

Tactility of History in Comics and Graphic Novels

A Way to Know the Other

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The Tactility of History in Comics and Graphic Novels

A Way to Understand the Other.

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History Tactility in Graphic Novels and Comics

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Abstract

My point to be proven by this study is the ability of comics to add tactility in retelling history as a way to know the “other.” The combination of images and words is a visual yet explained subject that creates an opportunity for the reader to add his or her thoughts to an interpretation of the subject. The comics chosen to be the main literature material for this theses are retelling history from a human point of view. This is not the usual way to tell history, but it appears to us that texts in complicated matters like Middle Eastern issues in Palestine and Iran have failed to deliver a message of peace, a message that opens the way for people from different backgrounds, particularly, people from the East and the West to connect and know each other as human individuals and not as a whole entity characterized with certain qualities. History has created the people we are now; it has formed and shaped our countries and our way of thinking. Joe Sacco and Marjane Satrapi are two activists who have used the power of comics or graphic novels to retell the history of misportrayed people. Comic books help readers realize complex issues from a different perspective; they can read words explaining sadness or fear on the character’s face, they can express the tears of a woman who, the reader would later read at the end of the page, is a mother who has lost her child. People can relate to cartoons more than they relate to actual people who would otherwise be strangers. The visual aspect of comics, and the simple language allows people to concentrate on the content and the meaning, apart from trying to figure out what a word means as one might find in complicated history texts.

Keywords: Culture, Postcolonial, history, gender issues, Orientalism, Imperialism, Colonization, dehumanization.

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Literature Reviewed

Three main comic books that are used in this study:

1. *Palestine* by Joe Sacco

This is a book where Joe Sacco drops all the masks away. It is his arena to tell people what he thinks of Palestinians and how his field trip to Palestine has changed his opinion. He saw the situation in Palestine and as a journalist he felt very uneducated in the history of the conflict. Learning the history of how the Israeli state was formed helped Sacco to understand the way Palestinians think. It helped him to know “the terrorist.”

2. *Footnotes in Gaza* by Joe Sacco

This is a book that shares Joe Sacco’s journalistic attempts to find some footnotes that are old and not clear: the footnotes of history. The massacres that happened in Gaza 1956, are an undocumented history that Sacco thought deserved to be told. This is a comic book telling the reader a story of trauma. Sacco used a journalistic approach to address a human tragedy. But such a work has its importance in advocating human rights and to showing how human rights are violated in Gaza.

3. *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi

This is a memoir of the author’s personal experience during a critical period in Iran, the revolution. Marjane moved to Europe when she was a teenager, and she was asked many questions regarding Iran and Iranians. So, she decided to write *Persepolis* to show how history played a turning point in people’s lives, including her family’s life, which changed the image of Iranians all over the world, especially in the West. This is a book where the author shares with the reader many personal and intimate details of her life.

1. Introduction

“Comics are just words and pictures; you can do anything with words and pictures.”¹-

Harvey Pekar

Comics or graphic novels can be recognized as mediums that communicate through images, words, and sequence. They are a form of visual communication making it easier for people around the world, regardless of their culture or language, to understand in some way, if not completely, the idea an artist is trying to deliver.

The comic is a form combining words and images that represents the dream of one common language for people all over the world. It is a place where information is more understandable, making things accessible that we do not read in texts or see on news and television networks. As a common example, there is a massive misunderstanding in the West regarding the Arabs and the Middle East, in general because of what we see in news reports, especially in American and European newspapers headlines. And, finally, the role an Arab or a Middle Eastern is given in Hollywood films is the exquisitely barbarically stupid or devilish terrorist. The *Twenty-Five Films* webpage once had a big headline saying: “This Arab actor has been asked to play a terrorist around 30 times, and he’s pretty done with it.”² The twenty-six-year old Amrou Al-Kadhi is a writer, actor, and filmmaker. His first film job in the industry was in Steven Spielberg’s *Munich*, which had him play an Islamic terrorist’s son.

¹ Gravett, Paul. *Graphic Novels: Everything You Need to Know*. Harpercollins. November 2005. P. 10.

² AL-Kadhi, Amrou. *This Arab actor has been asked to play a terrorist around 30 times, and he’s pretty done with it*. Twenty Five-Fils. Feb. 27. 2017. <https://twentyfivefilms.com/2017/02/27/this-arab-actor-has-been-asked-to-play-a-terrorist-around-30-times-and-hes-pretty-done-with-it/>. Web. March. 3. 2017.



Al-Kadhi claims to have since been sent around 30 scripts within which his role would be that of a terrorist, ranging from characters such as a “suspicious bearded man on the tube to a “Muslim man who hides his bombs in a deceptive burka.”³ In the same article, the actor notes that, “Hollywood should not be complicit as well. More than ever before, we need the cinema screen to do its unique job: to illuminate ignored identities, and to challenge the ideas that prejudice and politics would have us believe.”⁴

My theses will address the question of how a comic book or a graphic novel can turn history or incidents that we as readers never witnessed into a personal experience. Telling history with a comic or a graphic novel is not telling stories, it is retelling stories in a different way. It is a way that includes the reader in the author’s experience. It is a completely different way of telling history through stories of people -- people who suffer and who are in pain. Joe Sacco and Marjane Satrapi stand in activist shoes. Both authors tackle historical subjects that had a role in the formation of Palestinians and Iranians.

Sacco has chosen to tell the story of the Palestinian people, to be there to experience their daily life, to portray the difficulties they face, and to explore the roots of the American claim that Palestinians are terrorists. Joe Sacco wanted to understand the history that created

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

the Palestinian/Israeli conflict that led Palestinians to act in a certain way, a way, whether we agree or not, is a result of many years of oppression and terror.

Because of where Satrapi and Sacco stand, as educated and liberal personalities who seek the truth, the first thing they did through their books is to criticize their society. “The paradox of education is that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.”⁵ . Sacco showed how Americans stereotype Palestinians and Satrapi started with the veil that she refuses to wear. As writers and artists, they want to stimulate the readers with questions they had never asked themselves because they were given the answers already. The two artists want people to educate themselves about the “other,” to ask questions even if it challenges their own belief systems because this is how we learn.

Marjane Satrapi chose to tell her own story during the Iranian Islamic Revolution, a time that shaped Iran and Iranians. Both authors want the reader to recognize the pain of the other, the one they do not meet, but they hear about from one time to another, although what people hear is the same old story they have started to believe. Satrapi and Sacco have one thing in common, they both want to tell the untold story, the second version of the story, a hidden version.

People in the West definitely know not all humans are the same, but the media, politics, and intellectuals have managed to publish a certain image to accompany every race, color, nationality and religion to which others belong. Categorizing people is what the human brain has been trained to do. An Eastern woman is always a victim in the eyes of the West, always obedient and passive. A Palestinian is a terrorist, and an Iranian is a fundamentalist.

I want to prove that the comics is a very effective way to change the reader’s previous stereotypical images by giving a voice to people whose voice is unheard. Cartoons are an

⁵ Baldwin, J. (1963). A talk to teachers. Saturday Review. P.42.
<http://www.unz.org/pub/SaturdayRev-1963dec21-00042?View=PDF>. We. April. 22. 2017.

effective tool to help the reader identify with a character, with the “other’s” painful experiences and losses. This research will also address the importance of cartoons in retelling history, by combining words and images, to enable the reader’s imagination to move between images, words, spaces and eventually make sense out of a complicated historical subject. Comics and graphic novels, as we will discover in the three graphic books chosen to be the main literature study in this research, show us that human experience is worth telling when talking about history and people’s way of thinking. We are unable to identify a person unless we know their past, because the past experiences are what form people’s personalities and ways of thinking. Their past is what shaped their identity.

This is a time when we all have access to all the information we need in order to know the “other.” We have books, films, social media, thousands of television networks, and the Internet. Generalization and the transmission of the same old idea from one person to another around the world is unbelievably surreal. As someone who had generalized the description of a terrorist on all Palestinians, Sacco thought that retelling the history of Palestinian people would let the Americans know who Palestinians really are. Edward Said, in his book *Orientalism*, explains the way a distinction between the East and West has become the starting point of “us” and “them,” explaining how intellectuals in the West have played a huge role into this generalization:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus, a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,”

destiny, and so on. This Orientalism can accommodate Aeschylus, say, and Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx.”⁶

In *the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx wrote: They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.”⁷ This quote from Karl Marx is the first epigraph that Said mentions in his book *Orientalism*. It is also Karl Marx who said “There is something in human history like retribution; and it is a rule of historical retribution that its instrument be forged not by the offended, but by the offender himself.”⁸ The second epigraph Said used in *Orientalism* is by Benjamin Disraeli in *Tancred*, where he notes that “The East is a career.”⁹ The meaning behind Disraeli’s and Marx’s vision of the East leads the reader to one meaning referring to the Orient as weak and passive; in short, it is inferior to what they know, the West, or it could be mysterious and exciting, both ways have an imperial reading to the east and its people. History has been written by the offender, the powerful and colonialist side. Why not let people, normal people tell their history, by digging into their memories and own personal intimate experience, like in *Palestine, Footnotes in Gaza* and *Persepolis*?

Recognizing the East is challenging for someone from the West who has never been to the East because of all the long-held prejudices the West already has towards the East. That is why, the information the West receives about the “other” is not enough to understand or to have a common ground for a dialogue between “us” and “them.” A Hollywood movie, or a CNN report, and maybe a BBC documentary about the situation in the Middle East tends only to alienate. People see what the media and filmmakers have chosen to focus on, for many reasons -- whether it be publicity, money or growing audiences -- and people tend to watch what they agree with. So, if you are a Donald Trump supporter, you would watch Fox News;

⁶ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1. Oct 2014. P. 2-3.

⁷ Marx, Karl. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. 1852.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch07.htm> Web. Dec. 29.2016.

⁸ *The Indian Revolt. New York Daily Tribute*. September 16, 1857,

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/09/16.htm>. Web. Dec. 29. 2016.

⁹ Disraeli, Benjamin. *Tancred*. 1847.

if not, you might be watching the political satire shows that air every night on American cable networks. People tend to stay in their comfort zone. I want to examine the ability of graphic novels and comics in helping readers understand the “other” and how history is a way to make sense of the present, proving that “appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present.”¹⁰

The three graphic novels in this thesis create a human understanding, not a political or a geographical one. The main goal behind the combination of those cartoon images and the simple short texts is to comprehend other people’s lives under occupation or war circumstances. Artistic works such as comics are a simple yet demonstrative way to help the reader figure out “they” who are in pain and have no voice. To know is to understand more, these graphic books add tactility to their subjects to recognize people’s pain, what they have suffered, what makes them happy, and what makes them cry. What is the history that made those individuals end up in such a painful state? Because history is what makes the present and the future, it is crucial to recognize it in someone’s story, especially someone we do not know.

Joe Sacco and Marjane Satrapi chose their characters to be ordinary people, families, children, and mothers. They chose to share the dreams of the misfortunate in a way that standard texts and news could not. Edward Said has recognized this quality in literature and social work when he notes: “Humanism is the only - I would go so far as saying the final-resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history.”¹¹

Can comics change people’s perspective of the other, feel or recognize the struggle and pain the “other” feels? Randol Shaun wrote:

In Sacco’s *Palestine*, the reader becomes involved in the Palestinian plight. We begin to sympathize with the hurdles they must jump in order to thrive in business. We feel

¹⁰ Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. Random House, 7. Aug. 2014. P. 1.

¹¹ Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1. Oct 2014. P. xxix

the pain of the parents' whose children have been hit by bullets. We shiver in their cold rooms and we squint through their dark nights. We tremble when unnamed soldiers appear like Storm Troopers on the muddy streets of refugee camp.¹²

Graphic novels give people access to a different type of education where emotions of the reader as a human being are involved. Comics are the media where a new experience of reading is experienced, and a new way of understanding is formed. Life is changing, and so is literature. *Persepolis*, *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza* has proven that comics are a revolution for storytelling.

Although Joe Sacco says his graphic novels were never meant to be didactic, but that is their effect on readers. When learning about other people's pain and struggle, many people did not previously know much of what is really happening in Palestine in places such as the West Bank or Gaza. While many think that the news is the right place to learn, what is going on in the world, unfortunately it is not; it is where we get confused and do not get answers. Sacco gave answers to questions the American masses never thought of asking.

In the West, an Iranian woman is perceived as this veiled, all in black, passive, and uneducated woman. Marjane makes it clear that Iranians, especially Iranian women, are just like other women around the world, and Iranian children are just like every other child in the world.

How does the narrative in *Persepolis*, *Palestine*, and *Footnotes of Gaza* construct the reader's interpretations of this combination of the text and image taken from a real-life experience? We must realize the difference between Sacco's narrative as an outsider telling other people's stories and Satrapi's narrative factor as an insider, telling her own story and her family's story. How does *Palestine* contribute in realizing the role of the Palestinian woman?

¹² Randol, Shaun, "Quick Review: 'Palestine' by Joe Sacco," *The Mantle*. OCTOBER 21, 2009. <http://www.mantlethought.org/international-affairs/quick-review-palestine-joe-sacco>.

It is a question of whose life matters, a question that Judith Butler has asked by explaining “dehumanization” and how it affects the reaction of people when they look at all of those Muslims dying in the name of the “war on terrorism.”

Satrapı has mentioned many gender-related issues back in Iran and clarified how it is hard for a liberal woman to live in Iranian society because of what politics had made of it. Human rights and women’s rights are two important points in Satrapı and Sacco’s novels. The artists’ help readers see beyond the current picture, they help readers see how the current picture was formed. Marjane Satrapı said:

People always ask me, “Why don’t you write a real book?” But that is what *Persepolis* is. To me, a book is pages related to something that has a cover. Graphic novels are not traditional literature, but that does not mean that they are second-rate. Images are a way of writing. When you have the talent to be able to write and to draw it seems a shame to choose one. I think it’s better to do both.¹³

Satrapı asserts on the importance of combining text and image, adding that her life story benefits from being told as a graphic novel, because image is an international language, according to Satrapı. That makes it easy for her to be understood.

Scott McCloud claims that a graphic novel or a comic is “how words and pictures can combine to create effects that neither could create separately.” It is hard to define graphic novels because of the many factors it combines: pictures, words, colors, panels, and gutters -- where everything has a meaning. Images in a comic demand the reader to stop and look, read, analyze, and even feel, unlike movies and news, where everything visual fades in moments. Like our daily life, things could pass by without us noticing. However, a picture with some words alongside of it on the page of the graphic novel means you cannot miss the point! The

¹³ Satrapı, Marajane. *Marjane Satrapı: From the Author: On Writing Persepolis*, Random House. n. d., authorized=438018view=form author. April,13,2007.

artist draws what he or she saw and the moment that he or she wants people to see. As will be discussed, graphic style has special effects on the reader, as the cartoon below highlights. Compare the colors, the details in the cartoon, and these intense images in Sacco's style to the simplicity Satrapi uses in her *Persepolis*.



Understanding Comics, Scott McCloud. p. 48.

Neil Cohen (2007), proposes that comics can be thought of as a “visual language” rather than as a medium. We live in a visual world, where words are not enough; we need to see with our own eyes, and what better way to transfer the author’s experience than writing and drawing it? Reading is always a good way to educate ourselves, but sometimes it is hard to understand what you read if you have not witnessed it, or see some in images some traces of the event you read about.

Sacco and Satrapi helped readers understand the other through humanity and the retold history, a history we can see and touch on the pages of their books. They give us access to an era that explains much, but has just vanished. Satrapi and Sacco have stimulated the reader's imagination with images and words. Graphic nonfiction has its own unique impact, "both upon readers who don't usually pick up comics and upon comics' fans who wouldn't normally read nonfiction. The comic form is excellent for reaching visual learners and getting information across in a memorable way, and its atmospheric possibilities can fire the imaginations of readers otherwise not engaged by history."¹⁴

Palestine, *Footnotes in Gaza*, and *Persepolis* are all graphic novels that can give us a postcolonial cultural critique, whether to the situation in Palestine, or in countries like Iran, even though Iran was never officially physically colonized by a European force. Nevertheless, Iran was indirectly controlled by Russia and Britain, until these massive European powers were displaced by the United States in the late twentieth century. Even an indirectly colonized country is subject to an indirect economic, political, social, and intellectual level of colonization.

¹⁴ Steve Raiteri, "Graphic Journal" 1 Nov. 2004:64. Literature Resource Center. Web. 8th Sep.2016.

2. *Palestine* – Joe Sacco

2.1 The Role of the Author (An Outsider) – Objectivity and Experience

In the introduction of the graphic novel *Palestine*, Edward Said offers his opinion of Sacco's book as:

a political and aesthetic work of extraordinary originality, quite unlike any other in the long, often turgid and hopelessly twisted debates that had occupied Palestinians, Israelis, and their respective supporters ... With the exception of one or two novelists and poets, no one has ever rendered this terrible state of affairs better than Sacco.¹⁵

It is rare to find a written piece that comprehends Palestinian life on a human level. Mostly, the forms of communication are political, reflecting politicians' wild show of words and speeches, reports of the numbers of dead people, and the number of the houses that have been destroyed. Palestinians are living in a big prison, so producing knowledge about the conflict is not an easy thing to do for Palestinians, with all of their limitations surrounding them.

What is more, people tend to doubt the information Palestinians give, depending on the stereotypical image of a Palestinian in Western societies, especially among Americans. The international politics are on the side of the powerful. In this case, it is Israel, which has more access to media, business, and money markets in the world. Palestinians do not matter that much. The natives of a "third world" country can be erased, and Palestinian lives will mean nothing.

However, someone like Sacco came and showed them that finding answers and knowing the truth still matters. History matters if we want to know what people are about, to know their stories and their pain, the source of that pain, share their struggles, and try to feel what they feel. Joe Sacco gives us that history with all the crowded pages that he draws and the texts he writes telling us many different stories, facts, challenges, and sometimes doubts.

¹⁵ Sacco, Joe Sacco, *Palestine*, Introduction. Fanta graphic Books. 2015, p. iii.

These qualities are what makes *Palestine* a unique information source for the reader to experience what the artist experienced himself. It is not only numbers and statistics, the book tells people's stories, and shows their faces, eyes, tears, and body language to create a meaningful story of people's struggle.

We receive historical stories in multiple versions, especially the Israeli Palestinian stories. History books and media play their main role in forming our social and political views. Edward Said argues that "All knowledge that is about human society, and not about the natural world, is historical knowledge, and therefore rests upon judgment and interpretation. This is not to say that facts or data are nonexistent, but that facts get their importance from what is made of them in interpretation. (...) Such disagreements are the stuff out of which historical writing is made and from which historical knowledge derives. For interpretations depend very much on who the interpreter is, who he or she is addressing, what his or her purpose is in interpreting, at what historical moment the interpretation takes place. In this sense, all interpretations are what might be called situational: they always occur in a situation whose bearing on the interpretation is affiliative. It is related to what other interpreters have said, either by confirming them, or by disputing them, or by continuing them. No interpretation is without precedents or without some connection to other interpretations."¹⁶

Those "situational interpretations" Said talks about come from people, media sources or governments who have interests behind certain subjects and historical facts, which they like to take advantage of, they tend to present the information that is profitable for them and eliminate what does not support their side of the story. The importance of *Palestine* or *Footnotes in Gaza* lies in the representation an outsider represents the Palestinians in his two books. He is a journalist, a tourist, and an artist who happens to be experiencing Palestinian life, willingly and

¹⁶ Said, Edward. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. Vintage Books, 1997. P. 154-145.

individually; he had no media or journalistic policy to follow. Sacco wanted to answer some things that he as a journalist questioned when hearing nothing but the same Palestinian-Israeli story for most of his life, with his country, the United States, as it is the biggest player in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Therefore, Sacco decided to tell the story of a small country called Palestine, a name that you can't find on the map of the world, but you can find in history. The word "Palestinian" invokes misunderstanding, as I myself, as a Palestinian, experience. When hearing a reference to Palestine, people reply something to the effect of, "What? Pakistan?" Then I reply, "No, Palestine." And they would say, "Ooooh! And where is that exactly?" And this is the moment I must say, "Jerusalem." Of course, they reply with, "Aha! Israel, you mean!" Then, I again explain the story, which I became good at telling in almost ten seconds, but no one seems to understand.

Sacco has used his journalistic skills to relocate the "other's" version of the story on the surface, not in the depths where no one can reach. He combined these skills with his art of translating words into images, to add a human charm into his journalistic documentary. Some have argued that Joe Sacco's experience contradicts the objectivity of his contemporary journalistic book. I will start by explaining why Joe Sacco is a very good candidate for telling this story.

Edward Said asserts that to produce knowledge, you have got to have power. Said also added that a knowledge producer must be there, at the right place, and to see in an expert's way things that natives cannot themselves see, because the natives here are used to some things that, to them, are ordinary. But to people coming from other parts of world, it is the opposite of ordinary. For example, many people would ask Palestinians about why they are laughing when telling stories of the occupation, which are painful stories, or, we can say, crazy stories with no sense of reason. In one of the meetings with Palestinian men and young boys, Sacco noticed

Palestinians laugh at things that are not funny; they are dangerous or could be at least described as sad. When Sacco asks a young man “For what? I ask... Throwing a Molotov... then they burst, they think it’s funny!” (44-45) Sacco does not understand why this is funny to them. Sacco then realizes what is missing in the Western media. He spots things a person will never read or hear in the American media. Thus, Sacco is the ultimate candidate for accomplishing this kind of mission. One can argue that American writings of the East, especially the Palestinian Israeli conflict, are more of an indirect Orientalism, based on abstraction, very politicized by the presence of Israel, because the Jewish state is a Western state (practically) and America and Europe have great interests the region.

Sacco’s case was different. He is an independent journalist and cartoonist who had questions about the American media and, by his presence in the actual location of the famous unending conflict, came to expose reality. The *Los Angeles Times* notes in one of its articles that Sacco’s production has a “combination of engagement and complicity ... This is what visual storytelling has to offer, this kind of immediacy, of empathy, its ability to open up the narrative in a way that transcends words.”¹⁷

Sacco is able to accomplish this where he is the main narrator in the story, a leading character, dominating the cartoon dialogue with his questions. As a white American male and a journalist, it is very easy for an American or a European person to identify with Joe’s character. What Sacco does in *Palestine*, to include the reader, is that he starts his journey just as any other Western person who lives his life believing the stereotypes the media, previous writers, and intellectuals offer about the conflict. With the previous knowledge, he received from school and media stories of this struggle, Sacco shows us how ignorant he is when it comes to the definition of a Palestinian or the life in Palestine.

¹⁷ Sacco, Joe. *Palestine*. Commentaries, back cover.

However; things change after he is exposed to what is really happening on the ground. He started to look around to open his eyes and gradually let go the guards of his beliefs and prejudices regarding the Palestinian struggle and Palestinians as people. Therefore, the reader notices later on that Sacco's character is reconsidering things and a general understanding of what is going on in that part of the world is being created. He begins to understand the human aspect, regardless of politics or religion. This is an aspect a classical American journalist will never talk about, because it is not matters to the media to which he or she belongs. In an interview with Peter Aspden in 2003, Joe Sacco told Aspden that "It is almost preposterous to think that a Western reporter could be objective in a situation like that."¹⁸

Joe Sacco represents the life of the Palestinians he met, and he made his experience very personal with those people. Sacco is criticized for a lack of objectivity. As some journalists point out regarding his book; to classical journalists his book is missing a main part of classical journalism. Joe Sacco replied to his critics in the same interview with Aspden, "That is why it is important to write in the first person. It would be very difficult to get that feeling across if you were pretending you were not even there, as traditional US journalism does."¹⁹ I believe that when a person is talking in the first person, it means he or she is talking about personal experience, things he or she saw, and things he or she noticed.

Marc Singer notes that "some of the testimonies that he records, particularly (though not exclusively) stories of intra-Palestinian violence, prompt Sacco to fall back on the naturalistic detachment and professional objectivity of American Journalism, presenting second hand accounts and conflicting views without expressing his own opinions."²⁰ I believe Sacco's aim from telling this particular story and the rest of his journalistic stories is to give voice for people who do not have it. Sacco wants the reader to be the judge and to form their

¹⁸ Aspden, Peter. *Tugged by the Forgotten Places*. Financial Times, June 27, 2003, 15.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Singer, Marc. *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Views from Nowhere: Journalistic Detachment in Palestine*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015. P. 67.

opinion towards these stories the way they are told. The author is giving readers a place in his experience to see and listen for themselves; they have had enough journalists, writers, politicians, and even artists telling them how to think and what to think.

As a main cartoon character, Sacco gave a starting point to Western readers, especially Americans, beginning with an ignorant position and then telling stories about ignored realities left out by common classical media and journalism. It is a story that is completely misunderstood by most people in the world, by media agendas, governments, political agendas, and economic interests. These groups have come to define the “other” as dangerous and must be controlled all the time otherwise. These “others” have no clue of how to act. Take for example, countries like Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and others; what would they do without American interference, or without officials who their people believe certain things?

