# Contexts of Violence in Comics

Edited by Ian Hague, Ian Horton and Nina Mickwitz



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## Introduction

## Ian Hague, Ian Horton and Nina Mickwitz

#### **Violence in Comics**

The presence of violence in comics form is now so prevalent and accepted that it tends to go unremarked. Yet violence is a complex affair. Graphic (in both meanings of the word) depictions of fist fights and bodies skewered by swords, riddled by bullets or crushed under falling objects are commonplace in superhero, fantasy and action stories. However, these kinds of violence differ markedly from the slapstick gag of a thrown brick (as in George Herriman's Krazy Kat) or slingshot projectile (prime contenders include Dennis the Menace in The Beano and his American namesake, created by Hank Ketcham) hurtling through the air to hit its target, intended or otherwise. Different again are representations of violence in autobiographical and documentary comics, such as Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis and Joe Sacco's Palestine, which speak of real-world acts of violence and the contexts from which they emerge.

With their origins in the conference 'Violence in Comics,' organised by Comics Forum in 2014, these two companion volumes, Contexts of Violence in Comics and Representing Acts of Violence in Comics, have been curated to initiate a nuanced examination of the ways in which violence is evident in comics. Although we do not claim to offer an exhaustive history or a complete survey of the topic, this study strives to provide a broad overview of the ways in which a range of types of violence are presented across different genres, cultures and contexts. In so doing, we hope to offer a foundation for a wide-ranging and considered debate and discussion of violence in comics, and to prompt further discussion and analysis of this vitally important subject.

As violence continues to be a pervasive element in popular culture more generally, as well as in comics, it is intended that the chapters collected together in these two volumes will contribute to wider debates about the contexts in which violence takes place and how acts of violence are represented across the media landscape. This is a multifaceted subject that can be understood in many ways, and we have chosen to consider representations and contexts as two very different major subsections of the topic. When examining representation we are concerned with the different kinds of violence that take place in comics and in the specific

modes of depiction used to show these violent acts. By contexts we mean the various sociopolitical and cultural forces that shape the way violence is presented in comics and impact directly on their production.

This book concerns the cultural, industry, scholarly and critical contexts of violence in comics. Where *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics* attends to depiction and representation as the route to understanding this topic, this volume will present approaches to the contexts of violent acts, with examples organised thematically. This is, of course, not to say that the authors' treatment of examples will not take into account the representational strategies of these specific instances, but this book will pay particular attention to contextual factors.

#### Contexts of Violence in Comics

As well as being a major theme in comics themselves, violence has also played an important role in comics criticism and scholarship, and these contexts have informed, often in very meaningful ways, how the depiction of acts of violence in comics is perceived and treated. In America in the late 1940s and early to mid-1950s, for example, social and moral challenges put to comics' contents by 'church and civic groups that traditionally enforced standards of public morality, were able to gain the attention of the popular press' (Nyberg 1998, ix). Combining their efforts with the work of certain critics, most notably psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, such groups subjected comics to a sustained critique, much of which attacked them on the grounds of their ostensibly immoral content. Topics of concern included depictions of sex and criminality but also those of violence, which for some critics was among the most significant problems with the medium. Harry Wildenberg, one of two men responsible for the creation of Famous Funnies (arguably the first American comic book), summed up the anti-violence critique in a 1949 letter:

The primary appeal of comics to the juvenile mind lies in their goriness and violence [. . .]. The more violent the greater their fascination for the young. Publishers of comic books are aware of this fact and vie with each other in making their pages drip with blood and murder plots. Tame the comics, harness them to good works and children will have nothing to do with them.

(quoted in Hajdu 2008, 143)

In America, the tide of this critique did lead to a governmental investigation into the contents of comics that culminated in 1954's Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, but it did not result in legislative action being taken against comics (unlike in Britain, where a similar campaign led to the passing of the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act of 1955 (Barker 1992)). Instead, the industry was left to regulate itself, which it did through the development of the

Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) Comics Code 1954. This code specified the types of content that were acceptable in comic books and included three areas of general standards as well as more specific guidance on what was permissible in the presentation of dialogue, religion, costume, marriage and sex, and advertising matter. Though it did not get its own specific section, violence was discussed in a point under general standards. Where a 1948 predecessor to the code had simply asserted that 'No scenes of sadistic torture should be shown' (Nyberg 1998, 165) the 1954 code was more expansive, asserting, 'Scenes of excessive violence shall be prohibited. Scenes of brutal torture, excessive and unnecessary knife and gun play, physical agony, gory and gruesome crime shall be eliminated' (Nyberg 1998, 166).

