Illustrating Memory: Clément Baloup's *Vietnamese Memories* and the Visual Representation of the Past

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to highlight the role that Clément Baloup's comics, Vietnamese Memories: Leaving Saigon (Volume 1) and Vietnamese Memories: Little Saigon (Volume 2), play in the creation of an alternate archive that validates the forgotten tales and the memories of a neglected past. These texts provide an alternate form of remembrance by materialising the past in the form of images. The two volumes present the unheard experiences of the Vietnamese diaspora that Baloup recorded during his travels to the different parts of France and the U.S. Such experiences bring to the forefront memories that are otherwise kept at the margins or suppressed by the dominant discourse. If not recorded, they will be lost forever. The counter-memory, thus, calls for a reassessment of the idea of a singular past that denies the marginalised memories. It claims representation and restoration in the cultural memory. As works of postmemory, these texts form a link between the past and the present through mediation and give memorability to unremembered accounts. The memories are illustrated, and hence, visual representation becomes important to the task of postmemory here.

Keywords: Comics; Baloup; Vietnamese Diaspora; Postmemory; Visual Representation

INTRODUCTION

The exploration of the idea of memory through comics helps in vocalising the marginalised by giving materiality to the forgotten and the absent. The very act of drawing gives a physical form to that which is in the memory but otherwise lost. Such memories, when given representation, form counter-memory, one that has been kept at the margins and excluded from the institutionalised cultural memory. The recollection of memories is an active process and can be viewed "as a continuous process of reinterpretation, or re-remembering" the events or happenings (Refaie, 2012, p. 16). This active process finds an echo in the reading of comics, where the meaning needs to be constructed actively through reader interaction. "Comics locates the readers in space and for this reason is able to spatialise memory" (Chute, 2011a, p. 108). Comics capture memory as a process, mutable and reconstructed each time it is recalled. This quality of memory is represented well through "the plasticity of the comics page and the tension generated between its verbal and visual elements" (Nabizadeh, 2019, p. 185). The process of recollection includes not just remembering but forgetting as well. The structure of comics and its dual modality of visual-verbal elements embody both these aspects of memory recollection. The forgetting is embodied through the "tension between image and text (which mimics the interface between implicit and

explicit memories) and also within the space of the gutter- a space for unconscious memories-from which some elements of the past can be retrieved" (Nabizadeh, 2019, p. 187). The explicit memories are a part of the conscious mind, while the implicit memories inhabit the unconscious mind.

This paper delves into the exploration of the idea of memory using the medium of comics. It contends that comics offer a fitting avenue for discussing the fundamental nature of memory. In representing memory through comics, alternate ways for addressing testimonies are delineated, which can open ways to view the events of the past in a different light. The texts under analysis include Clément Baloup's *Vietnamese Memories* series. The present research explores how these texts create an alternative archive that preserves forgotten tales and memories of a neglected past. They bring to light memories that would otherwise be lost if not recorded. As Hoàng notes in the foreword to Volume 1, Baloup, upon hearing his father's story, realised the many unheard voices that have been lost or suppressed over time. This urgency drove him to record these accounts, working "frenetically" to ensure they were not forgotten (Baloup, 2018a, Foreword by Hoàng). These stories, representing the collective memory of the Vietnamese diaspora, demonstrate how memory and individual experiences are shaped by events like war and displacement. The social framework within which these experiences exist and the diverse media through which they are shared form the cultural memory of the community (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 1). Erll and Rigney (2006, p. 112) suggest that collective memory is actively produced through repeated acts of remembrance and various media like oral tales, literature, photographs, and monuments. Memory travels from individuals to groups and across generations through these media. To become a memory, significant events and experiences must be transformed into shareable encounters, using cultural expressions like personal accounts, documentaries, and exhibitions as vehicles for memory (Rigney, 2021, p. 13). Baloup uses oral narratives, materialised through images, to recollect the past, showing how postmemory serves as a vehicle for collective memory in the form of comics.

