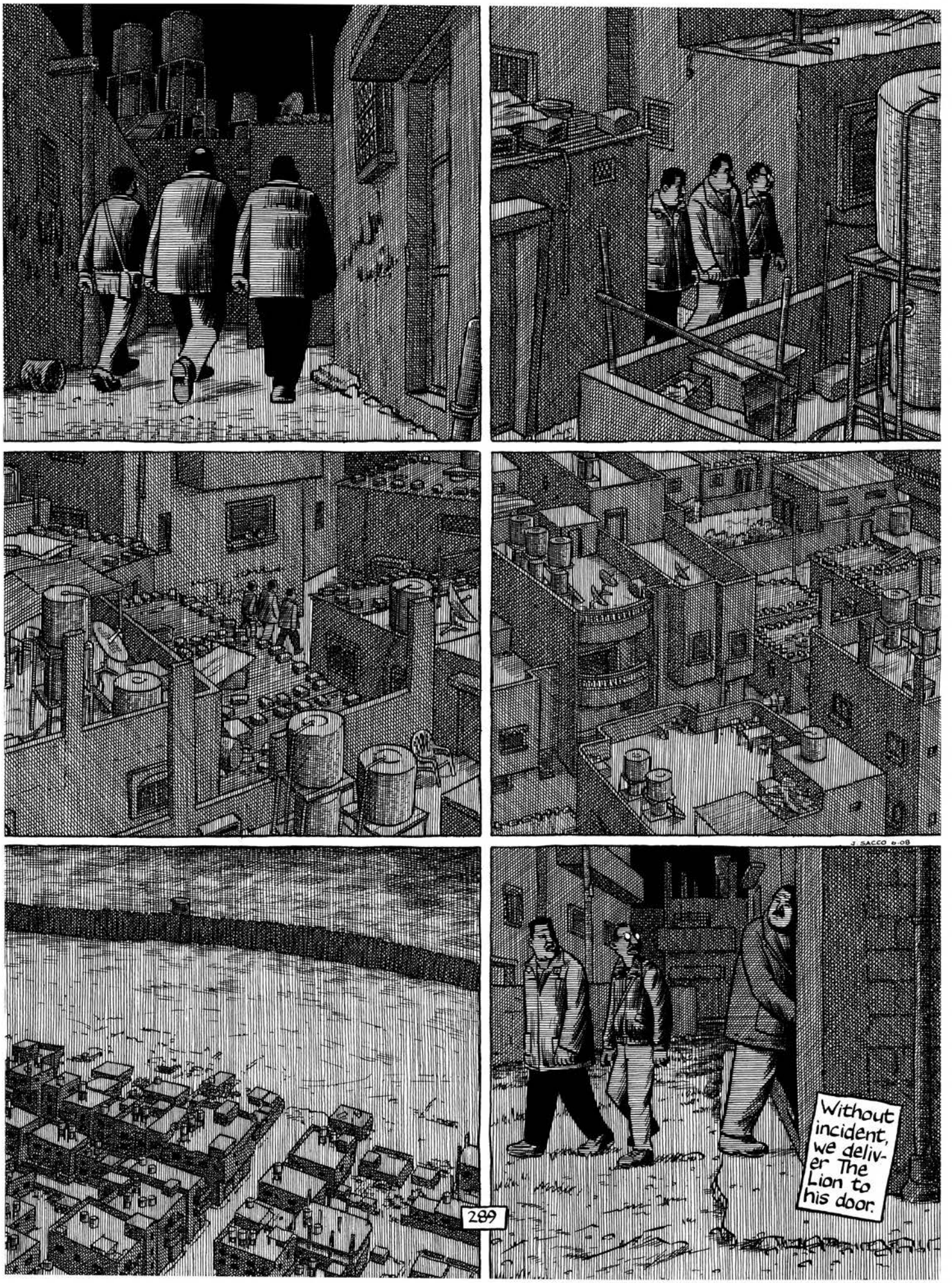

J. SACCO 6-08
Without incident, we deliver The Lion to his door.

LET'S BLOW UP EVERYTHING

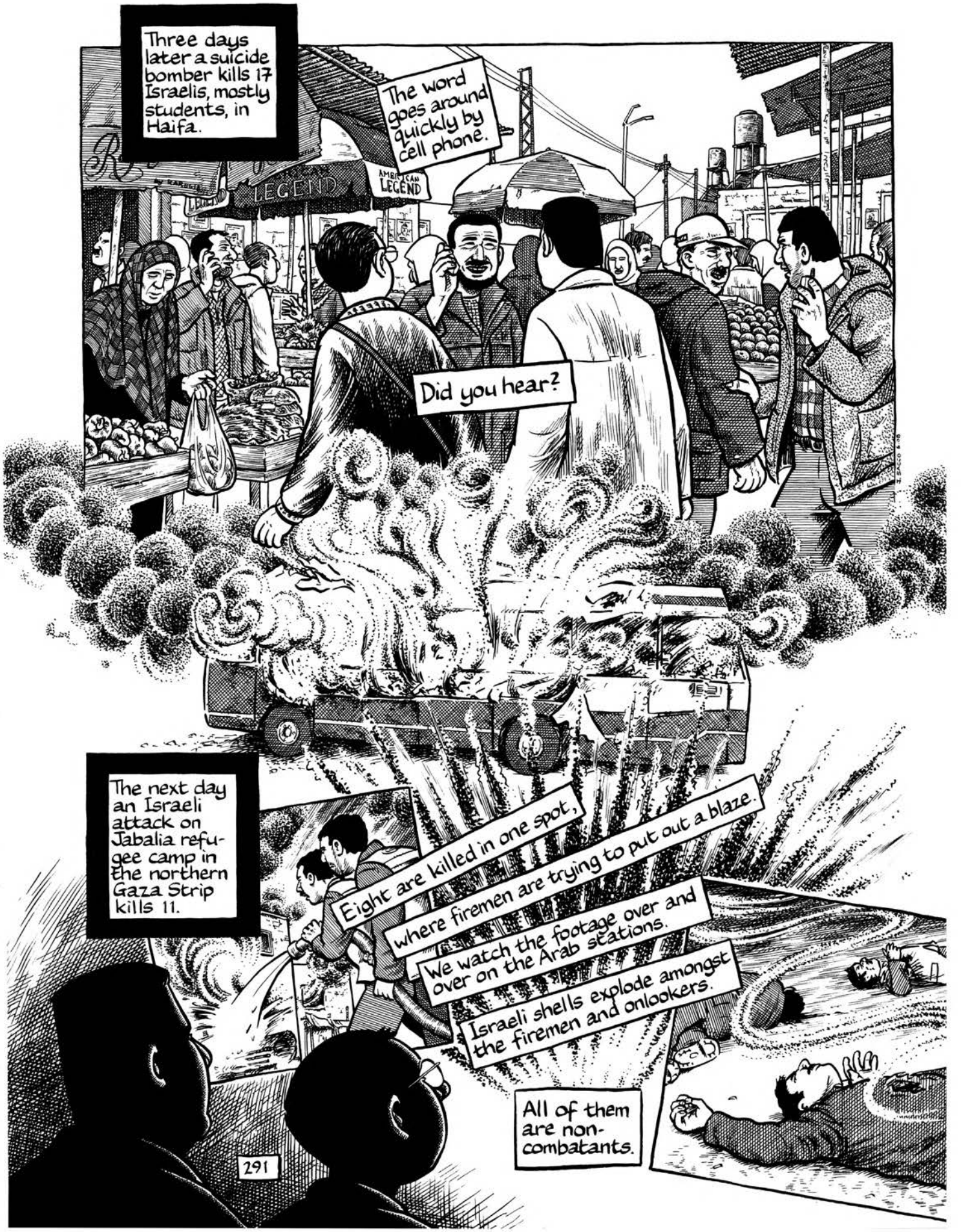
The taxi driver can no longer control himself, not even in front of a foreigner.

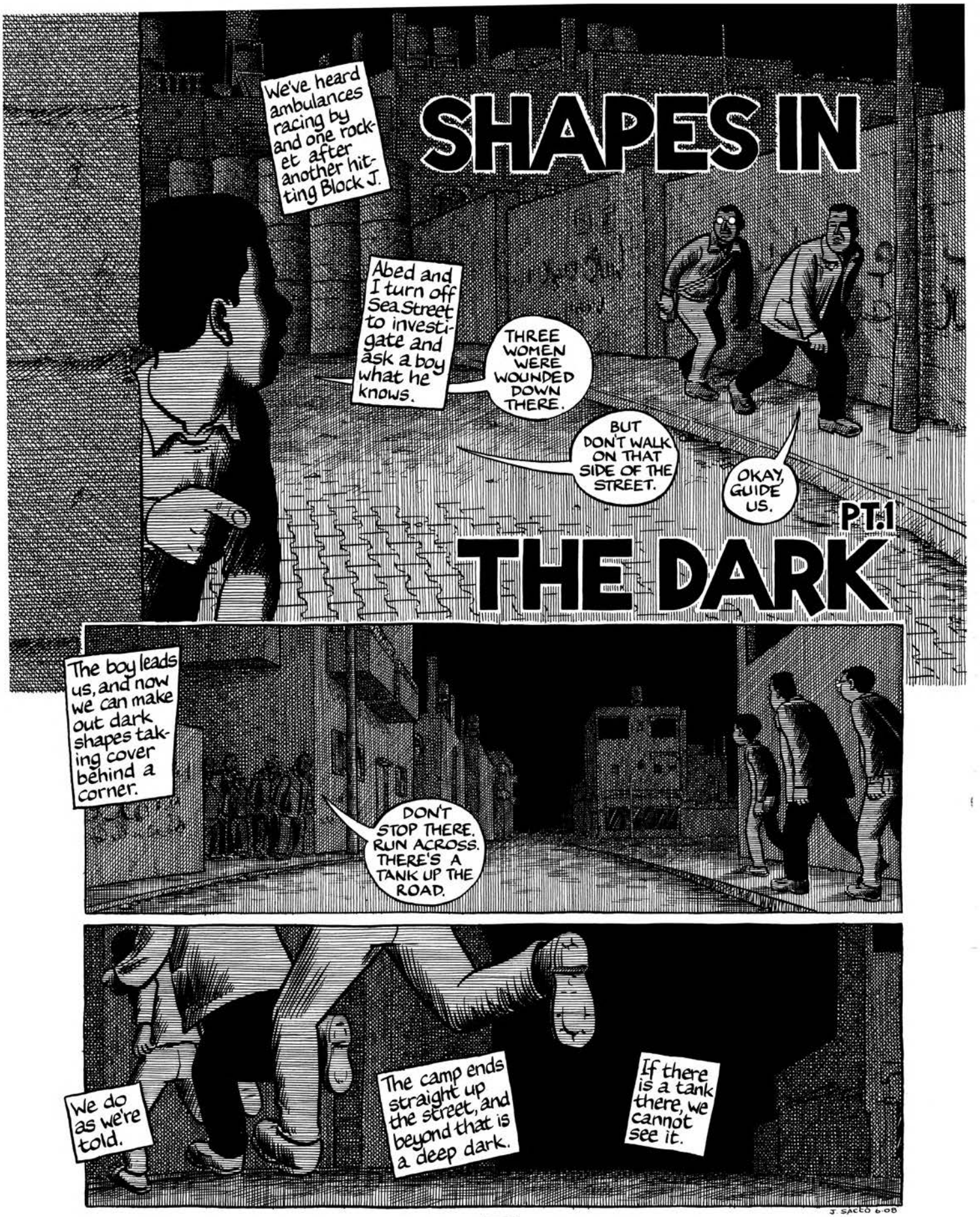


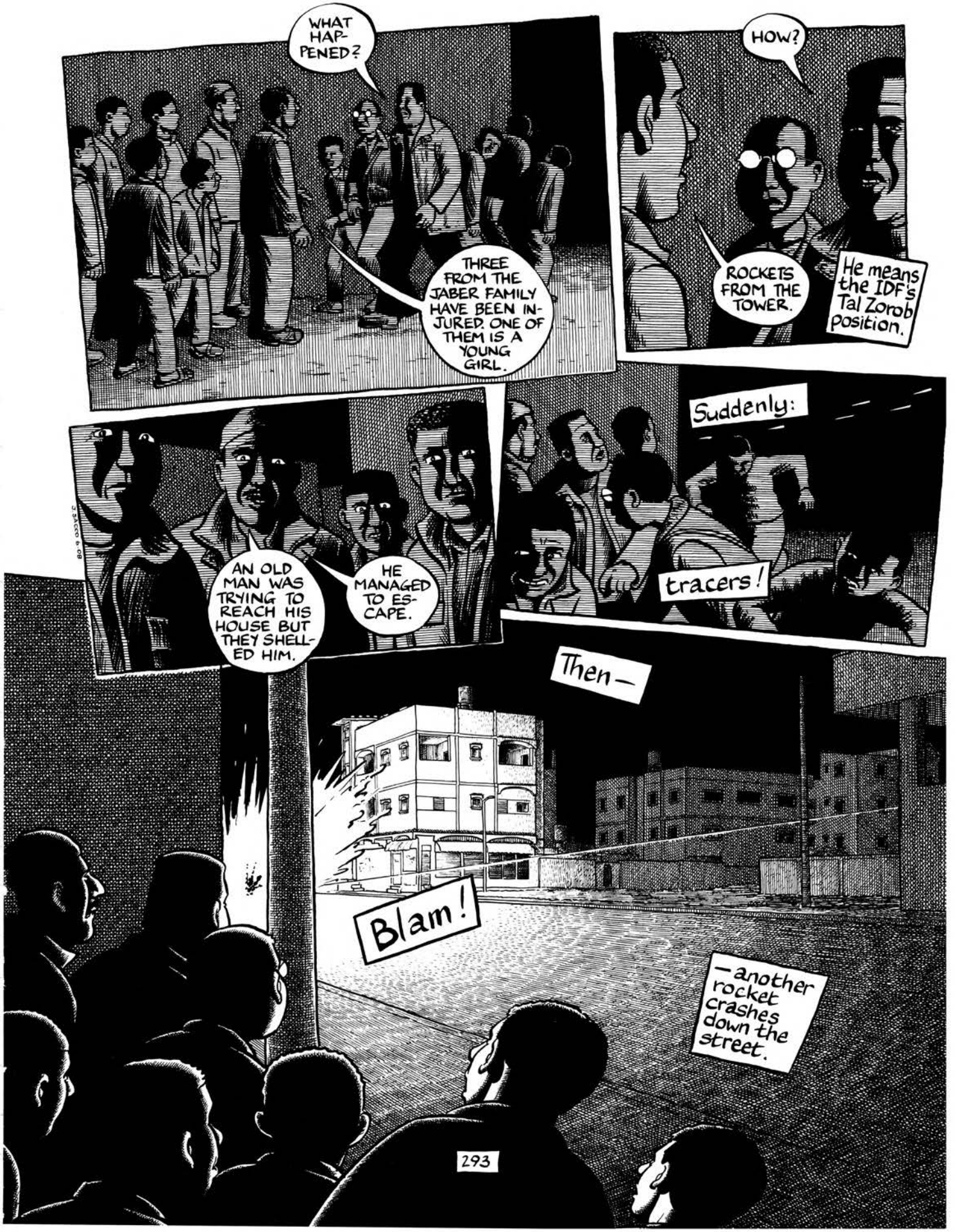




J. SACCO 6-08


Three days later a suicide bomber kills 17 Israelis, mostly students, in Haifa.
The word goes around quickly by cell phone.
LEGEND
AMERICAN LEGEND
Did you hear?
The next day an Israeli attack on Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip kills 11.
Eight are killed in one spot,
where firemen are trying to put out a blaze.
We watch the footage over and over on the Arab stations.
Israeli shells explode amongst the firemen and onlookers.
All of them are non-combatants.
291


SHAPES IN
PT.1
THE DARK
We've heard ambulances racing by and one rocket after another hitting Block J.
Abed and I turn off Sea Street to investigate and ask a boy what he knows.
THREE WOMEN WERE WOUNDED DOWN THERE.
BUT DON'T WALK ON THAT SIDE OF THE STREET.
OKAY, GUIDE US.
The boy leads us, and now we can make out dark shapes taking cover behind a corner.
DON'T STOP THERE. RUN ACROSS. THERE'S A TANK UP THE ROAD.
We do as we're told.
The camp ends straight up the street, and beyond that is a deep dark.
If there is a tank there, we cannot see it.
J. SACCO 6-08


WHAT HAP-PENED?
THREE FROM THE JABER FAMILY HAVE BEEN IN-JURED. ONE OF THEM IS A YOUNG GIRL.
HOW?
ROCKETS FROM THE TOWER.
He means the IDF's Tal Zorob position.
Suddenly:
tracers!
AN OLD MAN WAS TRYING TO REACH HIS HOUSE BUT THEY SHELL-ED HIM.
HE MANAGED TO ES-CAPE.
Then—
Blam!
—another rocket crashes down the street.
293


One of the guys we're with lives above the general store, which is a few meters from the last detonation.
I start asking:
Who's in there?
How many?
The whole family?
MY FATHER, MOTHER, BROTHERS, SISTERS.
WILL YOU CARRY ME THERE?
The next day Abed and I drive to the European Gaza Hospital, which sits off the road to Khan Younis, to visit one of the wounded women.
We've heard her leg was blown off.
The security guard doesn't think it's a good idea to visit her just yet. He's just handed the leg to the family.
SHE'S IN A BAD WAY.
SHE LOSES HER MIND AT TIMES.
SHE'S NOT USED TO THE IDEA THAT HER LEG IS GONE.
And she's unmarried, he tells us.
Do we understand that?
Do we understand what that does to her prospects?
294
J. SACCO 6.08


The other wounded females are laid up at El-Najjar Hospital in Rafah.
Fathia, the older sister, agrees to speak to us.
Her niece, seven-year-old Rola, is knocked out by drugs in the next bed.
Her dressing is soaked in blood.
The doctors won't operate on her badly injured leg until it stops bleeding.
That night, Fathia tells us, they had gone to shop at the market.
BEFORE WE LEFT HOME THERE HAD BEEN SOME...SHOOTING.
BUT IT HAD CALMED DOWN.
As they were returning, a short distance from their house, they found themselves under fire.
"I felt something enter my flesh...
"We stopped and ran back to the nearest door.
"I was in front, and now they started shelling.
"Uncountable shells!
HELP ME, AUNTIE!
HELP ME!
J. SACCO '08
295

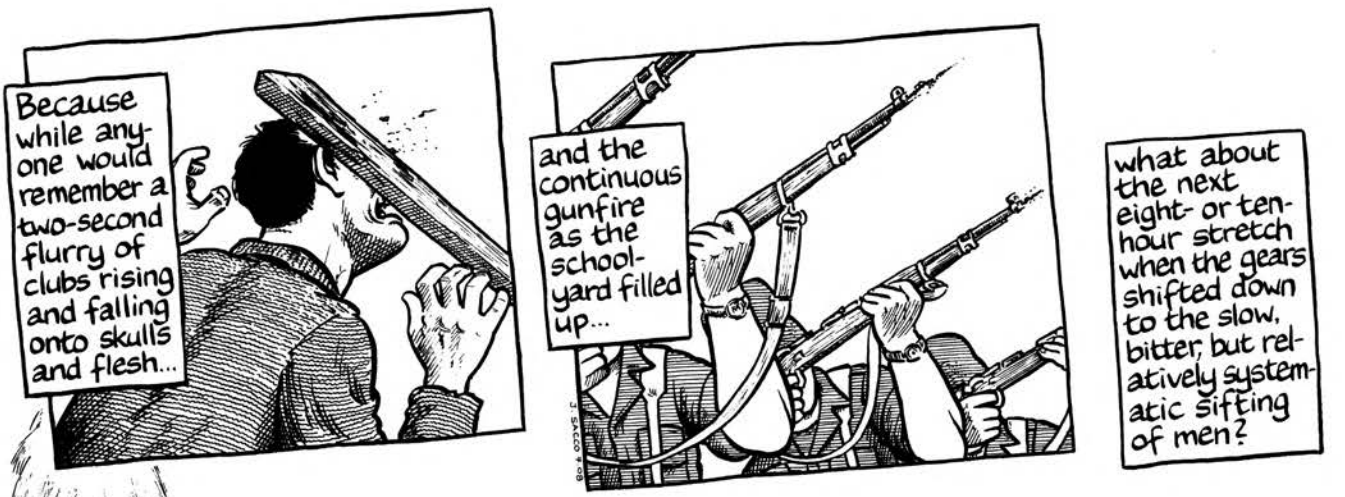

"I looked back
"and I saw her covered in blood.
"I saw my sister on the ground.
I'VE LOST MY LEG!
"She was five or six meters away but I couldn't reach her.
"The shelling was heavy.
"Everyone who showed his head to help my sister was shelled."
Finally, she says, a brave neighbor pulled her sister into his building, and medics evacuated them over a wall to avoid the rockets, which were still crashing in the street.
I have to ask: Why are you living along the border in such a dangerous area?
She says their home in Block J was demolished two months ago.
They then rented in the Tal El-Sultan neighborhood, but the Israelis damaged their new apartment and destroyed their car while demolishing the home of a neighbor.
With so many people made homeless by the demolitions, there was no other place to rent but back in Block J.
NOW WE'VE ALREADY PAID RENT FOR THE MONTH.
WHERE ELSE ARE WE GOING TO GO?
J. SACCO 7.08

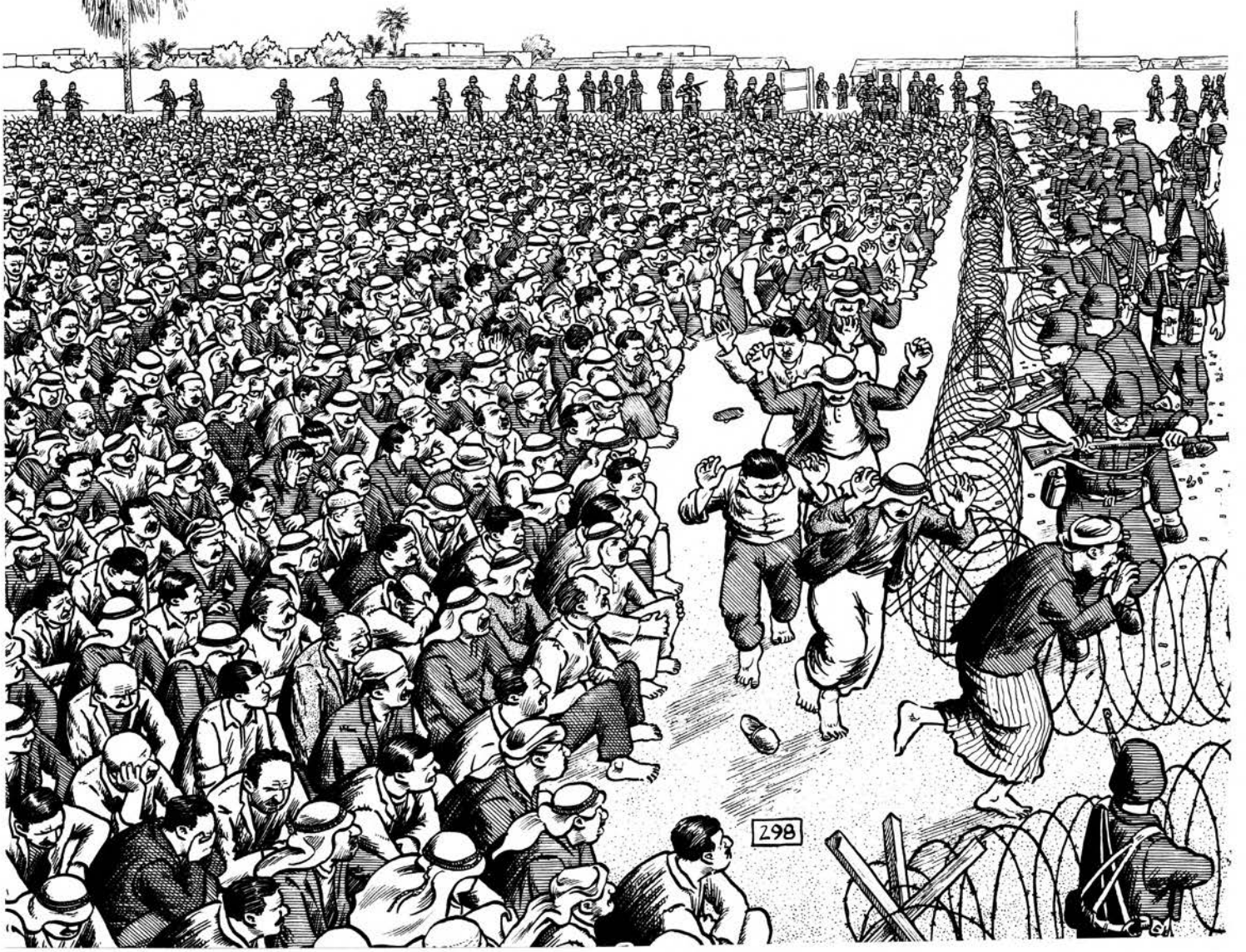
NOT EVERY DAY



This is the part of the story that wobbles and strains.

