



## The Dialogical Self: Investigating Multiple 'I' Positions in Sarah Glidden's and Guy Delisle's Select Graphic Memoirs

Samreen Fatima

Research Scholar, Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India.

Corresponding Author: Samreen Fatima , E-mail:samreen.fatima01@gmail.com

Received: 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Accepted: 11<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Published: 4<sup>th</sup> August 2022

### ABSTRACT

Graphic memoirs have gained a critical attention only after Spiegelman's foundational work *Maus*. The merge of images and text produces unique literary experience for the readers. The paper is an attempt to explore the gripping graphic memoirs of Sarah Glidden and Guy Delisle and the emergence of dialogical self and multiple 'I' positions within the text. Dialogical Self theory is a research module that showcases the self-expanding its definition. Unlike the Cartesian approach to self that believes its sharp distinction with other. Dialogical Self theory proposes the idea of a heterogeneous and dense self where the self involves in a dialogue with itself. This gives space for multiplicity of voices/narrations within the self and thus bridges the gap between self and other. *How to understand Israel in 60 days or less and Jerusalem: chronicles from the holy city* are works centered on the pertaining Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The creative format of a comic allows the respective authors to illustrate the different selves in a single panel. It fosters the concept of other as an extended self on the subjective level. The paper investigates how the protagonists Sarah and Delisle go on a trip to Jerusalem and gains a better understanding of themselves and of others.

**Keywords:** graphic memoirs, dialogical self, multiple 'I' position, self, other, Israeli Palestinian conflict

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Dialogical mind and the theories related to its exploration have significantly contributed to a new hybrid understanding of self (Hermans, Kempen, Van Loon, 1992). In contrast to the sharp/razor edged Cartesian distinction between self and other, dialogical self theory proposes the self as constantly involved in a course of organizing positions. Hermans and his colleagues theorizes (2010) that when self is positioned in different spatial and temporal spaces it opens the possibilities of taking multiple 'I' positions. The *I* shift among different positions and enable each position with a voice: agreeing, conflicting and negotiating. Self then is not limited to a single ideological framework. These positions are autonomous and even contrary to each other and also foster the concept of other as an extended self on the subjective level. Thus, it dilutes the long going division between the identification of self and other and creates a new space for a dense and heterogeneous self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Suleman & Rahman, 2020; Suleman et al, 2021).

The aim of the paper is to analyse the multi-voiced self in Sarah Glidden's *How to understand Israel in 60 days or less* and Guy Delisle's *Jerusalem: chronicles from the holy city* and how the emergence of multiple 'I' position in the self is crucial in engaging in dialogues with others.

The theory originated from the intersection between the American pragmatists William James (1890) and George Herbert Mead (1934) and European philosophers and Literary Scholars Martin Buber (1970) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1973). Hermans and his colleagues (1992, 2010) inspired by the psychological and philosophical theorists brought together the internal-external axis of self and dialogue. That the self builds the capacity to extend itself to others and may enter into a dialogue with perceived, extended and actual others. The self becomes a dynamic entity and is constantly in a process of allowing change. The key works that inspired the formation of dialogical self-theory are discussed below (Suleman & Mohamed, 2019; Suleman, Mohamed & Ahmmed, 2020).

William James' chapter on the Self (1890) and particularly his idea of the expansive natures of the Self was a pivotal source for the emergence of the theory. James reasoned that the extended self has the capacity of experiencing things about others as one would feel about oneself, "We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves." (p.650). Thus, the self does not belong to the skin but is extended to the

environment. He delineated self into me and mine categories. This gave a new outlook towards conceptualising the self as extending itself and sharing dialogues with others.

The influential concepts of generalized other and taking the role of other by Mead (1934) also conformed to the agentic qualities of the self. Believing the self as not only being a representative of the society and existing institutional structures but also having the potential to create and innovate them, Mead's concepts expressed those dialogues are innovative. Thereby, this vital observation influenced DST to exemplify the role of dialogues in extending the self to others. Mead's concept has been criticized on the ground that this can be applied to a homogeneous society and game like process. In a heterogeneous/ globalizing society, "there are different 'generalized others', they can be in touch with each other, oppose or inspire each other, or even suppress or silence each other." (Hermans, 2001, p. 5).

