Revealing Representations:

An Intersectional Analysis of Autobiography and Women of Colour in

Francophone Comics

Micah Leonida

INT D 520: Honors Essay

Fourth-Year Honors Political Science and Modern Languages and Cultural Studies

April 7, 2019

Dr. Fiona Nicoll and Dr. Chris Reyns-Chikuma

Contents

1. Introduction and Overview

My inquiry focuses on the diverse representations of marginalized women's experiences in the texts of Francophone comics or *la bande dessinée*. This project and its goals are twofold. First, it is about understanding explicit and implicit messages conveyed in contemporary autobiographical French comics written by women of colour. I will analyze the visual and linguistic elements that are unique to the comic book form in order to understand how the personal experiences, self-expressions, and world views of women of colour are visually depicted and linguistically expressed. The second part of this project focuses on the extent to which women of colour writing in French have filtered their unique stories, experiences, and challenges to conform to a French-speaking audience, reflecting their particular societal norms and values. Filters are especially important as they provide insight into the ways in which authors and *scénaristes* adapt their narratives to accommodate for their readers or audience, their publishers, or for themselves. I will analyze the following comics through a child or humour filter.

I am not privy to the unique and inner intentions of all the authors under discussion in this study. However, as a reader and researcher it is important to analyze the most prominent filters observed in comics regardless of their intended or non-intended purposes. Ultimately, authorship and readership is a relationship; what was meant to be interpreted might not be the final product for each reader. What matters most is to understand whether the filters used change the ways in which the narratives are read, and if so to investigate why that is the case. Each case under discussion will provide a number of examples to illustrate my arguments. My goal is to establish a form of analysis that teases out latent or subsurface meanings in comics in order to

give light to the women of colour at the centre of each narrative and artistic creation, but to also lay the foundation for similar and future research.

For the purpose of my project, I will focus on comics in France and Belgium. I argue that the Franco-Belgian comics industry is a particular case study. It has very recently and continues to encourage women's writing and other artistic ventures in comics. This is especially important when one thinks about its history as a male dominated field. These two major decisions have impacted my study's results and its justifications will become increasingly clear in the pages that follow.

I will draw upon scholars studying intersectionality as their contributions will inform my study's theoretical framework. Intersectionality is a complex and constantly evolving analytical tool and framework of analysis. It is one that focuses on the overlapping and relational structures of power that define our identities. Intersectionality, although born out of the Kimberlé Crenshaw's discussion on black women's marginalized experiences has grown to encompass other identities, bringing them to the forefront of meaningful conversations about the notions of exclusion, oppression and privilege. The contextual depth provided by such a framework is important to my inquiry because it challenges the reader to think critically about the overlapping and interconnected power relations that influence individual experiences, and their representations in writing. This study seeks to question our normative and often simplistic understandings of what a woman of colour's experience can be by considering the relationality of power and its dynamic characteristics in law, culture, and politics (Windsong 2018, 137). Therefore, intersectionality as a guiding framework adds to the depth and understanding of women of colour's autobiographical representations.

The examination of the twelve autobiographical texts in the following chapters provide important insights into a growing body of literature by women of colour and their contributions to the study of gender and politics. These narratives are particularly interesting because they instantly combine two social constructions: race and gender. As constructs, race and gender "are not neutral but instead involve power and dominance" (Windsong 2018, 136). However, it is also noteworthy to understand that these constructs vary in relation to other power structures such as class, sexuality, nationality, able bodiedness, and religious or spiritual beliefs (Windsong 2018, 137). My study does not engage nor does it seek to play into the concept of the "Oppression Olympics" (Hancock 2011,13). Power and privilege are relational and informed by our own experiences. After all, as Carol Hanisch says the personal is, in fact, political.

The duality of the comic book form provides the space to interrogate visual and linguistic narrative elements. This in mind, I argue that explicit and implicit messages conveyed in contemporary autobiographical French comics written by women of colour can be noted in the narrative's settings, the depiction of its characters, the focus on certain objects and places, the word connotations, and the story's represented points of views. I also argue that the authors and the creative contributors in question filter their personal accounts in visual and linguistic terms in order to accommodate for their audiences. A certain amount of filtering is also added to provide others perspectives in what concerns basic societal understandings of what life can be as a woman in the Middle East, West Africa, and East Asia. Surely, filters applied throughout narratives are equally purposeful and meaningful as they work together to also represent the author's narrative intentions. As Mark McKinney asserts, contemporary cartoonists tend to represent their own interpretations of colonial history in their narratives (McKinney 2013, 27). Historical representations of political events by marginalized populations intervene in the current

relationships between developed and developing countries. These adaptations are represented in two dominant forms. First, filters are applied with the strategic use of a child's first person narration. Drawing inspiration from Diti Vyas's work on Indian children's literature, I argue that a child's first-person point of view is able to fully explore difficult and conflict-inducing concepts or topics of debate in free and uninhibited ways. In many narratives, younger characters are portrayed as innocent and naive receptors of information. They are like non-blameworthy sponges that are accepting of the world around them despite their limited understanding of reality. Conversely, adult characters must explain their actions, making them accountable for what is said or done. I argue that the adult point of view does not have the same passivity accorded to younger characters, because readers apply a level of rationality to mature persons. A childlike perspective filter creates a level of trusting passivity. In using it, authors and creative contributors are able to describe and illustrate their personal narratives in acceptable ways that maintain legitimacy, but avoid critique that an adult point of view would not be able to escape because of the level of logic and rationality accorded to them. However, it is also important to note that not all children are innocent, trusting or passive. Many narratives told from a child's point of view display maturity, violence and harmfulness. In the end, it is a question of relativity which must be analyzed with further critiques. Furthermore, there is also a difference between the author's choice to represent children as innocent or non-innocent beings. This is a question which will not be discussed in this study, but it something that deserves future research and inquiry.

In the absence of the childlike perspective filter, I argue that satirical and humorous filters are then employed. To Vladimir Propp, "Laughter states the human and (consequently) social inferiority of the ridiculed; it suddenly makes a hidden flaw visible to everyone" (2013,

146). Propp suggests that it is through ridicule and laughter that flaws, or what the author may consider to be an issue of weakness and imperfection, are brought to the surface for further commentary and analysis. The intention of humour can be playful, or it can be used to reveal underlying issues that are too difficult to speak about in more serious tones or contexts. The presentation of complex concepts like race can be fruitfully explored with the use of humour. This does not mean that the subject matter is humours, rather it is a way for the writer to explore difficult topics through a channel that is often associated with lightness and relief. Laughter can be a cathartic experience, providing momentary psychological and emotional relief through the open expression of strong emotions. Therefore, humour and its filters must be analyzed as they reveal deeper insights to the emotional and psychological struggles faced by the writers and creative contributors in French comics. Humour, however, can also be harmful and violent as was observed in the Charlie Hebdo attacks on January 7, 2015. Like the discussion regarding children's levels of innocence, humour is contextual. Humour is also powerful and can be politically charged.

<center>Why Women of Colour, Autobiographical Comics and Intersectionality?</center>

Although the contributions of Caucasian and Western women have been instrumental in developing a rich and diverse comics industry in France and Belgium, I believe that it is fundamentally important to give light to those who are often underrepresented, overlooked and subsumed to fit under the umbrella term of 'feminism.' Following this line of reasoning, I will draw upon intersectionality as a framework to inform my method of analysis. As a school of thought, intersectionality "makes visible the categories and groups that were marginalized in theory and political practice, but also articulates a new set of political interests" (Lépinard 2014, 125) about the construction of complex and interconnected identities. Intersectionality as a

framework adds to the richness of my analysis, including layers of depth in the representations of women's stories in autobiographical comics. The latter comment is especially important in a Francophone context. The recent mobilization of women since the #MeToo movement has emboldened feminists around the world. However, its rise has also sparked questions surrounding women's rights in private and public spheres. To illustrate, many French women's organizations are finding ways to be increasingly inclusive, but are refusing to adopt an intersectional approach that would inevitably recognize and draw attention to ongoing patterns of discrimination and inequality linked to religious, racial and cultural identities. The role religion plays in Europe cannot be masked. Due to society's complex nature, intersectionality as a framework must be used to draw out nuanced and conflict-inducing debates about power struggles between different, often opposing, groups of people. Ultimately, intersectionality "provides an important framework from which to understand the social world" (Windsong 2018, 135) not through an additive view, rather through a relational view. I am not interested in understanding who is more privileged or underprivileged than the next. This view is overly simplistic and problematic. It assumes that people's experiences are ranked according to an arbitrary and non-evolving notion of privilege. However, in reality power is highly relational. I am interested in the idea of relational privilege, visibility and power where race, gender, class, religion, sexuality and citizenship are brought together in a single person who experiences different forms of domination in various systems of oppression (Windsong 2018, 136). My goal is to understand how relational power structures inform the writing of French women of colour in autobiographical comics, asking what is done, eliminated or sugar coated during the writing process in order to make their unique stories digestible and relatable for predominantly Western-educated audiences.

Why Comics? Visible and Invisible Power Structures and Interconnected Identities

What is the first thing that comes to you when you hear the word 'comics,' or to French readers, *'la bande dessinée*?' Perhaps you become nostalgic and are transported back to your childhood memories, to a creative and imaginative moment in time. If not, perhaps comics are associated with trivial, childlike and non-academic literature. Perhaps comics are only read by youths for pleasure or diversion; comics and its contents are pure fiction, make believe, superheroes and two-dimensional caricatures on a number of missions to protect or save the world. Any one of these interpretations are correct. Certainly, comics are written for any one of these purposes. However, this narrative form and its stories are vested with more power and potential than it is often given or due.

Comics are visual narrative art, "[la] *bande dessinée* produces meaning out of images which are in a sequential relationship, and which co-exist with each other spatially, with or without text" (Miller 2007a, 75). Narratives are told and represented differently in comics books. Plots, a character's inner thoughts and emotions, and meaning are produced and articulated between broken panels or boxes. These boxes exist independently, giving the reader a snapshot of what the characters are experiencing. Panels are clear snapshots of what the author wants and needs to demonstrate. Representational choices and vocabulary decisions are deliberate, not arbitrary. Poets use words, considering connotations and semantics to produce a poem. A poet's word choice is intentional and conscious, demonstrating in-depth thought processes and reflection. Similarly, comic book creators, illustrators and colourists's decisions can be informed by conscious, strategic and creative choice. Other times, colour choice is a financial matter for publishers and out of the control of the author's themselves. This fact is also important in the representation of women's stories in comic books as we will later discuss.

I chose comic books for my inquiry because of their creative duality; the combination of words and images. In this case, I have access to two worlds of representation. This adds to substance of my analysis. I am able to analyze what is said as well as what is visually represented. Parallel to the complex nature of human beings, comics and its characters do not always mean what they say. The findings of my inquiry are discussed in the following pages and will reveal what I mean by this statement.

It is worth understanding the often complex nature of comics, the invisible or visible and the spoken or unspoken, characteristics of each volume. As products of low culture, comics give platforms to individual experiences that are often overlooked in high culture or drowned in the saturation of male and Western-informed narratives. It is precisely this dominance and its imagined importance and authority of these voices that I aim to challenge.

