Panels Framing the Reality:
Joe Sacco's *Palestine* and the Deconstruction of Objectivity in Comics Journalism

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Tutkielmani käsittelee Joe Saccon *Palestine*-sarjakuvaromaania (2003) ja sen tapoja jäsentää ja esittää todellisuutta. Saccon kirja on yksi tunnetuimpia teoksia genressä, joka tunnetaan nimellä sarjakuvajournalismi. Nimensä mukaisesti genre pyrkii tuottamaan journalistista sisältöä käyttäen sarjakuvaa kerronnallisena välineenään. Tämän vuoksi kysymykset todellisuuden objektiivisesta esittämisestä ovat tärkeitä myös *Palestine*-kirjan kohdalla, sillä objektiivisuus luetaan usein journalistisen tekstin ihanteeksi.

Saccon piirrostyyli nojaa vahvasti underground comicx [sic] -nimellä tunnettuun sarjakuvagenreen, joka käyttää tyylillisinä keinoinaan muun muassa kehon mittasuhteiden liioittelua. Tämä näkyy myös *Palestinessa*, vaikuttaen siihen, kuinka tulkitsemme sen narratiivia.

Työssäni osoitan, että sarjakuvan kerrontakeinot voivat niin helpottaa kuin haitata todellisuuden esittämistä objektiivisesti. Sarjakuvajournalismi voi toisintaa henkilöitä niin, että lukijan on helpompi samaistua heihin, kulttuuritaustastaan riippumatta. Tämä johtuu siitä, että katsojan on helppo nähdä itsensä pelkistetyssä hahmossa. Toisaalta *Palestine* osoittaa myös esimerkkejä siitä, kuinka Sacco orientalisoi kuvaamiaan henkilöitä esimerkiksi liioittelun kautta. Liioittelu vaikuttaa myös siihen, kuinka tulkitsemme kuvatun kriisin osapuolet. Väitän, että Saccon kerronnalliset keinot jakavat kuvattavan kriisin osapuolet hyviin ja pahoihin, jolloin journalistinen puolueettomuuden ihanne häviää tarinasta.

Koska kirjan päähenkilönä toimii Joe Saccon hahmo, keskityn myös siihen, kuinka hänen mukaan tuomisensa vaikuttaa tarinan objektiivisuuteen. Kirjailijan esillä pitäminen teoksessa on piirre, jonka yhdistän New Journalism -genreen, jota ehdotan tutkielmassani sarjakuvajournalismin sukulaiseksi. *Palestinen* kohdalla Joe Saccon hahmon mukana olo vaikuttaa muun muassa siihen, kuinka tulkitsemme piirrostyyliä: koska Sacco kuvaa itsensä äärimmäisen liioitellusti, väitän, että lukija voi tämän perusteella lukea muiden hahmojen liioitellut kuvaukset oikein. Totean myös, että Saccon hahmon sisällyttäminen tarinaan yhdessä tarinan piirretyn muodon kanssa pakottaa lukijan hahmottamaan teoksen kuvailemat tapahtumat objektiivisen reportaasin sijaan niiden subjektiivisena tulkintana.

Avainsanat: sarjakuvajournalismi, Palestiina, objektiivisuus

1. Introduction

We are used to seeing foreign conflicts illustrated in photographs with vivid colours making us feel that we almost were there with the journalists taking these pictures, as if we are seeing exactly what they were seeing. We tend to think that the world that these news photographs represent is the actual representation of the reality such as it is. But what happens to our interpretations when these same conflicts are described to us in black-and-white drawings that do not even try to achieve a level of realistic depiction of what has happened? Susan Sontag (*Regarding the Pain of Others* 46) claims that "the photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace […], cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude." When this framing is made more visible with thick, drawn panel lines in the form of a comic, does that mean that the reader is deceived less when it comes to the authenticity of the situation the picture tries to depict? And if so, could it be argued that comics journalism can represent reality in a manner which does not enforce a certain depiction of reality on the reader, but instead makes the reader question the content of the narrative and this way the notion of objectivity in journalistic or documentary context altogether?

These are questions that can be asked when we are talking about comics journalism, a genre which tries to combine certain journalistic traits such as neutral tone and the depiction of real life situations with the aesthetics and the form of a comic book narrative. It is a complex genre which belongs to neither literary tradition nor journalistic media, but rather is a combination of these two. This complexity makes comics journalism an interesting case for a study. In this thesis, I will discuss how comics journalism represents reality and how the notion of objectivity is deconstructed throughout the book I am mainly focusing on (*Palestine* by Joe Sacco, that is) as an example of a work of the genre. Sacco's works are often considered to be pioneering in the field of comics journalism (see for instance Williams 52),

with multiple books focusing on the crises of recent history. However, *Palestine* probably remains his most renowned book, taking place in the early 1990s during the first Intifada and depicting the lives of Palestinians and Israeli and the relations between these two groups in the West Bank and Gaza strip.

What makes *Palestine* an interesting work to study is the author's presence in the pages. In addition to Sacco's drawings and handwritten text which do not let the reader forget the author, Sacco himself is almost always present in the comic as the main character, Joe Sacco, through whose eyes the events are narrated even when he interviews local people and their experiences. This is why in addition to studying the deconstruction of objectivity in the book, I am also going to focus on the effect this inclusion of the author brings in to this deconstruction process. By doing this, I hope that I will be able to show that comics journalism is a genre which enables the author to tell informative stories without black-and-white simplifications of complex political issues—something that is always needed in the world, one could claim. Even though my analysis focuses mainly on one particular genre, comics journalism, and on one particular work within that genre, I think that if needed to, the analysis can be applied and broadened to cover any type of a published narrative and the effects its form has on the reality it tries to represent. Also, even though one work does not necessarily represent its genre as a whole, some generalizations can in my opinion be made, especially when studying works by the leading author of the genre (see for instance Schack 109). As our worlds are expanded through the narratives we consume, it is important to focus on the problematics concerning the objective representation of the issues unfamiliar to us, as these narratives tend to shape our views on these issues.

Although my thesis focuses mainly on *Palestine*, a short introductory chapter on comics journalism as a whole is presented at the beginning of the study. This is because in order to fully understand and to be able to analyze Sacco's *Palestine*, one should first be

familiar with the genre itself and its relations with other literary and/or journalistic genres. This chapter focuses on the typical characteristics of comics journalism and is followed by a short comparison with other similar types of communication, mainly New Journalism and photojournalism. This will be followed by the analysis of Sacco's book, including theory sections when appropriate. The analysis is divided into two different sections: the first one will focus on the form of the narrative and how the combination of drawings and text affect our reading experience, whereas the second one deals with the issues of Sacco's presence in the narrative. After the analysis section, a conclusion chapter will be presented.

2. Comics Journalism as a Genre

The birth of comics journalism has been attributed to the rise of the more serious and mature comic narratives in the 1980s. Although these serious works included comics such as *Watchmen* by Alan Moore and *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller that belonged to the superhero comic genre, they were characterized by the increase of realistic elements. For instance, superheroes in *Watchmen* lacked actual paranormal superpowers, thus being equally as vulnerable as any other character in the book. Eventually, this progress led to the narratives that were not only filled with realistic plot elements but based on actual events, trying to convey these events in a neutral and documentary manner (Williams 52).

Although the turning point in the development of comics journalism as a genre has been pinpointed to the late twentieth century, the roots of the movement lie deep in the history of comics, dating back to the 1960s, when the growth of different counter cultures lead to the invention of the so-called underground comixs (sic.). In the following subchapters I will first describe the development of comics journalism and its typical characteristics. Due to the genre's deep connection with the underground comixs movement, the chapter dedicated to describing the origins of comics journalism also focuses to some extent on the development of the underground comixs movement. This is because the movement inspired greatly the leading authors in comics journalism such as Joe Sacco and Art Spiegelman, whose book, *Maus*, can be considered to be a documentary work, as it depicts Spiegelman's father's experiences during the Second World War as a Jew living in Poland. It is also worth noting that *Maus* also hails from the maturing era of comics of the 1980s, since Spiegelman started to work on his comic during that time.

As we are observing comics journalism as a literary genre, it is also important to place it in the continuum of other genres of literature. This is why the second subchapter is dedicated to the comparison between comics journalism and gonzo/New Journalism, that is,

genres which also try to combine journalistic approach to literature. However, since comics journalism relies strongly on the visual aspects of representation, we cannot ignore its relationship to other genres that intend to narrate newsworthy events and issues in pictures rather than words. In order to study this side of comics journalism, I will compare it to photojournalism as well.

2.1 The Genre's Origin and Its Form

Although the contemporary French magazine *XXI* is considered to be a pioneer in the field of comics journalism nowadays, partly due to the long tradition of comics in the country which makes the French open to different experiments inside the genre (Sutinen 37), the actual roots of the genre can be found in the United States. One could claim that the development of the comics which eventually lead to the invention of comics journalism as a genre begun in the 1950s with the so-called New Trend type of comics, created by E.C. Comics. The term refers to the fact that many considered these comics as a beginning of a new era, as the E.C. Comics held liberal publishing policies which enabled their artists to choose bold and realistic approaches to their comics. Harvey Kurtzman for example depicted war in his comics in a manner which partly resembled present-day work patterns of comics journalists: in order to create a realistic world in his narratives, Kurtzman interviewed experts and even collected first-hand experiences of for example being inside a submarine (Arffman 49–50).

However, in 1954 these liberal policies became harder to maintain by the publishers. It was argued that comics have a negative impact on the children reading them, and the nationwide concern eventually lead to the foundation of Comics Magazine Association of America Inc., (to which I will refer to as C.M.A.A. from now on) which invented and enforced the Comics Code whose function was to keep the so-called harmful elements away from the pages of the comics. Essentially, it was a question of censorship, as the endorsed

rules were vague and basically enabled C.M.A.A. to prevent the distribution of any comic which for example presented critique towards the ruling authorities: for instance, the code stated that "institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority" (C.M.A.A. n. pg.). This combined with the general political turmoil in the United States—the politics of the Cold War era and the patriotism of the older generations clashed with the younger Americans' views on individuality and the society on issues such as the Vietnam War—lead to a protest of a kind, an artistic movement which was influenced by the Beat movement and the Hippies and eventually became known as underground comixs (sic.). The term 'comixs' was coined from pioneering *Zap Comixs* magazine featuring comics from artists such as Robert Crumb (Arffman 83), and this different term was intended to separate underground comixs from the traditional works that obeyed the Code, thus being able to be distributed via traditional channels.

Comics representing this emerging genre were distributed in a fanzine form in the alternative shops built around blooming sub- and countercultures mentioned above. Arffman (203) argues that it is possible, perhaps even logical, that the rebellion of the 1960s was channeled into the form of these comics: after all, they offered a medium that was both cheap and independent. Although the genre faded away along with the rebellion of the 1960s, its ethos enabled the birth of new comic genres, one of these being comics journalism. Williams (51) argues that "[the] move towards respectability began in earnest in the 1970s, when The Comics Journal—the […] leading trade magazine—began agitating for serious study of [comics as an] art form." As the underground comixs movement had already knocked down some barriers concerning for example the content of the comics, the road was already paved for some of the artists that had previously identified themselves with the underground comixs movement to start to experiment with the form, some of them moving towards a documentary presentation.