THE SCREENING






Some 50 years on, most of those we interviewed had difficulty re-assembling the drawn out events in the schoolyard.
Furthermore, few men saw or experienced precisely the same thing.
J. SACCO '98
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THE OFFICER OR OFFICERS

But many interviewees agreed on certain component elements of the next few hours, starting with the arrival of the officers.

AFTER 12 O'CLOCK, MAYBE, WHILE ALL THE PEOPLE HAD THEIR HEADS ON THE GROUND...

MAHMOUD SALMAN QISHTAH

...A JEEP ENTERED.

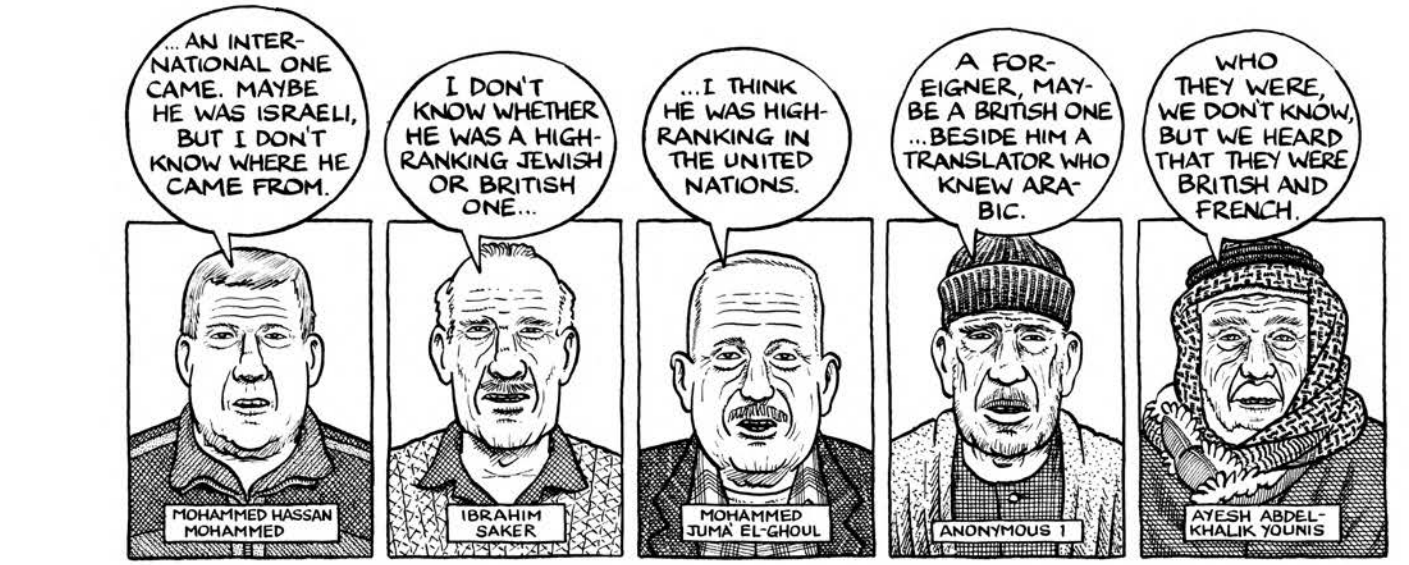
ZAKI HASSAN EDWAN

A JEEP CAME WITH TWO SOLDIERS INSIDE, ONE OF THEM SHORT, ONE OF THEM TALL.

AWAD MOHAMMED AHMED

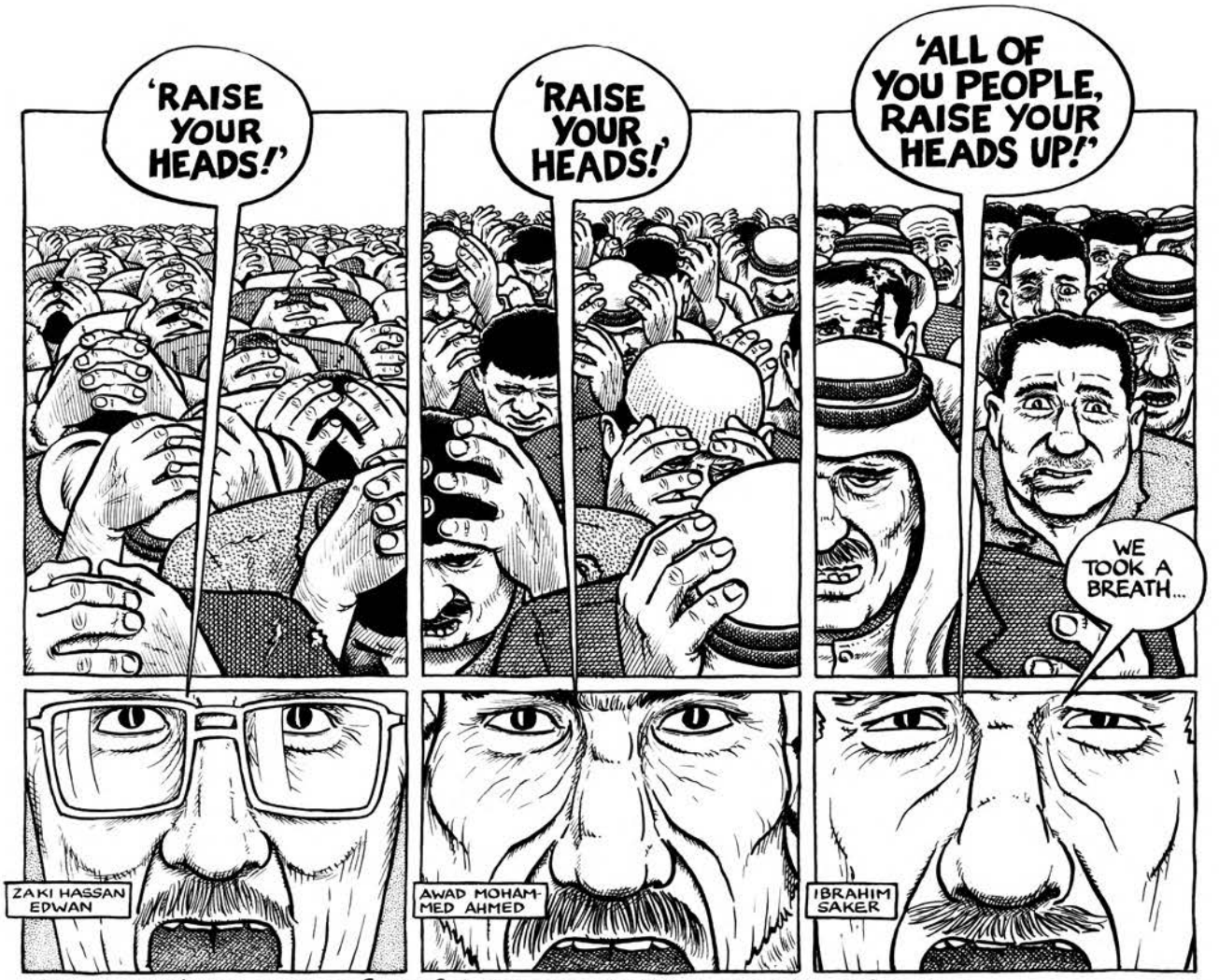
MOHAMMED ZIDAN: "In the afternoon two cars entered. It seemed that inside the two cars were officials of high rank."

J. SACCO 9-08


...AN INTERNATIONAL ONE CAME. MAYBE HE WAS ISRAELI, BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE CAME FROM.
MOHAMMED HASSAN MOHAMMED
I DON'T KNOW WHETHER HE WAS A HIGH-RANKING JEWISH OR BRITISH ONE...
IBRAHIM SAKER
...I THINK HE WAS HIGH-RANKING IN THE UNITED NATIONS.
MOHAMMED JUMA' EL-GHOUL
A FOREIGNER, MAYBE A BRITISH ONE ...BESIDE HIM A TRANSLATOR WHO KNEW ARABIC.
ANONYMOUS 1
WHO THEY WERE, WE DON'T KNOW, BUT WE HEARD THAT THEY WERE BRITISH AND FRENCH.
AYESH ABDEL-KHALIK YOUNIS


With the presence of this officer or these officers, most agree that the situation eased.
MOHAMMED ZIDAN: "Because immediately, by a sign of his hand... the firing stopped.
J. SACCO '08

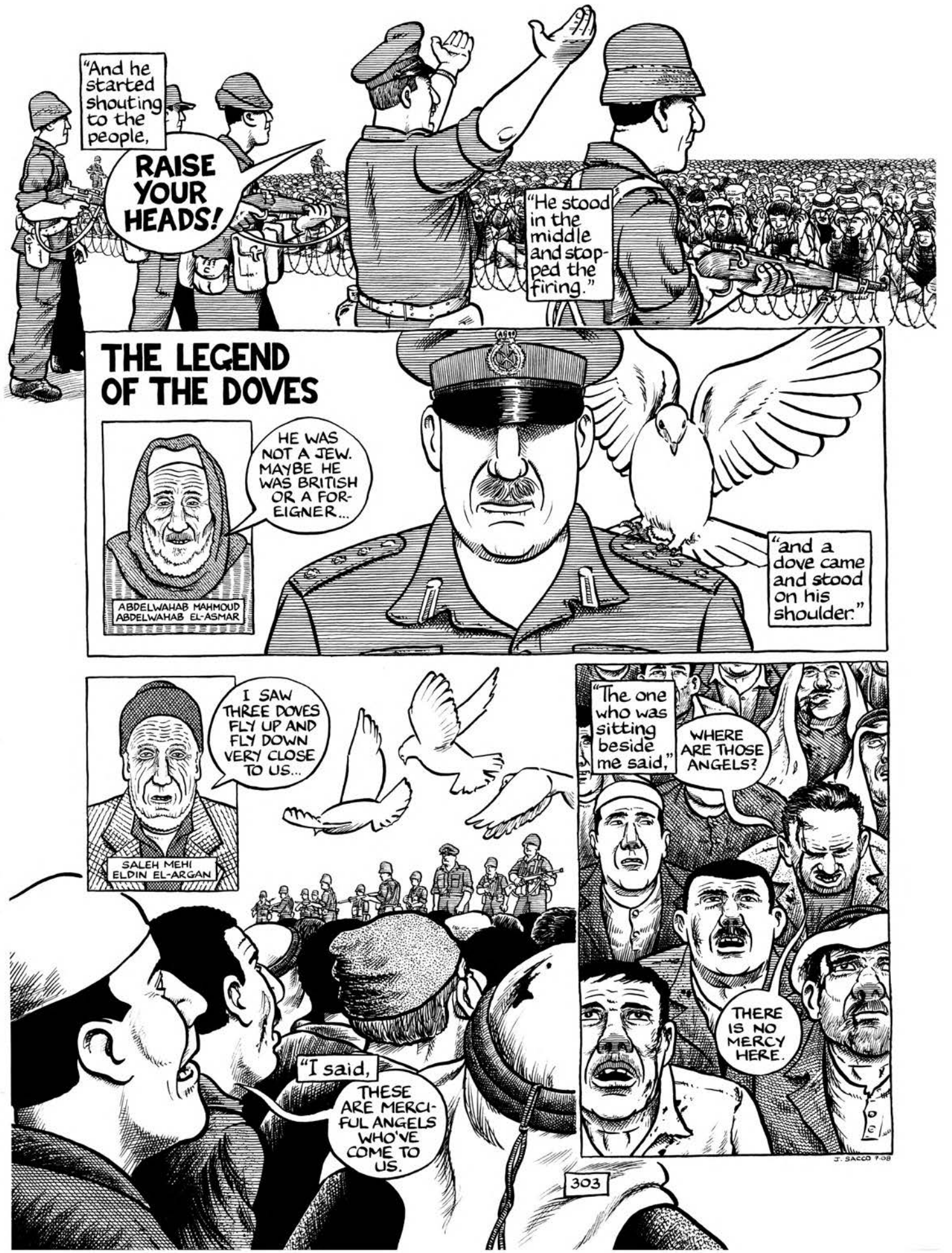

"He talked directly to the people and asked them to raise their heads."
301



Some attribute a more forceful persona to this mysterious figure.






"And he started shouting to the people,
RAISE YOUR HEADS!
"He stood in the middle and stopped the firing."
THE LEGEND OF THE DOVES
HE WAS NOT A JEW. MAYBE HE WAS BRITISH OR A FOREIGNER...
ABDELWAHAB MAHMOUD ABDELWAHAB EL-ASMAR
"and a dove came and stood on his shoulder."
I SAW THREE DOVES FLY UP AND FLY DOWN VERY CLOSE TO US...
SALEH MEHI ELDIN EL-ARGAN
"The one who was sitting beside me said,"
WHERE ARE THOSE ANGELS?
THERE IS NO MERCY HERE.
"I said,
THESE ARE MERCIFUL ANGELS WHO'VE COME TO US.
J. SACCO 7-08
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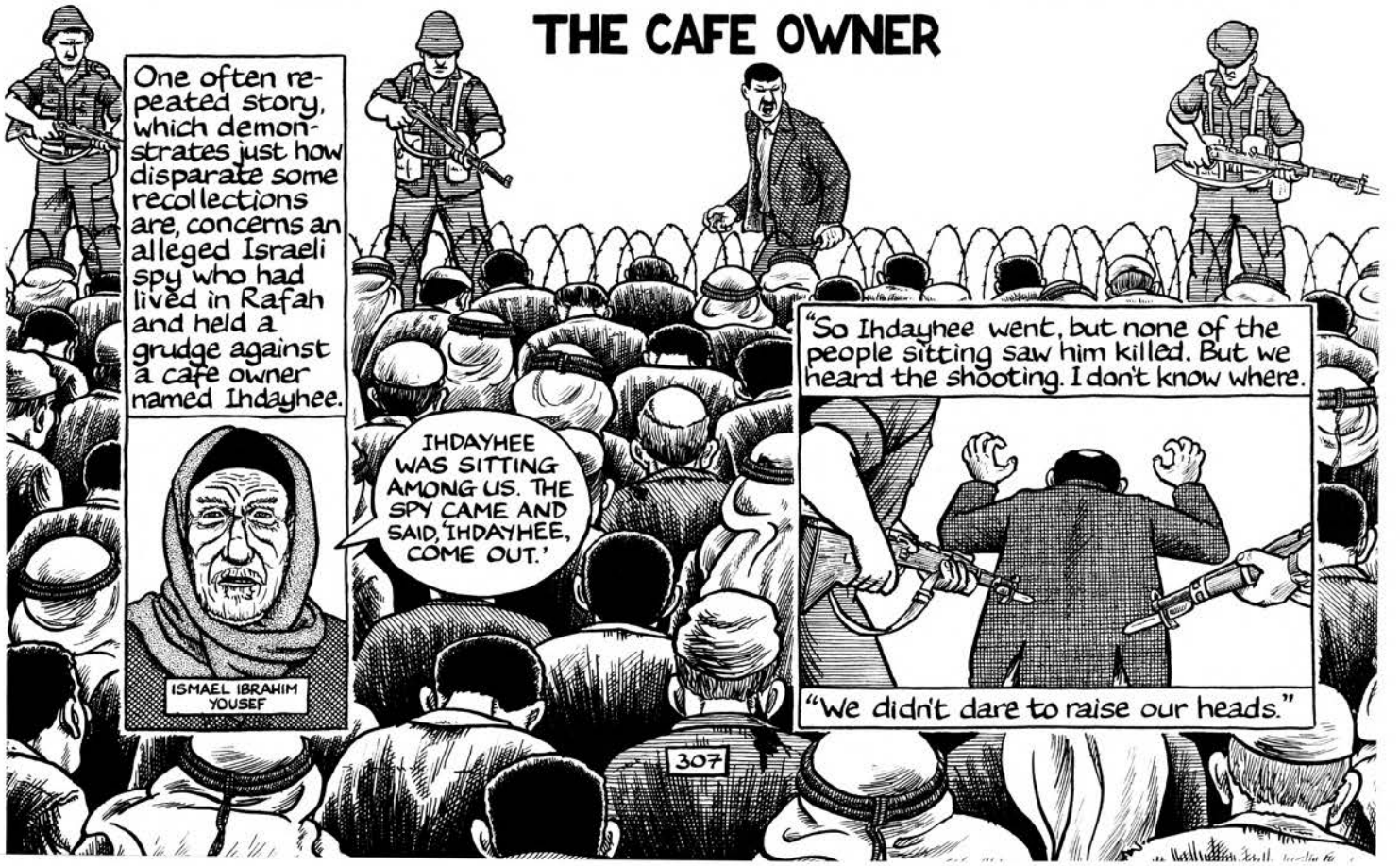
THE CALL FOR SURRENDER
The Israelis now began to pick out suspected Palestinian combatants.
AHMED HASSAN EDWAN
AS I REMEMBER, THEY SELECTED THE PEOPLE BY A LIST OF NAMES THEY HAD...
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA
THEY CALLED ON SOME PEOPLE BY THEIR NAMES... HOW THEY KNEW THEIR NAMES WE DON'T KNOW.
THEY TOOK THEM TO THE ROOMS OF THE SCHOOL.
MOHAMMED ZIDAN: "Each time someone entered the room we started to hear shooting inside, just to give us the idea that whoever entered the room would be killed, just to terrify us."
J. SACCO '09
THEY TOOK DIFFERENT GROUPS TO DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BUILDING.
THEY INTERROGATED THESE GROUPS IN A SERIOUS WAY AND GOT OTHER NAMES, WHICH THEY THEN CALLED.
ABDULLAH HASSAN KHADER EL-MOGHAIYER
The Israelis also asked Palestinian soldiers to surrender voluntarily.
THEY CALLED FOR THE SOLDIERS TO COME FORWARD THROUGH THE LOUDSPEAKER.
EL-SAYED ABDEL HAMID ABU TAHA
AYESH ABDEL-KHALIK YOUNIS
'HE WHO IS A SOLDIER, COME HERE AND WE WILL NOT HARM YOU.'
304


'DON'T BE AFRAID.
'AND IF YOU DON'T SHOW YOURSELF, YOU'LL BE KILLED.
'WE HAVE ALL THE LISTS FOR GAZA.'
"I showed myself.
MOHAMMED ISMAEL EL-SBAKHI
"Step by step, step by step.
"Two, then three, then four.
"They encouraged each other...
"Some soldiers... pointed to others."
J. SACCO 1998
ONE OR TWO OF THE SOLDIERS STOOD UP AND THEY POINTED OUT THEIR FRIENDS.
THEY FORCED SOME WEAK PERSONALITIES— I DON'T LIKE TO SAY COLLABORATORS— THEY FORCED THEM TO SELECT THOSE GUYS, THE SOLDIERS.
AHMED HASSAN EDWAN
THE ISRAELIS FORCED THEM...
ABDEL HADI MOHAMMED LAFI
305


THEY SELECTED TWO COLLABORATORS... WHO THEY KNEW WERE SOLDIERS AND ASKED THEM TO POINT TO THEIR COLLEAGUES.
ABDUL-MALIK MOHAMMED KULLAB
SO EVERY SOLDIER WHO KNEW HE WOULD BE SELECTED TRIED TO HIDE HIS FACE.
ANONYMOUS 1
... AND THE ONES WHO [TRIED] TO HIDE THEMSELVES THEY TOOK.
AT THE END, WHEN SOME SOLDIERS REFUSED TO SHOW THEMSELVES, THE ISRAELIS DECIDED TO COME AND SELECT PEOPLE.
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA
YOU, STAND UP!
YOU, STAND UP!
YOU, STAND UP!
"They selected people who were not soldiers."
'HEY, YOU, COME HERE!'
MOHAMMED JUMA' EL-GHOUL
THEY WOULD TAKE HIM AND... SHOOT HIM.
"This happened. We know. Everybody was trying to hide his face. So they wouldn't shoot him."
J. SACCO 8-08



THE CAFE OWNER




SUDDENLY I HEARD A VOICE CALLING ZAKI IHDAYHEE. ZAKI IHDAYHEE APPEARED AND HE NEVER RETURNED.
AYESH ABDEL-KHALIK YOUNIS
THIS SPY CALLED HIM, SELECTED HIM, AND SHOT HIM... THEY TOOK HIM AND SHOT HIM BEHIND THE BUILDING.
AHMED HASSAN EDWAN
THEY CALLED HIS NAME FROM THE LOUDSPEAKER INSIDE THE SCHOOL. THEY TOOK HIM BEHIND THE BUILDING, AND WE HEARD SHOOTING.
MOHAMMED ISMAEL EL-SBAKHI
MOHAMMED ZIDAN: "Through the loudspeaker they called for Ihdayhee and his sons. Of course, he wasn't there...
"The next day we heard that Ihdayhee had been killed inside his house or in the streets."
MOHAMMED HASHIM IBRAHIM ABU TALIB
[IHDAYHEE WAS] KILLED IN THE STREET... I SAW THE BLOOD RUNNING FROM HIS BODY.
THE LINES
Not satisfied they had discovered all the soldiers in the schoolyard, the Israelis next attempted to enlist the aid of local notables.
THEY ASKED EACH MUKHTAR TO COME AND SELECT THE SOLDIERS FROM HIS VILLAGE.
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA
"They lined the mukhtars in one area.

