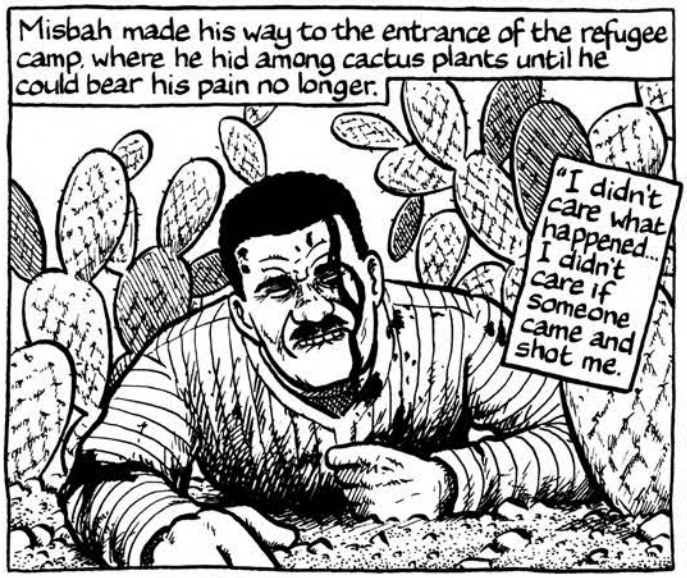
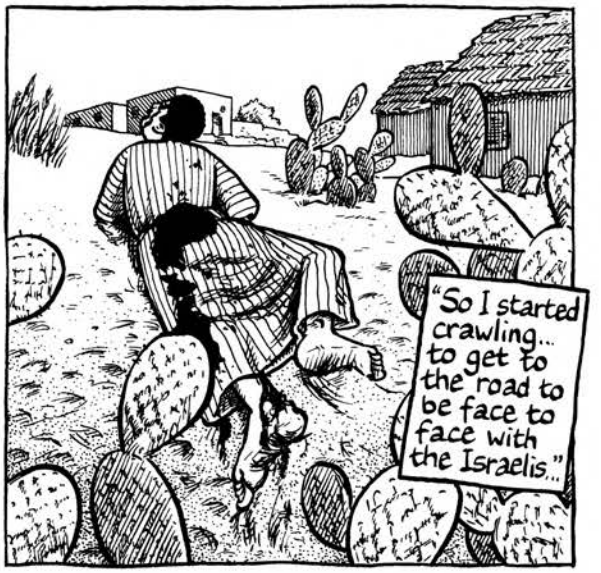

In addition, he says, a soldier was standing there with an Egyptian-issue Beretta sub-machine gun.
"I didn't think he had fired at all, but after seven years I discovered a bullet from a Beretta in my leg...
"I sort of went off to the side. I was thinking of escaping.
"Then they started firing.
"I fell down and the bodies began to fall on top of me."
THE SMELL HURT.
THE SMELL OF WHAT? CORDITE?
YES, FROM SO MUCH FIRING.
IT HURT OUR NOSES.
THEY FIRED A LOT.
J. SACCO 6.06
"And then there was silence.
"And then we heard them... putting in new magazines.
89

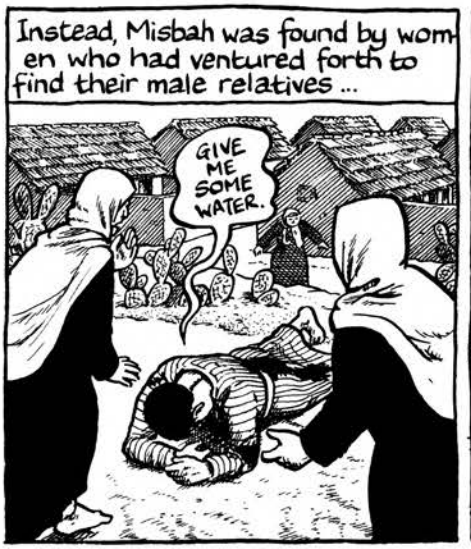

"They fired four different times."
THERE WERE MEN WHO HAD BEEN SHOT IN THE FACE AND THEIR SKULLS HAD OPENED UP BECAUSE YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT FOUR TIMES.
THEY WERE HEAVY BULLETS.
"I was reciting the Koran...
"and my spirit went all the way up to the sky.
"During the fourth burst I felt as though something weighing 50 kilos had been thrown from the top of a minaret onto my back"
A bullet had entered Misbah's buttock and exited at his tailbone. He also was wounded in his head and his heel.
J. SACCO 6-06


"After it happened, we waited... and then we heard someone say,
NOBODY'S HERE.
"We got up...
"my brother,
"this guy Fayeq,
"and me.
"And there were other people who lived [and] were wounded, but they eventually died.
"My brother had a lot of injuries. In his leg, in his arm, in his stomach"
The brothers fled the area and hid in a hole in the ground, but they could see Israeli soldiers nearby.
LET'S GO. LET'S RUN.
"I didn't really want to go. And my brother started to run...
"I tried to start running and would...fall every few meters.
I CAN'T RUN. BUT TAKE CARE OF MY SONS.
THERE'S NO HOPE FOR ME.
J. SACCO 6-08


"My brother went...toward the sea. He found someone with a donkey cart who took him to Mawasi.*
*MAWASI: A NARROW STRIP OF LAND ALONG THE SOUTHERN GAZA COAST.
"Three or four months later he died from his injuries."


Misbah made his way to the entrance of the refugee camp, where he hid among cactus plants until he could bear his pain no longer.
"I didn't care what happened... I didn't care if someone came and shot me.

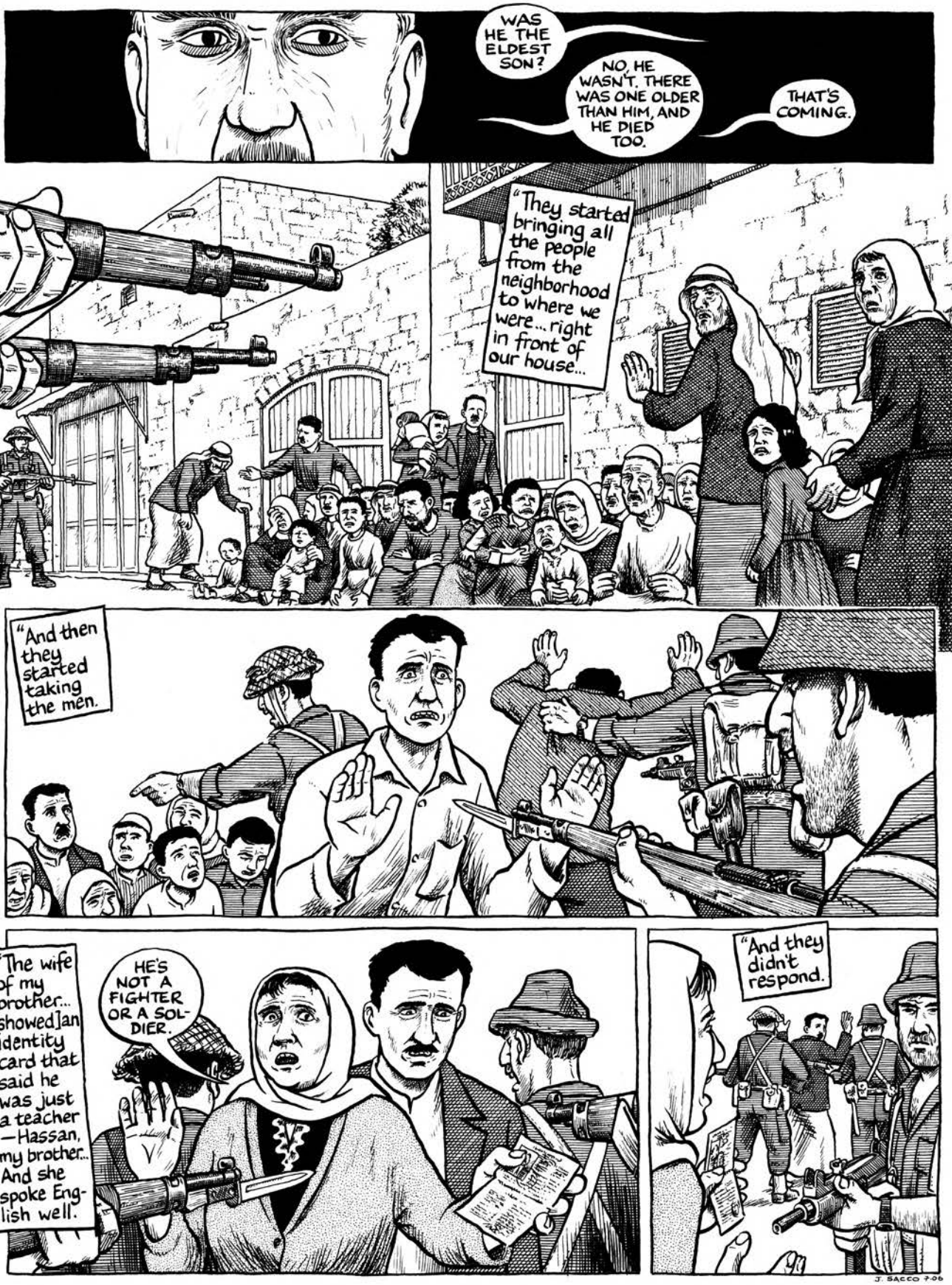

"So I started crawling... to get to the road to be face to face with the Israelis..."


Instead, Misbah was found by women who had ventured forth to find their male relatives ...
GIVE ME SOME WATER.

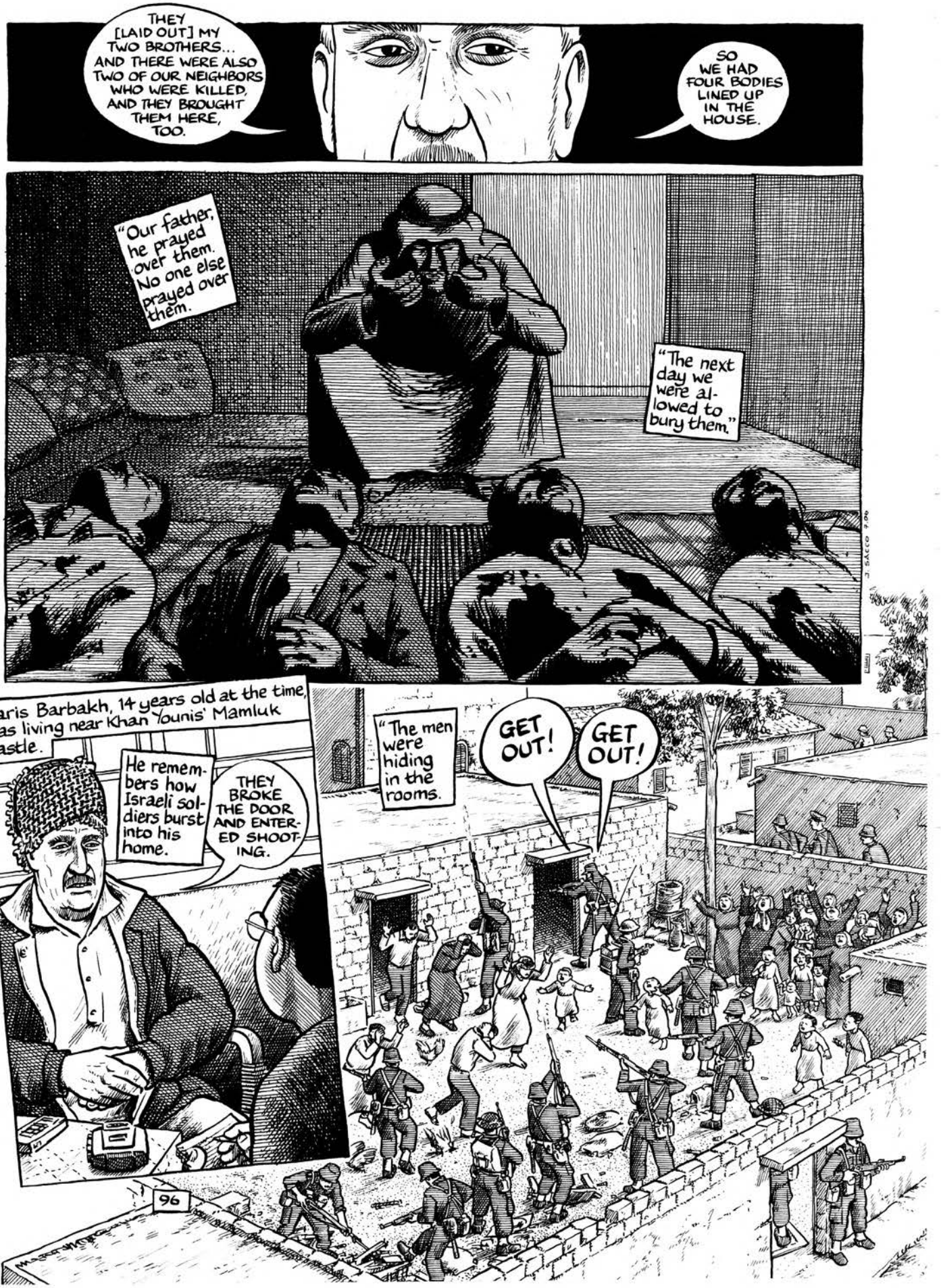

and soon he was discovered by his own family...


who tried tending to his injuries the best they could.
PUT COFFEE GROUNDS ON HIS WOUND.
PRESS THE WOUND WITH A HOT IRON...
After three days he was taken to a hospital in Gaza City where he had four operations over four months.
J. SACCO 8.08


Takreem El-Batta, who resided on the same street as Misbah, was a young boy at the time.
WE WERE LIVING IN THE HOUSE BELOW THIS ONE.
MY MOTHER, MY FATHER, FIVE SISTERS, FOUR BROTHERS, AND THE WIFE OF ONE OF MY BROTHERS.
AND SHE HAD TWO CHILDREN.
"We heard on Israeli radio to stay in our houses and nothing would happen to us.
"Khan Younis was the last place that fell to the Israelis.
"On the 3rd of November, 1956... they came and banged on the door, and my father, who was a sheik, came down and opened it...
"He asked... if he could wear his [sheik's] clothes... and put his headdress on.
"They said no,
"forget it.
"They said everyone had to come down."
AND RIGHT THERE THEY SHOT MY BROTHER NADEED IN FRONT OF MY MOTHER AND FATHER.
"He was 20 years old.
"He was a student at Al-Azhar University in Egypt, which is a religious school.
"He was on vacation."
J. SACCO '06


WAS HE THE ELDEST SON?
NO, HE WASN'T. THERE WAS ONE OLDER THAN HIM, AND HE DIED TOO.
THAT'S COMING.
"They started bringing all the people from the neighborhood to where we were... right in front of our house...
"And then they started taking the men.
"The wife of my brother... [showed] an identity card that said he was just a teacher —Hassan, my brother... And she spoke English well.
HE'S NOT A FIGHTER OR A SOLDIER.
"And they didn't respond.
J. SACCO 7-06


"They took them to the street opposite, where the Bank of Palestine is, and they began to shoot them.
"When we heard the shots, the women began to scream.
"It started around 10 o'clock. We had to stay outside until 2 o'clock.
GO BACK HOME!
"After another hour... soldiers came around the neighborhood banging on the doors saying,
GO GET THEM!
J. SACCO 1996
"The women went out to bring the bodies because the [remaining] men were scared.
"My sisters. And the wife of my brother, of course. And the neighbors."


THEY [LAID OUT] MY TWO BROTHERS... AND THERE WERE ALSO TWO OF OUR NEIGHBORS WHO WERE KILLED, AND THEY BROUGHT THEM HERE, TOO.
SO WE HAD FOUR BODIES LINED UP IN THE HOUSE.
"Our father, he prayed over them. No one else prayed over them.
"The next day we were allowed to bury them."
J SACCO 1996
Faris Barbakh, 14 years old at the time, was living near Khan Younis' Mamluk castle.
He remembers how Israeli soldiers burst into his home.
THEY BROKE THE DOOR AND ENTERED SHOOTING.
"The men were hiding in the rooms.
GET OUT!
GET OUT!
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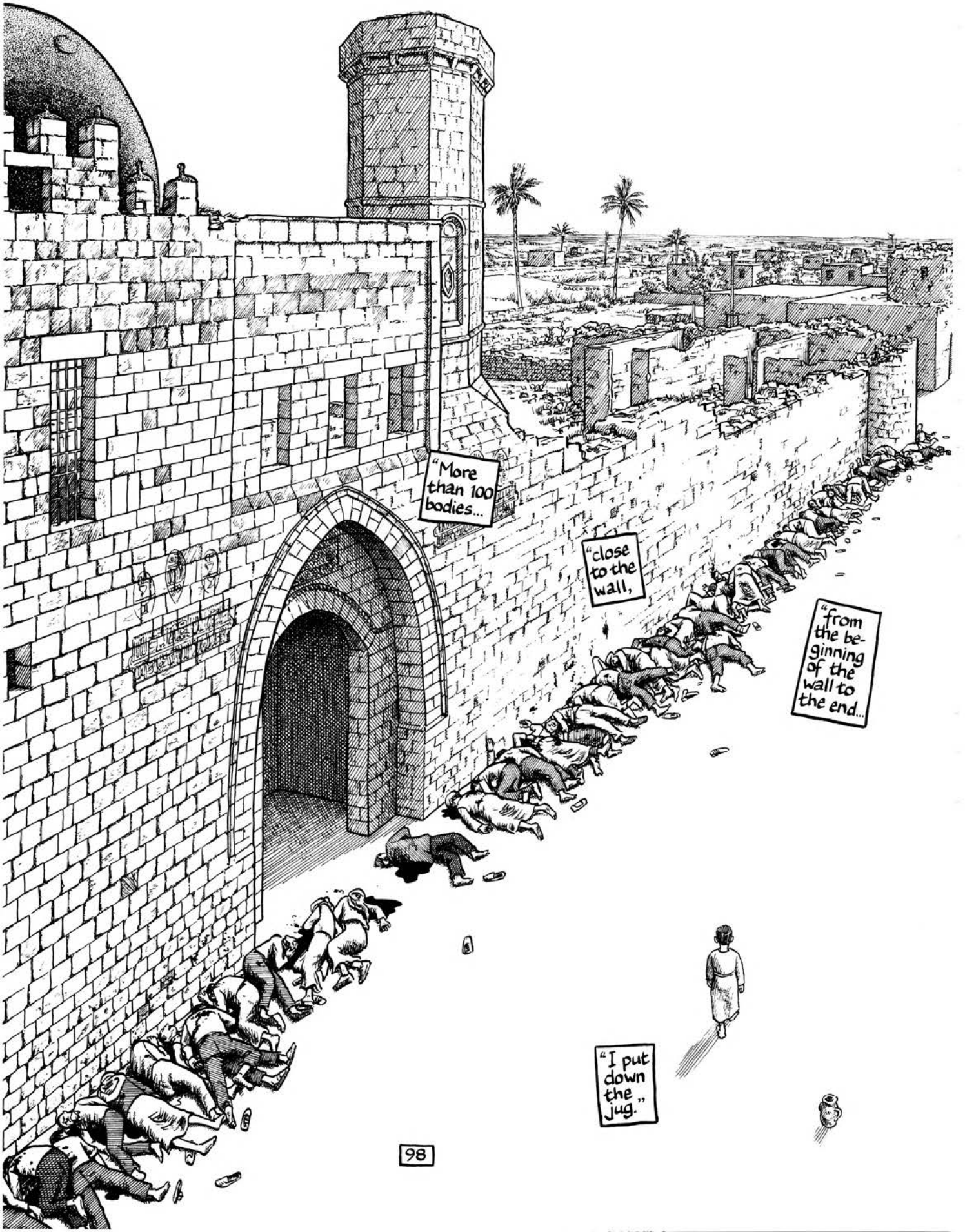
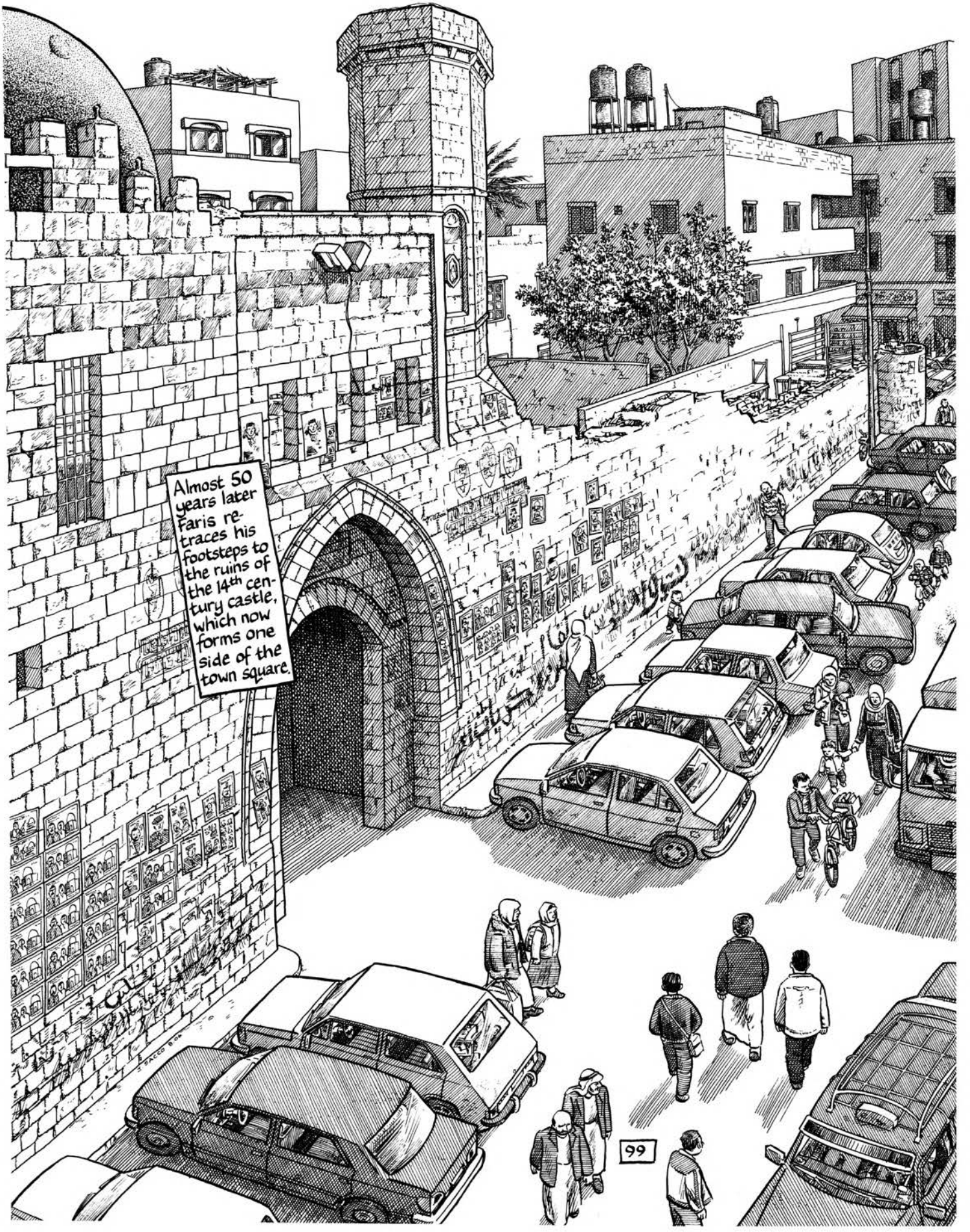
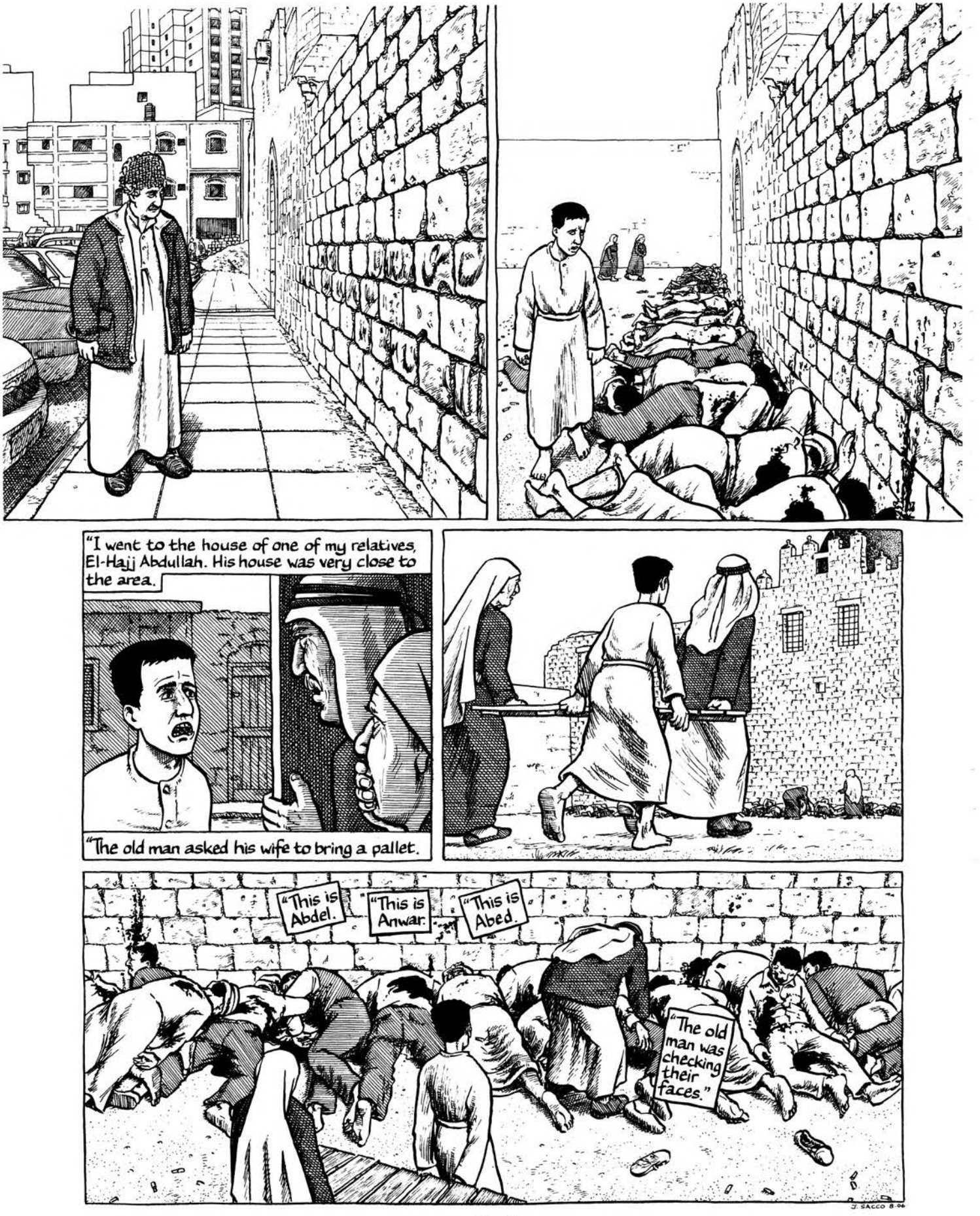
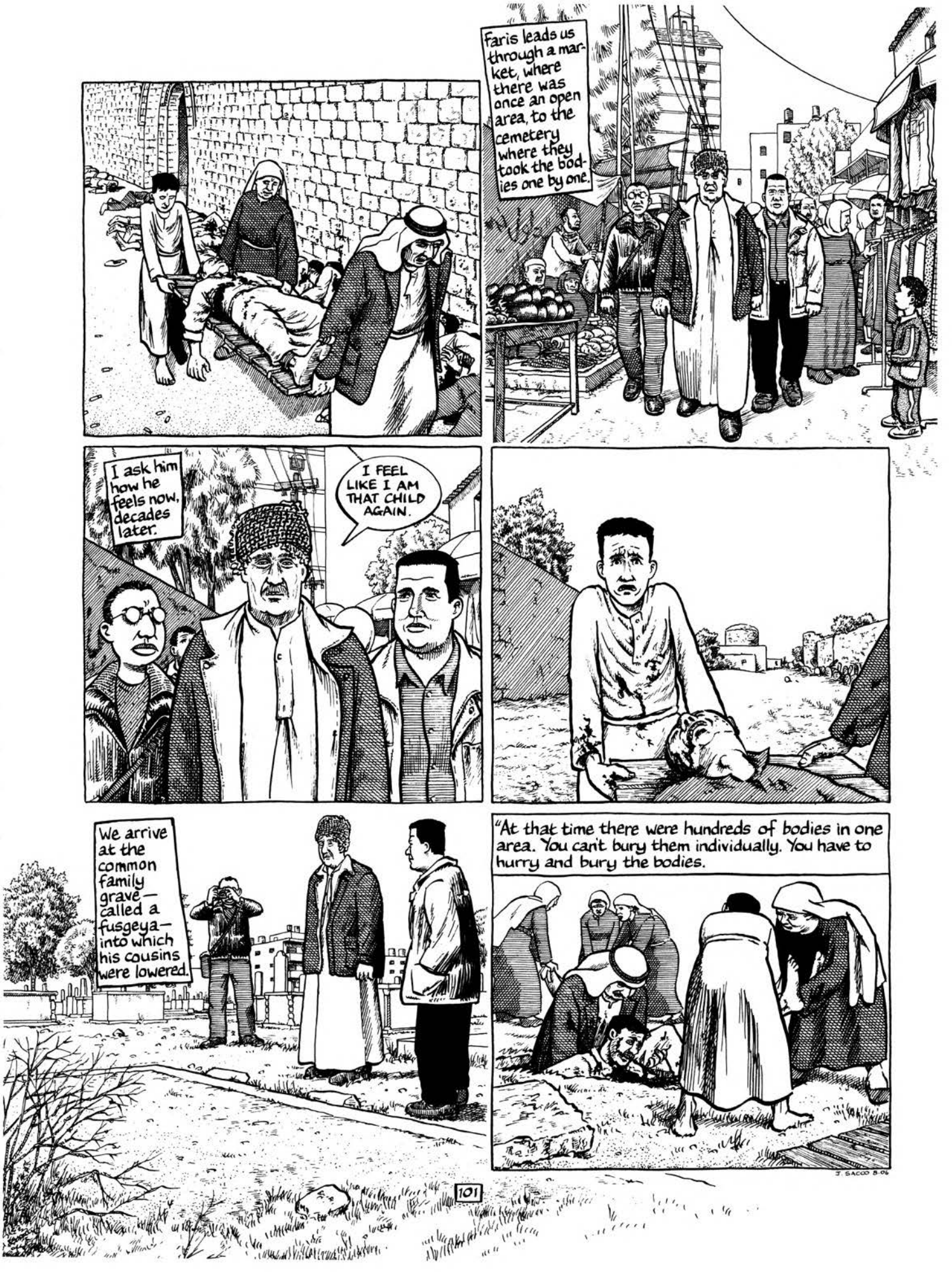
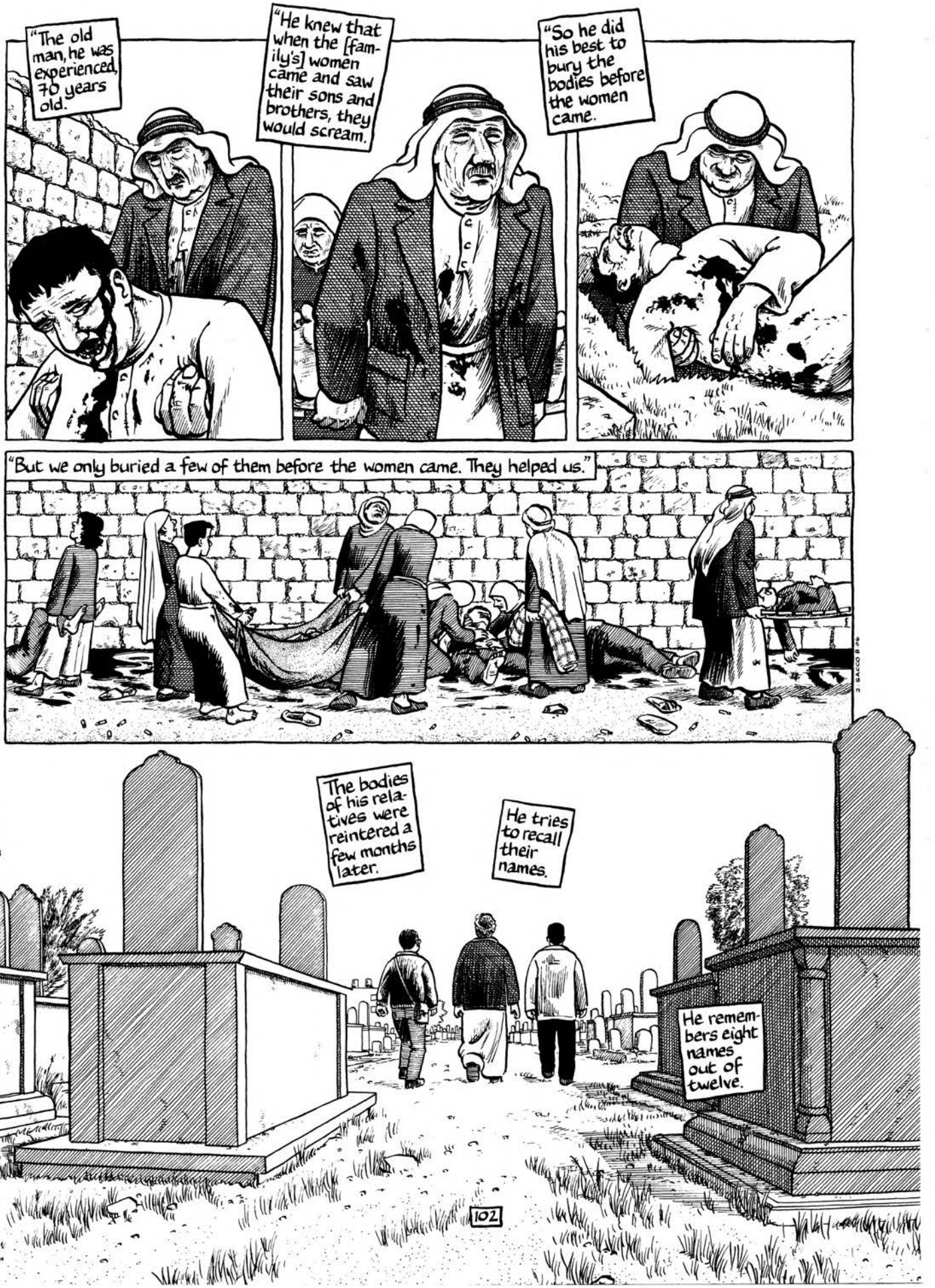
"They lined them up and took them to the castle."
Faris and another boy ran after the young men and their captors.
DIDN'T SOMEONE HOLD YOU BACK? DIDN'T ONE OF THE WOMEN SAY, 'DON'T GO'?
WE WERE CHILDREN AT THE TIME, AND WE JUST RAN.
WERE THE MEN SAYING ANYTHING?
"No."
[THE SOLDIERS] TOLD ME TO GO BACK... I'D MOVE AWAY AND COME BACK AGAIN.
THEY TOOK THE YOUTHS NEAR THE CASTLE...
I DIDN'T REACH THE CASTLE.
I RETURNED HOME.
Half an hour to 45 minutes later, Faris was sent to fetch water despite the curfew.
"I looked to the side as I approached the source of water.
"I saw all the bodies.
J. SACCO 7.06

