



Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Colliding Memories: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the Graphic Novels of Joe Sacco

Debbie Van Kerckem

Supervisor: dr. Stijn Vervaeet

*Master dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master
in English & Dutch*

Academic year 2012-2013

Acknowledgments

Writing this thesis has been far from an easy undertaking for me. The amount of stress and insecurity that came along with it were immense and in this sense it was a worthy final test at the end of five years of hard work filled with nerve-racking deadlines and sometimes seemingly impossible exams. However, writing this thesis was also generally an enriching experience because it gave me the chance to study two incredible pieces of non-fictional art and thus to combine two of my interests in an entirely different way. Also in this sense it was a suitable closure of five years gathering wisdom about and developing a critical attitude towards the literary giants and academic texts.

For this undertaking I have got help of all sorts from different people. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Stijn Vervaeke for his guidance and to help and keep me on track and thus being a big help to keep me focused. Next, I want to thank my mother for her continuous and loving support, not only during the writing of my thesis but for the entire course of my career as a student Dutch and English. An equal caring support came from my boyfriend, Merlijn, who has especially helped to boost my confidence in the last year. Furthermore I would like to thank some people who helped me to avoid making all too many spelling mistakes. Thank you Aaren and especially Hilde for your decisive and swift help. Finally, I would also like to thank the rest of my family and friends, not only because I like them so much, but also because a satisfied mood and mind make working so much easier.

1 TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Table of Contents.....	3
2	Introduction	5
3	The History of the Conflict.....	9
3.1	From Theodore Herzl to 1948.....	9
3.2	The Suez Crisis and the Seven Days War.....	14
3.3	The Rise and Formalization of the Palestinian Resistance.....	15
3.4	The First and Second Intifada.....	16
4	The Representation of Palestinian Traumatic History.....	19
4.1	The Outsider Position	19
4.1.1	Joe Sacco as a journalist, as a character, as a cartoonist.....	19
4.1.1.1	... as a journalist	19
4.1.1.2	... as a character.....	23
4.1.1.3	... as a cartoonist.....	25
4.1.2	East versus West	27
4.2	War and Occupation.....	33
4.2.1	The Difficult Home: House Demolition and the Refugee Problem.....	35
4.2.1.1	The eradication of home.....	39
4.2.2	Detention	45
4.2.2.1	Ansar III.....	47

4.2.2.2	Ghassan and ‘moderate pressure’	50
4.2.3	Segregation.....	57
4.2.3.1	Trapped outside: roadblocks.....	58
4.2.3.2	‘Through other eyes’: segregation in ideas and life	59
4.3	Taking up Arms against the Occupation: Active Resistance Error! Bookmark not defined.	
4.3.1.1	The modern militant: Khaled.....	65
4.3.1.2	The Fedayeen	68
5	Conclusion.....	75

2 INTRODUCTION

Every once in a while we, here in the West, are informed through media about some turmoil in the Middle East, where some people have been killed. But the singular amounts are not enough to cause mass indignation. We remember the image of youths throwing stones at tanks and soldiers, and some even remember the iconic picture of a man trying to protect his son from a hail of bullets. For us it may seem a conflict like so many conflicts, another part in the grand ‘clash of civilisations’. On top of that, it is a conflict that seems to have been going on forever, although we do not really know how to link the particularities. Thus it seems very complicated, so maybe it would be best if we let academics and other specialists handle whatever it is we cannot digest.

On the other hand we have learned in great detail about the Second World War, those dreadful five and a half years during which a frustrated German soldier, called Adolf Hitler, turned politician, terrorised the whole of Europe and beyond. We know about the Holocaust in which hundreds of thousands, even millions, of Jews were persecuted and killed in such a brutal way no one could have imagined and because of one simple detail, namely because they were Jews. We know that because of this cruel trick history played on the Jews, they moved to their religious, ancestral land in the Middle East. The connection between these facts are not always clear to us, nor are the details and nuances that go with the grand historical narratives.

These nuances and details are exactly the objective of Joe Sacco’s two graphic novels about the conflict between these two peoples. In fact, Sacco has made it his trademark to investigate major international conflicts on the spot as a basis for elaborate graphic novels that equally explore different aspects of a given topic. Sacco did not only repeatedly stay in Palestine for several months, he did the same exercise in Bosnia during the war there. *Safe Area Goražde* thus became his second bestseller, after *Palestine*, but clearly he was not ready with Palestine. In the foreword to the novel we read the inspiration for the graphic novel was twofold: on the one hand there was a planned trip to Khan

Younis with journalist Chris Hedges to look at the implications of the Second Intifada on the town and on the other hand there was Noam Chomsky's book *The Fateful Triangle* in which he refers to the large-scale killings of civilians in 1956 (Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza* ix). This was enough to attract Sacco's attention and during his preparatory research he found a similar incident which took place almost at the same time, several kilometres from Khan Younis in Rafah, on the border with Egypt. Consequently, Joe Sacco had a double subject for his new graphic novel, but the result would be even broader as Sacco chose not to dispose of his starting point –the Second Intifada - but to use it as a framework from which he started working on these two forgotten historical events.

Palestine has a slightly different objective because it is mainly a synchronic description of events during the Second Intifada in Palestine, whereas *Footnotes in Gaza* is an eclectic mix of descriptions. However, *Palestine* does not forget history and starts with the events that led to the present situation. It thus has become one of the most – if not the most - complete and precise description of the current situation in Palestine one can find outside the academic context. As will become clear from the discussion below, Sacco has succeeded in describing the most important themes of the occupation for the people who experience it every day. As such, he has tried to avoid grand political debated and strategic discussions but has chosen instead to let the actual witnesses tell their story. This is the same strategy as in *Footnotes in Gaza* where he also combined a wide array of testimonies with some crucial official documents, interviews and speeches. This became an ideal mix to be combined with Sacco's artistry.

Comics indeed prove to be an ideal medium to convey the impressions Sacco got when travelling around Palestine and talking with all kinds of people. It offers opportunities a novel or newspaper article could not offer and goes much further than any singular photograph could go. However, we cannot see the advantage of comics as a mere combination of image and caption. It is a genre on its

own and it offers new opportunities as does any other art form. As far as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* or Marjane Sartrapi's *Persepolis* did not make this clear, Sacco certainly does. In order to be able to adequately analyse Sacco's description of the situation in Palestine I depended on several interesting writers who have contributed to the academic appreciation of comics. The most important of them is Scott McCloud and his adequately titled comic about comics *Understanding Comics, the Invisible Art*, in which he successfully tries to describe and categorise the important aspects that make up a graphic novel. However, in McCloud's own words, a comic is 'a medium where the audience is a willing and conscious collaborator and closure is the agent of change, time and motion' and thus analysing graphic novels asks for more than simply putting the correct term to the right concept (65). So with the help of McCloud and others I will try to answer the following questions: is comics an evenly worthy art form to talk about suffering as other art forms, such as the novel, poems or even films? How does Sacco use different aspects of this art form to tell different stories?

In order to put Sacco's work on Palestine in the right context, it is essential to know the historical precedents and this is why I start my discussion with a very brief overview of the history of the conflict, or at least the points that are important here. I do this with the help of different academic texts and one book (*Palestina, de laatste kolonie?*) by the Belgian historian Lucas Catherine. A following question that pops up is how close Sacco stays to these historical descriptions. Is he as well-informed as we can expect from a journalist or does a comic inevitably implicate a certain amount of imagination?

After this historical overview, I turn to the main part of my dissertation, namely Sacco's description and visualisation of Palestinian testimonies. Next to the specialised texts about comics which I already mentioned, I also used texts coming from the field of memory studies and two texts were especially helpful, namely "Collateral Damage" by Marianne Hirsch and *Regarding the Pain of Others* by Susan Sontag. Sontag talks about the effect of images of war on the viewer and although she

especially refers to photographs, her comments are applicable to Sacco as well. Because of the involvement of the field of memory studies in the discussion of Sacco's work, several new questions arose. How does Sacco manage to transfer such traumatic experiences from the ones who lived through them to the reader through the medium of comics? What effect do Sacco's images have on their turn on the reader/viewer?

The structure of this thesis follows the different themes Sacco himself discusses, spread over his novels. The three main themes I found were the demolition of houses, detention and segregation. Apart from this I also discuss the armed resistance in Palestine as Sacco dedicates a great amount of attention to two characters who fit in this context.

3 THE HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the major conflicts of the 20st century. It is a long debated and often highly emotional matter because there is a large number of parties that has interests in the area, although these interests have waxed and waned, because the conflict has been going on for such an extended period of time. There are various root causes that each have had their resonances in the following decades. At the same time, several attempts have been made – whether or not sincere because also this is a point of discussion – to bring the parties closer to each other in the course of events, but especially in recent years. It is important to note that the nature of the conflict has not always been equally intense, although tensions have never ceased to exist since the thirties, when the first large waves of Jewish migrants came to Palestine.

The complexity of the situation urges me to give a concise overview of the history of this violent conflict before starting the actual discussion of Sacco's graphic novels situated in this area. Although Sacco gives an unseen complete picture of certain themes, his two main cartoons about Palestine are clearly situated in a certain timeframe, namely the war of 1956 for *Footnotes in Gaza* and the first Intifada for *Palestine*. Giving a complete overview of the history would lead us way too far and this is not at all the objective of this paper. Instead I will focus on the events, persons and themes that recur in Sacco's graphic novels and link them to each other. For this very reason I will not start in 1948 – the day Israel declared its independence – but in the 19th century with the rise of Zionism.

3.1 FROM THEODORE HERZL TO 1948

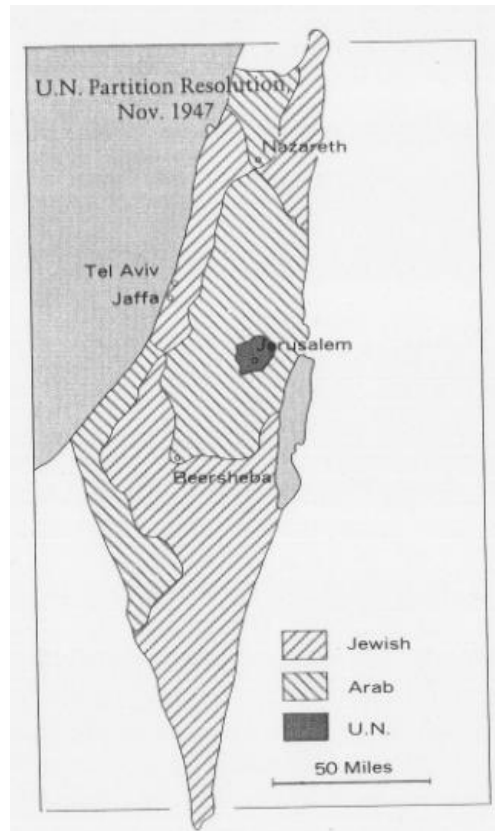
There are different strands of Zionism – and as Zionism is not the subject of this paper, it would lead us too far to discuss all of them - but the most important for this story, and the most famous version, is the political-historical Zionism as the one found in the writings of Theodore Herzl (Massad 4). By the end of the 19th century several Jewish thinkers were debating and looking for a solution for

the centuries of repression and prosecution that had haunted the Jews in the European diaspora and Herzl had a rather strange idea about how to subvert this sad tradition. According to Massad he was a great admirer of European cultures and states and through European eyes he could understand why this great race of empire-builders looked at Jews condescendingly. 'Zionism, which espoused these views of Jews while conscious of their anti-Semitic pedigree, simply wanted to rid Jews of such traits and teach them how to be Europeans' (Massad 4). However, Herzl also believed Jews could not simply become European in Europe and thus assimilate into an already existing society, but he deemed it necessary for Jews to found their own state, based on the European state, but outside its territory. Palestine was an obvious choice, as it inhabited an important role in Jewish religious texts. Furthermore, it fitted perfectly in Herzl's revaluation plan because this Jewish state would then serve as an 'outpost' of European civilization. The only problem was that Palestine was already inhabited by another people, although Herzl did not see this as a problem, cf. the famous quote that stereotypically characterizes Zionism; 'a land without a people, for a people without a land'. The solution was self-evident; Jews would colonize the land and its people just like Europeans had done in passed centuries. Theodore Herzl proved to be of great influence and his ideas gained popularity. He also contacted British politicians in order to gain legitimacy for his ideas (Damen). More and more Jews migrated to Palestine and joined the small Jewish population which was already present in Palestine and lived in peace with their Arab neighbours. The Jewish immigrants enjoyed financial help from wealthy European benefactors (Damen). However, until the beginning of the 19th century the coming of these new immigrants did not yet cause troubles because their numbers were not that high and they were not seen as a threat by their Arab neighbours. Moreover, Arabs had other concerns, namely the influence of the Ottoman Empire under whose rule they still lived and –after the First World War and the accompanying defeat of this empire- the French imperial aspirations in the region (Polk 1991). Polk declares that initially Zionists and Arabs were even working together to resist French

colonial pressure. But this sense of mutual belonging changed rather quickly when it became clear to the Arabs that the Zionists had great plans for their land and when, at the same time, Jewish immigration began to rise. In 1917 the now famous –and for some infamous- Balfour Declaration was written, a letter from British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to the influential Zionist Lord Walter Rothschild, which represented the British government’s support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine (Damen) (The State of Israel). After the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the door to the Orient was open for the European colonial powers. The French were already interested in the area for several decades.¹ In 1920 they invaded Syria and overthrew the government, but they were not able to capture Palestine as well (Polk). Instead, in that same year Palestine was appointed to the British as a mandate by the League of Nations and Sir Herbert Samuel became the first high commissioner of the territory. The following year, the migration to Palestine of (mostly) European Jews kept rising and the demand for more land with it. Because the Turkish administration was destroyed, missing or non-existing, land ownership was often hard to prove, so Jewish immigrants bought land which was often not meant to be sold (Damen; Polk 163). This gave rise to opposition from the Arabs, resulting in demonstrations and in 1936 even revolt in the form of strikes and large protests in Jaffa to which the British, unfortunately, responded with oppression (Damen). It is important to note that by now, the differences between the two religious groups were much greater than a few decades before, and that this was reflected in the policy of the British towards them. Whereas the Arab population of Palestine did not really have a central authority or a spokesperson, the Jews had organised themselves into a sort of informal government, the Jewish Agency, and they even had their own well-organised paramilitary groups, the Hagannah and the Irgun (Polk).

¹ Napoleon had already offered the Jews a national home in Palestine under French colonial rule. He tried to defeat the Ottomans in 1799 in Acre but he lost the battle (Damen).

The British government sent several commissions to Palestine to investigate the situation on the ground and to come to a solution that would favour both the Arab and Jewish parties. This resulted in the Passfield White Paper in 1930, which deemed an immediate halt to immigration the best solution. However, this never happened because Jewish reaction was furious and the chairman of the Jewish Agency at the time, Chaim Weizman, even resigned in protest (Polk). Also the conclusion of the Royal Commission in 1936 that partition was the better option, was dismissed by high ranking Zionists. So the status quo on the ground remained and immigration to Palestine kept rising and so were the numbers of demonstrations and terrorist attacks, by both Jews and Arabs. When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1932, immigration boomed and from 1932 to 1936 the Jewish population of Palestine quadrupled (Polk 167). In 1939 the British government decided to limit the immigration and after the war they were blamed for the death of thousands of Jews in Europe as a result. Although Jews and Arabs fought together in the war under British command, they also continued to fight each other in Palestine. Realising they had failed miserably, the British asked the United States for help after the war and they also sent a commission to Palestine. Surprisingly, the commission's conclusion was the same as the one in 1936. Now, the matter was handed over to the newly created United Nations in 1947, when there were approximately 1,200,000 Arabs in Palestine and already 600,000 Jews (Polk 175). Also the UN put together a Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) which quickly advised 'that the mandate be terminated "at the earliest practicable date," that independence be granted, and that until independence the United Nations assume responsibility' (Polk 177). International consensus was reached in that the British mandate would come to an end on May 1, 1948 and the two states would gain independence on July 1 following the UN Partition Plan.



