


HEB**Joe Sacco's *Palestine*****CASS****An Exploration of The Author's Roles In The Graphic Novel***Shraddha Kochar, Bangalore***Address for Correspondence: serviceheb@gmail.com****ABSTRACT:**

The paper will analyse the various roles of the author in the graphic novel *Palestine* (2003) by Joe Sacco where he depicted the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict. The research aims to analyse the author's first-hand narrative of the lives of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza. The paper's primary focus is to study his roles as a creator, journalist, intellectual, and observer which is further facilitated by his physical presence as a character in the text. This would also enable the exploration of Sacco's personal biases, the various ideologies of the people he encounters in the narrative, and the dominant discourse of the West.

Additionally, the paper delves into the multimodal nature of the graphic novel, interpreting the author's experiences through various mediums like images and text in terms of illustrations, words, and even page layouts. It also explores the coexistence of post-colonialism and colonialism in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. The research thereby elucidates the sociopolitical setting of Sacco's narrative and his role within it.

The study employs Foucauldian discourse, Gramsci's notion of the intellectual, and cultural hegemony in addition to Edward Said's theory of the Western gaze as implied in his book *Orientalism* (1978). Thus, the theoretical framework highlights not only the various functions of the author in the narrative but also the dominant power dynamics of the region.

Keywords: Israel, Palestine, discourse, power, hegemony, intellectual, ideology, graphic novel

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The majority Muslim territory known as Palestine, was, until 1948, the geographic territory situated between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. The land was ruled by various civilizations that included the Assyrians, the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and even the Romans. The Ottoman empire lay claim to Palestine from 1517 to 1917 after which the British took control in the wake of World War I and called it the British Mandate for Palestine. As the Zionist movement gathered momentum in Europe, Palestine, that for centuries had been laid claim to by the faiths of Judaism and Islam, entered the realm of political contention.

The Zionists merged nationality and religion into a need to “return to Zion” (Beauchamp), a return to the homeland, Israel. The holocaust was a decisive event in the formation of Israel as more Jews began to migrate to the British Mandate for Palestine and demand their own nation. This led to sectarian violence between the Jews and the Arabs resulting in the formation of Israel and Palestine under the UN proposal of 1947. This was to assure that the Jews had a state, their homeland, and the Palestinians gained independence from their colonial power. Jerusalem was demarcated as an international site holy to both Muslims and Jews. However, the Middle Eastern powers saw such a move as reminiscent of European colonialism, this sense of outrage led many Arab states to declare war on Israel to form a unified Arab Palestine. It is interesting to note how the end of colonial occupation offered a beleaguered population a homeland and sense of belonging while leaving another yoked to the consequences of colonial power.

Israel emerged the victor and laid claim to territory beyond the UN mandate. The six-day war of 1967 saw a similar outcome with Israel seizing the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank from Jordan and Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. The Camp David Accords 1978 marked the end of the conflict between Israel and the wider Middle Eastern powers as Sinai was returned to Egypt. It was with the continuing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza that the conflict turned into a struggle primarily between Israel and Palestine. The Palestinian Liberation Organization founded in 1964 fought for the reinstatement of the Palestine that existed before the creation of Israel. It waged guerilla warfare against the Israeli authorities all the while Israel was increasing the number of settlers in the occupied regions under the pretext of religion, outright territorial expansion and to avail of the subsidies the Israeli state offered. Thus, the expansion of the Israeli homeland displaced the Palestinians from their own. The rising tensions led to the first intifada which is Arabic for an uprising which began in 1987 and lasted six years claiming lives on both sides. During this time, a group of Palestinians living in Gaza, who found the PLO’s stance too mild and ineffective, formed the fundamentalist group Hamas. This brings one to the time of Joe Sacco’s graphic novel *Palestine* (2003).