Due to the shared history with the underground comixs movement, the characteristics of comics journalism share some features with its parent genre. The visual characteristics of the underground comixs—a certain roughness that is adopted via dark and heavy pencil work (Arffman 179)—also characterizes comics journalism as well (Williams 51). The reason why this is the case with comics journalism as well is not studied, but one could argue that one of the reasons behind the usage of the same visual style as the underground comixs is probably its economical nature: the black and white drawings that don't try to capture reality realistically but rather depict it in an exaggerated manner are faster to produce, thus making it easier to publish stories that are more topical with the current events. It could also be argued that in some cases the exaggerated style is chosen in order to protect the people depicted in the comics: drawings preserve a person's anonymity to much greater extent than a photograph (Sutinen 36). Sutinen also claims that this anonymity could be considered to be beneficial for the comic artist as well, as it probably means that the reporter is able to draw more people who would not necessarily agree on posing in a photograph (36).

However, it should also be noted that comics journalism in itself has no established style which would manage to characterize properly every work of that said genre; rather, the characteristics of the genre are features that occur in most of the works in the genre. Williams (52–55) argues that the most prominent feature of the genre is probably the fact that the reporter's role is not faded into the background but rather is brought up constantly one way or another. An argument could be made that this is a remnant of the underground comixs movement, in which the comics were often loosely autobiographical and/or featured the comic book artist as a main character. An underground comixs artist perhaps most known for this is Robert Crumb, who "was among […] the first contemporary American cartoonists to regularly depict himself in his own stories" (Kartalopoulos 76–78). The inclusion of the author in a comics journalism narrative is a feature in the genre I will focus on deeper in my

analysis of Sacco's *Palestine* in the upcoming chapters. But before that actual analysis I will first end my presentation on comics journalism as a genre with a comparison between comics journalism and its relative genres, including New Journalism and photojournalism, as this probably helps us to place comics journalism in the continuum of literature and journalism.

2.2 The Genre's Relationship with Other Genres

Comics journalism has close relatives both in the field of literature and journalism, with whom the genre shares similarities either in terms of its characteristics and/or background. The comparison between comics journalism and its so-called relatives is necessary if we want to fully understand the genre as it is a combination of different textual and visual elements, both fictional and factual, thus making it a unique way to create narratives. In addition to shedding more light into the discussion concerning comics journalism, the introduction of these genres related to it is necessary also because some of the theories I plan to use in the following analysis chapters will deploy the ideas that originate from the academic study of these genres (especially when it comes to the study of photography which often addresses issues of photojournalism, see for instance Sontag).

Each relative genre is given a subchapter of its own, in which I will shortly discuss the characteristics of the genre and the similarities between them and comics journalism. After this, the analysis of *Palestine* will begin.

2.2.1 Comics Journalism and New Journalism

When it comes to literature, the closest relative to comics journalism one can find is probably a style called New Journalism, coming to exist in the 1950s. Authors such as Truman Capote, Norman Mailer and Tom Wolfe are probably the best known representatives of the genre. Roggenkamp characterizes New Journalism "[championing] composite characters, inverted

dialogue, and 'the innermost thoughts of subjects in a combination that can blur the line between fact and fiction'" (117)—all traits that can be found in the works characterized as comics journalism, including Sacco's *Palestine* as well. This is recognized by other academics as well. For instance, Scherr notes that "[in] the context of journalism, [the use of] self-portraiture aligns [Sacco's] work with the 'new journalism' movement" (Framing human rights 113).

Arlen (247–249) suggests that the new style of writing that came to be known as New Journalism started appearing in the pages of *Esquire* and *Herald Tribune* (of which the former especially is considered an innovator—see for instance Wakefield 40—when it comes to New Journalism) in the turn of the fifties and the sixties. This development has been attributed to the impact of the Second World War era writers such as Hemingway and Fitzgerald who "made it somehow *respectable* to write journalism" (Arlen 249, italics in the original) and changed the traditional reportage pattern—Who? What? Where? When?—into a more aesthetic one. It should be noted, however, that Roggenkamp suggests that the roots of New Journalism lie much deeper than that: she traces them to the late 1880s and to American newspapers of that era such as *Sun, World* and *Journal* (xxi). Nevertheless, according to Arlen, the motive behind this new way of writing was mainly artistic, powered by the writers' wills to be able to express themselves even when they were covering real life situations. However, Arffman argues that there were also political reasons behind the paradigm shift. According to her, the New Journalism movement was powered by the same frustration that also powered the alternative cultures in the fifties and the sixties. The general mood for a protest in the society meant that the role of the reporter was also questioned, and soon the reporter was seen as a "thinking, working and feeling person" who should try to contribute to the public discussion as him or herself, not as an objective mirror of reality (77).

It should be noted that this subjective stance has also been criticized throughout the

history of the genre. For instance, Matthew Arnold, the man behind the term "New

Journalism" described the genre having problems regarding the role of the author: the genre's

"one great fault is that it is *feather-brained*. It throws out assertions at a venture because it

wishes them true; […] and to get at the state of things as they truly are seems to feel no

concern whatsoever" (Roggenkamp xxi, italics in the original). Thus it could be claimed that

the driving force behind New Journalism as a movement could be considered to be more of

an aesthetic one, if the inclusion of the author's presence in the narratives categorized as New

Journalism did not necessarily make them any closer to the reality they tried to depict than

other narrative forms.

Nevertheless, whether the actual reasons for the birth of New Journalism were artistic

or political, its close similarity with comic journalism cannot be denied. As is the case with

comics journalism, New Journalism did not try to hide the presence of the author but rather

brought it forward for the readers to see. One could also claim that these two literary genres

share the same motivator: the anti-war and Leftist underground movement that acted as a

source behind the underground comixs scene (from which eventually comics journalism was

born, as I discussed in the previous chapter) also helped in the formation of the New

Journalism. Arlen even goes as fas as claiming that "a lot of what's happened in New

Journalism has as much to do with the New Carelessness [a term used by Arlen to cover the

sexual liberation caused for example by the invention of birth control pill in the sixties] of the

times […], as it has to do with attempts to evolve freer journalistic techniques" (256).

One cannot talk about comics journalism without taking into account the fact that the

genre in fact uses highly freer techniques than the more traditional forms of journalism. The

usage of narrative tools such as drawn images draw the audience's attention to the role of the

author—as well as enable the author with more freedom when creating his or her narrative. It

could be argued that comics journalism has New Journalism to thank for regarding this, since

it could be considered that the latter had paved the way for the less traditional ways of narrating news-worthy events and issues. Curiously enough, New Journalism's value as a genre itself has more or less diminished in the eyes of a general public. Roggenkamp argues that during the course of time, "journalism and imaginative writing became more strictly defined under the force of professional conventions and new ideas about fictional artistry" (119), citing an incident in the 1980s in which a journalist received large amounts of negative publicity when her prizewinning story was found to include composite characters and other typical traits of New Journalism instead of being composed by using the ideals of traditional forms of journalism regarding objectivity and truthfulness (113–118).

In addition to the similar stylistic traits and a greater extent of freedom in the form of journalistic narrative, New Journalism and comics journalism share other similarities as well. The moral stance which can be observed in *Palestine* (and which will be discussed further later in this thesis) is visible in the making of New Journalism as a literary movement. Roggenkamp suggests that in accordance with nationalistic narratives told in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, New Journalism adopted a view of the Americans "as martial and regal as the Anglo-Saxons" in these nationalistic narratives (111). This, according to Roggenkamp, led New Journalism to promote ideas that enhanced clear moral stances towards the issues discussed and that promoted the role of the United States in solving these issues:

> The Spanish-American War had opened not only Cuba and a new kind of "Westering" […] but the Far East as well, "pushing the Frontier before it". The Journal's own captivity narrative, then, was cogent reminder of what many other medievalist romances of the 1890s also suggested—that America's most familiar frontiers may have closed, but new territories lay in wait to rescue from dark forces (111).

It could be argued that the subjective stance these both genres allow their narratives to have not only makes the author visible to the reader, but also highlights the opinions regarding politics and/or moral issues the author may have—if the author is more present in the narrative than in the other, more traditional forms of journalism, his or her opinions can be

more present in the narrative as well. However, if the reader is aware of the author's role in the narrative, this feature does not necessarily have to be considered a negative one: it is merely something that the reader must take into an account when consuming the story, a trait of the genre that has an impact on the reading of the narrative.

2.2.2 Comics Journalism and Photojournalism

What is now considered to be a golden era for photojournalism started at the beginning of the Second World War in the United States. Before that in the late 1920s, quiet and small cameras and fast lenses had aided the birth of the field in Europe and especially in Germany. However, after Hitler's rise to power, many of the professional photojournalists had to flee the country, partly because many of them were Jewish, partly because many worked for the liberal and socialistic newspapers which were closed down when Hitler's reign began. Due to this part of photojournalism's history (and possibly partly due to the powerful emotions an image is able to awaken in its viewers), photojournalism is often considered to be "a powerful means of promoting particular understandings of world events, invariably presented in the context of specific moral and political arguments regarding what constituted good and bad" (Boot 4–5).

Despite the idea above concerning moral aspects of photojournalism, Pfrunder (94) notes that the field's "guiding principle is laid down by journalism, whereby the photographer is expected to furnish an objective and undistorted eye-witness account of a particular topic." The similar ethos is adopted by comics journalism as well, as the artist is expected to pertain to the journalistic principles. Williams notes that the code-switching between the realistic and symbolic ways of presenting events is "major strength of comics journalism [and] also one reason why editors are likely to shy away from it [… since] newspapers favor plain language, in part to protect the readers from the seductions of the rhetoric, of art" (52). It could be

argued that the same could be said from journalistic photographs as well—they are inevitably artistically crafted and often work on a symbolic level as well. Both forms also loan from other visual media: photojournalism for instance was and is influenced by art history, whereas comics journalism, Sacco's works included, makes references to photographs and film. For instance, it could be argued that Sacco's representations of the Israeli military forces especially loan from and are influenced by the classic photojournalistic images depicting war. One example of this is the first page of the chapter titled "Eye of the beholder" depicting the Israeli soldier in a relaxed position smoking a cigarette and casually eyeing towards the Palestinian territories (see figure 1 in the appendices). The drawing shares resemblance with Philip Jones Griffiths' photograph (Griffiths n. pg.) of "[a] soldier of the US 9th Division under fire during the battle for Saigon. […] Vietnam, 1968." (Lardinois 230–231).

These two images share similarities in terms of a visual representation of casual power they depict, but also in terms of depicting conflicts that are considered by a large audience to be more or less controversial. Griffiths' photo is originally published in his book, *Vietnam Inc.*, which, according to Lardinois, "crystallized public opinion and gave form to Western misgivings about American involvement in Vietnam. One of the most detailed surveys of any conflict, *Vietnam Inc.* is also an in-depth document of Vietnamese culture under attack" (223). This description by Lardinois is worth noting, since Sacco's *Palestine* can also be considered to be a narrative focusing on depicting and documenting the Palestinian culture under an attack. Based on this it could also be argued that both photojournalism and comics journalism are well suited in depicting crises that can be considered complicated in their nature and which are prone to awake strong emotions amongst their audience.

Photojournalism is often considered an aid to cover news about conflicts in particular, perhaps due to its potency to awaken responses: Sontag notes in *Regarding the Pain of*

Others that a shocking element in an image is exactly its strong point, that "[c]onscripted as a part of journalism, images were expected to arrest attention, startle, surprise" (22–23). Williams considers this to be the case with comics journalism as well, claiming that "comics are well suited to represent the fragmentation of experience during crisis, or the incommensurable views of opposing sides in the midst of conflict" (54). This may be because a visual representation can often include a broader scale of emotions than a text can—or, at least, communicate them faster. Of course, because of this, there is room for different readings in a single photograph, which is why Williams praises comics journalism's ability to combine text with images, producing meanings that are created "by the interaction of image and text" within the image itself (since the text is often included within the drawn panel) (54). This is not the case with photographs: even though the event depicted in the photograph could be explained in the caption of the image, the photograph and the text never actually integrate with each other. One can be experienced without the other, which affects the reading the viewer makes.

