WHEN REPRESENTATIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH: GENDERED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE, PAIN, AND TRAUMA IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

A Thesis
by
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Abstract

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Using the intersecting threads of visual theory, the connections of gender and nation, theory surrounding trauma and pain, the connection between witnessing and representing, and the politics of textual circulation, this project works to answer the following questions: what does it mean to try and interact with the pain of another? How can we represent or recognize the pain of others? Can we intimately and ethically engage with the experiences of those who have routinely been pushed into spaces of silence and "otherness?"

With these questions in mind, this project uses *Safe Area Goražde* by Joe Sacco (2000), *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (2000-2003), and *Grass* by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim (2019) as literary case studies to interrogate the politics of representations, especially the politics of representing gendered and sexual violence. Ultimately, even as the texts are the focus, what also comes to light are essential ideas about silence in testimony, ethical readership, and the effects of circulation on texts in the global market.

Acknowledgments

This project is an amalgamation of all of the thoughts, works, concepts, and support that I have experienced throughout my life, but especially during my time at Appalachian State. At its heart, this project is a collaborative one, from start to finish.

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Dedication

For my mom, who taught me to love of stories, and who could never say no to the question, “can I have just *one* more book.”

Additionally, for Maisie, who snuggled with me through every writing session and always cheered me up with her favorite toys during the stressful parts of this project.

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Introduction

This study offers a comparative examination of graphic novel representations of gendered violence in zones of conflict and analyzes how these representations address the subject-positions of survivors. In the introduction to her book *Frames of War*, Judith Butler unpacks concepts of "recognition" and "recognizability" and how they force an audience to conceive of an individual or populace as grievable subjects (or fail to do so). This project posits that the question of recognizability becomes further complicated by the inexpressibility of physical pain. This element of inexpressibility is even further exacerbated the the perceived shame of sexual violence as deeply tied to patriarchal frames. As explained in Elaine Scarry's foundational work *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World,* the experience of pain works to unmake an individual's world only to make (or remake) it into something different. Scarry's work has been subsequently expanded upon by theorists like Idelber Avelar, who proposes an alternative to the traditional "unnarratable" perception of pain (especially pain through torture) by mapping out the limits placed on the possibility of representation and how representations are possible because of and despite these "limits."

This project is certainly interested in the mechanics of identifying and communicating pain and trauma, but I hope to take these discussions a step further, focusing not just on how pain is represented (or whether it can be) but *whose* pain is represented, the ways in which that pain and trauma are worked into or rejected by hegemonic, legitimacy-granting cultural forces, and how graphic narratives—with their specific combination of visual and textual elements—address this tension. To this end, I analyze three graphic narratives (comics) which represent gendered and sexualized violence in zones of conflict: *Safe Area Goražde* by

Joe Sacco (2000), *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (2000-2003), and *Grass* by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim (2019). While these works' gradual inclusion in "literary canons" certainly acts as a point of interest, it is the comic form's joining of textuality and visuality that particularly interests me. This combination, I argue, allows for an analytical approach of space (in content and page layout) designed to call attention to presence *and* absence in the diegesis.

In particular, the spatio-temporal issues involved in analyzing comics become paramount in looking at experiences of trauma, especially those tied to sexual and gendered violence, due to the potential importance of silence in recounting these experiences. As noted by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in their book *Testimony*, "there are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory, and speech," which highlights how traumatic memory is as integrally tied to the ruptures and gaps that emerge in the recounting as it is to what "can" be described (Felman and Laub 78). Therefore, paying attention to the spatio-temporal components of a representation of an experience of trauma provides opportunities to manipulate the use of space on a page to more appropriately deal with silence. Spatio-temporal components also allow readers to see silence as absent in the text *or* as a presence to be reckoned with. *Safe Area Goražde*, *Persepolis*, and *Grass* all deal with experiences of sexual and gendered violence. However, they vary dramatically in their historical situations, their ethos in approaching testimony, their artistic styles, and their ability to circulate in the global market. Ultimately, these narratives illuminate the feminine body's relationship to violence and pain in politically pressing and often contradictory ways.

This is an interdisciplinary project due to its interrogation of violence across media, language, gender, and national borders. To address this interdisciplinary nature, I will focus on four main threads of criticism and theory: visual theory and the comic form, discussions of the intersection of gender and nation (particularly as sexual and gendered violence emerge as being complexly tied to the establishment and continued policing of a nation), theories of trauma and pain, and the connection between witnessing and representing. While there are texts that address a number of these elements in conjunction with one another, my hope is that tackling all four of these elements in context-specific literary case studies will allow for a more robust understanding of the politics of representing (and recognizing) pain and trauma, opening the possible avenues for engagement and activism.

Visual Theory and The Comic Form

Although visual texts have played a major role in communication throughout much of history (through art, propaganda, political cartoons, etc.), comics as a medium of long-form storytelling came about in the 1930s, with "modern-comics" developing throughout the 1980s. The comics from this time period are often associated with setting up present associations with the comic *form* as synonymous with *comics*—often focusing on superheroes. However, as Hillary Chute notes in her book, *Why Comics? From Underground to Everywhere*, it is also during this period that the comic form exploded onto the scene as a topic worthy of scholarly pursuit. With the publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in 1995, it became clear that the comic form offers a unique avenue for dealing with emotionally charged issues (disaster, illness, sexuality, violence, and gender to name a few) thanks to its combination of visual *and* textual elements. It is this intersection of visuality and textuality

that makes the comic form a useful medium through which to tackle the slippery nature of violence, pain, and trauma.

When approaching storytelling in the comic form, I am interested in the ways the text subscribes to, excludes, or manipulates visual and textual techniques. While the language of the comic form used in Scott McCloud's 1993 book, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, is widely cited in comic theory. In recent years, scholars have taken many of the "base terminologies" of the comic form and combined the genre-specific associations with broader literary, political, and cultural critical theories, expanding the analytical possibilities for the genre of comics. Among these new areas of focus, a few of the terms are especially significant for my purposes: "gutter," "frame," "closure," and "narrative." While the pages in the comic form can be broken down into what is being directly represented on the page by looking at the frame (often also called the panel) and how a reader moves through empty space between panels (the gutter), recent texts like Acheson's "Expanding the Role of the Gutter in Nonfiction Comics: Forged Memories in Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*" and Marshall and Gilmore's "Girlhood in the Gutter: Feminist Graphic Knowledge and the Visualization of Sexual Precarity" interrogate not only how an issue is being represented in the frames but also how issues are relegated to the space of the gutter, addressing the ways in which the comic form works to act as an illuminative and oppressive force due to its visuality. In a similar vein, I will analyze the use of the gutter in *Safe Area Goražde*, *Persepolis,* and *Grass*. In the case of the first example, I am particularly interested in the implication of relegating sexual and gendered violence to the gutter, while in *Persepolis* and *Grass*, I discuss how sexual violence in the gutter can be better connected and represented in the panels through a careful attention to visual and textual silence.

In addition, analytical texts like these call attention to the autonomy the comic medium gives to readers through the act of closure. This autonomy is particularly productive when considering the role of witnessing—as is discussed in detail in Chapter 1. As the page in the comic form is made up of panels and intentional blank space between those panels (the gutter), closure is the act, committed by the reader, of navigating the gutter-space to fill in what is left "blank" to get to the next active representation and complete the story. Due to the intrinsic roles they have in establishing narrative, the elements of "gutter," "frame," "closure," and "narrative" lead to innovative possibilities of reading both the intended and unintended content of the comic form. As discussed in Eric Berlasky's "Lost in the Gutter: Within and Between Frames in Narrative and Narrative Theory," unlike other forms of storytelling like literature and film, the comic form requires an analysis beyond the idea of a singular frame which inaccurately fixes narrative possibilities. Instead, the framing—particularly of comics—should be analyzed on two axes presented by Berlatsky: the axes of cognitive role/role in interpretation (central to superficial) and physical location (external to central/internal). In this way, the "story" of the text is not just what is intentional and immediate, but also what gets left unsaid and must be processed to comprehend. As many aspects of trauma—especially gendered and sexual trauma—are difficult (if not entirely taboo) topics of representation, an understanding of these elements of the comic form enables a clearer reading of how what is there and what is *not* affects the limits and politics of textual engagement. Of course, the comic medium is not inherently more ethical due to the addition of a pictorial narrative to the textual narrative—we will see the possibilities for the failure of this combination in Chapter 1—but the visual and textual spaces paired together in comics can provide alternative optics and options for interacting with spaces of silence.

These new possibilities for accessing, approaching, and analyzing traumatic experiences through comics is a subversive way of offering new options to see gendered and sexual violence. The comic medium, through a complex use of image and text, can work to make non-worded threats of sexual and gendered violence visually explicit. In "Specters of Violence" Megan Burke notes how a potentially universalizable aspect of female experience is that of the threat of sexual violence. They work in their text to understand the ways in which the feminine experience is characterized and terrorized by *both* the physical act and the ever present threat (what Burke refers to as a "hauntology") of sexual violence. In this way, the "feminine existence reveals the temporal harm of rape culture and how that temporal harm is an integral part of the maintenance of feminine existence, perhaps most especially in a concrete situation when girls and women occupy the space of their bodies and the space around them in resistant and emancipatory ways" (Burke 113). Since the comic form is all about the negotiation of temporality and space, it therefore provides unique opportunities to look at the psychological, emotional, and physical trauma of the threat and actuality of sexual violence. In addition, comics, due to their origins, have even stricter categorical divides across national boundaries and language that affect their circulability and the regulation of their content, especially as they come to deal with "sensitive" topics like sexual violence.

Gender and Nation

Over the past three centuries, we have seen the rise of the modern nation-state, co-opting older societally organizing forces—such as religion and familial connections—and bringing along with it the myth that the nation and its borders as we know it today are, and have always been, immutable. Reliant on the idea of constancy, the modern idea of the

nation-state is particularly suspicious of narratives countering its timelessness and permanence and often acts to violently to respond to these challenges. Despite deep-held notions and attachments to the idea of the nation as intrinsic and self-evident, the modern nation is fundamentally an imagined category, but one with very material consequences. Similarly, binary notions of gender have been critically and widely acknowledged to be societal constructions built around the idea of performance. This emphasis on the falsity of the universalizing, master narrative of binary gender receives significant push-back due to the destabilizing effect it has on societal organizing features, including that of the nation-state. In turn, reflection on the constructed nature of a nation and gender is often perceived as a threat to the existence and perpetuation of the forces that are doing the construction or benefit from its stability. Interestingly, both gender and nation are often used to uphold and secure one another, particularly in times of dramatic cultural division, despite their vulnerability as organizing forces. In order to tackle the ways in which gender affects citizenship and subjecthood, these tensions necessitate an understanding of modern notions of the construction of nation, nationhood, and nationality.

Among the scholarship surrounding the nation, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is widely cited. Anderson's influential text traces the roots and causes of modern nationalism, nation building, and the overarching proposal of the nation as being imagined. In particular, he addresses how the nation comes to be a community that we identify with (or are excluded from) based on material productions and reproductions of memory. Although it is a formative work, *Imagined Communities* presents conceptions of national space and identity that are predominantly masculine, but these maculine leanings are coded in the languages of universality and neutrality. In turn, these understandings of nations

and their subjects leave little room to interrogate gendered violence within nation-building. Therefore, this project will be working through—rather than with—these ideas to identify how space for representations of gendered violence are made with and against traditional national discourses.

An understanding of these masculine and patriarchal connections to nationhood, nationality, and nation-building (or destroying) will be especially helpful with Sacco's work. Like many other cultural conceptions and "organizing" (or oppressing) forces, the effects of the patriarchal nation-state are exaggerated during periods of conflict. As will be further elaborated in the first chapter, although Sacco is interested in war and how certain national narratives are framed, he falls on neutrally coded, but actually masculine, understandings of the process of nation building without highlighting the gendered components. This becomes especially problematic as his subject, the Bosnian War, is often cited as pushing state-sanctioned and organized sexual violence into the international political view. In addition, understanding the origins of national construction provides an important avenue into understanding the hegemonic forces that control comics and comic readership. For example, even as comics are often regarded in the public imaginary as being significantly less tied to specific campaigns of nation building, like more canonized literature, they tend to be divided into three major categories/points of origin: American Comics, French *bandes dessinées* (with the subcategory of "western-European comics"), and Japanese manga. Although neither *Safe Area Goražde*, *Persepolis,* nor *Grass* falls clearly into one of these categories, the texts must still navigate these politics of national boundaries as they attempt to circulate "globally."

Focusing on gendered and sexualized violence in zones of conflict while remaining attentive to the masculine notions of nation, I am especially relying on works like Nira Yuval-Davis's *Gender and Nation* and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. In her book, Yuval-Davis addresses the limitations of ignoring the masculine coding of nation-building and nation-hood, demonstrating the enmeshing of conceptions of nation and gender. She argues that ideas of "manhood" and "womanhood" are directly related to perceived ideas of national stability, making gendered spaces and bodies a target for policing and violence within the frameworks of nation, citizenship, and culture. In particular, her discussion of women as targets for sexual violence and policing as they are often conceived of as being the "reproducers" of the national culture and ideas (and therefore the most vulnerable population for the continuity and the "destruction" of the nation) highlights the ways in which gendered voices are erased when these voices are articulating the violence committed against them.

While Yuval-Davis's text makes essential contributions to the conversation, it does occasionally fall into the trap of essentializing the idea of "woman" in several places. In contrast, Mohanty argues against universalizing notions of womanhood and, in particular, American and European conceptions of a generalized "third-world woman." Instead, she asks readers to particularize and contextualize specific struggles of women and recognize the instability of identity categories, especially in times of crisis. Ultimately, she argues for a politics of engagement with conflicting categories, rather than de-contextualized and "depoliticized" attempts to transcend them. The connections between gender and nation expose the effects of national boundaries on spaces of violence. Just as some identities are

viewed as more essential to the makeup of a nation, stories often receive similar treatment, and these boundaries work to control what stories are told and how those stories circulate.

Whereas Anderson's notions of nation are useful in looking at the work of Sacco, the ideas presented by Yuval-Davis and Mohanty become especially important in analyzing *Persepolis* and *Grass*. In the case of *Persepolis*, seeing how "national stability" is tied—especially in more insecure regimes—to particular performances of gender (particularly womanhood) allows for a more nuanced reading of the text as readers interact with the illustrations of the visual markers of gender. As for *Grass,* the notions of Yuval-Davis and Mohanty help the reader understand the singularity of how women in the comfort women system were targeted, while also working with the complexities of how the victims and survivors were simultaneously silent and silenced. In short, the works of Yuval-Davis and Mohanty provide essential frameworks for understanding sexual and gendered violence as theories and push readers to engage with the material and emotional consequences of these types of violence in *specific* contexts. As each graphic narrative in this project functions as a "case study" dealing with a different national, cultural, and political context, these theoretical frames become especially important to provide contextual nuance.

Finally, in drawing the connection between gender and nation (and how stories circulate within and against these categories), it is essential to highlight the fact that with the creation of nations comes the "need to defend" boundaries, both physical and cultural. In turn, this becomes tied in with the politics of waging war. Drawing from the ideas of Chris Cuomo, war—as being read akin to violence—*is* a presence, not an event, but the historically demarcated "events" of war often highlight controlling cultural and state apparati as they tend to be manipulated by "opposing" national forces in war to destroy a nation socially and

physically. Nowhere does this seem to be more clear than through the "use" of sexual violence in times of conflict. In her article "'Back Then It Was Legal': The Epistemological Imbalance in Readings of Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Rape Legislation," Susanne Scholz, in a Derridean fashion, critiques the notion of the "master narrative" surrounding classic representations and references to the act of rape, particularly those that dismiss the violence thruogh the rationale of supposed historical legality. Scholz is not interested in reading from "nowhere." Rather, she works to trace the laws surrounding rape—often textually coded in the language of "coerced marriage"—in Deuteronomy (Scholz 98). While cultural and legal assumptions surrounding violence on the bodies of women shifts in Deuteronomy depending on various aspects of the woman's identity (such as race, class, and sexual status, i.e., married, widowed, virginal), there are two guiding characteristics for the vast majority of biblical "rape legislature. The first is that the legislature is particularly concerned with the body of the "'enemy woman' and emphasizes the need for marriage as the law's noble intention. That the marriage is coerced does not become a problem" (Scholz 97). The second is that the legislature is meant to bring justice for the men of the victim's life in order to compensate the violence against their masculine honor. This patriarchal emphasis is then extended to the point that "the charge [of rape] depends on [male] others because the woman is not accepted as an accuser" (Scholz 113). In this way, the female body becomes representative of masculine honor and turns into a traditional "spoil" of war, and what is everpresent in many classic tales of rape "is that women and the violence they suffer are of less concern to the men than the future of the state" (Lillie 94). It is these assumptions that have guided many attempts to address (or not address) sexual violence in times of war.

Although these ideas are often regarded as antiquated, Sara Meger's book *Rape Loot Pillage: The Political Economy of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict* builds on these ideas about sexual violence and war "from ancient Hebrew and Roman wars" to understand them in the context of post-modern warfare (1). Meger discusses how:

> Sexual violence has for so long and so frequently coincided with armed conflict that it has been ignored or dismissed as an inevitable byproduct of war— committed by rogue soldiers with insatiable sex drives—and part of the expected "rapelootpillage" that unavoidably accompanies warfare. Lamented as the result of the breakdown of normal social behavior and conduct because of war, it was this understanding of wartime sexual violence that has, until very recently, led to relative silence in history books, scholarship, and policy on war. (2)

Instead, she highlights how specific cultural, national, and international policies on gender, nation, and material possession (articulated and unarticulated) make various forms of sexual violence and exploitation possible and integral to conflict. However, even though sexual violence seems to be a constant, it should not be regarded as a homogenous category with homogenous effects. As will be discussed with *Safe Area Goražde*, *Persepolis,* and *Grass,* certain individuals with certain intersecting identity categories will have various access in experiencing violence, sharing their experiences, *and* having their traumas recognized.

Trauma and Pain | Witnessing and Representing

While I have "separated" trauma and pain and witnessing and representing into two categories, discussing them distinctly is nearly impossible. For this reason, although the emphasis will be placed differently in the context of the project and each case study within the project, these "categories" will be unpacked here in conjunction with one another. As

discussed previously, thanks to the work of Elaine Scarry, trauma and pain studies deal heavily with questions surrounding the inexpressibility and unrepresentability of trauma and pain. According to *The Body in Pain*, this inexpressibility stems from the fact that to have pain is to have certainty and to hear about the pain of another is to have doubt (7). The issue is not merely one of having pain or not, but not being able to share or verify the pain of another. Additionally, when victims describe pain afterwards, they often can only say that the pain was (or is) *like* something, not that it *is* something, launching them into a space of limbo between certainty and uncertainty. Critiques like Idelbar Avelar's in "Five Theses on Torture" suggest that the opportunities for discussing the mechanics and "legitimacy" of descriptions of pain are more open-ended than initially appearance. Nonetheless, the patterns in representations of pain and trauma—particularly in situations where a significant amount of time has passed or the pain was used as a force for control—give clues about the material consequences of pain.

In looking at *Safe Area Goražde*, *Persepolis,* and *Grass*, using the foundational works of Scarry and Avelar will be essential in unpacking the language of pain (or at least how individuals often speak of it) and how it varies from work to work. In addition, the arguments of Scarry about representability—and the interventions by Avelar—are doubly complex in this project as I will be working through them visually *and* textually due to the comic form—especially in the scenes of torture in chapters 1 and 2. However, *whose* pain and what type of pain and trauma are represented are questions of special interest, even as critics debate whether pain can be expressed at all. In this way, understanding the theories of pain in this project are tied to debates of representation, but—especially in looking at *Grass*—I hope

to highlight how certain types of pain and trauma resist representation and recognition even further due to the identities of the individuals who attempt to give voice to it.

In a fashion similar to the way that discourses surrounding the nation tend to have a masculine bent, discussions of trauma and pain often deal with specific types of trauma and pain—notably, pain having to do with torture and war. Trauma and pain having to do with torture and war also tend (though do not always) to have masculine associations due to the traditional conception of war as a masculine space (going back to ideas of the nation) and torture being regarded differently based on the way it is defined (or if it defined at all). However, these associations often lead to the exclusion of targeted gendered and sexual violence from discussions of pain. This is especially true when it comes to looking at violence in spaces of national conflict, as can be seen in much of Sacco's work. Despite traditional omissions, there is a distinct and powerful history of scholarship that works to combat this exclusion. Building on the legacy of the intersectional and feminist works of authors such as Mohanty and Yuval-Davis, I will rely on Judith Butler's *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* and various works by Veena Das to unpack how pain and recognizable "life" is constructed through the frames and its ruptures in graphic narratives.

Thinking about precariousness and precarity established in Butler's earlier book *Precarious Life* and expanded upon in *Frames of War*, I am predominantly interested in the way that Butler deals with the idea of the "frame" as a container through which a viewer is *allowed* to "see" but which simultaneously limits the field of vision and works to create a notion of the normative. While predominantly tied to political understandings of subjecthood, this notion is also incredibly useful for this project as it provides a theoretical bent to understanding how readers interact with the comic form. Once again, the comic form is

composed of literal frames and panels, there are inherent gaps (gutters) that play with elements of visuality. As Butler unpacks the concepts of "recognition" and "recognizability" in the way that they force an audience to conceive (or not) of an individual or populace as living, grievable subjects, her analysis points to the ways in which readers/viewers conceive of the subjects (or objects) of graphic narratives in the panel-frames and between them. She then discusses the ways in which life, violence, and pain are framed and addresses the possibilities of working within the frame, outside of the frame, and searching for frame leakages. Ultimately, the intentional and unintentional exclusion and inclusion by the frames dealing with pain and gender open up the possibility of recognizing new subjects who are experiencing and have experienced violence and pain. In addition to being able to see and address new pained subjects, this expansion brings to focus different types of pain.

Previously, I have discussed the idea of "representing pain" fairly simplistically, but this idea must be complicated—especially in the medium of the graphic narrative—due to the complicated presence of an audience. While it is one thing to talk about the way that a survivor or victim (the terms used to describe those who suffered and continue to suffer are hotly contested) represents their own pain—for example, testimony—the question of witnessing becomes more complex when representation is being altered by either a listener, writer, or the fictional framework. Susan Sontag highlights these complexities in *Regarding the Pain of Others,* where she requires readers to enter into a conversation about the voyeuristic nature of images and how the viewers' gaze, particularly on images of violations and spectacle, commodifies the personal experience of paint and trauma. Similarly, Terri Tomsky's "From Sarajevo to 9/11: Travelling Memory and the Trauma Economy" unpacks the "marketability" of trauma, detailing how some traumas are given credibility based on

political connections, media attention, and spectacularity of violence. Ultimately, Tomsky uses the term "trauma economy" to discuss how traumas are circulated, valued, and divorced from their context. Tomsky uses a comparison between 9/11 and Sarajevo to illustrate how trauma comes in and out of "legitimacy" and circulation.

Especially as I will be working with the two of the three graphic novels (*Persepolis* and *Grass*) in translation, understanding the circulation of the text as products and as attestations to trauma illuminates the ways that these texts and the testimony they provide acquires historical, cultural, and political density from its "point of origin" and its receptor. By "receptor" I mean the "reading public" of a particular text, in a particular translation, at a particular point in time *and* the individual reader who is engaging with the text. The notable difficulty here arises from the difference between a receptor (in both senses) who is simply viewing trauma versus someone who is *bearing witness* to the trauma and engaging with it and their own perceptions, as detailed further in Kelly Oliver's *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition.* In its translation from an experience to words to a story for an audience, the experience of pain is vulnerable to mistranslations that have dangerous consequences.

However, while these dangers can never entirely disappear, Wendy Kozol's *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing* provides opportunities for radical encounters with this process. Although Kozol focuses on the subject of photography, the ethics of representing atrocity through a visual medium and its consumption are also fitting for the topic of comics and violence. Kozol criticizes the capitalist and nationalistic agendas often tied up in the corporate media world of representing and witnessing the trauma of others, and her interests lie in artistic endeavors that engage critically with atrocities. Kozol names these artistic endeavors "reparative projects" and argues that reparative projects open up different

possibilities of recognition. Interestingly, she does not condemn spectacular representations of atrocities, but she does emphasize the importance of working *through* these representations through the process of specifically contextualizing spectacular representations and interrogating our own complicity as a potentially voyeuristic audience.

The comic form becomes a valuable space to incorporate and interrogate these practices for several reasons. As noted in Chute's books *Disaster Drawn* and *Why Comics?,* while some comics make it to the "mainstream" Western media, many comics work with subversive and controversial topics due to a history of censorship and the culture of underground comics. In this way, the comic genre is often a space where topics rejected by hegemonic, legitimacy-granting cultural forces find a space for inclusion. Second, the comic form *forces* engagement with the text in question. The reader of a comic, unlike the viewer of a film, has the ability to linger on images and decide what is important for themselves (even if the page design does place specific emphasis), and, unlike a written text, will predominantly have to force their own transitions (closure). Finally, as a flipside to the same coin, the comic form's visuality *directs* the view in a certain way. While written word does allow for the creation of images, these creations can allow readers to avoid certain realms of suffering and conceive of them in more palatable, bearable ways. The comic form—while it is not guaranteed—acts as a space where meta-cognition about viewership practices is more accessible as it is an essential part of the medium.

Chapter Synopses

My first chapter will offer an analysis of Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde.* Taking the graphic novel as a case study, I will analyze issues of framing in the way that "the frame," at its essence, is a container through which a viewer is *allowed* to "see" (Butler 4). As Butler

explains, however, the frame simultaneously limits the field of vision and works to create a notion of the normative. The literal frame of the comic form works in similar ways. Keeping these dynamics in mind, I will examine representations of gendered and sexual violence against and the pain of women in *Safe Area Goražde.*

Sacco is widely known for his comic war reportage and journalistic graphic narratives. Published in 2000, *Safe Area Goražde* reports on Sacco's interactions with the people, predominantly Bosniaks, trapped within the enclave of Goražde during the Bosnian War. As discussed by Chute, Sacco is known for explicit illustrations that sometimes verge on the spectacular and a refusal to shy away from the difficult and often violent testimony of his subjects. Despite the fact that one of the core elements of the Bosnian War was a campaign of "ethnic cleansing" centered on the systematic and militarized rape of Muslim women, Sacco subordinates his communication of the testimony of the female victims of this war in favor of visual and textual rhetorics of spectacularity. Ultimately, though the work of Sacco is revolutionary in many ways, no representation can ever be unbiased or innocent. By looking at Sacco's representation of the Bosnian War's historical context and his take on the cultural dynamics of gender, witnessing and testimony, and his utilization of the "gutter" as a site of of the perpetuation of violence in cases of sexual assault and testimony, this chapter will problematize Sacco's representation of women's pain and violence against them.

My second chapter will focus on the widely-circulated *Persepolis*, a series of *bande dessinées* by Marjane Satrapi. This autobiographical narrative depicts Satrapi's experience growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution and her later return to Iran after an extended time in Europe. *Persepolis* provides an interesting case study for analysis for several reasons. Unlike the other texts in this study, *Persepolis* is an autobiography, calling

into question the role of *witness* versus *testimony*. The obviously constructed aspects of the comic form force the audience into conversations about the formation and communication of memory, particularly memory surrounding spaces of violence and trauma. *Persepolis* also represents Satrapi's position of privilege in her "access" to Europe through her family's associations and education, creating questions surrounding the connection of gender and nation. In the narrative, Satrapi inhabits a complex space where she possesses a important, personal connection to the religion of Islam while also working against the fundamentalist Islamic traditions that are state-controlled, particularly traditions related to veiling and gender relations. The conflict between these two elements of Satrapi's life in Iran come to the forefront as she enters Europe and deals with outside assumptions of what makes the falsely constructed idea of "The East"—which relies on geographic generalizations, oversimplification of experience, and assumptions of European superiority—in the eyes of her friends in Europe and her own highly contextualized experiences. While the text contains many scenes of violence that are witnessed by and passed along to Satrapi, many of the most striking scenes of the text focus on the *threat* of violence and its effects. This threat of violence is distinctly gendered in two ways. First, female sexuality is viewed as a danger to the agenda of fundamentalist Islam, which has been co-opted and manipulated by Iranian state forces and, therefore must be controlled through policies and threats of violence to gendered bodies in order to uphold traditional, patriarchal, and *national* ideas, leading to the explosion of less recognizable forms of everyday violence. Second, the sexuality of these women also establishes them as a target for sexual violence for internal and external forces in the way that the women, subordinated due to patriarchal values, have their bodies violated and pain appropriated for the immasculation of the governing (political and familial) forces.