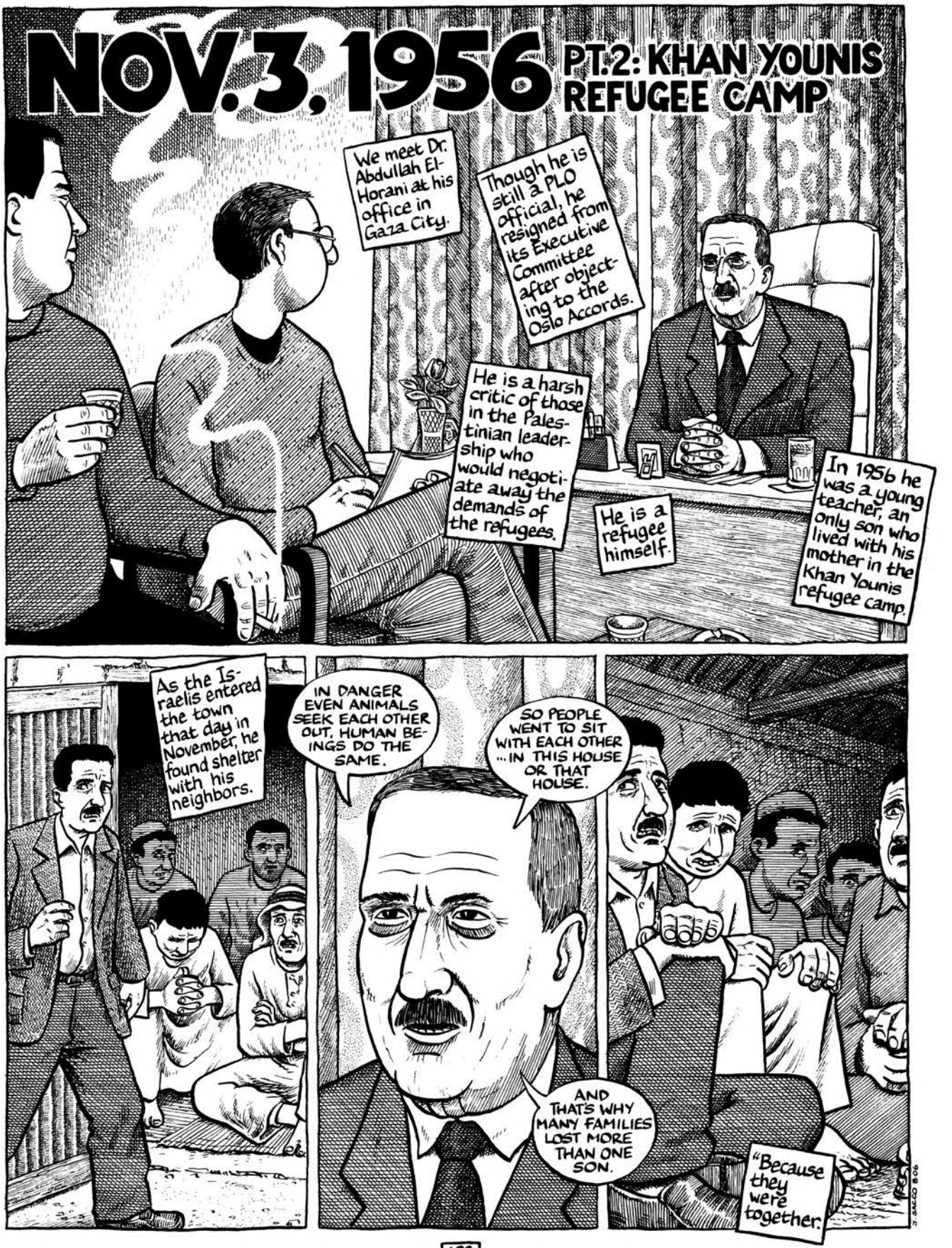

"More than 100 bodies...
"close to the wall,
"from the beginning of the wall to the end...
"I put down the jug."


Almost 50 years later Faris re-traces his footsteps to the ruins of the 14th century castle, which now forms one side of the town square.


"I went to the house of one of my relatives, El-Hajj Abdullah. His house was very close to the area.
"The old man asked his wife to bring a pallet.
"This is Abdel.
"This is Anwar.
"This is Abed.
"The old man was checking their faces."
J. SACCO 8-04

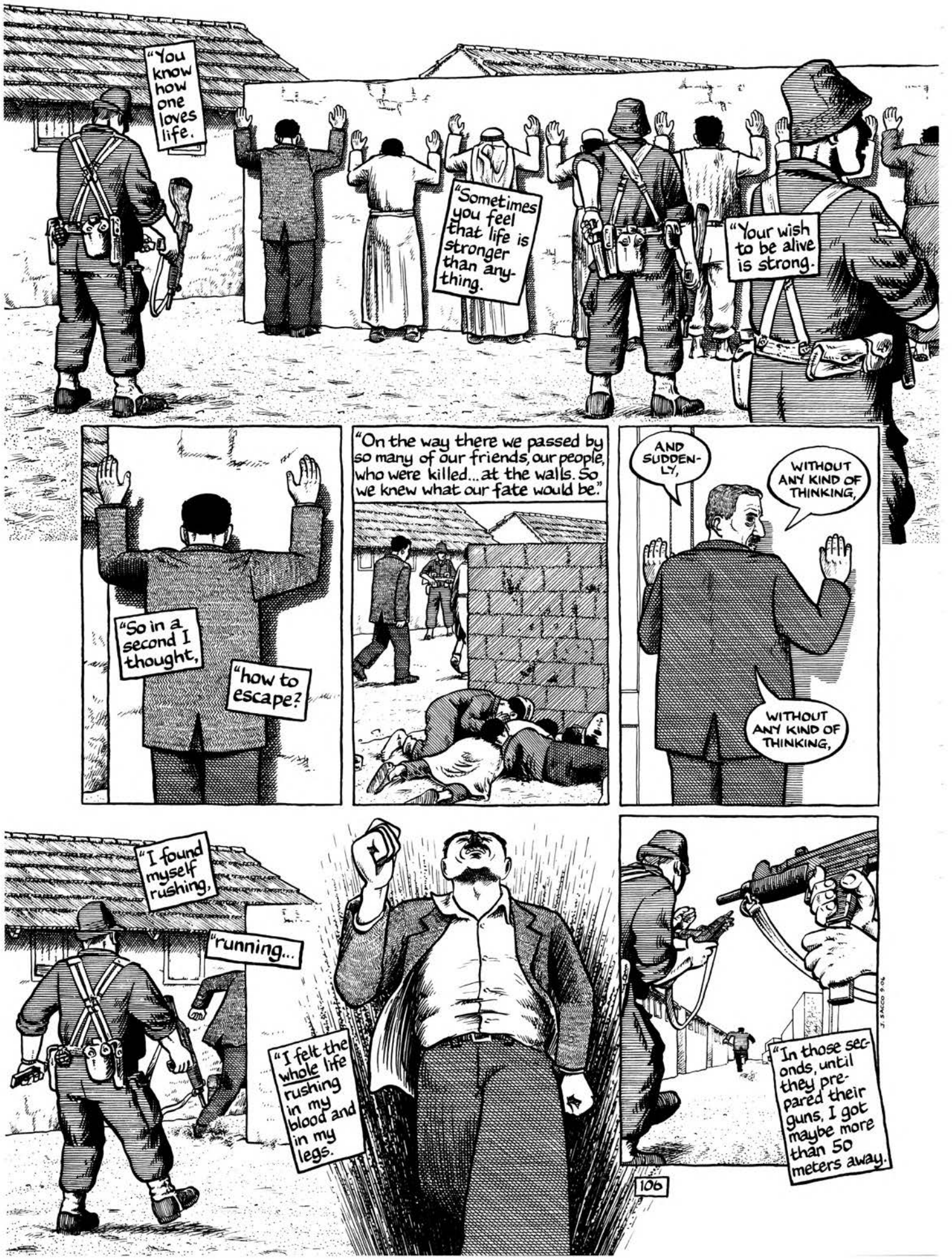

Faris leads us through a market, where there was once an open area, to the cemetery where they took the bodies one by one.
I ask him how he feels now, decades later.
I FEEL LIKE I AM THAT CHILD AGAIN.
We arrive at the common family grave—called a fusgeya—into which his cousins were lowered.
"At that time there were hundreds of bodies in one area. You can't bury them individually. You have to hurry and bury the bodies.
J. SACCO 8-06
101


"The old man, he was experienced, 70 years old.
"He knew that when the [family's] women came and saw their sons and brothers, they would scream.
"So he did his best to bury the bodies before the women came.
"But we only buried a few of them before the women came. They helped us."
J. SACCO 8.06
The bodies of his relatives were reintered a few months later.
He tries to recall their names.
He remembers eight names out of twelve.
102


NOV. 3, 1956
PT. 2: KHAN YOUNIS REFUGEE CAMP
We meet Dr. Abdullah El-Horani at his office in Gaza City.
Though he is still a PLO official, he resigned from its Executive Committee after objecting to the Oslo Accords.
He is a harsh critic of those in the Palestinian leadership who would negotiate away the demands of the refugees.
He is a refugee himself.
In 1956 he was a young teacher, an only son who lived with his mother in the Khan Younis refugee camp.
As the Israelis entered the town that day in November, he found shelter with his neighbors.
IN DANGER EVEN ANIMALS SEEK EACH OTHER OUT. HUMAN BEINGS DO THE SAME.
SO PEOPLE WENT TO SIT WITH EACH OTHER ... IN THIS HOUSE OR THAT HOUSE.
AND THAT'S WHY MANY FAMILIES LOST MORE THAN ONE SON.
"Because they were together.
J. SACCO 8.06


"While we were sitting, we listened to the shooting,
"we listened to the cries.
"We were afraid before they came.
"They entered three rooms. We were in one of these rooms."
'WE'?
APPROX-IMATELY HOW MANY PEOPLE?
I'M TRY-ING...
THE MEM-ORY...
I RE-MEMBER ONLY ONE OF THEM, A TEACHER WITH ME CALLED ATTA EL-OSTAZ.
"I remember he had three or four sisters, and when they took him outside, his mother and sisters cried – but the soldiers did not listen to anybody."
J. SACCO B.04


THEY PUT US AGAINST A WALL IN THE CAMP.
And now Abdullah is up,
and in a few steps he is at the wall of his office.
WE WERE AROUND 10,
11,
13,
I DON'T KNOW.
WE RAISED OUR HANDS.
THEY WERE BEHIND US.
THEY WERE PREPARING THE GUNS, THE MACHINE GUNS, TO KILL US.
YOU KNOW, THIS WALL ENDED HERE.
AND HERE THERE WAS A SMALL STREET.
I DID NOT PLAN TO STAND HERE, THE LAST ONE.
BUT I WAS PUSHED...
I CAME HERE.
BY CHANCE!
J. SACCO 8.06


"You know how one loves life.
"Sometimes you feel that life is stronger than anything.
"Your wish to be alive is strong.
"So in a second I thought,
"how to escape?
"On the way there we passed by so many of our friends, our people, who were killed... at the walls. So we knew what our fate would be."
AND SUDDENLY,
WITHOUT ANY KIND OF THINKING,
WITHOUT ANY KIND OF THINKING,
"I found myself rushing,
"running...
"I felt the whole life rushing in my blood and in my legs.
"In those seconds, until they prepared their guns, I got maybe more than 50 meters away.
J. SACCO 9.04
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"They started shooting, but I turned into another small street.
"And I ran until I reached the sea.
"Without knowing anything.
"Without looking behind me".
BUT LATER I KNEW THAT ALL [THE OTHERS], UNFORTUNATELY, WERE KILLED.
J. SACCO 7.06
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"After the soldiers left, all of the mothers and sisters and children came out looking for their sons and their brothers.
"My mother... searched more than three or four groups looking for me. She was crying all over the camp.
WHERE IS ABDULLAH?
"until I came back two days later."
WHEN I RETURNED ALL THESE THINGS WERE FINISHED. PEOPLE HAD BURIED THEIR MARTYRS.
BUT IN EACH HOUSE I FOUND PEOPLE CRYING.
I STARTED ASKING ABOUT MY FRIENDS.
WE LOST SO MANY FRIENDS.
Omm Nafez was a young woman at the time, married to Abdullah El-Sa'doni. They had three children.
IT IS AS IF IT IS HAPPENING NOW. I'LL NEVER FORGET IT.
On the morning of November 3, she says, a young boy came running from town with a warning.
IF YOU HAVE ANY YOUNG MEN, TELL THEM TO RUN!
THEY'RE KILLING EVERYONE!
J. SACCO 9-06

But Abdullah and three of his brothers were still in the camp, huddled with their families, when the Israelis arrived.

"Two Israeli soldiers stood outside the door, and one came in to get the boys out.

"The first brother who came out was Ibrahim.

"They killed him.

"The next was Subhi. Subhi held a child in his arms.

"They shot Subhi, and as he [fell] they shot the boy, too.*

"Then came Abdullah and Khamis. I called:"

MY HUSBAND!

At that point, Khamis made a run for it.

"He jumped over the wall and escaped.

"Abdullah...was trying to escape, but they caught him.

"They took him outside the door ...and they shot him in his side."

J. SACCO 9.06

* THE INJURED BOY, A NEPHEW OF THE BROTHERS, WOULD LOSE HIS LEG.


THEY KILLED ABDULLAH AND RAN AFTER KHAMIS.
"Subhi was alive till the next day. He was conscious. He asked about his brothers. I said that they were still alive..."
I KNOW THEY'RE DEAD.
According to Omm Nafez, Subhi asked to be taken to Rafah for treatment, but as the women lifted him—
PUT ME DOWN... PUT ME DOWN...
"Fifteen minutes later he was dead.
"We went to bury them. I went to UNRWA to get something we could carry them with. I held a white handkerchief as a sign—don't shoot me. There was a curfew at the time.
"The soldier at the clinic asked me,
WHAT'S UP?
I NEED SOMETHING TO CARRY THOSE YOU'VE KILLED.
GO HOME, TAKE YOUR DOOR. USE THAT...
THE CURFEW WILL BE OVER IN AN HOUR.
J. SACCO 9-06


"We moved the bodies. Our women, the other wives.
"We dropped Ibrahim once."
WE TOOK OFF THEIR SHOES, AND THEN WE BURIED THEM.
"I covered all the house with ash... from the oven with my hands...
"I made the house black."
FOR-GIVE ME, GOD.
YOU'RE NOT SUP-POSED TO MOURN MORE THAN THREE DAYS.
THE ASH RE-MAINED TILL AFTER THE CHILDREN GREW UP.
WHAT CAN WE DO?
GOD WANTS THIS TO HAPPEN TO US — TO LEAVE OUR LANDS AND COME HERE AND BE KILLED.
J. SACCO 9-06

MEMORY AND THE ESSENTIAL TRUTH




Khamis is still alive.
His recollections are interesting for the sake of comparison.
For instance, he says he and his brothers were lined up by soldiers before being shot rather than shot one-by-one as they came through the door, as Omm Nafez remembers.
In a separate interview, another witness, Khamis's nephew, Abu Antar El-Sa'doni, who was seven at the time, agrees that the brothers were lined up.*
In fact, Abu Antar's account concurs with Khamis's about the order in which the men stood against the wall – with Khamis nearest the door.
Now let's take up Khamis's story.
He describes how he ran as his brothers were being shot...
RUN, SUBHI!
how he knocked down the soldier pursuing him...
how he jumped over a wall...
and how he fled as soldiers fired at him.
Abu Antar confirms this version so far, down to Khamis's exhortation to Subhi to flee:
AND HE SAID, 'FOLLOW ME, SUBHI!'
J. SACCO 10-08
*ABU ANTAR'S FATHER, THE FIFTH BROTHER, WAS AWAY IN EGYPT AT THE TIME.
113


Khamis says he hid in the brush outside the camp until 9 o'clock, and then—
"I began to make my way between the houses back to my house."
He tells the story of his brother Subhi's agonizingly slow death.
SUBHI SAID—
TAKE ME TO THE CLINIC.
I'M FINISHED.
I'M GOING TO DIE.
"I ripped down a zinc door... and I put a mattress on it."
SUBHI WAS LYING LIKE THIS, AND WE PUT THE MATTRESS NEXT TO HIM.
HE WANTED TO MOVE HIMSELF TO THE MATTRESS.
AND HE BROUGHT HIMSELF UP LIKE THIS.
HE STARTED GURGLING...
HE HAD BULLET WOUNDS IN HIS STOMACH...
HE GOT WEAK AND SAID—
I CAN'T.
J. SACCO 10-06


Next, Khamis says, Subhi motioned to his family.
TAKE CARE OF THEM.
AND THEN HE DIED.
EVERY TIME IT COMES TO MY HEAD, I SEE IT LIKE A VIDEO.
Khamis's version of Subhi's death generally matches those of Abu Antar and Omm Nafez except on one crucial point.
Both of them say Khamis was not there.
AFTER DAYS, DAYS, WE GOT NEWS... THAT MY UNCLE KHAMIS HAD ARRIVED IN RAFAH, AND THAT HE WAS THERE AND SAFE... AND HE DIDN'T COME BACK TO KHAN YOUNIS FOR TWO MONTHS, AFTER THE WHOLE SITUATION COMPLETELY CALMED DOWN.
HE WAS GONE FOR FOUR MONTHS... I DIDN'T SEE HIM TILL AFTER THE JEWS HAD LEFT KHAN YOUNIS.
What are we to make of this?
J. SACCO 10-06


Is it my place to say that Khamis, who told his story so affectingly before a rapt group of his relatives and neighbors, was not there?
Perhaps Omm Nafez, who was so distraught at her husband's death, has blocked out her memory of Khamis;
perhaps Abu Antar was too young and simply doesn't remember him present.
Or perhaps Khamis has heard the story of his brother's death so often that it has become his own. Maybe Khamis feels he should have been with Subhi.
Khamis survived.
Three of his brothers died, leaving widows and five children.
And that is not all.
In the immediate area 36 people from nine houses, his neighbors and friends, were killed, he says.
OMER EL-HALA
In moments of calm, he says, he can remember the names of all the dead.
MED ABU AMER
HAMID ABDEL HAFEEZ EL-RANTISI
ABDEL AZIZ NOFAL
AHMED EL-ZAKZA
I cannot untangle the twining guilt and grief that envelope a person who survives what so many others did not; nor can I explain what might induce a traumatized individual to recall a brother's death if he was not there – assuming he was not.
J. SACCO 10-06
I only want to acknowledge the problems that go along with relying on eyewitness testimony in telling our story.
But all this should not let us forget the essential truth:
Khamis's three brothers were shot by Israeli soldiers on November 3, 1956.
They were among what a U.N. report alleges were 275 Palestinians killed in Khan Younis town and camp that day.
116

DOCUMENT

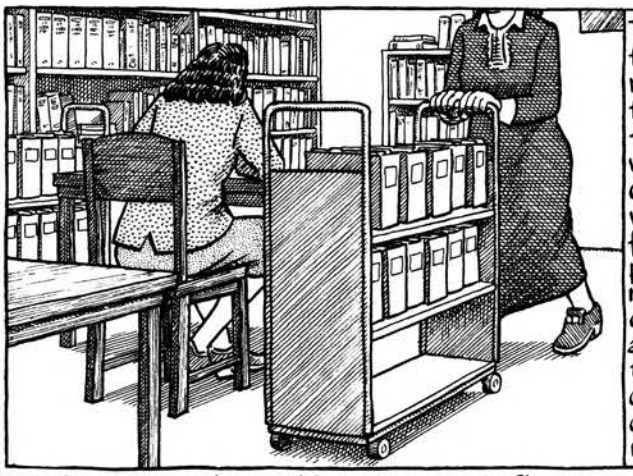
of the Gaza Strip by the
ber of civilian casualties
populati[on] caused
fugees, p[ar]

it would [b]een a log-
tions Tru[ce] ervision
d report [ca]sualties
k across t[he] demarcation
y, that organization was
ents of its officers in the

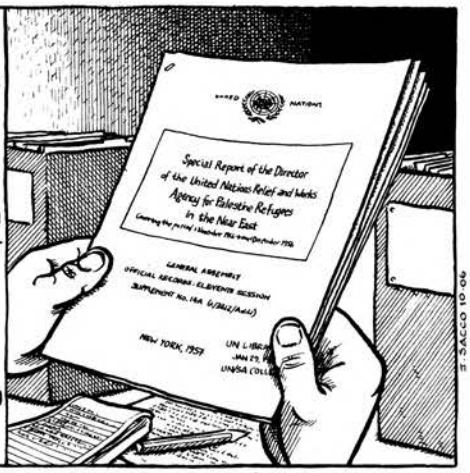
casualties. The Israel authorities state that there ...
resistance to their occupation and that the Palestini
refugees formed part of the resi[stance]. On the oth
hand, the refugees state that all r[esistance] had ceas
[at the time of the incident and that] many unarmed civ
[were killed as the Israel tro]ops went through t
town and camp, seeking men in [possession] of arm
The exact number of dead and w[ounded is] not know
but the Director has received fr[om] the consi
ers trustworthy lists of names [of persons] alleged
killed on 3 November, number[ing] viduals,
whom 140 were refugees and 135 local residents

You can read that report for yourself at the U.N. archives on East 43rd St. in New York City.

