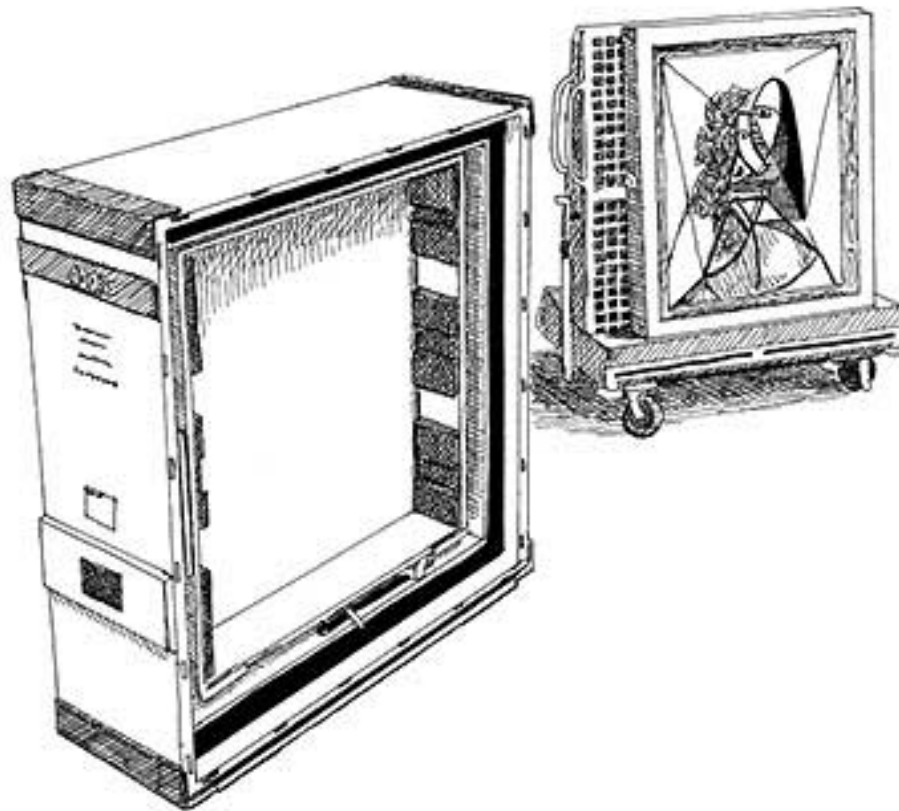


An Oral History of **PICASSO in PALESTINE**



AN ORAL HISTORY OF PICASSO IN PALESTINE

by Michael Baers



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NODE Berlin Oslo

The Story of the
Policeman's Wife
illustrated by Samir Harb

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Michael Baers, Author



Fatima Abdul Karim, Project Manager on Picasso in Palestine

An Oral History of
Picasso in Palestine

CAST OF
CHARACTERS



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Yazid Anani, Professor of Architecture, Birzeit University



Louis Baltussen, Senior Preservation, Van Abbemuseum



Christiane Berndes, curator, director of Collections at Van Abbemuseum



Remco de Blaaij, curator,
Picasso in Palestine project
manager, Van Abbemuseum



Jan Diepraam, freelance conservator,
Van Abbemuseum



Galit Eilat, curator,
Van Abbemuseum



Charles Esche, director,
Van Abbemuseum



Giovanni Fontana, former
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Ramallah office



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Globus Worldwide Logistics,
fine art division



Fredy Gareis,
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Toufik Hadad, junior researcher,
University of London



Khaled Hourani, formerly artistic
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Academy of Art Palestine



Ruud Imjker, Marine
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Bar Beit Anisa, Ramallah



Yehuda Levy, owner, Globus
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Artschool Palestine



Rashid Masharawi,
film director



Jack Persekian, director
Al-Ma'mal Gallery East Jerusalem



Nicola Perugini, anthropologist



Hosni Radwan, consultant,
PA Ministry of Culture



Dalia Taha, writer



Vera Tamari, curator, artist,
former Lecturer in Islamic Art and
Architecture, Birzeit University



Bettine Verkuijlen,
registrar, Van Abbemuseum

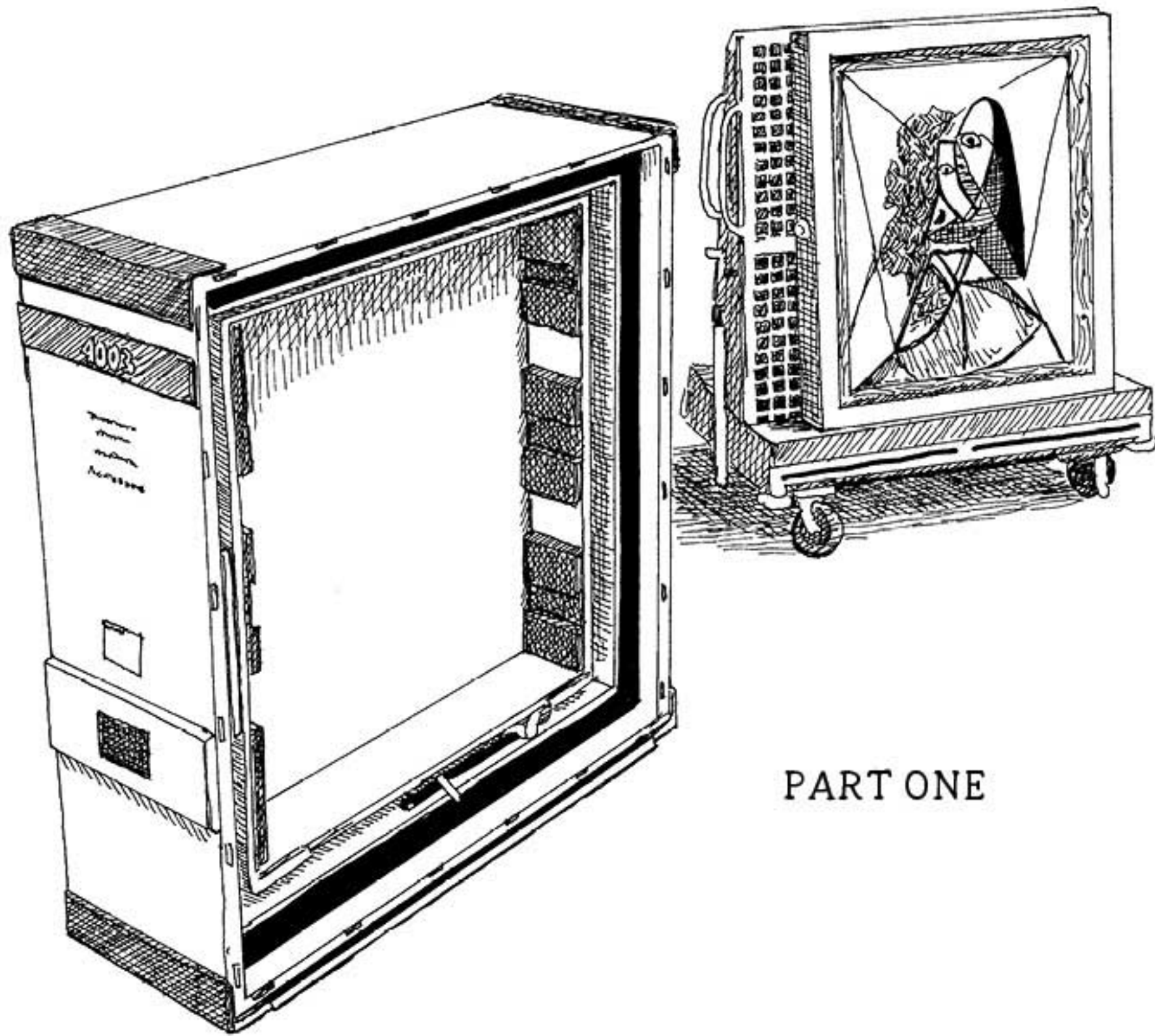


Eti Wellisch, project manager
at Globus Worldwide Logistics,
fine art division



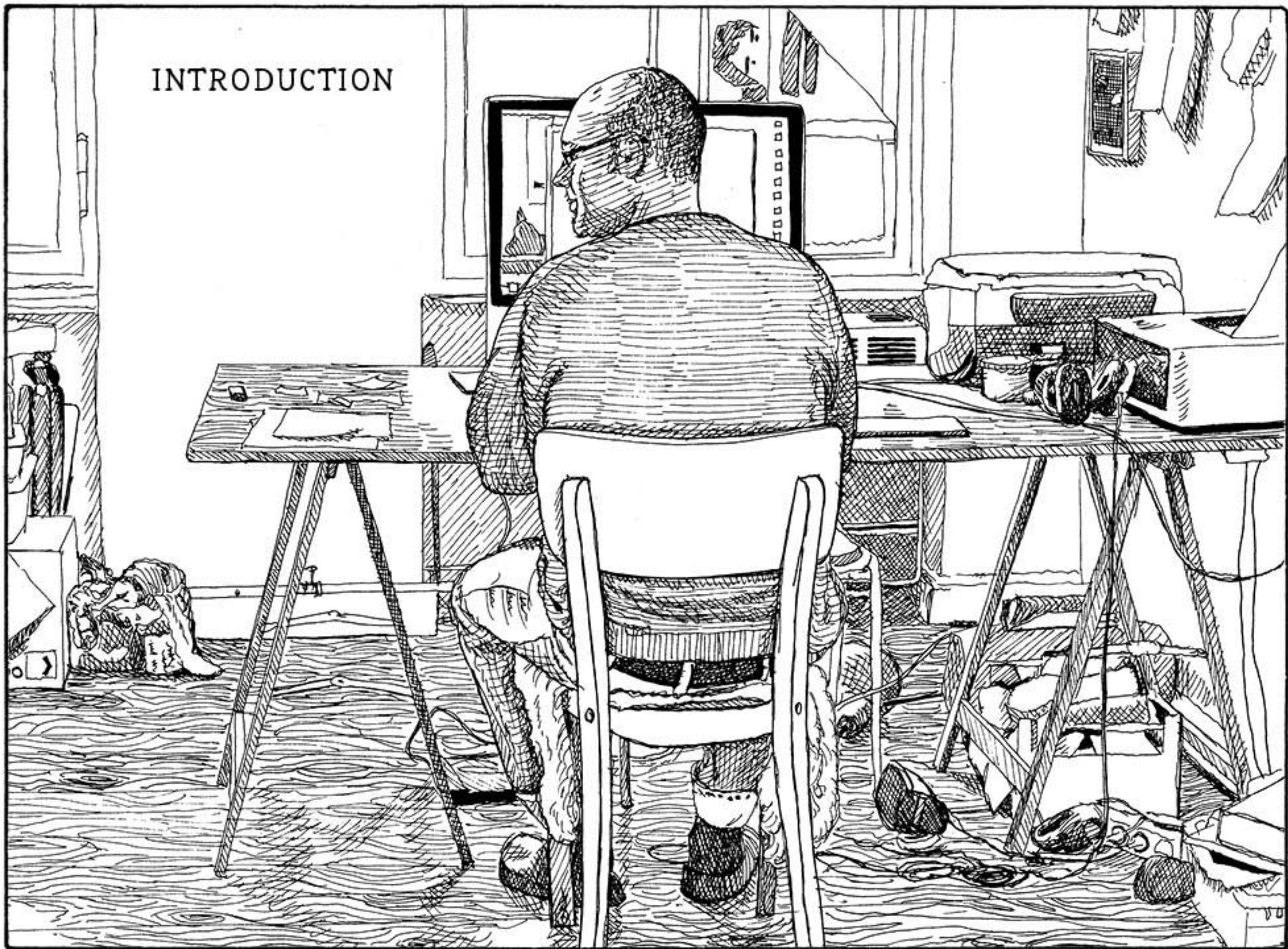
Slavoj Žižek, philosopher,
professor, European
Graduate School