In order to decipher the various roles that Sacco plays in the narrative the Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony would be of keen importance. Gramsci, in *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935* (2007), conceived of the "ethical state" (235) as one that formed the "'image' of a state without a state...capable of accepting the law spontaneously, freely, and not through coercion, as imposed by another class, as something external to consciousness" (235). In this manner Gramsci's concept of hegemony surfaces as the non-coercive form of control that has its roots in ideology, culture and arguably morality and is exercised by the dominant class over the subordinate (de Orellana). This concept would be integral when delving into the Israel-Palestine debacle which has seen colonialism, nationalism, western hegemony, and religious claims cross paths in one of the most violent and factious conflicts of modern times.

The conflict, as is evidenced by its history, sits on the geographic shoulders of the Middle East which is often labelled as part of the Orient in Western discourse. Edward Said, in his work *Orientalism* (1978), looked upon the West as the erstwhile colonial powers, namely the British and the French who dominated the Orient till World War II and then the Americans whose interest and influence has been foremost after the Second World War (Said 4). Said's concept of the Orient, until the 19th century, included the territories of India, China, and the Biblical lands (4). Said however focused on the territories one would recognise as the modern, Arab speaking countries. According to Said "such locales, regions, geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made" (5) and rely on each other for form and meaning. Said claimed that in modern times "there is a source of information (the Oriental) and a source of knowledge (the Orientalist)...The relationship between the two is radically a matter of power" (308). Thus, the Orientalist surfaces as a scholarly individual who is influenced by and a propagator of the Western discourse about the Orient. The Oriental is that passive individual hailing from the Orient who is "written about" (308) by the Orientalist. This offers one a basic understanding of the terminology that the paper would employ in the course of the analyses.

Sacco visited the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza during the first intifada and translated his experiences and encounters into the graphic novel *Palestine*. The two months that he spent between late 1991 and early 1992 saw him visit a number of refugee camps and cities. Thus Sacco interacted with people and situations in a way that allowed him to play various roles one of them being that of the creator of the text itself. The Guardian newspaper describes Sacco as "a Maltese-American comic book artist and journalist whose work is a compelling combination of eyewitness reportage and graphic art storytelling techniques" ("Joe Sacco | Books") which establishes him as a creator of graphic art and narratives.

The graphic novel as a genre uses a juxtaposition of images, and sometimes text, in a sequential form to create meaning ("Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy Series"). Will Eisner in his work *Theory of*

Comics and Sequential Art (2000) said that “comics communicate in ‘language’ that relies on a visual experience common to both creator and audience” (7). According to Eisner the structure of the comic book or even a graphic novel “presents a montage of both word and image and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art...and the regimens of literature...become superimposed on each other” (8). Hence, there is a sense of aesthetic and literary skills merging as one studies the graphic novel.

The author as the creator of the graphic novel has chosen to portray himself as the key character in the narrative. One of the most striking features about his characterization is the addition of thick glasses with circular frames. Though he is arguably omnipresent in the text and his expressions are quite exaggerated, the lenses of his spectacles are opaque barring the reader from seeing his eyes. This quasi-blindness could symbolize the precedence of the eyes of the reader over those of the author but at the same time it could also depict how the author is not free of influences like that of the dominant western discourse, he may not be an untainted, seamless conveyor of knowledge to the reader.

There are certain tropes that Sacco uses as a creator, key among them is the way he designs the first page of every chapter. The layout of the first page of the first chapter depicts Sacco with his back to the reader looking down over an embankment at what could be assumed to be the city of Cairo. The whole page is a single panel with no text except for the chapter number, this is the typical structure of all the chapter title pages. The act of the author being at a height could symbolize his status as a foreigner, an outsider or even the Occidental superiority that Edward Said associated with the Orientalist. Said felt that for the Oriental “passivity is the presumed role” (308) they are an object of study with no independent agency. The wall dividing Sacco from the rest of the activity is low enough for him to look over which created a barrier that one could identify as the distance between the East and the West or even that of the author and his subject.