Figuur 1 W.R. Polk 181

The short period between British withdrawal and the UN deadline was one of apparent chaos and 5,000 people got killed in 5 months (Polk 180). It is also important to note that up until this point the Arab representatives equally rejected every plan that included giving up a piece of their territory to the Zionists, but now that partition was inevitable, they referred back to a previously proposed plan that suggested a temporary trusteeship which would eventually lead to an Arab state with protected rights for the Jewish minority. However, it was already too late as the violence raged throughout Palestine and the Haganah and Irgun began to capture whole cities and cleansed them of their Arab inhabitants by either killing them or making them leave. On May 14, 1948 David Ben-Gurion declared the independence of the state of Israel.

3.2 THE SUEZ CRISIS AND THE SEVEN DAYS WAR

The next important conflict in relation to Sacco's narrative is less than a decade later, in 1956. This war was an international conflict between Egypt on the one hand and Israel, Great Britain and France on the other hand and is largely understood as the reaction of the 'Western' alliance to the internationalisation of the Suez Canal by Egypt's president Gamal Abdal Nasser – hence the alternative name as Suez Crisis. Notwithstanding the international character of the war, I will focus here on Palestine and Israel's motivations to participate. Isacoff notes that this conflict is perceived differently by different kinds of historians (according to nationality but also schools of thought). Also in Israeli historical sciences there is a schism, between the Zionist new-old historians on the one hand, and new historians on the other. The divide already becomes clear when we ask for the different parties in the 1956 war, as the new-old historians see Israel as a weak state who was attacked by Arab aggressors as soon as 1949, whereas the new historians see the war as an aggressive 'war of choice' that was planned for long (Isacoff). New historians will instead point to several other facts that suggest Israel was planning this war since an extended period of time (Isacoff 77). Of course the refugee problem, which is also still a hot issue today and forms one of the main themes in *Footnotes in Gaza*, was an important cause of frustration for Palestinians, even more so as Israel remained silent on the issue (Isacoff 77). A second cause was (and also still is) the continuing rise and expansion of settlements which threatened the already largely diminished space for Palestinians to live in. A third argument for new historians for presuming Israel's intentions for the 56' war is 'maintaining a policy of intentionally belligerent and escalating reprisal raids aimed at provoking a war' (Isacoff 77). Other than this, new historians also see political arguments for stating Israel started this war. Namely the pro-militaristic approach of Ben-Gurion that won against the more moderate approach of Premier Moshe Sharett (Isacoff 78). Regardless of the motives, from Israel's point of view, the war was a success as they saw it as an ideal opportunity to expand their territory and to deal with Egypt that had

trained the fedayeen in its army (Catherine 155). These Palestinian nationalists were highly trained military special forces who were active in military campaigns against Israel during these years. Therefore they also return in *Footnotes in Gaza*, but more about that later.

The years after the Suez crisis were never really quiet although there were not real open conflicts until 1967. This time, tensions between Syria and Israel increased as a result of which Egypt moved its troops to the border with Israel, ready to defend Syria if a conflict would break out. However, Israel saw this move as an act of aggression and attacked Egypt, Syria as well as Jordan, supported by both American and European politicians and public. The united Arab front was quickly defeated by a better equipped and better trained Israeli army, under the command of Yitzak Rabin, the military chief of staff (Catherine). Whatever the real motives for the war, the outcome was very clear; Israel seized the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank from Transjordan - which consequently became the Occupied Territories from then on – and occupied the Sinai desert in Egypt and Golan heights in Syria.

3.3 THE RISE AND FORMALIZATION OF THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE

As I said before, there was a notable difference in organisation between the Zionists and the Palestinians before 1948 and also after Israel's independence this situation remained unchanged for several years. The fedayeen (cf. 2.2) were a well-trained and organised group, but they were part of the Egyptian military. However, after the 1956 war some Palestinian intellectuals and businessmen decided to organise these fedayeen in a conjoint organisation called al Fatah, an acronym which means Movement for the Liberation of Palestine (Catherine 178). A few years later, in January 1964, the Arab League instructed its Palestinian representative, Shukairy, to form the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation). Next to these internationally known organisations, several other groups arose who claimed to speak for the Palestinians. One of them was the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, founded in 1966 as a left-wing organisation and which originated from the Beirut-based

Arab National Movement, founded by George Habash, who is referred to several times in Sacco's work as a hero and martyr of the Palestinians. 3 years later the Democratic Front split itself from this Popular Front. From 1968 onwards, the PLO started to cooperate with all these militaristic organisations and other civil-society groups (Catherine 179). They also invested in education, health care, agriculture and industry and as such have become a sort of shadow government for the Palestinians – to a certain extent quite literally as the PLO now has its own parliament. However, because of the leftist ideas in many of its factions, the PLO became suspicious in the eyes of the US who were in the middle of the Cold War, so they put pressure on Israel to contain these revolutionary ideas and to approach and even fund other, religious conservative forces similar to Hamas today, which was initially also supported by Israel (Catherine 182).

The PLO initially worked from Amman and the rest of Jordan where they gained in strength until they controlled large parts of the land and it was impossible for King Hussein to remain passive (Catherine 184-185). After a civil war that lasted 10 days, they retreated to Beirut in Lebanon where another civil war haunted the people of the Middle East from 1975 onwards (187). Also Israel got involved and in 1982 they invaded Lebanon under the command of Ariel Sharon, at that time Secretary of Defence, with the intent to destroy the PLO. As a result, the PLO was again forced to move its headquarters, this time to Tunis where they would stay for almost a decade.

After the First Intifada (see following) and several other attempts made by the Israeli government to silence the armed resistance, they agreed upon speaking to Palestinian representatives and later on even to the PLO as a consequence of which the PLO could officially come to Palestine.

3.4 THE FIRST AND SECOND INTIFADA

The same subjects that already caused a lot of frustration for the Palestinians since Israeli independence and created the willingness to fight their neighbouring state in 1956 and 1967, were also

the incentives for the popular uprisings in the second half of the 20th century and the first years of the 21st. Especially the First Intifada was a popular and spontaneous uprising that originated as the frustrations of ordinary people. In *Footnotes in Gaza*, Sacco's friend Abed looks back to this period with a great feeling of nostalgia as the Palestinians' will was strong in this period and they truly had something of their own again (15). And indeed, the First Intifada took everyone by surprise: Israel, Palestinian organisations, Arab Governments as well as Western media. Another consequence was the very basic equipment (because weapons is hardly applicable here) with which Palestinians equipped themselves, hence the familiar image of stone-throwing youths who attack highly equipped soldiers and tanks. The uprising started in 1987 but the end is not that certain, although the Oslo peace agreements were agreed upon in 1991 (Catherine). The agreements were controversial in Gaza and the Occupied Territories and caused the PLO to lose sympathy from a lot of Palestinians because for them it seemed like the Palestinian leaders had made a lot of concessions without getting much in return.

The Second Intifada is remembered by Abed as a sort of disillusion because it was not a bottom-up protest against the occupation, but a highly militarised resistance movement (*Footnotes in Gaza* 16). The different Palestinian resistance movements tried to supersede each other and all took their part in the violence that deeply affected both Palestinian and Israeli everyday life. The most noticeable feature of this widespread violence were the suicide bombings, which made up almost half of the casualties in this period (Schachter). As such, the Second Intifada is more a movement than a period in time and as a consequence, the beginning and end point are even more blurry than those of the First Intifada. In *Footnotes in Gaza*, the uprising is described as an immediate reaction to the visit of 'Ariel Sharon's provocative visit in September 2000 to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which is also the site of the Jewish Temple Mount' (16). Schachter on the other hand notes that some see

the failure of the Camp David negotiations as the run-up for the Second Intifada (63).² The end is even more unclear as some see it in the death of Arafat in 2004 and others in the agreement between Abbas and Sharon in 2005 and still others as a still ongoing uprising (Schachter 63). However, Schachter notes that although the suicide bombings had decreased, attempts were still made so the intention of Palestinian militants to hurt Israeli society has not stopped (69). As a conclusion we can say that this Palestinian resistance has not stopped but has diminished, although nobody can predict if and when it will regain in strength. Especially with the conditions of frustration listed by Isacoff leading up to the 1956 war unchanged, a Third Intifada is not unimaginable, although the weapons sought by militants and people could take a different form yet.

² These peace negotiations led by American president Bill Clinton at Camp David between Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat came to an unsuccessful end in July 2000.

4.1 THE OUTSIDER POSITION

4.1.1 Joe Sacco as a journalist, as a character, as a cartoonist

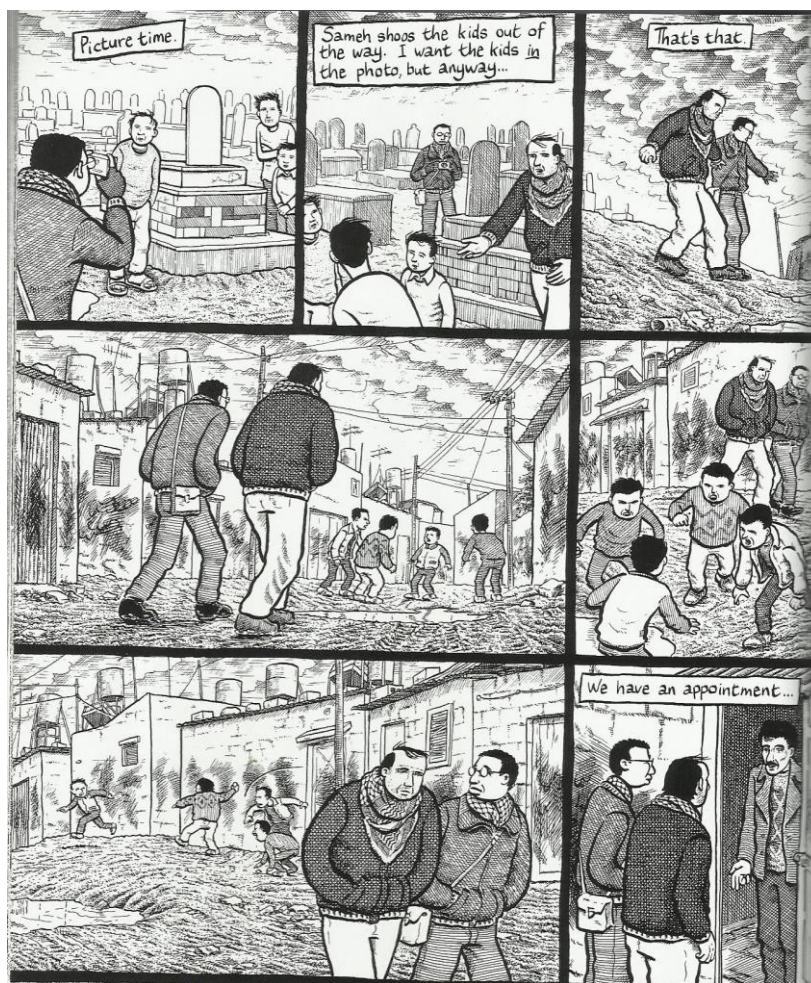
As Marjan Satrapi in *Persepolis* and Art Spiegelman in *Maus*, Joe Sacco is not only the writer and drawer of his cartoons, he is also the main character. Gillian Whitlock calls these characters ‘autobiographical avatars’ (Whitlock 971). Sacco’s avatar is a cartoonist who travels through Israel and the Occupied Territories to challenge the image disseminated by American mainstream media about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this respect he looks, draws, and takes pictures, records and, most importantly, talks to people of all kinds in order to get a complete picture. This working method should not surprise us, as Whitlock comments ‘that when public intellectuals write autobiographically their disciplinary training and affiliations can become a register that shapes their self-representation’ (Whitlock 972). Sacco’s avatar systematically interviews people who have gone through certain experiences in order to get a complete picture of life in war and under the occupation. In the same manner Sacco himself has travelled the area in order to be able to recreate a complete picture of the Occupied Territories and of the 1956 war. I will try to dissect these different aspects of the avatar Joe Sacco in order to understand his position and role in his separate graphic novels that deal with Palestine. First I will zoom in on the journalistic influence, then I will turn to Joe Sacco the character to conclude with an analysis of the cartoonist that Sacco (or Sacco’s avatar) is too.

4.1.1.1 ... as a journalist

Having in mind Whitlock’s claim that an author’s training resurfaces in his or her work, we should not be surprised by Sacco’s accuracy, as he trained to be a journalist at the University of Oregon (Drawn & Quarterly). In *Footnotes in Gaza* each interview is transcribed and presented to the reader in an index at the back of the book. In the third chapter of *Palestine* Sacco’s avatar elaborates on the journalist’s

philosophy. When his moved Japanese companion, the photographer Saburo, tells him about a baby's deformed head caused by tear gas during the mother's pregnancy, we get a hint of how the journalistic mind works. Sacco comments: 'I'm a skeptic. Journalistically speaking, you gotta be a Doubting Thomas; you gotta make sure. It's good to get your finger in the wound. Your whole head would be better' (*Palestine* 77). This is exactly what Sacco's avatar does in the rest of the novel; he does not only observe and talk to Palestinians, but after an invitation of a man working for a local NGO, he stays with the man in the refugee camp for several days, thus experiencing himself the primitive conditions under which the inhabitants are forced to live every day. Of course the ironic comparison between the situation in the Occupied Territories and an open wound becomes quite real when we understand how many Palestinians have been injured by Israeli attacks – whether directly or indirectly. So we can assume the place of this quote is no coincidence as it is positioned in the panel following the story about the deformed baby. This draws attention to the act of closure and the importance of bridging the gap between different panels. McCloud defines closure in comics as 'the phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole' (63). Furthermore, this is the special role the reader has in decoding the interplay between words and images in separate panels of the page (McCloud 65). In other words, the construction of the comic strip does not stop on the cartoonist's table, but extends to the reader as he or she attributes further meaning to the whole. Linking back to the scene with Saburo, we could thus have drawn different conclusions with regard to the existing or non-existing cohesion between the panels. For example we could see Sacco's comment merely as a skeptical journalist's reaction to the emotional relation of a story. The reason I chose to interpret it as a reference to the physical injuries is that the word wound is such a powerful trigger of memories for many Palestinians because the amount of people who have suffered physical harm during the war and occupation is so huge.

The non-fictional character of Sacco's cartoons is not only represented in the verbal part, also the drawings are as accurate as possible. In his book *The System of Comics* Thierry Groensteen notes that many modern comics use photographic material as a basis for the panel instead of a purely mental image (42). In Sacco this is especially the case and he even makes it fairly easy for the reader to trace this alternative source. In *Palestine* we have Sacco's avatar's companion Saburo, who is a Japanese photographer who supposedly supplied Sacco with a lot of photographic material. Furthermore, Sacco also took pictures himself and his avatar even mentions this in his comic. In this way we get a drawing of a photograph that is – although two degrees removed from reality - still the most accurate way to represent a situation through the medium of comics in Sacco's already realistic style of drawing. This urge for authentic images becomes quite clear in some of the panels that occupy an entire page. At the start of chapter eight we get another extremely detailed picture of the refugee camp. In the front Sacco's avatar is sitting on a donkey cart with his friend and guide Sameh - 'another authentic refugee camp experience/ good for the comic, maybe a splash page' (217). The entire chapter is made up of square shaped panels divided by a black gutter as if they were actual photographs or paintings. Beginning with the first big panel, their size gradually narrows down in order to get sometimes twelve panels per page, which visually represents the crowded, almost claustrophobic feeling that Sacco must have felt in the overpopulated camps.



