

BA Thesis

Trauma in Graphic Memoirs

The Representation and Visualisation of the Tension Between Personal
and Collective Trauma in Graphic Memoirs about War

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AAB' followed by a stylized flourish.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the traumatic experiences that are represented and visualised in three graphic memoirs about war, namely *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, and *Vietnamerica* by GB Tran. The main question that will be answered in this thesis is: how is the tension between personal and collective trauma represented and visualised in graphic memoirs about war? The fields of life-writing and trauma studies will be combined to form a theoretical framework by which the three graphic memoirs will be analysed in depth. To help analyse the graphic memoir, this thesis will also make use of theories about panelling and drawing styles. The aim is to find out how personal trauma can become collective and in which way this is achieved when looking at the three memoirs.

Key words: Trauma, graphic memoir, life-writing, war.

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Introduction

This thesis will explore the world of graphic novels, and specifically the world of the graphic memoir in which war stories are told and traumatic experiences are shared. What is a graphic novel? In which ways has the genre changed throughout recent years? How does the graphic novel differ from other mainstream literature? What topics are used for graphic novels? Which elements of the media does a graphic novel contain? What is a graphic memoir? How does a graphic memoir incorporate traumatic experiences and in which way does this result in a tension between personal and collective trauma? The term ‘graphic memoir’ is quite recent, and its connection to the field of trauma studies is not necessarily clear. Moreover, it has definitely not been fully researched. This introduction will thus give all the necessary background information on the fields of studies that will be combined in this thesis, and will introduce the questions that will hopefully be answered in the course of this thesis as well as the method that will be used to get to these answers.

The genre of graphic novels has gotten more attention over the last few years and several scholars have tried to define this genre. The term ‘graphic novel’ is a very recent term and was coined in the late-1970s by Will Eisner, who did not agree with the term ‘comic books’ because the associations that people had with this term were troublesome. The graphic novel is defined as a comic book dealing with one topic or related stories depicted in sequential panels and combined into one book of considerable length (Rothschild xiii). Even though graphic novels have dealt with the stigma of being solely for children, more and more graphic novels have been written for adults in recent years, and a new niche of graphic novels emerged. These adult graphic novels contain topics, such as war stories, which are written and drawn for adults and are definitely not inferior to literature in prose. As Aviva Rothschild says in *Graphic Novels* (1995), graphic novels deal with “the same topics, the same elements, found in mainstream literature. Yet, because of the century-old stereotypes about comics, most readers have discounted – or have never learned about – an entire body of literature that in many ways is as serious and significant as text-only material” (xiii). Thus, Rothschild touches upon two important aspects of the graphic novel: firstly, that reading a graphic novel is a skill that many people do not have because linking sequential panels is very much different from just reading text, and secondly, that the graphic novel is not inferior to mainstream literature; it is just different. Weiner agrees with Rothschild and says that the “subjects have expanded beyond standard comic book material ... Instead of limiting themselves to the superhero genre, many graphic novels are now concerned with conflicts often found in more accepted forms of literature,” which means that the graphic novels are

moving more towards mainstream literature if one looks at the topics discussed (55). Looking at the combination of narrative and images, it is clear that reading a graphic novel does take some skills; the reader has to be able to fill in the blanks. As Bradley puts it, “the comic pages’ ‘gutters’ – the space between panels – plays a pivotal role in the reader’s ability to make sense of the images and text in front of her, because the gutters are where ‘closure’ occurs” (164). Hence, to understand the novel or message, the reader has to know how to connect the panels and how to fill in the blanks between these panels.

Not only has the term ‘graphic novel’ been established, the medium of the graphic novel has been researched, too. It seems to be a trend that more and more writers start to use sequential art; however, “we still lack a common vocabulary to talk about this type of literature” (Bradley 161). Researchers have tried to find ways to talk about graphic novels by defining them as a multimodal medium, in which visual arts and narration are combined to convey a message. Karen Kukkonen states that “[c]omics can be described both as a type of medium and as a vehicle for storytelling. On the one hand, comics are a medium... On the other hand, comics also work as a vehicle for narrative” (34). In her article, she explains how comics can be seen as a multimodal medium and in what way the images and narrative interact. She concludes by saying that the narrative and visual elements in comics both limit and strengthen the story and that the different modes work together to give the reader messages, clues, or important details that are needed to understand the story (Kukkonen 49). The audience is thus aware of the images as well as the narrative when reading a graphic novel, these modes can interact, but might also contradict each other. Pascal Lefèvre calls the graphic novel a “hybrid medium,” which “shares many features with other media, but uses those features in unique ways; think of drawing styles, the *mise en scène* in panels, the way verbal and visual elements are combined..., the breakdown... of story elements into distinct panels, and the interaction between individual panels and page layouts” (14). He reflects on an important aspect that Rothschild touched upon earlier; when reading a graphic novel, it is important that the reader is aware of the use of panels. The panels can show minimal changes to emphasise a happening or mood, they can portray a different perspective of the same happening, they can be bigger or smaller than the rest of the panels on the page or in the novel or they can show two time periods in one panel. Like Lefèvre says, every panel is unique and can contain a brief period of time, multiple hours, or several moments in one (23). Thus, not only the interaction or contradiction between image and narrative, but also the small but significant differences between the panels contribute to the understanding of the graphic novel. Furthermore, some comic’s scholars seem to believe that either the image or the

narrative has superiority over the other. However, if the graphic novel is indeed seen as a multimodal medium, it is not necessary to claim that one is superior over the other, they simply work together to serve the greater good, namely telling a story and conveying a message (Kukkonen 36).

A subdivision of the graphic novel, in which conveying a message and connecting to the reader is very important, is what was first called the ‘autobio comic’ but has been referred to as the ‘graphic memoir’ in the past decade (Bradley 162). Bradley believes this term to be fairly apt, because it relates to the style of writing while at the same time placing emphasis on the visual part of the work and remembering the reader that it is a nonfictional work (162). This kind of nonfiction, or autobiography, or life writing, relates closely to a field of studies that is also quite recent, but has been researched in depth over the last decades: trauma studies. Anderson, for example, says that written testimonies of war or other traumatic experiences are important because they stem from and contribute to our own or others’ history, and as it is difficult for people to relate to or understand someone else’s situation or history, it is useful to read a written account of the events that made this person who he or she is (127). Moreover, when narrative forms are used to explain traumatic experiences, it can be said that

Traumatic memory can return unwilling, in dreams or flashbacks, for instance, but yet remain beyond the conscious recall of the subject. The traumatic history cannot become integrated into the subject’s narrative or history of themselves because it was not fully experienced at the time it happened; nor is it fully comprehended when it is re-enacted in the present. (Anderson 128)

This proves that the connection between trauma and narratives has already been researched and that this relationship between trauma and narrative is complex because it cannot fully represent the traumatic experience. However, when trauma studies is linked to the graphic memoir, Caruth argues that “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event” (qtd. in Crawly and Van Rijswijk 100). Using not only language or narration, but making use of images at the same time, the representation of traumas is different and probably more graspable for the reader. Sara Beskow says that the multimodal medium of the graphic memoir is pre-eminently suitable for expressing traumatic experiences because it combines the text to describe the event and the visual aspect to trigger the mind of the reader (5).

