FOOTNOTES IN GAZA

ALSO BY JOE SACCO

But I Like It

War's End: Profiles from Bosnia 1995–96

The Fixer: A Story from Sarajevo

Notes from a Defeatist

Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992–95

Palestine

FOOTNOTES IN GAZA

JOE SACCO



METROPOLITAN BOOKS

Henry Holt and Company ■ New York



Metropolitan Books
Henry Holt and Company, LLC
Publishers since 1866
175 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10010
www.henryholt.com

Metropolitan Books® and ® are registered trademarks of
Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

Copyright © 2009 by Joe Sacco
All rights reserved.
Distributed in Canada by H. B. Fenn and Company Ltd.

Some of the material in this book (from the chapters "Rafah's Curse" and "Worse Then, Worse Now") appeared in another form in "The Underground War in Gaza," *The New York Times Magazine*, July 6, 2003.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data
Sacco, Joe.
Footnotes in Gaza / Joe Sacco.—1st ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8050-7347-8
1. Arab-Israeli conflict—1948–1967. 2. Egypt—History—Intervention, 1956. 3. Rafah—History—20th century. 4. Khan Yunus—History—20th century. 5. Violence—Gaza Strip—Rafah—History—20th century. 6. Massacres—Gaza Strip—Khan Yunus—History—20th century. 7. Arab-Israeli conflict—1948–1967—Personal narratives, Palestinian. 8. Egypt—History—Intervention, 1956—Personal narratives, Palestinian. 9. Interviews—Gaza Strip—Rafah. 10. Interviews—Gaza Strip—Khan Yunus. I. Title.
DS119.7.S29 2009
956.04—dc22 2009028433

Henry Holt books are available for special promotions and premiums. For details contact: Director, Special Markets.

First Edition 2009

Printed in the United States of America
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

To the people of Gaza

FOREWORD

The genesis for this book dates to the spring of 2001 when the journalist Chris Hedges and I prepared to go on assignment to the Gaza Strip for *Harper's* magazine, he as a writer with me as illustrator. We had decided to focus on how Palestinians in one town—Khan Younis—were coping during the early months of the Second Intifada against the Israeli occupation. I recalled a reference I'd read many years before in Noam Chomsky's book *The Fateful Triangle*—basically a short quote from a United Nations document—about a large-scale killing of civilians in Khan Younis in 1956, and Chris agreed that we should add this barely noted historical episode to our story if it turned out to have some validity and current resonance.

Once in Khan Younis, we devoted about a day to gathering eyewitness testimony to what had happened in the town in November 1956 during the Suez Canal Crisis, when Israeli forces briefly occupied the Egyptian-ruled Gaza Strip. Old men and women had stark stories to tell about their fathers and husbands being shot in their houses or being lined up in the streets and killed by Israeli soldiers. One of those we interviewed was Abed El-Aziz El-Rantisi, a senior official of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Party (who was later assassinated by an Israeli missile). El-Rantisi, who in 1956 was nine years old, told us his uncle had been killed that day. "I still remember the wailing and tears of my father over his brother," he said. "I couldn't sleep for many months after that. . . . It left a wound in my heart that can never heal. I'm telling you a story and I'm almost crying. This sort of action can never be forgotten. . . . [T]hey planted hatred in our hearts."

Chris deemed what had happened in Khan Younis in 1956 a significant part of the town's history, and he included several paragraphs about it in the *Harper's* article. For whatever reason, that section was cut by the magazine's editors.

I found that galling. This episode—seemingly the greatest massacre of Palestinians on Palestinian soil, if the U.N. figures of 275 dead are to be believed—hardly deserved to be thrown back on the pile of obscurity. But there it lay, like innumerable historical tragedies over the ages that barely rate footnote status in the broad sweep of history—even though, as El-Rantisi alluded, they often contain the seeds of the grief and anger that shape present-day events.

To me, the story of the Khan Younis killings was not so easily dispensable. I had done some digging, and almost nothing had been written in English about the episode. I determined to go back to Gaza to research what had taken place in 1956. As I prepared, I began to learn more about another incident that had occurred around the same time, on November 12, in the neighboring town of Rafah, in which scores of Palestinian men were killed. What had happened there? Again, a couple of sentences in a U.N. report were all that saved the incident from outright oblivion. In some ways,

the Rafah story began to interest me more. The violence done in Khan Younis was shocking and brutal but, as I ascertained on my initial trip to Gaza with Chris, very straightforward; the killings in Rafah took place over a daylong screening operation for Palestinian guerrillas and soldiers. How had more than 100 people died in what should have been a standard, if complicated, military procedure? Had Israeli soldiers simply "panicked and opened fire on the running crowd," as the U.N. report surmised? Creatively speaking, there were more layers to investigate with the Rafah story, more pieces of a puzzle to put together. In addition, almost all the men of military age were caught up in the sprawling Rafah incident and many survivors would still be alive; at Khan Younis, only a handful of those involved survived being lined up and shot. So this book is broken up into two major though uneven sections—one about Khan Younis and the other, considerably longer, about Rafah.

Most of the on-the-ground field research for this book took place during two trips to the Gaza Strip between November 2002 and March 2003. My main priority was to record the stories of Palestinian eyewitnesses to the events in Khan Younis and Rafah. But 50 years is a long time to wait before asking people what they remember about a particular day. Thus the recollections reproduced here have been scrutinized in light of an inevitable blurring of memory and are compared in their details: Did the survivors recall essentially the same thing? Documentary evidence is usually considered more reliable than oral testimony by historians, but the record is scant and certain unsavory orders and reports are often kept "off the books" or are stored out of reach of even the most diligent researcher. Egyptian military records are closed to most inquiries. Certain U.N. records in Jordan and elsewhere that might shed some light are near unreachable. Still, it was important that available avenues be explored, and to this end I employed two Israeli researchers to go through the Israel Defense Forces archives. One of them also examined the Israel State Archives, the Knesset Archives, a press archive, and the *Kol Ha'am* (Communist Party) newspaper archive for any mention of the two incidents. Translations of key records and a list of Israeli historians and significant personnel consulted are included in the appendices at the end of the book. My hope is that this account will prompt former Israeli soldiers who might have witnessed the events in 1956 to offer their own recollections and points of view. Perhaps an Israeli historian needs to step into the breach.

Besides the problems inherent in relying on memories, addressed more fully in the book, the reader should be aware that there is another filter through which these stories passed before reaching the page, namely my own visual interpretation. In essence, I am the set designer and the director of every scene that takes place in the 1940s and 1950s. In reconstructing what the towns and refugee camps of Gaza looked like, I relied heavily on photographs available at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) archives in Gaza City. I also drew on physical descriptions related to me by Palestinians. Still, any act of visualization—drawing, in this case—comes with an unavoidable measure of refraction.

My research did not take place in a vacuum. While I was investigating what had happened in 1956, Israeli attacks were killing Palestinians, suicide bombers were killing Israelis,

and elsewhere in the Middle East the United States was gearing up for war in Iraq. Among the most critical developments in the daily lives of Gazans at the time was the wide-scale demolition of Palestinian homes in Rafah and Khan Younis, which made its way into the fabric of this book. (Interviews with Israeli military personnel for their take on the matter can be found in Appendix 2.) However, even the present-day stories I tell here quickly fell under the category of history because the situation in Gaza has undergone two major changes since I started this project almost seven years ago.

First, in 2005, Israel unilaterally dismantled all the Jewish settlements in Gaza and left the small sliver of land entirely to its Palestinian inhabitants. However, Israel still tightly controlled Gaza's airspace, coastline, and its entry and exit points save one. (That one was the Rafah terminal, with access to Egypt, which severely limited movement to and from Gaza.) In effect, the Gaza Strip, overcrowded and destitute, had not been freed from the Israeli clamp or the threat of withering attack or retaliation by Israeli forces, as witnessed in the winter of 2008–9.

Second, in 2007, the Islamic group Hamas seized control and has been in charge of Gaza ever since. Hamas, branded a terrorist organization by Israel and the United States, had won the majority of legislative seats in a 2006 election. A national unity government with its rival Fatah was unacceptable to the Israelis, who further tightened the screws on Gaza. When tensions between Fatah and Hamas boiled over, Hamas preemptively seized Gaza ahead of a U.S.-engineered coup by Fatah. What shocked Palestinians, even those disgusted with years of corruption under Fatah rule, was the ruthlessness with which Hamas crushed its Fatah opponents. The tradition of Palestinian militants, regardless of faction, standing shoulder-to-shoulder against Israel and not against each other was at an end. With the Hamas takeover, Israel declared the Gaza Strip an "enemy entity." The blockade of Gaza, which was joined by the United States and the European Union, is, at this writing, almost complete.

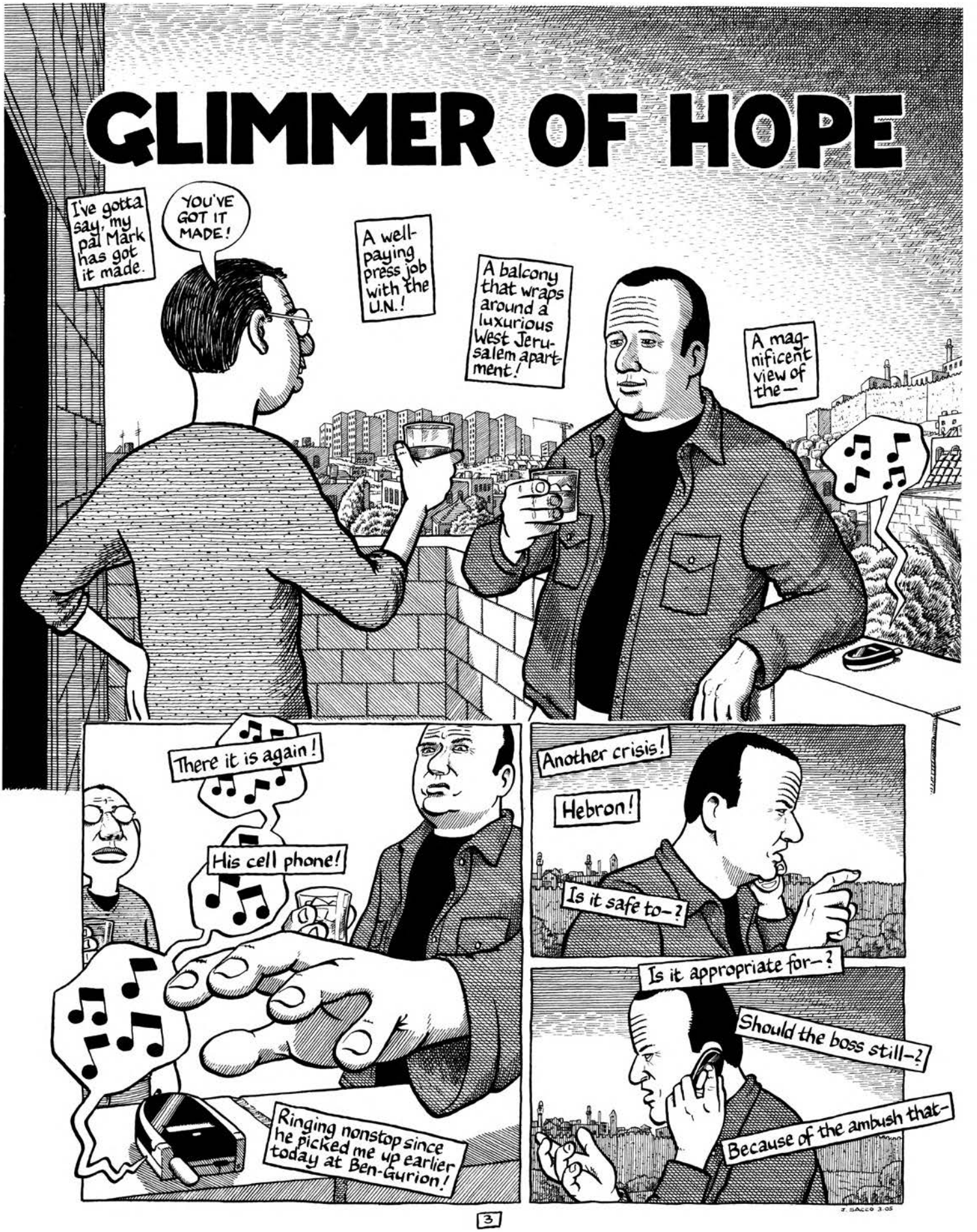
As someone in Gaza told me, "events are continuous." Palestinians never seem to have the luxury of digesting one tragedy before the next one is upon them. When I was in Gaza, younger people often viewed my research into the events of 1956 with bemusement. What good would tending to history do them when they were under attack and their homes were being demolished *now*? But the past and present cannot be so easily disentangled; they are part of a remorseless continuum, a historical blur. Perhaps it is worth our while to freeze that churning forward movement and examine one or two events that were not only a disaster for the people who lived them but might also be instructive for those who want to understand why and how—as El-Rantisi said—hatred was "planted" in hearts.

Joe Sacco
July 2009

FOOTNOTES IN GAZA

KHAN YOUNIS




GLIMMER OF HOPE
I've gotta say, my pal Mark has got it made.
YOU'VE GOT IT MADE!
A well-paying press job with the U.N.!
A balcony that wraps around a luxurious West Jerusalem apartment!
A magnificent view of the—
There it is again!
His cell phone!
Ringing nonstop since he picked me up earlier today at Ben-Gurion!
Another crisis!
Hebron!
Is it safe to—?
Is it appropriate for—?
Should the boss still—?
Because of the ambush that—
J. SACCO 3.05

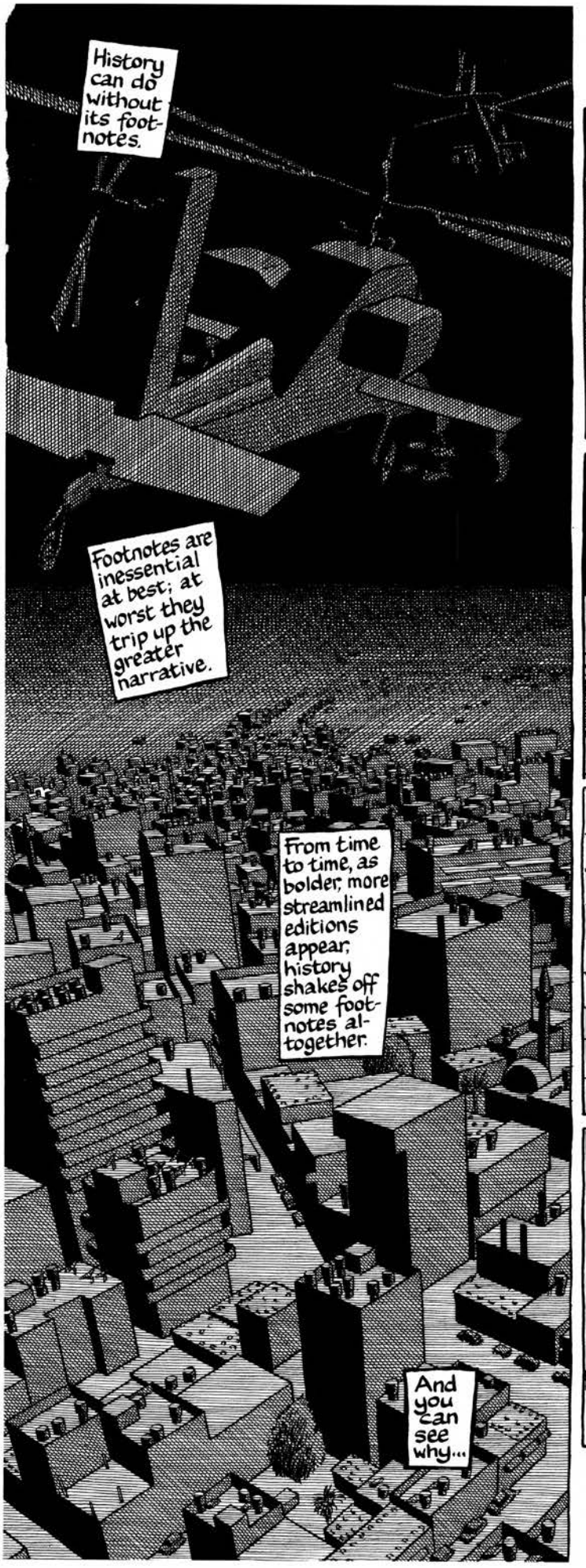

He hangs up...
but the cell rings again!
That call finishes...
and he's got to make a call himself!
He hangs up, the cell rings!
He answers, he hangs up!
It rings again!
And again!
And
I'm running out of there and into Christine's car.
Christine's Reuters.
HOWYA DOIN', DEARIE?
We haven't seen each other since—
And now we're somewhere to meet her journalist friends.
They're brushing off the day's dust, swirling the night's first drinks, and talking the rarified talk of the old hand and hack.
Where've you been today?
Hebron?
The ambush?
How many dead?
How will this affect the—?
J. SACCO 3-05

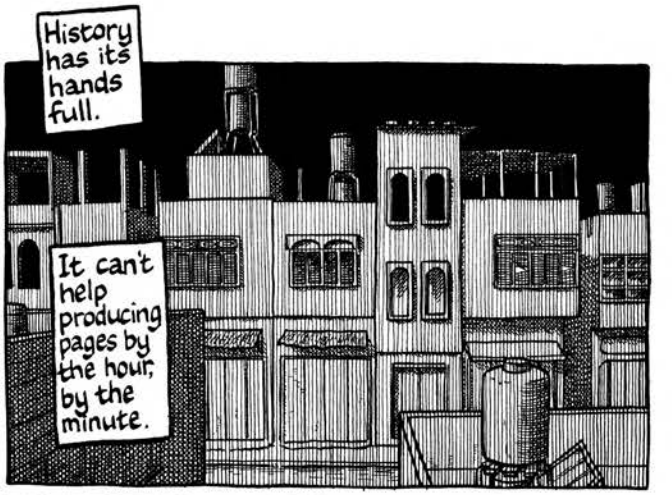

They shake their heads.
They roll their eyes.
It does get old.
Waitress!
What's on the menu?
Bombings!
Assassinations!
Incursions!
They could file last month's story today—or last year's, for that matter—and who'd know the difference?
Because they've wrung every word they can out of the Second Intifada, they've photographed every wailing mother, quoted every lying spokesperson, detailed every humiliation—and so what?
Two dead!
Five dead!
20 dead!
A week ago!
A month ago!
A year ago!
50 years ago.
J. SACCO 3-05 - 1-09
5

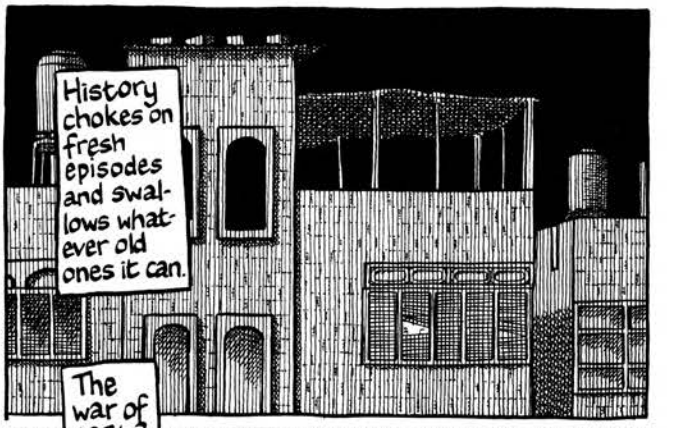

Mark shows up late and the ringing follows him here, too.
But it's not about the ambush.
He's organizing his party!
Can you make it?
They're coming from all over!
Big party tomorrow!
And now it's tomorrow!
And it's not just a party!
It's a blow out!
Everyone's there!
Diplomats!
U.N. officials!
World Bankers!
CNN!
The Financial Times!
Newsweek!
Yanks!
Dutchmen!
Brits!
Swedes!
Aussies!
Frogs!
And amazingly, perhaps uniquely in this season of bombed-out pizzerias and bulldozed refugee camps, hepcat Arabs from Ramallah and right-on Jews from Tel Aviv are sharing salads and grooving to the same post-bop jazz.
6

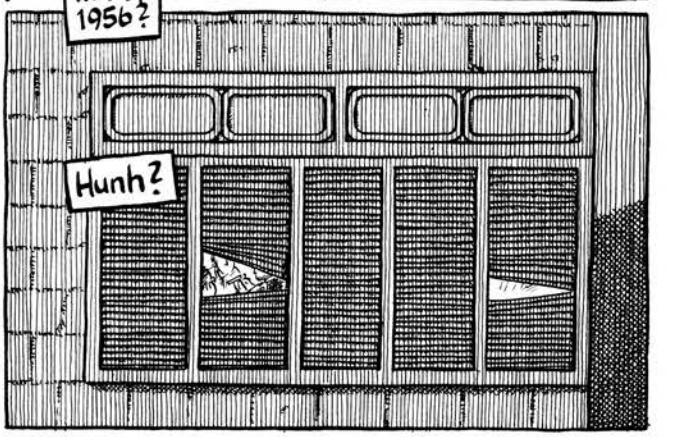

Are the dark-haired cuties who jump up when the dance beat kicks in Palestinian or Israeli?
I can't tell, and one Palestinian fellow, as blissed out as I by this heady scene, motions to me as if I were an audience of imaginary Jewish friends...
WE DON'T WANT TO PUSH YOU INTO THE SEA.
LET'S HANG OUT, MAN.
Ahhh, even in the belly of the world's most intractable conflict there's a glimmer of hope in which to exalt!
Meanwhile, my own glimmer is fading quickly.
I'M AFRAID IT'S NOT GOOD NEWS.
The guy at the Foreign Press Office tells me my application for press credentials has been turned down.
WHAT YOU'RE DOING DOESN'T FIT INTO THE CATEGORY OF REAL-TIME NEWS.
"Real-time news"?
I suppose he's right.
The world has already scraped last week off its shoe, and I want to poke at a story that's half a century old?
Still, he said I might be able to get into Gaza without a press pass, that it'd be up to the soldiers at the Erez crossing point.
And at Erez, the gateway to the Gaza Strip, they wave me through.
REALTÀ
EXPORT
Hope glimmers again!
J. SACCO 4.05
7


This is the story of footnotes to a side-show of a forgotten war.
FOOTNOTES
The war pitted Egypt against the strange alliance of Britain, France, and Israel in 1956;
the sideshow was the on-going raids and counter-raids across the Gaza border by Palestinian guerrillas and Israeli forces;
and the foot-notes—
Well, like most foot-notes, they dropped to the bottom of history's pages, where they barely hang on.
J. SACCO 4-05-1-09


History can do without its footnotes.
Footnotes are inessential at best; at worst they trip up the greater narrative.
From time to time, as bolder, more streamlined editions appear, history shakes off some footnotes altogether.
And you can see why...


History has its hands full.
It can't help producing pages by the hour, by the minute.


History chokes on fresh episodes and swallows whatever old ones it can.
The war of 1956?


Hunh?


Here we are tonight, for instance, in Gaza, with Israeli pilots circling above us and a Palestinian I have just met checking his Browning down below.
J. SACCO 4-05


They are a small part of a larger struggle between their two peoples over the same land, linked by a desire or a necessity to kill each other in the here and now.
What does 'Sb matter to them?
Someone brings in a Kalashnikov.
IT NEEDS TO BE CLEANED.
J. SACCO 4-05
We go up to the roof.
The unseen Apaches are receding, and their clatter is replaced by the lawn mower buzz of a drone, which circles overhead, relaying images from its see-in-the-dark camera to a command post somewhere.


