

Mourning in Colors

9/11 Trauma and the Visual in Alissa Torres's *American Widow*

Mémoire réalisé par
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Introduction

Every time a terrorist attack takes place, a large number of citizens all over the world compulsively watch the news. What can be reported about alternative representations of terrorist attacks – those that are produced later, when the event is better understood while being less mediatized? In this master dissertation, I will analyze how traumatic experiences can be conveyed, focusing on how the trauma after the 9/11 attacks is characterized and represented in graphic novels. As it is impossible to analyze all the representations of 9/11, the scope of the present research has been narrowed down to a specific literary genre, namely comics and graphic novels. This genre has been chosen because it is currently evolving and it offers several possibilities that other genres do not entail. Since Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, comics and graphic novels have addressed serious issues and even traumatic events. Moreover, the dialog that is created between the text and the images enables the author and the illustrator to add some tensions in their representations of traumatic events.

Furthermore, trauma is characteristic of our age since terrorism, which is directly linked to trauma, is ubiquitous in many countries. Since *Maus*, lots of autobiographic graphic novels representing trauma have appeared, even if it is known that trauma will never be overcome.¹ Nowadays, a great number of countries are concerned with terrorism and the trauma that ensues from it. A direct consequence of the omnipresence of terrorism is that security is increased everywhere to prevent new attacks. Due to this context, trauma is also evolving as Raya Morag states in her book *Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema* in which she writes that

The victims are in an especially tragic situation, since even if they have begun to process their personal trauma into future memories another attack can catch them at any moment. In other words, whenever they find themselves in a public space their personal traumatic experience ceases to be a one-time bloc and becomes repetitive.²

This means that because the attacks are multiplying, they are characterized by their chronicity and the trauma caused by terrorist attacks is not the same as for other traumatic events: it is chronic because it can take place anywhere at any time and citizens fear what might happen next.

¹ E. Ann Kaplan. *Trauma Culture. The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005. Print, p 136.

² Raya Morag. *Waltzing with Bashir*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013. Print, p. 74.

Alissa Torres's *American Widow* will be the focus of this research. This graphic novel published by Villard in 2008 combines the autobiographic genre with black, white and blue drawings. It is based on the true experience of Alissa Torres, a pregnant American woman who lost her husband in the attacks at the World Trade Center. It is not illustrated by the author but by Sungyoon Choi. It is an autobiography that deals with Torres's life during the year following 9/11 and it intertwines several struggles that the author/narrator had to face. The process of mourning, remembering and fighting to get the compensation from the government are conveyed throughout the graphic novel. Central to the present study is how this autobiography represents 9/11 trauma. How can trauma be represented? What are the characteristics of its expression? How can the combination between text and image address the unrepresentability of trauma in different ways? *American Widow* was not chosen at random as several comics and graphic novels representing 9/11 were read before deciding to focus on this single one. Others will be briefly discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation to establish a general background. While many media images are sensationalist, *American Widow* emphasizes a softer kind of representations since the drawings are discreet. Moreover, a gap needed to be filled as this graphic novel has not been analyzed by many scholars. To my knowledge, Davida Pines is the only author who has analyzed *American Widow* in an academic work. It was published in Jane Tolmie's book entitled *Drawing from Life: Memory and Subjectivity in Comic Art*.³ In his chapter, Davida Pines confronts *American Widow* to Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*. He focuses on Alissa Torres's loss as well as why she decided to write the graphic novel in the first place. He briefly analyzes the tensions as well as the fact that "Torres uses text to illustrate the experience of trauma and the symptoms of post-traumatic stress [and] she also utilizes images."⁴ Contrary to other graphic novels and comics, trauma and mourning are addressed in this book while it simultaneously attempts to find an alternative to those voyeuristic and violent representations that the media often conveyed.

The present dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter one considers the representations of 9/11 in three different genres, namely superhero comics, political comics and autobiographic comics. At the end of this first chapter, *American Widow* is introduced. The second chapter attempts to understand trauma thanks to Ann Kaplan's theory, developed in her book entitled *Trauma Culture. The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. Her groundbreaking approach to collective trauma sheds new light on *American Widow* as Kaplan explains the

³ Davida Pines in Jane Tolmie. *Drawing from Life*. 1st ed. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Print, pp. 185-204.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 191.

different types of trauma as well as what is particular about the 9/11 trauma. To what extent is 9/11 a kind of trauma that is visual and that needs to be responded with visual representations? The end of this chapter is devoted to the process of healing and working out after a traumatic experience, which is visually conveyed here. Following those theorization sections, the main part of the dissertation focuses on *American Widow* and how the comics and graphic novel genre can tackle the issue of representing 9/11 trauma. Each section of this chapter focuses on one aspect of its depiction in *American Widow*. This piece uses specific techniques to convey trauma such as a rupture in the chronology or the presence of repetitions. The graphic novel contains different types of representations of towers represented which also convey unending traumatic experience. Traumatization is also suggested in the presence or absence of words and in mixed temporalities entangled in some panels. Finally, chapter four is about the tensions and contrasts in *American Widow* and more specifically those created by colors, the tensions between the political and private spheres as well as those caused by the presence of photographs.

The aim of this dissertation is to discuss how the author, Alissa Torres, and the illustrator, Sungyoon Choi, represented 9/11 trauma in the text or in the images as well as in the relationship between the two. Every victim experienced the 9/11 attacks differently and each will need to represent his/her trauma in a different way, as is going to be developed here. Yet as everyone is faced with the threat of a terrorist attack, a new era of terrorism is created and the question that should be raised concerns chronic trauma since it is created by the “chronicity of the attacks”⁵. This dissertation will seek to look at the tensions, the devices and the possibilities that graphic novels offer in a world increasingly haunted by trauma.

⁵ *Ibid.*

1. Representing 9/11 in Comics and in Graphic Novels

Victims who endure a traumatic event can never feel the whole extent of its aftermath. When the 9/11 terrorist attacks took place, a whole nation was hit. The event has “left a mark on ordinary language [which] offers a hint of their historical force.”⁶ The name has now become an integral part of the United States’ culture and has even seeped its way into the mainstream culture of the modern Western world. The amount of photographs and videos that were taken on that pivotal day are archived “forever ready to reappear in the media or to be accessed via the Internet; [...] endlessly and unavoidably available [...] are the keywords themselves: the name-date, ‘September 11’ or ‘9/11,’ and, shadowing it, an atomic-era military idiom, ‘ground zero,’ turned toponym.”⁷

In the last fifteen years, the trauma of 9/11 has been increasingly represented in the arts, whether it be in movies, novels, documentaries, songs or comics. Andrew Arnold wrote about the latter that it is quite surprising that comics are one of the “many disparate groups” galvanizing the traumatic events of 9/11. “From the mainstream standard-bearers to the marginalized self-publisher, a spasm of creativity has produced an extraordinary group of works”⁸ which “ha[s] succeeded in providing the first national-scale artistic interpretations of this twenty-first-century international crisis.”⁹ Arnold states that a lot of artists decided to use this event as a central theme in their works, sometimes together, to honor the victims or as an attempt to understand the events.

According to Schlund-Vials, 9/11 comics “were [...] born out of crisis, redolent of paradox, and reflect a still-forming sense of post-9/11 selfhood and nationhood.”¹⁰ “The prevailing atmosphere of grief and distress soon gave way to sentiments of nationalism, patriotism and American heroism. While this response was reflected in many pop-culture products of the time, perhaps no format was better suited to portraying ‘heroism’ than comic books.”¹¹ Within a few months after the attacks, seven 9/11 comics were published and all of them were written in commemoration of the victims.¹² The profits of these comics were given to charities to support

⁶ Marc Redfield. "Virtual Trauma: The Idiom of 9/11." *Diacritics* 37.1 (2007): 54-80. Web. 18 Oct. 2016, p. 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Andrew D. Arnold. "The Most Serious Comix Ever." *Time* (Jan. 2002). Web. 20 Sept. 2016, p. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Cathy J. Schlund-Vials. "Crisis of Memory: Memorializing 9/11 in the Comic Book Universe." *Modern Language Studies* 1.41 (2011): 12-25. Web. 9 Feb. 2016, p. 15.

¹¹ Max Berkay Erdemendi. "Marvel Comics' Civil War: An Allegory of September 11 in an American Civil War Framework." *Traces - UNC Chapel Hill Journal of History* (2013): 213-223. Web. 20 Sept. 2016, p. 213.

¹² Arnold. *Op. Cit.*, p.1.

the families as well as the “New York relieve efforts.”¹³ With over one million dollars donated, the American publisher Marvel raised the most substantial amount of money.¹⁴ The particularity with the comic genre is that it mixes images with text and therefore “unlike other mass media forms (e.g. film and television), comics have a more ‘direct’ impact in part because their efficacy depends on defamiliarizing and reassembling images and text in literary fashion.”¹⁵ This visual art is less realistic than a photograph, creating some distance and yet it can engage with the complexities of a specific topic like 9/11.

In his article entitled “9/11, Image Control, and the Graphic Narrative: Spiegelman, Rehr, Torres,” Tim Gauthier paraphrases Ann Kaplan and claims that “art [is] a means of ‘translating’ trauma into forms that make the complexity and unrepresentability of the experience communicable to others.”¹⁶ According to Gauthier, “since the initial narratives were largely conveyed through images, it stands to reason that a medium that incorporates both text and image, such as the graphic novel, might have more success with the ‘translation’”¹⁷ of a traumatic experience. Comics and graphic novels belong to a genre less studied than others. The present dissertation focuses on Alissa Torres’ *American Widow* which also belongs to the autobiographical subgenre. Within a corpus of 9/11 works, one can distinguish three main subgenres, namely comics with the embodiment of firefighters, policemen and nurses by superheroes (superhero comics), the autobiographical comics, and the political comic books, in order to explain the representation of September 11.

Comic books with superheroes celebrate real-life heroes of that day while they reassert patriotic values. In his article “The Most Serious Comix Ever,” Arnold considers the possibility of comics’ creators writing stories with superheroes giving a hand during those terrorist attacks. DC and Marvel are publishers specialized in superhero comics, thus it came as no surprise that comics featuring superheroes during the 9/11-aftermath were published by them.¹⁸ But why exactly is 9/11 linked to the superhero comics’ industry? In their article entitled “‘We have experienced a Tragedy which Words cannot properly Describe;’ Representations of Trauma in Post-9/11 Superhero Comics,” Philip Smith and Michael Goodrum, observe that this genre is linked to 9/11 because superheroes add an “element of control to the narrative” which tends to

¹³ Schlund-Vials. *Op. Cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁴ Stefanie Diekmann. "Hero and Superhero." *The Guardian* (2004): 1-3. Web. 20 Sept. 2016, p. 1.

¹⁵ Schlund-Vials. *Op. Cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁶ Tim Gauthier. "9/11, Image Control, and the Graphic Narrative: Spiegelman, Rehr, Torres." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 46.3-4 (2010): 369-380. Web. 30 Mar. 2016, p. 370.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Andrew D. Arnold. "The Most Serious Comix Pt. 2." *Time* (Feb. 2002). Web. 20 Sept. 2016, p. 1.

avoid trauma.¹⁹ In narratives with superheroes, an event, traumatic or important enough, needs to happen in order to trigger the use of superpowers. And as Smith and Goodrum rightly point out: “[b]ecause the destruction of a cityscape is such a common event in a superhero comic, the genre itself must now bear the weight of what it means for a city to truly come under attack.”²⁰ This quote links the real world to the fictitious one in comics, reinforcing the impact of graphic representations. Hence, the idea that the infamous scene where planes attack New York City, was a reproduction in real life of numerous superhero comics’ scenarios in which “no knight in a bodysuit or on a shining surfboard intervened to prevent the catastrophe that followed.”²¹ As Cathy J. Schlund-Vials states in her article “Crisis of Memory: Memorializing 9/11 in the Comic Book Universe,” some people define 9/11 as being “unfamiliar.” This term is explained by Smith and Goodrum: “In a fictional world where large-scale urban destruction is commonplace, the 9/11 attacks are unfamiliar only in that they are a genuine, rather than fictional, event.”²² The truth, according to Schlund-Vials, is that with these attacks, an element of the fantasy realm was incorporated in reality and this surprised most Americans. She explains that a lot of American movies are “apocalyptic [fantasies]” and the attacks were an event similar to those present in these films.²³ This shows that Americans have always loved catastrophic scenarios in literature and cinema but with 9/11, one of them occurred in real life.

In his introduction to the comic *A moment of silence*, Rudolph Giuliani writes: “[...] we all now realise that we do not have to read fiction to find examples of heroism. The real heroes in American life have been with us all along. Our firefighters, police officers and other rescue workers put their lives on the line every day to protect the rest of us from danger.”²⁴ As for Stefanie Diekmann, “shifting the focus from fictive characters to NYC officials is thus understood as a transition from the heroes of everyone’s childhood to those of everyday life, from the realm of fantasy to that of the ‘real world,’ and from the age of naivety to that of responsibility.”²⁵ This is a way of linking the harsh reality of the terrorist attacks to fantasy. However, as Arnold states: “For some this will come across as a gross commodification and trivialization of an awesome, unspeakable tragedy.”²⁶ Schlund-Vials agrees with him as she

¹⁹ Philip Smith and Michael Goodrum. "We have experienced a Tragedy which Words cannot properly Describe;" Representations of Trauma in Post-9/11 Superhero Comics." *Literature Compass* 8.8 (2011): 487-498. Web. 24 Sept. 2016, p. 490.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

²¹ Diekmann. *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

²² Smith and Goodrum. *Op. Cit.*, p. 491.

²³ Schlund-Vials. *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.

²⁴ Rudolph Giuliani. *A Moment of Silence*. Introduction, 2002. Print.

²⁵ Diekmann. *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

²⁶ Arnold. "The Most Serious Comix Pt. 2." *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

judges 9/11 comics featuring superheroes as being inappropriate to commemorate the victims because those fictive characters “are unused to catastrophic failure and large-scale human loss.”²⁷

Nevertheless, further in her article, Schlund-Vials weighs the pros and cons of using superheroes in 9/11 comics: “superheroes after September 11 seem superfluous. Simultaneously, supervillains, who often [occupy] ‘terrorist’ roles replete with plans to destroy cities and take lives, [seem] ideal players in an instantly declared War on Terror because they fit within a strict binary of ‘good’ and ‘evil.’”²⁸ She therefore grants that using superheroes to represent 9/11 is not a bad idea. Moreover, she writes that “the unspeakable nature of September 11 is vocalized through an interdisciplinary comic book imaginary”²⁹ and that “within the largely black/white contours of comic book justice, such terrorist figures necessitate superhero counterparts, who maintain order and combat enemies committed to amorality and ‘at all costs’ gain.”³⁰

All the aforementioned demonstrate that not everybody agrees with the representation of superheroes in the 9/11 comics but the real question that should be asked is: should a single medium be unanimously chosen to best represent such a traumatic event as 9/11? No, this event cannot be confined to one literary genre or medium. This is simply because too many lives were lost that day and everyone has his own way to mourn and to remember; everyone is unique and it should be respected. In my opinion, this is why 9/11 has been represented in so many different media and genres since that day: to embrace the scope of the event.

Additionally, Tim Gauthier highlights the contrast between the unrealistic side of the attacks and its sense of “cinematic déjà vu.” The fact “[t]hat terrorists would crash planes filled with people into buildings, also filled with people, seemed as improbable as aliens destroying the National Monument,”³¹ this was so unrealistic that people thought the best solution was to let the media interpret the event. Nonetheless, as he explains, this was not a good idea because “[t]his eventually led [...] to a greater sense of alienation since many of us harbored a nagging suspicion about the veracity of this ‘official’ version of events.”³² The fact is that these events were so implausible that no one knew how to interpret them.

²⁷ Schlund-Vials. *Op. Cit.*, p. 15.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³¹ Gauthier. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 369-370.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 370.

A few examples will then illustrate the superhero comic type commemorating 9/11. The first 9/11 comic published by Marvel is entitled *The Amazing Spider-Man #36*³³ which was published in October 2001. In this comic, as Smith and Goodrum put it “the 9/11 terrorist attacks literally occur in the comic-book, interrupting the flow of the existing narrative and exposing the helplessness of the tremendous powerful Spider-Man.”³⁴ An explanation is provided when the authors state that “[i]f superheroes contribute to the mythology of US security then, when the myth of that security is shattered, superhero narratives must acknowledge that failing.”³⁵ Surprisingly its cover is entirely black, with only the title and the names of the editors written in white on it. It is as if the cover had been erased, as usually comics’ covers tend to contain bold colors and eye catching graphics or illustrations.

*Heroes*³⁶ followed *The Amazing Spider-Man #36* and was published in December 2001. This comic book is “a tribute to the firemen, police officers and other rescue workers [...]”³⁷ It is written on its cover: “The World’s Greatest Super Hero Creators Honor the World’s Greatest Heroes.”³⁸ On account of this sentence as well as the content of the comic book “it is hard to decide whether *Heroes* seeks to establish the heroes of 9/11 as equal or as superior to the older, more familiar ones, but, all in all, the concept is genealogical, representing NYC officials as the next generation in charge of the city’s safety.”³⁹ In this comic, two heroes, namely Captain America and Hulk are the main characters. The reason seems obvious: Captain America “had been invented as Marvel’s superweapon against Nazi Germany in 1941, leading the way a whole year before the US finally went to war”⁴⁰ and Hulk uses his “devastating superhuman powers”⁴¹ only when he is angry. Diekmann claims that “[t]ogether, those two seemed a good choice for driving home the nation of yet another historic cause, stressing the connection between anger and justified violence without having to depict anything more than a well-known and well-respected protagonist.”⁴² This last quote can help understand why using superheroes is also a way to justify each violent response to 9/11, such as the War on Terror.

³³ Michael J. Straczynski, Romita John, and Hanna Scott. *The Amazing Spider-Man #36*. Marvel, 2001. Print.

³⁴ Smith and Goodrum. *Op. Cit.*, p. 492.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Various. *Heroes: The World's Greatest Super Hero Creators Honor the World's Greatest Heroes 9-11-2001*. 3rd ed. Marvel, 2001. Print.

³⁷ Diekmann. *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

³⁸ Various. *Heroes*. *Op. Cit.*, Front cover.

³⁹ Diekmann. *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

Afterwards came the Marvel's series *Civil War* which was published between 2006 and 2007. "[It] was crafted as an allegorical treatment of the American Civil War and the terrorist attacks addressing contentious post-9/11 debates over national security and civil liberties."⁴³ Paraphrasing Erich Fromm, Max Erdemandi writes: "[...] people have a contradictory desire for both personal freedom *and* security."⁴⁴ What is particular with this comic series is that the storyline includes not only the American Civil War but also a recent part of American history, namely 9/11. *Civil War* juxtaposes these two major historical events, demonstrating "that [the] American identity has been shaped around the meaning of freedom and heroes who have fought for it."⁴⁵ Moreover, as Diana Taylor highlights, "[i]t is interesting how quickly the official scenario of active men rescuing vulnerable women was reactivated. For an event labeled [...] [as] a watershed that changed everything forever, it is clear how little the logic of justification has changed and how much it relies on gendering self and other."⁴⁶ She further exemplifies this quote when she writes: "The attacks immediately triggered the same old scenario: evil barbarians, threatened damsels, and heroic males drawn from a repertoire of frontier lore. 'Evil' wrongdoers attack the righteous defenders of manifest destiny [...]."⁴⁷ In other words, Taylor evidences that even if the event was unprecedented, many responses included clichés and they quickly fall back on typical gender stereotypes.

What differs in the story of *Civil War* is that it "is not rooted in the conflict of good versus evil personified by heroes and villains, but is instead motivated by a conflict of values and challenges to the system well mirroring both the landscape of dissent surrounding the PATRIOT Act and the need not to alienate potential dissenters."⁴⁸ This shows that several superhero comics also deal with the political aspects of 9/11, where similarities between the political landscape post 9/11 are present in both the world of comics and in reality. The example in *Civil War* is a direct correlation with the Patriot Act;⁴⁹ following an explosion, the

⁴³ Erdemandi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 214.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁴⁶ Diana Taylor. "Ground Zero." *Signs* 28.1 (2002): 453-455. Web. 16 Oct. 2016, p. 454.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Francisco Veloso and John Bateman. "The Multimodal Construction of Acceptability: Marvel's Civil War Comic Books and the PATRIOT Act." *Critical Discourse Studies* 10.4 (2013): 427-443. Web. 4 Nov. 2016, p. 431.

⁴⁹ "United States federal legislation that was enacted following the terror attacks on September 11, 2001. Under this act, the government and its contracted officials are allowed to track and monitor communication between individuals in an effort to prevent crimes and other acts of terror. Phone conversations, emails, text messages and other forms of communication may be monitored on a consistent basis if a potential threat has been identified. The act received a lot of backlash from citizens who felt like their right to privacy was being taken away." <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/Patriot-Act.html> "Patriot Act". (2016). Web. 3 Oct. 2016.

government established “a Superhero Registration Act (SRA), mandating that superheroes register their special abilities as well as their secret identity with the authorities, and sometimes recruiting them for a centrally controlled security organization overseen by the U.S. government.”⁵⁰ Indeed some of the debates created around the SRA are similar to those created around the Patriot Act. Through *Civil War* the reader feels that most of the civilians support the SRA and therefore agree with the fictitious American government because it reassures them. In other words, they are either in favor of the SRA enacted by the government to protect them or they are against it and prevent the government from establishing a reinforced security, which is indirectly a way to help the wrong-doers. This can be linked with President Bush’s well-known quote:⁵¹ “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”⁵²

The Patriot Act “was passed in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and subsequently received considerable critique due to the sweeping nature of its redefinition of what was acceptable in the cause of ‘fighting terror.’”⁵³ Moreover,

the PATRIOT Act was regarded as another frontline in the ‘war on terror,’ modifying pre-existing laws in order to remove any possible legal impediments to identifying suspicious activities indicative of potential acts of terrorism. [...] In lay terms, the PATRIOT Act allows anyone to be subject to investigation, arrest and detention without having had charges raised against them.⁵⁴

The Patriot Act was therefore not always well perceived in the public eye, even if citizens never fought as hard against it in reality compared to Marvel’s fictitious story.⁵⁵ The fact that superheroes have to reveal their identities “is used in this story arc as a trope for the real-life issue of letting go of privacy, and therefore of civil liberties, in the name of security and, as a trope, is not only a metaphor but also an interpretation of issues being represented through different signs.”⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it is not the only parallel that can be drawn between this comic and the real political measures that followed 9/11. Veloso and Bateman point out that Millar and McNiven, the authors of *Civil War*, also imagined that “super-teams have been placed in every US state under government command”⁵⁷ which is “a metaphor for law enforcement

⁵⁰ Véronique Bragard, Christophe Dony, and Warren Rosenberg. *Portraying 9/11*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2011. Print, p. 44.

⁵¹ Erdemandi. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 217-218.

⁵² George W. Bush. "Transcript of President Bush's Address." *CNN* (2001): 3. Web. 28 Sept. 2016.

⁵³ Veloso and Bateman. *Op. Cit.*, p. 427.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

⁵⁵ Erdemandi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 217.

⁵⁶ Veloso and Bateman. *Op. Cit.*, p. 436.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

agencies.”⁵⁸ Then something called the ‘negative zone’ is also mentioned, which is described as “a high-tech prison environment with clear references to Guantanamo.” This “[negative zone] was originally ‘controversial’ but was then received by the public with enthusiasm, [...] suggesting it is a place that brings a sense of security to the public as a reliable prison, located in another reality.”⁵⁹ It implies that Guantánamo was born out of necessity to secure the country in the aftermath of 9/11.

Hence, *Civil War* proves that comic books are not only a genre targeting children; but complicated ideas can also be conveyed through it.⁶⁰ This genre is not always taken seriously but it can be used to influence readers without them knowing it. In their article “The Multimodal Construction of Acceptability: Marvel’s *Civil War* comic books and the Patriot Act,” Veloso and Bateman analyze *Civil War* and study the “representations of the USA PATRIOT Act” in the comic. They state that “the comics story arc may have been constructed to further acceptance of controversial policies introduced to fight terrorism following 9/11. The potential of narratives of this kind for effecting changes in public opinion should certainly not be underestimated.”⁶¹ This quote implies that Milar and McNiven wanted to prove that a legislation such as the Patriot Act was important in the post-9/11 period. Veloso and Bateman further claim in the conclusion of their article that the analysis of this comic was meant to “shed further light on the role of popular culture in (re)interpreting reality and to understand more deeply how meanings regarding the PATRIOT Act and intended responses to that act were created in the series.”⁶² This means that comics can ease the acceptance of controversial elements. As they further explain: “The Civil War series constructs a discourse of acceptability that presents arguments from two opposing perspectives only to, in the end, state that, despite the negative aspects of the PATRIOT Act, it is still necessary to embrace it.”⁶³ In other words, comics can have a strong influence and they can help change the public opinion, in order to alleviate something that seems unacceptable. In my opinion, this resembles a propaganda as comics help the public to accept some touchy subjects such as the Patriot Act. Moreover, comics are accessible to everyone as it is easier to read than a book and it is rarely censored since comics and graphic novels’ authors are considered as troubadours according to a graphic novel author, Barly Baruti. He is convinced that thanks to this genre, the authors and illustrators can

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 439-440.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

⁶⁰ Erdemandi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 223.

⁶¹ Veloso and Bateman. *Op. Cit.*, p. 441.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

communicate ideas without being classified as vengeful.⁶⁴ It is therefore easier to pass on political ideas thanks to this medium because it is widespread and easy to get access to it, while not being thoroughly supervised.

Finally, the idea that superheroes are not able to prevent the attacks from happening is ever-present in those comics and the question is to know whether the twenty-first century society can still be protected by them.⁶⁵ This is a reconsideration of the efficiency of superpowers. It implies that even superheroes are not strong enough to fight jihadists and be rid of terrorism. Because of this implication, the scope of the situation is indirectly shown to the readers, i.e. even superheroes cannot prevent the terrorist attacks from happening which means that nobody can.