"Most of the mukhtars didn't go up. And some... went just to save the lives of the people.

"Maybe the mukhtars said,

ANYONE WHO IS A SOLDIER, COME HERE.

"They didn't insist, and they didn't mention anyone by name."

[THE ISRAELIS] ASKED THE PEOPLE TO STAND IN ONE LINE AND WALK IN FRONT OF THE MUKHTARS.



ANONYMOUS 1

"The mukhtars looked at us and never selected anyone...

"When I finished my turn and was going back, the soldier who guarded the selected area told me,

YOU! COME HERE!

"All the mukhtars ... shouted,

THIS IS THE PHOTOGRAPHER WHO MAKES THE IDENTITY CARDS FOR THE PEOPLE!

"So I went back to my place."

Awadallah Ahmed Awadallah, one of the mukhtars who had come forward, drives home the point. "We didn't identify anyone," he tells us.

"You have to understand this."

J. SACCO 8-08


Many men also recall being made to walk past a collaborator sitting in a jeep.
ABDUL-MALIK MOHAMMED KULLAB
THE COLLABORATOR WAS COVERED BY A BLANKET...
"Each group of four came in front of the jeep...
"The one inside the jeep, when he gave a sign with the horn—
"Beep
"—it was a sign to get that person,
"and they took that person and killed him behind this building."
THERE WERE COLLABORATORS WITH THE JEWS, AND THEY COVERED THEIR FACES INSIDE THE CARS.
EL-SAYED ABDEL HAMID ABU TAHA
IN JEEPS. JEWISH JEEPS.
"They asked one line to stand up and move in front of the jeep... and they selected [people].
"They made a sign—
"'That one'
"—and they took the soldiers."
310

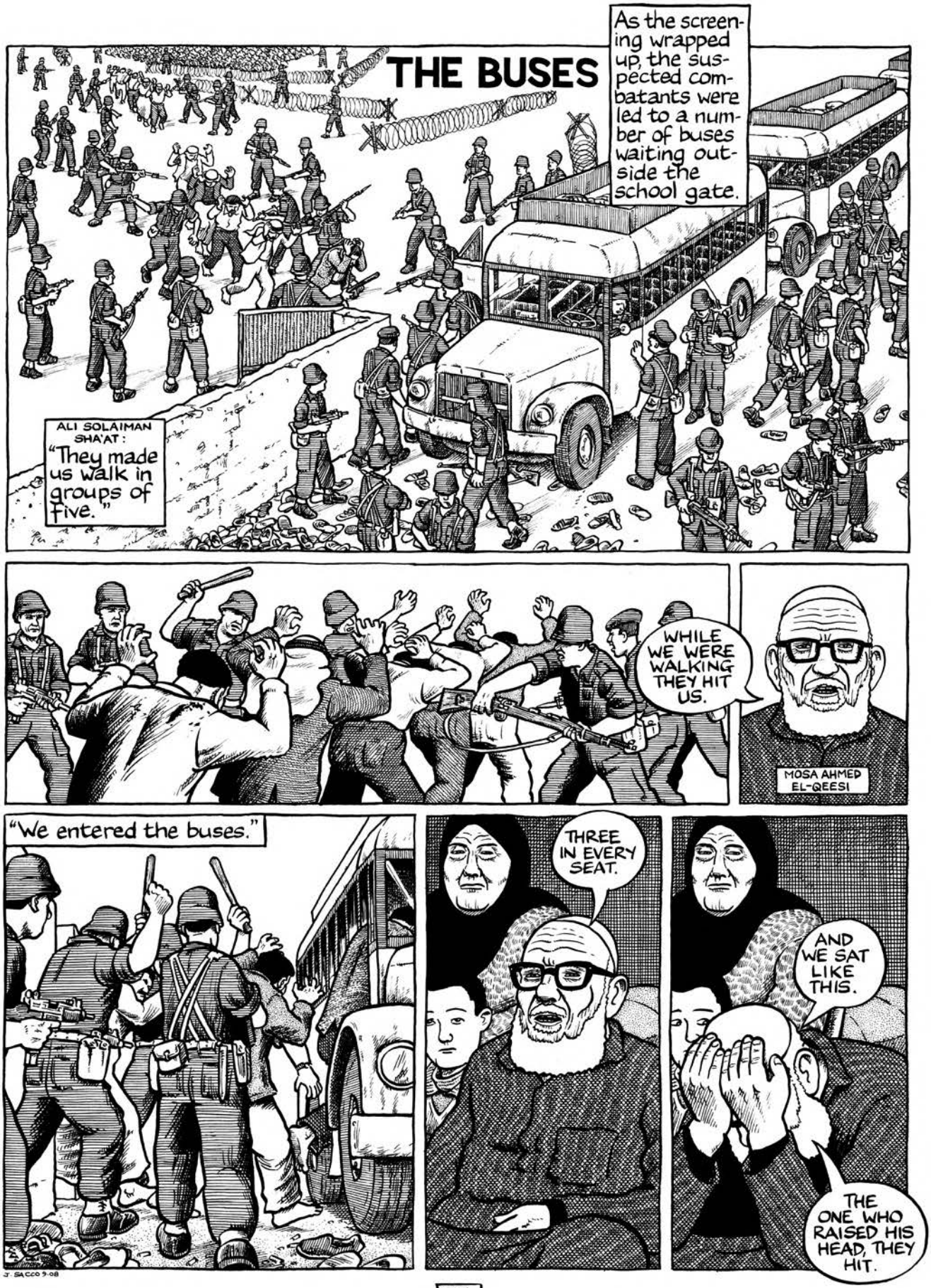

WE HAD TO STAND IN FRONT OF THE JEEP FOR AWHILE... AND THEN KEEP WALKING.
ABDULLAH HASSAN KHADER EL-MOGHAIYER
The men were led to a group of tables where they were questioned individually.
MANY SOLDIERS WERE LINING THE PEOPLE.
AYESH ABDEL-KHALIK YOUNIS
THE QUESTIONING PROCESS WAS VERY SLOW.
AND THEY TOOK WHO THEY WANTED.
"They stopped me and asked,
WHAT'S YOUR WORK?
TEACHER.
"So they left me..."
WHEN MY TURN CAME THEY ASKED,
WHERE DO YOU LIVE? WHAT'S THE NATURE OF YOUR WORK?
ANONYMOUS 2
I'M A POLICEMAN.
"Questions of this kind. I passed through without any problem."
JUST ONE QUESTION AND ONE ANSWER,
AWAD MOHAMMED AHMED
"and then go."
J. SACCO 8-08


IT WAS ONLY TEN DAYS SINCE I'D LEFT THE ARMY... I HAD A CIVILIAN [IDENTITY] CARD
ABDULLAH HASSAN KHADER EL-MOGHAIYER
"There was a colleague of mine whose personality was very very weak, and when they took him in the morning he gave all the information and all the names, and he stood... with them at the tables.
"When I came and showed them my identity card, they let me go.
"After five minutes...a soldier caught me by the collar..."
YOUR COLLEAGUE TOLD ME YOU'RE A SOLDIER.
I'M NOT A SOLDIER!
YOUR FRIEND TOLD ME: YOU'RE A DRIVER FOR A MAJOR!

THE SPEED UP


At some point the Israelis must have realized they might not finish screening all the men before sundown.
WHEN IT WAS ABOUT 4 O'CLOCK THEY STARTED TO MAKE THE PEOPLE STAND UP 30 AT A TIME.
ISMAEL ABDULLAH FARAHAT
312


MOHAMMED ZIDAN: "The people were many and the investigation rooms were few. It was near sunset and they started to hurry up the process...
"There was no time. They would take ten people at a time, but there was no time."
THEY DIDN'T CARE WHETHER WE WERE SOLDIERS OR NOT.
MOSA ABDULLAH EL-HAJJ MOHAMMED
THEY SELECTED THE HANDSOME GUYS, THE WELL-BUILT GUYS.
"We reached the desks and they selected us with their eyes."
THEY DIDN'T ASK YOU ANY QUESTIONS?
NO, THEY DIDN'T.
THEY JUST SAW US AND SELECTED US.
YOU GO THERE! YOU GO THERE!
SIT THERE!
MOHAMMED ZIDAN: "My turn hadn't come up...
"I was just sitting, watching."

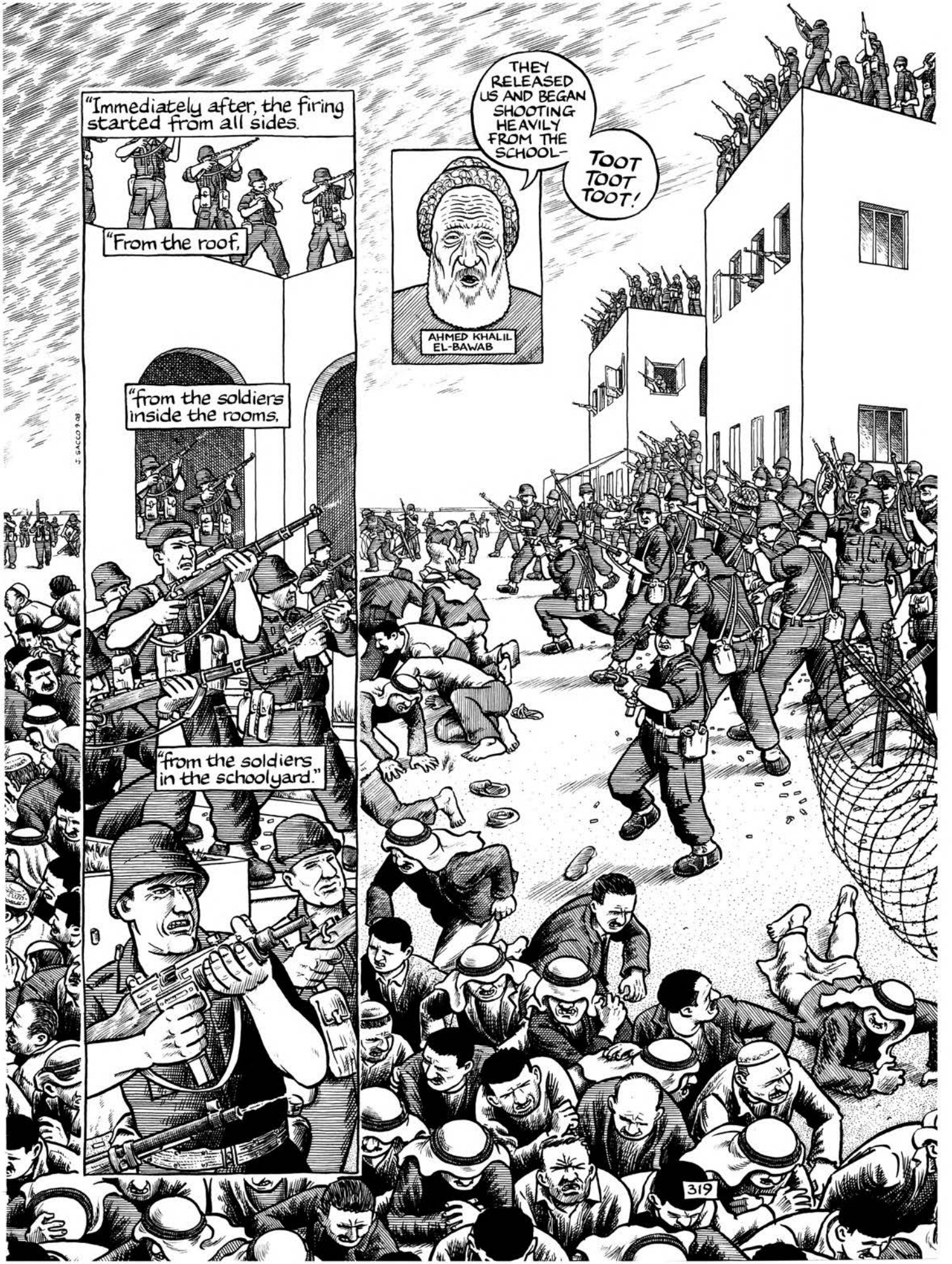

THE BUSES
As the screening wrapped up, the suspected combatants were led to a number of buses waiting outside the school gate.
ALI SOLAIMAN SHA'AT: "They made us walk in groups of five."
WHILE WE WERE WALKING THEY HIT US.
MOSA AHMED EL-QEESI
"We entered the buses."
THREE IN EVERY SEAT.
AND WE SAT LIKE THIS.
THE ONE WHO RAISED HIS HEAD, THEY HIT.
J. SACCO 9-08


GHANIM MAHMOUD SHA'AT:
"They made us sit on top of each other between the seats...
"The soldiers climbed over the people to beat them."
MOSA ABDULLAH EL-HAJJ MOHAMMED
ONE OF THE SOLDIERS —THROUGH THE WINDOW— HIT ME ON MY LEFT SIDE...
THERE WAS ONE WHO REFUSED TO ENTER THE BUS. THE SOLDIER ASKED HIM TO WALK, AND HE DIDN'T WANT TO WALK.
ABDULLAH HASSAN KHADER EL-MOGHAIYER
"When I entered the bus, I heard a shot. I raised my head.
"I saw him dead, [being] pulled and hidden behind the cactus trees."
J. SACCO 9.08


The suspects taken from the government school and the other gathering points were briefly incarcerated in Gaza City and elsewhere and then transferred to Atlit prison in northern Israel.
There, with thousands of other prisoners of war, they awaited repatriation.
THE RELEASE
NOW IT'S ABOUT SUNSET...
AWAD MOHAMMED AHMED
WE HEARD THE WOMEN SHOUTING FROM OUTSIDE.
ALL THE WOMEN CAME TO THE SCHOOL AT THAT MOMENT.
[WE] HEARD THE WOMEN OUTSIDE SCREAMING AND SHOUTING.
ZAKI HASSAN EDWAN
OH, THEY'VE KILLED THE PEOPLE!
THEY'VE KILLED THE PEOPLE!
J. SACCO 9.08
THERE WAS ONLY ONE HOUSE BETWEEN US AND THE SCHOOL. WE'D HEARD EVERYTHING.
HOSSON SALAMA BADWAN
"I went outside.
"Many many women were waiting to learn the fate of their men."
316


ALL THE KIDS, ALL THE WOMEN WERE IN THIS AREA WAITING FOR THEIR MEN, AND THEY MADE MALTAMAH.*
RA'ESA SALIM HASSAN KALOOB
*MALTAMAH: A DEMONSTRATIVE FORM OF GRIEF
AND WE [BECAME] NOISY WHEN WE HEARD THE WOMEN SCREAMING.
ABDUL-MALIK MOHAMMED KULLAB
"We thought they were being attacked by the Israeli soldiers.
"So they started shooting over our heads."
THE GOOD THING IS THAT THEY DIDN'T ATTACK OUR HONOR.
MOHI ELDIN IBRAHIM LAFI
OUR WHAT?
HE MEANS THE WOMEN.
DEATH AND MONEY ARE NOTHING.
THE IMPORTANT THING IS OUR HONOR.
J. SACCO 9.08


THEN A JEEP CAME. INSIDE IT, FOUR SOLDIERS, FOUR TALL SOLDIERS.
AWAD MOHAMMED AHMED
NOW... GO TO YOUR HOUSES.
BUT QUIETLY.
DON'T TRY ANYTHING BECAUSE THE SOLDIERS MIGHT SHOOT YOU!
A HIGH OFFICER CAME AND STOOD IN FRONT OF US.
ISMAEL ABDULLAH FARAHAT
AT FIVE ALL OF YOU SHOULD GO TO YOUR HOUSES!
TWO HOURS OR AN HOUR AND A HALF AFTER SUNSET—
ANONYMOUS 4
GO HOME!
YOU CAN GO HOME!
T. GACO 9.08
MOHAMMED ZIDAN: "Through the loudspeaker they said,
NOW YOU WILL GO TO YOUR HOUSES.
WITHIN THREE OR FIVE MINUTES WE WANT [NO ONE] IN THE SCHOOL.
ANYONE WE FIND WE'LL SHOOT!
"With his hand [an officer] gave us a sign to go.
318


"Immediately after, the firing started from all sides.
"From the roof,
"from the soldiers inside the rooms,
"from the soldiers in the schoolyard."
THEY RELEASED US AND BEGAN SHOOTING HEAVILY FROM THE SCHOOL-
TOOT TOOT TOOT!
AHMED KHALIL EL-BAWAB
J. SACCO 9.08
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NO ONE WENT THROUGH THE GATE...
ANONYMOUS 4
"We were afraid to go to the main street. We were very afraid.
"Because we'd seen all the people who had been killed [there]..."
THE PEOPLE WERE AFRAID TO GO THROUGH THE GATE.
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA
"They thought ...that leaving the school would be the same as entering the school.
"I jumped the wall...opposite my shop,
J SACCO 9-08
"and I came back through the same [path] I had used to go to the school."


MOHAMMED ZIDAN: "At the western end [behind] the school there wasn't a wall, there was a wire [fence].
"The first people who reached the fence broke it down in seconds."
THERE WAS A WALL ON THE NORTH SIDE...
ABDEL HADI MOHAMMED LAFI
...ALL THE PEOPLE STARTED TO JUMP OVER THE WALL.
EL-SAYED ABDEL HAMID ABU TAHA
J. SACCO 9-08
"Some people fell down and were injured.
"It was a disaster."
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I [THOUGHT I] WOULD DIE.
ABDUL-MALIK MOHAMMED KULLAB
I DIDN'T HAVE ANY SPACE.
"I could just move my arms,
"and put my arms on someone else's shoulders,
"and jump.
"After I walked five meters,
"the whole wall collapsed..."


ALL OF US PUT OUR HANDS [ON IT] AND PUSHED THE WALL AND KNOCKED IT DOWN.
MOHI EL DIN IBRAHIM LAFI
THE WALL DISAP-PEARED.
SALEH MEHI ELDIN EL-ARGAN