Although the term trauma might be clear, it might be useful to explain what trauma studies is exactly and why there is a common ground as well as differences between personal and collective trauma. Eyerman explains that:

Individual and collective traumas have in common that they issue from shock. The wounds that incur are collective and social as much as they are individual. Individual and collective trauma may also be thought of as reinforcing one another, making the shock and sense of loss even greater. In economic crisis as in war, one's personal loss is intimately tied to those suffered by others. The cumulative impact would only intensify the trauma, where a sense of belonging, a collective identity, is shattered along with individual identity. (43)

When looking at war-traumas, it is suspected that this will translate to the personal losses and traumas of the generation that experienced the wars first-hand, matching, reinforcing, or intensifying the traumas of the generation that comes after. This might make sense when looking at Eyerman's definition of personal trauma: "[p]ersonal trauma is difficult to narrate as it is lived through. It is formidable, not to say impossible, to grasp the meaning of shocking occurrences as they are experienced. It is only after fact that interpretation and real understanding become possible" (49). Thus, it is too difficult for the generation that experienced the traumas first-hand to actually narrate the traumas; however, over the years they have learned to express their experiences and are able to talk about it with, for example, their families. Moreover, for the second generation, who might not even have experienced the war (consciously), but heard of it in their parents' stories, the traumas can be just as emotional and scarring. D. Laub says that when stories about traumatic events are told to a witness, this witness becomes "a participant, and a co-owner of the traumatic event ... he comes to partially experience trauma in himself... [and] comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels...." (57). In this sense, the personal trauma thus becomes a collective trauma, because it is transferred onto another person. The impact of the war traumas on the younger generation is thus very real, broadening the scope of the trauma and also making the relationship between personal and collective trauma tenser. Consequently, it is fascinating to look at the way in which this tension is depicted in text and image in graphic memoirs.

Even though the link between graphic memoirs and trauma studies has been noticed and established, this link has not been researched fully yet. This thesis will attempt to fill the gap in research and combine the medium of graphic memoirs and the field of life-writing and trauma studies to focus on the tension between personal and collective trauma and how this is represented through narrative and images. Hence, all the relevant information of this multimodal medium and the several fields of studies will be used and combined so that it will form the theoretical framework that will be applied to the case studies, namely three graphic

novels with a similar topic; they all focus on the stories of families who live or have lived in war-torn countries. The three memoirs that will be analysed are *Maus* (2003) by Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Persepolis* (2007) by Marjane Satrapi, and *Vietnamerica* (2011) by GB Tran. Although, as said, all three memoirs deal with families during the war, they deal with three different wars. *Maus* deals with the Second World War, *The Complete Persepolis* is about the Iranian War, and *Vietnamerica* tells the story of the Vietnam War. As was mentioned before, the relationship between traumatic experiences and representing these experiences in a narrative is complex, but what if it is not only portrayed in a narrative? What happens when the traumatic experience is also visualised, as in graphic memoirs? Would the representation of the traumatic experience become more complex, or would it become less complex because it is visualised? How important is the use of colour and the size of the panels for the readers understanding of the memoir and the traumatic experiences depicted in the memoir? In which ways does the memoir represent the tension between personal and collective trauma?

A close reading and analysis of the three memoirs will enable the formulation of the ways in which the traumatic experiences are represented and visualised and how this relates to or contributes to the tension between personal and collective traumas. Hopefully, all questions that were mentioned above will be answered in the course of this thesis, leading to an answer to the main question: how is the tension between personal and public trauma represented and visualised in graphic memoirs about war? To get to these answers, it is important to not only look at the contents, but also at the colours, panelling, and drawing styles. Kukkonen has already mentioned some helpful tips to look at the drawing styles, she says:

Images can also represent the thoughts of a character through the flashback technique taken from film, and they can represent focalization, or the way that events are presented from a particular character's point of view... Their postures, gestures, and facial expressions then give us some insight into their attitudes and minds ...

Furthermore, the facial expressions of characters can be juxtaposed with the speech bubbles, enabling readers to corroborate what is being said by checking the characters' utterances against what their bodily postures and expressions reveal. (37-39)

Moreover, not only the visuals can convey important messages. Kukkonen also claims that the written text can convey a message or contain important information. For example, using divergent fonts for different characters, using a different colour, or writing in bold or italics can pressure the reader into a certain mood or emotion that agrees with the mood of the character or with the atmosphere of the portrayed event (37). Thus, many underlying

messages can be picked up by looking at the way in which the text and the images are presented to the reader. To answer the question of how the tension between personal and collective trauma is represented and visualised in graphic memoirs about war, a close reading of the memoir and a close analysis of the visual aspects will be the focus of each chapter. The conclusion will sum up the comparisons and differences between the three memoirs in terms of their dealings with the tension between personal and collective trauma.

Chapter 1: *Maus*

This chapter will deal with the graphic memoir *Maus* (2003), written and drawn by Art Spiegelman. The memoir covers the life story of his father, Vladek, during the Second World War until his deathbed, skipping back and forth from the present to the past, while trying to keep it chronological. The memoir is said to have changed the ideas about graphic novels. Spiegelman changed the face of the graphic novel, by using a more real and more serious topic for his comic than any other cartoonist had done before him. This new style in graphic novels attracted a more mainstream audience and stimulated other cartoonists to write and draw about their own lives as well (Weiner 55). Not only was the memoir special because it changed the ideas about the graphic novel, it was also unique because the characters were drawn as animals. In the course of the novel, the reader becomes aware of the personal traumas of Vladek and Art, for example Vladek's time spent in Auschwitz and the impact of Anja's suicide on both Art and his son. Victoria Elmwood says in her essay "Happy, Happy Ever After": The Transformation of Trauma Between the Generations in Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* that the absence of the dead influence the lives of the living and that traumas can hurt the second-hand witnesses, too (691-692). Katalin Orbán says in her essay "Trauma and Visuality: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and *In the Shadow of No Towers*" that the depiction of the characters as mice makes them a hybrid, dehumanizing them and showing blindness or incapability of fully grasping the traumatic experiences (63). This chapter will centre on *Maus* as a graphic memoir which portrays the characters in a unique way, namely as mice; the panels and drawing style will be the focus and will be placed in relation to the tension between personal and collective trauma, which will be explained by looking at the influence of personal traumas on the next generation.