Finally, *Persepolis* is of particular interest due to its wide circulation, translation, and emphasis on movement. Originally published in French, *Persepolis* has undergone many translations, but its form as a *visual* and written text make the layers of translation present even more complex. In addition, as the communication of pain goes through a variety of translations in order to be seen as recognizable (and this depends on the frames it is presented in), this element of translation highlights the politics of accessibility when it comes to detailing pain to an audience. In combination, these elements all work to bring into view important questions surround recognition and representation of gendered violence and gendered pain happening within the body of the textual narrator *and* outside of it.

My third chapter will focus on the little-studied *Grass* by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass* tells the story of Lee Ok-Sun, a Korean woman who was abducted and "served" as one of the thousands of "comfort women," women and young girls who were forced into sexual slavery at the hands of the Japanese government during WWII. Despite the massive scale of the comfort women system of sexual slavery and exploitation, *Grass* works against spaces of silence and repression created by issues of sexism, classism, colonialism, and politics in the global text market. The text follows Lee-Ok Sun's testimony as she discusses her life and the varying types of violence she faced before, during, and after her enslavement. In the midst of her testimony, Lee Ok-Sun discusses the pain of coming to sexual maturity in such a violent setting, going into explicit detail about the materiality of the pain as she discusses her lack of medical care and the inaccessibility of basic sexual sanitary supplies. In addition, there is another layer of narration to *Grass* as, in a similar manner to Joe Sacco, Gendry-Kim is a character in the story herself, providing her own commentary and reflections on the process of hearing Lee Ok-Sun's testimony. *Grass* ends on a note about the continuation of violence

against these comfort women—even long after their "release"—due to national and international refusal to acknowledge the official role and responsibility that state apparatus played in condoning and instituting the violence against these women on a wide-scale, while emphasizing the possibilities for individual subjectivity and reclamation of power even in the midst of wide-scale oppression and silencing.

Ultimately, it is difficult to simplify my hopes for this study into a single summative sentence—and I hesitate to boldly claim that I would like to create a "reparative project," to co-opt the language of Kozol, where I can address the presence and absence of gendered violence and pain. But my main goal is to investigate the ways in which we represent life, violence, and pain of women with a focus on women in and outside declared zones of conflict. In particular, I want to make it clear pain, violence, nationhood, citizenship are often gendered and *incredibly* context specific in the setting of the text itself and our consumption of it. In looking at graphic narratives specifically, I hope that the combination of visual and textual will emphasize the interdisciplinary and intersectional thinking required to interact with these issues. While no project can be entirely neutral, I hope the theoretical threads of visual theory and the comic form, discussions of the intersection of gender and nation, theory surrounding trauma and pain, and the connection between witnessing and representing will allow for a thorough understanding of the politics of representing (and recognizing) pain and trauma.

Even more importantly, I hope that the subsequent analyses of *Safe Area Goražde*, *Persepolis,* and *Grass* highlight that the ways that women experience sexual violence has a universalizable element, even as women's experiences of trauma and living in the world are incredibly singular. However, merely "representing" is not enough. In order to contend with

the experience of sexual and gendered violence, a level of intimacy with the specifics of an experience must be developed, and there must be a respect and working through of spaces and times of silence.

Chapter 1

"Scores of Muslim Women": Sexual Violence and Gendered Pain in Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*

Introduction

Following its liberation from German rule in 1944-1945, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formed under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito and the communist Partisans in 1946. From 1946 to 1991, Yugoslavia was composed of six socialist republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia) and two autonomous provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina) (Regan 198). Out of the six socialist republics of Yugoslavia ruled by Tito, Bosnia-Herzegovina was the most ethnically diverse, composed of Croats, Serbs, and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims). While each group possessed its own culture and historical background, the predominate differentiating characteristic was religious, as "Croats are Roman Catholics; Serbs are Orthodox Christians; and Muslims are generally descended from those slavs who converted to Islam during a 500-year Ottoman occupation" (Sacco 19). Despite an inordinate amount of bloodshed between the groups throughout WWII under a mantra of "Brotherhood and Unity"—i.e., the repression and attempted erasure of cultural differences and national grievances—proposed by Tito's authoritarian rule, the Croats, Serbs, and Bosniaks managed to live in relative peace throughout the majority of the latter half of the century (Bringa 154). However, with the death of Tito in 1980 came a power vacuum in which nationalist leaders vied for power with their idea of "nation" built on the "myth of common origin" (Yuval-Davis 19) and nations where there was a clear ethnic majority went through a process of "democratization." As Regan explains, "voters in Slovenia and Croatia on December 23, 1990, and May 19, 1991,

respectively, overwhelmingly approved resolutions calling for independence, and the two republics formally declared their independence on June 25, 1991" (199). However, this process of democratization was not the case in Bosnia.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, there was no clear national majority amongst the Croat, Serb, and Bosniak populations, and "where no one nationality formed a majority, the consequence was that the nationalist leaders pursued a political strategy of ensuring that their 'nation' or people would form a majority, either by redrawing state boundaries, and/or by the expulsion, terrorizing, and murder of other Bosnian 'nationalities'" (Bringa 191). Simultaneously, under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević, the newly independent Serbia worked to take control of Serb-populated areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina under a campaign built on violent force. In 1992 came the "official" onset of militarized violence, and "up to 150,000 Bosnians, mostly Muslim, had died in the first nine months of fighting, and up to one-and-a-half million Bosnians, also mostly Muslim, had become refugees" (Regan 201). At its "conclusion"—although the ramifications of this violence persist to this day, particularly for marginalized populations in the region, such as religious minorities, women, and children—in 1995, "more than three years of war had left Bosnian Serbs in possession of 70 percent of the territory of Bosnia, 200,000 Bosnians (mainly Muslims) dead, and 2,000,000 Bosnians (also mainly Muslims) refugees," making the Bosnian War the "most devastating" conflict fought on European soil since WWII (Regan 204). Arguably, what pushed the violence in Bosnia into the public eye, or—more accurately—the American-centric national news media arena, was the leadership sanctioned campaign of ethnic-cleansing and the presence of United Nations Protection Force (UNPF) throughout the war under whose "watch," "some of the worst deeds in human history" were commited (Hitchens). It is on

these interacting planes of violence, identity, and politics of spectacle where Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* finds its foundation.

Known for his comic war reportage and journalistic graphic narratives, Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* (published in 2000) reports on Sacco's interactions with the people, predominantly Bosniaks, trapped within the enclave and United Nations' designated "safe area" of Goražde during the Bosnian War. In interrogating the ways that conflicts come to the forefront of international attention or remain invisible (especially in European and American media coverage), Terri Tomsky's "From Sarajevo to 9/11: Travelling Memory and the Trauma Economy" highlights the constructed "marketability" of trauma, detailing how some traumas are given credibility based on political connections, media attention, and spectacularity of violence. Ultimately, Tomsky used the term "trauma economy" to discuss how traumas are circulated, valued, and divorced from their context. When looking at the "legitimacy" and circulation of trauma, the war in Bosnia has continued to receive critical (if not media) attention due to the way it became a "celebrity" of sorts in American and European media during the period. In short, representations and coverage on the war in Bosnia were used as a representative event of the potential for the violent dissolution of nations in the post-modern world on the Euro-perceived fringes of the construct of the West. In contrast, in communicating his experiences with victims and survivors of a war habitually divorced from context, Sacco prioritizes the experience, words, and testimony of average individuals in the enclave whose stories are often left as a footnote in the grand narrative of History (Tomsky 52). In working to critique the ways in which traditional reportage, such as photography, chooses specific events to represent and chooses *how* those events are represented, Sacco "is acutely conscious of the way representations of trauma circulate in an

international system" and chooses to work with the comic form in representing the history, the specific events, and the persistent, personal trauma of the people of Goražde (Tomsky 53).

The presence of the frame in the comic form creates an ever-present, genre-specific multiplicity which is particularly useful when interacting with (and representing) memory, especially traumatic memory. In his work, Sacco uses this multiplicity to illuminate and critique the ways an understanding of violence and the subsequent pain and trauma that stems from that violence are constructed by the writer and reader. As discussed in Eric Berlasky's "Lost in the Gutter: Within and Between Frames in Narrative and Narrative Theory," unlike other forms of storytelling like literature and film, the comic form requires an analysis beyond the idea of a singular frame which inaccurately fixes narrative possibilities. Instead, the framing—particularly of comics—should be analyzed on two axes presented by Berlatsky: the axes of cognitive role/role in interpretation (central to superficial) and physical location (external to central/internal). At the top of his y-axis (cognitive role/role in interpretation) is that which *must* be taken into account by "any responsible reading" and is connected to reader understanding and experience "within" the text, making it central (Berlatsky 168). However, reader interaction can also influence the interpretation of the text as a reader will bring in ideas that are not immediately connected to ideas intentionally put within the text, leading to this interpretation falling on the "superficial" end of the y-axis (Berlatsky 167). As for the x-axis, "on the right end of that axis are things that are clearly and physically 'in the text,' or part of the text in question. On the left side of the axis are things that are clearly "outside the text" (Berlatsky 168). Therefore, an idea or situation may be external to the "physical" text, but it is still centrally connected in interpretation. In this way,

the "story" of the text is not just what is intentional and immediate, but what also gets left unsaid and must be worked at to comprehend. However, "some frames are stronger than others, while others are ambiguous enough that readers play a more active role" (Berlatsky 175), and it is the strong frame of the "communications systems, media corporations, and state practices" that "regulate the majority of visual representations and, with that, the possibilities of contesting and reconfiguring representations of war" which particularly interests Sacco (Kozol 9). In addition to this, the presence of the gutter forces the reader into direct interaction with the text as it calls on them to perform the act of closure—the mental filling of the empty space (the gutter) in order to connect the various framed panels—by asking (I would say demanding) readers to call on their own understanding of the world and also "draw on various sensory and cognitive modalities that render the reading experience as physically intimate" (Scherr 21).

Fig. 1. Joe Sacco. *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, pp. 120-121

In figure 1, Sacco's illustrated persona and his fellow journalist Serif visit one of their various "hosts" in Goražde, and as they search for media and stories to send to their respective employers, they encounter tapes of "Goražde's own Most Horrifying Home Videos" (120). As they watch the horrors of the videos unfold before them—"a Serb killed by a Serb shell...Half her face sliced off...Toes!...Pulp!"—the journalists' host and the man who supposedly shot the video pushes and screams, "LOOK! LOOK!...YOU MUST LOOK!" (Sacco 120). The audience watches the horror as the journalists' faces, especially Serif's, evolve throughout the panels across the spread as she ultimately shifts from being unable to look at this spectacle of violence—a violence the reader does not see represented on the page and must, therefore, construct themselves—to a dissolution of resolve. Even more interesting is that Sacco's persona and Serif ultimately leave the home disgusted, not just by the "full-color images of the dismembered and the disemboweled," but by the "outrageous" price which their host requested in order to sell the tapes to them for television usage. Figure 1, along with countless other images throughout the narrative, is representative of the objective of much of Sacco's work, critiquing the ways in which witnessing, especially witnessing through media, distorts "outside" perceptions of conflict.

In part due to its designation as the "guerre du jour," images and videos of violence and suffering from the Bosnian War became a commodity, receiving saturation coverage and represented daily in the Western media" (Tomsky 52). In the spread on figure 1 alone, the reader sees the survivor's own understanding of the system that commodifies his and his fellow Bosnian's pain.The pain in the video is no longer the pain of an *individual* in the video, but an opportunity for recognition for the nation, "as the former Yugoslavia broke up, recognition or nonrecognition of states by Western countries had significant and unequal

impact on their political economies" (Kozol 40). While the forcefulness and diction with which Sacco paints and indicts the host for his own participation and perpetuation of the consumption of trauma, the real indictment—although subtle—is for Serif and Sacco's own avatars. Ending on their interest in the price of being able to circulate the videos (videos that they watched with such horror) and their disgust at the price works to demonstrate the journalists' own complicity in the process of making "distant wars visible" throughout circulation strategies that traditionally prioritize spectacularity of "distant suffering" (Kozol 6).

The ultimate indictment is of the readers. Because of the closure in the gutter-space, the readers must try to picture the images the avatars are seeing, calling on their own memories of viewing violence, in person or in the media. It forces the readers to think of the *theme* of violence as central to a responsible reading of the text (the top of Berlatsky's y-axis), yet does not physically include images of the violence (the left of Berlatsky's x-axis); the violence does not have specificity aside from what the reader can assign. In this way, to perform closure between the panels, there must exist an assumption about the commonality and banality of violence and pain. Even if a reader cannot "see it," they can think it because they have "seen" violence and pain before. By requiring the reader to watch the avatars watch pain unseen to the readers, the spread has the dual of effect of critiquing the ways in which violence becomes commodified or ignored (an ever-present theme in Sacco's work) *and* highlighting the places where Sacco does something different with the conflict and the pain of the people involved. However, even in Sacco's prioritization of the specificity of pain throughout *Safe Area Goražde*, I am interested in the instances where his work becomes complicit, falling into the cultural and media narratives that he works to critique. That is, I

am interested in the ways that Sacco represents—or better yet, *fails* to represent—the pain of women in a language outside of traditional understandings of women as victims in war.

Women and the Bosnian War

In conceiving of the connection between women and war, the influence that patriarchal conventions on the familial, cultural, and political field cannot be overstated. Notions of women and war and women *in* war can be roughly divided into two categories for the purpose of this project. The first category is the way that women (more specifically, women's bodies) are used in justifications of violent conflicts, noting the specific cultural perceptions of women as recognizable subjects (or not). In her analysis of the connection between gender and nation, Nira Yuval-Davis discusses how, in thinking of community responsibilities, "defending one's own community and country has been seen as an ultimate citizen's duty—to die (as well as to kill) for the sake of the homeland or the nation," but "this ability has been equated with maleness, while femaleness has been equated with weakness and the need for male protection" (89). "Manhood" and "womanhood" are relational categories, and, in this traditional relation, violence occurs supposedly on *behalf* of women ("our women need protection") in order to prevent violence on the *bodies* of women. These "women's victimization narratives" (Hesford 126) establish women as secondary subjects culturally—as they are perceived as incapable of fulfilling the "ultimate citizen's duty"—and are one of the many factors that make possible the exchange of women as symbols and messages of power during and after conflicts between men. Ultimately, the female body becomes representative of masculine honor and becomes a traditional "spoil" of war; what is ever-present in many classic tales of rape "is that women and the violence they suffer are of

less concern to the men than the future of the state" (Lillie 94). It is these assumptions that have guided many attempts to culturally address (or ignore) sexual violence in times of war.

The second category of interest in looking at women and war (especially important when looking at women during the war in Bosnia) is the way women fit into international law, specifically the laws surrounding the protection of human rights. As Wendy Hesford notes in her book *Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Rights Visions, Recognitions, Feminisms*, notions of a human rights subject—especially a violated human rights subject—often relies on spectacles of violence and "spectacular rhetoric," which "activates certain cultural and national narratives and social and political relations, consolidates identities through the politics of recognition, and configures material relations of power and difference" (Hesford 9). Concerns surrounding the official establishment and international legal protection of human rights exploded onto the international legal stage following WWII and the overwhelming atrocities of the Holocaust. This focus led to the drafting of a charter and the ultimate creation of the United Nations in 1945. While the United Nations Charter is not particularly useful in interrogating the response of international law to sexual violence against women during armed conflicts, as "it is intended to serve merely as a guideline document and does not transgress state sovereignty for purposes of recognizing specific norms," the charter highlights how these distinctions between custom/culture and law—made even in this project—are entirely constructed and even arbitrary (Levy 271). While the laws surrounding protections of international human rights are coded in the language of neutrality, their creation and enforcement are guided by the biases and the assumptions of those in the positions of power that create(d) them. Due to the breakup of societies into the public sphere of influence (traditionally denoted as being masculine) and the private sphere of influence

(traditionally denoted as being feminine), “men have traditionally maintained political and psychological control over most world cultures and over international politic,” and “international legal bodies, most notably the United Nations, mirror this patriarchal control” (Levy 261). This is reflected in the charter’s generality, but, even more important for situations of sexual violence in times of conflict, this patriarchal influence is seen in early international laws surrounding rape written in during the Geneva Convention.

Following WWII in the 1949 Geneva Convention IV, lawmakers worked to address the issue of sexual violence in war. In discussions surrounding protections that must be bestowed to civilians during war, the second paragraph of Article 27 states that “Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault” (ICRC). The emphasis on rape as a crime against *honor* perpetuates notions of patriarchal influence that connect the woman’s honor directly to her body (specifically whether her body is violable) and works to hide the question: on whose ideas of honor is this law being built? But we must also ask: What is honor? How is it defined? Why are we not talking about bodily and psychological harm, about objectification, about pain, and instead about "honor?" In constructing rape as an issue of honor and as an issue between an individual combatant and an individual non-combatant, sexual violence in war “traditionally fell within the context of a private, and not public, matter” (Levy 262). While throughout much of the past, it has been habitual to treat gendered violence (sexual violence) “as an unfortunate by-product or negative consequence of war, one that mainly affected women” or an issue of honor—predominately the father’s honor, regarding the violence during the Bosnian War, it became clear on a mass scale that rape is

not merely an unfortunate, inevitable by-product of masculinized violence, but a recognizable military strategy (Isikozlu and Millard 35).

Throughout the reporting on the Bosnian War—although the emphasis was often placed on massacres (mostly of Bosniaks and Croats by Serb forces), the physical destruction of the country, and the ineffectiveness and "embarrassment" of UN and NATO forces—there were whisperings of acts of organized rape occuring. It was during the following tribunals conducted in order to prosecute war crimes in the former Yugoslavia that the wide-spread and systematic approach to the "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnia was revealed. While numbers cannot be definitively provided due to forced expulsion, voluntary migration, the murder of victims, and the silence of survivors, "an estimated 20,000 women endured sexual assault in the form of torture and rape" (Salzman 348). Predominantly, the victims of these rapes were Muslim women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the perpetrators were Serbian men, especially soldiers and paramilitary groups (Niarchos 656).

In enacting this violence against Muslim women, there appeared to be five primary patterns to the rapes. The first is that individuals or small groups would break into the homes of known Bosniaks, steal property, and the women would be raped, often in front of other members of the home. In the second pattern, women were raped in conjunction with the invasions of towns and villages where the rape was enacted as a *public* spectacle. The third pattern often occurred as women were held in separate "detention camps" while the men from their villages were being executed. This pattern often occurred alongside acts of torture. In the fourth pattern, the women were forced into sexual slavery in brothels catering to soldiers, and these women were "more often killed than released" (Niarchos 657). Finally, the fifth pattern garnered the most political attention and outcry as it was particularly

emblematic of the mission of ethnic cleansing, genocide, by the Serbian forces. In the fifth pattern, the:

> rapes occured in the so-called 'rape camps.' Some of the camps [were] large and well organized; others [consisted] of houses or cafes. In this setting, the women [were] raped frequently, perhaps numerous times each day. They [were] humiliated, beaten, and some [were] killed. Some captors [said] their intention [was] to impregnate the women to make, 'Chetnik babies.' In one camp, where as many as 2000 women might have been held, the women were examined by gynecologists. If found to be pregnant, they were separated, given special privileges, and held until their seventh month when it was too late to obtain an abortion; at that point, they were released. (Niarchos 657)

While the patterns of rape are often read in connection with one another due to the emphasis on gang rape and sadism, in addition to acting as forms of ethnic cleansing, these patterns of rapes can be read as a political *and* cultural war. During this war, the battleground was very often women's bodies, and the goal was to decimate social cohesion in the already ethnically diverse Bosnia.

Women and the Nation

As previously noted, Bosnia was the most ethnically diverse state making up the former Yugoslavia. While this multiplicity is certainly not responsible for the violence that occured in the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, it has become an ever-present "case study" for scholars in looking at the modern process of nation-building and the creation of national identities. Benedict Anderson's formative book, *Imagine Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* presents the notion of nation as being "an imagined

political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 6). Anderson's influential text traces the roots and causes of modern nationalism, nation building, and the overarching proposal of the nation as being imagined. In particular, he notes how the nation comes to be a community that we identify with (or are excluded from) based on material production and reproduction of memory. Of particular note to Yugoslavia's collapse after the death of Tito is the distinction between "modernity" and "antiquity" enabled by "what might be called a 'comparative history'" (Anderson 68). For a nation to succeed—i.e., its members and citizens buy in and there is a sense of nationalism—it must be imagined as having finite borders while its history and future are infinite and irrevocable, but there was an understanding of Yugoslavia as being a modern nation. In turn, the concept of "homogeneous, empty time" which makes the creation of a modern nation possible through its linear understanding of time and cause-and-effect events also allows for a nation to be *unmade* (Anderson 70).

Although it is a formative work, *Imagined Communities* presents conceptions of national space and identity that are predominantly masculine, but these maculine leanings are coded in the languages of universality and neutrality. As "nationalism has to be understood by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being," failure to acknowledge and work to understand the cultural systems guiding controlling expression of gender and sexuality create the dangerous situation of leaving little room to interrogate gendered violence within nation-building and (especially in the case of the former Yugoslavia) campaigns of nation-*destroying.* In thinking of the ways in which modern nations and modern notions of nationalism are established, two paths of nation-building best

demonstrate how the supposedly neutral national space is actually predominantly masculine. The first are the notions of education that build an understanding of the nation and state. The second are the ideas surrounding the possibilities for entrance into the nation, particularly those surrounding birth and birth-rights.

In national campaigns of the twentieth-century, especially campaigns of national imperialism, there was a heavy reliance on ideas of modernity and a linear progress that worked to eliminate multiplicity that was a threat to the modern, imperial nation. These ideas of modernity were constructed and then spread by "modern-style education" (Anderson 116). While Chapter 7 of Anderson's work interrogates issues of colonialism and education, especially noting the ways in which language acted as an entrance point or block to those engaging with the "new" nation and power structure, he fails to highlight gender as even a component in the access to language, which then gives access to education (the education of the colonizer to be sure), which then gives access to power and recognition by the state (Anderson 128). Ultimately, while Anderson does address access—to an extent—the ways in which the modern notion is racialized, he fails to take an intersectional approach to look at the issues of "*gendered* and racialized citizenship" (Mohanty 66).

Second, entrance into the imagined community, especially in "pre-modern" communities, often hinges on the idea of birth and birthright. In early sections of his analysis of the modern nation, Anderson does address how sex was essential in early communities (notably religious communities), discussing how "in realms where polygyny was religiously sanctioned, complex systems of tiered concubinage were essential to the integration of the realm" (20). Even in later sections, Anderson notes how citizenship becomes an "inheritance"—the example he uses is that of the first generation of "Americans" born under

the flag of the United States—but he almost exclusively ties these connections between birth and nation to the role they play in the acquisition of language (196). For Anderson, language politics and nationalism are inseparable, but once again, Anderson's analysis fails to acknowledge the subjecthood, or even the physical *body* of the women and the ways in which they are co-opted to make the masculine modern nation possible. Ultimately, many instances of modern nation and nationalism, especially presented by Anderson, rely on the invisibility and second-class status of women.

At the risk of universalizing the oppression of women under a vague notion of "the patriarchy," it is easy (and accurate) to say that the cultural systems in the former Yugoslavia (especially Bosnia and Herzegovina) that dictate culturally accepted expressions of gender and sexuality are built around the subordination of women to the role in the domestic (especially outside of urban centers) sphere and an understanding of women as cultural and biological *re*producers of the nation (Yuval-Davis 27). In reproducing culturally, notions of national identity rely on the idea of a fixed authenticity, meaning there is only one way to truly be part of the national collective and to deviate is perceived as a threat to the stability of the nation. Women are then required to educate and pass on and "carry this 'burden of representation,' as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collective identity and honor, both personally and collectively" and are subordinated as the guards of tradition (Yuval-Davis 45). In reproducing *biologically,* women's bodies are nationally, politically, and culturally regulated as many notions of national entrance are regulated by shared "blood" and genealogical "inheritance." Therefore, the body of the woman, not only because of her constructed secondary subject position, is a target for attempts at nation-destroying due to the ability to violate the *nation* in the respect of "culture" (i.e., men's honor) *and* population

makeup (i.e., altering modes of biological "production). It is on (alongside? within?) these spaces that the policy of systematic sexual violence against women in Bosnia and Herzegovina by Serbian military and government forces was enacted.

Violence in *Safe Area Goražde*

In the introduction to her book *Frames of War*, Judith Butler unpacks the concepts of "recognition" and "recognizability" in the way that they force an audience to conceive of an individual or populace, or fail to do so. Butler's argument that "there are 'subjects' who are not quite recognizable as subjects, and there are 'lives' that are not quite--or, indeed, are never-recognized as lives" hinges upon the existence of the "frame" (Butler 4). The frame at its essence is a container through which a viewer is *allowed* to "see" while it simultaneously limits the field of vision and works to create a notion of the normative. However, because the frame is a controlled demarcator of a broader picture, a "leakage or contamination" of the pre-approved "image"is bound to occur in the frame (Butler 9). This leakage "troubles our sense of reality; . . . something occurs that does not conform to our established understanding of things." The leakage muddles the wide-ranging categories and concepts which can fall under the rhetorically-charged notion of the "normative" (Butler 9). I am specifically interested in the framing of violence, focusing not just on how pain is represented (or whether it can be) but on *whose* pain is represented, the ways in which that pain and trauma are worked into or rejected by hegemonic, legitimacy-granting cultural forces, and how the literary texts address this tension. Notably, it seems that the stories of the victims of sexual violence during the Bosnian war are habitually—intentionally or not—excluded from much of the narrative surrounding the framing of violence and pain. Instead, these troubling

narratives of systematic sexual violence are relegated to spaces in the gutter or must be actively searched for in spaces of leakage.

Renowned for the war reportage and unique approach at privileging the individual stories that do not often make it into the main discourses which focus on spectacle, while also critiquing his own role in the production of these spectacular narratives, Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* becomes an interesting case study when looking at experiences with pain. In particular, Sacco's choice to use the comic form to interact with violence and pain simultaneously acknowledges pain and works to recognize the subjects' experience of that pain. The comic form, unlike the camera, has the "ability to go places the camera cannot: 'The camera cannot go into the past,' [Sacco] says" (Scherr 27). In narrating pain as an *experience* across time and space, a movement of the panels of the page, by involving the reader in a way that strictly written text or strictly visual images cannot, creates an "ethical gaze" which can "occur only *through*, not despite, encounters with spectacles of violence" (Kozol 16).

In figure 2, a depiction of his conversation with his guide and friend Edin, Sacco represents Edin's narrative of discovering one of the many mass graves of his neighbors, friends, and fellow Bosniaks murdered by Serbian forces. In this representation, the spread moves deftly between past and present, making it clear that while the audience is *looking* at the discovery of the bodies of these men, they are not actually looking at the event. Instead, they are *interacting* with Edin's memory, Edin's trauma. In interacting with traumatic memory, especially traumatic memory as testimony or witnessing, there is a habitual tension between what is often classified as the "historical truth" (Oliver 1) versus what is important to the psychological truth of the witness, meaning that there is a difference between the facts

of history which material evidence can prove to be factually correct versus the experienced truth of the lived experience of an event (Oliver 2). This distinction also gives rise to the "double meaning of witnessing—*eyewitness testimony* based on first-hand knowledge, on the one hand, and *bearing witness* to something beyond recognition that can't be seen" (Oliver 16). In gathering testimony, one of the complications is determining what form of witness is being privileged in the gathering process and subsequent communication of this information. While eyewitness testimony can work to provide important information, especially in situations where legal action against violence is taken and events must be corroborated on various fronts, the truths that come from bearing witness can be lost in favor of exclusively "dead historical facts" (Oliver 16). Instead, it is a form of witnessing that is beyond mere recognition of historical accuracy and instead works to incorporate not just the experience of the event but the lived subject position of the tesifier is *bearing witness* which can simultaneously reveal the "'truth' of history" even in the middle of the "inaccuracies" of testimony (Oliver 17).