In passing, the topic of high versus low culture should be discussed. According to Pierre Bourdieu, the concept of "capital" is broader than "the monetary notion of capital in economics" (1986, 243). Capital extends to a generalized "resource" that may assume monetary or non-monetary, and tangible or intangible forms. The three dominant forms of capital are economic, cultural, and social; cultural capital is of particular interest for this study. Cultural capital exists in many forms, and includes established dispositions and/or habits acquired through the process of socialization, the accumulation of valued cultural objects like paintings or sculptures, and formal educational trainings or qualifications (Anheier et al. 1995, 862). In practice, cultural capital is operationalized through the ways in which distinct tastes in literature, fine arts, music, etc., are acquired. Important for our purposes is the notion of symbolic cultural capital which is the capacity to "define and legitimize cultural, moral, and artistic values, standards, and styles" (Anheier et al. 1995, 862). Symbolic cultural capital works through the creation of high versus

low culture. High-culture genres have higher degrees of social cultural capital, whereas low-culture genres, such as folk art or comics, are imbued with very little capital. Certainly, levels of social cultural capital depend on different scenarios, actors and social fields. Although comics may be considered low-culture genres, it is important to challenge this notion. Each art form carries some sort of capital which are informed by societal standards and norms, but this does not mean that a comic book is less culturally valuable than a renaissance painting. In fact, as I argue throughout this study, comics and the ways in which women of colour represent their unique experiences reveal important insights which shape and challenge preconceived societal ideas and norms. Therefore, comics are valuable works too, and should not be overlooked as simply "low-culture genres."

<center>Why the Franco-Belgian Comic Industry?</center>

La Francophonie is diverse in its nations, cultural identities, ideologies, and historical challenges with colonialism. I think that with the various experiences, identities and histories represented in the Francophone community I will be able to successfully capture the full scope of the representation of women of colour's experiences in comics and the relational power structures that continue to inform their stories.

Defined by the International Organisation of La Francophonie, the 84 francophone member states "share the humanist values promoted by the French language" ("About Us" n.d.); certainly sharing similar values, but are of course fundamentally different in many regards. For the purpose of this research project, I will focus on *la culture francophone* in France and Belgium and their unique comics industry. I argue that the particular context, history, strength and longevity of the Franco-Belgian comics tradition are unique, making it the ideal launching point for my inquiry. In this regard, although France and Belgium are unique in history, culture

and language, both countries share a rich comics industry and an early re-appreciation for low culture.

Further, the decision to limit myself to one comics tradition is informed. On one hand, there is merit in the evaluation and the analysis of American and Canadian autobiographical comics and graphic novels. There are numerous stories by women of colour that should be analyzed in order to gain insight and understanding of other identities and what they convey about the communities one inhabits. In the Canadian context there is the possibility to draw upon Indigenous autobiographical comics as a means to enrich the exploration of the representation of women of colour. For instance, *Surviving the City* by Tasha Spillett and Natasha Donovan tells the story of two best friends from Winnipeg of Anishnaabe and Inninew descent and their experiences with loss. An aspect of this story focuses on missing and murdered Indigenous women, and the ways urban and rural communities are directly affected. Spillett and Donovan's work is important, but for the purpose of this study it simply falls outside of the scope. Stories are powerful. They deserve careful consideration, and in-depth historical and contemporary contextualization. Since my focus in primarily on the Franco-Beligian comics industry the simultaneous exploration of other industries would result in an unfocused final project. Perhaps a comparative study would necessitate the dissection of multiple comics industries but this is not my goal.

Male Domination:

The French comics industry, like many literary fields, was pioneered and historically led by men, giving rise to the creation of cultural classics such as *Le petit prince, Les aventures de Tintin, Les Schtroumpfs,* and *Astérix et Obélix* to name a few. Notably, three similarities appear in these examples; the protagonists' male genders, the lack of diverse female roles, and the

European backgrounds of the authors and related artistic creators. *Le petit prince* was produced by French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and *Les aventures de Tintin* is the well-known undertaking of Belgian author Georges 'Hergé' Remi, *Les Schtroumpfs* or *Les Smurfs* was imagined by Belgian writer Pierre 'Peyo' Culliford, and *Astérix et Obélix* is a series created by French-Jewish author René Goscinny and Italian cartoonist Albert Uderzo.

Certainly the rise and success of these writers, creators and their respective stories were made possible because of society's patriarchal characteristics and male preferences. Spaces for women in the Franco-Belgian comics industry were not as developed as they are today, thereby limiting opportunities for women and their unique stories, voices and points of view. Pierre Fresnault-Derulle argues that the woman's voice continues to be invisible even after the great expansion of comic book readership during the post-war period, thereby further creating and contributing to a homogenous male-saturated literary sphere (1986, 67). The saturation of male-influence comics did not entirely close the door to women writers and creators, but it certainly narrowed the entryway and established locked doors.

Gilles Ciment, *bande dessinée* critic, historian, and former director of la Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image in Angoulême, echoes this. He argues that women in the *bande dessinée francophone* industry were isolated because of the conscious and omnipresence of sexism (2017, 148). This sexism was represented in three dominant forms: the lacking editorial desire to give space to female creators, traditional and masculine preferences (*habitudes machistes)*, and the influence of entrenched systems of representation that lacked openness and willingness to adapt for women (Ciment 2017, 148).

Persepolis

Published between 2000 and 2003 in France and then quickly translated into English in 2003 and 2004, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi is an autobiographical text that follows a young girl, Marji, as she grows up in Iran after its 1979 Revolution (Reyns-Chikuma and Lazreg 2017, 758). Told from the author's own childhood point of view, *Persepolis* reveals Marji's identity struggles in relation to religion and gender roles in a primarily conservative society. Authors speak about *Persepolis* as an important autobiographical text. According to Ann Miller the autobiography has "increasingly proved to be a key genre for women, enabling them to uphold both individual and group identities" (2007c, 231). It gives women, who have been silenced, a platform to recount personal experiences thereby "giving a voice to marginalized groups whose subjectivity has been hitherto denied" (Miller 2007c, 231). Leigh Gilmore echoes Miller's comments, arguing that the autobiography makes the reader a witness to the author's experiences. Gilmore argues that as a witness the reader develops a sympathetic attitude towards the subject matter. In turn, preconceived critiques and judgements are muted, encouraging the reader to remain open to other viewpoints (Gilmore 2011, 159). If society seeks to be more inclusive and accepting of diversity its literature must follow suit.

Moreover, *Persepolis* is able to visually represent existing power structures such as gender and religion. In her analysis, Miller argues that Satrapi is able to visually depict the "regulatory practices of exclusions and inclusions" under the fundamentalist regime thereby revealing the power relations between women and its government (2007c, 239). Miller describes the semiology of Islamic dress in *Persepolis* as being "severely repressed" (2007c, 239). This is an example of the oppressive power structures placed upon women by their government. However, Miller also explains that acts of collective resistance in *Persepolis* such as anti-veil demonstrations are ways for women to "rebel in more subtle and individual ways" (2007c, 239).

Therefore, *Persepolis* is not just an autobiography. It is a visual narrative about political power structures where a woman of colour is a central feature. Paralleling this, Chris Reyns-Chikuma and Houssem Ben Lazreg claim that *Persepolis* is often, if not explicitly acknowledged, as a source of inspiration for other stories about experiences in the Middle East (2017, 759). They argue that the theme of war and political upheaval (revolutions, police repressions, and censorship) observed in Satrapi's work is often seen in other works such as *Kamala Khan* and *L'Arabe du futur*.

This graphic novel is my study's source of inspiration as well as one of the cases under analysis. I specifically chose *Persepolis* because of its unconventional nature at the time of its publication. I argue that *Persepolis* marked an important shift in the Francophone comics industry; not only was it written by and about about a woman of color, but also because it proved that narratives about women's personal experiences can be successful too. *Persepolis* focuses on themes about class, gender roles and expectations, religion, political ideology, violence and race. These themes lend well to an intersectional framework and a study on the representation of women's experiences, because they demonstrate how inequality is not only created by gendered structures or systems, "but also by racism, classism and heterosexism" (Kantola and Lombardo 2017, 331). In other words, *Persepolis* discusses themes about power and oppression which informs the ways its female characters are represented in graphic novels. As my guiding text, *Persepolis* opens the door to further analysis of the autobiographical graphic novels in the Franco-Belgian industry. For this study, other Franco-Beligian comics with similar thematic elements such as point of view and representations of marginalized identities have been specifically chosen in order to understand how graphic novelists, specifically French-speaking

women of color have represented their experiences in comics and whether this representation is filtered to meet the Francophone market's expectations and political culture.

The Research Question

How are the experiences of women of colour represented in mainstream French autobiographical comics (la bande dessinée)? To what extent have these narratives been linguistically and visually filtered for the Francophone market?

The Cases

There are 12 comics under analysis. The earliest case was published in 2003 and the latest in 2018. Among these cases, there are three authors of Middle-Eastern descent, one of East Asian background, and one with West Africa roots. The following cases were chosen with the date of publication, genre, the author's cultural background and gender, and the Franco-Belgian comic industry in mind. Although these works can be considered part of the Franco-Belgian tradition, it is important to note that many of them are not published by mainstream Franco-Belgian publishers. Many of them were published by marginal or alternative publication houses, and existed as non-mainstream narratives only to be adopted as popular or mainstream works later on.

The Date Range:

Much of this study is inspired by Satrapi, her work, and her success with *Persepolis*. I argue that Satrapi's mainstream success encouraged other women to express themselves and their personal accounts through the autobiographical comic book form. Leading the way, Satrapi demonstrated the possibility of becoming a successful and respected contributor to the Franco-Belgian and Western comic book industry as her work is available in French and English. This in mind, only post-*Persepolis* comics were chosen for this study as the abundance, diversity and

quality of autobiographical comics after *Persepolis*' worldwide support grew tenfold. It is also acknowledged that there are only 12 cases representing 18 years of comic book development and publication. In choosing my cases, preference was given to the quality of analysis of each narrative over a larger amount of analyzed narratives. Quantitative or mixed-methods practitioners, and others preferring numerous examples could gravely fault me on this study's corpus. They may argue that a large amount of cases inevitably lead to a study's robust qualities, validity and reliability. These points are valid and in some cases exhibit the truth. However, the point of this study is not to quantify the amount of times a woman of colour's personal experiences has been represented in the visual and autobiographical form. It is equally not about the statistical significance revealed throughout the analysis of the conveyed literary or visual messages. The intention is to reveal notable trends, themes, and insights pertaining to the autobiographical works in question. It is about the interrogation of artistic and representational choices with the goal to ultimately understand the extent to which these choices have influenced the ways in which personal narratives are delivered, how its characters are represented and what this ultimately means for women of colour writing about their personal experiences within the Franco-Belgian comics industry. Although my findings may not be generalizable, the insights uncovered here may continue to contribute to the growing study of women, their depictions, and the power that their experiences hold in informing and re-educating society's simplistic and stereotypical views of such populations.

