Teaching Jihad: Developing Religious Literacy through Graphic Novels

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Abstract: This study examined the representations of jihad in graphic novels to ascertain how its depictions may inform the development of religious literacy in secondary classrooms. Hegemonic constructions of jihad in the West are commonly reduced to false binaries that shape non-Muslims' extant beliefs and perceptions of Islam and Muslims. This raises concerns about the ways in which societal expectations shape knowledge formation in schools. Accordingly, this critical content analysis explored the depiction of jihad in three graphic novel memoirs, an increasingly popular medium of instruction in secondary classrooms. Our analysis identified three forms of jihad conveyed through the graphic novels, specifically: jihad for education, jihad for gender justice, and jihad for identity. These representations provide robust counternarratives and suggest the value of teaching religious concepts through graphic novels as a way to develop deeper understandings and counter misinformation. The article concludes with six recommendations for educators to consider when teaching religious content through contemporary graphic novels.

Keywords: jihad; religious literacy; Islam; graphic novels; curriculum; education; gender justice; Muslim identity; expectations

1. Introduction

In Western contexts, jihad is often constructed in mass media as a "holy war", rather than its more accurate Arabic meaning of *struggle*, *strive*, or *exert effort* to live a just and ethical life (Antúnez and Tellidis 2013; Cook 2005; Esposito 2010; Fatoohi 2009; Hathout 2006; Kabbani 2010; Tagg 2009, p. 320). This miscommunication of jihad reinforces perceptions that Islam and Muslims are disposed to violence and antagonistic to Western democratic values (Bleich and van der Veen 2018; Curtis 2015; Rauf 2005; Saleem 2017). Moreover, this simplistic portrayal of jihad—and by extension Islam—is commonly reduced to false binaries that position Islam against the West, such as: tradition versus modernity; violence versus peace; oppression versus liberation; monoculturalism versus plurality; and religion versus secularism, amongst others (Esposito and Mogahed 2007). Undergirding these dualisms is the conviction that Islam is wholly incompatible with Western values and ways of life (Abou El Fadl 2005).

Further to this, other derogatory portrayals of Islam and Muslims are reinforced through the long-standing tradition in Western film, literature, cartoons, news outlets, and theatrical productions typecasting Muslims as exotic, dangerous, and untrustworthy (Esposito and Kalin 2011; Kincheloe and Steinberg 2004; Said 1997; Scott 2012; Shaheen 1994, 2003; Tagg 2009). These misrepresentations shape non-Muslims' extant perceptions (Esposito and Mogahed 2007) and raise concerns about the ways in

which Muslims and Islamic concepts are portrayed in schools (Liou and Cutler 2020). Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to examine the often misunderstood and miscommunicated concept, jihad, in order to ascertain how it is represented in graphic novels, an increasingly popular medium of instruction in secondary classrooms, and how this may inform the development of religious literacy. To this end, two central questions guided this inquiry:

1. How is jihad represented in contemporary graphic novels with Muslim protagonists?
2. How might religious literacy improve understandings of jihad, Muslims, and Islam in Western contexts?

This article begins with a review of the literature, which includes a discussion of religious literacy and how it frames understandings of religious concepts. We next consider graphic novels, their use in classrooms, and how Islam and Muslims are positioned in Western media. The complexity of jihad is presented, followed by an explanation of the critical content analysis method used in this study. Key findings are presented thematically followed by a discussion that expands on the literature. This study draws attention to the use of graphic novels, specifically in regards to jihad.

2. Religious Literacy

Concerns about global violence done in the name of Islam has brought a once marginal religion to the forefront of discussions about security, politics, and social cohesion in Western states (Brooks 2018; Brooks and Ezzani 2017; Lipka 2017). Non-Muslims often know little about Islam, with the majority of Westerners having few to no interactions with Muslims (Brooks 2010, 2013; Ezzani and Brooks 2015; Gardner and Evans 2018). As a consequence, media representations have inordinately shaped non-Muslim views of Islam and its 1.8 billion adherents (Saleem et al. 2017). This suggests an urgent need for non-Muslims in Western contexts to have access to accurate information about Islam, indicating schools as appropriate sites for imparting religious literacy (Baer and Glasgow 2010; Banks 2016; Liou and Cutler 2020).

However, the inclusion of religion in Western secular school curricula is contested (Conroy et al. 2012; Jackson 2016; Jödicke 2013; Smyth et al. 2013; Weisse 2010). Yet, developing meaningful understandings about religion remains one of the most important sociocultural dynamics that shape societies (Dinham and Francis 2015; Habermas 2006; Revell 2012; Richardson 2017). Individuals who develop accurate understandings of religion are able to analyse how and in what ways religions intersect with social, cultural, and political contexts (Prothero 2008). A religiously literate person will possess:

> (1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, and practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical, and cultural contexts; and (2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social, and cultural expressions across time and place. (Moore 2014, p. 380)

Developing religious literacy helps students have increased knowledge of society, culture, politics, ethics, literature, history, and art. Religious literacy introduces students to important, and possibly unfamiliar, concepts that shape peoples' ontology—both in their own communities and around the world, while also having the critical capacity to differentiate myths and falsehoods from veracity.

Therefore, the development of religious literacy requires engagement with different ethical frameworks and contentions about the nature of knowledge and different philosophies of life. This can be accomplished through specific units on religion or integrating religious topics throughout a curriculum (Brooks 2018; Ezzani and Brooks 2019; Moore 2014). Teaching religious literacy requires teachers to create caring and supportive communities (Noddings 1993, 2006) that allow students to grapple with religion as it interconnects with ethics, morality, history, and power (Kunzman 2006). This raises questions as to whether teachers should be neutral in their delivery of religious content,

and whether this is achievable in practice (Martínez-Torrón and Durham 2012; Zaver 2015). Ultimately, developing religiously literate young people is grounded in the notion that individuals should affirm religions, in all its diverse forms, and be able to engage in open and respectful communication with others who identify with different (and no) faith traditions (Richardson 2017).

