



Universiteit Utrecht

DRAWINGS THAT SPEAK

MORE THAN WORDS

A STUDY ON DIGITAL COMICS JOURNALISM



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Abstract

This thesis investigates the implications that the increasing popularization of new media formats such as digital comics have on traditional journalism in terms of reader involvement and the reproduction of inequality. The study provides a historical overview that contextualizes the connection between journalism and comics. This background explains the characteristics of digital comic journalism by using a postmodern approach that sustains that new media is a reinvention of past media formats. The study argues that digital comics are a good medium to report on hard-news because the information presented can be contextualized with drawings and appealing tools such as videos and animations. However, the research explores the risks of oversimplifying serious topics in order to attract the mainstream audience. The study claims that the popularization of converging media formats is challenging the role of journalists who are asked to carry out more tasks than ever before in order to build rich multimedia features. As this thesis claims, the role of the audience in digital comics also changes as its structure allows the readers to be more in control of their own reading experience compared to their paper counterparts. At the same time, users are now invited to constantly comment and share content which are conditions that have changed the traditional journalism paradigm.

The analysis is guided through the description of a case study, *Graphic Memories*, a digital comic depicting the story of four female Ugandan ex-soldiers. The piece mixes illustrations with embedded multimedia resources. Although the story is grounded in Uganda, the project has been developed and consumed mostly by Western users. The research describes this case study using a postcolonial angle, based on the principle that digital spheres are reaffirming and reproducing postcolonial relationships.

Real Life Cartoons: An Introduction

There is a child staring at her computer. She looks fascinated and fully immersed in the images displayed on the screen. It is difficult to say what is absorbing her that much. It would be hard to guess that she is learning about war stories. Cartoons are telling her about the cruelties that girls, like her, experienced after being recruited as child soldiers. Animations engage her with the story, she feels like she is there, running across Ugandan fields. However, she is not. Her teacher recommended this comic to her knowing she had a strong interest in arts and a negative attitude towards reading. She agreed on having a look- *If it's a comic it must be funny!* - she thought. Indeed, this is a common thought amongst young people.

Generally, if we think about comics, *Wonder Woman*, *Batman*, *Superman* and other magnificent superheroes are probably the first images that come to mind. Pieces that can recreate fantasy worlds and make us dream of faraway realities. However, nowadays comics are also used to represent matters happening just around the corner, situations in which reality overcomes fiction. [Stories of violence](#), [human trafficking](#) and other global concerns are increasingly covered through cartoons. Comics seem to be a very appreciated tool for journalists who are trying to call the attention of an audience already overwhelmed by information and images. In addition, many cartoonists are taking advantage of the opportunities that the internet offers to enrich their illustrations with different multimedia features such as animations and videos. Well-established media outlets are paying increasing attention to this genre and, consequently, these works are becoming more accessible to the mainstream audience. Digital comics prove that the way news is told is evolving, as are the platforms which are used to spread them. However, should we as a society consider whether there are consequences involved with this evolution?

It is true, that many authors have investigated the implications of digital comics as an emerging format. For instance, there is an extensive body of research examining the potential of digital comics when used for educational purposes (Azman, Bahrin Zaibon and Shiratuddin 2014, 589-594). Many other studies focus on the discussion of whether digital comics should be considered as an evolution of printed pieces or as a new genre (F.Dittmar 2012, 88). However, there is a gap of research looking precisely at digital

comic journalism and the possible consequences of its popularization regarding ethical issues such as how objectivity is treated on these type of multimedia pieces.

To shed light on these matters, this thesis explores the risks of presenting hard topics as pieces of infotainment in order to make them more appealing to the audience (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 8-197). To do so, it explores the consequences that bigger levels of participation might have in the public and in the working routines of professional journalists. Therefore, the research question that leads this study is as follows, how do digital comics shape reader involvement and the reproduction of inequality in the case of *Graphic Memories*?

This paper claims that there are consequences to a small extent because new media should be understood as a reinvention of past formats. This paper will show this by first; providing a historical overview of comics, establishing the connection between journalism and comics. This is important in order to establish how comics have evolved into a new type of media. This is achieved by analysing the characteristics of digital comic journalism and the consequences involved in the popularization of converging media formats. Secondly, this paper considers whether or not digital comics can pursue ‘serious’, socially and politically relevant topics. This is investigated in order to define if a medium characterised for its ability to represent fiction can accommodate the needs of a discipline with truth as its main goal. Thirdly, reflecting on the impact that a new form of media format such as digital comics has on traditional journalism paradigms, this thesis also reflects on the changing role of the audience. To do so, this paper explores the effects that bigger levels of participation might have in the public and also in the working routines of professional journalists.

In order to carry out this analysis, this paper takes a postmodern approach and doing so, it utilizes Jean Baudrillard’s and Fredric Jameson’s theories on postmodernism which analyse the construction of reality by questioning common assumptions (Mease 2016, 1-21). These theories are used for the purpose of revealing the cultural effects of technology on the media. To take part in this debate, *Graphic Memories*, a digital comic depicting the story of four female Ugandan ex-soldiers, is used as a case study. *Graphic Memories* was chosen because it covers and engages socially relevant topics, using rich multimedia resources. Furthermore, access to the author was available. The study’s data is gathered from the text, audio, illustrations, videos and photos used in the piece. Moreover, statements from the author, who was interviewed with the purpose of this thesis, are used

in order to describe the challenges he faced during the reporting and editing process to illustrate how his position is also involved in the reproduction of inequality.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

1.1 Historical Review

First, this chapter provides a brief historical overview of comics in order to show how the medium has developed over time and what historical changes have made comics an appropriate medium to portray serious topics.

According to international experts at the *Lucca Comics Festival* in 1989, the first ever comic was published on 25 October 1896. From their point of view, a strip of the *Yellow Kid* (see appendix A) published by the *New York Journal* on that day had “those special linguistic characteristics which would transform it into a new medium of communication” (Gravett 2014, 22). *Yellow Kid*’s contribution to comic art went beyond redefining the genre. The popularity attained by this comic strip resulted in an argument between Joseph Pulitzer, head of the *New York World*, and William Randolph Hearst, in charge of the *New York Journal*, who fought to have Outcault’s engaging cartoon as a fixed presence on their Sunday supplement pages. This demand to reach the largest audience possible at all costs constitutes the first steps to a new type of journalism that came to be known as *Yellow Journalism* (Silbermann 1986, 28). It is noteworthy that the first pieces officially considered as comics were published by newspapers. This proves that comics had an influence in the press industry from the very beginning.

1.2 The Birth of Serious Comics

To explore the consequences involved in the popularization of new media formats, this paper now explores the impact that the introduction of cinema and New Journalism pieces had in the beginning of serious comics.

Comic publications kept growing and the same applies to the cinema industry; so that both genres were continually influenced by each other. Some say that comic strips served as inspiration for the first movie storyboards and highlight the parallelism between comic strips and roll films (Gravett 2014, 28). Comics and cinema started together to evoke reality by accommodating illiterate audiences which helped to initiate a sociocultural transformation. Cinema served also to provide recreation during the hardships of an era marked by wars and conflicts. Spectators could observe on the screen the cruelties happening in the battlefield by a medium where the boundaries between fact

and fiction were blurred (Baudrillard 1987, 16). Similar to cinematography, the development of photography equipment allowed war footage to evolve. Certainly, the role of mass media was closely related to war matters by that time allowing “more widely accessible ways of *witnessing* combat” (Carruthers 2011, 2). The Vietnam and Gulf Wars were the first conflicts portrayed from the battlefield. Embedded journalists started to be an important part of these shooting wars as they turned civilians into eager spectators (Shaka 2012, 64). The use of unprecedented military welfare during this “first terrible postmodernist war”, in the words of Jameson (Jameson 1998, 16), created a need for additional media able to portray dramatic experiences. The legitimacy of those images was rarely questioned; as the availability of postproduction, such as imagine-editing and Photoshop retouching techniques, were not in existence.