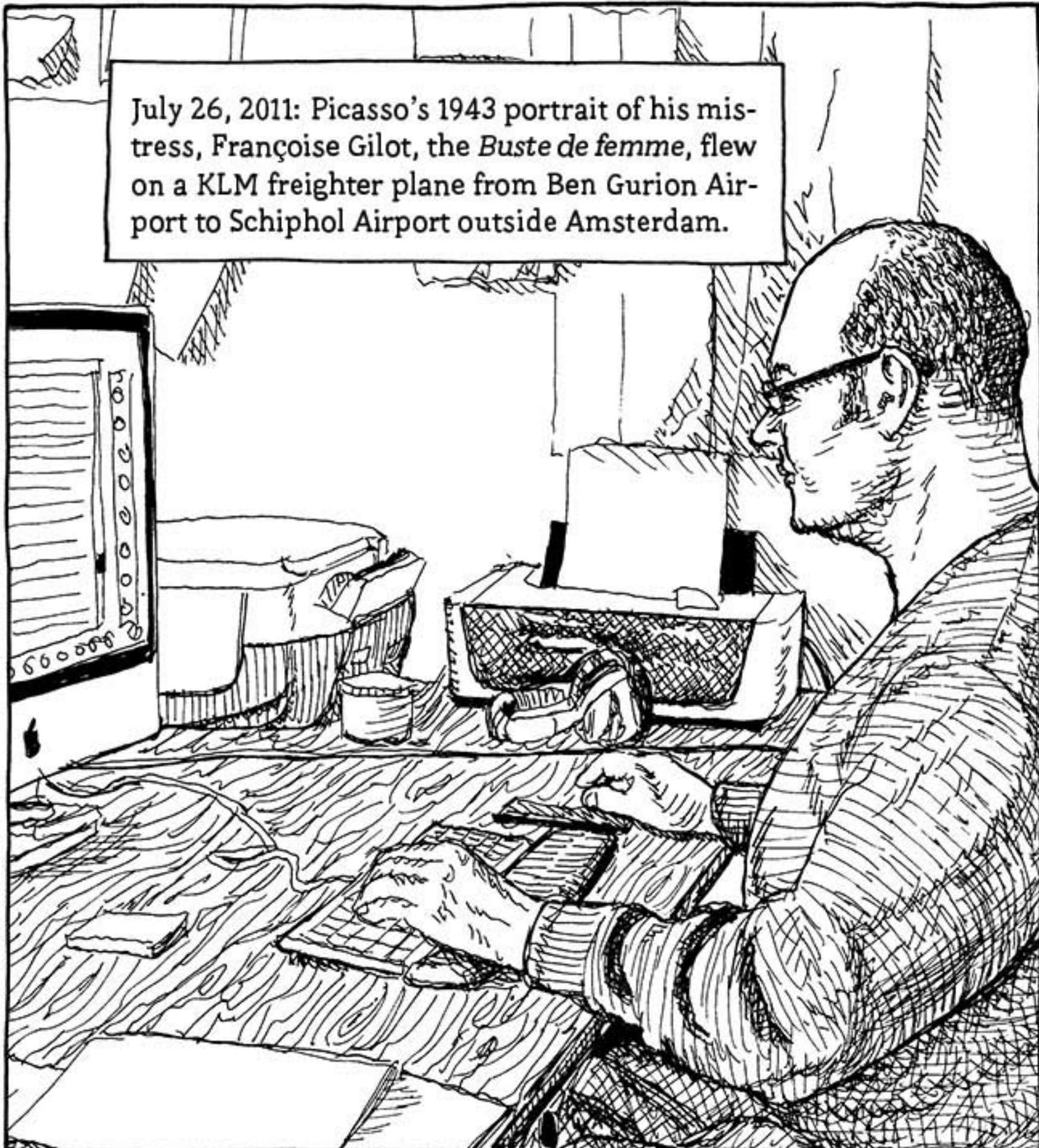
The accounts used in this work are taken from interviews conducted in July and August of 2011 and February 2012. Being that even the most practiced interviewee is not a recitation machine and can be prone to repetitions, misstarts, and malapropisms—especially when English is not their native tongue—I have treated their words as a kind of raw material, editing, reordering, and at times revising what people said to me. In this sense, the following consists neither of verbatim transcripts nor fictionalized account. In any case, lifting and isolating texts from their original context is already an act of distortion. These words exist, rather, somewhere in between the real and the fictional. MB



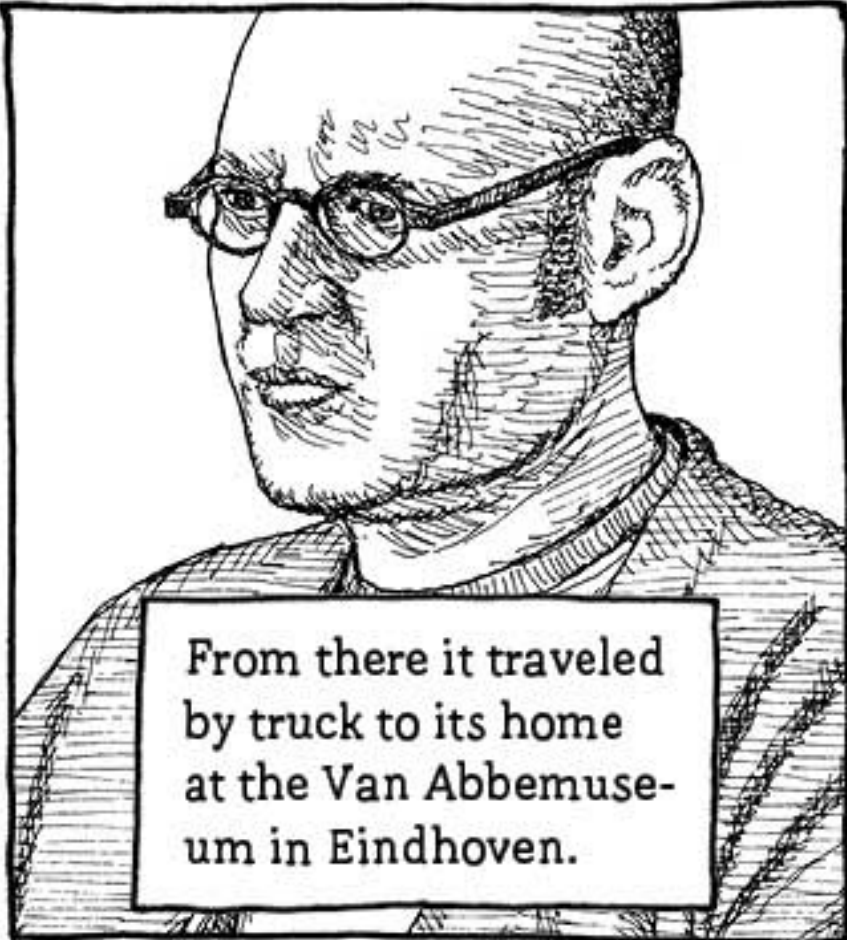
PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