WHEN WE CAME OUT WE FOUND THE WOMEN SCREAMING.
AHMED KHALIL EL-BAWAB
[MY HUSBAND] JUMPED OVER THE WALL...
HOSSON SALAMA BADWAN
J. SACCO 10-00
"He was jumping and running,
"looking to hide in the house."
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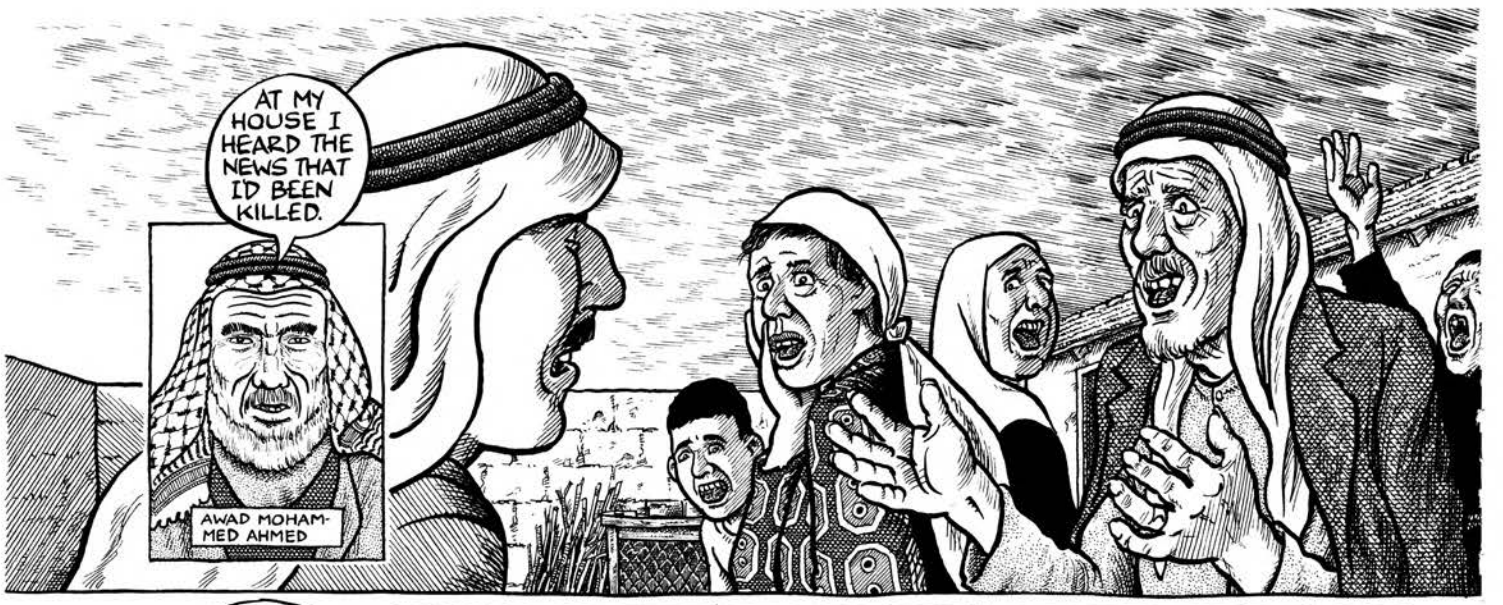
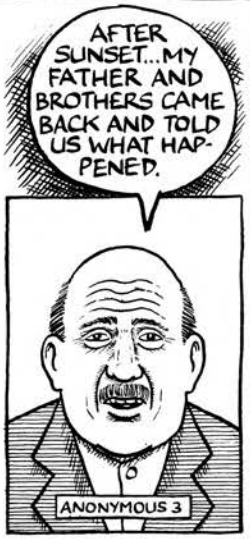
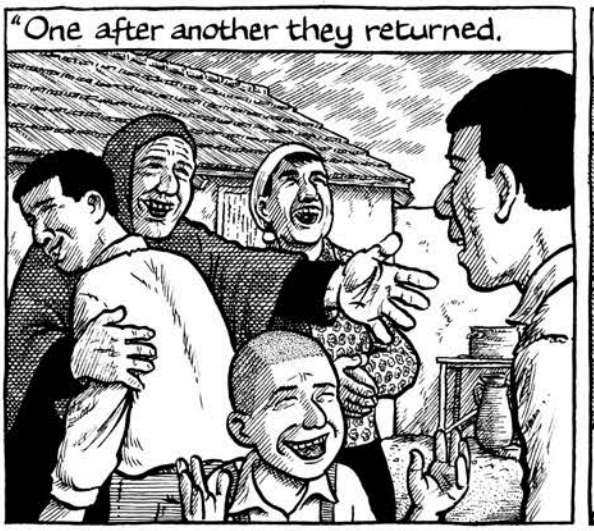
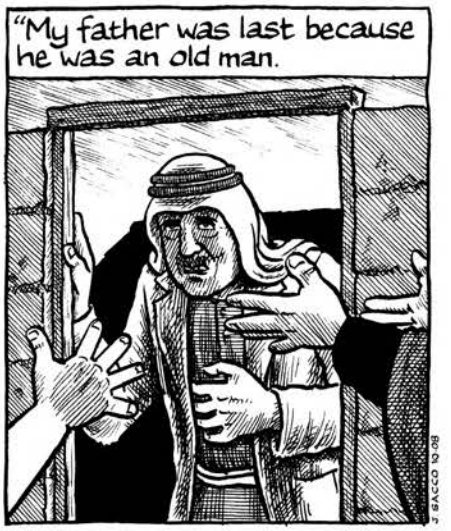
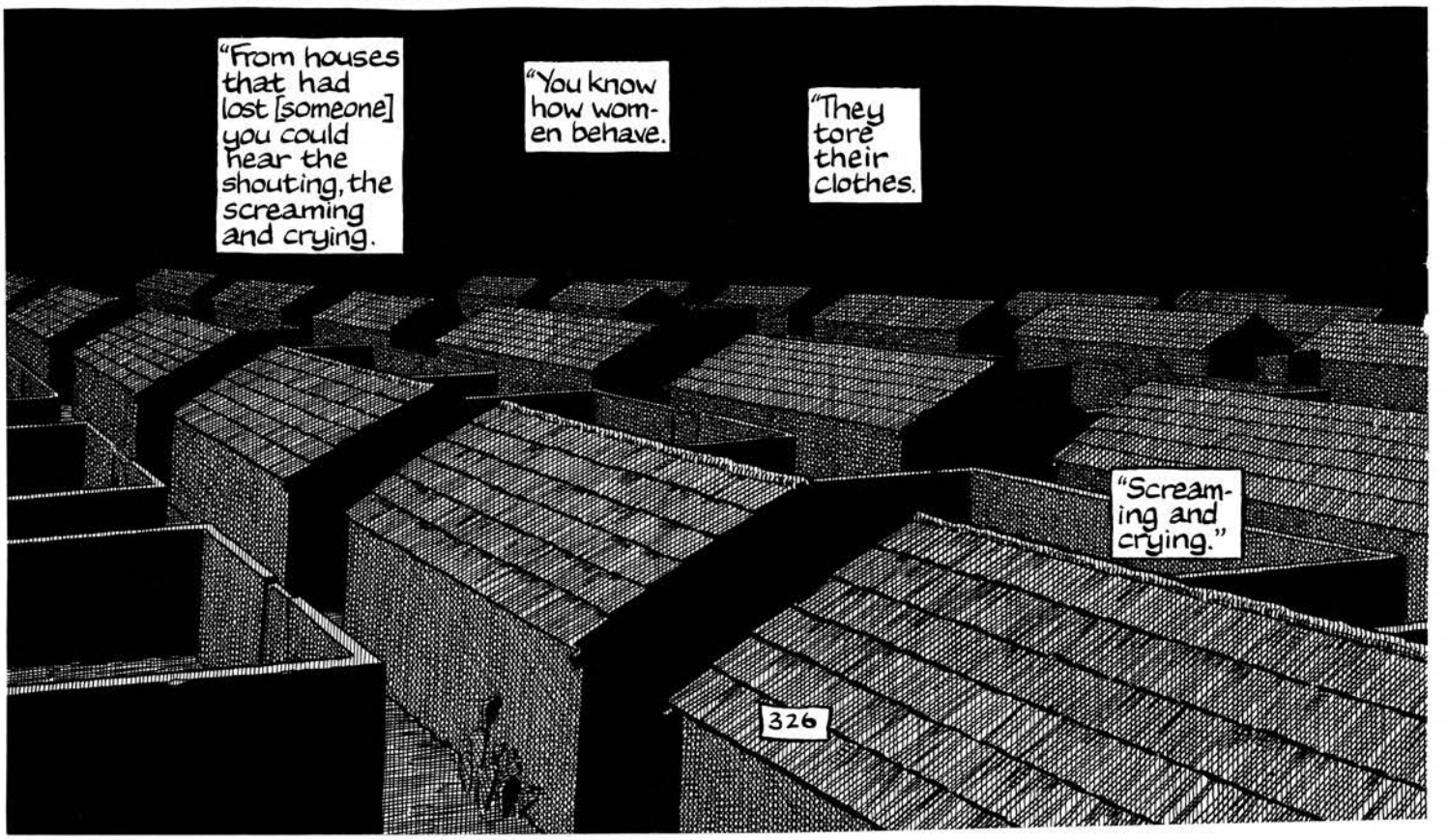
I DIDN'T GO BACK TO THE HOUSE BECAUSE MY BROTHER DIDN'T COME BACK.
RA'ESA SALIM HASSAN KALOOB
"I asked the men who had accompanied him when he went to the school, and they told me [the Israelis] took him...
"They took him to Atlit."
THERE WERE NO JEWS, NO SOLDIERS IN THE CAMP BECAUSE THEY WERE IN THE MAIN STREET...
AHMED HASSAN EDWAN
...AND ALL THE PEOPLE RAN TO THEIR HOUSES.
ANONYMOUS 1
325

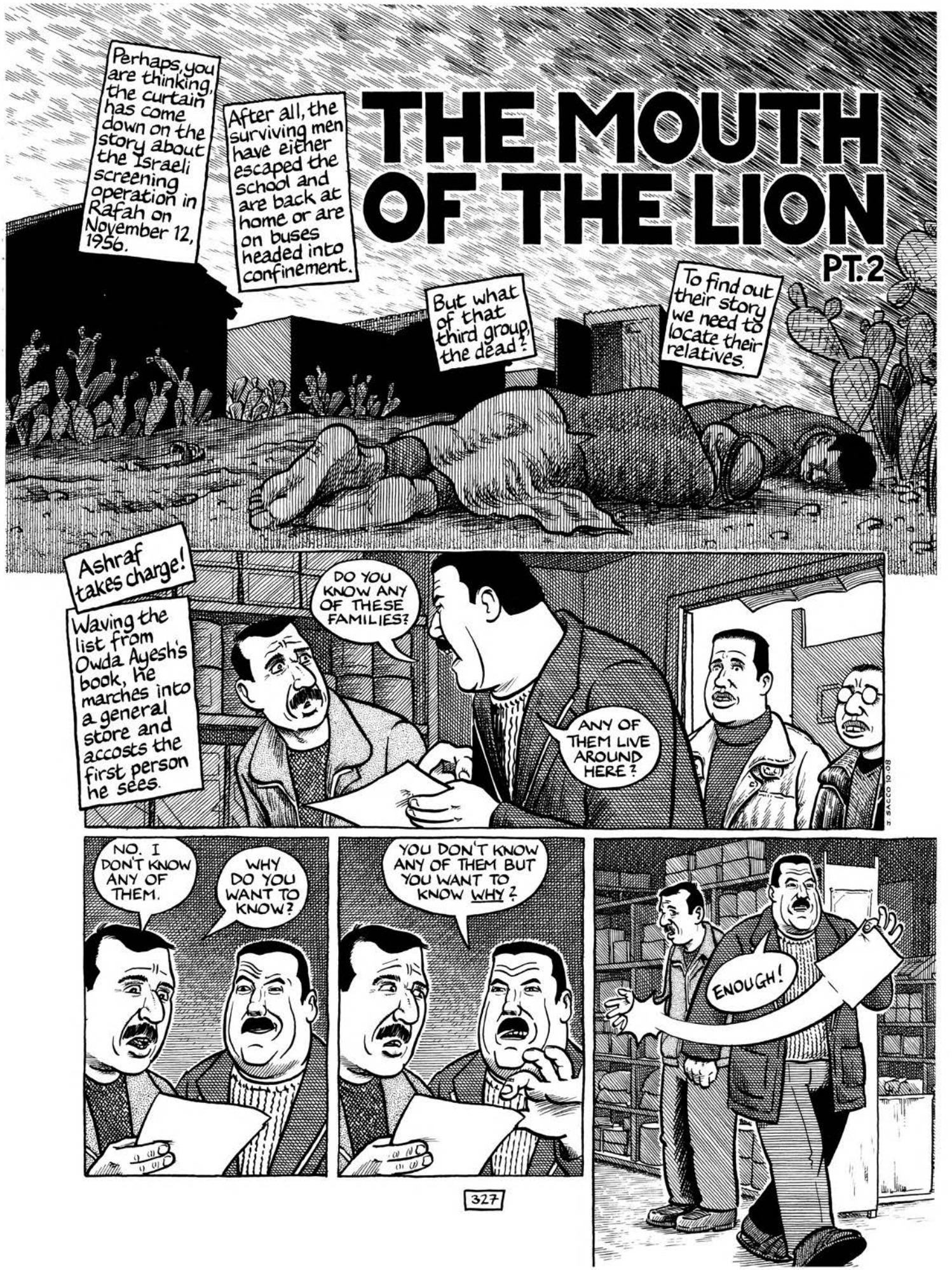

AT MY HOUSE I HEARD THE NEWS THAT I'D BEEN KILLED.
AWAD MOHAMMED AHMED


AFTER SUNSET... MY FATHER AND BROTHERS CAME BACK AND TOLD US WHAT HAPPENED.
ANONYMOUS 3

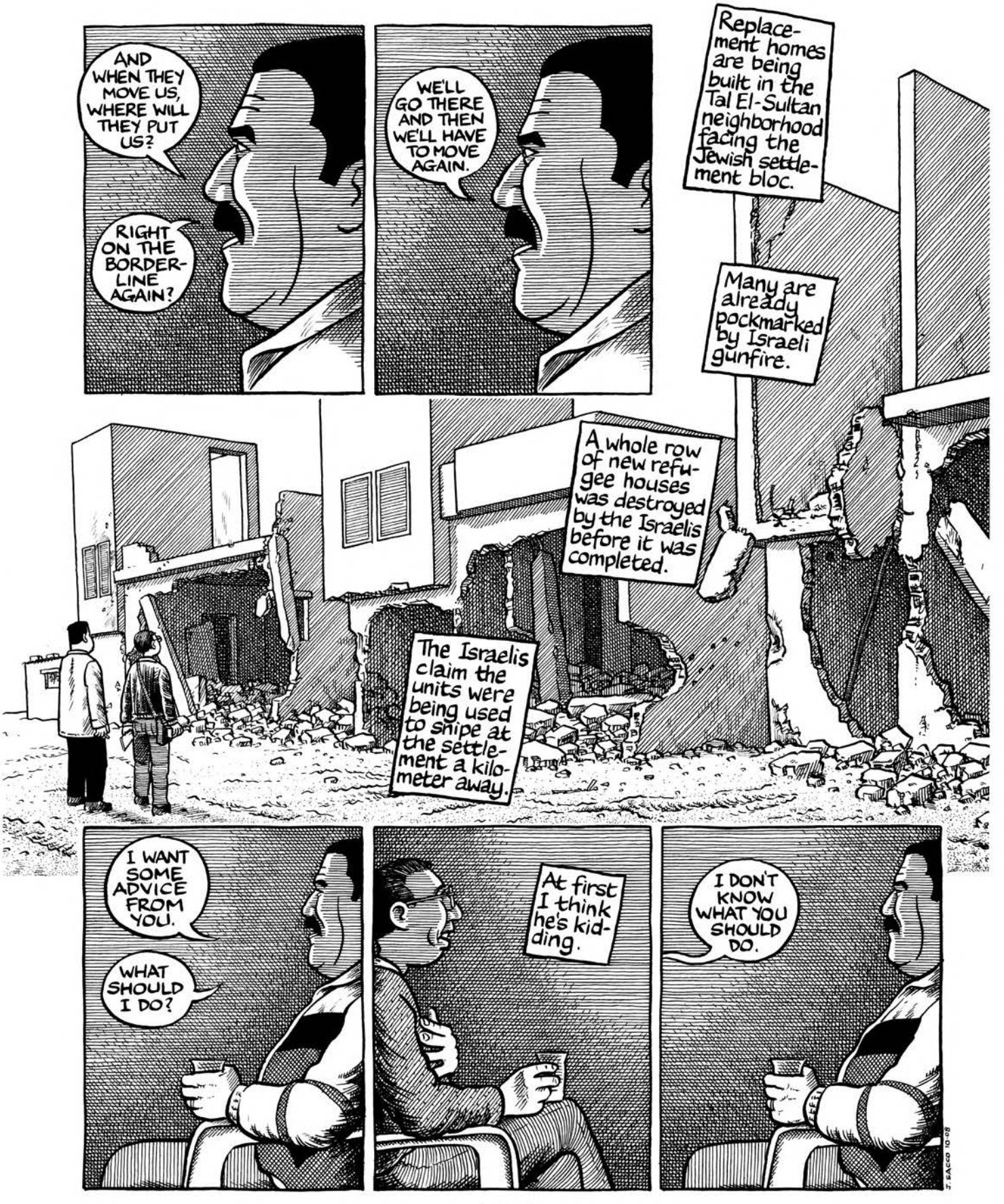

"One after another they returned.

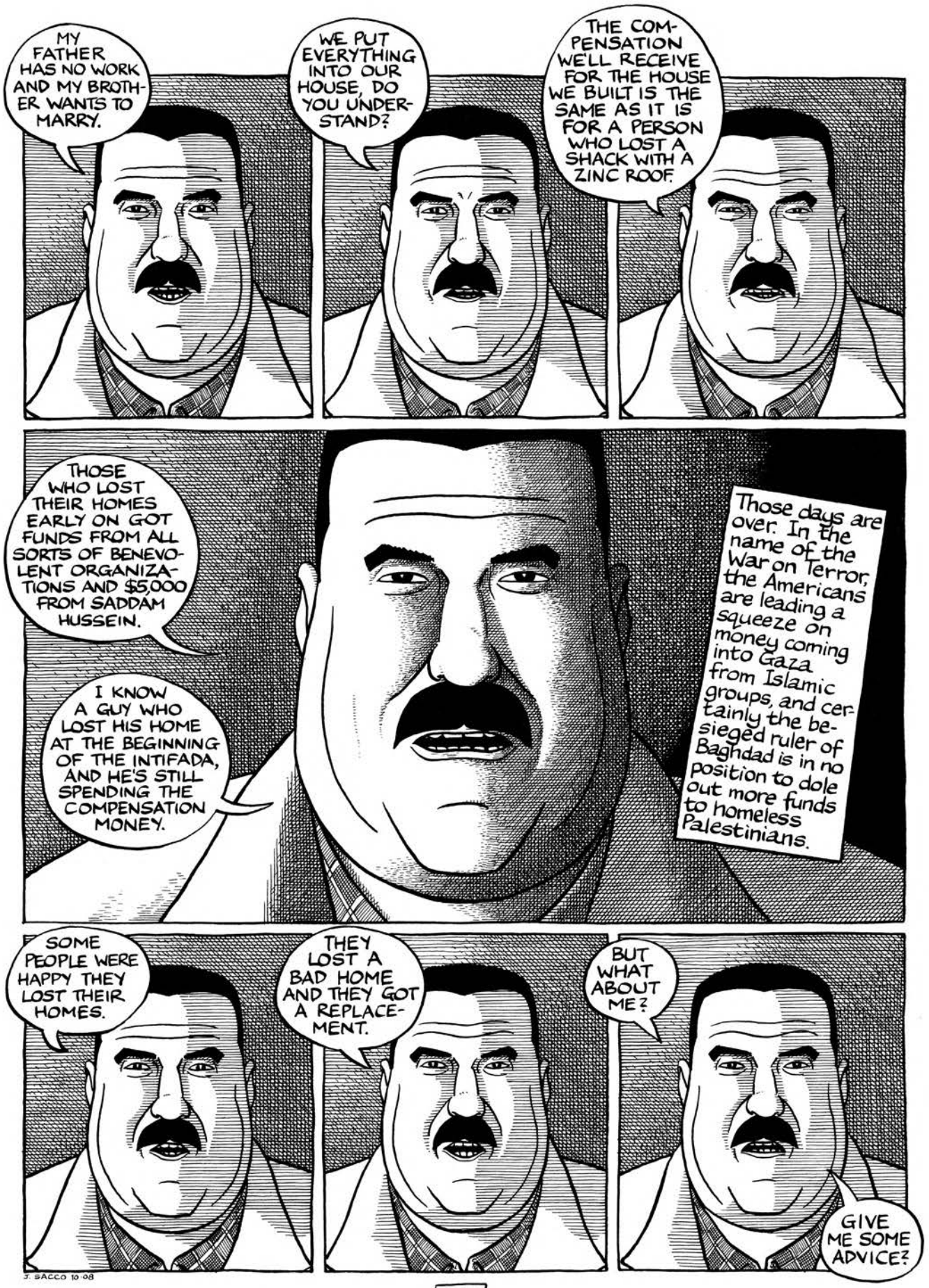

"My father was last because he was an old man.
J. SACCO 10-08

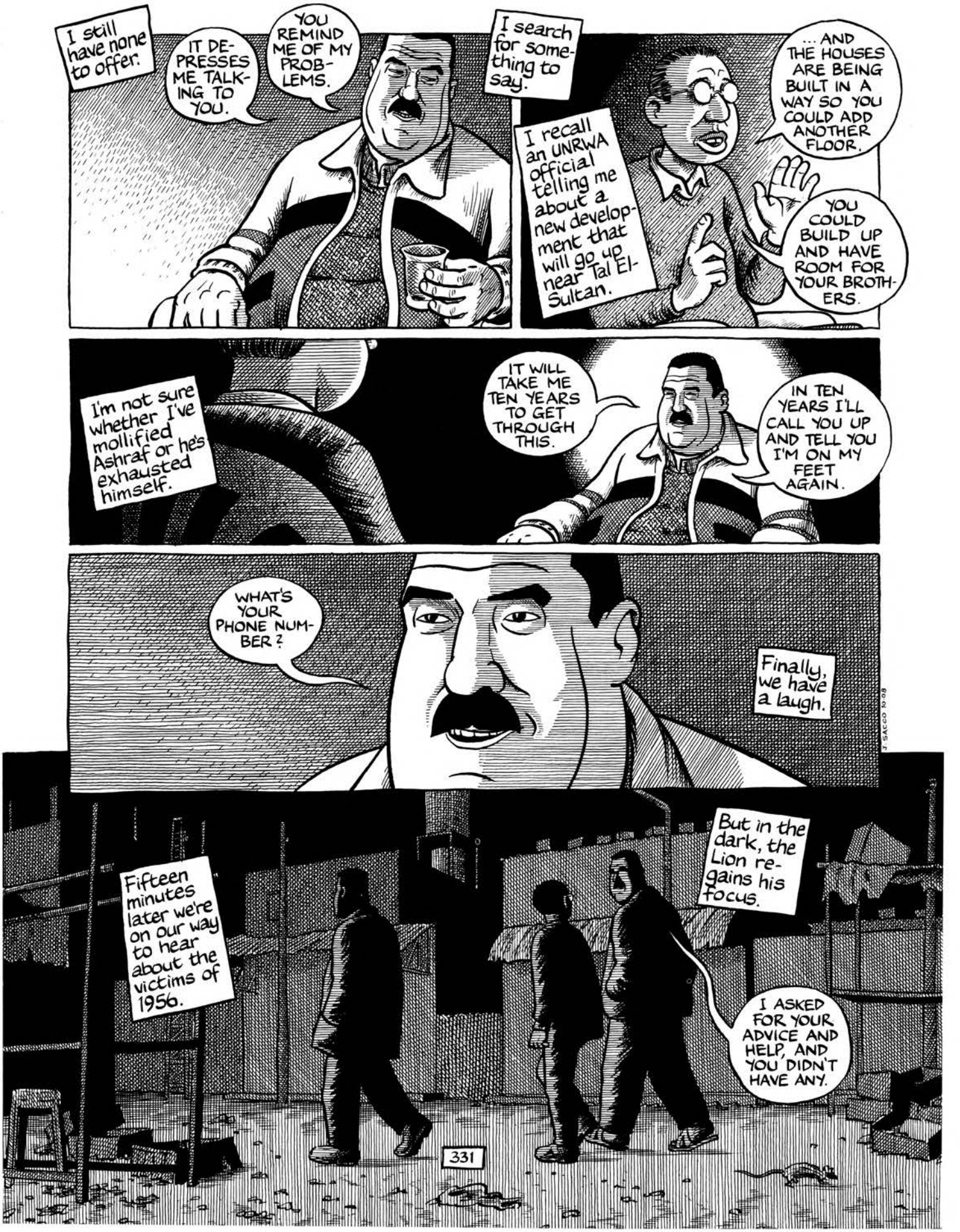

"From houses that had lost [someone] you could hear the shouting, the screaming and crying.
"You know how women behave.
"They tore their clothes.
"Screaming and crying."
326