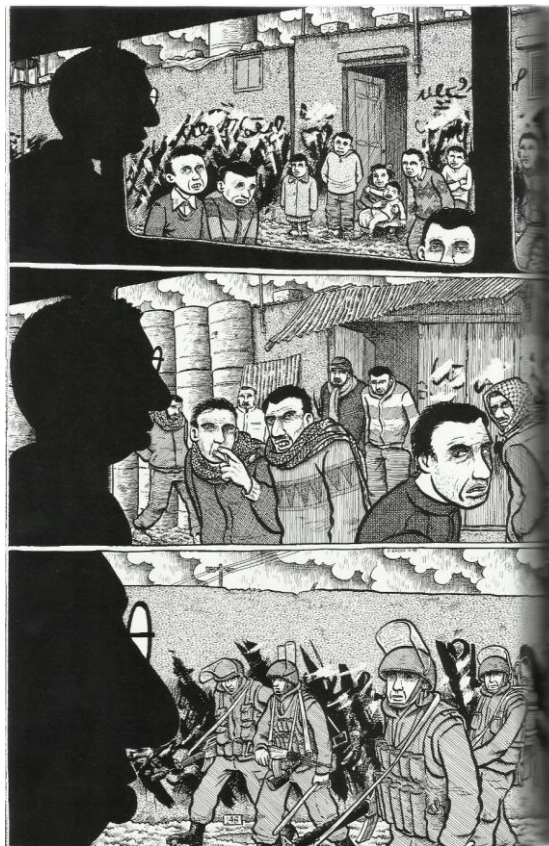
Figur 2 Palestine, three out of the four strips on page 224

These dense pages are already announced in the second and third page of the chapter, which also comprise the second and third panels of the chapter, horizontally spread over these two pages. The announcement comes in the form of a comment again: ‘He knows why I’m here, he knows my time is limited, I want real stories, he knows that, vivid descriptions, the details, man, comics is a visual medium...’ (219). What follows is an abundance of vivid descriptions, ranging from a wedding party to the story of a mother who lost two of her sons in two days as a result of violence and bureaucracy. When these different characters tell their story, Sacco zooms in and we get a detailed image of their faces stricken with pain, which not only adds a sort of drama to the whole but also illuminates their personality; the real stories Sacco was after.

4.1.1.2 ... as a character

Besides being a journalist, Joe Sacco's avatar is also the main character of *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza*. Sacco presents his avatar as a prejudiced, Western man who initially knows very little about the politically complex situation in historical Palestine. He tries to acquire an easy understanding of the situation as if it were a tourist souvenir: 'Fortunately he says he knows a one-stop village just east of the Green Line that's a veritable gold mine of Palestinian misery... Better be... I want my 89 sheks worth... and I've got quite the wishlist...' (Sacco 59). The gap between the Western main character and the Palestinian side characters does not ever close in these novels. Sacco never pretends to be one of them or someone who understands the situation completely. On the contrary, he always remains the outsider who can go in and out of the warzone whenever he likes. The tours he makes through the Occupied Territories are a perfect example of this. So in chapter six, when Sacco's avatar pays his first visit to a refugee camp under the guidance of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the near East), he literally sees the scene moving by from behind the glass windows of the van. The first words on the page ambiguously say 'Some of the world's blackest holes are out in the open for anyone to see...' (Sacco 145). Of course this can refer to the absence of international political response with respect to human rights violations of the Palestinians by Israel. Both drawings on this page seem to suggest this, as we see a gruesome scene with streets drenched in mud and littered with car parts and other rubble, children trying to keep themselves warm above a stove and men seeking shelter behind their scarves. All this under a dark sky that suggests nothing but problems ahead. But also in this picture the irony creeps in because of the distance between the onlooker and the subjects: '(...) you'll want your refugee camp experience to be an intimate thing/insist they take you out alone/Tell them you want to take pictures,/tell them you want to talk to refugees'.

When we turn the page we get this authentic refugee camp experience in a two page spread. The enormous drawing lacks words, but it is especially this solely visual character that makes us pause for a moment to examine the larger but very detailed overview of living conditions in such a camp. Just as Sacco is unable to take it all in from behind the window of an UNRWA-van, the reader is unable to 'read' the picture properly if he or she does not adapt the pace of reading. On the following page we get an overview of all these different impressions Sacco's avatar has to deal with in three different, horizontally separated images. He is depicted on the left side every time, so we literally look over his shoulder to all the different characters who see him passing by. As the drawing zooms in on Sacco, we get the same overwhelmed feeling as Sacco must have had when he saw all those different types of people looking back at him from what seems to be their world.



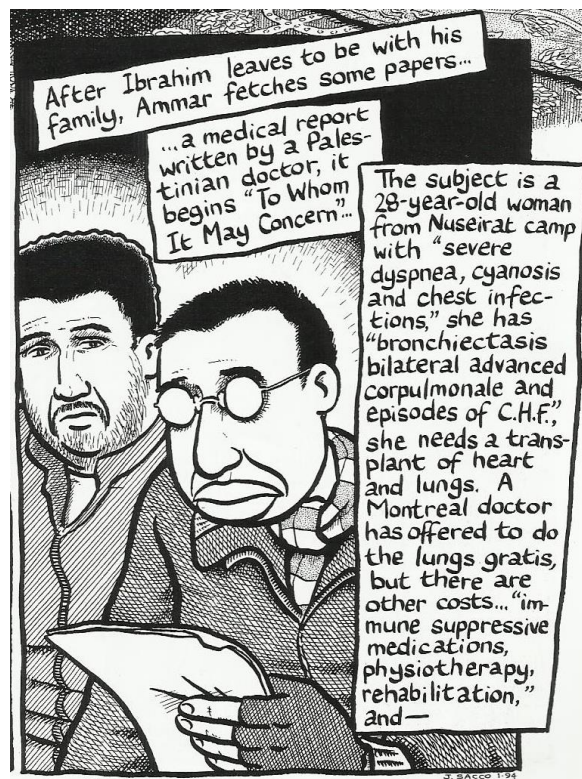
Figuur 3 Palestine 148

Like Sacco's avatar, we are silenced by the image of such harsh living conditions. We can say that Sacco's reproduction of the scene has 'the same effect on spectators outside this specific context, who thus become unintended victims' (Hirsch 1212). This is crucial in the understanding of Sacco's cartoons; when the image lacks words, the reader is forced to wander through the picture and let the cruelty seep in. In a sense we are trapped just like the Palestinians are trapped in their walled and unpredictable environment.

4.1.1.3 ... as a cartoonist

Earlier I described how Sacco uses photographic material in order to make his drawings as detailed as possible and to give a picture of everyday Palestinian life that comes much closer to reality than the classical story that repeats itself in mainstream American (and by extension Western) media. However, it is quite impossible to make sure every detail is an actual copy of reality. As most of the drawings were made after the research phase in Israel and the Occupied Territories, Sacco sometimes had to draw something or someone on the basis of his recollections alone and he does not hide this from the reader. In the first pages of the seventh chapter this self-awareness resurfaces in a scene where Sacco and Sameh visit a woman whose house has been damaged by a storm so every time it starts to rain, her roof leaks. When Sacco's avatar asks if he can take a picture, the woman misunderstands him and thinks he wants to take her picture. In the following panel we see Sacco's avatar taking a picture of the ceiling and the woman drawn standing behind him, also looking up to the ceiling and, by extension, to the reader, because the panel is drawn from bird's-eye perspective. So although Sacco supposedly does not have a picture of the woman, his avatar is depicted with her in the drawing. By indicating this, Sacco tells the reader that the woman might have looked differently and maybe he even comments upon his drawings by insinuating that his compositions could have been better.

This ambiguous attitude towards his own drawing becomes quite clear in another distinctive aspect of Sacco's cartoons. The details mentioned earlier are omnipresent, except in one rather important aspect of the story, namely the character Sacco himself. All other characters are represented very realistically as to accentuate the different personalities and their distinctive stories. This stands in sharp contrast to the quite basic and even cartoony way in which Sacco's avatar is represented. Especially his face is drawn much simpler than the recognisable, human faces of the other characters. Sacco's avatar's face is no more than two eyebrows, glasses, a rather large nose and an extremely large mouth. He even lacks a chin and when he is drawn sideways also his ears only consist of two curved lines.



Figuur 4 Palestine 157

By refusing these details, Sacco introduces an aspect of universality into his stories that stands in large opposition to the abundance of details in other parts of the drawings. Whitlock relies on McCloud too when she states that:

... iconic drawings of the human face are particularly powerful in promoting identification between reader/viewer and image, and the more cartoonish (iconic) a face is, the more it promotes association between the viewer and image' (Whitlock 976)

Whitlock uses the cases of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Marjan Satrapi's *Persepolis* but she also mentions Joe Sacco briefly. Besides the autographics form, these works also share a feeling of universality (Whitlock). *Maus* is not just another Holocaust-story, but the experience of a cartoonist whose father is a Holocaust-survivor and who struggles deeply with writing about his and his father's experience. In the same way, *Persepolis* is not only the story about the revolution and recent history of Iran, but also about a young girl/woman who tries to find her place in the world and discovers her own identity. By refusing to draw a particular and more recognisable face for his own avatar, Sacco makes this character as universally appealing as Marjan and Artie. It is the face of a Westerner who wants to look beyond the clichés and discovers the little truths behind a decade-long conflict. Whitlock also points to the similarities between these autobiographical characters and notes that they are the avatars 'of the artist working at the limits of representation in dealing with traumatic memory; they are dealers in images that remain intractable and overdetermined' (977). This goes hand in hand with the aspect of universality of course. By choosing such a distinctly Western but also accessible main character, the reader gains access to an otherwise very complex and removed subject (the Palestinian-Israeli conflict).

4.1.2 East versus West

Gillian Whitlock went even further with her article about autobiographical graphic novels. She claimed these cartoons were not written as a bridge between cultures. They were never meant to be

the long longed for and final stepping stone towards a unifying story between all cultures – East and West. Quite the opposite, as Art Spiegelman notes in his success story *Maus* that he did not even have a presupposed message. As noted before, Spiegelman, Sartrapi and Sacco's works are written for a Western audience. 'Great books do not enter in a process of transculturation whereby they are remade in transit to other cultures and histories' (Whitlock 973). This entails that they are firmly rooted in a Western, Anglo-Saxon tradition. In *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza* Sacco's avatar's identity never becomes vague in that he never claims an evolution towards his eastern side characters. When it comes to identity, there is no room for compromise.

These differences are played out in a number of fields, starting with the one that gets the most media attention, namely religion. From before the war of independence in 1948 until today's segregation, many of the conflict's origins can be linked to religion. It is a very heavyweight manner that can easily appear too complex to overlook. That is why Joe Sacco's alternative handling of the situation comes as a welcome new way to tackle the task of describing such a long-lasting conflict. The mere form of the cartoon offers new opportunities for description and Sacco's ironic comments allow a less heavyweight approximation.

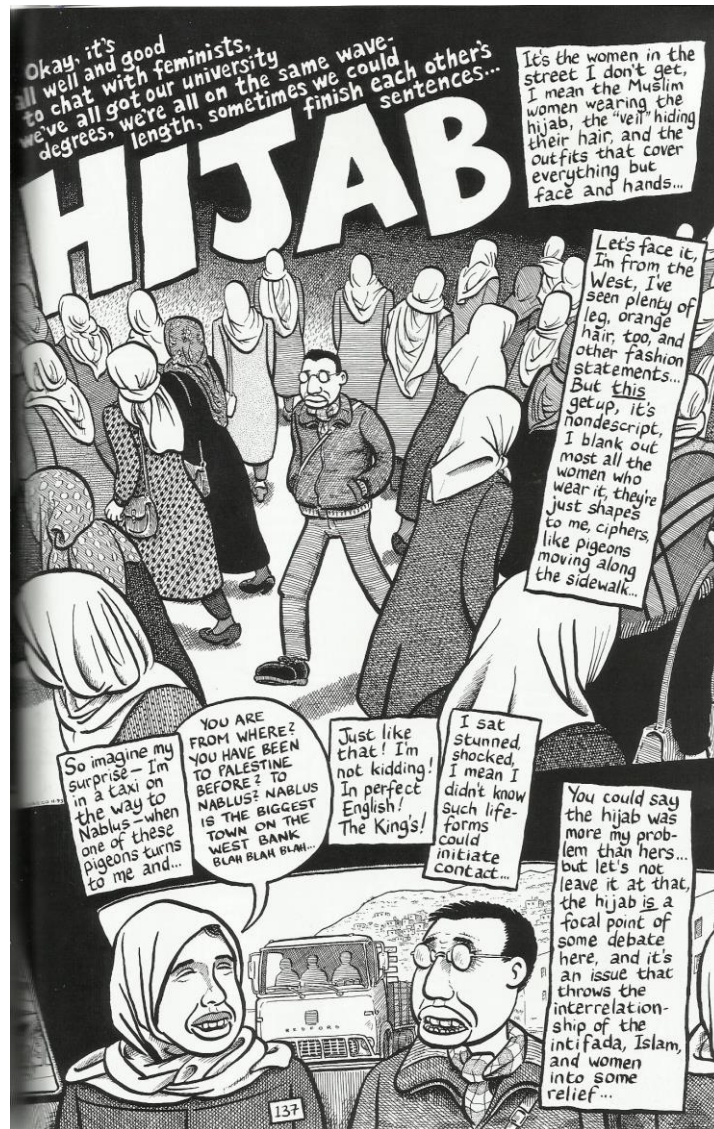
In McCloud's quite successful attempt to define comics, we instantly get the representation of the symbiosis between form and reader involvement. According to him, comics are 'juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer' (9). In Sacco's case, this aesthetic response is given an extra dimension as his comics go beyond aesthetics into the domain of journalism. The prejudiced Western man previously mentioned returns and initially he seems to have a great deal of trouble in applying his journalistic training when confronted with the cultural other. Sacco's avatar is especially ill at ease in his encounters with Middle Eastern women, although there is an important distinction in classification,

represented in different encounters but depicted one after another in chapter five under the all-saying paragraph 'Women'.

The first appointment he has in this context is with a group of feminists, who assist girls and women with legal advice, named the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (Palestine 133-136). There seems to be a healthy atmosphere of debate in the office; at one point literally, with a panel depicting three women in frog perspective fiercely arguing. One of the women from the Federation talks about emancipating Arabic women through the fundamental women's rights brought forward by Islam. Another woman points to the difficulties in reconciling Islam and women's rights by referring to the right men have to beat their wife. It seems to be more like an academic discussion and for the very reason that these women are university-trained professionals it is not that difficult for Sacco to find a common ground. He clearly indicates the distance between these women and the majority of Palestinian women. In all but one panel, the members of the Federation and 'ordinary' Palestinian women are never depicted together. The feminists are also distinguished by their lack of a veil and by their severe facial expressions, whereas the mass of other Palestinian women are depicted as rather cluelessly smiling or silently bowing their heads. Furthermore, Sacco's avatar only appears in the first panel, while feminists occupy most of the other panels and the majority of the narration. By formally and visually separating the two types of women, Sacco draws attention to the exclusive position of the feminists. He also seems to imply that these women are miles away from the larger part of Palestinian women in the matters discussed here.

The distance in opinions is all the more accentuated by the piece that follows 'Women': 'Hijab'. The first and all-saying panel of the paragraph takes up two-thirds of the page and is the perfect metaphor for this East vs. West theme. We see Sacco's avatar back in the centre of attention, surrounded by dozens of veiled women, all depicted with their backs towards him. However, it is

again closure that makes us realize the importance of the scene because the page also has a second panel that counteracts the first. But let us begin with the first panel.



Figuur 5 Palestine 137

Initially Sacco's avatar assumes that behind these covered creatures hardly any human characteristics can reside. Whereas the stereotypical Western woman shows plenty of skin and changes her haircut every once in a while, these women all seem to have the same physical appearance. For a

Westerner this easily implies that their individuality and basic humanity is covered and has even vanished as well.

