

Material Witnesses in the Comics Form

The Testimonies Provided by Joe Sacco's Representations of
Maps and Buildings in *Safe Area Goražde* and *Footnotes in
Gaza*

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which Joe Sacco's representations of maps and of the built environment in his graphic narratives *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000) and *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009), function as material witnesses which testify to human rights violations. In his narratives, Sacco has included a vast amount of information about space and architecture which constitute important parts of the surrounding geographical and historical contexts of both eyewitnesses' and his own recollections of past events. Based on Eyal Weizman's work on forensic architecture, and the idea of how *things* should not be regarded as static pieces of evidences in war crime investigations, but that they rather have dynamic qualities due to the various ways in which they are constructed, interpreted and used, I will investigate how Sacco's portrayals speak to the readers and provide testimony of past atrocities. By using our skills and knowledge of reading comics, we as readers are the necessary interpreters of what Sacco's representations testifies to. I will argue that his particular style and methods of organization make his portrayals stand out as powerful representations which persuasively convey information of the consequences the usage of maps and the destruction of houses have on the people who live within areas of conflict. Through analyses of Sacco's stylistic and organizational techniques, I will investigate how the material witnesses provide testimonies which complement the testimonies given by the human witnesses in his works, and I will argue that they should be understood as critical comments on how objects are used in cases regarding human rights violations.

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Introduction

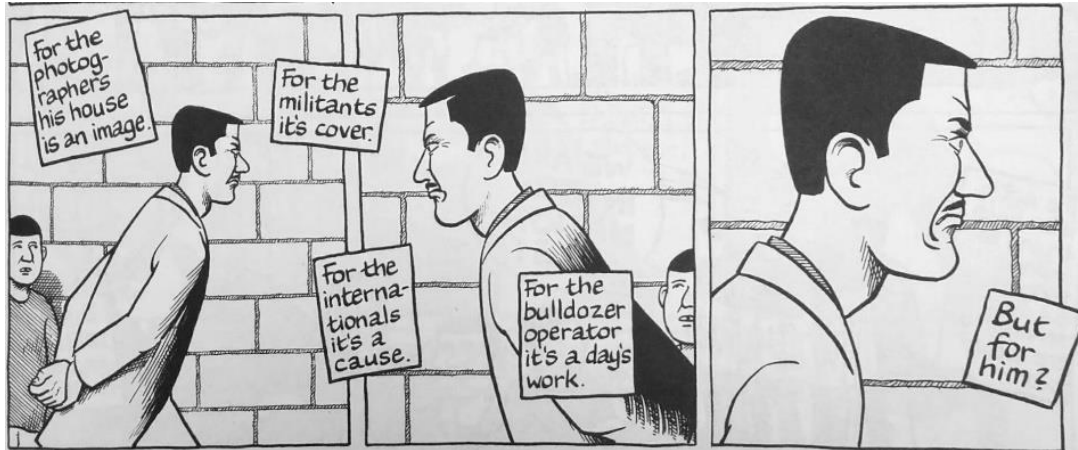


Fig.1. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 191.

In figure 1 we see Joe Sacco's portrayal of a Palestinian man who is pacing back and forth in front of a building in Rafah. The sequence is from one of several scenes in *Footnotes in Gaza* where Sacco depicts the Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes in Rafah, and it offers a question which is illustrative for the overall aim of this thesis: what is a house? This, moreover, raises the following questions: how are objects, such as buildings and maps, perceived and interpreted differently by different people? And, what consequences do these interpretations have on the lives of the people living within areas of conflict?

In this thesis, I will examine how Joe Sacco's representations of maps and ruins in *Safe Area Gorazde* and *Footnotes in Gaza* (hereafter *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*, respectively) provide testimony, and what they testify to. Sacco's skillful way of representing the recollections of eyewitnesses who have experienced traumatic events have been recognized and discussed by several scholars, and a lot of attention has been given to the ways in which Sacco manages to represent stories that have been overlooked or neglected by the history books and the global media. Through his drawings of faces and bodies in pain, his journalistic and honest approach, care for details, and organization of elements on the page, Sacco represents people and their stories respectfully and in an attentive manner in his works. Additionally, in his representations of the eyewitnesses' testimonies and the events that have taken place in Gorazde and Gaza, Sacco has included a large amount of information about the areas' geographies in maps, and about the built environment through both verbal and visual elements. These are representations of objects which, even though they do not have a voice on

their own, contain and convey information about human rights abuses that have taken place in the past.

As this thesis considers the act of bearing witness, it is necessary to provide some background information about testimony and trauma. In Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's book *Testimony – Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Felman writes that testimony is a "discursive *practice*" and that by testifying one carries out a "performative speech act" which implies that to testify is to perform an action (5). This means that the testifying process involves both a testifier and a listener, and that through their interaction "the "knowing" of the event is given birth to" (Laub 57). Laub writes that "because trauma returns in disjointed fragments in the memory of the survivor, the listener has to let these trauma fragments make their impact on both him and on the witness" (71). Felman furthermore explains how the act of bearing witness "is more than simply to report a fact or an event or to relate what has been lived, recorded and remembered" (Felman 204), which implies that the act of testifying is carried out "in order to *address* another, to impress upon a listener, to *appeal* to a community" (Felman 204). Because the testifying process involves performative speech acts, uttered by a witness to affect a listener, it can be seen in relation to the ways in which graphic narratives convey meaning that require active engagement by the readers due to the comics form. In *Understanding Comics – The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud writes that comics is "a medium where the audience is a willing and conscious collaborator" (65), and that when reading comics, we must actively make sense of the interplay between visible and invisible elements on the page, and in this way, achieve *closure* as we interpret the message that is conveyed (63). In "Joe Sacco's Comics of Performance", Rebecca Scherr writes about the performativity of comics, and about how the works of Sacco contain "several aspects of performance in terms of both form and content" and that, within his works, this "performativity ... highlights the ability of comics to intervene in specific ethical debates concerning the politics of representing pain and trauma" (184). Scherr explains how the "the performance inherent in drawing, and in the textural quality of the line, is akin to the performance of *testimony*" (194), something which makes visible the link between the comics form and the process of bearing witness as a performative act. Through the performativity of his comics, Sacco creates, in Scherr's words, "a *spectacle* out of the various testimonies and experiences of crisis" which offers the readers "a comment on the politics of humanitarian witnessing" (198). Because to testify is to perform an action, this must be seen in relation to the ways in which Sacco's representations of objects 'speak' to the

readers. Hillary Chute has written about how Sacco has an “interlocutory role” because he has collected the oral testimonies and created visual representations of the traumatic events that have been witnessed by others (206). This is something which also can be applied to Sacco’s representations of objects, as he has collected and represented a vast amount of information about the surrounding spatial and built environment in *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*, which constitute an important part of the stories he is representing. As the act of testifying involves “more than to simply report a fact” (Felman 204), it can be seen in relation to what Chute writes about how Sacco’s work “is openly reflective about itself, actively acknowledging the instability of knowing – and the problem of transmitted knowledge” (198). Because the comics form is inherently nontransparent (Chute 198), it is necessary to investigate how Sacco uses the form to convey information about traumatic events in his representations of objects. How do his stylistic and organizational techniques influence the ways in which we interpret his portrayals of maps and of the built environment? How do they have an impact on the readers? Since this thesis will be centered around Sacco’s representations of objects in the form of maps and buildings, and how they provide testimonies as they ‘speak’ to the readers, it is important to consider the ways in which *things*, which do not have a voice on their own, can function as material witnesses testifying to human rights abuses.

In this thesis, I will demonstrate how Sacco’s representations of maps and buildings speak to the readers in a powerful manner, as they complement the eyewitnesses’ testimonies in *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*. I will explore how Sacco’s representations of objects should be understood as ‘material witnesses’, a term which was coined by Susan Schuppli and which involves the idea that “an entity (object or unit) whose physical properties or technical configuration records evidence of passing events to which it can bear witness” (“Material Witness”). Eyal Weizman furthermore explains that if a material witness is “capable of some kind of ‘speech’, then it too might be interrogated and cross-examined” (*The Least of All* 114). Based on this, I will explore how we as readers are the ‘expert witnesses’ (Weizman, *The Least of All* 46) who interpret the testimonies the material witnesses provide by using our skills and knowledge of reading comics. The idea that objects can bear witness to past events has been explored extensively by Weizman, and his work on forensic architecture and the role of objects in cases regarding human rights violations, will be central to my investigation of Sacco’s representations of maps and buildings in *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*. In *The Least of All Possible Evils - Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza*, Weizman writes about the ‘era of forensics’ and how it implies a shift in emphasis from the *human* testimony to the

testimony of *objects* in war crime investigations (112). In his book, Weizman is concerned “with the problem of violence in its moderation and minimization”, and more specifically “with state violence that is managed according to a similar economy of calculations and justified as the least possible means” (3). Weizman explains that “[h]umanitarianism, human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL), when abused by state, supra-state and military action, have become the crucial means by which the economy of violence is calculated and managed” (3-4). He labels the clash between the “technologies of humanitarianism, human rights and humanitarian international law with military and political powers” the “humanitarian present” (Weizman 4). When it comes to IHL, or “the laws of war”, Weizman writes that it has become an increasingly central “part of global political culture” as it is concerned with “calculation and application of military violence” (10). Within IHL, the “principle of *proportionality*” plays an important role in the processes regarding military violence (Weizman 11). Weizman explains how the proportionality principle was established “in 1977, in Protocol 1 of the Geneva Conventions” to create a “balance ... between military objectives and anticipated damage to civilian life and property” (11). In both *Safe Area* and *Footnotes* Sacco portrays incidents where the laws of war are used. *Safe Area* contains representations of maps and ruins which can be understood as evidence of how calculations made by the international forces, such as the UN and NATO, were insufficient when it came to keeping the people in Eastern Bosnia safe. In *Footnotes*, Sacco’s maps and representations of the built environment convey information which provide evidence of the Israelis ways of justifying their military actions against Palestinian houses in Gaza based on the laws of war.

Weizman’s work on the ways in which inanimate things came to achieve an increasingly central role in political and legal decision-making in relation to war crimes and human rights violations, is thus relevant to the discussion about Sacco’s representations of both maps and the built environment in Goražde and Gaza. Weizman writes that “[e]xisting at the intersection of architecture, history and the laws of war, forensic architecture must refer to an analytical method of reconstructing scenes of violence as they are inscribed in spatial artefacts and in built environments” (Weizman, *The Least of All* 101). This implies that forensics is concerned with “the rhetoric associated with it” – the methods and techniques used when the material evidence is presented – and thus the ability to persuade, which is something Weizman has termed ‘forensic aesthetics’ (Weizman *The Least of All* 101). When

it comes to forensics,¹ Weizman writes that it involves both “the materialization of the event” and “the construction of a forum and the performance of objects and interpreters within it” (*The Least of All* 105). Furthermore, in “Forensic Architecture” Weizman et al. write about how the testimony of objects involves some of the same attributes as human testimony, because of the role and nature of, and the relationship between, the object’s interpreter and the forum to which it is addressed (62). Because objects, structures, or things should be understood as dynamic, due to the various ways they can be interpreted, perceived, and spoken for, they should be seen “as protagonists in the unfolding of incidents” (Weizman et al. 62). The “object/thing or structure should not be seen in isolation, but as a part of a complex assemblage, networked into ever shifting sets of relations - people, spaces and things, human and non-human, that are holding together social and political relations” (Weizman et al. 62). Based on this, I will examine the ways in which Sacco’s representations of non-human witnesses convey information both about past traumatic events, and about the various perspectives different people have on spatial representations and architectural structures. What is it about Sacco’s representations of material witnesses that speak to the readers, and convince us of past atrocities which have taken place? How does Sacco use the comics form to represent the built environment and the spatial organization in Goražde and Gaza, and how do these representations, in turn, persuasively convey information about violent events? The overall aim of this thesis is to show how Sacco’s portrayals offer a critique of the consequences the usage of maps and the calculated destruction of houses have on the people who suffer from human rights violations. I will argue that because of Sacco’s stylistic and organizational methods, the material witnesses become powerful “protagonists in the unfolding of incidents” (Weizman et al. 62), as they complement the human testimonies, highlighting the connection between the human experience and the role of objects, such as cartographic representations and architectural structures, in the events of conflicts and atrocities.

This thesis has two main chapters, the first of which is concerned with the testimonies provided by Sacco’s maps, while the second will be about Sacco’s representations of the built environment in Goražde and in Gaza. Both chapters contain two subchapters: one concerning *Safe Area Goražde* and one concerning *Footnotes in Gaza*. In the first chapter I will examine the relationship between maps and testimony. How do maps testify, and what is at risk when

¹ A term derived from Latin *forensis* < *forum* < ‘forum’, meaning “the practice and skill of making an argument before a professional, political or legal gathering” (Weizman, *The Least of All* 105)

it comes to having maps “speak” to human rights violations? What is Sacco’s style of maps, and how do they speak to the readers? In my attempts to answer these questions, I will use ideas derived from Weizman’s work concerning the various forces that are involved in mapping practices, and from Kitchin and Dodge’s work concerning the ways in which maps are “ontogenetic in nature” (335). Each of the subchapters will have one section regarding Sacco’s *style* and one regarding his *organization* of the maps. The second chapter will be about the ways in which the built environment in Sacco’s narratives provide testimony. The idea that material witnesses can testify to the ways in which military actions are calculated, will be central to my investigation of Sacco’s representations of the built environment in his works. The chapter will contain subchapters about *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*, where I will focus on Sacco’s stylistic and organizational methods jointly. Through the investigation of Sacco’s representations, I will aim to show the ways in which different perspectives on the politics and laws of war are used in calculations and decision-making related to military actions, and how this has severe consequences to the people living in areas of conflict.