Middle-East:

Unfortunately today, much of Western media tends to portray the Middle East as one homogenous territory where distinctions between national and cultural identities are blurred or are forced to fit under one reductionist Arab stereotype, or worse under a single terrorist

typecast. The mainstream understanding that inhabitants of this region pose serious threats to the Western security, endangering democracy, rights and freedoms is one that is difficult to ignore especially when national and international media outlets propagate these problematic images and portrayals in 24 hour news cycles that remind audiences of their harmful existence. This in itself is a growing issue of which many theorists and academics are in the process of developing critiques and future research. What is of concern to me, however, is the representation of women in the Middle East and the controversial ways in which their lives have been portrayed to the world. In many circumstances, it is assumed that all Middle Eastern women are under severe draconian powers, controlling the female body, its visibility and its actions. This notion is of particular interest because the *bande dessinées* chosen seek to interrogate what some may already consider the truth about the Middle East, and the ways in which women from the region are influenced by the patriarchy. The following analyses in the next chapter will evaluate how dress, behaviour, mobility, and speech have been depicted, questioning how similar or different the representations are from our often misinformed societal, religious and cultural generalizations.

In the United States, Canada, France, and the United Kingdom, to name a few, often find themselves debating religious attire in public spaces. This, to the detriment of women, has put an already at risk marginalized group at the centre of discriminatory and dangerous situations. As visible targets, many female practitioners of the Islamic faith having chosen to veil themselves have been questioned, harassed and have ultimately become political battlegrounds where Eurocentric liberal ideals and progressive values fight it out, apparently, in the name of gender equality and the woman's right to choose. Many of these debates, of course, despite their seemingly virtuous intentions fail to recognize the harms committed in championing such causes.

For instance, in 2016 15 towns in France banned the burkini, claiming its in accordance with "good morals and secularism" (Quinn 2016). This decision was put on trial when a 34-year-old woman was denied the right to dress of her own volition at a resort in Nice. The town's tribunal ruled that her attire offended other religious and non-religious convictions of the other beach users. The tribunal also claimed that the burkini could provoke tensions given the recent jihadi attacks that had occurred a month prior at the town's Promenade des Anglais. The politicization of women's dress and the assumptions that the unveiling muslim women or getting rid of visual divisions between communities will eventually lead to universal equality in public spaces are highly destructive. The media and certain governments around the globe portray the burka as a negative and threatening symbol to the advancement of women's rights, forgetting that veiling in not an intrinsically oppressive act. In fact, some would argue that it is the exact opposite.

I mention this topic as a means to begin a discussion of the ways in which women in the Middle East are understood. The women of this region come from many cultures and religions, education and employment backgrounds, traditions and social classes. These identities must be revealed even if they are confined to the *bande dessinnée*. Although the following cases are not popularly known around the world, and although their relevance is not broadcast across national or international media conglomerates it is important to analyze and study the limited number of Middle Eastern women's personal depictions of themselves as they may reveal unexpressed insights, highlighting the media's representational shortfalls. In this study, a small portion of Middle-Eastern perspectives are represented by three women: Marjane Satrapi, Brigitte Findakly, and Zeina Abirached. As previously mentioned, *Persepolis* is a case under analysis. In addition, Findakly's *Coquelicots d'Irak (Poppies of Irak)* and Abirached's *Mourir, partir, revenir: le jeu des hirondelles (A Game for Swallow: To Die, To Leave, To Return)* were chosen. Further, each

comic was chosen precisely because the narratives are told from a child's point of view which is an essential topic of exploration in this study. The corpus may appear limited, but the rich content provided by these works makes up in quality in what it lacks in quantity.

East Asia:

Representing a section of East Asia, Aurélia Aurita along with two of her publications, namely *Buzz-moi (Buzz-me)* and *Je ne verrai pas Okinawa (I will never see Okinawa),* focus on what it means to be a second generation Chinese and Khmer woman living and working as a professional *BDiste* in France and abroad. Her comedic personal accounts reveal and investigate deeper conversations about women's sexuality, race, discrimination, and community. I argue that Aurita's work adds substance to this study because compared to the other cases in question she uses an adult point of view informed by childlike characteristics, using humour to discuss taboo and often unexplored discussions about identity.

West Africa:

Marguerite Abouet, using her own childhood experiences and familial influences informs the final product of *Aya de Yopougon.* However, this graphic novel is not exactly an autobiographical text as it is the product of a collaboration between multiple identities and ideas. Born in the Ivory Coast, Abouet often visits her hometown of Yopougon and with the insights of her parents she is able compose the life story of Aya, a driven and intelligent fictional character that dreams of a better life outside of the impoverished and patriarchal life she was born into. This case is of particular interest because it does not use the child point of view, innocent or naive filters to explore conflict inducing topics. Similarly, it does not make use of humour in the same ways that are visible in Aurita's own work. This begs the question, how does Marguerite Abouet represent the often difficult to discuss topics presented in her work about life in a

developing country like the Ivory Coast, and what effect does this representation have on their

reader?

<center>Significance: Imagery, Visibility and Language</center>

Autobiography:

According to Ann Miller "Theorists of women's autobiography have argued that it breaks

with male tradition" (2007c, 229) and in turn creates a key platform for women to "uphold both

[their] individual and group identities" (2007c, 231). The autobiographic genre is important

because it makes visible and evident what mainstream news media often keeps out of sight, the

private and the public. Autobiographies develop marginalized viewpoints, "allows for the

recounting of experience which has previously been silenced and repressed" (Miller 2007c, 231)

and encourages readers to question their personal biases and pre-existing judgements. This genre

also allows for the experimentation of hindsight and real-time commentary which contributes to

the explicit and implicit representations of women's experiences. Now as grown adults, many of

the writers and creative *bande dessinée* contributors may choose to elaborate, complicate, or

simplify and downplay their insights and experiences. These creative decisions are strategic and

merit further inquiry and discussion. The evolution of one's representation of self reflects what

may be considered acceptable or unacceptable, and interesting or uneventful to a watching and

reading public. One writes with a specific European or Western audience. This may encourage

some to fully explore certain memories, allowing for repressed material to resurface and emerge.

However, others may do the exact opposite and instead mask or frame their experiences in ways

that accommodate the audience's political culture and levels of comfortability.

<center>Methods and Methodology</center>

The examinations of this study's corpus will take shape in the form of a textual analysis. According to Trimble and Treiberg, textual analyses are the examinations "of the messages and meanings conveyed by the text" (2015, 227). Texts take on many forms and can be written, visual, spoken, or symbolic. Political scientists often analyze texts "because of what they reveal about the ideas, goals, motivations, and activities of politicians, political organizations, and institutions" (Trimble and Treiberg 2015, 227). Further, in the context of autobiographical comics revelations associated with the representations of identity materialize in implicit and explicit ways. This argument is echoed by Trimble and Treiberg, stating that "plenty of overtly and subtly political content is embedded in texts produced by non-government actors" (2015, 228). Creative works like art installations, slogans, advertisements, music lyrics and even comics can convey important concepts and ideas about the people and communities that are producing such works. Therefore, there is power in unpacking and understanding these precious stories as their insights may be useful in informing people's impressions of others.

A discourse analysis was chosen for this study. The goals and intentions of this project considered, a qualitative approach and its direct focus on "meanings reflected in, and created by discourses" are closely linked with the linguistic and visual representations of women of colour in French comics (Trimble and Treiberg 2015, 228). Discourse analyses go beyond the manifest content of a text, "literal or surface meaning", and have the goal of exposing latent content, "underlying or implied meaning" (Trimble and Treiberg 2015, 229). This distinction is important as I am interested in analyzing the political and social implications pertaining to the personal narratives of the writers and creative contributors involved in this study as many of their insights are masked by filters.

I will not isolate particular discourse fragments as comics and their narratives are understood in their entireties. Therefore, to isolate a chapter, a couple pages, or a few frames would be doing a disservice to the carefully curated narratives produced. According to Mark McKinney, the layout "of sequential frames in the comic strip and on the graphic-novel page, and the separation between them, allow artists to make visual juxtapositions, ellipses between continuous frames, and other effects" (2013, 29). Therefore, the contextual disconnection and physical detachment of *cadres* or panels from their neighbouring frames would reduce the quality of content observed and by extension any undertaking of visual or linguistic analysis. Hence, the textual examination will be done in relation to the narrative's context. For instance, I will pull specific examples to illustrate my points but the analysis will be done in concert with the story's context.

Intersectionality and Power:

As previously mentioned, intersectionality is the primary school of thought that directly informs this study's discourse analysis. However, it should be noted that an intersectional framework has its critiques. On one hand, Patricia Hill Collins advocates for the decentring of society's dominant groups. She argues that all knowledge is partial. Individuals are naturally limited to their own experiences. Therefore, in order to study the phenomenon of gender and politics one must observe many perspectives. This is especially true for those that exist along the borders of the mainstream. Conversely, Nina Yuval Davis argues for a non-decentring intersectional analysis. Davis is a proponent of the analysis of all women, not just those that are marginalized. There are certainly critiques associated with each frame of analysis. I particularly am a proponent of decentring as it brings a certain focus to non-mainstream identities. However,

decentring may have its limitations as it excludes dominant and powerful bodies that influence the nature of societal privilege.

Intersectionality is difficult to define. In a study like this, one might ask how many categories should be analyzed, and which ones should be examined in the first place? Who takes precedence? Is there a precedence at all? Consider the numerous identities that each person passes on a daily basis. That is a large number. Therefore, it is impossible to give each and every group a substantive amount of space dedicated to the analysis of their own challenges and experiences in a single research study. I argue that this is intersectionality's main critique. As a theory, framework and analytical tool, on the surface intersectionality intends to dissect the multiple power structures that cross, intersect and clash with each other. Indeed it performs sufficiently in this regard, but how much is enough to be considered truly intersectional? In this sense, intersectionality must be continuous project that aims to address all identities and their related power struggles. The spaces reserved for Abirached, Abouet, Aurita, Findakly and Satrapi represent the beginning of an ongoing project and necessity to uncover more than we already know.

Intersectionality is also often criticized for its emphasis on socially constructed categories such as race. The focus on racialized bodies (Black, Asian, White, etc.,) may reinforce the idea that these categories are in fact true, legitimate and naturally occurring. This may contribute to the production of the 'Other', thereby making racial categories increasingly visible to the detriment of the social constructivist view. One might ask, as academics continue to speak about racial or gendered categories in seemingly legitimatizing ways; are we contributing to their deconstruction or to their continued construction? I challenge this critique. It is through meaningful dialogue that one is exposed to varying power structures and socially constructed

categories. It is through informed debate that problematic assumptions about the legitimate constructions of race are challenged. The increased focus on socially constructed categories does not necessarily lead to their legitimizations. If proper precautions are taken, this focus will deconstruct the notions of truth and *naturalité*.