Let's face it, I'm from the West, I've seen plenty of leg, orange hair, too, and other fashion statements... But this getup, 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... (Palestine 137)

All these prejudices and stereotypes collide head on with the content of the next panel where Sacco's avatar is depicted sitting in a taxi between two veiled women and against all odds one woman starts to talk to him. The woman's friendly face does not hide anything but a curious attitude towards this foreign traveller. Nowhere in *Palestine* is Sacco's avatar's face drawn with a look so surprised and stunned as here. Hirsch calls the detail 'the site where we enter, and indeed, "read" images' and this is exactly what happens here (Hirsch 1211). Formally the cartoonlike first panel contrasts heavily with the second panel that contains an abundance of detail. I already noted the distinctive facial features, but also through the back window of the taxi we get a detailed picture of the surrounding landscape. As a simple conclusion we can say that these two panels play out the ideas about Middle Eastern societies and Muslims that are very much alive in the West against the actual people living there. Needless to say the gap is quite large. Sacco adds: 'You could say the hijab was more my problem than hers...' (137). As a way of proving this he gives the floor to the woman who chose (not) to wear the veil and gives them an opportunity to give their opinion on the subject. It turns out that these women have very well-thought-out arguments to wear it and obligation is rarely one of them.

Already at the end of the highly important page 137 does Sacco comment upon the hijab-debate that 'it's an issue that throws the interrelationship of the intifada, Islam, and women into some relief...' (*Palestine* 137). In the following pages some references are made to Hamas, the party that currently rules the Gaza-strip but is considered by the West to be a terrorist-organization. In the

seventh chapter under the paragraph 'Rooms' this theme returns under the subject of fundamentalism. Again, Sacco's avatar is sitting in a room with a group of men of whom each tells his stories relating the occupation and the intifada. And again, a discussion arises about the possibility of peace or whether violence is a better option. Masud, a teacher in Khan Younis, is convinced the latter is the better option because all other options have run out and he thinks 'it is the turn of Islam' now (154). Sacco immediately comments: 'Fundamentalism? That's the cue for all true white men to form a perimeter around the women and children!' However, it turns out Masud is indeed not a terrorist, nor an active member of the armed resistance, but for a Westerner merely the reference to such a strong belief in the power of religion – certainly Islam – is enough to become highly sceptical and this is what Sacco refers to. When it comes to religious differences, the West has often used the argument of women's rights to interfere in the politics of other nations. Sarah Bracke puts this subject in a historical perspective:

Gradually women's emancipation and feminism were reframed within the public debate and encapsulated within mainstream political discourses, where they became a crucial marker for civilizational politics and an easy tool to criticize or dismiss 'multicultural society' and Islam.

In the case of Palestine of course, the treatment of women has not been used as an argument to intervene, but as a way for Israel to distinguish itself from Palestinian society. Israel often refers to itself as 'the only democracy in the Middle East' (the statement has even led to a counter-movement; theonlydemocracy.org) with equal rights for all of its inhabitants. When faced with criticism, Israel then often refers to its neighbouring Arab states, where human rights are supposedly far less respected. In this way, a sort of championship in human rights is initiated as a result of which all criticism with regard to human rights is dismissed because abuses in other countries are claimed to be far worse. Haritaworn, Tauqir and Erdem also talk about 'gender and sexuality discourse in the war on terror'

like Bracke, although they focus more on Muslim gays and lesbians, and they also see an uneven comparison between East and West: ‘In the current context of Islamophobia, white people are once again able to identify themselves as the global champions of ‘civilisation’, ‘modernity’ and ‘development’ (78). Sacco approaches these cultural differences in a whole different way, although he underlines that he comes from a society where such rhetoric is daily routine. For four pages he allows the men to give their versions of the story and even to elaborate on their personal motives to take up arms against the Israeli military. In these four pages Sacco’s avatar is nowhere to be found and close-ups of the men narrating are altered with scenes from their stories. We get severe faces with hints of pain but also resolve, scenes of men praying and dying and one exceptional close-up of new tea being served, marking the hospitable atmosphere and inexhaustible flow of stories. Furthermore, in these four pages the boundaries of the frames change from converging with the actual end of the page to separated, equal-shaped rectangular frames which include equally rectangular comment boxes at the top, like some sort of upside down Polaroid.

4.2 WAR AND OCCUPATION

With this topic we come to the most straightforward topic of Joe Sacco’s comics *Footnotes in Gaza* and *Palestine*. As said before, with his comics Sacco wanted to give a counterweight to the disproportionate coverage of Israeli suffering in mainstream Western media (Sacco, Artist Talk). In the previous paragraph we also saw that having himself as a character granted him the opportunity of not having to be subjective, which made it easier to go beyond the stereotype of Palestinians as terrorists and into their everyday lives and memories. These memories are filled with pain and injustice and Sacco does his utter best to bring them to the surface: ‘... we want faces, we want pain, we want to rub up against people who’ve had the shit kicked out of them’ (Palestine 59). You can frown upon

this journalistic tactic, but it has effectively lead to one of the most all-encompassing representations of Palestinian life in times of war and of a life under occupation.

This illustration of how war changes human life and identity is most important for the reader because it is her or his reaction the author is aiming for, whether this intended reaction is empathy or a critical investigation of the concept of war. In her novel *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag explores our response to images of war and suffering. With the help of notable representations of conflicts –mostly photographs, but also famous paintings like *Guernica*- she investigates the implications for feelings of identity and for concepts like martyrs and heroes, but also the possible intentions of the uses of images and their relation with reality. In this context Sontag also refers to the objective/subjective-divide in the characterization of images and extensively uses the writings of Virginia Woolf, for she has written about the subject during and after the Spanish Civil War:

‘(...) the eye is connected with the brain; the brain with the nervous system. That system sends its messages in a flash through every past memory and present feeling.’ This sleight of hand allows photographs to be both objective record and personal testimony, both a faithful copy or transcription of an actual moment of reality and an interpretation of that reality (Sontag 23).

This double identification as ‘objective record’ and ‘personal testimony’ is very strong in Sacco’s work to the extent that it returns on two levels. Sacco’s method is the objective, journalistic approach that is based on interviews and extensive research of official documents (mostly published by the United Nations). On the other hand his avatar comes across as anything but objective, but we have learned that this was not the goal either. The goal was to give a personal account of his impressions during the period he travelled the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the same way, he gives the people whose home this area is the chance to give their impressions and their version of the story, but Sacco does

not hesitate to assess the journalistic and historical value of these testimonies with the official numbers and other (possibly contradictory) testimonies as a guideline.

Now I will discuss the important themes in a Palestinian life of war and occupation –and accordingly, of *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza*- with Sacco's approach as a guideline.

4.2.1 The Difficult Home: House Demolition and the Refugee Problem

Under paragraph 2 we already saw that the most visible difference in Palestine before and after 1948 is the huge amount of people who were forced to leave their homes. In some cases whole towns were abandoned and eventually replaced by Jewish settlements, which is the reason why the sum of these events are often defined as ethnic cleansing (obviously, not by Israeli officials). So without exaggeration we can state that from the beginning (even before 1948, cf. 2.1) the loss and destruction of homes have been a crucial factor of remembrance for the Palestinians. This loss threatens the very essence of Palestinians' social organisation, namely family, as forced relocations often entail a disturbance of the family life, which is still the cornerstone of society in Palestinian culture. This is the reason why the refugee problem has always been an important point of discussion between Israel and Palestinian representatives. Moreover, irony has struck the Palestinians hard as a great group of these refugees who remained in Palestine have often seen their houses destroyed again in later years because their houses were often 'illegally built' (although we have already seen that proof of ownership is often a big problem for Palestinians as a result of historical circumstances). But whoever is the victim, fact is that every day Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem see their houses destroyed as if history is playing a cruel trick on them. The stories about the destruction of towns has been passed on from generation to generation, just like Jews all over the world still pass down the horror stories of WW2 and other prosecutions. This is why these young Palestinians today still see themselves

as refugees, although long ago the refugee camps stopped looking like the tented camps we associate with refugees today.

The camps look like small cities, only even more crowded and sometimes they are built next to the already existing cities, which makes the transition from city to refugee camp even more blurry. As a lot of refugees landed up in Gaza around 1948 it has largely effected this small piece of land and Sacco cannot but pay attention to this problem. Sacco also notices this density of population immediately and no better way to represent this than to explain it in figures. Being his well-documented self, Sacco even takes up the effort to draw a map of the Gaza strip to distinguish Palestinian towns, refugee camps, settlements, areas controlled by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and roads –on a little extra map he even clarifies the separated road system that connects the settlements but that also causes large traffic jams as the Palestinian roads are closed in order to let the Israelis use their roads. In this case, the caption says more than a thousand photographs or cartoons:

This is the Gaza Strip, 40 km long by no more than 12 km wide, one of the most densely populated places on the planet. In 2002-3, when I visited, 1.3 million Palestinians lived on about 70 percent of the land. The rest was the domain of the 7,500 Jewish settlers, who set up their enclaves after Israel seized Gaza in 1967 (*Footnotes in Gaza* 18).

The rest of this 2-page paragraph, simply called ‘The Gaza Strip’, exists of small and medium sized panels that are filled with people, cars, large badly maintained apartment buildings and traffic jams. We can see this formal density as the forerunner of an attack of claustrophobia. However, Sacco returns to the start of it all first, namely the ‘Mud, Tents, Bricks’ as the title of the next paragraph adequately summarizes the situation of the tens of thousands of refugees who had to build up their life again from scratch after the 1948 war. Sacco retreats his avatar from the page and lets the men and women who lived through it all speak for themselves. We see them as little children with their

families, initially sleeping under trees, building little huts with branches before they received tents from UNRWA, then one-room clay houses and in the fifties finally larger houses with a private open space made out of bricks. Sacco dedicates a whole page to the view of Khan Younis refugee camp in the fifties, suggesting a well-organised but already slightly crowded camp with no sanitation. However, we can still see the horizon in birds-eye perspective, which suggests there are still open spaces beyond the camp.

The following two pages are dedicated to one single image, representing the camp how it looks today; with sanitation and electricity but over-crowded to the extent that the only way to expand is up and badly maintained roofs which, together with the lack of a draining system for rain water, causes a constant chance of water seeping in. The title of the following page immediately wipes out all objections: 'The only option'. Again we get a dim picture of everyday life in the camps, even the children seem tired and walk with heads bowed. Afterwards Sacco zooms in even more and we get a look into these houses, 'a sample tour of these unfortunates' (31). It is a little house with only 2 rooms and one bed, where a family of 11 resides. The mother of the family repeatedly and enthusiastically encourages Sacco's avatar to take pictures, an invitation he gladly accepts at first but after a while he cracks under the pressure: 'I had to get out of there, to swim up to the surface and gasp for air' (32). One can wonder what is meant by the surface. Is it simply outside of the house, away from the pressure and expectations of Palestinians who see a Westerner as a possibility for change? The relative comfort of Abed's house? Or maybe it is the utter desperateness of the situation and his own impotence that suddenly struck him and suck him down.

Scenes as the previous one appear all the more alien to a Western audience because of the contrasting scenes Sacco has put previous to these pages. *Footnotes in Gaza* starts with panels depicting a casual conversation on a terrace with a nice view, followed by panels depicting a party and a relaxed

dinner. Compared to the violence, discrimination and deprivation in the majority of panels in this graphic novel, the first scenes come across as utterly decadent. However, does not let us linger for very long in this atmosphere of calm as page 5 already throws reality at us with scenes of death and misery. The captions accordingly say ‘Bombings! Assassinations! Incursions!’.

It is because of this distance between people who undergo cruelty and those who are only occasionally confronted with images of this cruelty that *Footnotes in Gaza* was named as such. The confrontation with these images is only a momentary event. Chosen to be important one day, but almost completely forgotten the next, they pass through our lives before becoming part of history, a footnote. ‘This is the story of footnotes to a sideshow of a forgotten war,’ is the first we read about this (8). Thus the stories represented in this comics are mere details of the long and troubled history of the Middle East (in comparison to *Palestine* which offers an all-encompassing view of present, everyday Palestinian lives). ‘History has its hands full. It can’t help producing pages by the hour, by the minute’ (9). This means events become part of the official past, but are considered trivial almost at the same time. Hence the many surprised reactions by many Palestinians who try to convince Sacco to write about other events (1948, 1967, the First and Second Intifada) instead of dealing with a war that happened more than 45 years earlier. However, what becomes very clear through the testimonies, is that for the victims these events are anything but trivial and passing for they have implications until long beyond their end. We can assume that this is where Sacco’s interest originated. Although the novel’s main occupation is to show the implications of the Suez Crisis for the inhabitants of 2 refugee camps and is dedicated to their experiences during this time, Sacco does not ignore other key developments in the region. Palestinians’ lives do not stop when this or that war ends, they merely undergo the implications of the wars in which they often have no active part, wait for the violence to stop after which they try to move on with their lives, although they rarely get this chance. ‘Another footnote, another page. Here, where the ink never dries’ (12).

4.2.1.1 *The eradication of home*

A special kind of footnotes in recent Palestinian history Sacco pays attention to is the demolition of houses. It is another contrast that makes the overcrowded refugee camps seem very different from the luxurious Jewish towns and settlements and from what wealthy Westerners are used to. Sacco dedicates several panels to the subject and draws, with great care and sense for detail again, the wide open spaces covered in rubble that are created after the Israeli bulldozers have visited. At several moments in the comic, Sacco lets the image take over the whole page and even double page in order to make an impression and stress the impact of the passage of bulldozers. Especially in the piece about Rafah this issue is repeatedly addressed. In the paragraph with the same name, Sacco calls this ‘Rafah’s curse’ because the city and refugee camp (respectively 90,000 and 30,000 people) are situated next to the border with Egypt and thus it is a transit point for smugglers. Again, accuracy is key here and Sacco again makes use of maps to visualise and explain the situation in Rafah, where and how everyone and everything is organised. We learn that particularly houses close to the border run the risk to be demolished.

Three pages further we understand how surreal the situation can become for the inhabitants of the crucial areas. While a huge bulldozer tears a house apart, like a dinosaur swallowing kilograms of food at a time, Sacco and Abed are interviewing a woman in her home, only several meters away. It is her neighbour’s house that is being torn down and accordingly the utter terrified expression on her face says more than any sentence could. Also here timing is well-considered, for in this passage Sacco zooms in on the personal story of one family and the implications for all when the woman’s house would be destroyed, the uncertainty and repeated disruption of their lives that it entails.

After a jump to the past and the Suez-crisis, where we further learn about the Israeli attack on Rafah during this war, Sacco again returns to the present in the paragraph, not coincidentally called

‘Attack West of Block J’ (179). The first paragraph of the page seems nothing out of the ordinary at first, with an accidental meeting with a befriended journalist. Sacco’s avatar and Abed follow him as they learn about the rumours about the bulldozers being at work again. The last two panels of the page represent the three men and the three men accompanied by the usual group of curious youths, respectively as they go past and over a pile of debris from earlier houses that were torn down. On the following page we get a third panel of the men walking on top of the rubble, but it is certainly not this picture that grabs the reader’s attention first as this panel is drawn on top of (or inside, as you wish) another panel, a two-page spread depicting the devastating effect of bulldozers. Sacco’s avatar and his company seem like mere ants now, walking over a wasteland of what once were buildings, towards a cloud of dust caused by another bulldozer that executes his orders from the IDF. From left to right, we see half demolished but uninhabitable houses first, then the wide strip of open space and on the utter right hand side ‘new’ outskirts of the overcrowded refugee camp. Apart from this opposition between the need for space to live and the newly created open sites, Sacco created another contrast in the background of the image. Behind 2 sets of fences we see another town, but one that looks far more pleasant. It represents the town at the other side of the border with Egypt (where ironically, a lot of Palestinians have relatives) and looks like a town as we would imagine it; with trees, squares, and a mosque and surrounded by fields and olive trees.

After the personal story of the woman and the jump to the resultative overview and gruesome effect, Sacco zooms in again; first on the same party running over the rubble (from bird’s-eye perspective to just above their heads), then to the discomfiting look of heavy armoured tanks in frog-eye’s perspective. We are at the personal level again here and find ourselves running along with Sacco’s avatar, Abed, the other journalist and a few other people. The next page, we find rest behind the corner, where a man and his wailing mother are also seeking shelter. Sacco’s avatar is immediately curious and we learn the company is standing at the front side of their home because it has recently

been attacked, without any warning (the man even starts to laugh when Sacco's avatar asks him whether the Israelis have urged them to leave). The man shows us the bullet holes and when he looks through one of them, much to his surprise, he sees the bulldozer literally standing in their house. This is the sign for the group to start running again.