Religious Literacy through Graphic Novels

An increasingly popular way to develop religious literacy is through graphic novels due to their ability to impart complex narratives through images, written language, and design elements that work together to make meaning (Burger 2018; Eisner 2008; McCloud 2006; Tabachnick 2017). Since the publication of Art Spiegleman's *Maus* in 1986, graphic novels have gained in popularity, both in popular culture and in the classroom. Some of the most acclaimed graphic novels taught in schools centre on issues of social justice and religion. A few of these are: *Persepolis* (Satrapi 2004); *A Game for Swallows* (Abirached 2012); *Jews in America: A Cartoon History* (Gantz 2006); *Hereville: How Mirka Got Her Sword* (Deusch 2012); *Boxers and Saints* (Yang 2013); and *Deogratias: A Tale of Rwanda* (Stassen 2018).

As multimodal texts, graphic novels are of high interest to students because they engage sensitive and difficult topics through visual art and the written word (Carano and Clabough 2016; Decker and Castro 2012). This dynamism captures reader attention and can engender an emotive response and critical thinking (Cook and Kirchoff 2017). Graphic novels are an excellent avenue to improve literacy, especially for struggling readers (Jobe and Dayton-Sakari 1999; Tomasevich 2013), and as a tool for teachers to reinforce students' prior knowledge and understanding of themselves in relations to religious Others (Liou and Cutler 2020). They deepen learner understanding of literary elements (Bakis 2012) and develop textual analysis, critique, and higher order thinking skills (Burger 2018), irrespective of the content.

Yet, when educators use graphic novels to instruct religious topics or themes, it is critical that they assess the imagery and content presented, especially given the historic disparagement of minoritised religious groups in the West (Lewis and Lund 2017; Said 1997). One such misrepresented concept is jihad and its common representation in the West as a "holy war," rather than its more accurate Arabic meaning of *struggle*, *strive*, or *exert effort* (Esposito 2010; Fatoohi 2009; Hathout 2006; Kabbani 2010). This distortion of jihad has its roots in Orientalist discourses that characterise Islam as threatening and violent (Esposito 2002; Said 1997; Tagg 2009). Therefore, given the long-standing demonization of jihad in Western contexts, it is essential that we provide an overview of its complexity prior to exploring its depiction in graphic novels.

3. Which Jihad?

In its most general sense, jihad is an Arabic word meaning "to struggle" (Fatoohi 2009; Hathout 2006; Kabbani 2010, p. 38). It is derived from the word, *juhd*, connoting effort and is typically used in the context of exhausting oneself for the sake of Allah or in seeking to live a moral and virtuous life (Esposito 2010; Kabbani 2010; Nasr 2002). The conceptualization of jihad was (and continues to be) shaped by historical and contemporary contexts, political thinkers, religious scholars, and Islamic jurisprudence (Aslan 2011). Accordingly, our discussion of jihad cannot address the entirety of understandings aligned with the numerous schools of Islamic jurisprudence (e.g., Sunni, Shia, Ibadi) and Islamic movements, (e.g., African American, Islamist, Liberal, Salafi, and Wahhabi). Accordingly, this framework acknowledges that within Islamic scholarship there are different approaches to and understandings of jihad (Kabbani 2010; Nasr 2002), on which we hope future research will interrogate and build. The following discussion of jihad begins with its origins followed by a presentation of the forms of jihad, which include an overview of greater and lesser jihads and their subdivisions. The section concludes with a brief discussion of contemporary understandings of jihad and its recent expansion to fringe Islamic movements.

