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Prova Finale di Laurea:

Aspects of American Graphic Journalism: Joe Sacco and Guy Delisle.

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Introduction

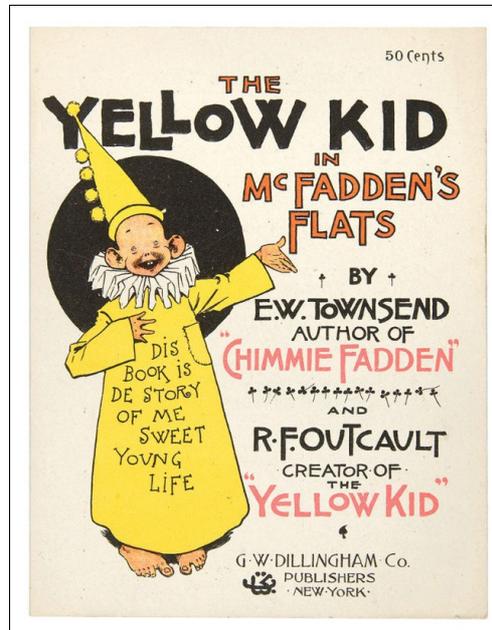


Figure 0.1 -The Yellow Kid, considered to be the first comic character

These last decades have witnessed what we might consider the rise and confirmation of a media that existed for quite some time, but had never before enjoyed the deserved esteem. In the collective imagination, comics are still seen by most as something childish or in any case linked to adolescence. The reality is that this media has evolved over the years and very often its readers have evolved with him: those who approach this world with soft readings like *Batman* or *Spiderman*, end inexorably in contact with the many other faces of comics; more mature, complex faces that were formed to suit the needs of these more mature and discerning readers. The result of this evolution is the birth of the graphic novel, a self-contained story that arises as an alternative to the serial comics, considered to be more "pop". The term became common use thanks to Will Eisner, in 1978 (*Contract with God*¹), but it was already used in the late '60s. The affirmation of the

1 Van Ness, Sara J., *Watchmen as Literature: A Critical Study of the Graphic Novel*, MacFarland, 2010, Chapter 3, Pp. 46-48

graphic novel goes through important names like Alan Moore, Art Spiegelman, Frank Miller and many others, as well as through the press, especially the American press, that finally decided to handle comics as literary works. But that's the history of a century of comics life. It is exactly on the newspapers that we witness the birth of the comic, in the form of *The Yellow Kid's* strips, designed by Richard Felton Outcault in 1895, and curiously it is where nowadays we find this particular form of comic, the graphic journalism, almost like a reconquest of the place where it all started. In recent years, the graphic journalism has found a place on some of the most important international magazines, and many of these works have since been collected in monographs that have become major sales successes.

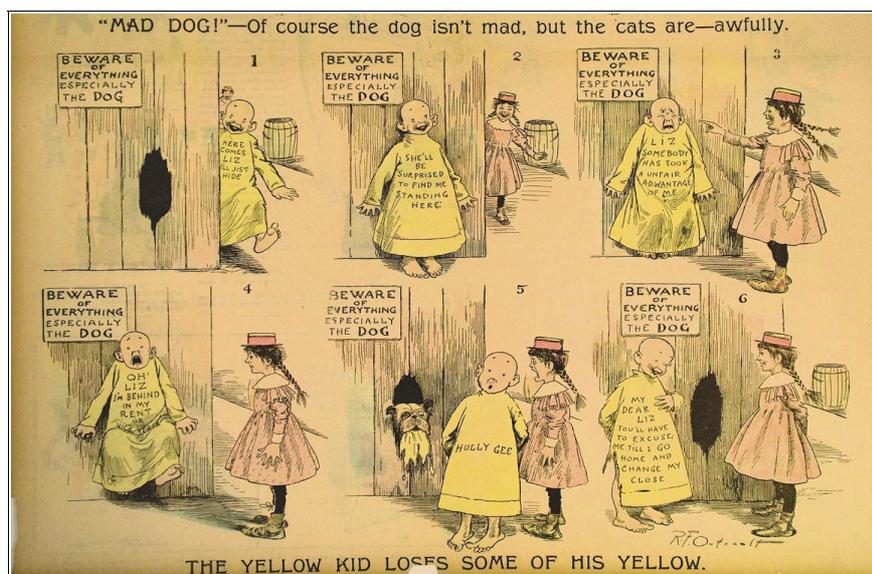


Figure 0.2 – An example of The Yellow Kid's strip

The aim of this thesis is to analyze some of these great successes, written by two of the greatest exponents of the genre: Joe Sacco and Guy Delisle. Through their works, which although belonging to the same class have quite a different approach both in content and in form, we will see how comic can not only be something very serious, but it is also the perfect method of expression for conveying some very harsh concepts, for example the violence of the torture of a prisoners of war, or to

describe a travel through unknown territories, thanks to the inclusion of maps, or even to accompany the touching declarations of a survivor with several portraits of his face to show the many expressions that accompanied his story. We will start with a brief presentation of the biographies of the two authors, a due tribute to two great artists that are appreciated around the world. In the next three chapters we are going to review three works of the Canadian author Guy Delisle, who will introduce us to graphic journalism with his soft style, that made him famous in his country and abroad. The books are presented in chronological order: starting from the first experience in North Korea, where the author has traveled for work purposes back in 2003. This trip has raised in him many questions, and knowing how rare it is the opportunity to visit this country, he has rightly decided to collect his memories and publish what could essentially be considered a travel diary (although there is very little adventure in a business trip...).



Figure 0.3 – Self-portrait: Guy Delisle

As his first work, this is definitely the most unripe, both in drawings and in content, yet the picture that shows us, and the testimonies of those who live and work in that country, make it a very interesting example of graphic journalism. In the next chapter instead, Delisle is going to bring us to Burma, where he lived for a year while he followed his wife Nadège, who works for Doctors Without Borders. This

time the situation is different because he is there mainly to take care of his son Louis, and not for work, so the dynamic is no longer the one of a travel diary, but the one of a resident who, coming from another country, is trying to integrate and to learn as much as possible from the local uses and customs. However, we are in a very complicated country, under a violent dictatorship, and it is automatic for both the author and the reader to be assailed by many questions, arising from the large amount of information that this book provides us. But if we talk about question-raising books, the third of Delisle's works is the more stimulating and in fact, of all his works, it is the one that enjoyed a greater success: Jerusalem is his most famous book, and it's by far the richest in content. The issues between Palestine and Israel are, unfortunately, ever present and perhaps for this reason this book managed to leave a profound mark. It is his most mature work, not only for the drawings but also for the style with which the author shows us what meant for him to live in Jerusalem for a year, between friendships, aversions, difficulties and moments of leisure, in a land where war seems to be constantly around the corner. It is not a coincidence that the first of the two works by Joe Sacco that are analyzed it's also set in Palestine, and shares the name of this land. Sacco has a completely different approach: he is a journalist through and through, and his works are a perfect example.



Figure 0.4 – Self-portrait: Joe Sacco

Palestine is a book that was born exactly as a major inquiry of a war reporter, with direct interviews and stories told by the people involved. Even better, for the author it is so important to underline the oral origin of his work that he has even included himself as a character in the comic, to allow us to assist while his witnesses are telling their stories, without interposing a filter, even at the expense of objectivity. The last work analyzed was written with the same mind, but this time it leads us to live again the terrible war in Bosnia. Also here we find Joe Sacco not only as a writer but also as a character, and once again the center of the narrative are the tales of the witnesses. Comic as a media allows us to see their faces, to see the devastating effects of this war on this poor, tormented land, and the power of these images was what has guaranteed the author's victory of the two most prestigious prizes in the world of comics: the Harvey Award and the Eisner Award.

Through the analysis of these five works, the goal is to present graphic journalism as a genre of comics, to show how comics can be an effective instrument for telling mature stories and not just a mean of recreation, and to point out its advantages in comparison to prose.



Figure 0.5 – Harvey Awards logo and Eisner Awards Logo, the most prestigious prizes for comics

Chapter One

The Authors



Figure 1.1 – Joe Sacco and Guy Delisle, guests at FILBA, a literature festival in Buenos Aires

For the understanding of the works that we are going to analyze, it is definitely important to know the biography of the two authors, almost contemporary regarding the date of birth but that have arrived on the international comic's scene in different moments, and with such different approaches that, sometimes, they may seem difficult to compare. Nevertheless, they are considered two of the most important members of this comic's current, and together boast an impressive number of prizes and awards, and have been translated in various languages.



Figure 1.2 – Guy Delisle at the presentation of the French edition of his book

Born in Quebec City (January 19, 1966), Guy Delisle now lives in the south of France with his wife and children. He studied animation at Sheridan College in Oakville, near Toronto, and then worked for the animation studio CinéGroupe in Montreal. He has spent ten years, mostly in Europe, working in animation, which allowed him to learn about drawing comics. His experiences as a supervisor of animation works by various cartoon studios in Asia were recounted in two graphic novels, *Shenzhen* and *Pyongyang: A Journey in North Korea*. The two books, Delisle's most famous works, have been translated into many languages, including



Figure 1.3 – Guy Delisle in his study

English, German, Italian, Polish, Czech, Spanish, Portuguese, Finnish and Burmese. By following his wife, Nadège, who works for Doctors Without Borders, he had the chance to travel a lot, around the world, and that fueled his art and his need to speak about different cultures. Of course, Doctors Without Borders is active in the most turbulent countries around the world, as a consequence the content of his book is deep and interesting, disturbing but at the same time full of hope.

Joe Sacco (Malta, October 2nd, 1960) has lived in Australia before settling in Los Angeles, in 1972. He graduated in journalism at the University of Oregon in 1981.

Since then he has traveled a lot: he was in the Middle East for the first time in 1991 and when he returned from Israel and the Occupied Territories he was carrying the material with which he created his first comic reportage *Palestine*, which won the *American Book Award* in 1996.

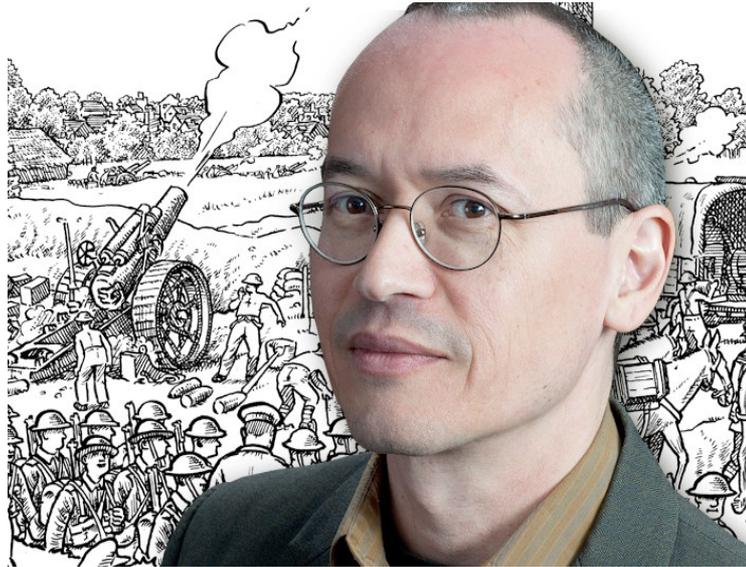


Figure 1.4 – Joe Sacco

In 1995, just before the end of the Bosnian war, it was in Sarajevo and in the surrounding areas. He later published *Safe Area Gorazde*, a tough condemnation of the impotence of western politics and of the clumsy military operations of the UN during the Bosnian conflict. Since then, Joe Sacco's works have been exhibited in art galleries and prestigious universities.



Figure 1.5 – Comparison between photography and caricature

In 2004, with his political satire stripes, he has become a regular contributor of the *Washington Monthly*. During the December of the same year, he followed a battalion of the American Army in Iraq and his report has been published by *The Guardian* in England, by *Libération* in France and *L'Internazionale* in Italy. In 2006 he made a brief foray into the world of punk rock music, with the volume *But I Like It*, then returned to deal with the Middle East: in December of 2009 he published *Footnotes in Gaza*, where he explores and reflects on the crisis of Suez of 1956.



Figure 1.6 – Joe Sacco and Guy Delisle guests of a French radio station

Chapter Two

Pyongyang, a Journey in North Korea

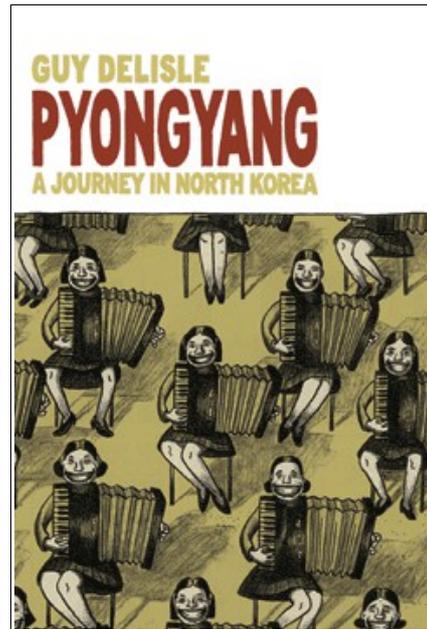


Figure 2.1 – The cover of *Pyongyang, a Journey in North Korea*

The first graphic novel we are going to discuss is the reportage of a brief transfer made by Delisle in Pyongyang, North Korea's capital, in 2003.

The purpose of this transfer was to check the production of the Korean branch of the animation company for which the author was working for.

As he explains in the first pages of the novel, the animation companies usually make the famous authors draw only the most important frames of an animation, while the inbetweens are drawn by their “assistants”, namely cheap labour from Asian countries. And so, these various companies send, from time to time, a senior animator to correct the work done so far. But thanks to this custom, Delisle had the chance to “visit” one of the most impenetrable countries in the world.



Figure 2.2 – the animation process

The word “visit” is in quotes for a reason: during these sixty days, he was constantly under the close watch of someone, either a guide or an interpreter, and that felt more like being under surveillance than being under the careful attentions of a caring administration. Even visiting the railway station requires several days prior notice, and the pocket guide suggests “Do not try anything on your own”.

And this surveillance is something that makes this novel unique, compared to the others, because where in the other Delisle's books (and also in Sacco's) the choice of drawing instead of using photography is a choice made freely, in “Pyongyang” it

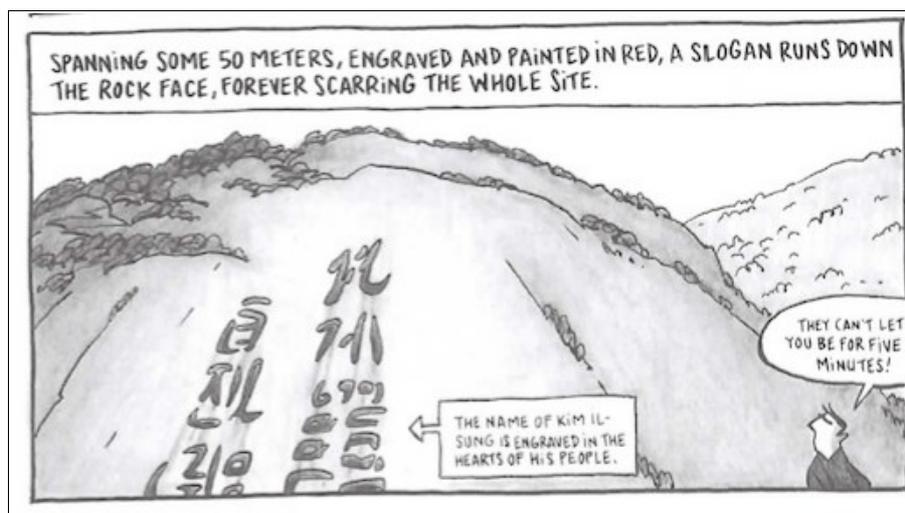


Figure 2.3 – The Dictator's presence is constant

was almost the only one possible, due to the fact that the regimen applies a strict control over the films of the foreigners visiting the country.

During the last days of his stay, Delisle met the French friend and colleague Fabrice Fouquet, who had an unpleasant experience about this strict control and, to explain us what happened, he asked his friend to draw the story.