The 60’s led to the advent of the New Journalism phenomenon calling the objectivity of the journalistic profession into question. This style, considered as a postmodernist variety (Jameson 1998, 22), served to rethink what the core values of traditional journalism should be. Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, and Gabriel García Márquez are some of the authors who popularized this movement, characterized by the use of sensationalist and emotional appeals (Marzolf 1984, 529). Dialogues and very detailed descriptions became the main features of long reports where journalists came to be omnipresent. New Journalism pieces became another example of the contemporary *pastiche* where literary resources and the most classic journalism techniques were combined (Jameson 1998, 22).

During the 70’s this postmodernist trend arrived at the comic industry, as journalism and comic art inspired each other once again. This led to alternative forms of comics which began to tell real stories based on social criticism and leaving behind childlike topics. During the 1990’s, authors such as Art Spiegelman and Joe Sacco, who covered journalistic topics, started to be recognized. Spiegelman’s masterpiece *Maus* became an international bestseller (Duncan, Taylor and Stoddard 2015, 10). In this artistic work, Spiegelman depicts the challenges his parents experienced living in a concentration camp during the Holocaust, using cats and mice instead of human characters. This piece made him the winner of the *Pulitzer Prize* in 1992, acknowledging his work done in bringing comics to a larger audience (Smith 2013, 17). In *Palestine*, Sacco tells of his encounters with Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. Sacco includes himself in the drawings, constantly taking notes as a foreign reporter (Fernández 2015, 21). *Palestine*

was awarded the *American Book Award* in 2003. Both works have been published by mainstream media, namely, the *New York Times* and *Time Magazine*. Furthermore, they are marked by the strong presence of the journalists who use their feelings and opinions to represent reality as Capote or Wolf did in their books.

As the popularity of this genre grew, so did the debate on how to label or categorize this fusion of journalism and comics. While some authors continued to support the use of the term graphic novel, others disagreed. For instance, Joe Sacco frequently showed his preference for the use of comics to define his works “what I do I don't see as a novel”, he says (Campbell 2003, n.p.). The debate has only continued to grow over the last years due to the adaptation of comics in the digital landscape; with the development and rise of hybrids pieces, mixing illustrations and rich media; namely audios, videos, and animations. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, only the terms *comic* or *digital comic* are used in this research. This conceptualization is based on Daniel Merlin Goodbrey’s research, which highlights the fundamental role played by the audience in this type of interactive composition. Goodbrey points out the “non-trivial efforts required on behalf of the reader” (Goodbrey 2013, 292), who is asked to take decisions and make choices in order to explore a story. To actively explore a digital comic, re-reading and re-viewing is encouraged, which allows the possibility of multiple interpretations to be present (Gravett 2014, 41).

With the success of *Maus*, *Palestine* and other acclaimed publications, comics, a format usually linked to “distortions of reality and, [...] to the vision of imaginary worlds, supernatural events [...]” (Vanderberke 2010, 72), started to be considered as another form of journalism. Dirk Vanderberke finds several reasons to explain this turn. First, the criticism directed at photography and cinema had damaged the public’s confidence in their authenticity as pure representations of truth; instead, they had begun to be considered mere representations of reality. Second, the growth of digital media and editing tools exacerbated this trend. Third, the subjective perspective and methods used by New Journalists assisted on the re-evaluation of accuracy. According to Vanderberke, the sum of these conditions allowed comics to “reclaim positions the sequential arts had lost to other media, among them the ability to address social and political reality in nontrivial and mature works of journalism” (Vanderberke 2010, 73). Objectivity and accuracy were no longer the main concern of the audience. People acknowledged that all representation of reality is constructed which allowed comics to be considered an equally

valued form of representing the truth. It seems that these conditions helped comic books to find their place as a suitable medium to convey nonfiction stories.

Additionally, from a Baudrillardian perspective, the representation of reality and the reproduction of the hyperreal that comics embody, allow to preserve the status quo in between the real and its simulacrum (Bertens 1995, 150). In other words, the account of true stories through drawings, a resource traditionally linked to fiction, can reassure readers about what the real is. Baudrillard chose *Disneyland* as an example of this phenomena. For the French philosopher, the fantasy world that the theme park recreates is thought to affirm the reality of the external world (Bertens 1995, 153). The same can happen with serious comics if this interpretation is considered; a thought that seems to agree with the work of serious cartoonists producing nonfiction comics that are “ethically bound to share and highlight reality” (Duncan, Taylor and Stoddard 2015, 6). However, for a big part of the audience, comics are still seen as a tool to “strive for reality, for escape from reality” (ibid.).

Cartoonists use different resources to convey meaning and overcome language barriers. For this reason, sometimes they are accused of oversimplifying serious matters and using stereotypes and standardized ideas (Gravett 2014, 74). Sexism, cultural stereotypes or racist imagery –for example, characters in *Tintin* have been accused of this– have nothing to do with an ethical journalistic approach. This is one of the main arguments used by comic journalism detractors who consider serious comics as “an incompatibility of content and form”, as cartoonists can rely on too many artistic distortions or fictionalization resources (Vanderberke 2010, 74). On the contrary, advocates of the genre argue that the audience is already conscious of the inherent subjectivity of the medium and highlight its strength to offer a better description than words can, as readers can visualize the scenarios where the news is understood at just one glance. Furthermore, comics can help to individualize the main characters of a story, while in traditional informative articles, involved citizens may be represented as a mass without an identity (Vanderberke 2010, 176).

In an analysis of comics, this is essential to reflect on the influence that images might have. Specifically, in the field of journalism, this combination of text and images can serve to concretize or elicit emotions that words alone cannot express (Marsh and White 2003, 653). Todd Shack, in *A Failure of language: Achieving layers of meaning in graphic journalism*, theorizes on the potential of comics to convey complex topics, as

the use of images can create diverse *layers of meaning* that are hard to evoke just with the use of prose journalism. These layers of meaning are as follows: firstly, an *emotional immediacy* encouraged by the opportunity to recreate atmospheric content in every single panel. Secondly, potential of visual elements to tell a story and capture readers' attention-known as the *stickiness phenomena*. Thirdly, *mnemonic value* of mixing words and images, either photographs or drawings (Shack 2014, 110). These ideas are closely related to the *braiding principle* proposed by Thierry Groensteen (Groensteen 2007, 147), that refers to those iconic images, concepts, symbols or even colours repeated along a comic. "Fixed images to which the reader can refer again and again" (Gravett 2014, 31), that keep the flow of the story going and constitute one of the main attributes in comics' compositions. This analysis looks at how these principles, through which readers construct meaning, are modified in items with embedded multimedia content.