The characters in the novel are presented to the reader as mice for several reasons, for example: to emphasise the cultural differences between the characters, to underscore the cat-and-mouse metaphor which hails back to the depiction of Jews as vermin during the Second World War, to dehumanise the characters, and to "blind" the characters to the traumatic experiences. The dehumanisation of the characters works on two fronts. First, the characters are portrayed as less than human by drawing them as mice, again adhering to the portrayal of Jews as vermin during the war, and second to make all Jews seem like the same character. The simplistic drawing style makes the mice look alike, the only details that make them identifiable are glasses or clothes. Another effect of dehumanising the Jews and drawing them as mice is that their gaze shows that they can see everything, yet they do not fully experience it. As Orbán explains

The true sight of blindness is ostensibly then the means by which the reader of *Maus* can (and *must*) see the Holocaust. Furthermore, the empty gaze—and the animal head that serves the same purpose in Spiegelman’s work—evokes not only a *connection* but also a *disconnection*. (63)

This fits perfectly when it is placed in relation to Anderson’s theory that a traumatic experience can never be fully experienced and can thus not be re-told because it remains beyond the consciousness of the witness (128). By re-telling the story, the reader is connected to the subject of the traumatic experiences. However, as Orbán has said, at the same time this disconnects the reader from the story and the traumatic events that are re-told in the story. In this sense the reader only partly becomes the co-owner of the traumas and experiences these traumas, like the subject, subconsciously. On some level the traumas thus remain personal, because they cannot fully move into the collective domain.

The dehumanisation is taken to the next level when it is alienating and, paradoxically, at the same time uniting the personal traumas into a more general or collective trauma, which becomes clear when looking at panelling. For example, looking at the panel on page 85, the reader is aware of the identity of the hanging mice, because Vladek tells the reader who they are (Figure 1). However, looking at this panel in isolation, it is striking that the faces of these mice are not drawn. The mice are in the panel, but are viewed from beneath, not showing their faces, but

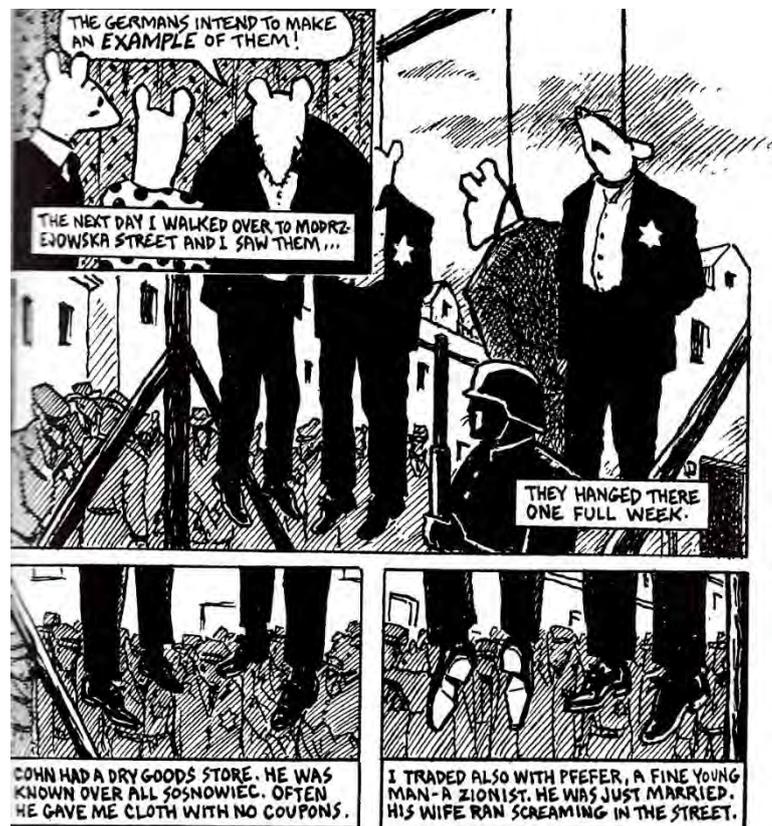


Figure 1: Detail *Maus*, p. 85

emphasising the traumatic experience. The reader can then conclude that this is a traumatic experience, but as these traumas were fairly common during the Second World War, it is also a collective trauma, so there is no need to give this particular trauma a “face”. Not only can this be concluded from the visual aspects, but the narrative takes its distance, too. Vladek speaks mostly about ‘them’ and ‘they’ in this part of the memoir, signifying the loss of

identity and the dehumanisation of the Jews and at the same time making the trauma collective.

Another instance in which the personal and collective are interweaved is on page 159, which is where Vladek comes to Auschwitz (Figure 2). This panel immediately grabs the attention of the reader, first because of the size, second because it has no frame, and third



Figure 2: Detail Maus, p. 159

because the speech is suddenly in the ‘we’-form instead of the more often used ‘I’-form. The panel connects to one of the most traumatic experiences in the memoir, the time in Auschwitz. Although, the story mainly focuses on Vladek, this changes in this panel. It becomes clear that Vladek’s personal traumas are inherent to the larger public traumas. Following Eyerman, Vladek’s story does not stand on its own, but is intertwined with the war stories

and traumas of the other people in the concentration camps (43). Hence, he does not speak about just himself, but also about the other people in the camps, which requires the use of the ‘we’-form.

One last instance in which dehumanisation becomes alienating and at the same time unifying is on page 201, where Art wears a mouse mask (Figure 3). The mask dehumanises

him and alienates him from society because he takes on his father’s role and tries to get into his story. However, by grasping his traumas, and making himself the co-owner of Vladek’s traumas he unifies the traumas within himself and makes it accessible for the reader, making them a third-hand witness to the traumatic experiences. As can be concluded from



Figure 3: Detail Maus, p.201

the panel, Art is feeling depressed and guilty about making money over the backs of so many war victims, which is in line with D. Laub’s theory about becoming a witness to the traumatic experiences of someone else. Laub says that the witness “comes to partially experience trauma in himself... [and] comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels....” (57).

The far-reaching influence of the deceased on the living becomes clearer when Anja's suicide is discussed in the short comic "Prisoner of the Hell Planet," which was written and published years before Spiegelman started to write *Maus* and which has an entirely different drawing style than the rest of the memoir. The collectiveness of Vladek and Art's traumas becomes apparent when this short comic is closely analysed. The loss of a loved one, in this case Anja, Art's mother and Vladek's wife, was traumatic in itself, but her suicide continues to influence their lives even after her death. Even though Anja does not have a voice in this memoir, her personal traumas become collective through Vladek's account of what happened to her during the war and because of Art's short comic. Both Art and Vladek do not really talk about Anja and her suicide until the short comic. However, her absence indicates a trauma of great importance. The pages describing Anja's suicide and the mourning period of Art and



Figure 4: *Maus*, p. 102

which the reader will pick up.

Vladek are different from the rest of the novel, again indicating the importance of this trauma on them both and making it clear to the audience that this is a shared and thus collective trauma, which does not fit into Vladek's story only.

The drawing style of this short comic is different, first of all the characters that are portrayed as mice in the memoir are now real human beings, second they are drawn realistically, so that there can be no confusion on who is which character (Figure 4). Even though these pages are still all in black and white, they have a definite black undertone, indicating the importance of the trauma and giving it an emotional quality

Furthermore, there are four small panels in this short comic that only show a tear dropping from Art's eye right after the doctor tells him his mother has died (Figure 5). This depicts more emotions than the simplistic drawings in the memoir and for the first time represents Art's trauma as important for the reader's understanding of the rest of the memoir. As Art's traumas and emotions are left out of the memoir when Vladek is telling his life story, this is the first time that Art shares his personal traumas with the reader. His trauma is now transferred into the collective domain and is emphasised by taking four panels for one tear to drop from his eye. The reader is thus asked to see the significance of this trauma and to recognise the importance of his mother's suicide. The fact that only a few panels later, Art is shown trying to comfort his father while he is crying and mourning over the loss of his wife gives the reader the idea that they are projecting the traumas onto each other.