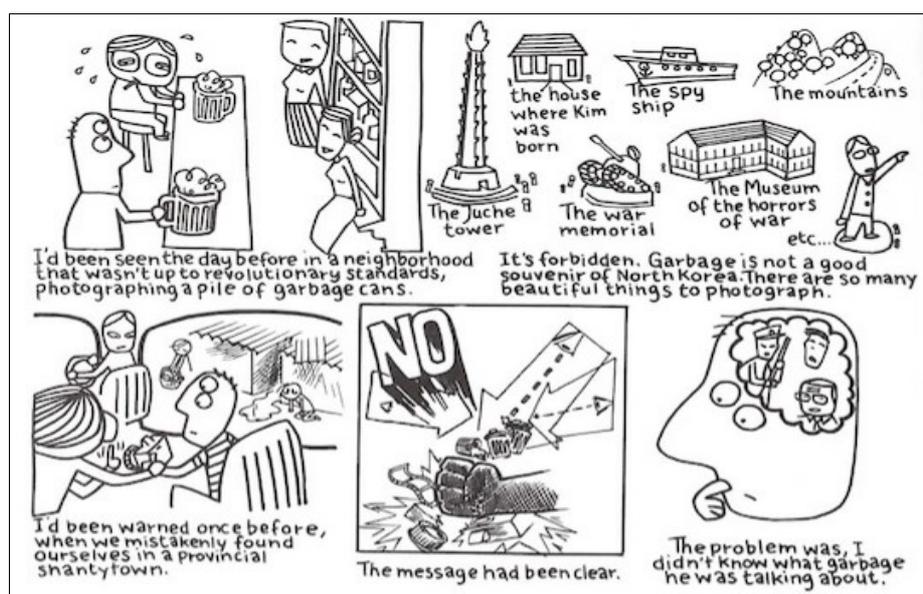


Figure 2.4 – pages drawn by Fabrice Fouquet

Just two pages, but the change of drawing style is clearly visible, and gives us the same feeling that we could have during an interview, when we hear the voice of the journalist change into the voice of the witness. The impression, not totally wrong, is that the drawing style is something so unique that could be compared to our voice or to our fingerprints.

So, Delisle entered the country with only a book (a copy of Orwell's "1984", that is going to be given as a gift to one of his interpreters) and a CD player, rigorously with no radio. The only way to tell us about his experience is to draw a "travel diary", taking notes of what he sees and feels, basically turning it into a report of a journey made through one of the most cruel dictatorships in the world.

Guy Delisle. has a very personal way of making journalism: compared to Sacco,

that has a degree in journalism and approached comics later, Delisle is first of all an animator and a comic book writer, and his way of telling stories is the perfect mix between a journalist and a tourist. He usually exploits the most mundane facts to bring out some broader considerations, and that is the biggest difference between him and his colleagues: while others *look* for events, evidences and testimonials, it seems like events and testimonials are the ones who *look for* Delisle. Deliberate or not, this is one of the aspects that make his books feel different from the other graphic novels, giving us information but in such a casual way that makes everything look so simple... makes us almost forget we are in some of the most dangerous countries in the world. Not being a journalist, while we follow him during his travels we have the chance to see some normal life scenarios that otherwise journalists may avoid to mention, either because considering them useless in terms of reporting or simply because their job never happened to put them in such situations.

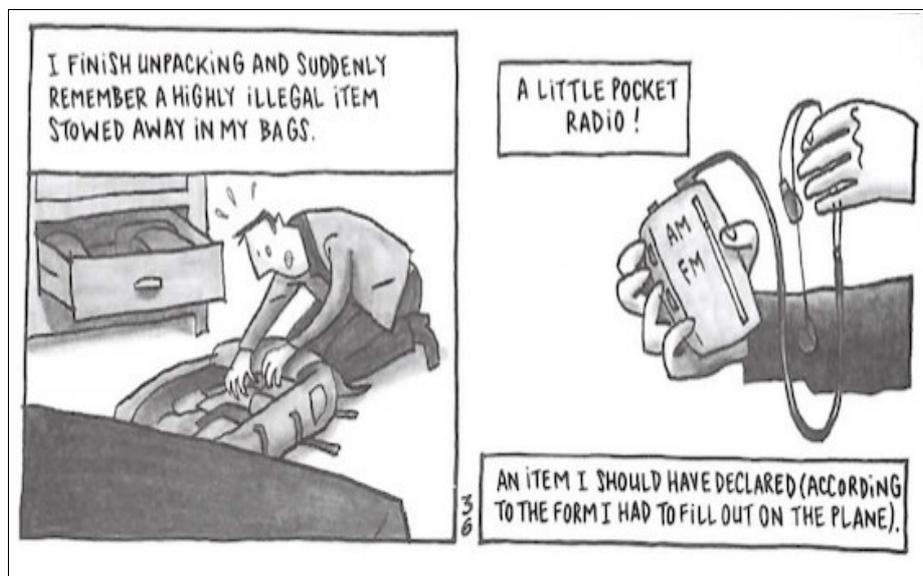


Figure 2.5 – the act of rebellion: a pocket radio

The most powerful act of disobedience made by the author is to bring in his bag a little pocket radio, an illegal object to possess in North Korea, but his rebellion leads nowhere, since there are no programs on any frequency except for the national broadcast and there is no way to reach a foreign signal, making this prohibition look

even more pointless and irrational. A small and naïve act of rebellion (still dangerous though, if we think of the severe consequences for who breaks the law in this country), but it gives the perfect perspective of Delisle's way of "ironically criticize" the regimes he confronted with in all these years, pointing out their inconsistencies and not missing any opportunity to laugh at them.



Figure 2.6 – the inscription in the guest book

Because it's in these details, these small deprivations of liberty, that we see the true delusional face of a dictator.

As Øyvind Vågnes pointed out, "...macro and micro histories blend and serve as a background..."², and this is even more noticeable in the other works by Delisle, since in Pyongyang he really had few chances to roam and experience the everyday life in North Korea. In some of the scarce occasions when the author was literally "carried around" by his "entourage", he met ordinary people doing maintenance work on the streets and on the public buildings, often in very dangerous or even inhuman conditions, but after asking his guide who were those poor workers, the answer was always the same: volunteers.

If the guide really meant what he said or if he was just giving the standard answer, we'll never know; but we know that North Korea's dictatorship is not soft with

² Vågnes, Øyvind, *Rudy Kelly's eyes: Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco's "Days of destruction, days of revolt"*, «European Journal of American Studies» Online, Vol.10 N.2, 2015



Figure 2.7 - volunteers

dissenters, and that is no secret that they have “re-education camps”, located in the north of the country, and that they are an inexhaustible source of cheap labor.



Figure 2.8 – re-education camps in the north-est

This is a typical example of why even a stroll around the block can be dangerous for the façade of the regime, and is also a perfect demonstration of how Delisle informs us about local reality (macro history) starting from a reflection born by a daily life episode (micro history).

Even the image used for the cover has a story behind: during a visit to the Children's Palace, a sort of school for the country's most gifted children, the author witnesses a musical show, composed by a number of these young girls playing accordions, all focused on their musical score, but most of all focused on keeping

up their smile, fake as the fake happiness that the rest of the people in this country flaunts.



Figure 2.9 – the strange musical and the author's reaction

Delisle's experience in North Korea was brief and he had no chance to dive deep in Korean's culture as much as he did in the other countries he visited later, but surely he saw behind the regime's curtain, and felt the urge to tell the world what he saw. In a review made by David Thompson for *The Guardian* we read: "Delisle's evocative pencil drawings are suited to depicting a colorless, twilight world in which the state is[...]"³, a sentence I could not agree more. Again, Forrest Halvie said: "Pyongyang, takes readers on a journey to a country that has been closed off to the West for years, and instead of dispelling fears of a fascist nation oppressing its people in every means possible, it provides visual confirmation of these notions with often-disturbing detail. Yet, the overall tone of the book does not seem to indicate a particular bias against the country; it merely records Delisle's continued surprise over the ways in which the country operates, when contrasted with his experiences in Western Europe and North America".⁴

3 Thompson, David, *The Guardian*, Sunday 15 October 2006

4 Halvie, Forrest, *Sequart Organization*, Thursday 19 July 2012

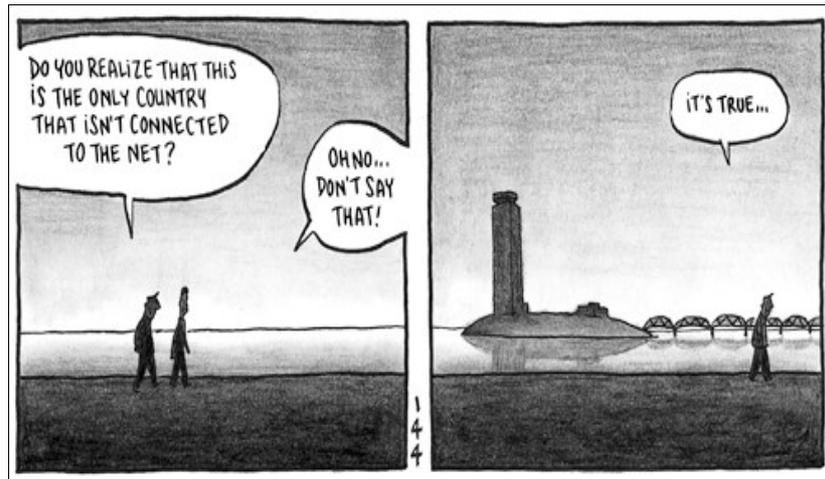


Figure 2.10 - isolation

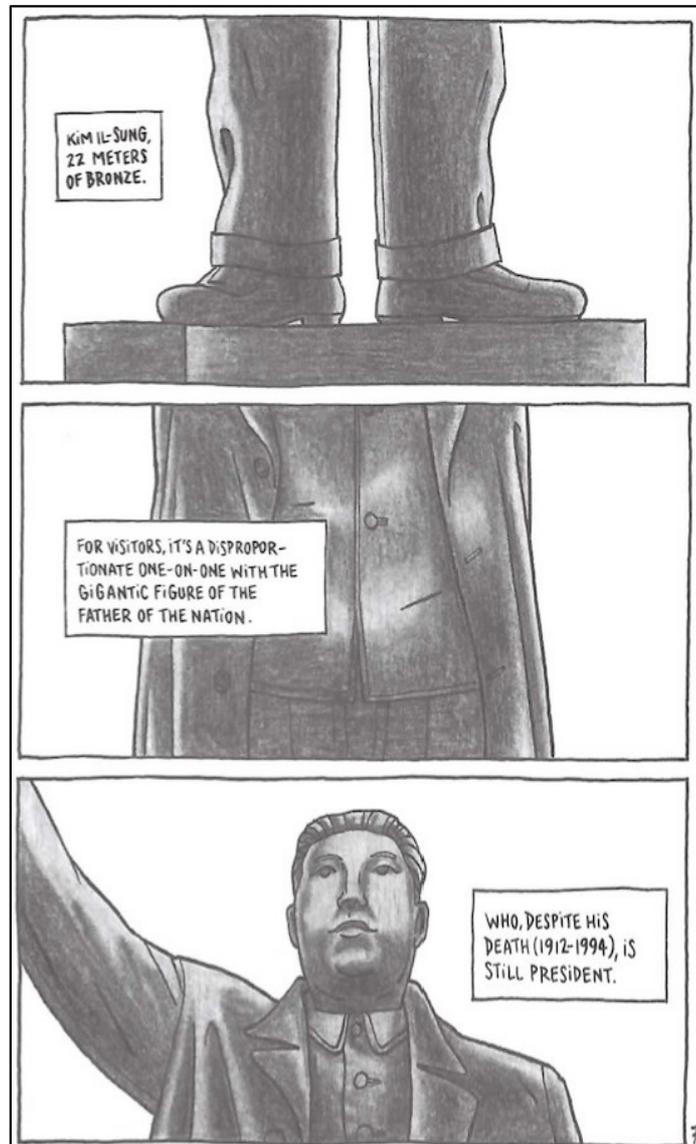


Figure 2.11 – sequence of vignettes that gives the impression of a view from the bottom

Being the oldest of Delisle's works we are going to analyze, we will notice his artistic improvements and the changes in his style, but in no other book we will find a colder shade of gray as we see in "Pyongyang" (in "Jerusalem" we also find warmer colours, in contrast with the black, gray and white), an effective symbol of the sense of isolation and warped self-perception he encountered during his travel in this land full of contradictions.



Figure 2.12 – "forging ahead into the 21st century!" (propaganda poster)

Chapter Three

Burma Chronicles

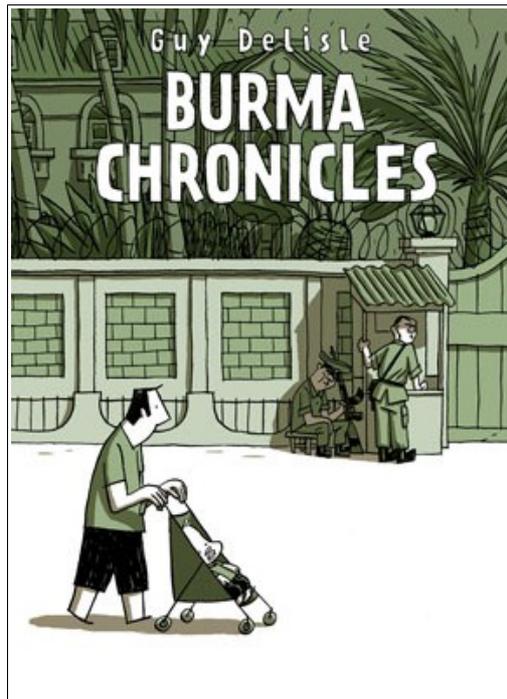


Figure 3.1 – the cover of *Burma Chronicles*

In 2005, Guy Delisle followed his wife Nadège, an administrator for Doctors Without Borders (DWB), while she was assigned to a mission in Myanmar or, as it is known to the most, Burma. As she traveled to various rural outposts, the author stayed home with their son Louis, in Rangoon. Delisle spent his days exploring the surroundings, attempting to experience as much native culture and traditions as possible, but censorship and the secrecy of the military regime made things hard, as expected.

Nevertheless, he managed to experience Vipassana Buddhism, one of Burma's oldest traditions, to bring Louis to a lot of play groups, to attend to a lot of Doctors Without Borders' activities and even to give lectures about animation to a group



Figure 3.2 – a walk with Louis

of burmese artists. In the meantime, he had to fight against the suffocating heat, frequent power outages, health threats, unreliable transportation, and confounding bureaucracy, and last but not least, with the new, exciting and frightening experience of being a father. Louis is often the pretext for the contact with the people of Burma, fascinated by a white child, definitely an unusual sight in that part of the world. The differences from the previous works are evident, his drawing style changed, less shades in pencil but still the predominant color is gray, as to underline that we are, once again, in a country that is facing a dark period in its history, and saw the colors of freedom taken away through violence. In a review, we read: “Delisle's drawings are rendered in clean, spare lines, and the wordless vignettes are well-placed throughout the story. The material is often depressing — aside from the repressive regime, Burma is also plagued with widespread prostitution and heroin abuse — but the author's tangential approach deflects some of the impact of the harsh reality”⁵. It is true, Delisle's trait is clearly derived from his experience as an animator, so it seems like it's in contrast with the gloomy mood of some episodes, but this gives us even more the impression of the “firsts contact” of a western citizen with the cruelty and ruthlessness of an asian regimen: a naïve look that meets a cynical reality, that generates many moments of silent

⁵ Liebetrau, Eric, *Charleston City Paper*, Wednesday 24 September 2008

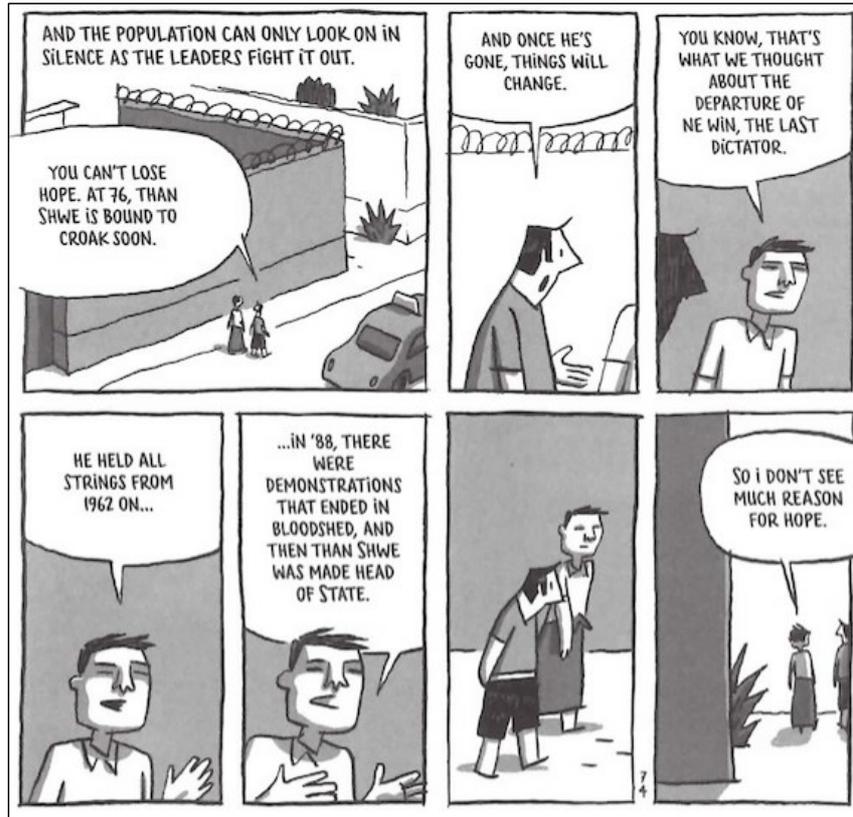


Figure 3.3 – wordless vignettes add drama to the scenes

reflection. Graphically, he kept the custom of adding drawings made by other authors he met, some more some less famous, as to give the impression of different "voices" within a story, but he also used new techniques to introduce small funny scenes, like when he had to try different types of ink available in Burma because he had finished his own (with the sequence of vignettes in which inks of low quality tended to stain or ruin the page), or when he was talking about the rainy season in Burma, pretending that it was not that wet (showing instead two vignettes completely ruined by moisture).