Rather than merely collecting a factual correct testimony of Edin, Sacco's work dually emphasizes Edin's role as an eyewitness to the horrors of the violence in Bosnia and Sacco's (and the reader's) role as bearing witness to the pain and trauma of the experience of Edin. The spread opens with Edin looking out onto the landscape in the "present-day" comic time as he reflects on his first hearing of the discovery of bodies. In the patterns of storytelling in *Safe Area Goražde,* overlaying images on a black page (not white) identifies the "events" of the images as having happened in the past. First situating the historical event within the frame of Edin's memory works to undermine the idea that recording these atrocities should

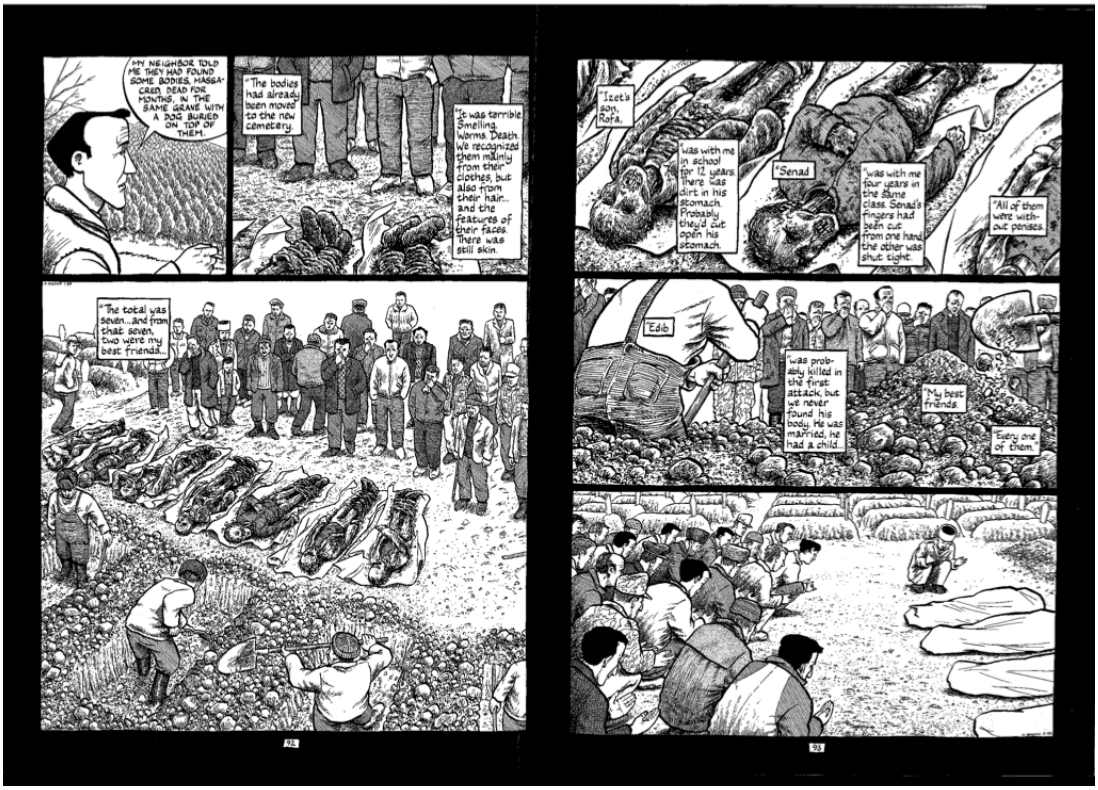

Fig. 2. Joe Sacco. *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, pp. 92-93.

occur secretly or "objectively," prioritizing only the role of the eyewitness in a way that makes the image a "spy in the house of love and of death" (Sontag 55). Instead, Sacco overlays the words of Edin as he makes it clear that, of the bodies, "two were [his] best friends" (92), naming them, "Rafa" and "Senad" (93). In allowing Edin to claim the event as his own through the inclusion of Edin's avatar in the panels *and* the inclusion of his words that indicate connection and possession ("two were [*my*] best friends"), Edin's story provides eyewitness testimony—such as his note that "all of [the corpses] [were] without penises" (Sacco 93)—and shows the ways in which victims of trauma work through that trauma. In turn, the use of the comic form in its construction with frames, panels, and gutters "enables a working-through rather than merely the repetition of trauma and violence" for the readers (Oliver 18). The representation of Edin's testimony and the events that Edin is discussing

highlights the fact that something “like this" happened and emphasizes that “getting the story ‘right’ factually” when addressing pain and trauma “is less important than getting it ‘right’ affectively” (Tomsky 54). What could have been a mere representation of the historical truth of a massacre (a “truth” that could easily be turned into an image and used to further the “CNN effect” that characterized the Bosnian war for many) becomes a deeply personal experience for Edin, Sacco, *and* the reader (Sontag 105). It is one that represents, bears witness, and recognizes the pain through the acknowledgement of the victims’*identities* and working through the spectacles of violence that often characterize war.

Representations of Sexual Violence in *Safe Area Goražde*

While Sacco highlights his concern for these narratives of trauma outside of their ability to circulate in the “trauma economy,” there is a space, a historical point, and an identity Sacco habitually fails to represent and recognize factually *and* affectively. I propose that Sacco fails to properly interact with the sexual violence of the Bosnian War *factually* in his exclusion of victim testimony and details surrounding the level of the violence. Furthermore, he uses the traditional frame of women as symbolically representative of “greater pain” in a way that undermines his work to step outside the co-option of pain, trauma, and violence. While the causes may be debated, the effects remain the same.

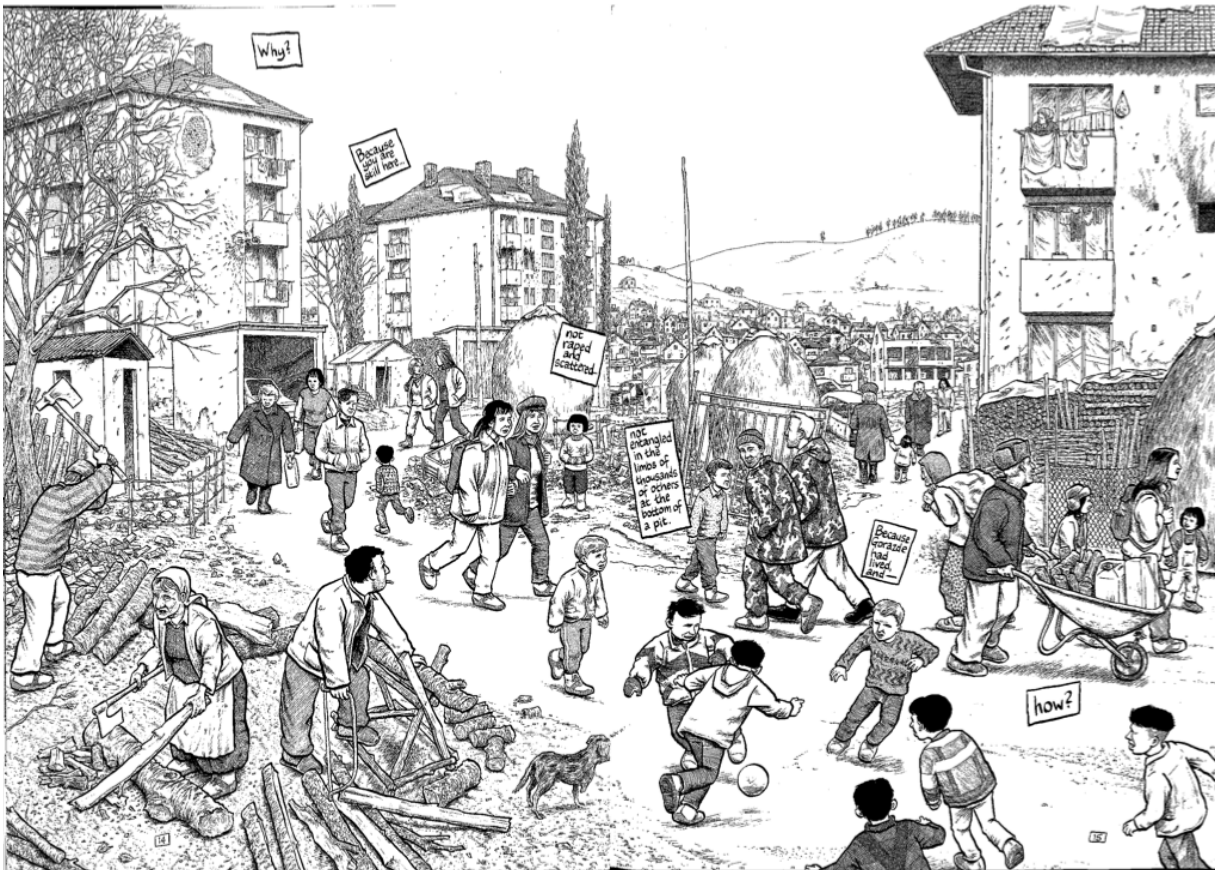

Fig. 3. Joe Sacco. *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, pp. 14-15.

Upon entering Goražde, a town that occupied a particularly large space in the narratives surrounding the Bosnian War due to its designation as a safe area by the UN and its continued survival even after its fellow eastern enclaves, Srebrenica and Zepa had been violently invaded by Serbian forces. Sacco paints Goražde as an anomaly, a miracle of sorts. His interest initially lies in unpacking "how:" How had the town survived? How had the people persisted (Sacco 15)? In the two-page spread in figure 3, as the physical destruction of the town is evident, it is the life and the movement which is meant to catch the attention of the reader. While the violence that caused the specific destruction on the page is not depicted, we are meant to make those connections. We too are meant to wonder, not how the material of the town was damaged, but how the vulnerable population, isolated in what is described in

the text as “no-man’s-land,” lives (Sacco 3). The spread itself is intentionally designed as overwhelming in its busyness and lack of traditional breakup with gutters and panels, but the sub-image that hints at the ways in which Sacco interacts with gendered—especially sexual—violence throughout the rest of narrative is that of the two girls walking side-by-side. Over their heads is a textbox that reads, “not raped and scattered” (Sacco 14).

As previously noted, rape—especially the rape of Bosniak women—was an integral part of the nationalistic campaign of violence that was meant to destroy the ethnic diversity in Bosnia and Herzogovina. It is not *these* acts of rape to which the spread is referring. Rather, the “rape” in question is that of the town, and this wording does not highlight the sexual violence many women experienced during this war; instead, it works to call on traditional notions of “rape” as being synonymous with “violability.” Throughout the remainder of *Safe Area Goražde,* rape, sexual violence, and gendered violence against the bodies and subjecthood of women are subordinated to the violability of borders (be they of a town, of a home, of a nation). Although this was a “war fought on and through women's bodies,” the women’s experiences in those bodies becomes secondary and—more often than not in Sacco’s work—relegated to the space of the gutter (Niarchos 651).

For those with knowledge of the conflict, Sacco’s and his interviewees’ silence about the rapes in the region is impossible to miss. However, in no place is this absence more evident than in the chapter “Around Goražde.” In “Around Goražde,” Sacco interviews two people who have come to Goražde as refugees, Rasim and Munira. The chapter opens with Rasim’s harrowing tale as an “eyewitness when Serbs brought Muslims to the bridge on the Drina and pushed them into the water and shot them” (Sacco 109). Once again, Sacco’s representation of Rasim’s memory

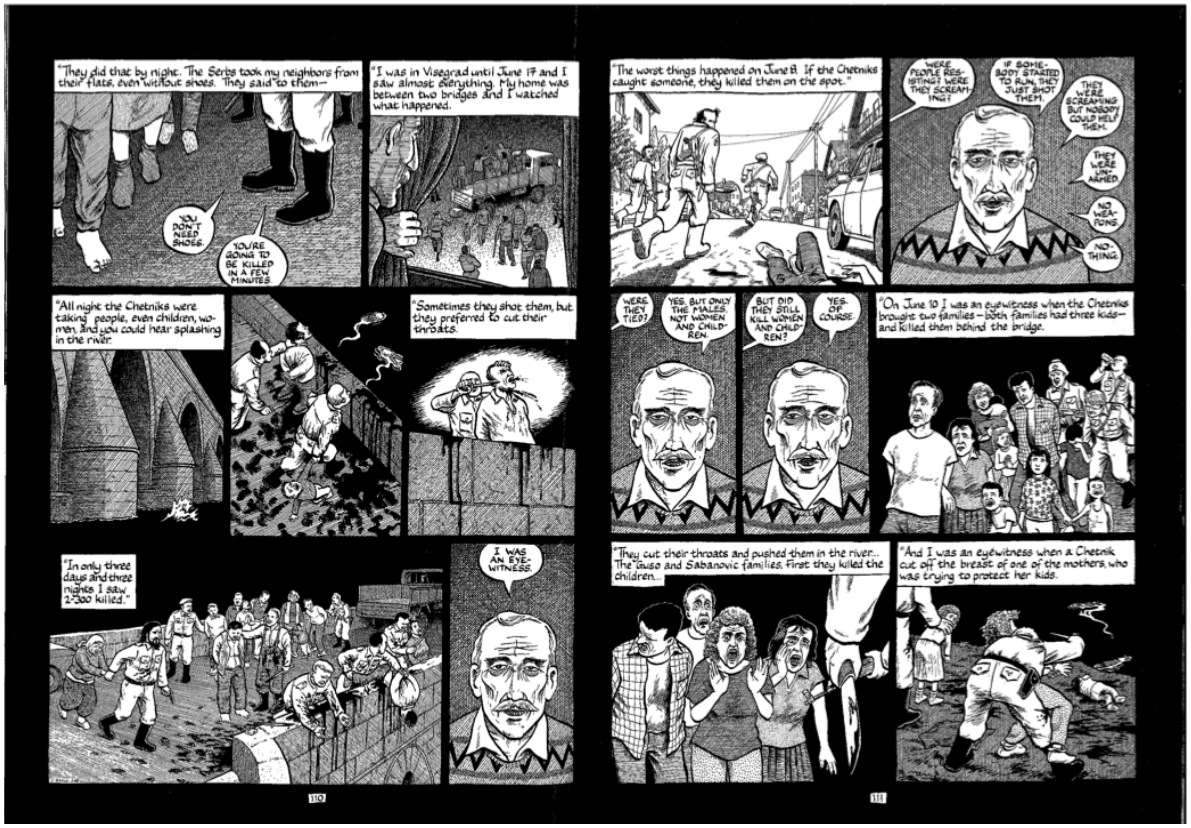

Fig. 4. Joe Sacco. *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, pp. 110-111.

does not shy away from signs that often make violence recognizable. As the narrative moves across time across the page, from Rasim's face in his testimony to the representations of the past, there is blood and gruesome depictions of death. Lingering on the panel, the gutter becomes the place, not where the violence disappears, but where the violence depicted in the panels is merely expanded, allowing for the movement from one scene of bloodshed to the next. The death, torture, and blood are not hidden in the gutter here.

In addition, the representation of dark blood and weapons making contact with the body signify physical pain, but Sacco's representation of the emotional terror of the event uses the faces and bodies of women to bear the burden of emotional affect. In a similar approach to his representations of Edin's experience, Sacco manipulates the roles between that of the eyewitness of the historical truth and those who bear witness to the affective truth.

Over and over, Rasim makes it clear that "[he] was an eyewitness" (Sacco). In his assumed role as historical eyewitness, Rasim is focused on communicating the factual information about the slaughter on the bridge, and as he is prodded for information from an outside voice (presumably comic Sacco) for details of the event, there is a notable absence of Rasim's affective claim to the event. Instead of functioning as the subject whose negotiation of trauma the reader works to bear witness to, Rasim's story—although horrific—functions more as a "repetition of trauma and violence" (Oliver 18). Although an eyewitness representation of this event is not without its merits in the context of war reportage, the aspect that problematizes Sacco's representation of Rasim's narrative is the creation of emotion in readers to drive home the horror of the "facts" of Rasim's tale. Sacco effectively communicates the atrocity of the events by representing them in a manner that "activates certain cultural and national narratives" (Hesford 9). Specifically, the narrative is that of the "women as archetypal victims," especially in the role of mother (Mohanty 24).

Primarily, the violence on the bridge detailed by Rasim and illustrated by Sacco—especially as the children are murdered while their parents are forced to watch—highlights the ways in which the goal of much of the violence enacted on non-combatants during the war in Bosnia was meant as an act of genocide *and* to eliminate the social cohesion among potential survivors through public spectacles of violence. In this space, Rasim's subject position is not the emphasis. Rather, Rasim, his lack of subject position, and his pain are represented in a way that where the reader cannot truly bear witness *or* acknowledge the pain outside if the role of "victim of violence." This is especially the case with women in the text. Ultimately, this representation only succeeds in perpetuating traditional rhetorics of power with a limited scope for recognition and is emblematic of a

"*crisis of witnessing,*" referring to the "risks of representing trauma and violence, to ruptures in identification, and to the impossibility of empathetic merging between witness and testifier" (Hesford 99).

In the bottom left-hand panel of figure 4, while the image of hands (presumably Serbian ones) holding weapons is at the forefront of the image and the men (presumably the fathers of the children killed first) are in the background, the focus of the image is that of the faces of the women, the mothers. The emotions depicted on their faces and through their bodies is complex. It could be fear. It could be horror. It could be outrage. The goal of the image is not to bear witness to the pain, which can only be executed by working with and through the victims' unique subject positions; it is to be sure that the reader feels horror. While the pain is certainly there for the fathers included in the image, the faces and bodies of these nonspecific women display a much more legible form of non-specific, non-recognized (in the manner of the politics of the recognizable subject), *but* representative pain. Thus, James Young's questions in his article "Regarding the Pain of Women" become particularly applicable: "do we actually ever see the pain of women, or do we see only our own reflections in the shiny veneer of women as symbols—of resistance, of innocence, of regeneration" (1779). In this moment, even as the reader imagines the violence of when "a Chetnik cut off the breast of one of the mothers, who was trying to protect her kids," we see a pain that is symbolic of overarching horror that the audience has become familiar with in *Safe Area Goražde.*

Many critics like Charles Acheson in "Expanding the Role of the Gutter in Nonfiction Comics: Forged Memories in Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*" celebrate Sacco's manipulation of the gutter space as a place that leaves "the most horrific acts...playing with

the medium's devices." The gutter space ultimately forces the reader—more often than not—to engage with the division between the role of eyewitness and the process of bearing witness (Acheson 294). However, in spaces where eyewitness testimony is prioritized, Sacco also uses the female body as a place to read cultural, symbolic pain and fails to critically work with and through the trauma of women. While similar instances do occur for male victims of violence from the Bosnian War in Sacco's work, the subsequent tale of Munira—following Rasim's narrative—highlight the ways in which this use of the female body as powerless without "uncovering the material and ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as 'powerless' in a specific context" is an alarming pattern that subordinates facts and makes Sacco's revolutionary use of gutter space into a space of erasure and further silence also (Mohanty 23).

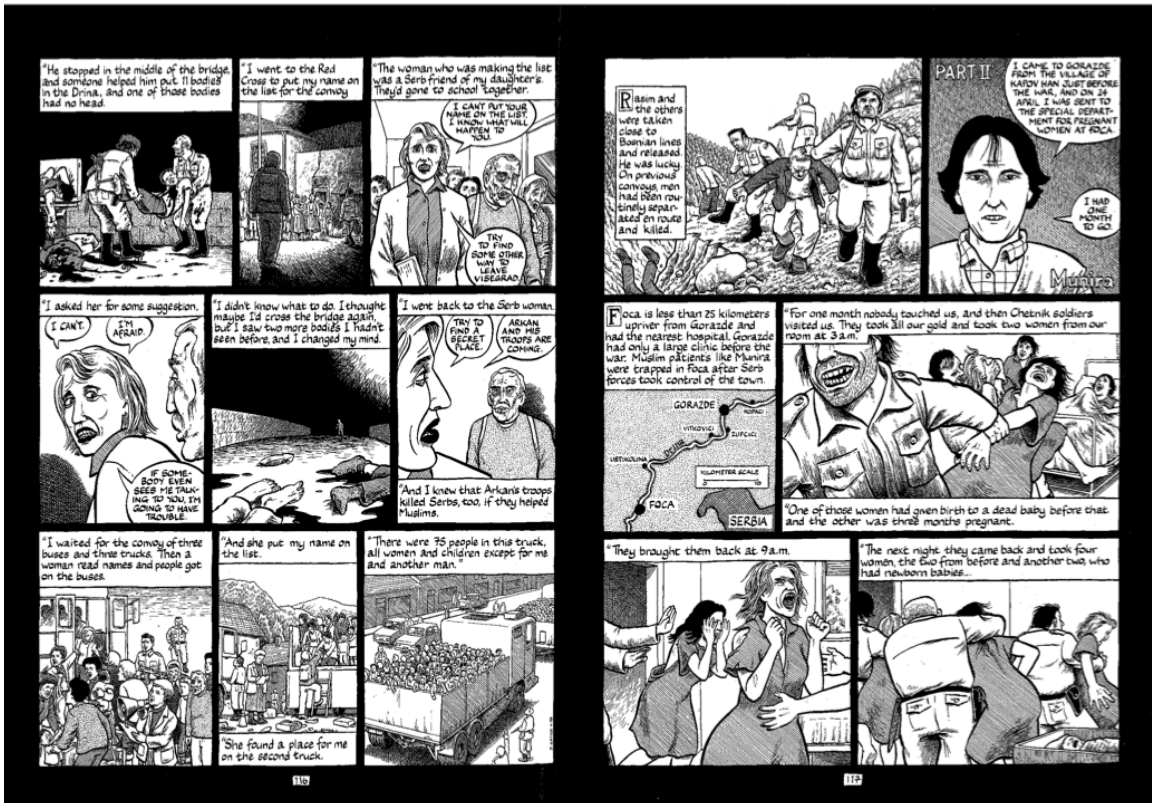

Fig. 5. Joe Sacco. *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, pp. 116-117.

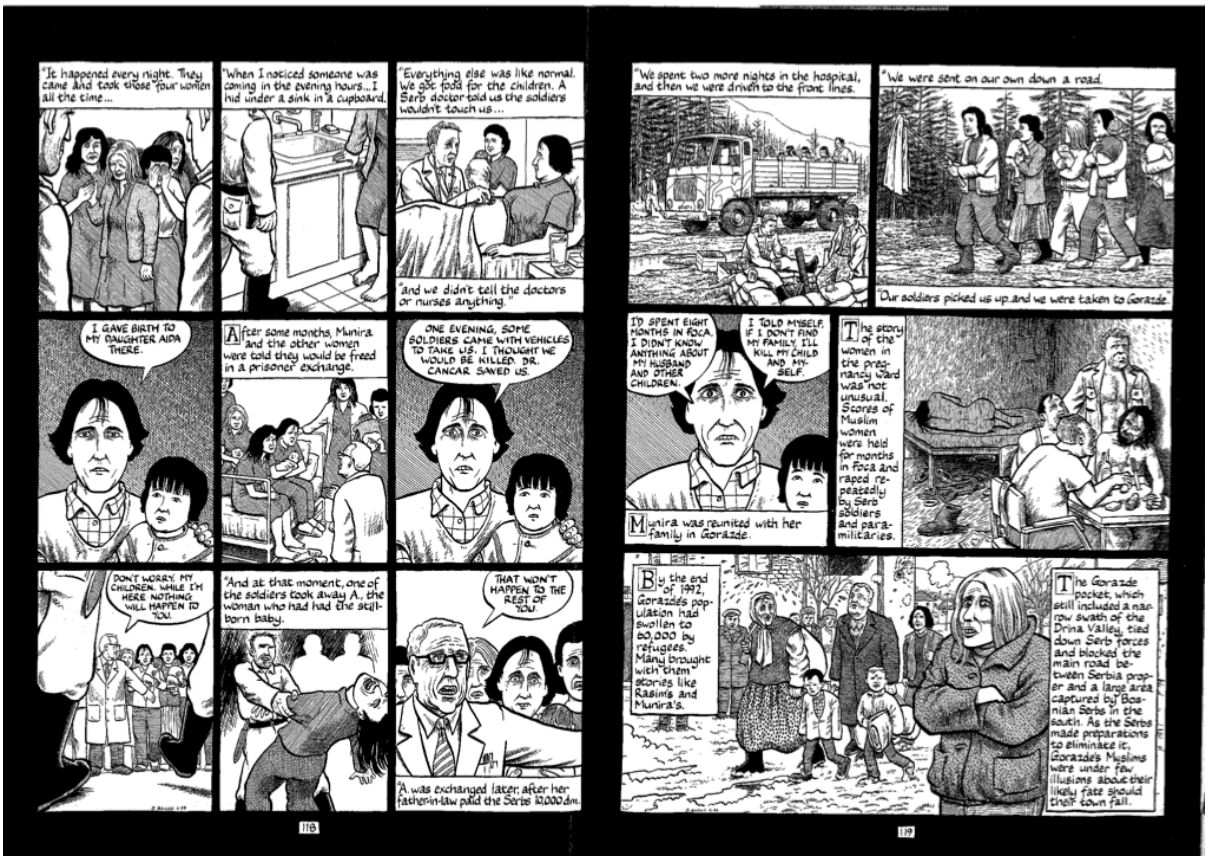

Fig. 6. Joe Sacco. *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, pp. 118-119.

The figures 5 and 6 mark the shift from telling Rasim's experience in "Around Goražde" to that of Munira's. Reading Munira's experience reveals the ways in which Sacco fails to value and recognize the violence against women—specifically sexual violence. Munira's story is the *only* instance in the entirety of the narrative where any reference towards the gendered nature of the War in Bosnia is made. Munira begins her story by revealing to the interviewer—presumably Sacco—in the modern day of the comic: "I came to Goražde from the village of Kapov Han just before the war. And on 24 April I was sent to the special department for women at Foča" (Sacco 117). In the subsequent panel, indicated as being informational by the lack of quotation marks and shift into "boxing" the text, the narrative states, "Foča is less than 25 kilometers upriver from Goražde and had the nearest

hospital. Goražde had only a large clinic before the war. Muslim forces patients like Munira were trapped in Foča after Serb forces took control of the town" (Sacco 117). What this aside fails to mention—and no following educational panels add as an addendum—is that Foča, along with having the nearest hospital, was a major subject in the trial of Prosecutor v. Dragan Zelenović, in which the crimes against the inhabitants of Foča by Bosnian-Serbs were presented as evidence. In particular, what characterized Foča was the abundance of rape camps established in the town (Fiori). Then, Munira's story shifts and tells of how the "Chetnik soldiers visited us...it happened every night. They came and took those four women all the time...we didn't tell the doctor's or nurses anything" (Sacco 117-118).