The titular page of the third chapter brings a different form of distance to the fore. Here Sacco is one amongst a throng of people at a bustling market yet he seems alone. His character is foregrounded while the rest of the scene is etched in a lighter hue. This brings out the character’s isolation, a sense of being different, detached from the theme and action on the page. The look on his face could be interpreted as equally pensive and anxious, perhaps the weight of his task, dealing with such masses of humanity, delivering their stories to a wider public and interpreting the conflict as he saw them. It is what set him apart from the crowd. This sense of foregrounding the author’s character on the titular pages of the chapter continues up to the ninth chapter, each page shows the author distinct and almost more real than the rest of the figures of the page which may underscore the fact that one is receiving the narrative through his perspective, coloured by his emotions and perhaps even his ideology. It is through him as a creator that the rest of the characters are realized. However, the chapter title page of

the ninth chapter depicts Sacco and two women in a bold ink looking over a city. This seems to mirror the first chapter with the addition of two more figures, perhaps an indication of a shared awareness of the West and a certain equality of cultural experience.

Another striking characteristic is the various textual and pictorial styles chosen by Sacco to depict different scenes and emotions. At the very outset of the first chapter the word “CAIRO” (Sacco 1) is written in bold graphic letters, all in capitals such that the “text reads as an image” (Eisner 10). The page is crammed full of figures in various stages of suspended action. The text boxes that hold the narration are disjointed and snake around the page in a craggy S shape. Sacco declares, “I’m spinning” (Sacco 1) in one of the boxes as the readers’ eyes turn and swerve to keep up with the sequence of his narrative. Thus, one gets an understanding of exactly what the creator, as a character, experiences. Hence, the reader becomes one with the narrative as points of view and perceptions merge allowing the reader to physically enter the panel.

In the second chapter, there is a distinct break with the graphic style followed thus far, the structure moves to an overtly journalistic style with columns of text taking the place of panels. The images provided lack speech bubbles and add to the experience of reading a report in a newspaper. Thus, the structure of the graphic novel seems to support and facilitate the various roles of the author like that of the journalist.

The narrative in the text is not linear, as a creator Sacco has not chosen any specific textual or visual trope to signify a change in timelines however there is either a distinct change in panel size and the text boxes change in shape or there is a distinct change in the narrative voice as another character takes over. The gutter changes in colour and width as does the placement of the panels. This allows for a more fluid narration which offers the reader an insight into various historical, personal, and factual accounts.

There are certain instances in Sacco’s narrative where there is no text at all, the double page layout succeeding the page titled “REFUGEELAND” (145) in chapter six, has no speech bubbles or text boxes. The camera angle offers a bird’s eye view of Sacco’s journey through a water-logged thoroughfare. There is no sequence of panels to offer coherence or direction. The single image spread over two pages has cars, men and animals caught in the chaos of everyday life giving the reader a wordless glimpse into life in the occupied territories. The reader seems to join Sacco as an observer as oblivious subjects trudge through garbage and sludge in an attempt to lead mundane lives. In this manner, the reader is encouraged to supply the narrative which elevates his level of involvement.

Thus, as a creator, Sacco seems to build the basis of analysis of his various other roles as an intellectual hailing from the West, a journalist studying a conflict, and even an observer assailed by a maelstrom of people and their experiences in the occupied territories.

Joe Sacco is a journalist by profession and in an interview with Al Jazeera said that he “had a difficult time finding a job in journalism...One that remotely interested me...One that addressed the need to do something inspiring”(Al Jazeera). In the course of the interview, he mentioned that his “impetus for going (to the occupied territories) was that I felt the American media had really misportrayed the situation (between Israel and the Palestinians) and I was really shocked by that” (Al Jazeera).

This brings into question the nature of the dominant Western discourse. Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse, in his work *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (1980), spelled out a system of knowledge creation where, “‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth” (133). This sense of discourse is present in terms of how the West views the conflict. The job of Sacco as a journalist seems to be to record and present the facts as he observes them.

