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The Crisis of Bicultural Identity in the Graphic Narratives Sacco's *Palestine* and Satrapi's *The Complete Persepolis*

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Abstract

Objectives: The study aims to analyze how these graphic novels represent bicultural conflicts related to human rights, freedom, and assimilation, emphasizing their role in expressing postcolonial narratives.

Methodology: Employing a qualitative case study approach within postcolonial and cultural studies, this research examines Sacco's *Palestine* and Satrapi's Persepolis, focusing on visual and textual elements – such as Sacco's monochrome palette and Satrapi's simple line art – to analyze how these works depict bicultural identity and socio-political issues.

Findings: The study reveals that Sacco's *Palestine* powerfully illustrates cultural fragmentation resulting from Palestinian displacement, while Persepolis captures Marjane's internal and external struggles between Iranian and European cultures. Both works portray how individuals respond to cultural pressures through solidarity and self-definition, illustrating identity formation within cultural conflict.

Implications: This research suggests that graphic novels serve as effective tools for depicting bicultural identity and postcolonial challenges, offering insights valuable to postcolonial studies, education, and policy. Works like *Palestine* and *The Complete Persepolis* promote empathy and cultural understanding by engaging with emotional and cultural struggles, and supporting educational and social frameworks for bicultural individuals.

Conclusions: Through vivid portrayals of bicultural identity, *Palestine* and *The Complete Persepolis* contribute to understanding how individuals navigate political and cultural conflicts, fostering resilience and solidarity amid pressures, thus enriching cultural studies.

Key words

Identity, Bicultural Identity, Hybridity, Postcolonialism, Diaspora, Orientalism, Graphic Narrative.

I. Introduction

After the fundamental changes that occurred in contemporary life and the advent of the era of a rapidly changing and developing world, we have become individuals sharing this world as one society facing the same risks and sharing common features. Despite variations in experiences and cultures, an increasing number of elements have been classified under the umbrella term of identity in recent times. The question "Who am I?" is crucial for maturation, as identity is changeable and multifaceted. Zehra Kılıçarslan (2013), argues that identity is the unique characteristics that separate an individual or group; cultural communication, traditions, and the environment influence it. Kolig et al. (2009) highlight that identity is a lifelong concept encompassing memories, experiences, relationships, beliefs, and values, providing adolescents with continuity, individuality, and psychosocial development.

As civilizations progress and the world becomes more diverse, identity has become a significant issue. Soraia Sobeih (2017) highlights that those identities, shaped by nationality, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, generation, and place of residence, define an individual's unique qualities and societal position. Thus, artists express and explore these identities, comforting those struggling.

This research explores the relationship between identity and cultural identity, highlighting how encounters with diverse individuals influence cultural identity. Frantz Fanon, a philosopher and psychiatrist, influenced postcolonial studies and critical theory by introducing a new identity development method that acknowledges cultural heritage and traditions, rejecting colonial-imposed myths. Fanon (1986), debunks racism and colonialism by emphasizing the significance of language in preserving cultural identity and challenging feelings of inferiority among colonized individuals, especially black individuals. Fanon (1986) states that "To speak a language is to take on a world maintaining their native tongue preserves cultural inheritance, especially when colonial forces oblige people to learn it." (Fanon, 1986, P. 39). Thus, language is a cultural tool enabling individuals to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, reflecting their distinct worldviews and cultural norms.

Language differences can lead to communication difficulties, and lack of confidence, causing disconnectedness, and confusion in messages. The sense of dislocation and confusion that arises from living between two or more cultures has formed Edward Said's conceptualization of the bicultural identity crisis. Said (1999) states, "As soon as my mother switched to English, her tone became more objective and serious, almost completely expelling the tolerant and consistent intimacy of her first language, Arabic" (P.26). The quote highlights the challenges of balancing two cultures, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural identity despite assimilation demands and societal implications.

Displacement in *Palestine* (2001) by Joe Sacco and *The Complete Persepolis* (2007) by Marjane Satrapi has an emotional and psychological side, and the need for specific visual techniques to express these is vital. In *Palestine*, Sacco uses monochromatic coloration and small enclosed spaces within the panel frames to depict the state of emotional displacement of different characters particularly in the scenes depicting the shanty refugee camps. Such visual components reflect the oppressive background and feeling of being entrapped which emigrate from political shifts and forced migration. Likewise, in *The Complete Persepolis*, Satrapi's simplistic line drawings provide a paradox between the imagery and an inner turmoil in the struggle of one's biculturalism. For example, her

option for black-and-white imagery reflects a struggle within her: one culture before the revolution and another after the revolution. This is a perfect portrayal of the idea of living between two identities with the help of visually minimalist production but narratives full of emotions. These techniques are comparable to Frantz Fanon's look at the psychological effects of colonialism and displacement where people feel hopeless as well as fragmented. Through the use of art, Sacco and Satrapi bring out the pains of displacement whereby the audience is engineered to have an emotional response towards the events that prompt displacement and the devil outcomes thereof.

In this regard, Edward Said's memoir challenges the West's misconception of Eastern cultures, highlighting the complexities of identity and belonging for marginalized individuals despite exile. Kılıçarslan discusses that Said's East-West conflict is a cultural identity crisis triggered by not belonging, differing perspectives, and uncertainty within cultural memory. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2003), argues that cultural identity is created through memory, imagination, narrative, and mythology, not just by looking back at historical events. It is neither a fixed essence nor an ethereal spirit.

In this vein, biculturalism integrates two cultures, balancing experiences, beliefs, and behaviors. It involves developing self-worth, communication skills, and cultural competency, learning about values, resolving cultural conflicts, and achieving success through prosperous integration. Meca et al. (2019), suggest that an individual's identity is shaped by their heritage and receiving cultures, enhancing cultural competence but causing ambiguity and confusion in interpersonal interactions. It extends beyond additive issues of cultural identification, focusing on how individuals manage and integrate their cultural systems.

To shed more light on biculturalism, Meca states that contemporary approaches identify four categories of biculturalism: assimilation (i.e., discarding the legacy culture and acquiring the receiving culture), separation (i.e., maintaining the legacy culture and rejecting the incoming culture), marginalization (i.e., eschewing the legacy culture and rejecting the receiving culture), and integration (i.e., preserving the legacy culture while absorbing the receiving culture). Immigrant groups benefit from biculturalism, combining receiving culture with heritage culture, leading to favorable psychosocial outcomes (P. 5). Two types of bicultural individuals blended and alternating, have emerged with positive attitudes towards their culture, with blended individuals being more oriented towards the dominant culture than their ethnicity (Nguyen et al., 2009, P. 20).