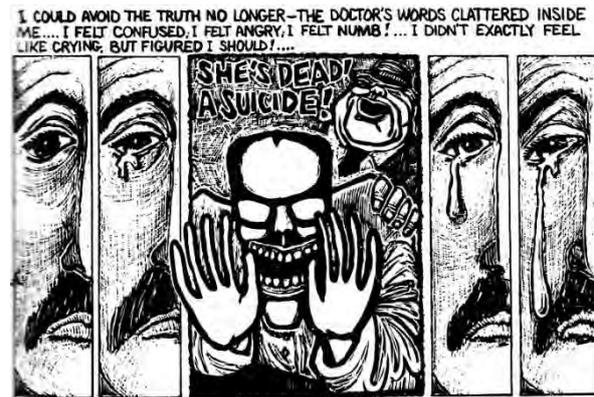


Figure 5: Detail Maus, p. 103

Another thing that stands out in this comic is that Art is wearing clothes that can easily be seen as the clothes that the people used to wear in the prisoner of war camps or concentration camps. The fact that Art is wearing these clothes, but Vladek, who also features in this comic, is wearing normal clothes, might suggest that there is some shift in or splitting of the trauma. It seems like the traumas of his mother and father are projected on Art, making him the subject of a trauma that he did not actually experience. Art's guilt over his mother's suicide projects her traumas onto him. Elmwood suggests that

The disruptions resulting from the Spiegelman family traumas take the forms of fetishes, silenced testimonials, and specters —memories of the dead that continue to influence the living. The relationships that Art has with his father, mother, and dead brother all bear signs of trauma, signs that show how gaps and absences created by extreme events can bleed into the next generation. (692)

Elmwood's quote is especially fitting when looking at the clothes Art is wearing as being the silent testimonial, or maybe even fetish, resulting from his parent's traumas and the guilt over his mother's death.

The simple drawing style is of great importance; its relationship to the traumas and to the memoir as a multimodal medium is complex, but by universalising the drawings the reader is enabled to become the co-owner of the traumatic experiences. In the memoir, Art

refers to the multimodal medium of comics and says that it is difficult to represent the traumas through this medium (Figure 6). In this part of the story he is not only talking about his father's personal traumas and the collective traumas of the Auschwitz survivors in general, but he is referring to his own personal traumas. In these panels, Art not only



Figure 6: Detail Maus, p. 176

touches upon the difficulties he encounters while trying to represent the traumatic story into a comic, but he also refers to his own traumas and struggles, being the only one not having lived through the war. He has difficulties portraying the story in the right way, representing everything as accurately as possible without incorporating false facts or his own ideas. As memories are personal and difficult to describe, it is not surprising that Art has difficulties visualising the stories and memories of his father or himself. In *MetaMaus*, Spiegelman says that memories disappear when they are expressed; memories do not last and change constantly (28). This made some of Vladek's experiences more vivid than others and thus easier to draw for Art. Spiegelman also talks about his thoughts on the black and white drawings, and he says that even though he thought about using more colours to make a clearer distinction between the past and the present; he decided against it because it would break down the seriousness of the topic and undermine the traumas represented in the memoir (145). The simplistic black-and-white drawings hence underscore the traumatic experiences. Or as Spiegelman puts it "[t]he work that actually works best deploys information visually to give you the necessary signs and not too much more" (*MetaMaus* 168).

The use of language in this memoir is also significant, especially when placed in relation to the drawing style and the memoir as the multimodal medium. The language used to build the narrative resembles and is in line with the simple drawing style. Looking at the text balloons, it becomes clear that the text used is also minimalistic and simplistic. Not much space in the panels is used up by the text balloons and the words that are used are fairly simple. Another thing that strikes the reader is the fact that whenever Vladek takes the floor, an accented English is used, which represents Vladek's broken language as an immigrant in America, but at the same time serves to make the text balloons as small as possible (*MetaMaus* 179). The language use of immigrants is often limited and contains mostly short

words, which is useful if there is not much space to spare like in a graphic memoir. Some examples of this accented English can be found in Figure 1 and 2. The use of accented English also makes it easier for the reader to identify with Vladek, to get into his mind set, and to relate to his traumas. It opens the reader up to the traumas and creates the opportunities to become the co-owner and witness of these experiences. Thus, the drawing style and the use of words, together, contribute to the seriousness of the memoir and the traumas represented.

In conclusion, even though the story is mostly about Vladek's experiences and traumas, these traumas are often transferred or projected upon another character or made collective by dehumanising and universalising certain traumatic experiences. By listening to and delving into Vladek's history, Art gets to understand his roots and thereby becomes a witness to the traumatic events that his family has lived through; indicating the traumas of the deceased can have an enormous influence on the lives of the living. By telling the story in the form of this graphic memoir, it becomes public and therefore the trauma moves out of the personal domain and into the domain of the collective traumas. The fact that the drawings and the narrative are so simplistic makes it more universal, which in turn makes it easier for the reader to relate to the story and agree with the story or traumas. The dehumanising effect that the portrayal of Jews as mice has underscores the fact that it should not necessarily be read and understood as the trauma of just one person, but it could literally be anybody's trauma if they have lived through the Second World War. The multimodal medium of the graphic memoir, in this case, contributes to the representation of the personal as well as the public or collective traumas, because the combination of text and images gives a unique insight into the traumatic experiences.

Chapter 2: *The Complete Persepolis*

This chapter will deal with *The Complete Persepolis* (2007), a graphic memoir written by Marjane Satrapi about the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the war between Iran and Iraq. The memoir is about Marjane and her family, trying to live a normal and quiet Western life in Iran during times of revolution and war. This memoir is special because it tells the story of Marjane as she grows up in Iran, leaves Iran for a few years, returns to Iran and then moves to Europe again. The traumas that Marjane experiences are therefore not completely and solely related to the war in Iran. Her traumas individual, yet also universal because they not only deal with war, but also with exile, loss of identity, isolation or alienation, and the suppression of women. This variety of different kinds of traumas makes the relationship between personal and collective traumas more tense and complex and also makes the family relations difficult, because their experiences and traumas differ. The tension between personal and collective trauma is closely related to the tension between individuality and universality, which becomes clear when looking at the mirror scene that will be discussed later (Elahi 321). In her article “Memoir as Iranian Exile Cultural Production: A Case Study of Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* Series,” Amy Malek describes the identity crises in the memoir, the feeling of exile and the use of the memoir as the best form of media to describe these traumas. Malek claims that “Satrapi’s illustrations perform a complementary function to her narrative: her words provide the captivating story, while her drawings provide resonance for Iranian and non-Iranian readers alike, the combination of which accomplishes Satrapi’s stated (and unstated) goals” (354). This chapter will focus on *The Complete Persepolis* as an Iranian exile story which portrays the characters’ traumas in a unique way: the panels and drawing styles will be discussed, and the tension between personal and collective trauma in this memoir will be explored by explaining some personal traumas, linking them to the D. Laub’s theory about the co-ownership of trauma.