According to Buber (1970), I manifests into I-thou (subject –subject) and I-it (subject-object) relationships. In I - thou relationship there is an encounter where you is addressed as an independent other and creates space for dialogicality unlike I-it relationship which is objectifying. For DST to consider the other as an extended self on the subjective level is also of crucial importance.

Bakhtin's (1973) polyphonic metaphor is also central to the theory which brings together the notions of dialogue and multiplicity of voices. It is derived from the notion that in Dostoevsky work there is not one but several thinkers who are represented by diverse characters such as Myshkin, Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, Ivan Karamazov and the Grand Inquisitor. Bakhtin introduced the metaphor of polyphonic novel as, "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices... a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world"(1973, p.6) In this way a plurality of consciousness and a diversity of perspectives are created.

### **The dialogical self**

Based on these key concepts Hermans and his colleagues formulated the dialogical self-theory where self is seen as dialogically extending to an independent other ( Hermans & Kempen, 1993) . The dialogical self is made up of two essential components: self and dialogue. The composite term is conceived of as a "*dynamic multiplicity of I-positions in the society of mind.*"(Hermans, 2001, p.8). The formation of self and its developmental process is conceptualised as an internal process whereas dialogues can only happen when conversations take place among two or more individuals. Thus, dialogical self-theory weaves these two

concepts together in such a way that it brings the external to the internal and, in reverse, infuses the internal into the external. Hermans and Gieser explains:

“As a consequence, the self does not have an existence separate from society but is part of the society; that is, the self becomes a ‘mini-society’ or, to borrow a term from Minsky (1985), a ‘society of mind’. Society, from its side, is not ‘surrounding’ the self, influencing it as an external ‘determinant’, but there is a society-of selves; (2012, p. 3)

This ‘society of selves’ is a significant phrase to understand that the dialogical self is ‘social’ in the way that other people occupy positions in a multivoiced Self. In other words a person meets different people with different ideological framework and builds an understanding to be able to answer as if the other is self and vice-versa.

The self then emancipates from the mini- society and its complex interactions with the (social) environment. In spatial- temporal course, the embodied I fluctuates positions between, within self and even imagined, remember or perceived others. The various positions of the self are involved in the dominance and social power. DST proposes that each position can have a voice which develops and has the potentiality of creating dialogues between different selves. Like different characters in a work of art gets involved in the process of agreement and disagreement, question and answer, struggle and conflict or negotiation and integration. The different voices in the self continuously exchange information about its respective Me’s thus forming a “complex, multivoiced, narratively structured self” (Hermans, 2001, p. 3). Hermans describes the process in the following words:

“As distributed by a wide variety of existing, new, and possible positions, the self is subjected to a process of decentralization...The decentering movements in the self are reflected by a highly dynamic multiplicity of *I*-positions that are evoked by ever-changing situations” (2001, p.9).

### **Key concept: POSITIONING THEORY**

Dialogical self-theory is a broad area to examine. This paper aims to narrow and focus on this central aspect of the dynamic multiplicity of I position and its manifestation in the select graphic memoir. Central to the concept is the notion of positioning theory where I move in different spatial and temporal spaces that creates the possibilities of multiple I positions. This gives space for multiplicity of voices/narrations in a self and thus the self extends bridging the gap between itself and other. To comprehend these positioning, Pieterse explains:

“The focus here is on intercultural processes that lead to the formation of a **multiplicity of cultural positions or voices coming together** in the self of a single individual” (1995, p. 45).

So, the question arises, how are voices positioned in a dialogical self? The concept of positioning emerged first among social and discursive psychologists Harre & Van Langenhove (1991) and Hollway (1984) who were interested in developing conceptual tools to analyze discourse. Harre and Van Langenhove wrote "Positioning can be understood as the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible..as social acts, and within which the members of a conversation have specific locations" (1991,p.16 ). Positioning is also defined as "a metaphorical concept through reference to which a person's moral and personal attributes as a speaker are compendiously collected." (1991, p.108)

Harre and Van Langenhove (1991) gave the definition of positioning in the dialogical sense, as a set of 'locations' on a variety of polar pairs of moral attributes. Thus the self becomes a kind of contradictory dialogue of voices that debate and dispute among themselves the moral basis of the social order in which they find themselves positioned. Positioning becomes central in conflicted areas and disputed lands where any involvement also brings in the moral being of the person.