1 Maps as Material Witnesses in *Safe Area Goražde* and *Footnotes in Gaza*

1.1 Introduction

Safe Area and *Footnotes* are both graphic narratives about people who live on land which is controlled by others, and whose lives are affected by borders which Sacco has portrayed in spatial representations in the form of maps. In the investigation of Sacco's maps as material witnesses, it comes down to his ability to convince the readers of the stories he wishes to convey. Sacco's stylistic and organizational choices when it comes to cartographic representations, are elements that have an impact on the maps' persuasiveness. In both *Safe Area* and *Footnotes* decision-making about the establishing of borders is central to the conflicts that are depicted. The inhabitants of Gaza and Goražde are left to themselves with the fear of both leaving and staying in the areas we see demarcated on the maps, trapped within strictly controlled borders and with no power to influence the control of the land they live on and off. Their lives are affected by walls, fences, roadblocks and checkpoints which have been constructed by others based on geopolitical decisions. Sacco's project is to give an as truthful as possible representation of the eyewitnesses' experiences of events that have been neglected or forgotten by the public media and the history books, and, in doing so, he has included several spatial representations in the form of maps which help situate the readers both geographically and historically. In this chapter I will investigate how Sacco's maps should be understood as dynamic objects which 'speak' to the readers – and provide testimonies – based on the ways in which we interpret both maps and comics.

The idea that objects such as ruins, models, diagrams and maps will be interpreted differently by those who engage with them, making them "protagonists in the unfolding of incidents" (Weizman et al. 62), applies to the comics medium as well. McCloud definition of closure as our active sense-making of the interplay between visible and invisible elements on the page, makes the reading-process individual, and he writes that "[t]he comics I "see" in my mind will never be seen in their entirety by anyone else, no matter how hard I try" (196). The cartographic representations will be understood subjectively based on the reader's background knowledge and skills of reading both comics and maps. McCloud writes that ideas which are conveyed in comics "follow a path from mind to hand to paper to eye to mind" (195), and that, even though the artist's style and methods will influence the reader's interpretation of the

visible and invisible elements, the intentional meaning is likely to change along the path (195). It is therefore necessary to investigate how Sacco's style and usage of the maps play a part in our understanding of what the material witnesses testify to. In both *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*, Sacco has included his own maps which are designed in ways which make them resemble traditional cartographic representations, and which help situate the readers in the geographical areas in question. The maps provide information about the areas that are relevant to the narrative, and thus Sacco has made decisions about what to include and exclude to best convey his message. Since land does not have a voice on its own, and is frequently represented visually by maps which are often perceived as truthful portrayals of space, it is necessary to consider critical cartography when discussing how Sacco's use of maps provide testimony. In "Rethinking Maps" Kitchin and Dodge writes about their approach to how maps are "brought into being through practices" (335). They argue that maps, being "ontogenetic in nature", are "transitory and fleeting, being contingent, relational and context-dependent" (335). Because we understand maps "through mapping practices", they explain that "maps are constantly in a state of becoming, constantly being remade" (335). Drawing on Kitchin and Dodge's argument on how maps are "ontogenetic in nature" (335), Sacco's spatial representations can be understood as material witnesses which will be interpreted differently by the readers who actively engage with them. Guida Peterle has written about how we read maps and comics in the same way due to their spatial qualities, and she explains that "[i]f maps as mappings do come to life only when someone engages with them, generating mobile cartographies, so the spatial architecture of the comic book comes to life when comic readers produce their own interpretative path by engaging with it" (50). Spatial representations in the comics form and in maps require the same active engagement from the reader, and in *Safe Area* and *Footnotes* the readers must interpret the maps as both maps in the comics form, and in relation to their surrounding context.

Edward C. Holland writes that geographic representations in Sacco's works are a combination of "traditional cartography ... and a grounded perspective that inserts the reader into the action and attempts to replicate the experience of war through the visual negotiation of the conflict landscape" (85). The reader is guided by the artist as he or she makes sense of the surroundings of the events that are portrayed. Both *Safe Area* and *Footnotes* contain traditionally drawn maps and grounded perspectives which situate the readers in the landscapes of conflict. Holland explains how Sacco's representation of space includes both what he refers to as "maps-in-text" and "mappings-in-text" (86), the first of which I will

examine in detail in relation to *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*. Maps-in-text are representations of space which include “traditional demarcation of borders and territories and a bird’s-eye view of space”, according to Holland (86). Such maps are used as a narrative technique where they serve a traditional role of conveying information about locations in ways which condition the reader’s interpretation of the events in focus (Holland 88). Additionally, such a use of maps offers possibilities of “a more critical interpretation of the experiences and consequences of conflict” (Holland 88). This is something Jae Haley also writes about in “Beyond the Boundaries of Maps: Methods of Dissensus in Joe Sacco's Footnotes in Gaza” where she is concerned with Sacco’s critical approach to the ways maps are used to represent the lives of Palestinians. Sacco’s representations of landscapes through a combination of traditional maps and illustrations with a grounded perspective, provide information about space which problematizes traditional cartographic representations of conflict areas.

In this chapter I will explore how we as readers of both maps and comics can be understood as “expert” interpreters of the messages they convey as material witnesses. I will argue that Sacco’s informative and personal style and use of maps – his voice always being present in the form of explanatory captions – bear witness to how spatial representations are produced, interpreted and used differently by those who engage with them. By combining different perspectives on the conflicts together with his maps, Sacco calls attention to the various ways in which maps are involved in cases regarding human rights violations. Firstly, I will examine Sacco’s style and usage of maps in *Safe Area* and how the reader’s interpretation of them will be influenced by the surrounding visual and verbal elements. I will argue that Sacco’s use of maps can be understood as a critique of how cartographic representations created an illusion of Goražde being a safe area during the Bosnian War. Secondly, I will focus on Sacco’s style and organization of maps in *Footnotes*, and I will argue that they can be understood as critical comments of the ongoing Israeli occupation and total control of space in Gaza.

1.2 *Safe Area Goražde*

In his “Introduction” to *Safe Area*, Christopher Hitchens writes about how Sacco manages to represent the history of a place which was “not one of the war’s more chic or celebrated spots” or “a generic hotspot”, but rather a “microcosm” which is represented with an objective geographic and historical context (Hitchens, “Introduction” 1). Sacco has included several maps which contain information about the changing geopolitical situation in Bosnia

during the war. In “Joe Sacco, Frontline Journalist”, where Gary Groth interviews Sacco about *Safe Area*, Sacco explains how he needed to interweave a “historical track” and an “atmospheric track” when composing the narrative (59). To guide the readers through the historical events, Sacco explains that he needed to include “basic information” (Groth 59), which is something that is related to his journalistic approach and style, and which can be found in his use of maps. The maps in *Safe Area* are part of the basic and solid information which Sacco has provided to help the readers understand both the geographical and historical contexts of the war in Bosnia and the situation in Goražde. Through Sacco’s style and composition of the elements on the page, the readers are invited to make connections between the different sets of provided information, and because each reader, through his or her active engagement with the text’s elements, interprets the representations individually, the maps must be regarded as dynamic pieces of evidence within the narrative. In the following close readings of Sacco’s stylistic and organizational techniques, I will show how Sacco’s maps are not static objects which represent a fixed reality of the situation of the land in and around Goražde, but that they rather bear witness to how there were different forces involved in representations of space, and how this furthermore had implications on the lives of the people living there. In the discussion about style I will examine how Sacco’s combination of explanatory captions and forms resembling traditional cartography convey information about the use of maps in representations of historical events. When it comes to the discussion about how he organizes the maps in relation to other elements on the page, I will consider how the placement of maps next to portraits of political, or other important figures, affects the reader’s interpretation of the unfolding events.

1.2.1 Style

McCloud writes that pictures which are meant to “resemble their subjects” (27) are types of icons that contain meaning which is “fluid and variable according to appearance” (28). This means that an image’s “level of abstraction” will vary depending on how realistic or iconic it is, according to McCloud (28). Sacco’s maps – and maps in general – can be understood as highly iconic images that are meant to represent the geographical features of an area. The reader who is familiar with reading maps as spatial representations, will use this background knowledge in the interpretations of Sacco’s maps. In *Safe Area* Sacco uses the same style for all his maps as they usually contain key information about borders, cities, towns, areas, routes and rivers. Additionally, there is one map which provides information about topography (see

fig. 4), three which contain arrows that indicate the movement of people and troops (Sacco 88, 117, 200), and one map has stippled circles indicating the areas which the Serbs were ordered to pull out of at the end of the war (see fig. 5). In “Brotherhood and Unity”, a section in which Sacco provides historical background to the conflict, we get the narrative’s first maps. Figure 2 is an example of how Sacco’s design of maps resembles traditional



Fig. 2. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Goražde*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 19.

cartography: with thick lines indicating borders between countries, thin lines demarcating republics, stippled lines indicating autonomous areas, different hatching styles which separates countries, and captions indicating the different territories. Additionally, Sacco has inserted a caption with information which tell us that we are looking at a portrayal of how the country was organized at a certain point in time. Both Sacco’s design of maps, which resembles cartographic representations, and his explanatory captions are aspects which influence the reader’s interpretation of the maps throughout the narrative. In “Brotherhood and Unity” there are three large maps which take up more space on the page than any of Sacco’s other maps, something which makes them stand out as important to the understanding of the events that are to come. Through Sacco’s explanatory captions, which provide information about the ethnic diversity of the area depicted on the maps, the readers are invited to reflect upon how the maps represent the people living there, as well as the geographical organization of the land. Using maps, Sacco calls attention to how issues

regarding geopolitics is an important aspect of the conflict portrayed in *Safe Area*. Sacco has arranged the three maps according to scale, so that we gradually zoom in on the Drina Valley. The map in figure 3 contains a box with information of the scale and a note which tells us that

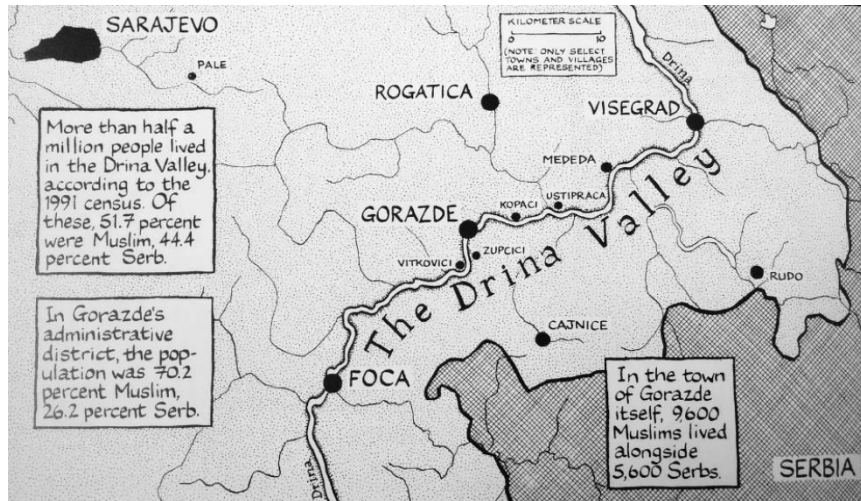


Fig. 3. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Gorazde*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 20.

only a selection of towns and villages is included (20). By noting this, Sacco makes it explicit that he has made choices about what to include and exclude when designing the maps. Through Sacco's captions the readers are made aware of the fact maps are reduced and selective representations of land, and that there are various forces and intentions involved in the processes of making maps. Due to Sacco's style and explanatory captions, which direct the reader's interpretation of the maps, one can say that they resemble maps which often are found in history books, with information about population and bordering nations and frontiers. The maps function as part of Sacco's historical track because they contain only the information which he meant was necessary to explain specific events, something he explicitly calls attention to in his captions. In figure 3, Sacco verbally informs us of the ratio between the Serb and the Muslim population in the area because these are the ethnic groups involved in the conflict. Since the ethnic diversity is highlighted, the map testifies to how a key aspect of the war was the tension between different groups of people.

While many of Sacco's maps are meant to help the readers make sense of the geopolitical situation of the area, other maps are inserted to communicate information about distance, time and movement through space. These maps illustrate something about the situation of the people involved which is different from the maps showing geopolitical changes. Figure 4 is an example where Sacco has included more information about the geography than he has in his other maps. The topography of a selection of mountains is

indicated by small symbols and captions with information about elevation in meters. Sacco's deliberate choices about what to include and exclude, which he explicitly calls attention to in the inserted caption, make it apparent that there are other mountains in the area, but that their elevations are not necessary for his representation of the route to Grebak, which is indicated by the stippled line. The information provided by the map about both the mountainous area and the distance between Goražde and Grebak, is relevant to the understanding of Edin's trek which Sacco portrays in the following pages. While the style of the map is simple and cartographic, containing a limited and selective amount of information, Sacco's caption adds to our understanding of the map as conveying information about the route as being highly

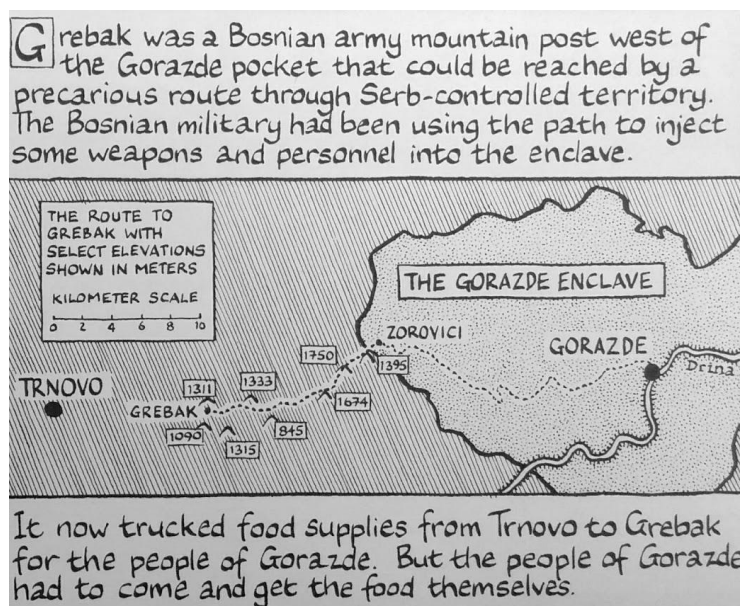


Fig. 4. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Goražde*, (London: Jonathan Cape), 135.

dangerous. Furthermore, due to Sacco's inclusion of explanatory captions we know that the area surrounding "the Goražde pocket" (Sacco 135) was controlled by the Serbs, which is something that adds to interpretation of the map as representing an immensely risky route.