1.3 Digital Comics' Characteristics

Even if comics have been considered "as the medium most resilient to digitalization" (Gardner 2014, 207), the number of cartoonists taking advantage of the opportunities that the internet offers is constantly increasing. Multimedia compositions mixing drawings with video, audio, and animations are becoming more common. One of the main differences between digital and printed comics relies on the page layout. Digital comics are no longer presented in physical pages, giving rise to new forms of storytelling (Dittmar 2012, 83). The screen display of the panels "allows for frames of different shapes and sizes, but also enables the transitions between frames to change, and makes it easier to create a comic containing multiple endings or other non-linear transitions" (Walters 2009, 6). This phenomenon was identified by Scott McCloud as *Infinite Canvas* in an attempt to predict the future of digital comics (McCloud 1994, 83). The *Infinite Canvas* paradigm contemplates the influence of the page layout on the reading pace, which is no longer marked by the necessity of turning a page to explore the content. Single panels presented on screens gain ground to traditional multi-panel pages (Gravett 2014, 126). The readers of digital comics are able to go through a story by clicking or scrolling down with their mouse. The way readers fill in the blanks in these pieces also changes as the empty spaces between frames are frequently replaced by multimedia elements that help to enrich their reading experience. Text, illustrations and other multimedia components such as videos or audio, are presented as independent units of meaning that can be explored together or separately without losing their sense. *Graphic Memories*, the main

case study of this thesis, is a good example of this phenomenon as it includes video interviews that complement the content provided by the illustrations.

Regarding the analysis of how the screens disposition can impact the reading process, it is important to consider the idea of *closure*, strictly related to the *Infinite Canvas* conception, also explored by McCloud (McCloud 1994, 63) and later reinterpreted by Kevin Brooks (Brooks 2009, 217). *Closure* refers to the process by which readers create meaning between one image and another. Viewers are supposed to make an effort in order to fill in the blanks between frames. Their level of effort depends on the type of transition used from frame to frame. When talking about journalistic topics it is fundamental to research how do authors use the blanks as these gaps of information can have a great influence on the way readers perceive a story and build their opinion.

As mentioned previously, digital comics such as *Graphic Memories*, which mix multimedia and illustrations, can actively involve the audience in a unique way. The interplay that digital items support, combined with the presentation of the content through non-linear structures, allows readers to be partly in control of their own reading experience. The participation enhanced by digital comics is comparable to the interaction promoted by social media. Readers are now invited to constantly comment and share content; conditions that have changed the traditional journalism paradigm. The effects of this rising participation of the audience have been explored by a number of authors, including Axel Bruns (Bruns 2006, 275-284). The researcher describes the empowerment of the audience through the *produser's* notion. He uses this term to describe the consumers dynamically involved in the content production process. Bruns develops on the characteristics of *Generation C*- which stands for content and creativity. This is a movement characterized by users whose contributions are breaking boundaries between consumers and producers, production and consumption. Bruns sees the growth of the Web 2.0 and the collaborative environment that it generates as the roots of *produsage* defined as “the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement” (Bruns 2008, 21). While this thesis considers Bruns’ observations regarding the rise of user-generated content, it also reflects on the cultural implications that the fluid roles between users and consumers might have through the work of Andrew Calcutt and Philip Hammond.

1.4 Postcolonial Contexts

The increasing popularity of digital comics is, however, not translated into an equal access to all. Due to the unequal access to the internet in some regions, digital comics such as *Graphic Memories* are not available to everyone at the same rate. For this reason, this study focuses on expanding new formats such as digital comics from a digital postcolonial angle, based on the principle that digital spheres are reaffirming and reproducing postcolonial relationships “that are directly and indirectly related to information and communication technologies” (Jandrić and Kuzmanić 2015, 37). The study considers the academic work of authors such as Petar Jandrić and Ana Kuzmanić who describe the complex relation between *digital natives* and *pre-digital* natives, the former having more options to be adapted to the network society (Jandrić and Kuzmanić 2015, 40). The analysis relies also on Gayatri Spivak’s notion of the *subaltern*, which refers to that group of citizens placed in a situation of a considerable disadvantage against others. “For the ‘true’ subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresented subaltern subject that can discern and speak for itself; the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation” (Spivak 1985, 80). Regarding this topic, Spivak (Spivak 1985, 92) poses the theoretical problem of the representation (speaking for) of the subordinate and concludes that the intellectual is incapable of doing so since in the best of cases they are “white men [who] are saving brown women from brown men” in a discourse that fails to move away from the imperialist and colonial view of women and black men. This is relevant when analysing *Graphic Memories*, as the story told is based on Uganda but it has been developed and consumed mostly by Western users.

Giraldo (Giraldo 2003, 299) goes deeper when analysing Spivak's criticism regarding the dangers of intellectual work. He argues that, consciously or unconsciously, the intellectual acts “in favour of the domination of the subaltern, keeping them silent without giving them a space or a position from which they can ‘speak’.” Therefore, recovering Spivak’s thought, Giraldo says that “the intellectual should not - and cannot - speak ‘for’ the subaltern, since this implies protecting and reinforcing ‘subalternity’ and oppression over them”. For the purposes of this study, the subaltern idea applies to both, those (the subaltern) who are represented by the intellectual and those with fewer opportunities to access the digital landscape.

In relation to the subaltern status of Ugandan women whose stories are collected by Ellison, it is worth mentioning Asensi's (Asensi Pérez 2009, 6-132) critical review of Spivak's piece of work. After studying Spivak's ideas and the reflections of many other authors, Asensi proposes a narrower definition of the subaltern; one that does not refer exclusively to the relational, but that includes those groups in which "the subordinate function is a constant", understanding, as is the case of the protagonists of *Graphic Memories* that "the subaltern would be the one whose life is unbearable and impossible to live to the point that it threatens the very possibility of his or her life in a literal or symbolic sense. The subaltern sees his or her body and mind managed in a way that leads to an agony that is a dead end for him or her".

On the other hand, the so-called *digital subaltern* (Kent 2008, 84-97) refers to the unequal access to means of information. This subaltern is reduced to accept what dominant groups state about them. This premise can assist in studying the *Graphic Memories*' case. Although it is grounded in Uganda, and it aims to raise awareness of the current situation of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) returnees in the country, it has only been promoted by Western media. This is the results of limited access to the local audience.

The following analysis aims to observe the theoretical concepts explained here in a practical way. The outline of *Graphic Memories*' is featured as a case study, helps to better understand the aforementioned theory by providing a specific example in which it has been applied. This research now focuses on exploring the characteristics of serious comics' forms of storytelling.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In order to pick apart the specific characteristics of digital comics, the analysis compares different qualitative approaches. First, this paper has presented a mini historical review analysing the partnership between comics and journalism. The overview has looked at the influence each discipline –comics’ art and journalism- has had on each other and has explored the extent to which this imprint has evolved over time. In addition, it has described the characteristics of the first pieces that could be considered as comic journalism. It has included well-known works recognized by the audience such as *Maus* and *Palestine*. Moreover, it has compared comics’ characteristics to other media, namely cinema productions and New Journalism pieces. The analysis has emphasized the principles of postmodern theoreticians, such as Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, who have extensively contributed to the research of news media impact on society. This study has explored the situation of the inequalities surrounding the Digital Divide using a postcolonialist perspective.