I've already brushed my teeth and performed my nightly ablutions.
I'd put on pajamas if I had them.
This is the end of my first day in Khan Younis, and I've been operating on less than two or three hours of sleep each of the last few jet-lagged nights.
An Apache's cannon is whirring at something in the distance.
30 MM.
Who is this guy?
Abed, my guide, tells me his name is Khaled.
HE IS 'MUTARAD,' WANTED BY THE ISRAELIS.
They'd snuff him out in a second if they had him in their cross-hairs.
Now we hear tanks to the east and their heavy machine guns opening up.
THEY'VE SURROUNDED TWO OF THE EASTERN VILLAGES.
IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE GOING TO DEMOLISH THE HOUSE OF TALAL ABU ZARIEFEH.
WHO'S THAT?
AN ACTIVIST. ALSO WANTED.
J SACCO 2009


Soon thereafter we hear a loud explosion.
That settles the matter of Talal Abu Zariefeh's house.
And so probably the Israelis aren't coming into Khan Younis after all.
Or are they?
IF YOU'RE TIRED, YOU SHOULD GO TO SLEEP.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT US.
The next morning we learn there's been a suicide bombing in Jerusalem.
Abed flips through the Arab stations before leaving the set on CNN for my benefit.
So far ten people are reported killed.
Another footnote, another page.
CNN
Here, where the ink never dries.
J. SACCO 5-05
12

ABED


You sort of forget what it's like till you're here again, and then it all comes back to you in a swirl of dust and a tornado of children.
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
HELLO! WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
Christ almighty, not this again!
WHA YOUR NAME
They don't see many outsiders here in southern Gaza, which makes me exotic, sometimes golden.
I was once one of three in the backseat of a taxi that stopped for a couple more passengers...
one of whom tried to squeeze in next to me—
but the driver would have none of it.
CAN'T YOU SEE HE'S A FOREIGNER?!
Then again, sometimes my presence elicits discomfort, suspicion, perhaps tinged with humiliation.
THEY'RE USING US FOR LAUGHS.
Who am I, after all, snooping around, taking photos, wanting names?
SOMEBODY FROM THE JEWS WILL GET YOUR BOOK AND READ MY NAME AND MY ADDRESS... AND THEY WILL COME HERE IN THE NIGHT AND—
—and demolish your house?
"If they demolish your house," I say, "I promise I will buy you a new one!"
J. SACCO 5-05


We laugh, and suddenly–
WHAT DO I CARE?!
I'M 72 YEARS OLD!
And he gives me his name and date of birth and tells me everything he remembers about that November in 1956 when the Israeli army crashed into the Gaza Strip and left two towns and their refugee camps shattered.
Generally speaking Abed sets people at ease about me and answers raised eyebrows with a smooth and soon-to-be-rote explanation about my obsession with '56.
Morning, noon, and night I'm with Abed, and if I'm with Abed, I must be okay.
ARE YOU TWO STILL TOGETHER?
He is well known on the streets of his hometown, Khan Younis.
He is educated, his family clan is respected.
He is a patriot.
He got a bullet in his leg while stoning an Israeli soldier when he was 13 or 14 years old.
That was during the First Intifada back in the late 1980s.
FUJIFILM
14


One day we watch a video from that era.
In it, Israeli vehicles charge defiant Palestinian teenagers who leap out of the way and let loose a torrent of stones.
A nostalgic Abed tells me the first Intifada was truly a popular uprising.
Abed is one of the many Palestinians angered by the agreements the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) made with Israel starting in 1993, known as the Oslo Accords, which ended the first Intifada and returned Yasser Arafat and the old-guard Palestinian leadership from exile in Tunisia.
OSLO [CREATED] A KIND OF HYSTERIA.
PEOPLE STOPPED THROWING ROCKS AT THE ISRAELIS AND STARTED THROWING OLIVE BRANCHES
BUT WE GOT NOTHING FROM OSLO.
Although Israeli soldiers mostly withdrew to their fixed positions, the overall occupation continued and the number of Jewish settlers on occupied land doubled.
DURING THE FIRST INTIFADA, I USED TO THINK WE WERE A GREAT PEOPLE.
NOW I DON'T.
OUR LEADERS, WHEN THEY WERE IN TUNIS, WERE LIKE HEROES TO US.
AFTER OSLO, WHEN THEY CAME HERE, WE SAW THEM FOR WHAT THEY ARE.
THEY PUT THEIR PRIVATE CONCERNS ABOVE THE NATIONAL CAUSE.
THE PEOPLE ARE THE ONES WHO SACRIFICED, AND WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT IS GOING TO TEL AVIV FOR A GLASS OF WINE AND TRAVELING AROUND FREELY.
J SACCO 5-05

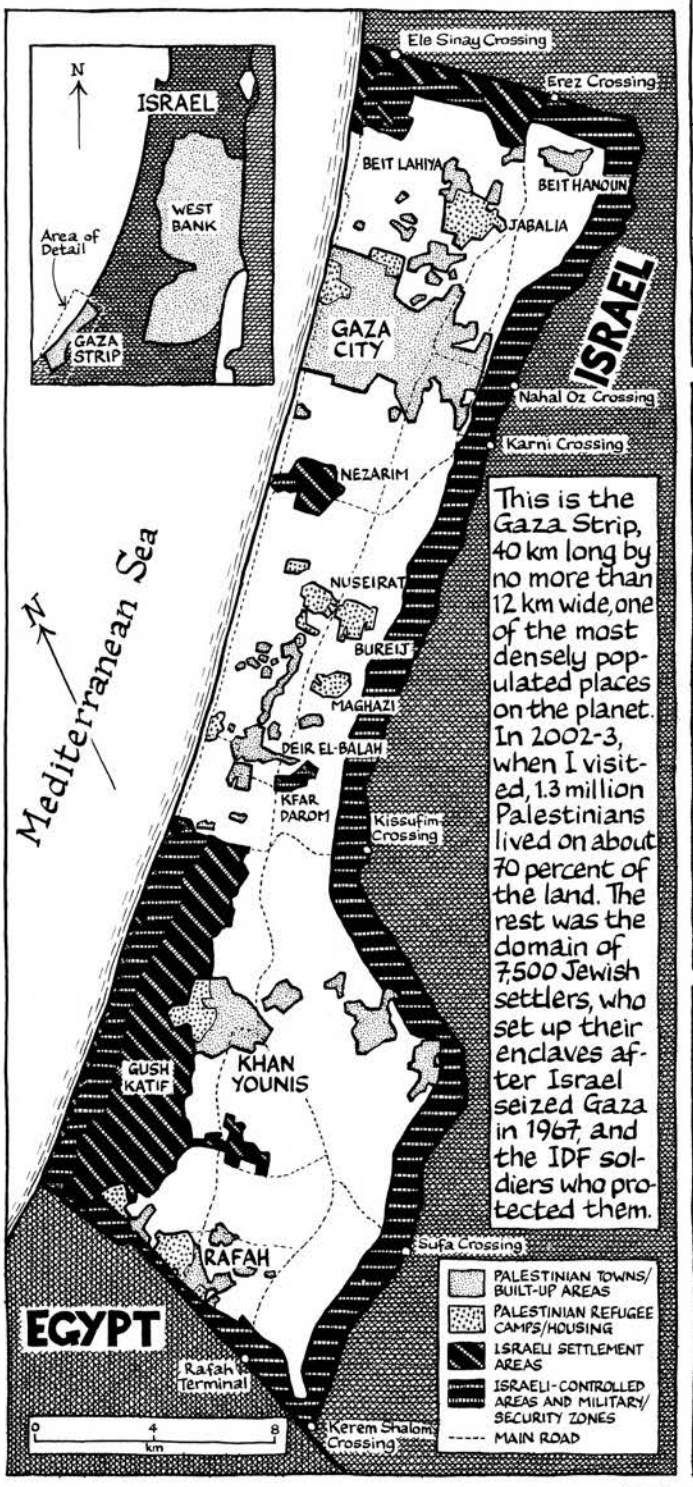
The uneasy "Oslo period," straining under the weight of the interminable occupation and the phenomenon of suicide attacks on Israeli civilians, ended after Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon's provocative visit in September 2000 to Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, which is also the site of the Jewish Temple Mount.



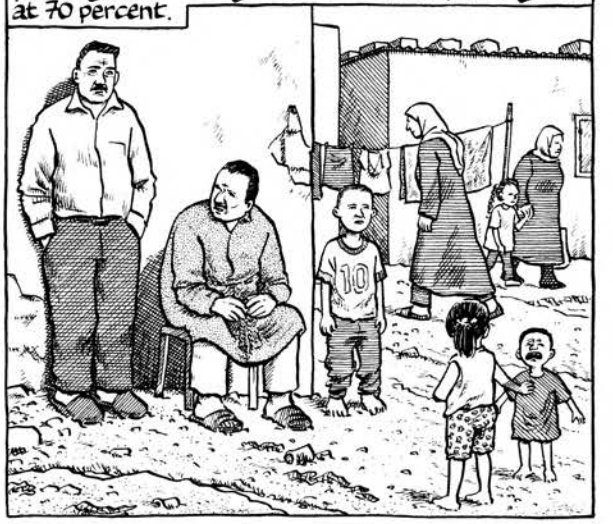



Sometimes Abed and I check out the damage wrought by the previous night's bulldozers.
We talk to people sifting through their rubble.
CAN YOU IMAGINE A DIFFERENT LIFE FOR YOURSELF, OR ARE YOU SO USED TO THIS THAT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE?
FOR ME, I CAN.
I WANT TO SPEND ANOTHER YEAR IN GAZA, AND THEN I NEED TO LEAVE, MAYBE FOR THREE OR FOUR YEARS...
NOT JUST TO FINISH MY STUDIES, BUT TO SEE SOMETHING ELSE OF THE WORLD, TO GET DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.
On another occasion Abed tells me—
I'D LIKE TO EXPERIENCE SOMETHING OF THE FREEDOM OF THE WEST WITHOUT MAKING MYSELF CONFUSED.
DO YOU FEEL FREE IN GAZA?
IN MY THOUGHTS.
Sometimes he's less philosophical.
I NEED TO DRINK SOMETHING.
TO FORGET ALL THIS.
TO GET DRUNK.
J. SACCO 5-05

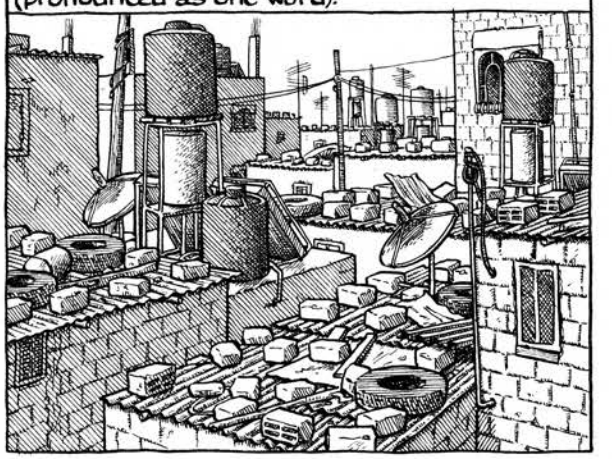
THE GAZA STRIP



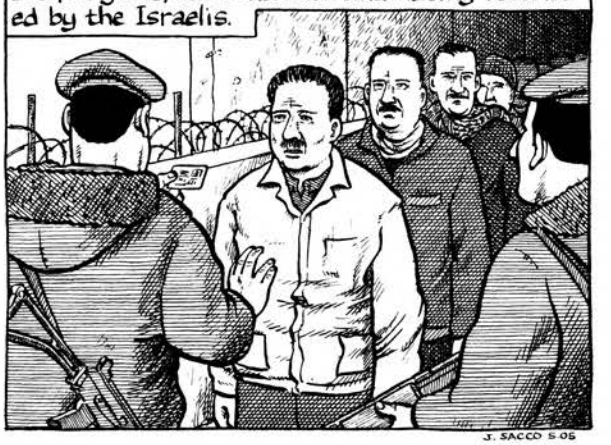
Among the Palestinians here, unemployment was at 50 percent. The number of people below the poverty level – living on less than $2 per day – was at 70 percent.



About two-thirds were registered refugees, the jetsam of the '48 war. Most of these lived in the eight major camps administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency – UNRWA (pronounced as one word).

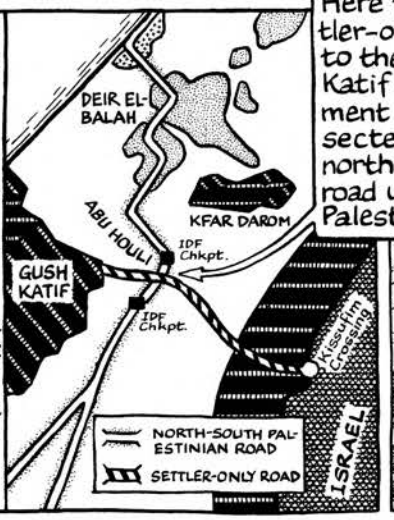


All access to and from Gaza, for Palestinians and foreigners, was controlled and heavily restricted by the Israelis.



J. SACCO 5.05

The placement of settlements, settler roads, and checkpoints allowed the Israelis to easily separate one part of Gaza from another. For example, the south was frequently cut off from the rest of the Strip at the IDF checkpoints at Abu Houli.



Here the settler-only road to the Gush Katif settlement bloc bisected the north-south road used by Palestinians.

When settler cars approached the overpass, or for "security" considerations, or for no discernible reason, Palestinian traffic was stopped here—for ten minutes, half a day, or days at a time.

The two major population centers in the south are Khan Younis and Rafah. We'll get to Rafah later. Right now our headquarters is Khan Younis.

And our command post is Abed's home in the center of town.

Here we plan the day's movements...

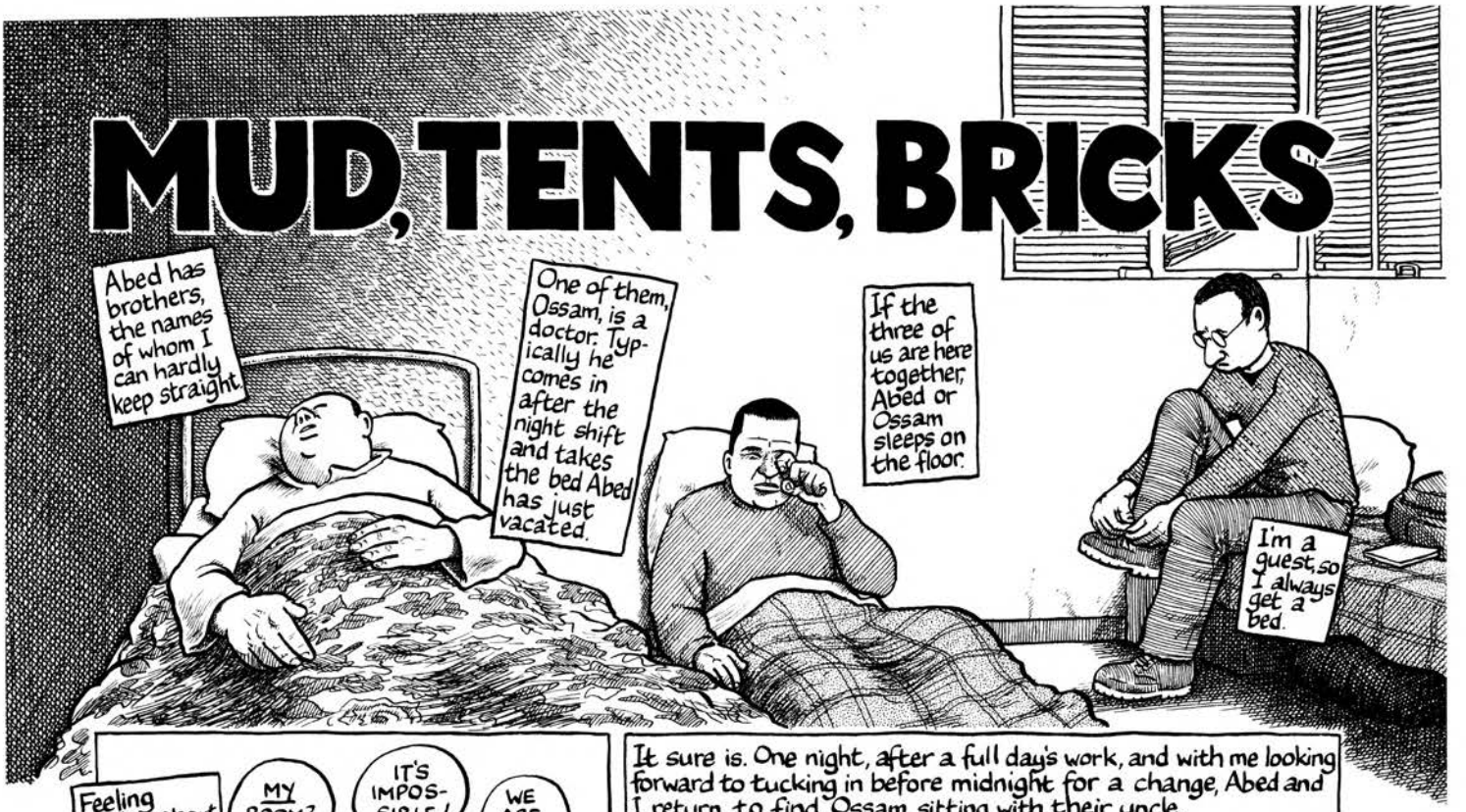
THE GUY WILL MEET US AFTER PRAYERS.

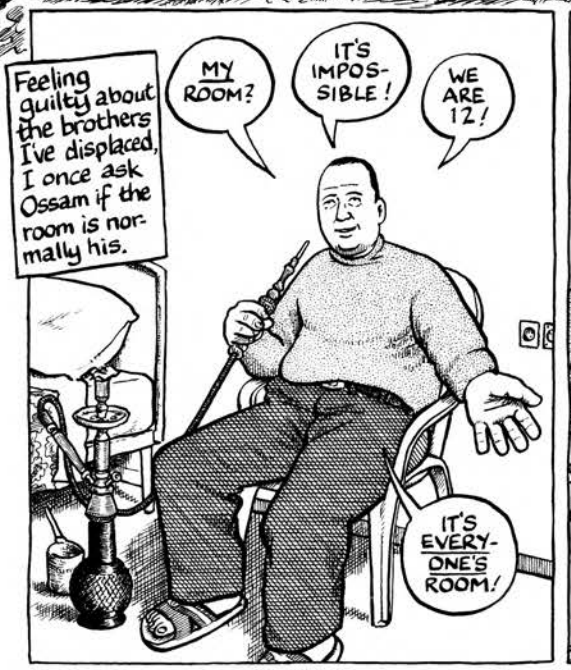
SOUNDS GOOD.

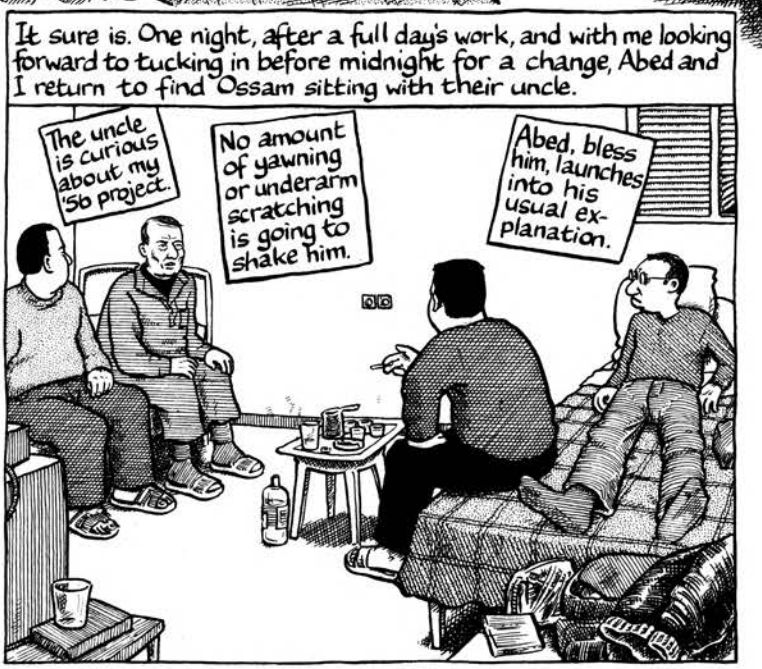
and here we eat and sleep.

J. SACCO 5.05

MUD, TENTS, BRICKS

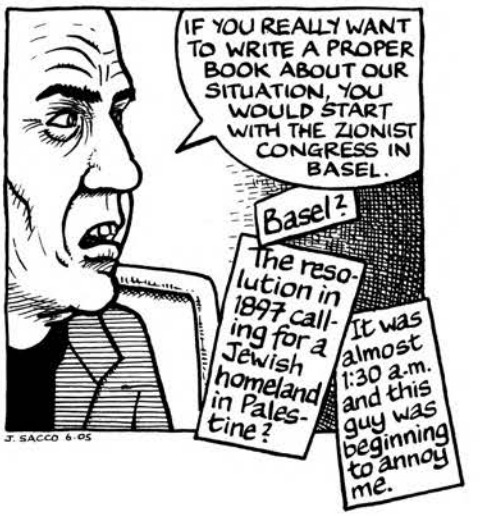






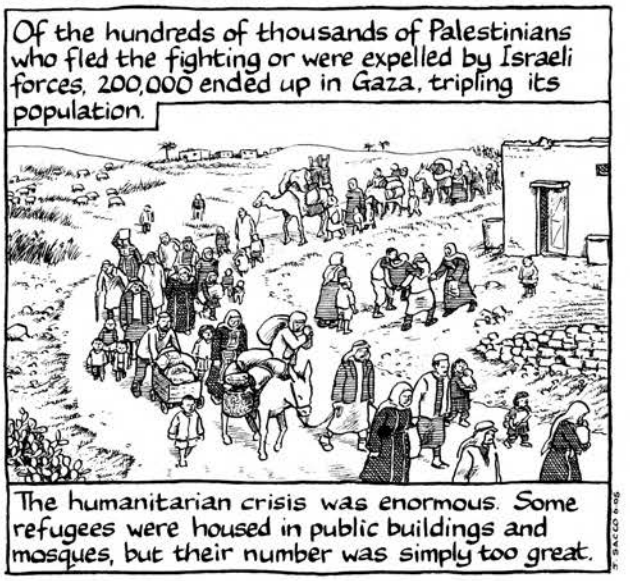







WHAT ABOUT 1948?
Okay, okay! His point is finally taken...
and since one must start somewhere, that watershed year, when Israel declared independence and Arab armies attacked the nascent state, seems as logical a place as any.


When the shooting stopped and the U.N. had brokered an armistice demarcation line, the bruised Egyptian army held on to a tiny sliver of Palestine dubbed the Gaza Strip.


Of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled the fighting or were expelled by Israeli forces, 200,000 ended up in Gaza, tripling its population.
The humanitarian crisis was enormous. Some refugees were housed in public buildings and mosques, but their number was simply too great.


Along the way, over the course of my visits to Gaza, Abed and I collect some stories about that time when the dispossesed came here with nothing and found— what?
21


WHEN WE CAME FROM OUR ORIGINAL VILLAGES...
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA
"we dug holes and put blankets on the ground, and we lived like that for a short time.
"Some of the people were under tree branches. They covered the branches with blankets and sheltered themselves."
WE WERE SLEEPING UNDER THE TREES...
MAHMOUD MOHAMMED
"We had nothing with which to live. We had no mattresses, no tents. Gaza was like a desert.
"Then the Quakers came, and they put up huge tents."
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA: "Some people were given a whole tent, a big tent. These big tents could be divided for four families. They divided each room from the others with a blanket.
J. SACCO 6.05

"Then they distributed food. Flour, oil..."

WE WOULD GO WITH MY FATHER... TO DIG IN THE GROUND FOR SOME METAL, SOME OTHER MATERIAL, TO SELL.

RA'ESA SALIM HASSAN KALOOB

"And we used to go to the Egyptian positions which were here to buy [the soldiers'] stale bread."

MAHMOUD MOHAMMED: "We cooked our food by burning cactus that we'd dried in the sun."

MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA: "They used to cut wood, and God would have to make it burn because the wood wasn't dry.

"No kerosene, no gas. Nothing."

MAHMOUD MOHAMMED: "We dug holes in the ground [for toilets] outside... People could do nothing more than this."

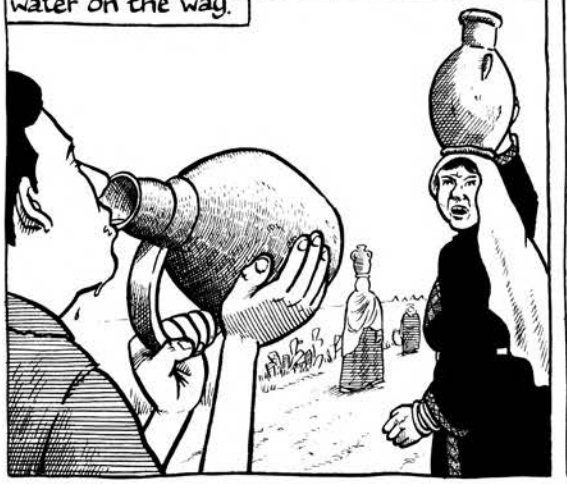
WATER? THERE WASN'T ANY WATER.

OMM AWAD EL-NAJEELI

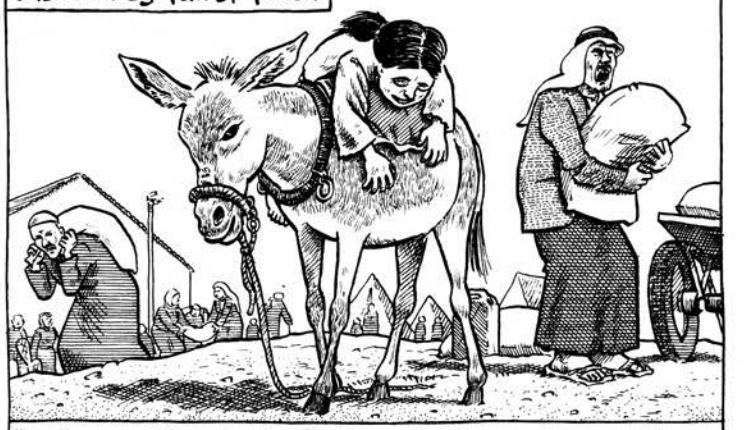
"We used to walk two kilometers to bring one jug of water... I used to carry my baby and at the same time put the jug on my head."

J. SACCO 6.05

MAHMOUD MOHAMMED: "We used to bring the water from a far distance. When we came home, we'd find the water was gone. We'd drunk the water on the way."



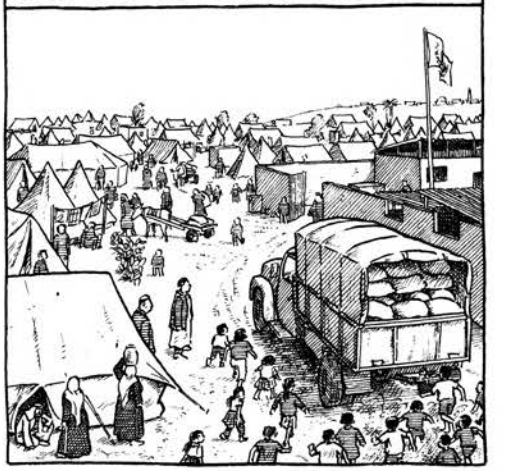
RA'ESA SALIM HASSAN KALOOB: "Once when I was a child there was a donkey walking the streets, and I jumped on the donkey. I found the donkey full of fleas.



"And my mother took off all my clothes and burned them. There was a shortage of water, a shortage of soap."



UNRWA was established in late 1949 to provide for the Palestinian refugees, and it took over from the Quakers in 1950.