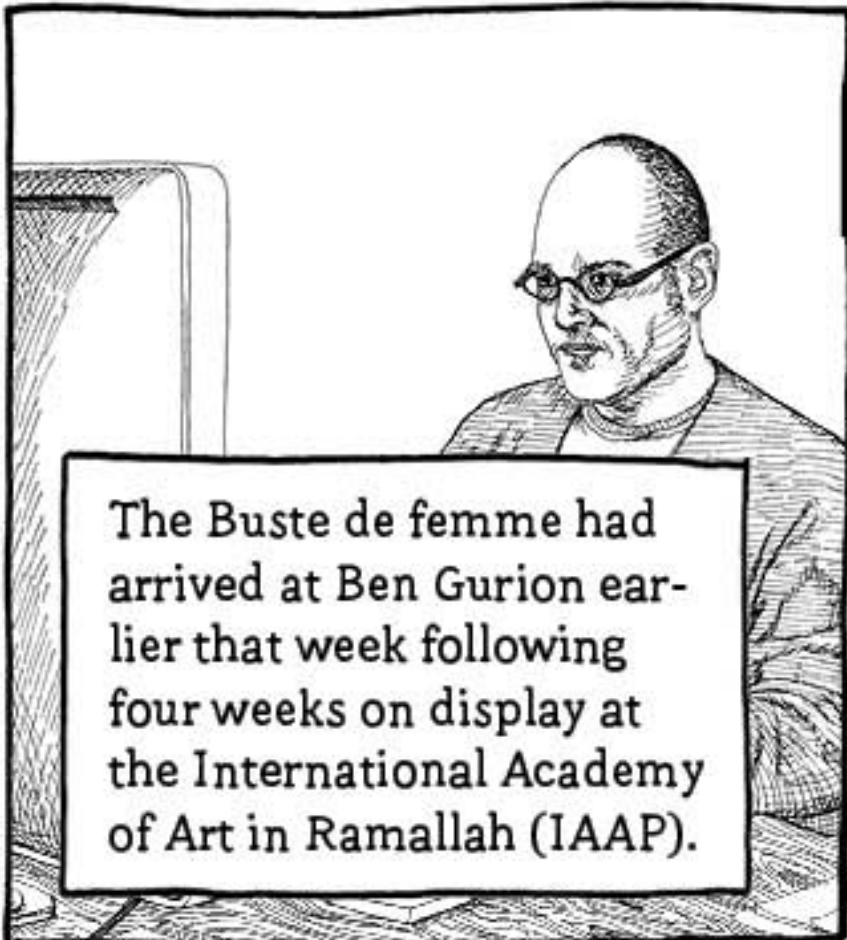




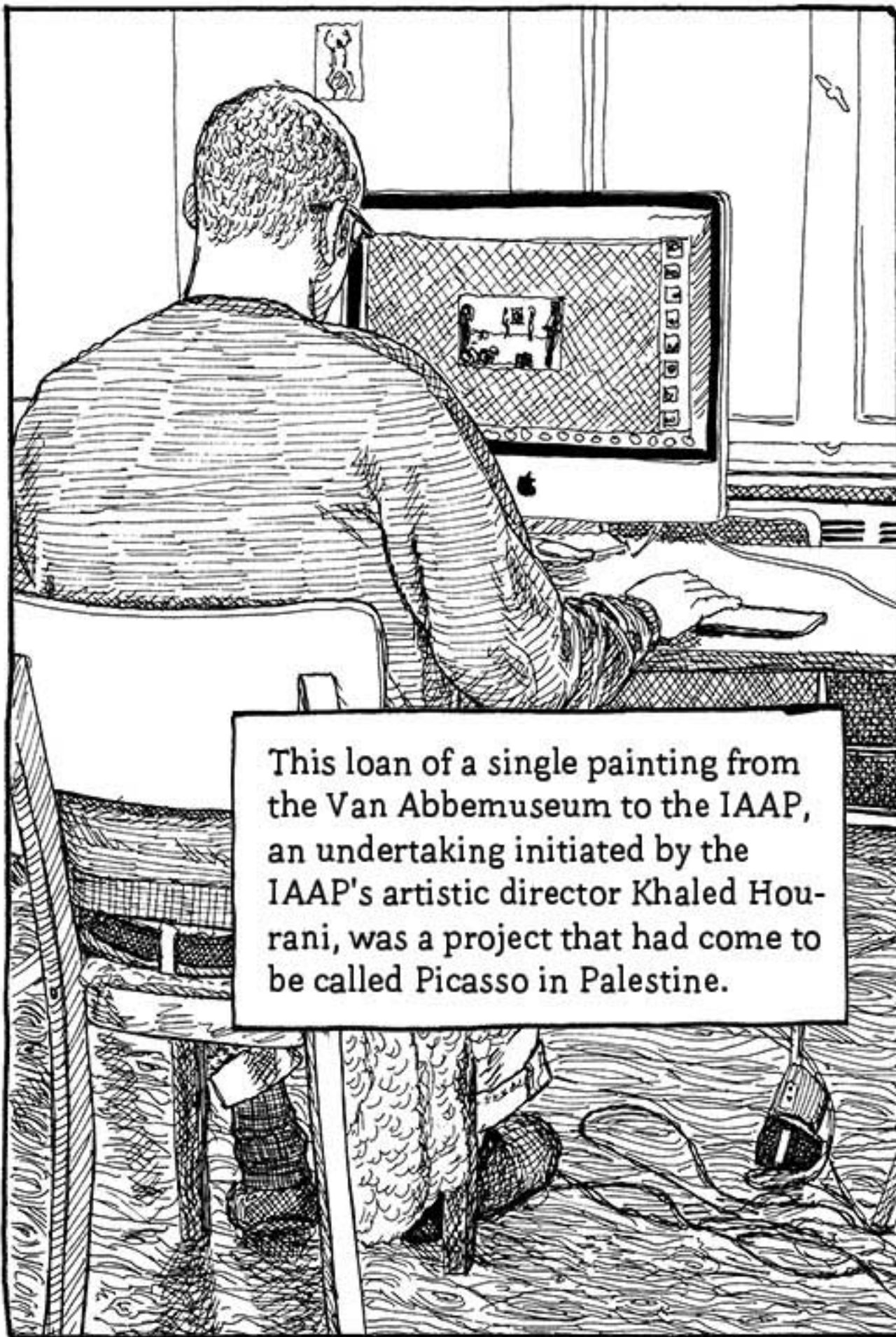
July 26, 2011: Picasso's 1943 portrait of his mistress, Françoise Gilot, the *Buste de femme*, flew on a KLM freighter plane from Ben Gurion Airport to Schiphol Airport outside Amsterdam.



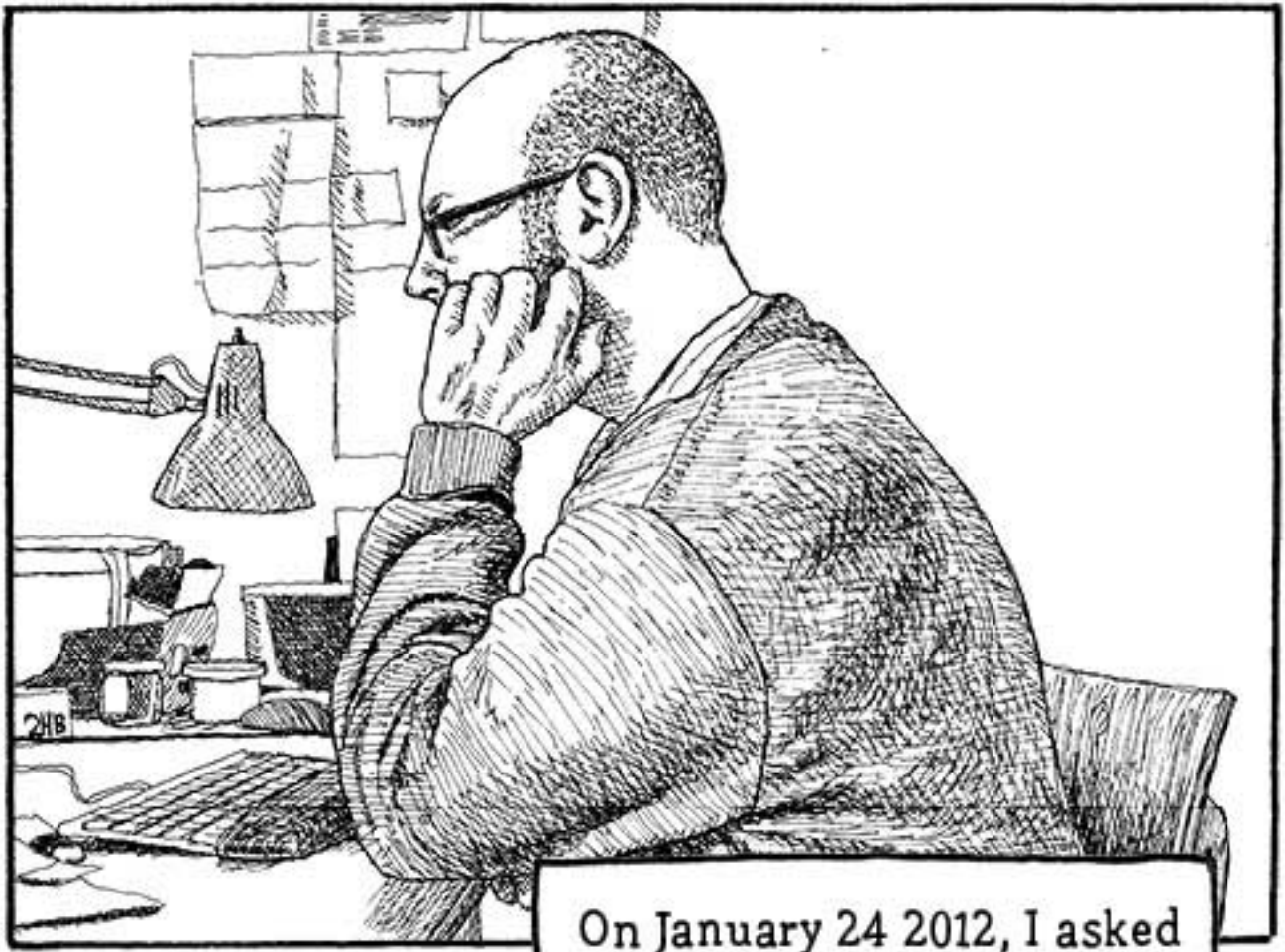
From there it traveled by truck to its home at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven.



