UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER

(an accredited institution of the UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON)

Department of History and Politics

Considering Kitsch: The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Narratives

by

Laurike in 't Veld

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND POLITICS

History

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CONSIDERING KITSCH: THE REPRESENTATION OF GENOCIDE IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES

by Laurike Carlijne in 't Veld

Graphic narratives that deal with genocide inevitably respond to and intervene in ongoing debates around (in)appropriate forms of genocide representation. This thesis mobilises the concept of kitsch to investigate the tensions around the representation of genocide in international graphic narratives that focus on the Holocaust and the genocides in Armenia, Rwanda, and Bosnia. In response to the predominantly negative readings of kitsch as meaningless or inappropriate, this thesis takes a more productive approach that considers how some of the kitsch strategies employed in these works can produce meaning, while also facilitating interaction with the genocide narrative. These productive strategies include the use of the visual metaphors of the animal and the doll figure and the explicit and excessive depictions of mass violence. It also carefully analyses where kitsch strategies still produce problems, taking a more critical stance towards the use of kitsch in the representation of perpetrators and in the visual and verbal representations of sexual violence. Furthermore, this thesis traces how graphic narratives employ anti-kitsch strategies, which include a modernist focus on crises in witnessing and the ways in which historical veracity is emphasised in the paratext. Examining a range of contemporary graphic narratives, this study argues that kitsch and excess can be used to offer compelling strategies of representation that consciously intervene in the issues and debates around depictions of mass violence.

Keywords: genocide, Holocaust, comics, graphic narratives, kitsch, excess

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Laurike in ‘t Veld,

declare that the thesis entitled

Considering Kitsch: The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Narratives

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- parts of this work have been published as:

  “Introducing the Rwandan Genocide from a Distance: American Noir and the Animal Metaphor in *99 Days*” in *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 6.2 (2015): 138-153.

Signed: Laurike in ‘t Veld

Date: 18 July 2016

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Introduction

There is now a substantial group of graphic narratives that tackles the highly sensitive and complex topic of genocide. Although it might be too early to speak of a fully developed subgenre, there are certainly commonalities between these works, even though they focus on different genocides. This thesis takes these graphic narratives about genocide as its starting point, driven by the conviction that the analysis of this group of works will lead to important knowledge about the medium-specific ways in which cultural texts engage with historical instances of mass violence. Graphic narratives that deal with genocide will inevitably respond to and intervene in the ongoing debates around (in)appropriate forms of genocide representation. In attempting to find productive ways of dealing with the difficult subject matter, these works balance explicit truth claims with more immersive strategies that aim to connect with a wider audience: a tension between 'didacticism and sensationalism' (1989, 43) that Joseph Witek ascribes to historical comics in general.

This thesis mobilises the concept of *kitsch* to investigate these tensions around representations of genocide. As a cultural and visual concept, kitsch is generally associated with elements like excess, aestheticisation, and (emotional) manipulation and it is often seen as a questionable mode when dealing with precarious topics like mass violence, destruction, and death. Debates around (in) appropriate representations of genocide have centred on the Holocaust, but in the last few decades they have moved on to include other genocide texts as well.[1] Where initial debates in Holocaust studies were primarily focused on the 'unrepresentability' of the Holocaust, there seems to have been a shift to a more detailed engagement with some of the visual and narrative strategies employed. Key elements in debates around the representation of the Holocaust are the extent to which the texts under scrutiny distort, aestheticise, trivialise, and dramatise the genocidal events. There remains the suggestion, sometimes explicitly communicated, sometimes implicitly inferred, that limit events like the Holocaust cannot be captured adequately in words or images that violate the moral guidelines of silence and restraint. Another concern is that these techniques will decontextualise the Holocaust and create a universal moral narrative that ignores historical specificities. Many scholars concerned with the representation of the Holocaust focus on texts that follow (post)modernist techniques like self-reflexivity, fragmented narratives, and anti-

[1] See for instance Iordanova 2001; Harrow 2005; Mirzoeff 2005; Härting 2008; Uraizee 2010; Heckner 2010; Chaney 2011a & 2011b; and Keen 2011.

redemptory messages, explicitly or implicitly reinforcing the (academic) value and moral superiority of these representational strategies.[2]

In response to the predominantly negative readings of kitsch as meaningless or inappropriate, this thesis takes a more productive approach that considers how, in these graphic narratives that deal with genocide, some of the kitsch strategies can produce meaning, while also facilitating interaction with the genocide narrative. At the same time, I do not completely replace the critical frameworks around genocide and kitsch with an unequivocally positive reading. Instead, I carefully analyse where representational strategies that use kitsch can be valued, and where they still produce problems. Throughout this thesis, I argue that kitsch can become a powerfully affective tool when it opens up a space for reflection. In these instances, the graphic narratives offer compelling and direct forms of representation that consciously intervene in the issues and debates around depictions of mass violence. I argue that kitsch becomes productive when it shows how visual metaphors stand in for victims (see chapter 1) and I consider how explicit and excessive depictions of violence can produce meaning (see chapter 3). However, the visual and moral excess of kitsch can also lead to ambiguities that do not necessarily allow for an effective interaction with the genocide narrative. For this reason, I take a more critical stance to kitsch in the representations of perpetrators (see chapter 2), and in the visual and verbal representations of sexual violence (see chapter 3). Furthermore, I also analyse how graphic narratives respond to the idea of silence and restraint as more appropriate forms of representation by using anti-kitsch strategies that include acknowledging the impossibility of representation and installing explicit truth claims in the paratext (see chapter 4).

Throughout this thesis, I use a comparative approach, analysing a corpus that includes graphic narratives that focus on the Holocaust and the genocides in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Armenia. The graphic narratives that deal with the Holocaust include Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986 & 1991), Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* (2002, translated to English in 2003), Joe Kubert's *Yossel, April 19, 1943* (2003), Eric Heuvel's *The Search* (2007, translated to English in 2011) and Dave Sim's *Judenhass* (2008). Art Spiegelman's *Maus* charts the experiences of Spiegelman's father before, during, and after the Holocaust. The graphic narrative famously uses animals to portray the different ethnic identities and Spiegelman switches between past and present to tell his father's story and detail the testimonial process. In contrast, three graphic narratives present stories in which fictional characters are placed in the historical context of the

[2] See for instance Felman and Laub 1992; White 1996; Caruth 1996; Young 2000; Hirsch 2004.

Holocaust. In Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz*, an elderly couple looks back on their time in Auschwitz and the loss of their child. Croci contrasts the two stories of the father and the mother, using stark black and white images and portraying his characters with distinct, large eyes with haunted expressions. The translated English edition of *Auschwitz* retains the hardbound, larger format of the original *bande dessinée*. Joe Kubert's *Yossel* follows the story of the young eponymous protagonist and his experiences in the Warsaw ghetto. The graphic novel presents the drawings as if they were Yossel's, resulting in sketchy and rough line work. Kubert's work eschews the use of panels and grids in favour of borderless drawings that are loosely arranged on the page. Eric Heuvel's *The Search* (*De Zoektocht*), which was made in cooperation with the Anne Frank foundation, presents the Second World War and the Holocaust through the stories of two families and a variety of characters that occupy different positions during wartime. Drawn in the clear line style, the graphic novel incorporates iconic images of the war and the Holocaust. It is also used as an educational tool in high schools, in conjunction with the earlier published *A Family Secret* (*De Ontdekking*). Finally, Dave Sim's *Judenhass* juxtaposes anti-Semitic quotes from a variety of historical figures with stark and confrontational black and white images from the Holocaust. Using redrawn iconic photographs which are broken down into smaller parts, Sim creates a haunting repetition of these shocking visual signifiers.

The works that focus on the Rwandan genocide discussed here include Jean-Philippe Stassen's *Deogratias* (2000, translated in 2006), Rupert Bazambanza's *Smile through the Tears* (2005, translated in 2007), and Matteo Casali and Kristian Donaldson's *99 Days* (2011). In Jean-Philippe Stassen's *Deogratias,* the eponymous Hutu protagonist struggles to deal with feelings of guilt after his traumatic experiences during the genocide. The graphic narrative juxtaposes past and present and slowly unravels how Deogratias has survived the horrors. In a similar narrative move, Matteo Casali and Kristian Donaldson's *99 Days* shows how an LAPD detective of Rwandan descent is haunted by the past and his complicity in the genocidal events. The graphic novel presents a hybrid between a detective whodunit and a trauma narrative, a mix that is constituted on both a narrative and a visual level, as the detective iconography is complemented with visual elements that link to the genocide. *Smile through the Tears*, drawn and written by Tutsi survivor Rupert Bazambanza, recounts the story of Bazambanza's befriended family, the Rwangas. The work devotes a substantial portion of the text to the political and historical background of the genocide, while also functioning as a eulogy for the Rwanga family.

Two graphic narratives in my corpus deal with the war and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia: Joe Kubert's *Fax from Sarajevo* (1996) and Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde* (2000). Joe Kubert's *Fax from Sarajevo* details the experiences of Kubert's friend and colleague Ervin Rustemagić and his family. The Rustemagić family is unable to leave Sarajevo when the war breaks out, and the only line of communication with the outside world is through faxes. Kubert draws the family's desperate attempts to get out of Sarajevo in a colourful and expressive style, using the fax messages as a structuring device. Joe Sacco's graphic journalism in *Safe Area Goražde* interweaves Sacco's experiences in the Eastern Bosnian enclave with eyewitness reports of the atrocities that were committed during the Bosnian War. Sacco's style moves back and forth between caricatured and exaggerated images of characters (including Sacco as a main character and narrative filter) to more conventional and toned down depictions of the eyewitness reports.

Lastly, Paolo Cossi's *Medz Yeghern: Het Grote Kwaad* (original title *Medz Yeghern: il grande male* 2007, translated to Dutch in 2011) focuses on the Armenian genocide. It deals with the genocide in Armenia in a highly graphic manner, interweaving the stories of different characters with explicitly violent images. Cossi introduces real historical figures, like the German soldier Armin Wegner, and juxtaposes them with fictional characters. *Medz Yeghern* has been translated from Italian to Dutch, Spanish, and French, but not into English.

This corpus has been selected with a few criteria in mind. Firstly, I am interested in graphic narratives/graphic novels that deal with the topic of genocide. As proposed by Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey in *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (2015), graphic novels are long-form narratives that deal with serious and sophisticated themes in often innovative ways, and they are inclined to focus on non-fictional topics and genres such as historical narrative, (auto)biography, and journalistic reportage (10-12, also see Sabin 1993, 2001; Hatfield 2005). I have hitherto referred to the primary sources as 'graphic narratives', a term taken from work by Hillary Chute (2006, 2008, 2016). For Chute, the term successfully encompasses both fictional and non-fictional modes in comics form, while still connoting that these are works of substantial length. She proposes that '[a] graphic narrative is a book-length work in the medium of comics' (Chute 2008, 453).[3] This emphasis on the content and length of graphic novels applies to the works under discussion, as they are aiming to confront the sensitive histories of mass violence and atrocity in a long-form narrative. Furthermore, the majority of the primary sources in my corpus are published in a format that is characteristic of graphic

[3] Following Chute's definition of graphic narratives, I use the term 'comics' to designate the medium.

novels: they are one-shot narratives, presented in a format that 'resembles that of the traditional novel (in size, cover, paper, number of pages, etc.)' (Baetens and Frey 2015, 14). This publication format is different from the shorter, thin-papered comic book, which, generally speaking, includes advertisements and proposes a continuous narrative arch that is serialised over longer periods of time.

I am interested in *contemporary* graphic narratives, which shows in the selection of my corpus; with the exception of *Maus*, all the graphic narratives have been published between 1996 and 2011. These works stand out through elements like visual style, narrative framework, use of characters, and the inclusion of (self-)reflexive commentary, and the selection is purposefully limited to allow for a close reading of these elements throughout the thesis. In addition, most of the graphic narratives under discussion have been published in, or translated to, an Anglo-American context. Paolo Cossi's *Medz Yeghern* is the only exception to this rule, although the graphic novel has still been published in different languages. Through this level of international distribution, these texts have arguably achieved a status that transcends national borders. This international status further facilitates the comparative approach of this thesis, as my analysis departs from the notion that genocide graphic narratives face similar representational challenges. Consequently, these challenges motivate certain recurring visual and verbal strategies and resultant narrative effects. The notion of an international, or transnational dimension of genocide narratives has been theorised in the context of the Holocaust (see Levy and Sznaider 2006 – originally published in 2001 – on the 'cosmopolitan memory' of the Holocaust, and Kansteiner 2008 on global Holocaust narratives) and in this thesis I extend the scope to include other genocides. Rather than focusing on the specific local, national context of the graphic narratives, I have thus selected works that enable considerations of how contemporary, transnational memories of genocide are articulated.

This focus on major, contemporary graphic narratives that deal with genocide also means I do not engage with longer histories of colonial cartoons and comics (see McKinney 2011 and 2013 for an excellent analysis of this topic), nor do I provide a comprehensive historical overview of representations of the Holocaust and WWII in comic books, or an investigation of the plethora of images of Nazis in world comics. Furthermore, the notion of 'contemporary' ultimately poses temporal limitations; graphic narratives have been published since starting this research project—like Josh Blaylock and Hoyt Silva's 2015 *Operation Nemesis*, which deals with the Armenian genocide—but their recent publication date prevents inclusion into this thesis. Finally, the main corpus provides the content for the analyses, but

where relevant more peripheral works will be discussed. In this way, I aim to balance an in-depth investigation of the corpus with a wider view on the cultural landscape of genocide graphic narratives.

Figure 1

As pointed out, an extensive history of the Holocaust in comic books is not part of my thesis. However, there are a few fascinating early representations of genocide that I would like to address. In addition to providing a sense of historical lineage that precedes *Maus*, these examples also present some further context for the discussions and tensions that inform the contemporary works in my corpus. Before *Maus*, several comic books featured stories that

referenced the Holocaust. Although the immediate post-war period was characterised by a relative (cultural) silence about the horrors of Holocaust (see for instance Rousso 1991; Novick 1999; Mintz 2001), there are a number of short but noteworthy comic strips that refer to the genocidal events. In 1952, Atlas Comics—which later evolved into Marvel—included a reference to the Holocaust in one of the stories in the war comic *Battlefield*. Written by Hank Chapman and drawn by Paul Reinman, the Holocaust is notably not the main theme of "Atrocity Story". Over the course of seven pages, the comic strip confronts its readers with the atrocities committed during the Korean War. With a clear motive of justifying America's presence in fighting Communism in Korea, the first two pages present an overview of the brutalities of the 'reds'. Chapman and Reinman show Korean soldiers, who are drawn in a racially stereotyped manner with yellow skin tones, and the brutalities they inflict on Korean civilians and US soldiers. The third page of the story asks readers to consider what would happen to the American population if they were invaded, showing different hypothetical (and equally gruesome) scenarios. The penultimate panel on this page visually foreshadows the turn that the story will take, as bulldozers push the bodies of the hypothetical carnage of 'every human being in Inglewood, California' into a pit. The next two pages detail the atrocities of the Holocaust as a warning sign of what may happen if Communism remains undefeated. Chapman and Reinman do not hold back on the visual representation of the genocidal events; listing names of the different concentration camps and the horrors committed, the drawings display an explicit visual catalogue of the Holocaust (see figure 1). The images show dead, naked bodies, smoke coming out of the chimneys, medical experiments, forced labour, and drawings of hollow-eyed 'men whose minds can never forget the horror'. On the next page, the artists also include drawings of the dead bodies of perpetrators like Hermann Goering and Julius Streicher, some depicted with the noose still around their neck.[4]

The story's comparative framing of the terror enacted by Communism and Nazism can be linked to the concept of totalitarianism; the notion of an authoritarian state that implements terror to regulate all aspects of life received burgeoning intellectual attention in America from the 1930s onwards. The political system has most famously been described in Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), in which she analyses the dictatorships of Nazism and Stalinism in light of histories of anti-Semitism and imperialism, arguing that

[4] Michael J. Vassallo writes about "Atrocity Story" for his blog about Atlas Comics: http://timely-atlas-comics.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/a-history-of-atlas-war-comics-1950-1960.html. Ger Apeldoorn researches Hank Chapman's work and analyses the comic strip on http://thecomicsdetective.blogspot.co.uk/2010/03/hank-chapman.html.

totalitarian rule is well suited to policies that motivate genocidal actions. In “Atrocity Story”, Chapman and Reinman provide a visual polemic of the tyranny and horrors of these two regimes and with a sense of exasperation and despair the last few panels turn back to the present and forcefully ask the reader to consider what will be the best solution to stop Communism. A decisive answer remains absent, as the final panel of the story shows different, boldly coloured question marks, ironically counterpointed by the caption ‘The End’.

A second, more famous Holocaust story is Bernard Krigstein’s 1955 “Master Race”, which was published in an issue of the EC Comics magazine *Impact*. Krigstein’s narrative reversal of protagonist/victim into perpetrator cleverly thwarts reader expectations. The exposé sets up a survival story (‘This is America, you’re safe now! You’re free…’) as we see a man board the underground in New York. The subsequent confrontation with an eerie looking stranger and triggered flashback seems to reinforce the notion that we are entering the personal nightmare of a camp survivor. However, it isn’t until the penultimate page that Krigstein turns the tables and affirms that the man is a Nazi perpetrator rather than a victim, which forces us to evaluate what we’ve just read. The story is analysed in great detail by John Benson, David Kasakove, and Art Spiegelman (2009, originally published in 1975). Here, the authors commend Krigstein’s artwork for its eschewal of ‘exaggerated visual comic book phrases usually used to clearly denote action and emotion (speed lines, large beads of sweat, etc.)’ in favour of a more abstract and clean visual approach to the story (288). The authors argue that the flashback is visually understated, as ‘[t]he horrors described are consistently underplayed in the pictures’ (Benson, Kasakove, and Spiegelman 2009, 294). A few panels make explicit visual reference to the horrors: a drawing directly inspired by Margaret Bourke-White’s iconic photograph of prisoners standing behind barbed wire in Buchenwald, and a panel showing how Nazi perpetrators buried their victims alive (Korean communists also bury victims alive in “Atrocity Story”). Rather than using the Holocaust as a portent for the atrocities of a contemporary war, Krigstein’s story uses the events as the main plot device, although the actual treatment of the Holocaust is conveyed through flashbacks.

Concentration camps also featured as narrative fuel for comic strips, like in a 1968 issue of *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos*, titled “Triumph at Treblinka”. Drawn by Dick Ayers and John Severin and written by Gary Friedrich, the comic strip presents a ‘superheroic take on World War II history’ (Chute 2016, 12) as the story details how the squad attempts to rescue a doctor from Treblinka by breaking into the camp and posing as prisoners. The cover shows the squad lined up in concentration camp garbs—the discrepancy between the

characters and their location is further enhanced by their muscular and hypermasculine appearance; one of the men wears his sunglasses and another dons a moustache—while the company commander, his shirt torn open and his posture clearly communicating angry defiance, is threatened at gunpoint by a Nazi soldier. In the background, a Nazi officer with monocle, gloves and long jacket is looking on at the events.[5]

In 1972, Art Spiegelman published a four-page story about his father's Holocaust experiences, titled "Maus", in the underground comix magazine *Funny Aminals* (sic). Inspired by filmmaker Ken Jacobs's lecture about the links between racist stereotypes and funny animal cartoons, Spiegelman considered creating a comic about the experiences of blacks in America by utilising animal figures. However, he quickly realised that 'it would have been very easy for my notion to come off as one more racist "parody" even if I did bring in Ku Klux Kats and worked it with honourable intent' (Spiegelman 2011, 113). Instead, Spiegelman found a more personal way to use the cat-and-mouse metaphor, as '[t]he cats and mice came as a set, part of all the Tom and Jerry comics and cartoons that I grew up with' (2011, 118). The four-paged "Maus" was the result of these first steps into charting his father's Holocaust experiences in animal form. Its style is different from the graphic narrative as the panels are drawn with more line work and detail, and Spiegelman's mice figures have large eyes and quite distinct—and arguably more anthropomorphic—facial features. Similarly to Krigstein, Spiegelman incorporates Bourke-White's iconic photograph, using the image—here the mice prisoners are characterised by their enlarged, terrified, and haunted eyes—as the opening panel to the story. Spiegelman has also remarked that this short story is almost completely deracinated; the young mouse in the story is called 'Mickey' and references are made to *die Mausen* and *die Katzen*, rather than the Jews and the Nazis (2011, 118).

"Maus" then formed the basis for the graphic novel *Maus*, the process for which started in 1972 and then continued from 1977 onwards, when Spiegelman interviewed his father Vladek about his wartime experiences. The story was subsequently serialised in Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly's *RAW* from 1980 onwards to 1991, and the first six chapters were published in 1986 as *A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*. Spiegelman pushed for an early publication of the first half of his work because he worried that the release of Stephen

[5] Other (oblique) early references to the Holocaust and concentration camps in comic strips include Vince Napoli's "Escape from Maidenek" (*Stamps Comics* #4, April 1952) and Sam Kweskin's "City of Slaves" (*Battlefield* #9, March 1953). See Ralf Palandt's overview on http://fifties-horror.de/wissen/der-holocaust-im-horrorcomic-der-1950er-jahre-ein-zeitdokument and Markus Streb's forthcoming article "Early Representations of Concentration Camps in Golden Age Comic Books" (*Scandinavian Journal of Comic Art* 3 (1), Autumn 2016).

Spielberg and Don Bluth's *An American Tail*, which also used mice to depict Jews, would result in unfavourable comparisons and accusations of plagiarism.[6] The second volume, *And Here My Troubles Began*, was published six years later in 1991.

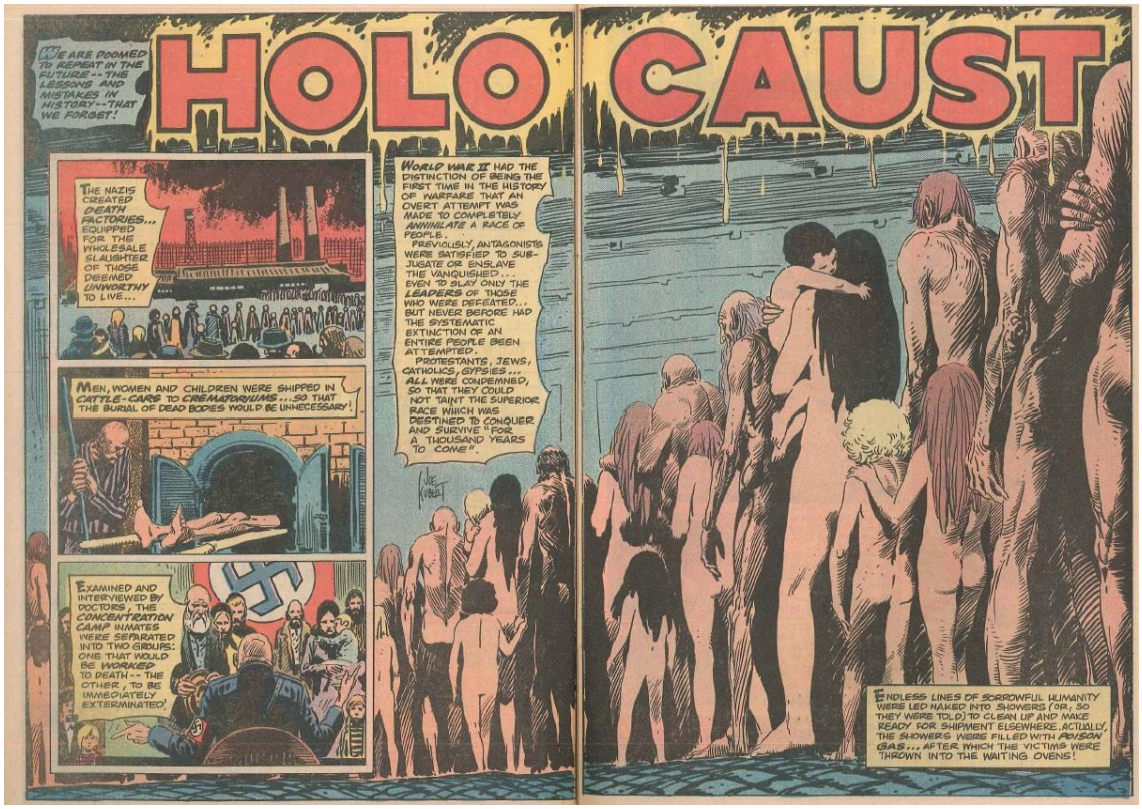

Figure 2

As a final example, Joe Kubert's 1981 two-page story titled "Holocaust" was featured in issue 351 of *Sgt. Rock* (see figure 2).[7] Here, the red lettering of the title and its inflamed and dripping background immediately conveys a sense of horror and doom. In a similar vein to "Atrocity Story", Kubert's double-page spread functions as a warning sign, as the first caption on the page reads that '[w]e are doomed to repeat in the future - - the lessons and mistakes in history - - that we forget!'. However, Kubert's captions emphasise the singularity of the history of the Holocaust, counterpointed by the graphic image of a line of naked people standing in front of the gas chamber. This image dominates the two pages to the extent that a mother and a child are visible in the left hand corner of the page, blocked in by the third inset panel. Kubert does

[6] In *Metamaus*, Spiegelman states that Bluth was influenced by the *Maus* chapters in RAW, and that the film 'was a sanitized reworking launched from the *Maus* concept' (2011, 79).
[7] In 1971, Kubert created the artwork for Bob Haney's story "Totentanz" in #158 of *Star Spangled War Stories*. The story shows how the Unknown Soldier infiltrates a concentration camp in order to save an underground agent.

not hesitate to visualise the vulnerability of the victims as they are waiting to be killed. In contrast to the last panel of the inset, which shows the victims during the process of selection—clothed and with their faces visible—the image of the line portrays the elderly and mothers and children from the back. This prevents an overly explicit rendition of their nudity, but this anonymous group also comes to stand in for the 'sorrowful humanity' that was led to the gas chambers. Kubert also uses bold text to underscore the horrors, giving extra emphasis to phrases like 'death factories', 'crematoriums', and 'poison gas'. As the unsuspecting reader turns the page from a more conventionally heroic *Sgt. Rock* war story, these visual and verbal elements thus aim for maximum emotional impact.

What can be gleaned from this concise overview of some of the early representations of the Holocaust in comic books? Firstly, that *Maus* was the first graphic novel to emphatically highlight the *Jewish* experience of the Holocaust, and the fact that the Final Solution was primarily aimed at the extermination of the Jewish population. Neither Chapman nor Friedrich highlight the Jews as victims of the Holocaust, and Kubert mentions them in a list of victims that also includes Protestants, Catholics, and gypsies. In "Master Race", Bernard Krigstein includes a few panels that depict the *Kristallnacht*, one of which shows a man with a star of David being led away by German soldiers, while the broken shop window in the background has the word 'Jude' painted on it. In contrast to the other comic strips, it is a more direct visual reference to Jewish victimhood, but it remains limited to a single panel. The early post-war comic strips thus demonstrate the relative silence around Jewish victimhood in the 1950s, while *Maus* is created in a time of increased awareness around the specificities of the Jewish genocide (see Novick 1999). Kubert's strip is placed in this time of awareness as well, but here the limited space is used to confront the reader with a more generalised view on the human atrocities of the Holocaust. Furthermore, *Maus* was not only the first book-length graphic narrative to deal with the Holocaust; it is also a very personal take on the historical events. Although Joe Kubert and artist Paul Reinman were of Jewish descent, their short stories do not explicitly establish a personal connection to the events.[8]

Furthermore, these early examples also prefigure some of the tensions that inform the analyses in this thesis. They demonstrate that 'comics is a mass cultural art form drawing on both high and low art indexes and references' (Chute and DeKoven 2006, 769). Where the comic strips by Chapman, Krigstein, Friedrich, and Kubert are part of a mass commodity

[8] However, Kubert did highlight his personal connection to the events in the later published *Yossel* (2003).

culture—arguably using a more hyperbolic comic book style—Art Spiegelman's dense, visually and verbally layered work was published and serialised in the more highbrow, avant-garde magazine *RAW*. The medium's position as one that encompasses high and low art, both in its content and cultural status, will be an instrumental backdrop for the discussions about the representation of genocide in graphic narratives. Furthermore, both the comic strips and Spiegelman's work do not eschew a visually explicit representation of the Holocaust. The artists choose visual and verbal immediacy over restraint, showing victims, perpetrators, and (effects of) genocidal violence. This visual excess prefigures the issues around kitsch that inform the analyses of the contemporary works.

The first chapter of this thesis looks at how the graphic narratives use visual metaphors to show the 'unrepresentable', as this trope is used to deal with elements like death, destruction, and issues around complicity. In charting the use of animal and doll metaphors, I argue that these figures lack a form of rationalised agency, which connects them to the kitsch discourse. I demonstrate that this perceived lack of agency opens up a narrative space that allows for an affective interaction with the genocide narrative. Chapter two explores the moralisation of perpetrators, arguing that the visual excess of morally depraved and extraordinarily evil perpetrator figures does not motivate a better understanding of why genocides occur. As a counterpoint to these visually and morally excessive figures, I explore examples that include 'nuancing gestures' and I complement these two tendencies with an example of a graphic narrative that puts forward a complex mix of approaches to perpetrators. The third chapter traces extreme images of violence, arguing that the visual kitsch of these explicit images can productively defamiliarise the atrocities, while also drawing attention to the process of representation. In addition, I focus on the depiction of sexual violence, demonstrating the interaction between presence and absence that underlies representations of rape, while placing the examples taken from the graphic narratives in a wider cultural context of excessive and explicit images of sexual violence during genocide. The final chapter explores how graphic narratives employ anti-kitsch strategies as a means to avoid the (presupposed) dangers of kitsch and excess in dealing with genocide. The first of these strategies of restraint works under the sign of modernism in stressing the impossibility of representing atrocity and trauma, while the second strategy puts forward explicit and educational truth claims. I show how the graphic narratives demonstrate the crises in comprehension in the act of witnessing atrocities; a crisis that is most poignantly played out by focusing on the eyes and seeing. Furthermore, I explore works that include paratext,

particularly pre- and postfaces, as a means to address and substantiate notions of veracity and historical accuracy.

As proposed, the comparative approach employed in this thesis allows for a further investigation of the global dimensions of genocide narratives in the medium of comics. The notion of creating a dialogue between histories of conflict is also explicitly taken up in Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* (2009), which advocates an approach towards memory—in Rothberg's case memories of the Holocaust and memories of slavery and colonialism—that considers how different memories come into being through a dynamic and mutually inclusive interaction (also see Max Silverman's notion of 'palimpsestic memory', 2013). Rothberg suggests that rather than seeing different memories as engaged in competition in a limited public sphere, it is more productive to consider how memories of different historical events come into being through dialogical interaction in a public sphere that is considered to be more open-ended. Contrary to the notion that the unique character of the Holocaust and its dominant position in the memory landscape do not allow for a sense of multidirectionality, Rothberg demonstrates how early memories of the Holocaust came into being in a direct interaction with the struggles of decolonisation. This multidirectional approach thus emphasises how 'coming to terms with the past always happens in comparative contexts and via the circulation of memories linked to what are only apparently separate histories and national or ethnic constituencies' (Rothberg 2009, 272). Taking note of this multidirectional approach to memory, this thesis uses a comparative approach to consider how memories of atrocities in comics form similarly come into being through dialogical interaction. This interaction can take place within the text—an early example is the dialogue between the memories of the Korean War and the Holocaust shown in "Atrocity Story"— and between different texts, which will inevitably be affected by similar ethical considerations. By comparing representations of genocide in the medium of comics and using kitsch as a guiding concept, I reveal how these graphic narratives share a visual and narrative vocabulary that is informed by recurring considerations around appropriate and productive strategies of representation.

As part of this comparative endeavour, awareness also needs to be raised about the fact that the term 'genocide' is not without its complications. The term was coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1943/1944 and adopted by the UN in 1948. The UN convention determines that 'genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group'[9], after which the acts are listed, including

[9] http://www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm

causing harm to or killing members of the group and imposing measures to prevent births. Since then, there has been a great deal of debate about this official definition, particularly because of its exclusion of political groups or social classes and the slippery notion of 'intent' (Chalk and Jonassohn 1990; Feierstein 2011; Travis 2012). In addition, the recognition of instances of mass violence as genocide is by no a means straightforward process. For instance, the Armenian genocide is currently still not recognised by Turkey and Azerbaijan, and the UN and the Clinton administration's apprehension in labelling the massacres in Rwanda genocide in 1994, as well as the international lack of decisive intervention in Rwanda, Bosnia, and more recently Darfur, display the political sensitivities related to the issue of mass violence. Notwithstanding the complexities around the term, I opt to use the concept of genocide, as the graphic narratives under scrutiny deal with historical events that have entered public consciousness as primary examples of genocide.

In official terms, the instances of mass violence during the Holocaust and in Armenia and Rwanda are recognised by the UN as genocide. The Bosnian War that took place between 1992 and 1995 saw both ethnic cleansing—which refers to the forced displacement of a certain group—and genocide. During the war, Serb forces were engaged in an ethnic cleansing campaign throughout Bosnia. Technically speaking, ethnic cleansing does not constitute genocide and thus far only the massacre at Srebrenica has been officially labelled as genocide by the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. However, sexual violence directed specifically against Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats was commonplace and in 2001, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia recognised rape as a crime against humanity, labelling it as an essential part of the genocidal mechanism. Furthermore, there are several instances of international recognition of the Bosnian case as constituting genocide.[10]

Not only can these four case studies be considered as genocide in the definitional sense of the word, but using the term has become the primary way of talking about these events. I recognise the political difficulties and apprehensions in using the label for instances of mass violence, as well as the limitations of the current definition, but I also see a decided benefit in naming these events as what they are known for—the planned and systematic persecution and murder of a specific group of people. These cases constitute the most extreme forms of

[10] In 2005, the United States Congress passed a resolution declaring the Serbian policies as genocide and in 2007, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that paramilitary leader Nicola Jorgić acted with the intent to commit genocide against Bosnian Muslims in the North of Bosnia. In March of 2016, the former leader of the Bosnian Serbs, Radovan Karadžić, was found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity over the ethnic cleansing campaigns during the Bosnian war, the siege of Sarajevo, and the Srebrenica massacre.

historical mass violence. The term genocide immediately evokes this notion of widespread destruction, which is exactly the element that makes its representation—in whatever form—so difficult and loaded.

In this thesis, my methodology consists of using the graphic narratives as case studies, analysing what they present and taking these visual, narrative, and thematic elements forward through the theoretical debates around Holocaust and genocide representation and kitsch theory. I view the graphic narratives as a visual and literary form that is fascinating and distinct but not rigidly fixed, which allows me to consider how graphic novel/comic book elements can interact in the examples under discussion (see Baetens and Frey 2015). Although the primary sources are the guiding thread throughout my work, I do not engage in a comprehensive study of semiotics or comics narratology. Rather, I examine these graphic narratives through close readings in which I take note of the visual and verbal strategies used, while considering how these strategies contribute to narrative and thematic effects. At the same time, I actively look for similarities in strategies of representation, connecting these common features to the theoretical considerations around cultural memories of the Holocaust and other instances of mass violence. In tracing the representational strategies used throughout the corpus, I mobilise the concept of kitsch as a productive means to consider what is at stake when graphic narratives deal with the topic of genocide. Kitsch is a concept that proposes a set of tensions (between high and low, between attraction and repulsion) and this tension is particularly pronounced when kitsch is used to deal with histories of genocide, as the topic of atrocity is inevitably accompanied by a tension around (in)appropriate forms of representation.

In addition, Charles Hatfield (2005) has proposed that the medium of comics is 'composed of several kind of *tension*, in which various ways of reading—various interpretive options and potentialities—must be played against each other (Hatfield 36, italics in original). According to Hatfield, comic art is characterised by the interaction between different codes, from the friction or dialogue between image and text to the possible relationships that manifest between panels and pages. The productive tension of the interpretive options and potentialities of comic art matches the tension that underlies kitsch, which can similarly offer a range of interpretive options and potentialities that open up space for reflection. The methodological framework of this thesis thus departs from the notion that the key terms of this research project—graphic narratives, kitsch, and genocide—share a vocabulary of (productive) tension. By critically mapping how these tensions manifest, and when and where they allow for interaction and negotiation with the sensitive and precarious topic of genocide, I

aim to provide an informed overview of (theoretical) issues around genocide representation and the ways in which graphic narratives engage with the subject matter.

Theorising Graphic Narratives and Kitsch

The rapidly developing field of graphic narratives has been accompanied by a concomitant development in scholarship around these works. Part of *Maus*'s success was its fairly uncomplicated inclusion into academic discourse. Spiegelman's work has primarily drawn attention from historians (Rothberg 1994; Doherty 1996; Landsberg 1997; LaCapra 1998; Young 2000; Huyssen 2000), and literary scholars (Staub 1995; Ewert 2000; Michaels 2006; Loman 2006 and 2010; Orbán 2007; Chute 2006, 2008, and 2016). A notable exception is Harvey Pekar's 1986 "*Maus* and Other Topics". Not only is Pekar a comic book writer rather than an academic, but the article is also one of the few overtly critical interpretations of Spiegelman's work. Pekar commends *Maus* for its subject matter, but his critique of volume I—Spiegelman was still working on his second volume at that time—is primarily directed at Spiegelman's use of the animal metaphor and his portrayal of his father Vladek. Pekar argues that the animal figures perpetuate ethnic stereotypes, particularly the use of pigs to portray the Poles. The animal metaphor is a superfluous and unnecessary device that takes away from the poignancy of the content, according to Pekar.

Notwithstanding Pekar's criticism (also see Michaels 2006 and Loman 2006 for more critical notes on the work), academic attention for *Maus* has mostly been positive, as scholars applaud the work for its visually and narratively intelligent and self-reflexive representation of the Holocaust. A recurring theme in the scholarship around *Maus* is Spiegelman's juxtaposition of memory and history. The focus here is on issues concerning the transference of Vladek's memory and the act of bearing witness, the possible discrepancy between memory and history, and the constant oscillation between past and present. The result is described as the making and unmaking of meaning (Young 2000, 22) and a 'polyvalent weave' (Chute 2006, 209); scholars refer to Spiegelman's ability to highlight how Vladek's memories conform to, or clash with, official histories and how these memories are then mediated through Spiegelman's narrative filter and the medium of comics. Many of the commentaries also emphasise the ways in which the work highlights its position as a text that is (in)capable of representing the Holocaust. Particularly in the second volume, Spiegelman addresses the commercialisation of Holocaust memory, critically reflecting on the idea of 'Shoah business' and pondering the value

of his own contribution to the discourse of Holocaust texts (see Rothberg 1994; Staub 1995). *Maus* has a line of commentary running alongside the story of Vladek and the story of the father-son relationship, serving as an 'extended essay on the pitfalls of trying to represent the unrepresentable' (Hatfield 2005, 139). Scholars thus note Spiegelman's visual and thematic self-reflexivity in interweaving Vladek's story with the generational narrative of father and son, as well as Spiegelman's thoughts on the cultural position of his graphic narrative.

In addition, Art Spiegelman's *Metamaus* (2011) provides further personal reflection on many of the abovementioned themes. Spiegelman uses the space of his metatext to exhaustively confront and answer three recurring questions (Why the Holocaust? Why comics? Why mice?). Set up in an interview format that is conducted by comics scholar Hillary Chute, Spiegelman provides richly detailed and illustrated background information to the creation of *Maus*, while also reflecting on its impact and the wider landscape of Holocaust narratives. In tackling the three questions, Spiegelman effectively extends the self-reflexive strand of *Maus* to include his present-day contemplations on using the comics form and the animal metaphor to present a work that fuses historical narrative and autobiography.

The scholarship on *Maus* contributed to a more sustained academic consideration of graphic narratives as a valid, complex, and affective cultural form. Despite, or perhaps because of, the plethora of critical works on Spiegelman, the artist and his work continue to interest scholars, as recently published work demonstrates.[11] In a sense, the recurring themes and questions in the critical discourse around *Maus* form a blueprint of the questions often at stake in the commentaries that consider how graphic narratives take on the topic of genocide. Themes like the interplay between memory and history, the interaction between narrative layers, the self-reflexive awareness of the work's position as a genocide or trauma text, and the analysis of medium-specific qualities in the construction of sensitive historical episodes similarly inform scholarship focused on other graphic narratives that deal with historical violence and traumatic events, and they also continue to inform this thesis.

Another noteworthy artist whose work has received increasing academic attention is comics journalist Joe Sacco. His graphic narratives—particularly his reportages on the conflicts in the Middle East and the war in Bosnia in works like *Palestine* (serialised as nine stories

[11] See for instance Philip Smith's monograph *Reading Art Spiegelman* (2016), Julie Reiser's "'Thinking in Cartoons: Reclaiming Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2014), Jenn Brandt's "Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* and the Art of Graphic Autofiction" (2014), Laura Findlay's "*In the Shadow of No Towers:* The Anxiety of Expression and Images of Past Trauma in Art Spiegelman's Graphic Novel" (2014), and Liam Kruger's "Panels and Faces: Segmented Metaphors and Reconstituted Time in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*" (2015).

between 1993-1995, published as a single edition in 2001), *Safe Area Goražde* (2000), *The Fixer* (2003), *War's End: Profiles from Bosnia 1995-1996* (2005), and *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009)—have been analysed in a number of chapters and scholarly articles (see for instance Versaci 2007; Chute 2008, 2011 and 2016; Rosenblatt and Lunsford 2010; Walker 2010; Scherr 2013, 2015a and 2015b). In addition, the recently published collection *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World* (Worden 2015) further demonstrates the value attributed to Sacco's work, as well as the expanding attention for graphic narratives that focus on conflict and atrocities.

Scholarship on Sacco's work explores his connection to the style and (auto)biographical works of the underground comix and the New Journalism movement of the 1960s and '70s (Versaci 2007; Walker 2010; Worden 2015). Similar to the methods of the New Journalists, who used literary devices to draw attention to the process of constructing meaning, Sacco demonstrates the fallacy of objective journalism by including himself as a visible, narrative filter into his drawings. Furthermore, he also explicitly critiques his methods of gaining information, and his drive (and even excitement) to investigate other people's pain. Rebecca Scherr argues that '[d]esire cannot be separated out from pain in Sacco's comics, and it is this juxtaposition that often infuses the comics with a deep sense of unease' (2015b, 192). Sacco provides an entry into the lives of other people, but he also self-reflexively questions his abilities, and motives, in exploring these lives. Sacco similarly draws attention to the limits of other forms of news coverage, like television and photography, but he also again implicates himself by showing his cartoon version 'on the prowl' with a camera.

Sacco and Spiegelman share this self-reflexive attention to the role of the artist as the idiosyncratic mediator between the subject and the reader, which, I suggest, is one of the reasons that these authors have quite successfully been included into academic discourses. By drawing attention to the 'journalistic performance' (Scherr 2015b, 188), or the performance of memory that Spiegelman is engaged in, these artists use the medium's visual immediacy to give a powerful rendering of historical events and witness testimonies, while also providing a metanarrative about the difficulties and limitations of engaging with these events (also see Chute 2016).

In addition to the scholarship on Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Joe Sacco, other key works in the field of graphic narratives that deal with war and conflict include Joseph Witek's 1989 *Comic Books as History*, which interweaves comics analysis, historical context, and overarching questions about the status of the real in an 'unreal' medium. Focusing on work by Art Spiegelman, Jack Jackson, and Harvey Pekar, Witek's monograph demonstrates how the

medium inventively engages with (precarious) historical subjects, while also pointing out the tension between didacticism and sensationalism that underlies the genre of historical graphic narratives. His analyses show how medium-specific elements like text balloons, lettering, panel size, and overall style can contribute to a more straightforwardly factual/didactic approach or a more sensationalist and emotionally charged narrative. He points out how 'each teller [of an historical event] must hew closely enough to the "known" story to seem factually accurate while at the same time presenting a narrative emotionally compelling enough to be worth the retelling' (1989, 17).[12]

Finally, when mapping the ways in which graphic narratives engage with sensitive historical topics, work by Hillary Chute also needs to be underlined here. Chute has written about Spiegelman and Sacco (2006; with Marianne DeKoven 2006; 2007; 2008; 2011; 2016). In addition, the author has traced how the everyday, (gender) trauma, and autobiography intersect in the work of women graphic novelists in *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (2010). Chute's most recent monograph, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (2016), charts how comics as a form of documentary 'endeavors to express history—particularly war-generated histories that one might characterize as traumatic' (2). Focusing on work by Art Spiegelman, Joe Sacco, and Keiji Nakazawa, Chute traces the ways in which the medium of comics bears witness to atrocities and the lived experiences of people. She argues that these works, and the medium as a whole, are characterised by a simultaneous presence—the 'accumulation of evidence' (2016, 16) in the panels—and an absence, through the spaces of the gutter. This idea of presence connected to the medium is also theorised by Chute as comics' 'plenitude', which ties in with the notions of kitsch and excess that I investigate in this thesis. Drawing a picture that is wider

[12] In line with Witek's work, Roger Sabin's *Adult Comics* (1993) and Charles Hatfield's *Alternative Comics* (2005) are further important publications in the development of scholarship around graphic narratives; these scholars were among the first to map the field of works that were different from mainstream comic books, paying attention to historical developments in the Anglo-Saxon context, the importance of underground comix, and the rise of autobiographical works. Publications that are relevant when considering these lines of enquiries include, among others, Elisabeth El Refaie's *Autobiographical Comics: Life Writing in Pictures* (2012), Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey's *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (2015), and edited collections such as Jan Baetens' *The Graphic Novel* (2001), Deborah R. Geis's *Considering Maus: Approaches to Art Spiegelman's 'Survivor's Tale' of the Holocaust* (2007), and Michael A. Chaney's *Graphic Subjects: Essays on Autobiographies and Graphic Novels* (2011c). Works that focus on the European/Franco-Belgian context include, but are not limited to, titles like Ann Miller's *Reading Bande Dessinée: Critical Approaches to French-Language Comic Strip* (2007), Bart Beaty's *Unpopular Culture: Transforming the European Comic Book in the 1990s* (2007) and *Comics Versus Art* (2012), Beaty and Miller's edited collection *The French Comics Theory Reader* (2014), and Mark McKinney's *The Colonial Heritage of French Comics* (2011) and *Redrawing French Empire in Comics* (2013).

than the medium of comics alone, Chute includes a genealogy of visual depictions of war, witnessing, and documentary images that encompasses works by Jacques Callot and Francisco Goya, and early newspaper comic strips.[13]

As proposed, I am using the concept of kitsch to map and analyse the challenges and strategies linked to the topic of genocide in graphic narrative form. When considering kitsch in the context of the Holocaust, there are a few core texts to take into account, among which Susan Sontag's 1974 article "Fascinating Fascism", in which she charts the sexualisation of the discourse around fascism. Sontag exposes the theatrical and performative dimensions of fascism, positioning its allure in networks of power and sado-masochism. Following on from this, Saul Friedländer's 1984 *Reflections of Nazism* traces a new discourse of Nazism in the literature and films from the '70s and early '80s. Friedländer argues that the characteristics of this group of texts strongly reflect the psychological hold of Nazism and Nazi aesthetics over post-war culture, especially by the late 1960s. This link between fascism, Nazism, and kitsch has been repeated subsequently, as 'Nazis were particularly adept at deploying kitsch to create a sense of shared national sentiment' (Sturken 2007, 22; see also Dorfles 1973; Heins 2013). In tracing these images, Friedländer draws a connection between the representation of the Holocaust in popular culture, and the use of kitsch and kitschy strategies as a means to entertain an audience. For Friedländer, this type of kitsch finds its most poignant expression in a coupling of the harmony of kitsch with the destruction of death. In a 1990 round table titled "On Kitsch"—which includes Friedländer, Sontag and other (Holocaust) scholars like Berel Lang and Sidra Ezrahi—the participants further discuss the inauthenticity of kitsch and its potential to provide a 'type of fascination or state of hypnotic enhancement' (358) that can be mobilised in political contexts (with dangerous implications). The texts by Sontag and Friedländer are instrumental in outlining how kitsch in the context of genocide representation is 'read': these are the generic, aesthetic, thematic, and narrative elements that pull us into a story (they are, to a certain extent, attractive and deemed manipulative) about a specific and challenging topic that seemingly resists this type of immersion or connection.