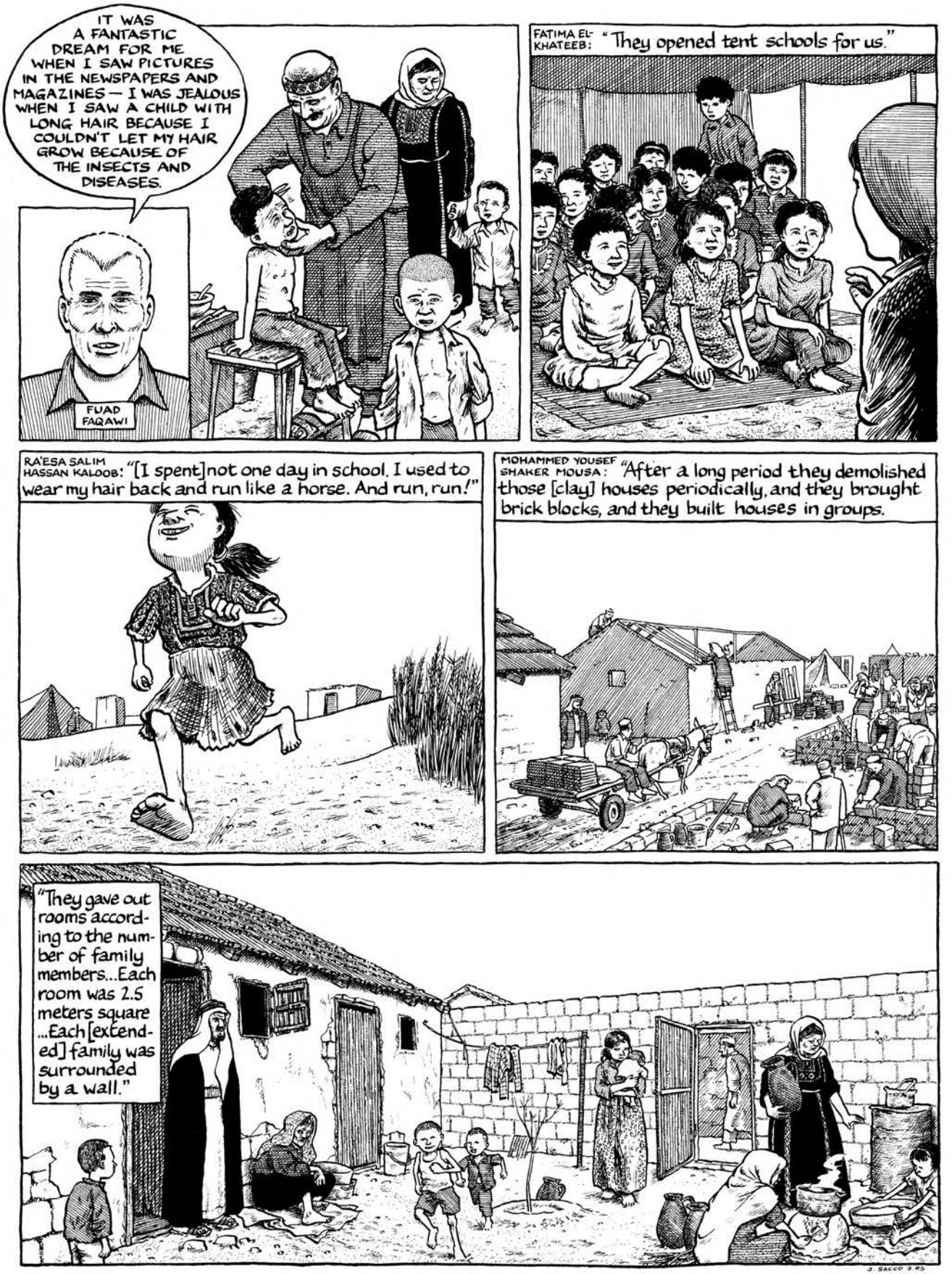


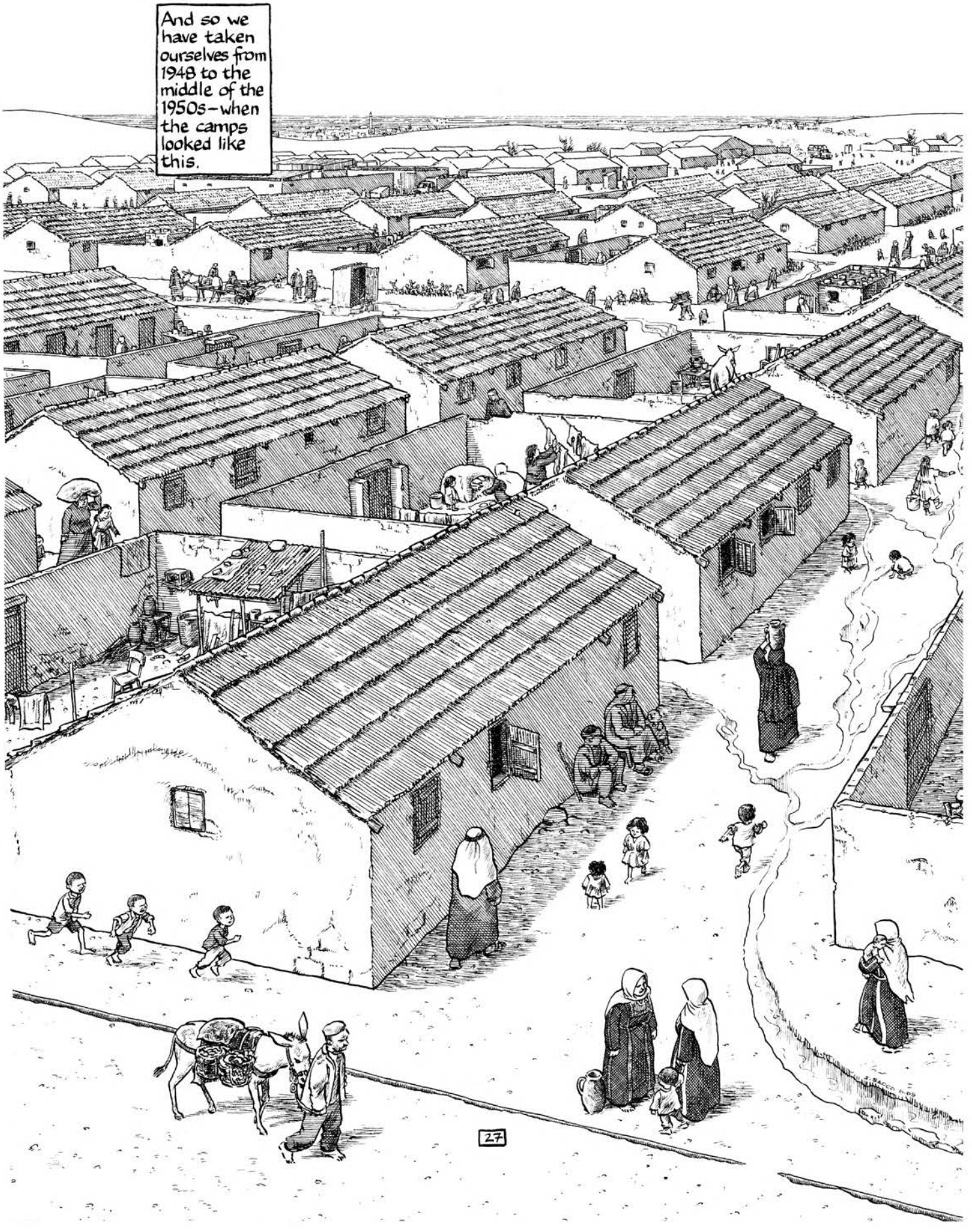
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA: "They built groups of toilets. A door for the women, and on the other side a door for the men. Anyone entering these toilets should wear high shoes otherwise he'd sink in the water and sewage."

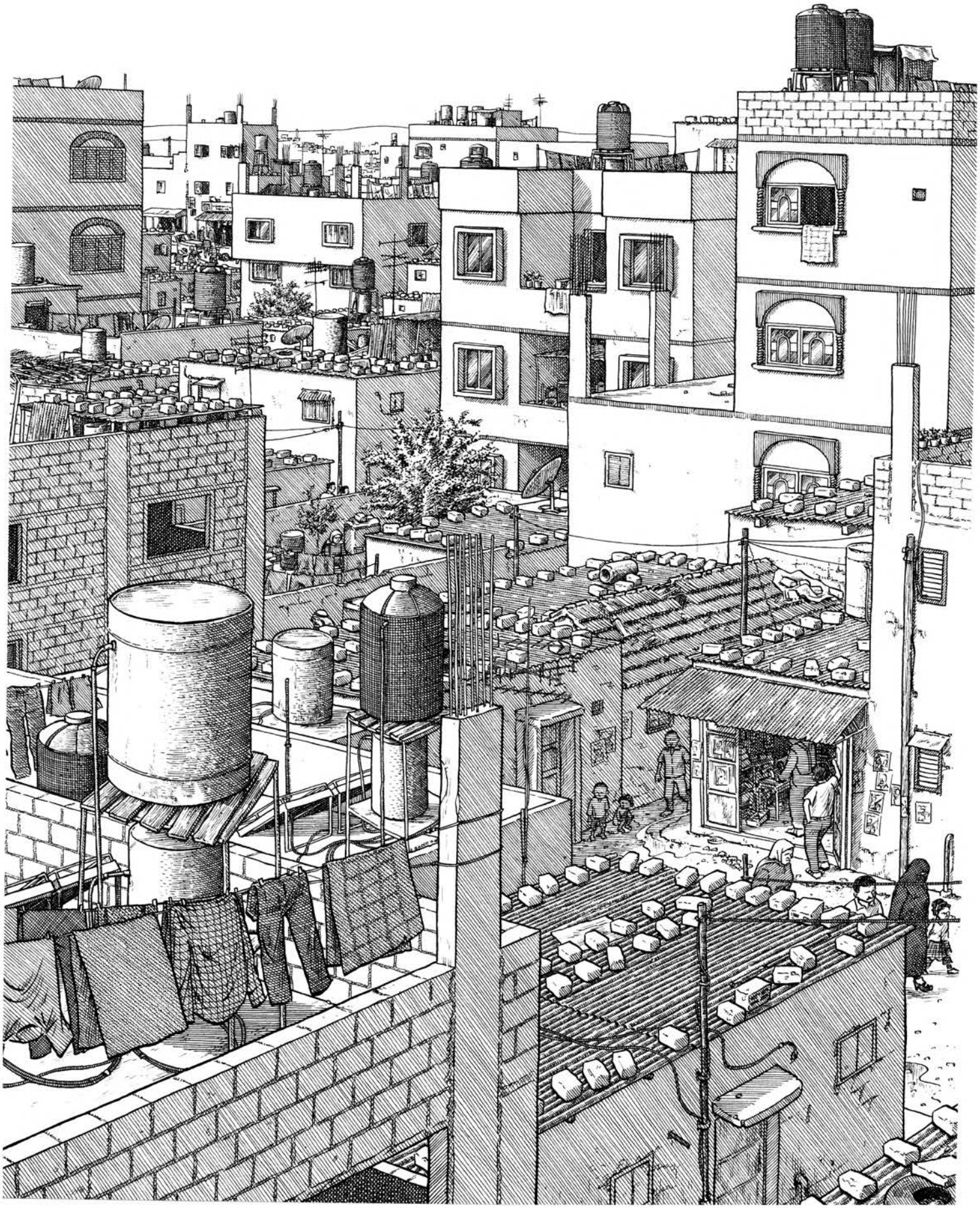


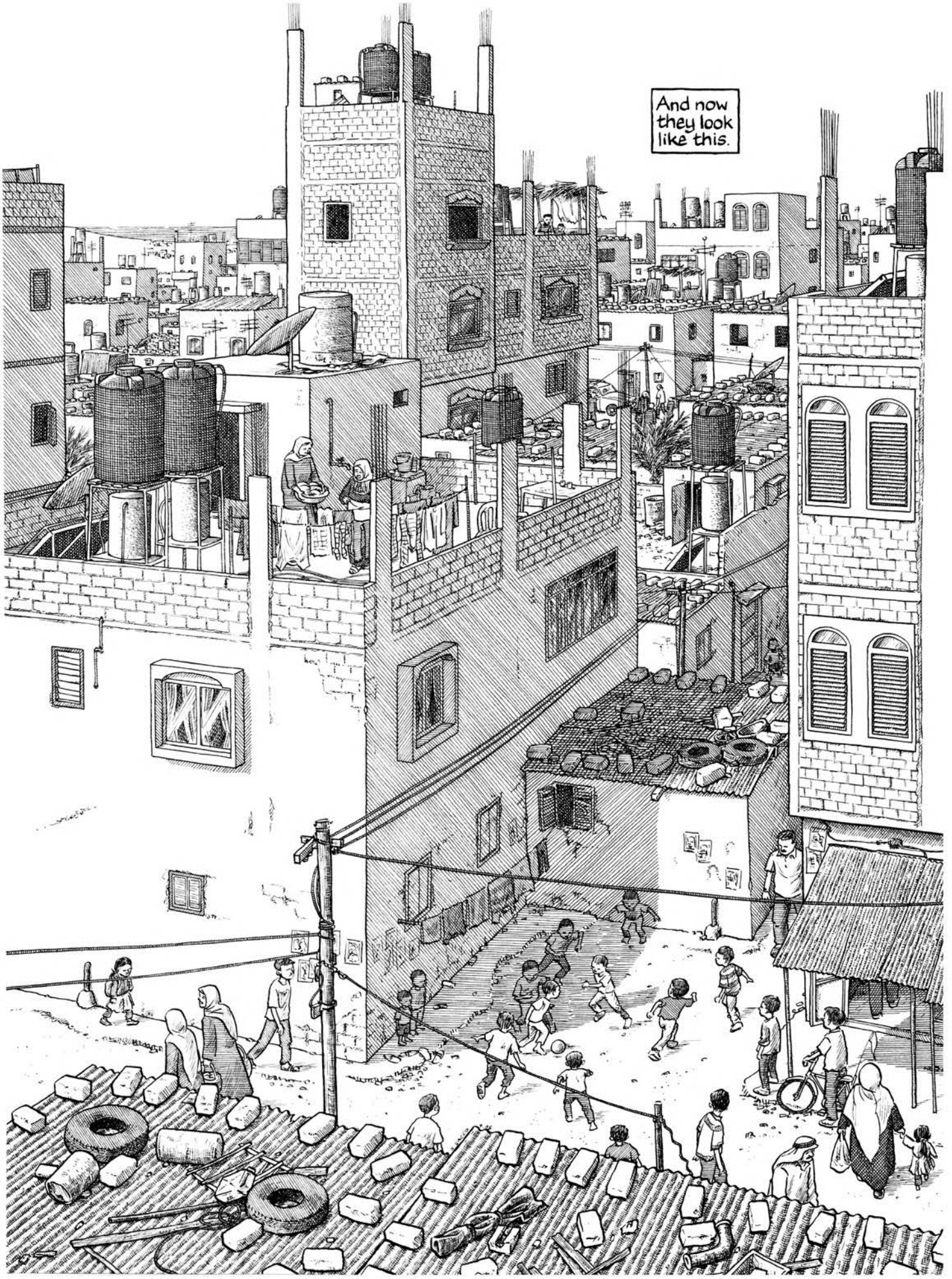
J.SACCO 9.05


YOUSEF ISMAEL FOUDA: "We started to build clay houses ourselves because the tents didn't protect us from the rains... Small rooms, 3.5 x 3.5 meters.
"Fifteen people in this room."
RA'ESA SALIM HASSAN KALOOB: "They used to make bricks and used wooden boxes as a frame. And they lined them up and put them in the sun. When they were dry they used them to build walls.
"No windows, of course. Without a door. A hole in the wall."
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA: "The walls from clay, the roof from palm branches. Over the branches, clay. On top of that they put tar to prevent the clay from getting wet."
YOUSEF ISMAEL FOUDA: "We used to buy mats from Egypt that were full of bugs.
"I'm going to make you laugh. We would use a bit of moist flour to kill the bugs. You'd find bits of flour full of blood.
"UNRWA would spray DDT from time to time."
J SACCO 6-05


IT WAS A FANTASTIC DREAM FOR ME WHEN I SAW PICTURES IN THE NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES — I WAS JEALOUS WHEN I SAW A CHILD WITH LONG HAIR BECAUSE I COULDN'T LET MY HAIR GROW BECAUSE OF THE INSECTS AND DISEASES.
FUAD FAQAWI
FATIMA EL-KHATEEB: "They opened tent schools for us."
RA'ESA SALIM HASSAN KALOOB: "[I spent] not one day in school. I used to wear my hair back and run like a horse. And run, run!"
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA: "After a long period they demolished those [clay] houses periodically, and they brought brick blocks, and they built houses in groups.
"They gave out rooms according to the number of family members...Each room was 2.5 meters square ...Each [extended] family was surrounded by a wall."
J. SACCO 9.05


And so we have taken ourselves from 1948 to the middle of the 1950s – when the camps looked like this.
27

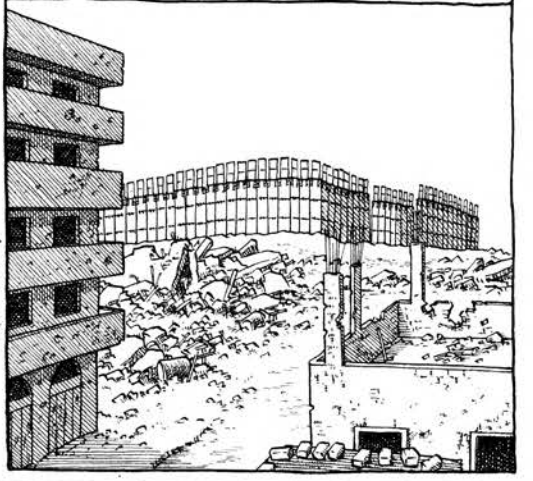



And now they look like this.

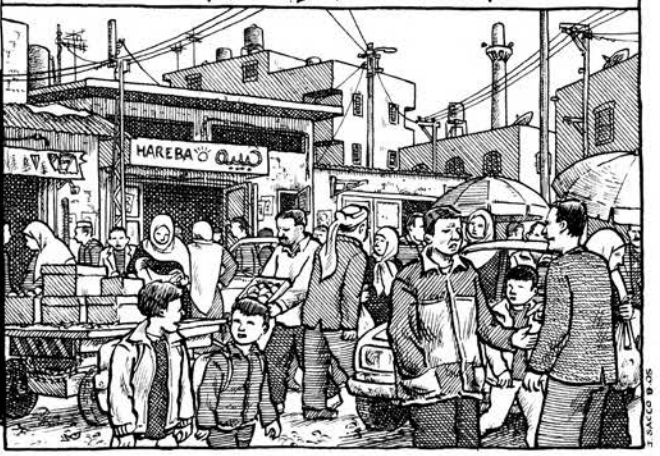
THE ONLY OPTION

Since the mid-1950s the swollen population of Khan Younis camp has had nowhere to build but into the streets and up.

The camp is bordered by the town of the same name. From the late 1960s to 2005, it was hemmed in on its other sides by Gush Katif, the Jewish settlement bloc.



Palestinian camps all over the Gaza Strip have taken on a look of densely packed permanence, at some places indistinguishable from the towns they abut, with schools, workshops, mosques, and marketplaces...

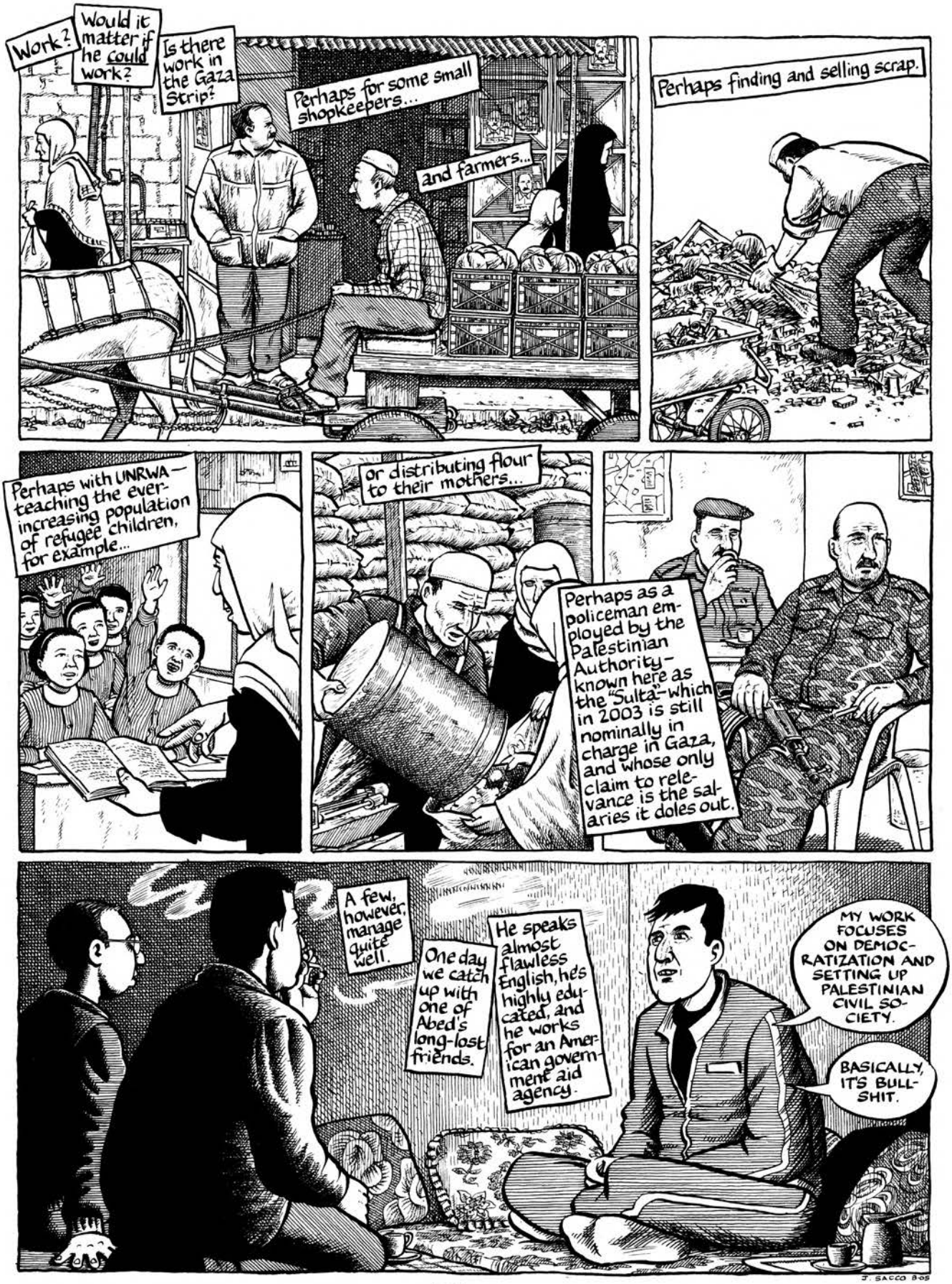


and at other points the still-common asbestos roofs and the squalor beneath many of them remind a visitor he is among the grandchildren and great grandchildren of refugees who arrived with nothing and for whom nothing fundamental has changed.

The poorest of the poor are designated hardship cases by UNRWA—there are almost 13,000 of them in Khan Younis alone.

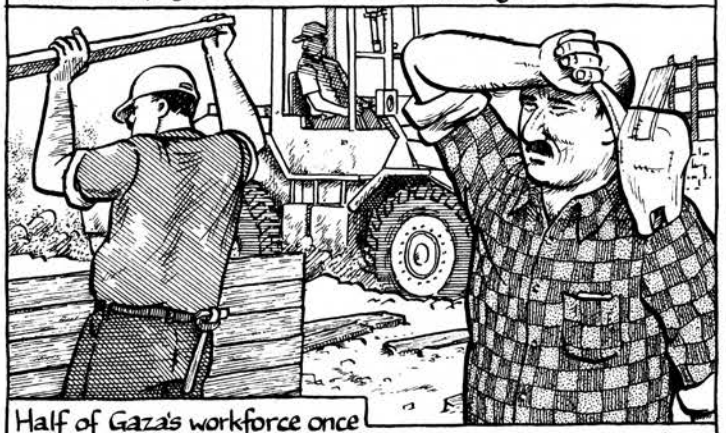

A local UNRWA official once invited me to tour a sample home of these unfortunates.
We walked in on a family of 11 living in two rooms.
While the UNRWA guy chased out the neighborhood kids who'd followed us in, the mother of the house agreed to my request to document her shambles.
TAKE PICTURES!
TAKE PICTURES!
They had some blankets and thin mattresses but only one single bed between them.
Their clothes were piled in heaps or hung in plastic bags.
TAKE PICTURES!
31
T. SACCO 8.05


In the kitchen, broken-down appliances were used for storage.
TAKE PICTURES!
The sink, also used for bathing, drained into a bucket.
TAKE! TAKE!
Back where the girl had been sitting, only a blanket separated the toilet and the most private of human functions from the rest of the room.
J. BACCI 8-05
I had to get out of there, to swim up to the surface and gasp for air...
and the girl undoubtedly wanted to return to her studies...
but the mother was holding us back...
explaining that her husband was clinically depressed...
telling us about his pills...
his pills!
how he couldn't get work because of his condition.
32


Work?
Would it matter if he could work?
Is there work in the Gaza Strip?
Perhaps for some small shopkeepers...
and farmers...
Perhaps finding and selling scrap.
Perhaps with UNRWA—teaching the ever-increasing population of refugee children, for example...
or distributing flour to their mothers...
Perhaps as a policeman employed by the Palestinian Authority—known here as the "Sulta"—which in 2003 is still nominally in charge in Gaza, and whose only claim to relevance is the salaries it doles out.
A few, however, manage quite well.
One day we catch up with one of Abed's long-lost friends.
He speaks almost flawless English, he's highly educated, and he works for an American government aid agency.
MY WORK FOCUSES ON DEMOCRATIZATION AND SETTING UP PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY.
BASICALLY, IT'S BULLSHIT.
J. SACCO 8-05


He doesn't believe in it, he says, and neither do the other Palestinians who work with him.
He says the Americans spend millions on these projects so Palestinians will focus inward rather than on resisting the Israelis.
Still—
IF I DON'T TAKE THE JOB, SOMEONE ELSE WILL.
He says there's an opening that pays $1,900 a month, which is a fortune here in Gaza.
Is Abed interested?
The answer is no.
Outside, Abed lets loose...
I'M SHOCKED BY HIM.
Abed says his friend has traded his national convictions for foreign currency.
HERE YOU CAN LOSE YOUR LIFE FROM A BULLET MADE IN THE USA WHILE YOUR SALARY COMES FROM THE USA.
Abed himself recently agreed to take a dramatic pay cut — from $900 to $400 a month — when the Palestinian NGO he works for stopped accepting checks from British and American donors.
WE BELIEVE THERE IS A HIDDEN AGENDA BEHIND EACH WESTERN DONOR — ESPECIALLY AMERICAN DONORS...
THEIR IDEA IS TO MAKE US FOCUS ON HOW TO DEMOCRATIZE OURSELVES AND TO FORGET THAT WE ARE STILL SLAVES.
J. SACCO 8-05

Most Gazans don't have the luxury of such assessments. Many covet menial or physically demanding low-wage jobs in Israel, which still pay twice as much as similar jobs in Gaza.



Half of Gaza's workforce once held jobs in Israel, but with the escalating violence Israel weaned itself off Palestinian labor and now imports Thais and Romanians and Chinese and others to do its hot, dusty work.

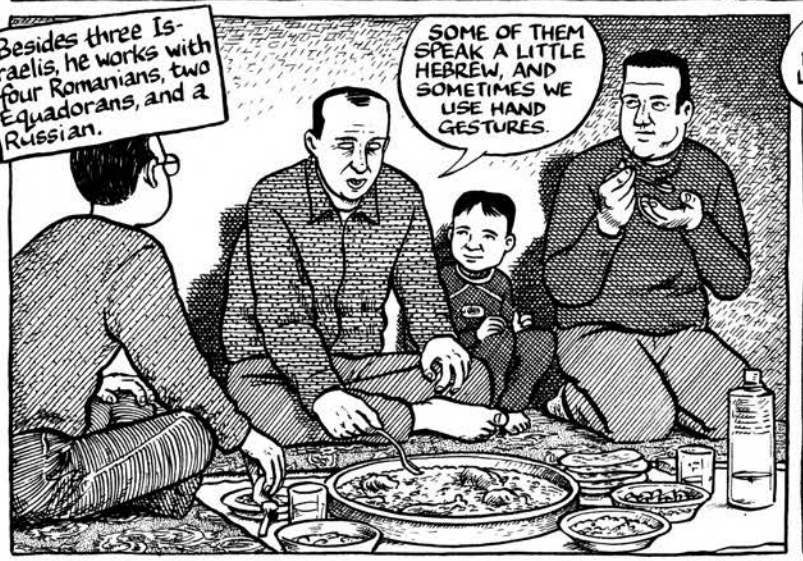
Mahmoud, Abed's brother-in-law, is one of the few Gazans still holding a permit to work in Israel.

He's just returned home from his job where he finishes wooden furniture.



Besides three Israelis, he works with four Romanians, two Equadorans, and a Russian.

SOME OF THEM SPEAK A LITTLE HEBREW, AND SOMETIMES WE USE HAND GESTURES.



I HAVE NO PROBLEMS WITH THEM.

THEY ARE WORKERS LIKE ME.

THEY HAVE THE SAME TARGET: TO WORK AND MAKE MONEY.



He endures an average of eight hours' traveling to and from his job every day. When he gets home to Khan Younis, he gives himself an hour to shower, pray, and eat before hitting the sack.

He'll be up at 3a.m. to start all over again.



I tell him that, despite the difficulties, he must feel lucky to have a job in Israel.

I'M NOT LUCKY.