Figure 3.4- effects of moisture on the paper



Figure 3.7- the request of the book...



Figure 3.8- ...and the results

by getting around with Doctors Without Borders, sure the chances to be an eyewitness are not few. Even though he is not directly a collaborator, he often gets the occasion to help, like when they asked him to illustrate a book to teach kids how to fight HIV and to remember to take their medicines. In 2008, Doctors Without Borders had become the major health provider of anti HIV treatment in Burma. It gave anti-retroviral therapy drugs, essential for surviving AIDS, to about 11.000 people, while over 70.000 people needed the treatment. However, less than 20% of HIV/AIDS sufferers receives the necessary cures. Burma's government spends the least percentage of its GDP (Gross Domestic Product) on health care of any country in the world, and the no-profit associations must overcome this lack with donations.

Delisle's wife, Nadège, helped his husband receive the necessary pass to access the areas normally forbidden to foreigners, where the military dictatorship is free to do all kind of atrocities, away from the prying eyes of the international opinion, and to witness the conditions in which the population is forced to live. These moments are, as said before, full of silences, perfectly represented by wordless vignettes that silently communicate the questions of a man who is, despite the many years of experience around the world, still surprised by the atrocities of which men are capable of.

Censorship generated many interesting episodes too, like when Delisle first attempted to read *The Times* just to find out that government censors had snipped out "offending articles" (that means any critic made to the military caste and any dangerous information coming from the outer world). The paranoia of the regime reached the point of intercepting the emails of the no-profit organization, looking for any "unusual" word or reference to rebel factions in the country. In one occasion, the head office of Doctors Without Borders sent an email containing the name of a rebel faction in the title, and that caused an intensification of controls on the mails. Since these controls are made by employees that check every single message, word by word, the result was a delay of weeks in the delivery of electronic messages, which caused many problems for the management of the aid operations.



Figure 3.9- the problem of censorship spares no one, even the NPO

Since these controls are made by employees that check every single message, word by word, the result was a delay of weeks in the delivery of electronic messages, which caused many problems for the management of the aid operations. Censorship was overwhelming, until August 2012, when the Ministry of Information lifted the requirement that print media organizations submit materials to the government before seeing it published. The most unpleasant episode related to censorship that Delisle has drawn is the one about his animation class. During his stay, he helped a little group of animators, making some seminars about animation, hosted in the apartment of one of the students. This experience gave him the chance to experience the life in the poor side of Rangoon, where electric power is available only for few hours a day. But in the same period, Delisle received a visit from a friend, a journalist that wanted to write an article about the burmese



Figure 3.10- unexpected problems caused by the inquisition of Burmese government

situation. Delisle was glad to drive him around the city, showing the most interesting sites, discussing the burmese traditions... and showing the state in which the Burmese people are forced to live because of the cruel dictatorship. Of course, the article was not really flattering about the government of the country, and it was published together with a picture of the journalist next to Delisle. When he had the chance, Delisle was happy to show to his class that he was on the front page of the newspaper, not thinking that for burmese people it would be dangerous to be seen around someone so close to hostile press. At the end, one of his students, being a government employee, decided to stop attending these animation seminars to avoid risking his life... Fortunately, there were no consequences, but it is sad to see how this inquisitorial climate affects people's lives.



Figure 3.11- reflections on the history of this country through the banknotes

If we talk about Burma and the oppression of the military caste, it's impossible not to talk about its most famous citizen: Aung San Suu Kyi, awarded with a Nobel Prize for peace for his political struggle against the dictatorship. Born on 19 June 1945 in Rangoon, daughter of Aung San, founder of the modern Burmese army and negotiator for Burma's independence from the British Empire in 1947. When she arrived back in Rangoon in 1988, after many years spent in England with her husband and their two children, Myanmar was in the middle of major political

disorder: thousands of students, workers and monks were demonstrating in the streets, demanding a democratic reform. “Aunt Suu” lead the revolt against the dictator, general Ne Win, organizing rallies and traveling around the country, asking for a democratic reform and free elections, but the demonstrations were brutally suppressed by the army, who seized power in a coup on 18 September 1988. Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest the following year. In May 1990, the military government called national elections, which Aung San Suu Kyi's party won; however, the military junta refused to hand over control. Her house arrest lasted until 2010, alternating with brief moments of freedom, and during Delisle's stay she was still living in her house, not far away from the author's house.

In fact, one of the first “adventures” undertaken by Delisle was simply to try to pass by Aung San's residence, perpetually under military patrol, but he had to give up:

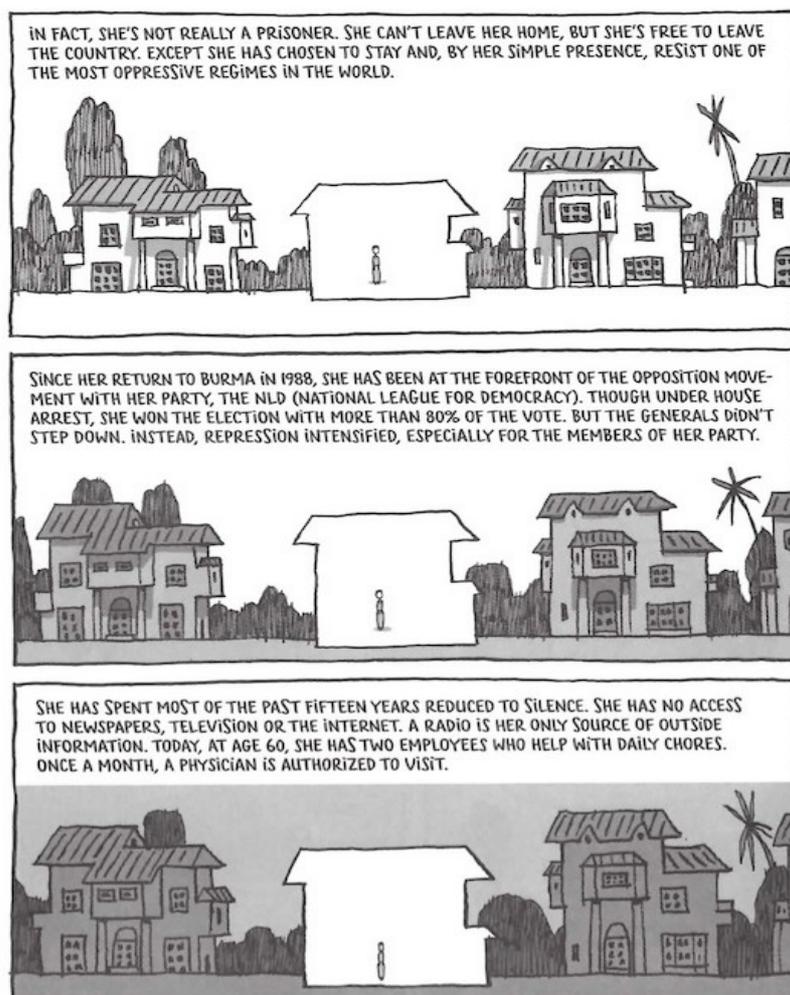


Figure 3.12- Aung San Suu Kyi's situation

apparently it is forbidden, for a foreigner, to walk in front of the house of the main opponent to the regime.

Foreigners have contributed to the bloody history of Burma and, as always, the reasons are oil and raw materials. Jade mines are property of Chinese corporations, and they often pay the miners directly with drugs, creating a literal “workaholism”. Oil extraction plants in the country are owned by Total, a British Company that extracts materials from burmese territory to sell it to Thailand, and of course they had to expropriate the land from natives to build ducts, with the support of the burmese army, which has never been shy in front of the use of brute force.

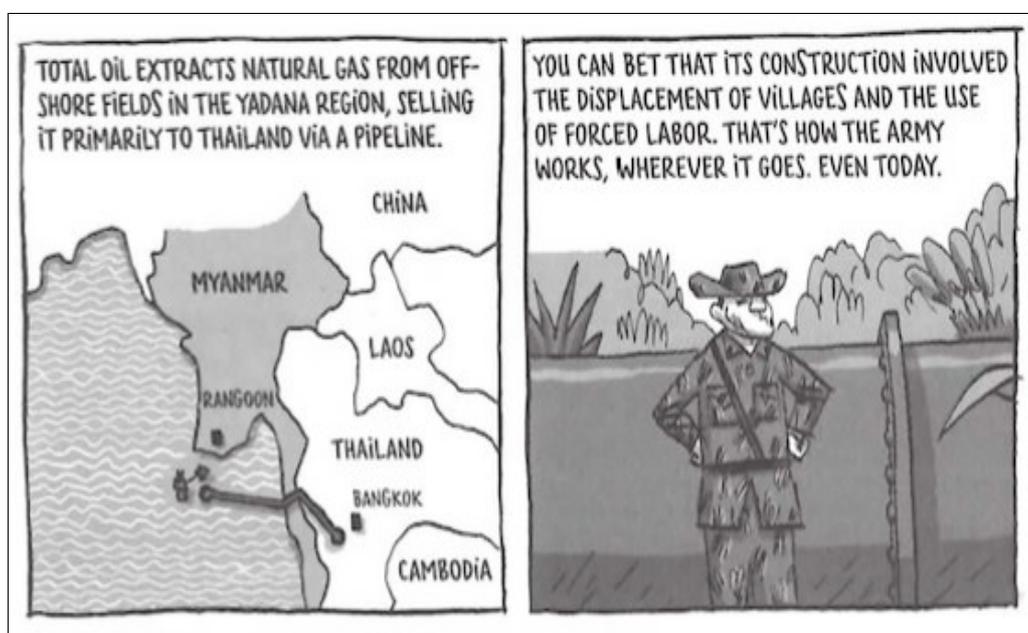


Figure 3.13- violent expropriation procedures

In the end, Delisle and his wife left Burma. Doctors Without Borders decided to close the burmese operations, not because the authorities didn't grant the access to the most needy areas, but because they were being forced to work in places which should have been served by the national health care system, making DWB an instrument of government discrimination. That, along with the slowness of bureaucracy, made the permanence of this and other no-profit organizations hard to justify.

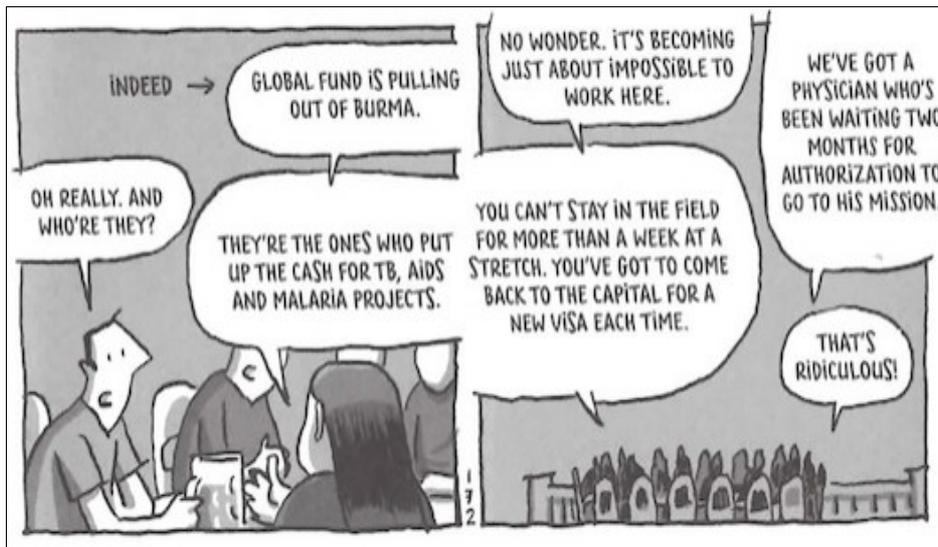


Figure 3.14- Doctors Without Borders decides to leave the country

As we can read on *The Guardian's* review of this opera, “as well as following Delisle's year in Rangoon, the book chronicles the difficulties the authorities make for foreign aid organizations. Travel permits are refused. Doctors are stranded in the capital. Whole ethnic regions are closed to outsiders so that the military can do some cleansing”⁶.

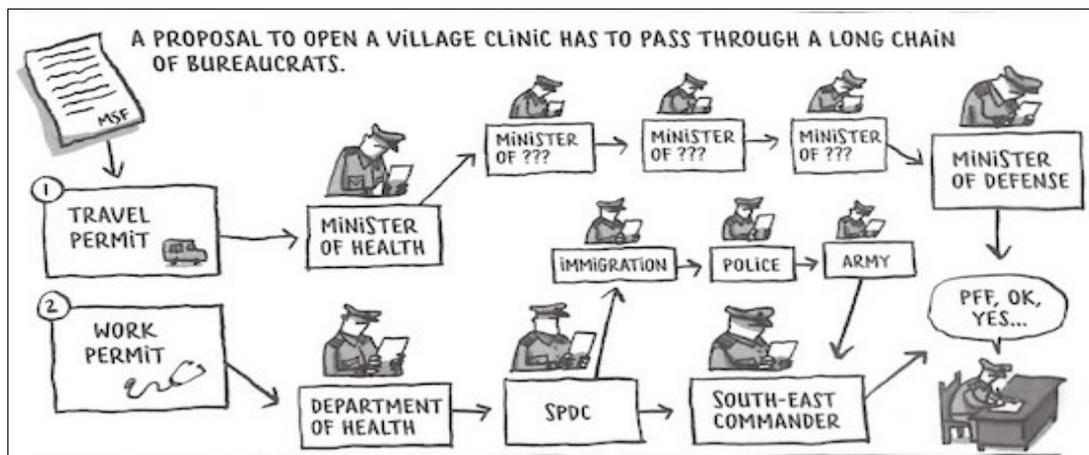


Figure 3.15- bureaucracy in Burma

We have already spoken about the problems that censorship caused to the planning of the operations, and if we add the long time needed to obtain the

6 Maclean, Rory, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 19 May 2009

necessary permits to travel and work in the country, and the frustration of seeing the military junta foreclose the access to certain areas of the country to try to hide some terrible truth at the eyes of the World, we get the idea of what kind of situation these volunteers were forced to face.



Figure 3.16- the government and the fight against drugs

Again, "labourers working in the chinese-owned jade mines are paid allegedly with shots of heroin. Here, as in other ethnic regions, are hundreds of "shooting galleries" where \$1 will buy a fix.