This wording remained in place when the code was revised in 1971 (Nyberg 1998, 171), although other elements relating to violence did change. For example, where 1954's code asserted under 'Marriage and Sex' that 'Violent love scenes as well as sexual abnormalities are unacceptable' (Nyberg 1998, 168), 1971's code broke these two aspects apart, stating that 'Illicit sex relations are not to be portrayed and sexual abnormalities are unacceptable' (Nyberg 1998, 173) and that 'Rape shall never be shown or suggested. Seduction may not be shown' (Nyberg 1998, 174) in two separate points (again under the 'Marriage and Sex' heading). When the code was revised again, in 1989, things were a little different. Now, violence did have its own specific section:

Violent actions or scenes are acceptable within the context of a comic book story when dramatically appropriate. Violent behaviour will not be shown as acceptable. If it is presented in a realistic manner, care should be taken to present the natural repercussions of such actions. Publishers should avoid excessive levels of violence. excessively graphic depictions of violence, and excessive bloodshed or gore. Publishers will not present detailed information instructing readers how to engage in imitable violent actions.

(Nyberg 1998, 176)

By this time, public and scholarly attention to such matters had moved on, and media effects debates had new targets, such as the so-called 'video nasties' of the mid-1980s (today's equivalent is probably violence in video games). Nevertheless, important academic work on comics, such as Martin Barker's A Haunt of Fears (originally published in 1984), maintained a scholarly focus on violence, albeit as one small part of a larger investigation into the media effects debates contributed to by the work of Frederic Wertham and others. Wertham's work, meanwhile, has largely been disregarded, as Amy Kiste Nyberg has observed:

Many media scholars have dismissed Wertham's work as an example of early, unsophisticated social science research into media

effects, and contemporary social scientists criticized Wertham for his lack of scientific evidence and his failure to present quantitative evidence to support his findings.

(1998, x)

While Nyberg and others (Bart Beaty 2005, in particular) have taken a more nuanced view of Wertham in subsequent years, it is clear that the contexts in which violence sits in comics, and the ways in which it is studied, have changed radically since the 1940s–1950s. Indeed, since that period, and perhaps in response to the position of Wertham as the 'Bogey Man' of Comics Studies, the academic field has been fairly resolute in resisting the media effects narrative or arguing for censorship or content controls *per se* (with some exceptions). Today, perhaps the most prominent civic group associated with comics is the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF), 'a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the First Amendment [freedom of speech and freedom of the press] rights of the comics medium' (CBLDF 2017).

#### From Effects to Texts

While the media effects debates of the mid-20th century are among the most well-known engagements with violence in comics, they are not the only ways in which context has shaped the presentation of the subject. In his seminal 1973 book *The Early Comic Strip*, for example, David Kunzle shows how although 'the ancestors of Hogarthian narrative' were 'preoccupied with the theme of political violence' (427), violence in these 17th-century comic strips served a different function to violence in more modern (i.e. post-Second World War) mass media. The former '[were] a creation of popular fervor; they appear[ed] only when a situation [became] intolerable to a large number of people,' while the latter 'has appeared less as a popular response to political crises than as the constant of a mass culture which serves the cause of an established capitalist economy' and offers 'a safety valve for those emotions which might otherwise threaten economic and social stability' (Kunzle 1973, 427). He goes on:

By constantly presenting the public with the face of war, the masters of the popular press, film and television offer vicarious enjoyment of the processes of revolutionary change at home, and at the same time justify wars pursued "in the national interest" abroad. But in the seventeenth century, the broadsheet press was much less tied to government interests than are the mass media today, and the popular engraver then was less subject to a publisher's censorship than is the strip cartoonist of the mid-twentieth century.

(Kunzle 1973, 427)

Newspaper comics and other formats, such as magazines, were exempt from the CMAA Code, which only applied to comic books. Nevertheless, the creators of such comics could hardly have been unaware of the debates around their profession, and commonly agreed standards of taste and decency, along with the economic and political motivations identified by Kunzle, are likely to have had significant impacts upon what was permissible (officially or otherwise) in comics. One group of creators that was certainly well aware of social standards, and did their best to subvert them at every turn, was to be found in the writers, artists and publishers of American Underground Comix. In some cases inspired by the very work that had led to the creation of the Comics Code in the first place, Underground Comix creators went further than publishers like EC Comics 'by adding sex and drugs and carnage and stuff' to their work, as creator S. Clay Wilson put it (quoted in Rosenkranz 2008, 145). Here, then, we see a multiplication of contexts for violence in comics: on the one hand, there is a clear social drive to moderate violence or to instrumentalise it for particular political purposes. On the other hand is a push to indulge in the excesses of violence and use it to challenge both the moral foundation and the legal and administrative frameworks that underpinned and upheld that moderation. Although the American context is certainly not wholly representative of similar battles that have taken place around the world (see Barker 1992 and Lent 1999 for more on these), it is instructive because it very overtly highlights the various contextual elements that can lead to specific types of content being permitted or rejected and indicates the terms in which violence in comics has come to be understood and controlled by governmental, social, cultural and other forces.

