Routledge Advances in Comics Studies

CONTEXTS OF VIOLENCE IN COMICS

Edited by
Ian Hague, Ian Horton and Nina Mickwitz

ROUTLEDGE

Contexts of Violence in Comics

This book is part of a nuanced two-volume examination of the ways in which violence in comics is presented in different texts, genres, cultures and contexts.

Contexts of Violence in Comics asks the reader to consider the ways in which violence and its representations may be enabled or restricted by the contexts in which they take place. It analyses how structures and organising principles, be they cultural, historical, legal, political or spatial, might encourage, demand or prevent violence. It deals with the issue of scale, such as violence in the context of war versus violence in the context of an individual murder, and provides insights into the context of war and peace, and ethnic and identity-based violence, as well as examining issues of justice and memory.

This will be a key text and essential reference for scholars and students at all levels in Comics Studies and Cultural and Media Studies more generally.

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Introduction

Ian Hague, Ian Horton and Nina Mickwitz

Violence in Comics

The presence of violence in comics form is now so prevalent and accepted that it tends to go unremarked. Yet violence is a complex affair. Graphic (in both meanings of the word) depictions of fist fights and bodies skewered by swords, riddled by bullets or crushed under falling objects are commonplace in superhero, fantasy and action stories. However, these kinds of violence differ markedly from the slapstick gag of a thrown brick (as in George Herriman's *Krazy Kat*) or slingshot projectile (prime contenders include Dennis the Menace in *The Beano* and his American namesake, created by Hank Ketcham) hurtling through the air to hit its target, intended or otherwise. Different again are representations of violence in autobiographical and documentary comics, such as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Joe Sacco's *Palestine*, which speak of real-world acts of violence and the contexts from which they emerge.

With their origins in the conference 'Violence in Comics,' organised by Comics Forum in 2014, these two companion volumes, *Contexts of Violence in Comics* and *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics*, have been curated to initiate a nuanced examination of the ways in which violence is evident in comics. Although we do not claim to offer an exhaustive history or a complete survey of the topic, this study strives to provide a broad overview of the ways in which a range of types of violence are presented across different genres, cultures and contexts. In so doing, we hope to offer a foundation for a wide-ranging and considered debate and discussion of violence in comics, and to prompt further discussion and analysis of this vitally important subject.

As violence continues to be a pervasive element in popular culture more generally, as well as in comics, it is intended that the chapters collected together in these two volumes will contribute to wider debates about the contexts in which violence takes place and how acts of violence are represented across the media landscape. This is a multifaceted subject that can be understood in many ways, and we have chosen to consider representations and contexts as two very different major subsections of the topic. When examining representation we are concerned with the different kinds of violence that take place in comics and in the specific

modes of depiction used to show these violent acts. By contexts we mean the various sociopolitical and cultural forces that shape the way violence is presented in comics and impact directly on their production.

This book concerns the cultural, industry, scholarly and critical contexts of violence in comics. Where *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics* attends to depiction and representation as the route to understanding this topic, this volume will present approaches to the contexts of violent acts, with examples organised thematically. This is, of course, not to say that the authors' treatment of examples will not take into account the representational strategies of these specific instances, but this book will pay particular attention to contextual factors.

Contexts of Violence in Comics

As well as being a major theme in comics themselves, violence has also played an important role in comics criticism and scholarship, and these contexts have informed, often in very meaningful ways, how the depiction of acts of violence in comics is perceived and treated. In America in the late 1940s and early to mid-1950s, for example, social and moral challenges put to comics' contents by 'church and civic groups that traditionally enforced standards of public morality, were able to gain the attention of the popular press' (Nyberg 1998, ix). Combining their efforts with the work of certain critics, most notably psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, such groups subjected comics to a sustained critique, much of which attacked them on the grounds of their ostensibly immoral content. Topics of concern included depictions of sex and criminality but also those of violence, which for some critics was among the most significant problems with the medium. Harry Wildenberg, one of two men responsible for the creation of *Famous Funnies* (arguably the first American comic book), summed up the anti-violence critique in a 1949 letter:

> The primary appeal of comics to the juvenile mind lies in their goriness and violence [. . .]. The more violent the greater their fascination for the young. Publishers of comic books are aware of this fact and vie with each other in making their pages drip with blood and murder plots. Tame the comics, harness them to good works and children will have nothing to do with them.
>
> (quoted in Hajdu 2008, 143)

In America, the tide of this critique did lead to a governmental investigation into the contents of comics that culminated in 1954's Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, but it did not result in legislative action being taken against comics (unlike in Britain, where a similar campaign led to the passing of the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act of 1955 (Barker 1992)). Instead, the industry was left to regulate itself, which it did through the development of the

Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) Comics Code 1954. This code specified the types of content that were acceptable in comic books and included three areas of general standards as well as more specific guidance on what was permissible in the presentation of dialogue, religion, costume, marriage and sex, and advertising matter. Though it did not get its own specific section, violence was discussed in a point under general standards. Where a 1948 predecessor to the code had simply asserted that 'No scenes of sadistic torture should be shown' (Nyberg 1998, 165) the 1954 code was more expansive, asserting, 'Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gun play, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated' (Nyberg 1998, 166).

This wording remained in place when the code was revised in 1971 (Nyberg 1998, 171), although other elements relating to violence did change. For example, where 1954's code asserted under 'Marriage and Sex' that 'Violent love scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable' (Nyberg 1998, 168), 1971's code broke these two aspects apart, stating that 'Illicit sex relations are not to be portrayed and sexual abnormalities are unacceptable' (Nyberg 1998, 173) and that 'Rape shall never be shown or suggested. Seduction may not be shown' (Nyberg 1998, 174) in two separate points (again under the 'Marriage and Sex' heading). When the code was revised again, in 1989, things were a little different. Now, violence did have its own specific section:

> Violent actions or scenes are acceptable within the context of a comic book story when dramatically appropriate. Violent behaviour will not be shown as acceptable. If it is presented in a realistic manner, care should be taken to present the natural repercussions of such actions. Publishers should avoid excessive levels of violence, excessively graphic depictions of violence, and excessive bloodshed or gore. Publishers will not present detailed information instructing readers how to engage in imitable violent actions.
>
> (Nyberg 1998, 176)

By this time, public and scholarly attention to such matters had moved on, and media effects debates had new targets, such as the so-called 'video nasties' of the mid-1980s (today's equivalent is probably violence in video games). Nevertheless, important academic work on comics, such as Martin Barker's *A Haunt of Fears* (originally published in 1984), maintained a scholarly focus on violence, albeit as one small part of a larger investigation into the media effects debates contributed to by the work of Frederic Wertham and others. Wertham's work, meanwhile, has largely been disregarded, as Amy Kiste Nyberg has observed:

> Many media scholars have dismissed Wertham's work as an example of early, unsophisticated social science research into media

> effects, and contemporary social scientists criticized Wertham for his lack of scientific evidence and his failure to present quantitative evidence to support his findings.
>
> (1998, x)

While Nyberg and others (Bart Beaty 2005, in particular) have taken a more nuanced view of Wertham in subsequent years, it is clear that the contexts in which violence sits in comics, and the ways in which it is studied, have changed radically since the 1940s–1950s. Indeed, since that period, and perhaps in response to the position of Wertham as the 'Bogey Man' of Comics Studies, the academic field has been fairly resolute in resisting the media effects narrative or arguing for censorship or content controls *per se* (with some exceptions). Today, perhaps the most prominent civic group associated with comics is the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF), 'a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the First Amendment [freedom of speech and freedom of the press] rights of the comics medium' (CBLDF 2017).

From Effects to Texts

While the media effects debates of the mid-20th century are among the most well-known engagements with violence in comics, they are not the only ways in which context has shaped the presentation of the subject. In his seminal 1973 book *The Early Comic Strip*, for example, David Kunzle shows how although 'the ancestors of Hogarthian narrative' were 'preoccupied with the theme of political violence' (427), violence in these 17th-century comic strips served a different function to violence in more modern (i.e. post-Second World War) mass media. The former '[were] a creation of popular fervor; they appear[ed] only when a situation [became] intolerable to a large number of people,' while the latter 'has appeared less as a popular response to political crises than as the constant of a mass culture which serves the cause of an established capitalist economy' and offers 'a safety valve for those emotions which might otherwise threaten economic and social stability' (Kunzle 1973, 427). He goes on:

> By constantly presenting the public with the face of war, the masters of the popular press, film and television offer vicarious enjoyment of the processes of revolutionary change at home, and at the same time justify wars pursued "in the national interest" abroad. But in the seventeenth century, the broadsheet press was much less tied to government interests than are the mass media today, and the popular engraver then was less subject to a publisher's censorship than is the strip cartoonist of the mid-twentieth century.
>
> (Kunzle 1973, 427)

Newspaper comics and other formats, such as magazines, were exempt from the CMAA Code, which only applied to comic books. Nevertheless, the creators of such comics could hardly have been unaware of the debates around their profession, and commonly agreed standards of taste and decency, along with the economic and political motivations identified by Kunzle, are likely to have had significant impacts upon what was permissible (officially or otherwise) in comics. One group of creators that was certainly well aware of social standards, and did their best to subvert them at every turn, was to be found in the writers, artists and publishers of American Underground Comix. In some cases inspired by the very work that had led to the creation of the Comics Code in the first place, Underground Comix creators went further than publishers like EC Comics 'by adding sex and drugs and carnage and stuff' to their work, as creator S. Clay Wilson put it (quoted in Rosenkranz 2008, 145). Here, then, we see a multiplication of contexts for violence in comics: on the one hand, there is a clear social drive to moderate violence or to instrumentalise it for particular political purposes. On the other hand is a push to indulge in the excesses of violence and use it to challenge both the moral foundation and the legal and administrative frameworks that underpinned and upheld that moderation. Although the American context is certainly not wholly representative of similar battles that have taken place around the world (see Barker 1992 and Lent 1999 for more on these), it is instructive because it very overtly highlights the various contextual elements that can lead to specific types of content being permitted or rejected and indicates the terms in which violence in comics has come to be understood and controlled by governmental, social, cultural and other forces.

Violence in Comics Studies

It is notable that although violence has long been *present* as a theme in comics scholarship and criticism, it is not until relatively recently that we see it emerging as a primary focus of that scholarship. While Wertham, Kunzle and others identified comics violence as a key area of concern, and it was explicitly included as a point of discussion in texts like the CMAA Comics Code, it tended to be bundled in with other representational and moral concerns: sex, drugs, criminality, political unrest and so on. When Comics Studies began to develop as a more clearly identifiable field, and the emphasis on media effects declined, certain approaches became more dominant. As Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo have put it, 'Comics and comics studies—like film and film studies before them—have attempted (with mixed success) to imitate the values and discourses of literature and painting in order to legitimate their field' (2016, 5). The literary approach in particular has tended to privilege 'atypical or exceptional works' (Beaty & Woo 2016, 6), many of which

contain violence within them as a central theme, though even here this centrality has not necessarily been mirrored in comics scholarship. Key works by Art Spiegelman, for example, who is by a considerable margin the most studied comics author in Western scholarship (Beaty & Woo 2016, 6–9), centre around two exceptionally violent events: the Holocaust (*Maus*) and the 9/11 attacks in New York (*In the Shadow of No Towers*). Yet Spiegelman is more frequently understood in terms of autobiography, trauma, history and the form of the graphic novel than in terms of violence *per se*. This is not an absolute classification, but it would be difficult to argue that violence is a dominant subject in studies of Spiegelman, even if it does underlie other topics, such as trauma. Violence on its own terms, rather than as an element of another thematic unit, a cause or an effect of the thing being studied, is not a major area of study.

This effect can also be observed in studies of the so-called 'mainstream' (i.e. superhero comics, although the application of the term to this genre has been called into question (Woo 2018), and we do not seek to make a case for this classification here, only to use it as a shorthand). While (one of) the genre's central theme(s) is the meting out of violence in the name of justice or terror (depending on the perpetrator), this violence is often taken for granted or not even mentioned, perhaps as a result of its ubiquity. It is worth noting, however, that the superheroes who ostensibly represent the best that humanity has to offer have few solutions to the world's ills beyond extreme violence, often carried out in the form of illegal vigilantism. This is not to say that violence is not a concern at all, but as with scholarship of Spiegelman and others, it is often bundled up with other themes, such as justice, patriotism and identity politics, rather than studied on its own terms. For example, none of the contributions to Hatfield, Heer and Worcester's *The Superhero Reader* directly addresses violence, but it is implicit as an issue throughout the section dealing with culture and identity. Similar connections have been made in the various comics that have addressed super violence, good examples of which would include *Miracleman* (1982–1989), Marvel Comics' *Civil War* event (2006–2007) and *Daredevil: Supreme* (2017). Those comics that *do* fit within the remit of the 'works that typified cultural production over time,' as described by Beaty and Woo, are relatively understudied (no date, web), so there is even less said about the violence within them than in the apparently normative titles represented by the superhero genre.

Recently, socially oriented work on comics that prioritises the contexts in which comics sit over textual analysis of the comics themselves has begun to return to the forefront of the field. Important work by scholars such as Mel Gibson (2015) and Casey Brienza (2016), among others, has privileged the idea that readers, along with broader social, economic and cultural contexts, have materially impacted upon the forms that comics

take and the ways they are understood. Violence too has begun to develop as a focus in studies of comics, with authors such as Jane L. Chapman, Adam Sherif and Dan Ellin (2015), and Harriet H. E. Earle (2017), as well as editors Michaela Precup and Rebecca Scherr (2017, 2018), undertaking work that does engage more concertedly with various types of violence and their contexts. Building on these developments, and seeking to offer a general (but not comprehensive) introduction to the subject, this book asks the reader to consider the ways in which violence and its representations may be enabled or restricted by the contexts in which they take place. It analyses how structures and organising principles, be they political, cultural, legal or historical, might encourage, demand or prevent violence. It also deals with the issue of scale: violence in the context of war versus violence in the context of an individual murder. It provides insights into violence in comics in the context of war and peace; ethnic, religious and identity-based violence; as well as the legal and historical contexts of violence. Together with its companion volume, *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics* (Mickwitz et al. 2019), it offers an examination of the ways in which violence in comics is presented in different texts, genres, cultures and contexts.

The Structure of This Volume

Section 1: History and Memory

The chapters in this section explore the ways in which historical context might affect the forms of and motivations for violence, and how the remembering or memorialisation of events impact on our perceptions of those events. In his book *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* Joseph Witek noted that there is 'a minor but long-established tradition of historical and fact based comic book narratives' (1989, 10) and explicitly examines the potential educational function of the work of Jack Jackson (Jaxon) and the role of violence in his work (1989, 58–95).[1] The relationship between history and collective memory has been explored by Mickwitz in her study of documentary comics, which highlights the role that comics dealing in conflict have in remembering the past, regardless of the veracity of the narratives told (2015, 59–89).

This section opens with Lynn Fotheringham's discussion of *Three* and the ways in which it tackles the problematic history of Sparta, a state that has long been connected with extreme forms of violence (that have in some cases been glorified as particularly heroic or honourable) but whose actual history is far longer and more complex than the pared down ultra-violence that a work like Frank Miller and Lynn Varley's *300* might suggest. In her chapter, Fotheringham explores how Kieron Gillen and Ryan Kelly's *Three*, produced in collaboration with academic

historical consultant Steven Hodkinson, seeks to nuance the perception of Sparta and its citizens by drawing more attention to the ways in which the social structures of the state contributed to and perpetuated violence of various kinds.

Following on from this, Enrique del Rey Cabero's chapter explores the role of comics in the process of the recovery of historical memory through the portrayal of the extreme violence of the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent Francoist repression. The Civil War is still the subject of heated debated in Spain, following the transition to democracy (Transición): many streets keep their Francoist names, and Franco himself is buried in a glorious pantheon, while the bodies of many thousands of antifascists still lie in ditches. In recent years graphic novels in Spain have explored stories that outline the victims' individual and collective experiences of violence, which help Spain recover its traumatic memory. These graphic novels include *Paracuellos* (stories about children living in Francoist orphanages), *Cuerda de presas* (the abuse of women in Francoist prisons), *Un largo silencio* and *El arte de volar* (the memory of some defeated and fearful Republicans through their children's perspectives) and *Los surcos del azar* (about those Republicans who continued fighting in the Second World War after the Spanish Civil War). Taken collectively these suggest that the medium has allowed voices previously silenced to have a role in understanding the complexities of remembering the Spanish Civil War.

Claire Gorrara's chapter also deals with issues of individual and collective memory, and the difficulties surrounding the act of remembering. It specifically examines the transmission of memories of the Second World War in French comic books from the immediate post-war period to the present day, focussing on the experiences of those who were deported as prisoners of war and more particularly the intergenerational dynamics of communicating those experiences and memories to future generations. To this end, it starts by exploring graphic narratives by Raymond Henry and Antoine de Roux, two French prisoners of war who published their war experiences in 1945. This is followed by an analysis of the issues raised by two recent autobiographical albums by authors dealing with the wartime experience of close relatives: Florent Silloray's *Le Carnet de Roger* (2011), which scrutinises his grandfather's time as a prisoner of war, and Jacques Tardi's two albums, which examine his father's time in a prison camp and subsequent return to France following the war (2012, 2014). The chapter considers the specificity of the comic book as a means of recrafting and curating a violent past in an era of commemoration, and of additionally recuperating wartime memories that continue to remain outside the standard historical accounts of the period.

This section concludes with Mihaela Precup's chapter, which examines the aesthetic and narrative choices evident in Lebanese cartoonist

Zeina Abirached's autobiographical novel *A Game for Swallows. To Die, To Leave, To Return* (originally published in French in 2007 and in English in 2012). The novel covers the events from one troubled night during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) by representing not only acts of violence but also the constant threat of violence and the way it permeates everyday life and transforms the geography of the city and the home. It is argued that Abirached constructs a graphic narrative where she successfully shows both how the prolonged state of exception that was the Lebanese Civil War fragmented the architecture of the city and the home, and how a community in mourning coalesced against a common threat. Abirached's panels, full of repetitions and dark spaces, characters frozen in tense expectation, show that the indoor space of the community is not 'safe' but 'more or less safe,' as the grandmother puts it. Abirached's style, strongly influenced by Lebanese calligraphy, contributes greatly to the recreation of the personal space of the home, populated by objects of sentimental value that also need to be protected from destruction and whose memory she tries to preserve.

Section 2: War and Peace

The book's second section addresses two notions and contexts that have long determined the ways in which images have been presented in comics. However, comics that represent military conflict are relatively underexamined by comics scholars, and the more populist studies that exist tend not to explicitly examine the issue of violence but rather situate these comics within specific cultures and nation states.[2] An exception to this trend is Tatjana Prorokova and Nimrod Tal's recent edited collection *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Trauma, and Memory* (2018), where a number of papers examine the issue of violence, but as the subtitle suggests it is just as firmly focussed on the issues of memory and trauma as it is on violence.

When expressing his dismay that war comics as a genre has received very little attention Kent Worcester has noted that American and British 'War comics tend to be romantic in their treatment of military conflict, with an emphasis on good guys versus bad guys, and tidy story resolutions, and they are almost always temporarily disconnected from the historical periods they portray' (2015, ix). Worcester contrasts this with the notion of wartime comics, which are 'generated within the crucible of interstate violence' and are 'incubated within particular contexts and time frames.' He goes on to suggest that for the comics scholar this raises the issue of interpreting representation in comics form in relation to the actions actually taking place on the ground.

This issue of interpretation is central to Michael F. Scholz's chapter that considers the ways in which Swedish government and publishing industry responses to the events and politics of the Second World War

drove or suppressed the import and production of particular comic strips, and the ways in which they were published in the country. The context of Sweden's neutrality and how it managed to negotiate its position in relation to the warring factions is central to this chapter. It also examines the use of historical fictions created by Swedish artists and writers to support the official government policy of promoting national identity in the face of this conflict. As the war progressed comics production seesawed between the justification of Sweden's neutral politics and a growing pro-war propaganda related to the Western powers. Increasingly, during the war more and more American comics, often with violent content and produced or initiated by the Office of War Information (OWI) and the Writers' War Board (WWB), came to Sweden, spreading American values, encouraging hate towards fascism and Nazism, and promoting the achievements of the allies in the anti-Hitler-coalition.

In a like fashion but on a more individual level, Malin Bergström's chapter examines Will Eisner's experiences of working for the United States army on comics that were intended to both entertain and educate the troops, and the ways in which this impacted upon his own practice as a creator. Eisner's involvement in military comics allowed him to promote the educational values of the medium, and his army publication, *Preventive Maintenance Monthly* (*PS Magazine*), served as a guide for equipment maintenance for American troops from the 1950s onwards. The underlying dilemma of military comics' connection to killing (even if the killing was executed in the name of patriotism) exists even within publications such as *PS Magazine* because, by helping soldiers survive, the magazine equally helped them survive to kill. Eisner's later work was influenced by his experiences in the army but rarely took a positive stance towards military actions and political intentions. Instead Eisner positioned himself between military patriotism and the peace movement; the complexity of this ethical position has not been directly explored by existing critical research and potentially reveals new aspects to research in the history of comics.

Section 3: Urban Violence

Moving on from the very broad national or international engagements with violence in war the two chapters in our third section examine the more limited and specific context of violence in the city. Urban violence has, and continues to have, a significant presence within comic books. For example, urban contexts are often central to the violence that takes place within the American superhero genre. Batman's vigilante actions are the direct consequence of the murder of his parents by a petty criminal in the heart of Gotham City, and in many of the storylines both the physical and the sociopolitical aspects of the city shape the kinds of violence that take place. Similarly Spider-Man's early battles with villains

such as Doctor Octopus, Green Goblin and Kingpin were reliant on the backdrop of New York City, with the skyscrapers playing a significant part in the kinds of violent actions depicted.

The opening chapter in this section, by Jörn Ahrens, focusses on the American comic book series *DMZ*, which takes us into a fictional war that has overtaken the United States and locates us in New York, now a city riven by conflict that has destabilised established norms and thrust unlikely players into positions of great power and influence. Here, journalist Matty Roth must navigate a complex social, political and physical milieu within an urban sphere that has been defamiliarised through violence. Ahrens argues that the territorialisation of space in the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) allows for an escalation of violence that offers no escape and where the ruins of the former metropolis become a central force in explaining why such acts of violence occur. In conclusion it is suggested that these kinds of urban spaces become places in which it is impossible to escape violence.

Similarly, Dominic Davies's chapter asks us to consider how the Lebanese Civil War transformed its infrastructure and notions of public space through a discussion of recent graphic memoirs that also connects back to Mihaela Precup's chapter on Zeina Abirached's work. When examining Lamia Ziadé's *Bye Bye Babylon: Beirut 1975–1979* (2010) and Zeina Abirached's *A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Leave, To Return* (2007) Davies, in contrast to Precup, focusses on the notion that rather than highlighting the sense of community that is engendered by the violence of the civil war these graphic narratives in fact mark the death of the urban spaces that allow for multicultural communities to exist. By focussing on the notion of grievability, Davies suggests that we should consider the biggest casualty of the civil war to be the fluidity of the cosmopolitan city that preceded it. In conclusion he considers these graphic novels as playing a part in looking forward to the reconstruction of a city still divided along sectarian lines.

Section 4: Law, Justice and Censorship

In the final section of this book three chapters consider the role of the law and the contexts in which these laws are both established and enacted. The concept of graphic justice is a new sub-discipline in the field of Comics Studies and was first established with the formation of the Graphic Justice Research Alliance in 2015.[3] This innovative approach to the study of comics was cemented through the publication of Thomas Giddens's *Graphic Justice: Intersections of Comics and Law* in 2015 and here provides an alternative perspective for considering the issue of violence in comics.

Golnar Nabizadeh opens this section with a chapter that, like Dominic Davies's, considers questions of grievability but this time more directly

in relation to notions of justice and cultural grief. Nabizadeh argues that melancholia is a useful concept that allows us to consider social justice and political agency when examining public presentations and perceptions of grief. This analysis is primarily achieved by examining graphic narratives that address issues of immigration and by considering the formal devices of comics that allow such stories to be expressed to those directly impacted by these narratives as well as other audiences. The idea of grieving is considered not as a form of closure but as a more open-ended process that is only partially redemptive and thereby allows for the continued acknowledgement of loss, be it cultural or personal.

Alex Link, meanwhile, returns to the theme of war in his chapter on Nate Powell's *Any Empire* but this time situates it more particularly in relation to its effects upon the people who are involved in it when they return home and the ways in which violence can impact on the communities of its perpetrators and victims. By the end of *Any Empire*, Link argues, we are witnessing the collapse of local and global scales of violence; of romanticised warfare in comics and nostalgia, and its lived reality; of global American policing and local militarised law enforcement; of adolescent and adult relationships with violence; of domestic comforts and the distant unseen traumas that enable them; and of the narrative's present and its alternative possible pasts and futures.

Finally, David Huxley rounds out the volume with a look at a lesser-known victim of censorship and public outrage: the British humour comic *Oink!*. Censorship has already been acknowledged as a central framework for examining the issue of violence in comics, and while *Oink!* does not sit in precisely the same context as those works discussed by Martin Barker in *A Haunt of Fears* (1992), Huxley demonstrates how public concern over comics extended beyond the 1950s and continued to have an influence on the position of comics in culture and on the newsagents' shelf long afterwards. Huxley argues that *Oink!* belongs to a trend in British comics of the 1980s and 1990s that challenged established norms and specifically used violence and 'slapstick' death as devices to outrage parents and attract children. *Oink!* 'won' a hearing at The Press Council in 1987 when defending the material they published against complaints; although they won this marked the beginning of the end, and within a year the supposed 'excessive' violence had caused *Oink!*'s demise.

The chapters of this book all examine contexts of violence in comics, from remembered wars to contemporary conflict areas; from imaginary worlds to actual, lived places, and not forgetting social and institutional structures—the military and systems of law. The approaches adopted by the authors are equally diverse. Some privilege attention to contextual specificity and publication histories, while others draw on theoretical frameworks for their analysis. Such plurality and range align directly

with the editorial aims of this contribution. Both in its own right, and together with its companion volume, *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics*, our intention has from the outset been to make visible, beyond any lingering doubt, that the relationship between comics and violence is as varied as it is complex.

Notes

1 For a more detailed account of Jack Jackson's work in relation to violence see Laurike in 't Veld 'A Balancing Act: Didactic Spectacle in Jack Jackson's "Nits Make Lice" and *Slow Death Comix*' *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics* (2019).
2 See, for example, Adam Riches's *When the Comics Went to War*, a study of the history of British War comics, and Mike Conroy's more general study *War Comics: A Graphic History,* both of which celebrate rather than critique the genre.
3 See https://graphicjustice.wordpress.com/.

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History and Memory

1 Doing Justice to the Past through the Representation of Violence

Three and Ancient Sparta

Lynn Fotheringham

Introduction

This chapter examines a recent work of graphic historical fiction set in the ancient Greek city state of Sparta, focussing in particular on its representation of violence within Spartan culture. The decision about which kinds of violence to represent is an important factor in the work's self-positioning vis-à-vis the traditions of popular depictions of Sparta, especially one important precursor in the comics medium; this self-positioning, together with aspects of the way that violence is represented, encourages readers to think about the complexities of our historical understanding. The chapter builds on my earlier analysis of approaches to Sparta in 20th-century popularising works in different media (Fotheringham 2012) and combines comics-analysis with insights taken from Jerome de Groot's work on the (prose) historical novel (2010).

Three, conceived and written by Kieron Gillen, with art by Ryan Kelly (pencils/inks) and Jordie Bellaire (colours), was published by Image Comics in five monthly issues from October 2013 to February 2014; a collected edition followed shortly after the end of the run. The choice of the title *Three*, for a graphic novel about Sparta published in 2013–2014, already indicates that the work is positioning itself in relation to *300*, Frank Miller and Lynn Varley's depiction of the glorious sacrifice of the Spartans in the battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C.E. (Dark Horse, five issues May–September 1998; collection 1999). In prepublication interviews, Gillen had been open about the fact that his initial idea for *Three* emerged from concern about *300*'s suppression of the Spartan military machine's dependence on unfree labour, jarringly combined with a constant emphasis on the Spartans as the defenders of a freedom they denied to others (Jaffe 2012; Dietsch 2013). In *Three*, as a consequence, the majority of the scenes of violence do not show the Spartan army in glorious combat with external enemies but show the elite Spartans' violent oppression of the local slave/serf-class, known as the helots. Gillen's first move in his attempt to do justice to the historical sufferings of the helots is to reinsert them into the story being told.

The plot of *Three*, however, goes well beyond a simple reminder of the helots' existence. When a small group of Spartans, led by an ephor

(annually elected magistrate), carries out a massacre at a helot farmstead, three of the helots—two men, Terpander and Klaros, and one woman, Damar—unexpectedly succeed in killing all their attackers except the young nobleman Arimnestos; they flee ahead of reprisals, making for the neighbouring state of Messene. Arimnestos takes the news back to Sparta, where he is outcast for having fled the slaughter; the remaining ephors send Kleomenes II, the young king of the Agiad dynasty (Sparta had two royal households ruling in tandem), at the head of 300 elite warriors, to chase down the three helots. Arimnestos also pursues the three on his own; after trapping them in a ravine with no exit, he fatally wounds Terpander but is himself killed by Klaros. Kleomenes and his warriors are not far behind. In an echo of Thermopylae, where 300 Spartans held a narrow pass against the overwhelming might of the Persian army, the three helots are trapped in the ravine by 300 Spartans; Klaros, wearing Arimnestos' armour, holds them off for a while but is eventually killed, although by a trick rather than in open combat: two Spartans are sent to climb the ravine and push a rock down to crush him. Because the Spartans, unaware that one of the three fugitives was a woman, take the mutilated corpse of Arimnestos as that of the third helot, Damar is no longer pursued and escapes to Messene, where she bears Klaros' twin sons.

The violent massacre at the helot farmstead, along with various other events recalled over the course of the main narrative, takes a second step towards doing justice to the sufferings of the neglected historical group by representing those sufferings in vivid detail on the stage. Gillen's story also takes further steps, giving the helots personality and agency rather than treating them simply as victims. This is achieved both in small ways throughout the narrative and in the major acts of rebellion depicted and referred to—occasions when helots used violence against their Spartan masters. The invented story and characters allow the helots' rebellion to be represented as having some success: they achieve heroic status, especially through the plot's reversal of the Thermopylae motif, which turns the 300 Spartans from heroic defenders into the overwhelming odds against which these new heroes must fight. One of the three, against all odds, escapes and survives.[1]

De Groot draws attention to certain aspects of historical fiction, which means that it can very naturally be used—though it need not be used—to encourage reflection on the ways in which historical information is handed down, to draw attention to individuals and groups who have been under-represented in the historical record and to challenge earlier authoritarian narratives (2010, 2–4; 21; 29; 139–182).[2] The conflicting duties of the writer to historical accuracy (where such a thing is possible) and to the narrative expectations of fiction-readers, to representing the strangeness of the past and to creating a picture that can be understood in the present encourage reflection; this is confirmed by the tendency of historical fiction to include substantial amounts of discursive paratext in the form of prefaces, afterwords, footnotes and so on (De Groot 2010, 6–7; 63). Paratext

is a notable feature of *Three*, discussed later. The need to invent material, in order create a convincing fictional world, encourages the inclusion of women, children, servants, slaves and other neglected and oppressed groups; this, in turn, enables the challenging of earlier accounts which focussed primarily on elite males. In the case of *Three*, reinserting the helots into the picture was the *raison d'être* of the project, and although Gillen emphasised in interviews that the challenge to a particular precursor was only the starting point for the project, the relationship with *300* increases the chance that readers may reconsider previously held ideas about Sparta.

Doing justice to lost figures from history, however, is far from easy due to the extreme difficulty of knowing anything at all about them. The majority of the ancient evidence for Sparta, including for Spartan-helot interaction, was composed by other Greeks viewing the city state from the outside, often writers from inimical cities or those working centuries later and looking back on semi-legendary paragons of military virtue. As neither enmity nor idolisation is necessarily conducive to accurate reporting, historians refer to the traditional composite picture of Spartan society, built from a patchwork of comments and anecdotes, as the 'Spartan mirage.'[3] There is almost no aspect of this picture that has not been addressed sceptically by some historian or other, and there are widely divergent views on the helots, as expressed by the various authors in Luraghi and Alcock 2003—a work read by Gillen as part of his research for *Three*. On the other hand, popular depictions of Sparta, including popular history/documentary as well as historical fiction in various media, tend to perpetuate the traditional composite view, albeit with varying emphases.

In my earlier work on 20th-century popular representations of the battle of Thermopylae, I identified two common approaches to the depiction of Sparta (Fotheringham 2012). Because one of Sparta's best-known features is military prowess, all representations include reference to the military violence the city exercised with such skill against her external enemies. Works taking a positive approach to Sparta, however, tend to ignore or downplay those aspects of the mirage which involve violence internal to Spartan society, including the violent treatment, or even the very existence, of the helots; works coming to an ultimately negative view of Sparta horrify the reader/viewer by emphasising these aspects. Miller's *300* and Steven Pressfield's prose novel *Gates of Fire* (also 1998) seem at first to represent something new in that they combine a clearly positive evaluation of Sparta with more emphasis than had been shown previously on one form of internal violence, the brutal communal training regime. Each author, however, appears to have had greater qualms about other forms of violence, including the oppression of the helots. Miller essentially leaves them out, an omission that he acknowledged in interviews was made in order not to 'turn off' readers (George 2003, 65). Pressfield allows the helots considerable prominence in his plot, but I argue that aspects of his presentation reveal discomfort

with the historical situation, ultimately undervaluing the suffering of large numbers of historical individuals. These works, therefore, although appearing more willing to face up to some of the less palatable aspects of the Spartan mirage, in the end still de-emphasise others out of a desire to present Sparta positively.

I will return briefly later to the question of whether *Three* presents a straightforwardly negative view of Sparta. Wishing to produce something that stands as more than simply the 'anti-*300*,' however, Gillen chose not to present an alternative take on Thermopylae itself—though still engaging with Thermopylae as a moment in Spartan history important to his characters—but to set his story over a century later, a period far less represented in popular culture. Focussing on this period, when Sparta's power had entered its long period of decline, provided the opportunity to present an alternative picture of Spartan society that would still not be too jarring for readers familiar with *300*. Since so little is known about the helots, the core story had to be fictional, whereas *300* depicts an actual historical event; although Miller's approach to the battle of Thermopylae is heavily mythologised, Gillen wanted to ground his story in as accurate a setting as possible. The importance of the claim to historicity for the image of the book is signalled by the inclusion of Professor Stephen Hodkinson (University of Nottingham) as 'Historical Consultant' alongside members of the creative team when the forthcoming comic was being advertised to retailers (CBR Staff 2013), and on the title-pages of each issue and the collection. A conversation between Gillen and Hodkinson about various aspects of Sparta was serialised in issues 2–5 and reprinted in the collection. Considerably more pages of the collection's back matter are devoted to historicity than to artwork: nine pages of 'Historical Footnotes' (new to the collection) and eleven pages of '*Three*: A Conversation' in comparison to seven pages of 'Covers Gallery' and three of 'Layouts & Design.' Even readers who do not choose to read the historical information in detail are likely to notice the claim to historicity being staked here.[4]

Hodkinson's own work on ancient Sparta has taken a sceptical approach to numerous aspects of the Spartan mirage; he describes the tendency in recent research, including his own, 'to "normalize" Sparta, [...] based upon an increasing realization of the many respects in which her society – for all its peculiarities – was also characteristically Greek' (2006, 113). One scene in which this kind of normalisation may have been influential on *Three*, in contrast to other works where Spartans are depicted as going about armed in daily life because of the constant threat of a helot revolt, is the one in Issue/Chapter 2, where two Spartans stroll through the streets without weapons, although behind them numerous helots can be seen working, including one wielding a mallet which could easily have been used as a weapon against the hated oppressors (2.14–15; cf. '*Three*: A Conversation,' p. 9, Hodkinson 2006, 133). For the most

part, however, Gillen felt that he could not challenge the traditional picture of Sparta too much for fear of losing the reader altogether:

> I ended up mainly writing to a core, popularly recognisable Sparta while trying to avoid conflicting with the latest research. I also backed away from some of the more radical theories, simply because they were so far away from that perception [...] and so making the whole story too easily dismissed.
>
> ('Historical Footnotes,' p. 1)

Today's historians are in any case not agreed on the extent to which normalisation is appropriate; each aspect of the mirage is hotly debated. As historical consultant, Hodkinson was well aware not only of these disagreements but also of the artistic and commercial considerations that have to be taken into account when advising on the historicity of a project like *Three*. For all Gillen's desire to do justice to the current scholarship on Sparta, a work of fiction is not necessarily the place to explore the wide variety of possible interpretations—although the use of inset stories, explored later, allows for the possibility that the storytelling is not always reliable, and Gillen does manage to include a reference to the fact that one of these existed in two versions (2.13–14). In the back matter of Issue 1 (not reprinted in the collection), Gillen describes his goal as producing 'a story as heroic as Thermopylae, but about the people in Sparta who never made it to the history books' (cf. Dietsch 2013). Heroic stories often involve some distortion of history.[5]

In what follows, I will begin with the representation of the helots as victims of violence and then move gradually to representations of their turning violence against their oppressors. I focus on embedded stories rather than violent events belonging to the main narrative for two reasons: because they are shorter and can be analysed in fewer words, and because the relationship between embedded and frame stories encourages readers to reflect on the nature of historical understanding. I will start, however, with the opening five pages of the comic, which establish key aspects of the culture in which the story is set, and which are themselves separated from the main narrative as a kind of prologue.

Helots as Victims: The *Krypteia*

The prologue-section, marked out from the main narrative by heavier use of the narratorial voice in captions which help establish the setting, depicts a particularly brutal form of Spartan-helot violence described as a semi-regular occurrence by Plutarch:

> The magistrates from time to time sent out into the country at large the most discreet of the young warriors, equipped only with

> daggers and such supplies as were necessary. In the day time [*sic*] they scattered into obscure and out of the way places, where they hid themselves and lay quiet; but in the night they came down into the highways and killed every helot whom they caught.
>
> (Plutarch, Life of Lycurgus 28)

Plutarch was writing in the early 2nd century C.E., but drawing on an earlier work of Aristotle (late 4th century B.C.E.). He refers to this institution/activity as the *krypteia*, a word sometimes translated as 'Secret Service.' An earlier account by Plato (early 4th century B.C.E.) omits the helot-killing and may suggest that all Spartan males went through this activity:

> the "Crypteia," as it is called, affords a wonderfully severe training in hardihood, as the men go bare-foot in winter and sleep without coverlets and have no attendants, but wait on themselves and rove through the whole countryside both by night and by day.
>
> (Plato, *Laws* 633b-c)

This description has led some modern scholars to see in the *krypteia* an ordeal which formed an initiation into manhood for Spartan youths. In Miller's *300*, although the word *krypteia* is not used, the scene depicting the young Leonidas' 'initiation' appears to draw on this Plato passage (*300*, 1.7–9). Plato may have omitted the helot-killing from his description because he did not know about it—because the Spartans were secretive, because the function developed after his time or because it was not relevant to his focus on training that develops 'hardihood.' The evidence provided by these two passages and a few other brief references has been hotly debated.[6]

The different scholarly interpretations of the *krypteia* are acknowledged by Gillen:

> In terms of the Krypteia's visuals, we walk an awkward line. As we talk about in the conversation, there's two traditional views of them. One has them as the secret police assassins. The other has a coming of age survival test. We merge both. The nakedness is mainly a nod to the latter. Greek sports were performed naked, so if this was an act of "sport" I wanted it visualised as such. The red cloaks are one of the big Spartan icons. The face paint is an invention.
>
> ('Historical Footnotes,' p. 1)

The idea of the 'coming of age survival test' is indicated by the use of the term 'rite of passage' that appears in the captions; it may also be indicated by the nudity of the Spartan youths—although after *300*,

this early in *Three*, this could be understood as simply the way Spartans are always depicted. The face paint is compatible with the notion of this activity as some kind of ritual; as depicted, however, the ritual involves helot-killing, with the hardship undergone by the Spartan youths only hinted at if the reader stops to think about what wandering through the countryside naked would actually mean for the soles of the feet and the tenderer parts of the body, and perhaps also in the emaciation of a couple of the youths' faces. A leaning towards the more violent take on the *krypteia* is ultimately unsurprising, due to its recognisability as a standard feature of the Spartan mirage (for readers familiar with the mirage; see e.g. Selwood 2016), and for its value in establishing the type of Sparta in which the story is set. Hodkinson might perhaps be expected to be critical of this easy acceptance of the more vicious interpretation of the *krypteia*; instead, he acknowledges that 'most modern scholars produce a composite picture' of the two views, and describes Gillen's representation as 'the perfect amalgam' ('*Three*: A Conversation,' p. 2).

The artwork by Ryan Kelly and Jordie Bellaire demonstrates the effectiveness of the comics medium for conveying the effects of violent action, doing justice to the possible sufferings of the historical helots. The first page and a half of the sequence establish a potentially idyllic country-scene: the olive harvest. Halfway down p. 2, the atmosphere darkens with the depiction of a group of young men, naked but for red cloaks and with faces weirdly painted, apparently lurking at the edge of the scene. On these pages, the panels are rectangular, separated by broad gutters, and extending to the page-edge; on p. 3, as the Spartan youths begin to stalk their victims, the framework of the page changes. Panel-corners are no longer right angles; there is a subtle mismatch between the angles of the panel borders and those of the surrounding gutter, which itself is surrounded by black, seeping in from the page-edge. It is as if both the images and their frames have broken free from the regular grid and are floating loose on the page, reflecting the violent disturbance about to erupt. The visual disturbance is developed still further on p. 4, where the panels have broken apart altogether and overlap; two corners of the largest are lost beyond the edge of the page; and the gutters of the two short, wide panels are coloured not pale yellow but a vibrant, shocking red (see Figure 1.1). The final page of the sequence, which is given the spare, emphatic label 'Sparta,' is a victim's-eye-view splash-page, coloured in shades of orange/brown against a pale-yellow background, showing five youths stabbing downwards in a frenzy (see Figure 1.2). Reading *Three* in dialogue with *300* and the heroising image of Sparta that work represents, the prologue comes across as strongly corrective, pointing out that the Spartans not only exploited unfree labour but violently oppressed the helot labourers.

Figure 1.1 Young Spartans of the *krypteia* attack helots during the olive harvest. *Three*, 1.4.

Figure 1.2 A helot's-eye-view of the *krypteia*'s daggers. *Three*, 1.5.

Helots as People: The *Krypteia* and Other Massacres in the Main Narrative

The *krypteia* is briefly referenced in the main narrative at 3.7 when Damar, referred to earlier as a 'widow' (1.10), confirms that her husband was one of the helots who was 'harvested' by the *krypteia*. Two panels illustrate Damar's memory as what I have called earlier an inset story. The narrative of *Three* is peppered with references to the past, both fictional character's memories and attested historical events such as Thermopylae. On seven occasions (1.22, 1.23, 2.13, 2.18, 3.7, 4.7, 5.12) the references to earlier events are not simply referred to in dialogue but illustrated in separate panels, marked out from the main narrative by their colouring. In the next section I will discuss the first two examples of these flashbacks, the pair of stories told by Terpander which prompt the initial massacre at the helot farmstead (see Figures 1.3, 1.4). Like these

Figure 1.3 Terpander tells the story of the battle of Plataea. *Three*, 1.19.

Figure 1.4 Terpander tells the story of the battle of Stenyklaros. *Three*, 1.20.

images, Damar's memories are illustrated in a pair of identically sized panels united by a single gutter, in grey tones rather than colour except for a spattering of red blood-drops which creates the impression that these images have a physical substance, as if they were documents on which blood could be spilled. The grey tones convey a sense of pastness through the association with pre-colour photography, while the regular size and shape within a noticeable gutter used here may recall Polaroids. The images of violence that are conveyed using this technique thus acquire something of the status of historical documents.

The way the colouring technique used for flashbacks in *Three* grants the episodes a kind of physical existence means that they vividly symbolise the ongoing presence of past—a potentially important theme in any historical novel. The visual representation of Damar's memory on the page, immediately beside the image of Damar in the present of the story, parallels the way her present behaviour is influenced by her past.