Seppänen (166) argues that there are two discursive frameworks used when reading a photograph: the discourse of the real and the discourse of an interpretation. The former suggests that a photograph represents reality outside of itself, whereas the latter highlights the role of the photographer, suggesting that a photograph is a result of the creative work its creator has done. According to Seppänen, these two frameworks interlace with each other but are not interchangeable. This then creates the dynamic that creates the concept of a documentary photograph: "the framework of interpretation is a regulating principle via which the creative work of a photographer defines the way in which the discourse of truth is present in the photograph" (166, my translation). Similar approach could also be used when reading the works of comics journalism. *Palestine*, for instance, features illustrations of landscapes among other things that seem to represent reality to a very high degree (see for instance

Sacco 146–147). Yet these illustrations inevitably also remind us that they are a result of someone's work, not a complete representation of reality by themselves. The same discursive frameworks can be used with photojournalism and with comics journalism as well—however, in the upcoming chapters I am going to suggest that there are also differences between these two genres, especially when it comes to the representation of 'truth'.

Being called comics *journalism*, the genre itself makes its affiliations with other visual genres clear. This is why the genre may have more in common with the likes of photojournalism than other comic genres, despite its form and roots in the comic narrative. Said has noted this too, briefly summarizing what separates comics journalism from the so-called traditional comics:

> Recall that most of the comics we read almost routinely conclude with someone's victory, the triumph of good over evil, or the routing of the unjust by the just, or even the marriage of two young lovers. Superman's villains get thrown out and we hear of or see them no more. Tarzan foils the plans of evil white men and they are shipped out of Africa in disgrace. Sacco's Palestine is not at all like that. […] Sacco's art has the power to detain us, to keep us from impatiently wandering off in order to follow a catch-phrase or a lamentably predictable narrative of triumph and fulfillment (v).

With his description, Said has made a brief summary of what journalistic objectivity means in comics journalism. This explanation will be deepened in the next chapter, in which I am going to discuss issues relating to objectivity in *Palestine*.

3. (Journalistic) Objectivity in Sacco's *Palestine*

According to Tumber, "the idea of objectivity can be regarded in two distinct ways," first one

being an impossible goal to aim at. He explains this description by noting that even though

the conventional ways of reporting news "in a detached, impersonal way free of value

judgements" are often considered to be objective, "the act of reporting itself places

limitations (such as space, time, and pertinence) on the ability to report the whole known

truth." This leads to "the necessity of selection and the hierarchical organization of a story",

which means that the story is actually far from an impartial representation of what has

happened (Tumber 201).

This inability to record events impartially has also much to do with the fact that the

subject witnessing the events cannot produce but a subjective view of the matters in question.

Couldry (115) argues that

> [we] have to recognize how historical forces—of racism, class conflict, and
> other forms of oppression—have systematically distorted the the conditions
> in which selves are able to reflect, and speak, in their own name. […] It
> follows that the reflexivity of those who are privileged in structures of racism
> will often also be distorted, since they will be blind to the sources of the
> privilege of their own voice.

This is an important argument when discussing Sacco's *Palestine*, since even though the

issues regarding class or race are not addressed in this thesis, at least to an extent, it is worth

noting that Sacco as an American journalist hails from a highly different background than the

Palestinians he depicts in his graphic novel. Thus we cannot let it pass unnoticed that his

subjective experience can be very different to the ones of the people he interviews, for

instance. However, it is also worth mentioning that Sacco recognizes his privilege in various

accounts during the narrative.

> *Something* happens… Something *always* happens… And if it's too much, if
> the scene gets too heavy, if my stomach's knotting up, I jump into a taxi…
> And I'm outta there, man! In the evening I'm back in Jerusalem, maybe at
> the Underground club in the New City, watching Tom and Jerry brain each
> other on the video screen, I'm shaking my bootie in front of off-duty

paratroopers with the Dutch and Swedish girls from the hostel…,

Sacco admits (28, italics in the original), summarizing his ability as an outsider to escape

from the chaotic crisis zone. By depicting his escape from the chaotic Palestinian territories

in which "something always happens" into a more safe, even frivolous environment amongst

both the Israeli soldiers and the European travelers, Sacco recognizes that he is able to leave

and that he is one of the people who have some amount of control over the situation. Thus his

accounts of the situation, his 'objective truth' is inevitably colored to some extent by his

privilege in the situation.

The second way to approach objectivity, according to Tumber, is considering it being

"a strategic ritual", consisting of "[t]he procedures of the verification of facts, the separating

of 'facts' from 'analysis', the presenting of conflicting possibilities and supporting evidence,

the judicious use of quotation marks, the structuring of information in an appropriate

sequence and the criterion of common sense in assessing news content" (201). Thus, in the

latter case, objectivity is not a goal, but a certain set of principles relating to the way the news

are collected, put together and presented.

Objectivity being a dominant ideology within journalistic professions (Tumber 201),

questions relating to it should be recognizable in comics journalism as well, since the genre

claims in its name to pertain to the same principles and values than the traditional news

outlets. In *Palestine*, it is clear that the first way of approaching objectivity is something that

does not fit the way the story is presented in the book, since the author and the narrator is far

from detached and impartial. Thus, it could be claimed that objectivity in *Palestine* concerns

the rituals, the ways in which the narrative is formed and presented to the reader. There is a

difference between creating a work of fiction and a work of journalism. "I figured I was

going to tell my autobiographical story of being in the Middle East. Journalism got pulled

into it; *that's how I behaved* when I was there," Sacco describes the process of writing

Palestine (Mitchell and Sacco 70, italics added). In the following subchapters, I am going to discuss the elements in the comic book that affect the readers' response to it, focusing on the elements that are crucial in relation to the idea of objectivity.

Rhodes and Brown argue that all writing is more or less constructed and that because of that, reality can never be truly represented in any form of writing. Because of this, some textual genres based on narrating real life events can benefit from a more fictive form of writing, since it can act as a way to "free the author from the 'constraints of [the genre]', and draw on thoughts and feelings which are not readily accessible to standard forms of [that genre]" (474). They also propose that with a fictional approach, the role of the author and the choices he or she has made in the narrative are made more visible to the reader (470). "To label one's writing 'factual' is to claim an equivalence between one's representations and an externally located 'reality' that not only sidelines the need for reflexivity, but also denies the author's responsibility for his/her writing," Rhodes and Brown state (476). These ideas relate deeply with the journalistic notion of objectivity, since journalism is about representing something as factual: 'this is the way that the outside world is'. This way of representation brings about notions of reality. Whose reality is depicted as being the state of the affairs and whose is left out of the depiction? Does this inclusion or exclusion of the realities affect the ways in which the consumer of journalism relates to the depiction he or she reads or sees? The following subchapters focus on the effects the form of *Palestine* as a comic book has on our interpretation of the story and its objectivity.

3.1 Iconography of an Image

Before discussing the ways in which journalistic objectivity manifests itself in *Palestine*, we must first get acquainted with the appropriate terminology relating to images and the ways in which they refer to reality. How do we think about images and their relation to the object they

depict? Berger (*Ways of Seeing* 2) classifies an image as something that is "a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It has an appearance, or a set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance." He also argues that images were first used to "conjure up the appearances of something that was absent" but it was gradually realized that images could outlast the thing they represented, thus enabling "an image [to become] a record of how X had seen Y" (*Ways of Seeing* 3).

The last part of Berger's notion quoted is crucial to remember when considering images and the things they represent. Pictures and even photographs are always created by someone. According to Barthes (28, italics in the original),

> the photograph is pure contingency and can be nothing else (it is always *something* that is represented)—contrary to the text which, by the sudden action of a single word, can shift a sentence from description to reflection—it immediately yields up those 'details' which constitute the very raw material of ethnological knowledge.

However, despite Barthes' description concerning the nature of an image, the act of framing the picture—including something and excluding something else, choosing what to depict and in which manner—always happens. Berger (*About Looking* 41–44) calls this act an act of freezing time, in which the image seized is separated from the reality it is taken and turned into an iconographic representation. Eventually it is disconnected from the series of events it was taken in. Because of this, Berger claims, "the issue of the war which has caused that moment [to be photographed] is effectively depoliticised. The picture becomes evidence of the general human condition. It accuses nobody and everybody" (44).

Similar problematic issues are recognized by Johnson, who argues that due to the iconic nature of pictures, "we can identify more quickly and effortlessly with a stick figure 'any man' than with a perfectly rendered portrait of 'another man'" (n. pg.). He argues that the more detailed the way people from other (often non-Western) nations are represented is, the more we readers tend to Other these people portrayed. Their pain feels less important to

us, since we cannot identify with them. Johnson even goes on to argue that these people are dehumanized to some extent for example in journalistic war photography. Sontag has similar thoughts regarding the process of taking a photograph of someone: "[to] photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (*On Photography* 14).

This idea relates strongly with the themes in my thesis. In order for *Palestine* to be fully an objective representation of the conflict in the Gaza strip, the way the comic represents different sides (the Israeli, who have more in common with the Western readers than the Palestinians who are categorized as Middle-Eastern people) should not affect directly the reading of the comic. The politics of power and representation are constantly present in the actual form of the comic. However, it should be noted that Johnson's praise for the comic medium as an alternative often fails to notice that the panels and characters need to be drawn by someone, that they are a product of the creative work by an author who—willingly or not—comes from a certain cultural background that inevitably has an effect on the way he or she sees the world around him- or herself and how he or she chooses to represent it in the art. Thus the process of dehumanization Johnson depicts above can occur in the comics by the author as well as the reader also.

Relating to the discussion concerning the iconography of an image, Barthes (91) notes that photographs are "never, in essence, a memory" but actually something that "blocks memory [and] quickly becomes a counter-memory." He refers to this process as violent "because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (91, italics in the original). In other words, we tend to remember the events in our lives via photographs, which eventually leads to the photographs being able to shape these memories. It could be argued that the same idea can be applied with other media as

well. For instance, Schack (111) proposes that comics provide an "'immediate medium'" that uses the "visual immediacy" to affect the reader on emotional level. He argues that partly because of this, drawn images carry the same "mnemonic value" than photographs: they also carry "the power of the image as testimony (to 'bear witness'), and to solidify cultural memory (to 'never forget')" (113).

The notion regarding the image's power to testify brings forth the question of power itself. According to Hall, there are always ideological processes at work when we read pictures. He proposes that we make thematic interpretations based on the context in which we see these pictures. By combining an image to the already formed set of concepts or themes we have, this image is turned into an ideological sign (179). The ideologies we attach to images and the images themselves are hard to separate from each other, since they are so deeply interconnected. However, two distinct levels of ideological framework can be detected:

1. the level of 'an event' these images create

2. the level of 'a subject' (or 'subjects') that act within the event (Hall 183).

Considering this, the iconographic value that the images in *Palestine* have is to some extent ideological. Sacco narrates certain events, thus making them into a public ones, raising them into general awareness so that they can be discussed. In attempt to make his narrative an objective one, Sacco frames his depiction with historical facts in some parts of *Palestine* (see for instance 11–15). He also tries to include narratives from both Israeli and Palestinian points of view. However, according to Hall (183), this kind of framing always carries an ideological element in itself, since a political and moral framework is given for the reader. In order to discuss these ideological aspects further, the relationship between *what* Sacco depicts and *how* he depicts that is discussed in the next subchapter.

3.1.1 What Is Portrayed and How in *Palestine*?

*"*In Photography, the presence of the thing (at a certain past moment) is never metaphoric,"

argues Barthes (78). Comics, however, work on a wholly different basis. Herkman argues

that the most radical changes in the things depicted are often absent in the comic form:

usually, they occur between the panels instead (71). Thus, the transformations the thing goes

through and the moments of these transformations are not present. It can also be argued that

the comic form utilizes the metaphoric value of an image to a much greater extent. In comics,

the presence of the thing that has been drawn is always metaphoric. Herkman proposes that

this may be the reason why comics are often used as an aid of distributing propaganda as well

as educational content: caricature-like visualizations can be interpreted despite different

backgrounds and even languages the audience may have (63). This is all because the

relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary (Herkman 62).