Marjane is exiled to Austria by her parents, which is where Malek’s article about the memoir as a product of Marjane’s experiences during her exile comes in use, especially since it is connected to Pascal Lefèvre’s theory about the hybridity of the graphic memoir. The term ‘hybrid’ gets a double meaning when we look at Satrapi’s memoir. She makes use of the graphic memoir, which Lefèvre so aptly calls a “hybrid medium,” because the graphic memoir combines many features of several kinds of media (14). Moreover, Marjane also becomes a hybrid by trying to adopt another culture, which makes the form in which the story is told even more fitting (Malek 366). Malek goes on by saying that the memoir is not only a fitting form in the sense that it makes Marjane’s life as a hybrid, in which she constantly feels

like she is in-between two cultures, more clear, but the form also enables the reader to identify with the story, consequently making it more universal (367). Malek claims that memoirs “have not only allowed writers to record their histories, work through memories, and negotiate their identities in diaspora, they also can provide a pedagogical forum in which identifications form across cultures, as well as between subjects, in the diaspora space” (367). This would then mean that, simply because the story is told and because the readers can relate to the story, the traumatic events in the memoir become collective traumas, which fits perfectly if it is linked to Laub’s theory about co-owning traumatic events. Marjane tells the story of her life in an universal way, making the reader sympathise with her while recognising certain events or character traits, thereby making them the co-owner of her experiences and making her personal traumas collective traumas.

A definite surge in personal traumas and negative feelings is noticeable in the chapters in which Marjane is living in Austria; especially the feelings of isolation, alienation, and abandonment play a significant role in this part of the novel. Not only does Marjane feel in-between two cultures, but making friends does not seem to go well for her either. The friends

that she does make mostly do not make an effort to really get into her culture, which makes her alien to them. Page 218 shows a large panel featuring Marjane and Ingrid under the influence of drugs (figure 7). The text balloon in this panel reads “I didn’t always like it, but I by far preferred boring myself with her to having to confront my solitude and my disappointments” (Satrapi 218). Feeling lonely and abandoned, not only by her parents, but



Figure 7: Detail The Complete Persepolis, p. 218

also by her boyfriends and friends affects Marjane greatly and make her want to suppress her feelings by taking drugs and isolating herself more and more from society. She eventually ends up on the streets until she is hospitalised. All these traumatic events stem from the fact that she was sent into exile by her parents. Even though her parents sent her away to give her a better life, she ends up traumatised and scarred because she is unable to reconcile the two cultures between which she is torn. As a result she is isolated from the Western society as well as the Iranian society, which expands the gap between the two cultures.

Drug use seems to be Marjane's way of coping with her personal traumas during her



Figure 8: Detail The Complete Persepolis, p. 43

time in Austria; however, during her childhood, God and the devil play a big role when coping with traumatic experiences, which is emphasised by the panels. In the first few chapters of the novel Marjane remains a pure, however, curious girl, constantly trying to indicate what is good and what is bad. Whenever something happens that she does not like or when someone tells her a story about a traumatic event she often turns to God to pray and ask him for help and most of the times he knows how to sooth her. In terms of panels and how God, but also the devil, is represented, something interesting happens. God is presented as a middle-aged male who is always dressed in white and who is called "a friend" by Marjane (Satrapi 53). The devil on the other hand, is represented in different ways: for example, as a dark and black snake with horns on page 43, forming the panel (figure 8).

Moreover, on pages 52 and 53, Marjane experiences the



Figure 10: Detail The Complete Persepolis, p. 53

feelings of isolation and alienation for the first time. The isolation and alienation, at first, make her feel small, then powerful a few panels later, resulting in her feeling the burden and negative strength of power, eventually making her retreat into the arms of her friend, God (figure 9 and 10). The image of the devil, in this case Marjane with devil horns on her head, referring to the negative strength of power, and the image of God taking Marjane into his arms, referring to everything that is good, soothing, and forgiving, follow each other up quickly. The framing of this panel, as shown in Figure 11, is important, because the mirror results in a double perception, namely the perception of the reader and the perception of Marjane looking at herself in the mirror, again making clear the distinction between individuality and universality, between Marjane the

time in Austria; however, during her childhood, God and the devil play a big role when coping with traumatic experiences, which is emphasised by the panels. In the first few chapters of the novel Marjane remains a pure, however, curious girl, constantly trying to indicate what is good and what is bad.

Whenever something happens that she does



Figure 9: Detail The Complete Persepolis, p. 52



Figure 11: Detail The Complete Persepolis, p. 53

is an essential part of religious identity (43).

When the Iran-Iraq war begins, Marjane has a better understanding of what is happening around her, indicated by events portrayed in the panels. Marjane is still at a young age and perceives the world differently from, for example, her parents, but the execution of her uncle has affected her and has been experienced as a traumatic event. This relates to the previously discussed point of Marjane's relationship to God, whom she now sends away. Her loss of faith in God makes her seem more adult, because she can now deal with traumatic events on her own and without the help of her friend. However, at the same time this is an indication of the isolation and alienation that will catch up with her when she lives in exile in Austria. This first sense of loneliness and alienation is illustrated on page 71 with one of the first full-page panels in which Marjane is shown in space confirming that she is feeling lost and that no feeling could be worse than the feeling of isolation and loneliness (figure 12). Furthermore, it is in this panel that the war between Iran and Iraq officially



Figure 12: The Complete Persepolis, p. 71

starts and that the first bombings commence, which is a sign that more heartache and traumatic events are bound to happen. Moreover, different fonts are used in this particular panel. According to Kukkonen “[t]he use of different fonts, enlarged, presented in bold or in different color, gives the written text a visual and emotional quality,” which, in relation to this panel, leads to the conclusion that the enlarged font steers the reader to the understanding of a more collective emotion, while the smaller font features the personal musings and traumas of Marjane (37).

The way in which the memoir deals with personal and collective traumas changes throughout the course of the memoir and co-ownership of traumatic experiences is achieved in several ways. The first part of the memoir shows Marjane as a young girl, which represents the traumatic events in a different manner than the rest of the memoir because they are portrayed as the little girl perceives them. In the first part of the memoir, Marjane does not experience any traumatic experiences first-hand. However, traumatic experiences concerning her family members are told to her and she often listens in on her parents debating the happenings in Iran. Marjane’s relationship to the traumatic events in this part of the story is thus complex. She is made a witness of the traumatic events if one follows Laub’s theory that if a traumatic event is told to someone who was not there, he or she becomes “a participant, and a co-owner of the traumatic event” (57). However, Laub goes on by saying that if the witness becomes a co-owner of the traumatic event, he or she also feels the feelings that the victims have felt. In the case of Marjane, this would be unlikely, simply because she is too young in the first part of the memoir and she does not fully understand what is happening around her and in her country yet. In this sense the traumas are not transferred from the personal domain into the collective domain, thus Marjane is not personally traumatised by the stories she has been told.