4. Theoretical Framework: Forms of Jihad

The Prophet Muhammad received the first message about jihad during his time in Mecca and prior to his migration to Yathrib (570–622 CE). While in Mecca, Muhammad focused on teaching his nascent community the importance of developing personal qualities related to perseverance, patience, and nonviolent resistance, all grounded in their monotheistic faith. Termed the "greater jihad," or *jihad al-akbar*, this inward struggle to develop personal qualities fortified the growing Muslim community during a time of Qurayshi persecution. In response to ongoing oppression and death threats, Muhammad and his companions left Mecca and emigrated to Yathrib in 622 CE, a journey known as the *hijra*. During his ten year stay in Yathrib, a city later renamed Medina, Muhammad received a revelation that expanded jihad to include sanctioned violence (Badareen 2009). This "lesser jihad," or *jihad al-asghar*, allowed Muslims the right to defend themselves against aggressors. Yet, jihad is more than a binary struggle that is either inward or in defence against aggression. Further examination reveals complexities that show myriad ways individuals and groups experience jihad and struggle for moral betterment, as shown in Figure 1 (Esposito 2010; Fatoohi 2009).
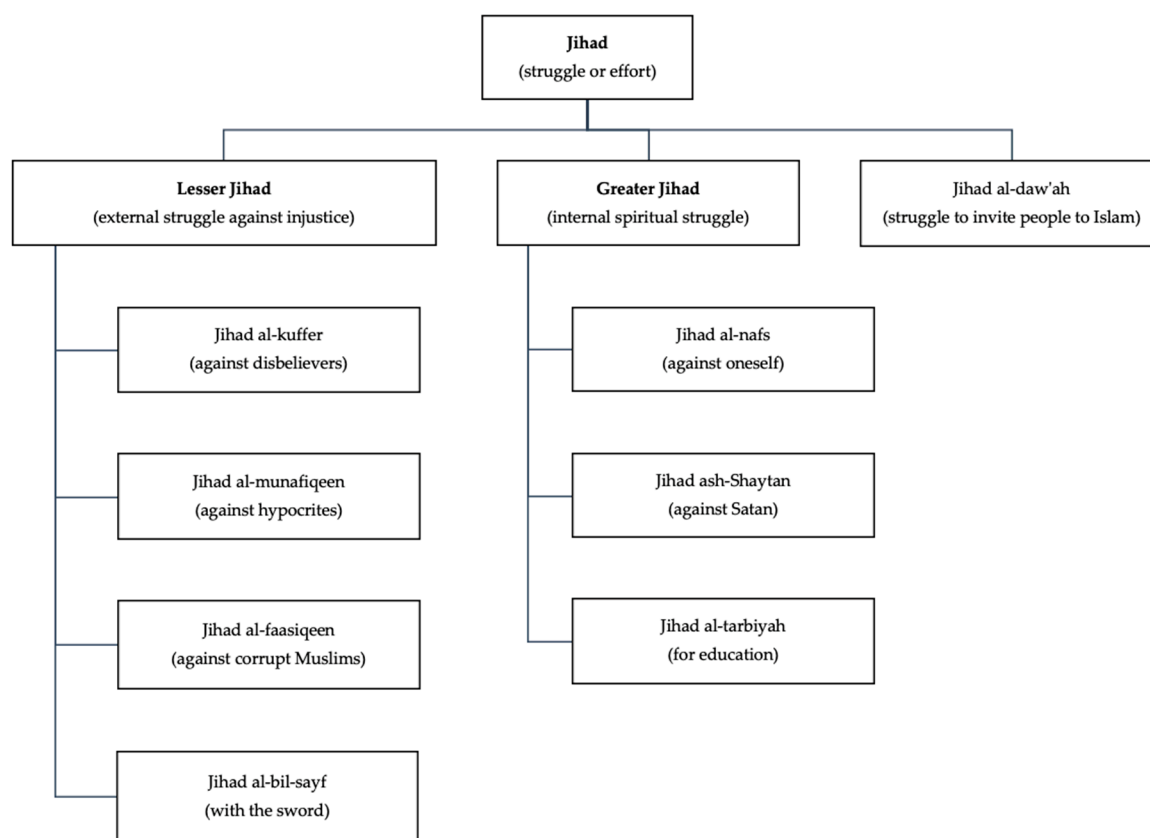

Figure 1. Forms of Jihad (Huzen 2008).

"Greater jihad" refers to the inner spiritual struggle against one's ego to live an ethical, moral, and virtuous life (Sardar 2007). Living in alignment with the greater jihad requires Muslims to resist bad habits and desires and act with patience, fairness, compassion, justice, generosity, and service, amongst other moral qualities (Al-Ghazali 1995; Fatoohi 2009). Greater jihad can be subdivided into jihad against oneself (*al-nafs*), jihad against Satan (*ash-Shaytan*), jihad for education (*al-tarbiyah*), and jihad in the proselytizing of Islam (*al-da'awa*), along with other recognized subdivisions (Kabbani 2010). *Jihad al-nafs* means to struggle against one's lower self or base instincts, in order to become a better Muslim (Bakircioglu 2010). This internal struggle for spiritual growth requires Muslims to resist arrogance, anger, temptation, pride, greed, jealousy, lust, stinginess, and malice (Al-Ghazali 1995;

Fatoohi 2009). *Jihad ash-Shaytan* refers to the struggle against Satan (Grieve 2006). This includes resisting illicit desires and actions instigated by Satan, which can range from doubting faith to corruption and deceit (Al-Ghannouchi 2015). *Jihad al-tarbiyah*, or the striving for education and intellectual growth, is reflective of the high value Islam places on education. Education includes learning grounded in reason along with knowledge derived from spiritual and divine revelation (Aslan 2011). *Jihad al-da'wah* is the struggle to invite people into the faith. Collectively considered, the "greater jihad" is a doctrine centred on inward focused self-improvement and the effort and struggle needed to live a Muslim life as faithfully and morally as possible.

"Lesser jihad" addresses the outward struggle against injustice, oppression, and tyranny (Nasr 2002). It can be exerted through violent and peaceful means, although widespread emphasis is typically placed on *jihad al-bil sayf*, or jihad with the sword. Sunni and most Shia jurists affirm that *jihad al-bil sayf* is only legitimate in self-defence against an oppressor as a way to achieve peace (Fatoohi 2009; Nasr 2002). Sunni Medieval jurists (8th–14th CE) established that *jihad al-bil-sayf* is a collective and binding duty (*fard kifaya*), which can only be declared by an imam, caliph, or head of state. In addition, acts of war are required to be defensively proportionate and in keeping with Islamic codes of conduct for battle (Fatoohi 2009). For example, non-combatants are not to be killed, which include women and children. Civilian property must not be destroyed, which includes plants, animals, and homes (Nasr 2002). It is also not permissible to force another to convert to Islam or afflict torture (Fatoohi 2009; Kabbani 2010).

Shia medieval jurists differed from their Sunni counterparts in two ways, namely in terms of who can declare *jihad al-bil sayf* and who are enemies (Badareen 2009; Madelung 1997). For the Twelvers (*Ithna-Ashari*), authority resides with the twelve infallible leaders, believed to be the direct descendants of Muhammad. Enemies are those who rise against one of the twelve Imams (Lambton 1970). Shia Twelver Muslims believe in an eschatological redeemer due to the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam in 941 CE. Known as the Major Occultation, this "hidden Imam" left a gap in leadership and an inability to declare *jihad al-bin sayf* until the *Mahdi* returned to establish justice and peace (Moghadam 2007, p. 130). It is important to note that other Shia sects (e.g., Ismaili, Waqifi, Zaidi) vary in their interpretations of the return of the Mahdi and Islamic eschatology (Badakhchani 2010). In addition to *jihad al-bil sayf*, lesser jihad also includes the struggle against disbelievers (*al-kuffer*), against hypocrites (*al-munafiqeen*), and against corrupt Muslims (*al-fasiqeen*). Medieval jurists (e.g., Al-Ghazali; Ibn al-Qayyim; Ibn Rushd [Averroes]; Imam Ad-Dardir; Imam Nawawi; Imam Bahuti) classified ways that individuals can carry out jihad, most notably by the heart; by the tongue; by the hand; and by the sword. It is only in the last instance in which jihad is aligned to warfare (Kabbani 2010).