Delisle speculates that the authorities turn a blind eye to drug abuse as they prefer to see young men stoned rather than taking up arms and joining an anti-government resistance group"⁷. These words give us an image of a country that is unable to change because there are too many interests at stake, and a no-profit organization can do little against certain powers.



Figure 3.17- the many economic interests that affect the country

7 Maclean, Rory, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 19 May 2009

A final touch of sadness is given by an elderly woman, sick and bedridden, that experienced firsthand the riots of 1988 and remembers how things were before. As she lives the last years of her life, she sees her country descending, not so slowly, down a spiral of violence and ignorance from which she knows it will not be easy to go back. Her situation reminds us the state prevailing in her country: the feeling of helplessness, of immobility, the paralysis of a people that fights not only against physical illnesses like HIV, but also with a social evil and, in its daily struggle, shows the same pride and the same sorrow that Delisle drew in the eyes of that poor woman.



Figure 3.18- reflections of an ill woman

Chapter Four

Jerusalem, Chronicles from the Holy City

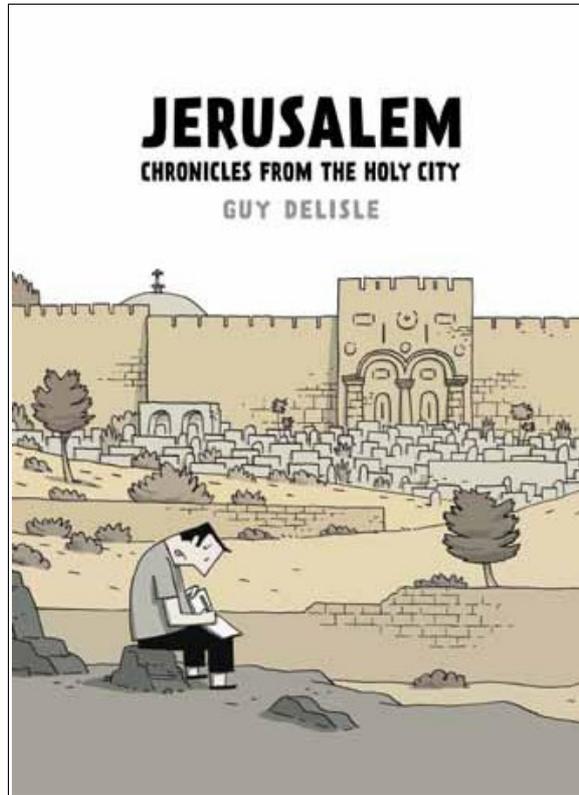


Figure 4.1- the cover of *Jerusalem, Chronicles from the Holy City*

Of the three graphic novels by Delisle that we discussed, “Jerusalem” is the most recent (2011). As we have noted earlier, in terms of graphics the big change is the inclusion of new colors like beige, which is the color of sand, stones, the heat of an area of the world especially dry, but also the heat of a zone perpetually at war, that lives a long conflict that seems unsolvable. Among the new colors, we see also orange and green, used to highlight details in the various maps drawn by the author. The drawings evolved, becoming more similar to a cartoon, showing the nature of the artist as an animator. Guy Delisle is once again lead abroad thanks to his wife's job at Doctors Without Borders. Again, there follows the son Louis, but this time there is a new entry, Alice, the youngest daughter.

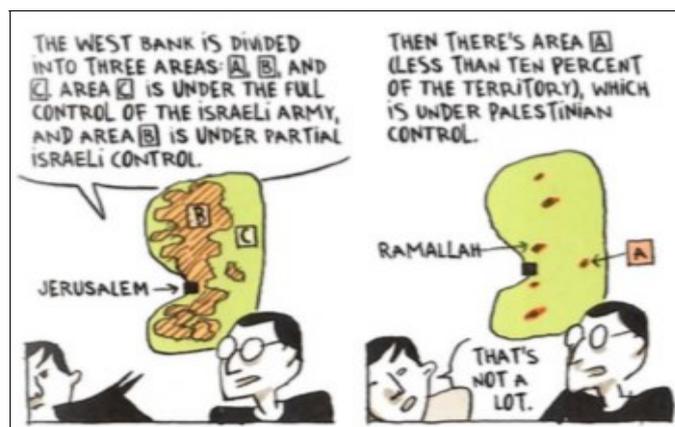


Figure 4.2- the use of maps is one of the advantages of graphic journalism

Delisle has already experienced, in obedience to his polyphonic method of telling, that children are a precious ally in representing his simple, western lifestyle, often naive, and with their needs they are the most powerful excuse to explore the new environment that surrounds him, making them a good motivation to talk about



Figure 4.3- the day of Yom Hashoah

aspects of everyday life in a country that we don't know well, and that surely would eventually escape the eye of a true journalist, much more focused on the activities of war that are certainly more striking. And it is this, its strenght: the genius of Delisle lies in this vision of daily life that he offers, a new and fresh perspective that goes beyond the "reporter language" that we are used to couple with the news regarding Palestine and Israel. Douglas Wolk of *New York Times* writes: "It's a series of brief strips, many only a page or two long, depicting his

experiences caring for his kids, seeking opportunities to draw local landmarks without being interrupted by soldiers, and trying to comprehend how the residents of a heavily contested territory live day to day”⁸. As an appendix to the novel we find a selection of these sketches that the author has drawn during the year, mainly landscapes and monuments.



Figure 4.4 - "palestinian humour" while watching the sketches

The work is subdivided in 12 months, and each month is divided according to several episodes. Spatial and temporal elements describe the existential perimeter of a way of life. As a result, we have a greater awareness of the time spent by the author in this country, thanks to this time division.

To give us the impression of cyclicity and immutability is the fact that the work begins on a plane en route to Jerusalem and ends with the image of an airplane taking off, as if the author wanted to tell us that he had left the country in the same condition in which he found it. And about the first impression of Delisle on the country he found, the first impact is definitely disappointing: reality is undoubtedly poorer than the idea that the author had about the Israeli territory... years of war have claimed their price.

⁸ Wolk, Douglas, *The New York Times*, Friday 1 June 2012



Figure 4.5- disappointment during the first stroll

From the early days, with the first experiences outside the house, the author is immersed in the contradictions of this land, and this is reflected in the fluctuating episodes we see, in which at first the coexistence of the Palestinian and Israeli people seems possible, while immediately after it seems a distant mirage. In this respect, the author is very good at not committing either for or against one faction or the other, but to show countless insights on what is common (but also on what divides) these two cultures. Delisle gives us a lot of information on the various

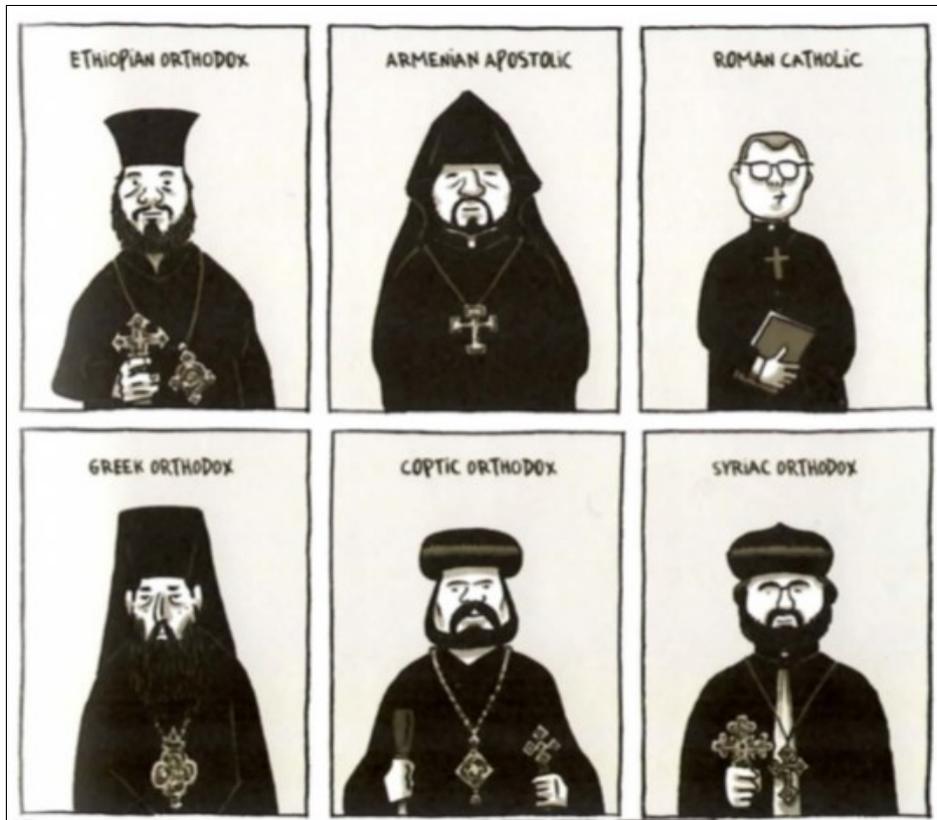


Figure 4.6 – clothes of the many religious orders of Jerusalem

religious orders present in the country, whose shades are much more than a simple division between Christians, Muslims and Jews. Also, he deepens very well some aspects of the Jewish and Muslim religions that may be unknown to the majority, helping even the most casual reader to have a more complete view of the cultural and historical heritage that is behind this conflict. Delisle's passion for drawing landscapes and monuments finds in these lands much more material compared to the previous travels (where indeed he saw very little worth of a portrait). Also this time we meet several wordless vignettes, always used to give the impression of meditation on the questions that some situations have been able to arouse in the author, whether positive, linked to the pleasures of travel and discovery, or negative, born by tales of atrocities of war.

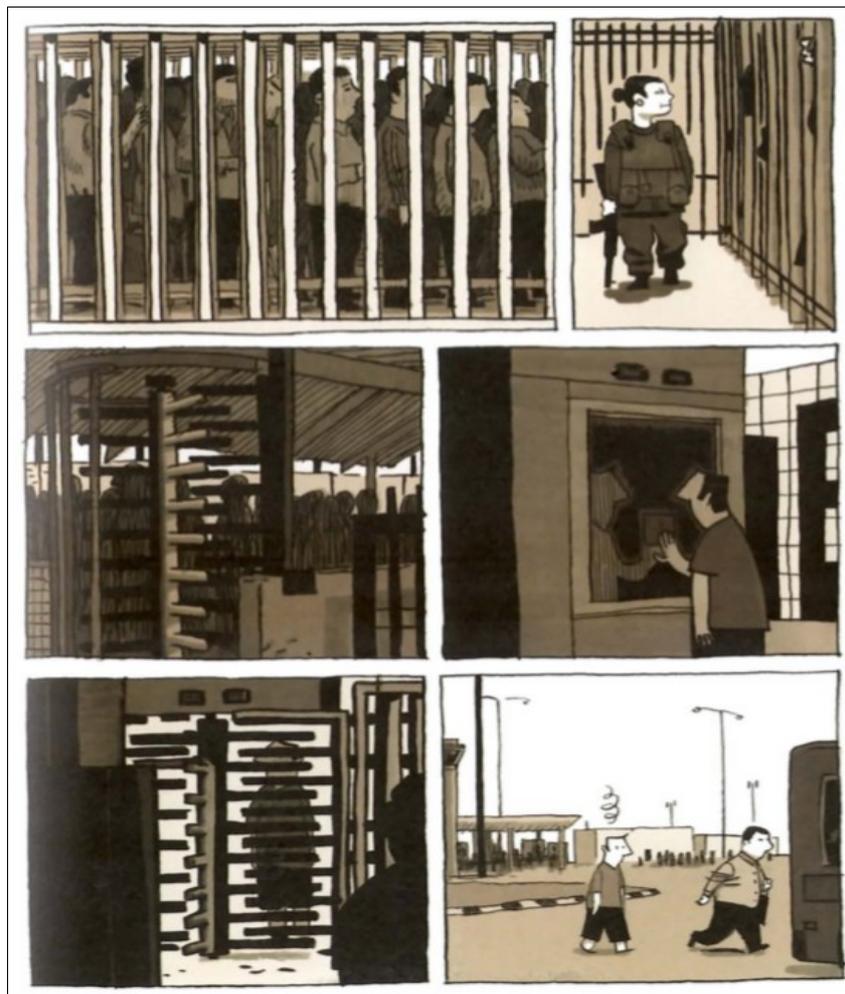


Figure 4.7- scenes of a checkpoint

In this work, even more than in the previous, the author includes maps, fundamental for the understanding of a tension that arises precisely because of the disputed territories. Without these maps it would be difficult for someone unfamiliar with the area to understand the unstable equilibrium in which the country finds itself. And it is perhaps here that we see the reason that makes graphic novel the ideal media to explain these situations: as noted by Stefania Imperiale during her speech at the International Conference on the Hybrid Context organized at Ca'Foscari University⁹, this media has the capacity of a more direct communication compared to literature, making it easier for the reader to understand complex concepts and specific terminology, by simply positioning images next to words.

Delisle himself, interviewed by Rachel Cooke for *The Guardian*, says: "I love comics because they are so efficient. If I need to draw a little arrow, or a map, then I do. If you did those things in a documentary, it would look like a PowerPoint presentation. But in a comic, it's fine."¹⁰ The universal language of comics arrived of course to Israel too, where the author managed to organize some workshops with exhibitions of his original drawings, thanks to the collaboration with some universities and some animation studios. However, he will be received differently depending on the region: while in Nablus the public will be scandalized in front of



Figure 4.8 – different reactions at the workshop

⁹ "The Hybrid Context – Illustration, Literature, Comics", in publishing

¹⁰ Cooke, Rachel, *The Guardian*, Thursday 31 May 2012

some vignettes with nudity, in Ramallah they will prove to be more tolerant and open-minded, laughing and showing appreciation.



Figure 4.9- graphic journalism is spreading through Israel

In Tel Aviv then, Delisle even met a couple of students familiar with his work, causing him no little surprise. Obviously, circulating so freely in a country in which moving sometimes results difficult even for the residents, is an advantage derived from his wife's contacts: even this time, Doctors Without Borders had an important role for the author and his experience in this troubled country.

As before, Guy Delisle offers his help, albeit limited, and in return he gets a chance to pass through the borders and to be followed by guides and interpreters.

These guides do not always prove to be perfectly comfortable with the habits and customs of the country, generating even hilarious situations, as the brief foray in the neighborhood of *Mea-Shearim*, an ultra-orthodox neighborhood, during the *Sabbath*, the day of the week that Jews consecrate to absolute rest, and where is forbidden even to drive a car.

Speaking of the overall content of the work, the main difference from the previous novels is that we are no longer talking about a country under dictatorship, but a country in which war is still going on, with almost daily bombings and shootings. That's the so called "state of exception": it follows that Delisle's report is different, no



Figure 4.10- during Shabes it's forbidden even to drive



Figure 4.11- the dangers of the volunteer's life

longer confined to showing the idiosyncrasies and contradictions of a dictator or a military junta, but instead brings us direct experiences of volunteers in the Gaza Strip, who have found themselves to work under the bombs while dodging bullets.

It also makes us aware of various humanitarian organizations working on the territory, many of which are of Israeli origin such as "Breaking The Silence", an organization made by former soldiers of the Israeli army that decided to break the code of silence and to speak of the atrocities that have been forced to commit,

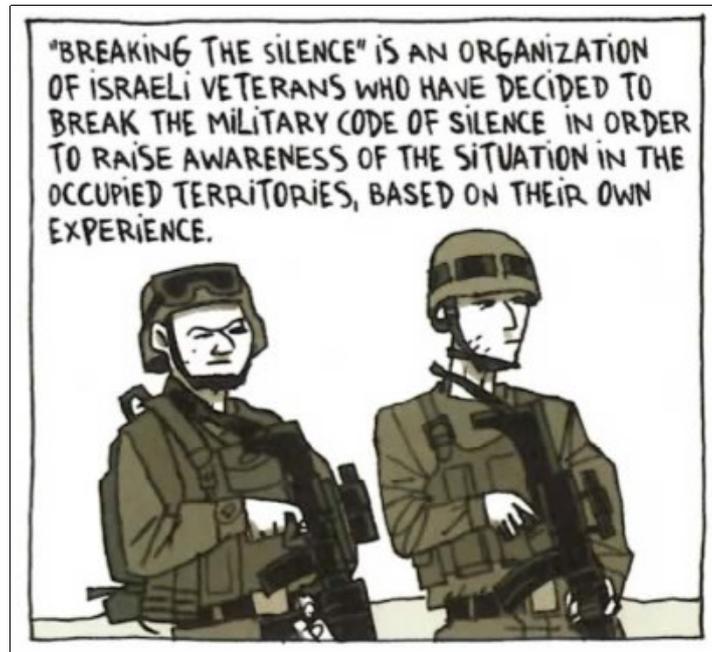


Figure 4.12- "Breaking the Silence"

or as "Checkpoint Machsom", a group of Israeli women who undertakes the task of surveying the checkpoints located throughout the region, to make sure that the soldiers respect the civil rights of the Palestinians who want to circulate freely in their country.