In order to deeper analyse the situation, this study carries out a textual analysis of the digital comic *Graphic Memories*. The textual analysis approach seeks to develop new insights of a cultural object based on what other theorists have already attested (McKee 2003, 71). To do so, the first part of the thesis has sought to explain the circumstances that turned comics into a suitable form to portray serious topics. With this aim in mind, it has mobilised Dirk Vanderberke’s theories (Vanderberke 2010, 70-81). As part of the study, the potential influence that the combination of images and text to report on serious matters has been considered by taking into account Todd Shack’s ideas on the different *layers of meaning* used in graphic journalism (Shack 2014, 127). Moreover, the symbolism and imagery that cartoonists tend to apply have been studied through Thierry Groensteen’s notion of *braiding* (Groensteen 2007, 1-193). As this investigation focuses on digital comics, it has highlighted the extent to which illustrations are modified when presented through digital devices. With this aim, it has applied the notions of *Infinite Canvas* and *closure*, used by Scott McCloud, to explain the screen-display effects (McCloud 2009, n.p.). Besides this, it has contemplated Jean Baudrillard’s and Fredric Jameson’s thoughts on postmodernism and deconstruction of reality (Baudrillard 1987; Jameson 1998). The previously explained theoretical concepts guide the analysis and open some questions to further research.

2.1 Operationalisation & Case Selection

The case study *Graphic Memories* provides an in-depth analysis of digital comics as a form of journalism. This research strategy aims to shed light on the emergence of innovative journalistic techniques that might end up generating new theories (Kohlbacher 2006, n.p.). The work of English-Canadian journalist Marc Ellison has been selected as the main case analysis because of the sizable amount of multimedia content used alongside its illustrations and the creative way of presenting it. In addition, it has been published by mainstream media such as [Al-Jazeera](#), [Die Zeit](#) and [Toronto Star](#). Furthermore, it has been recognized with a number of awards such as the [World Press Innovative Storytelling prize](#). These characteristics make it an outstanding example to reflect on the current state-of-the-art of comics. For the purpose of this thesis, the data has been gathered from the original website, <http://marcellison.com/graphicmemories/>.

The case study approach aims to “provide an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied” (Hartley 2004, 323). The theoretical propositions previously explained serve to describe the panels’ structure, colours, symbolism, use of the blanks and other references applied in the cartoons. The study also integrates the analysis of multimedia content such as videos and animations. As part of this case study, the author, Marc Ellison, was interviewed on 9 October 2015. This interview was published on the [European Journalism Centre’s website \(EJC\)](#). During that interview, Ellison was made aware that his piece would be analysed in this thesis. However, he was not made aware of the perspective this study would follow in order to ensure that his answers were not influenced. During this interview, conducted through Skype while he was in Canada, I asked a list of 13 opened questions (see appendix B). The information provided relates to Marc Ellison’s working routines, the reporting process, and the challenges he faced while building up the story. Some of the answers provided are used in the analysis and quoted literally as they were the most relevant by trying to explain how the popularization of new media formats affect traditional journalism in terms of reader involvement and the reproduction of inequality.

2.2 Strengths & Limitations

The strengths and weaknesses of using a case study as a method of examination must be recognized. On the one hand, this technique is characterized by strong subjectivity. Results may be biased because of my background in journalism which might place the emphasis on my own moral values regarding the profession. Also, by analysing a single case study, information cannot be generalised. The same happens with the interview process as it was only the main author who was interviewed and not the illustrator, Chris Magafiri, or the women involved in the story. To have a more complete analysis it would be interesting to work on more than one case study to consider the opinions of all parties concerned. Consequently, the results can only be partially generalized (Kohlbacher 2006, n.p.) and should not be extended to the judgement of other digital comics.

On the other hand, the combination of a case study research with the detailed description of several theories can help to minimize these disadvantages by offering a holistic perspective (Ritchie and Jane 2003, 4). While the theoretical contextualization serves to sustain the analysis, the in-depth examination of a specific case assists to construct meaning. Through this cross-checking strategy, the reliability of the current research increases. The results obtained by the present analysis aim to foster debate on the core characteristics of digital comic journalism pieces and provides as a starting point for a more exhaustive analysis. In future research, it would be interesting to explore other examples and conduct deeper studies that could lead to alternative results. This would help to create a different hypothesis and generate new insights not yet explored.

Chapter 3: A Closer Look: *Graphic Memories*' Analysis

"The interactive element will also allow readers to converse with Agnes through additional pop-up video and photography as she tells her story.

But more importantly, I want others to be able to visualize the zen that haunts Agnes, to better understand the anguish she's experiencing", Marc Ellison.

Graphic Memories, the main case study of this thesis, is a digital comic depicting the story of four Ugandan female ex-soldiers. English-Canadian photojournalist Marc Ellison and cartoonist Chris Mafigiri are the authors of the piece, which was funded by a [European Journalism Centre \(EJC\)](#) grant. The comic was launched on 12 October 2015 by the Canadian newspaper, [Toronto Star](#).

Ellison was successful in his application to the fourth round of the [Innovative Development Reporting Grant](#) (IDR) programme. To achieve this, he presented a creative pitch that drew the attention of the whole IDR Grant Programme Advisory Council. Ellison suggested developing a digital comic, something that the EJC had not explored before.

The IDR programme arose as a reaction to the existential crisis of traditional journalism and the increasing growth of *global infotainment* (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 8-197). Mainstream media is becoming more controlled by big corporations that seek to make a profit rather than make a social impact. For this reason, content that is not considered breaking news might not be covered by media outlets, as it can seem less interesting and therefore, unable to provide economics benefits. This has become a growing tendency, as mentioned before, since Pulitzer and Randolph Hearst started the game of considering everything acceptable in the fight to sell more copies, and journalism began to become dependent on the market strategies. However, the internet and social media, have only exacerbated this trend in recent decades. More content has become available at no cost, making it harder to find customers interested in paying to access specific material (Bolin 2007, 246). The situation has led to a crisis amongst the media industry, resulting in low budgets to invest in communication professionals; which is questioning what the values of professional journalism are (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 8). Apart from that, journalists need to pursue 'popular' stories in order to make money and cannot cover all newsworthy or 'unpopular' topics that might be less attractive to the audience.

In fact, the IDR looks for innovative reporting methods than can make development news more entertaining for a common audience (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 10). The animated comic that Ellison pitched is such an example. Inspired by the comics of recognized cartoonist Joe Sacco, Ellison planned to develop “some sort of a 2.0 version” (Ellison 2015, n.p.) mixing illustrations with videos and audios. Mafigiri, a Ugandan artist, was in charge of drawing. According to Ellison, it was important to count on a local to be able to accurately portray the reality of the country.

Ellison, for his part, uses his background in photography and computer science to carry out the web-development. However, he recognizes that it would have been better to collaborate with other journalists. “Collaborations would have made things easier. I would have asked for an additional amount of money to pay a web producer to develop the website”, he explains (Ellison 2015, n.p.). This is the situation affecting journalists worldwide whose professional identity is being affected by media convergence. The number of tasks professional journalists are assigned keeps raising as journalism projects are expected to gather more resources than ever before. This pressure can not only undermine their work but also “limits its powers of observation and evaluation” (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 9). In the conversation I had with Ellison, he inspired me by his attractive and creative way of presenting such compelling content and by his personal situation which represents the current situation associated with media professionals.

3.1 Data Explored

Graphic Memories presents its insights through a combination of resources. While the illustrations offer a lighter experience, the videos are addressed to those spectators who are ready to invest more time on them and understand that exploring every item of the story needs a consistent amount of time. “The modern audience expects that long journalistic pieces include videos and images. They demand interactivity. If I would have just presented a 1000-word-piece, people would not have read it to the very end. My hope is that graphic elements can encourage people to explore every chapter”, states Ellison (Ellison 2015, n.p.). Although its presentation as a comic might lead to confusion, *Graphic Memories* seems to be aimed at an adult audience as its images may be shocking for young people. *Graphic Memories* is a clear example of a *pastiche*, an imitation of a genre that seeks to satisfy the demands of a contemporary audience (Jameson 1998, 6). In fact, the piece does not present a completely new format but a variant of a comic. It

exemplifies the trends of new media convergence, that are breaking the boundaries between genres (Bolin 2007, 238). This innovative media form can help to create an interest amongst young people with regards to topics they would normally have no interest in.