According to the revelation revealed by the Prophet Muhammad, Allah permitted Muslims to defend themselves from their enemies using force (Fatoohi 2009). However, this armed jihad was solely for the purposes of self-defence. The Qur'an states, "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress. Indeed, Allah does not like transgressors" (Holy Qur'an 2:190). Discourses and representations of jihad have failed to make the distinction between armed jihad as defensive, as stated in the Qur'an, and the Arabic word for war, *qital* (Tagg 2009). Further problematizing this distinction are fringe movements that have galvanized followers and incited violence worldwide for ideological, socio-political, and economic reasons (Aslan 2011; Ramadan 2009). The vast majority of Muslims consider these actions abhorrent, immoral and counter to the teachings of Islam (Abou El Fadl 2005). Yet, the conflation of violence in the name of Islam with jihad continues to reify racist depictions of Muslims and Islam in the West, no matter the medium.

5. Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to consider how jihad is represented in graphic novels, an increasingly popular medium of instruction in schools. To this end, we employed critical content analysis (Johnson et al. 2017) to expose and disrupt depictions of jihad as portrayed in three graphic

novels. In the analysis, we interrogated representations of jihad and its relations to issues of power and agency, which necessitated consideration of the socio-historical, cultural, and political contexts in which each text is positioned (Short 1995). Accordingly, our analysis took into consideration the privileging of certain values and ideologies over others, further compelling us to analyse how jihad is presented in graphic novels and the importance these representations have in the development of religious literacy.

5.1. Text Selection

The text selection process occurred through four stages. First, we explored the range of graphic novels on topics related to Islam and Muslims. We focused this search for graphic novels available in English. Second, from this initial list of 25 graphic novels, we eliminated those that were written by non-Muslim authors to ascertain their construction of jihad as lived experience (Larson 2007). Third, we searched each title on the Internet, specifically looking for each graphic novel's intended age range and its use in secondary classroom settings. Lastly, we winnowed the list to first-person memoirs written by self-identified Muslim authors because of their "revealing and reflective" narratives of critical life incidents (Larson 2007, p. 21). We were not interested in investigating the authors or the veracity of their memoirs; rather, we focused on the extent to which these texts illuminated life experiences and representations of jihad. Table 1 shows the three graphic novels used in this study.

Table 1. Key Characteristics of Graphic Novels used in this Study.

Book Title	Author	Summary	Honours/Awards	Recommended Age
Dare to Disappoint (2015)	Özge Samanci	Memoir of Samanci's childhood in Turkey amongst secular and fundamentalist conflict.	Amelia Bloomer Book List (2017)	14+
Persepolis (2004)	Marjane Satrapi	Memoir of Satrapi's life in Tehran during the Iranian Revolution.	Angoulême Coup de Coeur Award (2001) Angoulême Prize for Scenario (2002) American Library Association's Best Books for Young Adults (2004)	12+
The Arab of the Future: A Childhood in the Middle East, 1978–1984 (2015)	Riad Sattouf	Recounts Sattouf's nomadic childhood growing up in France, Libya, and Syria amongst the fervor of his father's political idealism.	Fauve d'Or prize for best graphic novel at the Angoulême International Comics Festival (2015) LA Times Books Prize (2016)	16+

5.2. Textual Analysis

Analysis of each graphic novel involved two coding cycles. We began the analysis process reading each text and writing reflective memos about the narratives and images that captured our reactions and questions that arose through reading. The second cycle involved *a priori* coding ten forms of jihad using color-coded tabs placed in the texts (Saldaña 2016). This allowed us to visually see patterns emerge from the data. *A priori* codes included codes related to lesser jihad, such as: 'resisting bad habits'; 'patience'; fairness' and 'generosity'. A priori codes for greater jihad included struggling outwardly against: 'against injustice'; 'oppression'; 'tyranny' and 'violence' (Saldaña 2016). We used an inductive and iterative process (Miles et al. 2020) to identify descriptive categories, such as 'critical learning versus indoctrination', 'gender inclusion/exclusion', and 'deference to socio-religious norms'. These categories were winnowed, sifted, and refined (Miles et al. 2020) into the themes of 'jihad for education', 'jihad for gender justice', and 'jihad for identity'. The research team met monthly over the course of a year via video conferencing for discussion and to act as critical friends (Swaffield 2007).

Together the team interrogated the data through alternate viewpoints and participated collaboratively in data analysis (Costa and Kallick 1993). We established trustworthiness of the findings through a systematic and informed coding process underpinned by the literature review (Silverman 2013).

There were several limitations to this study. First, the focus on the representation of jihad in three graphic novels is limited; however, the study's detailed descriptions aid in transferability and suggest the need for additional research that explores jihad, and other religious concepts, in graphic novels (Creswell and Poth 2018; Lincoln and Guba 2006). Second, these texts were purposefully selected and may weaken the findings (Woodley and Lockard 2016). Third, the research team sought to mitigate bias by co-constructing knowledge from a postmodern position of inquiry and reflexivity (Lincoln and Guba 2006; Roulston and Shelton 2015). Lastly, there is no empirical research on the representation of jihad in graphic novels that we could find, and this lack of research limited the theoretical foundation of this study. However, this study contributes new knowledge to this gap and encourages future research.