#### Violence in Comics Studies

It is notable that although violence has long been *present* as a theme in comics scholarship and criticism, it is not until relatively recently that we see it emerging as a primary focus of that scholarship. While Wertham, Kunzle and others identified comics violence as a key area of concern, and it was explicitly included as a point of discussion in texts like the CMAA Comics Code, it tended to be bundled in with other representational and moral concerns: sex, drugs, criminality, political unrest and so on. When Comics Studies began to develop as a more clearly identifiable field, and the emphasis on media effects declined, certain approaches became more dominant. As Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo have put it, 'Comics and comics studies—like film and film studies before them—have attempted (with mixed success) to imitate the values and discourses of literature and painting in order to legitimate their field' (2016, 5). The literary approach in particular has tended to privilege 'atypical or exceptional works' (Beaty & Woo 2016, 6), many of which

contain violence within them as a central theme, though even here this centrality has not necessarily been mirrored in comics scholarship. Key works by Art Spiegelman, for example, who is by a considerable margin the most studied comics author in Western scholarship (Beaty & Woo 2016, 6–9), centre around two exceptionally violent events: the Holocaust (Maus) and the 9/11 attacks in New York (In the Shadow of No Towers). Yet Spiegelman is more frequently understood in terms of autobiography, trauma, history and the form of the graphic novel than in terms of violence per se. This is not an absolute classification, but it would be difficult to argue that violence is a dominant subject in studies of Spiegelman, even if it does underlie other topics, such as trauma. Violence on its own terms, rather than as an element of another thematic unit, a cause or an effect of the thing being studied, is not a major area of study.

This effect can also be observed in studies of the so-called 'mainstream' (i.e. superhero comics, although the application of the term to this genre has been called into question (Woo 2018), and we do not seek to make a case for this classification here, only to use it as a shorthand). While (one of) the genre's central theme(s) is the meting out of violence in the name of justice or terror (depending on the perpetrator), this violence is often taken for granted or not even mentioned, perhaps as a result of its ubiquity. It is worth noting, however, that the superheroes who ostensibly represent the best that humanity has to offer have few solutions to the world's ills beyond extreme violence, often carried out in the form of illegal vigilantism. This is not to say that violence is not a concern at all, but as with scholarship of Spiegelman and others, it is often bundled up with other themes, such as justice, patriotism and identity politics, rather than studied on its own terms. For example, none of the contributions to Hatfield, Heer and Worcester's The Superhero Reader directly addresses violence, but it is implicit as an issue throughout the section dealing with culture and identity. Similar connections have been made in the various comics that have addressed super violence, good examples of which would include Miracleman (1982–1989), Marvel Comics' Civil War event (2006-2007) and Daredevil: Supreme (2017). Those comics that do fit within the remit of the 'works that typified cultural production over time,' as described by Beaty and Woo, are relatively understudied (no date, web), so there is even less said about the violence within them than in the apparently normative titles represented by the superhero genre.

Recently, socially oriented work on comics that prioritises the contexts in which comics sit over textual analysis of the comics themselves has begun to return to the forefront of the field. Important work by scholars such as Mel Gibson (2015) and Casey Brienza (2016), among others, has privileged the idea that readers, along with broader social, economic and cultural contexts, have materially impacted upon the forms that comics

take and the ways they are understood. Violence too has begun to develop as a focus in studies of comics, with authors such as Jane L. Chapman, Adam Sherif and Dan Ellin (2015), and Harriet H. E. Earle (2017), as well as editors Michaela Precup and Rebecca Scherr (2017, 2018), undertaking work that does engage more concertedly with various types of violence and their contexts. Building on these developments, and seeking to offer a general (but not comprehensive) introduction to the subject, this book asks the reader to consider the ways in which violence and its representations may be enabled or restricted by the contexts in which they take place. It analyses how structures and organising principles, be they political, cultural, legal or historical, might encourage, demand or prevent violence. It also deals with the issue of scale: violence in the context of war versus violence in the context of an individual murder. It provides insights into violence in comics in the context of war and peace; ethnic, religious and identity-based violence; as well as the legal and historical contexts of violence. Together with its companion volume, Representing Acts of Violence in Comics (Mickwitz et al. 2019), it offers an examination of the ways in which violence in comics is presented in different texts, genres, cultures and contexts.