In addition, it appears Ellison wants to build on his target audience by getting closer to topics relevant to both Western and African society. In Ellison's opinion, the use of illustrations would help people to empathize with this topic and this would raise awareness. This belief can be tested when exploring the whole piece as there is not much text. The power of the story is mainly vested in visual elements, both videos, and illustrations. The biggest amount of information is presented by the different interviewees in the videos. When text appears, it is presented on word balloons and narration boxes, even though the latter are much more common. Texts are written in English and videos have English subtitles when the interviewee speaks in a different language. However, the same does not apply when the main language is English as there is no translation to other languages. This seems to contradict the author's intention to satisfy varied audiences. This condition can be paralleled with the Digital Divide phenomenon, which is linked to "the information sharing, facilitation of social networks, and online participation and collaboration that in part define Web 2.0, but, rather than being defined by the presence of these characteristics, it is their absence, and the lack of connectivity and social networks" (Kent 2008, 87). *Graphic Memories* has only been promoted by Western media outlets which makes its reception difficult to receive in Uganda. In this case, new digital spaces act as a representation of already existing inequalities (Jandrić and Kuzmanić 2015, 38). Going back to the research question that leads this study on how do digital comics shape reader involvement and the reproduction of inequality. It is important to highlight the enforcement of postcolonial power structures that digital pieces as *Graphic Memories* can embrace.

3.2 The Readers' Role

In order to explore the role of the audience in the case of study, the analysis focuses on exploring the influence of digital environments among users.

Graphic Memories' readers can explore the story by scrolling down with their mouse. It is designed with a sense of verticality that contributes to the user impression of being able to infinitely scroll until the end of each chapter. This format may satisfy the

readership not accustomed to consuming comics because they do not need to feel confident with traditional comics' layout, instead, they can just easily flow through the site. This endless pagination scheme agrees with Scott McCloud's *Infinite Canvas* conceptualization (McCloud 2009, n.p.). In *Graphic Memories*, the rhythm of turning a page is broken. Even though, the indented order to follow the story is well-marked. Readers keep moving from one panel to the other with the constant possibility to go back to the beginning of the story since there is a link to the homepage in every illustration. However, they can only be redirected to the beginning of the chapter they are already exploring, it is impossible to switch to another story without skipping the main screen. This can be a bit inconvenient because the flow is broken and users' experience is briefly interrupted. Still, the reading path remains intuitive and "the only breaks that need to occur are those that fit the stories natural break points" (McCloud 2009, n.p.). One disadvantage of relying on this *Infinite Canvas* approach is that if a user wants to pause his or her reading there is no option to get back to the same point easily. McCloud suggests the use of bookmarks as a solution. It would be interesting to test them in a long-comic such as *Graphic Memories*.

As outlined above, *Graphic Memories*' readers play a key role. They can choose how they prefer to explore the story: contemplating the illustrations, checking the videos or doing both. This is achieved because of the multicursal narrative structure pursued by the author. Beyond any doubt, choices made by readers constrain the way the story is understood. If someone decides to pay attention only to the drawings, they will have access to less information than if they look at the videos, where crude details are openly told without being hidden behind the softer appearance of the cartoons. *Graphic Memories* counts on several types of media; however, it is the decision of the audience in which they rely on to understand the story. This is strictly related to what has been described as *user fragmentation* or *narrowcasting*, a notion that explains the wide options that the internet and the new media offer to engage the audience with different interests (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 158).

The relevance of the readership choices agrees with *hypercomics*' characteristics. Daniel Merlin Goodbrey identifies this format as the combination of "juxtaposition-based visual language of a comic with the multicursal narrative structure of a hyperfiction. It is a form that foregrounds the importance of reader interaction, with the choices made by the reader influencing elements such as the sequence events are encountered in a story, the outcome of events or the point of view through which events are seen" (Goodbrey

2013, 292). Goodbrey traces the conceptual roots of *hypercomics* to Ted Nelson's ideas of hypertext and hypermedia. For Nelson, *hypercomics* are a form of hypermedia characterized by the distribution of comics strips in branches which allows users to choose the type of explanation they want and, when they want it (Nelson 2003, 313). This is also the case in *Graphic Memories*, which successfully seeks to increase audience participation. The non-linear structure boosts users' interactivity, enabling them to navigate freely through the comic branches. Readers' are acting as *producers* who have the power to develop the story through their active participation—not only during the reading process but also at the end; they are invited to provide their feedback through social media or in those media channels where it has been published (Bruns 2008, 50).

The different narrative tracks are enhanced by the inclusion of audiovisual material. Videos pop-up by clicking on the video icon placed on the right side of certain illustrations. To exit them readers can press the close icon and go back to the original panel. Videos can be paused but not fast-forwarded or rewinded. They provide a valuable contextualization to the cartoons, but they are not essential to understanding the meaning of the story. All videos in *Graphic Memories* have a similar appearance. The four stories start presenting their main characters: [Christine](#), [Grace](#), [Jacinta](#) and [Mary](#) with a short video using a close-up of the women saying their name and a couple of sentences on how they were related to the LRA. This short clip connects the viewer to the story so that we can verify that the drawings are based on real-life events. As Baudrillard argues, using a style widely linked to fiction can help to make clear the truthfulness of the story once approached by other media such as videos, text, and photos (Baudrillard 1987, 1-55).

Both these pieces and the rest of the videos are shot in a plain background, placing the visual impact only on the women and their words. Ellison's questions can be clearly heard in several shots, maybe to make it clear that even if presented as a comic, *Graphic Memories* is nonetheless a serious journalistic project on which processes of reporting and researching have been involved.

Ellison appears in the illustrations, too (see appendix C). He is represented interviewing one of the women with his camera which is also depicted in the panel. His emergence evokes the New Journalism movement where reporters made their presence obvious, acknowledging that their work could be biased for this reason. In digital pieces such as *Graphic Memories*, the New Journalism style is enriched with a "more intimate voice, hypertextuality, multimedia, and an instant, interactive audience reaction" that the internet offers (Greenberg 2012, 384). As a consequence, the story is strongly marked by

the journalist's presence, and his own view of the facts which can differ from journalistic standards of truth.

At the same time, comics are a suitable genre for anonymity with people's stories. This can be very useful for journalistic practices when it is frequently necessary to protect the sources of information or the people connected to the subject matter. One such example is the way women's aggressors are represented. Cartoons give them a face while protecting their real identity. Even if presented in cartoon form, their representation can be more compelling for the audience than written data could be.

The attachment of the photos alongside the story increases the perception of objectivity. By mixing these photos with illustrations, it provides constant proof that the story truly happened. As reported by Ellison, "The mixture is really powerful when you click the video to actually see the girl talking about her experience after you see a few pages of illustrations. It grants the illustration a sense of reality in a way the authentic article would not" (Ellison 2015, n.p.). This combination helps us to fully examine the project from all angles. If such a dramatic story had been told without the contextualization that the videos provide, it could have resulted in an oversimplification of the events. Also, if the drawings were used as a single resource, relevant information and background details would have been lost (see appendix G).