Vietnamese Memories exhibit polyphonic memory by giving voice to diverse stories collected over time, highlighting the heterogeneity of experiences and memories. The texts provide a space for "counter visuality" (Chute, 2016, p. 136) by giving visual form to marginalised memories, thereby creating counter-memory. As Egger (2018, p. 59) describes, *Vietnamese Memories* (Volumes 1 and 2) are "oral history comics", where Baloup's interviews with various narrators are visually archived, making them a part of "the sphere of active remembering". These oral tales provide the foundation for the graphic narratives, which, in turn, materialise and archive them as counter-memory, challenging the dominant discourses. This study emphasises the significance of visual representation in postmemory, showing how these graphic narratives create a space for counter-memory and contribute to a reassessment of cultural memory by including marginalised experiences. It illustrates how Baloup's works serve as an alternate archival repository, creating a dynamic and inclusive cultural memory that reflects the complex, polyphonic nature of human experience; thus contributing significantly to the fields of comics studies and memory studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chute in *Graphic Women* points out how the basic layout of comics, fragmented and punctured, comes close to the structure of traumatic memory, which is similarly fragmented and, at times, incomplete (2010, p. 4). Harriet Earle also points out, "comics is a visual medium and trauma is typically seen to be encoded in image and sensation more than in word" (2017, p. 77). Traumatic memory and its association with visual quality indicate yet another reason for the suitability of its representation through the graphic medium. The imagistic quality of memory has been emphasised by scholars time and over (Janoff-Bulman, 1992, p. 108; Mitchell, 1994, p. 192; Pillemer, 1998, p. 53; and Terr, 1990, p. 140). According to Patricia Moran, trauma stories "feature fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation that possess iconic, visual qualities" (2007, p. 5). In her essay "Comics Form and Narrating Lives" (2011), Hillary Chute focuses on themes such as archival research, the embodiment of characters, and the unique capacity of comics to organise memory spatially and chronologically map out a life narrative. Nabizadeh discusses how contemporary comics serve as a vital medium for amplifying marginalised voices and depicting a broad spectrum of memories—personal, political, social, and historical (2019, p. 1). Marianne Hirsch introduced the concept of "postmemory" (2012, p. 5) to describe the profound connection between the second generation and the traumas experienced by their predecessors. She advocates for the integration of aesthetic and institutional frameworks that extend beyond the conventional historical archive, emphasising the importance of an alternate "repertoire" (2012, p. 24). Pillemer defines "personal event memory" as a specific, detailed recounting of an individual's own experiences at the time of the event. These memories are often accompanied by vivid sensory images and are represented in an imagistic manner (Pillemer, 1998, p. 50).

Aurelie Chevant examines Baloup's *Leaving Saigon* to discuss the creation of a "third space" through innovative graphic and textual practices (2017, p. 82). Chevant's analysis highlights how the text not only navigates postcolonial identities but also redefines Vietnamese spaces within the Francophone graphic novel genre. Jennifer Howell (2015) explores how Baloup's narratives reconstruct collective memory, juxtaposing it against the institutionalised history of Vietnam as disseminated through educational systems, mainstream media, and iconic photographs. In contrast, Baloup's work weaves diverse and individual stories into a tapestry of postmemorial narrative, utilising food and food metaphors as a critical lens for analysis. In her essay, Nguyen explores the graphic memoirs of Clément Baloup and G.B. Tran's *Vietnamerica* to highlight how these narratives express the combined power of text and imagery to convey a rich tapestry of personal and varied experiences. Nguyen (2018) argues that this medium transcends the limitations of a singular narrative or a monolithic historical perspective, offering instead a polyphonic and multifaceted portrayal of the Vietnamese diaspora.

Sawin (2024), in her thesis, studies Baloup's texts in the light of transnational and multidirectional memory, cultural hybridity, and the role of foodways in preserving cultural identity. Pham (2018) discusses the various graphic texts by the writers of the Vietnamese diaspora to highlight the role of comics in the healing process for the Vietnamese diaspora. It emphasises how these comics facilitate personal and collective recovery from trauma by providing a medium for storytelling and memory preservation. Similarly, scholars have mostly analysed Baloup's works through the lens of postcolonialism, Viet Kieu identity, transnationalism, and the interrelation of memory and foodways in his works. This paper, thus, aims to address two gaps as observed from the study of existing literature. Firstly, despite the growing recognition of graphic narratives as a powerful tool for engaging with historical subjects, there remains a significant gap in scholarship

concerning their role in depicting the Vietnam War. While the works by authors/illustrators such as Spiegelman, Sacco, and Satrapi have garnered immense attention, graphic narratives depicting the Vietnam War have not received equal recognition. Secondly, the present research studies Baloup's *Vietnamese Memories* from the lens of postmemory, focusing primarily on visual representation and the importance of such works in the creation of alternate visual archives. It aims to bridge the gap in Vietnam War scholarship within the graphic narrative landscape by exploring the less discussed aspects of Baloup's works.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Comics captures the idea of memory in its essence by understanding memory as a continuous process punctuated by mediation. The structure of the comics, with its basic fragmentation into panels and gutter, represents memory as fragmented and remembered in parts, especially when we talk about traumatic memory. "The basic structural form of comics—which replicates the structure of traumatic memory with its fragmentation, condensation, and placement of elements in space— is able to express the movement of memory" (Chute, 2011b, p. 293). It can also help in understanding the idea of conscious and unconscious memory with panels as the "sites of remembrance placed within the gutters as a sea of forgetting" (Nabizadeh, 2019, p. 4). Comics "access the instability that resides at the heart of memory as they capture its appearance and disappearance" (Nabizadeh, 2019, p. 8). The panels represent its appearance while the gutter space records its disappearance. David Pillemer, a psychologist, delves into the concept of autobiographical memory and highlights the inherently visual nature of these memories. In his exploration, he asserts, "the memories are represented imagistically: 'Intrusions in daily thoughts are typically visual memories and images of the traumatic event'" (Pillemer, 1998, p. 53). This statement underscores the profound connection between memory and its visual representation.