Furthermore, in both an academic and non-academic context, the scandals around Holocaust texts have often been based on kitsch elements as deceptive and distorting factors. For instance, Gerald Green and Marvin J. Chomsky's 1978 television series *Holocaust* was criticised for being overly couched within the aesthetics and generic narrative formulas of soap

[13] For more on comics as a mode of documentary also see Nina Mickwitz's *Documentary Comics: Graphic Truth-Telling in a Skeptical Age* (2016).

operas, and Roberto Benigni's 1997 *Life is Beautiful* (*La vita è bella*) was criticised for trivialising the events by using humour as a representational mode.[14] An exemplary case of debates around appropriate strategies of representation can be found in Steven Spielberg's 1993 *Schindler's List*, which has been heavily criticised for its adherence to Hollywood conventions, melodramatic features, sexualisation of victims and perpetrators, and perpetuation of stereotypes of Jews (e.g. Mamet 1994; Horowitz 1997a; Bartov 1997a; Picart and Frank 2006; and comments made about the film in the 1994 *Village Voice* round table, where Spiegelman was a participant). Critics find fault with these strategies because they somehow distort the 'truth' or 'reality' of the Holocaust.

In the discussions around kitsch and Holocaust texts, Art Spiegelman himself often features as a vocal proponent against the use of excess and melodrama in the context of the Holocaust. Although he has stated on several occasions that he does not want to become 'the Elie Wiesel of comics' (Spiegelman 2011, 80; Ditmars 2013), the artist has certainly not shied away from actively participating in debates around Holocaust texts and the medium of comics. Spiegelman is highly critical of kitsch in Holocaust films like Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, which conjures up the image of '6 million emaciated Oscar award statuettes hovering like angels in the sky, all wearing striped uniforms' (*Village Voice* roundtable, 29), and *Life is Beautiful*, which he was 'appalled by'[15]. In *Metamaus*, Spiegelman further comments on the field of Holocaust texts, also referring to other comics dealing with the subject. These more recent projects cannot count on Spiegelman's approval, as they are seemingly 'trying to set my work right by smoothing down the rough edges, by making a more didactic, more sentimental, more slickly drawn Holocaust comic book' (2011, 127).

For Spiegelman, many representations of the Holocaust are 'Holokitsch', characterised by a sentimentalising tendency that reframes the total destruction of the events into life-affirming and hopeful narratives. Spiegelman also points out kitsch's Manichean tendencies to reduce everything to oppositions between good guys and bad guys. For Spiegelman, Holokitsch is a marker of a more general kitschification in culture, 'that thing of trying to always go for the sentimental money shot whenever one can' (2011, 70). The implicit premise of these comments, as well as their placement in *Metamaus*, a book that is devoted to *Maus*, is that Spiegelman's work is different, perhaps better, or at least more complex, than many

[14] Tom Dawson of the BBC called it 'a deeply problematic contribution to the growing body of films about the Holocaust', and *The Guardian*'s Jonathan Romney terms it 'fundamentally mendacious'. Charles Taylor's *Salon* review 'The Unbearable Lightness of Benigni' denounces the film because of its 'sheer callous inappropriateness of comedy existing within the physical reality of the camps'.
[15] http://www.thirteen.org/nyvoices/transcripts/spiegelman.html

other Holocaust texts. Spiegelman's relation to *Maus* is not straightforwardly positive; Spiegelman has, on more than one occasion, described how its canonical status has proved to be a burden. However, Spiegelman's critical voice in the debates around Holocaust representations, his recurring use of the mouse masks in work after *Maus*, and the decision to publish *Metamaus* have all undoubtedly helped in maintaining that canonical status.

Another recurring concern in the discourse around representations of atrocity is that these cultural texts can, wittingly or unwittingly, cater to a sense of fascination, excitement, and even pleasure. In a sustained preoccupation with the relationship between art, ethics, and acts of barbarity, Theodor W. Adorno's 1962 "Commitment" includes a poignant statement that highlights the (dangerous) ethical ramifications of artistic representations of the Holocaust. In discussing Arnold Schoenberg's musical piece *Survivors of Warsaw*, Adorno argues that

> The victims are turned into works of art, tossed out to be gobbled up by the world that did them in. The so called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of those who were beaten down with rifle butts contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it. (2003, 252)

Adorno points out the incongruity between aesthetic pleasure and the Holocaust, positing that art can have the problematic ability to lessen the horrors of the Holocaust, but that it can also dangerously allow the audience to 'squeeze' pleasure out of it. The notion of a deep-seated fascination with violence and suffering also returns in Mark Seltzer's 'wound culture', which is characterised by a 'collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound' (1997, 3). Seltzer argues that this fascination with trauma and wounded bodies is located in the public sphere, which becomes pathological through its incessant focus on spectacles of suffering. If, as Sontag (2003) posits, we are ultimately all voyeurs that take pleasure from looking at atrocities, or from flinching because we are unable to look, then the question is whether the visual excess of kitsch prohibits a productive interaction with the subject matter. The possibility of titillation seems counterproductive to an appropriate, respectful, and informative representation of atrocities. However, this question departs from the notion that elements like fascination and pleasure are uncomplicated and straightforward responses. This idea does not sufficiently account for the ambiguities and frictions that can underlie (looking at) images of atrocities, nor does it take into account how these ambiguities can be made productive.

Although the possible negatives of kitsch may by now be apparent—its universalism, its reduction of complexity, its visual excess—I argue that kitsch can provide for a meaningful interaction with the genocide narrative. Sontag and Friedländer's attention to fascinating fascism has been instructive in thinking about the ways in which excess and kitsch form part of contemporary representations of atrocities and their work has undoubtedly inspired further investigation into the value and meaning of transgressive representational strategies in Holocaust texts. Rather than dismissing these strategies as distasteful or banal, there is a group of texts that critically examines if and how kitsch can produce meaningful interaction with Holocaust narratives. These scholars trace the use of kitsch, excess, and melodrama in literature and pulp fiction (Pinchevski and Brand 2007; Sandberg 2014), in film (Ravetto 2001; Rapaport 2003; Maron 2009; Petley 2009; Magilow, Vander Lugt, and Bridges 2012), and in comics (Noys 2002). What many of these authors share is a critical but inquisitive look at how the unnerving and ambiguous elements of kitsch can be embraced in order to draw attention to the process of mediation. The cultural texts under scrutiny are valued because they enable insight into a cultural negotiation with precarious historical events and because many of them use kitsch and excess in a manner that displays a keen awareness of the debates around the limits of representation. These, I posit, are 'knowing texts' that consciously use kitsch to address issues around representation. An example of kitsch as a marker of cultural negotiation can be found in Amit Pinchevski and Roy Brand's reading of the production of *Stalags* pulp fiction: erotic narratives of sadomasochism with domineering female Nazi camp commanders and Allied prisoners of war that were produced in Israel in the early 1960s. In connecting these books to the 1961 Eichmann trial, the authors argue that the Stalags offered a counter-narrative to the stories of destruction, loss, and victimisation that surrounded the trial. The Stalags' sexually infused stories of captivity, victory, and revenge allowed readers to negotiate issues around power and Jewish identity (2007, 388).

The inclusion of kitsch as a form of self-reflexive commentary is further explored in work by Eric Sandberg and Kriss Ravetto. Sandberg (2014) traces the aesthetics of excess in Jonathan Littell's perpetrator perspective on the Holocaust in the novel *The Kindly Ones* (2006). He argues that Littell uses excess—in the detailed descriptions of the scale and corporality of the atrocities, in the aberrant sexual proclivities of the protagonist—to make the horrors of the Holocaust tangible but also to enact (and expose) the process of habitualisation. Sandberg thus posits that the excess of the novel prompts readers to reconsider their understanding of, and emotional responses to, the genocidal events. Moving from literature

and pulp fiction to cinema, Sontag and Friedländer's focus on fascinating fascism in a group of 1970s Italian films is further extended in Ravetto's *The Unmaking of Fascist Aesthetics* (2001), which focuses on the 'neodecadent' films by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Liliana Cavani, and Lina Wertmüller. Ravetto posits that rather than providing a redemptive and cathartic narrative that offers a moral inversion of Nazi ideology (as proposed by neorealist cinema), these films radically deconstruct binary models of right and wrong. Through their use of theatrical, grotesque, and sexually transgressive elements these films productively 'foreground the subjective "presence" of interpretation in each historical revision and question the construction of a dialectical narrative as a means of perpetual separation of the subject of history from what is considered abject' (Ravetto 2001, 19).

The notion of a deconstruction of binary models without a comfortable (ideological and moral) replacement that Ravetto attributes to the neodecadent post-war films can also be traced in Benjamin Noys's examination of David Britton's *Lord Horror* comics, which were published in the 1990s. Noys confronts the issue of fascinating fascism by demonstrating how Britton's work, drawn by artists Kris Guido and John Coulthart, is similarly engaged in a carnivalesque inversion of history that does not allow for comfortable closure. Tracing the comics' use of a fascist protagonist, Noys argues that the texts are profoundly disturbing through their conflation of the categories of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders, and the subsequent inversion of issues around historical responsibility. However, it is this unnerving ambiguity and lack of moral positioning that does not adhere to Sontag's sense of fascinating fascism, and it is precisely this instability that calls for analysis rather than dismissal on the grounds of it being an inappropriate work.

Sandberg, Ravetto, and Noys demonstrate how excess and kitsch can radically undermine and challenge conventional narrative patterns and visual guidelines. However, is there a place for a productive reading of kitsch and excess when it is used in service of a more conventional narrative trajectory of conflict, redemption, and heroism? A final example that argues in favour of this use of excess is Jeremy Maron's article (2009) on the use of the melodramatic mode in *Schindler's List*. Maron posits that the film's melodramatic mode productively addresses the epistemological challenges of the Holocaust. Rather than using excess as a mode to radically introduce ambiguity, Maron argues that *Schindler's List*'s melodramatic concern with the staging and retrieval of innocence—which is productively made problematic in the final scenes of the film—comments on issues of inexpressibility of the Holocaust. Here, Spielberg's melodramatic visual and narrative trajectory is revalued as a

mode of historiography that offers an 'emotional excessiveness that embodies the epistemological limitations that modernist events pose to intellectual, empirical historical inquiry' (Maron 2009, 93).

Scholarship that considers the potential of kitsch and melodrama in the context of the Holocaust has generally been more focused on art and cinema than on graphic narratives. As pointed out before, cultural debates around (in)appropriate forms of representing historical violence have often been centred around films and, following Sontag and Friedländer's emphasis on cinema as a purveyor of fascinating fascism, critical studies of kitsch and excess have extended this cinematic focus. Scholarship that analyses kitsch for its productive and positive elements is slowly starting to develop, and cinema provides a relevant starting point for these discussions.

In order to further understand what kitsch is and does, and how it has been analysed and employed in academic discourses outside of studies focused on Holocaust representation, some final historical and theoretical context is required. Kitsch has become a widely used and therefore somewhat vacuous term, but from its inception onwards it has been associated with the notion of bad taste. Art critic Clement Greenberg's 1939 "Avant-garde and Kitsch", which denounces kitsch and its dangers to high art, lays the foundation for what the term has generally come to represent: an attack on good taste, and one that is deceptively alluring. For Greenberg, who explicitly denounced comics as a form of kitsch, the phenomenon 'is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations' (Greenberg 1961, 10). For Greenberg, the mass mechanics of kitsch can only exist in the wake of a 'fully matured cultural tradition', from which kitsch steals and appropriates. This view of kitsch can similarly be traced in the work by Hermann Broch (1974, originally published in 1933 and 1950) who introduced the notion of *Kitschmensch*—the man of bad taste who enjoys the falseness of kitsch, and is thus in dire need of education— and Gillo Dorfles, who collected various essays on the dangers of kitsch in an anthology that was originally published in 1968, which also includes various of his own essays on the sentimental and vulgar nature of kitsch.[16]

Although the Marxist rigid distinction between high and low art, and the danger of mass culture as put forward by Greenberg and others seems somewhat dated, the academic view on kitsch as a marker of bad taste has persisted (e. g. Morreall and Loy 1989; Ward 1991; Kulka 1996). The concept has moved from the art scene to a wider cultural context, so that

[16] Dorfles references the adaptation of Alessandro Manzoni's 1827 novel *The Betrothed* (*I Promessi Sposi*) into a 'strip cartoon'. The caption accompanying a page taken from the comic states that the results of this transposition from novel to comic 'need no comment' (Dorfles 1973, 88).

some of the negative markers of kitsch can now be applied to a variety of cultural texts, from art objects to novels, films, and comics. Robert C. Solomon's "On Kitsch and Sentimentality" provides a useful summary of kitsch's most common and persistent connotations; kitsch is excessive, it manipulates, it is fake, easy, self-indulgent, and distorts our perceptions, as well as interfering with rational thought (Solomon 1991, 5). Solomon distils these findings from literature on ethics and aesthetics, but these connotations transfer to other texts as well. In looking at the kitsch consumer goods produced after the Oklahoma bombing and 9/11, Marita Sturken (2007) posits that

> A kitsch image or object not only embodies a particular kind of prepackaged sentiment, but conveys the message that this sentiment is universally shared, that it is appropriate, and, importantly, that *it is enough*. When this takes place in the context of politically charged sites of violence, the effect is inevitably one that reduces political complexity to simplified notions of tragedy. (26, italics in original)

The logical consequence of viewing kitsch as manipulative and excessive is that it simplifies and depoliticises. This is where kitsch becomes dangerous, as, in this view, kitsch not only decides how we should feel, but in doing so it reduces historical, political, and moral complexities to easily manageable portions of information.

However, there have also been attempts to read kitsch in a more nuanced or informed manner, and to trace its importance in our contemporary cultural landscape. Cases are made for kitsch as a form of 'liberating pluralism' and an instigator of cultural resistance (Congdon and Blandy 2005), and the validity of kitsch emotions (Solomon 1991). Sturken uses the concept to capture a particular type of comfort consumerism in America, and she argues that these kitsch experiences should not be dismissed, as they provide valuable insight into cultural mechanisms. What returns in many of these readings is the notion that kitsch can 'attract and repel' (Ward 1991, 17), that it 'simultaneously repulses and seduces' (Congdon and Blandy 2005, 200), and that it defies 'simple hierarchies of high and low' (Sturken 2007, 21). These observations demonstrate that kitsch causes frictions that cannot be resolved that easily. The idea that kitsch inevitably fuses attraction and repulsion creates a clear connection to the problems with which the graphic narratives are confronted. The subject matter of mass violence and complete destruction deters readers, who might be 'repulsed', or at least not very willing to engage with the topic. These works are thus inevitably struggling to find a form that 'attracts' readers by reaching out to them.

Kitsch is by no means an isolated concept with clear and rigid demarcations. On the contrary, the concept of kitsch spills over into other, related categories and concepts like melodrama and camp. Scholarship that includes one or more of these terms often presupposes that readers will be able to distinguish between them, and this lack of disambiguation signals how closely interwoven these concepts have become. However, this fuzziness of terms often creates uncertainty as to what these phenomena mean, and how they will be used in relation to each other. In order to install kitsch as the guiding thread in this thesis, it is thus important to trace where these three concepts link and where they diverge.

Melodrama is genre or mode that has been linked to theatre, literary works, and films. In the context of film, Linda Williams (1998) argues that the melodramatic mode is an essential and recurring part of American popular cinema. It is characterised by, among other things, the sounding of emotional and moral registers, the invitation to feel for the victims and their virtues, and the insistence on the retrieval or staging of innocence. Camp as an aesthetic mode is, as delineated by Susan Sontag (1994, originally published in 1966), concerned with the artificial and the dominance of style over content. Similar to kitsch, Sontag outlines how there is an oscillation between attraction and repulsion; camp constitutes a specific interplay around good and bad taste.

What camp and melodrama share with kitsch is an emphasis on the notion of excess; like kitsch, the affective strategies of melodrama manipulate through pathos and clear-cut morality, and camp aesthetics revel in exaggeration and extravagance. The difference between camp and kitsch seems to be that camp is usually seen as an active, positive, playful, and often delayed act of appropriation. Where camp acknowledges and celebrates bad taste with a tongue-in-cheek attitude, kitsch is more ambiguous. In this way, camp is ‘a special attitude, sophisticated and somewhat snobbish’ (Dorfles 1973, 292) or ‘self-conscious kitsch’ (Congdon and Blandy 2005, 198). In addition, camp is also a more rigorously aesthetic mode, as ‘[i]t incarnates a victory of “style” over “content”, “aesthetics” over “morality”, of irony over tragedy’ (Sontag 1994, 287). Kitsch is linked to aesthetic excess, but it can also be traced in narrative elements or themes, thereby being a more inclusive concept than camp. Melodrama is a more specific generic mode with a particular emotional aim (pathos, restoration of innocence), that is linked primarily to literature and film, rather than a label that encompasses a variety of texts, styles, and a range of emotional responses. In this way, the melodramatic mechanism falls under kitsch, and has a more distinct set of characteristics. In addition, melodrama has for a large part been successfully redeemed by film scholars, who read the

genre through the lens of irony (e.g. Mercer and Shingler 2004; Ang 2007; Stewart 2014), whereas the concept of kitsch denotes a tension that better fits the field in which the graphic narratives are placed.

Up to this point in the introduction, kitsch has been located as a western concept that is primarily used to deal with artefacts of western culture. However, the graphic narratives that deal with the genocide in Rwanda inevitably raise issues around (post-)colonial identities and histories of (visual) racism: elements which can also be connected to kitsch. In this context, the notion of kitsch as inauthentic excess can be traced in a variety of art objects and everyday collectibles. Within an art setting, kitsch has been linked to western glorifications of the (presupposed) primitive art of non-western cultures. In the edited collection *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art* (1991), Daniel Miller argues that the industrialised, modern western world has cultivated myths of primitivism as a means to celebrate, and arguably contain, the otherness of the periphery. In this western, romantic notion of the other, primitive art will appear in more naturalistic forms (as opposed to geometric forms), with spiritual and magical elements, and it contains 'a mixture of human and animal attributes with the idea that primitives tend towards an animistic conception of the universe' (Miller 1991, 64). The issue of anthropomorphism as a particularly primitive and non-western element poignantly returns in the chapter on animal metaphors in graphic narratives on the Rwandan genocide. In the case of these art objects, kitsch seems to consist of a set of stereotypes that are constructed, and applauded, in opposition to the inauthenticity of the modern, technological western world.

Moving from art to everyday objects, another pernicious strand of kitsch and visual stereotyping can be found in the mass produced 'contemptible collectibles' of African-American figurines. What these figures have in common with primitive art is the notion of visual excess as a form of stereotyping that severely limits a more honest, complex, and pluralised view of non-western cultures or minority groups. As described and catalogued by Patricia A. Turner (1994) and Kenneth W. Goings (1994), these collectibles sell the image of the happily servile African-Americans in a variety of stereotypical tropes, among which the mammy figure and 'pickaninny' characters. These cheap, mass produced, and racist objects demonstrate what kitsch is in its most negative and dangerous form: a reworking of atrocious historical events into 'comforting artifacts' (Turner 1994, 16). Here, kitsch functions as a form that reduces moral and political complexities into simplified and commodified objects.

A tentatively positive reading of kitsch can be located in tracing its presence in African art and contemporary life. This is what Donald John Cosentino terms 'afrokitsch': imitations of authentic art that find their way into the contemporary cultural scene. Relying heavily on Friedländer's work on kitsch, Cosentino's outlook is mostly critical; he traces different examples of the appropriation of authentic art into 'uplifting kitsch', such as the cheap mass produced imitations of elements of the Yoruba folklore and mythology in the Nigerian cultural scene. For Cosentino, kitsch can have value when it allows for 'composite culture', when older traditions are reworked and reinvented into new forms. This composite culture is also critical and investigative as it 'calls into question all previous assumptions about universalism' (Cosentino 1991, 254). The negative variant of afrokitsch is 'masscult' (a term coined in 1961 by Dwight Macdonald and further taken up in the "On Kitsch" round table), which is characterised by a homogenisation and commodification that 'aims at being accepted all over' (254). This aim of acceptance is echoed in Sturken's observation that the sentiment of kitsch is presented as universal and as 'being enough'. This masscult can be traced in a pan-African symbolism, but also in the increasing presence of western cultural artefacts, such as Disney figures. Cosentino posits that in aiming for this uplifting universalism, kitsch loses its critical and inventive potential.

These secondary writings, although dealing with different cultural objects and geographical contexts, demonstrate that kitsch can be used as a form of othering; the visual excess of stereotypes can allow for a comfortable and comforting version of the other, whether part of non-western cultures or part of a minority group. However, kitsch also aims for a universalism that can obscure historical specificities and political and moral complexities. The notion of the African other—whether explicitly addressed or implicitly present—inevitably comes into play in the graphic narratives that deal with the Rwandan genocide, and I further address these issues in the context of the animal metaphor in chapter two and the construction of perpetrator figures in chapter three.

In the end, this thesis contributes to kitsch theory, critical debates around Holocaust and genocide representation, and comics studies. It asserts that by studying graphic narratives that deal with genocide through the lens of (anti-)kitsch we can better understand the tensions and considerations at play in the cultural memory of atrocities. Equating kitsch with elements like bad taste, lack of complexity, and inappropriate forms of excess ultimately constitutes a facile oversimplification of the concept and its cultural position. Instead, we ought to critically consider kitsch's potentialities, and pitfalls, in the context of genocide representation in

graphic narratives. Finally, using kitsch and anti-kitsch as a guiding thread also highlights how the corpus offers a range of fascinating, engaging, and at times questionable representational strategies.

1. (In)human Visual Metaphors: The Animal and the Doll

1.0 Introduction

This chapter analyses the tension and interaction between visual and moral restrictions and visual inventiveness by focusing on the use of metaphors. It explores how the visual metaphors of the animal and the doll figure allow for a graphic discussion of elements of genocide that are often deemed to be 'unrepresentable'. This graphic discussion is achieved by the metaphors' particular oscillation between human and non-human components. The animal and the doll suggest a lack of human, rationalised agency, as the animals tap into a sense of instinctive and feral behaviour and the doll figures are inanimate objects without consciousness. I demonstrate that this perceived lack of agency leaves open a narrative space in which the human dimensions of genocide can be considered. In this way, the metaphors reflect on what it means to be human—or to be dehumanised—during mass violence, while also providing an interaction with some of the more sensitive elements of the genocide narrative, particularly the death of children.

Focusing first on the animal metaphors, I address the broader implications of using animals as a representational device, after which I detail Spiegelman's (de)construction of the animal trope in *Maus.* I then analyse how the animal figures in *99 Days* and *Deogratias* comment on the process of dehumanisation and related issues around moral responsibility and complicity. After this, I explore the use of the doll figure, tracing its metaphorical dimensions in *The Search* and *Auschwitz*. These doll figures, which are often imbued with human features, stand in for the fate of child victims, and their subsequent mistreatment by perpetrators further strengthens these substitutive qualities.

After tracing the construction of these visual tropes, I examine how *Maus* and *Auschwitz* feature both metaphorical figures in the same panel. These doll/animal hybrids further expose the ways in which these tropes negotiate between the particular and the universal. This interaction demonstrates how the graphic narratives are attempting to balance historical specificities with a more universal take on the horrors of genocide. Finally, I connect the visual tropes to the discussions around kitsch and the representation of atrocities, tracing critical readings of the performance of innocence and the melodramatic focus on a sense of 'too late-ness'. In response, I point out that the 'softened' representation of trauma,

destruction, and death through the use of the metaphors can provide affective access to the genocide narrative.

1.1 Animal (De)constructions

The animal metaphor is often, if not always, used as a tool to reflect on humans and human behaviour. The ties between animal figures and humans have historically been explored by a range of academic disciplines, and more recently, critical thinking about the role of real and literary animals is linked to the interdisciplinary field of animal studies. In his monograph on the plethora of animal images in contemporary Western culture, Steve Baker notes the ways in which animals are used as powerful tools that can comment on human identity, arguing that 'much of our understanding of human identity and our thinking about the living animal reflects . . . the diverse uses to which the concept of the animal is put in popular culture' (1993, 4). In *Thinking with Animals*, Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman similarly note that there is a reflexive assumption that animals and humans share many traits, as 'humans assume a community of thought and feeling between themselves and a surprisingly wide array of animals' (2005, 2). This means that '[o]nce one starts looking around the cultural landscape, the animal is everywhere' (Wolch and Emel 1998, 17). This ubiquity of animals is connected to a longstanding tradition of using these figures as a means to comment on our human experiences. John Berger (1991) notes the parallel and metaphoric relations between man and animal; being like us, and also distinctly being unlike us, animals provide a means to comment on our experiences whilst upholding some sort of distance from it.

One of the earliest manifestations of these relations between man and animal can be found in Aesop's fables, where the animal figures are imbued with human features and 'endowed with the capacity for a (rudimentary) type of ethical reasoning and psychology' (Zafiropulos 2001, 38). By acting like human beings but appearing to the readers in an animal guise, the fables create a space in which humans can understand the (moral) message of the story without being confronted with an explicit likeness that might be too close for comfort. The obvious fictitiousness of the narratives in which the animals are outsmarting each other is thus coupled with 'a sense of familiarity to the fable's audience, which facilitates the acceptance of the fable figures as mouthpieces for human life' (Zafiropoulos 2001, 38). This quality, combining sameness and otherness—being part of the story world but also partly standing outside of it—is an intrinsic feature of the system of animal figures.

In addition, Daston and Mitman argue that the animal figure is more than just a straightforward substitutive device. Animals are performative, as '[t]hey do not just stand for something, as a word stands for a thing or a rhetorical trope figures something else; they *do* something' (Daston and Mitman 2005, 12, my emphasis). This performative quality of the animal figures is also bound to a particular cultural and historical context. Rather than just straightforwardly reflecting a specific historical moment, the animal figures perform and negotiate a set of historical, cultural, and moral traits. This means that these figures can be used to create a position of commentary that actively and critically questions a given set of values and ideas.

With regard to this historical rootedness, Baker posits that the animal is a flexible symbolic device and 'ours is a culture in which animal references can be employed in any context, and in which animals can apparently be used to mean anything and everything' (1993, 4). However, and this is also pointed out by Baker, certain animal figures will immediately tap into a body of knowledge that frames them in a particular way, and these stereotypical connotations can subsequently either be reinforced or subverted. Suzanne Keen underlines this point and argues that many animal figures are 'part of a literary tradition that dictates which figures will be sympathetic and which ones will automatically evoke antipathy' (2011, 138). This does not mean that these pre-determined characteristics are fixed within cultural discourse. On the contrary, it means that certain animal representations—notably those animal figures that come with a set of predetermined negative markers—might have to work against their stereotypical connotations.

In the graphic narratives that are the subject of this thesis, the animal figures are purposefully employed to create a connection with human behaviour in the context of the genocidal events. The medium of comics arguably offers a more direct articulation of this juxtaposition between sameness and otherness because the animal figure is drawn and visually present. We *see* the animal, and we recognise it as being an intrinsic part of the vocabulary of the medium, while, at the same time, '[i]ts appearance almost always accompanies the strategic and parodic veiling of the human' (Chaney 2011a, 130). This strategic and parodic veiling of the human is explored in depth in *Maus*, which has been instructive in setting the stage for animal figures in the context of war and genocide. At the core of the animal metaphor in *Maus* is the implementation of a system that simultaneously starts to unravel. Spiegelman installs this animal system with a certain sense of logic and

internal coherence, but by continuously and actively working against it, his metaphor starts to come loose at the seams.

These two strands, implementation and unravelling, have been theorised extensively by a wide variety of scholars. Many critics point out how the cats and mice are the product of the fascist visual strategy of dehumanisation, as well as a direct reference to the animation and 'funny animal' tradition of American popular culture (Pekar 1986; Doherty 1996; LaCapra 1998; Ewert 2000; Young 2000; Huyssen 2000; Loman 2006, 2010). By explicitly referencing Hitler's quote on the verminous status of the Jews ('The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human'), Spiegelman consciously appropriates and deconstructs the Nazi system of dehumanisation. At the same time, the fact that Spiegelman grew up with cartoons and comics like Tom and Jerry, coupled with his work for underground comix, also positions his work in a cultural lineage of comical inclusions of animal figures.[17] This dual reference also builds symbolic bridges '[b]ecause Vladek's past and his son's present encompass a graphic aesthetic bound by *Der Sturmer* and Steamboat Willie, Joseph Goebbels and Walt Disney, the cartoon world is an apt if disjointed recreation of their shared experience' (Doherty 1996, 75).

The main characters in this animal universe are mice, and this allows Spiegelman to assign a range of human traits to this particular animal figure. In contrast, the Nazi cats are fairly one-dimensional in their role as menacing and predatory antagonists. A more controversial animal is the pig, an animal figure which typically lacks positive connotations.[18] In one of the few explicitly critical analyses of *Maus*, Harvey Pekar denounces Spiegelman's use of the animal metaphor, specifically pointing out the problems with the figure of the pig:

> I don't know what Spiegelman thinks of Poles, but when he shows them doing something admirable and still portrays them as pigs, he's sending a mixed message. I realise that pigs are more praiseworthy than is generally recognised; nevertheless most people think it is more of an insult to be called a pig than a mouse or even a cat'. (1986, n.p.)

[17] See the discussion of the origins of "Maus" in the Introduction (page 23). Spiegelman has listed several sources of inspiration for his animal metaphor. In addition to the eye-opening class taught by Ken Jacobs on the visual racism of animated cartoons like Mickey Mouse, and the cat-and-mouse metaphor of Tom and Jerry he grew up with, Spiegelman has pointed out how Franz Kafka's 1924 short story "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk"—which has been read as a commentary on Jewish identity—'began humming to me and told me there was something closer to deal with' (Spiegelman quoted in Chute 2016, 157).

[18] In "The Human Bestiary", N.C.W. Spence traces the use of animal names in a variety of languages in Western Europe, claiming that '[i]n all the languages under consideration certain pig names designate the dirty person and the greedy person' (2001, 916).

Spiegelman defends his choice for Poles/pigs by claiming he wanted to find an animal that was outside of the cat/mouse (and /dog) food chain. In addition, Spiegelman posits that the dual connotation of the pig—being either a cute piggy or a swine—ties in with the 'mousie'/rodent tension that underlies the choice for the mice figures (Spiegelman 2011, 121). However, Spiegelman also admits to incorporating his father's not too favourable view of the Poles, which implies that the pig is chosen precisely because of its negative connotations.

Figure 3

The simultaneous implementation and deconstruction of the animal system is included in *Maus* by openly addressing the arbitrariness of its occurrence (the debate over how to draw his French/Jewish wife Françoise), and by drawing attention to its inconsistencies (the use of

masks, the presence/absence of tails). Spiegelman also creates friction by introducing real animals to the narrative (the rat in the cellar where Vladek and Anja hide, the lice that cause typhus, his therapist's pet cat and dog), thereby disturbing the logic of one system by juxtaposing it with another. Perhaps the most telling example of this last type of unravelling takes place when Vladek compares the death of a prisoner to the death of a dog (see figure 3).

Spiegelman creates a visual analogy between the two animal systems, juxtaposing the shooting on the left with the rolling bodies on the right. This 'bitterly ironic' (LaCapra 1998, 163) simile is further underscored by Vladek's comments: 'How amazing it is that a human being reacts the same like this neighbor's dog' (242).[19] The comparison between the two deaths is problematised on different levels. Not only do we have to discern between a dead mouse (who is human) and a dead dog (who is not), but we are also confronted with two examples where animals kill each other, with cats killing mice and mice killing dogs. Within the animal constellation cats-mice-dogs, we thus have to untangle the different metaphorical implications. The death of the mouse is likened to that of the dog, but the final panel reaffirms the humanity of the mouse figure, its open mouth decidedly drawn in an expression of agony.

In addition, Vladek's narrative voice helps in further deconstructing the images of the different animals. Not only is his manner of speech distinctly personal, idiosyncratic, and *human*—thereby contrasting with the voiceless dog and mouse in this sequence and reaffirming that Vladek is a person and not an animal—but Spiegelman also strategically inserts Vladek's voice into some of the panels. The captions that are placed inside three of the panels work as a counterpoint to the juxtaposition between real and metaphorical animals. By locating Vladek's voice near the drawings of the dead mouse and the shooting of the dog, Spiegelman's cats-mice-dogs constellation is more decisively extended to include a human presence, thereby further destabilising the metaphor. The complexity of this interaction between three systems (real animals, animal metaphors, and human speech) becomes even more pronounced when we consider that Vladek effectively recounts two personal memories: the story of his neighbour's dog and the story of the prisoner that is killed. Not only do we have to resolve the different manifestations of animals, but Spiegelman also shows how human memory is layered and associative, connecting different moments in time.

[19] When including quotations from graphic narratives, I provide page numbers, rather than repeating the author's name and the year of publication. I will render these quotations as faithfully as possible, so when words are highlighted in bold, I will use bold text as well. However, when the works use captions throughout, I have decided to relay these in lower case writing. In the case of *Medz Yeghern*, quotations are my translations from Dutch.

Throughout his work, Spiegelman's drawings of the mice are done with minimal line work, as 'Spiegelman performs subtle wonders of characterization and expression using only two dots for eyes and two lines for eyebrows' (Witek 1989, 106). Critics—including Spiegelman himself—argue that the simplified faces can create more room for the reader to identify with the characters, as 'it all actually becomes a lot more open to one's inner sets of associations' (Spiegelman 2011, 149). Jeanne C. Ewert (2000) argues that the schematic drawings of the mice figures move towards a universality of character that is contrasted with a specificity of Jewish historical context. This historical specificity is articulated through metonymical features: symbols like the Star of David and the swastika denote Jewishness and the Nazi threat, but the (infrequent) presence of the mouse tail functions as the most prominent sign of a visible Jewish identity. The tail arguably offers a metonymical route to transfer a sense of Jewish appearance to the rules of the animal system. The most noteworthy example of the use of the tail takes place when Vladek and Anja are trying to pass for Polish, which is visualised by their use of pig masks. However, Anja's tail remains visible, and Spiegelman explains that 'Anja's seen with a long rat tail hanging out because it wasn't as easy for her with her Semitic features to pass for Polish as it might have been for Vladek' (2011, 122).[20] According to Ewert, this tension between a universalising and particularising mode moves towards the universal and away from the particular as the story progresses. Ewert argues that in Volume II, Spiegelman abandons the metonymical emphasis on Jewishness when dealing with the concentration camps. There are no mouse tails in this volume, and Ewert interprets this as a sign that Spiegelman 'is outraged not just that Jews died in the Holocaust, but that anyone did' (Ewert 2000, 101).

This tension between the universal and the particular also underlies the debates around *Maus*' roots in American popular culture and the ways in which the graphic narrative does (not) allow a dialogue between Holocaust memory and the experiences of black racism in America. Walter Benn Michaels (2006) positions *Maus* in the context of the Americanisation of the Holocaust, arguing that the work presents America as a place where every immigrant group is assimilated in the figure of the dog, except for the Jewish mice. Although Spiegelman may consciously deconstruct the animal metaphor, Michaels posits that he does not allow for much plurality in creating his American animalised characters. This foregrounding of the Jewish

[20] It is interesting that Spiegelman explicitly describes Anja's tail as a rat's tail, as it creates a more clearly articulated connection between the metaphor and anti-Semitic notions of the Jews as rats (as visualised in Fritz Hippler's 1940 Nazi propaganda film *Der Ewige Jude*). This dialogue between mice and rats is further established when Anja is afraid of a rat in the cellar where she's hiding with Vladek, with Vladek in turn comforting her by stating the animals are 'just mice' (149).

experience, and a division of the American people as being Jews or Gentiles, works to the detriment of a fair recognition of America's own history of racism. Michaels argues that this focus on the Holocaust conforms to an American and neoliberal nostalgia for anti-Semitism; a nostalgia that ultimately negates issues around class and economic inequalities in favour of race.

Andrew Loman (2006) also takes up the point of Spiegelman's lack of attention to the American context of racism in *Maus*. In considering that Spiegelman derived his inspiration for *Maus* from a lecture on racist visual stereotypes in cartoons, Loman critically questions Spiegelman's treatment of American race relations. However, Loman convincingly highlights several instances where *Maus* addresses how black and Jewish experiences are interrelated. For instance, Vladek's shocking racist response to the figure of the black hitchhiker in Volume II 'suggest[s] that Vladek's salvation from a murderously racist milieu will not be perfect, and that in America he himself will perpetuate, *mutatis mutandi,* the racism to which he has been subject in Germany and Poland' (Loman 2006, 558, italics in original). Another example of Spiegelman's awareness of the American history of racism is the panel where Vladek tells the story of the hanging of four girls who were involved in the Auschwitz revolt. Spiegelman draws the hanging bodies in a panel that is set in 1980s America, in a sequence that precedes the incident with the hitchhiker and Vladek's racist rant. The image of the hanging bodies demonstrates how Vladek's Holocaust memories spill over into present-day life, but it inevitably also calls to mind the lynching of black Americans. Rather than using the Holocaust as a displaced form of American history, Spiegelman thus offers moments where a dialogue between these two histories of racism is enabled. Taking this dialogue into account, Loman critiques the continued emphasis on the metaphor as a reworking of Nazi imagery, arguing that the links between the Holocaust and American racism become visible when locating *Maus* and the animal metaphor more properly into their American context.

This interaction between histories of racism conforms to Michael Rothberg's notion of multidirectional memory. In a direct response to the critique voiced by Walter Benn Michaels, Rothberg points out that *Maus*'s self-reflexive use of the animal metaphor engages with the construction of racial codes and issues around representation, thereby enabling a dialogue between different memories. In drawing attention to the process of representation, Spiegelman also shows the disjuncture between Vladek's history and his own, thereby 'mark[ing] his very distanced, uncomprehending relationship to his father's story' (Rothberg 2006, 304). Rather than seeing memories as in a zero-sum competition, Rothberg considers

how Spiegelman's work draws attention to the ways in which different histories come into being through a dialogical and productive interaction.

Taking note of Rothberg's helpful concept of 'multidirectionality', I posit that the animals can equally be labelled as a multidirectional device. Throughout *Maus*, a dialogical interaction takes place between real animals, metaphorical animals, and human characters. The metaphor constantly moves in different directions, inverting expectations and not allowing for the comfortable and consistent distance that the animal fable offers. In reading *Maus* we are constantly made aware of the layers of representation; this is not Vladek, or a drawing of Vladek, but this is a drawing of a mouse that represents Vladek. *Maus* explores the pitfalls of the animal system and thus cleverly employs the multidirectionality of the animal figures to critique essentialist notions of identity, as well as comment on the (in)human dimensions of the Holocaust. In *Metamaus,* Spiegelman comments on the breakdown of the metaphor, stating that 'I guess it's all an inquiry into what it means to be human in a dehumanizing world' (2011, 133). This statement, although casually phrased, captures the main point of the metaphor: the multidirectional animals expose and confront the inhumanity and dehumanisation of genocide, while also highlighting the very human dimensions of survival, the process of oral history, and the post-war position of survivors and their interactions with the second generation. Ultimately, *Maus* makes us understand that '[i]t is not the animals who are bestial but human beings in certain situations' (LaCapra 1998, 169). The distance imposed by the animals, and the fact that the figures perform a set of (complex and at times ambiguous) moral traits, opens up an affective space for readers to engage with the atrocities.

1.2 Animals as distancing device

Where the animal metaphor in *Maus* is an intrinsic part of the structure of the work, other graphic narratives use the animals in a more fragmented or isolated manner. As a result, the occurrence of the animal trope stands out more when placed in a comics universe that is inhabited by human characters. In *Deogratias*, the story of the eponymous Hutu protagonist unfolds as Jean-Philippe Stassen shuttles between sequences of frames that move between the past and present. We gradually learn that the young and hormonal teenager has been forced to commit atrocities against his loved ones during the Rwandan genocide. Set after the genocidal events, a dishevelled and traumatised Deogratias embarks on a quest for revenge,

poisoning anybody who is in any way connected to the past events. Unable to deal with the atrocities he has committed and haunted by the image of the dogs eating the corpses, Deogratias displays his trauma and fragmented state of mind by physically turning into a dog.

Throughout *Deogratias,* Stassen includes explicit and implicit references to animals and the dog figure. In a move that is similar to Spiegelman's appropriation of the Nazi language and images, Stassen uses the discourse of Hutu propaganda by including an image of cockroaches (*inyenzi*, the derogatory term used on radio channel RTLM to designate the Tutsi) on the first page. This reference is extended when the nameless and controversial figure of the French sergeant threatens to kill a cockroach at the moment that the Tutsi character Venetia is included into the conversation (see figure 4). The juxtaposition of the sergeant's question about Venetia, who has been killed, and the visual emphasis on the image of the cockroach, which is about to be killed, clearly refers to the dehumanisation of the Tutsi victims through the use of animal imagery. Following on from this, Stassen also includes the first reference to Deogratias's traumatic internalisation of the dog figure on this page, as the boy references how the dogs were eating the corpses (we later learn these were the corpses of his friends). By moving from the sergeant wanting to kill the cockroach—a foreshadowing of his dubious role during the genocide—to Deogratias referring to the image that haunts him, Stassen connects the bestial and inhuman discourse of the Hutu perpetrators to the personal, traumatic, and inhuman elements that the dog symbolises for Deogratias. Suzanne Keen underlines this point when she argues:

> [I]f dehumanization is something that the architects of genocide do to victim classes in order to recruit murderers (call them cockroaches often enough and extermination will seem the inevitable response), Stassen shows that it is also a consequence of participation and survival. (2011, 140)

The graphic narrative demonstrates how the process of dehumanisation is connected to both victims and perpetrators (with Deogratias embodying both roles), and the animal figures become the trope through which these processes are articulated.

Figure 4

As the story unfolds, Stassen includes multiple references to the dog figure before he creates a complete visual manifestation. These references, and their culmination in Deogratias's breakdown, signal the overwhelming and destructive effect of trauma. Other characters are aware of the animal/man divide that is part of the boy's persona. Neighbourhood kids tease Deogratias and ask him if he's still a dog, and the character Bosco, a former soldier of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, attempts to ease Deogratias's mind by stating that there is no room in jail for dogs, supplying him with his daily doses of Urwagwa beer. At several points in the story, others call Deogratias a 'filthy dog', most poignantly when the sympathetic character Augustine finds Deogratias with the Interahamwe and learns about the horrors he has committed. In an act of appropriation and projection, Deogratias in the present denounces the French sergeant as a filthy dog when we see, in a flashback, how the sergeant is lauding the sexual skills of Tutsi girls. The dog figure represents Deogratias's complicity in the genocidal events, and so he fears the presence of real dogs, particularly during night time. Although not as visually pronounced as in *Maus*, Stassen introduces the disjuncture between real animals and metaphorical animals to draw attention to the construction of the symbolic animal, and the ways in which the internalised dog figure ultimately comments on Deogratias's human behaviour. As the story progresses, Stassen carefully hints at the character's deteriorating mental state by slightly changing parts of his physique into canine features.

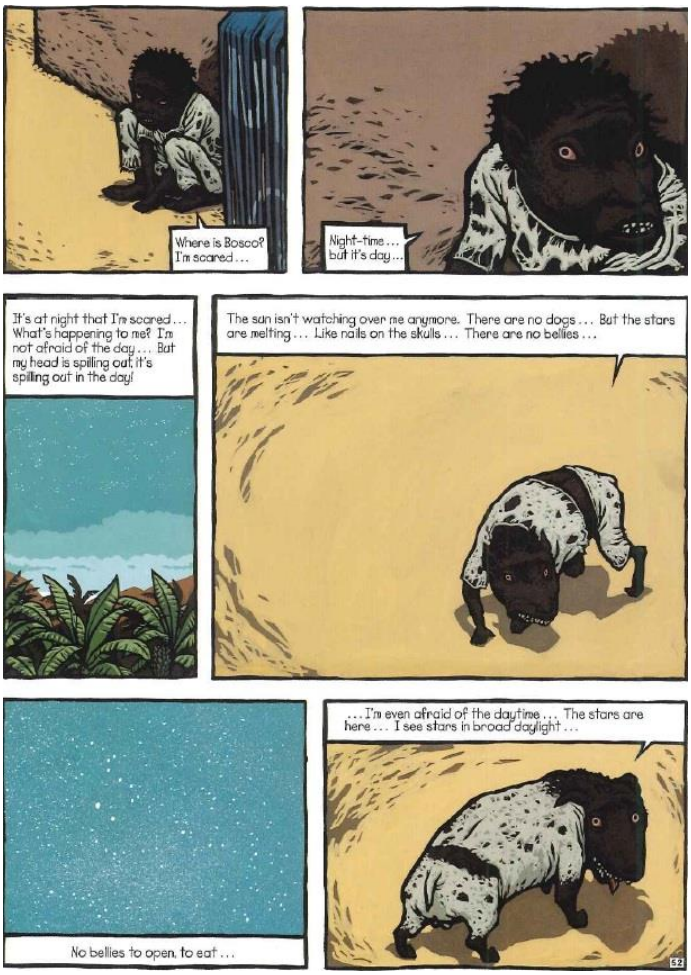

Figure 5

The complete visual transformation and traumatic dissociation from human to dog takes place in six brightly coloured panels, around two thirds into the story (see figure 5). Unable to numb his fear and distress with Urwagwa beer, Deogratias's human appearance crumbles. Sitting against the wall as a human boy in the last panel of the previous page, the first two panels portray how the human features of the protagonist are slowly dissolving into a completely canine exterior. The bright colours in the background are contrasted with the 'dark' emotional turmoil that takes place within Deogratias. His monologue in these panels presents us with an amalgamation of magical beliefs and traumatic imagery. Deogratias fears his head will 'spill out' in the same way as the bellies of the victims spilled open when eaten by the dogs. Connecting the horror of what he's done and seen with divinatory practices, Deogratias believes that the sky is inhabited by the spirits of the victims that are looking down at him. Unable to subdue his fears, the seemingly innocuous starry blue skies turn into a threat.

Stassen moves back and forth between the image of the dog and sky to emphasise how the ordinary occurrence of a cloudless sky has now turned into a personal nightmare.

In the overall page layout, the focus is on the largest image at the centre of the page. That panel shows the completed transformation, and the lines on the ground seem to suggest a whirlwind in which Deogratias has been caught up. Although his narrative voice is considerably more incoherent than before, the balloons and captions provide enough information to understand that Deogratias is haunted by past events. An important temporal marker in this text is Deogratias's t-shirt, which is tattered and ripped in the present and clean and white in the past. In addition to its function as a temporal marker, the state of the t-shirt also comments on Deogratias's state of mind. In this dissociated condition, the shirt fuses with the dog figure, so that '[i]f Deogratias's past self is a more innocent one, not yet contaminated by the guilt of genocidal violence, the pelt of the present self reveals his bestial nature, his fear, and his dissociation' (Keen 2011, 150).

The shocking image of the dogs eating the corpses of his friends becomes the basis for Deogratias's dissociative state in the present. The dog figure comes to stand in for the loss of his friends, as well as symbolising Deogratias's role in the events. This hybrid dog/human figure echoes the notion of 'doubling', a concept proposed by Robert Jay Lifton (1986) to explain Nazi perpetrator behaviour. For Lifton, dissociation was a psychological strategy employed by Nazi doctors in order to carry out their work. By splitting the self, Nazi doctors created a persona that was able to carry out the horrors while they could also maintain the notion that they were good humans. As posited by Lifton, 'a major function of doubling . . . is likely to be the avoidance of guilt: the second self tends to be the one performing the "dirty work"' (1986, 419). Deogratias's dog-like exterior can be viewed as a visualisation of his split self. Through the process of doubling, the protagonist's identity fragments into an innocent boy and a feral part that takes over in order to survive. Graphic narratives provide the visual and verbal tools to show this process of doubling through the character's transition from human to animal. James Waller connects this notion of doubling to cultural discourse, arguing that the idea of a divided self is readily taken up in folk tales around the world. According to Waller, '[t]hese allusions, fascinating in and of themselves, are important because of how they influence cultural and professional acceptance of a divided self as an acceptable explanation for human (mis)behaviour' (2002, 121). Taking the concept of doubling forward into the graphic novel, *Deogratias* provides us with a contemporary visual manifestation of the divided self as a means to explain his behaviour.