On the one hand, people who identify as blended biculturals merge many cultures to create a distinct identity that incorporates aspects from each. They are fluent in the languages of the different cultures they embrace and appear at ease in a variety of situations. On the other hand, alternating are bicultural persons who switch between cultures relying on their environment, which might influence them consciously or subconsciously and be influenced by other people, places, and objects (Meca et al., 2019, P. 8). A blended bicultural identity is a deeper connection between two cultural identities while alternating bicultural identity is more distinct and different when adopting one cultural identity which leads to the emergence of an identity crisis.

Identity crisis causes young people to examine their perceptions of themselves and discover their identity, which is crucial. This issue has persisted since World War II in both Arab and Western countries. Ashcroft (2002), argues that post-colonial literature emphasizes the importance of place and dis-

placement, highlighting the crisis of identity and the need for a strong connection between self and place, often influenced by myths of identity and authenticity. Furthermore, Dizayi (2019) argues that the identity crisis arises from doubt and uncertainty, with post-World War II, decolonization, and liberation causing a significant shift in reclaiming social and individual identities. According to Dizayi, this concept is evident in graphic novels like *The Complete Persepolis* and *Palestine*, where characters face cultural shifts and historical transitions. Marjane Satrapi's story in Iran demonstrates how historical events affect one's identity, while Sacco's narrative in *Palestine* evokes the idea that social and political transformations disrupt cultural identity fragmentation. These graphic novels represent attempts at identity reconstruction and renegotiation, influenced by external and internal forces. Thus, Dizayi's findings suggest that these novels represent attempts at reclaiming and renegotiating identity in response to these changes.

Additionally, A group of features causing identity crises has been identified, including increasing cultural contact and mixing resulting from migration, colonization, economic globalization, multicultural policies, multi-nation states, fast travel, and media exposure which explains why individuals describe themselves as bicultural or multicultural (Benet-Martinez & Hong,2014, P. 18). In this vein, identity crises arise from individual differences, personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and societal expectations. Furthermore, women's and civil rights movements challenge conventions and promote biculturalism.

Argument

The Palestinian people have faced a campaign of ethnic cleansing, genocide, massacres, and murder since the 1948 NAKBA (Palestinian Catastrophe), with Zionist state policies often encouraging the integration of Palestinians into Israeli culture. Joe Sacco's graphic novel *Palestine* explores the cultural identity struggles of colonized Palestinians, using graphic novel themes to challenge injustice and preserve their heritage. Marjane Satrapi's *The Complete Persepolis* explores Iran's cultural identity dilemma, focusing on the younger generation's struggle to reconcile traditional and Western cultures. Visual narratives and cultural experiences are crucial in understanding this issue, as illustrated by Marjane's triumph over racial and gender discrimination. Furthermore, McCloud (1994) discusses graphic narratives as storytelling techniques that enhance human communication and explore bicultural identity. Cartoons can significantly influence an individual's identity, self-perception, psychological connection with characters, and emotional and cognitive experiences. Overall, graphic narratives play a crucial role in understanding and addressing the cultural identity struggles of the Palestinian people.

Research Significance

This paper delves into how graphic narrative is crucial in addressing the crisis of bicultural identity, aiming to examine how group dynamics are defined, how they occur, and how crucial identity development is. This study also aims to help understand group dynamics in a political environment and develop skills in managing multiple responsibilities and citizenship. Complex concepts and emotions might be easier to comprehend and process when visual aids such as panels are used. In addition, it explores the importance of maintaining identity in a rapidly changing world through visual narratives. It highlights the hybrid identity crisis in Sacco's *Palestine* and Satrapi's *The Complete Persepolis*. The research employs graphic narrative analysis to preserve cultural heritage and values in this fast-evolving world, utilizing postcolonial theory to explore bicultural identities, and featuring relatable characters and iconography for cultural balance.

Graphic novels are increasingly recognized as literary works, gaining places alongside regular ones on bookshelves. In this regard, the graphic novel *Palestine* was written by journalist Joe Sacco, who traveled to Palestine in the early 1990s. Sacco explores Palestinians' daily lives under Israeli occupation through illustrations and interviews, while Marjane Satrapi's graphic memoir, *The Complete Persepolis*, delves into her experiences in Iran and Europe during the Islamic Revolution, highlighting military challenges and refugee issues. Graphic narration, such as Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics (1994) explores cultural identity, whereas postcolonial works such as *Palestine* and *The Complete Persepolis* emphasize the suffering and the hardship of oppressed people, and challenge traditional narratives.

Research Problem

Palestinian people have been subjected to ethnic cleansing, genocide, and murder since Nakba 1948. In *Imagining Palestine*, Hamdi (2022) revisits the Zionist occupation of occupied Palestine and emphasizes the awful crimes carried out to obliterate Palestinian history, identity, and memory. Highlighting the misery of Palestinian refugees, Hamdi highlights land theft, racial apartheid, and torture of Palestinians (Hamdi, 2022, P. 21). Joe Sacco's *Palestine* delves into the cultural identity struggles of colonized Palestinians, emphasizing their resilience, the need to challenge injustice, and the preservation of their heritage.

The Complete Persepolis delves into Iran's cultural identity issue, focusing on the younger generation's struggle to reconcile traditional and Western cultures. The text highlights the significance of visual narratives and cultural experiences in comprehending the issue of racial and gender discrimination, urging global solidarity and equality for exiled immigrants (Beigi, 2021, P. 75). In this regard, Said (2002) argues that exile is not a decision but rather a natural occurrence, characterized by alienation, emigration, and stigmatization, which are distinct characteristics and components of exile (Said, 2002, P. 184). *The Complete Persepolis* and *Palestine* are graphic novels that delve into the postcolonial theory, focusing on displacement, cultural hybridity, and various aspects, using narrative techniques and visual storytelling to explore identity formation and balancing rights and citizenship.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative analysis to examine bicultural identity crises in Joe Sacco's *Palestine* and Marjane Satrapi's *The Complete Persepolis*. Focusing on both visual and textual elements, the analysis explores how these graphic narratives present bicultural themes through various storytelling techniques.