IT'S THE ONLY OPTION.*



J. SACCO 8-05

*AFTER THE HAMAS TAKEOVER IN 2007, IT WAS NO LONGER AN OPTION. ISRAEL SEALED ITS BORDER WITH GAZA.

SIDESHOW


Indeed, what are Mahmoud's other options? He has to provide for a wife and five children.
And what were the options of the Palestinian refugees who had lost their homes and land with Israel's birth and found themselves roaming the sands of Gaza?
Of them, an Israeli Foreign Ministry report in 1949 predicted that "the most adaptable and best survivors would manage by a process of natural selection, and the others will waste away. Some will die but most will turn into human debris and social outcasts and probably join the poorest classes in the Arab countries."
The refugees were landless, destitute, and hungry; they were dependent on meager handouts; the men were unemployed, idle.
Meanwhile, in the fields they had left behind, their crops ripened. In the larders of the homes they had fled there was oil and flour. All of it was a tantalizingly few hours' walk away.
All of it was now in the hands of a new people, the Israelis.
J. SACCO 8-05

In those days the Gaza Strip was not surrounded by an electrically charged fence like it is today. The armistice demarcation line was thinly guarded. The hungriest and the boldest refugees started to slip into what was now called Israel to harvest and scavenge and to bring back all they could carry.

In time, the poorly defended outposts Israel began putting up along the border with Gaza became tempting targets for refugees, who stole livestock and equipment from them.

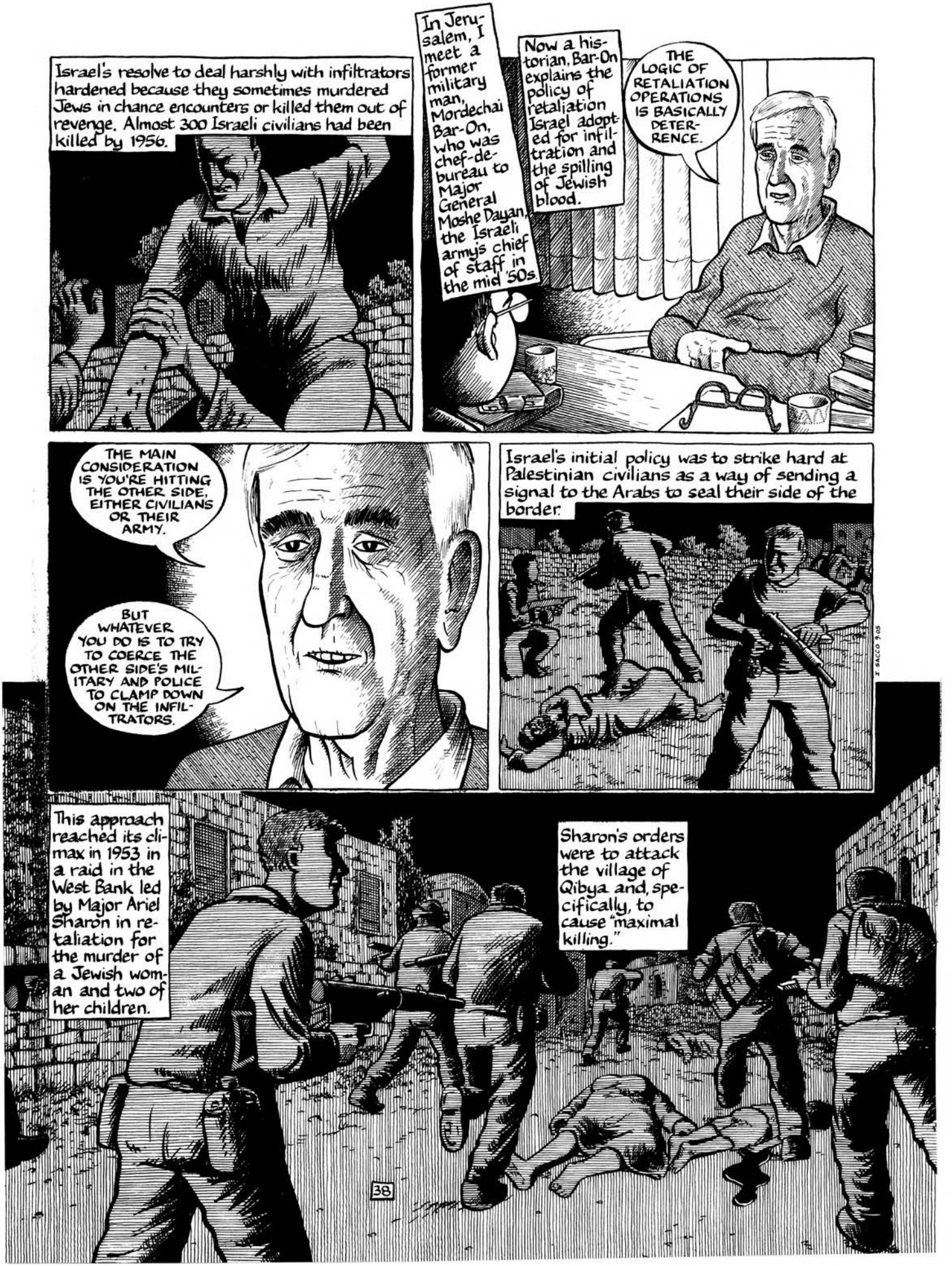
Refugees also entered Israel to visit family members who had not fled; to transit to the Jordanian-annexed West Bank, where there might be a chance of a better livelihood; or even to move back home.

Israel was absorbing hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants.

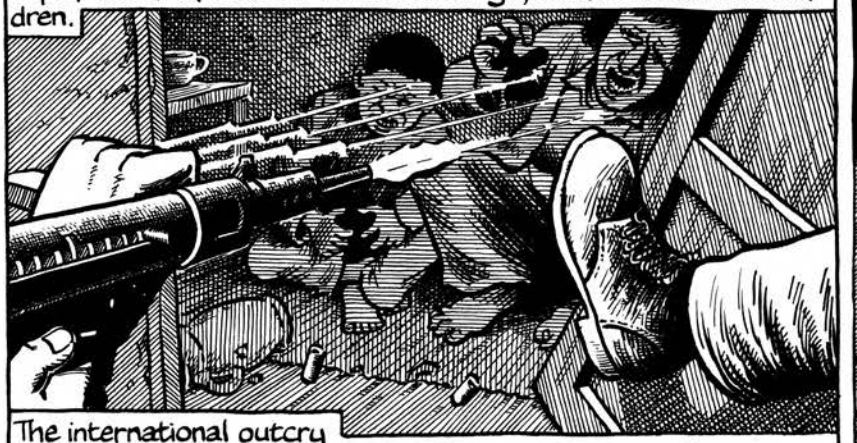
It would not countenance the return or trespass of Palestinian refugees.

To Israel, all refugees who crossed back into its territory were "infiltrators," and in an effort to stop them, army units patrolling the border were given shoot-to-kill orders. About 1,000 returning refugees were killed in 1949 alone.

By 1951, the order was amended to spare women and children and those who were surrendering, in most cases. But by 1956, between 2,700 and 5,000 Palestinians who crossed into Israel—most all of whom were unarmed—had been killed in ambushes by Israeli soldiers and by booby traps rigged up by outpost communities.


Israel's resolve to deal harshly with infiltrators hardened because they sometimes murdered Jews in chance encounters or killed them out of revenge. Almost 300 Israeli civilians had been killed by 1956.
In Jerusalem, I meet a former military man, Mordechai Bar-On, who was chef-de-bureau to Major General Moshe Dayan, the Israeli army's chief of staff in the mid '50s.
Now a historian, Bar-On explains the policy of retaliation Israel adopted for infiltration and the spilling of Jewish blood.
THE LOGIC OF RETALIATION OPERATIONS IS BASICALLY DETERRENCE.
THE MAIN CONSIDERATION IS YOU'RE HITTING THE OTHER SIDE, EITHER CIVILIANS OR THEIR ARMY.
BUT WHATEVER YOU DO IS TO TRY TO COERCE THE OTHER SIDE'S MILITARY AND POLICE TO CLAMP DOWN ON THE INFILTRATORS.
Israel's initial policy was to strike hard at Palestinian civilians as a way of sending a signal to the Arabs to seal their side of the border.
This approach reached its climax in 1953 in a raid in the West Bank led by Major Ariel Sharon in retaliation for the murder of a Jewish woman and two of her children.
Sharon's orders were to attack the village of Qibya and, specifically, to cause "maximal killing."
38

Encountering no resistance in the village itself, Sharon's men shot Palestinians hiding in their homes and then blew up the structures on top of them. Of at least 42 killed in Qibya, 38 were women and children.



The international outcry was such that the Israeli government decided henceforward to focus retaliatory strikes on military and police targets, not civilians.

But according to Bar-On, the raids on civilians—

—HAD NO EFFECT ON THE EGYPTIANS BECAUSE NASSER COULDN'T CARE LESS WHAT HAPPENED IN THE GAZA STRIP.

President Jemal Abdel Nasser!

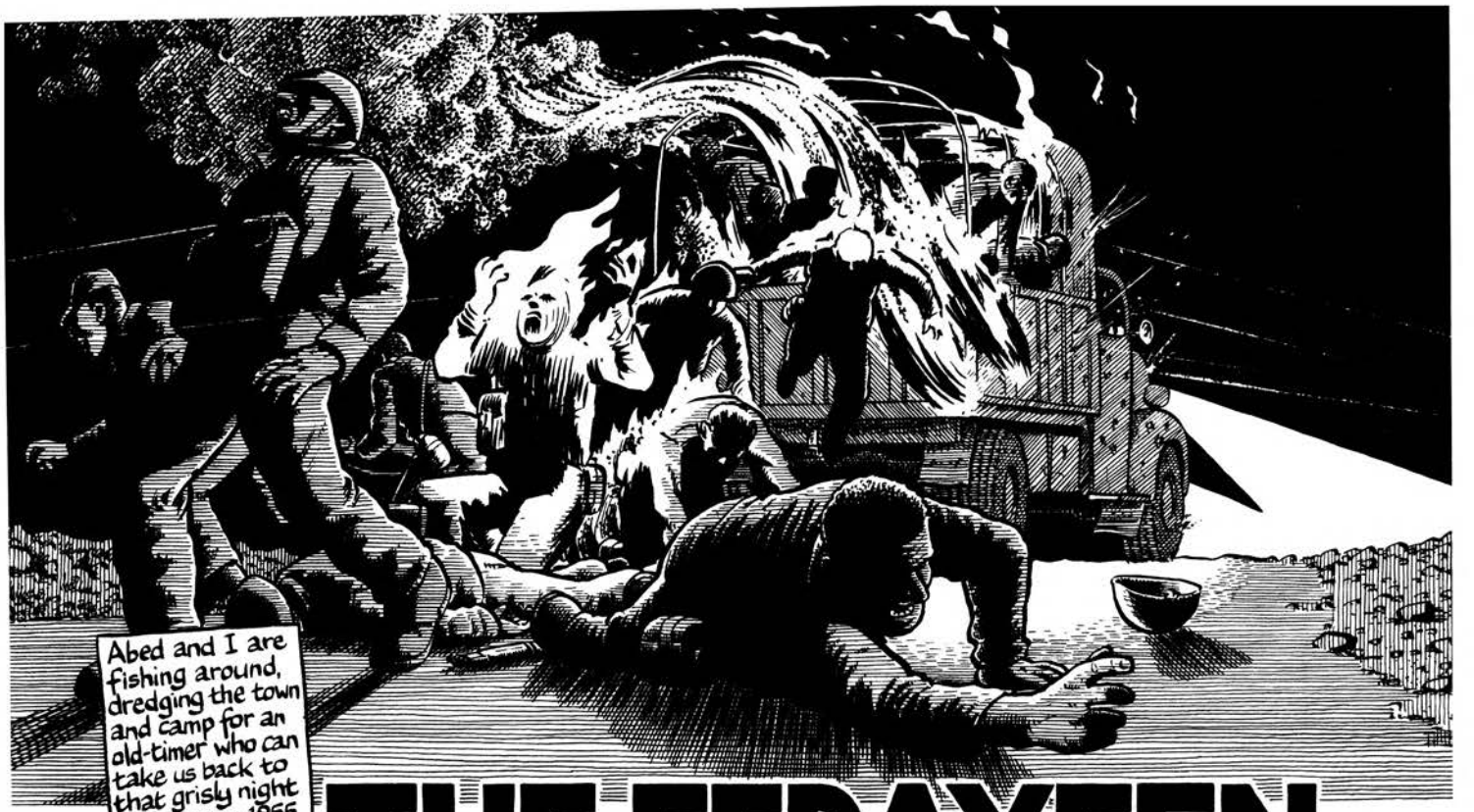
One of the greatest leaders of modern Arab history!

He had been among the military men who had overthrown Egypt's monarchy in 1952, and he was the chief proponent of pan-Arab nationalism—a single state that would include North Africa, Mesopotamia, and the Arabian Peninsula.

But if Nasser thought events in Gaza weren't really "anything that would endanger his own regime in Cairo," as Bar-On suggests, that was going to change on the night of February 28, 1955.

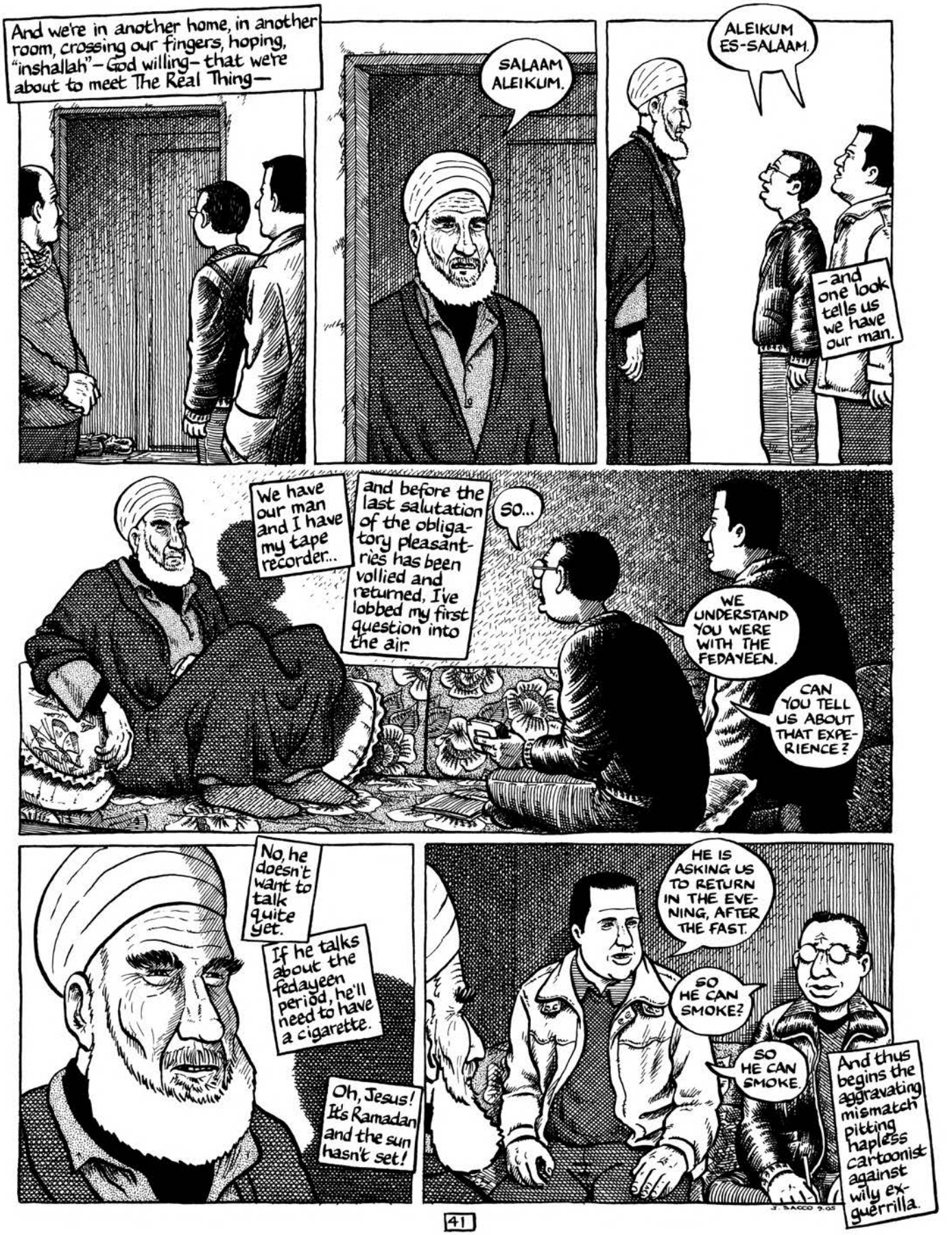
Which brings us to our first footnote.

J. SACCO 9.05



THE FEDAYEEN




And we're in another home, in another room, crossing our fingers, hoping, "inshallah"—God willing—that we're about to meet The Real Thing—
SALAAM ALEIKUM.
ALEIKUM ES-SALAAM.
—and one look tells us we have our man.
We have our man and I have my tape recorder...
and before the last salutation of the obligatory pleasantries has been vollied and returned, I've lobbed my first question into the air.
SO...
WE UNDERSTAND YOU WERE WITH THE FEDAYEEN.
CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THAT EXPERIENCE?
No, he doesn't want to talk quite yet.
If he talks about the fedayeen period, he'll need to have a cigarette.
Oh, Jesus! It's Ramadan and the sun hasn't set!
HE IS ASKING US TO RETURN IN THE EVENING, AFTER THE FAST.
SO HE CAN SMOKE?
SO HE CAN SMOKE.
And thus begins the aggravating mismatch pitting hapless cartoonist against wily ex-guerrilla.
J. SACCO 9.05


I visit him four times over the months, and each time he runs me ragged between '48 and '67, because he's seen it all and can tell me everything, but I don't want all and everything...
I want the mid-'50s!
The mid-'50s!
The mid-'50s!
He fought against Jewish forces in 1948...
He served in the British army during the Second World War and later joined the Transjordan frontier force.
He was a soldier's soldier.
But he's not taking orders from me though, let's be clear, he used to take a lot of orders.
"I went to get my salary; I found it was groceries. Some rice, some corn. I threw down the bag."
MY GOD DIDN'T CREATE ME TO HOLD THIS PEN, BUT TO HOLD A GUN!
and for a short time after the armistice he found himself in an unlikely role...
I WORKED AS A TEACHER FOR 16 DAYS.
J. SACCO 9-05


In 1953, the year after the military coup toppled the Egyptian king, our man joined a newly formed Egyptian-commanded Palestinian militia.
Part of his duties entailed crossing into Israel on intelligence-gathering missions.
BUT WE USED TO GO BEYOND OUR ORDERS.
IN THOSE DAYS THE SETTLEMENTS WEREN'T AS PROTECTED LIKE NOWADAYS.
SOME OF US USED TO ENTER THE SETTLEMENTS AND STEAL... COWS AND SHEEP.
At one point scores of Palestinian militiamen were temporarily cashiered for their ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, a militant Islamic group hostile to Cairo and responsible for its own freelance missions of sabotage and revenge in Israel.
AND YOU WERE ONE OF THOSE DISMISSED?
THE FIRST ONE!
J. SACCO '05
YOU, COME HERE!
YOU ARE THE FIRST ONE!
YES, I SWEAR!
But after four months he was called back to service, he says.
His new Palestinian unit began to take over border-guard duties from regular Egyptian soldiers, for whom he had nothing but contempt.
"They were in a room.
"It wasn't a proper military position.
"At night they brought hashish and smoked it through the hubbly-bubbly.
"And they brought alcohol and drank it.
"And slept.
"Anytime the Israelis wanted to kill them, they could have killed them.
43

"When I took responsibility, I made a real position, with barbed wire around it and a wall and a trench. A good position. I had 36 soldiers under me."

He and his men watched over a section of the overheated armistice demarcation line, often the site of deadly skirmishes. His orders were to prevent Palestinians from the Gaza Strip crossing into Israel.

The Egyptian authorities implemented stiff jail sentences for those caught doing so. Crackdowns often would intensify after Israeli retaliatory strikes on Egyptian positions in Gaza that usually followed the murder of Jews by Palestinian raiders.

But how far could the Palestinian border guards be trusted to prevent their refugee kin from entering what had until recently been their land?

Not at all, according to Major Mustafa Hafez, head of Egypt's military intelligence in Gaza, who claimed that "Palestinian troops encourage the movement of infiltrators and carry out attacks along the line, and this will lead to an increase in tension."

And our man here is precisely the sort of Palestinian soldier Hafez complained about.

He is drawing a map.

THESE ARE OUR POSITIONS... AND THIS IS THE AREA OF THE ISRAELIS.

HERE, PEOPLE ARE LIVING... FARMERS. THEY WERE PREVENTED FROM COMING CLOSE TO THE LINE.

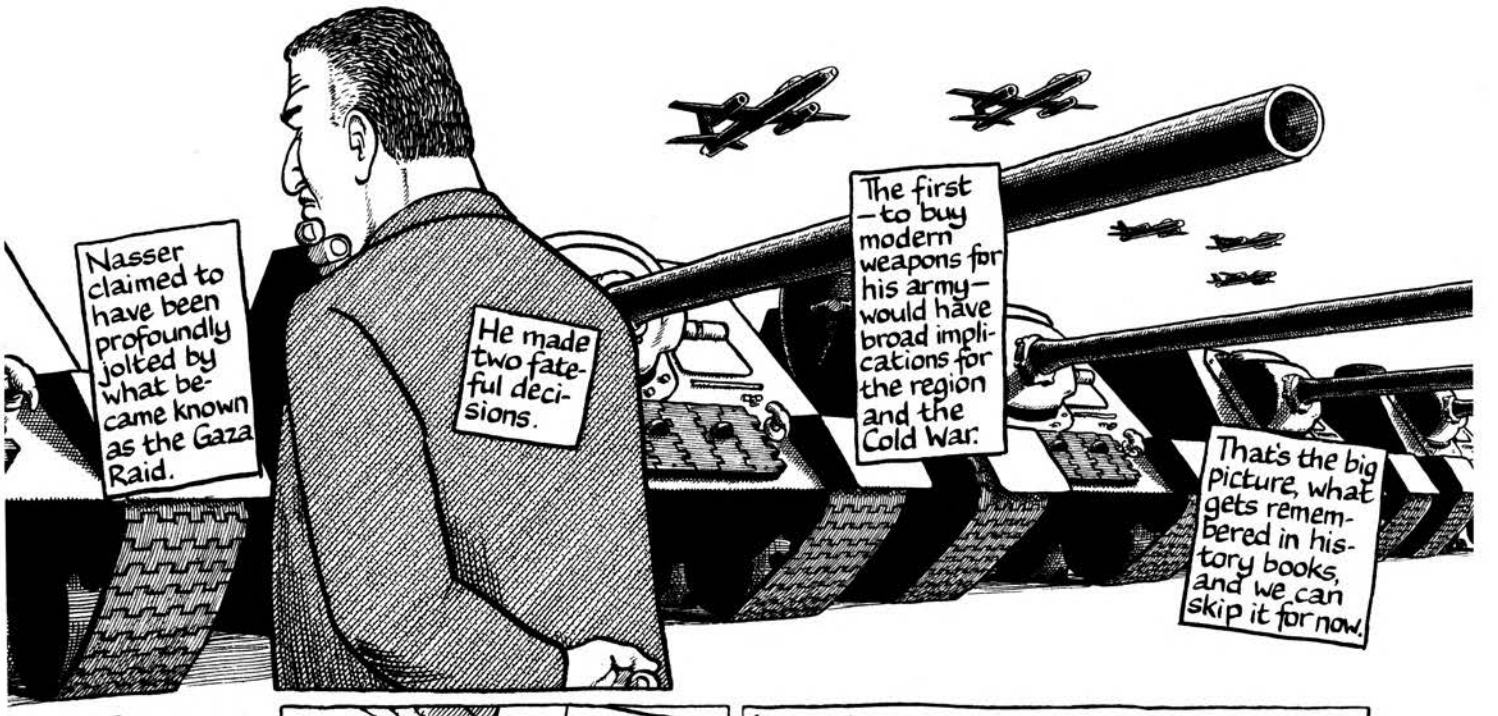
He relates one incident when he allowed Bedouins to graze their flock across the demarcation line.