Hirsch first coined the term "postmemory" in the early 1990s in reference to Spiegelman's *Maus*. She defines postmemory as "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before- to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up". Such experiences seem to be a part of own consciousness as they were transmitted so "deeply and effectively" across the generations. The events of the past continue to influence the present. This, according to Hirsch, is the "structure of postmemory and the process of its generation" (2012, p. 5). Her idea of postmemory is mediated by imagination, aesthetic, and personal expression. Postmemory offers "reparative reading" and "alternate ways of knowing" (Hirsch, 2012, p. 24). Graphic narratives, which are outcomes of postmemory, work on similar lines to contribute to the alternate repertoire and undo the finality of any interpretation which negates counter expressions.

Bettina Egger (2018) introduced the concept of "oral history archives" to describe works like *Le Photographe* (*The Photographer*), where the author/illustrator of the comic book makes use of the interviews and conversations with the narrators to produce the text. "For Egger, these comics represent a process of archiving the raw material of interviews, photographs, letters and others that are remediated as drawings or quotes into the comic form" (Nayar, 2021, p. 46). She examines Guibert's work "as a polyphonic and plurimedial graphic novel that stages an archive of representation strategies which combines oral history interviews with photographic remains" (Egger, 2018, p. 59). Through Guibert's work, she studies the relation between "oral history comics" and the archive. In doing so, the inclusions and exclusions that underlie the production of

any archive, as well as the placement of personal memories in such an archive, are highlighted. Baloup's texts, as "oral history comics", offer a distinctive approach to reinterpreting historical narratives.

Drawing upon the outlined theoretical framework, this paper will derive its arguments. Baloup's narrative aligns with Hirsch's concept of postmemory, illustrating the deep affective transmission of trauma across generations and offering alternate ways of understanding through imaginative mediation. Furthermore, Egger's notion of "oral history archives" is reflected in Baloup's integration of interviews, creating a polyphonic narrative that challenges traditional historical records and foregrounds marginalised voices. By doing so, *Vietnamese Memories* not only document but also reimagine the historical record, emphasising the importance of diverse and inclusive narratives. The framework highlights the significant potential of graphic narratives to act as dynamic archives, offering innovative perspectives on history and memory. This approach allows for a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the events of the past.

METHODOLOGY

This paper will undertake a detailed examination of selected primary texts through close textual analysis while simultaneously engaging with a diverse and extensive body of secondary literature. By intertwining the study of form, structure, and content within comics with critical discussions from a broad spectrum of scholarly works, the approach seeks to provide a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis. The selected texts will be analysed for their structural elements, including panel layout, gutter space, and the sequence of images and narratives. This analysis will explore how these structural components contribute to the narrative's representation of memory, considering how the arrangement and design of these elements shape the reader's experience and interpretation. Additionally, the stylistic choices made by the artists—such as the use of colour, line work, and visual motifs—will be closely examined for their effectiveness in conveying emotional depth and narrative complexity. Building on comics theories, as well as drawing from trauma and memory studies, the methodology employed in this paper aims to produce a nuanced understanding of how comics can encapsulate and communicate complex narratives of historical events and personal memories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

CLEMENT BALOUP'S *VIETNAMESE MEMORIES*

Baloup is an author, illustrator, and a cartoonist born to a French mother and a Vietnamese father living in France. His texts aim to record the experiences and narratives of those who have long been silenced by the dominant discourse. This quest emerges out of his father's story of migration. During his journey through different parts of France and the U.S., he meets different people, particularly those who were displaced because of the unrest in Vietnam and takes the opportunity to carefully document their life stories, which he later illustrates in two graphic narratives. The first volume, *Vietnamese Memories: Leaving Saigon*, hosts five stories, including Baloup's father's story of migration.

The first story introduces readers to Baloup's father and his migration and resettlement in France. Baloup travels around France, documenting the experiences of Vietnamese immigrants. In the second story, we encounter Mr. Nguyen and the horrors of the re-education camps after Saigon's fall. The third narrative tells André's story, who fled Saigon twice—first during World War II due to his French heritage, and later during the Vietnam War, never to return. The fourth story follows Jacques and his family's perilous sea journey as refugees of the Vietnam War. The final section takes readers to the Cafi area in France, a community where Vietnamese who left after the French administration's withdrawal preserve their memories, culture, and roots. We also met Abel and learn about his journey to Cafi. Volume 1 includes a second section, *Linh Tho*, adapted by Baloup from comic journalist Pierre Daum's work. It highlights undocumented stories of the forced immigration of Indochinese workers during World War II, a work that had a significant impact in recognising these workers' roles in France.