De Saussure's ideas regarding semiotics can be applied to the analysis of comic

books. What he has labelled as 'a sign' is formed by two factors: 'a signifier', meaning what

is expressed in some way, and 'a signified', meaning what the signifier refers to (Herkman

62). So, even though the signifier refers to something that exists (on a concrete or conceptual

level—an object or an emotion, for instance) in our lives, it is always separate from the object

it refers to. Kukkonen criticizes the use of Saussurean semiotic approach in the analysis of

comics to a certain extent. According to her, "images are primarily analogical representations

and thus do not comply with the differential requirements of the Saussurean sign", and that it

would be more fruitful to analyze comics using the concepts of metaphor and metonymy,

"special processes of meaning-making" (90). Kukkonen bases her argument on the following

premise:

> Etymologically speaking, metaphor *transfers* meaning from one conceptual
> domain to another, while metonymy *renames* one thing with a name from the
> same conceptual domain. This meaning-making need not necessarily be tied
> to language and verbal expression, but can also appear in visual art […].

> Metaphor and metonymy are sometimes combined and sometimes also the verbal and visual modes work together in these tropic processes of meaning-making (90–91, italics in the original).

This observation regarding the nature of comics—that the verbal elements can support and contrast the visual elements (and vice versa) in terms of meaning-making—concerns the issues regarding *Palestine* as well.

Since I am interested in how *Palestine* manages to represent reality in an objective manner, the question of the relationship between the textual and visual and how they affect each other and the overall reading of the comic is a crucial one. For instance, the contrast between what is shown and what is narrated creates sometimes tension in the comic that reflects the role a journalist has to take in the areas of crisis. When Sacco describes his encounter with the Israeli soldiers during a Palestinian demonstration, the narration of the panels reflects his panic and discomfort with the situation. "Okay, I've had it… I want out before the soldiers check this side of the street… *Like a leaf*, I tell you, the whole fucking time…," Sacco's monologue states (125). However, he draws himself with a blank, almost an indifferent expression. It could be argued that this creates a contrast in the comic that can reflect in our reading of other characters whose inner monologue is not revealed. Is everyone as scared as Sacco is? Are the blankly narrated testimonies only a facade, hiding uncertainty and hurt behind them? This type of juxtaposition works well with a narrative in which the figures of power are also interviewed—it can make the reader question the seemingly confident manner in which an Israeli soldier for instance claims that he "[is] a Zionist and believe[s] in a strong Israel" (Sacco 19).

Irwin also recognizes problems when applying the Saussurean theory to the study of comics. He notes that in terms of the so-called nonfictional comics (which includes comics journalism as well), the relationship between the signifier and the signified becomes somewhat troublesome. "One of the complexities of 'truth' in graphic nonfiction is that in

addition to the truthfulness of the words, visual depictions may be more or less tied to the

actual appearances of people, places, and settings they purport to depict", he argues,

continuing that the amount of truthfulness in the narrative is often left unexplained, especially

when it comes to the visual aspects of comics (107–108). Thus, the reader is left unaware of

the relationship between the signifiers used and the reality they try to convey. It could be

argued that this is the case with *Palestine* as well. Even though the book is presented as a

journalistic work, Sacco does not state clearly the level of arbitrariness between the actual

events and his depictions of them. However, this can also be considered as an uncertain

aspect of any type of journalistic work.

> Journalism is cold sort of work. You are trying to get the information out of
> [the people you interview]. […] Obviously I'm a filter. I mean, I do all I can
> to be as accurate as I can, but there is no getting around the fact that I'm the
> one who is translating [these interviews] into drawing, which by nature is a
> subjective act. But as much as possible I'm trying to use the information I've
> been given to depict something, to get to the essential truth of what
> happened,

Sacco describes his methods (Mitchell and Sacco 61). It is worth noting that this account of

the working methods and the problems behind them does not apply to comics journalism

only—similar issues rise in the more traditional forms of journalism as well.

If we look at the drawings of people Sacco interviews, the arbitrariness of the reality

and representation mentioned above becomes evident. We can observe that he more or less

depicts them as anonymous, without any distinct features. The people whose stories he

narrates become anonymous, which changes the focus from them to the stories they tell about

the injustices they have endured. Considering this, we can observe that this conflicts with the

idea Johnson proposes in his article about our ability to relate better with the drawn images of

people from other cultures than with photographs of them because of the iconographic nature

of a comic book illustration:

> We do not read iconic figures in a mode of paralyzed wonderment but rather
> we project, appropriate, assimilate almost as soon as we see it. Against the

historical and geographical locatability of the ethnographic photograph, the comic icon works on a more utopic register; its non-place can easily become any place or every place. The reader, rather than thinking 'I want to go there one day' thinks '*there* could easily be *here*. Perhaps it is already here. Perhaps I am already there.' (n. pg., italics in the original)

Instead of humanizing the characters he draws, Sacco actually transforms them into a mass with no other characteristics than the atrocities they have experienced. This observation can be supported by Sontag's notion regarding the spectacle of human pain (*On Photography* 42): the depiction of suffering takes over and we tend to forget the actual people who experience the pain that is being depicted. An argument could be made that this emphasizes the actions committed towards Palestinians and takes the focus off from an individual to a broader level in order to produce a journalistically credible narrative.

However, these depictions of Palestinians can also be interpreted otherwise. Brister and Walzer for instance recognize elements of human rights discourse in the way Sacco depicts the people, especially the Palestinians, in his comics. They argue that "Palestinian erasure is belied by the very presence of the 'temporary' housing and by the people themselves" and that "Sacco's visual rendering of bodies and bodily trauma indicates a kind of productive intransigence for Palestinians" (147). Based on this, it could be argued that the representation of the Palestinians as a mass without distinguishable features is an act of rebellion made by Sacco on the behalf of them: Sacco depicts the Palestinians as they are seen by the Israeli forces. However, it could also be argued that the similar issue regarding the erasure of the identity remains. After all, Sacco is an outsider to the culture and the situation he depicts, so by choosing to depict something the way he does, he inevitably uses the power this stance brings him to erase some of the identities of the people interviewed.

This erasure of the identities of the people Sacco interviews can also be regarded in other ways. For instance, it could be argued that in order to create an objective representation of the reality he encounters, Sacco tries to diminish his role as the mediator between the

experiences of the people he interviews and the reader he produces his narrative for. This is partially done by the process of making the people he interviews anonymous. According to Peters (710), an act of witnessing is actually a shift from a personal experience to a public statement in which "words can be exchanged, experiences cannot." It could be argued that Sacco's choice of narrating the interviews via mostly anonymous characters supports this idea by Peters. Sacco brings the experiences of the Palestinians from the personal sphere into the public one, and this process is highlighted by diminishing the individual traits and features of these people interviewed. As he makes these people anonymous, he also turns their personal experiences into public accounts of a larger political issue. If we take Sontag's (*On Photography* 42) ideas discussed earlier in this thesis into account, this could also mean that the larger issue is transformed into a spectacle to be watched. Instead of individuals, these Palestinians are a part of a bigger representation of torment.

The idea above can be approached from two opposite views. On the other hand, this can be regarded as a positive feature: according to Johnson (n. pg.), it is easier for us to "identify more quickly and effortlessly with a stick figure 'any man' than with a perfectly rendered portrait of 'another man.'" However, this way of representing the Palestinians also makes them distant. It can be claimed that their experiences are transformed into narratives, which implies that there is nothing to be done to help these people. Sontag (*On Photography* 42) argues that the spectacle of torment often suggests that the situation is beyond repair to the audience. However, the same argument can be used with traditional forms of journalism as well, since "[the] objective witness claims disembodiment and passivity, a cold indifference to the story, offering 'just the facts'" (Peters 716).

Discussing this anonymity in representation in comics, Kartalopoulos (78) suggests that even though "the simplicity of iconic cartoon characters [...] invites readers to fill in the blank spaces of the image and, therefore, to identify with the protagonist", "these kinds of

abstracted […] representations can control the reader's perception." He argues that simplistic, iconic images can "direct [the reader's] attention to [the author's] rational arguments, unsupported by emotional arguments." This notion relates directly to the idea regarding objectivity as a passive disembodiment discussed above. Blankness suggests indifference, which affects the reading of the comic. In *Palestine*, it frames the narrative as an objective witness of reality, even though we can find moral stances in the narrative that tell us otherwise.

The anonymity used as a narrative tool in *Palestine* can also be read differently. Brister and Walzer propose an interesting idea concerning Sacco's relationship between the Palestinians and himself. They argue that there is "a separation between the consumer-tourist and the danger and poverty of occupation" (141). An argument could be made that this separation between Sacco and the Palestinians is highlighted by the narrative choice of making the Palestinians appear as anonymous. This produces the so-called spectacle of torment discussed above, which itself "enacts a 'pedagogical model of ethical spectatorship' […] that attempts to teach the reader that he/she should be uneasy with the act of looking" (Brister and Walzer 141). In other words, by making the separation of the real persons and the signifiers used in the comic clear by highlighting the anonymity of the latter, Sacco manages to comment on our will to read about the suffering of the former.

Sacco's separated position is emphasized in the section titled "Hijab" in which he describes his thoughts about the Palestinian women. As he states that he does not understand their faith and their choice of wearing a hijab, he also separates them from himself by making all of the women turn away from him in the opening picture of the section (see figure 2 in the appendices). As Sacco's character is the only one whose face is shown in this picture, this creates a juxtaposition of 'us' versus 'them': just like the Palestinian men, the women are represented as anonymous mass in *Palestine* as well. Combining this type of representation

with Sacco the comic book character's depiction of his own negative ideas of Muslim women,—he for instance compares women wearing veils to "pigeons moving along in the sidewalk" (Sacco 137)—Sacco the comic book author is far from the ideas regarding comics journalism's humanizing nature Johnson proposes. Johnson for instance argues that "iconicity of comics […] allows the readers to project their own lives more readily onto otherwise culturally alien subjectives, creating new possibilities for compassion and humanization" (n. pg.). In *Palestine*, it seems that this is not always the case. Instead, Sacco sometimes seems to rely on the orientalizing depictions that seem to distance the reader from the issue and the people he tries to depict: as discussed above, the women in *Palestine* are often reduced to the hijab they are wearing.

However, it could also be argued that this is only a stylistic matter, since Sacco seems to have adopted a caricature-like drawing style similar to the underground comixs [sic.] scene of the Sixties. Since caricatures often rely on only a few distinct features, it could be argued that representing the Muslim women as a veiled anonymous mass could just be an attempt to adhere to the stylistic tradition Sacco has adopted. As we read the book, we are also able to observe that the character of Sacco is probably the most caricatured character in the book. His eyes remain hidden behind his large glasses and his nose and lips are drawn proportionally larger than the rest of his face. In addition to this, Sacco is often depicted with a distorted expression on his face (see figure 3 in the appendices).

Thus we could also claim that the reader is able to see that the book is a colored depiction of reality because of the exaggerated style of the drawings. Scherr discusses the effects Sacco's representational choices relating to his own character by arguing that "the character of 'Joe Sacco' […] moves between his present encounters and others' past experiences […, but] this reconstruction of others' bodies is mediated and complicated by the ways that Sacco reconstructs his own body, transforming himself into a major character"

("Shaking hands" 20). This could be interpreted to address the issue regarding the representational choices that can seem to dehumanize the people depicted in the comic: since the character of Joe Sacco is a caricature—or at least caricature-like—, the rest of the humans depicted in the comic are caricatured as well in order for the comic to be aesthetically uniform. Thus, the representational choices are made based on how Sacco wants to depict himself and then expanded to include other characters as well, not vice versa.

