

SDSU CENTER FOR COMICS STUDIES

Why This Comic for Social Justice?



“Power Born of Dreams: My Story is Palestine” breaks down the dehumanization faced by the people of Gaza from the perspective of those directly affected. By telling the story through the lens of an individual, it makes abstract political concepts like occupation, displacement, and human rights violations tangible and personal.

The comic format makes this story accessible and allows complex geopolitical issues to be broken down in a way that’s engaging and easily understand. For those unfamiliar with the intricacies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the visual nature of the comic and its clear, concise storytelling help demystify the situation. Overall, this comic presents the Palestinian struggle in a way that fosters understanding, showing readers the emotional and psychological toll of injustice.

“What is a prisoner’s concept of freedom from the inside of a dark cell?”



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About the Comic



Summary of Story

The story opens with a bird, symbolic of the independence the prisoner lacks, perched on the cell window. He offers to bring stories to the prisoner, author and artist Mohammad Sabaaneh, in return for him agreeing to record stories of the people. This setup allows for an organic narrative to be built where readers learn about the history, everyday lives, and continuous dehumanization of Palestinians.

Through this perspective, we see that prison is not limited just to physical cells. Instead, the entire area is a police state full of danger and obstacles for people trying to live their daily lives: walking to school on broken streets in blistering shoes, while soldiers in tanks loom at every corner; mothers praying for their children's safety, only to end up wondering how they can keep their babies warm now that they are in the morgue.

“Power Born of Dreams: My Story is Palestine” humanizes the ongoing conflict in ways both elegant and heartbreaking.

Readers are dragged down into a dark cell alongside an imprisoned political cartoonist. The immersion forces readers to reconcile their previous perception with the reality of human rights violations in Gaza.



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About the Creator



Mohammad Sabaaneh

Mohammad Sabaaneh is a Palestinian cartoonist and a former political prisoner in Israel. His work has been published in the Middle East Monitor as well as Al-Quds Al-Arabi, and he is the principal political cartoonist for the Palestinian Authority's daily newspaper, Al-Hayat al-Jadida. Mohammad is a Middle East representative for the Cartoonists Rights Network International and teaches art at the Arab American University of Palestine. His work has been included in international art fairs around the world. The author of "White and Black," he received his master's degree on a Chevening Scholarship from the University for the Creative Arts, London, UK. He currently lives in Ramallah, in the West Bank.

"My story begins in prison...The life of the Palestinian has become a hemorrhage between military checkpoints, and between one prison and another...This book is an attempt to translate headlines into stories and illustrations, so that you, the reader, can see and feel the reality of Palestinian life." – Mohammad Sabaaneh, author and artist, "Power Born of Dreams: My Story is Palestine"

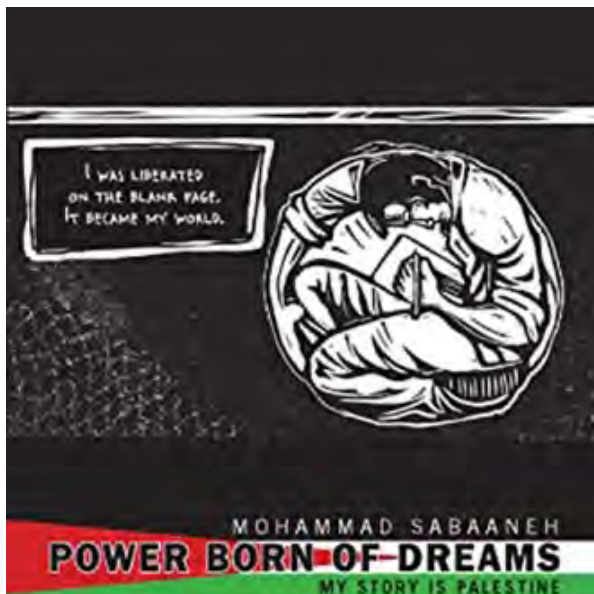


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Discussion Questions



1. Discuss the structure of the narrative in “Power Born of Dreams,” including the use of the bird and pencil motif, and the pathway that connects each story. How does this structure enhance the stories? To what extent is it ever confusing or distracting?
2. Many journalists and witnesses have reported on the conflict in Gaza. In what ways does the lived experience of a Palestinian prisoner such as Sabaaneh differ from non-residents who travel to report? What are your thoughts on first-hand narratives versus visitor witness accounts?
3. The illustrations play with dimensions of the panels and pages in a way that contributes to the reader’s feeling of also being inside the prison cell. How does this enhance or detract from the story?