6. Findings

Findings suggested the representation of jihad in the graphic novels was complex and multifaceted. The three texts reflected a much more nuanced representation of jihad, if teachers and learners were aware of its robust conceptualisation. Jihad was not directly named; however, forms of jihad and the ways in which the protagonists *struggled*, *strove*, or *exerted effort* were evident. Our analysis identified three ways jihad was represented, providing a robust counternarrative to extant stereotyped depictions. The discussion will use the authors' first names, in keeping with how they referred to their textual selves.

6.1. Jihad for Education

Muslims are obliged to learn both revealed knowledge (*ilm naqliya*) and humanly constructed knowledge (*ilm aqliyya*) in order to develop themselves spiritually, morally, and socially (Shah 2006). Fittingly, the graphic novels reviewed in this study emphasised the importance of obtaining an education and learning both religious and secular knowledge. Yet, this learning was fraught with socio-religious tensions that each protagonist navigated. In *Persepolis*, Marjane begins formal schooling just before the Islamic Revolution in Iran and its establishment of an anti-Western theocracy. This social transition to abiding by new theocratic norms compels Marjane to question observed contradictions. The novel opens with black and white scenes of a frowning Marjane in her primary school uniform, equipped with a mandatory hijab. She comments, "We didn't really like to wear the veil, especially since we didn't understand why we had to" (Satrapi 2004, p. 3). For Satrapi, formal schooling centres on abiding by rules and learning accepted forms of knowledge without question. Even though Marjane does well in school, her struggle for erudition takes place in the informal deconstruction of meanings learned outside of formal schooling and acquired through prolific reading and personal experiences. These include: forced subjugation to an oppressive and restrictive interpretation of Islam; socio-political violence and upheaval; involvement with complex familial and intimate relationships; homelessness; and drug and alcohol use.

As a child, Marjane speaks with God, depicted as an old man with a flowing white beard. She says that she "was born with religion" and "at the age of six [she] was already sure [she] was the last prophet" (Satrapi 2004, pp. 6, 8). When Marjane shares this with her classmates, she is shamed. God soon thereafter stops being a comforting figure and withdraws from her life. Satrapi (2004) acknowledges that her education was personal. She reflects, "To educate myself, I had to understand everything. Starting with myself, me, Marji, the woman" (p. 175). Marjane's belief in God declines over time. For Satrapi, her education grew from the tensions, violence, and incongruities experienced in her childhood and youth. Ultimately, these tensions supplanted her struggle to maintain faith.

Similarly, Riad Sattouf recalls a difficult childhood beleaguered by oppressive cultural and religious norms, physical violence, and observed hypocrisies experienced during the 1980s in Libya, Syria, and France. Sattouf's father, Abdul-Razak, a fervent believer in pan-Arabism, moves his family

to a succession of academic teaching positions to rear his son as an "Arab of the future." Abdul-Razak values education; yet, he pays little attention to Riad's schooling experiences in Syria and chooses instead to see it through his idealised memories of his childhood. In reality, Riad's schooling is rife with violence. Teachers hit students with truncheons and school yard bullies physically and verbally abused Riad. In reflection, Riad states, "It was strange that the teacher had no feeling at all for those children, who were all poor and unfortunate. She seemed to let off steam by hitting us as hard as she could" (Sattouf 2015, p. 73). In one frame, Riad recoils after being struck in the school yard, "Suddenly, out of nowhere, someone punched me in the belly. I couldn't breathe! 'What are you doing here Jew? He's a Jew. His mother is Jewish. They stole our house! He's a son of a dog'" (Sattouf 2015, pp. 18–19). He is confused by the cruelty and as to why he is being called a Jew, but does not seek out answers. He takes the abuse and acknowledges his unfamiliarity with Syria. He reflects, "I was very scared the teacher would ask me a question and my ignorance would be revealed" (Sattouf 2015, p. 103).

Like Marjane, Riad struggles to understand spirituality and the world in which he lives. He recognises the importance of spirituality, such as seeing his father's expression change when reading the Qur'an. Riad recalls, "his face was not the same as usual. This seemed extremely important" (Sattouf 2016, p. 116). He also looked to his two cousins for spiritual knowledge. Although fraught with errors, the two cousins readily share what they've been taught. Riad explains a typical outing with his cousins:

> We had to observe certain superstitions. Always look at the ground, in case you see a bit of bread. If you find one, you should pick it up and do this [places it to forehead and then kiss it]. Then you put the bread on a wall or a rock, so it's not touching the ground. 'The bread mustn't touch Satan. If you see a shoe lying upside down . . . you do this [Flip it right side up]. The soles of shoes have been touching the filthy earth. You mustn't let them face God! You have to turn them to the earth, toward Satan. The same goes for your own shoes! Watch out!'". (Sattouf 2015, pp. 124–25)

Riad's cousins also teach, what they consider, the worst insult, "A curse . . . on . . . your . . . God" (Sattouf 2015, p. 126). They continue, "Of course, you can never say that to a Muslim. You can only say it to a Christian or a Jew you're planning to kill" (Sattouf 2015, p. 127). Riad listened and assumed his cousins' teachings; yet, this learning did not strengthen his faith. Doubting the existence of God, Riad reflects,

> I pretended, thinking that maybe faith would come one day. In my family they spent their time talking about God and invoking his name. They praised the qualities of moral purity, honesty, kindness, sincerity . . . and showed none of them. The way they behaved was the exact opposite of the things they said. It seems obvious to me that if God existed, he would not allow such hypocrisy". (Sattouf 2018, p. 13)

Riad's physical and mental survival relied on his learning to be complacent, submissive, and not challenging folkways and mores. Doing so was far too risky.

