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Joe Sacco, **Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992–95**, Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2000, 240 pp., $19.95 (paperback).

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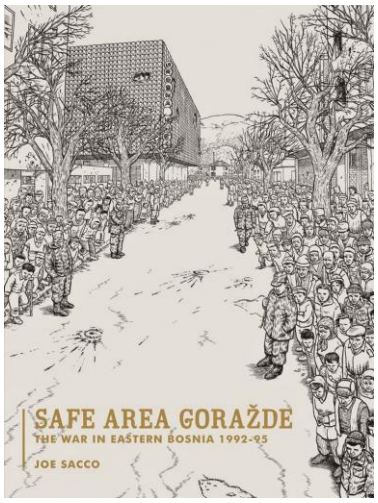

Safe Area Goražde is the second graphic novel by Maltese-American cartoonist Joe Sacco, the author of the nonfiction comics *Palestine* (2007), *The Fixer* (2003b), *War's End* (2005), *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009), and *The Great War* (2013). Sacco has also published three collections, *Notes from a Defeatist* (2003a), *But I Like It* (2006), and *Journalism* (2012), as well as *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (2012), a collaboration with Chris Hedges. Sacco is in essence a war correspondent, and, like much of his oeuvre, *Goražde* is a collection of accounts collected from witnesses to a conflict. The book is intended for a general audience, providing an oral history of one small corner of the Bosnian War that presumes little, if any, familiarity with the Balkan region, its history, or its politics.

When Sacco arrives on a UN supply convoy during a cease-fire in 1995, the town of Goražde in eastern Bosnia has already been subject to shelling by Serbian forces—including, in some cases, its ethnically Serbian former residents—for three years. It had been designated a "safe area" for Muslim Bosnians under United Nations protection, though two other UN safe areas were abandoned to the Serbs earlier in the conflict. Sacco interposes himself and his own experiences in Goražde as a framing device, but the core of the book's narrative is based on interviews with the enclave's residents. There are harrowing tales of hardship and escape from brutal massacres, but there are also beautifully rendered vignettes of everyday life in a town under siege. Sacco is an embedded reporter; he just happens to be embedded with civilians rather than soldiers. However, it is clear from the book's physical design that it is intended to be an aesthetic object as much as a piece of reportage. Gold foil graces the 2009 printing's thick card stock cover, while a recent hardback version is labeled a "special edition." Thus, the book would perhaps be most useful as an exemplar of "comics" or "graphic" journalism as practiced by one of its masters.

In a brief introduction to the field, Dan Archer (2011) grounds comics journalism in a broader history of editorial cartooning, though he sharply distinguishes these shorter, often satirical works from "longer form comics journalism, which typically spans several pages and aims to explore a topic" and to make use of the full range of visual communication tools (panel 4). In practice, these exist as two poles of a spectrum of nonfiction cartooning oriented to public affairs. While Sacco's artistic influences (rather than his journalistic ones) stem from the American "underground comix" movement of the 1960s, cartoonists such as Ted Rall, Jen Sorensen, and Matt Bors began their careers drawing editorial cartoons and comic strips for alt-weekly newspapers.