However, although the notion of doubling is valuable in demonstrating a coping strategy that can partially be traced in the graphic narrative, the central tenets do not transfer that easily to the dog figure. It is by precisely by problematising the notion of doubling that *Deogratias* allows for the grey areas of genocide survival. The dog figure is not a manifestation of the avoidance of guilt, but an example of how the crushing weight of guilt causes Deogratias to dissociate. In addition, the work does not elaborate on how Deogratias was able to carry out the horrors during the events. It is not until after the atrocities have occurred that Deogratias sees the dogs eating the corpses, leading to his internalisation of the animal. The act of doubling thus takes place as an aftereffect, not as a psychological process during the genocide. This echoes some of the critique on Lifton's notion of doubling, as Waller points out that it is unclear whether doubling is a cause or a consequence of evildoing. *Deogratias* explores the possibility that it is a belated consequence of committing atrocities. Another point of critique is directed towards the seemingly rigorous division between the two selves, as Waller wonders how these disparate selves reconcile in one person. In *Deogratias*, the dog figure morphs both animal and human features, demonstrating that the self is not divided in two separately functioning identities. On the contrary, the hybrid figure shows the collapse of these two parts, painfully detailing how Deogratias is unsuccessful in trying to keep them separated. The protagonist also shows the collapse of the categories of victim and perpetrator, as his involvement in the genocide is not ideologically motivated but the result of force and peer pressure.

In contrast to the systemic metaphor in *Maus*, which is derivative of other animal systems while also inverting their central tenets, the dog figure in *Deogratias* signifies a projection of inner feelings and torment. Deogratias's fragmented psyche is visually represented by the dog, and this skewed deformation is only visible to Deogratias and the readers. Other characters recognise that Deogratias *thinks* he is a dog, but they are not confronted with his actual hybrid state. In this way, *Deogratias* establishes a more intimate contract between the protagonist and the reader. The dog figure is so closely tied up with Deogratias's feeble state of mind that its narrative position is tenuous. The dog figure is never comfortably incorporated into the narrative premise, thereby maintaining its power to confront the reader with issues around trauma, guilt, and complicity. This use of the animal metaphor as a way to confront issues around identity is something that *Deogratias* shares with *Maus*. Where Spiegelman implements an animal system and carefully orchestrates its frictions and inconsistencies, Stassen selectively positions his animal metaphor in a world with human

characters in order to maximise its emotional impact. These are different approaches to the use of animal figures, but the result is comparable, as neither of the graphic narratives allows for a comfortable acceptance and narrative disregard of the animal metaphor. In both works, the animal figures are used in ways that disrupt the fabric of the text, ultimately drawing attention to the methods of representation.

In *99 Days*, the animal metaphor is presented near the end of the story. Throughout the work, the present-day machete murders in L.A. are, in a narrative move that is similar to *Deogratias*, constantly connected to the traumatic backstory of Antoine as a young boy in Rwanda. The graphic narrative shows how Antoine's family is brutally murdered, after which he is installed as a Hutu persecutor and forced to commit (sexual) violence. Having become close friends with the Tutsi boy Bertrand before the genocide, the narrative comes to a traumatic culmination when Antoine is forced to kill him. The traumatic flashback takes place over four pages and constantly contrasts the image of the hyena and Antoine. Casali and Donaldson juxtapose the main players on the first page by showing them from different angles and emphasising their different positions in relation to the event that is bound to take place (see figure 6). Visual connections are made between the dripping wound of Antoine's friend Bertrand (an image that haunts Antoine in the present and is repeated in the machete victims in L.A.), the saliva dripping from the hyena and the Interahamwe leader spitting on the ground. In a similar vein, the fearful eyes of the two victims in this situation frame the page, while the merciless hyena and Interahamwe perpetrator occupy the centre. In addition, the hyena and Antoine are looking straight at us, which creates a first visual link between the two. In a twist of animal re-appropriation, the hyena is referred to as 'Lassie', and the Interahamwe chief menacingly plays on this notion when he states: 'Remember the doggie that always **saved the day**…? Well, **this** time, he can only save **one** of ya' (169).

Figure 6

Confronted with the horrible decision of losing his friend's life to the actual beast or to the beast in himself, Antoine chooses the latter. This decision is played out dramatically on the final page of this flashback (see figure 7). Drops of blood litter the page (a visual continuation of the liquid theme that was started on the first page) and in four frames Casali and Donaldson zoom in on Antoine's eyes, while the transference of human to animal is conveyed through the captions: 'I never forgot Bertrand's **eyes**. I went at him faster than the **hyena**. I scared the beast. I became one **myself**.' (171) In the last panel, the drops of blood are speckled around Antoine's tearful eye and the man/beast analogy is underscored by the way in which light and dark frame the two halves of his face.

Figure 7

In this simile, the role reversal between man and animal is further emphasised by the third panel on the page, which shows how the hyena is seemingly observing the events. Michael A. Chaney argues that the recurrence of animal figures in trauma narratives is linked to the animal gaze, which ultimately questions and investigates the limits of human behaviour. The use of an animal in the context of a genocide narrative thus makes sense, as '[w]hat better icon than the animal and its "abyssal gaze" to figure a killing so vicious that it strains human comprehension and the vicissitudes of narrating or indeed receiving the story of that killing?' (Chaney 2011b, 95). The impossibility of understanding, and representing, the horrors of genocide is thus captured by the 'bottomless gaze' of the animal figure. The hyena's stare at

Antoine's act of murder displays this abyssal gaze, as the animal overlooks the denouement of the traumatic flashback. The image of the observing animal is coupled with Antoine's caption, 'I scared the beast', so that the hyena's gaze does not only represent its status as witness, but also signals a reversal of roles. The hyena is verbally assigned with an emotion (fear), thereby functioning as a marker that temporarily renders Antoine as other. The animal takes in Antoine's position as the (frightened) witness, while Antoine becomes the animal in order to survive. Here, the animal's stare and relative passivity is contrasted with the human brutality that takes place in the surrounding panels.

Maus's unravelling animal system is clever because it evades simple and unidirectional equations between characters and animals. *Deogratias* and *99 Days* explore the metaphor 'man is beast' by linking it to the protagonist of the story, not including any of the other characters into the metaphor system. This might arguably result in a simplified reading that maps the negative properties of the animal onto the character and concludes that human beings are (more than) bestial. Furthermore, the metaphor raises the issue of a history of racist visual stereotypes of likening African or black characters to animals (see, e.g., Jan Nederveen Pieterse 1992; Jahoda 1999). The implication here would be that Antoine and Deogratias lose their humanity when they take on the predatory characteristics of an animal: a narrative move that runs the risk of harking back to a history of racial thinking in which Africans or blacks are viewed as a species that is less than human. If it is true that 'only that which is already known will be readily recognized as having meaning' (Baker 1993, 28), the coupling of a predatory animal with an African character, and the suggestion that Antoine and Deogratias are more beastly than the animals, could reinstall a harmful racist stereotype.

However, reading these animals as a perpetuation of racist stereotypes negates the decidedly more complex ways in which they are used. Rather than viewing the animals as a means to stereotype the protagonist as beastly or inhuman, the links drawn between Antoine and hyena, and Deogratias and the dog, are far more complex. The protagonists do not simply and straightforwardly 'become' an animal. A straightforward mapping from animal to human is complicated by the fact that both graphic narratives carefully position their protagonists as innocent adolescents who are caught up into the chaos and horror of the Rwandan genocide. The graphic narratives emphasise that the protagonists do not want to engage in violence, and that ultimately doing so severely traumatises them. Suzanne Keen's observation that Deogratias's 'pelt of the present' reveals his 'bestial nature' does not sufficiently address that within the narrative Deogratias is not *naturally* inclined to commit violence. The dramatic

punch of the story comes from the realisation that this boy is not a stereotypical perpetrator (this will be further explored in chapter three). If Deogratias can be forced to commit atrocities against his loved ones, then who else could be made into a perpetrator?

Furthermore, the visual manifestation of the dog also works against the simple equation of 'man is beast', as Deogratias is drawn as a hybrid figure; he appears as a dog but still wears his human garments. Even when the boy is taken away by the police at the end of the story, his transformation into a dog remains incomplete, as he still pleads his case in a human voice. In *99 Days*, the juxtaposition between Antoine and the hyena contrasts the protagonist's horrified eyes with the passive stare of the animal, thereby confounding any straightforward similarities between man and beast. By slowly zooming in on Antoine's eyes, the graphic narrative avoids an explicit representation of violence, but it also reaffirms the character's humanity, particularly as the teary eye in the last panel can be recognised as a human response to the events.

The singular metaphors might not provide the opportunity of creating inconsistencies in an animal system like *Maus* does, but these tropes certainly echo Baker's observation that the visual image of the animal has 'the effect of *bringing to light* the disruptive potential of the story's animal content' (1993, 139, italics in original). In the graphic narratives, this disruptive potential is used as a means to investigate what is distinctly human, and by extension also inhuman, about genocide. Rather than proposing a complete transference, the graphic narratives thus ask us to explore where the characters and the animals meet, and where they diverge. And in the end, the animals expose the fact that these are not animals killing animals, or animals killing humans; what we observe in all these graphic narratives is that it is humans killing other humans.

In the context of war and genocide, the animal figures thus offer the possibility of dealing with the genocide in an imaginative way that allows for narrative distance, but simultaneously also emphasises that the horrors are perpetrated by humans and directed at human victims. The interaction between human and inhuman elements becomes possible because there is a presupposed lack of rational agency linked to the animal figures. The animal figures of the dog and hyena are characterised as driven by instincts based on food and survival, rather than compassion and morality. These figures posit an absence of agency that is starkly contrasted with human behaviour, which is governed by moral consciousness and choice. In this way, the animal figures open up a narrative space in which questions around the human dimensions of genocide can be explored. Furthermore, rather than having to grapple

with the notion of historical verisimilitude in the representation of acts of violence and the manifestation of trauma, the animal figures propose a more indirect interaction with the genocide narrative. The metaphor allows us to see terrible things while not negating the complexity of the genocide narrative. The animals are multi-layered markers; they capture the notion of the inhumanity within humans, comment on the process of dehumanisation, and they depict trauma in a vivid and visually accessible way by creating a deformed exterior to reflect the fragmented self.

1.3 The (in)animated state of the doll figure

A second non-human visual metaphor can be found in the figure of the doll. In contrast to animal figures, which can be used to deal with the victim and the perpetrator position, the dolls are part of a clear-cut moral universe in which they are uniformly linked to children, (lost) innocence, and victimhood. Issues of complicity are absent in the visual articulation of these figures, and the dolls become stand-ins of (brutalised) children, commenting on and exposing the process of dehumanisation. In this sense, the dolls are easily accessible visual tropes that are designed to strike an emotional chord with readers. The doll figures propose a lack, or a loss, of agency that is similar to the absence of rationalised agency in the animal figures in *Deogratias* and *99 Days*. Here too, the doll figures present a mitigated version of the horrors through their status as a non-human plaything that stands in for actual children. In the context of child psychology, the doll figure has been theorised as an object through which 'the child can explore some of the parameters of the adult world' (Simms 1996, 672) as its human likeness allows for a distanced interaction with the human world. I surmise that in these graphic narratives, the doll figures give the readers (adults or children) a similar opportunity to explore some of the parameters—and the brutal crossing of these parameters—of the adult world, specifically in relation to the fate of children in genocide. In this way, the metaphorical dolls, just like their real-life counterparts, provide a 'safer' way of gaining entry into the (horrors of the) adult world through 'literary doll play' (Van Tuyl 2015, 35).

Figure 8

Throughout *Auschwitz*, the doll figure is metonymically linked to the daughter Ann, and these substitutive qualities become more poignantly articulated when it is unclear whether the girl is dead or alive. Early in the graphic narrative, Croci introduces the brutality that is directed at children when a baby is shot through the head by an SS officer after the family's arrival in Auschwitz. Later in the graphic novel, the sheer horror of this act of violence finds a more metaphorical expression in the image of the doll, which functions as a marker of innocence amidst a world of destruction and death. The doll figure returns at several points in the story, but most dramatically after a sequence in which the father Kazik, who is part of the

Sonderkommando, has found his daughter alive in the gas chamber.[21] Not knowing whether her life is spared or not, a subsequent confrontation between the Nazi officer and Kazik is set up over two pages. In an act of malice, the officer throws Ann's doll at Kazik's feet when he is dragging corpses to the pit, seemingly suggesting that he hasn't spared Ann's life (see figure 8). However, in the mother's story, which follows after Kazik's recounting of the events, we learn that the officer has kept Ann alive. This intentional and sadistic deceit is reiterated by the platitudes in the text balloons ('Now keep working, and never forget: "Arbeit macht frei!"'), which underline the officer's malicious intent.

The image of the doll shows how Croci has recreated the toy to closely resemble a human body. The eyes are strikingly similar to those of the characters in the story, and the figure looks more like a small child than a lifeless plaything. When the officer throws the doll at Kazik's feet, its posture and wide open arms mimic the background where corpses are being dragged to the pit by prisoners. The link between the victimised doll and the humans is further established when the doll is sprawled out in the pit, lying next to the remains of human beings. The blank eyes of the human skull in the second panel are visually repeated in the doll's eyes. Croci consciously imbues the inanimate object with human features, linking the doll to Ann and other victimised children. In creating this connection between human and non-human elements, Croci highlights the loss of agency of the doll/child. The panels demonstrate how the doll is subjected to the officer's mistreatment, thereby ultimately hinting at what happened to child victims. With regard to its symbolic qualities, Henry Gonshak argues that the doll metaphor in *Auschwitz* works on several levels; its status as an inanimate object mirrors the status and treatment of the Jews in the camps, and Nazis dehumanised camp prisoners by referring to them with the euphemisms of *Stücke*, 'pieces', and *Figuren*, which means both 'figures' and 'dolls'. In addition, 'if the guards turned prisoners into objects, any object the prisoners were somehow able to preserve from their pre-camp lives took on cherished, totemic significance' (Gonshak 2009, 74). The doll thus connects past, present, and future by functioning as a beloved toy from a peaceful time, a marker of current atrocities, and a sign of what's to come for Ann and many others.

Eric Heuvel's *The Search* similarly uses the doll figure to articulate the death of children. In contrast to Croci's darker, more impressionist images, Heuvel employs the clear

[21] This sequence is based on Miklós Nyiszli's *Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account* (2012), originally published in 1946, in which Nyiszli describes his experience of finding a girl alive in a gas chamber. This episode is also recounted in Tim Blake Nelson's film *The Grey Zone* (2001) and referenced in László Nemes's film *Son of Saul* (*Saul fia*, 2015).

line style. In *The Search,* the doll belongs to a little girl who comforts her toy just before she goes into the gas chamber. The doll is then vandalised by a German soldier, who kicks it in the head (see figure 9). In this particular flashback, Esther tells the story of how her mother was gassed in Auschwitz. However, the images present us with a story-within-a-story in which an unknown girl takes the center stage. The lay-out of this page conventionally breaks down the story into nine panels, introducing the girl in the first panel and ending with Esther's interruption in the present.

Here too, the doll figure becomes a stand-in for the little girl, and its mistreatment is visually highlighted in the penultimate panel through a variety of motion lines, red stars, and yellow outlines. The dramatic resonances of the scene are heightened by the way in which the girl comforts her doll (and herself) by telling it to not be afraid. The manner in which the doll is positioned amidst the belongings suggests a human resemblance that is articulated when the doll is kicked by the soldier. Here, the doll's implied sentience is further established by the red stars near its head, which seem to suggest that the toy has a consciousness, or a degree of awareness, that can be affected. The doll's helpless position and the fact that it is breaking apart visually stands in for the horrors perpetrated against the girl and other children, which is more poignantly suggested because the child is relatively anonymous. Similar to Gonshak's remark on the various connotations of the doll figure in *Auschwitz*, Wendy Stallard Flory (2011) argues that the doll image in *The Search* works on several levels. Firstly, where the doll stands in for fate of child victims, the boot is metonymically linked to the Nazi methods of destruction. In addition, the doll figure refers back to a sequence in the graphic narrative that depicts how children were smuggled out of the nursery near the Theatre Hall in Amsterdam, where Jews were brought prior to their deportation. To make sure the head count was still correct, dolls replaced the children. According to Flory, this sequence 'allows us to consider how some of the dolls left behind with the clothing in the undressing rooms would have been carried there by women who *did* leave their infants behind, some of whom would have been saved' (2011, 48, italics in original).

Figure 9

On the page, the doll metaphor not only works horizontally but also vertically, as the first panel of each of the three tiers shows the doll in a different position, from safely cherished by the little girl, to left behind in the dressing room, and in the last panel alone and sprawled out on the floor. This vertical reading also works for the next tier, where the line of people is visually aligned above the gas chamber, and the doll being kicked becomes a metaphor for what happens inside the gas chambers. Taking an audience inside a gas chamber and showing what happens is arguably one of the last (visual) taboos in the representation of the Holocaust. *The Search* cleverly uses the doll figure to emphasise the unrepresentability of the gas chambers, leaving readers at the door and thereby following the moral guidelines around the

representation of atrocities, while simultaneously finding a visual trope that can adequately stand in for the horrors. At the end of this sequence, a distressed Esther states that '[m]y mother was gassed and her body burned in a crematorium' (45). Although Esther guides us through the sequence—her narrative position is visually underscored by inserting her head into the panels—her final empathic comment seems to pertain more to the little girl than to Esther's visually absent mother.

In Joe Kubert's war comic *Sgt. Rock: The Prophecy*, one of the soldiers receives a puppet from his Native American comrade to commemorate the real puppy he took care of during the platoon's mission. The interesting fusion of doll and animal is presented as being a 'kachina', or 'spirit doll'. This term adequately corresponds to the function of the doll figure in these graphic narratives, as the dolls embody the spirit and innocence of children. Within the context of genocide, the indexicality of the dolls is now imbued with metaphorical qualities, as the doll figures are not only owned by children, but they literally replace their young owners. Similar to the functions Jocelyn Van Tuyl (2015) traces in Holocaust children's literature, the doll figures symbolise larger losses and the disappearance of childhood. Van Tuyl points out how in many children's and young adult Shoah stories 'dolls are frequently the trope of choice to portray the manipulation and loss of autonomy to which victims were subjected' (2015, 33). This loss of autonomy is similarly present in the graphic narratives, and it can be linked to the notion of a lack of agency that connects the animal and the doll figures. This absence of agency is perhaps even more pronounced in the doll figures, whose inanimate object-status highlights the ways in which children are subjected to the course of the events.

The particular uncanniness of the doll's (in)animated state has been theorised by variety of scholars (Simms 1996; Kauppinen 2000; Van Tuyl 2015). Eva Simms and Asko Kauppinen both take note of Freud's dismissal of the doll as an uncanny element in his seminal essay on the topic. They argue that for all of Freud's insistence that the doll should not be taken seriously as an uncanny object, his work is clearly still haunted by the image of the doll. Taking this link between the doll and the uncanny as a starting point, scholars attempt to pin down what the uncanniness of the doll consists of, commonly referring to its fusion, and confusion, of human and non-human elements.[22] This uncertainty around the (in)animate status of the toy also connects the doll to death, as its rigidity and unresponsiveness resembles the dead body of a child. If the doll figure 'reveals that there is a limit to life . . . and that death

[22] This was pointed out By Ernst Jentsch in his 1906 essay on the uncanny, titled "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen".

is everywhere' (Simms 1996, 676), the doll figures in the graphic narratives are well suited to communicate themes of life and death in genocide.

The dolls in *Auschwitz* and *The Search* are positioned on the border between life and death, moving from inanimate toy to animate stand-in, and at times appearing sentient. This in-betweenness can be characterised as *unheimlich*, but rather than inhabiting the eerie or mysterious qualities of the uncanny, their inclusion conforms more to ways in which the uncanny can be unsettling and disruptive, as it 'puts definitions in a state of unrest' (Kauppinen 2000, 10). Similar to the use of animal metaphors, the doll figures allow for a consideration of the (in)human dimensions of genocide. This border position between animate and inanimate, and between life and death, offers readers a chance to grasp some of the horrors of genocide without being confronted with a complete visual manifestation. The dolls offer a way of visually evading the representation of the actual horrors, but their presence simultaneously reinstates these atrocities through their human likeness.

These 'spirit dolls' are also present in other graphic narratives. In Joe Kubert's *Fax from Sarajevo*, a doll figure is placed prominently on the cover, its red colour hinting to the destruction that will ensue. Within the narrative, the doll stands in for a family that has gone missing. When protagonist Ervin and his family enter the abandoned and derelict house of his friend Senad, the room is ominously rendered in dark tones, while the doll figure is depicted in a red tone, propped up against a board. A connection to a child is established when Ervin states 'No one is here. Senad had a daughter, a baby. That must be her doll' (68). As with the dolls in *Auschwitz* and in *The Search*, the doll is abandoned and left sprawled out on the floor (see figure 10). The mistreatment of Senad and his family is thus denoted by the final remnant of normality that is embodied by the toy. Kubert creates a more explicit link when Ervin holds up the doll figure, noting the blood stains. Not only is the doll linked to the uncertain whereabouts of a young child, but it is also implied that something terrible has happened. In a visual move that imbues the doll with human features, its arms are reaching out to Ervin, as if the child/doll is searching for affection and support. Again, the brutalised and abandoned doll stands in for the fate of (young) victims during war and genocide, and the figure moves from a lifeless toy to an animate being that seems to consciously reach out to the protagonist.

Figure 10

This (implied) treatment of the dolls in works like *Auschwitz, The Search*, and *Fax from Sarajevo* resonates with a development that Van Tuyl traces in Holocaust literature from the 1970s until now, where a 'comforting symbolism' is replaced with a 'stark and disquieting treatment of anthropomorphic playthings' (2015, 25). Not only are the doll figures positioned amidst the chaos of war and destruction, they are also helplessly subjected to the brutal mistreatment of the perpetrators. The fetishist image of the Nazi officer in *Auschwitz* and the obscured view of the straw men in *The Search* form marked contrasts with the innocent connotations of the dolls, and the doll's blood stains in *Fax from Sarajevo* bear witness to the events that caused the disappearance of the family. In transferring the violence directed at children to their respective dolls, the examples demonstrate how the violation of the doll 'enact[s] anxieties about bodily integrity' (Van Tuyl 2015, 27). This violation of the dolls' bodies

is another way in which the metaphor presents a softened version of the fate of victims during genocide.

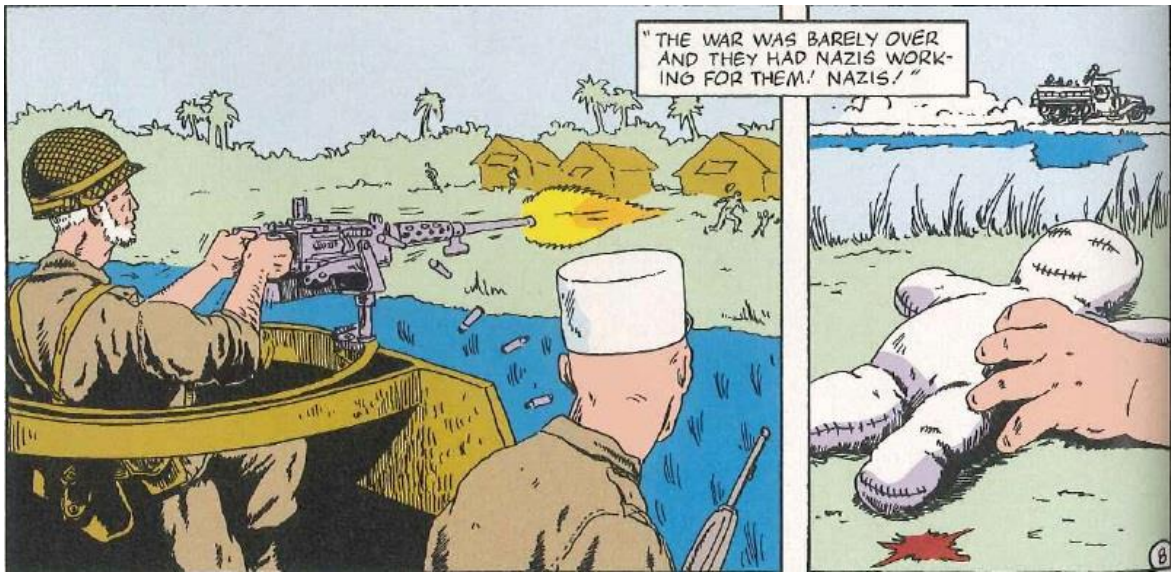

Figure 11

Moving away from my core corpus, a less humanised doll features in *The 'Nam*, a comic series that deals with the war in Vietnam. In issue 7, "The Good Old Days", a flashback details the French invasion. In depicting the French attack on the Vietnamese population, two panels present an interesting fusion of a doll, child, and references to Nazi cooperation (see figure 11). While soldiers are firing away at a Vietnamese village in the first panel, a child's hand reaches for a simple, white doll figure with visible stitches in the second panel.[23] At no point in the story do we attain more information about child and the doll, so this remains an isolated instance. A blood stain is placed near the doll, while in the background a presumably French tank drives away to its next target. In the caption that connects both panels, the narrator points out that the former Nazis were now working for the French. The two panels draw heavily on the emotional qualities of juxtaposing the sensitive markers of hand, doll, and blood. In the first panel, we see how the soldiers are firing away at a sketchily drawn child figure. And although the doll in the second panel is not thoroughly humanised, the stitches on its face show a smile—thereby forming a marked contrast with the faceless soldiers on the left.

[23] Except for the genderless doll and hand in *The 'Nam*, all of the other dolls wear dresses and are linked to girls. This raises question about gendered notions of victimhood and innocence. It implies that girls/dolls might be better suited in genocide narratives because of a more clearly pronounced lack of agency, or it might show that doll figures as suitable metaphors are presumed to be a girl's territory.

The comic highlights the fact that former Nazis joined the French foreign legion and served in Indochina. Although this is historically correct, it is noteworthy that the comic book inserts the child/doll figure in the context of Nazi cooperation, rather than linking it more explicitly to French or American misconduct. As in *Auschwitz* and *The Search*, the ultimate innocence embodied by the doll is countered by the ultimate evil of (former as well as extended) Nazism. This is clearly a safer narrative option in the problematic context of the Vietnam War. The emotionally charged confluence of hand, doll, and blood works to convey the severity of the atrocities, while the anonymity of the child underscores the wider implication of war.

In the context of the Rwandan genocide, a doll figure appears in Pat Masioni, Cecile Grenier, and Ralph's *Rwanda 1994: Descente en enfer* (the second and final part of this series is titled *Rwanda 1994: Le camp de la vie*). The graphic novel, outside of my main corpus but interesting nonetheless, tells the story of a Tutsi mother and two of her children as they are attempting to escape the Hutu violence. When the daughter is killed, the mother places the girl's doll—the two have been visually connected from the start of the narrative, as the girl constantly carries the doll around—on a makeshift grave. In the last panel of the sequence, the mother places the doll upright on the grave, which shows the toy in a more active and alive position with the arms outstretched. The indexical link is further established by the doll's dress, which resembles that of the girl. Again, the example shows how the doll figure functions as a 'spirit doll': an (in)animate object that captures the spirit and innocence of the girl and is positioned somewhere on the borders between life and death.

The references to child victims throughout the graphic narratives tie in with a more widespread use of children as main characters in genocide depictions. In the *Village Voice* roundtable discussion on *Schindler's List*, James E. Young remarks that the use of the child figure is very common in Holocaust discourse, 'mostly because the victim often needs to be represented as a child, that is somebody without a past who can't be blamed now for his or her own murder' (1994, 27). A child is in many ways the perfect victim, one that is without guilt or history. This 'unspoilt' quality provides for a morally unambiguous character that sends out a clear message: whatever happens to a child is unequivocally wrong. In the same round table discussion, Art Spiegelman critiques this notion of the perfect victim, arguing that he showed his father Vladek with 'warts and all' because 'survival mustn't be seen in terms of divine retribution or martyrology' (1994, 27). Annette Insdorf also points out how the narrative strategy of the Jew as child 'highlights the intimacy of family, insisting upon the primacy of blood ties even as it demonstrates that individual survival was predicated on separation'

(2002, 81). Both in *Auschwitz* and *The Search*, the connection between the doll, child, and family is clearly articulated. In *Auschwitz*, the doll connects the three family members that have been separated (both physically and psychologically) during and after their experiences in Auschwitz. In *The Search*, a familial link is forged between Esther, her mother, and the little girl.

1.4 Doll/Animal Hybrid

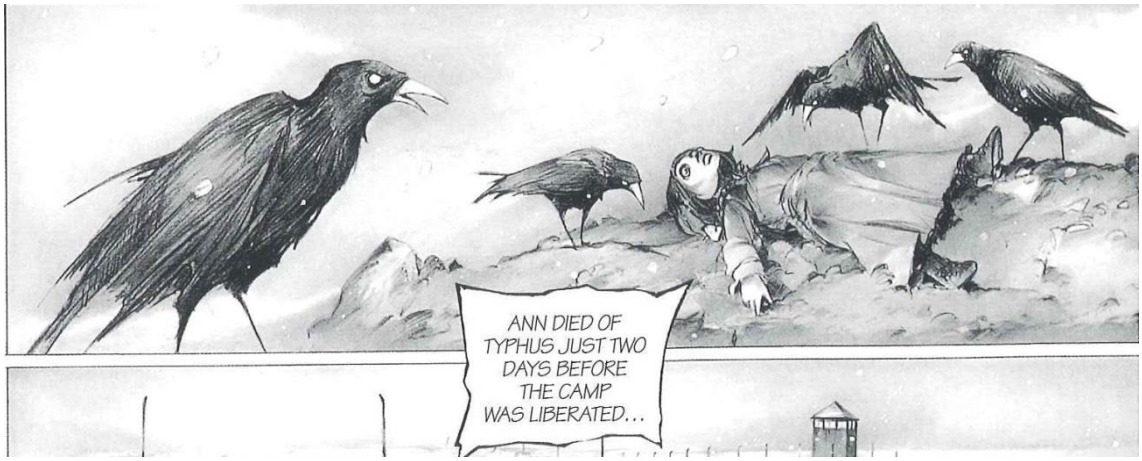

Figure 12

Maus and *Auschwitz* include panels that feature both metaphorical figures; these panels further demonstrate how the visual tropes are used to deal with the unrepresentable elements of genocide, while their presence also highlights how the metaphors propose an oscillation between the particular and the universal. When Ann eventually passes away from typhus in *Auschwitz*, her doll is placed on top of her grave (see figure 12, this image is echoed in the abovementioned *Descente en enfer*). In a final act of transgression, the crows are picking away at the doll, echoing an image from a nightmarish dream that Kazik had earlier on in the story. In a poignant move of transference, the doll has lost any of its playful connotations and now almost completely resembles a human being, its eyes staring up into the sky. The ominous looking birds that are scouring the grave take on a metaphorical quality and become stand-ins for the Nazi perpetrators, ready to continue the mistreatment of the doll's body. The drawing style further supports this metaphorical link by implying visual similarities between the wings of the birds and the SS uniforms, as both are drawn with a dark and angular quality. The panel demonstrates how the confluence of these two metaphors yet again proposes a softened or distanced version of the horrors. Where the previous occurrence of the doll, and the alleged

death of Ann, was accompanied by the sadistic behaviour of the Nazi perpetrator, this panel demonstrates Ann's actual death, replacing the perpetrator characters with birds. Although Ann's death is not directly at the hands of the Nazis, the inclusion of the menacing birds suggests that the Nazi system of destruction is ultimately responsible (and will not leave the body to rest in peace).

Furthermore, the convergence of these two tropes exposes a negotiation between the historical specificities of the Holocaust and the universal implications of mass violence. Both the crows and the doll figure are linked to specific characters—the Nazi officer and Ann—while their positioning in the panel as metaphorical markers also proposes a more universal dimension of human suffering. The metaphors show a destruction that is historically specific, and connected to a particular narrative, but through their non-human status they also hint at recurring processes of dehumanisation and atrocities. Croci uses the eyes to create contrasts between the two stand-ins, as the humanised eyes of the doll are contrasted with the seemingly empty and haunted-looking sockets of the crows. The metaphorical quality of the birds is also explicitly addressed in a conversation between the mother Cessia and her friend. Cessia's friend points out that there are birds on Ann's grave, after which Cessia bitterly remarks that 'there have never been birds at Birkenau' (67). This negation of the birds' appearance strengthens the idea that the presence of the animal figures and their abuse of the doll figure take place on a symbolic level. In a further referential twist, the image of the birds calls forth Primo Levi's notion of the 'crematorium raven' (1986, 60), a term he used for the prisoners in the *Sonderkommando*. In this way, the birds are ambiguous markers that reference both the Nazi officer as well as the prisoners (including Kazik) that were made complicit in the killing mechanism of Auschwitz.

The sequence from which this panel is drawn shows how mother Cessia and her friend place the doll on top of Ann's grave at the gates of Auschwitz, after which they walk away from the scene. The sequence demonstrates that the metaphors take over when humans leave the scene. The traumatic kernel of the story is thus not captured by human interaction or historical verisimilitude, but by the symbolic image of the crows picking away at the doll. In this way, the limits of (human) representation are worked into the page. By replacing human characters, the metaphorical figures poignantly address the impossibility of adequately representing destruction and death, but by standing in for key characters the doll and animals inevitably also re-inscribe human presence.

Spiegelman's *Maus* also provides us with two moments where an animal and a doll figure are fused. These hybrids have thus far not made much of an appearance in the secondary literature discourse around *Maus*, and I argue that these animalised dolls form (unconscious) 'slippages' that further symbolise the unravelling of the animal system. This unravelling happens in ways that are consciously implemented by Spiegelman—as discussed in the first part of this chapter—but also in ways that are, perhaps, less consciously incorporated. These inanimate objects, which would not necessarily have an ethnic identity within the system, are imbued with a Jewish identity. These animalised dolls become extensions of the characters, so the objects function as visual stand-ins that expose a negotiation between the specific and the universal.

Figure 13

The first animalised object can be found in the sequence where Vladek talks about how Anja was involved in communist 'conspirations'. During a police raid, Anja asks her seamstress, Miss Stefanska, to hide important documents. In her room, the seamstress has a mannequin that is shaped like a mouse (see figure 13). It is set up quite inconspicuously in a corner of the room, denoting Miss Stefanska's profession. In the second example, Vladek urges Anja to take her

doll collection with her when they are packing up their stuff to leave. In a visual move that is similar to the depiction of the mannequin, the doll, which is positioned in the background, is drawn like a mouse (see figure 14). In both examples, we recognise the objects as being inanimate through their shape, size, and context. Within the animal system constructed by Spiegelman, it is clear that the different ethnic groups have a specific animal cipher and that Spiegelman has created a logic from which we can infer the different relations. Although the figures may vary with regard to their symbolic underpinning, there is an underlying structure that rules that living characters have to be portrayed as animals.

Figure 14

However, something interesting happens when we look at the objects surrounding these characters. Within the logic of the animal system, these objects should not necessarily be drawn as animals. They are part of an object universe that is arguably separate from the animal metaphor. Can a mannequin or doll figure be assigned with a particular animal identity? And why would objects need an identity that is linked to the animals? Another example of this type of animal transference occurs with the 'halt/stoj' sign in Auschwitz, in which the skull has been given mouse ears (see figure 15).

Following this logic, one could argue that objects are metonymically linked to the person who owns it, thereby acquiring the same animal appearance by extension. However, this doesn't hold in the case of the sign in Auschwitz, which is a Nazi object. In this example, it would make sense that this sign portrays the victims and not its owner, but why choose for a Jewish identity when the figure of the skull would appropriately denote all Holocaust victims? In contrast, there are also instances where similar objects are not drawn as an animal, like

Richieu's doll figure (86) or the skull that appears in the gypsy's fortune telling, which refers to death in Anja's family but is drawn like a normal, human skull (293).

Figure 15

These inconsistencies are—much like the more overt reflexive gestures such as the use of the animal masks and the clashes between animal systems—signs that the system cannot work coherently, therefore ultimately coming loose at the seams. The animalised objects demonstrate once more how the animal system in *Maus* refuses to be fixed into reliable patterns or rules, which is an essential part of Spiegelman's attack on Nazi ideology. These animalised objects are subtle markers that demonstrate how the instability of the metaphor does not only pertain to the main characters, but also to the more mundane and seemingly trivial aspects of this universe. The fact that the objects are affected by Spiegelman's animal metaphor strengthens the pervasiveness of the system, whereas the inconsistency in the occurrence of these animalised objects underscores the notion that in the end, the entire framework collapses in on itself. As argued by Ewert with regard to the use of masks and the confrontation with real animals, '[t]he inconsistencies in the mouse metaphor serve to remind us of a larger reality outside of the world of mice and cat' (2000, 95). A similar process can be applied to the objects, as their animalised identity and the fact they only feature on rare occasions will inform an awareness of the constructed nature of the system.

Moreover, as we have seen, Spiegelman has chosen to transform certain objects into *mouse*-related markers, imbuing them with a Jewish identity. The mannequin and Anja's doll are thus not just any kind of doll figure, they are *Jewish* doll figures. The skull on the sign in Auschwitz would, with this line of reasoning, be a *Jewish* skull. One could argue that Anja's dolls are actually mice, and not human dolls that are being depicted as Jewish, but this seems unlikely given the context. All of these objects thus become part of the animal universe, but only in the guise of the mouse figure. There are, for instance, no cat-shaped objects that are metonymically linked to the Germans or dog-shaped objects that denote the Americans.

The tension between the universalising and particularising mode that is noted by Jeanne Ewert (2000) in relation to the drawings of the mice is also present in the case of these two dolls. On the one hand, their occurrence is linked to Jewish characters, thereby marking a specific and personalised Jewishness. The dolls are extensions of Miss Stefanska and Anja, placed in their personal space and clearly connected to their daily life. The fact that they are shaped like mice reinforces the notion that they are not there to fill up the background. They are more than just random objects, as their animal appearance denotes a specificity of the Jewish experience. On the other hand, the objects seem to tie in with the metaphor quite naturally. We do not necessarily question their appearance, and they do not attain any further visual emphasis, like some of the earlier mentioned doll figures.[24] In line with this Steve Baker points out that the seamstress's dummy, which is introduced at a point in the narrative when we haven't yet fully figured out the animal system, seems to denote an ordinary body, rather than a Jewish object/body (1993, 141). The specificity of the mouse figure blends into a universalised victim experience most poignantly in the case of the sign in Auschwitz, where the mouse skull seems to stand in for all the victims of the Holocaust. Again, the move between the specific and the universal demonstrates how the animal system is crumbling down under the weight of its conflicted impulses and inconsistencies. However, Ewert's argument that Spiegelman's second volume consistently moves away from the particular and towards the universal is arguably incorrect, as the mouse sign in Auschwitz still metonymically stands in for the Jewish experience.

In addition to distancing the representation of death and trauma through their substitutive and inhuman elements, the animal and doll figures further demonstrate that the occurrence of these metaphorical figures is also interspersed by a particular oscillation

[24] Anja explicitly mentions that the dolls are not important to her. However, Vladek's narration revalues them and underscores their importance for their survival.

between the specific and the universal. The metaphoric stand-ins create a form of empathy that is related to particular characters, as well as to the historically specific process of dehumanisation. At the same time, these non-human markers also have a more universal impulse, referring to processes of dehumanisation that take place on a more worldwide scale and commenting on the fate of (child) victims during war and atrocities. This universal impulse is also visible in the fact that the metaphorical figures of the animal and the doll feature across the corpus. Where the recurring use of the animal metaphor can be linked to a longer cultural history of animal figures in narratives and its famous use in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, the doll's ubiquitous appearance highlights another striking visual and narrative element of a transnational genocide narrative.

1.5 Visual tropes and the performance of innocence

The softening or distancing that takes place through the use of visual metaphors can also be seen as a form of kitsch or melodrama. The animal and the doll function as symbolic ciphers that are placed into the narratives to strike an emotional chord. Particularly the doll taps into emotional and moral registers through its easily graspable connotations and explicit mistreatment by the Nazi characters. The link between the dolls, children, and the presupposed lack of agency that is attributed to both, means that the trope can be viewed as successfully 'performing innocence' (Van Tuyl 2015, 30), which is a key quality of melodrama (Williams 1998). Staging and retrieving innocence is also linked to notions of kitsch, as '[m]ost kitsch conveys a kind of deliberate and highly constructed innocence, one that dictates particular kinds of sentimental responses and emotional registers' (Sturken 2007, 21).

The alleged problem with this type of sentimental eliciting is that it does not encourage critical reflection and political engagement. Marita Sturken points out the dangers of the 'teddy-bearification' of American culture, which foregoes a critical self-reflexive look at a nation's complicity in historical events. The idea of a 'comfort culture' that proposes both a literal and figurative softening through the symbolic figure of the teddy bear can be connected to the doll metaphors, which could be viewed as a repackaging of atrocities into a mitigated and comforting figure. Just like the toy figure of the teddy bear represents a more innocent and 'cuddly' version of complex historical events, the doll figures can be seen as a device that presents a sanitised reading of the horrors of genocide.

Furthermore, not only do the dolls embody an absence of agency, their insertion into the graphic narratives marks a powerlessness that extends to all the victims of genocide, but also to the readers. The dolls embody the notion of 'too late-ness', which is another important characteristic of the melodramatic mode (Williams 1998; Kerner 2011). The realisation that things might have worked out more positively—'if only'—infuses melodramatic texts, which rely heavily on a 'pathos [that] arrives from the powerlessness to change things' (Kerner 33). In *Auschwitz*, Croci surmises that the death of Ann could have been prevented, as the caption accompanying the image of her grave reads: 'Ann died of typhus just two days before the camp was liberated'. In *The Search*, the little girl's tells her doll she will see it later, but of course we realise that 'later' won't happen. The doll figures in *Fax from Sarajevo, Descente en enfer*, and *Sgt. Rock* similarly rely on this principle: the family's arrival at Senad's house is too late to save or help the family, the doll figure in the Rwandan context follows the narrative set-up of *Auschwitz* in emphasising how the doll 'lives' but the girl doesn't, and the image of the hand reaching for the doll in *Sgt. Rock* suggests that the child is alive but will not make it. To some extent, the animal figures use this melodramatic quality as well—they encapsulate the moment where the innocence of the two teenage boys is irrevocably lost.

The use of doll figures also relates to Spiegelman's notion of Holokitsch: (popular cultural) texts that use the Holocaust as a perfect setting for a clear, Manichean paradigm of good versus evil (Spiegelman 2011, 70). The stark contrast between the innocence of the doll and the mistreatment of the perpetrator, particularly in *Auschwitz*, proposes a morally straightforward division between good and evil. In the examples, the absence of agency that is attributed to the doll is contrasted with the power and control that is (mis)used by the Nazi characters. The officer in *Auschwitz* can play around with his victim, Ann's father, by alleging his daughter's death through the doll figure, whereas the more anonymised soldier in *The Search* can physically break the doll apart. In a transference from innocent child's play to a more sadistic and aggressive adult treatment, the dolls have now become playthings for the perpetrators. This mistreatment reframes both parts of the seemingly innocuous word, as the perpetrators 'play' with what they perceive as a 'thing', while the human resemblance of the doll drives home the point that the figure is more than just a lifeless toy.

However, viewing the innocent qualities of the metaphors, and the ways in which they propose a softened version of the genocide narrative, as resulting in a lack of (political) complexity or constituting an example of comfort culture does not do justice to the various levels on which these metaphors work. Not only do the graphic narratives find a form that

allows readers to interact with some of the most sensitive elements of genocide, but the presence of these non-human metaphors ultimately raises questions around the (in)human dimensions of mass violence and trauma. The animals and dolls propose a negotiation between the particular historical context of the genocide and the universal implications of mass violence that further contributes to the multi-layered character of the metaphors. After *Maus*, using animal figures in the context of genocide representation can be seen as an easy replication of a successful visual strategy, but *Deogratias* and *99 Days* cleverly use the disruptive potential of the singular metaphorical animal to confront difficult and complex questions around human behaviour and explore ways in which trauma can manifest. One of the strengths of the animal figures as explored in this chapter is that the trope proposes an interaction with the genocide narrative that allows for the presence of a moral ambivalence that is not resolved immediately.

In contrast, the doll figures are certainly more straightforward in their moral positioning. The Manichean contrasts between good and evil that can be classified as Holokitsch are an important part of the effectiveness of the metaphor. I agree with Spiegelman that this moral reduction can lead to a simplification of the complexities of the historical context. However, where Spiegelman is mostly critical about the ways in which representations of victims and survivors can fall prey to this Manicheanism—the 'sentimentalising notion of suffering and how it ennobles' (Spiegelman 2011, 127)—I find more fault with one-dimensional and monstrous representations of perpetrators that do not allow any consideration of why genocides occur (I explore this in depth in the next chapter). Although the innocent dolls are starkly contrasted with the cruel perpetrators, they are not necessarily an 'easy' metaphor, as a form of active decoding is required on the part of the readers. As pointed out by Henry Gonshak and Wendy Stallard Flory, the multi-layered symbolism of the doll metaphors demonstrates that the tropes are complex in their significance, not just standing in for the child characters in the graphic narratives but also referring to methods of dehumanisation and calling attention to the precarious position of children during these historical events.

Furthermore, the use of the melodramatic principle of being 'too late' provides for a dramatic staging of the loss of innocence and a confrontation with past horrors. Although the melodramatic mode works towards a restoration of innocence, it often takes its emotive power from the ways in which a retrieval of innocence fails, leading to a 'disruption of social structures' (Kerner 2011, 136). The visual metaphor strategy denies this restoration of

innocence, and it also refuses an easy and uncomplicated catharsis. The perceived innocence of the children and young adolescents in these graphic narratives is shattered by the horrors of genocide, and there is no sense of a comfortable, happy ending, or of some form of moral rehabilitation. Deogratias and Antoine both end up severely psychologically disturbed, and neither of the two girls in *Auschwitz* and *The Search* survives the Holocaust. However, in *The Search*, protagonist Esther lives to tell the tale to the next generations. Here, the educational thrust of the graphic novel precludes an ending that is as grim as in some of the other graphic narratives.

The visual metaphors are thus effectively staging an affective encounter with the genocidal events as the animals and dolls are accessible tropes that can enhance reader involvement. Suzanne Keen (2011) discusses the 'fast tracks to narrative empathy' that can be provided by animal figures in graphic narratives, positing that the immediate rendering of emotional states, which are projected onto the animal faces and thereby recognisable as human-like, create an intersubjective connection between characters and readers. In a similar manner, the dolls are imbued with human characteristics, forging a link between inanimate objects and human subjectivity. The juxtaposition between human and inhuman elements sets up a process whereby distance and affect are interchanged. As proposed, the notion that the animals and the dolls are not rational and active figures opens up a narrative space that allows for a consideration of the very human dimensions of the atrocities. These affective, and to a certain extent passive, qualities of the metaphors can be seen as unproductively kitsch, but their presence within the genocide narrative opens up the possibility to engage with the story and the characters, and these figures provide a narrative and visual route to deal with unrepresentable elements of genocide.

1.6 Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated that the visual metaphor is an affective and productive trope that allows readers to engage with difficult and complex issues of the genocide narrative. As proposed by Max Silverman: 'Metaphor is a creative and transformative process in that it unsettles or defamiliarises habitual meanings, connects the most unlikely elements and reshapes our perceptions' (2013, 23). Throughout the chapter, this unsettling or defamiliarising quality is constituted through the negotiation between human and non-human elements. The distancing quality of the animal and the (in)animated status of the doll have the

potential to disrupt the narrative, allowing readers to interact with sensitive elements of the genocide while also drawing attention to the process of representation.

What the dolls and the animals share is the fact that their non-human status is used to comment on questions around human behaviour. The absence of human agency that is part of both metaphors permits a commentarial quality to surface. The metaphors are performative; they actively perform and negotiate a set of moral traits. Where the two visual tropes diverge is in the moral complexity of its use; dolls are fairly straightforwardly performing innocence, proposing a clear moral division between right and wrong, whereas the animal figures arguably require a more sustained interaction with its various connotations (and new or familiar interpretations of these connotations). However, the chapter has demonstrated that both metaphors are multi-layered as the figures invite readers to consider their (range of) substitutive qualities.