The anonymous act of helot-slaying depicted in the prologue is personalised and made more specifically relevant to the current action; in addition, Damar's expression of her own thoughts on the process turns her from simply a victim into a human being finding a way to live with what has happened. This narrative move parallels recent developments in scholarship on historical slavery explained by Hodkinson: from viewing the enslaved as 'defenceless, passive victims' to exploring the ways in which they retain agency in an attempt to do more justice to their experiences ('*Three*: A Conversation,' p. 5).

Here what is depicted is not a specific incident recounted in an ancient source, although it does have a mediated relationship with the passages from Plutarch and Aristotle discussed earlier. On five of the occasions when the technique is used, however, an episode taken from the actual ancient sources is being illustrated. This is the case with the next episode of violence to be discussed, dealing with one of the most controversial single episodes in Spartan-helot relations (4.7).[7] Here Terpander, suspicious about Klaros' skill with weapons, is asking about his compatriot's past; he has guessed that Klaros once fought in the Spartan army, as helots were on various historical occasions encouraged to do. The story Terpander tells comes from Thucydides 4.80.3 (with variants in other authors):

> with a view to guarding against the Helots—they had once even resorted to the following device. They made proclamation that all Helots who claimed to have rendered the Lacedaemonians [= Spartans] the best service in war should be set apart, ostensibly to be set free. They were, in fact, merely testing them, thinking that those who claimed, each for himself, the first right to be set free would be precisely the men of high spirit who would be the most likely to attack their masters. About two thousand of them were selected and these put crowns on their heads and made the rounds of the temples, as though they were already free, but the Spartans not long afterwards made away with them, and nobody ever knew in what way each one perished.

It is precisely fear of such an act—an extension of the *krypteia*'s remit to kill the 'strongest' helots, established in the prologue—that, Terpander suspects, prompted Klaros to fake an injury and thus get away from the army.

The two panels containing this story are not united by a single gutter but alternate with panels showing Terpander speaking (2.18). Readers may be suspicious of Terpander, whose aggravating character has been well established by this point in the story, and who is clearly motivated by a desire to get a reaction from Klaros; this is emphasised by the repeated depiction of his face: in two panels he is directing a probing look at his addressee. Terpander's use of the past here goes beyond Damar's explanatory use earlier; he actively shapes the telling of the story, not for the purpose of informing and educating, but to support a theory he has developed and to get a reaction out of his interlocutor. The parallel

between Terpander's use of history and Gillen's or indeed any historical writer's is there to be drawn by any reader inclined to reflection. Those who turn to the back matter are explicitly invited to consider the problem of historicity in terms not only of what happened but of what historical groups believed about what (might have) happened:

> This anecdote was high up the list of stories to use. It's also a controversial story, in terms of where and when (and even whether) it could have happened. Even the "how" is controversial if you think about it. It's not as if 2000 people being killed is in any way easy to arrange. I end up choosing the most conservative, safest telling – and it's presented by Terpander who – despite all his knowledge – is far from a reliable narrator. It's the sort of story that while we may doubt details of it, you have to suspect the Helots believed it 100%.
>
> ('Historical Footnotes,' p. 8)

Gillen's reflections on Terpander's use of this story encapsulate the problem of the Spartan mirage: our evidence does not give us Sparta, but only the stories people told about Sparta.[8]

In a subsequent conversation with Damar in 5.12–13, Klaros finally confirms Terpander's suspicions, that he faked an injury in order to 'hide from the krypteia's blades.' He also conveys a memory of his own, explaining the event which drove him, through shame, to reject the freedom offered by the Spartans to those who fought alongside them, and return to his helot status: his participation in the torching of a sacred grove where the Messenians (themselves former helots) had taken refuge from the Spartans under whom he was fighting. The offer of freedom to 6,000 helot soldiers is from Xenophon (*Hellenica* 6.29); the torching of the grove is invented by Gillen, although based on an attested event from another period ('Historical Footnotes,' p. 9). The episode represents a variety of ways in which helots could attempt to take control of their lives: Klaros himself, the character we are most interested in, demonstrates moral judgement in his decision about the future he deserves—reversing the decision he and other helots made previously to support the Spartans against the Messenian freedom fighters in the hope of acquiring freedom through this means. The Messenians themselves are an example of helots using violence against their masters in an act of rebellion, the ultimate exercising of agency by the enslaved. The first occasion on which *Three* mentions such a thing happening is the subject of my final section.

Helot Use of Violence

The first two inset stories in *Three* are a pair told by the helot Terpander, who is characterised as skilful with words but also as something of a troublemaker; it is the second story of the pair which causes the massacre of the helots—a fact Terpander acknowledges later (3.8, 4.20). Although only one

of the stories involves helots, the two have to be taken together. When the ephor and his retinue, including the young Arimnestos, take shelter from the weather at the farmstead, the helots are commanded to drink unwatered wine in order to demonstrate the follies of drunkenness. This Spartan practice is attested at Plutarch *Lycurgus* 28; its inclusion in the story underlines the oppression of the helots by the Spartans even when they are not being murdered but instead compelled by the threat of violence to perform humiliating actions. Emboldened by the wine and in spite of Damar's attempt to stop him, Terpander tells two stories about a namesake of Arimnestos from more than a century before. The first of these focusses on the battle of Plataea, a year after Thermopylae, in which the Greeks, led by the Spartans, dealt the final crushing blow to the invading Persian army (1.19; see Figure 1.3). Both Herodotus and Plutarch attest that over the course of this battle, the Persian general Mardonios was killed by a Spartan named Aeimnestos (Herodotus)/Arimnestos (Plutarch): Plutarch specifies that this Spartan crushed Mardonios' head with a rock (*Aristides* 19); Herodotus adds that he subsequently died in battle against rebellious Messenian helots in a place called Stenyklaros (9.64). Terpander goes on to tell this story too (1.20; see Figure 1.4), embellished with references to the fact that the Spartans have lost their pre-eminence in the Greek world. This is an act of insolence so great that the ephor initiates the massacre by commanding: 'Everyone dies. He dies last' (1.21–22).

The first of these two stories depicts the event most likely to be familiar to readers, the promise of victory at the battle of Plataea having been the end-point of *300*; Thermopylae itself has just been mentioned (1.16–17). The preceding conversation also flags up that what is coming is an inset narrative:

> I know stories. I know history. I know where one starts and where another begins. […] Would you hear that story?
>
> (1.18)

The references to Thermopylae and Plataea may create an association between the use of this technique and the representation of historically attested events; Terpander's conversation, however, draws attention to the difficulty of distinguishing history from some other kind of story. When the visuals shift, introducing the grey-scale, blood-spattered technique for the first time, it is clear what the shift signals: what is depicted is the content of this 'story.' The angles also change to fit the subject matter: an outdoor, action-packed battle-scene that contrasts with the oppressive interior of the farmstead. A continuous gutter frames the four panels of the story, together with one at the top showing the storyteller and one at the bottom showing the reaction to the story.

The second story is a surprise addition, which instantly shifts the tone; appropriately, it comes after a page-turn. Speaker and listener are both depicted above the panels of the story itself, which break free from

the rest of the page in a 2×2 grid surrounded by its own gutter, hanging suspended on the page as Terpander's words can be imagined hanging suspended in the deathly silence of the room. The absolutely even size of the four panels may recall film-frames as well as Polaroid photographs. The sequence of four images precisely parallels the visual storytelling of the Plataea story on the previous page: an establishing shot showing the two sides in the conflict; a second shot showing which has the upper hand; a third showing Mardonios/Arimnestos on the ground while his nemesis approaches; a fourth showing Arimnestos/the helot delivering the *coup de grace*. The low angle from which the helot is shown, however, recalls a different image: the victim's-eye-view of the stabbing carried out by the *krypteia* at the end of the prologue (1.5). The reversal of the Spartan's position is thus communicated in relation to two previous moments from the issue/chapter; it embodies on a small scale the reversal of the Thermopylae story constituted by *Three* as a whole.

The encounter between the Spartans and the Messenians attested by Herodotus is not well known, even to many scholars of ancient history. Readers who do not turn to the 'Historical Footnotes' to check may assume that it is invented; anyone who tracks down the original reference will be able to appreciate Gillen's skill in turning a brief aside in Herodotus into a significant event in his fictional narrative. The fact that some helots rebelled, sometimes successfully, may not be known even to readers who know they existed; the inclusion of this incident, like the setting of the story in this time-period, does some justice to the endeavours of historical helots. The back matter indicates where Gillen stands on the question of where history ends and story begins:

> Terpander is cheating a little. The Helots had free Messenian allies in this battle, and it was much more like a field battle than what he paints here. Worth noting that the elaborations Terpander makes are pretty much identical to the Spartan-centric telling of the battle of Thermopylae – entirely stressing the achievement of the group he wants to hail and removing everyone else.
>
> (Historical Footnotes, p. 4)

Terpander's narration describes the attack on the Spartans as 'a lowly helot ambush' and suggests that the 'untrained, unremembered helot' can be seen as 'a better hero' because he 'had nothing but a rock to do the deed.' The images back up this emphasis: whereas at Plataea the heavily armed and armoured Spartans appear to be natural victors, the helots at Stenyklaros are dressed in ordinary clothes and wield clubs, farm implements and rocks; their victory is a surprise. But in addition to making the point that Terpander is not always a reliable narrator, Gillen also invites readers to think again about representations of Thermopylae. Not all readers will be aware of these subtleties, but by including the

'Historical Footnotes,' Gillen at least makes it easy to become aware of them and to reflect on the uses of history.

Conclusion

There is no room here to discuss one final step which Gillen takes in his attempt to do justice to the past: his handling of the Spartans themselves.

> I said earlier that my plan for *THREE* wasn't to stick a dagger into Sparta. If I was entirely honest, initially, my inspiration did lean angry. However, the second I started the research, I couldn't. I wanted to show Sparta, with all its complications.
>
> ('*Three*: A Conversation,' p. 4)

The treatment of the historical character Kleomenes II and the invented character Arimnestos, specifically the representation of inter-Spartan violence (including one kind ignored by both Miller and Pressfield), could be usefully explored in order to demonstrate that what Gillen is doing in *Three* is critiquing the Spartan system rather than demonising the Spartans in the way that Miller demonises the Persians in *300*. As well as doing justice to the sufferings of historical Spartans, this approach can be seen as a final step in doing justice to the helots, by acknowledging that their enemies too were human beings rather than caricatured oppressors. *Three* makes the most of the capabilities of the comics medium to convey a layered and sophisticated fiction exploring the complexities of historical knowledge, and succeeds more than many other works in various media have done in doing justice to the violence experienced by a range of people from the distant past.[9]

Notes

1 An earlier work of fiction—not read by Gillen—which similarly creates a heroic tale about helots is Manfredi 2002.

2 For an example of graphic historical non-fiction focussing on the telling of untold stories, see Witek's *Comic Books as History* on the work of Jack Jackson (1989, 58–95). Witek hints at the connections between history and fiction when he states that 'all three creators [whose work is explored in his book] are concerned to varying degrees with the connections between historical and fictional narrative' (p. 4). Another non-fiction equivalent to Gillen's recuperation of the helots is Joe Sacco's work on the 'previously unarchived voices' of Palestinians discussed by Chute (2016, 235; 243), and also by Adams (2008, 121; 157) and Earle (2017, 120), under the label 'documentary' comics. For an example of an academic historian expressing concern about certain historical approaches undervaluing the sufferings of the helots, see Cartledge (2003, 17).

3 The term was originally coined as 'le mirage Spartiate' by French historian François Ollier in 1933.

4 Page-numbers do not appear anywhere in either the individual issues or in the collection. In order to reduce the numbers which must be counted in

order to provide and decode references to specific pages, the count has been restarted for each individual issue/chapter ('1.1' indicates Issue/Chapter 1, page 1), and for each section of the back matter. References to '*Three*: A Conversation' are to the printing of the complete text in the collection rather than to its piecemeal distribution in the issues.

5 His emphasis on *Three* as a heroic tale leads Gillen to downplay its 'social realist' aspects. Nevertheless, his explicit orientation towards class politics and his focus on the labouring helots mean that his work has much in common with those works Adams classifies as social realism (2008, 29–34). It is worth noting that although Adams is explicitly focussing on documentary comics, one of his examples—Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen*—is a partly fictionalised version of Nakazawa's life.

6 A recent painstaking analysis can be found in Ducat 2006, 281–332.

7 Opposing scholarly views of the credibility of the story are expressed by Paradiso 2004 and Harvey 2004.

8 Similar awareness of the way information about more recent historical events may be filtered through the perspectives of the individuals recounting them is conveyed by Joe Sacco's emphasis on his own presence as interviewer filtering the accounts of his Palestinian interlocutors; see, for example, Adams 2008, 151–153.

9 I owe sincere thanks to the editors for their patience and helpful suggestions; to Kieron Gillen and Stephen Hodkinson for their generosity in allowing me access to their correspondence; and to Matt Brooker, as always, for listening to ideas. I have also received feedback on the ideas from generous audiences at meetings of the Historical Fictions Research Network, Nottingham Does Comics, and the Classical Association.

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2 Comics Do Not Forget

Historical Memory and Experiences of Violence in the Spanish Civil War and Early Francoism

Enrique del Rey Cabero

The Historical Memory Debate in Spain: The Importance of Remembrance

Since the publication of *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925) and the posthumous *La Mémoire collective* (1950) by Maurice Halbwachs, the concept of 'collective memory' has found great acceptance in social sciences. The French sociologist argued that memory is not only individual: there is another memory which can be constructed, shared and transmitted by groups of different sizes. Debates about the relationship between history and memory have long been commonplace, but they took on a particular relevance after the traumatic wars and genocides of the 20th century. Walter Benjamin had already claimed memory as a source of knowledge in his posthumous *Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen* (1959). According to Benjamin, historical interpretations are created (as a result of both personal and collective memory) in order to establish an identity within a group. This memory is expressed through concrete or abstract objects, including monuments, museums, symbols and books. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to cover all the different approaches to memory studies (for a thorough classification, see Erll and Nünning 2008), but, in any case, one must agree with Mate when he declares that nowadays memory is 'an increasingly valuable resource'[1] and 'a world phenomenon' (2009, 149).

Civil wars are known to often be of extreme violence, and the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) was no exception. It can be said, without exaggerating, that it is the key event in the history of the country in the 20th century and is often perceived as a sort of prefiguration of the Second World War (in the sense that international powers were heavily involved: namely fascist Italy and Germany supporting Franco and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet Union aiding the Republic). Violence against civilians, especially in the Francoist zone, was, according to Paul Preston (who controversially used the word 'holocaust' in one of his books), a product of state terror as the rebel leaders 'regarded the Spanish proletariat in the same way as they did the Moroccan, as an inferior race that had to

be subjugated by sudden, uncompromising violence' (2013, xii). In this sense, Emilio Mola, one of the main organisers of the coup against the Republic, declared in his first secret instructions to his fellow conspirators that 'the action has to be violent in the extreme so as to subdue as soon as possible the enemy' (Preston 2013, 119).

In contrast to the rest of Europe, where anti-fascist forces finally succeeded during the Second World War, Franco and his troops won the Spanish Civil War in 1939. This allowed him to define the way in which the war was perceived over the following decades: the conflict was often called *Cruzada* (Crusade), and Franco himself was presented as a peace bringer and the motherland's saviour against the 'red plot' through propaganda and education. The transition to democracy (known in Spanish as the *Transición*) only began after the dictator's death of natural causes in 1975. It is debatable whether the *Transición* did establish a total fear-induced 'pact of silence,'[2] but, in any case, it certainly did not represent a clear break with the old regime and its crimes. Indeed, debates around memory and remembering in Spain reverberated well into the democratic era, especially triggered by Neofrancoist and revisionist theories (such as the ones that populate works by authors such as Pío Moa and César Vidal), which increased in number during the years that the right-wing party Partido Popular was in power (1996–2004). These conservative theses tried to slander the second Republic, equate *vencedores* with *vencidos* (winners and losers) and presented the Civil War as a collective madness between brothers (ignoring or reducing the importance of its socio-economic causes), disregarding the dictatorship's repressiveness and, in more extreme cases, vindicating again the figure of Franco as the peacemaker who saved Spain from communism. These particular characteristics explain why the removal of Francoist symbols and monuments is still controversial and incomplete today (Hadzelek 2012) and why many thousands of Republicans are still buried in mass graves (Silva 2006). These unresolved issues, according to Martín Pallín, makes Spain 'a sick and traumatised society that is not able to repair the horrors of the past which would repulse any civilised and democratic conscience' (2009, 75).

There was, thus, a need to resist this Francoist and Neofrancoist constructed memory, as the only way to forget and move forward seemed to be to actually remember in the first place. Victims of Francoism were, in a certain way, invisible for a long time. Here memory plays an important role; as Mate remarks, it 'makes the invisible visible' because 'without memory of injustice there is no way of talking about justice' (2008, 167–69). Moreover, apart from this symbolic justice, there were more immediate reasons for this recovery: victims' and direct witnesses' testimonies were being lost due to their passing or their old age. It is in this particular context that the concept of recovery of historical memory was understood in Spain. Inspired by the rising influence of collective

memory and political memory, it found some adversaries, both in those who believe that it meant the 'reopening of old wounds' (namely the Partido Popular) and those who consider that memory is never historical, as it can only be individual and subjective (Juliá 2006).

In 2007, the socialist government finally passed the much awaited *Ley 52/2007*, popularly referred to as *Ley de la Memoria Histórica* (*Historical Memory Law*). It was the first piece of legislation condemning Franco's regime and acknowledging the memory and rights of victims both from the Civil War and the dictatorship. However, it was not compulsory to comply with it; many considered it insufficient (Torrús 2013), and, at the same time, it was outrageous to the eyes of the Spanish political right-wing.

Therefore, it can be argued that, in fact, civil society has always been the main driver of the historical memory process due to the weakness or overall lack of state policies. Thus, many grassroots organisations for the recovery of historical memory have been created in Spain since the year 2000. The most important one, the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory), was founded in 2007 by Emilio Silva. Silva, a journalist at that time, decided to start an organisation after locating his grandfather's remains at the end of a long and difficult search, which exemplifies the close relationship between personal and collective remembering. Since then, the main role of the association has been to gather information to locate and excavate bodies dumped in mass graves.

> In its most common use in Spain, the term "historical memory" implies in fact a group of practices and politics of memory. José María Pedreño, former president of Federación Estatal de Foros por la Memoria (National Federation of Memory Forums), another prominent organization that promotes historical memory, defines it as: a socio-cultural movement, born within civil society, which aims at disseminating rigorously the history of the struggle against Francoism and its main figures in order to get justice done, while retrieving references to fight for human rights, freedom and social justice. And when we say justice, we are talking about recognition and reparations, never about revanchist attitudes (2004, 10).

Taking into account all the aforementioned, it is not surprising that during the first years of the 21st century, especially before the economic crisis of 2008,[3] a vast cultural production appeared around the war and the act of remembrance (for an extensive list of films and books about the Civil War that came out around this period, see Harris 2017), including successful novels such as Javier Cercas's *Soldados de Salamina* (*Soldiers of Salamis*), in which a fictionalised version of the author researches the lives of both a right-wing writer and the Republican soldier

who pardoned his life, and films such as *Las Trece Rosas* (*13 Roses*), which portrays the execution of 13 young women (half of them socialist) just after the end of the war. Julia Conesa, one of these women, famously said before being shot, 'Don't let my name be erased from history.'

Comics, Spain and the Recovery of the Memory of Victims

Comics in Spain have not only found new voices and new audiences in the last decades, but also seen their presence increased in the cultural and academic world (for a recent overview on Spanish comics, see Harris and Del Rey Cabero 2015[4]). As in many other countries, the arrival and consolidation of the much-debated term *graphic novel*[5] coincided with the rise of graphic memoirs, as well as autobiographical, testimonial and non-fictional works. The medium has grown enormously in visibility due to its increasing presence in academic journals, reviews, symposiums at universities and a new National Prize awarded since 2007 by the Spanish Ministry of Culture that placed comics along other more established media such as literature, photography and architecture. In recent years, Spanish graphic novels have also been increasingly translated into other languages (including, to a lesser extent than others, English) and, in addition, there seems to be more interest in the field of comics translation itself (Muñoz-Basols and Del Rey Cabero 2019).

Among the various subjects, memory and the act of remembering in general have become central subjects (Muñoz-Basols and Muñoz-Calvo 2017), as shown by successful and critically acclaimed works such as Paco Roca's *Arrugas* (*Wrinkles*)[6] and Miguelanxo Prado's *Ardalén*. As mentioned earlier, whereas in other media (such as cinema and literature) the Spanish Civil War has long been a common subject, it is only in the last ten years or so that comics have incorporated it into their discourse. The list is long and continuously growing and, besides the comics analysed or mentioned in this chapter, includes works such as the anthology *Nuestra guerra civil* (2006), Felipe Hernandez Cava and Bartolomé Segui's *Las serpientes ciegas* (2008), Iñaket and Mikel Begoña's *Tristísima ceniza: un tebeo de Robert Capa en Bilbao* (2011), Carlos Giménez's *Todo 36–39: malos tiempos* (2011), Paul Preston and José Pablo García's *La guerra civil española* (2016), Jaime Martín's *Jamás tendré 20 años* (2016) and Sento's trilogy *Dr. Uriel* (2017). In parallel, growing interest in the academic field is evident, with a notable number of exhibitions, articles, talks, seminars and PhDs focussing on comics and the remembrance of the war[7] over the last few years.

Given this recent growth and repercussion of graphic novels about the war and its aftermath, and, in particular, non-fictional and autobiographical ones, it is illuminating to consider the ways in which the

field has responded to the subject. Over the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss five of the most significant works in this area by authors of different generations.

The Forefather: Carlos Giménez and *Paracuellos*

Carlos Giménez was one of the protagonists of the so-called Spanish boom of adult comics in the late 1970s and produced a considerable number of works. The most famous is *Paracuellos*, a series of comic albums exploring the life of children in the Francoist Auxilio Social schools. These institutions were run by the Church and Falange (a political party of Fascist inspiration that played a key role in the coup) and modelled after the Nazi *Winterhilfe* programme, so they imparted a highly disciplined, religious and militarised education to resident students.

The six albums were compiled in *Todo Paracuellos* (Giménez 2007), although a new issue was published in 2016 (that year IDW also published the first volume of the long-awaited English translation of the series). *Paracuellos* is divided into short stories which are inspired by the childhood of the author himself at the Auxilio Social home of Paracuellos del Jarama. *Paracuellos* uses the children's perspective to denounce the mistreatment of children, who were often ill-nourished, beaten and psychologically abused by their guardians (and by other children). As Giménez commented, these centres were 'The logical and monstrous outcome of a monstrous society' (Serrano 2007). The first page of the first issue gives the reader an idea of what he or she will find in the series: a guardian forces one child to slap another, which triggers an endless spiral of violence. Violence and its impact on children and their upbringing is indeed one of the main themes of *Paracuellos*, expressed through Giménez's rigid grid and small frames populated by expressive faces in the foreground that provoke an effect of suffocation and accumulation.

Paracuellos focusses on daily life in a small institution and does not reflect major historic events. The author is well aware of the power of memory and, in this sense, constitutes a pioneer in the comics sphere. He has jokingly commented that he sometimes is attributed with 'inventing historical memory' (Caballero 2010, n.p.) as in the 1970s there was not a huge interest in this kind of stories. Giménez also reflects on the power of memory and its complementarity with history: 'When we die, all of us who were there, a chapter of history will disappear, somebody has to tell [the story] […] There might be documents describing what the schools were like but not how people lived there' (Serrano 2007). In this sense, Merino and Tullis have pointed out Giménez's vindication of 'personal history of memory, which in certain ways confronts objective institutionalised history' (2012, 217–218).

Remembering the Father: *Un largo Silencio* and *El arte de volar*

Two decades after the release of the first volume of *Paracuellos*, Miguel Gallardo, an important figure in the underground comics scene during the 1980s, published *Un largo silencio* (*A long silence*). The book brings together the written autobiography of Gallardo's father, a defeated Republican officer, and some comic pages written by Gallardo himself. His idea was to pay a tribute to his father, a common man who stayed silent for many decades, until Franco's death prompted him to speak. In the beginning, Gallardo describes him as a hero, but:

> not like those in the films, nor one from the cheap novels he kept in the second drawer of his desk, in his office. His great achievement was surviving – surviving to fall in love with my mother, so that my brother and I could be here, surviving to make friends, read, laugh… To get all this, my father had to become a shadow, and shadows do not have a voice. Now I am lending him a small voice: mine (Gallardo and Gallardo 2012, 6).

Apart from the first two pages of introduction, the rest of the book is conceived as a first-person memoir which combines his father's account, with a few drawings, and pages of comic interludes (still in his father's voice). Although a very different work in nature, connections with Art Spiegelman's *Maus* are obvious. Not only is Gallardo's work a mixture of biography and autobiography, but it also constructs claims to authenticity by representing the front pages of newspapers of that time, as well as real photographs and documents belonging to Gallardo's father, gathered at the end of the book. These techniques, as in the case of *Maus*, 'signify the authority derived from empiricism, investing the image with connotations of "accuracy" and "truthfulness"' (Adams 2008, 6).

Although there are some mentions of historical figures and war events, the focus is on the life of Gallardo's father. He presents himself as an ordinary man, compassionate but not politicised and often terribly scared of violent experiences. For instance, after his first war experience in Guadarrama, he writes, 'The only thing I wanted was to go home' (Gallardo and Gallardo 2012, 26). He survives the war as an artillery officer and, like many Republicans, flees to France only to end up in a concentration camp. Risking his life, he then goes back to Spain where, luckily, he finds out that the manager of the prisoners' camp is a former classmate. At the end of the memoir, he is finally liberated and meets his future wife. Throughout the memoir, Gallardo's father's voice is that of a survivor who plainly describes all the events that have happened, the injustices and killings he has witnessed and the fear he has felt. The story is full of small anecdotes and details about daily life during the war and the people he met. He often focusses on anonymous victims, like some

girls he and his friend were flirting with and who are killed in a bombing just a few minutes later.

Un largo silencio was originally published in 1997 and did not meet with much success, but it was republished in 2012. Not only had the author found new fame with *María y yo*, a comic about his relationship with his autistic daughter, but the memory of the Civil War and the Francoist repression had also become a more common subject in comics.

Three years earlier, in 2009, *El arte de volar*, by Antonio Altarriba and Kim, was published (it was translated into English as *The Art of Flying* by Jonathan Cape in 2015). The work is quite long (more than 200 pages) and complex in structure (for a detailed analysis of the work, see Espiña Barros 2015). At the time, along with Roca's *Wrinkles*, it was unanimously acclaimed by the critics as one of the most ambitious Spanish graphic novel of the 21st century, and the recipient of the National Comic Award in 2010.

El arte de volar was born after the tragic death of Altarriba's 91-year-old father, who killed himself jumping from the window of a nursing home. Antonio, Altarriba's father, like Gallardo's, was a Republican (although not an officer, but a regular military driver) who was exiled in France after the war, before deciding to return to Spain. However, unlike *Un largo silencio*, Altarriba's story is only partially based on his father's personal diary, and he includes many other fictional details. Yet they both intend to understand their fathers by lending them a voice. In the case of *El arte de volar*, Altarriba considered narrating the events in the third person but decided otherwise:

> In a way, his blood lives in me and I am him, so I tell the story of my father in first person [...] It meant going back to the history of my family to see to what extent my personal history, what I have lived, owes to the decisions my father made, in the same way Spain is the heir of that past (Grau 2010).

It could be said, thus, that both Gallardo and Altarriba start a journey to understand not only their fathers but also their families, their country and, ultimately, themselves through memory. Here the concept of postmemory, first formulated by Marianne Hirsch in an article about *Maus*, offers a useful framework for understanding:

> Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right (2008, 106).

The memory of Gallardo's and Altarriba's fathers is that of Republicans, the losers of the war, hidden by shame until the end of the dictatorship and expressed only through their respective sons. Both Altarriba and Kim make use of visual metaphors, a distinctive resource of comics as a visual medium (Kukkonen 2008), in oneiric and often rather nightmarish sequences to express these memories, many of which reflect episodes of extreme violence. For instance, in one of the pages, Altarriba's parents, now old, are shown arguing and fighting, depicted as tree trunks attacking each other with axes (170–172). However, perhaps one of the most eloquent of these visual metaphors is reflected by Antonio's delirium when sick in bed. The loss of hope of the protagonist and his dislike of the new regime are graphically expressed by the eagle of the new coat of arms of Franco's Spain that chases him. After being caught by the eagle, he has eyes his eyes torn out; more dead than alive, he declares, under a 'rain' of saluting Francos, that 'he is happy because he cannot longer see anything.'

Paco Roca and the Documentary Fiction Form

Paco Roca is part of a new and younger generation of comic artists and has become one of the most visible faces of contemporary comics in Spain, thanks to the aforementioned *Arrugas*. As early as 2004, he published *El faro* (*The Lighthouse*), which portrays a Republican soldier who escapes the Civil War and meets an enigmatic lighthouse-keeper. In 2010, he also collaborated with Serguei Dunovetz in *El ángel de la retirada* (*The Angel of Retreat*), set in Beziers (France) and explicitly linked it to historical memory, as it follows the story of a French young woman of Spanish origin who takes an interest in her heritage. However, here I will discuss one of his longer and more ambitious works: *Los surcos del azar* (*The Furrows of Chance*), published in 2013.

Paco Roca is notoriously in favour of the recovery of historical memory, which he described as a necessary process. This is what he declared in relation to *Los surcos del azar*:

> We cannot forget those to whom we owe a Europe free from fascism. It is outrageous that some political parties still talk with ambiguity about Francoist crimes. That would be unthinkable in France and Italy. We have made a bad transition to democracy and if the allies had not turned their back on us and had installed a democracy in Spain, our history would be very different. That is why it is so important to remember and never forget, so that these things do not happen again (Jiménez 2013).

This graphic novel tells the story of La Nueve, a company mainly composed of Republicans who escaped Spain after the Civil War and went on to fight the Nazis in France. They formed part of the French Army and were among the first to liberate Paris, although this was hushed up

at the time. For this reason, many critics have highlighted the connections between the present and the recovery of historical memory in *Los surcos del azar*. Roca's work engages with memory in an interesting way, as he presents two storylines. The main one is represented in colour and tells the story of an old Miguel Campos, once a Republican soldier of La Nueve. The second one, in black and white, is the recollection of past events by the protagonist himself as he is interviewed by a fictional alter ego of Paco Roca. Despite the fact that Miguel Campos did exist, he actually disappeared after the liberation of Paris, so, unlike the comics journalism practices of authors such as Joe Sacco, Roca's graphic novel appropriates non-fiction codes and conventions, thus engaging with rising genres such as the mockumentary (Hight 2010). In fact, Roca's graphic novel seems to be both making use of and undermining a practice of other visual media (such as film and photography), in which one tends to connect black and white with the depiction of past events. In addition, it helps the reader to identify with Roca's alter ego (who is not dissimilar to Cercas in the already mentioned novel *Soldiers of Salamis*), in his process of uncovering and understanding the truth. This identification continues until the end of the graphic novel, when Miguel seems irritated when asked about the killing of unarmed Nazis: 'They were fascists! fascists! They were not people with wives or children. They were Nazis who would have not hesitated to do the same with us!' (221). In this way, Roca, as part of a generation who did not suffer the war (like most of his readers), is taught about the difficulties of judging the past by modern standards. Accordingly, the book demonstrates an educational intention, containing various maps and factual information that are a result of the author's extensive research with the assistance of historian Robert S. Coale. Such visual techniques are common in other comics representation of traumatic experiences and, as Hillary Chute points out, 'place pressure on traditional notions of chronology, linearity, and causality –as well as the idea that 'history' can ever be a closed discourse or a simply progressive one' (2016, 62).

The Memory of Republican Women: *Cuerda de Presas*

One of the most notable examples of the recovery of historical memory in Spanish comics came from two young authors, Jorge García and Fidel Martínez, who published *Cuerda de Presas* (*String of Prisoners*) in 2005. This comic is a compilation of short stories which depicts female Republican prisoners in Francoist jails after the Civil War. As in Roca's case, it is the product of extensive research rather than family witnessing. Although too young to have lived under Francoism, García and Martínez consciously decided to participate in the recovery of memory process: 'We wanted to rehabilitate the memory of women who seemed to have been forgotten by those in charge of shaping a coherent and truthful historical past' (Barrero 2005). Interestingly enough, the comic,

as in the case of *Un largo silencio*, will be now potentially enjoyed by a wider readership, as it was republished in 2017.

Each short story shows different characters in different prisons. In many of the stories, the act of remembrance in the present becomes especially significant. In 'El cuarto bajo la escalera' (The room under the stairs), one of the women remembers the continuous and traumatic rape of one of the prisoners, as well as the tortures suffered by many of them. In an interview that takes place in the present, the old woman confesses that memories do not hurt so much anymore, a statement which seems to be contradicted by the depiction of the torture (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 © Jorge García and Fidel Martínez. Page 31. *Cuerda de presas*. Graphic Novel published by Astiberri Ediciones, 2017.

One of the advantages of comics is that 'images in print do not chase each other in the same way as scrolling on-screen images: they stay put, remain available, can be checked, compared and returned to multiple times' (Groensteen 2008, 50). Therefore, the reader can see before his or her eyes the present and the past blended together (as in *Los surcos del azar*), as well as the physical similarities (and differences) between the old woman and her younger self. Fidel Martínez's expressionist and chiaroscuro graphic style recalls some works of Alberto Breccia but also of Picasso: namely the faces depicted in his world-famous *Guernica* (1937), seeming to suggest the victim's status as a universal symbol of human suffering.

The final challenge of putting into words the experience lived in those prisons concludes *Cuerda de presas*: in 'Qué escribir' (What to write). One of the women, when asked to describe their conditions in Francoist prisons, cannot decide what to write about and finally hands in a blank paper. This represents well 'the constant tension between what can be contained within the frame and what cannot be contained within it –both in terms of historical realities and in terms of the burden of expressing those realities' (Chute 2016, 140). This metaphorical ending, expressing the difficulty of remembering and representing traumatic events, can also be interpreted as the silence and oblivion that came afterwards for memory. As Touton points out, *Cuerda de presas* reflects on the traumatic experience and its transmission, and 'manages to represent both the impossibility to testify and the necessity to do it' (2010, 411).

Conclusions

Though different in nature, the comics I have discussed all deal with the Civil War and the Francoist repression, and can be linked to the process of the recovery of historical memory. Even in their prologues, most of them recognise the importance of collecting these memories and seeking symbolic justice for their protagonists. Either through memoir, biography or semi-fictionalised documentaries, by representing individual memories these comics are also engaging with a collective part of memory which was buried or forgotten. They all explore stories that might never have been heard due to repression, and that express the unspeakable horror of violence, trauma and war. Antonio Martín says in the prologue of *El arte de volar* that it is 'the chronicle of a whole generation through the feelings of a common man, the author's own father, who tries again and again to go on with his life, only to end up dragged to the past by the tides of history' (Altarriba and Kim 2005, 5). That is, precisely, the value of memory, and what makes it compatible and complementary to history: it rehabilitates the victims, who have been often considered the price of history and progress. It is, according to Sanz Hernández, 'effective and affective' (1999, 235). Because, as Mate

suggests, memory is not only a hermeneutical activity against oblivion and invisibility but also a powerful tool that can be used for the recognition of victims (justice) and a moral and political duty (2009, 167–171).

Comics explore memory in ways that are intrinsic to the medium, and thus differs from literature or cinema. Through the combination of words and images, graphic style, the use of colour (or lack of it) and their capacity to represent and incorporate past events in a rich dialogue with the present, comics have proved successful in vividly recreating the memory of the Civil War. These comics have been received with interest in Spain (Formount 2009), both by old and new generations, and they have also recently started to be available in translation. In this way, Spanish comics have joined the growing international genre of trauma and comics (Chute 2016; Earle 2017), producing a new and refreshing approach to a topic which a part of the Spanish population deems overexploited (the so-called abuse of memory). Far from an exhausted topic, it is highly likely that the memory of the Civil War and its many repercussions will continue to be explored in Spanish graphic novels and comics.

Notes

1 'Cotiza al alza' in the original Spanish, a term borrowed from the economic jargon of the stock exchange. This and other translations (including titles) from Spanish in this article are mine.
2 The debate about memory and oblivion of the Civil War is a very long one (Ortiz Heras 2006; Sevillano Calero 2013). Some authors, such as Juliá (2006), have negated the existence of a pact of silence, arguing that ever since the arrival of democracy there was an interest in research about the past and in dismounting Francoist theories. However, it does seem that advances in the field of historiography have not often reached general audiences. As Reig Tapia remarks, our memory of the Civil War possesses a contradictory essence: 'sometimes it seems more alive than desirable and sometimes more forgotten than it should' (1997, 40–41).
3 Since then it can be argued that the economic crisis (at least until the recent events in Catalonia) has dominated most political debates. This has also become an increasingly present subject in comics, as seen in works such as Aleix Salo's *Españistán* (2011), Antonio Hito's *Inercia* (2014) and Miguel Brieva's *Lo que me está pasando* (2015).
4 Some of the topics and works of this chapter were discussed in this online conversation, which appeared on the website of Comics Forum just after its 2014 conference. The author thanks the organisers for the idea and Sarah for engaging in what was a very stimulating talk. Some of her own insights can be read in a recent article she has published (Harris 2017).
5 Debate in which some authors have actively participated, as shown in Santiago García's *La novela gráfica* (2010), recently published in English in 2015 as *On the graphic novel* by University Press of Mississippi.
6 Roca is arguably one of the most famous and best-selling authors of the Spanish comics market, particularly thanks to *Wrinkles*, which has been widely translated (see Muñoz-Basols and Del Rey Cabero, forthcoming), including two different translations into English by Knockabout (2015) and Fantagraphics (2016).

7 The representation and memory of the Civil War received attention in events such as Semana Negra de Gijón (Gálvez and Fernández 2006), exhibitions such as Los Tebeos de la Guerra Civil Española. Niños y Propaganda (Salamanca, 2008–2009) and the international conference Guerre civile espagnole et bande dessinée celebrated in Musée de la bande dessinée of Angoulême in 2016. More recently, it has also become the subject of study of PhDs (Matly 2014) and works that explore how to teach historical memory through comics (Fernández de Arriba 2018).

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3 Legacies of War

Remembering Prisoner of War Experiences in French Comics about the Second World War

Claire Gorrara

Introduction

French prisoners of war are largely absent from stories of the Second World War in France. Although the experience of defeat, exile and incarceration in camps in the Third Reich was the fate of 1.5 million Frenchmen aged between 16 and 45, such men felt themselves to be 'les exclus de la victoire' (excluded from victory) (Cochet 1992). At the end of the Second World War, French prisoners of war did not fit comfortably with the dominant post-war narrative of an honourable France resurrected from the shame of defeat and occupation by the glory of liberation and resistance. Yet, even if their experiences have not coincided with this image of *France résistante*, French prisoners of war have continued to reflect on their forgotten war over the post-war period, in private and public, in print and in visual cultures. As the events of the war recede in time, the baton of recollection has been handed on to family members. Children and grandchildren have increasingly come to highlight the legacies of such a neglected experience for the prisoners of war themselves and for those closest to them.

This chapter will focus on the comic form as a vehicle of memory for individual and collective stories of and about French prisoners of war during the Second World War. It will begin by identifying the specificity of the comic as a cultural form well suited to telling stories of war and conflict. Which war stories does the comic enable and privilege? How does an image-word medium affect the representation of violence, history and memory? The chapter will then examine the experiences of French prisoners of war and their place in the ongoing memory debates that characterise France's troubled relationship with its wartime past. It will briefly outline the war trajectories of French prisoners of war and then focus on two autobiographical graphic narratives published in 1945. It will analyse the common textual strategies used by these two returning prisoners of war to represent their experiences. The chapter will end with a discussion of albums by two contemporary comics artists, Jacques Tardi and Florent Silloray, respectively, the son and grandson of French prisoners of war. It will interrogate the effects of temporal

distance and historical recontextualisation on such war stories. Later generations represent this past as an integral part of family memories impacted by the memory politics of the present. Making extensive use of their family archives of wartime notebooks, photographs and drawings, these comics artists demonstrate the role of the comic form as *lieu de mémoire* for neglected memories of French prisoners of war.

Drawing Stories of War in Comics

Contemporary autobiographical comics are now recognised by scholars and readers as an influential medium for representing the experiences of the individual in moments of violence and conflict (Chute 2016). As Harriet E. H. Earle comments in her study of comics, trauma and war, major comics authors, such as Joe Sacco, have been instrumental in distancing the comics form from superhero stories of war as battles between good and evil. Their work, instead, 'gives voice to traumatic experiences, the difficulties faced in recovery, and a multitude of small things that combine to create a conflict experienced by the individuals who recreate it in narratives and art' (Earle 2017, 16). Seeing war from the perspective of those transformed by its aftermath necessarily opens textual spaces for conflict and violence to be imagined differently. History becomes 'humanised,' and the spotlight shifts from the big picture of military endeavours to what Earle terms 'personal stories, bound up in minutiae and nuanced characters […]' (Earle 2017, 18). In such autobiographical comics, the emphasis is on personal experiences, ones that communicate a deeply held emotional truth rather than the 'facts' of war.

Comics provide a vehicle for mapping such personal stories in spatial terms that highlight the relationship between history, memory and representation. War is visualised on the page as a multisensory experience, with panels acting as 'boxes of memory' (Chute 2016, 194) that chart its long-term effects. In autobiographical mode, the comics invite the reader to take a visual journey that promises to bridge the gap between recollection and an external reality. The role of memory and modes of representation are pivotal to such an endeavour. Memorial continuity can be signalled via a smooth visual motion across panels and clear causality of action and representation. Alternately, traumatic memory can be signalled through jarring panel sizes and shapes and an intensive or recurrent focus on talismanic objects or scenes. Different colour regimes are also indicative of the impact of past events on present recollection. Black and white or sepia tones are often associated with documentary or period detail, while vibrant colour schema can represent stark memory recall and the intercession of contemporary perspectives. In many contemporary autobiographic comics, the reproduction of other visual media, such as photographs, provides a form of authentication for past experiences. In his study of documentary graphic novels, Jeff Adams

terms this 'proof by correspondence' (Adams 2008, 60). By creating a link to traumatic histories located outside the narrative, and verified by the recrafted photograph, contemporary comics remind readers they are engaged in an act of reading that draws upon a wide repertoire of graphic techniques. This ability to accentuate different modes of representation for memorial effect is what, for Jennifer Anderson Bliss, makes the comic form so adept at 'reflecting the multidirectional qualities of memory and history' (Bliss 2016, 89). For French prisoners of war, these are memories and histories that remain tinged with shame and humiliation.

French Prisoners of War: Exile and Return

For France, the end of war and occupation ushered in a period of 'acute national identity crisis' (Kitson 2008, 68). General de Gaulle and other French national leaders sought to minimise an image of France as a country of collaborators, symbolised by the Vichy regime and its compliance with the German occupier. They focussed instead on promoting a narrative of national resistance. For such political and cultural elites, the recent history and memory of the resistance was critical to their efforts to reconstruct France as a powerful actor on the post-war world stage. As such, resistance came to incarnate the spirit of the new France and became a prerequisite for political power and influence. Yet this image of *France résistante*, while dominant in the early post-war decades in France, was never a totalising narrative. Such a 'top down story' of the nation coexisted with 'bottom up' stories of general lassitude and fear and the psychological impact of protracted total war. The 'long liberation' of France, from 1944 to 1946, was a time coloured by uncertainty as French people existed in an 'emotional interregnum' (Footitt 2008, 130) between war's end and its ongoing reverberations. French people were unsure about the social and political structures of a new France and, in many cases, awaiting the return of loved ones still trapped in war-torn Germany and its collapsing Reich protectorates.

In 1945, over two million French men and women were yet to return to France from exile or deportation. These people were divided across three main categories: deportees on political or racial grounds, conscripted or volunteer workers for the Third Reich and prisoners of war. This last group included soldiers captured and transported to German-occupied territories after the defeat of France in May–June 1940. In France, as in other Allied countries, such prisoners of war were predominantly men drafted by military conscription. In all, 1,850,000 French soldiers had been captured in 1940, and 1,500,000 had been transferred to prisoner of war camps in Germany. Of these, 950,000 would return to France only five years later. Some of these men, roughly 250,000, were employed as civil workers for the duration and often benefitted from better living conditions than compatriots who remained within the prisoner of

war camps. Over the five-year period of war, 550,000 French prisoners of war returned to France due to specific personal circumstances, such as sickness and ill health or family responsibilities. In the summer of 1945, prisoners of war made up 44% of all those returning to France (Lagrou 2000, 83–84).