The range of colours used in *Graphic Memories* is relatively small. Dark tones are the most common and with them Mafigiri has represented those images depicting women's experiences after being abducted by the LRA. Lively colours such as yellow or red are applied to especially harsh images. This happens, for instance, when Christine explains how her house was torched by the soldiers and how they killed one of her friends. Red brushstrokes appear as well when the cartoonist wants to represent those moments in which death and blood were somehow involved (see appendix D). Yellow tonalities are applied for lighting the images. Contrastingly, pastel colours are utilised in the images portraying women's past life memories before being in the bush. In these illustrations, characters are painted with cheerful faces. Through these resources, readers can understand the nostalgia that the women feel about their past. Changes in the colour palette help to change the reader's perspective of time. Because the panels are structured, drawn and coloured using the same style, the audience gets used to the story flow and can fully understand the author's changes between past and present. This is linked to the braiding phenomena explored by Thierry Groensteen that describes "how comics creators

plant cues and clues, recurring motifs, symbols, colours, intended to spark recognition, memory, and other echoes through the story” (Gravett 2014, 31).

Animations also play an important role in this representation of time and movement. Most common animations involved in our case study consist of the entrance and exit effects, symbolizing the appearance and disappearance of characters and scenarios. Other illustrations are animated along motion paths. The latter enhances the sense of movement in opposition to static images. Through the zoom in and zoom out of different elements the author emphasizes and places the attention on different aspects. “Animated elements offer something that the printed pages cannot; an explicit sense of time and movement. In a digital comic, which uses animation to dictate when the current panel disappears, and the next panel appears, the management of reading time is taken from the reader and given to the author” (Nichols 2015, 9). Animations in *Graphic Memories* get considerably better as the story develops, making their improvement near the end obvious. One remarkable animation appears in the last chapter, Mary’s story. In this panel, the reader can see through the woman’s eyes (see appendix E) to witness an LRA soldier unceasingly beating a man. This effect is quite an interesting resource as it really grabs the viewer’s attention and effectively represents what Mary had to experience as an abductee but at the same time, it is also a good example of how the intellectual represents the subaltern.

Just as important as images, are the blanks in traditional comics. For McCloud, it is along empty spaces that the reader constructs meaning through the act of *closure* (McCloud 1994, 72). However, in digital comics, this process changes as narrative blanks are commonly filled up with multimedia elements. In *Graphic Memories*, for instance, videos are strategically placed on non-sequitur transitions (McCloud 1994, 63). These are the points where the story might sound unclear for the readers without enough background knowledge since there is no apparent connection between one panel and another. Audiovisual material is properly used to support the narrative, leaving little to the imagination. While drawings offer a rough idea of what the women’s stories are, videos offer precise facts and information. In a conventional comic format, this would not happen, and readers would have to rely more on their previous experiences to forge meaning (Gravett 2014, 30). As explained by Ellison, “I include photo and video in my comics; it’s really multimedia and the illustrations that are used to plug the narrative gaps” (Ellison 2015, n.p.).

Graphic Memories presents other elements that are striking from a journalistic perspective. In the first place, illustrations depict situations where the camera could not have gone. As Ellison states, “when the girl was abducted on a motorbike, I was not there to witness that, so I imposed the illustration on top of the picture of the family’s home.” (Ellison 2015, n.p.). Media has portrayed the LRA massacre from many different perspectives; however, *Graphic Memories*’ illustrations have helped to represent the story through images that have not appeared before. Words are used to support the visual material through a picture-specific approach where text serves to support images, and not the opposite. The combination of text and images achieve other layers of meaning unaffordable for traditional journalism, namely, the emotional immediacy of being able to contemplate the background to the story in every panel. These resources end up generating a *stickiness phenomenon* that can enhance audience involvement with the plot (Shack 2014, 110).

The four women involved in the story have a key role because *Graphic Memories* is built on their input. Although Ellison recognizes that it was not easy to convince them to share their thoughts: “Maybe in the past some of these women would think, “why should I tell my story to you?” They were really wary of journalists, whom they believed simply made a profit from their stories whilst the women themselves did not benefit directly from sharing their experiences at all” (Ellison 2015, n.p.). The journalist decided to provide each woman with a camera, so they could capture those moments of intimacy where his presence could have made them feel uncomfortable (see appendix F). This idea has indeed resulted in very intimate and personal images. Furthermore, the digital comic format encourages their participation as it offers them a wide range of resources to properly describe the challenges they have faced. This phenomenon is not common in conventional informative articles where those citizens involved have fewer opportunities, in terms of space and media, to express themselves.

3.3 A Postcolonial Perspective

This section explores the data described above using a critical perspective emerged from the previous points that permits going further into the problem of postcolonialism. Spivak refers to this phenomenon as the difficulty or even impossibility of the subordinates speaking for themselves. In this regard, Asensi (Asensi Pérez 2009, 37) supports that and argues that “those who have difficulties in living are more concerned

with survival than with speaking". It is therefore not surprising and understandable that these women had doubts about their participation in this project.

In addition, they might also experience some uncertainty not knowing even if they would be able to see the project final's result. Indeed, that was one of the aspects that Ellison highlighted when during his interview: "Ugandan schools rarely have Wi-Fi, I think it would be great to present it as an offline project as well. The one good thing about the graphic novel is that the story stands alone. You do not necessarily need access to the video, you can simply download the whole project, print it and use it in class" (Ellison 2015, n.p.). However, this process would take a longer time and would need extra resources, this further highlights the inequality in the reception of the piece.

Graphic Memories has mainly been promoted via social media channels, namely Twitter and Facebook. As a consequence, the audience has been constantly sharing their thoughts about what the story tells and the way it is told, this can provide Ellison with valuable information for further projects. This type of word-of-mouth promotion helps also to reach the target audience and to boost its dissemination. New forms of distribution are one of the most outstanding characteristics of current media paradigms. It is the audience who plays a key role in sharing the content within their network. At the same time, in the process of distribution, it is the audience who frequently adds content to the product, modifies the pieces and/or serves as a reference to future works. The dissemination on social media seems to offer bigger visibility to the pieces, but at the same time, it is a narrow audience as people tend to distribute content they agree with or that matches with their own interests and as it has been described. Furthermore, access to this media is conditioned by technological barriers (Kent 2008, 84).

The latter characteristics lead to the reflection on how the development of a society is strictly related to the development of journalism (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 18). If at a certain stage it was the New Journalism which put into questions the roots of the profession, currently it's the internet and the development of new media which are challenging previous journalistic techniques and how the audience interact with them

Chapter 4: Drawing Discussions

This paper examines the research question; how do digital comics shape reader involvement and the reproduction of inequality in the case of *Graphic Memories*? It has shown that there are a number of consequences to this phenomenon. However, it is also important to discuss whether or not these consequences should be considered to have an overall positive or negative impact or contribution towards society. This next chapter discusses further implications by firstly, comparing the characteristics of print comics to their digital counterparts. Secondly, the chapter continues by exploring how digital comics have evolved into a postmodern medium that is compatible with journalistic work. Thirdly, the chapter concludes by exposing the strengths and weaknesses in relation to the specific case study, *Graphic Memories*.