2. Analysis

Coquelicots d'Irak

Published in 2016, *Coquelicots d'Irak* (Poppies of Iraq) recounts the childhood of a young biracial girl, split between Iraq and France. The *scénaristes* (writers), Brigitte Findakly and Lewis Trondheim, collaborate as they navigate the intricacies of Findakly's own experiences with the use of unattached panels, pastel colours, real childhood photos, and modern day commentary with the use of narrative interruptions by Findakly, herself. Through this child filter, Findakly discusses racial, religious, political and gendered themes in Iraq and France. The story is not overtly humorous, but the commentary and blissful insights provided by younger Findakly nurture a sense of childlike ease during a tumultuous time under Saddam Hussein's regime. Despite the child filter, Findakly does not limit herself to one narrative voice. A modern day Findakly makes a number of interruptions throughout the story, inserting herself to provide her current thoughts as a matured adult. This is an interesting choice as it gives the writer the flexibility to reflect on her childhood and to clearly understand certain parts she was previously unable to grasp. This back and forth commentary between the past and the present helps reposition Findakly's readers, forcing them to see things through her eyes; both as a child between 1959 to 1973 and then in 2016 in response to the turmoil in Iraq (Brigitte Findakly & Lewis Trondheim - Coquelicots d'Irak, 2017).

Coquelicots d'Irak (Poppies of Iraq) is distinct from the rest of the comics in this study. First, it is a collaborative work between two individuals involved in a romantic relationship. This relationship is important as it reveals the power dynamics and the innate privilege represented in this work. Second, the concept of biraciality reveals the multilayered intersections between culture, gender and religion that accompany Findakly's experiences as French-Arab and Christian woman. Finally, there is the notion of past and present commentaries which contextualizes the work within a certain time period, but also within Findakly's own understanding of the world around her. These three factors work together to influence the book's reception, and to challenge preconceived ideas about the Middle-Eastern woman's life experience. Findakly is an Arab woman but she is Christian, well-educated, and straddles a 'Western' and an 'Eastern' identity. Findakly primarily explores these themes with the child's perspective. She uses it to primarily present events, avoiding political commentary, power clashes and in-depth analyses of her childhood experiences. This recounting gives the impression of going through the motions as a child would; not necessarily asking questions, and by accepting one event after the other in the security of a loving and privileged home. It places the reader in younger Findakly's position, empathetically re-living her experiences instead of critiquing them. I also argue that the role of modern day Findakly is to dissect and problematize her childhood observations. This is clearly demonstrated in the representation of her mother's struggles as a European woman in Iraq and France, and Findakly's later experiences as an ex-patriot from France to Iraq.

In June 2014, Nimrud, an ancient Iraqi Assyrian city dating back 3, 300 years was one of the most treasured ancient Mesopotamian ruins in history, found itself under the capture of Islamic State (IS) militants. According to the Iraqi government, militants began bulldozing the

ancient ruins with other fortified vehicles, vandalizing the precious historical and cultural

landmarks. After one month, statues and frescos were smashed. Anything that remained was

destroyed. In 2016, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) called

this destruction a warm crime, accusing IS of deliberate erasure of Iraq's history.

In an interview with Findakly and Trondheim conducted by Librairie Mollat, Findakly

reveals her longstanding intentions to write and eventually publish comics. However, she

explicitly states that it was the destruction in Nimrud, a site that she would often visit as a child,

paired with the growing militancy in France that finally encouraged her to write about her

childhood (Souvenirs: "Coquelicots d'Irak", une enfance à Mossoul, 2016). Prior to Findakly's

first comic strips, her partner, Lewis Trondheim, was approached by Frédéric Potet to contribute

to a weekly comics section in the LaMatinale in LeMonde.fr, a centrist French newspaper (Wong

2017). The catch was that the comics had to do something with the latest current affairs. In the

process of her own comics creation, Findakly felt as if she was falling short own her own. With

the knowledge of Trondheim's LeMonde job offer, Findakly decided to enlist Trondheim's skills

to help launch the *Coquelicots d'Irak* project. After a short trial collaboration, it became clear to

Findakly that Trondheim's style and direction fully encaptured her vision; this was the beginning

of their artistic and literary partnership.

The power dynamics presented at the outset of *Coquelicot d'Irak*'s creation reveals the

innate privilege that was accorded to Findakly's work. Unlike many of the other creators in this

study, she was presented with a unique opportunity to tell her story on a national platform at

almost the very beginning of the project's inception. Findakly became a mainstream *scénariste*

almost overnight. This fortunate series of events could be interpreted as a handout by

Trondheim; as if he was passing up and giving this opportunity to Findakly. I caution against this

assessment. Superficially, the power dynamics almost immediately observed are the following: a successful male caucasian French *scénariste* collaborates with a relatively unknown female French-Iraqi writer and comics creator with whom he is in a relationship with and their project is warmly received by the public. Findakly certainly had the proper connections that led to the creation and publication of her story, but she is the visionary and the focus. In fact, Findakly began to write the story three years prior to Trondheim's La Matinale offer (Wong 2017). Further, Trondheim's own drawing style is adapted to fit within Findakly's own style and vision. Even more so, Findakly, as a successful colourist, expertly employs her skills, adding her own artistic touches to the final product.

Many have often conflated a woman of colour's success to the man standing beside her, eclipsing the woman's achievements. On the surface, this certainly appears to be the case. However, in all of the strips and pages of *Coquelicots d'Irak,* Trondheim is never mentioned nor is he drawn as a character in Findakly's story. His name only appears as a *scénariste*, no more and no less. In an interview with TV5 Monde, in response to the interviewer's question about Trondheim's absence, Trondheim succinctly states that it was not his story; he had no desire to be its focus (Souvenirs: "Coquelicots d'Irak", une enfance à Mossoul). I make this point to highlight the power dynamics in this creative endeavour. A woman of colour's literary success and warm public reception should not be overshadowed by controversies surrounding her male collaborators. Findakly and Trondheim achieve a desired balance of owing credit where it is due, and respecting the contributions of the other. In terms of intersectional analysis, success is not a zero sum game. Findakly and Trondheim's collaboration is successful because it prioritizes Findakly's vision, but at the same time Trondheim's influence in the final product is difficult to ignore. The publication house, *L'Association,* is his own and was created and founded by him.

The privilege of proximity, and thereby opportunity for publication is explicit and certainly plays a factor, but they are not the only factors that contribute to Findakly's success.

Children's Filter and Modern Day Findakly: Biraciality, Religion and Expat Intersectionality:

In the comic book Findakly reveals that she is biracial with an Iraqi father and a French mother. This is important as intersecting identities, cultures, values, languages and norms must co-exist with one another. This co-existence ultimately influences Findakly's childhood, sculpting her interpretations of her own world. She represents these interpretations in a seamless way by inserting short tableaus and snippets, revealing particularities of her Iraqi-French childhood. One way in which she explores the intersection of French and Iraqi identity is through her mother's experiences. For instance, Findakly recounts a story about Iraqi and French food etiquette. According to Findakly, when guests are invited to an Iraqi household and offered something to eat the host must offer the dish many times before the guest is able to accept. As a

child, Findakly would observe as her mother offered desserts to her guests but would only insist once, unconscious of the country's culinary norms. She writes, "Ma mère ne se fit jamais à cette coutume…Par contre, les invités finirent par changer leurs habitudes quand ils venaient chez nous" (Findakly and Trondheim 2016, 20)[1]. Through the

---

[1] My mother never caught on to this custom…However, our guests ended up changing their own habits and norms whenever they came over.

child filter, Findakly represents a cultural exchange in a humorous way, exaggerating the

expressions of the house guests as they are defined with large eyes filled with disbelief. This

experience reveals the power dynamics that Findakly's mother was forced to navigate, exposing

clashing and overlapping systems of privilege. The child filter provides the avenue to discuss

cultural differences without immediate backlash or critique. These are simply childhood events

in Findakly's life. Upon's one's initial reading, this event is a simple childhood memory.

However, in the context of the entire story this event sheds light on a greater conversation about

cultural clashes and the domestic roles of women.

Biraciality is
further explored through
her observations of her
mother's linguistic
abilities and
inefficiencies. Findakly
reveals that French was
spoken at home, but

Arabic was the lingua franca in public spaces. As such, Findakly's mother was forced to learn

Arabic. Although her mother was able to communicate relatively well, her distinct French accent

always exposed her foreign-self. This experience is visually represented with malformed Arabic

characters when Findakly's mother speaks, and is contrasted with an Iraqi man that repeats the

phrase in clearly defined characters. This simple depiction reinforces the Findakly's experiences

as a biracial child. Findakly is able to reconcile both of her identities because this has always

been her reality. She is bilingual, was raised in Iraq and therefore understands the country's

cultural norms. However, Findakly is constantly confronted with the conflicts between her two worlds through her mother's own experiences. Through the child's perspective, Findakly does not dive into the nuances of power that are clearly represented in her mother's experiences. Younger Findakly recalls the events and does not supplement with additional political or sociocultural analysis. It is only through modern day Findakly's experiences that in-depth conversations about clashing identities and cultural norms are brought to the fore. Such questions, for example, are explored by modern day Findakly through the topic of gender when she recalls her trips to Iraq.

The navigation between gender norms, sexuality and women's freedoms are different depending on sociopolitical contexts and political cultures. In turn, people, especially women often find themselves adapting their dress, the way they speak and ultimately they ways they interact with the realities around them. Women's bodies are highly politicized and are easily critiqued or controlled by those in power. During a visit to Mosul, Iraq in 1978, older Findakly observes the liberal regressions in her hometown;

women were no longer allowed to show their elbows or knees. When she wears Western style outfits in public, people on the streets vocally remark her "foreign" identity. Findakly no longer felt at home. The person Findakly had become was no longer compatible with the town that had played a foundational role in her childhood. This experience is not explored with the child filter. However, it does expose the overlapping systems of power, gender and a traditional political culture, navigated by modern day Findakly. It seems like the role of younger Findakly is to only recall events as they really happened, cautiously avoiding political commentaries through the child perspective. However, it is clear that modern day Findakly expands on the events by adding context and imbuing past events with political, social and cultural significance.

While continuing her education in France, Findakly shares a story of a classroom conversation about racism. The professors asks "Who here can pretend not to be racist?" but turns towards younger Findakly and states that this question did not apply to her; it was just too different for her (80). Although not explicitly stated by the professor or further expanded by

Findakly and Trondheim, the reader is able to read between the lines; in the professor's view this question did not pertain to Findakly because people of colour could not discriminate against other people of colour. On the following page, however, this notion is starkly countered when

Findakly finds herself defending her Arab-Christian identity.