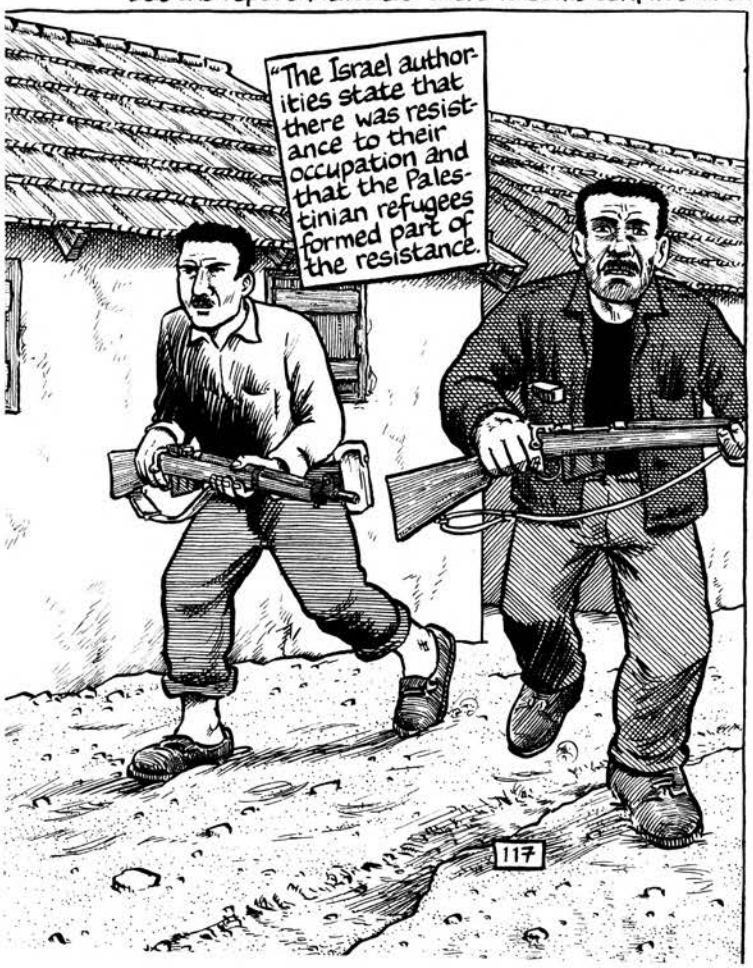
It is the 'Special Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East Covering the period 1 November 1956 to mid-December 1956' to the General Assembly.

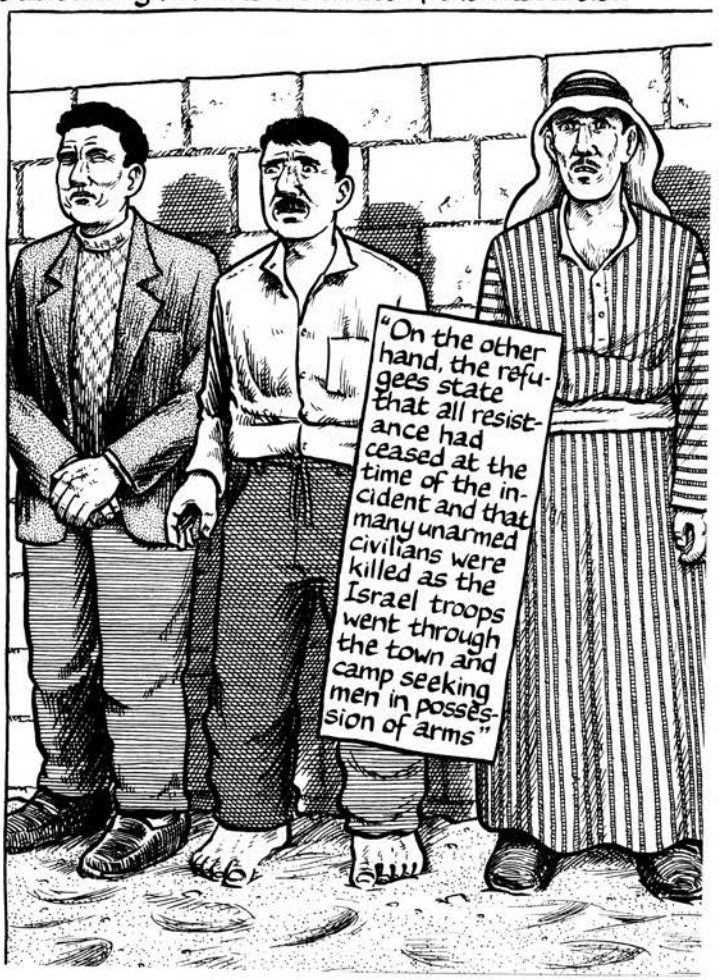


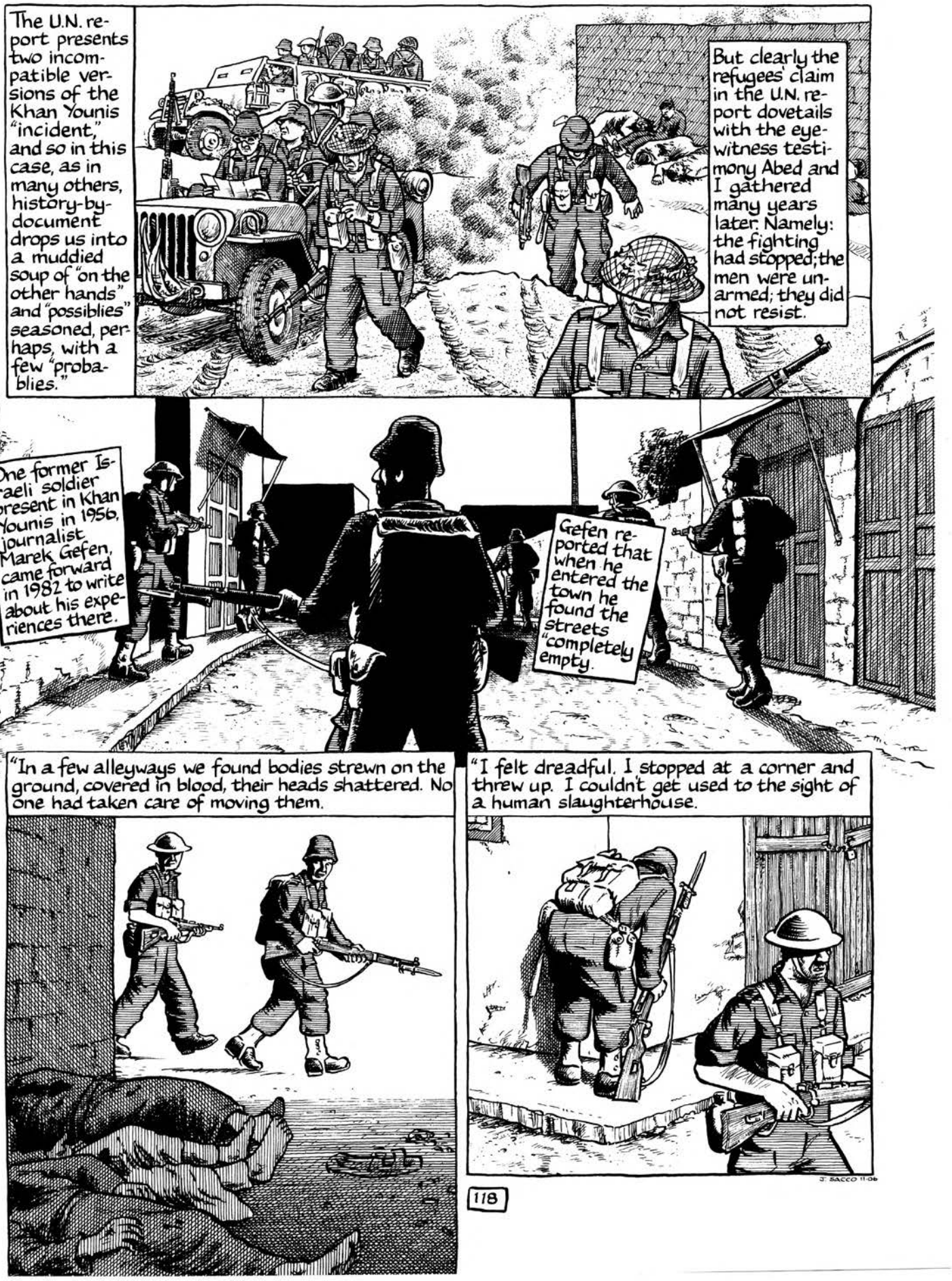
To the historian, who rubs his hands together as the archivist wheels out a cart loaded with forgotten files, a contemporary document like this can represent a more definitive version of events than decades-old memories.



But the report indicates "there is some conflict in the accounts given as to the causes of the casualties.



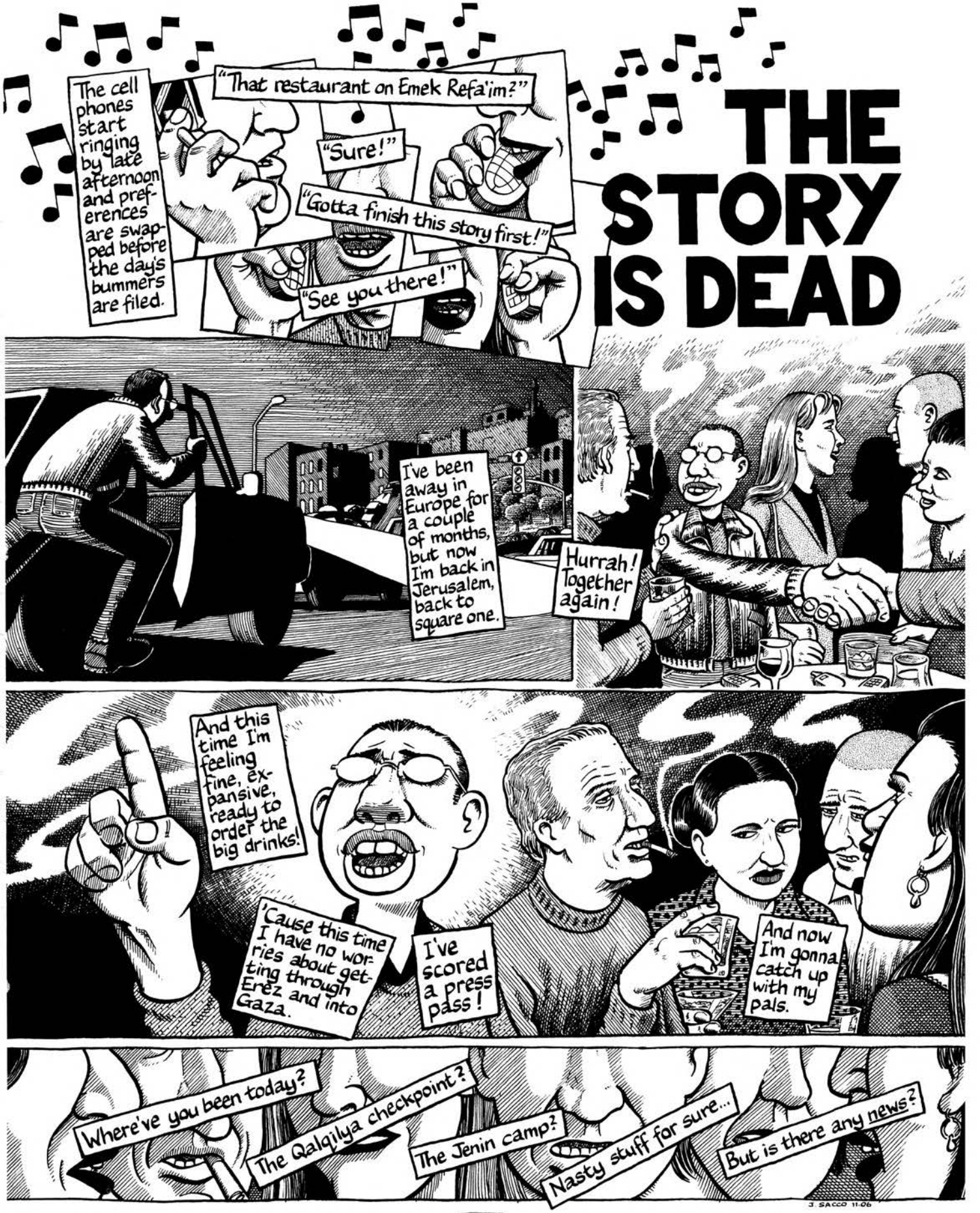



The U.N. report presents two incompatible versions of the Khan Younis "incident," and so in this case, as in many others, history-by-document drops us into a muddied soup of "on the other hands" and "possiblies" seasoned, perhaps, with a few "probablies."
But clearly the refugees' claim in the U.N. report dovetails with the eyewitness testimony Abed and I gathered many years later. Namely: the fighting had stopped; the men were unarmed; they did not resist.
One former Israeli soldier present in Khan Younis in 1956, journalist Marek Gefen, came forward in 1982 to write about his experiences there.
Gefen reported that when he entered the town he found the streets "completely empty."
"In a few alleyways we found bodies strewn on the ground, covered in blood, their heads shattered. No one had taken care of moving them.
"I felt dreadful. I stopped at a corner and threw up. I couldn't get used to the sight of a human slaughterhouse.
J. SACCO 11-06


"The cleansing of the Strip went on," he wrote, and described a fellow soldier killing an unarmed Arab doctor in an UNRWA clinic during a search for weapons.
WHY?
ONE LESS.
Gefen has passed away, but I manage to locate one of his army comrades in Tel Aviv. Naftali Carni was in the same unit as Gefen.
He remembers some minor abuses of the Palestinian population by soldiers, but says he recalls nothing like the bodies Gefen saw in Khan Younis.
In fact, Carni doubts Gefen's story. He thinks Gefen was prone to sensationalism. "He was a newspaperman," he says by way of explanation.
Well, I'm a newspaperman at heart, and to me it's never been a term of disparagement.
A newspaperman wants the facts, the definitive version, not a bunch of "on the other hands" and "possibles" or even "probables."
And I swear I'll wrench nothing but the facts from our next batch of eyewitnesses, frail and imperfect as they might be.
We have one more footnote to go.
119

FEAST




THE STORY IS DEAD
The cell phones start ringing by late afternoon and preferences are swapped before the day's bummers are filed.
"That restaurant on Emek Refa'im?"
"Sure!"
"Gotta finish this story first!"
"See you there!"
I've been away in Europe for a couple of months, but now I'm back in Jerusalem, back to square one.
Hurrah! Together again!
And this time I'm feeling fine, expansive, ready to order the big drinks!
'Cause this time I have no worries about getting through Erez and into Gaza.
I've scored a press pass!
And now I'm gonna catch up with my pals.
Where've you been today?
The Qalqilya checkpoint?
The Jenin camp?
Nasty stuff for sure...
But is there any news?
J. SACCO 11.06


They light their smokes.
They sip their drinks.
"There are no good stories," says Barbara, who wonders why she is still here.
The story is dead!
Ahhh... but there's another story!
The mother of all imminent epics!
A once-in-a-journalistic-generation extravaganza with oodles more potential than our dried up old beat!
But Barbara says she'll get there through Kuwait, and Harvey plans to slip in via Iran. Meanwhile, Christine's already done a chemical warfare course hoping she'll be tapped to go, too.
Long live the story!
Or so my esteemed colleagues believe.
IRAQ?
WON'T HAPPEN!
THEY AIN'T THAT STUPID!
But I'm playing it safe.
I'm heading to the Gaza Strip for a 50-year-old story.
Because old stories are always good ones.
Old stories are a sure thing.
J.SACCO 12-06
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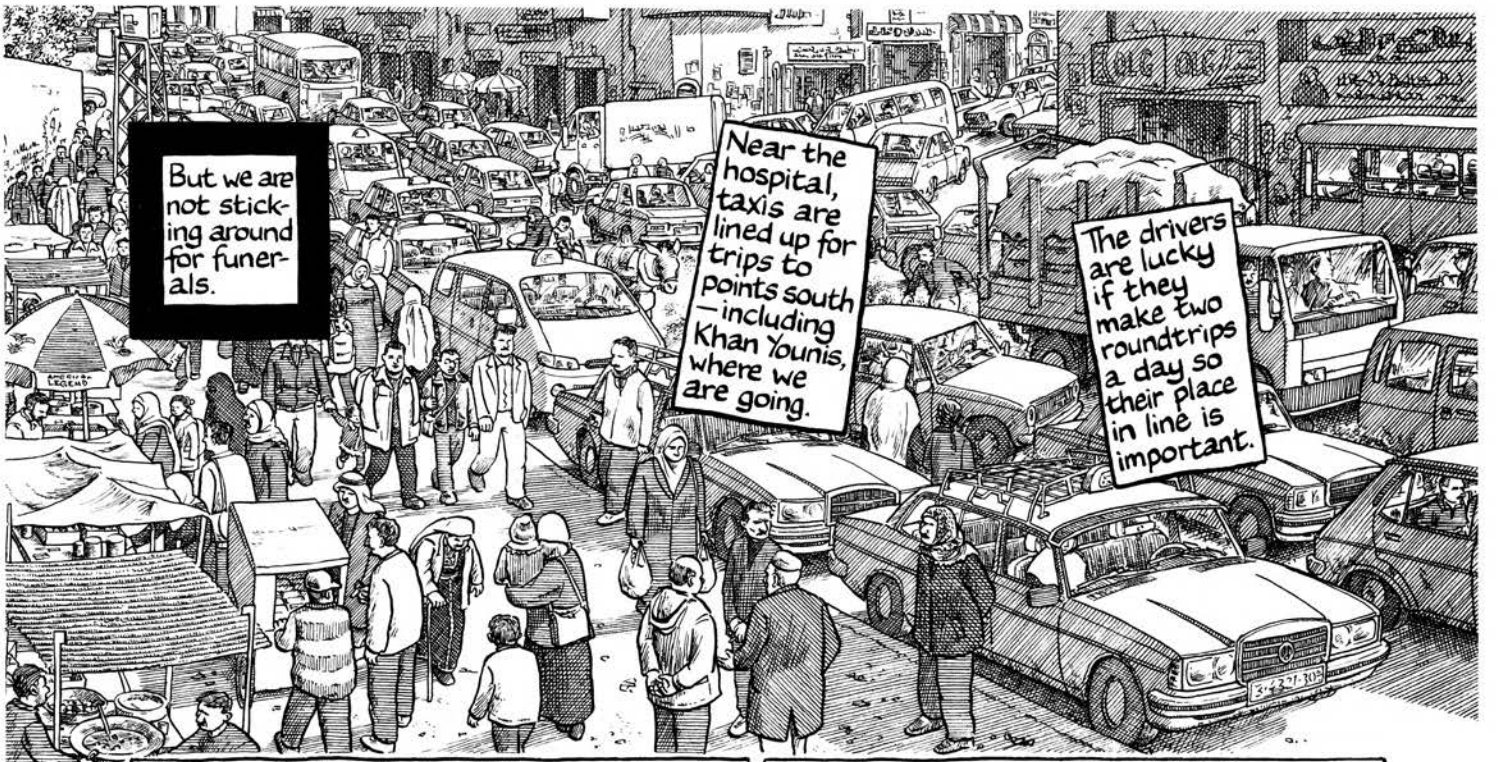
CLAUSTROPHOBIA
I hook up with Abed and his pal Hani in Gaza City.
They're good friends.
They met while doing activist work for women's rights, and they studied law together in Egypt.
Abed has news.
He's decided.
IT'S TIME FOR ME TO LEAVE. AT LEAST FOR A WHILE.
He's applying to MBA programs abroad and for scholarships available to Palestinian students.
Abed and I spend the evening at the office where he works to write up his resume and "personal statement."
Why do you want to study abroad?
How will it better your prospects?
How will it help you develop your country?
We come up with some sufficiently earnest bullshit.
J. SACCO 11-06


Before midnight we hear helicopters and bursts of gunfire.
We turn on the TV. to see what's up.
Two male nurses have been killed by the Israelis in a Hamas-run rehabilitation center.
The Palestinian cameras don't flinch at the gaping wounds in the nurses' chests.
The next morning, Hani rejoins us.
The office balcony overlooks Shifa Hospital, where the nurses' bodies were brought last night.
Loudspeakers are blaring Islamic songs.
Hani explains that the bodies will be carried to their homes, then taken to the mosque for prayers, and then to the cemetery for burial.
The dead are martyrs, he says, so they will not be washed or redressed.
THE BLOOD OF THE MARTYR HAS THE SMELL OF PERFUME.
THE CLOTHES IN WHICH HE IS KILLED ARE THE BEST CLOTHES IN WHICH HE CAN MEET GOD.
J. SACCO 12-06



But there's a woman waiting in the front seat of the taxi slated to leave next, and Hani, who is tall for a Palestinian, doesn't want to sit in the cramped rear seats.

Propriety, however, prohibits him from asking the woman to change seats.

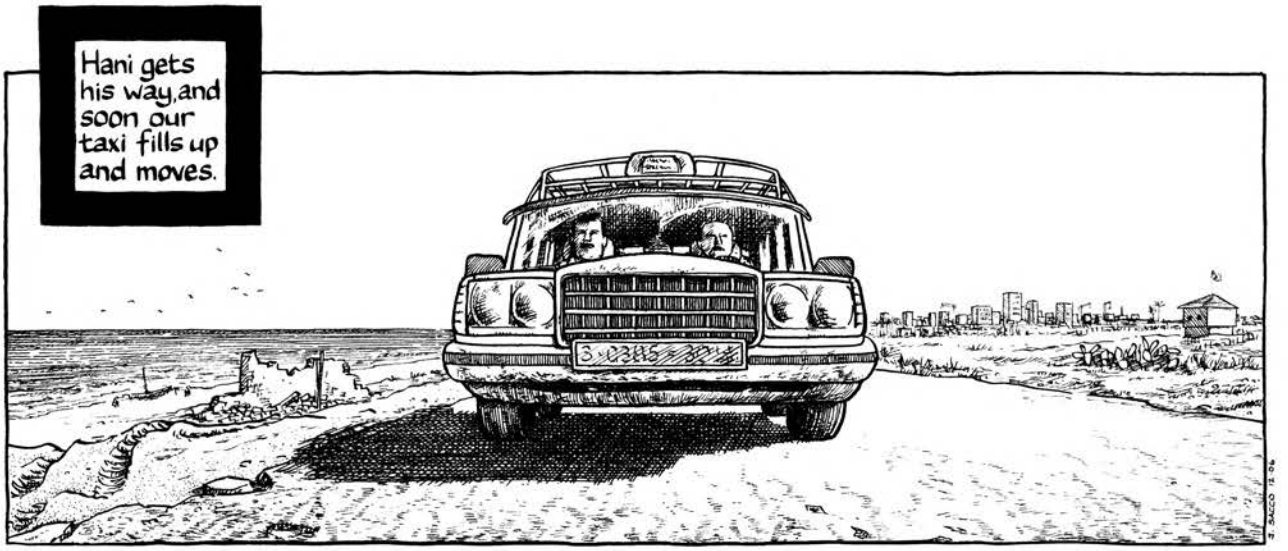
Hani's solution is to sit in the front seat of the second taxi in line. We join him in back.