The methodology includes examining key elements like panels, gutters, symbolism, and color schemes to understand how they contribute to narrative depth and emotional resonance. Panels are assessed for their impact on storytelling and reader engagement, where the concept of gutters – the space between panels – plays a critical role. These gutters create narrative transitions and allow readers to connect and interpret story elements across visual and textual boundaries. Furthermore, symbolism, visual signs, and repeated images are analyzed to uncover bicultural struggles, particularly as these elements reflect the characters' cultural tensions and identity challenges.

In terms of art style and color schemes, the study considers how specific visual patterns enhance cultural and emotional content, thereby supporting the thematic exploration of identity issues. This approach aligns with Eisner's (1985) concept of using both images and text to construct meaning through

spatial movement and panel segmentation.

Thematic analysis is employed to identify motifs related to cultural tension and identity processes, focusing on moments of acculturation, rebellion, and self-acceptance. By examining these graphic elements, this research seeks to illuminate how *Palestine* and *The Complete Persepolis* address bicultural identity, showcasing graphic novels' unique capability to represent the complexities of living between cultures.

Literature Review

This literature review examines the cultural and psychological complexities of bicultural identity and how these issues are portrayed in graphic narratives. According to Benet-Martinez and Hong (2014), culture acts as a "shared knowledge system" encompassing learned routines, social interactions, and values, which are transmitted horizontally through peer interactions and vertically across generations (Benet-Martinez & Hong,2014, p.13). This transmission shapes individual perspectives and enables adaptation to various cultural settings. Identity formation, therefore, becomes a relational process shaped by cultural contexts, as Erikson (1968) describes, where people define themselves through decisions about roles, values, and worldviews within their social surroundings (Erikson, 1968, p. 22). Hall (2003) also emphasizes that identity is shaped by self-perception and by how one is perceived by others, thus constructing an individual's role in society. This cultural identity fosters self-awareness and cross-cultural understanding, reflecting universal human experiences within unique cultural contexts (Hall, 2003, p. 225).

Meca et al. (2019) describe hybridization as a phenomenon in which individuals blend new cultural features with existing cultural frameworks, resulting in dynamic bicultural identities. Hybrid identities are partially predictable through cultural harmony, though personal variability in adaptability complicates these dynamics (Meca et al, 2019, p.10). Bicultural individuals often experience conflicting perspectives but benefit from a more profound understanding of both cultures, gaining cognitive flexibility and empathy (p.17-19).

The challenges of biculturalism are notably prevalent among immigrant populations. Nguyen et al. (2009) describe biculturalism as the process by which individuals integrate two cultural backgrounds into their self-concept. Bicultural individuals, particularly in diverse countries like the U.S., navigate both dominant and ethnic cultural identities, embodying a broader cultural intersection that reflects the complexities of globalization (Nguyen et al. 2009, p.17).

Colonialism, exile, and diaspora contribute to cultural identity crises, often destabilizing established customs and social frameworks. Said (1999) explores these themes in the Palestinian context, highlighting how displacement disrupts identity and the continuous negotiation with multiple cultural influences. He writes, "I was neither one thing nor the other," underscoring the perpetual feeling of estrangement and the challenge of reconciling multiple identities (Said, 1999, p.12). Said's own experiences of exile illustrate how hybrid identity can drive intellectual inquiry and cultural critique, making exile a means for personal and cultural emancipation (p. 240).

In this context, Bhabha introduces the concept of the "third space," where identities are negotiated, challenging traditional hierarchies and emphasizing cultural hybridity. Bhabha's theory encourages discourse on representation and equality within multicultural contexts, although critics argue that his focus on abstract hybridity can overlook socioeconomic struggles and the real-world impact of colonial histories (Bhandari, 2022, p.177). In contrast, Hall (2003)

highlights the role of historical continuity and shared heritage in shaping identity, arguing that self-representation and historical context are integral to understanding cultural identity (Hall, 2003, p.175).

In literary analysis, the application of Bhabha's theories to real-world issues, particularly in contexts of conflict like Palestine, has drawn critique. Sacco's *Palestine*, for example, illustrates Palestinian experiences under occupation but may not fully engage with Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which can obscure the specific historical injustices Palestinians face. Some scholars contend that Hall's notions of diaspora and third-space perspectives more effectively capture the tensions in Palestinian identity, especially regarding belonging and displacement.

In *The Complete Persepolis*, Satrapi navigates Iranian and Western identities, particularly as an Iranian woman. This narrative challenges traditional gender roles and offers an alternative perspective on Iranian identity. The graphic memoir, as analyzed by Basu (2007), subverts Western notions of Iranian women as passive, highlighting their agency and resilience (Basu, 2007, p.2). McCloud (1994) observes that the comic format itself allows readers to "fill in" gaps, inviting them to project their interpretations into the narrative (p.5). This quality allows *The Complete Persepolis* to vividly portray bicultural identity's complexity and the struggle for self-definition.

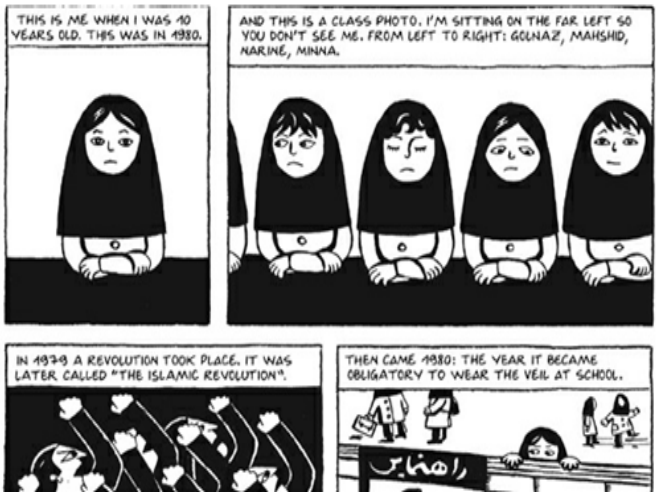
This paper builds on these theoretical insights to conduct a qualitative analysis of bicultural identity in *Palestine* and *The Complete Persepolis*. Through thematic and visual analysis, it explores how these works address the tension between cultural integration and identity preservation. The study aims to reveal how graphic novels uniquely convey the dualities of bicultural experience, examining the interplay of imagination and solidarity in response to cultural challenges and political dynamics.