In most cases, people listen to those who share much in common with them regarding religion, race, color, social status, and the same geographical sphere. There are many things that decide the level of communication and the trust given to the source of information; sharing the same grounds of knowledge and interests are one of those things. Edward Said suggests that knowledge gets its importance from the interpretations we give to it. In that case, recipients of the knowledge choose the parts that help build their belief systems; just like putting a puzzle together, we as humans have a certain image in our heads and collectively choose the missing parts to complete the image implanted in our brain.

In contrast, Sacco chose to get out of the familiar and question the image in his head. By that step, he is helping the readers, unconsciously, to question the image they have implanted in their mind. Hsu and Lincoln suggest that “readers are allowed to identify with the person who physically resembles them, yet simultaneously they are encouraged to identify with the person who speaks for them: the white male character, who dominates the cartoon’s

dialogue.”²¹ This specificity allows Sacco to gain an influential force on the opinion of the reader. Sacco is telling Claudia “Americans won’t care about the problems of Palestinians when Americans get killed in these terrorist attacks. One American dies like that, it eclipses anything Palestinians have to say!”(7) He moves on to the narration to write “terrorism is the bread Palestinians get buttered on.”(7) Then he recalls some terror incidents and asks the reader to remember with him what they have been told or, as he describes, what Americans have “swallowed.” The terror spread by the Palestinians is what the author describes as what “I’d swallowed that since the airliners went sky high in the desert, do you remember that, do you remember Munich and the blown up athletes, the bus and the airport massacres?” (7)

Yes, everyone remembers those incidents, and for Sacco to be self-aware of what he has been absorbing from the American media, and to remind the reader they had the same experience with identifying Palestinians, is a special way to tell the reader how all Americans have heard the same stories that creates the same attitudes towards all the Palestinians. He is reminding himself and the reader that they are controlled to think of the same thing, to generalize, and to fear other people who are Palestinians because they are terrorists and no matter what happens to them, it is ok. This is the kind of fear we even see now in Europe. Take, for example, the European Parliaments discussing the law of *hijab* prohibition in work places. Dutch anti-Islam lawmaker Geert Wilders is calling immigrants “scum.” He is making his people fear immigrants and Muslims, and pretending to be the hero to save their country from “scum” like that. Noam Chomsky observes that “The more you can increase fear of drugs and crime, welfare mothers, immigrants and aliens, the more you control all the people.”²²

²¹ Hsuan, L. Hsu & Lincoln, Martha. *Health Media and Global Inequalities*. Daedalus, vol. 138, no. 2, 2009. P. 25-26.

²² Chomsky, Noam. *Noam Chomsky*. April 16th, 2010
http://speakingofdemocracy.com/quotes/noam_chomsky/

It was far into the a.m., wed been drinking, and Claudia, who was half Iraqi, who was Arabic in Damascus where she'd left her Palestinian Romeo whose brother in the PLO was on first names with Yasser - Claudia may or may not have said something of interest at that point...

You better believe I did:

AMERICANS WON'T CARE ABOUT THE PROBLEMS OF PALESTINIANS WHEN AMERICANS GET KILLED IN THESE TERRORIST ATTACKS. ONE AMERICAN DIES LIKE THAT, IT ECLIPSES ANYTHING PALESTINIANS HAVE TO SAY!

WELL... I DON'T KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT THESE THINGS...

I knew she did, but...

Conversation over!

A peck on the cheek and—

I went home alone



PALESTINIAN BOYFRIEND! HA! BITCH! TERRORIST GROUPIE!

Unfair? You bet, but I couldn't get the taste out of my mouth, terrorism is the bread Palestinians get buttered on, I'd swallowed that ever since the airliners went sky high in the desert, do you remember that, do you remember Munich and the blown up athletes, the bus and airport massacres?



F

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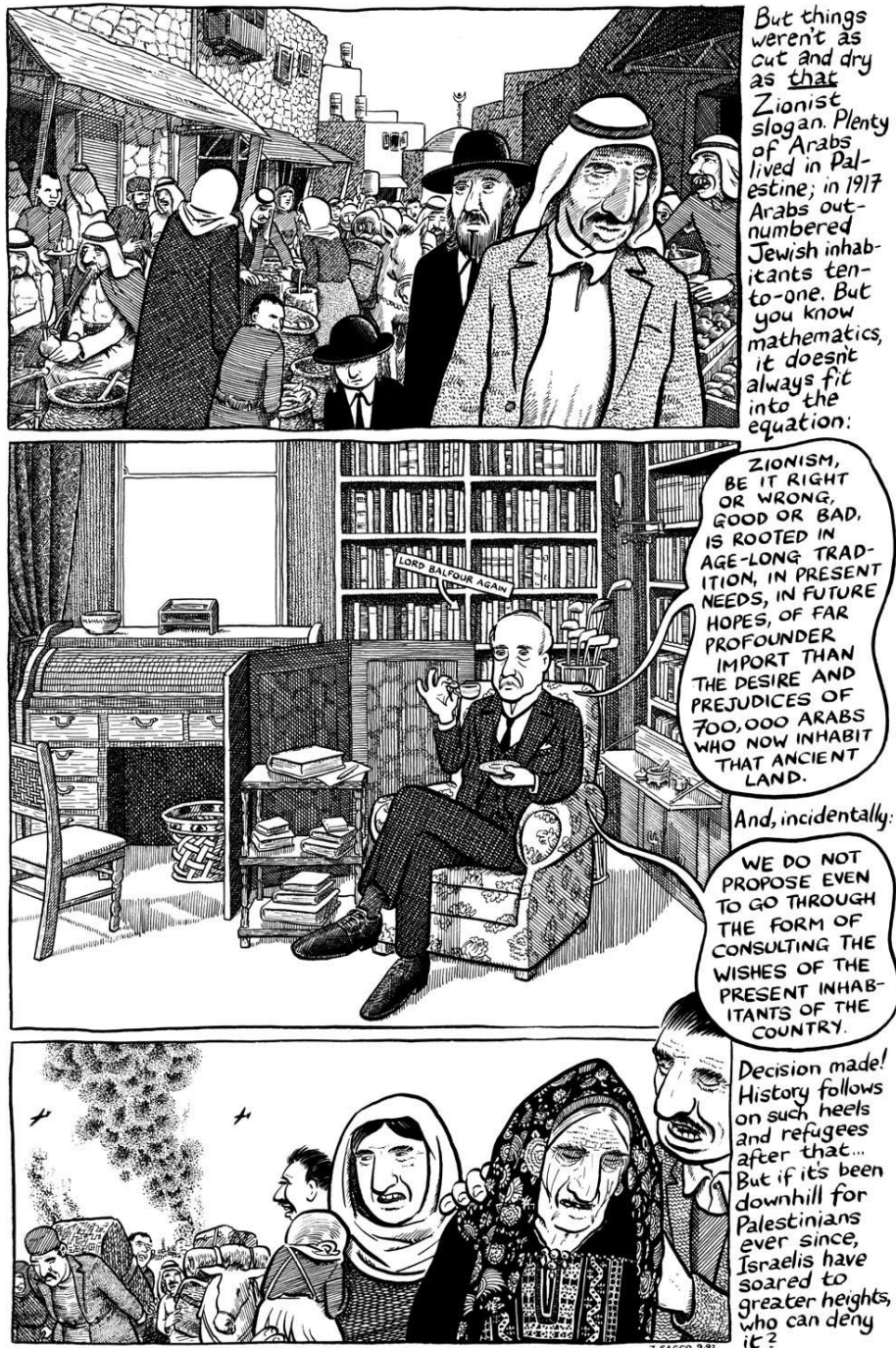
What is interesting is that Sacco points out that no matter how many televised news reports he has seen, “televised pools of blood...” (8), he knows about Klinghoffer “who ate brand X corn flakes” (8), but did not recognize Palestinian faces in the news. Sacco notes “... and if Palestinians have been expelled, bombed, and kicked black and blue, even when it’s made the evening news I never caught a name or recall a face, to say nothing about their corn flakes”(8). Sacco wants to “shake hands with people’s pain,” or at least this is what the man from Nablus would love the author to do.



Starting from an ignorant place, and then moving on to the stage where the author is invited to open up and let other people in, Sacco has chosen to tell the story from the beginning. He tells about what placed those people, the Palestinians, in their situation. He begins to tell the reader about Zionism, the British Lord Balfour, and how Europe and America helped Zionists occupy the Palestinian land. Sacco rewrote history in a visual way, a way that is complicating enough to be forgotten in history books. Sacco goes far as to draw God saying the phrase from the Torah.



Sacco is transferring very essential historical facts most probably American and European people are not familiar with. It is a simple way of retelling the history of a people accused of terrorism; people whose lives do not matter to Western masses.



War news, and particularly news of the Palestinian situation, is the kind of news in which viewers hear about numbers killed and demolished houses. But the Western media do not go

into detail about the human side of stories. No one get to know about those people who lost a loved one or those whose houses were demolished. This reality and how it traumatizes Palestinians is what Sacco needs people to understand when addressing the Palestinians. Objectivity is what Sacco is after, like any other journalist or historian. Objectivity in journalism tends to be used to describe the word reality, as promoted by journalists. Walter Lippman explains that, “objectivity” in journalism is the pursuit of verification and transparency that could validate journalistic work, “namely the belief that simply reporting the facts will produce a story free of any ideology or worldview.”²³ By the 1930s, things were changing and the word “objective” started to be used as a term to describe journalists themselves. I would argue that Sacco has fulfilled the standards of being objective in his book, he has the viewless objectivity that suspends Sacco’s willingness to comment on the stories he hears. This way of reporting a story, as, press critic Jay Rosen describes, adapts a term from the philosopher Thomas Nagel: “the view from nowhere.”²⁴ Rosen describes the view from nowhere as,

‘a bid for trust that advertises the viewlessness of the news producer. Frequently it places the journalist between polarized extremes, and calls that neither-nor position ‘impartial.’ Second, it’s a means of defense against a style of criticism that is fully anticipated: charges of bias originating in partisan politics and the two-party system. Third: it’s an attempt to secure a kind of universal legitimacy that is implicitly denied to those who stake out positions or betray a point of view. “American journalists have almost a lust for the view from nowhere because they think it has more authority than any other possible stance.”²⁵

²³ Schudson, Michael. *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. New York: Basic, 1978. P.121-44.

²⁴ Rosen, Jay. *The View from Nowhere: Questions and Answers*. Press Think, Nov. 10, 2010, <http://pressthink.org/2010/11/the-view-from-nowhere-questions-and-answers/>.

²⁵ Ibid.

However, Sacco can get readers to form their own view and release their imagination, moving from the stories Palestinians tell and the pain they feel expressed either with their words or their body language and faces. As Sacco was invited to shake hands with people's pain in *Palestine*, Sacco is giving the chance for the reader to shake hands with all the pain, struggle, and loss Palestinians suffer. Sacco as a journalist and as an American citizen wanted to know the truth that is why he is not writing from his point of view. For him, it is much more honest and effective to express the realm of the shadowed life of some people with no voice, people who are only counted as numbers. What about them? Are they really terrorists? The reader will realize just as Sacco did, this whole propaganda is not true.

When journalists accuse Sacco for moving away from journalistic objectivity, they may wonder why he doesn't address the Israeli perspective. But, there are no Israeli stories in *Palestine*. Where does the Israeli story fit into this?

This critique, he already replied to in *Palestine*. When two Israeli women are telling Sacco that his story should include the Israeli side of the story; Joe notes "And what can I say? I have heard nothing but the Israeli side most all my life which, it'd take a whole other trip to see Israel that I'd like to meet Israelis, but that wasn't why I was here...." (256)



Has not the Israeli story been adopted by the American media for tens of years now? Sacco is trying to figure out why this story is still existing, the story that constantly victimizes the Israeli people, and terrorizes the Palestinians. It has been decades and this is only version of the story in America. With Sacco, Palestinian stories are told in a new way, a different way. With his retelling of their history, Sacco gave them a new perspective, a new image. Adam Rosenblatt and Andrea A. Lunsford state that Sacco “uses comics not just to create a new kind of journalism, but also to question the orthodoxies of more traditional reporting ... In stressing

his subjective position, Sacco distinguishes himself from the traditional journalistic aims of distance and objectivity.”²⁶

However, all what Sacco wanted to do was comprehend the reality of other people’s lives. In the pain and struggle they face in their daily lives, he is there observing, listening, sketching, asking questions, and writing down names. He is someone who has finally got it; Palestinians are not only news material. They have names and feelings worth sharing with everyone. While narrating facts and memories, it seems that he is questioning the possibilities of the objective truth as Rocco Versaci suggests when he locates Joe Sacco with other comic journalists in the category of the new journalists who “questioned the very possibility of objective truth.”²⁷ And at this point the artist gets the inspiration to blend journalistic and novelistic techniques to tell a complicated story that no one seems to understand, by doing so, Sacco “engages the subjectivity ties of author and reader.”²⁸

Whether *Palestine* is a novel, a comic or a journalistic piece -- and some would refer to it as a “documentary reportage”²⁹ -- it is undeniable that Sacco has used his journalistic and artistic skills along with his experience to tell a story of human sorrow and struggle, a history no one understand in the right way. Sacco created an assessable source for whoever wants to know the reality of a Palestinian life, a book readers can read not only by its words, but also read the lines, faces, bodies, colors, and even spaces. He is creating a visionary historical story that is still happening today to free the reader’s imagination to enter a tangible and perceptible world of the displaced other, the Palestinians. It is somewhere the West has never been before; somewhere real and human. Amy Kiste Nyberg states that real “journalists distill experience

²⁶ Rosenblatt, Adam & Lunsford, A. Andrea. *Critique, Caricature, and Compulsion in Joe Sacco’s Comics Journalism. The Rise of the American Comic Artist: Creators and Contexts*. Paul William and James Lyons (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), p. 69.

²⁷ Versaci, Rocco. *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics as Literature*. New York: Continuum, 2007. P. 114.

²⁸ Harstock, C. John *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), P. 40.

²⁹ Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007. p. 10.

into story.”³⁰ This distillation applies to *Palestine*. By transferring real-life experience into those crowded pages with images, words, names and faces, Sacco has succeeded in making a complicated story an understandable one, much easier for the readers to relate to and question the prejudices they have regarding Palestinians. Sacco made it possible for people to deal with news as a human experience, not only comprised of facts and numbers but a medium where an indirect dialogue is possible between the East and the West. The West hears the real story of Palestine from the people who truly suffer, not from an American or a Palestinian official and not an Israeli, because the three parties are trading with Palestinians lives to sign meaningless agreements. Sacco is even giving the reader an idea of what Palestinians think of the Palestinian officials and the PLO; the people have lost trust in their officials who are also after personal benefits; they seem to trust Sacco and have faith in him more than they trust the PLO.



³⁰ Nyberg, Amy Kiste. *Comics Journalism. Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods*. Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan. New York: Routledge, 2012. P. 118-19.

The old man describes to Sacco how the peace process Palestinians officials have signed is feckless and fruitless: “You know what this peace process is? It is our Palestinian leaders signing papers to make what the Israelis have done legal ... But it doesn’t matter. Let them make it legal ...” (278) In an interview by Richard Carleton with Ghassan Kanafani for Australian TV, Kanafani described these talks with the Israeli side as ““You don’t mean exactly ‘peace talks.’ You mean capitulation. Surrendering.”³¹ Kanafani described the peace with Israelis as “That kind of a conversation between the sword and the neck.”³² Kanafani wanted to make sure the journalist understands what he is describing as talking is not going to be talking, because the two parties are not on the same level of power and military resources. Carleton asked Kanafani about a way that could end this civil war. The Australian journalist must have been not well informed of the conflict history when he describes it as a civil war. Kanafani comments, “It is not a ‘civil war,’ it is self-defense, someone came into your land, took your house, and threw you out in the streets, no.... Worse, uprooted you and killed you to take what you have.”³³ However; the Australian journalist seems like he was talking about another case, as if he read someone else’s story before he did the interview with Kanafani. The uprooted Palestinian living in exile noted “I have never seen any talk between a colonialist and a national liberation movement.”³⁴ History had created a stiff and complex case, a present and a future no one could unravel without knowing its history. The Australian journalist seemed uneducated about the history of the Palestinian misery, although the interview was made twenty years after the *Nakbah* (the 1948 Palestinian exodus). Palestinians are still convinced up to this day that someday they will get their land back. Whenever there is a mention of the peace process, history is something Palestinians cannot forget about.

³¹ Kanafani, Ghassan. An interview with Ghassan Kanafani, by Richard Carleton for Australian TV, Beirut 1970.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

If an American viewer read only the sentence where the Palestinian man says “the Israelis will never leave they will flee. You see them up there. On the roofs. Looking? They must pay attention... Once the sleep we will... KKKKKIK,” the only reading would be that these Palestinians are crazy, violent, or that the terrorist image is true. However, Sacco realized that the history of Palestine and the way an Israeli state was formed is critical for knowing the truth about the conflict is marked with; hatred, death, and despair.

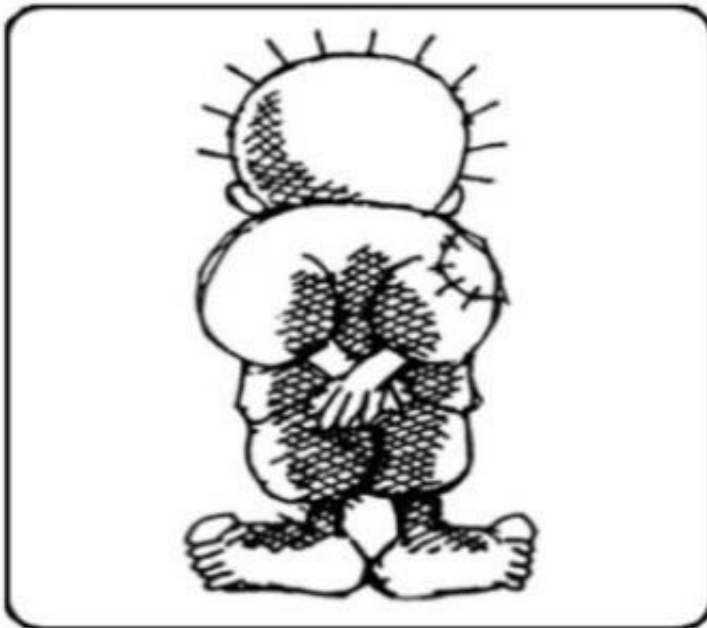
Although Sacco has his own presence in *Palestine* as a character, he made a decision to absent himself and his opinions. With that he gives the reader some space to rethink the present image of the Palestinians and the conflict in general. However, I would not claim that he never offers his opinion in the book, because we notice Sacco is being satirical when he talks about historical incidents or when he takes quotations from famous Israeli officials like Golda Meir, Ben Gurion, and Lord Balfour the British prime minister at the time of the Balfour agreement in 1917. He is makes fun of the situation or what has been said or done; by that the artist is drawing the reader’s attention to some of the most rootless points in the Zionist allegations to give an excuse to steal the Palestinians’ land. History in the Palestinian Israeli conflict is a key player in understanding the origin of the conflict and the Palestinian point of view.

Naji al-Ali, a Palestinian artist and an intellectual, knows who he is as a Palestinian. Naji was ten years old when he and his family were expelled from their country Palestine to find themselves in Ein Al Hilwe, a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. Naji al-Ali grew up to become perhaps the most popular cartoonist in the Arab world. With brutal honesty, Naji al-Ali analyzed the relationships between the governments of the United States, Israel, and the Arab regimes and the ramifications for the Palestinians. *Time* magazine notes that "This man draws with human bones." The *Asahi* newspaper in Japan once wrote, "Naji al-Ali draws using

phosphoric acid." The *New York Times* wrote "if you want to know what the Arabs think of the U.S., look at Naji al-Ali's cartoons."

Handala is the name of the ten-year-old child who became a symbol of Palestinian children's struggle living in refugee camps. Naji al-Ali wrote:

That was when the character Handala was born. The young, barefoot Handala was a symbol of my childhood. He was the age I was when I had left Palestine and, in a sense,



I am still that age today and I feel that I can recall and sense every bush, every stone, every house and every tree I passed when I was a child in Palestine. The character of Handala was a sort of icon that protected my soul from falling whenever I felt sluggish or I was ignoring my duty. That child was like a splash of fresh water on my forehead, bringing me to attention and keeping me from error and loss. He was the arrow of the compass, pointing steadily towards Palestine. Not just Palestine in geographical terms, but Palestine in its humanitarian sense—the symbol of a just cause, whether it is in Egypt, Vietnam or South Africa."³⁵—Naji al-Ali, in conversation with Radwa Ashour.

³⁵ Al- Ali. Naji. *A Child in Palestine: The Cartoons of Naji al-Ali*. Verso Books, 2009 - Comics & Graphic Novels. *Note: A video on Youtube telling the story through Naji al-Ali's memoir as Handala the character in a conversation with the artist who created Naji al-Ali in a conversation with Rawda Ashour. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdQ8TAQIHeI>. Web. April. 25. 2017.

Naji al-Ali chose the name Handala, which is an old Arabic name meaning “bitterness.”

His Handala is ten years old and will remain ten years old until he returns to his homeland.

Naji al-Ali is a Palestinian artist, and it is helpful to read his story and notice the similarities between Sacco’s images and Handala, Naji the child. Sacco comprehends the reality of Palestinian scene in its poverty and fear; so many things are crowded in one page of *Palestine*, the content is disturbing and stressful: death story after another, tears and misery, this is how it goes over there in the so called “holy land.” Not very far from the shame and humiliation Handala feels, are children now in Palestine still suffering the same horrible circumstances. In the last part of the book, a young boy of 12 years old is stopped on a cold raining day to humiliate him. Handala is the past and the present of Palestinian children, it was represented by al-Ali and it is noticed by Joe Sacco.



According to Naji al-Ali, Handala turned his face because his eyes can't bear what is happening to Palestinians, and this is exactly what Sacco has passed on to the reader, readers who know nothing about the realm of an occupied land and people.



Sacco questions the reader “what can happen to someone who thinks he has all the power, what of this -- what becomes of someone when he believes himself to have none?” (283) He chose to end his book with questioning the human conscious of the reader.

Sacco took a position where he is telling the story of people’s pain in a place called Palestine. He is representing Arabs in his book. For readers from the west, he is someone to trust, as an American white man, he represents the majority of the West, many will identify with his experience. The author/artist decides to give himself a chance to visit the area, “Sacco finds himself in Israel and Palestine seeking to give voice and face to these ‘terrorists,’ to rethink his own notions of prejudice and pain, and to convince others to do the same.”³⁶ He started his story with telling and showing the reader what the word “Palestinian” meant to him; to sum it up, it meant a “terrorist.” Claudia, whom Sacco had a crush on, is with a Palestinian boyfriend. That means she is a “Terrorist Groupie,” as Sacco described her in his book. Sacco openly describes the idea most American people have towards the Palestinian issue and Palestinians and how it does not concern them as long as Americans die by terror attacks. It is a distracting image of Palestinians, which the American media has sculpted in American society.

Sacco here is the one who can take their voices and reach the outside world with those voices. In an interview with *Aljazeera*, Joe Sacco was asked about *Palestine* and what he wanted to do with a piece like that. Sacco answered:

“I don't really know what I was trying to do, but I think my impetus for going was that I felt the American media had really misportrayed the situation [between Israel and the Palestinians] and I was really shocked by that. I grew up thinking of Palestinians as terrorists, and it took a lot of time, and reading the right things, to understand the power

³⁶ Scherr, Rebecca. *Shaking Hands with Other People's Pain: Joe Sacco's Palestine*. Mosaic, Vol. 46, No. 1, March 2013, pp. 19-36.

dynamic in the Middle East was not what I had thought it was... And basically, it upset me enough that I wanted to go, and, in a small way, give the Palestinians a voice - a lens through which people could see their lives.’³⁷

Palestinians lost hope in their officials and the PLO a long time ago, since the Oslo agreement was signed by Israel and Palestine under the American supervision. Palestinians have more hope in humanists from around the world more than any politician. They did not give up on life, they will always find hope. Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian poet had to say this sentence in every interview, when he was asked about the Palestinian people: “Without hope we are lost.” Like Marjane, Sacco found himself between the East and the West, he knew one side of the story but the other part was missing. That is why he chose to go to Palestine for field research. To Palestinians he represents hope, to people in the West, he is the character they are familiar with, the character they can relate to.

Joe Sacco gave his readers the privilege of travelling somewhere far and dangerous, without even moving from their living room. He helped them travel with their imagination to catch up with an old history, to see history from a humanitarian point of view.