By always including explanatory captions, Sacco's voice becomes a part of how we interpret his cartographic representations in *Safe Area*. In addition to providing information about what the maps are meant to represent, he makes it explicit that he has made certain choices when designing the maps. Additionally, his own interpretations of the events are made apparent through the verbal information. Because of this, one can say that Sacco's maps testify to the ways in which there always are different forces involved in mapping practices, which, in turn, affect the reader's interpretation of the maps. In addition to being representations of the land, I believe that the maps are representations of the situation of the

people inhabiting the land, due to the use of explanatory captions which adds meaning to what is portrayed. Furthermore, as we will see in the following section, the ways in which Sacco has structured the maps in relation to other elements in the narrative, make them stand out as objects bearing witness to the ways in which the design and usage of maps have consequences for the people living within the drawn lines on such representations.

1.2.2 Organization

McCloud writes that “by creating a *sequence* with two or more images, we are *endowing* them with a *single overriding identity*, and *forcing* the viewer to consider them as a *whole*” (73). As the readers achieve closure by making sense of the visible and the invisible elements on the comic book page (McCloud 63), the interpretation of the maps will be influenced by their surrounding context. Sacco’s otherwise realistic style makes the maps stand out as highly iconic spatial representations. To exemplify the ways in which the maps testify as material evidence in *Safe Area*, I will analyze how Sacco has organized his maps in relation to other images and sequences in the narrative. As we will see, Sacco uses maps to illustrate both changes of borders and movement through space, and they are often surrounded by visual and verbal elements providing detailed information about the political developments during the war. McCloud has written about different panel transitions in relation to how readers achieve closure, and one of these transitions is “aspect-to-aspect” (72). He explains that in this type of transition “bypasses time for the most part and sets a wandering eye on different aspects of place, idea or mood” (McCloud 72). The iconic maps in *Safe Area* are images which, when put together with images portraying people and/or actions that are part of the events, can be said to represent the aspect or idea of a place or of time. McCloud writes that when aspect-to-aspect is used, “time seems to stand still” (79). When reading the narrative, the representations of maps put together with other aspects, such as a portrait of a political leader, will cause the reader to pause and contemplate the connection between the two, which in turn will influence the ways in which the maps are interpreted.

The map in figure 4 is followed by a detailed representation of the journey Edin and other people from Goražde had to make to get supplies at the end of 1992 when they suffered from starvation due to a lack of resources and support from outside. Sacco has illustrated the route, and the men’s dangerous journey along it, using what Holland refers to as mappings-in-text (86). While Sacco’s maps give a bird’s-eye view of the geography, the mappings offer a grounded perspective which situates the reader in a different way in the spatial experience of

the conflict. The reader is, due to Sacco's style and use of perspective, situated in the landscape in a way that makes it possible to understand the experience of the trek. Because of the previous map, the reader is aware of the topography of the area, and can thus use this information when interpreting the representation of the unsafe journey along the route. When the map is put in sequence, its information about elevations influences our understanding of Edin's testimony. Sacco's cartographic representation, which on its own testifies to the topography of the area, and to how close the Serb were to the Bosnian territories, gains additional meaning of portraying a deadly route through the representation of Edin's recollection of his journey.

When Sacco places maps next to images representing political leaders or other important figures who played a part in the conflict, he draws attention to the relationship between objects and their interpreters. These maps bear witness to the many voices that were

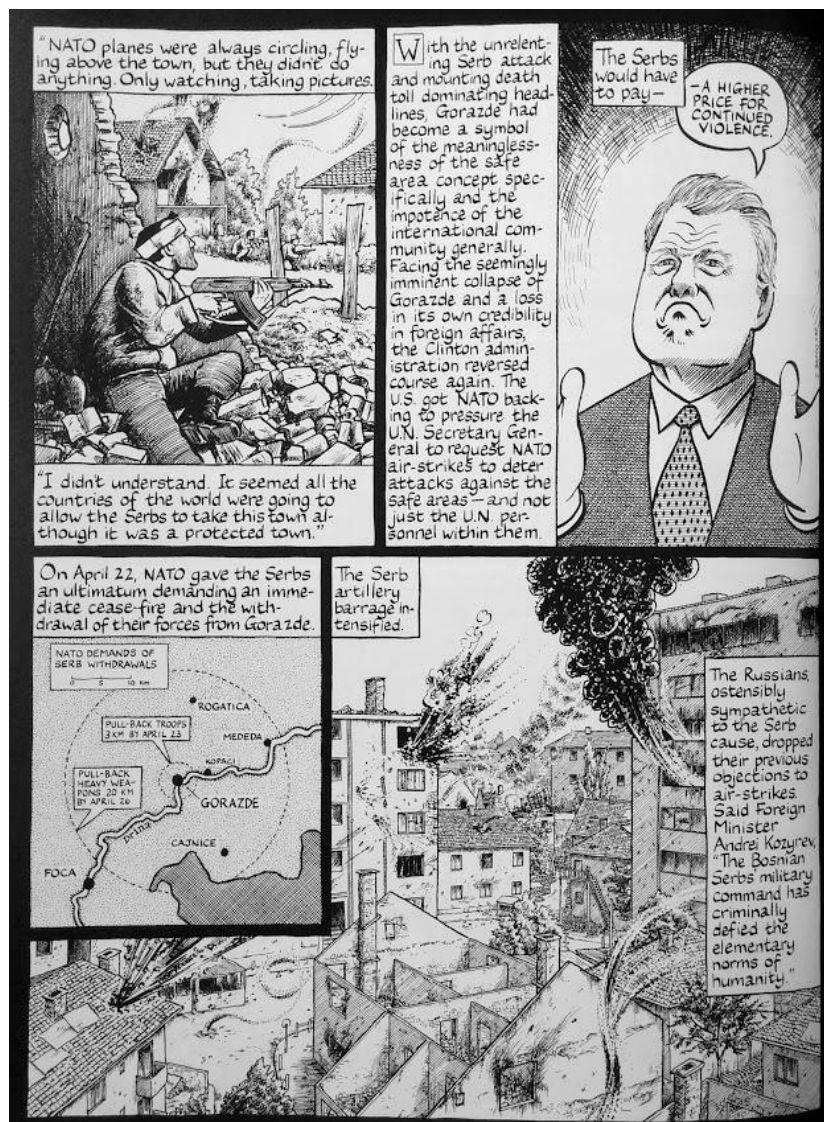


Fig. 5. Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Gorazde*, (London: Jonathan Cape), 184.

involved in the geopolitical changes, and how this is something which is part of the processes involved in creating and understanding spatial representations. The reader will interpret the map in figure 5 with the information provided by the surrounding context in mind. From Sacco's representations of the atrocities that had taken place (and still was taking place) in and around Goražde, the reader is made aware of how the indicated 'safe areas' were not safe at all. Through the text, we get a greater understanding about the various parties involved in the decision-making revolving the critical situation in Bosnia, and how they failed to cope with the ongoing violent events. Here Sacco draws attention to the various voices that represented Bosnian land during the war. How far could the Serbs push the line before the international community intervened? The two different-sized stippled circles on the map in figure 5, indicate the areas from which the Serbs were ordered to pull back troops and heavy weapons by NATO. However, because of the surrounding verbal and visual elements, the demarcated lines on the map stand out as unreasonable indicators of security. As it appears, the map is conveying a lie since we see how the ongoing "Serb artillery barrage intensified" (184) in Sacco's portrayal of Goražde under attack. The people who we have become familiar with throughout the narrative, and who we know have suffered tremendously within the UN-declared safe areas, still lived under an immense threat, something which is indicated by the way in which the map is situated next to the information about both the decision-making which was taking place, and the representation of the ongoing atrocities. Because Sacco has located the maps in close vicinity of both powerful political figures, such as the US president at the time, Bill Clinton, and representations of the ongoing violence, I believe that the maps bear witness to how there were multiple forces involved in representations, interpretations, and control of the land. Sacco's traditional cartographic representations, understood as parts of the surrounding portrayals of eyewitnesses' testimonies of the atrocities which took place, are representations which testify to the political and military decision-making which affected the situation of the people living within the safe areas, under constant threat and physically closed off from the rest of the world.

1.3 *Footnotes in Gaza*

In his foreword to *Footnotes in Gaza*, Sacco illustrates his project by referring to a Palestinian who said that 'events are continuous' (xi). He points to how the situation of the Gazans are affected by the ongoing, and seemingly never-ending, occupation of Palestine. The maps in *Footnotes* provide information about spatial structures such as borders, fences, checkpoints,

and inhabited areas, and because of this one can say that they bear witness to the strict control of Palestinian territories, and how this in turn affects the situation of the people living in Gaza. Like we saw in the discussion about *Safe Area*, the testimonies provided by the maps in *Footnotes* will be interpreted through a combination of Sacco's style and usage of maps, and the reader's background knowledge when it comes to reading and understanding both maps and comics. While Sacco explicitly problematizes human testimony within the narrative, something which can be seen in the section "Memory and the Essential Truth" (112-116), he problematizes the notion of truthfulness when it comes to representations of space in a more implicit manner through his combination of maps and drawings of eyewitnesses' testimonies. Haley points out that the lives of the Israelis and the Palestinians often are perceived through maps indicating borders and areas of housings, and that Sacco's representations of space challenge this kind of understanding (61). She writes that Sacco's attention to Palestine's ever-changing borders and landscape, due to political and military action by the Israelis, offers a critical reading of how maps are perceived as accurate and practical (Haley 61). Haley argues that, through his focus on individuals whose stories have been neglected, Sacco challenges the "sensitivity of the maps and their version of reality with individual stories from Palestine lives under Israeli occupation" (61). The landscapes in focus in *Footnotes* are difficult to represent by traditional cartography, which is something Sacco calls attention to by combining his own maps with visual representations of the land based on the testimonies of the people he meets and his own experiences while visiting Gaza. In his article "Perspectives on Palestine: Architecture and Narrative in Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza*", Jeffery Mather writes that Sacco's juxtaposition of "perspectives from outside and inside Gaza" makes the reader "consider not only the disastrous social effects of mapping practices but also their constructed, situated, and perspectival nature" (179-180). Mather explains that maps are dynamic as they "evolve and change" and that "within them one can find spaces for creativity" (180). In what ways do Sacco's maps convey information about both the past and the ongoing situation in Gaza? In the following section I will analyze Sacco's style and use of maps to shine light on the ways in which I believe they bear witness to the continuous occupation and control of land in Gaza. Additionally, I will examine how maps which are created based on eyewitnesses' testimonies are used in representations of movement, and how these maps are indicators of the relationship between memory and visual representations, and of Sacco's attention to detail when it comes to representing human testimonies.

1.3.1 Style

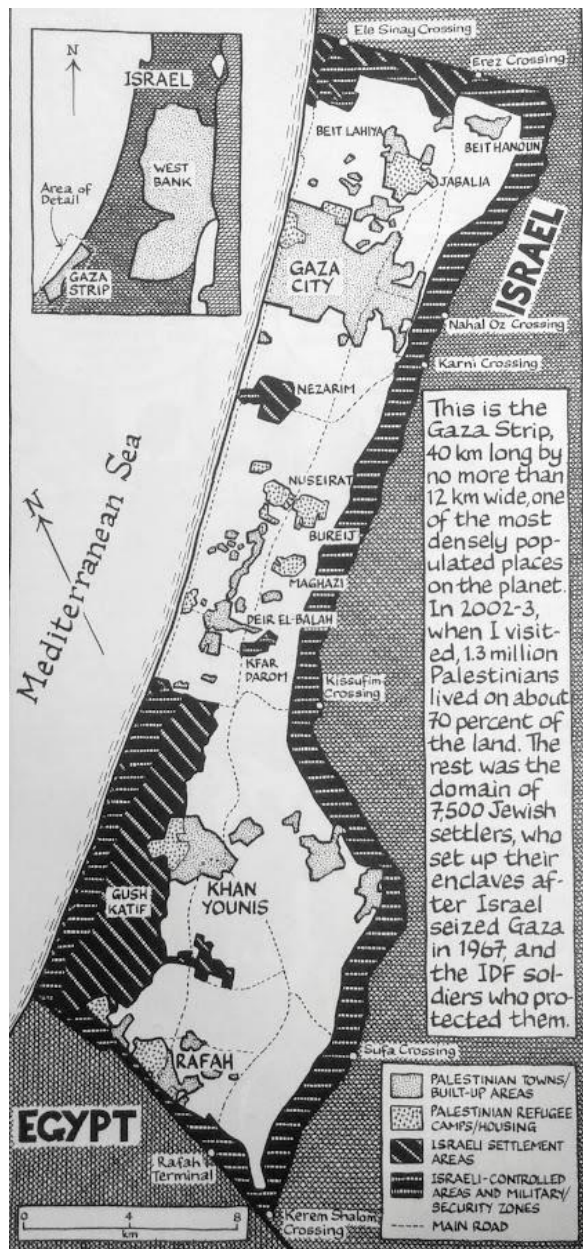


Fig. 6. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 18.