J. SACCO 10-05


WHEN WE NOTICED A JEEP COMING, WE TOLD THEM TO BRING THE SHEEP BACK INSIDE.
A firefight ensued with the Israeli patrol, and two sheep were killed.
The Egyptian military was not pleased by this unnecessary provocation of the Israelis, and—
—THEIR JUDGMENT WAS THAT I PAY THE PRICE OF THE BULLETS FIRED. (IN FACT, THE OWNERS OF THE SHEEP PAID ME BACK.)
AND I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE PROMOTED TO SERGEANT, BUT THEY STOPPED THE PROMOTION.
But the sheep incident did not end there because—
—I SWORE BY GOD THAT THE PRICE OF THE TWO SHEEP WOULD BE TWO JEEPS.
I am made to understand, elliptically, that he destroyed two Israeli jeeps.
I am hungry for details.
SO THIS OPERATION... IT WAS OBVIOUSLY WITHOUT ORDERS.
YES. THEY WERE MY OWN ORDERS.
DID YOU GO WITH OTHER PEOPLE?
TWO WERE WITH ME.
But he won't tell me about the actions inside Israel that took care of the jeeps except to say he got caught red-handed by UNTSO, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, which was charged with the unenviable task of monitoring and if possible preventing cease-fire violations.
"It was our bad luck in the incident over the second jeep... that there was a battle, and the international supervisor came immediately and photographed us. I was carrying a [captured] machine gun."
UNTSO presented the photographic proof that Palestinian troops, supposedly under Egyptian control, were crossing the very border they had been ordered to secure.
"It was impossible to deny this picture.
"This picture was very clear."
J. SACCO 10-05


The Egyptians sentenced him to a prison term in Khan Younis.
And while our protagonist cooled his heels behind bars, the history from which our footnotes dangle was proceeding apace.
In Israel, former Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion came out of retirement and took over the job of defense minister. Together with army Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan, he advocated a hard-line position against the Arabs.
When an Israeli bicyclist was killed by Palestinian infiltrators on February 25, 1955, Ben-Gurion and Dayan were able to convince the less hawkish prime minister, Moshe Sharett, to authorize an attack on Egyptian military positions near Gaza City.
Ironically, in the few months spanning late 1954 and early 1955 the Egyptians had largely succeeded in stopping Palestinian refugees from entering Israel and had halted their own cross-border missions.
Lt. General E.L.M. Burns, the Canadian head of UNTSO, called it "one of the most quiet periods on record."
Dayan promised Sharett that the raid would be nothing out of the ordinary, that it would cause perhaps ten Egyptian casualties.
But let's let Mordechai Bar-On, Dayan's right-hand man, pick up the story...
THAT RETALIATION OPERATION, WHICH WAS ACTIVATED ON FEBRUARY 28, 1955, WAS TO HIT A SMALL MILITARY CAMP AND A BUILDING AT THE RAILWAY STATION.
AND IT WAS TO BE HIT AND RUN.
J. SACCO 10.05
46

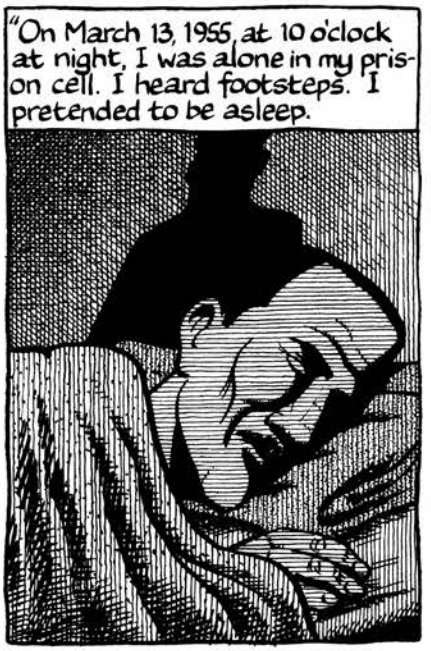

The battle was unexpectedly fierce. Israeli paratroopers, commanded by Ariel Sharon, lost eight men, the Egyptian-led defenders about twice as many. Two civilians also died.
Meanwhile, the Israelis had set up an ambush to the south to block enemy reinforcements from reaching the battle.
They caught a truck carrying Palestinian soldiers.
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD THEY WERE ATTACKED, AND ALL WERE KILLED.
ALL OF THEM WERE PALESTINIAN.*
NATURALLY THE NEWS AFFECTED ME...
I BEGAN YELLING AND SHOUTING.
I STILL HAD 16 DAYS BEFORE I WOULD BE ALLOWED OUT.
*ACCORDING TO UNTSO COMMANDER LT. GENERAL BURNS, 22 SOLDIERS WERE KILLED AND 13 WOUNDED, "MOSTLY" PALESTINIAN.
The incident had immediate repercussions. The next morning riots broke out in Gaza's refugee camps against the Egyptian authorities and the UN. A few Palestinian protestors were shot dead by Egyptian soldiers. Palestinians beat Egyptian troops in the street.
A SEMI-REVOLUTION HAPPENED HERE.
JEMAL ABDEL NASSER HAD TO RESPOND TO THIS ATTACK BECAUSE OF THE PRESSURE OF THE PEOPLE.
And Nasser's dream to unite and lead the Arab world, which depended on his prestige, might have suffered a fatal blow if the Israelis could get away with such an audacious incursion.
OUR SUCCESS MEANT A HUMILIATION FOR NASSER.
J. SACCO 10-05

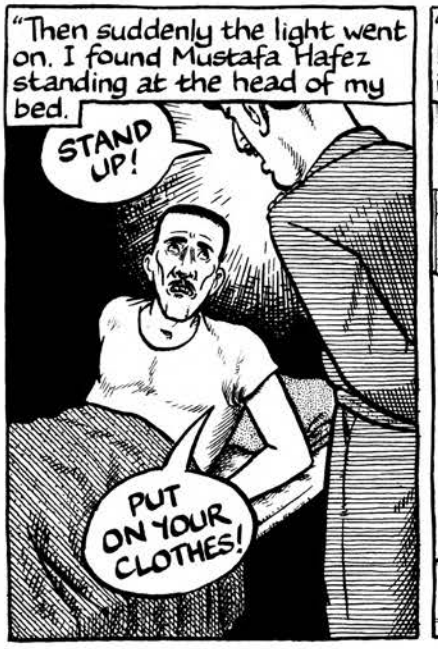


The second decision was to strike back at Israel in a way that would satisfy Arab anger without escalating to an all-out war, which, incidentally, Nasser could not risk until the new arms were available.



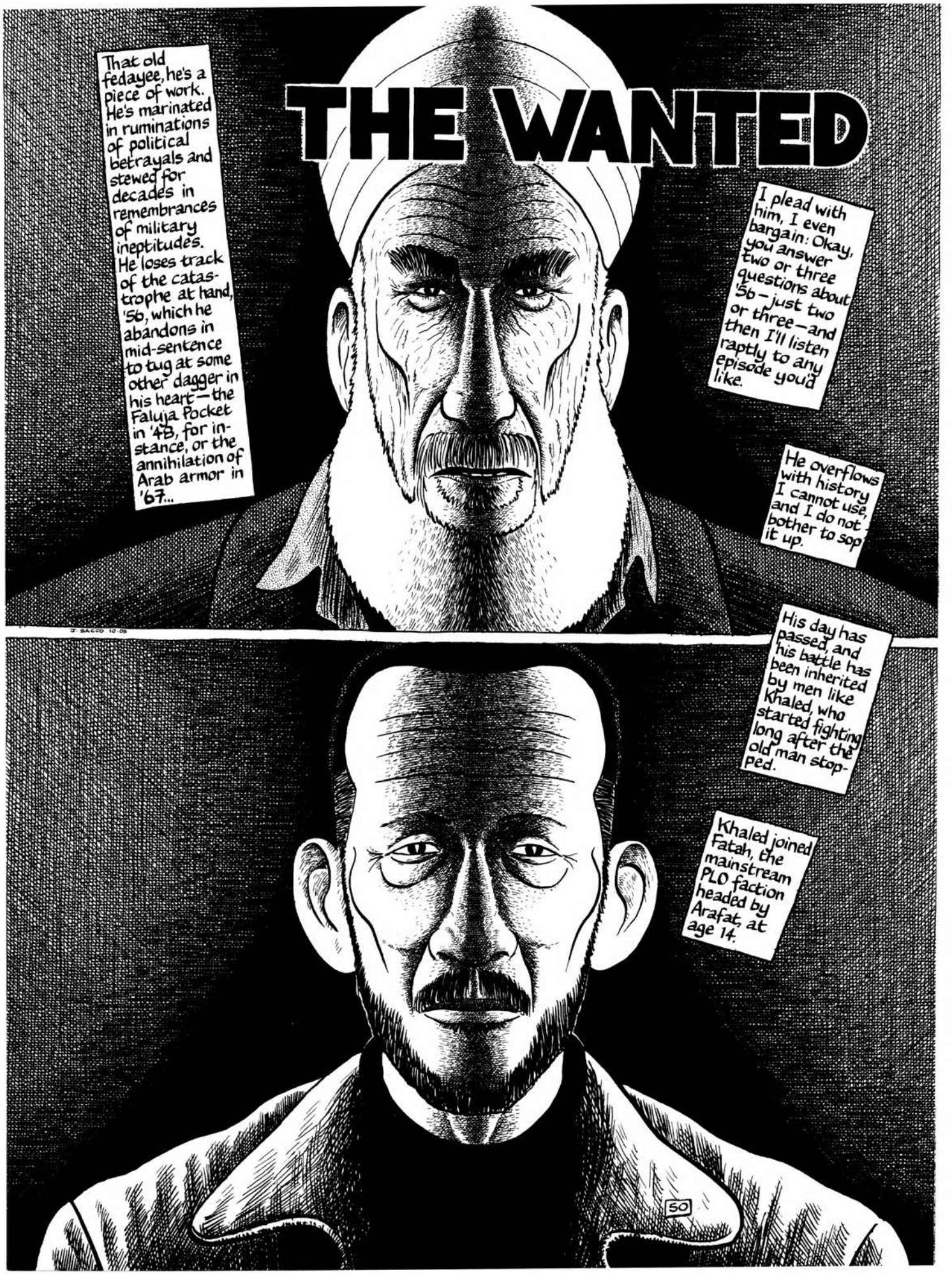




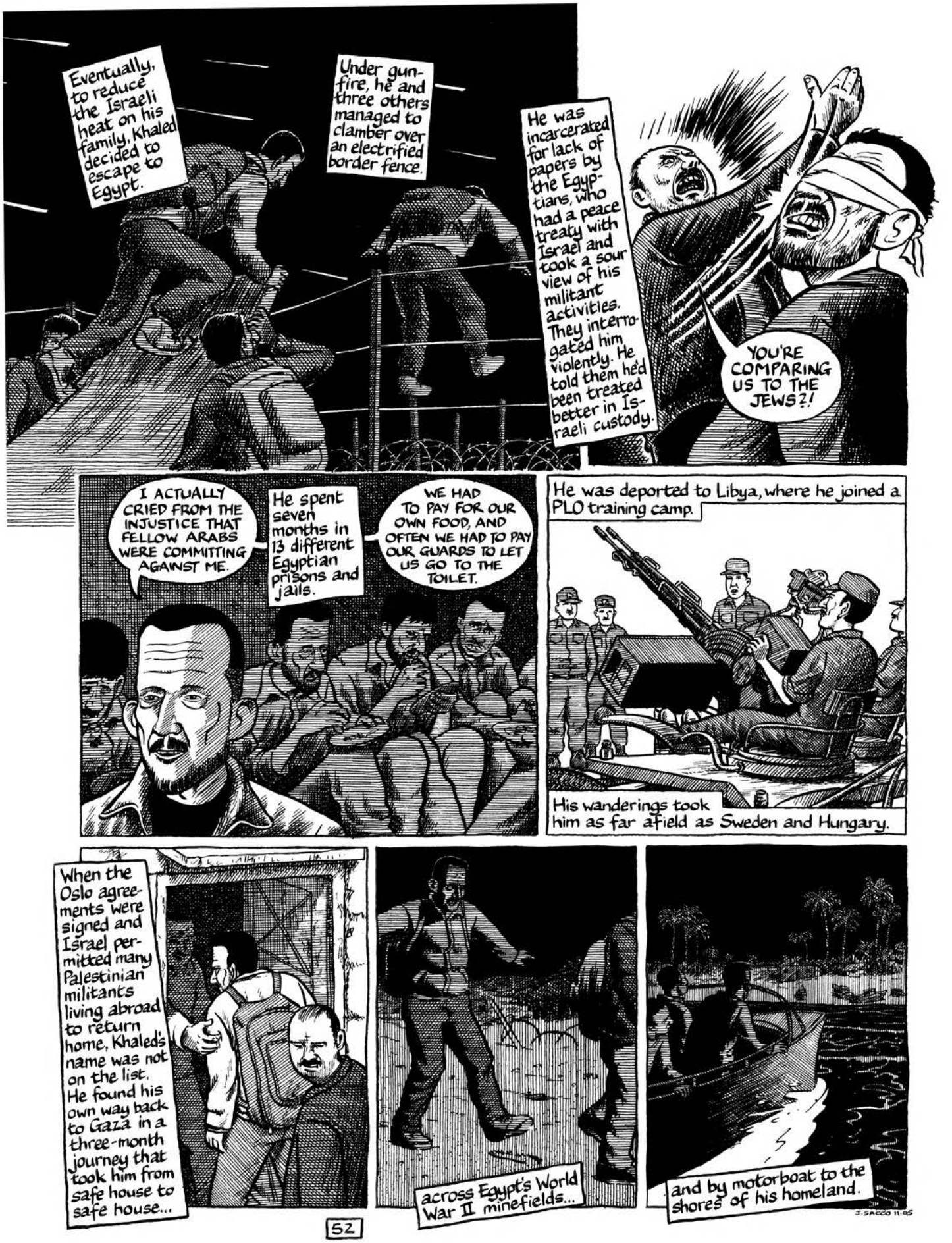





"I found some people waiting. This group had been assembled by Mustafa Hafez. They said they wouldn't carry out any military operation without me.
"Mustafa Hafez...gave us the details about the operation we were going to do. Where and when."
THEN WE WENT OUT AND WE SUCCEEDED.
IT WAS A VERY SUCCESSFUL OPERATION.
AND WE LOST NO ONE IN THIS BATTLE.
CAN YOU DESCRIBE THAT OPERATION AT ALL?
I CAN, BUT I DON'T NEED TO.
Over the next few months, the Egyptians recruited a core of militants to establish a Palestinian guerrilla group.
"Most of them came from jail.
"Mustafa Hafez recruited the ones who had been crossing the border...to steal crops and food.
"Some murderers.
"He collected 125 of them and sent them for training."
I ask how he, a professional military man, was able to mix with these recruits, many of whom were criminals.
THEY MADE ME SUFFER.
EACH ONE STARTED TO ACT THE CLEVER FELLOW, TO SHOW OFF AS IF ORDERS DIDN'T APPLY TO HIM.
AT FIRST I CLASHED WITH THEM.
BUT THEN I ABSORBED THEIR MADNESS.
MADNESS.
YES!
J. SACCO 11-06

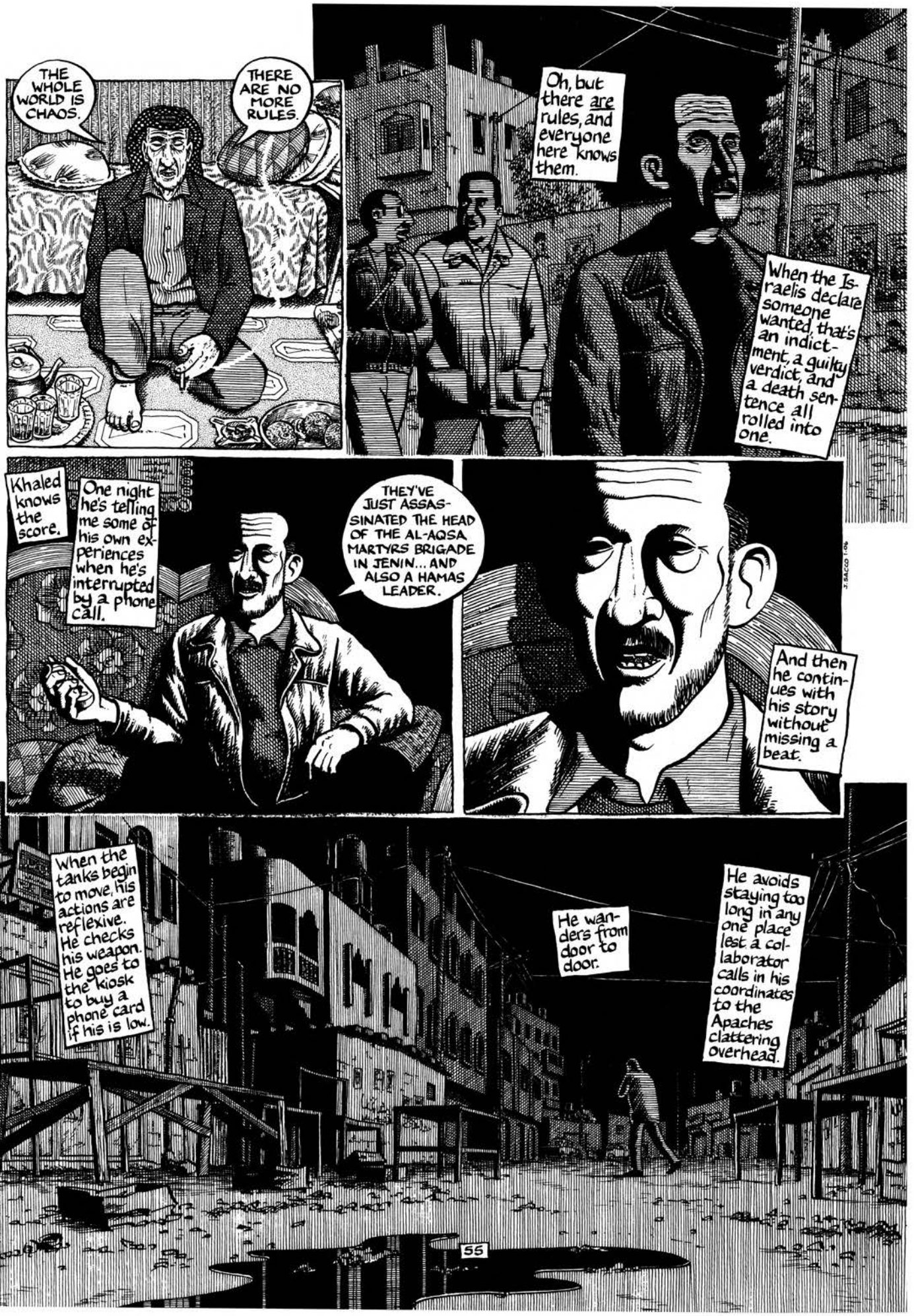

THE WANTED
That old fedayee, he's a piece of work. He's marinated in ruminations of political betrayals and stewed for decades in remembrances of military ineptitudes. He loses track of the catastrophe at hand, '56, which he abandons in mid-sentence to tug at some other dagger in his heart—the Faluja Pocket in '48, for instance, or the annihilation of Arab armor in '67...
I plead with him, I even bargain: Okay, you answer two or three questions about '56—just two or three—and then I'll listen raptly to any episode you'd like.
He overflows with history I cannot use, and I do not bother to sop it up.
J. SACCO 10.05
His day has passed, and his battle has been inherited by men like Khaled, who started fighting long after the old man stopped.
Khaled joined Fatah, the mainstream PLO faction headed by Arafat, at age 14.
50


He proved his mettle in Israeli prisons and in unflinchingly rooting out Palestinian collaborators.
WAS IT HARD KILLING COLLABORATORS?
IT WASN'T HARD AT ALL.
MAYBE YOU COULD SAY IT WAS ONE OF OUR DESIRES.
In the First Intifada, when secret military groups decided to confront the occupation with weapons more lethal than stones, they turned to men like Khaled.
He ended up a high-priority target of the IDF, what the Israelis call "wanted."
I asked him when he knew he was wanted. He said Israeli soldiers had once raided his home while he was away...
His father had been used as a shield as the troops searched each room...
And Khaled had been left with a message to give himself up within three days.
He decided to go underground.
"I shook hands with my father and my mother and I stood at the door.
"I took my pistol and shot into the sky.
"My mother started to ululate.
"It was a declaration. Everyone knew then I was wanted. I left. I started a new stage in my life. There was no way to go back on this decision."
He has been on the run ever since.
J. SACCO 10-05

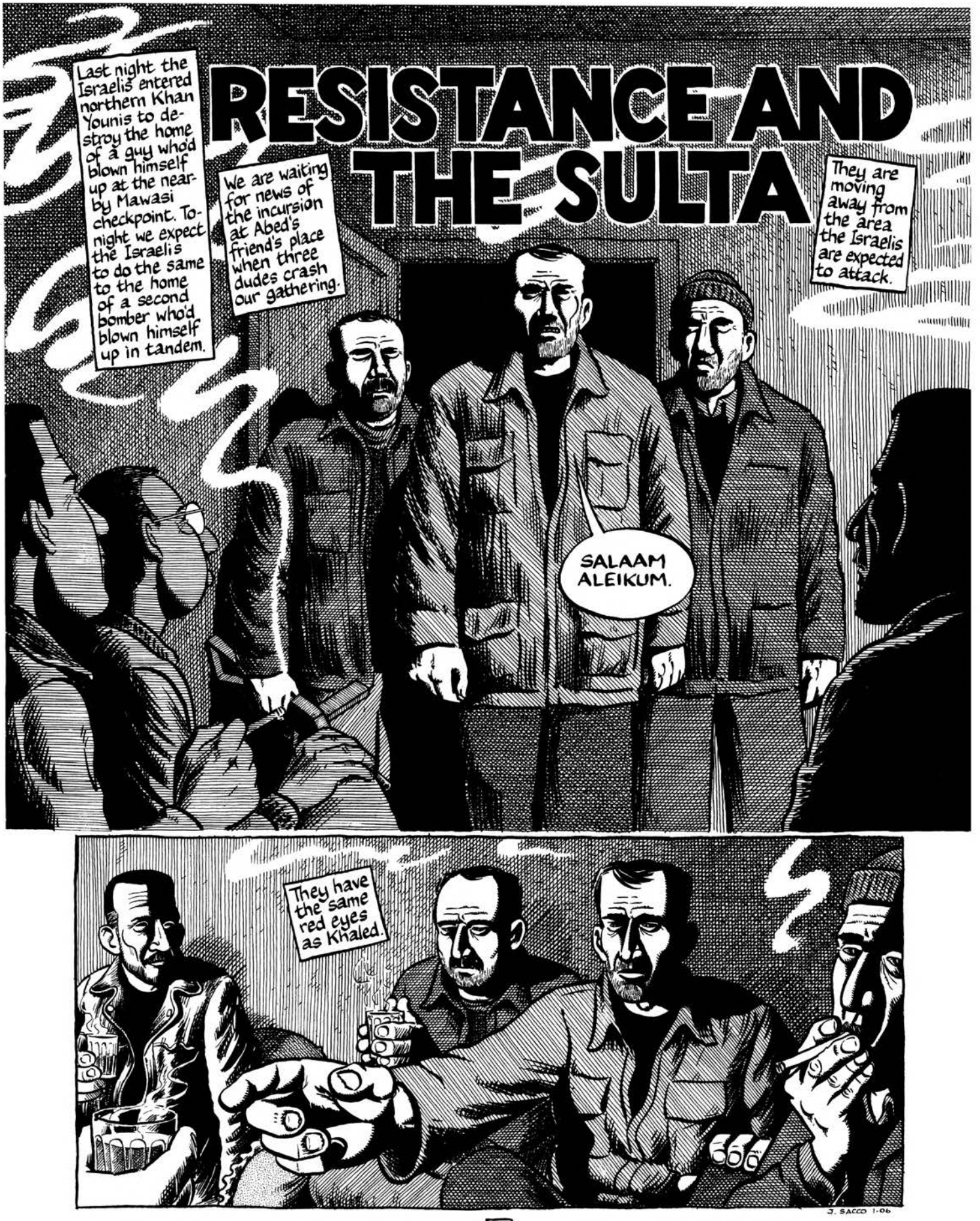

Eventually, to reduce the Israeli heat on his family, Khaled decided to escape to Egypt.
Under gunfire, he and three others managed to clamber over an electrified border fence.
He was incarcerated for lack of papers by the Egyptians, who had a peace treaty with Israel and took a sour view of his militant activities. They interrogated him violently. He told them he'd been treated better in Israeli custody.
YOU'RE COMPARING US TO THE JEWS?!
I ACTUALLY CRIED FROM THE INJUSTICE THAT FELLOW ARABS WERE COMMITTING AGAINST ME.
He spent seven months in 13 different Egyptian prisons and jails.
WE HAD TO PAY FOR OUR OWN FOOD, AND OFTEN WE HAD TO PAY OUR GUARDS TO LET US GO TO THE TOILET.
He was deported to Libya, where he joined a PLO training camp.
His wanderings took him as far afield as Sweden and Hungary.
When the Oslo agreements were signed and Israel permitted many Palestinian militants living abroad to return home, Khaled's name was not on the list. He found his own way back to Gaza in a three-month journey that took him from safe house to safe house...
across Egypt's World War II minefields...
and by motorboat to the shores of his homeland.
J. SACCO 11-05

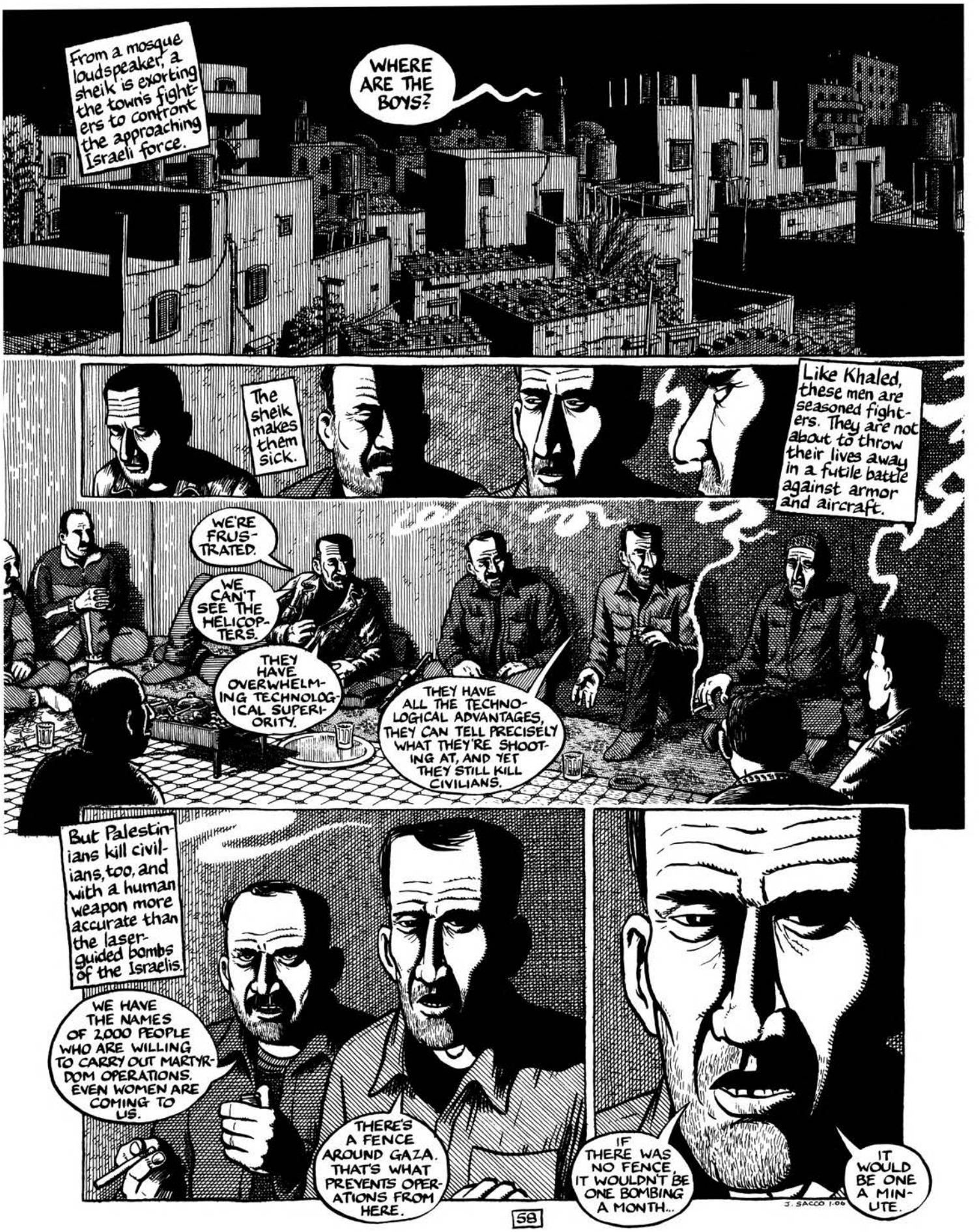

He had been gone six years.
"They gave me my Kalashnikov, and I fired into the sky.
"All my neighbors, the old women, came to embrace me.
"My father came out the door and when he saw me he fainted."
But Khaled knows I'm searching for querrillas from another time, and he introduces me to his uncle, who might know someone I could talk to.
SALAAM ALEIKUM.
ALEIKUM ES-SALAAM.
Khaled's uncle is a jocular man who was a guerrilla himself as the PLO emerged as the primary Palestinian resistance movement in the 1960s.
J. SACCO 11-05

