocco	Ahmed Bouanani

Country	Artist Name
	Meriem Mesfioui
	Roshbena
	Zineb Benjelloun
Netherlands	Bas Köhler
Palestine	Hosam Omran
	Islam Khatib
	Mahdi Fleifel
	Nidal El-Khairy
Peru	Robotv
Portugal	Maria Goes
Romania	Matei Branea
Saudi Arabia	Sarah
Serbia	Dzaizku Volodya
Slovenia	Domen Finzgar
South Korea	Keum Suk Gendry-Kim
Spain	Mery Cuesta
Sweden	Maja Björk
Switzerland	Alex Baladi
	Alex Chauvel
	Andreas Kündig
	Aude Barrio De Sousa
	Cécile Koepfli
	Ibn al Rabin (Matthieu Baillif)
	JM Bertoyas
	Manuel Maria Almereyda Perrone
	Maurane Mazars
	Pierre Schilling
	Titus Ackermann
Taiwan	Li-Chin Li
Tunisia	Abir Gasmi
	Noha Habaeib
	Othman Selmi

Country	Artist Name
UAE	Khalid Mezaina
	Mohammed Al Shaibani
	Ra'ed Tulefat
UK	Simon Mackie
US	Andy Warner
	Jeremy Baum
US	Joe Namy
	José Luis Olivares
	Suheir Hammad
NN	Fgrdietch
	Houssala
NN	Kenji Ishimaru
	Rio Safari
	Schlobb

Appendix 5: Lebanese graphic novels

This is a list of all the graphic novels I worked with for my research, although not all of them are included in this thesis.

Abdelrazaq, Leila (2015) *Baddawi*. Charlottesville: Just World Books

——— (2017) *The Opening* Beirut: ToshFesh

Abirached, Zeina (2006) (*Beyrouth*): *Catharsis* Paris: Éditions Cambourakis

——— (2006) *38, Rue Youssef Semaani* Paris: Éditions Cambourakis

——— (2007) *Mourir partir revenir le jeu des hirondelles* Paris: Éditions Cambourakis

——— (2008) *Je me souviens: Beyrouth* Paris: Cambourakis

——— (2013) *Mouton* Paris: Éditions Cambourakis

——— (2015) *Le Piano Oriental* Paris: Castermann

——— (2018) *Prendre Refuge* Paris: Castermann

Adra, Hoda; Fayad, Zeina (2015) *Boukra 3al Mechmouch* [Everything will be fine] Beirut: Antoine Publishing House

Armache, Sophie (2010) *Un été au Liban*. Beirut: Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts

Ayoub, Marie Joe (2007) *Tuiles de Beyrouth: en hommage à nos demeures patrimoniales* Beirut: Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts

Chahwan, Tracy (2018) *Beirut, bloody Beirut* Vanves: Marabulles

Debs, Ivan (2017) *David Nava* Beirut: Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts

Doumit, Ralph (2004?) *Gebran Tuéni* Beirut: An-Nahar

Fasiki, Zainab (2018) *Feyrouz versus the World*. Beirut: ToshFesh

Ghaibeh, Lina (ed.) (2020) *قصص مثورة (Qışaş muṭawwira)*. AUB: Beirut

- Ghosn, Ghadi** (2007) *Cri* Beirut: Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts
- (2008) *Debout* Beirut : Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts
- Halal, Christelle** (2009) *La phenicie : un liban d'autrefois* Beirut: Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts
- Issa, Rawand** (2017) عاصية (Āṣīyya) [Disobedient] Beirut: Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO
- Khairallah, Toufic** (2008) *Jean* Beirut: ALBA
- Khélif, Kamel** (2013) الوجه الآخر (*al-Waġh al-Āḥar*) [The Other Face]. Mareseille: Le Port a Jaun
- Khouri, Omar** (2017) يوتوبيا (*Yūtūbiyā*) [Utopia]. Beirut: Samandal
- Kerbaj, Mazen** (2000) *Journal 1999*. Beirut: ALBA?
- (2004) *24 poèmes*. Beirut: La CD-Thèque.
- (2005) *Une Semaine Sans La Voix De Samir*. Lebanon?: Selfpublished.
- (2006) "(WAR's) KERBLOG". Warkerblog.Blogspot.Com.
<http://warkerblog.blogspot.com>.
- (2007) *Beyrouth, Juillet-Août 2006*. Vol. 20.;20;. Paris: Association
- (2010) هذه القصة تجري أو لا تجري تلك هي المسألة Beirut: Dar Al-Adab
- (2011) *Cette Histoire Se Passe*. Lebanon: Tamyras.
- (2013) *Lettre À La Mère*. [Paris]: L'Apocalypse.
- (2014) *Un An: Le Journal D'une Année Comme Les Autres*. Nice: Tamyras Editions.
- (2016a) *My Cloud*. NN: Headache Comics
- (2016b) *Cola*. NN: Headache Comics
- (2016c) *Lettre À La Mère*. NN: Headache Comics
- (2017) بيروت لن تبكي ؛ يوميات حرب 2006 Beirut: Editions Snoubar
- (2019a) *Politique*. Arles: Arte Éditions / Actes Sud
- (2019b) *Antoine: Chapitre 1: Le Destin Arabe*. Beirut: Samandal.

- (2019c) *Antoine: Chapitre 2: Rue Hamra*. [Beirut]: Samandal.
- (2019d) *Beirut Won't Cry. Lebanon's July War: A Visual Diary*. 2nd ed. Seattle: Fantagraphics Underground (first edition was published in 2017)
- (2020) *Antoine: Chapitre 3: Les Évènements*. [Beirut]: Samandal.
- Keyrouz, Karen** (2018) *Flux et reflux* Beirut: ALBA
- Kraytem, Mohamad** (2017) *In Retrospect*. Beirut: ToshFesh
- Makhzoumi, Jala** (2010) *Horizon* Beirut: Dan Onbuz
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