4.1 Digital Vs Print Comics

There are several different aspects between digital comics and paper pieces. In digital works, the screen presentation is commonly based on a single-panel-display format while paper information usually comes in a multi-panel disposition. This significantly influences the way a reader receives information. As Scott McCloud recognizes on his *Infinite Canvas* paradigm (McCloud 1994, 83), the endlessness pagination visual appearance of digital comics offers bigger levels of freedom to a user who can freely navigate through the content without an intended order to follow. This non-linearity is also generated by the inclusion of multimedia material placed as different blocks of information. A user can choose where to focus his attention to explore a story. Due to the embedded material, the process of *closure* is also modified: gaps of information are fulfilled with multimedia, providing a large-volume of information and leaving not much to the user's imagination. This is one of the main differences between analogical and digital comics, as the reading process between both forms, changes.

Digital comics which bring together different resources such as video, illustrations, text, and animations can reach more diverse audiences than paper comics. As people are attracted by different stimuli, the convergence of diversity means a single piece helps to engage a readership with different motivations whereas in traditional comics' resources are more limited. The fragmentation of the audience has been boosted by digital technology as more content regarding different topics has become available

online. Consequently, the audience has greater options and is no longer seen as a 'mass' but as users with diverse needs.

In this era of personalized information, it is fundamental to reflect on the positive and negative aspects of this tendency. The consequence of the increasing personalization of information, as shown in section three, should be considered to have a positive impact because of the empowerment of the audience who are able to produce additional content and give feedback to the work of professional journalists (Bruns 2006, 277). However, it could also be said to have a negative impact on journalism because not every user has the same opportunities to react to the information which ends up generating certain inequalities between groups of people (Kent 2008, 86). Additionally, it is true that users might be more interested in the information they receive as it can be tailored to their needs. However, they might end up being less well-informed as they might hear only part of the story. This phenomenon is identified by some theoreticians as the *filter bubble* (Ward and Wasserman 2010, 203). In the case of *Graphic Memories*, only subscribers of the outlets where it has been published or those who have friends that have shared the piece within their own network, might have access to it.

Moreover, this thesis has explored how multimedia tools can engage the audience into a deeper understanding of a topic as they help to empathise with the characters in a unique way. Learning about them through videos, and listening to their first-hand experiences, humanises their stories, something that does not happen if only drawings are used.

4.2 The Impact of Drawings When Used to Tell Real Facts

When focusing on the properties of digital comics to portray journalistic topics there are other features and consequences to be highlighted. Primarily, illustrations provide more contextualization than traditional articles. Drawings help to recreate the context where events take place, giving deeper meaning to data. On this investigation, this phenomenon has been analysed through Todd Shack's ideas on the layers of meaning that elaborate on the power that the mix of words and images can have (Shack 2014, 112). At the same time, using drawings instead of photos allows anonymising character's identities. In *Graphic Memories*, where both photos and illustrations are used, real images help to personify the narration while cartoons assist to protect the sources. This can be

especially useful when referring to sensitive topics or opinions. This phenomenon has been explained through Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal (Baudrillard 1987, 1-55). *Graphic Memories* portrays a real dramatic story through cartoons, by exchanging fictionalization techniques with real images, the sense of truthfulness in the story increases. Likewise, drawings aid to recreate situations in which audiovisual material is not available. Events that have not been witnessed can be represented through fiction. As a result, audience's comprehension of the topic is enriched as they can better imagine the situations that words tell.

Speaking on the negative implications of using comics to portray journalistic topics, the question of fictionalization of information needs to be highlighted. Nonetheless, a common critique of serious comics is that sometimes, it is unclear what comes from real events and what it is just the result of the authors' imagination. The unclear distinction between *facts* and *opinions* has always been one common criticism in the media industry as the New Journalism movement started to play with it (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 68). Lukas Plank (Plank 2014, n.p.) contemplates adding symbols or footnotes next to the illustrations clearly differentiating facts and opinions. In *Graphic Memories*, another resource is used: the author, Marc Ellison is drawn in some of the panels. This can be seen as a form to assure reader that he has been in the place of the news and, even if, the information can be biased by his personal opinions it comes from real facts. It would be interesting to analyse other examples of digital comics covering journalistic topics to observe how the authors have dealt with this distinction between reality and fictionalization.

4.3 Unequal Audiences

The research has pointed out several aspects that seem to contradict *Graphic Memories'* purpose of promoting dialogue in both Western and African societies. As mentioned in the analysis, the fact that text is only available in English limits the number of people that the piece can reach. If translated to other languages the comic could also be used as an educative tool to teach more people about the LRA conflict. Even if grounded in Uganda, the piece has not been promoted by any African media outlet. Therefore, the author's goal, which is to raise awareness about the situation of the LRA returnees, loses part of its purposes as its availability in the society where the events took place is lacked; and it is not read or discussed by that audience. This condition depicts the

issues concerning the media monopoly affecting the new media sphere which is still dominated by Western societies. In this regard, Spivak's work criticizes Western efforts to problematise the subject when in fact those who do so are complicit in the economic interests of that part of the world (Spivak 1985).

The analysis has collected the words of Ellison who suggested printing the piece, so it could be accessible in those Ugandan's schools where the internet might not be available. However, without access to the benefits that the internet allows, namely providing instant feedback or sharing and modifying the piece, the Ugandan audience would be at a disadvantage. Therefore, not every reader can participate as '*produser*' of information at an equal level. In this line, the study has described the impact that the internet can have on the proliferation of user-generated content and the involvement of the audience in the news making processes. However, through the use of a case study, the analysis has gone deeper into the inequality with regards to internet access that is leading to a wider divide amongst the contemporary audience.

What is more, as pointed out by Jandrić and Kuzmanić (Jandrić and Kuzmanić 2015, 36), "It is fairly easy to over-estimate the role of the internet, digital networks cannot be divorced from the contemporary society". Therefore, a society that for years allowed these women to be abused by their captors will most probably not, even if they could have access to it, be affected by hearing or seeing their stories told on the internet. This kind of work is, as a result, a product for the others, for those who are not the subaltern, the outsiders, those who look with horror at the suffering of the Other without this really altering their Western perspective of the world.

4.4. Postmodernism and Digital Comics

Using a postmodern angle, the study argues that new media formats such as digital comics can be considered as a *pastiche* of pre-existing forms. To sustain this argument, the analysis has compared comics to other media such as cinema, photography and of course, paper comics. It also has grounded the study in the comparison of the current media situation to what happened in the past when the New Journalism movement first emerged. It has described the conditions that allowed the birth of the movement and further developed the impact that it had on the media landscape. This description has served also to compare the New Journalism emergence with the revolution in the media panorama that digital technologies are causing. If at some point there were new journalists

who challenged the key values of the profession, now there are convergence journalists who together with tech-savvy citizens are doing so.

The IDR programme is supposed to fund innovative journalistic projects. This thesis has questioned the nature of these projects by placing the emphasis on the innovative aspect of them. Although, digital comics are presented as a new form of media, according to postmodern theoreticians it can be stated that they are a reinvention of other media that already exist. This agrees with Jameson definition of *pastiche* “pastiche is, like parody the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language” (Jameson 1991, 16).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explore the characteristics of digital comic journalism from a postmodern perspective aiming to depict the consequences for traditional journalism in terms of reader involvement and the reproduction of inequality. The previous chapters have collected the description of *Graphic Memories* and have explored the extent to which digital comics can be a good medium to report on hard-news.