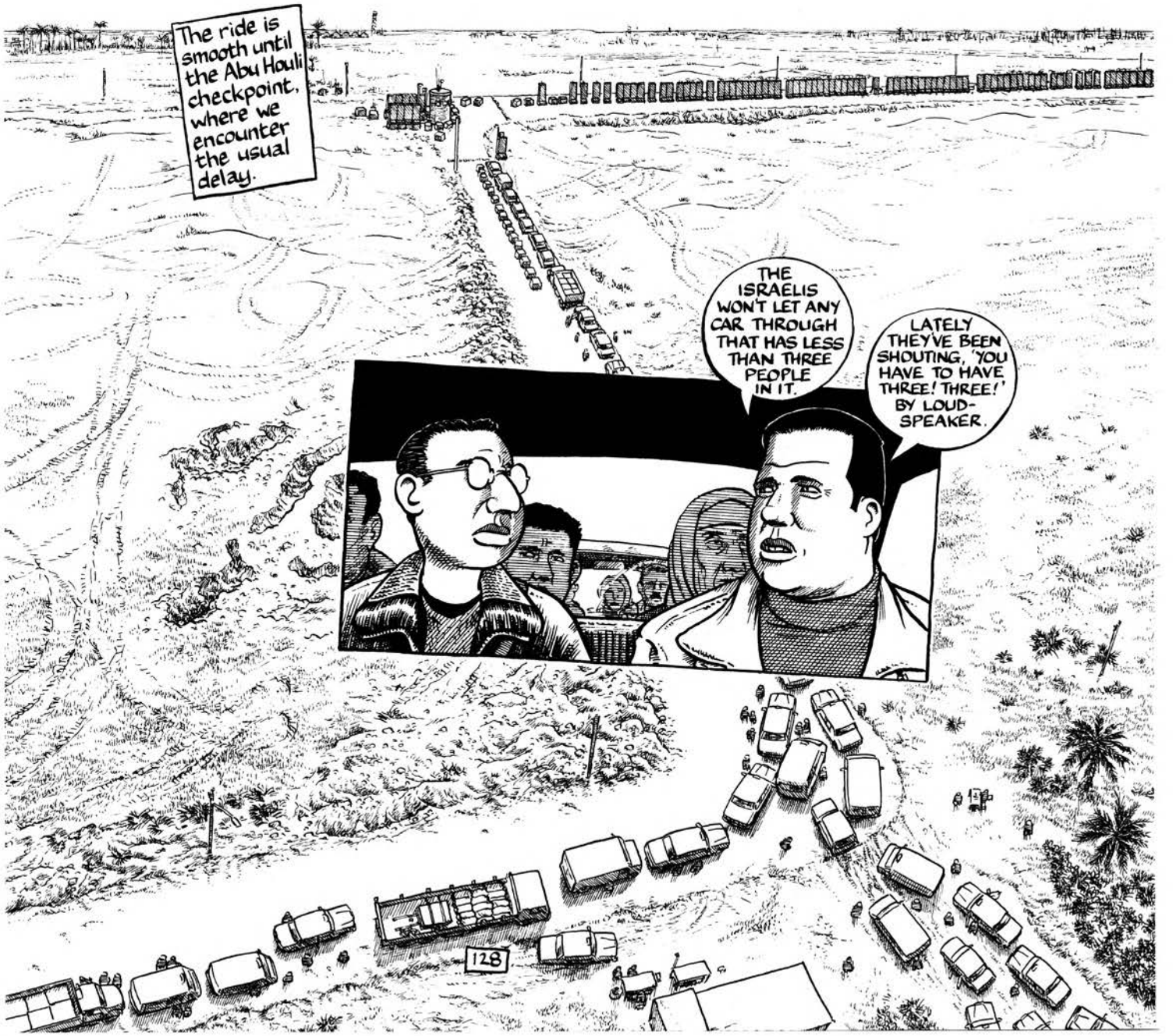
This sets off a shouting match between the first taxi driver, who thinks he's being cheated out of his customers, and Hani.

I've learned that a shouting match in Gaza is not what it seems.

No, actually, it is exactly what it seems:

A bunch of shouting.


Hani gets his way, and soon our taxi fills up and moves.


The ride is smooth until the Abu Houli checkpoint, where we encounter the usual delay.
THE ISRAELIS WON'T LET ANY CAR THROUGH THAT HAS LESS THAN THREE PEOPLE IN IT.
LATELY THEY'VE BEEN SHOUTING, 'YOU HAVE TO HAVE THREE! THREE!' BY LOUD-SPEAKER.
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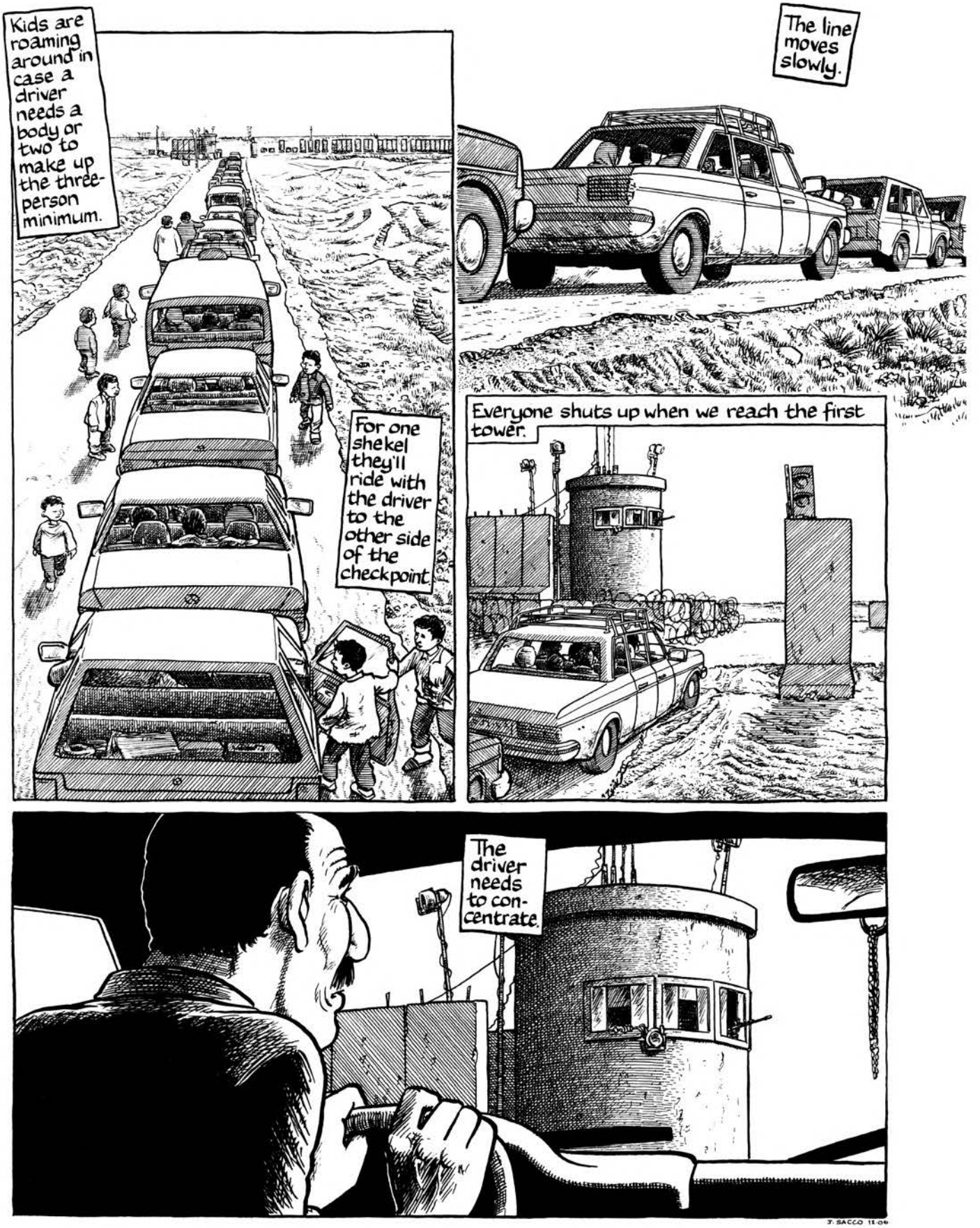
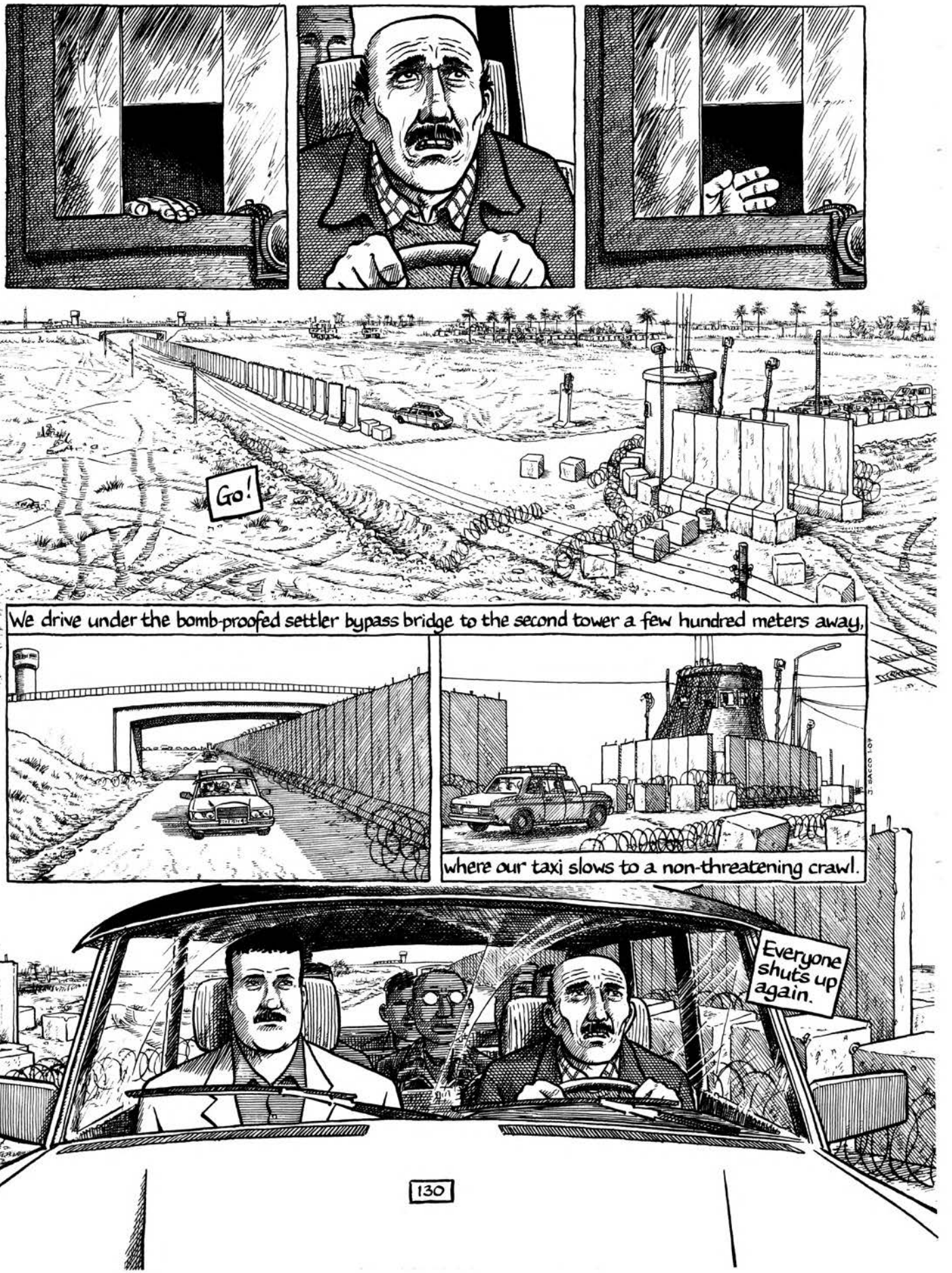
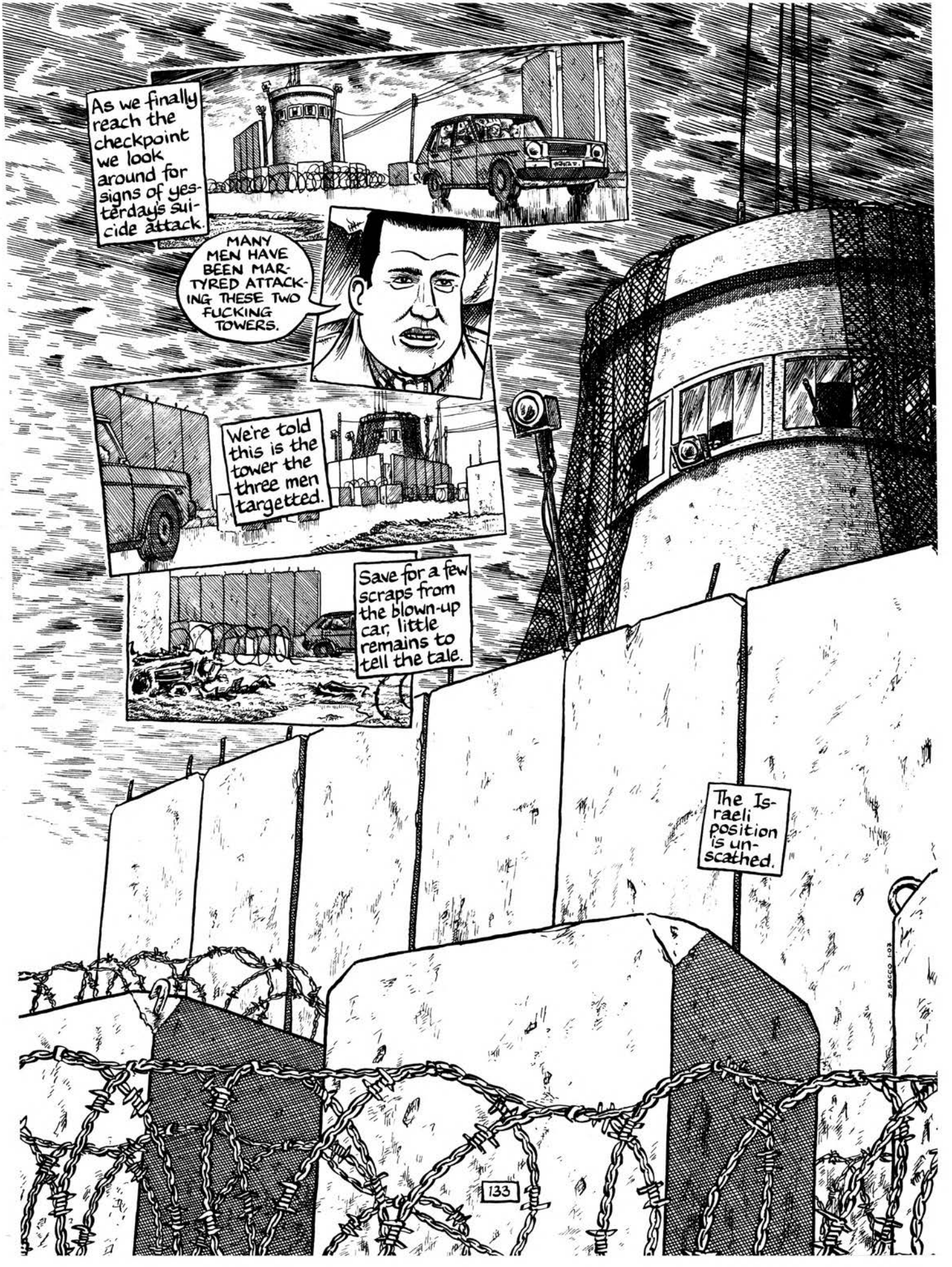

Kids are roaming around in case a driver needs a body or two to make up the three-person minimum.
For one shekel they'll ride with the driver to the other side of the checkpoint.
The line moves slowly.
Everyone shuts up when we reach the first tower.
The driver needs to concentrate.
J. SACCO 12-06

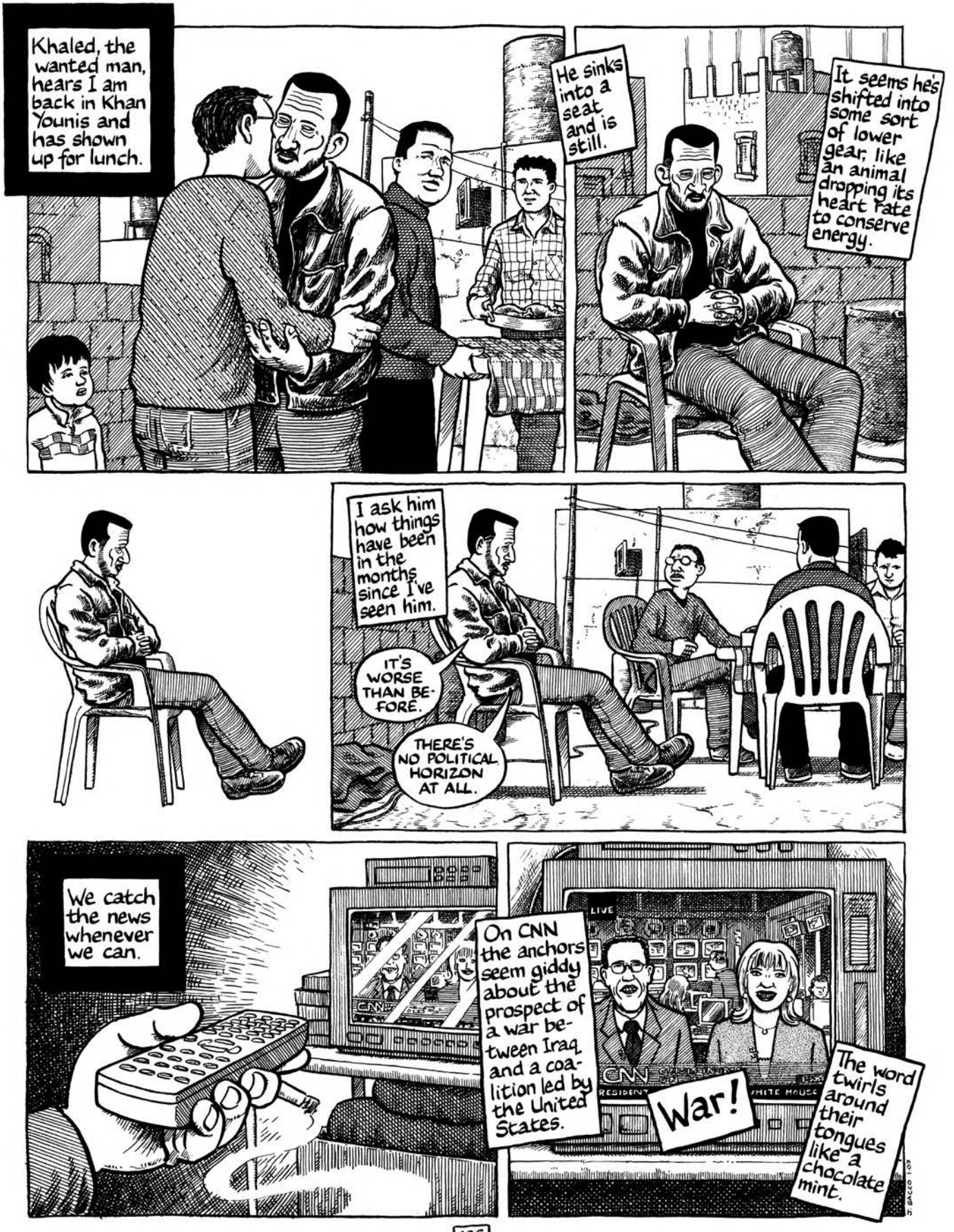

Go!
We drive under the bomb-proofed settler bypass bridge to the second tower a few hundred meters away,
where our taxi slows to a non-threatening crawl.
Everyone shuts up again.


Because Abed needs to tend to his applications, we spend the next few days shuttling between Khan Younis and Gaza City, where he has access to the office computers and fax machine.
That means getting through the Abu Houli checkpoint time and time again.
The delay may be ten minutes, or we might find the road cut indefinitely.
"Whenever I'm in Gaza City," Abed tells me, "I prepare myself for being stuck for a day or even a week."
Me, I've learned to bring along a change of underwear.
Once, while we're in Gaza City, we hear of a suicide attack on one of the Abu Houli towers.
Apparently, a Palestinian car, carrying three men so as not to arouse suspicion, suddenly raced at the Israeli position, passengers firing, and detonated.
The Palestinians were killed; a few Israeli soldiers were diagnosed with shock.
J. SACCO 1.04


We expect the Abu Houli checkpoint will be closed for a day or two, but it reopens in the evening, and the next morning we find ourselves at the familiar jam-up as we try to get back to Khan Younis.
WHO NEEDS TEA, TEA?
WHO NEEDS TEA, TEA?
TEA, TEA?
There's a rap on our taxi's window.
The driver behind us is alone, and he needs two passengers to be allowed through.
It's been raining, and the usual shekel boys are nowhere to be seen.
CAN ANYONE COME WITH ME?
Abed and I agree to join him.
His car is stuffed with bags full of biscuits he has to deliver.
The line begins to move, and with each lurch the load threatens to engulf us.
J. SACCO 1.07


As we finally reach the checkpoint we look around for signs of yesterday's suicide attack.
MANY MEN HAVE BEEN MARTYRED ATTACKING THESE TWO FUCKING TOWERS.
We're told this is the tower the three men targetted.
Save for a few scraps from the blown-up car, little remains to tell the tale.
The Israeli position is unscathed.
© JOE SACCO 1003


The lack of serious Israeli casualties in the Abu Houli suicide attack has disappointed the Palestinians.
ALL OF US WILL GET A BEATING
I pose a question to the table:
IF YOU HEAR THAT A BOMB HAS GONE OFF IN TEL AVIV, WHAT'S YOUR FIRST REACTION?
MY FIRST REACTION IS HAPPINESS.
OF COURSE, ISLAM DOESN'T SANCTION THE KILLING OF WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND OLD PEOPLE.
DO THESE BOMBINGS SERVE ANY STRATEGIC PURPOSE AT ALL?
EVERY ISRAELI IS A SOLDIER.
THEY GO INTO THE ARMY AT AGE 16*, AND AFTER THEIR MILITARY SERVICE, THEY STILL DO 40 DAYS OF SERVICE A YEAR.
YOU HAVEN'T ANSWERED MY QUESTION.
* IN FACT, THE AGE OF CONSCRIPTION IS 18.
I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT THE MORALITY OF THESE ACTIONS.
I'M ASKING IF THEY SERVE THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL INTEREST.
THEY MAKE THEM FEARFUL.
I'm still not satisfied, and Hani is getting flustered.
I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT ANYMORE.
LET'S EAT!
J. BACCO 1.04


Khaled, the wanted man, hears I am back in Khan Younis and has shown up for lunch.
He sinks into a seat and is still.
It seems he's shifted into some sort of lower gear, like an animal dropping its heart rate to conserve energy.
I ask him how things have been in the months since I've seen him.
IT'S WORSE THAN BEFORE.
THERE'S NO POLITICAL HORIZON AT ALL.
We catch the news whenever we can.
On CNN the anchors seem giddy about the prospect of a war between Iraq and a coalition led by the United States.
LIVE
CNN
War!
The word twirls around their tongues like a chocolate mint.
J. SACCO 1.03

Bush appears on the set brimming with determination.



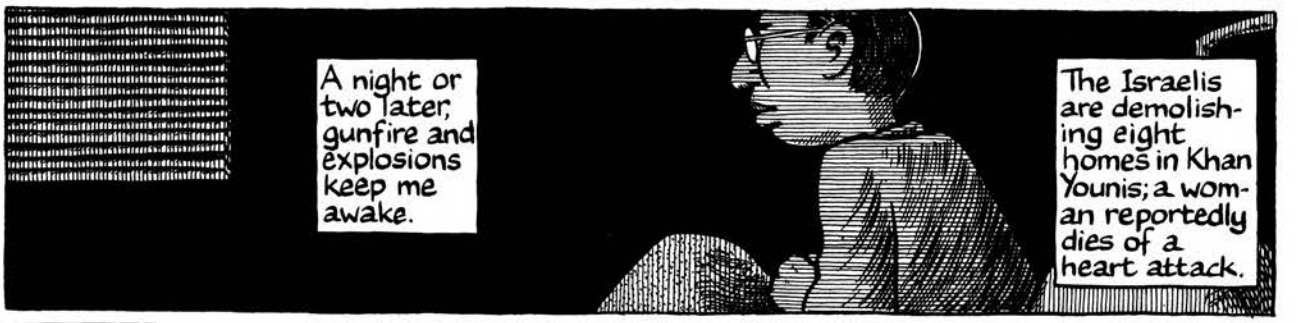
Everyone laughs when he refers to Iraq as "a prison."



Do they laugh because they don't think Iraq is a prison? Or because they believe they are the ones living in a prison?

"The game is over," Bush tells the world.





In a taxi the next morning, one passenger mutters to himself for a few seconds, and then...