The second volume, *Vietnamese Memories: Little Saigon*, centres on the migration stories of five women across different parts of the U.S. In Part 1, Romy, a Filipino, guides Baloup to the Lao Area in San Francisco Bay, a ghetto home to people from Laos and Cambodia, also affected by the Vietnam War. She then leads him to the Vietnamese district, where in Part 2, Dangerous Beauty, Anh's story of sexual violence in refugee camps unfolds. Part 3, set in Los Angeles, explores cultural hubs like Chinatown, Little Tokyo, and Little Saigon, where we meet Mae, Mimi, and Yên, whose story continues in Part 4, Champion. Yên's attempts to escape Ho Chi Minh City and the repressive post-war regime, despite failed attempts and imprisonment, ultimately lead to her successful migration to the U.S. for her daughter's better future. The final part, set in Charleston, South Carolina, follows Nicole's life through its ups and downs, culminating in her reunion with the love of her life and a happy life in the U.S.

For analysis, this paper discusses the stories related to the Vietnam War. These previously unheard and undocumented stories put into question the placement and validation of certain narratives over the others. By recording personal memories in the form of graphic narratives, Baloup preserves the unrepresented memories of a community. This visual archive questions the official by foregrounding the personal.

PRODUCTS OF POSTMEMORY

A kitchen conversation between a father-son duo that kindled the quest to record the experiences of Vietnamese immigrants led to the creation of two marvellous graphic narratives that bring to the forefront those stories which otherwise find no mention in the official records that largely constitute the history of the unrest in Vietnam. These texts are products of 'postmemory', which are based upon the stories, experiences, and memories of those who faced the horrors first-hand. Baloup belongs to the postmemory generation and attempts to bring together the memories which need to be preserved to claim their rightful place in history. "There are so many stories that deserve to be heard. So many heroic journeys, tales of survival, and family dramas that people keep quietly to themselves" (Baloup, 2018b, Epilogue).

Baloup gives representation to the memories of the direct witnesses, as for the postmemory generation, the "memory consists not of events, but of representation" (Hirsch, 2001, p. 8). In the absence of direct witnesses, these visual documents can act as the connecting link to the events of the past. We see "familial" as well as "affiliative" postmemory, where the transmission of memory is not just within the family, from one generation to another, but also across generations. Baloup incorporates the life narratives of others, as well as makes the collective memory available to his contemporaries and for the generations to come, "a larger collective in an organic web of

transmission" (Hirsch, 2012, p. 36). The father's narrative fuels Baloup's desire to learn about history and collect such memories. The family's role in mediating and representing these memories helps foster connection within the community and in the newer generation, as Hirsch (2012, p. 39) suggests: "*familial* structures of mediation and representation facilitate the *affiliative* acts of the postgeneration" (Italics in original text). Cultural memory is facilitated by postmemory mediation and transmitted through oral narratives, which are materialised as graphic texts.

A work of postmemory "strives to *reactivate* and *re-embody* more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression" (Hirsch, 2012, p. 33) (Italics in original text). Baloup's aesthetic intervention gives life to the various stories and materialises them in the form of graphic narratives. For Baloup, there is a distance between the actual events and his awareness of them. It is through his father that a sense of history, belongingness, and the desire to record that history awakens in him. It is either through his father or the people whom he encounters that he gets to envision the events of the war and how they affected the narrators. Hirsch's (2011, p. 22) concept of postmemory, characterised by its "imaginative investment and creation", finds resonance in Nabizadeh's (2019, p. 2) idea on the role of "imagination and visual play" in the formation of personal memories. Together, they underscore the shared emphasis on the significance of imagination and creative engagement in shaping one's relationship to memory.

Baloup draws the scenes as they might have looked like and puts his own imagination to work. He visualises the events based on the oral tales. It is in the act of drawing that the memories of the past are represented. These texts form a link between the past and the present through Baloup's mediation and concretise the unremembered accounts. They bring to life and make tangible the stories and memories that were never recorded. The memories are illustrated, and hence, visual representation becomes important to the task of postmemory here. This also emphasises the significance of aesthetics and creative arts in the process. The visual representation, the artistic choices made, and the emotional impact of this representation are all crucial factors in ensuring that these memories are not overlooked or forgotten. Creative expression and aesthetics are important in keeping these memories alive and "unforgetting what has been overlooked" (Rigney, 2021, p. 12).