#### The Structure of This Volume

#### Section 1: History and Memory

The chapters in this section explore the ways in which historical context might affect the forms of and motivations for violence, and how the remembering or memorialisation of events impact on our perceptions of those events. In his book *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* Joseph Witek noted that there is 'a minor but long-established tradition of historical and fact based comic book narratives' (1989, 10) and explicitly examines the potential educational function of the work of Jack Jackson (Jaxon) and the role of violence in his work (1989, 58–95). The relationship between history and collective memory has been explored by Mickwitz in her study of documentary comics, which highlights the role that comics dealing in conflict have in remembering the past, regardless of the veracity of the narratives told (2015, 59–89).

This section opens with Lynn Fotheringham's discussion of *Three* and the ways in which it tackles the problematic history of Sparta, a state that has long been connected with extreme forms of violence (that have in some cases been glorified as particularly heroic or honourable) but whose actual history is far longer and more complex than the pared down ultra-violence that a work like Frank Miller and Lynn Varley's 300 might suggest. In her chapter, Fotheringham explores how Kieron Gillen and Ryan Kelly's *Three*, produced in collaboration with academic

historical consultant Steven Hodkinson, seeks to nuance the perception of Sparta and its citizens by drawing more attention to the ways in which the social structures of the state contributed to and perpetuated violence of various kinds.

Following on from this, Enrique del Rey Cabero's chapter explores the role of comics in the process of the recovery of historical memory through the portrayal of the extreme violence of the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent Françoist repression. The Civil War is still the subject of heated debated in Spain, following the transition to democracy (Transición): many streets keep their Françoist names, and Franço himself is buried in a glorious pantheon, while the bodies of many thousands of antifascists still lie in ditches. In recent years graphic novels in Spain have explored stories that outline the victims' individual and collective experiences of violence, which help Spain recover its traumatic memory. These graphic novels include Paracuellos (stories about children living in Françoist orphanages), Cuerda de presas (the abuse of women in Francoist prisons), Un largo silencio and El arte de volar (the memory of some defeated and fearful Republicans through their children's perspectives) and Los surcos del azar (about those Republicans who continued fighting in the Second World War after the Spanish Civil War). Taken collectively these suggest that the medium has allowed voices previously silenced to have a role in understanding the complexities of remembering the Spanish Civil War.

Claire Gorrara's chapter also deals with issues of individual and collective memory, and the difficulties surrounding the act of remembering. It specifically examines the transmission of memories of the Second World War in French comic books from the immediate post-war period to the present day, focussing on the experiences of those who were deported as prisoners of war and more particularly the intergenerational dynamics of communicating those experiences and memories to future generations. To this end, it starts by exploring graphic narratives by Raymond Henry and Antoine de Roux, two French prisoners of war who published their war experiences in 1945. This is followed by an analysis of the issues raised by two recent autobiographical albums by authors dealing with the wartime experience of close relatives: Florent Silloray's Le Carnet de Roger (2011), which scrutinises his grandfather's time as a prisoner of war, and Jacques Tardi's two albums, which examine his father's time in a prison camp and subsequent return to France following the war (2012, 2014). The chapter considers the specificity of the comic book as a means of recrafting and curating a violent past in an era of commemoration, and of additionally recuperating wartime memories that continue to remain outside the standard historical accounts of the period.

This section concludes with Mihaela Precup's chapter, which examines the aesthetic and narrative choices evident in Lebanese cartoonist

Zeina Abirached's autobiographical novel A Game for Swallows. To Die, To Leave, To Return (originally published in French in 2007 and in English in 2012). The novel covers the events from one troubled night during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) by representing not only acts of violence but also the constant threat of violence and the way it permeates everyday life and transforms the geography of the city and the home. It is argued that Abirached constructs a graphic narrative where she successfully shows both how the prolonged state of exception that was the Lebanese Civil War fragmented the architecture of the city and the home, and how a community in mourning coalesced against a common threat. Abirached's panels, full of repetitions and dark spaces, characters frozen in tense expectation, show that the indoor space of the community is not 'safe' but 'more or less safe,' as the grandmother puts it. Abirached's style, strongly influenced by Lebanese calligraphy, contributes greatly to the recreation of the personal space of the home, populated by objects of sentimental value that also need to be protected from destruction and whose memory she tries to preserve.

#### Section 2: War and Peace

The book's second section addresses two notions and contexts that have long determined the ways in which images have been presented in comics. However, comics that represent military conflict are relatively underexamined by comics scholars, and the more populist studies that exist tend not to explicitly examine the issue of violence but rather situate these comics within specific cultures and nation states.<sup>2</sup> An exception to this trend is Tatjana Prorokova and Nimrod Tal's recent edited collection *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Trauma, and Memory* (2018), where a number of papers examine the issue of violence, but as the subtitle suggests it is just as firmly focussed on the issues of memory and trauma as it is on violence.

