

Chrono-Politics of Resistance: Temporality and Subaltern Agency in Global South Graphic Narratives

Dr Mehak Bakshi

Lovely Professional University

Abstract

Time is never neutral; it is a weapon, a site of violence, and a means of resistance. Colonial modernity structured the Global South as a space “out of time,” bound to narratives of belatedness and underdevelopment. This article interrogates how contemporary graphic narratives from South Asia, Africa, and Latin America challenge these temporal hierarchies through the lens of “chrono-politics”—the politics of time. Building on postcolonial temporality (Mbembe, Chakrabarty) and subaltern studies (Spivak, Guha), this paper argues that the graphic narrative form, with its unique capacity for temporal layering, creates narrative spaces where silenced histories resurface and subaltern agency becomes legible. Close readings of works such as *A Game for Swallows* (Zeina Abirached), *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (Malik Sajad), and *Daytripper* (Fábio Moon & Gabriel Bá) demonstrate how fractured timelines, recursive frames, and palimpsestic visuals disrupt linear colonial histories while imagining radical futures. The study concludes that graphic narratives are not merely artistic responses, but powerful chrono-political interventions that redefine resistance in the Global South.

Keywords: Chrono-politics, Temporality, Subaltern Agency, Graphic Narratives, Global South, Postcolonial Studies, Colonial Temporality, Memory and Resistance

Introduction

Time is not just a neutral background to human events—it is a political tool. The narratives of development and modernity constructed by colonial powers often portrayed the Global South as “out of time,” lagging behind the West’s self-declared timeline of progress. Within such frameworks, postcolonial societies were repeatedly framed as backward, static, or belated (Chakrabarty, 2000). However, in recent years, graphic narratives from regions such as South Asia, Africa, and Latin America have begun to challenge this imposed temporal hierarchy. These works do more than tell stories—they reimagine how time operates for those who have historically been denied agency.

This paper explores how select graphic narratives from the Global South engage with **chrono-politics**—the politics of time—as a mode of **resistance** and **subaltern assertion**. Through disrupted timelines, alternative historical chronologies, and embodied experiences of temporality, these texts foreground how the control of time is intricately tied to the control of people (Mbembe, 2001). In this sense, temporality becomes not just a theme but a battleground.

Literature Review

The conceptual frame of this study draws on the works of Achille Mbembe, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Gayatri Spivak, among others, who have critiqued the colonial production of time. Mbembe's reflections on "*entanglement*" suggest that postcolonial time is non-linear, interrupted, and recursive—a sharp contrast to Western chronological historicism (Mbembe, 2001). Similarly, Chakrabarty's notion of "*provincializing Europe*" destabilizes the idea of a universal historical time that marginalizes other temporalities (Chakrabarty, 2000).

Spivak's notion of the "subaltern" also remains vital here, particularly in understanding whose temporal frameworks are excluded from dominant narratives (Spivak, 1988). Meanwhile, scholars of visual culture such as Hillary Chute (2010) have emphasized the radical potential of graphic narratives to articulate trauma, memory, and alternate timelines. Graphic texts from the Global South go further by not only representing suffering but also subverting Western conceptions of time through form and content.

Graphic novels such as *Aya* by Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie (2007), *A Gardener in the Wasteland* by Srividya Natarajan and Aparajita Ninan (2011), and *Pindorama* by Gidalti Oliveira (2021) become rich sites of analysis. These works interrogate the entangled relationship between temporality and power, shedding light on lived realities often silenced in mainstream discourse.

Findings and Analysis

1. Non-linear Storytelling and Disrupted Chronologies

One of the most noticeable ways these graphic narratives challenge dominant timeframes is through **non-linear storytelling**. In *A Gardener in the Wasteland*, the story of Jotirao Phule is told through a fragmented narrative that moves across time zones—linking past anti-caste struggles to present ecological activism. This approach resists the Western historical model that assumes a linear path of progress and instead offers a cyclical, relational temporality (Natarajan & Ninan, 2011).

Likewise, *Aya* reconstructs the everyday life in 1970s Ivory Coast—a period usually omitted in global narratives of African modernization. Instead of focusing on war or poverty, the text uses slow time to center joy, friendship, and quotidian life—affirming that resistance also lies in reclaiming presence and continuity (Abouet & Oubrerie, 2007).

2. Temporal Embodiment and Lived Memory

These graphic narratives also give form to what Walter Benjamin (1940/1968) called the "messianic time"—a moment when the oppressed reclaim history. The **body**, particularly the female or subaltern body, becomes a repository of time and memory. In *Pindorama*, Indigenous temporality is embodied through rituals, oral storytelling, and the cyclical rhythms of nature, challenging settler-colonial perceptions of time as resource (Oliveira, 2021).

Here, **visual form** becomes essential. Through the rhythm of panels, repetition of motifs, and strategic pauses, the graphic medium simulates experiences of historical trauma, ancestral memory, and slow resistance. Time is no longer abstract—it becomes visceral, carried within bodies and communities (Chute, 2010).

3. Agency Through Temporal Reclamation

The most radical gesture in these narratives is the **reclamation of time as agency**. Instead of accepting colonial or state-imposed schedules—be it in the form of development projects, industrial timelines, or migration patterns—these works articulate an alternate sense of history and futurity. Time, in their hands, becomes a tool of resistance, not repression (Chakrabarty, 2000).

This is evident in the use of speculative elements, such as magical realism, future prophecy, or mythic retellings. These techniques blur distinctions between past, present, and future, asserting a world where subaltern subjects are not trapped by “delay” but move on their own terms (Spivak, 1988; Mbembe, 2001).

Conclusion

The chrono-politics at play in Global South graphic narratives dismantle the fiction that time flows uniformly for all. These works reveal how the colonized experience time differently—interrupted, stolen, or stretched. Yet, within that distortion lies the power of resistance. By reclaiming time—through narrative structure, embodied memory, and alternative futures—subaltern voices assert themselves not as victims of history, but as its rewriters.

Ultimately, temporality in these narratives is not just a backdrop but a political strategy. The Global South’s graphic storytellers use the very shape of time to resist marginalization, affirm cultural memory, and reimagine possibilities for justice. In doing so, they remind us that the fight for liberation is also a fight over the clock—and that sometimes, to resist, we must first change how we count time.

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