After having analysed digital comic characteristics from a holistic perspective and through a specific case study, different conclusions have risen. Firstly, the study has shown through the case study that the adoption to the digital environment of traditional media is changing the way in which comics are designed and perceived. Such as is the case of digital comics, which can now be displayed on computers. Due to this reason, multimedia resources can be embedded on their pages and this enriches the readers' experience by allowing different perspectives to emerge. A positive consequence is that digital comics' readership has more information available and can contextualize drawings with appealing tools such as videos and animations. Content is not the only subject that dissents. Through the digitalisation of comics, the way they are read also changes. However, as this thesis has illustrated the reading path is still strongly marked by the author's choices.

Secondly, the appearance of new media is modifying the way newsworthy information has been traditionally consumed. The development of new techniques that seek to satisfy the high expectations of the contemporary audience is making journalism evolve. On the bright side, innovative forms of storytelling such as web documentaries, news games, and the previous explored digital comics, are striving to attract users' attention to sensitive topics.

On the other side, the popularization of converging media formats and the increasing use of social media channels to access information is challenging the routines of journalists that aim to be the first ones to break the news. To do so, they sometimes have to overlook time-consuming tasks such as the proper verification of the sources or long periods of field reporting. However, other trends are emerging in opposition to the immediacy in the production of content that the internet demands. Such as the case of pieces like *Graphic Memories* that entail high-levels of budget and work. These items look to defend high-quality journalism and offer well-thought material to an audience

who is equally supposed to spend a certain amount of time and attention on them. The challenges that these types of works have to overcome can be described by taking *Graphic Memories* as an example. For instance, as the author of *Graphic Memories*' recognizes, journalists now have to deal with certain reluctances on the part of the newsrooms who do not always offer enough financial support or assistance.

The description of this case study allows us to think about the negative implications of turning serious projects into pieces of *infotainment*. The trend to trivialize information in order to make it more attractive and profitable is not an isolated drift, but it represents the general mindset adopted by media outlets worldwide. Hoofd (Hoofd 2017, 2) likewise asks in the case of Malala, what concrete effect these journalistic efforts have on the lives of the women who participate in them. Moreover, she wonders whether or not they are unintentionally at risk of oversimplifying the current situation of these people in order to create a product that is welcome in the eyes of the Western viewer.

Additionally, the confluence of different tools in one single project leads us to think in terms of demands that communication professionals have to fulfill nowadays. In the best-case scenarios, *convergence journalism* is practised by multi-disciplinary teams who work together with the same scope. In worst cases, a single, multi-tasking professional is involved at every step. This is what happened to Ellison as it has already been discussed on the previous pages. Overwhelmed professionals like him are supposed to accomplish many different goals. At the same time, the convergence of different media in single pieces is affecting the fragmentation of the audience. If at some point, users had to choose whether to use the TV, buy the press, or play the radio to get updated, now they can find all these resources in digital platforms.

The *Graphic Memories*' case also points out the interaction that the audience demands. It is rare to find a journalistic piece which does not offer to the public the possibility to provide instant feedback or to be shared if it is considered relevant. Eventually, the interaction between the authors and the readers increases. Readers are not passive consumers anymore but are active content-generating users (Calcutt and Hammond 2011, 149). However, these opportunities are not equal to citizens across the globe; inequality is generated through the unequal access to internet around the world. From the moment when a certain command over information and communication technologies has become indispensable for full participation in the information society, "digital colonialism has evoked the familiar discourse of personal responsibility for

structural inequalities. In ancient times, the savage was guilty of being poor, dirty and ill; the contemporary pre-digital savage (...) is guilty of being unable to use computers” (Jandrić and Kuzmanić 2015, 44).

This paper claims that new media can be understood as reinventions of past formats and has shown this by comparing digital comics to cinema productions, paper comics and to the New Journalism movement. The appearance of these revolutionary forms called into question what the values of the journalistic profession were as it is happening now. Once again, the development of journalism is paralleling the development of society, being the first one subjected to the public’s demand.

5.1 Future Lines of Research

As mentioned before this study has been limited because only one case study has been explored. In further research, it would be interesting to explore other examples and conduct deeper studies that could lead to more accurate results. This would help to create a different hypothesis and generate new insights not yet explored by comparing different cases. Moreover, it would be convenient to study the audience’s point of view by researching on how they perceive the information through a digital comic. This could be done by conducting ethnographic research within the Ugandan audience. In addition, further researches could focus on the growing demand for journalists with convergence skills in strong cross-platform training. In the same line, it could be interesting to research the working routines, strategies, and challenges involved in global teams of journalists and the changes they generate on the traditional journalism paradigm. The risk of turning the coverage of complex topics into entertaining products deserves further attention because as this study proves, it is an emerging trend worth exploring. Moreover, the analysis has touched upon the topic of objectivity and graphic journalism. For further research, it would be interesting to explore how objectivity is perceived by the audience in the digital media landscape and specifically in the field of digital comics.

As this thesis has argued, new media formats and the endless opportunities that they are offer, are challenging the work of journalists and the role of a more and more demanding audience. This paper opens an interesting question on how the digital sphere is modifying the way news are consumed in different ways around the globe.

Appendices



Appendix A. "The Yellow Kid and His New Phonograph". Published by the New York Journal on October 25th, 1896. (Retrieved from <http://www.people.virginia.edu/~mmw3v/html/ykid/intro.htm>).

Appendix B: Questionnaire made to Marc Ellison on 9 October 2015.

- You have been reporting from Uganda since 2011. During these years of fieldwork, you have deeply investigated how the Ugandan Government and several NGOs try to reintegrate female children soldiers into society. Have you perceived any changes regarding the policies adopted by institutions to solve this issue?
- Your project is based on the personal experiences of four women that served to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) during their childhood. How did these women answer to the proposal of being the protagonists of your project?
- Why did you decide to present your findings as an interactive graphic novel?
- You previously described your method as anthropographic. Can you elaborate on what this means?
- You said you want to turn this story into a conversation with the audience. What did you do to achieve this?

- What properties make graphic novels a good tool to cover social and human right issues?
- How can drawings and other visual resources such as graphics or illustrations enrich traditional journalism?
- The Ugandan artist Chris Mafigiri has been responsible of illustrating the insights of your research. How was the experience of working together and, also, of getting organised with such a big distance between the two of you?
- Do you think that graphic novels like yours could also be used for educational purposes?
- Although their popularity is increasing little by little, it is still hard to find journalistic comics in mainstream media. How did you find a publisher interested in your project?
- On your web page you recognised that it would have been a better idea to collaborate with other journalists, as you have been doing many different tasks at the same time, like editing the videos, shooting the photographs and the web development. What would you have done differently in hindsight?
- Are you planning to continue working on similar ideas?
- If you had to select one of the passages of *Graphic Memories* that makes you feel especially satisfied, which one would you choose and why?



Appendix C. Panel depicting Marc Ellison's interview with Grace (Retrieved from http://marcellison.com/graphicmemories/GM_Ch4/).



Appendix D. Example of the use of red colour to portray women's experiences while in the LRA. (Retrieved from http://marcellison.com/graphicmemories/GM_Ch1/).

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Appendix E. Animation that allows a reader "to see through a woman's eyes" (Retrieved from http://marcellison.com/graphicmemories/GM_Ch4/).



Appendix F. Ellison showing some of the photos taken by the women involved in the story with their own cameras. (Retrieved from <http://www.storybench.org/bbc-journalist-using-cartooning-international-reporting/>).



Appendix G. *Graphic Memories* combines both photos and illustrations (Retrieved from http://marcellison.com/graphicmemories/GM_Ch1/).

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