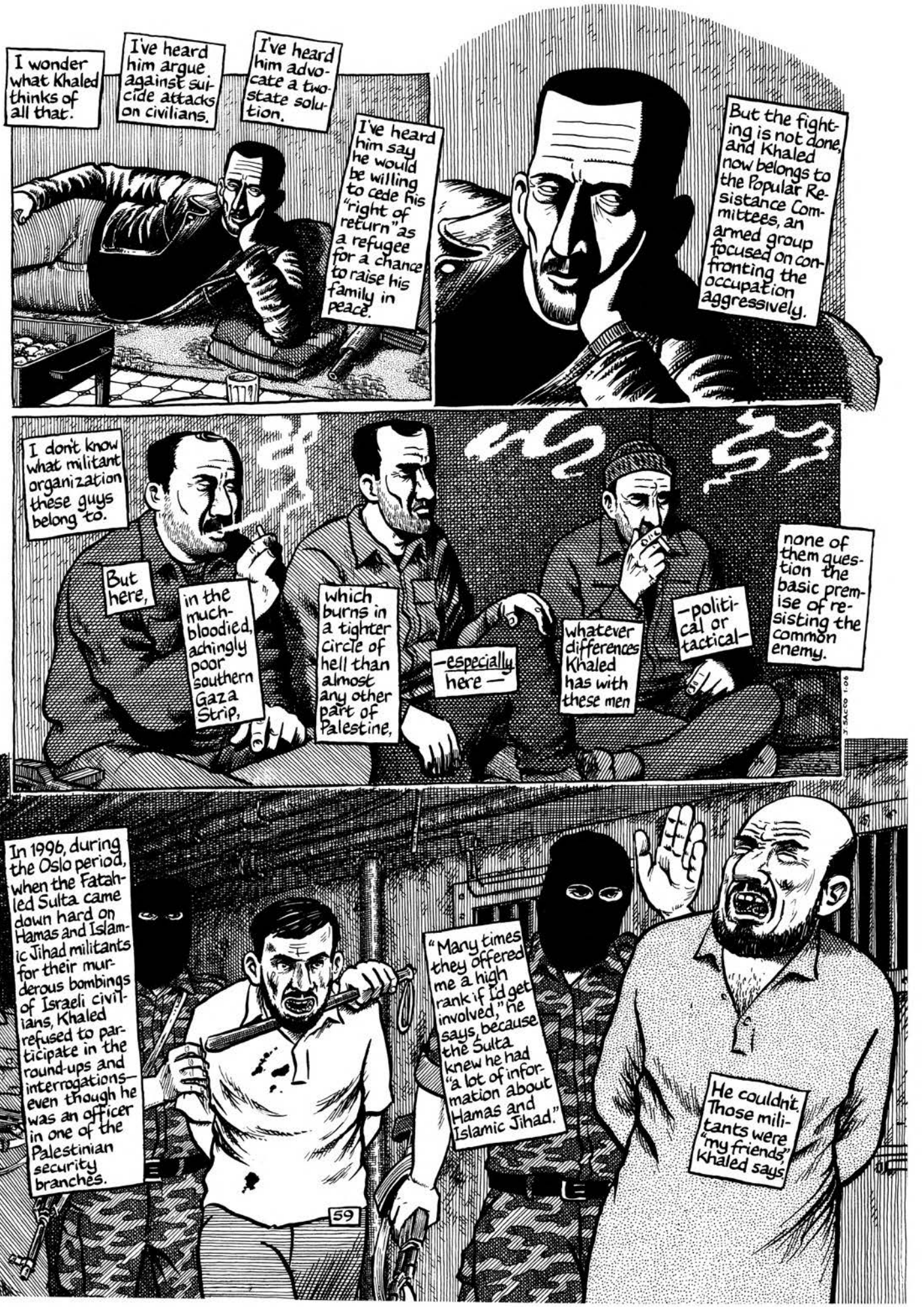

But his day has passed, too, and his struggle reduced to several well-worn stories and a nod to where his arm used to be.
I ask him what he thinks of his nephew's militancy.
I ADVISED HIM NOT TO BE INVOLVED IN THE RESISTANCE.
IT DOESN'T HELP.
WHEN WE WERE IN JORDAN WE COULD GO IN, SHOOT, AND WITHDRAW.
AND WE HAD MANY MORE WEAPONS.
NOW IT'S CHAOS.
IN THIS FIGHTING IT'S LIKE WE'RE SHOOTING BLANKS.
THEY HAVE MACHINES AND AMERICAN SUPPORT.
HE'S SPEAKING OUT OF FEAR FOR ME.
I AGREE THAT THAT TIME WAS DIFFERENT.
DOES IT MEAN THAT IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT THE MEANS, YOU STOP RESISTING?
Khaled's uncle talks approvingly about the recent ambush in Hebron that killed 12 Israeli soldiers and settler militiamen.
But as to the Jerusalem bus bombing a few days ago–
–IT'S WRONG.
AN OLD MAN? A SMALL CHILD? WOMEN GOING SHOPPING?
WHY KILL THEM?
EVEN A SOLDIER, IF HE GIVES HIMSELF UP, YOU DON'T KILL HIM.
IF YOU GIVE YOURSELF UP TO THE JEWS, THEY TAKE CARE OF YOU.
I'M NEVER HAPPY WHEN I HEAR THAT ISRAELI WOMEN OR CHILDREN ARE KILLED.
LET THEM LIVE.
J. SACCO 1.06


THE WHOLE WORLD IS CHAOS.
THERE ARE NO MORE RULES.
Oh, but there are rules, and everyone here knows them.
When the Israelis declare someone wanted, that's an indictment, a guilty verdict, and a death sentence all rolled into one.
Khaled knows the score.
One night he's telling me some of his own experiences when he's interrupted by a phone call.
THEY'VE JUST ASSASSINATED THE HEAD OF THE AL-AQSA MARTYRS BRIGADE IN JENIN... AND ALSO A HAMAS LEADER.
And then he continues with his story without missing a beat.
J. SACCO '04
When the tanks begin to move, his actions are reflexive. He checks his weapon. He goes to the kiosk to buy a phone card if his is low.
He wanders from door to door.
He avoids staying too long in any one place lest a collaborator calls in his coordinates to the Apaches clattering overhead.

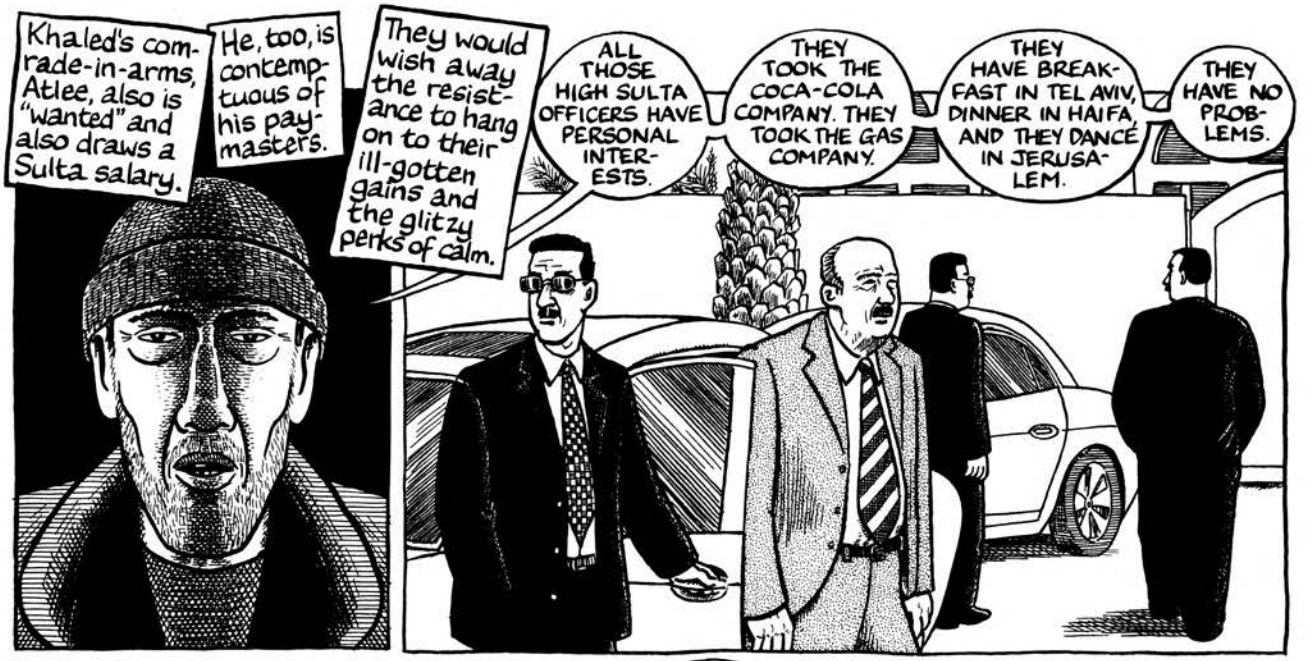

Sometimes Khaled drops by to steal an hour's rest in the afternoon.
He climbs into one of the beds without removing his pants.
I NEED SLEEP.
I HAVEN'T SLEPT IN TWO YEARS.
He seldom spends the night in his own home.
Two or three times though we visit his house, and once we're up talking till almost two in the morning.
His son is up with us.
SHOULDN'T HE BE IN BED?
Sure, I'm told, but he doesn't get to see much of Khaled. The boy insists on being woken up to play with his dad no matter what time he shows up.
Khaled's wife is expecting again. Khaled says her relatives encourage her to have more children as soon as possible.
They wonder how much longer Khaled has to live.
J. SACCO 1-06


RESISTANCE AND THE SULTA
Last night the Israelis entered northern Khan Younis to destroy the home of a guy who'd blown himself up at the nearby Mawasi checkpoint. Tonight we expect the Israelis to do the same to the home of a second bomber who'd blown himself up in tandem.
We are waiting for news of the incursion at Abed's friend's place when three dudes crash our gathering.
They are moving away from the area the Israelis are expected to attack.
SALAAM ALEIKUM.
They have the same red eyes as Khaled.
J. SACCO 1-06

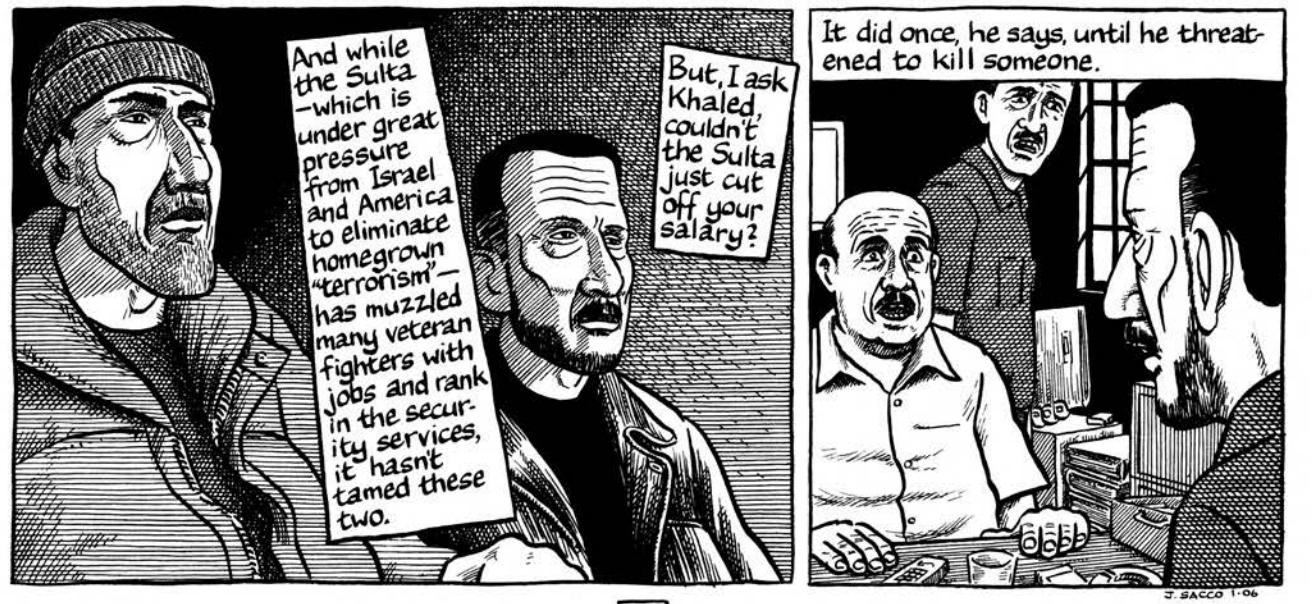

From a mosque loudspeaker, a sheik is exorting the town's fighters to confront the approaching Israeli force.
WHERE ARE THE BOYS?
The sheik makes them sick.
Like Khaled, these men are seasoned fighters. They are not about to throw their lives away in a futile battle against armor and aircraft.
WE'RE FRUSTRATED.
WE CAN'T SEE THE HELICOPTERS.
THEY HAVE OVERWHELMING TECHNOLOGICAL SUPERIORITY.
THEY HAVE ALL THE TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANTAGES, THEY CAN TELL PRECISELY WHAT THEY'RE SHOOTING AT, AND YET THEY STILL KILL CIVILIANS.
But Palestinians kill civilians, too, and with a human weapon more accurate than the laser-guided bombs of the Israelis.
WE HAVE THE NAMES OF 2,000 PEOPLE WHO ARE WILLING TO CARRY OUT MARTYRDOM OPERATIONS. EVEN WOMEN ARE COMING TO US.
THERE'S A FENCE AROUND GAZA. THAT'S WHAT PREVENTS OPERATIONS FROM HERE.
IF THERE WAS NO FENCE, IT WOULDN'T BE ONE BOMBING A MONTH...
IT WOULD BE ONE A MINUTE.
J. SACCO 1.06

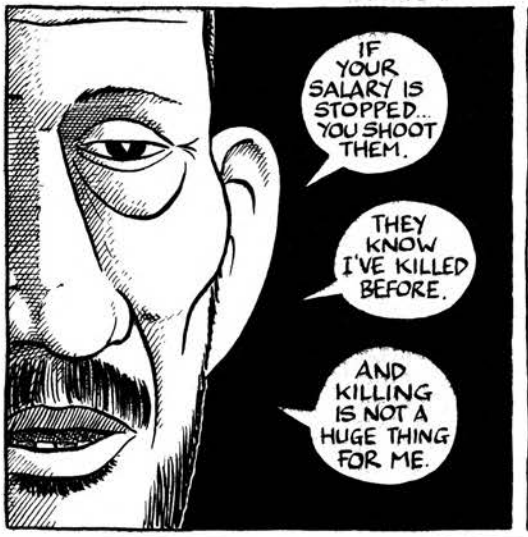

I wonder what Khaled thinks of all that.
I've heard him argue against suicide attacks on civilians.
I've heard him advocate a two-state solution.
I've heard him say he would be willing to cede his "right of return" as a refugee for a chance to raise his family in peace.
But the fighting is not done, and Khaled now belongs to the Popular Resistance Committees, an armed group focused on confronting the occupation aggressively.
I don't know what militant organization these guys belong to.
But here,
in the much-bloodied, achingly poor southern Gaza Strip,
which burns in a tighter circle of hell than almost any other part of Palestine,
—especially here—
whatever differences Khaled has with these men
—political or tactical—
none of them question the basic premise of resisting the common enemy.
J. SACCO 1.06
In 1996, during the Oslo period, when the Fatah-led Sulta came down hard on Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants for their murderous bombings of Israeli civilians, Khaled refused to participate in the round-ups and interrogations—even though he was an officer in one of the Palestinian security branches.
"Many times they offered me a high rank if I'd get involved," he says, because the Sulta knew he had "a lot of information about Hamas and Islamic Jihad."
He couldn't. Those militants were "my friends," Khaled says.
59


Abu Ahmed, who works for a different security service, also refused to participate in the arrests of Islamic militants.
In the First Intifada-
-I ATE WITH THEM AND SLEPT NEAR THEM AND WAS IN PRISON WITH THEM.
AND WE CONSIDERED OURSELVES BROTHERS.
THE GUY WHO USED TO GUIDE MY PRAYERS IN THE MOSQUE WAS FROM HAMAS.
IT'S UNIMAGINABLE THAT I WOULD ARREST HIM.
Abu Ahmed stays away from work for months at a time whenever the assignments don't suit him. However, he proudly threw himself into the Sulta's anti-drug campaign and invited me along on a few swooping raids that busted some dealers and users.
I STOPPED DEALING A LONG TIME AGO.
IF YOU CAN FIND ONE GUY WHO SAYS I GAVE HIM A SINGLE PLANT, I DESERVE TO HANG IN OWDA SQUARE.
Khaled, however, wouldn't even participate in that popular government crack down because he feared being drawn into more objectionable assignments. To quote an Arabic expression:
THE FIRST STEP TO DANCING IS MOVING.
But, I ask, don't you owe anything to the Sulta for your salary?
I'VE DONE MANY THINGS FOR THIS LAND.
NOT FOR THE SULTA.
BUT I'VE SERVED ALL MY LIFE FOR THE LAND, UNLIKE THE PEOPLE WHO DO NOTHING AND STILL GET SALARIES.
LET ME BE ONE OF THEM.
J. SACCO 1.06


Khaled's comrade-in-arms, Atlee, also is "wanted" and also draws a Sulta salary.
He, too, is contemptuous of his paymasters.
They would wish away the resistance to hang on to their ill-gotten gains and the glitzy perks of calm.
ALL THOSE HIGH SULTA OFFICERS HAVE PERSONAL INTERESTS.
THEY TOOK THE COCA-COLA COMPANY. THEY TOOK THE GAS COMPANY.
THEY HAVE BREAKFAST IN TEL AVIV, DINNER IN HAIFA AND THEY DANCE IN JERUSALEM.
THEY HAVE NO PROBLEMS.


THE RESISTANCE ALWAYS STARTS WITH THE SIMPLE, POOR PEOPLE.
THE RESISTANCE IS IMPOSED ON THE SULTA.


And while the Sulta —which is under great pressure from Israel and America to eliminate homegrown "terrorism"— has muzzled many veteran fighters with jobs and rank in the security services, it hasn't tamed these two.
But, I ask Khaled, couldn't the Sulta just cut off your salary?
It did once, he says, until he threatened to kill someone.
J. SACCO 1-06



Especially in southern Gaza in a place like Rafah, for example, the Sulta's control is tenuous. Says Atlee: "They know we can turn the city upside-down in a few minutes and get the public behind us. Because we are respected among the people."



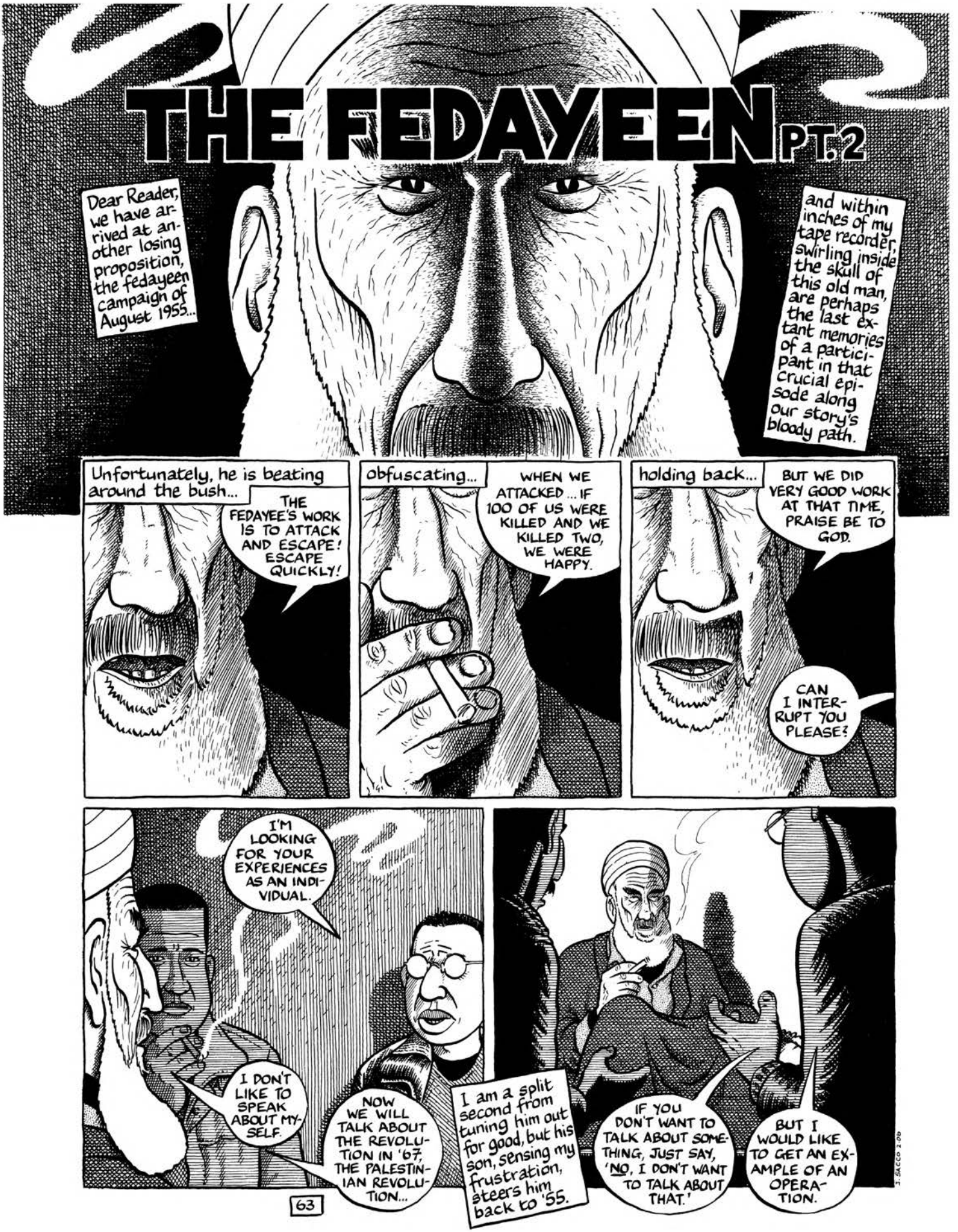


So the Sulta teeters, impotent, caught between the occupation and the resistance, neither a proper policeman for the Israelis nor a competent defender of Palestinian lives and land.





J. SACCO 2-06

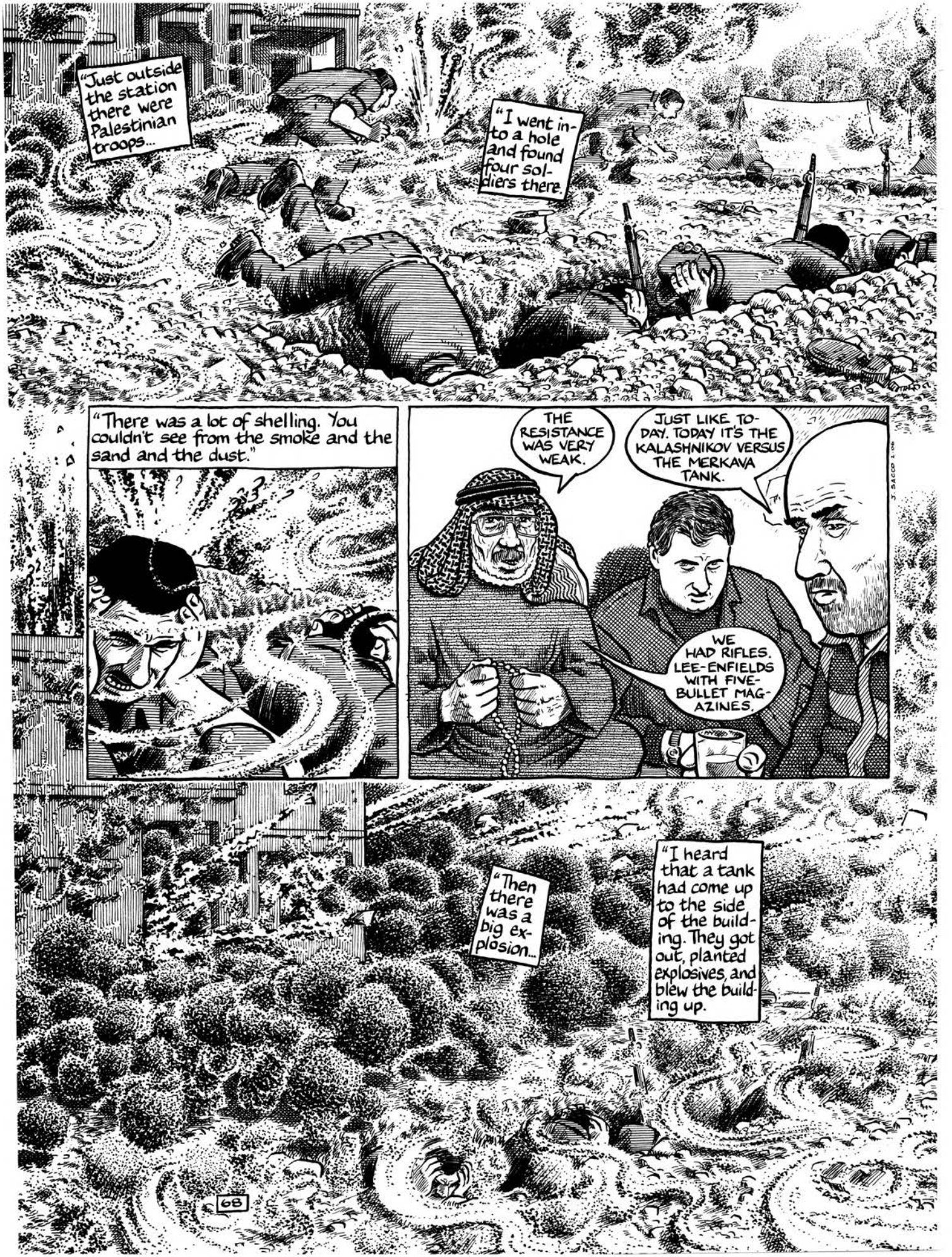

THE FEDAYEEN PT.2
Dear Reader, we have arrived at another losing proposition, the fedayeen campaign of August 1955...
and within inches of my tape recorder, swirling inside the skull of this old man, are perhaps the last extant memories of a participant in that crucial episode along our story's bloody path.
Unfortunately, he is beating around the bush...
THE FEDAYEE'S WORK IS TO ATTACK AND ESCAPE! ESCAPE QUICKLY!
obfuscating...
WHEN WE ATTACKED ... IF 100 OF US WERE KILLED AND WE KILLED TWO, WE WERE HAPPY.
holding back...
BUT WE DID VERY GOOD WORK AT THAT TIME, PRAISE BE TO GOD.
CAN I INTERRUPT YOU PLEASE?
I'M LOOKING FOR YOUR EXPERIENCES AS AN INDIVIDUAL.
I DON'T LIKE TO SPEAK ABOUT MYSELF.
NOW WE WILL TALK ABOUT THE REVOLUTION IN '67, THE PALESTINIAN REVOLUTION...
I am a split second from tuning him out for good, but his son, sensing my frustration, steers him back to '55.
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT SOMETHING, JUST SAY, 'NO, I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT THAT.'
BUT I WOULD LIKE TO GET AN EXAMPLE OF AN OPERATION.
J. SACCO 2.06