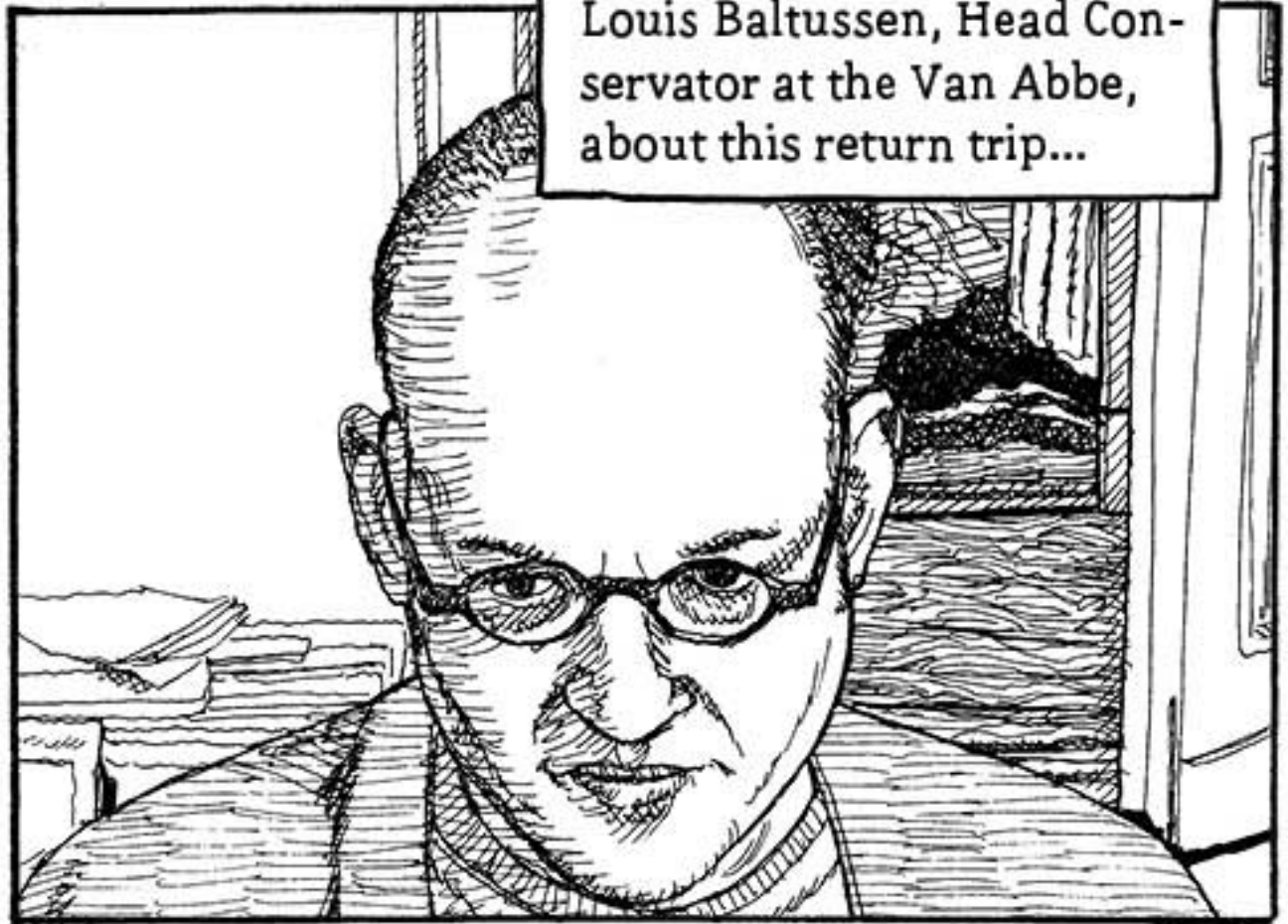
The *Buste de femme* had arrived at Ben Gurion earlier that week following four weeks on display at the International Academy of Art in Ramallah (IAAP).

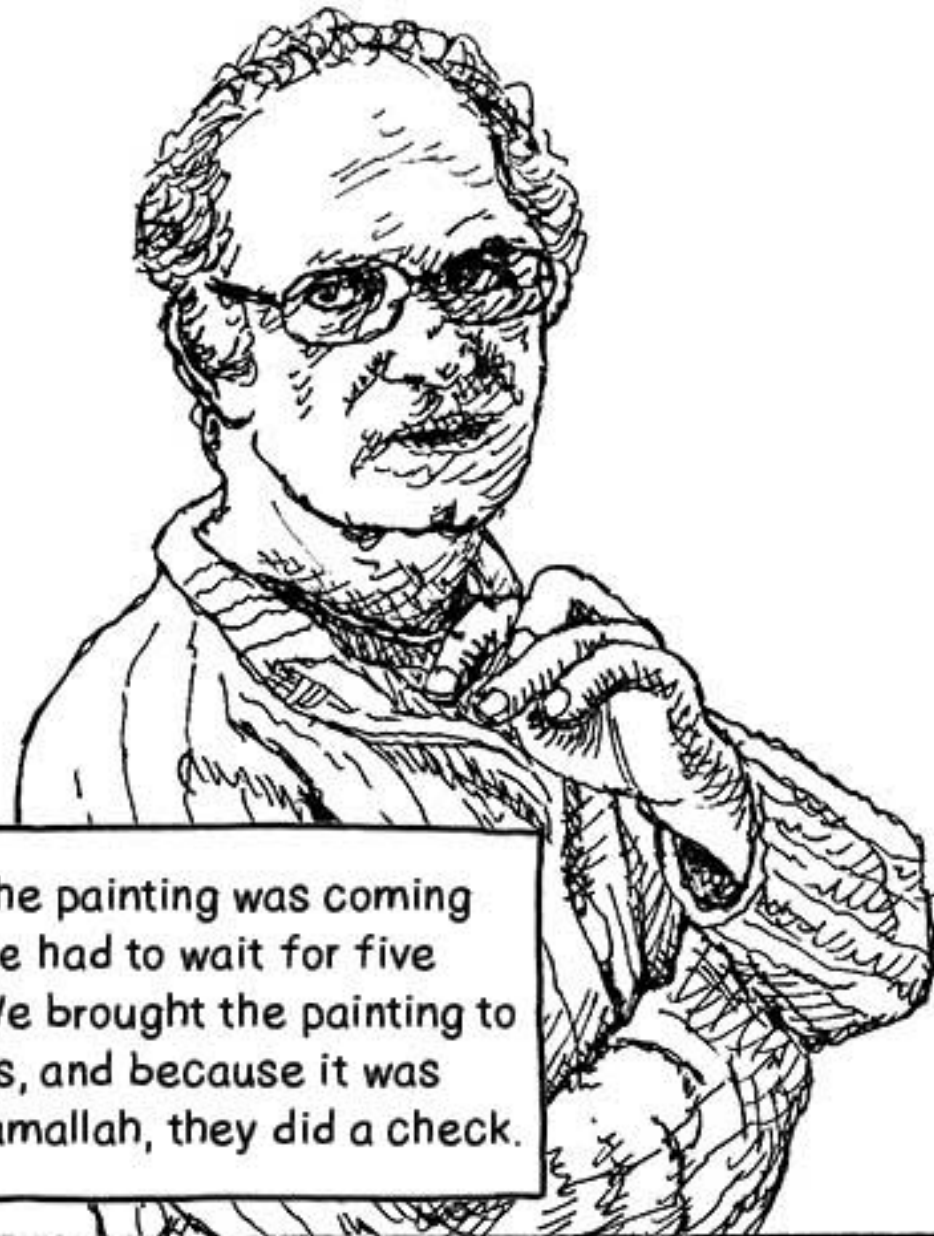


This loan of a single painting from the Van Abbemuseum to the IAAP, an undertaking initiated by the IAAP's artistic director Khaled Hourani, was a project that had come to be called Picasso in Palestine.



On January 24 2012, I asked Louis Baltussen, Head Conservator at the Van Abbe, about this return trip...