Dialogical self-theory (2012) also exemplifies some different types of positioning but as the paper is related to I Position and promoter position, so let us look at their definitions:

I position is responsible for preserving the coherence and unity of the self yet it also acknowledges its diversity and multiplicity. It has its relative autonomy in the self, has coherent structure and also forms different developmental pathways. Involved in the process of positioning, I-position paves way for new and possible positions.

The most significant position is the promoter positions when the self-functions as a successive multiplicity of unrelated I-positionings such that each follows its own course and specific development over time, a confusing cacophony of voices lacking any insightful organization emerges. In order to understand the organization of the self from a developmental perspective, a special concept, a promoter position, is required to create order and direction in what James would depict as the 'blooming, buzzing confusion' of I-positions. Anyone who plays a role in oneself typically, significant others – real, remembered, anticipated or imaginary – serve as promoter positions.

### **Application**

The paper aims to critique two engaging graphic memoir - *How to Understand Israel in 60 days or less* (2010) and *Jerusalem: Chronicle from the Holy City* (2012) .

Graphic memoirs have caught the attention of academic scholarship only in the recent time.

Graphic memoirs are a subcategory among many non-fictional comic categories. Autobiographical works in a comic format has been gaining a wider acclaim and appreciation especially after Art Spiegelman '*maus*' won a Pulitzer prize (the special award in letters). Comics as a format offers an engaging merge of visual and verbal play. The select memoirs also touch upon the long on going Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As the self is placed in a political turmoil situation, it witnesses itself into forming multiplicity of voices and in the process shares the worldview/ dialogues with the other.

*How to understand Israel in 60 days or less* (2010) is a graphic memoir written and Illustrated by Sarah Glidden and an interesting site to explore this channelizing of self and other. Sarah a Jew by birth and a progressive American decides to on a birthright trip to experience the lives of the people living in a conflicted land. She is willing to get to a conclusion that is closer to her identity and self. The graphic memoir projects multiple positions in the self where Sarah chooses to go for a birthright trip even though she has been critical of Israeli's propagandist agenda behind these tours.

The initial chapter opens to Sarah's already dealing with two selves – one who has strong opinion regarding the conflict and another who is curious to experience the living situation first hand. Sarah is shown as strong headed left-wing supporter and eager to come in terms with her Jewish Identity. We are already introduced to her I positions, unity and multiplicity torn in the selves. Initiating her trip, Sarah at the airport sees a Hasidic Jew wearing a "rock and roll black hat" ( 2010, p. 10) , in that moment another appears. The man who shares history with Sarah yet she feels alienated. She feels a distant member of her community while remembering her mitzah in the airport security check.

Sarah's take on Hebrew as an unjustified first language of Israel, Arabic being the second – an encroachment of Jewish expression in Arab land runs parallel to her Jewish Identity. Though belonging to the same community, Sarah's position is an oppositional contrarian to the birthright trip. In many ways, she is the other.

A gripping incident, Sarah finds ants walking inside the green house in Israel and wonders, Israeli Ants! Or "these ants may belong to a colony which runs beneath the green lines, down where border politics are meaningless" (Glidden, 2010, p. 21) These thoughts highlight how the division between different identity creates ruthless politics, which further increases the engulf between self and other.

Meeting almost twenty-eight members in this trip, Sarah is constantly seen taking new positions, questioning another team member and conforming to their position after an understanding is built. Gil, the ex- soldier and their guide to the tour, is not accepted as a trustworthy narrator initial, “it’s hard to believe there’s soldier somewhere in Gil” (2010, p. 18) but as Sarah and the other travellers spends more and more time with their guide Gil’s oppositional position is seen with authenticity.

Another important example is when everyone is thrown a question as to why did they choose a birth right Israeli trip, two Sarah emerges (fig.1). One Sarah answers that she has been always interested in the history and politics of Israel, another imaginary one says Palestine (Glidden 2010). Sarah is seen in a conflict and her indecisiveness to choose one place over the other, promoter position emerges. Cacophony of voices emerges within Sarah. Sarah in the midst of her visit questions her basis for always standing in opposition to Israel and her policies. Though she is the only firm member in the group who presents the Palestinian point of view, Sarah contemplates the difficult life of Bedouins Jews. Sometimes she confides in a place where she really tends to understand why it is necessary for the Jews to record and build their own history. Sometimes she is against these very chains of memory documented as a legacy of Jewish history. We see the emergence of many significant others in Sarah or as Sarah’s voice playing as a role of promoter position.