The strength of the metaphor in the context of genocide is that it proposes a particular oscillation between distance and affect. If '[i]mages of catastrophe, maybe more than other images, have to stand in for what they represent' (Buettner 2011, 10), then it is through the distancing quality of the non-human elements that the possibility of an affective interaction with the genocide narrative is opened. The quality of this affect conforms to elements from the kitsch/melodrama aesthetic, but rather than proposing straightforward simplicity the metaphors allow for a consideration of the complexities and issues around genocide representation. However, the stark contrasts between perpetrators and victims in the case of the doll figures is questionable in permitting a productive interaction with the genocide narrative, and my next chapter will further explore how graphic narratives construct these perpetrator figures.

2. From Gruesome to Grey: The Moralisation of Perpetrators

2.0 Introduction

This chapter investigates the representation of perpetrators of genocide, and it considers the moral issues at stake in visualising the perpetrator position in graphic narratives. I explore the moralisation of perpetrators, proposing a visual and thematic scale that runs from Manichean depictions of extraordinary evil on the one hand, to an exploration of the 'ordinariness' of perpetrators and their (varied) reasons for participation on the other. I use the term 'moralisation' here in a broad sense, pointing to the notion that genocide texts have to address the moral relations between victim and perpetrator, as well as the specific moral make-up of those committing genocide. The proposed division between ordinary and extraordinary representations of perpetrators does not necessarily mean that the graphic narratives always decisively choose one or the other. Nonetheless, by considering constructions of perpetrator figures along the lines of stark moral contrasts and visual simplification on the one hand, and morally ambiguous dimensions on the other, I aim to highlight noteworthy tendencies in the graphic narratives, as well as trace some of the complexities around addressing the role(s) of perpetrators.

The chapter first explores the cultural model of the evil Nazi, tracing its characteristics and considering how notions of excess are tied into these perpetrator figures. Linking this cultural model to the graphic narratives, I examine to what extent elements of this evil Nazi figure return in the works that deal with the Holocaust. After this, I further explore how these notions of excess are connected to the perpetrator figures in *Smile through the Tears* and *Medz Yeghern*. These works follow the Manichean model of the evil Nazi perpetrator by depicting these characters as homogenously aberrant and sadistic. Furthermore, these figures are drawn in caricatured manner, so that visual excess further consolidates the extraordinariness of their behaviour.

Focusing on *Deogratias* and *The Search*, I demonstrate that these two graphic narratives present a more nuanced view of perpetrators, as they allow for a heterogeneity of depiction. Both works explore a variety of reasons for participation and demonstrate different ways of dealing with the moral implications of being a perpetrator. Visually, the perpetrators on this end of the scale often look similar to the victims, so that the two groups inhabit the same moral universe. Finally, I propose that *Safe Area Goražde* presents a complex mix of

approaches to the construction of perpetrators. Sacco's work draws on Manichean strategies of representing Serb perpetrators but it also includes nuancing gestures. By oscillating between images of sadistic perpetrators and strategies that nuance this view, Sacco offers a complex negotiation between the two models.

In analysing these various perpetrator figures, I critically question whether the immoral and visual excess of the extraordinarily evil characters in international graphic narratives allows for a productive interaction with the genocide narrative. Excessive and kitsch perpetrator figures accommodate a comfortable psychological distance to the atrocities, and it is questionable whether these perpetrator images contribute to a better understanding of why genocides occur.

2.1 Evil Nazis in Graphic Narratives

In our cultural landscape, Nazi perpetrators often function as 'cipher[s] for unassimilable evil' (Adams and Vice 2012, 1) and 'icons of the monstrous' (Petley 2010, 205). The figure of the Nazi perpetrator frequently signifies a sense of unconstrained immorality and extraordinary evil, effectively being placed outside of the realm of human behaviour and aligned with the monstrous and the aberrant. The notion of evil and otherness that is embodied by Nazis in many cultural texts is characterised by overt displays of sadistic and erratic behaviour. Showing how Nazi perpetrators take unbridled pleasure in the pain of others provides a narrative shorthand to their intrinsic depravity. An early visual example of this model is Roberto Rossellini's Nazi officer in *Roma, città aperta* (1945), the 'ur-vampiric Nazi' (von Dassanowsky 2012, 118), whose cold and formal appearance is contrasted with the warm-blooded and righteous partisan characters. The officer's detached demeanour works in conjunction with his stilted and stylised appearance, and his unflinching attitude towards human suffering is most explicitly communicated when he orchestrates, and enjoys, spectacles of torture.[25]

What this early incarnation of the evil Nazi figure also demonstrates is the importance of visual appearance. The construction of the Nazi as an immoral villain is further established through the particular aesthetic qualities of his attire, particularly the clean and rigid cut of the SS uniforms. This aesthetic manifestation of the 'right to have total power over others and to

[25] Also see Sidney Gottlieb's edited collection *Roberto Rossellini's* Rome Open City (2004). Gottlieb posits that the Nazi officer is 'part caricature, played as an effete and blasé sadist . . . He is also part cinematic villain' (2004, 7). Marcia Landy's chapter on the film argues that the character is 'an effeminate male homosexual fastidious in dress and in his manner of speaking' (2004, 98): a strategy that aligns homosexuality and fascism in order to provide evidence of a (presupposed) perverse sexuality.

treat them as absolutely inferior' (Sontag 2001, 99) further contributes to the cultural model of the Nazi perpetrator as morally detached and highly violent. Furthermore, the fusion between total dominance and a certain aesthetic sensibility provides an erotic charge that moves fascism into the realm of fetish and sado-masochism. Susan Sontag's argument around this type of fascinating fascism highlights the notion that the depravity of the evil Nazi perpetrator also has a certain appeal. The internal lack of a moral compass and the external fetishised appearance create a cultural figure that is both terrifying and attractive.

This fusion between sexuality and Nazism also finds another, more explicitly spectacular articulation in cultural texts that link the evil Nazi character to deviant and depraved sexual proclivities. Particularly the genre of exploitation films, or 'Nazisploitation', has banked in on using the Nazi perpetrators' inherent sexual perversion and preference for sexual sadism (see Petley 2010; Kerner 2011; Magilow, Vander Lugt, and Bridges 2012). The bodily spectacles of these exploitation films show the Nazi perpetrator at his most hyperbolic—with a recurring preference to invert gender structures and feature sadomasochistic female perpetrators—but even more mainstream representations of Nazis 'share a certain logic whereby the judgment of Nazis as morally deficient for their perpetration of Holocaust atrocities extends into all other realms of their character and behaviour, particularly as it concerns sexuality' (Richardson 2012, 41; also see Picart and Frank 2004, 2006).

The persistence of the notion of extraordinary evil as proposed by these Nazi figures provides a comfortable position of moral detachment. The absence of a narrative perspective on the perpetrator—the negation of the motivations, thoughts, and feelings of perpetrator characters—prevents the possibility of identifying with these motivations and forecloses the concurrent fear that an understanding of these figures effectively perpetrates their crimes anew (Adams and Vice 2012; McGlothlin 2014). James Waller argues that '[i]t makes it easier for us to distance ourselves from the Nazi atrocities by regarding all perpetrators as inherently evil, psychopathic killers' (2002, 58). The image of the evil Nazi perpetrator thus allows for a psychological distance that minimises a more complex and morally uncomfortable interaction with the ambiguous elements of genocide perpetration, and it closes off any further investigation of the premise that perpetrators are humans, rather than monsters.

At the same time, there is also a distinct appeal to these characters. The fascination with the total and undisputed power of the Nazi figures is often catered to in spectacles of life and death. In this way, the evil Nazis propose a negotiation between repulsion and attraction,

which ties in with the underlying mechanism of the kitsch aesthetic (Ward 1991; Congdon and Blandy 2005). This friction between attraction and repulsion can, at its most productive, reflexively confront the audience with a simultaneous fascination for, and an abhorrence of, images of sadistic perpetrators and violence. However, in its less productive moments the confluence of attraction/repulsion as embodied by the Nazi perpetrators 'allows us to situate the monstrous characters on the side of utter evil, and places us on the side of righteousness' (Kerner 2011, 119).

Figure 16

Does the cultural model of the evil Nazi also find an expression in the graphic narratives that deal with the Holocaust? The work that follows the model the most closely is Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz*, as the graphic narrative clearly positions its main Nazi perpetrator as a cold and sadistic figure. Throughout the work, the Nazi officer oversees the horrors of the camp in a detached and merciless manner, and at several points in the story the cunning cruelty of the character is emphasised by displaying his deceitful behaviour. In this context, the episode with the doll most prominently establishes the perpetrator as a callous figure who takes pleasure in creating spectacles of humiliation and suffering (see figure 12). As figures 12 and 16 show, the Nazi perpetrator's depraved behaviour is matched by his visual appearance; he wears glasses, which distinguishes him from the other Nazi perpetrators, and he is rendered in a sharply cut uniform with a long jacket, leather gloves, and a slender cigarette holder. Particularly this last item caters to a fetishised image of the perpetrator, as the extravagance of the cigarette holder, and the way in which it symbolises a detached sense of power, has a certain erotic appeal, but also constitutes a completely otherworldly and perverted item to have in the inverted universe of Auschwitz. Croci constantly shows the Nazi perpetrator in full attire,

placing him amidst the chaos of the camps but also visually highlighting the character by showing him in close-up. The close-up panel, a device that Croci uses more often throughout the work, isolates the figure and places visual emphasis on his appearance, demonstrating his duplicity through his use of euphemistic and deceitful language. Later in the story, Croci draws the officer as Nosferatu in a dream sequence, making an explicit connection between perpetrator and monster, and drawing a link to the filmic context. In Kazik's dream, the perpetrator is drawn with fangs and long claw-like fingers, while ranting on about exterminating the Jews. Croci visually addresses the dehumanisation of Jews by including a panel that combines the perpetrator's racial hatred with an image of rats, but he simultaneously reverses this Nazi propaganda by positioning the perpetrator as the actual monster. The Nazi officer in *Auschwitz* fits perfectly with the kitsch figure of the evil and perverted Nazi perpetrator, as his cruelty works in tandem with the full Nazi attire to position him as a coldblooded and immoral figure.

In considering the pitfalls of this type of visual excess, Spiegelman points out how his earlier experimental rendition of the cats in a scratchboard illustration style made the figure in full Nazi attire look too fetishised, resembling Marlon Brando in Edward Dmytryk's *The Young Lions* (1958) and 'tying into the stereotypes that presented Nazis as somehow sexy' (2011, 143). Spiegelman wanted to avoid these alluring elements in favour of a less polished version, and he also decided to scale down the cats in order not to put the mice in 'total biological disadvantage' (2011, 118). Although the Nazi cat figures in *Maus* lack any erotic appeal, they are quite uniformly depicted as evil; they are menacing figures with grim dispositions, their mouths twisted in angry grimaces and their eyes often shielded by the helmets.

Interestingly, Spiegelman claims that cats are—out of all the animals included in his animal system—the most loveable and that this 'has the advantage of making the reader, in this particular case, complicit with the murderers. Even in the way that they're drawn, the cats have the most human of faces' (Spiegelman 2011, 128). This observation seems to contradict Spiegelman's remark about how the 'Little Orphan Annie' quality of his drawings (of the mice specifically, I should add) allows the reader to connect with the characters. Spiegelman's point about the readers' complicity with the cats through their human faces is directly opposed to a presupposed identification with the schematic and 'open' mice faces. Are we complicit with the cats because they look human and are loveable, or are we invested with the mice because their schematic rendering aids reader immersion? Rather than becoming complicit with the cats, the perpetrators are decontextualised from their loveable metaphorical qualities and

reinstated as menacing figures throughout the graphic narrative. Their more detailed rendering (I would not call it more humanised than the mice) actually makes them more eerie.

Similar to the model of the evil Nazi, there is no narrative perspective on the perpetrators in *Maus*, and this lack of background information also reinstates the cats as dehumanised and dangerous creatures, whereas the mice are narratively humanised. However, Spiegelman's work is a highly personal investigation that explores his family's experiences in the war, and this (auto)biographical focus arguably precludes a more thorough narrative investigation of the perpetrator figures. This biographical focus also means that Spiegelman includes an unhindered depiction of the quirks and difficulties of Vladek, which nuances an opposition between innocent and sanctimonious victims and purely evil perpetrators. A striking example of Vladek's position as a complex character is his racist response to the black hitchhiker (see page 52 in chapter one). Furthermore, Andrew Loman also aptly observes that the first death in *Maus* is at the hands of Vladek, who kills a German soldier, camouflaged as a tree, when he is drafted in 1939. Vladek is thus the 'narrative's first killer' (2010, 231), and Loman argues that Vladek dehumanises the German soldier, as he explains that '[i]t held up a hand to show it was hurt. To surrender. But I kept shooting and shooting' (50). These examples of Vladek as a character who is capable of racism, dehumanisation, and even murder, works against straightforward oppositions between right and wrong. *Maus* shows how a flawed protagonist does not depreciate the horrors of the genocide or the impact of the victim narrative.

Spiegelman further works against the dichotomy of evil/good by including different types of perpetrators with different levels of involvement, from the anti-Semitic Polish bystanders to brutal Kapos and Nazi officers. By showing these levels of complicity, *Maus* ultimately nuances the all-reigning evil represented by the Nazis. In further contrast to the model of the individualised and fetishised evil Nazi character, the anonymising tendency is further established by the multiplicity and uniformity of the cat figures; a visual strategy that adequately captures the Nazi totalitarian regime. The lack of individualism becomes apparent through the shielding of the cats' eyes and through the drawings of identical feline figures that are not given any background information or variation of image or character.

This anonymising of the perpetrators by denying a sense of individuality and obscuring a view of the perpetrators' faces is a recurring strategy in the graphic narratives that deal with the Holocaust. In Joe Kubert's *Yossel*, the fetishised Nazi model is countered by the characteristics of the drawing style. Here, Kubert's pencil drawings generally work against an

overly detailed and slick rendering of the perpetrator, as his sketchy line work does not allow for much individual detail. This visual strategy echoes Spiegelman's choice to steer clear from a photorealistic, cinematic style that relies too much on verisimilitude, thereby running the risk of presenting a clichéd or visually unrealistic version of the events. The 'pronounced individualism' (Baetens and Frey 2015, 136) that is communicated through Kubert's drawing style (one that he similarly employs in his 2010 graphic novel *Dong Xoai Vietnam 1965*) functions as a counterpoint to more glossy renderings of the Holocaust and its perpetrators. The anonymity of perpetrators, and victims, is most strikingly rendered in schematic drawings that almost completely deny a sense of individuality to any of the characters. In these drawings, people almost become stick figures, as Kubert depicts heads without faces and bodies without much detail. Kubert also obscures faces through helmets and caps, and by showing the perpetrators from the back. At the same time, Kubert includes drawings of faces that float on the page; his style, and the narrative conceit that it is Yossel who draws, position these images as quickly drawn studies of different characters. In these more detailed drawings of people, Kubert does not supply the Nazi characters with any hyperbolic features or fetishised paraphernalia.

Where the paraphernalia in *Auschwitz* are used as fetish objects that draw attention to the evil character of the Nazi officer, other graphic narratives use the perpetrators' paraphernalia and a range of visual strategies as a means to conceal the individuality of these figures. A variety of caps, helmets, and glasses obstruct a clear view of the eyes, and artists use strategies like shadows, high angle views, or panels depicting the perpetrators from the back to enhance this lack of individuality. The use of this strategy in *The Search* will be explored when dealing with 'nuancing gestures' later in this chapter, but another example can be found outside of the main corpus. When showing the arrival of protagonist Max Eisenhardt in Auschwitz, *Magneto Testament* (which tells the background story to the *X-Men* character Magneto and shows his experiences in Nazi Germany and during the Holocaust) similarly uses an anonymising approach towards the Nazi perpetrators. Not only does the arrival in the dark give Greg Pak and Carmine Di Giandomenico the opportunity to use shadows to obscure the perpetrators' faces, but the headgear—the black caps of the SS and the trapper hats of the soldiers—also prevents a full view of their individual features. Furthermore, the eyes of the Nazi doctor who is present at the selection are obscured by the glasses he is wearing (although the doctor's noteworthy moustache and the stethoscope around his neck position him as different from the other perpetrators), and the sequence includes panels that use a high angle

or show the perpetrators from the back. The effect of this visual strategy is twofold: the obscuring of the perpetrators and the darkness of the sequence work as portents of what will follow, but this denial of individuality also works against the singular extraordinariness of the evil Nazi model.

This anonymous rendering of the perpetrators arguably counters the fascinating fascism that Sontag outlines, as there is little opportunity to engage in a fetishised spectacle. This does not mean that the Nazi perpetrators are not depicted as menacing and threatening figures that use terror and violence to instil fear. On the contrary, the lack of individuality is arguably an effective method of showing the brute and overwhelming force of the Nazi regime. Furthermore, the individuality that is denied to the Nazi perpetrators is often contrasted with the distinct narrative and visual individuality of the victims. All of the graphic narratives discussed here have named and visually distinct victim characters that are placed in opposition to the unnamed and more anonymous Nazi characters. Even *Auschwitz* does not allow its Nazi officer to have a name. Although the anonymity of these perpetrators figures generally works against the singular evil Nazi character, in some ways it still adheres to the model of the evil Nazi in that it allows the artists and the audience to disregard any interaction with the reasons behind participation. There is no backstory to any of these perpetrator figures, and there is thus little incentive to attempt any understanding at why these perpetrators are engaged in these atrocities (other than the obvious sadistic motivations). In this way, the strategy of anonymising the perpetrators can function as another element that contributes to a morally safe narrative of good and evil.

2.2 Excessive Perpetrators

Beyond the model of the evil Nazi, the corpus includes other perpetrator figures that are positioned as excessively immoral. In *Smile through the Tears* and *Medz Yeghern*, Hutu and Turkish perpetrators conform to the Manichean model of the extraordinary evil of Nazis by being depicted as homogeneously malevolent. Both graphic narratives portray the perpetrators as functioning without any sense of moral hesitation. Instead, they are exposed as figures that find sadistic and malicious pleasure in committing atrocities. In *Smile through the Tears*, Hutu characters are constantly and unfavourably contrasted with the Tutsi protagonists. The juxtaposition between these groups is constituted through recurring visual and verbal elements, as the Hutu characters are drawn decidedly different from the Tutsi

characters, while also expressing their invidious characters through speech balloons. *Medz Yeghern* allows for a wider range of characters with various forms of complicity, although the sadistic behaviour of the Turkish perpetrators is reflected in their caricatured rendering.[26] These Hutu and Turkish perpetrator figures adhere to the model of the evil Nazi; not only are they characterised as highly—and unapologetically—immoral, but their visual appearance reflects this depravity.

Rupert Bazambanza's *Smile through the Tears* is fraught with contradictions between the moral message that infuses the work (all Rwandans are equal) and the visual manifestation of victims and perpetrators that seems to constantly underscore how Hutu and Tutsi characters are at opposite ends of a moral scale. Throughout the graphic narrative, Bazambanza draws the Hutu characters decidedly different from the Tutsis. Without any variation, the Hutu are drawn with crude lines and darker skin tones, broader noses, and fuller lips. In contrast, the Tutsi characters are fair skinned, have straight noses, and are generally drawn in a more composed and detailed manner. This difference is not just limited to the depiction of the actors and victims of genocide, as Bazambanza shows the same divisions when drawing children. At the start of the work, Bazambanza traces the ethnic categories back to the Belgian colonisers, showing how the Rwandan were divided based on their physical attributes. However, Bazambanza explicitly states that '[t]hose whose physical characteristics didn't fit into any particular division were ranked according to the number of cattle they owned' (7). Even though Bazambanza acknowledges the fact that the physical attributes were not always that straightforward, he doesn't allow for any visual in-betweenness in his work, as his drawings constantly reassign the categories of Hutu/Tutsi along physical lines.

As the story progresses and Bazambanza details the events leading up to April 1994, this contrast in depiction is increasingly linked to a sharp distinction between innocent and angelic victims, and simple-minded and demonic perpetrators. Bazambanza's story of the perpetual victimisation of the Tutsi—a lineage he traces from 1959 to 1994—culminates in the 1994 genocide. As a survivor and eyewitness, Bazambanza draws the distinctions between perpetrators and victims most sharply when depicting these events. The evil disposition of the Hutu perpetrators can be read from their faces, as Bazambanza draws these characters with angry, twisted, and crude grimaces. Particularly the rank-and-file killers of the Interahamwe

[26] I do not want to imply that photorealistic styles are somehow better equipped at depicting atrocities in graphic narratives than the more impressionist, cartoony, or caricatured styles. On the contrary, impressionist drawing styles can successfully expose and highlight elements that would be difficult to render in a photorealistic style. I use the term 'caricatured' here specifically to designate how the drawings of perpetrators are contrasted with those of the victims.

are often sketchily drawn as grotesque caricatures with enlarged and skewed facial features, so that the monstrosity of their actions is directly reflected in their appearance.

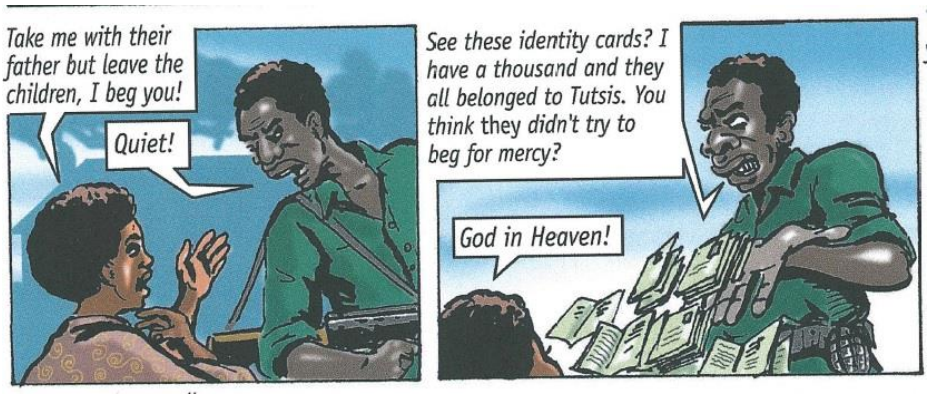

Figure 17

In figure 17, the angry grimace on the face of the perpetrator in the first panel is turned into a distorted and clearly inhuman or bestial form in the second panel. Here, the perpetrator's eyes are turned upwards and his mouth is contorted in an expression of malice, which is supported by the explicit use of derogatory language. Coupled with the low angle perspective that demonstrates the division of power as the perpetrator towers over Rose, these elements are clearly communicating the perpetrator's evil disposition. This demonic imagery is further substantiated by including genocide accoutrements into the images. In the two panels, the perpetrator is depicted with a gun and a hand grenade clipped to his belt, and the identity cards are metonymically linked to the victims. Throughout the graphic narrative perpetrators are often depicted holding machetes dripping with blood, so that the objects used to commit the atrocities become outward extensions of inner depravity.

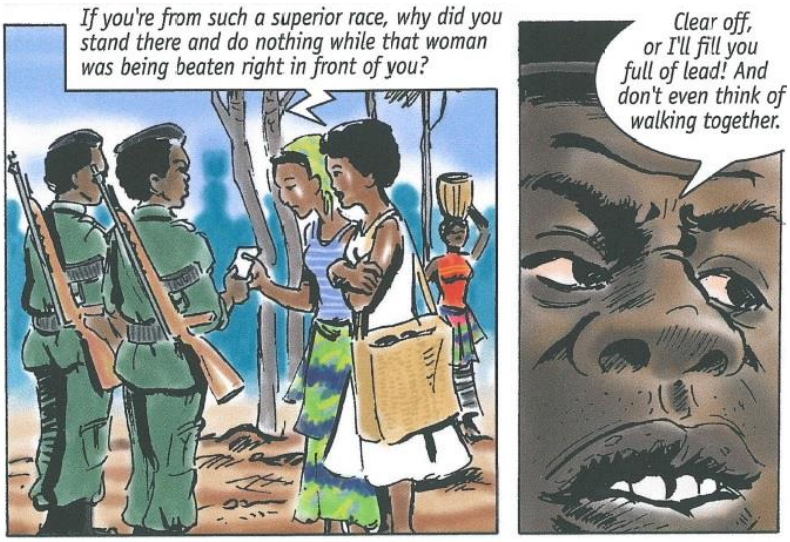

Figure 18

At times Bazambanza places perpetrators squarely at the centre of a panel in grotesque close ups, emphasising their role in the events. In the second panel of figure 18, the framing of the soldier's face puts even more emphasis on the skewed facial features. This image links back to Croci's visual emphasis on the Nazi officer in figure 16, and it shows the appeal of the single, close-up panel to highlight the perpetrator's malevolent disposition. Where the evil character of the officer in *Auschwitz* is underscored by the deceitful and euphemistic language of the Nazi regime, Bazambanza's perpetrator explicitly threatens the Tutsi women. By highlighting the perpetrator's facial features—which are already drawn in a grotesque manner but inevitably become more distorted through their detailed rendition—Bazambanza assigns negative moral value to the appearance of the perpetrators.

This visual strategy of using exaggerated and stereotyped facial features as a manifestation of an inherent depravity echoes the strategies used in the anti-Semitic propaganda of the Nazi regime. The distortion of the Jewish body as a means to assign a sense of otherness was particularly present in Julius Streicher's work for *Der Stürmer*, where Jews were depicted as overweight, balding men with grotesque hooked noses and mouths that are contorted in grimaces of perverted pleasure or spiteful anger. In anti-Semitic propaganda, physiognomy was—and is—used as a sign of pathology (see Gilman 1991, 1998; also see Kotek 2009). This use of visual exaggeration and distortion to expose a moral deficiency is also common in political cartoons. The cartoon's aim is generally 'to expose something bad or shameful rather than to highlight something positive', which explains the use of visual stereotypes and caricature to bring the point across (El Refaie 2009, 176). In responding to the

controversy around the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, Spiegelman similarly argues that cartoon language 'makes use of the discredited pseudo-scientific principles of physiognomy to portray character through a few physical attributes and facial expressions' (2006, 45). This lineage of caricatured figures demonstrates the appeal of visual excess in order to create moral judgment.

Although the format of the graphic narrative is clearly distinct from the (political) cartoon, the examples demonstrate that the use of visual stereotypes provides a quick route to moral labelling. The narrative dichotomy installed by Bazambanza underscores the notion that the Hutu and Tutsi are on opposite ends of the moral scale, but the appearance of the Hutu characters also suggests that this immorality is embodied: depravity can be read from the characters' faces. Bazambanza's reliance on stark differences between the ethnic groups is motivated by a colonial mechanism that precedes the elements of perpetrator kitsch as found in the Nazi figures. Rather than assigning a visual and moral excess to the perpetrators as a means to, belatedly and decidedly, disambiguate between right and wrong, Bazambanza visually repeats the history of colonial coding of Hutu and Tutsi on the basis of physical attributes. In doing so, Bazambanza takes these colonial and racialised codes forward into the realm of perpetrator kitsch.

In a further consolidation of this juxtaposition between the angelic Tutsi and the demonic Hutu, Bazambanza constantly connects the role of the Tutsi women to ideas around purity. The daughter, Hyacinthe Rwanga, resists advances made by French soldiers and opposes sexual blackmail by a Hutu cleric on two occasions, and mother Rose Rwanga stands up for a Hutu woman whose husband beats her and tells off Hutu soldiers for not intervening. In her thesis on the work, which is informed by interviews with Bazambanza, Jessica Silva argues that 'Rupert [Bazambanza] weaved into his narrative a depiction of Rwanda's patriarchal society through the use of charged words such as "honour" and "dishonour" reinforcing gendered notions and expectations of "purity" among both unmarried and married women in Rwandan society' (2009, 25). According to Silva, Bazambanza has worked in these themes of purity to memorialise Hyacinthe and position her as somebody who brings honour to the family. Although these observations are undoubtedly accurate, the emphasis on purity in *Smile through the Tears* is also positioned in direct opposition to the 'impurity' of the Hutu perpetrators. The outcome of the situation between Hyacinthe and the cleric—he will hide her in turn for sexual favours—indeed establishes a moral soundness of Hyacinthe, but it also assigns a moral depravity to the Hutu character. Similar to the model of the evil Nazi, the Hutu

perpetrator is characterised by a sense of sexual perversity. The fact that the sexual proposition is made by a religious figure heightens the dishonourable nature of the request. Comparable to the evil Nazi figures, the sequence employs a sense of sexual deviance to further construct the Hutu perpetrator as corrupted and unprincipled.

Figure 19

Language also plays an important part in the construction of the perpetrator, as Bazambanza makes sure that the evil character of these perpetrators is made apparent through their speech. This leads to transparently malicious and blunt statements similar to the crude remarks about identity cards made by the Hutu perpetrator in the second frame of figure 17. At times Bazambanza resorts to even more direct articulations of the malicious predilections of characters. When Juvenal Habyarimana is appointed as Minister of Defense, his thought balloon—which simply reads 'Heh, heh, heh, heh!' (8)— unambiguously hints to his role in the planning of the genocide. Bazambanza also uses text to emphasise how simple-minded the Hutu perpetrators are. At times, this leads to moments where text is needlessly demonstrative of the image, like when a perpetrator in pursuit of the Rwanga family falls over and hits his head against a tree, exclaiming 'Ohhh these Tutsis are a headache!' (40), or when an Interahamwe member is cleaning his bloody machete while stating that '[d]ay in, day out, all we do is kill more Tutsis, and we still haven't wiped them out! Sheesh!' (56). Figure 19 shows another example of this over-determined coupling of text and image, as two Hutu persecutors are professing and condemning their own imbecility. Their distorted facial features, glaring eyes, crudely drawn nose, and gap-toothed mouths are directly connected to their despicable behaviour. Their inability to catch and murder the Tutsi character Joseph Bitega is celebrated, while the event is also used to demonstrate their shortcomings. These men are thus not only

immoral through their status as perpetrator, but their stupidity is made transparent precisely through their *failure* as perpetrators.

This characterisation of the Hutu perpetrators arguably harks back to racist stereotypes around African or black characters as savages, or stupid and childlike in their simplicity (Nederveen Pieterse 1992; Goings 1994; Turner 1994; Jahoda 1999). In the Manichean contrast that is set up between the two ethnic identities, the Hutu characters are often positioned as the more simple-minded, barbaric and 'beastly' Africans, as opposed to the more civilised and righteous Tutsi. This beastliness is proclaimed most poignantly when a Hutu perpetrator murders his own wife and children after she accuses him of being 'worse than all the beasts of the forest' (60, another animal reference that asks us to consider who is more beastly). The implication here is that the immorality of the Hutu perpetrator can even lead him to murder his own family (and subsequently blame the Tutsi for driving him to that point). Bazambanza further combines the tropes of the savage and simple-minded African character by drawing his Hutu perpetrators as seemingly mindlessly, and gleefully, going about their tasks as rank-and-file killers. Figure 19 further demonstrates this fusion, as the confession of incompetence, which seems to aim for an odd comical note, is simultaneously connected to the barbaric behaviour of the Hutu perpetrators in general (connoted by the machete).

The crude line work of the Hutu perpetrators and the overly demonstrative use of language create an image of Hutu characters as depraved and monstrous. However, some nuancing is necessary here, as a balanced perspective might not be expected or possible in a survivor testimony. Michael A. Chaney argues that 'it is this very Manicheanism of characterization that transforms Bazambanza's traumatic solicitation of memory and redress into an object for visual scrutiny' (2011a, 95). For Chaney, the reiterative logic of trauma becomes apparent through the use of existing (and problematic) iconographic discourses. It is arguably more sensible and productive to read Bazambanza's as a traumatic working-though of the genocidal events, rather than finding faults for including excessive and caricatured perpetrators. In a similar vein, Steven High acknowledges the 'dichotomy between civilized Tutsis and uncivilized Hutus' in Bazambanza's work, but argues that the graphic narrative 'should be read as a subjective first-person account, rather than a comprehensive history' (High 2014, 221). Bazambanza's urge to be a witness to the events, and his aim to commemorate the Rwanga family, have resulted in a graphic narrative that relies heavily on the evil perpetrator model in order to expose the injustices that took place. In exposing these injustices, the graphic narrative squarely places the issue of guilt where it belongs, with

President Juvénal Habyarimana's MRND, Hutu extremists, and militias like the Interahamwe and Impuzamugambi.

I agree with Chaney's argument that the graphic narrative is highly relevant as an object for visual scrutiny, but the story of 'depthless evil of the Hutu and the interminable sanctity of the Tutsi' (Chaney 2011a, 94) constructs a Manichean narrative that ultimately presents an overly simplified moral universe that relies on visual classifications to delineate right and wrong. The international status of the graphic narrative increases exposure to this dichotomised view of the perpetrators and victims, which is not sufficiently contextualised in the work itself. It is Bazambanza's noble aim to 'fight racism and to perpetuate the memory of the Tutsi genocide so that it may never happen again' (n.p.), but it is important to highlight that the graphic narrative fails to address why *people*, rather than depraved and evil figures, become involved in the genocide. In addition to falling back on existing and problematic colonial codes, *Smile through the Tears* relies on common elements of perpetrator kitsch to forcefully put forward a story of Tutsi victimhood. It presents a simplified and distinctly excessive perpetrator figure that remains one-dimensional in his 'depthless evil'.

In contrast, Paolo Cossi's *Medz Yeghern* does not constantly create stark visual oppositions between perpetrators and victims, as it introduces a wider range of characters with various forms of complicity. I will however deal with this work as part of the Manichean tendency as the graphic narrative often presents the perpetrators as particularly sadistic and demonic; the perpetrators are drawn as thoroughly enjoying the acts of violence they are engaged in and their caricatured appearance becomes a pronounced visual manifestation of their malice. Throughout the graphic narrative, Cossi aims to shock the reader into awareness by explicitly displaying the horrors of a genocide that is still underrepresented and contested. In creating this shock effect, Cossi maximises the impact of the content by drawing both victims and perpetrators in a caricatured manner and by emphasising the brutality of the violence. Although Cossi introduces a variety of characters that are all drawn with exaggerated facial features, his use of caricaturing is most pronounced in the depiction of the perpetrators.

Throughout the work, other characters are drawn with enlarged and distinct facial features, but it is in the depiction of the perpetrators that these features become signs of malice and an evil disposition. Perpetrators are drawn with distinctive and hyperbolic facial features, and angered or sadistic facial expressions are expressed by downwards turned eyebrows, enlarged noses, and contorted mouths that display sadistic smiles or screams of anger. Cossi ensures we read the facial features of the perpetrators differently from other

characters, connecting the exaggerated facial features to the excessively violent and sadistic behaviour of these characters. Similar to *Smile through the Tears*, the outward appearance of the perpetrators thus demonstrates the warped morality of these perpetrators. This use of physiognomy often relies on certain exaggerated facial features to assess a character's validity. Similar to the use of the nose as 'one of the central loci of difference in defining the Jew' (Gilman 1998, 74), Cossi draws attention to this particular facial feature in positioning the Turkish perpetrator in stark visual and moral contrast to the victims. One of his strategies to highlight the appearance of the perpetrator is by showing them in profile. These instances of literal and figurative 'profiling' clearly expose the visual differences between Armenian victims and Turkish perpetrators.

Figure 20

Figures 20 and 21, two panels from different points in the story, juxtapose the perpetrator, in both cases placed at the side of the frame, with a group of victims. Cossi maximises these differences through his drawing style and the positioning of the characters. The helpless group of victims—Armenian soldiers in figure 20 and Armenian civilians in figure 21—are drawn with simple lines, as their facial features become more schematic the further away they are. In contrast, the Turkish perpetrators are positioned at the front of the panel, their faces expressive of what could be read as anger or a grim disposition. This framing is further expressed by language in the first example, as the Turkish officer has marched a group of Armenian soldiers to the desert to assassinate them. In bold captions he answers the question

of what they are doing in the desert with an explicit: 'exactly! You'll make a new desert by becoming one!' (15). Cossi uses the profiling of the perpetrators to highlight the squinted eyes, hooked noses, and mouths with the corners turned downwards in an expression of grim determination or moral disengagement. Similarly to *Smile through the Tears*, the facial features are used to create a visual rift between perpetrators and victims. Perpetrators thus become recognisable through their appearance, as their malice can easily be read from their faces.

Figure 21

Figure 20 is followed up by an explicit depiction of the Armenian soldiers being murdered, as Cossi uses a full page to show how the impact of the shooting, bullets entering the bodies and blood littering the page. Figure 21 is followed by several panels depicting hollow-eyed and starving victims being marched off into the desert, where they are kicked, raped, and murdered. The two panels thus set the stage by introducing the main players, victims and perpetrators, through a visual juxtaposition that highlights the spiteful behaviour of a few, targeted against the innocent position of the many. It is noteworthy that there is only one perpetrator in each of the panels. The presence of a single perpetrator substantiates the power relations between the two groups, and their position in the foreground draws more attention to the facial features. In this way, these images of the Turkish perpetrators conform to the model of the evil Nazi, who is often presented as singular source of evil against a group of victims.

This visual skewing of the perpetrator is taken to its visual limits in a panel where a persecutor is depicted as the devil, complete with pointy ears, empty eye sockets and baring his teeth in a feral manner. This panel echoes Croci's drawing of the Nazi perpetrator as Nosferatu, and it demonstrates how existing cultural models of depravity—stereotypical monsters like the vampire and the devil—are used to maximise the impact of the perpetrator characters. Cossi uses the full page to set the stage for a nightmarish collage where the historical figure of Armin Wegner—drawn with less pronounced facial features than the other characters—is surrounded by victims in various daunting guises: hollow-eyed, starving bodies, their heads on stakes, and blood dripping from the panel borders. Here, victims and perpetrators are not visually opposed, as they have both become subjected to a visual treatment that distorts and skews their appearance. Images like these drive home the madness of the genocide in a more effective manner, as in this case the visually skewed universe pertains to all the groups implicated.

The archetypal evil Nazi figure is clearly echoed in the construction of the perpetrators in *Smile through the Tears* and *Medz Yeghern*. The visual manifestation of these characters proves their immorality, which is equally present in the case of the immaculately and rigidly clothed but inwardly depraved Nazi perpetrator. Comparable to the evil Nazi, the graphic narratives follow the narrative premise that the perpetrator is wholly 'other', as neither of the artists allows for much background information on the perpetrator characters, thereby keeping them at a safe distance from becoming too human or ordinary. Instead, the perpetrators in *Smile through the Tears* and *Medz Yeghern* are characterised as depraved and monstrous figures that take a sense of pleasure in killing the victims. This use of perpetrator kitsch also highlights the cleverness of Spiegelman's animal metaphor, as the animal trope to a large extent avoids issues around how to adequately represent the (in)human appearance of persecutors and victims.

However, there are also noteworthy differences between the specific visual articulations of these figures. In the representational schemata, the Nazi attire takes in an important position—the well-cut uniforms communicate power, hierarchy, and organised and systematised violence—but in *Smile through the Tears* uniforms and their implied hierarchical position and totalitarian power are replaced with a more chaotic and visceral type of violence, which further ties in with stereotypes around Africa as a continent of unbridled violence and primitivism. In *Medz Yeghern*, the villainous characters are mostly framed as sadistic, using various tools to inflict torture and pain. In this sense, the perpetrator figures lack the distinct

erotic appeal of the evil Nazi. Although the Hutu and Turkish perpetrators are positioned as malicious, charged with the power over life and death, their appearance does not necessarily conform to the eroticised, sadomasochistic power displays of the cold and calculating Nazi perpetrators. These perpetrators are not eroticised, but their visual and narrative construction certainly appeals to a sense of depravity and otherness, which can become fascinating and spectacular nonetheless.

In considering how *Smile through the Tears* and *Medz Yeghern* match up to the graphic narratives that deal with the Holocaust, the question can be posed whether the African and Turkish perpetrators are presented in a manner that is perhaps even *more* visually stereotyped than Nazi figures in graphic narratives. In the graphic novels that deal with the Holocaust, the Nazi perpetrators are certainly shown as menacing and threatening figures, but these works often negate the culturally more persistent strategies of physiognomy and (erotic) spectacles of depravity in favour of strategies that anonymise and obscure.

In contrast, the non-western perpetrators in *Smile through the Tears* and *Medz Yeghern* are drawn in a highly caricatured manner, and there is a distinct and continued emphasis on the blatant immorality of the Hutu and Turkish perpetrators. This reliance on visual stereotyping and notions of excess could be explained by the fact that these are lesser known genocides, so there is more of an incentive to shock the audience into awareness by conveying the brutalities in the starkest manner possible in order to fully address the issue of guilt. Following this line of thinking, the caricatured Hutu and Turkish perpetrators ultimately generate more empathy for the (perhaps underrepresented) plight of the Tutsi and Armenian victims of genocide. Another possible reason for this discrepancy is the more regrettable observation that moral and visual stereotypes are more common when dealing with non-white and non-western characters, particularly if these characters are on the wrong moral side of history.[27]

Finally, a noteworthy figure amidst these excessive perpetrators is the token righteous character. This character is introduced to ostensibly balance the moral representation of the perpetrators, but ends up as the exception that proves the rule. In *Smile through the Tears*, the token righteous figure is briefly introduced in two panels at the outbreak of the genocide, but features more extensively at the end of the narrative, after the genocidal events have transpired. As Rose Rwanga is laying flowers at the grave of her daughter Hyacinthe, her friend

[27] For more on the use of visual and moral stereotypes in representing non-western and non-white characters see for instance JanMohamed 1985; Nederveen Pieterse 1992; Jahoda 1999; Mengara 2001.

discovers and apprehends ‘a Hutu Interahamwe’ (61) spying on her through the bushes. This man turns out to be Canisius, a Hutu character who, at an earlier point in the narrative, advised the Rwanga family to flee. His discovery triggers a page-long morality tale where Bazambanza uses Rose as a mouthpiece for his message of equality, mutual understanding, and allowing the official path of justice to take its course. Where Rose’s friend voices the standpoint that all Hutu are guilty (it remains unclear whether Canisius participated in the events, although the fact that he is alive arguably implies that he has been involved in some way), Rose retorts that ‘I was always against Rwandans being judged along ethnic lines. For me, no one should have to pay for someone else’s sins’ (62). The text balloons go on to warn the victims against retaliating when led by their anger, as that would only lead to more bloodshed. The lesson that needs to be drawn from the horrors is that ‘none of us has the right to take the law into our own hands. We must let justice take its course. After all, impunity is what made the genocide possible in the first place’(62). In a caption positioned above the image of Rose, her friends, and Canisius, Bazambanza drives the main moral message home: ‘All of Rwanda’s ethnic groups must strive to understand each other if we want to live together. As a wise man once said: You can live together like intelligent creatures, or die together like fools! It’s diversity that makes life so interesting’ (62). These overt moral appeals to the celebration of diversity and the importance of equality run as a verbal thread throughout the work. However, they cannot override the visual contrast between the groups and it is noteworthy that only the Tutsi characters voice these moral messages, contributing once more to their moral sanctity. The figure of Canisius is used in an attempt to provide some ideological balance—or to ward off criticism that the graphic narrative is too biased—but in its singular instance the token character only reinstates the Manichean mechanism.

Medz Yeghern also introduces an exemplary good person from the persecutor community: the Turkish Murat, a bystander who helps the Armenian Aram to escape. Cossi introduces a range of characters, some of whom are not easily classifiable as good or bad, like the elusive Nicolaj. He is a cynical swindler who brings the Armenian protagonist Aram to Murat, but he also profits from the genocide by taking money from European Armenians to help their family members. Cossi leaves it to the righteous Murat, a character that explicitly labels himself as a Turk, to balance the depiction of the Turkish perpetrators by stating that ‘the fact that some Turks are involved in something this horrible doesn’t mean that all Turks hate Armenians!’(68). Murat is dedicated to helping Aram, killing two soldiers along the way and fighting on the side of the Armenian rebels after they manage to escape. Unlike the more

ambiguous role played by Canisius in *Smile through the Tears*, Murat is more explicitly positioned as a bystander to the genocidal atrocities. However, in both cases the token good characters are connected to the perpetrators through their ethnic or national identity, although they decisively distance themselves from their behaviour.

This outsider position upholds the borders between bad and good 'others'. Canisius and Murat are the sole exceptions that should provide ideological balance, but they inevitably end up demonstrating and reinforcing the dichotomy between innocent victims and guilty and evil perpetrators. These figures thus function as 'procataleptic disclaimers' (Reisigl and Wodak 2000): utterances (Reisigl and Wodak focus on verbal statements, but I surmise that visual utterances/rhetoric can have a similar function) that attempt to pre-empt expected critique while upholding a positive self-presentation. The token righteous figures also echo what Teun A. van Dijk, in his analyses of racist discourses, has labelled 'Apparent Concession': semantic constructions that follow the logic of 'some of them are nice/smart, but in general…' (van Dijk 2000 and 2002). These types of disclaimers simultaneously feature a positive element about 'us', or in this case the artist/graphic narrative ('this is not a racist or biased work'), while further substantiating a negative presentation of the other. However, the graphic narratives that present excessive perpetrator figures do not hesitate to explore what the 'in general' part of the concession entails, thereby creating an even starker opposition between the exception and the rule.

What the examples demonstrate is that the excess related to these characters, which is displayed by their grotesque actions and appearance, inevitably leads to a one-dimensionality of characters that does not further a more comprehensive understanding of the genocidal events. The perpetrators remain at a narrative and visual distance, as the graphic narratives deny any narrative viewpoint on the feelings or motivations of the perpetrators, and their visual construction places them firmly into the realm of the 'other'. The kitsch that is connected to the moralisation of perpetrator does not require an investment on the part of the reader, and it closes off a space to reflexively interact with the genocide narrative. On the contrary, the comfortable homogeneity (both visually, morally, and narratively) of these figures presents the readers with the dangerously simplistic but highly comfortable notion of the perpetrator as an inhuman, monstrous, and perverted figure.

2.3 Grey Areas and Nuancing Gestures

There are also graphic narratives that move more towards the other end of the spectrum, including 'nuancing gestures' that are aimed at presenting a more complex representation of perpetrator figures. As pointed out before, *Medz Yeghern* includes some of these nuancing gestures, but the graphic narratives discussed here, *The Search* and *Deogratias*, distinguish themselves through their visual rendering of perpetrators and a more thorough exploration of why people commit genocide. In this way, they construct a universe where victims and perpetrators are aligned in being human, and they productively explore moments of moral decisions without resorting to dichotomies of good and evil.

In *The Search*, these nuancing gestures have a strong educational backdrop, as the graphic novel highlights different positions in wartime through panels that encapsulate moral choices. The educational thrust of *The Search* is perhaps articulated most clearly in its treatment of the different wartime positions. The graphic novel incorporates a range of characters with varying forms of involvement in the events. Some of the minor characters—often unnamed and brought forth in singular instances—are used to explore perpetrator and bystander behaviour and involvement. One of the characters, a police officer and the father of the Dutch girl Helena, who is good friends with the Jewish Esther, aids in the transportation of Esther's parents, while also bringing Esther to a safe place (an event that is explored more in detail in *A Family Secret*, the first graphic novel made by Eric Heuvel in cooperation with the Anne Frank Foundation). In Auschwitz, a guard turns a blind eye when the character Bob finds a piece of bread during his work in the Kanada commando. Heuvel employs uniformity in the visual rendering of his characters, as everybody is drawn in the clear line style and with similar (facial) features. Certain Nazi perpetrators are drawn with angry grimaces, but their rendering is less caricatured and less contrasted in relation to the other characters. Rather than portraying all perpetrators as vicious killers, *The Search* explicitly points out different types of involvement. For instance, one of the panels shows two men working on the train to Westerbork, conversing about their reasons for staying on. They mention financial motivations and are reasoning along the lines of 'if we don't do it, somebody else will'.