Unlike Persepolis and Riad, Özge's early schooling experience was welcoming and enjoyable. She developed an infatuation with her first teacher, stating, "Like many first graders, I immediately developed a crush on my teacher" (Samanci 2015, p. 12). She questions, "Should I tell her that I really love her? Maybe I could kiss her cheek, but I didn't know how to reach her cheek" (Samanci 2015, p. 17). Although she liked school, Özge recognised its nationalistic focus, especially the reverence held for Atatürk. She comments, "We all read from our course book aloud. EVERY TURK IS BORN A SOLDIER! I suddenly understood why I saw Atatürk's image everywhere" (Samanci 2015, pp. 24–25). Schooling took on a militaristic tone, requiring Özge and her classmates to learn military poses, march, stand at attention, and take a student oath promising to "love my country and my nation more than I love myself" (Samanci 2015, p. 27).

Yet, as she grew older, Özge began to question her identity and school became less enjoyable. The social upheavals in the 1980s exacerbated tensions between Muslim fundamentalism and Western modernity. Özge's schooling experiences reflected these tensions, most notably in terms of sexism. Özge recalls an incident in which a male classmate yells, "Gentleman, I got the exam questions from the other class. Who wants them?" In response, Özge and her three female classmates yell, "HEY, HELLO! THERE ARE GIRLS IN THIS CLASS!" (Samanci 2015, p. 112). In another frame, Özge explains, "In the eyes of some of our male classmates, we were promiscuous and valueless" (Samanci 2015, p. 112). It was common for the boys to view their female classmates as "infidel exhibitionists" and "brainwashed westernized bitches" (Samanci 2015, p. 112). These schooling experiences contributed to Özge seeing herself as a "cat in dog school. I did not fit in. I felt empty. I didn't know where I belonged" (Samanci 2015, p. 148).

Unlike Satrapi's black and white illustrations that are bound, Özge's drawings are not held within frames, implying a fluid journey of becoming. Throughout her adolescence and young adulthood, she struggled to hear her own voice amongst the religious and militarist tensions. She spent afternoons staring at a ceiling fan, engaging in circular questioning, " . . . but what do I want? I don't have a goal in life. I would die if I end up in a cubicle. What if I quit school . . . I could take the nationwide college admission exam again to study something else . . . but what do I want?" (Samanci 2015, p. 149). Schooling did not help Özge find her path in life. Rather, her process of becoming happened in spite of school and familial expectations. She concluded the graphic novel asking the reader, "Do you dare to disappoint?" (Samanci 2015, p. 189). In the end, Özge did dare.

6.2. Jihad for Gender Justice

The three protagonists followed socially constructed gender roles. Yet, each character ranged in their approach to gender justice. In *Persepolis*, Satrapi portrayed Iran as oppressive and misogynistic. She showed the contradictions of official Iranian discourse venerating women with the brutal and deadly forces levelled at women engaged in political opposition. Satrapi depicts this blunt reality through a full-page frame of individuals dying by a firing squad, half of which are women in various stages of falling to the ground (Satrapi 2004, p. 256). In another frame, Marjane speaks back to her university professor who criticizes women for not following Islamic dress codes. Marjane comments, "You don't hesitate to comment on us, but our brothers present here have all shapes and sizes of haircuts and clothes. Sometimes they wear clothes so tight that we can see everything" (Satrapi 2004, p. 297). In another incident, Satrapi is stopped in the streets for running. She recounts the experience,

> 'Hey—blue coat! Stop running!' Me? 'Madam, why were you running?' I'm very late! I was running to catch my bus. 'Yes . . . but . . . when you run, your behind makes movements that are . . . how do you say . . . obscene!' WELL THEN DON'T LOOK AT MY ASS! I yelled so loudly that they didn't even arrest me. (Satrapi 2004, pp. 301–12)

Satrapi remarks that even showing strands of hair or wearing makeup "became acts of rebellion" (Satrapi 2004, p. 302). Throughout *Persepolis*, Satrapi struggles with the hypocrisy of misogyny in Iran. She reflects, "Our behaviour in public and our behaviour in private were polar opposites . . . the disparity made us schizophrenic" (Satrapi 2004, p. 305). At the end of her graphic novel, Satrapi speaks of the ongoing struggle to achieve gender justice, reflecting, "We confronted the regime as best we could" (Satrapi 2004).

Like Satrapi, Özge Samanci experienced a childhood during socio-political and religious upheaval. The 1982 Turkish military coup intensified the conflict between secular and religious fundamentalists, with opponents of the regime tortured, shot, or killed. In order to give Özge a better education, her family sends her to a boarding school in Istanbul. She comments, "There were a few girls in the school who came from conservative families, but most conservative families were not inclined to send their daughters to a boarding school" (Samanci 2015, p. 112). She shows a frame of a Muslim father talking to his veiled daughter, "You are a young girl. You need to be in our sight. Science is for boys."

(Samanci 2015, p. 112). Although Özge comes from a modern, secular family, she struggles to fit in at her hard-line conservative school. A male literature teacher comments, "The head of the family union is a man. Woman follows him. If she doesn't, she should be taught to obey" (Samanci 2015, p. 118). The religion and ethics teacher states, "Crossing legs for women is just not healthy. It stops blood circulation. Your nails cannot breathe if you put on nail polish" (Samanci 2015, p. 118). Özge rejects these gendered discourses. She speaks with her roommate, "We all should be able to wear whatever we want" (Samanci 2015, p. 114). Özge sees the religious hypocrisy in the gendered expectations of her teachers and the wider society; however, she did not perceive religion as a viable avenue for gender justice.