Textual Analysis

The Complete Persepolis explores Marjane's childhood and subjectivity during the Islamic Revolution and Iran-Iraq War, blending visual and literary elements to explore identity, home, nostalgia, and displacement in diasporic communities (Maulida, 2022, P.134). In this realm, prominent diaspora writer Marjane Satrapi (1969) is well-known for her comics that portray her struggles, conflict with her family, and issues with the Iranian government. *The Complete Persepolis* is a literary piece that explores her life from childhood to early adulthood, highlighting her identity conflicts and development. The research aims to investigate Marjane's experiences and the impact of her bicultural identity on her life.

Marjane, a passionate rock metal, and punk music fan, navigates Iran's strict laws and political engagement, influencing her self-perception during a turbulent period (Basu, 2007, P. 7).

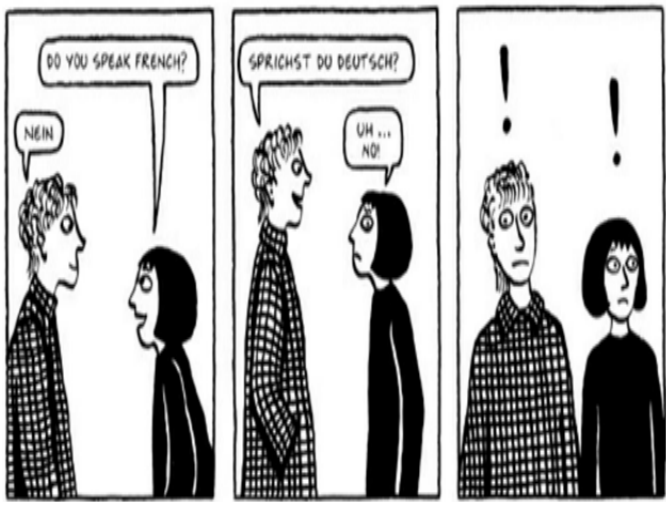
Figure (1): Marjane recalls childhood under the Islamic Revolution and the mandatory veil



(Satrapi,2007, p.3, Fig 3)

Satrapi begins the novel at the age of 10, dressed in a headscarf at a gender-segregated school, depicting the political unrest of the Islamic Revolution through her early memories (Beigi,2021, P.83). With the tale of her uncle Anoosh's execution, Marjane Satrapi, a courageous and confident woman, challenges her teacher's claim that the current regime is better than the Shah regime (Satrapi,2007, P.142). Furthermore, Marjane struggles with communication and socialization in Vienna due to her limited German language skills, despite speaking French well at school, making it difficult to adjust to her new surroundings (P.158).

Figure (2): Marjane struggles with language barriers while adapting to life in exile



(Satrapi, 2007, P. 158, Fig 3)

Marjane, a teenager, left Iran due to the Iran-Iraq war, affecting her Iranian diaspora status and mental health. She tries to forget her past to fit in with the new culture but later returns home in her early twenties, missing her family and country. This experience leads to an identity dilemma, as she feels she does not belong anywhere after arriving (Maulida, 2022, P.135).

Marjane adopts a hybrid identity to reconcile her diverse cultural backgrounds and create an integrated identity. Hybridity, a concept in diaspora identity study, refers to the complex blend of identities through cross-cultural interaction. In post-colonial contexts, identities are emerging, ambiguous, and nonlinear. The Third Space, where traditional cultural practices come together, allows for translation, negotiation, ambiguity, and ambivalence, allowing understanding to evolve (P.136). Therefore, The Third Space is a dynamic environment where cultural traditions merge and grow, fostering a blend of new interpretations and disruptions, potentially challenging historical hierarchies (Bhabha,1994, P.28). Hence Marjane Satrapi's identity crisis can be addressed through these concepts, promoting fluidity and adaptability in her identity.

Figure (3): Marjane struggles to fit in with her new friends in Vienna by changing her appearance and identity

(Satrapi, 2007, P.187, Fig 4)

Marjane, a 14-year-old girl living in the diaspora in Viena, struggles with adjusting by changing her appearance and identity. Yet she uses eyeliner and shortens her hair, revealing significant changes (Satrapi,2007, P.187, Fig 4). Marjane struggles to fit in with her new friends in Vienna, who have different lifestyles from her Iranian friends, who consume al-

cohol, smoke marijuana, and do drugs (Maulida,2022, P.137). Her attempts to change her style and behavior demonstrate her need to give up her values and sense of self to fit in and complete her punk look.

Figure (4): Marjane, a diaspora residing in Vienna, grapples with her identity and past beliefs, despite attempting to conceal her drug use. Despite overcoming challenges, she returns to Iran.

(Satrapi, 2007, P. 189, Fig 4)

Marjane, a diaspora who spent four years in Vienna, struggles with her identity and past beliefs. Despite her attempts to hide her drug use, she remains uneasy and unable to adapt. Despite facing challenges and losing independence, Marjane decides to return to her native country, Iran, despite suffering significant loss. Despite her attempts to cope, Marjane's struggle with her past and present selves remains a significant issue in her life (Maulida,2022, P. 141).

Marjane, acknowledging the challenges faced by Third World women, rediscovers her new Iranian identity in the West. Marjane states: "I am Iranian and proud of it" (Satrapi, 2007, P.197, Fig 7).

Figure (5): As Marjane navigates the obstacles of cultural hybridity and women's resistance in the diaspora, she embraces her Iranian identity.

(Satrapi, 2007, P. 197, Fig 7)

However, she illustrates women's subversion, resistance, and revolt against the limitations placed on their behavior and appearance in public (Beigi, 2021, P.83). Diaspora people often struggle to establish their identity due to their diverse cultural backgrounds, leading to feelings of alienation and blending in with their surroundings or native country. However, the merging of multiple cultures into a diasporic identity through hybridity allows individuals to maintain their individuality without conforming to a single culture (P. 83).

Marjane returns to Iran after a long absence, feeling uncertain about her freedom to express herself. Despite enjoying freedom in Vienna, the Iranian government severely restricts her right to free speech, similar to her life in the West. Marjane is forced to wear the veil ONCE MORE and conform to state regulations, acknowledging that she will need time to adjust (Satrapi, 2007, P.242, Fig 8).

Figure (6): Marjane returns to Iran, feeling apprehensive about her freedom of speech due to strict restrictions imposed by the Iranian **gov**ernment, similar to her experiences in the West.