This is one example where the clash between gender, education level, cultural identity and religion is visibly depicted. At this moment in the book, Findakly is in the process of explaining her educational setbacks. She explains that, after many years in Iraq, her French writing skills are not up to par with her colleagues. This is important because it explains Findakly's eagerness to better herself in other domains, thus compensating for her weaknesses in writing. This is clearly represented in Findakly's debate with another student and her need to educate him on the concept of the Arab identity. In this encounter with a male Algerian student, Findakly introduces herself as an Arab woman. Upon realizing Findakly's Christian background, he immediately claims that she is, in fact, not Arab. Findakly explains that "Arab" denotes a geographical location, not a particular religious identity. In relation to the Findakly's conversation about racism with her professor, it is clear that racism can exist within ethnic groups. In two pages, Findakly exposes two distinct experiences with racism. In the first example, race is confronted in the context of a predominantly caucasian and European classroom. The second, she is confronted with racism in a conversation between similar ethnic minorities. These examples further demonstrate Findakly's experiences as a biracial woman. Although these experiences are not explored with the use of the child filter it exposes Findakly's intention to encourage political debate with her readers. Through a adult perspective, Findakly encourages critical thought whereas the child filter is used to set up a wider discussion of race, cultural identity, and gender.

Take Aways and Final Thoughts:

Biraciality is primarily explored in single panels and through Findakly's childhood observations. Although the previous examples are not all firsthand experiences explored with the child filter, it is clear that they provide insights into the intersecting and often clashing systems of power in Findakly's life. The complex discussions surrounding cultural and culinary norms, linguistic difficulties and foreign accents, and societal regressions towards the traditional are all equally explored in simplified ways. Their explorations are represented on a single page or in very few panels. These concise representations demonstrate the crucial interplay between visuals and texts. In certain examples, the child filter is expertly used, revealing underlying power struggles.

With its use, Findakly is able to avoid further explanations with regards to her experiences because she is telling her story in sequences like a child would; one event after the next, unable to see the power dynamics that are invested in all these moments. Findakly inserts her childhood observations, succinctly delivers the central point, and moves on to the next event without further explanation. It is, in fact, the reader who is entrusted with the responsibility to dissect these events for themselves, noting the underlying messages that Findakly's childhood memories covertly express. For example, the cultural and linguistic challenges faced by Findakly's mother represent the intersections between different cultural identities, and the difficulties that must be navigated to live in a new country. Findakly does not expand on the significance of this event. This is similar to the ways in which some children miss underlying meanings in the actions of others, accepting superficial acts but failing to comprehend deeper cultural significances. Now as an adult, Findakly is exposed to the underlying nuances which were missed in her childhood. This representation of events is important because it reveals the intersections of power. From one point of view, Findakly's mother is in a position of

powerlessness. She is unaware of the culinary and cultural norms. On the other hand, the guests are powerless because they are unable to protest these acts; they were invited and were offered desserts but politely declined thereby creating an unfavourable situation for themselves. The complex power struggles make it difficult to define who is in the position of power, making it the readers responsibility to render their own judgements; never is the judgement explicitly stated by younger or modern day Findakly. Similarly, the second example explores the intersections of linguistic power. Findakly's mother would normally situate herself in a position of power. She is caucasian, educated, literate and is not required to work to earn a living for herself or her family. However, in the second example Findakly's mother is represented in a situation of powerlessness. Despite her powerful characteristics, by virtue of living in a foreign land Findakly's mother's privilege is reduced because she is unable to coherently communicate in the country's dominant language. These central takeaways are not explicitly exposed in the text by younger Findakly. Instead, it is the reader, their informed knowledge and ability to read between the lines that underlying conversations about power are effectively revealed. Following suit, the third example provides insights into the regressive nature of women's dress in Mosul and Findakly's difficulties in navigating her newly transformed hometown. Although this experience was not observed as a child, it reveals Findakly's use of the child filter. She employs the child filter to bypass additional political commentary; only stating necessary information to get her points across. This concept is observed in the first two examples. However, the filter is not used with modern Findakly's experiences. Findakly experienced the changes in Mosul as an informed adult. The increased political commentary in Findakly's later years is consistent with her own social and political maturities and awakenings as a young woman. Perhaps this choice is deliberate. If so, it adds to the narrative's complexity. Not only does it follow Findakly's life

events, but it also traces her evolving relationship and engagement with biraciality, cultural clashes, and gender norms.

À tel point qu'un jour le professeur de français, pour qui il était logique et normal d'être raciste, a posé la question en classe.

Qui, ici, peut prétendre ne pas être raciste ?

Ah oui, toi, bien sûr. Mais ça ne compte pas.

Mais alors comment pouvez-vous dire être raciste et me parler ?

Ah, mais toi, c'est pas pareil.

Mourir, partir, revenir: le jeu des hirondelles[2]

Published in 2007, Zeina Abirached's *Mourir, partir, revenir: le jeu des hirondelles* is a story about Abirached's own childhood in Lebanon in the 1980s. Although not explicitly stated, one can deduce that Abirached's story takes place during the 1982 Lebanon War. On June 6, 1982, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) invaded southern Lebanon which instigated counter-attacks between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) also operating in southern Lebanon. This conflict caused many civilian casualties on both sides of the border, and ultimately left lasting effects on Lebanese citizens.

In her story, Abirached focuses on a single night during this conflict. On this night, Abirached's parents have gone to visit Annie, Abirached's grand-mother, on the other side of town. However, as a result of violent and heavy bombings Abirached's parents are unable to leave Annie's home. This is a problem because Abirached's family home is located on the complete opposite side of town. The book recounts the events, anxieties, and conversations

---

[2] A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Leave, To Return

between characters as they wait for the parents to return. For the most part, *Mourir, partir, revenir: le jeu des hirondelles* communicates the experience of war through Abirached's limited child's perspective. This simple view point is emphasized by the use of black and white which conceals much of the violence that occurs outside of the children's home. In terms of intersectionality, the interaction between different power structures is much more nuanced compared to the other cases in this study. Conversations surrounding the interconnected and clashing nature of gender, race, religion, class, etc., at a visual and linguistic level are less explicit. These concealed conversations about power and privilege may be explained by Abirached's use of the child's filter. Through this limited world view the reader is only exposed to what the child sees or hears, often failing to clue into other issues or conflicts that surround them. Unlike Brigitte Findakly's work, current day Abirached does not interject or intervene in the story to clarify or to add additional commentary from a matured adult perspective. In this sense, it is the reader's responsibility to pick up on subtle entry points to further political critiques and commentary.

On page 61, Abirached describes Anhala; the family's hired hand. Anhala works as the family's cook, nanny, and house cleaner. She has been with the family for three generations, becoming an instrumental family figure in the lives of three generations of women. When Abirached describes Anhala she does not mention where she comes from, nor does she discuss Anhala's family, class, level of education, or how Anhala was originally hired. Abirached simply discloses that Anhala has been with the family for 65 years, and originally worked for her grand-

AVEC SONIA, LÉNA ET FARAH, ELLE A ÉLEVÉ TROIS GÉNÉRATIONS DE FEMMES.
QUAND FARAH EST TOMBÉE ENCEINTE, ANHALA NE L'A PLUS QUITTÉE.

parents (2007, 58). In this context, the child filter does not interrogate Anhala's character; it simply accepts Anhala's position and status within the family. One can read this in two ways. First, perhaps Abirached wishes to communicate that Anhala's past, education, race, religion, class, etc., do not define who she is today. This may be interpreted as a critique of intersectionality as it forces the reader to see Anhala for her qualities; kindness, generosity, loyalty, and dedication instead of through an external and socially constructed lens where Anhala's personal power structures and privileges are interrogated and assessed. Second, perhaps this information is left out to challenge preconceived ideas of about the help. The help like nannies, cooks, or house cleaners are often thought to come from the lower class or minority groups where opportunities are scarce. It is assumed that these positions are unimportant or less respected. Abirached's lacking interrogation of Anhala's character may speak to these unfair generalizations. Following this logic, it is possible that Abirached refuses to discuss Anhala's identity because it does not matter; because they are equals.

Regardless of its reading, this panel reveals the strategic use of the child's filter. Its failure to describe Anhala's identity demonstrates how the child filter can deliver politically charged content in a digestible and easily relatable fashion. Abirached could have explicitly revealed her lack of knowledge, and engaged in a political conversation about the unimportance

of describing Anhala's history. However, Abirached instead teases her readers into critically evaluating this choice for themselves, forcing them to engage in a dialogue about Anhala's status.

In relation to violence and the conflict in Lebanon, throughout the entire comic book Abirached never illustrates military men, shootings, or bombings. This subject matter is only discussed and mentioned in relation to the victims of war. The intention to render violence invisible in an illustrative sense not only speaks to Abirached's decision to focus on the people, but it also brings forward a child's experience with conflict.

First, the lack of illustration related to combat and military operation forces the reader to narrow in on the important relationships in Abirached's life. Instead of describing and visually representing the world outside her childhood home, Abirached chooses to discuss the thriving lives of those around her within the four walls of her family's home. Throughout most of the book, she describes each character in great detail. This demonstrates what Abirached considers to be the most important theme; family and relationships. This phenomenon is largely supported by the fact that Abirached effectively blacks out most of the background scenery with the exception of family portraits, and the family's large tapestry rug which is hung on the wall. The deliberate decisions to visually suppress external conflict speaks to the importance of family and community relationships in Abirached's work. In the comic, Abirached

is aware of the dangers that define her everyday life. She is not ignorant to the fact that members of her community have been killed in bombings and shootings. Although visual references to war are limited, most of the discussion about violence is done during conversations about loved ones, and the lack of security that everyone faces.
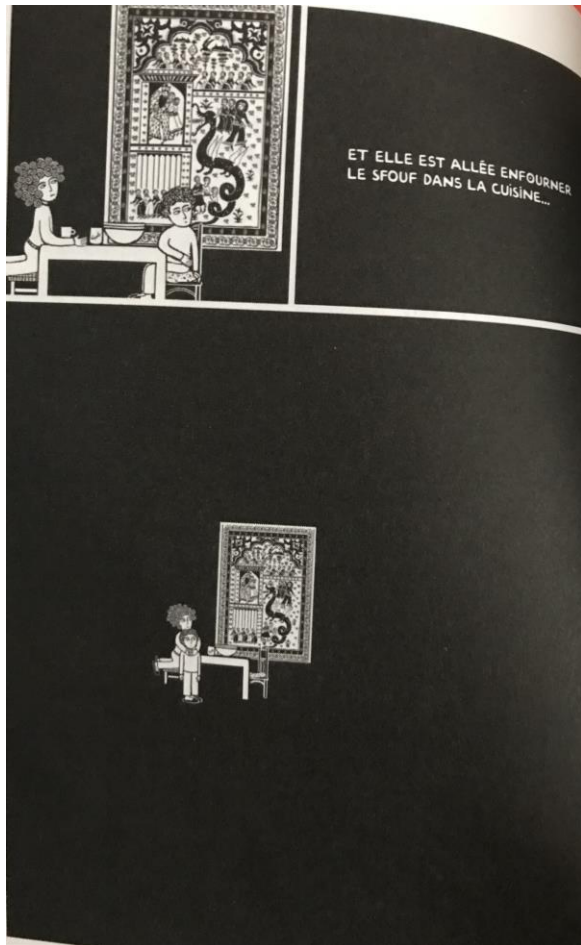
Another way to analyze the lack of combat and war-time illustration is to focus on the use of the child's filter and the experiences that it depicts. Through the child's filter, Abirached illustrates scenes that challenge normative ideas of what life is like during times of war. It is popular to believe that life stops once war begins, and to some extent, this true. However, life goes on and people discover different means to adapt to their current situations. One way in which the Abirached depicts every day life is through the childlike experiences. These illustrations unpack and challenge preconceived ideas of what life was like as a young girl in the Middle East during times of conflict. For instance, on page 42 Abirached shows the reader a childhood memory as her younger sister and Anhala make sfouf, a traditional and celebratory Lebanese cake. The pages below clearly demonstrate two younger girls as they discover Labanese traditions through the enjoyment of cooking and baking. This illuminates the idea that, regardless of one's geopolitical context people are people; regardless of the religious,

cultural, gendered, sexual, racial, or class structures that may divide humanity Abirached's illustration forces the reader to consider the concepts that unite rather than divide.