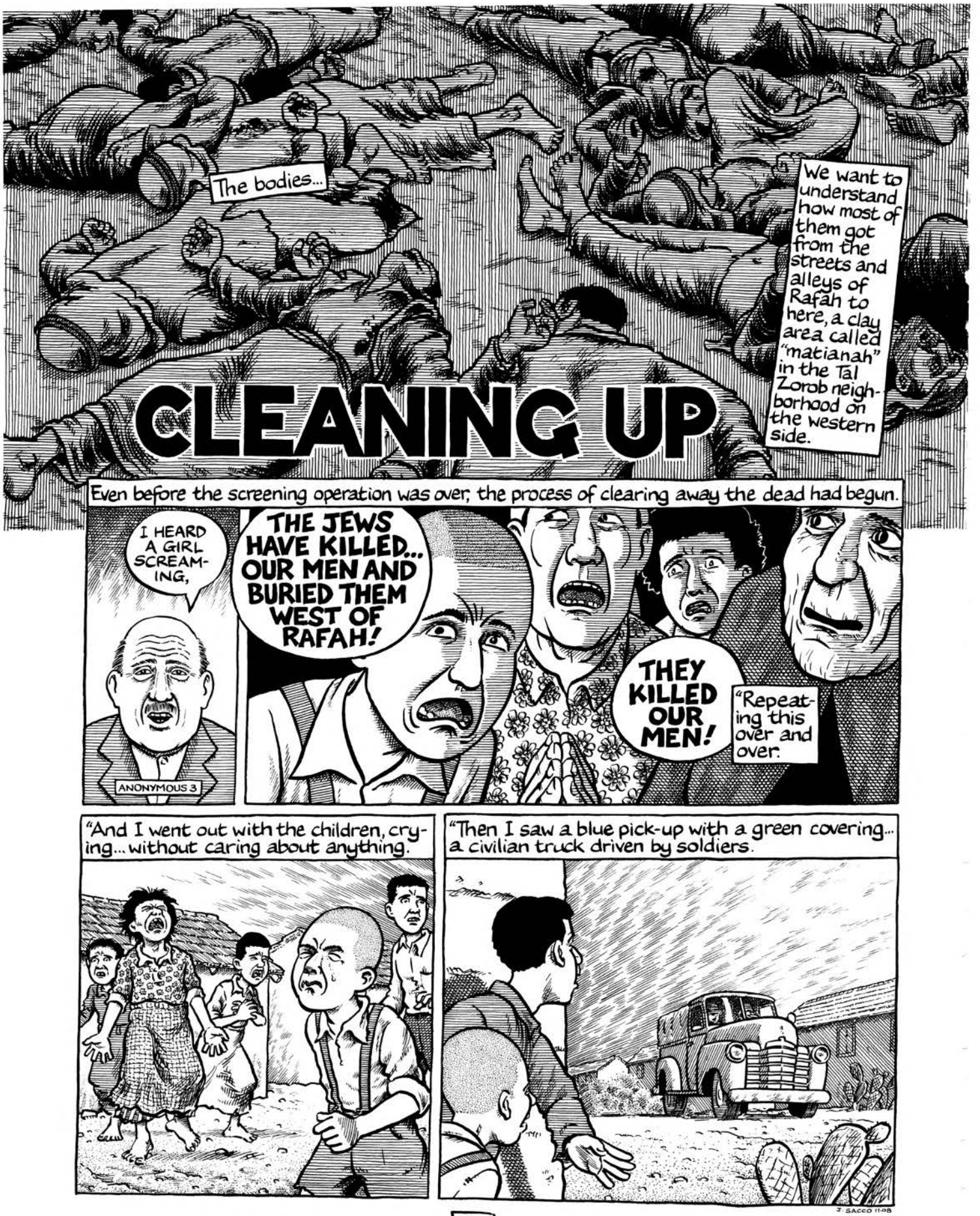

Perhaps, you are thinking, the curtain has come down on the story about the Israeli screening operation in Rafah on November 12, 1956.
After all, the surviving men have either escaped the school and are back at home or are on buses headed into confinement.
THE MOUTH OF THE LION
PT.2
But what of that third group, the dead?
To find out their story we need to locate their relatives.
Ashraf takes charge!
Waving the list from Owda Ayesh's book, he marches into a general store and accosts the first person he sees.
DO YOU KNOW ANY OF THESE FAMILIES?
ANY OF THEM LIVE AROUND HERE?
J. SACCO 10-08
NO. I DON'T KNOW ANY OF THEM.
WHY DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?
YOU DON'T KNOW ANY OF THEM BUT YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY?
ENOUGH!


But the Lion isn't always charging, and he isn't always roaring.
One night, before setting out for another interview, he takes out a $100 bill.
He caresses Benjamin Franklin's face.
THIS IS GOING TO PAY THE RENT THIS MONTH.
I HAD TO ASK FOR THIS MONTH'S PAY IN ADVANCE.
UNRWA IS TELLING US THEY WILL GIVE US TWO HOUSES...
ONE FOR MY FATHER AND ONE FOR ME.
BUT WE ARE FOUR BROTHERS.
His brothers are unmarried, and only heads of households are eligible for the housing units UNRWA is slowly building to replace the homes the Israelis have bulldozed.
Ashraf is case number 710.
His father is case number 711.
There are hundreds of refugee families on the waiting list.
As one UNRWA representative in Gaza City told me, "First demolished, first served."
Ashraf estimates he won't move into new UNRWA housing for two years.
WHAT ABOUT BETWEEN NOW AND THEN?
J. SACCO 10-08


AND WHEN THEY MOVE US, WHERE WILL THEY PUT US?
RIGHT ON THE BORDER-LINE AGAIN?
WE'LL GO THERE AND THEN WE'LL HAVE TO MOVE AGAIN.
Replace-ment homes are being built in the Tal El-Sultan neighborhood facing the Jewish settle-ment bloc.
Many are already pockmarked by Israeli gunfire.
A whole row of new refu-gee houses was destroyed by the Israelis before it was completed.
The Israelis claim the units were being used to snipe at the settle-ment a kilo-meter away.
I WANT SOME ADVICE FROM YOU.
WHAT SHOULD I DO?
At first I think he's kid-ding.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU SHOULD DO.
J. SACCO 10-08


MY FATHER HAS NO WORK AND MY BROTHER WANTS TO MARRY.
WE PUT EVERYTHING INTO OUR HOUSE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?
THE COMPENSATION WE'LL RECEIVE FOR THE HOUSE WE BUILT IS THE SAME AS IT IS FOR A PERSON WHO LOST A SHACK WITH A ZINC ROOF.
THOSE WHO LOST THEIR HOMES EARLY ON GOT FUNDS FROM ALL SORTS OF BENEVOLENT ORGANIZATIONS AND $5,000 FROM SADDAM HUSSEIN.
I KNOW A GUY WHO LOST HIS HOME AT THE BEGINNING OF THE INTIFADA, AND HE'S STILL SPENDING THE COMPENSATION MONEY.
Those days are over. In the name of the War on Terror, the Americans are leading a squeeze on money coming into Gaza from Islamic groups, and certainly the besieged ruler of Baghdad is in no position to dole out more funds to homeless Palestinians.
SOME PEOPLE WERE HAPPY THEY LOST THEIR HOMES.
THEY LOST A BAD HOME AND THEY GOT A REPLACEMENT.
BUT WHAT ABOUT ME?
GIVE ME SOME ADVICE?
J. SACCO 10-08


I still have none to offer.
IT DEPRESSES ME TALKING TO YOU.
YOU REMIND ME OF MY PROBLEMS.
I search for something to say.
I recall an UNRWA official telling me about a new development that will go up near Tal El-Sultan.
... AND THE HOUSES ARE BEING BUILT IN A WAY SO YOU COULD ADD ANOTHER FLOOR.
YOU COULD BUILD UP AND HAVE ROOM FOR YOUR BROTHERS.
I'm not sure whether I've mollified Ashraf or he's exhausted himself.
IT WILL TAKE ME TEN YEARS TO GET THROUGH THIS.
IN TEN YEARS I'LL CALL YOU UP AND TELL YOU I'M ON MY FEET AGAIN.
WHAT'S YOUR PHONE NUMBER?
Finally, we have a laugh.
J SACCO 10 08
Fifteen minutes later we're on our way to hear about the victims of 1956.
But in the dark, the Lion regains his focus.
I ASKED FOR YOUR ADVICE AND HELP, AND YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY.


The bodies...
We want to understand how most of them got from the streets and alleys of Rafah to here, a clay area called "matianah" in the Tal Zorob neighborhood on the western side.
CLEANING UP
Even before the screening operation was over, the process of clearing away the dead had begun.
I HEARD A GIRL SCREAMING,
ANONYMOUS 3
THE JEWS HAVE KILLED... OUR MEN AND BURIED THEM WEST OF RAFAH!
THEY KILLED OUR MEN!
"Repeating this over and over.
"And I went out with the children, crying... without caring about anything.
"Then I saw a blue pick-up with a green covering... a civilian truck driven by soldiers.
J. SACCO 11-98


"I saw the bodies stacked on top of each other, and their legs hung out of the end of the truck.
"I saw only one car... Many cars had already passed.
"I turned back to my home crying and fearful. We started to hit our faces with our hands.
"We thought they'd killed all the men."
One man held at a secondary gathering point, an UNRWA school on Sea Street to the west of town, told us that as he and the others were being released—
—WE SAW ONE OR TWO CARS CARRYING BODIES.
ANONYMOUS 5
"What I saw is—this is certified—we should be honest when we are telling the story...
"I saw one car actually.
"The car was moving and we were leaving the school, that's all."
Owda Abdullah Hejazi, who had been released from the government school, arrived home in Tal Zorob where he had a clear view toward the west.
THE LAND AT THAT TIME WAS EMPTY... WITHOUT BUILDINGS, WITHOUT HOUSES.
"I saw the trucks carrying the bodies...
"About four trucks ...one by one...
"A few minutes before Maghrib [prayer].
J. SACCO 11-08


"They...threw the bodies out and went back.
"I couldn't see who was taking out the bodies."
There is at least one man who can shed light on "who"—Mohammed Atwa El-Najeeli, left for dead near the UNRWA distribution center, bleeding from his many wounds.
IN THE AFTERNOON, AFTER THE ASR [PRAYER], I HEARD.. THE SOUND OF A VEHICLE COMING TO GET THE BODIES.
"I saw it was full of youths... and all of them with their tongues out.
"They were dead.
"Like fish.
"Like fish.
"On top of each other.
"The vehicle came with two soldiers, and two Palestinians came toward me.
"They took the bodies, all the bodies.
"I was the last.
J. SACCO 11-08
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"They took me by my legs.
"When I realized they were Arabs, I told them I'm still alive.
ARE YOU STILL ALIVE?
YES.
SO SHUT UP.
OKAY, LET'S GO. WE'RE FINISHED HERE.
"They went. I was the only one in the street... Only me.
"It became cold.
J. SACCO 11-08
"Now the people left the school. I heard them... and heard shooting also.
"I began to tell myself, 'Maybe someone will come and find me.'
"No one came except one of my dearest neighbors.
ARE YOU MOHAMMED?


YES.
PUT ME IN THIS HOUSE, IN THIS DOOR.
"I started to cry.
"I started to cry.
"This was my dearest neighbor, and he left me.
"Then a woman in front of whose door I'd been shot...told her husband she'd seen...a guy who was still alive near the center.
"He came with his father and took me with a blanket...to the clinic.
"I was shouting from my pain, screaming...
DON'T LET THE ISRAELIS HEAR US.
YOU ARE INJURED, BUT WE'RE STILL ALIVE.
"They put me on a bed in the clinic.
"My clothes were like one jacket from the blood. They cut off my clothes and left me.
"I slept all night with many injured people. The next morning they took us to Gaza City in ambulances."
J. SACCO 11-08


In a second discussion, when I ask Mohammed more closely about the Palestinians who were gathering the bodies, he says,
IT WAS THE POLICEMEN WHO TOOK ME.
[IN] THEIR UNIFORMS.
Who then were these men who removed the dead from the streets?
What happened to them?
One story is repeated to us over and over.
ABDEL HADI MOHAMMED LAFI
THEY TOOK THE BODIES BY CARS ... AND KILLED THE ONES THAT DUG THE GRAVES.
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA
... THEY BURIED THE BODIES AFTER KILLING THE PEOPLE WHO DUG THE HOLES.
AHMED HASSAN EDWAN
THEY SHOT THE ONES WHO BURIED THE BODIES AND BURIED THEM.
Without corroboration, Abed and I are about to file this story under "legend" until, one day, someone tells us he had heard that the Israelis forced the director of the UN sanitation center to pick some workers to collect the bodies.
The director has since died...
But after a few phone calls, we're sitting with his son, who also works at the sanitation center.
Yes yes, he knows the story. He heard it from his father.
J. SACCO 11.08
A day or two later we're in his car looking for Ibrahim Saker, a former employee of his father's who apparently was one of those tasked with picking up the bodies.
And here he is in the streets of Yibna!
Hey! Hey! Do you remember me? Do you reme
Of c
Get in the car! We need to
But I'm g
to play dominoes!
to you!
Get in the car!
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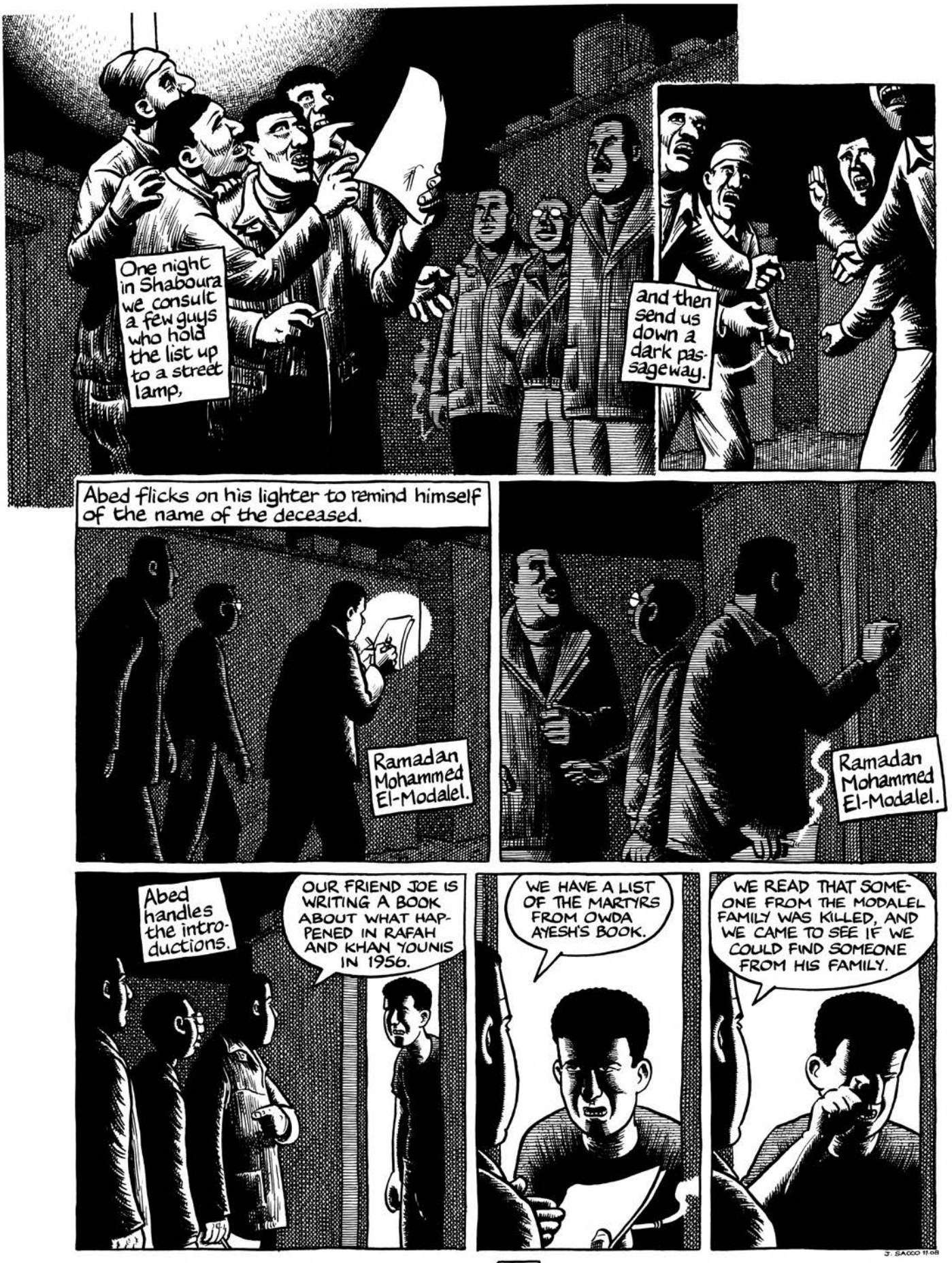
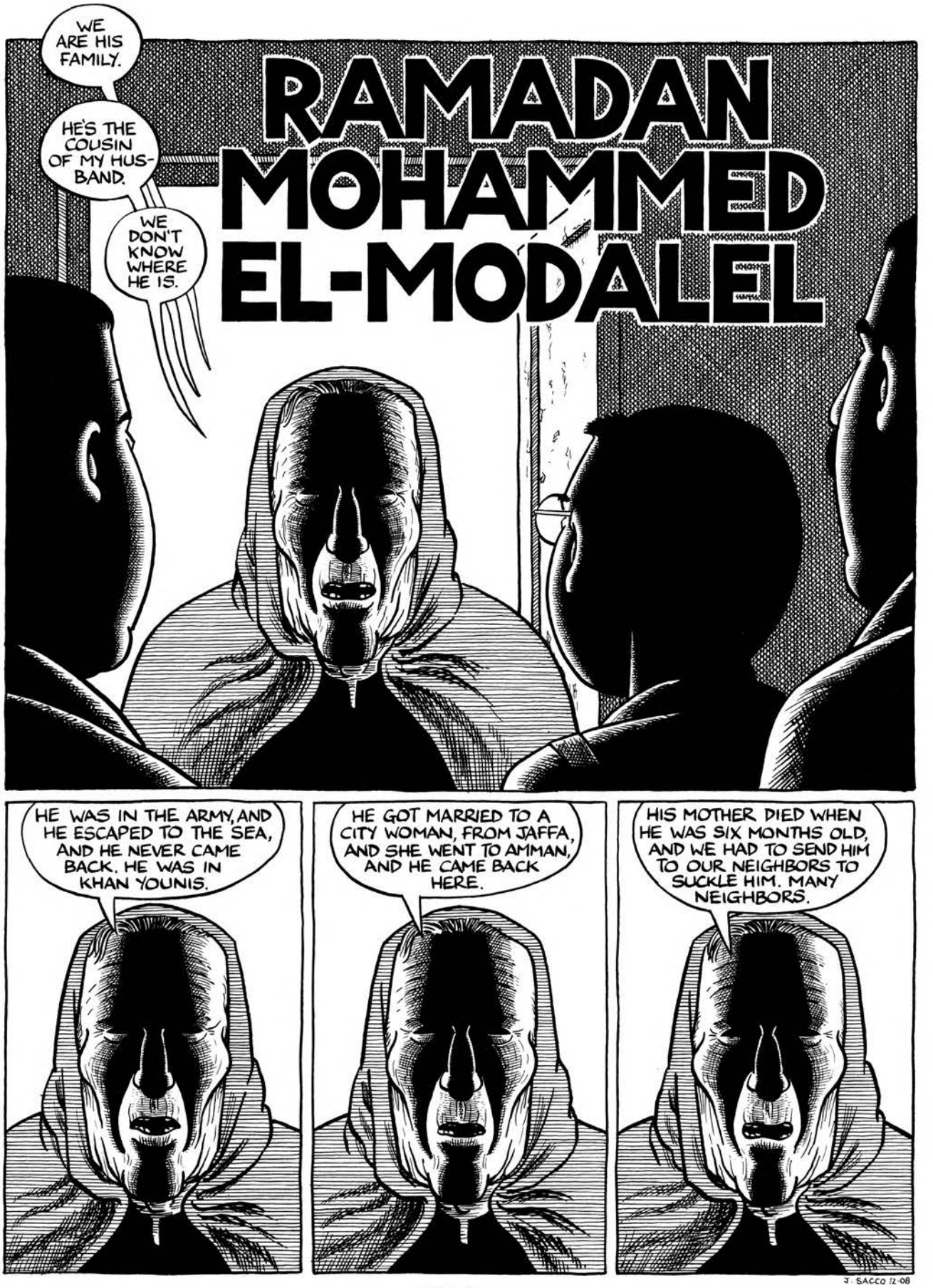
And now we're sitting in an office, Abed and I exchanging glances of imminent journalistic triumph.
We are about to talk to a man who actually handled the bodies.
It all fits!
The dress of UNRWA personnel might have confused the badly wounded El-Najeeli into thinking the men loading the dead were policemen.
Ibrahim Saker begins to talk and our bubble is burst.
The incident is from 1967 not 1956.
Egyptian soldiers hiding in the school during the Six Day War.
Killed on the spot by an Israeli tank.
Ibrahim tells us the bodies lay there for 20 days. Then the Israelis ordered UNRWA workers to remove them.
He was part of the crew "but I couldn't stay because of the smell."
We can't stay either.
We've lost interest.
1967 is not our department.
J. SACCO 11-08


THE LIST
Ashraf is blunt:
THE GOAL IS TO FIND A FATHER WHO BURIED HIS SON.
I wish he'd put it more delicately, but neither he nor Abed thinks I need worry about anyone's sensibilities.
PALESTINIANS ARE LIKE IRON.
We walk the alleys of the refugee camp armed with Owda Ayesh's list of Rafah's dead.
Our method is simple.
We pick out a name, find the neighborhood where his extended family is supposed to live, and begin knocking on doors.
"Does anyone here remember the, er, martyr?"
Our method soon hits some snags.
We sit with one very elderly man whose son was killed in '56 all right but in Khan Younis.
He doesn't know where his son is buried, and now he's crying.
This woman's father was taken and killed, yes, but in March '57, when the Israelis were withdrawing.
It turns out Owda Ayesh's list contains not just the names of everyone killed on November 12, 1956, but everyone from Rafah killed during the general period, soldiers included, even if he was killed elsewhere.
J. SACCO 11.08


One night in Shaboura we consult a few guys who hold the list up to a street lamp,
and then send us down a dark passageway.
Abed flicks on his lighter to remind himself of the name of the deceased.
Ramadan Mohammed El-Modalel.
Ramadan Mohammed El-Modalel.
Abed handles the introductions.
OUR FRIEND JOE IS WRITING A BOOK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED IN RAFAH AND KHAN YOUNIS IN 1956.
WE HAVE A LIST OF THE MARTYRS FROM OWDA AYESH'S BOOK.
WE READ THAT SOMEONE FROM THE MODALEL FAMILY WAS KILLED, AND WE CAME TO SEE IF WE COULD FIND SOMEONE FROM HIS FAMILY.
J. SACCO 11-08