Figure.1

While travelling on the bus with her fellow team, Sarah interrogates about the giant wall. The guide draws the picture of the utmost need to have the wall, an integral part of Israeli security (Tel-Aviv). Yet also highlights how it affects the everyday life of Palestinian farmers who

have to walk several miles as these walls separate their homes from their fields. Sarah is seen as being in the same shoes as these farmers. Farmers instil the promoter position in Sarah.

Another captivating example is when Glidden illustrates a courtroom where four imaginary Sarah are drawn - Sarah the prosecutor, Sarah the defendant, Sarah the bailiff, and Sarah the judge (fig 2). Sarah the prosecutor brings in the argument that these trips are made just to convince their extremist ideology and Gil though not in line with all the government policies yet shows a lack of sympathy towards the plight of the Palestinian people. However, Sarah the defendant disagrees and brings to light Gil showcasing negative aspect of the wall (Glidden 2010) In consequence, he is encouraging critical thinking and approach. These imaginaries.

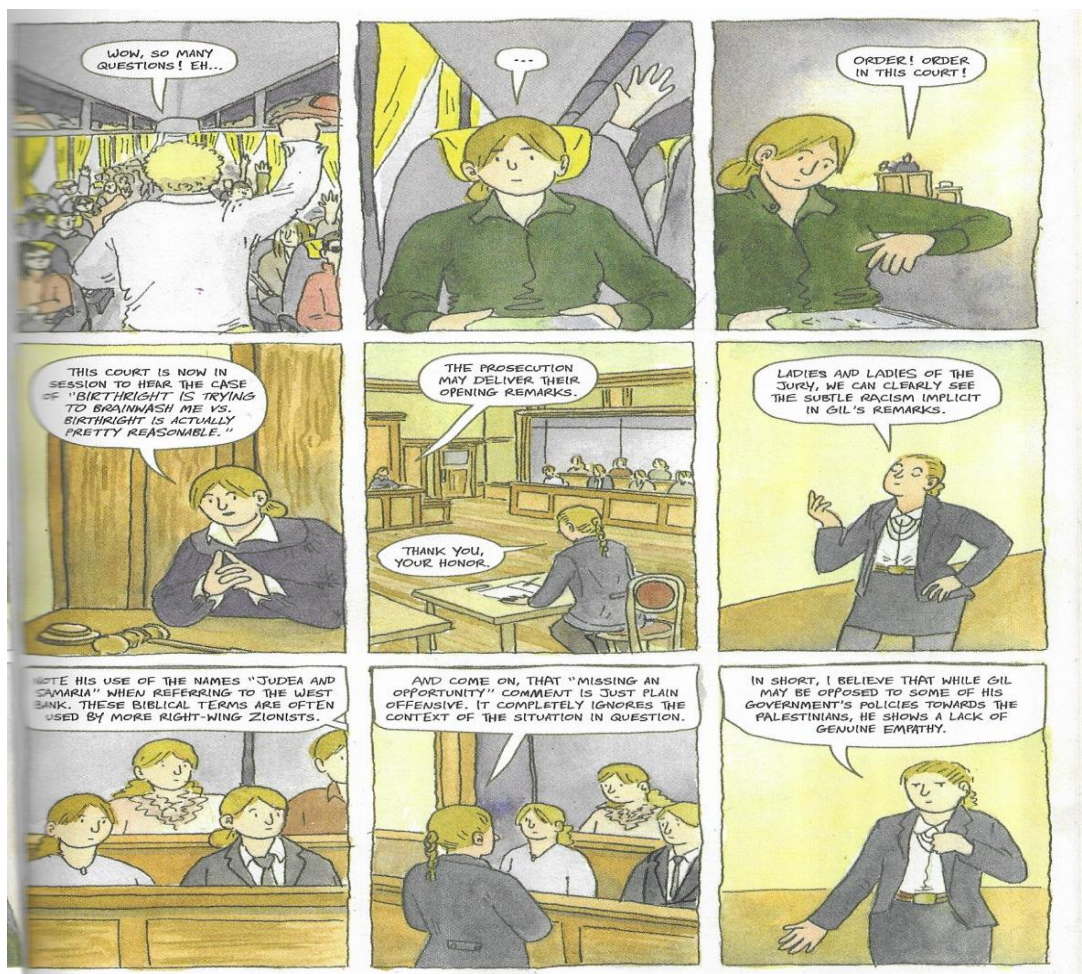


Figure.2

Sarah's are multiple voices/narrations that are in conflict and negotiation within one individual. These mini-Sarahs behave as both conscience and devil's advocate; they judge, they defend, they accuse, and they enforce. These elements call attention to the split and mixed feelings that Glidden has about her trip (Reignold 2018). Thus, we see "a plurality of



voices that are neither identical nor unified, but rather heterogeneous and even opposed” (Hermans, 2001, p.249).

Sarah is also continuously engaged in Self- talk, thus multiple positions comes to forefront,

“What does it mean to live in “disputed territory”? Do you just ignore the controversy and try to live your life like normal? Or does it define you?” (Glidden, 2010, p. 36)

So, does living in a conflicted area defines a clear demarcation between you and other?

However, Tahneer Oksman suggests that Glidden’s position is of an oppositional contrarian to the Birthright trip and is also directly linked to her self-identity; she writes: ‘[Glidden’s] sense of self is often tied to her inability to conform, to find a space of belonging’ (2016 ,p. 182). This self-identity is, however, what allows her to arrive at her own understanding of Israel and to ‘avoid the biases of others’ (2016, p.182).

Glidden’s journey is one in which a secular and unaffiliated Jew had adopted a stance that is openly hostile towards Israeli policies and also of the one were following a personal encounter with Israeli Jews on the other side of the world, she develops a more complex appreciation of her own history and identity (Reignold, 2018).