However, the issue regarding the character of Joe Sacco in *Palestine* and the exaggerated style of the comic is more complex than that. That is why the character of Joe Sacco is discussed in more detail further in this thesis, and the exaggerating nature of the comic in the next subchapter.

3.1.2 Realism versus the Style of Underground Comixs

In describing the characterizing features of comics journalism, Schack goes on to suggest that

> the ability to orchestrate an image, to fix the meaning and thus the testimony and the cultural memory of the image in way that would raise all manner of objections should they be similarly manipulated in photojournalism […] is yet another argument for the formal uniqueness—and the power—of the genre. This is because graphic journalists, and the images they create are not beholden to the same standards of objective truth as are photojournalists—the audience of graphic non-fiction work can simultaneously entertain the contradictory notion that drawn images are at once true, but not actual. (114)

It could be argued that this notion supports the ideas presented by Rhodes and Brown. They too are able to differentiate between reality and presenting "'realities' [… of] subjective and emotional perspectives" (471), still considering the latter accounts valuable even though they are presented in a way that does not adhere to the typical way of presenting something factual (an academic study or a journalistic text for instance). The ability to communicate feelings and personal realities is utilized in *Palestine* on numerous occasions.

According to Sacco himself, the form of the comic allows the artist for instance to express the atmosphere of the surroundings much better, since "no words are necessary at all

if you want to create [a certain] mood" (Sacco and Mitchell 57). The comics journalist is able to narrate the mood via his or her illustrations in order to express the reader the situation in a way he or she wishes to. Rosenblatt and Lunsford believe that this type of exaggeration can express issues that are larger than the matter depicted. They connect comics journalism with the works of fine art that depict war. "These works of art have strong subjective point of view, expressing the horror and outrage," Rosenblatt and Lunsford argue. By moving away from a distant and objective standpoint and by taking a more subjective and expressive one, artists are able to "[move] beyond realism into the hallucinatory, fragmented, and speechless horrors that war always entails" (71). In other words, just because something is depicted using artistic manners, that does not mean that the feelings that are being expressed are untrue or false. Rosenblatt and Lunsford argue that Sacco's drawings that utilize the visual techniques of exaggeration and caricature "feel 'loud'" (71)—they have an impact on the reader on an emotional level.

Irwin notes that Sacco's exaggerated manner of drawing also serves the reader by revealing Sacco's involvement in the creation of the story (112). He points out that Sacco utilizes the manners of the underground comixs movement especially when it comes to drawing himself within the panels. By doing that, Sacco's stylistic choice "serves as a sort of disclaimer whereby [he] makes his own subjectivity evident and signals his awareness of the limits of visual truth" (113). It should be noted that the role(s) of Sacco in *Palestine* are discussed further in chapter 4, which concerns Sacco's presence in the comic. Maher notes that Sacco's choice of depicting himself "as unusually small and weedy with exaggerated facial features" and with his glasses that never show his eyes may have something to do with Sacco's willingness to portray himself as an outside observer (129). By adhering to the stylistic traditions of underground comixs, Sacco is able to highlight his feelings and reactions to the things he observes—but at the same time this representational choice ensures

that there is a distance between Sacco and the people and the events he depicts.

By now we have established that Sacco's narrative attempts to evoke feelings amongst its readers and emphasize the role of Sacco in the narrative. But what are the exact techniques that are used in the first attempt? Scherr describes Sacco's style with the term 'haptic visuality'. She explains this definition by calling it a technique or strategy that "can be understood as a connective readerly address incorporating sensation and emotion in its communicative reach; it is therefore a strategy that calls particular attention to the role of affect in the encounter between work and audience" ("Shaking hands" 21). Scherr also notes that the term 'haptic visuality' can refer to touching in a literal sense of the word as well as touching "in the realm of feeling and emotion more generally" ("Shaking hands" 21). It could be argued that this technique of haptic visuality Sacco deploys relies heavily on the exaggerated stylistic manners of underground comixs. Every expression is drawn at its most powerful manifestation: for instance, the pain depicted transforms into excruciating torment which distorts the facial expressions of its sufferer and makes him or her sweat (see for instance Sacco 32).

Because of this, it could be argued that Sacco's stylistic choices, even when they are exaggerated, do not stray far from the ideals of journalism. After all, written journalism sometimes tends to depict the expressions of the persons interviewed—why should comics journalism be any different? However, there are also downsides to this narrational choice. Tumber proposes that even though the dispassionate stance in war journalism can often be accused of lacking patriotism, he also recognizes that "the 'journalism of attachment', the human, emotional face of war correspondence" can sometimes be considered as "'self-righteous' and 'moralizing'" (201). Considering this, we could argue that because of Sacco's stylistic choices, a clearly moralizing stance is visible in *Palestine*. As discussed above, the caricature-like manner of drawing can emphasize emotions such as those relating to the

suffering in terms of the Palestinians depicted in the comic. However, the other side of the story, the Israeli, is represented in a different manner, even though Sacco draws them in a similar artistic manner. The exaggerated drawing style often emphasizes either the cool indifference or the violent outbursts of the Israeli people (see for instance Sacco 264 for the former and 128 for the latter). Because of this, the stylistic manner distorts and simplifies the reality it tries to depict.

Different opinions can also be found when it comes to the effect the style of *Palestine* has on its readers. For instance, Maher finds "irony in [Sacco's] cartoon-like depiction[s]" to serve as a tool for a reader to recognize the discomfort Sacco feels as journalist, as well as "the unequal power dynamic in which the foreign journalist functions" (129–130). However, it could be argued that this idea only applies to Sacco's depictions of himself. By using his power as an outsider by relying on the caricature-like style, Sacco does not only make 'the unequal power dynamic' Maher discusses visible. He also sustains it when he simplifies the relationships between the two groups of people he does not belong to into exaggerated manners and facial expressions that fail to recognize the complexity of the issues behind them.

But why should we care about the drawings on the pages of a comic book, even when this comic book claims to represent reality to some extent when labeling itself as comics journalism? There is a reason for this. "Reality has always been interpreted through the reports given by images; and philosophers since Plato have tried to loosen our dependence on images by evoking the standard of an image-free way of apprehending reality," argues Sontag (*On Photography* 153). We are dependent of images as a tool for the construction of our reality—even when these images are constructed and artificial. The images used in the narrative affect the way we interpret the narrative they tell. This is why the pictures on the pages of a comic book matter. In the following chapter I discuss the issue of constructed

pictures (that is, drawn images as opposed to photographs, even though it can be argued that they are also constructed to some extent) and the effect they have on the narrative and the reality *Palestine* represents.

3.2 A Constructed Picture—Constructed Reality?

Images have the power to influence us and our thinking. In addition to informing us about the world around us, they also play a part in constructing the way we see and relate to our surroundings. Because of this, what we consider 'reality' and 'a picture' cannot be separated from each other. The former affects the latter. Sontag has noted that, claiming that images shape our views to some extent:

> To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the […] images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more—and more. Images transfix. Images anesthetize. An event known through photograph certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs […]. But after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real (*On Photography* 20).

Is a drawn picture different to a photograph in this matter? It could be argued that this is the case. Sontag, for instance, argues that even though photographs are to be considered artifacts, they are more commonly regarded as "unpremeditated slices of the world," simultaneously being something artistic as well as something real, "clouds of fantasy and pellets of information" (*On Photography* 69).

Images in a comic book make their artificiality known to their reader, who realizes that they are drawn and thus cannot mirror reality such as it is. However, we cannot argue that the issues *Palestine* (as well as Sacco's other works) discusses are not real and that the images used to depict them do not represent reality to a certain extent. In *On Photography* (87), Sontag proposes that "[it] is reality which is scrutinized, and evaluated, for its fidelity to photographs. […] Instead of just recording reality, photographs have become the norm for the

way things appear to us, thereby changing the very idea of reality, and of realism." In this subchapter, I am going to propose that comics journalism is a powerful tool of representation because it too can chance or affect the ways we experience the reality in the narrative.

Williams (54) argues that due to the characteristics of comics journalism as a medium—as a combination of both words and images that can juxtapose and complement each other—, "comics are well suited to represent the fragmentation of experience during crisis." It could be argued that in terms of *Palestine*, this is true. For instance, we can observe the effects of the conflict to the reporters residing in the politically restless areas. At the very beginning of the book, the panels are chaotic and they give the reader an impression that Sacco is overcome with his surroundings (see for instance Sacco 1–10). In the beginning, the panels overlap with each other while the speech bubbles as well as the other textual elements are not aligned with the panels nor with each other. This creates a sense of chaos.

As the story proceeds, the panels become more structured: they are more symmetrical and aligned with the text in them. This tells the reader that Sacco is accustomed to the situation he is in, he now feels organized in it. This is emphasized in the part of the book in which Sacco visits Jerusalem, in which the chaotic description of the surroundings is used again. This type of narration could be considered an interesting account of the experiences of war reporters. Rhodes and Brown suggest that fictional approaches can offer a better understanding of different realities because they often "[incorporate] subjective and emotional perspectives" (471).

We can see an example of this in *Palestine*, as Sacco's personal perspectives are narrated for example with the use of the panel structure. This 'subjective perspective' is emphasized when an actual perspective shifts are used: for instance, when Sacco feels threatened, the people he encounters are shown in frog perspective (see figure 4 in the appendices). According to Herkman (29), this is a perspective in which a point of view is on

a lower level than what is actually displayed and it is often used to make the reader to identify with the feelings of smallness and powerlessness the perspective provides.

Similar method is also used in chapter "Moderate Pressure Part 2" (Sacco 102–113), in which Ghassan tells about his experiences when he was arrested. As the chapter continues and Ghassan's situation becomes more hopeless, the panels become smaller and smaller. It could be argued that this emphasizes his feelings as a concrete prisoner as well as his feelings about his situation in general. The chapter describes the reader that it is not just the imprisonment Ghassan is anxious of; descriptions of his interrogations and court trials appear frequently in between the descriptions of his time in prison. This emphasizes the hopelessness of the situation, since the interrogations become more violent and the court trials more frustrating as the chapter continues.

This can be used as an example of what Schack (110) describes as "multi-layered narrative": he argues that by "blending words with images" the author is able to "inform and enhance" both of these aspects in the narrative and this makes it possible for him or her to "create understanding on an intellectual level as well as feeling on an emotional, visceral level." This is an excellent example of offering the reader an emotional and subjective experience I have discussed earlier in this chapter. In his interview with W.J.T. Mitchell, Sacco admits this being his purpose in that particular chapter.

> What I do is I increase the amount of panels so he's in a smaller and smaller space as time goes on, but I think that works because that's trying to give some feeling of oppression. But again, it is a matter of degree. I think really getting inside someone's pain, that's a matter of fiction. That's where fiction works. And I think that's where fiction can take over (Sacco and Mitchell 65).

The notion of emotional and visceral level mentioned above is interesting and concerns *Palestine* as a book quite deeply. Sacco sides with the Palestinians quite openly in the book: "Well, what about a Palestinian state? Can you imagine that?[…] The territories are economically suppressed. They're a captive market and a source of cheap labor for

Israel…[…] The occupation is harsh. Do you really know what goes on over there?", he argues with Israeli women in the book (Sacco 263–264). This can be considered problematic to some extent. Comics, as discussed earlier, are able to create narratives that are able to make us emotionally attached to what is depicted due to the "multi-layered" (Schack 110) type of narration. This becomes evident in *Palestine* as well. Sacco depicts almost exclusively the suffering of the Palestinians, and this pain is depicted in a exaggerated manner that highlights it to a great extent.