THE REPARATIVE ART

Vietnamese Memories, as the postmemorial visual archive, opens the way for "reparative reading" and challenge the institutionalisation of only selective knowledge. Such an approach offers "alternative ways of knowing" and the possibility for exploration of marginal experiences which are otherwise kept outside the domains of traditional knowledge (Hirsch, 2012, p. 24). As "oral history comics", these texts serve as a unique vehicle for reimagining the historical record. They contribute to the formation of an alternative "repertoire" of knowledge, one that sheds light on previously neglected aspects of history. In doing so, they underscore the vital importance of developing both aesthetic and institutional frameworks that extend beyond the confines of traditional historical archives (Hirsch, 2012, p. 2). The inclusion of different kinds of testimonies makes this possible. Baloup's texts, which are home to diverse memories and voices, bring into the picture such an alternate repertoire. This is also instrumental in the creation of a counter-memory that calls for a reassessment of the idea of a singular past that denies the marginalised memories.

The institutionalised archives are social and cultural constructions, and so are their inclusions and omissions; what is recorded and preserved is as important as what is not. The

authority to decide lies with the dominant groups. Certainly, the testimonies that align with the privileged discourse find a record in the archives, while the dissenting ones are excluded. Baloup's texts bring attention to the forgotten memories and thus question the formulation of the archive. The intervention of these accounts brings to question their placement in the archive. Such memories reclaim their place in cultural memory, and their placement in the archive can act "as a point of transference, between communicative memory and cultural memory", the inclusion of the personal into the cultural (Mickwitz, 2014, p. 133). They can act as the link between the personal and the cultural memory. As the reparative art, *Vietnamese Memories* advance "alternative ways of knowing" by focusing on the marginalised. The previously unacknowledged memories claim representation and restoration in the cultural memory as their exclusion questions the very idea of archive formation.

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF MEMORIES

David Pillemer (1998, p. 1) points out that "for truly momentous events, memory longevity is expected". The memory of the event stays with the victim and reappears repeatedly. Studies (Caruth, 1995, pp. 4–5; Earle, 2017, p. 77; Moran, 2007, p. 5) show that for such momentous events, specifically traumatic ones, the memory is characterised by visual elements. The imagistic quality of such traumatic memories challenges its representation through a singular mode of expression. "Personal event memories cannot be adequately described as occurring within a single level of mental representation or as involving a single mode of expression" (Pillemer, 1998, p. 22). As Pillemer (1998, p. 52) suggests, there are two levels of representation in personal event memories: image and narrative. There is a relationship between these two, as the felt experience needs to be communicated verbally. "The phenomenal experience at the time of a momentous occurrence is not primarily verbal; things are seen, heard, and felt" (Pillemer, 1998, pp. 52–3). When communicating such events, the sensory experience is translated into the verbal narrative. "The common presence of perceptual, imagistic representation alongside narrative suggests that personal event memories are the blended productions of two functionally distinct but interacting memory systems" (Pillemer, 1998, p. 55). The visual-verbal duality of memory structure indicates why comics may be well suited for the representation of certain kinds of events and the associated memories. The multimodality of this form depicts meaning at multiple levels where it is continuously constructed. The various elements portray meaning simultaneously, coherently and opposingly at the same time, like the movement of memories in the mind.

The formal elements of comics lend the way for the depiction of traumatic memory in its basic form: fragmented, non-linear, and challenging temporal boundaries. The gaps in comics reinforce the idea that memory cannot always be represented. The extremity of certain traumatic events can render them inexpressible, as the memories remain preserved in the mind but often struggle to find a channel for representation, thus eliding into the gutter space. The spatiality of comics materialises memory as a process on its pages. The movement of time is recorded in the physical space of the comics. As we read comics, we experience the passage of time, and thus, it can record the flow of memories over time. Chute (2011b, p. 293) maintains that the structural form of comics can "express the movement of memory. It both evokes and provokes memory: placing themselves in space; authors may forcefully convey the shifting layers of memory and create a peculiar entry point for representing experience". Comics, therefore, act as an appropriate medium "for thinking about, imagining, and representing memory" (Nabizadeh, 2019, p. 4).

Just as memory is mediated by the recaller, the act of drawing involves the illustrator mediating the representation of events through their images. This mediation is evident in comics,

a self-reflexive medium that not only represents but also reveals the process of representation, marked by the presence of the graphiateur in the drawings. Baloup records and illustrates the accounts of witnesses, engaging in what Nayar describes as "amanuensistic witnessing". This process involves absorbing the eyewitness's account into the artist's subjectivity and expressing it through drawing (2021, p. 130). The material space of the panels becomes the site of this witnessing, where memories are reconstructed through imagination. As Nayar (2021, p. 103) notes, in amanuensistic witnessing, there is no direct referentiality; instead, readers "see the drawings as *mediated versions of what the artist-storyteller perceived* in the faces, events, and accounts s/he encountered" (Italics in original). This process gives memorability to the witnesses' accounts through visual representation. These images have the potential to draw readers into secondary witnessing, bringing attention to neglected stories that are absent from official archives. Through this, we become witnesses to events that are not officially acknowledged and are prompted to consider the place of personal memories within the official record.