While Marjane is living in Austria, the Iran-Iraq war continues and affects Marjane’s parents a great deal; however, Marjane is dealing with her own set of traumatic events in Austria, and states that she cannot bear to watch the news when it is about the war in Iran, making the relationship between personal and collective trauma tense (Satrapi 194). Surely, Marjane picks up certain things about the war, but when she decides to move back home her father tells her the story from his point of view, making clear that the personal experiences and traumas are not necessarily the same as the traumatic events as they are presented to the (western) public on TV. On the one hand, Marjane has become the co-owner of the traumatic events by what she has seen or heard on the news during her time in Austria; the media has thus made traumatic events collective. On the other hand, her parents’ personal traumas differ

in several ways from the traumas that became collective. Marjane's father makes her the co-owner of the traumas as he has experienced them when he tells Marjane about his life in Teheran during her absence. Marjane thus becomes the co-owner of the same events twice; the perception of the events is merely different. Hearing her father's side of the story in turn makes this a traumatic event for Marjane leading her to the conclusion that her experiences and personal traumas need not become collective by telling it to her parents because these traumas seem like "little anecdotes of no importance" (Satrapi 257).

Nearing the end of the memoir, it becomes clear that Marjane is greatly affected by her time spent in Vienna and that she feels guilty about the anecdotal traumas that she has gone through when her parents had to go through so much more in Iran, making it difficult for her to share her personal traumas and making her parents co-owners of these traumatic experiences. The guilt about not experiencing the same things as her parents did and the feeling of living in-between two cultures, not really belonging to either one of these cultures, makes her again alienated and isolated from the rest. She deals with her traumas by not speaking of them, resulting in a depression and even a suicide attempt (Satrapi 271-273). One of the problems is that she is constantly reminded of the past and of the traumatic events of her parents that she did not experience because she was abroad. Her father tells her stories about life in Teheran when she was gone and the streets are all named after famous martyrs who supposedly died for her and her country. On page 251, Marjane is taking a walk through the city, but keeps getting confronted with the past years which she has not spent in Iran. To her it feels like she is walking through a cemetery, the panel stressing the traumas that she has not experienced first-hand. This panel underscores Marjane's isolation from the Iranian society and culture, complicating her personal traumas and making the collective traumas more complex (figure 13).



Figure 13: Detail The Complete Persepolis, p. 251

In conclusion, Marjane Satrapi's *The Complete Persepolis* is a compelling, but also very complex memoir because the tension between the personal and collective traumas is stressed by the time that Marjane and her parents spent apart and is implied through the panels. While Marjane is coming of age, and during the time that Marjane is living in exile, the definition of what a traumatic event really is changes. Her relationship with God changes and her understanding of cultures changes. However, the personal traumas that are the result of these changes are never made collective because Marjane is ashamed of her anecdotal personal traumas. Especially when she compares them to her parents' personal traumas of which she is made a co-owner. Personal traumas that have no way of becoming collective have a deep impact on a person, which becomes clear when looking at Marjane, who, at first, had God to confide in, but later on only uses drugs to numb the pain and forget about her solitude, which became clear in figure 7. Sharing personal traumas and confiding in someone to make them the co-owner of these traumas is thus significant. Moreover, the way in which these personal traumas move into the collective domain and become collective traumas is also fascinating and complex. Marjane becomes the co-owner of several traumatic events that have happened in Iran during her time abroad twice. She has heard the story through the media and is told a different version of the same story by her father. This indicates that every traumatic experience is filtered and is perceived through a certain lens, complicating co-ownership of the event.

Chapter 3: *Vietnamerica*

This last chapter will focus on the graphic memoir *Vietnamerica* (2011) by GB Tran, which describes the journey of a family during the French occupation and the Vietnam War until Tran's parents flee to the United States and try to build a new future for their family. The drawing style of this memoir is quite different from the other two memoirs that have been discussed in this thesis. The memoir features characters that are drawn in more detail and are more lifelike than the characters in the other two memoirs and Tran uses colours, which makes his memoir more vivid. However, he uses the same kind of approach in his memoir that Spiegelman and Satrapi used in theirs. By writing and drawing *Vietnamerica*, he tries to reconcile two cultures: the Western culture of the United States that he is accustomed to and the Vietnamese culture of his parents and older siblings that he knows nothing about. In his book review of *Vietnamerica*, David Ulin explains the difficulties of being torn between two cultures and how Tran tries to reconcile these cultures, making the story confusing for the reader. Harriet Earle discusses the drawing styles in her article "Traumatic Analepsis and Ligne Claire in GB Tran's *Vietnamerica*" by asking why it is interesting to see that Tran uses different drawing styles to recreate one of his father's traumatic experiences (1). Candie Sanderson provides many insights into the memoir by paying close attention to the drawing style and panelling that Tran uses (1). Thus, this chapter will deal with *Vietnamerica* as a war and exile story built up by the memories of Tran's family, and will discuss panelling, drawing styles and the use of flashbacks, while also paying attention to the traumatic events in the memoir and how this all represents the tension between personal and collective traumas.

In the beginning of the memoir, the philosopher Confucius is quoted, saying "A man without history is a tree without roots," which closely relates to the writer of the memoir, GB Tran, and his former disinterest in his

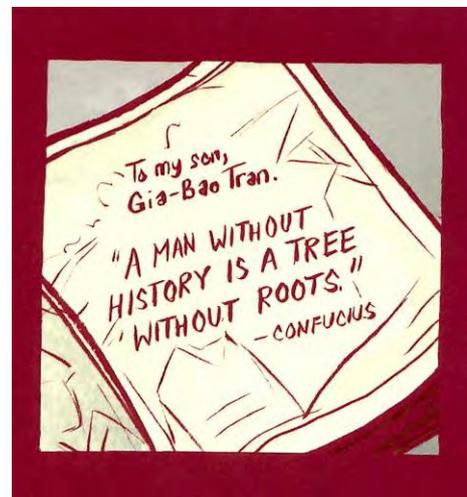


Figure 14: Detail *Vietnamerica*, p. 8

family's life and the history of the Vietnamese culture (Figure 14). This memoir is Tran's attempt to reconcile the two cultures between which his family and he are torn: the American and Vietnamese cultures. Tran's parents and siblings travelled to the United States just before the fall of Saigon in 1975, leaving other family members behind and entering a whole new life and foreign society which was very different from their customs. A two-page panel features a scrabble-board with (misspelled) keywords and images telling the story of the anxiety and struggles of the Tran family as they fled Vietnam and tried to build a new life in America



Figure 15: Vietnamera, p. 108-109

(Figure 15). On the next page, the struggles are verbalised by Manny when he says “How long could we juggle double lives defined by the walls of home? Vietnamese rules and responsibilities on one side and allure of American freedoms on the other,” voicing the immigrant problems of living in exile and feeling torn between two cultures (Figure 16). While his whole family has to deal with the trauma of loss and exile, Tran has never really been included in this trauma, simply because he has not experienced the same traumas as his parents and siblings because he was born in America. This memoir, however, shows that, after many years, Tran begins to show an interest in the history of his family.