Figure 4.13- "Checkpoint Machsom"

Delisle is therefore giving information, although we can find difficult to catalog it as journalism, at first glance. The difference between Delisle and a professional journalist can be seen in various aspects, such as the language used, to the details



Figure 4.14 - the risks of the journalist's profession should not be underestimated

he pays attention to, but especially from a certain fear that makes us understand that his place is not the front line: when he is proposed to visit the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of a series of bombings, he first accepts, but then the fear of what might happen convinces him to refuse. In his place, many journalists rushed to the area, following the various teams of NGO operators, looking for a scoop... a behavior more appropriate for a war correspondent. It is a significant detail, because we realize that despite his opera being a report, he is not a journalist by profession, and it is reasonable to expect from him the behavior of a responsible family man who simply wants to tell his experience through what he considers to be the best media, but avoiding to risk his life. Instead, like we said, journalists face their duty, careless of the dangers. Sean Collins, blogger for *The Comics Journal*, wrote:



Figure 4.15- references between authors

“Delisle is not Joe Sacco, as a joke near the end of the book drives home, and he’s not out to tell a “story” in either the sense of a storyteller or a reporter. His *modus operandi* is to record his life when that life is placed in an unfamiliar and (to put it mildly) politically problematic environment, under the assumption that the result of that recording will provide a useful window on the interaction between the personal and the political”¹¹. The kind of narrative by words and images proposed by Delisle, from its autobiographical initial premises, present in

11 Collins, Sean T., *Jerusalem Review*, *The Comics Journal*

every report, develops a form of autofiction, effective but at the same time limited to the horizon of exploration, and so able to conclude a new autobiographical pact with the reader. Would it be reasonable to consider the work of Delisle not as a



Figure 4.16- a message of hope

reportage, but rather as a travelogue? Or at least consider this document less important than a more classic report? It would be a mistake to consider this a travel diary, because the author was a resident in the country for an entire year and not simply passing through, and considering that we are talking about one of the areas with the highest mediatic coverage in the world, probably the kind of information supplied to us by Delisle are even more valuable than those that could have been provided by any war correspondent, maybe focused on the violent aspect of war but careless about the human aspect of the victims and the history of their people. This characteristic makes this work a rare gem, able to let us note something that perhaps, anesthetized by the daily news of massacres and tragedies, we had forgotten.

Chapter Five

Palestine, a Nation Occupied

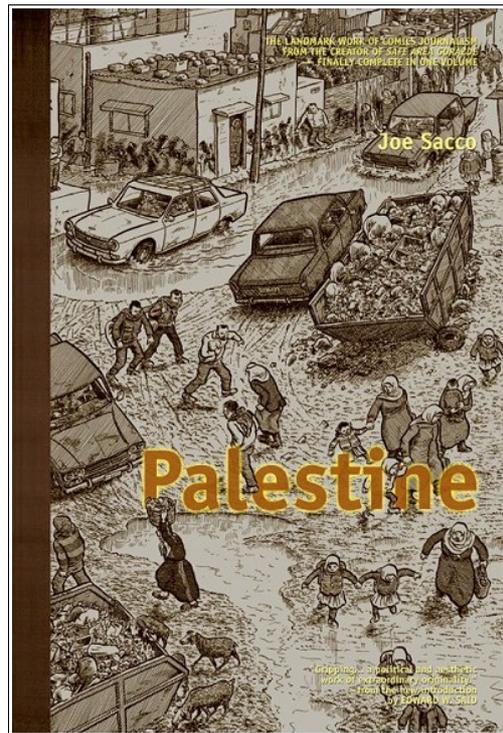


Figure 5.1- the cover of *Palestine, a Nation Occupied*

Originally published in 1993 as a nine-issue comic series, *Palestine* is an illustrated account of the journalist's visit to the Occupied Territories during 1991 and 1992. Joe Sacco is a journalist, before being a cartoonist and this, coupled with the fact that this book precedes the first work of Delisle of about 10 years, greatly influences the language and the content of this comic. Sacco's panels are particularly rich in detail, and present a style almost caricatured, especially in portraying the faces of the characters. The author himself has continued to represent himself as a caricature even in later works, where his drawing style has evolved and it has become more realistic, trying to maintain a consistency in the representation that



Figure 5.2- Caricature of the author, an important feature of his works

seems more characteristic of a fictional character (that therefore needs to be recognizable) rather than a simple autobiographical representation that the author makes of himself. As Rebecca Scherr says: “One of the most distinguishing features of all of Sacco’s work is the way in which he transforms himself into a major character. In the context of journalism, such self-portraiture aligns his work with the ‘new journalism’ movement of the 1960s and 1970s, while in the context of graphic narrative such self-exposure links his work to graphic memoir, for example, works like Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* and Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*. Yet his work does not fit neatly into either category, and the often uneasy co-existence between the autobiographical and the investigative is part of what gives Sacco’s work its particular edginess.”¹² The author reconstructs his body, transforming himself in a character, an autobiographical tendency known as “ironic authentication”, which is a strategy to reenact the making of the opera itself. This strategy fuses documentary and autobiography, and the irony shown allows the artist to approach even the hardest topics. Also, as Øyvind Vågnes wrote: “Sacco’s approach of drawing oral testimony enables an ethical act of the imagination that involves the triangular constellation of the subject, the artist, and the reader”.¹³ Sacco is well known for the expressive faces that draws and the great

12 Scherr, Rebecca, *Framing Human Rights: comics form and the politics of recognition in Joe Sacco's "Footnotes in Gaza"*, London, Routledge, 2014, Pp.113

13 Vågnes, Øyvind, *Rudy Kelly's eyes: Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco's "Days of destruction, days of revolt"*, «European Journal of American Studies» Online, Vol.10 N.2, 2015

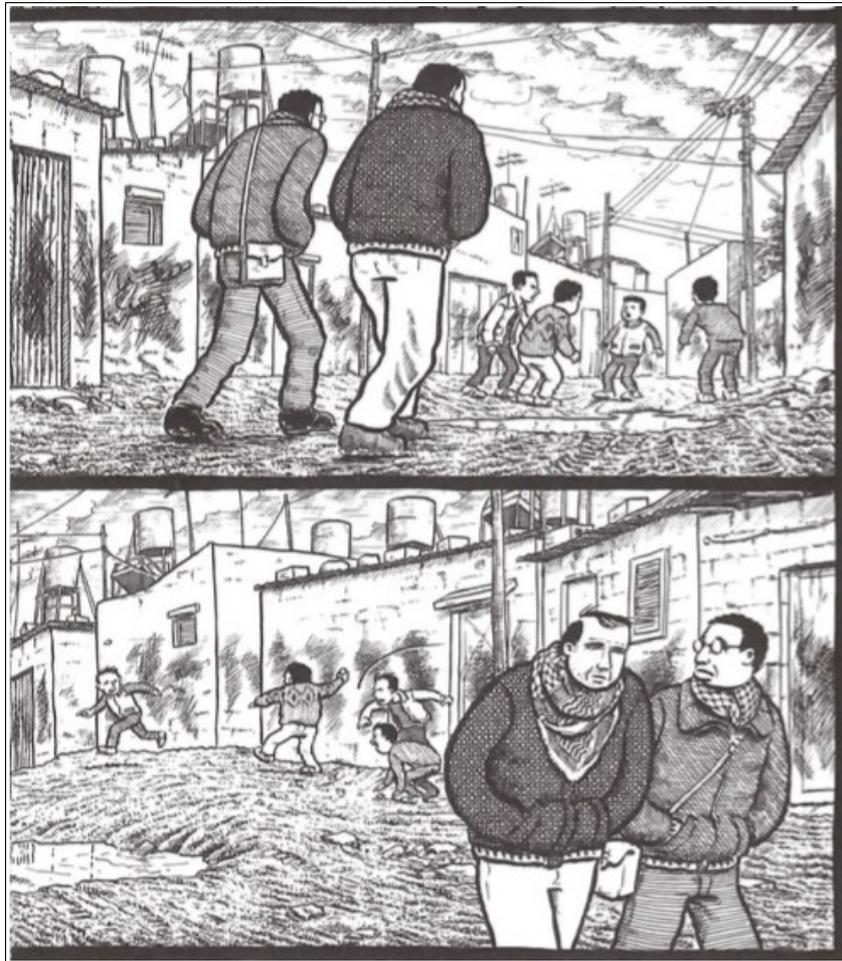


Figure 5.3- vignettes full of details, rigorously in black and white

dynamism of his tables, a chaotic style that not coincidentally recalls the chaos of war zones. Portraiture is essential to communicate the pain and discomfort caused by the violation of human rights. Another difference that we see with Delisle's panels is the total absence of colours, replaced by several degrees of outlines, along with a visual style that tends to exaggeration and "ugliness"; a style typical of the underground comics movements of the 90s, clear source of inspiration for Sacco. But what stands out most is the strong dynamism of its lines, thick and deep like furrows in the page, composing crooked, oblique or vertical vignettes. The panels are heavy, full of signs, each dotted with dozens of small, big and crooked captions. The reader's eyes often concentrate on the many details that characterize

the landscape; the reading it's slow, between insights and sarcastic gags, and the pages formed mainly by text, accompanied by a single image.

Joe Sacco travels in Israel and the occupied territories during the end of the First Intifada, in the winter of 1991-1992. The narrative switches abruptly from Cairo to the tumultuous Jerusalem, passing by the old city of Nablus and so on, during the course of the nine chapters, touching Hebron, Ramallah and the welfare of Tel Aviv, as well as the refugee camps of Nuseirat and Jabalia, ironically called "Refugeeland" as a fantastic theme-park.



Figure 5.4- "Refugeeland"

The only thing that is fixed is our protagonist, anything but a hero, a man as common as it gets, voracious of information as only a journalist can be, afraid to face the most dangerous situation, and especially powerless to reality. The only power in the hands of Sacco is to share the stories that he witnesses, made of harassment, violence, deprivation, riots and unspeakable atrocities. He wants to tell the Israeli occupation not on a political map, but in the reality of everyday life. Only by eating and sleeping with them, becoming part of their lives, a cup of tea after the other, he has been able to achieve this dramatic documentary. In the dialogues between him and his partners, as well as in the monologues, emerge broader issues on the coexistence of peoples, on the effect of the European and American influences in those lands, on the conception of Western life-style. As the symbolic end scene, in a village where children are avoided almost as wild creatures, and where reigns a complete uncertainty on what road to follow to get out of this reality.

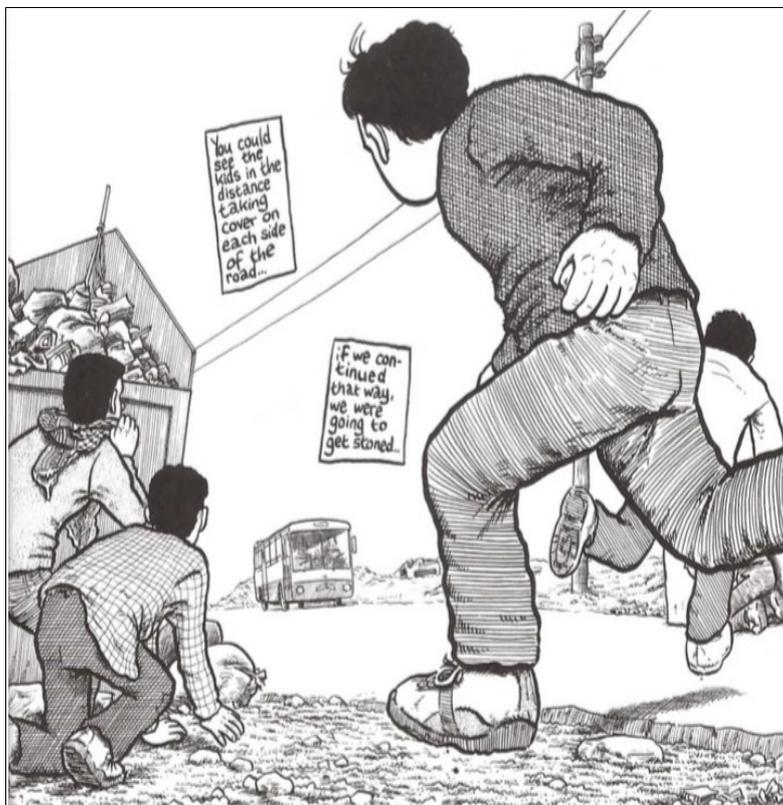


Figure 5.5- children out of control by the roadside

In Palestine, Joe Sacco takes us way beyond a simple tour by a rickety bus, indeed he puts the reader almost in a state of "colonial tourist" on vacation to see "the natives" or, making a comparison with a macabre trend of our times, makes us "disaster tourists", and not surprisingly uses the term *Refugeeland* to create this idea of a Disneyland for journalists, where you can literally collect some shots that are considered "classics" if you want to represent a typical war scenario.



Figure 5.6- the "collection" of photographs

This parody of a journalist, hungry for scoops, pushes so far to the point of making him feel a kind of jealousy for those "intimate" moments between him and the violence of everyday life in *Refugeeland*, with a resulting feeling of annoyance if another journalist intrudes into this morbid relationship, ruining its intimacy. This idea of intimacy with the pain of others is made clear from the very first words of the work, when Sacco uses the expression "to shake hands with his people's pain". In this regard, Rebecca Scherr writes: "To shake hands is to greet, to make contact, to enter into a contract or agreement, one that by its unspoken rules connotes fair play. This is not to say that all handshakes signify mutual understanding—sometimes they are simply empty gestures—but in *Palestine* Sacco seems to use the idea and image of the handshake as a gesture that signifies connection".¹⁴

Also in the chapter entitled *Public and Private Wounds*, the author proves excited to

14 Scherr, Rebecca, *Shaking Hands With Other People's Pain: Joe Sacco's "Palestine"*, Published by Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature, Volume 46, Number 1, March 2013, pp. 21

visit an hospital in Nablus, where he will be led by hand through a tour between scars, burns and wounds of war to photograph the youngest victims, always with a morbid ingenuity that tastes as satirical on the attitude of some reporters.

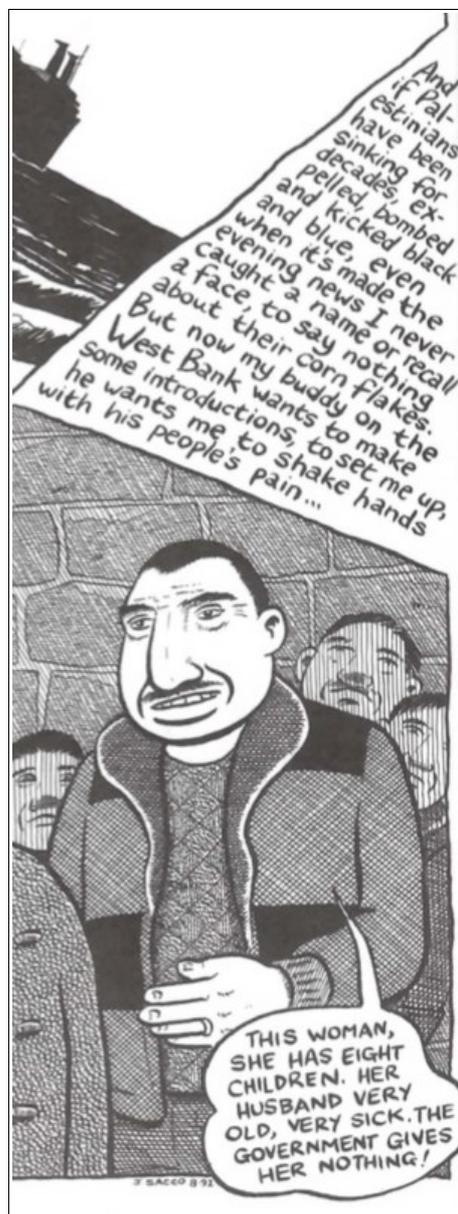


Figure 5.7- "to shake hands with his people's pain..."