“What makes Sacco's work so powerful is its self-awareness, its lack of self-righteousness, and its attention to odd, humanizing detail - Cairo hotel clerks discussing the merits of Pink Floyd and Barclay James Harvest, for instance - so that readers feel they are discovering things at the same speed as Sacco. He feels that the form he has chosen gives him a freedom that perhaps most contemporary journalism does not have and is happy that his work should be described as a comic.’³⁸

The words and pictures of Joe Sacco have much more credibility than a Palestinian to a Western reader, all he had previously heard of Palestinians was that they are terrorists who harassed the

³⁷ Sacco, Joe. *Joe Sacco on Palestine*. Aljazeera. Nov. 2007.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2007/11/2008525185042679346.html>

³⁸ Campbell, Duncan. *I Do Comics Not Graphic Novels*. The Guardian, October 2003.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/oct/23/comics.politics>

innocent and harmless Israelis. Judith Butler notes this in one of her interviews with an Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*: “It felt like the same kind of policing of the community. You only trust those who are absolutely like yourself, those who have signed a pledge of allegiance to this particular identity.”³⁹ Sacco has succeeded in communicating with his readers through his powerful, still ignorant position that he takes as a main character in *Palestine*’s first chapter.

2.2 East and West

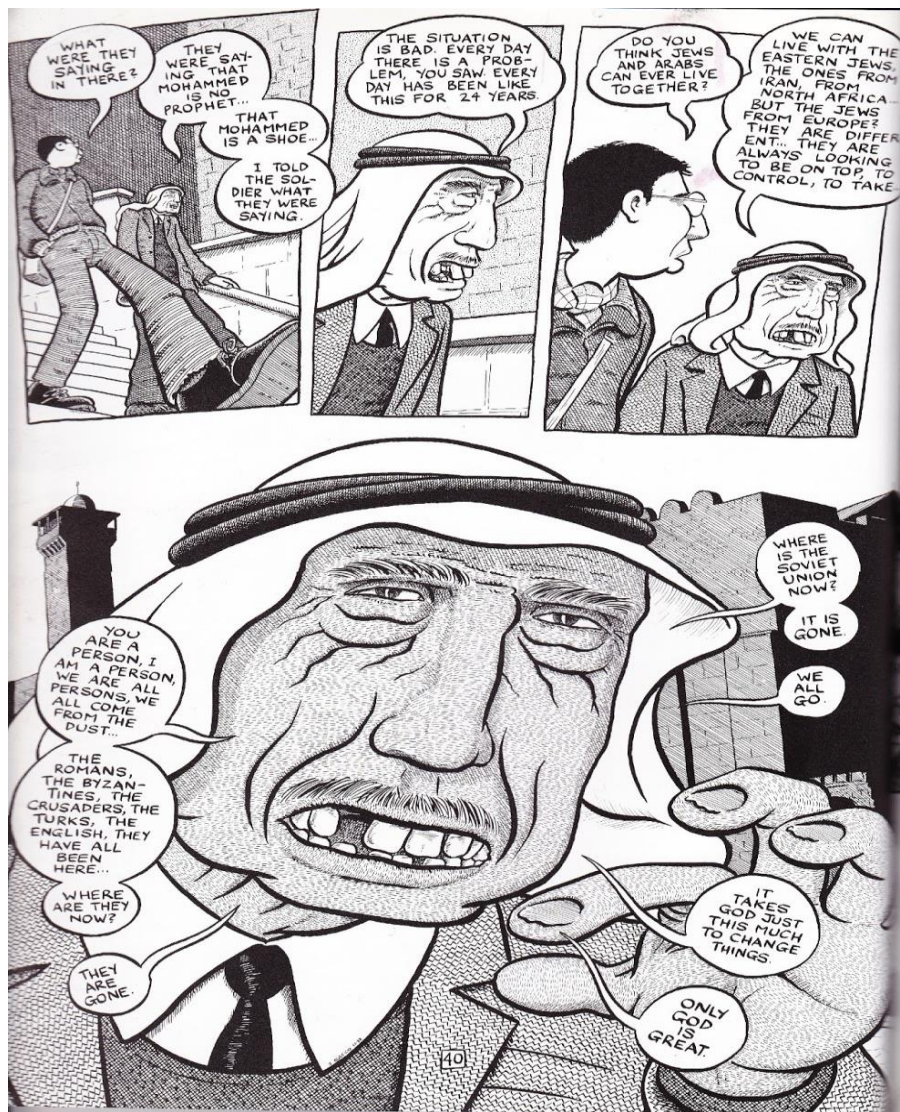
An East and West binary shows in the book, how Palestinians identify themselves with Eastern Jews more than Western Jews. Sacco asked a Palestinian man: “Do you think Jews and Arabs can live together?” (40), the old man answered: “We can live with the Eastern Jews, the ones from Iran and North Africa- But the ones from Europe? They are different, they are always looking to be on top... To control ... To take.” (40)

Sacco made it clear that a Palestinian man does not trust the Jews who come from the West because the West wants to dominate Eastern cultures, countries, and people. The conclusion is religion is never the problem, it is not about who is a Jew, Muslim, a Christian, or even a non-believer. Imperialism and the West’s interest in the area is what the Western world is after. Marx said, “they must be represented;” the imperial mindset is implanted in the Western governance way of thinking, because the West believes that it has this type of power to control and to direct others. This way of thinking is reflected in individuals, too. Social theorist Michel Foucault defines power as immaterial, as a "certain type of relation between individuals that has to do with complex strategic social positions that relate to the subject's ability to control its environment and influence those around itself.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Butler, Judith: *As a Jew, I Was Taught It Was Ethically Imperative to Speak*. Haarets Newspaper. Feb. 24. 2004. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/judith-butler-as-a-jew-i-was-taught-it-was-ethically-imperative-to-speak-up-1.266243>. Web. December. 05. 2016.

⁴⁰ Foucault, Michel. *Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of Political Reason*. Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 3: *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1979).

This positioning, makes it hard for someone from Palestine to believe that a relationship with the western Jews as possible. In the next page, the image shows an old Palestinian man, assuring that for him Jewish people from Arab and Eastern countries can be someone who Palestinians can live with. However, Jewish people from the west think they are superior to everyone that is why Arabs can't coexist with them. All they want is "to control, to take." (40)



This is the way the West sees the East, and Arabs in Palestine, and Arabs think it is hard to live with Jews from the West. Sacco made notes of all these things he heard. Tamim Al-Barghouti, a Palestinian poet, suggests in one of his poems, that no matter how many crusades and invasions of Palestine, chiefly Jerusalem "Al-Quds," Arab Palestinians believe they are the

ones who have the complete right of the land even though many others have been in Palestine.

Tamim wrote:

In Al-Quds⁴¹ graves arrayed in lines they are, as if lines they are in the city's history
and the book is its soil...

Everybody passed from here...

Al-Quds accepts anybody who visits it whether infidel or believer he is...

In it I pass and its tombstones I read in all the world's languages...

In it there is African, European, Kafjaks, Syklabs, Bushnaks, Tartars, Turks, and God's
peoples.

The doomed, the poor, landlords, the dissolute, and hermits...

In it there is whoever treaded on the earth...

Do you think it could hardly provide us alone with living???

O you history writer what happened to exclude us alone...

You old man, again reread and rewrite... mistakes you committed...

The eye shuts and opens...

Left wise the yellow car driver turned...

Away from Al-Quds' gate...

Al-Quds we bypassed...

The eye sees it in the right mirror...

Its colors changed before sunset...

If a smile surprises me...

How it sneaked in between tears I don't know, she told me when I went far too far...

"You weeper behind the wall... fatuous you are?"

Are you mad...? Your eye shouldn't cry, you forgotten one from the book's text...

⁴¹ *Al-Quds* is the Arabic name of *Jerusalem*.

You Arab your eye shouldn't cry... You should know that...

In Al-Quds, all mankind is in Al-Quds but I see nobody in Al-Quds except you..."

Tamim Al-Bargouthi, offered his readers a short lesson of history to show how many invasions this city went through, and the Arabs are still there. This is exactly what the old man told Sacco: "The Roman, the Byzantines, the Crusaders, the Turks, and the English. They have all been here... Where are they now? They are all gone?" (40)

The East and West binary is also present in where Sacco likes to stay while he is in Palestine. Although Joe Sacco sees how terrible the situation is in Palestine, it does not mean he does not want to get along with Israelis. His neutral position shows how familiar and comfortable he is in the Israeli side (the Western side). That is why Sacco identifies himself with the Israeli atmosphere. He alludes to that when he goes back every time to sleep in Jerusalem, or when he mentions he is so relieved at being in Tel Aviv with those two Israeli women. Sacco writes: "but, meanwhile, it's pleasant enough to be in Tel Aviv, which seems familiar, somehow, to my western ears and eyes..." (261).

This reminds me of what Edward Said talked about in one of his recorded films, when he was in New York in 1967 while a war between the Arabs and Israel was in action. Said heard shopkeepers talking to each other about it tells us about how one of them asked the other, who had a radio, "How are we doing?" The reply was "We are doing great!" "We" is meant for the Israelis, of course. Said explained how it made him feel so much more alienated than before. He felt alienated because he identifies himself as a Palestinian, the "others," living in a society that identifies itself with the "we." Basically, it goes down to "them" and "us."

Thus, according to Said, the Orient is not a fact of nature, but it is rather a hegemonic cultural production of the intelligentsia. Hence, the "Other" is being constructed through language, through the expert, as an intellectual formation. Probably that is what gives Judith Butler an answer for her question: Why are some people's lives are not countable, and it does

not mean anything? A simple way of answering this question is that most people are recipients, they receive an information from a known intellect, and they believe it, eliminating any doubts of what has been said. So, when Arabs lives are taken, the excuse is that they are terrorists in this world, and isn't it better for humanity to get rid of terror? Arabs are portrayed as barbaric and passive in this world. But go back in history to the times when Jewish people were coming from all over the world to Palestine to build their Jewish state. What I found remarkable is how even in Israel there is discrimination between Jewish people who come from Europe and those who are from Morocco or Yemen. In one session of the Knesset constitution, law and justice committee, Ben Gurion referred to the Moroccan Jews as "savages" and that they were no different than Polish Jews who are thieves. Then a few years later, the Moroccans in Israel were the only society that would keep thieves and gangsters because, according to Ben-Gurion, they are barbaric and primitive. He claims this in a letter that he wrote to Moshe Estzioni: "An Ashkenazi gangster, thief, pimp, or murderer will not gain the sympathy of the Ashkenazi community (if there is such a thing), nor will he expect it. But in such a primitive community as the Moroccans--Such a thing is possible."⁴²

Ben Gurion's attitude towards the Yemenite Jewish immigrants also shows in one of his letters. Ben Gurion wrote a letter to Yigael Yadin, who is of Polish origin, and the second Israeli Chief of Staff. To describe the Yemenite Jewish immigrants, he wrote:

“It is two thousand years behind us [European cultured Jews], perhaps even more. It lacks the most basic primary concepts of civilization (as distinct from culture). Its attitude toward women and children is primitive. Its physical condition poor. Its bodily strength is depleted and it does not have the minimal notions of hygiene. For thousands

⁴² Segev, Tom & Weinstein Arlen Neal. *1949, the First Israelis*. New York: Free Press; 1986. P. 157.

of years it lived in one of the most benighted and impoverished lands, under a rule even more backward than an ordinary feudal and theocratic regime.”⁴³

What is remarkable is that he referred to the Yemenite tribe with “it” and not “they.”

Those binaries show also in a cultural dialogue in *Palestine*, where in the conversation between Sacco and Khaled, Khaled tells Sacco “I have a girlfriend here, But I respect her... we don’t do any bad things...” (74) Sacco replies “In the west, we don’t think of sex in terms of bad things...” (74) and they keep on with their conversation, with Khaled saying “we” as in Palestinians or to be more accurate he refers to, “we in the east” and Sacco replies with “but in the west we...”(74). It is a conversation between “we” and “them.” The struggle between Israel and Palestine is much more than geography. It is a struggle of existence involving ideas, dreams, and aspirations in life. Those two people have a different image of how their life should be, what is right and what is wrong. Colonialism involves much more than just geography and power.

Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.⁴⁴ – Edwards Said, *Culture and Imperialism*

The solution is to open a conversation between the two worlds, more like what Sacco and Marjane Satrapi are doing. Through their comics, they are offering a reading of the “other.” Zainab Salbi, wrote in a *New York Times* article:

This conversation is not a dead end but one that should be held publicly, leading to reflection in the East and the West rather than defensiveness. Many, if not the majority, of the Muslim societies in the Arab world are indeed hurt by what they believe are the

⁴³ Ibid. p. 186-187.

⁴⁴ Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. Random House. Aug. 7. 2014. P. 7.

West's ill intentions. The path to a true conversation starts with both sides of the aisle knowing – truly knowing – what the others think of them and deciding for themselves what is the truth and what is not, what needs adjustment and change and what does not. As someone who lives in two worlds and thinks of America as my home as much as the Middle East and Iraq, I see the fault and the good in both sides and the hope for more authentic communication.⁴⁵

2.2.1 *Two parallel worlds; Media and reality*

It seems that not only the West and East are parallel worlds, media and reality do not seem to meet. Duncan Campbell interviewed Sacco in October 2003, to talk about his comics, as Sacco likes to call them. Sacco recalled the American media when he used to listen to it while he was living in Berlin in the early 90s. The news he listened to back then regarding the Middle East piqued his curiosity and the feeling he was not hearing the whole story invaded him. This was when Sacco thought the “American coverage of the Middle East is very shallow,”⁴⁶ and this is where his journey of seeking for the truth started.

He started to catalogue what he saw, writing down conversations, recording stories, letting everyone from Palestinian detainees to Israeli soldiers to American tourists have their say. By doing so, he is giving the reader an overview of what to expect from an American tourist, an Israeli, and a Palestinian. All three are in *Palestine* witnessing reality; Sacco is giving a chance for the reader to have a say, too. Simple yet complicated and a risky subject, the author thought his comic would ever be published: “I wasn't sure if anyone would even print the comic.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Salbi, Zainab. *What People in the Middle East Say in Private About the West*. New York Times. May. 26. 2015. <http://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2015/05/26/what-people-in-the-middle-east-are-saying-in-private-about-the-west/>

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Sacco mentioned Klinghoffer, Munich. And the blown-up athletes -- incidents famous in the Western world. The conclusion is, of course, that a Palestinian equals a terrorist. Sacco did not hesitate to write "terrorism is the bread Palestinians get buttered on," continuing this sentence with "I've swallowed that..." (7). Hence, he suggests he had been fed such information, and thus formed this point of view before even meeting a Palestinian or visiting Palestine.

He starts to advocate for the American media when he says to Claudia, "You gotta understand the American media. They want human interest."(6) Sacco raises an important question regarding the credibility of the American media. An articulated point is reconsidered here regarding this perfect image of the American media and the essential role it has in giving people information that can be misleading and confusing at many times, especially on a controversial issue like the Israeli- Palestinian conflict. Another American journalist, Shaun Randol, commented on the reasons Americans are ignorant regarding Palestinian life. He tells his own personal story to show his ignorance. In 2009, Randol wrote an article where he confesses:

Despite my interest in international affairs and despite the conflict's forays into the headlines of American newspapers, I generally avoided the topic. I did so because I knew the particulars and history were too nuanced and went too deep for me to get a real grasp on the situation quickly—it would take months for me to get my bearings, and I just did not have the time, energy, or interest. In short, I relegated the conflict to my peripheral interests and left the knowledge-gathering, opinion-making, and peace-building efforts to others. It just wasn't going to be in my area of interests. It got to the

point where even if the conflict was being discussed in the news I turned the channel or flipped the page—it barely registered on my radar.⁴⁸

This is where Sacco's work is important. The author managed to retell a history that everybody thinks is hard to understand because of its complexity. Sacco offered the Palestinian history a great chance to be heard and understood. The media will cover the event of a Palestinian attacking Israelis, or if small children are throwing stones at the Israeli army to show Palestinians as violent and aggressive. Joe Sacco realized that people have the right to know the reason behind such acts to understand where the Palestinians are coming from.

2.3 Gender issues in Palestine

I would not say that a huge part of Sacco's book is talking about gender issues. However, there are some major points covered in his book. Women in this book are portrayed as the mother, wife. And daughter who lost a son, husband, or brother in the conflict. It is hard to put women's issues on display because of the political situation. However, Sacco managed to shed some light on women's organizations in Palestine that are naturally interrupted by the miserable situation there; it looks like even women themselves do not prioritize their issues. It also shows, how society and religion are part of the limitations for women, just like in any other Arab country.

When Sacco is sitting with the nurse, they talk about love in her life, and her answer is clear: she loves an Australian, but it will never work out, no matter what she does. Society, religion, tradition, and people are standing in the middle between the two. This woman gave up from the moment she met him; generally, freedom of choice is not a Palestinian option, and certainly it does not characterize Palestinian women. I would say pressure and restriction is much harder on women than it is on men under those circumstances.

⁴⁸ Randol, Shaun. "Quick Review: *"Palestine"* by Joe Sacco. The Mantle, OCTOBER 21, 2009. <http://www.mantlethought.org/international-affairs/quick-review-palestine-joe-sacco>

Sacco has talked to women's organizations and they had a dialogue of how women are so busy with their reality they do not even think about women's issues seriously. *Palestine* shows Palestinian women stuck in certain roles they cannot get out of. This is a harsh reality imposed on Palestinian women because of the Israeli occupation and what it brings to Palestinians' daily lives. Israeli authorities put Palestinian people in one frame, a frame that they should not step out of, either by the segregation wall, the checkpoints, the destruction of house, and so many other practices. The rough reality of occupation and dangerous living keeps women away from dreaming and achieving. The nurse, for example, thinks she should not even dream about her love, because it is not accepted and that is all there is to it; she is not even willing to try. Women's organizations are not free to address women and gender issues because women have enough problems already.

1.3.1 Hijab

Sacco now he admits his ignorance towards the *hijab* and the women who are wearing it. "It's the women in the street I don't get, I mean the Muslim women wearing the hijab, the 'veil' hiding their hair, and the outfits that cover everything but face and hands..." (137). He is just like the Western reader, he does not know why they even wear it. He continues "Let's face it I am from the West, I've plenty of leg, orange hair, too, and other fashion statements ... But this get up, it's nondescript, I blank out most all the women who wear it, they're just shapes to me, ciphers, like pigeons moving along the sidewalk..." (137). But he was surprised when a woman with a *hijab* started a conversation with him in a taxi.



Sacco expresses his shock, “so imagine my surprise –I’m in a taxi on my way to Nablus –when one of those pigeons turn to me and...Just like that I’m not kidding! In perfect English! The King’s!”(137) Sacco admits how the *hijab* presents a problem for him and not for her. The author also sheds the light on how controversial the *hijab* is between Palestinians and how the *intifada* has its role in Islamizing society, “and it is an issue that throws the interrelationship with intifada, Islam and women into some relief” (137). When people were driven believed, that Islam was the answer while everything else failed to save them and to protect their rights, it was the period when Hamas started in an active position in the beginning of the 90s. Hamas

followers wanted the *hijab* to be compulsory. Some of Hamas' followers threatened women who were secular and started to throw things at them if they did not cover their heads. It is case where, like in Iran, some women were convinced to wear the *hijab* and some were not, but it is worse when they are forced to wear it. To Sacco's shock, these "pigeons" are educated, some speak perfect English, and some are doctors. They can start a conversation with a random man in a taxi! This is something Sacco did not realize; they are not passive as the West is being told. Women in Sacco's *Palestine* show the importance of the women's role in nationalist movements. To feminists, it is important to protect women's rights while resisting the Israeli occupation.



2.4. Graphic Style in Palestine

In *Palestine*, the words are interrupted through the images and the images are interrupted through the words. I could not help but scrolling my eyes between the text and the

pictures, so many times, to understand the intention behind the link the artist is making. Goldsmith (2002) notes this interplay between words and images, saying:

Every picture (as well as the words) helps tell part of the story in a graphic novel. It is the dynamic format of image and word offered in combination that delivers meaning and enjoyment to graphic novel readers. Whether fiction or factual, graphic novels rely on visual components and verbal text to communicate.⁴⁹

Communication in a comic or a graphic novel is happening on more than one level, it is visual and verbal. This combination, gives readers an opportunity to exist in the writer's experience with their imagination and senses.

2.4.1 The handshake in Palestine to create tactility

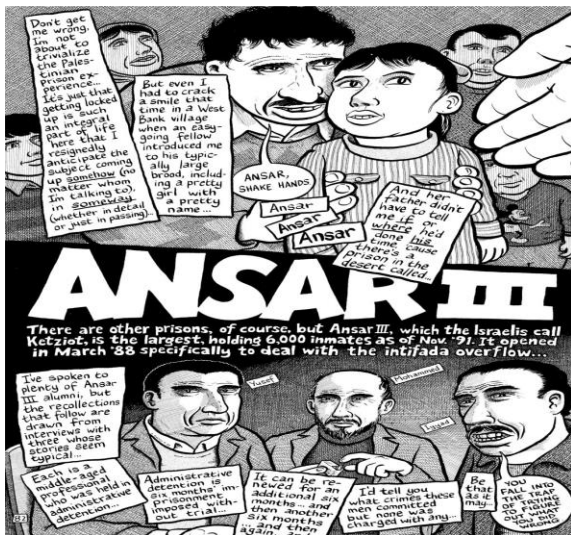
The understanding in the comic book, or in Sacco's journey, seems to begin after a handshake between the man in Nablus city and Joe Sacco. This gesture can mean many good things: acceptance, welcome, bridge-building, an expression of a desire to get to know one another, respect, love, and mercy between people. Sacco uses a "gesture that signifies connection."⁵⁰ "He wants me to shake hands with his people's pain..." (10) He made sure that the man's other hand is laying on top of their handshake to form what they call a "hand hug." This is when a man chooses to wrap your hand with his left hand, creating this warm cocoon protecting your hand. When done by the right person, he is perceived as being warm, friendly, trustworthy, and honest, sharing close bonds. Similar to hugs, it is seen as step closer to intimacy by people.

A while after that meeting, Sacco refused to shake hands with another man, because he had been robbed by Palestinian children. This revived a negative image of Palestinians to confirm what Sacco had already in his mind. His reaction now, after being robbed by those

⁴⁹ Goldsmith, F. *Get Graphic @ Your Library: An Introduction*. Retrieved May 2, 2005, <http://WWW.ala.org/yalsa/teenreading/trw2002.htm>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

kids, is to refuse any connection with the evil side, the Palestinian side. A man on the street says “See! He doesn’t want peace!” (24), because Sacco refused to shake his hand. We all know Sacco does not understand Arabic, at least not now, since he only had spent a few days in the Palestinian territories. Despite this, he knew what the Palestinian man said, which leads the reader to understand that a handshake in this context is “peace.” The handshake transforms the readers into an intimate experience, where the ability of a graphic style is revealed. “On a more basic level, the handshake is a statement of corporeality, as touch is a primary body sensation. In Palestine, this gesture calls attention to the fact that the comics genre is in many ways as much of a haptic form as it is visual.”⁵¹ Sacco offered to shake the hand of Ansar the little girl, as we see in page 82. The writer focused on his hand when taking the initiative for a handshake, and the Palestinian man encouraged his daughter to shake hands with Joe, the stranger. To Ansar, her father says “Ansar, shake hands.” (82) It was an invitation from her father to communicate.



The reader is invited to involve all his or her senses to make this reading process more of an intimate physical experience. Thus, a handshake is adding extra to the readership, something

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 21

haptic -- a tactile way of understanding someone's actual experience involving the viewer's senses, where the eyes function as organs of touch.

Laura U. Marks, a Canadian media theorist and curator, initially developed this concept in relation to the formal and aesthetic strategies of intercultural cinema. In *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, she argues that intercultural media, which often points to the limits of sight, sound, and representation, appeals to an intimate, embodied, and multisensory viewing. Marks notes "the switch between what I will term haptic and visual vision describes the movement between a relationship of touch and a visual one"⁵². The nature of Sacco's work, demonstrates the alliance between the dominant narrative form and the official history stressing the collective nature of memory (all the scenes that Sacco has decided to draw); repeated and memorized, the look of those people telling their painful stories to Sacco; collecting those memories and leaving them in boxes of memories for the reader's perception and reception.

While it is a tactual way of reading, the physical intimacy experienced by the reader is interrupted by the realization of missing the real sense of touch, as Rebecca Scherr suggests in her paper, *Shaking Hands with Other People's Pain: Joe Sacco's Palestine*. Therefore, the reader can connect through this bridge created by the artist, but we can never be the "other." Thus, we as readers can "maintain an ethical stance in the face of looking at, and in a sense touching, other people's pain."⁵³

Drawing more closely the hands reminds us of the materiality of the artist's hands, a way to remind the viewer the pictures he is holding are real pictures of real people whom have been photographed, while he was visiting the hospital, representing a trace of his existence in

⁵² Marks U. Laura. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and Senses* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2000), p. 129.