This guy has just woken up, and he doesn't know what we're talking about.
GO INSIDE AND ASK THE OLD WOMEN AND THE OLD MEN.
THEY MIGHT KNOW ABOUT HIM.
The young man's grandmother appears at the door.
WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU, HAJJA, ABOUT RAMADAN MOHAMMED EL-MODALEL, WHO DIED IN '56.
EH?!
YOU FOUND HIM?!
J. SACCO 11-08


WE ARE HIS FAMILY.
HE'S THE COUSIN OF MY HUSBAND.
WE DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS.
RAMADAN MOHAMMED EL-MODALEL
HE WAS IN THE ARMY, AND HE ESCAPED TO THE SEA, AND HE NEVER CAME BACK. HE WAS IN KHAN YOUNIS.
HE GOT MARRIED TO A CITY WOMAN, FROM JAFFA, AND SHE WENT TO AMMAN, AND HE CAME BACK HERE.
HIS MOTHER DIED WHEN HE WAS SIX MONTHS OLD, AND WE HAD TO SEND HIM TO OUR NEIGHBORS TO SUCKLE HIM. MANY NEIGHBORS.
J. SACCO 12-08


HE WAS HIS FATHER'S ONLY CHILD,
BUT HE LOST HIM.
COME IN!
I'LL SERVE YOU CAKE AND MAKE TEA FOR YOU.
We excuse ourselves. We're pressed for time. We say goodbye.
IT'S NOT RIGHT!
COME IN!
J. SACCO 12.09
I THOUGHT YOU'D FOUND HIM.
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THE BURIALS
That old woman has lived with her uncertainty for almost 50 years. On the evening of November 12, 1956, perhaps hundreds of uncertainties flared over the fates of loved ones in Rafah.
As Mohammed Juma' El-Ghoul told us,
WHOEVER DIDN'T COME BACK TO HIS HOUSE...
WAS DEAD OR A PRISONER.
Abdelwahab Mahmoud Abdelwahab El-Asmar awaited word about his brother and nephew.
THEY DIDN'T COME BACK THAT NIGHT SO WE BEGAN TO THINK THEY HAD BEEN SHOT.
Latifa El-Qeesi wondered about her missing husband.
MY FATHER ARRIVED FROM THE SCHOOL. I ASKED HIM, 'DID YOU SEE MOSA?'
YES, I SAW HIM WHEN I REACHED THE SCHOOL, BUT LATER I DIDN'T.
DID YOU SEE HIM ON THE BUSES?
NO.
"We spent all night crying because [we] thought he was among the people who had been killed.
"We didn't sleep."
J. SACCO 12-08


Others, like the family of Ahmed Khalil El-Bawab, already had a body on its hands.
His brother-in-law, Saleh Hassan Awaja, had been badly beaten before entering the school.*
He lived through the day until just after the release.
SALEH LEFT THE SCHOOL... AND WHEN HE REACHED THE HOUSE HE IMMEDIATELY DIED.
* SEE P. 230
WE THOUGHT HE WAS STILL ALIVE, BUT WHEN WE TOOK HIM TO THE CLINIC THEY TOLD US HE WAS DEAD.
And some, like Mariam El-Najeeli, who received word that her husband Mohammed had been shot, began to venture outside to find their relatives themselves.
HIS SISTER WAS SCREAMING,
'YOUR HUSBAND IS DEAD!
'YOUR HUSBAND IS DEAD!'
"His father asked us to go out and bring the body. So we went out... me, my cousin, and his two sisters.
T. SACCO 12-08
"I was looking... for his clothes... to see whether he was among the bodies or not.
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"I went to the first one...near the cactus tree. Near him [another]. And the third at the door of my parents' home, and another one near to him. Four.
"I didn't find my husband among them.
"[Then] shooting started.
"I was pregnant at that time, five months.
"I wasn't able to run so they left me, and I stayed at my parents.'"
News was beginning to spread about the bodies that had been dumped on the matianah in the Tal Zorob neighborhood.
Among the first to go to the site was Owda Abdullah Hejazi, who had seen the trucks taking the dead there.
SOMEONE FROM OUR FAMILY WAS MISSING... AND HIS FATHER TOLD US, 'LET'S GO FIND HIM.'
J SACCO 12.08
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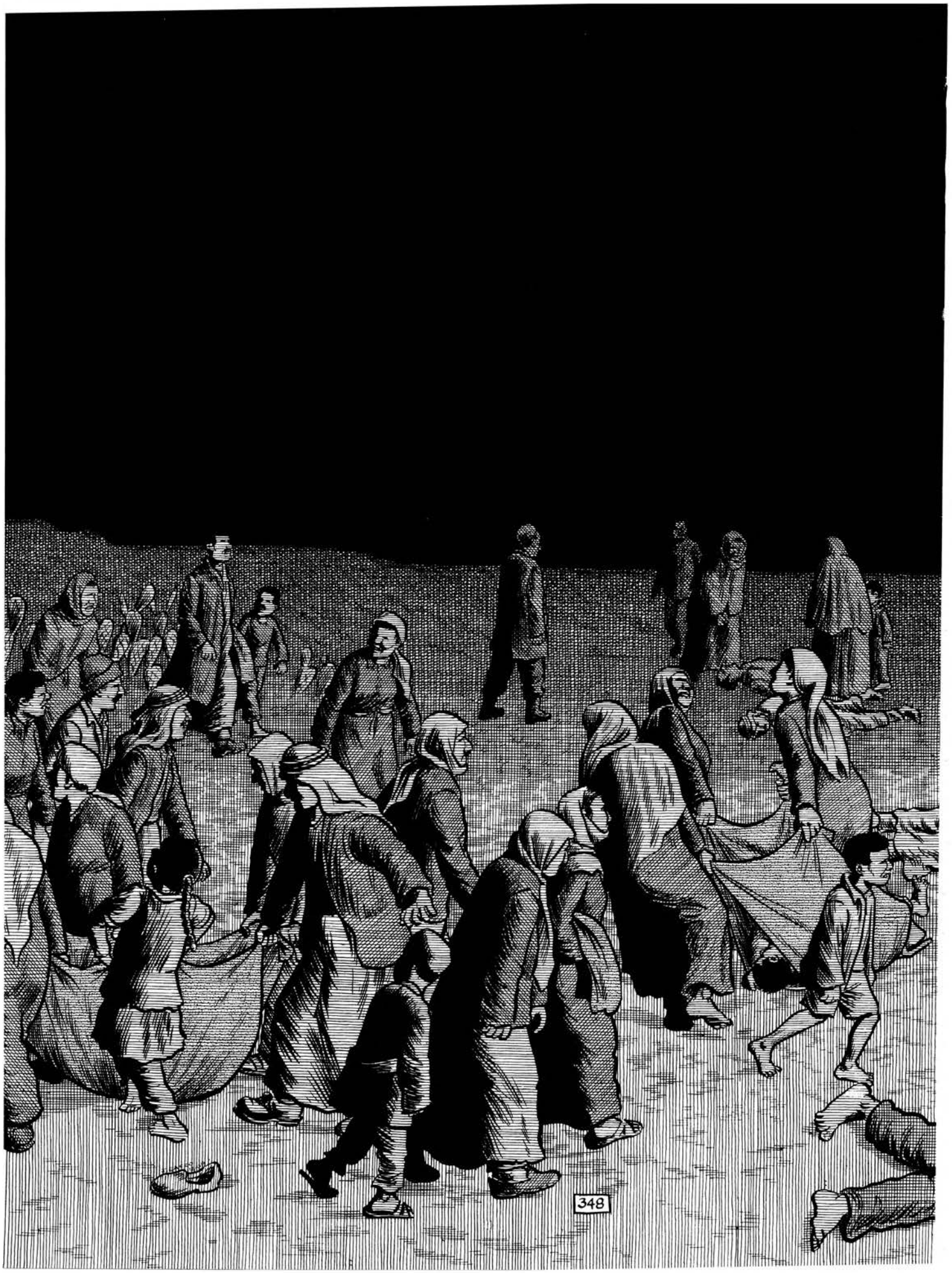
"There were many, many, many people.
"Mostly women, but men also...
"turning the bodies to look at the faces.
J. SACCO 12-08
"They didn't stay for long.
"If they found their dead, they took them and went. Using blankets.
"It was horrible...
"The people were afraid.
"There was no shouting there. No screaming.
"It was slightly like thieving."
347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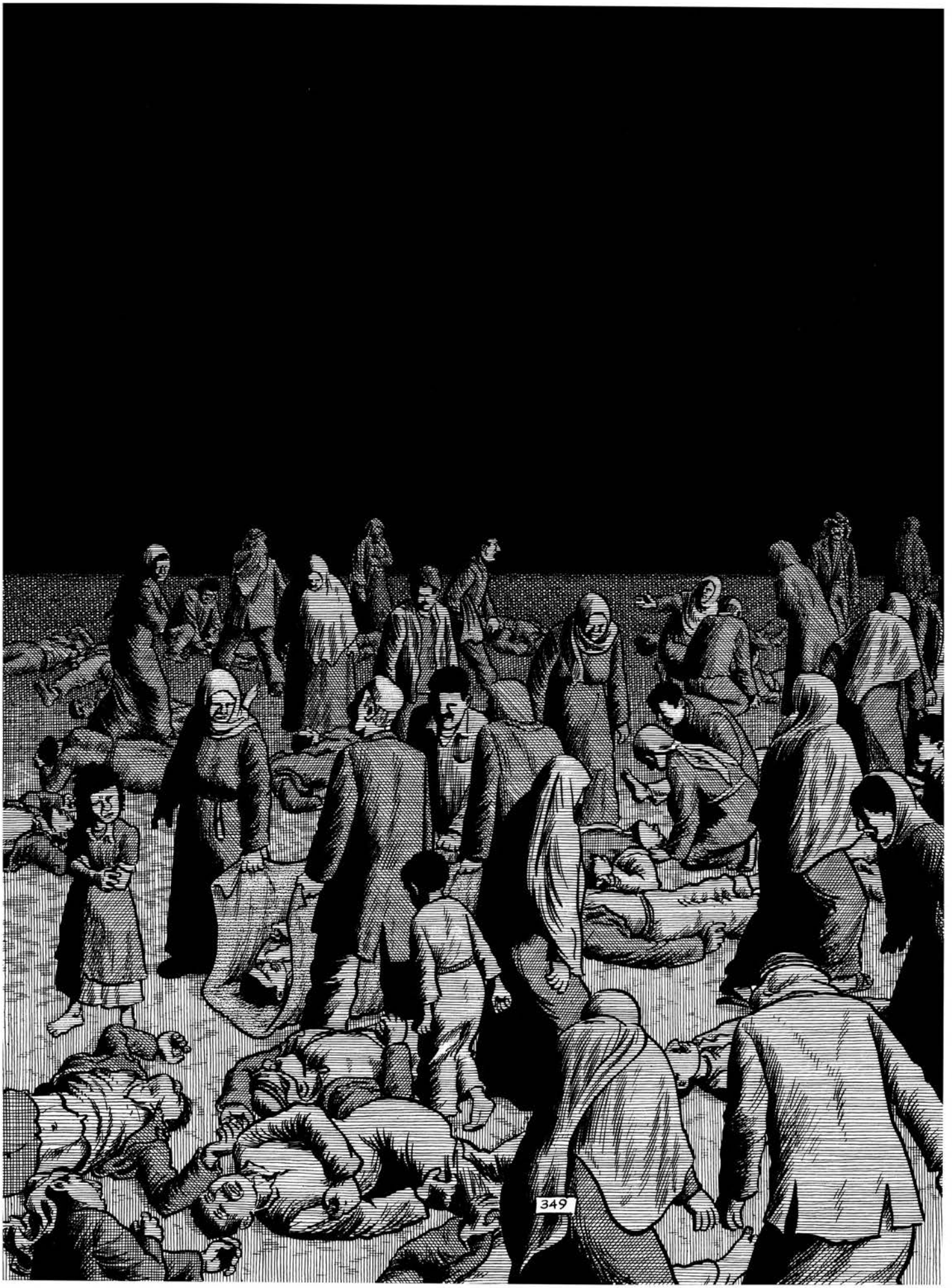
349


WE DIDN'T FIND HIS BODY AND WE WENT BACK.
Owda's relation, it turned out, was away in Egypt.
T. SACCO 12.08
Ahmed No'man Zorob also came to look for missing relatives that night.
THE PEOPLE [WERE] HIDING BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T WANT TO BE SEEN BY THE JEWS.
IT WAS DARK AND THEY HID THEMSELVES AMONG THE CACTUS.
"We reached the matianah area...
"There were many bodies, many groups of bodies.
"Here a group, there a group, wherever the truck left the bodies...
"They...put them like fish."
WE DIDN'T FIND THEM.
WE FOUND OUT OUR FAMILY MEMBERS HAD BEEN TAKEN PRISONER.
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We're directed to Block O to meet a man named Abdullah Abdelrahim Ghanim, who lost a number of relatives that day in 1956.
Perhaps catastrophe follows Abdullah around.
The Israelis have recently demolished his three-story home, which was shared by four related families.
Now the lot of them, 24 people in all, are crammed into the back of a decrepit, empty shop.
His sons would rather talk about the here and now, their destroyed house, not the long-ago event we're hosing off for reconsideration.
THE FLIES WERE ON THE WALLS BECAUSE THEY'D DEMOLISHED THE SEWAGE SYSTEM.
WE KEPT OURSELVES IN THE HOUSE TO THE LAST BECAUSE WE HAD NO OPTIONS, NO OPTIONS.
But Abdullah, who has heart problems and has not worked in 20 years, graciously obliges our inquiries into the past.
He was a teenager when he went to look for his brother, Ismael Abdelrahim Ghanim, his uncle, Yousef Khalil Ghanim, and his cousin, Issa Mustafa Ghanim.
THE PEOPLE TOLD US THEY'D THROWN THEM NEAR TAL ZOROB
MY COUSINS, MY BROTHERS, THEIR WIVES... ALL THE WOMEN OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD, WE WENT RUNNING.
J. SACCO 11.08
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"I found my relatives thrown on the ground.
"But some other bodies were in a trench. Not completely buried. Just a bit of sand."
And the number of bodies?
I DIDN'T COUNT THEM, [BUT] MORE THAN 50, 60.
AND THE REST IN THE TRENCH.
"The people dug them out.
"At the time you want to take your body and go, that's all. You may help with other bodies if you know them, but the main thing is to get your dead.
"We took all the bodies and buried them in the Tal Zorob cemetery, the western cemetery of Rafah."
J. SACCO 1.09


The cemetery is now dominated by the IDF tower.
Once, before fully understanding its fearsome reputation, Abed and I walked by it to reach the graveyard.
ARE YOU AFRAID?
WE USED TO GO PLAY ON THAT MOUND.
ARE YOU AFRAID?
The old cemetery is mostly made up of family tombs—the fusgeyi—of Rafah's original residents.
That night no one paid attention to the niceties of ownership. Slabs were removed and bodies handed down to join the corpses of strangers.
WE PUT THE BODIES INSIDE THE FUSGEYA AND THEN LEFT IMMEDIATELY.
SOME PEOPLE, A WEEK LATER, STARTED TO TAKE THEIR BODIES FROM THE CEMETERY AND BURY THEM IN OTHER PLACES.
AND YOUR RELATIVES ARE STILL THERE?
YES, UP TILL NOW.
353
J. SACCO 1-09


Early in the morning the furtive search for the missing continued.
Latifa El-Qeesi looked in the streets for her husband with her mother.
WHENEVER WE HEARD THE JEEPS AND VEHICLES COMING, WE HID OURSELVES AMONG THE HOUSES.
Finally, Latifa met a relative who gave her the news that her husband had been taken prisoner.
DON'T WORRY, THEY TOOK THEM... ON THE BUSES.
Later that morning, the Israelis officially lifted the curfew for a short time, allowing the wounded to seek care and others to gather and bury the remaining bodies.
Mariam El-Najeeli learned that her husband was alive and in the UNRWA clinic.
MANY PEOPLE CAME FROM ALL OVER TO SEE THEIR RELATIVES.
MANY, MANY, MANY PEOPLE.
J. SACCO 1-09
"The soldiers were at the door and prevented us from going inside.
"If I had entered, I would have screamed and made a great [scene].
"But thank God I didn't see [him]."
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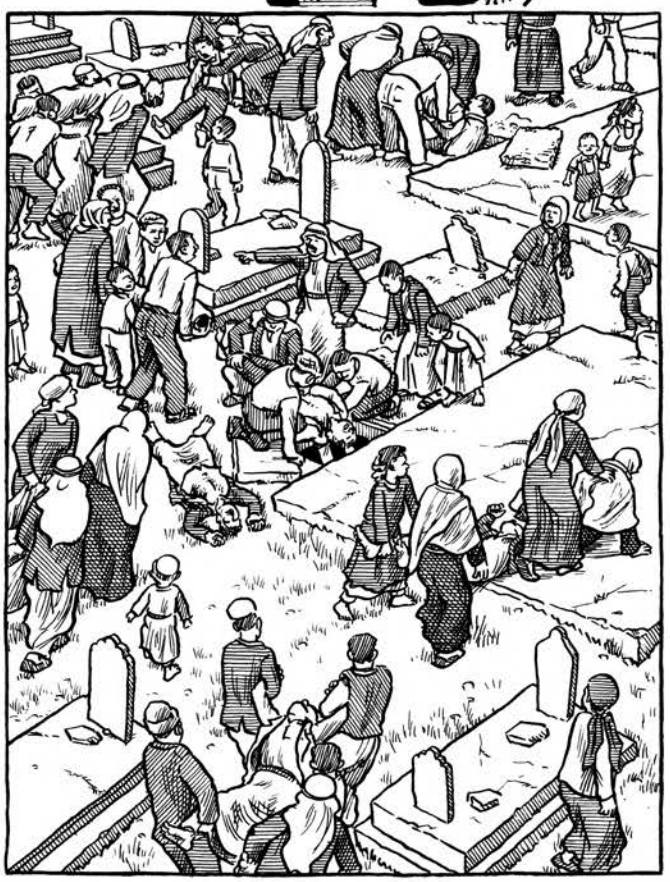
Bodies were collected from the side streets where they had lain overnight. Some were not immediately identified.
MOHAMMED YOUSEF SHAKER MOUSA
[A MAN FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD] WAS SHOT... SOME PEOPLE TOOK HIM INTO THEIR HOUSE AND HE DIED [THERE].
"My father and uncle carried him, wrapped in a blanket... to the street and removed the cover from his face to allow the people to see him.
"His family came and recognized him and took him."
Nasrah Felfel's husband had been lying a few meters from her front door since he'd been shot the morning before.
NOW I NEEDED PEOPLE TO HELP ME BURY THE BODY.
"One of his relatives was killed in another area, and they brought his body on a donkey cart and came here...
"I went with them to the eastern cemetery."
355

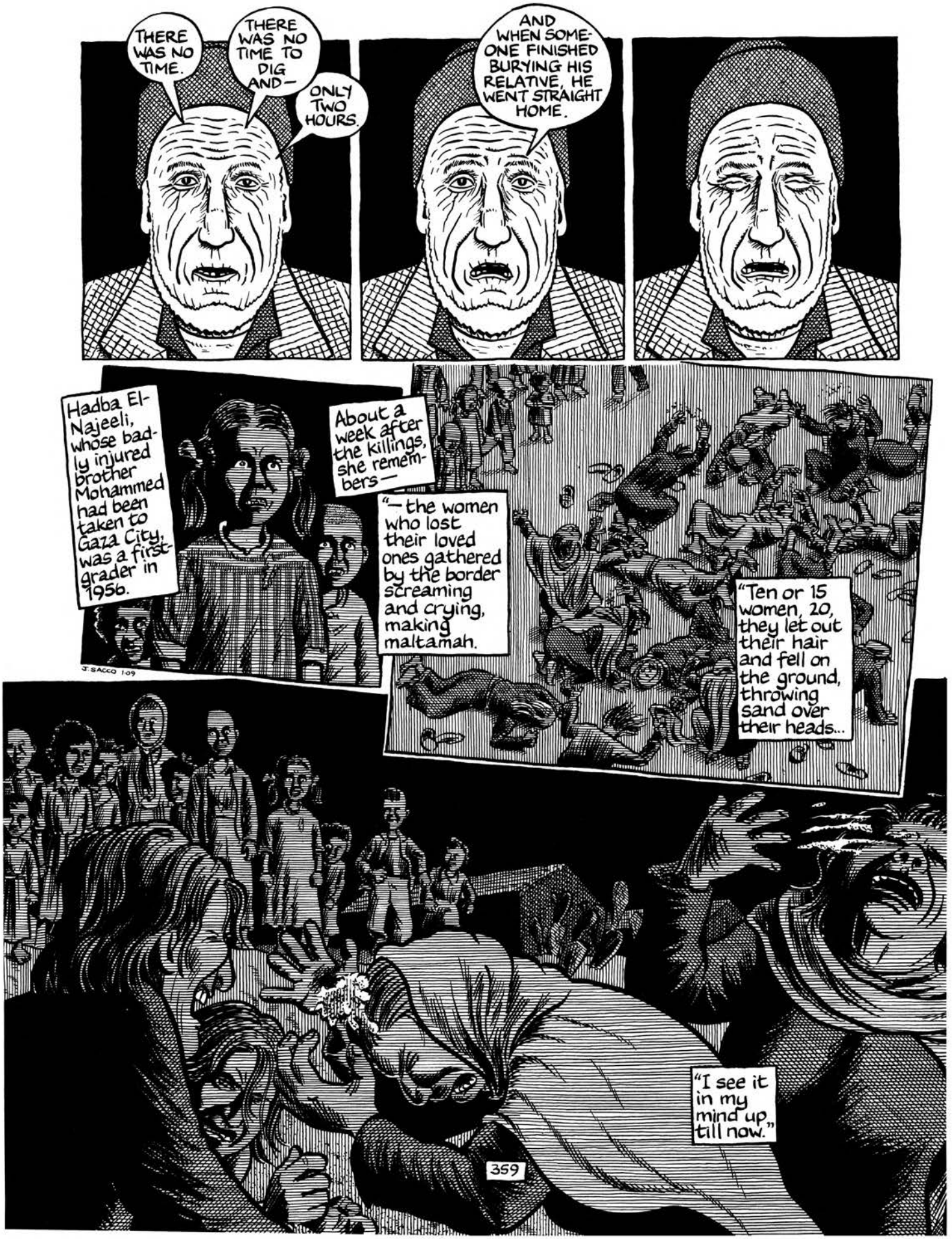

Meanwhile, people rushed to Tal Zorob's matianah where many bodies remained.
I express doubt, but Abdelwahab Mahmoud Abdelwahab El-Asmar insists that while searching for his brother and nephew he counted 133 bodies in two separate groups of dead.
I COUNTED THEM ONE BY ONE.
"At the third group [my brother's] daughter ...found them.
HERE IS MY FATHER!
COME!
"We covered them with blankets and we buried them [near] the main road...We didn't have time to bury them in another area..."
THIRTY DAYS LATER THERE WERE NO CURFEWS, IT WASN'T TENSE. I WENT THERE AND DUG [UP] AND TOOK THE BODIES.
Abdelwahab reinterred his relatives in the Tal Zorob cemetery.
J. SACCO 1-09


Saleh Mehi Eldin El-Argan had watched his cousin Abdullah being clubbed at the school gate and then dragged off.*
*SEE P. 242
I WENT WITH MY FATHER... AND WE FOUND 70 BODIES AND ABDULLAH AMONG THEM.
DID YOU COUNT THE BODIES YOURSELF?
I WAS THERE!
YOU COUNTED THEM?
IN THAT PLACE 70 BODIES. [BUT] THERE WERE OTHER PLACES.
"Abdullah was wearing a white hatta. His head was open and there was blood from his mouth.
"My father was starting to cry. I told my father,
ABDULLAH IS ONE. HERE THERE ARE 70.
WHY ARE YOU CRYING?
DON'T CRY!
J. SACCO 109


"The people hurried, trying within two hours to take the bodies to a fusgeya in the cemetery...
"We carried him with our hands.
"Some people dragged the bodies on the ground.