Dialogical conversations take place between her different selves throughout the text. Throughout the memoir Sarah is seen exploring self/other and other/self. In encapsulating her memories from this trip, the dialogical self-narrative technique produces the narrative other.

A comparative analysis could be drawn between *How to understand* and Guy Delisle’s *Jerusalem: Choricles from the Holy City* ( 2012). Guy- the narrator- who has a neutral side, neither a Jew nor a Muslim, neither an Israeli nor a Palestinian explores the region through his perspective. Delisle’s work is significant and fresh as it traces the development of the self who does not identify himself as a part of the conflict yet enters in dialogical relationship with multiple selves and reads the situation as many other involved.

Delisle’s work brings a novel projection to the multiple I position of the self. It is a typical example of a stranger in a strange land. The graphic novel opens as Delisle is on the flight to his one year stay in Jerusalem with his wife and children. He meets a man on the plane who plays with his daughter. Suddenly Delisle observes a series of numbers tattooed on his hand, “a camp survivor” ( Delisle, 2012, p.2). Delisle visions and contemplates how this man have

had two lives, one as a survivor and another as a jolly man playing with his daughter. The situation of other is imagined.

In the initial days of his stay, Guy Delisle's finds himself perplexed in the neighbours around, in understanding the travel route and day to day life in a conflicted zone. Jerusalem is a place rooted in religiosity and an ideal home to many practising Jews, Christians and Muslims. Delisle shows a confusing state when coming across any religious practices, which also subtly hints of him being a better, rationed and part of a civilised culture and the conflict is dealt through the gaze of an outsider. The involved identities in the conflict are sometimes showcased as - irrational, uncivilised and inferior. Figure 3 is one of the examples of Delisle observing other's culture. But his one year stay in Jerusalem makes him vulnerable in places and he relegates the role of another. At first, he showcases belief in the concept of Cartesian self- where a clear demarcation with other takes place. But Delisle's curiosity to meet new people and visit new places eventually gets him involved in a dialogical relationship with himself and to be in place of multiple others. Thus, Multiple I positioned takes birth.



98

Figure. 3

Like Mead brings out the idea of the generalised others. We do find scenarios where multiple generalised others emerges for example while Delisle taking a stroll notice, “Men in Kippas on one side, veiled women on the other”(2012, p. 58).