When expressing his dismay that war comics as a genre has received very little attention Kent Worcester has noted that American and British 'War comics tend to be romantic in their treatment of military conflict, with an emphasis on good guys versus bad guys, and tidy story resolutions, and they are almost always temporarily disconnected from the historical periods they portray' (2015, ix). Worcester contrasts this with the notion of wartime comics, which are 'generated within the crucible of interstate violence' and are 'incubated within particular contexts and time frames.' He goes on to suggest that for the comics scholar this raises the issue of interpreting representation in comics form in relation to the actions actually taking place on the ground.

This issue of interpretation is central to Michael F. Scholz's chapter that considers the ways in which Swedish government and publishing industry responses to the events and politics of the Second World War drove or suppressed the import and production of particular comic strips, and the ways in which they were published in the country. The context of Sweden's neutrality and how it managed to negotiate its position in relation to the warring factions is central to this chapter. It also examines the use of historical fictions created by Swedish artists and writers to support the official government policy of promoting national identity in the face of this conflict. As the war progressed comics production seesawed between the justification of Sweden's neutral politics and a growing pro-war propaganda related to the Western powers. Increasingly, during the war more and more American comics, often with violent content and produced or initiated by the Office of War Information (OWI) and the Writers' War Board (WWB), came to Sweden, spreading American values, encouraging hate towards fascism and Nazism, and promoting the achievements of the allies in the anti-Hitler-coalition.

In a like fashion but on a more individual level, Malin Bergström's chapter examines Will Eisner's experiences of working for the United States army on comics that were intended to both entertain and educate the troops, and the ways in which this impacted upon his own practice as a creator. Eisner's involvement in military comics allowed him to promote the educational values of the medium, and his army publication, Preventive Maintenance Monthly (PS Magazine), served as a guide for equipment maintenance for American troops from the 1950s onwards. The underlying dilemma of military comics' connection to killing (even if the killing was executed in the name of patriotism) exists even within publications such as PS Magazine because, by helping soldiers survive, the magazine equally helped them survive to kill. Eisner's later work was influenced by his experiences in the army but rarely took a positive stance towards military actions and political intentions. Instead Eisner positioned himself between military patriotism and the peace movement; the complexity of this ethical position has not been directly explored by existing critical research and potentially reveals new aspects to research in the history of comics.

#### Section 3: Urban Violence

Moving on from the very broad national or international engagements with violence in war the two chapters in our third section examine the more limited and specific context of violence in the city. Urban violence has, and continues to have, a significant presence within comic books. For example, urban contexts are often central to the violence that takes place within the American superhero genre. Batman's vigilante actions are the direct consequence of the murder of his parents by a petty criminal in the heart of Gotham City, and in many of the storylines both the physical and the sociopolitical aspects of the city shape the kinds of violence that take place. Similarly Spider-Man's early battles with villains

such as Doctor Octopus, Green Goblin and Kingpin were reliant on the backdrop of New York City, with the skyscrapers playing a significant part in the kinds of violent actions depicted.

The opening chapter in this section, by Jörn Ahrens, focusses on the American comic book series *DMZ*, which takes us into a fictional war that has overtaken the United States and locates us in New York, now a city riven by conflict that has destabilised established norms and thrust unlikely players into positions of great power and influence. Here, journalist Matty Roth must navigate a complex social, political and physical milieu within an urban sphere that has been defamiliarised through violence. Ahrens argues that the territorialisation of space in the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) allows for an escalation of violence that offers no escape and where the ruins of the former metropolis become a central force in explaining why such acts of violence occur. In conclusion it is suggested that these kinds of urban spaces become places in which it is impossible to escape violence.

Similarly, Dominic Davies's chapter asks us to consider how the Lebanese Civil War transformed its infrastructure and notions of public space through a discussion of recent graphic memoirs that also connects back to Mihaela Precup's chapter on Zeina Abirached's work. When examining Lamia Ziadé's Bye Bye Babylon: Beirut 1975–1979 (2010) and Zeina Abirached's A Game for Swallows: To Die, To Leave, To Return (2007) Davies, in contrast to Precup, focusses on the notion that rather than highlighting the sense of community that is engendered by the violence of the civil war these graphic narratives in fact mark the death of the urban spaces that allow for multicultural communities to exist. By focussing on the notion of grievability, Davies suggests that we should consider the biggest casualty of the civil war to be the fluidity of the cosmopolitan city that preceded it. In conclusion he considers these graphic novels as playing a part in looking forward to the reconstruction of a city still divided along sectarian lines.

#### Section 4: Law, Justice and Censorship

In the final section of this book three chapters consider the role of the law and the contexts in which these laws are both established and enacted. The concept of graphic justice is a new sub-discipline in the field of Comics Studies and was first established with the formation of the Graphic Justice Research Alliance in 2015.<sup>3</sup> This innovative approach to the study of comics was cemented through the publication of Thomas Giddens's *Graphic Justice: Intersections of Comics and Law* in 2015 and here provides an alternative perspective for considering the issue of violence in comics.