On the other hand, we are talking about a political work that aims to represent the human suffering, and despite the naive attitude that sometimes transpires, Sacco reminds us that we are always talking about a physical and psychological pain, not a purely conceptual one, therefore it is perfectly represented by a physical handshake.



Figure 5.8- the visit to the hospital will be fruitful



Figure 5.9- the hassle to see another reporter on the same scene

Rebecca Scherr often stresses that the choice of comics medium is particularly suitable to represent the pain, even more than the photograph. She says: "One of its strengths is that because it possesses a visceral, resonant dimension, and because it is made up of sequences of panels that give the impression of the movement of time and space, the format can communicate the *experience* of pain,

not just the existence of pain. Photographs, conversely, are traditionally used to document the existence of suffering”.¹⁵ A perfect example for this is the famous sequence, representing the torture of a young Palestinian, entitled "Moderate Pressure", with a grid of vignettes that gradually becomes smaller, perfectly able to communicate the sense of oppression experienced by the victim, with a capacity of synthesis that would be difficult for a photography (because as the author himself says, it is impossible for the camera to capture the past, which, however, can be done very well in comics).

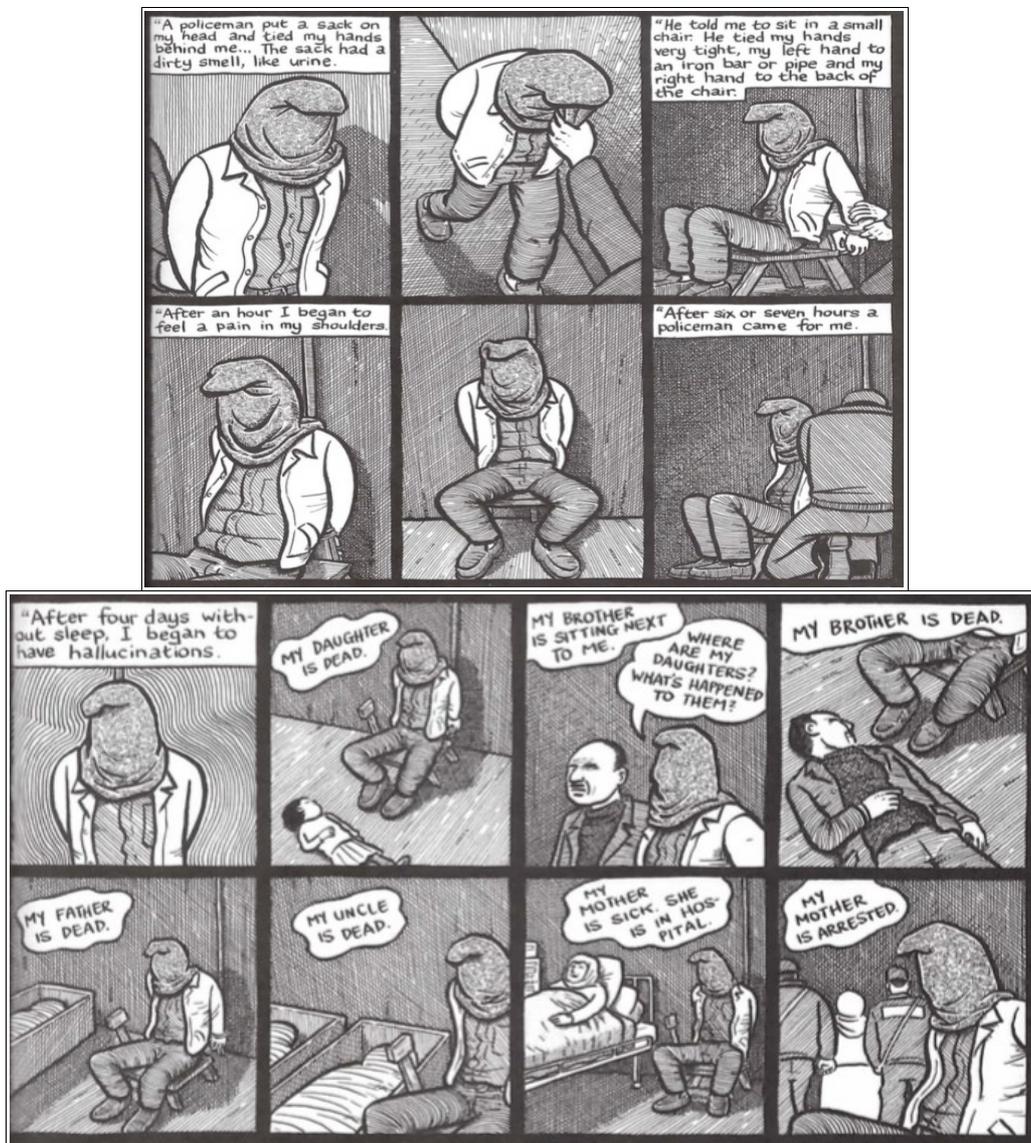


Figure 5.10- the famous sequence of torture

15 Scherr, Rebecca, *Shaking Hands With Other People's Pain: Joe Sacco's "Palestine"*, Pp. 27

Joe Sacco, however, is well aware of the importance of photography, and not only depicts himself always with a camera in hand or in the bag at his side, but in this as in other works, as temporary traveling companion, is accompanied by a photographer, almost to form what the collective perceives as the classic couple journalist/photographer, more authoritative than a lonely cartoonist. Sacco himself has repeatedly said that many of his vignettes are copied from photographs he took on site, and the impression that some panels give us is



Figure 5.11- Saburo, photographer and traveling companion

exactly that of a distorted view through the lenses. The author plays the role of the first western adventurer who goes in those exotic lands to conquer them (or rather, "consume" them), hazarding a comparison with the famous Dr. Livingston. Even in the darkest moments, such as the visit to the tomb of Hatem Sissi, the first victim of the first Intifada, the character of the journalist/tourist emerges and it's depicted in an almost comical way: the carelessness that he shows during the visit to the

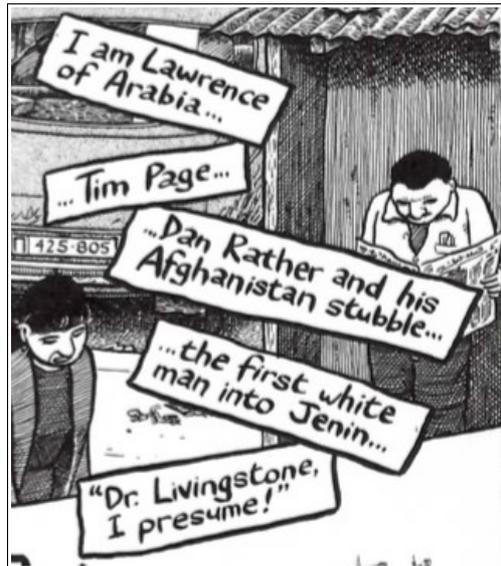


Figure 5.12- “i am Lawrence of Arabia...”



Figure 5.13- a quick visit to the tomb of Hatem Sissi, first victim of the Intifada

monument and the way he looks for the composition of the perfect tear-jerking picture with the kids tastes like caricature, of both the average tourist and the average journalist. But Sacco is not only a conqueror or a journalist, but also an historian and an archivist, as his work aims to collect evidence of people that can not make its voice heard. In fact, several years after the publication of this work, the author will return to those territories, with the specific aim of continuing this collection of testimonies, a collection that was published under the name of "Footnotes in Gaza".

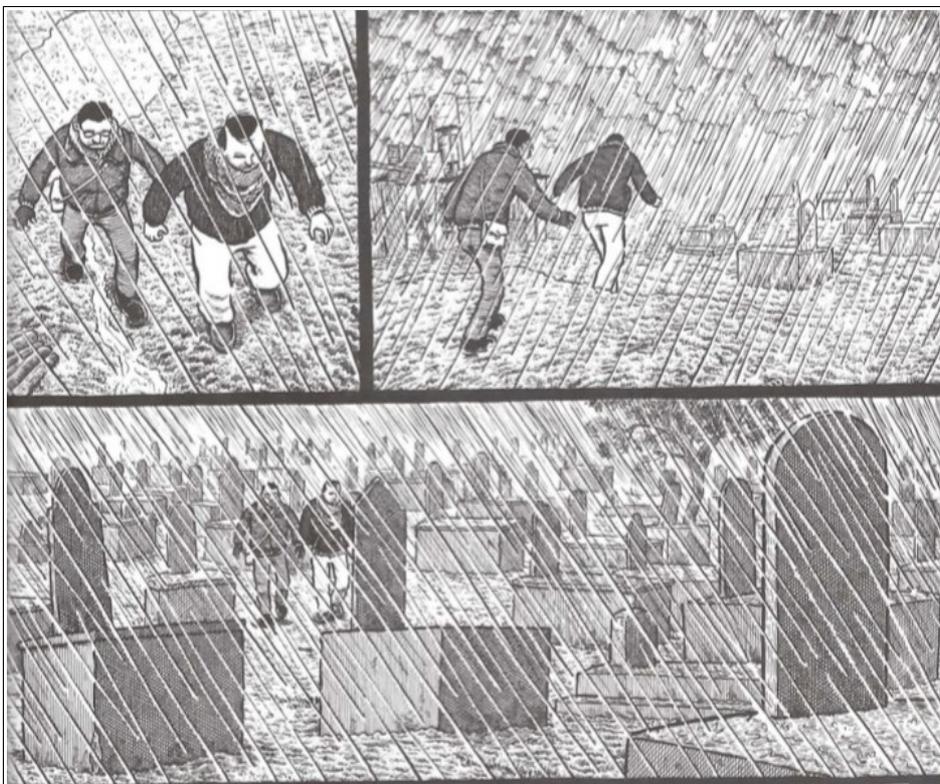


Figure 5.14- looking for the right grave

Sacco's desire to represent an evidence of the violations of civil rights in this country finds abundance of material, and comic is the ideal medium to represent with dynamism the stories of victims and survivors. During his solo tour in a van, Sacco visits a rehabilitation center for deaf children where everyone, students and teachers, are trying to show him that, at the expense of the degrading state prevailing in the center, under the shadow of Israeli watchtowers, "progress is being made".¹⁶

¹⁶ Sacco, Joe, *Palestine*, London, ed. Random House, 2003, Pp. 149



Figure 5.15- "progress is being made!"

Although this was not the first contact of the author with the population scourged by the war, it is the first sequence where the space between the vignettes takes an important value, but it is left completely in the hands of the reader, that can just

perceive the dynamism of the movement during this road trip between atrocities. In light of what can be relived through these pages, *Palestine* becomes a container of many different experiences that can be lived in this painfully occupied region, referring both to the nation and the territory, but with an emphasis on people that are “in fact refugees while being denied the official status of refugees as a result of international political intervention; they are, in short, caught in a deadly legal loophole in which their very ‘humanness’ is put under question.”¹⁷



Figure 5.16- a view from the van

17 Scherr, Rebecca, *Framing Human Rights: comics form and the politics of recognition in Joe Sacco's "Footnotes in Gaza"*, London, Routledge, 2014, Pp. 115

Chapter Six

Safe Area Gorazde

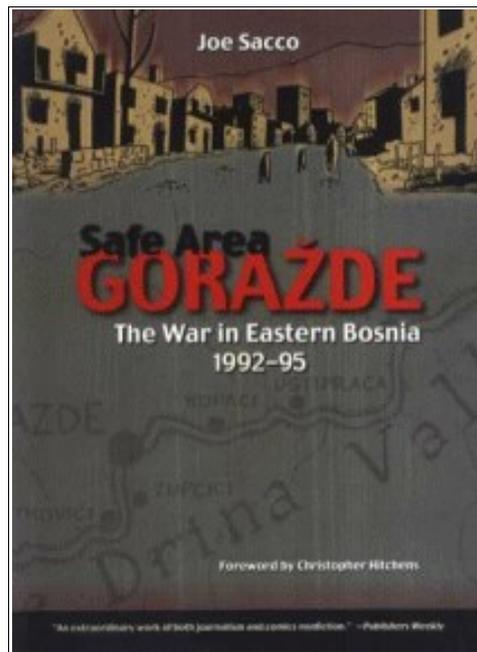


Figure 6.1- the cover of *Safe Area Gorazde*

The last work that we are going to analyze is a reportage of the war in eastern Bosnia. During the Bosnian conflict, the U.N. declared a few enclaves still occupied by Bosnian Muslims "safe areas". Gorazde, a city east of Sarajevo and not far from the Serbian border, was one of them. The goal of the author is to show us how the ordinary Bosnians were affected by the conflict. David Rieff of the *New York Times* writes: "High politics, the shuttling of international negotiators, the United Nations' empty promises, the movement of front lines, are so much background noise in Sacco's book, just as they largely were for ordinary Bosnians over the course of the four years of fighting. Sacco's aim is to evoke a very different and far more visceral reality."¹⁸ To do so, Sacco visited Gorazde, an important city for being the only one

¹⁸ Rieff, David, *The New York Times*, Sunday 24th December, 2000

in the east of the country still under control of the Bosnian government, and just listened to what the locals had to say, and narrating a piece of history with the voices of those who had lived that history on their skin. Again, “on one level *Safe Area Gorazde* seems like a familiar combination of reportage and first-person narrative of a trip to a war zone (though one of exceptional distinction with, moreover, the novelty of being in the form of a comic book). But Sacco's book not only has dramatic force. More crucially, it has the emblematic quality of a good historical or political novel. And in some ways, at least in Sacco's hands, the comic book form reveals itself to have advantages that neither novels nor nonfiction prose can command.”¹⁹

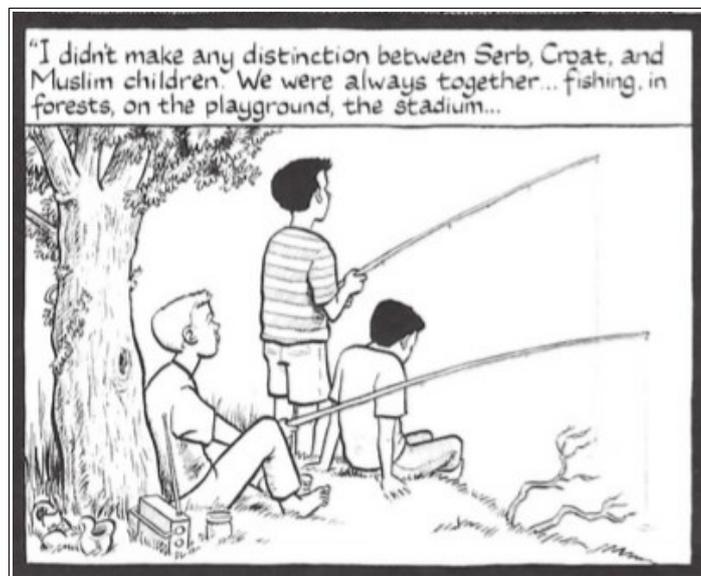


Figure 6.2- a history of peaceful coexistence

Once again, the focus of Joe Sacco's work are people, their testimonies, and especially their faces that, although made caricatures, remain fundamental to communicate emotions. The author will represent both those who appeared to be most affected by the war, eager to leave their land and the memories of atrocities linked to it, and those who seem not to have given too much importance to what happened, proving at times more “annoyed” than really afraid, being able to show

¹⁹ Rieff, David, *The New York Times*, Sunday 24th December, 2000

us psychological nuances very different from the ones we can see in the common images of a newscast. Sacco let the residents of Gorazde speak for themselves. Their accounts of miles-long marches for basic supplies, dead relatives, understaffed and undersupplied hospitals overrun with the wounded and dying, the systematic slaughter of Bosnian Muslims, bodies clogging the river Drina, frustration and hope for a peace that is not in sight span the entire experience of the war. It's important to underline, as we said before, that "Sacco is known for including his own person in the form of a carefully constructed persona in almost all of his work, often in order to draw attention to the subjective quality of his stories, to his translation of oral testimony into drawn images".²⁰ And again: "Sacco similarly portrays himself both visually and anecdotally as an ambiguous figure whose instinct for self-preservation and gratification sometimes outweigh his ability to be an ethical witness. Visually, he makes a strange figure. As opposed to those he interviews, whom he draws realistically, Sacco as journalist shows up as a "cartoony" figure who often has his mouth hanging slightly ajar, sometimes with spit flying from his face."²¹



Figure 6.3- the author remains a caricature, compared to the other portraits

20 Vågnes, Øyvind, *Rudy Kelly's eyes: Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco's "Days of destruction, days of revolt"*, «European Journal of American Studies» Online, Vol.10 N.2, 2015

21 Bartley, Aryn, *The Hateful Self: Substitution and the Ethics of Representing War*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, Pp. 65

This self representation functions as an anchor, as a way of always giving to the reader something familiar to hold on to, not to get lost in the sea of hundreds of faces that we meet while reading. A strategy that proved to be very useful, because it helps the reader to understand that the facts that are shown in this book are not objective: they are presented as they were presented to the author, that decided to report them without interfering: the reader is seeing things through the author's eyes. This strategy became staple in Sacco's works, but it was only after *Palestine* that he realized how important it was not to filter the testimonials, even thou he came from a journalism school where they taught him objectivity, and that self-portrait was the perfect way to render this dynamic with no need to explain it by words, as a tacit author-reader agreement.