What happened to the women in Munira's testimony of her time in Foča was what happened to 20,000 women throughout the Bosnian War. The women were raped. An important difference between Rasim's experiences of violence and Munira's is that while Rasim boldly declares his status as "an eyewitness" (Sacco 111), Munira makes it clear that "when [she] noticed someone was coming in the evening hours…[she] hid under a sink in a cupboard" (Sacco 118). In Munira's story, the representations of rape occur in the gutter space between the panels of Munira's narrative. While there were similar gaps that left the violence in Rasim's in the gutter space as well, the implied time passing between the panels of Munira's experience are significantly longer. Whereas Rasim's gutter is one composed of—timewise—mere moments, the time in Munira's gutter was explicitly noted to be *hours* or potentially longer. The dual approach of pushing the sexual violence against these women into the gutter, out of the representative field of the frame, *and* failing to preface Munira's experience with an informational aside that allows readers to effectively interact with the violence in the gutter furthers the marginialization and violence against these survivors. This

approach to dealing with the rampant sexual violence during the Bosnian War functions as a "myth of not-knowing"— "if only we had known what was happening, we would have done something"—that marks so many rape narratives (Marshall and Gilmore 97). It participates explicitly in the discourse of rape as something "shameful," a discourse that has led to devastating consequences on the lives of these victims as individuals and members of their community:

> The indirect effect of the rapes committed for purposes of "accomplishing" genocide is to have the women themselves, through their guilt and silence, enforce and perpetuate the genocide. Bosnian and Croatian Muslim women who have been raped are reluctant to seek help because of the resulting stigmatization that they would face in their communities. Even in western society, women are reluctant to seek prosecution of a rapist due to the shame and stigma attached to what society often regards as a voluntary sexual encounter. However, because Islamic culture esteems virginity so highly, there is an additional stigma attached to violated Muslim women. Women who have been brave enough to report these incidents to international and medical sources have experienced a backlash of social isolation. Some international investigators have found that husbands no longer want to touch their violated wives, families reject daughters who have been victimized, and women themselves, horribly traumatized, recoil from sexual conduct. Women have largely failed to report these crimes to doctors and are often unable to discuss the crimes even when receiving psychiatric help. (Levy 266)

Instead of words or affirmations of the violence that occured, we—the readers—are left with the screaming faces and torn clothes of women. We are left with the widened eyes of Munira

as she discusses how she planned to "kill [her] child and [herself]" if she could not find her family after her release (Sacco 119).

Silence in testimony, especially in testimony surrounding sexual violence, can come from many places. The silence of many survivors of rape during the Bosnian War comes from a place of cultural shame where violation by the "enemy" caused a woman to be viewed as a pariah and a traitor. In his attempts to track the gendered effects and the post-war situation of women who were victims during the Bosnian War, Hariz Halilovich discovered that "stories of rape have come predominantly from women who were forced by their experience to choose isolation: all have come from divorced women, widows, or unmarried women who do not have to contend with outraged husands or other family and community members" (157). The shame of being raped and of surviving that rape (especially if pregnancy followed) is not read as the pain of the woman but as the symbolic destruction and violation of the nation. In addition to this, the silence of many victims of *any* form of trauma can come from a resistance to having their trauma depersonalized. In his "Five Theses on Torture," Idelber Avelar notes:

> The traumatized subject finds him/herself caught in a quandary: there can be no elaboration and overcoming of the trauma without the articulation of a narrative in which the traumatic experience is inserted in a signifying way, inserted as signification. But this very insertion can only be perceived by the subject as a real betrayal of the singularity and intractability of the experience, being treated...appears to many survivors to imply the abandonment of an important reality, or dilution of a special truth within the comforting terms of therapy. (Avelar 261)

To articulate an experience, while it does potentially enable "overcoming," leads to a loss. This becomes even *more* so when the voice narrating their experience is not conceived of having the "authority to speak" and is not recognized as a life or having pain that is grievable (Avelar 254).

When making space for silence in testimony —an essential part of testimony—the gutter in comics can do phenomenal work. The gutter is not exclusively an empty space used to move through time; it can be used to actively engage the reader and shift the text, but the panels that surround it and the frame that contains it alter the gutter's effectiveness at creating the needed affect. Ultimately, the greatest indictment of Sacco's handling of sexual violence during the Bosnian War is not the failure to represent the act of rape. It is not the fact that the narratives of women are not prioritized in *Safe Area Goražde* (although this absence is notable with prior knowledge of the conflict). The indictment against Sacco is best represented in the final informational panel that bookends Munira's story, followed by the assertion that many refugees in Goražde "brought with them stories like Rasim's and Munira's" (Sacco 119).

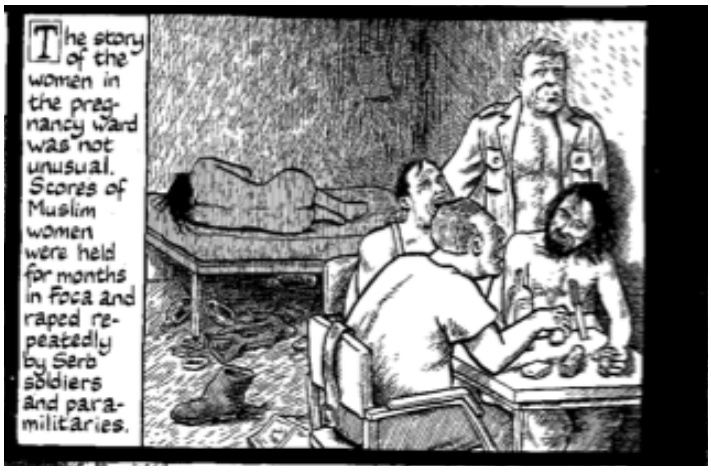

Fig. 7. Joe Sacco. *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, pp. 119.

In figure 7, the educational narrator—often imagined as the reportorial persona of Sacco—states, "the story of the women in the pregnancy ward was not unusual. Scores of Muslim women were held for months at Foča and raped by Serb soldiers and paramilitaries." While the information is factually correct, the language of "scores" is a vague reference to a documented number of women who suffered sexual violence and torture. In addition, in exclusively referencing Foča, it misrepresents the historical facts that this sexual violence against women was an organized military campaign created and pushed by political leaders, not an anomaly restricted to Foča. In the illustration itself, there is some factual evidence attesting to the rapes, such as the presence of several men in the lit foreground of the image. In the background, is—once again—a symbolic woman. The audience does not see her face, erasing her identity as a specific victim of this torture, and her nakedness highlights her vulnerability and violation. In her isolation, this woman is meant to elicit sympathy and possibly outrage, but she is not even able to claim the trauma enacted against her. Her naked back carries "this 'burden of representation'" (Yuval-Davis 45).

Ultimately, "while Sacco guides readers to a certain level of brutality through visual and linguistic markers...readers unify the reality and forge memories" (Acheson 294). The idea that memories and experiences within the text can be forged is reliant on reader knowledge. While the campaigns of sexual violence against Muslim women by Serb forces during the Bosnian War has received much attention, failure to highlight this history—as Sacco does for many other experiences throughout the texts—makes the gutter, the space where these memories are forged, useless as a site for bearing witness and revolutionary recognition. In this way, *Safe Area Goražde* becomes a prime example of how texts can be revolutionary in interacting with violence and simultaneously complicit in relying on and

perpetuating cultural narratives and systems built on subordination, especially that of women.

Chapter 2

"You know what they do to the young girls they arrest?": Imagined Pain and Gendered Violence in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*

Introduction to *Persepolis*

In a discussion on World Literature presented at the 2011 American Comparative Literature Conference in Vancouver Canada, two leading names in the field, David Damrosch and Gayatri Spivak, expanded on some of their "productive disagreements" (Damrosch and Spivak 455). These disagreements address many of the fundamental issues between Comparative Literature and World Literature. In reviewing these debates—such as the politics of language learning, academic elitism, and the dangers of tokenization—the thread that ties all of these discussions together is a fervent concern about the potential flattening of complex texts as they become deeply embedded in global circulation and function widely in translation. This flattening pushes singular texts to stand for entire cultures and histories as irresponsible textual engagement by readers, theorists, and critics attempts to locate elements of the "universal" human experience, rather than the textually, culturally, and historically singular. This is especially true in the case of Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood.*

Originally published in French as a series of *bande dessinées* in four volumes (one for each year from 2000 to 2003), *Persepolis* quickly gained popularity and "from an initial print run of 3,000, it has sold over 400,000 copies in France" as of 2011 (Miller 50). With its growing popularity in France, Satrapi's text was translated into English and initially appeared in the United States "in an explicitly feminist, antiracist context in *Ms.* magazine in 2003" (Chute, *Graphic Women,* 136). In the years since, the English translation has sold over a

million copies in the United States, the series was collected into one complete volume in 2007, and *Persepolis* was adapted into an Oscar-nominated film the same year (Miller 50). By numbers, the global circulation of *Persepolis* cannot be ignored, but, in the midst of detailing Satrapi's "unforgettable" childhood "in Tehran during the Islamic Revolution" and her life that follows, the jacket cover declares that *Persopolis* is set apart by the "universal trials and joys of growing up." However, alongside Spivak's dictum "the singular is the always universalizable, never the universal," I would like to argue that *Persepolis* is *not* a "universal" tale, although the struggles it depicts might be *universalizabl*e to some degree (466). However, the universalizable threads can only be understood by first identifying the instances of singularity: the historical context, gender dynamics, circulation politics, and abilities of the comic medium.

Satrapi's text tells the story of her life growing up in Iran to an "engineer father and dress designer mother" in the midst of a childhood spent in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution—also called the Islamic Revolution—and a war between Iran and Iraq (Chute, *Graphic Women,* 136). The later volumes narrate and illustrate her late school years spent in Austria without her family, her return to Iran, the personal and political conditions under which she lived, and her ultimate decision to return to Europe in her twenties. While the narrative is clearly one that "speaks" (whatever this may entail) to international readers, this universalizing of Satrapi's text calls into question the dual elements of the concerns presented by Tomsky when looking at "travelling trauma" (50) and the ways in which Kozol is concerned with how conflicts "elsewhere" often come with a "gendering of sympathy" (61). Rather than accepting the influence *Persepolis* has over an international audience, we must interrogate the question, why is *Persepolis* so popular as a work of World Literature*?*

Particularly, what happens to the specificity of *Persepolis* and its context and content when it moves so deceptively fluidly in a transnational market?

In contextualizing *Persepolis,* I hope to investigate the questions presented by Veena Das in her book *Life and Words: Violence and Descent into the Ordinary*:

> What is it to inhabit a world? How does one make the world one's own? How does one account for the appearance of the subject? What is it to lose one's world? What is the relation between possibility and actuality or between actuality and eventuality, as one tries to find a medium to portray the relation between the critical events that shaped large historical questions and everyday life? (2)

Persepolis is a text inseparable from instances of violence, pain, trauma, and testimony, *especially* in conjunction with issues of sexuality and gender in its textual world. In interrogating representations of violence, pain, and trauma, *Persepolis* opens up as a case study in which the borders and "lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities, are real" (Mohanty 2). In addition, a tracing of *Persepolis*'s circulation works to highlight the power dynamics of representing—and potentially recognizing—pain and violence in relation to the politics of gender and nation. Ultimately, my concern in this chapter is to analyze *Persepolis* and its circulation through Spivak's emphasis on " [asking] what makes literary cases singular." If, as Spivak says, "the singular is the always universalizable, never the universal," and "the site of reading is to make the singular visible in its ability," this becomes especially significant in thinking through the gendered violence in Satrapi's text and its global circulation (Damrosch and Spivak 466). Even as Satrapi's text is extremely context-oriented in content, *Persepolis* is often co-opted

in circulation in neocolonial ways that flatten the issues of gender and violence while pushing a problematic narrative of escaping to an "enlightened West."

Iranian Revolution—Also Called the Islamic Revolution

In critiquing many of the ways that translations often fail to intimately engage with "source" languages, Spivak declares that "without a sense of the rhetoricity of language, a species of neocolonialist construction of the non-Western scene is afoot. No argument for convenience can be persuasive here. That is always the argument, it seems" (181). Intimate engagement with a language's nuances, possibilities for expression, and possibilities for domination are essential to create a translation that identifies a text's singularity. However, in reading a translated text of World Literature, I argue that the same intimacy and process of working-through applies for the *historical* and cultural context of the text even at the sake of "convenience."

Fig. 8. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, 2004, pp. 131.

Figure 8 is a frequently commented on moment in *Persepolis* that is often magnified in the eye of the reading public as showcasing Satrapi's supposed concern with relatability and universality. As the child-avatar of Satrapi—referred to as Marji from here out—dances in front of her Iron Maiden poster and poses in front of English popstar Kim Wilde, what often stands out to readers and critics are these "universal" behaviors of teenagehood. In particular, the third and fourth panel where Marji dons her "1985 Nikes" and a denim jacket over her headscarf—for many Western audiences—is simply a moment of teenage rebellion and expression. However, what these readings fail to acknowledge is the symbolic weight of putting a denim jacket over a headscarf, the implications of Marji describing her mother as permissive for an "*Iranian* mother," and the story of how these items were smuggled into Iran by her parents from the neighboring Turkey—a story that was only told a few spreads before (Satrapi 131). In ignoring the history and cultural context for Marji's self-expression, a complex and specifically situated moment is *missed,* flattening the text. Ultimately, a reading of this moment without historical knowledge, while possibly more convenient, is a "neocolonialist construction of [a] non-Western," as would be any scene from *Persepolis* without any historical intimacy—an intimacy that *is* prioritized in the text but gets muted in its circulation.

In her introduction to *The Complete Persepolis,* Satrapi takes a moment to give a brief account of the history of Iran from the "second millennium B.C." to the 1979 "Islamic Revolution" which brought about the end of the Pahlavi dynasty. Satrapi's introduction highlights various key moments in the history of Iran, particularly in her condemnation of the political investment (invasion) from key European and American powers after the discovery of oil in the country during the twentieth-century. The decades under the last ruling house of

Iran and the years of—and immediately following—the revolution in Iran emerge as especially important in interrogating the intersecting planes of gender, nation, violence, and pain in *Persepolis*. This importance stems not only from the emphasis placed on these years in the story (and in Satrapi's *oeuvre*), but also from the way that these years are problematically regarded as emblematic of the gendered violence in the region, especially within the framework of global politics and the global literary market.

In "The Paradoxical Status of Iranian Women," Medea Benjamin argues that "two key societal restrictions affect the lives of Iranian women: patriarchal values that pre-date the 1979 revolution, and post-1979 institutional structures based on hardline interpretations of Islamic principles" (101). Narrowing the scope, the period that most interests many scholars— notably scholars studying the influence of European and American forces of "global" politics and scholars interrogating the interactions between state and gender—is the rise and fall of the Pahlavi dynasty. After being chosen by the British government in 1921 to lead a brigade, the "Russian-trained soldier" Reza Khan successfully led the Iranian army and seized control of the capital, Tehran. After quickly ascending to prime minister in 1926 through ambition and military pressure, "dominated by his supporters" the Parliament crowned Reza Khan as Shah (Benjamin 17). Under Reza Shah and through the remainder of the Pahlavi regime, a move towards "modernization" began. The campaign of modernization was notably "limited to improvements that would enhance the power of the state and enforce national identity" while also being "consciously designed to break the power of religious hierarchy" (Benjamin 19). However, after Reza Shah refused to ally himself with Great Britain, the Soviet forces, and the United States in World War II and, instead, choosing to declare Iran a "neutral zone" due to his sympathies with Germany, the Allied forces "invaded

and occupied Iran" (Satrapi, "Introduction). After this invasion and occupation, Reza Shah went into exile and abdicated his throne to his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi; this abdication was only "allowed" by the Allies due to the fact that Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (simply referred to as "the Shah") would "allow the British and Soviets to occupy their respective zones in the north and south of the country" (Benjamin 20).

Under the Shah's reign (spanning from 1941-1979), the years of 1941-1953 "marked a brief period of renewed constitutional government" with the rise of the socialist Tudeh party who made significant gains for workers, including outlawing child labor and pushing for a national minimum wage (Benjamin 20). However, opposed to Iran's central government, the Soviet Union supported secession movements in Iran in 1946, and, in response, the Iranian government claimed that the Tudeh party supported secessionist movements, outlawed the party, imprisoned party leaders, and shut down newspapers (Benjamin 21). Despite its fall, the Tudeh party left lasting impressions on millions of Iranian citizens, setting the groundwork for calls for the nationalization of the oil industry and the election of Mohammad Mossadegh.

After being elected to prime minister in 1951, Mossadegh created the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) in competition with the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). In the aftermath of his moves to nationalize oil in the region, improve working conditions, and end the AIOC exploitation of the region, British forces pulled out of the region and, in retaliation, placed an embargo on oil from Iran that decimated potential for trade and profit-making (Ghasimi 443). Simultaneously, Mossadegh went head-to-head with the Shah, questioning the power of the Shah versus that of elected officials, and pushed the Shah (and many of his supporters) out of the region (Benjamin 24). However, despite his national

support, Mossadegh was deposed on August 19, 1953 (Ghasimi 456) by a CIA and M16 organized coup, designed to protect American and British economic and political power in the region. The Shah became a mouthpiece for American and British interests and issued a decree from exile, dismissing Mossadegh and appointing a new Prime Minister. In the protests that followed, mobs and agitators incited mass violence, and "Richard Cottam, who was with the CIA in Tehran at the time, wrote later, 'The mob that came into north Tehran and was decisive in the overthrow was a mercenary mob. It had no ideology. That mob was paid for by American dollars'" (Benjamin 26). Ultimately, the Mossadegh loyalists were outgunned and the Shah "returned to power" (Satrapi).

Under the continued reign of the Shah, tensions grew, anti-monarchy sentiments continued to rise, and—in particular—the Shah's continued "westernizing programme" (one of aggressive secularization) gave rise to the revolution in the 1970s, led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Initially labelling itself as a nationalist, leftist collective, Khomeini's movement played on human rights campaigns (particularly those established by U.S. president Jimmy Carter) and "put forward a democratic religious narrative" that worked to undermine the previous connection between European and American governments and the monarchy, and in Iran "Khomeini's careful distance from the concept of *Velayat-e Faqih*[1] allowed space for the unified clergy to establish a strong alliance with the nationalists" (Tabaar 60). Especially in his critiques of the Shah's campaigns of land distribution, Khomeini was able to unite communist and nationalist campaigns in "mass Islamist rallies" and his commemorations, especially for killed protestors, behind Khomeini (Tabaar 61). In response, the Shah attempted "to gain religious legitimacy by associating the senior clerics with the monarchy,"

[1] The theory of *Velayat-e Faqih* is rooted in fundamentalist practices of Shia Islam and justifies the rule of the clergy over the state. Khomeini discusses his plans for *Velayat-e Faqih* in Iran in his 1970 book *Islamic Governance.*

but this backfired and "undermined the clerics' credibility. Thus, they quickly distanced themselves from the state and demonstrated their dismay at the provocation, but in the process were put in the position of defending someone [Khomeini] they had long considered politically ambitious" (Tabaar 62). Sent into exile by the Pahlavi regime—first in Iraq and then into France where, "by moving to a liberal environment with advanced communication tools, Khomeini could become the center of the world's attention and thereby 'internationalize the Iran question' (Tabaar 65)—Khomeini continued to garner support in his moves against the Shah, and as reporters scrambled to give Khomeini a platform, noticeably absent were the plans of the implementation of *shari'a;* instead, an emphasis was placed by Khomeini in American and European media outlets on the Shah's disruptions of free elections and human rights violations (Tabaar 70). As the ailing Shah worked to combat the growing political unrest on several fronts, many soldiers were deserting the monarchy-controlled military forces. Fearing execution, the Shah fled Iran on January 17, 1979, and:

> Upon landing in Tehran in February 1979, Khomeini was reportedly greeted by millions of people in the flower-strewn streets of Tehran. He went straight to the Behesht-e Zahra cemetery to pay homage to the martyrs of the movement and then delivered a strongly worded speech promising to "appoint a government" and "slap this [Bakhtiar] government on the mouth." As soon as his audience clapped, his clerical disciples rose up and directed the audience to shout "Allah Akbar" or "God Is Great." Little by little, "Islamic" gestures were being imposed on the masses. (Tabaar 84)

Two months into the government under Khomeini, Iran officially became an Islamic Republic.

Women in Iran

Despite the titles and systems of power that were constantly shifting in Iran during the twentieth-century due to nepotism, interference and invasion by outside forces, and internal political upheavals, topics that were perpetually at the forefront of conversation/state policing—whether being used to laud societal "advancement" or "corruption"—were (andare) the bodies of women and the notion of veiling. As a region with historic and cultural ties to Islam, veiling is a common practice in Iran, as in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, and women are often viewed as "the moral guardians of the Islamic identity and community." In turn, as sociologist Nilüfer Göle explains, within this framework "women [become] the touchstones of this Islamic order in that they become, in their bodies and sexuality, a *trait d'union* between identity and community. This implies that the integrity of the Islamic community will be measured and reassured by women's politically regulated and confined modesty and identity" (Göle 21). As noted in the history of Iran immediately leading up to the Iranian Revolution, the nation's standing in the eyes of the international community(especially in the constructed international "West") was (and is) an obsession. In particular, the ever-shifting powers in Iran often sought recognition by outside forces and nations through the presentation of specific forms of cultural capital, notably in relation to gender. As Yuval-Davis discusses in her notion of "border guards" (23) for the "cultural construct" of the nation of Iran, women habitually "bear the burden of symbolisation, most obviously and visibly through the 'loaded signifier' of the veil" (Miller 42).

It has not merely been the presence and wearing of the veil that works to act as a symbolically defining feature of a power regime throughout Iran's history. The non-presence of the veil is often just as powerful. As noted above, under the Pahlavi regime (both father and son), a major component of their national and international identity was one based on a campaign of "modernization," or, more accurately, westernization. However, as the process of veiling only functions effectively through its visibility, Pahlavi's "westernizing programme," rather than using women's bodies to signify traditional ties to Islam, policed women's bodies "to symbolize modernity" through the banning of the veil on a national scale (Miller 42). Under this program, Iran became one of the Muslim countries to "impose Western dress on women when Reza Shah abolished the veil in 1936 and soldiers were instructed to unveil women by force," leading to scenes of violence and mortification (particularly for poor, rural, and/or religious women) in the streets (Miller 42). At the basis of these programs is a neurotic pull between the desire to Europeanize and the desire to push back against European dominance, and—as can also be seen simultaneously in neighboring Turkey—it was women who predominantly bore the burden (and violence) of this representation.

Ironically, this period was also a time of significant gain for the rights of women in many ways. Women were granted the right to vote and run for office in 1963, several women held high ranking government offices from 1968-1969, and "The Women's Organization of Iran was founded in 1966 to promote women's rights" (Benjamin 102). In particular, some of the political gains for women during this period were those relating to physical safety and public health, such as the passing of the Family Protection Act in 1967 (which was later updated in 1975) that gave Iranian women the right to divorce their husbands and to retain

custody of their children after a divorce, raised the minimum age for girls to marry from 13 years to 18 years, and objected to polygamy. Most interesting, and controversial for many members of the clergy with ties to the Pahlavi regime, was the legalization of abortion for women (Benjamin 102). Despite this supposed progress (a progress obviously defined through Euro-centric and American-centric lenses), the politics of women's bodies was still an obsession, especially "for the secular Left" (Nasrabadi 138), and the constant harassment by police meant that "religious women often remained at home, either by their choice or at their family's insistence…[and] that fewer religious women were educated or employed outside the home" (Benjamin 106).

Conversely, under the Islamic Republic established in 1979 by Khomeini and his supporters, many of the advancements for women's rights made under the Pahlavi regime were rolled back, especially laws pertaining to state intervention in the domestic sphere on behalf of women and relating to reproductive health. However, the topic of particular international interest and that comes to the forefront of *Persepolis* is when the veil became mandatory in 1983, and:

> Now, women who were *not* veiled faced harassment by authorities. *Bad hijab* became a crime and was defined not just by an uncovered head, but also uncovered arms and legs; tight, bright or see-through clothes; clothing with foreign words; makeup; and even nail polish. The punishment in the 1983 Penal Law was 74 lashes, which was changed in 1996 to a prison sentence of up to four months and a monetary fine. Over the years, the rules have been relaxed, with women merely issued a warning. (Benjamin 107-108)

Initially, the idea of a return to "traditional" dress was sold by Khomeini to his supporters as a move towards "cultural authenticity" in 1970 as a reaction against "an instrument of emancipation from Westernisation" and "imperial ideology" (Miller 42). However, it quickly became tied back to notions of *shari'a* "as *the*, rather than *a*, source of lawmaking" (Tabaar 70).

Similar to the paradoxical situation in which women found themselves under the rule of the Shah, Iranian women cannot *only* be regarded as veiled objects of meekness and oppression even in the space of forced veiling. As Nima Naghibi notes in the introduction to her book *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*:

> In some ways, women were the beneficiaries of the post revolutionary period as the majority of university students are now female, and women hold many lucrative and professional posts in Iran as doctors, engineers, lawyers, and professors. Far from suggesting, however, that Iran is a nation committed to gender equality (it is important to point out, for instance, that a woman's legal status is considered half that of a man's, so in legal and official government terms, she is understood to be a second-class citizen), it bears repeating that for some women from the traditional and religious classes, the revolution made possible a university education and a professional mobility previously not available to them. (Naghibi 4)

Fundamentally, while both regimes (to even divide them into binaries seems counterproductive, but for the moment it is helpful to try to imagine the at least partially separate) differed in their goals of recognition by international powers and national policy, both rely the unarticulated perspective that "it is women—and not (just?) the bureaucracy and intelligentsia—who reproduce nations, biologically, culturally, and symbolically," and

manipulate their policies to control the bodies of women in different ways in response (Yuval-Davis 2). Ultimately, what stands out in an analysis and presentation of this history and these patterns is that the gendered violence and pain with which Satrapi is working in *Persepolis* exists on a spectrum of visibility—invisibility, visibility, and *hypervisibility*.

Spectrum of Visibility and *Persepolis*

The dichotomy of invisibility/visibility finds its origins in the politics of recognition, which addresses how individuals come into "existence" (i.e., the public/powerful imagination) through acknowledgement by legitimized outside forces (Butler 4). Habitually, in the dichotomy of invisibility/visibility (which is actually more of an axis or continuum, as I discuss below), visibility is regarded as being the preferred situation of a subject. In her editorial "Managing (In)visibility and Hypervisibility in the Workplace," Buchanan provides a succinct definition and explanation of visibility: "visibility is defined as the extent to which one is fully regarded and recognized by others . . . [and is] often considered to be a desirable state, particularly when people can control their visibility" (1). At its core, an assignment of visibility denotes a desirable amount of control over how the subject represents itself and how the subject is recognized by others. In contrast, "invisibility refers to a state or condition where an individual is not fully recognized and valued" (Buchanan 2). Typically, an assignment of invisibility is placed on more marginalized groups/group members who are both unlikely to be represented and unlikely to be recognized by the hegemonic looker. While invisibility is often regarded as negative, there *are* "conditions under which invisibility is preferred to visibility by individuals in marginalized groups" (Buchanan 2). The politics of invisibility/visibility as being, respectively, negative and positive has grown increasingly complex in recent years due to the fact that simply being *seen* does not necessarily grant

power. In fact, being seen can put a subject in an even more vulnerable position, which has led to the addition of *hypervisibility* to the recognition continuum.

The addition of hypervisibility has typically been used in critical race theory for the discussion of elevated surveillance of black citizens in the United States (Clapp 170). At its essence, hypervisibility is *super*-regard as an object without the recognition as a subject, and, while visibility can be beneficial to hegemonic group members, the negative turn of visibility—marked by hypervisibility—is often detrimental to minority group members as the visibility leads to perceptions of "deviance" and "when individuals are hypervisible, their personal identities are invisible as they are seen only in terms of their marginalized group membership" (Buchanan 2).

In the realm of hypervisibility, there is always an element of state control or interference in the way that citizenship is built on the ability to surveil members of the national community—"it specifically requires identification, cataloguing, tracking, and the discrimi nation of classes of individuals" (Clapp 170). Particularly for marginalized groups, visibility is a "kind of trap," which shifts them over not into the category of visual and recognizable subjects but of hypervisible, policeable objects (Clapp 173). In a state where "surveillance extends to the minutest details of dress" for women, an understanding of this continuum emerges as particularly useful (Miller 44).