⁵³ Scherr, Rebecca. *Shaking Hands with Other People's Pain: Joe Sacco's Palestine*. Mosaic, Vol. 46, No. 1, March 2013, p. 22.

that place where he took pictures of actual people with actual horrifying stories. By this means, the author offers us “a link to life beyond the text.”⁵⁴

Sacco mentions hands in many occasions in the text, directly and indirectly. There is always a constant mention of the sense of touch: he describes the woman holding the coal with her fingers, he writes, “she’s turning the bread and rearranging the coal with her fingers ... Christ, she’s gotta have some kinda calluses to handle the heat.” (66) This signifies burning with heat, and adding the word “calluses” denies the feeling of a current pain regarding a previous one. The calluses signify numbness, to suggest this woman has been through a lot and now she is not feeling a thing. This observation and the way it is described by words and pictures renders tactility to the viewer’s reading experience. They say seeing is Believing. Comics create a sense of touchability between the reader and the image that is explained by words. Thus, visual art has great relation to multiple senses and embodiment of characters.

2.5 Sacco retelling history in a comic’s way

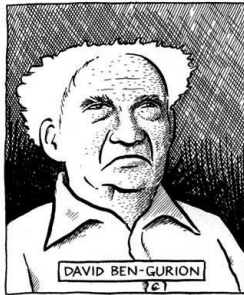
Fabricating historical facts can build a state out of nowhere. Europe and American are great powers who stood behind Zionist propaganda; it even gave the right to Zionists to speak in the name of Judaism and the Jewish people all over the world. Sacco mentions Ben Gurion and Golda Meir, two key players in establishing the state of Israel on another people’s land, Palestine. Sacco also drew the reader’s attention of the role Britain played in the establishment of Israel, since Europe wanted the best for Jews all over the world at that time.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 22.

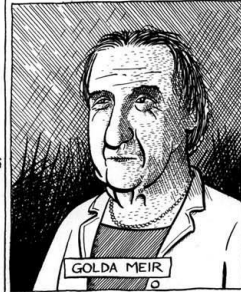
of Israel.

Of course, it's more comfortable to think of refugees as some regrettable consequence of war, but getting rid of the Palestinians has been an idea kicking around since Theodor Herzl formulated modern Zionism in the late 1800s. "We shall have to spirit the penniless population [sic] across the border," he wrote, "by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it employment in our own country."

After all, some Zionists reasoned, Palestinians were less attached to their ancestral homeland than the Jews who hadn't lived there for centuries. According to Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, a Palestinian "is equally at ease whether in Jordan, Lebanon or a variety of places." With war imminent, Ben-Gurion had no illusions about "spiriting" or inducing the Palestinians away. "In each attack," he wrote, "a decisive blow should be struck, resulting in the destruction of homes and the expulsion of the population." When that was basically accomplished he told an advisor, "Palestinian Arabs have only one role left — to flee."



But if 1948 is no secret, it's all but a non-issue, dismissed entirely by Prime Minister Golda Meir: "It was not as though there was a Palestinian people considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist."



But they did exist, and they do, and here they are... and their children, and their children's children... and still they are refugees... stale ones, maybe, in the nightly news scheme of things, but, nonetheless, refugees... which I suppose means they're waiting to go back...

But back to what? Close to 400 Palestinian villages were razed by the Israelis during and after the '48 war... fleeing Palestinians were declared "absentees" ... their homes and lands declared "abandoned" or "uncultivated" and expropriated for settlement by Jews.

You say refugee camp and I picture tents, people lying on cots... but somewhere along the line Balata's residents figured they'd be here for the long haul, and the camp took on a sort of shabby

permanence... People live here, they watch TV, they shop, they raise families... On first glance, sloshing down a main road, what sets Balata apart is the mud. The snows have melted and the road is mud. Everywhere, mud.

We came here to meet Saburo's friend, but he's gone to a wedding somewhere and won't be back today. Now what? I'm freezing, and I wonder how long we're going to walk around in the cold.

Fortunately someone remembers Saburo from last time he was here and invites us into his shop for tea... ah, tea... holding a cup of tea, that's the ticket for right now... I'm lost in my tea while Saburo arranges a place to spend the night.

Meanwhile, word must be out 'cause small groups of the shebab are coming and going, giving us the once over. Most of them hang out for a few minutes and leave. Foreigners? Journalists? Big deal! We're not the first and won't be the last to drop by looking under their skirts for stories...

One of them, though, maybe he's 16 or 18, takes a shining to me. It must be all my smiling. His English is piss-poor, but that doesn't stop a guy like this, pantomime's not beneath him. He makes it clear he's done some rough-and-tumble with the IDF, the Israeli Defense Forces. He takes out his ID card to prove it. Every Palestinian over 16 in the Occupied Territories has to carry one, and his is green, which means he's done a

47

Telling history, like Lord Balfour's agreement in 1917, and relating the kind of propaganda governments used on behalf of the Jewish people when they declared "A land without a people for a people without a land," (12) Sacco brings us to see there is more than one way to interpret events. Edward Said suggests that history interpretations are built upon others, how Zionists repeat the same thing until today, teaching their children at school the same sentence. The history they taught their children at school is what is keeps them enrolling in Israeli military service to support an apartheid state.

Sacco quotes Golda Meir, “It was not as though there was a Palestinian people considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country from them, they did not exist.” (42) Sacco chose to comment on this quote to suggest the opposite of what she says. He writes under her picture, “But they did exist, and they do, and here they are ... and their children, and their children’s children ... and still they are refugees ... Stale ones, maybe, in the nightly news scheme of things, but, nonetheless, refugees ... which I suppose means they’re waiting to go back...” (42) Even if Golda Meir has tried to change history for the sake of Zionism, it never occurred to them that Palestinians will never forget their history. William Faulkner expressed it plainly in his often-quoted remark: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”⁵⁵ The past is mutable, forever subjected to interpretation.

History through graphic novel offers us a textual and visual reworking of traditionally linear narratives. Frey and Noys note that “what we mean by history in the graphic novel is how the graphic novel is a site where ‘history’ itself, or representations of history, are put into play: interrogated, challenged, and even undermined.”⁵⁶ And this what Sacco is doing, he is interrogating, challenging, and undermining every historical representation that is not convincing. They create it to fool people, but it is also where the reader is challenged to rethink the information they have. The graphic novel gives the reader a new, less complicated environment to test the history we are taught. “The particular hybrid form of the graphic novel might offer a testing place to probe the limits of history and historiography.”⁵⁷

Sacco offers a new way of writing a complex history, where he did not only undermine Golda Meir’s saying, but he also undermined Belfour’s decision and what he said about the existence of Palestinian Arabs. For the British prime minister to say that about a population in

⁵⁵ Faulkner, W. *Requiem for a Nun* (NY: Random House, 1951). Act 1, sc. 3.

⁵⁶ H. Frey & B. Noys, Editorial: History in the Graphic Novel, *Rethinking History*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2002, p. 258.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 259.

public, means that it is all right in the West to talk about Arabs that way, as an occupied territory, and justifies the decision to give the land away to the Jewish people in Europe.



It has been so long now, and it does not seem that people are getting what is going on. People do not search answers anymore, they read what others have written or hear what others have said. By others here I mean the intellectuals in societies, and especially in European and American societies. It is the intellectuals who spread imperialist thoughts taught in schools and universities, the Orient in Hollywood has its own way of representation. "In 'World War Z,' the Israeli army and 'security' agencies are portrayed as the guardians of Jerusalem, who built the Apartheid Wall in order to keep zombies locked-in behind it."⁵⁸ That very same wall presented in the film as a necessary tool for the salvation of humanity, in real life is a racism

⁵⁸ Mansour, Noura, *Hollywood's anti-Arab and anti-Muslim propaganda*, Middle East Monitor. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20150129-hollywoods-anti-arab-and-anti-muslim-propaganda/>. 29. Jnuaray.2015.

wall that keeps more than three million Palestinians behind it, having lost all their rights and freedom in their own land. Israeli soldiers are portrayed as heroes who are protecting Israelis, while Palestinians are in a very ironic setting, chanting together to keep the people behind the wall where they are because they are a source of danger, misleading the viewer and distorting reality. “By creating sympathy and positive feelings towards militant oppressors and a brutal colonial occupation whilst demonizing those living behind the wall, the film provides a degree of legitimacy to Israel’s occupation and, indeed, to the state itself.”⁵⁹ This is a place in the film, where history matters, to remind us that Israel has been occupying Palestine since 1948.

Some would say that it is a good thing both sides are singing together to free Jerusalem. Perhaps the writer added an idea; “For the sake of objectivity, let’s add that ridiculous scene where Arabs and Israelis are singing together aimlessly about peace in Jerusalem; only let’s have Nazis and Jews singing together about peace instead. See what I mean?”⁶⁰ A history that caused trauma is not a something that one would forget about. Therefore, we cannot deny the importance of the past to create the present and the future.

It is not only Hollywood, also Disney. Small children are exposed to the same inferior position and image of the East in many Disney movies. That is why Arab Palestinian blood costs nothing, because they simply mean nothing to the West. As Belfour said, “We do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country” (13).

Knowing history will turn the equation for the reader, Christopher Hitchens wrote:

And I’m afraid I know too much about the history of the conflict to think of Israel as just a tiny, little island surrounded by a sea of ravening wolves and so on. I mean, I

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

know quite a lot about how that state was founded, and the amount of violence and dispossession that involved. And I'm a prisoner of that knowledge. I can't un-know it.⁶¹

Joe Sacco has chosen to retell the historical story known in the West but has never been told accurately to people. Sacco realized that people should be educated about what they have never been told -- the victim's side of the story. In one of his interviews, the artist suggested that "History has to be written not just by the victors, but by the people being victimized."⁶² With this initiative, Sacco is trying to change what Walter Benjamin observed when he wrote "History is written by the victors." Unfortunately, the victors have been writing history for a long time now; it affected not only the image of the East in the West, it also affected the people in the East themselves, where they suffer from an inferiority complex. Because of this kind of information, people in the Orient start to think of themselves as inferior and the West as superior. Many years of colonialism was enough to convince the Orient of the superiority of the West over the Eastern part of the world.

2.6 The Relation between Humanity and Knowledge

There is an intimate relationship between humanism and knowledge, for knowledge is not inalterable. But as soon as those soldiers develop a relationship on a humanitarian level, they are to be replaced by others, "and then we get another bunch of bastards" (91). A human side of the story will bring distanced people together. However, to achieve this human status, one should let go of one's social and political status. In this page, we see that the understanding of the other is created when they get to know more of the human side of that person, even when it comes to a prisoner and a soldier's relationship, "The soldiers rotate every 15 days. At first, they have stereotypes about the prisoners. They act tough. They watch out." (91); "After seven

⁶¹ Hitchens, Christopher. *7 Things to Consider Before Choosing Sides in the Middle East Conflict*. The Huffington Post. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ali-a-rizvi/picking-a-side-in-israel-palestine_b_5602701.html.

⁶² Sender, Hannah. *The Universal Language of the Image: Joe Sacco's Comics and Conflicts*. The Culture Trip. <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/articles/the-universal-language-of-the-image-joe-sacco-s-comics-and-conflicts/>.

or ten days they see things differently, they're impressed with our organization. The moment they start to relax and act like humans, we have about three days with them, and then we get another bunch of bastards.” (91



Belfour said, “We don’t care about the 700,000 Arabs on the land of Palestine” and the international world to accepted it. This falls under what Judith Butler calls “dehumanization.”

Palestine’s pages are full of violence, crowded and disturbing for the reader, with images of inhuman practice, humiliation, and despair on people’s faces. Judith Butler argues that war produces outraged humiliated people: “War begets war. It produces outraged and humiliated and furious people. That is almost invariably the case.” And in war there is always the powerful and the powerless. In this case, Palestinians are the powerless humiliated people who, as Marx claims “need to be represented.” The representative is the interpreter, the authority who can provide a meaning, an articulation, and a visibility to their story. In this case,

it is not only the facts that are presented to readers; it is also the interpretation, which is in a constant movement. It is a mobile structure following the dynamics of translation as described by Derrida in his concept of *Différance*, where the meaning is constantly differed and multiple. A series of meanings are created that makes historical knowledge described by Said as both necessary and impossible.

Sacco chose a sentence said by an old man in his son's wedding: "We must show we are stronger than the pain." Isn't this the pain Sacco wants to shake hands with? The woman with the coal in her hand and another woman who didn't feel the stone a soldier threw on her leg because she wanted to see her hospitalized son the soldiers shot. "One of the soldiers took a stone and threw it at my leg. But I didn't feel it because I wanted to see my son." (236)

Sacco has shaken hands with those people's pain that is when he realized they want to beat this pain. They are not terrorists, they are people who want to get married, be happy, have families, and move on in life.

3. *Footnotes in Gaza* - Joe Sacco

3.1 The Role of the Author in collecting the “Other’s” Traumatic Memories to Write History.

The role of Joe Sacco here is different than what it was in his previous book *Palestine*. Here, he plays the role of traditional journalist. He asks questions regarding a specific thing, he is looking for specific answers to the story of the 1956 war. Through historical research, he wants to find a story not documented by the media or even the United Nations.

Joe listened to many stories and some of them sounded real. Some were obviously exaggerated, but his mission was to eliminate the exaggerated stories and find the link between all the stories he listened to. It was not an easy mission because of the reliability of people’s memories. Collecting memories of events that happened tens of years ago difficult, so Sacco had to ask for help from friends who live in Gaza. He had to write every name behind his or her story, to make it even traceable, as a reference to all the events that were mentioned. Joe Sacco’s *Footnotes in Gaza* is a war journalism piece, but “instead of jotting down a few quotes and flashing the camera for some images before taking off in a hurry, he stays, listens, and observes.”⁶³ Sacco has written a book of memory and testimonies, a history that will otherwise be forgotten, because it has no documentation, to tell the painful untold story. Hilary Chute writes “*Footnotes* is about the situation of testimony— which is to say, it is a book about memory and about the transmission of trauma.”⁶⁴

Sacco worked closely with all the interviews and stories to create a piece that functions as a “transfer of memory to a Western audience via a Western interpreter”⁶⁵ It is indeed a transfer of memory and trauma. There are always many versions of historical stories, especially when we do not have any record of it. Recovery of the story depends of course on the storyteller

⁶³ Daniel Worden. “Inside and Outside the Frame: Joe Sacco’s Safe Area Grozade,” *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2015), p. 47.

⁶⁴ Hilary Chute, “Comics Form and Narrating Lives,” *Profession*, vol.11 (2011), p. 113.

⁶⁵ Alexander Dunst, “Sacco with Badiou: On the Political Ontology of Comics,” *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World*, ed. Daniel Worden (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2017), p. 173.

or the interpreter, as we noticed in our discussion of *Palestine*. The author's perspective here is very different because he is not a part of the struggle in Gaza, West Bank, or Israel, which supports the objectivity of Sacco's story.

Gazans have mentioned they have been interviewed many times by local historians to retell their story of the 1956 war. However; Sacco is different because he is addressing the Western readers, especially the American, one of the biggest key players in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Just like in *Palestine*, Sacco is there to represent those who have no voice. *Footnotes in Gaza* and *Palestine* are works of translation, translated to Western readers by one of their own.

Sacco mentions the complexities and difficulties he faces while collecting those testimonies. He explains in one of his interviews about how collecting historical facts and memory targeting is much more complex than we think. Sacco mentions an incident where he asked a widow and a man who was a little boy in 1956 about the time when four brothers were taken out by the Israeli soldiers and they all were shot. One of them was able to run away and another did not die right away, so they took him into the house and he died there. The brother says that he was there when his brother died at the house, but the widow and the little boy at the time say that he was not there. Consequently, Sacco's assured information is that three were killed at that incident. He explains:

I bring that up because I want to confront the reader with the kind of problems I had doing this story. To me, the essential truth was that three brothers were killed. The fact that they remember it differently - or perhaps that one of the brothers feels like he should have been there when his brother died, and has kind of made it part of his own personal mythology - it's not irrelevant, but it doesn't detract from the fact that three brothers were killed. But I do want to confront the reader with the kind of problems with oral

testimony. There are problems with oral testimony... Academic historians are always looking at documents. But I think there are problems with documents, too.”⁶⁶

Sacco was told that a guy has been shot many times by an Israeli soldier, which Sacco does not doubt. However, the number of bullets and the way the story was told to Sacco is exaggerated. “I’m very skeptical that Mohammed could have survived so many bullets to the head. And how would he know how many had been fired? Automatic fire is too rapid to count, especially, I bet, while being shot. Exaggeration or not, I don’t doubt he was hit by bullets.”

In the next figure, we see a crowd in the school yard, heads down, and gunfire ... many things are happening and it looks like a movie shot that was paused. Many testimonies have been taken into consideration. Sacco writes “Some 50 years on, most of those we interviewed had difficulty resembling the drawn-out events in the schoolyard.” He adds, “Furthermore, few men saw or experienced precisely the same thing.” (299)



⁶⁶ Sabin, Roger. *Notes on Sacco's Footnotes in Gaza Eye*. Nov. 29.2009. <http://www.eyemagazine.com/blog/post/notes-on-saccos-footnotes-in-gaza>.

The author has interpreted in his paper all the testimonies and memories told and they have stimulated the author's ability to imagine and activate his creativity to create an interpretation of these full and crowded pages with people and many stories to tell. By transferring his imagination to a piece of paper as cartoons, he helps the reader create an understanding of the artist's vision depicting all the violence, tragedy, blood, and trauma. As history, that we do not see its traces now, so it is hard for the reader to even imagine what he or she did not witness or live. And that is why the author has mentioned the obstacles and difficulties in gathering testimonies and memories. It is a way to show the reader that he did his best to get the real story, which is harder than one might think. Everything in Sacco is a retelling of a neglected story, but it is documented with names, dates, and places. It is hard not to be attracted to the accuracy he approaches in documenting the information he conveys on the pages of his comic book.

Many people and countries fabricate the truth to suit a certain idea or a certain agenda, whether the story is big or small, whether it concerns a person or a whole nation. That is why it is critically important to listen to stories of history from more than one person and from more than one side. No wonder the accounts of the 1956 incident, as with many other war crimes stories, are missing much when one is concerned with the actual truth. This is exactly what happened with Sacco when he tried to look for more than what the world has been told; documents were missing. As a journalist and artist, he thought there was something that deserves to be told, an untold story. He decided to research it closely, with interviews and testimonies. He would try his best to help people, who went through this painful experience, recall their painful memory. Joe Sacco is "arraying boxes of witnessing, they narrativize and dramatize complex information while they intensify the effect of empathetic identification."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Sedonie, Smith. *Human Rights and Comics: Autobiographical Avatars Crisis Witnessing, and Transnational Rescue Networks*, "Graphic Subjects: Critical Essays on Autobiography and Graphic Novels." Michael A. Chaney. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), pp. 61-72.

Sacco could simply not mention many stories, but he added those stories to create an intimate reading experience as he did in his previous comic book *Palestine*, creating empathy and understanding. Producing a trustworthy historical story, real and believable, Sacco has mentioned what was beyond reason in his story to give the readers the chance to be present although they are not there. He gives the reader's imagination the chance to expand and to live the actual process of gathering these information; readers have their own space to exist in the interpretation of the stories Sacco is retelling. It is a collaboration between language and image, boxes and gutters, followed by the reader with his or her understanding of the big picture. Sacco gave the reader the privilege of sharing his own experience in gathering painful stories, testimonies, and memories that are painful and allows the reader to enter the painful world of the other. Therefore, his graphic novels possess a capacity for the audience's interpretations. They challenge the reader to take a position and have an active, engaged reading experience.

The pages of *Footnotes in Gaza* are crowded with action-filled, traumatic, and bloody memories as the main source for the journalist to tell an untold fifty-year-old story. Of the veracity of those testimonies and the difficulty of writing the story of the 1956 war, Sacco says: "I'm trying to confront the reader with the problems I had. But in the end I am trying to sift and get to the overall arc of the story. And when you talk to 20 or 30 people, who have seen the same thing separately, you can tell if something has an overall arc and is essentially true."⁶⁸

Sacco takes his story and begins with the fact that he knows nothing. It is just how he started in Palestine, but the difference here is that in *Palestine* he had some ideas and bigotries before he even began, ideas he had to change after certain point. In *Footnotes in Gaza*, just like the book's name, he knew nothing and had to follow the footnotes to arrive the point of a certain

⁶⁸ Sacco, Joe. *Notes on Sacco's Footnotes in Gaza*. Joe Sacco, interviewed by Roger Sabin, at London's ICA. 29 November 2009. <http://www.eyemagazine.com/blog/post/notes-on-saccos-footnotes-in-gaza>. Dec 6 .2016.

knowledge. In *Footnotes in Gaza*, the author knows what he wants, he is concerned with a particular incident, the massacres of 1956 -- a real-life story of war, death and pain.

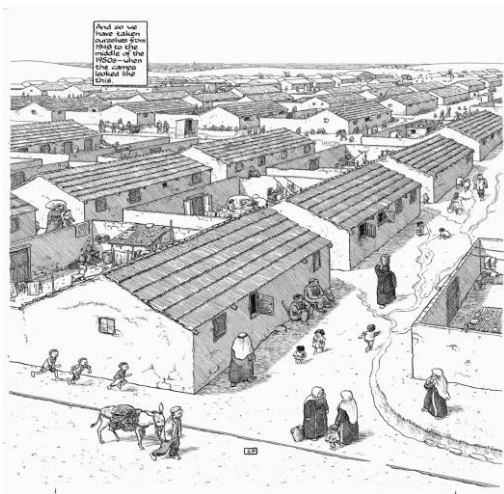
What Sacco is doing is an important thing that can dramatically shift the way history is told; the rule where the victorious party writes the history is not a rule anymore. Sacco puts himself in a position of a human rights activist. In both *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza*, he gives a voice to those who does not have one, or even worse, those who have an unheard voice. Sacco created a platform for himself to show human rights violations and he frames his work with ethical issues, just like his other works.

An illegal occupation that we see all over the world has come to the point that it became ordinary to see. Unbelievably, now it is ok to see Palestinians die. While a revolution erupts in European and American streets when a few French or American people die in a terrorist attack, which is painful and unbearable of course, these reactions do not happen when a Palestinian child dies because of Israeli military actions. Is it possible that Palestinian blood is legal to shed because we have become used to see it happening on screens every day for the last six decades? Somewhere on this earth, men, women, and children get arrested every day; they are murdered every day; and they lose their loved ones every day. Do people get used to watching another nation suffer, and yet feel that it does not concern them? It is not new, Sacco is showing how this painful reality goes back in time to the 50s with this ugly war in 1956.

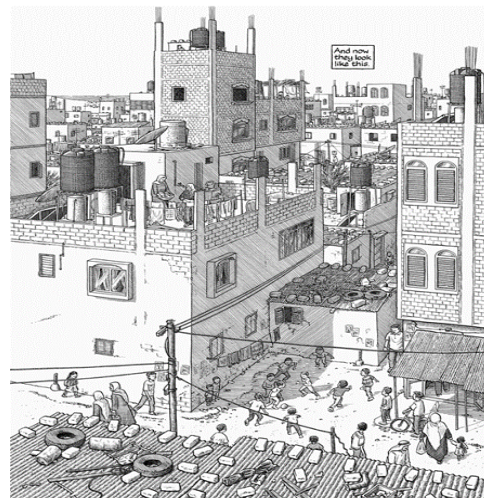
Opening our eyes to some ugly truth that has never been documented in the right manner from the perspective of the victims, where the Egyptian army mentions their glory in that war and the Israeli side hides all the crimes and human rights violations they have committed. Sacco seeks in his journey, which is now a book, to humanize tragic events that occurred over a short period of time. The author explained an Israeli attack by saying “the Israelis used the old trick of laying down one or two rounds and waiting several minutes for a crowd to form before returning to the original target ...Thus, many casualties. About 50

Palestinians were killed and 100 wounded.” (72) Sacco can show the desperation, death, confusion, and torture Palestinians experienced. Sacco saw what a Palestinian would not see in other Palestinians who have been in this together for a long time now. Sacco can spot the desperation on women’s and men’s faces, an image that cannot be shown by a text alone. While he is driven by curiosity, Sacco's goals are compassion and humane treatment, animating his powerful, black-and-white art to describe the evil that humanity does in the name of nationalism.

Sacco divides the book by areas in the Gaza strip, targeting Khan Younis first, and then Rafah. Sacco notes in his book, "I don't need to tell you, memories change with the years, and the memories we have excavated here are decades old ... Memory blurs edges, it adds and subtracts."⁶⁹ He cultivates a memory that needs to be sharpened to wake up and be present. He crafts individual stories, contrasting the oral history with images.