The multiplicity of voices come to surface through significant other, as in one of the interviews in the memoir the Israeli Prime Minister says, “We must share with those we live with” (Delisle, 2012, p.58). Also, a nice cross section of Jerusalemite society is seen in the park, ‘orthodox Jewish moms, secular Jewish moms and Muslim moms, the kids mix easily and sometimes the others too’ (Delisle 2012, p. 64). Delisle comes across his multiple selves—one who mocks\ sees in a self-ridiculous manner the belief of others, another who tries to be in the shoes of the marginalised/oppressed people, sometimes contemplating the life of young Jew Soldiers and sometimes the life of the laborious Palestinians. These diverse significant others help in channelizing Delisle’s self and promoter positions come to the forefront.

Delisle also tries to comprehend the difficult situation of the people involved and affected by the conflict. For example, he visits the giant wall and thinks, “It is strange to think that one point five million people live behind that wall and cannot get out.” Is there any place like it?” (Delisle, 2012, p.83) Fig.4

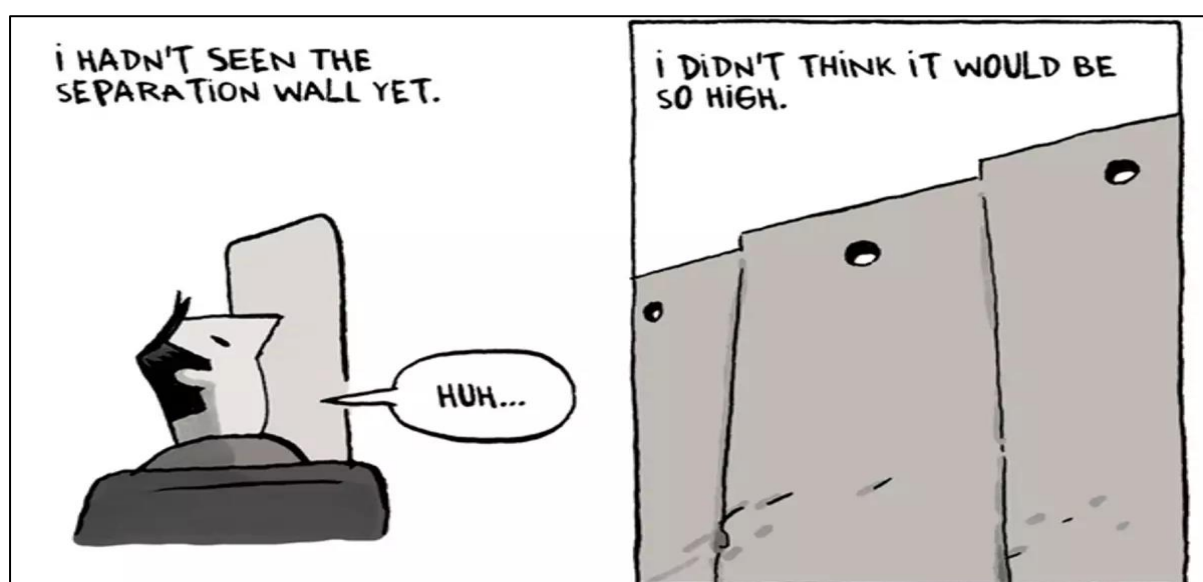


Figure. 4

His visit to Ramallah is another interesting outlook on the lives of the subjects living under an occupation. He thought that Ramallah would be a dead city crippled by the conflict. But instead Delisle finds himself having a good time and enjoying the local food ‘Hummus’ over there. Thus, Delisle’s character is not limited to his identity but his self-delves in dialogues with itself and comes in terms with multiple others.

Religious diversity is quite common in the holy land. The sacred church is a custodian to six religious orders and yet the keys to the holy site are entrusted to a Muslim family. Delisle is successful in showcasing how in the past the two communities now engulfed in a conflict used to live in harmony with each other, "...not so long ago that Jews and Arabs were on good terms in Hebron" (Delisle, 2012, p. 111) This is another significant of example of a negotiable self.