"We mixed all the people.
"We put four or five bodies inside one fusgeya... [on top of] each other."
J. SACCO 1.09


THERE WAS NO TIME.
THERE WAS NO TIME TO DIG AND—
ONLY TWO HOURS.
AND WHEN SOMEONE FINISHED BURYING HIS RELATIVE, HE WENT STRAIGHT HOME.
Hadba El-Najeeli, whose badly injured brother Mohammed had been taken to Gaza City, was a first-grader in 1956.
About a week after the killings, she remembers—
"—the women who lost their loved ones gathered by the border screaming and crying, making maltamah.
"Ten or 15 women, 20, they let out their hair and fell on the ground, throwing sand over their heads...
J. SACCO 1-09
"I see it in my mind up till now."


ARMAGEDDON
Sometimes, when shooting erupts and ambulances race by, I realize I hardly know what's going on a kilometer away, much less what's up in Baghdad and Washington.
I'm elsewhere, lost in the filigree of the intricacies of a few hours in November 1956.
P.R.C.S
Every few days, however, gulping lunch between appointments with Rafah's ancients, Abed fills me in on the fast approaching Armageddon.
CONDA-LEEZZA RICE. WHAT'S SHE SAYING NOW?
ONLY FORCE WILL ELIMINATE THE WEAPONS IN IRAQ.
J SACCO 1 09
But while my head is buried in the sands of the past, the rest of Rafah is girding for new realities.
On Salah Al-Din Road masked Hamas men sporting faux suicide belts mix with child squadrons holding up pictures of The Man Who Would Defy The Great Satan.
360


Amplified orators shatter our eardrums with garbled denunciations of the imminent attack on Iraq, but Hani, who helped organize this demonstration, will not be one of them.
Alas, his prepared invective has been bumped.
A mock tank and a mock warplane are set alight, and when the bonfires of wishful thinking have died down, the show comes to a close.
The Hamas men march away smartly up Sea Street, and the schoolboys, weighed down by their books, can barely keep up.
J. SACCO 3-09


One afternoon, Sameh, the landlord's son, brings us a bottle of fresh water and news.
DEATH
An American woman, one of the International Solidarity Movement activists protesting the demolition of homes in Rafah, has been run over by an Israeli bulldozer.
Abed makes some calls.
The American woman is dead.
Her body is at El-Najjar hospital.
Rafah is one of the most dangerous places in the Palestinian territories.
But while the rest of Gaza has been bursting with violence, Rafah has been relatively quiet in my weeks here.
Only three people have been killed: two Islamic Jihad members in a tunnel the Israelis destroyed; and the boy whose funeral we watched from our balcony.
At the hospital I talk to one of the activists who witnessed the death of his colleague.
Rachel Corrie, 23, from Olympia, Washington, was among a group of foreign nationals determined to prevent the demolition of a home in the El-Salam neighborhood.
362


Apparently Corrie slipped on a mound of earth being pushed up by a bulldozer
and was crushed as the driver continued over her,
with blade lowered,
and backed up.
But Death is not finished with Rafah today.
A Red Crescent ambulance rushes in,
and another casualty is propelled into emergency.
Ahmed El-Najjar, 49, who lives in Rafah's Tal El-Sultan neighborhood, was shot by Israeli forces in the head, the chest, and the leg, reportedly while standing in his doorway. In a few minutes he is dead.
His wailing, blood-stained relatives take possession of the body.
But if, like Corrie's friends, they are in shock, there is nothing shocking about what has happened to their kin.
The killing of a Palestinian in Gaza is a routine occurrence. His loss will cause not a ripple outside of his immediate circle of family, friends, and neighbors.
The killing of an American, however—
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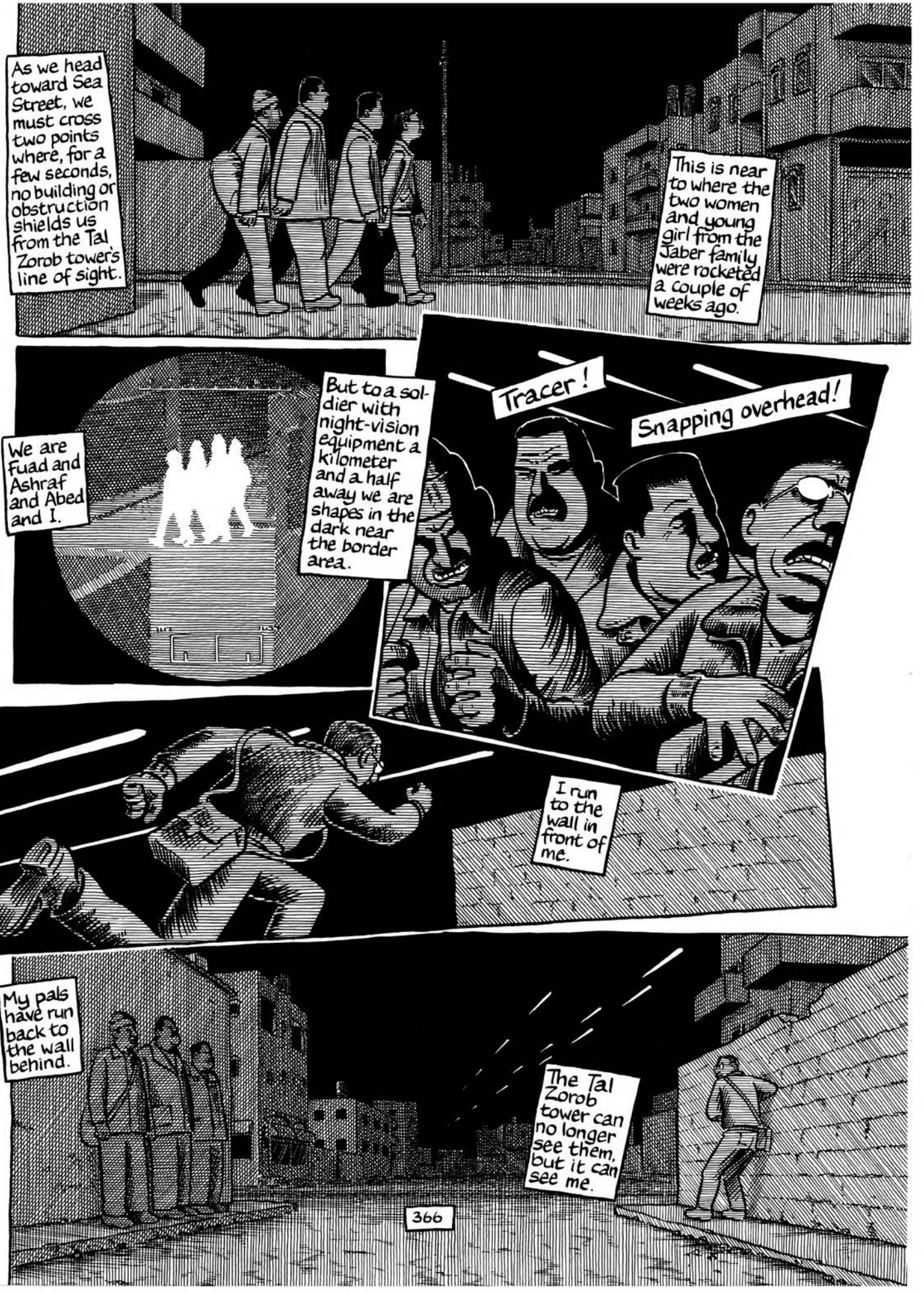
Abed and I make our way to the adjacent morgue.
The crowd parts way and lets us through.
Corrie's friends stand around in disbelief;
my pal Asim, the photographer, sits dazed against a wall;
local photo-journalists, stringers for Western wire services, go about their business-as-usual.
Two hours ago Rachel Corrie, an American, was killed by an Israeli bulldozer as she attempted to defend a Palestinian home.
She is about to enter the realm of iconography.
But the hospital staff isn't thinking about that.
Right now Corrie is a body that must be tended to.
They plead with everyone to clear out of the room and let them get on with it.
364


SHAPES IN THE DARK PT.2
The squeaking sound of armored vehicles, passing endlessly on the Philadelphi Route a few dozen meters from Fuad's place, bounces off the buildings around us.
Fuad keeps the windows slightly open so they won't shatter if there's a blast, and he has long mapped out his avenues of escape.
OUT THE DOOR IF THEY COME FROM THIS SIDE...
OUT THE WINDOW IF THEY COME FROM THIS SIDE.
Tonight is the night everyone expects the war against Iraq to begin, and Rafah is bracing for a possible Israeli attack under its cover.
Fuad's parents have pressured him to leave the house, which he watches over, at least during these critical hours, and he has agreed to sleep at our place tonight.
J. SACCO 3-09


As we head toward Sea Street, we must cross two points where, for a few seconds, no building or obstruction shields us from the Tal Zorob tower's line of sight.
This is near to where the two women and young girl from the Jaber family were rocketed a couple of weeks ago.
We are Fuad and Ashraf and Abed and I.
But to a soldier with night-vision equipment a kilometer and a half away we are shapes in the dark near the border area.
Tracer!
Snapping overhead!
I run to the wall in front of me.
My pals have run back to the wall behind.
The Tal Zorob tower can no longer see them, but it can see me.


My friends are laughing their asses off.
Once the shooting stops, I start laughing, too.
Perhaps the shots were meant to scare us or hurry us along.
We dash back across the road and make our way up to Sea Street.
We're still laughing.
Anyway, I'm still laughing.
CALM DOWN, JOE.
JOE, WE LIKE YOU VERY MUCH.
WE DON'T WANT TO LOSE YOU.
THE BULLETS DON'T DISTINGUISH BETWEEN US AND FOREIGNERS.
WHY DID YOU RUN FORWARD?
YOU RAN AND YOU STOPPED.
WHY?
THERE IS A RULE:
LOOK.
THINK.
DO.
LOOK. THINK. DO.
LOOK. THINK. DO.
But I still can't stop laughing.
J. SACCO 3.09

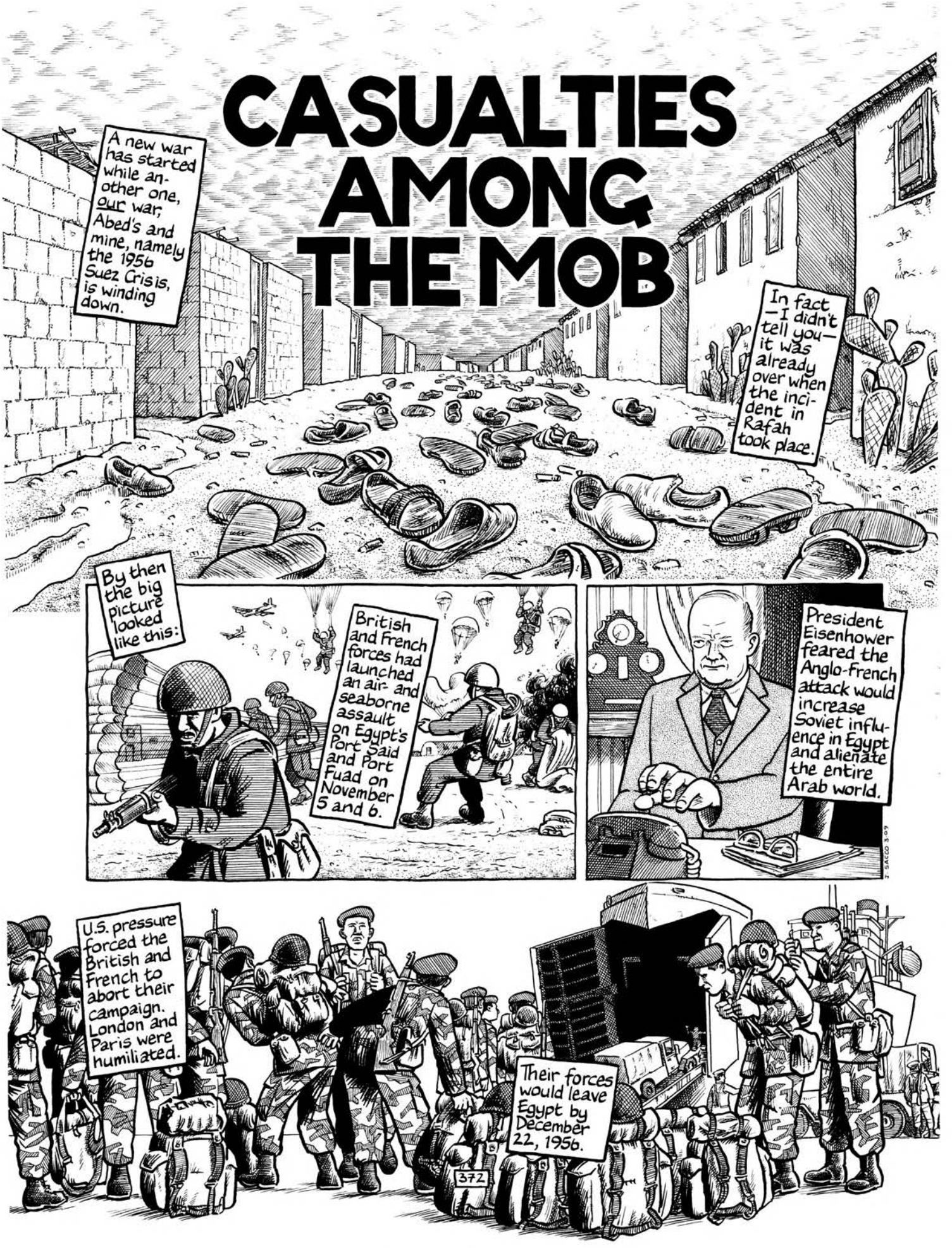

DID YOU SEE THEM?
On the first Friday of the Iraq war, over all the other sermons blaring from Rafah's minarets, we strain to catch our own neighborhood imām's ear-splitting fulminations.
ISRAEL, AMERICA, AND BRITAIN: THE THREE PILLARS OF EVIL!
MY BROTHER MUSLIMS SHOULD REALIZE THAT THE FUTURE IS ISLAM'S, BUT FOR THAT WE MUST PAY THE PRICE!
AND PALESTINIANS AND IRAQIS ARE PAYING THE PRICE!
War!
And all the dread of its build-up is now replaced by desire as Palestinians wait and pray for the anti-aircraft fire streaming into the Baghdad night to tear an American bomber from the sky.
Praise be to God, the first victories come!
Two enemy helicopters have collided and their occupants are killed.
The owner of the appliance store, where we stop by to do a little shopping, cannot tear his eyes from the television.
I HOPE THEIR BODIES WERE CUT TO PIECES AND MIXED TOGETHER.
J. SACCO 3-09

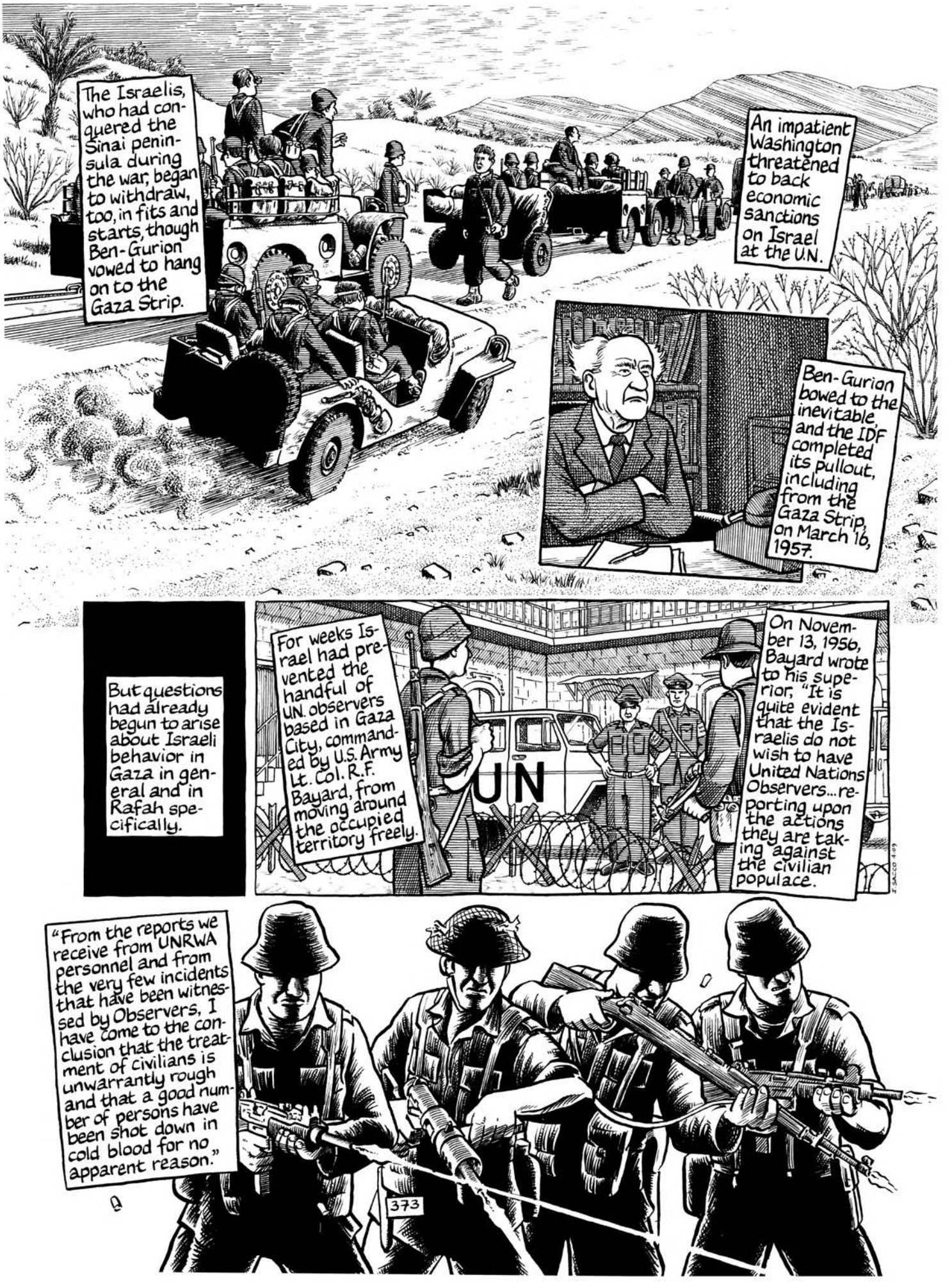

Khaled has added up the Coalition deaths so far.
ABOUT 23 OR 25.
Abu Ahmed cannot hide his glee that another four Americans have been killed.
And if you add those to the ones killed in the helicopters—what's the total now?
GOD WILLING, GOD WILLING, AMERICA WILL BE BROKEN.
The Western media, they say, is full of lies.
They are watching Abu Dhabi and Al-Jazeera.
Hani prefers Iraqi T.V. He says it makes him feel better.
J. SACCO 3.09
Saddam Hussein rides across the screen brandishing a sword.
He greets children while reports come in of five more tanks destroyed! A sixth aircraft!
He issues an order for the Bedouin of southern Iraq not to behead all the American prisoners falling into their hands.
Iraqis are burning money to show they don't need cash rewards for killing the invaders.
They will fight, fight, fight!
SADDAM WILL BE VICTORIOUS.
THE ENTIRE ARAB WORLD AND THE WHOLE WORLD IN GENERAL WILL CHANGE OWING TO THE AMERICAN DEFEAT.
369


The next day the Iraqis deliver on a promise to show captured Americans.
Look at them shake with fear!
And here are American dead on display
and close-ups of their wounds.
I balk
The footage of the bodies disturbs me.
THEY ARE SOLDIERS, JOE.
SOLDIERS.
THEY CAME TO KILL.
IF AMERICA WINS THIS WAR, PALESTINIANS WILL BE THE FIRST LOSERS.
And that, in their minds, is what's at stake: An American victory would assure Israel of its never-ending supremacy.
J. SACCO 3-09
Geo-strategic considerations aside, they enjoy the moment.
DID YOU SEE THEM?
370


And so it goes over the next few days as reports come in of more helicopters falling, of dozens of tanks burning.
DID YOU SEE HOW THE OLD MAN SHOT DOWN AN APACHE?
DID YOU SEE IT?
SADDAM HUSSEIN 100 PERCENT!


But not everyone is so caught up in the cheap propaganda and the minor American setbacks to expect Iraq to prevail.
Khaled's view is the most philosophical.
It is stripped of illusion and seems somehow self-reflective.
IT'S NOT A MATTER OF VICTORY.
IT'S A MATTER OF RESISTING TILL THE END.