The camp in 1956



the camp in 2003

Sacco effectively intersperses his historical re-creations, partially based on period photos, with depictions of the ambience in 2002 and 2003, when he traveled to the area for his research. “I relied heavily on photographs available at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency

⁶⁹ Sacco, Joe. *Footnotes in Gaza*. Metropolitan books, 2009. p. ix.

(UNRWA) archives in Gaza city. I also drew on physical descriptions related to me by Palestinians.”⁷⁰

In his book, *Requiem for a Nun*, William Faulkner wrote: “The past is not dead. In fact, it’s not even past.” That is what the reader will notice, passing by with all the memories that Palestinians are telling Sacco. They still hold on to their memories as if they happened not a long time ago, they do fade, but the results of the past keeps on reminding them of what happened. In *Footnotes in Gaza*, the pictures of Khan Younis and Rafah in 1950s and the time when Sacco was on ground there to do his research, are different. In the 50s there were those primitive buildings and less people. Now it is more vibrant and lively, with more people and arrays bursting with life. However; the refugee camp is still there. People did not move, they are just increasing. To Sacco “the past and present cannot be so easily disentangled; they are part of a remorseless continuum, a historical blur.”⁷¹ Sacco’s role in recreating this old story comes from his belief that this historical blur is worthy of focus. It is:

worth our while to freeze that churning forward movement and examine one or two events that were not only a disaster for the people who lived them but might also be instructive for those who want to understand why and how—as El-Rantisi said-hatred was “planted” in hearts.⁷²

As a journalist, an author, and an artist, he makes it clear in this research of retelling history his main goal is to answer the question of why and how regarding the Palestinian story and the decades-long Palestinian-Israeli conflict. History matters. It is history that determines the relationship between the two peoples. What is happening now is just part of what happened before, the bloodstained history comes in the way whenever a solution is put on the table of negotiations.

⁷⁰ Sacco, Joe. *Footnotes in Gaza*. Metropolitan books, 2009. P. x.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. xi.

⁷² Ibid. p. xi.

That is why the Europeans and Americans ways of talking about the peace process in the Middle East sounds like abstract hypotheses that can never be proven or even accomplished. People around the world need to know the history to comprehend the situation, to understand the complexity of it. Sacco has brought people's stories, faces, and feelings into his book to create an outstanding way for the West to understand, to know more, and open their minds to think and not simply accept what a CNN correspondent is telling them.

Sacco has used two Israeli researchers to help with his research in the Israeli documents. He relied not only on the UNRWA and his on-the-ground field research. Sacco asserts in his book's introduction that he "employed two Israeli researchers to go through the Israel Defense Forces Archives. One of them also examined the Israel State Archives, the Knesset archives, a press archive, and the Kol Ha'am (Communist Party) newspaper archive for any mention of the two incidents."⁷³

The author also suggested that an Israeli Historian could step in to into the breach and collect information from Israeli soldiers who have been there. But, the question here would be, why would Israel document its own crimes? As long as they are the only first world country in the Middle East and the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel continues to build settlements on Palestinian land that was divided according to the road map signed by the United States, the country that provides Israel with most of its military budget and American weapons. Israel continues to say they will stop the settlements, but it never happens. They build settlements and give the order to building new units on Palestinian land every day. They having been using their military power on civilians in the Gaza strip for a very long time and it still goes on in our present day.

So, for a fake democracy like that, it is very valuable to have an American voice like Sacco telling the West that Israel is not what Americans think it is. Graphic journalism or

⁷³ Ibid. p. x.

comics have been used by Sacco in a brilliant way, showing the ability of this genre to unfold universal truths for those who are willing to pick them up, rethink assumptions, and ask questions. Sacco helps the reader, question his or her own thoughts and ideas of the conflict. He helps them gain knowledge based on human stories, real stories of people -- not soldiers and militias.

“Sacco brings the conflict down to the most human level, allowing us to imagine our way inside it, to make the desperation he discovers, in some small way, our own.”⁷⁴

— *Los Angeles Times*

⁷⁴ Ulin, L. David. 'Footnotes in Gaza' by Joe Sacco. *Los Angeles Times*. Dec. 27. 2009. <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-ca-joe-sacco27-2009dec27-story.html>.

3.2 Intensity: Fear, Desperation, Violence, Hatred, and Trauma

Footnotes are the way we trace the past and what happened then. Footnotes help us to know what shaped our identities, dreams, personalities, attitudes, and actions over time. This is an essential point to the three comic books of my study. It lays bare how history creates who we are. At the same time, retelling history can change what we already know with no clear evidence, by using a story with all the foundational research like Sacco did. Therefore, it is a good starting point to introduce the reader to the reality of the other. Most of the time, people see the outside of the other from a distance. Sacco goes into the journey of seeking the footnotes that would lead himself and the reader to the past.

Sacco examines those two massacres in Gaza in juxtaposition to show the violence Gazan people have been struggling under for fifty years, ten years ago, a month ago, and a week ago. So many violent images show the intensity of the situation in Gaza. The author shows us things traditional journalists are bored of telling, complete with journalists rolling their eyes, shaking their heads, and saying, “It does get old” (5). This is contrasted with the “other,” the Palestinian -- “Two dead. Five dead. 20 dead. A week ago. A month ago. A year ago. 50 years ago.” (5)

With an intensity that written history misses, Joe Sacco mentioned in his book’s introduction: “While I was investigating what happened in 1956, Israeli attacks were killing Palestinians, suicide bombers were killing Israeli’s and elsewhere in the Middle East the United States was gearing up for war in Iraq.”⁷⁵ “Well, like most footnotes, they dropped to the bottom of history’s pages, where they barely hang on.” The “footnotes” is what concerns Sacco the most, because traces of history are what he is looking for, to know the truth of an old, almost forgotten story, but of course not forgotten by the people who have been through it. Those footnotes can be easily erased and never come back. Many painful and tragic memories, a kind

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. xi.

of pain that Sacco saw on those people's faces when they try to remember what happened; these are the memories he managed capture on those cartoon character faces. We see them in their body language, all the humiliation, using the high contrast of white and black to make it even more intense. The reader can feel the intensity of these images of violence and traumatized faces of the people who are recalling their memories.



We see fear, humiliation, and despair. People are walking, they do not seem to know where, raising up their hands, surrendering and falling apart, their heads down. They are leaving their shoes behind and, while walking barefoot, they are not able to move back to collect them because they are threatened. People are walking on dead bodies and the reader sees their suffering and humiliation.

But, “So what?” Even the journalists sit in bars to listen to things they have been writing about for a long time. It does not matter if it happens yesterday or today, because it is the same old story to them. Why doesn't matter? Sacco answers “Because they've wrung every word they can out of the second Intifada, they've photographed every wailing mother, quoted every lying spokesperson, detailed every humiliation, and so what?” (5) Palestinians being killed and abused every day means nothing to those journalists anymore, as if it is what Palestinians are supposed to do, be tortured to death ... nothing new!



Naji al-Ali's Handala is turning his back to the viewer. Handala is not surrendering. Those in the picture are told by the Israeli soldiers to turn their backs, raise their hands, and lower their heads as a gesture of surrender -- a humiliating loss of human rights. This image is used as one of many *Footnotes in Gaza* book covers.

To those journalists who think the story is dead, maybe it is dead to them. But to Palestinians it is certainly not dead. Journalists and news networks deal with the situation in terms of numbers of dead people and numbers of demolished houses. The humiliation of people does not count. Maybe if this happened in the United States or Europe, it would be different.



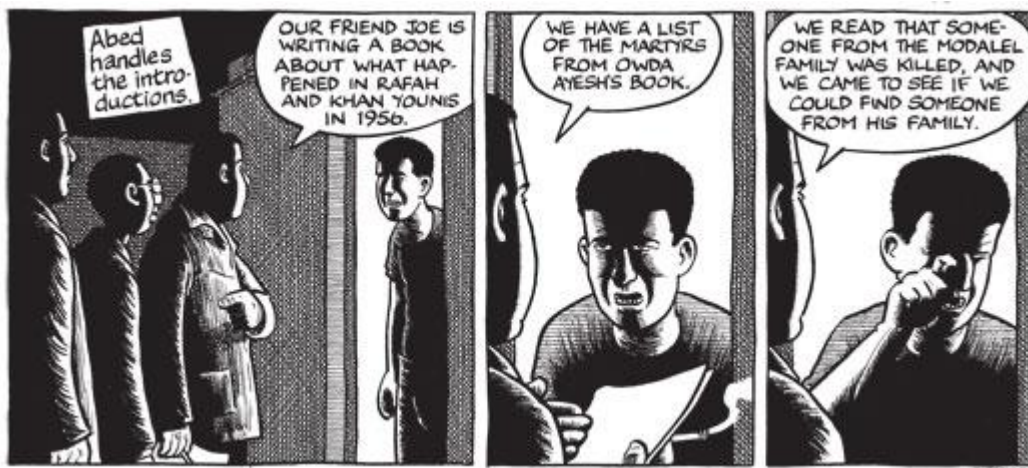
“Dehumanization” is a topic Judith Butler has tackled in *Precarious Life*. She suggests how the bereaved Arab peoples involved in the war on terrorism are dehumanized and not even allowed to mourn. To Israel and the West, the violence and killing that happens to Palestinians is a justified part of a war on terrorism. That is why the Israeli soldiers who did the screening in school yards to get the terrorists as they call them ended up killing whoever they wanted to kill.

This is the concept of “othering” in life and death. It is a process of deciding whose life is worth something, and whose life is worth nothing. Western journalists are guilty of “othering.” They live in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, dance and drink, and they are heroes when they go back home, because they reported on a war. However, it is not war, because war is between two armies. Palestinians do not have an army.

It is precisely for this reason there should be a coverage of inhuman practices towards the Palestinians. But the news networks are not interested in this reality. Sacco was ready to be in the field in Gaza to ask questions and notice things on people’s faces other journalists never noticed. He went to where all the intensity lies -- in their faces and eyes, their memories. Joe Sacco went against what all those traditional journalists believe in; he cared about humans and their lives, not what Hamas did or said, not what any political party did. He took his position

to stand in the position of a human activist. Judith Butler argues that, “whether or not we continue to enforce a universal conception of human rights at moments of outrage and incomprehension, precisely when we think that others have taken themselves out of the human community as we know it, is a test of our very humanity.”⁷⁶

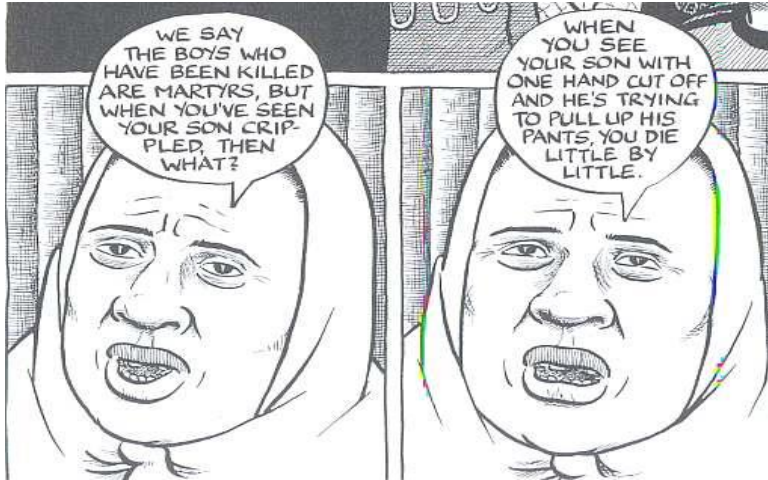
In the image below, despair, hopelessness, misery, fear, and tears are all gathered in one face, the face of that young man Abed is talking to. Abed and Joe came to ask about someone from his family. That family member was killed, and the young man is shedding tears. The way Sacco chose to intensify the color black makes the character step into a very dark and emotional circle. There is a massive focus on the face and reaction when he is informed about the death of his family member.



Sacco shows us the quiet, grinding desperation of the families attempting to carry on under occupation. They are exhausted freedom fighters and frustrated unemployed young men. What Sacco could always find in Gaza are the memories of dispossession, helplessness, desperation, and humiliation. There is always a hope to return to where they feel their dignity is, to return to their villages.

⁷⁶ Butler, Judith, *it is a Free Country: Personal Freedom in America after September 11, (Dehumanization vs. Indefinite Detention)*. Akashic Books, 2002, p. 277.

A woman who is standing to watch her neighbor's house being demolished assails Sacco with her question, "What's all this little by little? Why don't they get rid of us in one go?" (166)



It is not just her home and her memories being destroyed, it is also her future as a woman and mother. Her son is down the street throwing stones at the bulldozer. "Can't you stop him?" asks Sacco. "You can't stop them!" (166) she replies. "The blood of the Intifada is in the boys!" (166) unfortunately, fear has evolved into hatred. Hatred is something that destroys the future of children who learn to fear and hate at such an early age. She despairs when she thinks of her children feeling hatred towards someone, because it destroys their future. When children see their houses and friends' houses demolished, we expect them to develop hatred and fear that they will take into their future.

3.3 Women under Siege

Women in Palestine have been thrown into a national struggle. The people of Palestine in general have been thrown into this struggle, with no other options, because their nationalism is their way of self-determination, crucial for every nation. For a woman in the Middle East, life is not easy with all the society and family rules and the limitations they put into any woman's life. Women have had to struggle to have the right to vote around the world; they struggle to have equal payment in the work place; they struggle to compete with men to be a

CEO at a huge company, whether it is in Arab countries or in America. But Palestinian women have even more to contend with. A woman in Gaza has to worry if all her children will come back from school unhurt. A woman in Gaza prays to God that her house is not the next to be demolished after her neighbor's house. Her neighbors were very nice with the garden it had, all the jasmine flowers her neighbor planted, because her neighbor and her husband wanted to grow old in that house. For a Gazan woman, it is not about the house anymore, it is about if her family are all alright at the end of the day, she is afraid of the hatred her son and daughter have towards the Israelis, and she is worried about their future.

That is why many Palestinian women make sure her children know their story, who they are, why this happened, and what should they do to have a plan B. A Palestinian should always have a plan B, because you never know what is going to happen the next minute, or month, or year. A woman in Palestine is taught to be strong, and have a degree so she can have a decent job if her husband goes to jail, or gets killed. She needs to be strong to raise her children. However; despair and misery are her companions. We see it on the faces of women Sacco draws on the pages of his book. The thing with women in *Footnotes in Gaza*, they always ask questions of Sacco, human questions. They always ask him what he would do if he was in their shoes. It is interesting how most of women pose questions for Sacco and the reader to ponder.

Women in Palestine have many cultural and economic limitations. As a young Palestinian girl, education would be the aim, especially since education is the only asset Palestinians can rely on after the catastrophe in 1948. Then, when she becomes a young woman, she should act and dress in a certain way, depending on what class she belongs to. All that matters is a girl's reputation and education, so she can find a suitable husband in the future. Basically, like any other Arab society, Palestinian women are put into a certain frame, and it is not acceptable to get out of the borders of this frame. Some Palestinian women have found a

place in between these borders, or we can say that this place was created for her, where they can improve their lot in life. The Palestinian feminism movement is based on accepted national principles and nationalism is the platform from which women can expand their dreams and



hopes in Palestine.

Unlike any other woman, she does not have space to think of women's issues common in the rest of the world, because there are many other things of greater concern. She worries about her occupation. She has to contend with the electricity and water that is cut off two or three times a week and sometimes every night. How does she cultivate the Palestinianism of her children, their education, her husband's and children's safety, and above all, her strength to protect her family?

No matter what women do, it is always men who are in the spotlight as the nationalist hero. Normally, they ask women how many kids you lost. How many do you have in prison? How was your husband killed? These questions are what a woman is asked, because she cannot escape the nationalism that permeates Palestinian society. It is not her dreams that matter, it is the whole family's well-being. The situation in Gaza cannot handle an individual's dreams and aspirations, probably because there is no way out from under this barbaric siege that allows nothing but the constant thinking of the how to survive the pain and daily struggles caused by the past. It is hard to erase the memories of a traumatic experiences that have come from a state of constant war.

The woman in this figure, for example; is asking Sacco what he would do if he was living in the fear of having his house demolished. And this is what women think of day by day in Gaza. Unlike any other woman in the world who would think of paying the bills, or her love life, she has to think of death, destruction and live in fear that her child can be gone, while she can do nothing about it.

From listening to stories of women in the 1956 massacre and observing the role women in Gaza are playing, Sacco noticed Palestinian women are supposed to be strong and independent, but within the frame of their society and their culture and nationalism. However, women in Gaza are traumatized, afraid of today, and afraid for their children's future.

Restrictions on movement and access, increased settlement expansion and settler violence, demolitions of Palestinian infrastructure and displacement, the fragmentation of the territory and the closure of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the Gaza Strip, continue to have a negative gender differentiated impact on the lives of Palestinian women and their families.”⁷⁷ - Report of the Secretary General, 19 December 2014

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is a humanitarian organization that worked on a detailed report in November 2015. The report's title is “*Gaza: The Impact of Conflict on Women.*” This report is very compatible with what Sacco states in his book regarding the Palestinians, and especially women, whether it is in 1948, what happened in the 1956 massacres, or what was happening when Sacco was in Gaza for a field study. They all match the NCR report made in 2015 regarding the last war on Gaza.

⁷⁷ Report of the Secretary-General. *Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women*. Economic and Social Council (UN). Dec. 19. 2014.
<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/376754D9CD0034F785257DF5006F06A7>. Web. Jan. 6. 2017.

The NRC interviewed many women in focus group discussions. Gazan women “described their experiences and recounted their terror of fleeing the bombing, running from place to place. Some women were pulled out of the rubble, amazed at being alive, others saw children and other family members killed in front of their eyes”⁷⁸. Rabab Wahdan’s home was destroyed during the war and eight members of her husband’s family were killed. She said: “I still can’t understand how I didn’t get injured when others died or were injured. I saw the rocket coming down. I can picture it as it came down. It was red. It was coming down towards me. This cannot escape my mind. Now if I hear war planes I feel terrified.”⁷⁹ The killing and the witnessing of people being murdered has also happened back in 1956, and is still happening.

“Memories were vivid and horrifying and they had in no sense been able to ‘move on’ from those days. Many of them had not received any psychological support and there has been no accountability or findings of responsibility for those who had caused the deaths of their loved ones, their displacement or the destruction of their homes.”⁸⁰

The same thing also happened in 1956, when the two massacres happened in Gaza. There was no clear documentation found, and people who went through this ugly experience seem to remember very well what happened, although their memory is blurry at time.

Women need a strong faith to hang on to with all the inhumanity they are forced to experience, so they turn to religion. Religious faith has proven how strong it is in directing and sustaining people. The same phenomenon happened in Iran during the revolution, a subject I will address in the third chapter of this study.

The thing about Palestinian women is that they are mothers, daughters, wives, and fighters. It is very rare that you see a Palestinian woman who is indulged in her own life, or in her own thing, whatever it is. The political situation has managed to put her in that frame that

⁷⁸ Rought-Brooks, Hanna. *Gaza: The Impact of the Conflict on Women.* NRC Report. November 2015. p.5. <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/gaza---the-impact-of-conflict-on-women.pdf>

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 5.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

she can't get out of because nothing has priority more than her children's life and well-being. But what about her well-being? I think everything else comes first, that is why she has to be a fighter even if her occupation is as a housewife.

Laila al-Hamdani was a Palestinian political prisoner in an Israeli prison during the first *intifada* (the Arabic word to describe the people's revolution). In an interview, she talked of women's roles and why religion became a big part of people's lives, including women, most of them wearing a *hijab*. She states, "In the 50s and 60s, the Palestinians turned to different political groups, the Baathists, the Nasserites. They all proved to be failures. So, people have turned back to religion. In a Muslim society, it is easier to turn to Islam than to Marxism. The Iranian revolution encouraged this."⁸¹ Therefore the *hijab* was imposed on many women in Gaza and why many others have chosen it.

3.3.1 Women in resistance

Laila al-Hamdani was asked also if the situation is different in Gaza than the West Bank. Her answer was clear:

"Both are occupied, both have settlements and both are oppressed. What makes Gaza a more difficult situation is the higher population density, the more extreme poverty and lack of access to the bridges [into Jordan]. Educational standards are also lower, most schools being UNRWA schools. These factors have made the Gaza Strip a more fertile breeding ground for religion, so many Gazan women are religious and wear the veil. But often this religiosity is combined with a fighting spirit that makes many of the women there really tough."⁸²

Religion is that deep and strong faith that makes women go on, wake up the next day, and give something to her children, husband, and the whole family. If she must give, regardless her pain

⁸¹ Al-Hamadani, Laila. "Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories: An Interview with Laila al-Hamdani." Sep. 28. 2014. <https://libcom.org/library/palestinian-women-occupied-territories-interview-laila-al-hamdani>. 21 Dec.2016.

⁸² Ibid.

and daily torture, she must be stronger than all the circumstances. Religion helps the Gazan woman to reach that goal.

Laila continues in one of her interviews to sing a song all the prisoners would sing together from their cold lonely cells. Laila says: “Back in the cell with *Umm Sabir*⁸³, I unrolled the little piece of paper and found a song, written in pencil. Its words were simple. The song says:

We are not going to die; we are
Going to uproot death from our land. . .
There, far away, the soldiers will
Take me, to be locked in the darkness
In the hell of chains . . .
But now I am amongst my comrades
Adding my voice to theirs, now I
Am strong, I can break down the
Walls of my cell. . .
And I swear there will be no peace
Until our revolution, our struggle
For freedom is victorious.”⁸⁴

Laila continued to share her feeling when singing that song and how it was a freeing experience for her,

I learned the words by heart and joined the comrades from the men's block in singing it. It is strange, almost mysterious, the way that sharing makes one so much stronger. When I was first brought in, I felt so small and isolated, I could easily have been

⁸³ A prisoner with Laila inside the Israeli prison.

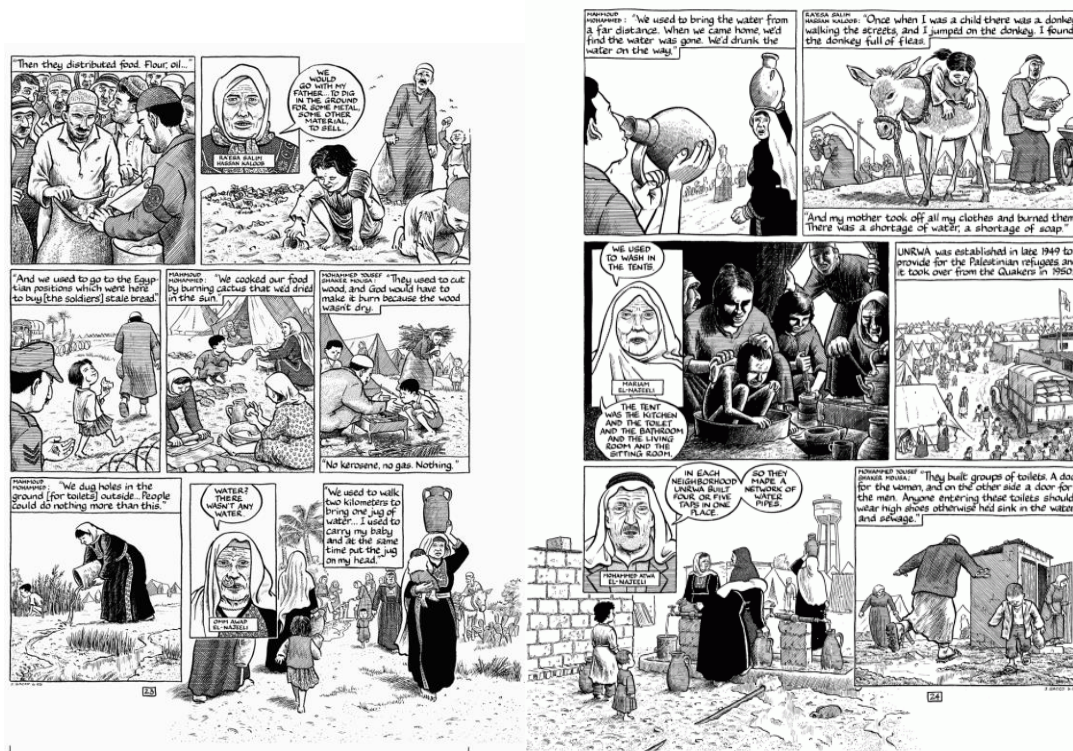
⁸⁴ Laila al-Hamdani. *Kahmsin: A Palestinian Woman in Prison, Women in the Middle East*. Zed Books, 1987, p.45. <https://libcom.org/book/export/html/48798>

crushed. Now, hearing my own voice singing in union with the others, I felt completely different. I had the strength to bring down the walls of my cell. Sharing was the first lesson I have learnt-the knowledge that behind the wall there is someone prepared to grit their teeth and ignore their pain. To let you know that you are not alone; thousands have passed down the same corridors before you. Harassed, tortured, and even died in this place, all for the cause. It matters little that I did not know their names, they are part of you, you are part of them; that feeling of comradeship joins you together. You lose the boundaries of your own body, it becomes part of this huge, strong, living entity-you cannot help feeling the pain of their bruises on your own face.⁸⁵

3.3.2 *Women's role as housewives caring for the family*

In the beginning of *Footnotes in Gaza* we see women in 1948, when the Palestinians were displaced and kicked out of their homes. Women were the ones doing almost most of the work for the family, taking care of the children, and walking for almost two kilometers to get clean water for their families. One of the women talked about how they would make food: “We cooked our food by burning Cactus that we’d dried in the sun.” (23). “No kerosene, no gaz. Nothing” (23), Om Awwad Al-Najeeli says “we used to walk two kilometers to bring one jug of water ... I used to carry my baby and at the same time on the jug on my head.” (23)

⁸⁵ Ibid.