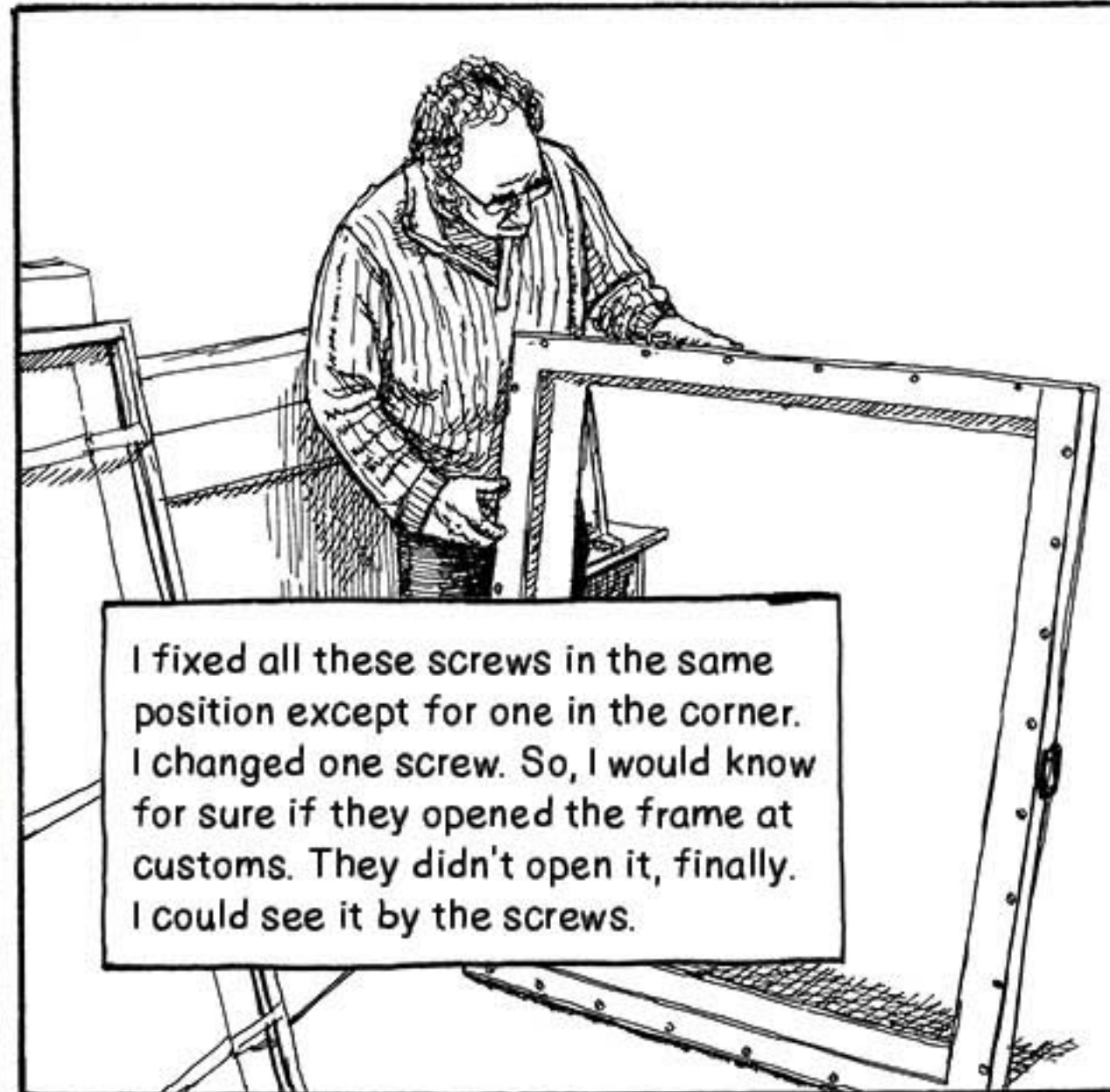




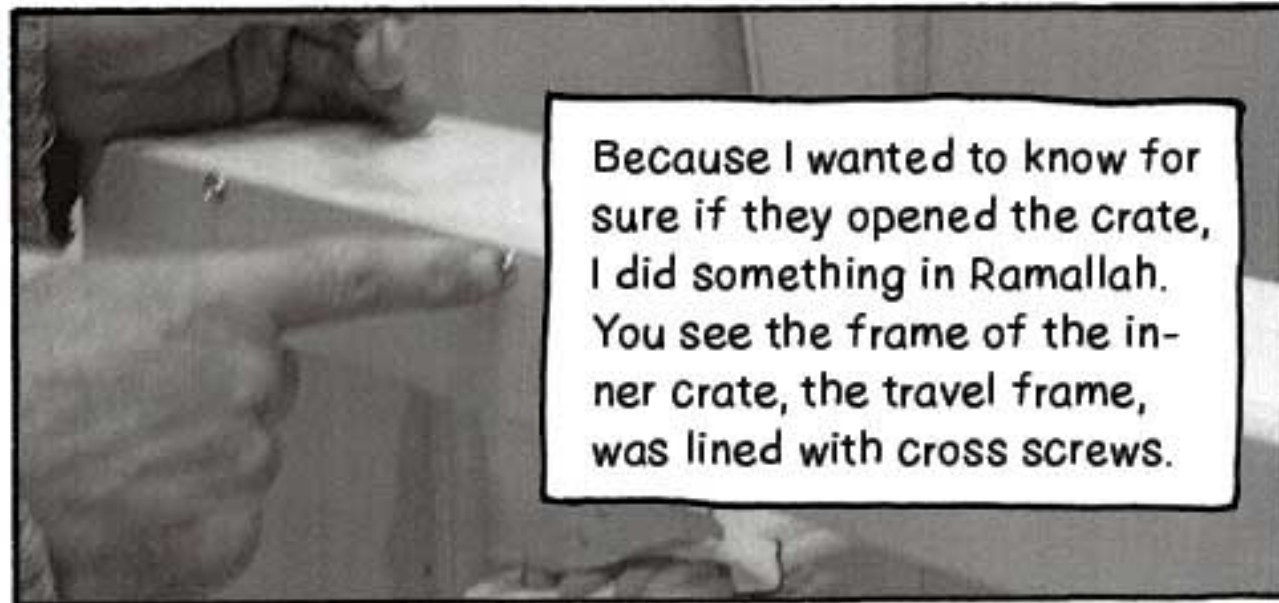
When the painting was coming back, we had to wait for five days. We brought the painting to customs, and because it was from Ramallah, they did a check.



I think there was a kind of five-day waiting line with objects. That's my idea. So we also had to wait for five days. Then they released the painting.



I fixed all these screws in the same position except for one in the corner. I changed one screw. So, I would know for sure if they opened the frame at customs. They didn't open it, finally. I could see it by the screws.



Because I wanted to know for sure if they opened the crate, I did something in Ramallah. You see the frame of the inner crate, the travel frame, was lined with cross screws.

Presumably this was the end of the story. But for me its echoes continued reverberating, inducing a kind of vertigo, a sense of the temporal going in two directions: into the future where the appearance of a Picasso in Ramallah presaged Palestine's further integration into the global art network, and back to the past, to the beginning of the story, whichever event one might arbitrarily assign for its commencement—whether that was the proximate start of the project or the proximate start of the conflict itself. To my mind, the interaction of these two orientations created a complex of shifting temporalities—a sense of time out of joint matching the fragmented space of occupation, the space out of joint created by the Oslo map.

Buste de femme's fractured modernist space encountered this disorder; encountered as well the tiny white cube constructed for the *Buste de femme*



in the Academy's single classroom, like a reduction of any museum gallery in the West.

All of these elements interacted with each other in what I suspected were complex and volatile ways, but when the painting first arrived in Ramallah, the manner in which the different media outlets covered the story portrayed a far simpler situation: valuable Picasso painting arrives in Ramallah, a triumph for the organizers, the Palestinian Authority, and especially, the PA's security apparatus. End of story. There were marginal differences in focus, in sketching local color and arranging facts, but these superficial distinctions revealed the deeper consistency the stories shared in first of all selecting these facts, and then from them assembling a coherent narrative.

The question I began asking myself was this: what, in fact, would be produced by this coverage? Would it provide an au-

thentic image of contemporary Palestine or would it contribute further raw material for the spectacular representation of the conflict?—spectacle being the other ground where the conflict is waged. Sometimes I thought this a likely outcome. So, my interest in the mainstream media's narrative arc existed only to the extent it revealed certain ideological quirks taking form as habits of articulation, ways of



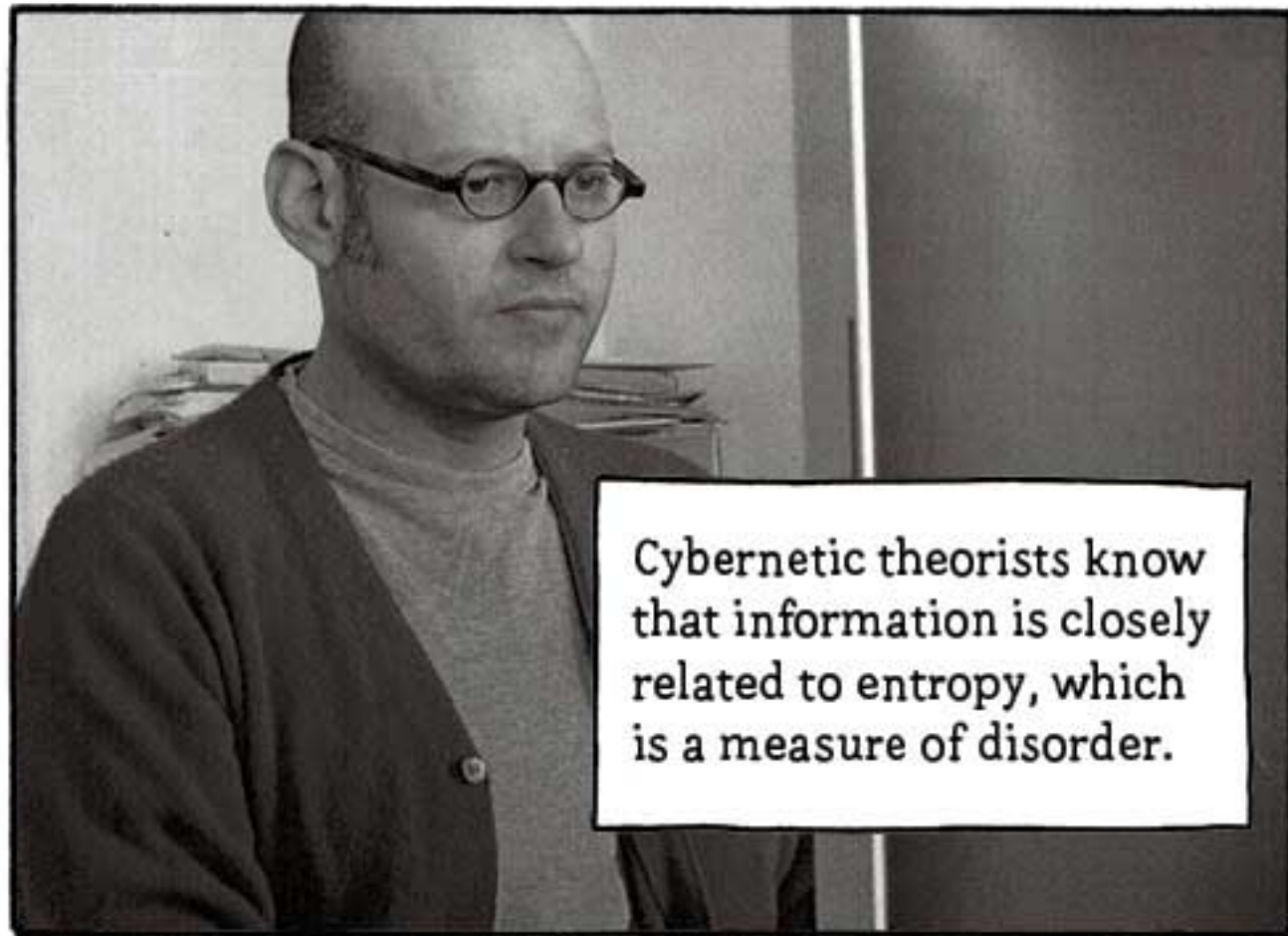
making things banal. And in any case, this was all that could result from reducing the project's two-year gestation period to a couple of paragraphs—the project becoming banal. I was curious about the minutiae left out of these paragraphs—the meetings, e-mail correspondence, faxes and phone calls—all the banal procedural stuff that in this context isn't banal at all. Because what I found interesting about the project was precisely how it tended to disappear into the everyday. Too technical and unsexy to warrant more than cursory mention, these details were possibly where the project might reveal something consequential about how Israel's occupation of the West Bank functions today.