A form of meta-journalism arrives in terms of the photographs that Sacco is constantly taking through the novel. Sacco, in a section titled “PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WOUNDS” (29), is in Nablus and comes across victims of the first intifada who had various injuries and scars all over their bodies, the very act of him seeing them meant that they were pictorially depicted in the narrative. However, Sacco is asked, “you want to see more?” (30) and then whisked away to a nearby hospital. It is here that one gets a glimpse of the process of photojournalism from the technical and social standpoint. There are hardly any speech balloons only text boxes which indicates a sense of indirect communication—“Leg wound!” (31), “Cast!”(31), “See!” (31) each declaration has its own text box emphasizing the exhibition of the suffering on display. One patient made the victory sign and smiled for the camera. “This guy’s already awake!... And chipper!” (31). It is unclear whether his expression was an automatic response for the camera or an act of resilience and pride. Such are the questions that arise as the reader is made privy to the process of such journalism. Sacco remarks “I am prowling around...Looking for angles” (32). When Sacco is photographing a girl who had been shot at in the schoolyard “She laughs at the flash” (33). This juxtaposes the nature of conflict journalism with the innocence of childhood in a way that invokes a sense of pathos within the reader.

The way Sacco is manhandled from bed to bed is telling of the desperation of the Palestinians to get their stories heard and seen. The reactions he receives from most patients are symbolic of how

commonplace such injuries are. The narrative is extremely self-aware as Sacco literally references the people and their location in the novel while he takes pictures—“Okay the 11-year-old from the last page, definitely a sweetie...my heart’s still melted”(34). He intersperses such comments with factual data “But there are fewer clashes these days” (34). Therefore, it appears as if the reader has entered the thought process of the journalist getting an insight into how facts and experiences make their way into his reporting.

In terms of Sacco’s journalistic style, in one instance in the narrative, he uses structured columns to form a quasi-newspaper format as he enters the city of Balata. He constantly converses with the reader in an extremely informal tone, “Do we need to talk about 1948?” (41) he asks as he dives into an inquisition of the ideological roots of modern Israel. Interestingly he works against the accepted Western discourse claiming that “its hardly a secret how the Zionists used rumours, threats, and massacres to expel the Arabs and create new demographics that guaranteed the Jewish nature of Israel” (42). The fact that he represents such information as established fact implicitly challenges the “‘regime’ of truth” (Foucault 133) that created the Israeli state. Sacco succinctly analyses the force behind the accepted discourse that facilitated the post-colonial cleaving apart of Palestine by bringing forth the ideas of the key figures involved. “But getting rid of the Palestinians has been kicking around since Theodor Herzl formulated modern Zionism in the late 1800s” (Sacco 42). He goes on to quote the erstwhile prime minister of Israel Golda Meir “It was not as though there was a Palestinian people considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.” (42) However, Sacco provides an immediate counter—“but they did exist and they do” (42). The reader, in this manner, is never overtly pushed to either side of the conflict but offered a narrative that encompasses and represents both.

Sacco continues the narration in the same parallel columns and offers accounts of Israeli policy, “Israel calls the economic shots and makes rules to suit itself, as when defense minister Rabin said in 1985 ‘No permits will be given for expanding agriculture or industry (in the Territories) which may compete with the state of Israel’” (44). Sacco peppers this with the testimonies of various Palestinians living in the occupied territories “Mahmoud says he hasn’t worked for two years...Firas says soldiers shot him two years ago and his leg’s still not right” (44). The shifts in styles create another case of meta-journalism where a non-fiction graphic novel creates a parallel stream of reportage that not only discusses the facts and outlines testimonies but also explores the very nature of conflict journalism. It explores the very nature of discourse and how it interacts with the factual information it seeks to suppress. What does not seem to change is the conversational tone and colloquial western diction. Thus, the level of the reader’s engagement remains consistent.

One is also offered an insight into the interactions of two journalists as they work to cover a story. Sacco and Saburo, a Japanese journalist, go to a refugee camp in Balata to talk to Saburo's friend. "Foreigners? Journalists? Big deal! We're not the first and won't be the last to drop by looking under their skirts for stories"(42). This candid admission reveals a certain sense of saturation that such refugee camps have experienced in terms of attention from the foreign media. The working of the mind of a reporter comes to the fore as Sacco interacts with a teenage refugee at the camp "his English is piss-poor" (42) he admits. This is evidence of the fact that there aren't any pity induced biases in Sacco's mind.