Mariam Al-Najeeli says “the tent was the kitchen and the toilet and the bathroom and the living room and the sitting room.” (24). these are the conditions that women had to live in back in 1948. Very desperate. Even when Sacco visited Gaza in 2002-2003, he went to family who lives in a two-room poor house. The woman was the most frustrated one; she kept on asking him to take pictures “take pictures, take pictures” (31), then she continued to talk about her clinically depressed husband who is standing behind her speechless. The situation is very suffocating. Sacco explains, “I had to get out of there, to swim up to the surface and gasp for air.” (32)

3.3.3 Women in trauma

Women had to be the ones who collected the bodies of their loved ones, searching for their sons, husbands, brothers, and fathers. Om Nafez says, “It is as if it is happening now. I’ll never forget it.” (108) Women were pretty much very furious when it comes to that period because while the Israelis were collecting all the men and boys to kill or arrest them, women were watching all of this happening to their loved ones. Women’s issues in the Gaza strip and

the West Bank have remained the same since 1948. The wall of segregation has a painting on it to demonstrate the ugly reality women have to endure in Palestine, how women have to say goodbye to their family members because an Israeli soldier pulled the trigger.



Women's organizations fail at some points in Gaza and the West Bank; the Palestinian society is focused on the national cause. They deal with the women's right to fight side by side with men, or if young girls should have to grow up to watch their mothers, aunts and grandmothers wearing the *hijab* because of Hamas governance in the Gaza strip (a fundamentalist political party). Women so they grow up to think that this is the best for girls and women.

Palestinian women are pictured by the media as passive women. However; all the losses of their loved ones and all the hardship of their lives as women is making them stronger and stronger. Who does not cry and weep if their house is destroyed, all the memories in their house are threatened, as are their children's lives?

All they have left are their memories. It is all history now, their loved ones, their houses, their neighborhood. Displacement is not only geographical in this case, it is on every level. Palestinians live in exile on their own land.

3.4. Whose life matters?

Sacco used the past in his two books to give himself and the reader a chance to identify with the present, to understand and to realize that nothing happens in one night. People are not born to hate, but things happen in life and hate directs people to hurt others. Knowing the footnotes of history will give us the answer for many questions. As Edward Said observed, “Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present.”⁸⁶

Either in *Palestine* or in *Footnotes in Gaza*, Sacco has understood that the past is what we need to track down in such a complicated history. His goal is to spread credible information so people in the world would know how citizens are manipulated by media and by the intellectuals who write books regarding the East and the Arabs to make colonialism and occupation excused.

Lately, Marine le Pen, who ran unsuccessfully for the French presidency, has been praising the French colonialism. The controversial candidate argued that “(French) colonization gave a lot to former colonies, especially Algeria.”⁸⁷ She continues to thank the French colonization, because it gave Algerians “hospitals, roads and schools ... Many Algerians of good faith admit that.”⁸⁸ Algeria’s nickname is “the country of the million martyrs.” Algeria paid a very high price to get its independence, over one million lives. She did not think of how many girls have lost their fathers, how many women have lost their husbands, sons, and brothers, and how life treated them because of colonialism. There are occasional statements from French officials and even intellectuals to praise their previous colonialism to Algeria. That is why we need more people from the West to ask questions regarding the past, to spread knowledge and humanity when thinking about the “other.”

⁸⁶ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*,

⁸⁷ “Marine Le Pen, *Algeria Owes a Lot to French Colonization*.” MENA, 23/4/2017.

<http://menafn.com/1095414795/Marine-Le-Pen-Algeria-Owes-a-Lot-to-French-Colonization>

⁸⁸ Ibid.

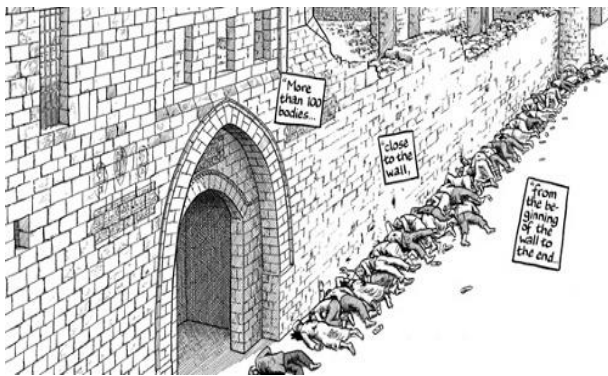
Judith Butler asks, “Whose life matters?”⁸⁹ Obviously, the colonialists still have a hard time believing that the life of the one who was colonized matters. How about when the occupation is still there, like in Palestine? How can Europe pay for the cruelty of their regimes with the European Jewish people? Yes, give them a land for a people whose lives do not matter, those are the Arab Palestinians. Intellectuals, media and politicians are teaching us “human beings” the circumstances and the criteria for the people who we should feel sorry for, and the criteria for the people that do not matter, again “the other.” The history of how we got here is very critical to be able to diagnose the world we live in and understand where our prejudices come from. An understanding of the complete history will allow us to make a change in an unjust world like ours.

There is a phenomenon in the West, and it is getting worse by time. Politicians and intellectuals who are following certain agendas far from any humanist methodology are using the fellowship of people to guide them down the fear and hatred path. Ohio Governor John Kasich stated in one of his interviews on NBC that the divided situation in America has been going on for decades. The last election made the division clear. In his interview, Kasich said that there are two paths that America has to choose between, one of those paths is “the path that exploits anger. Encourages resentment. Turns fear into hatred and divides people,”⁹⁰ This is the main point of his book, *Two Paths: America Divided or United*, a book that was published in April 2017 after the last elections. But what Kasich described exists not only in America; it is how the longstanding relation between the West and East was built, it is how the relation between Palestinians and Israelis was built.

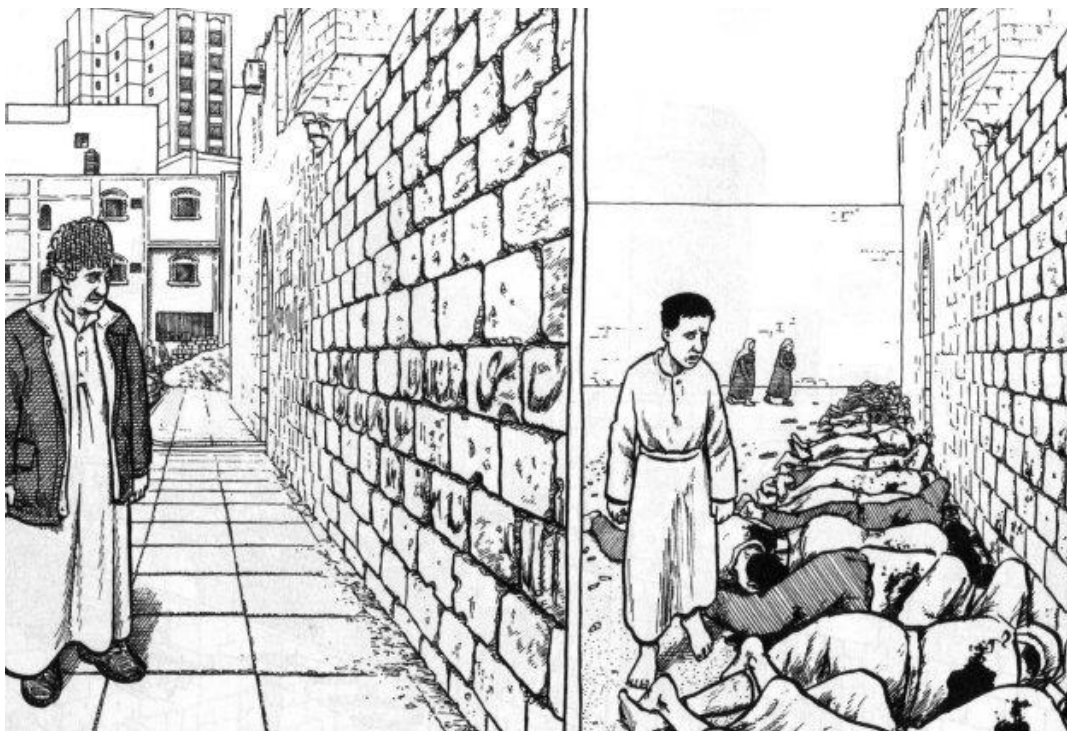
⁸⁹ Butler, Judith. *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Harvard University Press, 17. Nov. 2015. P. 199.

⁹⁰ Kailani. Koenig, “Laying Out ‘Two Paths,’ John Kasich Issues Stark Warning to GOP,” NBC NEWS. 12. April. 2016. <http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/laying-out-two-paths-kasich-issues-stark-warning-gop-n554656>.

Indeed, fear turns into hatred and people are divided when it comes to the East and West, Islam and Christianity or Judaism. The Western population is following those who want them to be afraid of the Arabs and Islam, to be hateful and think that whatever happens to them is just fine, because then the world gets rid of people who are ruining it, “the others,” Muslims are terrorists and Arabs are passive and useless. Western leaders and media have been working, for ages now, on preventing their population from knowing the truth, the real past that created our present, to trap their human consciences by fear, ignorance, and the unawareness of who really is the “other.”



It does not seem that the Palestinian blood matters for Israelis, or even the rest of the world.



4. *Persepolis* - Marjane Satrapi

This book by Marjane Satrapi is the author's personal story that is why it is slightly different than Sacco's journalistic approach. Marjane triggers her memory as a child since the revolution in Iran started in 1979. She reveals that her story is going to be a historical story by naming the "*Persepolis*," the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (ca. 550–330 BC) in present days Iran.

On the first page where her character looks directly at the reader, Marjane is 10 years old. It is 1980, when the Iranian revolution started. The author makes it clear from the beginning that she is telling a story that a young girl has witnessed. The reader will accompany her and her family on her journey into one of the hardest eras of modern Iran, an era that shaped many prejudices about Iran and Iranians. Marjane the young girl witnessed many unforgettable memories, dramatic changes that happened, fear of war and oppression that made Marjane's family decide to let her leave to Vienna, to protect her and to give her the chance of being free.

4.1 Marjane, an Insider, Telling her Story

Those memories helped Marjane grow to be an independent woman in exile. Still, it took her a while to figure out who she really is in the middle of everything happening to her and her family. She had to find her way out of all the chaos, a chaos her parents wanted her to be away from. They thought Europe would be a good place for her, where she could live in freedom to find her way as she pleases. However; is moving away to be in exile -- to leave the turbulent life in Tehran and live in the luxury of freedom -- everything it is supposed to be? Or, does this kind of decision displace her from her roots and identity?

The author lives in between the two worlds of East and West. Now she is neither from the West nor the East. This is what happens with almost every exiled person. Marjane had to learn a lot when facing all the looks and hearing the words full of prejudice and negative images of the East and Islam. Marjane wrote her book for a reason, being in the West helped her figure

out that she wants people to know how similar Iranian children are to other children in a Western country. The author spent her teenage and youth years stuck in the space between two contrasting worlds, East and West, Iran and secularism. Satrapi collected her memories of childhood and teenage years, then she moved to the other part of the story where is trying to find her way around her place. She feels out of place wherever she is, either in Iran or in Europe.

On exile and what exiles feel like, Edward Said wrote in one of his essays *Reflections on Exile*, ‘Exiles look at non-exiles with resentment, *they* belong in their surroundings, you feel, whereas an exile is always out of place.’⁹¹ In her novel, Marjane shows in many places how estrangement is part of her life experience whether in Vienna or in Iran. Edward Said continues to talk about how an exiled person feels, he described it as if he or she is ‘clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong.’⁹² Belonging is one of the needs that a human soul strives to meet. The identity and origin of the self are essential to serve the needs of someone’s self-acknowledgment. It is the need to know who you really are, what made you the person you are today.

Simone Weil expresses how this need is one of the most important factors of a human’s well-being. Weil argues “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.”⁹³ This part of my thesis addresses the question of identity, and how history is one of the main factors to shape the future of nations, countries, and individuals. This is what Satrapi is trying to do through her book. She went back with her memory to her childhood, the history of Iran, the revolution, and what changes occurred in her family’s life, her life, and her exile. It is a book that retells the history of a critical period in Iran. From another point of view.

⁹¹ Edward Said. *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays: Reflections on Exile*. Granta Books 2001, p. 180.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 182

⁹³ Weil, Simon. *The Need for Roots* Psychology Press, 2002. P.43.

Satrapı shows the reader how history is important to understand the story of the other and to really know who they are.

We the people get our stories of the other from powerful people, people who have powerful positions like politicians, kings, and presidents. One should not forget the media has political and economic agendas following the powerful leaders and political parties. No wonder there is much hatred in the world. Satrapı did not choose to live outside of Iran, the conditions of Iran made her family make that decision for her. Edward Said mentioned in his article *Reflection on Exile* how “Exile is not after all, a matter of choice: you are born into it, or it happens to you.”⁹⁴

Satrapı, as many other people from Iran, or any country that went through rough times and war, had to leave, and by that, leave many things behind. They had to leave so many aspects of their life behind it seems to be an abandonment of who they are. That is why people who are in exile tend to search for their originality and roots, to be aware of their own self and their position in their community. This displacement is hard to accept and it is what a reader cannot miss when reading *Persepolis*. In many situations Marjane felt displaced and out of place. This sense invited her to remember who she really is and to tell her story to others who made her feel different than the real Marjane. The author experienced so much as an Iranian woman in exile. She believes that “If people are given the chance to experience life in more than one country, they will hate a little less. It’s not a miracle potion, but little by little you can solve problems in the basement of a country, not on the surface. That is why I want people in other countries to read *Persepolis*, to see that I grew up just like other children.”⁹⁵

In an interview conducted by Nermeen Shaikh of *Asia Society*, Marjane Satrapı said: “there is something extremely pedagogical about *Persepolis*. For me there were so many

⁹⁴ Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays: Reflections on Exile*, p. 184.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

misunderstandings and so many mistakes concerning my country that I wanted to tell the story in a way that people would understand it better.”⁹⁶

The constant search for some historical facts, including her family’s history and their role in Iranian politics, the Iranian history and what she mentioned regarding the Shah of Iran, seems like a very important part for her to acknowledge to know her background, to identify herself to the reader whom she is trying to show the realm of the shape of her country and the people of her country. Iran played a great role in who she is as a character, the past is what made Marjane and it is what made the current Iran. She also focused on her relationship as a child of God, how religion is one of the main factors to form a personality and way of thinking unconsciously. It is culture, religion, and politics that have shaped who she is as an Iranian child and then as an exiled Iranian woman. She relies on her memories and her mother’s memories in telling her story. Marjane made sure to have her own memories combined with historical dates and incidents to show the role of the Iranian environment and revolution in shaping her identity, and the shape of the Iranian society containing people who are different as individuals. Individuality is her main point in the first chapter of the book, *The Veil*.

The reader would notice through *Persepolis* how the author experienced alienation in Europe because of her origin. She felt obliged to tell her story as an Iranian who lives between the East and the West. Satrapi has a powerful position as an Iranian child who lived in Iran during the Islamic revolution, a very troublesome period in Iran, then as an Iranian teenager and an Iranian woman living in Europe. As an Iranian woman, Marjane’s point of view will be controversial to Iranian men and some women, because she is a liberal Iranian woman. She will stand here for the word liberated, because if you are a liberated woman in secret then it is

⁹⁶Shaikh, Nermeen. “Marjane Satrapi: 'I Will Always Be Iranian'” *Asia Society*.
<http://asiasociety.org/marjane-satrapi-i-will-always-be-iranian>

ok. But if you talk about it, then it is not ok. Honesty about one's personal life is an issue we have in the Middle east, where you can live the way you want in the dark but not out in public.

Marjane's point view comes from an experience and an existence in Iranian life, she is a part of it. Her story tells details of how Iranian girls and women suffer to be heard and how their free will is taken by force. However, women found a way to resist the oppression of the regime. I mentioned earlier in "the veil" section that Marjane mentioned women fought through the color of their socks a woman is wearing. For example, wearing red socks for women is not allowed because it can draw attention, and the Iranian government does not want that to happen.

Being an Iranian gave Marjane access to the slightest details Sacco did not realize during his trip to Palestine. He had to ask about everything and it can be pretty much exhausting. Sacco worked more through his journalistic profession in his two books. He depended on collecting information through Palestinians memories and his observations. Marjane relies on her own memories and her family's experience. She is concerned of how history has changed Iran in one night, but it did not change the people.

Satrapi is bold in addressing many hard questions. Anthony Lane expressed in *The New Yorker* how "there is no denying the boldness of Persepolis, both in design and in moral complaint, but there must surely be moments, in Marjane's life as in ours, that cry out for cross-hatching and the grown-up grayness of doubt."⁹⁷

Marjane is giving her opinions as an individual. At other times she is talking from her position behind the veil. She covers both angles of the story. Anthony Lane argues that "Grand upheavals are viewed through her gaze, and sometimes through her veil. She is an odd compound of the malleable and the defiant, doomed to settle nowhere, and as quick to argue with God—a remote sage on a cloud—as she is with her kindly grandmother."⁹⁸ Marjane is

⁹⁷ Lane. Anthony. *Settling Scores 'Charlie Wilson's War,' 'Sweeney Todd,' and 'Persepolis.* The New Yorker. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/12/24/settling-scores>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

also described as “the feisty Iranian heroine of the marvelous animated movie *Persepolis*.”⁹⁹ Lisa Schwarzbaum argues that, “Satrapi doesn’t shy from the violent shocks that tore her home country apart, but neither does she settle for generalizations or prescriptive conclusions.”¹⁰⁰

Generalization is what bothered Marjane. It is the usual way Arab and Muslim women are portrayed in the Western media, a general picture for all of them and the same perspective on all of them. A famous incident happened when Donald Trump talked about the Khan family who lost their son while he was fighting with the American army. Trump accused Mrs. Khan of fearing to speak, that she is not allowed to speak because she is a Muslim with an Eastern origin. I am not saying that Trump represents an intellect, but at least he speaks the mind of many American people who are not familiar with Muslim women. Not even the loss of her son gave her the excuse to be silent, nothing stopped him from saying what he thinks in public. This reminds me of the nun who asked Marjane if Iranians have education, and also said that Iranians have no manners. She generalized the passive image on all Iranians because she did not like Marjane’s answer.

Being an insider who is writing about Iranian issues put her in a position where other Iranian writers accused her with communicating with the Western audience by giving them what they want to hear regarding Iran, to reassure the West about Iran and Iranians. It is true she is a native, as Dabashi is also an Iranian, but Dabashi’s point of view wants to erase Marjane’s personal story. The book itself starts with the image of her outside of her friend’s frame. The artist is telling us her story as a woman growing up when her nation went through a dramatic change. The story is not about what happened with the shah when he was removed and replaced by the fundamentalists and how history changed Iran for individuals like Marjane. Instead, she is sharing her own intimate experience with the reader, to show how as an Iranian

⁹⁹ Lisa Schwarzbaum, “*Persepolis*,” *Entertainment Weekly*, 9th, Jan. 2008.
<http://ew.com/article/2008/01/09/persepolis-3/>.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

child she is like any other child in the world. In *the Mirror and the Killer-Queen* Gabriele Schwab argues:

“our culturally acquired and internalized patterns of reacting to otherness will also shape our habits of reading, then reading also affects and mobilizes our relationship to ‘otherness’ in general. Reading might influence and change these patterns, and, at its best, widen the abilities to perceive and to acknowledge otherness.”¹⁰¹

Marjane shares very intimate details of her life. She wanted to share with people she knew in the West the reality of Iranians to answer all of their questions. In *Persepolis*, we get to know the author’s point of view as well as her mother’s, her father’s and her grandmother’s point of view. She even relays the maid’s opinion of a certain point in the Iranian society regarding social class: the maid fell in love with the “wrong guy.” I refer to him with that expression because he was from an upper middle class family and she was a maid. In Iran, there is no chance for them to have a future together because of their social status, so he is not the right guy for a maid. We get to know that when Marjane’s father tells his daughter “you must understand that their love was impossible!” (5, 37), and to answer Marjane’s curiosity, the father says, “because in this country you must stay within your own social class.” (5, 37)

Class division, the style clothing, and even the color of clothing are problematic issues in Iranian society. Religion and religious beliefs have a strong platform from which to influence Iranians’ way of thinking. Marjane explains many details one would only get to know from an insider.

Persepolis is translated to 18 languages to be spread all over the world. How could her story and her drawing style communicate with the Western reader? It is a human phenomenon that it is always scary when a person sees things he or she does not understand. Marjane

¹⁰¹ Gabriel Schwab. *The Mirror and the Killer Queen. Otherness in Literary Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

understood that and therefore wanted her readers to understand the who they refer to as the “other,” the unknown mysterious other.

Marjane had the chance to leave Iran to live with Westerners and have her own Iranian voice to change people’s perspective of Iran. She is telling the story of herself. While Sacco is giving his voice to the people who does not have one, people who are trapped, he is telling the story of the “other.” Marjane is an insider who has been asked many questions regarding her origin. She thought now is the time for the West to realize that who they consider the “other” is a human being just like them.

Satrapi helps the reader understand how religion is used to blindfold people, how it is misused to impose a radical political agenda. In an interview with David Barsamian, Noam Chomsky said “The rise of what’s called Islamic fundamentalism is to a significant extent a result of the collapse of secular nationalist alternatives which were either discredited internally or destroyed, leaving few other options.”¹⁰² He also commented on American politics in this regard: “We can’t renew our country unless more of us, I mean all of us, are willing to join churches.”¹⁰³ Chomsky also talks about the standard techniques and devices used to control the population: construction of enemies, both internal and external, the creation of hatreds, religious enthusiasm, and then Chomsky asserts that, those techniques are there to back up the structural reasons: “The structural reason is that power is concentrated. The general policy is exactly the way that Adam Smith described it: it’s designed for the benefit of its principal architects, the powerful. It serves the vile maxim of the masters: all for ourselves and nothing for anyone else.”¹⁰⁴

Religion has been used for a long time to gain the followship of people. It happened, it is still happening, and will always be there to be used as shield for the powerful to gain more

¹⁰² Noam Chomsky, “Remarks on Religion: Noam Chomsky Interviewed by Various Interviewers.” 1994. https://chomsky.info/1990____/

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

power and for the wealthy to be wealthier. This is exactly what has happened in Iran, a competition of power between the countries turned normal people's lives into constant fear and anticipation of tomorrow. Some people follow those in power, but those who do not follow the powerful set of rules they are punished, just like Marjane could not go to Iran to visit her family after publishing *Persepolis*. She is also punished by having her book banned from the Iranian market. The Iranian government has banned the book and film after describing *Persepolis* as "anti-peace and insulting." This chapter will discuss four main issues: the veil, contrasting regions (East and West), an insider version of the story, and the style of her graphic art, especially in relation to how it helped her reach the artist's goal.

Her story begins with the most obvious phenomenon after the revolution: the veil, which became obligatory for women in Iran after the Islamic revolution.

4. 2. Women's Issues: The Veil, the Revolution, and the Resistance

The Western viewpoint is the dominant truth, whether we like it or not. Principles of the West are the principles that one should live by, otherwise a person is backwards. The veil, -- although it exists in the three biblical religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- on the public surface is more related to Islam.

4.2. 1 The veil

In Islam, the veil is supposed to be a personal choice that a woman takes by herself to fulfill her belief system and to live by her convictions. No woman should be forced to cover up herself with the veil, unless she chooses to. At least this is the way real Islam looks at it. The Quran and prophet Mohamed said: {There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion.}— this verse is found in the first Sora in Quran, in Surat Al-Baqara, 256.