Another thing in common with the previous work is critic, but this time the critic to modern journalism is openly expressed: what Sacco criticizes is the tendency to make abstract the individual pain of the victims. The author writes that "most journalists blew in with the U.N. convoy in the morning, hit the hospital for some English-language quotes from Dr. Begovic, noted the mini-centrales on the Drina, and did some man-in-the-street and/or a quickie stand-up on the second bridge, and blew out with the U.N. convoy in the afternoon".²²

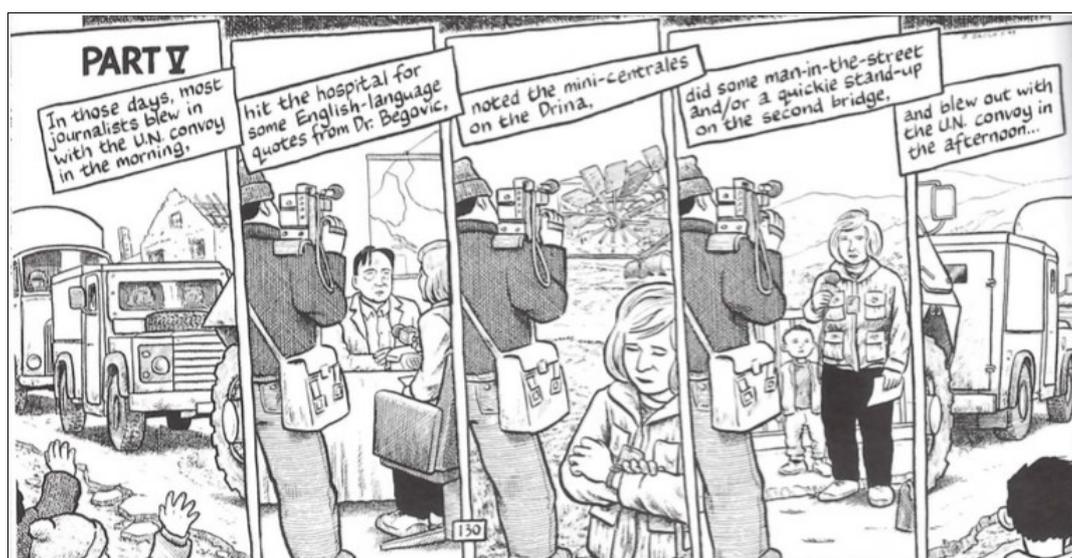


Figure 6.4- "journalistic economy"

22 Sacco, Joe, *Safe Area Gorazde*, London, ed. Random House, 2007, p.130

Aryn Bartley explained this behavior with a concise yet perfect term: “Journalistic economy—finding the best representative images and quotes in the least amount of time—here erases all that is not apparent to the eye and all that cannot be encapsulated in a brief sound-byte”.²³ Unlike *Palestine*, here criticism does not appear as irony. This time, Sacco is really openly critical of his present colleagues, although he is the first one not to pull back in front of the possibility of portraying the bodies of the dead and the injured survivors, but it is the context in which they are presented that makes the difference: in this work, these images force the reader to



Figure 6.5- dr. Begovic, one of the many witnesses present in this book

confront with the results of violence, and are always accompanied by the stories of the survivors told in first person in a past tense, a way to emphasize that they are not tales, but memories. It's Sacco's ability to capture such moments, that makes this work both a remarkable act of storytelling and an invaluable piece of journalism.

As an American journalist, Sacco has a freedom of expression and movement in the war zones which makes him fundamentally different from the inhabitants of the area. The residents of Gorazde will soon realize it, and before he even notice, he will become a mean of communication with the outside world, a messenger...

²³ Bartley, Aryn, *The Hateful Self: Substitution and the Ethics of Representing War*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, Pp. 54

a shuttle between the Safe Area and Sarajevo, delivering letters, packages and acting as a connection between missing relatives.



Figure 6.6- Gorazde's fifteen minutes of fame



Figure 6.7- inclusion of maps, a staple for graphic journalism

But he represents more than just that, because in the eyes of the younger people he represents a sign of the existence of a world outside their everyday ghetto: he is the kind of hope to which a child, Mela, can hang on with both hands, clutching the strong, concrete evidence that the rest of the world has not forgotten them;



Figure 6.8 - Mela

he represents, for two young girls, Kimeta and Sabina, a chance to get a pair of real American jeans, bought at the market in Sarajevo with the little savings granted by their relatives... a worldly desire, almost a whim if we consider the kind of basic necessities of people living in a war zone, but definitely important to exorcize the fears of two teenagers.



Figure 6.9- Kimeta and Sabina

During this trip, the author more than once felt guilty before the pain of these people, and not always the people proved to be willing to talk to him (an

understandable mistrust, given the situation), but there is only a single occasion where someone proved to be openly hostile towards him: during this scene, set in a restaurant, he will be verbally assaulted by a Bosnian man who accused him of being there only in search of easy money and a scoop. The view in the vignettes is getting closer to the mouth of the threatening aggressor, while the figure of Joe Sacco is getting smaller and smaller, snuggled in the dark corner of the room in which he tries to find shelter, visually communicating the sense of oppression perceived by the author.



Figure 6.10- the only moment of resentment against the author

Even his thoughts at that moment are unique, and represent the only time in the whole book in which he will speak hostilely about Bosnian people and their land, expressing the desire to leave and get away from that place as fast as possible.

One of the factors that make Sacco an atypical reporter, in addition to the medium he uses to do journalism, is precisely his willingness, and ability, to build a bond with the population, making easier for him and for us to understand the actual situation and the dynamics of a war that took place far from the public eye. During this trip the friendship with Edin, a young teacher and former soldier, was crucial.

Edin was his guide and interpreter since his arrival, and it is through him that we discover most of the history that took place during those years: when the U.S.S.R. collapsed and their hold on eastern Europe relaxed, the tensions that had been below the surface for decades suddenly and violently resurfaced, fueled by the nationalist policy of Milošević. It literally meant, for the citizens in the mixed city of Gorazde, that people who had been your neighbors one day were shooting at you the next.

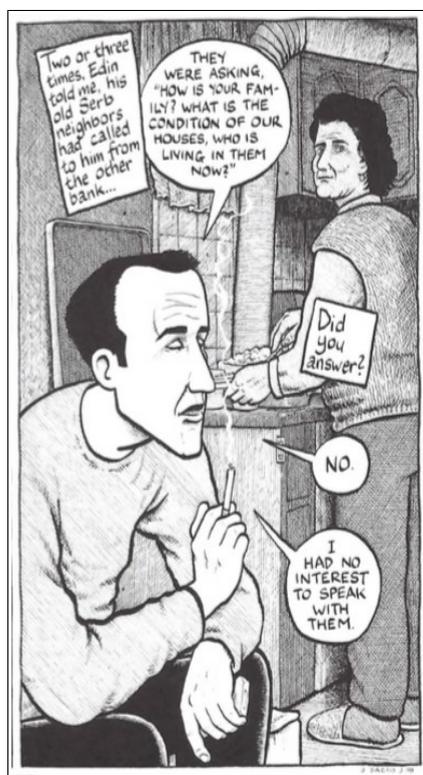


Figure 6.11- neighbors turning into enemies



Figure 6.12- Edin

These experiences are told by Edin in first-person, but riences where lived by thousands of Muslims and the marks left by war are everywhere on the territory. Sacco draws them in minute details, carefully highlighting every crater left by a bomb and every crack caused by a mortar round... every friend that Edin lost, executed by Serb soldiers for retaliation or just to satiate their urge of violence.

Together with the Serbian army, the UN is depicted as a villain, like a bumbling organization that had the power to prevent a lot of deaths but that lacked the willpower to stand up against the violence. While most of the western media's attention was focusing on Sarajevo to the west, the Serbs were slowly conquering the cities in the east, totally ignoring the UN-designated "safe areas", where a predominantly Muslim population was looking for salvation. There, the citizens were completely cut off from the rest of the world: no food, no weapons, no hope. The Serbs had tanks and automatic weapons, there was simply no contest, in a war

driven by an instrumental hatred incited against Muslims.

However, the aim of the author is not to look for culprits, but to tell stories of survival, of resistance, and therefore of hope. The book begins at the end, with news of peace in the air after the U.S. had finally stepped in to stop Serb attacks. Sacco begins with a joyous note, relating people's simple joys in having food again, in having hope again. "[They] partied like the resurrected, not like there was no tomorrow, but because there was a tomorrow".²⁴ Sacco alludes to the horror early in the book and slowly reveals the details of the siege of Gorazde and its consequences as we keep reading, jumping around from story to story, from face to face.



Figure 6.13- the signs of war

24 Sacco, Joe, *Safe Area Gorazde*, London, ed. Random House, 2007, p.9

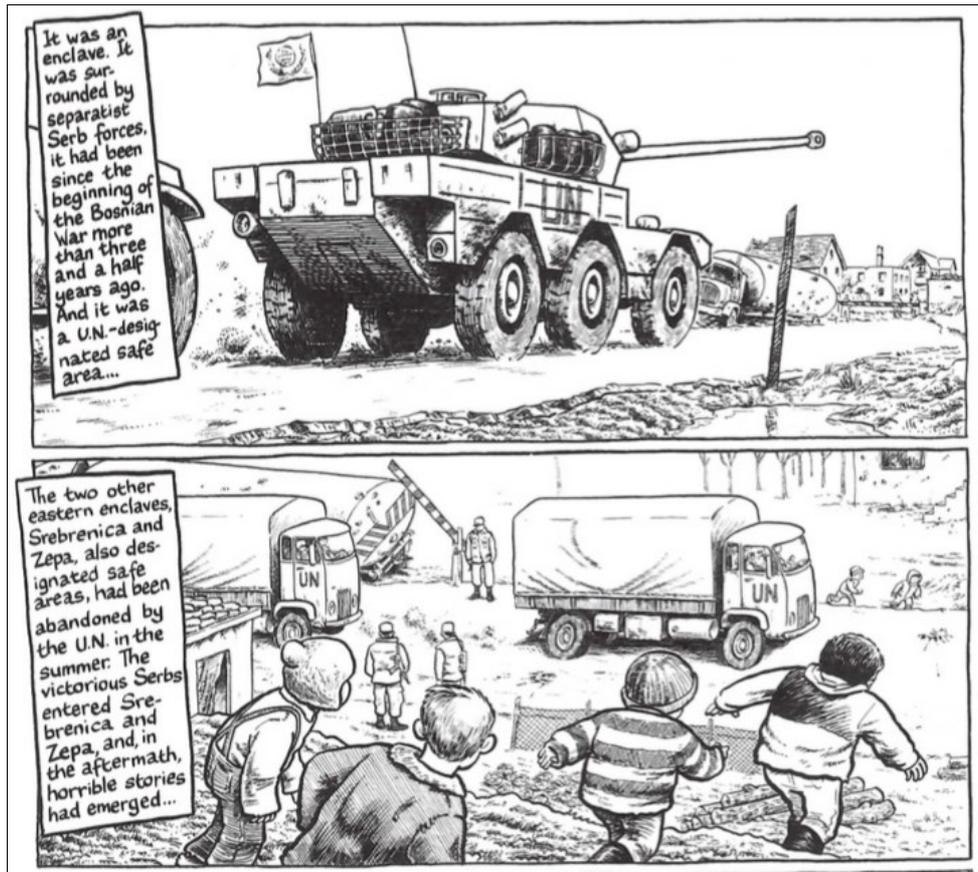


Figure 6.14- the poov showing of the UN

There are two important chapters where all the action is focused. *White Death*, where we are witnesses of the journey that Edin and other Gorazdens made during winter in order to get basic supplies and food.

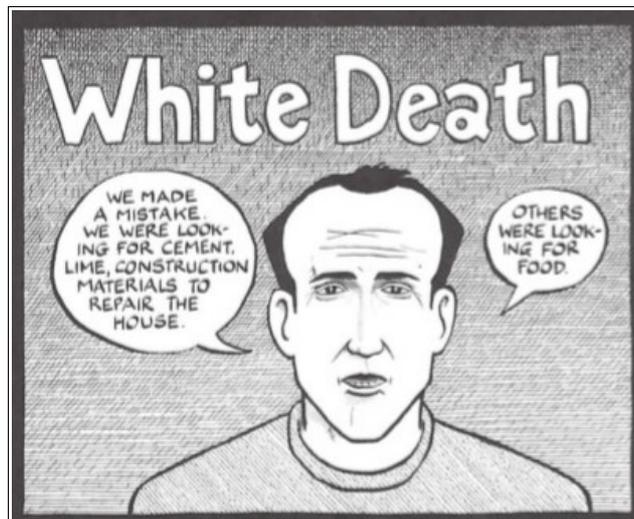


Figure 6.15- White Death

They had to travel at night in freezing temperatures over a span of many miles just to obtain the human basics, with no guarantee they would survive.

The '94 Offensive is the chapter that covers the siege, when the Serbs continued to ignore an impotent UN and kept "cleansing" several "safe areas". They had built mass graves for 5000 people in the town of Srebrenica, but that was too much to take even for Americans and Russians, and NATO started bombing them. A cease-fire was called just in time to save Gorazde.



Figure 6.16- The '94 Offensive

As we said before, *Safe Area Gorazde* is at times an incredibly violent book, but this is the kind of violence with a clear purpose: it is not meant to shock, but to shake the reader, to make him aware of what we are referring to with the words "war", "massacre" and "ethnic cleansing".

Indeed this work, which just for his complex and intricate narrative part is amazing, has as its secret weapon the visual impact.



Figure 6.17- maps make it easier to understand the unfolding of history

Sacco displays a recognizable pop style, an unique authorial imprint. His figures show intense expressions, the adopted views continuously vary from top to bottom, always looking for dynamism. Generally the vignettes, for all these reasons, tend to be large and spacious, only three or four per panel, but Sacco knows how to adapt his style, even radically, and during some scenes he uses increasingly dense cages, almost like sequences from a movie-script. Comic is a particularly effective medium when it comes to this, as it can make people see the atrocities that took place during the war without the immediate shocking reaction that may be caused by a photograph or a movie. Sometimes graphic violence can push people away from a story for this type of reactions, but comics, especially black and white ones, are less prone to cause this kind of repulsion, but at the same time they maintain the power of the image.