With the next panel, we get the overview in bird's-eye perspective again, in which we see the bulldozers at work being watched at and filmed from a distance by journalists and inhabitants of the camp. Then suddenly, a tank is coming their way, which causes a lot of chaos and Sacco manages to adequately represent this chaos visually. Panels and captions are scattered over the page, pointing in every direction and even covering each other. In this way, it is not really clear for the reader in what direction to read. This clearly reflects the chaos at the moment and the different things that were happening at the same time too. It also probably reflects the internal turmoil in Sacco at the moment; should he stay and make notes like the photographer who stays and keeps taking pictures or should he run like everyone else? The only certainty which is conveyed very clearly by the group of panels is the feeling of fear uniting these people. Not coincidentally in the centre of the page, squeezed in between two panels of a huge armoured tank that quickly approaches, we see two panels depicting the terrified face of a boy hiding behind a heap of dirt. This is also the feeling that lies at the heart of the majority of stories related by his interviewees. Subsequently, it is also this feeling that is passed on to next generations as they tell the same stories to their children. The forced relocation –certainly when repeated over time- and the insecurity it brings with it, undoubtedly leaves its marks. As Palestinian refugees do not get the chance to process these sudden changes because they never really find peace, the marks remain very present even after several years and even decades. And because the traces remained pronounced in the persons who lived through the experience, they also do so in the conscience of their relatives who have heard their stories.

Later on in *Footnotes in Gaza*, Sacco again dedicates a whole double-page to the devastating effect of Israeli security policy when it comes to Palestinian houses and lands. This time however, the whole panel is occupied by one single heap of rubble, the remains of what was only a few hours before still the home of several people. In this panel we do not get the bird's-eye perspective and the large overview either, instead we look just above the heads of the few people looking at the damage or walking past it. The pile of rubble is almost as high as the building on the left and we see that also the building on the other side has been damaged. Although the image certainly leaves an impact on its own, this time captions are numerous and moreover, the comment and background that go with the image add to the impact the whole makes. We learn about the reason why the IDF have destroyed the house, and how unbelievable this sounds. What is sure, is that 90 people are homeless now, and probably several more as the neighbouring buildings are damaged as well. The captions also have formal importance as they are arranged all over the page, from the upper left corner down to the lower right, just above Sacco's head. So this time, we literally come down to the personal level but in one single panel, and without interviewing one of the deprived like we have seen at previous occasions.

Also Sontag refers to this relation between images and caption, although she does not refer to comics but to the work *The Disasters of War* by Goya, made between 1810 and 1820 and depicting some cruel scenes that are linked to the realities of war (Regarding the Pain of Others 39). 'While the image, like every image, is an invitation to look, the caption, more often than not, insists on the difficulty of doing just that' (40). The invitation to look is clear as we cannot but look when confronted with an image. The caption refers to or accentuates the provocative nature of the image, especially those depicting violence. When confronted with yet another image of a destroyed house, the danger of normalisation even shows, although we cannot say the graphic novels is loaded with similar panels, especially not the 2-page spreads as the one discussed here. However, with captions and a certain amount of details, we are able to contextualise the image, but at the same time the whole becomes all

the more gruesome when we see the facts and figures –essentially, the human beings behind the rubble. This action in this particular panel is repeated in what follows, as Sacco again turns to the victims and their personal testimonies.

This time, Sacco’s avatar meets a woman whose family’s house has been destroyed and who has moved (together with her whole family) to a much smaller apartment. When we accept the invitation of this particular panel, as Sontag would call it, we see an elderly woman sitting against a single wall still standing amid heaps of rubble from which people are searching parts that can still be used. She tells her story and we learn she cannot get used to the small home. One of her final comments can be seen as a comment on the situation of all dislocated Palestinians: ‘I spend the time in this area in order to breathe’ (257). So, although after a while most dislocated people find a new place to live or are appointed one by UNRWA, this turns out to be far less ideal than it sounds because the housing is often insufficient for large families.

Not only *Footnotes in Gaza* deals with the demolition of houses, but the topic also gets a place in *Palestine*. This may not seem surprising at all because *Footnotes in Gaza* is supposed to deal with the events in November 1956 and *Palestine* with the situation in Gaza and the West Bank during the Second Intifada. From the previous paragraphs it has become clear however that Sacco has eyes for far more than the past in *Footnotes*, while *Palestine* covers a wide range of topics as it has the objective of describing all the particularities of a life under Israeli occupation. So, although Sacco does not spend as much attention to the topic as in *Footnotes*, he does not neglect the topic and because of this repetition we can assume the problem has certainly made an impression on Sacco during his time in the area. In the paragraph ‘The Bucket’ Sacco again deals with several topics, including the demolishment of an elder woman’s house, who now lives on her own in one small room as the only son who still lives at home is serving a 5-year sentence for throwing a Molotov cocktail (68,69). The

paragraph thus treats different subjects together and has a slightly different approach towards the subjects than the paragraphs in *Footnotes* have. It starts with seemingly trivial matters, like the cutting of trees, but gradually the events narrated become more severe. After the trees we get the rise of settlements, then the protest of settlers in a neighbouring Palestinian village during which they shoot in the air and throw stones through the windows (59-67). Hereafter we get the story of the woman, followed by another attack by settlers during which a man is shot (68-71). Then Sacco's need for accuracy pops in and he reaches for the numbers: in a period of 49 months in the late 80s settlers killed 42 Palestinians but only three have been sentenced at a maximum sentence of three years. At the same time Palestinians killed 17 settlers and for this six suspects got life imprisonment, one got 20 years and six homes were demolished. On the one hand this evidently proves that the judicial system does not work as it should (see following) and discriminates gravely on the basis of nationality. On the other hand we can also assume that Israelis use the demolition of houses as a sort of collective punishment, although the dissuasive effect of this is open for discussion as it is more likely this will even raise anger and tensions between Israelis and Palestinians.

Sacco uses the metaphor of the bucket to illustrate this rising frustration. One farmer's trees destroyed, one woman's house demolished or one Palestinian in prison for a couple of years, they are all just a teardrop in a bucket, a minor incident we could say. One of 120,000 trees uprooted during the Intifada's first four years or one of 1,250 houses demolished during the same period (62, 69). But the testimonies and especially Sacco's representations of the witnesses, who live through the sadness and fear once more, do not lie. This is as real as it gets for them and this is how the occupation looks for them every day. By building up the tension, Sacco acknowledges the gravity of these events, especially when he and Saburo agree the picture of two dead youths they got from an old man is 'too heavy, even for a vulture like me' (71). But even the minor offences are not completely relativised as

such, because they are mentioned in the first place, but also because the numbers and testimonies Sacco puts together give every separate case its individual importance.

4.2.2 Detention

Next to the demolition of houses, imprisonment is another key aspect of everyday Palestinian life. For a Western audience this may sound strange and difficult to process, because we fall under the authority of a well-defined judicial system, in which we are supposed to know what crimes are defined as such and what the punishment is for them. However, when living in an occupied country the rules of law are not always that clear, nor do the parties involved always follow these rules. Under situations of conflict, human rights are among the first to go down, despite the efforts of international organisations (like the Red Cross) and intergovernmental organisations (like the United Nations) to set standards and convince state parties to comply.

The combination of unclear rules and a conflict situation seems to be a recipe for disaster and a direct threat for the human rights' protection of Palestinians. In Area C –one of the three areas in which the West Bank is divided as stated under the Oslo Accords- the situation is especially critical as it falls under direct and exclusive Israeli military control. This means the Israelis can easily arrest and detain someone without having to justify this much and without having to give the detainee sufficient access to a lawyer. Subsequently the chance exists they are incarcerated for a vague or unclear reason and that the terms of imprisonment are renewed every 6 months (this is what happened to one of Sacco's interviewees). As also this is a theme in the Occupied Territories, it equally becomes a theme in *Palestine*.

Sacco again interviews different people about their experiences with the Israeli judicial system. In fact, Sacco dedicates the whole fourth chapter to the subject, but he classifies the separate parts differently. There is a part that deals with the testimonies about the Ansar III prison (the largest prison

for Palestinians), three parts including personal testimonies from people who have been arrested and interrogated, another part of a paragraph that deals with the background again (a story familiar to all Palestinians) and even a joke. It is important to note that all these different stories also differ from each other in style. Some parts are highly organised and have regular, rectangular shaped panels (especially the two parts I will discuss and the joke), whereas the other parts ('Moderate Pressure Part 1' and 'The Tough and the Dead') have panels of all kinds of shapes, combined with panels-in-panels and balloons that run over different panels. This shows Sacco adapts his style according to the content and to the different narrators and their visibility (in the parts where Sacco's comments are more present, the balloons become bigger and seemingly less organized). However, I will mainly focus here on the testimonies of three men who have done time in Ansar III and one particular elaborate testimony from a man who had spent 19 days in custody for interrogation only a week and a half before Sacco interviewed him (so his memory is still fresh).

This does not mean the other parts are not of significant importance as well, of course. The paragraph 'The Tough and the Dead' first deals with a curious woman who has also been detained and interrogated by Shin Bet (the Israeli service for internal security) among other things. She tells about sleep deprivation, claustrophobia and threats of rape but still looks at men who give in under such conditions condescendingly. She's an activist, but what is more important here, a female activist in an Arab society and thus the opposite of the stereotype that exists about women from this area, and indeed, everywhere. Interestingly, her interrogator even uses this stereotype against her, but she cunningly counters his moves.

In the paragraph 'Moderate Pressure Part 1' we find ourselves in Jabril's house where several men again have been imprisoned. 'Has he ever been interrogated? Sure, he says. Beaten? He looks at me like, are you being serious?' (93). When Sacco's avatar asked about how this proceeded, the man

shows him right their how it went, luckily for Sacco's avatar without actually hurting him. Also at the beginning of 'The Tough and the Dead' Sacco places himself in the position and realises he would cave in quite fast: 'I wonder how long I'd last setting the business behind a closed door... Not long I bet, but I'm a Pussy First Class...a harsh word and a dirty look and I'd be screaming for Amnesty Int'l...' (97). This is the acknowledgment of a luxury position, of someone who does not need to worry about such matters. On the other hand it is also self-relativism and irony as we often see in this character.

4.2.2.1 *Ansar III*

In this rather extensive paragraph (10 pages) we get the combined testimony of three men who have been incarcerated in Ansar III. I already referred to the difference in perception this might cause between a Westerner and a Palestinian, because for a Westerner having to spend time in prison is a major event, whereas in Palestine this has indeed become part of life under occupation. All over *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza* Sacco's avatar meets people who have been in prison. This is how the paragraph starts:

Don't get me wrong, I'm not about to trivialize the Palestinian prison experience... It's just that getting locked up is such an integral part of life here that I resignedly anticipate the subject coming up somehow (no matter who I'm talking to), in someway (whether in detail or just in passing)... (82)

So the three people are rather chosen by coincidence than because of their experience, because the group who has gone through the same is so big. They represent the greater part of those who have been detained: 'Each is a middle-aged professional who was held in administrative detention... Administrative detention is six months' imprisonment imposed without trial... It can be renewed for an additional six months... and then another...' (82). This is the arbitrariness Sacco is talking about

and to strengthen this statement he ends this introduction with the fact that the men do not even know what their crime was. This is the paragraph's first approach to counter the subject and the first panels further elaborate on the uncertainty and unsolicited painful treatment the men initially go through. One of the man talks about being beaten with sticks on the hands when he arrived in prison. The panels hereafter especially feature overcrowded cells and men who are being transferred from one such a cell to another. Also the heat and unhygienic circumstances play a role here.

These first two pages with scenes from inside the detention centres are drawn from different perspectives, but they have one other thing in common: they are all drawn from very near, as if Sacco wants to bring us as close to these stories as possible, literally. Another effect is that the picture never seems to be complete. Because these men live very close to each other, they are always standing next to someone and no panel can be occupied by only one character. It enhances the claustrophobic and suffocating feeling the men must have had in their cells. Another remarkable aspect of the form are the little panels, which are printed over these panels and contain a little portrait of the interviewee in question and quotes from their testimonies. This reminds us of a similar stylistic approach Sacco frequently uses in *Footnotes in Gaza*. There he puts a small panel with the portrait of the interviewee and their full name (if they do not wish to remain anonymous) into a larger panel depicting scenes from their memory about the 1956 war. Since this technique is only used in *Palestine* in this particular paragraph this could point to an evolution in Sacco's style.

The following pages begin with the opening of the prison Ansar III and the panic in the men who are transferred there but do not know at the time what will happen to them. Then the testimonies quickly turn to the way the prisoners organise themselves in order to make life easier for everyone. As so many men are imprisoned, there are people from all corners of society and all professions present, so everyone can contribute to this little society-out-of-society. As a result they organise themselves in

committees who make sure the few resources available in the prison are distributed equally, but they also provide pastimes such as education of all sorts (one of the interviewees mentions 14 people learned to read in three months). Furthermore, these committees depend on the political faction of the PLO according to which they are organised. However, this division does not imply any rivalry but merely a way to run things smoother than would be the case when everyone had to be completely self-reliant. One witness tells about the rule that no one could talk to a new prisoner before he had chosen a committee, so that there would be no chance for recruitment. On the other hand, the prison is not completely void of political action. Another witness tells about the spontaneous gathering of all as a reaction to the death of Abu Jihad, to co-founder (together with Yasser Arafat) of al Fatah (89). Although the action only consists of lining up between the tents for one minute, the Israeli guards immediately panic and shoot tear gas. The prisoners react by throwing stones and we immediately get the feeling nothing has changed at all: the Israelis have the upper hand (partially literally as the area of the prisoners is a few meters beneath the walls of earth where the guards walk), superior weapons and infrastructure, while the Palestinians try to counter the attack with what they can find on the ground.

From these panels where the Israeli guards are depicted merely as attackers we move on to several panels in which the interviewees give a rather different idea. We begin with the given fact that the guards rotate every 15 days and that this implies a different treatment towards the prisoners once they approach the end of their term in *Ansar III*: ‘After seven or ten days they see things differently, they’re impressed with our organization. The moment they start to relax and act as humans, we have about three days with them...and then we get another bunch of bastards’ (91). These few days as humans among each other, as the witness says, are used to talk, exchange news and even to pass cigarettes around. But what is most remarkable is this opposition of perspectives. As long as there is no mutual sense of solidarity, an appreciation of the other party as merely being human, a humane and decent treatment is out of the question.

On the last page of the paragraph we get the interviewee's final opinion about these prisons, their guards and why they think the Israelis transfer so many Palestinians down here.

Getting to know the guards isn't so much a way of easing conditions. We want to counteract the policy of recruiting Israelis to be Palestinian-haters. Ansar III wasn't set up to counter the intifada; it's also a policy.... The same faces keep showing up in the prisons, so it's not a deterrence. (92)

The policy consists of putting Palestinians into an environment with insufficient resources, food and sanitation so that it becomes very hard for them to preserve their decency and pride and for the Israeli guards to see them as equal human beings. For the prisoners the explanation above is a way to make sense of their presence in this prison, because they are never explained what their crime is. In the same way, they try to make sense of the aggression they and their families face every day and clearly, the explanation of aggression and hate is the most viable. Unfortunately, this explanation, especially when coming from both parties, leads to a never-ending circle of hate and violence. The last remark by one of the men, named Yusef, is quite an ambiguous one: 'I don't want to be in prison again, but this is our life' (92). This does not only refer to a life where the threat of prison sentence is very real, but also to this continuous confinement to hate and struggle.

4.2.2.2 Ghassan and 'moderate pressure'

While 'Ansar III' mainly conveyed its message via the use of captions, which contain the written testimonies of men who served in this prison, 'Moderate Pressure Part 2' especially relies on style to narrate a certain experience. The whole paragraph exclusively consists of rectangular shaped panels which completely contain the captions and word balloons and which are all separated by a black gutter. This black gutter immediately gives the whole a different outlook: organised and neat but also threatening. Furthermore, Sacco makes use of the panel's sizes and repetition to convey a certain

mood. This is not surprising, because Sacco is now almost completely designated to his own imagination to describe the witness' experience to the reader, whereas in the paragraph about Ansar III Sacco could still rely on prisoners' drawings of the prison to be as truthful as possible (Sacco, Artist Talk). But here this is not even the case, as the prisoner himself did not even know what was happening most of the time. So although the two paragraphs both deal with the experience of detention by Israeli authorities, the paragraphs seem to differ as much as they can coming from the same artist.