When in Nablus Sacco specifically declares, in a text box placed slightly askew in the top left corner of the page, "I repeat: Today we're not looking for trouble...But here it comes anyway" (53). Keeping in mind the intifada afoot, their surroundings and their line of work it is ironic that such a thought should cross Sacco's mind. The two journalists find themselves in the middle of a demonstration—"Saburo and I, we're professionals, we nod to each other and click into journalistic mode" (54). Once again, the process behind and the result of the material that the reader views is showcased. Sacco captures the tumult, fury, and violence of the uprising in both his graphic narrative and the lens of his camera, what surfaces is a sense of almost choreographed chaos. The disjointed text boxes read: "like everyone's done this before" (56), "like everyone knows his or her part" (56). There is a sense of rehearsed uproar.

Thus, the duality between the creation and its process are spread open for the reader to dissect. One is even introduced to the business side of such journalism as a "Palestinian photographer for an international wire service" (Sacco 57) wants to buy pictures from the two journalists after the demonstration. He assures Sacco and Saburo, "never mind if it is a good picture we'll buy it from you" (57). On the way to his office, he tells them that "he's bored with the uprising...there's no good pictures anymore...same old demonstrations" (57). The text boxes and speech balloons literally wind their way through the page, creating a path to the next page. Not only does this show an overlapping of Sacco's roles, that of the creator and journalist, but also allows the reader to enter Sacco's experiences.

The whole purpose of the intifada seems to be to provide a compelling picture to the journalist, the Palestinian journalist tell Sacco, "the intifada is over, especially when I don't get the picture!" (57). Thus, even a revolution boils down to the need for a sensational photo, one that Sacco felt he had captured. As he awaited a handsome reward, maybe even a "Pulitzer" (58) the reader is given a glimpse of the work of a photojournalist as he struggles to sell his wares. Each new day makes yesterday's news and pictures redundant and a single ban angle can ruin the potential of a picture as it did to Sacco's.

One of Sacco's most striking roles is that of the intellectual. Gramsci "defines intellectuals in the prison notebooks as those people who give a fundamental social group 'homogeneity and awareness of its own function'" (Gramsci 425). He bifurcates the term into organic intellectuals who emerge from and work for their own social economic class and the traditional intellectual "who have remained from earlier social formations and who may attach themselves to one or the other fundamental class: for instance priests, who may have either a revolutionary or a conservative function depending on their class identifications" (425). Thus, the organic intellectual seeks to represent the interests of a certain class and struggle against the established hegemony while the traditional intellectual strengthens the power structure in place. Keeping such a dynamic in mind it would be interesting to note whether Sacco, as an intellectual, tries to break from the established hegemony or add to its strength.

In the section titled "RETURN" (Sacco 11) Sacco analyses a few key tenets of the Jewish discourse. In a borderless text box that runs the length of the page Sacco elucidates, "'next year in Jerusalem'—all over the world that's the Jewish toast at Passover, and now here he is a Jew in Zion, a land promised by God to his chosen people" (12). He explores the Zionist discourse by quoting Joshua 1:3, having God himself enter the second panel and say, "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon I have given to you as I promised Moses" (12). Thus, the essence of the Zionist movement, the relationship between nationhood and religion begins to emerge. This ensures that the reader is not blindsided by the Palestinian narrative that Sacco chooses to focus on in the lion's share of the text.

Sacco offers a historical blueprint of the division of Palestine; "and in 1917 after two millennia of Jewish Diaspora the British dusted off the promise of the Lord...Lord Balfour signed his declaration and the Zionists had a British commitment to a homeland in Palestine" (12). In this way, Sacco offers both the theological and historical backdrop of the current conflict. The irony of a colonial power rendering a region independent and occupied at the same time is a theme that pervades much of the narrative.