Figure 16: Detail Vietnamica, p. 110

The memoir contains several different storylines which interweave and lose track of each other at certain points, just as the family did. Tran has trouble making sense of his family and their experiences and customs, which becomes clear when he asks his father several



Figure 17: Detail Vietnamica, p. 13

questions at once and his father's response is "You can't look at our family in a vacuum and apply your own myopic contemporary western filter to them" (Figure 17). Tran has to learn to leave his perception of things out of the memoir because his opinion, lens, or filter is not applicable to the memories of his family, which will be discussed

in more depth later on. The multitude of memories, perceptions, and experiences makes the story confusing. The reader has to find his way through the memories to make sense of the story and to become the co-owner of the characters' traumatic experiences. The difficulties that the reader experiences in doing so reminds them of Tran's struggles, trying to reconcile these memories and trying to build a bridge between the Vietnamese and American cultures, making the reader a double co-owner. On the one hand, the reader becomes the co-owner of the traumatic experiences of the characters, or Tran's family, while, on the other hand, they become the co-owner of Tran's experiences trying to reconcile the cultures. The story, as

Candie Sanderson says “mirrors the way in which memory functions, especially when trauma is involved” (3). The memory of a traumatic experience is not clear-cut, it is a selection of many different pieces which are difficult to connect, and thus indeed very similar to the way in which this memoir is built up.

According to Ulin, the confusing style in which the story is presented to the reader agrees with Tran’s drawing style as he says it is

Too broad, not specific enough, with few identifying details to make his characters truly come to life. This, coupled with the tendency of his anecdotes to bleed together, leaves us with a book that feels uncomfortably open-ended, neither specific enough for memory nor expansive enough for myth. (“Book Review: ‘Vietnamerica’ by GB Tran”)

Even though Ulin’s opinion might be easily explained, it does not do justice to the memoir. Tran is writing and drawing his family’s memories, making it confusing, but definitely not less good. The experiences of the Tran family simply do not lend themselves to be told in a clear narrative structure, but the reader is guided throughout the story by small, but significant, features that help the reader to identify the character and the storyline. For example, characters wear different kinds of glasses and the font used in the speech balloons differs for some characters. Sanderson states that “Tri always speaks in capital letters, which suggest his authority and imposing fatherly presence. Dzung’s words, on the other hand, are rendered in delicate cursive,” contradicting Ulin’s opinion (3). Moreover, Tran’s drawing style in terms of the use of colours does give life to the memoir and structures the story. Sanderson claims that

Dzung’s story is almost always told in hues of blue, while Tri’s is often brown. The parents’ courtship years are depicted in sophisticated black and white drawings, while Tri’s younger years are more colorful and cartoonish—simplistic compared to the intricate illustrations of present day Vietnam. The parents’ marriage’s early happy years are full of light and feature mostly coastal landscapes. (4)

Not only does the use of colour structure the memoir and guide the reader. The differing drawing style and the colours are meaningful for the understanding of the character and the mood of the time about which they speak, which will be explored in more depth when discussing the use of flashbacks.

Vietnamerica tells the story of Tran’s whole family, however, Tran seems to be absent most of the times. By giving voice to his family members, and giving the reader clear clues as to where memories shift or might contradict, he makes himself and the reader become a co-

owner of the traumatic experiences of his family. He makes it difficult for himself and the reader to link all memories together and form a coherent story, however, this does not mean that the memoir is not specific enough to be a memory, as Ulin has suggested. Moreover, while Tran gives voice to the traumatic experiences of his family members, he puts his own traumatic experiences as a young man living in-between two cultures seem obsolete, yet very much present because the readers attempt in trying to make sense of the memories mirrors Tran's search for his family history and the reconciliation of the two cultures of which he is part. In certain parts of the memoir, for example on page 207, it becomes clear that he wants to learn about his roots and will eventually want to become the co-owner of his family's traumatic history



Figure 18: Vietnamerica, p. 207

(Figure 18). Sanderson voices the importance of the memoir beautifully when she says that it is “an urgent attempt to give voice to a narrative from the past, before it is too late and all the voices are silent, their secrets forgotten with them” (5). This indicates that it was just as important for the Tran family to tell their stories and memories to GB than it is for GB to give these memories a voice and educate the readers to understand the memoir and to become the co-owner of these experiences as well.

Sanderson says “*Vietnamerica* doesn't follow a linear, chronological progression. Instead, the narrative goes back and forth between multiple generations, alternating flashbacks and present time, interweaving GB's questions and his parents' answers” (1). Especially these flashbacks are interesting to look at in relation to Anderson's theory about traumas and flashbacks in which she says that

Traumatic memory can return unwilling, in dreams or flashbacks, for instance, but yet remain beyond the conscious recall of the subject. The traumatic history cannot become integrated into the subject's narrative or history of themselves because it was

not fully experienced at the time it happened; nor is it fully comprehended when it is re-enacted in the present. (128)

However, Tran uses flashbacks multiple times in his memoir, and even uses flashbacks-within-flashbacks as can be found in the memoir from page 69 until page 90 where this is done three times. The differences in colour, drawing style, and the sizes of the panels are of great importance and show a clear distinction between the flashback and the flashback-within-the-flashback.

Starting off with page 69, it is clear that the panels on this page have the same size, meaning that they are equally important and the passage of time is constant (Figure 19). The drawing style is rough, yet detailed, and the colours are



Figure 19: Vietnamerica, p. 69



Figure 20: Vietnamerica, p. 71

Moving on to the first flashback-within-the-flashback, starting on page 71, Tran starts to use more colour, which makes the drawing style look more vivid, cartoonish, innocent, happy, and childlike (Sanderson 4). The characters' faces are much less detailed than in the

flashback. The sounds portrayed in these panels are of great importance and are, following Harriet Earle's article, used to "evoke certain emotions and sensations within the reader. This brings the textual style into direct involvement with the meaning of the words, furthering the onomatopoeic effect" (2). The use of these words is significant for the reader and his understanding of the story and atmosphere during the event that is portrayed. The mood of the character enduring the traumatic experience is passed on to the reader and thus transferred into the collective domain, making the reader the co-owner of the event.

flashback, making clear that the flashback-within-the-flashback is set during Tri's childhood and the events are thus experienced by and seen through the eyes of a child (Figure 20). The sudden shift in time represents the same kind of transgression into memory that can happen in a traumatic rupture, proving that a traumatic experience can be integrated into a graphic narrative, simply by making use of a flashback, which is in line with Caruth's opinion that experiencing trauma is like being possessed by an image (qtd. in Crawly and van Rijswijk 100). However, Anderson's opinion that traumas cannot be put into words or images because they were not fully experienced does not hold up when analysing the flashbacks in *Vietnamerica*.