These issues set in the visibility regime—particularly in relation to gender—are at the forefront in form and substance in *Persepolis.* In form alone, the use of the comic medium allows Satrapi to manipulate the politics and expectations of visuality. While visual politics and concerns come into play because comics are "essentially pictorial," the inclusion of text in various forms makes it clear that "it is a *hybrid* art form" that uses text *and* visuals as

inseparable elements of storytelling (Pratt 107). As these two elements are at work on the page, either in conflict or support of one another, the reader's own understanding of the process of piecing together and *prioritizing* visual elements is essential as, "it is for the reader to decide how long to take over each panel, each page, and even how quickly to turn the pages" (Earle 123). As a storyteller interested in state politics pushing specific gender regimes with deep ties to the politics of visuality and *visibility*, it is no wonder that Satrapi selected such a medium, stating herself in an interview with Robert Root that "there are so many things that you can say through images that you cannot say with the writing. The comics is the only media in the whole world that you can use the image plus the writing and plus the imagination and plus be active while reading it" (Root and Satrapi 150).

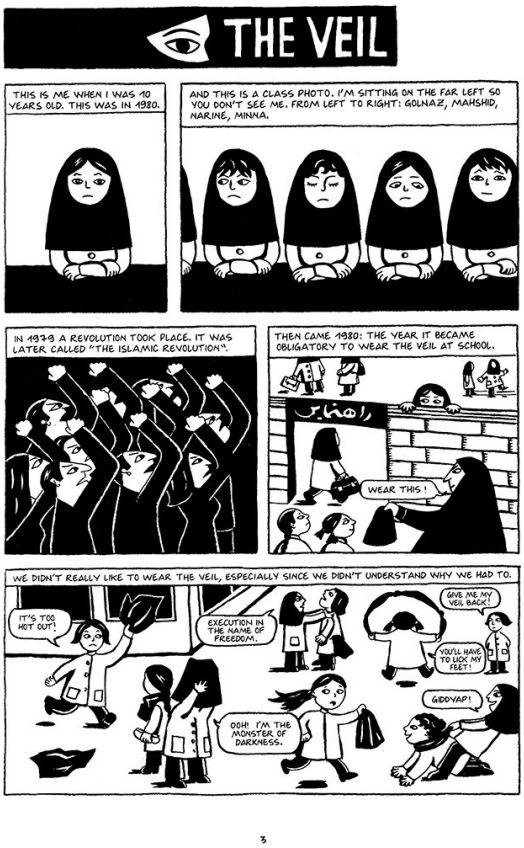

Fig. 9. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, 2004, pp. 3.

Figure 9 is the opening page of the first volume in *Persepolis*. As Satrapi points to her child avatar, Marji, the narrative voice of *Persepolis* says in two subsequent panels, "This is me when I was 10 years old. This was in 1980...And this is a class photo. I'm sitting on the far left so you don't see me" (3). In these two panels, the previously detailed politics of visibility immediately come into play in the text as Satrapi manipulates reader expectations of the role of images in their ability to tell "truth," the connection between text and image in comics, *and* the hypervisibility of the veil. All of these elements will continue to inhabit an essential role throughout the remainder of *Persepolis*.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag pushes against ideas of the roles of images, especially in their ability to communicate infallible truth. At *first* glance, *Persepolis*'s first page does not seem to get into the issues of violence and pain that particularly concern Sontag in her critiques of mainstream media and visual culture. However, the first two panels of the text push into view a major through-line of Sontag's work: "it is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude" (46). While the first panel shows a singular girl, reportedly Marji, who will "lead" the viewer through the text for the remainder of the work, the immediate next panel excludes her from the image. It claims "I'm sitting on the far left so you don't see me," giving the names of the girls that the viewer can "see" (3). The constructed nature of comics's visuality—as an *illustration* of an event which is more easily identified by many as a *representation* of the "truth" of an event than, say, a photograph—forces into question how the frame of the image shifts positions. As the (literal and metaphorical) frame shifts, including some moments while excluding others, the shifting pushes some moments into the gutter-space where the reader must actively engage and complete closure in moving from

panel to panel. In addition, the movement is not "fixed." As Charles Acheson notes in "Expanding the Role of the Gutter," "because of panel permanence—both panels coexist on the page—readers easily return to the previous panel as an aid to reconcile the rhetoric found in each panel," and these two panels commencing *Persepolis* demand of the viewer Sontag's core questions (292). What do we see? What do we *not* see? And most importantly—why is this decision of exclusion made? In a span of two panels, a character can move rapidly on the continuum from visible subject to invisible.

While it is easy to prioritize the images themselves in such a picture-oriented medium, as opposed to Sacco's work, Satrapi's uniquely non-photorealistic—but certainly sophisticated—illustration style works to also bring to the forefront the inseparability of picture and *text* in the comic form. In comics, words are typically found in one of four major categories: word balloons (words are connected directly to the character speaking them), text that is a caption (often the narrative "voice"), sound effects, and words that are parts of the image (for example, posters or street signs) (Pratt 108). For *Persepolis,* like most traditionally formatted comics, words are important and allow the audience (as viewers *and* readers) "to follow narratives that might otherwise be inaccessible" (Pratt 108). In this sense, there is a *visual* story literally seen through images and an invisible narrative that only emerges in the combination of words, images, and gutter-spaces specific to the comic form. Once again, these two opening panels of *Persepolis* set this textual precedence as the non-photorealistic art style highlights the inability of image to exclusively tell the "story," and the text adds information—filtered through the essential narrative voice of Marji—to the narrative. This connection works to prioritize an "interdependence of witnessing (as a visual rhetorical act) and listening (as an auditory rhetorical act)—especially, but not only, when

considering mixed-media representations" that Hesford calls for in *Spectacular Rhetorics* "to better understand the sought-after rhetorical intersubjectivity of testimonial acts" which will be spoken on more later (100).

Finally, in beginning *Persepolis* with two panels illustrating the school-aged girls in a class photo where they are wearing the veil, Satrapi speaks to the gendered hypervisibility of women in Iran through the visual symbol of the veil. Later on the page, but still existing simultaneously due to panel permanence, Marji narrates over images from her youth: "then came 1980: the year it became obligatory to wear the veil at school...We didn't really like to wear the veil, especially since we didn't understand why we had to" (3). In highlighting the childhood confusion over the veil in image and text, the text draws attention to visual symbols, particularly those placed on hypervisible (and hyper-vulnerable) subjects. As the last panel of the page opens up, the veil—a cloth laden with so much symbolism (religiously, culturally, and politically)—becomes unrecognizable as it is turned by the young girls into a scarf, a jump rope, a hood for a "monster of darkness," and horse reins in a game of make believe (Satrapi 3). This sharp contrast between the somber girls of the first two panels and the playful girls of the last makes it clear that Satrapi is interested in issues of gender, which, on this page, are communicated through the gendered symbol of the veil. However, while the first page establishes Marji's interactions with this symbol for the text, *Persepolis* has the unique feature of being widely circulated. Therefore, as Satrapi plays with these issues connected to the regimes of visibility and gender in Iran, the response and understanding shift as the text's location shifts. Essentially, while "Islamization has gained visibility through the veiling of women; in other terms it is women who serve as the emblem of politicized Islam."(Göle 83). As a result, the elimination of *Persepolis'*s singularity and

universalizability in circulation at the expense of the marketable idea of "universality" often results in *Persepolis* being co-opted for islamophobic and xenophobic campaigns *and* ignoring the universalizable ideas of sexual violence and gender discrimination that play a pivotal role Marji's story.

Circulation and *Persepolis*

Looking at the life of *Persepolis* in translation and circulation is an intimidating feat. There are the elements of Satrapi's translation of instances from her childhood from Farsi to written French, from memory to representation of that memory, and from the "original" French to an English translation that has sold over a million copies (Miller 50). In many ways, "this Iranian woman, writing in French, has become the highly recognizable face of the new-found legitimacy of the medium as a whole" (Miller 50). Despite its power as a text, *Persepolis*'s circulation also brings about worrying questions of privilege, universalization of experience, the marketability of trauma, and the ways in which American and European audiences (fail to) recognize he narratives of the "other," especially when the "other" is a woman, and even more so when she is a woman from a Muslim country. So the question that must be asked is—once again—this: what does *Persepolis* gain *and* lose as it circulates so widely as an esteemed text of World Literature*?*

As detailed in the previous chapter, Terri Tomsky points towards the ways trauma moves through a system which is "overdetermined by capitalism" and is created by a market of "sympathetic, yet self-indulgent spectators." Such economies of trauma can illuminate *Persepolis*'s sucess as well, especially when interrogating who is looking (for they are certainly not *witnessing*) at trauma and why (53). It seems that there is "no fixed value to any given traumatic experience," and that value is instead determined in the relationship between

the source material and its receptors (Tomsky 49). For example, while the act of sexual violence may have similar motivations for perpetrators (patriarchal domination, national concerns, displays of power, etc.) *and* similar outcomes for victims and survivors (physical trauma, psychological distress, social ostracization, etc.), sexual violence's lack of "fixed value" does not come from the violence, but from the recognition by outside, hegemonic forces. In the case of *Persepolis*—particularly the English translation of *The Complete Persepolis* for an audience in the United States—the text gains its traumatic value and circulability through the supposed "familiarity" of the difference in the text. Once again, this familiarity of difference comes from the hypervisibility (without actual recognition as subjects) of veiled women in the Western gaze, while also being mediated by a privileged Marji and Satrapi who have access to avenues to circulate their narratives—even if it is one that habitually gets co-opted by neocolonial campaigns.

In particular, these neocolonial campaigns rely on notions of "us" and "them" to perpetuate international power relations. However, the fact of the matter is that these categories are entirely constructed and relational. Most famously, in the words of Edward Said, "the Orient is not merely *there*, just as the Occident is not just *there* either" (4)[2]. This relational category of the Occident, "the West"—as can be seen in the history of the policies implemented by the Pahlavi regime in Iran—is often also paired with the label of "modernity," a slippery and culturally dependent concept at best. In attempts to define modernity, gender is often used as a symbol to indicate supposed equality and progress,

[2] Originally published in 1978, Edward Said's *Orientalism* foundational text coins the phrase "Orientalism," which Said defines as a concept to speak of the European and American depictions of "the East." It is in these provincializing and exoticizing depictions that the relational category of "the West" also emerges, and while western conceptions of the East are often attached to specific nations through regimes of imperializing, the Orient is an entirely fictitious category that "the West" defines itself against.

but—once again—this notion can only be defined *against* something else. In Western media, particularly media centered around issues of human rights, this definition often occurs against the "spectacle of veiled Muslim women...including liberal American feminist representations, where the veil is a symbol of gender apartheid" (Hesford 6). The image of a veiled woman, notably in the United States due to this repetition and use in defining what is *not* "western," is one of spectacle—of othering.

While this spectacle of difference is highlighted, it is also frequently aestheticized. The gendered trauma of the veiled woman, per the process detailed in Allen Feldman's "Memory Theatres, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma-Aesthetic," in "its lability, actually functions as an aesthetic concept to the extent that it lends itself to creating a universalized human rights subject, enabling mass reception and commodification" (185). Once again, this reception and commodification occurs with the West as a locus of—often—unproblematized power. In looking at the otherized veiled woman from a Western gaze, the trauma is *assumed* due to the constructed (and perceived as "universal") signals of gender oppression and apartheid. Veiled women (an important linguistic distinction as opposed to "women who wear the veil" due to the fact that the former implies force and the latter active choice) are habitually only circulated and consumed in Western media as long as they embody a visible *difference,* but possess a familiarity as an assumed traumatized subject and object of oppression which must be rescued and/or pitied. Ultimately, this process works to reify ideas about human rights subjects in which there is a "holder of rights" who acts as a "distributor to those who are unable to claim them independently" and fails to interrogate the ways in which these images do not actually represent a complex subject, while upholding global

discrepancies of power and violence (Hesford 4). This valuing of a familiar difference, especially in the United States, is the market in which *Persepolis* succeeds.

Returning to figure 8, the image evokes many of the visual elements and textual themes of the narrative that assist in its marketability in the United States and Europe, especially in Marji's "universal trials and joys of growing up" and spaces of Satrapi's relative privilege. As Kozol astutely observes,"feminists challenging military violence and other forms of state power often turn to women's voices and testimonials as key sites for counter narratives" when pulling first-hand accounts and sources from "elsewhere" (56). In many popular and scholarly critiques of *Persepolis*, what is habitually lauded is the alternative perspective provided in the text through Marji's narration, a narration that comes from a child observing issues of gender and state violence. While Marji's narration gives much to think about in its representations of pain and engagement with traumatic memory, I hesitate to buy into the narrative that *Persepolis* "contests dominant images and narratives of history, debunking those that are incomplete and those that do the work of elision" (Chute, *Graphic Women*, 136). *Persepolis* does present an alternative vision into post-Islamic revolution Iran through Marji, whose character often becomes utilized to show that all Iranians are not fundamentalists tied to religious extremism, but it does this through emphasizing Marji's "westerness." There are many instance where Marji exhibits "universal" child and teen behavior but the third panel in figure 9, where Marji physically covers her body—already covered by the visual symbol of the "headscarf"—with a denim jacket and musical pins, is a prime example of the slipping between the hypervisibility of her Iranian-ness and the visibility of "western-ness" clash (Satrapi 134).

With a historical and cultural knowledge of the neurotic pull between the desire to "Europeanize" under the Pahlavi regime and push against "Western" cultural domination cited as a forefront issue during the revolution, the illustrations of Marji's behavior in figure 8 become a fascinating presentation of the complexity of identity and class positions in Iran—especially during the time immediately post-revolution. Once again, the spreads immediately preceding figure 8 trace the experience that Marji's parents went through to even access these items. Marji reflects on how, "a year after my uncle died, the borders were reopened. My parents ran to get passports," an expensive process to begin with, and even with these passports, there were certain borders that were closed to them as Iranian citizens (Satrapi 126). From there, while buying the items from Marji's list was easy enough in Turkey, to even return with these items was illegal, making them "smugglers" (Satrapi 129). As Marji leaves her home in the final panel of figure 8, noting how "for an [*Iranian*] mother, my mom was very permissive," Marji even highlights her unique identity position with parents who have access to means to acquire passports, who are able to cross (certain) borders, who have means once they get there to purchase her items, *and* who allow certain behaviors as Iranians, not just parents. Ultimately, figure 8 highlights Marji's multi-layered experience (much like her outfit), and this moment is not a calculated world literature marketing strategy inherent to the text, but rather a historically singular, specific point that gets co-opted into universality, losing its anchor and its significance.

Furthermore, Satrapi—as an author—has privileges, influences, and experiences that, in attempting to cast *Persepolis* as "universal," flatten the various violences and power dynamics at play. In looking at the production of Satrapi's narrative, it is important to note that *Persepolis* came onto the world literary scene when there was a "surge in the popularity

of the genre of life writing...in response to what appears to be an insatiable market demand," and the stories of Iranian women became a valuable niche in this market (Naghibi 1-2). However, like in the case of Satrapi, the *vast* majority of these texts concerned with the experiences of Iranian women in revolutionary or post-revolutionary Iran come from writers living in the diaspora which, "then, appears to be the main condition for producing these narratives: both making it necessary to address the loss of home and providing the authors with a cultural environment more permissive of such self-revelation" (Naghibi 2). In addition, almost all of these texts appear initially in one of the author's second or third languages (often a major language of commerce), and while writers like Nima Naghibi make legitimate and valuable claims that "recalling a traumatic episode in a language that is at an emotional remove from one's experience could ease some of the stress of the testifying process," it is difficult to ignore also the politics of trying to write in a language like Farsi in the global market—a market predominantly designed to cater to American and European audiences (2). For these reasons, being able to testify to these gendered experiences of living before, through, and after the revolution in Iran is a privilege centered around issues of language, cultural, geographic, *and* financial capital. While the text does acknowledge its own singularity, especially the ways in which "freedom has a price" for Satrapi, Satrapi's capital allows *Persepolis* to circulate so easily in "the West," which results in the muting of this singularity nonetheless (341).

In the gap between the "scene of testimony production and the sites of narrative screening and consumption," there can exist an "entire archive" governed by unique expectations, privileges, and rules (Feldman 163). This is the case with *Persepolis*. In celebrating Satrapi's text as "universal," what is demolished are the significant instances of

cultural and historical singularity and the possibility of the text as being *universalizable,* rather than universal. In particular, *Persepolis* is especially unique in its approach to persistent, traumatizing *threats* of violence and to the imagining of the experience of pain.

Imagining Pain and Representing Violence in *Persepolis*

As explained in previous chapters looking at the contributions of Scarry and Avelar, stories of trauma require an audience. Despite the possibilities for critique when looking at circulation, at the heart of *Persepolis* is a concern for bearing witness and engaging with the pain of others. In an interview, Satrapi says, "I was born in a country in a certain time, and I was witness to many things. I was a witness to a revolution. I was a witness to war. I was witness to a huge emigration. I was a witness when I came back (Leith 2004)" (Nabizadeh 158). In particular, the character of Marji acts as a witness in the "primary and secondary" role, and it is her childhood role as witness to the story and testimony of others that grabs readers' attention and engages with a complex understanding of the pain and trauma of others.

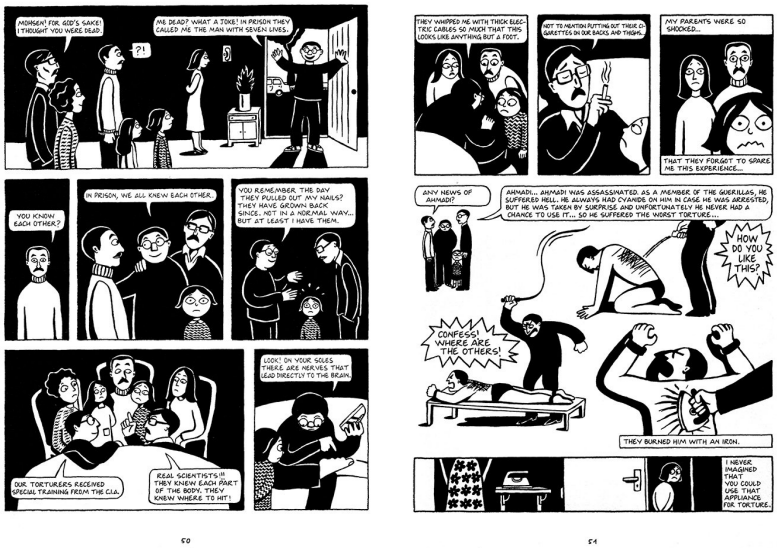

Fig. 10. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, 2004, pp. 50-51.

The spread in figure 10 features the return of Mohsen, a friend of Marji's parents, from a prison in Iran where he and others experienced torture at the hands of state officials who "received special training from the C.I.A" and were "real scientists" when it came to inflicting pain on the human body (Satrapi 50). However, the scene features a distinct shift when Marji's father inquires about another friend, Ahmadi. While the text bubbles from the conversing adults say that "Ahmadi was assassinated...he suffered the worst torture," there is a distinct *lack* of language used to describe Ahmadi's experience, except the words of the torturers ("How do you like this?...Confess! Where are the others!") and a final note that "[the torturers] burned him with an iron" (Satrapi 51). In an exclusively textual narrative, the "gap" in a linguistic explanation of Ahmadi's torture and pain might work to support Scarry's general point that pain is inexpressible and, in turn, unrecognizable to the point that "physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it" (Scarry 4). But in imagining the pain of others, while the language disappears, the experience of the pain (or at least witnessing it through imagining) does not, and this is where the comic medium shines—particularly in the hands of Marji. In particular, it is important to note that while the memory is going through various narrative checkpoints the mediation is fundamentally occurring through that of *child* Marji. In recounting hearing about Ahmadi, Marji says that her parents "forgot to spare me this experience"—not just "conversation," but *experience*, emphasizing the ways in which testimony of atrocity and torture can have its own traumatic effects and gesture towards something akin to collective trauma (Satrapi 51). As the next panel opens, undelineated by a traditional frame, what the audience experiences is the representation of bodies in empty, white space—specifically, bodies in pain. In depicting Marji's imagination of Ahmadi's experience, Ahmadi's pain, this *visual* representation works

against Scarry's idea that "nothing sustains [pain's] image in the world...its absolute claim for acknowledgement contributes to its being ultimately unacknowledged" (60-61). Certainly, in choosing to visually represent acts of torture and *scenes* of pain (if not the experience of pain itself), there is the possibility for merely voyueristic consumption, but as these scenes are not contained within a traditional comic frame, it visually signals how these are traumatic memories, traumatic *moments* that persist and are meant to function simultaneously with the moments that come before and after them. There is no language ascribed to Ahmadi's experience (especially as Ahmadi cannot testify to his experience itself), but Marji's push through this space of wordlessness to still imagine the pain indicates the essentiality of working to recognize the way that pain and trauma persist and expand, as that pain does not have clear boundaries, visually or textually.

Finally, as the spread closes with a once-again bordered panel of Marji looking back on an iron and reflecting that, "I never imagined that you could use that appliance for torture," the posssibility of recognizing pain is not closed (as Scarry would like to suggest), but we *do* see the ways in which it is limited (Satrapi). For example, if we are meant to see Marji as the narrator, the translator of the stories of torture, and—at times—torturer herself, then she can in fact *imagine* the iron as a tool of torture, for she visually showed the possibilities of that appliance for inflicting pain in the illustration above. In this moment, we see the points and critiques from Avelar of Scarry's firm stance on the "inexpressibility" of pain. Certainly, "for the political and therapeutic task of representation of trauma, the dictionary is a battlefield," but that battlefield is not in pain being capturable in language or not, but through what *frames* are violence and pain being recognized—or not (Avelar 262). Although Scarry in her analysis of torture emphasizes the how the use of of everyday

appliances are often tools for pain in torture which works to add layers of invisibility, the panel permanence in the comic medium and—once again—the lack of borders on the scenes of torture creates a text in which the trauma and pain is coded as *persisting*, resisting invisibility on the page. Ultimately, the manipulation of visual and textual elements, especially in relation to the literal frame of panels and the narrative frame of Marji, complexly works with and through the ability to imagine others and their pain complexly; a theme which is carried throughout the narrative.

While the text contains many scenes of violence and pain where Marji acts as an imagining, secondary witness, many of the most striking scenes of the text focus on the *threat* of violence and its effects, and this persistent threat of violence is—especially living in Iran—is gendered. This threat of violence is distinctly gendered in two ways. First, female sexuality is viewed as a danger to the agenda of fundamentalist Islam, which has been co-opted and manipulated by Iranian state forces. Therefore, it must be controlled through policies and threats of violence to gendered bodies in order to uphold traditional, patriarchal, and *national* ideas, leading to the explosion of less recognizable forms of everyday violence. Second, the supposed "sexuality" and hypervisibility of these women establishes them as a target for sexual violence for internal forces. This, predominantly, finds its origins in the way that women, subordinated due to patriarchal values, have their bodies violated and pain appropriated for the benefit of governing (political and familial) forces.

Threats of Violence | Everyday Violence

Violence can be highly simplified into two overarching categories. The first is a spectacular violence as detailed in Hesford's work *Spectacular Rhetorics.* Hesford's engagement with the idea of spectacularity addresses the disturbing "hierarchical dichotomy"

of power in which the frame through which we are often asked to see pain and trauma is based on "spectacle"—i.e., human suffering, violence, and atrocities—and, more specifically, spectacular eruptions of violence (10). Kozol's *Distant Wars Made Visible* gives several examples of this type of violence which we easily see and, in the frame of war, often relate to "actions of the battlefield" (7), such as the "the [United States] military's 'shock and awe' bombing campaign of Baghdad" which "situated visual spectacle at the center of the global display of U.S. dominance" (8). However, Hesford and Kozol both make it clear that the frame which works to prioritize spectacular violence as the ultimate way to acknowledge violence, pain, and trauma can be exceptionally dangerous, as it is embroiled in a "site of dominant power...to arrest the public's gaze—to discipline, display, and isolate the subject" (Hesford 16). While recognizing that spectacular violence can be useful, it is important to investigate "alternative ways of looking elsewhere"—to look for leakages (Kozol 7). The leakage that works in particularly interesting ways is the notion of everyday violence.

In regarding violence and potential spaces for interacting with leakages, the work of Veena Das—notably *Life and Words*—is invaluable in interrogating the troubles many scholars face in on the ways in which violence functions in societies marked by continued conflicted and how it "attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life" (1). In short, everyday violence pushes to highlight violence and the subsequent pain and trauma as a *presence*, outside and embedded with the rhetorical trap of exclusively recognizing violence and suffering through acts of spectacular violence. Engaging with everyday violence undermines the frame which argues that spectacular violence is simply an eruption that comes out of nowhere, and rather states that it is deeply entangled with politics and executions of power that are working constantly in the everyday. Second, through

conceptualizing spectacular violence "as attached to the everyday," viewers are encouraged to see "the everyday itself as eventful" (8). In this way, Das's analysis addresses the problem proposed by Butler. The problem is not how to destroy the concepts of the frame since, after all, we exist and see through boundaries created by rhetoric. Neither is the problem "merely how to include more people within existing norms" (Butler 6). Instead, the problem surrounds "how existing norms allocate recognition differently" (Butler 6). While *Persepolis* falters in its ability to gain recognition for a subject not embedded in issues of imperialism and westernization as it circulates, Satrapi's text succeeds in making the everyday *eventful*, especially in interacting with the hypervisibility of women and subsequent policing.

Fig. 11. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return,* 2005, pp. 142.

In figure 11 from *Persepolis: The Story of a Return,* Marji recounts an assembly called at her university where the topic focused on the university administration's concern with the "moral and religious conduct" of the students (Satrapi 142). However, as the convocation unfolds, it becomes clear that the administration is not concerned with the moral conduct and presentation of *all* of the students, merely the women. The language quickly shifts from that of a "we" to the demands (framed as requests) that "young ladies present here to wear less-wide trousers and longer head-scarves. You should cover your hair well. You should not wear makeup. You should…" (Satrapi 142). In situating the scene so that the university administrators look over a faceless crowd (with the exception of two profiles who the audience is meant to read as Marji and her boyfriend), the language of the administration, framed as a request, is visually coded as being an exertion of power. In addition, the administrator—although men and women make up the audience—only looks to the half of the amphitheater with the female students. Ultimately, they are not just visible, they are *hypervisible,* and (in turn) are subject to a level of policing that goes on and on and is coded in language of morality and social conduct—"you should," rather than "the state requires" (142).

Fig. 12. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return,* 2005, pp. 148.

In response to the university administration and the government on a larger scale, the students (Marji included) "dared not to talk politics," but they did engaged in a "discreet struggle" often based around the subtle breaking of moral codes—implemented as laws—as can be seen in the third panel (Satrapi 148). However, even in recounting this struggle, particularly of the women, the reliance on visual clues to what the gendered moves of this struggle were highlights the hypersibility of these women. In the third panel, while the textbox describes it as "our struggle," the characters in the panel are women, breaking rules such as that banning makeup and showing hair. In this way, it is clear that the "our struggle" in question is better read as the "struggle of women" under a unique regime of visibility (Satrapi 148). In his article "War is Not Just an Event," Chris Cuomo emphasizes the ways in

which, "war is currently best seen not as an event but as a *presence*" (31). However, in replacing the idea of "war" with "violence," it fully speaks to the experience that Satrapi works to highlight in *Persepolis.* Ultimately, the events of the everyday, particularly as they relate to issues of gender are problems which are "a different order," in the way that violence is enacted and fought against, but this does not make them any less important ("Crisis, and the Everyday" 800). In fact, understanding this violence in the every day provides an opportunity to better engage with places of pain that often remain hopelessly gendered and under-recognized.