Sacco's maps in *Footnotes* are, to a certain degree, designed in similar ways to those in *Safe Area*, which implies that he has used symbols and keys which make them resemble traditional cartographic representations. The maps portraying different nations or territories in and around Gaza, provide geographical information and details which are relevant to the events in the narrative. Both the maps in figure 6 can be used as examples of how Sacco uses different patterns or hatching styles to indicate the spatial organization of Gaza during his visit. The inserted map provides geographical information of Gaza's location within Israel, and the larger map represents the spatial organization within Gaza. Sacco's design of patterns and use of black and white is something which influence the understanding of the map, and I will argue that these techniques are indicators of the extent to which the Palestinians were (and continues to be) under strict control by the Israelis. The areas which are meant to represent "Israeli Settlement Areas" and "Israeli-controlled Areas and Military/Security Zones" resemble

each other, only with the direction if the white lines being different. This similar design makes it visible how there is a close link between the settlement areas and the military/security zones, something Sacco also draws attention to in the caption where he writes that the Israeli IDF soldier were there to protect the settlers. The fact that they are marked with the color black makes the Israeli areas stand out on the map, and it adds to the understanding that the Palestinians have no control of their borders. What is furthermore significant to Sacco's style in *Footnotes* (as in *Safe Area*), are his explanatory captions which

influence the reader's interpretation of the maps. The understanding of the maps as bearing witness to the situation of the people living in Gaza and Rafah, will be shaped by the inserted captions in figure 6 and 7, respectively. In figure 6, the map's caption provides the readers with information about both the situation of the territories at the time of Sacco's visits, and about how the indicated Israeli Settlement Areas were established in 1967. One can say that Sacco's combination of the verbal elements and the maps are what McCloud refers to as "additive", where the "words *amplify* or *elaborate* on an image or *vice versa*" (154). Because of the map's caption, it can be understood as a representation which provide information about both the past and the ongoing control of the Palestinian territories and lives. Sacco's style makes the map stand out as a material witness testifying to the impact of strict border-control and an ongoing Israeli occupation, something which is relevant for the rest of the narrative.

Similarly to the way the prominent use of black make the borders stand out in figure 6, is the use of black influential in the interpretation of the maps representing Rafah. In figure 7, black is used to indicate both Egypt and the Israeli Settlement Territory, and thus the color

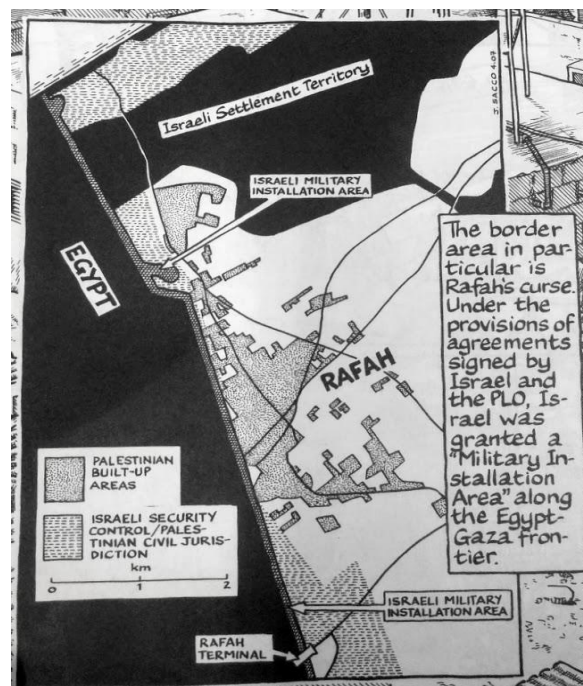


Fig. 7. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, (New York: Metropolitan Books), 160.

dominates the map, making Rafah look completely isolated. The deliberate choice of representing the bordering territories in the same color, calls attention to the mapping practices which lies behind the creation of the map. The reader who is familiar with the geography of the area, and who has seen other spatial representations where the nations are

demarcated with lines or different colors/patterns, will read and interpret Sacco's map differently. Because he uses same color to identify the different surrounding territories, the map gives the impression that it is equally difficult to enter Israel and Egypt from Gaza. It seems like there is no way out, and that Rafah is left alone against the world. Sacco's choice of representing the surrounding territories in this way, also makes it difficult to understand how the citizens of Rafah were supposed to have dug smuggling tunnels along the entire border with Egypt, which is one of the reasons why the Israelis demolished such a vast number of Palestinian homes. In figure 7 the caption draws our attention to the "Military Installation Area" which runs along the border between Gaza and Egypt and how it was established due to political agreements, which makes it apparent that there were various voices involved in the decision-making related to the control of space in Rafah. By including this information, it becomes apparent that decisions about space are made based on different intentions, and that they have an impact on the people they involve. Sacco's choice of the word 'curse' in "Rafah's Curse" furthermore makes it clear that the Israeli control of the border area affects the situation of the people living there severely. The information provided by the caption adds to the understanding of how the inhabitants of Rafah were under total control, which the design of the map also testifies to. I will argue that Sacco's style of maps, which resemble traditional cartography and, at the same time, includes information about the mapping process, which is seen in his expressive use of the color black and of what information to provide both verbally and visually, says something about how Sacco perceives and wishes to convey information about how mapping practices have consequences on the Palestinians. The maps are Sacco's interpretation of the geopolitical decisions that heavily influence the lives of the people living there, and to me they bear witness to how the Gazans are both unable to move and to gain any help from outside, something which have been their reality since the occupation started, and which was their reality during Sacco's visits, and which continues to be their reality, something Sacco calls attention to in his "Foreword" to *Footnotes* where he refers to atrocities that have taken place in the years following his visits (Sacco xi). Sacco's ways of structuring the maps in relation to other elements in the narrative will, as we will see in the following section, furthermore influence in the interpretation of his maps.

1.3.2 Organization

The ways in which Sacco has organized his maps in relation to the portrayal of historical events, his own experiences and eyewitnesses' recollections, play a part in the reader's understanding of the spatial representations. By including realistic depictions of the locations he represents in the maps, Sacco equips the readers with information which adds to the understanding of what the maps bear witness to. Figure 8 is a whole page map which is adjacent to the inserted maps on page 160 (one of which can be seen in fig. 7), and it is organized in a way which furthermore adds to the understanding of how the inhabitants of Rafah were affected by the Israeli control of Palestinian space. The inserted images of the Tal Zorob Tower and the Termit Position – strategically located on the Philadelphi Route – bear

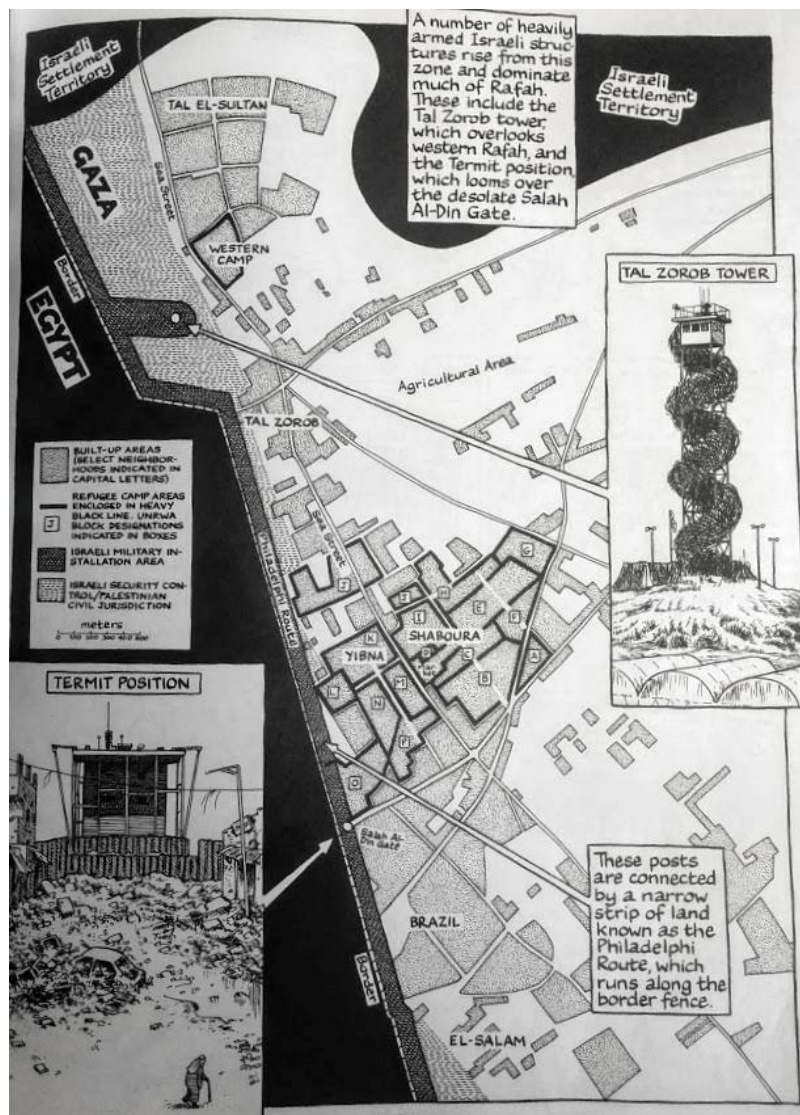


Fig. 8. Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, (New York: Metropolitan Books), 161.

witness to constant Israeli surveillance as the architectural structures “overlooks” and “looms” over Rafah. By inserting these images, Sacco creates a visual connection between the cartographic representation and the place it represents. The images provide information about time and space which adds to the interpretation of the map as saying something about the situation of the people living there. In the image depicting and pointing to the Termit Position on the map, Sacco has included a small human figure walking with a stick. By portraying human movement in this way, Sacco calls attention to the reality which the map alone is unable to represent, and it exemplifies how lives are affected by the control of space. The interpretation of the map is furthermore influenced by the elements, and the ways in which they are organized, on the preceding page, where the two maps are inserted on a whole page depicting a section of Rafah. Because the portrayal of people and architecture is combined with maps, the readers are invited to reflect upon the ways in which maps are made and used to represent space. The images depicting the refugee houses, and the people living there, put together with Sacco’s style of maps – with the heavy use of black which makes Rafah look completely hemmed in – bear witness to the Israelis total control of the land and the implications it has for the people living there.

Another way in which Sacco uses maps in *Footnotes*, which is closely linked with the act of testifying, is when he depicts the witnessing process of one of the people who experienced the events in Rafah in 1956. In figure 9 the verbal utterances in the captions do not belong to Sacco, but to the eyewitness Ayesh Abdel-Khalik Younis who is testifying to the Israeli attack on Palestinian men in Rafah, November 12, 1956. Here the maps used in the portrayal of the testimony are representations of the one which the eyewitness is using within the narrative to point out direction of movement (Sacco 216-7). While the eyewitness is pointing at the map, he is recollecting his personal experience, which Sacco has included in the captions. Additionally, the movement indicated by Sacco’s inclusion of arrows can be seen in the bleed onto which the map is inserted. This is an explicit example of how maps are “ontogenetic in nature” (Kitchin & Dodge 335). The map is used to aid both the eyewitness in his process of recollection, and Sacco in his process of creating the narrative. Additionally, the map helps the readers understand how people were moving in the streets during that day. The bleed onto which the map is inserted is Sacco’s visual representation of the people moving in the streets, based on eyewitnesses’ testimonies, portrayed from a bird’s eye perspective. The maps we see on page 217 are the same as the one the eyewitness is drawing on, and they are not to scale, showing the approximate distance between buildings, something

which makes them different to Sacco's other cartographic representations. By using the map in such a way, Sacco calls attention to the visual aspects of memory. It shows how maps can be used in an organizational and active way, by both the producer and the interpreter of the map, which in turn shows the dynamic nature of maps as material witnesses. Sacco has used the information he gained from the eyewitness' recollection based on the map, to spatially

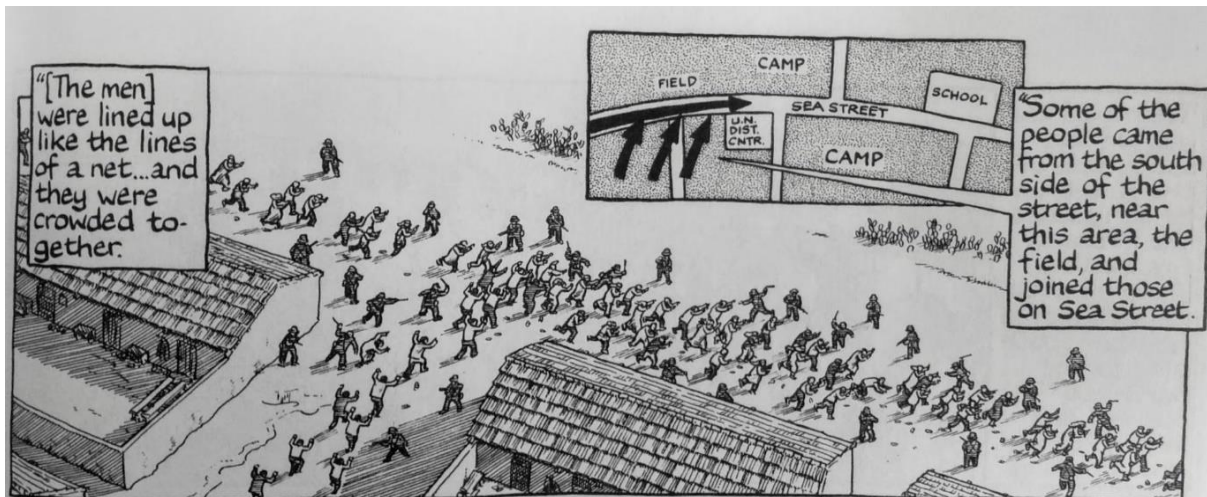


Fig. 9. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, (New York: Metropolitan Books), 217.

represent movement both in the maps (with arrows) and in his portrayal of the street and the people. It bears witness to the close connection between people and places and memory, which is something Sacco calls attention to throughout the narrative and which is relevant to the following discussion about the built environment in his works. Moreover, by using the maps in this way, Sacco makes it apparent how he respects and values eyewitnesses' testimonies. His attention to detail when it comes to portraying the eyewitness' recollection of the event, shows how he intended to tell the story in an as honest way as possible – true to the people who witnessed and experienced the atrocities.