In occupied France, the Vichy government had taken responsibility for its prisoners of war under the terms of the Geneva Convention (Lagrou 2000, 106). It made use of the captive male population abroad to appease the occupier, initially pledging three men of working age who would volunteer to work in Germany for the release of one prisoner of war. However, the relative failure of this scheme (*la Relève*) meant that Vichy eventually decreed that all men of working age were to be conscripted to work in Germany. The majority experience of French prisoners of war of working age was, therefore, one of up to five years of exile and incarceration, with little possibility of release. As Pattinson et al. (2014) note therefore, 'being a POW was not, then, an exceptional or minority experience but rather was remarkably common' (180).

Public responses to this exiled male population were mixed. For some, the capture and defeat of the French army was a source of shame and humiliation, and French prisoners of war were held responsible for catastrophic military failure (Lloyd 2013, 27). In addition, the Vichy regime had mobilised French prisoners of war for propaganda purposes, associating them with suffering and penitence. They were presented as atoning for France's defeat and were used in official materials as representing the need for 'national redemption through sacrifice' (Lagrou 2000, 107). On their return, French prisoners of war were then, perhaps unsurprisingly, 'somewhat suspect' (Koreman 1997, 11). They could not be classified as resisters or collaborators, and their war experience bore little relationship to the exalted model of masculinity associated with the soldier-hero. Indeed, some prisoners of war felt slighted on their return and not accorded comparable recognition to political deportees who had been deported as a result of their opposition to the German occupier and the Vichy regime (Koreman 1997, 16). For Koreman, this social and cultural occlusion of the prisoner of war experience in French public life was in large part because they, and others returning from exile, 'posed an unbearable contradiction to the founding myth of postwar France' (Koreman 1997, 21). They were living proof that not all French people had suffered equally in wartime and that not all French people had stood together to defeat the German oppressor. Autobiographical graphic narratives of the period demonstrate these tensions and contradictions.

Camp Stories: Collective Histories and the National Epic

During the Second World War, prisoners of war from across the globe chronicled their experiences of incarceration in imaginative ways: from

letters and diaries to notebooks and drawings. For Pattinson, Noakes and Ugolini in their overview of male prisoners of war and the Second World War, there was a 'flowering of creativity behind barbed wire' (2014, 181). In post-war popular cultures, this creativity translated into published memoirs and autobiographies, television programmes, such as the BBC's *Colditz* series, and iconic films, such as *The Great Escape*. Such printed and visual narratives display a fascination with the inner world of the camps and the survival and coping strategies of the inmates of camps, prisons and internment centres. In such accounts, both fictional and autobiographical, there is often an overemphasis on the theme of escape and a preference for stories that pit the stoicism, imagination and humour of prisoners of war against dull and humourless German guards.

In the case of France, captivity in prisoner of war camps has generated, to date, over 500 texts, but few have attracted attention or critical study (Lloyd 2013, 26). In his study of five such prisoner of war narratives, Christopher Lloyd terms the authors 'spokesmen for a mute generation of captives' (2013, 26). Lloyd makes no reference to graphic narratives or the use of illustrations and focusses predominantly on how autobiographical prisoner of war stories grapple with the psychological need to come to terms with defeat. In such texts, derision or self-mockery is the most frequently adopted tone or posture, signalled by anti-heroic, ironic or belittling titles (Lloyd 2013, 27). For Lloyd, such narratives bear little relationship to the upbeat escape narratives of post-war popular culture, which 'fail to convey the monotony and misery of long-term captivity, during which many prisoners subsisted on the verge of starvation […]' (2013, 28). Yet, as Lloyd argues, whilst the heroic epic is resolutely debunked in his small sample, the authors he discusses make use of a variety of narrative techniques and approaches to represent their experiences. These range from naturalistic reportage to more experimental forms that seek to depict the phenomenology of incarceration. Just as there is no singular prisoner of war experience, so there are multiple forms of representation. Yet all are preoccupied with the importance of testifying to the vicissitudes of enforced exile and separation from loved ones.

Raymond Henry and Antoine de Roux were two French prisoners of war who published graphic narratives of their war experiences in 1945.[1] Raymond Henry was captured as an officer in Alsace in May 1940 and spent the five years of the war in Oflag VID in Munster, Westphalia. He represents his war in a loose-leaved album, *La Vie de château!* (This is the Life!). The narrative begins with a two-page overview of Henry's war and then reproduces 50 single-page monochromatic drawings, with captions, cartoonish in style and presentation. These provide a panorama of capture, interment and liberation. Antoine de Roux's *Journal dessiné d'un prisonnier de guerre* (The Illustrated Diary of a Prisoner

of War) follows a more traditional format as a graphic narrative. The book is presented in bound format, with chapters that are framed by a short descriptive text and then stark black and white line drawings, with a single image on each page and a caption. The reader is given a chronological account of Roux's war experiences: from capitulation and defeat in May 1940 to the journey to Stalag IID, in Staargard, Pomerania, through an account of the daily life and brutalities of the camp to Roux's repatriation due to ill health in October 1941 as part of the Vichy regime's *Relève* scheme.

Both graphic narratives concentrate on the collective story of French prisoners of war. In so doing, they keep the reader at arm's length from the events depicted. Even though both accounts are meticulously detailed on the geography of the individual author's actual exile and return, they shy away from designating a first-person narrator. Instead, the narratives focus on groups of anonymous men drawn walking, eating, working, sleeping, undergoing punishment or in rare moments of leisure. For Roux in *Journal dessiné d'un prisonnier de guerre*, these groups are variously named as 'les prisonniers' (prisoners), 'captifs harcelés' (harassed captives), 'les compagnons de misère' (fellow sufferers) or 'les détenus' (detainees) as if they have no distinguishing identity, not even that of nationality. However, as Roux's illustrated diary progresses, 'nous' (us) begins to creep into the printed text and captions, culminating in one panel when the first-person singular is used. This is a poignant moment when a first-person narrator (never named) laments the few personal items left to him; photographs and his watch as 'les derniers témoins de la vie de naguère' (the last remains of my old life) (Roux 1945, 87). Drawn images are starkly expressive with sweeping lines and angular group portraits, with little attention paid to background detail. The effect is to position the reader as an omniscient observer of camp life, excluded from the prisoner of war's world. This experience takes on the quality of the universal human condition, unremitting in its suffering and humiliation.

This dissociative or distancing effect is achieved with humour in Raymond Henry's *La Vie de château*! As the title suggests, the volume offers a darkly ironic account of capture, transportation, internment and eventual release. The prisoner of war camp is imagined as a holiday camp with its 'châtelain' (lord of the manor) and 'concierges' (grounds staff). Prisoners go on a 'chasse à la puce' (flee hunt) rather than a fox hunt; they are the captive 'hôtes' (guests) of a violent regime. The beautifully realised images have a Disneyesque quality, playing on the appeal of American animation, with character visualisation reminiscent of Disney's 1937 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. The camp enclosure is portrayed in distorted and warped form as if to capture the unreality of the experience. As Karen Horn has noted from her interviews with South African Second World War prisoners of war veterans, this humorous approach is the 'laughter of the captured' (Horn 2011, 540). Its

purpose is to create a bond with the reader, showing that the prisoner of war has not succumbed to exigencies. In the case of *La Vie de château!*, such sardonic humour creates a 'them and us,' separating the prisoners of war from their captors and ridiculing the pretensions of those who considered themselves 'les dieux du stade' (the gods from on high). Humour here also allows Henry to avoid confronting negative aspects of his war experience, focussing instead on the more picturesque. As Horn states, humour was mobilised as 'a universal tool that boosted morale, showed defiance, created unity, and to an extent helped POWs accept powerlessness' (Horn 2011, 552).

These two very different graphic narratives provide insights into the challenges and dominant war narratives that greeted prisoners of war on their immediate return to France. Roux's landscape of memory is one that tells a story of the suffering and martyrdom of the prisoners of war. Ending with a panel profiling the French *tricolore* flag, coloured in red, white and blue (the only coloured image of the book), *Journal dessiné d'un prisonnier de guerre* accentuates a Vichy-style discourse of French prisoners of war as a sacrificed community. A 'France mutilée' (mutilated France) (Roux 1945, 183) finds its counterpart in the damaged bodies of its returning sons. In contrast, Raymond Henry's *La Vie de château!* refutes this victim narrative, making use of humour to highlight the ingenuity and agency of the French prisoners of war. As Henry writes in his preface, his graphic narrative is a pointed riposte to those who believed that the prisoners of war were 'la honte de la France. Ils auraient dû se faire tuer plutôt que d'accepter la vie de château (sic) en Allemagne. C'est une ignominie dont ils ne se relèveront jamais et qui les suivra toute leur vie' (shamed France. They should have killed themselves rather than live the life of Riley in Germany. They will never recover from such humiliation and it will dog them all their lives) (Henry 1945, n.p.). While there is no attempt to cover up the hardships of camp life, this is a story, nonetheless, of prisoners of war as 'des fils qui n'ont pas baissé les yeux devant l'ennemi' (sons of France who remained defiant in the face of the enemy) (Henry 1945, n.p.). Martyrs or rebels, in both cases prisoners of war in these early autobiographical graphic narratives, are part of a collective story and experience and not individualised. The authors themselves sit on the periphery of their own life stories. They are part of a returning male community that had no place in the national epic of resistance.

Family Stories: Personal Histories and the Return to the Past

Since the turn of the 21st century, family stories of the Second World War in France have become increasingly prominent in popular culture. This can be attributed largely to the temporalities of the present, as those

who were children or adults during the Second World War pass away. We are moving away from a time when the Second World War was a period lived by those we knew and loved to a time when the war will exist only as objects, narratives and commemorative rituals (Assmann 1995). In this liminal phase of memory evolution, between the Second World War as an embodied experience and the Second World War as a cultural memory, family stories become a primary conduit for sustaining individual and group memories. This family frame allows for proximity to public history and knowledge but also highlights how traumatic pasts continue to impact negatively on those who come after. Such 'post-memories,' to use Marianne Hirsch's term (1997), can overshadow the lives of children and grandchildren as they struggle to understand their relationship to monumental events that have determined the course of their family history. As the two recent narratives analysed here demonstrate, the comic form has offered French authors and artists a vehicle for confronting the emotional and psychological impact of prisoner of war experiences on their close relatives. This rich vein of comics, war representation and memory in France certainly owes its legitimacy and artistic development to the critical success of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, serialised from 1980 to 1991, widely translated, and credited as having 'revolutionised the cultural portrayals of war and genocide' (Stańczyk 2018, 1). As the depiction of the autobiographical narrator's relationship with his father, a Holocaust survivor, revealed, the comic form could be used to explore personal, familial and cultural histories of war in innovative and arresting ways. In the case of Jacques Tardi and Florent Silloray, the intercession of a family frame changes the war stories that can be told and opens different perspectives, and debates on the prisoner of war experience and its legacies in France.

Florent Silloray's *Le Carnet de Roger* (Roger's Notebook) (2011) tells the story of Silloray's grandfather, Roger, who was conscripted into the French army in September 1939 from the village of Saint-Sébastien-sur-Loire. He was captured in May 1940 and transported to Stalag IVB in Mühlberg in Germany. The large album-size comic alternates the story of Roger's capture and internment with the journey of the autobiographical narrator, his grandson, back to Germany. Florent is depicted searching for the traces of his grandfather's war journey, travelling from France to the Mühlberg prisoner of war camp, now a heritage site. In so doing, the comic album creates a set of mirroring effects between past and present: Roger's halting journey on foot and by train to Germany in 1940 is mirrored in the autographical narrator's plane flight and car journey from France to Germany in 2008. This paired structure extends to the use of notebooks; Roger's original notebooks, reproduced on the inside covers of the album, are mirrored in the scribbled notes of the autobiographical narrator who is shown maintaining his own log and account of his travels. Here the hybrid image-word form of the comic heightens

the sense of the relationship between past and present as the diary and log enter in virtual dialogue. Whilst Roger is accompanied by a host of fellow prisoners of war, the autobiographical narrator journeys with Thomas, a German translator, who helps him navigate the linguistic and cultural differences between present-day France and Germany. In a real sense, therefore, the journey of the grandson functions as a posthumous act of recognition of his grandfather's experiences.

In *Le Carnet de Roger*, Roger's death is the catalyst for his grandson to tell this war story in comics form, unearthing stories that were silenced within the family. The death of Jacques Tardi's father equally acts as the impetus for his two-album series devoted to his father. Entitled *Moi, René Tardi, prisonnier de guerre au Stalag IIB* (Me, René Tardi, Prisoner of War in Stalag IIB) (2012) and *Moi, René Tardi, prisonnier de guerre de Stalag IIB: mon retour en France* (Me, René Tardi, Prisoner of War in Stalag IIB: My Return to France) (2014), Tardi's work, like Silloray's, is centred on the personal war story of a close male family relative. Yet, unlike Silloray, Tardi does not create a parallel narrative structure for his investigation into his father's wartime past but instead embeds himself in his father's story as an imagined interlocutor. As a postmemory technique, such a structuring principle creates a set of entangled narratives, refusing the clear differentiation of 'then' and 'now' so central to Silloray's *Le Carnet de Roger*. Instead, the son, a teenage comic avatar of Jacques Tardi himself, accompanies his father on his wartime odyssey from his home of Valence in France to Stalag IIB near Hammerstein in Germany. This son is a phantom presence, seen only by the father, not by other characters, but visible to the reader in every scene. He asks questions; challenges his father's period interpretations of events and reacts to the scenes represented. As such, he is a complex and composite being. He is at the same time an imagined witness to his father's dehumanising treatment at the hands of his German captors; a secondary historian able to fill in the gaps in his father's story; and a surrogate for the reader and for our surprise, horror and curiosity at the events depicted in the graphic narrative.

The comic form is central to both authors' endeavours to represent the impact of prisoner of war experiences on the individual and the transmission of such memories into post-war family life. For Silloray, the comic form allows him to visualise the historical and emotional gulf between past and present. All panels that represent Roger's experiences are coloured in sepia tones, with splashes of white lightening the effect of uniformly brown background and black line drawings. The present of the autobiographical narrator is differentiated from the past with panels that make use of a muted colour palette of greys, blues and orange. These restricted colour schemes emphasise the parallel but quite separate worlds of grandfather and grandson and the emotional restraint that lies at the heart of their relationship. Silloray also makes use of panel size

and sequence to suggest the challenges facing grandfather and grandson in their attempts to communicate about the past. In the sequences that depict Roger's camp life, there is a preponderance of small boxed panels that denote repeated actions (sleeping, working, eating), conveying the monotony of camp life. These camp panels tend to be 'crowded' with figures as if to indicate the proximity of life in the prisoner of war camps and the subsequent loss of individuality, interestingly echoing the depersonalised graphic narratives of prisoner of war life depicted by Roux and Henry over 60 years earlier. Indeed, Roger as a figure is often difficult to distinguish amongst a sea of other human figures as if barely visible to himself. In sharp contrast, the autobiographical narrator is frequently depicted in panels in one-to-one interactions with key interlocutors and in large rectangular panels that give a panoramic view of urban and rural landscapes. These panels emphasise the grandson's textual presence as a fully realised narrative agent, unlike the small claustrophobic panels that denote Roger's incarceration. Perhaps the most telling indication of the different textual presences of grandfather and grandson is achieved through speech bubbles. While Roger's scenes are invariably 'voiceless,' with written text provided beneath the panels to explain the scenes of camp life, the autobiographical narrator is frequently portrayed in dialogue with others. Roger's inability to articulate his memories of the prisoner of war experience is, thereby, embedded into the very fabric of the graphic novel. His textual self appears incapable of speech, symbolising the challenges of intergenerational communication.

For Jacques Tardi, the hybrid visual-verbal nature of the comics form is also mobilised to show the impact of the past on the present and the challenges of communicating across the generations. A uniform pattern of three rectangular panels per page across both albums denotes the unrelenting and 'prolonged temporality' (Bliss 2016, 84) of René Tardi's camp incarceration. The albums make use of a grey-scale colour scheme, reminiscent of faded black and white photographs, with occasional red backgrounds for moments of emotional intensity.[2] This tonal grey provides the emotional register of the albums, which is one of depression and despair, and indicates the dreariness of René's experiences in a foreign land of interchangeable villages, towns and farms. Dark tones and colours and thick, heavy line drawings give a sense of the oppression and confinement of the camps. Like Silloray, Tardi provides a contrasting colour palette as an indicator of a movement from the historical past into the post-war present. In the second album, as the father figure moves forward in time towards liberation and reunion with his fiancée Henriette, the background greys of the album begin to shift imperceptibly into shades of blue and grey. Once the father figure crosses the border into France from occupied Germany, the colour scheme transforms to full technicolour. With the final panel of a passionate embrace between René and Henriette, the panel is suffused with pink and garlanded with

flowers. Here, the narrative of wartime deprivation and suffering metamorphoses into an epic romance that leaves the son, as imagined interlocutor, a relieved and satisfied onlooker.

Yet, Tardi's albums also confront the communicative difficulties that subtend this narrative of reunion and liberation and the impact of wartime incarceration on post-war family life and relationships. This is evident in the opening panels of the first album in which the imagined son wanders in search of his father through devastated French towns and villages destroyed by the *blitzkrieg* German advance. He finally locates him inside his tank in his role as a certified tank driver, promoted to the rank of sergeant just before the commencement of hostilities. Despite the son's exhortations to leave the protection of his tank, the father spends the first half of the album ensconced in his tank, haranguing the son about his lack of understanding of the war years. The protective shell of the tank symbolises the challenges for the imagined son to communicate with a parent who is emotionally unavailable to him, literally bunkered in, and who has been silent about his wartime experiences. Working together to bridge the gap, the comic charts their partnership as they begin to dismantle post-war myths and preconceptions about life in a prisoner of war camp.

Both contemporary comics artists address post-war misunderstandings about life in the prisoner of war camps and promote the historical verisimilitude of their graphic recreations. Silloray achieves this with his documentary aesthetic and detailed depiction of Roger's camp experiences. By quoting direct excerpts from Roger's diary and recrafting period photographs as part of his comic narrative, Silloray attempts to authenticate his grandfather's experiences as drawn from real life.[3] In the case of Tardi, a comparable paratextual process of authentication is mobilised. Tardi makes use of personal testimony from his wife Dominique, the daughter of another prisoner of war, and family photographs, signalling the personal archives and family histories from which the comic album has emerged. This anchorage in family stories, rather than in sanctioned historical narratives, creates the textual conditions for Tardi to broach taboo topics that disrupt post-war myths of the Second World War. These include the existence of homosexual relationships in the camps and cross-dressing on social occasions, denunciation amongst prisoners of war and group rivalry and, perhaps most shockingly, the crimes of French prisoners of war returning home across war-torn Germany. The rape of a German woman by one French prisoner of war and his brutal punishment by German guards is one such crime, as is the gunning down of columns of fleeing German prisoners of war by French artillery troops in a moment of frenzied rage on their trek back to France. Tardi, more than Silloray, refuses nationalist fervour and solidarity, showing instead how French prisoners of war were themselves dehumanised and damaged by their camp experiences.

Figure 3.1 Image from *Moi, René Tardi, prisonnier de guerre au Stalag IIB: mon retour en France,* Jacques Tardi, copyright Editions Casterman. With the kind permission of the authors and Editions Casterman.

Ultimately, both Silloray and Tardi write, draw and narrate in a memorial context where their father's and grandfather's stories are suffused with the memory politics of the present. For Tardi, this is a memory politics that acknowledges the horrors of the prisoner of war experience, such as the moment when his father and other French prisoners of war hanged their German prison guards as the liberation of Europe turned to their advantage: 'on les a pendus dans les arbres et au poteau avec du câble téléphonique. Ça n'a pas trainé. Et puis on n'en a pas parlé' (we hung them from the trees and from stakes with telephone wire. It didn't take long. Afterwards, we didn't talk about it) (Tardi 2014, 92). If they did not talk about it at the time, this experience remains a traumatic point of reference for the father. As the comic reveals in its graphic visualisation of the scene, the imagined son becomes a shocked secondary witness to the horror (see Figure 3.1). For Tardi, the Second World War is subject to ongoing personal and political negotiation.

For Silloray, the grandfather's prisoner of war experience is not framed in a narrative of repressed personal trauma but projected instead onto a European canvas as a story that promotes post-war reconciliation and commemoration. Yet this is also a narrative with its contradictions and frictions. The autobiographical narrator concentrates on the support he receives from his German interpreter and translator, Thomas, but also acknowledges the reticence and fear he detects in older German and French residents he interviews about the internment camps once located close to their homes. The Mühlberg prisoner of war camp, where his grandfather lived out captivity, is a particularly redolent site of memory for the autobiographical narrator. Visitor information points and small signs indicate the spaces of now disappeared prisoner blocks. These affect the autobiographical narrator and reinforce his emotional

Figure 3.2 Image from *Le Carnet de Roger*, Florent Silloray, copyright 2011, éditions Sarbacane, p. 68.

connection with his grandfather as he imagines his life in the camp. Yet, what is equally striking are the different commemorative sites and practices that the Mühlberg site encompasses.

There is an imposing stone memorial with plaques commemorating the thousands of German civilians who died in the camp over its chequered wartime history. This is in contrast to the field of untended wooden crosses, with the occasional decaying bouquet of flowers, marking the passage of a multinational community of prisoners of war (see Figure 3.2). While one community is visibly recognised and named, the other remains barely acknowledged, evoking the selective remembering of different wartime groups.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the contribution of the comic form to representations of French prisoners of war over the post-war period. It has argued that, in the immediate post-war period, memories of French prisoners of war did not conform to narratives of resistance integral to the re-establishment of France as a victorious nation on the world stage. However, while such experiences were sidelined in the public sphere, the graphic format gave some prisoners of war the opportunity to represent their collective experiences in visually arresting ways. In so doing, a graphic narrative enabled some authors to grapple with the shame and humiliation of incarceration, offering a variety of modes, such as documentary-style realism or humour, through which to depict what were then neglected memories. Comics also have the capacity to make rhizomatic linkages, to seed further networks of verbal-visual

representation that stretch out below the surface of official histories. For succeeding generations of comics artists, the form has allowed them to engage with a now departed parent and grandparent in ways that map, visually and cognitively, the geographies of a largely forgotten past. In their work, artists and authors, like Jacques Tardi and Florent Silloray, interrogate the realities of prisoner of war experiences and reflect on the impact of traumatic memories on themselves and their families. By scrutinising personal stories and by refusing a generic approach to the prisoner of war experience, such comics give credence to Harriet E. H. Earle's proposition that 'texts of conflict are oftentimes texts of mourning and traumatic grief, rather than of violence and traumatic experience' (Earle 2017, 26). Both Silloray and Tardi are concerned with bringing meaning and significance to the silent black and white family photographs around which their narratives coalesce. These are comic albums of mourning and commemoration, breathing new life into wartime memories that continue to remain on the margins of the historical record.

Notes

1 I am indebted to the curators of the Liberation collection at Cambridge University Library, above all Sophie Defrance, for their support in accessing these rare wartime texts. They form part of a unique collection of texts and materials from the Liberation period, 1944–1946, donated by philanthropist Charles Chadwyck Healey. See www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/french-collections/special-collections/chadwyck-healey-liberation.
2 Jacques Tardi also journeyed back to visit the sites of his father's wartime experiences, like Florent Silloray. He charts this in photographic form on his website. Photographs and panel images from the two albums can be matched in many instances: http://cargocollective.com/tardi-stalag-iib/.
3 The preface to the album is provided by Isabelle Bournier, the Director of Education of the Mémorial de Caen. Her endorsement reinforces the historical value of Silloray's work as a unique testimony to one man's experiences but also as 'un émouvant hommage à tous ceux qui partagèrent ces années de captivité' (a moving homage to all those who shared these years of captivity).

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4 'I think we're maybe more or less safe here'

Violence and Solidarity during the Lebanese Civil War in Zeina Abirached's *A Game for Swallows*

Mihaela Precup

Lebanese cartoonist Zeina Abirached's autobiographical book-length comic *A Game for Swallows. To Die, To Leave, To Return* documents the events from one troubled night in 1984, during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), when she was only three years old. Originally published in French in 2007 and in English in 2012, the book returns to a time when Beirut was divided into two parts, Christian and Muslim, by a so-called 'green zone.' Abirached lives with her parents and younger brother in the Christian part, where their apartment is reduced to one entryway where the neighbours also take shelter during the bombings. On the night in question, Abirached's parents decide to take a perilous journey only three blocks away, to visit the children's grandmother. When they do not return on time, the neighbours gather in the entryway to take care of the children, play games, put on mini-performances and tell stories. This pleasant atmosphere is punctured by the noise of bombs and the fear that snipers may have hit yet another friend or family member. The story in *A Game for Swallows* was anticipated by two short autobiographical comics published by Abirached in 2006 with Éditions Cambourakis, the pocketbook-sized *[Beyrouth] catharsis*, which depicts the space around the Abirached home, and *38, rue Youssef Semaani*, whose three-part structure mimics the architecture of the three-floor building where the narrator was raised, and its panoramic fold-out layout offers readers the opportunity to freely visit the inhabitants and connect their stories.[1]

In her follow-up to *A Game for Swallows*, Abirached continues to pay tribute to the Beirut of her formative years and to draw attention to the manner in which violence can profoundly affect the most minute everyday gestures and rituals. The story from *I Remember Beirut*, which came out in French in 2008 and in English in 2014, is bracketed by two wars: the Lebanese Civil War and the 2006 war with Israel. The latter finds the narrator in Paris, where she now lives, and feels anxious about the fate of her family, who are still in Beirut. The narrative is

episodic and made up of little stories about fondly remembered items from her childhood and adolescence, and thus resembles a chest of personal treasures that function as talismans during a time of crisis. This loving inventory shows items that, even though ultimately unable to fully ensure their owners' physical safety, do manage to contribute to the preservation of their sanity. Abirached's interest in objects whose history connects personal and collective experiences is also visible in her latest publication, a book that is so far only available in the original French, *Le Piano Oriental* (2015). In this latest work, Abirached fully explores interests that had only been hinted at in her previous works, such as the ability of comics to convey music, as well as the potential of imagining and representing an unwitnessed history, in this case the nostalgic view of Beirut in the 1960s, before the war.

In this chapter, I focus mainly on *A Game for Swallows*, but I also refer to her other war-related comics, in order to examine Abirached's aesthetic and narrative choices when representing not so much acts of violence, but rather the constant threat of violence and the way it permeates everyday life and transforms the geography of the city and the home. I am interested in Abirached's artistic decision to represent violence by focussing on its insidious effects rather than on graphic depictions of assassinations and falling bombs. I argue that, by relying on the vocabulary of graphic narration, which allows her to represent violence through blank spaces and silences, but also through attempts to convey music and unveil traces of violence, Abirached provides a valuable contribution to the conversation about the politics of witnessing and testifying to disaster, the cultural specificities of memory-building and the narration of trauma.

The Lebanese Civil War and the Graphic Work of Memory

Abirached's work can be positioned not only in the context of other graphic narratives that reference the Lebanese Civil War but also against a broader background of documentary efforts that include comics, traditional fiction and non-fiction accounts of war and conflict in the Middle East.[2] While the region has been beset by multiple conflicts accompanied by significant literary responses, it has been argued that Lebanon, more specifically the civil war, is of particular importance for the understanding of the connection between literature and political change in the context of more recent events such as the Arab Spring (Lang 2016, 2). It has also been argued that the literature produced around the Lebanese Civil War (over 50 novels on the topic in the past 20 years) has now become a means of gaining literary recognition in the field (Lang 4–5). This literary interest in the civil war may have influenced Abirached, but her work lies both outside and inside the Lebanese literary scene since

she is an expatriate, and she has always first been published in French by publishers based in France and later translated into other languages.[3] At the same time, her work also lies outside the Lebanese literary field because there comics are not widely respected or are simply regarded as a medium that is mostly appropriate for children's literature (Lang 28; Matthews). However, what she does seem to have in common with the authors who approached the civil war is the fact that most of them appear to belong to a similar social class, a 'secular, liberal, and democratic subset of society that is largely excluded from sectarian, communitarian, and religious memory cultures' (Lang 5).[4]

Lamia Ziadé's *Bye Bye Babylon*, an illustrated autobiographical account of witnessing the civil war between 1975 and 1979, appears to have been produced in a family and social background similar to Abirached's. However, Ziadé's account of her experience of the war is far more graphic than Abirached's and also contains more political details. Since she is 13 years older than Abirached, Ziadé's memories of the war are both more precise and more visibly violent. Hence, her target audience does not seem to include children (while Abirached's work is child-friendly), and her vivid watercolours often paint scenes of destruction and carnage that clash with bright images of popular culture items, beautiful family heirlooms and paintings of street signs. Her book also provides a more substantial background of the various political manoeuvres and factions of the civil war, including portraits of anonymous fighters, victims and well-known politicians; these coexist alongside precious mementos of peace, loving drawings of Bazooka gum and other Western wonders that were readily available on the Lebanese market before the war.

Mazen Kerbaj, a 'highly caffeinated, whiskey-drinking experimental musician from the cosmopolitan bubble that exists in a certain part of Beirut' (Sacco 2017, n.p.), published a visual diary written in Arabic, French and English (with English translations provided by the author) during the 2006 July War with Israel. It was initially published on his blog in an attempt to both document and manage the extreme stress and horror of living under constant threat and to inform the world at large about the bloody events from Lebanon. Kerbaj shares both Ziadé's brutal representation of the war victims and absurdist humour, and Abirached's particular fascination with war as not just a visual but also an auditory experience, one where the absence of sound between bombardments and sniper fire can be just as disturbing as the explosion of bombs.[5] At the same time, Kerbaj is deeply preoccupied with the sense that art is ultimately insufficient and inefficient when it comes to representing war (Kerbaj 2017, 8). Partly because of this particular dilemma, Kerbaj's work has—and actually shares with Ziadé's—an unpolished underground quality that works well to render the disorder and sense of despair produced by the prolonged situation of conflict in the area.

Lebanese visual artist Lena Merhej's webcomics and online 'visual essays,' as she calls them, are absurdist and sometimes humorous meditations on everyday life during the civil war in Beirut, which she too experienced as a child, but also express the exasperation of having to go through yet another war during the summer of 2006 (as in her autobiographical comic 'I Think We'll be Calm During the Next War'). Merhej, whose work for the comics magazine *Samandal* has been subject to censorship (Qualey 2015), steers clear of political satire or partisanship and prefers to focus instead on the manner in which everyday life is affected by the war.[6]

These Lebanese cartoonists' work belongs to a wider tradition of autographic representations of violence in the Middle East. Perhaps the most internationally famous comics that have successfully represented war, conflict and social unrest in the area are Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* and Joe Sacco's *Palestine*.[7] Sacco's comics journalism in particular has generated productive conversations on, for instance, how violence should be represented and the way in which the cartoonishness of his (self-) representation draws attention to 'the mediated quality of the whole project' (Worden 2015, 11). Other works, such as Israeli cartoonist Asaf Hanuka's two collections *The Realist* (2015, 2017), contain a large number of weekly autobiographical strips, translated into English, that feature numerous representations of the narrator transformed into a grotesque other not only by the pressures of family life, but also by the constant stress of living in a conflict area. At the centre of the story is a self whose existence is deeply connected to an unstable body whose boundaries and shape shift under daily responsibilities and emotions. It is, in fact, the extremely strong emotions that cause the artist's body to become unrecognizable, grotesque, monstrous or robotic; in Hanuka's representation of apparently mundane family episodes, it is the body that spells out the strangeness and enormous pressure of everyday life as a father who lives in contemporary Israel.[8] In *Baddawi*, US-based Palestinian cartoonist Leila Abdelrazaq productively uses traditional Palestinian folk motifs to explore her father's childhood spent in a refugee camp in Lebanon during the civil war. The short comic unveils the struggles of attempting to escape a near-constant state of precarity, a fate that seems to have already been designed for refugees by indifferent political actors. Another experience of life as a child on the move because of haphazard decisions made by adults is encapsulated in Riad Sattouf's successful *Arab of the Future*, where the former *Charlie Hebdo* contributor describes his childhood, a time when the family was dragged by the father's utopian pan-Arabic dreams first to Libya during the time of Gaddafi's rule and, later, to Syria under Hafez al-Assad. Satouff's comics employ a contemporary Western perspective that is often highly critical of the Arab communities he lives in, and builds a sympathetic portrait

of his bewildered French mother, whose facial features often mirror exhaustion and anger at the prevalent sexism and random violence of the worlds that have become her home. Still, there are instants of authentic affection between little Riad and some of his relatives, and the father remains a somewhat likeable—although deeply absurd—figure because of his vaguely reasoned bumbling optimism.

Remembering War, between Revived Memory and Nostalgia

Even a cursory look at the autobiographical and documentary comics (Mickwitz 2016) produced in the Middle East shows that cartoonists are preoccupied with how and whether it is opportune to represent violence graphically, how comics can build a significant work of memory, as well as how violence should be signposted stylistically and firmly positioned in a political agenda. At the same time, artists from the area whose work is being translated into English, French and other Western languages, or whose work is written directly in one of these languages, are probably more interested in finding strategies that would allow them to communicate not merely locally, but also internationally, the plight of a population that is often othered in the Western media. This generation of artists might, thus, be more aware of the fluidity and transmission of memory as 'something that doesn't stay put but circulates, migrates, travels' in constant transnational movement that not only implies transitions from one geographical space to another, but also from one medium to another (Bond et al. 2016, 1).

A Game for Swallows is a work of memory, but it needs to rely more heavily than other autobiographical comics on research and interviews of other witnesses, since the action takes place in 1984, when Zeina Abirached was three years old.[9] It is thus quite probable that the representation of events is, in fact, the result of a dynamic between what Abirached remembers and a second kind of memorial work which is done by appealing to witnesses who share memories regarded as more valid than those of the subject, who has to interview them in order to obtain confirmation, rectification or a revived version of her own memories.[10] I define revived memory as characteristic of testimonies where the witness either needs confirmation for some recollections or simply cannot remember what she has seen. Revived memories are not the indexical correspondent of the subject's uncertain or incomplete memories, but rather creative recitations of them. They are the result of a process that often involves multiple actors, with their own set of political and social backgrounds, as well as their particular relationship to the subject/interviewer; also, in the case of comics, this endeavour is mediated through its specific norms of storytelling. However, in Abirached's case, the collective and creative aspects of this particular work of memory are obscured in the end product, as her work does

not contain any pointed metafictional elements that would draw attention to it.

I Remember Beirut is more firmly planted in the author's actual memories of the war, since it moves beyond 1984, past the end of the civil war in 1990 and well into the early 2000s, when Abirached is an adult living in Paris and fearing for the safety of her parents and brother who are stuck in Beirut during the Israeli bombings of 2006. While Abirached's nostalgia is visible in both books, through the minute attention she gives to the quirks, mannerisms and prized possessions of all of her characters, in *A Game for Swallows* the atmosphere remains tense and dark; as the hours pass and the parents fail to return home, an air of dread surrounds the stories told by the characters, and traumatic autobiographical details from their own past can be read as anticipating the fate of the Abiracheds themselves. On the other hand, *I Remember Beirut* is more specifically dedicated to the author's own nostalgic perception of her childhood before the end of the war and dwells lovingly on memories of things the children watched on TV (such as the animated series *Grendizer*, Lebanese singer Sabah's hit song *Ayam el Loulou*), favourite drinks such as RC Cola and Tang, as Coke had not arrived in Beirut yet, or favourite stories ('Little Red Riding Hood' read with great patience by a neighbour). Even accounts of hardships are tinged with nostalgia in episodes that emphasize the locals' resourcefulness, patience and humour. For instance, since it is too dangerous for the school bus to stop in the Abiracheds's neighbourhood, several parents ask Mr. George, a kind and overwhelmed taxi driver, to drive their children to a bus stop improvised in a former ice cream parlour, a very noisy and unsettling experience that the man has to go through every morning (Abirached 2014, 12). When they have to use kerosene to heat their homes because they no longer have either gas or electricity, a 'gas man' in a cart driven by a horse with tiny bells conveniently attached to its saddle passes under people's windows and places kerosene bottles in baskets they lower out of their balconies (Abirached 2014, 20); RC Cola and Tang are procured from the grocer in a similar manner (Abirached 2014, 22). There are several ambivalent nostalgic moments in *I Remember Beirut*, such as the memory of Zeina Abirached's brother's combing the streets in order to enrich his treasured shrapnel collection (Abirached 2014, 39–41) or the inventory of little Zeina's backpack (containing practical items such as a flashlight and batteries but also comfort objects like *Tintin: Red Rackham's Treasure* and a stuffed puppy), which she keeps by the bed in case they have to make a quick escape (Abirached 2014, 44). Thus, this separation between the space of memory dominated by tension and trauma from *A Game for Swallows* and the space of *I Remember Beirut*, where nostalgia is the predominant mood, seems to confirm Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's observation that survivors often need to be able to separate nostalgic and traumatic memory 'in order to sustain the positive aspects of nostalgia' (2002, 260).

Spaces of Protection and Violence in *A Game for Swallows*

There are no certainties or ultimate protection against harm during the war, which Abirached represents as a frozen space of endless waiting for something—for someone to come home safely, for the war to end so that everyone can be safe again. Everyday routines are disrupted and replaced, the chronology of everyday life 'organized around the cease-fires' (Abirached 2012, 14). Thus, Abirached references the violence of the war without providing representations of the death and destruction caused by it.

The decision to place most of the action of the book inside the home is significant and offers the author the opportunity to introduce a large number of sympathetic characters whose lives were altered by the war. These characters are usually represented inside the Abirached home, in the entryway, in small still tableaus that, like the cover, echo the visual traditions of family photography (see Figure 4.1). Here, the makeshift family made up of unsmiling blood relatives and neighbours who gather to support one another is placed against the background of dark buildings in the distance, separated from the group by a large traffic jam of identical-looking cars. In this self-portrait, the author is shown wearing a T-shirt where Snoopy can be seen relaxing on the roof of his kennel, in a

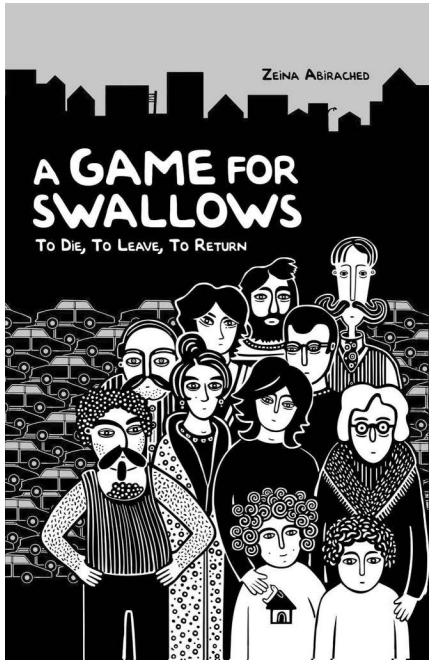

Figure 4.1 The cover of *A Game for Swallows. To Die, To Leave, To Return* (Graphic Universe). Published by permission of the author. Copyright ©Zeina Abirached.

characteristic pose. The choice to include Snoopy hints at the blissful cluelessness and relaxation that children in non-violent areas may be allowed to preserve, while at the same time signalling the author's lifelong love of comics that are also immediately recognizable to a Western audience.

The image of the traffic jam is important, as it foreshadows other representations of agitated stillness from the book. Movement is, in fact, minimal throughout, and when it does appear, the smallest of gestures (like someone lifting an arm) is emphasised by it being deliberately placed in the next panel. A lot of characters, in fact, remain unchanged from panel to panel. The action is thus slowed down, and the characters resemble dolls trapped or hiding in the space of stop-motion animation. Thus, Abirached is able to suggest the perplexity generated by the war, as well as the difficulty of performing many everyday actions outside the home. The confinement to the inside space expands time, and every small gesture is slow and deliberate, both to fill the time and to reassure the characters through rituals like coffee-drinking and storytelling. Both powerless to act and stuck in a situation they cannot escape and which is outside their reach, the civilians' tense stillness permeates their actions as well. This is an important comment on the effects of living under constant threat of violence, even though the adults are never engaged in political conversations.

The relative safety offered by the Abirached home because of its location on the second floor, 'the floor least exposed to shelling' (Abirached 2012, 43), prompts the neighbours to gather there on the evenings when there are bombings. All the indoor routines in the book (cooking, making coffee, drinking a glass of whiskey, bathing the children, telling them stories, looking at photographs) are raised to the level of ritual meant to protect but also take the adults' mind off of the constant danger. These past routines that become present rituals read like elements of secular magic, quite powerless before actual violence, but soothing and hopeful. The geography of the apartment itself is modified by the geography of the divided city: too close to the street barricade, the inhabitable part of the apartment soon shrinks to a room at the front, the 'foyer' or entryway dominated by a family heirloom inherited from the children's paternal grandfather, a wall hanging of 'Moses and the Hebrews fleeing from Egypt.' In the Abiracheds's apartment, everything is thus out of place: a mattress is moved into the foyer, together with a collection of other pieces of furniture that are meant to make it more comfortable throughout the day and night, for both the family and their numerous neighbours.

The characters are introduced minimally, but the details that are provided indicate the heavy toll that the war has taken: for instance, Chucri is introduced as 'the son of Salma, the building caretaker. He was 16 when war broke out in 1975; a year later, his father, Saïd, a taxi driver, disappeared' (Abirached 2012, 51). The juxtaposition of the narrative of Chucri's father's disappearance and certain death, and four other panels on the right, featuring Chucri in the centre drinking a cup of coffee,

delicately covering his mouth as he hiccups and then nodding off, to everyone's amusement, serves to draw attention to the limits of the protection offered by the family and the home. It also creates suspense as the children are waiting for their parents, who, like Chucri's father, had only just telephoned to say they would be home soon. Abirached returns to Saïd's death later (see Figure 4.2), when she draws what may have been his last words inserted in small black panels that only contain the speech bubbles and the purring of his car engine ('rrrrr…') replaced by the implacable sound of the gun (a banal life-ending 'click').

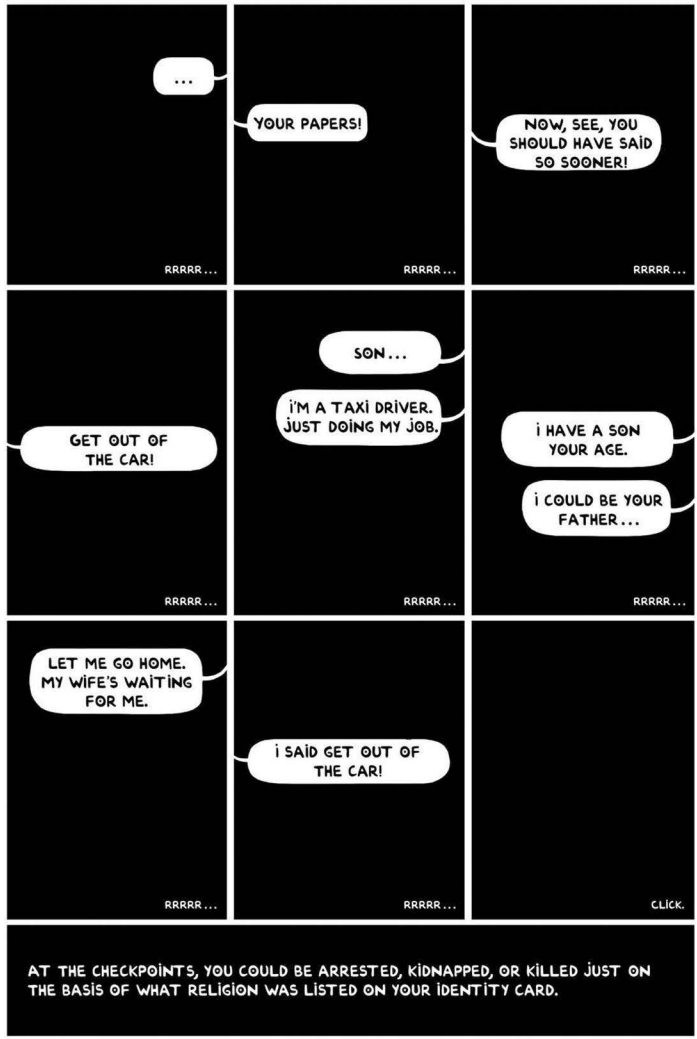

Figure 4.2 Chucri's father's death (*A Game for Swallows. To Die, To Leave, To Return*, Graphic Universe). Published by permission of the author. Copyright ©Zeina Abirached.