JUST ONE EXAMPLE.
I FEEL THEY MIGHT READ YOUR BOOK AND DO TO ME WHAT THEY DID TO THAT GERMAN ONE — I STILL REMEMBER HIS NAME — WHO THEY BROUGHT FROM ARGENTINA.
EICHMANN?
EICHMANN! EICHMANN!
TO FACE THE FATE OF EICHMANN!
TAKE CARE! THE JEWS MISS NOTHING!
THEY KNOW EVERYTHING!
THEY KNOW EVERYTHING!
WHEN YOU ENTERED!
WHERE YOU WENT!
I agree not to use his name, and immediately, as if he'd never felt a moment's hesitation, he begins...
BY CHANCE, WHEN WE WERE COMING BACK FROM ONE OPERATION, WE MET A JEEP.
WE DESTROYED IT COMPLETELY, AND ALL THE SOLDIERS IN THE JEEP WERE KILLED.
"But on their radio the Israelis said only two soldiers were injured. Mustafa Hafez told us—"
YOU ARE LIARS!
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
I HAVE BROUGHT SEVEN GUNS FROM THE SOLDIERS.
SHUT YOUR MOUTH!
DON'T SPEAK!
IF SOMEONE WANTS TO CLAIM SOMETHING, HE SHOULD BRING PROOF.
GO AWAY!
J. SACCO 2-06

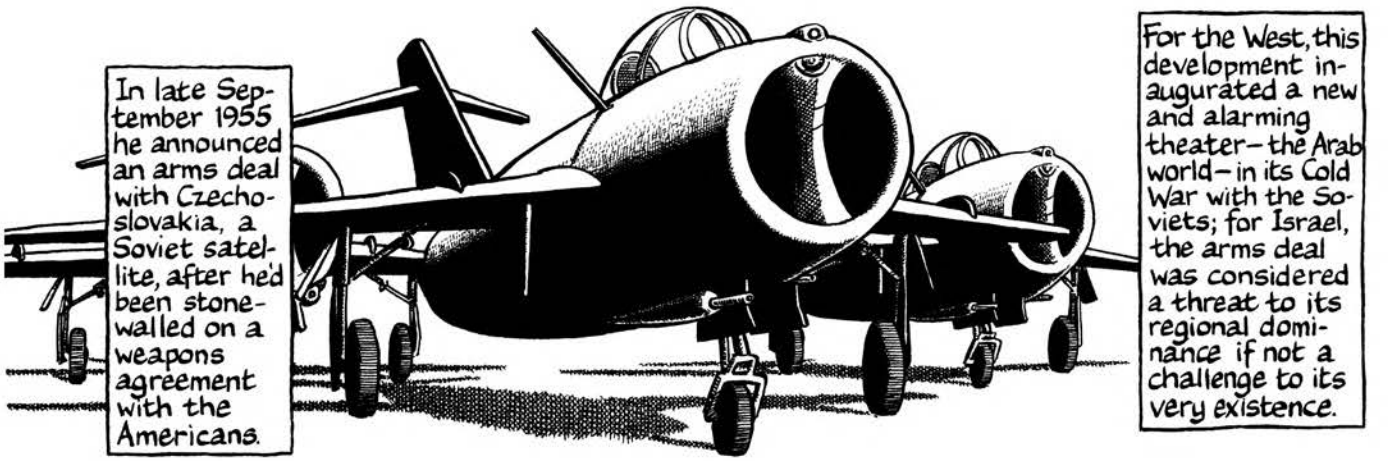

ONE OF MY COMRADES, HAMDED ABBAS – HE DIED IN SAUDI ARABIA –
HE DIED?
WE'RE SUPPOSED TO MEET HIM...
– HE WAS OUR GUIDE. HE KNEW THE ROADS.
HE WAS ONE OF THE OLD THIEVES.
"He told me –
LISTEN, I KNOW A WORKERS' CAMP.
THE LEADER ASKED US TO GET PROOF.
DON'T WORRY. LET'S GO.
"We went there. We didn't even come across guards.
"We entered the tents and we killed them all. There was no resistance, nothing.
"The only thing that happened is one of them stood up and stated his nationality.
YOU ARE TURKISH?
WHY DID YOU COME HERE?
GO TO HELL!
"I had a big knife. I cut off their ears.
"It was very easy to cut off their ears with this big knife.
J. SACCO 2-06


"We handed Mustafa Hafez the ears."
NOW I BELIEVE YOU.
The old guerrilla doesn't tell me whether this episode took place during this, the first fedayeen campaign. In that week-long assault Israel reported 15 fatalities: five soldiers and ten civilians.
"The goal of most of our operations was to spread panic and fear among those settlements. To prevent more immigrants from coming."
According to Mordechai Bar-On, the fedayeen campaign—
—WAS NEVER CONSIDERED SOMETHING THAT MIGHT DESTROY ISRAEL.
"But it was taken very seriously because of the impact on the general morale, especially on the border. In two or three places settlers evacuated their settlements and new people had to be brought in.
J. SACCO '06
"The fedayeen...were considered something that could not be tolerated."
On the night of August 31, 1955, Israel responded to the fedayeen raids with a devastating attack on the Khan Younis police station.
Hassan Hammad Abu Sitta was there.
He seems like another tired old man in a room full of tired men until I discover he was a policeman on duty that night some 50 years ago.
The memory seems to jolt him awake.
IT WAS 1955, IN THE SUMMER. WE COULD STILL SIT OUTSIDE.


"It was 8p.m. exactly because we were listening to the news at the time on Nasser's radio station...
THE ISRAELIS ARE ATTACK-ING!
"I entered the building... Everyone who had a gun took his gun.
"...and at that moment the shells started falling.
"Some people who had been outside were going inside for protection, and there were people inside who wanted to get out."
YOU SWITCHED PLACES?!
WHY?
HE'S GOING TO DRAW YOU RUNNING AWAY.
THERE WAS A LOT OF CONGES-TION.
"I think of how, thank God, I was inside and went out.
J. SACCO 2-06
67


"Just outside the station there were Palestinian troops..
"I went into a hole and found four soldiers there.
"There was a lot of shelling. You couldn't see from the smoke and the sand and the dust."
THE RESISTANCE WAS VERY WEAK.
JUST LIKE TODAY. TODAY IT'S THE KALASHNIKOV VERSUS THE MERKAVA TANK.
WE HAD RIFLES. LEE-ENFIELDS WITH FIVE-BULLET MAGAZINES.
J. SACCO 1.08
"Then there was a big explosion...
"I heard that a tank had come up to the side of the building. They got out, planted explosives, and blew the building up.
68


"Two floors on the south side collapsed. The whole south side."
I ask what happened to the men inside.
MAY GOD KEEP THAT EVIL FROM YOU.
"They had all been our friends and comrades.
"Most of them were good men, and God bless them.
"You'd find a body crushed by stones and just the legs sticking out.
"There were people who were completely buried."
The Egyptians reported 72 dead, both Egyptians and Palestinians. The U.N. observers confirmed about half that number.
Nasser suspended the fedayeen campaign. His Egyptian and Palestinian forces had shown an inability to repulse Israeli retaliatory raids.
But Nasser remained as determined as ever to tilt the balance of power in Egypt's favor.
J. SACCO 2006
69


In late September 1955 he announced an arms deal with Czechoslovakia, a Soviet satellite, after he'd been stonewalled on a weapons agreement with the Americans.
For the West, this development inaugurated a new and alarming theater—the Arab world—in its Cold War with the Soviets; for Israel, the arms deal was considered a threat to its regional dominance if not a challenge to its very existence.


After general elections, Ben-Gurion replaced Sharett as Israel's prime minister.
The hardliners were now ascendant and determined to start a war with Egypt before it could obtain and incorporate the modern Soviet aircraft and tanks.
According to Bar-On, "many many Israelis, high officials, were clamoring for a preventative strike on Egypt," but Ben-Gurion feared the reaction of the Americans and especially the British, who were treaty-bound with the French to guarantee the borders of the Middle East.


Ben-Gurion, says Bar-On, WAS TOTALLY OPPOSED TO A PREVENTATIVE WAR, TO INITIATING A WAR OUT OF THE BLUE.
"But he did agree to what Dayan proposed, which was to escalate retaliation operations to the level which would provoke Nasser to begin a war or, at least, would blur... who started it.
"It didn't work."
J. SACCO 3.06
Nasser did not take the bait despite continued raids on Gaza and the Sinai that killed scores of Arabs and a deadly strike against Syria, with whom Cairo had recently signed a mutual defense pact.
70

Unable to trigger a war, Israel reverted to a defensive posture, according to Bar-On.

Israel had already started procuring weapons from France to outmatch the quality of the Soviet weapons ordered by Egypt.

A period of relative calm prevailed. Egypt had stopped its infiltrations from Gaza, and despite shooting incidents along the armistice demarcation line, no Israeli had been killed for months.

But over the course of a few clashes in early April 1956, one Egyptian and four Israeli soldiers were killed.

Then, on April 5, a far deadlier incident occurred. According to U.S. Army Lt. Col. R. F. Bayard, chairman of UNTSO's Egyptian-Israeli armistice liaison commission, Israeli mortars fired on an Egyptian position, which led to exchanges of mortar fire along the entire borderline.

Bar-On tells me that the Egyptians fired heavy mortars at "two or three kibbutzim, and it became quite hot," though Bayard reported that UNTSO could not determine which side had fired at civilian targets first.

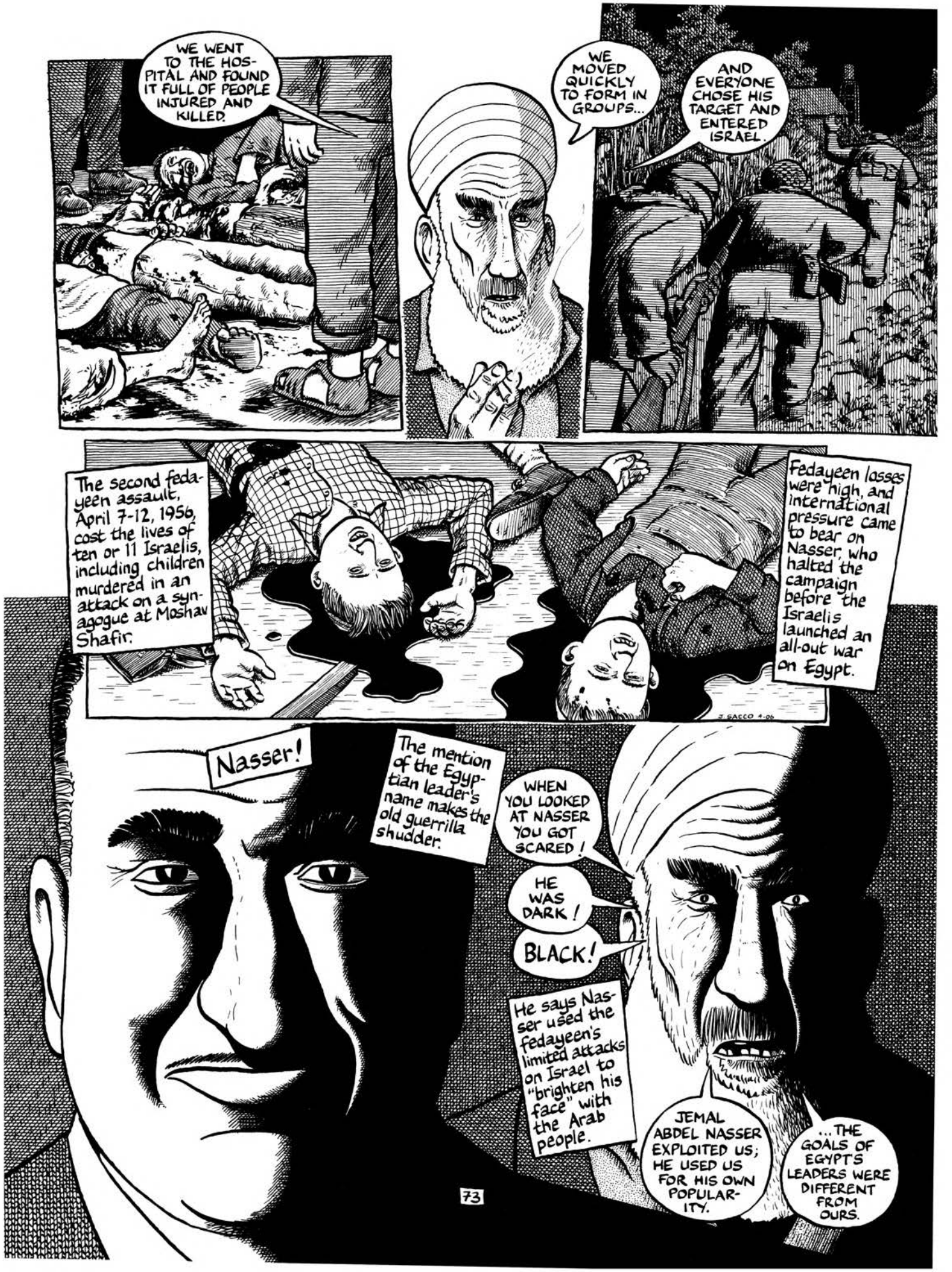
In any case, five Israeli civilians and two soldiers were wounded that day, and to continue the Israeli perspective...

DAYAN, I THINK, REACTED ALMOST SPONTANEOUSLY.

I WOULDN'T SAY IRRATIONALLY.

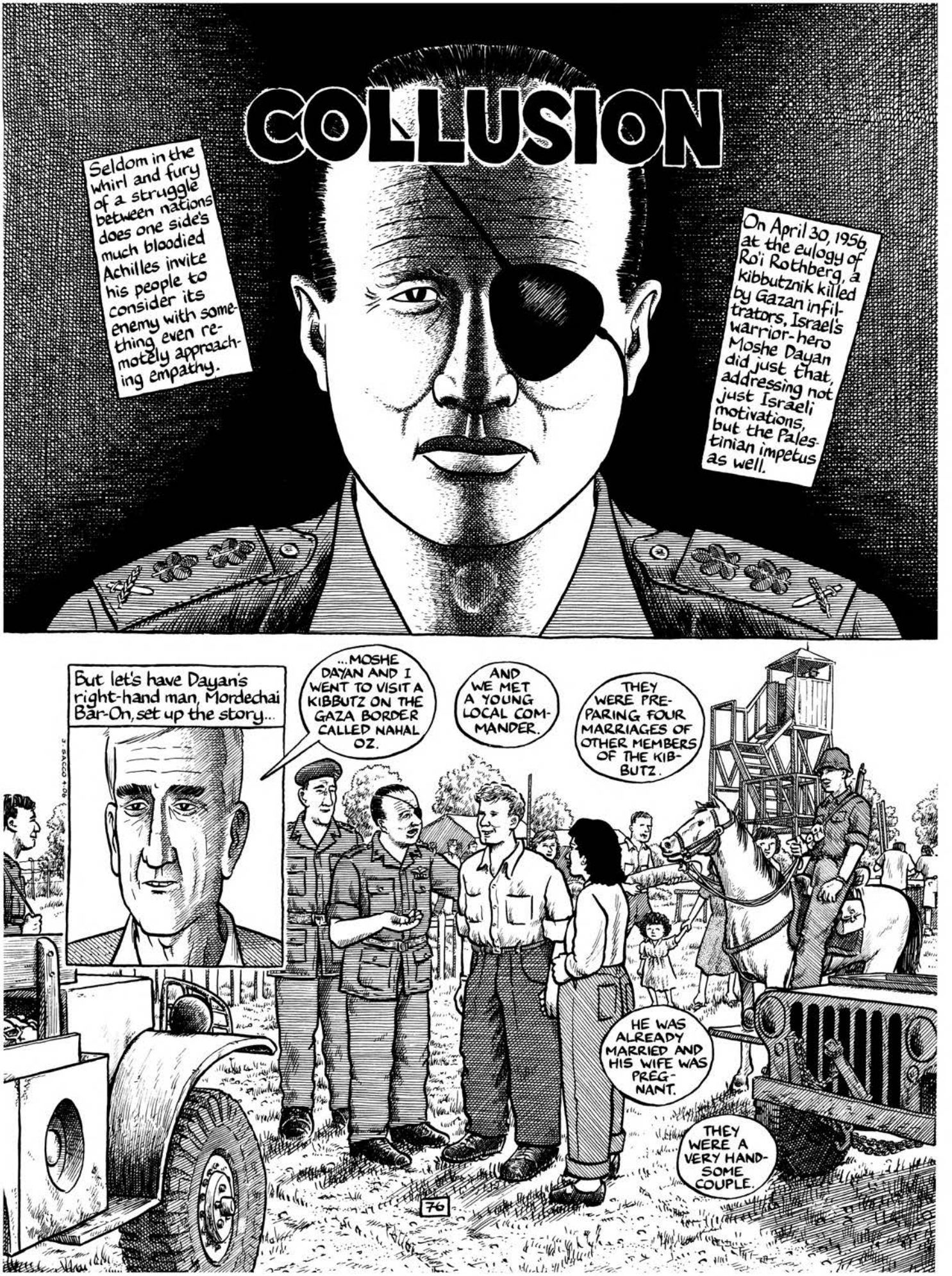
J. SACCO 3-06

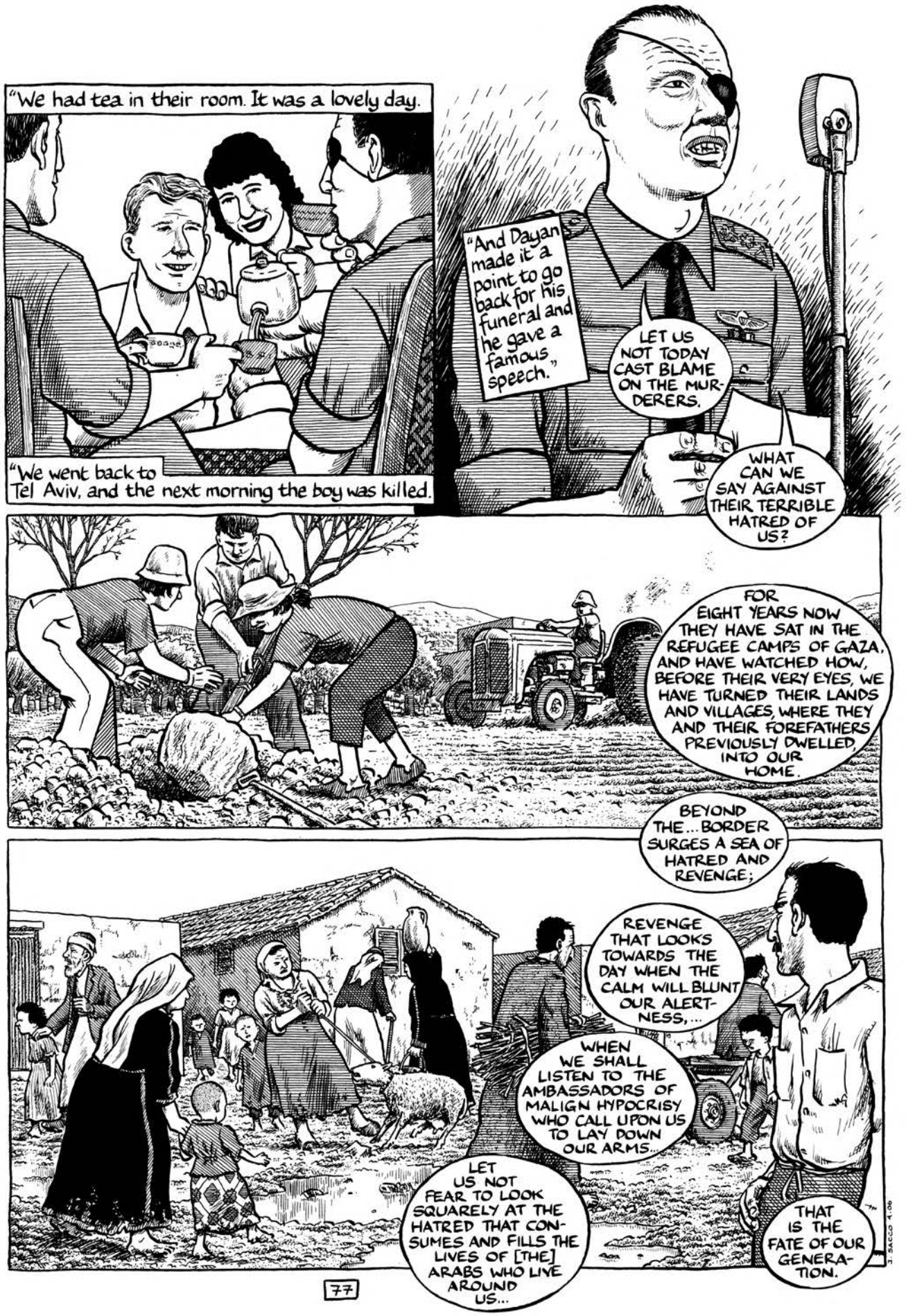

"He was a rational person, but there was an element of anger, I think: 'To hell with you! If... you're shelling our kibbutzim, which are civilian targets, I'll show you!'
"And he gave the order to hit Gaza.
"Not much.
"It was one or two barrages."
Israeli heavy mortar shells landed "all along the main street" of Gaza City "at a time when the streets are most crowded," according to Bayard's report, which claimed the Israelis used "the old trick of laying down one or two rounds and waiting several minutes for a crowd to form before returning to [the] original target... Thus many casualties."
About 50 Palestinian civilians were killed and 100 wounded.
According to Bayard, the Israeli claim that they "were firing 120mm mortar at military targets in Gaza is in my opinion an outright lie." The nearest Egyptian military position was one kilometer away.
The attack brought an immediate response from Nasser.
He reactivated the fedayeen.
J. SACCO 4.08
72


WE WENT TO THE HOSPITAL AND FOUND IT FULL OF PEOPLE INJURED AND KILLED.
WE MOVED QUICKLY TO FORM IN GROUPS...
AND EVERYONE CHOSE HIS TARGET AND ENTERED ISRAEL.
The second fedayeen assault, April 7-12, 1956, cost the lives of ten or 11 Israelis, including children murdered in an attack on a synagogue at Moshav Shafir.
Fedayeen losses were high, and international pressure came to bear on Nasser, who halted the campaign before the Israelis launched an all-out war on Egypt.
J. SACCO 4-06
Nasser!
The mention of the Egyptian leader's name makes the old guerrilla shudder.
WHEN YOU LOOKED AT NASSER YOU GOT SCARED!
HE WAS DARK!
BLACK!
He says Nasser used the fedayeen's limited attacks on Israel to "brighten his face" with the Arab people.
JEMAL ABDEL NASSER EXPLOITED US; HE USED US FOR HIS OWN POPULARITY.
...THE GOALS OF EGYPT'S LEADERS WERE DIFFERENT FROM OURS.
73


Recall, many of the original fedayeen had been criminals or, like the old guerrilla here, soldiers who had once angered the Egyptian authorities by making freelance attacks on Israelis.
THIS IS A SECRET... AND THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE TOLD IT.
I DISCOVERED THAT THE EGYPTIAN AIM WAS TO GET RID OF ALL OF US BECAUSE THEY CONSIDERED US TROUBLEMAKERS.
And Nasser may have had no interest in creating too potent a Palestinian guerrilla force whose loyalties were not, ultimately, to Egypt.
"Israeli armored vehicles used to chase us...When we...requested anti-tank rifles we were rejected, rejected, rejected. We had the Carl-Gustav rifle. It was useless against those vehicles.
"Mustafa Hafez told us:
I'M WITH YOU, BUT I CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT YOUR REQUEST... I RECEIVE MY ORDERS FROM EGYPT.
"Sometimes Mustafa Hafez got upset. He would locate positions that could be attacked but Egypt told him no."
Whether or not Hafez felt caught between his Egyptian superiors and his mostly Palestinian cadres was of little concern to the Israelis, who assassinated him with a package bomb on July 11, 1956.
"We took him to Cairo and buried him... I cried very much. And his mother was crying with me, trying to stop me from crying...We were crying more than the women. He was very dear to all of us."
MUSTAFA HAFEZ DIED, AND WE DIED.
AFTER HIM, WE DID NO MORE OPERATIONS WORTH TALKING ABOUT.
J. SACCO 4-06
74


Discipline unraveled among a new group of recruits who had joined the fedayeen during Hafez's tenure but who would have been discharged, the old guerrilla contends, had Hafez lived.
"Many rules were broken.
"They made trouble and created many problems.
"They stole gold and attacked women.
"We looked bad before the people."
In his eyes, the Egyptian officer corps was also rotten, starting at the top with the army's chief of staff.
"Abdel Hakim Amer was carousing with women and drinking. We have a proverb: If the head of the family is drumming, don't blame the children for dancing.
"So his officers were just like him.
"Drunkards.
"Drug users."
He says he was convinced the Israelis would retaliate for the second fedayeen campaign.
I BELIEVED THE REACTION OF THE JEWS WOULD BE STRONG.
AND MANY TIMES I SHOUTED AND WARNED THE PEOPLE, 'BE CAREFUL!
'WAKE UP!'
J. SACCO 4.06


COLLUSION
Seldom in the whirl and fury of a struggle between nations does one side's much bloodied Achilles invite his people to consider its enemy with something even remotely approaching empathy.
On April 30, 1956, at the eulogy of Roi Rothberg, a kibbutznik killed by Gazan infiltrators, Israel's warrior-hero Moshe Dayan did just that, addressing not just Israeli motivations, but the Palestinian impetus as well.
But let's have Dayan's right-hand man, Mordechai Bar-On, set up the story...
...MOSHE DAYAN AND I WENT TO VISIT A KIBBUTZ ON THE GAZA BORDER CALLED NAHAL OZ.
AND WE MET A YOUNG LOCAL COMMANDER.
THEY WERE PREPARING FOUR MARRIAGES OF OTHER MEMBERS OF THE KIBBUTZ.
HE WAS ALREADY MARRIED AND HIS WIFE WAS PREGNANT.
THEY WERE A VERY HANDSOME COUPLE.
J. SACCO '09
76


"We had tea in their room. It was a lovely day.
"We went back to Tel Aviv, and the next morning the boy was killed.
"And Dayan made it a point to go back for his funeral and he gave a famous speech."
LET US NOT TODAY CAST BLAME ON THE MURDERERS.
WHAT CAN WE SAY AGAINST THEIR TERRIBLE HATRED OF US?
FOR EIGHT YEARS NOW THEY HAVE SAT IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS OF GAZA, AND HAVE WATCHED HOW, BEFORE THEIR VERY EYES, WE HAVE TURNED THEIR LANDS AND VILLAGES, WHERE THEY AND THEIR FOREFATHERS PREVIOUSLY DWELLED, INTO OUR HOME.
BEYOND THE... BORDER SURGES A SEA OF HATRED AND REVENGE;
REVENGE THAT LOOKS TOWARDS THE DAY WHEN THE CALM WILL BLUNT OUR ALERTNESS,...
WHEN WE SHALL LISTEN TO THE AMBASSADORS OF MALIGN HYPOCRISY WHO CALL UPON US TO LAY DOWN OUR ARMS...
LET US NOT FEAR TO LOOK SQUARELY AT THE HATRED THAT CONSUMES AND FILLS THE LIVES OF [THE] ARABS WHO LIVE AROUND US...
THAT IS THE FATE OF OUR GENERATION.
77