The veil is an important subject for post-colonial feminists, like Marjane Satrapi. In the beginning of her first chapter, Satrapi seems to represent the veil as consistent with the Western view point, the veil represents part of an oppressive system. She counters the image of Middle

Eastern women as passive, oppressed, and victimized. As a writer who comes from Iran, her knowledge of the Iranian heritage and women in their families makes her capable of emphasizing the individuality women have in Iran. The author is inviting the reader to look beyond the veil when identifying Iranian women, away from politics and fundamentalism. Marjane wants to tell everyone that when a woman covers her head in Iran, it does not have to be interpreted only one way: some women are convinced of it, but some hate it and they were forced to do it because of their families or a regime Iran, which makes the veil an obligation and not a sacred thing to represent certain beliefs. In Iran, women are different even though they have the same outfit. Unfortunately, people judge others according to what they are wearing.



On the very first page we find an establishment of the comic's resistance to the Western image of the veiled woman. The first panel shows a ten-year-old Marjane, with the veil surrounding her cartoonish face. Her classmates are similarly veiled in the second panel, with Marjane outside of the frame, but we see a little bit of her in the frame. She appears to us as an individual, alone in the first panel, then we get to see her classmates as a group. Monica Chiu suggests that these first two panels are "representing Marji as both an individual girl and a member of her class."¹⁰⁵ Chiu also comments that, far from the stereotypical images we are imposed to by the media, readers will notice the subtle variations Marjane has given each of the girls, things like differences in hair texture, the way they chose to style their bangs, their expression, and shape of their eyes. They assert their existence as individuals who are different but share the same experience. No one could help noticing the bottom of the page where a lot of action is going on, where a group of girls is shown refusing to wear their veils—some are complaining it is too hot, and others jumping rope with them, which explains their looks in the picture above -- looks of confusion and disagreement. The resistance of wearing the veil is shown by those young girls, running counter to the images presented by the West of the always passive, victimized women who are oppressed and flattened into a monolithic group being forced to do things they do not want to do, like wearing the veil.

Eastern women are very much portrayed as victims who are weak and without a voice. Just because they dress in a different way, or have a different social life does not mean that they are less than American or European women. In his book *Palestine*, Sacco was shocked when a

¹⁰⁵ Chiu, Monica. *Sequencing and Contingent Individualism in the Graphic, Postcolonial Spaces of Satrapi's Persepolis and Okubo's Citizen 13660*," English Language Notes, vol. 46, no. 2 (2008), p 102.



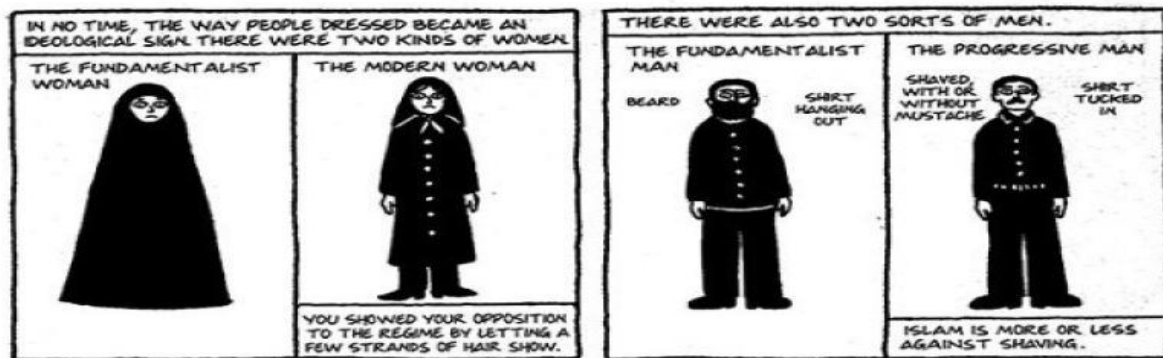
Palestinian woman with a *hijab* started a conversation with him while taking the same taxi, Sacco thought that women in Palestine -who wear are *hijab*- will never approach a man to open a conversation.

Marjane made it clear that it is not the case at all. The generalization of the image of passive victim as it relates to women -- that women are only obedient and do not speak their mind -- is not the real picture. People are different. They can be from the same country, religion, and school, but still they can be different. Marjane made it clear how war made strong women stronger and weak women more obedient and weaker. The author managed to tell how individuals are different in Iran. It is not all Khamenei soldiers as the media wants us to believe. Not all women are happy with putting on the veil, and not all Iranians believe in being the Islamic Republic of Iran, while some of them do.

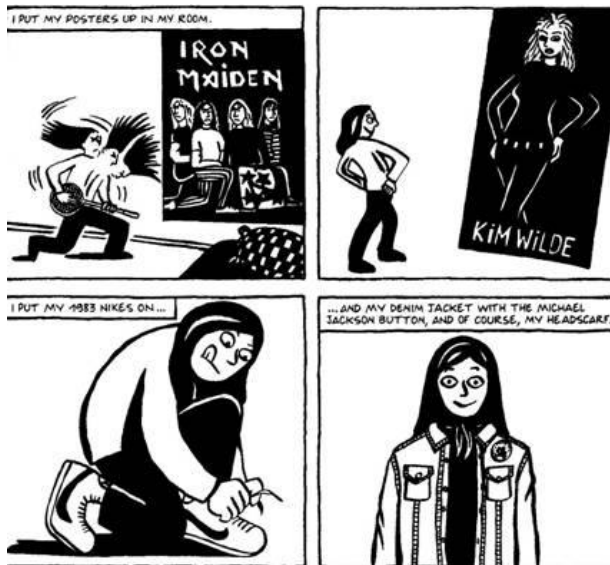
4.2. 2 Women's role in resisting the fundamentalists

In her book, Satrapi shows the tropes of resisting the veil, even after the regime became powerful. In her *Sartorial Review of Persepolis*, Emma Tarlo notes that the “more subtle

indicators”¹⁰⁶ become the way to distinguish between the fundamentalist and secular men and women. Satrapi managed to represent how they can distinguish between a fundamentalist and someone who is more secular depending on the look, and the style they adopt to dress themselves with, so she draws the fundamentalist next to the secular person, both from the same sex, to point out the differences for the reader. Explaining how seclars began their resisting by the way they look and dress.



¹⁰⁶ Tarlo, Emma. *Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis: A Sartorial Review*. *Fashion Theory*, 11:2-3, 347-356, DOI: 10.2752/136270407X202934. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2752/136270407X202934>. 2015.



Marjane shows how this shape of resistance, although simple, is yet effective, and has its own consequences. In the picture above-(Satrapi 133) - where Marji is stopped by the Guardians of the Revolution for wearing a denim jacket with her veil. They consider that the young girl Marjane is trying to align herself with the forbidden in Iran, which is, the Western youth culture. And it could be that Marjane the little girl is trying to do so, because to her Western culture represents many things an Iranian does not have: these things have one headline where they can be categorized under, it is “freedom.” This represents everything the government does not want them to have, and it is “freedom” of choice. The government prevents the people from having the minimum standard of freedom, which is adopting a certain style to represent themselves, the way they think, and the way with which they are comfortable, instead imposing the veil and the clothes one should wear.

Obviously, to fundamentalists in Iran it is an embrace of the Western culture to be wearing denim in Iran. It is unacceptable, even the picture of someone who comes from a Western culture, like Malcolm-X, is not ok to carry, thinking that he is Michael Jackson, just because he is black! His color means he is not from Iran, and that means he is an intruder to the Iranian Islamic fundamentalist society. Those actions that are completely normal in other countries the Iranian government considers as resistance to their governing. In his book *The*

Common Good, Noam Chomsky commented on the obedience and the passiveness some governments want to spread among its people for the sake of their political agendas. Chomsky notes “You need something to frighten people with, to prevent them from paying attention to what's really happening to them.”¹⁰⁷ This is a classical strategy government’s use everywhere. They make people busy thinking of other minor things, things that touch their daily lives without looking at the big picture. Chomsky adds “the best defense against democracy is to distract people.”¹⁰⁸ That is why women are hit in the streets if they are not wearing the veil that is why people started to be concerned with their own personal limited freedom. When Marjane’s mother was verbally abused by the government men, she said “They insulted me. They said that women like me should be pushed up against a wall and fucked. And then thrown in the garbage ...And that if I didn't want that to happen, I should wear the veil,” (74) they are trying to frighten people, distract them from the things they should be thinking of by imposing things like the veil. And this is how they get obedience to make their agenda spread in the country smoothly.

Even *Nike* shoes are forbidden, because an Iranian is importing them from America. They interpret it to mean the economy will be good in America, and will fall in Iran. They want the youth to be raised in an Islamic way, the only good way, as the claim goes. The government intends to have a society is standing on its own in the world. However; a systemized society needs systemized citizens; how do they do that? Girls are the mothers of the future. The way they raise their children, boys and girls, can create the society. If a mother is an oppressed woman, she is very unlikely to raise strong opinionated children. The reader notices in *Persepolis* that Marjane’s character is defined by her family, their belief system, and aspirations of a free and a democratic Iran. This is especially true of her mother, who Marjane repeatedly

¹⁰⁷ Noam Chomsky, *The Common Good* (Odonian Press, 2002), p. 41.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 53.

mentioned. Her mother wants to raise Marjane to be a strong, independent woman. It is her mother who says "[Marji] should start learning to defend her rights as a woman right now!" (10.32) Her mother refuses to have her daughter in an oppressed position.

There is an old saying in Arabic, telling us how critical the role of a mother in society is. It says: 'a mother is a school, preparing her in a good way is like preparing a good nation.' And it was Abraham Lincoln who said, "All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel Mother." In Marjane's case, if all the mothers were like hers, society in Iran would be different. That is why, the fundamentalists thought it was an important demand of their plan to oppress women. They knew that a systemized oppression to women would create a systemized oppressed generation. All their thoughts and lifestyle will be automatically passed on to their children in one way or another. That is why, the Guardians of the Revolution would fight every concept they saw which did not represent the government's concept, even a simple pair of jeans or a pair of *Nike* sneakers. Marjane shows the way of wearing a veil, and the length of woman's dress is a demonstration tool, if jeans are forbidden and Western products are all forbidden to be used. A creative way of using the imposed outfit is a must to rebel against the regime. This way of resistance has evolved through time, as the author shows us in the picture below. Iranian women wanted to say what they think, in any possible way. Here we see the way they created to show their objection.



Resistance took many shapes. Much later, when Marjane returns to Iran after spending time in Vienna, she comes back to Iran to discover that her friends adopted the commercial Western

beauty standards, which Marjane is completely against – “They all looked like the heroines of American TV series” (259). The author comes to understand later that adopting Western beauty standards is “an act of resistance on their part” (259). Marjane herself is easily identified as having been an outsider for some time due to her inability to wear the veil in the sneakily fashionable way that the other women do (293). While on the surface this expression of resistance through an embrace of Western culture appears to support Western liberal feminist ideology, that these women demonstrate agency and independence, not relying on outside forces to enact political change, problematizes this simple reading.

The author is showing this subtle marker of resistance, the nature of wearing the veil over the course of *Persepolis*, to communicate individual identities and political ideologies. There is always this common image in the Western media to represent women who wear the veil to portray passive women accepting to wear the veil by force. Satrapi brings the veil to a different level. Because in the book it becomes increasingly clear it is a way to represent women resisting authority through the way women choose to wear it. They are also represented as individuals while still wearing their veils but choosing to wear it in a different way. Satrapi shows how the veil issue created an uproar between Iranian women; she shows the story from all different sides. While some women have chosen to protest, and resist the oppression of the regime, other women are convinced about the veil and think it is the best way for women. Women split into two groups, as we notice in the image below.

We should be aware of the subtleness of the acts of resistance to the regime – as it has to do with simple thing, that without Marjane we would not even notice. Take, for example, wearing red socks. Who would think of it as a resistance act unless we are told so? Things like that are not noticeable and not even something to understand if an outsider is telling the story.

After reading the author’s side of the story regarding the veil and how women are in the Iranian society, it is clearer to the reader what is it like to be an Iranian woman after reading

Persepolis. Marjane as an Iranian woman lives abroad in the West has a platform to explain all the details to Western readers. Her book can create an understanding an average Western person would not have simply because of all the media images they receive in the West regarding Iranian women and culture. Even though Iranian women are forced to wear the veil, they found their own way to make it their resistance tool to express their dreams and aspirations, to express their opinion. Iranian women do wear a lot of make-up and like to dress up. They follow Western commercial beauty, which many women in the West are against, but Marjane made us understand that this is a way of disobedience too. It is just like the way some women decide to wear a *hijab*, and how men decide to grow their beard. The book helps us realize what Iranian women suffer from and where they stand.

4.2.3 *Contrasting Regions East and West*

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,

Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;

But there is neither East nor West, border, nor breed, nor birth,

When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!—Rudyard Kipling

I was a Westerner in Iran, an Iranian in the West. I had no identity. I didn't even know anymore why I was living.”— Marjane Satrapi

There is always this confusion with people who live outside of their country of origin, feeling displaced, as I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. However, this feeling comes with the privilege of understanding more, and being aware of two different versions of stories, as every story has a few different versions depending on the identity of the storyteller. Marjane has a position that enables her to contrast both regions. As an Iranian who lived most of her life in the West, the author managed to evaluate how life is very different in Europe, especially for women. Many of her perceptions were formed by her family, particularly her mother who

is a strong woman and who wanted Marjane to grow up to be an independent strong woman too. Marjane is living abroad, she has her own experience outside of her country, which was not easily formed. At the beginning she could show us how she and many other girls felt out of place when they were made to wear the veil '*hijab*.' Then she communicated all the oppression in Iran for women and young girls and what made her parents decide to send her to Europe so she can grow her own character the way she chooses it to be and escape the war and destruction in Iran.

Her first days in Europe were hard. She did not have any friends and even when she got some friends, they are a special type of friends, "outsiders" would be the right word to describe them. Being an outsider is the thing they have in common. For Marjane, she thinks that "It's wonderful to have international friends." (21, page) She would not be the only different one.

It was not easy to fit in a new school. A new whole country must be harder. That is why she has those friends who are considered different; she would not be marked as different in her own circle of friends. However, other Westerners managed to make Marjane feel alienated and anxious with the image they hold against Iranians. When in Vienna, a nun approaches Marjane asking her "It's true what they say about Iranians. They have no education." (179) since Iran is a third world country, Europeans expect them to have no education, and at the time they were not ashamed of asking this kind of question. No religion could stop that European nun from asking such a question. As if it is ok to label all Iranians with the same negative thing. Those little moments and short questions that put Iran and Iranians in one frame made Marjane not want to say she is an Iranian. People made her believe it is not a good thing to be an Iranian, thanks to Orientalists, newspapers, and history lessons. Of course, media plays a big role in stereotyping cultures and other nations with whatever pleases its authority. Iranian people, like

most Middle Eastern people, are labelled with a very big question mark, linked to the words “terror,” “ignorance,” and “passiveness.”

For a young girl, there are many reasons why she does not want to admit she is an Iranian. Maybe she thought they would look down at her. Maybe it is much easier if she does not have to explain herself and the place she comes from. Still, she was not comfortable when she lied about her origin. It was very painful hearing other girls talking about her and her family. All she could do is to jump out in rage and shout “I am Iranian and proud of it.” (199) This was the moment that she ran out crying, regretting the moment she abandoned her origin and the way she was raised up to fit in another society. It is her grandmother who told her that someone will never be comfortable, if he or she is not comfortable of who they really are.

Marjane’s mother went to visit her in Vienna and she commented on how irritating it is in the airports for Iranians. “Now as soon as they learn our nationality, they go through everything, as though we were all terrorists. They treat us as though we have the plague.” (205). As Muslim Middle Eastern women, Satrapi and her mother had to put up with many unreasonable and humiliating stereotypes for Iranian people, especially Iranian women. Iranian people, like many people who come from the East, have a reputation of being backwards and not worthy of being treated in a normal way. It made it easier for a European person to judge all Iranians and put them in a basket of ignorant passive people. They forget that people come as individuals and not as one entity embodying everything. It is easier for the brain to collect what is not understandable under that same category. But an interesting question would be: Why do humans tend to keep the negative image to categorize people? If we hear someone say, “I come from Afghanistan,” Taliban pictures will pop into the mind, and women covered head to toe. Hugo Spiers, a neuroscientist at the University College London, who led a research project explaining why it is the negative stereotypes that sticks more into people’s mind. Spiers notes that “the newspapers are filled with ghastly things people do ... You’re getting all these

news stories and the negative ones stand out. When you look at Islam, for example, there's so many more negative stories than positive ones and that will build up over time."¹⁰⁹ The study found that "the brain responds more strongly to information about groups who are portrayed unfavorably, adding weight to the view that the negative depiction of ethnic or religious minorities in the media can fuel racial bias."¹¹⁰ A scan was done on a human brain to see what happens when the brain receives bad news or good news, it was revealed that the brain did not respond equally to the bad and the good information. "Once the participants had seen enough snippets to feel reassured that a group were essentially goodies, brain activity in the anterior temporal pole quickly tailed off. But it continued to respond strongly to the negative snippets about the behavior of the 'bad' group."¹¹¹ That is why groups with negative stereotypical images are treated in a negative and sometimes aggressive way. The scan also shows how the brain has a strong reaction when an individual from "the bad group" does something good, this kind of information would shock the brain, leading the person who hears the information to say words like: "weird" or "really?!"

Spiers went on to say that brains have a certain flexibility, just like any other muscle in the body, it needs training, and if someone has been training the brain to be afraid of certain groups and nationalities, just like media in America and Europe is scaring the people from Islam or Middle Eastern people, then no wonder Satrapi's mother is being stopped in the airport. Marjane had to lie sometimes about her origin, not because it was the only solution Marjane had, but sometimes it is overwhelming for people who come from countries with negative stereotypical images in Europe. It is the way people are raised.

¹⁰⁹ Hanna Devlin, "Human brain is Predisposed to Negative Stereotypes, New Study Suggests," *The Guardian*. Tuesday 1 November 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/nov/01/human-brain-is-predisposed-to-negative-stereotypes-new-study-suggests>. * Note: This study was made by Hugo J. Spiers, Bradley C. Love, Mike E. Le Pelley, Charlotte E. Gibb, and Robin A., "Anterior Temporal Lobe Tracks the Formation of Prejudice," *The Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, Vol. 29, No. 3. (March 2017), pp. 530-544.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Marjane wants to change the perception of the East (Iran) in the West. The author lived in Europe and in Iran. It made her grow and know that she will never belong to Europe, she is an Iranian who is different from other Iranians living in Iran and that is it. She wants the reader to realize she is an Iranian who is different than the common image of Iranians Living in Europe did not change the fact that she is an Iranian, it just made her sure of where she comes from and who she really is a person. That is why in her book, the author is criticizing Iran's agenda in Islamizing people, who obviously want nothing but their life to run smoothly and happily, to have a sense of democracy and freedom of making individual decisions. Marjane wants to tell people all over the world that the government of Iran does not represent the people of Iran.

The image of the Orient, specifically Muslims, through the eyes of the Westerners, from the primary days of encounter up to the moment, has changed very little. Friedrich Nietzsche in his *Human, All Too Human* argues the "world of appearance" is quite apart from the "thing-in-itself" and emanates from the fecund imagination of human beings. He censures philosophers for their tendency to "confront life and experience (what they call the world of experience) as they would a painting that has been revealed once and for all, depicting with unchanging constancy the same event."¹¹² Nietzsche argues that life "has gradually evolved and is still evolving, and therefore should not be considered a fixed quantity."¹¹³.

How is it possible for Orientalists to generalize certain qualities on the Orient? We are not talking about a minor entity, the way the Orient appears through the Western glasses because of a mass of illogical thoughts. For Nietzsche, the real appears to us as a direct result of "illogical thoughts" and projection of mistaken conceptions onto the things. It is nothing but ignorant to generalize on such a vast notion as 'Orient.' Orientalists registered unreal findings in the Orient, and generalized it on the whole Orient as a fact, all they want to do is to entertain

¹¹² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p.23.

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 23.

their audience with exotic stories of the Orient, stories that do not meet the realm. Nietzsche states that “now the world of experience and the thing-in-itself seem so ordinarily different and separate that it rejects any conclusion about the latter from the former.”¹¹⁴

Simon Hattestone, a writer in *The Guardian*, mentions how “*Persepolis* has been dismissed by the Iranian authorities as Islamophobic, but Satrapi says: ‘this is ridiculous’ - she is not a political animal or a religious commentator, she is an artist.”¹¹⁵ Satrapi was clear that she considers religion as this private relationship between the individual and what he or she considers God, and should always be private. She also thinks that it is not a good thing once this kind of relationship becomes public. The artist ends her interview with Hattestone by saying “I’m this woman coming from Iran, I’ve succeeded in what I wanted, I live in the city I want, I live with the man I want, I make the work I want, and they pay me for it, which is incredible. How many people in the world have this luck?”¹¹⁶

Being a young woman from the East living in the West is a situation that left Marjane hanging between the two worlds. It was a situation where the young woman was not aware of. Her father gave her a hint, though – a hint that she probably understood after experiencing her reality in Europe. Marjane had to lie about her origin, she said that she was French, because of all that pressure she was going through, and the result that she discovered is that lying is taking her nowhere but into a painful place.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 23.

¹¹⁵ Hattestone, Simon. *Confessions of Miss Mischief*, *The Guardian*, March, 2008.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/mar/29/biography>

¹¹⁶ Ibid.



This page explains what happened to Marjane when she overheard her colleagues talking about her, and how she lied about where she comes from, not having in mind the whispers, looks, and fingers pointing at her as different and inferior to them. They did not know how intimidated she feels by the way they look at her as an Iranian. She heard many things that made her feel uncomfortable in her own skin. I would call it bullying, the West bullying people from the East. It is still going on these days, where Muslims and people from the East are bullied over and over again, and it is easy for a young person feel pulled both ways.

Marjane’s father told her in the airport “Don’t ever forget who you are!” (148). Now we all know what he meant by this sentence, all he wanted his daughter is to have is inner peace. He knew what it meant for a girl who is getting outside of a suppressed box like Iran, finding herself in Europe. What happened to her is basically playing by the “others” rules to fit in. Marjane wrote “I was distancing myself from my culture, betraying my parents and my origins. [...] I was playing a game by somebody else's rules.” (24.29)

Marjane thought it would be easy to forget about her origin, family and culture, the more she tries to forget the more everything around, reminds her of who she really is. Young

Marjane thought that she would skip over many explanations and questions; she seems to be tired of explaining herself, and answering questions about Iran. When her mother came for a visit she was glad because “It had been so long since I'd been able to talk to someone without having to explain my culture.” (25.62)



Marjane looks surprised, her eyes are wide open, and eyebrows are lifted, she did not really know what her father meant by “Don’t ever forget who you are.”

This is the weakness that an Easterner feels once surrounded by Westerners who do not realize the truth. Western people define an Eastern individual with what they have been told, not because they know this individual. Edward Said suggested that Orientalism creates a divide between the East and the West, and in his book *Orientalism* suggests that:

Orientalism can also express the strength of the West and the Orient's weakness—as seen by the West. Such strength and such weakness are as intrinsic to Orientalism as they are to any view that divides the world into large general divisions, entities that coexist in a state of tension produced by what is believed to be radical difference.¹¹⁷

It is this division that created Marjane’s need to fit in, and that is why she lied. She did not want to explain anything, she wanted to be unquestionable, someone who belongs to the world

¹¹⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 2014), p. 45.

she lives in, fitting in with the people who she deals with every day of her life. Marjane did not hesitate to admit that she was an Iranian girl when she arrived in Vienna. But that is at the beginning. The moment she knew in what way Western people perceive her as an Iranian woman, hearing the questions they ask regarding Iran and Iranians, it annoyed Marjane. It definitely made her feel different and inferior. She is not. She is just a normal kid with a normal life, a normal family, but they insisted on suggesting that the two worlds do not meet. That division makes her different.

Marjane tried to be a part of the Western society in every way. She says “I didn't like to smoke. So, I pretended to participate, but I never inhaled the smoke.” (24) She even pretended doing things she does not want to do, things she knew are bad for her. Even though she knows all about it, she went too far with consuming drugs, to fit in, to be a part of the Western world she knew. Satrapi registers some differences between the Iranian life and the Western life. For example; partying in Iran is different. Marjane says people would dance and eat, while in Vienna people would lie down and smoke in a party. She also notes the difference between the West and Iran in the way mothers are treated by their own children, after watching the way her friend Julie treats her own mother, screaming at her mother and not giving her answers. Marjane notes “In my culture, parents were sacred. We at least owed them an answer.” (23.8)

The author used the word “sacred” to describe what parents represent in her culture. Many other things are sacred in her culture, and some others do not matter. The same goes for her friend Julie. What it Marjane noticed here, and what she is trying to deliver is that, there will always be differences between cultures, but it does not mean that the West has the best culture in every way.