Some writers and illustrators have focused on 9/11 comics with some political aspects such as *The 9/11 Report: A graphic Adaptation*⁶⁶ written by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón and published in 2006. As the title suggests, it is a graphic adaptation “based on the Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States,”⁶⁷ which was the commission charged with understanding and reviewing the events leading up to 9/11. Throughout the comics, the reader learns how the jihadists arrived on the American soil, how and where they learned to fly and how the attacks took place thanks to a summary at the beginning where the facts are described for each plane. The comic is divided into thirteen chapters where the authors explain how the attacks could happen as well as the consequences of them, i.e. the political responses and the wars. It is consequently factual but feelings and interpretations are nonetheless present. Despite lots of facts being known about the attack, some details stayed unknown and needed to be invented for the drawings of this comic. For instance, the scene in the flight 93 depicts the passengers rebelling against the jihadists.⁶⁸ No camera was in the plane and the authors invented the passengers’ assault, which has enabled to avoid the worst, as their plans was to crash either in the White House or the Capitol. It is, in my opinion, a comic which is factual and explains the political aspects of the attacks. However, Smith and Goodrum claim in their article that this comic book “whilst self-described as non-fiction, stylistic conventions associated with the superhero genre are evoked in [it] to the point where

⁶⁴ Barly Baruti. "BD Rencontre autour du Congo imaginer un nouveau Dialogue." 2015. Louvain-la-Neuve. Lecture.

⁶⁵ Erdemendi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 213.

⁶⁶ Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón. *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006. Print.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, front cover.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-17.

such genre-distinction are unclear.”⁶⁹ They also provide further insight as to why stylistic conventions are blurred: Ernie Colón, who adapted the report, also worked on other comics genres, such as *The Green Lantern*.⁷⁰ The style of Jacobson and Colón’s comic is quite particular because it “[...] does not adopt a traditional panel layout; therefore, the chaos of the page, the busyness of the spread, replicates the frantic energy surrounding the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.”⁷¹ The style is different from DC’s comics as superhero comics are usually well-organized because the layout is clear whereas here no white frame surrounds each drawing and the vignettes are mixed up and juxtaposed which is something that can be observed in some superhero comics. Nonetheless, Smith and Goodrum argue that the effects of the genre are the most important and that it “is realised within the expectations of the superhero genre, both in visual and narrative terms. President Bush and other US politicians are therefore represented in the manner of superheroes, a project that contributes to the simplification of the attacks.”⁷² In my opinion, this desire to add some superhero characteristics is an indirect need to touch a widespread public as it will seem more attractive to read if the comic resembles a superhero comic than a political and seemingly more complicated one.

Despite these superhero characteristics present in the comics, Anna Wiederhold also points at some disadvantages of this adaptation in her article entitled “The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation: Making Meaning in the (Gutter) Spaces Between Word, Image, and Ideology,” which show that not every comic featuring 9/11 is a good adaptation. Anna Wiederhold claims “that the artists utilize the interactions between words and images to represent the unspeakable and unimaginable.”⁷³ However this means that “plenty of the scenes portrayed in the graphic adaptation are purely speculative and [that] the representations, therefore, are entirely fictional;”⁷⁴ like the one explained above with Flight 93. She provides an example to support her argument: “no video cameras captured the struggle between hijackers and passengers on United Airlines Flight 93. And [...] footage of people’s immediate responses to the initial impact of the plane crashing into the first tower simply did not exist.”⁷⁵ Moreover, she argues that “in transforming the original 568 page report into a 131 page graphic adaptation, Jacobson

⁶⁹ Smith and Goodrum. *Op. Cit.*, p. 496.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Anna Wiederhold. "The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation: Making Meaning in the (Gutter) Spaces between Word, Image, and Ideology." *International Journal of Comic Art* 15.1 (2013): 419-434. Web. 14 Mar. 2016, p. 423.

⁷² Smith and Goodrum. *Op. Cit.*, p. 496.

⁷³ Wiederhold. *Op. Cit.*, p. 422.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

and Colón necessarily condensed, omitted, and altered significant portions of the public policy document,”⁷⁶ viz. it is not as truthful and exhaustive as it could be.

Finally she writes that “[...] the creators of *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* claimed that their version was a faithful transposition of the original text, using images to clarify the words and a new medium to increase accessibility to this important public policy document.”⁷⁷ However, contrary to this, she asserts that “ideology necessarily precedes representation”⁷⁸ as “Jacobson and Colón animate their speculations with sexist and Orientalist ideologies;”⁷⁹ therefore the graphic adaptation cannot be totally neutral. Bryce Traister agrees on this point as he argues in his article "Terrorism Before the Letter: Benito Cereno and the 9/11 Commission Report" that “[i]t’s a gripping narrative of disaster and confusion, presenting a cacophony of voices separated by space, by function, and by differing terrains of authority.”⁸⁰ However, the story remains coherent and unified with “leaderless response, panicked gesture, preventable death, and powerful grief [which] lead [...] to the 9/11 Commission’s [...] conclusion: that no American or even generally white person is to blame for the tragedies just described by the report authors and endured by the nation in the abstract.”⁸¹ This last quote reveals that the conclusion is clearly not neutral, that they blame only a part of the population but most importantly that they include every non-white person as potentially being responsible for the attacks. For this reason, addressing political issues in comics can be more complicated than it seems as it is neither personal, like autobiographical ones which are about the private lives of the victims, nor as malleable as superhero comics which are a fictional tribute to victims.

Another example of a political comic is *12 Septembre l’Amérique d’après*, a French comic published in 2011. It was edited by Pascal Delannoy who decided to organize meetings between nineteen authors from the USA and France, among other countries. Delannoy wanted the authors to give their opinion on how 9/11 has been handled and how America has evolved ever since. Together, the authors give their opinion about that, ten years after the terrorist attacks. They criticize the government, the society, the evolution of America and the fact that an attack of this size was even possible. This comic therefore questions the changes and uncertainties

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Bryce Traister. "Terrorism before the Letter: Benito Cereno and the 9/11 Commission Report." *Canadian Review of American Studies/Revue canadienne d'études américaines* 43.1 (2013): 23-47. Web. 9 Feb. 2016, p. 34.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

which come from the traumatic shock of the 9/11 attacks.⁸² Between the real terrorist threats and the terror created by governments – lobbyists and medias –, citizens are paralyzed by fear and are held hostage in the name of security. The authors write about this permanent anxiety and this failure to stick to the human rights with vehemence and humor but always with sensitivity. For example, Roger Cohen writes

Mais les attentats du 11 septembre suivis de deux guerres successives, chacune sans issue, en pays musulmans ont fait du fanatique barbu le plus effrayant épouvantail de l'imaginaire collectif américain. Dix ans après la découverte traumatisante de leur vulnérabilité, les Etats-Unis n'ont pas retrouvé leur sérénité. La nation est fissurée, angoissée, à la recherche de boucs-émissaires.⁸³

They mention the first reactions and consequences of this terrorist attack, namely the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which have challenged their images of America and its values.⁸⁴ This comic is therefore different than the American ones as here they raise the problematic side more thoroughly, whereas American comics concentrate more on the victims and the private experiences of the victims and their families, as it is going to be explained.

Following the 9/11 attacks a collective trauma was created which touched everyone. Therefore, the most used genre is autobiography, where authors can express their private experiences. The third 9/11 comic book published by Marvel, *A Moment of Silence*,⁸⁵ was printed in February 2002 and does not include any superheroes.⁸⁶ Three out of the four stories are true-life ones, consequently this comic is an autobiography. The autobiographical representations of 9/11 are often tragic, as victims of the attacks tell their traumatic experience of that day. In his article "Terrors of the Mirror and the 'Mise en Abyme' of Graphic Novel Autobiography," Michael Chaney writes about autobiographical comics in those terms:

Beyond the crisis of self-representation and self-spectacle, the contractual rupture of the reader-viewer with the I-con forbids the uninterrupted reading pleasure of authorial consistency. But there are other pleasures than consistency. Indeed, the surge of autobiographical comics of trauma narratives and stories of survivorship attests to this other kind of desire, strangely wedded to the form of the comic, which resists authorial continuity in favor of a semiotics of selfhood grounded in caricature and the grotesque.⁸⁷

⁸² Pascal Delannoy et al. *12 Septembre, L'Amérique d'après*. France: Casterman, 2011. Print.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁸⁴ "12 Septembre : L'Amérique d'après." *Liguedh.be*, 2016. Web. 3 Mar. 2016.

⁸⁵ Mark Bagley, *A Moment of Silence*. Marvel, 2002. Print.

⁸⁶ Arnold. "The Most Serious Comix Pt. 2." *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Michael A. Chaney. "Terrors of the Mirror and the 'Mise en Abyme' of Graphic Novel Autobiography." *College Literature* 38.3 (2011): 21-44. Web. 24 Sept. 2016, p. 34.

A Moment of Silence is a comic where the dialogs are outside the drawings, in the margins. Its particularity is a predominance of images over words “in order to honour these new heroes. Wordlessness here becomes a policy that is not restricted to the question of how to respond to the heroic deeds (and deaths) of ‘that day,’ but aims at discrediting discourse and discussion about 9/11 in general.”⁸⁸ Stefanie Diekmann insists on the fact that visual representations of 9/11 should be in comics, which are adapted to suit the particularities of remembrance of an event such as September 11, by stating that: “All in all, the policy of wordlessness marks speech (aka debate, discussion, questioning) as a totally inadequate response to the attack. As such, it might have had its share in promoting the idea that the events of 9/11 were not an occasion for discourse.”⁸⁹ This quote states that 9/11 is best represented in comics because whether it be in novels or songs, there is too much text. As for movies and pictures it can be too hard to watch for those who were directly concerned by the attacks. Moreover, another feature of graphic novels is the polyphony which is at the basis of the possibility to create wordless panels. Andrei Molotiu explains this term in the following words: “[a]s applied to comics, the inherent ability of the medium to juxtapose two or more simultaneous narrative threads (be they visual, verbal, or both) in one panel or from panel to panel; the artistic exploitation of this potential.”⁹⁰ Once more, comics and graphic novels seem to be a suitable genre to represent trauma since it offers the possibility to create wordlessness.

Normally, as Veloso and Bateman argue, paraphrasing Meskin: “Comics are, almost by definition, considered a medium that combines visual and verbal resources in order to express its messages [...]”⁹¹ The editors of *A Moment of Silence* wanted “to underline the superiority of deeds over words, action over speech, by clearly associating discourse with a state of helplessness and presenting speech as dangerous hindrance or escapist form of reaction.”⁹² As stated before, this quote above highlights the fact that the comics genre is even adapted to suit the representation of these traumatic terrorist attacks. These attacks were traumatic because “[t]he event called [...] 9/11 was as real as death, but its traumatic force seems nonetheless inseparable from a certain ghostliness, not just because the attacks did more than merely literal damage [...] but because the symbolic damage done seems spectral [...]”⁹³ More precisely, the

⁸⁸ Diekmann. *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Andrei Molotiu. "List of Terms for Comics Studies by Andrei Molotiu." *Comics Forum*. 2017. Web. 8 July 2017.

⁹¹ Veloso and Bateman. *Op. Cit.*, p. 429.

⁹² Diekmann. *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

⁹³ Redfield. *Op. Cit.*, p. 56.

attack was so unreal that witnesses found it difficult to assimilate this reality. These attacks seemed so surrealistic that some eyewitnesses thought the events seemed to come straight out of a movie.⁹⁴ Speaking about September 11, Redfield wrote in his article that it is “[...] a kind of trauma without trauma: [...] an event that can only be named by its date, located at an unrepresentable zero-point, sacralized as a revelation and point of origin yet talked about as a (false, illusory) real-life-movielike spectacle.”⁹⁵ According to Tim Gauthier, “[o]f the many traumas endured on the morning of 11 September 2001, one of the most widespread was our silent, helpless witnessing of the televised events. The distanced perspective, combined with the rapidity with which one calamity followed another, made comprehension nearly impossible.”⁹⁶ As the acceptance of such an event is complex, to represent it is consequently a thorny matter.

Therefore, there was a need to write about this trauma as Alissa Torres, the author of *American Widow*⁹⁷, explains by saying that “the narrative works as a recuperation of self.”⁹⁸ Tim Gauthier adds in his article that “[...] these 9/11 ‘survivors’ do not set out to represent the empirical facts about 9/11; rather, they seek images to convey the emotional reality of the incident. September 11 is framed as an individualized experience, metonymically implying the thousands of other stories that might be told.”⁹⁹ Moreover Gauthier claims that “these graphic narratives strive to expand our visual recollection, seek to wrest control away from the dominant ideologies, and insert degrees of nuance not found in the images broadcast [...]”¹⁰⁰ Gauthier also clarifies that with his comics, *In The Shadow of No Tower*, Spiegelman “accentuates the personal character of the trauma”¹⁰¹ because he supplied a testimony that nobody else has seen nor reported. “By providing a ‘new’ image he opens the possibility for the reader to re-experience and re-imagine the incident”¹⁰² with other material than the ones given by the media at the time. More details will be given about this comic in the next chapter.

Then, these autobiographical narratives acknowledge “the flaws in our responses, as well as their own, the creators of these graphic narratives provide an authentic and truer representation

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-69.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁹⁶ Gauthier. *Op. Cit.*, p. 369.

⁹⁷ Alissa Torres and Sungyoon Choi. *American Widow*. New York: Villard, 2008. Print. (following references to this book will be further written in the text).

⁹⁸ Gauthier. *Op. Cit.*, p. 372.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

of our working through of the trauma,”¹⁰³ and they “believe a conviction that trauma cannot be coped with nor healed without a direct confrontation of what really happened to an individual – no sugar-coating, no political positioning, no collective processing.”¹⁰⁴ That is to say autobiographical comics participate in conveying the trauma of the author and help him or her to overcome it as well as to ease the pain. Whereas for the reader it helps him to better understand the traumatic event. However, it is linked to a certain voyeurism as people are increasingly used to see the life of others on Facebook or in the media. Because of that, people became obsessed with individuality and read the life of others in a voyeuristic way.

Finally, Tim Gauthier, at the end of his article, writes that “[t]hese graphic narratives reveal different levels of trauma, and individuals coming to terms with that presence in very personal ways.”¹⁰⁵ This shows an advantage to represent the 9/11 attacks in autobiographical graphic narratives as “[those authors] give voice to a qualitatively different, and harder won, resilience than the simplified flag-waving version propounded by the official engines of testimony. They exist finally as more complex, and potentially truer, testimonials to the events whose impact still resonates.”¹⁰⁶ As will be explained in the next chapter, different types of trauma exist and the media often plays an important role in their creation, even if they do not show an exhaustive version of the events.

1.1 American Widow

American Widow is a comic book written by Alissa Torres and illustrated by Sungyoon Choi which was published in 2008 by Villard. Choi graduated from the School of Visual Arts in New York. Since then she has illustrated some articles for *The New York Times* and realized short comics. (cover) The content of this work, which is quite difficult to read because of the emotions it triggers, is balanced by Choi’s peaceful drawings. Only three colors are used, namely white, black and blue. As a result, the harshness of the black and white is balanced by the presence of the blue which adds some dreamlike tone to the drawings and softens them. A peaceful element, the color blue, is introduced in an awful content, which could symbolize the need of trying to cope with loss.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

The title of the graphic novel hesitates between a singular experience and some kind of more universal message. Normally, instead of *American Widow* it should have been either *An American Widow* or *American Widows*. It therefore raises some ambiguity. The author obviously wrote it like this on purpose. To my mind, it shows how the situation was blurred at the time. It could signify that an American Widow had no complete identity outside the community of American Widows and that Torres wanted to show that she was torn in between her new status of widow and her undesired affiliation to the community of 9/11 widows. In her graphic novel, she often focuses on her issue to fit in the community as “this is a role she neither asked for nor desires”¹⁰⁷ and it is a status that she sometimes even despises. In fact, her situation occasionally creates hatred since she was granted some money from the compensation fund which she explains in the comic when saying: “It felt bad to be hated. It felt even worse to be envied.” (137) This sentence is taken from a scene where two acquaintances came to her house to ask her for some of her recently awarded money. One of them shockingly says: “I’m so depressed. If you gave me some money to buy a motorcycle I’d feel so much better. After all, who better than you knows the healing power of money?” (137) Consequently, the title could imply that she struggles to find her new identity as her situation is not easily manageable and the reactions of some people are barely acceptable.

Regarding 9/11 widows, Gauthier argues that they “were [...] perceived as the embodiment of [the Americans’] pain, but, more importantly, as proof of [their] fortitude and determination. They became part of a hierarchy of grief created by the media [...]”¹⁰⁸ The 9/11 widows were turned into “official sites of mourning and recovery” because they had endured the “greatest loss.”¹⁰⁹ Gauthier adds that Torres grieved longer than the “appropriate” length¹¹⁰ as she was deeply emotionally involved in those terrorist attacks. Torres mentions that 9/11 victims’ stories became “someone else’s product,” as the event became public, which was a real problem for her.¹¹¹

The opening pages of this creative memoir, give a hint to the reader, who instantly knows that it is about 9/11 because on the title page, a TV screen where the twin towers appear on it is present, as well as the date of “September 11, 2001” below “Chapter 1.” The opening page mentions that: “*American Widow* is a work of nonfiction. Some names and identifying details

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 374-376.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

have been changed.” This note emphasizes the fact that Alissa Torres based this story on her own experience. It narrates how she, a seven-month pregnant woman, became a widow on the morning of September 11. While it is definitely a non-fictional work, the autobiographical status of the comic cannot be proved as Torres wrote the comic but did not illustrate it herself. The fact that the drawings were made by someone else implies the presence of two voices, which entails the comic to be less faithful to Torres’ own story as it could have been, because Choi inevitably introduced her own view of the attacks. Even if Torres gave her instructions for the drawings, the author says that Choi followed those instructions, made some changes or did something totally new with them. Therefore, it was a loss of control to leave the drawings to someone else.¹¹² However, “as part of the process of becoming OK it was very helpful and healthful to relinquish that control and to create a book in collaboration with others and then also to give it over to readers.”¹¹³ This means that creating the comic, even without drawing it, was beneficial for the author.

Moreover, when talking about the graphic novel as a means of helping her to overcome the trauma, she says that it was therapeutic but that writing the book did not heal her loss even if “the process of writing and creating and and [sic] re-creating is very powerful and helpful and definitely something useful in maintaining wellness.”¹¹⁴ Torres wrote the comic addressing her husband. However, this “you” in the text creates some ambiguity: does it address her husband or is the reader involved in it? This creates an intimacy with the husband and the reader as well, as throughout the graphic novel in which the reader is being directly addressed, the feeling of ambiguity aroused by this apostrophe never seems to dim.

This creative autobiographical piece establishes echoes with a number of 9/11 texts and iconic images such as with Eddie’s representation as a falling man. The only one appearing in the graphic novel is at the end, which seems similar to the falling man in Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*¹¹⁵ where a flipbook at the end of the novel represents a reversed scene of a man falling from the tower. This means that the man seems to fly toward the tower’s top from which he is theoretically falling. However, there is no link between Foer’s book and the comic. Indeed, according to Torres who claims that she never reads 9/11 literature. She explains this sole representation of Eddie as a falling man “as [being] the lead up to the

¹¹² Alissa Torres. “Re: Master dissertation about your comic *American Widow*.” Message to Manon Hausse. 3 January 2017. E-mail.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Safran Foer. *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. 1st ed. London: Penguin Books, 2006. Print.

following spread of all the IDs that I've been [*sic*] basically splattered on the page.”¹¹⁶ The panel where Eddie is represented as a falling man will be analyzed later in the main body of the dissertation.

Before beginning the analysis of the corpus, we shall get acquainted with some theory on graphic novels as *American Widow* belongs to this genre. Firstly, Hillary Chute highlights how graphic narratives or graphic novels are “a book-length work composed in the medium of comics.”¹¹⁷ In this genre, “even as [the authors] deliberately place stress on official histories and traditional modes of transmitting history, they are deeply invested in their own accuracy and historicity.”¹¹⁸ This last quote implies that the story cannot be entirely truthful due to the authors’ focus on their own life experience; the storytelling will concentrate on their own opinions and what they experienced, not always on the whole event and its wider implications. Moreover, “[t]he medium of comics can perform the enabling political and aesthetic work of bearing witness powerfully because of its rich narrative texture.”¹¹⁹ And they “ha[ve] a peculiar relationship not only to memoir and autobiography in general, [...] but also to narratives of development.”¹²⁰ Chute states that “a first-person narrator” is present, while being “graphically visible.” In these types of works, violence as well as “a political intervention into mainstream representation” is present.¹²¹ “Images in comics appear in fragments, just as they do in actual recollection; this fragmentation, in particular, is a prominent feature of traumatic memory.”¹²² Therefore, images in comics are very close to the process of memory recollection in real life.

Comics and graphic novels have a particular “notion of representing time as space on the page [...] especially when the form is used to recount narratives of the past.”¹²³ Chute supports this by paraphrasing McCloud, “[i]n every other form of narrative that [she] know[s] of, past, present, and future are not shown simultaneously - you're always in the now. [The] future is something you can anticipate, and the past is something you can remember.”¹²⁴ However, in comics the three time periods coexist simultaneously. For example: “if you're reading panel two on page two, then to its left is the past, and to its right is the future. And your perception of the

¹¹⁶ Alissa Torres, “Re: Master dissertation about your comic *American Widow*.” Message to Manon Hausse. 4 January 2017. E-mail.

¹¹⁷ Hillary L. Chute. *Graphic Women*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. Print, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

present moves across it.”¹²⁵ In other words, as Mc Cloud writes “[...] unlike other media, in comics, the past is more than just memories for the audience and the future is more than just possibilities!”¹²⁶ As we shall see in the last section of the dissertation, mixing chronology is a process used several times in *American Widow* thanks to flashbacks.

Finally, in her book, Chute writes mostly about graphic narratives written by women and she emphasizes that the story of such narratives is often related to traumatic events because “the cross-discursive form of comics is apt for expressing that difficult register, which is central to its importance as an innovative genre of life writing. However, the authors do not project an identity that is defined by trauma: they work to erase the inscription of women in that space.”¹²⁷ This is definitely the aim of Alissa Torres who wants to change her image as a victim and use her voice to express what she feels.¹²⁸ Chute adds that “the force and value of graphic narrative's intervention [...] attaches to how it pushes on conceptions of the un-representable that have become commonplace in the wake of deconstruction, especially in contemporary discourse about trauma;”¹²⁹ this is the case in *American Widow* as the author wants to regain some control over the tragedy which was, as previously stated, implausible and therefore difficult to represent in the aftermath of the destruction of the towers.

1.1.1 Torres' *American Widow* as “An Emotional Ruin and Rebuilding After 9/11”¹³⁰

As George Gene Gustines writes in his review entitled “An Emotional Ruin and Rebuilding After 9/11,” “*American Widow* is very good – largely because of the author's willingness to address difficult issues, including her anger at her husband and her frustration in dealing with relief agencies that at times alternated between being overeager and counterproductive.”¹³¹ In my opinion, the fact that Torres expresses both her anger and frustration is the strength of this comic as it shows a complete panel of emotions linked to her loss. Gustines emphasizes that the comic “starts quietly, but the mood is deceptive”¹³² because the content of the comic is not quiet at all; it is deep, sad and it conveys the narrator's “emotional ruin” as it is the story of her change

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Scott McCloud. *Understanding Comics*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1994. Print, p. 104.

¹²⁷ Chute. *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

¹²⁸ Alissa Torres. “9/11 Widow: What I've Learned.” *Salon.com* (2011): 1-5. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

¹²⁹ Chute. *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

¹³⁰ George Gene Gustines. “An Emotional Ruin and Rebuilding after 9/11.” *The New York Times* (2008). Web. 3 Mar. 2016.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹³² *Ibid.*

of life in the course of the year that followed the attacks, intertwined with flashbacks of her private life with her husband Eddie.

When Gustines writes about Torres' private life, he claims that the story of the "courtship [between Eddie and Alissa] is brief, mercifully so, because the details of their domestic relationship are more compelling."¹³³ He illustrates this argument with a summary of this high-speed storytelling going from their "meeting in August 1998 to marrying and moving to Queens to conceiving a child in early 2001."¹³⁴ However, the focus of the comic is not on the couple's love story; it is neither honeyed nor is it the account of a perfect love life. Eddie started to work in the towers on September 10, 2001. That evening, the couple got into an argument and because of their quarrel, the narrator never had the opportunity to ask how his first day at work was. The aftermath of this quarrel is told in the first part of chapter four where the reader discovers drawings showing a couple having a normal life and quarreling like any other. The reader can easily identify with Eddie or Alissa as this chapter represents everyday domestic scenes. Alissa is represented having insomnia on that night, whereas Eddie sleeps soundly. She seems to be very angry at him even if the reason for their quarrel is never revealed to the reader. On pages 31 to 33, she went for a walk with her dog, imagining herself leaving Eddie and starting a new life with another man. On the next two panels contrast is created, as she comes back and thinks: "And no message! The asshole doesn't even call to apologize," (34) but then receives a phone call warning her that the tower was hit by a plane. She is, of course, devastated. What is important in this scene is that she describes intimate moments between a couple in love which has its ups and downs, like any other married couple. To my mind, this is essential as the reader can easily identify with the character which aides in accentuating the realism of the story.