Golnar Nabizadeh opens this section with a chapter that, like Dominic Davies's, considers questions of grievability but this time more directly

in relation to notions of justice and cultural grief. Nabizadeh argues that melancholia is a useful concept that allows us to consider social justice and political agency when examining public presentations and perceptions of grief. This analysis is primarily achieved by examining graphic narratives that address issues of immigration and by considering the formal devices of comics that allow such stories to be expressed to those directly impacted by these narratives as well as other audiences. The idea of grieving is considered not as a form of closure but as a more open-ended process that is only partially redemptive and thereby allows for the continued acknowledgement of loss, be it cultural or personal.

Alex Link, meanwhile, returns to the theme of war in his chapter on Nate Powell's *Any Empire* but this time situates it more particularly in relation to its effects upon the people who are involved in it when they return home and the ways in which violence can impact on the communities of its perpetrators and victims. By the end of *Any Empire*, Link argues, we are witnessing the collapse of local and global scales of violence; of romanticised warfare in comics and nostalgia, and its lived reality; of global American policing and local militarised law enforcement; of adolescent and adult relationships with violence; of domestic comforts and the distant unseen traumas that enable them; and of the narrative's present and its alternative possible pasts and futures.

Finally, David Huxley rounds out the volume with a look at a lesserknown victim of censorship and public outrage: the British humour comic Oink!. Censorship has already been acknowledged as a central framework for examining the issue of violence in comics, and while Oink! does not sit in precisely the same context as those works discussed by Martin Barker in A Haunt of Fears (1992), Huxley demonstrates how public concern over comics extended beyond the 1950s and continued to have an influence on the position of comics in culture and on the newsagents' shelf long afterwards. Huxley argues that Oink! belongs to a trend in British comics of the 1980s and 1990s that challenged established norms and specifically used violence and 'slapstick' death as devices to outrage parents and attract children. Oink! 'won' a hearing at The Press Council in 1987 when defending the material they published against complaints; although they won this marked the beginning of the end, and within a year the supposed 'excessive' violence had caused Oink!'s demise.

The chapters of this book all examine contexts of violence in comics, from remembered wars to contemporary conflict areas; from imaginary worlds to actual, lived places, and not forgetting social and institutional structures—the military and systems of law. The approaches adopted by the authors are equally diverse. Some privilege attention to contextual specificity and publication histories, while others draw on theoretical frameworks for their analysis. Such plurality and range align directly

with the editorial aims of this contribution. Both in its own right, and together with its companion volume, *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics*, our intention has from the outset been to make visible, beyond any lingering doubt, that the relationship between comics and violence is as varied as it is complex.

#### Notes

- 1 For a more detailed account of Jack Jackson's work in relation to violence see Laurike in 't Veld 'A Balancing Act: Didactic Spectacle in Jack Jackson's "Nits Make Lice" and *Slow Death Comix' Representing Acts of Violence in Comics* (2019).
- 2 See, for example, Adam Riches's *When the Comics Went to War*, a study of the history of British War comics, and Mike Conroy's more general study *War Comics: A Graphic History*, both of which celebrate rather than critique the genre.
- 3 See https://graphicjustice.wordpress.com/.
- 1 An earlier work of fiction—not read by Gillen—which similarly creates a heroic tale about helots is Manfredi 2002.
- 2 For an example of graphic historical non-fiction focussing on the telling of untold stories, see Witek's *Comic Books as History* on the work of Jack Jackson (1989, 58–95). Witek hints at the connections between history and fiction when he states that 'all three creators [whose work is explored in his book] are concerned to varying degrees with the connections between historical and fictional narrative' (p. 4). Another non-fiction equivalent to Gillen's recuperation of the helots is Joe Sacco's work on the 'previously unarchived voices' of Palestinians discussed by Chute (2016, 235; 243), and also by Adams (2008, 121; 157) and Earle (2017, 120), under the label 'documentary' comics. For an example of an academic historian expressing concern about certain historical approaches undervaluing the sufferings of the helots, see Cartledge (2003, 17).
- 3 The term was originally coined as 'le mirage Spartiate' by French historian François Ollier in 1933.
- 4 Page-numbers do not appear anywhere in either the individual issues or in the collection. In order to reduce the numbers which must be counted in order to provide and decode references to specific pages, the count has been restarted for each individual issue/chapter ('1.1' indicates Issue/Chapter 1, page 1), and for each section of the back matter. References to 'Three: A Conversation' are to the printing of the complete text in the collection rather than to its piecemeal distribution in the issues.
- 5 His emphasis on *Three* as a heroic tale leads Gillen to downplay its 'social realist' aspects. Nevertheless, his explicit orientation towards class politics and his focus on the labouring helots mean that his work has much in common with those works Adams classifies as social realism (2008, 29–34). It is worth noting that although Adams is explicitly focussing on documentary comics, one of his examples—Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen*—is a partly fictionalised version of Nakazawa's life.
- 6 A recent painstaking analysis can be found in Ducat 2006, 281–332.
- 7 Opposing scholarly views of the credibility of the story are expressed by Paradiso 2004 and Harvey 2004.
- 8 Similar awareness of the way information about more recent historical events may be filtered through the perspectives of the individuals recounting them is conveyed by Joe Sacco's emphasis on his own presence as interviewer filtering the accounts of his Palestinian interlocutors; see, for example, Adams 2008, 151–153.