Once again, the juxtaposition of this violent scene from the past and the temporary safety of the present, where the characters listen to a radio broadcast of a litany of problem-areas, destruction, dead and wounded, suggests the normalisation of death as well as individualises the depersonalising numbers ('81 dead') announced on the radio. It also implies that Chucri, a tough man who runs errands for people in the building and drives his father's car through the city to get gas for the building's generator and other things, may himself make the connection between the impersonal voice on the radio and his personal loss.

The intertwining of past and present that trauma produces is also suggested in the case of Ernest Challita, an elegant moustachioed neighbour. Introduced as an important part of the routine of the building because of his incredible punctuality (he shows up at the Abiracheds's precisely ten seconds after Chucri turns on the generator, which produces a specific noise), Ernest Challita is a retired French teacher who has not gone outside the building ever since his twin brother Victor was killed by a sniper. The brother's dead body is not drawn here either, and the story of his death is told through textual, rather than visual, means: 'One afternoon, Victor was killed by a sniper. His body lay in the middle of the street all night. The next day, Chucri brought the body back to Ernest. Two days later, containers were set up in the street to protect pedestrians' (Abirached 2012, 82). Ernest's discreet suffering is dwelled upon later (Abirached 2012, 94), when he is shown routinely watering his plants every Wednesday evening, despite the necessity of rationing water, because his brother had been killed on a Wednesday evening. Incorporated as it is in the act of mourning, this neutral routine gains the force of ritual and symbolically prolongs his brother's life, much like the continued games of 'trictrac' where Victor now plays against himself (Abirached 2012, 95). The home may offer some protection against the sniper and almost none against the bombs, but it cannot stave off the violent tales told by its inhabitants in front of the children who are anxiously awaiting the safe return of their parents.

The streets of divided Lebanon are silent, empty and dark. In fact, the first six pages of the book are almost entirely wordless depictions of streets of Beirut, a Lego-like space of sandbags, cinder blocks and metal drums that are piled on top of one another, for protection, along the green demarcation line. The meticulous order of these walls belies the unrest of the city. The markers of war are the bullet holes in 'containers taken from the docks of the deserted port' (Abirached 2012, 14) that, together with domino-like bricks, function as makeshift barriers and protect the inhabitants from snipers' bullets. The only signs of human habitation are, in fact, the bullet holes.

In the minimalist maps of East Beirut drawn by the author, buildings, stores or cafes are erased because they do not offer protection once one is outside, like Zeina's parents. Instead, the map contains useful objects that offer protection: walls; containers; as well as the main source of danger, the depersonalised sniper, whose possible trajectory is drawn

in the shape of an interrupted line to suggest the presence of bullets (see Figure 4.3). The absurdity of the fact that, over the course of a family visit, the small distance between parents and children is crossed by sniper fire, is reinforced by the 'complicated and perilous choreography' (Abirached 2012, 17) that is probably the product of months of rehearsals and dangerous experiments. Abirached introduces the two maps of the city in the matter-of-fact manner of a scenographer detailing the appearance of a movie set and of a director meticulously giving stage directions to his actors ('run,' 'walk,' 'climb,' 'jump,' 'hug the wall,' etc.), respectively. No place on this map is quite safe, however, as the central presence of the disembodied sniper suggests.

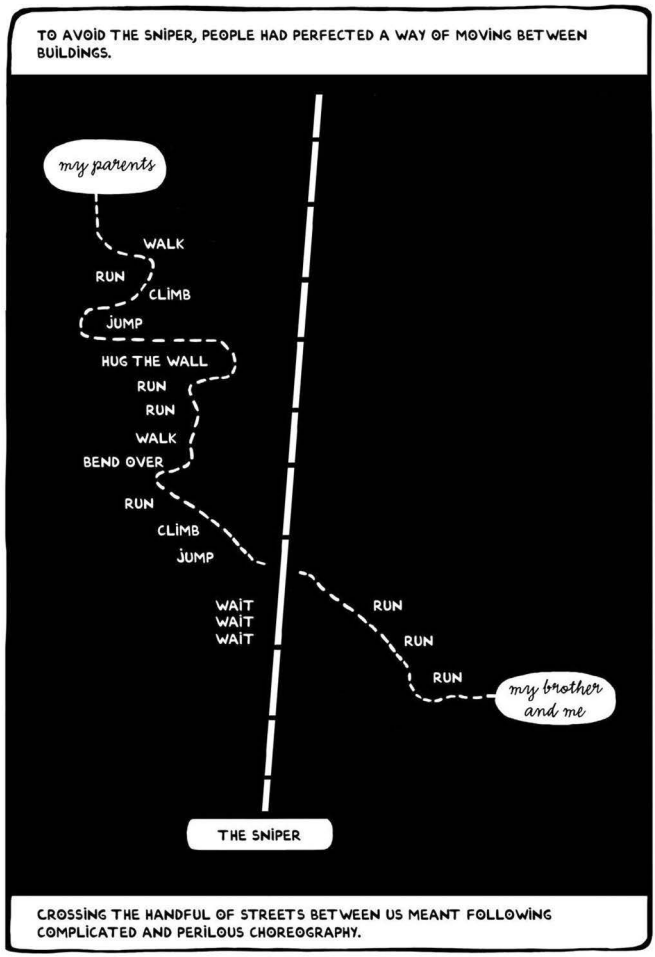

Figure 4.3 Maps of the area around the Abirached home (*A Game for Swallows. To Die, To Leave, To Return*, Graphic Universe). Published by permission of the author. Copyright ©Zeina Abirached.

The absurdity of the 'game for swallows' ('to die, to leave, to return') is inscribed on the wall separating East and West Beirut; Abirached draws over the photo in one of the final images from the book, colours the road black and puts in the drawing of a car. These are the only two photographs in a book where comics come very close to the stillness of photography (Abirached 2012, 172–173). The photograph, the general lack of movement from *A Game for Swallows*, as well as the motto of *I Remember Beirut*, from Chris Marker's photographic essay *La Jetée*, suggest a connection between photographic stillness and memory, particularly the memory of painful experiences.[11]

Abirached's panels, full of meaningful repetitions, dark spaces and characters frozen in tense expectation, show that the indoor space of the community is not 'safe' but rather 'more or less safe,' as the grandmother puts it. Her style, strongly influenced by Lebanese calligraphy and her background in graphic art, contributes greatly to the cultural definition of the personal space of the Christian Lebanese home, populated by objects of sentimental value that also need to be protected from destruction, and whose memory she tries to preserve. When Abirached shows her name turning into a boat at the end of the book (Abirached 2012, 184–188), the symbolic sign (the writing of her name, that points at her through convention) turns into an icon (the boat, that points at her through resemblance), and this aptly suggests that the displacement caused by the war becomes inscribed in the identity of the character.

Conclusion

A Game for Swallows and *I Remember Beirut* show both how the prolonged state of exception that was the Lebanese Civil War fragmented the architecture of the city and the home, and how a community in mourning coalesced against a common threat. The intimacy and warmth of this group of friends and relatives—whose members all lost someone they loved during the conflict—indicates both how forging bonds of affection and surrounding oneself with comforting familiar objects can help preserve sanity during times of crisis, and how the same things can frustratingly fail to provide physical protection against harm.

In the wider context of autobiographical and documentary comics that represent war and conflict, particularly in the Middle East, Abirached's work retains a warmth and positivity given by profound human connection even when the underlying emotion is dread or when the symptoms of the war are too evident to ignore. However, the cultural specificities of remembrance and storytelling in Lebanon remain somewhat obscure in the absence of metafictional elements that might have shown how the narrator's memories are revived through intergenerational dialogue. At the same time, Abirached provides a profound and

important contribution to the debate about the visual representation of past violence. Her evident nostalgia does not indicate the fetishisation of life in a conflict area or the erasure of trauma, as her narrative strategies enable her to reference violence without providing graphic details and without diminishing the suffering of her subjects.

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Notes

1 A more complex presentation of the books is available in a free recording of a lecture Zeina Abirached gave at the Center for French and Francophone Studies at Duke University on 13 September 2015: www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPBTZ8kegjI.
2 For a bibliography of comics—both in Arabic and French—on the Lebanese Civil War, see Merhej (2015).
3 In his monograph on post-civil war Lebanese literature, Felix Lang convincingly proposes that the Lebanese literary market is dominated by 'a post-holocaust concept of memory characterized by a moral imperative to remember past violence' (Lang 5). He proposes instead a reading that would steer focus away from post-war trauma and instead focus more closely on authors' social background and other factors that influence literary production and tropes (Lang 7).
4 I am here referring to a few details that seem to indicate that the author is raised in a relatively well-off family of intellectuals, such as the fact that she grows up in a beautiful three-bedroom apartment in a building from the 1940s that used to belong to her grandfather, with a large library.
5 Kerbaj, a jazz musician, keeps pondering the issue of how comics can convey sound, particularly the disturbing sounds and silences of war. He even recorded an improvised trumpet piece he played on his balcony as Israeli bombs fell on one night in July 2006 (Whitaker 2006).
6 As previously mentioned, these are only a few examples of book-length comics from what is a larger body of work, for which Lena Merhej's doctoral dissertation, 'Analysis of Graphic Narrative: War in Lebanese Comics,' is an invaluable archive. Of those longer autobiographical comics that are also available in English, I have not discussed, for instance, *Beirut 1990. Snapshots of a Civil War*, by Sylvain Ricard, Bruno Ricard and Christophe Gaultier, because it is an outsider account of a short time near the end of the war, and the authors keep circling the events around them without actually managing to become involved in a significant manner.
7 *Persepolis* comes closer to Abirached's work because it depicts the experience of conflict and threat of violence autobiographically through the eyes of a child.
8 On the other hand, Naji al-Ali's comics, available in English as *Naji al-Ali: A Child in Palestine*, famously show the brutality of everyday life in Palestine as seen through the eyes of the child-like character Handala.

9 This is about the same age as US-based Hungarian cartoonist Miriam Katin was when she fled Budapest with her mother, thus managing to avoid what would have been inevitable incarceration in a concentration camp, a story she tells in her graphic memoir *We Are on Our Own*.

10 Abirached has mentioned in interviews that her work relies not simply on her own memories, but also on interviews with family members, since she was only three when the events recounted in *A Game for Swallows* took place: 'I talked a lot with her [the grandmother], with my parents and my neighbours to compare my memories with theirs. But my connecting thread was my memories and the feelings I had when I was a child' (Abirached 2013).

11 I quote the motto of *I Remember Beirut* in full: 'Nothing distinguishes memories from ordinary moments. Only later do they make themselves known, from their scars. –Chris Marker' (Abirached 2014, 6).

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War and Peace

5 In a Growing Violent Temper

The Swedish Comic Market during the Second World War

Michael F. Scholz

The relationship between comics and representations of violence and justice has continually evolved throughout history. During the First World War, when comics were a part of psychological warfare, even children's comics were enlisted in the propaganda war against the enemy. During the Second World War violence became a natural and ever-growing part of comics, even in 'neutral' Sweden, where the war was fought through propaganda and where comics played a still overlooked role.

This chapter outlines some developments in comics in Sweden during the Second World War, with a particular focus on violence in comics. The signification and definition of violence depends on historical, political and cultural premises, and in this case, we need to consider Swedish or Scandinavian history, the circumstances of the Second World War and Sweden's policy of neutrality. The focus in this chapter lies on violence in 'serious' comics, mainly historical comics and contemporary war comics, and considers them in terms of the visual representation of violence against the enemy and sexual violence, thereby excluding comic violence in the funnies, purposely meant to be taken as a 'joke' (Hutchison 1969, 358–362).

Representations of violence are testing grounds for the limits of what can be shown in different contemporary spaces, and this study of the Swedish comic market in the war years will seek to document the war's mental impact on neutral Sweden. Changes over the course of war, such as the German occupation of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, and the entry into the war of the USA in December 1941, affected the development of the comics published in Sweden from being compliant with (1940/43) to rebelling against (1943/45) the Swedish government's official policy of neutrality.

The Swedish Comic Market at the Beginning of the War

When the Second World War began in autumn 1939, so did the struggle for people's hearts and minds in Sweden. The country pursued a policy of neutrality and coordinated its psychological defence under The State Information Board, officially established in January 1940. Subordinated

to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Board explained to the public the significance and purpose of the government's actions, and kept central authorities advised of public opinion. One task was to combat tendencies in foreign opinion that were 'unfavourable' to Sweden (i.e. 'un-Swedish') and to preserve the strength of moral resistance on the home front. A secret Coordination Section for Counter-Propaganda surveyed all 'un-Swedish' propaganda and reported their findings to the authorities (Runblom 1992; Gilmour 2010, 157–186).

Illustrated weekly newspapers had a great influence on the broader public opinion and these coloured journals had published many comics, both of Swedish and of foreign origin, since the turn of the century. Among the bigger Swedish publishing companies, it was Åhlén-Åkerlund (Å & Å) that primarily published comics from Swedish in-house productions. Since 1929, this company had belonged to the Albert Bonniers Publishing Company, which, at that time, was already the biggest book publishing company in Northern Europe (Gustafsson & Rydén 2010, 194–195). American comics had, after a successful American distribution offensive in the beginning of the 1930s, taken an important part in the Swedish dailies and weeklies, with a peak in 1940 (Scholz 2017). The Swedish syndicate Bulls Press Service (Bulls Presstjänst), founded in 1929, distributed the American comics in Northern Europe. Bulls's main customer in Sweden was the illustrated weekly press; the more serious dailies long remained reluctant to publish the funnies (Bjarneby 1994).

Even in neutral Sweden, many of the established Swedish comic strips sent their heroes to defend the country within months of the outbreak of the war, but in funnies such as *91:an*, *Karlsson*, *Filimon* and *Fabian*, the war was only a subject of humour. The real big sellers at the time were the American newspaper adventure comic strips *Flash Gordon*, *Brick Bradford*, *Terry and the Pirates* and *Prince Valiant,* which were published in Swedish weeklies before 1939. In 1940 additional American newspaper adventure comics made their debut in Sweden; these included *The Phantom*, *Mandrake*, *Superman, Barney Baxter* and *Jungle Jim*. At the same time some strips from comic books, such as *Abdul the Arab* from *Smash Comics* or *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle* from *Jumbo Comics*, found their way to Åhlén & Åkerlunds story magazines, and later, in October 1942, *Wings Wendall* from *Smash Comics* was also published by Å & Å.

The Compliant Period (1940/1942)

For Sweden as a neutral country the war meant 'preparedness' with a high combat readiness and many men drafted during the war years. Stories of military preparedness and the need for vigilance became main topics of the Swedish propaganda. An American comic that fitted well with Swedish preparedness and vigilance propaganda was *Navy Bob*

Steele (*Marinlöjtnant Bob*), which was published in colour in Å & Å's *Hela Världen* (The Whole World) for 27 weeks, starting in October 1940. This comic from McClure Syndicate was one of the first American strips supporting President Franklin D. Roosevelt's policy of war preparedness, having launched in the USA in November 1939. The story was about a terror attack against the USA carried out by a criminal league in service of a foreign power, but it is notable that we find nearly no images of violence at all during all the 27 episodes published in *Hela Världen*.

The consequences of encirclement by Germany in spring 1940 were severe and accompanied by powerful and intense Nazi propaganda. The Swedish government faced the challenge of defending their policy of neutrality and promoting the people's intellectual and moral resistance, but they needed to do so carefully in order to avoid irritating their powerful neighbour in the south. One solution seemed to be in the emphasis on national feelings, as exemplified by a 'Swedishness'-campaign organised by The State Information Board. To strengthen the self-confidence of the people, to create respect for ancient traditions of historical freedom and autonomy, and to arouse feelings of connectedness with the great achievements of the past, exhibitions about Swedish history were organised all over the country. The Board also expected the media to encourage 'reverence' for the traditions of 'old historical freedom and independence' as well as emotions felt by the population connected to their country's past (Jönsson 2011).

Bonniers, the most important Swedish publishing house, strongly supported the policy of neutrality and followed the recommendations of The State Information Board even in promoting comics. For economic reasons too, Bonniers had already tried to reduce the influence of foreign comics by setting up a new production unit and syndicate for comics: Alga. War restrictions and transport problems had stopped or disabled the import of American comics to Northern Europe (Patrick 2017, 81), and the popular and widespread Swedish comics, with their long national tradition, still held the interest of Swedish readers (Strömberg 2010). The new situation encouraged the development of a stronger national school of comic artists. Alga would feature issues based on the pattern of Swedish national epics and started developing comics based on heroic Swedish historical events—from the Viking age to the Warrior Kings Gustav the Great and Charles XII.

Bonniers was not alone; most Swedish publishers wanted to actively support the Swedish government. Together they offered to open their magazines, with a circulation of 2.5 million per week, for The State Information Board as an excellent pipeline for issues related to people's preparedness. They promised to share information of a factual character with their audience and to propagate national ideals. They sought particularly to become 'a counterweight' to foreign propaganda, 'which, irrespective of costs and economic calculations is spread throughout our

country.' A formal deal with The State Information Board was agreed in 1942 (Lundström et al. 2001, 171).

The new nationalist Swedish comics, published as part of the official 'Swedishness'- propaganda, first appeared in weekly adventure story magazines produced by several different publishing houses; these weeklies included *Lektyr* (Saxon & Lindströms), *Levande Livet* (Å & Å) and *Tidsfördriv* (Elanders Göteborg). These comics had no bubbles, and the text was always placed under the panels. The first nationalist comic to appear in these magazines was a literary adaptation of Zacharias Topelius's novel *Fältskärns berättelser* (*Tales of a Barber-Surgeon*; art: Bo Vilson), an adventure story about the Swedish wars during 1631–1772. This first Alga-production started in March 1942 in Å & Å's adventure magazine *Levande Livet* (*Vivid Life*, 1942, #10–1944, #35) and was introduced as 'a splendid episode of our glorious history that has been the Swedish people's fondest reading for generations.' *Fältskärns berättelser* pushed *Flash Gordon* from the magazine's colour pages to the less attractive black-and-white ones. Because the original story was mostly about war and love, several visual images show violence, mostly sword fighting, always inspired by, and with close references to, iconic paintings by the greatest Swedish painters from the 19th century, such as Gustaf Cederström and Carl Wahlbom. In doing so the comics could build on traditional viewing habits of their Swedish readers, and at the same time, the iconic romantic nationalist works of art helped to legitimate Alga's new history-adventure comics. Many of the classic paintings, mostly in a revised form, showed battle-scenes. Their depictions of violence were almost always heroic and the violence—killing and dying on the battlefield—was glamourised (Storskog 2017). As the real war around Sweden progressed, the portrayal of violence in the nationalist comics that followed in the lead of *Fältskärns berättelser* increased steadily.

Bonniers (Å & Å) also published imported comics fitting in the government's ideas about vigilance, the other main topic of Swedish propaganda at that time. In April 1942 Bonniers's newsmagazine *Allt!* started publishing *Svarta Masken* (*Black Fury*), a comic interesting to the war effort in two respects. First, the creator, Tarpe Mills, was a woman, a rarity in the male-dominated field of comics; second, even the comic's hero was female: Miss Fury, a strong and independent woman who dealt with Nazi spies. *Black Fury*'s imagery depicts a lot of fist-fighting, even between women, but without severe injury during the run in *Allt!*

Other comics in this magazine were more violent: for example the adventure comic *Hadži Murat* from Serbian comics artist Konstantin Kuznetzow, added in June 1942. This story, first published in Serbian comic magazine *Zabavnik* in 1938, was about violent battles in the Caucasus in 1851. Here, Russians appeared as the villains, vandalising Murat's native village and killing his mother. In July 1942 another nationalistic comic, *Göinge-Hövdingen*, started in *Allt!*; this was a literary

adaptation of Carl August Cederborg's novel of the same name (art: Bo Vilson). The story is about a critical year for Sweden, 1677, when the Danish King Christian V with a strong army and help from local people wanted to recapture Scania-Skåne. The story clearly showed the destruction created by military conflict, and the images show more violence than *Fältskärns berättelser,* including the brutality of both armies against the rural population and more hand-to-hand-fighting (*Allt!*, 1942, #28–52). With the ongoing war more pronounced violence was offered. In 1943, *Tidsfördriv* published another adaptation of Cederborg's writings, *Hans Våghals* (Hannes Daredevil), a secret agent for King Gustav Vasa (*Tidsfördriv*, # 1–1943, # 1–1945, # 1, art: John Mauritz Lindblom). This story is about a rebellion against King Gustav Vasa in 1529 and shows how Daredevil contributes to the failure of the uprising. It contains very realistic violence from the beginning, often not even motivated by the text. Brutal fist fights in close-up and striking with unusual weapons are the types of physical violence that are most frequently presented, some ongoing over several pages, and resulting in injury and death. Women too are suffering from the war, but they are strong in this comic. As Daredevil and his men are under siege, the young farm maid Kersti is taking care of the wounded. But when the enemy attacks, she actively participates in the fight. Over five panels we can follow her fight:

> Kersti grabs a bar and rushes to the wall to fight a warrior just climbing the barrier. She hits him with the heavy bar, but his helmet softens the punch; and under wild curse he makes a new attempt to come up. When he has just got up on one knee, Kersti strikes him in the stomach. With a roar he loses his balance and with violent speed he falls down on his cronies. Kersti hears the horror of the dull dun to the stones down there.
>
> (*Tidsfördriv*, # 46–47, 1943)

In October 1942, Alga started the comic magazine *Veckans Serier* (*Comics of the Week),* the only comic magazine in Sweden during the war. It mostly collected comics of American origin, like *Tim Tyler's Luck* (*Bob och Frank*) and *Wings Wendall* (Löjtnant Vinge), but *Hadži Murat* was moved to the new magazine when *Allt!* closed down their comic section in November 1942, and the valiant Dzigit continued his struggle against a 'humiliating peace with Russia' for the next four months (1942, #8–1943, #11). The only Alga-produced comic in *Veckans Serier* was first published in November 1942: *Karolinerna* (*Caroleans*, 1942, #8–1943, #21). The plot was based on a national epic by Verner von Heidenstam, visualising the Swedish Warrior King Charles XII's campaign against Russia (1707–1709), Sweden's traditional enemy. In the images of this adventure comic we can find a lot of fighting scenes but not as violent as in the American comics in this magazine.

The Swedish king's aggression results in *Karolinerna* in a lot of battle-scenes with killing and dying in close-up, but always glamourised. When the text tells that a storm attack did not go without 'casualties,' we see the dying soldiers in close-up (1942, #10). When it tells about 'a man-to-man fight,' we see, even this in close-up, a Swede drilling his sword through his opponent's neck (11/1942). 'The effect of the cannon fire' is visualised by showing a whole group of enemy soldiers blowing up in parts (1943, #16). But torture is here more verbally than visually indicated. When the king's adjutant was captured, the Russians threaten to torture him: 'You will tell me about the king's plan of attack… otherwise you'll taste the glow of iron.' The glowing torture tool is shown, but not actual scenes of torture (1943, #11). Violence is here a natural part of the war, and the legal and moral right of the Swedish king to use violence is unquestioned.

In December 1942, Alga presented a comic strip about the Viking age: *Röde Orm* (*Red Orm or The Long Ships*), after the bestselling novel by Frans G. Bengtsson (art: Uno Stallarholm). Alga could sell this strip to several daily papers, including the conservative daily *Svenska Dagbladet* (15/12/1942–11/12/1943), and the social democratic papers *Ny Tid* (*New Time*) and *Arbetet* (*Work*). In this Viking story the impressive pictures speak mostly for themselves and the text takes up only little space. The story portrays the political situation of Europe in the later Viking Age, visualising the rough life of the Vikings with fist fighting, wrestling and sword fighting as recurring elements. But the most violent part in the story is played by the force of nature, especially the raging sea. The brutality of the Viking raids is shown, even explicit, but violence gets less space in this relatively long story. A whole Viking raid with all the cruelties is shown in one strip, with four panels accompanied by a short text: '(1) Many of the men sprung into the huts, to quench their thirst,' (we see the Vikings quaffing and looting); '(2) looking to make booty' (visualised by Vikings assaulting women); '(3) But most followed the retreating victims to their big castle house' (we see Vikings fighting and killing); '(4) and they came in with the retreating people before the door could be closed'—visualised by more fighting and killing in close-up (Svenska Dagbladet, 1943-03-23).

A more contemporary Swedish comic, *Luftinvasion i Sverige* (*Air invasion in Sweden*, art: Allan Löthman), started at the end of 1942 in *Levande Livet* (1942, #47). This comic was advertised as a new Alga comic about Sweden's pilots and National home guard, the favourite topic of 'Preparedness Sweden.' The realistically drawn comic was obviously inspired by the German-Italian comic artist Kurt Caesar and his aviation-comics from the Italian comic magazine *Il Vittorioso*. The plot of the comic is very realistic as neutral Sweden is suddenly attacked by the air force of a foreign power. A similar situation was to be expected daily in reality. Because of Sweden's neutrality, even in the comic, the foreign

enemy is not described, we cannot recognise their uniforms or faces, and only the enemy planes are shown. With them superior in number a terrible battle starts. The home guard has to fight enemy parachutists, always from long distance, and the situation becomes critical for the frantically fighting Swedes, but no man-to-man fight occurs. Dying on the battlefield is normal but not heroic. When the enemy's fighter planes on low altitudes drop bombs over the woods around the landing field to destroy or drive away the home guard we see the Swedes being torn apart by the bombs. But at last they regain superiority, thanks to their knowledge of the terrain and good relations with the local population. After heavy aerial warfare the Swedish aircraft fighters, superior in speed, get control of the airspace as well. The story shows the destruction created by military conflict; the violence is graphic, but justified.

Already in October 1942, at the same time that Bonniers had launched *Veckans Serier*, their competitor, Allers, a publishing house of Danish origin with owners in German-occupied Denmark, started its own magazine, *(Allers) Ungdomsrevy* (*Youth Review*), in fact a comic supplement to their famous weekly *Allers*. The cover shows a comic from 'the glory days of Scandinavian and Swedish history' about the Viking Björn Starke (art: H. Berg); inside the magazine we find American comics such as *Terry and the Pirates* (*Jim och Piraterna*) and *Mandrake*. *Björn Starke* is particularly interesting because this Viking story is a tribute to Swedish neutrality. We are told the Vikings never needed to fear a sudden assault by their enemies because of their country's location; therefore, the men were always unarmed, but when they were attacked they were able to defend their country. The violence in the comic was, at the beginning, moderate, with some fist and sword fighting, but in 1943/44, the fight scenes became more brutal. Fighting in close combat could now even end in death (*Ungdomsrevy* 1943, # 19; 1944, # 2), and mass fight scenes could depict fighting with glowing iron bars and uneven battles with 'blood flowing in streams' (*Ungdomsrevy* 1944, # 4, 5).

Rebelling against the Policy of Neutrality (1942–1945)

When the USA joined the war in December 1941 the situation changed on all frontiers, and psychological warfare took on a different quality. After the German occupation of Norway and Denmark in April 1940, German propaganda had been predominant in Sweden, but this changed in 1942, and from then on there was a rapid expansion of intelligence and propaganda activity in Sweden to the advantage of the Anglo-American powers, as they were called in Sweden. Almost no one in Sweden doubted the defeat of the Third Reich, and as a result, postwar perspectives concerning Sweden's foreign trade became a central topic of discussion. The Swedish government's main intention was to secure an economically and politically favourable relationship with the

USA after the war. Public opinion ran strongly in favour of the Allies, and expanding cultural relations with the West appeared to be a low-cost concession. Practically, this resulted in giving up on fighting 'Non-Swedish propaganda.' From 1943 onwards, however, all censorship of and responses to Western propaganda stopped, and the Coordination Section for Counter-Propaganda ceased its activities. Cultural imports from the USA were now seen as an advantage, as a chance to promote trust in Swedish democracy. Even the former nationalistic propaganda strategy was discarded. Therefore, Alga and Swedish comic creators had to find other topics, so they underwent a transformation from being propagandists of patriotism to now challenging the still official line and creating material similar to Anglo-American propaganda. Alga's attempts to establish in-house productions became what were essentially reproductions of famous American comics, and their quality was often doubtful.

In September 1942, Alga launched *Johnny Wiking – äventyr i världsrymden* (*Johnny Wiking – Adventures in the Outer Space*, art: Björn Karlström), a science fiction comic where the world is being attacked (*Vecko-Revyn* 1942, #38 –1946). The story and pictures were clear plagiarism of Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon*; even speech balloons were used from now on.

The strip follows the space adventures of Johnny Wiking, a young engineer attempting to stop a disaster for the planet Earth, as it was the case in Alex Raymond's original story. During their adventures on foreign planets the female hero, the reporter Eva Lundgren, gets into trouble several times. In these cases the Swedish strip shows sexual violence. When Johnny and Eva were captured by (extraterrestrial) Vikings, their boss, named Korp (Raven), orders, smirking, 'The girl I take care of. The men you can put to work.' Some panels later, Korp tries to get the furious girl to submit, but she fights back, and a violent Korp grabs the fragile girl brutally, crying, 'Just wait! You'll soon be soft!' (1942, #51). Later in the story, she is taken hostage by another villain, who attacks her brutally, shown in close-up. When he drags her away she looks nearly undressed, giving the image a stronger sexual dimension (1943, #12). Later in the comic, with the ongoing real war, the horrors of war are graphically displayed in a naturalistic manner by marching troops and cities under bomb fire (1944, #39).

The problem of plagiarism was obvious even in the Alga-produced comic *Biggi Smart* (art: Foch), advertised in *Vecko-Revyn* as an exciting and up-to-date story about a female reporter's adventure in the war in Europe (1943, #48). In fact, it was a bad replacement for the American newspaper comic strip *Jane Arden*, which was published in the same magazine until September 1943. Biggi was an American (!) female reporter, cooperating with British war heroes and fighting dumb German soldiers and spies, but the strip was almost completely without images of

violence. Even one of the better Swedish adventure comics, *Allan Kämpe* (*Veckans serier*, 1943, #22–42; art: Eugen Semitjov), was not free from plagiarism. Replacing the heroic comic *Karolinerna*, Semitjov's comic was about a near future with many science fiction elements. The story starts after the Second World War had ended, and the world had started to rebuild, but there seems to be no end to human suffering, and war is threatening again; a new modern war begins, resulting in widespread destruction. Probably due to lack of time, the comic imitated more and more both the story and the look of *Flash Gordon*, which resulted in the visualisation of similar types of sexual violence, with the torture and whipping of the female hero (1943, #36–7). Even in the other comics in *Veckans serier, Tim Tyler's Luck* and *Wings Wendall*, the violence in the shape of fist-fighting and air-battles increased in 1943. An exception in quality in Swedish comics was the fairy story *Tusen och en natt* (*One Thousand and One Nights*, art: Bo Vilson), a comic published in *Vecko-Revyn* starting in April 1944 (1944, #16–1949). Inspired by the Hollywood movie *Arabian Nights* (1942) it showed erotica and nudity but no violence.

The content of American comics, generally superior to the Swedish ones, changed dramatically during these years. Since at least 1942, comics in the USA had been part of pyschological warfare, with precise instructions for the comics publishers issued by the Office of War Information (OWI) and later the Writers' War Board (WWB). This development started when the USA officially entered the Second World War in December 1941. From that point on the majority of newspaper comic strips were caught up in the war effort (Goulart 1995, 143). The role of the OWI, established by an executive order signed by President Roosevelt in June 1942, was to influence US public opinion regarding American participation in the Second World War. This meant creating enthusiasm for the war effort and informing people at home and abroad of the status and progress of the war effort and of the war policies, activities and aims of the government. One idea was to cloak propaganda within the context of good entertainment as much as possible. The US government efforts to win public support for its foreign policies are common in American history; using comics as propaganda was a long-standing tradition, dating back at least as far as the First World War (Graham 2011). On the other hand, the history of US psychological warfare was one of improvisation, without central leadership, even as late as the Second World War.

The OWI examined the appeal of popular comics as potential instruments for propaganda, but delegated this task to the WWB in early 1943 (Blum 1976, 21–52; Wright 2001, 34 f.). The WWB became one of the most important US non-governmental propaganda organisations; it ensured that there was a pool of authors at the government's disposal for propaganda tasks. Privately organised, WWB was partially funded by the OWI, and convened a Comics Committee in July 1943, to supervise the contact with the comics industry, with cooperating publishers

agreeing to write stories based on ideas proposed by the WWB and to incorporate wartime topics. The board's efforts would also extend to encouraging international cooperation in the post-war era, particularly among the Allies (Howell 1997; Casey 2005). Thus, American comics became part of American war propaganda, but Sweden (or other European countries) was not originally their target.

Bulls Presstjänst managed to sell American comics during the whole war, even to the occupied neighbour countries Norway and Denmark. The price, however, was censorship as, before appearing in the Scandinavian press, comics had to pass an editing process. This mostly resulted in the speech balloons being erased and replaced by captions but could also result in bizarre changes, as in the case of Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*. This comic had suffered most from transport problems as a consequence of the ongoing war, and over some periods Bulls had to produce *Terry and the Pirates* stories on their own. Bulls could solve the import problems after a while, having convinced the Anglo-American representatives in Stockholm of the comic's value for winning hearts and minds in Northern Europe and through the good contacts of their American business partners with the OWI in Washington. To a modest extent, since April 1942, and with relatively regular shipments from autumn 1942, the comic's import to Sweden via London was secured. But transport was not the only problem.

Milton Caniff involved his comic heroes from *Terry and the Pirates* in fighting the Japanese invaders even before the USA joined the Second World War. After the USA had entered the war, Caniff's story was fuller than ever with wartime references, starting in January 1942. Because the publication of *Terry and the Pirates* in Sweden was 14 months delayed, this first became a problem for Bulls Presstjänst in 1943. Publishing Caniff's original work, showing Japanese invaders as regular armed forces, was not possible in neutral Sweden or in the occupied neighbouring countries. All connections to the ongoing war were erased before publishing. Censored elements included uniforms and flags, but violence was censored too: for example, a knife threatening a child was retouched (*Ungdomsrevy* 1943, #31). When the main female character Normandy and her little daughter were hiding from the 'invaders,' sexual violence was also censored. In the original version, Japanese soldiers discovered the woman and her daughter and discussed raping her: 'Let us arouse the woman! It will be sport to see her cringe in fear … (and) pleading for mercy' (Caniff 1992, 54 f.). In the Swedish version, the Japanese soldiers became bandits with typical Chinese straw hats, with the sole intention of catching Normandy and the girl, and bringing them to their boss, as ordered. This time, however, the knife in the hands of Normandy was not retouched (*Ungdomsrevy* 1943, #38). In both versions, Normandy and her child were subsequently rescued, but the Swedish story took a totally different course.

The American comics had made their comeback in the Swedish market in 1943, and criticism was not long in coming. In June 1943 *Svensk Lärartidning* (*The Swedish Teachers Journal*) published a survey of 500 children's spare time reading; the most popular was *Hemmets Veckotidning* (Allhems förlag), and primarily the comics, at that time mostly from the USA and one from Serbia, *Ben Berry* (Ben Kerigan, art: Konstantin Kuznetzow). The journal strongly criticised the comics, but only for their bad language. The owner of the publishing house, Einar Hansen, reacted promptly and ordered the editor-in-chief to take care of the problem immediately, and the critics fell silent (Modéer 2002, 171 f.).

In the last year of the war the Anglo-American propaganda became better organised, and their different propaganda units established outposts overseas. Outpost Sweden gathered information about local attitudes and distributed material about the USA to encourage support for the USA's goals (Winkler 1978, 80). One propaganda goal of the OWI was to promote the achievements of the allies. Non-fiction comics, featuring the lives of real-life British war heroes, were produced in the USA, and they became very popular, even in Sweden. By mid-1944, readers of family and teenage magazines were able to share the adventures of Winston Churchill, General Alexander, General Montgomery, Lord Louis Mountbatten or Robert Edward Laycock and Charles Wingate as comics (*Vårt Hem* 1944, #26–28; *Levande Livet* 1944, #22; *Rekord-Magasinet* 1944, #14–15). Eventually, in December 1944, even the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* published comics about a British war hero.

All these comics visualised the war, and martial acts from historical theatres of war were portrayed. Images of explicit violence were only exceptionally shown, as in the portrait of General 'Monty' Montgomery (1887–1976). But here it was an incident from the First World War, when Montgomery was wounded during a battle in France, and a soldier went out to try to save him but was shot through his head and fell dead over him (Vårt Hem 1944, #31). In the portrait of General Harold Alexander (1891–1969), who led the British Expeditionary Force's withdrawal to Dunkirk, where it was evacuated to England, the reader gets acquainted with a real hero: 'During the worst hours at Dunkirk he kept his men in good courage. It is told that between his excursions along the beach he settled down calmly and built sandcastles.' The foreground shows the image of the general and his comrades building sandcastles, and the background shows violent fighting in the air and on the ground but no dying at all (Vårt Hem 1944, #30). It is noteworthy that despite the instructions of OWI to highlight all Allies' efforts, the American comics in Sweden exclusively celebrated British efforts. Obviously, for the pro-Anglo-American Swedes the Soviet Union was not easy to accept as an ally in the anti-Hitler-Coalition. This was also known in the OWI, which had formulated special propaganda instructions for Sweden regarding the Soviet Union contribution to the war (Runblom 1992, 41 f.).

In the spring of 1944, an influential American political group had started a campaign to enforce harsh peace conditions on Germany and Japan. The WWB joined this group and assigned comic-publishing companies to concentrate on anti-Japanese, as well as anti-German topics (Hirsch, 460; Howell, 802). The official propaganda adopted codes and conventions to describe the enemy as evil, a position already well established in American popular culture. As a consequence, racist depictions increased in comics, with rodent-like Japanese and bloated, sneering Germans. This was especially the case in the *Barney Baxter* comic strip, which had been running in Sweden in *Veckans Äventyr* (*Adventures of the Week*) since late 1940. This was Bulls's own youth magazine, and it published the uncensored adventures of *Barney Baxter*, *Superman* and *Jungle Jim*. Despite most Swedish publications being rather defensive in their description of the Axis powers, this was not the case in the comics published in Bulls's own magazine. Young aviator Barney Baxter battled spies from a 'fifth column,' planning to attack the USA by air. In his eagerness to defend his country, any and all means were alright with Barney. When he visited a chemical laboratory, where a new machine developed deadly gases, Barney asks, 'And why not deadly gases? If our country is given it as means to prevent every possibility of invasion …' (*Veckans Äventyr* 1942, #35). In 1943 it became quite obvious that Barney's enemies were both Nazis and Japanese villains. And in 1944 *Barney Baxter* portrayed the brutality of the enemy with even more racist images of Japanese officers, wearing huge glasses and showing bucked teeth (*Veckans Äventyr* 1944, #28).

The other main comic strip in *Veckans Äventyr* from the first issue in 1940 was *Jungle Jim* (art: Alex Raymond). The strip's hero, Jim Bradley, was appointed captain of the US Army early in 1942. With an 18-month delay the Swedish readers could follow his fight against the 'Japs' in *Veckans Äventyr* in an uncensored version with a lot of fighting and shooting in close-ups. Jim and his guerrillas, working behind enemy lines, raid on the enemy supply lines. One day, they were observing an inhumane treatment of a prisoner by the Japanese: 'Towards evening, the enemy patrol stops at a stream to refresh themselves – but when their exhausted prisoner stumbles to the water's edge for a drink, he is beaten back with a rifle butt' (*Veckans Äventyr* 1944, #4, original 6–21–42). Freeing the prisoner, Jim shoots all of the enemies: and this repeats when he meets a fleet of enemy trucks. After a lot of shooting and killing, often shown in close-up, he blows up the Japanese; nobody survives (*Veckans Äventyr* 1944, #7).

In late 1944, anti-German stereotypes had finally found their way into the Swedish press. The daily strip version of *Barney Baxter*, published in Bonnier's new tabloid newspaper *Expressen*, showed overweight and sluggish German soldiers, decidedly different from the 'typical American boys' and easy to handle for Barney's strong fists (*Expressen*

27/12/1944). Hitler's Germany was aware of this kind of propaganda. But a protest in the Nazi magazine *Illustrierter Beobachter*, in August 1944, had no consequences (Palandt 2005) and did not especially impress Bulls Press. The Swedish syndicate could now, with the help of the Western allied offices, secure the distribution of comics in Sweden and Northern Europe. When in December 1944, the German Press department from the diplomatic mission in Stockholm realised that even a Swedish newspaper was publishing anti-German comics, they were disillusioned and did nothing more than make a file note (Landström 1956, 131).

Other adventure comics also dehumanised German soldiers. In October 1944, the adventure weekly *Lektyr* (Saxon & Lindströms) published a realistic war comic, *Bob Stanton* (*Lektyr* 1944, #40–1945, #9), about the adventures of a secret agent for Britain's Intelligence Service acting in different European theatres of war. At the beginning, Bob is in Italy and receives orders from headquarters to investigate the German fortifications on the other side of the river that the British intended to occupy. Instead of taking pictures he blows up the German battery. In *Bob Stanton,* killing the enemy was always the easiest solution. And the killing—shooting, slaying, strangling—of German and Japanese soldiers was here depicted in many close-ups until the comic suddenly ended in March 1945.

Such brutal and inhumane stories from American comics made an impression on Swedish comics creators as well. One of the most extreme examples was *Kalle Modig. En svensk grabbs äventyr till lands och vatten* (*Kalle Brave. A Swedish boy's adventures on land and water*, art: John Mauritz Lindblom) in *Rekord* during 1944. Editor and owner Edwin Ahlqvist (pen name Crusher) had started this magazine in December 1942 as a sports magazine but demonstrated a stringent anti-Nazi and pro Anglo-American attitude from the first issue, publishing English-language courses and stories of freedom fighters and resistance men in Norway and Denmark. *Kalle Modig* was a story about a young Swedish seaman in occupied France fighting together with French partisans against German soldiers' intent on raping and killing the local population. They get involved after saving a French girl, Musette, who is connected with the partisans and chased by the Germans. When they came across a German patrol, one of the German officers tried to rape the girl, but just in time, a bullet hits him in the head, and he dies instantly (1943, #3–9). An incoming German motorbike patrol is hit by an Anglo-American bomb-flight attack (1943, #10), and the killing of German soldiers continues in close-up (1943, #12). Depicting German violence and their victims' heroism, the comic argued for an easy solution to get rid of the Germans: killing them. When the partisans had taken control of a train carrying German Gestapo and their prisoners, they called for retaliation. The Germans 'shall be rewarded!,' the partisans

cry out, 'they will get a proper funeral salute' before blowing up the railway wagon with the captured Gestapo men inside (1944, #14).

Comics like the American *Bob Stanton* and the Swedish *Kalle Modig* agitated for Swedish youngsters to fight the enemy in ways that today would be regarded as war crimes. The harmful influence of the coloured press was relentlessly discussed late in 1944, but it was most about 'Swedish taste' and the 'lack of quality.' The main target of the attacks in the press was Bonnier as publisher of weeklies; some voices argued that the press should release itself from American influence and portray Swedish conditions more. The Christian teachers' associations joined the protests against certain weekly newspapers and appealed to the youth to boycott such literature. The protests were fuelled further when Bonniers's new tabloid *Expressen*, starting in December 1944, published eight comics daily: four Swedish and four American. But it was the comic's 'stupidity' that was debated, not images of violence.

Conclusion

The Swedish comic market during the war years was a mirror of the dramatic changes in the Swedish politics of neutrality and demonstrates the American propaganda tactics in Sweden. The comics in the weeklies and dailies should not be considered a passive impression of the war, since they actively contributed to the formation of public opinion. They expressed competing interpretations of the political debate: about whether or not to be neutral in the war, about the image of the enemy and that of friends and allies. If these interpretations in comics are compared to the political propaganda distributed in other media, pro-neutral or pro-active and pro-Western powers in the anti-Hitler-coalition, we would see that the comics could go further in their pro-active and pro-Anglo-American statements because Swedish censorship didn't take comics seriously.