1.4 Conclusion

Because both comics and maps come into being through the processes of being made and interpreted, and because each reader thus will interpret the Sacco's maps differently, they must be understood as dynamic objects. We, as expert readers of maps and comics, become the necessary interpreters of Sacco's cartographic representations and the testimonies they provide. In both *Safe Area* and *Footnotes* Sacco uses a style which resembles traditional cartography – with symbols and lines indicating geographical organization seen from a bird's eye perspective – and his maps are always accompanied with explanatory captions. Through

the captions it becomes clear that Sacco has made certain choices when designing the maps, which indicates that only the information relevant to the narrative is included. Because his voice is always present and influencing our interpretations of the maps, the readers are aware of the mapping processes, and one can say that they testify to the ways in which the people of Gorazde and Gaza were closed off from the rest of the world. This is something which furthermore is made evident in Sacco's use of black in the maps representing Rafah in *Footnotes*. By using this technique, the areas around Rafah stands out as both intimidating and impenetrable, testifying to the Israelis' total control of Rafah's borders and thus also of the people living there.

The ways in which the maps are organized bear witness to how there are different perspectives and political forces behind the making of maps and how this in turn has an impact on the people living in the areas of conflict. In *Safe Area*, because he has included maps which illustrate essential changes due to geopolitical decisions next to portraits of international leaders who partook in making those decisions, Sacco calls attention to the problems related to interpretations of traditional cartography. Because he places the maps next to realistically drawn representations of the ongoing atrocities that took place, they testify to how demarcations on a map, based on political decisions, did not improve the lives of the people living there. In *Footnotes*, Sacco has placed maps next to images depicting the housing situation in Rafah, something which testifies to the consequences of establishing and controlling borders. Additionally, he has included maps that show the close relationship between memory and visual representations of place. By including how he used maps in the process of collecting eyewitnesses' testimonies, and using these maps actively within the narrative, Sacco draws attention to the processes of creating, using, and interpreting maps. I believe that, through his style, which involves making his choices visible, Sacco convincingly uses maps both to make a comment on the ways in which maps are used during conflicts, and to portray the stories of the people who experienced the atrocities in an honest way. As we have seen in Sacco's use and style of maps, the control of space in Gorazde and Gaza had critical consequences for the people living there. This is something which is furthermore evident in his representations of buildings and ruins. In the following chapter I will discuss how Sacco's realistic and detailed style, and his organizational methods of representing the built environment within the areas indicated on the maps, influence the ways in which we interpret the testimonies provided by buildings.

2 Buildings as Material Witnesses in *Safe Area Gorazde* and *Footnotes in Gaza*

2.1 Introduction

In the discussion about Sacco's use of maps in *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*, we saw that they provided geographical, geopolitical and historical information which helped situate the readers in the narratives. In his maps, Sacco has simplified and presented the geopolitical decisions which heavily influenced the situation of the land in Gorazde and Gaza, something we find evidence of in his representations of the built environment. Sacco focuses on territories where issues regarding borders are crucial aspects of the lives of the people living there, and through his maps one gets an understanding of the extent to which these areas were, and continues to be in the case of Gaza, closed off from the rest of the world. Sacco's combination of maps and other elements on the page, makes it apparent that borders are not static, which the traditional map alone can create an illusion of. While the maps testify to the extent to which the people living in Gorazde and in Gaza were affected by borders and roadblocks created because of conflicts, they do not include information about the continuous construction, destruction and reconstruction of buildings within these areas. There is, however, a considerable amount of visual and verbal representations of the built environment in both *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*. Because the narratives are filled with detailed representations of the ways in which houses are destroyed, and because Sacco focuses on individuals' personal experiences related to their homes, it is important to examine how these representations speak to the readers as material witnesses testifying to past violent events.

How do we interpret the testimonies provided by Sacco's representations of ruins? What about Sacco's style makes the material witnesses speak to us, and what do they tell us? The built environment which Sacco has portrayed – people's homes and neighbor's houses, schools, churches, watchtowers, walls, bridges – relates to the eyewitnesses' memories of past events. Mather explains that the comics medium can "raise questions about the various ways that inanimate structures such as walls, border, maps, and towers potentially contain, provoke, or inhibit the processes of memory and storytelling" (177). What Mather writes about how the past is present in Sacco's work, how the past occupies "space and" is "capable of being squeezed out, fragmented, or buried" (178) is relevant to the ways in which representations of the built environment bear witness to past events in both *Footnotes* and *Safe Area*. How do

we as readers achieve an understanding of the atrocities that have taken place through Sacco's portrayals of buildings? In both *Safe Area* and *Footnotes* Sacco depicts damages on houses in great detail, and there is an overwhelming number of traces left on the built environment as a result of attacks made by the Serbs and the Israelis, respectively. Furthermore, in both narratives Sacco pays careful attention to how individuals experience the violent events that are carried out against their homes, and because of this I will concentrate on representations of private residences in this chapter. I will argue that, because of Sacco's detailed style and inclusion of eyewitnesses' testimonies about violations against their homes, the portrayals convey information about how the control of space ultimately affects the lives of the people living in areas of conflict.

When it comes to the discussion concerning *Safe Area*, I will focus on the transformations Edin's house goes through as a material witness throughout the narrative. In doing so, I will examine how the reader is invited to recognize the ways in which the identity of buildings change due to violent acts, and how such events affect the people involved. Drawing on how we "mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" (McCloud 67) through closure, I will argue that Sacco's attention to detail and organization of the changes Edin's house undergoes, bear witness to the ways in which the deliberate destruction of houses is used as a warfare technique, causing terror and making people flee, and, furthermore, to the strong connection between buildings and people's lives and memories. I believe that Sacco's portrayals of Edin's house should be understood as material witnesses which convey information of how people's perspective on, and relationship with, their homes influence their persistency to maintain and remain in their houses, even in the event of crisis.

Because a considerable amount of the narrative in *Footnotes* is devoted to the demolition of buildings in and Rafah during Sacco's visits to Gaza in 2002 and 2003, I will concentrate on representations involving these events in the second part of this chapter. McCloud explains how we "perceive time spatially" (100) when reading comics, and that the arrangement of panels, with and without borders, have an impact on the reader's understanding of time (101). He writes that borderless panels "can take on a *timeless quality*" and that they can "linger in the reader's mind" (102). The same goes for *bleeds*, according to McCloud (103). Within panels which continue outside the page "time is no longer contained by the familiar icon of the closed panel" (McCloud 103), and bleeds may thus convey a sense of timelessness. In his representation of the demolition of refugee houses in Rafah, Sacco often uses bleeds and spreads, and I will examine how these techniques, in addition to his

attention to detail, affect the reader's interpretations of the unfolding events. In Sacco's portrayals of the demolitions in Rafah, there is evidence of how the Israelis use international laws to justify their actions, something which calls attention to what Weizman writes about how "the humanitarian present" involves that "political oppositions are replaced by the elasticity of degrees, negotiations, proportions and balances" (*The Least of All* 4). Drawing on this, I will aim to show how Sacco's portrayals of the Israelis' systematic demolitions of Palestinian buildings testify to how the laws of war are abused to gain complete control of the inhabitants of Gaza.

2.2 *Safe Area Gorazde*

In "Joe Sacco, Frontline Journalist" Sacco explains how he experienced a "personal catharsis" when drawing the horrible events that took place in and around Gorazde during the Bosnian War (Groth 67). This, he explains, was because the events became more clear to him during the drawing process than they did during the interviews that he carried out (Groth 67). In a way, it is Sacco's trauma we are witnessing as we individually interpret his work. His representation of the events is the material witness which we the readers interpret and understand through our knowledge of, and skills at reading comics. And through interpreting his work, we also become witnesses of past events. In his "Introduction" to *Safe Area*, Hitchens writes about how Sacco manages to transport him back to Bosnia through his illustrations of "domestic architecture - [with] the gable ends and windows" (Hitchens, "Introduction" 1), and through his attention to details of the damages done on houses during the Serbian attacks. He refers to the ways in which Sacco depicts how mortar-shells made "unforgettable "bear's paw" scar[s]" on pavements, and how wooden houses were burnt to the ground, leaving only "a silhouette and a brick chimney stack" (Hitchens, "Introduction" 1). In the interview with Groth, Sacco explains how he attempted to show the readers what Gorazde *really* looked like, that he tried to "capture something as accurate as possible" (60), showing the readers that it "is a real town with real people" (61). How does Sacco manage to take the readers to Bosnia, and inform about the atrocities that took place, through his representations of the built environment? Memories of the past events are contained in the built environment in Gorazde, made visible through marks of destruction on buildings and constructions in Sacco's representations. In "Architecture, Violence, Evidence", a conversation between Weizman and the historian Andrew Herscher, the role of architecture as material witness is discussed. In their conversation about how architecture, and the destruction and construction

of it, is used as evidence, Herscher points out that architecture changes “meaning and identity” when it becomes a victim of violence (114). As we read *Safe Area* we must interpret the realistically represented changes which Edin’s house goes through, and how these changes affect Edin’s experience of the conflict. I believe that Sacco’s attention to Edin’s persistency when it comes to rebuilding his home and remaining in Kokino Selo after the attacks, testifies to the importance of a home and the memories that it holds, especially in the event of crisis. Furthermore, Sacco’s many representations of how other people in the narrative are affected by violent acts against their homes, underlines how various people have different perspectives on their houses. By examining Sacco’s style and way of organizing the representations of the built environment, I will argue that the portrayals of the deliberate destruction of the built environment testify to how the UN-designated safe area suffered tremendously during the war, something which is evidence of how the international community should have intervened at a much earlier stage conflict.

2.2.1 Style and Organization

Because the reading experience is individual it can be seen in relation to Weizman’s notion of the problematics regarding the expert witness’s impartiality (*The Least of All* 105). The role of the expert witness is to interpret and present the object, and to “place it within a larger narrative”, according to Weizman (*The Least of All* 105). As readers of comics, we are the experts who must interpret Sacco’s narrative as evidence of past events, and thus it comes down to the ways in which Sacco uses the comics form to convey his message and make an impact on the readers. How do his techniques contribute to our understanding of the representations? In Sacco’s portrayals, it is evident that the damages done by both the Serbs and the Muslims on the built environment in Goražde were massive and systematic, and Sacco’s careful attention to detail and realistic style of drawing, make his visual representations dense and informative. The traces left on buildings after shelling and shootings resemble gun wounds in some ways, and when they remain unfixed they serve as evidence and reminders of the past events. Following the prologue, introducing us to the environment in which the narrative will take place, Sacco depicts the UN controlled Blue Road, winding its way through an area with severely damaged buildings in the section “Go Away” (Sacco 1). In figure 10 we see holes in walls, broken walls, completely or partially missing rooftops, missing doors and windows, and empty rooms which are evidences of warfare against civilians. The representation of the empty ruins bear witness to the destructive

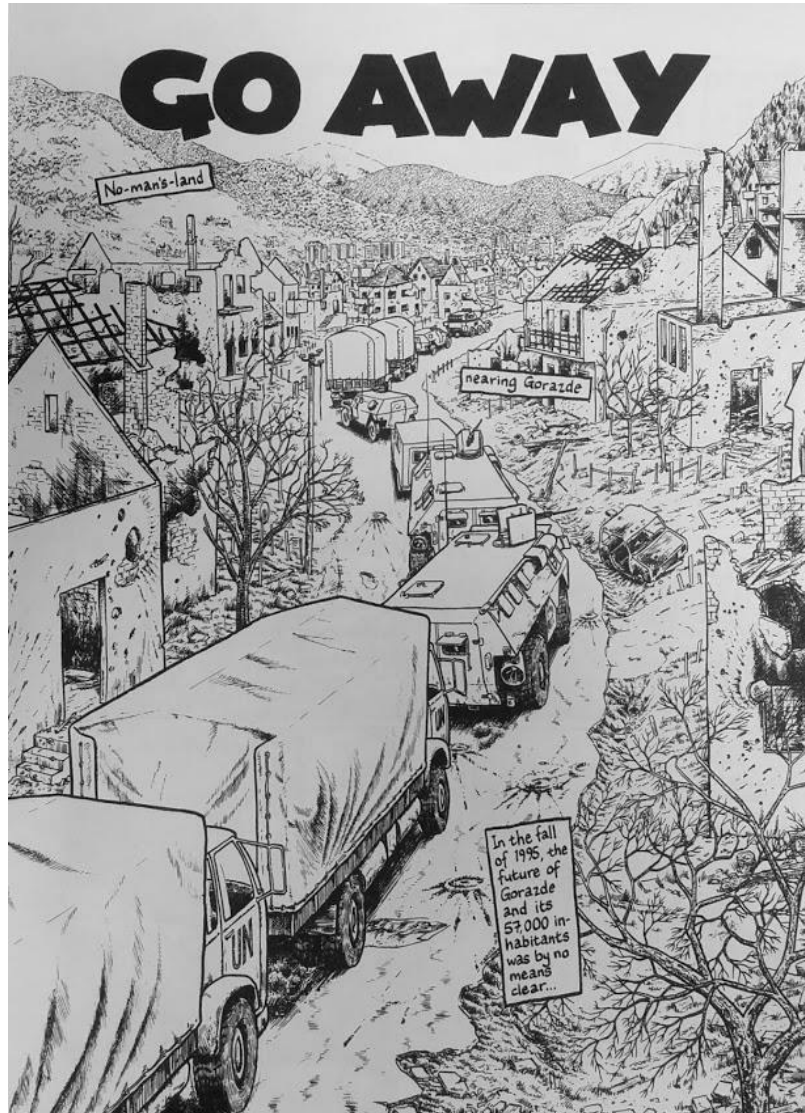


Fig. 10. Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Gorazde*, (London: Jonathan Cape), 1.

and violent events which have taken place during the years of the war, something which have caused people to leave their homes. By initiating the narrative with a whole page to represent the destruction of buildings in a detailed manner, Sacco invites the readers to stop and take in the results of the war which have left the houses uninhabitable. Each house contains information about both how it was constructed and how it was destroyed. The ruinous environment stands out as an indicator of how Gorazde, which had been established as a 'safe area' by the UN, had suffered heavily under the attacks carried out by the Serbs. This is something which additionally makes the maps where these areas are demarcated stand out as misleading representations of the situation of the people living there. Sacco's detailed style is recurrent throughout the narrative, and thus his portrayal of the built environment become an important visual aspect in the representations of the atrocities and the eyewitnesses' testimonies.