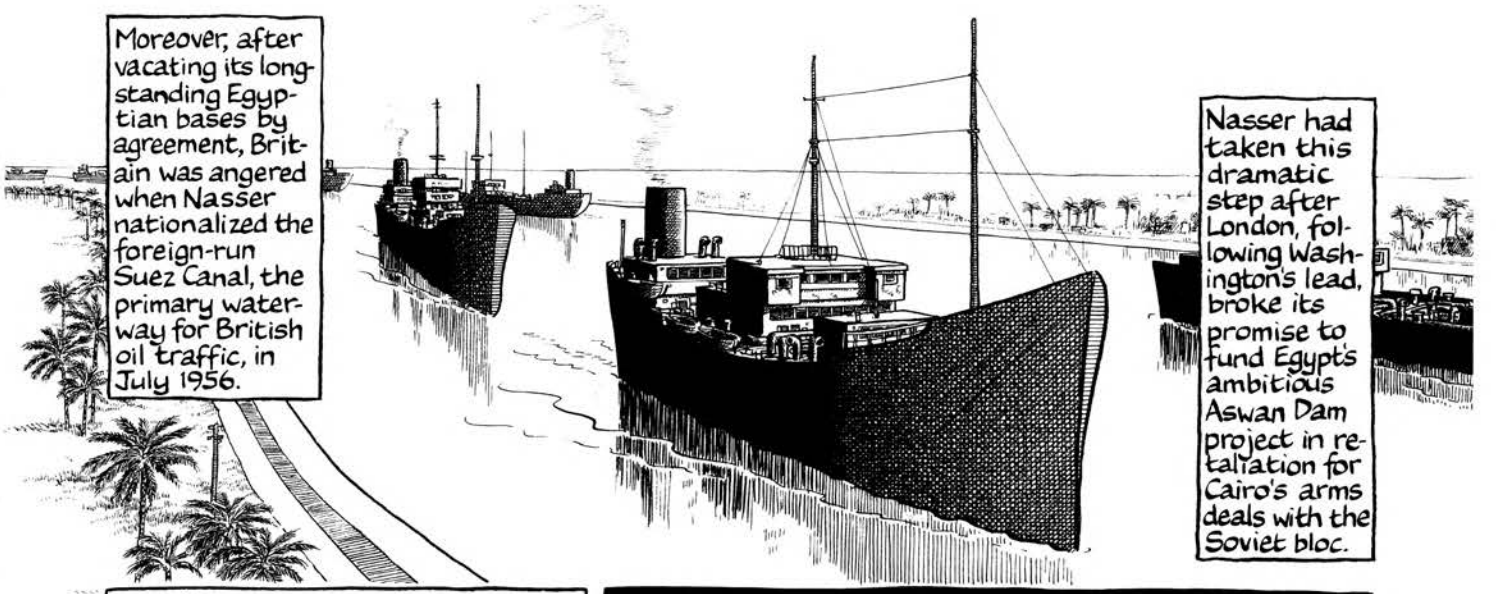

THIS IS OUR CHOICE:
TO BE READY AND ARMED, TOUGH AND HARSH—OR ELSE THE SWORD SHALL FALL FROM OUR HANDS AND OUR LIVES WILL BE CUT SHORT.
YOU COULD SEE IN DAYAN A REALIZATION THAT THE PALESTINIANS HAVE GOOD REASON TO DO WHAT THEY DO ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO OPTION OTHER THAN TO DEFEND OURSELVES.
According to Bar-On, Dayan had decided that Palestinian infiltrators would have to be stopped once and for all, and that meant one course of action.
HE WANTED TO CREATE A CHANGE IN THE BASIC SITUATION —AND CONQUER THE GAZA STRIP.
Ironically, after trying unsuccessfully to pick a fight, Israel was about to be handed just such an opportunity.
Dear Reader, while we have been focusing on deadly raids and destitute refugees in a sliver of land along the south-easternmost edge of the Mediterranean Sea, overly clever people in London and Paris were hatching a plot that would turn the region upside-down.
BRITISH PRIME MINISTER ANTHONY EDEN
The British and French —for their own reasons —had decided to bring down the Egyptian regime.
FRENCH PRIME MINISTER GUY MOLLET
J. SACCO 4.06
France seethed at Nasser for supporting the costly rebellion against its colonial rule in Algeria.
In fact, by feeding modern weapons to the Israelis, the French hoped to cause problems for Egypt, perhaps even goad Israel into striking Egypt a decisive blow.
78

Britain marked Nasser for removal because his nationalist, anti-colonialist agenda and pan-Arab alliances could have threatened London's client regime in Iraq and British-controlled oil resources there.



Moreover, after vacating its long-standing Egyptian bases by agreement, Britain was angered when Nasser nationalized the foreign-run Suez Canal, the primary waterway for British oil traffic, in July 1956.

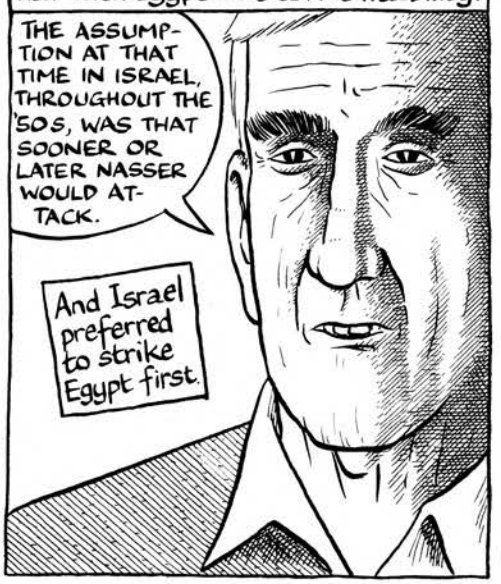
Nasser had taken this dramatic step after London, following Washington's lead, broke its promise to fund Egypt's ambitious Aswan Dam project in retaliation for Cairo's arms deals with the Soviet bloc.



Israel, as we have seen, thought war with Egypt was an inevitability.

THE ASSUMPTION AT THAT TIME IN ISRAEL, THROUGHOUT THE '50S, WAS THAT SOONER OR LATER NASSER WOULD ATTACK.

And Israel preferred to strike Egypt first.



Thus, the interests of Britain, France, and Israel overlapped in Cairo.

These nations concocted an elaborate deceit to destroy Nasser, which they outlined in a secret protocol signed in Sèvres, France—the infamous tripartite collusion.

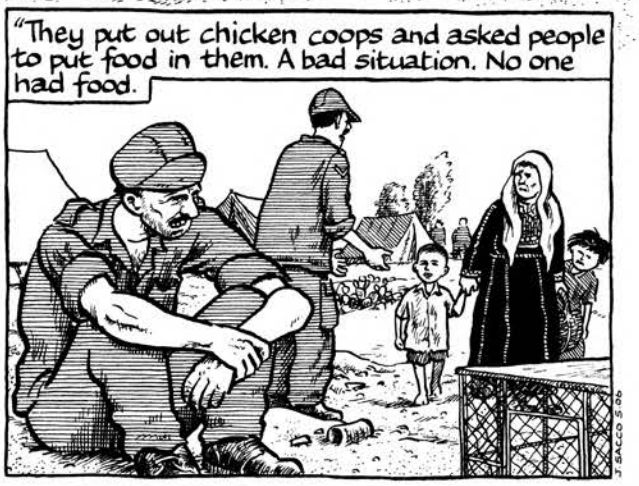


J. SACCO 4.06


The plot called for Israel to attack the Gaza Strip and the Sinai with the chief reason that it wanted to finish off the fedayeen once and for all.
Israel also would make a superfluous parachute drop close to the Suez Canal.
Claiming a duty to protect international shipping traffic, Britain and France would then demand that both Egyptian and Israeli forces withdraw 10 miles from the Canal Zone...
and that Egypt accept the Canal's temporary occupation by an Anglo-French contingent until a settlement could be reached.
The Israelis would comply with the "ultimatum"; Nasser, with Egypt's sovereignty at stake, would certainly refuse it.
The British and French would then attack Egypt.
The scheme started as planned and then quickly unravelled, but let other histories concern themselves with Washington's diplomatic intervention and the subsequent humiliation of Britain and France.
U.S. PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER
J. SACCO '06
We've got our "human debris and social outcasts" to tend to.
80


Israel's assault on Egypt began on October 29, 1956.
ISRAEL
SUEZ CANAL
EGYPT
JORDAN
SINAI
SAUDI ARABIA
On November 2, Israeli forces invaded the Gaza Strip.
GAZA STRIP
GAZA CITY
KHAN YOUNIS
RAFAH
TO EL-ARISH
ISRAEL
ATTACK


Fatima Abu Salem was 19 at the time, a mother of two, and living in Khan Younis.
THE ROAD TO EL-ARISH* WAS CUT, AND THE EGYPTIAN SOLDIERS WEREN'T GETTING ANY FOOD.
*EL-ARISH: EGYPTIAN TOWN IN SINAI ABOUT 50 KM WEST OF RAFAH


"They put out chicken coops and asked people to put food in them. A bad situation. No one had food.
J. SACCO '96

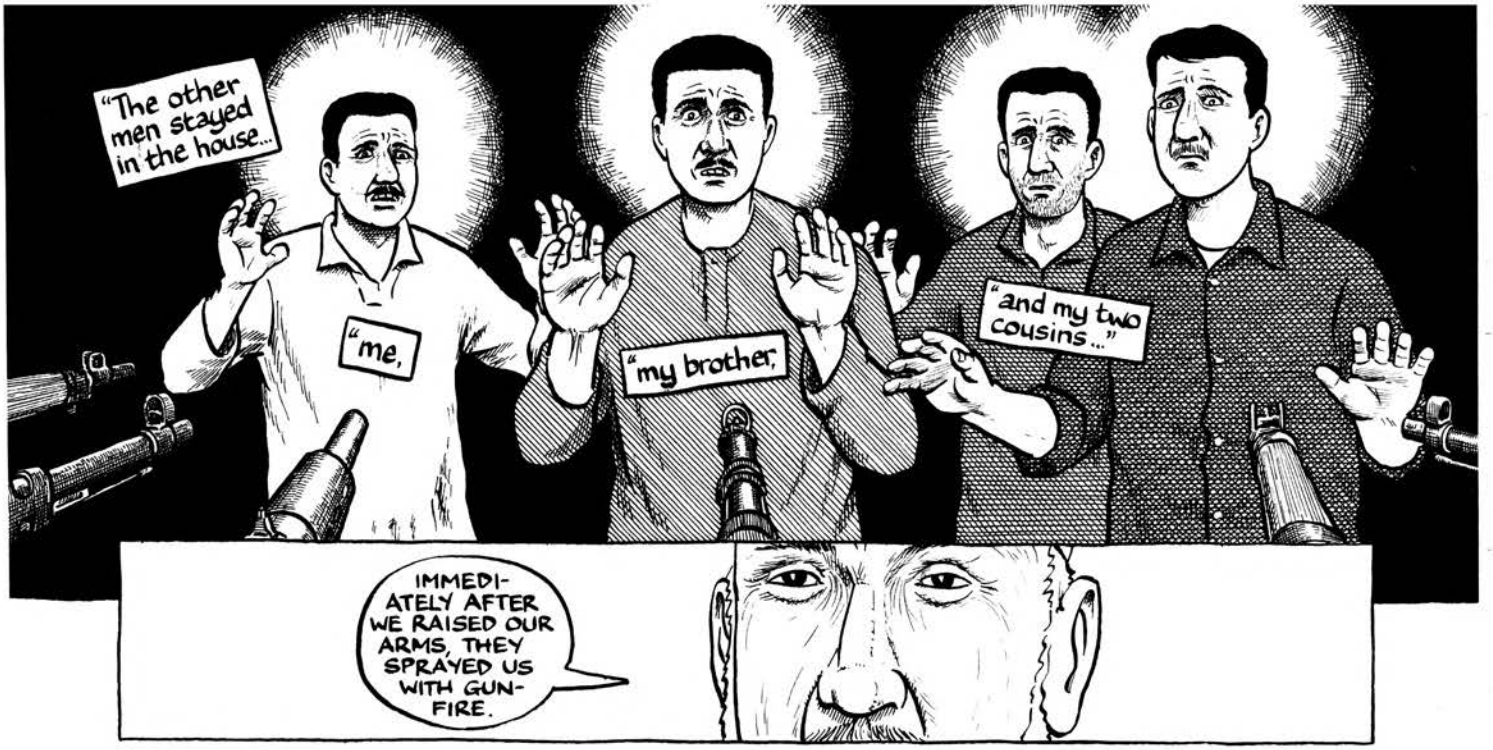

"The army was in a complete state of chaos. Soldiers were running into the brush area, taking off their uniforms."
Her husband, a policeman, joined the rout. "He had a uniform," she says. "He was scared...
81


"From ships at sea they started shelling the camps. Airplanes were bombing. So we left at night with our neighbors. Everyone was going.
"We walked down to Rafah through the trees and stayed in a sister's house there."
Saleh Shiblaq was a Palestinian in the Egyptian army stationed at an intersection between Khan Younis and Rafah.
THERE WERE ABOUT 55 OF US.
WITH CARL-GUSTAV RIFLES.
WE HAD MACHINE GUNS AND SOME CANNONS.
WE DIDN'T HAVE TANKS TO DEFEND OURSELVES.
"We couldn't do anything against planes and tanks."
IT'S JUST LIKE NOW.
WHAT'S A GUY WITH A KALASHNIKOV GOING TO DO AGAINST AN APACHE?
"People started dying. There was an Egyptian officer with three stars who died in front of me named Hanafi ... I was the one who covered him with some sand...
J. SACCO 5-06


"We got orders to withdraw... Everyone went back to his house."
Meanwhile, our old fedayee hurried to Khan Younis with his squad from a mission in Israel to find the defenses already collapsed.
WE RETURNED AND SAW NO PALESTINIAN OR EGYPTIAN FORCES.
WE WERE FEW IN NUMBER. A GROUP OF 11...
"The Israelis outnumbered us... They entered with a huge number of tanks.
"I'd be out of my mind to try to defend with a Carl-Gustav.
"So we escaped to the sea, and we changed our clothes and moved away."
DID THE INVASION OF GAZA BADLY HURT THE FEDAYEEN?
NONE OF THE FEDAYEEN WERE KILLED IN THE '56 INVASION.
ALL OF US ESCAPED.
SOME OF US WENT TO EGYPT AND SOME TO JORDAN.
"The people who suffered were the young men in our cities."
[THE ISRAELIS] TOOK THEM OUT OF THEIR HOUSES AND LINED THEM AGAINST THE WALL AND SHOT THEM.
© SACCO 3.06


NOV. 3, 1956
PT. 1: KHAN YOUNIS TOWN CENTER
We last left Saleh Shiblaq fleeing the battle-field.
He found his family and other relatives at the home of his uncle in the middle of Khan Younis.
I WANTED TO LEAVE THE AREA BECAUSE IT WAS CENTRAL, BUT MY RELATIVES SAID-
STAY HERE!
WE'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU.
The next morning, Saleh could see Israeli soldiers in the street.
Despite this, one of his cousins decided to leave for his own home.
NO, LOOK, THERE ARE JEWS AT THE INTER-SECTION THERE.
NO, THEY'RE NOT JEWS.
TAKE IT FROM ME, THEY'RE JEWS.
"He walked toward them, about 100 meters, and they told him to lift his hands...
"and they took him away."
J. SACCO 5.04

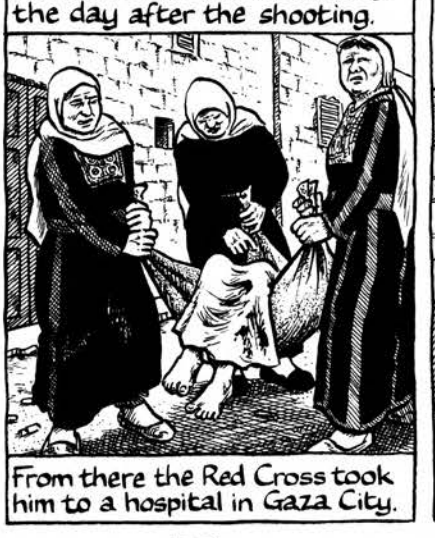

AFTER A WHILE THE ISRAELIS... STARTED KNOCKING ON DOORS, COLLECTING PEOPLE, SHOOTING THEM IN THEIR HOMES.
NOW, HOW DID YOU KNOW THAT?
DID YOU SEE IT OR DID YOU HEAR IT?
I SAW THE ISRAELIS BANGING ON DOORS AND KICKING DOORS!
AND I COULD HEAR SHOTS...
I WAS WATCHING THEM TAKING THE PEOPLE OUT OF THE HOUSES.
"I had taken off my uniform, but my weapon was with me. I thought I'd take some shots at them, but my father said,
WHAT? YOU WANT TO BE A FEDAYEE NOW?
"They came to where we were... (By this time I had hidden my rifle and some grenades I had under a bed.)
"They came in... and they forced all the women out.
"All the kids... and the old men, too.
"My father was taken out with the women.
J. SACCO 5.06
85

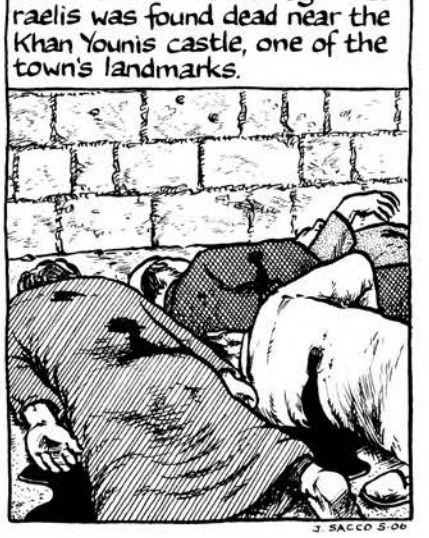

"The other men stayed in the house..."
"me,"
"my brother,"
"and my two cousins..."

IMMEDIATELY AFTER WE RAISED OUR ARMS, THEY SPRAYED US WITH GUNFIRE.

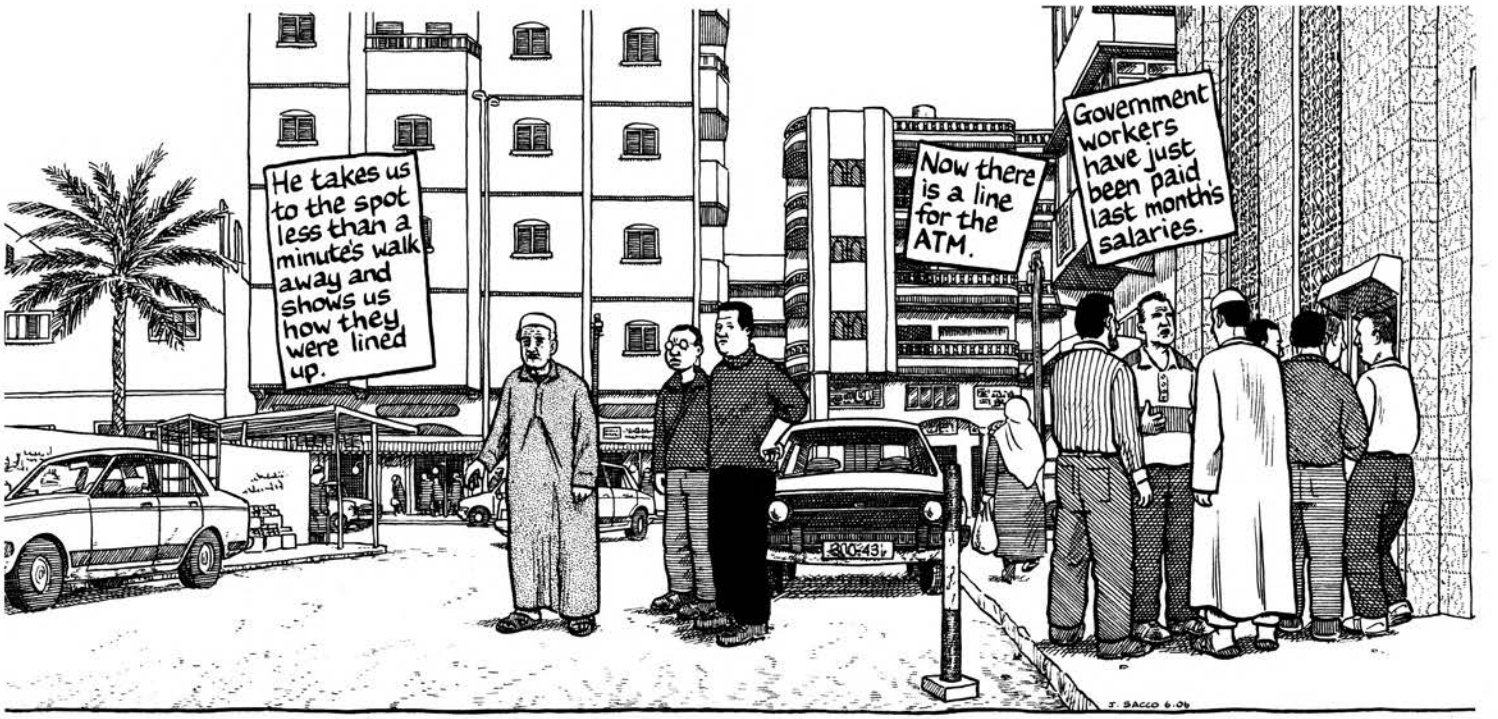

"I was unconscious maybe half an hour, 45 minutes... I saw that the ones in the room were dead.
"I tried to get up and I fell down."


Saleh was wounded in three places. One bullet shattered his forearm.
He still cannot move his arm properly or open his hand fully.

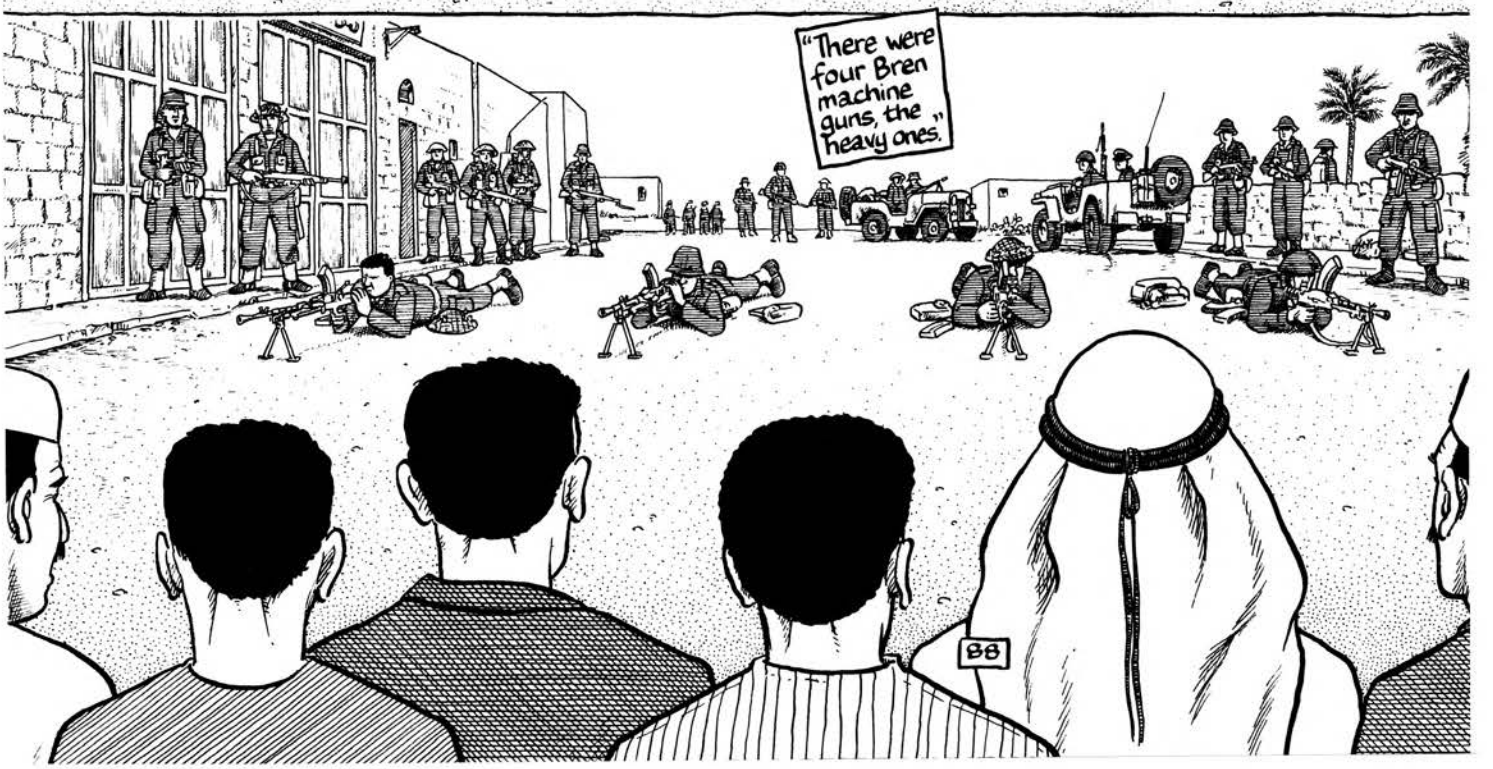

The women of the household carried him to the local clinic the day after the shooting.
From there the Red Cross took him to a hospital in Gaza City.


The cousin who had left the house earlier and been taken by the Israelis was found dead near the Khan Younis castle, one of the town's landmarks.
J. SACCO 5-06


In those days, Misbah Ashour Abu Sa'doni was a handyman living on Jalal Street in the center of Khan Younis, only a couple of dozen meters from where we are talking now.
I WAS WITH MY WIFE, MY MOTHER, MY FATHER, AND MY TWO SONS...
MY SISTER AND HER HUSBAND...
MY BROTHER AND MY BROTHER'S WIFE...
AND ALSO A MAN NAMED SABRI ASHOUR.
SABRI ENDED UP DYING...
THEY CAME TO US BECAUSE OF THE FEAR.
"All of a sudden we heard banging on the door... and by the time we got there they were already breaking it down."
LIFT UP YOUR HANDS!
LIFT UP YOUR HANDS!
The soldiers moved the residents of Jalal Street into the road.
"They divided the men from the women, lining us up on different sides.
"We saw all our neighbors lined up because they were all being brought to the same place..."
J. SACCO 5 '06
Misbah was led away in a group of what he estimates was 30 men.
"We went north a little bit.
"To the bank.
"It was a dentist's office at the time, not a bank."
87


He takes us to the spot less than a minute's walk away and shows us how they were lined up.
Now there is a line for the ATM.
Government workers have just been paid last month's salaries.
J. SACCO 6.06




"There were four Bren machine guns, the heavy ones."
88