At first, the reader sees that the narrator still hopes that her husband is returning home, then she searches for him in hospitals but sadly she finally writes: "September 22, 2001. When the police came and told me you'd been recovered, they confirmed what I already knew." (54) She imagines how her husband died and explains that she has a corpse to bury because he jumped from the tower, which means that some families never got one. When thinking about Eddie's death, she wonders: "The medical examiner said it took you 18 seconds to fall. – What were you thinking?" (196); a question that will, obviously, haunt her. Furthermore, Gustines observes how a widow portrays the different reactions of people "rang[ing] from simply stating, 'What can I do?' to shouting 'I want to help!' to hysterically screeching, 'Please, what can I do to

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

help?’(50)”¹³⁵ However, pages 127-128 epitomize how reactions evolve. In March 2002, Torres wrote: “People near and far, friends and strangers, were suddenly angry with me. [...] A lot of their anger had to do with the federal 9/11 victim compensation fund.” (127-128) In fact, *American Widow* quotes people who criticized 9/11 widows: “Crybabies that’s what they are. After all we’ve given to them through the charities. The USG should never compensate them. Now these people and their greed make me sick and it’s undoing all those good feelings we all felt and all the money we gave and gave.” (128) The author mocks this as she writes: “Oh, I get it now. This is about compensating the airlines and protecting them...FROM US!!” (129-130) The following page is a representation of the author with her son in her arms, defenseless as she is drawn looking distraught and alone on a panel deprived of scenery. (130) She personifies loneliness and distress.



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¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

On page 135, the narrator explains that Feinberg, an attorney “specialize[d] in what is dryly called mediation or alternative dispute resolution,”¹³⁶ published a “chart he’d use to calculate [their] loved ones’ value.” (135) “In practice, this often means he must decide exactly how much money aggrieved people will receive from the private company, institution or government that could, in the traditional trial system, be found responsible for their suffering.”¹³⁷ This compensation fund has helped numerous victims from 2001 to 2003. “The September 11th Victims Compensation Fund finishes its work processing death and injury claims from families and relatives of 9/11 victims [in June 2004].”¹³⁸ Victims could apply in order to receive a compensation until December from the previous year for those who did “agree not to sue the airlines.”¹³⁹ However, the fund needed to be “re-opened [in 2011] to compensate first responders and individuals who later experienced health problems related to 9/11 [, such as cancer].”¹⁴⁰ Billions of dollars were offered to the victims and their families in several payments throughout the years that followed the attacks.¹⁴¹

However, the methods used by the Victims Compensation Fund seem unfair to the narrator as she says: “The chart projected our loved ones as failures-people who rarely earned.” (135) After the release of this chart, victims expressed their contempt but the fact that 9/11 victims received money from the state, was not always approved. Therefore, some people criticize the situation and particularly women who received the fund for the victims. An example could be the comic published by Ted Rall in *The New York Times* in 2002, which was entitled *Terror Widows*.¹⁴² Rall used it to criticize widows receiving money from the charities after 9/11.

¹³⁶ Ross Barkan. "Meet Ken Feinberg, the Master of Disasters." *Observer* (2016). Web. 4 Apr. 2017.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Ted Rall. *Terror Widows*, <http://www.gocomics.com/ted-rall/2002/03/04>, consulted on February 22, 2017.



Ted Rall. *Op. Cit.*

In response to Rall's comic, Torres wrote an article entitled "Wrath of a Terror Widow" where she writes: "I thought the first take on us was problematic, but it was certainly better to be pitied than to be despised to the point that my loved one's death can be painfully and unapologetically satirized."¹⁴³ However, contrary to what Rall seems to think, receiving money from charities at the time was not easy, because of all the procedures the victims needed to follow. (103-112) The comic depicts how Torres struggled to receive the promised money from charities: she had to explain her situation over and over because every time that she went to the red cross, she was sent to someone else, without receiving any money. It sometimes seemed impossible and it often drove her to despair. One scene with red cross employees is a good example to illustrate this: the red cross had to pay for the cost of Eddie's funeral, but the worker could not say when Torres would get the money, even if the funeral was taking place that weekend. In chapter 9, Torres even wrote: "Who'd have thought that being helped would feel like such a beating?" (112) because she had to write countless letters to get the money she was supposed to receive.

As for the structure, the graphic novel is mostly constructed in panels with a frame. The only exception is chapter seven, which is a few pages long (see the figure on page 28) and looks like a baby diary. It is a poignant letter to Eddie, where she describes her labor. She tells him: "I welcomed the grief in the screams of my hard-earned labor. I invited you into each one,

¹⁴³ Alissa Torres. "Wrath of a Terror Widow." *Salon.com* (2002). Web. 29 Nov. 2016, p. 1.

mourning you each time as I had not done previously.” (83) According to her, it was the first real sensation she felt in fifty days. Further in the comic, she writes

As my body was torn apart in the rhythmic convulsions, so too was my heart, in the sudden full realization of my loss. [...] [y]ou were dead and I was still alive and this being bearing the name of tragedy would never know you except as I built you in his memory. (83)

After the birth of her child, the narrator had a breakdown, which is also described in the comic. She says, while stuck in bed: “If I could, I’d never leave this bed. I’m so depressed, everything’s new but nothing’s different. - You’re still dead.” (88) She finally got up in December 2001; she did it for her son. From this moment on, the story lights up a little as she seems to better deal with her new life status, as we shall see, since the drawings do not represent her stuck in bed anymore; her depression is apparently over.

Moreover, the author also shows every step of her mourning in the graphic novel, how she is destroyed emotionally, like when she thinks: “You told me, ‘I want to turn 90 beside you,’ but you didn’t. So that’s how I got here. – I am still so mad at you.” (200) This is only one example of her anger against Eddie which is present throughout the comic. Torres does not even hide when she is angry at her dead husband.

Finally, the comic ends on September 2002 with a real picture of her and her son. She is smiling and writes: “Although I was so confused by who I was and how I was supposed to be, I knew so fiercely that I was alive, together with my son, and that it was a beautiful day.” (210) This last sentence suggests that the narrator managed to overcome part of her trauma, or at least that she succeeded in the process of easing her pain. This graphic novel will, of course, be analyzed in more detail later in the last chapters of the dissertation.

“Chapter Seven – A Birth Day” (83-85)



YOU ACCOMPANIED ME TO THE HOSPITAL TODAY IN AN ENVELOPE OF LARGE, VIBRANT PICTURES TAKEN AT THE BEACH ON SEPTEMBER 9, 2001, OUR LAST DAY TOGETHER. BECAUSE I WAS UNPREPARED FOR OUR SON TO COME 3 1/2 WEEKS EARLY, IT WAS ONE OF THE FEW THINGS I TOOK WITH ME. THAT AND THE STRANGE THOUGHT THAT I'D FIND A NEW LIFE AT THE HOSPITAL TO TAKE HOME. AT THAT TIME, I KNEW HOSPITALS ONLY AS THE PLACES TO GO TO FIND DEATH OR LESS, AND TO COME HOME EMPTY-HANDED.

I WELCOMED THE GRIEF IN THE SCREAMS OF MY HARD-EARNED LABOR. I INVITED YOU INTO EACH ONE, MOURNING YOU EACH TIME AS I HAD NOT DONE PREVIOUSLY. SO BADLY, I NOW WANTED THESE MOMENTS OF UNFETTERED NOISE THAT I DIDN'T HAVE TO EXPLAIN. AS I SCREAMED, IT FELT LIKE SEX. I INVOKED YOU IN MY MIND AS THE CONTRACTION ROSE TO MY LIPS. I REMEMBERED YOUR PHYSICALITY UPON ME AS I RODE EACH WAVE OF PAIN. MY FIRST INTENSE PHYSICAL SENSATION IN FIFTY DAYS. IT RECALLED THAT WORLD OF LUST AND BODY I USED TO INHABIT; NOW MADE MANIFEST ONLY IN GRIEF, WITH EACH THRUST OF LIFE.

AS MY BODY WAS TORN APART IN THE RHYTHMIC CONVULSIONS, SO TOO WAS MY HEART, IN THE SUDDEN FULL REALIZATION OF MY LOSS. THE SHOCK HAD PARTED DURING THESE MOMENTS OF CONTRACTION, AS A SUN OF REALITY PEERED IN, SHINING STRONG ON THE FACT THAT YOU WERE DEAD AND I WAS STILL ALIVE AND THIS BEING BEARING THE NAME OF TRAGEDY WOULD NEVER KNOW YOU EXCEPT AS I BUILT YOU IN HIS MEMORY.

FIVE HOURS THAT FELT LIKE FIVE MINUTES.

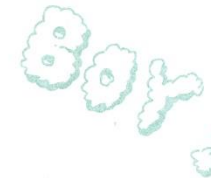


AND THEN THEY ANESTHETIZED ME.



THEY SAID: "YOUR BABY IS UPSIDE DOWN." I ANSWERED UNDER THE UNWANTED HAZE: "OF COURSE HE IS; I'M UPSIDE DOWN, TOO."

NO ONE, LEAST OF ALL ME, WANTED TO TAKE CHANCES WITH A BREECH DELIVERY. INSTEAD, THEY HANDLED ME KINDLY, AS A V.I.P., BECAUSE I HAD A POST-9/11 BABY TO DELIVER. GENTLY, GENTLY, THEY CUT THE WIDOW OPEN AND TOOK OUT THE PRIZE.



2. 9/11 Trauma

Writing about 9/11 without approaching the theme of trauma would not be possible. Trauma is quite complicated to define, each traumatic experience being different.¹⁴⁴ However, Mark Redfield offers a definition in his article entitled “Virtual Trauma: the Idiom of 9/11:” “Trauma involves blockage; an inability to mourn, to move from repetition to working-through.”¹⁴⁵ This chapter briefly examines what trauma is and what is particular about the one caused by the terror attacks at the World Trade Center. In many ways, it was a visual trauma because “9/11 reache[d] its most extreme semiotic isolation not in the trauma of its sudden factuality, but in the ideology of its image.”¹⁴⁶ Moreover, “approximately two billion people, almost one third of the world’s population, are estimated to have witnessed these horrific events directly or via television, radio, and Internet broadcasts that day,”¹⁴⁷ which means that this event engendered a widespread visual trauma.

2.1 What is Trauma?

In her book *Trauma Culture. The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, 2005, E. Ann Kaplan “distinguish[es] different types of trauma [...]. At one extreme there is the direct trauma victim while at the other we find a person geographically far away, having no personal connection to the victim.”¹⁴⁸ She names this last extreme as “secondary” or “vicarious trauma.”¹⁴⁹ Then, she further explains that “in between” positions exist such as “relative trauma victims,” “workers coming in after a catastrophe [...] or clinicians who may be vicariously traumatized now that increasingly counselling is offered to people who survive catastrophes.”¹⁵⁰ In other words, human beings can “encounter trauma by being a bystander, by living near to where a catastrophe happened, or by hearing about a crisis from a friend.”¹⁵¹ However, she states that most people experiences trauma through the media. As “[t]he phenomenon of 9/11 was perhaps the supreme example of a catastrophe that was experienced globally via digital technologies [...] as well as by television and radio, and responded to in a

¹⁴⁴ Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Redfield. *Op. Cit.*, p. 56.

¹⁴⁶ Bragard, Dony, and Rosenberg. *Op. Cit.*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁷ 9/11 Memorial and Museum. 21 May 2014. 200 Liberty Street, New York City.

¹⁴⁸ Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

myriad of ways depending on peoples' national and local contexts."¹⁵² This distinction between types of trauma seems to be significant for several authors writing on the subject such as Art Spiegelman, who emphasizes the differentiation between people "who experienced [9/11] trauma, either as victims or witnesses, and those who only saw it on TV."¹⁵³ This difference is significant as is emphasized by Katalin Orbán: "The idea of televisual witnessing as an enhanced, detail-rich record seems to ignore the drastic limitations inherent in its framing and limited sensorium."¹⁵⁴ In other words, someone who was downtown at the time of the attacks could see everything and not just the elements that were filmed and contained in the television frame. Hence, the people who were near the World Trade Center physically experienced trauma as they could smell the scent of smoke and see the events unfolding in live without a TV screen to protect them. However, as Pederson states in his article: "Trauma forces the self into hiding, and while the sensory manifold keeps 'recording' sights, sounds, smells, and feelings, the brain fails to work them through."¹⁵⁵ Therefore, those people experienced the attacks with all their senses and not only their sight.

According to Kaplan, it is difficult to generalize trauma as everyone reacts differently to the same traumatic event, depending on one's personalities and "the particular cultural and political context within which the catastrophe takes place."¹⁵⁶ Three different ways to label trauma exist, namely "individual," "cultural" and "collective trauma."¹⁵⁷ On the one hand, "individual trauma" and "cultural trauma" are both difficult to distinguish as it is sometimes very complicated to know "where the 'self' begins and cultural reactions end;"¹⁵⁸ they are interconnected.¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, "collective trauma" is a trauma experienced by a whole group. Kaplan gives an example of her own experience of "collective trauma" in the aftermath of 9/11. She explains that the shock was palpable as "people did not laugh out loud in the streets or in the Square; voices were muted. People's expressions were somber."¹⁶⁰ She also adds that she felt connected to strangers, as "nowhere was safe [...] and [they] were in this together."¹⁶¹

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Sven Cvek. *Towering Figures*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011. Print, pp. 92-93.

¹⁵⁴ Katalin Orbán. "Trauma and Visuality: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and *In the Shadow of No Towers*." *Representations* 97.1 (2007): 57-89. Print, p. 71.

¹⁵⁵ Joshua Pederson. "Speak, Trauma: Toward a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory." *Narrative* 22.3 (2014): 333-353. Print, p. 335.

¹⁵⁶ Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

In other words, as Spiegelman shows when he writes: “Nothin’ like the end of the world to help bring folks together,”¹⁶² ties are created between people when a tragic event occurs.¹⁶³

When writing about “secondary” or “vicarious trauma,” Kaplan states that it is commonly associated with women. This is interesting since the present research project is about the analysis of Alissa Torres’ *American Widow*, which is a representation of the author’s trauma, as it will be explained later. Kaplan explains this by using an example from the past world wars, during which women participated indirectly as “nurses [...], trackers [...], factory workers, [...] mothers of wounded sons, and [...] wives or daughters of men captured or sent to camps.”¹⁶⁴ Thanks to this indirect position, women “avoided the direct trauma of such situations [...] [but] they were [...] subject to vicarious traumatization.”¹⁶⁵ Which means that because of their status in society, women experienced a different kind of trauma.

Next, Kaplan explains that victims of “vicarious trauma” needed to write for different reasons, namely “to organize pain into a narrative that gives it shape for the purposes of self-understanding (working their trauma through), or with the aim of being heard, that is, constructing a witness where there was none before.”¹⁶⁶ Or in other words, “trauma, in order to be communicated and integrated into one’s personal knowledge of the past as well as that of the collective, must be narrativized.”¹⁶⁷ As Cvek Sven explains, “[t]rauma demands to be represented, and there is contention over the possible or proper modes that appears not to be a matter of representational choice: trauma is always represented in terms of property and ownership.”¹⁶⁸ This means that when victims write or talk about trauma, they will make it their own. On that subject, Kaplan writes that victims of 9/11 narrating their experiences wanted “to provide a ‘lesson’ to upcoming generations” and the focus of a majority of 9/11 narratives is “on individuals and on personal loss” which is often categorized as being “sentimental.”¹⁶⁹ However, she advises that those “attributions of sentimentality” should be put aside because no good manner to manage loss or grief exists; it is always something personal.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶² Art Spiegelman. *In the Shadow of No Towers*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 2004. Print, p. 7.

¹⁶³ Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 100.

¹⁶⁴ Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Ilka Saal. "Regarding the Pain of Self and Other: Trauma Transfer and Narrative Framing in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 57.3 (2011): 453-476. Web. 4 Feb. 2017, p. 459.

¹⁶⁸ Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 105.

¹⁶⁹ Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 147.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

2.2 Visual Trauma of 9/11

The trauma experienced after the collapse of the towers was specific because it was a visual trauma and even “their visual absence was traumatic.”¹⁷¹ It was, as Sven suggests, a “turning point”¹⁷² as a before and an after 9/11 can be dissociated. Moreover, the role that the media played increased the visual aspect of the trauma because “the attack on the World Trade Center is said to be the most photographed disaster in history,”¹⁷³ which implies that a plethora of photographs was available to anyone who wanted to see or use them.

Firstly, the same images of the planes filled with human beings were broadcasted endlessly on television. Kaplan claims that such “images were part of the traumatic symptom” as “this event seemed to feed trauma by being so highly visual in its happening.”¹⁷⁴ Despite these terrorist attacks being experienced and broadcasted live, the situation remained implausible as the terrorists were able to organize something that Americans had only imagined in movies. This and the fact that the jihadists “[took] advantage of the United States’ own open society” humiliated the Americans.¹⁷⁵ Mark Redfield even adds that it is unsurprising to become aware that “Osama bin Laden’s associates watched Hollywood disaster movies in their Afghan compound while brainstorming attack strategies.”¹⁷⁶ This suggests that the terrorists gained inspiration from movies in order to design the ideas that producers invented for their films. That is why, shortly after 9/11, “Hollywood directors and executives” were hired by the White House and the Pentagon to assist in the anticipating of other terrorist attacks.¹⁷⁷ However, Redfield does not mean that movies are the direct cause of the attacks (other elements triggered them too); they only “for[m] part of the shaping.”¹⁷⁸ What is interesting is that he draws this link between movies and the terrorist attacks because the scene of destruction was so unrealistic for 9/11 victims that they used the expression “like a movie” to describe the event.¹⁷⁹ Nonetheless, a distinction needs to be made between people who suffered indirect trauma and “those who suffered genuinely traumatic shock” as they were the people “who [were] either physically or psychologically too close to ‘Ground Zero’ [and] did not have the luxury of seeing a spectacle

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁷² Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁷³ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. “Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11.” *New York University* (2017): 1-37. Web. 24 Mar. 2017.

¹⁷⁴ Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁶ Redfield. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, footnote 28.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

that was ‘like a movie.’”¹⁸⁰ This visual metaphor is therefore interesting as, for some people, the feeling of the scene being “like a movie” was directly linked to the type of trauma that they were experiencing.

Secondly, Kaplan explains the role of the media and how biased they were. She became aware of that while noticing differences between what she had witnessed herself in New York and what was told in the media. As an explanation, she writes: “The world was watching. Osama Bin (*sic*) Laden and Al Qaeda were watching. The media aided the attempt to present a united American front.”¹⁸¹ She spotted the differences between what happened on the streets and what was reported in the media. On the streets, activities were spontaneous and came “from multiple perspectives, genders, races, and religions or nonreligions. Things were not shaped for a specific effect, nor apparently controlled by one entity,” whereas in the media, “a stiff, rigid, controlling, and increasingly vengeful response” was presented.¹⁸² It could be argued that Sven reinforced this point of view when he writes that “the fact [...] that the media simultaneously produced information and traumatization, only showed the full force of their potential for subjectivation, or their implicit political power.”¹⁸³ Kaplan and Sven are not the only authors who agree on this manipulation of the media as Art Spiegelman also approaches this issue in his political comic *In the Shadow of No Towers*.¹⁸⁴ Sven explains that “in Spiegelman’s text, unlike in the more melodramatically inclined ones like Foer’s [*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*], we witness a politicization of what is initially introduced as an individual traumatic experience.”¹⁸⁵ In fact, Spiegelman’s comic criticizes the American government and its response to the terror attacks. He even qualifies the war in Iraq as being a “distraction:”¹⁸⁶ “You rob from the poor and give to your pals like a parody of Robin Hood while distracting me with your damn oil war!”¹⁸⁷

However, Spiegelman raises those political issues without using any images from the media because he sees them as “participating in the commodification and instrumentalization of 9/11.”¹⁸⁸ In her article “Trauma and Visuality: Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and *In the Shadow of No Towers*,” Orbán gives a deeper explanation, when she writes that the comic “is about the desire

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁸⁷ Spiegelman. *Op. Cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

and challenge to see differently, relearning to see despite one's overexhausted eyes."¹⁸⁹ Spiegelman, therefore, wanted to visually represent 9/11 without using the images that were overly present in the media at the time. Moreover, when he represents TV screens in the comic, the reader is "behind the TV set, [which means that he] can only see the viewers' faces, not the image on the screen."¹⁹⁰ This last quote proves that Spiegelman was clearly avoiding a direct representation of the media in his comic.

In addition to Kaplan's analysis, Mark Redfield also addresses this issue of the media manipulating the Americans and the world in the wake of 9/11 in those words: "Consumer society understands the media representations that it ravenously consumes as fundamentally violent, voyeuristic, pornographic. The camera that records suffering provides a supplemental violation, an obscene repetition of injury."¹⁹¹ Besides, in Redfield's view, 9/11 was meant "to be mediated" and he even writes that "it would have no sense, perhaps would not even have occurred if it were not being recorded and transmitted. (For this particular act of terrorism was utterly dedicated to the camera [...])."¹⁹² This means that the World Trade Center was a famous place, with lots of cameras all around the towers. Consequently, the terrorists were obviously sure that this attack would be heavily recorded and mediatized.

Due to the role of the media and the "endless hours of compulsive television viewing,"¹⁹³ the trauma ensued by the 2001 attacks was changed. For Tim Gauthier, what was witnessed in real life and on TV that day was mixed up. "The problem was that the images did not, and could not, tell the whole story."¹⁹⁴ Sven adds that as a result of this "massive mediation," the viewer became "a witness, an uncomprehending passing-by"¹⁹⁵ of this attack. This shows that the ferocious images that were broadcasted endlessly during and after the events could traumatize people who lived far away just because they could live this event in live;¹⁹⁶ as explained above.

Finally, the symbol featured by the targets that the terrorists chose also played a role in the creation of trauma as the Pentagon, the World Trade Center and either the White House or the Capitol (as their third target was never attained, it is not sure which one was their aim)¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁹ Katalin Orbán. *Op. Cit.*, p. 75.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁹¹ Redfield. *Op. Cit.*, p. 69.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Gauthier. *Op. Cit.*, p. 370.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 81.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Jacobson and Colòn. *Op. Cit.*, p. 17.

became the embodiment “of a superpower.”¹⁹⁸ Moreover, the World Trade Center “was a bustling, postmodern area, a center for international business and communications, as well as a thriving commercial, art, and entertainment space, full of shops, restaurants, and game centers [...] [with an] extensive network [...] connecting city workers to the surrounding suburban area.”¹⁹⁹ After the attacks, because the towers were symbolic and Ground Zero contained the ashes of the victims who lost their lives, a lot of debates around its future were conducted. Some New Yorkers “wanted it to be left as [...] a gaping void with ashes of the dead to forever recall the devastation” but it was not possible and something needed to be done with the place.²⁰⁰ After a few years, a decision was taken to build a new tower called the Freedom Tower and memorials where the former World Trade Center stood.²⁰¹

In addition to the visual trauma, the vocabulary used to describe the terrorist attacks and their aftermath also played a role in the trauma that the victims had to undergo. To begin with, the name of the attacks which is “a name-date” is peculiar in itself as it has been the only term used since a few days after the attacks to describe and refer to that day.²⁰² The only difference is that outside the United States, a word is added to describe the event, meaning that it is not only reduced to a date. For example, French speakers will tend to use “les attentats du 11 septembre” and German speakers “die Anschläge vom 11. September.”²⁰³ For American English speakers, the situation is different as only the “name-date” is used and necessary to understand without a doubt what people are talking about.²⁰⁴ Redfield analyzes this “name-date” usage and even writes that if we were to use the numerical writing of the term, it is “an even more sharply American idiom, for it depends on and makes rhetorical capital out of the US convention of citing the month before the day in numerical dating: ‘11/9’ would not pack the rhythmic punch that the double-trochee hammer-blows of ‘9/11’ do.”²⁰⁵ Even in the modalities used to talk about the terror attacks, some patriotism is present as American English speakers have a particular system to write the date. Because of this singularity and the fact that a “name-date” was chosen, when hearing about “9/11” a link is instantly made to the event and the place where it happened.

¹⁹⁸ Redfield. *Op. Cit.*, p. 56.

¹⁹⁹ Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 141.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ J. Gavin Paul. "Ashes in the Gutter: 9/11 and the Serialization of Memory in DC Comics' *Human Target*." *American Periodicals* 17.2 (2007): 208-227. Web. 16 Oct. 2016, p. 222.

²⁰² Redfield. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 56-57.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Then, Ground Zero which describes the place where the former towers stood, was a term previously used “to refe[r] to the impact point of a bomb or the exact locus of an explosion.”²⁰⁶ It first was a military term used “after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki [...] [referring to] centers of devastation, natural or man-made.” Therefore, several Ground Zero existed, but this changed in the aftermath of 9/11, as now, only a singular one exists, in New York City.²⁰⁷ However, this term differentiates itself from the “name-date” as it existed before; consequently, it “calls up and wards off the ghost of Hiroshima.”²⁰⁸ To my mind, using this term already bearing a previous trauma is, in a way, adding a supplementary traumatic shadow to this place. Moreover, as Redfield rightly points out, the use of this name implies a new point of view towards the attacks, which would be “*they* targeted *us*” and it suggests that a counterattack was necessary. This need for revenge is the root of the War on Terror.²⁰⁹ Nonetheless, this vocabulary item favors the “events” at the World Trade Center over the one at the Pentagon and in Pennsylvania.²¹⁰

2.3 Falling Man

The image depicting “a man falling headfirst to his death from the north tower of the World Trade Center[,] [h]is crooked knee and his almost recognizable face [...] set off against the steel columns of the tower”²¹¹ is emblematic to 9/11 as it could be seen in many places,²¹² such as in newspapers. “The desperate act itself, which was in the debate usually referred to as ‘falling’ rather than ‘jumping,’ will probably remain the most traumatic moment for the witnesses of the event.”²¹³ This following picture, taken by Richard Drew, is the one that became famous. Its title is “The Falling Man,” which was used by Don DeLillo for his novel *Falling Man*.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

²¹¹ Jim Rutenberg and Felicity Barringer. "After the Attacks: The Ethics; News Media Try to Sort out Policy on Graphic Images." *The New York Times* (2001): 1-2. Web. 19 Feb. 2016, p. 2.

²¹² This photograph was taken by Richard Drew who worked for the Associated Press. (Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 52.)

²¹³ Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 52.



Tom Junod. "The Falling Man. An Unforgettable Story."
Esquire (2016). Web. 22 Mar. 2017.