In conclusion, the reader has to rely greatly on the panelling, drawing styles, and details in the memoir because there are multiple storylines that are not presented to the reader in a chronological order, making it difficult to connect the dots and to form a coherent story. The only way in which the reader is guided through the story is by the colours, panel sizes, and the identifying details of the characters. Because the story features so many storylines and explains the traumatic experiences of several generations, the tension between personal and collective trauma is very high. Personal traumas are portrayed as flashbacks, giving the reader a sense of Tri's mood and anxiety by using dark colours and placing emphasis on the sounds that Tri hears, thereby transmitting emotions into the collective domain. Furthermore, the feelings of exile and loss play a huge role in the memoir. These traumatic feelings are apparent in the lives of his parents and siblings, but as Tran was born in America he has not experienced the loss of family members and the Vietnamese culture. However, in his attempt to reconcile the Vietnamese and American cultures, he has to make sense of his family's history and their memories, and in learning about his family's history, he becomes the co-owner of their history including the traumatic experiences.

Conclusion

After closely analysing three graphic memoirs about war, namely *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, and *Vietnamerica* by GB Tran, it is safe to say that these memoirs are comparable on many levels when focusing on the tension between personal and collective traumas and how this is represented and visualised; however, there are also some interesting differences to be found. This last concluding chapter will serve to identify the comparisons and differences between the memoirs. Moreover, it will include a critical evaluation of some of the sources that have been used in this thesis, and some topics that might be interesting for further research will be stated.

The memoirs *Maus* and *Vietnamerica* were both written by the second generation and were written to make sense of what had happened to the author's family members during the war. *The Complete Persepolis*, however, is another kind of story. Satrapi herself has experienced parts of the Iran-Iraq war and is greatly influenced by it. Spiegelman and Tran were both born and grew up in America, far from all the traumatic war experiences and they thus have a different sense of the tension between personal and collective trauma. It is clear that Spiegelman and Tran try to make themselves absent in their memoirs, simply because they want their families to tell the story as they were the ones who actually experienced the war. The voices of the family members are thus the focal point of these two memoirs, while in *The Complete Persepolis* the emphasis is placed on Satrapi and her experiences. Even though she spend some time abroad, she knows what it is like to live through a war. Satrapi's memoir is thus more personal, because she is a first-hand witness, while Spiegelman's and Tran's memoirs are already in the collective domain because they were made the co-owners of the traumatic experiences of their parents and other family members.

Where *Maus* and *Vietnamerica* are more comparable on the previous note, Spiegelman's and Satrapi's memoirs are easier to compare when focussing on the drawing style, their memoirs are both completely drawn in black and white and their characters are simple. By making the visual aspect of the memoir so simple, the reader is drawn into the story and the universality makes it easier for the reader to relate to the traumatic experiences that are represented in their memoirs. *Vietnamerica* is different in the sense that it uses colour and that different drawing styles follow each other up, as was discussed during the analysis of the flashbacks in the memoir; his drawings are sometimes cartoonish, while at other times realistic, depending on the mood and the view from which the story is told at that time. Other than that, Tran also draws his faces more detailed, so that the interweaving storylines are easier to follow.

In terms of panelling, all three memoirs have in common that the half-page or full-page panels are used to let the reader linger on the page. Almost every time that a large panel is used there is some kind of change happening. For example in *Maus*, when Vladek arrives at Auschwitz, in *The Complete Persepolis* when Marjane is drawn in space contemplating her uncle's assassination while, in the meantime, the bombings start, and in *Vietnamerica* when GB finally decides that he is interested in his family's life story and starts to ask questions about the time his parents came to America. These changes are in turn closely related to the shift from personal trauma to collective trauma. When Vladek arrives at Auschwitz his tone changes and the traumas that he will experience there will not just be personal, because the other war victims are experiencing the same thing. When the bombings start in *The Complete Persepolis* it means that this is not just Marjane's trauma, but also that of, for example, her parents. And when GB decides that it is time to learn more about his roots he becomes the co-owner of his family's traumas.

The influence of the dead on the living is another important discussion when looking at the tension between personal and collective traumas. The traumas of the dead are re-told through the ones surviving. In *Maus*, the deceased Anja and Richieu influence Art's life on a daily basis; there is the feeling that he has to live up to his deceased brother, there is the feeling of guilt about his mother's suicide, and there is the guilt of making money off telling the story of the Holocaust, indicated by the panel in which Art wears his mouse mask and sits on a pile of dead mice (Figure 3). In *The Complete Persepolis*, the martyrs, who have died for their country have an important status, and Marjane's life is influenced by them because their names are everywhere, which is indicated by the panel in which she walks the streets in Teheran reading the street names and imagining herself walking through a cemetery that bears a vague resemblance to the pile of dead mice in *Maus* (Figure 13). In *Vietnamerica*, the influence of the dead on the living is less apparent. GB does not seem to be influenced much by his deceased relatives. Their influence is to be read between the lines and seen beyond the visuals. The simple fact that he is giving voice to his family members and compiling their memories before it is too late indicates that his roots, and thus also his dead family members, have influenced him.

The feeling of being torn between two cultures and trying to reconcile these cultures is apparent in both *The Complete Persepolis* and *Vietnamerica*. For Marjane this translates in her feeling isolated and alienated from society. She is not able to connect to her friends in Austria, because they know nothing about her roots, but she is also not able to connect to her family and friends in Iran, because she does not know what they are going through during her

absence. For GB this is a whole other story, he is stuck between two cultures, but has not experienced the Vietnamese culture until the end of the memoir. He is raised by the Vietnamese values to which he cannot connect, and has been brought up with the American freedoms to which his parents cannot connect because they hold on to their Vietnamese roots. However, in *Maus*, the reconciliation between two cultures is not really a point of discussion, which makes it different from the other two memoirs.

The theories by Ron Eyerman and D. Laub have proven to be accurate and were applicable to most memoirs. Especially Laub's theory about the second generation becoming the co-owner of the traumatic experiences of their family members was helpful to explain the tension between personal and collective trauma as the traumas were transferred into the collective domain when they were revisited and retold by the generation that experienced them first-hand. However, with this thesis it can be concluded that traumatic experiences can be incorporated into a narrative, contradicting Linda Anderson's theory that traumatic experiences are never fully experienced and can thus not be retold because they remain in the subconscious of the subject. The visual aspect of the graphic memoir can even be claimed to be useful when representing traumatic experiences because it projects the emotions of the subject onto the reader. Even though Anderson's theory was thought out well, and her link between trauma and dreams or flashbacks certainly interesting, within the scope of this thesis it seems that her theory was not completely correct.

Some points that stood out in the memoirs and that would make for interesting future research are the piles of dead mice when compared to the cemetery of the martyrs in *Maus* and in *The Complete Persepolis*. How do they relate to each other? Were they based on each other? Are there more panels that bear resemblance to these in other graphic memoirs? Another fascinating theme that was noticeable in *Maus*, *The Complete Persepolis*, and *Vietnamerica* was the recurrence of smoke and smoking. Why is smoking and the use of smoke relevant? To what does it refer? Why is it used so often in these graphic memoirs? Does smoking or the use of smoke relate to trauma or war? Even though the use of smoke and smoking has not been discussed in this thesis, this seems to be something in which all memoirs connect and which might give new insights to visualisation of traumatic war-experiences. Last, but not least, in all three memoirs, dreams seemed to be important. Why are they so important? Can this be linked to Anderson's theory about traumas coming back to the subjects in dreams? If so, in what way is this relevant for the development of trauma studies?

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