J. SACCO 1.07

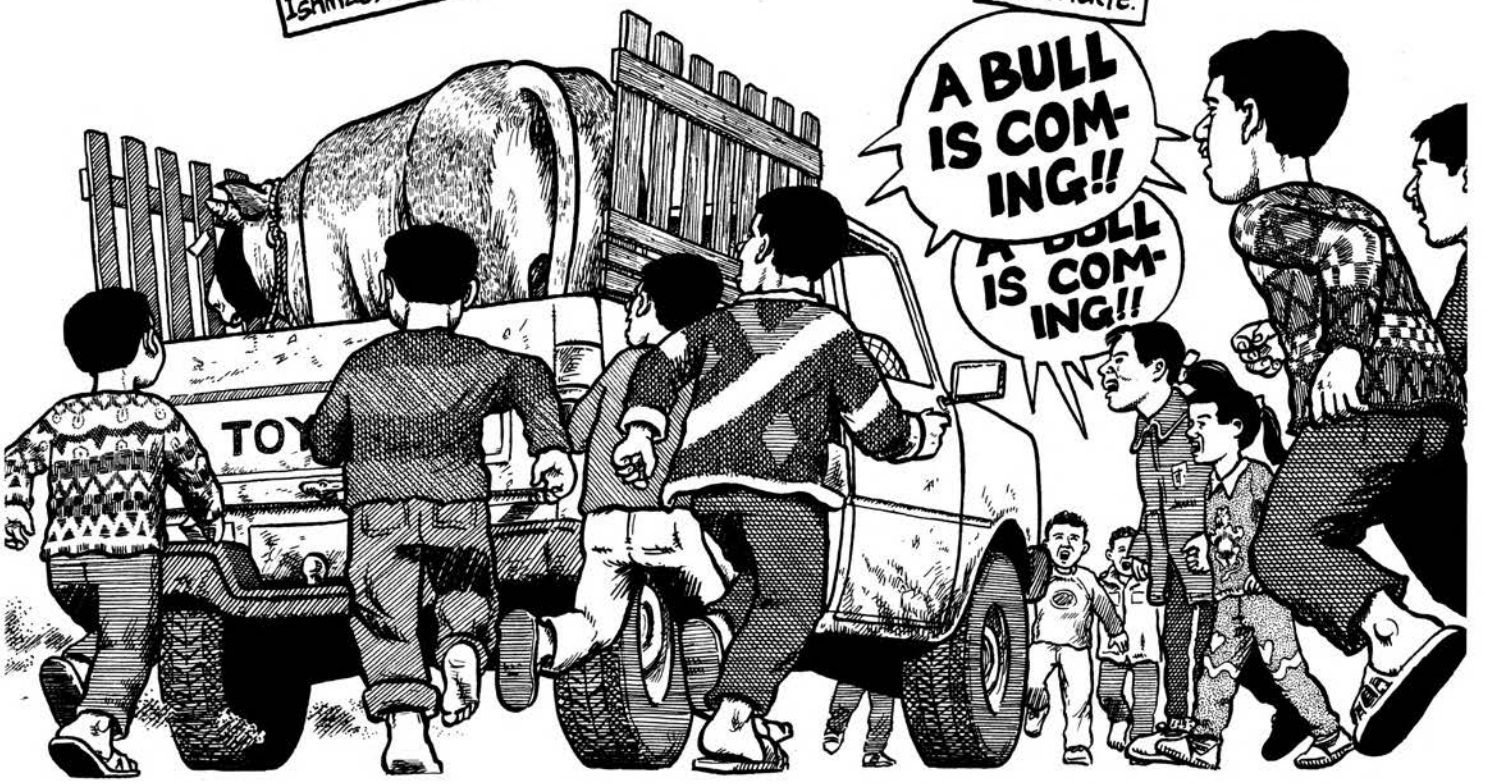
FEAST

We've suspended our research for a few days.

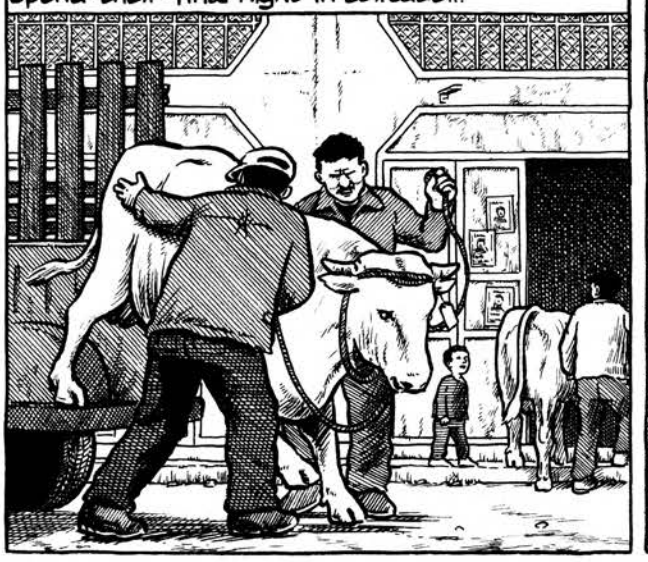
No one wants to sit down for an interview about Sb during Eid El-Adha, the feast which commemorates Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son Ishmael to Allah.

Over the last week goats and rams have been coaxed and pulled down the streets of Khan Younis in a lonely, sad trickle.

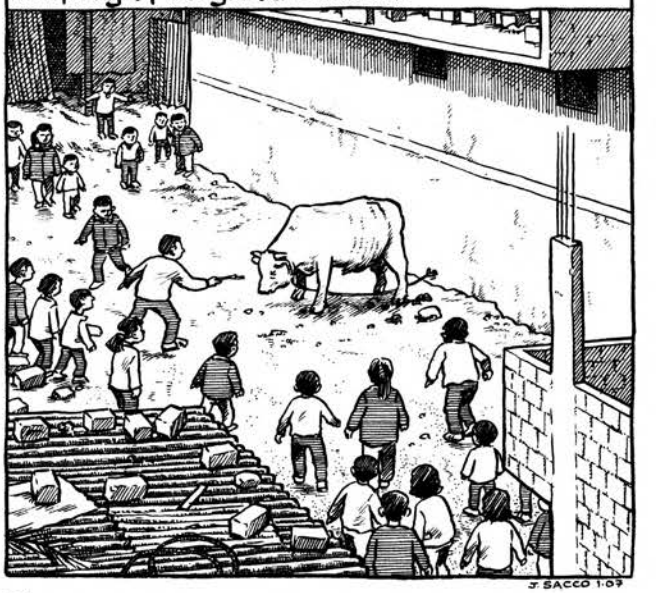
But this is the eve of the feast, and now the bulls are arriving.



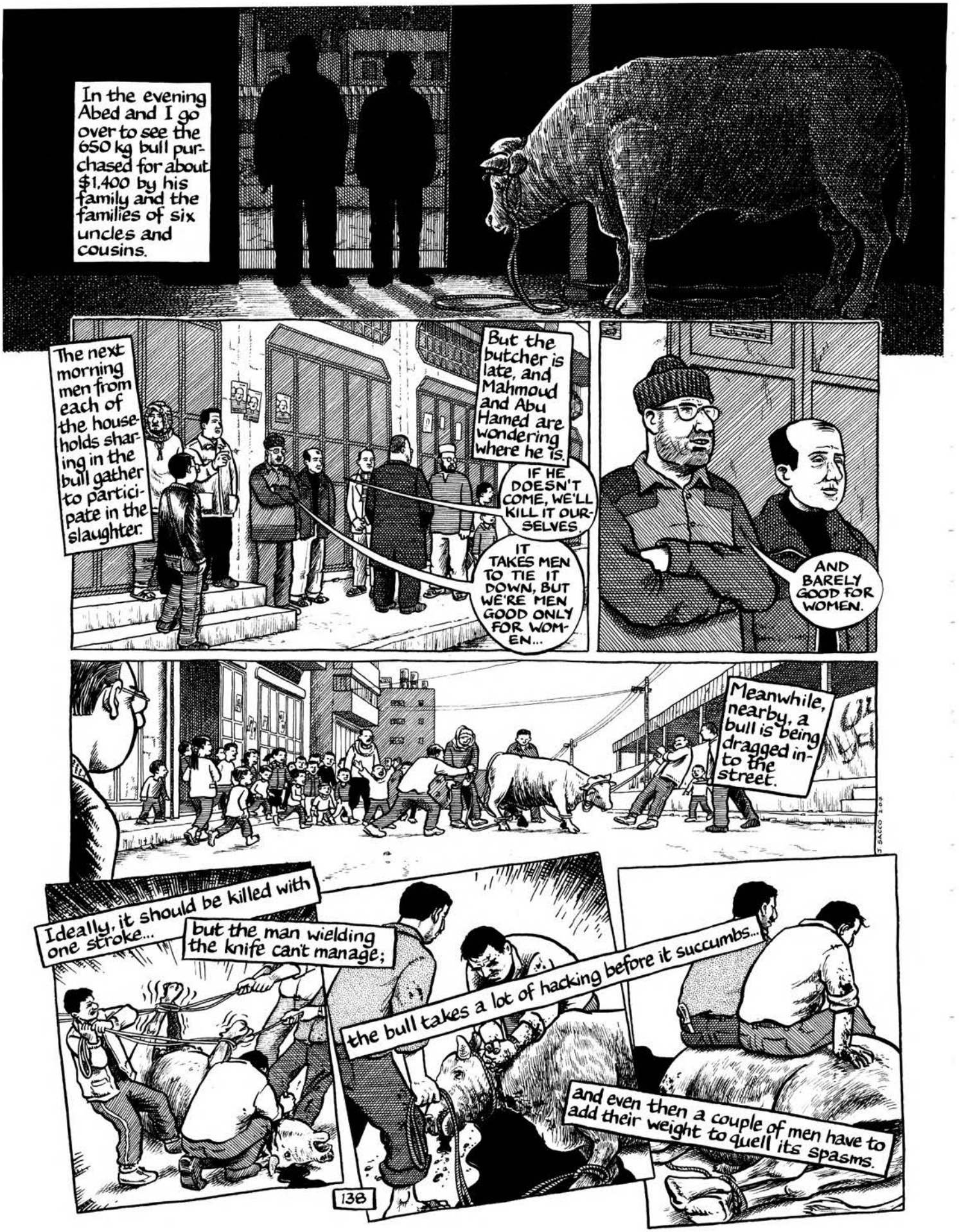
The animals are made to jump out of vehicles and are driven into empty stores, where they'll spend their final night in solitude...



or taken to back lots where they'll have the company of delighted children.



J SACCO 1-07


In the evening Abed and I go over to see the 650 kg bull purchased for about $1,400 by his family and the families of six uncles and cousins.
The next morning men from each of the households sharing in the bull gather to participate in the slaughter.
But the butcher is late, and Mahmoud and Abu Hamed are wondering where he is.
IF HE DOESN'T COME, WE'LL KILL IT OURSELVES
IT TAKES MEN TO TIE IT DOWN, BUT WE'RE MEN GOOD ONLY FOR WOMEN...
AND BARELY GOOD FOR WOMEN.
Meanwhile, nearby, a bull is being dragged into the street.
J SACCO 2003
Ideally, it should be killed with one stroke...
but the man wielding the knife can't manage;
the bull takes a lot of hacking before it succumbs...
and even then a couple of men have to add their weight to quell its spasms.
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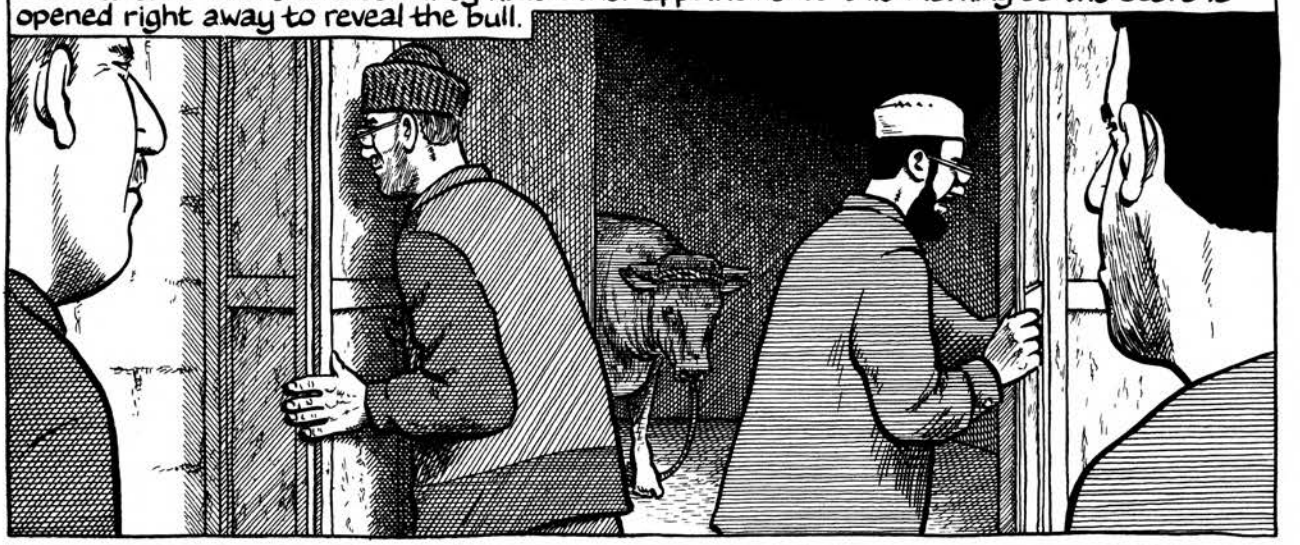
The street, as they say, is running with blood, and the kids use the goo to make handprints on the walls.
Meanwhile, we're still waiting for the butcher.
Bored, Abu Hamed asks what I'm doing in Gaza.
Abed explains my '56 project.
'56?
He was six years old then, he says, but he remembers.
"Before the Israelis entered Khan Younis," he tells us,
I WAS IN A MARKET WHEN WE CAME UNDER AIR ATTACK.
I RAN FROM SHOP TO SHOP BETWEEN PLANES.
A half century has passed, and things seem just as bleak.
WE MAKE A SACRIFICE OF THE BULLS, AND SHARON* MAKES A SACRIFICE OF US.
*ARIEL SHARON, THEN PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL
J. SACCO 3.07
Finally, the long-overdue butcher pulls up.
WAS HE IN FRANCE OR WHAT?

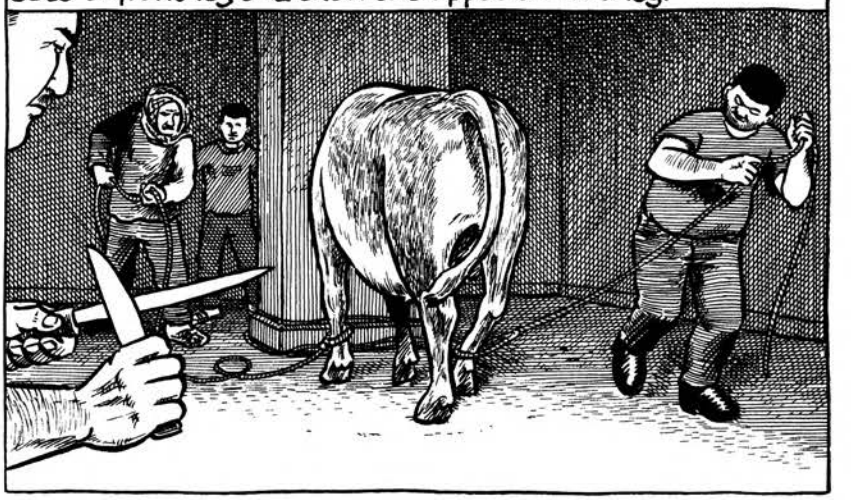
The butcher is with his son. They have other appointments this morning so the store is opened right away to reveal the bull.



This is nothing personal, but the bull knows something is up.



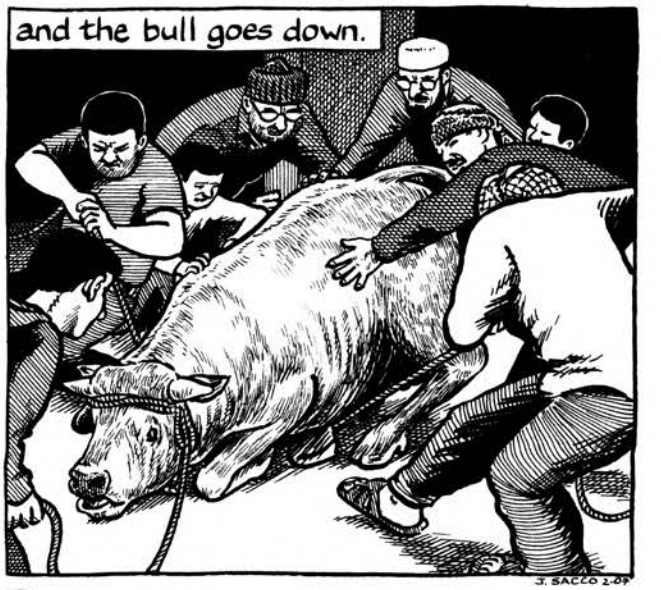
The butcher sharpens his knives while his son expertly lassoes a front leg and then the opposite hind leg.



Now everyone gets in on the act. The ropes are crossed and pulled...



and the bull goes down.



J. SACCO 2-09


When the butcher is satisfied that the animal cannot right itself, he steps forward.
IN THE NAME OF GOD...
He strikes three times before he breaks through the hide.
The son takes the father's place.
He has a small knife, but he drives it in so deep that his fists disappear into the bull's throat.
As he hacks, the butcher works to extend the cuts to the sides.
The bull has stopped kicking.
The other men join in, cutting through the neck and twisting off the head.
Cinder blocks are brought in to support the carcass which is flayed...
while the legs are cut off at the knee joints.
J. SACCO 2-09


The bull is split open and the organs are removed.
The stomach and intestines are dumped on the sidewalk.
The toxic spleen is handed gingerly to a boy who throws it like a grenade into the street.
J. SACCO 2-07


The hide is given to a poor spastic man who has asked for it. He might fetch 50 shekels ($10) from a dealer.
The bull has been quartered, and the butcher prepares to go.
I'VE DONE MY JOB.
No, no!
You've been paid to divide the bull further!
Grumpily, he cuts away a while longer before leaving for his next $50 appointment.
The pieces of the animal are taken a couple of doors down to be hung up and washed.
The men begin slicing off chunks and dropping them into buckets.
It's time for a smoking break at a nearby shop where Mahmoud is earning a little money making kebabs for neighbors who bring meat from the animals they've just slaughtered.
To entice more customers, Mahmoud throws fat on the coals and fills the street with the smell of his grilling.
J. SACCO 2.07


Abed is staring absently at a poster depicting a couple of martyrs.
MY FRIEND WAS KILLED AND I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW.
WHO?
THE ONE ON THE LEFT.
AMMAR.
I ONLY LEARNED ABOUT IT AN HOUR AGO.
HOW COME YOU DIDN'T KNOW?
I'VE BEEN WORKING IN GAZA CITY. I'M THERE MOST OF THE TIME.
His pal had been resisting a recent Israeli incursion.
HE WAS WOUNDED AND DIED LATER.
AMMAR.
We finish our Cleopatra cigarettes and join the final stage of the butchering.
The meat has been separated into piles representing the different parts of the animal and is cut up into even smaller bits.
The pieces are divided into seven equal portions, one for each household.
With all the family heads assembled, the portions are distributed by lot.
J. SACCO 2-09

The entire process, from butchering the bull to allotting the meat, has taken four hours.



But there's more. Each household must now further divide its portion: a third is for the family; a third is passed out to close relatives and friends; and a third goes to the poor.



Abed's mother hands plastic bags full of meat to one of her sons and mentions the name of an old woman.



An hour later, Abed and I are eating our first meal from the bull.



The next day Abed jokes that I ought to interview bulls about their massacre.



J. SACCO 2.07

A hard rain has begun just as everyone hoped.

While Israeli bombers roar low and unseen overhead, it washes the blood from the streets.


HANI
A day or so later, Hani pays us a visit from Rafah, where he lives in the refugee camp.
He says the butcher was late to his place, too, and in the end he decided to take care of the killing himself.
BUT I COULDN'T DO IT.
THE COW WAS TREMBLING AND DIDN'T RESIST.
I DIDN'T HAVE THE HEART TO GO THROUGH WITH IT EVEN THOUGH THE COW WAS DOWN AND I HAD ALREADY SAID, 'IN THE NAME OF GOD, GOD IS GREAT.'
EVERYONE LAUGHED AND MY FAMILY TEASED ME.
Eventually the butcher came and did the deed.
But Hani took no part in skinning or cutting up the carcass.
He couldn't bring himself to eat from the cow, either.
Hani has put himself in charge of logistics for the next phase of my investigations, which will be centered in Rafah.
On my introductory visit to the camp there, the kids follow me around as usual-
HOW ARE YOU?
HOW ARE YOU?
-until Hani politely tells them to shove off.
J. SACCO 2004


But when we are sitting in his front room and they climb the wall to peer inside, he blows his top.
DON'T EMBARRASS ME! I'LL TELL YOUR FATHER TO BREAK OPEN YOUR HEAD!
When Hani returns, he has already calmed down.
IT'S NOT JUST A MATTER OF YOU BEING HERE.
THEY WERE CLIMBING UP TO THE WINDOW, AND THIS IS MY PRIVATE SPACE.
During the First Intifada, when Hani was in his mid-teens, he was jumped by an Israeli undercover unit while he was spray-painting slogans and shot seven times at close range.
He's shown me the scars.
THEY TOOK ME BY HELICOPTER TO AN ISRAELI HOSPITAL.
NOT BECAUSE THEY WANTED TO SAVE ME, BUT BECAUSE THEY WANTED INFORMATION.
After he recovered, he was put in prison.
I WAS KEPT IN A TINY ROOM FOR DAYS.
THEY THREW URINE ON ME.
AND THE INTERROGATOR WOULD BANG MY HEAD ON THE WALL.
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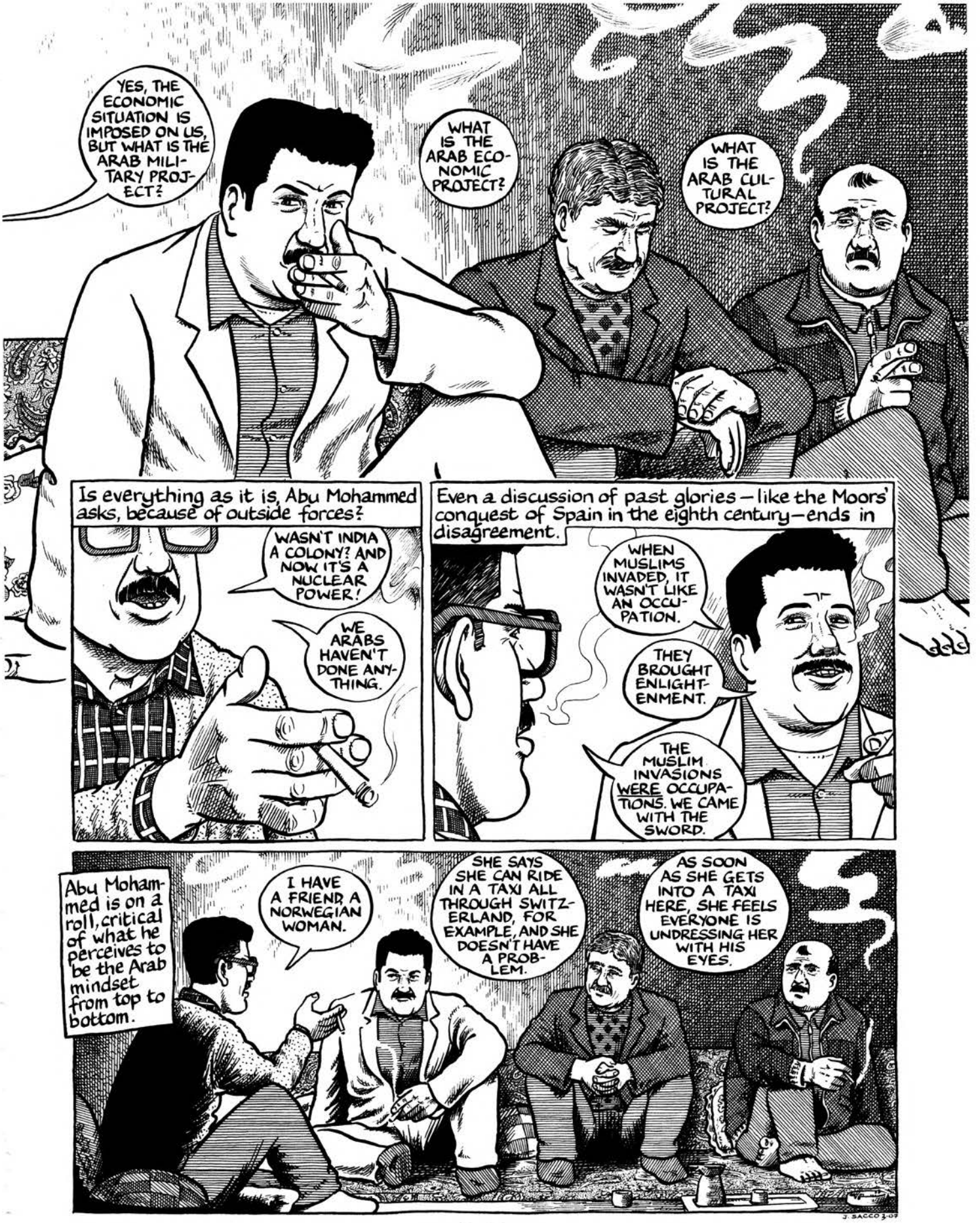
His story goes on and on...
In the end, Hani tells me, he confessed to nothing.
He's proud of that. He's a Bedouin, and proud of that as well; he enjoys explaining Bedouin traditions.
He's proud of being an Arab.
Once, he takes me to see a friend of his, a teacher of Arabic named Abu Mohammed, who is interested in my '56 project and contends that Arabs don't know their own history.
ARABS DON'T READ.
Hani takes exception to this, but Abu Mohammed is insistent.
THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF ONLY ONE COUNTRY—SPAIN—IS MORE THAN THAT OF THE ENTIRE ARAB WORLD.
DICTATORSHIPS AND UNEMPLOYMENT MAKE ARABS THINK MORE ABOUT THEIR STOMACHS THAN THEIR MINDS.
Everyone erupts, especially Hani.
COLONIZATION AND OCCUPATION ARE AT FAULT! WHERE DOES OUR ECONOMY COME FROM?
He answers his own question:
FROM THEM!
The colonizers and occupiers!
J. SACCO 3.07