One of the reasons why this photograph became well-known is given by Tim Gauthier, who writes in his article:

First, the sheer immensity of the towers guaranteed that we could barely glimpse those trapped inside. Second, the very scale of the buildings required a long camera shot to encompass the calamity. As such, we watched things unfold *from* and *at* a distance. Third, the very horror of the events, most particularly images of falling people, promptly elicited a reflexive self-censorship and the cameras pulled away. Finally, within only 102 minutes the devastation was so complete there were few survivors to film and precious few stories to collect. For most of us, then, 9/11 was a distanced and mediated experience.²¹⁴

In other words, this photograph is well-known, as due to the horrific glimpse of these bodies, not a lot of people dared to take such a picture. However, because such photographs exist, TV channels and newspapers had to decide whether to show those harsh images²¹⁵ or if they should censor them, as they were an “intimate connection” to this traumatic event.²¹⁶ That is why, in the media, some differences in the representations of falling people exist. In their article, Rutenberg and Barringer explain why newspapers and television reacted differently to this image of a falling man. Several newspapers used this picture “on the inside pages,” either “in color in The New York Times and The Detroit News” or “in black and white in Newsday and The Denver Post.”²¹⁷ In contrast, “[t]elevision ha[d] a harder time showing the imagery of people jumping from the buildings. It was given added impact when presented in real

²¹⁴ Gauthier. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 369-370.

²¹⁵ Rutenberg and Barringer. *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

²¹⁶ Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 52.

²¹⁷ Rutenberg and Barringer. *Op. Cit.*, p. 1.

motion.”²¹⁸ Rutenberg and Barringer quote “Marcy McGinnis, the CBS vice president” saying: “This is terrorism, and terrorism has terrible, violent results. On the one hand, you want to be sensitive to the viewer. But on the other hand, you want to show what these terrorists have done.”²¹⁹ This quote implies that producers of TV channels demonstrated some humanity, as they were not thrilled to display those images, but that was quickly put aside in order to fully mediatize the event.

Novelists also represented falling men. In Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, for example, the narrator, Oskar, a nine-year-old boy, tells his own aftermath of 9/11. He is traumatized as his father died in the towers and he suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.²²⁰ In addition to that, he is “obsess[ed] with the image of the falling man, onto which he projects the unknown particularities of his father’s death.”²²¹ In this novel, some “time reversals”²²² are used to represent traumatic events (it is a 9/11 novel but Oskar’s grandparents also speak about their own traumata due to Dresden’s bombing). The time reversal about 9/11 is the flipbook at the end of the novel representing a reversed falling man.²²³ In my point of view, it bears a huge symbol, as if Oskar was trying to suppress this event and to go back to the point right before it happened.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ According to Redfield, “[s]ufferers from post-traumatic stress disorder are not spectators: possessed by an event, they endure preternaturally literal repetitions of it as hallucinatory flashbacks, nightmares, and daydreams.” (Redfield. *Op. Cit.*, p. 68.)

²²¹ Saal. *Op. Cit.*, p. 460.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 466.

²²³ Foer. *Op. Cit.*, p. 327 ff.



In addition to the representations explained earlier, the image of falling men haunt comics and graphic novels such as Torres' *American Widow*, which will be analyzed further in this dissertation or Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*. At the beginning of his graphic novel, Spiegelman explains that he wanted to draw about his family and his personal history but he reconsidered his idea because "the government began to move into full dystopian Big Brother mode and hurtle America into a colonialist adventure in Iraq [...]." ²²⁴ Instead of writing a comic about his personal experience, he decided to draw a comic in a "more overtly political, critical and satirical representational mode." ²²⁵ In the comic, Spiegelman represented himself as a man falling from the tower, "preferring the freedom of the sky above death by fire." ²²⁶ The text from this panel says: "He is haunted now by images he *didn't* witness... images of people tumbling to the streets below... especially one man [...] who executed a graceful Olympic dive as his last living act." ²²⁷ Spiegelman did not witness any victim "jump[ing] from the tower." ²²⁸ Nevertheless he seemed traumatized by those images and the fact that he drew his self-representation is, in my point of view, a proof that he cannot forget this moment and that he is traumatized enough to imagine himself as the victim that is going to die in an instant. ²²⁹

²²⁴ Spiegelman. *Op. Cit.*, foreword.

²²⁵ Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 99.

²²⁶ Kristiaan Versluys. "Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*: 9/11 and the Representation of Trauma." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 52.4 (2006): 980-1003. Print.

²²⁷ Spiegelman. *Op. Cit.*, p. 6.

²²⁸ Versluys. *Op. Cit.*, p. 995.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the major difference between the representations of falling men is in the nature of its support. In other words, it was used with different purposes depending on whether it was pictured in the press or by artists. On the one hand, in the press, it was often used a single time; not twice in the same newspaper.²³⁰ The fact that the falling man was almost recognizable aroused the curiosity of some people. For example, two journalists, Tom Junod and Peter Cheney, wanted to discover the identity of the man depicted on the famous picture.²³¹ Sven offers two reasons for this identity seeking, either “an effort to make sense of the trauma” or a need “to turn the unspeakable occurrence into a familiar narrative of personal tragedy [...]”.²³² On the other hand, for the “reproductions by visual artists [...] there [was] no attempt to identify the falling figure.”²³³ In this case, it “is used in its anonymous, iconic form, the same one that for Junod could ultimately represent a fallen soldier defending his nation at war.”²³⁴ This journalist even writes that “the Falling Man [...] became the Unknown Soldier in a war whose end we have not yet seen.”²³⁵ Thanks to this quote, it can be argued that this parallel to the Unknown Soldier shows the importance and impact that the picture of the falling body could have on everyone at the time.

Besides, the responses to those representations were different as well: while a sculpture from Eric Fischl entitled “Tumbling Woman” or the photographs that Kerry Skarbakka took of himself “falling from high places” were not happily and positively received, the response was entirely different when it was represented in “literary texts.”²³⁶ The latter “were considered [as] relatively unproblematic,” be it the flipbook at the end of Foer’s novel, the borrowing of the title’s photograph for Don DeLillo’s book or Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* where men falling are heavily present on the cover and in the comic itself.²³⁷

²³⁰ Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 52.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, footnote 30.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ Junod. *Op. Cit.*

²³⁶ Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*



No Photography Allowed. 2011. Web. 25 Mar. 2017.



Anna Kérchy. *Creative Iconoclasm and Cultural Trauma*. 2015. Web. 24 Mar. 2017.

In his book, *Towering Figures*, Sven paraphrases Susan Lurie and writes that “the images of falling people had to be seen, but only in order to be replaced by more ‘tolerable ones.’”²³⁸ However, he then writes that “since the falling people could not be identified in the images, they became empty signifiers pointing to the fundamental unrepresentability of the traumatic event.”²³⁹ Afterwards he explains that the “anonymity” of those images “had a disorienting effect in relation to the dominant narrative that represented the event as a wound in a body politic defined by a strictly national imaginary.”²⁴⁰ And these people represented as vulnerable bodies fleeing their deaths to the ground were traumatizing.²⁴¹

2.4 Healing and Working out

According to Kaplan, there is a need to “translate trauma,” which means “finding ways to make meaning out of, and to communicate, catastrophes that happen to others as well as oneself.”²⁴² When writing about Foer’s flipbook, an implied meaning was highlighted, namely the need to go back right before the traumatic event occurred. Of course, as Kaplan writes, “trauma can never be ‘healed’ in the sense of a return to how things were before [...]” Nonetheless, she offers a solution when she further states: “if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being ‘translated’ via art.”²⁴³ Writing about a trauma

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 19.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

can help to ease the pain even if it seems impossible to heal from it, especially as the one caused by 9/11.²⁴⁴

Further in her book about trauma, she distinguishes the people who “share” their trauma and those who “engage in witnessing.” The latter implying “a new level of responsibility”²⁴⁵ as it means that it differentiates itself “from voyeurism/sensationalism, and from melodramatic attempts to close the wound [...]”²⁴⁶ For her, “‘witnessing’ happens when a text aims to move the viewer emotionally but without sensationalizing or overwhelming [him/her] with feeling that makes understanding impossible.”²⁴⁷ In her article, Ilka Saal also writes about the “translation of the wound” in order to approach the “important and ethical questions” raised by such narratives.²⁴⁸ As a matter of fact, when undertaking such a translation, the witness needs to face “the essential incomprehensibility of trauma, but also [...] what kind of narrative perspectives, structures, and tropes we ultimately deploy to render the ineffable fathomable.”²⁴⁹ For traumatized people, writing their tragic experience is more than being “only [...] a cathartic purpose” – it was not always cathartic, since the healing of trauma is limited as previously explained – because it is also a way for them to be heard “if only to honor the victims and to make sure that their death was not in vain.”²⁵⁰

An example would be Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers*, which is an autobiographical comic but it “is not a tale of horrors and only very partially a tale of physical survival.”²⁵¹ Spiegelman wanted to create his comic “to testify as a witness” as well as a remonstrance in response to the misinterpretation of the attacks and the political abuses.²⁵² “He was not in one of the towers at the time and he suffered no personal injury.”²⁵³ The “narrator-protagonist” “records his fear and panic [...] and mourning or working-through [...]. It is the record of a psychologically wounded survivor, trying to make sense of an event that overwhelmed and destroyed all his normal psychic defenses.”²⁵⁴ He describes his own situation as “a state of alienation.”²⁵⁵ However, he was already an indirect victim of the Holocaust through the tales of

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

²⁴⁸ Saal. *Op. Cit.*, p. 453.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ Versluys. *Op. Cit.*, p. 987.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 981.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 987.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 981.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Spiegelman. *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

his father (which he tells in his famous comic *Maus*), therefore “[i]n reading 9/11 through the Holocaust, Spiegelman suffers a primary trauma that resuscitates the secondary one.”²⁵⁶ In his comic, where he witnesses his traumata (he writes mostly about 9/11 but the Holocaust is mentioned and a few representations of him as a mouse like in *Maus* are present),²⁵⁷ he keeps a distance “from the world of mass-market sensibility, national superheroes and certain truths.”²⁵⁸ Moreover, an issue is developed in his two comics, “namely, the role of the visual media in the transmission of traumatic memories.”²⁵⁹ This confirms the role of the media in the process of traumatization as already discussed in this chapter with the point of view of Kaplan, Sven and Redfield.

In conclusion, the term trauma can encompass a lot of elements and it can ensue from a lot of different causes. As explained previously, different sorts of trauma exist and victims will not respond with the same kind of trauma to a common tragic event. However, in all the cases, healing from trauma is very complicated and it is a long process, which often never ends, as the pain is eased but the wound is not completely healed. In the words of Kaplan, for 9/11, “the stage of accepting what has happened, mourning the many kinds of loss, and providing – not closure or healing (the wound to New York will remain forever) - but a fitting witness, a fitting way to memorialize the catastrophe”²⁶⁰ is a good alternative in order to begin the process of decreasing the traumatization.

²⁵⁶ Versluys. *Op. Cit.*, p. 982.

²⁵⁷ Spiegelman. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 3, 9, 10.

²⁵⁸ Sven. *Op. Cit.*, p. 87.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

²⁶⁰ Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 136.

3. Trauma conveyed in the Graphic Novel

Since *American Widow* is a graphic novel about 9/11 in which the author explains what happened to her as well as how and why she was traumatized, the presence of trauma in the book is going to be analyzed. Several questions can be raised and some answers will be provided in this chapter: How was Torres traumatized? How does she represent her trauma in the graphic novel? Is it most of the time represented directly or indirectly? Are those representations only in the drawings or also in the language or anywhere else? In this chapter, the trauma of Alissa Torres as well as the way she conveys it will be analyzed.

In his article, Tim Gauthier analyzes and compares Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Rehr's *Tribeca Sunset* and Torres' *American Widow* which

[R]eveal different levels of trauma [...]. In the process [of writing], [the authors] give voice to a qualitatively different, and harder won, resilience than the simplified flag-waving version propounded by the official engines of testimony. They exist finally as more complex, and potentially truer, testimonials to the events whose impact still resonates.²⁶¹

In other words, a distinction needs to be drawn between the official accounts of the events and the private testimonials which are situated outside this official context; suggesting that the private ones will not be biased by political interests. For the people who did not experience the event, it will be complicated to spot every time that a testimonial is manipulated, that is why it is essential to relate private ones. Understanding this distinction suggests becoming aware of the difference between the national and the private spheres which creates some tensions in *American Widow*; those tensions will be analyzed in the next chapter.

Gauthier then analyzes how the three “authors re-appropriate sometimes iconic images to speak of their own experiences of 9/11.”²⁶² This re-appropriation was necessary since, as Gauthier points out, right after the towers collapsed, there was “a gap between event and interpretation” because “the event was being ‘translated’ for [the Americans]” as they “were already being told what it meant and what to think.”²⁶³ For most people, the experience of 9/11 was made of what was shown on screen, which was problematic as “the images did not, and could not, tell the whole story;”²⁶⁴ they were just broadcasted endlessly. However, even with those visual

²⁶¹ Gauthier. *Op. Cit.*, p. 379.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 369.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

repetitions, the event could not be understood nor grasped because it was beyond imagination and understanding. Then, the fact that those comics are autobiographies links what was to be seen on TV with what the victims and their families experienced on that day.²⁶⁵ Next, Gauthier paraphrases Torres and writes that for her, writing the comic was a means to control what had happened to her.²⁶⁶ As it was a visual event, she could not only write about it;²⁶⁷ some visual representations were needed. Therefore, the graphic novel genre seemed to be suitable for her aim and they seemed to be an appropriate response to represent 9/11 because of the possibilities that they offer in the process of translating trauma.²⁶⁸ As Gauthier states the event was initially “conveyed through images”²⁶⁹ and “experienced [...] visually, in a set of (eventually fixed) images, [which] meant that the graphic form could lend itself to a reordering and (re)presentation of the events.”²⁷⁰ Finally, Alissa Torres’ *American Widow* illustrates “literal and earnest re-creations of the events,” and it “depicts the ongoing presence of the wound and its lasting effect on individual lives,”²⁷¹ as will be shown in the following analysis. In order to distinguish Alissa Torres, the human being, from the character, the terms “author” and “Torres” will be used to describe the human being writing the graphic novel, while “narrator” and “Alissa” will refer to the comic character.

3.1 Trauma in the Representations of the Towers

From the beginning, the graphic novel clearly appears to be about 9/11 since on page 5, a TV screen displays the burning towers. The news is written in several languages as if to show that it spread extremely quickly across the world. The extent of the news’ broadcast is reinforced by the following panels where different reactions in several countries are depicted. First, on page 6, the narrator is watching the news. She is colored in black, with a hand on her pregnant belly and no emotion can be seen on her face. Then, journalists flying to the towers are drawn, followed by Bush learning the news in an elementary school in Florida. Afterwards, on pages 7 and 8, miscellaneous reactions are portrayed in images of New York, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Indianapolis, Kuwait, Cali, London, Madrid, Cairo and Brooklyn, while people from those places are learning the tragic news on TV or on the radio. However, the latter is a drawing of a

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

woman witnessing the events from her window and not from the TV screen like the others, which brings the reader back to New York. By contrast to Spiegelman who refused to draw any mediatized images in his comic as explained in the previous chapter, here almost every TV screen can be seen but the images on them are either not precise or a representation of the burning towers. Therefore, some distance is kept towards the media as no harsh images are reproduced here; the drawings are kept as simple and neutral as possible. In other words, shocking pictures seem to be avoided as well as blood and body parts, which are sometimes mentioned but not shown. Some obliqueness is consequently present in order to avoid a repetition of the trauma caused by the terror attack. Finally, on page 9, alien men are arrested, with no apparent reasons. This last page shows the confusion and the numerous arrests that have directly followed the attacks. The content is therefore unambiguous for the reader, who is directly overwhelmed by the unfolding of events on that day. Details about the story will be given further in this chapter along with the analysis.

As it is a graphic narrative about 9/11, representations of the towers are of course ubiquitous in the story as they are the starting point of the author's trauma. In this section, they will be analyzed while being classified in groups as different depictions are present in the graphic novels. First the ones represented untouched, then the representations of burning towers in the media compared to the ones of the illustrator, afterwards the state of the towers after their destruction, the consequences of this destruction and finally the subtle metaphors used to represent them.

First the towers are represented untouched, bearing their whole power as a landmark of New York. They appear undamaged for the first time on page 11, which begins the story of how Alissa and Eddie met. The towers are here evoking the American dream, at the center of the panel, full of light and life. Then on page 15, while Eddie offers: "It's such a beautiful night. Would you like to walk together for a bit?" (15), both are represented in front of a tower, Eddie on the left with a tower surrounding him and Alissa on the right with another tower enclosing her. They are holding hands, which are situated in between the two towers and in front of a black background. This suggests an ironical opposition between some happy moments and unity versus the future separation they will endure due to the fate of the towers, only three years after that.



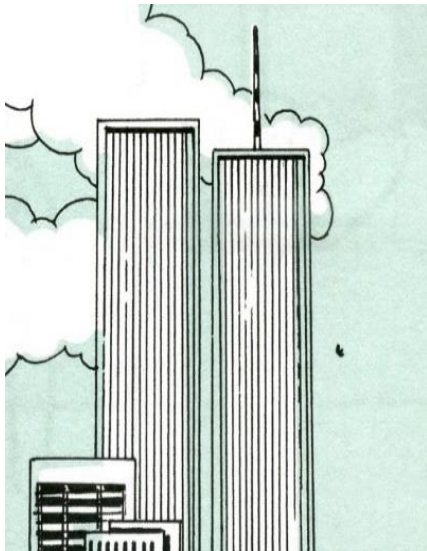
Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 15.

However, here again the towers are filled with life and lights. Then on page 25, a piece of each tower is represented while Eddie is heading to “his first day of work [in the World Trade Center] on Monday, September 10, 2001.” (25) Therefore, each of those representations can be interpreted as an ominous sign, conveying that Eddie’s death is lingering over them all along during the flashbacks about their past. Finally, a last representation of untouched towers is to be found on page 38. They were in theory already hit but the narrator sees them as undamaged. She is walking in the street, completely lost, she is alone and heading towards the towers, which appear beautiful and yet bearing less life than on the previous representations. Since they are drawn without windows, it suggests a ghost-like image such as an abandoned building.

In order to draw a faithful representation of the events, smoking towers are also drawn, first in mediatized images and then in the own illustrations of Choi. These representations of smoking towers convey some of the apocalyptic scenes that the events contend. First of all, at the beginning of the graphic novel, the towers appear on the title page and in the first chapter in a TV screen. (5 and 7) Those three representations are quite similar because the towers have just been hit and they are therefore smoking. They appear in the first chapter where everyone around the world is hearing the news. Further in the book, they are also represented once in a newspaper where they are smoking too. (127) Those four pages include the only mediatized images of the

towers that the illustrator used. The fact that those images taken from the media are not the most shocking ones can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid representing some of the atrocious images that were broadcasted at the time of the terror attacks in the media – such as falling men or people covered in blood.

Following those mediatized representations, Choi's own illustration of smoking towers are also present. (6, 39, 46) The first is on page 6 where the first tower has been hit and the second plane is coming toward the second tower. A helicopter with journalists is flying in the direction of the towers. Another representation is drawn when the narrator is walking in the street, hoping that her husband is alive. In the background, one of the towers is smoking. (39) In the last representation, both towers are burning and on the right, a black point is drawn along with the text: "You jumped." This depiction of Eddie as a falling man (46) echoes Richard Drew's



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 46.

picture – which was shown in the second chapter and bears an important part of 9/11 trauma. However, the narrator imagines it since she has no proof that her husband is dead (even if she supposes it), and she has no idea how he died. It is consequently only an imaginary representation of a falling man, which could even be confused with a bird considering its form. Nonetheless, it is still a traumatic image for the narrator as well as an obsession. She is haunted by her husband and throughout the graphic novel she talks to him, i.e. the graphic novel addresses Eddie.

Since the terror attacks provoked the collapse of both towers, they are also depicted as destroyed towers that evoke the violence of the impact when the planes hit them. The first representation takes place when the narrator is in the street and she witnesses the tower collapsing in the background, with Eddie perhaps still inside even if she has no proof of that. (41) On this panel, the tower is reduced to a monster of ashes and dust, going in the streets and covering everything. Then further in the graphic novel, only remains are drawn; the scene is one of destruction. (78) However, on the following page, hope for a rebirth is conveyed through a bird, namely a sparrow, building its nest on top of this havoc. This sparrow conveys hope for the future of Ground Zero but also for Eddie and Alissa as it is nesting with a paper where "Cantor" is written, which is, in my opinion, a symbol of revival for the Cantor Fitzgerald's employees – Eddie was one of them. The fact that it is nesting is also a link to Alissa as she is pregnant and

a bird creates a nest only to welcome baby birds; it is therefore the symbol of birth. Moreover, it is also indirectly the symbol of the citizens' rebirth: since sparrows are common birds, it can be a representation of the American people and the other victims that need to regain faith and hope.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 79.

This is similar to a panel, in which Eddie is represented as waiting, alive, below the remains of the tower, for the rescuers to come and save him: “In the first days after you died, I imagined the underground shopping concourse turned into a city where you’d eat cinnamon rolls, read borders books, and wear clothes with white security tabs still attached. You’d call home from a pay phone that still worked and say you’d be home soon.” (115) Thus, those aforementioned representations of destruction interestingly bear hope, while being imaginary. After the destruction, the ruins needed to be cleaned up which leads to an illustration where Ground Zero is empty, except for the snow that covers the ground. (119) Afterwards, the direct consequences of this destruction are, of course, represented such as with the illustration where Eddie is depicted as a real falling man this time, (197) as the narrator knows how he died and can imagine it.

Finally, subtle metaphorical representations of the towers are also present in the graphic novel. The first metaphor which is used on two different pages, can be found when Eddie is fired from his job and the couple is experiencing some financial problems: Eddie and Alissa are both represented surrounded by two towers of paper. (23 and 25) To my mind, this is a parallel representation of the real towers creating an echo between their problems and the future death of Eddie since their major issues in life are symbolized by towers, i.e. stacks of bills or the real towers taking the life of Eddie. Then, the terror attack is represented in form of a childish drawing with a metaphoric text, as will be further analyzed, which can be the explanation she imagines giving to their son when he will begin to ask questions about his father while still being too young for the real and tragic explanation. (45)

3.2 Trauma in Chronology and Repetitions

3.2.1 Chronology and Flashbacks

As previously explained, the graphic novel instantly introduces the main topic to the reader. The narration is not chronological as numerous flashbacks interrupt the flow of the story. Those flashbacks unveil the narrator's trauma; she was traumatized which means that she finds it difficult to think clearly and chronologically about the events. This is called, "belatedness" in trauma theories. It is "often translated as 'deferred action' and described in terms of disruptions in the process of remembering traumatic events. Belatedness is often manifested for trauma victims in repetition, flashbacks, prolepsis, and other forms of temporal instability"²⁷² which are features that are present throughout the graphic novel and that are going to be analyzed in this section. Everything that precedes the death of Eddie is told in the numerous flashbacks present throughout the graphic novel. Because the story is about 9/11, his death and the terror attacks are the starting point of the narration. As numerous flashbacks are contained in the graphic novel, the list of the ones analyzed in this approach is not exhaustive: only the longer ones were considered as the last section of this chapter will be about the mixed temporalities, namely the shorter flashbacks, contained on the same page as the present time of the narration. After being moved by the events, the reader discovers a completely different story in the second chapter. (10-21) It is the first flashback as the narrator goes from 2001 back to August 1998, to recount how she met her husband. This is quite long as it lasts eleven pages but their whole encounter until the moment they bought a house together and the narrator got pregnant is described. This could be completed by a flashback from chapter sixteen, (175) when the reader sees them in a kitchen store, in January 2001. Eddie says: "I like this sample for the kitchen counter, but it's way too expensive." (175) The last panel seems to answer Alissa's previous question: "How do I choose a headstone for you?" (174) as the panel shows the headstone of Eddie, maybe implying that she bought a headstone in the material of the kitchen counter that he wanted.

Then the third chapter also takes place before the attacks as here the narrator tells that Eddie was fired from his job at Tullett. Alissa is worried but Eddie replies: "There's a saying back home that every baby's born with bread under its arm. Don't worry." (23) Sadly, he proved to

²⁷² Ann Keniston. "'Not Needed, Except as Meaning:' Belatedness in Post-9/11 American Poetry." *Contemporary Literature* 52.1 (2011): 658-683. Web. 24 June 2017, p. 661.

be right as the author explains in an article in which she writes: “When our son was born in October, I no longer worked. But there was enough money to take care of all of our expenses, and the promise of more money to come. Eddie, who died on Sept. 11, became the bread under our son’s arm.”²⁷³ Eddie’s demonstration of hope is followed on the next page by a prolepsis where he “envisioned [their] future filled with joy.” (24) Nevertheless, the narrator regains hope when in mid-August Eddie was hired by Cantor Fitzgerald. Below a “Hooray!” the last two panels of the page are important in the story and seem to be filled with joy as she writes: “But then he got the job after all – His first day of work, Monday, September 10, 2001.” (25) The chapter ends with a view of the tower which counterbalances the previous happiness because the apprehension that he is going to die very soon is triggered by the perspective of the drawing, i.e. the towers seem menacing.

Following this, chapter four begins with a flashback as the narrator is drawn during the night between September 10 and 11, 2001. This scene will be analyzed in the last section of this chapter. Eddie and Alissa had a fight the night before the attacks which prevented the narrator from sleeping. In the morning, she was still angry and she says goodbye to Eddie when he goes to work only to learn a few hours later that he is probably dead. This chapter is a mix between a flashback and the present time of the narration. It seems to link the previous chapter, which was entirely in the past, to the point in time when the attacks took place and Eddie lost his life.