Another difference between the two paragraphs is that 'Ansar III' wants to convey a correct overview of a situation based on facts, whereas 'Moderate Pressure' (both part 1 and part 2) especially want to convey a state of mind, here fear. The first part introduces the term "moderate pressure", which was introduced in the 1987 Landau Report, a report that was ordained to put an end to false testimonies in court by Shin Bet officers after confessions were obtained under disproportionate physical and psychological pressure, in other words: torture. However, the report also stated that

the Shin Bet must be allowed some means of "non-violent psychological pressure" and 'moderate...physical pressure" in its interrogations... Just what constituted such permissible pressure was outlined in Part II of the report, which has been kept secret (95).

Sacco adds to this:

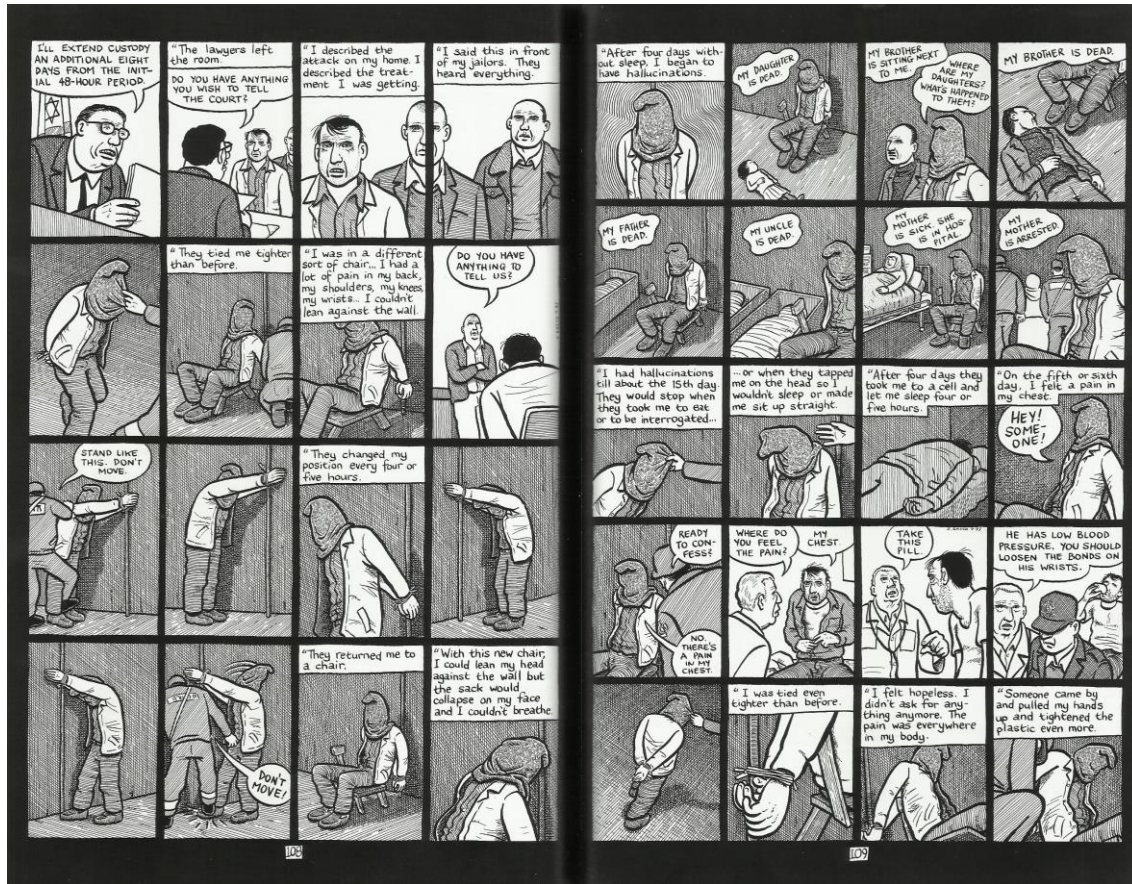
So (...) Israel goes on being "the Middle East's only democracy"... and Palestinians go on being interrogated, though now within secret guidelines, subject to who-knows-what interpretations, and, whatever else you want to say about the "new" methods, now they're legal... (same page).

It is clear Sacco does not believe this investigation and report have changed something on the ground, for the detainees. The ironic tone is one argument for this, but a more important argument are the three panels on the left of this long comment box. Successively we see a man signing a confession

under pressure, his interrogator declaring what he confessed before the judge and then the man sitting in a prison cell. Before this page are the testimonies of different men who have been interrogated (all supposedly after 1987 and the Landau report) and tell about being beaten by Shin Bet officers.

In 'Moderate Pressure Part II' we get another argument against this supposed change in the Shin Bet's methods to gather information. The paragraphs tells the story of a man who has been arrested, detained and interrogated by Shin Bet for 19 days, and this only four weeks before Sacco spoke with him. We meet the man in his home, surrounded by his two daughters, and with Sacco looking at the marks the experience left on Ghassan's body. We then quickly turn to the arbitrariness and feeling of impotence when faced with the Israeli judicial system. Ghassan is woken up at night by soldiers, police men and security men who accuse him of being a member of an illegal organisation – which organisation is never specified. Ghassan is handcuffed and blindfolded and we see the men in frog perspective, accusing him while he does not get the chance to defend himself. This opposition of Ghassan in panic and four unspecified but powerful men is a strong symbol for the unequal power relationships between citizen and authorities.

The six panels on the following page depict the official arrest of Ghassan: he is photographed, taken to a police station where his belongings are confiscated and he undergoes the most primitive medical examination. The next page, which already consists of 9 panels, introduces a constant in the rest of the paragraph: Ghassan with a hooded cap, sitting on a chair with his hands tied behind him to a drain pipe. The point immediately becomes clear as he is not able to relax and already feels pain after an hour, whereas he will undergo this treatment for 19 days. Finally, in the last two panels we see Ghassan being interrogated, or rather being accused again for there is no real questioning or explanation about why he is being accused.



Figur 6 Palestine 108, 109

The routine for the following days continued down the same road. We mainly see panels depicting Ghassan standing and sitting in all kinds of positions, in human rights contexts better known as stress positions. The aim seems to be to force the prisoners in such an uncomfortable position that after several hours the pain is so bad that the prisoner will confess whatever crime he is guilty of, or, unfortunately, not guilty of. In Ghassan's case, he was also forced to listen to all sorts of music, presumably so he would not be able to sleep, as also this is used as a means of putting pressure on prisoners. He was only allowed to sleep on the ninth day, but still for only six hours, and several hours more during the last two or three days of his detention, as a result of which he started to hallucinate. He was also moved to different cells multiple times, and one time he was even moved to a very small cell, the size of a closet, covered in urine. On the other hand it is made very clear that this was not the

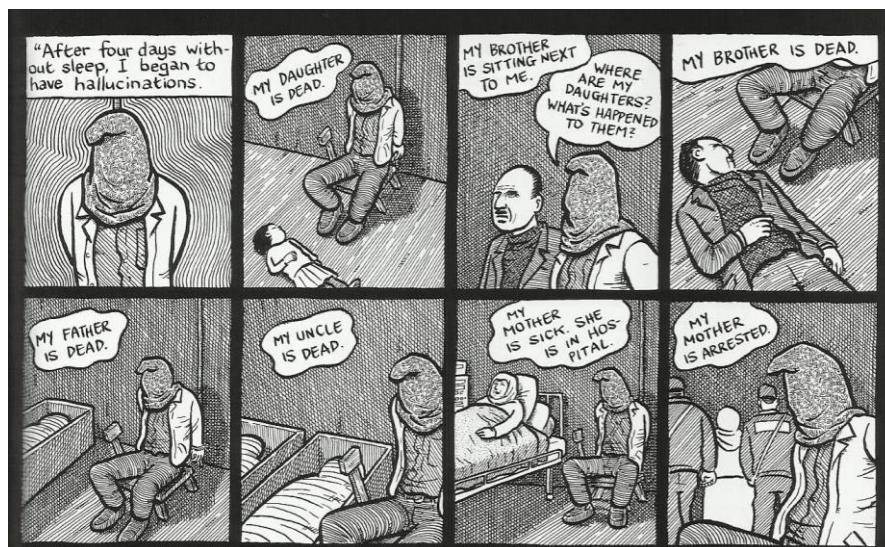
act of a single, frustrated official, but part of a policy, as he appears before 3 different judges, who each sent him back, and one doctor, who only advised to loosen the bonds on his wrists and gave him a pill. Finally, the fourth judge, a woman, decided that he should be released.

It is clear this moderate pressure is a controversial technique, comparable to the enhanced interrogation techniques the US army uses in its war against terrorism. There is no extended direct contact between the prisoner and an official who would torture him (or her, as we have seen in ‘The Tough and the Dead’), nor is the prisoner deprived of food or water (although food comes at irregular times and Ghassan points out the amounts did not suffice). However, from Ghassan’s testimony we can deduce the experience is highly unpleasant at least. When taking into account the psychological impact, the term “torture” comes in mind, although this is a grave accusation.

On the other hand, the emphasis does not lie on the acts of officials or the policy behind them, but on the impact on the lives of Palestinians and how a singular individual experiences this. This paragraph clearly revolves around one single character, namely Ghassan. He is present in almost all the panels and in some cases he is even the only distinguishable form. I already mentioned we see him hooded most of the time, but when his face is uncovered, we clearly see the traces of sleep deprivation and fear. In this case, maybe even more than in other paragraphs, the combination of panels is responsible for its impact. There are no impressive, singular panels like the two page spreads elsewhere which are full of detail, both in the front and background. Yet again, the whole is very impressive indeed, and with it Sacco really succeeds in conveying the intended mood as a result of which the paragraph really stands out in style and atmosphere. As said in the first paragraph, the black gutter adds to this effect, but also the size of the panels immediately attracts the eye because we jump from three and four, to six and nine panels per page in the first pages. Later this amounts to 12, 16 and eventually 20 panels per page, which is highly unusual for Sacco, especially in this organised and

structured lay-out with each panel having the same size. On the last page, the panels are bigger again and one half of the page is occupied by six panels, depicting the final judgement and his following release, whereas the other half only consists of one panel depicting a busy street full of all kinds of people.

This paragraph again points out one of the core concepts of comics, namely what McCloud calls closure. What the reader does with the space between panels is important here, because it is he or she who ‘takes two images and transforms them into a single idea’ (McCloud 66). The single idea here is Ghassan’s personal experience and feelings, which is a very dark, frightening experience as we can deduce from the sphere of the paragraph. ‘Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality’ (67). Indeed, a singular, not very detailed panel of a man in a strange position does not tell a story. It is in the repetition of positions, insecurity and psychological pressure we find the meaning of this paragraph.



Figur 7 Palestine, detail of page 109. Perfect example of how Sacco uses style as a way to create a certain atmosphere.

McCloud makes another distinction here, between more or less realistic images in the panels, because they have consequences for the act of closure (91). To know which process is at work here, McCloud gives as a simple rule of thumb that the reader's awareness of the art in a panel is a good indicator of how much effort he has to put in the act of closure, because the emphasis lies elsewhere.

I think when comics art veers closer to concerns of the picture plane, closure can be more difficult to achieve though for different reasons. Now it's the unifying properties of design that make us more aware of the page as a whole, rather than its individual components, the panels.

And indeed, it is the style that connects these different panels, more than in other panels, where it is the line of thought that runs through a series of panels and makes them a whole. Nevertheless, the line of thought is not to be neglected in this paragraph, as has already been discussed. Sacco uses a different style here, but because of the theme it fits into the chapter perfectly.

As a matter of fact, it is not the first time Sacco experiments with style in this chapter. Between 'Moderate Pressure Part 1' and 'The Thought and the Dead' Sacco squeezes in another small chapter, only one page in length, called 'A Palestinian Joke'. The page actually puts a famous Palestinian joke in comics and plays the Shin Bet against the CIA and the KGB, which does not turn out so great for the Shin Bet of course. Each of the three spies is ordered to go into the forest and return with a rabbit as soon as possible. Whereas the CIA and KGB spies return quickly, the Shin Bet spy does not and when the other go looking for him, they find him beating up a donkey and yelling he should admit he is a rabbit. Although meant as a joke, it is a sad forerunner of what will come in the following paragraph: the detention and questioning of the female activist, Mustafa Akkawi's funeral, who died during interrogation, and Ghassan's story.

While the two paragraphs are very different in outlook, they both stand out as quite different from what we could call Sacco's usual style. In fact, each separate paragraph in this chapter is a little comics world on its own, both in story and style. They all have their particularities with a different storyline, whether the story of one individual or a whole society, a different way of involving the reader and different points of view, whether we hear Sacco's voice or a testimony. On the other hand, the combination of all these paragraph can also be regarded as a 'unified reality' as McCloud would call it. It exposes the 'parallel realities', what happens 'over the wall behind closed doors', behind the surface and trivial everyday things that happen everywhere (Sacco, *Palestine* 102). Hence, it shows a side of life that is as real but much more dim than what we are used to see every day and everywhere: people going to work, couples walking hand in hand, children going to school. It especially shows what happens if particular, singular agencies become too powerful and are beyond control.

4.2.3 Segregation

After detention and the demolition of houses, segregation makes up a third aspect of the impact of war and occupation in the Palestinian Territories. However, it is an aspect that is more open for discussion because it is less a fact than an intention. The demolition of houses and arrests of Palestinians are registered by journalist, activists and others every day. Segregation on the other hand, is more difficult to determine because it does not happen overnight, nor does it consist of one act, even if this act would be repeated. Segregation is imposed by a whole group, on different levels and repeated over time so that it influences everyday life. Another reason why this term is quite controversial is historical occurrence. In the past notorious regimes have used segregation as a way to oppress one group -whether religious, cultural or racial - in favour of another. The Nazi regime, South-African Apartheid, government and racial segregation in the U.S. immediately come to mind, but unfortunately, there are far more examples, even today (eg. Taliban, who advocate segregation towards women, Saudi-Arabia). Nevertheless, there are different levels of segregation, so it does not always

have to take on the amount or gravity as in the previous examples. As such, we can also detect segregation in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. To keep things clear, I will limit myself to the most straightforward occurrences here, which also correspond to the main themes in Sacco's comics.

In Israeli official communication, all instances of segregation come down to the same goal: security reasons. It seems to be an obvious argument and thus it is one that is hard to counteract. On the other hand, as we have seen, also the previously discussed theme comes down to security reasons as houses are said to be demolished because they would hide terrorists and also arrests happen because the people in question would be part of an illegal organisation. However, through Sacco's hand we have seen what the consequences on the individual level are and these are not to be considered lightly. Also in this paragraph I intend to show how Sacco demonstrates the influence of this security policy on the way Palestinians act and exist.

4.2.3.1 Trapped outside: roadblocks

The most obvious occurrence of segregation in the Palestinian Territories is the segregated road system. Both Palestinians and Israelis have their own road system, although all Israelis can use almost all Palestinian roads (except in Gaza), whereas Palestinians' access to some roads is restricted or even forbidden (Barclay and Polypod)³. When discussing the demolition of houses, I already referred to Sacco's drawn map of Gaza, which also pointed out the different roads and checkpoints, and although this is not up to date anymore because Israel has withdrawn from the Gaza Strip, we can easily use it as a basis to compare with the situation in the West Bank.