Throughout the work, *The Search* uses single panels or short sequences to confront the reader with moral decisions or difficulties in dealing with perpetrator duties. For instance, three panels are used to introduce and show the horror of the executions committed by the *Einsatzgruppen*, while also including three possible reactions (see figure 22). These three

panels manage to give us essential information about the *Einsatzgruppen* while conveying the horrors and demonstrating a variety in the soldiers' reactions. Heuvel uses many emotion lines to clarify what characters are feeling. The squiggles, twirls, droplets, and spirals above and near the characters' faces indicate and emphasise a variety of emotions throughout the work, and its use ties in with the clear line style that we know from Hergé. These emotion lines, or 'pictorial runes' (Forceville 2011) are present in the last panel, but they are also often used for groups, as the little droplets in the first panel show. The first two panels introduce the killing units through the blue caption, while the leader on the right exclaims that the soldiers are doing it for the Führer and fatherland. The second, wordless, panel conveys the fear through the facial expressions and the position of the bodies. In addition, the Jewish victims are also spatially boxed into the panel, which aptly communicates their fear and precarious position.

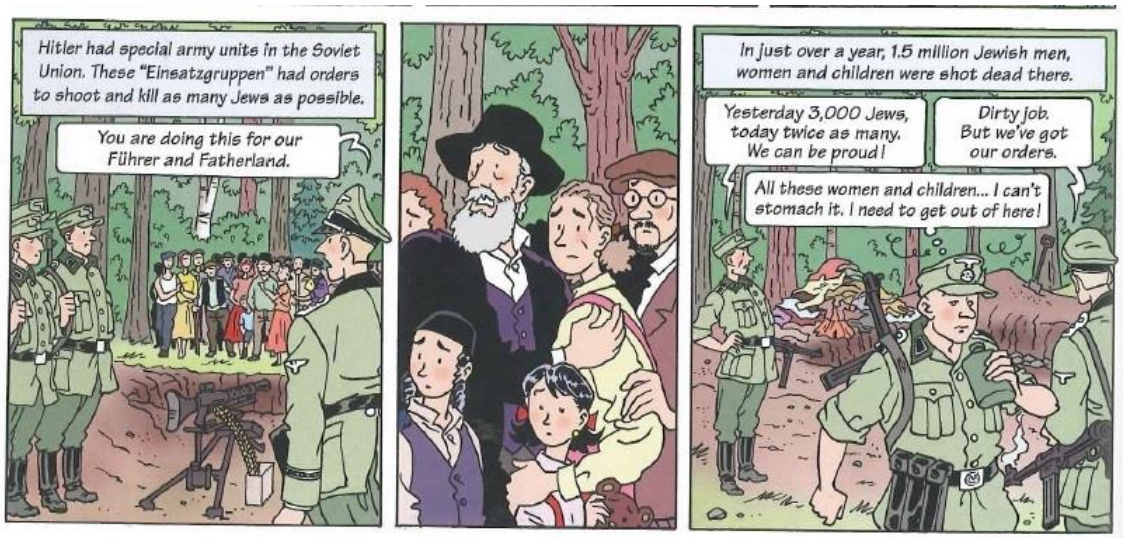

Figure 22

In the final panel of this short sequence, the caption explains the task of the killing units, while the pile of clothes functions as a clear visual marker of the atrocities committed. In this last panel, the three soldiers take in different positions with regard to their involvement in the events. The soldier on the left is positioned as somebody without moral hesitation, as he boasts about the numbers killed, professing that they can be proud of their accomplishments. The soldier on the right verbalises the rhetoric of obedience and hierarchy, stating that it isn't a pleasant job, but that they are doing their duty. The soldier that is visually highlighted by being placed in the middle voices his difficulties with the task in a thought balloon: 'All those women and children…I can't stomach it. I need to get out of here!' (40). This type of moral

hesitation is further underscored by the twirls above his head, signalling confusion and emotional distress.

These three panels echo Christopher Browning's work on the Order Police in *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992). In his book, Browning charts how a battalion of ordinary, working class men could turn into a group of killers, taking special note of the pressures of conformity and obedience to authority. Browning investigates how committing horrible acts eventually became part of a routine, exploring the different ways of coping with the task as well as detailing strategies of evasion. In a dialogue with his work, the three soldiers in figure 22 articulate some of the positions explored in *Ordinary Men*. The last panel demonstrates Browning's argument that these were not sadistic and evil perpetrators but ordinary men who struggled to carry out their orders. It also highlights that there was not necessarily a uniform response to the atrocities committed. Where the graphic narratives that follow the Manichean model uncritically present the perpetrators as similar in their motivation and disposition, this short sequence complicates a sense of homogeneity in the perpetrator role. Note also how the soldier is carrying a flask, a reference to the alcohol supplied to keep the men going. Browning's argument that we need to try and understand the perpetrators in human terms is thus worked into this three panel sequence that portrays the horrors, while also complicating the notion of uniformity in the moral make-up of the perpetrators.

Similar to earlier mentioned strategy of negating the individuality of Nazi figures as employed in *Maus* and *Yossel*, *The Search* often obscures the faces of the persecutors. There are several panels—or sequences, like the page using the doll figure (see figure 9 in chapter one)—that show the Nazis from the back, or with their faces obscured by their caps or glasses. Faces with angry grimaces are included throughout the narrative, but more often than not we do not see the perpetrator in full. Main actors like Adolf Eichmann and Rudolf Höss are visually singled out and introduced, but the rank-and-file killers remain anonymous. As proposed before, this obscured characterisation arguably denies the possibility of turning the perpetrators into a spectacle, as the visual evasion shows the persecutors as interchangeable rather than sadistic psychopaths. Although the Nazi persecutors are undoubtedly part of the same human universe as the victims—they are by no means portrayed as extraordinary or aberrant—they are not given a specific, individual identity.

In contrast to this reading, the lack of individuality could also be seen to prevent a further examination of why perpetrators engage in violence, as the anonymising strategy

denies a narrative perspective on these characters. However, *The Search* complements these instances of negating the individuality of the rank-and-file killers with sufficient emphasis on the fact that there are different levels of perpetrator involvement and forms of complicity. Rather than using the anonymising strategy to avoid complex questions around participation, *The Search* tackles these issues head on, while consciously responding to the model of the fetishised evil Nazi. The educational context also becomes poignant here, as explicit depictions of perpetrators and perpetrator behaviour might lead to negative responses in the classroom or could lead to an inappropriate fascination with the perpetrator figure. One could argue that *The Search*'s use in education creates a safer narrative wherein violence and perpetrator depiction are softened for the benefits of the readers. Although this might be the case, a side effect is that the graphic narrative does not allow a sensationalised perception of the perpetrator. In addition, by not portraying the Nazis in an excessive manner, there is a more sustained focus on the victim experience.

The arrival of one of the protagonists, Bob, at Auschwitz further demonstrates this anonymising visual strategy, as both Nazis and camp inmates are portrayed in indirect ways (see figure 23). Whether seen from the back, standing in the shadow, or too far away to make out their features, the perpetrators are not given any individual focus. Even the dogs are not depicted fully. There is one guard on the left hand side of the panel that is depicted with more detail, his face showing an angry grimace, but on the whole the aggressive retort of one of the other guards and the boldly lettered barking of the dogs provides us with enough information about the intimidation exerted. The panel is set up in a way that the focus is directed towards the three figures on the train, whose helpless position is further underscored by Bob's father raising his hand. The page follows up on this obscured characterisation, as three out of the next four panels depicting perpetrators do not show their faces. Two pages later, the sequence with the doll figure is constructed in a similar way, with the victim experience taking the centre stage and the perpetrators performing as anonymous figures that facilitate the existence of camp universe. *The Search* doesn't allow the images of perpetrators to be turned into a spectacle of evil, thereby creating a narrative that could paradoxically enough be considered both educationally safe as well as narratively complex. By including moments of moral hesitation and by demonstrating different types of perpetrators with various levels of complicity, *The Search* productively questions (visual) dichotomies of right and wrong.

Figure 23

Does this then mean that *The Search* avoids all 'dangers' of kitsch in its treatment of the Nazis? Similar to the graphic narratives with a Manichean representation of perpetrators, *The Search* can also be connected to notions of kitsch and excess. Art Spiegelman implicitly critiques the work in the context of Holokitsch and the colonisation of the Holocaust by comics. In the same breath, Spiegelman commends *The Search* as an earnest work drawn in a pleasant style, and argues that 'some of these projects strike me as if they were trying to set my work right by smoothing down the rough edges, by making a more didactic, more sentimental, more slickly drawn Holocaust comic book' (Spiegelman 2011, 127). Spiegelman worries about the kitschification of the Holocaust in contemporary culture and articulates this more explicitly in the context of comics by setting his own work apart from his successors. These works (like *The Search*) present a more stylised and educationally inclined depiction of the Holocaust, and in doing so aestheticise and sentimentalise primarily Jewish suffering, according to Spiegelman.

The educational thrust of *The Search* has resulted in a style that is aesthetically pleasing, with its clear lines and flattening colours, and the narrative shies away from exploring the full depth of the horrors and the violence committed. If the clear line style 'seems to deny the materiality of the comics page' (Hatfield 2005, 60), the question is whether this crisp and seemingly simplified style is suitable for the depiction of genocide. The clear line style might present a closed world in which the brutalities of reality are placated through the smoothness

of the line work.[28] This notion of an aesthetic sanitising of the event is clearly also Spiegelman's problem with the slickness of these and other works. However, the depiction of perpetrators opens up a space to contemplate why people—with various forms of complicity—become involved in the genocidal mechanism. So although *The Search* might be presented in an easily accessible drawing style with a relatively straightforward narrative—as opposed to Spiegelman's denser style and multi-layered approach—it doesn't eschew important and potentially controversial debates around perpetrator involvement. In this sense, the line work might actually aid the involvement in the story, which will make it easier to address these morally difficult topics.

The premise that there are different perpetrator positions and forms of complicity within the events of the Holocaust is also explicitly taken up in Reinhard Kleist's *The Boxer* (2014), a Holocaust graphic narrative placed on the periphery of the corpus. The graphic narrative explores Primo Levi's notion of 'the grey zone', a term from *The Drowned and the Saved* (originally published in 1986) that describes the camp universe in which victims are engaged in various degrees of (forced) complicity. Levi details how the structure of the Lager creates divides between the privileged and the unprivileged, and between newcomers and seniors. In this warped universe of brutality, different forms of complicity and collaboration arise and in his work Levi asks us to consider the different positions, from low-ranking inmates that would take on extra jobs to increase their food intake to those who occupied 'commanding positions', like the *Kapos*. Levi deals with questions of guilt and responsibility, quick to absolve 'all those whose concurrence in the guilt was minimal and for whom coercion was of the highest degree' (1989, 44) but approaching the higher ranking forms of complicity in a more tentative and critical manner. Levi's notion of the grey zone has been instrumental in considering the complex moral relations of the camp universe, and allowing for the idea of an in-between space that counters clear oppositions between good and evil.

The Boxer, based on the biography of Hertzko Haft, details how Haft survived the horrors of the camps through his bonds with a foreman and an SS officer. The protection given to Haft by the camp guard Schneider leads to his role as a boxer in make-shift boxing games

[28] The pioneer of the clear line, Hergé, worked for the Nazi collaborative newspaper *Le Soir* and used anti-Semitic caricatures in, among others, *The Shooting Star* (also see Frey 2008a on *Flight 714*). This further raises the question of the suitability of the style for a topic like the Holocaust. South-African comic artists Joe Dog and Konradski (Anton Kannemeyer and Conrad Botes) use the clear line style to deal with (Hergé's) racism, thereby exploiting the flatness and smoothness of the work as a counterpoint to poignant issues around racial violence, visual stereotyping, and Afrikaner history. See their comics anthology *Bittercomix*, started in 1992 (an overview is given in *The Big Bad Bittercomix Handbook*, 2006), and *Pappa in Afrika* (2010).

between prisoners, staged for the entertainment of camp personnel. Haft knows what is meant by 'when one of you can't fight any longer' and in this horrid game of survival several other prisoners who are not so lucky find their death in the gas chambers, or are shot immediately after the game. By showing gradations of cooperation and scheming between prisoners and Germans, as well as the survival instinct that takes hold of people, Haft's story works against clear binary oppositions between innocent victims and evil perpetrators. Visually, the characters are drawn with the same black and white expressive ink style. Kleist does not create a visual rift between the different characters, although he uses more line work to establish the gaunt faces of the prisoners.

The figure of Mischa, an acquaintance of Haft who has become a *Kapo* and treats Haft particularly brutally, is another example highlighted by Kleist to point out the spaces in between right and wrong. Mischa embodies the notion of the grey zone, as his complicity with the Nazi regime is motivated by a (marginally) better treatment and a greater chance at survival. When Haft confronts Mischa after the war, the former *Kapo* pleads that he was only trying to survive and that 'I thought they'd spare me if I acted like them . . . The only thing that mattered was staying alive' (107). In return, Mischa confronts Hertzko with the fact that they are not that different: he too beat up weak and vulnerable prisoners in the staged boxing games in order to save his own life. The meeting of the two men poignantly underscores the fact that survival was often predicated on the mistreatment of others. Hertzko's narrative position as a complex and at times troublesome character, not unlike Vladek Spiegelman, is further emphasised when he attempts to shoot Mischa. The juxtaposition between the cowering and terrified Mischa, who is begging for his life, and the ruthless and angry Hertzko invites readers to negotiate the complex moralities of survivor trauma and degrees of complicity.

In terms of exploring the complicity and ordinariness of genocide perpetrators outside of the context of the Holocaust, *Deogratias* functions as a radical and uncomfortable graphic narrative. The work presents us with a variety of characters that are implicated in the genocide in different ways and these characters display a range of behaviour and levels of complicity that demonstrate that good and bad decisions are not always that easily discernible. However, our view of perpetrators is tested to its limits through the protagonist, whose complicity in the genocide is unexpected given our narrative involvement with the character. Deogratias is presented as an innocent and ordinary teenager with a healthy dose of sexual curiosity. From the start, the work juxtaposes pre- and post-genocide Deogratias in a way that makes it clear

that something bad has happened. However, it isn't until the final pages that we learn the extent of Deogratias' troubled nature. By this point, Deogratias has also confessed to his quest for revenge, which gives us a double shock: not only is Deogratias complicit in the genocide, but he has also plotted to kill everyone involved in the traumatic events. This realisation throws the notion of an adolescent innocence into sharp relief, while we are narratively still firmly connected to the protagonist. The moral discomfort triggered by the protagonist arguably also extends to our own western complicity. Kate Polak argues that by not having access to the subjective experiences of a victim but that of a perpetrator, the graphic narrative suggests that western audiences are closer to the position of the bystander than that of the victims, so that '[b]y invoking empathetic identification with a perpetrator, to some extent Stassen is suggesting a broader complicity in the genocide than simply those hundreds of thousands that did the killing' (2014, n.p.).

Visually, Stassen doesn't distinguish between victims and perpetrators or Hutu and Tutsi. Where in *Smile through the Tears* the two groups are clearly delineated, *Deogratias* introduces a range of Rwandan and white characters that are not always that easily pigeonholed. A panel showing Deogratias and his two friends, Apollinaria and Benina, at school aligns the three characters, clearly displaying that there are no visual differences to be seen. Apollinaria's skin tone is noticeably lighter than that of her friends, but this is because her father is the white missionary Father Stanislas, rather than her being a Tutsi. Stassen further underlines this visual indistinction between Hutu and Tutsi by having a western outsider ask Deogratias to which ethnic group he belongs. His retort—'No one but whites asks questions like that' (36)—displays an indifference to these categories (an indifference that may be related to the views of a younger generation).[29] In a similar vein, Stassen doesn't create visual juxtapositions between victims and perpetrators. There are various characters that are drawn in a more caricatured manner than the simple line work of Deogratias and his friends, but these characters are linked to different sides in the genocide. In this way, the RPF soldier Bosco and Interahamwe leader Julius—two figures from opposing camps—are not overdetermined by their visual appearance. If anything, Stassen creates a visual distinction between adults and children. The innocence of the children is conveyed through the simple line work, whereas the

[29] This narrative moment of disambiguation and ethnic labelling returns, in different formats, throughout the cultural discourse on the Rwandan genocide. Similar to the example mentioned here, Terry George's *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) includes a white outsider enquiring about ethnic categories, leading to a comparative response that it is hard to see any differences. Another variation on this type of disambiguation is the setting of the classroom where children are asked to confirm their ethnicity, which is included in *Smile through the Tears* and *Deogratias*.

adults often look more caricatured through more detailed line work and skewed facial features.

The figures around Deogratias make for a varied display of human traits. The three main white characters all embody different aspects of the outsider position to the conflict. The unnamed French sergeant is an unsympathetic character that aids Hutu perpetrators by allowing them to flee through the *Zone Turquoise*, while also protecting Deogratias from his fellow Interahamwe. Father Stanislas's two-faced behaviour is exhibited in his fathering a child but not openly acknowledging it, and by fleeing Rwanda at the first opportunity. Brother Philip functions as a somewhat ignorant but overly friendly, moral, and genuinely interested figure, not unlike the token righteous characters in the aforementioned graphic narratives. The Rwandan characters are similarly varied. The religiously devout Apollinaria is juxtaposed with her feistier sister Benina and her mother Venetia, who prostitutes to make money for the girls. Augustine is a friendly character adamant to protect Venetia and her daughters, something he sacrifices his life for at the end of the work. Interahamwe member Julius is menacing and threatening and RPF soldier Bosco seems to have lost his faith in Rwanda after the genocidal events. It is this multiplicity of characters, all named and with distinct individual identities and character traits, that works against clear cut notions of morally right and wrong behaviour. The characters demonstrate a diversity of Rwandan society before the genocide, while also highlighting different positions and levels of complicity during and after the genocide.

It is important to reinforce that none of the graphic narratives that include nuancing gestures absolves perpetrators from their responsibilities or the question of guilt. Whether immediately involved in the brutalities or a small cog in a larger mechanism, the works do not attempt to mitigate the perpetrators' actions. However, there is an active attempt to move beyond the model of the evil perpetrator in order to explore how and why people become involved in genocide, or alternatively, how victims are able to survive the horrors. The graphic narratives show that exploring grey zones does not jeopardise the victim position. If anything, showing what victims had to resort to in order to survive, particularly in *Maus* and *Deogratias*, only demonstrates how destructive the genocidal system is. In this sense, notions of excess or slickness are counteracted by the ways in which these works confront difficult truths: that perpetrators are humans and that victims are not necessarily saintly.

2.4 Sacco: Negotiating the Two Tendencies

In this last part of the chapter, I demonstrate how *Safe Area Goražde* combines the two models I have underlined, presenting a complex mix of approaches to perpetrator figures. Throughout his work, Sacco uses several of the strategies outlined above to engage with the role of Serb perpetrators in the Bosnian War. In doing so, Sacco is attempting to move away from kitsch when dealing with the perpetrator side of the conflict, but at the same time his work still relies on some of the recurring elements used in perpetrator kitsch. This complex mix runs throughout the graphic narrative, and it is poignantly demonstrated in the sequence titled 'Around Goražde: Part I' (109). For many of the harrowing witness accounts, Sacco changes his panel borders to black and tones down his more cartoony and exuberant style, adding a sense of gravitas to the witness narratives. In the 'Around Goražde' sequence, Sacco details the story of Rasim, a Muslim refugee from Visegrád who witnessed the massacre of Muslim families by Serb forces in the spring of 1992. After seeing these horrors, Rasim is beaten up and escorted out of his house by Serb troops, and a former neighbour attempts to help him flee. Throughout this sequence, Sacco juxtaposes past and present by switching between Rasim's story and panels of the present-day Rasim recounting his experiences.

Over the course of eight pages, Sacco obscures the faces of the perpetrators in a variety of ways, but he also draws them as menacing figures that sadistically enjoy carrying out the atrocities. On the second and third page of the sequence, Sacco uses distancing strategies such as drawing the events from a higher angle—which does not allow for full view of the individual faces—portraying the perpetrators with closed or squinting eyes, and showing these figures from the back (see figure 24). In contrast, the faces of the Muslim victims are depicted with more detail and pathos, particularly in the penultimate panel of the page. The anonymity of the perpetrators is further contrasted with the individuality of eyewitness Rasim, whose recurring appearance and narrative voice functions as a counterweight to any denialist discourses (Sacco includes an explicit affirmation of Rasim's witness position in the last panel on the first page). In this sequence, Sacco's obscuring strategies could function as nuancing gestures, as no evil, individualised perpetrators are singled out, and their appearance is not markedly different from that of the victims.

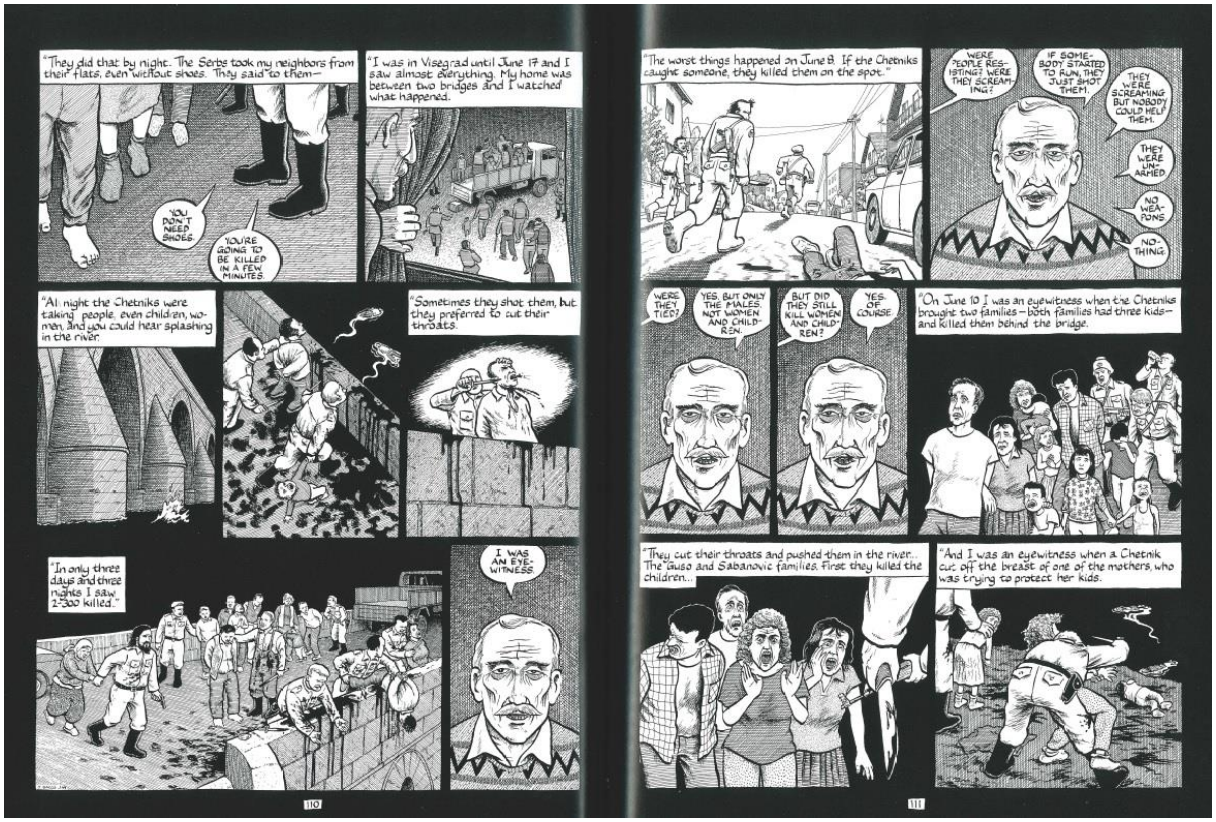

Figure 24

However, Sacco's strategies of obscuring the eyes of perpetrators could also be interpreted in a different light when we consider his thoughts on dealing with the moralisation of perpetrators. In an interview, Sacco admits that he finds it difficult to 'draw ordinary people doing atrocious things' (Morton 2012, n.p.). Sacco states that he considers it a challenge to draw the eyes of perpetrators when they are committing horrible acts. Although Sacco acknowledges that perpetrators are not necessarily always sadists, he will more often than not draw them as such, as it provides an easier visual route. Taking this confession into account, Sacco's visual strategies of evasion, and the obscuring of the eyes, can also be read as an unwillingness to engage with more complex questions around perpetrators' actions. Hillary Chute draws attention to Sacco's vision of the act of drawing as a form of inhabiting other people's bodies. Chute poses that '[d]rawing someone carefully is a form of dwelling . . . in the space of that person's body, taking on their range of postures that themselves reflect experience' (2016, 249). Inhabiting his subjects, and thereby engaging with their narrative perspective, provides moral difficulties when having to embody a perpetrator position, which is why Sacco chooses to minimise his interaction with these figures. Where *The Search*

complements the obscuring strategies with panels that analyse different perpetrator positions, attempting to understand their motivation and responses, Sacco tends to quite uniformly draw the Serb perpetrators as one-dimensional figures. The eyes form the connection with the humanity of the perpetrators and by not showing them, Sacco can evade the motivations behind their behaviour.

In contrast, Sacco seems to have fewer qualms when drawing the perpetrators' mouths. The fourth and fifth page of Rasim's sequence include two panels that show the perpetrators with open mouths, either screaming threats at Rasim or, heads tilted back and eyes closed, drawn in the act of maliciously laughing at the expense of the victims. This focus on the perpetrators' mouths returns throughout the graphic narrative, and it seems to provide Sacco with a visually more comfortable route to engage with the perpetrators' behaviour. Admittedly, Sacco also uses this visual strategy for other characters, as he similarly draws attention to the mouths of the victims. The difference is that where the open mouths connote a sense of menace and sadistic pleasure in the perpetrators, the mouths of the Bosnian Muslim characters work in conjunction with their eyes, which are not obscured, to fully render their agony and horror. The penultimate panel of figure 24 shows this opposition between obscured perpetrators—accoutrements are used as a sign of the atrocities—and the individual victims. This detailed rendering of the victims and Sacco's interviewee is arguably aimed at giving a sense of humanity and individuality back to the victims of the atrocities. By denying a full view of the perpetrators in favour of the visual manifestation of the victims, Sacco re-humanises those who have been dehumanised through the war, and individualises those who have been subsumed in the abstracted numbers of global news coverage (Walker 2012; Dong 2015; Chute 2016).

Rasim's story also features his Serb neighbour who attempts to help him escape an imminent death. While Rasim is being threatened to be killed, this man manages to put in a good word for him, thereby thwarting his death sentence. In this sequence, this figure seems to conform to the tendency to put forward an exemplary good person from the persecutor community as a means to provide a sense of ideological balance. In the graphic narratives that propose a Manichean model, this righteous person from the persecutor side ultimately proves the rule that the perpetrators are inherently depraved, whereas Sacco's work, and the example of the helpful Serb neighbour, does not completely follow this narrative set-up. Firstly, the neighbour is not the singular exception to the rule, as there are more examples of cooperation between Serbs and Muslims throughout the work. In addition, unlike Canisius and

Murat, Rasim's neighbour does not make overt statements about his righteousness or his morally exceptional status as a Serb. Where the exemplary righteous figures in *Smile through the Tears* and *Medz Yeghern* are positioned as outsiders to the persecutor community, Rasim's neighbour is positioned as complicit in the round up of Muslims, and his soldier's attire and rifle hint at the fact that he plays an active role in the atrocities. In this way, Sacco proposes a morally more ambiguous version of the token good person. Because Rasim's neighbour is not the only 'good Serb' in the work, and positioned as playing an active part in the persecutor community, the figure is less clearly installed as the moral exception that ultimately proves the rule.

To place Rasim's sequence in the context of the overall work, and to understand why the graphic narrative does not neatly fit in to either of the perpetrator models—instead proposing a complex mix of approaches to the persecutors—three interlinked elements warrant further investigation: the book's narrative structure, the continuous emphasis on the broken bonds of brotherhood and friendship, and Sacco's self-reflexive stance towards his role as a graphic journalist. These three narrative strategies work together in complicating morally straightforward categorisations of perpetrators, but they also demonstrate how Sacco is reluctant to engage further with the narrative perspective of the perpetrators.

Rather than providing a linear and straightforward narrative, *Safe Area Goražde* is characterised by an episodic structure in which personal reflections, witness narratives, and historical context are juxtaposed. The work's structure 'visualizes multiple narrators and narratives' (Dong 2015, 42), and by shifting between different narrative sequences, and narrators with different wartime positions—ranging from students, soldiers, to doctors and nurses—Sacco slowly pieces together a rich and detailed image of the enclave's history, its inhabitants, and a wider historical perspective on the war in Eastern Bosnia. As an embedded journalist, Sacco lives and befriends several of Goražde's residents and details conversations while also interspersing the present-day episodes with eyewitness interviews that further explore the events during the war. By moving back and forth between past and present, but also between different stories and narrative perspectives, the graphic narrative denies a simplified reading of the war while also working against a singular and closed storyline.

Although Sacco focuses predominantly on the stories of Bosnian Muslims, the emphasis on different narrators and their stories demonstrates the premise that there are always multiple viewpoints to take into account when dealing with historical events. Sacco further establishes this point by including the story of a Serb, Veljko, who decides to stay in

Goražde. Veljko details how he is harassed by the Serb troops, who terrorise him for not leaving the enclave (and ostensibly for not choosing sides). His witness account also provides some further insight into the retaliation aimed at Bosnian Serbs and their properties; many houses were burned and Veljko explains how Muslim refugees forced remaining ordinary Serbs out of their houses (155-159). The sequence is the only direct representation of a Serb witness account, and although it functions as a small nuancing gesture, it demonstrates that ordinary Serbs did not necessarily endorse the behaviour of the troops. Similar to the neighbour in Rasim's story, Veljko could function as an exemplary good Serb. The fact that he is the only Serb directly interviewed by Sacco makes his testimony as an atypical character that is linked to the persecutor community more pronounced. Unlike Rasim's neighbour, Veljko is not an active participant in the atrocities, and his story—particularly the fact that he too is terrorised by the Serbs—positions him more clearly as the one exception that proves the rule. However, although Sacco is avowedly biased and more concerned about the Bosnian side of the war, he still counters the notion of one token good Serb (and evil other Serbs) by subtle references throughout his graphic narrative.

One of these subtle references can be found in the recurring theme of the sudden and painful disintegration of friendship bonds. Early in the story, Sacco's translator and friend Edin details childhood memories which are characterised by the harmonious co-existence of the mixed population under Tito's rule in Yugoslavia. The breakdown of these seemingly stable social bonds during the war is mourned by the witnesses at several points in the graphic narrative. In these witness accounts, there is a strong sense of exasperation, anger, and disbelief that former friendship bonds and neighbourly relations do not seem to count for much during the war. Sacco emphasises the sense of betrayal felt by the Bosnian Muslims, and he explores his interviewees' thoughts about a possible future with the Serbs under the heading 'Can you live with the Serbs again?' (160). By emphasising how different ethnic groups lived together peacefully before the war, and by repeatedly addressing the disintegration of these social bonds, Sacco again proposes a complex negotiation between nuancing the contrasts between Muslims and Serbs, and viewing the Serb community as distinctly other. On the one hand, the premise that former friends and neighbours could turn on you—even taking up the role of perpetrator—feeds into the notion that there was perhaps already a sense of evil or malice present in the Serbs. One of the interviewees states that 'I used to have many Serb friends… I had a close friend named Miro, and it's possible he was a sniper shooting at my daughter, that he was one of those people who reaped and slaughtered' (160). This

transference from friend to possible perpetrator has a devastating impact on the possibilities of post-war coexistence, as Sacco stresses the interviewees' suspicion and anger: 'I can never trust those Serbs again, that's obvious' (160). On the other hand, the emphasis on the peaceful bonds between the different ethnic groups before the war conveys the painful truth that people, even close friends, can be broken up by propaganda and war.

Finally, Sacco's work can be characterised as 'a comics of performance: a discourse of performance pervades just about every aspect of his art' (Scherr 2015, 184). This sense of performance is perhaps most noticeably present in Sacco's role as a visible narrative filter to the events. By inserting himself into the story as a cartoony character with his eyes obscured behind the blank glasses, Sacco constantly reminds us that he mediates what we see and that he is responsible for selecting the different narrative voices. In the style of the New Journalists of the 1970s, Sacco uses the imaginative vocabulary of the medium to reflexively highlight that journalism is ultimately, and inevitably, a subjective interpretation of events (see Versaci 2007; Chute 2016). By showing his close friendships to the inhabitants of Goražde, but also by critiquing some of the predatory techniques employed by himself and other journalists, Sacco debunks the myth of objective journalism. Furthermore, Sacco raises awareness of the disparity between the role of the journalist and that of the journalistic subject by contrasting his privileged and mobile position as an American outsider with the fate of the people stuck in the enclave.

This notion of performance motivates the reflexive awareness that Sacco is the go-between that influences what we read and how we read it. In some ways, using this conceit functions as a form of 'ironic authentication' (Hatfield 2005), as it is precisely through Sacco's rejection of straightforward truth claims that he reinforces the veracity of his stories. This reflexivity does not extend to an active investigation of the medium chosen, as Sacco does not self-reflexively address the comics form, or the visual strategies chosen to deal with the Bosnian War. Rather than actively questioning his own visual methods (like *Maus* does, for instance), Sacco does however draw attention to the fact that he is the artist responsible for the visual selection at hand. By highlighting his own position as a human, subjective filter to the events, Sacco's reflexivity also influences the ways in which we perceive his perpetrator figures. The evaluation of his position as a foreigner and a journalist, and the switches in style and alternation of narrative sequences are continuous reminders of the fact that we are looking at a visual construction. With this in mind, Sacco allows for a critical space where his methods and work can be questioned, including his drawings of perpetrator figures.

Furthermore, Sacco also briefly addresses his position in relation to the different sides of the conflict in a small nuancing gesture that is inserted towards the end of the work, and placed just before Sacco addresses the genocide of Srebrenica. While Sacco is visiting some of his friends in Goražde, he shares with them, and us, that he has also visited Grbavica, a Serb-held area of Sarajevo, and that he has 'made some friends there' (194). Sacco then shares some of the thoughts of these friends on the other side of the conflict. A panel shows Sacco holding up his notebook as he tells the Goraždans about the Serbs' distrust of the Muslims and their denial of atrocities committed by Serb troops, particularly the massacre in Srebrenica. Although the sequence is clearly aimed at countering this denialist discourse, and to show its impact on the inhabitants of Goražde, it is Sacco's use of the word 'friends' that stands out. A panel shows Sacco with some of these friends, and their appearance is similar to the other characters in the book. Placed near the end of the graphic narrative, their denial of the Serb atrocities is painful after reading several witness accounts that detail the atrocities committed. However, the fact that Sacco considers these people to be friends nuances the ignorance displayed, and by labelling the Serbs as such he proposes us to consider that war pits ordinary, and friendly, people against each other.[30]

Sacco's complex interaction between perpetrator models—following some of the elements of the Manichean model, but also including nuancing elements and gestures—aptly exposes the moral negotiation that underlies the representation of perpetrator figures. In telling the story of Goražde, Sacco is ostensibly trying to get away from kitsch, using the episodic narrative structure, nuancing gestures, and ironic authentication to counter the excess of a narratively linear and closed dramatic retelling of the events, while also allowing for subtle gradations in dealing with the persecutor community. On the other hand, kitsch is still present in Sacco's work. Taking into account his remarks about drawing perpetrators, kitsch can be traced in Sacco's refusal to further engage with the perpetrators' narrative perspective, which is visually highlighted by the obscuring of the eyes and the visual emphasis on the mouths. As proposed, the graphic narrative does not present its perpetrators as decisively homogeneous, nor is it convincingly nuancing. Sacco seems to grapple with the moral implications of either strategy, and by presenting a complex mix of approaches he

[30] Sacco's *The Fixer* (2003) details the story of the ethnically mixed Sarajevan 'fixer' Neven, and in relaying his experiences as a member of a group of paramilitary warlords, Sacco also deals with the paramilitaries' mistreatment of the Serbs during the war. This work thus adds further moral complexity to the stories told in *Safe Area Goražde*, highlighting another side to the conflict (also see Chute 2016).

invites the reader to navigate the options with him, without conclusively choosing one model over the other.

2.5 Conclusion

The cultural model of the evil Nazi and the perpetrator figures in *Smile through the Tears* and *Medz Yeghern* demonstrate the psychological comfort in the kitsch labelling of perpetrators as inhuman and monstrous. In the graphic narratives that follow the Manichean model, perpetrator figures are characterised by their visual and immoral excess, which overdetermines their position as an aberration. In this way, these figures enable the construction of a narrative that emphasises the horrible plight of the victims, but ultimately these notions of excess preclude the morally more uncomfortable realisation that ordinary people are capable of committing atrocities. By not providing an interaction with the perpetrators' thoughts and feelings, the graphic narratives attempt to deny the possibility of any misplaced sympathies or the absolution of guilt. Although this is an understandable strategy of representation in the context of mass violence, it does not necessarily have the desired outcome, as the eschewal of a narrative perspective on the perpetrators can paradoxically motivate a sense of fascination and appeal.

The model that can be placed in opposition to this Manichean depiction conforms to the notion of a 'disturbing heterogeneity' (Waller 2002, 76) of perpetrators. This helpful phrase aptly demonstrates the ambiguities and moral discomfort in accepting the premise that there might be varied reasons for participation, as this diversity ultimately implies that perpetrators cannot be seen as a single-minded group. In a seemingly contradictory manner, the heterogeneity of perpetrators visually manifests in a consistency of appearance between the characters. Perpetrators and victims are drawn in a similar manner, and this visual uniformity further contributes to the premise that perpetrators are not inherently different from other humans. Graphic narratives also establish nuancing gestures by addressing the notion that survivors of genocide do not necessarily take the moral higher ground. Graphic narratives like *Maus* and *Deogratias* present survivors that are complicated and ambivalent characters; they are not saintly survivors and in some cases their survival is predicated on their complicity with the genocidal system.

Ultimately, the graphic narratives demonstrate the multidirectional dialogue between perpetrator figures in different genocides. The contrasting use of the visual and moral excess

provided by kitsch demonstrates how different perpetrator figures are at different stages in their construction. The graphic narratives that deal with the Holocaust follow the strategy of obscuring perpetrators' faces and denying a sense of individuality in order to avoid the fetishised and singular figure of the evil Nazi. Graphic narratives like *The Search* complement these anonymising strategies with a more detailed investigation into levels of complicity and perpetrator motivation. In contrast, a work like *Safe Area Goražde* responds less clearly to existing models of perpetrators, instead using strategies of obscuring to more fully claim the victim perspective, but also displaying more reluctance to engage with the narrative perspective of perpetrators. As a counterpoint to these strategies of obscuring and negating perpetrator individuality, the most kitsch manifestation of persecutors can be found in the graphic narratives dealing with the genocides in Armenia and Rwanda. Here, the stark contrasts provided by kitsch allow for a clearly delineated universe of right and wrong; this Manichean use of perpetrator kitsch forcefully exposes histories of atrocities that have been underrepresented.

3. Visualising Violence and Sexual Violence

3.0 Introduction

This chapter examines how the international graphic narratives convey mass violence and sexual violence. In the first part of the chapter, I trace the use of excess and repetition in the graphic images of dead bodies in *Judenhass* and *Auschwitz*. Connecting these examples to discourses around kitsch, the chapter demonstrates that graphic narratives 'engage the difficulty of spectacle instead of turning away from it' (Chute 2016, 17). In not adhering to the moral guidelines of silence and restraint that are often connected to representations of the Holocaust, these graphic narratives aim to reveal and expose the effects of violence on the bodies of the victims. These excessive images of violence respond to the plethora of iconic and graphic Holocaust images—and the arguably increased desensitised reading of these images—by employing the graphic narratives' vocabulary to defamiliarise and reimagine the horrors.

The chapter then investigates how graphic narratives engage with (the effects of) sexual violence, focusing specifically on the occurrences of rape during the Rwandan and Bosnian genocide. Following the ideas around the simultaneous inscription/erasure of rape narratives as proposed by Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver, the graphic narratives that deal with sexual violence display a similar negotiation between absence and presence. Focusing primarily on *Smile through the Tears* and *Fax from Sarajevo*, I demonstrate that there is a lack of interaction with the rape victims after the occurrence of sexual violence. However, these graphic narratives acknowledge rape as a significant part of genocide, and the examples show that the artists are consciously attempting to minimise a titillating or ambiguous representation of sexual violence. Finally, I demonstrate that graphic narratives that deal with the Holocaust notably avoid representations of sexual violence, in this way responding to the fusion of sexuality and violence that is often put forward in other Holocaust representations, notably in cinema from the 1970s.

What these examples of mass violence and sexual violence poignantly demonstrate is the constant negotiation between restraint and excess that underlies cultural representations of genocide. Visualising the scale and destruction of mass violence and sexual violence produces images that run the risk of deterring readers, or alternatively, they can appeal to a sense of spectacle and become fascinating, which in turn can lead to a desensitised reading of genocide images. The chapter demonstrates that the graphic narratives under discussion do

not completely avoid images of (sexual) violence and death, as they continuously 'risk representation' (Chute 2016, 17). However, the examples show that this risking of representation is coupled with an awareness of the complexities of including images of violence, so that these graphic panels are engaged in a dialogue with the core issues around genocide representation.

3.1 Excess and Repetition in *Judenhass* and *Auschwitz*

In *Judenhass*, Dave Sim redraws photographs of the skeletal bodies and survivors of the Holocaust, juxtaposing it with quotes and facts that demonstrate that anti-Semitism is and has been a pervasive and widespread sentiment, voiced by a variety of people and appearing in a variety of guises. Departing from the notion that the term anti-Semitism is an inadequate and obfuscating term, Sim uses 'Jew hatred' as the more straightforward semantic replacement. According to Sim, it is the continuous persistence of Jew hatred that made the Holocaust inevitable, and his work sets out to prove this point. Sim uses a sense of excess when dealing with the bodies of the victims, adding a structurally rigorous repetitive logic to these images. Throughout the work Sim breaks down iconic and less iconic photographs into smaller details, repeating these fragments into separate panels on the pages. Images of hollow eyed and skeletal bodies are deconstructed into smaller parts, and visual details—often parts of the faces of the victims—are repeated over several panels and pages. These images of atrocity are starkly contrasted with the superimposed healthy and serene looking historical figures, whose sanitised words of hatred find an immediate visceral counterpart in the surrounding images. Sim does not allow for a straightforward narrative structure, instead presenting a kaleidoscope of images and quotes that, in their juxtaposition and friction, constantly reinforce that anti-Semitism can lead to the total destruction displayed on the pages.

Sim alternates between showing the visual details before giving us a clear and complete image and showing the complete image first, after which it is broken down into its smaller parts. Figure 25 shows the first of these visual strategies, as two pages display fragments of multiple bodies, the final image of which is shown in a larger panel on the next page. It is clear that the panels show a heap of mangled and skeletal victims of the Holocaust; we recognise body parts as they are repeated over the two pages. Sim shows us one part of the complete image at the start of each tier, slightly changing the angle over three panels. The left page is broken up by three captions, each of which includes an anti-Semitic quote. These

verbal interjections break up the rhythm of the page, and their neat and organised appearance contrasts with the contorted bodies in the background.

Figure 25

In breaking down the photographic images of emaciated bodies, *Judenhass* evokes Saul Friedländer's writing on the notion of an 'aesthetic frisson' of kitsch and death. In his critical reading of kitsch in the context of the cultural discourse on Nazism, Friedländer argues that the coupling of kitsch and death leads to a 'ritualized, stylized and aestheticized death' (1993, 43) that is constituted through the language of repetition and accumulation. This particular kitsch aesthetic is characterised by a 'circular language of invocation, which tirelessly turns on itself and creates a kind of hypnosis by repetition' (1993, 50). To some extent, *Judenhass* conforms to this circular loop of excess, as the kaleidoscopic scenes of atrocity lean towards a stylisation of death. In their constant repetition, the images run the risk of losing their connotative meaning, which puts forward a decontextualised play of lines rather than a meaningful engagement with the Holocaust narrative. In this line of reading, Sim's visual strategy can be linked to the recurring fear that kitsch and excess simplify and close off 'an appetite for

complexity' ("On Kitsch" 2015, 363) in favour of a fascinating set of images that provides some sort of (simplified) thrill or a sense of excitement.

However, in contrast to this reading of the aesthetic of excess and repetition as a form of hypnotic allure, I posit that *Judenhass*'s circular language and breakdown of images proposes a much more complex and productive interaction with the processes of defamiliarisation and habitualisation. In using iconic and graphic photographs and breaking them down into smaller units, Sim enacts a process of making strange what has become overly familiar. Working against a comfortable reliance on the iconic visual repository of the Holocaust, Sim uses excess—an excess of graphic images, and an excess of repetition—to unsettle the reader. Rather than avoiding images of violence in order to conform to the guidelines prescribing that the Holocaust cannot be imagined, and/or should be approached with restraint and indirection, Sim's work enacts the moral stance that '[*w*]*e are obliged* to that oppressive imaginable' (Didi-Huberman 2008, 3, italics in original). In *Judenhass*, this obligation to imagine the Holocaust takes the form of a disconcerting and disruptive sequence of images.

At the same time, by looping this new visual form throughout his work, Sim also introduces a sense of familiarisation. The explicit drawings of victims and dead bodies are shocking, but the succession of these images, and the lack of a straightforward narrative that offers moments of respite, also produces a sense of habitualisation. In enacting this dual process, Sim further comments on the position of Holocaust memory in our contemporary cultural landscape. *Judenhass*'s unusual visual and narrative format raises questions about what, in the context of Holocaust representation, can still shock us. The graphic narrative attempts to find a way in which images contribute to a revitalised understanding of the horrors of the Holocaust, but in its repetition it also hints at a sense of defeat. In the end, the conclusion might be that we can, and have, become used to excessive images of violence.

Throughout *Judenhass*, Sim includes a sense of excess through his constant visual lingering on horrific details and the corporality of the victims; gaping mouths, hollow eyes, and skeletal body parts are shown in a succession of panels. *Judenhass* features a few pages that do not feature images of victims, placed mostly at the beginning and ending of the work, but the majority of the work is relentless in its display of the dead and dying bodies of the victims. Page after page, the panels encapsulate and repeat the horrors of the Nazi system of destruction. The graphic narrative's overall set-up does not allow the reader to look away to the safety of the next panel, as every panel is designed to confront us with the horrors anew.

Sim's drawings also expose the interaction between the panel and the page. The repetition of the panels and the superimposed heads and text balloons push for a reading that takes in the overall page first. In figure 25, we take in the jumble of forms and shapes scattered over the two pages, while also being drawn to the quotations on the left hand side. However, because conventions teach us to move from one panel to the next, the next step of reading the work will take place on the level of the individual panels, which arguably causes a high level of discomfort as readers are continuously confronted with a similar-but-slightly-different rendering of mass violence.

Visually, the text balloons offer a seemingly sanitised space disparate from the plenitude of the panels. However, Sim does not allow his text to function as a comfortable break, as the blatant racism and callous hatred voiced in the anti-Semitic quotations works as a verbal counterpoint to the visual discomfort of the images. There is not much of a narrative logic to the sequence of images and quotations; the quotations that are dated follow each other in chronological order—although these are combined with terms and quotations that are not dated—but overall the work does not present a linear and coherent story. Rather, Sim's work presents a visual polemic that aims to expose the historical pervasiveness of anti-Semitism, mobilising the tension between text and image to create an emotional impact. *Judenhass* thus re-examines the subject matter of the Holocaust by denying a visual and verbal language of restraint, as well moving away from a straightforward and closed narrative structure.

In "'This Incomprehensible Thing': Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* and the Aesthetics of Excess" (2014), Eric Sandberg examines how Littell's novel controversially uses excess. In Littell's perpetrator perspective on the Holocaust, excess features in the detailed descriptions of the scale and corporality of the violence committed, the narrative use of an unremorseful and grotesque perpetrator and the centrality of his non-normative sexual proclivities, the conflict between attraction and repulsion to the horrors described, and the novel's excessive length. For Sandberg, this use of excess constitutes a conscious rejection of an aesthetics of reticence and silence that dominates Holocaust literature. He argues that Littell's work productively defamiliarises the events through a new, shocking form of representation, while also 'acknowledging and enacting the very process of habitualisation against which it struggles' (Sandberg 2014, 245). The novel's aesthetics of excess evokes a strong sense of discomfort, and it is this lack of comfort that re-sensitises the readers to the Holocaust narrative, while

simultaneously demonstrating how the extraordinary becomes commonplace through repetition.