This, in fact, was the stated intention of the project's initiators—to unmask the occupation by transporting a valuable work of art from the developed West to Palestine. All the quotidian

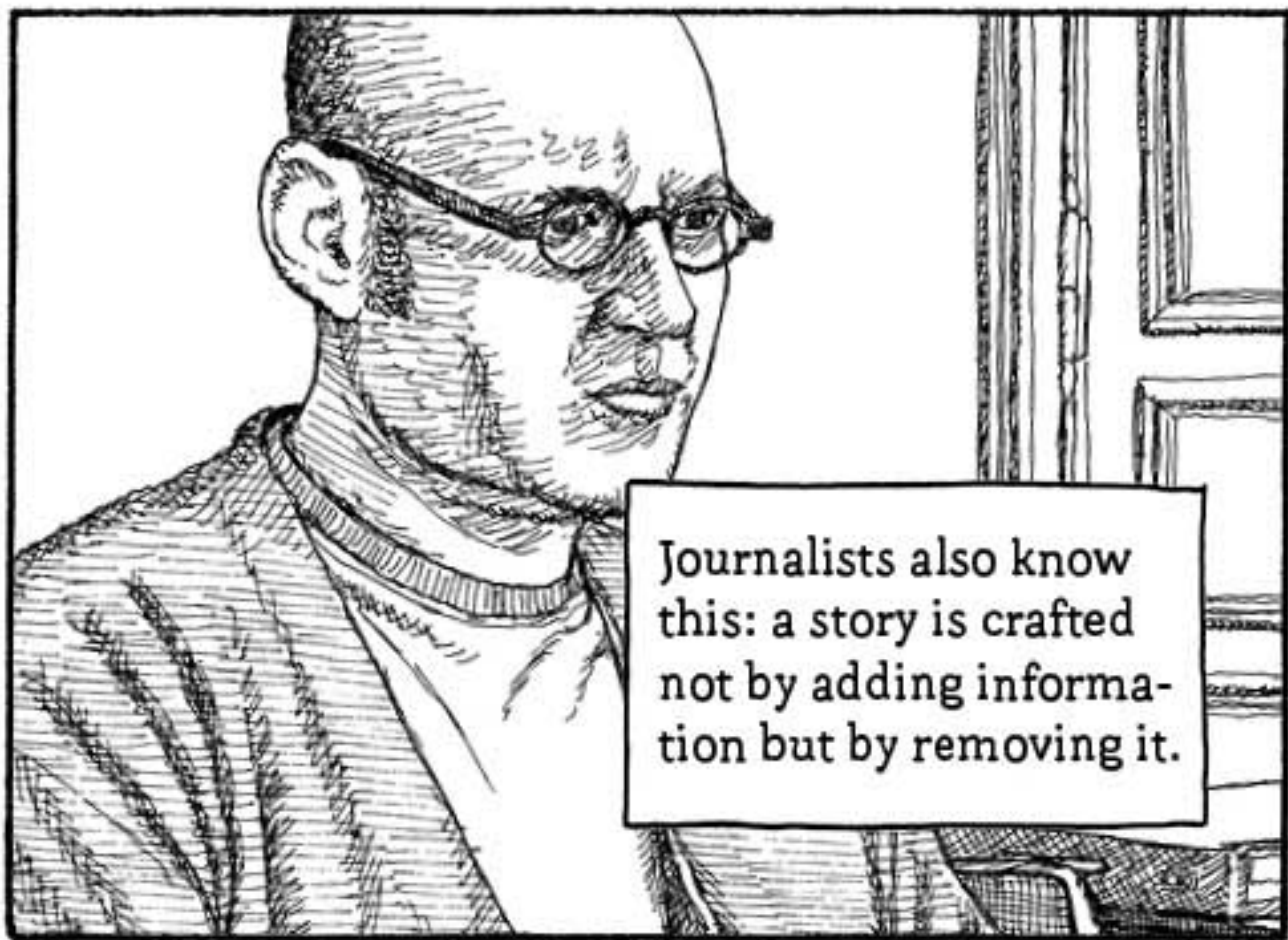
details comprising the project's development also comprised the occupation: they were coextensive. If this were the case, one needed to know exactly what took place in detail—including



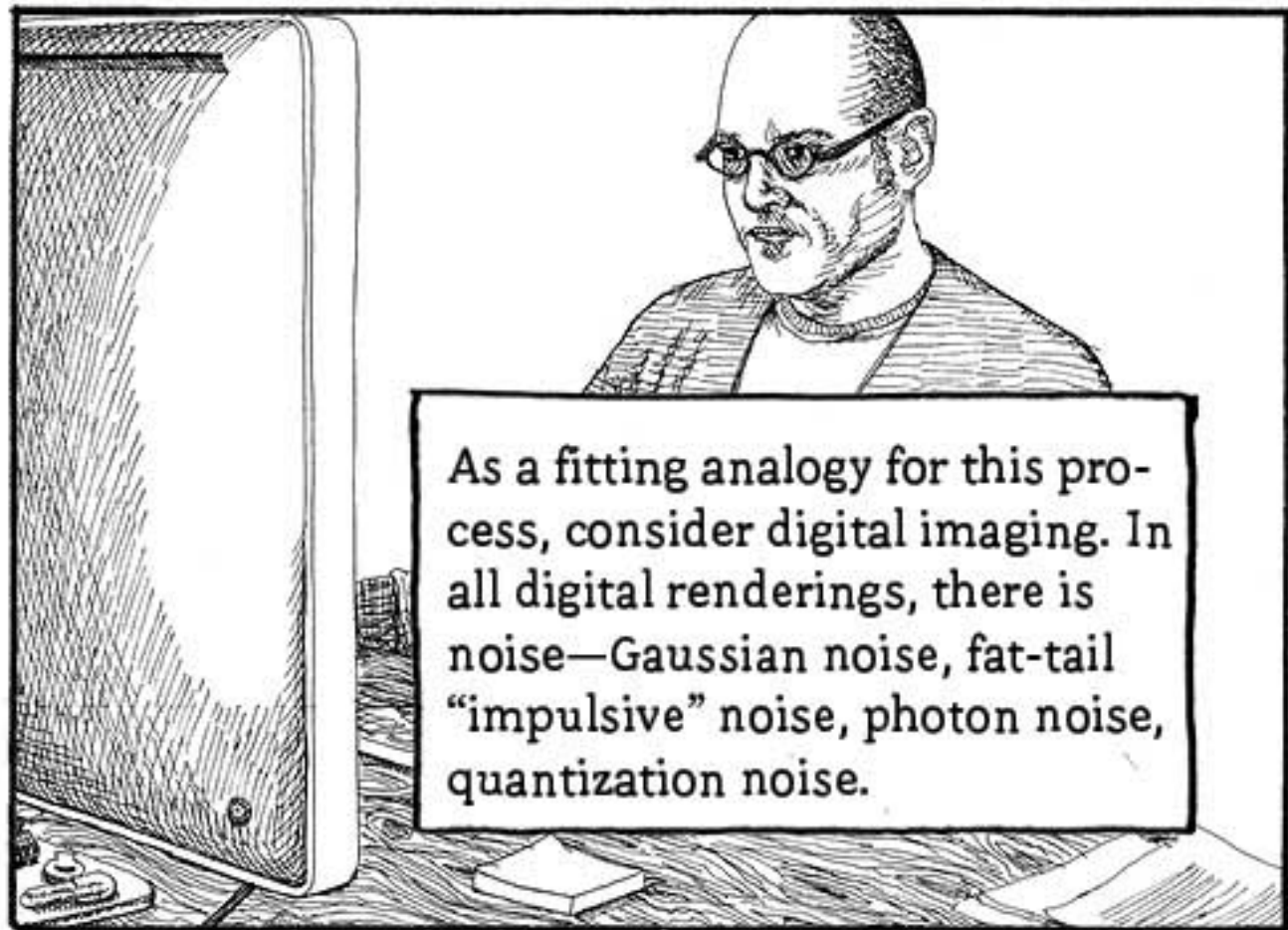
the periods of waiting, including the misunderstandings and uncertainties, including the whole bureaucratic universe of laws, regulations and international agreements regulating every instance of lawful transnational trade, and the nebulous world of fixers and political operatives necessary for negotiating its complexities.



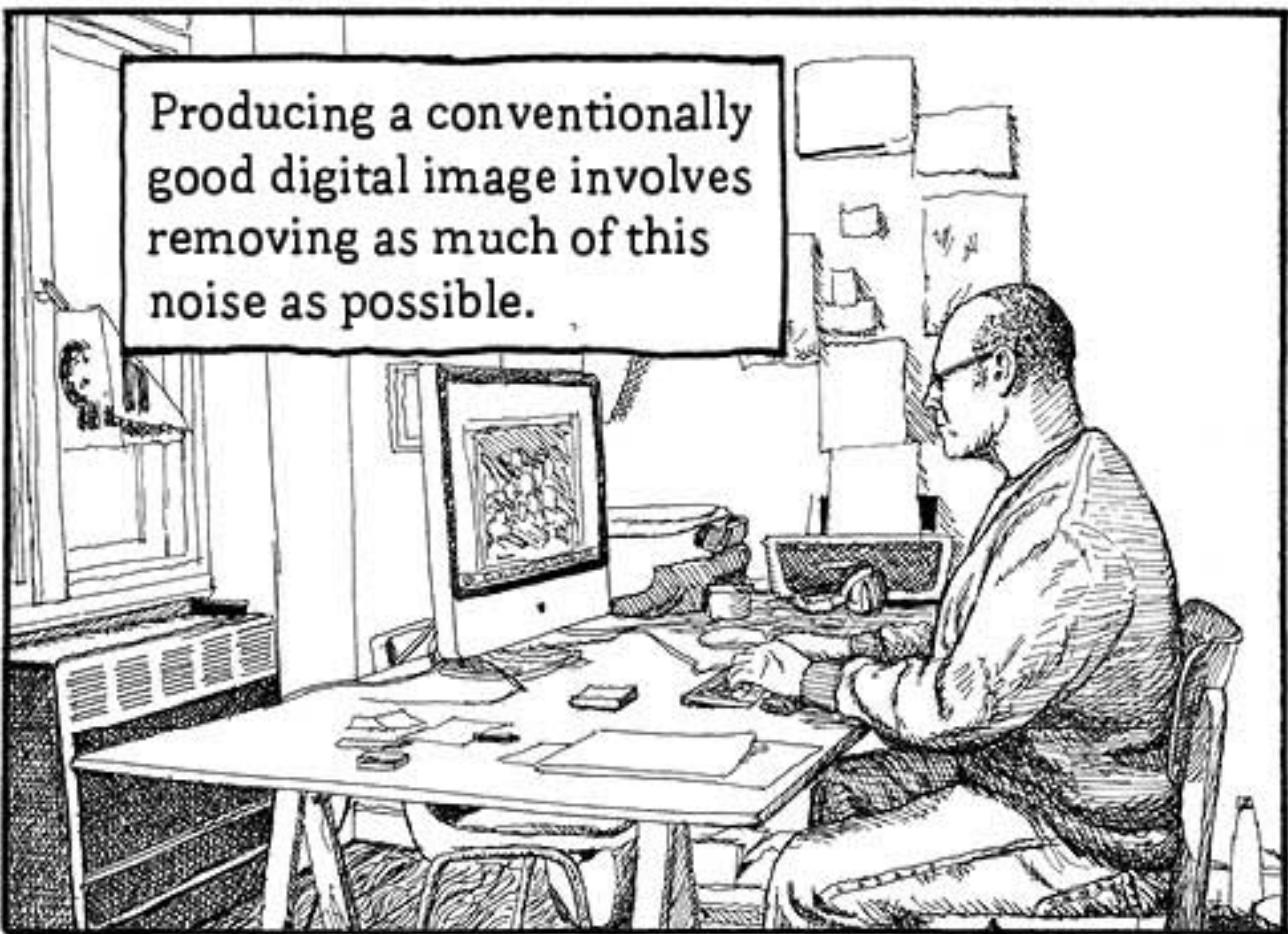
Cybernetic theorists know that information is closely related to entropy, which is a measure of disorder.