- 9 I owe sincere thanks to the editors for their patience and helpful suggestions; to Kieron Gillen and Stephen Hodkinson for their generosity in allowing me access to their correspondence; and to Matt Brooker, as always, for listening to ideas. I have also received feedback on the ideas from generous audiences at meetings of the Historical Fictions Research Network, Nottingham Does Comics, and the Classical Association.
- 1 'Cotiza al alza' in the original Spanish, a term borrowed from the economic jargon of the stock exchange. This and other translations (including titles) from Spanish in this article are mine.
- 2 The debate about memory and oblivion of the Civil War is a very long one (Ortiz Heras 2006; Sevillano Calero 2013). Some authors, such as Juliá (2006), have negated the existence of a pact of silence, arguing that ever since the arrival of democracy there was an interest in research about the past and in dismounting Francoist theories. However, it does seem that advances in the field of historiography have not often reached general audiences. As Reig Tapia remarks, our memory of the Civil War possesses a contradictory essence: 'sometimes it seems more alive than desirable and sometimes more forgotten than it should' (1997, 40–41).
- 3 Since then it can be argued that the economic crisis (at least until the recent events in Catalonia) has dominated most political debates. This has also become an increasingly present subject in comics, as seen in works such as Aleix Salo's *Españistán* (2011), Antonio Hito's *Inercia* (2014) and Miguel Brieva's *Lo que me está pasando* (2015).
- 4 Some of the topics and works of this chapter were discussed in this online conversation, which appeared on the website of Comics Forum just after its 2014 conference. The author thanks the organisers for the idea and Sarah for engaging in what was a very stimulating talk. Some of her own insights can be read in a recent article she has published (Harris 2017).
- 5 Debate in which some authors have actively participated, as shown in Santiago García's *La novela gráfica* (2010), recently published in English in 2015 as *On the graphic novel* by University Press of Mississippi.
- 6 Roca is arguably one of the most famous and best-selling authors of the Spanish comics market, particularly thanks to *Wrinkles*, which has been widely translated (see Muñoz-Basols and Del Rey Cabero, forthcoming), including two different translations into English by Knockabout (2015) and Fantagraphics (2016).
- 7 The representation and memory of the Civil War received attention in events such as Semana Negra de Gijón (Gálvez and Fernández 2006), exhibitions such as Los Tebeos de la Guerra Civil Española. Niños y Propaganda (Salamanca, 2008–2009) and the international conference Guerre civile espagnole et bande dessinée celebrated in Musée de la bande dessinée of Angoulême in 2016. More recently, it has also become the subject of study of PhDs (Matly 2014) and works that explore how to teach historical memory through comics (Fernández de Arriba 2018).
- 1 I am indebted to the curators of the Liberation collection at Cambridge University Library, above all Sophie Defrance, for their support in accessing these rare wartime texts. They form part of a unique collection of texts and materials from the Liberation period, 1944–1946, donated by philanthropist Charles Chadwyck Healey. See www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/french-collections/special-collections/chadwyck-healey-liberation.
- 2 Jacques Tardi also journeyed back to visit the sites of his father's wartime experiences, like Florent Silloray. He charts this in photographic form on his website. Photographs and panel images from the two albums can be matched in many instances; http://cargocollective.com/tardi-stalag-iib/.