Hypervisibility and Sexual Violence

The gendered violence and trauma that Satrapi's text confronts is that of sexual violence (and its constant threat) in a situation where the female body is a site of control that is "at the base of social order" (Yuval-Davis 13). In figure 13, Marji recounts the fate

Fig. 13. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, 2004, pp. 125.

of Niloufar, a young communist against the Islamic government, who was "spotted...arrested...and executed" in a quick succession of panels (Satrapi 125). This execution—at first glance—appears to be a sad death and scene of suffering in a long line of many which Marji recounts from her childhood, but this shifts a few chapters later after Marji's expulsion from her school for speaking out against the government in front of the class. While Marji's father celebrates her tenacity, Marji's mother is enraged, but this rage quickly shifts into what appears to be panic and *desperation*. The images in figure 14 show Marji's mother grabbing her by the shoulders and shaking her, asking "you know what they do to the young girls they arrest? You know what happened to Niloufar...you know that it is against the law to kill a virgin...so a guardian of the revolution marries her...and takes her virginity before executing her" (Satrapi 145). When pushed by Marji about the validity of her mother's claim, Marji's father tells her that, in the tradition of giving a dowry to the family of the bride in the case that she dies, "that's what happened with Niloufar. After she was executed, to make sure her awful fate was

Fig. 14. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood,* 2004, pp. 145.

understood they sent 500 tumans to her parents" (Satrapi 146). The page closes as the clear figure of Niloufar looks over the resting Marji in a stance that can be read as a guardian or a vision of the imminent threat of sexual violence.

Fig. 15. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, 2004, pp. 146.

Fig. 16. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return,* 2005, pp. 85.

As Marji's narrative moves her across borders, in and out of homes, and finally onto the streets of Vienna, what is essential to note is that—despite supposedly "escaping" the state implemented threats of sexual violence essential to cultural policing in Iran after the revolution—Niloufar and what she represents does not leave Marji. As Marji sleeps on the streets in Figure 16, she sleeps with one eye open, noting that "I had to find a well-hidden place to sleep at night. Nights on the street could end very badly for a young girl like me" (Satrapi 85). In the background, white, masculine silhouettes move through the darkness of the panel. In this moment, a universalizable (not universal) aspect of the text is pushed to the forefront, but it is an aspect that many receptions (intentionally or unintentionally) overlook. For even as Marji moves out of Iran and into the locus of power that is the "liberated" West, the threat of sexual violence persists.

In *When Time Warps: The Lived Experience of Gender, Race, and Sexual Violence*, Megan Burke notes the ways in which the lived feminine experience is one characterized by acknowledged and everpresent endangerment and bodily vulnerability. By interrogating the repetition of feminine testimonies of violence often framed as ghost stories, Burke argues that there is a "spectral of violence, the normative threat of rape" (106) which haunts feminine existence in all patriarchal contexts (although how this haunting occurs specifically will, of course, be different) and "refers to the way the present is marked by an absence, by that which is not yet here, by that which may arrive in the future" (107). While the threat of sexual violence—even as Marji imagines it—does possess differences in the specificity of which she is aware, the threat leads to behavioral adjustments as it *could* occur. Whereas Niloufar's figure acts a detailed manifestation and specter of violence because the politics and scenarios of the sexual violence that Niloufar represents for Marji—sexual violence

enacted on the state level—are familiar, the figures in the background of Figure 16 remain non-detailed, but still visible silhouettes. However, in being set out visually in their masculine, whiteness against a black background, they appear even more spectral, more haunting, *and* their coloring also manipulates the frequently proposed dichotomy of "Westerness" and whiteness and "Easterness" and darkness to emphasize the presence of sexual violence even in Vienna, and even as the *exact* details may be unfamiliar to Marji.

While Satrapi never shows these scenes of rape, these interactions are vital in highlighting the very real and persistent threat of sexual violence and against the "myth of not-knowing" presented by Elizabeth Marshall and Leigh Gilmore (97). In addressing the sexual precarity and vulnerability of girls (and women), Marshall and Gilmore argue that a myth of not-knowing is pushed along by statements "that although one witnessed the physical evidence of abuse in the form of marks on the body or traumatized affect, one can claim not to know what happened and, further, to claim that if the abuse had been seen and known, then 'we' would have intervened and stopped it" (97). In this way, sexual violence against women and girls in particular continues in silences and gaps in acknowledgement. However, *Persepolis* does not push these acts of violence into the silence to be lost. Instead, while leaving potentially voyeuristic and traumatizing depictions of rape out of the borders of the illustrated panels, the gutters and scenes between Niloufar's execution and Marji's discover highlight the ways in which these threats of sexual violence *were* temporarily "lost" to Marji and (in turn) the audience. In the forthrightness of her parents and their fear there is not an "omission" or "oblique references that groom audiences to overlook the social fact of sexual violence against girls" (Marshall and Gilmore 95). Rather, the scene explicitly acknowledges how this threat of sexual violence is everpresent, not due to Marji's

responsibility, but due to the ways in which her body is used in a larger campaign of nationalism and religious fundamentalism as:

> peacetime rape reinforces gender identities indigent to the patriarchal society: rape serves as a punishment for the woman who placed herself in harm's way by leaving the protection of her family. Wartime and genocidal rape aim to destroy publicly the traditional gender identities of the community, feminizing men and instrumentalizing women. The spectacle of rape targets not just women whose bodies are violated and degraded, but "their men" as well, who are degraded and humiliated in the eyes of the enemy, of the onlookers, of their peers, of their tortured women, and in their own eyes. (Astashkevich 44)

In this way, a space is made to acknowledge the trauma and pain that comes along with this continuous threat. Even more than this, Satripi's representation of the movement of the threat of sexual violence with Marji emphasizes the importance of the gendered experience of the everpresent threat of sexual violence, even in spaces where the reception would prefer to see this universalizable aspect ignored. Ultimately, Niloufar's final presence (or, more specifically, Marji's memory of Niloufar's story) and the white, masculine spectrals serve to make room for narratives and recognition of sexual victimization in memory, acting in response to "tradition governing paradigms for sexual victimization" that leave no room in "male memory—but not even, perhaps, in female memory" for the effects of this gendered violence (Young 1784).

Conclusions

Highlighting the complexity of literature in circulation, especially as it is translated, Spivak notes, "In globality, we're in an island of signs, in an ocean of traces...when you don't

understand a language, to simply say ‘oh, the handwriting looks beautiful, it sounds wonderful’—that is legitimizing by reversal the reason why barbarians were called barbarians” (469). To appreciate texts without attempts at intimacy and contextual familiarity (for complete comprehension is a lofty, and I might say, impossible goal), is akin to looking at a letter written in a language you don’t understand and only admiring the penmanship. While many praise “universality” in widely circulated texts, what should be prioritized should be instances of singularity which speak to a larger universalizability. In identifying the instances of singularity in Persepolis through an understanding of historical context, gender dynamics, circulation politics, and abilities of the comic medium, Persepolis can be investigated as the complex reflection on pain, trauma, witnessing, gender, and global politics that it is—not just a universal tale of a childhood.

In particular, while recounting of memory and attestations of violence—especially sexual and gendered violence—push a text and its audience into a “crisis of witnessing” (Hesford 99). Ultimately, in interrogating the various planes of the politics of privilege, identity, oppression, and reception, the interwoven effects in *Persepolis* speak to how experience can become flattened in circulation (and it not be “inherent” to a text) *and* the importance of emphasizing the aspects violence as *presences*, and not just events, especially in discussing the pervasiveness of sexual and gendered violence.

Chapter 3

"Fifty-five years...That's how long it took to go home": Representations of Pain and Sexual Violence in Grass by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim

Introduction to Grass

From 1932 to 1945, Japan fought in an imperial war referred to as the Pacific War, sometimes called the Asia-Pacific War. Often categorized under the broader umbrella of WWII and analyzed as the preliminary (and later largest) theater for United States military involvement during the war, the Pacific War has often been subsumed under traditional "just war" narratives of WWII. This approach obscures, and at times erases, the essential singularities of the conflict and the trauma of its victims. Working with the concepts of the possibilities and dangers of certain moments and texts being flattened as they go about being "worlded," in his work "To World, To Globalize: World Literature's Crossroads," Djelal Kadir notes that "while we cannot deny that we are in the world, we can and do differ on how we are of it" (265). In the way that "the worlding of literature is not random," the worlding of wars and violence is also not random, and the specific worlding works to make some violence, some pain, and some trauma recognizable and forces others into spaces of silence (Kadir 266). Looking at the worlding of the Pacific War, one of the aggressively policed spaces of silence is that of the "comfort women issue" (Tai 105), but in her graphic narrative *Grass*, Keum Suk Gendry-Kim creates an aperture through which the silences of these women may be heard.

Translated into English from Korean and published by Drawn & Quarterly in 2019, *Grass* chronicles the life of Granny Lee Ok-sun through a series of interviews with Gendry-Kim as Granny Lee details her experience before, during, and "after" her time as a

comfort woman for the Japanese Imperial Army. “Comfort women”—an expression I will analyze shortly—is the moniker given to the sexual slaves (sometimes referred to as “forced prostitutes”) of the Japanese military during the years between 1932 and 1945. While definitive numbers are unknown, conservative estimates place the number around 50,000 to 200,000, with many modern researchers leaning towards the latter (Soh 63). Of these numbers, “it is believed that about 80% of them were Korean” (Soh 63), influenced by the fact “Japan made Korea its protectorate in 1905...and annexed it in 1910. Japan's colonization of Korea lasted until August 15, 1945, when the Pacific War ended with Japan's defeat. During the colonial period, Japan appropriated a vast amount of land from the Chosun individual Koreans and distributed it to Japanese citizens” (Min 943). Despite this grandscale, state-organized “mobilization” of sexual slaves, the event was historically ignored in international narratives—even in the aftermath and legal proceedings following WWII—until the 1990s, when there were “234 Korean women willing to break decades of silence about their history as sex slaves” (Ching 79). While narratives of this exploitation and violence have since slowly emerged, understanding the experiences of these women and their attempts at testimony rely on an understanding—and, in a sense, respect—for silence.

Fig. 17. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 16-17.

In figure 17, Gendry-Kim illustrates Granny-Lee's return to Korea from China for the first time in "fifty-five years" (16). An asterisk indicated aside notes how this journey was made possible by the Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS), which aired Granny Lee's story in 1997. As the avatar of Granny Lee looks out the window, the background coloring of the panels alternate from white to black and back again. This alternating color scheme creates a dynamic image akin to a checkerboard, but when paired with the textual narrative, it is clear that these panels of blackness indicate a shift in memory, a shift in temporality. The assumed voice of Granny Lee in these dark panels discusses how she "was reported dead in Korea" and reflects on the "fifty-five years" of her journey (Gendry-Kim 16). As the spread concludes with a full-page illustration of the rear of a plane, and Granny Lee notes—even though "the flight was only two hours"—"fifty-five years...that's how long it took me to go home," there is a distinct sense of a story not yet told—a silence (Gendry-Kim 16-17).

Regarding the possibilities and processes of communicating trauma, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub highlight how silence is an integral and intimate aspect of this communication. Whether it is due to ruptures in memory, a fear of ineffective or antagonistic listening that leads to the return of the trauma, or a lack of words with which to express it, Felman and Laub emphasize that "the listener must be quite well-informed if he is to be able to hear—to be able to pick up the clues" (61). More than this, "he or she must listen to and hear the silence" (Felman and Laub 58). From the outset of *Grass* it is clear that silence is an indispensable part of Granny Lee's story, the story of the comfort women, and the story of violence and trauma as it is intentional in the comic medium conventions, a deliberate storytelling choice, *and* imposed by international hierarchies and norms.

Ultimately, "literature…is itself the outcome of cultural practice, and to world literature is to give it a particular historical density," and there are essential moments that acquire a density that borders on complete opacity (Kadir 266). In approaching the narratives, histories, and identities represented in *Grass*, this density influencing (and essential to) the "literary" seems of utmost importance An analysis of the "comfort women issue" in relation to the conflicts in the Pacific War and the aftermath of WWII, the worlding of comfort women, *and* the politics of Korean comics in circulation reveals the singularity of Granny Lee's testimony in *Grass*. In turn, the notion of Spivak's "universalizable" can once again illuminate the maneuvers of Gendry-Kim when representing violence (particularly sexual violence), representing trauma, and representing the possibilities for *recognizing* trauma.

The "Comfort Women Issue"

Although in decades past, the Pacific War has been cited as beginning in 1941 with the attack by Japanese military forces on Pearl Harbor, recent scholars have pushed to expand the timeline for studying military aggression in southeast Asia outside of the traditionally established American and European demarcations. Instead, as Pyong Gap Min discusses in "Korean 'Comfort Women': The Intersection of Colonial Power, Gender, and Class," many argue that the Pacific War should be conceptualized as officially "beginning" in 1932 as Japan intensified its imperial push in the region (Min 940). As previously noted, Korea had been under the control of Japan for nearly three decades; during this period, historical political hostility between China and Japan was exacerbated as Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 (Soh 64). While the military forces of Japan were certainly not alone in their commitment of war crimes and violence against civilian populations, the notions of "victor's

justice" and war responsibility have led to significant attention to actions by Japan (Saito 137). Of particular interest to many scholars—especially those interested in the establishment of the comfort women system—is the Nanjing Massacre, alternatively titled the Rape of Nanjing[3].

On December 13, 1937, the Imperial Japanese troops captured the city of Nanjing, the capital of China at the time. With the capture began a campaign of mass murder and rape by Japanese troops against the civilians of Nanjing which spanned six weeks. While many government documents and records pertaining to the massacre were destroyed near the end of WWII, the Nanjing Massacre "became a major case at the military tribunals in Tokyo and Nanjing shortly after Japan's surrender" at the end of WWII (Yang 844). In the subsequent trials and as discovered in research since, the number of murdered Chinese civilians and prisoners of war is discovered to range between 50,000-300,000 (with the greatest scholarly consensus being closer to 300,000 based on primary and secondary document analysis), and the number of rapes total at least 20,000 within the city alone (Yang 844). At the time, the Nanjing Massacre was widely reported on by the press in China and American and European media outlets, although the full scale of the violence was not known. In years since, the killings and rapes in Nanjing have been cited as expanding the scale of the comfort women system through its incorporation into official military control. However, attributing responsibility of this *specific* sexual slavery system to a singular, widely recognized instance of military brutality ignores the various dimensions of colonialism, class, gender, andsexual violence essential to understanding the comfort women system and the problems of classifying these women's trauma as an "issue."

Colonialism, Class, and Gender—Establishment of the Comfort Women System

[3] Occasionally spelled as "Nanking."

Working to form a clear connection between the establishment of the comfort women system and military action, historians—especially those interested in a revisionist history—cite military records stating that the comfort stations were created "to prevent soldiers from committing rape in occupied areas and contracting sexually transmitted diseases," proposing that the stations *decreased* violence, especially after international backlash from the Nanjing Massacre (Tai 3). This narrative disregards the violence committed against the comfort women and paints their experience with a universal brush that works to conceive "of the comfort system as a militarized version of the licensed prostitution available in imperial Japan and its colonies" (Soh 61). To be sure, not every woman in the comfort women system was "forcibly drafted"—i.e., abducted—into the system, but personal accounts and legal records highlight how this discrepancy in experience was drawn along national (colonial) lines as there were "conspicuous differences in living conditions between Japanese and non Japanese comfort women" (Soh 66). In addition, this supposed justification that does not change the trauma these women experienced is a complete state-level fabrication. Studies have found that soldiers "never stopped raping local women," and venereal diseases were pervasive at the comfort stations due to the soldiers' disregard for preventative measures and the health of the comfort women (read as *victims*) (Tai 3).

As previously mentioned, Korea was under the colonial rule of Japan from 1905 to 1945 (Min 943). During this time, not only was the land violently taken from Korean individuals and redistributed to Japanese citizens, but the peninsular population became a free labor source for mainland Japan and—later—forced participants into the imperial military forces.

Fig. 18. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 66-67.

As Gendry-Kim notes in the midst of her interview with Granny Lee, "Japan wanted to wipe out Korean identity and tradition" as people were forced to adopt Japanese names, work in factories and labor camps, and were prevented from attending school (66-67). Fundamentally, "the Japanese government considered the Korean people—whether men or women—mainly as instruments to be expended for war purposes" (Min 944). Despite this general perspective, there were distinct differences in the types of labor and level of mistreatment based on class and gender.

For the purposes of this project working with expanded timelines, under this conception of the Pacific War are two stages of the Sino-Japanese War. The first comfort stations—in the sense of there being locations for the purposes of sexually servicing *specifically* Japanese troops—were established in urban centers, particularly in China by the Japanese navy in 1932 (Tai 3). At this time, the stations were most often civilian-run, and the "commercial sexual entertainment" was "supplied by predominantly Japanese female employees." During this stage, the women working were often referred to as *shakufu*,

meaning “waitress” in Japanese and acting as slang for the notion of a paid prostitute (Soh 64). The second stage of the Sino-Japanese War (1937/8-1945) was when the Japanese military “establish[ed] comfort stations formally, making an amendment to the *Yasen shuho kitei* (Military regulation on the commissary in field battles)....the term *shuho*, which usually meant a military commissary, was now used to refer to a comfort station where ‘there was only one thing for sale,’ that is, comfort women” (Tai 3).

Now conceptualizing comfort stations as interchangeable with commissaries, the women “working” these stations became synonymous with supply objects (rather than individuals) and the responsibility of keeping this sexual commissary stocked fell to the Japanese government. At this point, “the military began targeting females from colonial Korea as comfort women...and the ethnic hierarchy among Japanese, Korean, and Chinese comfort women, in this descending order, was formally reflected in their different service fees posted at comfort stations,” and these “fees" did not go towards the payment or the wellbeing of the women, but to the formal managers of the stations which led to the system becoming a profit generating business for some, increasing the incentive to abduct, kidnap, imprison women (Soh 64). While the term *ianfu* is often used in Japan to discuss comfort women throughout both of these stages, it is much more applicable to the situation of women in the first stage of the development of these stations “where *ianfu* is often interpreted as ‘paid prostitute,’” but “in the English-language literature on Japanese military sexual slavery, the term *comfort women* has been used widely with the understanding that it actually means ‘sex slaves’” (Tai 8). Despite this understanding, it cannot be ignored that this translated euphemism imposes its own silence, with the notion of “comfort” almost suggesting that the women played a role in caring for the soldiers, when they were essentially prisoners. Adding

to this distinction is the fact that, during this second stage, soldiers often only referred to comfort women as *pi*, "i.e., the vagina" (Soh 64).

The debasement and dehumanization/objectification of these women were further enabled by intentionally created and manipulated class differences, along with national ones. When not abducted by government forces or individuals who then sold the women to the government for use—as was the case with Granny Lee—young girls "from landless or jobless families" were vulnerable and actively targeted by military brothels. In fact, post-war research has indicated that "the majority of the Korean victims of sexual slavery (59 percent) were drafted through false promises of well-paying jobs in Japan" (Min 951). However, this excessive class vulnerability was made possible due to Japan's formerly detailed colonial practice of land expropriation and redistribution, which left a great percentage of the population vulnerable to exploitation. Finally, the patriarchal values and prevalence of sex trade in east Asia—especially Japan and Korea—dramatically affected the enslavement of these women.

In looking at the patriarchal values that made the comfort women system possible and continued to perpetuate the silencing and trauma of the victims, "male violence must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies in order both to understand it better and to organize effectively to change it" (Mohanty 24). Predominantly, the patriarchy in Japan and present-day South Korea are greatly influenced by Confucian norms of class and gender, which "can be traced back to the Three Kingdoms period (313–676), and [which], by the time of the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392) . . . coexisted with Buddhism" on the Korean peninsula (Sechiyama 141). With Confucianism came particular classes, such as the *yangban*, "the general name given to the class of military officials and civil servants in the

national bureaucracy that ruled Korea" that was determined through patrilineal blood relations that were policed and "strengthened by marriage in ways that ensured that their class would be reproduced" (Sechiyama 142). However, even once the Yi dynasty collapsed, ending the formal establishment of the *yangban*, ideas of class status were deeply ingrained in Korean society and "large numbers of people chose to see themselves as and declare themselves to be descendants of the *yangban*," dictating their behavior, especially in regard to gender (Sechiyama 144).

Despite traditional Confucian norms valuing intellectualism, education was discouraged for the majority of the women. "The Korean proverb…'A woman who cannot count more than ten bowls will enjoy good fortune' worked in concert with the Confucian maxim 'Ignorant women are more virtuous (女子無才便是德)'" (Sechiyama 146). There existed sharp rules of appropriate behavior that differentiated between "sexual norms of lower- and middle-/upper-middle-class women," especially in Japan; "both the government and the general public emphasized the chastity of middle-/ upper-middle-class women, but they believed lower-class women could be mobilized to public prostitution and at the same time protect the chastity of their daughters and wives" (Min 952). For these reasons, not only were Korean women "mobilized" (i.e., enslaved) due to their various levels of subjugations, they were also held in contempt for their lack of education, physicality of work, and patriarchally-constructed impurity.

The "Worlding" of Comfort Women

Despite the overwhelming number of the victims of sexual slavery, the experiences of these women and the severity of the violences committed against them were nearly invisible in international discourse until the 1990s. Once again, it is clear that to "'world' is, in fact, a

highly repercussive and consequential verb" and the comfort women system stands "poised between a putatively flattened world of economic globalization and an array of counter-movements of heightened inequality, cultural and religious conflict, and expansionist realpolitik emanating from multiple locales around the globe" (Kadir 268). The ways in which the stories of the comfort women become worlded—in the establishment of density or in their flattening—can be traced through Japanese and international silence, tied to politics of state apologies and reparations.

Silence in Japan

After the atrocities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, WWII, and the Pacific War quickly came to an end—and despite the violence enacted on citizens of various nations by Japanese military forces—"many Japanese, remembering only the last months of the war, and especially the events of early August 1945, see themselves as victims" (Cameron 550). This understanding of the events of these conflicts seems to have been further exacerbated by the subsequent trials addressing war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Axis powers, particularly the Tokyo Trial. However, the Tokyo Trial notoriously executed a form of victor's justice that worked to oversimplify crimes committed on all sides of the wars and "blames Japan solely and entirely for the wars with China and the Allied powers between 1931 and 1945 and presents Japan's actions as self-propelled" (Saito 136). Isolating Japan's actions during the wars, the Tokyo Trial ignored the ways in which Japanese imperial aggression was integrally tied to earlier (and continued) European and American colonialism and domination in Asian countries—including Japan. In turn, in failing to address the effect of colonialism by Western forces in Asia, the Tokyo Trial also failed to recognize the effects of Japanese imperialism on its subjects and "obstructed Japan's commemoration of the

suffering of Asians, most of whom had been colonial subjects in the first half of the twentieth century" (Saito 139). Of these crimes tied to colonialism that failed to come into focus during the trials were the violences committed against comfort women. "As a result, many Japanese citizens forgot Japan's prewar history as an imperial power vis-à-vis the wrongs that Japan had committed in the countries that it had invaded and occupied" (Saito 139). In understanding themselves as exclusively victims and seeing the Tokyo Trials as an unbalanced execution of justice, these events furthered the continual failure of acknowledgement of offenses on imperial subjects by Japanese officials over the next decades (Saito 139).

For example, even after "the situation changed dramatically in 1991 when a former comfort woman from South Korea, Kim Hak Sun, broke nearly half a century of silence and made her story public" and "she was followed by several more women, not only in South Korea, but in other Asian nations as well," the experiences of these women were repeatedly denied (Hayashi 127). Even after Japanese activists organized support groups and lawsuits were filed against the Japanese government, "the Japanese government denied any Japanese military involvement in the comfort women system and refused not only to apologize to or provide reparations for the women, but also to carry out any kind of investigation" (Hayashi 127). Finally, in 1992, after the historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki "unearthed official documents in the Defense Agency's National Institute of Defense Studies that proved conclusively that the military had played a role in the establishment and control of comfort stations," the Prime Minister of Japan admitted to military involvement and a coverup of the comfort women system for the first time (Hayashi 127). Still, there has been no formal state apology to these

victims. No reparations have been paid, and "the term 'comfort women' can no longer be found in the textbooks" in Japan (Hayashi 128).

International Silence and International Acknowledgment

While an obstinate refusal of acknowledgment of the comfort women system has persisted on various "official" levels in Japan, the international response has been equally enmeshed in issues of colonialism, capitalism, and—in particularly—notions of American exceptionalism. For many historians the post-WWII era marks the birth of modern human rights law due to the creation of the United Nations in 1945 and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. In turn, the nonbinding—but "internationally" adopted—guidelines set forth during these meetings worked to guide notions of justice and legal and *moral* responsibility when looking at the atrocities committed by Axis powers during the Nuremberg Trials and the Tokyo Trial ("A Short History of Human Rights"). However, in worlding justice, these campaigns of human rights and their redress have failed colonial subjects, have failed women, and have most dramatically failed the comfort women.

Once again, the victor's justice executed in the era following WWII prevented the acknowledgement of colonialism's effects on the war and perpetuated the myth of United States's "moral authority" in its silence (Saito 151). This silence is often noted—as it should be—in relation to the United States' refusal to apologize or officially recognize the immense suffering of the victims of the atomic bombs "by justifying the act as a means to end the war and to save 'half a million American lives'" (Saito 151). This explanation of violence regards some lives as more valuable, more recognizable, and more *grievable* than others, and it also endorses narratives of complete heroism or complete *victimization,* such as those that follow

Chinese and Korean survivors of the Pacific War and WWII. In these binary constructions of hero and villain, perpetrator and victim, active war (as violence) and peacetime (as non-violence), and moral and immoral, there is a dual effect. The first is that these dichotomies—as the Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson stated to President Truman—perpetuate a silence that keeps the United States from having "the reputation of outdoing Hitler in atrocities" and allow for continued references to (and belief in) the moral high ground when confronted with historical failings (Cameron 564). The second is that particular intersectional identities become more vulnerable to exclusion. The international experiences of the comfort women, particularly the *Korean* comfort women, are the prime example of both of these effects.

As the testimonies of the comfort women gained more attention, many people began to question how these stories remained out of the public (read as "Western," i.e., American or European) eye for so many decades (Kozol 9). Of course, there is historical evidence attesting to the fact that many Japanese documents were destroyed to hide the violence committed against civilians and colonial subjects, but it came to light that even as the trials were unfolding, "US military intelligence units had gathered relevant information on [the comfort women system] (as revealed in documents kept at the National Archives in Washington" (Soh 60). Even more incriminating is the fact that cases for women in the sexual slavery system *were* prosecuted immediately following WWII, but these prosecutions *only* occurred for the Dutch victims who were abducted into the Japanese military brothels in the Dutch East Indies, highlighting the racism that went into determining the need for justice (Nelson 14). Nonetheless,

> The 2007 US House of Representatives House Resolution 121, Korean Americans and their supporters lobbied state legislatures in New York, New Jersey, and Illinois to adopt similar resolutions to condemn Japan for violating women's human rights through military comfort stations. They also helped create memorials for comfort women in New York and New Jersey as well as erect a statue of a thirteen-year-old comfort woman—the same as the one in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul—in California in July 2013. (Saito 152)

Even as the resolution acknowledges the existence of the comfort women system, it fails to highlight the initial and prolonged erasure of these events and ignores the role the United States and other western countries played in establishing an unbalanced perspective on history and victimhood in Japan. Therefore, this is a clearly hypocritical move that "acknowledges" events in a way that still supports narratives of Allied-force-heroism.

There is an outstanding disparity in how we consider crimes against women—especially as violations of human rights in relation to sexual violence. Chapter 1 highlighted how the 1949 Geneva Convention IV addressed sexual violence in war as one of a crime against *honor*, with the second paragraph of Article 27 stating that "Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution, or any form of indecent assault" (ICRC). This notion perpetuates patriarchal influence that connects the woman's honor directly to her body, hides the singularity of constructions of honor, *and* posits falsely clear demarcations of wartime and peacetime, and combatatant and non-combatant that keep sexual violence in war "traditionally...within the context of a private, and not public, matter" (Levy 262). As Chapter 1 points out, it became clear during the Bosnian War that on a mass scale, rape is not merely an unfortunate,

inevitable by-product of masculinized violence but a recognizable and *organized* military and *government* strategy (Isikozlu and Millard 35). In response, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) established "systematic rape" and "sexual enslavement" during war as crimes against humanity (Regan 208). By this understanding of rape and sexual slavery as weapons of war, the comfort women system meets all of the "qualifications" internationally set forth for recognition, but "the wars in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda serve as the first and most critical analogues or reference points for horrific sexual violence" (Crawford 52).