YES, THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS IMPOSED ON US, BUT WHAT IS THE ARAB MILITARY PROJECT?
WHAT IS THE ARAB ECONOMIC PROJECT?
WHAT IS THE ARAB CULTURAL PROJECT?
Is everything as it is, Abu Mohammed asks, because of outside forces?
WASN'T INDIA A COLONY? AND NOW IT'S A NUCLEAR POWER!
WE ARABS HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING.
Even a discussion of past glories—like the Moors' conquest of Spain in the eighth century—ends in disagreement.
WHEN MUSLIMS INVADED, IT WASN'T LIKE AN OCCUPATION.
THEY BROUGHT ENLIGHTENMENT.
THE MUSLIM INVASIONS WERE OCCUPATIONS. WE CAME WITH THE SWORD.
Abu Mohammed is on a roll, critical of what he perceives to be the Arab mindset from top to bottom.
I HAVE A FRIEND, A NORWEGIAN WOMAN.
SHE SAYS SHE CAN RIDE IN A TAXI ALL THROUGH SWITZERLAND, FOR EXAMPLE, AND SHE DOESN'T HAVE A PROBLEM.
AS SOON AS SHE GETS INTO A TAXI HERE, SHE FEELS EVERYONE IS UNDRESSING HER WITH HIS EYES.
J. SACCO 3-07


JOE!
WHEN YOU COME HERE AND VISIT, DO YOU FEEL WE RESPECT YOU?
Yes, I say, of course.
AND IF AN ARAB GOES TO EUROPE, WILL HE GET THE SAME KIND OF RESPECT?
The conversation shifts to the foremost topic on everyone's mind:
the probability of an American attack on Iraq...
and the rumors that Israel might use the war as cover to "transfer" Palestinians out of the Occupied Territories.
Hani darts a look at Abu Mohammed.
I RECOMMEND THIS NEIGHBORHOOD.
JACCO 3.07

RAFAH



HOUSE HUNTING




WHAT ABOUT OUR SECRETS?
WE WON'T TELL HIM OUR SECRETS.
THE CAMP IS FULL OF SECRETS!
THERE WAS A PALESTINIAN GUY WHO WORKED FOR ONE OF THE ISRAELI HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS.
IT TURNED OUT HE WAS A COLLABORATOR.
Information he gave the Israelis-
-LED TO AN ASSASSINATION BY MISSILES HERE IN RAFAH
He was discovered by the resistance, "interrogated," and executed, Khaled says.
I'M TELLING YOU TO SHOW THAT SOMETIMES EVEN TRUSTED PEOPLE TURN OUT TO BE TRAITORS.
He gets up and prepares to pray, but there's one more thing.
THERE USED TO BE A JEWISH WOMAN WHO WOULD COME BEFORE THIS INTIFADA TO DRIVE WORKERS TO ISRAEL.
EVENTUALLY SHE WAS KILLED BY THE GUYS, TOO
WHY?
Khaled can't remember.
Does Hani?
I DON'T RECALL EXACTLY...
BUT THERE WERE REASONS.
"Jesus," I say. "How long do I have to live?"
They all think that's pretty funny.
J. SACCO 3-07


SEA STREET
A little while later we're checking out the flat Khaled has lined up.
It's a palace.
Six bedrooms, three toilets, three or four balconies.
Even Hani is seduced.
YOU COULD TRAIN A FOOTBALL TEAM IN HERE.
I'LL TAKE IT.
Abed and I settle in to our new digs a day or two later.
We occupy one room.
The rest of the place remains empty.
We're fortunate.
There's a major housing crunch in Rafah.
Hundreds of families have been made homeless by Israeli bulldozers or have fled heavily shot-up neighborhoods.
(We'll get to that soon.)
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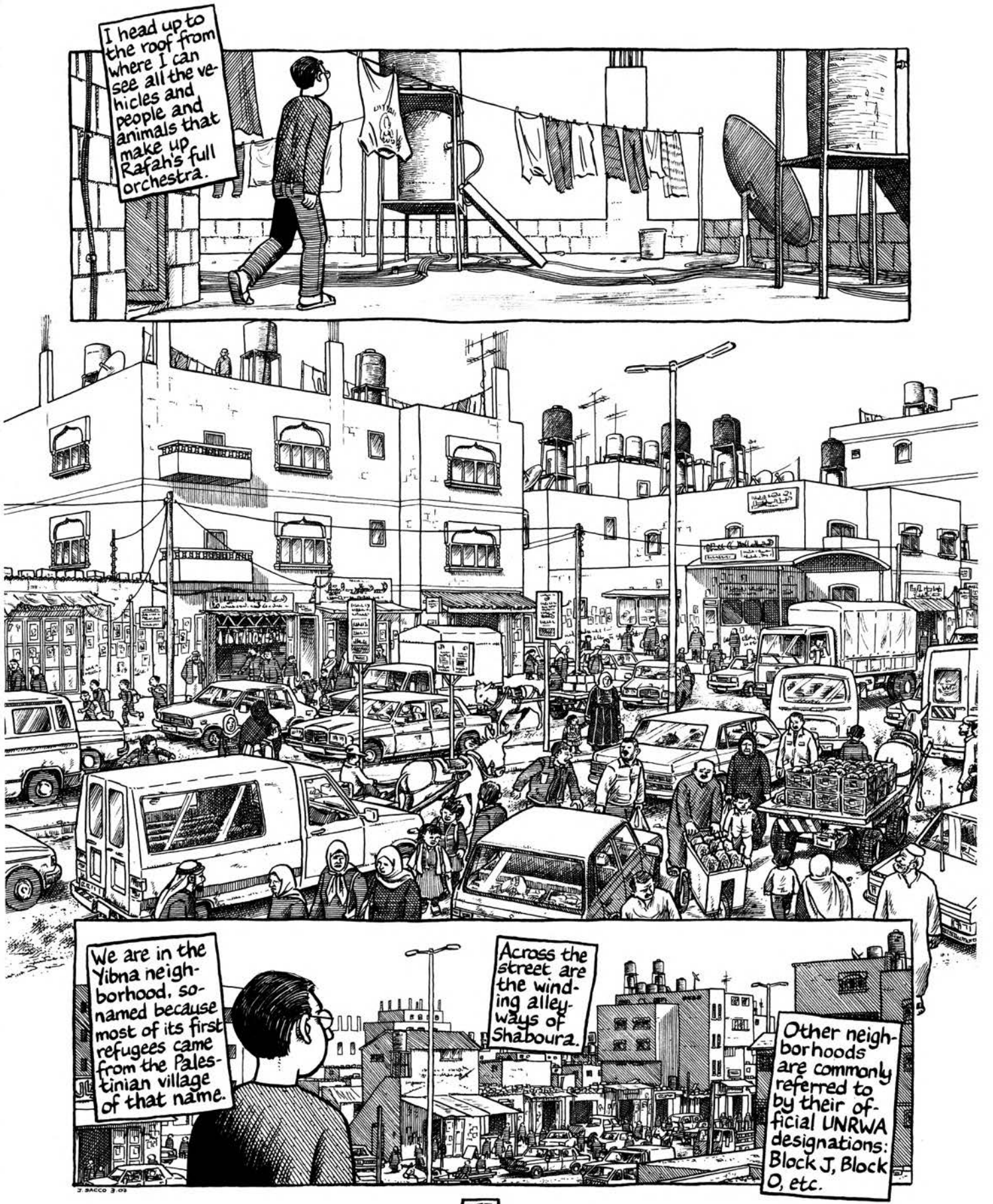
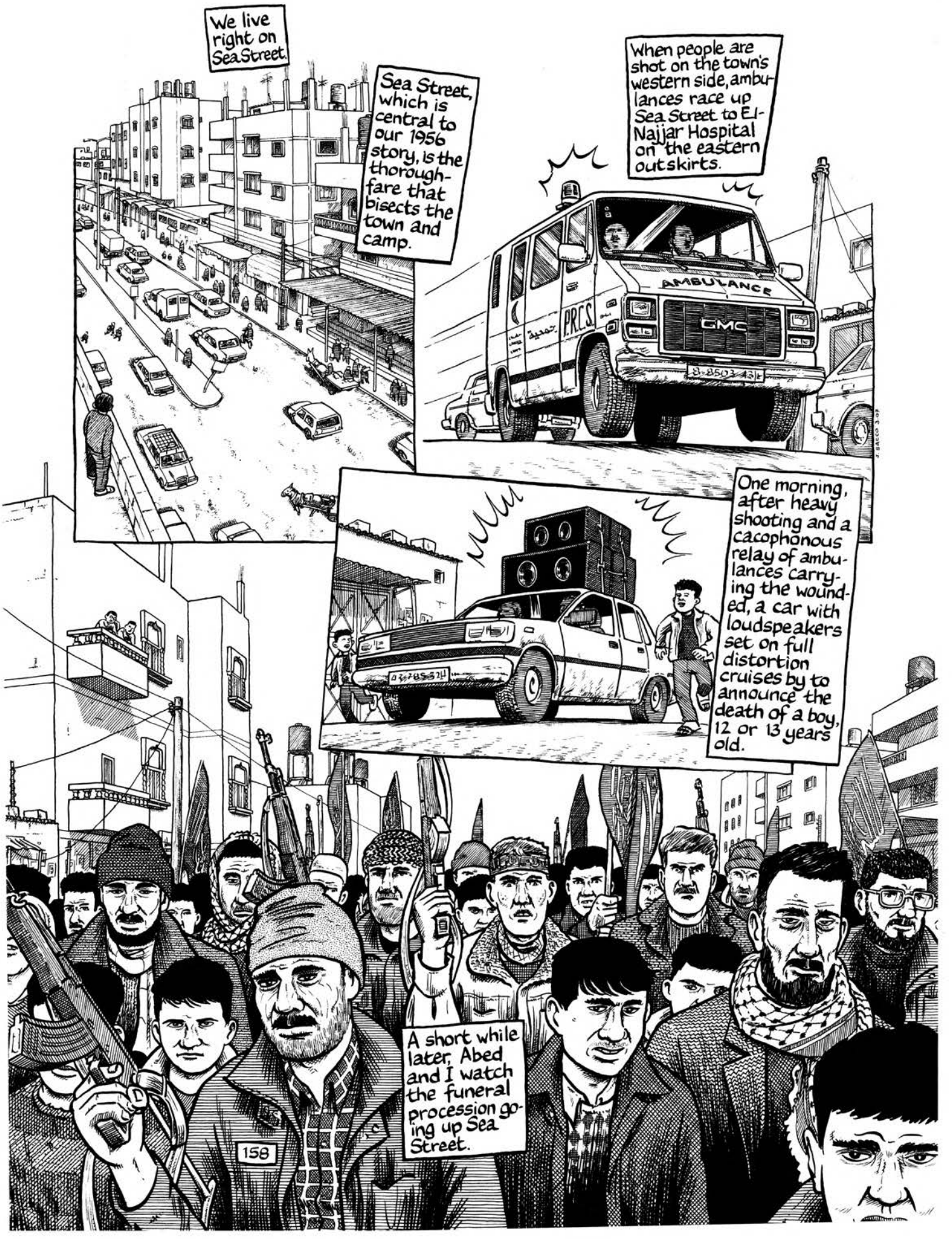
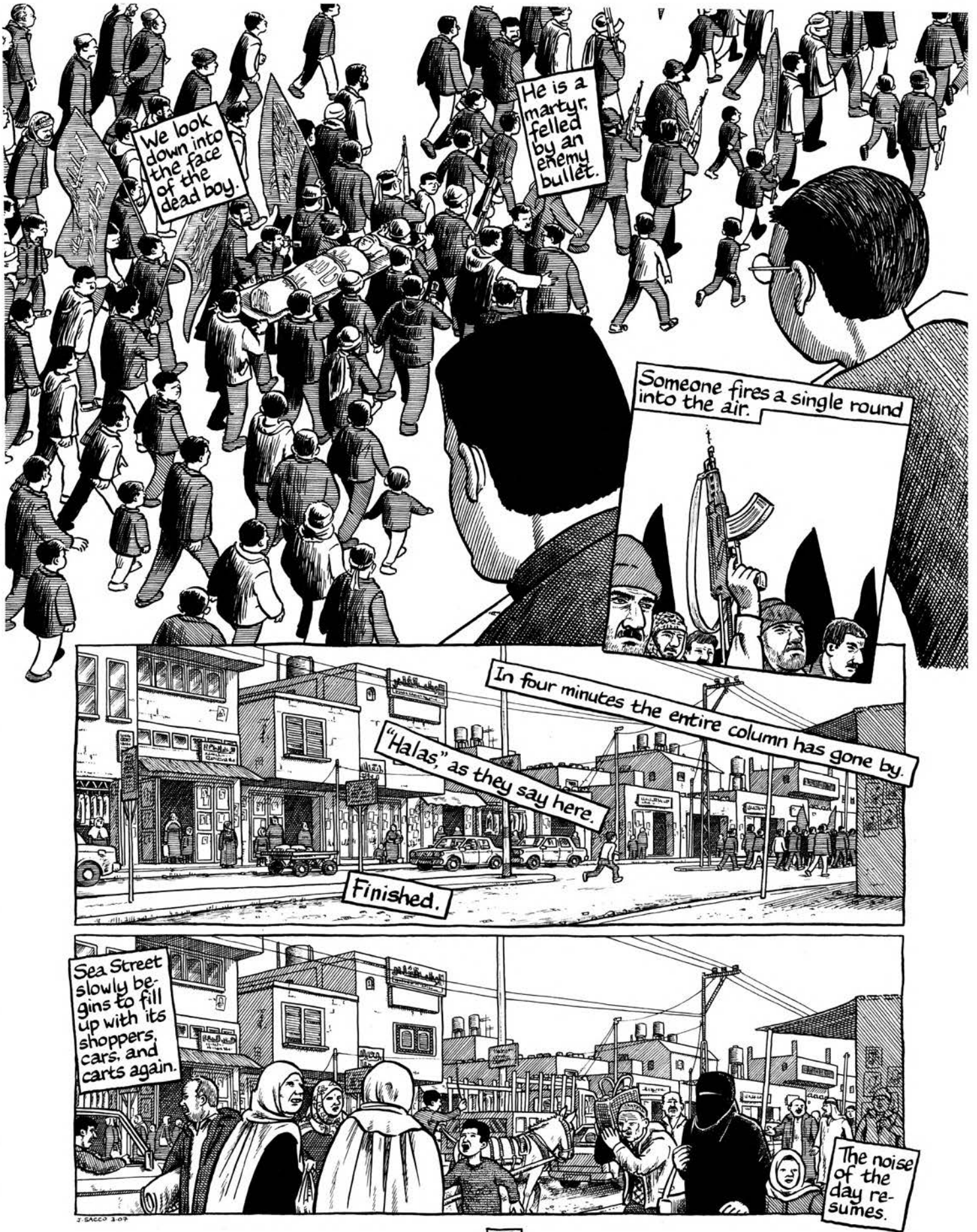
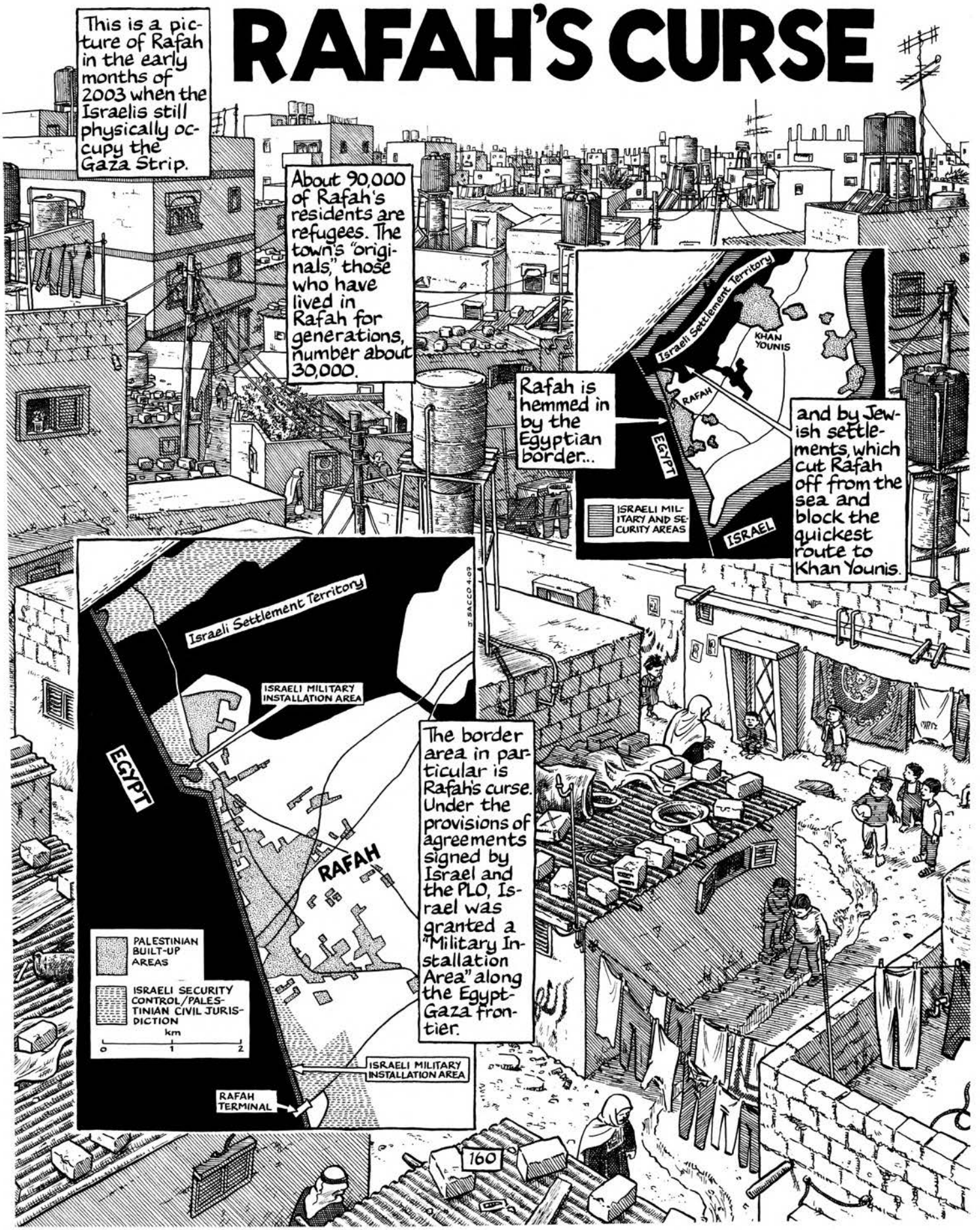
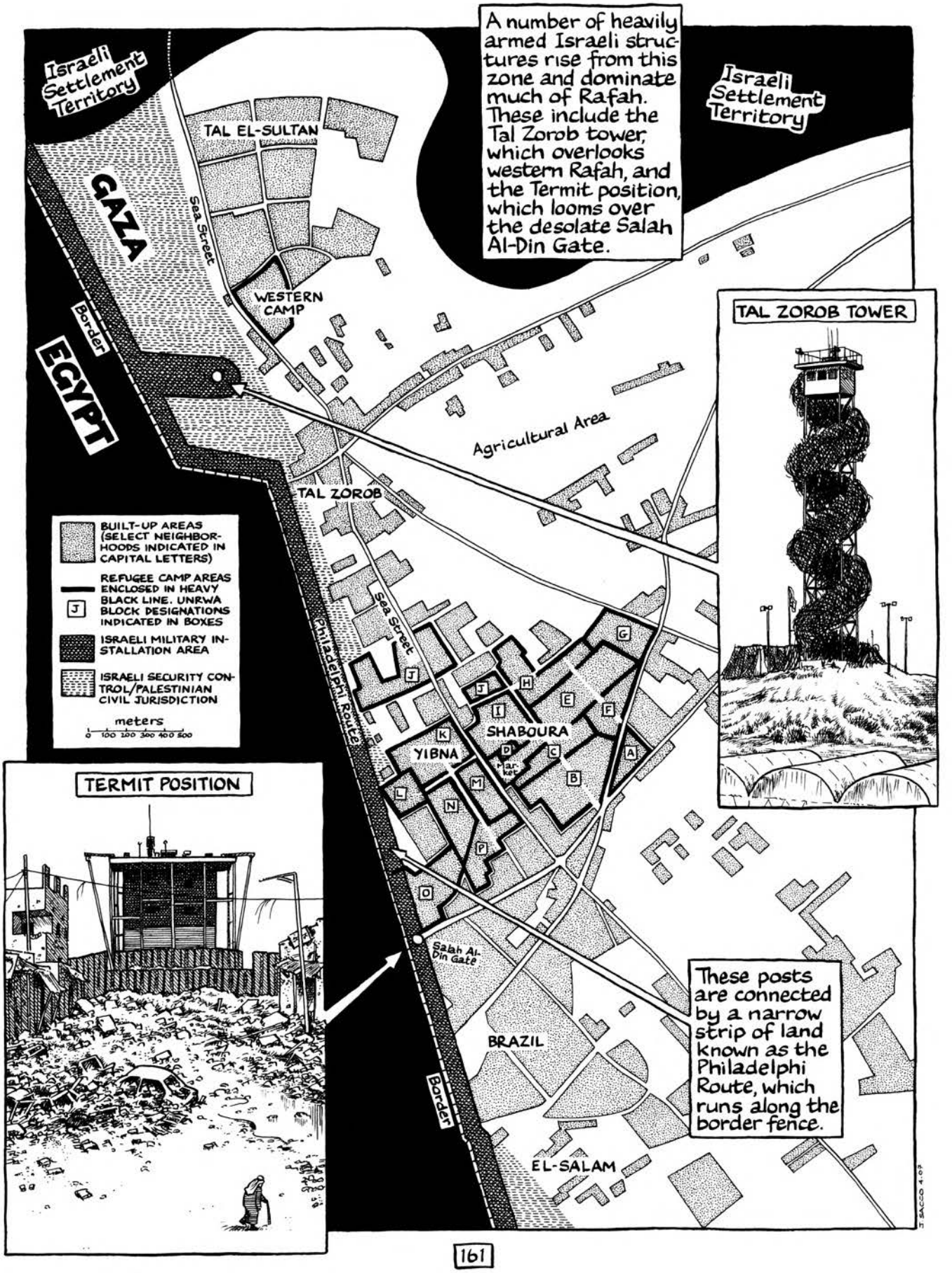
We're staying in a relatively safe area, but the sounds of conflict are ever present, especially after dark.
The eerie squeaking of treads lets us know Israeli vehicles are on the move.
Shooting punctuates the night.
Blasts rattle the walls and set roosters to crowing.
I wear earplugs, but sometimes I'm jolted upright.
I'm convinced Abed could sleep through the apocalypse.
Z
If I fall back asleep, it won't be for long because the day starts early in Rafah.
The blaring call to prayer is followed by tooting car horns and shrieking school children.
The clip-clapping of donkey feet is the final straw.
I'm wide awake now.
Z
J. SACCO 3-07

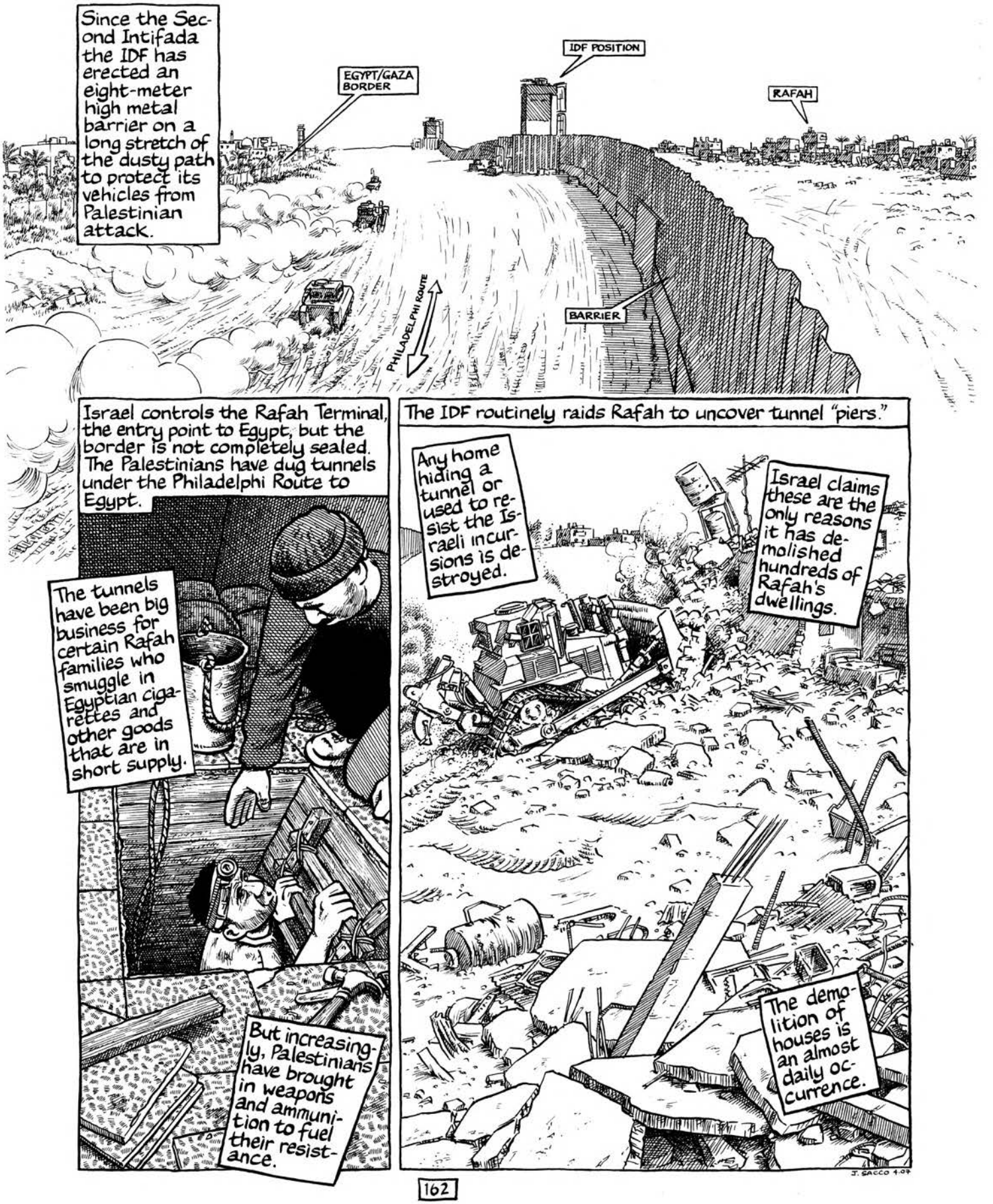

I head up to the roof from where I can see all the vehicles and people and animals that make up Rafah's full orchestra.
We are in the Yibna neighborhood, so-named because most of its first refugees came from the Palestinian village of that name.
Across the street are the winding alleyways of Shaboura.
Other neighborhoods are commonly referred to by their official UNRWA designations: Block J, Block O, etc.
J. SACCO 3.03