The war gave Swedish publishers a valuable opportunity to improve their public image by linking their products to patriotism and the war effort. The changes in topics and visualisation of violence in the comics reflect the changing power from strict neutrality to sympathy for the Anglo-American side. During the war more and more American comics, produced or initiated by the OWI and the WWB, came to Sweden, spreading American values, encouraging hate towards Nazism and promoting the achievements of the allies in the anti-Hitler-coalition. The American comics influenced numerous readers in Sweden towards democracy. But as it was on the battlefields, even in the comics violence was growing. Even more questionable were the racial stereotypes and the construction of and justification for race-based hatred of other nations.

Because comics in Sweden, at least after closing down the Coordination Section for Counter-Propaganda, were not subject to external

censorship, they could include images of violence, racism and sexuality. The combination of large circulation in the coloured weeklies and minimal censorship made comics unique among Swedish popular media. This raises the question of legitimate and illegitimate acts of violence. In the Swedish comics, we find realistic depictions of combat in both the past and in the contemporary war; violence served the purpose of strengthening moral positions and increasing trust in the government. In the USA, wartime violence in comics and even racism were 'acceptable,' at least if directed against the hated enemy. But this was hardly an excuse for neutral Sweden, with traditional social norms characterised by humanity and the Christian religion, to follow suit. The typical Swedish reader was not a soldier, as was the case with comic books in the USA during the war. In Sweden, comic readers were mostly young boys and girls, who, by reading these comics, were running the risk of losing their relationships with society and humanity. No damaging effect is known to have appeared, probably because of the very short time that these violent and inhumane comics were published in Sweden. Nevertheless, a positive image of the USA with a desirable American lifestyle, a working democracy and a mighty military power survived.

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6 Will Eisner and the Art of War

Educational Comics in the American Defence Industry

Malin Bergström

The comics medium has proven a suitable outlet for publications on various themes around war. From the satirical cartoons of the First World War to the propaganda-oriented superhero titles of the Second World War and reflexive approaches to the morality of war in more recent titles, comics have been able to portray war and share war stories for a wide readership of all ages. War comics have been produced to tell stories from the field (both true and false), to share perspectives from the front and to reveal the human experiences behind the soldier's uniform. War as a theme in comics has been widely researched by scholars such as Cord Scott, Christopher Murray and Paul E. Fitzgerald (e.g. Fitzgerald 2009; Murray 2011; Scott 2011). I have also previously studied Will Eisner's war comics through research conducted in my Master's thesis (see Bergström 2017).

Will Eisner is one of the most important figures in the history of the comics medium, and was a significant driving force behind comics as an educational, as well as a communicative, storytelling device. When inducted into the army in 1942, Eisner was able utilise comics within the American Defence Industry, shaping comics as a means of communication and education within military praxis. Eisner's professional path within military comics expanded to a long career of over 20 years within the American Defence Industry. The army as a theme would reoccur in Eisner's later works from an introspective and reflexive approach—as the memories, experiences and views of an American soldier.

This article will examine Eisner's career path within the realm of military comics, and discuss the implications of placing comics as an educational tool within an institution such as the American military.

Educational Military Comics during the Second World War

Eisner was drafted in 1942, but remained on the home front during the war. Eisner, who tended to lean further to the left than to the right politically, experienced some qualms about his conscription. Initially, Eisner saw his conscription as a threat to his career in comics and attempted to

defer his service, before eventually accepting his patriotic duty (Schumacher 2010, 152, 80–81).

As an established comics creator he was offered a position as a cartoonist for the Aberdeen Proving Ground Base newspaper *The Flaming Bomb* in Maryland, for which he drew the humorous strip *Private Dogtag*. The strip included several characters based on real soldiers, including Eisner himself (Schumacher 2010, 84). The base was developing a preventive maintenance programme, and the U.S. Army Ordnance Corps was looking for artists to produce a series of educational posters to promote high-quality equipment maintenance among the troops. Eisner was assigned the job, and the new position allowed him to develop and consider the image-to-text ratio in the publication for best communicative effect (Schumacher 2010, 84–85). He was soon transferred to Holabird Ordnance Motor Base in Baltimore, and began developing their magazine *Army Motors*, which aimed to promote the maintenance of equipment as a preventive measure against accidents and mistakes in the field. Eisner also drew covers and illustrations for the Army Ordnance Association-funded magazine *Firepower, the Ordnanceman's Journal* (Fitzgerald 2009, 140–141).

The military maintenance manuals were written with technical jargon and used complex terminology, which particularly affected the soldiers with low literacy skills. Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, illiteracy levels in the USA were at an estimated 2.9%. As people were drafted into service from different backgrounds, and were integrated from different social and economic classes into the same military barracks, the different socio-economic standards, such as levels of education, became apparent (Bureau of the Census 1948, 4; Harris et al. 1984, 46–47; Brandt 2004, 486). At first illiterate draftees were rejected during the selective service process, but as the demand for manpower increased after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the restrictions on draftees were altered. According to the new restrictions up to 10% of inductees per day were allowed to be illiterate, as long as they proved to be easy to train. The quota was later reduced to 5%, and by 1943 all restrictions on recruiting illiterate draftees were removed (Brandt 2004, 486). Soldiers were expected to handle new technological advances in military weaponry more than they had before, demanding a higher grasp of literacy for soldiers (Brandt 2004, 498). In 1942, 63 out of 100 draftees were in need of technical training prior to deployment; by 1944 that number had increased drastically to 90 out of 100 (Brandt 2004, 486). To rectify the issue of illiteracy amongst the troops, the army offered special training to improve reading skills (Bureau of the Census 1948, 1).

For Eisner, this meant an opportunity to take comics out of the realm of entertainment and into the world of pedagogy. Eisner believed that comics could function as a bridging component in the understanding of awkward and difficult information, because the simplicity of image/text

combinations could communicate instructions, whilst simultaneously speaking the language of the soldiers on base (Schumacher 2010, 84–85; Eisner 2011, 8; Inge 2011, 59). Maintenance was an important aspect of equipment safety, be it weaponry or vehicles, which could prove essential on the front. Therefore, the effective communication of technical advice and tips could make a life-saving difference in combat.

While working for *Army Motors*, Eisner developed new characters and reinvented existing ones. Characters such as Joe Dope, Sergeant Half-Mast McCanick and Connie Rodd would become established characters in the *Army Motors* illustrations and comics. Sgt Half-Mast McCanick first appeared in *Army Motors* (Volume 3, Number 1, April 1942) and was more of an 'old-timer' than a battle-ready soldier (Fitzgerald 2009, 81). Joe Dope was one of the more controversial characters due to his comedic attributes and started out as a character in a poster-series that was published biweekly and sent to army maintenance organisations. Joe Dope made his first appearance in *Army Motors* (Volume 3, Number 9, November 1942), and soon received continuous exposure in the publication (Fitzgerald 2009, 82). Following Joe Dope was Private Fosgnoff, another careless and sloppy soldier (Fitzgerald 2009, 140; Schumacher 2010, 87).

Also pushing the line of decency was the character Connie Rodd, but in her case the provocation lay foremost in her loaded sexuality. Connie first appeared in *Army Motors* (Volume 3, Number 5, August 1942), and had started out innocently enough as a corporal with brown locks. When Eisner started working on the publication in November 1942, he drew Connie working under a truck, with only her legs visible, for several issues, until he reinvented her as a busty blonde civilian, in the image of the actress Lauren Bacall, and reintroduced her in *Army Motors* (Volume 3, Number 11, February 1943) (Fitzgerald 2009, 84).

Demographic and Orientation

Eisner's military comics were aimed at a soldier demographic as opposed to a juvenile audience. The focus was not particularly on defeating an enemy or even on winning a war but rather on the daily operations at base and in the field. Eisner never saw combat during his service, but rather saw his work as a way to help those soldiers who were sent into life-threatening situations (Schumacher 2010, 152–155). Considering that Eisner's comics were produced for the military, the comics themselves were not particularly violent, despite being created in a context of war and geopolitical tensions. The aim was not to teach soldiers how to kill or defeat their enemies, but rather to help soldiers survive with minimum damage to equipment.

For some military officials, comics in a military environment, and especially comedic comics, were seen to make light of serious subject matters

and to ridicule the military as an honourable institution (Schumacher 2010, 92–93). Though many admired Eisner's work, he was also met with scepticism and had to defend his work. In various sources, Eisner spoke of a survey made for the military by the University of Chicago, where the comics were tested for their abilities as a pedagogical tool, and the results had proven that comics were more effective than other illustrative or textual means of communication. However, I have been unable to verify that the survey was conducted by the University of Chicago, or indeed exists, as their records do not show any such test having been conducted (University of Chicago library, customer service email to author, 2016; Cord A. Scott, email to author, 10 October 2017). Equally, in these sources, the timing of the test varies from Eisner's time on *Army Motors* and *PS Magazine*, which further confuses the origins of the story. The biography *Will Eisner: A Dreamer's Life in Comics* claims that the test was conducted during the Second World War (Schumacher 2010, 93), but in an interview with Charles Brownstein, in the book *Eisner/Miller,* Eisner explains that the test was actually done on *PS Magazine*, a later publication (Schutz and Brownstein 2005, 201–202). Following a private email correspondence in 2016 with the editor of *PS Magazine* Bruce Cotton, Cotton investigated the matter and kindly contacted older staff members, but none recalled such a survey ever taking place (Bruce Cotton, email to the author, August 16th, 2016). Without conclusive evidence of when and for which publication the survey was conducted, it is difficult to determine its effect on the overall cause, namely comics as an appropriate pedagogical tool in the military.

Back in the Game

The idea of educational and didactic functions of comics stayed with Eisner after he returned to civilian life in 1945. In 1948, he founded the American Visuals Corporation, a company with the objective of simplifying manuals and easing technical jargon by using comics-based techniques and narrative structures (Schumacher 2010, 119–121). The business eventually progressed with big name customers, such as General Motors, the American Red Cross and the American Medical Association (Schumacher 2010, 148).

As the conflict in Korea intensified, much of existing US military equipment was outdated and in dire need of maintenance (Fitzgerald 2009, 15–16; Schumacher 2010, 130; Eisner 2011, 12). Eisner was approached by *Army Motors* veteran Norman Colton, who invited him to work on a new educational project for the military. Colton had initially been tasked with developing the publication *Army Motors* during the Second World War and was now commissioned by the US army to develop a similar product for the Korean War (Fitzgerald 2009, 139; Schumacher 2010, 129). The result was a monthly publication called *Preventive Maintenance Monthly*, commonly referred to as *PS Magazine*, which used comics to teach soldiers about appropriate equipment

maintenance. The original commission was for six issues (Fitzgerald 2009, 17; Schumacher 2010, 130; Eisner 2011, 13), but the lifespan of *PS Magazine* exceeded all expectations. *PS Magazine* still runs as a military publication today, moving from printed magazines to a digital format in 2009 (USAMC LOGSA 2017). Eisner worked on *PS Magazine* from June 1951 to October 1971, on a total of 227 issues (Eisner 2011, 9, 11).

As a printed publication, *PS Magazine* has undergone various physical changes. Before being distributed digitally it mostly remained in the size range of five by seven inches, occasionally increased to five by seven and a quarter inches, and was designed to fit inside a soldier's work uniform. The comics narratives were printed in four colours, whereas technical and incidental illustrations, as well as other remaining contents, were often printed with black and one primary colour (Fitzgerald 2009, 37–39). The primary colour could then be used to further enhance instructions visually, by highlighting specific parts of the illustration.

By using comics in a military context, Eisner was able to bring characters into the magazine that the readership, consisting primarily of American soldiers, could easily relate to. Eisner brought back the familiar faces of Sgt Half-Mast McCanick, Joe Dope, Connie Rodd and Private Fosgnoff (Fitzgerald 2009, 80). A readership correspondence programme was also re-established, opening a channel of communication between soldiers, superiors and editors.

While the magazine was well received among some army authorities, it was also highly criticised by others. Each issue had to be submitted for review by a board of officials at the Pentagon prior to publication, and Eisner and various editors of *PS Magazine* often found themselves having to defend their magazine and its method of teaching (Fitzgerald 2009, 30; Schumacher 2010, 144). The most significant concern was that the magazine, in its attempt at humorous narratives, would actually be interpreted as ridiculing the military service or portraying the American armies as clumsy and inept in their military activities, challenging the US army as an institution (Fitzgerald 2009, 145–7; Schumacher 2010, 144–145).

The Myths Surrounding the Military Institution

A prominent heroic myth, which often reoccurs in various forms of media and stories, is that of the GI (the word GI stands for government issued, meaning soldier or enlisted person). The GI myth can be seen as a military extension of a broader American hero myth, which is itself based on the structural worship of human archetypical heroes in history, such as Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone, and which has been used to justify an American sense of superiority over other cultures (Fuchs 2010, 36–37). The American hero myth applies to characters played by John Wayne, the ultimate representation of American heroism as the stern, silent cowboy, carrying himself with pride as well as humility (Fuchs 2010, 43). As I have observed elsewhere, the hero myth has established formative

as well as affective aspects of American cultural memory by providing behavioural patterns for the American people that offer the possibility of identifying with the hero, which consequently forms an illusory sense of belonging (Fuchs 2010, 36–37; Bergstrom 2017, 49–51).

The GI myth, subsidiary of the hero myth, channels such humilities further, emphasising the humanity of the soldier, connecting him with American society as a united people who stand together in the face of opposition. During the Second World War, the GI myth demonstrated human antithesis against a mythical foreign enemy (Goscilo 2012, 138; Bergstrom 2017, 50). The portrayal of the American GI showed a pure-hearted and honest all-American boy, who was as an avid sportsman, and either a college student or otherwise employed (Blum 1976, 57–64; Bergstrom 2017, 50). The myth represents a 'cult of the underdog' mentality, emphasising that American soldiers were simply 'regular American boys' (Blum 1976, 60; Bergstrom 2017, 50).

This portrayal painted a public image of a boy next door, taken out of the innocent idyll of small-town America and placed into the role of the hero. Even more so, the myth perpetuated that indeed by leaving the established sense of idyllic to fight in the big war, the American GI becomes the hero in the process. The GI myth humanised the concept of the soldier, which, in turn, marked all military achievements as remarkable and admirable, evoking sympathy from the American people (Blum 1976, 58–59; Martins 2012, 166; Bergstrom 2017, 50).

In *PS Magazine*, the characters Joe Dope and Private Fosgnoff might have taken the human faults to the extreme in their clumsy endeavours, but the sentiment is evident. Joe Dope was known for his dopey look with crooked teeth and large, round eyes, making him look constantly bewildered and lost. The characters could be seen as relatable and credible, in particular for soldiers who lacked confidence in their skills. Reading about two soldiers being disastrously incompetent taught soldiers what not to do, thereby relaying preventative measures in equipment safety (Schumacher 2010, 87–88).

The discourse of military communication is highly instructional, with a significant emphasis on the persuasiveness of the text. In order to best reach their readers, technical writers need to achieve a balance of credibility and emotional appeal—a sense of ethos, pathos and logos in their writing, creating relatable characters in relatable situations. Equally, showing warnings of how not to act and the consequences of poor management or maintenance were prominent methods of teaching within military manuals, where writers emphasised the 'rhetoric of blame' (Steward 2004, 45–53).

The GI myth carries a significant connection to what the historian George L. Mosse defines as the Cult of the Fallen Soldier, as part of what he calls the Myth of the War Experience. The Cult of the Fallen Soldier derives from European war myths, and has its roots in the French Revolution (Mosse 1991, 17–19). The purpose of the Myth of the War Experience was to legitimise the war as an honourable experience and

thereby ignore the grim realities of war. The cult aspect derives from the glorification of the death of soldiers in war as part of nationalistic patriotism, as a 'triumph of the youth' where youth was symbolic of masculinity and virility, while death was considered a form of sacrifice and thereby formed symbolic resurrection (Mosse 1991, 7, 73). According to Mosse, the Myth of the War Experience and the Cult of the Fallen Soldier reached their symbolic heights during the First World War, and the theory was fragmented in the wars thereafter (Mosse 1991, 201–205). However, both the myth and the cult still have strong societal holds within the social constructions of masculinity, tradition and patriotism, which are widely recognised in the continuous modern dramatisations of war narratives within media, such as cinema and video games.

As with the GI myth, the Cult of the Fallen Soldier encapsulates a sense of personal growth through the war *experience*, and equally emphasises the soldier as a heroic image of the 'boy next door' (Mosse 1991, 133). Soldiers become heroic by partaking in a nationalistic institution such as the military, and the soldier becomes the representative of a collective heroism defined by its martyrdom—to fight and die for one's country. The honour in the war plight stripped the concept of martyrdom of the violent reality of actual death in war (Mosse 1991, 133).

Where Mosse's Cult of the Fallen Soldier differs from the GI myth, is that the Myth of the War Experience and the Cult of the Fallen Soldier focus on honour in military institutions rather than in individual experience. Mosse's theories stress the collective imagery of the military as a nationalistic machine, as he examines how the honour of the military is evoked early in life through, for example, toy soldiers and toy guns (see Mosse 1991, 139–144). A similar conclusion may also be applied to military comic book titles of the early to mid-20th century. The Second World War GI myth also featured the notion of patriotism, but the focus was more on the individual experience—functioning on the principle that you too could be a hero.

Eisner's characterisation of clumsy and funny soldiers such as Joe Dope and Private Fosgnoff, as well as the over-sexualised Connie Rodd, was in direct violation of the notion of a structured and honourable institution. Human faults were not only displayed but emphasised, and the sexual undertones suggested by Connie Rodd were anything but honourable. *PS Magazine* was designed to capture the male attention, and did so by appealing to a sense of male gaze through its controversial female characters (see Figure 6.1).

Connie was an intelligent character in the story arcs, but her central role was as a voluptuous fantasy to lead the foolish men onto the correct path of equipment maintenance. Connie also raised some eyebrows from the magazine's female readership right from the start. This was an irritation that reached its boiling point in the 1980s, when Senator Orrin Hatch confronted *PS Magazine* for over-sexualising its female characters, after which the magazine toned down the overall sexualisation of all its female characters (Steward 2004, 88).

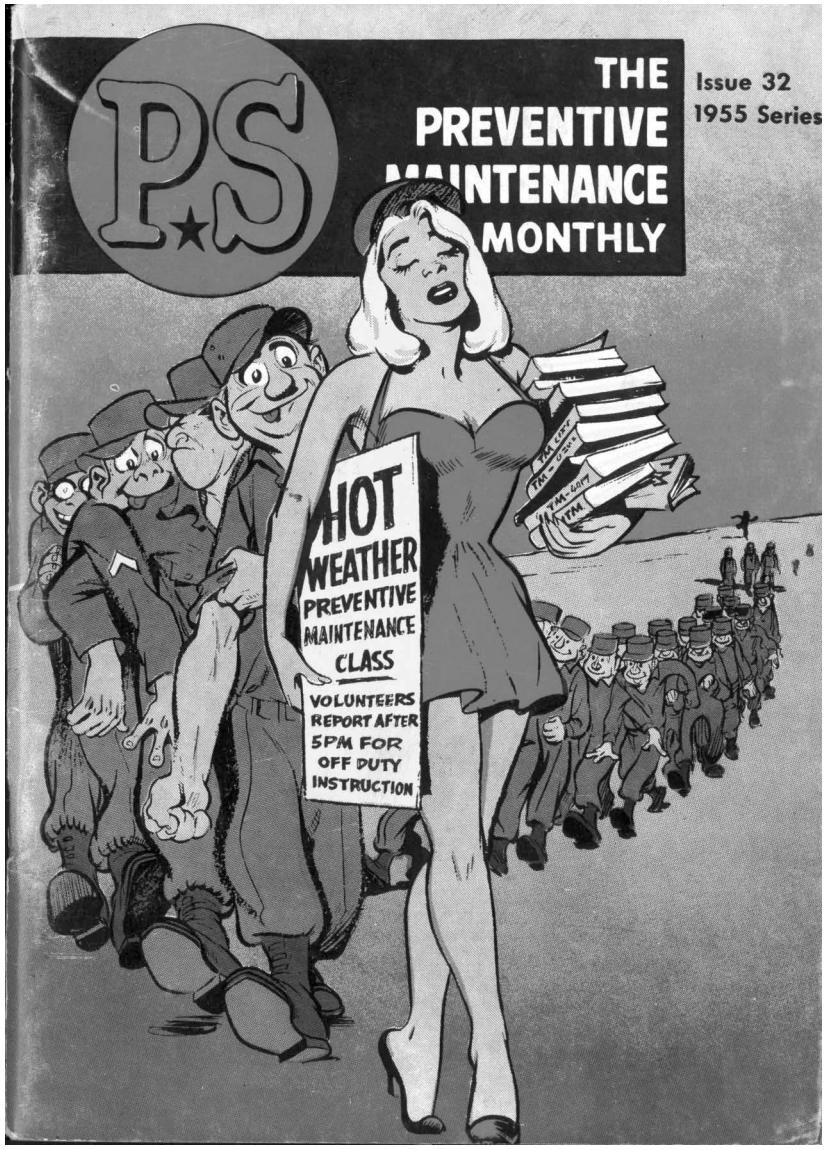

Figure 6.1 *PS Magazine*, Issue 32, 1955, Cover Page.

On the Chopping Block

Regardless of how the mythological connotations and societal perceptions of the military came to shape the way it was considered as an institution, Eisner and the *PS Magazine* editors were unable to convince the higher command of its use of humour. After the magazine moved

from the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland to Raritan Arsenal at Metuchen, New Jersey, in 1955, some significant changes took place in the magazine's humorous approach. The editors were called to a meeting in the Pentagon on 28 June 1955 to discuss the future of the magazine (Fitzgerald 2009, 147).

Prior to the meeting, the staff of *PS Magazine* prepared an informative package, including a thorough study of the use of humour in manual writing, named 'Humor and the American Soldier' (Fitzgerald 2009, 144–151). The study argued that humour was proven to aid in retaining information, and that humour had proven successful in previous pedagogical approaches to learning. Equally, the study argued that the humour used in *PS Magazine* was the same as the humour of the soldier, emphasising that the soldier was an 'everyday American' (thus echoing the notion of the GI myth) (Fitzgerald 2009, 147–148). The study stated that *PS Magazine* had not received any official complaint from soldiers or officers and that:

> It is difficult to imagine that any American soldier has taken offense at any cartoon which has appeared in PS Magazine [...] The soldier-reader of PS recognizes these humorous illustrations for just what they are. It is true that some of the faces are ridiculous, but that in itself is their saving grace—they are ridiculous to a degree that is equally ridiculous for anyone to suggest that they represent, or are intended to represent, typical American soldiers [...] The magazine is designed so that the article talks with [sic] the soldier [...] In this atmosphere (as the soldier reads) there develops no antagonism or ill feeling as a result of what is said or of whatever pictures are shown. Instead, the characters drawn become realistic, alive and seem to converse with the soldier. It creates a most receptive attitude on the part of the reader.
>
> (*Study: Humor and the American Soldier*, 1955, page 6, as reproduced in Fitzgerald 2009, 148)

The study further referred to previous military cartoons, such as *Willie and Joe* by Bill Mauldin, saying that the comic had entered into 'the realm of American folklore' in the way it amused the soldier, despite the unromanticised portrayals of soldiers (*Study: Humor and the American Soldier*, 1955, page 7, as reproduced in Fitzgerald 2009, 140).

Despite their best efforts, the editors of *PS Magazine* were unable to convince the officials at the Pentagon, and significant changes to the *PS Magazine* narrative followed. The character Private Fosgnoff was to be immediately discharged from service, and a replacement was to be developed, with 'good military bearing and appearance' (Fitzgerald 2009, 82). The word 'dope' was no longer to be referred to as Joe's surname, but Joe's narratives were to be titled 'Joe's Dope,' and Joe's general appearance was to be cleaned up. Finally, the humour presented in the narratives

was to be 'connoted through the use of expression and attitude, rather through grotesque distortion' (Fitzgerald 2009, 83) (Figure 6.2).

Private Fosgnoff was discharged soon thereafter, leaving the magazine in 1955. Joe suffered a serious facial injury after an accident in 1956, which was caused by his carelessness. His injuries gave cause for facial

Figure 6.2 PS Magazine, Issue 2, 1951, p. 59.

reconstruction and his teeth were corrected. Joe's role in the magazine thereafter began to diminish, and he played his final part in issue 61, October 1967 (Fitzgerald 2009, 82–83).

New Wars, New Faces

The Vietnam War, as a proxy war in the fight against Communism under the Cold War umbrella, reshaped the public opinion of the American army and governmental intentions, dividing the population as the anti-war movement gained significant attention both from the media and from the population (Matthews 2015). Consequentially, the image of the honourable American GI suffered tremendously, and transitioned into a symbol of American fallibility (Goscilo 2012, 152–3).

Though Eisner personally opposed the Vietnam War, he did not express any moral issues with working for the military at the time. Rather, Eisner saw himself helping the soldiers who themselves had very little control over the war agenda (Schumacher 2010, 152–153). *PS Magazine* not only shared basic information and tips for best maintenance procedures, but also stories and ideas that had come directly from soldiers in the field. When discussing his work with *PS M*agazine, Eisner often spoke of a specific incident from his visit to Vietnam, when a GI approached him and told him that the magazine had saved his life. The GI told Eisner that his tank had broken down in a combat situation on the field, but the GI had remembered a field solution that was published in *PS Magazine*, which helped him fix his tank and get to safety (e.g. Schumacher 2010, 153) (Figure 6.3).

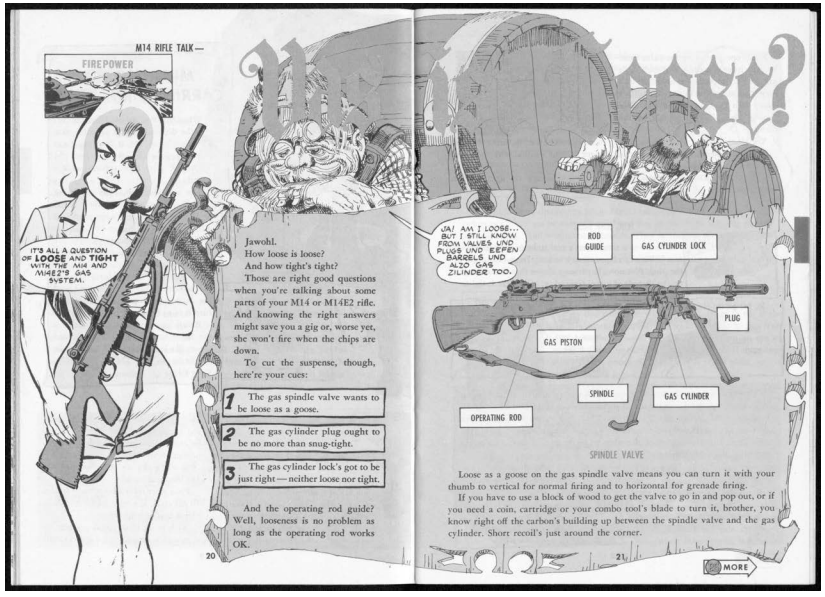

Figure 6.3 PS Magazine, Issue 154, 1965, pp. 20–21.

As the magazine grew, the editors and staff began to broaden the character roster to meet demand. New characters were introduced, such as Bonnie (no known last name). Bonnie was the first African American character in the magazine and was first introduced in 1970 (*PS* 209, April). Although initially created by Eisner, Bonnie's character was developed according to the specifications given by the forces and further shaped by the *PS Magazine* artists that followed Eisner (Fitzgerald 2009, 85). A strong-jawed and broad-shouldered Master Sergeant named 'Bull' Dozer was introduced in 1954 (*PS* 17, February) after the Corps of Engineers began cooperating with *PS Magazine* (Fitzgerald 2009, 86). *PS Magazine's* first aircraft expert was Sergeant First Class Windy Windsock, and was first introduced in the early 1950s (Fitzgerald 2009, 87). Because Connie and Bonnie offered something for the male audience, Sergeant First Class Macon Sparks was introduced in 1977 (PS 290, January) as something to entice women working for the armed forces (Fitzgerald 2009, 87). Sergeant First Class Pablo Hablo (later changed to Habla), the magazine's only Hispanic character, was introduced in 1993 (*PS* 492, November) (Fitzgerald 2009, 88).

Other less conventional characters followed. Among these was Percy the Skunk, an anthropomorphic polecat that was introduced in 1960 (*PS* 95, October) as a representative for the Chemical Corps (Fitzgerald 2009, 86), and The On-Line Warrior, a non-human character with superhero qualities that was introduced in 2001 (PS 589, December) as a representative of the Logistic Management department (Fitzgerald 2009, 88). Anthropomorphism was a common communication tool in the magazine's pedagogical discourse and aimed to personalise the relationship between the soldiers and their equipment, and by doing so further increase a sense of responsibility in their duties (Steward 2004, 55–56).

As the US armed forces have had a significant global presence, several *PS Magazine* segments have been translated to meet the needs of readers in foreign bases. The magazine has been translated into, for example, Chinese, Farsi, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese. Equally, various physical features of the characters (such as hair colour and wardrobes) were altered, depending on the local demographic and its cultural standards (Fitzgerald 2009, 89–93).

Life after *PS*

Eisner left *PS Magazine* in 1971, and was soon introduced to a new world of comics outside of the parameters set up by the military. The underground revolution of the anti-establishment-focussed 'comix' phenomena took him by surprise but turned out to be a positive career opportunity. After becoming acquainted with the comics creator Denis Kitchen, Eisner initially agreed to rerelease his groundbreaking 1940s title *The Spirit* through Kitchen's publishing house Kitchen Sink Press,

with the hope of being able to reintroduce the title for a mature audience through the Underground Comix movement. The first agreement was short-lived, as Eisner soon moved the publishing rights to Warren Publishing because of their wider demographic. After the title had run its course with Warren Publishing in 1976, Kitchen Sink Press continued to publish the reprints, establishing a professional partnership between Eisner and Kitchen that would last for decades (Schumacher 2010, 159–189; Levitz 2015, 122–127). Not long after the revival of *The Spirit*, Eisner released his first graphic novel in 1978—the widely acclaimed *A Contract with God* (Eisner 2000).

Eisner's post-*PS Magazine* work took a significant turn towards the self, and many of the stories reflected back to Eisner's youth in early 20th-century New York City. Growing up in tenements densely populated with Jewish and Catholic families struggling to make ends meet, Eisner frequently met with anti-Semitism. As a child of immigrants, Eisner existed in a state of in-betweenness; he had not quite shared the struggles of his immigrant parents trying to make a life for themselves in a foreign land, but also did not quite feel accepted by his peers due to his Jewish immigrant heritage (Bergstrom 2017, 56–60).

At the end of the Cold War, Eisner took a deeper journey into his past and released the autobiographical *To the Heart of the Storm* in 1991 (Eisner 2008). Marking the end of an era when the world lived in constant fear of a Third World War, Eisner looked back to the Second World War, which was the war that had changed his life. In the novel Eisner leaves for the army and during the train journey reflects back upon his life. Here Eisner's work addressed the military once again, but from a deeper and more reflexive perspective, capturing the individual conscript's anticipation of going to war. Eisner's military experience was no doubt quite different from many of his fellow draftees, but sitting on the train awaiting what was next, Eisner was able to relate to them, and share his thoughts and memories before entering the barracks (see Bergstrom 2017, 43–54). In his later graphic novel *Last Day in Vietnam: A Memory* (Eisner 2013), Eisner returned once more to his military past, sharing stories from the front and portraying the human side of the soldiers at war. The graphic novel presents a set of memories, true stories of witnessing shared by soldiers in the field whom Eisner had met during his travels as a journalist for *PS Magazine* to military bases around the world. Despite the title, the novel included stories from Korea as well as Vietnam, along with one memory from the Second World War, told some 30–40 years after the fact through sketch-like illustration and photographs presented as 'memories' rather than as a collective 'memoir' (Eisner 2013, 5, 7). While not taking a stand against the war *per se*, the melancholy tone of the narrative establishes another deeply reflexive approach to the military, and to the role of the serving GI. *Last Day in Vietnam* contextualises the grim realities of war by showing soldiers in

danger and exposing the true violence of war that *PS Magazine* had so carefully avoided. The novel shows men who appear too shell-shocked by combat to engage in conversation (Eisner 2013, 20–23), or men who display both nihilistic monstrous tendencies while at the same time appearing affectionate and loving (Eisner 2013, 63–66), and the strength of the camaraderie (and even love) that can exist among the men on base (Eisner 2013, 69–78). The violence is not only visually presented in these memories, but is also reflected in one of the photographs included in the novel, showing two men carrying a third to safety in the middle of what appears to be an attack on base (Eisner 2013, 40). Where *PS Magazine* followed a carefully thought-out script that aimed to keep soldiers alive while in service, *Last Day in Vietnam* exposes the unpredictable hardships and consequences of surviving a war.

Conclusion

Eisner is widely known as a spokesperson for the comics medium, promoting the literary values and possibilities that the medium has to offer storytelling-wise. By applying comics praxis to a military milieu, he was able to further extend the medium into new and somewhat unexpected spaces of possibility. While Eisner was producing comics for the American army with *PS Magazine*, the American home front underwent a wave of moral panic, deriving from Dr Frederic Wertham's conclusions about the connection between comics and juvenile delinquency. Obviously, *PS Magazine* was never intended for a juvenile readership, yet the underlying dilemma of military comics' connection to killing (even if the killing was executed in the name of patriotism) exists, even within publications such as *PS Magazine*, because, by helping soldiers survive, the magazine equally helped them survive to kill. This moral contrast has not been directly addressed in previous critical research, and may open another interesting and multifaceted avenue of research in the history of comics.

For Eisner, the intention of his military comics was to create a communicative pathway between GIs in military bases around the world, with the aim of ensuring the safest working environment possible in unsafe working conditions. From Eisner's work with the military, as well as his memoir-novels *To the Heart of the Storm* and *Last Day in Vietnam: A Memory*, it is evident that Eisner approached the military institution from a soldier's perspective and not a military leader placed high in the chain of command.

Working with various army publications during his service, and then being commissioned to develop *PS Magazine*, Eisner was able to showcase comics as a mature and communicative medium for the military sector. That *PS Magazine* has survived all of its challenges and changes, and is still alive today, suggests that his point was valid.

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Urban Conflict

7 Bringing the War Back Home

Reflecting Violence in Brian Wood's *DMZ*

Jörn Ahrens

The future is now. In the face of a Texan secession movement, diverse and actively armed militias distributed across the entire nation, flourishing conspiracy theories centring on the US government, and the clear radicalisation of political culture since the arrival of President Donald Trump on the scene, it is all but astounding that the USA still presents a unified picture of nationhood—and that it, moreover, still appears to be the most significant world power. Many Americans cross-examine their own country's seeming insatiable urge to engage globally in international conflicts. In this respect, it seems quite dumbfounding that scenarios of the impending self-destruction of the American political system and its society that directly respond to the given political and social developments are not already well established in popular culture narratives. Contributions in this direction often remain on a rather dystopic science fiction or metaphoric level, like *The Walking Dead*, *The Planet of the Apes*, *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Homefront: The Revolution* as productions in comics, literature, film and video games. However, games based on concrete ideas about how contemporary politics could unfold into the near future are rare. Indeed, the only extant example for such a scenario—not just from comics but from film, too—is the Franco-Belgian series *Jeremiah*, begun in 1975 by Hermann and Greg. In this storyline, however, the modern American Civil War is mere backstory and serves only as trappings for a post-apocalyptic society that clearly foreshadows imagined plots in the style of the *Mad Max* films. Not until approximately 30 years later, in 2006, did Brian Wood's series Demilitarised Zone (*DMZ*) appear under the spinoff label Vertigo, an offshoot of the major American publisher DC. Wood is one of the most renowned authors and artists in comics of the last decades, one whose work extends from independent comics (*Demo* 2003–2005, *Channel Zero* 1998) to solidly mainstream material (e.g. *X-Men*, *Northlanders*, *Star Wars*, *Conan*) (Lund 2015). *DMZ* was initially made exclusively in cooperation with the artist Riccardo Burchielli, but diverse guest artists soon followed and took over individual storylines. As of 2012, the series is complete at 72 comic books or 12 volumes—or trades, as they are known.

The idea at the foundation of the series is as clever as it is simple: what would happen if the USA were itself struck by war? And what if, moreover, this situation resulted not from attack by a foreign power but from the culmination of homegrown conflict? Wood introduces his story in the following way: at some point in the near future, the irregular paramilitary groups that actually exist across the country unite into a common, loosely coordinated army. Concurrently, they proclaim a 'Free States of America' that breaks away from the national structure of the USA. Given massive, international military engagements that tie up the established military forces, the army and the US government prove to be insufficiently prepared for such an internal threat and soon lose influence and territory. Ultimately, however, another dynamic comes into play in one of the arguably most symbolic of places—New York City. While the Free States Army controls New Jersey and positions itself on the coastline facing Manhattan, the US army holds Brooklyn and Queens. Between them lies Manhattan, now cut off from the world, a no man's land that is declared a *DMZ* by the USA.

Wood chooses an unusual approach for grappling with the theme of war. The setting resituates the experience of modern-day society and its devolution into a state of warfare by lifting war from the peripheries of the Western hemisphere and relocating it to a keenly iconic location in America and indeed all of Western culture—New York City. With respect to this, Martin Lund indicates that much of Wood's work circles around New York as an urban centre; the question is therefore exactly which (and whose) New York is being portrayed here (Lund 2015, 1). For *Channel Zero*, Wood chose the city as the setting for a comic that was clearly drawn up as political intervention. However, *DMZ* takes the setting a step further. Wood's sleight of hand lies in altering Manhattan into a theatre of war, an environment of continual suffering and fraught endurance, of daily battles for self-preservation and the perpetual fear of missile attack by the US army. The characters who populate the stories and who are described in the series are not simply blank strangers given dramaturgic form by their struggles with savage politics and war crimes. Instead, they could be the reader herself or neighbours, friends, relatives. Another element relevant to the possibility of this personal identification is the iconography of relocalisation used in *DMZ*. Independent of the human characters it is the city itself that plays a leading role. New York City, condensed here by Manhattan, is granted clear priority in the representative strategy of the series: 'New York took on a more mimetic quality. This mimetic aspiration is coupled with a frequent use of street signs and a constant use of narrative captions that provide neighborhood designations' (Lund 2015, 18). It is primarily Riccardo Burchielli, as the most prominent artist of the series, who develops a style that reimagines the enduringly familiar city in precise detail as an unrecognisable zone of destruction and war. This he achieves with a

graphic rendering that is without abstraction, that does not fall back on the coarse sketchiness so often used in similar formats. On the contrary, Burchielli's relatively conventional drawing style carries the concept of the series. It visually produces the continuous juxtaposition of New York as we know it (from countless images and mediations) and the gruelling image repertoires of war zone reporting. Even when we involve the pertinent, media-historical models of representation for a destroyed New York, beginning to unfold in the late 19th century already and developing into a vast aesthetic with well-established motives (Page 2008), this finding stands up—precisely because Wood and Burchielli so directly tie in images from current news coverage and openly cite them. The series' distinction lies in relocating or, perhaps better said, translating civil war from the reality of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria into the heart of *the* Western metropolis, par excellence, whereby *DMZ* gains an unmistakable quality of parable. Felix Giesa remarks that the series takes up numerous themes from current events by way of demonstrating the life of a war zone—'fictitious, to be sure, and yet seemingly authentic' (Giesa 2013, 136).[1]

After just seven pages of story, the first book in the series unleashes its first page-filling splash panel, an all-encompassing look at a Manhattan marked by war. From the start—in this, the first of many similarly executed panels that appear over the course of the series—Burchielli succeeds in capturing everything for which *DMZ*, as a series, stands. The beauty of the famed New York City skyline is still apparent, clearly evinced by an unscathed Empire State Building, a topographical orientation point and a landmark for the former, pre-war New York. At the same time, the city is drawn as a deterritorialised landscape. This means that New York is liberated from its territorial features and also, therefore, from its social parameters. This process of deterritorialisation proceeds in *DMZ* by way of a transformation of the metropolis's space, one traditionally carved by clear social structures and rules, into the pared-down arena of war, which dissolves these systems and replaces them with extreme confusion and unpredictability. Territory, according to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, does not precede its qualitative determination, but rather both arise in a mutually referential process: 'The territory is not primary in relation to the qualitative mark; it is the mark that makes the territory. (…) In this sense, the territory, and the functions performed within it, are products of territorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari 1993, 315). The geographical space exists insofar as space is designated, solely as social space—and the social space has always previously been geographically based. Territorialisation denotes that process of the production of a space wherein both interact performatively: the spatial delimitation of a particular territory and its enrichment with specific rules, including a social system. This is precisely what occurs in the DMZ. The former Manhattan, already marked by

its spatial insularity, becomes a completely new type of territory. As a de facto war-torn area and formally DMZ, it sits between the fronts of a civil war. Deleuze and Guattari speak of the 'marking of a territory,' realised as a rhythm (Ibid.). Rhythm because this labelling is variable, is subject to fluctuations and can at once inhabit a space of differing qualities. In particular, they interpret this quality in the concept of smooth and striated space. Smooth space, Deleuze and Guattari clarify, is in no way homogenous space. Rather, it is an amorphous and informal space (474ff.) that, although it rules the modes of organisation, does not institutionalise them reliably. '(…) The smooth itself can be drawn and occupied by diabolical powers of *organization*,' and yet it wields one of the 'force[s] of striation' that reimparts smooth space, puts it back into operation everywhere, on earth and in the other elements, outside but also inside itself (480–81). This fluid, unfinished and simultaneously embattled space corresponds directly with that of civil war and therefore with the topography conceptualised in *DMZ*. The first volumes of *DMZ* establish just such a smooth space by showing the surveying of the war zone through the series' main character's spatial exploration, and effort to become familiar with the radically changed conditions, hard facts and improvised social notches within a once quintessentially striated, now (through war) resmoothed space. New York City, as an iconic American city, makes for an excellent template in this case, since the urban planner's grid system first implemented here also exemplifies a topographical and structural striation that now, in a state of war, exists only as a reminiscence. In this respect, the series' first volume follows a narrative principal with extreme logic: instead of a story progression it evinces snapshots of the quotidian in the DMZ. The main character, a young reporter being initiated into the profession, serves in this part of the series as a type of vehicle in an unfolding parable for America's actual, global exportation of war. Not until the second volume does a classic narrative structure appear, albeit one that is repeatedly interrupted by illustrative depictions of individual people and incidents.

A splash panel in the first issue of *DMZ* vividly portrays the DMZ's spatial nature. Although it bespeaks the city's erstwhile spatial and concomitant social structure, it also evidences that, under the terms of war, these have lost their significance. Deterritorialising, as a smooth space hewn from the striated, means abolishing structure and security, the stripping of spatial orientations as social organisation. In this panel, the buildings are shown maimed by bombings, some completely destroyed and levelled to the ground, others standing as ruins; smoke rises from some areas, indicating that the last attack occurred just recently. What should be a DMZ proves actually to be a zone of exception within which daily goings on are determined by war. Individual buildings are skeletonised not just by the bombings but also riddled with bullet holes, covered in garbage and rubble; litter flies through the air. The sky is

shrouded in dusky clouds, lending it a dark tone of despair that is underscored by the sense of desolation one gets from reading the accompanying words. That said, there are signs of human existence to be found on the ground (to cite the title of the first trade in the series), without even the shadow of a person being shown. Thus the building to the lower right of the image exhibits not just a line of bullet holes, but also an array of graffiti, one of which, as though offering up an official designation, reads 'New New York City.' This bitter-sounding moniker makes clear that in this New York nothing is as it once was. On the rooftop to the immediate left, there is the sight of laundry hung out to dry. The clean laundry—waving like flags in the wind, even here—functions as proof that there is still civilised life in the midst of this landscape of ruins. Not to be overlooked, the painted word 'Help' looms large on the next rooftop over, imploring someone for an all too improbable rescue.