Regarding Eddie’s past before he met Alissa, several flashbacks are spread throughout the graphic novel. In chapter seventeen, the reader discovers how he got a fake identity card to cross the border and arrive in Mexico in 1990. (179-183) The customs officer knows it is a fake one but he thinks: “I know he’s a liar but he’s just a kid.... – Well, it seems like we made a mistake detaining you. Sorry for any inconvenience. Bienvenido a México, Hijo.” (183) Before that, in chapter eight, Eddie tells how he managed to arrive in New York, which is chronologically happening after this previous flashback. (95-98) A shift of narrators is used in those pages as Eddie becomes the narrator; it is the only time it happens in the book. He arrived in the United States in 1990 and he explains: “So for the next several years, I worked my ass off at any job I could get, so I could pay my bills and to send [*sic*] money to my family.” (96) However, those small jobs ended when he finally got “[in June 1995] [his] first job in finance [...] as a runner.” (97) Then he became a reporter and finally in 1996: “[...] from there, after trying so hard all these years to learn English, it was [his] Spanish that took [him] where [he]

²⁷³ Alissa Torres. "The Reluctant Icon." *Salon.com* (2002). Web. 8 May 2017.

dreamed!” His job was to “broke[r] Latin American currencies.” (98) This can be linked with the flashbacks in chapter fourteen, (149-151) in which Alissa thinks in “what-ifs.”

What if they had connected the dots? What if they had deported you long ago? What if you had started work a week later? What if Bush had read that president’s daily brief? What if you weren’t fired from your last job? And what if, at the very least, the fire escapes had been built to code? – So many what-ifs, and I still wake up to this same life without you. (149-151)

With those what-ifs, the narrator calls Eddie’s recent life’s story into question as to demonstrate that if only one thing had been different, he would still be alive. Page 99 ends chapter eight and the flashback about Eddie’s life before he met his wife. It depicts a magic lamp from which a genie gets out and speaks to Alissa. He seems to be only constituted of smoke, which suggests a link to the tower’s smoke uttering their messages of death. He has four heads, each saying something different but equally hard to hear:

Your wish is my command, you can have anything you desire, except for the one thing you want most of all. – Each wish fulfilled is a consolation prize that will make you feel more like a collaborator than a victim. – And anything I give you, I give you because I took away that one thing. – So good-bye for now, but just know that I’ll be here long after everyone else leaves. (99)

These messages suggest that Alissa can have anything she wants thanks to the money from the Red Cross but of course, nothing can be done to bring Eddie back.

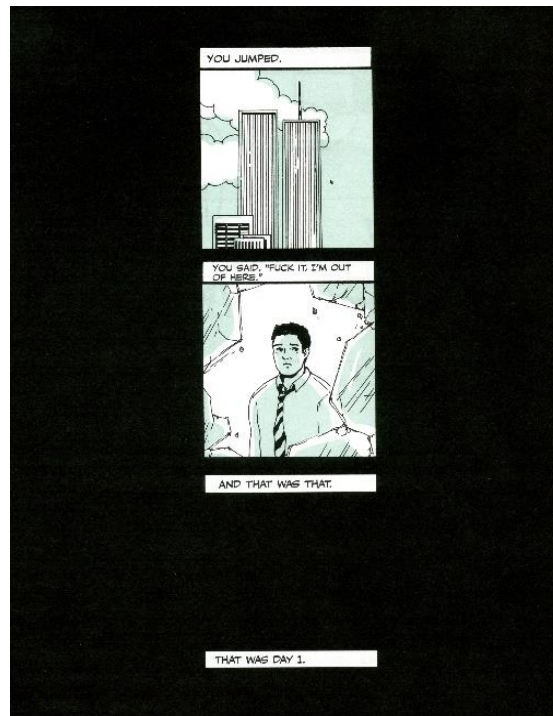
Finally, sometimes positive flashbacks are triggered by the difficult times that the narrator is experiencing. First, in chapter thirteen, someone just called her to say that some properties of Eddie were recovered. She remembers their last day together, on September 9, 2001, (140) which leads to her imagining what belongings they recovered: “his scuba diver watch,” “his wallet” or “his lucite pyramids with saints inside.” (141-142) However in the end, “[she] did not get what [she] wanted,” (143) but the reader never discovers what she received. Then, she learns from a friend that more body pieces were identified. (158) This last piece of news triggers another flashback where Eddie almost died: in 1999, he is in New York and goes parachuting but he took too long to pull his cord. The man with whom he jumped had to scream “[w]ake up!” (161) before he reacted. Once on the ground, he cannot explain what happened. This is clearly linked in the narrator’s mind to Eddie’s jump from the tower, the last one of his life. Lastly in chapter eighteen, a flashback describes their last holidays together in Kauai, an island in Hawaii, in June 2001. (203-205) To my mind, an anticipation of Eddie’s death on 9/11 can be interpreted here as well since he is swimming in the sea while Alissa stays on the beach but for a long moment, she does not see him anymore and she thinks when he reappears: “There

you are. Hey, where'd you go? Diving down deep? How would the world change if you never came back?" (203-204) On these drawings, she appears to be relieved to see him, which is at the present time of the narration, her biggest dream. Otherwise, they are represented both happy and in love, walking or swimming together in what seems to be romantic sceneries. This flashback is linked to the present time of the narration, as for the anniversary of the events, she flies to Hawaii with her son.

3.2.2 Repetitions haunting the Narrator

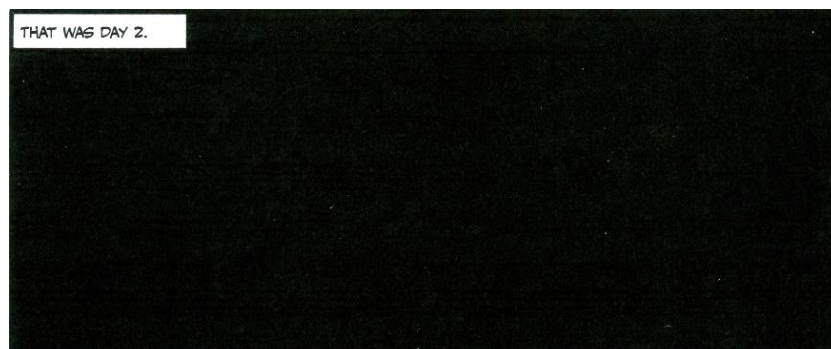
In the graphic narrative, several repetitive layouts are present. The first repetition are black panels without drawings accompanied by a sentence. They can be interpreted as a pause in the narration, as Pedri explains that "[e]mpty frames are powerful graphic punctuation marks that interrupt the narrative so that readers come to realize that they need to fill in the dots and get the job of storytelling done." (75) Those black panels are situated in the first part of the book, right after the attacks, when the narrator still hopes that Eddie will come back home while simultaneously supposing that he died in the tower. She will get proof of his death afterwards.

The first occurrence depicts the narrator thinking about her husband's death in those words: "You jumped. You said, 'Fuck it, I'm out of here.' And that was that. That was day 1." (46) The last two sentences surround the black panel. However, here, the whole background is black and only two small panels are filled with drawings on this page. The black frame suggests that the narrator sees everything negatively, which could be symbolized by the color black. The color is spilling over the panel and tainting the background of the whole page because her negativity and sorrowfulness are too strong to be contained. This emphasizes the emptiness and the nothingness which fill her life after 9/11.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 46.

The second black panel is contained in a frame concluding a page illustrating her search for Eddie. The text preceding it is: “They said, or I thought they said, that there were 83 people who got out from those floors. So I continued to go from hospital to hospital, looking for you. That was day 2.” (49) The fact that the page ends with a black panel suggests, in my opinion, that her search for her husband is never ending but that most of all, she is losing hope as she cannot find him.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 49.

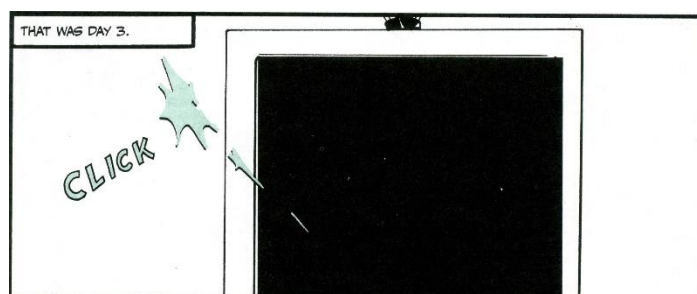
The number of potential survivors is again mentioned further in the comic, preceding the third occurrence of a black panel: “But there were never 83 people who survived from those floors. Somehow I misunderstood. No one had survived.” (52) The drawing accompanying this text is constituted of three different panels representing one scene, cut in three vertical parts, representing the bedroom of the narrator and Eddie. The cutting of this drawing highlights her

disillusioned emotional state and it is used to illustrate her hope being torn apart. Nevertheless, another meaning is to be deduced since the three drawings make a whole, even if it is fragmented and it keeps being interrupted by the text. This drawing conveys emptiness since no one is represented in this room while simultaneously showing some abandonment because it appears like someone just left it in a hurry. From left to right it suggests that Eddie will never come back to this place; he left it in an abrupt fashion. The room is going to miss the presence of a human being, namely Eddie. Finally, the language becomes empty and shorter which means that it disappears too and that even the words convey the absence of Eddie.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 52.

The third occurrence of a black panel is introduced by this text: “I learned the truth when I saw the CEO cry on TV that night. That was day 3.” (53) Here the black drawing is contained into a TV screen, in the panel, which is switched off. A “click” is here written because she switched off the TV which metaphorically conveys that she switches off the media she was watching as well as her hope. In other words, she does not want to have news from the world anymore because she stopped hoping that her husband is coming back home, alive.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 53.

On the following page, the fourth black occurrence is different as the narrator is represented in her bed in a panel where the background is colored in black. It follows the one with the TV, on the other side of the page. The text is: “On day 4, I accepted the truth.” (54) This bears several

meanings as she is still surrounded by black and negativity but she accepts that Eddie is dead and she stops searching for him everywhere. She is represented lying in her bed in this black background, with her bed and a photo on the wall as only set. It probably is a picture of Eddie as she constantly thinks about him. The next panel represents what Alissa is thinking of as it is a drawing showing Eddie right before he jumped – she is imagining what happened to him as she does not know it yet. Eddie is drawn in the tower – since broken glass can be seen around him – saying one more time: “Fuck it, I’m out of here.” (54) The page ends with the police coming to announce the bad news on “September 22, 2001.” (54) The narrator emphasizes that she already knew and accepted that Eddie was not coming back home when she thinks: “When the police came and told me you’d been recovered, they confirmed what I already knew.” (54) The layout of the page clearly conveys the narrator’s train of thoughts as she is alone in her bed, probably thinking about Eddie while, as she puts it, “accepting the truth,” which is that hope is not an option anymore when it comes to her husband being alive. Finally, the police arrive at her house to give her proof of what she has already anticipated, namely that she was to become a widow “legally”.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 54.

The black drawings are consequently evolving with the amount of information that the narrator gets as well as her emotional state. These differences between the four occurrences imply an accelerated evolution of the narrator's trauma during the first few days following the attacks until September 22, when she received proof of his death.

In addition to those representations, a last occurrence echoes the previous ones while being different as it is only a square filled with black in a chapter taking place in November, when she almost accepted the truth. (88) This is right after her labor, which is why it could symbolize a baby blues as it is next to a panel with a cradle drawing a link between the baby and the blackness. It could also duplicate her negativity as she has accepted the truth, namely that Eddie is not coming back home but she has not accepted his death yet – even if the question whether it is possible to accept the death of a loved one is to be raised. In the chapter where she narrates her son's birth, she even writes: "They said: 'Your baby is upside down.' I answered under the unwanted haze: 'Of course he is; I'm upside down, too.'" (84) The black panel therefore correlates with her negativity.

This sequence of days is then replaced by Eddie drawn sitting in corners. According to Davida Pines, "Torres uses text to illustrate the experience of trauma and the symptoms of post-traumatic stress [but] she also utilizes images."²⁷⁴ Those images of Eddie sitting in corners clearly suggest his ghostly presence as well as one symptom of Torres' post-traumatic stress since she imagines him everywhere she is. Cathy Caruth who writes about trauma explains that a post-traumatic stress is characterized by a "repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event."²⁷⁵ Eddie appears for the first time a few pages before his funeral, where the reader sees his profile since he is sitting on the edge of a lake. Policemen already told the narrator that some remains of her husband have been identified and she begins to plan his burial: "When do you want the funeral? – You are a dead body unburied for far too long. – As soon as possible." (57)



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 57.

²⁷⁴ Davida Pines. *Op. Cit.*, p. 191.

²⁷⁵ Cathy Caruth. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. 1st ed. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. Print, p. 4.

Then, the wandering representations of Eddie in a corner can be interpreted as a depiction of him in form of a ghost because he hasn't been buried yet. Moreover, like the reader will discover afterwards, only some parts of his body were identified and found. On the page where he appears in this way for the first time, Alissa is hesitating about the choice of the graveyard, Eddie appears in the place she finally chose, as to approve the graveyard where he is going to be buried. The second occurrence appears on the following page where he looks desperate and completely lost. He is surrounded by a seafoam blue circle which highlights a difference with the other panels as no square border surrounds it. Hence the rounded-shape suggests the form of a halo, implying that he is an angel. In this scene, Alissa is in the Columbian consulate, asking for visas for her family-in-law so that they can attend the funeral as she will bury him in New York.

Further in the graphic novel, lost Eddie appears again along with a suitcase this time, (61) looking even sadder than on the first representation. He seems to be seeking an eye contact since he looks towards the reader. To my mind, this could be the representation of his soul preparing to leave our world and go to heaven which implies that he will leave his wife and his unborn son behind him. A circle of seafoam blue is again present around him. This panel ends the page where the narrator is waiting at the Red Cross, which promised to pay for the funeral costs. The facial emotions of Eddie echo the ones on Alissa's face and vice versa. They both seem at a loss for actions and completely desperate to have lost each other; at least on the physical side as it is said in the graphic novel that a strong link still seems to exist between them. Eddie is then represented seated in a corner two times on the same page, where his funeral is described. (70) The first occurrence on this page is in the second panel which follows one where the narrator addresses Eddie in her thoughts: "Acquaintances, enemies, politicians complete strangers.... I don't know half of these people, did you?" (70) Alissa addresses Eddie a lot during the graphic novel which is her way to mourn. On this first representation, he seems sad and his suitcase is next to him, the circle is still present but it is smaller here. On the second one, the angle is a bit different and it enables the reader to see more of the background. He is sitting on the floor from an airport which reinforces the thesis that he is prepared to leave and go somewhere else, away from Alissa and their child. Here the seafoam blue circle is replaced by a dark one which seems to bring even more sadness in the point of view of colors in this drawing. However, as he is represented as a young boy in front of a wall where "Airline" is written, it could also be a representation of Eddie either leaving Mexico or arriving in the United

States when he was younger. It is consequently a strange allusion to departure both for and from America.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 61.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 70 – first one.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 70 – second one.

Finally, the representations of Eddie as a lost man with no place to go disappear after the funeral as his body is now buried and his soul can be wherever he wants to. However, he is probably near his family as Alissa sometimes tells in the graphic novel that she can feel him. An example can be found in chapter eleven: “High voltage traces of our lust and love flowed through our mattress nightly. Until one night when the power surged and overflowed. And then I felt you....” (121-122) Despite the fact that she feels him, he is of course not physically there: “But as I communicate back, to tell you that I know you’re here.... I make contact only with my own skin.” (125) The drawings illustrating this scene depict Alissa in her bed, sitting either half asleep or extremely sad and disappointed to discover that Eddie is not physically there. Loneliness and emptiness are once again emphasized in those drawings as she is on her own and a spot is available for her husband in the bed.

3.3 Trauma in the Presence/Absence of Words

Comics and graphic novels rely on the combination of image and dialog. They convey silence via the visual representation or the text, which is an important feature linked to the terrorist attacks and their aftermath. Moreover, this genre, as previously stated, allows for alternative visual possibilities for the representation of 9/11. As it was a traumatic event, it needed to be represented in literature as “fiction helps give a voice to traumatized individuals and populations.”²⁷⁶ Moreover, the presence of text is not essential in comics and graphic novels as sometimes, images suffice to understand the story.²⁷⁷ This allows the representation of a traumatic event without having to use words. Several examples are present in *American Widow*.²⁷⁸

To begin with, one of the first panels without text depicts the encounter between Eddie and Alissa; it is a peaceful scene, with a burgeoning love and happiness. (16) Obviously, no text is needed, the images being enough to tell the beginning of their story. The second page deprived of text is completely different as here the towers have just been hit. (38) Alissa is panicking, she walks in the street because no taxis are allowed to go downtown. On the first panel, her back is drawn in black and no one is in the street, which is quite improbable in the light of the events. On the next panel, she passes two transparent people, which conveys that she either does not see them or that New York has already lost some of its inhabitants, which are represented as ghosts. They are the only ones that can be seen in the street. However, on the last panel, more people are there and it seems that on the first two panels, the author was not especially aware of her surroundings. Therefore, this page brings together two temporalities – she is physically living the present moment while simultaneously being mentally somewhere else – which depicts her loneliness following her husband’s death. Then, the next wordless panel covers a whole page. It is a representation of the “Family Resource Center” (59) which should help Alissa get the visas for her family-in-law who has to come from Colombia for the funeral. It seems to be a nicely decorated place but after having read the first part of the comic, it is clear that it will be another painful step for her as she has already struggled so much with the Red Cross.

²⁷⁶ Paraphrase of Cathy Caruth in Pederson. *Op. Cit.*, p. 334.

²⁷⁷ Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester. *A Comics Studies Reader*. Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, pp. 133-134.

²⁷⁸ Those examples are present in Torres’ graphic novel on pages 11, 16, 19, 33, 38, 59, 67, 87, 166, 197, 198-199, 205 and 209.

In addition to that, the beginning of chapter eight bears more sad emotions as it is a depiction of the narrator in November 2001, right after the chapter about her labor. She is at home, stuck in bed. A cat and a dog are drawn around her. Nonetheless, even if a corner of the crib is drawn, no baby is represented here. This could imply that the narrator does not care about her baby because of her breakdown, or that she has no energy to pay attention and to think about him for the moment. Moreover, on this panel, the bedroom seems empty while in other representations, it was messy and the alarm clock which was always present in the other illustrations is no longer visible in this scene. The image suggests that time has stopped for the narrator as every passing day is the same and she is stuck in her depression which ensued from her trauma. This implies that she is traumatized as a traumatic event is: “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.”²⁷⁹ She also adds that it is “the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness and horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge,”²⁸⁰ which is an explanation as to why the narrator seems to be so lost. She is alone as no other human being is represented on this panel – only her cat and dog are around her.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 87.

²⁷⁹ Caruth. *Op. Cit.*, p. 153.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

However, a ghostly presence is in the room as she occupies only half of the bed: she lies on the right of it, leaving space on the left where the bedcover seems to be open as if someone has just left it. This representation suggests that Eddie has just woken up from their bed and that the space is almost still warm. This highlights the emptiness of the drawing while the absence of Eddie is made clear and palpable since traces of his presence are in the room (such as the sheets that are open as he just left or the free place for him in the bed). This drawing conveys Alissa's desire to resurrect her husband since she appears to live as he only left, even if he has been dead for two months already.

Several temporalities are also intertwined at the end of the graphic novel on wordless panels. (204-209) On page 205, a flashback of Eddie and Alissa on holidays in Hawaii in June 2001 is depicted and on page 209, she returns there with their son, in September 2002. A striking difference is present between the two scenes. On page 205, the panel is full of vegetation and the couple seems happy. The scene is romantic and joyful in comparison with page 209 where the drawing is blank. This emptiness suggests absence and loneliness. Alissa and her baby are not directly represented, only their boat is to be seen as well as the vegetation, which is much less luxuriant than on page 205.

In contrast with the silent panels described above, the economical use of text on some panels amplifies the impact of the drawings. An example is to be found when the narrator is seen awake at night, with an inscription telling the reader that it is "September 11, 2001." (27) It is 2.00 a.m., the towers are consequently still untouched. This scene conveys a particular feeling as the reader knows what is going to happen a few hours later, creating dramatic irony. The panels contain numerous details such as the fact that she is home, awake in the middle of the night while being pregnant. The next page is wordless as well and depicts her in bed, awake and seemingly anxious while Eddie is soundly asleep and peaceful. Without the caption, it could have been any night of insomnia but because of it, feelings of sadness, anticipation and dread are triggered, which brings back memories of what happened on that day. Further in the comic, she is in Ground Zero thanks to a detective she met while she was displaying posters to find Eddie. She is anxious to go downtown but she "needed to know that there was nothing there." (117) As the detective had access to go there, they visited the place only four months after the attacks. On this panel, the former spot of the towers is filled with nothing except snow which suggests emptiness. Without the caption, it could have been any snowy field anywhere in the world but it is written on the top left corner: "It just made me remember," (119) which amplifies

her loss, her sadness, her mourning, her previous love life and the new life that she has to face now.

This relation between image and text and their balance enable the author to remember the dead when needed thanks to an absence of words which conveys a considerable meaning as Carrie Hunt says: “The silence’s the screaming.”²⁸¹ Sometimes, even if more text is present, it nonetheless highlights the impact of the drawing. An example could be pages 44 and 45. The reader faces the puzzled look of the narrator after having turned the page. Then, the perspective changes and the reader sees that Alissa is tenderly touching a picture of Eddie who is asleep. Then the angle is larger and the whole body of the narrator is drawn, she seems to sleep. In her dream – or at least in her thoughts – she is imagining a scene representing that day where a tower is depicted in a childish way with a metaphorical but still explicit text:

In the beginning there was a clear blue sky on a beautiful day. And there were two winged beasts of metal, no different than any other that flew... except that on this day they were piloted by insane men with sharp purpose and weapons. And then the metal beasts unleashed monsters of fire that consumed all they could. (44-45)

Different interpretations of this drawing are possible. It could first be an explanation of the terror attacks aimed at a child, as it is highly metaphorical for them but still explicit for adults. It could also symbolize the beginning of that cloudless sunny day as the sun could be represented at the bottom of page 44, while the destruction following that beautiful morning is depicted on page 45. Or it could simply be a more bearable point of view of the event as some childhood innocence is brought in it, thanks to the form and the content of the panel. Interestingly, Thierry Groensteen states in his book *A Comics Studies Reader* that comics are linked to children but that this “handicap” should not be fought against as for him it is a positive element: “[c]omics still have a privileged relationship with childhood because it is in childhood that each of us discovered them and learnt to love them.”²⁸² Thanks to that quote, it can be further argued that this aspect of comics can help bring some childhood innocence into the tragic events of 9/11, when they are told in a graphic form. Thanks to the drawing on page 45, this innocent aspect is highlighted.

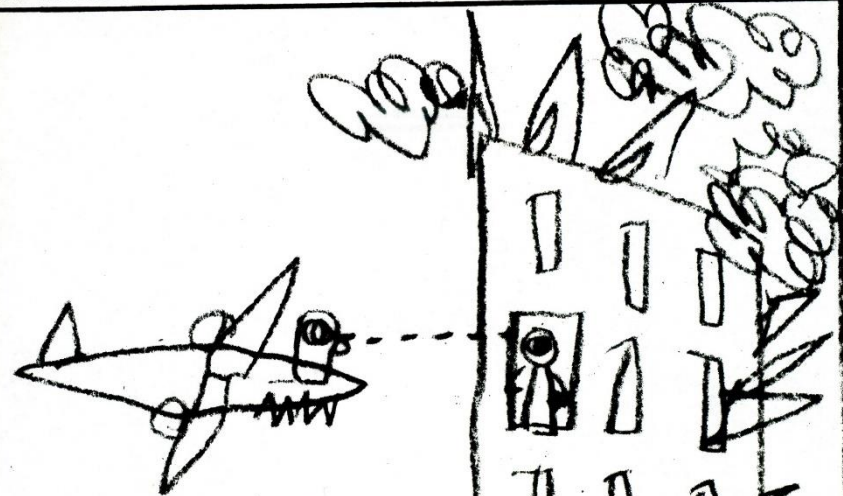
²⁸¹ *9/11: Stories in Fragment*. USA: Molly Hermann, 2011. Film, 42:37.

²⁸² Heer and Worcester. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 10-11.



IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS A CLEAR BLUE SKY ON A BEAUTIFUL DAY.

AND THERE WERE TWO WINGED BEASTS OF METAL, NO DIFFERENT THAN ANY OTHER THAT FLEW...



... EXCEPT THAT ON THIS DAY THEY WERE PILOTED BY INSANE MEN WITH SHARP PURPOSE AND WEAPONS.

AND THEN THE METAL BEASTS UNLEASHED MONSTERS OF FIRE THAT CONSUMED ALL THEY COULD.

Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 44-45.

However, in contrast to this childish and naïve drawing, a biblical interpretation is possible as well. The text which starts with: “In the beginning there was [...]” is clearly related to the Bible. This text can therefore also be interpreted as religious.²⁸³ Moreover, it is also mythical since the planes are compared to “winged beasts of metal,” the jihadists are qualified as “insane men” and the fire ensuing from the impact is described as “unleashed monsters of fire,” (45) which is a vocabulary clearly linked to mythology. Consequently, a contrast is created between the text which is formal, biblical and mythical and the drawing which is childish, innocent, naïve and literal. This tension emphasizes the difference between the perspective of a child and the one of an adult as all generations experienced 9/11 with their own approach. Children in general tend to perceive life in a very naïve way – or at least more naively than adults do – while adults have a more fatalistic perception of life. Lastly, this panel is only in black and white, with black being only used to draw. The ubiquitous presence of white therefore suggests the emptiness left by the dead.