How does Sacco's organization of the events contribute to our interpretation of the representations of the buildings? The ruins and houses which are portrayed in *Safe Area* are often built constructions that once were people's homes, and they are frequently connected with eyewitnesses' recollections of past events. Unlike the way many houses are bulldozed to the ground, leaving only rubble, in Sacco's representation of the built environment in *Footnotes*, the houses we see in *Safe Area* often remain as ruins in the background throughout the narrative. In *Safe Area*, the targeting of people's homes as a warfare technique is frequent and it creates a sensation of fear as it causes people to flee, which is something Sacco calls attention to by including stories of various individuals' perceptions on their housing situations. This can for instance be seen in a scene where we meet an old refugee couple from Rudo, which we know is a small village near the Serb border from Sacco's maps (see fig. 3), where Sacco has included both his own and the woman's view on the place where they have taken up residence (Sacco 32). A representation of Sacco and Edin who are inspecting the old couple's room makes it evident that Sacco wishes to portray how various people lived at the time, and it thus shows how the built environment plays an important role in the portrayal of the conflict *Safe Area*. From Sacco's drawings and the caption saying that they lived in a room which "wasn't up to code" (Sacco 32) because the Serbs had set fire to it during the '94 offensive, it becomes clear that refugees lived under difficult circumstances during the war. The abandoned and ruinous house is depicted as both exposed and falling apart, and the representation of their living conditions can be understood as evidence of the desperate housing situation in Goražde at the time. The fact that Sacco has included both a representation of himself inspecting the room, and his own voice in the caption, calls attention to how various people interpret buildings differently. Because Sacco makes an explicit comment on his view of the room not being "up to code" (32) he draws attention to what is considered acceptable living standards. To him the room seems uninhabitable and he questions why they chose to stay in "such a vulnerable area" (Sacco 32). For the refugee couple, who had nowhere else to live, due to full refugee centers and no other available rooms, it is their only option, and they must make do with the rickety room. This representation underlines the distinction between various views on what kind of built structures can function as a home during the event of crisis.

The representation of Edin's housing situation, which follows immediately after the story of the refugee couple, testifies to a more positive improvement and usage of a building which suffered from Serb attacks. Edin's memories of what happened to his house before

Sacco's visit, are portrayed on several occasions throughout the narrative, and the story of his house is one of transformation, which shows the dynamic qualities and nature of buildings as material witnesses. Because Sacco has moved in with Edin and his family, he gets a good insight into the people's living conditions, which is something he visually represents in his narrative. The portrayal of Edin's relationship to his house, bears witness to his unwillingness of leaving Kokino Selo, and to his persistency at keeping his home habitable. Even though the Serbs pose a great threat, Edin and his family have chosen to remain in their house due to, in Edin's words: "A big garden. Plenty of fruit. Vegetables. Eggs. The cow gives us milk, cheese" (Sacco 34). However, in addition to having the possibility to sustain themselves, I



Fig. 11. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Goražde*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 87.

Serbs and the Muslims burned each other homes down, something which shows how both sides of the conflict carried out violent acts (see fig. 11 and fig. 13). By including this information Sacco furthermore emphasizes his project of representing the narrative in an honest way, which adds to the persuasiveness of his portrayals. In figure 11 we see the representation of the first attack on Edin's house, and the panel shows the three Serb

believe Edin's reasons for staying in the house are related to his, and his family's, memories of it as their longtime home, and the idea that if they move, they also surrender to the Serbs. Because the violent acts against his home has left traces which can be understood as indicators of the oppressors' control, Edin's restorations of his house can be regarded as acts of both hope and resistance.

Edin's house suffers from two attacks, the first of which was carried out by their Serb neighbors who burned it in the spring of '92. The burning down of private and public buildings is a recurring method of destruction in *Safe Area*, and Sacco devotes a substantial part of his narrative to representing both burning houses and houses that have traces of being burned on them. Additionally, Sacco has portrayed the ways in which both the

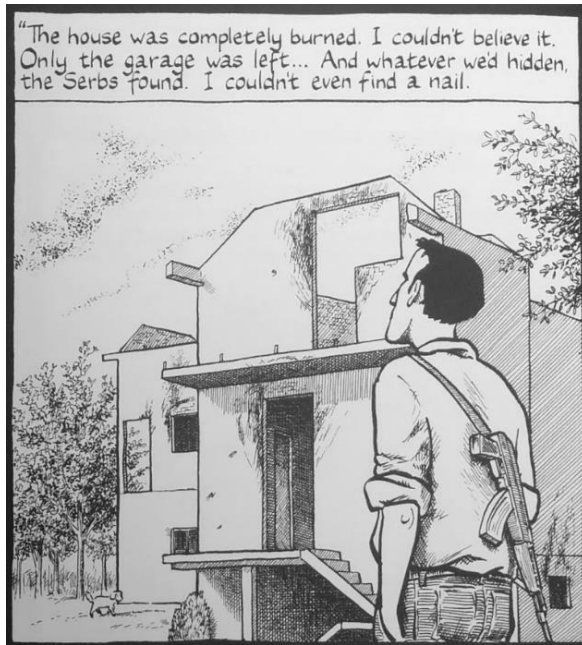


Fig. 12. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Gorazde*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 88.

neighbors walking away from the burning house. Here the readers get an understanding of what the house looked like before it was left in ruins by the Serbs. Sacco's representation shows a big three-story house with a balcony enclosed with decorative a railing, something which testifies to how their living standards were better before the war. Furthermore, Sacco's portrayal of the neighbors as tall, dark figures with hidden eyes, walking with firm steps away from the crime-scene, makes them look both dangerous and powerful. The deliberate destruction of someone's home has both emotional and practical consequences on

people's lives, and Sacco portrays homes that become either completely or partially uninhabitable in his *Safe Area*. In the case of Edin's house, which lost its identity as a habitable and safe construction because of the fire, it remained in a mendable state, which is evident in Sacco's portrayal of Edin and his family's restoration of it. Following the burning, we get a representation of Edin who is inspecting the damages done to his house (see fig. 12). All parts of the house that were made of wood, or other inflammable materials, which are

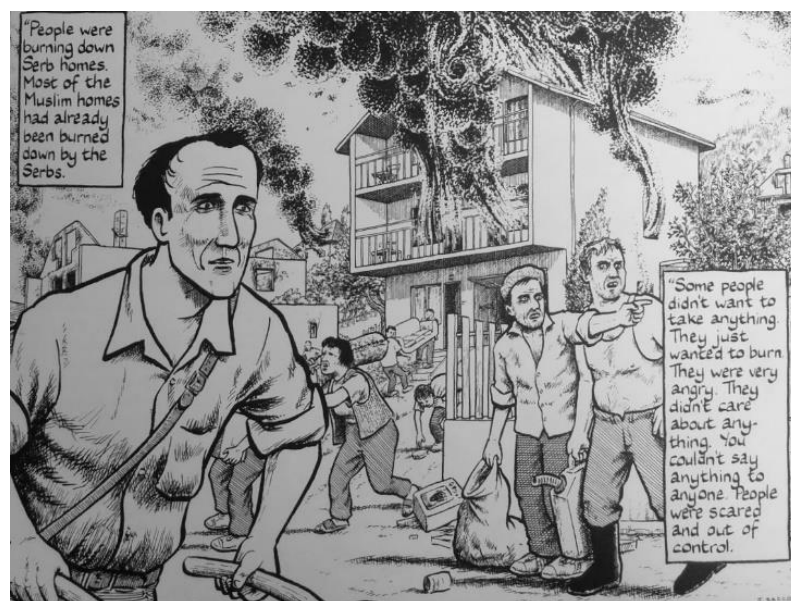


Fig. 13. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Gorazde*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 89.

present in the panel showing the burning house on the preceding page, are gone, leaving a concrete-skeleton in Sacco's representation of the ruins of Edin's home. The absence of the balcony door (their front door was stolen by the Serbs), windows, roofs and balcony railings are all clues that indicates what was destroyed in the fire. Additionally, Sacco has drawn shadows above the gaping holes in the concrete walls, where there used to be doors and windows, something which bears witness to how the fire must have started from inside the house. After the attack on Muslim homes, Muslims and other people started robbing and burning down Serb houses, and Edin explains how "Some people didn't want to take anything. They just wanted to burn" (89). The image illustrating the burning down of a Serb home in figure 13, resembles the portrayal of the burning of Edin's house; with violent flames leaping out of doors and windows, indicating that the same act of violence has been done on the buildings. What makes the image of Edin's burning house different from that of a Serb family, is the people portrayed in the foreground. While Edin's Serb neighbors firmly walk from their site of crime, with invisible eyes, carrying Edin's skis and gasoline cans, the portrayal of the people in front of the burning Serb house is one of chaos and desperation. Because Sacco is telling the story of what happened in Goražde as accurately as possible, it is necessary to include how both the Serbs and the Muslim took part acts of violence. Both portrayals bear witness to the deliberate burning down homes, but Sacco's way of differing between the violent acts of Serbs and the Muslims through his representations of the people, shows his concern with interpreting Edin's testimony, something which calls attention how the narrative is told from the perspective of those who suffered from the Serb attacks.

Groensteen defines *iconic solidarity* as "interdependent images that, participating in a series, present the double characteristic of being separated" (18). When one interprets an image, the understanding of it will be influenced by the information provided by the surrounding images. The similarities that the images of the burning houses share, make it seem as though Edin's burning house could have belonged to a Serb family, and vice versa. Due to the comics medium's form, the reader does not comprehend the meaning conveyed by an image in isolation, but, he or she rather achieves an understanding which is influenced by information provided by the surrounding images. Thus, the material witnesses, that are Sacco's representations of the houses, are not understood in a vacuum. Sacco's representations of what happened to Edin's house will be interpreted in relation to the representation of the burning down, or destruction of other houses, in addition to the other images that make up the narrative. After the first attack, Edin and his family decided to

restore the remains of their home, making it a habitable building again. In forty days Edin and his brother work on repairing their house, and the mending of it gave it the properties of a home again (Sacco 91). The purpose of burning down Edin's house was to make it uninhabitable, but since Edin and his family decided to reconstruct their home, and not move further away from the exposed neighborhood of Kokino Selo, the ruins of their old house regains the function of a home. Sacco represents the process of fixing the house on pages 90-91. Here he also provides two images of the burned remains of Edin's neighbors, which is something that echoes the ruins of the burned houses seen on the previous pages, and creates



Fig. 14. Detail of Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Gorazde*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 90

a disturbing and stark contrast between the mendable house of Edin and the unfixable lives of his dead neighbors. The image in figure 14 shows the remains of a human being, and it too is a representation of an inanimate object which bears witness of past atrocities. In the caption, Sacco has included Edin's recollection of what they believed was the probable cause of death, gasoline, and the traces left on the body by burning resonates the surrounding depictions of the burned buildings. Weizman explains that human remains, as evidence in war crime investigations, share similarities with the forensics of architecture (110). This is because architectural structures contain and convey "information about the effects of historical processes" in ways which correspond to the possibilities of reading the biography of a person in his or her bodily remains. Sacco's portrayal shows how the only remaining parts of the body are its spinal column, some of the rib cage, and the clothes which made Edin and his father able to recognize it as their neighbor. This is one of many examples of Sacco's inclusions of material witnesses in the form of human remains in his narratives. His detailed representations of injured, dead people, convey information about how it was the civilian

population which was targeted and killed, something which corresponds to how private homes were targeted and burnt during the war.

Following the intense portrayal of the '94 Offensive, we get a representation of Edin's house after it suffered from the second attack by the Serbs (Sacco 186). The first panel on page 186 portrays Edin as he watches his cousin's house burn, and the following three panels depict him inspecting the damages done by the Serbs after they had pulled back. Edin's recollection in the caption tells us that "part of the roof was completely destroyed, shot by a tank" (Sacco 186), which we can see traces of in Sacco's visual representation of the house. In the two following panels, we see the insides of the rooms that had been occupied by the Serbs during the offensive. One of the rooms had been used as a toilet, which, based on Edin's recollection, Sacco has visually represented in detail, and Edin is portrayed as deeply hurt by the events. In the preceding depiction of how the people in Goražde suffered from the Serb offensive, Sacco has included Edin's concerns about the state of his house. Through the representations of Edin's connection with his house and his neighborhood, it is evident that he values his home and his heritage greatly, something which testifies to the impact the destruction of buildings has on people's lives. I believe that Sacco's portrayal of the relationship between the built environment and the people of Goražde, both shows how there is a strong link between peoples' identities and material objects, and that objects mean different things to different people, something which underlines the dynamic qualities of material witnesses.