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Discussion Questions



4. The imagery in the book was created by linocut, which is a printmaking technique where a sharp tool is used to cut designs into linoleum and then printing the raised areas. The author states he was “unable to carve my name into the walls of my prison cell,” which was what inspired him to “carve” the prisoner’s stories and share the book with the world.” After reading the book, and watching this [brief video](#) where Sabaaneh shares the process of creating each linocut illustration, think about the nature of graphic novels versus traditional prose novels. How do illustrations enhance or detract from the storytelling? Why was it important to Sabaaneh to illustrate his experience in this way, especially when the process was so tedious?

5. From the perspective of the Israelis, why conduct random interrogations, prison cell rotations, and other intentional upheavals to the prisoner’s routines? What is their intent and purpose in using these practices?

6. Colonialism is defined by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy as “A practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people to another.” By this definition, think of a region in the world, at any point in human history, that has experienced colonialism. Using the example you came up with, discuss the similarities and differences in the ways the systems of power have attempted to assert dominance over other people. Are there any factors that might be universal to these situations?



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Discussion Questions



7. Consider the role of journalists in relaying messages and sharing information. Why do their core job functions make them frequent targets of criminalization? How do we see this play out with Sabaaneh throughout the story?

I wake up in the morning while... I hiss my partner while...
I wake up my kids while... I brush my teeth while...
I shower while... I eat breakfast while... I take the bus while...
I go to work while... I listen to the radio while...
I put a wash on while... I cook lunch while...
I greet my colleagues while... I vacuum the floor while...
I read a book while... I go to the law while...
I go to the supermarket while... I go to a demo while...
I laugh at a joke while... I check IG while... I look at myself in the mirror while...
I do the dishes while... I call a friend on the phone while... I go to the gym while...
I ask myself how all this is possible while...
I watch on TV Gaza getting bombed while... I fall asleep while...
I put my alarm for tomorrow while...

GAZA IS BEING BOMBED

8. The book breaks down the dehumanization faced by the people of Gaza from the perspective of those directly affected. Meanwhile, the public and politicians around the world find this conflict to be a complex one. Consider and discuss your own stance on the situation. What factors make it complicated? Try to consider these questions in terms of basic human rights versus struggles over power and control.



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Activities and Assignments



1. Pre-reading assignment: Think about what you already know or have heard about the Palestinian conflict.

- What current beliefs do you hold about the conflict in Palestine, if any?
- What questions do you have?
- Consider what preconceived biases you might have, such as which groups or people you think are “wrong” or “right.”

Spend five minutes reflecting on your thoughts, knowledge base, and existing questions. Keep your notes handy for referring back to after you complete the reading.

2. Post-reading assignment: Once you’ve finished “Power Born of Dreams,” spend five minutes journaling your thoughts and feelings. Consider the following, and be prepared to discuss:

- What have you learned?
- How have your pre-writing ideas changed (or not)?
- Write down what questions you still have.

3. There are many examples of symbolism seen in the illustrations throughout the story. Write out at least two that you noticed. Next, either sketch images or write words that come to your mind when you think about the story. Share your thoughts with the class or smaller group.