All over *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza*, instances of roadblocks and checkpoints pop up. Sometimes only as trivial as Sacco's avatar passing a roadblock without problems, on other occasions it is much worse, like a mother who loses her son because his ambulance was stopped for half an hour,

³ See attachment number one.

among others. In fact, this is the same mother I already briefly mentioned before, as she lost two of her sons in a couple of days (*Palestine* 236-240). If not all Palestinians are a victim of the occupation, then this woman certainly is because not only did she lose her sons, their deaths were unnecessary and probably evitable too. They did not get the appropriate medical attention and not because it was unreachable but because Israeli officials and soldiers refused to grant her sons access to this care.

Other examples of roadblocks do not always have consequences this harsh. Mostly they just pop up as an annoying disturbance of plans, at least for Sacco, because most taxi drivers react quite mad and irritated, which is not surprising of course, since their income depends on it. What stands out in these cases is the huge amount of people which gathers behind the roadblock once the road is closed because all cars are full of people and traffic in Palestine is equally busy because it is so densely populated. Hence, it is not only an impediment to taxi drivers' source of income but so many more: all sorts of traders or people who just try to get to their work in time. We can thus assume the taxi driver in this particular scene is not the only one annoyed by this impediment, although here it is his voice we here: "They kill 11 of us, and they've blocked the road too!" (*Footnotes in Gaza* 240). This seems to be a huge overreaction, but in the course of events, it is just another step in a never-ending chain of impediments so this roadblocks then becomes just another step too much.

4.2.3.2 'Through other eyes': segregation in ideas and life

Segregation does not only appear in the Palestinian Territories, it also becomes quite clear when we look at the differences between Israeli and Palestinian lives. Also Sacco spends a great deal of attention to this, although mostly not directly, but we clearly see the difference in wealth and comfort between Israel and the Palestinian Territories as he travels through and stays in one or the other. Next to this it is also the freedom that stands out most of the time when Sacco speaks to non-Palestinians, which may sound very surprising as fear seems to be the main argument for many of

Israel's policies. One of these instances where this becomes clear is in the first half of the ninth chapter, where Sacco takes an interesting step in order to put things in perspective again.

In the paragraph 'Through other eyes' Sacco meets two ladies from Tel Aviv in Jerusalem and ends up walking around the city with them. They seem quite uncomfortable when they are in Arab neighbourhoods but Sacco's avatar tries to calm them down and even convinces one of the two ladies -Paula - to go to the Arab market with him, although this time he does not seem to be able to lift her confidence but takes over her nervousness instead. When he admits he has not been around Israel, the ladies react in surprise and say he should at least see Tel Aviv (which he will do, we come to this right away). From the beginning it was clear Sacco wanted to see the side of the Palestinians because in the West, this is often the side that is neglected. However, Sacco admits that, after spending all this time with Palestinians, Israelis are 'mainly soldiers and settlers' to him (256). It shows how an extended and intense stay in an extreme environment can easily change someone's ideas and opinions. On the other hand, Sacco has only stayed in Palestine for several months, so the result on one who is born and raised here cannot but reflect this extreme environment, or so it seems.

In the next paragraph we learn Sacco has accepted the women's invitation to go to Tel Aviv as it carries the city's name, and in the first panel we see Sacco's avatar strolling along the beach with Naomi and Paula. The second and third panel, respectively, depict the next scene in Tel Aviv, where they are sitting and chatting very relaxedly, and Sacco's avatar's previous day in Nablus, walking the streets but surrounded by patrolling soldiers. The contrast is immense, especially since this paragraph comes at the end of the graphic novel and after all the hardship we have seen at the other side of the Green Line (i.e. the border between Israel and the Occupied Territories since 1948).

In Tel Aviv, Sacco's avatar seems to enjoy himself quite well, he is very relaxed, in a way on familiar ground just like the women: 'Naomi and Paula seem familiar, too...their day-to-day concerns

remind me of the stuff that makes up the lives of people I know in Europe, the States...’ (261). However, Sacco’s avatar’s concerns go beyond his own life and when he starts to ask about politics, recreation makes room for discomfort. He repeatedly tries to counter their remarks with what would probably be the Palestinian point of view, but the women do not seem to follow his line of thought. In fact, Naomi even becomes quite made and falls out of character as she declares that ‘Israelis are tired of apologizing for the occupied territories! There was a war! We won the land in the war! It’s our land now!’, whereas right after their encounter she stated: ‘I would never cross the Green Line into Arab land. It’s not my country over there’ (264 and 254). The opposition could not be bigger but it is not completely clear what motivated this change in opinion.

On the one hand the angry outbreak of emotions could hide a deeper emotion, in this case impotence. Although Israelis seem to be free in their own society, they have not much to say about foreign/security policy directly. So maybe Naomi did mean what she said the first time, but because she as an individual cannot stop her fellow citizens from entering and especially occupying the Palestinian Territories, her only defence when confronted with criticism is the official discourse. Another possibility is that she does lose her cool in this scene and finally declares her uncompromising opinion. In this case her final statement is of great significance, as she says Israelis ‘just want to live [their] lives’ without hearing the same criticism over and over again (264).

It is hard to be sure of the exact meaning of this scene, but at the end of the novel, Sacco inserts a scene of which the content is more straightforward. In this scene we see Sacco’s avatar sitting on a bus, leaving Palestine and heading for Egypt and then Europe. He is sitting next to an American Jewish woman and she talks about the wonderful time she had in Israel, but when Sacco’s avatar confronts her with the other side of the story she simply answers ‘[a]ll I’m saying is I want peace’ (281). This is an undeniable fact for many people, both Israeli and Palestinian, but also quite an

ambiguous one. Sacco thus adequately comments on this quote: ‘Yes yes, we all want peace, whatever that is, but peace can mean different things, too, and isn’t described identically by all who wish to imagine it...’. The question here is whether peace entails a status quo or change, so both parties can be equally satisfied.

4.3 TAKING UP ARMS AGAINST THE OCCUPATION: ARMED RESISTANCE

Until now we have focused on aggression coming from the side of Israel, mainly from official agencies such as the IDF and Shin Bet. This does not mean Sacco is completely oblivious for acts of violence and disobedience coming from Palestinians. Throughout *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza* we encounter several instances of resistance, although Sacco does not discuss them all very elaborately. Next to the numerous stories of ordinary civilians, he also gives the word to militants. These are the people actively opposing the occupation and in many cases even the very existence of the state of Israel. It is important to note that there is also a whole range of people who oppose the occupation through different non-violent and often even non-political means. However, Sacco does only briefly pay attention to these characters, as in the paragraph about women’s rights in Palestine where he interviews several women who fight for women’s rights and see the occupation as an extra obstacle on their path. There are also the numerous women and men who have found jobs with UNRWA, the organisation for Palestinian refugees, although these are often paid jobs and one of the few available to Palestinians in Gaza or the Occupied Territories. Sacco also briefly refers to this when he mentions the difficulty for Palestinians to find jobs (especially those in the Gaza strip) and the subsequent high level of unemployment in the area.

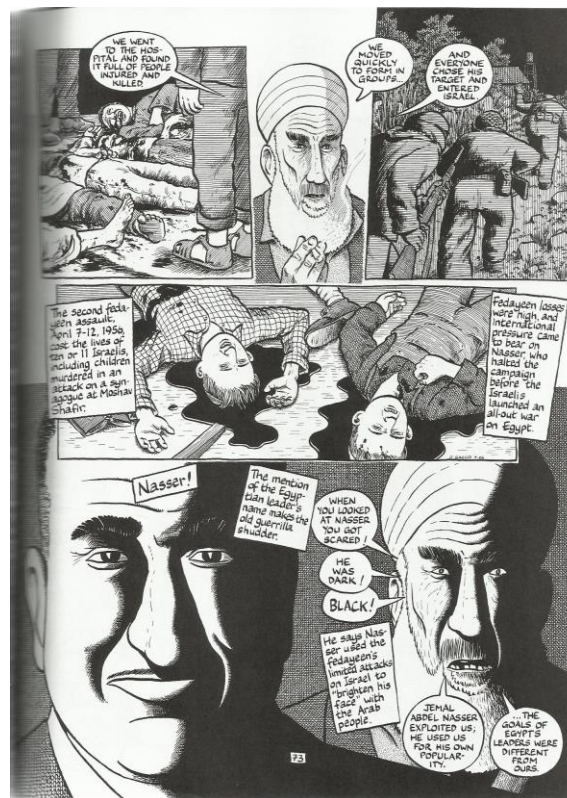
However important the unarmed resistance, Sacco pays far more attention to the armed resistance and this for several reasons. Firstly the Palestinian armed resistance played an important role in the running-up to the Suez Crisis in the form of fedayeen taking part in the Egyptian army.

Secondly, Sacco's interest for the armed resistance was undoubtedly fuelled by his meeting with Khaled, a mysterious Palestinian militant who has been on the run for his Israeli persecutors for several years. It is no coincidence that it are these 2 figures - the fedayee and Khaled, the contemporary rebel - who play a major role in Sacco's narration. The third reason is an even greater guess but it is not impossible Sacco chose to spend extra attention to this sort of armed resistance from the onset of his project. As we have already seen, Sacco wanted to give an alternative vision to the mainstream, Western ideas around the Middle East. However, the armed resistance is a reality and to ignore it would hardly suffice as a reply and argument against the stereotypes established through repetition in different media. The motivations are numerous, as are the appearances of these characters.

Before going to the militants, it is important to note that Sacco also spends considerable attention to this larger struggle, hence to the other warring party, i.e. the Israelis. There is of course the general overview of events which permit Sacco to adequately put these personal testimonies into a context of decades of international conflict(s). I already referred to Abed who talks about the different emotions surrounding the First and Second Intifada. However, when it comes to the high-ranking politicians like Yasser Arafat and Yitzak Rabin who agreed upon the Oslo Accords under the supervision of Bill Clinton, there is a sense of distrust and even disconnection between the people and its leaders. Sacco chose to represent this visually on page 15, where we see the famous photograph of the protagonists of the Oslo Accords reproduced in drawing, but placed high above the heads of ordinary Palestinians' homes; a strong symbol of this disconnection.

Even Jemal Abdel Nasser, the highly popular Egyptian president - because of his defence of pan-Arabism - meets criticism because of his policies through which he did not always acted according to his promises to help the Palestinian people. Furthermore, he never acts as a character, but merely as a background, to enable the reader to put a face on the events. Sacco actually does the same for

numerous other important international individuals: Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Saddam Hussein, Dwight Eisenhower, Guy Mollet and Anthony Eden. They all appear in *Footnotes in Gaza* as having a part in the way historic events occurred as they did during the Suez Crisis. Despite of their undeniable influence on the events they are seldom given a literal voice - in the form of word balloons - nor a great deal of attention. Although this may seem surprising, it is not when we consider the scheme of the comic. It was not meant as a historical overview, a political pamphlet or an epic narration. Sacco's interest lays with the footnotes, the insignificant people who suffer in silence in the margins of history, to put it bluntly. Hence not one page is completely dedicated to high-ranking politicians but all of them include what we would call ordinary people, civilians. Those who undergo the actions and decisions of the elite are present everywhere and Sacco is very conscious of this as if he wanted to take revenge on their behalf and make them the footnotes of a story for once.



Figur 8 Footnotes in Gaza 75, where the fedayeen accuses the incredibly popular Egyptian president Nasser of using the fedayeen for his own political benefits.

However there are some exceptions which include high Israeli representatives. David Ben-Gurion (former Prime Minister) and Moshe Sharett (Prime Minister at the time) do appear more than once, although it is because they appear in the testimonies of Sacco's interviewees. The man who appears most often however, is the Chief of Staff of the military at the time: Moshe Dayan. This again has multiple reasons: first of all, because of his position he is the direct opponent of the fedayeen Sacco interviews extensively (more about this right away). Also, Sacco gets to interview Dayan's right-hand at the time, Mordechai Bar-On. Although he gives a quite nuanced account of the events (as opposed to the aggressive speeches of Dayan and other Israeli representatives Sacco writes down), it is still surprising he gives a voice to 'the other side'. Sacco himself has given an interesting explanation for this in interviews and talks, namely because it is interesting for seeing the lie and the reality and especially the gap between these 2 (Sacco, Artist Talk). It has already become clear Sacco has an extremely well-documented and informed background. This together with the great amount of personal stories of eyewitnesses (after critical investigation of course) puts him in the ideal position to be able to distinguish lie and reality, even before members of the establishment.

4.3.1.1 The Modern Militant: Khaled

Khaled is one of the characters that reappear multiple times in *Footnotes in Gaza*, although he is not one of Sacco's avatar's interviewees in the light of his search for stories about the 1956-war. He meets him by chance at the start of his quest in Gaza, as he also stays with Abed. In the comics, it becomes immediately clear he is a mysterious man, other than the others, less talkative, but it is clear right away what he represents because he is depicted from the onset with a gun in his hands. However, it is also immediately clear Sacco does not want to present us the image of a terrorist, but merely as a Palestinian who has taken up arms against the Israelis. About the 2 fighting parties Sacco says: 'They are a small part of a larger struggle between their two peoples over the same land, linked by a desire or a necessity to kill each other in the here and now' (10). After which we get a strip of 3 panels

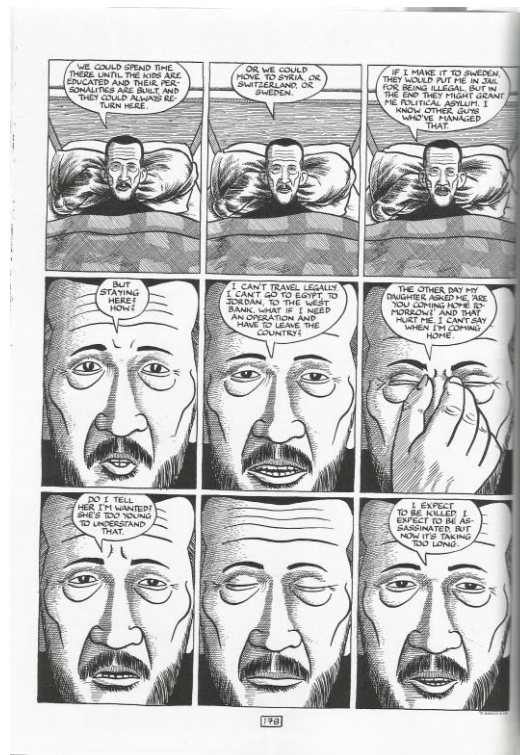
depicting a man cleaning a gun. After this Sacco leaves the bigger picture of the larger struggle and introduces the man with the gun as part of the group to which he also belongs, standing on Abed's roof. They are all looking up to the sky, where, far above their heads, Apaches and drones are circling above Khan Younis, taking part of the larger struggle to which Sacco refers, making history.

Khaled plays an important role in *Footnotes in Gaza*, because we get to know him, as a character, in a relaxed environment, far away from the battlefield (this in opposition to the Fedayee Sacco interviews). However, 'relaxed' does not really seem appropriate here because Khaled is presented to us a 'mutarad', wanted by the Israeli, hence in constant fear to be arrested or killed (11). We get to meet a character that is deprived of sleep, security, his family and friends and in the long run from a sense of reality and morality ('killing is not a huge thing for me', when his salary threatens to be stopped (62)). Sacco dedicates a whole paragraph to this militant, somewhere halfway *Footnotes in Gaza*, called 'Taking too long' (175-178). It deals with the consequences of being a 'mutarad' for decades. The result is a great deal of authority and even a celebrity status.

Sontag also refers to this image groups of people create of individuals. She declares that only in certain extreme situations people will ascribe this sort of saviour-like status to individuals (*Regarding the Pain of Others*). She starts from the idea that only if people consider violence to be unjustifiable under all circumstances, they will see representations of suffering (like photographs and drawings like Sacco's) as an argument against war. In the opposed situation however, 'those who in a given situation see no alternative to armed struggle, violence can exalt someone subjected to it into a martyr or a hero' (Sontag 11).