Sacco brings forth Lord Balfour's opinion in a panel saturated with British elitism, the lord sits by his desk in a plush chair sipping tea while a speech bubble reads "Zionism be it good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desire and prejudices of 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land" (13). The combination of the structure of the panel and Balfour's words echoes the colonial mindset towards the Orient that Edward Said had spoken of; "to speak of Orientalism, therefore, is to speak mainly, though not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise" (Said 4). They created the dominant discourse that supported Western hegemony as is evidenced by Lord Balfour's upper crust demeanor and comments. Sacco added "Big Battleships" (Sacco 12) and "Broad Penstrokes" (12) decided the fate of

a people. This reinforces Said's thought that "the relationship between the Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said 4). Sacco thus illuminates the passive state of the Oriental in such a system by quoting Lord Balfour "we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country" (Sacco 13).

Sacco juxtaposes such a view against what modern day westerners think of the conflict as he speaks to a few bag packing travelers "the International Student Set" (14). Their opinions ranged from "Israel needs a strong army, it's surrounded by enemies" (14) to "I think its so wonderful how young Israelis have such a sense of their country" (14). The conversation still appears skewed in favor of the Israeli hegemony that western powers helped create and perpetuate. The author as the intellectual is acutely aware of the place of the Orient in Western discourse, informing the reader of its sociocultural origins and its manifestation in modern times.

The fact that Sacco hails from the West means that he is keenly aware of the attitude of the white man towards the modern Arab. In one of his accounts of the "Nuseirat refugee camp, Block 2" (150) while he is sitting with a group of men drinking tea Sacco's narrative shifts to pages quartered into panels. The journalist and the intellectual seem to merge as statistics are presented "in '89 for example, of 3,779 live-round casualties, 1,506 were children under 15" (153) alongside some fecund conclusions like "Fundamentalism? That's the cue for all true white men to form a perimeter around the women and children" (154). This sense of awareness of the dominant Western discourse allows the reader to gain an insight into how hegemony operates.

However, the reader is simultaneously offered a counter-narrative. Sacco quotes Masud, "We Arabs have tried nationalism, ...but what people must do is return to their Muslim roots" (154) and then concludes, "but Masud's brand of fundamentalism doesn't sound like the militancy of Hamas" (154). According to these Palestinian men, the intifada has "been an experience in restraint...But the Israelis are exponentially more powerful" (154). Such an admission puts into perspective the disproportionate equation of power. This makes one question the accepted definitions of Islam and fundamentalism as created by the West and by extension the accepted Western discourse about the conflict. This need to understand the individual and not generalize an ethnic group is one that Said concluded in his work *Orientalism*— "Orientalism failed to identify with human experience, failed also to see it as human experience" (Said 328). But Sacco doesn't create a narrative that would completely undermine the Israelis. His is a quest to offer the reader a cross-section of opinions and experiences. There is never a moment in these conversations where he exalts one cause and decries the other.

The page title “EDWARD SAID” (Sacco 177) is a clear indication of Sacco’s intellectual leanings. The patchwork of text boxes that surround the image of the author reclining with a book offer additional insights as Sacco muses, “I like Said” (177). He credits his trip to the occupied territories to Said’s work “*The Question of Palestine*” (177). Thus, the reader could surmise that Sacco has been trying to create a different narrative of the Orient, one that allows the readers to challenge the established definitions and policies through the visual and verbal depictions of his eyewitness experiences.

Sacco ends his trip and narrative in Tel Aviv, offering an insight into the minds of those at the pinnacle of the power structure. Not only is the atmosphere much more relaxed but the format of the narrative takes a more calm and structured route with clearer panels, structured textboxes, and a less dire shade palette. Thus, his role as a creator facilitates every other form of expression. As he relaxes with Naomi and Paula, his newfound Israeli friends, his pointed brand of questioning allows for the reader to delve deeper into the mind of an average Israeli.