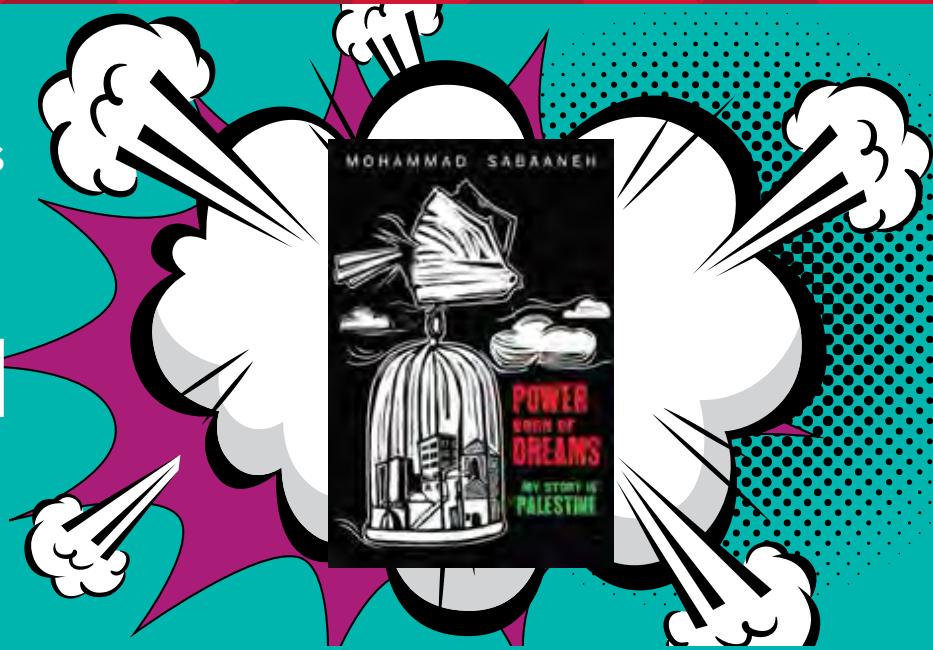
4. Whether intentional or not, the art style, themes, and narrative framework in “Power Born of Dreams” have many similarities to Will Eisner’s “A Contract With God and Other Tenement Stories.” Once you have reviewed both titles, free-write more specific similarities, along with any notable differences. Cite at least three similarities and differences from the text and prepare to discuss.



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Further Reading and



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Kerbaj, M., Traboulsi, J., Maasri, Z., & Toukan, H. “Gaza in plain sight: witnessing in solidarity.” (2024). *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 22, No. 3. Accessed 4 October 2024.

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Further Reading and



Read-Alikes

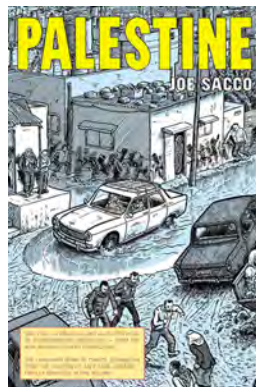
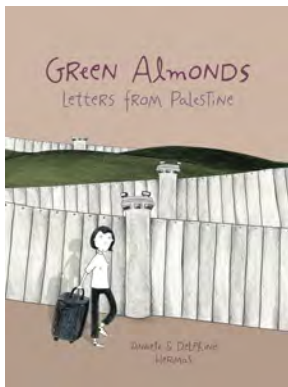
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Hermans, A. "Green Almonds: Letters from Palestine." Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2001.

Sacco, J. "Palestine." Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics, 2001.

Sacco, J. "Footnotes in Gaza." New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company, Inc., 2010.



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About the Educator



Moni Barrette

Moni Barrette is a career public librarian who expanded her expertise in libraries, comics, and relationship building through her role at Comics Plus for LibraryPass as the director of content management and publisher relations. As co-founder of the nonprofit Creators Assemble, president of the American Library Association's Graphic Novel & Comics Round Table, and former lecturer at SDSU, she is dedicated to promoting learning through the use of comics and popular culture. A 2023 Eisner Awards judge, Barrette frequently attends comic conventions, hosts industry networking events, and helps librarians and educators implement comics and tabletop role playing games into their learning spaces. In her spare time, Barrette loves hanging out with her husband, daughters, and poorly mannered rescue dogs. She can often be found hunting for ghosts in old historic locations across the country.