- 3 The preface to the album is provided by Isabelle Bournier, the Director of Education of the Mémorial de Caen. Her endorsement reinforces the historical value of Silloray's work as a unique testimony to one man's experiences but also as 'un émouvant hommage à tous ceux qui partagèrent ces années de captivité' (a moving homage to all those who shared these years of captivity).
- 1 A more complex presentation of the books is available in a free recording of a lecture Zeina Abirached gave at the Center for French and Francophone Studies at Duke University on 13 September 2015: www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPBTZ8kegjI.
- 2 For a bibliography of comics—both in Arabic and French—on the Lebanese Civil War, see Merhej (2015).
- 3 In his monograph on post-civil war Lebanese literature, Felix Lang convincingly proposes that the Lebanese literary market is dominated by 'a post-holocaust concept of memory characterized by a moral imperative to remember past violence' (Lang 5). He proposes instead a reading that would steer focus away from post-war trauma and instead focus more closely on authors' social background and other factors that influence literary production and tropes (Lang 7).
- 4 I am here referring to a few details that seem to indicate that the author is raised in a relatively well-off family of intellectuals, such as the fact that she grows up in a beautiful three-bedroom apartment in a building from the 1940s that used to belong to her grandfather, with a large library.
- 5 Kerbaj, a jazz musician, keeps pondering the issue of how comics can convey sound, particularly the disturbing sounds and silences of war. He even recorded an improvised trumpet piece he played on his balcony as Israeli bombs fell on one night in July 2006 (Whitaker 2006).
- 6 As previously mentioned, these are only a few examples of book-length comics from what is a larger body of work, for which Lena Merhej's doctoral dissertation, 'Analysis of Graphic Narrative: War in Lebanese Comics,' is an invaluable archive. Of those longer autobiographical comics that are also available in English, I have not discussed, for instance, Beirut 1990. Snapshots of a Civil War, by Sylvain Ricard, Bruno Ricard and Christophe Gaultier, because it is an outsider account of a short time near the end of the war, and the authors keep circling the events around them without actually managing to become involved in a significant manner.
- 7 *Persepolis* comes closer to Abirached's work because it depicts the experience of conflict and threat of violence autobiographically through the eyes of a child.
- 8 On the other hand, Naji al-Ali's comics, available in English as *Naji al-Ali: A Child in Palestine*, famously show the brutality of everyday life in Palestine as seen through the eyes of the child-like character Handala.
- 9 This is about the same age as US-based Hungarian cartoonist Miriam Katin was when she fled Budapest with her mother, thus managing to avoid what would have been inevitable incarceration in a concentration camp, a story she tells in her graphic memoir *We Are on Our Own*.
- 10 Abirached has mentioned in interviews that her work relies not simply on her own memories, but also on interviews with family members, since she was only three when the events recounted in *A Game for Swallows* took place: 'I talked a lot with her [the grandmother], with my parents and my neighbours to compare my memories with theirs. But my connecting thread was my memories and the feelings I had when I was a child' (Abirached 2013).
- 11 I quote the motto of *I Remember Beirut* in full: 'Nothing distinguishes memories from ordinary moments. Only later do they make themselves known, from their scars. –Chris Marker' (Abirached 2014, 6).
- 1 Quotes from German publications have been translated into English by the author.

- 1 Most notably, the comics collective *Samandal* were prosecuted by the Lebanese government under these post-war censorship laws for 'a) inciting sectarian strife b) denigrating religion c) publishing false news and d) defamation and slander' in 2009. After protracted legal proceedings, they were found guilty of these charges, and the resulting fines have financially crippled the collective, which nevertheless sporadically produces new comics anthologies that remain contingent on crowd-funding campaigns (see Samandal 2015).
- 2 Ziadé does not paginate her memoir, and so I am unable to point to the specific point at which this occurs in the book. However, this lack of pagination might itself contribute to the reader's multidirectional encounter with the comic. Bereft of chronological coordinates, readers instead encounter the text spatially, more like a map, as Ziadé works to secrete pre-war cosmopolitan spaces back into Beirut's urban present.
- 1 Chute uses the term 'texture' to describe the dynamic attributes of the comics page, that is, 'its flexible page architecture; its sometimes consonant, sometimes dissonant visual and verbal narratives; and its structural threading of absence and presence' (2008, p. 94).
- 2 Robert Burton's tome, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621, explored melancholy—among other conditions—as a condition of multiple valences, that is, as a matter of disposition as well as a potentially excessive response to be eavement.
- 3 'Pickelhaube' refers to the distinctive spiked helmets worn by German soldiers in the First World War.
- 1 All subsequent references to Any Empire are to this unpaginated edition.
- 1 The reasons for the demise of some of the British underground comics are discussed in Huxley, D. *Nasty Tales: Sex, Drugs, Rock'n'Roll and Violence in the British Underground*, Critical Vision, 2001. The main reasons might be briefly summarised as distribution problems and censorship interference. The characteristics of Viz are described in 'Viz: Gender, Class and Taboo' In Wagg, S. (ed.) *Because I Tell a Joke or Two*, Routledge, 1998.
- 2 Oink began as biweekly title; 1–44 (May 1986–December 1987), then weekly; 45–62 (January 1988–May 1988, and finally monthly; 63–68. (June–November 1988).

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