For instance, in the chapter "Public & Private Wounds", Sacco depicts his encounter with a wounded man and his family in the hospital Sacco visits (32). The wounded Palestinian is drawn sweating, grinding his teeth and arching his back. His physical pain is made clear to the reader, especially when it is exaggerated with the use of a panel structure that distorts the humans in the panel in the vein of a wide angle lens in a camera, and exaggerated one at that. This way of drawing the situation makes the arch of the man's back seem larger, since wide angle lenses tend to magnify the object that is framed in the center of a picture. As Sacco is in fact not photographing the events but drawing them, this usage of distorting effects can be considered to be intentional for him, not merely an unavoidable feature of the tool chosen as it would be with a wide angle lens. It could be argued that this is because the exaggerated manner of drawing is adopted in the chapter in order to provide the reader with the sense of chaos in the ER ward in the hospital and the fragmented nature of experiencing pain. Following this argument, it could be claimed that Sacco wants the reader to empathize with the pain of the man who has been shot.

Thus it could be argued that Sacco's depiction is far from objective, even though he categorizes his work as journalism. This creates a colored depiction of the state of the issues concerning the relations of Palestine and Israel. What is curious about this is the fact that this actually takes away some of the narrative's power as a depiction of Palestinian suffering.

Peters (721) argues that

> [ultimately], the boundary between fact and fiction is an ethical one before it is
> an epistemological one: it consists in having respect for the pain of victims, in
> being tied by simultaneity, however loosely, to someone else's story of how
> they hurt.[…] Simultaneous suffering forms the horizon of responsibility:
> liveness matters for the living. Facts impose moral and political obligation that
> fictions do not.

This idea is supported by Sontag (*On Photography* 42), who proposes that suffering becomes

a spectacle when represented to others, and that this process makes the audience think that

nothing can be done. What Sacco is doing is in fact turning the suffering of the Palestinians

as a spectacle for us to observe. This can make us think that all accounts Sacco has recorded

are actually mere fiction. In *Palestine*, it could be argued, the affairs between Palestine and

Israel are turned into fictive ones. The conflict becomes yet another fictive conflict, which

means that the experiences of the Palestinians are turned into fictive pain that we can

cathartically consume. The same applies to the depictions of the violence and confrontations

in the book. Sacco seems to highlight the differences in the power relations between the

Israeli and the Palestinians by portraying the Israeli troops in a more negative light than the

Palestinians. For instance, the former group is often drawn with distorted expressions of rage

on their face when they are depicted in some kind of conflict with the latter group (see figure

5 in the appendices).

Again, it could be argued that this kind of juxtaposition between the two opposite

groups takes away the real aspects the book is based on. As the Israeli are represented as the

villains of the narrative, the complex political situation is changed into a fictional story with a

clear moral stance. Danger in this type of representation lies in the fact that it hints the reader

that a simple solution exists, which is rarely the case with real life conflicts. Even though this

could be regarded as using fiction for "a 'carnivalesque' critique" (Rhodes and Brown 472)

of the situation in Palestine, this way of describing the conflict is confusing for the reader in a

narrative that is often labeled as 'non-fiction' (for instance Schack 111). This diminishes the

journalistic value of the book, since Sacco seems to openly favor one group over the other. "A witness […] may not offer an opinion (about culpability, for instance) but may only describe the facts of what was seen. The blanker the witness the better," argues Peters (716) when discussing ideas relating to the notions of objectivity. However, he also notes that humans cannot always properly give this blank witness described above. The idea that for the witness to be credible, "[the] observer [should act] as a mirror, dull as the microscope to human concerns or consequences" (Peters 716) can be regarded as impossible to realize in action. By comparing the ideal witness to inanimate objects, Peters simultaneously argues that witnesses always carry personal opinions to a certain degree. It could be argued that this applies to *Palestine* as well: even though Sacco (as a protagonists of the book) does not often directly state his opinions, they are still visible with the choices he has made when constructing his narrative.

We have now established the author and his or her views are inevitably present in the narrative he or she produces. In addition to this kind of presence, we can observe Joe Sacco in the pages of *Palestine* in other ways as well, since he draws himself as a character in the book. But is there a difference between Joe Sacco the author and Joe Sacco the comic book character? And if there is, does that affect the narrative we read? These questions will be addressed in the next chapter, as well as the question concerning the author's presence in the comic book. Is the artist more exposed to the reader since the reader can see the artist's handiwork, as opposed to a novel, in which typography can act as a distancing barrier between the author and the reader? These are all questions that relate deeply with the question regarding objectivity, and thus need to be studied when discussing comics journalism and its relationship with the reality it tries to depict.

4. The Ever-Present Author

Joe Sacco is present in *Palestine* in two ways. There is a character of Joe Sacco, a protagonist of the story who experiences the narratives told in the novel. In addition to this, the reader can also see Joe Sacco the author in the pages of the book, since the hand drawn illustrations notify the reader of his presence constantly. As Scherr notes, "[the] intervention of the human hand on the surface of the photographs is rendered purposefully invisible, while, as [she argues], the evidentiary power of the drawing entirely depends on making such intervention visible" ("Shaking hands" 26). Does this have an effect on the reading of the novel? Does the presence of the author guide the reader towards a reading that emphasizes the subjectivity of the narrative told? These are questions I will discuss in this chapter. It is worth emphasizing that these are important themes to discuss, since although journalistic media often emphasize their strife for objectivity, objectivity is often merely an ideal, since every narrative carries the values of its narrator.

In *Palestine*, the character of Joe Sacco describes the events and stories the author, Joe Sacco, has witnessed. Peters approaches witnessing as a passive as well as an active course of action: seeing and saying (709). This combined with his partial focus on the so-called credible instruments (that is, cameras and microphones are credible in terms of objectivity, since they are recording devices that condone to the idea of "objectivity as passivity" [715]) is a fairly traditional approach to the issue, especially in terms of some kind of visual media. However, Peters' thoughts on the political aspects of witnessing are an interesting read, especially regarding literary genres:

> Primo Levi, Anne Frank, Victor Klemperer, Wiesel, to name a few, have the cultural authority of witnesses of atrocity. As survivors of events, they in turn bear active witness which we, at one remove, can in turn witness passively. There is a strange ethical claim in the voice of the victim. *Witnessing in this sense suggests a morally justified individual who speaks out against unjust power*. Imagine a Nazi who published his memoirs of the war as a 'witness' — it might be accepted as an account of experiences, but never as a 'witness' in the moral sense: *to witness means to be on the right side*. (Peters 714,

italics added)

This idea can be broadened to concern news as well: reporting about the atrocities in a foreign ground means that the reporter takes a moral stand, for example by excluding some possible approaches to the subject matter. This in turn relates directly to *Palestine*: the fact that Sacco has drawn himself as the main character highlights his acts of witnessing—and also the fact that even though seemingly objective, he inevitably takes a moral higher ground.

This may be even confusing to the reader, since there are two Joe Saccos at play in the comic book: Joe Sacco the author and Joe Sacco the comic book character. Are these characters one and the same or is there any differences between them? In *On Photography*, Sontag notes that "[most] tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter. Unsure of other responses, they take a picture" (10). Even though she discusses the actions of tourists, it could be argued that the same applies to professionals as well, which she also recognizes: "[while] real people are out there killing themselves or other real people, the photographer stays behind his or her camera" (*On Photography* 11). Relying on this approach, it could be argued that the character of Joe Sacco in *Palestine* is used as a tool for Joe Sacco the author to distance himself from the events narrated. Joe Sacco the character acts thus similarly to the camera Sontag mentions: he comes between the experiencer and the events experienced. If we consider this to be the case, Joe Sacco the character cannot be the same as Joe Sacco the author: in order there to be distance from the events narrated, the protagonist in the novel must be different from the author himself.

The observations regarding distance between the narrative and the author and its relationship with the notion of objectivity can be approached in two ways. It could be argued that by using the character of Joe Sacco, Joe Sacco the author distances himself from the narrative told, which makes it appear more fictional, since the role of the journalist is

diminished in the narrative. However, it could also be argued that this has an opposite effect: that the distance between Joe Sacco the author and the events he describes emphasizes the role of the author. Because of this, it could be claimed, the objective stance the narrative strifes for by the choices regarding its form resembles very much the ideals of traditional forms of journalism. If we consider objectivity to be merely an ideal and not something that can actually be present in a narrative, there should not be restrictions to the ways in which this ideal is pursued.

If we observe the character of Joe Sacco, we can see other examples of Joe Sacco the author distancing himself from the narrative by using a stand-in character. In the comic book, the character of Joe Sacco is presented as a caricature. His eyes are hidden behind the glasses he wears, and we can never actually see them. Thus, the inner life of Joe Sacco the character stays hidden, if we consider the eyes to be the mirror to one's soul, as the proverbial saying goes. Could this be important when it comes to the characterization of the protagonist in *Palestine*? Joe Sacco the character is always present in the novel as a character whose thoughts and reactions we cannot completely observe—despite his exaggerated facial expressions. This could be read as an attempt for the author himself to partially hide his thoughts and reactions whilst still recognizing his presence during the event which trigger them. Instead of the author, it is the character of Joe Sacco who is present in the events described in the novel. It could be argued that this relates to Peters' idea of objectivity as passivity discussed earlier, since compared to an actual person, a character of a literary work is inevitably a passive one, forced to experience the events brought before himself.

However, Scherr argues that the presence of the character of Joe Sacco can be regarded crucial when it comes to the witnesses he records in his works:

> While comics is primarily a visual medium, Sacco constantly represents himself listening to his informants' stories of torture, imprisonment, home invasion and so forth, thereby framing many of the sequences as testimonial narratives. Since testimony is one of the most accepted 'styles' of human

rights narratives, this aspect of the work reinforces the politics of recognition
[…]. Because Sacco's cartoon avatar is positioned as the reader's filter as we
navigate this landscape of crisis, we too are positioned as listeners as much
as we are positioned as spectators ("Framing human rights" 115).

Regarding this, it could then be argued that the character of Sacco is crucial in *Palestine* if we

want to consider it as a narrative of witnessing. If the comic is actually a witness of human

rights violations, it needs, according to Scherr, someone who these testimonials are entrusted

to. So, following this line of thought, by using a character of Joe Sacco, Joe Sacco the author

strives for objectivity by recording testimonials via his avatar, who must also be present in

the comic in order to the audience to recognize the type of the narrative in the book (that is, a

human rights narrative, which according to Scherr is characterized by its testimonial nature).

The character of Joe Sacco as "the reader's filter", as Scherr calls him ("Framing

human rights" 115), is crucial to the testimonial nature of the journalistic narrative *Palestine*

presents itself. It is worth noting that most of the events depicted are narrated with the

character of Joe Sacco visible in the panels. Even though his narration, including his own

thoughts, are included in the story, there are very few instances of the types of focalization in

the context they are understood in the comic medium. Herkman suggests that the idea of

focalization in comics should be broadened to include not only the visual perspectives but

also the so-called psychological spaces which can include for instance emotions and

cognitive reactions in the narrative. Herkman also notes that there can be more than one

focalization in a single panel and that it is more abstract than the narrative modes in written

literature (141–142). So, how does this relate to *Palestine* and the issues regarding objectivity

in it? Herkman suggests that there are usually three different types of focalization in the

comic form, which are:

1. a visual subject seeing an object,

2. a verbal subject narrating or describing an object, or

3. a psychological subject that views, feels, gives value and experiences an object in a certain

way (144).

The third type of focalization Herkman lists can be considered problematic when it comes to the narratives that strive for objectivity to a certain degree, *Palestine* included. This is because the focalization type handles the subjective experiences towards the objects present in the narrative. This clashes with the ideas regarding objectivity.