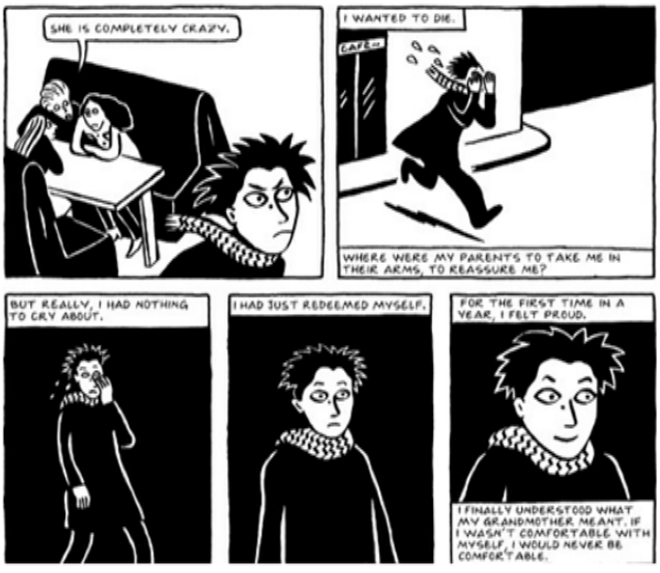
(Satrapi, 2007, P. 242, Fig 8)

As a result, Marjane struggles with social interactions with her former Iranian friends, who believe her accomplishments were unlikely without her travels to Vienna and are shocked when she shares her exile experiences. Beigi's portrayal of Marjane, a young girl facing gender and racial discrimination, breaks down the ignorance barrier through mental imagery. She advocates for international solidarity and equality for immigrants living in exile, breaking cultural, intellectual, and geographic barriers. Marjane's story demonstrates the power of communication in breaking down barriers and promoting global equality. Edward Said (2002) states that; "After all, exile is not a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you," (qtd In. Beigi, 2021, P. 75). According to Said, birth, exile, and stigmatization are more likely causes of exile than decisions made (P.78-79).

In this vein, Satrapi's feminist graphic novel delves into the experiences of Iranian women writers in the diaspora, who frequently face marginalization and alienation, challenging conventional notions of intellectual exile and being the first in West Asia (P.79). The comic's theme can be analyzed through feminism and hegemony theory, revealing the Iranian administration's control over women's behavior and thought processes, and their resistance to these regulations (Maulida,2022, P. 146). In this regard, Beige writes: "Marjane, her mother, and her grandmother are portrayed as women conscious of their rights and their identity in fighting back against oppression" (P.86). Thus, the novel explores the complexities of personal relationships in a conservative society, focusing on Iranian women like Marjane who fight for peace and face terror after divorce.

The Complete Persepolis explores Marjane's journey, feeling isolated due to her identity contrast between Iran and Vienna, and her decision to leave Iran to forget her past (Satrapi 2007, P.328). Marjane, grappling with a personal identity crisis, decides to relocate to France, acknowledging her mixed cultural identity, and leaving Iran, as neither Europe nor Iran can fully capture her true self (Maulida,2022, P.145). Satrapi returns to Iran after a long voyage, feeling accepted but unable to express her passion due to strict laws. Marjane's identity negotiation involves accepting her inability to feel whole in Iran or Europe, as her surroundings and culture significantly influence her self-perception.

Figure (7): Marjane's identity is a distinctive blend of her past and present selves, showcasing the adaptability of her diaspora.



The panel discusses the intricate nature of cultural identity and how individuals can navigate their sense of self in diverse situations. Marjane's identity blends past and present identities, showcasing her diaspora's flexibility. Comics journalism, like James Carey's, combines social, political, economic, and cultural perspectives, allowing readers to experience imaginative reality interpretations (Kocak, 2015, P. 36 & 37). McCloud (1994) argues that the comic process emphasizes ideas that cannot be seen, heard, smelled, touched, or tasted, conveying the world both inside and outside by downplaying its appearance (P. 19). These notions such as cultural identity can be embodied through graphic narrative.

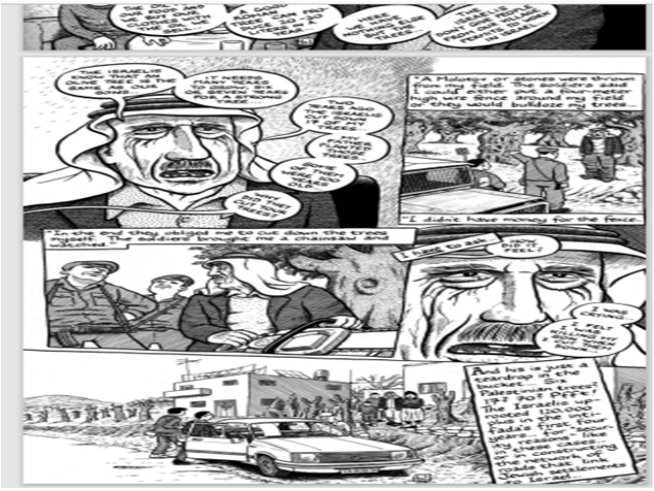
In this vein, *Palestine* explores the cultural identity issues faced by the Palestinian people, highlighting their history, heritage, and current circumstances. The narrative follows an anonymous journalist who struggles with his identity, highlighting the challenges faced by Palestinians under occupation. It highlights resilience, territorial integrity, and the ongoing struggle for self-determination and dignity. The narrative highlights the 1948 Israeli occupation and the Nakba (Catastrophe), which traumatized Palestinian identity and collective memory.

Figure (8): Palestine's contemporary landscape reflects a painful history through its damaged homes, devastated refugee communities, and destroyed olive trees.

(Sacco,2001, P.15, Fig 1)

Palestine so vividly captures the motions of a horrific recollection. Thus, contemporary Palestinian homes, the wrecked refugee homeland (Sacco, 2001, fig. 1), or the destroyed olive trees on Palestinian territory (Sacco, 2001, fig. 2) serve as temporary inspiration for comics. Because of this, Sacco's imagined Palestinian home surroundings serve as a kind of visual force, turning the house into a place the reader is either obliged to look away from or leave. Thus, this creation of space reflects the Palestinian people's mental exile from their current homes as well as their physical expulsion from their homeland.

Figure (9): Palestinians remember their history, particularly the Nakba, to maintain their cultural identity and connection to their homeland.