In regarding sexual violence and (in) war, there seems to be a clear refusal to engage with temporality, and instead, time appears solely linear. However, this is a privileged approach to interacting with time as it fails to acknowledge the ways in which certain traumas do not end and violence functions cyclically, and it disregards politics that flatten the experiences of some while allowing almost incomprehensible densities to others (how often do we hear the expression—rightfully so—"never again"). Additionally, a linear approach to time is ineffective in dealing with trauma, as trauma is marked by ruptures, gaps, and silences. Clearly, the comfort women issue has become subject to *all* of these spaces where violence, pain, and trauma can be made to disappear. *Grass* works with and against these spaces, succeeds in an hostile international market, and engages complexly with trauma and time in content and form to promote ethical witnessing to the traumatic experiences of others.

The Worlding of *Grass*—Korean Comics in Circulation

In an interview published through Korea.net on behalf of the Korean Culture and Information Services (KCOIS), Gendry-Kim detailed how she first heard of the abuses of the comfort women system in 1993 "when she conducted translation and interpretation related to

the comic book Comfort Woman Report" while living in France (Aiying and Hwaya). Over the next two decades, Gendry-Kim conducted research on the exploitation of these women, writing a 10-page short comic in 2010—titled "Secret"—and "she met Lee after finishing this work, and wishing to produce a work that went more in depth on the issue, the artist created *Grass*" (Aiying and Hwaya). Nevertheless, the road to the creation and publication of *Grass* was not an easy one. Not only did Gendry-Kim have to navigate the silence and erasure of the experiences of the comfort women across linguistic, national, and cultural barriers, but she also had to navigate the politics of textual publication and circulation in a market that has high regard for work from the perpetrator states.

South Korea has a rich history of visual storytelling practices, especially as it relates to the creation of comics. Often referred to as *manhwa*, a cognate "of *manhua*, the Chinese term for comics," the genre "arose from Japanese influences during the country's occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945" (McKinney). Similar to the history of comics in the United States, *manhwa* became a space for the publication of social and political criticism and faced intense censorship by Japanese officials as the market was driven underground. However, even after the "comics craze that spiked" after the liberation of Korea in 1945, *manhwa* has still not received the physical publication levels, attention, and critical acclaim of its Japanese counterpart, *manga* (Mckinney). In his book *Unpopular Culture: Transforming the European Comic Book in the 1990s*, Bart Beaty traces how "in practice, the world of comics is divided into three general regimes or markets: the United States, which includes English-speaking nations such as Canada and Great Britain; Japan, which includes all of Asia; and France, which incorporates not only Belgium, but all of western Europe and some parts of South America" (111). Naturally, these comics regimes are constructed around politics of access

and language, and these regimes often force artists into "developing within a national context, working for the international market, or working to internationalize the local context," making it difficult to publish against those with a hegemonic status in the comic world (Beaty 119).

Interestingly, in a similar vein to that of the experience of Marjane Satrapi, Gendry-Kim did not set out as an artist to challenge the triad of comic control, but she was able to publish and succeed with *Grass* due to her unique access to the French comic market. In an interview with *The Korea Times,* Gendry-Kim discusses her education and how her artistic career shifted to the field of comics:

> In Korea, I majored in Western painting at Sejong University. Then I moved to France to learn sculpting because I had a passion for the arts. I chose to go to France because the tuition was almost free and Paris is the city of art. I also admire the works of French Impressionist painters. I realized that gaining recognition in school and debuting as a professional artist are two different worlds. Since sculpture is an installation art, I couldn't make money out of it. So I began to translate Korean cartoons, like the works of Lee Hee-jae and Oh Se-ho, into French for a living. (Yeon-soo)

With her market familiarity and knowledge of the French language, Gendry-Kim situated *Grass* in style and artistry to that of the *manhwa* while embedding it within the field of French comics. Despite this, even as "French comics artists are best positioned to emerge as international stars – first, by being recognized as innovative and important within the French context and, second, through exportation to less well-established comics cultures," Gendry-Kim has been shocked by the critical acclaim *Grass* has received (Beaty 126).

Since the Korean-language version was published in 2017, it was quickly translated into French and then English, and "an Italian-language version will follow on Oct. 10, and those in Japanese, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic are slated for release in February next year" (Aiying and Hwaya). Yet, "Gendry-Kim said she was surprised that *Grass* won an award in France since Japanese comics command a large share of the French market," highlighting an awareness of the difficulty of textual circulation, especially circulation of a text that does not shy away from indictments of governments and individuals and representations of great suffering and violence (Aiying and Hwaya). *Grass* does not shy away from these complexities and, rather, pushes them to the forefront of the text in interesting ways as Gendry-Kim—as witness to the experience of Granny Lee *and* artist/author—confronts depicting sexual violence in drawing and emphasizes that "because I'm a woman and I've grown up watching my mother and sisters face gender discrimination in patriarchal society, I feel determined to tell stories that center on women," providing a unique singularity *and* an element of the universalizeable (Yeon-soo).

Representing Violence and Pain

Confronting testimony and subsequently grappling with how to shift that testimony into a representation (whether textual, visual, or—in the case of comics—both) is a process laden with potential pitfalls that can lead to the further traumatization of the testifier and/or a disregard for particular elements of the testimony by the witness. Even in trying to theorize the process of testimony, Felman and Laub seem to struggle with this complexity as they try to describe the listener as "the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" while pushing the idea that "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event" (57). Ultimately, this struggle between listener as "blank

screen" and listener as "participant and co-owner" is one that appears constantly across representations of violence, and is compounded as even more "listeners" are introduced into the narratives. For example, *Grass* and *Safe Area Goražde* inhabit similar positions and face similar challenges because, unlike *Persepolis*, both texts deal with the trauma and memory that do not inherently belong to the narrators. In this way, there are added levels of refraction of the testimony Gendry-Kim and Sacco work to represent as they deal with the memories of the testifier, the accounts of these memories to the listener, their roles as participants in representing this testimony into their chosen medium (comics), *and* the text's entrance into circulation. Adding to these complications is the detail that *all* three of these authors are attempting to represent violence, pain, and suffering. Gendry-Kim has a particular awareness of the difficulty of representing violence and pain as she states that "while working on 'Secret,' I wasn't sure how I should depict extreme violence in my drawings. I realized that the comfort women issue is far more complicated than I acknowledged" (Yeon-soo). However, in tracing the ways that *Grass* negotiates these potential pitfalls through the acknowledgement of the presence of agendas in testimonial refraction, emphasis on singularity, manipulation of the relationship between factual and affective accuracy in memory, and regard for spaces of silence and rupture, Gendry-Kim's work emerges as a force to be reckoned with—especially in serving as a "reparative project" addressing sexual violence and the comfort women system.

In moves similar to Sacco's own awareness of the ways in which "witnessing the nation at war through visual culture occurs through complex interactions between photographers, artists, filmmakers, editors, and others involved with the production and distribution process, and of course the viewers," Gendry-Kim attempts to dispel myths about

the objectivity of reporting on violence and trauma as she inserts her own avatar and journey into the experience of gathering and recounting the memories of Granny Lee (Kozol 6). In figure 19, the page consists

Fig. 19. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 145.

of six nearly identical panels as the avatar of Gendry-Kim conducts interviews with Granny Lee. The text details that "the interviews did not go as smoothly as I'd hoped," as Granny Lee repeats over and over that "Abe needs to compensate us," with the only major visual changes to mark the passage of time being the changing of clothes and the visible exasperation of Gendry-Kim's avatar. As the next spread opens, Gendry-Kim says, "I felt lost...What exactly did I want to hear?...As time went on, I wondered if there was even a story here" (146). While these

Fig. 20. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 146-147.

scenes may evoke responses of disdain as the Gendry-Kim avatar grows frustrated with Granny Lee's repetition and "refusal" to simply tell her story, they also work to highlight the process by which a testimony comes to be "co-owned" and the difficulties that arise in listening. In listening to testimony, there is always "an agenda of my own that might have interfered with my ability to listen, and to hear" (Felman and Laub 61). For the avatar of Gendry-Kim, that agenda is finding "a story here" (146); specifically, a story about violence and trauma, about spectacle, that would appeal to a literary market with an appetite for the "popularized and generic aesthetic of trauma" (Feldman 191). However, through representations of these potential agendas, *Grass* does work to highlight (and critique) the different ways in which agendas alter the ability to listen and continue to oppress individuals, even if the "listener" might be working to tell their story.

Fig. 21. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 155.

After several months without visiting Granny Lee and frustrated with publication deadlines, the avatar of Gendry-Kim returns to the House of Sharing and comes to face the statue outside the home, "the naked bronze torso of an elderly woman" (155). She notes that "it makes [her] feel uncomfortable," but as she regards the statue—and the audience regards it along with her—the tone of the page shifts. The narrator begins to question herself: "was I just stirring up painful memories for Granny Lee by trying to tell her story as a comic when all she wanted was to put the past behind her? I know many have come to her with similar agendas…" (Gendry-Kim 155). While these reflections have been building for several spreads in the graphic narrative—and over the course of months in the indicated literary timeline for the text—situating these reflections, this discomfort, over a statue of an elderly comfort woman produces a sophisticated effect and commentary on the nuances of listening and bearing witness to testimony. In her book *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Kelly Oliver discusses how "oppression and subordination render individuals or groups of people as other

by objectifying them. Objectification undermines subjectivity: to put it simply, objects are not subjects. Through the process of bearing witness to oppression and subordination, those othered can begin to repair damaged subjectivity by taking up a position as speaking subjects" (Oliver 7).

Simply put, in coming face-to-face with an object (a *statue* meant to represent a comfort woman), the narrator of *Grass* is forced to confront the ways in which her interactions with the events narrated to her by her interviewee have objectified *Granny Lee* and might continue to do so. Although *Grass* (like any project) is not without complicity, the text situates itself firmly in the category of bearing witness, rather than just "listening," as it works through representations of violence *and* the violence of agendas in representing. In turn, by acknowledging the universalizability of violence in agendas, *Grass* can also create moments of remarkable singularity that are essential in approaching violence and pain.

In delineating singularity, *Grass* utilizes two methods. First,the narrative habitually returns to the specificity of the violence committed against Koreans during the Pacific War and thus avoids being co-opted into "universal" debates of violence. The second is the way in which Gendry-Kim uses her own history and experiences in interpreting pain and trauma for the visual medium. As previously mentioned, the atomics bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States "enabled" a political and cultural amnesia of Japan's atrocities during the Pacific War and WWII, by creating a politics of victimhood in Japan following the war. Certainly, this sense of victimhood is indeed appropriate, but does not preclude the possibility of victimizing others. These events must be seen separately, not causally or sequentially. As *Grass* works to construct an ethnography of Granny Lee's life, in a vein running alongside are the historical moments in which Granny Lee's life is embedded. For

this reason, although the bombings complicate the binary between perpetrator and victim, *Grass* does not shy away from this complication, adding nuance to its account of the events.

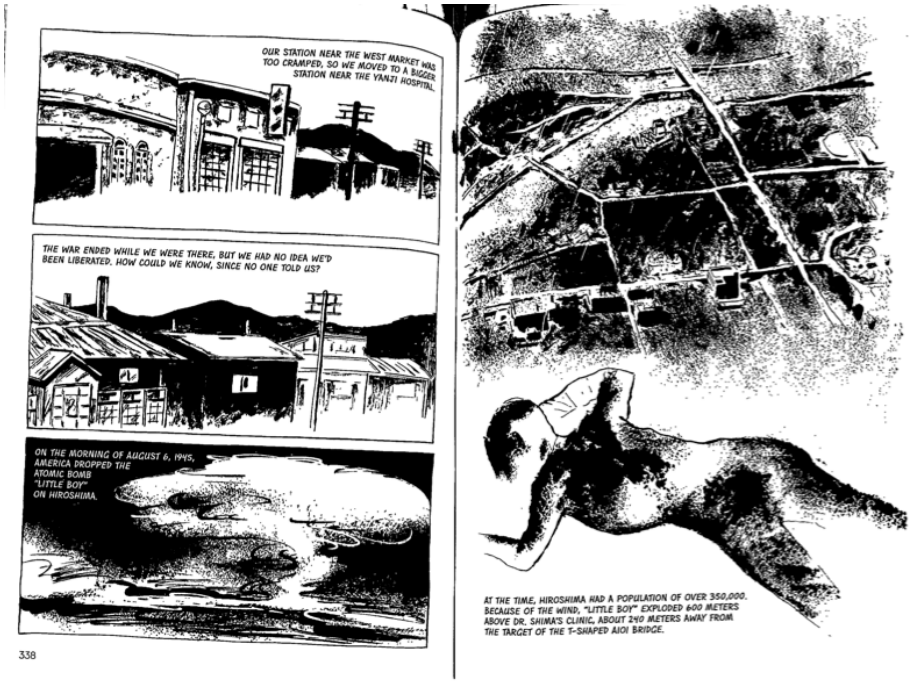

Fig. 22. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 338-339.

The spread featured in figure 22 comes in the midst of Granny Lee's detailing of the horrors she faced as a comfort woman, and when faced with the question by the narrator—the investigative textual persona of Gendery-Kim—"how'd you find out the war was over?" (337), Granny Lee responds, "the war ended while we were [at the comfort station], but we'd no idea we'd been liberated. How could we know, since no one told us" (338). The subsequent panel—in a familiar approach for the text—shifts from the exclusive memory of Granny Lee, to the research of the narrator persona Gendry-Kim. In a reportorial approach, the narrator inserts the details of how "on the morning of August 6, 1945, America dropped the atomic bomb 'Little Boy' on Hiroshima...At the time, Hiroshima had a population of over 350,000. Because of the wind, 'Little Boy' exploded 600 meters above Dr. Shima's clinic, about 240 meters away from the target of the t-shaped Aioi Bridge"

(338-339). Over the next several spreads, *Grass* contains full page images of devastation, death, and mourning. Instead of being paired with particular insights, these images feature museum-esque captions, such as "a girl stands in the rubble, crying desperately for her mother, who's been reduced to a charred corpse behind her" (Gendry-Kim 341) and "a young boy waits his turn at a cremation ground with his dead baby brother on his back. He stands at attention, biting his lower lips so hard he draws blood" (342)[4]. Gendry-Kim's illustrations are inspired by photos taken in the aftermath of the atomic bombings. And among these familiar scenes of violence roll across the pages, ushered by lines, shading, and space meant to indicate movement, there is figure 23.

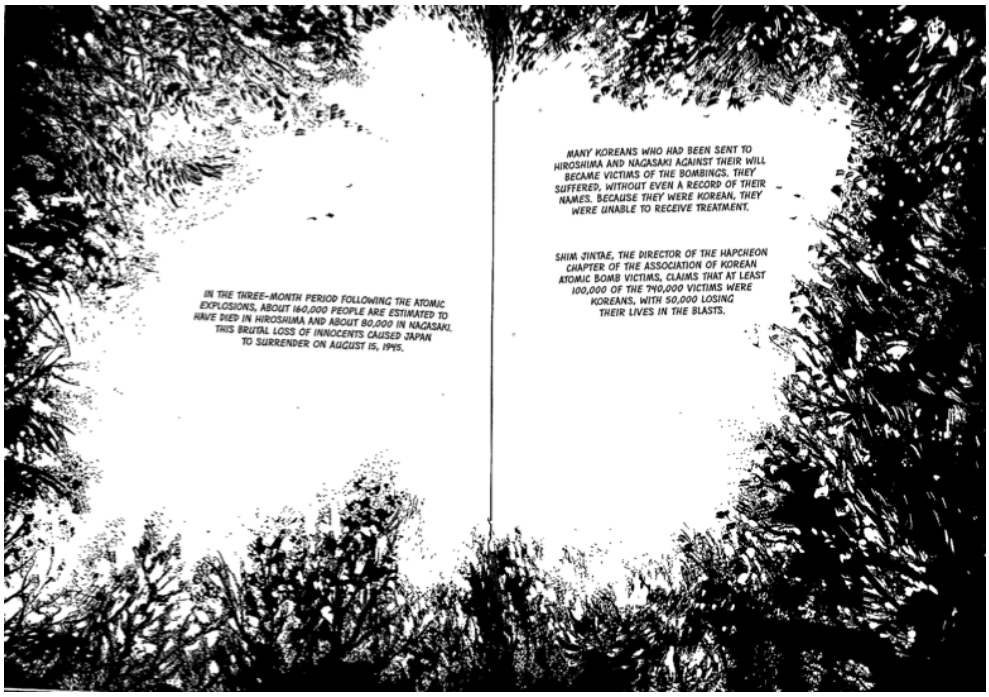

Fig. 23. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 344-345.

[4]A Japanese boy standing at attention after having brought his dead younger brother to a cremation pyre, 1945

Figure 23 recounts the death toll in the months following the atomic bombings, a common practice in discussing acts of violence, especially during war. However, it also includes a much less publicized detail about these deaths:

> Many Koreans who had been sent to Hiroshima and Nagasaki against their will became victims of the bombings. They suffered, without even a record of their names. Because they were Korean, they were unable to receive treatment...Shim Jintae, the director of the Hapcheon chapter of the Association of Korean Atomic Bomb Victims, claims that at least 100,000 of the 740,000 victims were Korean, with 50,000 losing their lives in the blasts. (Gendry-Kim 344-345)

While it could be easy to see this moment in *Grass* as establishing a hierarchy of trauma or grief policing, I argue that this moment is an indictment of the possibility of *universally* understanding trauma. In *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing*, Kozol comments that while "eyewitnesses and survivors today retain powerful cultural authority as embodied witnesses...most viewers engage with distant military conflicts and their social impacts through photojournalism and other visual cultures" (6). From this engagement with conflicts through predominately photojournalistic means, there are certain patterns and signifiers that are more recognizable as violence or pain than others. This is even more noticeable when the conflict being visually presented inhabits a familiar position in the viewer's imagination. When shifting from Granny Lee as an eyewitness to her own trauma and to her unawareness (at the time) of such a "significant historical event," *Grass* interacts with the falsity of the idea that certain events are universally known and possess an "inherent" understanding of certain events as being traumatic. Instead, *Grass* challenges this idea of universality and produces a more sophisticated "image-glut" that "keeps attention

light, mobile, relatively indifferent to content. Image-flow precludes a privileged image" (Sontag 106). However, in choosing to re-represent images that may be familiar from this event in the comic form, the process of image contextualization becomes less gluttonous and more singular.

Figure 23 does not *create* a hierarchy of trauma, but instead comments on how universal associations with violence and pain work to hide global inequalities. Some victims are more recognizable as victims, as traumatized, than others. Figure 23 forces the viewer/reader to contend with the questions, "which atrocities from the incurable past do we think we are obliged to revisit" and how do we conceive of who these atrocities belong to (Sontag 92)? Therefore, as Gendry-Kim is *specifically* concerned with the erasure of Korean identity and Korean suffering—elements intimately tied to the comfort women system—she emphasizes how the atomic bombs which are often read as a tragedy for Japan *and* a universal tragedy as it pushed nuclear weapons into the realm of possibility in international conflicts, are also quite singular in the Korean context. "It is intolerable to have one's sufferings twinned with anybody else's," not only because Koreans suffered during the blast but because they were forgotten due to the systematic erasure of their identities through names and a refusal to provide treatment to those injured (Sontag 113).

Along with an acknowledgement of agendas and emphasis on singularity in representing violence and pain, where *Grass* shines is in its negotiation of memory through the comic form, especially in the employment of factual and affective memory. In approaching traumatic memory, the search for "truth" becomes problematic as there are often distinctions in what is being looked for by the listener in these memories: the example highlighted by Oliver is how a historian may discredit a Holocaust survivor's testimony that

four chimneys were blown up when, in fact, there was only one chimney, while a psychoanalyst might regard the impact of this memory on the survivor, valuing the memory differently (1-3). In short, in handling traumatic memory and representing violent events and pain, there seems to be a difference between the historical truth ("factual truth") of an event and the emotional truth for victims and witnesses. While some scholars propose that "getting the story 'right' factually is less important than getting it 'right' affectively," what happens when the facts of an event have been so thoroughly obscured and repressed that even to speak of "history" (a problematic and non-objective notion as we have seen in the way history is often handled by the "victor") is regarded as opinion or sentiment as has been the case with the recognition of comfort women (Tomsky 54)? For the comfort women, and in the colonial experience in Korea as a whole during this period, the facts *and* the affect are inseparable, and, in fact, the affect *is* the effect due to the lack of recorded or exposed facts via the archives. In this way, the comic medium becomes a potentially radical avenue for working with these various regimes of truth as there is space for "forged memory" (Acheson 293) and narratives that would be inaccessible without its multimodality.

Henry Pratt argues that "the presence of words in comics allows us to follow narratives that might otherwise be inaccessible," but I propose that the images in the comic medium also enable a similar project (108). In figure 24, the textual narrative is of the Japanese

Fig. 24. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 58-59.

actions in China during their invasion and occupation, specifically the "horrible fate" that "awaited those who were unable to escape" the city of Nanjing (Gendry-Kim 57). The textual narrative speaks to the "historical truth" of the Nanjing Massacre, but the illustrations call attention to an otherwise inaccessible narrative because these images are illustrations of photos of acts committed by Japanese troops, but the photos are not of the Nanjing Massacre (Oliver 1).

While all of these re-representations are not particularly well known, the image in the panel at the bottom left of figure 24 is an illustration of a famous image taken by American photographer Carl Mydans, reproduced below. The narrative text details the image as being from the six-week

Fig. 25. Carl Mydans. *Casualties of a mass panic during a June 1941 Japanese bombing of Chongqing,* 1941.

massacre in Nanjing, when, in fact, it is a photo taken of the aftermath of a Japanese air raid in 1941 in the city of Chongqing. This discrepancy does not discredit the legitimacy of *Grass* as a testimony; rather, it highlights the possibility of the coexistence of fact and affect in the forged memory of comics.

Whereas the text gives a clear narrative about the facts of violence uncovered in research about the Nanjing Massacre, the images provide a narrative about the *patterns* of violence by Japanese troops during the Pacific War. In this way, these panels construct "memory as *multidirectional"* and non-linear (Acheson 292). The trauma of a single event is *not* separate, but works in a grand scheme across various levels of density and accessibility. What then becomes universalizable—not universal—is how memory is constructed across various dimensions. working to represent these memories as "reality" is always "subject to a

politics of representation" (Tomsky 56). In the case of *Grass*, it is important to remember that "some frames are stronger than others, while others are ambiguous enough that readers play a more active role" (Berlatsky 175). Images of conflict and violence are certainly strong frames as has been discussed throughout this project, but *Grass* works with not just these solid and visually "realistic" frames, but also plays with elements of expressionism, especially in framing pain.

Gendry-Kim's aforementioned artistic education was predominantly Eurocentric, and she graduated from L'Ecole Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Strasbourg. During this time, she details how she greatly admires "the works of French Impressionist painters," and their influence can be seen in her illustrative emphasis on light, open composition, and inclusion of movement—particularly in her two-page spreads (Yeon-soo). Despite her declaration of her admiration of impressionism, a less noticeable frame is that of expressionism, an artistic movement that worked to represent emotional experience rather than creating representations of the external world. In the frames leading up to figure 26, Gendry-Kim recounts Granny Lee's memories of her friend Seo Mija. After being tricked into believing that she was taking

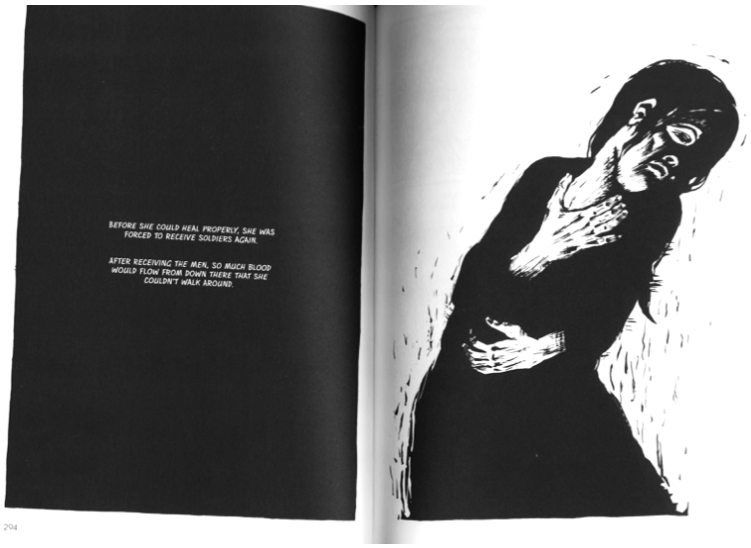

Fig. 26. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 294-295.

a waitressing job in Manchuria, Seo Mija was forced into sexual enslavement as a comfort woman alongside Granny Lee. During this time, she became the "favorite" of a Japanese soldier, Yoshida, who—like the vast majority of the troops and despite military protocols—refused to wear a condom when he raped her, and Seo Mija became pregnant. Once she gave birth to her child, the baby was immediately taken from her by the comfort station managers, and even as she mourned for her stolen child and healed from childbirth, "she was forced to receive soldiers again...after receiving the men, so much blood would flow from down there that she couldn't walk around" (Gendry-Kim 294). Gendry-Kim's illustration of this account does not work to highlight the pouring blood or Seo Mija's continued violations. She does not work to represent the external. Instead, in illustrating Seo Mija's bodily contorsion in stark contrasting black and white, Gendry-Kim works to illustrate the experience of emotional *anguish*.

As the light source of the image catches a singular eye on an elongated face and short line strokes outline the body, giving the illusion of trembling and broken movement, I am reminded of one of the most famous examples of expressionist paintings, Edvard Munch's

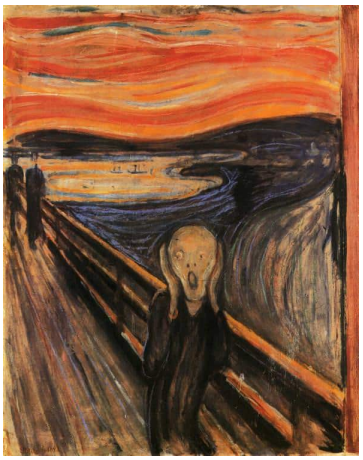

Fig. 27. Edvard Munch. *Der Schrei der Nature (The Scream of Nature)*, 1838.

Der Schrei der Natur. In invoking famous artistic expressions of pain, and panic, and anguish, Gendry-Kim makes this moment respondable and recognizable to a particularly Western, or Western-influenced, audience and injects the pain of Seo Mija into a long tradition that has historically worked to colonize, oppress, and delegitimize the pain of women like her. I would like to read this artistic allusion exclusively as a narrative of power and reclamation of pain , but there is one startling detail about figure 26 that undermines this reading. Seo Mija's mouth, unlike that of *Der Schrei der Natur,* is closed. Even as the illustration highlights the embodiment of the experience of pain, there is the presence of silence. Just as speaking memory has a variety of effects, "while silence is defeat, it serves them both as a sanctuary and as a place of bondage" (Felman and Laub 58). In illustrating Seo Mija's avatar as silent, even as an element of her story is told by Granny Lee and refracted through the witnessing of Gendry-Kim, *Grass* maintains silence as an integral part of the experience of the comfort women, especially in representing the sexual violence they suffered at the hands of the Japanese government and troops.

Representing Sexual Violence

Fig. 28. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 198-199.