It is clear that this is the case for Khaled, who has moral authority over men and gets welcomed with a big smile by women (especially the older women who have once hidden him from the Israelis). On the other hand, Khaled himself seems to enjoy his status rather passively, because after all this

years he wants peace more than anything. He favours a two-state solution ('I hate the Jews, but I could live with them'), but sees the unwillingness in both Israelis and Palestinians to let go of aggression. After years of living in the present, Khaled wants to be able to think about his future, together with his wife and children. The last page shows an intensely troubled Khaled, represented in 9 panels of the same size, of which the first 3 show Khaled lying in bed and the next 6 show a close-up portrait of the man. Sacco's realism almost reaches undiscovered heights on this page, as only the drawings are enough to convey the pain in this nonetheless very violent man. The deep wrinkles on his forehead, skinny cheekbones and puffy eyes are witnesses of an inner turmoil and maybe even a difficult life in general. He wonders whether it's best to run or to stay, whether he should tell his little daughter the truth she may not understand and this uncertainty reflects in his expressions. Apart from this, it also returns in the last utterance on the page: 'I expect to be killed, I expect to be assassinated, but now it's taking too long' (178).



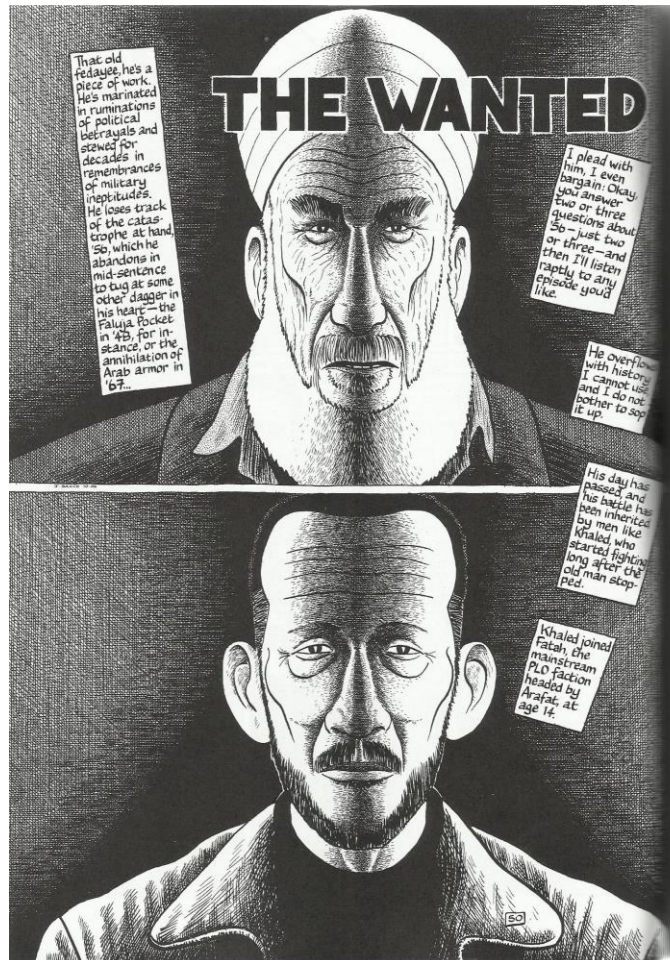
Figuur 9 Footnotes in Gaza 175, the last page of the paragraph dedicated to the character Khaled.

4.3.1.2 *The Fedayeen*

The other key-representative of Palestinian militancy in *Footnotes in Gaza* is the fedayeen (who is not given a name because he prefers to remain anonymous). He is part of the older generation of rebels and has taken part in numerous infamous international wars: the '48 war, Suez Crisis, '67 war. Sacco dedicates two paragraphs to the personal experiences of this man, called 'The Fedayeen' and 'The Fedayeen Pt. 2'. Moreover, these paragraphs are separated by 2 other paragraphs, called 'The Wanted' and 'Resistance and the Sulta'⁴ respectively, so we can conclude Sacco devotes a significant part to these men and their life.

The inheritance of violence is again visually represented at the beginning of the paragraph, titled 'The Wanted' (50). In 2 panels that are horizontally separated from each other, we get the portraits of the 2 men, from their shoulders, in frontal view as if it were a real search warrant. The inheritance is not only made clear visually through the similar gesture, but also by similar traits in their faces as we see the distinctive characteristics in Khaled I mentioned above returning in the fedayeen: the wrinkled forehead, small narrowed eyes, high skinny cheekbones. We also recognise the same troubled look in his eyes. Sacco introduces him as follows: 'That old fedayee, he's a piece of work. He's marinated in ruminations of political betrayals and stewed for decades in remembrances of military ineptitudes'. And indeed, from the previous paragraph ('The Fedayeen') it has become clear the man has extensively faced frustration and disappointment in his life as a soldier and officer, and this has had its consequences later in life.

⁴ The Sulta is another name for the Palestinian Authority and is referred to in this context with contempt because they ordered Palestinians to round up other –religious extremist- militants with whom they had often fought side by side. The Sulta is also the institution which still pays their salaries, although Khaled and others have been on the run for years.



Figur 10 Footnotes in Gaza 50

First, however, we get to know him as a solemn and because of his height and figure very impressive man, in spite of his advanced age. He is also a man with a strong will, as he talks imperturbable about the most gruesome scenes. To Sacco's frustration, it is also impossible to lead the conversation in the favoured direction, so they get to hear stories about all the wars the man has lived through. Sacco's avatar nonetheless manages to get some stories from the crucial period out of the man. What we get then is a sequence of loosely connected scenes depicting soldiers fighting, parading and giving or taking orders, so that the scenes look more like anecdotes than a logically constructed story - presumably a similar logic as the real life conversation Sacco had with the fedayeen.

The structure of the paragraph is still not its most noticeable aspect. What immediately catches the eye is the omnipresence of the fedayeen's image in several panels. Here Sacco has not chosen to adjoin a little panel at the side of panels depicting scenes from the past with the portrait of the interviewee and the name, but he has drawn the fedayeen's portrait on top of these scenes, not separated but as if these scenes were happening in the background at this very moment and the man was giving comments on the events, like a sports journalist. These in-scene portraits vary in size and also alternate with the scenes of the interview with Sacco and Abed, but with the fedayeen as the centre of attention. These formal adaptations make it very clear Sacco sees the man as a star witness, despite the difficulties to obtain a coherent testimony on the '56 period. Another aspect that underlines the importance of the fedayeen paragraphs is the opposition Sacco creates with the testimony of Bar-On, the right-hand of Moshe Dayan at the time. In this way Sacco not only shows the 2 sides of the same story, but also gives us a glimpse of how decisions are made at a higher level. These pieces indeed put the personal stories in a bigger perspective - not only the fedayeen's personal perspective, but also that of the other Palestinians who do their best to remember the events surrounding the '56 war. We thus get a link between the civilians and the military, both Israeli and Palestinian/Egyptian.

An important note Sacco puts to the first part is a semi-conclusion on how a lifetime as a soldier influences a person's personal mental health. The last strip of the paragraph consists of 3 panels, which make up a sequence of panels that zoom in on the man's eyes. It represents his reaction to other so called soldiers who were actually no more than criminals. In the last panel we get a frightening look of the man who declares he 'absorbed their madness', and indeed his eyes reflect the hollow look of a man affected by a difficult past.

As said before, there is a continuity between different paragraphs in this section of the book and also between 'The Fedayeen' and 'The Wanted' Sacco has built a formal bridge in that the latter

part's first panel is the portrait of the fedayeen, as has been discussed above. After another paragraph in which Khaled and the contemporary resistance play the lead role, we come to 'The Fedayeen, pt. 2' which starts with a part of the enlarged portrait of the man at the beginning of 'The Wanted'. Moreover, Sacco has also secured the visual continuity with the 'The Fedayeen' by inserting the second strip, which is made up of 3 panels again. Although this time Sacco does not zoom in on a particular facial expression but we merely get the man's mouth, beard and nose, the similarity between the parts is quite obvious. Also, Sacco choice for drawing's the man's mouth is no coincidence as Sacco's comments now focus on his testimonies and most notably on the difficulties he has with it. With great difficulty Sacco's avatar manages to steer him back to the events preceding the Suez Crisis (cf. the intrusions of the fedayeen Israel used as a reason to Egypt and occupy the Gaza Strip in '56).

In what follows, two things attract the attention. First of all, the cruelty of the stories is particularly striking as the scenes are far bloodier than in the first part and because the crimes themselves are more massive and cruel. One panel explicitly depicts the fedayeen cutting off the ear of Israeli workers, but we also see dead children and massive bombings (by Israelis). The second aspect that stands out is the less visible presence of the fedayeen in the panels. As I already said, he is still the centre of attention in the first panels. In fact, he occupies a place in every one of 6 panels of the first page. On the second page this presence is already decreasing and in the third page he only just appears once. We can assume these 2 characteristics are related to each other in that Sacco does not wish to explicitly link the fedayeen to these cruelties. Maybe because he wants to give the man room for change after all these years, but perhaps even more because this part especially delivers the link between the individual militant and the great military tactics and movements. From page 4 onwards also other interviewees are consulted as to widen the scope of the plot. One of these interviewees is Mordechai Bar-On again, who represents the opponent as he worked under Moshe Dayan, who is also a character in this paragraph and is represented together with Ben-Gurion as Prime Minister again. And to make

the picture complete, also Nasser is represented. Surprisingly, he is not evaluated very positively here by the fedayeen, because he would have used the fedayeen's attacks 'for his own popularity' (73, see figure 8). Sacco translates this formally by drawing the portrait of Nasser with one half of his face standing in the shadow and the fedayeen in the background, as if he were standing behind him, still threatening him. Sacco acknowledges the pain they both caused for their own and the other side's people by drawing this sorrow and distress in the first place, on this same page. Literally simultaneously, because on the same page but with alternating panels, Sacco draws the two leaders aggressively addressing a crowd or giving orders (the context is not quite clear, opposed to their facial expressions). He also added a remarkable detail: standing behind each of them is a military officer who is visibly surprised and even scared by what they are supposedly saying. From these panels it becomes clear Sacco does not choose sides but acknowledges the wrongs caused by both sides. No rhetoric about the great socialist and pan-Arabist leader Jemal Abdel Nasser becomes apparent here, but instead a realist perspective, because also his policies caused the people of Gaza great grief. This acceptance of both parties' fault and consequences of policies on civilians was already apparent from the previous page. Sacco organizes the heads of these 2 pages symmetrically as we see two times three plains facing each other, as if they were opposed. It represents the alternating tactics of the Israeli military in 1955, but it might as well represent the aggression by both parties, because under these two head panels we get panels depicting soldiers being attacked and civilians on the run.



Figur 11 Footnotes in Gaza 72

The two politicians aggressively speaking are not Nasser and Ben-Gurion but Nasser and Moshe Dayan, which might seem surprising because he is not the president or prime minister but the military Chief of Staff. However, Dayan's role in the turn of events cannot be underestimated. Also Isacoff acknowledges the influence he had on Israeli foreign policy and even on Ben-Gurion. Hence it is not a surprise Sacco dedicates another paragraph to these directors of history, in which Dayan plays the leading role. After 'The Fedayeen Pt. 2' we get 'Collusion', narrating the real start of the

Suez-Crisis on the international level. The paragraph's first panel is a highly detailed front view portrait of Dayan, in the same way as the portrait of the fedayeen at the start of the previous paragraph, and as the portraits of the fedayeen and Khaled at the start of 'The Wanted'. Continuity all over again, but this time via the portrait of an Israeli officer, thus seen through his eyes. Mordechai Bar-On plays an important role again and he testifies about an Israeli family this time and how their death fuelled Dayan's engagement to do something. This is where we also get the involvement of Britain and France and after the invasion took off, the interference of the United States. A very general and swift summary of the events, but the ideal transition to the actual core of this graphic novel: the implications of the Suez Crisis for the life of civilians in the Palestinian towns and refugee camps of Rafah and Khan Younis.

5 CONCLUSION

Sacco states he left his job as a journalist because he wanted to write more about the context, about root causes and this was not possible as a regular journalist. When reading *Palestine* and *Footnotes in Gaza* we immediately notice this immense difference with regular journalism. With these comics we see him delivering on his promises and digging deeper than he could, writing for a regular newspaper or magazine, which demands fresh news at regular intervals. Instead he uses his abilities as a journalist and as a cartoonist and combines best of both worlds, so the journalist in Sacco is still very visible. We mainly discover him in the thoroughly investigated background stories Sacco adds to the personal testimonies of Palestinians (and on few occasions also Israelis). He gathers official sources of all sorts: U.N. reports from public sources, but also in the U.N. archive in New York and official Israeli sources from different departments. But next to this Sacco also interviewed several representatives from the Israeli military. However, the most important source of information were the testimonies of Palestinian civilians. Sacco combines these sources of information fluently and as such we get an extraordinary image of Palestinian life and memory.

However, by putting his own character so much in the forefront Sacco immediately indicates that facts not only passed the interviewee's screen of memory but also his own. Also in the foreword to *Footnotes in Gaza* he explicitly indicates this impediment of some sort, although is an inevitable stepping stone. As I have discussed, Sacco's avatar symbolises several aspects at the same time, of which the journalist, the cartoonist and the mere character are the most important, thus reflecting the actual person Joe Sacco to a large extent.

Also comics prove to be a valuable asset to his novels as they have a lot of aspects to experiment with, probably even more than novels. Sacco plays with different styles too, according to which message or feeling he wants to convey. Panel size and shape is probably the most notable aspect he

experiments with. We have seen different examples of instances in which a bigger or smaller panel suited the occasion better, for example a two-page panel when he wanted to make a big impression, or multiple and smaller panels in case of fear or even claustrophobia.

Apart from all this, I still do not believe these previous aspects are Sacco's most important merits. Although his well-documented background as a journalist, his ability to play with style and language and the advantages of having his own character all contribute to the worth of his comics, his most important accomplishment is how he manages to transfer memories from the witness to the reader. In this way he succeeds in translating the impact of war and occupation from one culture to another, if we can apply Whitlock here who states that also *Maus* and *Perspolis* are not meant for a local audience but a Western one. However I would like to praise this effort once more, because the subject is not something we are very familiar with. In times and places where large parts of the population have never experienced a war, it is important that other means are addressed in order keep this kind of memory alive, not only to honour the victims and witnesses, but also to understand their consequences today.

6 WORKS CITED

Al Nakba. Dir. Rawan Damen. Al Jazeera. 2013. aljazeera.com.

Artist Talk. Perf. Joe Sacco. Walter Art Center, Minneapolis. 13 November 2007. Youtube.

Barclay, Ahmad and Polypod. "Visualizing Palestine: Inforgraphic." May 2012. Visualizing Palestine. Document. 15 July 2013.

Bracke, Sarah. "From 'saving women' to 'saving gays': Rescue narratives and their dis/continuities." *European Journal of Women's Studies* May 2012: 237-252.

Catherine, Lucas. *Palestina. De laatste kolonie?* Berchem: EPO vzw, 2002.

Drawn & Quarterly. drawnandquarterly.com. 2010. 19 april 2013.

Haritaworn, Jin, Tamsila Tauqir and Esra Erdem. "Gay Imperialism: Gender and Sexuality Discourse in the 'War on Terror'." Kuntsman, Adi and Esperanza Miyake. *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Raciality*. New York: Raw Nerve Books, 2008. 71-95.

Hirsch, Marianne. "Collateral Damage." *PMLA* October 2004: 1209-1215.

Isacoff, Jonathan B. "Writing the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Historical Bias and the Use of History in Political Science." *Perspectives on Politics* (2005): 71-88.

Massad, Joseph. "The Persistence of the Palestinian Question." *Cultural Critique* (2005): 1-23.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics, The Invisible Art*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.

Polk, W. R. (1991). Palestine: The Promised Land. In W. R. Polk, *The United States and the Arab world* (pp. 161-182). Harvard University Press.

Sacco, Joe. *Footnotes in Gaza*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009. Document.

Sacco, Joe. *Palestine*. Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2001.

Schachter, Jonathan. "The End of the Second Intifada?" *Strategic Assessment* October 2010: 63-70.

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Book.

The State of Israel. knesset.gov.il. 2008. Document. 6 June 2013.

Whitlock, Gillian. "Autographics: The Seeing "I" of the Comics." *Moderns Fiction Studies* Winter 2006: 966-979.