In addition, other panels offer a suitable representation of trauma for other reasons than the ones that were stated above. An example can be found from pages 39 to 41: on the first page, the narrator is in the street and she is lost as she has just heard the news. The whole page is constituted by three different panels representing one drawing cut into three horizontal parts. The text shows that she is lost but still hopeful that Eddie is alright: “So many people alive and well – maybe you’re okay too. It only makes sense. It’s like a snow day. Everyone’s happy to be off from work. [...]” (39) However, the fact that the drawing is cut in three can be interpreted as a representation of her emotional state: she wants to hope and she thinks about Eddie being alive but at the same time, she is so confused that she cannot encompass the situation at once, which is represented by the splitting up of the panel. On the following page, she asks people if they work at the World Trade Center and a man answers that he does. She asks him: “How are the Cantor Fitzgerald people? My husband just started working there.” (41) He then lures her with positive news about Fitzgerald’s employees when he says: “Just a little cut up from some broken glass. Your husband probably headed home.” (41) Yet some stairs that people are using to go out are represented on the next panel, which is shaking as well as the next and last one of this page depicting one tower collapsing. These two drawings end chapter four on a highly negative taint, contrasting the hope that the narrator had just regained thanks to the man coming from the World Trade Center, to the complete destruction of the towers. Clearly, this apocalyptic representation contributed to her traumatization; it corresponds to a drastic turning

²⁸³ Davida Pines. *Op. Cit.*, p. 193.

point in her life. In other words, she was almost a direct eyewitness of the instant when she became a widow.

Finally, page 94 also bears an interesting interpretation of her trauma. Someone from the “German Church down the street” calls her to offer her some financial support. She will have to face some cameras with other victims’ families and after having shared their griefs in front of the German TV, some money will be given to them. This representation is very interesting as the first panel says: “If I go... ‘Congratulations, Alissa! Here’s this new car for all your sorrows!’” (94) and the man who states this is handing her a key to a convertible filled with banknotes. The next panel is introduced with: “If I don’t...” and here the narrator is represented upside down at a desk filled with papers that can be seen as bills that she has to pay but cannot. Those papers fly to the last panel of the page where the narrator is in bed thinking: “Wrong day to get up. Strange scary new world. Reminds me of you, your stories. Tell me them again...” (94) This represents the narrator being torn between decisions that she constantly has to make despite having no strength to get out of bed.

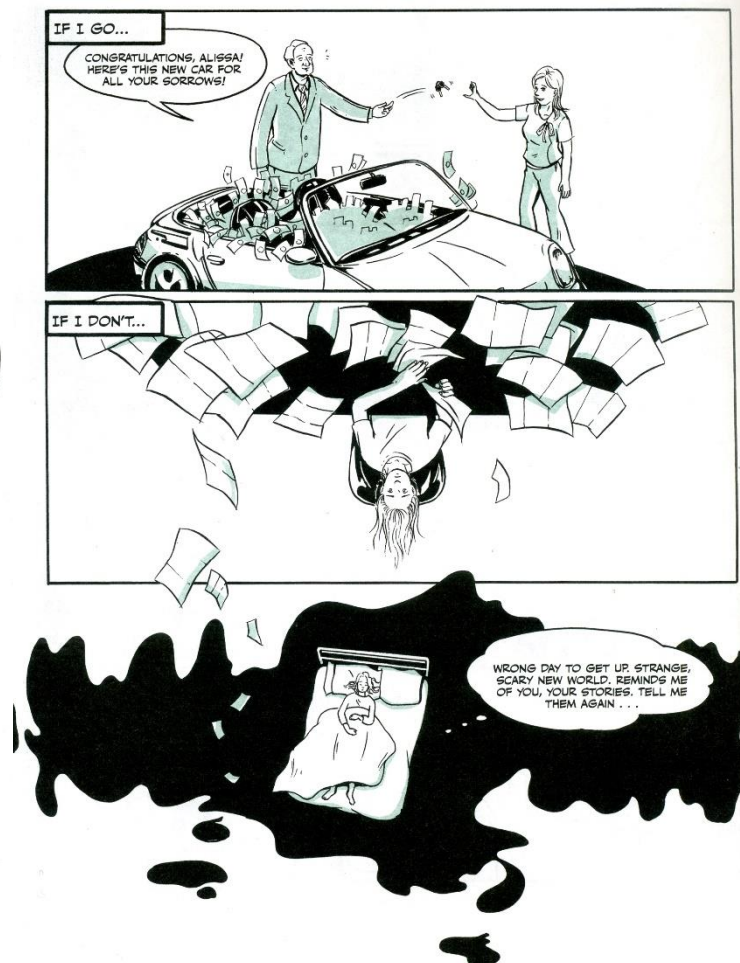


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Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 39.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.



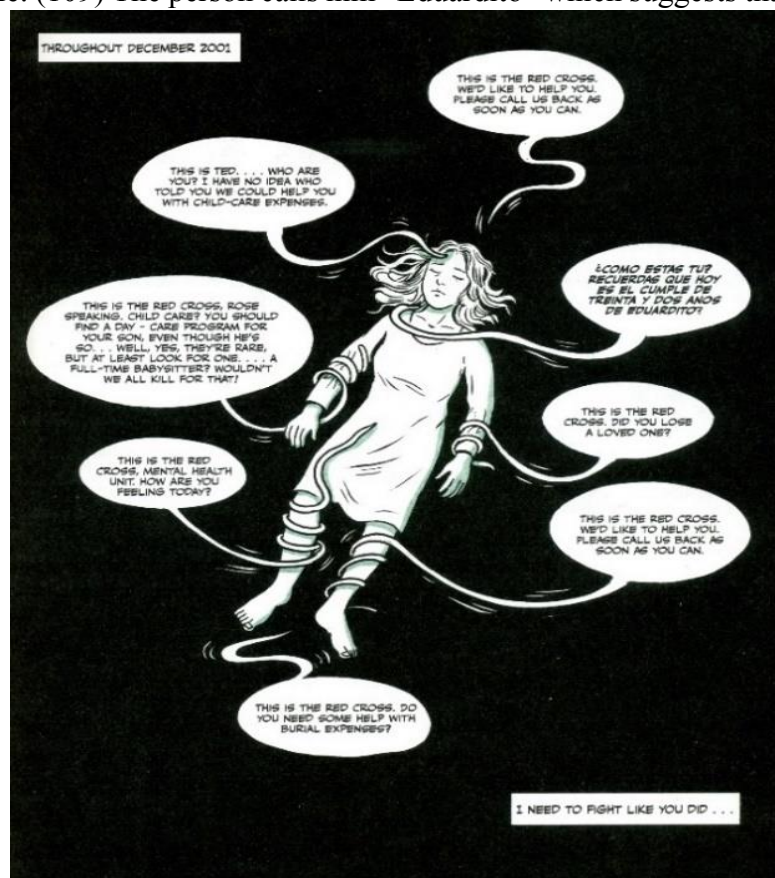
Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 94.

3.4 Trauma in Mixed Temporalities

Trauma is also conveyed through entangled temporalities: the narrator is telling what she is currently living and the present moment triggers some memories, reminding the reader that Alissa's sorrow never ends and that everything keeps coming back to her trauma. The first example is in chapter five, which contains mixed temporalities on page 64. The narrator goes to the "US immigration & naturalization service" to ask for the green card that her husband never received. As an explanation, the reader discovers a situation that took place on "November 15, 2000 – INS Green Card Interview." (64) After the interview at the immigration service, the employee says: "Everything is in order, but I can't approve you today because your file is lost." (64) This suggests that the narrator wants her dead husband to be buried as a legal American citizen. Otherwise, this chapter explains "[t]he rest of the longest month" while being interestingly the longest chapter of the graphic novel. The length of the chapter conveys that this month was extremely long for the narrator, as she had to deal with several issues along with the end of her pregnancy and mostly her recent trauma. In addition, chapter six ends with another flashback which triggers other memories of Eddie as Alissa is on the phone with a woman working for Cantor Fitzgerald who explains "the financial assistance and support that [they're] providing to [their] employee families..." (81) to her. In the last panels of this page, the recent past is triggered as the narrator thinks: "So for a moment you became alive. You got that job you really wanted – and then you died all over again." (81) This is illustrated by the entrance of Eddie at Cantor Fitzgerald, when he was introduced to his new colleagues.

Then, in chapter eight she remembers the struggle with volunteers that she had to face: "After the towers collapsed, I would have been happy to see the hordes of volunteer therapists straight-jacketed and sedated so that they couldn't inflict any more harm on us." (90) Other flashbacks about her twists and turns with the Red Cross are numerous. For example, in chapter nine, there is a flashback from September 24, 2001 which is introduced following a new invitation of the Red Cross in December to come and speak about her experience but she "dread[s] facing the Red Cross... again. But they collected the most money for [them]..." (102) Therefore, on the next page, she explains how it went in the few weeks following the attacks. The Red Cross employees are described as behaving with a strong lack of respect as one wails when she hears Alissa's story while another wants her to wait for her turn even if she just needs to hand in her "husband's death certificate" because she "just came from [her] husband's funeral," to which the employee answers: "Really? So how was the funeral?" (103) However, the trouble of the narrator does not stop there as in chapter six, a flashback explains why Eddie is still absent from

the employee's list of Cantor Fitzgerald. (76-77) This scene describes an additional obstacle that she has to deal with in order to be helped by the Red Cross; she needed to prove that her husband was working in the World Trade Center. In addition, she explains her struggle to receive the family gift (25,000\$) which lasted from the death of Eddie until December, when she finally received it. (104-113) To illustrate this, she is drawn as having to explain her tragedy repeatedly (105-107) since the employees change all the time as shown in those quotes: "No, Bea's tour of service ended," (105) or "Why don't you come talk to us about your situation?" (107) to which she answers "Maybe you could read my file? I just can't bear to tell it all to you again," (107) or another man who says: "Okay, let's get started. Tell me about yourself, please. – What? Didn't you read my file?" (108) Every time, she has to come back later to leave them time to read it but the reader never sees when she goes back; maybe, every time, she has a new employee in front of her. This panel is therefore not a surprise as the narrator is sleeping, surrounded by bubbles which are depicted as snakes around her limbs, representing the oppression caused by the Red Cross and the trauma which ensued from those exchanges. Only one of the bubbles is an exception as it seems to be from someone closer to her: the bubble is in Spanish and the person is asking how she is while reminding her that today is the thirty second birthday of Eddie. (109) The person calls him "Eduardito" which suggests that he or she was very close to him.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 109.

This is followed by a flashback about young Eddie fighting with three brothers, (110-113) which will be analyzed in the next chapter. He successfully fought with three boys and was consequently “nicknamed Boliche, Bowling Ball, ‘cause [he] knocked them all down.” (111) The flashback ended with a picture of Eddie as a strong and victorious boy. It appears as to give her strength since she needed to fight for her rights as a victim and therefore “[she] described every painful experience [she] had in dealing with [the Red Cross]” (112) in a letter addressed to the headquarters; the picture suggests that she needs to fight like Boliche.

Then in chapter fifteen, the reader is confronted with a representation of a flashback from March 2002 where she learns from a friend that more body pieces were identified which shattered her previous belief that she “had all of Eddie.” (158) Alissa is surprised and says: “But I have his whole body. It named all his parts on his death certificate,” to which her friend answers: “You mean ‘multiple blunt trauma to head, torso, and extremities?’ Ha! It’s on every death certificate! Even if you just got a fingernail. But maybe you don’t need to worry about any of this. Ask your funeral director.” (158) When she asks the funeral director, “[he] informed [her] that there was indeed an additional small piece of muscle mass. – It wasn’t great news but it was okay.” (159) This flashback occurs when she is with the family of other victims at the Chief Medical Examiner’s Office where an employee apparently explains the procedures of identification. This leads the narrator to think: “He’s talking about people who’ll never receive a body. But that didn’t happen to you.... You jumped.” (159)

3.5 Writing a Graphic Novel, a Possible “Cure” to Trauma

According to Gauthier, “[n]arratives that give voice to the diversity of responses to 9/11, the weak and the strong, the cowardly and the noble, work to reformulate and rebuke simplistic narratives with agendas other than the exposition of the truth [...].”²⁸⁴ By writing their autobiographies, authors such as Alissa Torres add other perspectives and elements to the attacks than the aspects that were already known – for example personal and private perspectives of the terrorist attacks. However, the question whether the graphic novel was “a working through” of Torres’ own trauma can be raised. In an article, she states that “[w]riting for [her] has never been cathartic, because loss is permanent, and [her] grief cuts deep.”²⁸⁵ Nonetheless, her aim was “to transform how 9/11 impacted [her] life. [She] felt less like a helpless victim of 9/11 — someone violently acted upon and later exploited by the media, a

²⁸⁴ Gauthier. *Op. Cit.*, p. 378.

²⁸⁵ Alissa Torres. “9/11 Widow: What I’ve Learned.” *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.

mute and powerless player in a tragedy.”²⁸⁶ Thus, thanks to writing, she “became a subject with a voice, someone who gets to control how her story is told, even if she couldn’t control what happened to her.”²⁸⁷ Consequently, it was not a “catharsis,” which means that it did not cure her from her trauma but it was helpful in that she was seen differently by others.

Lastly, “[i]n the final image, Torres and Sungyoon Choi go some way towards re-appropriating the notion of a happy blue sky [they] lost on that day,”²⁸⁸ viz. they symbolize that some happiness was regained, which implies that the author gets better, even if she is not totally cured. Therefore, even if writing was not a catharsis, the graphic novel seems to have been useful to Torres in helping her to work through her trauma, suggesting that writing this graphic novel was similar to a therapy. It enabled her to reconnect with herself and her husband since the graphic novel mostly addresses Eddie. It is therefore similar to a eulogy as she addresses Eddie in it. The content of the graphic novel is very intimate but she decided to publish it. In a talking cure, the person needs someone to listen to him/her; like a psychologist. In this case, the reader is the one who reads and indirectly listens to this story. Furthermore, it is sometimes easier to confess to a stranger than to someone close. The graphic novel was also a reconnection to what she wants to be in the future as well as to the feeling of being alive since she says on the penultimate page: “Although I was so confused by who I was and how I was supposed to be, I knew so fiercely that I was alive, together with my son, and that it was a beautiful day.” (210) This last sentence is full of hope and suggests that she is ready to start anew for the new life that awaits her and her baby.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ Gauthier. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 378-379.

4. Tensions and contrasts in *American Widow*

Tensions between different spheres can emphasize anxiety and suggest gaps. Analyzing these tensions will shed new light on *American Widow*. Tensions between the private and the public and political spheres will be the main focus of this chapter. Colors and the tension added thanks to them will also be part of the analysis. Finally, this chapter will explore the contrast between real life and its story telling created by the photographs included in *American Widow*. Those tensions will add some complexity and irony²⁸⁹ to the graphic novel as is going to be developed here.

Several tensions and contrasts are present in the graphic novel. In “An Art of Tension,” Charles Hatfield²⁹⁰ explains that “comics can be a complex means of communication”²⁹¹ and that various messages are conveyed through them. He also adds that “they are heterogeneous in form, involving the co-presence and interaction of various codes.”²⁹² According to him, the strength of comics is that they are an art comprised of four types of tension, a characteristic which has to be considered in a comic’s analysis; the different possible readings should be taken into account and compared.²⁹³ The first tension is “code vs code”²⁹⁴ which is the tension between images and words; images are normally transparent and easy to make sense of, while words are more abstract and complex to grasp.²⁹⁵ The second tension is called the “pictographic language”²⁹⁶ which means that words are not an obligation, a panel can be understood without words, i.e. it will be comprehended thanks to the “diagrammatic symbols” (speed or vector lines, and ideograms, for example) enabling a reinforcement of the actions drawn.²⁹⁷ These two tensions were analyzed in the chapter about trauma as in the graphic novel, emotions are conveyed through silent panels or those in which the presence of a few words reinforces the strength of the scene. The third tension “sequence versus surface,”²⁹⁸ refers to the fact that the story is divided into a series of images, “the sequence” that can be unified in “an unbroken

²⁸⁹ Charles Hatfield in Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester. *A Comics Studies Reader*. Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2008, p. 133.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-156.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-138.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 139-144.

surface” and the reader has to deal with this opposition while reading a comic.²⁹⁹ The last tension is the opposition between “text as experience and text as object.”³⁰⁰ For a lot of comics, the distinction between “text per se” and the materiality of the comic is impossible to notice “because they continually invoke said aspects [, design and physical package,] to influence the reader’s participation in meaning-making,”³⁰¹ which means that the “text as experience” cannot easily be distinguished from “the text as object,” even if they are two different concepts.³⁰² Thanks to this theorization, it is now clear that the comic genre involves a plethora of tensions. Those in *American Widow* will be explained and analyzed. In this graphic novel, a tensed relationship is especially present between the intimate memories and the trauma of Alissa and the national trauma of the United States in which enter the political and national concerns linked to the terror attacks.

4.1 Tensions created by Colors

One of the tensions in the graphic novel is created by colors as they often bring a sense of patriotism or remembrance to a scene where the narrator is telling her sorrows. Looking at colors and their absence in *American Widow* is essential because “the shift from black and white to color not only modifies the form of the panels and the page design, but [...] it concerns in the very first place the nature of the panel structure.”³⁰³ This quote underlines the importance of colors in comics and graphic novels as colors can completely change them. That is why analyzing the meaning of their presence is important. What is their role? What is their purpose? Jan Baetens, in his article “From Black and White to Color and Back: What Does it Mean (not) to Use Color?”, emphasizes that having colors or not, is not always the author’s choice.³⁰⁴ Printing in colors is still very expensive, which means that some publishers do not leave the choice to the writers. But for others, who have more budget, printing in colors is not only a possibility for their customers, it is also an obligation.³⁰⁵ Therefore a generalization about colors

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 144-147.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ Jan Baetens. "From Black and White to Color and Back: What Does it Mean (not) to Use Color?" *College Literature* 38.3 (2011): 111-128. Web. 25 Nov. 2016, p. 126.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

should be avoided as some authors cannot decide while others freely choose to print their comics with the tone they want.³⁰⁶

As far as Torres and Choi are concerned, the publishers limited them to have only three colors: black and white and one other color.³⁰⁷ However, it was not too expensive to have only one colored section in the graphic novel and that is why from page 196 to page 210 colors are a little used as they appear only on six different pages. Thanks to that, Torres and Choi were given more opportunities with this section and they were able to convey emotions and meanings that would have been impossible without colors.³⁰⁸ Consequently, the third color they chose, namely blue, and the meaning of the colors in the last section of the comic are the only aspects that can be analyzed. As for the others, money was the reason of the choice to omit them. As explained earlier, the color blue they chose is arguably mellowing, including peacefulness in the graphic narrative and its hard content. Torres and Choi may have chosen this color to add a dreamlike shade to their work. Thanks to it, the graphic novel is pleasant to look at, even if it is still emotionally difficult to read it. Moreover, blue is the color of the sky and a page of sea-foam blue is present both at the beginning and the end of the book. In his review, Gustines interestingly writes about those two blue pages. According to him, the one at the beginning “is just a field of sea-foam blue, evoking the good weather that began that terrifying, profoundly momentous day,” whereas the sea-foam blue at the end of the comic “evok[es] a more peaceful day.”³⁰⁹ In my point of view, the color blue is clearly a metaphor of the sky and it could bear the meaning that Gustines explains but other implied significations are obviously also present. First, it can significantly imply that 9/11 victims have found peace in heaven, which is symbolized by the sky. Second, because the pages are repeated at the beginning and at the end of the graphic novel, it could as well convey that several months after the terror attacks, the peace present before 9/11 was recovered. Nonetheless, this last signification still bears a distinction as at the beginning of *American Widow* two pages of sea-foam blue, including one with two birds, are drawn, whereas only one is present at the end, without birds. While it conveys a similarity between the past and the after 9/11, it emphasizes a distinction, showing that the terror attacks were a turning point for the United States despite some peace recovered in the aftermath.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ Alissa Torres, “Re: Master dissertation about your comic *American Widow*.” *Op. Cit.*, 3 January 2017.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ Gustines. *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

Furthermore, Baetens claims in his article that “it can be stimulating to analyze the use of colors, not as a ‘being,’ but as a ‘becoming’ [...], more specifically as a process between successive or competing types of color [...],”³¹⁰ which means that they should not be studied for their nature but for what they represent in comics, namely their role in them. Regarding the last section of Torres and Choi’s work, several meanings added thanks to colors can be deduced and a new tension is created, as mentioned above. The section with colors lasts from page 196 to the end, on page 210. Colors are however not present on each page and they are mostly used in what appears to be only details.

When comparing Torres’ *American Widow* to Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* and Rehr’s *Tribeca Sunset*, Gauthier claims that “*American Widow* most explicitly highlights the gap between personal grief and the mission of national healing.”³¹¹ 9/11 changed the private lives of many people as well as the national and international perception of American security.³¹² Everyone sensed how anyone could have been involved in such a tragedy and that is why the event has engendered a collective trauma.³¹³ Nevertheless, Gauthier observes: “The belief that we all had an equal share in this tragedy, however, is an assumption that *American Widow* strongly contests,”³¹⁴ which is logical as every experience of 9/11 is different and Alissa Torres is an authentic victim of the terror attacks. He explains that “a head-on collision between world history and personal history”³¹⁵ is present in the comic – i.e. a tension between the political and the personal spheres – and he illustrates this with an example on pages 196 and 197. On the former, world history is represented as Laura Bush’s letter is being read at a baby shower organized for 9/11 widows, whereas on the latter, it is about the personal history of Torres, as it is the representation of Eddie falling from the tower. This is the most obvious example of the tension created between her private issues and the political ones. Interestingly, it is also the first occurrence of colors other than black, white and blue which adds a patriotic meaning here.

³¹⁰ Baetens. *Op. Cit.*, p. 118.

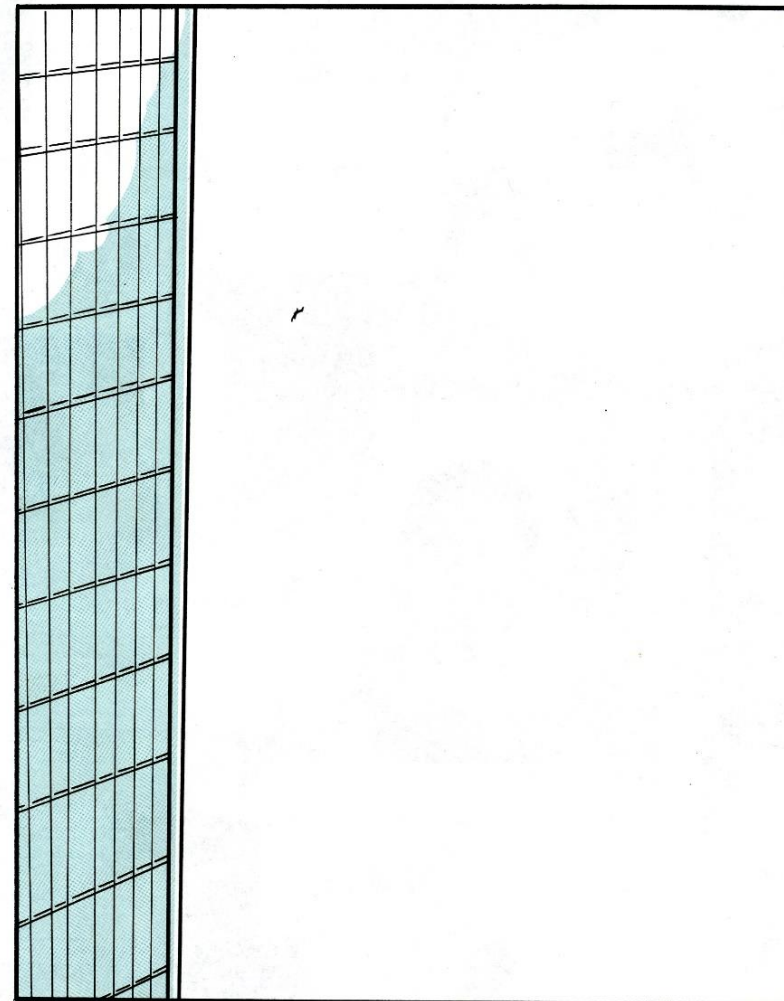
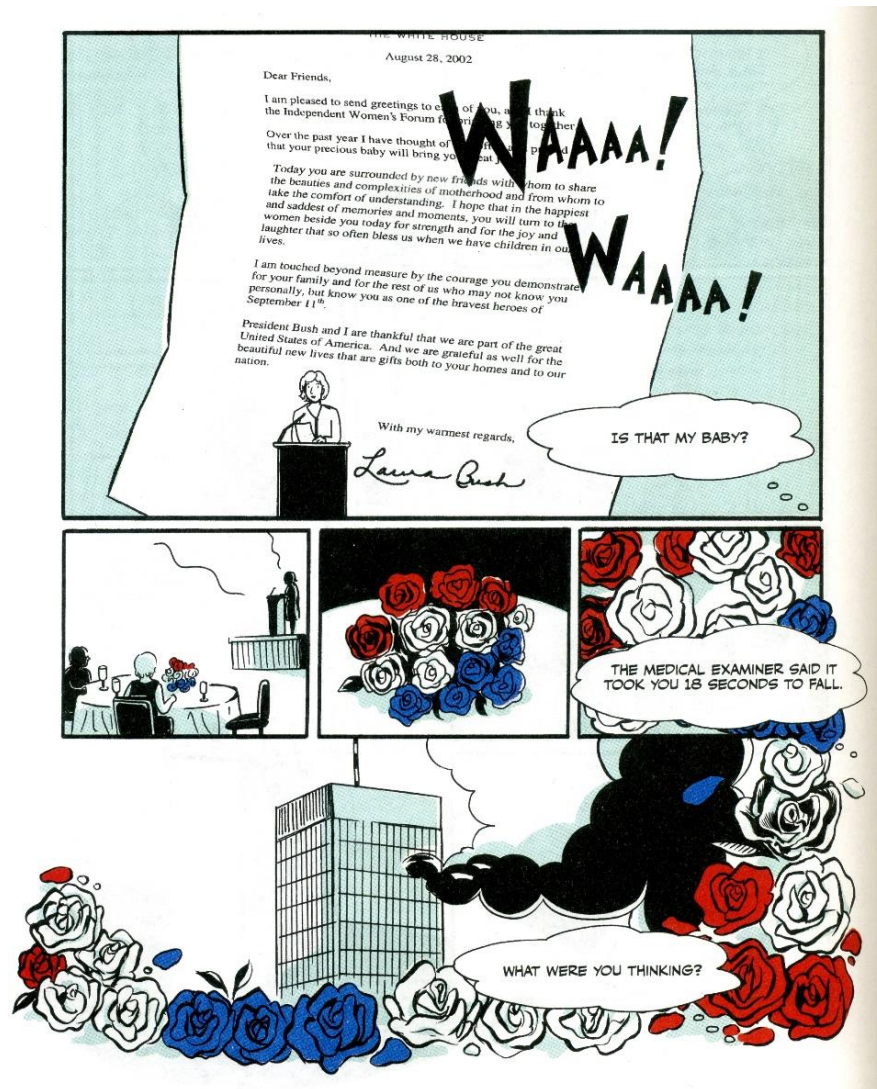
³¹¹ Gauthier. *Op. Cit.*, p. 376.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 377.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 196-197.