(Sacco, 2001, P.62, Fig 2)

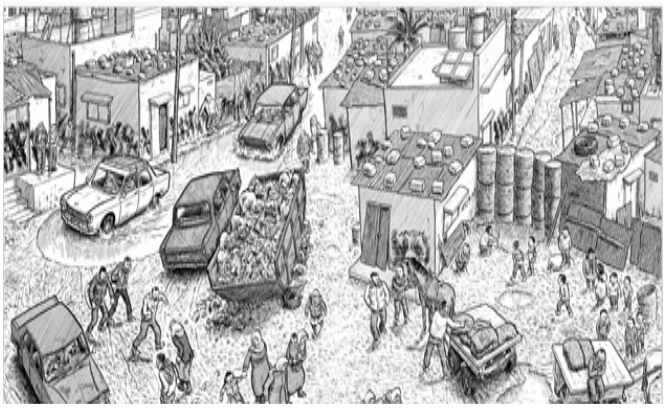
Sacco's work highlights the challenges faced by the Palestinian people in reclaiming their homeland, the psychological and physical effects of exile, and the importance of the diaspora in preserving and forming their identity. It explores the cultural identity of the Palestinian people, their resilience and determination amidst oppression, and the impact of nationalism on their identity. Furthermore, Sacco's evidence highlights how crucial it is for Palestinians to remember and celebrate their history—especially the Nakba—to preserve their cultural identity and ties to their native country.

Said's "Orientalist mentality" perpetuates prejudices and misconceptions about the East, leading to unequal power dynamics. Joe Sacco advocates for the portrayal of Arab characters in comics aiming to change stereotypes and provide a more humane portrayal. Critics argue that Sacco's novel uses stereotypes to represent Palestinian identity through shared historical memories. Eisner (1985) highlights how national identities are portrayed differently in comics and graphic novels, and that body language and expression are crucial in narratives but effective expression is easier without words (P. 95-111).

The genre of graphic narrative is being used more and more to depict human rights abuses in useful ways. "From Persepolis to Joe Sacco's multiple works, the graphic narrative is increasingly utilized as a genre in the representation of human rights atrocities in complex and productive ways" (Brister & Walzer, 2013, P.138). *Palestine's* comic journalism delves into the Palestinian independence struggle, highlighting the complex issue of preserving Palestinian culture and preventing marginalization amidst Israeli occupation, despite the impact on Palestinian identity.

In Occupied Palestine, journalist Sacco used visual narratives to address human rights abuses during the First Intifada. Instead of creating an illustrated travelogue, he focused on comics to highlight the importance of human rights in addressing conflict (1991–1992).

Figure (10): Sacco in Palestine aims to strengthen the bond and remove external distractions.



(Sacco,2001, P.147, Fig1)

In *Palestine*, Sacco demands solitude during his visit to the UNRWA-sponsored refugee camp Jabaliya, indicating a desire for personal interaction with the refugee situation to strengthen the bond and remove external distractions that may decrease the significance of the visit (P.147). Said emphasizes the profound impact of displacement on cultural identity, particularly for migrants who often find themselves in a transitional state between their old and new identities. The challenges they face in assimilating into new cultures, such as learning new languages and practices, lead to feelings of alienation, as highlighted by Said's *Orientalism* (1978) which explores the impact of conflicting land, and property claims and identifies historical human rights violations.

In this vein, Spivak (1988) critiques the bias of human rights language, often influenced by Western perspectives, which marginalizes non-Western voices. She advocates for a decolonized human rights strategy, prioritizing marginalized communities' experiences and voices, and addressing power relations and representational limits. Sacco's *Palestine* portrays displaced Palestinians, highlighting the loss and relocation caused by conflict, which can lead to feelings of alienation and cultural disorientation. It critiques conventional human rights language, emphasizing the need for a decolonized, inclusive approach to under-

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standing and addressing marginalized communities (Spivak, 1988, P.24-27).

Similarly, Williams and Childs (2014), state that in post-colonial theory and historiographical practice, the Subaltern Studies group tackles a critical problem: how can historians give voice or agency to parts of the colonized who engaged in anti-colonial resistance, even when most existing narratives are produced by colonizers (Williams & Childs ,2014, P.216). Also, they provide a voice and agency to the colonized people, particularly those who rebelled against colonial masters. This theoretical understanding is crucial in analyzing the suffering depicted in graphic novels like *Palestine* and *The Complete Persepolis*. By applying historical theories to the marginalized, they can better understand the representation of resistance and identity in these works. Both graphic novels offer a critical view of society and give a voice to the oppressed, emphasizing the need to incorporate these agents' perspectives to understand the complexity of identity and resistance depictions in postcolonial spaces. As seen in T*he Complete Persepolis*, Satrapi's story accurately presents Satrapi as a girl who is subjugated and refuses to surrender to the colony or authoritarian rule. In this regard, the same can be said about Sacco's *Palestine* where the author focuses on the stories of Palestinians in the context of war and occupation. To a certain extent, the critique of Williams and Childs will help to understand how both graphic novels offer a critical view of society and give a voice to the oppressed.

Conversely, Hodapp emphasizes Sacco's work as a political project, aiming to connect Western readers with underrepresented geographies and people, such as refugees and other subaltern groups, and tell their stories (Hodapp,2015, p. 8). In a similar vein, Brister and Walzer (2013) state that "Sacco's work presents particularly important ramifications for ethical reading practices and human rights advocacy through the graphic narrative" (Brister & Walzer 2013, P.139). Occupied Palestine faces human rights violations, emphasizing the need for safety and dignity. Graphic human rights literature emphasizes identity, rights, and cultural customs, emphasizing intersectionality and self-identification for a secure environment.

Figure (11): Palestinians fight for independence is characterized by the migration of refugees and Jewish settlers, highlighting the diaspora's struggles

Sacco, 2001, p. 13, Fig 1

Sacco, 2001, P. 12, Fig 1

Villaneda (2016) argues that Sacco's novel portrays the Palestinian struggle for independence, focusing on the migration of Palestinian refugees and the inflow of Jewish settlers, highlighting the diaspora's challenges, cultural diversity, societal narratives, homeland connection, new societies, and conflicting allegiances.

Figure (12): The veil, or hijab, holds different meanings for Muslim women in Palestine.