Following Sandberg's logic, *Judenhass* uses excess to defamiliarise and unsettle ubiquitous Holocaust narratives and iconic images. Similar to the strategies used in *The Kindly Ones*, Sim's work aims to 'make strange again what had risked becoming too familiar' (Sandberg 2014, 247). The example shows what this 'making strange' looks like: Sim is engaged in a rigorous examination and juxtaposition of historical resources. Not only does he visually examine and deconstruct historical photographs, but he extends this process to include and collect documented instances of anti-Semitism. Panel by panel, the graphic narrative confronts readers with details of the photographs. With every panel, Sim seems to ask: 'Have you seen this? Have you really paid close attention to this element of the picture?' In thoroughly exploring existing photographs of the atrocities of the Holocaust, Sim suggests that the photographs have lost their ability to move; they have, in Roland Barthes's terms, lost their 'punctum' (Barthes 1981, 27). *Judenhass* aims to revive this sense of something that 'pricks' or 'bruises' by redrawing the photographs and multiplying their presence on the page.

However, it is through this repetition that the reader also becomes engaged in a form of habitualisation. Sim tests our abilities to respond to the horrors, using a new visual and narrative form but then looping it to test its limits. In the proliferation of the 'puncti', Sim's work creates an awareness of the process of becoming inured to images of violence. Not only does every panel ask: 'have you seen this?', but at the same time Sim also wonders: 'Do you still care?' Sim includes different photographs in order to renew a sense of horror every few pages, but as the reader becomes used to Sim's method—and the shock value inherent in this method—the work enacts a process of unnerving re-sensitisation to a subsequent weariness and developing desensitisation.

In *Auschwitz*, Pascal Croci similarly uses excess to confront the horrors of mass violence. Croci does not eschew showing us the heaps of bodies in the gas chamber or how these bodies are subsequently thrown in a pit to be burned. The work features several panels that show the atrocities of the death camps, in particular the work carried out by the *Sonderkommando*. In contrast to Sim, who uses excess as his main structuring device, Croci more carefully orchestrates the instances of excess, thereby harnessing their power. These harrowing drawings rely on a sense of plenitude to render the impact of death and horror. For instance, Croci uses two pages to detail how the *Sonderkommando* prisoners are charged with burning the victims of the gas chambers. The page opens (see figure 26) with a single vertical

panel in which a detail of the scene is shown, while the text balloon uses the obfuscating term 'pieces' (*Figuren*), voiced by a Nazi officer, to designate the victims' bodies. Similar to Spiegelman's *Maus*, Croci redraws one of the illicit photographs taken in 1944 by the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz. This iconic photograph depicts how prisoners are forced to dispose of the bodies in large burning pits, and the image is framed by the dark framed doorway of the gas chamber (which is mirrored here and altered to a more clearly visible wooden exterior).

Figure 26

Croci draws this photographic evidence more firmly into the story world by giving the prisoner in the photograph a voice, as he replies to the question posed in the first panel. After this, Croci reserves two large panels to depict the naked bodies as they are lying in the pit, and the

page that follows shows one large image that further details the pit with the sprawled out bodies, while a smaller inserted panel depicts a meticulously clothed Nazi figure (with gloves and a handkerchief) angrily shouting at the prisoners: 'By this evening, all this has to be ashes!' (49). The size of these panels—*Auschwitz* is published in a traditional larger *bande dessinée* format—allows for a detailed rendering of the bodies, as we can clearly make out the bodily features of individual victims. Although the bodies are visibly human—heads, legs, arms, and rib cages are discernible—Croci draws his victims' eyes as empty/white, and the drawings of the mangled and contorted bodies further move away from a distinct individuality to a more massive display of death.

The explicit drawings of the dead bodies in figure 26 clearly rely on visual excess rather than restraint and silence as its main strategy of representing mass violence. These images can be read, and subsequently dismissed, as a visual spectacle that is inappropriately and unambiguously aiming to evoke a sense of fascination. In the repetition of the blank eyes and gaping mouths, the bodies become almost zombie-like figures as their overwhelming presence shows the scale of the atrocities, but perhaps also numbs the impact of the images. Here, the kitsch of the naked bodies can be seen as gratuitous in its aim to exploit the horrors of the Holocaust in order to shock readers. The excessive panels echo Friedländer's critique of kitsch as an *'indiscriminate word and image overload on topics that call for so much restraint, hesitation, groping,* on events we are so far from understanding' (1993 96, italics in original).

However, the panels depicting mass violence need to be read in conjunction with the redrawn *Sonderkommando* photograph, as *Auschwitz* presents a dialogue between visual documentation and artistic licence that uses the historical record of the photograph as a means to further investigate the horrors of the Holocaust. This sequence presents a negotiation between visual excess and visual absence that does not 'simply' employ a theatrical display of bodies to appeal to a sense of the spectacular, but one that, similar to *Judenhass*, suggests a more complex interaction with images of the Holocaust. In searching for an adequate representation of mass violence, Croci does not eschew graphic depictions of the victims, but uses visual excess as a counterpoint to often repeated moral guidelines around appropriate visual strategies of representation. As argued by Hillary Chute, '[w]e might understand what comics offers as the radical visible—a capacious, expansive, and self-conscious mode of representation that refuses to shy away from the power of presence and visual plenitude' (2016, 223). In exposing what mass violence looks like, and complementing the visual archive with the radical visible of the drawn interpretation, *Auschwitz* demonstrates

that the medium is capable of using its vocabulary to respond to debates around appropriate forms of representation by suggesting a visual form that uses excess in a self-conscious manner.

In *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (2008), Georges Didi-Huberman argues against the discourse of the 'unimaginability' of the Holocaust, positing that the resistance photography of the *Sonderkommando* transfers (fragments of incomplete) knowledge: a stance that sparked heated debates around the epistemological value of archival material. In opposition to the point of view propagated by Claude Lanzmann, who completely rejects the visual archive, Didi-Huberman suggests that images of atrocities can bear witness to something, even though this testimonial meaning is likely to be fragmentary and incomplete. Finding fragments of meaning in the photographs, Didi-Huberman takes the stance that 'we must say that Auschwitz is *only imaginable*, that we are restricted to the image and must therefore attempt an internal critique so as to deal with this restriction, with this *lacunary necessity*' (Didi-Huberman 2008, 45, italics in original).

Spiegelman, who is the first comic artist to redraw one of the same *Sonderkommando* photographs in his work, adds to this fragmentary meaning by complementing the photograph—he has cropped the image, highlighting and mirroring the figure in the middle, who is portrayed as a mouse, while also adding additional mice figures—with a harrowing and larger panel of burning mice figures, their mouths visible and open in an expression of agony. Vladek's narrative voice heightens the horrors when he states that 'the fat from the burning bodies they scooped and poured again so everyone could burn better' (232, this echoes former *Sonderkommando* member Filip Müller's eyewitness accounts). Before Croci's use of the image, *Maus* already displays the drive to further reveal what the image obscures, using an image of violence as a counterpoint to the fragments of the horror that can be read from the original photograph. *Auschwitz* follows in *Maus*'s wake—a lineage that is explicated in the postface—which might explain why Croci also decided to include this particular *Sonderkommando* photograph. In a similar vein to *Maus*, Croci includes visual and verbal excess to highlight what the historical documentation obscures. In a joint disavowal of Didi-Huberman's stance, who argues that the four photographs have to be seen together in order to better understand how they were taken sequentially and under dangerous conditions, Spiegelman and Croci choose to only use the image of the bodies in the pit. Out of the four resistance photographs, the image used by Spiegelman and Croci has the most clarity in terms of definition and subject matter. In both graphic narratives, the photograph lends itself to a

narrative link with the characters: Vladek talks about the cremation pits and the character of Kazik works as a member of the *Sonderkommando*.

Croci's choice to use this photograph as the starting point to a sequence of visual plenitude conforms to a more consistent negotiation in the work between showing and not showing the horrors. A couple of pages before the *Sonderkommando* sequence, Croci takes his readers inside the gas chambers but adheres to the moral taboo of not visualising the inside of the chambers during the final moments of life by filling two pages with clouds of gas. Here, Croci maintains comics conventions as he divides the page up in different sized panels, using superimposed captions that explicitly describe what the gas clouds obscure: 'some lay crumpled on the ground, crushed beyond all recognition by the weight of others…' (42). However, this explicit visual rejection of showing the final moments of life is counterpointed by a full page showing the mass of dead bodies as the doors to the gas chamber are opened. Here, the bodies are noticeably clothed but drawn with similar blank eyes and mouths open, frozen in screams of horror. In line with the abovementioned example, the bodies are not presented as lifeless corpses just yet, as they 'look as if they are between dead and living because they have so recently been killed' (Tabachnick 2014, 65).

A similar negotiation between showing and not showing also structures figure 26. Although the *Sonderkommando* photograph provides us with a glimpse of the horrors, the still image simultaneously follows the 'rules' of reticence and restraint. The scene depicted in the photograph shows part of the atrocities, but we remain at a safe distance (literally and figuratively), so that the impact of violence can be kept at bay. Additional information is needed to understand what the *Sonderkommando* photo has captured. *Auschwitz* aims to provide this information, as the subsequent panels plunge into the horrors of mass violence with a detailed rendering of the scale and corporality of mass violence. In doing so, Croci does not sustain the (spatial and figurative) distance that is partly inscribed in the photograph. In confronting us with explicit images of mass violence and death at several points in the story, *Auschwitz* aims to complement narratives of minimal language and (visual) understatements with a visceral immediacy.

Placing the text balloon into the redrawn photograph demonstrates Croci's method throughout the graphic narrative: using facts and historical resources as the basis from which his fictional narrative unfolds. The drawings provide an interpretation of what mass violence looks like, thereby moving from abstract language to a specific visual interpretation. In the end, the panels give a more extensive view of the *Sonderkommando'*s tasks, conveying context

and explanation to the obscured elements of the iconic photograph. The immediacy of the graphic images is also contrasted with the euphemistic and distanced language. The Nazi officer, whose voice is captured in the text balloons, refers to the bodies as 'pieces' and 'this putrid rot'. To some extent, this verbal dehumanisation of the victims is heightened by their visual rendering; the scale and repetition of the starving and disfigured bodies, and their hollow blank eyes, position the victims as shapes and figures rather than distinct individuals. However, it is this sense of the scale of human destruction, which is visually articulated by the repetition of the anonymous bodies, which is poignantly contrasted with the blatant refusal of humanity as proposed in the text balloons. The victims are clearly not 'pieces' or 'putrid rot' but human beings and this process of dehumanisation is exposed through this contrast between image and text.

Auschwitz also brings up the issue of how different types of kitsch can interact together on the page. Throughout the work, the kitsch of mass violence is connected to the kitsch of evil perpetrators, as the stereotypical evil Nazi officer, and other equally menacing Nazi characters, orchestrate and oversee the industry of death (as pointed out, the second page of the sequence discussed here shows an angrily screaming perpetrator, eyes bulging, in an insert panel on the top of the page). The confluence of different manifestations of kitsch demonstrates that it is important to carefully unpick the implications and effects of kitsch strategies. Where the images of mass violence and the bodies of the victims, in conjunction with the photograph, propose a negotiation with the subject matter and its position in visual discourse, the excess of the perpetrator is less available to this type of self-conscious questioning and negotiation. This dialogue between different types of kitsch demonstrates that the stakes are high when using visual and thematic excess. Kitsch can productively open up avenues for further enquiry, but it can also, at the same time in a different guise, close off narrative opportunities and moral considerations.

As I discuss in the introduction, Theodor W. Adorno's 1962 "Commitment" highlights the possibility that pleasure can be 'squeezed' from the artistic rendering of physical pain. The incongruity between aesthetic pleasure and the Holocaust is a recurring argument in the debated around (in)appropriate forms of Holocaust representation. Rather than using the strong term 'pleasure', which connotes something enjoyable, I posit that graphic, direct, and artistic representations of (mass) violence inevitably contain an oscillation between attraction and repulsion, and immersion and distance. This tension between an attraction (something drawing us in) and repulsion (something pushing us away) is partly established through the

interaction between drawing style and content. The drawings by Croci and Sim have a particular aesthetic quality, they are beautifully or at least evocatively drawn, and these skilful drawings are to some extent attractive, while the subject matter is, of course, repulsive in its brutality and destruction. The artistic rendering of mass violence also hinges on an oscillation between immersion and distance, as both graphic narratives employ strategies that show the horrors in a way that immerses readers into the story, but these strategies also reflect on using these explicit images, thereby relying on a sense of reflexive distance.

These pairs, attraction/repulsion and immersion/distance, need to be viewed not as two disparate ends of a scale, but as the terms of a continuous and more subtle negotiation that offers readers the possibility of engagement with the subject matter. It is through this negotiation that, as Sandberg pointed out, readers can revitalise their feeling for the horrors of the Holocaust, while also being made aware of how the strategies used impact on us. Sim's breakdown of the images into smaller parts poignantly displays the centrality of the horror while showing its indecipherability in the repetition and subsequent 'making strange' of the images. Croci confronts us with the scale of death, making it a central feature of his pages, but he also shows an awareness of the debates around visual restraints by including a double spread that refrains from taking us inside the gas chambers, and by juxtaposing the images of mass violence with the *Sonderkommando* photograph.

It is noteworthy that both graphic narratives draw (on) photographic evidence. This use of existing images provides the artists with a means to reflect on the existing visual discourse of the Holocaust, and it simultaneously adds a sense of veracity to their work. Although both graphic narratives provide a drawn interpretation of the photographic evidence, rather than including actual photographs, they differ in the methods employed. Where *Auschwitz* opens the sequence to mass violence with one iconic image, *Judenhass* uses photographic evidence as a consistent structuring device. Croci adds a narrative voice to the image to link it more firmly to the story, whereas Sim consciously breaks any narrative frameworks through his photographic deconstruction. However, both artists use these images as a means to comment on the status of the photographic image. *Auschwitz* complements the absence of the photograph with the visual presence of Croci's drawings whereas *Judenhass* multiplies the presence of the photographs in order to defamiliarise their iconic status.

Although both graphic narratives creatively use existing images, commenting on their status as photographs, part of their inclusion could also be motivated by the fact that there is a truth claim linked to visual documentation. Including photographic evidence of the atrocities

provides graphic narratives with a strategy to substantiate their narrative veracity. *Auschwitz* features another sequence in which existing photographs are redrawn, again using historical evidence to substantiate the truthfulness of the story. A similar strategy is also used in *The Search*, where iconic images are redrawn and worked into the narrative; at times emotion lines are added to place it more firmly into the comics universe. Photographs provide a clear link to the historical context; they are, as Didi-Huberman terms, 'instants of truth' (2008, 31). Although it is clear that photographs are just as much prone to manipulation and distortion as any other visual medium, these photographic inserts provide fragments of truth and meaning that can be used to heighten the sense of veracity linked to the graphic narratives. In attempting to anchor the graphic narratives more firmly into historical reality, these photographic inserts function as a form of anti-kitsch: a means to counteract or balance the (presumed) drawbacks of excess and kitsch.

In contrast to *Judenhass* and *Auschwitz*, Spiegelman avoids emphasising the corporality and scale of violence in a more sustained effort to work against the kitsch of visualising violence. Throughout *Maus*, there are in fact relatively few panels that address violence, and these panels are never extended into longer, sprawling, or repetitive sequences. *Maus*'s interweaving of past and present and Vladek's narrative voice instil a sense of commentary that allows Spiegelman to narratively and visually move away from the atrocities in the past. In addition to working against an excessive representation of violence by limiting the amount of panels and adding a sense of distance through temporal layering, Spiegelman also carefully selects which elements of the horror he visualises, and which elements he leaves out of the panel. Rather than creating a confrontation between the attraction and repulsion of excess like in the aforementioned examples, *Maus* restricts the plenitude of the image of violence, using it in service of Vladek's story rather than making it a defining feature of the work. The most poignant and explicit examples of the horrors committed by the Germans include Vladek's retelling of how the Nazis swung young children against a wall (110) and the image that follows the redrawn resistance photograph, which shows the burning mice figures engulfed by flames (232).

Although not relying on excess to the same extent as *Auschwitz*, Spiegelman's treatment of violence precedes Croci's negotiation between showing and not showing. Three panels depict how the Germans, in rounding up Jews from Srodula to send to Auschwitz, picked up screaming children by the legs and swung them against a wall, so that 'they never anymore screamed' (110). In visualising this horrific act, Spiegelman shows how the child is

smacked against a wall—a motion line indicating the force involved and a black blotch on the wall shows the blood spill—but he refrains from showing the child's face, which is cut off by the panel borders. In line with the observations around perpetrator figures in the previous chapter, Spiegelman completely negates the Nazi's individuality, as the shadowy figure, seen from the back, is further anonymised by the fact that the motion line visually obscures his face. In the final panel, Spiegelman adds a drawing of himself and Vladek in the present in the corner of the image, and his father's text balloon conceals the blood stain on the wall. The short sequence demonstrates that Spiegelman does not avoid dealing with the atrocities committed, but he uses Vladek's narrative voice to quite literally conceal the most excessive aspects of violence. Furthermore, in having Vladek's second-hand witnessing obscure the events—in the text balloon, Vladek states that he didn't see these horrors with his own eyes—Spiegelman rejects the notion that he can create an adequate representation of these events, particularly as they involve young children, while also simultaneously allowing for a tentative consideration of the truthfulness of the story.

This negotiation between showing and not showing also structures the panel that shows the burning mice figures. This image is more closely related to the visual strategies employed in *Judenhass* and *Auschwitz*, as Spiegelman uses a larger panel in emphasising the bodily violation of multiple victims—a form of visual plenitude that is accompanied by the verbal excess of Vladek's description. However, Spiegelman limits his depiction of the burning bodies to one panel at the end of a page, focusing on the mices' heads, while the entirety of the next page is set in the present again, showing Art, Vladek, and Françoise in the Catskills. Similar to the example with the murder of the child, Spiegelman thus frames his instances of violence with panels set in the present, thereby providing some distance and respite from the suffering confronted in the past.

Having explored the representation of mass violence in the context of the Holocaust, the question surfaces how graphic narratives that deal with other genocides address mass violence. In these graphic narratives, there are fewer instances where the scale of the bodies is visually emphasised and repeated. This does not mean that kitsch is absent in other works that deal with mass violence, but rather that the plenitude of the victims' bodies is replaced by different types of excess. Although these graphic narratives use divergent strategies to deal with genocidal violence, they find common ground with the Holocaust examples in the fact that they all demonstrate how genocidal violence violates vulnerable human bodies.

The emphasis on the corporality of the bodies as explored in the Holocaust narratives returns most poignantly in *Medz Yeghern*'s treatment of violence. The graphic novel primarily focuses on acts of torture that dehumanise the bodies of the victims. The repetition of these acts throughout the work communicates a sense of the systematic nature of the Armenian genocide, but *Medz Yeghern* takes its visual and narrative punch from visualising these singular acts in detail, showing how they are directed against specific individuals. Although the work includes panels that show how groups of Armenians are marched into the desert, the sequences that stand out the most are the one-on-one acts of sadistic torture and sexual violence. In these instances, the bodies of the victims are foregrounded: horse shoes are nailed onto the feet of two men, eyes are gauged out, teeth are extracted, a young man is beheaded, and the heads of the Armenian victims are put on stakes. All of these examples emphasise the mutilation of the victims' bodies, showing how the transgressive nature of violence directly violates the physicality of the victims. By drawing attention to the maiming of specific body parts, Cossi moves genocidal violence from a larger system of destruction to very specific instances of severe violations of unprotected and innocent bodies. In contrast to *Auschwitz* and *Judenhass*, Cossi foregrounds the corporality of individual victims, rather than adding a sense of scale to extend this corporality to a more massive display of violated bodies.

Cossi's work also brings up again the issue of the confluence of different types of kitsch, as he places the excess of violence directed against the victims alongside the immoral and visual excess of the perpetrator figures. Similar to *Auschwitz*, *Medz Yeghern* shows that these forms of excess can reinforce and heighten each other, so that the horrors of mass violence become even more horrible because they are perpetrated by monstrous figures. The question at stake is then whether productive forms of kitsch are weakened when coupled with more uncritical inclusions of excess? Although the excessive images of bodily harm can provide a confrontation with an underrepresented instance of historical violence, the malicious perpetrator figures obstruct any further consideration of the reasons for participation. Kitsch related to the depiction of the victims can still successfully negotiate issues around visibility and violation, like in *Auschwitz*, but the Manichean universe installed by the presence of excessive perpetrators ultimately reduces the effectiveness of other, more productive, forms of kitsch employed in the genocide narrative. Here, the cultural and visual status of the genocide also comes into play. Where the Holocaust is ubiquitous in our cultural landscape, so that readers have an awareness of different types of Holocaust narratives, the Armenian genocide is characterised by a paucity of cultural representation. Cossi's shock treatment—

excessive violence and excessive perpetrators—aims to jolt readers into awareness, but the graphic novel might not provide enough productive forms of kitsch to really facilitate an interaction with the work and with the history of the Armenian genocide.

In terms of visualising the scale of violence, *Safe Area Goražde* employs a strategy that is more aligned with the use of dramatic excess in *Auschwitz* and *Judenhass*, albeit Sacco ultimately uses a sense of scale in a more restrained manner. His representation of the massacre in Srebrenica is visualised in a large panel that shows how Bosnian Muslim men are shot and thrown into a ditch (203). The panel emphasises the massive nature of the violence by showing the bodies of a previously shot group of men already sprawled out in the ditch, while the drawing captures the bullets riddling the bodies of the next line of men. The planned nature of the genocide is made apparent through the fact that a ditch has already been dug out for the sole purpose of the victims' bodies and the visual presence of a bulldozer, seemingly ready to cover up these bodies once the massacre is carried out. Sacco does not show the eyes of his perpetrators (a strategy that is explored in the previous chapter) but the faces of the victims are similarly obscured through the use of blindfolds. This obscuring of the victims' eyes echoes the ways in which the victims are anonymised through the repetition of bodies and the similarity in appearance in *Auschwitz*. By blindfolding these men, they do not see what is coming, but Sacco shows how this obscuring of the eyes also functions as a form of dehumanisation—the perpetrators do not have to look at the eyes of the victims, thereby denying them a sense of humanity. Corresponding to Sim's aim to revive a more emotive interaction with images in *Judenhass*, Chute proposes that Sacco's image contains a *punctum* that 'pricks' the reader: amidst the destruction, a single cane is lying on top of the dead bodies in the ditch (Chute 2016, 221).

Although Sacco's panel stands out in the work because of its size and explicit depiction of violence, it does not entirely follow the sprawling displays of bodies in *Auschwitz* or the structured repetition of images of victims in *Judenhass*. In contrast, Sacco places his panel after a sequence of two eyewitness accounts, the experiences of Haso and Nermin, who attempt to flee Srebrenica after the Serbs have entered the enclave. Sacco then cuts away from these witness accounts and subsequently uses three panels to detail the genocide in Srebrenica. The larger sequence demonstrates that the work's episodic structure, which moves between different narrative elements, ultimately works against the narrative and visual repetition of mass violence in *Judenhass* and *Auschwitz*. Furthermore, in detailing the atrocities of the war, Sacco depicts how victims have been killed and bodies are maimed, but these instances focus

more on the effects on individual bodies rather than emphasising the display of masses of bodies. This is partly due to Sacco's focus on eyewitness accounts—these are people that have seen and survived atrocities, but they have generally, by virtue of being alive, not witnessed larger-scale massacres—but it also seems to tie in with Sacco's wish to avoid the excess of repeated or hyperbolic displays of mass violence.

More akin to *Judenhass* and *Auschwitz*, Joe Kubert's *Fax from Sarajevo* employs the visual kitsch of the comic book style—particularly the vocabulary of American superheroes and war comics—to interact with the story of the Rustemagić family in Sarajevo. Kubert's colourful drawing style employs this comic book vocabulary to create spectacular panels that display the shelling of the city and the magnitude of the explosions. The graphic narrative is visually closer to his work for the *Sgt. Rock* war comics than *Yossel*, as Kubert uses a variety of kitschy panels to detail the ways in which the city is placed under fire; motion lines show the impact of the bombs and the bullets, often accompanied by boldly and colourfully captioned onomatopoeia, and many panels are filled with bright yellow and red explosions. In repeating these panels, Kubert uses visual and verbal excess show the relentless shelling of the city. Kubert's panels also emphasise the impact of the attacks on the bodies of the Sarajevans. One of the early examples of this type of excess is the rendition of how the shelling affects a young boy and his sister (30). Most of the page is taken up by the image of the explosion, and the smaller inset row of panels on the left hand side of the page shows a young boy and his sister who are exhorting their mother to let them go out to play. These panels of youthful innocence are directly contrasted with the image that depicts how the children are thrown around by the explosion that follows. Particularly the young boy is foregrounded in this image; the inverted position of his body, together with his tattered t-shirt and expression of shock, shows the impact of the bomb, and Kubert heightens this image by drawing bright yellow and orange flames in the background (the image of the boy also features on the book's back cover). In detailing the shelling of the city, Kubert often draws the bodies of Sarajevans in the midst of the explosion, their bodies contorted by the force of the blast, faces showing expressions of shock and pain, and at times bloodied body parts are visible.

Figure 27 demonstrates how Kubert employs a similar strategy when dealing with the mass slaughter of a group of 'defenseless male civilians' on 'the outskirts of an outlying village north of Sarajevo' (147). Here, Kubert does not provide much more context; the victims and perpetrators are not further specified in terms of ethnic identity and it remains unclear what village and what massacre Kubert is referring to, although in the timeline of the story he links it

to the early months of 1993. Kubert could be referring to the Busovača massacre of January 1993 or the Ahmići massacre of April 1993, both of which involved Croat forces against Bosnian Muslims. However, the setting in the woods and the fact that a large group of boys and men is massacred seems to partly transfer the horrors of the genocide in Srebrenica to an earlier moment in time.

Figure 27

This sense of historical collage is further established when the panels depicting the massacre are followed up by an iconic image, reminiscent of Holocaust imagery, that shows a group of prisoners standing behind barbed wire—referring to the concentration camps in places like Omarska, Trnopolje, and Keraterm. Kubert's brief sequence of five panels cuts away from the story of the Rustemagić family to provide some historical context about the Bosnian war. Interestingly, Kubert changes his panel borders to black for this brief sequence, a strategy that is more consistently employed in Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*. Kubert does not use black borders

anywhere else in the graphic narrative, which heightens its function as a sign of the gravity of the content (Sacco uses his black borders with a similar purpose).

In dealing with the massacre, Kubert includes a large panel that shows a smaller group of men captured in the moment that they are killed. Figure 27 conveys how the victims' bodies are positioned mid-air in a dynamic composition, their faces obscured or frozen in expression of horror, while drops of blood are littered across the page. Similar to the recurring panels that show the impact of the shelling, Kubert makes an effort to convey the impact of the violence on the victims' bodies. The dynamism of the affected bodies posits a sense of excess, as the contorted bodies are displayed in a spectacular fashion. Kubert orchestrates the bodies in a way that most poignantly shows how they are being violated—the men are both distinctly separate and entangled in a group—while also ensuring readers understand the massive nature of this massacre. Similar to the rendering of the bodies in *Auschwitz*, Kubert captures the victims at a moment between life and death. This orchestration of violated bodies also functions as a counterpoint to the story of the Rustemagić family. Where the family is under great stress but still alive and together, Kubert highlights the fate of others during the war.

A final noteworthy strategy of visualising violence is the theme of displaced/continued violence as explored in the context of the Rwandan genocide. In the detective set-up of *99 Days*, the violence of the Rwandan genocide is displaced to present-day America, where an unknown serial killer is murdering his victims with a machete. There are multiple panels in the graphic novel that show the victims of this machete murderer in L.A., their bloody wounds and maimed bodies graphically drawn. Rather than showing violent images of machete killings in the context of the Rwandan genocide, Casali and Donaldson reserve their most graphic images for the American setting. Throughout the work, connections are drawn between the chaos and violence erupting between gangs in L.A. and the backstory which explores the genocide in Rwanda. This leads to politically questionable comparisons between gang members in L.A. and the Hutu perpetrators, but it also uses the American setting as a means to create access into the genocide narrative. This displacement hints at the difficulty of representing genocidal violence while commenting on the persistence of violence outside of a genocidal context. In a similar vein, violence also informs the post-genocide situation in *Deogratias*. Here, the violence perpetrated by the protagonist does not stop after the genocide, as Deogratias takes revenge on those who were involved in the events by poisoning their drinks. Although Stassen does not avoid dealing with the atrocities committed during the Rwandan genocide, he effectively

introduces violence in the present-day story in order to show the longer lasting effects of the genocide on individuals and Rwandan society.[31]

What these strategies of visualising mass violence in graphic narratives demonstrate is that between the Holocaust examples and the representations of violence during other genocides, there is a concerted effort to show the vulnerability of the victims and the ways in which their bodies are violated and affected through acts of violence during and after the genocide. In showing these violations of the body, whether visualised in singular panels or lengthy sequences, or alluded to verbally, a sense of kitsch inevitably comes into play. An act of violence already carries in it a sense of excess and transgression, and this notion of 'too much' is multiplied through the (knowledge of the) systematic and massive scale of genocide. In discussing atrocity images of the Holocaust, focusing on photographs and archival footage, Susan A. Crane argues that '[s]eeing atrocity images in ignorance only shocks the senses; it does not teach meaning-making or historical truthfulness, and it risks kitsch' (2008, 316). Kitsch and excess are present in these graphic narratives in different ways, from large sprawling panels to sadistic displays of bodily harm, displaced violence, hyperbolic explosions and dynamic compositions of bodies, but also through explicit verbal references. However, dismissing these forms of excess as the opposites of meaning-making or truthfulness foregoes the opportunity to examine when and where excess can become meaningful and productive. In the examples, the images of violence are not shown in ignorance, but they are embedded in narratives that aim to contextualise the horrors. These images do not 'risk' kitsch, they *rely* on kitsch and excess in order to transfer meaning; the graphic narratives consciously use explicit images of violence to demonstrate and explore the impact on the (bodies of) victims.

The main difference in the use of kitsch and violence between the Holocaust narratives and the works that deal with other genocides is that the Holocaust has clearly acquired a distinct position in contemporary visual discourse. Although the debates around the 'unimaginability' of genocide are firmly linked to the Holocaust, there is no shortage of atrocity images of these events in western cultural discourses (accompanied by a vast and continuously expanding collection of scholarly works examining these images, see for instance Zelizer 1998, 2001; Young 2000; Hornstein and Jacobowitz 2003; Kaplan 2007; Hirsch 2012, and the many works on Holocaust cinema, e.g. Loshitzky 1997; Insdorf 2002; Hirsch 2004; Baron 2005; Kerner

[31] This strategy is also employed in *Auschwitz*, where the story of the Holocaust is framed by a limited amount of panels that show how the couple Kazik and Cessia are caught up in the war in Former Yugoslavia. Without much context, the final panel of the graphic narrative shows how, in this present-day conflict, the protagonists are executed as traitors.

2011; Bayer and Kobrynskyy 2015). From iconic photographs to archival footage and cinematic representations, many of these Holocaust images are explicit in showing the horrors of mass violence. The graphic narratives that deal with the Holocaust are inevitably responding to this plethora of visual representations, searching for ways to address the horrors in novel ways. This could suggest why Croci and Sim use visual excess and repetition, as these are the strategies that have the ability to re-sensitise readers, while also productively mirroring—and commenting on—some of the key features of Holocaust visuality.

Graphic narratives that deal with the genocides in Armenia, Bosnia, and Rwanda similarly stress the violation of vulnerable bodies in the context of mass violence. This common strategy thus demonstrates a key element of the wider genocide narrative and a marker of the multidirectional dialogue between the graphic narratives. In highlighting the violation of vulnerable and innocent bodies, the corpus quite uniformly relies on a sense of excess in order to communicate the violent transgressions inherent to the genocidal mechanism. In contrast to the works that deal with the Holocaust, the other graphic narratives are less clearly responding to existing and often repeated visual frameworks. This means that these graphic narratives are carving out a set of appropriate and effective responses to the issues around representing mass violence without a more direct and urgent engagement with longer visual histories of the genocide in question. This has resulted in a variety of strategies, all of which are still connected through their reliance on some form of kitsch and excess in order to convey the brutalities of genocidal violence. In the end, each of these uses of excess foregrounds the premise that kitsch has an instrumental position in representations of genocide in graphic narratives.

3.2 The Presence and Absence of Sexual Violence

In 2001, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) recognised rape as a crime against humanity. Three Bosnian Serbs were convicted for the systematic and brutal rape of Muslim women in Foča, Bosnia and they received a combined sentence of 60 years in jail. The verdict was instrumental in changing the conception of rape as a by-product of war and conflict. The ICTY verdict recognised that sexual violence 'is increasingly employed as a tactic in violent conflict because of its destructive effects on individuals, families and communities' (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 280). The conflicts in Rwanda and Bosnia have demonstrated how rape can be used as a deliberate tactic of genocide. In both instances,

sexual violence and rape were used as displays of power as 'nationalist militias waged ethnic conflict against women's bodies' (Sharlach 2000, 396). Scholarship on genocidal rape traces the symbolism of the act, as well as its connection to the construction of masculinity (Thomas and Ralph 1999; Sharlach 2000; Reid-Cunningham 2008). Sexual violence and mass rape are used as strategies of genocide because of their lasting effects; not only are women's bodies desecrated, but frequently the stigma of being a rape survivor carries the burden of the experience far into their lives, inevitably also affecting relationships and communities. In this context, rape can also be used as a form of ethnic cleansing through forced pregnancies. In addition, sexual violence is used to reinforce constructions of masculinity, as the sexual aggression displayed demonstrates virility to peers as well as shaming the male partners and family members of the victims.

In *Public Rape: Representing Violation in Fiction and Film,* Tanya Horeck (2004) poses the question: 'What are the ethics of reading and watching representations of rape? Are we bearing witness to a terrible crime or are we participating in a shameful voyeuristic activity?' (vi). The link between comics and voyeurism has been theorised before, as '[r]eading a comic book always entails a degree of Peeping Tomism, as we peer through the "windows" of the panel borders at a world beyond our own' (Witek 1989, 72). If the medium, with its panelled environment that reinforces the notion of looking, is prone to a sense of voyeurism, the question at stake is whether sexual violence can be integrated without any ambiguities at all. As argued by Lorna Jowett '[t]here is an inherent problem with presenting rape as part of "entertainment" even if the form of entertainment is capable of offering complex negotiations of gender and power' (Jowett 2010, 229). In highlighting elements like fascination, titillation, and voyeurism, scholarship around representations of rape legitimately questions the inherent ambivalence of rape in visual discourse. Images depicting sexual violence will run the risk, however slight it may be, of titillating or fascinating the reader—even if they have no desire to be titillated.

Showing awareness of these dangers, the graphic narratives that deal with sexual violence in the context of genocide make a decided attempt to avoid a sense of sensationalism and titillation; in eschewing spectacular images of sexual violence, these works alternate between a simultaneous presence and absence of women's experiences of violence. To explore this interaction between presence and absence, I will use the line of thought put forward by Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver in their edited collection *Rape and Representation* (1991). In their introduction, Higgins and Silver describe 'an obsessive

inscription – and an obsessive erasure – of sexual violence against women' (1991, 2). The authors argue that cultural depictions of rape are framed along two contradictory impulses; images of rape are ubiquitous in our (contemporary) cultural landscape, but at the same time 'rape exists as an absence or gap that is both product and source of textual anxiety, contradiction, or censorship' (Higgins and Silver 1991, 3). This simultaneous presence and absence of rape can also be traced in graphic narratives that deal with genocidal rape. In many of these works, the artists inscribe stories of sexual violence, ensuring that readers understand the brutal and involuntary nature of the attack through the positioning of bodies and facial expressions. Furthermore, the presence of the rape narrative is often conveyed through language, which is used as a means to reinforce the construction of perpetrator masculinity as well as to avoid the explicit visual manifestation of the violence committed.

On the other hand, the graphic narratives generally do not expand on the aftermath and stigma of sexual violence, nor do they explore how this weapon of destruction affects communities in the long run. Although the treatment of sexual violence in the graphic narratives under scrutiny varies substantially in length, they find common ground in the fact that they elide an important part of sexual violence that continues after the events. Higgins and Silver's notion of elision/inscription is thus similarly present in the depiction of sexual violence in these works, and graphic narratives are visibly grappling with this process of presence and absence. The depiction of sexual violence becomes a clear marker of the problems that popular cultural texts face: how to depict sexual violence accurately but respectfully, and how to engage with its long lasting effects?

For example, in Rupert Bazambanza's survivor testimony *Smile through the Tears,* a single panel deals with the rape of Tutsi women (see figure 28). The panel is placed at the centre of a visually dense page that consists of 15 panels. The ambitious endeavour of telling the story of the Rwanga family while also providing a comprehensive historical account of Tutsi victimisation leads to pages where visual and verbal information is vying for attention. In the sequence, Bazambanza tells the story of a group of Tutsis resisting Hutu perpetrators at the CELA (*Centre d'education de langues Africaines*). Starting at the end of the second tier on the page, Bazambanza uses four panels to show the brutalities committed at the nearby *Sainte-Famille* Church. In a chronological inversion, Bazambanza first shows how Tutsis are murdered, after which he deals with the sexual violence that preceded these murders. The single panel shows a—presumably Tutsi—woman who is raped by a Hutu soldier. In contrast to the factual caption which states that '[g]irls and women were first gang-raped by the soldiers' (47), the

image displays the violence that is implicated in the rape. The positioning of the hands of the victim and perpetrator clearly demonstrates that force is involved, and that we are not witnessing a consensual scene. The faces of the perpetrators are grim, whereas the victim's face seems to be frozen in a scream with the eyes turned upwards. The background of the panel shows two more shadowed outlines of soldiers, indicating how groups of men raped Tutsi women.

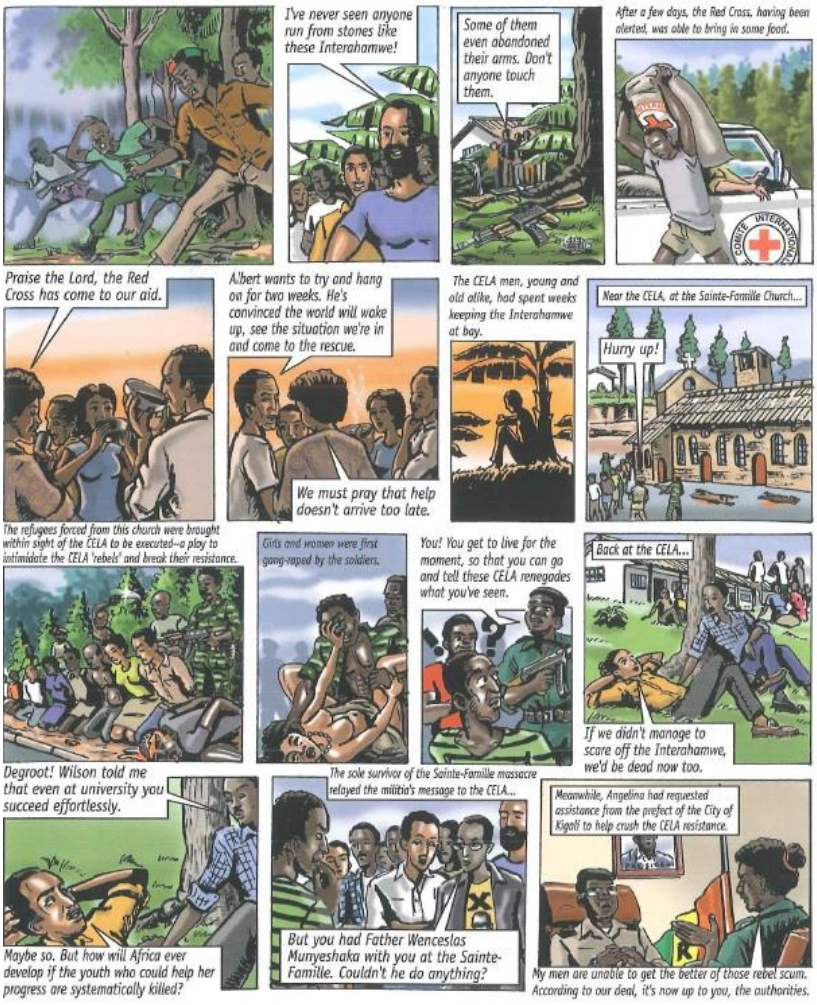

Figure 28

Because the four panels are a digression from the main narrative thread, there is no context as to who the victim of sexual violence is. The anonymity of the characters ties in with the limited depiction of sexual violence, as this lack of narrative individuality creates more distance to the events. The absence of any context on the identity of the victim is coupled with the fact that the panel loses a sense of urgency in the overload of information on this page and in the

graphic narrative. The page is a jumble of different narrative 'tones' and pieces of information. It starts with an almost comical scheme against the Interahamwe—where the Tutsi use stones instead of grenades—after which it moves on to the arrival of the Red Cross with a poetic panel of a figure leaning against a tree. After the narrative digression to the events at the church, the story turns back to the CELA, ending the page with another switch to a panel dealing with the politics within the Hutu camp. This ubiquity of information, coupled with the lack of connection to the characters in the panel, results in a fleeting impression of the extent and horrors of sexual violence in the context of the Rwandan genocide.

Jessica Silva interviewed Bazambanza about his work, also discussing the depiction of (sexual) violence. She states that Bazambanza 'faced resistance from some members in the Rwandan community in Montreal [where Bazambanza lives and works] who felt that his representation of genocide was already too graphic' (Silva 2009, 23). Bazambanza was also worried about excluding younger readers, who form an important target group. Bazambanza's educational aim thoroughly informs his work and his graphic voice as a survivor. He created the educational graphic narrative/lesson plan "Tugire Ubumwe - Let's Unite! Teaching Lessons from the Rwandan Genocide", which deals with post-genocide Rwanda. It uses child characters that embody the three ethnic groups to tackle issues of guilt, respect, and reconciliation. Messages of reconciliation also inform *Smile through the Tears*, particularly at the end of the story through the figure of the token good Hutu (see chapter two on perpetrator figures). The final message of Rwandans striving to understand and respect each other obviously works against explicit and graphic depictions of rape, although Bazambanza does not eschew showing murder. Silva adds her own interpretation of this limited depiction of sexual violence, which she describes as 'slightly pornographic' (2009, 21). She argues that Bazambanza's sparse inclusion is related to the shame and stigma that is still attached to rape and rape victims. In Rwanda, rape victims were often seen as willing participants that would sometimes be excluded from their communities, resulting in a 'second rape' (Sharlach 2000). This could explain why the victim in this example remains anonymous, as Bazambanza eschews the question whether rape occurred in his own family or the Rwanga family.

As briefly explored in the chapter on perpetrators, Bazambanza reinforces the cultural values of purity and honour attached to women by showing how the women in the Rwanga family cannot be bribed or persuaded by sexual offers made by depraved individuals. This display of purity is most explicitly articulated when a Hutu cleric offers to help the daughter Hyacinthe, wanting sexual favours in return. Hyacinthe articulates the values of a good and

pure Rwandan/Tutsi woman when she states: 'No, Father – I won't take back what I said. I won't dishonour my parents. They brought me up to respect certain values. I'd rather die than shame myself before you!' (59). The chapter on perpetrator figures demonstrated how this emphasis on female honour and purity was placed in direct opposition to the 'impure' Hutu perpetrators, but here it also becomes apparent how this narrative theme, and the named and recognisable characters embodying these values of purity, further obscures and diminishes the impact of the panel depicting sexual violence.

In *Smile through the Tears*, Bazambanza erases the depiction of sexual violence as he inscribes it onto a single panel. The erasure of rape takes place on two levels: the visual manifestation on the page and the themes built around Rwandan women. On the page, the information overload and the panel size don't allow for a sustained focus on the occurrence of rape. On a thematic level, the narrative thread of the pure and honourable Tutsi women—an image that is further contrasted with the immoral and depraved character of the female Interahamwe member Angelina—overpowers the panel depicting rape. Bazambanza's Tutsi female characters manage to maintain their composure and purity throughout the work. It is clear that this is directly influenced by Bazambanza's relation to the Rwanga family, but this strategy obscures the extent to which rape was an intrinsic element of the genocide. The inscription of sexual violence is thus minimalised as well as overwritten by the context of the page and the overall theme constructed around womanhood. Bazambanza's struggle with regard to the depiction of rape is tangible. Even in this one panel, the neutral caption seems at odds with the immediacy of the graphic image. Bazambanza does not want to completely eschew the subject of sexual violence, but he has chosen to show it in a decontextualised and singular form.

The oscillation between absence and presence in the representation of rape is also traceable in other graphic narratives that deal with the Rwandan genocide. *Deogratias* and *99 Days* display a noticeable struggle between showing the horrors of genocidal rape while simultaneously attempting to ensure that the scenes of sexual violence do not become titillating. In line with Bazambanza's work, these graphic narratives use a paucity of panels to portray the events, and they negate a further examination of the longer lasting effects of sexual violence; in the case of *99 Days* this is also coupled with the anonymity of the victim. In contrast to *Smile through the Tears*, these works employ language to emphasise the brutality of the events. The coarse use of language by the perpetrators emphasises the force involved, while also becoming a stand-in for what is visually not represented.

Deogratias includes a highly graphic panel that shows the body of Tutsi character Venetia on the floor, beheaded and brutally raped; a bloodied bottle between her legs shows that implements were used. This panel is fairly small in comparison to the other panels on the page, and Stassen has rendered the image in darker tones so as to not overly highlight the content. The size of the panel, coupled with the rendering of Venetia's body and the brutality of the scene clearly work against any displaced sexual connotations. However, the graphic nature of the image retains a high shock factor, which is maximised by the fact that we have become narratively aligned to Venetia. Her severely maimed body is the most graphic image in the work, showing a degree of bodily violation that combines sexual violence, torture, and murder. Stassen visually inscribes sexual violence, but there is also a sense of absence with regard to the rape narrative. Similar to *Smile through the Tears*, the occurrence of rape is linked to murder rather than survival, thereby not dealing with its longer lasting effects. Although it is a fact that many women did not survive the rape or were killed immediately afterwards, the death of these characters eschews the painful and difficult issues around rape survival, like the 'second rape' of stigma and the issues around integration back into society. By not dealing with the aftermath, the stories of rape run the risk of becoming no more than shock narratives or decontextualised instances of violence. Readers become aware of rape as a genocide strategy, but the effects of rape—which can ultimately be more violent and destructive than the act—remain unexplored.

Deogratias also uses language as a means to convey sexual violence. Interahamwe leader Julius praises Deogratias's skills as a perpetrator to the distressed character Augustine, who is looking for Benina and Apollinaria. Julius's coarse language degrades the Tutsi girls, while also explicitly referring to Deogratias's role: 'The black one, Deogratias had already fucked her, so he left her to us. But the mulatta, he kept her pussy for himself. That's the kinda guy Deogratias is: he likes refined stuff!' In the next panel he adds: 'You did good, that little whore got nicely fucked' (71). This vulgar use of language exposes what Stassen refrains from showing us, while also underscoring the ways in which perpetrators use a particular (linguistic) mix of sexual objectification, humiliation, and bragging to demonstrate their masculinity and virility. Not only do Julius's remarks expose the dehumanisation of women at the heart of genocidal rape, but they also reposition Deogratias more firmly as a perpetrator who is part of the genocidal mechanism, thereby further complicating the reader's sympathies for the protagonist.

Language is used in a comparable manner in *99 Days*, which includes two pages that show how protagonist Antoine leaves a room where a woman is naked and vulnerable on the bed, as he is cheered on by fellow Interahamwe members who are praising him for his skills to make the woman 'squeal'. Where the woman is first only seen from the back, a subsequent panel depicts her bloody and beaten face, and her expression drives home the point that Antoine has just raped her. Although the rape narrative is inscribed, it is also simultaneously elided by the fact that woman remains anonymous, and we do not know what happens to her after this scene. The language used by the Interahamwe leader heightens the brutality of the events while also, similar to *Deogratias*, reinforcing the notion that rape is a systematic part of genocide, and that women were generally raped by multiple men. In a style of speech that is reminiscent of American slang—a further linguistic link between the two diverging locales of Rwanda and America—the Interahamwe leader boasts: 'I let you go **first** cuz I wanted you to **prove** yourself, but that doesn't mean she's not getting it from **me** and the **boys**…' (121). This emphasis on the notion of multiple rapes of the same victim heightens the vulnerability of the victim, while also showing the symbolic dimensions of repeated humiliation and inflicted pain that is part of the genocidal mechanism. In finding ways to convey the severity of the sexual assault, language thus functions as a means to become explicit without running into the representational difficulty of a complete, or prolonged visual manifestation of rape.