Comics represent memory through specific graphic practices, and Baloup's use of these techniques in *Vietnamese Memories* captivates readers while emphasising the nuances of memory recollection and representation. The colour palette plays a crucial role, with the scale ranging from blue-grey tones to bright reds, oranges, and greens. Flashbacks are often depicted in monotone, while present events are rendered in vibrant hues. Baloup uses this colour distinction to differentiate between past memories and present events. Occasionally, he introduces bright colours into a monotone frame to highlight the lingering impact of past events on the present. As Baloup notes, "But I like to play with the emotion of the colour so sometimes when the past is vivid, bright colour pop up in a blue-grey scene" (Gusain & Jha, 2022, p. 52).

For instance, in *Leaving Saigon*, when Mr. Nguyen recalls the horrors of the re-education camp, a bright shade of red is introduced in a monotone panel to signify the enduring presence of those traumatic memories. Similarly, when Mr Nguyen describes the fall of Saigon and its takeover by communist forces, Baloup paints the panel red, using the colour to symbolise communism and its violent impact. In another scene, as Mr. Nguyen talks about the indoctrination of communist ideology through relentless lectures, Baloup illustrates this with a root-like structure formed by the shadows of the officers, symbolising the forced rooting of this ideology into the inmates' minds. A panel focusing on an open, shouting mouth further emphasises the aggressive nature of this indoctrination. These detailed graphic choices reflect the powerful interplay between memory and emotion in Baloup's work.

Pillemer (1998, p. 55) suggests that "memory descriptions usually are consistent with the general form and content of past experiences, even if particular details are lost, added, or distorted in the act of remembering". The various narrators recall their horrific experiences in depth, and the graphic rendition can be seen in the minute details of Baloup's illustration. Mr. Nguyen's horrors of the re-education camps are portrayed by putting emphasis on the bodily sufferings of the victims. Baloup's attention to details like sweat drops, torn hands, fine lines, and skeletal physique parallels Mr. Nguyen's sharp recollection of such details. The weak and miserable bodies speak of torture, hunger, sleeplessness, and sickness. The emphasis on these suffering bodies portrays the vulnerability they experience. The depiction of this vulnerability stirs an emotional response in the readers, making them a witness to this suffering. The pain is materialised on the pages through these images.

Anh's account of sexual violence is depicted through panels filled with darkness or black backgrounds, symbolising the lasting impact of these traumatic events. Some of the panels run across the entire length of the page and "suggest the illimitable and continuing impact of those

events, even if they now exist only in memory" (Nayar, 2021, p. 109). The darkness in these panels contrasts with the rest of the narrative, highlighting the ongoing trauma. Early in the narrative, hints of the second big brother's intentions are shown through illustrations that focus on different parts of Anh's body, culminating in a close-up of his grim, dark-lined face, foreshadowing the violence to come. During the assault, he is often depicted as a black shadow, embodying the darkness of his personality. The traumatic memory is emphasised by close-ups of Anh's tear-filled eyes during the assault, and in the following panels, she is shown fading into darkness while crying. Baloup's detailed illustrations reflect the narrator's recollection of this pivotal and haunting memory.

Nicole's life is vividly illustrated through powerful imagery that reveals her mental state and how she recalls pivotal events. After moving to France during the war, Nicole loses hope of reuniting with her ex-boyfriend Tam, marries Salvatore, and later relocates to the U.S. for his job. When Salvatore betrays her, leaving her with children and no money, Nicole feels overwhelmed by despair, believing she is possessed by demons with no chance of salvation. The illustrations depict these demons tormenting her, with dark backgrounds symbolising her descent into darkness and deteriorating mental health. Baloup's portrayal captures the haunting memories of this period, emphasising their lasting impact through detailed and evocative techniques. Baloup's graphic portrayal vivifies the memories of the various narrators. The various techniques and attention to detail signify the impact of those memories on the recallers.

Baloup, by drawing the past and present selves together on the same page, illustrates the process of memory recollection. In *Leaving Saigon*, Baloup draws the past and the present selves of his father together on the page. It marks the end of his story, thus pointing towards the recollection of various events witnessed over the material space of the previous panels. The two selves, side by side, delineate the development of the self and capture memory as a process. In the father's story, we also witness the body being fragmented into different panels. Instead of showing it in totality, Baloup chooses to illustrate the body in parts in the different panels. This, in addition to the already fragmented form of comics, reflects the basic structure of traumatic memory, appearing in parts and, at times, disrupting the chronology.