(Sacco,2001, P. 137, Fig 1)

Joe Sacco explores the cultural and religious significance of the veil for Muslim women in Palestine, revealing their diverse perspectives and the impact of the Israeli occupation on their lives, thereby emphasizing the importance of understanding the intricate dynamics of the veil in Palestinian society (Ch. 6). Some see wearing the veil as a way to protect their cultural legacy and religion from external forces, while others regard it as an expression of resistance against occupation. Alsyouf (2024) argues that the use of Palestinian symbolic imagery related to Palestinian culture acts as an essential tool of "opposing the erasure of Palestinian land and identity" (Alsyouf, 2024, P.177). This theme resonates in Sacco's portrayal of Palestinian customs and culture, as seen in Chapter 4, "Hebron," where his artwork captures the essence of Palestinian life through music, food, and song, highlighting the resilience and cultural pride within the community.

Palestine portrays the daily hardships faced by Palestinians, such as checkpoints, settlements, and military invasions, which alter their way of life, violate their cultural customs, and increase their sense of loss. It explores the cultural identity dilemma they experience, focusing on deprivation, displacement, and the fight against oppression. The ongoing demolition of refugee housing in Rafah serves as a reminder of the initial deportation and erasure of Palestinian existence, as Israeli authorities systematically destroy Palestinian houses. Said (1993) critiques the Western imperialist project's impact on colonial cultures, arguing that it has distorted intercultural connections, leading to a biased view of the colonized world.

Sacco explores the resilience and humanity of Palestinians despite occupation and persecution, contrasting it with the perpetuation of stereotypes and misrepresentations in literary works and historical narratives. In this context, Fanon (1968) writes: "The truth is that there is no colonial power today which is capable of adopting the only form of contest which has a chance of succeeding, namely, the prolonged establishment of large forces of occupation." (Fanon, 1968, P.47). The quote underscores the diminishing effectiveness of traditional colonial methods, highlighting the growing tension between colonizers and colonized, thereby complicating the bicultural identity issue.

Said emphasizes the role of colonized people in shaping their cultures and identities, despite imperial obstacles. He argues that the struggle over geography is intricate, involving ideas, forms, images, and imaginings, as none are entirely free from it, just like we are not entirely outside geography (Said,1993, P.7). Said critiques the imperial project's impact on colonized cultures, highlighting its distortion of cultural connections, power dynamics, and the role of colonial people in shaping identities. Said writes; "The more

one can leave one's cultural home, the more easily is one able to judge it, and the whole world as well, with the spiritual detachment necessary for true vision. The more easily, too, does one assess oneself and alien cultures with the same combination of intimacy and distance." (Said,1978, P.259). As a result, Said argues that the imperialist mission extends beyond economic exploitation and political dominance, shaping the culture and identity of the colonized.

The Palestinian people, living in makeshift homes, express their resilience against Israeli occupation, resembling their attempts for independence. The harsh physical existence is reminiscent of the 1956 mascaras and the First Intifada. Sacco (2001) explores the history of pain and dispossession in Palestine and Gaza using graphic narratives, focusing on the 'original tragedy' (Nakba) and visiting Hatem Sissi's tomb. His work goes beyond mere reportage (Sacco, 2001, P.108).

Sacco's "Closure" delves into the emotional divide between Palestinians and Israelis using color and close-ups to evoke emotions and highlight increasing hostilities. Whereas *The Complete Persepolis* explores the protagonist's struggle with bicultural identity through comic panel frames and the gutter, which visually separate scenes and create a sense of separation between events and emotions, making it the most creative space in comics (Brister &Walzer, 2013, P.142). The novel explores Marjane's struggle with her Iranian and Western identities through visual narrative, questioning her adaptation and the impact of her bicultural identity.

Findings and Discussion

The graphic narratives *Palestine* by Joe Sacco and *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi provide rich depictions of the bicultural identity crisis. Both works demonstrate how characters navigate the complex terrain of belonging to two or more cultural identities, with distinct visual styles contributing significantly to these depictions.

The novels have shown how social, political, and cultural upheavals affect a person's belief in self, community, and solidarity. The way the characters come together to create supportive communities highlights the need for unity in overcoming bicultural obstacles. The authors offer distinctive viewpoints on the internal and external tensions experienced by individuals who have bicultural identities through creative storytelling and visual depiction. The study additionally emphasizes how cultural conflicts affect one's ability to define oneself, emphasizing how difficult it is to negotiate one's identity in a diverse community. Furthermore, these results have demonstrated how well graphic novels capture the complex feelings associated with bicultural identity crises.

The artworks have explored the bicultural identity challenge, highlighting characters balancing cultures and dealing with violence, highlighting the importance of preserving cultural balance to prevent identity crises. *The Complete Persepolis* explores the emotional struggles of an Iranian woman reconciling her two cultural identities before and after the Islamic Revolution, while *Palestine* focuses on the struggle against Israeli tyranny for freedom and independence. These literary pieces offer insights into social, cultural, and political obstacles individuals and groups face.

The research has discussed the bicultural identity issue, emphasizing the significance of accepting diverse cultural backgrounds for societal respect and acceptance. It differentiates between oppressive, discriminatory, or occupation-related identities and those that promote justice and peaceful coexistence.

Visual Depictions of Bicultural Identity

In *Palestine*, Sacco employs a monochromatic color scheme that conveys the stark reality of Palestinian displacement. The absence of vibrant colors enhances the sense of loss and fragmentation, evoking feelings of alienation and cultural disintegration. This visual approach aligns with Edward Said's (1978) theory of exile, where the displaced subject experiences a rupture from their homeland and identity. The black-and-white palette acts as a metaphor for the fragmented identity of Palestinians under Israeli occupation, emphasizing the emotional distance from their homeland.

In contrast, Satrapi's *The Complete Persepolis* uses minimalist line drawings to reflect the protagonist's internal struggles with bicultural identity. The simplicity of the visual style contrasts sharply with the complexity of Marjane's emotional landscape. The stark, childlike quality of the drawings often juxtaposes moments of deep psychological and cultural tension, underscoring the protagonist's isolation in navigating between Iranian and Western cultures. This aligns with Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space," where cultural hybridity leads to a negotiation of identity beyond fixed binaries (Bhabha, 1994). The visual minimalism reflects the in-between space Marjane inhabits, capturing the ambiguity and fluidity of her bicultural experience.