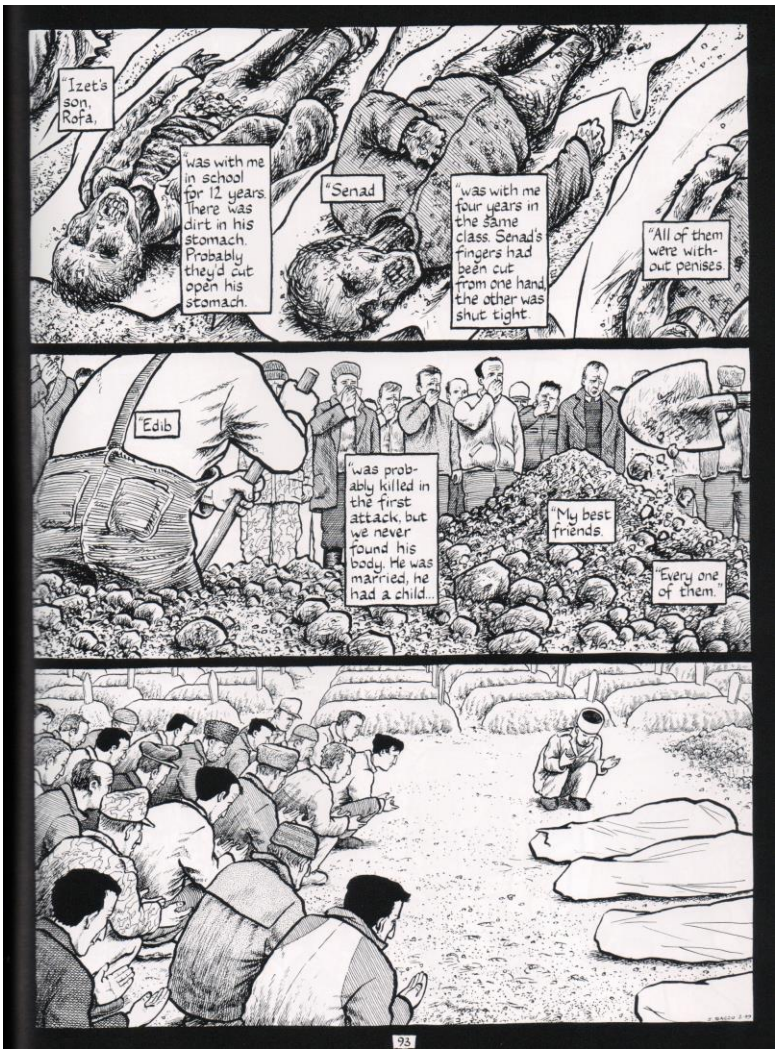

Figure 1. Sacco visualizes eyewitness accounts of human rights abuses from the Bosnian War (p. 93).

The field of comics journalism has grown immensely in recent years—not only in the graphic novel format employed by Sacco but also and especially online. Despite tracing their origins to the work of a nineteenth-century Swiss schoolmaster (Smolderen, 2014), comics are at home in the visual culture of the Web and social media. Like photographs, memes, and infographics, they have proven a remarkably "spreadable" mode of communication (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). While still somewhat unusual, newspapers, magazines, and other media outlets are increasingly commissioning works of graphic

journalism from artists such as Susie Cagle, Molly Crabapple, and Josh Neufeld, among others. Some have experimented with dedicated portals for comics journalism, such as The Nib (http://thenib.com/; formerly part of Medium.com) and Fusion's Graphic Culture series (http://fusion.net/story-type/graphic-culture/). Comics journalism seems poised to become an increasingly visible component of the current affairs mediascape. However, works of comics journalism also trouble certain popular assumptions about what journalism is.