Delisle's visit also highlights the life of Bedouins and Samaritans, 'world's oldest and smallest sects' (2012, p. 220). The Bedouins live a life of seclusion and have to work a lot for basic necessities, like 'to get to school, the kids need to pass by there and walk two hours.' (Delisle, 2012, p. 220) They thanked Delisle for thinking of them and paying them a visit. The Samaritans on the other hand are mixed identities. They are considered Jews by the Israeli government and hold Palestinian ID cards and Jordanian Passports. Delisle's self-witnesses the emergence of multiple promoter positions throughout his stay. His workshops in multiple places also give us an insight into the difficult lives of the Palestinian women – one's mother got killed, one's divorced. In one of the instances, an Israeli security detail joined Palestinian cops for the Pope's visit. Thus, Delisle the character though not belonging to Jerusalem or being affected by the conflict becomes the voices of many others- sharing their histories, their beliefs, their difficult lives, the remembered and the forgotten.

## CONCLUSION

The two engaging graphic memoirs has been analysed in the light of dialogical self-theory. The works are an exemplum of the stages of the self where multiple positions emerge. This multiplicity of voices paves way for dialogue within the self and providing a space for others and their point of views. Self is considered as an internal organisation within the person whereas dialogue as an external environment between self and others. "A dialogue assumes different points of view" (Hutchins vi). The select graphic memoirs is an interesting work to explore beyond the limited notion of self and other and create space for multiplicity/voices within the central character Sarah and Delisle. Multiple others like Bedouins Jews, young soldiers, Palestinian farmers, Palestinian women and many others becomes a part of their dialogical selves.

## REFERENCES

- Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1973. (Original title: *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* [Problems of Dostoevsky's art]).
- Bakhtin, M. (1929/1973). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (2nd ed.; trans. R. W. Rotsel).
- Buber, M. (1970) *I and Thou: A New Translation with a Prologue 'I and You' and notes by Walter Kaufmann*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- Delisle, G. (2012). *Jerusalem: Chronicles from the Holy City*. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly.
- Gieser, T. & Hermans, H. J. M. (2012). *Handbook of Dialogical Self Theory*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Glidden, S. (2010). *How to Understand Israel in 60 Days or Less*. New York: Vertigo.
- Harré, R. & Van Langenhove, L. (1999) *Positioning Theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Harre', R. & Van Langenhove, L. (1991) Varieties of positioning, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 21, 393–407.
- Herman, David. ( 2007). *The Cambridge companion to Narrative*.UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hermans, H. J. M. (2001). The dialogical self: Toward a theory of personal and cultural positioning. *Culture & Psychology*, 7, p.5.
- Hermans, H. J. M., & Hermans-Konopka, A. (2010). *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and counter-positioning in a globalizing society*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hermans, H. J. M., Kempen, H. J. G., & Van Loon, R. J. P. (1992). The dialogical self: Beyond individualism and rationalism. *American Psychologist*, 47, 23–33.
- James, W. ( 1890). *The Principles of Psychology*. Holt and Company.
- Matt Reingold (2018): American Jews explore Israel: Jewish and Israel identity exploration with Harvey Pekar and Sarah Glidden, *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, DOI:10.1080/21504857.2018.1532920
- Mead, G. H. (1934) *Mind, Self and Society* . Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Oksman, T. (2016). 'How Come Boys Get to Keep Their Noses?': Women and Jewish American Identity in Contemporary Graphic Memoirs*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Pieterse, J.N. (1995) Globalization as hybridization, in M. Featherstone, S. Lash and R. Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities*. London: Sage, 45–68.
- Robert M. Hutchins Quotes. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved July 10, 2022, from BrainyQuote.com [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/robert\\_m\\_hutchins\\_117361](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/robert_m_hutchins_117361)

- Suleman, D., & binti Ab Rahman, F. (2020). Transgender Issues in Indian Society from the Viewpoint of Arundhati Roy's Novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1(3), 159-172. doi: 10.48165/sajssh.2020.1312
- Suleman, D., & Mohamed, A. H. (2019). Examining the Women Issues and Child Abuse as Mirrored by Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *Indonesian Journal of Cultural and Community Development*, 3.
- Suleman, D., Mehmood, W., Iqbal, F., & Ashraf, M. U. (2021). Covid-19 Suicidal Cases in India in the Light of Poverty: Upcoming Challenges for India in Terms of Economy. *Review of International Geographical Education Online*, 11(10), 2108-2118.
- Suleman, D., Mohamed, A. H., & Ahmmed, M. F. (2020). Political and Gender issues in Arundhati Roy's "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness.". *Indonesian Journal of Cultural and Community Development*, 5.