However, only two other colors are added in this panel to color the bouquet of flowers on the narrator's table, namely red and royal blue. This scene takes place in chapter eighteen in which the narrator received a check for \$3, 000 from the Independent Women's Forum; she is invited to attend a baby shower in exchange. This event is "organized in honor of women who were pregnant when their husbands were killed on September 11th."³¹⁶ Nonetheless, the media will be there, which is a problem for her. She calls the organizer to refuse the invitation but the woman says: "Oh, no! Please come, and definitely bring your baby! We have so many beautiful gifts to give him. Originally, we were going to have news coverage, but then we changed our minds." (191) That is why Alissa decided to go. Nonetheless, when she arrives with her baby, the place is filled with the press. The host then justifies herself and says: "Welcome, Welcome! Well, we weren't going to have the media, but then we changed our minds." (194) Therefore, the narrator arrives in this 9/11 widows gathering with media coverage where she does not fit. She does not pay attention to the present moment as she is wondering if the baby who is crying is hers, while simultaneously thinking about Eddie dying: "Is that my baby? The medical examiner said it took you 18 seconds to fall. What were you thinking?" (196) This thought is followed by a representation of Eddie as a falling man. Then, photographs of Eddie fill two full pages, showing that she is lost in the past and not paying attention to what is happening in the present time. Afterwards, the reader again faces the narrator's table before she decides to stand up and leave with her baby.

The tensions in this scene at the shower are mostly situated between the two scanned pages above, which are interestingly next to each other in the graphic novel. Two kinds of tensions are here represented as first a tension between past and present is depicted: the present moment at the 9/11 shower and the past that Alissa is recalling. The second tension is between the political and the national spheres, which are mixed up. At the beginning of this contrasted scene, the host arrives to read a letter from Laura Bush, in which private and national interests are already intertwined as the then-First Lady concludes by writing: "President Bush and I [...] are grateful [...] for the beautiful new lives that are gifts both to your homes and to our nation." (196) However, Alissa does not seem to be concentrated on the content of the letter as she hears the cry of a baby making her wonder: "Is that my baby?" (196) which is written in a bubble situated on the letter but it does not hide its content. What is shown here is that her intimate and personal thoughts dominate the political and national aspects as on the panel where the letter is drawn and read, the cry of her baby seems to be dominant because the "Waaaa! Waaaa!" (196)

³¹⁶ Pines. *Op. Cit.*, p. 195.

is materially hiding Laura Bush's speech, which suggests that she hears the baby more than the host who is reading. The onomatopoeia only covers a part of the introduction as well as some words in the first paragraph of the letter's main body which starts with this sentence: "Today you are surrounded by new *friends* with *whom* to share the beauties and complexities of motherhood and from whom to take the comfort of understanding." (196, my emphasis) The two words in italic that are covered by the first W of the baby's cry are "friends" and "whom" – which relates to the word "friends". This can be interpreted as a rejection from the narrator to consider the 9/11 widows as her potential friends from whom she could receive comfort. Then, Alissa's back is depicted and the reader sees that the host is still reading but nothing is written, as if the narrator could not hear her anymore. In other words, because she is lost in her traumatic memories and sorrow, she is unable to concentrate on the present moment filled with political features and interests.

Central to this double page is the colored bouquet of flowers. The story told on this page is important as the colors used are the ones of the American flag. It therefore seems patriotic at first glance as Laura Bush is mentioned along with the presence of the colors of the flag in the flowers. However, as the narrator does not seem to fit in the community of 9/11 widows, it conveys that it is too much and that she cannot bear those patriotic signs at mediatized events anymore. That is why the presence of the colors are overwhelming since the bouquet is becoming increasingly invasive, which suggests that it oppresses her. It conveys how every object can lead you back to memories, i.e. here it leads her back to the tower and the cause of her trauma. The fourth panel is a zoom on the bouquet where a bubble is covering the half of it with thoughts of the narrator remembering what the medical examiner told her about Eddie's death. Once more, the bubble with her thoughts covers the background depicting her present time, which implies that she is dominated by her thoughts about Eddie's death. The last panel of the page does not have a frame; it is replaced by flowers seemingly coming from the bouquet on the previous panel. The flowers are underlying – they do not completely surround the drawing – one of the towers, smoking. The smoke is both black and white and seems to be mixed up with the flowers. Here the narrator wonders what her husband was thinking when he jumped. Finally, the next page is a representation of a tower, without smoke. It appears untouched apart from the fact that Eddie is represented falling from it. (197) The narrator speaks about the tragedy without directly showing very shocking images. However, even if they are only implied, everyone can have them back in mind. On this representation, Eddie's body cannot be mistaken for a bird anymore – contrary to the representation on page 46 which was

previously analyzed – since the v-form is upside-down and the reader can distinguish a head as well as arms and legs; he is falling head first to the ground. Consequently, these two pages show that the narrator is obsessed with her traumatic images, namely Eddie's death as well as the wellbeing of her baby, which prevents her from listening to the political speech at a gathering where she did not want to be in the first place. Nonetheless, the situation is not always similar to this one in the graphic novel as most of the time she is overwhelmed by the political issues, contrary to the situation described here where she has the ability to ignore the political features of the moment in order to concentrate on her private matters. Other tensions between the political and the private concerns are going to be described later on in this chapter. The colors present in the graphic novel will be analyzed as they stress the political features of the scenery by adding a patriotic aspect as previously explained or a need of remembrance as will be developed further in this section. On this two pages, the colors convey something disgusting since they lead her back to her trauma and they erased the beauty of the present moment.

The following occurrence of colors is on page 200 where the patriotic bouquet is again represented in the middle of the narrator's table, being the only colors of the drawing and a continuity of the panels from pages 196 and 197 as she is still thinking about Eddie's death at the same event.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 200.

Then, colors are once more absent until page 207, where yellow, pink and purple flowers are represented floating on the water in Hawaii. Consequently, colors other than black, white and

sea-foam blue are present only when photographs are included or to color flowers symbolizing patriotism or remembrance. This, obviously, bears a meaning. Flowers have several symbols such as peace as well as “natural processes” like “reproduction or death;”³¹⁷ which is linked to 9/11. But each flower has its own meaning. Roses originally symbolize love, passion, honor, sensuality and devotion;³¹⁸ however, each color adds a meaning to the flower. The first illustration of colored flowers is on page 196 where roses are represented in white, red and blue. The flowers were not chosen at random and the fact that they are colored is underlying their patriotic significance as they are colored with the same tone as the American flag. On page 200, those flowers are again present since she is at the shower with the same bouquet on her table and she thinks about Eddie: “You told me: ‘I want to turn 90 beside you,’ but you didn’t. So that’s how I got here. – I am still so mad at you.” (200) Once again, a tension is created between the political setting and her private sorrow.

Contrary to the flowers on the table which were associated with government and politics, the flowers present on page 207 convey more intimate feelings and they are drawn in the context of remembering. The flowers depicted are orchids, symbolizing friendship, joy and revival.³¹⁹ They are tinted in yellow. Then, pink frangipani flowers, which bear several meanings, namely “the strength to withstand tough challenges,” the connection to ghosts and spirits, an “intense love and a lasting bond between two people” and the “immortality and spiritual devotion spread over multiple lifetimes”³²⁰ are also represented.

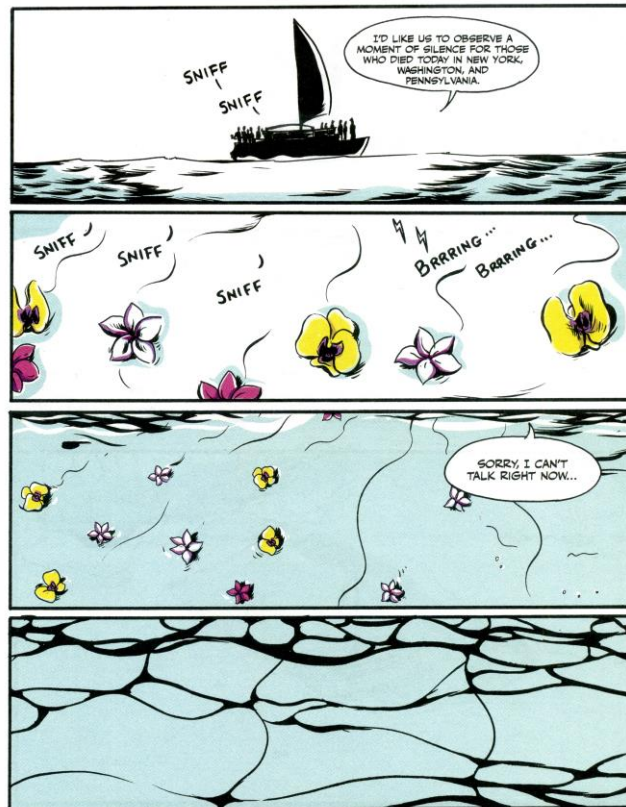
On this page, she is in Hawaii with her son and they are together on a boat, on September 11, 2002. Someone on the boat says: “I’d like us to observe a moment of silence for those who died today in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania,” (207) describing a need for remembrance on this national anniversary. Therefore, another tension is created here as the chosen flowers symbolize the desire to remember and at the same time an eternal connection between her and her husband as well as the want and need to continue to live her life with her son.

³¹⁷ <https://www.reference.com/home-garden/flowers-symbolize-8dc0677d4efd3a8a#>, accessed on April 1, 2017.

³¹⁸ <http://www.significationdesfleurs.com/signification-des-roses/>, accessed on April 1, 2017.

³¹⁹ <http://www.significationdesfleurs.com/orchidee-signification/>, accessed on April 1, 2017.

³²⁰ <http://www.flowermeaning.com/frangipani-flower-meaning/>, accessed on April 1, 2017.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 207.

In addition, the fact that those flowers are colored emphasizes their meanings and symbols as other roses were used previously in the graphic novels without those significances. In other words, they only bear the general meanings of roses (as previously stated: love, passion, honor, sensuality and devotion) without the ones attached to their colors, namely patriotism. Even in black and white the presence of flowers creates some tensions. For example, on page 149, Eddie gives a bouquet of flowers to Alissa for Mother's Day in 2001 which is a gesture conveying love and passion. On the second panel where the narrator thinks: "What would motherhood be like without widowhood?" (149), the petals of her flowers fall to the penultimate panel of this page where a newspaper is represented, surrounded by 9/11 related keywords. The train of thoughts of the narrator leads to this question: "What if they had connected the dots?" (149) and the dots connect to form the contour of a plane, on the fourth and last panel of the page. Here, the petals are a representation of the narrator's nostalgia as well as a contrast between her own grief and her disappointment with the government.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 149.

A last example is illustrated on pages 172 and 173 where she is going to see Eddie's grave but she can never find it on her own in the graveyard. The first represented visit is on December 2001, it is winter, she is lost and a man offers his help. She has a bouquet of roses in her hands and the petals fly to the next page where the scenery is changing from winter to spring. (172-173) The petals fall to a warmer time of the year until a new representation of Alissa, who is again searching for the tomb in the graveyard either in spring or summer. Here the petals serve as a link between the visits of Alissa to Eddie's grave. The narrator is apparently lost in the graveyard but undoubtedly in her life as well and the rose petals lead the reader throughout her progression to overcome her mourning. Consequently, the petals of roses definitely connect the panels and it symbolizes a link between the love and passion of Eddie and Alissa before and after the tragedy. Those petals show the evolution of their love: while on the first panel of page 149 the scene is full of happiness as Eddie is alive and their passion is shared and intense, pages

172 and 173 are filled with sorrow but also with love which is present as the narrator brings roses to her husband who she needs to remember.

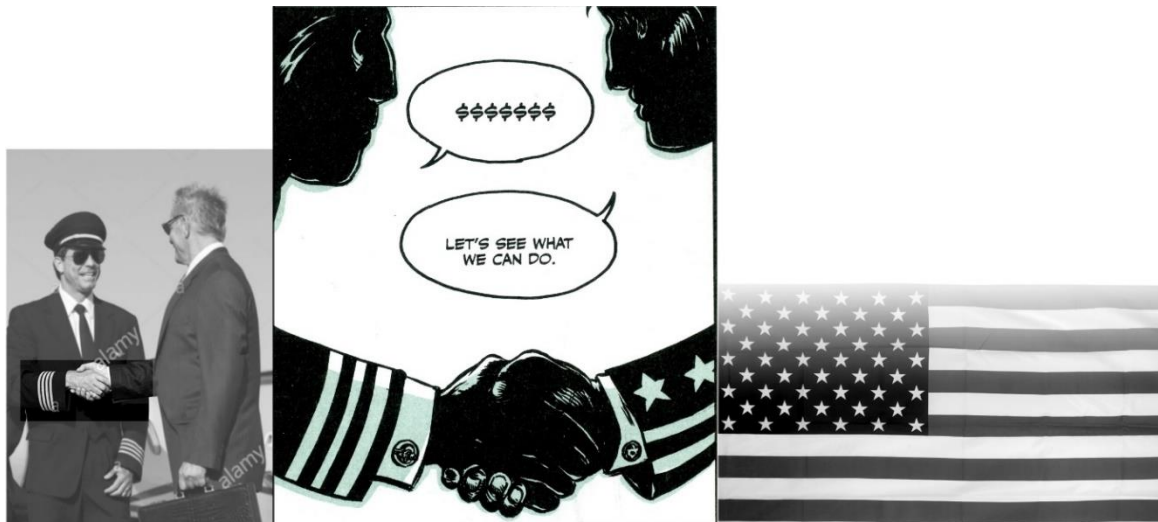
Finally, even when only the three basic colors are used, they sometimes emphasize some scenes or parts of them. An example can be found in the church where Eddie's wake is taking place. It is represented with mostly black and blue, suggesting that the scenery is dark and joyless. White is present only above and in front of the coffin, which could be seen as a spotlight focusing on it or it could be more positively interpreted as a concentration of purity around Eddie's body. By contrast, when the funeral is represented, the scene is almost only white and the presence of sea-foam blue and black only serves to draw shadows. Therefore, it gives life to the scenery. However, the scene is not a joyful one either but it seems more bright because of the light tone which is used here.

4.2 Tensions between the Political and Private Spheres created in the Drawings

9/11 involved both the private and the public in many ways. Torres' *American Widow* tells the sorrow of the author while continuously contrasting them with the national issues of the time. The first tension occurring in the graphic novel without the involvement of colors is at the funeral of Eddie. (73) When the narrator receives the rest of his belongings, she is given an American flag. (143) His burial is a mix between their private life and politics where a song in Spanish is being played. The lyrics are translated in English next to the original ones: "I'm searching for America, and I fear I won't find it. Its traces have become lost amongst the darkness." (143) These lyrics convey that the 9/11 aftermath brought obscurity and darkness. It was so dense that it finally hid America which prevented the people from finding the old one back. This demonstrates that the darkness caused by the attacks was both tragic for the families' victims and for the country as well, as it forever changed the way other countries and Americans themselves perceived the United States.

Further in the comic, the reader discovers the economic issues that the narrator had to face. (128-135) A law was passed in order to grant some money to the families who lost loved ones in the attacks. She explains that it is complex to understand the documents and the procedure to follow in order to submit a claim. A highly interesting representation, where two men are shaking each other's hand is depicted. (129) On the left in the graphic novel's scan, this is the hand of a pilot from American Airlines as they are similar to the ones on the left-hand picture with a real-life pilot. This man is only speaking in dollars to his interlocutor, situated in front

of him, on the right of the panel, which is a representation of Uncle Sam as he has stars on his sleeve. He is saying to the pilot: “Let’s see what we can do.” (129) They are therefore depicted as concluding a pact together, which is a metaphoric drawing of an agreement between American Airlines and the American government in order to avoid losing too much money over the compensation.



<http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/airline-pilot.html>, accessed on May 7, 2017.

Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 129.

<https://www.maison-des-drapeaux.com/drapeau-usa-90-x-150-cm.html>, accessed on May 7, 2017.

Moreover, the narrator explains that she finally understood what the government was doing as she says: “Oh, I get it now. This is about compensating the airlines and protecting them...FROM US!!!” (129-130) The two figures represent two institutions forming a team to protect each other from the victims who could ruin them because of the money they should each receive for their loved ones’ deaths. In the real-life aftermath of 9/11, Mr. Feinberg was designated to represent the government and deal with the Compensation Fund and he “was bound by certain directives. For a family to receive the tax-free money, they had to waive their right to sue or appeal. The airline industry would be safe.”³²¹ In other words, victims’ families had to choose between suing the Airlines or accepting a limited amount of money.

Feinberg is an attorney “specialize[d] in what is dryly called mediation or alternative dispute resolution,”³²² and was in charge of compensating the victims of 9/11. (131) He is depicted in the graphic novel. In the first representation, he seems to be touched by the events but the caption rises some negativity as it is written: “The fund was touted as an act of compassion and kindness, allowing the families to receive a substantial financial award without

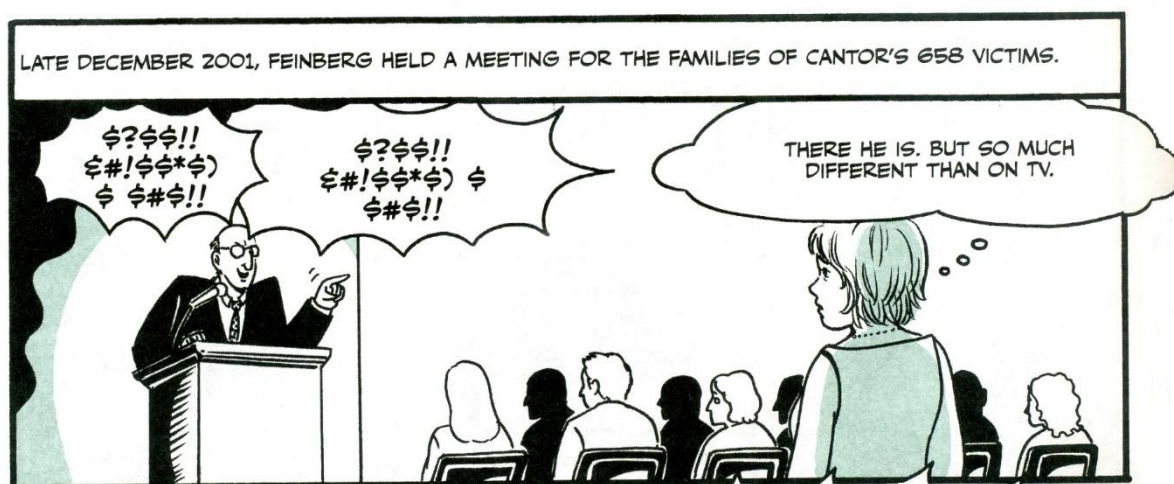
³²¹ Barkan. *Op. Cit.*

³²² *Ibid.*

a lengthy legal battle. It sounded great but you should always look at the fine print when the government starts handing out money.” (131) With this quote, the reader knows that it will not be simple to obtain money from insurance companies. After turning the page, the reader faces a depiction of Feinberg analyzing everyone who is asking to be compensated: “When the statute finally talked about compensating the victims and their families, it described what it should give – and what it would take away.” (132) Feinberg points out an accusing finger at a woman with her two children while saying: “Did you have life insurance? Well, we’ll have to deduce that – and the workers comp and social security death benefits from you and your children. Well actually, for you it’s only a setoff if you don’t remarry.” (132) Then he says to a man: “Your wife certainly worked well beyond her years. So the bad news is that her actual economic value is minimal. But fortunately, since she didn’t have any insurance or other retirement package, your setoffs are minimal.” (132) He addresses another woman by saying: “Your son’s pension also has to be deducted from the award. But seeing here from your paperwork that he often took care of your disabled daughter, I may be able to raise the award based on these special circumstances...” (132) Feinberg therefore seems to find excuses in order to avoid giving too much money to the victims’ family. In terms of depiction, he is represented as saying that while either pointing an accusing finger like it was the fault of the people to whom he refuses the money or with an innocent face as if he wants to show that he is not responsible for their misfortune. At the center of this page, a barrel filled with bank notes is represented with this inscription: “Compensation for the life of 9/11 victim **Eddie Torres** for his economic value for your pain and suffering.” (132, bold in original) The narrator seems to mix the story of other victims with her own, since the words of Feinberg to the people who lost someone in the attacks are surrounding the representation of Eddie’s compensation, suggesting that Alissa is going through the same troubles as other victims regarding the money she will be granted for her husband’s death. This panel consequently depicts a struggle between Feinberg embodying the emotionless government and the overwhelmed victims of the terror attack. Here both spheres are struggling in order to avoid being the one who will lose the most in this new financial battle.

Following this depiction of victims’ struggles, the narrator addresses her deceased husband: “I’m so confused. What is your ‘economic value,’ Eddie? Do I have ‘extraordinary individual circumstances?’ What kind of person is Feinberg? What kind of person takes this kind of a job?” (133) Feinberg is not positively described by the author, which is not surprising as he was highly contested. In other words, Americans admired or despised him: “To his admirers, Mr. Feinberg is a little like the titan Atlas holding up the planet. To his detractors, he is high-handed

and patrician, a press-savvy enabler for flush corporations to dodge costly lawsuits.”³²³ Therefore, this comes as no surprise that Torres seems to despise him considering that this man judged the economic value of her dead husband and decided how much money she was going to receive in compensation. She will meet him later on as he “held a meeting for the families of Cantor’s 658 victims.” (134)



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 134.

His speech at the meeting is interspersed with dollar signs, which highlights his obsession and only aim, namely money. After this meeting, Alissa is portrayed in bed thinking: “One thing’s become clear: if I don’t get my act together we could get **screwed**.” (134) The most surprising is but to come as Feinberg is depicted giving a speech, in which he says how much each family is going to receive. Page 135 presents figure in an economic chart, which “he’d use to calculate [their] loved one’s value.” (135) Alissa says: “The chart projected our loved ones as failures-people who rarely earned.” (135) In this chapter, the narrator is overtaken by the economic issues she has to face, which intermingle with her private life and the situation she is experiencing because of her husband’s tragic death.

Another illustration of the tensions between the private and the political sphere is conveyed in the what-ifs haunting the author, which were already analyzed in the previous chapter. Some of them are personal since they relate to Eddie such as “What if you had started work a week later?” (150) whereas some are political, for example: “What if Bush had read that president’s daily brief?” (150) or “What if, at the very least, the fire escapes had been built to code?” (151) However, the second what-if, namely “What if they had deported you long ago?” (150) can be

³²³ *Ibid.*

interpreted as being a mix of both spheres as here, the narrator raises a failure of the administration to deal with migrant illegally staying on the American soil. This was in favor of Eddie as he managed to stay in the United States before getting married although it was against the law – he illegally arrived in the United States, had a fake social security number (150) and never received his green card because his file was lost. (64) Nonetheless, it shows that the administration is flawed which is a negative aspect related to the political field. This kind of carelessness was sometimes a real problem in the aftermath of 9/11 as Eric Lipton states in an article he published in *The New York Times*:

Some of the toughest cases, not surprisingly, have concerned the victims who had the lowest profiles and stations in life, like illegal immigrants who worked in cafeterias, or one 77-year-old Bronx man who for years had shined shoes at a financial-services firm at the top of one of the towers. His name was added to the list only after survivors who were shown his photograph confirmed that he had been there that day.³²⁴

In other words, the private issues of migrants struggling to receive a green card in order to be a legal citizen were not only a personal matter but a national one as well since it complexified the identification of victims and the creation of a list with all the dead's names.

Further in the graphic novel, the narrator is walking with her baby in a stroller, she has a neutral expression on her face and the baby seems calm; the scene takes place in July 2002. (171) In this scene, several newspapers are falling down on her. On the top of the page, four small newspapers are depicted and nothing can be seen on them, except for a black one which bears an apparent representation of a tower. Then three bigger newspapers are represented. The first one on the left is intertwined with a banner where one can read: "LMDC – Lower Manhattan Development Corporation," (171) which "was created in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 by then-Governor Pataki and then-Mayor Giuliani to help plan and coordinate the rebuilding and revitalization of Lower Manhattan, defined as everything on or south of Houston Street."³²⁵ This newspaper runs "Innovative Design Study" as title and the following one "LMDC to build New World – New WTC." (171) The last one, on the right, has the same size as the narrator. She covers a part of the front page but the reader can still distinguish that the title is "More plans." (171) As for the presence of the newspapers, it conveys, that it is overwhelming, which

³²⁴ Eric Lipton. "Struggle to Tally all 9/11 Dead by Anniversary." *The New York Times* (2002). Web. 5 May 2017.