CASUALTIES AMONG THE MOB
A new war has started while another one, our war, Abed's and mine, namely the 1956 Suez Crisis, is winding down.
In fact—I didn't tell you—it was already over when the incident in Rafah took place.
By then the big picture looked like this:
British and French forces had launched an air- and seaborne assault on Egypt's Port Said and Port Fuad on November 5 and 6.
President Eisenhower feared the Anglo-French attack would increase Soviet influence in Egypt and alienate the entire Arab world.
U.S. pressure forced the British and French to abort their campaign. London and Paris were humiliated.
Their forces would leave Egypt by December 22, 1956.
372


The Israelis, who had conquered the Sinai peninsula during the war, began to withdraw, too, in fits and starts, though Ben-Gurion vowed to hang on to the Gaza Strip.
An impatient Washington threatened to back economic sanctions on Israel at the U.N.
Ben-Gurion bowed to the inevitable and the IDF completed its pullout, including from the Gaza Strip, on March 16, 1957.
But questions had already begun to arise about Israeli behavior in Gaza in general and in Rafah specifically.
For weeks Israel had prevented the handful of UN observers based in Gaza City, commanded by U.S. Army Lt. Col. R.F. Bayard, from moving around the occupied territory freely.
UN
On November 13, 1956, Bayard wrote to his superior, "It is quite evident that the Israelis do not wish to have United Nations Observers... reporting upon the actions they are taking against the civilian populace.
"From the reports we receive from UNRWA personnel and from the very few incidents that have been witnessed by Observers, I have come to the conclusion that the treatment of civilians is unwarrantly rough and that a good number of persons have been shot down in cold blood for no apparent reason."
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Press accounts began to refer to an incident in Rafah in which some 50 Arabs were killed, and U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold wrote to Israeli foreign Minister Golda Meir on November 21 expressing "great concern" about the "situation in the Gaza Strip, in particular Rafah..."
Meir answered that, regarding Rafah, "complete tranquility prevails in the whole area, and relations between the local population and the authorities are amicable."


As to reports of widespread killings by Israeli soldiers, Meir wrote that "rioting instigated by Egyptian agents took place in Rafah on 10 and 12 November.
"During the disorders the UNRWA food Depot in the town was attacked by an unruly mob and the Israel authorities were compelled to take action to prevent large scale looting and destruction.
"Order was restored with some difficulty and, regrettably, there were casualties among the mob."


On November 23, the 13 Knesset members of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee had their own questions for IDF Chief of Staff Dayan about the conduct of Israeli forces in Gaza. In a closed door session he assured them that while in "borderline" circumstances some units may have fired on those who might otherwise have been captured,
...I DON'T KNOW OF ANY INSTANCE WHERE THEY STOOD PRISONERS IN A ROW AND KILLED THEM.
MK* Moshe Aram wanted to know, "What exactly happened in Rafah?"
IN RAFAH THERE WAS A BIT OF AN UNFORTUNATE CONVERGENCE OF EVENTS, AND THE ARABS THERE HAD A NEGATIVE DISPOSITION...
*MK: MEMBER OF THE KNESSET


"Our unit left the area during a changeover of units, the second unit hadn't yet entered the area...and [Rafah's residents] were sure that we'd left without intending to come back."
The second unit, Dayan explained, entered the next day to search for arms and Egyptian soldiers.
...THEY ANNOUNCED A CURFEW ON THE LOUDSPEAKERS AND THAT ALL THE MEN HAD TO ASSEMBLE, AND NOT ONLY DID THEY NOT SHOW UP BUT THEY PAID NO ATTENTION TO THE CURFEW INSTRUCTIONS.
"There were a lot of Egyptian soldiers and a lot of arms among this big group of Arabs who weren't listening to the instructions, which is why I said a certain disposition was involved."
SO THE UNIT OPENED FIRE. I DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY FIRED AND WHETHER THE ARABS FIRED...
ABOUT 40 PEOPLE WERE KILLED...
...BUT IF THERE ARE 200 SOLDIERS IN THE HOUSES WHO DON'T WANT TO HAND THEMSELVES OVER AND ARE INCITING OTHERS NOT TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES, THEN THE UNIT COMMANDER WAS ABSOLUTELY RIGHT WHEN HE OPENED FIRE.
Ultimately, Dayan said, the Arabs "responded to the order to come for identification, and then 200 Egyptian soldiers were found..."
J. SACCO 4-09

On November 28, Ben-Gurion rejected a proposal to debate the Rafah incident in the Knesset but offered an explanation that combined and added to elements of Meir's and Dayan's accounts.





In the same Special Report for the U.N. General Assembly which outlined the killings in Khan Younis,* UNRWA navigated between the competing claims about what had happened in Rafah.

"The Israel authorities in Gaza state that the attitude of the refugees in Rafah camp was hostile and that there was some resistance to the screening operation, during which the casualties occurred.

"The refugees deny any such resistance."

The "facts appear to be," UNRWA concluded, that some refugees did not hear the loudspeakers calling on them to gather and that not enough time was allowed for the men to reach the designated screening sites.

designated hour. In the confusion, a
f refugees ran toward the screening
f being late, and some Israel soldiers
cked and opened fire on this running
tor ived from sources whic
ustworthy lists of names of person
legedly killed at Rafah on 12 November, numberin

J. SACCO 4.09

*SEE P. 117




RETURN
The Israelis and the Egyptians eventually exchanged prisoners, and those bussed from Rafah to Atlit prison in Israel came home.
Mohammed Atwa El-Najeeli, badly wounded on November 12, 1956, remained in Gaza City hospitals for some three months.
Now he laughs about the experience.
MY FRIEND CAME TO SEE ME AFTER TEN DAYS.
HE WALKED ALL THE WAY FROM RAFAH TO GAZA CITY ALONG THE BEACH TO FIND ME.
"He told me,"
ARE YOU OKAY, MOHAMMED?
AM I OKAY?
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
I ask his wife, Mariam, about her feelings while Mohammed was away.
I WAS PREGNANT.
I WAS NOT ABLE TO WALK FROM HERE TO GAZA CITY.
BUT I USED TO SEND FOOD FOR HIM WITH THE AMBULANCES.
AND CLOTHES.
THE AMBULANCES BROUGHT ME THE CLOTHES [IN WHICH] HE WAS SHOT.
THEY HAD BEEN CUT BY SCISSORS.
HIS LONG UNDERWEAR WAS FULL OF BLOOD.
"I washed all those clothes and his underwear.
"What was in my mind?
"I was crazy.
"I was mad.
"I was crazy seeing that this happened to my husband,"
MY LOVER.
J. SACCO 4.09
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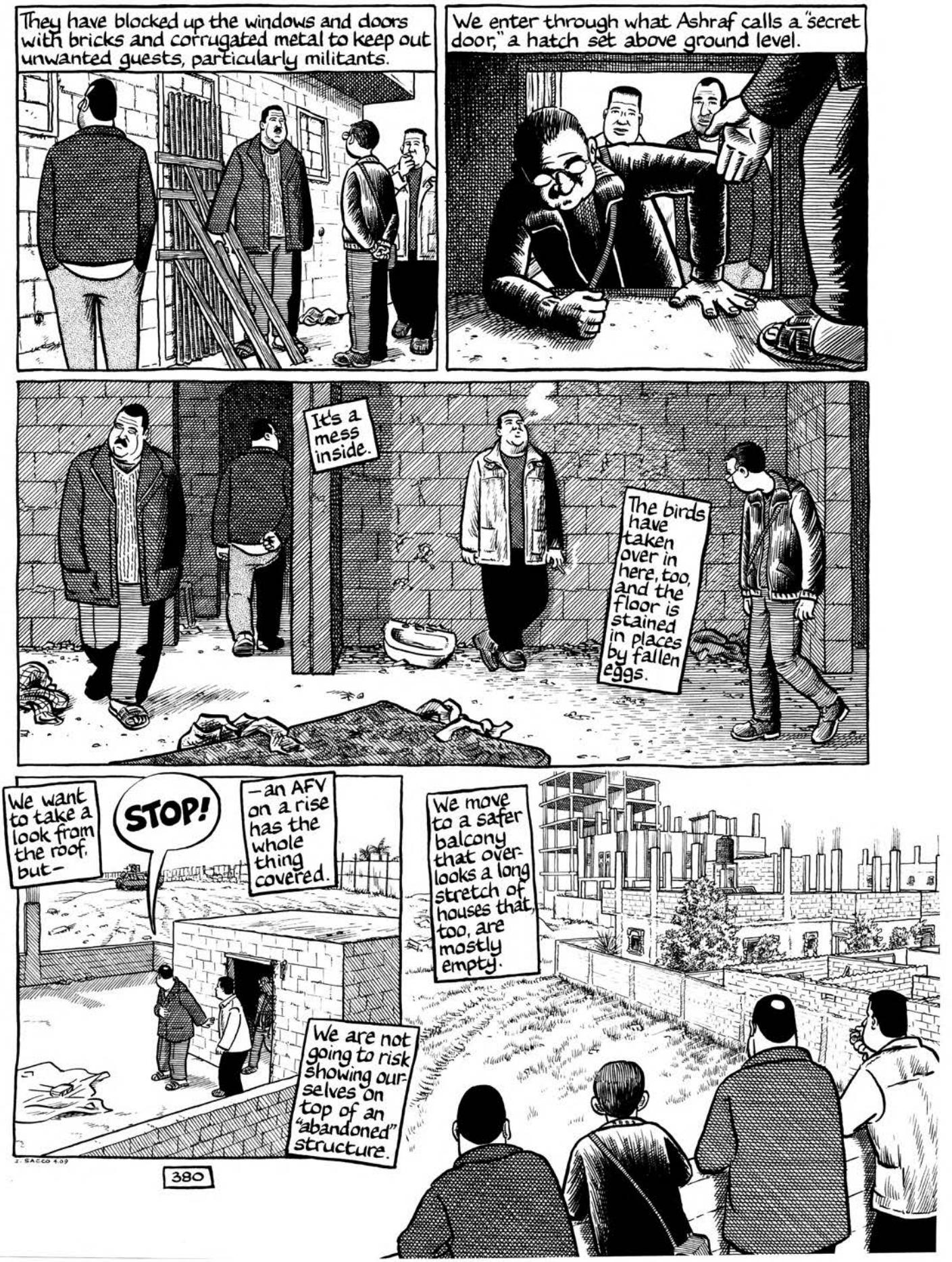
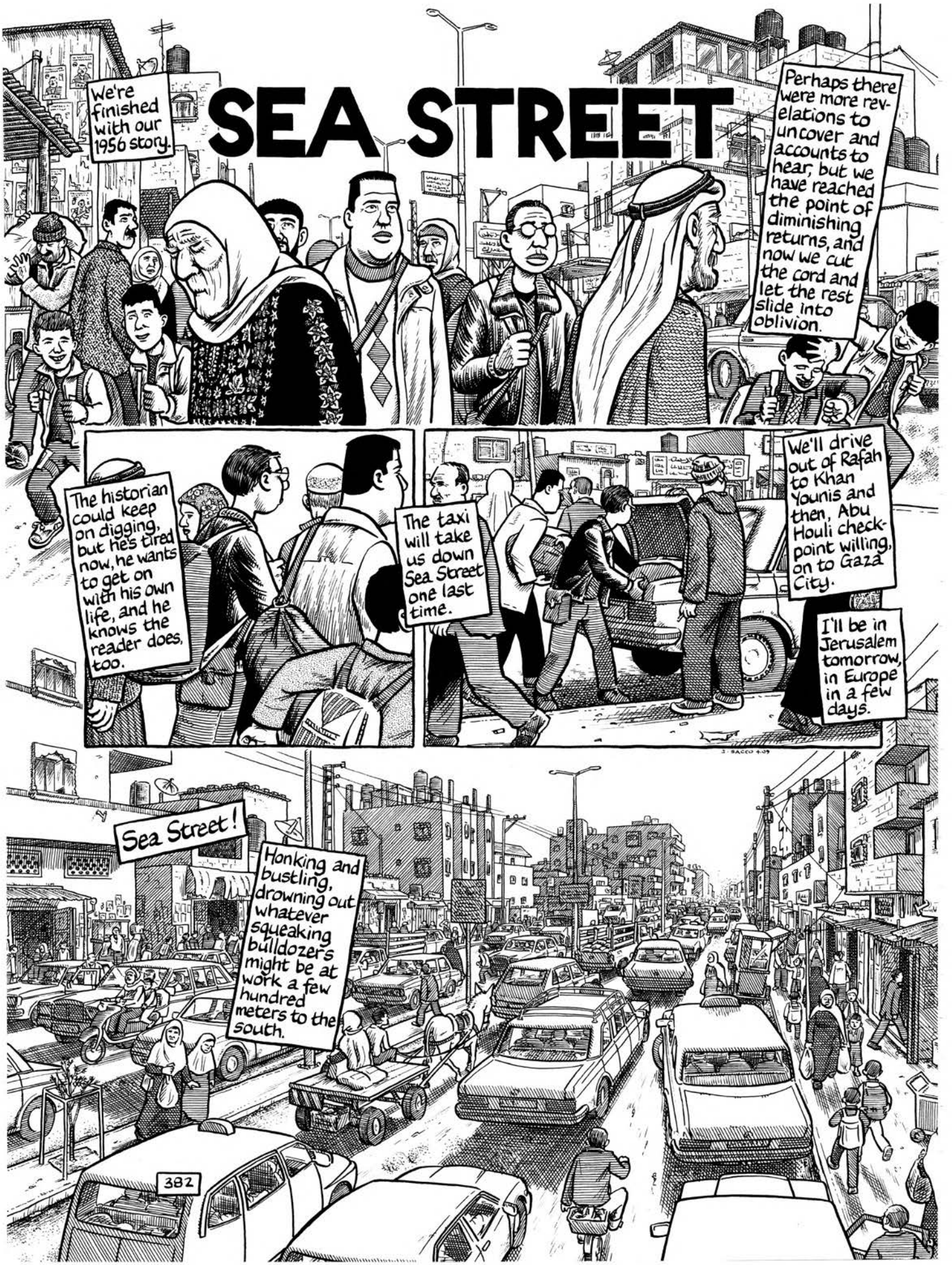
"Praise be to God. When I received the clothes, I thanked God that they didn't bury him in them...
"I put [them] in the pillow.
"I kept them as a momento.
"Because I was just a bride.
"Just five months before that event I'd been married.
"Of course I'd never leave the pillow."
AND NOW, PRAISE BE TO GOD, I HAVE TEN CHILDREN.
SIX SONS AND FOUR DAUGHTERS.
I LOST MY ELDEST.
A HEART ATTACK.
ANYWAY, THANK GOD.
ALL THE TIME I'M CRYING, BUT WHAT CAN I DO?
PRAISE BE TO GOD.
46 YEARS OLD.
HE WAS STRONG AND SITTING WITH ME.
EVERY DAY MANY PEOPLE ARE KILLED...
WE CANNOT PREVENT THE FATE OF ANYONE.
"The hajj was considered dead, he should have been carried [away] and left on the garbage, but at the last moment—
"Thank God.
"And for us, we don't know what will happen..."
I SAW HIM AT HOME AFTER THREE MONTHS.
WE DIDN'T BELIEVE HE WOULD COME BACK.
J. SACCO 4-09
"And we took care of him and praise be to God."
378


ABANDONED
These are my last days in Rafah, and I spend as much time as I can with the people I've met in Block J.
We pay Fuad a final visit.
Birds have taken up residence in the bullet holes inside his house.
THEY CAN GET COMPENSATION FROM UNRWA IF THEIR NESTS ARE DEMOLISHED.
We walk over to Ashraf's damaged home. His dad no longer makes the daily pilgrimage.
When the Israelis finally knock down the house they can, without compunction, claim it was an "abandoned" structure.
Technically —and what are some lies but shameless technicalities? —that will be true.
ALL THESE ARE NEW.
But even now, with another row of bullet holes in the wall, Ashraf and his family continue to assert ownership of the battered home.
379


They have blocked up the windows and doors with bricks and corrugated metal to keep out unwanted guests, particularly militants.
We enter through what Ashraf calls a "secret door," a hatch set above ground level.
It's a mess inside.
The birds have taken over in here, too, and the floor is stained in places by fallen eggs.
We want to take a look from the roof, but—
STOP!
—an AFV on a rise has the whole thing covered.
We are not going to risk showing ourselves on top of an "abandoned" structure.
We move to a safer balcony that overlooks a long stretch of houses that, too, are mostly empty.
J. SACCO 4.09

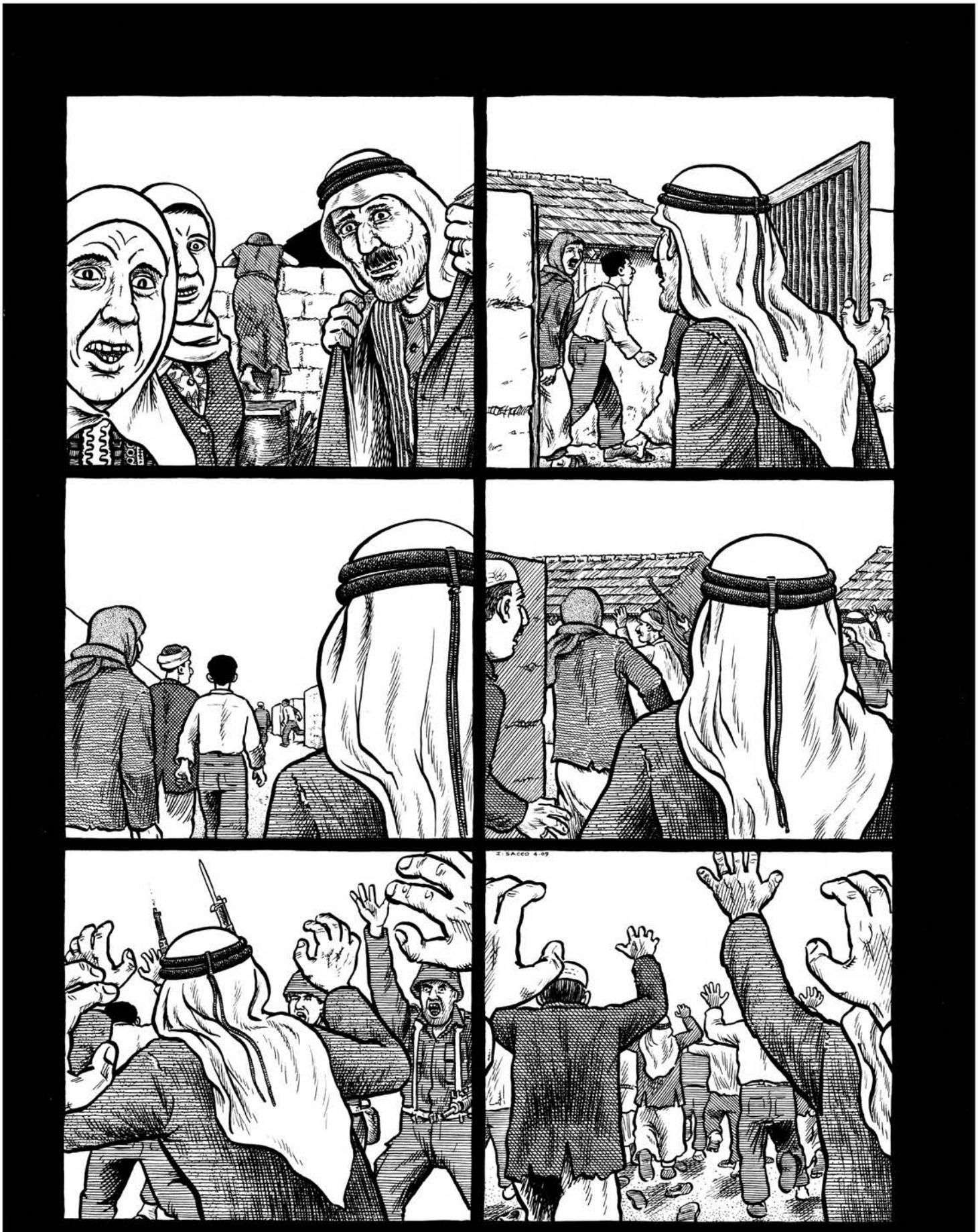

In the other direction Fuad calls out to the Egyptian soldiers across the border who are checking us out with binoculars.
They do not return the greeting.
Okay, that's that.
I say farewell to Fuad.
Then I say goodbye to Ashraf.
and as we embrace
BAP
a machine-gun opens up!
A horse hitched to a cart bolts past us,
and so we have our last laugh.
J. SACCO 4.09


SEA STREET
We're finished with our 1956 story.
Perhaps there were more revelations to uncover and accounts to hear, but we have reached the point of diminishing returns, and now we cut the cord and let the rest slide into oblivion.
The historian could keep on digging, but he's tired now, he wants to get on with his own life, and he knows the reader does, too.
The taxi will take us down Sea Street one last time.
We'll drive out of Rafah to Khan Younis and then, Abu Houli checkpoint willing, on to Gaza City.
I'll be in Jerusalem tomorrow, in Europe in a few days.
J. SACCO 4.09
Sea Street!
Honking and bustling, drowning out whatever squeaking bulldozers might be at work a few hundred meters to the south.
382


Abed and I came here to find out what happened on November 12, 1956, and now, arguably, we are the world's foremost experts.
How often we forced the old men of Rafah back down this road lined with soldiers and strewn with shoes.
HABEBA
How often we shoved the old men between the soldiers with sticks and through that gate.
How often we made them sit with their heads down and piss on themselves.
In the end, when we'd finished with them, we let them break down the wall and run home.
As we negotiate the traffic, I recall one of our final interviews. It was with the grandfather of one of Abed's pals.
Abu Juhish was clubbed on his head as he entered the school, and his friends had tried to staunch the bleeding with sand.*
J. SACCO 4-09
*SEE P. 266
383


Abu Juhish had health problems, and our meeting with him was put off a number of times.
Finally his grandson Belal took us to see him.
Abu Juhish clearly strained to tell us even sketchy details of his story.
Soon he was crying.
It wasn't the first time one of the old men had cried in front of us, and I knew how to handle it.
I assured him it was okay, that he needn't continue, that—
BE STRONG, MY GRAND-FATHER.
NOW TRY TO TALK FROM YOUR MIND, NOT WITH PASSION.
TRY TO REMEM-BER.
And so Abu Juhish con-tinued fit-fully until Belal inter-rupted to cut to the chase.
WHAT IS THE WORST THING YOU REMEM-BER FROM THAT DAY?
FEAR.
FEAR.
Suddenly I felt ashamed of myself for losing some-thing along the way as I collected my evidence, dis-entangled it, dissected it, indexed it, and logged it onto my chart.
J. SACCO 4-09


And I remembered how often I sat with old men who tried my patience, who rambled on, who got things mixed up, who skipped ahead,
who didn't remember the barbed wire at the gate or when the mukhtars stood up or where the jeeps were parked,
how often I sighed and mentally rolled my eyes
because I knew more about that day than they did.
J. SACCO 4.09


J. SACCO 4-09