We live right on Sea Street.
Sea Street, which is central to our 1956 story, is the thoroughfare that bisects the town and camp.
When people are shot on the town's western side, ambulances race up Sea Street to El-Najjar Hospital on the eastern outskirts.
AMBULANCE
P.R.C.S.
GMC
One morning, after heavy shooting and a cacophonous relay of ambulances carrying the wounded, a car with loudspeakers set on full distortion cruises by to announce the death of a boy, 12 or 13 years old.
A short while later, Abed and I watch the funeral procession going up Sea Street.
158


We look down into the face of the dead boy.
He is a martyr, felled by an enemy bullet.
Someone fires a single round into the air.
In four minutes the entire column has gone by.
"Halas," as they say here.
Finished.
Sea Street slowly begins to fill up with its shoppers, cars, and carts again.
The noise of the day resumes.
J. SACCO 2007


RAFAH'S CURSE
This is a picture of Rafah in the early months of 2003 when the Israelis still physically occupy the Gaza Strip.
About 90,000 of Rafah's residents are refugees. The town's "originals," those who have lived in Rafah for generations, number about 30,000.
Israeli Settlement Territory
KHAN YOUNIS
RAFAH
EGYPT
ISRAEL
ISRAELI MILITARY AND SECURITY AREAS
Rafah is hemmed in by the Egyptian border...
and by Jewish settlements, which cut Rafah off from the sea and block the quickest route to Khan Younis.
J. SACCO 4-09
Israeli Settlement Territory
ISRAELI MILITARY INSTALLATION AREA
EGYPT
RAFAH
The border area in particular is Rafah's curse. Under the provisions of agreements signed by Israel and the PLO, Israel was granted a "Military Installation Area" along the Egypt-Gaza frontier.
PALESTINIAN BUILT-UP AREAS
ISRAELI SECURITY CONTROL/PALESTINIAN CIVIL JURISDICTION
km
0
1
2
ISRAELI MILITARY INSTALLATION AREA
RAFAH TERMINAL
160


A number of heavily armed Israeli structures rise from this zone and dominate much of Rafah. These include the Tal Zorob tower, which overlooks western Rafah, and the Termit position, which looms over the desolate Salah Al-Din Gate.
Israeli Settlement Territory
Israeli Settlement Territory
TAL EL-SULTAN
GAZA
Sea Street
WESTERN CAMP
Border
EGYPT
Agricultural Area
TAL ZOROB
TAL ZOROB TOWER
BUILT-UP AREAS (SELECT NEIGHBORHOODS INDICATED IN CAPITAL LETTERS)
REFUGEE CAMP AREAS ENCLOSED IN HEAVY BLACK LINE. UNRWA BLOCK DESIGNATIONS INDICATED IN BOXES
J
ISRAELI MILITARY INSTALLATION AREA
ISRAELI SECURITY CONTROL/PALESTINIAN CIVIL JURISDICTION
meters
0 100 200 300 400 500
Sea Street
Philadelphi Route
SHABOURA
YIBNA
market
TERMIT POSITION
Salah Al-Din Gate
BRAZIL
Border
EL-SALAM
These posts are connected by a narrow strip of land known as the Philadelphi Route, which runs along the border fence.
T SACCO 4.07


Since the Second Intifada the IDF has erected an eight-meter high metal barrier on a long stretch of the dusty path to protect its vehicles from Palestinian attack.
EGYPT/GAZA BORDER
IDF POSITION
RAFAH
PHILADELPHI ROUTE
BARRIER
Israel controls the Rafah Terminal, the entry point to Egypt, but the border is not completely sealed. The Palestinians have dug tunnels under the Philadelphi Route to Egypt.
The tunnels have been big business for certain Rafah families who smuggle in Egyptian cigarettes and other goods that are in short supply.
But increasingly, Palestinians have brought in weapons and ammunition to fuel their resistance.
The IDF routinely raids Rafah to uncover tunnel "piers."
Any home hiding a tunnel or used to resist the Israeli incursions is destroyed.
Israel claims these are the only reasons it has demolished hundreds of Rafah's dwellings.
The demolition of houses is an almost daily occurrence.
J. SACCO 4.07


And on one of our first tours of the camp, to the sound of gunfire and shelling, we find it happening again.
An armor-plated Caterpillar is crashing into houses in Block O.
A couple of armed Palestinians show up to add to the fray.
Meanwhile, a woman nearby motions us into her home.
She's wrapped up in layers of clothing, ready to run.
THERE'S ONE HOUSE MORE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF OURS.
THERE'S NO ONE LEFT IN THIS ROW OF HOUSES BUT US.
J. SACCO 4.07
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MY HUSBAND WAS BLINDED BY A RUBBER BULLET IN THE FIRST INTIFADA.
WE'VE ALREADY TAKEN HIM TO HIS FATHER'S BECAUSE IF THIS HOUSE IS DEMOLISHED, HE WON'T BE ABLE TO ESCAPE.
WHAT WILL YOU DO IF YOUR HOME IS DEMOLISHED?
THERE'S NOWHERE TO GO. THERE'S NOTHING BUT A TENT.
SHE'S STARTED PISSING ON HERSELF.
SHE CRAWLS AROUND WHEN THINGS START HAPPENING.
WE'VE MOVED AWAY AND COME BACK, MOVED AWAY AND COME BACK.
IF WE HAD MONEY, WE WOULD HAVE RENTED SOMEWHERE ELSE LONG AGO.
WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN MY PLACE?
WHAT WOULD YOU DO?
The gunfire is picking up behind us.
164
J. SACCO 5.09


Just a few dozen meters away, around a bend, we find two ladies and a flock of children.
One of the women sees my foreign face and lets loose.
WHY DON'T THEY GET RID OF US IN ONE GO?
WHAT'S ALL THIS LITTLE BY LITTLE?
THE KIDS ARE PISSING THEM-SELVES!
IT'S SOMEONE'S HOME, SOME-ONE'S MEMO-RIES, SOMEONE'S LIFE THEY'RE DESTROY-ING!
I HAVE A SON AND HE HAS SHARDS OF SHRAPNEL IN HIS HEAD AND NECK. RIGHT NOW HE'S OVER THERE—
She means throwing stones at the bull-dozer.
CAN'T YOU STOP HIM?
J. SACCO 5-04


YOU CAN'T STOP THEM! THERE'S THE BLOOD OF THE INTIFADA IN THE BOYS!
MY OTHER SON SHAKES ALL NIGHT AND HAS CONVULSIONS.
HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO STAY HOME AND COOK WHEN MY KIDS ARE ON THE FIRING LINE?
EITHER GET RID OF THE BLOCK AT ONE GO, OR STOP DOING IT!
She motions to the other woman who says that all five of her children have been injured in this intifada.
One of them lost a hand.
WE SAY THE BOYS WHO HAVE BEEN KILLED ARE MARTYRS, BUT WHEN YOU'VE SEEN YOUR SON CRIPPLED, THEN WHAT?
WHEN YOU SEE YOUR SON WITH ONE HAND CUT OFF AND HE'S TRYING TO PULL UP HIS PANTS, YOU DIE LITTLE BY LITTLE.
AND THEN WHEN SOMEONE GOES TO MAKE A SUICIDE ATTACK, THE WHOLE WORLD TURNS UPSIDE-DOWN!
J.SACCO 5.04


WE'LL TEACH OUR KIDS THAT THIS IS OUR LAND AND THAT THEY ARE OUR EN-EMY!
WE'LL KEEP HAVING KIDS AND KEEP HAVING KIDS!
WE'LL HAVE A FARM OF KIDS!
WE'LL MARRY OUR SONS AT 17!
YOU!
WHEN ARE YOU GETTING MARRIED?
We all laugh at that. It's a good time to leave Block O, when everyone has a smile on his face.
J. SACCO 5.07
I come back weeks later to check on the first woman I'd met.
She's no longer there.
Her house and the entire row of houses where she lived is gone.
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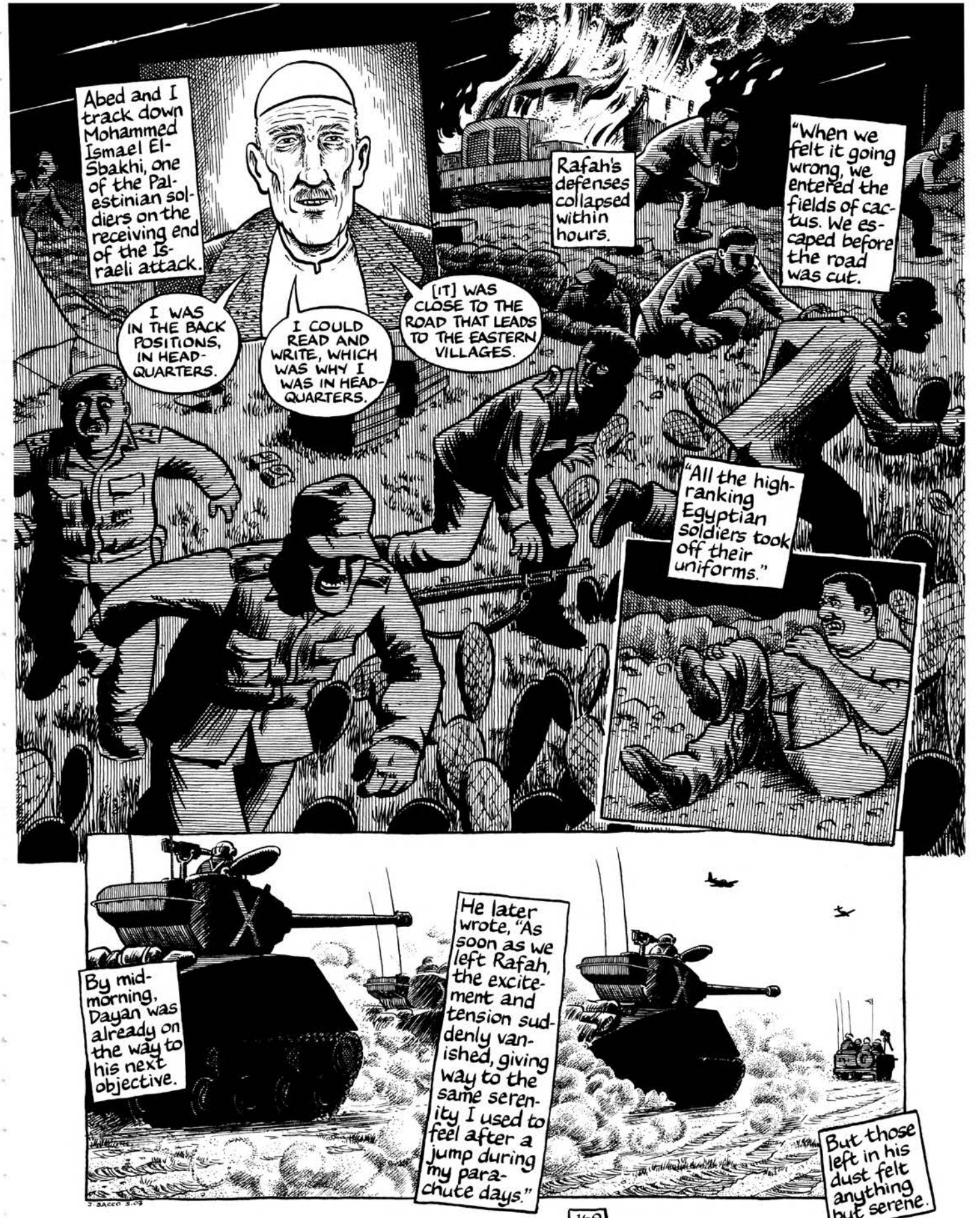
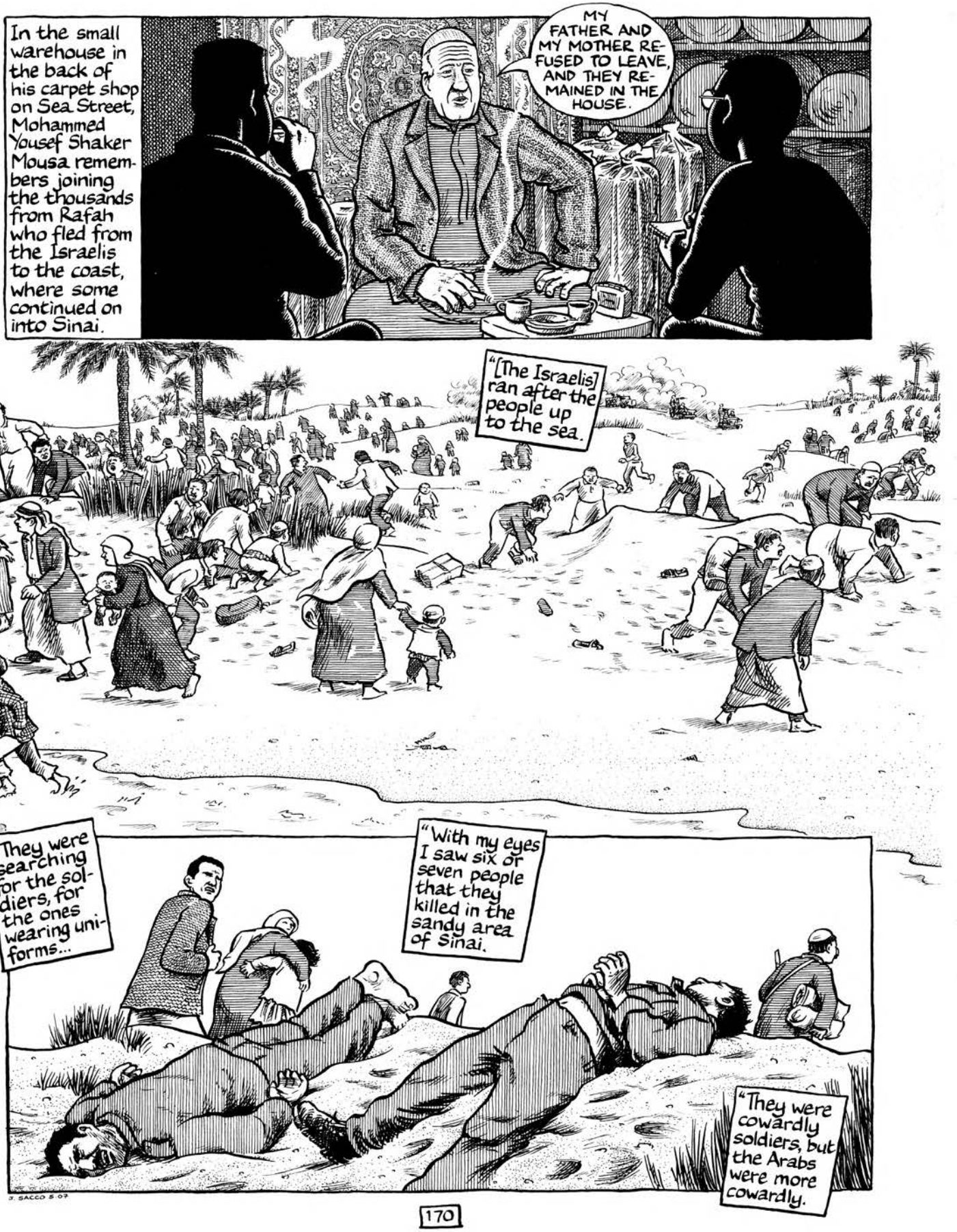
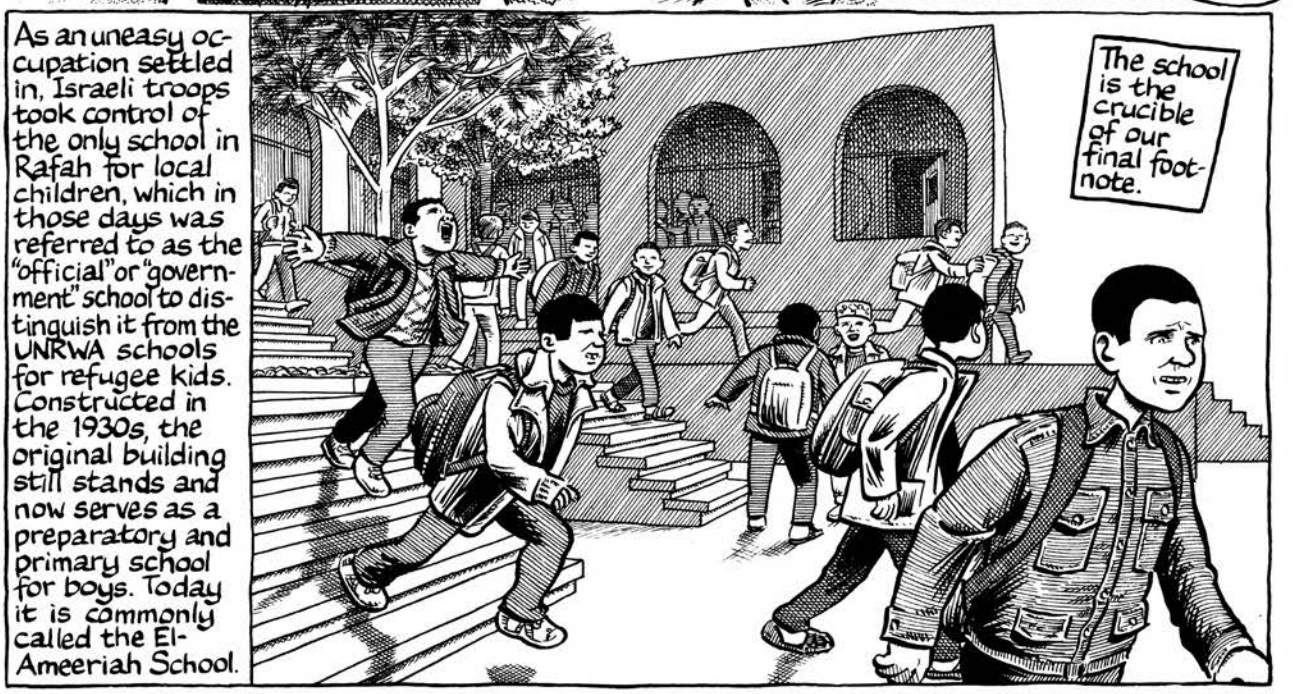
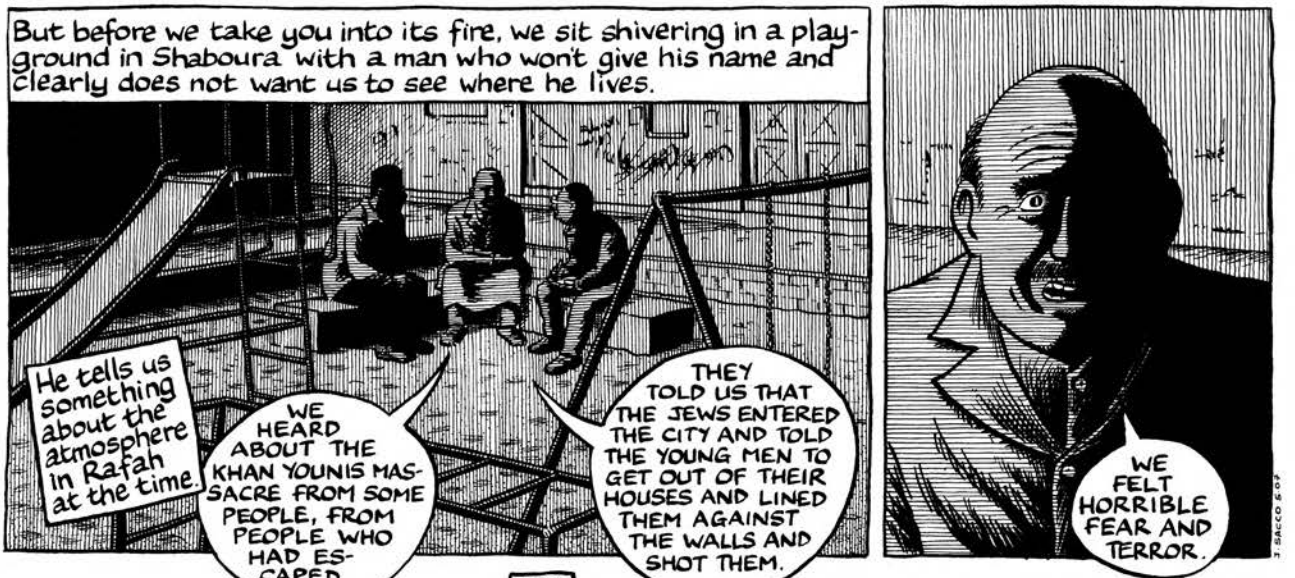
THE FALL OF RAFAH
The demolition of Rafah's houses is the present-day white noise over which we are listening for the sounds of another time, 1956.
The distant voices of the conquerors, at least, still come through loud and clear.
DIARY OF The Sinai Campaign MAJOR-GENERAL Moshe Dayan
And so while the nighttime gunfire stammers and the armored vehicles rumble over the Philadelphi Route wasteland, Abed loses himself in my English-language translation of Moshe Dayan's wartime memoir, 'Diary of the Sinai Campaign.'
It's jammed with orders of battle, inventories of artillery pieces, and combat maps with attack arrows stabbing in various directions.
DIARY OF The Sinai Campaign MAJOR-GENERAL Moshe Dayan
MOSHE DAYAN
DIARY OF THE SINAI CAMPAIGN
One of these maps, with no less than six thrusting arrows, represents the Israeli capture of the Rafah area.
GAZA STRIP
"If El Arish and Rafah fall to us," Dayan wrote, "the Gaza Strip will be isolated and unable, alone, to hold out."
© JOE SACCO 5.04
In fact, Dayan considered the attack on Rafah important enough to personally accompany the 1st Infantry Brigade's assault, which began in the early hours of November 1, 1956.
168


Abed and I track down Mohammed Ismael El-Sbakhi, one of the Palestinian soldiers on the receiving end of the Israeli attack.
I WAS IN THE BACK POSITIONS, IN HEADQUARTERS.
I COULD READ AND WRITE, WHICH WAS WHY I WAS IN HEADQUARTERS.
[IT] WAS CLOSE TO THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO THE EASTERN VILLAGES.
Rafah's defenses collapsed within hours.
"When we felt it going wrong, we entered the fields of cactus. We escaped before the road was cut.
"All the high-ranking Egyptian soldiers took off their uniforms."
By mid-morning, Dayan was already on the way to his next objective.
He later wrote, "As soon as we left Rafah, the excitement and tension suddenly vanished, giving way to the same serenity I used to feel after a jump during my parachute days."
But those left in his dust felt anything but serene.
J. SACCO 5.03


In the small warehouse in the back of his carpet shop on Sea Street, Mohammed Yousef Shaker Mousa remembers joining the thousands from Rafah who fled from the Israelis to the coast, where some continued on into Sinai.
MY FATHER AND MY MOTHER REFUSED TO LEAVE, AND THEY REMAINED IN THE HOUSE.
"[The Israelis] ran after the people up to the sea.
"They were searching for the soldiers, for the ones wearing uniforms...
"With my eyes I saw six or seven people that they killed in the sandy area of Sinai.
"They were cowardly soldiers, but the Arabs were more cowardly.
J. SACCO © 07

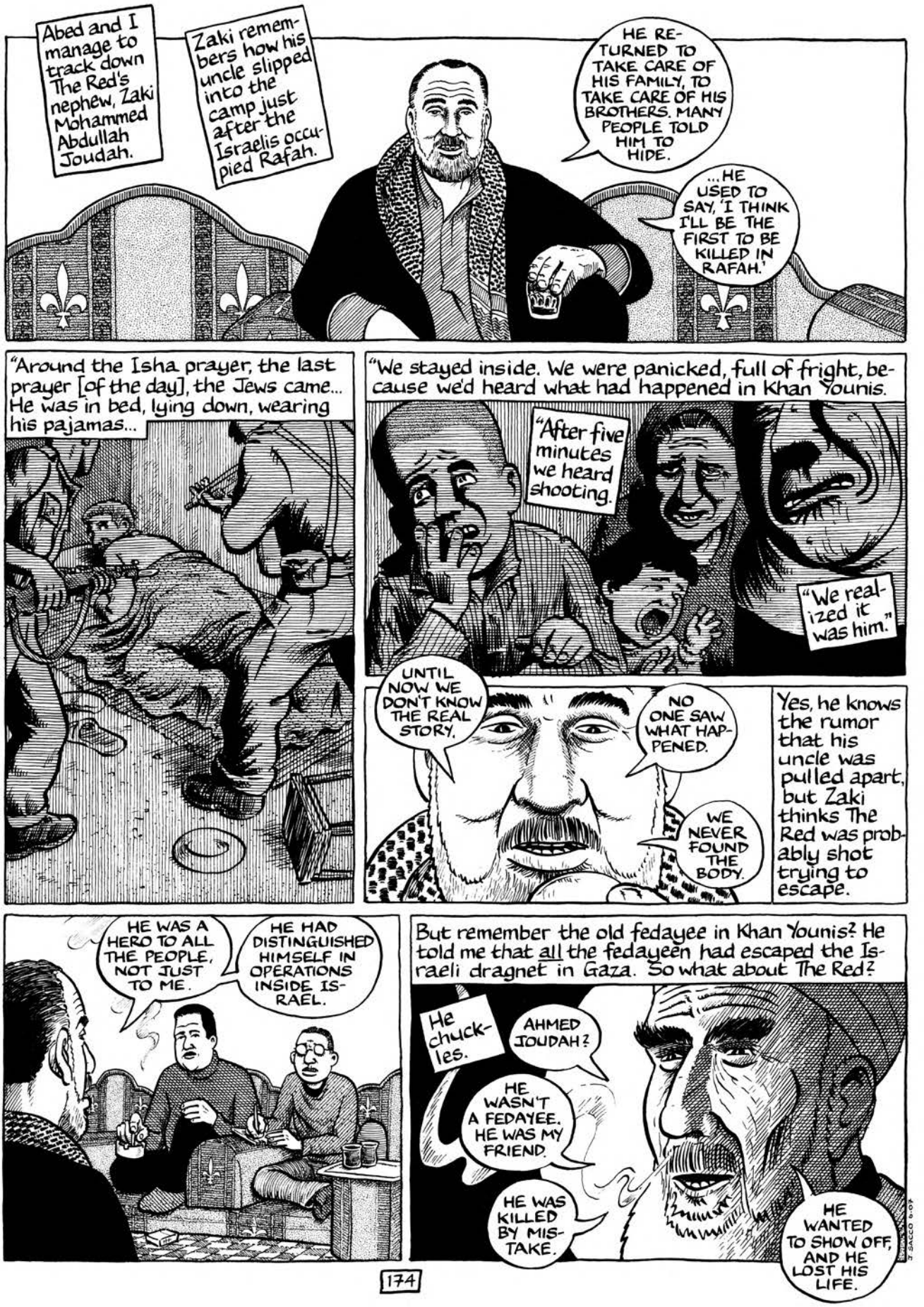

"The Israelis called to the people to go back to their houses through loudspeakers.
ANYONE REMAINING OUTSIDE IS IN DANGER!
"Their aim was to get the people to come back so it would be easier to gather them."
I CAME BACK BECAUSE THERE WAS NO HOPE [OF ESCAPE].
AND I ALSO STARTED TO THINK ABOUT MY FATHER AND MOTHER.