Considering this event and the ideas it inspires, the following page grounds Abirached's situation back in reality. Page 44 is made up of three panels, and all of them are filled by black space, creating the feeling of being stuck in a void or a black hole. In the largest panel, Abirached and her younger sister are left alone. This isolation may speak to a number of interpretations, but the most prevalent is that this isolation could be made permanent by the impact of war. As previously mentioned, Abirached's mother and father are stuck on the opposite side of town. In their attempt to rejoin their children a number of things could happen to them as they cross through heavily militarized zones. This seemingly mundane and simple illustration is imbued with political meaning. It encourages the reader to think about those most affected by war, and the impacts it has on younger generations. Further, because Abirached has chosen to utilize black and white shades instead of colour the reader is not directly confronted by the issue of race. As a result, Abirached and her younger sister are received as two young girls instead of two Lebanese girls. This specific representation demonstrates an integral concept in the comic; regardless of race, black or white, all people are effect by war, especially orphaned children.

Abirached's use of the child perspective demonstrates its ability to deliver difficult and often political messages. Her discussions surrounding war are indirect which forces the reader to imply what is being communicated. This forced critical reflection is important as it takes the simple viewpoint of a young child but charges it with political commentary that reveals underlying intersections of power.

<div align="center">

Je ne verrai pas Okinawa and *Buzz-Moi*

</div>

Born in 1980 in Châtenay-Malabry, Chenda Khun goes by her artistic pseudonym, Aurélia Aurita. Aurélia is a French, Chinese and Khmer woman and *scénariste*. Aurélia is widely known for her straightforward and humorous discussions about love and sexuality thanks to the success of *Angora* in 2001 and *Fraise et chocolate*[3] in 2007. The comics under analysis for this study, however, are Aurita's *Je ne verrai pas Okinawa* (2008) and *Buzz-Moi* (2009). *Je ne verrai pas Okinawa* recounts Aurita's personal experience with Japanese immigration, sharing her feelings about discrimination and racism as a French, yet Asian foreigner in Japan. *Buzz-Moi*, on the other retraces Aurita's career over a few months after the successful launch of her first comic books. Throughout the work, Aurita discusses the exciting yet tumultuous time as she navigates unforeseen success and nationwide interest in her personal life. These stories were chosen as they tackle often challenging conversations about a woman of colour's literary success, the issue of foreign identity, racism, and Asian women's sexuality in a humours manner. Aurita's experiences, unlike many of the other cases, are not explored through a child's perspective nor with an intervening speaker as was observed in Brigitte Findakly and Lewis Findakly's

---

[3] *Strawberries and Chocolate*

Coquelicots d'Irak[4]. Instead, humour is used to filter and render challenging discussions more palatable, allowing for increased ease in comprehension and digestion for the reader.

Je ne verrai pas Okinawa

Foreign identity, discrimination and what Aurélia refers to as relative racism are the primary themes presented in this comic. Although Aurita's experiences are her own, they reveal deeper conversations about the ways in which power travels and functions in society. For instance, on a three-month trip to Japan, Aurita is stopped at the airport by Japanese immigration. She is asked to step out for further questioning. During her private interview with a male

Japanese immigration officer Aurita is asked about her current relationship. In this interaction, Aurita states "Je ne vois pas le rapport! C'est ma vie privée![5]" (2008, 46). The interviewer responds by saying that her unresponsiveness may result in the nullification of her Japanese tourist visa (2008, 47). When Aurita eventually responds in the positive, she is in fact in Japan to also visit with her partner, she is asked if she intends to seek and pursue marriage while in Japan (2008, 47). This interaction reveals patriarchal systems of power. The questions, although valid, are gendered. The

---

[4] Poppies of Iraq
[5] I don't see how this matters! It's my private life!

immigration officers' questions are not about work or business; they are mostly about her

personal life as if women only travel to foreign countries to marry residents. This sexist

interaction uncovers foundational discriminatory practices embedded in institutions, even those

of democratic and progressive national establishments. Further, Aurita is an Asian woman that

has travelled to Japan prior to this

experience under the same circumstances.

The repetitive questioning unpacks the

concept of foreign identities. Although

Aurita is, in fact, Asian she is treated and

scrutinized like a terrorist. In an interview,

Aurita expands on this concept of

foreignness by stating that her intentions

were to live as a French woman in Japan

just as she desired to live as an Asian

woman in France; free of racism ("Je ne

verrai pas Okinawa" : une histoire

d'immigration en bande dessinée, 2018).

Therefore as Aurita states in the interview, the constant questioning and inquiry just because she

was "une étrangère[6]" raised latent feelings of bias and discrimination ("Je ne verrai pas

Okinawa" : une histoire d'immigration en bande dessinée, 2018). This experience explores the

clash between patriarchal powers, and Aurita's personal history of being othered and

marginalized. These experience demonstrate that racism and sexism are not a contained

---

[6] A foreigner

phenomenons. Aurélia's foreign body is scrutinized by a man that shares similar racial characteristics. This demonstrates that racism is not only perpetrated by caucasian bodies against people of colour too. Discrimination can be applied by people of colour against other people of colour, regardless of the similarities that bind them. Moreover, Aurita's feelings as a female foreigner in a land that has previously welcomed her with open arms is a reminder to readers that gendered biases exist and continue to thrive. The issue of gender further adds to the clash of identities experienced by Aurélia; not only is she a seen a foreigner in France but one in Japan as well. Compounded by this is her female identity. The male interviewer assumes that she is in Japan to marry, not to necessarily work or travel. Aurita's negative exposure to Japanese immigration is both racial and gendered, demonstrating that an intersectional analysis in necessary to further unpack the dynamics

at play.

In the same interview, Aurita discusses "le relatif du racisme[7]" ("Je ne verrai pas Okinawa" : une histoire d'immigration en bande dessinée, 2018). Aurita points out that it is not only caucasian bodies that can be interrogated as racist entities; anyone regardless of race face the same cross-examination.

This notion is explored with Aurita's own racial assumptions. In the immigration office, Aurita is

---

[7] racism's relativeness

seated next to a caucasian woman. An immigration officer subsequently approaches and asks

Aurita if she speaks Japanese. Aurita discloses that she does but only "un petit peu[8]" (2008, 16).

When the caucasian woman is asked the same she discloses that she speaks fluently, and Aurita

responds with surprise. In the subsequent panels, it is clear that Aurita is uncomfortable or

disappointed with her reaction; her body's posture echoes as much. Although this experience is

minute, it is an entry point for further discussion and analysis about racial clashing and

discrimination.

In terms of humour, Aurita makes use of inconvenient body processes, facial expressions

and body language. While in line for Japanese immigration, Aurita reads a sign warns passengers

with upset stomachs or general unwellness to report themselves to immigration officers.

Although Aurita experiences these symptoms she ignores them and continues to push through

towards the airport's customs area. When she is apprehended she humorously confounds her

questioning to her inconvenient bowel movements. This humour frame serves to casually

introduce the reader to the prospect that Aurita will soon be questioned by Japanese immigration.

It is a friendly and off-handed way to segway into deeper conversations about racial and gender

discrimination. The use of humour is further observed in Aurita's character's facial expressions.

They show all her initial thoughts and fail to conceal any semblance of poise or maturity like a

child in some senses.

Whereas *Je ne verrai pas Okinawa* explores racial and gender tensions, *Buzz-moi*

grapples with a woman of colour's experience with professional success, sexuality and

fetishization, and public scrutiny and support in the midst of literary popularity and intrigue.

These power structures are assessed through a humorous frame, thus further contributing to the

---

[8] a little bit

ways in which women of colour frame, shape and recount their life events in comic books. On a superficial level, the humourous frame may introduce funny facial expressions or political references. On a deeper level, perhaps humour is a window into the struggles experienced by women of colour. The use of a humorous frame speaks to narrative channels available to women. Humour may be considered a cathartic, light and undemanding mechanism used to unravel and explore embedded themes related to empowerment and oppression. These questions are posed and answered with Aurita Aurélia's *Buzz-moi.*

Buzz-moi

Aurita's comic style is very simple and minimalist. Compared to the majority of texts discussed in this study, Aurita's backgrounds are often left undrawn. These empty spaces force the reader to narrow in on nuances represented in the characters' facial expressions, their body posture and positioning, selected objects, dialogue, and word choice. This minimalist approach may evoke plainness or a lack of sophistication. However, I argue that Aurita's strengths as a writer and illustrator lie in her ability to say a lot with very little. An example of this is clearly depicted on page 21 when Aurita sits down for an interview with a female caucasian journalist to discuss her latest comic book. A conflict quickly ensues as the interviewer clearly has not read Aurita's book. When the journalist, drawn in an exaggerated manner, asks "Oh mais c'est quoi cette fixation sur

votre livre?!?[9]" (Aurita 2009, 20), Aurita responds with a surprised disposition; she is evidently taken aback by the disrespectful and blunt nature of the question. Aurita's exaggerated facial expression is meant to be funny. It evokes exactly what the reader is thinking; that the journalist is out of line, unfair and irrational. This facial expression and the single panel devoted to its representation acts as an entry point to further conflict. In this sense, humour is one way the Aurita is able to successfully deliver feelings about disrespect and impertinence.

After further questioning, Aurita finds herself in a delicate predicament. She is being interviewed by a woman that clearly has not read the book, and yet demands that Aurita explain its visual and linguistic intricacies. There is an evident power struggle that is visually and linguistically represented throughout this interaction. On page 21, the journalist appears taller; almost as if she is towering over Aurita. This visual depiction reflects Aurita's unarmed conflict with a visibly aggressive woman; not only is Aurita being harassed, she is also depicted as something smaller. The difference in levels is a direct assessment of the conflict at hand. The journalist evidently holds the power at this point. She dictates which questions are posed, what topics are discussed, and the tone of the interview. Aurita, on the other hand, is subjected to this dominance. Additionally, Aurita is wearing black whereas the journalist is wearing white. This stark juxtaposition connotes a direct conflict between women of colour and caucasian women;

---

[9] Oh, but why are people so fixated on this book?!?

the journalist's elevation and height add to this visible production of power, hierarchy, and privilege. The turning point of this dominance is also on page 21. In the third panel, Aurita again focuses on her character's facial expression.