³²⁵ "Lower Manhattan Development Corporation." *Renewnyc.com*. 2017. Web. 4 May 2017.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 171.

is problematic for Alissa because the newspapers not only fill the whole scenery of the page but the last one is as big as her. To my mind, it suggests that she feels threatened by the media as their size is not of a normal newspaper. Moreover, as they are falling, it is a metaphor that she is swamped with those plans to rebuild Lower Manhattan as they probably only talked about that in the media at the time. However, she is simultaneously walking straight ahead, which shows that, even if the political issues ensuing from the terror attacks were still present and that the national media cover the project to rebuild Lower Manhattan, she goes on with her life. To state it differently, she seems to have found a balance between her private life that she has to rebuild and the political and national matters that continuously besiege her.

Nonetheless, her grief is not over yet and imbalance regarding some events is still present as she experiences overwhelming feelings at the sight of the countdown until the first 9/11 anniversary, (184) for example. She is depicted as walking in the street with her baby, which is similar to the panel analyzed above. It again implies that she wants to move forward and avoid reliving her past trauma. The panel where she is walking covers the whole page but is interrupted in the middle by a banner which shows the countdown: “Just 21 more days.” (184) This sentence is also written on each TV screen which are drawn on the top of the page. Therefore, the panel can be perceived as a drawing cut in three, even if no real frame is present. On the first part of the drawing, the eighteen TV screens display the same picture: a burning tower and another one untouched. It is probably a repeat showing of the program that were broadcasted on September 11, 2001; the only difference being that, this time, a banner counting down the day until September 11, 2002 is added at the bottom of the screen. Alissa is drawn in bed in the middle of those TV screens, thinking: “It wasn’t you. You’d never call it a valise.”³²⁶ She is thinking that following a meeting with a psychic who was supposed to create a contact between her and Eddie by telling her what her husband wanted to say to her. However, it did not work as she could not recognize him in the words he supposedly said to the psychic.³²⁷ Once more, her private concerns – was it Eddie who speaks through the psychic? – and the national aspect – 21 more days until the anniversary – are intertwined to convey an imbalance and a tension between those two spheres. The last part of the drawing picturing her on the street clearly shows the tension created between her feelings and the atmosphere of expectation that everyone should feel in anticipation of the anniversary. She is depicted as thinking: “We’ve gotta get out of here!”³²⁸ while walking in front of a radio store where “United we stand” is written on a banner. Her only desire is to flee from New York which is in clear contradiction to the sentence.

Moreover, a group of American is following her, taking pictures around them and carrying some American flags. This group of American people celebrating the anniversary embodies patriotism in this panel, conveying that a patriotic feeling was prevailing around the anniversary as numerous shops were selling gadgets dedicated to the terror attacks. Spiegelman also mentions that in his comic book and suggests that he was shocked by this spreading of 9/11 designed merchandise when he writes: “I can still **visibly** remember the horrors of Ground Zero

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-179 and p. 184.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

on September 11... 2002! I was an **eyewitness** to the bombardment of kitsch on sale that day... and I almost became a participant.”³²⁹



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 184.

The count down and the turmoil around the anniversary seemed to be exciting for the inhabitants but they were shocking for the victims' families who were still grieving. Different types of countdowns existed at the time. Some were in the streets like the one which is depicted in the graphic novel but one was also present at the Pentagon where “[a] huge illuminated countdown clock on the construction site display[ed] in bright red numbers the time remaining until 9:38 a.m. on Sept. 11, 2002, the completion goal for the Phoenix Project and anniversary of the attack.”³³⁰ This project aimed at rebuilding the part of the Pentagon that had been destroyed during the terror attacks of September 11; it was “named for the mythological bird

³²⁹ Spiegelman. *Op. Cit.*, p. 10 (bold in original).

³³⁰ Briana B. Picc. "24/7 at Pentagon Fixing 9/11." *Chicago Tribune* (2002). Web. 4 May 2017.

that rises from its own ashes.”³³¹ This countdown was, consequently, used to motivate the workers who had to repair the buildings in time for the anniversary. It was a different motivation than the other ones – such as the banner pictured in the graphic novel – which were aimed to show everyone that the anniversary, and therefore the time to remember the event, was coming.

Writing about the first death anniversary, a widow who lost her husband because of cancer mentions on her blog her own count of days before the first anniversary of her husband’s death. It is interesting even if it is not linked to 9/11 as she has a countdown in mind anyway which she explains as follows: “Time keeps marching on — relentlessly. Passed nine months, and it’s halfway to ten months. I feel like I am in a Space Shuttle launch countdown sequence. Inevitable, inescapable, unavoidable, no turning back.”³³² This last quote raises an interesting question: is a countdown always present when reaching the date of the anniversary of someone’s death? The fact is that a year after the death of a loved one, “[the aggrieved person has] endured many of the difficult ‘firsts’ that grievers dread — first birthdays, holidays, and school events.”³³³ Different ways to deal with the death anniversary of a loved one are possible:

On the one hand, survivors often are amazed that so much time has passed since the death. Four seasons weathered; the holiday periods endured. It seems impossible that they have borne the pain for a full twelve months. On the other hand, it may seem that time has not moved at all. Emotions and memories seem fresh. The news of the death and the ensuing days of confusion and painful decision making seem like only yesterday. With this perspective, comes a fear that little recovery has taken place at all.³³⁴

This quote highlights the fact that every mourning is particular and that no generalization is possible.

Besides the possible differences in the reactions of grievers, another distinction will also be present whether it is a private anniversary or a national commemoration which is taking place. For the latter, the aim of such an anniversary is “to remember those who’ve died in wars and conflicts, or to mark the passing of time since an event like September 11th 2001 [...]. They are important for communities to come together and remember events that have had a huge collective impact on the community, and have shaped its future.”³³⁵ Therefore, the reaction of the narrator on the page with the countdown clearly creates a tension between her private issues and the national ones as she does not perceive the anniversary in the same way as those who

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² Jamie Greenebaum. "Countdown to the First Anniversary of my Husband’s Death." Huffpost. 2017. Web. 4 May 2017.

³³³ Christy Heitger-Ewing. "Surviving the First Year of Grief." Huffpost. 2014. Web. 4 May 2017.

³³⁴ Hoag CARES Program. *Celebrating the Life of your Loved One*. 2nd ed. Hoag, 2013. Web. 4 May 2017.

³³⁵ "The Importance of Marking Anniversaries." *The awarenesscenter*. 2017. Web. 4 May 2017.

were not deeply emotionally involved in the terrorist attacks. Because of her situation, she cannot understand the excitement at the approach of the anniversary and she dreads this upcoming period. Moreover, Alissa rejects the national commemoration as she flew away from New York with her son in order to go back to a place where she was happy with Eddie for their last holidays together. She has her own way of remembrance, which is entirely different from the national one. As Candice Coleman states, “[o]n the anniversary of the death, you might honor – and grieve – for your loved one by baking her favorite dessert, sharing stories about her or playing her favorite music to acknowledge her influence and her impact on your life,”³³⁶ and in the graphic novel, the narrator honors her husband by going on holiday with their son in Hawaii.

Consequently, a striking difference exists between a commemoration and the anniversary of a loved one’s death. In the graphic novel, the narrator is remembering her husband and her inner desire seems not to commemorate the terror attacks but only the sole victim who matters deeply to her, namely her husband. By contrast, the commemoration organized by the states surrounds her and she feels oppressed and not – or at least less – concerned by it. Therefore, a tension is created between her private desire to remember her husband and the political commemoration which filled the city.

4.3 Tensions created by Photographs included in the Graphic Novel

A last tension is present in the comic as the presence of photographs creates a tension between the narrator’s real life and her story telling. On the one hand, photographs can be useful, as Nancy Pedri states, because “[i]nstead of corroborating the memoir’s truth claims, the inclusion of photographs in graphic memoir can very well draw attention to the divide between real life experiences and the telling of those real life experiences.”³³⁷ This tension participates in clarifying the ambiguous status of the graphic novel created by the participation of an author and an illustrator to its realization. Moreover, as Torres stated herself: “I gave [Choi] my script that had artistic directions that I put together, envisioning myBook [*sic*], but then as an artist she interpreted my directions and took it to a whole different place.”³³⁸ Thanks to “the reproduction of photography in graphic memoir [...] a critical distance between the ‘real’

³³⁶ Candice Coleman. "How to Cope with the Anniversary of a Loved one's Death." (2010). Web. 6 May 2017.

³³⁷ Nancy Pedri. "Cartooning Ex-Posing Photography in Graphic Memoir." *Literature & Aesthetic* 22.2 (2012). Web. 30 Mar. 2017, p. 252.

³³⁸ Alissa Torres. *Op. Cit.*, January 3, 2017. E-mail.

subject and the cartoon version of that subject”³³⁹ is emphasized and “the perception of self and the representations it gives rise to are actually more truthful (and, thus, more real) than the extradiegetic, real self pictured in the photographic image.”³⁴⁰

On the other hand, a difference exists between the perception of drawings and photographs because “[t]he cartoon image does not hide, or attempt to hide, the hand of its maker as the photographic image does.”³⁴¹ Or in other words, in comics, the images are abstract and have a “handcrafted quality,”³⁴² while photographs are a “transfer” of reality.³⁴³ It therefore adds some reality in this ambiguous autobiographical comic since the photographs act as proof that the story is about real people. Some scans show that Eddie worked at the Cantor Fitzgerald as he has a pass to go there, his identity is also proved thanks to his identity card showed on pages 198-199 and the narrator/author is represented at the end with their son. This juxtaposition adds some tragedy to the story, since the reader is faced with a real-life representation of the characters of the book who survived the terror attack. However, the ambiguity of the graphic novel’s status is, in my point of view, still present as photographs are easily modified and a story is often romanticized. Furthermore, even if we want to be truthful, it is difficult because human’s memories are always idealized and sugar-coated. In other words, “memory oscillates between remembering and forgetting and is therefore subject to assimilation, appropriation, and even distortion.”³⁴⁴ Pedri further asserts “that the photographs reproduced in comics have a narrative, story-based (and not a referential, reality-based) function that blurs boundaries separating the documentary and the aesthetic.”³⁴⁵ Moreover, she establishes that the presence of a photograph can “announc[e] a break in the narrative as disrupting the narrative’s flow so to encourage readers to engage actively in its reading.”³⁴⁶ In this analysis of *American Widow*, family photographs appear three times and every time, it marks a turning point in her grief since it gives her strength to act and bounce back as will now be developed.

The first occurrence of a photograph follows a flashback which recounts how ten-year-old Eddie, in 1979, fought with a boy who brought his two brothers to defend him after having lost

³³⁹ Pedri. *Op. Cit.*, p. 265.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

³⁴¹ Nancy Pedri. "Thinking about Photography in Comics." *Image & Narrative* 16.2 (2015). Web. 30 Mar. 2017, p. 7.

³⁴² Pedri. "Cartooning," *Op. Cit.*, p. 248.

³⁴³ Pedri. "Thinking," *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

³⁴⁴ Bragard, Dony, and Rosenberg. *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

³⁴⁵ Pedri. "Thinking," *Op. Cit.*, p. 8.

³⁴⁶ Nancy Pedri. "Empty Photographic Frames." *Image & Narrative* 15.2 (2014): 60-76. Web. 30 Mar. 2017, p. 65.

the battle. (110-111) However, Eddie managed to fight with the three brothers and “[a]fter that victory, the kids nicknamed [him] Boliche, Bowling Ball, ‘cause [he] knocked them all down.” (111) This story is told because the narrator explains her combat with the Red Cross and she says: “I’m not you, **Boliche**, but I’ll always try my best to stand up for our family.” (112, emphasis in original) She then details how she managed to finally receive the family gift, the money she was to receive from the Red Cross, three months after her first request. On the page following this story, a photograph of ten-year-old Eddie is present, as to give her strength for the fight she must engage in. This marks a turning point as the narrator needed to send “many certified letters” to “maneuver[r] through [the Red Cross’s] intricate systems of 9/11 assistance.” (112) The photograph appears after a scan of the first letter she sent. However, from this moment on, the situation changes as she knows how to proceed to receive her money.

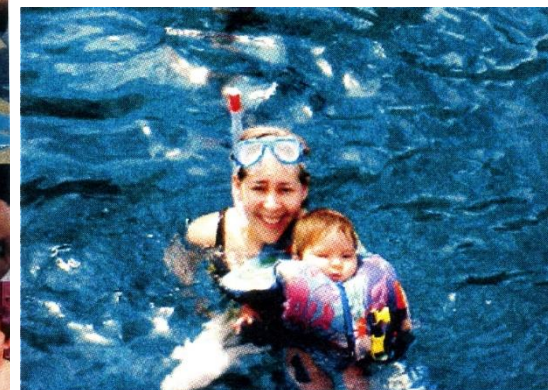


Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 113.

The second occurrence of photographs in the comic clearly conveys a tension between the real life of Eddie and the story telling as the photographs, covering two pages, interrupt the narrator’s train of thoughts when she is thinking about Eddie’s death and his jump from the tower at the 9/11 shower. The photographs seem to be a summary of her husband’s life as pictures of him at several ages are also present as his driver license, his permanent resident card, his ID, his video club membership card, his entry pass to the World Trade Center and some business cards, just to name a few. On those pictures, the reader discovers the real physical appearance of Eddie, the character becoming a real-life human being with a human face and not a drawn one anymore. Intensity is given to the story since the reader now knows the physical appearance of Eddie in addition to his life’s story. A turning point is also present here as the narrator took her son to flee away from the cameras at the 9/11 event and shortly after, away from New York during the first anniversary.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 198-199.



Torres and Choi. *Op. Cit.*, p. 210.

The numerous photographs of Eddie resemble a memorial that Torres would have created for her husband as his whole life is represented through the two pages filled with photographs. This memorial echoes the collective memorial since it is constituted with pictures showing important features of the dead person, namely his origins, his childhood, his military past, some of his birthdays, his travel and more generally the passing of time. Every picture seems to represent something positive about Eddie, which is normal since pictures at a memorial will not show negative aspects of the dead person; the family will try to keep only the good memories in mind. Those photographs emphasize the feature of this graphic novel being a eulogy to Eddie, since here, it is a memorial dedicated to him. Torres is haunted by her husband which is shown throughout the graphic novel. The presence of those numerous photographs is a metaphor to all the hallucinations that the author/narrator could have had in the aftermath of the attack because of her trauma, i.e. visions of her husband and memories of him recalled constantly during the day.

The third and last occurrence of a photograph is on the last page, where the reader can see the author and her infant son. This picture was taken on September 2002, when they were in Hawaii to spend a holiday away from New York on the first anniversary of the attacks. This final photograph on the penultimate page of the narrative emerges as a turning point as one year has passed since the tragic events and the narrator explains that “[she] knew fiercely that [she] was alive, together with [her] son, and that it was a beautiful day.” (210) Being the last word of the graphic narrative, this positive thought conveys a feeling of regained happiness and a desire for the narrator to live and enjoy her new motherhood. Moreover, the fact that it is situated on the last page clearly states the ending of the graphic novel, of the year following 9/11 and of her profound despair. It suggests the beginning of a new life, her enjoyment of motherhood and a pain eased thanks to the narration of her trauma. The storytelling has a particular structure since it tells the whole year of Alissa Torres after her husband’s death and it ends in September 2002, as if to complete a circle which would convey that she needed a year to be able to be happy again. It suggests that this trip with her son ends the most difficult part of her mourning and that now, she is ready to try to be happy again.

Finally, Pedri states “that when included in graphic memoir one would expect photographs to provide a more factual, accurate rendition of the author’s self than the crafted cartoon images they work alongside of.”³⁴⁷ In *American Widow* this is true for Eddie and Alissa as they are

³⁴⁷ Pedri. “Cartooning,” *Op. Cit.*, p. 251.

discovered alongside the story and when the readers become familiarized with the graphic characters and their lives, they are faced with real-life representations of those two human beings. For Eddie, the readers need to wait until page 113 to see his first photograph but he is only a child. Then he appears again on pages 198-199 as an adult in numerous colored photographs and here the reader discovers his physical appearance, when the narrator has almost finished her story and that Eddie has already been represented as a falling man. As for the narrator/author, she appears on the penultimate page of the comic, namely on page 210, holding her baby son in a colored photograph as well. Consequently, the reader discovers the appearance of the narrator at the end of the story which enables him/her to imagine Alissa's physical appearance throughout the whole graphic novel. It suggests that the author and the illustrator wanted to leave some space for the imagination of the reader, even if at the end, they wanted to show the real-life faces of Torres and her baby.

Finally, the tensions depicted in the graphic novel are important. Of course, their interpretation is personal, as is the whole analysis presented in this master dissertation. In this sense, Paul J. Galvin writes in his article "Ashes in the Gutter: 9/11 and the Serialization of Memory in DC Comics' *Human Target*" that

The gutter's relative ambiguity is a reminder of the utility and importance of subjective remembering: we won't recollect or retrospectively interpret the events of 9/11 in the same way, nor will there be agreement as to the ultimate and proximate causes of this tragedy, but this plurality of interpretation must be understood as critically productive.³⁴⁸

The gutters "pla[y] host to much of the magic and mystery that are at the very heart of comics" as two panels are always separated by a gutter – something that creates a gap between them and an ellipsis in the course of the story telling – the reader therefore needs "to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality."³⁴⁹ Therefore Galvin's quote draws an interesting link between the gutter in comics and the interpretation of the events of September 11 as filling it is personal as well as the interpretation of 9/11.

Comics and graphic novels are very often characterized by gutters and they can convey many of the tensions that an event like 9/11 triggers. The graphic artist manages to use this literary genre and the gutters to convey the issues that Alissa Torres went through as well as the obstacles. Some gutters need to be accepted because they cannot always be filled such as on

³⁴⁸ Paul J. Gavin. "Ashes in the Gutter: 9/11 and the Serialization of Memory in DC Comics' *Human Target*." *American Periodicals* 17.2 (2007): 208-227. Web. 16 Oct. 2016, p. 224.

³⁴⁹ McCloud. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 66-67.

pages 196-197 where a gutter is present between Alissa at the shower and her thinking about her husband. This gutter between the political and the private sphere creates a tension and cannot be filled as the gutter is created between the environment of the narrator and what she is thinking. Whether it is for gutters in graphic novels or the interpretation of the terror attacks of September 11, gaps will need to be filled in a personal way and this subjectivity is essential because everyone has his own remembrance of a similar event, as Galvin explains in his quote. The author/narrator seems to be better at the end of the graphic novel since the reader sees a joyful picture of her and her baby, which implies that she succeeded in filling the gap by creating this graphic novel and its gutters.

Conclusion

Trying to heal the wounds caused by trauma is necessary after terrorist attacks even if it is impossible. As acts of terrorism multiply nowadays, an increasing number of victims need to deal with those difficult times. Each terrorist attack is different as well as each victim, which implies that every response to it differs as well. Due to the recurrence of terrorist attacks, citizens have increasingly indicated the wish to express trauma in public. Some victims need to write as Torres did, while others use different artistic expressions. Dr. Bessel van der Kolk wrote a book entitled *Psychological Trauma*. In an interview in which he talks about his book he explains:

This research needs much more work, but it opens up new perspectives on how actions that involve noticing and befriending the sensations in our bodies can produce profound changes in both mind and brain that can lead to healing from trauma. When we understand these things about the brain, how it works, we learn more about how to adjust our treatments.³⁵⁰

Humor is also helpful as it is another form of expression of trauma. An example can be the famous comedian GuiHome, a Belgian humorist who creates videos that he posts on Facebook. After the terrorist attacks in Brussels on May 22, 2016, he posted a video which has been seen fourteen million times. In this video in which he speaks to his mother, he explains to her that he has to go to school even if she wants him to stay at home in order to be safe. For him, the most important thing after a terrorist attack is to go in the streets and avoid staying inside. He criticizes the jihadists and then expresses his view about Belgian humor when he says: “Bon, après Maman, on a une arme beaucoup plus puissante que leurs kalachnikovs. On a l’humour Maman! Et l’humour belge est indestructible. [...] Le savoir est une arme.”^{351,352} Humor can therefore help the victims of an attack to regain hope and stay united. Being together was also often part of the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks as Kaplan claims, when writing about the days following the events: “We were in this together,”³⁵³ while Spiegelman writes “Nothin’ like the end of the world to help bring folks together.”³⁵⁴

³⁵⁰ Bessel van der Kolk. “Bessel Van Der Kolk on Trauma, Development and Healing.” 2014. Web.

³⁵¹ My translation: “Well, Mom, we have a weapon far more powerful than their Kalachnikovs. We have humor Mom! And Belgian humor is indestructible. [...] Knowledge is power.”

³⁵² GuiHome. *Les Attentats de Bruxelles*. #Noirjaunerouge. 2016. Web. 20 June 2017, 1:18.

³⁵³ Kaplan. *Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

³⁵⁴ Spiegelman. *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

Other artistic responses exist too, such as music. Recently, London and Manchester were subjected to new attacks. What was remarkable was Ariana Grande's reaction who experienced a suicide bombing at the end of the concert she was performing in Manchester in May 2017.³⁵⁵ She decided to organize a concert two weeks after the terror attacks in the same arena to support the families of the victims. This was called *One Love Manchester* and thanks to it she raised several millions for the victims' families.³⁵⁶ 50,000 people attended the show of Ariana Grande as well as other guest stars. This concert was meaningful as people shared love and showed that it will always prevail over hate.

Writing a graphic novel is not the only therapeutic approach that victims can choose to overcome their trauma. Since *Maus* published by Spiegelman in 1986, however, it seems to be an evolving genre which is increasingly used to create autobiographies about traumatic events.³⁵⁷ Hilary Gray sums up this evolution when she writes that "[s]ince the mid-80s, graphic novels have become more and more popular. They now cover every genre, from non-fiction to classical literature to stories about robots; they can appeal to every demographic; and they are wonderful tools for any classroom."³⁵⁸ Moreover, this genre creates some possibilities for mourning and empathy as it combines both the visual and the text while simultaneously creating some tensions between the two. Text and images are, in other words, both complementary and opposite as was shown in the dissertation, since they convey the ambivalent feelings of the victims. Because this genre is increasingly used to represent traumatic events, it includes some intimacy as the content is private and highly personal. In *American Widow*, the reader is not directly addressed as it is similar to a letter to Eddie. Therefore, the content is personal as she recalls memories throughout the writing. The reader is situated in the middle of this monologue as s/he reads the words and sees the images that Alissa addresses to Eddie. The reader is the first and direct witness to Alissa's unending trauma included in the graphic novel. S/he also witnesses her mourning and her desire to deal with her grief in order to be able to become a good mother to her newborn.

Furthermore, the genre of graphic novels is filled with possibilities to create an intermediality work. As was developed in this dissertation, photographs can be used in graphic novels. "Instead of corroborating the memoir's truth claims, the inclusion of photographs in graphic

³⁵⁵ Vikram Dodd et al. "At Least 22 Killed, 59 Injured in Suicide Attack at Manchester Arena." *The Guardian* (2017). Web. 19 June 2017.

³⁵⁶ Spencer Kornhaber. "Ariana Grande Returns to Manchester, with Allies." *The Atlantic* (2017). Web. 19 June 2017.

³⁵⁷ Art Spiegelman. *Maus*. Pantheon Books, 1986. Print.

³⁵⁸ Hilary Gray. "Graphic Novels in the Classroom." *Courseweb.ischool.illinois.edu*. 2017. Web. 8 July 2017.

memoir can very well draw attention to the divide between real life experiences and the telling of those real life experiences,”³⁵⁹ which implies that the author wants the reader to keep in mind that the storytelling is biased as an autobiography will always be slightly different than reality. Then, this dissertation has shown that several aspects enable the author to show trauma such as the repetitions present in *American Widow* – i.e. the repetitions of the black panels and Eddie as a ghost, which punctuate the story. Those representations of trauma are a visual echo of the author being traumatized and haunted by her husband. Afterwards the colors are also a feature which creates a great potential for graphic novels and comics as they enable the author and illustrator to completely change a panel thanks to the addition or suppression of colors – as long as the publisher agrees in terms of money. This genre is consequently extremely open as it mixes text and images while enabling the author and the illustrator to add colors, photographs, repetitions and flashbacks among others, if they want to. They offer a great potential for development and originality. Mourning is everywhere nowadays. However, the polyphony present in comics and graphic novels enables the authors of the genre to multiply the standpoints, the tones, the irony and the ambivalence of the representations of trauma. Furthermore, as trauma is increasingly transmitted by and associated to the visual, it seems logical that the responses should be visual as well.

In the future, research should be carried about other graphic novels representing 9/11 trauma or any other terrorist attacks. Some comics and graphic novels that were used to generalize the representations of 9/11 at the beginning of this dissertation have not been extensively studied so far. Moreover, as we are entering a more chronic era of terrorism, the graphic novels genre is adapting itself and it increasingly tries to address the causes and to understand the political side of terrorist attacks in general. This point of view totally differs from the one present in *American Widow*, which was analyzed in this master dissertation, since here it was the point of view of a victim. In the future, some research should be carried out in order to compare the American tradition, which is the one of victimhood such as in *American Widow*, to the European point of view which tends to concentrate on the political implications while trying to understand them. Two graphic novels are a good example of that, namely *11 Septembre, L'Amérique d'après*, which was briefly described in the theorization section as well as *13/11: Reconstitution d'un attentat, Paris 13 novembre 2015*. This last graphic novel was created by a French author and is a reconstruction of the attacks that took place in Paris in November 2015. It is factual

³⁵⁹ Nancy Pedri. "Cartooning," *Op. Cit.*, p. 252.

and details about the jihadists and their plans are ubiquitous. It explains as well the political causes of those attacks.³⁶⁰ As terrorist attacks multiply, comics and graphic novels about the trauma they cause are more numerous, which means that new material will be available in the coming years. However, a difference between several traditions such as the American and the European one will always exist, which implies that literary work devoted to express and represent trauma in both cultures should be compared.

³⁶⁰ Anne Giudicelli and Luc Brahy. *13/11 Reconstitution d'un Attentat. Paris, 13 Novembre 2015*. 1st ed. Paris: Editions Delcourt, 2016. Print.

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