The regular repetition of such subjects organises and characterises *DMZ* as a series and proves to be its iconographic centre. Over and over the full-page splash panels appear, giving large-scale views of this wrecked urban landscape and the new society of emergency unfolding there. Even when irregularly implemented, this element gives rhythm to a story that, in the first volume, follows no linear narrative, but is rather indebted to a traditional process of self-contained, episodic storytelling. By contrast, the splash panels facilitate a repeating, consistent aesthetic experience and therefore mark *DMZ* as a coherent series, from the start. The first serial-narrative form used (Kelleter 2012) is therefore a graphic instrument that actually organises the narrative flow by breaking it up, repeatedly interjecting into the serial. This strategy of storytelling has been characterised by Arno Meteling as 'narrative seriality.' According to Meteling, it is always an expression of economic logic, one that demands standardisation, quantitatively high output and almost uniform consistency in its handiwork. In implementation, therefore, there is a clear-cut need for choosing an 'aesthetic of similarity and thereby of redundancy,' ultimately strengthening the principle of the copy in the face of the original (Meteling 2013, 91). Hereby, the comic medium was a natural choice for early experimentations, since comics radically and fruitfully—like no other medium—use and perfect this technique of the serial. Nevertheless, there is play for aesthetic conviction within the serialised format, room for using the comic logically but above all inventively—as arrestingly demonstrated in this case by Riccardo Burchielli. In this way, an iconography of relocalisation identifies the horrors of war as belonging to us, the recipients. Under the process of relocalisation, I wish to designate the technique that, mise-en-scène in comics form, seizes a familiar space—here, the urban environment of Manhattan—but contextualises it anew. By this means, the actual space, which is familiar from media exposure or from personal experience, receives a new, generally disturbing form. This defamiliarisation of locale

by which familiar places are transformed through scenes such as those we only witness from war-zone reporting—from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia or Syria—sets up a force of identification that clearly differs from a relating that is based on compassion.

Iconography, therefore, insofar as it is brought to bear, essentially always joins up with iconology. The iconological quality of the series does not stem from its approach of figurative representation; in no way does *DMZ* begin experimentally. Rather, it develops with the graphic deterritorialisation of New York as a smooth space in a state of war, with the epistemic translation of a familiar (or at least a familiar seeming) urban setting into a topography that either represents something else entirely or should be a completely different place than this originally familiar topography. *DMZ*'s iconology arises from the effect of a figurative defamiliarisation, a graphical separating of the portrayed from the usual frame of representation. This is particularly true of the first volume, where the connection between the daily assault of the war and the sensory and symbolic transformation of the urban space plays a central role. This Manhattan, a landscape of ruins where children play in the stripped remnants of car wrecks and local militias let sacks stuffed with the corpses of hanged people swing from fire escapes in warning—this Manhattan hardly has anything in common with its pre-war reality. At the same time, these body bags invoke practices of the demarcation of gang territory that have long been customary in American metropolises, now translated into wartime communication. Indeed, the iconological level does add something to this rock-bottom representation of the awareness of the depicted space by targeting its epistemic tradition and enfolding it with a new level of meaning. The reality of war as reality within the DMZ is then identical with a reality in which violence acts as a motif that determines actuality. The everyday in Wood's *DMZ* corresponds with what historian Jörg Baberowski calls the 'space of violence,' a living environment imprinted with the practices and semantics of violence: 'As soon as the surroundings become a space of violence in which the right of the stronger structures life, people become accustomed to injuring and killing' (2015, 107). It is striking how that 'space of violence' is embedded into the 'smooth space' and how the latter is designing the first, as *DMZ*, again and again, demonstrates. Wood's comic series thus plays here with a classic figurative approach to the problem of capturing reality. On the one hand, he uses representations of the unfamiliar and the monstrous in scenarios that have already become iconic; on the other hand, he undermines any certainty we might have that we know what we're seeing. All told, in this respect the medium of comics toys with an established issue, the relation of imaging and perception that, in this form, is specific to the stationary, drawn image.

With consideration for the wars and conflicts ignited in particular by the USA in the wake of 9/11 and which give a series such as *DMZ*

its backdrop, Gerhard Paul speaks of the 'new war of images' (2013, 592). From the war in Afghanistan to the killing of Bin Laden—these were 'primary symbol-political operations' meant 'to overwrite the images of America's defenselessness and vulnerability of 11. September' (593). Thus, he states, the images were designed to create a 'new level of conflict and reality' within the 'asymmetrical wars of the present.' Brian Wood's *DMZ*, too, responds to the meaning of the image, the image politic and the pictorial dissemination of reality and postures of sympathy. Although the series, when mentioned, is included in the category of so-called post-9/11 comics, it is primarily linked to treatments of the theme in superhero comics (Giesa 2013; Goldstein 2014; Funken 2015). The series subjects the strategy of figurative warfare to the contextual exchange of a counter-reading and, instead of producing icons of the august—exemplified by the image politics of the George Bush administration—writes new formulae of pathos, of horror and of suffering in the domestic social environment. The comic thereby essentially radicalises the historical image politics attested to by Susan Sontag, specifically the invitation, in the face of the gruesome, 'to be either spectators or cowards, unable to look' (2003, 42). Even in the case of film one can, as the recipient, close one's eyes. By contrast, the comic leaves us no choice: if you wish to read, you must also take in the images—even when, as Sontag establishes, the reactions to depictions of violence are unpredictable and 'may give rise to opposing responses' (13). Precisely this is, at the same time, only partially the case, since figurative representation—not just in comics—always takes something away, alters details of the portrayal and, much like in filmic framing, selects the clip to be seen as presenting the real world.

The city, pictorially depicted as a 'body in pain' (Scarry 1985), is a city to which anyone can relate, that everyone has already somehow experienced, be it even just medially—New York City is, with respect to iconography, a paradigmatic city. The vulnerability of the Western social living environment is thereby ostentatiously demonstrated, as is the unreliability of that which here appears as social normalcy. According to the art theoretician Horst Bredekamp, images influence not only thought, but also produce feelings and actions. Without the element of iconography, he reckons, enlightenment in the present would not be possible. The 'image act,' Bredekamp says, deploys an 'impact on the sensibility, on thinking, and on acting (…) that arises from the effect of the image and the interplay with the observing, the touched, and the hearing counterpart' (2010, 52). This competency is also found in the images of *DMZ,* as they declare that, rather than soldiers stationed overseas being brought home, war itself has now arrived in the homeland of the war-exporting superpower, the USA. This homeland devastated by war shows that anyone, at any point, can be killed by his fellow countrymen, instead of being attacked by a rogue nation or fundamentalist foreigners.

The image act in this comic serves the visualisation of a potential for violence that is more than just a choice of phantasm. It renders visible a suspended reality—a reality of the horrors of war, which have radically advanced from the uncoupled peripheries of the globalised world into the heart of the metropolis. As such, *DMZ* can be understood as a type of blueprint for an iconology of popular culture. Therein, social reality as an urban environment, as architecture and urban culture, would infiltrate the reader's reality—namely by confronting her with a New York City transformed into a war zone, as it might actually appear were it to become a theatre of war. While in these the technique of alienating the familiar offers the guarantee of, ultimately, pure fiction, in *DMZ* this defamiliarising factor is employed as an artistic strategy that facilitates identification.

Right from the outset, in the first volume, *DMZ* portrays violence as a mode of life, on all levels relevant to daily life. If, as Trutz von Trotha has established, the showplace of violence today is no longer its material but rather its medial setting (2011, 131), then *DMZ* takes this proposition seriously and thereby references the combination of the material and imaginative sides of violence and brutality remarked upon by von Trotha (139). Not only is the entire topography drawn in the acts of violence of war, this also assaults the security of the existence of the individual on a very basic level. In a day-to-day where at any point a further outbreak of war violence and its connected, individualised violence can strike, not even the standard codes of self-preservation have validity. Consequentially, the reality of the living environment, the entire scope of everyday life in the DMZ is organised around a present-day violence that ultimately transgresses the limits of what people are so far familiar with in modern societies. This approach is naturally taken to extremes in this day and age, particularly in zombie comics, which consistently exploit the principle dramaturgically (Griffin 2015). In *DMZ* this aesthetic-dramaturgical concept is visible when apartments are envisaged as improvised clinics, when people re-emerge into the light after a failed invasion by US troops or when refugees from the good life are shown wrung out from the war.

This perspective on the importance of society and culture in times of war and military rule is initially implemented in the series with a narrative level that falls back onto a fairly traditional approach. The still budding, inexperienced journalist Matty Roth flies into the DMZ for an internship with a famed journalist, but their helicopter is shot down over Manhattan, and the journalist is apparently killed. Roth thereupon takes on the role of war reporter in the DMZ and documents it for himself, for the public and not least of all for the series' readership. This is the reason why Matty not only writes but also works intensively as a photographer. In a medium such as comics, which is in any case characterised by images, this would not be absolutely necessary, since the image medium is

included, anyway. The 'click' noise the camera makes in the panel caters to a double exposure; directs the eye of the observer; fuses intermedially the frozen comic panel and the motionlessness of photography; and thereby verifies, as it were, the authenticity of the depicted. The photo produced by the photojournalist becomes the structural and aesthetic equivalent of the comic panel. It is therefore only consistent that the photos that Matty Roth makes in the comic are not translated into images but are only onomatopoeically invoked. The picture-real quality of the panels, with their thoroughly composed aesthetic, corresponds with the picture-real quality of photography, from the outset—although not one of the artists involved in *DMZ* even remotely attempts to deploy a photographically inclined aesthetic. By contrast the series lives and breathes by an emphatic display of the graphical. And yet there remains a difference with respect to a possible translation of the photo in the form of the comic panel. The photo always identifies itself, even when it is no more than an imitated photo in another medium, as documentation of the depicted. In photos, the moment is always set aside for a potential eternity. By contrast, in the panel the reader encounters the frozen volatility of the moment with the knowledge that this moment should actually vanish, only remains ascertainable in time due to a structural impairment of the medium itself. The frozen time in the image offsets the transience of the moment and transports it in the gesture of documenting the actual 'former' for a potential eternity. Nevertheless—and this is made abundantly clear in the example of Matty Roth's photojournalism—it is explicitly this photo-level of the comics that constitutes its central difference from film. Just as the photo does, image development in the comic profits from its stillness and therefore from its emblematic character.

In general, as Giesa establishes, the image strategies in *DMZ* can be classified as an instrument of critical confrontation with the media coverage of war: 'So the narrative flow in comics is continually interrupted by images of digital maps (…), views through camera or rifle scope objectives, satellite or television pictures' (Giesa 2013, 138). Very literally, Matty Roth falls into the field of war and war reportage, rapidly developing into a key figure within the chain of events. Dramaturgically conceived as a journalist, Roth assumes a place in an illustrious band of pop cultural heroes, be they from comics or film. Not only does the journalist appear more or less akin to the ancient, epic type of hero, valour and all, he also stands for the mass-media view of society. With journalists it's a matter of the person who documents what really takes place in a society, or what's more: first brings it to light investigatively. Yet, in *DMZ*'s telling, what is uncovered by the reporter 'on the ground' becomes repeatedly and inevitably amended to suit powerful interests. On the contrary, the truth of what does occur in society is, at its root, notoriously undiscoverable. There are two reasons for this: on the one hand, the truth remains concealed by the very powers of discourse that

actually wield power; on the other hand, truth—in a society that has set up its reality as an infinite loop by allowing media information to circulate—has simply ceased to exist. Even when, in most cases, in the end it plays no role for the development of the story that the hero is endowed with the identity of a journalist (Hergé's *Tintin* might be the most well-known example for this), there are exceptions that persist. Matty Roth counts among these, just like Manfred Sommer's *Frank Cappa* or the comic alter-ego of a Joe Sacco. Again and again, Roth's occupation as journalist advances the storyline and serves as a key element for plot construction and the actions of the most varied characters.

From the start, Wood selects a way of gaining entry into the development of his figure that is as classic as it is simple: by portraying Matty Roth as a journalist in progress. The more he grows into his job as journalist, the more familiar he becomes with the DMZ and its novel social universe. What's more, Roth is the de facto sole journalist in the DMZ; his professional linkage therefore changes frequently. Sometimes he operates as a freelance journalist; other times he works on 'embedded' assignment for the US government; sometimes he's even dependent upon whether anyone is using him for their own goals or not. In this way Roth functions perfectly as an identifying character because the reader is just as new and disoriented in the DMZ as Matty himself, and each must somehow familiarise himself with this foreign, heterotopic and yet immediately adjacent world. It doesn't take long, however, before Roth is a celebrity in the DMZ. He thereby becomes on the one hand a part of the DMZ—but on the other hand, he will remain an outsider, an attentive observer of what occurs both on a large-scale and in the intimate spaces. In this way, Roth functions as a medium for the readership par excellence, a politically neutral but nonetheless ethically engaged observer through whose eyes the reader is shown essential details about the DMZ and also how war in the middle of Manhattan might actually appear. As someone who, in the same measure that he is far-removed from almost all warring parties, also swiftly advances to the rank of insider with a view of the DMZ's major events, Matty Roth appears at first as a neutral character. For this reason, he should also be in the position to convey the portrayed conflict's most disparate, on the whole antagonistically entwined stances and perspectives—and to regularly report on them over the course of the series.

However, although thoroughly penning Matty Roth as a sympathetic yet naive greenhorn only serves to make the reader familiar with a character whom she must hence accompany through the DMZ's ruined landscape; Wood soon thereafter switches the narrative strategy with the interaction of his protagonists. Since he wins too great a degree of likability, being a straight guy who simply bears with the people in the DMZ, Matty remains a decidedly flat, unconvincing figure over the course of the series' first two volumes. Still, it is repeatedly underscored

that Matty Roth, as a journalist, even though currently residing in the DMZ, never truly belongs there. Even more, Wood creates Roth as a character with a high degree of opportunism: over the course of the series, he cuts deals with practically all active parties in the DMZ. Roth proves himself to be anything but a figure of integrity, and not at all a straightforward hero figure, but rather more of the ultimate collaborator who—sometimes for his own interest; sometimes out of idealism; or then again for pragmatic, professional reasons—makes alliances with one person or another. Using this linchpin for Matty Roth's personality, Wood ultimately, and intentionally, equips his main character with ambivalently drawn traits. And so, Roth makes mistakes. He makes bad decisions when his status as a DMZ celebrity and as someone on the outside, each in equal measure, lead him to believe that he himself can choose what is good for the DMZ and what isn't. As a consequence of such missteps, even Zee, an extremely savvy activist in the DMZ who, from the first volume, is his friend and even at times his lover, turns her back on him. Matty Roth sleeps with many women, all of whom he loves in some way but amongst whom he is hardly in a position to choose and enter into a long-term relationship—which is why they are, one after the other, redacted from the series, either by being killed off or simply by beginning to hate Roth. Only Zee reappears again and again. Her narrative function is as obvious as it is trivial, even though she is created as an emphatically well-rounded figure: In this series, Zee embodies conscience; she is forever acting as Matty Roth's superego or even as antiquating, one-woman-chorus for the interests of the DMZ in general. For a long while, as the stories swirl around the TradeWell Affair (which are blatantly modelled on the US Blackwater scandal in Iraq), Roth's ambivalent personality appears to ripen into a complex, in no way perfect but fundamentally dependable character.

The depiction of violence in *DMZ,* and therefore the violent reality represented in the series from the peripheries of war, in point of fact distant from the readership, contains, by the same token, very iconic and narrative elements. This violence, or at least the constant threat of violence on widely varied levels, repeatedly and symbolically drives the action of the series forward and, often enough, is itself sufficient to direct the plot. The territorialisation of violence in *DMZ* captures the smooth space of a demilitarised but virulently violent Manhattan and ultimately every fibre of a social reality as it can still be established in the ruins of the former metropolis. It encompasses the people in the DMZ affectively and becomes a decisive constant of existence for all living there who are introduced as active characters. This consistently elucidates what Jörg Baberowski postulated about spaces of violence in general: in a living reality dominated by violence, it is impossible to escape violence in the long run. One will at some point become a participant in the violence. 'Violence produces compulsions out of our control. One loses sovereignty

over the situation' (Baberowski 2012, 19). For this reason, it is not at its roots decisive how one fundamentally positions oneself, but rather, for a 'dynamic of killing and injuring' as such it is only relevant 'how and where one acts' (Ibid.). This perspective ultimately puts Matty Roth's basic optimism in a somewhat different light, if it and his actions are revealed extremely intensely from out of a living environment overcome by violence, which Roth must not simply document but resist on an individual and an existential level. Ultimately, according to Baberowski, where 'violence has become a normal, daily occurrence' (20), no one questions it. As a self-evident fact in a living environment, violence no longer needs a justification, but rather affects its social reality structurally: 'Instead, every man holds it as sensibly imperative to arm himself and take precautions to avoid becoming the victim of violence' (Ibid.).

Note

1 Quotes from German publications have been translated into English by the author.

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8 Infrastructural Violence

Urbicide, Public Space and Post-War Reconstruction in Recent Lebanese Graphic Memoirs

Dominic Davies

Introduction: When Is City Life Grievable?

The Lebanese Civil War, which raged for 15 years from 1975 to 1990, centred most intensively on, around and *within* the country's capital city, Beirut. The conflict transformed the beautiful Mediterranean coastal city, known for its rich cultural heritage and heterogeneous communities, into a cautiously demarcated, though also ever-shifting spatial kaleidoscope of militarised zones. In particular, the war reduced the built environment's public spaces—its piazzas and squares, its beaches and roads, even its iconic architectural landmarks and ornate façades—to infrastructural 'weapons' (see Lambert 2012). The physical architecture and material infrastructure of Beirut itself became a weapon, its fractured terrain reflecting the increasingly complex sectarian conflict that spread through the city. The erection of segregation barriers and numerous checkpoints between militarised areas became commonplace, as well as the reduction of swathes of the city to zones of hot conflict, eradicating from Beirut much of its widely (if sometimes nostalgically) celebrated pre-war, cosmopolitan civilian life (see Calame and Charlesworth 2009, 47–52). Most notably, the city was carved in two by the installation of a Green Line that divided East from West Beirut, a space that became 'reified as a no-man's land with a handful of militia-controlled-crossings' in between (Yassin 2012, 69–72).

The Lebanese Civil War is indicative of the global urbanisation of warfare in recent decades. As Stephen Graham documents at length, 'urban areas are now the "lightning conductors" for the world's political violence. Warfare, like everything else, is being *urbanised*' (Graham 2004, 3–4). Clearly, warfare produces catastrophic moments of what Slavoj Žižek would call 'visible' violence—maimed bodies, injured civilians, heavily armed militia men and so on (2008, 1). Where such instances of corporeal violence are represented, photographically or otherwise, they can provide, as Judith Butler observes, 'the conditions for breaking out of the quotidian acceptance of war [by inducing] a more generalised horror and outrage that will support and impel calls for justice and an end

to violence' (2009, 11). Such images go so far as to 'frame' the conditions of what can be 'recognised' as 'grievable life'—a weighty contention if we concur with Butler that, '[w]ithout grievability, there is no life' (15). Visualising civilian populations clearly suffering from the visible afflictions of bomb blasts and rogue gunfire can shock viewers into recognising the human loss produced by urban warfare, certainly. But for the lives of such victims to really be recognised as grievable, a range of future social and infrastructural conditions similarly need to be made visible.

While acknowledging the importance of direct, 'visible' violence in mind, I therefore want in this chapter to change tack slightly, focussing on how recent Lebanese graphic memoirs, written and drawn by comics artists who were themselves present in Beirut during the Civil War (albeit as young children), excavate and critique a different kind of violence—an embedded, citywide, *infrastructural* violence. In particular, I will address Lamia Ziadé's *Bye Bye Babylon: Beirut 1975–1979* (2011) and Zeina Abirached's *A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Leave, To Return* (2007), both drawn and written first in French and translated into English in 2011 and 2012, respectively. These artists visually reinterpret wartime Beirut by challenging its increasingly segregated and fragmented urban infrastructure in comics form. Indeed, they foreground this infrastructural violence, in particular by deploying two formal techniques at which the comics form is particularly adept: first, a self-reflexive and subjective 'process of mapping, which, as Edward Holland outlines in his discussion of Joe Sacco's work, shifts away 'from the fixed ontology of maps-as-objects towards an increased engagement with the practice of mapping' itself (2015, 86); second, what Catherine Labio, among others, has identified as the 'structural similarities between buildings and comics' (2015, 315; see also Ahrens and Meteling eds. 2010; Dittmer 2014). Here I emphasise Labio's work on comics and urban space, in particular because their structural correspondence is, for her, more than formal coincidence. Comics' 'extradiegetic mirroring of domestic architecture,' she contends, 'gives the page its basic structure and accounts in significant measure for the readability, emotional power, and popularity of the genre' (2015, 317). This distinction is crucial when turning, as I will in this chapter's concluding sections, to the exploration of how these Lebanese graphic memoirs seek to reconstruct, post-war, the urban fabric of the still deeply segregated, infrastructurally violent and traumatically violated city of Beirut.

This chapter argues that the cartographic and architectural representations of the city in Ziadé's and Abirached's graphic memoirs expose the less visible, though fundamentally embedded, infrastructural violence that both exacerbated and actively participated in the more visible instances of Lebanon's wartime violence. In so doing, these comics allows us, following Žižek, 'to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure of this directly visible "subjective" violence, violence performed

by a clearly identifiable agent,' to instead perceive the contours of an otherwise 'invisible,' structural violence (2008, 1). Published some two decades after the overt violence of the Civil War came to an unstable conclusion, these Lebanese graphic memoirs engage 'post-memorially' with the infrastructure space of Beirut's wartime urban landscape. By foregrounding the deeper spatial and structural violence of the war, they seek first to emphasise how this violence endures in the present, and second, to offer a future-oriented vision of a more inclusive, desegregated post-war city space.

Marianne Hirsch writes that 'postmemorial work [...] strives to reactivate and reembody more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression' (2013, 210). In Ziadé's and Abirached's memoirs, the built environment of the city *itself* functions as the overarching 'memorial structure' into which they reinsert their childhood memories of familial spaces and civilian resilience. As Abirached herself recalls in a recent interview, referring to the Green Line that once divided Beirut in two:

> I realized that I had to get to know the city after the war. We used to live in a very small place that was very protected and we couldn't go to the other side. Once I was able to go to the other side I felt like I had to know everything about this other side. [...] the city is changing and a lot of the old buildings are disappearing. I feel like we are losing—it's too strong to say that—but it feels like we are losing our identity. Now the city is beautiful but I feel like it doesn't belong to the people who are from here. There is an economic gap also—like everywhere—this is not special to Beirut.
>
> (Dueben 2015)

Crucially, then, both Abirached and Ziadé undertake this postmemorial work—a process of reconstruction, or as Labio might argue, a literal *rebuilding* of the city—in order first to foreground, and then resist, the 'invisible' violence that remains embedded into Beirut's infrastructural and demographic makeup in the post-war present. In so doing, they raise questions about what kinds of life are 'grievable,' as Butler would have it. For Ziadé and Abirached, Beirut's pre-war cosmopolitan urbanity (and the public spaces in which it thrived) is placed centre stage as the Civil War's most grievable casualty.

Highlighting the 'economic gap,' or socio-economic inequality, that has further contributed to the proliferation of segregationist and securitisation infrastructures that increasingly divide Beirut (see Schmid 2006, 368–76), Abirached suggests that it is not so much the individual civilian life that is grievable. Rather, it is the public urban spaces that allowed for the flourishing of a certain *kind* of civilian *living* that must be grieved.

Such spaces, and the ability to inhabit them safely and visibly, cultivate urban 'heterogeneity' and 'encounters with difference,' as a number of urban commentators have shown (Mitchell 2003, 18; see also Amin 2008). Within a post-war context of lingering sectarian division, such urban spaces might foster not only tolerance, Abirached realises, but a mutual recognition of the grievability of lives between those inhabiting Beirut's still physically segregated communities. If, for Butler, '[t]here is no life without the conditions of life that variably sustain life, and those conditions are pervasively social' (2009, 18), we might then add—in addition to food, shelter, education and healthcare—the need for an *infrastructural* condition of shared public space.

Both Ziadé and Abirached reframe through their visual and narrative mappings of Beirut the private space of their childhood home as a public space that facilitates the heterogeneous coexistence of multiple ethnic and religious groups. In so doing, they mobilise their personal post-memories of Beirut in an effort to facilitate the mutual construction and recognition of grievable life between communities still segregated from one another in the post-war present. Thinking about these comics with Butler thus allows us to emphasise the temporal futurity of what are otherwise ostensibly backward-looking memoirs: 'life is grievable, [and] it would be grieved if it were lost, [*only* when the] future anterior is installed as the condition of its life' (15). The emphasis on the 'future anterior' here helps us to understand that Ziadé's and Abirached's post-memorial (and sometimes strategically selective) engagement with Beirut, the city, grieves for the loss of its public spaces in the 20th century so as to reconstruct them as necessary infrastructural conditions for civilian urban life in the 21st century.

Infrastructural Violence: Urbicide and Public Space in Beirut

In their coinage of the term 'infrastructural violence,' ethnographers Dennis Rodgers and Bruce O'Neill contend that 'broad and abstract social orderings such as the state, citizenship, criminality, ethnicity and class' are engrained into the physical shapes of infrastructure space with often violent ramifications (2012, 402). Their emphasis on the 'everyday' effects of infrastructural violence, when situated within the context of the everyday violence of the Lebanese Civil War—which after all, continued for well over a decade, becoming a way of life for many Beirutis—takes on a particularly pernicious aspect, a condition that has been described as 'urbicide.' Martin Coward defines this phenomenon in opposition to urbanity, which is constituted through 'an existential condition of plurality or heterogeneity' (Coward 2009, 13–15). If the 'urban' designates a condition of coexisting difference that cities and their public spaces, which, as noted earlier, pack diverse populations

and different networks of cultural and social exchange into proximal spaces, tend to facilitate, then urbicide is the violent destruction of these public spaces. For Martin Shaw, 'urbicide is a form of genocide'—hence their shared root—and constitutes 'the fundamentally illegitimate form of modern war in which a civilian population as such is targeted for destruction by armed force' (2004, 153).

As I have already started to suggest, both Ziadé and Abirached recognise in their comics that this concept is a particularly pertinent lens through which to view the historical trajectory of Beirut as both a city and an urban society. Once a cosmopolitan site of cultural interaction, indicatively known in the West as 'the Paris of the Middle East,' during the Civil War different factions strategically recalibrated, if not purposefully destroyed, the city's physical fabric, fragmenting it along ethnic and religious lines to further their political agendas. The city's urban infrastructure—its multiple grids of gas and water pipes, electricity and phone lines, bridges, overpasses and roads—was fundamentally reshaped by the sectarian tensions that fuelled the war. As Sara Fregonese observes, 'Practices such as blocking streets, piercing buildings to create passages, partitioning neighbourhoods, climbing towers or even commemorating urban warfare martyrs, all played a part in the tactics and strategies used to bifurcate—physically and ideologically—this urban environment' (2009, 310).

Fifteen years of urban violence therefore drastically altered the socio-ethnic geography, physical topography and concrete layout of Beirut, and these violent spatial reconfigurations of the city's infrastructure linger on, reproducing in the present some of the war's most divisive aspects. After the war amnesty of 1991, which included peace talks and the installation of a precarious post-war government, a concerted attempt to resolve and work through the various tensions that had both led to, and been exacerbated by, the conflict, might have seemed a fundamental project. However, with sectarian enclaves still existing side by side in close spatial proximity, though no longer separated by dividing walls or roving militias, to move forward peacefully the Lebanese government encouraged a '[s]tructural forgetting,' leading to 'media-censorship laws (the 1994 broadcasting law), and the complete absence of criminal tribunals, compensation schemes, or truth and reconciliation committees' (Larkin 2010, 617–8). As Robert Bevan has argued, this forgetting takes place as much through the built environment as it does in the realm of politics or social relations: 'To lose all that is familiar—the destruction of one's environment—can mean a disorientating exile from the memories they have invoked'; correspondingly, for Bevan the post-war reconstruction process requires the literal rebuilding of the urban public spaces that have been eradicated by war, and both Ziadé and Abirached engage in such a project. Recovering urbanity in this infrastructural way functions to tie both individuals and segregated ethnic enclaves 'back into a wider community' (2016, 24).

War memories have, of course, despite Lebanon's institutional amnesia, remained in Beirut's public consciousness and have marked its post-war cultural production, and the graphic memoirs discussed in this chapter are no exception. Such memories tend to crystallise 'around lessons learned, injustices still to be resolved, and the recurring threat of political violence' (Larkin 2010, 617). Crucially, as Craig Larkin concludes from extensive interviews with the city's inhabitants, 'it is in the scarred urban landscape that [many] situate and explain their nation's violent past,' pointing to 'derelict houses, bullet-pocked walls, and posters and memorials to fallen fighters as the most enduring reminders of war' (621). For esteemed Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury, Beirut is 'a broken mirror' (De Cauter 2011, 427); 'in piecing together the present,' he has observed, 'we rethink our memories. […] We make a choice what to remember and what to forget' (Rahim 2015). In 'second-generation civil war literature,' Lebanese novelists and artists have sought to reconstruct the urbanity of pre-war Beirut 'in writing and drawing […] and thereby preserve it for the future' (Lang 2014: 488–9).

Images are crucial in this reconstruction process. 'Beirut is photogenic,' writes Miriam Cooke: 'Ironically, the Lebanese Civil War made it even more so. During the war […] and afterwards the urban violence was obsessively photographed' (2002, 393, 397). This emphasis on the photographic image resonates with Hirsch's commentary on postmemorialisation: photographs outlive 'oral or written narrative,' she writes, functioning 'as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world' (2013, 215–6). But Hirsch's commitment to the photograph is, in the case of Beirut, a troubling one. As Butler points out in her discussion of war photography, 'the photograph, in framing reality, is already interpreting what will count within the frame' (2005, 823). She continues, 'the frame takes part in the interpretation of the war compelled by the state; it is not just a visual image awaiting its interpretation; it is itself interpreting, actively, even forcibly' (2005, 823); the result, as I have already indicated, is the state-sanctioning of what lives, and indeed, what landscapes are deemed grievable (Butler 2009, 15).

Memorialised in singular photographs of a violated urban landscape, wartime Beirut circulates visually in the 21st century as an unpeopled geography of physical destruction. The violence of the Civil War, its civilian casualties and the complex kaleidoscope of sectarian militias are neatly and retrospectively consolidated into photographic representations of bullet-ridden buildings and other dilapidated infrastructures. All that then remains is for the buildings to be torn down and new ones to be built, a reductively smooth and amnesic process of post-war reconstruction that fails to account for the violence inflicted on ordinary civilian lives, as well as modes of civilian living. Within this visual culture, the urban infrastructure that bears the scars of Lebanon's wartime violence simultaneously—and somewhat paradoxically—overshadows the direct, 'visible' violence of civilian casualties while also becoming

the site around which effective efforts to reconstruct Beirut's pre-war urbanity, such as those undertaken by Ziadé and Abirached, must necessarily mobilise, as we shall now see.

Lamia Ziadé's *Bye Bye Babylon*: The City as Witness

With these infrastructural and cultural coordinates in mind, then, the publication of a number of comics about the Lebanese Civil War in recent years is perhaps unsurprising (see di Ricco 2015; Merhej 2015). As I have already suggested, comics intervene particularly effectively into the infrastructurally violent conditions of both wartime and post-war Beirut. They triangulate the relationship between, on the one hand, a city still bearing the scars of urban conflict and, on the other hand, an archive of singular images devoid of cohesive and conciliatory narratives, with and through a countercultural (or subcultural) form that has a long historical tradition of resistance to censorship laws—particularly in the USA but also more recently in Lebanon itself (Hatfield 2005, 21–22).[1] This anti-institutional counterculture thus functions to complicate Lebanon's official 'War Story.' As Cooke points out, this 'War Story,' with the 'W' and 'S' capitalised to indicate its hegemony, is 'allowed,' whilst 'others' are 'proscribed,' leading her to ask, 'How could the Lebanese war be told within the frame of the War Story when its experiences exploded outside available frames' (2002, 398–9)?

With their architecture of multiple frames, as well as the self-referentiality of this framing that is also central to their formal mechanism, comics are able to expose the 'frame' of this 'War Story,' which 'seeks to contain, convey, and determine what is seen' (Butler 2009, 10), and, we might add, what is remembered. They foreground the violence of the war's censored memorialisation through a simultaneously literal and metaphorical account of the infrastructural violence of the urban conflict. As Hillary Chute argues, '[i]n its succession of replete frames, comics calls attention to itself, specifically, as evidence,' as a form of witness (2016, 2). Crucially, as Chute observes elsewhere, this retelling, or witnessing, in comics form is 'not necessarily an emotional recuperation,' somehow '"cathartic" or didactic'—more importantly, the relationship is 'a textual, material one,' allowing comics to make an explicitly 'political intervention into mainstream representation through their form' (2010, 2–4).

Ziadé's *Bye Bye Babylon* and Abirached's *A Game for Swallows* are comparable in their paradoxically double-facing yet strategic project of memorialisation and amnesia, one that they both route through the infrastructural coordinates of the city. The authors mobilise their post-memorial drawings of private and familial spaces as public moments of civilian living, thereby countering the violence of urbicide that endures in the present. In this sense, they follow well-known Lebanese 'war memoirs,' such as Jean Said Makdisi's indicatively titled *Beirut*

Fragments, published at the end of the war in 1990. There, Makdisi's fragmented diary entries and vignettes document Beirut's 'new topography' as the city's pre-war 'cosmopolitanism'—'the rollicking pluralism of its society'—is spliced into segregated enclaves through proliferating urban violence (1999, 68–70). Her mapping of a fragmented form onto Beirut's splintering urbanism resonates with Khoury's metaphor of the 'broken mirror' (Khoury 2016) and underpins also both Ziadé's and Abirached's comics. These artists recount their childhood experience of the war, reconstructing it through a montage of first-hand—though because of their youth intermittent—memories; second-hand stories from their parents; and, most importantly, the violent traces that remain indexed by the city's physical infrastructure. Crucially then, for both Ziadé and Abirached these post-memories are not only excavated out of but also rebuilt back into the city they depict.

Jörn Ahrens, Arno Meteling and others have demonstrated at length the long historical connections between urban spaces and comics (2010). Cities, with their 'combinations of words and images in the form of signage and graffiti' (6), read as comics and vice versa, and Ziadé and Abirached exploit this formal and material correlation, rebuilding the grid of the city through the grid of their comics sequences. Both Ziadé and Abirached carefully map the layout of the city in opening splash pages, frontispieces and appendices. As Labio observes in her qualificatory discussion not of 'architecture in comics' but 'the architecture *of* comics,' we find in these Lebanese graphic memoirs that 'the architectural disposition of the page intensifies the emotive charge of comics by triggering individual and collective memories—of home, childhood, and earlier examples of narrative art' (2015, 317). Though drawn in starkly different styles, for both Ziadé and Abirached, the city contains memories that, once recovered, might replace the post-war infrastructural violence of ongoing sectarian division with Beirut's pre-war public urban spaces, thereby fostering a future of cosmopolitan plurality. In so doing, both comics counter Lebanon's mainstream 'War Story' that sustains and reproduces lingering sectarian division through their efforts to rebuild a socially inclusive and spatially fluid—that is to say, public—urban space.

A crucial component of this rebuilding process is the threading of personal memories (and post-memories) into their depictions of the city, lacing them through and around street corners, architectural landmarks and Beirut's distinctive coastal topography. An early map in Ziadé's *Bye Bye Babylon* is inflected with a subjective psychogeography as she maps locations remembered from her childhood and moments of violence that impinged upon her family and their friends not temporally but spatially—the multiple sites of violence thus occur and exist not through time, but with claustrophobic simultaneity.[2] Its hand-drawn quality emphasises her subjective response to the city, whilst the future tense of the accompanying textual commentary—'he'll continue,' 'they'll endure,'

'they decide'—strains against the spatially static map, drawing it into the present. The subjective quality of this map is then foregrounded by a contrasting to scale map, which is included as an appendix to the comic. Here a grid overlays the map of Beirut to indicate its cartographic accuracy, whilst the accompanying key registers locations from the narrative—Ziadé's 'parent's apartment,' her 'father's office'—alongside significant historical sites, such as the Holiday Inn and the British Bank of the Middle East (Figure 8.1).

This interlacing of Ziadé's personal memory and city space challenges a 'War Story' that blames Beirut's pre-war plurality for its subsequent violence, a line of argument that continues to justify ethnic segregation in the present. Ziadé meshes her own childhood memories with the post-memories received from her parents—not to mention the infrastructure of the city itself—to make a blanket condemnation of the war's urban violence, regardless of sectarian affiliation. Through this refusal to affiliate herself with a sectarian faction, she moves beyond the 'visible' violence of the Civil War's local infighting to target her critique

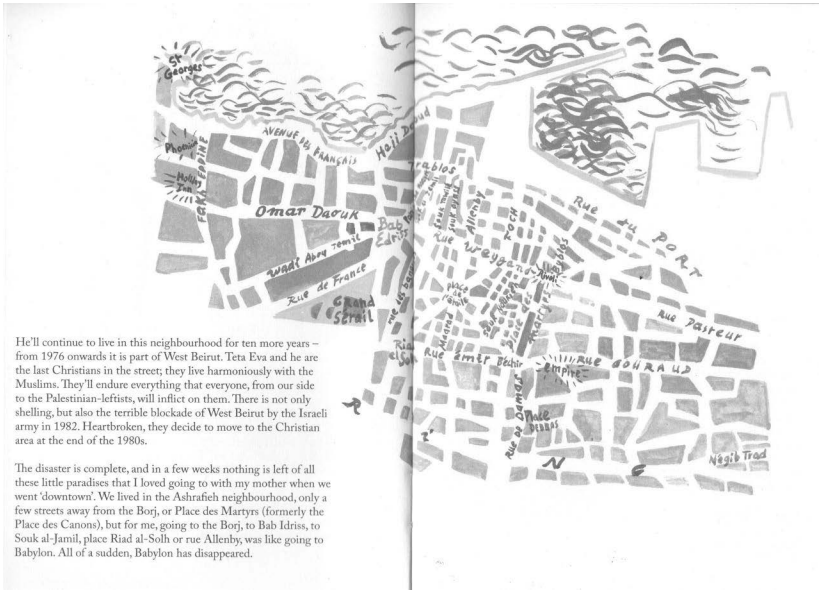

Figure 8.1 Ziadé's hand drawn map of downtown Beirut is layered, palimpsest-like, with now iconic locations in the postmemorial visual culture of the Lebanese Civil War (the Holiday Inn, Place des Martyrs), but these are nevertheless interspersed with locations she recalls from her childhood (the Empire Theatre, Place Riad al-Solh). From *Bye Bye Babylon* by Lamia Ziadé, published by Jonathan Cape. Reproduced by permission of The Random House Group Ltd. ©2011.

instead at the larger, more abstract geopolitical, neocolonial and economic forces that fuelled the Civil War.

Her depiction of Beirut's physical urban infrastructure is again crucial here. Reflecting its built infrastructural environment in comics form allows Ziadé to explore, to return to Rodgers and O'Neill, first, how these abstract 'relationships of power and hierarchy translate into palpable forms of physical and emotional harm,' and, second, and perhaps more importantly, how this focus on the violence embedded in the city's infrastructure offers 'a potential place for imagining more positive politics' (2012, 402). Ziadé uses comics' cartographic capabilities to identify the violent, urbicidal eradication of the spatial conditions needed for heterogeneous civilian living that took place during the Civil War. But she also recovers instances of her and her family and friends' resilient wartime civilian living, re-construing her remembered engagement with these pre-war public spaces—or 'little paradises,' as she calls them—as a social blueprint from which future, desegregated public spaces in Beirut might be constructed. It is in this sense that she deploys what Carolene Ayaka and Ian Hague describe as comics' 'inherently multicultural form,' which draws on 'both cultures of images and cultures of words' (2015, 3) to rebuild back into the city multicultural spaces in which the grievability of lives are mutually recognised.

If at first glance *Bye Bye Babylon* resembles a children's colouring book, this is soon disrupted by descriptions of massacres reprinted as awkwardly positioned chunks of Times New Roman typescript. Meanwhile, though the comic opens with bright imagistic reproductions of imported Western commodities drawn in a child's scrawling crayon, images of militia men armed with kalashnikovs, destroyed buildings and segregated streets slowly seep into the comic's frames, jarring against this childlike aesthetic. The comic gradually blends its depictions of commodities such as ketchup, Kellogg's cereal and cocktail peanuts with aesthetically similar representations of weapons, from AK-47s to RPGs, all the while returning to page-length spreads of public buildings and squares that become increasingly damaged by wartime violence as the comic progresses.

In one double-page spread, the text visually conflates the 'wondrous items' finding their way from New York and London onto Beirut's 'supermarket shelves' with the 'stockpiling' of 'arsenals with weapons and munitions'—meanwhile, a ketchup bottle leaking a bright red ooze visually links these circulating commodities with the imminent bloody violence of the war. Through these visual cues Ziadé levels her critique at a set of geopolitical forces—as well as corrupt Lebanese politicians and self-interested militia leaders—that exploited local ethnic-religious tensions for their own gain: commodities such as ketchup, which have flowed from the Cold War's hegemonic players through Beirut and into the Middle East, are easily replaced with arms, she implies. For

international parties and a profit-oriented global economy more generally, it matters not whether these profitable trade routes funnel consumer goods or deadly weaponry into the city. As M. Lynx Qualey argues, Ziadé reveals how 'war is ritualised, commercialised, capitalised on, and profited from'—indeed, how it 'is just another product' (2011).

Crucial here is the extent to which the city emerges as itself a protagonist, functioning as a kind of physical witness that testifies against the urbicidal violence perpetrated against it. The colourful products of the comic's opening pages jar with the browns and greys of the scenes of urban warfare, images that, in turn, recollect and reframe the photographic documentation of wartime Beirut as it circulates in the mainstream postmemorial visual culture. On the one hand, Ziadé contextualises these singular images with in-depth accounts of the war's multiple participants, including a comprehensive timeline alongside the comic's concluding map in its final pages. On the other hand, Ziadé's personal memories of pre-war Beirut's celebrated cosmopolitanism are infused back into the city's private spaces—her family's apartment, the backseat of her father's car—as an expression of civilian resilience against the urban destruction that rages outside. For Ziadé, the urbicide resulting from the Civil War has broken up a cosmopolitan condition of urbanity, one that is occluded from the singularly framed photographs of Beirut's violated urban landscape but that she here seeks to recover through her comic's multicultural form, mobilising it towards a future-oriented post-war reconstruction project.

Zeina Abirached's *A Game for Swallows*: Drawing Urban Division

In *A Game for Swallows*, Abirached embarks upon a similar project, visualising the eradication of Beirut's pre-war urbanity through a cartographic, semi-abstract mapping of its violated physical infrastructure. This is most obviously undertaken in an early sequence of double-page spreads, which begins with a thickly textured, black-and-white map of city streets. Turning the page, the reader finds these black-and-white streets restricted to the margins of the pages, the centre transformed into a void of white nothingness. Then, in the final splash page of the sequence, the marginalised streets are fragmented once more, reduced to segregated blips on the urban landscape that are denoted by violent infrastructures such as 'oil drums,' 'containers,' 'barbed wire' and 'sandbags,' all of which, the narrator informs us, 'carve out a new geography' (Abirached 2012, 24–29) (Figures 8.2 and 8.3).

As Eszter Szép writes of this sequence, here 'Beirut is cut in two,' the 'whiteness' indicating 'inaccessible space' (2014, 31), which is to say, space that is no longer public. The comic asks readers to witness the process of urbicide suffered by Beirut through the gradual eradication

Figure 8.2 The first double-page spread in *A Game for Swallows* opening mapping sequence.

of the city's social and spatial connective tissue. However, there remains also in these pages a small, encircled location within the fabric of the city, labelled 'here,' denoting the resilient space of Abirached's family apartment, where, as the comic goes on to document, civilian living continues in defiance of the urbicide that is otherwise violently eradicating Beirut's public spaces. In response, and as for Ziadé, Abirached here laces her personal memories and post-memories of her familial private life into the city, reconfiguring them as alternative public spaces.

Furthermore, though the comic documents the fragmentation of these spaces, jamming the pages with blockades of debris that disincentivise

Figure 8.3 The final double-page spread of Abirached's opening sequence, in which Beirut's urban geography is carved up by various violent infrastructures.

movement through the city, the climactic moment to which the whole plot leans—the safe arrival of her parents who, intermittently throughout the narrative, are seen making their way across the physical barrier of the Green Line that separates West from East Beirut—is premised on the ability to bypass these physical barriers and the sectarian divisions that they symbolise. Indeed, the eventual arrival of Abirached's parents defies urbicidal efforts (and, it should be stated, post-war governmental policies) to segregate different ethnic and religious communities from one another, documenting the lengths to which civilians will go to retain and reproduce the city's pre-war public spaces.