Emotional and Psychological Impact of Displacement

Both graphic novels also explore the psychological effects of displacement on the individual, with the visual and textual elements working in tandem to highlight the emotional turmoil experienced by characters. Sacco's portrayal of Palestinians in refugee camps, for example, does not merely document the physical conditions but also illustrates the psychological trauma of cultural and spatial dislocation. The panels emphasize crowded, claustrophobic spaces, and the repetition of images of barriers—walls, fences, and checkpoints—reinforces the idea of entrapment, both physically and culturally. This visual representation of confinement resonates with Frantz Fanon's (1986) discussion of the psychological impacts of colonial oppression, where the colonized subject is trapped in a cycle of alienation and resistance.

Similarly, Satrapi's representation of Marjane's exile in *The Complete Persepolis* illustrates the internalized emotional struggles of living in the diaspora. Marjane's fluctuating identity, represented through changing hairstyles, fashion, and body language, reflects her attempts to reconcile her Iranian heritage with her experiences in Europe. Her visual transformation, especially during her time in Vienna, where she adopts punk styles and engages in rebellious behaviors, symbolizes the pressure to assimilate into Western culture. Yet, her inability to fully integrate into either culture points to the persistent tension of bicultural existence, which Meca et al. (2019) describe as an "alternating identity," where individuals shift between cultural frameworks based on context.

Solidarity and Resistance through Cultural Identity

The graphic medium in both works also serves as a powerful tool for exploring how cultural identity becomes a source of resistance and solidarity. In *Palestine*, Sacco illustrates moments of communal solidarity among Palestinians, where cultural practices such as storytelling, food sharing, and music become acts of resistance against Israeli occupation. This aligns with Sacco's own view that "any people resisting oppression will naturally fall back on their cultural heritage to create solidarity" (Sacco, 2024). The visual emphasis on these cultural practices underscores the role of shared identity in fortifying resistance against external forces, reaffirming the importance of cultural continuity in the face of political and

spatial displacement.

In *The Complete Persepolis*, Marjane's cultural identity similarly becomes a point of resistance, particularly against the oppressive regime in post-revolutionary Iran. The act of wearing the veil, a central visual motif in the novel, serves as both a symbol of repression and a tool for subversion. Marjane's decision to wear the veil while asserting her individuality (for instance, through rebellious acts like listening to Western music) illustrates her resistance to the imposition of a singular identity. This reflects Stuart Hall's (2003) argument that identity is not a static essence but a process of becoming, shaped by memory, imagination, and resistance.

Conclusion

In a pivotal exchange that illuminates the depths of graphic narrative, I had the privilege of corresponding with Joe Sacco the esteemed author of *Palestine*, who graciously provided insight into his treatment of how the Palestinian people can preserve their cultural identity despite the Israeli occupation. He wrote: "Any people resisting oppression will naturally fall back on their cultural heritage to create solidarity and to distinguish themselves from their oppressors. Culture, tradition, and heritage thus become important aspects of fortifying resistance, which is certainly true of the Palestinians. Recognizing this, in the current war on Gaza, Israel has made it a point to destroy cultural sites, universities, and archives. I believe that Palestinian culture has been internalized to the extent that these material losses, as horrible as they are, will not crush the Palestinian spirit but will end up fueling it" (Sacco). I believe that the Palestinian people have resisted Israeli oppression through art, oral tradition, and history, preserving their unique identity. Their tenacity is evident in the ongoing conflict in Gaza, which weakens Palestinian intellectual identity.

Postcolonial theory has delved into the intricate nature of a bicultural identity crisis, highlighting the challenges and misunderstandings individuals face when integrating multiple cultural identities influenced by colonial ideology and indigenous traditions. Dizayi (2015) argues that colonization led to mixed, hybrid cultures with immigrants and natives coexisting, while post-colonial cultures face resistance and desire for freedom, balancing multiple cultures and abandoning traditional knowledge (P.999). These issues stem from historical incidents, cultural changes, colonization, globalization, and exile, necessitating legislation, respect, and historical awareness to address self-worth issues.

This research has demonstrated how graphic novels like *Palestine* and *The Complete Persepolis* effectively portray the complexities of bicultural identity through the interplay of visual and textual elements. The findings suggest that the graphic novel format, with its ability to juxtapose visual simplicity with deep emotional and cultural themes, provides a unique medium for exploring identity crises, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Sacco's and Satrapi's works show that bicultural identity is not merely a personal or internal struggle but one shaped by broader socio-political forces such as displacement, colonization, and cultural hegemony.

The visual narratives not only illustrate individual struggles with biculturalism but also offer critical insights into the role of cultural identity as a form of resistance. Sacco's portrayal of Palestinian resistance through cultural continuity and Satrapi's depiction of Marjane's negotiation of Iranian and Western identities highlight how graphic novels can serve as powerful tools for addressing cultural and political issues.

Future research could extend this analysis to other media, such as film and digital storytelling, to further

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explore how bicultural identities are constructed, navigated, and represented. Additionally, the intersection of graphic narrative with other identity markers—such as gender, class, and religion—offers a rich avenue for further investigation. Ultimately, this study affirms the potential of graphic novels to serve as an important medium for understanding the nuances of identity crises in multicultural societies.

Recommendations

Educational Integration: Schools and universities must add graphic novels such as *The Complete Persepolis* and *Palestine* as part of teaching materials to discuss themes such as biculturalism, trauma, and political instabilities. Such texts afford students to have broader perspectives on complicated cultural and political issues that are central to the development of student's identities.

Therapeutic Approaches: It is further suggested that graphic narratives should be used where the patients are bicultural, especially adolescents and their therapists. These novels describe the Wars westernization and identity issues familiar to many contemporary immigrant generation patients, and can therefore help them reflect their feelings with greater ease.

Support for Adolescents: This means that educational institutions together with parents and other policymakers must embrace the need to deal with the issues of bicultural identities. It means that the introduction of platforms where people can freely discuss cultural differences coupled with proper support at school and in communities would lead to healthier identity development.

Promoting Global Therapists: More workshops should be conducted, and materials will need to be provided to find international practitioners competent in treating dual identity cream clients. As more young people grow up in two cultures, the availability of therapists would help such people be assisted in their developmental processes.

Postcolonial Studies and Curriculum Development: This is why graphic novels should be incorporated more in postcolonial studies, identity work, and trauma healing initiatives. Such works do not only represent cultural distance and individual concerns but also provide the perspective in which the role of bicultural issues at both macro and micro levels can be observed.

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