ALTERNATE FORM OF REMEMBRANCE

Comics not only visually represent memories but also create an alternate form of remembrance by materialising the absent on the page. The act of drawing gives a spatiality to the otherwise unrecorded happenings. On the pages of his graphic narratives, Baloup materialises those experiences, memories, and facts which have long been silenced due to trauma and the hegemony of the prevalent narrative. We see Baloup bringing together experiences that range right from the horrors of the war to the settlement issues in a new land. We see glimpses of the re-education camps, the terrifying sea journeys, incidents of rapes and other sexual violence, separation of loved ones, life in refugee camps, ethnic settlements like the Cafi area and the 'Little Saigon', and settlement problems away from the homeland. These texts then act as the "human documents", giving voice to the marginalised by recording such accounts. As Chute (2016, p. 19) discusses, the "human document" is the opposite of the "official" kind, thus focusing on the personal. Such "human documents" showcase the absence and elimination of personal memories and stories from the archive.

Baloup's portrayal of Mr Nguyen's story sheds light on the grim reality of the re-education camps after the fall of Saigon. With no proper records of these camps, including the number of people confined or who died there, Nguyen recalls the panic as American advisors were evacuated,

leaving the Vietnamese population to suffer. As the communist regime took over, Nguyen and other civil servants were ordered to attend a training program, only to be transported to re-education camps, where they faced relentless torture. Forced to write and rewrite confessions of their association with the previous government, they endured starvation, sleep deprivation, and gruelling labour, often relocated with no knowledge of their whereabouts. After five years, Nguyen was finally released. Baloup's illustrations capture the suffering and hopelessness of the prisoners, challenging the sanitised official records and echoing Truong's (2017, p. 274) observation that "the West didn't see much of these Asian concentration camps".

The war's aftermath led many to flee Vietnam, risking their lives on perilous sea journeys, earning the name "boat people". Desperate to escape the communist regime, countless individuals vanished without record during these attempts. In *Leaving Saigon*, we encounter Jacques, whose family's harrowing sea journey to escape Saigon reveals the fear, struggle, and deaths endured. Jacques' father, being a high-ranking officer, was allowed to flee the night before Saigon's fall. Their journey, from a packed boat to a barge and finally to a ship, was a nightmare. In a splash panel, Baloup depicts the overcrowded barge in a monotone, blurring the distinction between waves and sky to emphasise the endlessness and desperation of the journey. Jacques vividly recalls the ordeal—the suffocating heat, freezing nights, and the unbearable wait with no horizon in sight. Baloup captures the struggle and hopelessness on the travellers' faces and illustrates the vast sea to convey the journey's dreadfulness. The horror is palpable as people climb from the barge to the ship, witnessing fellow travellers being crushed. Though Jacques was just a child, these traumatic memories remain vivid. He notes that being a child "doesn't stop me from remembering everything in perfect detail" (Baloup, 2018a, Part 4). Like the re-education camps, these countless sea journeys and lost lives are largely unacknowledged.

Baloup provides glimpses into the harsh realities of refugee camps, highlighting the struggles of those who fled Saigon seeking better futures. Anh's story focuses on her time in the Pulau Bidong refugee camp, where 40,000 people lived in cramped, unpleasant conditions. Despite trying to adapt, Anh was victimised, suffering two rapes by a fellow refugee she trusted, shattering her spirit. The story also reveals through Major Hansen, an American officer, that rape by sea pirates and others was not uncommon. Though Anh worked for Hansen, she never shared her own traumatic experiences. Before reaching America, Anh endured another difficult stay in a refugee camp. Baloup's illustrations bring these painful, often silenced stories to light.

In drawing these memories and stories, Baloup is also performing the act of "embodiment". As Chute (2011a, p. 112) suggests, drawing in comics is also about drawing the bodies and materialising them. If comics concretise and map events, stories, and memories over the physical space of the panel, they also map the lost, unmarked, and suffering bodies. Baloup materialises on his pages the memories of the past, which is also achieved by giving physicality to the suffering bodies. In our reading of the above-mentioned experiences, it is also the suffering body that speaks of the horrors faced. "Embodiment in comics may be read as a kind of compensation for lost bodies, for lost histories. Comics resurrects and materialises" (Chute, 2011a, p. 112). They resurrect those who are lost by recreating it on the page and making concrete the lost aspects of the past. Personal memories are recreated through drawn images, thus expanding the visual archive. In illustrating the unarchived stories, Baloup depicts the rarely captured and discussed events of the past. He gives a voice to those who cannot afford to tell their stories.