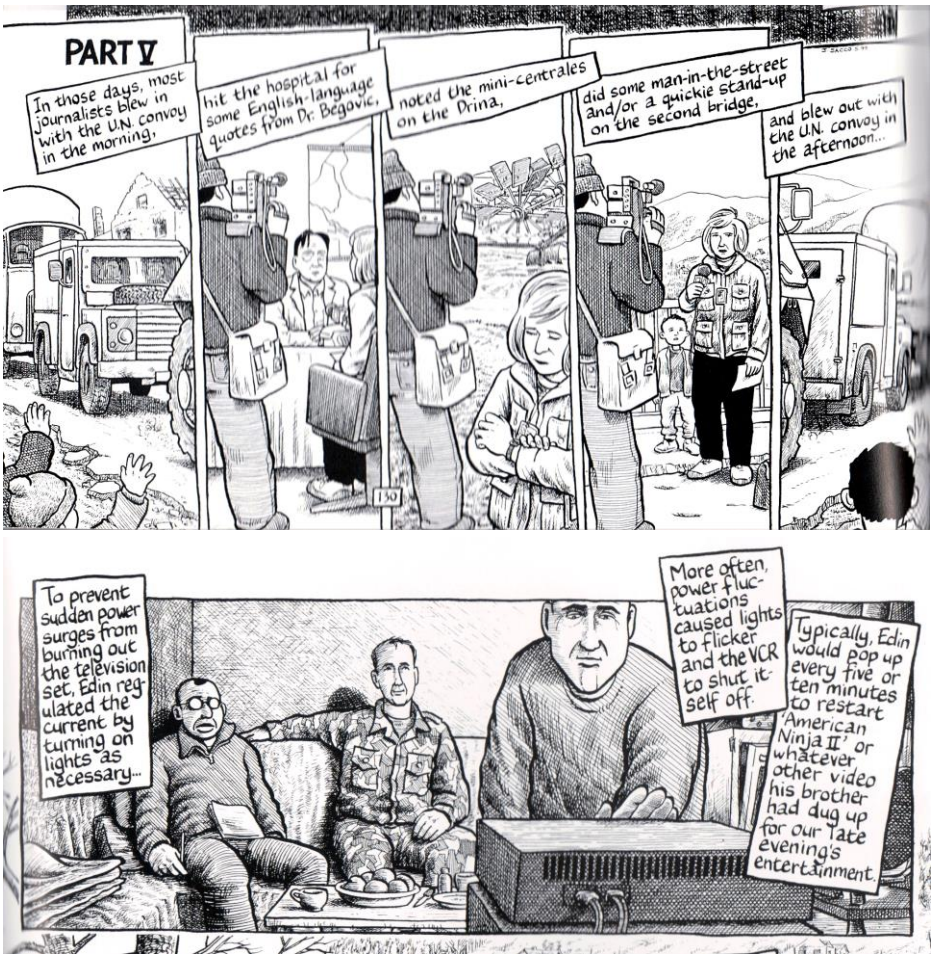

Figure 2. Sacco raises questions about journalists' relationships with their subjects (top; detail from p. 130). By contrast, he depicts himself as more or less fully integrated into the life of the community (bottom; detail from p. 49).

One persistent theme is a perceived contradiction between the objectivity of professional journalism and comics journalism's "inherent" subjectivity (Nyberg, 2006; Williams, 2005). As the title of Duncan, Taylor, and Stoddard's (2015) recent textbook suggests, the field evinces a significant overlap between the categories of journalism, memoir, and nonfiction cartooning. In this, *Goražde* is perhaps closer to the documentary mode than conventional news reportage (Woo, 2010). Indeed, it is almost ethnographic. Read in these terms, *Goražde* raises compelling questions about journalistic method and the evidentiary function of images.

If journalism is the first draft of history, then comics journalism is necessarily some intermediate stage. Drawing comics—particularly with Sacco's densely cross-hatched visual style—takes a very long time. Without the pressure to meet the demanding timelines of cable news cycles, Sacco is able to devote more time to developing local knowledge. While he seems to enjoy casting himself as a member of the roving fraternity of hard-bitten war correspondents, Sacco also apparently delights in portraying his colleagues as outsiders committing drive-by journalism. As a reporter, he is strongly influenced by the more literary mode of New Journalism, and the book's hypothetical prose equivalent would be more at home as a feature in an upmarket magazine than a daily newspaper or the nightly news. While he stresses the accuracy of his work—drawing from photo references, using direct testimony as much as possible, including a bibliography of sources for the background information—it is hardly neutral. With Sacco embedded in town, hanging out with the locals, and ferrying money and consumer goods from Sarajevo for them, they become characters more than conventional journalistic subjects. Sacco's local fixer Edin is a particularly prominent figure in the narrative. While this technique may be relatively unproblematic in the case of *Goražde*, it has invited charges of a political agenda in Sacco's (2007, 2009) works about the Israel-occupied territories. (There is, curiously, a surfeit of comics journalism about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; see also Delisle, 2012; Glidden, 2010; Pekar & Waldman, 2012; Yakin & Bertozzi, 2013.)

Illustrations and cartoons were once a common accompaniment to the news of the day, but the reporter-artist was supplanted by the photographer (and later videographer) and relegated to the editorial page and the funnies. So, while we are used to visual means of communicating information, mechanically captured images have a greater evidentiary value than drawn ones, and this perhaps goes double when (as in *Goražde*) much of this is the artist's interpretation of a spoken account. Conversely, insofar as the reader comes to trust Sacco's visual record of his own experiences, those of his subjects are rendered in exactly the same way, giving greater impact to their testimony. These are, moreover, not simply illustrations but comics. They are, to borrow Charles Hatfield's (2012) term, a case of "narrative drawing," a form of writing with pictures. Teasing out what this might mean for conventional notions of journalistic methods and ethics is a task that still remains to be done, particularly as the field of comics journalism continues to expand.

What is the use of a 15-year-old comic book today? Certainly, it's not as news, though it may find an audience interested in a—admittedly, narrowly focused—history of the former Yugoslavia. Rather, its primary value is its timeless human dimensions: What is it like when a multiethnic nation-state unravels at the seams? How do people cope with the physical and emotional suffering of war? How do they retain hope for the future? Is reconciliation possible? These are important and poignant questions, and Sacco's

exploration of them relies on a range of visual storytelling techniques. For teachers and researchers of communication, visual culture, journalism, it is *how* this is accomplished in the comics form that will lend the book utility.

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