Sattouf depicts a grim status of women in Hafez al-Assad's Syria in the 1970s and 1980s. Life is segregated by gender and women were subservient to men. He writes of a typical meal, in which women cook the dinner but eat what is left of the men's meal, "Using their hands, the woman began to eat the remains of the meal eaten by the men in the next room" (Sattouf 2015, p. 75). Riad routinely observes the women in his life demonized and oppressed. He recounts a slur he learns from his cousins, Mohamed and Wael:

> Another one you can use all the time to insult anyone is 'fuck your mother!' But insults about fathers were always much more serious. 'A curse on your father.' You have to be careful with that one. It's dangerous. If you want to say it, you need to be sure you can beat up the guy you say it to. (Sattouf 2015, p. 126)

Abdul-Razak reinforces female subjugation when he scolds Riad for eating cookies from an elderly neighbour, "You must always refuse food from strangers, especially women. You know why? Because Satan likes to hide inside women. It makes it easier to trick men" (Sattouf 2015, p. 150). Riad did not answer his father's accusations. Rather, he turns his struggle inward and does not act against the oppression of women in Syrian society. For the female protagonists, striving for gender justice was outward, visible, and acted to strengthen their sense of self. Even though Riad recognised repeated gender injustices, he did not have the capacity to push back against entrenched socio-cultural misogyny.

6.3. Jihad for Identity

Each graphic novel showed ways the protagonists struggled with their developing identities. In *Persepolis*, Marjane opens the novel with a school picture of herself frowning and wearing a black veil that covers her body. In the second frame, only a portion of her arm, hand, and veil appear in a larger photo that includes her classmates, suggesting that her individuality is unimportant. From this opening, Marjane candidly shows the reader that her identity is not hers. Rather, it is imposed by the socio-cultural, religious, and nationalistic expectations of the Islamic revolution. She says, "I really don't know what to think about the veil" (Satrapi 2004, p. 6). A few frames later, Marjane is shown split into two halves. One side she sees herself as a veiled Muslim. The other side she sees herself as unveiled, rational, and modern. This split image shows Marjane's internal struggle with identity, and the tensions between her veiling and unveiling, entering and exiting gendered spaces, wearing Western and Islamic clothing, navigating private and public spheres, and negotiating traditional and modern ways of life. Ultimately, Marjane chooses a life outside of Iran. At the airport, her mother shows support for Marjane's efforts to claim her modern identity, "This time you're leaving for good. You are a free woman. The Iran of today is not for you. I forbid you to come back!" (Satrapi 2004, p. 341).

Comparable to Marjane's experience, Riad does not return to his childhood home of Syria. Yet, it was in Syria where Riad's identity as "other" began to take shape. To his uneducated extended family and school classmates, Riad is perceived as a Jew. Although he is not Jewish, the fact that he has blond hair was enough to categorise him as Jewish. Riad recounts a troubling incident with his extended family. He explains, "When I got close to the group, two of the boys pointed at me. 'Yahudi! Yahudi!' 'Yahudi' means 'Jew'. It was the first word I learned in Syria" (Sattouf 2015, p. 74). Later, Riad asks his father about the Jews. Abdul-Razak responds, "Jews are our enemies. They are occupying

Palestine. They're the worst race in the world. Well, them and the Americans, of course, who are their biggest pals . . . A-ha! Look at your mother, she loves Jews!" (Sattouf 2015, p. 133). The absurdity of calling Riad a "filthy Jew" (Sattouf 2016, p. 42) reinforces his identity of "other" and underpins his alienation in Syria. As Riad grows, he returns to France with his mother and brothers. In France, Riad experiences racism for the first time against Arabs. Consequently, in France, Riad's identity is once again reinforced as "other." At the conclusion of volume four, Riad's self-identity remains unresolved and he sees himself as neither French nor Arab (Sattouf 2019).

Özge's graphic novel recounts her struggles with identity during Turkey's political instability in the 1980s. Like Marjane Satrapi, Özge faces tensions between Muslim fundamentalism, Western modernity, and middle-class familial pressures. Unlike Satrapi's black and white illustrations that are bound in frames, Özge's drawings are not held within frames, implying a fluid journey of becoming. As Özge comes of age, she struggles living under the spotlight of an older sister, Pelin, who excels in school. She writes, "I adored Pelin and yearned for the approval that she receives. I became part of the competition" (Samanci 2015, p. 99). Özge attends a "less prestigious public school" and reports that she was "not happy" (Samanci 2015, p. 109). She struggles to hear her own voice amongst the religious tensions of Turkey. Critical of her school, she writes, "I felt like a cat in dog school. I did not fit in. I felt empty. I didn't know where I belonged" (Samanci 2015, p. 148). She felt pressure to meet her parents' expectations,

> Our parents made it clear to Pelin and me that we had one job—to be good full-time students. We wanted to do this to please our parents but also because they were still giving us a monthly allowance". (Samanci 2015, p. 150)

After several years of struggling, Özge finds her answer,

> In the midst of the noise that I grew up with I could not hear my own voice . . . What I was looking for was right in front of me for many, many years . . . . I could learn whatever I wanted . . . I had to do what I love to do, even if it was against the expectations of the people I love. (Samanci 2015, pp. 181–89)

In the end, Özge dared to disappoint her parents. Like Marjane and Riad, Özge's struggle for identity was complicated by socio-religious tensions and familial expectations. Thus, each protagonist struggled to obtain education, enact gender justice, and develop their identities. However, all were constrained by the contexts in which they lived. None of the graphic novels showed resolutions to these struggles, thus, sending the message that jihad, in its many forms, continues.