4.3 Religion, Culture, and Power

A very important subject the West is anxious about is martyrs in Islam. Marjane chose to identify the martyr to Western readers. She added a drawing of the Axis of Evil, comparing Jesus to a martyr's image in Iran. In Islam, martyrs are individuals who sacrifice their lives for their country or any noble issue. Choosing to compare martyrs to Jesus probably is the easiest way for the West to understand what it means to be a martyr and how not every suicidal person is a martyr. It is not only the image of the martyr that she empowers here, the author unifies the religious and cultural tropes of both hemispheres. By suggesting the opposite of a passive woman image, she empowers the Iranian female image. By demonstrating the similarities between Islam and Christianity, Satrapi obliterates the construed ideological dispute. Satrapi highlights the irony of utilizing a Christian scene to depict the Islamic phenomenon of jihad or martyrdom.



She uses an Islamized La pieta by putting a black chador on Mary's head, as Iranian women wear it in black. Jesus is wearing pour a military uniform in her recreation of the La Pietà, and tulips are inserted on either side. This way the artist manifests the merging of the two faiths. The act of veiling Mary with the black chodor and militarizing Jesus reflects not only the "sacrilegious" crossing of the religious fringe, but also the existence of a doctrine that transcends both the East and West: that of sacrifice. With this Satrapi is narrowing the gap between a Christian's

and a Muslim's principles and thoughts. An attempt to build a bridge that both sides can get closer by. To bring them together.

The blurring of the picture Marjane is drawing could represent the ideological differences between the East and the West. The presence of a hand clutching a pencil and squiggly curves in the picture Marjane is drawing suggests that Marjane is in the process of erasing both socially drawn religious thresholds and redrawing new, a new drawing that realizes those different ideologies, but is also aware of the similarities. The pair of tulips Marjane decided to draw on each side represents the East and West; each are each a pair of tulips. The artist explores and criticizes the Eastern and Western perceptions of women and religious principles. Distinctions are not the ultimate truth, there are other realities. It is what we are made to believe through media and religious beliefs. It appears that Marjane knew more than what she has been told. She fought the idea of distinctions because she is aware there is more in her story to tell. To her, the past determines the present, which we look at without thinking of what created it.

Noam Chomsky talked about what he calls "thought control." According to him, this kind of control is "conducted through the agency of the national media and related elements of the elite intellectual culture."¹¹⁸ Therefore, Chomsky asserts that "citizens of the democratic societies should undertake a course of intellectual self-defense to protect themselves from manipulation and control, and to lay the basis for meaningful democracy."¹¹⁹

Through telling her story and the ink of her drawing, Marjane is telling her own story. The way she matured into *Persepolis* can lead to a maturity in reading the otherness. A possibility of rereading people and their history, a person can rewrite things.

118 Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1989).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

We are in a world where religion is misused to achieve certain interests. Each regime government has its way to distract people. In Iran, Islam is portrayed as the ultimate way to live. As a child, Marjane heard on Iranian national television a government's spokesperson who says: "Everything needs to be revised to ensure that our children are not led astray from the true path of Islam." (73)

Even the "Iranian National Anthem had been forbidden and replaced by the new government's Islamic hymn." In the eyes of the West and in the eyes of Marjane, Iran is building up humans who do not think, people who obey orders in the name of God. Marjane's book is inviting Iranians and non-Iranians to rethink their own prejudices and to realize how the story has its past that created the current situation.

The Iranian government is undoubtedly a severe danger to its own population, but not beyond that. – Noam Chomsky

4.4 Persepolis' Cartoon Style

A cartoon character is always much easier to relate to. Films or text have been the classical ways to tell stories, stories of people, real people. We can see it through the screen and read about it in the text. In Marjane's cartoon characters lies this simplicity. Scott McCloud make a very important observation regarding stories told as cartoons. He asserts that "when you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face, you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon, you see yourself."¹²⁰ This is exactly what happens when reading Marjane's *Persepolis*; the way she drew her characters has the effect of making them anyone.

The panels, the gutters, the lines, the colors, and the faces are all very simple. It allows images to be "a little voice inside your head. A concept,"¹²¹ according to McCloud. No wonder

¹²⁰ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (William Morrow/HarperCollins, 2008). p. 36.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p. 37.

retelling the story of the “other,” the unknown, exotic, terrible other can be simplified for those who never met the character. The cartoon character becomes an extension of the reader, in one way or another we become the character at some stage of reading and imagining because the character becomes part of us; it has no clear features, it can be anyone, it can be me or you.

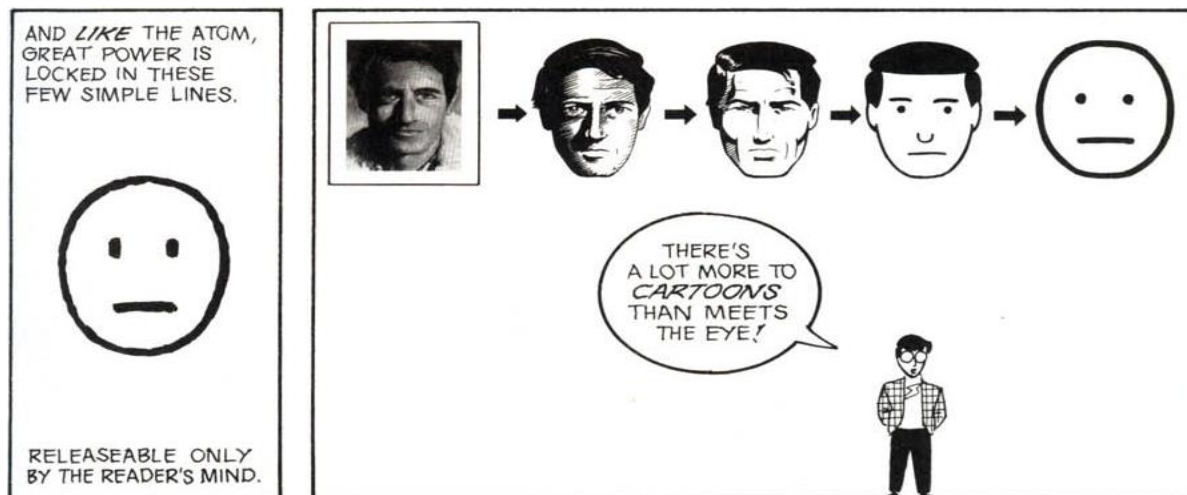
Persepolis begins with a picture of Marji and her friends at school, wearing the veil. Even though the sharp darkness and the shape of their clothes are the same, we could read different characters. The way the artist drew the lines of their faces, eyes, and hair shape allows the reader to mask the character and enter a world full of small details that makes difference in the readership.

A reader from the West is going to take baby steps into this. All they have are prejudices made by someone else for them. Marjane gives them the chance to go into her small world to get the bigger her own image of Iran and the Iranians’ reality, which is damaged by the media and political agendas. An important point here is that if Marjane’s character were to be drawn more realistically, according to Scott McCloud, it would objectify the character and alienate the reader from it. Then the reader will not be given any assistance nor guidance in reading the “other.” Thus, simple images are an easy way to include the reader, a way to identify himself or herself with the character.

The picture below taken from Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* represents the stages a cartoon face can go through, from the most detailed features, which will make the reader feel the otherness, ending with the simple lines, which represents Satrapi’s style of drawing in *Persepolis*, basic and simple. McCloud claims this is the kind of cartoon in which “great power is locked in these few simple lines. Releasable only by the reader’s mind.”¹²² Cartoons have more than what meets the eye. They elicit the reader’s imagination and the way

¹²² Ibid. p.45.

the reader identifies with the character. This process plays an important role in understanding comics: the other is not far, not unknown. A reader from the West can identify with the little Iranian girl, the teenager, the woman, and the family. The reader is getting to know her, the “other.”



Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, p. 45.

We readers can rely on the gutters between framed panels, making us culpable for the creation of what happens between the gutters. For example, we can question how violent the revolution was. It depends on the reader's imagination, I believe. We have those images of martyrs, and her uncle in prison. We also have pictures of demonstrations and people chanting in the streets. The way Marjane's white and black story is flat gives readers the opportunity to have their own translation. In Sacco's style, it is more detailed, intense, and many things are going on in each frame.

Unlike other visual media, the transitions are instantaneous and direct in the story, the reader's experience depends on his or her speed and concentration in reading. Comics offer a different experience than simply reading a text: The spatial arrangement allows an immediate juxtaposition of the present and the past. A reader can link the past to the present. This spatial aspect of the comics -- the panels and the short text on each page -- offer the viewer a special journey. Satrapi took the reader on her own journey when she talks to her God, watching the

news, fighting with her family, and then moving to Vienna with all the questions that she has, questions she did not know the answer to when she asked them. This way she could stimulate the reader's imagination, wanting to know the answers, just like Marjane "the character" in the story is seeking for the answers.

Marjane asserts "If people are given the chance to experience life in more than one country, they will hate a little less." She noted "I have been justifying why it is not negative to be Iranian for almost 20 years."¹²³ She continues, "That is why I wanted people in other countries to read *Persepolis*, to see that I grew up just like other children."¹²⁴ Her simple style helps her to transform the reader into her own world.

In one of her interviews Satrapi said:

The world is not divided between East and West. You are American, I am Iranian, we don't know each other, but we talk and we understand each other perfectly. The difference between you and your government is much bigger than the difference between you and me. And the difference between me and my government is much bigger than the difference between me and you.¹²⁵

Satrapi, just as Sacco, succeeded in offering the reader an international language, a common human language everyone can understand.

The cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled . . . when you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face . . . you see it as the face of another . . . but when you enter the world of the cartoon . . . you see yourself" – Scot McCloud.

The image of Satrapi's character could be anyone. The reader can easily identify with her character. Her daily life, her joy and tears are more relevant for it associates with challenges,

¹²³ Paul Wells and Johnny Hardstaff, *Re-imagining Animation: The Changing Face of the Moving Image* (Lausanne: AVA Publishing, 2008, p. 39.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 41.

¹²⁵ Michelle Goldberg, "Sexual Revolutionaries," *Salon*, MONDAY, APR 25, 2005. http://www.salon.com/2005/04/24/satrapi_2/.

problems, fear, interests, and competition of who is the greatest. Marjane opened up on a personal level, in a simple way, so people get the chance to strip down the image. “By stripping down an image to its essential ‘meaning,’ an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't.”¹²⁶ This is something politics, news headlines, and traditional history books cannot do.

The colors in *Persepolis* are intense. There are not many colors, it is mostly black and white. This contrast gives her story a graphic weight that plays with the intensity of colors to press on a certain meaning or a thought: very flat, simple, clear, and with no distractions.

She draws light on issues she wants people to pay attention to. As an example, I would like to offer the first page of her childhood story, where all the girls in her class sit beside each other, in the same outfit, with the same colors. The way they sit is also the same, but she managed to make them appear as different individuals. The concentration is on the faces. With all the blackness in the picture, the contrast between the two colors invites the reader to look closely at their faces to realize how different the girls are. Marjane has her own frame in that picture, the same picture she took with her classmates. The girls roll their eyes in a different way with different features; their hair bangs are done in a completely different way. Obviously, the outfit is what they are supposed to have as their uniform, a uniform is not a person's choice. She knew they are different characters, and she is fully aware of herself as different from the other girls. That is why she chose to draw herself in a different frame of the same picture.

¹²⁶ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*.



The contrast of colors created an “open blank” in the girls faces, an invitation for the viewer to imagine what the character is feeling. The body language has an important role into Marjane’s book. Here I would assume they are not comfortable with the veil. It feels weird for them as little girls, judging from the look on their faces. The artist also relies on using the gutters, as it can help the reader understand more. For example, the table-like space upon which the girls’ hands rest, the similarity of pose, dress, size, and contrast -- the girls remain worlds apart.

A conflict between individuality and universality is dramatized in *Persepolis* in the first two panels. In the first panel, young Marjane is represented as a part of Iranian society by the veil she is wearing. At the same time she does not see herself with the whole picture because she thinks of herself as an individual very different from her peers. She drew herself in another frame although it is the same picture. “And this is a class photo. I’m sitting on the far left so you don’t see me. From left to right: Golnaz, Mahshid, Narine, Minna.” That is why Marjane mentioned all of the girls’ names, to suggest they are not the same girl, to remind the reader that they may look similar but have different names, faces, and different reactions to their situation, a reaction we can read on their faces. In the first frame, I see a little girl looking straight at the reader. She appears to be unhappy with her mouth turned down in the midground of the frame, wearing a veil with her arms folded on something. In the second frame, I see four littler girls who look like Marji. The first girl looks off to her left. The second has her eyes

closed. The third is looking down. The fourth looks more puzzled than unhappy as her mouth does not curve down.

She explains the history of the veil, how it became mandatory in Iran, to let people know why women in Iran wear it in the first place, why all the girls dress in the same outfit, and how it makes them not only look alike, but also be alike. So, the message is that one should not judge any book by the cover, before reading it.

5. Conclusion

All three comic books have suggested the importance of historical knowledge before judging any case. They present history as an essential step for nations to know each other, and to communicate to reach a common understanding, a human understanding. People's present is made by their past.

Professor Arthur Marwick has questioned the importance of historical knowledge in his article *The Fundamentals of History*. Marwick suggests "What happens in the present, and what will happen in the future, is very much governed by what happened in the past."¹²⁷ However, knowledge of the past has not brought any solutions to problems in the world when we consider places like, Northern Ireland, the Balkans, or Palestine. Marwick continues to say "but without a thorough knowledge of past events and circumstances, we could not even attempt to grapple with these problems. Without knowledge of the past we would be without identity, we would be lost on an endless sea of time."¹²⁸ The professor asks the reader to "try to imagine what it would be like to live in a society where there was absolutely no knowledge of the past."¹²⁹ Then he assures us that history has a vital importance for societies and nations. That is why history must be accurate, based on evidence and on logical thought. Therefore, it must be far from any specious theory or any political agenda.

Many historians involve their political agenda with the sense of self-indulgence in their writing, which is a mistake. Joe Sacco and Marjane Satrapi have managed to retell history in an intimate way, yet no personal agendas are included in their books. It is obvious that what they are going after is the truth and the desire to connect people by humanity rather than their nationality, color, religion, or race. However, what I would argue here is that comics give the

¹²⁷ Arthur Marwick, *The Fundamentals of History*.
<https://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Whatishistory/marwick1.html>

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid

reader the chance of experiencing, even if in a limited way. The story with all the repeated frames, make it hard for the reader not to join the artist on the journey. Joe Sacco claims that the repetition factor in comics helps make the reader experience the whole setting, asserting:

“one of the advantages of comics is that you're drawing frame after frame after frame, so almost in the background scenes you can create this atmosphere that's following the reader around, that doesn't necessarily relate to the foreground action but is somehow always present. For example, the way the buildings look—I can show that over and over again in the background, so in some ways I think you can really put the reader in that place, just with all these repeated images. If there's mud in the background, you can show that in every frame, so the mud is following the reader around. If you're a prose writer, really what you're doing is just mentioning it once, you're not going to keep mentioning it ever few lines— ‘and by the way, it was really muddy.’ So, it's this constant reminder of what the place looks like.”¹³⁰ This constant reminder of the place and the environment vacuums the reader into the story.

Joe Sacco realized that history is a main factor in giving people the knowledge they need before making accusations. Consider what we see around the world now: in Europe and America people are labeled with terrorism if they are Muslims or Arabs. People are being labeled according to their religion, color, or race.

The reasons of why Joe Sacco's and Marjane Satrapi's books have achieved this success is that their stories are taking cliché stories from another angle, an angle people have never considered. The two authors took human and personal stories as a way of retelling a left-behind history, like in *Footnotes in Gaza*, or a history that is misinterpreted, like in *Palestine* and

¹³⁰ Sonja Sharp, “Joe Sacco: *Graphic History*,” *Mother Jones* (Interview by Sonja Sharpjan.), 8, 2010. <http://www.motherjones.com/media/2010/01/joe-sacco-graphic-history>.

Persepolis. Those stories often take a political approach, the Palestinian or Iranian human side is often not mentioned in American or European media.

Marjane Satrapi asserts that getting the knowledge of people from other countries from news and television is a bad idea. She claims that having friends from other countries made her believe that if people get to know each other on a personal level, the world would be a better place. That is why she wants the world to know that Iranian people are not the Iranian government. Those changes in Iran are due to history and did not happen overnight due to people's choice. Iranians have lost many lives and did many things to obtain democracy. The result was not what most openminded Iranians wanted, and they do not believe in fundamentalism. She assures us "I was brought up open minded. If I didn't know any people from other countries, based on news stories, I'd think everyone was evil."¹³¹

This is her main purpose, and I would argue that her text has reached out to the whole world because she wrote a story of that young girl growing in Iran, a state the whole world thinks of as a nuclear threat. Marjane succeeded in letting people know that Iranians are not the government. People should travel and meet others from different countries before judging anyone. This is actually one of the Islam's principles. Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, one of the prophet Mohamed's good friends, was a very successful Muslim leader. He said "You do not know a person unless you travelled with that person, lived with him or dealt with him in money issues." In Islam, if you see someone praying or fasting, it is not considered as a credible sign of who they are ethically. In Iran, fundamentalism has taught people to say that they are praying if they were asked about what they are doing, wearing the veil even if they are not convinced about it. Fundamentalists ask Iranians to judge Western people as the bad people because their policies and media do everything against Islam, and yet they call themselves Muslims. People in America are judging people in the same way. They take information from a third party but they

¹³¹ Marjane Satrapi, "Why I wrote *Persepolis*," *Writing*, vol. 26, no. 3, (2003): p. 9.

never think of getting to know an Iranian before they accuse them of anything. The same is happening with Palestinians.

Fear is what is planted in America and Europe. Fear is controlling the way they look at others. This fear is built not in one year or two, it started in the past and people are building their thoughts up on those ideas. For the sake of oil, natural resources, and power, the world is in constant fear. All over the world people are living in fear, in a world where violence can occur anytime. In Syria, people are bombed because their dictatorship is fighting ISIS. America and Russia are obviously sending their weapons and gun machines to end that terror. No one is saying anything, because they are fighting terrorism. It appears to be ok that all those children are dead and all those families are displaced, for the sake of ending terror. What we see is the terror those bombings and killing create in the children's eyes.

Judith Butler laments the situation of “having perpetrated and perpetrating it still, having suffered it, living in fear of it, if not an open future of infinite war in the name of ‘a war on terrorism’”¹³² That is why it is important for people to know others' history, to meet people, read about other cultures' and ask the question of how we got here. Why are we living in fear of Muslims? Why is it ok that children in the third world are dying because of America's and Europe's war of terrorism?

History can tell us many stories. It is not a world that is open, with all those cable networks and social media. Graphic novels, or comics as Sacco likes his books to be called, are a perfect match to the fast life we live. The combination of image and word has a magical effect on the learning process. It helps people witness things that happened maybe a hundred years ago, just like a Hollywood film depicts a story that happened in the 1700s. Sacco and Marjane are talking about history, the only difference is that the repetition of the setting and the

¹³² Butler, Judith. *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2006), p. 28.

images forces the readers' imagination to transport them to the setting the narrator is talking about.

Both Sacco and Marjane start with the main image people in the world when they think of Iran, or Palestine. In *Persepolis*, Marjane chose to begin with the image of the veil. It is true that Iran, in most of the West's eyes, are represented by the black veil and black clothing for women. In his book *Palestine*, Sacco has chosen to start with the Palestinian terrorists' image cultivated in America since the Munich attack. These are two main images the readers can relate to. Why? Because it is what they see on the news. They heard in their official's political speech. Starting from the position of the reader is a good beginning to take that reader on a journey back in time, an exploration journey back in time to realize that most what he knows about the "other" is not true. Then they can move gradually to know the truth. A reader would soon realize what they consider in the West as terrorism is not created by itself. There is no smoke without fire.

Sacco's main goal was to open a window for the reader to see and experience some of the realm, even from a distance, to see the current situation as a result of something bigger. He wants the readers to ask questions like: Why do we call Palestinians terrorists? Why do they act that way? Where do their belief systems come from? The author of *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza* was asked about the reason that made him dig so deep to find the reality of the 1956 incident in Gaza. He said:

I want people to be able to look at this situation in a historical context and understand the layers of hard history that the Palestinians have endured, and get a sense of why perhaps there's resentment in the region—it doesn't come out of the blue. You might not want to excuse it, but it doesn't come out of the blue. It bothered me personally that

so much history gets lost. In some ways, I want this book to prompt an Israeli historian to really do a thorough research job from that end.¹³³

Sacco's book shows many Palestinian lives have been lost, many houses were demolished, and people were displaced and killed. Many lives, many houses, and uncountable traumatized people, people who are not the same, and will never be after the pain and suffering they have been through and are still going through. Joe Sacco makes it clear that even if one would not agree with what some Palestinians believe in, and what some of them do, we should try to look at it another way. He invites us to look at it the way Judith Butler has described it in her book, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. She writes of human loss:

For if I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you. I cannot muster "we" except by finding the way in which I am tied in to "you," by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you. You are what I gain through this orientation and loss. This is how the human comes into being, again and again, as that which we have yet to know.¹³⁴

Sacco and Marjane has applied human measurement to things through their books. They have shown that history matters. A complicated and misinterpreted history can be told in a simple language that everyone can understand. Faces of people from the other part of the world can be seen as our own faces. The two artists have indeed proven that comics give a sense of tactility to history, misery, loss, pain, and happiness. In short, they offer us a tactile sense of *humanity*. A combination of words and human expressions we read on cartoon's faces and cartoon's body language is there to guide us and to explain the fear and the resentment on those faces. They made history easier to relate to. To understand is the way to know.

¹³³ Sharp, Sonja. *An Interview with Joe Sacco: Graphic History*. Mother Jones. Jan. 8, 2010
<http://www.motherjones.com/media/2010/01/joe-sacco-graphic-history>

¹³⁴ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*. Verso, 2006 p. 49.

Why would a comic or a graphic novel be better than traditional text books, articles or even televised documentaries? Sacco argues that we live in a visual world now. I have mentioned earlier in this study how the brain responds to visuals. But why cannot films or documentaries do what a comic is doing? This is a question Dave Gilson, has asked Sacco in an interview. Sacco answered:

“It’s a visual world and people respond to visuals. With comics, you can put interesting and solid information in a format that’s pretty palatable. For me, one advantage of comic journalism is that I can depict the past, which is hard to do if you’re a photographer or filmmaker. History can make you realize that the present is just one layer of a story. What seems to be the immediate and vital story now will one day be another layer in this geology of bummers.”¹³⁵

Thus, *The Guardian* has noticed the advantage of a comic over the traditional media and text books. David Thompson describes in his article “Eye-Witness in Gaza” Sacco’s way of communicating: “Drawing on first-hand experiences, extensive research and more than 100 interviews with Palestinians and Jews, Sacco has gained access to unusually intimate testimony, giving space to details and perspectives normally excluded by mainstream media coverage.”¹³⁶

This medium achieved a unity of images and words to create an intimate readership, to observe and read the words that amplify those images.

This medium will not let us separate actions, faces, bodies and scenes from the words that explain and amplify them ... Sacco shows how much that is crucial to our lives a book can hold. –*The New York Times*.

¹³⁵ Gilson, Dave. *Joe Sacco: “The Art of War: An Interview with Joe Sacco,”* Mother Jones, July, August/2005 Issue. <http://www.motherjones.com/media/2005/07/joe-sacco-interview-art-war>.

¹³⁶ Thompson, David. *Eye Witness in Gaza*. *The Guardian*. 5, Jan/2003. www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2003/jan/05/comics.politics.

Although Sacco's style has more details, and is slightly more realistic than Marjane's style in drawing, they both have transformed the reader to another place: a place of war, misery, oppression and pain. Both authors avoided any political agendas to defend or to explain. They made the human aspect come alive, inspiring a life beyond what is written in books regarding the Middle East, Iran, or Palestine. The authors illustrated how an individual's life matters for people to know more about each other. This deep knowledge does not come from reading news headlines. Many books have been written about both struggles, but the historical prose content combined with the art that goes along with the story creates a new element to story-telling and history narratives. Imagine writing those stories as texts only, without those panels, gutters and spaces. It would not be the same. The reader would find it extremely hard to identify with those people's pain, struggle, and their daily life resulting from being surrounded by war and death.

There is no doubt that *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza* are two art masterpieces that demonstrate human rights and show Joe Sacco as a human activist, converging on trauma on a psychological and physical level. In *Persepolis*, Marjane advocates for Iranian individuality.

Comics have proven to add tactility to subjects that are hard to imagine or to even understand. Their pictures and words can turn a complex subject into a piece the reader, no matter what his or her background, can relate to. The reader can be drawn into the text as a cartoon character with whom the author shares experiences. It makes people understand by gaining knowledge that they might have thought too complicated to understand.

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