REPRESENTATION AND AUTHENTICITY

Comics representing personal accounts are often questioned for their truth value and authenticity. Moreover, the mutable and fragmentary nature of memories is cited as a possible reason for the distortion of facts. However, for momentous events, the details are retained, as proposed by Pillemer (1998, p. 1). In an interview, Baloup suggested something similar, "I found that the narrators were surprisingly sharp about details; they have a vivid memory of the events" (Gusain & Jha, 2022, p. 50). As a drawn medium, mediated in nature, comics fall under scrutiny when portraying historical events. But as a self-reflexive medium, comics draw attention to the limitations and mediation as well. As Hatfield (2005, p. 131) suggests, comics work through "ironic authentication", "a means of graphically asserting truthfulness through the admission of artifice". The formal properties of the medium indicate the gaps and point out the fragmentary nature of memories and narratives. The drawings mark subjectivity but also the presence of the narrator. This presence underlies the fact that someone has witnessed the events personally or the narrator gives representation to the experiences or life events of the others. These drawn images then act as the trace "not of the object it depicts but rather as an inscription of the physical presence and gesture of its originator" (Mickwitz, 2014, p. 98). Comics materialise on the pages the interpretation of the events as they are experienced by the narrators and not their mimetic representation. It is about the "emotional truth" and the reinforcement of the fact that there is no unmediated truth (Kunka, 2018, p. 8).

Comics work through the notion of "performed authenticity", developing trustworthiness rather than establishing a singular truth claim (Refaie, 2012, p. 137). The texts' stylistic features are a way to perform authenticity. As discussed, the detailed graphic rendition of the verbal accounts of the narrators points out the intricate nature of the stories. Also, they are presented without any kind of intervention on Baloup's part. We see the stories as they probably happened, and it is the narrator's voice, and not Baloup's, that guides the reader into the course of the action. Baloup begins his first volume with an 'introductory section' that includes black and white representations of some of the iconic images and events that are usually associated with the history of Vietnam. In doing so, he sets the ground for the stories to follow and suggests that they are as authentic as the official ones. The inclusion of Pierre Daum's journalistic work, *Linh Tho*, as an extension of the first volume indicates a similar approach to Baloup's work in unburying the buried stories.

The subjectivity of hand-drawn images is often contrasted with the perceived objectivity of camera-produced photographs due to the "direct relationship between image and referent" in the photos (Mickwitz, 2014, p. 82). Photographs capture a moment in time and are often seen as truthful representations of reality. However, all forms of representation involve mediation, whether in photographs or drawn images. The infamous 'Saigon Execution' photograph by Eddie Adams illustrates this point. The image of General Loan shooting a Viet-Cong prisoner damaged South Vietnam's and Loan's reputation globally, yet the photograph lacked the context that the prisoner had killed a police colonel's family, which led to Loan's action. "The viewer can never be certain what really happened at the time the picture was taken, while the photographer cannot know how it will be read in the future" (Refaie, 2012, p. 159). This highlights how the interpretation of any image, whether photographic or drawn, can be misleading. The mediation in photographs, as in the 'Saigon Execution', raises questions about the reliability of all forms of visual representation, not just drawn images. If drawn images are considered unreliable, then they also bring under scrutiny representation through any means.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the representation of memory through the medium of comics, using Clément Baloup's *Vietnamese Memories* series as a primary example. These works underscore the importance of personal memories in understanding historical events, providing a counter-narrative to official discourses. The role of visual representation in these texts is pivotal, as it creates an alternate form of remembrance, materialising the absent and the silenced on the page. The dual modality of comics, combining visual and verbal elements, offers a unique capability to capture the complexity of memory. As scholars such as Pillemer (1998, p. 55) and Nabizadeh (2019, p. 8) have noted, memories, particularly traumatic ones, are often imagistic and fragmented, challenging representation through a single mode of expression. Comics, with their inherent structure of panels and gutters, mirror the non-linear and fragmented nature of memory, effectively representing both presence and absence. Visual representation in graphic narratives like *Vietnamese Memories* provides a vivid portrayal of memory that engages readers on multiple levels. The use of colour palettes to distinguish between past and present, detailed depictions of traumatic experiences, and the emphasis on specific visual details all contribute to an immersive and emotionally resonant narrative. These techniques allow readers to experience the fluid and mutable nature of memory, where meaning is actively constructed through the interplay of images and text.

Baloup's work exemplifies how comics can act as a powerful medium for secondary witnessing, enabling readers to engage with and bear witness to the narrated events. This engagement fosters a deeper connection with the memories being presented, ensuring that these personal accounts are not lost to history. By creating an alternate archive, Baloup's works validate the forgotten tales, challenging the institutionalised cultural memory and advocating for the inclusion of marginalised voices. The scholarship on memory and visual representation highlights the importance of comics in capturing and conveying the complexities of memory. Chute (2011a, p. 109) and Kunka (2018, p. 84) emphasise the suitability of comics for representing traumatic experiences due to their fragmented and visual nature. The visual-verbal interplay in comics facilitates a richer, more nuanced understanding of the past, bridging the gap between personal and collective memory. The integration of visual and linguistic elements in comics not only enhances the representation of memory but also provides a crucial platform for marginalised narratives. The dual modality of comics allows for a multi-layered depiction of memory, capturing its fluidity, fragmentation, and emotional depth. By doing so, works like *Vietnamese Memories* play a vital role in preserving and honouring the diverse experiences that constitute the collective history, ensuring that these stories continue to resonate with future generations.

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