One of the most comprehensive depictions of rape however can be found in Joe Kubert's *Fax from Sarajevo*. In the graphic narrative, the chapter titled "The Rape Camp" introduces the character of Samira, a friend of Ervin's wife Edina. Half of the chapter details her experiences of sexual violence in a flashback. The cultural position of the rape victim is made explicit in the second panel that features Samira, as she hesitates to tell the family about her experiences because she is too ashamed. Switching panel borders from rectangular to soft-edged, Kubert then reserves 17 panels to show how Samira's family is murdered by Serb troops, after which she and her mother are raped and taken to one of the Serb rape camps. These rape camps were a central element of the ethnic cleansing during the Bosnian war, as Muslim and Croatian women were systematically assaulted in detention centres (Thomas and Ralph 1999; Sharlach 2000; Reid-Cunningham 2008). Kubert draws the flashback in yellow and brown tones, simultaneously indicating that these events happened in the past as well as instilling a sense of gloominess around Samira's experiences. Over the span of two pages, Kubert interchanges angles and perspective, including close-ups of the perpetrator's eyes and a high angle perspective on the room in which the rape takes place (see figure 29).

Figure 29

Kubert integrates the fact that '[f]orced pregnancy was a central strategy of the Serb forces during the genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina' (Reid-Cunningham 2008, 286) by having the menacing figure of the perpetrator vocalise this strategy: 'you will have the honor of bearing **Serb children**. The fathers of your children stand before you …**now**' (102). The example suggests again how language is instrumental in setting up the scene of conflict, as it verbally demonstrates how perpetrators construct their masculinity and exert their terror. Derogatory language and verbal abuse is central to the act of othering the victim and establishing power relations, which becomes even clearer when the perpetrator states that 'your daughter will experience a **man**. A **Serb officer**' (103).

Thus, in line with the other graphic narratives, *Fax from Sarajevo* follows the strategy of using language to verbalise elements that are too horrific and controversial to show visually. The panel with a high angle perspective shows a schematic rendering of group rape, but most of the terror and horror of the events is conveyed through facial expressions—Samira's

expressions of disgust and fear are clearly highlighted—and explicit language. In contrast to some of the other works, Kubert allows for a more comprehensive look at the victim's position by giving Samira a name and a voice. The visual juxtaposition that is set up between the Serb officer and Samira is also transferred to the use of language. In the two consecutive panels that show Samira and the officer, Kubert switches from the sadistic remarks of the perpetrator to the voice of the victim. The terror enacted by the perpetrator is thus countered by Samira's side of the story. In contrast to the general anonymity of the rape victim, and the lack of narrative voice or exploration of the aftermath in earlier mentioned examples, Kubert names his victim and allows her to narrate her own experiences. The last panel of the page aptly conveys that rape was committed on a large scale. The panel shows a seated Samira, her clothes torn and her facial expression grief-stricken; an image that is also positioned at the start of the flashback. As Samira recalls how she was taken into a truck with other women, she is surrounded by their faces. The text balloon states how these women were staring with blank eyes, but the facial expressions show a variety of emotions, from anger to grief and shock. Because the faces of these women surround Samira as if they were ghostlike appearances, this panel demonstrates that these are not just the women taken into the truck, as their appearance becomes representative of the thousands of women that were raped during the wars in the Balkans.

Although Kubert is more successful in representing the effect and scope of sexual violence, there still is a sense of fleetingness to the rape narrative that is echoed in many of the graphic narratives dealing with genocidal rape. Samira is introduced at the start of the chapter, visiting Ervin and Edina as she does not know where to turn for help. But just as suddenly as Samira entered the story, she leaves, with a contradictory statement that she came by to warn Ervin and Edina and that she has family to go to. Again, the inscription of the rape narrative is accompanied by a simultaneous narrative elision. Like Bazambanza's panel, Samira's story functions as a clearly encapsulated and narratively disconnected episode which doesn't allow for a more comprehensive interaction with the rape narrative, especially with regard to the difficulties these women have in rebuilding their lives and the longer lasting impact of rape on the community. Graphic narratives dealing with genocide generally don't inscribe the perspective of the rape victim as central to the story, and so this part of the rape narrative remains un(der)explored.

Delegating a voice to the victim of sexual violence also takes place in Joe Sacco's *Safe Area Goražde*, where Munira is interviewed about her experiences in a hospital where women

were taken away to be raped (an episode that is partly visualised). Munira narrates her experiences, and Sacco returns to the image of the witness testimony—she is seated with her young daughter beside her—at several points throughout the sequence. However, Sacco introduces Munira in a single panel at an earlier point in the graphic narrative. At this point in the work, we do not yet know her name or her story, but Sacco places her in a short sequence that explores the effects of the war on witnesses. The image shows Munira sitting against the wall, visibly distraught as her daughter tries to comfort her. The text reads: 'When this woman told us about her experiences in Foča [the hospital where women were taken away], she started shaking so hard she had to sit down against the wall' (106). Sacco thus foregrounds the longer lasting traumatic effects of Munira's experiences before actually introducing her story. The image of a traumatised Munira is striking, but Sacco enables her victim narrative more clearly by giving her room to narrate her own experiences. Like in *Fax from Sarajevo*, the story of sexual violence in *Safe Area Goražde* is inscribed more assertively because the victim has a distinct identity and a clear narrative voice.

It is noteworthy that the graphic narratives in which a victim attains a voice are dealing with the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. This may be because there are more rape survivors in Bosnia, or because the artists dealing with the Rwandan context are aware of the culture of shaming around sexual violence in Rwanda. Another explanation can be found in the fact that the graphic narratives dealing with Rwanda are ultimately informed by pre-existing sexualised discourses around Africa and African characters. The (neo)colonial histories of stereotyping African and black bodies, particularly female bodies, as exotic, erotic, dangerous, and mostly silent (see for instance Gilman 1985a, 1985b; Nederveen Pieterse 1992; McClintock 1995; Hobson 2005; Tamale 2011) form a cultural backdrop that can, however unwittingly, influence the visual repertoire drawn upon by the artists. The sense of excess and othering inscribed in historical images of African and black sexuality perhaps more readily enables graphic narratives dealing with the Rwandan genocide to take up the topic of sexual violence in a manner that is visually more explicit and elides any interaction with the rape victim or the aftermath of rape. In contrast, there are less clearly developed historical frames of sexual reference for the war in Bosnia, which is coupled with the fact that the conflict has been less prone to exoticism and cultural othering because it took place on European soil.[32] In terms of

[32] Although the region may be less prone to exoticism in comparison to the discourses around Africa, Bosnia and the Balkans have certainly not escaped the mechanism of cultural othering. See for instance Robert D. Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts; A Journey through History* (1994), Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), and Lene Hansen's *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (2006).

the depiction of rape in the graphic narratives that deal with Bosnia, this absence of a sexualised discourse could explain why there is a more sustained interaction with the rape victims.

With regard to the representation of sexual violence in the context of the Armenian genocide, Cossi's *Medz Yeghern* features a depiction of rape that takes place over four panels, but is most explicitly highlighted in a single, larger panel. Here, Cossi employs the animal trope to convey the horrors of the situation without showing them in great detail. The perpetrators take on snakelike features so that they form human/animal hybrids—a demonic looking, fully formed snake complements the scene—and the victim is rendered in an expressionistic style that similarly distorts the scene in an effort to make what is shown more palatable. The rape victim is the sister of one of the main characters, but she remains unnamed, and her absence later in the story suggests that she has not survived the atrocities. This lack of engagement with the aftermath of rape ties into the elision of rape as explored in the earlier examples, but Cossi's treatment of sexual violence stands out through his use of the animal metaphor. Here, the animal metaphor follows the use of animal tropes as previously explored by associating the perpetrators' actions with a sense of feral and animalistic behaviour while simultaneously allowing for a distance to the events depicted. However, the snakes propose the 'man is beast' metaphor in a more straightforward, and narratively less disruptive, manner than the more complex use of the dog and hyena in *Deogratias* and *99 Days* (see chapter one).

The process of inscription and elision of the rape narrative, and the obvious dangers and pitfalls of this elision, can be nuanced by taking into account that the main aim of these graphic narratives is to deal with genocide and ethnic cleansing. The task of creating an accessible form to interact with the genocide narrative is arguably daunting enough. Artists have to grapple with conveying historical context, creating characters and a story that allow for reader investment, while also inevitably having to deal with elements that work against a connection with the readers, such as the depiction of mass violence, trauma, and sexual violence. It is understandable that artists do not want to deter readers through extended sequences of sexual violence. The strategies of presence and absence examined here—a tangible hesitation to visually engage with rape through a paucity of panels and the use of language—demonstrate how the artists are attempting to come to term with these representational dilemmas.

I have pointed out a particular interaction between presence and absence in the graphic narratives that deal with sexual violence in Rwanda and Bosnia, but there is a more

decided move away from engagement with rape narratives in the works dealing with the Holocaust. Where *Smile through the Tears*, *Deogratias*, *99 Days*, *Fax from Sarajevo*, *Safe Area Goražde*, and *Medz Yeghern* are grappling to visualise sexual violence, or its immediate aftermath, the graphic narratives that focus on the Holocaust feature little to no reference to sexual violence, and if they do it is usually in a visual form that is more clearly removed from the actual events. As explored in the first part of this chapter, the Holocaust graphic narratives respond to existing visual discourses by consciously implementing excess in the representation of mass violence. However, in the case of sexual violence, the majority of these works counter existing kitsch discourses around sexually perverted Nazis and sexualised victims when dealing with rape narratives.

Auschwitz and *Yossel* both include a brief reference to forced prostitution in concentration camps. Comparable to the excess employed in the construction of perpetrator figures and the visualisation of violence, Croci's *Auschwitz* is evidently relying on kitsch in order to allude to sexual violence. In breaching the topic, Croci draws on existing cinematic models. Towards the end of the graphic novel, the mother Cessia finds a Nazi photo album with images spilled out amidst the rubble of the camps, which have at that point been deserted by the Germans (58). Croci shows the collection of photographs in a collage; some of these photographs are redrawn versions of actual photographic evidence, but Croci also inserts two images of the daughter Ann. In the smaller image, Ann is captured in her camp outfit while she seems reluctant to engage with the camera. The second, considerably larger image more clearly demonstrates that Ann was abused by the Nazis. The photograph bears a striking resemblance to the iconic image of Charlotte Rampling donning a Nazi outfit in Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (*Il portiere di notte*, 1974), as we see Ann wearing an officer's hat and holding what seems to be a Nazi jacket to her body, covering her nudity. Croci does not explicitly show the sexual violence directed against Ann, but the discovery of the photograph provides enough evidence to assume that she was forced to engage in sexual activities. In contrast to *The Night Porter*, where the character played by Rampling performs a cabaret routine in a scene that deliberately confounds the borders between agency and lack of agency, sadism and masochism, Croci removes any sense of reflexive theatricality from the drawings. It is clear that Ann has not consented to what is shown, and this lack of agency, as well as the innocence and youthfulness of the character, are once again emphasised in the next panel by the juxtaposition of the photographs on the ground with the doll figure.

Yossel also includes a visual reference to rape by showing a female prisoner, wearing a normal outfit rather than the camp garments, who is scrutinised by two Nazi figures in the background of the image. Similar to the examples from Rwanda and Bosnia, the woman remains anonymous, and language is used to further explain what is not shown visually. Kubert has his narrator, a rebbe who escaped Auschwitz, explain that the more attractive female prisoners were rounded up for the solders' entertainment, and that '[a] special barracks building was designated in which the engagements took place. On a quiet night, soft music could be heard, punctuated by an angry shout or a scream of pain' (53). Kubert thus uses the interplay between text and image to convey sexual violence, but he also feels compelled to further exempt the female prisoners from guilt or responsibility, adding that '[t]he women were fed and clothed to enhance their performance. Who could blame these women? Have you ever felt hunger that tore at the pit of your stomach?' (53).

A more decisive absence of sexual violence can be found in *Maus*, *The Search*, and *Judenhass*, which feature no sexualised bodies or references to sexual violence. In the case of *Maus*, this absence can be explained by Spiegelman's adherence to his father's story—rather than providing a more comprehensive overview of the atrocities committed— and his general aim to steer away from any pre-existing (cinematic) Holokitsch discourses. Furthermore, the systemic use of the animal metaphor in *Maus* further supports Spiegelman's choice to refrain from engaging with the topic of sexual violence.[33] The few instances where Spiegelman shows the mice with naked human bodies are visually quite disturbing through their hybridity (see Orbán 2007), which suggests that an explicit depiction of genocidal rape would be too problematic within the confines of the animal metaphor. *The Search*'s refusal to engage with genocidal rape is motivated by its educational context, which limits exposure to this topic. In Sim's case, excess is used only for the display of mass violence, rather than instances of sexual violence.

In order to better understand why these graphic narratives do not engage as much or as explicitly with the topic of sexual violence, more cultural context is needed on the persistent fusion of sex and violence in the context of the Holocaust. Particularly the Nazisploitation genre is characterised by its fusion of sex and violence, combining horror and pornographic elements to provide an aesthetic frisson to the audience. Nazisploitation films like *Love Camp 7* (Lee Frost, 1969), *Ilsa: She-Wolf of the SS* (Don Edmonds, 1975), and *Salon Kitty* (Tinto Brass,

[33] This is certainly not always the case; the systemic use of the animal as employed in Robert Crumb's underground comix *Fritz the Cat* (1960-1972) does not prevent the explicit representation of sex and violence.

1976) ostensibly do not aim to do more than titillate an audience with bodily spectacles and prolonged visual displays of rape and humiliation (of both men and women). The neodecadent Italian films of the 1970s, such as Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974), Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (*Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, 1975), and Lina Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties* (*Pasqualino Settebellezze*, 1975), use the kitsch of sexual perversity, theatricality, and sexual transgressions in a more reflexive and critical manner that deconstructs comfortable and comforting notions of right and wrong. These filmmakers work against straightforward categories of heroes, victims, and perpetrators by 'question[ing] the production of digestible visualizations of Italy's and Germany's fascist past' (Ravetto 2001, 27). However, these films still rely on the shock of transgressive and violent sexual practices in order to confront audiences. Mainstream films can similarly rely on titillation as a narrative device in the context of sexual violence. For instance, *Schindler's List* famous shower scene, with the naked bodies of the female prisoners on display, as well as the film's sexualisation of the body of the Jewish character Helen Hirsch—and the scene's invitation to align with perpetrator Amon Goeth— have been critiqued for their inappropriate use of kitsch (see for instance the *Village Voice* roundtable 1994; Hansen 1996; Horowitz 1997a; Bartov 1997a; Picart and Frank 2006).

Predecessors to this titillating use of sexual violence in the context of the Holocaust can be found in Ka-Tzetnik's (pen name of Yehiel Dinur, born Yehiel Feiner) *House of Dolls* (1953) and the Stalags series of pulp novels published in Israel in the 1960s. Holocaust survivor Ka-Tzetnik's novel presents a 'bizarre and startling mixture of kitsch, sadism, and what initially appears as outright pornography, with remarkable and at times quite devastating insights into the reality of Auschwitz' (Bartov 1997b, 45). Ka-Tzetnik's collection of Holocaust novels—*Salamandra* (1946, translated as *Sunrise over Hell*) and *Karu lo pipl* ('They Called him Piepel', 1961, translated as *Piepel*) are other titles—are characterised by a negation of the moral guidelines of silence and reticence in favour of an 'obsession with violence and perversity' (Bartov 1997b, 46). In *House of Dolls*, Dinur details how the protagonist's younger sister is forced to work for the 'Joy Division', the camp brothel in Auschwitz. The novel includes many of the elements that would later be picked up by the exploitation films; it features the sadistic and violent character of the 'Master-Kalefactress', called Elsa, and it presents a particular voyeuristic mix of physical and sexual violations against vulnerable and young girls.

Ka-Tzetnik's work can be linked to the genre of Stalags pulp novels: books that take their power from the illicit excitement of the fusion between sex and violence in the context of

the Holocaust. These pulp novels 'were renowned for their scenes of domination, torture, and sadistic sex, most characteristically between SS female guards and Allied soldiers in German POW camps' (Pinchevski and Brand 2007, 388). Written and published primarily in Israel, the popularity of these pulp novels coincided with the 1961 Eichmann trial, offering a platform for readers to negotiate power relations and fantasies of domination/submission. The Stalags further establish the tropes of sexual abuse by domineering and nymphomaniac female officers—a gender inversion that has an obvious titillating and sadomasochistic appeal—which then allows for a violent (male) revenge fantasy that restores (patriarchal) order. Amit Pinchevski and Roy Brand point out that the most controversial of these novels was a 1962 title, *I Was Captain Schulz's Private Bitch*, which focused on the story of a French girl that is abused by a Nazi officer in occupied France. This work featured 'explicit scenes of the Nazi officer raping and molesting the book's narrator' (2007, 391) and caused such a stir that it was subsequently confiscated.

What these examples from cinema and literature demonstrate is that the particular fusion of sex and violence and the allure of inscribing rape narratives have informed the context of representation of genocide. These representations propose an interaction with rape narratives that is based on a sense of horror or pleasure (and often both), revelling in the details of the violation in order to maximise the shock impact. However, even with the most excessive pulp examples it is important not to immediately dismiss them as meaningless or trivial. For example, the Stalags offered young Israelis a means to come to terms with Holocaust issues around powerlessness and the loss of agency through the kitsch of the prose and the displacement of the Holocaust to a setting of sadistic female commanders and Anglo-Saxon prisoners (see Pinchevski and Brand 2007).

In contrast to this sexualised discourse of Holocaust narratives, the graphic narratives are consciously avoiding replicating the cultural tropes around the sexual deviance of perpetrators and the titillating perversity of sexual violence. Rather than using the excess of sexual violence as the main drive of the narrative, or as a questionable thematic device, the Holocaust graphic narratives attempt to limit kitsch in the context of sexual violence using similar strategies to the graphic narratives dealing with Bosnia and Rwanda; *Auschwitz* and *Yossel* rely on a paucity of panels and the use of stand-in language in dealing with the topic. It is noteworthy that quite a few of Holocaust graphic narratives do not engage with sexual violence at all. This absence is motivated by the fact that the graphic narratives are forcefully delineating themselves from the rape kitsch of other cultural representations of the Holocaust.

In following the educational incentive of showing why the Holocaust is important for public history, the graphic narratives thus move away from the more excessive and sexualised populist depictions.

The question at stake is whether panels that deal with sexual violence inevitably include—through their visual rendering and explicit language—an element of ambivalence, ranging from outright sexual spectacle to even just the slightest hint of pleasure, attraction or titillation, however unintended it may be. As explored, this ambivalence clearly permeates the instances of rape in the wider Holocaust discourse. In comparison, the international graphic narratives discussed in this thesis are taking more responsibility for their rape narratives, using different strategies to avoid catering to a visual spectacle, among which a paucity of panels and the use of stand-in language. The tangible hesitation to visually engage with rape runs as a common thread throughout the corpus, and it emphasises the (presumed) dangers of kitsch in dealing with this topic. The works discussed may not fully engage with the aftermath of rape, but they do not include any type of apologist elements, nor do they allow for much ambivalence with regard to the relationship between perpetrator and victim. The panels clearly establish who is the aggressor and who is victim, and they markedly imply the force and brutality involved.

3.3 Conclusion

In engaging with the topic of mass violence and sexual violence, the examples demonstrate that the panels dealing with mass violence tend to focus more heavily on the image of the violated body, whereas the depiction of sexual violence places more emphasis on stand-in language as a means to convey these transgressions. If it is true that 'an image often appears where a word seems to fail; a word often appears where the imagination seems to fail' (Didi-Huberman 2008, 26), this contrast highlights the ways in which the body image proposes a more direct and emotive interaction with the horrors of mass violence, whereas the stand-in qualities of language are deemed a more appropriate strategy when imagination fails in the context of sexual violence. The notion of 'failing' in the latter case is twofold: it points to a cultural and moral hesitation to fully imagine and represent sexual violence—as opposed to mass violence, we cannot and do not want to completely imagine this type of violence—but when imagination has been employed, in the case of the excessive fusion of sex and violence in Holocaust discourses, it has often failed to move beyond a sense of frisson or disgust.

There is an inherent risk to representing mass violence and sexual violence, as these representations can deter readers or cater to a sense of spectacle. Particularly the images of violence that rely on an explicit rendering of the corporality of the victims run the risk of not allowing for more than a visceral shock effect. The limited inclusion of sexual violence as explored in this chapter further raises questions about the ways in which rape narratives are simultaneously inscribed and elided, and to what extent those strategies sustain a culture in which rape stories are invalidated or underrepresented.

However, a careful consideration of images of mass violence has shown that excess is not by default straightforwardly aiming to shock or provide a spectacle. On the contrary, many of the strategies used to deal with mass violence rely on forms of kitsch, but the graphic narratives can use this kitsch in a complex manner that self-consciously addresses the inclusion of these images and their position in a wider visual discourse. The graphic narratives posit excess, but they simultaneously employ restraint by considering the impact of these atrocity images. This negotiation between restraint and excess is even more pronounced in the depiction of sexual violence. Here, many of the works attempt to avoid the more overtly ambiguous forms of excess in favour of strategies that rely on visual and narrative constraints, using stand-in language as a more appropriate form of dealing with the topic.

In conclusion, these graphic narratives aim to convey a sense of the human destruction of genocide, and they take responsibility in doing so. Showing the violation of human bodies, and the repeated transgressions enacted on these bodies by various forms of violence, is central to all of the graphic narratives. Visual and verbal excess is used in service of this expository drive and the graphic narratives in the corpus poignantly reveal the act and effects of genocidal violence.

4. Modernism and Historical Accuracy: Anti-Kitsch Strategies

4.0 Introduction

This final chapter investigates how graphic narratives respond to the debates around silence and restraint as more appropriate methods of representation by employing anti-kitsch strategies as a means to avoid the dangers of kitsch and excess in dealing with genocide. The anti-kitsch strategies explored in this chapter include an emphasis on the unrepresentability of genocide on the one hand, and the substantiation of claims about the veracity of the events on the other. The first of these anti-kitsch strategies follows the critical emphasis on the unimaginability of genocide—a premise that has been theorised most comprehensively and consistently in the context of the Holocaust—by incorporating a modernist aesthetic that highlights the failures and crises around (not) witnessing and (not) fully comprehending the events. These crises in witnessing are explored through a visual and verbal emphasis on the eyes of the victims and the notion of seeing. Here, witnessing the horrors is (temporarily) displaced from the reader to the characters, so that the events are conveyed through visual and thematic indirection. In exposing a crisis of witnessing by focusing on the eyes and seeing, the graphic narratives follow 'a modernist fixation on vision and the visual' (Hansen 1996, 302).

The second anti-kitsch strategy can be found in the paratext, which is used to posit truth claims and to straightforwardly anchor knowledge about the events. Focusing primarily on pre- and postfaces, I demonstrate that these paratextual inserts are used to substantiate the historical accuracy of the graphic narratives. Furthermore, these paratextual spaces (implicitly and explicitly) comment on recurring critical debates around the representation of genocide in popular culture, and the graphic narrative's ability to present an appropriate and truthful representation of the events. Although both strategies explored in this chapter are aimed at countering the kitsch aesthetic, there is a noteworthy contrast between the epistemological crisis explored in the crises of witnessing in the text and the more direct and unambiguous claims to knowledge in the paratext.

4.1 Modernist Forms of Witnessing

Holocaust scholars and trauma theorists point to a crisis in bearing witness to catastrophe, focusing on the Holocaust as the limit event in which this crisis of witnessing is played out most poignantly. It is often argued that the traumatic and incomprehensible nature of the Holocaust shattered a space in which straightforward forms of witnessing and testimony could take place. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) posit that bearing witness to a trauma like the Holocaust 'begin[s] with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality of its occurrence' (57). Other scholars also point to this notion of absence, or how the event was 'not known' (Caruth 1996, 4) in the first place. This absence is also directly reflected in the witness accounts after the events, which are haunted by the 'anguished memory' (Langer 1991, 40) of Holocaust survivors that are struggling to come to terms with their own experiences.

As the overwhelming nature of genocide precludes a straightforward and coherent form of witnessing, trauma and Holocaust scholars tend to focus on cultural texts that employ modernist strategies in order to demonstrate these testimonial lacunae. These modernist strategies are considered more appropriate for trauma narratives, as they resist the classical realist approach of providing a sense of transparency and mastery over the past and they more adequately mirror the experiences of trauma (Hirsch 2004, 3). Modernist strategies of representation are characterised by, among other things, rejections of straightforward and linear narratives, (hyper) subjective point of views, and formal and narrative self-reflexivity. These strategies draw attention to the construction of the genocide narrative and allow for a sense of reflexive interrogation that emphasises the impossibility of a straightforward and completed representation. Holocaust scholar Berel Lang describes this negation of standard and conventional patterns of representation as 'the constant turning in Holocaust images to *difference*' which can manifest in the use of elements like silence and 'obliqueness in representation' (Lang 2000, 10, italics in original; also see Craps 2013 for a critical evaluation of this modernist trauma aesthetic). In addition, the modernist aesthetic often pays particular attention to the act of testimony and bearing witness. Real and imaginative witnesses have had access to the events; this means that their testimonies, however fragmented or elusive, provide an evidentiary trace of the atrocities and convey a sense of authority (Horowitz 1997b, 8; also see Vice 2000, 4-6). The critical attention to the process of representation and the role

of the witness as explored in modernist works can be placed in contrast to kitsch, which is viewed as an aesthetic mode that works to an opposite effect. Kitsch ostensibly aims for a closed and simplified past—which is seen as inaccurate or manipulative— and it has been argued to value style over content, and comfort over complexity.

Key modernist visual representations of catastrophe, like Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et brouillard*, 1955) and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), and Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), are often used as examples of successful, or at least visually and narratively adequate trauma narratives. Joshua Hirsch (2004) argues that *Night and Fog* is one of the first films of a posttraumatic cinema of the Holocaust, as it breaks away from the traditional expository documentary mode into a more poetic and self-reflexive form, where friction occurs between the images, music, and the narration. In this way, *Night and Fog* 'invites the spectator to attend to the film's presence as both a historical and an artistic artifact' (Hirsch 2004, 42) and it functions as a 'definitive modernist gesture to make the present complicit in the atrocities of the past' (Metz 2008, 22).[34] Resnais's modernism is further developed and established in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, a film that intertwines the characters' personal memories of WWII and the Hiroshima bombings by using hypersubjective flashbacks and non-linear chronology. Cathy Caruth (1996) demonstrates how the film employs indirection and incomprehension—visual representations of 'experiences not yet completely grasped' (56)—in order to address the interplay between trauma, history, and memory. By exploring notions around seeing and not seeing, both *Night and Fog* and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* directly respond to the visual crises around witnessing catastrophe.[35] In a similar vein, Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* is often celebrated for its ability to resist the perceived limitations of classical realist or expository modes of (documentary) representation. Its length of nine hours, lack of archival footage, and extensive interview process are commended for exposing the crisis of witnessing while also taking a witness stand (Felman and Laub 1992) and for its ability of demonstrating 'the ways in which understanding breaks down' (Caruth 1995, 155).

[34] *Night and Fog* was not straightforwardly embraced as a modernist masterpiece. The film has been criticised for its lack of referencing Jewish victims and its experimental aesthetic, and it sparked controversy at the Cannes Film Festival in 1956 after German and French protests, causing its withdrawal (see Frey 2008b; Pollock and Silverman 2011, particularly the chapter by Andrew Hebard; Lindepberg 2014).

[35] See Boswell 2012, 144-145. Also see Pollock and Silverman (2011) and Silverman (2013) for further readings of *Night and Fog* (and other films in Resnais's oeuvre) as a form of 'concentrationary cinema', which uses radical, and modernist, filmic techniques to 'expose invisible knowledge hidden by a normalized, documentary presentation of a real that could become bland and opaque unless agitated by disturbing juxtapositions and prolonged visual attentiveness' (2011, 2).

Maus is instrumental in tracing the use of modernist strategies of representation in graphic novels. The work has been lauded and analysed for its modernist elements, as Spiegelman 'draws on the comic as a mass cultural genre, but transforms it in a narrative saturated with modernist techniques of self-reflexivity, self-irony, ruptures in narrative time and highly complex image sequencing and montaging' (Huyssen 2000, 70). These techniques include Spiegelman's implementation, and simultaneous deconstruction, of the animal metaphor by emphasising the inconsistencies in upholding the animal categories. Throughout his work, Spiegelman creates unnerving contrasts between metaphorical animals and real animals, and he employs the device of the mask as a means to critique essentialist notions of (ethnic) identity. After *Maus*, Spiegelman has continued using the mouse head/mask in his graphic narratives *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004) and the expanded *Breakdowns* edition of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&*!* (2008), and it has arguably become a visual signifier that connotes Spiegelman's sense of self-reflexive, authorial commentary. In addition, Spiegelman's formal organisation constantly draws attention to the ways in which past and present coexist, interact, and overlap (see Chute 2006). In showing how Vladek's memories pervade the present—both narratively and formally, as the panels often display the co-existence of different temporalities—Spiegelman follows the modernist trope of collapsing chronology and drawing attention to the ways in which traumatic histories linger and impact on the present.

Spiegelman also works against a straightforward and linear narrative by interjecting his father's story with autobiographical comments about the interview process and the relationship between father and son, as well as the reflecting on the process of creating the graphic novel and its position as a work of Holocaust memory. This line of commentary is interwoven throughout the story, but it is also present in external documentation; the CD-ROM for *The Complete Maus* (1994) and the background work *Metamaus* (2011) provide extended information about the project, while also including Spiegelman's thoughts on (issues around) Holocaust representation. These external texts further establish the modernist mode of drawing attention to the construction of the text, while also providing Spiegelman with a platform to establish himself as a modernist author who is actively engaged in questions and debates around his own work.

Furthermore, the work functions as a testimonial palimpsest that includes a variety of witness elements: from Vladek's position as an eyewitness to the ways in which Art Spiegelman bears witness to the father-son struggles that ensue, and the ways in which the

graphic novel includes Spiegelman's ponderings about the use of the comics medium as an adequate form to bear witness to the Holocaust. With regard to the visual representation of crises in witnessing, Spiegelman's work includes telling references to eyes, notably Vladek's (crying) glass eye—which has been theorised as a metaphor for Vladek's inability to come to terms with what he has seen (Levine 2002) and for the second-generation that did not witness the horrors first-hand (Landsberg 1997). However, and as pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, the actual visual manifestation of the eyes is not nearly as pronounced as in the original 1972 three-page comic in *Funny Aminals* (sic), where the mice's eyes are drawn with more detail and pathos. Because of the simplicity of the black dots, the eyes in *Maus* are inevitably working in conjunction with the animal heads in which they reside. In *Metamaus*, Spiegelman explicitly highlights his artistic debt to modernism when discussing how it influenced his work and drawing style: 'That aspect of modernism that distilled drawing down past its representational point, but was still representing, had the most impact on me . . . certainly the ways in which modern artists, both verbal and visual, allowed one to see the construction and seams of their work led me toward things that were fruitful' (2011, 205). The distillation of drawing past its representational point can be seen in the 'Little Orphan Annie' quality of Spiegelman's schematic and abstracted animal heads, which—as pointed out by Spiegelman on several occasions—facilitates the (emotionally resonant) interaction between the reader and the graphic narrative (2011, 196).

How do the 'empty' eyes and the animal metaphor work together to create a specific type of modernist witnessing? Following Nicholas Mirzoeff's (1995) ideas on visuality and blindness, Katalin Orbán (2007) explores how the use of the animal trope prompts a distinct notion of blindness: 'blindness as true sight'—a (metaphorical) gaze that is characterised by simultaneously seeing both everything and nothing. Orbán posits that this notion of blindness is a recurring visual trope in Western art and culture, and I would add that it is one that is often deployed and analysed by Holocaust and trauma theorists. The concept of a gaze that is full (of knowledge, of impressions) but simultaneously empty because of an inability to register is central to the ideas around a crisis in witnessing. This type of blindness is partly taken up by Spiegelman, both on the level of the individual mice figures as well as on the level of the animal metaphor as a whole. The 'blank canvas' of the animal head proposes both a connection with the receiver (we can project our feelings onto the empty screen of the animal heads) as well as a disconnection: 'Besides the connection of blindness and understanding, it also evokes that dissociation of sight and comprehension that is central to trauma and a

recurring element in the Holocaust survivors' accounts' (Orbán 2007, 63). The animal heads, and their schematic eyes, thus signal the modernist aesthetic of formal self-reflexivity, hinting to notions of (not) knowing and (not) seeing through the emptiness of the animal gaze and the representational distance imposed by the animal ciphers. Furthermore, blindness also takes place when the sustained presence of the animal figures throughout the graphic narrative cancels out their visuality, so that the animal figures are something to be seen through. It is, as Joseph Witek noted, a representational trope that is to be noted, absorbed, and then forgotten (1989, 111).

However, Orbán argues that this blindness invoked by the animal heads and the general premise of the animal metaphor (see also chapter one herein) is severely disturbed by the visual manifestations of the (naked) human body. Rather than allowing us to project ourselves into the animal heads, or to disregard the animality of the figures altogether, the hybrid body, particularly in the panels where it is presented as naked, disrupts the constructed blindness because of an 'excess in visual representation' (Orbán 2007, 67). After arriving at Auschwitz, the prisoners are stripped of their clothes and showered (186). Several panels show the mice figures with naked, male human bodies, which presents a visual incongruity and rejection of blindness that is further developed by the juxtaposition with Nazi cats who are holding real dogs on a leash (the clash of two animal systems similarly exposes and disrupts a sense of blindness). For Orbán, this tension around the mice figures and their hybrid bodies demonstrates how Spiegelman's work positions itself between the visual restraints that have informed (discussions about) the representation of the Holocaust, while also proposing new visual ways of dealing with the topic. In a similar vein, Andreas Huyssen points out how *Maus* demonstrates that *Bilderverbot*[36] and mimesis, the approximation of some form of historical and personal truth, are not two ends of the spectrum, as the animal figures offer a mimetic approximation that is not realistic but still authentic, while simultaneously acknowledging the constraints around Holocaust representation (2000, 76).

The temporal juxtapositions, self-reflexive attention to the construction of the text, and interactions between visuality and blindness all substantiate *Maus*'s position as a modernist Holocaust text. These modernist elements work in tandem with Spiegelman's commentaries on Holokitsch, which help to anchor *Maus* as a limit point against kitsch. The graphic narrative's position in a modernist lineage is further established in scholarly

[36] Huyssen terms it 'the prohibition of graven images' (2000, 66), Orbán calls it 'a prohibition on iconographic representation . . . in some monotheistic religions' (2007, 86). Both authors position the term in relation to representations of the Holocaust.

discourses, which often discuss *Maus* in relation to other modernist texts. For instance, in the introduction to *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (1997), Sara R. Horowitz's draws multiple connections between Lanzmann's *Shoah* and Spiegelman's *Maus*. She points out how both texts eschew an artistry that aestheticises or softens in favour of a modernist approach that 'resides in the meshing of disparate fragments into a cognitive, psychological, and ethical whole that unsettles the viewer' (6). Furthermore, Horowitz points out that both Lanzmann and Spiegelman stress the non-fictionality of their work. By insisting on the veracity of their work, Lanzmann and Spiegelman distance themselves from fictional Holocaust texts, as 'the easy conflation of "fiction" with "lies" threatens the integrity of their respective projects and the credibility of Holocaust representation' (Horowitz 1997b, 12). This authorial emphasis on the veracity of the work counters the presupposed dangers of kitsch and highlights how modernist strategies of representation are informed by truth claims; the negation of straightforward and classical realist representations through strategies of fragmentation, montage, and self-reflexivity are directly linked to claims about historical accuracy (with the presumption that these modernist strategies of representation are more truthful, or at least better capable of showing the crises in representation of atrocity).

Elements of the modernist trauma aesthetic, notably the tension between seeing and not seeing and the disruption of the flow of the narrative, recur across other genocide graphic narratives. By incorporating these modernist witness elements into the narratives, the works explicitly repeat (academic and cultural) discourses around seeing, testimony, and trauma. In particular it is the theme of witnessing that is consistently employed in the graphic narratives. Across the corpus there is a repeated visual and verbal emphasis on seeing; these witness panels show how characters respond to the events by including close-ups of eyes or panels that highlight the facial expressions of the eyewitnesses. These images are in many cases presented without dialogue in text balloons, although captions sometimes add a narrative voice to the scene in order to reiterate the difficulties of bearing witness, while also exposing the longer lasting impact of witnessing atrocity.

In these witness panels, the eyes become the proverbial 'windows to the soul'. Rather than focusing on the horrors committed, the graphic narratives place emphasis on the eyes and the notion of seeing to temporarily halt the flow of the narrative and to make visible the impact of the events on the witnesses. By focusing on the act of witnessing, these graphic narratives counter an omniscient perspective in favour of one that stresses incomprehension and uncertainty. Here, meaning is no longer conveyed straightforwardly, but the panels claim

veracity through their focus on (non-)fictional witnesses through which we grasp traces of the atrocity rather than a complete picture. Artists include these difficulties of witnessing as a form of anti-kitsch; the graphic narratives cater to the notion of the unrepresentability of genocide by following a modernist aesthetic that stresses the crisis in comprehending the events and bearing witness to them. In doing so, the works posit an absence of representation rather than implementing the excess of kitsch.

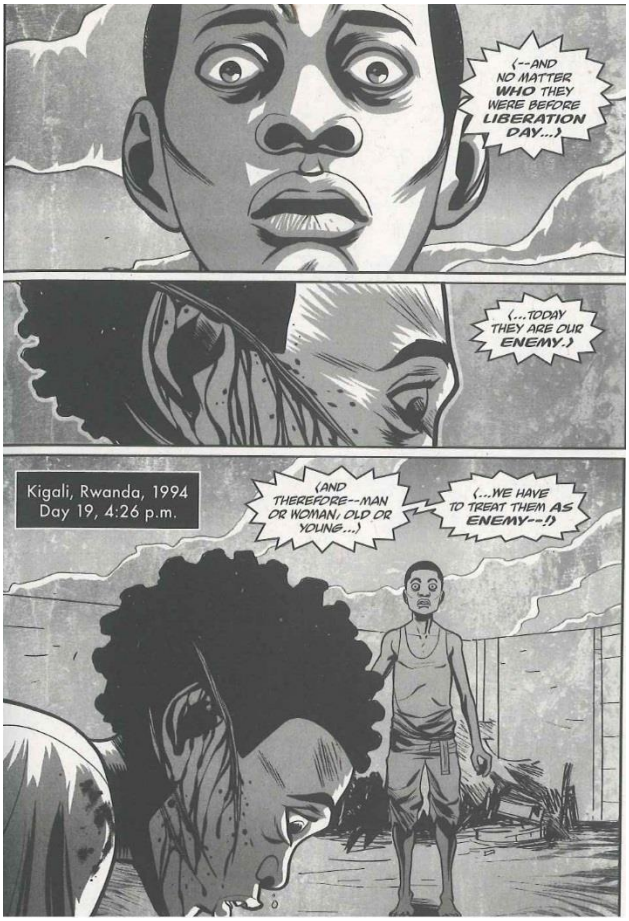

Figure 30

Probably the most compelling case of this visual emphasis on the difficulty of witnessing is found in Matteo Casali and Kristian Donaldson's detective story *99 Days*. It opens with an image of eyes and seeing, as the first panel of the graphic narrative depicts the severely distraught face of the main character Antoine (see figure 30). A sense of horror and shock is communicated through his wide open eyes, which are given more emphasis through the surrounding shading. Here, we are plunged into the traumatic backstory, which is set in Rwanda, without much contextual information, and our first encounter with the protagonist

takes place by literally coming face to face with him in the first panel. The second panel shows us what Antoine is looking at, and the gash on the boy's face—only part of which is framed within a horizontally narrow panel—is complemented by what appears to be a look of shock or fear in his eyes. The third panel on the page brings together Antoine's shocked expression and the boy (we later learn this is Antoine's friend Bertrand), so that we know for certain that the two previous panels are correlated. Clouds of smoke are present in the background, framing Antoine's face in the first panel and creating a visual counterpoint to the lines and shades in his face. Convention teaches us that the text balloons, with their jagged edges and lack of tails, are probably radio messages, and their content is painfully contrasted with the horror of the scene that is unfolding.

These three panels, which constitute the first page, are then followed by a shift in time to a present-day Antoine in Los Angeles. It's not until the very end of the story that we return to the harrowing images of the eyes. We then learn that it is Antoine who has inflicted the wound, after which he is forced by Hutu militias to kill his friend. This horrible act is conveyed by, again, focusing on Antoine's eyes as the panels zoom in on them while drops of blood litter the page. In opening the graphic novel with these witnessing panels, followed by a temporal shift to the present, *99 Days* follows the modernist convention of working against a linearity of experience. This interweaving of past and present not only structures the work, but Casali and Donaldson visualise the workings of trauma when the image of Bertrand starts to intrude on the narrative in the present.

Going back to the first page, the eyes of the two boys are the focal points in the three panels, positioned in such a way that we move from one set of eyes to the next, moving back and forth between Antoine and Bertrand. We can let our gaze drop straight down the middle of the page, and the eyes will guide us through the scene. The visual emphasis on eyes in the first panel confronts us with the tragedy that is at the core of the narrative. The emphasis on Antoine's shocked expression and the alternation between his eyes and Bertrand's set up a specular drama in which Antoine is unable to fully comprehend the scene that is unfolding before his eyes. However, it is not until the end of the graphic narrative that we discover Antoine's complicity in the events. Casali and Donaldson have cleverly masked this involvement on the first page by blocking out the machete that Antoine is holding in the third panel.

Here, the narrative follows a course that Lynn A. Higgins describes as characteristic of World War II fictions, where 'memories are organized around a focal scene that appears in

some ways to be the origin or crux of the story' (1989, 200). Higgins traces how the act of looking is tied to issues around complicity in Louis Malle's *Au Revoir Les Enfants* (1987). In this film, Malle's childhood experiences are fused into a dramatic scene where a single glance in a classroom causes the arrest (and implicit death sentence) of a friend (also see Frey 2004 for a more detailed analysis of Malle's exploration of the bystander). This fusion of seeing and complicity is equally present in *99 Days,* where the focal traumatic scene not only revolves around Antoine visually taking note of the horrors, but also, as we later learn, his complicity in the events and his role as executioner. Seeing and (not) comprehending are central to this first page, but the already strenuous relation between the witness and the event is further problematised by turning the witness into an active participant in the genocidal events.

Figure 31

In Paolo Cossi's *Medz Yeghern*, the image of eyes is most poignantly displayed in a two-page spread that is positioned at the end of a chapter that details atrocities committed against Armenians in great graphic detail. We are introduced to the character Sona and we see how her love interest and father are murdered and her sister is raped. The final two pages of this

chapter show Sona's wide open eyes superimposed over the background, with the heads of her father and other male victims put on stakes in the forefront (see figure 31). The teeth of Sona's father have been pulled out and hammered into his forehead, so that blood is gushing from his mouth. The blood flowing from the mouths infuses the rest of the page, as smaller and bigger specks of a dark substance litter the pages (some of these specks may also be birds, but this remains decidedly ambiguous). The image also shows a group of people, including Sona, walking off in the background, pointing to the killing method of forced deportations into the desert. There is a marked juxtaposition between Sona's eyes, which seem to be overlooking the unfolding of the atrocities, while the eyes of the victims have lost the ability to see and are displayed as empty sockets. The mountains in the background seem to have been coloured in with paint, so that the loose brushstrokes, which are also visible on the ground, give an impressionistic feel to the natural surroundings. The witness position that Sona, by virtue of surviving, has taken on is underscored by superimposing her look over the entirety of the scene, both the serenity of the landscape and the scene of atrocity that frames the left part of the page. Her eyes are, similar to Antoine's, wide open and show an expression of shock and horror. Using a two-page spread for this scene of atrocity and doom, Cossi slows down the rhythm of the panel sequences in order to create a moment of visual impact. The image of Sona's superimposed eyes is also used as a background image for the preface at the start of the graphic novel. Its importance, and its symbolism as a key moment of witnessing, is thus heightened by the fact that it is one of the first images the reader encounters.

This double page is positioned at the end of a chapter that incorporates several witness elements. Throughout this chapter, Cossi interweaves images of eyes with explicit references to seeing/not seeing that add to the tensions around a straightforward form of bearing witness. For instance, earlier in the chapter a priest is forced to watch the torture of two Armenian men. The malicious Turkish general stages the dramatic visual display and orders the priest to 'watch the show' (25). Horrified by what he witnesses, the priest exclaims that he can't bear to look any more, his eyes closed and face turned away from the scene. Prompted by this negation of seeing, the general orders the priest's eyes to be removed. A second witness element takes place a few pages later, when Sona's love interest is beheaded. In three panels, Cossi depicts a grim looking Turkish soldier who, as the panels zoom out, is holding the head of the young man. At the same time, the text balloons, which talk to us and the characters in the diegesis in a second-person singular address throughout the work, exhort us and Sona not to look: 'close your eyes, please, close them!' (33). Together with Sona's

omnipresent witnessing and its juxtaposition with the lack of vision of the murdered victims, these three instances in this chapter of *Medz Yeghern* encapsulate the ambivalences, crises, and failures in bearing witness to the atrocities.

The graphic novel does not completely replace a visual manifestation of the horrors with an emphasis on seeing, as we still observe some of the atrocities committed, but it does conform to the modernist strategy of highlighting the complexities of witnessing and comprehending atrocities. In doing so, the graphic novel addresses the idea that the horrors of genocide are profoundly disruptive and cannot be readily transferred into existing schemata of comprehension. The sequence demonstrates that being a witness to genocide is by no means an uncomplicated, linear experience of visual registration. The responses of shock and disgust as portrayed by the priest and Sona demonstrate how becoming a witness is not necessarily a noble task that is taken up voluntarily. Here, the work also explicitly addresses and implicates the readers, effectively confronting them with the same question asked of the witnesses: to look or not to look?

In addition to the visual representation of eyes and the act of seeing, there are several graphic narratives that make verbal allusions to these elements. These textual references are often temporally positioned after the events. When coupled with images of the atrocities or of characters bearing witness during the events, these references, which are often conveyed in captions, function as a delayed interpretation of the events that have transpired. Comparable to the images of eyes and seeing, these references allude to a crisis in comprehension, thereby responding to the discourse around witnessing trauma and the 'unrepresentable' nature of genocide. More so than the images of eyes, these verbal statements are explicitly dealing with the issues around a failure of witnessing.

For instance, *Yossel* includes the eyewitness testimony of Yossel's old rebbe, who is sent to Auschwitz but miraculously escapes and finds his way back to the Warsaw ghetto. His dishevelled, starving appearance and his broken spirit are further explained through his witness account, which deals with his position in the *Sonderkommando* and the hardships and atrocities he has seen and endured. Kubert introduces the character of the rebbe in order to explore what happened in the extermination camps, as the main narrative involving Yossel and others takes place in the Warsaw ghetto. By positioning the rebbe as a member of the *Sonderkommando,* Kubert opens up a narrative space to touch on some of the most traumatic and incomprehensible elements of the concentrationary universe. As the rebbe is the only character to emerge from Auschwitz, he is assigned with a depth of knowledge that seems

implausible, but works well narratively. Because the main conceit of the story is that Yossel sketches all the images, there are a few verbal references to the eponymous protagonist's urge to draw what the rebbe is telling him ('Unnoticed, I drew as he spoke', 43).