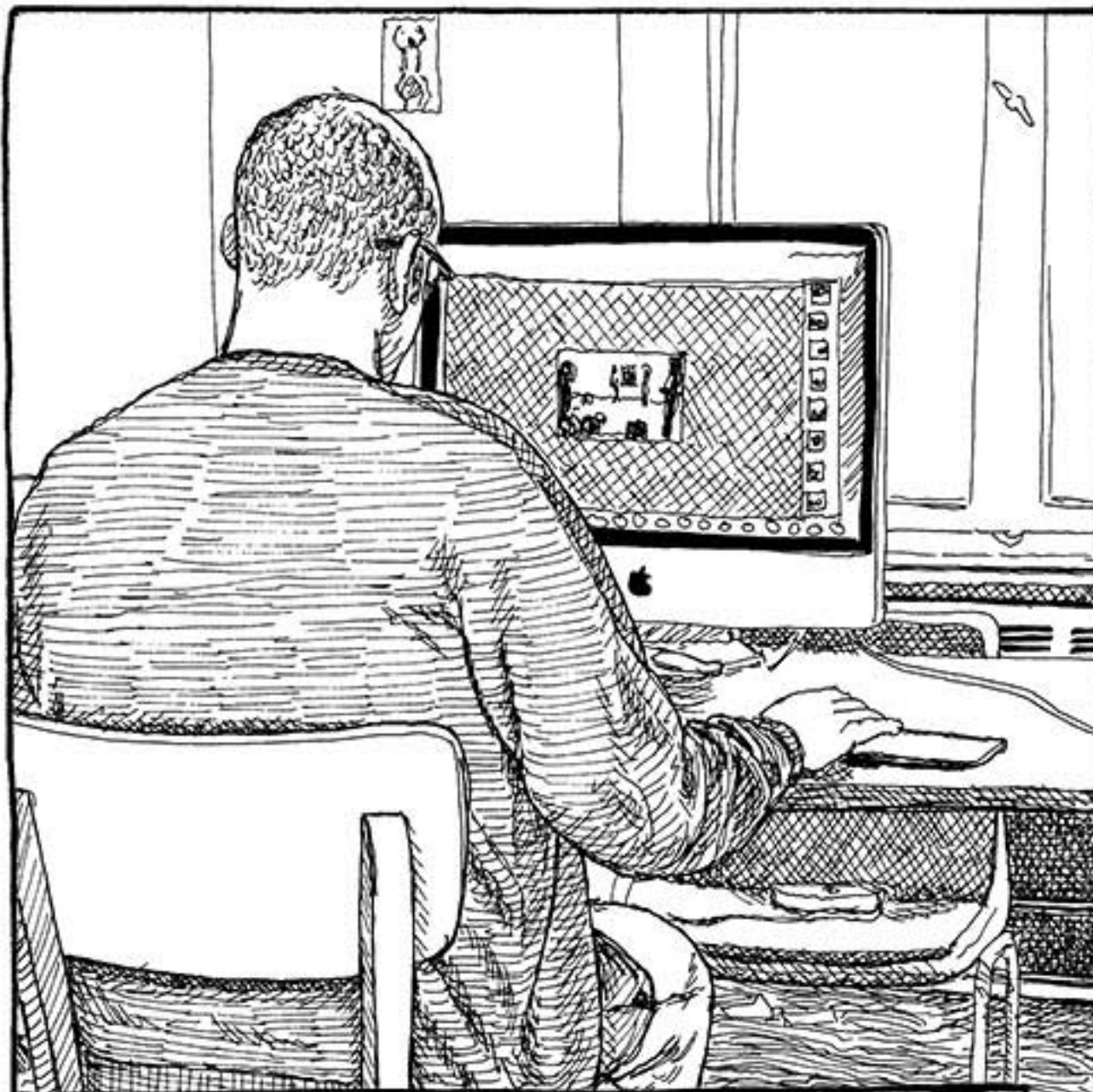
Journalists also know this: a story is crafted not by adding information but by removing it.



As a fitting analogy for this process, consider digital imaging. In all digital renderings, there is noise—Gaussian noise, fat-tail “impulsive” noise, photon noise, quantization noise.



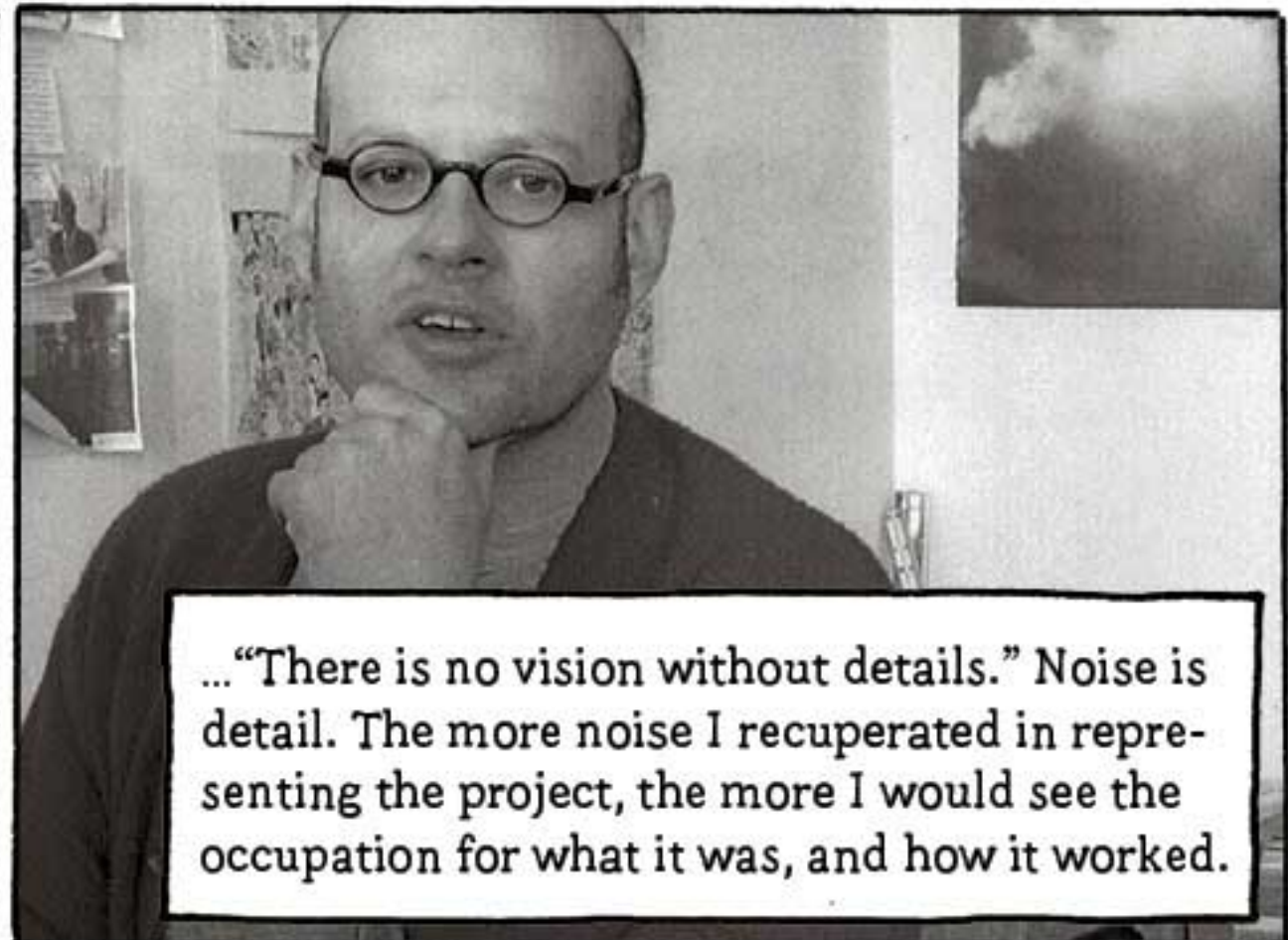
Producing a conventionally good digital image involves removing as much of this noise as possible.