As an uneasy occupation settled in, Israeli troops took control of the only school in Rafah for local children, which in those days was referred to as the "official" or "government" school to distinguish it from the UNRWA schools for refugee kids. Constructed in the 1930s, the original building still stands and now serves as a preparatory and primary school for boys. Today it is commonly called the El-Ameeriah School.
The school is the crucible of our final footnote.


But before we take you into its fire, we sit shivering in a playground in Shaboura with a man who won't give his name and clearly does not want us to see where he lives.
He tells us something about the atmosphere in Rafah at the time.
WE HEARD ABOUT THE KHAN YOUNIS MASSACRE FROM SOME PEOPLE, FROM PEOPLE WHO HAD ESCAPED.
THEY TOLD US THAT THE JEWS ENTERED THE CITY AND TOLD THE YOUNG MEN TO GET OUT OF THEIR HOUSES AND LINED THEM AGAINST THE WALLS AND SHOT THEM.
WE FELT HORRIBLE FEAR AND TERROR.
J SACCO 07


"The walls of our houses were very low, and some of the soldiers would look over the walls.
"When you went outside into the yard and saw them, you got scared and went back to your rooms.
"We turned off our lamps and lay down... In the night, no one would light his lamp.
"They gave only two hours daily, from eight to ten, for the people to leave their houses. The people went out quickly to get their food.
"About five minutes to ten... they would start shooting everywhere... shooting in the sky to frighten the people..."
Those who had not reached their homes in time were sometimes shot, he tells us.
ONE PERSON WAS KILLED IN FRONT OF OUR HOUSE.
"He was shot in the back, and he began screaming and shouting, but no one could help him. I saw this with my eyes.
"And there weren't any ambulances at the time. The injured always bled until they died."
J. SACCO 5.07

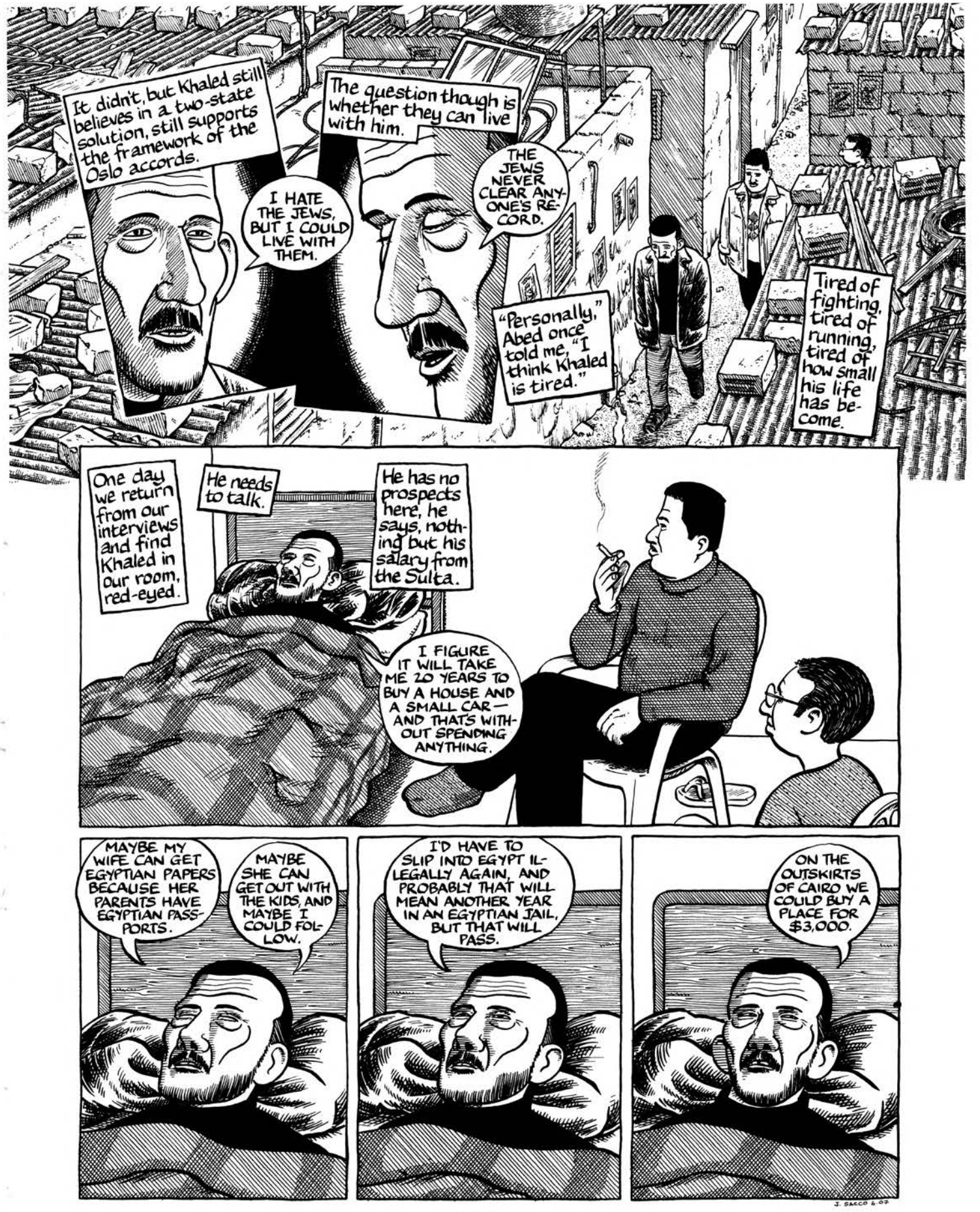

THERE WAS NOTHING, NO KIND OF RESISTANCE.
Rafah was cowed, but the Israelis had unfinished business there.
They wanted to seize Palestinian soldiers and any of the hated fedayeen who may have mixed in with the civilians.
Meet Owda Ayesh, who was six years old in '56. He's a school teacher now, and Rafah's unofficial chronicler.
I WRITE DAY AND NIGHT, MOVING FROM ONE IDEA TO ANOTHER.
A number of times I'm told:
OWDA AYESH INTERVIEWED ME ALREADY. EVERYTHING IS IN HIS BOOK.
Because Ayesh has beaten me to the punch. Long before I struck a claim to this episode, Ayesh lived it and then began mining it himself.
And his motivations trump my Gaza dilettantism.
Israel's hunt for Palestinian combatants cost him six relatives.
Rafah was the center of the fedayeen, says Ayesh, but according to his Arabic-language account, the Israeli search netted only one fedayee there, Ahmed Joudah, known as The Red.
Ayesh claims the Israelis took The Red from his home, tied him to two jeeps, and pulled his body apart.
173


Abed and I manage to track down The Red's nephew, Zaki Mohammed Abdullah Joudah.
Zaki remembers how his uncle slipped into the camp just after the Israelis occupied Rafah.
HE RETURNED TO TAKE CARE OF HIS FAMILY, TO TAKE CARE OF HIS BROTHERS. MANY PEOPLE TOLD HIM TO HIDE.
...HE USED TO SAY, 'I THINK I'LL BE THE FIRST TO BE KILLED IN RAFAH.'
"Around the Isha prayer, the last prayer [of the day], the Jews came... He was in bed, lying down, wearing his pajamas...
"We stayed inside. We were panicked, full of fright, because we'd heard what had happened in Khan Younis.
"After five minutes we heard shooting.
"We realized it was him."
UNTIL NOW WE DON'T KNOW THE REAL STORY.
NO ONE SAW WHAT HAPPENED.
WE NEVER FOUND THE BODY.
Yes, he knows the rumor that his uncle was pulled apart, but Zaki thinks The Red was probably shot trying to escape.
HE WAS A HERO TO ALL THE PEOPLE, NOT JUST TO ME.
HE HAD DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF IN OPERATIONS INSIDE ISRAEL.
But remember the old fedayee in Khan Younis? He told me that all the fedayeen had escaped the Israeli dragnet in Gaza. So what about The Red?
He chuckles.
AHMED JOUDAH?
HE WASN'T A FEDAYEE. HE WAS MY FRIEND.
HE WAS KILLED BY MISTAKE.
HE WANTED TO SHOW OFF, AND HE LOST HIS LIFE.
J SACCO 6-07

TAKING TOO LONG




He takes us into the labyrinth of Shaboura to meet some old women who hid him during Israeli sweeps for militants in the first Intifada.
They are delighted to see him, and they reminisce about close calls and quick escapes.
One of the women seems particularly concerned with his well-being, with the chance the Israelis will kill him in a helicopter strike.
YOU SHOULDN'T SPEND SO MUCH TIME WITH THE OTHER 'MUTARAD.'
DON'T STAY TOGETHER. SPREAD OUT.
DON'T BE IN THE SAME CAR.
I'VE SAID FAREWELL TO MANY FRIENDS.
YOU SHOULD BE ABROAD.
WHY DID YOU COME BACK?
J. SACCO © '97
Why did he come back?
Because this is his home...
and because he hoped the PLO's peace agreement with Israel meant an end to the fighting.
176


It didn't, but Khaled still believes in a two-state solution, still supports the framework of the Oslo accords.
The question though is whether they can live with him.
I HATE THE JEWS, BUT I COULD LIVE WITH THEM.
THE JEWS NEVER CLEAR ANYONE'S RECORD.
"Personally," Abed once told me, "I think Khaled is tired."
Tired of fighting, tired of running, tired of how small his life has become.
One day we return from our interviews and find Khaled in our room, red-eyed.
He needs to talk.
He has no prospects here, he says, nothing but his salary from the Sulta.
I FIGURE IT WILL TAKE ME 20 YEARS TO BUY A HOUSE AND A SMALL CAR — AND THAT'S WITHOUT SPENDING ANYTHING.
MAYBE MY WIFE CAN GET EGYPTIAN PAPERS BECAUSE HER PARENTS HAVE EGYPTIAN PASSPORTS.
MAYBE SHE CAN GET OUT WITH THE KIDS, AND MAYBE I COULD FOLLOW.
I'D HAVE TO SLIP INTO EGYPT ILLEGALLY AGAIN, AND PROBABLY THAT WILL MEAN ANOTHER YEAR IN AN EGYPTIAN JAIL, BUT THAT WILL PASS.
ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF CAIRO WE COULD BUY A PLACE FOR $3,000.
J. SACCO © 07

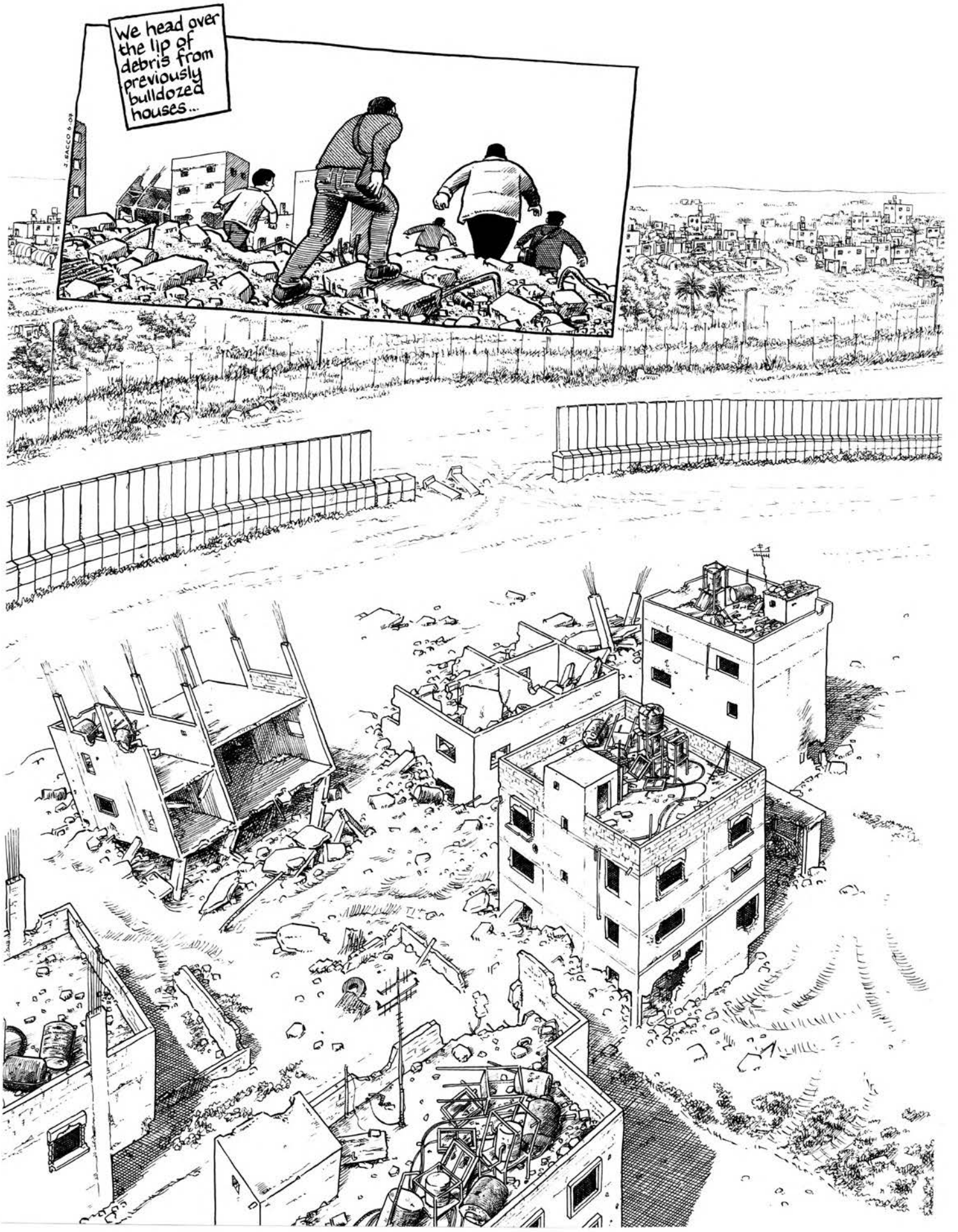

WE COULD SPEND TIME THERE UNTIL THE KIDS ARE EDUCATED AND THEIR PERSONALITIES ARE BUILT, AND THEY COULD ALWAYS RETURN HERE.
OR WE COULD MOVE TO SYRIA. OR SWITZERLAND. OR SWEDEN.
IF I MAKE IT TO SWEDEN, THEY WOULD PUT ME IN JAIL FOR BEING ILLEGAL, BUT IN THE END THEY MIGHT GRANT ME POLITICAL ASYLUM. I KNOW OTHER GUYS WHO'VE MANAGED THAT.
BUT STAYING HERE? HOW?
I CAN'T TRAVEL LEGALLY. I CAN'T GO TO EGYPT, TO JORDAN, TO THE WEST BANK. WHAT IF I NEED AN OPERATION AND HAVE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY?
THE OTHER DAY MY DAUGHTER ASKED ME, 'ARE YOU COMING HOME TOMORROW?' AND THAT HURT ME. I CAN'T SAY WHEN I'M COMING HOME.
DO I TELL HER I'M WANTED? SHE'S TOO YOUNG TO UNDERSTAND THAT.
I EXPECT TO BE KILLED, I EXPECT TO BE ASSASSINATED, BUT NOW IT'S TAKING TOO LONG.
T. SACCO 5-09

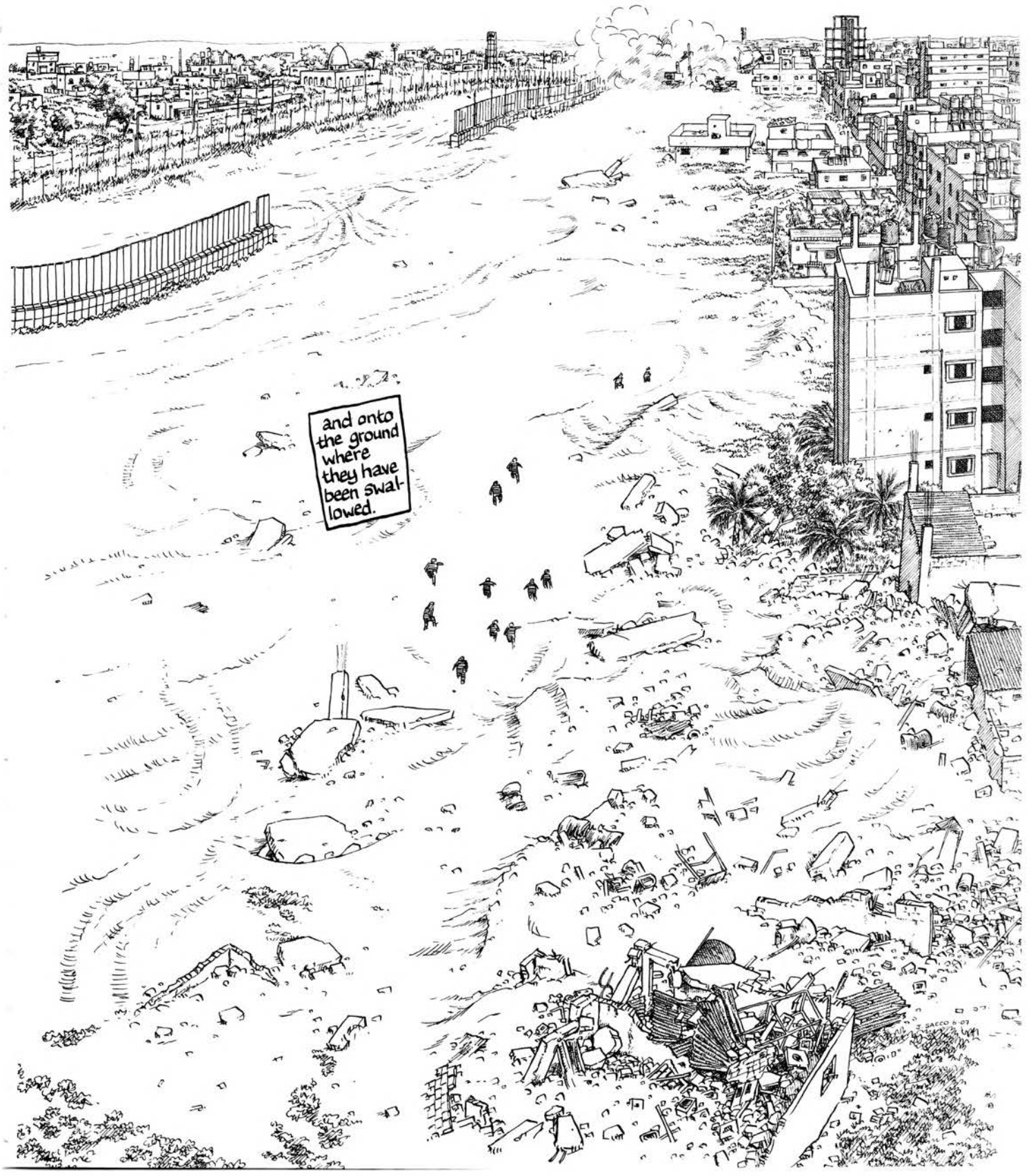
ATTACK WEST OF BLOCK J





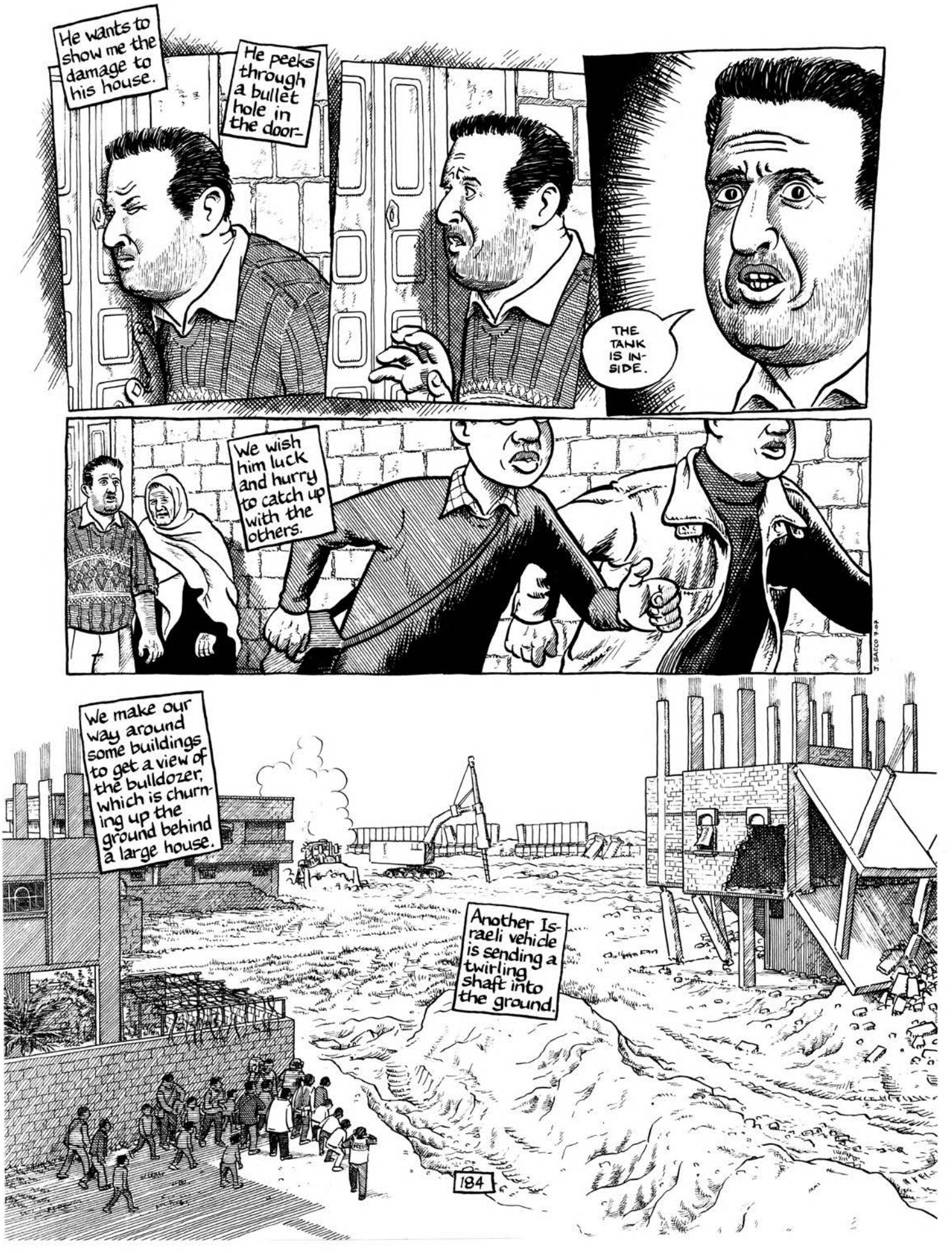



We head over the lip of debris from previously bulldozed houses...
J. SACCO 6.09


and onto the ground where they have been swallowed.


We can hear and see the bulldozer now...
and we spot an escorting AFV* behind it.
J.SACCO 6.92
*AFV: ARMORED FIGHTING VEHICLE
We dash to a group of dwellings as quickly as we can.
182


There we find a dazed man named Munir Abdelsalam Hassuna. His mother is with him.
The back of his house has just been attacked.
HAVE YOU BEEN LIVING IN IT?
YES, WITH MY MOTHER, MY WIFE, AND OUR CHILDREN.
THE BULLDOZERS HAVE DESTROYED THE WALLS... AND THEY SHOT HERE AS YOU SEE.
WE WERE INSIDE THE HOME. WE LEFT IT JUST NOW.
DID THE ISRAELIS GIVE YOU WARNING?
He thinks I'm joking.
NO.
SUDDENLY WE FOUND BULLETS COMING INTO OUR ROOM.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW?
I DON'T KNOW.
GOD WILL HELP US.
AS FOR NOW, WE'RE IN THE STREET.
J. SACCO 6-09


He wants to show me the damage to his house.
He peeks through a bullet hole in the door-
THE TANK IS IN-SIDE.
We wish him luck and hurry to catch up with the others.
J. SACCO '04
We make our way around some buildings to get a view of the bulldozer, which is churning up the ground behind a large house.
Another Israeli vehicle is sending a twirling shaft into the ground.
184


A powerful blast momentarily scatters the watching crowd.
The driller is detonating underground explosives to collapse any tunnels that might be nearby.
TV
Meanwhile, the bulldozer is still churning...
churning...
and finally!
Some of the teenaged boys start lounging out in the open on a heap of earth pushed up during an earlier bulldozing.
TV
They're showboating for their friends.
J. SACCO 7-09


Now they can't decide whether to watch the Israeli vehicles or pick on Asim.
They don't want Asim to take their pictures.
When they tire of bugging him, they turn to me.
I'm sick of teenaged boys.
I'm sick of their taunts and posturing.
If any of these little shits get hit today, I'm going to have a hard time showing my dismay.
J. SACCO 7.09
DUBABAH!
DUBABAH!
Dubabah!
It means tank!
And suddenly...
186


the AFV...
TV
darts outta nowhere...
except
for one phot
like a spider...
her...
We're running...
running for it...
who wants...
his shot...
and a kid...
who's pinned down...
and races...
on the ridge.
our way!
187


whew
We need a breather.
We need a break.
And just then a woman steps forward.
She sees my notepad.
She takes it for an invitation to let loose!
WE HAVE CHILDREN WITHOUT MILK AND FOOD, AND NOW THEY'RE DEMOLISHING OUR HOUSES!
THEY'RE NOT HUMAN! THEY'RE ANIMALS!
HITLER DIDN'T DO THIS TO THEM!
HITLER DIDN'T EXILE THEM FROM THEIR LAND!
HITLER DIDN'T DEMOLISH THEIR HOMES!
I ASK GOD TO MAKE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AND THE CHILDREN OF AMERICA LIKE US—
OR-PHANS!
J. SACCO 9-03
188