In a mocking fashion, she looks up, curls her fingers and explains that she is unable to answer any of the journalist's questions because she barely knows anything about the book to begin with. Therefore, even if Aurita was to answer the questions the journalist would still be clueless. The interaction ends when Aurita stands up and leaves. In this moment, Aurita is taller than the journalist. She also yields more power as she solely decided to end the interview.
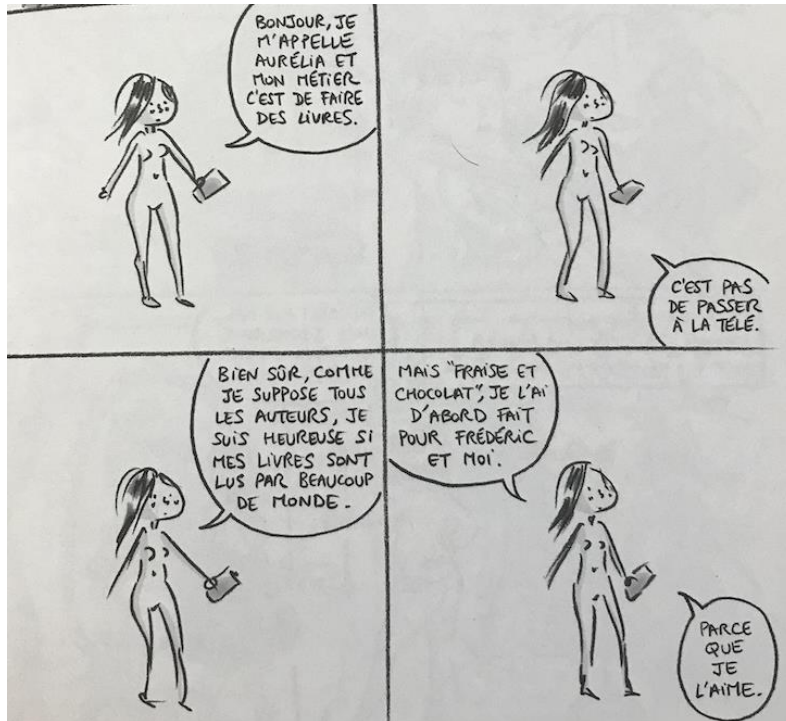

This analysis surrounding disrespect, height and colour demonstrates the ways in which power is represented in Aurita's work. Despite its perceive simplicity, Aurita challenges the reader to look beyond surface-level reading to uncover deeper and latent messages and meaning.

Buzz-moi also explores sexuality and Asian stereotypes. These power structures are paired together as Asian women's sexuality have long been fetishized and eroticized. Having written *Fraises et chocolat,* a personal story about her sexual and intimate relations with her partner many of Aurita's interviews focus on this intriguing topic often imposing harsh and fetishized

critiques. Aurita is a successful writer, but she is also an exoticized Asian woman. This combination makes Aurita feel naked and exposed in terms of sexuality, but not in terms of race. For instance, on page 29 Aurita draws herself in the nude. She states her job is to write books, not to appear on television where her work is reinterpreted in an eroticized manner (Aurita 2009, 29). On the same page, Aurita

draws herself in the nude, without any background details, and where she maintains a surprised disposition. This illustration is bizarre which makes it humorous. It directly represents Aurita's feelings of nakedness in the sense that her sexual are fully discussed, analyses and ultimately exposed to a nationwide audience. Although Aurita is not actually naked, her inner feelings are formerly depicted as bare and unconcealed.

In response to the direct exposure and national analysis of her sex life, Aurita states that there is one thing that consoles her despite this entire situation; at least her Asian origins are left untouched and unmentioned (2009, 92). Aurita writes, "Je préfère être la cochonne de service…plutôt que 'la jeune fille issue de la diversité de service[10]" (2009, 92). This statement reveals further power structures that inform Aurita's identity, and her own feminist values. One

---

[10] I'd rather be the spokesperson for whores than for diversity.

can interpret deeper meaning from this statement. Perhaps Aurita values and appreciates the fact that she is not being treated differently because of her race, and existing Asian stereotypes. Due to this lack of racial focus, journalists and their audiences are able to focus on the main theme of her recent books: sex and sexuality.

Persepolis

Originally published in 2000, Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* in groundbreaking in many ways. It is arguably the first comic written by a woman of colour, about a woman of colour, and published by a non-mainstream publisher to reach success in Europe and North America. *Persepolis* recounts Satrapi's own personal narrative from her experiences in Iran during its Islamic Revolution. For this study, *Persepolis* demonstrates a good balance between the child and humour filter. They work together to create and dismantle tense portions in the book. For example, unlike Findakly and Abirached, Satrapi depicts violence in her panels. These scenes are not as graphic as Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, but they are, in relation to the other works discussed in this study, much more revealing in essence. Sections in the book, however, that depict violence are appeased by humour which makes the content easily digestible for the readers.

Satrapi uses the child filter to discuss issues about women's dress, religion, and politics. She utilizes the child filter by framing younger Satrapi as an inquisitive and curious character. This adds to the filter's notion of innocence and naivety which transforms challenging and political subject matter into something digestible for most readers. The humour filter is also used in conjunction with the child filter in order to decompress, or to render heavy subject matter like death less intimidating for the reader.

The reader is first confronted by images of Marji and her friends; they are wearing the hijab. The first images play on established stereotypes many Western readers have about Iran.

The images conform to the idea that Iranian women are silenced, oppressed, and discriminated against based on their gender. They reveal dominant intersections between religion, politics, and gender. However, at the bottom of the same page the reader is confronted by a humorous event involving the hijab. Satrapi depicts a playground scene with all the younger girls running around without their headscarves, using them as toys, jumprope or dog collars. This page represents the ways in which Satrapi uses the child filter in tandem with the humour filter. She

playfully communicates the idea that mandatory dress codes and expectations that are strictly enforced onto women and girls without any prior warning or basis is a ridiculous proposition. The younger girls do not buy into the new idea of veiling, and are not privy to the consequences that arise when it is not worn. In a way, Satrapi uses these young girls and their reactions towards the veil to challenge the oppressive nature of forced veiling. Satrapi through the playful and unassuming reactions of the young girl's at Marji's school is able to deconstruct the symbolic and politically charged image of the veil, and to challenge its religious and political enforcement on women because she removes its powerful and political abilities. For most girls in the image below, the veil is just a piece of cloth that is meant to be played with. Therefore, it seems like

Satrapi is conveying the message that symbols like the veil only have power when people believe

in its religious, political and social uses. However, like many of the younger girls, the veil is

rendered powerless without prior political or religious background knowledge. This political

comment is revealed with the use of the child and humour filter in conjunction with the use of an

intersectional framework because it teases out latent meaning that would not be revealed upon

first glance.

Whenever violence is discussed in the book it is usually contrasted with an uplifting

childhood anecdote. For instance, Satrapi writes about how frightened and anxious she would

become whenever her father left for work for long periods of time. She states that she would

wonder if he was dead or shot somewhere waiting for help. This discussion is supported by

images of war, soldiers with heavy artillery, injured civilians, and people behind wired fences

which reinforce the feelings of fear conveyed in the comic. These are all clear representations of

ELLE EN AVAIT 10 QUAND JE SUIS NÉE... ELLE S'OCCUPAIT DE MOI,

some of the violence Satrapi witnessed during her childhood, but they are juxtaposed by her story about Mehri, the family's caretaker. In the pages that follow Marji's father's apparent disappearance, is a story about Mehri and her kindness. Satrapi writes that Mehri is like an older sister with whom she had made many happy memories with. Satrapi recalls many of their playdates, scary bedtime stories, and when Mehri was old enough to date Satrapi recalls the love letters she would help write. On a linguistic level, this is recounting of events is not humorous. Humour is fully depicted in Satrapi's illustrations. For instance, she illustrates a younger Mehri as she throws the baby version of Satrapi high in the sky. This exaggerated event is meant to be ridiculous and playful, and is subsequently used to diffuse tension that was built by Satrapi in the pages that preceded it. This humorous recounting of events also serves as commentary on Mehri's status and education. On the same pages, Satrapi reveals that Mehri was born into a poor family that did not have the resources to raise her, and so Satrapi's parents took her in as a caretaker. Satrapi further reveals that Mehri did not have a basic education, did not have basic reading or literacy skills. Similar to Abirached's depiction of Anhala, Satrapi speaks about Mehri with love and appreciation instead of sympathy or through a critical lens. For younger Satrapi, Mehri is not defined by her lower status or uneducated background; she is defined by her qualities are a person.

These two examples demonstrate key insights into the ways in which Satrapi communicates her story to her audience. She utilizes the child filter to visually critique and challenge political symbols like the veil. In the example provided above, it is clear that Satrapi uses a playful event to question the politically charged notion of the veil. Through this representation, Marji and her friends deconstruct difficult debates by turning the imposition of the hijab into a seemingly ridiculous act. Furthermore, the child and humour filters are used to discuss difficult subject matter like violence, death, and the lack of opportunity. As discussed, the child filter empathetically speaks about a child's feelings related to fear of losing her father. Through the child filter, the reader is able to relate to Marji's feelings regardless of socially constructed divisions like race, gender, or religion. Satrapi also contrasts this difficult discussion with the use of the child and humour filter when she recounts a story about Mehri. The interplay between the humour and child filter render politically charged discussions more humane. In this sense, Satrapi uses relatable stories, the notion of a child's innocence, and playful and comical narratives to communicate politically charged commentary.

Aya de Yopougon[11]

Written and illustrated by Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, *Aya de Yopougon*, reveals interesting insights into the daily life of Aya. She is a young girl from the working class town of Abijan, Ivory Coast. Aya aspires to become a doctor, but in order to do so she must first find a way out of her neighbourhood. In the lower class neighbourhood of Yopougon, Aya's education and employment opportunities are reduced which contributes to her daily struggles as a young woman intent on making a name for herself. Added to these challenges, is the highly

---

[11] Aya of Yopougon

patriarchal nature of Aya's social situation. Her father is a traditional man, and only considers Aya's worth in relation to marriage, not higher education.

Aya de Yopougon is an especially interesting case study because the narrative does not recount Marguerite Abouet's own personal story, nor is it told through a purely child or humour filter. *Aya de Yopougon* was chosen because it is similar to the cases in this study. It challenges the normative ways in which readers think about the simplistic "African women's experience." This, however, is accomplished without a child filter and a semi-present humour filter. These differences reveal the diversity of storytelling in comic books, which have been discussed throughout this study. *Aya de Yopougon* as a case study that straddles the line between and outside of the child and humour filters. This suggests that much more research has to be done in order to fully understand the ways in which women of colour write about autobiographical, or personally inspired stories.

The following examples and excerpts demonstrate how *Aya de Yopougon* uses the humour filter to critique the patriarchy. As a powerful, independent and critical thinker, Abouet has made Aya into a fearless character through explicit and implicit, and visual and linguistic elements thereby demonstrating that black women are autonomous and power individuals despite their unfavourable socioeconomic situations.