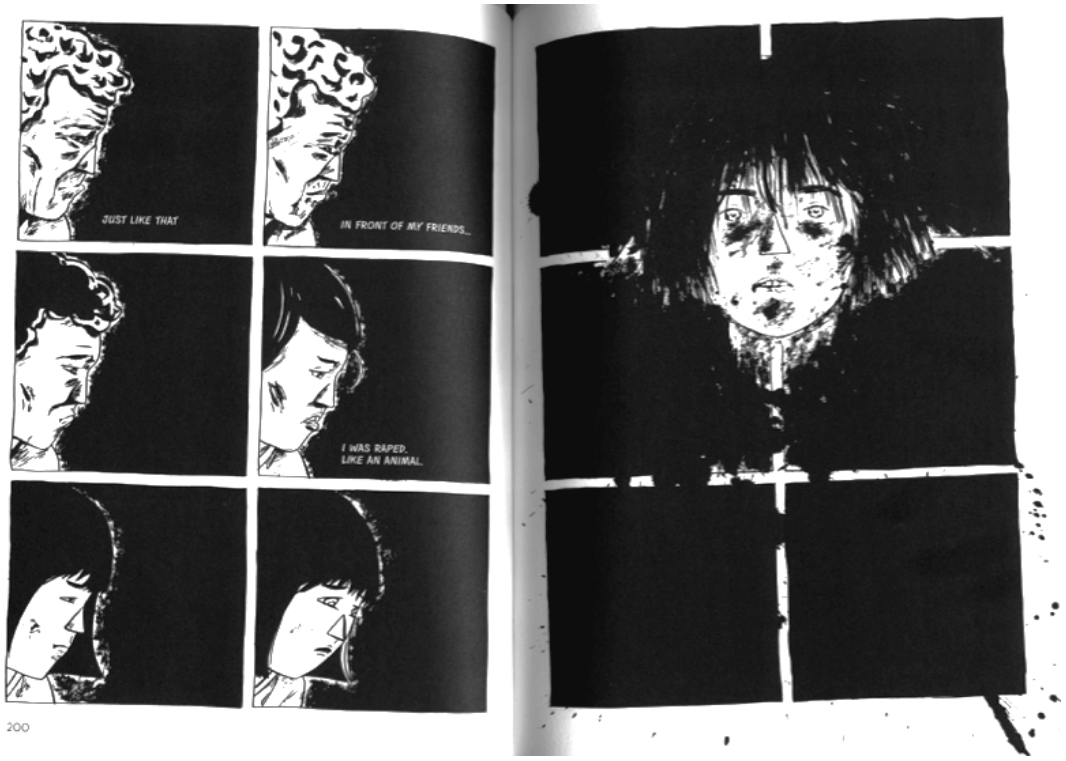

Fig. 29. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 200-201.

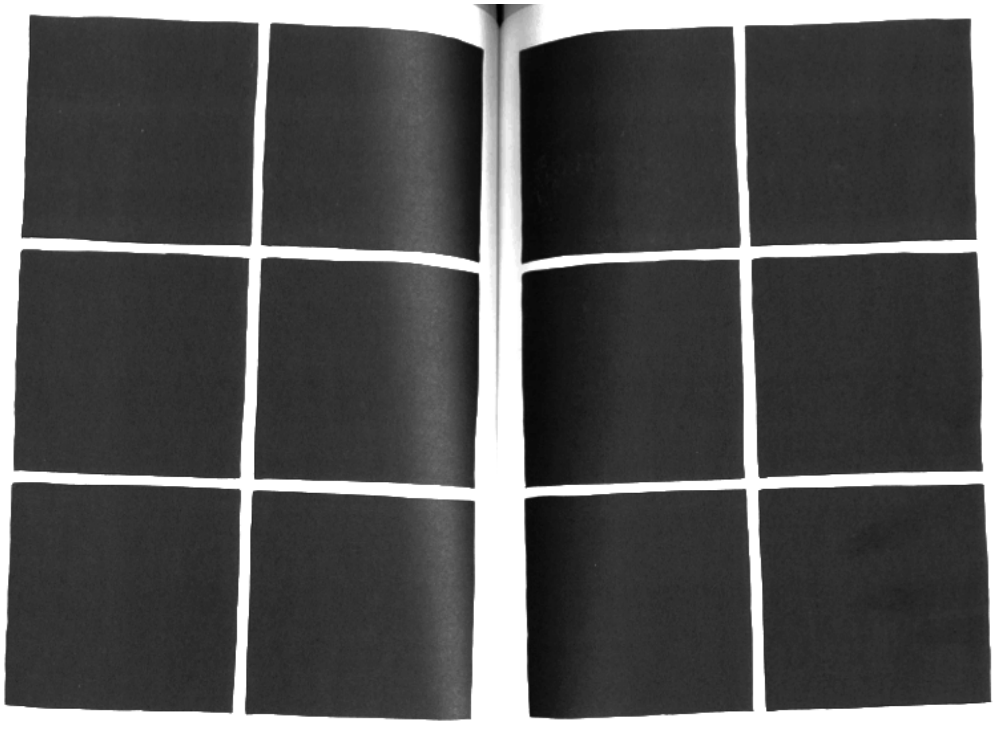

Fig. 30. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 202-203.

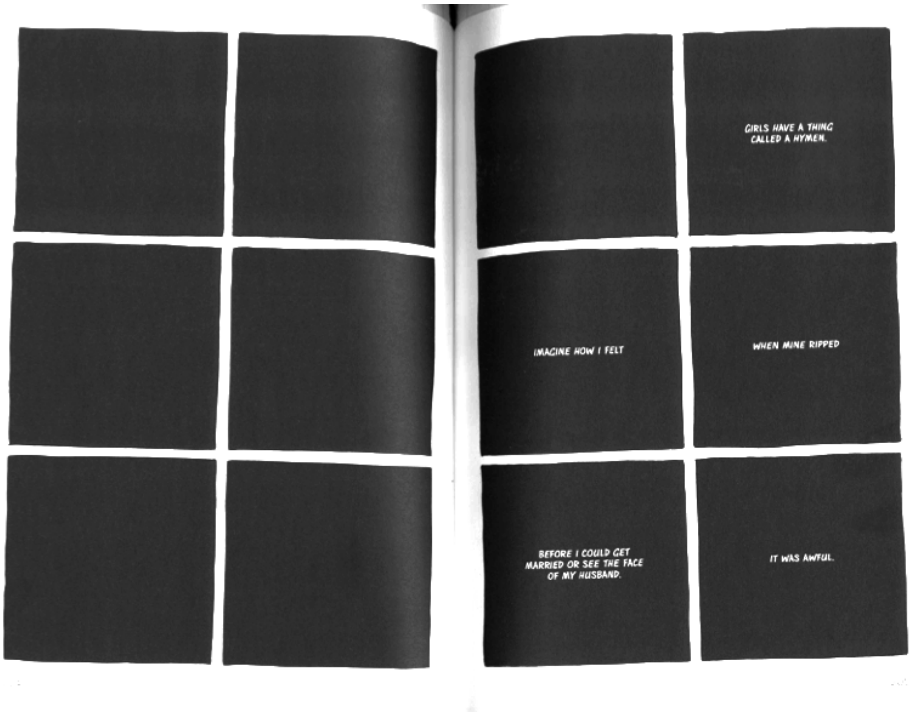

Fig. 31. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 204-205.

"Just like that...in front of my friends...I was raped. Like an animal" is how Granny Lee describes the events of her first sexual assault by a group of Japanese soldiers at the comfort station (Gendry-Kim 200). As the words unfold on the page, they are punctuated by gutter-space and blackness, and while Granny Lee recounts her experience, her avatar grows younger before the reader/viewer, indicating that these spaces are not merely pauses in her testimony, but moments of pause in her memory as she is taken back to those traumatic moments. Following are a series of nineteen exclusively black panels over the course of figures 30 and 31, and these panels initiate a radical shift in *Grass*. To be certain, violence has been represented throughout the early parts of the novel, but in these scenes, silence and its representation become essential to understanding the sexual violence committed against Granny Lee and the silence that follows her and many other comfort women.

In an interview with CBS, Lara Logan, an American journalist who was raped by a mob in Tahrir Square in Cairo, famously says of sexual assault, “you only have your word” (Stetler). However, although Logan’s account has radically shifted critical perspectives on how the experience and testimony of rape and sexual assault should be handled with a “conceptual definition” which “places emphasis on the whole person and the dignity of the victim, thereby permitting testimony that is less graphic and addresses the psychological damage done by the crime” instead of “the mechanical definition, which places an emphasis on what happened in order to create a picture of the crime in consonance with realist legal memory,” where does this perspective leave victims and survivors when even words are not enough (Coundouriotis 367)? In the case of the individuals who served as comfort women, these women have been politically, historically, legally, and culturally silenced as they sought to “not become the pariahs of the post independent, economically driven, and militarily ruled authoritarian postwar South Korean regime” (Ching 60). More than this, as is the case with many instances of traumatic memory, what happens when there do not even seem to be the words available to describe experience? How does one go about providing a testimony of silence?

Analyzing *Grass* provides a unique and productive opportunity to work with these questions in its medium and content. Focusing first on the comic medium, as has been discussed in earlier chapters, gaps, lapses, and gutters are essential to the function of comics and are moments of intrinsic, material silence for the medium. While “the gutter does not have a concrete lexicon such as the panels possess...meaning made within each gutter informs reader understanding of the next panel,” and even as there is silence on the page, the gutter space is where issues of closure, temporality, and—in the case of many

comics—brutality is negotiated (Acheson 295). Interestingly, the comic medium opens itself up to the sort of "co-ownership" of testimony described by Felman and Laub; yet, even as "the pace of reading a comic is literary, constructed by the reader," the silence required by the medium construction does not inherently force the process of *bearing* witness to testimony and testimony's ruptures if it only exists in the gutter-space, as the gutter allows certain aspects of experience to be ignore while others are prioritized (Pratt 110). This is where *Grass* functions differently—especially in comparison to the work of Sacco—as it negotiates silence in the framed panels which are habitually reserved for image and text. This is especially important when representing sexual violence due to the "myth of not-knowing" presented by Elizabeth Marshall and Leigh Gilmore and discussed in this project alongside *Persepolis* (97).

In the 19 panels of blackness in figures 30 and 31, Granny Lee and Gendry-Kim do not represent words or events. They represent silence through the black boxes of testimony. However, these are not images divorced from language or context that would fall into the frequent critique that "sight is effortless" that often follows representations of violence and pain, and it is not as intrinsic to the medium as the gutters that break up these boxes. Instead, in pushing the (textual and visual) silence out of just the gutter breaks and into the panels as well forces the reader/viewer to contend with their imagination and assumptions about the kind of stories that an audience expects in traumatic testimonies. Felman and Laub foreground the fact that "there are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory, and speech," and the construction of these panels acknowledge these challenges (78). Yet they do not become an unspecified

reflection on universal pain, silence, or atrocity, as they are aggressively centered on both ends of their inclusion and the material and bodily reality of the experience of rape.

Debates surrounding how sexual violence and rape should be represented or censored are far from being settled as some argue—problematically—that visual familiarity could work to make sexual violence more easily recognizable while others—also problematically—push for "indirect reference to rape" which "stems from the anxiety that a more explicit narrative is potentially pornographic. This unease reflects the influence of patriarchal authority and its framing of rape" (Coundouriotis 372-373). While I do not pretend to have an answer to these challenges of representation, *Grass* takes a powerful position by speaking about the bodily and emotional trauma of rape, which highlights the fact that sexual assault is about power and how this creates "obliqueness" (Coundouriotis 373). For example, the panels in question are not empty silence, which is indicated by the images that precede them, highlighting the way that trauma breaks temporal linearity (as shown by Granny Lee's de-aging) and suggesting the persistence of emotional pain across time and space, and closing with a call back to the trauma of the body. Granny Lee intimately details how, "girls have a thing called a hymen...imagine how I felt...when mine ripped...before I could get married or see the face of my husband...it was awful" (Gendry-Kim 205). In this refusal to shy away from the memory of the materiality of her experience, she also pushes the reader to bear witness ("imagine how I felt"), forcing the reader to contend with silence and deal with the fact that "perhaps too much value is assigned to memory, not enough to think" (Sontag 115).

Finally, these spreads mark an important shift in content, as they set the framework for an understanding of the urgency of Granny Lee's testimony and that of other comfort

women: the role and time sensitive nature of the body. Throughout earlier sections of *Grass*, the presence of bodies—young bodies, old bodies, healthy bodies, and mutilated ones—is visually undeniable. However, figures 28 through 31 set the precedent for talking about bodies in an urgent fashion. While this urgency may stem from the intimacy formed between Granny Lee and Gendry-Kim during their interviews, the discussions of bodies has also been an integral part of addressing the comfort women issue—or at least highlighting the need to address it. Discussions of the experience of comfort women and the need for state apology and reparations are often characterized by three elements: the physical experience and conditions of these women during their enslavement, the long term physical effects and trauma, and their aging bodies.

> Many accounts discuss how the women were:
>
> Confined to filthy shanties, sexual slaves were forced to have intercourse with Japanese soldiers from 10 to 30 times per day. They were regularly subjected to torture, beating, sometimes stabbing. Some women died of venereal disease in military brothels, while other women committed suicide. Testimonies by both the victims and Japanese witnesses reveal that Japanese soldiers abandoned the comfort women, in some cases killing them, when Japan was defeated in World War II. (Min 2941)

And the account provided by Granny Lee makes similar testimonial moves as can be seen in the accounts of sexual assault, violent examinations, and abuse illustrated figure 32. Similarly, she reveals how she became infertile after contracting syphilis in the comfort

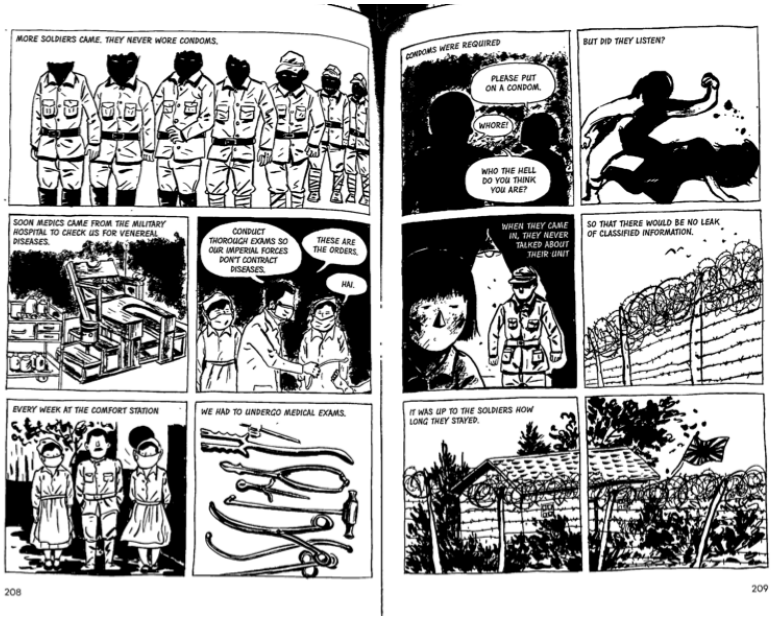

Fig. 32. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 208-209.

Stations and being "treated" by military doctors by being forced to squat over a dish of boiling Mercury (Gendry-Kim 262-263). Finally, the constant presence and insertion of the aged Granny Lee—often alongside the Gendry-Kim avatar—highlights how, while in memory and experience, trauma seems to have no true temporal limits, the body does. One of the most poignant examples of the interest in the body is in a series of spreads (figures 33 through 36) where Gendry-Kim asks "Granny...when did you get your first period" (215).

Fig. 33. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 215.

Fig. 34. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 216-217.

Fig. 35. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 218-219.

Fig. 36. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 220-221.

In these spreads, Granny Lee goes into extensive detail about beginning menstruation while enslaved by the Japanese government and military. As she discusses how she saw "blood on her legs" (Gendry-Kim 217) and told her friend and fellow comfort woman, "I'm bleeding down there...it won't stop...it keeps bleeding," Granny Lee reveals how she thought she was dying, but her friend consoles her that it means "you're a real woman now" (Gendry-Kim 218). This interaction between the girls highlights the irony and horror of the situation, for even as Granny Lee was forced to serve as a comfort woman to countless troops, she had not even had her first period. She details how no sanitary products were provided for them, "so we tore old clothing into strips to make menstrual rags" (220). When she told her station managers that she was on her period, they told her to "plug it up and service [the soldiers]" (Gendry-Kim 221). With an astounded expression, the Gendry-Kim avatar interrupts the anecdote to ask Granny Lee "with what? How? Like with cotton or gauze?" to which Granny Lee responds, "It wasn't even white. More the color of dirt," implying the filthy conditions to which she was subjected (Gendry-Kim 221). These spreads do not merely highlight an interest in materiality that follows the latter half of *Grass*, but also notes how "materiality cannot be separated from the symbolic meanings that are vested in it" (Hesford 12).

The bodies of the comfort women "were used to protect the bodies of imperial soldiers from diseases and to prevent the production of hybrid children from this mutually contaminating intercourse," making it clear that though the women had bodies, they symbolically belonged to the Japanese government and its troops (Ching 68). Their bodies would not be recognized outside of these boundaries. However, in recounting the biological workings of her body, there does seem to be a moment—as grisly as it is—where Granny

Lee's body is *hers*. There is no coding in talking about her experiences menstruating, the sensations, and feelings connected to it, nor does there seem to be shame between the two women, as many traditional patriarchal codes would dictate, when talking about the materiality of menstruating during this time. Of course, by no means is menstruation intrinsically tied to identification as a "woman," but there is a shame tied to it that is distinctly *feminine* in the "specific notions of both 'manhood' and 'womanhood'" (Yuval-Davis 1). Consequently, as notions of manhood and womanhood are tied to specific notions of nationhood, to act contrary to these expectations—especially in combination with other identity markers, such as those tied to colonialism and class discussed earlier in the chapter—does create challenges to the hegemonic structures. As Granny Lee remarks that the men who assaulted her while she was on her period "never noticed a thing," she even further reclaims her body.

Certainly, a discussion of the "period secrets" between Granny Lee and Gendry-Kim does not counteract years of abuse and further decades of silence and social ostracism, but it does provide alternative optics when looking at how "the boundary of who I am is the boundary of the body, but the boundary of the body never fully belongs to me" (Butler 54). In interacting with bodies detailing experiences with bodies that have been sexually violated, *Grass* works to construct alternative optics for regarding the sexual violence experienced by the comfort women. By respecting silence and including moments of potentially tabo materiality, *Grass* conceives of these women as violated but not inherently violable, emphasizing elements of their own subjecthood and challenging the traditional patterns recognition of their experiences.

Conclusion

In passing, I have half-jokingly remarked that my project "started with Scarry and ended with Spivak." Of course, I owe my research and conceptualizations of the project material to countless other scholars—such as Butler, Yuval-Davis, Mohanty, Oliver, Tomsky, Kadir, Felman, and Laub, just to name a few—but in tracing the origins of my own remark, focusing in on the works of Scarry and Spivak seems to highlight the main questions that inspired this project from the beginning: what does it mean to try and interact with the pain of another? How can we represent or recognize the pain of others? Can we intimately and ethically engage with the experiences of those who have routinely been pushed into spaces of silence and "otherness?"

Despite its long-standing and wide-spread influence on the field of trauma studies, the various commentary and interventions that have followed the publication of Scarry's *The Body and Pain* often remark on the subjectivity bind into which Scarry's theorizations on pain, its inexpressibility, and its world-destroying capabilities push the victims and survivors of corporeal violence. While the almost antagonistic relationship between expressibility and bodily experiences that Scarry articulates is one with which I still struggle, her three-fold suggestions through which we must approach pain—especially its representations—have opened useful avenues for investigation of "*first,* the difficulty of expressing physical pain; *second,*the political and perceptual complications that arise as a result of that difficulty; and *third*, the nature of both material and verbal expressibility…. Physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story, and the story that it tells is about the inseparability of these three subjects" (3). Merely looking at pain is not enough. Instead, although its voice is far from perfect, the story of the way it finds its voice has important

political, cultural, and historical (if these can even be identified as "separate" categories) implications. In struggling to work with the pain of another and this pain's representation, we see the constructions of our own boundaries when it comes to recognizing the experiences and subjectivity of those outside of ourselves. This leads to the second question that has guided this project: can we intimately and ethically engage with the experiences of those who have routinely been pushed into spaces of silence and "otherness?"

To be sure, "ending with" Spivak might read more as the beginning of *another* theoretical inquiry, especially as she demands readers, writers, and translators push past the "first step" of identifying commonality to the second step but "first obligation" to "understanding her mother tongue" (191). By this, it seems that while identifying common threads (the universalizable aspect of the text) is significant, it should not be attempted at the expense of or without first prioritizing the specific identities, histories, languages, and power regimes through which a narrative comes into existence. However, as is pointed out by Spivak and countless others, there are some identities (predominantly white, straight, American/European, and masculine) to which this obligation of emphasizing singularity is given more than others. Therefore, it seems the answer to the second question is not a clear one and might instead be a demand: engage with the experiences of those who are pushed into spaces of silence or flattened through an emphasis on the universal, rather than the singular, by earning "the right to become the intimate readers"; otherwise, Spivak suggests, we "cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text" (Spivak 183). In short, there is no "master narrative" through which we can interact with an experience, especially those having to do with trauma. This conclusion is magnified when the identities

of those with whom we are interacting are habitually subordinated or silenced, as such is often the case with the female victims of sexual and gendered violence.

This brings me to the second roadmap of the project, between and through which the chapters relate to one another, the "worldliness"—or, better yet, the world literature-ness—of the chosen texts. The idea of World Literature, especially in recent years, has justifiably come under fire by critics who are deeply concerned with the ways that the category of "World Literature" works to further solidify problematic literary and cultural conceptions of division and otherness, especially in the idea of "West" versus "East." Although these categories, in particular, do have inescapable and important descriptive power, they are often used without clear identification of what each category is being defined against—for, as Edward Said points out, they only work relationally.

As I have noted in each of my case studies' dedicated chapter, respectively focusing on *Safe Area Goražde* by Joe Sacco, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, and *Grass* by Keum Suk Gendry-Kim, it is not only the identity positions of the writers that make categorizing these texts difficult, but it is also the way that they circulate in global markets, a core concern in looking at "World Literature." For example, *Safe Area Goražde* focuses on the Bosnian War, and while Bosnia falls within the continent of Europe, it is often a nation considered to be on the periphery of "the West." In turn, Joe Sacco is a Maltese-American cartoonist and journalist who was born in Malta, spent his childhood in Australia, received his education in the United States, and spends much of his career looking at conflicts—to borrow from Kozol—elsewhere. So is *Safe Area Goražde* world literature? Is it more or less "worldly" than, for example, *Grass,* whose author is South Korean but works closely with the French comic market, whose translator is Canadian, and whose content predominantly takes place in

Japan, China, and Korea during a period of colonialism? Even setting aside the question of whether these graphic narratives are considered "literary" due the elements of their visuality, ultimately, none "fit" clearly into clear categories—even on a level of formatting and marketing, making it interesting to use them to see the way that so often the labels we assign must be looked at on both sides of their refraction, both within their contexts of origin and in the contexts through which they circulate.

Finally, the third roadmap of this project relates to content: sexual and gendered violence in spaces of conflict. Looking at sexual and gendered violence—even in uncritically and inaccurately labeled times of "peace"—as individual events, of moments of spectacularity or explosive violence, is ineffective and unethical as it hides the power dynamics and relational categories that make these types of violence possible. While these dynamics are also present in times of peace, political conflict either within or across the constructions of national borders pushes sexual and gendered violence from invisibility to hypervisibility. At a base level, I initially selected *Safe Area Goražde*, *Persepolis*, and *Grass* because of the hypervisible role that sexual and gendered violence played in their affiliated conflicts and the fact that they all dealt with these issues in the comic form. At the beginning of my project, I searched for the commonalities between these texts.

My selection of these texts became "final" as I flipped through pages and saw a visual throughline, as can be seen in figures 7, 16, and 37. Although the artistic styles are very different—Sacco with his realism and oversaturated pages, Satrapi with her exaggeration of contrast and illustrative minimalism, and Gendry-Kim with her emphasis on the illusion of movement inspired by impressionism—the visual motif of the curled up woman is one that got repeated across all of these texts. When paired with research tracing the effects of trauma,

the influences of gender and nation, and the varying psychologies of sexual violence, what seemed to emerge was a universal bodily vulnerability and a hyper-presence of physical and emotional pain. However, as I researched each conflict and each text, understanding this vulnerability as universal appeared problematic. Not only did it not work, but it did an injustice to the stories being told or being ignored.

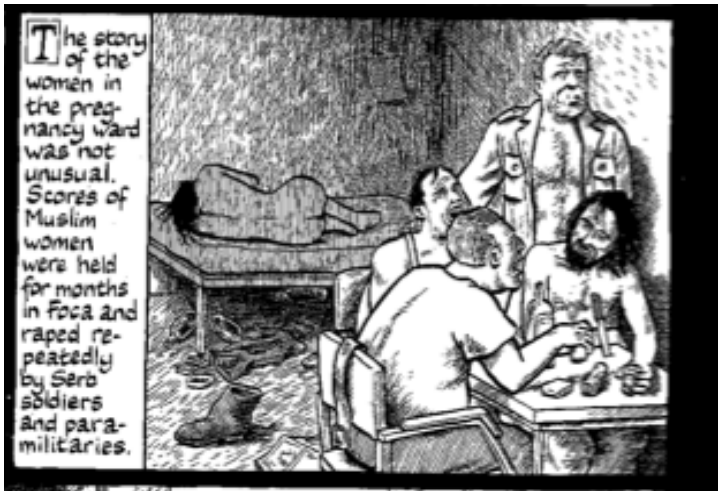

Fig. 7. Joe Sacco. *Safe Area Goražde*, 2000, pp. 119.

Fig. 16. Marjane Satrapi. *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return*, 2005, pp. 85.

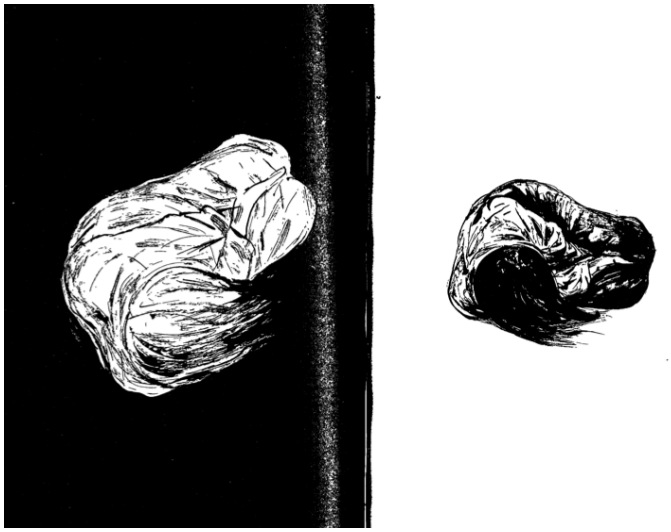

Fig. 37. Keum Suk Gendry-Kim. *Grass*, 2019, pp. 364-365.

While "logic allows us to jump from word to word by means of clearly indicated [connections, rhetoric] must work in the silence between and around words in order to see what works and how much" (Spivak 181). In approaching the ecology of each text—in its content, its production, and its circulation—it became clear that emphasizing the commonalities, the "universal" did not work or provide the opportunity to engage ethically with the various power dynamics and intersecting identities present in the texts. The fact of the matter is that each text, through its form, deals with the silence inherent to the idea of testimony and trauma very differently. However, while silence and vulnerability are a throughline (even as they are also points of departure), the women in these texts are not silent and not silenced equally. What started as an attempt to acknowledge that recognition of pain and violence is deeply tied to gender and specific types of violence and to find patterns of representation and recognition leaves me with this conclusion: representing visually, textually, or both is not enough.

Ultimately, in analyzing *Safe Area Goražde*, *Persepolis*, and *Grass*, their various approaches to their subjects and subject-matter, and investigating their power positionings, I

am left with an understanding of the need for intimacy with a text. Especially in investigating issues surrounding sexual and gendered violence, there are moments of silence, and even as the silence is often one that is attempting to be worked through, there will always be moments of complicity and failure. This complicity does not mean that a text should be disregarded or a sense of "unknowing" should be uncritically accepted. Rather, the boundaries of our abilities to interact with spatio-temporal elements (in form and in content) must continue to be analyzed. We must notice the ways we become co-creators of texts through our witnessing, and we must work to research through, against, and with spaces and times of silence to understand how specific dynamics of power and politics of recognition are being perpetuated or challenged.

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