As I have suggested, then, the private space of Abirached's childhood apartment is reconfigured throughout the narrative as a space of public conviviality as different members of the civilian community come and go, interacting peacefully; sharing food and stories; as well as collaborating collectively towards the provision of infrastructural services, such as access to gas and electricity (see, for example, Abirached 2012, 115–9). As Hirsch writes of postmemorial cultures more broadly, 'the screens of gender and familiality, and the images that mediate them [...] function as screens that absorbs the shock, filter and diffuse the impact of trauma, diminish harm' (2013, 226). However, Abirached gives these 'screens' literal shape through the physical walls of her family apartment, reinserting the public space they contain imaginatively back into Beirut's city space. The comic deconstructs the singularly framed visual memorialisation of the Civil War as it circulates in photographs of bullet-riddled urban buildings and dilapidated infrastructure, revealing instead their physical interiors to emphasise the continued existence of civilian resilience and public community in spite of the urbicidal and infrastructural violence that sought to segregate Beirut's urban environment.

As for war memoirs such as Makdisi's, then, both Ziadé and Abirached foreground the infrastructural violence of the war, as it is engrained into—and then memorialised visually through photographs of—Beirut's physical urban architecture. In so doing, they both also challenge an official 'War Story' that continues to justify the division of contemporary Beirut along sectarian lines, an infrastructure of segregation that, in turn, allows different religious communities to deem some lives grievable and others less so. If Ziadé and Abirached's commitment to the urbanity of pre-war Beirut—configured here as a society of tolerance, intercultural exchange and religious plurality—is refracted through an undeniably nostalgic lens, they nevertheless emphasise the political urgency of this recovery project by asserting public space as a necessary condition for recognising the grievability of all kinds of multicultural civilian lives. In so doing, they map out the spatial and social coordinates for a post-war society no longer shaped by segregationist infrastructures and factional enclaves, promoting instead a vision of urban space that can be mobilised effectively towards conflict resolution.

Perhaps most valuably, however, is the extent to which these comics self-reflexively foreground the fundamental role that the physical space of the city has to play in such resolution; they use the multidimensional architecture *of* the comics form to rebuild a publicly hospitable city, broadening the private space of the childhood home to accommodate this function. Whereas in Lebanese society more widely the effort 'to remember and to forget' has been informed, as Samir Khalaf has documented, by an 'impulse to seek refuge in cloistered spatial communities' (2002, 307), these comics invert this process. They reclaim a personal archive of Beirut's private spaces in order to build a new postmemorial

urban geography, one that transcends infrastructural violence and sectarian division through an emphasis on post-war public collaboration, a mutual recognition of grievable lives and the possibility of future peaceful coexistence.

Notes

1 Most notably, the comics collective *Samandal* were prosecuted by the Lebanese government under these post-war censorship laws for 'a) inciting sectarian strife b) denigrating religion c) publishing false news and d) defamation and slander' in 2009. After protracted legal proceedings, they were found guilty of these charges, and the resulting fines have financially crippled the collective, which nevertheless sporadically produces new comics anthologies that remain contingent on crowd-funding campaigns (see Samandal 2015).

2 Ziadé does not paginate her memoir, and so I am unable to point to the specific point at which this occurs in the book. However, this lack of pagination might itself contribute to the reader's multidirectional encounter with the comic. Bereft of chronological coordinates, readers instead encounter the text spatially, more like a map, as Ziadé works to secrete pre-war cosmopolitan spaces back into Beirut's urban present.

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Law, Justice and Censorship

9 The Lives of Others

Figuring Grievability and Justice in Contemporary Comics and Graphic Novels

Golnar Nabizadeh

Introduction

This chapter considers representations of law and justice in selected comics through the notion of cultural grief and 'grievability.' Visual narratives can be positioned to disrupt or support dominant ideologies within local, regional and global contexts, and this becomes particularly important when exploring people and places that may be unknown or unfamiliar. Comics scholars have long emphasised the ways that the medium can operate as a politically engaged form of inquiry as artists generate unique ways of imagining subjectivity and challenging discursive iterations ascribed to minority cultures in conscious and unconscious ways (Adams 2008; Chute 2010; El Refaie 2012; Mickwitz 2015). In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Judith Butler identifies the potential for grief to generate political agency, asking, '[w]ho counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life?' (20). Butler emphasises the transformative possibilities that loss may provoke for individuals and communities. Globally, the widespread loss of life through conflict and state-sanctioned violence, among other events, means that questions about whose lives are acknowledged as such and whose are disavowed remain pertinent to debates about the recognition of human rights. This epistemological enquiry is named 'cultural mourning,' with an emphasis on exploring the value of recognising, rather than seeking to recuperate, loss.

The discussion will progress in three parts: first, grievability is anchored via the concept of 'cultural mourning,' that is, the notion that human life is inevitably marked, or touched, by loss, and that grief acquires not only personal but also public and social dimensions that can offer significant insights into how we are bounded to our 'others' (Caruth 1996; Derrida 2001; Butler 2005, 2009). The next section offers an in-depth analysis of mourning and melancholia, as delineated by Freud, before turning to the productivities of melancholy—a modern articulation of attachment to loss—in relation to the recognition of historically marginalised subjects and bringing this understanding to bear on Kiyama's *The Four Immigrants Manga* (1999). The final section will consider representations of justice in *The Photographer: Into War-Torn*

Afghanistan with Doctors Without Borders (2009) by Emannuel Guibert, Didier Lefèvre and Frédéric Lemercier, and Safdar Ahmed's online comic *Villawood* (2015).

The 'textural' qualities of comics, their particular aesthetic and verbal strategies through which these stories are conveyed, articulate detailed, and counter-historical narratives that frequently embed efforts to raise readers' consciousness within their pages.[1] Examples include Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2008), Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006) and Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen* series (1976–1980). The techniques that comics creators use to shape their respective story-worlds can help recuperate marginalised subjectivities such as women, refugees, people with disabilities, LGBT+, among other groups, as they focus on personal stories about loss and resilience. These themes remain highly relevant in contemporary global crises. The claim for the centrality of grief to modern life thus rests on the recognition of widespread loss of human life due to political violence, social persecution and the systemic disavowal of lives that are not regarded as 'grievable.'

By framing the inquiry via a consideration of the productivities of loss, this chapter suggests that understood as a social as well as private phenomenon, grief offers a useful prism to explore the shared construction of identity politics. These fields of inquiry have been influenced by the literary theory of Cathy Caruth, particularly her work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992) has also provided groundbreaking critical research on the intersections between memory, trauma and testimony in relation to framing and representations of the Holocaust. In the last two decades, Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) and David Palumbo-Liu's *The Deliverance of Others: Reading Literature in a Global Age* (2012) have all extended debates around intersubjectivity, violence and trauma in contemporary contexts. In the field of visual studies specifically, Nicholas Mirzoeff's *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (2011) delineates the genealogy of visual culture via postmodernism and suggests that visuality and the 'right to look' (or countervisuality) are interpolated within a complex of power relations.

A precedent for the kind of work proposed by the current chapter is Mieke Bal's full-length study on the political art of Doris Salcedo in *Of What One Cannot Speak: Doris Salcedo's Art* (2010). Bal suggests that Salcedo's primarily non-verbal installation art (or performance) induces a kind of 'affective contagiousness' that encourages viewers to respond to the 'reality of precarious states' (106). In relation to visual culture more broadly, Marianne Hirsch writes about the legacies of historical trauma in her work *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012). Originally developed in relation to

the individual, collective and cultural legacies of trauma in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (2003), Hirsch explores 'postmemory,' or the inheritance of traumatic memory, in relation to other contexts, such as the generations of stolen children in Australia and dictatorships in Latin America. Hirsch emphasises the way that subsequent generations maintain a creative investment in the past, particularly through visual technologies. Understood as a historiography of affect, the study of loss allows alternative social and individual histories to emerge from the annals of time. Visual cultures such as comics can thus tend to pasts and people that are frequently occluded from dominant public discourses. Indeed, the historically marginalised status of comics, at least in the West, has meant that they are able to incorporate a multiplicity of perspectives. Early comics were ephemera in a material sense—designed to last only a day or two after their publication in Sunday newspapers. As Jared Gardner argues, 'it cannot be entirely a coincidence that at precisely the period of the greatest wave of new immigrant into the United States—predominantly from Eastern Europe and Asia—the *sequential* comics form first emerged in the United States' and that the shift in the newspaper workforce helped shape the emergence of stories about 'racial and ethnic "Others"' (135). The 1950s saw the rise of censorship in comics across the USA and Australia as authorities became concerned with the alleged detrimental impact of comics on the social behaviour of children and adolescents. In recent decades, however, this trend has been reversed as comics have become popular vehicles for social criticism, frequently in the form of autobiography and memoir.

The respective works by Butler and Hirsch intersect with a public conversation between Gayatri Spivak and Eduardo Cadava from 2004 entitled 'The Politics of Mourning.' In a discussion moderated by Jean-Michael Rabaté, Spivak and Cadava focus on Derrida's work on mourning, while using the occasion to contemplate the meaning of his then-recent death. The speakers assign mourning a specifically political mandate, distinguishing this from the depoliticised process (at least in the West) that is sometimes associated with grief as a solely private experience. By contrast, Cadava suggests that grief conveys something about the individual as it reveals our connection to others—and that this recognition can offer valuable insights for connectivity within the public realm. He draws on Derrida's work on the relationality between self and other—which Derrida refers to as the 'trace' of the other—instantiates both dispossession and boundedness because it reveals the bonds that persist in the face of loss and absence.

Mourning and Melancholia

The cornerstone of the modern discourse on loss is Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917). His essay describes the different kinds of

responses to the loss of 'a loved person' or 'some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, and ideal, and so on' (243). In either case, the loss is felt to be that of an 'object' in the psychoanalytic sense. Freud observes that there are two kinds of affective reactions to loss: mourning, on the one hand, and melancholia, on the other hand. In mourning, the individual eventually de-cathects, or detaches, his or her libidinal investment in the lost object and is therefore free to reattach that energy to another object. For Freud, mourning is carried out through grief work, or *Trauerarbeit*, which is produced through an active remembrance of the lost object—what Tammy Clewell describes as a kind of 'hyperremembering' (2004, 44).

This intensely focussed form of remembrance is the correlative of the more general process of reality testing, and it is through this remembrance that the mourner accepts that the object 'no longer exists' (Freud 1917, 255). Here, the ego, driven by its narcissistic interest for survival, dissolves the attachment with the lost object as it confronts the threat of its own extinction (255). In this account, the subject does not identify with the lost object but rather, through the painstaking progression of *Trauerarbeit*, re-establishes the boundaries of his or her ego. By retracting the libido from the lost entity, the ego inures itself against the further importation of loss that afflicts the melancholic subject. The distinction is the after-effects of the object's loss, which arise from the individual's inability (or disinterest) to de-cathect his or her libidinal energy from the lost object. In contrast to mourning, in melancholia, some element of the loss remains unconscious, so that the subject knows 'whom he (sic) has lost but not what he has lost in him' (245).

The outcome of this unconscious aspect of the loss is that the subject withdraws the libido into the ego, so that the latter begins to identify with the abandoned object. Freud identifies narcissism as the mechanism that enables this identification, a technology of the self that acts as a substitute for the 'erotic cathexis.' Moreover, the substitution takes place as one relation consumes the other, in accordance with the ego's oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development (258). The melancholic relation with the lost object is thus characterised by ambivalence, where 'hate and love contend with each other; the one seeks to detach the libido from the object, the other to maintain this position of the libido against the assault' (256). This process is characterised by Freud's statement: '[i]n mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself' (246). The diminution of the mourning period is signposted by the subject's ability to re-append the libido onto a substitute object. Once this process is enabled, the 'poor and empty' world bears, unexpectedly, the fruits of the subject's labour, and thus the period of mourning arrives at a 'spontaneous end' (Freud 1915, 307). Indeed, Freud's conception of melancholy can be further understood in relation to an earlier iteration in classical humoural theory, where the

four humours—blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm—were considered to play an important part in regulating temperament and mood. Physician-scholars from this era, most notably Hippocrates (5th century B.C.E.) and later Galen (131–201 C.E.), argued that melancholia, a morose and maudlin state of mind (often associated with philosophic or artistic preoccupations), was caused by an excess of black bile.[2] As Eng and Kazanjian suggest, the 'classical trace of melancholia's corporeal origins calls attention to the twentieth century's vigorous, often catastrophic, embodiments of loss—over and against intervening splits between body and mind, spirit and matter.' (8) In this way, the historical conception of melancholia bears upon contemporary debates on loss and mourning—evident in works such as Kristeva's *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1992) and Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (1997). Perhaps the most significant shift on the conception of melancholy as figured in these works, among others, is its de-pathologisation and reconfiguration as an affective constellation that cleaves subject formation with political discourses—particularly notable in relation to queer and migrant subjectivities.

One example is Anne Anlin Cheng's exploration of the role of melancholy in the production of minority subjects in *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (2001). Extrapolating on the work of Freud, Bhabha and Butler, among others, Cheng's study focusses on identity formation for Asian and African Americans, with particular attention to the unspoken dynamics of race relations in the USA. Cheng argues that 'public grievance is a social forum and luxury to which the racially melancholic minorities have little or no access' (174). Within the strictures of the modern nation, these minorities hold an uncomfortable position as the recognition of their grief remains outside communal acknowledgement. And yet, this grief does not simply dissipate but, perversely, informs the defences of the nation. Similarly, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha argues that the presence of minority, especially migrant, subjects within modern nations articulates:

> [T]he death-in-life of the idea of the 'imagined community' of the nation; the worn-out metaphors of the resplendent national life now circulate in another narrative of entry-permits and passports and work-permits that at once preserve and proliferate, bind and breach the human rights of the nation. Across the accumulation of the history of the West there are those people who speak the encrypted discourse of the melancholic and the migrant.
>
> (236)

The 'migrant,' then, circulates as a figure that threatens the nation as its 'death-in-life,' wedged as it is between elision and hushed forms of recognition within and beyond the borders of the nation. Narratives of

'encrypted discourse,' to use Bhabha's term, form the central concern of Cheng's study, who suggests that melancholia (in accordance with Freud's model of ego-formation) provides a 'provocative metaphor for how race in America, or more specifically, how the act of racialization, works' (50). Cheng suggests that melancholic migrant narratives speak back to the erasure of migrant subjectivities under narratives of the American nation, whose very constitution depends on the simultaneous recognition and disavowal of those identities.

Drawing against erasure is evident in Henry Yoshitaka Kiyama's *The Four Immigrants Manga*, originally self-published as a collected graphic novel in Japan in 1931, which explores the challenges faced by Japanese migrants to the USA, specifically in the first three decades of the 20th century. Kiyama created the work while living as an art student in San Francisco. The story follows the lives of four protagonists (Henry, Frank, Charlie and Fred) over 52 self-contained episodes that provide an invaluable interface between the characters' lived experiences and events of historic and cultural significance. One such episode, entitled 'The Great War,' conveys the struggle for citizenship faced by Japanese immigrants, focalised through Charlie's desire for inclusion. Kiyama uses a conversation between two friends, Charlie and Frank, to situate political and legal concerns of historic significance for the *Issei* (first-generation Japanese migrants to the USA). The episode commences with Charlie's address to Frank that he is thinking of joining the US army, to fight in the First World War, in an effort to be awarded citizenship (see Figure 9.1). In the second panel, he declaims with an outstretched arm, '[s]ome people say Americans won't recognize us 'til we have 10,000 *tombstones* in our San Mateo cemetery. But I think I oughta join up, get citizenship, and then run for *president!*' Frank's response, 'Now *there's* an idea,' coupled with his furrowed brow, suggests that he shares Charlie's concern for recognition (italics in original, 118).

Here, Kiyama configures citizenship negatively through loss, that is, through the notion that 10,000 Japanese individuals must lose their lives in order to be conferred recognition by the nation. Charlie's ambitious plan to run as a Presidential candidate almost eclipses his preparedness to risk losing his life to improve his political and legal status in the USA. His opening statement, however, frames this desire within a broader recognition of boundedness to the *Issei*, thus, 'I've been thinking 'bout the future of our countrymen in America.' In the third panel, Frank and Charlie meet for a drink after the latter has signed up for military service, and Kiyama shares a tongue-in-cheek joke via Frank, who states, 'if you don't come back alive our cartoonist'll run out of ideas!' The next four panels depict imagined scenes of battle as Charlie slices the bodies of two German soldiers. His cavalier statement, '[t]ime to let'em taste the steel of [his] *samurai* sword' supports the stylised and cartoony rendition

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The Great War in Europe

Figure 9.1 From *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924* by Henry (Yoshitaka) Kiyama, translated by Frederik L. Schodt, p. 118. © Estate of Yoshitaka Kiyama, Frederik L. Schodt. Used by permission of Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley, California.

of battle (see Figure 9.2). As with his depictions of other events, Kiyama infuses this gruesome battle scene with irony, as the ease with which Charlie cuts through the German soldiers demonstrates the 'superior' quality of his samurai sword.

Surviving the war, Charlie triumphantly returns to San Francisco with a collection of Pickelhaube[3] as 'booty,' which, he claims, demonstrates

Figure 9.2 From *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924* by Henry (Yoshitaka) Kiyama, translated by Frederik L. Schodt, p. 119. © Estate of Yoshitaka Kiyama, Frederik L. Schodt. Used by permission of Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley, California.

his knack for fighting strategically. Charlie then informs Frank that his next move is to 'buy some land, marry a white woman, and build a *home*' (italics denote the hand-lettering used in the English translation) (119). As Frederick Schodt suggests, Kiyama's inclusion of these aspirations may have provoked 'an ironic, slightly bitter laugh' by the comic's contemporary Japanese American readers, because Charlie's plans to 'buy land, marry a white woman, and obtain citizenship—were illegal at this time' (145). Despite serving as a soldier, citizenship is still withheld. Frank and Charlie go to the Town Hall, where the latter requests citizenship from the official in 'broken' English. In response, the official casually states, 'Um! Not for Orientals yet,' and as Frank mutters 'Uh, oh…,' Charlie adopts a pose of intense surprise, his hat lifting off his head, with the marks, '?!' signifying his range of responses. Coupled with a dismissive wave of his hand, the ease with which the official discharges Charlie's case demonstrates the struggles faced by *Issei* in having access to equal opportunities. Indeed, Japanese migrants would not be entitled to the right to apply for citizenship until decades later, when Congress passed the *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952*. Standing outside City Hall, Charlie complains, 'After that, I feel like a real idiot…,' and Kiyama ends the episode with the trademark levity that marks each incident in *The Four Immigrants Manga* as Frank quips, 'Guess you don't always have a knack for *strategy* after all, eh, Charlie?!' (119). The combination of word and image in this episode allows Kiyama to economically and effectively display the systematic disenfranchisement of the *Issei* under successive administrations, and the ways in which their civil rights were curtailed or denied under a variety of legal and political privations.

The melancholic figure of the migrant finds a belated form of recognition within the text. Kiyama's text utilises these characteristics of the medium to great effect, recuperating the occluded figure of the *Issei* within the pages of his story, without seeking to resolve the tensions that permeate the text. For minority subjects, who frequently navigate legal and political incursions, comics offer a textual analogue to a world where verbal and visual cues are conjoined, and meaning is acquired through their interdependence. David Eng similarly argues that melancholia can be used as a model for political agency:

> [P]eople of color and postcolonials are all coerced to relinquish and yet to identify with socially disparaged objects on their psychic paths to subjectivity […] If, for instance, there is no public language by which a loss can be recognized, then melancholia assumes a social dimension of contemporary consequence that must be acknowledged and analysed as a problem of the political.
>
> (2000, 1278)

In Eng's words, melancholia can thus be used to mobilise a politics of grief that lies outside public regimes of mourning, and which can speak

back to politics across private and public realms. Migrations—traumatic or otherwise—similarly involve processes that can be powerfully expressed through the apparatus of visual narration. As a fractured narrative medium, comics offer a productive scaffold—one characterised by gutters that fragment the story-world of the text—on which responses to trauma and loss can be built. The 'interdependent' gap between the respective written and visual syntaxes thus appends two distinct levels of meaning—literal and metonymic—to the text.

Modern comics frequently critique the policies and ideologies that shape real-world circumstances. In his introduction to Joe Sacco's graphic novel *Palestine* (2001), Edward Said wrote that comics seemed to defy 'the ordinary processes of thought, which are policed, shaped and re-shaped by all sorts of … ideological pressures,' concluding, 'comics freed me to think and imagine and see differently' (ii). The production of the new, the exciting, the unorthodox, to which Said attests, are the kinds of creations that Marianne Hirsch focusses on when she emphasises the 'relation of visuality to the experience and the transmission of personal and cultural trauma— trauma that may be unspeakable but may be communicated viscerally and emotionally through the alternative cognitive structures of the visual' (2004, 1211).

'Cognitive structures of the visual,' to use Hirsch's phrase, find two forms of representation in Guibert, Lefèvre and Lemercier's *The Photographer*, where Didier Lefèvre's journey with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is transmitted via drawn and photographic strips. Didier was invited to accompany MSF on its mission to Northern Afghanistan in 1985 during the Afghan-Soviet war, with the specific assignment of photographing the impact of the war on the civilian population. He took around 4,000 photographs on the mission, including a few that he thought would stand as a testament to his death after becoming stranded on his return journey to Pakistan. Guibert utilised photographs and drawn images in tandem, to reconstruct Didier's story. The co-presence of the photographs and the drawn images establishes a dynamic storyline where readers must creatively navigate between each form to identify the nuances, gaps and slips of the narrative.

In one sequence, the group sets up camp in a village in North Afghanistan, and Didier notes that '[t]he days pass and along come the wounded. Followed by more wounded, and more, and still more wounded,' a statement accompanied by photographic images of the doctors receiving multiple patients. One of the doctors, Robert, treats a man with a bullet wound in his back. The narrative notes that although the man has what would usually be referred to as a 'minor wound,' 'it's useful to witness what a person with a minor wound has to go through' (127). Overleaf, 20 images from a photographic contact sheet occupy most of the page, unaccompanied by text, as they capture subtle shifts in posture and angle as Robert extracts the bullet from the patient's body.

In this sequence, the moment-to-moment transitions decelerate the pace of reading as the reader absorbs the witnessing taking place through the camera lens. In this sequence, the images slowly 'zoom' onto the procedure from mid-shot to close-up, so that the reader becomes increasingly acquainted with the man and his expressions of pain as the bullet is extracted. The final panel on the page comprises text only as Didier's voice re-enters to explain,

> That's a scene I've seen a hundred times at the movies: the hero takes a swig of whisky, bites down on a piece of wood, and aaargh! They extract the bullet with pliers in one sharp tug, then the guy wipes the sweat from his brow and is fine. The truth is that the whole thing is excruciatingly painful.
>
> (128)

Didier's words draw attention to the representation of pain as witnessed in a visual documentary format compared to their stylised depiction in feature films. By the time the reader arrives at Didier's statement about the excruciating pain of the procedure, they have already seen the patient's agony captured through the photographs, the absence of a narrative voice amplifying the horror of the event (Adams 2008, 62). Contact sheets are frequently discarded, a form of 'visual detritus' associated with popular culture (64). Yet, in *The Photographer*, they are used to great effect, offering significant insights into the ways in which lives in the Middle East are witnessed—through the camera, as well as drawn—and which begins a process of grievability, for the individuals whose lives and losses are recorded within the pages of the work. In the words of Jeff Adams, comics and graphic novels thus act 'as a medium for recounting societal or collective memory' and 'facilitate the ways in which we come to experience, and to know, traumatic history' (67).

Commenting on Freud's formulation of trauma, Cathy Caruth explains that this phenomenon is caused by 'a shock that appears to work very much like a threat to the body's spatial integrity, but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time' (1993, 25). Judith Butler describes trauma as a radical 'interruption' to the life narrative that sustains our being-in-the-world:

> If a life is constituted through a fundamental interruption, even interrupted prior to the possibility of any continuity, then narrative reconstruction will also have to be subject to an interruption if it is to approximate the life it means to convey. Of course, learning to construct a narrative is a crucial practice, especially when discontinuous bits of experience remain dissociated from one another by virtue of traumatic conditions.
>
> (2001, 32)

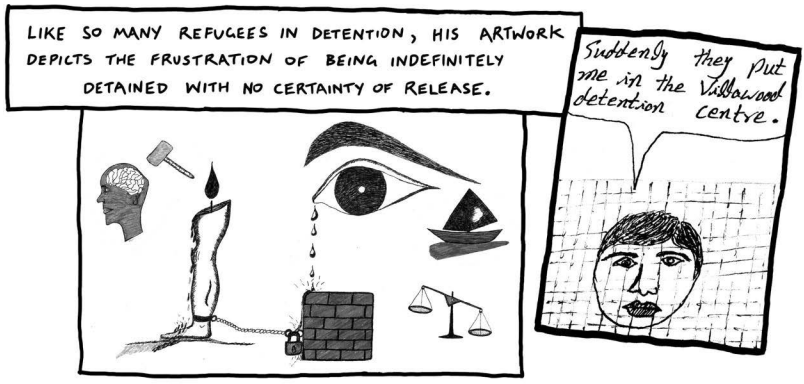

Figure 9.3 From Safdar Ahmed, *Villawood: Notes from an immigration detention centre*, web comic, GetUp!—The Shipping News.

Breaks in linear temporality, then, are one hallmark of traumatised time, and each of the respective narratives under examination evokes—by different means—this conception of fissured time, where the past and present bear painfully upon each other. Safdar Ahmed's comic, *Villawood*, depicts the author's first visit to the eponymous detention centre in Sydney, Australia. At the centre, he sets up a 'small art workshop' as a way to 'get to know people,' finding that, 'without always putting it into words, some refugees draw about their experiences' prior to their arrival in Australia, as well as in detention. One of the detainees, Ahmad, depicts his experience of indefinite detention through a symbolic composition, alongside a smaller sketch (see Figure 9.3).

Consisting of a collection of images, the first panel appears to have been drawn over a relatively extended period, while the adjoining panel is more realistically rendered, with iconic representation of Ahmad's face drawn behind a wire fence. The abstracted elements in the first panel, such as the scales, weeping eye and candle-leg chained to a wall, are not placed in a sequential order but are arranged schematically. This arrangement encourages readers to bring a range of associations to bear on how the elements may be understood in relation to one another. The move between the two modes of signification—symbolic and realistic—speaks of the way in which the representation of traumatic events can affix themselves to multiple forms of expressions, as they speak of a fractured relationship with, in this instance, indefinite detention while grappling with other traumata. Here, meaning is deferred so that it exists in between these alternate forms of representation.

The comic also reproduces Ahmad's handwriting, noting that the latter would write 'beautiful couplets on napkins in Urdu' (see Figure 9.4).

Figure 9.4 From Safdar Ahmed, *Villawood: Notes from an immigration detention centre*, web comic, GetUp!—The Shipping News.

While a translation of a selected couplet is provided, the colouring and texture of the panel background invites the reader to stay with the image over a longer duration in time. Ahmad's handwriting acts as a trace of his now belated presence, a reminder of his death from a presumed heart attack while in detention. This textual presence speaks against his erasure; the inclusion of his story and drawings in *Villawood* creates a literal frame of recognition that persists beyond his death. By including images drawn by the asylum seekers, the comic acts as a melancholic reminder of the lives that have been lived, and some lost, in Australian detention centres—lives that have not been recognised as such in mainstream Australian legal and political discourses, and which may otherwise remain ungrievable.

In late 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees described the humanitarian crisis on Manus Island as 'a damning indictment of a policy meant to avoid Australia's international obligations' (Davidson). At the time of writing, Manus Island is in the process of being closed down, with most detainees being deported to the USA, excluding nationals from the eight countries (Chad, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen) broadly barred from entry under the Trump administration's travel ban (Amnesty). For those subjects, there is now a double exclusion underway. In the words of Behrouz Bochani, a Kurdish journalist and detainee on Manus Island, 'refugees have been able to reconfigure the images of themselves as passive actors and weak subjects into active agents and fierce resistors,' and as a

group that has been able to 'refashion the image of themselves as the 'Other' (2017). The work that *Villawood* performs supports this 're-fashioning,' to use Bochani's term, as it depicts not only some aspects of the lived experiences of the asylum seekers but also their creativity and resilience in the face of trauma.

Conclusion

Comics panels, and the gutters that help shape them, offer a visual cognate to the lacunae that punctuate language itself. The tension generated within and across the panels that make up a comic and through the gaps between word and image are ideally suited to exploring the discrepancies in the distribution of justice by recovering the human subjects who are otherwise ignored or rendered invisible through some forms of legal discourse. The recognition of loss in comics thereby offers a productive hermeneutic through which to explore the representation of law and justice in relation to particular stories about history, place and identity. In *Precarious Life*, Butler identifies the potential for grief to activate a variety of political and social processes, and emphasises the impact that loss engenders in terms of its transformative possibilities. The acknowledgement that each subject is changed—perhaps irrevocably—by the loss of another, highlights the ongoing relevance of grief to social, cultural and political life. The work of mourning can thus be understood as a productive process that can help recognise the significance of ongoing relationship between individuals, culture and grief.

It is within the framework of such boundedness, and the vexed relations that constitute the social realm, that this chapter has explored the representation of grievability and literary justice in comics. Visual narratives are an important source of subjective and sensory detail and offer unique insights into historical and social traumas. They also offer empirical detail about different and changing ways of seeing the world and its contents. In a meditation on the image and narrative, Tobin Siebers writes, '[t]he image may teach nothing, but it does open wounds' (2004, 1320). By extension, for those who are unable to mourn within dominant discourses of nationhood, the ongoing recognition of 'wounds,' or traumas, becomes a politically infused strategy of resistance to losses that remain attached to figures such as that of the migrant—a person whose recognition is frequently elided within public discourses of grief.

Cheng similarly argues that, '[t]he model of melancholia can help us comprehend grief and loss on the part of the aggrieved, not just as a symptom but also as a dynamic process with both coercive and transformative potentials for political imagination' (xi). Thus, melancholia may be invoked as a politically charged position that signifies resistance towards the occlusion of grief in the public domain. While the comics discussed here dramatise a response to loss and injustice, they offer only

partially redemptive or consolatory resolutions to the pain of grief. Instead, they retain an open-ended engagement with the past, and demonstrate an attempt to honour the pain of loss, and particularly the loss of individual subjects through a form of cultural mourning and grievability. Framed in this way, attention to the productivities of melancholia can provide one way of exploring the nexus between social justice, affect and political agency in the world today.

Notes

1 Chute uses the term 'texture' to describe the dynamic attributes of the comics page, that is, 'its flexible page architecture; its sometimes consonant, sometimes dissonant visual and verbal narratives; and its structural threading of absence and presence' (2008, p. 94).
2 Robert Burton's tome, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621, explored melancholy—among other conditions—as a condition of multiple valences, that is, as a matter of disposition as well as a potentially excessive response to bereavement.
3 'Pickelhaube' refers to the distinctive spiked helmets worn by German soldiers in the First World War.

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10 Scales of Violence, Scales of Justice and Nate Powell's *Any Empire*

Alex Link

A winner of Eisner, Ignatz, Harvey and even National Book Awards, Nate Powell is perhaps best known as the illustrator of the *March* trilogy (2013–2016), the graphic memoir of American Civil Rights pioneer and Georgia congressman John Lewis. This work is consistent with Powell's career, as American politics and social justice—often presented through a punk music lens—have always featured significantly in his work. His loosely autobiographical (Powell 2015) *Any Empire* (2011) is no exception, as it maps the colonisation of American consciousness by a pervasive militarism, answering that colonisation with a violence done to narrative form. It does so by representing sanctioned American violence as it appears in multiple, isomorphic contexts and scales, be that in youth and adulthood, in the suburbs and in foreign theatres of war or in the cultural past and the present. It responds to this American culture of violence with a corresponding violence done to the storytelling conventions that normalise and perpetuate it. In doing so, *Any Empire* troubles the categories of nation and other, police and military, and justice and force in a manner that underscores the way in which peace in white suburban America, such as it is, is ever fragile, and comes at the expense of others subjected to violence elsewhere.

Any Empire tells the story of three children—Lee, Purdy and Sarah—growing up in Reagan-era Wormwood, Arkansas, also the setting of Powell's narratively independent, previous graphic novel *Swallow Me Whole* (2008). Lee and Purdy develop a complicated love-hate friendship built primarily around Purdy's aggression and insecurity. On one hand, the boys grow up steeped in military-themed play; on the other hand, they are both disturbed that their friends, Matt and Mark, or 'the twins, enjoy smashing box turtles with baseball bats while playing war, calling it 'executing prisoners' (Powell 2011a, n.p.).[1] When Sarah discovers the smashed turtles in the field behind her home, her *Nancy Drew*-inspired detective work, aided by Lee, leads her to the twins, but finding this solution has no consequence beyond itself. There is certainty, but no justice. The narrative balances these childhood scenes against scenes from the trio's adulthood, juxtaposing them in a manner that invites readers to see correlations that may be causal or perhaps iterative.

For example, we transition from Lee reading *G.I. Joe* comics as a child and fantasising that his neighbourhood is a war zone to an adult Lee reading about the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, where actual prisoners, not turtles, are brutalised. As adults, Lee and Sarah reunite and begin a romantic relationship. Meanwhile, Purdy and the twins are soldiers in non-specific places evocative of the Middle East, where Purdy loses an arm to a landmine and awakens to find it replaced with a weaponised prosthetic. The narrative culminates in Operation: Metropolis, a scene in which Purdy and the twins stage an invasion of Wormwood as part of a military training exercise. During the invasion, they re-encounter Lee and Sarah. At the same time, they see themselves, as children, passing through the scene. Their childhood selves are on a pretend military adventure to the local quarry, depicted near the opening of *Any Empire*. This unexplained collapse of temporalities is literal as Lee and Sarah see the children too. The adult Purdy leaves his tank to join Lee and Sarah in effortlessly overturning it, while the child Purdy meets himself at the quarry as a different adult who has lived an alternate possible future, both arms intact after having gone AWOL.

Militarisation saturates the background noise of everyday life in Wormwood. The children's lives are replete with war toys; tactical maps of Wormwood; and cardboard boxes that house weapons, prisoners or wounded turtle 'prisoners,' not to mention *Star Wars* franchise merchandise, the film itself a reframing of Second World War romance. As adults, it is plain that *Any Empire's* characters live in a post-war America consistent with that described by Brian Massumi: one that 'has mutated into a state of generalised deterrence against an enemy without qualities' who 'threatens to rise up at any time at any point in social or geographical space' (Massumi 1993, 11). This ambient fear, characteristic of the Cold War, is no different—or even intensified—in the post-9/11 America of *Any Empire*'s publication, and is so commonplace that repeated announcements of Operation: Metropolis go unnoticed. This ubiquity of military preparedness puts the lie to the initial claim by a military official that Operation: Metropolis is 'merely an anti-terror training exercise' when this description is followed by the far more general and sinister declaration that 'Domestic Destabilized zones must be secured. Or *flattened*.' The 'state of generalised deterrence' is reflected in Purdy's admission to Lee, when invading Wormwood, that while the operation is 'trainin',' he cannot answer Lee's demand, 'for *what*?!'

The instrumental militarisation of popular culture, particularly for youth and through comics, can trace its history to the many propagandistic superhero and other comics of the Golden Age, of which *Any Empire* and *G.I. Joe* comics are heirs. Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith argue that superhero comic books 'actively engaged in dehumanizing' the enemy in the Second World War and formed a part of their readership's 'psychological preparation' for 'the front lines' (249). War comics,

particularly after the Korean War, grew more ambivalent and sophisticated with respect to the relationship between war and patriotism. Even so, the expression of American patriotism that lauds participation in the military remains consistent in toys, comics and games targeted at children and youth, from the dawn of Superman to G.I. Joe to the first-person shooter *America's Army*, a 'recruitment aid' 'designed and hosted by the U.S. Department of Defense' in 2002 (Crogan 280).

Youth in *Any Empire*, especially for boys, is shaped by rigidly hierarchical systems, such as organised sport, which anticipate military systems of rank and discipline. When let loose in open fields with free time, Purdy and the twins mimic this rigid ordering of daily life by establishing their own pretend army unit, with secret codes; military ranks; secret teams within teams; and tests, such as whether one is 'man' enough to 'execute a prisoner.' The actions replicate not only military organisation but the everyday disciplinary structures that share their organisation and often agonistic logic with the military: organised martial arts with its ranks of belts, Little League baseball with the hyperbolic competitiveness that has become a mainstay of the American *Bildungsroman*, public school with its own sorting and disciplinary mechanisms and secondary school where the military actively recruits and trains cadets. This last, with its own quota system for recruiters, is a particular object of Powell's personal scorn (2012a).

In Powell's own words, Purdy sees his peers 'as infinitely more powerful or competent than he is, all ready to ditch him at a moment's weakness' (Powell 2011b). Purdy repeatedly fails these rites of passage that test his prowess. He is humiliated playing baseball, bullied by his brother Benny and embarrassed by his father's unremarkable military career. He balks at killing turtles. His usual way to save face is to dominate Lee, and the narrative suggests in this way that Purdy's aggression is overcompensating for a perceived deficit, implying, in turn, that his pursuit of a military career is the pursuit of an ever-receding masculine ideal first put out of reach in childhood play.

Powell is perhaps more correct than even he might intend when he describes the 'vampiric allure [of] joining the armed forces' because it provides one obvious avenue of participation in a massive technological apparatus of power, while its regimentation relieves one of the responsibility of choice. Furthermore, it offers security for low-income Americans, as it did for Powell's own father, an Air Force veteran upon whom Lee's own father is modelled (Powell 2012a). One wonders, then, what *Any Empire* makes of the agency of the poor. One wonders, also, whether it risks reinscribing the nuclear family unit as the foundation of stable subjectivity and as both marker and implied promise of continued middle-class comfort. It gestures towards, without exploring, the possibility that middle-class comfort in a conventional nuclear family produces the potential for critical subjects. Given Lee's and Purdy's diverging career paths, it also implies that the military activity that shores

up middle-class comfort is built upon the filtering of less well-adjusted youth, such as Purdy, into military service. Put another way, if normative biopolitical structures presuppose privilege and favour, and reproduce white American middle-class conservative nuclear families, Lee is the beneficiary of a system that is responsible for Purdy's perceived lack of choices. Lee is unknowingly structurally complicit in the American cultural apparatus that helps craft Purdy into someone he loathes, and that ultimately is likely to cost Purdy a limb.

Any Empire is particularly interested in causality, including the relationship between chance, childhood socialisation and the production of American domestic culture. It speculates on the factors that determine Purdy's life trajectory, giving us multiple Donnie Purdys, one of whom loses an arm in a different hemisphere; another who abandons his post and does or does not face a firing squad; and another, thanks to a simple variation in how his first meeting with Lee could have gone, perhaps never enters the military at all. These multiple possible paths in Purdy's life raise far-reaching questions. For example, to what extent are Purdy's desires formatted, and a function of his environment? Does he control his destiny, or is he simply nudged, throughout his life, in different directions? Rather than take up the hoary questions of nature versus nurture, or predetermination versus free will, it is more interesting to consider the way in which ideological reproduction in *Any Empire* is a function of biopolitics and the way in which biopolitical disciplinary systems are at once subtle enough to become normalised and obvious enough to be replicated in child's play. Thus, one must consider those factors that seem directly to influence the allure of military service to Purdy. One must also consider those contributing factors in his environment that might make it difficult for him to consider alternatives.

Among these factors is Purdy's home life, or what we know of it. Purdy may be unhappy; insecure; and in need of some measure of stability, certainty and control, but he is also quite unlike Lee in other ways. Lee has an older brother with special needs, who requires care and support, while Purdy's is a simple domineering bully. Lee's home clearly features attentive, loving parents and middle-class comfort evident in the layout of their home, for example. By contrast, Sarah lives in a trailer home, but with some mobility as she moves to a nicer house. Purdy's family, like Sarah's, is with a single parent, it seems. His mother is nowhere to be seen; his father is addressed as 'sir'; and the family meals are TV dinners, takeout pizza or fast food burgers consumed in near silence. Entertainment has a decidedly military emphasis, as we see them watch *Platoon* and *The A-Team*, a severed arm appearing on-screen to anticipate Purdy's injury as Lee, staying the night, falls asleep on the living room floor. The narrative makes no claims to a causal connection between Purdy's family and class position and his military career, but its interest in causality makes the question of the relative likelihood of a

career trajectory, given one's relative access to privilege, difficult to miss. That is, Purdy's childhood sense of disempowerment finds its correlate, in adulthood, in the limited options for economic betterment among poorer Americans (Figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1 Lee's G.I. Joe fantasy in the basketball court as he imagines taking aim at Purdy's head. Excerpt from *Any Empire* by Nate Powell © 2011. Reprinted by permission of Top Shelf Productions.

It is uncertain how one reconciles childhood disempowerment with adult complicity in structures of privilege and violence with their own foundations in militarised childhood play. The tension in the relative relationship one has to violence as adult or child, agent or patient, imaginary or literal, is encapsulated in the image of Purdy, as a little boy, holding a ball patterned like a globe in the school gymnasium, while Lee imagines Purdy is a giant monster, face obscured by crosshairs, the target of Lee's tiny, *G.I. Joe*-inspired imaginary characters. More generally, the question of scale suffuses *Any Empire* as we move between epic battles fought by childhood toys, and unseen and remote banalized fields of distant conflict. The local construction site sand pile becomes a desert with tanks streaking across it, and the firing squad Purdy faces in a possible future narratively transitions into Lee's action figures. A barbecue becomes a fortress for G.I. Joe's nemesis 'Cobra scum.' Violence may be on a human scale when adults, and not toys, are the soldiers. It is nevertheless diminished in its depiction—or miniaturised—by the events' remoteness; the action is far away from Wormwood, out of sight and largely out of mind. When Purdy loses his arm, the explosion is toy-like in scale, with Purdy invisible in the distance.

The relative nature of adult physical trauma and the trials of growing up also urge one to consider the way in which they might be compared. While it is true that Lee imagines the neighbourhood tree fort being uprooted and destroyed by tiny tanks at the end of Part One, this tragedy is not necessarily the same as his own uprooting as he pulls away from his house for the last time, when the family moves across town, and he imagines his house destroyed as if in one of his imaginary battles. The simple act of placing of a For Sale sign on Lee's lawn is a major domestic tragedy, for a child, more intensely felt than the imaginary battles of play and perhaps not understood by the adults around him. That painful event pales, in turn, when compared with the literal destruction that Purdy brings to foreign homes and villages as we see him burn them down. Both experiences, however, are notably wordless, underscoring their resistance to being put into words as is typical, if not constitutive, of trauma (Earle 2017, 52–53). Sarah's mother offers the prospect of their moving to a nicer home as consolation for their failure to save the injured turtle, but it is clear there is no comparison between the material comfort of the one and the emotional scarring of the other. At the same time, the adult twins have forgotten entirely about the turtles, while Sarah is unable to clearly reconcile the scale of the event's importance relative to her adult self. As a child, she wrote, 'we will *never* forget,' but as an adult she resolves to rid herself of the box of evidence. She has moved on but, as someone who makes a career of helping vulnerable families in their own boxy trailer homes, perhaps not as much as she might think.

The narrative's ironic equation of toys and soldiers, despite their differences measured in scales of distance, scope, size and consequence,

also brings domestic stability into a problematic relationship with distant battlefield violence: it implies that distant violence is a prerequisite for suburban peace. We see repeatedly that the security and safety of American suburban domesticity comes at the cost of violence to the homes of others, that Lee's house depends perhaps on Purdy's burning down the houses of others in an oblique way. Implying as much, a single two-page spread shows Purdy and the twins on the march, moving through a field from the top right towards palm trees at the bottom of the image, while Lee walks through the same field, beginning on the left as a child, and ending on the right as an adult about to enter a party in full swing (see Figure 10.2).