Sacco's representation of the destruction of houses in Goražde is overwhelmingly detailed and prominent throughout the narrative, making them "stand out", as Sacco said he wanted in the interview with Groth (61). In *Safe Area*, the representations of buildings, and the traces left on them, provide testimonies of both the past and the ongoing acts of violence throughout the narrative. The portrayals effectively the consequences the destruction of homes has on the people related to them. While the representation of a 'safe area', such as Goražde, on a map may create an illusion of the situation being under control, Sacco's representations of the built environment testify to the immensely damaging consequences of letting the Serbs carry out their attacks without any adequate intervention from the international community. With great accuracy, Sacco has included traces of the damages done by various weapons and methods of destruction in his representations of houses in *Safe Area*. Based on his devotion to history, use of photographic references, and realistic style, his representations of the events create a sensation of the totality of the destruction of the built

environment in Gorazde, and how the atrocities affected those who lived there. Sacco's representations make the quote from the UN top military commander Lt. General Rose after the '94 Offensive sound almost ridiculous: "The situation was a lot better than I had been led to believe... the town had not been destroyed to the level which I had expected." (186). This statement calls attention to how there are various interpretations of the material witnesses. To Lt. General Rose, the violence and the destruction of houses in Gorazde did not provide sufficient evidence for him to find it necessary to intervene. By including this, Sacco calls attention to the politics of war, and the measurements and calculations which lies behind military action. As we saw in chapter one, the maps alone can convey an illusion of how the demarcated areas in Eastern Bosnia were safe during the war. Sacco's surrounding representations of the atrocities that took place, bear witness to how the situation was nothing but safe, and one is left to wonder what level of destruction Lt. General Rose had expected. The representation of architecture in *Safe Area* both situates us in the town of Gorazde and provides information about the experience of losing one's home as a result of war. Edin's relationship to his home is part of what constitutes him as a character, and thus a part Sacco's representation of him as a human being. While someone wished that Gorazde would "go away" (Sacco 4), Sacco has created a material witness in the form of a highly detailed visual/verbal narrative of the changing nature of the built environment due to war. To me, Sacco's representations bear witness to people's commitment and connection to their homes, and of the atrocities that could have been avoided had only the international community intervened at a much earlier stage in the war.

2.3 *Footnotes in Gaza*

In *Footnotes*, Sacco's depiction of the built environment is likewise characterized by his attention to detail. While telling the stories of what happened in Khan Younis and Rafah in 1956, Sacco is also telling the story of what happened in Gaza during the time he was there doing his research for *Footnotes*. A considerable amount of the narrative portrays the housing situation in Rafah at the time of Sacco's visit, and this will therefore be the focus in the following section of this thesis. Sacco's attention to, and depiction of, the demolition of houses and refugee buildings, provide testimonies of the atrocities which have taken place, and which continue to take place, in Gaza. Sacco, as interpreter and presenter of the events, and as a part of the narrative, has included comments which indicate his attitude towards the Israelis' questionable reasons for demolishing houses based on beliefs about hidden tunnels or

Palestinian “gun nests” (Sacco 16). How do we understand Sacco’s representations of architectural structures as material witnesses, and what do they testify to? Critics such as Maureen Shay (207) and Øyvind Vågnes (58-60) have written about Sacco’s use of adjacent images portraying the same location in 1956 and in 2002-3, and how this technique both links the present with the past in relation to eyewitnesses’ testimonies, and provides information of the development of the built environment in Gaza. Mather has written about how Sacco manages to “explore the disconnection and fragmentation of urban spaces” as he portrays the ongoing processes of destruction and construction of buildings in *Footnotes* (185). Mather links the “fragmentation of urban spaces” with Sacco’s representation of the fragmented nature of testimony as “the readers encounter the history of 1956 in fragments through a non-linear narrative that is an expression of the architectural realities that impinge upon, delineate, and constrain life in Gaza” (185). In his “Epilogue” to *The Least of All Possible Evils*, Weizman writes about the documentation of destroyed buildings in what has been labeled the “Book of Destruction”², and how this serves as an archive that functions as an “instance of forensic architecture” (139). Weizman writes that “the visible ruin plays a major role in the public display of the facts of domination and violence; it demonstrates the presence of colonial power even when the colonizer is nowhere to be seen” (141). He explains how the archive was meant as a document indicating the “necessary work of reconstruction and its cost” (142), and that it testifies to “the impossibility of undertaking any major programme of rebuilding” (142). Furthermore, Weizman writes that the demolition of refugee homes has been referred to as “the destruction of destruction” (145) due to the temporary nature and never-ending destruction of refugee camps (145).

Sacco’s *Footnotes* can in a similar way be interpreted as a visual documentation of the continuous and deliberate destruction of refugee homes in Rafah. His portrayal of the ruins testifies to both the violent events that took place during his visit to Gaza, and of the reconstructions and destructions that will continue to take place in the future. In the following discussion about how Sacco’s representations speak to the readers, it will be necessary to investigate the various perspectives on the buildings that are demolished. Who defines what a house is, and what does a house mean to various people? In this section I will consider the ways in which Sacco’s representations of buildings in Rafah provide testimony using

² An archive made by the Gaza-based and Hamas-run Ministry of Public Works and Housing, containing “thousands of entries, each documenting a single building that was completely or partially destroyed, from cracked walls in houses that still stand, to those completely reduced to rubble” (Weizman 139)

borderless panels and bleeds, which, as McCloud puts it, “can take on a timeless quality” (103). I will argue that through these techniques, Sacco asks the readers to stop and examine the scope of the damages done on the built environment as a result of the ongoing occupation, and that they help convey an understanding of events being “continuous” (Sacco xi). Furthermore, I will examine Sacco’s attention to individuals who suffer from violent acts against their homes, which emphasizes the Palestinian perspective on the ongoing demolitions. In doing so, it will also be necessary to consider the ways in which Sacco portrays the how the Israelis use the laws of war as means to justify their demolitions of the Palestinian houses.

2.3.1 Style and Organization

Following the maps which situate us geographically in Rafah on pages 160-1 (see fig. 7 and fig. 8), and which provide information about the extent to which the town is fenced in and controlled by the Israelis, Sacco depicts how the Palestinians “have dug tunnels under the

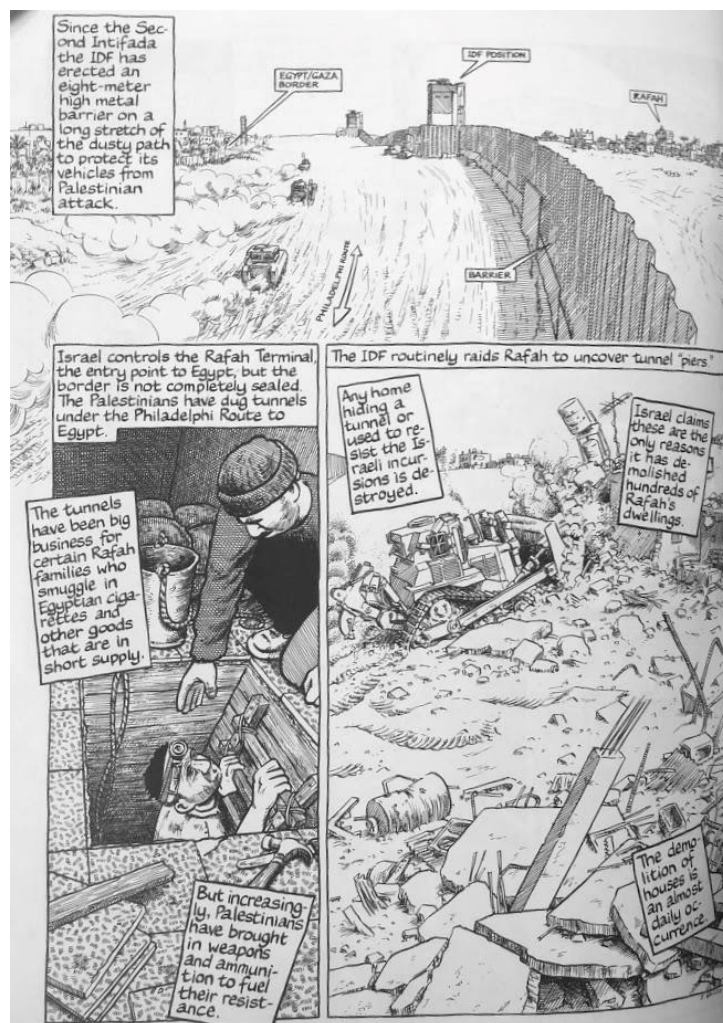


Fig. 15. Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 162.

Philadelphi Route to Egypt” (162). Sacco explains how “any home hiding a tunnel or used to resist the Israeli incursions is destroyed” and that these claims “are the only reasons [Israel] has demolished hundreds of Rafah’s dwellings” (162). By providing information about what arguments the Israelis use to legitimate their military actions against the citizens of Rafah, Sacco underlines how there are various forces and calculations involved in decision-making about the control of space in Gaza. Because the Israelis can target any house they believe hides a tunnel, their control extends beyond the border area and into the inhabited areas of Rafah, something which ultimately affects the people living there. As “the demolition of houses is an almost daily occurrence” (162), it becomes an important part of Sacco’s representation of the events and history of Gaza, and it lingers in the background throughout the narrative. The top image in figure 15 is a bleed where the Philadelphi Route continues outside the frame. The image contains arrows and captions that resemble those used on the maps, and it depicts the “Israeli military installation area” (Sacco 161) where there are vehicles driving along the route. Portrayed in the map on the preceding page (see fig. 8), we saw that the area between the barrier and Rafah is a Palestinian built-up area where people live. However, in the bleed in figure 15 the space between the barrier and Rafah is empty, indicating that the houses which once were there have been demolished. Groensteen writes that an inset panel can magnify the image in the background, and that a “dialogic *interaction* between the concerned panels” (86). Drawing on this, Charles Acheson writes that the bleed “creates tension with all the panels on the page and forces a continually recursive reading when negotiating the page” (304). Underneath the bleed depicting the Philadelphi Route and the empty built-area in Rafah continuing outside the page, there are two panels that contributes to our understanding of both the bleed and the page as a whole. One panel depicts a tunnel which the Palestinians have dug under the Philadelphi Route, seen in the bleed, and the other panel portrays the ongoing bulldozing of a building in a heap of rubble. Both the images show actions that are closely connected with what goes on in the border area portrayed in the top bleed. The image depicting the Palestinians and the entrance of a tunnel, indicates the existence of built constructions which are invisible on the surface of the earth, and which are the reasons the Israelis are demolishing buildings in the adjacent image. While the tunnel is depicted as small, only fitting one person, something which makes it look both fragile and dangerous to go through, the vehicle demolishing the building is depicted as forceful and overpowering. Notably, the Palestinians depicted are exposed, something they frequently are when seen in relation to the built environment, while there contrastingly are no

visible Israelis in the representations of the vehicles, leaving the oppressors out of the image. By portraying Palestinians next to the built environment in *Footnotes*, Sacco highlights the close relationship between people and their homes, something which calls attention to the impact the Israeli attacks has on those living in Gaza. Because of this, the representations bear witness to an uneven relationship of power between the Israelis and the Palestinians, something which Sacco calls attention to in his portrayals throughout the narrative.

Whereas Sacco only once depicts a tunnel which can be understood as evidence of the underground constructions made by the Palestinians to smuggle goods (see fig. 15), which is the legal basis for Israeli military action, he has included a multitude of portrayals of demolitions of houses carried out by the Israelis. This can for instance be seen in the section “Attack West Block J” where Sacco depicts an attack on refugee houses close to the Egyptian border in Rafah. By introducing us to different groups of people who are interested in witnessing the Israeli attack on the buildings, Sacco calls attention to the various perspectives that different people have on houses, and the frustration felt by the Palestinians is foregrounded. Through the use of a two-page spread representing the area where Sacco and his peers are moving towards the site where the bulldozer is at work (Sacco 180-1), the extent to which the demolitions have been taking place is emphasized. The large white area indicates the location of houses that have been demolished by Israeli bulldozers, something we understand from the surrounding context. The depiction of houses and the remains of houses which have been partially destroyed, encircle the vast, white field and help the reader create a mental image of what the demolished houses may have looked like before they were bulldozed to the ground. The large area in white, which we understand is the rubble of buildings due to details such as the portrayal of debris and tracks left by vehicles, become a representation which testifies to both the method of destruction and to its devastating results. Because Sacco depicts the scene in a two-page spread from a bird’s eye perspective, the reader is invited to slow down the reading process and achieve an understanding of how the portrayal of the white can be perceived as evidence of the vast number of houses the Israelis have demolished based on the suspicion of Palestinian tunnels. However, since Sacco has included a large number of stories representing Palestinians who have had their homes destroyed based on wrongful accusations, it is difficult to understand how there could have been tunnels underneath all the houses that have been demolished. Seen in relation to the surrounding elements in the narrative, the representation bears witness to how the Israeli

control of the border includes additional control of areas within Rafah, something which furthermore implies their strict control of the people living in Gaza.

Following the two-page spread, Sacco has represented how various groups of people are following the bulldozers to witness the demolitions, and he has included details of how houses are being attacked without warning, even though there are people still within them (Sacco 183). The Israelis target houses based on potential threats, something we are made aware of through Sacco's portrayal of a man who is particularly frustrated by the events. As the man sees a couple of militants next to his house, he fearlessly shouts at them, asking them to leave because their appearance could cause the Israelis to attack (Sacco 190). Due to the "Israeli policy ... to flatten any home from where they say they've taken fire" (Sacco 190), any gunmen next to a house causes a potential threat, indicating how there are various perspectives on houses among the Palestinians. The man's frustration about the situation is furthermore evident in Sacco's depiction of him "pacing back and forth" (see fig. 1). Here Sacco calls attention to the various perspectives people may have on buildings as he wonders: "For the photographers his house in an image. For the militants it's cover. For the internationals it's a cause. For the bulldozer operator it's a day's work. But for him?" (Sacco 191). This remark is interesting in relation to the ways in which the material witness is not a fixed object, or a neutral piece of evidence, as it will always be interpreted with a degree of bias. The fact that Sacco has left out the answer to what the house means to the man living there (which one would think is "home"), makes it apparent that the Gazans have no official power when it comes to defining the status of their houses, something which furthermore implies that they have no say in the control of their housing situation. These representations make it evident how easily the Israelis can carry out military actions against Palestinian homes based on their suspicions of the houses being potential military threats, something which legitimizes their actions.