7. Discussion

As schools throughout the Western world seek to better understand Islam, non-Muslim educators turn to texts on topics related to Islam as a way to teach about the faith (Liou and Cutler 2020; Sian 2013). Yet, their questioning of the veracity of these texts and their capacity to impart meaningful understandings of Islam shapes their ability to develop students' religious literacy. Accordingly, purpose of this study was to consider how jihad was represented in graphic novels, a popular medium of instruction in secondary classrooms, and how this may inform the development of religious literacy. To this end, our findings suggested three areas for discussion. First, the graphic novels presented accessible counternarratives to hegemonic understandings of jihad. Second, the graphic novels emphasised greater jihad (jihad al-akbar) through imagery and text. Third, the three graphic novels reinforced the false binary that the only way to live a self-directed, Western, and modern life was to reject Islam. The article concludes with recommendations for developing religious literacy in students through graphic novels, the import this has for fostering meaningful understandings of religious difference, and the ways in which this learning can aid in countering pervasive misconceptions about jihad and Islam.

First, the various depictions of jihad provided accessible counternarratives to the dominant discourse of jihad as a "holy war" (Esposito 2010; Hathout 2006). For example, Marjane, Riad, and Özge struggled to understand themselves in relation to rising nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and political idealism. In *Persepolis*, Marjane's greater jihad was her inward struggle to understand God and conform to a repressive theocracy. Her lesser jihad showed through her protesting the Islamic Revolution and speaking out against oppression and misogyny (Nasr 2002). Violence was part of Marjane's early life in Iran; however, she experienced violence as an onlooker, not as a perpetrator. Marjane's positionality as onlooker counters hegemonic understandings of jihad as a violent undertaking (Fatoohi 2009). In a similar way, Özge struggled to understand Turkey's political upheaval and its shift to religious fundamentalism and conservatism. Her outward struggle was with gender injustice, which she spoke out against, and for which she was reprimanded. Özge's greater jihad, though, was her inner struggle to find her voice amongst societal and familial pressures. Both *Persepolis* and *Dare to Disappoint* show two protagonists engaged in both greater and lesser jihad, thereby directly countering Orientalist depictions of jihad as violent and aggressive (Esposito 2010; Fatoohi 2009; Hathout 2006; Kabbani 2010; Said 1997).

Second, the graphic novels placed emphasis on greater jihad (jihad al-akbar), or the internal struggle against oneself (jihad al-nafs), against temptation (jihad ash-Shaytan), and in striving to obtain education (jihad al-tarbiya). For example, Marjane's greater jihad was evident in her struggle with drugs and alcohol as a way to avoid facing her inner turmoil. Riad's greater jihad was apparent in his struggles with understanding Islam, Syrian socio-cultural norms and mores, and schooling. Greater jihad is clear in Özge's struggle with her conflicting desires for her future and perceptions of academic success. No protagonist fully overcame their inner struggles, showing the ongoing nature of greater jihad (jihad al-akbar) (Al-Ghazali 1995; Fatoohi 2009).

In addition, the authors used imagery, colour, fonts, shapes, and lines to emphasise the protagonists' internal struggles (Burger 2018; Eisner 2008; McCloud 2006; Tabachnick 2017). Riad's anger was articulated through the colour red. Özge employed meandering pictures and stylistic fonts to show her internal struggles with identity and parental expectations. Marjane's drawings were contained in black solid frames, reflecting her struggle with inflexibility, rules, and austerity. The authors' use of imagery complemented their narratives (Bakis 2012; Burger 2018) and reinforced the significance of their greater jihad (jihad al-akbar).

Lastly, the three graphic novels presented narratives that reinforced the false binaries of religion versus secularism and tradition versus modernity. Marjane, Riad, and Özge ultimately rejected Islam for modern, Western lifestyles. This false binary in the choice of being either Muslim or modern (i.e., Western) suggests that Muslims cannot have hybrid identities (Bhabha 2004). This reinforces Orientalist views of Muslims positioned in opposition to a more "enlightened," liberating, and modern West (Liou and Cutler 2020; Rauf 2005; Said 1997). In the graphic novels reviewed, each protagonist chose a future either physically located in the West (France) and/or aligned with progressive attitudes and behaviours. Thus, through their life choices, the authors perpetuate the stereotypical depiction that to be liberated one has to relinquish their Islamic faith (Liou and Cutler 2020). An unknowing reader risks misconstruing Islam as fundamentally opposed to modernity and failing to deconstruct these entrenched dualisms. This further suggests the importance of engaging critically with multimodal texts (Goldburg 2006).

8. Recommendations and Conclusions

In summary, this study calls upon educators to teach deep, complex, and nuanced concepts in faith systems, rather than teaching students a few central tenets of a religion. In this way, students cultivate deeper understandings, which can foster respect for religious difference. Our findings suggest that focusing on a specific religious concept, such as jihad, helps counter misinformation and provides students with accurate understandings so they are equipped to counter erroneous representations of jihad and Islam. Further to this, it is essential that teacher education programs

include critical religious literacy and instruct educators on best practices in how to integrate religious topics throughout curricula. To this end, we offer six recommendations for imparting religious literacy through contemporary graphic novels:

1. Acknowledge that graphic novels represent points of view and are not neutral texts;
2. Interrogate hegemonic discourses and explore alternative discourses;
3. Uncover representations of inequities and injustices to educate for equity and justice;
4. Admit knowledge gaps and seek answers;
5. Read imagery and written language with a critical eye;
6. Recognise and affirm the multiplicities of religious experiences and faith traditions.

Finally, this study suggests a need for empirical research to explore how and in what ways graphic novels impart religious content and the influence this may have on the development of religious literacy. Jihad is one important example of the many religious concepts that should be taught through a robust curriculum. We encourage educators to see multimodal texts, such as graphic novels, as innovative and engaging resources that will engender dialogue and transformative knowledge to foster deeper learning about complex religious beliefs.

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