More insistently we see, across another two-page spread, Lee and Sarah enjoying the predictable bliss of a romance in the suburbs in the safe, contained domestic space of a bedroom, made solid with its detail, while on the other side of the world, in the open, unstructured and undefined space of a field in a foreign country, tiny in the open landscape, Purdy's life is about to change dramatically when on the next page we see him step on the landmine without any drama at all. It is that unheard, unremarked 'blooompf' that makes Lee and Sarah's unremarkable romance possible in its material comfort. The violence is invisible, its consequence both concealed and revealed as we see a half-page silent

Figure 10.2 Collapsed landscapes and temporalities. Excerpt from *Any Empire* by Nate Powell © 2011. Reprinted by permission of Top Shelf Productions.

image of a bandaged Purdy in his hospital bed, isolated by a dimensionless solid black background. The cost of Wormwood's comfort in blood is concealed in much the way globalisation exploits distance to conceal the unequal relations of capital in, perhaps among other things, the manufacture of toy soldiers. It is a concealment of inequality, labour and violence here extended to routinised military action at a distance. In *Any Empire*'s post-9/11 America, warfare is not only perpetual, but a workplace like any other, a factory that supports an American privileged class through an underprivileged kind of military sweatshop, with the unequal relations expressed in blood rather than capital.

The sense that American military activity is an industry, an end in itself, is clear in *Any Empire* from its very title, underscored by the presence of a two-page spread in which multiple Purdys, in examples of military gear from throughout history, march single file into the grave, to the absence of any direct mention of any specific conflict in *Any Empire*, its justifications, locations, ideological drivers, stated purposes or context. If war is an indiscriminate economic process, a factory where contemporary American culture is made, it becomes far easier to picture the invasion of American suburbs. After all, if one considers American warfare's primary purpose as redirecting the flow of capital towards centres of global financial agglomeration, one must also recognise that these centres have a murky relationship with respect to their place in a nation, given that they create 'homogenization along certain lines that cross national boundaries and sharp differentiation inside these boundaries' (Sassen 31, n.5), calling into question the notion of national coherence and making possible the location of Wormwood Arkansas outside of one construction of 'America.'

This interdependence of violence and comfort seems intuitive in *Any Empire*. Lee's fantasies of military glory are paired with a desire for domestic comfort: he imagines himself a hero who will accomplish his mission, save his comrade, 'and then we'll get married,' he promises. When Lee asks whether he can use Purdy's tree 'fort,' Purdy decides Lee must 'kill something' to enjoy that privilege. Indeed, the fort's tree is killed, bulldozed to make way for a new house, and when the bulldozing is visualised, we see it as military action: tiny tanks in the page's upper corner rolling across a desert. All three children's houses are unstable. While the children in *Any Empire* are bred from the start to become supports to future American military violence, violence that even promises to underwrite a future suburban plenitude, that material comfort is neither guaranteed them in the future nor, it seems, even terribly important when weighed against the priorities of simple safety, stability and justice. Perhaps this is why Sarah is so shocked at the abused turtles. It is, after all, a creature best known for carrying its home on its back, an icon of security, but now the pervasive militarisation of daily life, ostensibly meant to protect domestic stability, actually means not even a turtle is safe.

The safety and stability of the home is relativised here—it is like the turtle in its shell and, perhaps, no safer for all that. In their boxy mobile home, Sarah's mother peers into her boxy room, where Sarah peers into a shoebox that shelters a box turtle with its shattered shell. That instability, or lack of absolute guaranteed safety, resonates with the adult Sarah's attempt, as a social worker, to peer into a mobile home quite like the one she grew up in, as she has become a part of the institution that looks—however inadequately—after the people for whom the promised American material security, for which a price in blood has been paid, has nevertheless not been forthcoming. Likewise, while 'Sarah seeks a window into a world governed by forces very different than what she feels surround her' (Powell 2011b), through her fantasies of imposing justice on the twins, her adult role as an increasingly embittered social worker gestures unconsciously to the sense of futility in living within a social structure that makes it impossible not to be complicit in the unjust suffering of others. She fails to recognise herself in her clientele, grumbling that her 'fuckin job' requires her to deal with 'fuckin rednecks.' Outside these boxes or enclosures that promise but do not always deliver safety, we have the infinitely more dangerous spaces of open fields, where turtles are destroyed; where boys erect their own provisional and brutal disciplinary systems; where war is a kind of self-structuring play, quite like the equally open battlefields on the other side of the world where, too, anything can happen, and that 'anything' seems always to be traumatic.

These alternations of structured and unstructured spaces have a narrative correlation in the balance between realist narrative—structured by one's assumptions about what is possible and plausible within the lived everyday—and romantic narrative—or, simply put, stories freed from these structures. While the relationship between realism and romance has long been a subject of debate, this foundation, which might also be described as a relative proximity to myth (Frye 139–40) or to Greek 'adventure-time' (Bakhtin 86–110) is where these debates find common ground. Realism and romance in *Any Empire*, however, become difficult to distinguish. Losing one's arm in a war and having it replaced with a prosthetic would seem to be realistic. However, for Purdy this moment is shaded with melodramatic intensity, weighted with romantic language about 'Destiny,' and his arm is weaponised. To be clear, the loss of a limb is not in itself either realistic or romantic, so much as its role in Purdy's narrative trajectory. Here, the loss of a limb becomes part of the conventional superhero trope of transforming trauma into a superpower, when up until this point *Any Empire* has prepared us to expect a realistic exploration of Purdy's readjustment to civilian life. Instead, he has become a flesh and blood *G.I. Joe* Battle Android Trooper, as his arm is a clear visual quotation of the robotic soldier of the G.I. Joe Team's antagonist, the fascistic Cobra Command organisation. Purdy's

transformation recalls his violent real attack on Lee—otherwise no different from Lee's fantasies that often involve harm coming to Purdy—in the midst of their imaginary play, with a pipe on his arm, recalling the action figure they played with and anticipating the living action figure he will become. The narrative thus confronts readers with the question of whether it is plausible that the American military would create weaponised prosthetics and realise the boyhood fantasies it has itself participated in formatting from the start. More to the point, we are left unable to tell whether this weaponised prosthetic is more or less implausible, more or less romantic, than the possibility that one day in the field Purdy might say 'fuck it, we just won't fight' and go AWOL. The narrative presents that decision as an alternative possible path for Purdy to have taken, a decision he could have made seconds before he would have stepped on the landmine. *Any Empire* asks whether it is harder to believe that a passive military plaything would be upgraded, and that, powerful yet passive, it would take part in the military occupation of its own home town, or that a soldier, powerless but agentive, might refuse to serve. The question is particularly fraught in the wake of the increasingly unsubtle occupation of American suburbs by a militarised police force in places such as Ferguson, Missouri (2014), and Charlottesville, Virginia (2017), the conflation between policing and military occupation only intensifying under the Donald Trump presidency (Goldman 2017), not to mention actual US Marine Corps military training exercises played out in American cities 'complete with helicopter drops' (Hahne n.d.).

Purdy's weaponised arm is revealed in a full-page illustration on a page that follows Sarah asking, about the turtles, 'who could do that to little babies'? The arm and the military ideological complex it represents is an answer to her question if one considers the way in which American militarism has formatted its own 'babies,' as it were. This reversibility of realism and romance gestures to what is perhaps the narrative's deepest irony, which is that we see freedom defended by an American fascistic social structure, or, as Powell puts it, the state's self-preservation 'is historically a much higher priority than representing or even protecting its citizens or their vital interests,' particularly pronounced since the advent of a 'dangerous authoritarian-right shift in many Americans' political alignment' (Powell 2011b). It confuses realist and romance notions of nation, a conflation made explicit as we see Purdy at the army surplus store, in anticipation of his military adulthood, where a Nazi flag hangs from the ceiling, unremarkable and unremarked, among others. Like Purdy's visual quotation of a *G.I. Joe* villain when he becomes a cyborg weapon, the flags' juxtaposition undermines the firm opposition Golden Age comics insist upon. Even Purdy's T-shirt advertises Southern and white nationalism, declaring, 'you wear your X I'll wear mine,' paralleling white American nationalism's adoption of the Confederate Flag with the legacy of African American activist Malcolm X.

It is not clear, then, whether *Any Empire*'s story of Purdy's superheroic robot arm is more or less plausible than the possibility that Sarah might at least find justice for a bludgeoned turtle. It is a seemingly humble ambition, but her own mother sees it as hopelessly romantic: 'sometimes people get away with doing *terrible* things I hope you never see,' she says, using the dead turtle as what would seem to be a life lesson in resignation: 'nobody ever catches them,' she says, 'or someone *helps* them.' Her mother could be right. After solving the mystery, all Sarah can do is write interminable and increasingly elaborate letters of condemnation she never sends, drawn from the fantasies of power that also shape Lee's and Purdy's childhood, and that underscore their sense of helplessness: 'we wait in darkness in your house at night, wherever tornadoes strike,' she writes. As an adult, reflecting on this formative moment, Sarah declares, 'there *is* no justice' and decides to get rid of the box of evidence she has kept ever since. Given that Sarah's estrangement from her brother Josh is founded upon his passive refusal to get involved in the turtle case, this act is one of profound capitulation.

Little wonder, then, that it is at this moment of surrender that troops, under Purdy's command, invade her neighbourhood. Sarah exits the narrative as the twins mistake the shoebox for an explosive. Then again, as the trace of a childhood dream of agency and justice, it may very well carry the latent potential of a bomb. The moment continues to hold out a hope of some form of justice in a narrative in which it is ever elusive, asking, 'if you know that your efforts might be only good as gestures, what good are gestures' (Powell 2012a) 'when those gestures are essentially meaningless' (Powell 2012b)? The importance of this ongoing urge to resist, this gesture, hopeless on the one hand but grounding Lee and Sarah's relationship in a shared sensibility of resistance, is signified in notes about the turtle case that they trade in class as children. These notes that first bring them together are the only images in *Any Empire* that are photographed, rather than drawn, signalling a privileged locus of authenticity in the resistance they signify not only to the injustice of the turtles out in the open field, homologous with the battlefield, but to the disciplinary structures that would hamper such resistance, given that the notes are passed in secret, in class, homologous with structures of American domesticity.

Romance—the place of ostensible imaginative freedom—is colonised and instrumentalised in *Any Empire*, rendering it a relative quantity. Bearing in mind the fact that realism and romance in any narrative are 'mixed, like racial strains in human beings' rather than strictly binary, romance in Wormwood is particularly dilute (Frye 305). Fantasies, here, seem to be primarily of successful conformity, of the achievement of nationally and culturally sanctioned ideals of masculine prowess and the realisation of formatted domestic desires. That is, they are neither particularly free nor fantastic, colonising the imagination in a way one

of the twins literalises in a moment at the end of *Any Empire*, saying to Lee and Sarah that it is his job 'to keep you from moving until someone says you can,' and in Wormwood, Arkansas, this biopolitical discipline has governed its citizens' imagination since childhood. In fact, when the world *does* offer a surprise, going off script—a firing squad misses one version of Purdy, another Purdy lifts a tank or a third possible Purdy goes AWOL—no one knows what to do, and, paralysed, our characters can only ask 'now what?' just as the younger Purdy asks the intact adult version of himself at the narrative's end.

The same can be said about the story itself. That is, these moments of fantastic agency in the narrative are also applied to the narrative. Until we see Purdy's narrative trajectory diverge into multiple paths *Any Empire* seems very predictable. Purdy's military career seems unsurprising, as does Sarah's pursuit of social work, or the more docile Lee's own adult embrace of punk music and the arts. But punk's individualist, agentive, do-it-yourself aesthetic, combined with its deliberate assault on conventions of aesthetic quality and competency, seems to be extended to *Any Empire*'s storytelling in the end, as it rejects narrative coherence and linearity. It abandons not only realism, but the generic restrictions of familiar romance that give romance narratives their rule-governed stability, such as the way in which superhero stories, however fantastic, typically obey rigid conventions. It enacts violence on the narrative form itself, allowing it to probe the narrative's chains of causality for possible points at which other choices might have been made. Furthermore, this rupture to conventional narratives invites one to consider why the narrative trajectories of *Any Empire*'s central characters are as predictable as they are in the first place. Instead, we see different versions of the same characters from different possible lives converge on the page, in this kind of Borgesian suburb of forking paths. We abandon the rules of the superhero romance, epitomised by that Second World War icon Superman, whose first appearance, on the cover of *Action Comics* lifting a car above his head, is reprised by two average suburbanites, while the one-armed superhero in the scene is superfluous: Lee and Sarah do it alone as Purdy, the new, robotic Superman declares that this moment has 'got *nothing* to do with power' beyond, perhaps, the power to imagine a different story.

Put another way, *Any Empire* reminds one of the different possible lives that might be lived, in America, and the different kinds of stories comics can tell about them. If one of comics' most-noted strengths is their ability to spatialise temporality on the page by showing readers multiple narrative moments in a single composition, Powell takes comics' space-time one step further. If the comics page specialises in simultaneity, then its capacity for critique seems tailor-made for certain timely arguments. If a characteristic of globalisation is its ability to exploit distance to conceal how prosperity in one locale often comes as a result of violence enacted

in an unseen elsewhere, the comics page has the power to collapse these distance by juxtaposing them on facing pages, as with Sarah's apartment opposite Purdy's distant adventures, or even on the same page, as when Lee and Purdy cross the same field along perpendicular vectors.

If a characteristic of the biopolitical formatting of subjectivity is its reframing of a life of limited choices as American freedom, the comics page has the power to present the cause and effect relationship of this scripting by paralleling child and adult on the same page, sometimes even in the same space, where they might meet alternate selves from alternate temporalities. In other words, if *Any Empire* suggests that the freedom to choose one's future is actually compromised, and that the freedom to tell a story that could go anywhere is in fact limited by genre expectations, so too is the comics page's 'innovative' spatialised temporality often constrained by storytelling formal conventions of temporal and spatial unity.

The same is true of the supposed sentimentalised total freedom that the child's imagination has come to represent in contemporary culture. If, throughout *Any Empire*, the domestic American home's not-quite-guaranteed safety has only served to facilitate the militarisation of youth through popular culture by providing an insulated space for the incubation of formatted fantasies of heroism, where one can comfortably enjoy fantastic and fantastically violent play in pyjamas, 'removed from the immediate reality of war and immersed in a Cold War glory-myth that convey[s] state violence as some kind of idealized epic' (Powell 2011b), perhaps the most radical childhood fantasies are fantasies of peace. Lee and his father watch the 1939 cartoon *Peace on Earth*, an apocalyptic story in which humanity has destroyed itself, and the animals of the world have taken residence in abandoned army helmets, which in *Any Empire* are drawn more viscerally as helmeted skulls that visually quote the box turtle shells. This cartoon is so foreign to the script that pervades Lee's life that, after watching it, he wants to play war, unable to see the gasmasked soldiers in the cartoon as human. In other words, what he sees in the cartoon is what he has thus far been taught to expect to see in everything, making it difficult to hear or see or respond to voices that might present a differing perspective without help, such as that provided by the blunt violence of a punk, radicalised romance. It is, perhaps, the purest expression of a colonised imagination, when Lee sees a call for peace as a call to war.

If throughout *Any Empire* open spaces have been ones of vulnerability, where one is unprotected, our final, most open space, is one of unimagined—which is to say unprescribed—possibilities, beyond mere trauma. The child Purdy watches an adult, AWOL Purdy, who has no idea of the future, answer that 'now what' question with 'whatever it takes,' and this Purdy dives into the air into the blankness of the page, out of the narrative altogether. *Any Empire*'s closing images take us back to the open field, where box turtles feed at the grave of the turtle Sarah

buried. They bind the narrative threads into a single knot, their movement now resembling that of live soldiers in tall grass with only their helmets visible, or resembling the dead ones buried in *Peace on Earth*. They collapse the narrative's places, scales, eras and aesthetics as they ask for a different story.

Note

1 All subsequent references to *Any Empire* are to this unpaginated edition.

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11 *Oink!*

The Story of a Dangerously Funny Comic

David Huxley

There have been many British comics which have tried to challenge the norms of national humour comics (*The Beano*/*The Dandy*) or adventure (*Eagle*/*Lion*/*Commando*) titles, but few have been successful. Many titles, in different ways, have arguably tried to create some kind of adult or more sophisticated comic trope of the kind readily available in Europe: for example *Nasty Tales* (1971–1973), *Brainstorm* (1975–1978), *Ally Sloper* (1976), *Graphixus* (1978), *Knockabout* (1980–1988), *Pssst* (1982), *Warrior* (1982–1985), *Crisis* (1988–1991), *Deadline* (1988–1995), *Revolver* (1990–1991) and *Toxic* (1991). Some only had very brief lives; others lasted longer but failed to establish themselves for a very long stay. Only *Viz* (in the adult/humour category) and *2000AD* (in the adventure category) have bucked this trend. The reasons for this are complex and not absolutely clear, but I have discussed some potential explanations for some of these failures elsewhere.[1]

This chapter will examine the case of one comic which at first appeared to be successful in a niche of a more sophisticated children's comic, but then failed like so many others. It was not unusual for mainstream British comics of all types to be short-lived. IPC was one of the major comic publishers in the UK. But none of the 1970s/1980s IPC comedy titles, such as *Monster Fun, Shiver and Shake, Knockout, Krazy* and *Wow*, lasted more than three years. When sales were not strong enough, it was the usual practice for IPC to merge the failing titles with a more successful stablemate, retaining a few of the most popular characters, at least for a time. Although this was to happen to *Oink!*, the reasons for its demise, although related to sales, were rather more complex.

Oink! ran from 1986 to 1988 and was created for IPC in Manchester by Mark Rogers, Tony Husband and Patrick Gallagher. IPC guaranteed the comic good distribution, a luxury many of the aforementioned non-IPC titles did not have.[2] Aimed at as wide an audience as possible, the comic did not have the freedom that *Viz* enjoyed, courtesy of its 'adults only' status. Yet it did try very hard to break from the more formulaic humour comics of the period, not only D. C. Thompson's *The Beano* and *The Dandy* but also the other titles then published by IPC, such as *Buster* and *Whizzer and Chips*. *Oink!* was a break from tradition

not only in terms of content but also visually. *Oink!*'s main artists were founder Tony Husband, David Haldane, Banx (Jeremy Banks) and Lew Stringer. All were highly experienced, and between them had worked for many publications, including *Private Eye, The Financial Times* and *The Spectator*. Although in some ways deceptively simple, their varied styles gave the comic a more sophisticated, and sometimes eccentric, look when compared to any of their British rivals. *Comic Vine* describes its different qualities:

> Pitched as a "Junior Viz" or "anti-Beano", *Oink!* was so much more. A true unique, *Oink*'s creators were mostly UK cartoonists from the world of newspaper and magazine giving it a distinct style, very different to other British humour comics of the time. It was also ahead of its time in allowing (and expecting) artists to sign their work, a rarity in British comics at the time.
>
> (Comic Vine)

Oink! has been described as 'one of the comic world's strangest publications.' And 'little short of a comic revolution' (Kibble-White, 2005, 179–80). Alongside regular characters there were many one-off, anarchic strips and other items. The regular characters were strange enough. These included Manchester music legend Frank Sidebottom, with his papier mâché head, who also lent the comic a particularly odd tone. Sidebottom (Chris Sievey) often appeared in photographic form: for example on the cover of Issue 50, where he is being knighted outside Buckingham Palace by a particularly unconvincing 'Queen.' In many other issues he appears in detailed drawings by Sievey, recounting the adventures of Frank and a small version of himself, Little Frank, who later morph into various other personas, including a strange Batman parody, 'Batbottom and Bobbins.'

Other major characters included porcine editor Uncle Pigg; Burp, the smelly alien; and internal 'critic' 'Mary Lighthouse.' Other regular characters included Pete and His Pimple (by Lew Stringer), Harry the Head (he was only a head) (by Marc Riley), Billy's Brain (he was only a brain), Rubbish Man (by David Haldane), Horace 'Ugly Face' Watkins (by Tony Husband), Pete and his Pimple and Tom Thug (by Lew Stringer), Mr Bignose (by Jeremy Banks) and Psycho Gran (by David Leach). There are obvious overtones of *Viz* here, just as *Viz* had overtones of *The Beano* and *The Dandy*. Thus, the *Beano* would have 'Pansy Potter, the Strongman's Daughter'; *Viz* would have 'Roger Mellie, the Man on the Tellie'; and *Oink!* would have 'Tom Thug, What a Mug.' Pete and His Pimple' can be seen as *Oink!*'s version of the *Viz* character 'Buster Gonad and his unfeasibly large testicles.' The different parts of the bodies of these characters that swell to huge proportions show some of the differences between the areas where the two comics could go. Essentially *Viz* would go below the belt, but *Oink!* would not.

There are problems here, of course, in defining what 'adult' actually means. *Viz,* for example, might be 'for adults only,' but it has also been described as 'smutty juvenilia' (Oldfield, 1989, p. 21). It is certainly adult in the sense that it uses language and sexual references that could be seen as out of place in children's literature. Calling the humour in *Viz* 'juvenile' does also touch on a dichotomy central to the comic. Roald Dahl pointed out the simple mention of a 'rude' word could be enough to make children laugh, but *Viz* was prepared to push boundaries and build on the taboo nature of certain words and concepts in a way that *Oink!* could not.

Oink! was successful not only in terms of sales but also in terms of critical approbation. On the cover of Issue 54 (12th March, 1988), alongside an image of Uncle Pigg holding an award, there are a series of quotes:

> "A comic for the modern reader"-Fantasy Advertiser, "Outstanding" – Sunday Times, "Subversive" – Guardian, "Top of the Slops" – Sounds, "Snot-nosed" – N.M.E. "A Funny comic that really is funny" – Escape. All the quotes are genuine, but to give some balance there are two more: "Tasteless" – The Press Council and "Lavatorial" – News on Sunday.

All these quotes are genuine, and they reflect not only the enthusiastic approval of some music and quality newspapers, but also the criticism from some quarters, which will be discussed in more detail later.

Oink!'s position was, in political terms, largely implicit rather than explicit. However, on at least one occasion politics did take centre stage. In Issue 64 (July 1988) a whole page was given over to 'Ten Things you should know about Poll Tax,' which explains that the poll tax you pay is dependent on parrot ownership. Thus, Point Three is 'If it says rude words, you pay treble the basic rate.' Point Five is 'People who are members of the Conservative Party don't have to pay poll tax, no matter how many parrots they have.' The final comment is 'A government spokesman explained that the new tax is necessary…when we suggested that the tax seemed to favour the well-off, he replied that nothing could be further from the truth and told us not to give the game away.' Part of the page was even read out in parliament on 20 July 1988 by Birmingham Labour MP Jeff Rooker.

This is a reminder that the comic was appearing in one of the most divisive periods in UK politics, with widespread poll tax riots in 1988 and 1990, followed by the fall of Mrs Thatcher, and then the repeal of the tax in 1992. The implicit politics of the comic are also suggested by its close connections with the Manchester music scene, not just through Frank Sidebottom and Marc Riley but also guest contributors like John Peel and Jon Langford. Peel appeared in Issue 30, presenting a 'Most irritating DJ of the year' to Steve Wright, and Langford, from the punk band the Three Johns, painted the cover for Issue 36 (5 September 1987)—'*Oink!* Goes Peculiar!'

Violence

Despite *Oink!* being aimed, theoretically, at a younger audience than *Viz*, when some of the strips in *Oink!* are examined in more detail, there is a surprising amount of violence and 'slapstick' death. Much of this is in short gag strips where there little or no justification or explanation for the ensuing mayhem. In Issue 15 (15 November 1986), for example, there is a half-page strip starring 'Psycho Gran.' The titular character is shown in the first panel counting 'fifty nine' continuously, whilst standing on a pier. When a passer-by asks her why she is doing this she throws him into the sea. In the final panel a second man approaches, and she is counting 'sixty' continuously. Similarly, there is sudden, comical death in 'The Adventures of Death.' Written and drawn by a then schoolboy, Charlie Brooker, the strip tended to be just half a page. In Issue 64 (July 1988), in a five-panel strip, Death asks to have his scythe sharpened in a hardware shop and then promptly decapitates the shop owner (see Figure 11.1).

Perhaps not the subtlest joke, but in the final panel the head flies off, albeit quite bloodlessly. On the opposite page of this issue is another sinister strip. 'Torture Twins' promises a victim tied to a post that he will have a hot shower, and it is revealed that he is tied at the foot of a volcano. Another strip where there is regular violence is 'Hector Vector and his talking T-Shirt' by Banx. In Issue 28 (16 May, 1987) the T-shirt insults a thug who the shirt has declared to be Frank Sinatra, exclaiming, 'You look and sound just like Frank Sinatra when you're

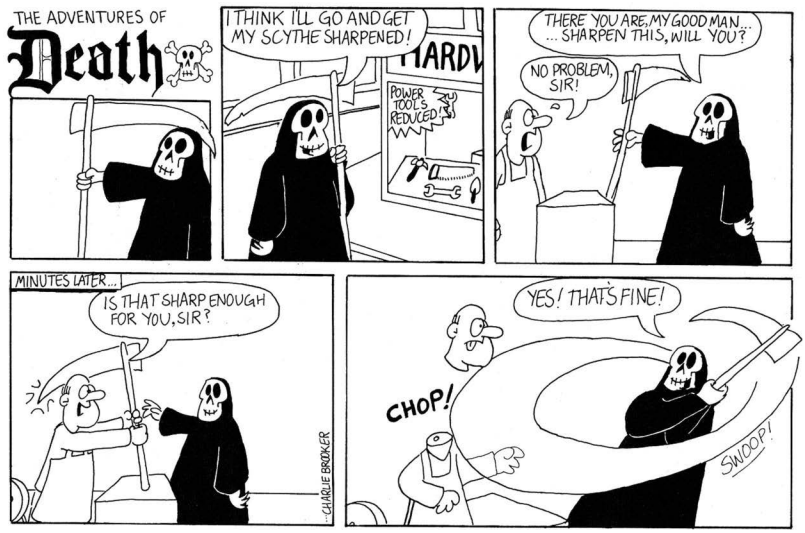

Figure 11.1 *Oink!* 64 (July 1988). The Adventure of Death. Charlie Brooker. *Oink*™ Rebellion, Copyright © Rebellion, All Rights Reserved.

angry, as well as smelling like a Turkish wrestler's jockey shorts.' The thug launches the poor innocent Hector into a pile of dustbins. There is a twist at the end when the huge thug, resplendent in bovver boots and spiked haircuts, reveals, 'Actually I am Frank Sinatra but I don't like everyone knowing about it.'

However, the more extreme examples of horror are not limited to shorter strips. *Oink!* was full of parodies, some of which, like the Dan Dare parody 'Ham Dare,' may have been lost on younger readers. More accessible was a parody of the already violent character Judge Dredd from *Oink!'s* stablemate, *2000AD*. Unsurprisingly called Judge Pigg, the character appeared in two issues. He featured on the cover of Issue 58 (9 April 1988) but had appeared as early as Issue 14 (1 November 1986). In a one-page story, drawn by Steve Gibson, the judge beats up some criminals, then ends with him eating 'beef-burglars.' This denouement with its gleeful cannibalism is almost like an EC 1950s horror comic ending.

Perhaps the continuing character who appears to be the most committed to violence is 'Tom Thug.' Appearing in the preview issue and then 83 more times (the latter appearances in *Buster* after *Oink!* folded), Tom, a descendant of Ghenghis, Napoleon and Adolf Thug, is introduced to bovver boots by his dad. Unfortunately, Tom is so stupid he can't tie the laces on his boots. Tom continues to fail with the laces task, and all his efforts at violence are frustrated by a lady from the RSPCA, a tramp, his own dad and many others. Thus, the character is, in fact, unable to live up to his name, and the strip is actually about the stupidity of violence and its continual defeat rather than any revelling in violence, as some of the comic's critics would later argue.

Parody and Violence

However, it was in the realm of parody that *Oink!* did fall foul of its critics. *Oink!* was full of all types of parody. Many pages were devoted to mock adverts and tabloid press and media excesses, and as we have seen many strips were parodies of existing comics. The most consistent parody, however, was of Mary Whitehouse, clean-up TV campaigner, in the character 'Mary Lighthouse.' When the comic first appeared in 1986 Whitehouse and her 'Festival of Light' had in recent years criticised and sometimes affected the content of British TV programmes as diverse as *Till Death us do Part, Doctor Who*, comedian Dave Allen, and *Robin of Sherwood*, amongst others; intervened in other media, such as pop records; and attempted to effect a ban on singles by Chuck Berry and Alice Cooper. The Lighthouse character even appears on the cover of the preview issue, exclaiming, 'Disgusting! Torture and a bare belly-button on the front cover…I dread to think what's inside!! MARY LIGHTHOUSE (Critic).' Lighthouse continued to appear regularly,

sometimes in her own short strips, and sometimes invading an existing strip to complain about the content. She also appears on numerous covers, sometimes as a peripheral complainant, other times as the 'star'—crushed by animals for Issue 6 (12 July 1986), tied to a railway track for Issue 9 (23 August 1986) (Figure 11.2) and covered in graffiti for Issue 15 (15 November 1986).

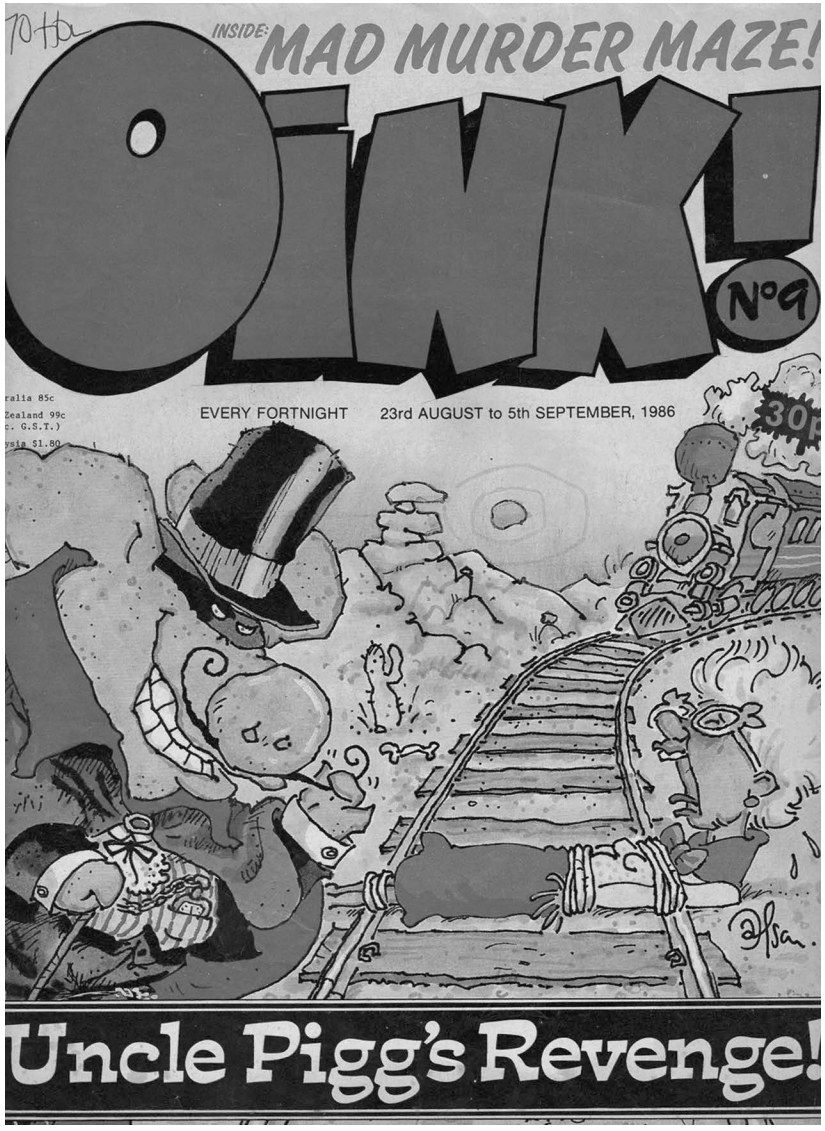

Figure 11.2 *Oink!* 9 (23rd August 1986). Cover. *Oink*™ Rebellion, Copyright © Rebellion, All Rights Reserved.

The half-page strips that feature Mary Lighthouse, drawn by Ian Jackson, tend to show her attempts to ban the comic being frustrated at every turn. But it was a one-off parody strip by Tom Johnson that was perhaps surprisingly became the key target for Mary Whitehouse and her organisation. 'Janice and John and the Parachute Jump' was a one-page strip that was a parody of a 1950s reading book and announced as 'Uncle Pigg's Reading Course.' The eight panels of the story each have text underneath. A mother and her children watch daddy go up in a plane and jump. His parachute fails to open, and the text underneath panel six, comments, 'Mummy can hardly look. Janice and John have broken daddy's fall.' After it is revealed that she sabotaged the parachute, and as she drinks and watches TV with the final caption, 'See mummy enjoy herself while her soppy family are in the hospital. Clever mummy!' Before looking at the ensuing furore, it is interesting to look at the amount of the violence in the strip. The actual crash is simply expressed by a cloud of dust, and only the increasing look of horror on daddy's face anticipates the ensuing crash. There is no gory violence and, in effect, some minor slapstick. Slapstick is, of course, one of the oldest forms of humour, where the reader may feel a certain schadenfreude, where, as Will Rogers claimed, 'everything is funny as long as it is happening to somebody else' (quoted in Loomans and Kolberg, 2002, p. 14). In this, and many of the earlier examples, this seems to hold true. There is also the question of what this violence means, and why anybody would find it funny. Louise Peacock sees this kind of violence in the context of slapstick, and examines it in examples as diverse as Buster Keaton, *Tom and Jerry* and *The Simpsons*. Even when the violence is perpetrated by real actors, it is clearly important that the violence is not real or seriously damaging. Thus, 'When somebody slips on a banana skin and falls to the floor are we laughing, as Bergson would have it, because in falling the individual becomes less human and more like some kind of mechanism?' (Peacock, 2014, p. 38).

In the world of the drawn image it is much easier to stress the artificiality of the situation whilst at the same time exaggerating it to great, unrealistic heights of violence. Peacock discusses this in relation to *The Simpsons*,

> The example given earlier of Homer repeatedly strangling Bart contains the potential for offence. Around the world child abuse is rightly condemned but the Simpsons makes a situation which should draw our approbation funny through cartoonish exaggeration and excessive repetition.
>
> (Peacock, 2014, p. 37)

There is also, in this violence, an element of rebellion that fits in nicely with the comic's 'punk' aesthetic. The point is neatly summed up by

one of the cinema's great visual comedians: 'The comedian who knocks down the policeman is the small child rebelling against authority. The custard pie is the symbol of revolt' (Stan Laurel, quoted in Louvish, 2002, pp. 293–294). Despite the proliferation of comedic violence in various media, it was this one apparently innocuous strip, 'Janice and John and the Parachute Jump,' that became an object of concern.

The comic then found themselves called to defend the strip at The Press Council, as they had been reported for producing an 'attack on family values.' The Press Council was a body set up in 1953 to curb any excesses in British print media, and normally concerned itself with issues of privacy or defamation. Seen as increasingly irrelevant, it was replaced by The Press Complaints Commission in 1991. Thus, the invoking of the Council to address issues surrounding a one-page comic strip seemed to reek of desperation. And when the *Oink!* team went to London to defend the comic they discovered there were very interesting reasons behind the case. The complainant was a member of Mary Whitehouse's organisation, who was purportedly concerned about the effect of the comic on her 15-year-old son. The ensuing hearing is probably best summed up by the comic itself, which boldly reran the strip in Issue 28 (16 May 1987) under the title 'The Press Council and Clever Mummy' (see Figure 11.3).

In a side bar they explain, 'Once upon a time a lady of Avon saw a copy of Number 7 of OINK!... and was *not* amused. She complained to The Press Council that the "Janice and John" story disregarded mother-family relationships.' It continues, 'I second that! Voiced Mary Lighthouse (Critic) AND THAT IS PRECISELY HOW MANY PEOPLE OBJECTED...TWO!' And then adds, 'It was also claimed that OINK! was helping to prepare the ground for hooliganism, vandalism and indisciplined behaviour.' *Oink!* then included a perfectly reasoned response from 'Tom Thug': 'Well, it ain't done me no good! Says Tom Thug. I've been in the comic since it started, tryin' me best to BE an 'ooligan, vandal and a bad boy – and I ain't been successful yet!'

Finally, the page concludes with:

> "The Council's adjudication was: 'The cartoon complained of was a presumably tasteless parody of the kind of picture strip designed for young children but The Press Council is unable to say that the publication was improper. THE COMPLAINT AGAINST OINK! IS REJECTED." and then, in very large capitals, "CLEVER OINK!"

Despite this defiant response, the publicity surrounding the case led some major retail chains such as WH Smith to move the comic from lower display shelves. Thus, instead of being shelved with *The Beano* and *The Dandy* where children could select it, it moved to the upper shelves with *Viz* and *Private Eye*, where parents would have to select it for younger children.

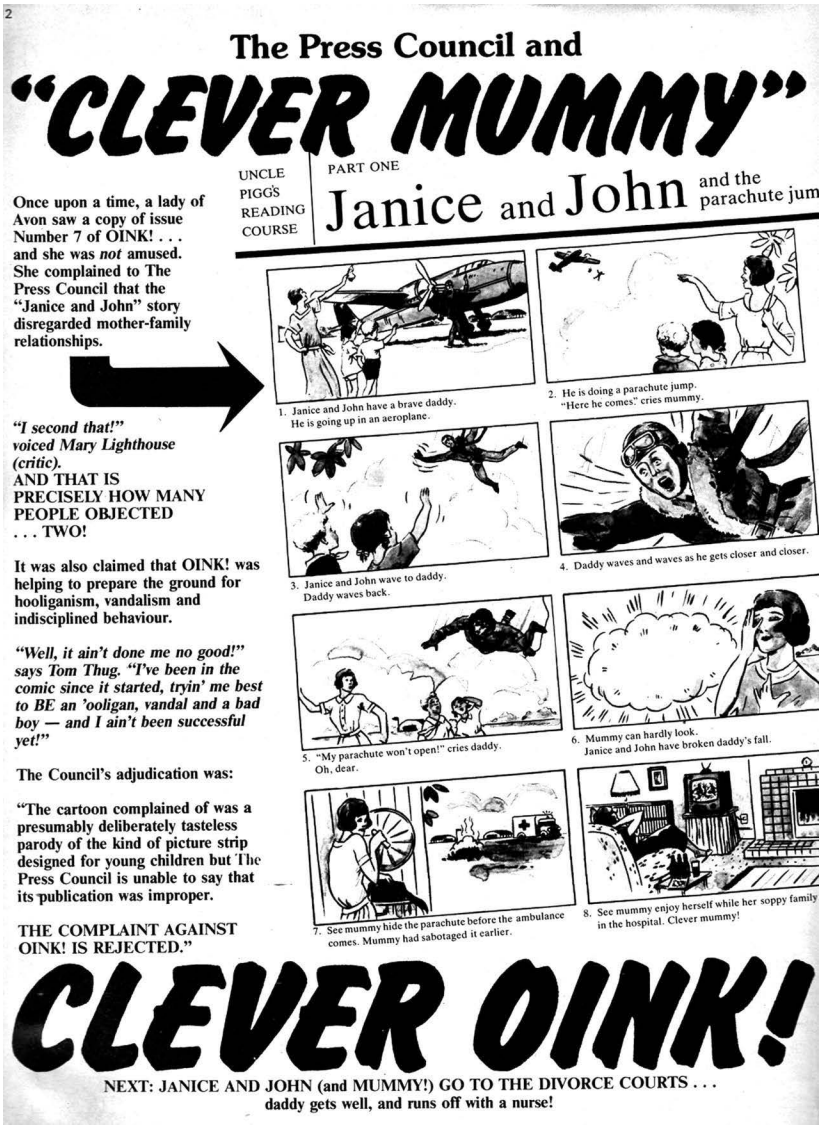

Figure 11.3 *Oink!* 28 (16th May 1987). Reprint of the Janice and John strip, with Press Council verdict added. *Oink*™ Rebellion, Copyright © Rebellion, All Rights Reserved.

Demise

The comic may have been something of a cult in its lifetime, and it continues to have loyal fans. There is a tremendously detailed blog—'Phil's *Oink* blog and Beyond.' This has general news, interviews and a detailed

analysis of every one of the 68 regular issues and various special issues. From examining the blog, responses and an *Oink!* fan Facebook page it is clear that the comic made an impact on many of its readers. There are appreciations of many different characters, deep shock at its cancellation and in particular a sense that it didn't 'talk down' to its readers. What seems to have happened is that the comic had developed what Martin Barker calls a 'contract' with its readers. Barker, talking here about the girl's comic Jackie, argues that it is 'More than just a body of contents looking for a mind to invade…it offers a kind of relationship to its readers…extends an invitation to readers to join in and use its content in particular ways' (Barker, 1989, pp. 256–257). Barker also sees a similar connect to its readers with another IPC comic, *Action*. Attacking the notion that violence in *Action* can only be harmful, he suggests other reactions from its faithful reader and comments that the comic could be

> making you think, or giving resources to the imagination, filling up boring time, or providing a private space away from adults, dramatizing how you feel about the world, giving a sense of belonging to a special community.
>
> (Barker, 1990, p. 11)

Indeed *Action* had a remarkably similar problem to that encountered by *Oink!*, but being an adventure comic the stakes appear to have been even higher. Once again Mary Whitehouse was involved in protests about the violent content of the comic and was more directly successful in this case. In 1976 *Action* was pulled due to the furore (which had spread to various media), and then it returned for a brief period, toned down to the extent that it failed soon afterwards.

There were several reasons for the demise of *Oink!* It was certainly not because the comic lacked a sense of humour, as implied by *Viz* editor and creator Simon Donald. After admitting a strong sense of rivalry, and describing a cake theft gone wrong,

> How could anyone who claimed to know anything about the great traditions of British comic humour place a big, yummy cake on a table, turn their backs and not expect it to disappear? Hardly surprisingly, it was only a couple of years before IPC sent Oink off to the slaughter.
>
> (Donald, 2005, p. 106)

This might be slightly tongue-in-cheek, but may also be fuelled by the fact that IPC had rejected *Viz*. In fact, the actual reasons for its cancellation are much more complex.

It is difficult to know for certain to what extent The Press Council case affected the comic. But it must have been inevitable that the subsequent moving of the comic to top shelves by many retailers would have

impacted on sales. Although sales remained healthy this must also have restricted potential growth, and *Oink!* did not rival bestselling titles like *Buster*, which sold over twice as many copies. Thus, when there was a change of publisher *Oink!* was left vulnerable. The *Oink!* blog outlines the problem:

> *Oink!* was a hit for IPC and they certainly treated it as such, with an average of around 100,000 sales an issue. But when the comics were sold off and Fleetway was 'reborn' under Maxwell a reorganisation took place across the titles.
>
> (Oink Blog)

And subsequently:

> *Oink!* was placed into a sales group with a few other Fleetway titles and one of these was Nipper, a humour comic for a younger audience. Unfortunately, it hadn't found that audience, and so it was that in September of 1987 Nipper was cancelled and merged into Buster. The comics sharing *Oink!*'s group were falling one-by-one.
>
> (Oink Blog)

Then it became *Oink!'s* turn. Without the stellar sales they might have had they were vulnerable, and Issue 68 was the final issue. The title theoretically merged with *Buster*, but in fact only three characters, Pete and his Pimple, Tom Thug and Weedy Willy, moved over, and they were gradually adapted for a younger audience. Uncle Pigg tried to make light of the closure, explaining that 'Your caring sharing Uncle Pigg is taking a well-deserved rest on the bacon-hot island of Cor-phew,' adding, 'Hope this island hadn't got a lighthouse on it.' One last shot at the critic who had tried to kill the comic.

Notes

1 The reasons for the demise of some of the British underground comics are discussed in Huxley, D. *Nasty Tales: Sex, Drugs, Rock'n'Roll and Violence in the British Underground*, Critical Vision, 2001. The main reasons might be briefly summarised as distribution problems and censorship interference. The characteristics of Viz are described in 'Viz: Gender, Class and Taboo' In Wagg, S. (ed.) *Because I Tell a Joke or Two*, Routledge, 1998.
2 *Oink* began as biweekly title; 1–44 (May 1986–December 1987), then weekly; 45–62 (January 1988–May 1988, and finally monthly; 63–68. (June–November 1988).

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