First, the patriarchy is critiqued through a humours and exaggerated depictions of male characters throughout the narrative. For instance, on page 12 a father returns home

from a long night of drinking. He stumbles through the streets until he finally arrives home where his wife greets him with a disappointed and judgmental disposition. The wife stands tall with both hands on her hips and critically looks down at her husband. Abouet's strategic visual representation clearly demonstrates a power struggle between the sexes, turning a male stereotype upside-down. In most patriarchal societies the man is often called "the king of the


house" or "the man of the house." This implies that men hold jurisdiction over the household, and are charged with the primary responsibility to protect those that live within his four walls. However, Abouet's

decision to comically portray the husband's drunken walk home in contrast with the wife's steadfast disposition serves as a critique of the notion of "the man of the house." Evidently, household jurisdiction and the responsibility to protect is not a male-centred phenomenon. Abouet makes this point clear in the visual representations of the scene on page 12. She also linguistically reinforces her critiques of gendered norms. Upon the husband's arrival, the wife states, "Look who's here! You should be ashamed" (Abouet and Oubrerie 2007, 12) and "You should have stayed where you were" (Abouet and Oubrerie 2007, 13). It is clear that the exaggerated and comical depictions on
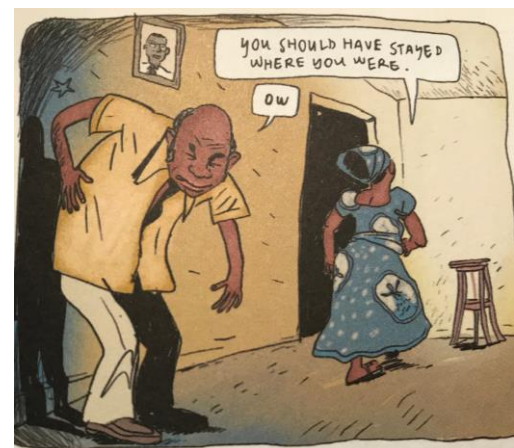
pages 12 and 13 are used to deconstruct accepted gendered norms. This reinforces women of colour's autonomy and power.

On page 22, Aya goes to her father to ask for his permission to pursue higher education. In Aya's town, it is unusual for women and girls to pursue education past high school. Normally, young girls are encouraged to marry early and to dedicate themselves to their husbands and future family. Aya is different. She has already received approval from her mother to pursue a university education, but as the family's primary breadwinner Aya must receive her father's blessing. Aya's desire to pursue her dreams of becoming a doctor demonstrate her strong resolve to push past the status quo. In her interaction with her father, Aya does not use the same type of comedy as the previous example to critique or challenge the patriarchy. Instead, she employs sarcasm and satire to critique her father's traditional and sexist values. Her father states, "Aya, university if for men, not girls" and in response Aya states, "And I'll find a rich husband to take

care of me?" (Abouet and Oubrerie 2007, 22). This line of questioning demonstrates a nuanced form of the humour filter. It is not explicitly funny. However, the question

does reveal the ridiculous and problematic nature that higher education only reserved for men. It also serves as a critique for marital dependence, and calls for women's economic independence. These messages are implicit, but Aya's visible reactions communicate frustration.

These examples demonstrate two forms of the humour filter in *Aya de Yopougon;* one that explicitly critiques gendered household power structures and norms, and one that implicitly critiques education and marital norms through sarcasm and satire. Although these are only two examples amid numerous others in *Aya de Yopougon*, they are the strongest examples. They demonstrate the ways in which the humour filter can challenge and critique the patriarchy. However, they also reveal further questions with regards to the representation of women of colour's writing and representation. *Aya de Yopougon,* unlike the previous examples discussed above uses humour in a very nuanced manner. At times it is difficult to distinguish comical from serious rhetoric. This may be an issue of interpretation, or perhaps my inability to fully understand as a consequence of my own cultural biases; given my own Western upbringing what may be considered ridiculous or outrageous to me, may in fact be, a very serious topic of conversation for another. This inquiry unveils further questions related to humour, how it is used and manifested, and what does it communicate. For the most part, this study has focused on exaggerated expressions or rhetoric to describe the humour filter. *Aya de Yopougon* is interesting because it employs exaggerated expressional humour, but Abouet and Oubrerie also use sarcasm and satire to their advantage in order to challenge and critique other forms of power. Both concepts are difficult to analyze, especially when one lacks the necessary knowledge to attempt this act in the first place. Perhaps, the analysis of sarcasm and satire in French comics is another study that should be pursued.

3. Conclusion and Next Steps

All in all, many of the cases in this study use the child or humour filter to render difficult subject matter more digestible for their readers. Whether this act is a deliberate decision by each author is up for debate, and deserves further analysis and research. However, it is clear that many

of them have implore these techniques, knowingly or not. This pattern reveals the ways in which women of colour writing about their experiences through an autobiographical lens or, in the case of Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie, through a lens inspired by personal experiences have visually and linguistically decided to communicate their content. The use of the child and humour filter aids in the process or relaying important information. Often times this information provides critical assertions and/or challenges accepted or normative assumptions about the experiences of women of colour. Other times the child and humour filter clarify and reveal deeper meanings or messages which add to the narrative's complexity.

Moving forward it would be interesting to test these observations and patterens against Franco-Belgian comics written by other people of colour, perhaps men of colour. A compare and contrast model between similar cases could provide additional insights into the ways in which people of colour write about the experiences for a predominantly Western and European audience.

Comics are certainly words and images on pages, but they are much more. After having considered the subsurface and latent messages buried in the cases above, which revealed conversations about intersectional power relations I hope that my work is the beginning of a bourgeoning field of literary analysis that puts the stories of women of colour at the centre of inquiry and research. Their stories have been long censored and overshadowed by caucasian and Western perspectives. It is time to actively engage with these works in order to balance the scales, and to provide spaces where fruitful debate about culture, race, gender and sex can occur within the realm of Francophone comics.

<div align="center">References</div>

Abirached, Zeina. 2007a. *Mourir, partir, revenir: le jeu des hirondelles.* Paris: Cambourakis.

—— 2008b. *Je me souviens: Beyrouth.* Paris: Cambourakis.

Abouet, Marguerite and Clément Oubrerie. 2007. *Aya de Yopougon.* London: Jonathan Cape.

Anheier, Helmut K., Jürgen Gerhards and Frank P. Romo. 1995. "Forms of Capital and Social

Structure in Cultural Fields: Examining Bourdieu's Social Topography." *American

Journal of Sociology* (100) 4: 859-903.

Aurita, Aurélia. 2008a. *Je ne verrai pas Okinawa.* Bruxelles:Les impressions nouvelles.

—— 2009b. *Buzz-moi.* Bruxelles: Les impressions nouvelles.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the

Sociology of Education,* edited by John G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood.

"Brigitte Findakly & Lewis Trondheim - Coquelicots d'Irak." 2017. Produced by Librarie

Mollat, March 11, 2017. Youtube video, 4:48.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2yigCU9CRo

Deyzieux, Agnès. 2010. "Rencontre avec Marguerite Abouet, Aya de Yopougon." *Le cas des

cases.* April 2010.

http://agnesdeyzieux-bd.blogspot.com/2010/04/ayadeyopougonmargueriteabouet.html

Findakly, Brigitte and Lewis Trondheim. 2016. *Coquelicots d'Irak.* Paris: L'Association.

Fresnault-Derulle, Pierre. 1986. "Aspects de la Bande Dessinée en France." In *Comics and

Visual Culture: Research Studies from ten Countries*, edited by Herausgegeben von

Alphons Silbermann and H. -D. Dyroff, 62-78. K.G Saur Verlag.

Gilmore, Leigh. 2011. "Witnessing *Persepolis:* Comics, Trauma, and Childhood Testimony." In

Graphic Subjects: Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels, edited by

Michael A. Chaney, 157-163. University of Wisconsin Press.

Kantola, Johanna and Emanuela Lombardo. 2017. "Feminist political analysis: Exploring

strengths hegemonies and limitations." *Feminist Theory* 18 (3): 323-341.

Hancock, Ange-Marie. 2011. *Solidarity Politics for Millennials: A Guide to Ending the Oppress*

   sion Olympics. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

"Je ne verrai pas Okinawa" : une histoire d'immigration en bande dessinée." 2018. Produced by

   Courrier International, September 11, 2018. Youtube video. 2:24.

Lépinard, Éléonore. 2014. "Impossible Intersectionality? French Feminists and the Struggle for

   Inclusion." *Politics and Gender* 10 (1): 124-130.

McCall, Leslie. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs* 30 (3): 1771-1800.

McKernan, Bethan. 2016. "Mosul: Isis destruction of ancient Iraqi city revealed for first time

   with new photos." *The Independent.* November 16, 2016.

   https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/mosul-offensive-latest-isis-

   destruction-ancient-city-of-mesopotamia-nimrud-a7421036.html

McKinney, Mark. 2013. "Chapter 1. Redrawing French Empire in Comics: An Introduction." In

   Redrawing French Empire Comics, 1- 34. Ohio: The Ohio State University Press.

Miller, Ann. 2007a. "The Codes and Formal Resources of Bande Dessinée." In *Reading Bande*

   Dessinée, 75-102. Bristol: Intellect Ltd.

—— 2007b. "Autobiography and Diary Writing in Bande Dessinée." In *Reading Bande*

   Dessinée, 215-228. Bristol: Intellect Ltd.

—— 2007c. "Gender and Autobiography." In *Reading Bande Dessinée,* 229-242. Bristol:

   Intellect Ltd.

"Nimrud: Photos show IS destruction of Ancient Iraqi City." 2016. *BBC,* November 15, 2016.

   https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37992394

Propp, Vladimir. 2013. "Conclusion, Results, and Further Thoughts." In *On the Comic and Laughter,* edited by Jean-Patrick Debbèche and Paul Perron, 137-148. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Quinn, Ben. 2016. "French police make woman remove clothing on Nice beach following burkini ban." *The Guardian,* August 24, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/24/french-police-make-woman-remove-burkini-on-nice-beach

Reyns-Chikuma, Chris and Houssem Ben Lazreg. 2017. "Marjane Satrapi and the Graphic Novels From and about The Middle East." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 39 (1): 758-775

Satrapi. Marjane. 2000. *Persepolis.* Paris: L'Association.

"Souvenirs: "Coquelicots d'Irak", une enfance à Mossoul." 2016. Produced by TV5 Monde, October 23, 2016. Youtube video, 11:55. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4XLXWS8ymw

Trimble, Linda and Natasja Treiberg. 2015. "Textual Analysis." In Explorations: Conducting *Empirical Research in Canadian Political Science, edited by Loleen Berdahl and Keith* Archer, 227-243. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Windsong, Ariel. 2018. "Incorporating Intersectionality into Research Design: An Example Using Qualitative Interviews." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 21 (2): 135-147.

Wong, Alex. 2017. "We've Worked Side by Side for 25 Years": Brigitte Findakly and Lewis Trondheim Interview. *The Comics Journal,* September 27, 2017. http://www.tcj.com/brigitte-findakly-and-lewis-trondheim-interview/