The events in *Palestine* are rarely visually narrated in a first-person perspective (the first focalization type) and the presence of Joe Sacco the character identifying as a journalist means that the narrative tries to tone down the instances in which a possible subjective perspective could take control over an objective one. It could be thus argued that even though we can read Joe Sacco's psychological narration simultaneously with the panels depicting the events he tries to convey, the role of Joe Sacco the author is diminished. Thus we could also argue that even though the character of Joe Sacco is present in the novel, the role of Joe Sacco the author is kept to the minimum. The testimonies recorded in the narrative are not directed to Joe Sacco but rather to the world in general, which resembles the traditional forms of journalism in which the journalist asks the questions but the answers are formed into a narrative with a larger audience. Because of this, it could also be argued that even though Joe Sacco—both the character and the author—is present in *Palestine*, the ethos of the novel resembles the traditional forms of journalism more than the genre I argued to be its relative, New Journalism. This is because the latter often emphasizes the subjective experiences to a larger degree. However, it is worth noting that this argument does not necessarily apply to comics journalism as a genre. Rather, it is a feature of a work studied in this thesis.

But how about Joe Sacco the author? Is he present in the pages of *Palestine* in other ways than via his avatar of Joe Sacco the comic book character? Berlatsky (n. pg.) notes that "[p]recisely because comics is a less familiar form for journalism than film or prose, it ends up emphasizing its own artificiality. Everything you see in *Footnotes in Gaza* is created and

represented by Joe Sacco," referring to another comic book by Sacco about Palestinian territories. However, even though I agree with Berlatsky, I also think that the actual form of the comic—not only its unfamiliarity amongst masses as a form of journalism—has also an effect of how we interpret the accounts told us using that form. According to Hall, photographs tend to 'suffocate' their possible ideological dimensions by offering to be interpreted as visual replicas of the so-called real world (185). Since the objects in photographs carry resemblance of a highest order to the objects they depict, photographs can be interpreted representing the way things actually are, despite the possible ideological processes that affect the image in its making. Comics journalism on the other hand is brutally honest—it does not hide the fact that the reality represented is represented and created by the author of the narrative. Comics journalism "demonstrates, almost reflexively, that journalism is not 'truth', but an effort to reconstruct truth" (Berlatsky n.pg.).

It could be argued that the hand drawn images that eventually remind the reader of their creator also remind us about "the stains of subjectivity, fallibility and interest that attach to our sense organs," whereas traditional tools of journalism such as a microphone 'by-passes' this notion of humanity in the creation of a narrative. This has a lot to do with the idea of "objective as passivity", since scientific instruments are considered to be indifferent "to human interests" (Peters 715). While it cannot be denied that writers can have their own voice and style of writing, the typeset letters on a blank page make the words more distant than the illustrations that come directly from the pen of the author of a comic, I argue. This argument is supported by Scherr, who suggests that the fact that *Palestine* "is entirely drawn by hand, including the accompanying text, is a reminder that [comics journalism's] very form calls attention to the author's hands. Line drawing itself seems to communicate the almost living presence of the artist's hands," Scherr continues ("Shaking hands" 24).

Thus it could be proposed that Joe Sacco the author is present when we are reading

his works. This invites us to consider his role in the making of the narrative. Or, as Scherr

puts it, "the graphic form's tactile quality, as expressed in the line drawing and experienced

by the reader on a visceral level as a trace of the artist's presence, continually communicates

the *subjective* and *affective* dimensions of the content presented" ("Shaking hands" 24, italics

added). Scherr seems to propose that the more the author is present in the narrative, more

visible the subjective nature of the narrative becomes. This can also invite the reader to

consider the possible privilege(s) and take them into account when reading the journalistic

narrative:

> [There] is a change in the intellectual atmosphere in the postmodern era,
> which […] can also justify the change in journalistic practices (Ezrachi
> 2002). The new historiography heralds the end of the grand narratives of the
> postcolonial era, narratives well known for their being a 'white mythology,'
> aimed at repressing various others. [… The] attention has to shift from the
> content of conversations to the communication act or, in other words, from
> what was said to the fact of saying (Liebes and Kampf 81–82).

As Scherr suggests, line drawings inevitably call the presence of the artist into our reading of

a comic. Thus it could be argued that this shifts the focus from the content of the narrative to

the actual act of narration, which, according to Tumber, can challenge the traditional

narratives of 'white mythology'—and by doing that, creating narratives that are more

objective, at least in certain respects.

It is also worth noting that the comic form of the narrative in *Palestine* can make the

reader more aware of the writing as "a method of reality construction" (Rhodes and Brown

483) instead of an actual representation of reality. Since Sacco has made a conscious choice

of including a character of Joe Sacco who is drawing a comic book based on what he sees as

a protagonist of *Palestine*, the reader is unable to escape the author's presence in the book.

This combined with the stylistic choices in the comic, the reader is forced to realize that the

reality the book presents is a creation of the author and does not necessarily bear any

resemblance to the actual events. "Distance is a ground for mistrust and doubt," suggests

Peters (717), and with *Palestine*, this seems to be the case. By making us read about the lives of the Palestinians via his exaggerated drawings, Sacco creates a distance between his accounts and the story he narrates. This is not, however, a negative thing. Peters (721) goes on to argue that "[facts] are witnessed, fictions are narrated," supporting the ideas presented us by Rhodes and Brown as well: that all accounts of reality become somewhat distorted when they are narrated since reality cannot be properly communicated. Perhaps in genres such as comics journalism this is more evident, since drawn accounts of real events cannot resemble reality.

This idea becomes important in the next chapter, in which I will discuss the possibly beneficial strategies comics journalism can offer for more established forms of media for instance when it comes to reporting crises. Even though these modes of journalism contain the notion of staying true to the objective reality (which is impossible, as discussed in this thesis), there are instances in which they could benefit from representations that are not as true to the reality as usually portrayed. How is that possible and what are these instances in which objective media can adopt a more subjective stance? This will be addressed next.

5. Possibly Beneficial Strategies of Comics Journalism

Sontag claims that

> [taking] photographs has set up a chronic voyeuristic relation to the world which levels the meaning of all events. […] A photograph is not just the result of an encounter between an event and a photographer; picture-taking is an event in itself, and one with even more peremptory rights—to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on (*On Photography* 11).

She also argues that because of this, "[it is] easy to feel that any event, once underway, and whatever its moral character, should be allowed to complete itself—so that something else can be brought into the world, the photograph." Photography, in its way, desensitizes us and "[depersonalizes] our relation to the world (Sontag, *On Photography* 167)." The same can be argued, to some extent, to apply with comics journalism as well. In this chapter I am going to discuss how the form of comics journalism can provide journalists tools in depicting complex events in a narrative form. Since comics journalism is a relatively new genre that has not been studied extensively, it is important in my opinion to study both the works of the genre as well as the genre itself and the possible ways its strategies could benefit more traditional forms of journalism. In this thesis, I have focused on the aspects relating to the narration of the so-called objective truth in *Palestine* in order to mirror the strategies of the whole genre. In this chapter, I will discuss how these could be applied in journalistic media in general—and what possibly problematic issues arise from them.

It could be argued that the depersonalization Sontag mentions in the paragraph above regarding photographing events applies to comics journalism as well—perhaps even better than in photography itself. For instance, if we consider the fact that "terrorism consists of acts carried out in a dramatic way to attract publicity and create an atmosphere of alarm that goes far beyond the actual victims," (Moeller 66) we can see the benefits comics journalism as a form of informing about political events can offer. It enables the artist to reclaim the events depicted and narrate them by his or her own terms. As discussed previously in this thesis, this

can pose some problematic issues for instance when the author openly seems to favor one side of the political conflict more than the other. However, when it comes to the events such as terrorist attacks, this reclaiming of an event by the author can be considered a means of narrating the event that diminishes the effect the terrorists strife for. With comics journalism, these events can be reported without giving terrorists the publicity they strive for.

This aspect of comics journalism can be considered a crucial feature for the genre, since the traditional forms of journalism are being criticized for their traditions of reporting terrorist attacks. Liebes and Kampf for instance note that "[t]he genre of disaster marathons caused public criticism of journalists for playing into terrorists' hands, that is, for inadvertently doing them a service" (79) because the 'disaster marathons' in media outlets make the attack an event, thus recognizing the power of the terrorist act and the power of the terrorists behind it. Liebes and Kampf argue that this "facilitates the upgrading of terrorists to superstars" (81). It could be argued that the comic form offers the artist a way to depict these events without creating these terrorist superstars. Since the artist can choose what to depict realistically and what not, the actual terrorist acts and the persons relating to them can be narrated in a more abstract manner, which does not necessarily have an effect on the narrative itself, but it definitely takes away the power terrorists strive to have with the acts they do. By making these acts more anonymous, they do not carry the similar power of fear the terrorists wish they to have.

Anonymity the comic form enables can be utilized in other ways, too. Sutinen argues that comics journalism works well when the anonymity of the people interview needs to be preserved (36). This may be the case, and Sacco's *Palestine* offers us a great number of examples in terms of the depictions of people who can be considered anonymous: they have no distinguishing features and probably cannot be traced back to the real life people the images in the pages of *Palestine* depict. It can also be that the people depicted in *Palestine*

are actually used as avatars for a much larger amount of people interviewed, whose experiences are condensed in the characters narrating these experiences. However, *Palestine* also demonstrates us a polemic way of making use of this feature comics journalism. In the chapter "Public & Private Wounds", Sacco depicts a man who is wounded and is lying in a bed in a hospital (32). Sacco carries a camera with him and he asks the wounded man's mother whether he can take a photograph of the man: "[m]om asks her son. 'LA!'. 'No' in Arabic. Okay okay. Io capisco. Say no more. A private wound." But since Sacco has drawn the wounded man, paying attention to his pain for example by depicting his facial expressions, is the man's wound private any more, even when the wound itself is not drawn in the comic?

Thus it could be argued that the anonymity as a tool in comics journalism can be considered as a positive as well as a negative feature. In addition to actually preserving the anonymity of the people who otherwise express their consent in being interviewed and/or telling their story publicly, a comics journalist can also use anonymity as a tool to separate the comic book character and the person the character is based on when the actual person does not consent in being represented in a comic. The former aspect supports the journalistic ideals regarding the protection of sources, but the latter opens up the possibility of discussions regarding ethics. Is it ethical to depict someone who wishes not to be depicted (especially in an environment in which people can be extremely vulnerable, both mentally and physically)?

Maher recognizes other beneficial elements in the comic form. "By showing people the kind of work he does, Sacco can win trust and encourage collaboration even without a shared language," she argues (125). "[A] recognizable drawing can be an important reassurance for people who might otherwise feel somewhat uneasy about foreign languages and the prospect of being translated," Maher explains. It is worth noting that even though she

addresses Sacco's comics and his methods of working, these conclusions can be applied in a

broader scale, especially the following conclusion. According to Maher, this type of

reassurance "can be particularly important for groups that feel vulnerable, victimized,

misrepresented or misunderstood" (125). Thus it could be argued that comics journalism and

its methods are not only applicable in crisis journalism, but in any type of a journalistic

narrative that concerns the issues of the minority groups that are in danger of being

misrepresented in media.