In *Footnotes*, like in *Safe Area*, we get to follow one of the character's relationship to his home, and the events that happen to it, closely throughout the narrative, something which emphasizes the Palestinian perspective on the devastating acts carried out by the Israelis. In the section "Ashraf" Sacco has portrayed Ashraf and his family's home following the Israeli attack. On page 198 we see the depiction of the traces the bulldozer has left on the building which is located on the fringe of the built-up area. Using a bleed, Sacco shows how he and the other men inspect the damages done, and we see how the back of the building has been hurt in the attack. In response to Sacco's question about their plans of restoring the place, Ashraf and

his father Talal express their assurance about how the house will be demolished eventually, and that it thus is pointless to do anything but move their belongings to a safer location. Because the Israelis did not demolish their home completely, but rather made “minor damages” (Sacco 199), the family could have continued to stay in their home. However, because of its location next to the field where the Israelis claim there are tunnels, it is under a serious threat of being demolished, and since they interpret the attack as a warning (Sacco 199), they decide to take out their possessions. By doing this, the house will be empty, and thus the Israelis can legitimize a possible attack. This is something Sacco calls attention to near the end of the narrative in the section “Abandoned”. Figure 16 depicts a sequence where Ashraf, Abed, Fuad, and Sacco inspect Ashraf’s home one last time. Ashraf points out new traces – a row of bullet holes – left on the building by the Israelis. These traces bear witness to

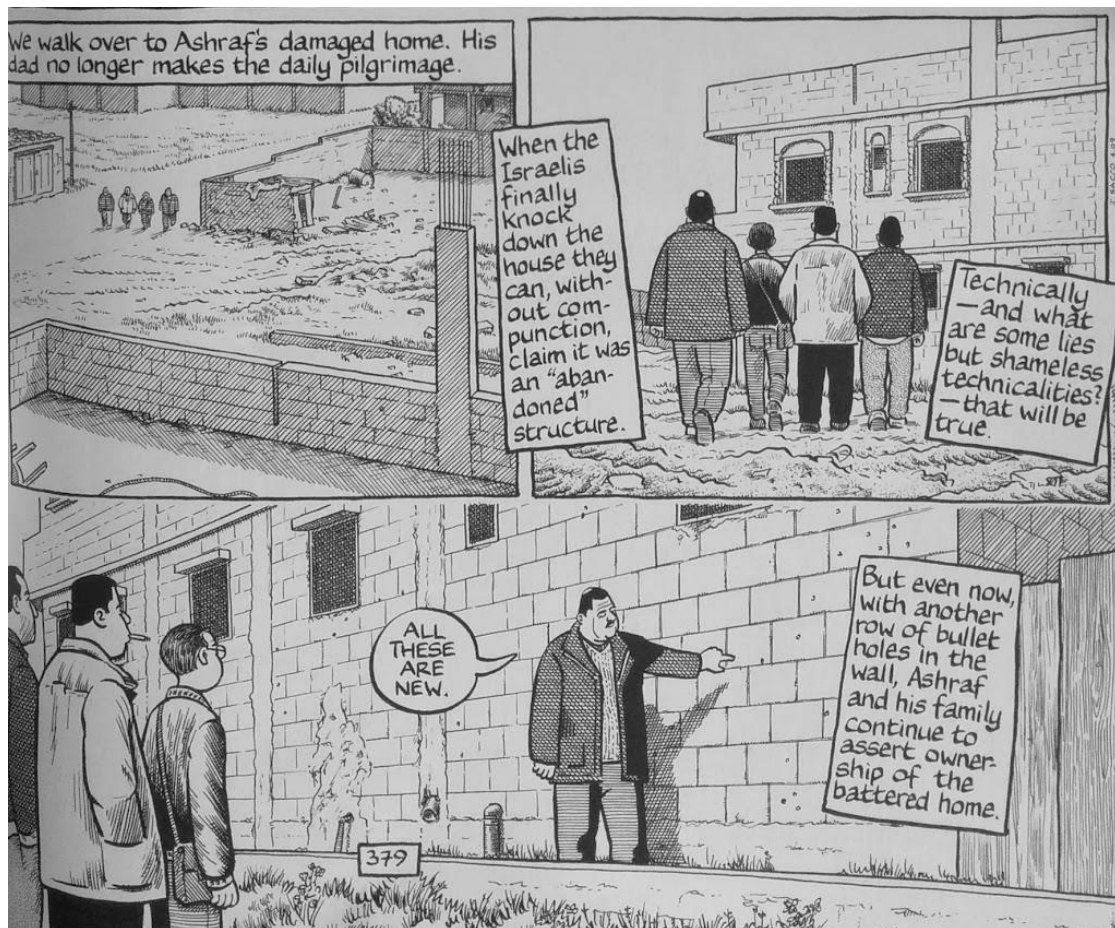


Fig. 16. Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 379.

the violent acts performed by the Israelis with the intention of make people flee from the house, so that it would achieve the status of being an “abandoned structure” (Sacco 379), making it acceptable to demolish it. Ashraf and his family have abandoned the house a long

time ago, due to warnings in the form of violent acts against their house, but they still “continue to assert ownership of the battered home” (Sacco 379). This insistence of the inhabitants to remain connected with their homes shows how they still define it as their home, even though it is made uninhabitable. Sacco’s representations of Ashraf’s house make the reader question who gets to decide the status of a house, and it is apparent that Israel who, by taking advantage of the laws of war, holds the power to define the architectural structures in Gaza, something which ultimately affects the people living there.

Since Sacco shows us the inside of people’s homes which are being targeted even though there are neither tunnels nor militants posing threats against the Israelis, the representations of the built environment testify to how the attacks are essentially carried out to exercise control over the Gazans. Sacco’s portrayal of the destruction of the homes “step by step”, as Ashraf puts it (Sacco 248), bears witness to the attacks being systematically carried out, something which keep the Israelis in control of both the space and the people living there. In “Appendix 3 – The Demolition of Ashraf’s Home” of *Footnotes*, Sacco has included information about how Ashraf’s home was demolished in 2003, after he was done with collecting material for the book (413). In an interview with Sacco, an Israeli military official explains how they decided to destroy the house because they believed it served as the location of Palestinian gunmen (413). Because we have seen how the built environment in Rafah is tactically targeted by the Israelis, Sacco’s representations stand out as convincing evidence of how international laws may be used to justify human rights violations. The massive amount of information provided by Sacco’s representations of the demolition of refugee houses in Rafah and Khan Younis during the time of his visit, bear witness to the ongoing destruction and the regressive development of the housing situation in these areas. Sacco’s portrayals of the completely or partially destroyed buildings are detailed and often represented in bleeds, indicating a continuation of events, and they show the effects of Israeli attacks from the Palestinian point of view. This is something which furthermore is emphasized through Sacco’s attention to individuals and their relationships to their homes. Sacco’s focus on how the Palestinians have no power of definition when it comes to determining the status of their houses, bears witness to their inability to affect their housing situation. The borders which Sacco depicts in his traditionally drawn maps that were discussed in the first chapter, can thus be understood as non-representative of the situation in Rafah, where the Israelis have extended their control from the border area and into the refugee camps.

2.4 Conclusion

What is significant about Sacco's representations of buildings in both *Safe Area* and *Footnotes* is his attention to detail and realistic style, and the fact that he has included a vast amount of information about the built environment, often in relation to the people whose testimonies he is portraying. Sacco's representation of the changing built environment must be interpreted as products of his own interpretations of the events as they were perceived and recollected by the people living in Goražde and in Gaza. Through his stylistic and organizational methods, Sacco guides our understanding of the narratives, and our interpretation of the material witnesses.

In the part concerning representations of built environment in *Safe Area*, we saw that Sacco portrays an extensive amount of details showing the ways in which houses were damaged or destroyed. As Riki says towards the end of the narrative: "There are damaged buildings everywhere" (Sacco 217). The Serb attacks on Muslim homes in 'safe area' Goražde went on without intervention from the international community. Sacco's representation of a town closed off from the rest of the world shows how the people had no choice but to live in the remains of their own, or someone else's, homes during the years of war. While the cartographic representations seen in chapter 1 indicated that the area should have been *safe*, the surrounding depiction of the built environment bears witness to how the demarcations on the map provide an unreliable truth. Sacco's attention to the destruction and restoration of buildings, in particular Edin's house, in *Safe Area* testifies to the dynamic nature of buildings, and to the close relationship between individuals and their homes and neighborhoods.

Sacco's use of borderless panels and bleeds when representing the demolition of buildings in *Footnotes*, creates a sensation of continuation which bear witness to both the connection between past and present events, and to how the continuing occupation creates a regressive development of the built environment. This is furthermore exemplified in the portrayal of Asraf's house which gets progressively targeted by the Israelis throughout the narrative, and which we know got destroyed completely in the end (Sacco 413). Sacco's representations of the built environment in Gaza during the time of his stay, bear witness to never-ending acts of destruction carried out by the Israelis based on questionable reasons. In the examination of Sacco's style and use of maps in chapter one, we saw that Sacco's use of the color black make the borders of Gaza and Rafah stand out as impossible to cross, something which indicates total Israeli control of the border areas. When seen in relation to

Sacco's consistent and detailed portrayals of the demolition of Palestinian houses, one understands that the Israelis have extended their military enforcement far beyond the border area and into the occupied Gaza. Sacco's representations provide testimonies of how the principle of proportionality in Protocol 1 of the Geneva Conventions, which "calls for a balance to be established between military objectives and anticipated damage to civilian life and property" (Weizman, *The Least of All* 11), is interpreted and used in favor of the Israelis as it ultimately harms the lives of the Palestinians living in Rafah.

Conclusion

I set out to examine the ways in which Sacco's representations of maps and buildings function as material witnesses testifying to human rights violations in *Safe Area Goražde* and *Footnotes in Gaza*. Sacco's journalistic and honest approach to historical events, is part of what makes his portrayals of both eyewitnesses' recollections, the surrounding built environment and cartographic representations, elements which convey information about past events in a truthful manner. In this thesis, I have considered what Weizman writes about the relationship between "an event and the object in which traces of that event are registered" and between "the object and the forum that assemble around it and to which its 'speech' is addressed" (*The Least of All* 105), when investigating what testimonies Sacco's depictions of maps and ruins have provided as material witnesses. In what Weizman refers to as the 'era of forensics' (112), a time where objects play a central role in both international laws of war and war-crime investigations, the ways in which material witnesses are presented, used and interpreted differently by different people are important to consider in issues regarding human rights violations. As the material witness share similarities with the human witness, seeing that they both can be "interrogated and cross-examined" (Weizman, *The Least of All* 114), it has been necessary to investigate how Sacco uses his style and organizational methods to represent maps and buildings to convey information about past atrocities. Because texts in the comics form "inherently rejects transparency" (Chute 198), something which is evident in Sacco's portrayals of maps and of the built environment in *Safe Area* and in *Footnotes*, it is apparent that Sacco presents the narratives from the perspective of the Goraždeans and the Gazans.

In the first chapter of this thesis, we saw that Sacco's style and organization of his maps are aspects which influence the readers' interpretations of what they testify to. Because Sacco provides information about choices he has made when designing the maps in his explanatory captions, it becomes clear to the reader that the maps are meant to represent particular geographical and historical contexts which are necessary for the understanding of the conflicts portrayed in both *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*. Sacco's maps resemble traditional cartographic representations which are often perceived as truthful representations of space. However, due to his personal style and usage of the comics form, Sacco openly calls attention to the fact that maps are reduced versions of reality and that they are always designed with a purpose. Additionally, because of the surrounding elements, the maps stand out as

representations of geopolitical decision-making, rather than of the actual situation in Goražde and Gaza. In *Safe Area*, the maps located next to portraits of political leaders provide testimonies of how various forces partook in decisions regarding spatial organization from outside the scene of the conflict. However, when seen in relation to the portrayals of the ongoing atrocities, it becomes clear that the international intervention was insufficient during the years of the war. What is significant about Sacco's style of maps in *Footnotes*, is his expressive use of the color black in his cartographic representations of the surrounding territories of Gaza and Rafah. The borders stand out as threatening and impenetrable, and they function as material evidence of how the Palestinians are completely hemmed in on all sides. Furthermore, Sacco has included maps when portraying the testimony of an eyewitness who is recollecting the violent events that occurred in Rafah in November 1956. By making the eyewitness actively use the map as aid to remember the events, and by including and using the same map as a narrative technique, Sacco calls attention to the close link between people's memories and places.

The connection between people and places is evident in Sacco's representations of buildings as well. Sacco has represented the built environment in Goražde and Gaza with great care and accuracy in *Safe Area* and *Footnotes*, respectively. It is evident that the destruction of homes is a crucial warfare technique which have major implications on the people living within the depicted areas of conflict. Sacco's representations of the demolition of homes, make it apparent that the control of the people living in Goražde and Gaza extends within the lines demarcating the territories on the maps. In both narratives, we follow the stories of individuals' close relationship to their homes, something which underlines the connection between the eyewitnesses' testimonies and the built environment. In both *Safe Area* and *Footnotes* Sacco has included information which calls attention to how international humanitarian law is used in relation to military action. The situation in Goražde was by some regarded as not bad enough to intervene. However, Sacco's detailed portrayals of the demolished built environment testifies to how critical the living conditions were for the people living within the area. In *Footnotes*, the ways in which the laws of war are used in conflicts, are made even more apparent in Sacco's portrayals of how the Israelis justified (and continues to justify) their military actions against the Gazans based on the Geneva Conventions. By calling attention to the various perspectives people have on what constitutes a house, Sacco makes a critical comment on the ways in which the interpretations of objects have serious consequences for the people living in Gaza.

Overall, Sacco's stylistic and organizational methods make his cartographic representations and portrayals of the built environment stand out as material witnesses which convincingly testifies to how the ways in which objects are interpreted differently by different forces ultimately affected the people who suffered from human rights violations in *Safe Area Gorazde* and *Footnotes in Gaza*.

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