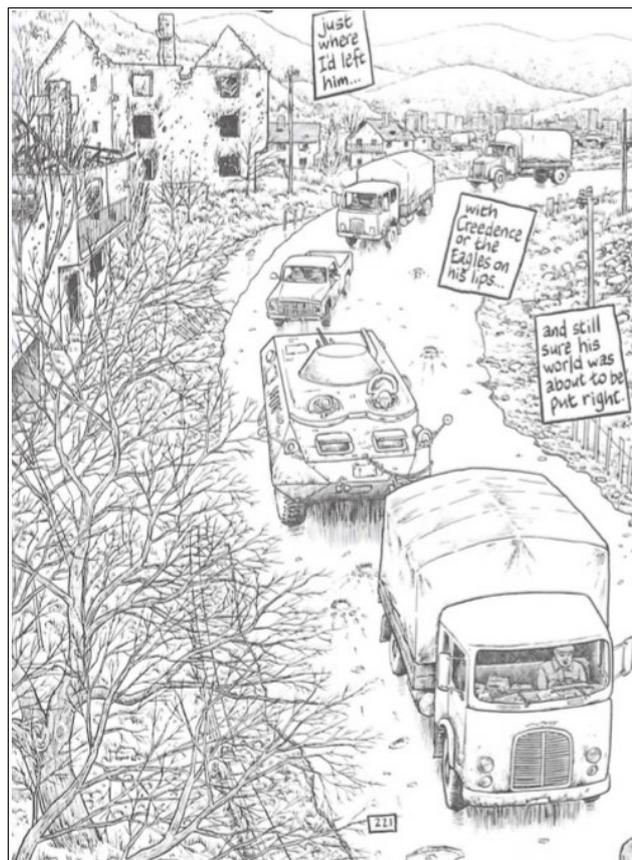


Figure 6.18- column of trucks leaving the city

Conclusions



Figure 7.1- graphic journalism on newspaper

What was displayed during the analysis of these five works is undoubtedly the most mature aspect of comics. The themes and the way they were treated differentiate graphic journalism from all other kinds of comics, and makes it an interesting case to analyze. Of course, there are lots of authors who experience this genre, and many of them have developed their personal style and would be worthy of being analyzed in depth. Some of them are journalists, who have adopted the comic method for both personal passion and for the need to experience a new media, more subjective, that leaves them a freedom of expression that they could not find in the prose of a newspaper article, like Joe Sacco; others are cartoonists who, for various reasons, have found themselves in the position of wanting to tell a story about current events, and therefore improvised themselves as journalists, like Guy Delisle. These two authors are at the antipodes of the world of graphic journalism, and so they were the logical choice to show how opposite approaches to comics can lead to achieve the same result, while making very different routes.

Sacco has a degree in journalism, and has numerous publications in his name, but he also has a great passion for comics and a deep awareness of what can be achieved through the careful use of this media. His works are definitely not easy to

read, they are loaded with violence and terrible stories, and the use that he makes about drawings is of reinforcement for these gruesome scenes and to define the emotions on the faces of the witnesses that told him their memories. His style, his panels, reflect the chaotic nature of the countries he visited. They are full of detailed drawings, heavily loaded, but very often they lack of balance, of proportion between elements (especially anatomical elements), like a sort of metaphor of those countries, that lack of political and social balance. Furthermore, the birth of his works has a lot, if not everything, in common with the birth of a journalistic investigation, with many interviews and numerous entries of historical accounts. Not being primarily an artist, many of his vignettes are drawn inspired by the photographs he took while traveling, another feature that greatly influences his graphic performances and that reminds us of his journalistic training.

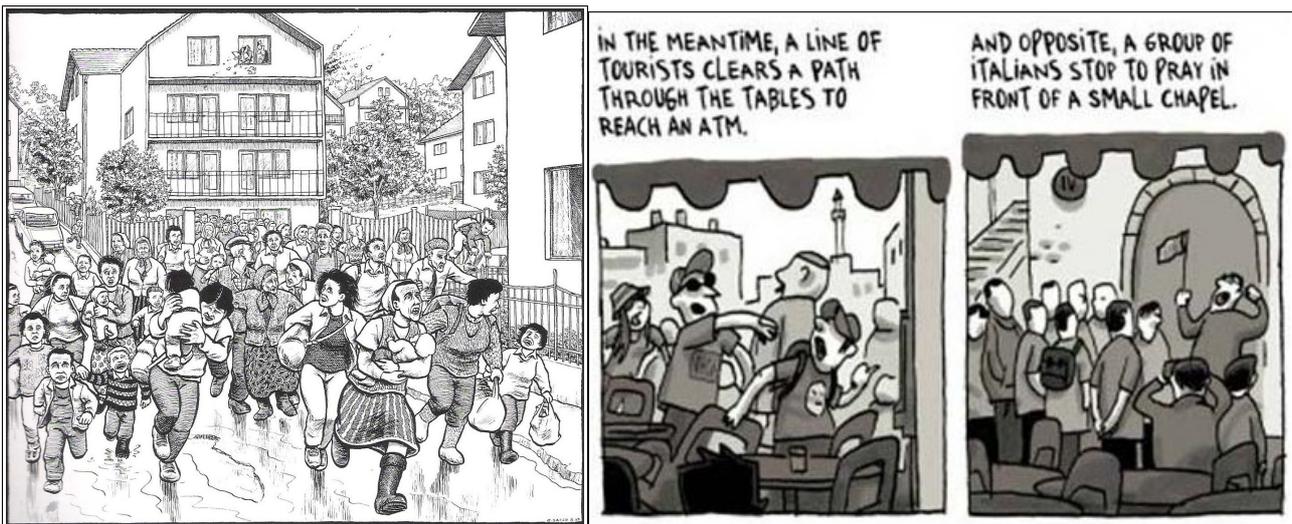


Figure 7.2- different styles compared

In all his books, Sacco is the first to criticize the work of journalists, their tendency to decontextualize the suffering of others and their superficial approach to all the aspects considered to be not suitable for a “scoop”. Both in *Palestine* and in *Safe Area Gorazde* he has repeatedly expressed his opinion bluntly, with the same sincerity and brutality with which he presents also the most violent details. However, he never forgets even for a second to be a journalist, and by reading his books it would be impossible for the reader too. The analysis of his works has been

especially difficult because of his bluntness, and the fact that he spares nothing to the reader... a very different attitude compared to a writer of comic books for teenagers.

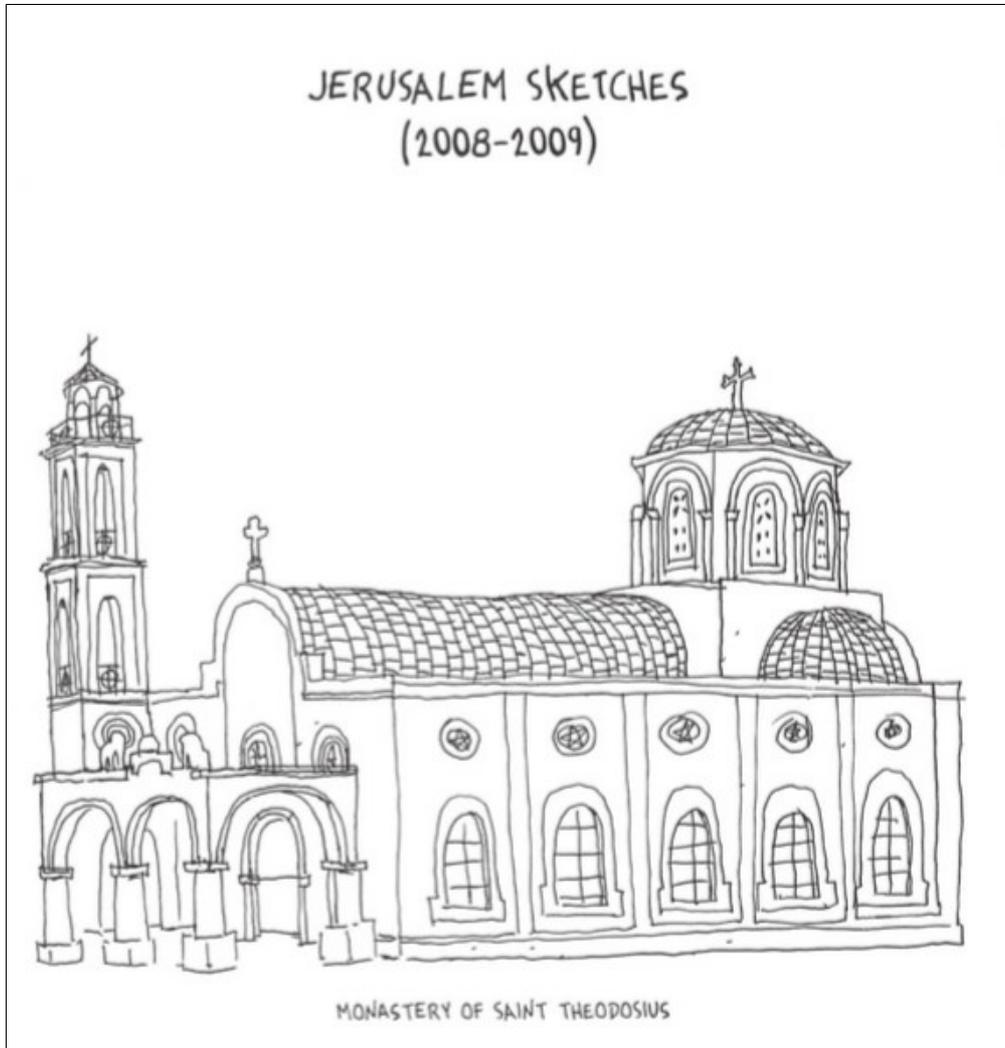


Figure 7.3- Delisle's sketch: Monastery of Saint Theodosius

Guy Delisle instead has a completely different background: artist, animator, his drawings have a light-hearted style, and we can imagine that his works could have remained equally light-hearted if he had not married a doctor from Doctors Without Borders and decided to follow her everywhere. Delisle heard for the first time the need to tell what he has seen abroad after his first trip to China and North Korea. There, where you can not take pictures, he dedicated himself to making sketches, and after returning back home he put together his drawings and his memories and

created a personal style of graphic journalism. Then, following his wife around the world, he had the opportunity to live in both nice and dangerous places, and hence his need to tell his story grew exponentially.

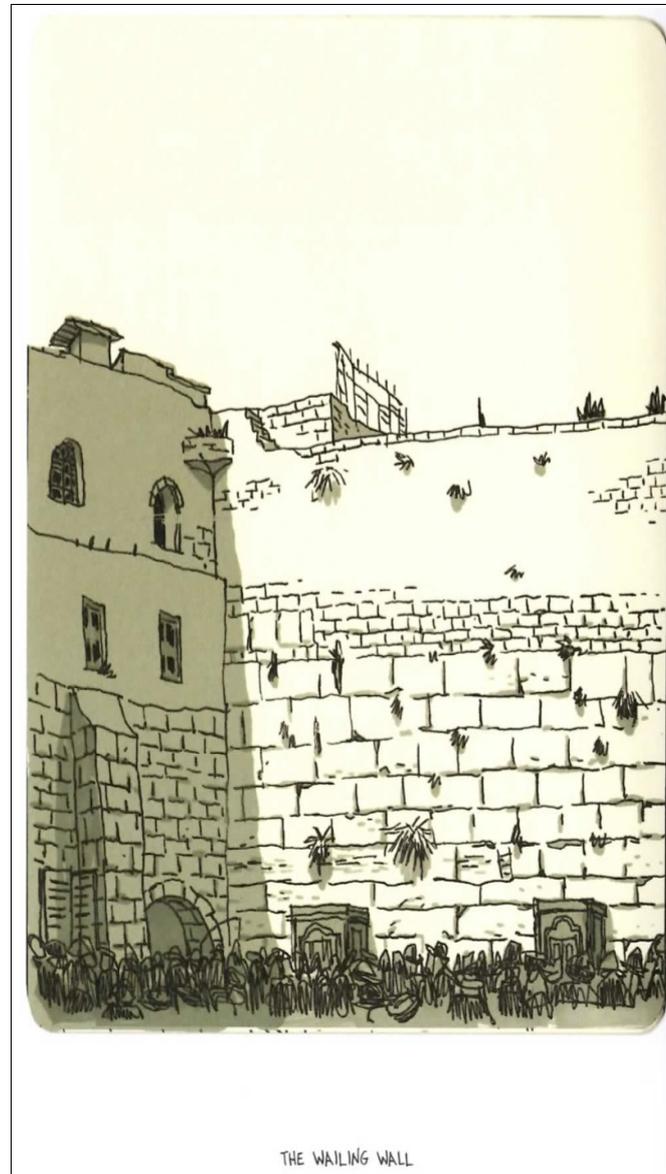


Figure 7.4- Delisle's sketch: the Wailing Wall

Delisle is not a journalist, and does not even attempt to be so: he simply tell us what his daily routine is, but because of his daily routine being so far from ours, it becomes really interesting. His cartoony style makes reading much easier and smoother than reading Sacco's books, but even without being so violent (both in content and in form), he manages to raise many questions, often using irony as a

goad. It is hard to find in his works things like interviews with some veteran or some survivor of captivity, things we can find plenty of in Sacco's books, but Delisle never fails to show his genuine wonder at the oddities and the injustice of which he is often a witness, and every book is full of interesting facts and funny encounters, expertly dosed and alternated to give a fast pace to the reading. But do not be fooled by the apparent levity that permeates this author's works: for the intrinsic nature of the places where these stories are set, it is impossible not to notice that violence, though not present in a clear manner, it is still the protagonist, often in the form of what are its results. For this reason, the analysis of Delisle's works proved to be more complex than expected. His approach to the sad reality of the countries he visited may seem less grave than the one of his American colleague, but only in appearance. Behind the daily routine, there are many opportunities for reflection that may not be immediately noticed, and therefore a second reading often reveals new clues.



Figure 7.5- the arab market in Jerusalem as seen by Sacco...



Figure 7.6- ...and all his fears as he pass through it

Both authors were winners of countless awards, and their works have been translated into many languages, and are without a doubt two of the greatest exponents of the graphic journalism worldwide. Despite their different origins, their different approach to journalism and comics, they both managed to bring this media to a higher level, to give it an authority and a depth that many outsiders of the comic books world would not have imagined possible.

The spread of graphic journalism on the newspapers around the world is a wonderful opportunity to let everyone know about the effectiveness of this media, and the sales successes are a confirmation that readers are interested in these stories. As a growing media, there will be many emerging authors that surely will keep alive the interest of people towards this kind of comic, and indeed will make it increasingly popular. Through the hands and minds of these new authors, graphic journalism will continue to give a voice to those who never had the opportunity to be heard.

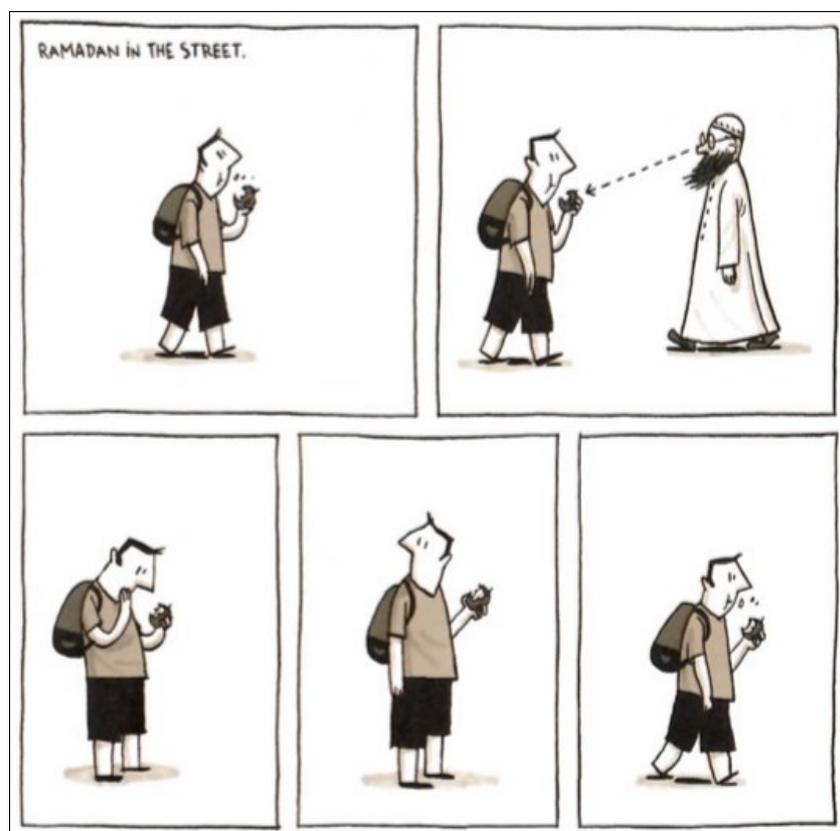


Figure 7.7- Ramadan in the streets of Jerusalem

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