The issue regarding vulnerability comes to play in other ways as well when

considering the use of comics journalism as a way of narrating newsworthy events. Sontag

argues that a photograph can act as a way for the photographer to feel safe and partly refusing

the photographed experience by making it a souvenir: "[as] photographs give people an

imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of

space in which they are insecure" (*On Photography* 9). This can be done with comics

journalism as well, except for one crucial difference. In order to be able to take a photograph

of an event, one must be present—and quite close—to the event itself. This means that the

photographer is essentially in an unsafe position, especially when it comes to narrating the

events of conflict, even though he or she is able to secure him or herself by the ways Sontag

suggests. Unlike photojournalism (as well as journalism relying on videography), comics

journalism makes it possible for the journalist to be present in the event when it comes to the

narrative, yet experiencing the actual event from a more distant position. "They say when the

shooting starts, the writers run for shelter, the photographer runs towards the shooting. Since

comic artists use both words and images, perhaps they have to run in both directions at the

same time, like [a] cartoon character," Sacco jokingly suggests (Mitchell and Sacco 70).

It is also worth noting that the ability to depict a situation visually while not being

dependent upon being in the midst of the situation itself can also act as a narrative effect. For

instance, for a comic artist who knows "something about […] perspective" it is possible to depict situation from above, in a so-called bird's eye perspective (Mitchell and Sacco 60). Just like perspective choices discussed for instance in the chapter 3.2, this can affect our reading of the situation, producing different connotations to it. The same can be done with aerial photography, obviously—but in terms of comics journalism, to achieve this effect is not dependent on the financial situation of the journalistic institution or the person producing the narrative. The strategies discussed above can protect the safety of the journalists in question as well as give them possibilities to depict something from an angle they are otherwise unable to get to themselves, but does this have an effect on the journalistic value of the testimony recorded? As I have already established in my thesis, the journalistic value of a narrative does not necessarily depend on how true to life this narrative is. This, among other things, will be readdressed in the next and the last chapter, which is the conclusion of this thesis.

6. Conclusion

It could be argued that comics journalism has been influenced by genres such as New Journalism and that comics journalism carries the legacy of these genres which themselves may be untrendy in the modern era. It may be because comics journalism reveals the role of the author to the reader perhaps clearer than for instance New Journalism, whose techniques are now mostly absent in the modern journalistic texts. This argument applies to *Palestine* as well. As we have observed, the author is present on two levels in the book: there is a character of Joe Sacco and Joe Sacco the author. The former acts as a protagonist of the story, presenting the reader a chance to reflect on the role of the journalist to the story depicted. The latter remains more hidden, yet constantly present behind the illustrations of the book. According to Scherr ("Shaking hands" 24), this invites the reader to pay attention to the act of narration instead of focusing solely on the narrative itself. The inclusion of the author in the narrative, albeit a fairly common strategy in other literary genres as well, can also be regarded as a nod to the genre's predecessor, underground comixs, a genre in which the artists often included autobiographical elements in their narratives. This also suggests that these two genres have more in common than merely their aesthetic choices.

Besides making the author more visible, comics journalism as a genre carries other beneficial features when it comes to narrating news and/or conflicts. As discussed in this thesis, *Palestine* (and comics journalism as a genre) is able to describe different realities in conflict areas partly because the genre enables the artist to use artistic measures to communicate feelings in real life situations. This is why it could be argued that comics journalism a particularly suitable medium when depicting a crisis, since it can visually communicate meanings that would be harder to relate to in textual accounts. The combination of text and images offers the author a rich environment to tell narratives in which the textual content can either be supported or juxtaposed with the visual content. Because of this, further

analysis of comics journalism—especially concerning the genre's formal features—might benefit more from the analysis that focuses on the meaning-making tropes such as metaphor and metonymy instead of taking a semiotic or Saussurean approach. As Kukkonen (91) argues, "[i]n order to grasp the literary dimension of comics, we therefore have to focus on [the] complexities, which go beyond language, its semiotic units and their functions. If comics are left with semiotics as the only tool of analysis, only the most basic meanings will be found." Since we are discussing a rich medium for possible meanings, this is an important observation. For a genre that more or less claims to adhere to the journalistic ideals regarding objectivity (by naming itself as comics *journalism*), it is important to be able to reveal possibly hidden meanings behind the narrative. And indeed, we can find these in *Palestine* as well.

"[To] write is always about making representational decisions", argue Rhodes and Brown (479). This is evident also in *Palestine*, since its form as a comic book forces the reader to question the representational choices Sacco has made. It could be argued that this is one of the genre's benefits. However, *Palestine* is not without its downsides. Before studying the book further, I initially thought that the book would offer representations of other cultures in a manner that would embrace the features Sacco shares with the Palestinians he interviews. However, it turned out that Sacco sometimes relies on the representations that reduce their referent to few stereotypes. This goes against Johnson's (n. pg.) argument that comics journalism could avoid "ethnographic [photography's potential] to become dangerously orientalizing (or at least exotizing) practice, which valorizes alterity as an end in itself, and leaves little room for the viewer to identify with the subject of the photo." To some extent, this is what Sacco does as well in his drawings.

The Palestinians in *Palestine* become an anonymous mass in many instances, which prevents the reader from relating to them. It could be argued that this type of representation

reduces the human value of the people whose stories are being narrated. Instead, they are portrayed as "anonymous, generic victims" (Sontag *Regarding the Pain of Others* 9) of a war that is equally generic. This might superficially resemble an objective approach, but this type of representation also fails to recognize that the situation is able to change. "Torment […] is often represented […] as a spectacle, something to be watched (or ignored) by other people. The implication is: no, it cannot be stopped," argues Sontag when discussing the generic depictions of "atrocious suffering" (*Regarding the Pain of Others* 42). This type of representation has also other downsides to the objectivity of the narrative. When the other side of the conflict is depicted as generic victims and when the conflict itself is turned into a spectacle to be observed, a black and white approach of moral issues is also invited into the narrative. The ones suffering are depicted as helpless victims, whereas their opponents are forced to take the role of a cruel oppressor. Instances of this can be found in *Palestine* as well.

Anonymity can also suggest indifference, which is sometimes regarded as a stance in which objective witnesses are narrated. Thus, the representational choices in terms of anonymity in *Palestine* can affect the reader by suggesting a higher level of objectivity than the narrative actually contains. However, the opportunity to represent something as generic mass can also be a useful feature for comics journalism. When it comes to the genre in general, this could be a way for the journalist to protect his or her sources. It should be noted that this process of separating the actual subject and its referent in the comic enables some problematic methods of working, which can neglect issues such as consent. This is evident in the case where Sacco depicts a wounded man in hospital in a great detail, despite the man's declining answer when asked whether he could be photographed (Sacco 32).

Even though *Palestine* can offer us an account of the life on conflicted areas, it could also be argued that it produces a colored depiction of the reality it tries to depict. Sacco's

drawings are able to communicate feelings that impact the reader more than mere words could. In terms of objectivity, this sometimes becomes a problem. As discussed in this thesis, the emotion-wise heavy drawings are actually favoring the other side of the conflict, which makes them a traditional fictional narrative with clear juxtaposition of 'good' and 'evil'. This way of representation fails to recognize the complexity of an actual real life crisis, which takes away the possible impact of the book. It is also worth noting that this approach can take away some of the journalistic value this work of comics journalism strives for. Then again, it could also be argued that each and every journalistic text is laden with hidden attitudes and moral stances. Because of this, could it also be that *Palestine* is merely more honest about the effect that the journalist's own thoughts affect the narrative he or she creates?

The journalist and his or her role is highlighted in other ways as well in Palestine. As discussed, the hand-drawn images keep the author constantly present in the narrative, "emphasizing [the genre's] own artificiality" (Berlatsky n. pg.). This can guide the reader and remind him or her about the fact that the narrative is in fact an account of reality from a single point of view—not an objective account of the way the things truly are. By doing this, the narrative actually also questions other accounts of reality, making us reconsider the subjective nature of their seemingly objective representations of what has happened.

It could be argued that these characteristics of comics journalism described above could prove fruitful when narrating events that are complex. The fact that the genre can be regarded openly subjective—starting from the hand drawn images that form the narrative— could be considered positive. This way the reader knows that the event depicted are narrated from a certain perspective. In addition to this, a deeper study of the genre could produce possible further uses for it. For example, if the genre really enables us to represent ethnicity in a more inclusive manner compared to photojournalism, as Johnson proposes, it could be useful in narratives that concern multicultural issues et cetera. Also, because the series of

drawn images rarely can achieve similar iconographical value as a single photograph, comics journalism could be used to narrate events such as terrorist attacks of which the photographs could be also used as propaganda by the attacking organization, as suggested in chapter five. Comic panels do not necessarily have the similar capacity to this, since they rarely work as single units but require the whole narrative in order to be effective.

Appendices

The figures aren't published in TamPub. The complete version of the Master's thesis can be viewed in print at University of Tampere Linna library.
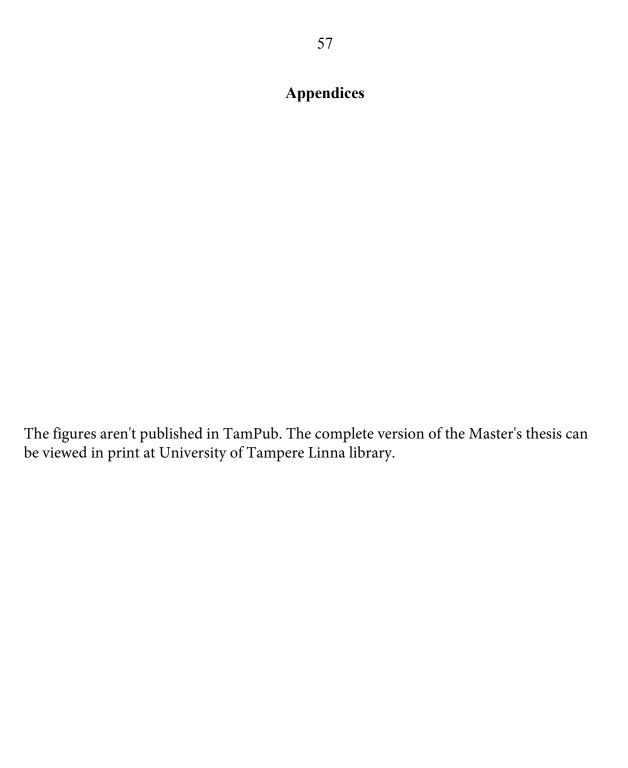
Figure 1. Opening page of the chapter "Eye of the beholder" in *Palestine* (Sacco 16). Some similarities can be found with Philip Jones Griffiths' photograph from the Vietnam war. *Palestine*: © Sacco, Joe.

The figures aren't published in TamPub. The complete version of the Master's thesis can be viewed in print at University of Tampere Linna library.

Figure 2. Opening panel for the section "Hijab", in which Sacco discusses his thoughts on Muslim women in Palestine (Sacco 137). As we can see, the women in the panel are depicted with their faces facing away from Sacco, thus remain anonymous.
Palestine: © Sacco, Joe.

The figures aren't published in TamPub. The complete version of the Master's thesis can be viewed in print at University of Tampere Linna library.
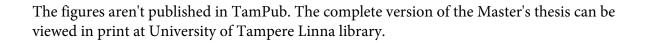
Figure 3. Sacco's depiction of himself (Sacco 121). Note the exaggerated nose and mouth, as well as the glasses hiding his eyes.
Palestine: © Sacco, Joe.

The figures aren't published in TamPub. The complete version of the Master's thesis can be viewed in print at University of Tampere Linna library.

Figure 4. Armed teenage boys Sacco admits being afraid of (Sacco 37). An example of the use of frog perspective and its effect on the atmosphere of the narrative.
Palestine: © Sacco, Joe.

The figures aren't published in TamPub. The complete version of the Master's thesis can be viewed in print at University of Tampere Linna library.

Figure 5. An angry Israeli soldier who has "a short fuze [and is] about to blow his top" while guarding the entrance to the centre of Hebron (Sacco 127–128). Note the exaggerated facial expressions (for example the proportionally large mouth) that emphasize the soldier's feelings of rage.
Palestine: © Sacco, Joe.

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