The visual depiction of this frame narrative shows various scenes involving the rebbe, all drawn in the sketchy pencil style that is used to demonstrate Yossel's artistry. And although there are a few panels in which the act of seeing is highlighted visually, it is in the text that the difficulty of witnessing is communicated most explicitly. Similar to the witness elements that inhabited the chapter in *Medz Yeghern*, the rebbe's story is laced with verbal references to seeing. The rebbe speaks of the horrible things that passed before his eyes and how his job as a member of the *Sonderkommando* made him witness things that no regular inmate would see. He describes the things he has seen in detail and also references the (obscured) eyes and gazes of other prisoners. When people are herded into the gas chamber, the rebbe observes them '[w]ith heads bowed, not looking from left to right' (57). There are several verbal references to the pressing and impossible task of being a witness, as the rebbe intersperses his account with phrases like 'I have seen this with my own eyes' (50), '[i]f I hadn't seen it for myself I wouldn't believe it' (51) and '[h]ow can I describe what I saw?' (58).

Yossel also presents the oscillation between seeing and actively choosing not to see or to delay comprehension. On two separate pages the rebbe's witness account includes the phrase '[m]y eyes were open but I saw nothing' (54, 64), which signals his survival strategy in order to carry out the assigned tasks for the *Sonderkommando*. The second time this phrase is used, we see an image of the rebbe in profile, with the faces of the victims staring at him and us from the page. Text and image reinforce each other here, as the rebbe states that '[i]n the days and weeks that passed, my eyes were open but I saw nothing . . . I forced my vision to blur so what I saw was through a haze of my own making' (64). In *Yossel*, the references to seeing also encapsulate the position of the witness that has seen too many shocking images, resorting to *not* seeing as a strategy to preserve some form of sanity. This negation of seeing is contrasted with the conflicting impulse to watch when the victims are brought into the gas chamber. The drawing shows the rebbe looking through the peep hole in the door, while he explains how '[i]t was horrific. Revolting. But I could not tear my eyes away from that awful scene' (58).

Kubert includes a panel that depicts the rebbe and two other men staring out from the page after the rebbe has looked inside the gas chambers (see figure 32). This image follows the moral guidelines around not showing the inside of the gas chambers, and instead focuses on

the witnesses to transfer the horrors of mass destruction. The three men are drawn showing different responses to what is seen. Where the men on either side of the rebbe seem to display a sense of shock and weariness, the rebbe's face and gestures convey a range of emotional responses: from horror, disbelief, and disgust to fear and anger. In his facial expression, Kubert has even managed to skilfully and subtly convey the rebbe's conflicting urge to watch the scene. Comparable to the panels in *99 Days* and *Medz Yeghern*, the individuals are staring at the horrors, but in a noteworthy twist they are also framed to be staring at us, the reader. In this way, we are made complicit to the scene, a visual move that counters a sense of comfortable narrative detachment. The look out of the page implicates the reader in an exhortative manner, so that the destructive impact of visually registering the events is made apparent not through an extended focus on the atrocities, but through a direct interaction with the witnesses. This interaction ties in to the modernist emphasis on bearing witness and testimony as providing an evidentiary trace of the atrocities. By allowing us to come face to face with the witnesses and their responses, the panels emphasise the fact that these characters function as intermediaries that are capable of conveying (fragments of) the reality or truth of the events.

Figure 32

In *Safe Area Goražde*, Sacco effectively fuses the visual and verbal witness paradigm together in a single panel (see figure 33). The story told by Edin, his translator and 'fixer', runs as a thread throughout the graphic narrative and is juxtaposed with other eyewitness testimonies. Edin never falters in his position as an eyewitness, as his story relates the events in a coherent

and straightforward style. However, when Edin and his father are confronted with the maimed body of his neighbour, comprehension temporarily stops. 'I didn't believe at that moment it was possible, but it had been' (90), Edin explains. The verbal reference to seeing in *Safe Area Goražde* details the shock of witnessing something that defies imagination. The reference to this crisis in testimony is underscored by the image, which shows four men staring out of the panel in disbelief and shock: an image that is strikingly similar to figure 32. Both the examples by Kubert and Sacco show how the problematic position of being a witness to atrocities is conveyed by focusing on the moment of witnessing, with the voices functioning as a testimony in hindsight.

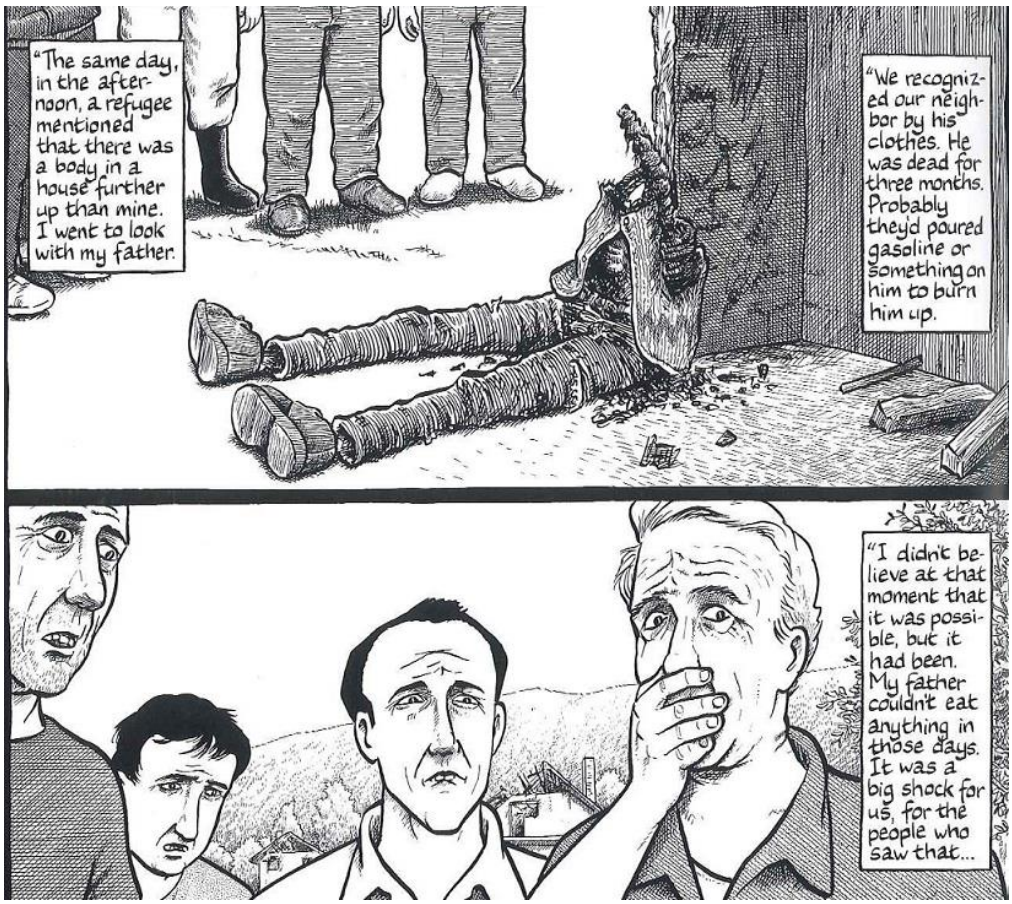

Figure 33

This verbal reference to a crisis in witnessing does not mean that Sacco eschews the portrayal of horror that is witnessed by Edin. On the contrary, the image of the men is preceded by the graphic depiction of the burned up body, while the witnesses are cut off at the waist. Sacco splits the act of seeing and the subject that's seen in two panels—similar to what we've seen in

99 Days—so that the reader has time to take in both elements. At the same time, comics form makes it possible for the two elements to co-exist on the same page, so that what's left of the neighbour's body frames the heads of Edin and his father. Although the last panel of the page only shows the men's facial expressions, the image that is (literally and figuratively) burned into their memory still looms over their heads, almost functioning as a thought balloon. Sacco also cleverly uses the panels to create a body disjuncture, so that the lower and upper body of the witnesses are separated in the two panels. The 'headless' legs of the men in the first panel are thus also working in conjunction with the headless body of the victim.

Sacco's panels complement the crisis of witnessing with a direct and brutal image of the burned body. Although *Medz Yeghern* also visualises the horrors seen—particularly the image of the heads on stakes is explicit—the two panels here stand out when considering that Sacco's approach to showing images of atrocity in *Safe Area Goražde* is fairly measured. In not following the modernist 'rules' around the impossibility of representation—the general focus on the witnesses seeing rather than on what is seen—Sacco's graphic drawing ensures we are not exempted from witnessing the horrors ourselves. Here, the brutality of the image links back to the emphasis on violated bodies as explored in the previous chapter on mass violence. This expository drive is even more pronounced because Sacco shows us the image of the body first, so that we are immediately confronted with the cause of the crisis in witnessing.

The image is placed in a sequence that details the first Serb attack on Goražde in 1992, as narrated by translator Edin and other eyewitnesses. However, where the sequence up to this point is characterised by action and movement—Sacco shows the eyewitnesses fleeing from their houses while being attacked by Serb troops, then returning to find their homes destroyed—the juxtaposition of the graphic panel with a witness panel fulfils a similar function to the earlier examples in temporarily slowing down and halting the flow of the narrative. Sacco extends the shock of witnessing atrocities to include both the characters and the readers, so that the graphic image provides further, and highly visceral evidence as to why Edin and the other characters are struggling to register the scene.

Sacco's inclusion of Edin's story also displays how the impact of witnessing atrocity can impact a person for a longer period of time, as 'My father couldn't eat anything in those days' (90). The panel thus inventively interweaves different positions in time, running from the moment of seeing (the image) to the immediate aftereffects (his father can't eat) and a position of reflection and interpretation ('I didn't believe *at that moment* that it was possible'). This moment of witnessing is extended to the panel on the next page, where Edin and his

brother are shown looking at the skeleton of another victim, their heads framed at both sides of the panel with the body lying in the centre.

The witness elements in the graphic narratives under discussion are clearly linked to the modernist strategies of representation; they address issues around (not) seeing and (not) knowing the events by creating a pronounced visual and verbal focus on the eyes and issues around sight, comprehension, and cognitive processing, thereby responding to, and intervening in, the academic and modernist discourses around bearing witness to catastrophe. Similar to the key modernist visual texts, the graphic narratives explore moments that expose 'a series of breaks, of stutters, in which the act of witnessing becomes apparent *only* at points of trauma' (Bernard-Donals and Glejzer 2001, 52, italics in original). The visual focus on the eyes causes the narrative to halt; *99 Days* implements this break right at the start of the graphic novel, and in the case of *Medz Yeghern*, *Yossel,* and *Safe Area Goražde*, the use of larger panels or a full page slows down the rhythm of the narrative in order to transfer the impact of the visual shock. The verbal allusions to crises in witnessing further demonstrate these stutters and breaks in the process of witnessing, and they often present a temporal overlap of past and present, thereby signalling how trauma persists long after the initial shock of witnessing the events.

Furthermore, the medium's vocabulary adds to this sense of incomprehension through its use of gutters. As proposed by Hillary Chute, graphic narratives continuously inscribe a sense of pause and erasure through the use of the blank spaces between the panels (which works in opposition to the plenitude of the panels). These gaps signal a '*constitutive* absence' (2016, 35, italics in original), and this absence arguably ties in with the incomprehension explored in the witness constellation. The gutters in *99 Days* and *Safe Area Goražde* and the spaces surrounding the sketchbook drawings of *Yossel* suggest a narrative pause that is part of the medium's conventions, but this pause also highlights the crisis of witnessing by further installing a visual halt in the narrative. Straightforward relationships between the witness and the witnessed event are critically reflected on through the use of the gutter, as the spaces between the witness panels add to the notion of not knowing and not seeing. At the same time, the gutter has also been theorised as opening up a space for the reader to complete the action between the panels (McCloud 2003). In that sense, the breaks and absences installed by the gutters also offer readers the opportunity to take on the position of an external witness, connecting the different moments in time. In contrast to the use of gutters in the majority of the examples, *Medz Yeghern* relies on the absence of gutters to create a moment of impact

and pause in its key witnessing image. Here, the double page spread conveys a sense of prolonged duration, drawing a sense of incomprehension from the scale and stillness of the scene.

By catering to the notion of unrepresentability, the graphic narratives aim to circumvent accusations of kitsch. Elements of the kitsch aesthetic that are countered in these witness panels include a (false) sense of transparency or mastery over the past, an emphasis on the excess of atrocity, and the application of a dramatised version of the events that substitutes historical accuracy for emotional impact. In contrast to these elements of kitsch, the graphic narratives employ restraint by moving away from extended and repeated atrocity panels to focus on the eyes of witnesses and the (crises in the) act of seeing, and they interweave different moments in time to convey the impact of witnessing beyond the initial moment of visual registration. In the reworking of histories of genocide, these graphic narratives thus consciously cater to the notion of an impossibility of representation. The previous chapters have demonstrated that the works in the corpus embrace kitsch and plenitude, with varying effects, in order to create an affective and direct interaction with the genocide narrative. However, the witness panels function as a form of anti-kitsch in proposing a treatment of genocide that adheres to notion of ineffability. Similar to the panels dealing with sexual violence, the instances of witnessing are marked by an absence; this absence proposes indirection and respectful silence as a more effective strategy in representing atrocity and the traumatic experiences of witnesses, but it also ties in with the educational aim of creating an appropriate and informative narrative around the events

4.2 Paratextual Anchors of Knowledge

The second anti-kitsch strategy can be found in the paratext of genocide graphic narratives. Comparable to the instances of modernist witnessing, these paratextual features aim to establish a sense of truthfulness by moving away from kitsch and excess in favour of a more restrained representation of the events. Even more so than in the case of witness panels, paratext couples this search for truth with an emphasis on the 'facticity' of the graphic narrative, and the work's ability to function as an appropriate genocide text. An awareness of respectability, truthfulness, and moral prohibitions thus underlies these paratextual inserts, which are positioned as a means to counter (the pitfalls of) kitsch while also establishing a sense of 'literariness' that attributes higher value to the work (Baetens and Frey 2015, 150).

Where the witness paradigm explores the tension between (not) seeing and (not) knowing the events, paratextual features are often used as a space in which a more straightforward and unambiguous form of knowing and understanding takes place. The crises and failures in witnessing as explored in the witness constellation are thus complemented or replaced by a firm anchoring of knowledge in the field of historiography or (auto)biography. Here, a more explicitly framed educational drive precludes the uncertainty of witnessing discussed above. Because paratext constitutes 'an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside' (Genette 1997, 1)—not being part of the main text but also not being outside of the work completely—it offers a threshold position that authors, or the relevant 'allographic' voice of a third person, can use to comment on the work.

In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997, originally published in 1987), Gérard Genette explores a variety of paratextual elements, like the name of the author, titles, epigraphs, blurbs, dedications, and pre- and postfaces, in literary works.[37] Out of the different paratextual elements, pre- and postfaces offer the best platform for an author to present their work to the reader.[38] Genette argues that the original, authorial preface has two main functions: to ensure that the text is read, and that it is read properly (1997, 197). Genette's two overarching functions can be subdivided into a range of related functions which are all, in their own way, linking back to the fact that *this* text should be read and that it should be read *in this way*. Genette provides readers with a comprehensive list of prefatorial functions, which can be subdivided in why-functions and how-functions. Functions that are directed towards explaining *why* this work should be read include showing that the content has high value, which can be done by demonstrating its truthfulness and insisting on the originality of the work. The functions of *how* this work should be read include, among others, the story of genesis, statements of intent, definitions of genre, choice of public, commentary on the title, and supplying information about the order in which the work should be read. I will limit myself here to discussing what I consider to be the three main functions of pre- and postfaces in the graphic narratives, which all demonstrate how these paratextual instances are used as a

[37] Genette divides paratext into peritext (those extratextual features that are positioned within the space of the same volume) and epitext (the messages that can be found outside of the book, like reviews). This chapter investigates the use of peritext rather than epitext but for reasons of clarity and common usage, I will employ the term paratext throughout the chapter.

[38] Genette uses the term preface to include 'every type of introductory (preludial or postludial) text, authorial or allographic, consisting of a discourse produced on the subject of the text that follows or precedes it' (1997, 161). In analysing this form of paratext in the graphic narratives, I will explicitly distinguish between preface and postface. This is motivated by the fact that there is a considerable number of graphic narratives that includes a postface rather than a preface, and so I suggest that the location of this type of paratext, and its implications, need to be addressed more explicitly.

means to reinforce the historical and socio-political veracity of these works. These three functions—truthfulness, high value, and statement of intent—overlap in the pre- and postfaces under consideration but for reasons of clarity I will present them separately, in order of importance for the topic of genocide.

Not without irony, Genette argues that '[t]he only aspect of treatment an author can give himself credit for in the preface, undoubtedly because conscience rather than talent is involved, is truthfulness or, at the very least, sincerity – that is, the effort to achieve truthfulness' (1997, 206). The function of truthfulness is used to underscore that the events described in the text have really transpired or are realistic, or that the author has taken a sincere approach to the topic at hand. This effort to prove truthfulness or sincerity about the ways in which the author has dealt with the subject matter isn't always as straightforward as the author explicitly voicing a truth claim. It can be proposed in a more subtle way, like in the case of the extended written introduction to the translated version of *Deogratias,* wherein the allographic voice of the translator informs us about the historical context of the Rwandan genocide, giving us 'historical pointers' (n.p.). These historical pointers demonstrate that this genocide actually happened, and that the graphic novel is acutely aware of the historical context. A more extensive version of these historical pointers can be found in the paratextual classroom material designed for *The Search*, which provides students with a range of questions that highlight how the graphic narrative has incorporated historical context, while also offering them a route to further consider and explore the events conveyed.

This claim to truthfulness can also take place on a more personal level. In the introduction to *Yossel*, Joe Kubert informs us about the personal link to the story of Yossel, explaining how the work explores what might have happened to him if his parents hadn't managed to come to America in 1926. *Yossel* is thus presented as a form of alternative history, and the links between the protagonist and the artist are made apparent by the boy's insatiable drive to draw. Although this is a fictional story, Kubert emphasises his use of historical data and 'authenticated references' (n.p.). By announcing this personal link to the events, as well as explicating that this story is grounded in reality, Kubert suggests that his approach is sincere and earnest. Furthermore, Kubert ends his preface by underscoring a general sense of truthfulness when he emphasises that '[t]here is no question in my mind that what you are about to read could have happened' (n.p.). Of course, a combination of historical pointers and personal truth claims are also established within the text of the graphic narratives. For instance, *Maus* substantiates the truthfulness of the story through the use of Vladek's

narrative voice, Spiegelman's drawings of maps and diagrams, and the inclusion of redrawn and reprinted photographs. In *Maus*, truth claims also arise in the friction between memory and history, like in the famous example of (Vladek's denial of) Auschwitz's orchestra at the gates of the camp (214).

The second function, and one that is closely related to truthfulness, is that of placing high value on the subject of the text. Genette explains that '[o]ne can attribute high value to a subject by demonstrating its importance and – inseparable from that – the usefulness of examining it' (1997, 199). The moral urge of (correct) representation and the value therein ('we need to examine what happened so it will never happen again') is often constitutive to the creation of a genocide narrative. Again, this function usually finds its articulation not in explicit references ('this is important') but in more implicit allusions, like in the introduction to *Medz Yeghern*, where Antonia Arslan (who is an Italian writer and academic with Armenian origins, but the book provides no information about her) states that the facts of the Armenian genocide need to come to life in characters we care for, and that the author Paolo Cossi has done just that, as 'the tragic history of the Armenians is revived though his vibrant creativity' (n.p.). Here, high value is placed both on the subject (it is a tragic history) and on Cossi's treatment of it (his vibrant creativity). In a similar vein, Christopher Hitchens opens *Safe Area Goražde* by praising Sacco's role as 'moral draughtsman' and his ability to conjure up the specifics of the Bosnian scenes through his artistry (n.p.). We can see here how much this function is intertwined with that of truthfulness, as the argument that something is truthful inevitably leads to the notion that the topic is important and thus has high value. A similar link between historical context and artistic integrity is made in the preface to *Deogratias*. The translator links the notion of truthfulness to Stassen's integrity as an artist, positing that 'Stassen's compassionate narration and his beautifully expressive artwork enable us to imagine the unimaginable, in a way that few will forget' (n.p.). The third person allographic voice thus allows for an emphasis on the truthfulness and value of the topic, while simultaneously complimenting the artist's treatment. As argued by Genette, the mere presence of an allographic preface, regardless of the content, becomes an implicit recommendation for the book. Having an external third person who is considered relevant, famous, or knowledgeable write the pre- or postface instantly adds an acknowledgment of high value.

Thirdly, pre- and postfaces can be used as an authorial statement of intent. In this case, these paratextual instances provide an interpretation of the text, giving us insight into 'here is what I meant to do' (Genette 1997, 223). Again, this function ties in with the

aforementioned functions, as the authorial interpretation will inevitably lead to statements about the truthfulness and value of the work ('here's what I meant to do *and* this is why I think it is truthful and has high value'). For instance, in *Smile through the Tears*, Rupert Bazambanza's introduction features an emotional statement of intent, in which he emphasises his mission as a witness to the Rwandan genocide. Voicing survivor's guilt, Bazambanza shares his existential questions and doubts about his own survival, converting these into a clear testimonial incentive: 'I was spared so that I could be a witness' (n.p.). Following on from this, Bazambanza argues that it has been his intention to tell the world about the horrors of racism, in hope of contributing to the prevention of more atrocities.

These three paratextual functions are anti-kitsch because they counterbalance the aestheticism, visual immediacy, and excess employed in the stories and pre-empt criticism about the graphic narratives' ability to provide an adequate and comprehensive representation of the events. In the 1990 round table discussion "On Kitsch", one of the recurring points of discussion is that kitsch substitutes for something more serious or truthful. This notion of substitution leads to the conclusion that kitsch lacks appropriate context, as it ultimately constitutes a diluted version of 'the real thing'. By presenting a weakened version of things more serious and complex, kitsch 'aims at the unreflective emotional response' (Friedländer in "On Kitsch" 2015, 358). These two points of critique—kitsch's lack of context and its negation of a reflective response—are to some extent made up for in the paratext, which can be used to provide ample (historical and artistic) context and (authorial or allographic) reflection. An unspoken suggestion of the presence of pre- and postfaces is that the work's visual and verbal content is not (sufficient) enough to convince readers of its value. By including paratext that substantiates the functions of truthfulness, high value, and statement of intent, the graphic narratives aim to invalidate the kitsch heritage of the comics medium, while also proposing that their representational strategies are distinct and ultimately more successful. In addition, the mere presence of paratext links the graphic narratives to literature and the book format (as opposed to comic books), which further elevates their status as literary works.

Although the aforementioned functions apply to both prefaces and postfaces, the location of this type of paratext warrants some further discussion. The preface can clearly fulfil the functions of declaring truthfulness and placing high value on the topic through its position at the start of the work. Readers can be prompted to read the work, and to read it correctly, by taking note of the information given in the preface. However, Genette points out that the

preface offers quite an unbalanced form of communication, as it provides a commentary on a text that has not yet been read. In this sense, the postface allows for a more balanced interaction between writer and reader. Genette argues that this type of interaction functions more along the lines of: 'Now you know as much about it as I, so let's have a chat' (1997, 237). Although the postface might allow for a more equal relationship between reader and writer, its position is inevitably less effective, as it cannot perform the two main functions of ensuring the text is read (properly). Instead, it can only serve a corrective function, and for Genette this explains the relative absence of postfaces in literature.

However, there are quite a few graphic narratives that include postfaces rather than prefaces. Placing this informative device at the end of the graphic narrative rather than at the start generally means there is more space to fully articulate the paratextual functions of truthfulness, high value, and statement of intent. Where a lengthy preface might deter readers before they have even reached the main text, thereby working against the main functions of making sure the work is read, an extended postface is less challenging for the reader, who can take it or leave it. Although it is less effective in making sure that the work is read (correctly), the postface provides authors with more space to elaborate on, or provide a rationale for, their visual, thematic, and narrative choices. When dealing with a precarious topic like genocide, it is perhaps preferable to use the platform of the postface to demonstrate the sincerity and veracity of the story, rather than creating a hook for the reader at the start of the work. The postfaces are generally more concerned with providing detailed background information to the creation of the story, often explicitly addressing moral issues around the representation of genocide in graphic novels. In contrast, the prefaces included in graphic narratives are usually more concise introductions that set up the scene for the main narrative and/or sing the praises of the author.

The most comprehensive and explicit demonstration of the full range of Genette's paratextual functions can be found in Pascal Croci's postface in *Auschwitz.* Both the original French version (2002) and the English translation (2003) include an extended postface that is presented under the title 'background information'. The first paragraph—which is an introduction to the postface so to speak—positions Croci-as-author in a lineage that encompasses Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*. In setting up the main premise of the postface, this introduction provides a textbook example of how Genette's functions interact:

> There is no key to understanding what provoked his [Croci] decision to create this moving story, but rather pieces of a puzzle. In the following pages, the author aims to help readers discover how the pieces fit together through an interview about how the project came about. The interview is also an opportunity to explain some of the script's less obvious elements, and to reveal the complicity between the author and various witnesses he met during the conception and creation of this work. (75)

In this short piece, we can trace the functions of truthfulness ('the complicity between the author and various witnesses he met'), intent ('the author aims to help the reader'), and value (there is an earlier reference in the introduction to the fact that fictional accounts of the Holocaust have moved from being 'unthinkable' to 'increasingly more common, representing the deeply personal visions of their creators'). However, this introduction also incorporates other paratextual functions, namely the function of genesis ('how the project came about') and unity (how different fragments of the story are actually coherent, the so called 'pieces of the puzzle').

What follows is an interview with Croci in which the work and its origins are discussed, but in which the identity of the interviewer remains undisclosed. At no point do we gather more information about the context of the interview, which sparks the suspicion that Croci presents us with an imaginary dialogue, a device that 'allows an author to answer objections he himself has chosen to raise' (Genette 1997, 208).[39] The interview is clearly set up to discuss the validity of the work and different paratextual functions are constantly overlapping in order to create a continuous reaffirmation of truth claims. The interviewer asks several questions about Croci's interviews with survivors—what they told him, how much of that is used in the book—which not only recounts the story of genesis but also implicitly makes claims about the value and the truthfulness of the work, as if to say 'this is how I went about this difficult and important subject and as you can see I haven't allowed myself any liberties'.

At times functions are addressed explicitly, like when the interviewer asks Croci about the philosophical message of the graphic novel. In a response that is set up to elucidate the authorial intent, Croci answers that a sentence uttered by one of the characters, 'why can't we just hate each other in peace?', is a direct representation of his vision (77). Croci also emphasises that apart from his fictional characters, his story 'strictly follows the course of

[39] Without information on the identity of the interviewer, some of the questions are slightly puzzling. For instance: '[o]f all the violence perpetrated by the Nazis, which type seems to you the most abominable?' (77) and '[s]hould we forgive the Germans?' (80). Not knowing who asked the questions, and through which lens we are approaching the subject, increases the unease around this dialogue.

history' (78), which, again, is an explicit confirmation of truthfulness, intended to ward off any criticism about the book's use of kitsch and the fictionalisation of the events. In a further negation of the kitsch aesthetic, Croci also addresses the issue of 'avoiding aestheticism in the drawings' in one of the sidebars to the interview. Here, he explains how he wanted to avoid voyeurism and 'the perverse effects of fixed images of nudity' (79) by creating a realistic style without special effects. Croci is also quick to point out that he has had no pleasure in creating these images. This explicit repudiation of kitsch signals Croci's awareness of, and response to, the sexualised discourse of Holokitsch; a response that is somewhat ironic, as Croci's graphic novel consistently uses kitsch and excess to deal with the Holocaust. And to some extent, the excess that informs Croci's main narrative also applies to his implementation of anti-kitsch strategies in the postface. As pointed out by Henry Gonshak: 'all this explanatory material seems *excessive*, as if Croci doubted the ability of his graphic novel to speak to readers on its own' (2009, 72, my emphasis).

A function that is less overtly present in *Auschwitz* is Genette's notion of using the pre- and postfaces to profess the work's fictiveness. This function can be traced in novels wherein the author claims to have no resemblance to the main character. However, amidst all the substantiations of truthfulness, Croci makes sure to demonstrate where he engaged in visual cheating: the headgear worn by the characters in *Auschwitz* is incorrect. Croci admits to his own incompetence in drawing the flat beret worn by the prisoners, and even includes a letter by one of the witnesses that, in denouncing his mistake, simultaneously functions as a means to reinforce the theme of truthfulness that pervades the postface: 'I find it hard to understand your logic, since in every other aspect you have shown your desire to fully comprehend every detail concerning the tragedy of the Shoah, in order to better convey the period through a popular artistic medium' (81). Croci's self-congratulatory postface thus fuses many of the paratextual functions, ensuring not only that the text is read properly, but in the process also pre-empting critique on the kitsch of the comics medium and excessive, and supposedly inappropriate, strategies in dealing with a topic like the Holocaust. The postface clearly establishes that the work should be valued for its ingenious mix of truthful historical accounts and gripping artwork. The question-and-answer format of the interview allows Croci to constantly reinforce the veracity of the storyline while simultaneously underscoring a deeply personal and artistic vision which, in a subsequent twist, had to be as realistic as possible, 'without special effects of style' (79).

Other artists similarly use the postface as a space for anti-kitsch truth claims and further discussions about the validity of the work. In the postface to *Judenhass*, Dave Sim details the sources for the anti-Semitic quotes and photographs used in the text. Over the course of eight pages, Sim provides background information on some of the historical figures and quotations used, while also listing quotations that he decided to leave out. His postface is a straightforward attempt at demonstrating that a sufficient amount of research has gone into his work, and that the drawings are based on photographs, rather than deriving from Sim's imagination. Although Sim seems to be aware that relying on photographs as a truth tool can be problematic as well—he admits that '[a]ll photographs are deceptive by nature' (n.p.), but places this comment in the context of his efforts to faithfully render the details of a picture, having to imitate patterns of light and dark when elements were not clear enough—his discussion of the methods used to draw the photographs and bibliographic listing of the images included is clearly aimed at substantiating the veracity of his work. Furthermore, he expresses the hope that *Judenhass*, with its 'distillations of the facts' (n.p.), can be read by anybody, thereby functioning as an appropriate educational tool.

In addition to the corpus, the use of the paratext to promote the graphic narrative as an appropriate educational tool is more emphatically foregrounded in the postface to the collected edition of Greg Pak and Carmine Di Giandomenico's *X-Men: Magneto Testament* (2014). The collection—which details the origin story of the Jewish-German mutant Magneto, named Max Eisenhardt, and shows his experiences in Nazi Germany and as a member of the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz-Birkenau—has a striking 19 pages of informational paratext at the end of the story. In this case, the expected criticism revolves around the kitsch heritage of comics, particularly with regard to the superhero genre that *Magneto Testament* is connected to. Although the graphic novel steers clear from superhero conventions, its postface displays an awareness that the work could potentially be seen as an inappropriate hybrid of a Holocaust narrative and superhero kitsch; a kitsch that is characterised by a fictional universe of good and evil, extraordinary superpowers, and the use of hyperbolic and aestheticised imagery. The postface includes endnotes by writer Greg Pak that refer to many of the pages in the work—demonstrating historical accuracy and providing links to further resources—and it features an extensive teacher's guide that lists a number of approaches that can be used to teach about the Holocaust by using the graphic novel. This guide provides possible 'hook lessons' and directs teachers to themes within the story that provide a starting point for class discussions. The postface also subtly defuses any further critique on Magneto's

superhuman/mutant status by suggesting that teachers might want to instruct their students on magical realism, and how fantastical elements work in conjunction with the historical narrative.

Including a teacher's guide, which is written by Brian Kelley, a PhD candidate in literacy and learning, sends out a clear message that the content of *Magneto Testament* can be used to successfully educate students about the Holocaust. However, in using a substantial amount of space to demonstrate the ways in which the graphic novel can be used in the classroom, *Magneto Testament* inevitably also displays the tension between education and entertainment that underlies these direct claims to knowledge. The fact that Max Eisenhardt is, or will become, a superhuman character, and the fact that the story is drawn in an expressive comic book style and created by a writer and artist who have predominantly worked within the superhero genre, are clearly seen as working against the perceived veracity of the story. Furthermore, Magneto's backstory informs his position as a (sometimes) villain in the *X-Men* stories. His antagonistic position in the series and his extreme views on protecting the mutants from the humans are partially explained by Magneto's Holocaust experiences and his urge to prevent another persecution. However, this connection between a Holocaust survivor and a future villain further complicates a straightforward truth claim and arguably necessitates a more pronounced move of the character out of the realm of superhumans and into the historical context of the Holocaust. In having page-by-page endnotes and an extensive educational framework, the postface is thus used to position the story as one that is truthful and has high value.

The collected edition also raises the issue of paratext and format. *X-Men: Magneto Testament* was first serialised as five comics between 2008 and 2009. In contrast to the graphic novel edition, these comics feature advertisements—which leads to uneasy juxtapositions between stark Holocaust images and mass marketed commodities—and have no extended pre- or postfaces, except for a single-paged afterword in the first and final instalment. The afterword to issue one present a very concise version of the aims of the extended postface in the graphic novel: 'we've done our best to ensure that the real-world history we explore in the series is entirely accurate and that we deal with this unfathomably harrowing material in a way that's honest, unflinching, human, and humane' (n.p.). Again, even this single sentence reads as a statement of intent which includes a reference to truthfulness and the importance of the subject (and dealing with it in an appropriate manner). However, where the comic books have to make do with a brief acknowledgement of the issues

surrounding the topic, the publication format of the graphic novel allows authors, and publishers, to further address and defuse expected criticism.

What the examples discussed in this chapter demonstrate is that pre- and postfaces offer authors and publishers an opportunity to explicitly address issues around the representation of genocide. By using paratext as a space for the articulation of truth claims and the legitimation of the comics form to successfully tackle genocide, the graphic narratives at times paradoxically hint to the notion that the medium does not have the appropriate tools to fulfil these claims. Why use paratext to prove the medium's capacity to deal with genocide rather than actually using the medium's visual and verbal repertoire? This friction between the story and paratext is particularly pronounced in the case of the extended postfaces in *Auschwitz* and *X-Men: Magneto Testament*. Croci argues that he has attempted to avoid aestheticism in his work, but the previous chapters have demonstrated how Croci actually embraces a particular type of aestheticism—a kitsch aesthetic—in dealing with the Holocaust. Rather than presenting a respectable genocide narrative because kitsch is avoided, Croci and other artists often rely on it. It would have been more honest, and more powerful, if Croci had admitted to it rather than holding on to the arguments around veracity and realism. *Auschwitz* and other graphic narratives do not avoid aestheticism; they embrace it in the act of drawing and they use strategies of kitsch in service of a compelling genocide narrative.

However, paratext can supply readers with valuable information that would be out of place in the main story, or it would slow down the pace of the narrative unnecessarily. A graphic narrative like *Deogratias* gives more background information about the genocide to readers who might not be familiar with the Rwandan genocide and *Magneto Testament* offers educators a route to using the graphic novel in a productive classroom setting. The paratext's threshold position prepares us for the main body of work in the case of the preface, or it allows for a contextualised and guided exit from the work in the case of the postface. Furthermore, paratext can also be used to draw attention to the aestheticism of the work, rather than negating it. In *Magneto Testament*, the teacher's guide includes 'aesthetic appreciation activities', which suggests different ways of drawing the students' attention to the page and the interaction between image and text. It is also important to note that the use of paratext to explain, highlight, foreshadow, and contextualise cultural texts is ubiquitous in our cultural landscape. As readers and viewers we are certainly used to receiving additional information all the time (from film trailers, to blurbs on book cover, and interviews with

artists). In that sense, the paratext in the graphic narratives is following the fairly standard marketing set-up of cultural texts.

4.3 Conclusion

Where the previous three chapters have demonstrated that international genocide graphic novels employ kitsch in a variety of ways, this final chapter shows that these works also implement strategies that are directly aimed at countering and pre-empting the (expected) problems around the use of kitsch and excess. As proposed throughout this thesis, the key elements under discussion—graphic narratives, the kitsch aesthetic, and the representation of genocide—are composed of several kinds of tensions. These tensions manifest when kitsch is applied, but they similarly inform the anti-kitsch strategies explored in this chapter. In correspondence to the depiction of sexual violence, a tension can be traced between presence and absence, and education and entertainment. This tension manifests in the absence and presence of kitsch in the graphic narratives, and in the twofold incentives of providing an accurate and respectful, yet compelling and emotive story about genocide. The ways in which the graphic narratives embrace and oppose excess demonstrates the interaction between the visual and verbal properties of the medium and the awareness of, and intervention in, debates around (in)appropriate strategies of representation.

The witness panels in the graphic narratives choose indirection, restraint, and instability over excess and knowledge. By focusing on the crises and difficulties in registering and comprehending the horrors of genocide, the graphic narratives conform to modernist strategies that stress the impossibility of representing atrocities. These instances of modernist witnessing adhere to moral guidelines around appropriate and respectable representations of genocide by foregrounding uncertainty and the precarious position of the (traumatised) witness. In these examples, visual and verbal references to seeing displace straightforward forms of witnessing and explicit manifestations of the horrors. The witness panels propose a metaphorical quality—the eyes stand in for the atrocities—that can be contrasted with the visual metaphors explored in chapter one, particularly the doll figures. Throughout the corpus, metaphors thus work as ambiguous tropes that can be used to promote kitsch or to nuance it.

In contrast to this general emphasis on crisis and instability, paratext offers a form of anti-kitsch that relies on straightforward anchoring of knowledge. Particularly the postfaces are used to substantiate truth claims and to suggest that the graphic narrative has followed

the moral guidelines around appropriate representations of genocide. The two anti-kitsch strategies have opposing incentives—uncertainty and instability on the one hand, truth claims and straightforward knowledge on the other—but they find common ground in their refusal of excess and kitsch, and in their bids for respectability and awareness of existing debates around genocide representation.

Nevertheless, the power of kitsch still shines through in these anti-kitsch strategies. In the case of Sacco, kitsch and anti-kitsch are closely aligned on the page, as the witness panel is preceded by an image of excess. Other graphic narratives are thoroughly informed by kitsch, so that the restraint proposed by the anti-kitsch strategies is ultimately working in tandem with moments of excess and plenitude. For instance, the modernist witness panels in *99 Days* are complemented by the straightforward generic patterns of the detective story, the graphic images of violence in the present-day, and the use of the animal metaphor. In a similar vein, the postface in *Auschwitz* is positioned after a story that makes explicit use of graphic depictions of violence and the softening qualities of the doll metaphor. Although anti-kitsch strategies are employed to cater to the notion of unrepresentability and respectability in the context of genocide representation, the graphic narratives ultimately use kitsch and its qualities to follow Georges Didi-Huberman's stance that, in spite of all, 'to remember, one must imagine' (2008, 30).

Conclusion

Using the concept of kitsch as a helpful tool to trace the particular tensions and negotiations around the representation of atrocities, I have investigated how this kitsch aesthetic manifests in international graphic narratives that deal with genocide. I have critically assessed the kitsch strategies employed, tracing where they provide a productive interaction with the genocide narrative—allowing readers to relate to the challenging and complex subject matter—and where they fail to do so, thereby closing off opportunities for narrative engagement. The thesis demonstrates that many of these works employ kitsch to create an emotive representation of (the effects of) mass violence, destruction, and trauma, while they are simultaneously also concerned with presenting a truthful and accurate narrative that adequately and respectfully conveys appropriate information.

Kitsch can be productively mobilised in presenting a softened or indirect version of death and destruction. The 'controllable frames' of the animal and doll metaphors posit a lack or loss of human agency, opening up a narrative space that allows for an interaction with painful and difficult elements of genocide, like violence, death, and issues around moral responsibility. I have also traced the productive use of kitsch in the visual representations of violence. Analysing the use of excessive images of violence, the graphic narratives display a keen awareness of existing visual discourses, using strategies that reflect back on the visual and cultural position of the genocide. The excess used to portray violence also provides a counterpoint to representational 'rules' or guidelines around reticence and restraint, emphasising how the bodies of vulnerable victims are violated during genocide.

In contrast to these revaluations of excess, I have proposed that kitsch strategies are questionable when they do not allow for reflection or when they do not engage with difficult moral issues around genocide representation. With regard to the construction of perpetrator figures, the cultural model of the evil Nazi is indirectly replicated in other genocide narratives. The stark immorality of these perpetrator figures proposes a 'comfortable homogeneity' and this sense of comfort precludes a more sustained engagement with the genocide narrative. Here, I have argued in favour of graphic narratives that investigate the ordinariness of perpetrators and explore different levels of complicity. Furthermore, I have placed question marks around kitsch representations of rape and sexual violence, as these images can allow for a sense of titillation and spectacle that similarly closes off further consideration of the subject

matter. However, in contrast to wider cultural discourses around genocide, particularly film, the graphic narratives display a noteworthy restraint in the treatment of sexual violence.

The analyses demonstrate that kitsch can become a powerfully affective tool when it opens up space for reader interpretation and reflection. The graphic narratives that manage to link two of the main strengths of the comics medium, its unique and kitschy elements and its possibilities of opening up a (self-)reflexive stance, create a platform for a productive interaction with the genocide narrative. In other words, the works that are able to employ the medium's opportunities for kitsch and excess while also using the particular dynamic of these kitsch strategies to actively respond to debates around genocide representation, present compelling and appealing options for reader engagement. There are a few graphic narratives in the corpus that stand out through their creative and affective use of kitsch.

As demonstrated, Pascal Croci's *Auschwitz* employs kitsch consistently throughout the work, albeit with varying results. The graphic novel functions as a primary example of the tensions at work in the application of kitsch in the context of genocide. There are moments where the kitsch aesthetic is used commendably, and there are instances when it arguably forecloses interaction with the genocide narrative. Notwithstanding the presence of the more questionable instances of excessive perpetrators, *Auschwitz* shows its significance in powerfully combining two productive forms of kitsch: the visual metaphor of the doll figure and the explicit and excessive images of violence. These two kitsch elements propose an interaction with the Holocaust that relies on the interaction between softening and exposing; the doll as an innocent stand-in figure proposes a sense of softening or distance as a means to gain access to sensitive elements like death and destruction, while the work also implements a visual and narrative thread that exposes the horrors of violence by including excessive images. The tension between softening and exposing presents a powerful combination that shows how two distinct applications of kitsch can serve different purposes while also enhancing each other in a compelling manner.

Other graphic narratives in the corpus stand out because they manage to implement productive kitsch while also consciously countering the more questionable forms of plenitude. For instance, Eric Heuvel's *The Search* employs the accessible clear line style and introduces the doll figure as a powerful visual tool to deal with death, but it also replaces the perpetrator kitsch of the evil Nazi model with a more complex and nuanced version of (different levels of) complicity. In a similar vein, Jean-Philippe Stassen's *Deogratias* and Matteo Casali and Kristian Donaldson's *99 Days* use the animal figures as a softened and indirect way of dealing with the

atrocities, but they simultaneously confront difficult questions about genocide participation, avoiding the trap of relying on an overly simplified universe of right and wrong. Finally, the comic book aesthetic of Joe Kubert's *Fax from Sarajevo* offers a form of visual kitsch that establishes an internationally recognisable and emotive style. Kubert carefully selects when this style is used in service of excess, like in the case of the doll figure and the images of mass violence, and when it is used to offer a more restrained version of the events, as in the case of Samira's rape narrative.

In the corpus, and in the wider discourse of genocide narratives, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* functions as a limit point against kitsch. The graphic narrative employs powerful anti-kitsch strategies, including its dense and idiosyncratic drawing style, the modernist and self-reflexive interplay of narrative levels and deconstruction of the animal system, and Spiegelman's authorial commentary in the text and in discourses around *Maus*. *Maus* functions as a landmark Holocaust narrative because it works as an original, complex, and rich text on so many different levels. Not only does Spiegelman's work present a highly inventive and layered account of the Holocaust and its ramifications for survivors, further generations, and (popular) culture, but the work's key position in debates around the Holocaust in the medium of comics offers a rich interpretative framework that informs other graphic narratives dealing with genocide. As demonstrated at several points in this thesis, *Maus*'s landmark position means that it often functions as a point of departure for analysis. Although the work has been of immense value for graphic narratives that deal with genocide, its overwhelmingly positive inclusion into academic discourses, as well as Spiegelman's vocal position on other Holocaust texts, have not always been beneficial to a more inclusive (academic) look at some of these graphic narratives. What this thesis has demonstrated is that *Maus* is certainly not the only graphic narrative that warrants academic attention. Although *Maus* has undoubtedly influenced many of the graphic narratives under discussion, these works also employ their own set of noteworthy representational strategies. In contrast to *Maus*, these representational strategies rely more consistently on elements of kitsch and excess to engage with the genocides.

How do the results of the analyses feed back into kitsch theory and the discourse around genocide representation? Firstly, the research suggests that there is marked validity to the use of kitsch strategies in the context of genocide representations. This means that it would serve kitsch theory well to reconsider how the tension caused by kitsch's excessive, dramatised, simplified, moralised, and affective strategies might provide an audience with a

starting point of interaction with (challenging) historical narratives. Rather than (implicitly or explicitly) continuing to rely on the negative presupposition that kitsch constitutes bad taste, unintelligent entertainment, or decontextualised drama, this thesis has demonstrated that kitsch should be taken more seriously. This does of course not mean that all kitsch strategies are equally effective or should be revalued without critical assessment. However, the premise that kitsch *does* something and *means* something is a good starting point.

The findings also show how kitsch has primarily been analysed and employed in the context of the Holocaust. This ties in with the more general observation that the Holocaust predominates in visual and academic discourses around genocide. Here, the influence of film posits an instrumental backdrop to the debates around genocide representation. Particularly the (ongoing discussions around the) Holocaust melodrama of Hollywood films and the excess of Italian arthouse and Nazisploitation films provide a cultural frame of reference for the graphic narratives. The works in the corpus, especially those that deal with the Holocaust, are responding to these existing (kitsch) discourses: by following existing forms of Holokitsch, by consciously employing excess in a reflexive manner, or by attempting to circumvent it. Where (more or less) productive forms of kitsch have been explored in a variety of Holocaust texts, there is decidedly less scholarly work that considers the relationships between kitsch and cultural representations of other genocides. Although debates around Holokitsch and appropriate forms of genocide representation ultimately inform the entire corpus, other frames of kitsch can also come into play. This is most clearly traceable in the context of the Rwandan genocide, where (post)colonialist discourses and histories of (visual) stereotyping form a cultural and academic backdrop to the graphic narratives. In addition, in the works that deal with the genocides in Armenia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, kitsch can be used as a means to counteract the relative absence of cultural representations of the genocide in question. In these cases, excess is used to forcefully impose a cultural presence that confronts audiences with instances of mass violence that have not reached the same (cultural, visual, and moral) status as the Holocaust.

Although it is important to be aware of the historical and cultural specificities of the different genocides, this thesis has argued that the different graphic narratives share concerns about how to adequately and respectfully represent genocide. These shared concerns result in common representational strategies that contribute to a global genocide narrative. This international narrative consists of a range of inventive strategies that draw on kitsch and anti-kitsch, including the use of visual metaphors as stand-in figures, the emphasis on the effects of

(seeing) mass violence on the witnesses and the bodies of the victims, and the moral decisions around the construction of perpetrator characters. These recurring themes and issues are characterised most consistently by the tensions that inform it. The oppositional pairs explored in this thesis—excess/restraint, attraction/repulsion, distance/affect, presence/absence—underlie the representation of genocide in graphic narratives and its critical analysis in secondary literature. Rather than treating these pairs as in constant opposition, the chapters have demonstrated that the tension between these dual incentives is not necessarily inappropriate or unproductive. On the contrary, it is the medium's ability to combine and articulate these frictions on the page, as proposed by Hatfield (2005), which provides opportunities for a dialogue with the sensitive subject matter. The graphic narratives combine the visceral and potent immediacy of the image with the reflexivity encouraged by the drawn lines and the medium's ability to, literally and figuratively, draw the reader's awareness to the ways in which the genocide narrative is constructed. The medium's vocabulary presents kitsch, but in its most effective instances the graphic narratives use this kitsch, and its underlying tensions, as a means to enable access into the genocide narrative while also commenting on the ongoing debates around productive and appropriate forms of engaging with the subject matter. As a visual and narrative tool and a theoretical lens, kitsch thus offers potent ways to consider and explore the representation of genocide in cultural memory.

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