There appears a distinct sense of distrust and insecurity that the Israeli women have towards the Palestinians, as the conversation flows through the panels; “have you looked at a map have you seen how small Israel is?” (Sacco 262) “Can we trust the Arabs?” (262) “who’s to say they won’t get some leader in the future who wants to destroy Israel” (262). The fact that there existed extremists on both sides did nothing to quell their fears or justify the violent actions of Palestinian militants. They are vehemently against settlements but “We can never give up Jerusalem...it’s the symbol of Israel” (263) even though part of it is occupied territory. Naomi feels that a Palestinian state would never be “economically viable” (263) especially with what they have heard about the conditions in the refugee camps but Sacco immediately counters them “I think that’s sort of a myth. The territories are economically suppressed” (263). In the end, it all seems to boil down to the law of the jungle as Naomi exclaims definitively, “We won the land in the war! It’s our land now!” (264).

The conversation ends with a sense of exhaustion, tired old discourses are raked up where the Palestinian are portrayed as rash terrorists and the Israeli troops as law-abiding protectors of the State. The women seem to be aware of, yet exasperated with, the Palestinian narrative leaving Sacco’s own analysis at a tautological end.

Through Sacco’s narrative, Homi K Bhabha’s notion of the liminal space surfaces. In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha describes how “this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5). There is a kind of negotiation taking place between cultural roots, national identities, race, and even class. In Sacco’s, narrative occupied territories seem to offer an

insight into what Bhabha called “the overlap and displacement of domains of difference” (2). They are spaces of transition that are fraught with conflicting national and historical claims. Sacco represents this liminal space such that even the reader is made a party to the sense of flux and competing interests. This offers the reader a unique power of judgement as Sacco presents to him the components of the dominant western discourse which are often at odds with the Palestinian accounts of life in the occupied territories.

The whole narrative is a collection of Sacco’s observations yet there are certain instances when his presence as an onlooker or observer offers the reader an objective view into life in the occupied territories. Sacco spends a lot of time in cars, vans, and buses being ferried from one city to another, one refugee camp to the next, and it is during these journeys that the reader gets a true sense of the hustle and rhythm of life in such places. In Cairo, the city the author travels to in the first chapter the reader is assailed with a cacophony of sounds, faces, expressions, and chaos. Swerving text boxes read, “Traffic?” (Sacco 1), “I’m swallowing exhaust and my snots gone black” (1), “Get me outta here” (1). It is through such exclamations that one gets an insight into not only the stream of consciousness like thought process of the author but also the nature of his surroundings, the irreverence of some his companions, the tumult of city centers, and his own role as a bystander.

The beginning of almost every chapter overwhelms the reader in terms of the sights and sounds. Through the nature of the graphic narrative, the reader turns into a quasi-observer living Sacco’s actions and thoughts. Thus, just as Sacco observes his surroundings the reader observes him. His look of fear as he becomes part of a violent uprising on Nablus road in the third chapter, the view of Ansara III prison camp in the fourth, and the various first-person narratives of the people he speaks to are all examples of the ability of the graphic novel to allow the reader a holistic view of a conflict and a person. One is offered the author’s view, who is the key observer, but also that of his various metaphoric camera angles. What liberates Sacco’s gaze is the non-linear nature of the genre allowing him to patch together information and experiences. This allows for his observations to break through the limitations of mere thoughts and memories and actually create a counter-narrative to what the Western mind is accustomed to receiving about the region.

What is evident from this analyses is the deep interrelationship that is shared between the various roles played by Sacco. One seems to facilitate the other. However, one of the key conclusions of the research would be that the reader is engaged in the narrative at various levels, almost entering the mind space of the author as the creator, journalist, intellectual and observer. Thus, the reader is offered a sort of independent agency of thought and analysis as he almost appropriates the liminal space that the author explores. As Sacco questions deeply rooted Western discourse and provides his eyewitness accounts the reader is not only the recipient but also a participant. This level of

involvement creates the possibility for a far deeper understanding and perpetuation of the author's representation of the conflict and the nature of the hegemony that upholds it. It is through the various functions of the author, and not Sacco's overt judgement, that the reader is empowered with the tools with which to question the established Western discourse.

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