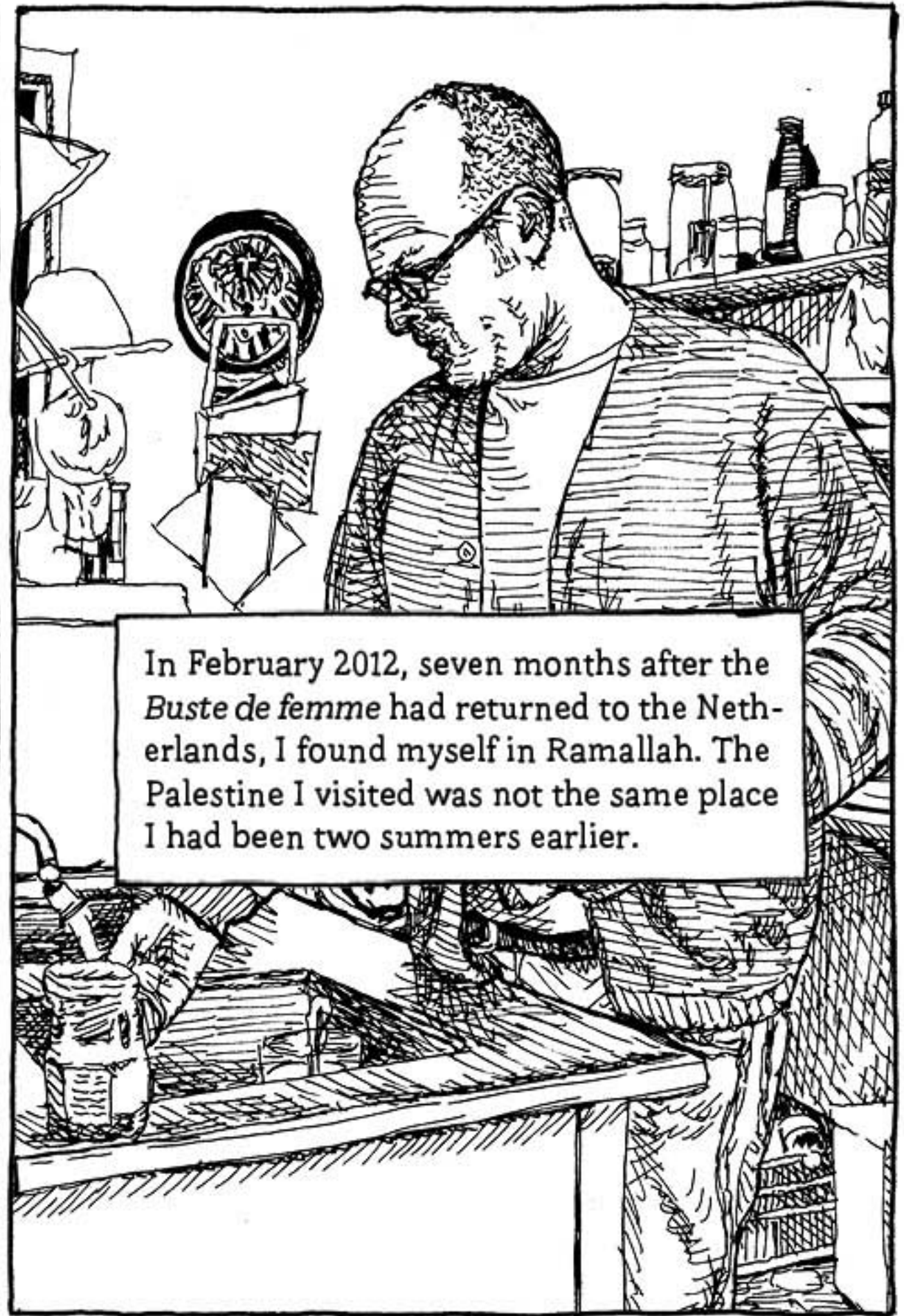
In a related context—that of sound recording—the meaning of the word noise is “unwanted sound,” and one aspect of the transformation from an analog to a digital society is that noise ceases to be an integral feature of recording technology, becoming instead its waste product.

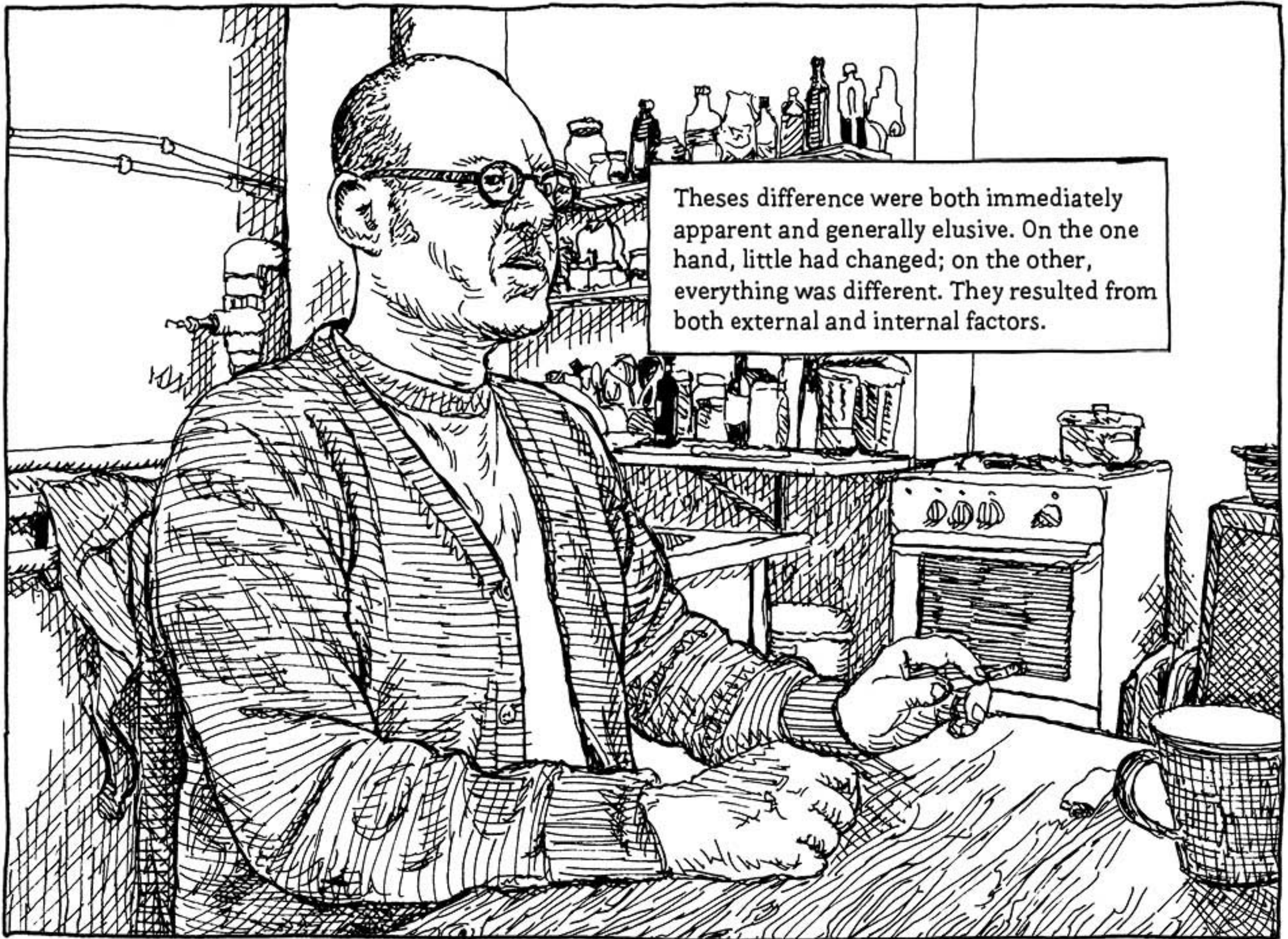


Somewhere I had come across a quote by the Palestinian poet Hussein Barghouti...



...“There is no vision without details.” Noise is detail. The more noise I recuperated in representing the project, the more I would see the occupation for what it was, and how it worked.

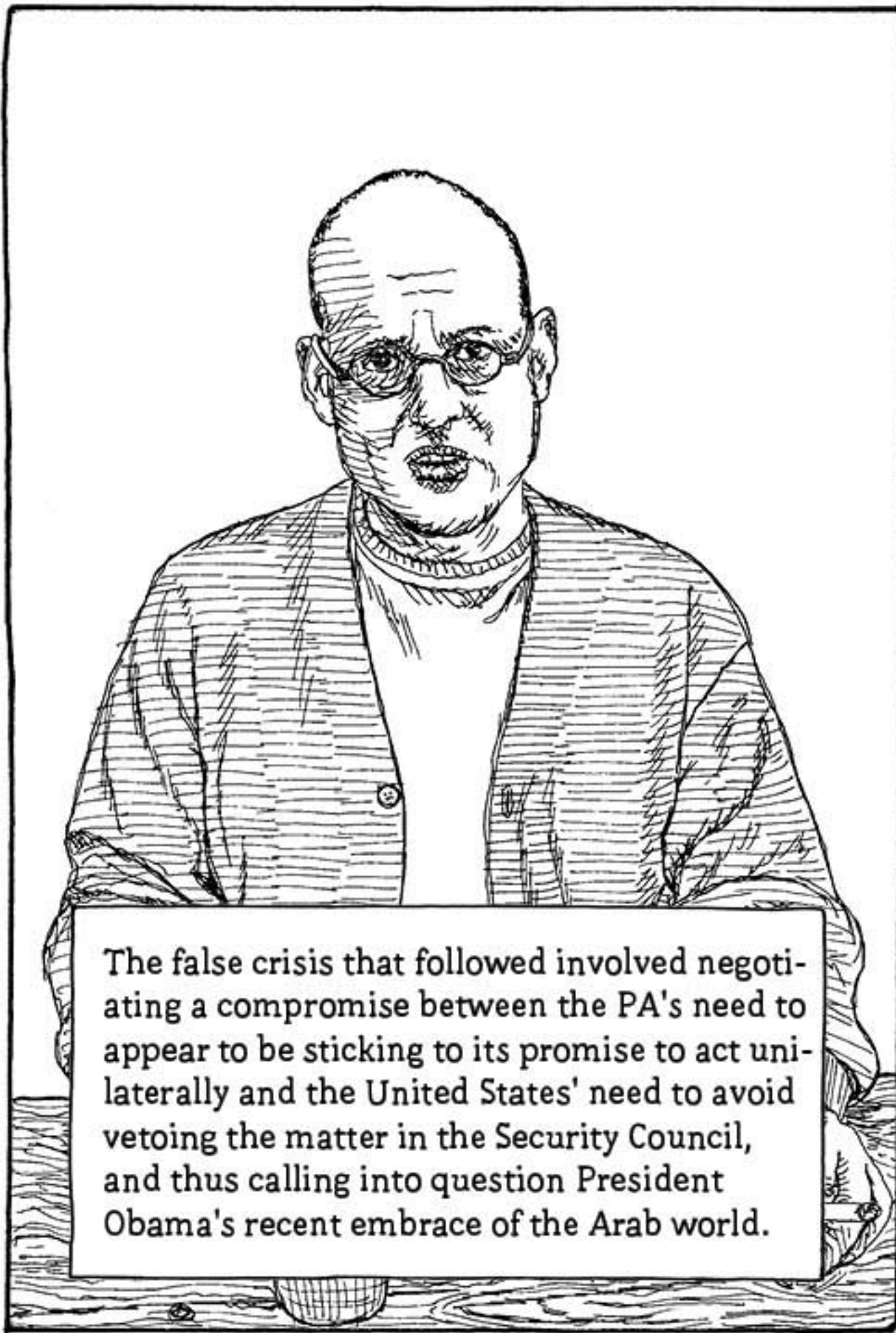




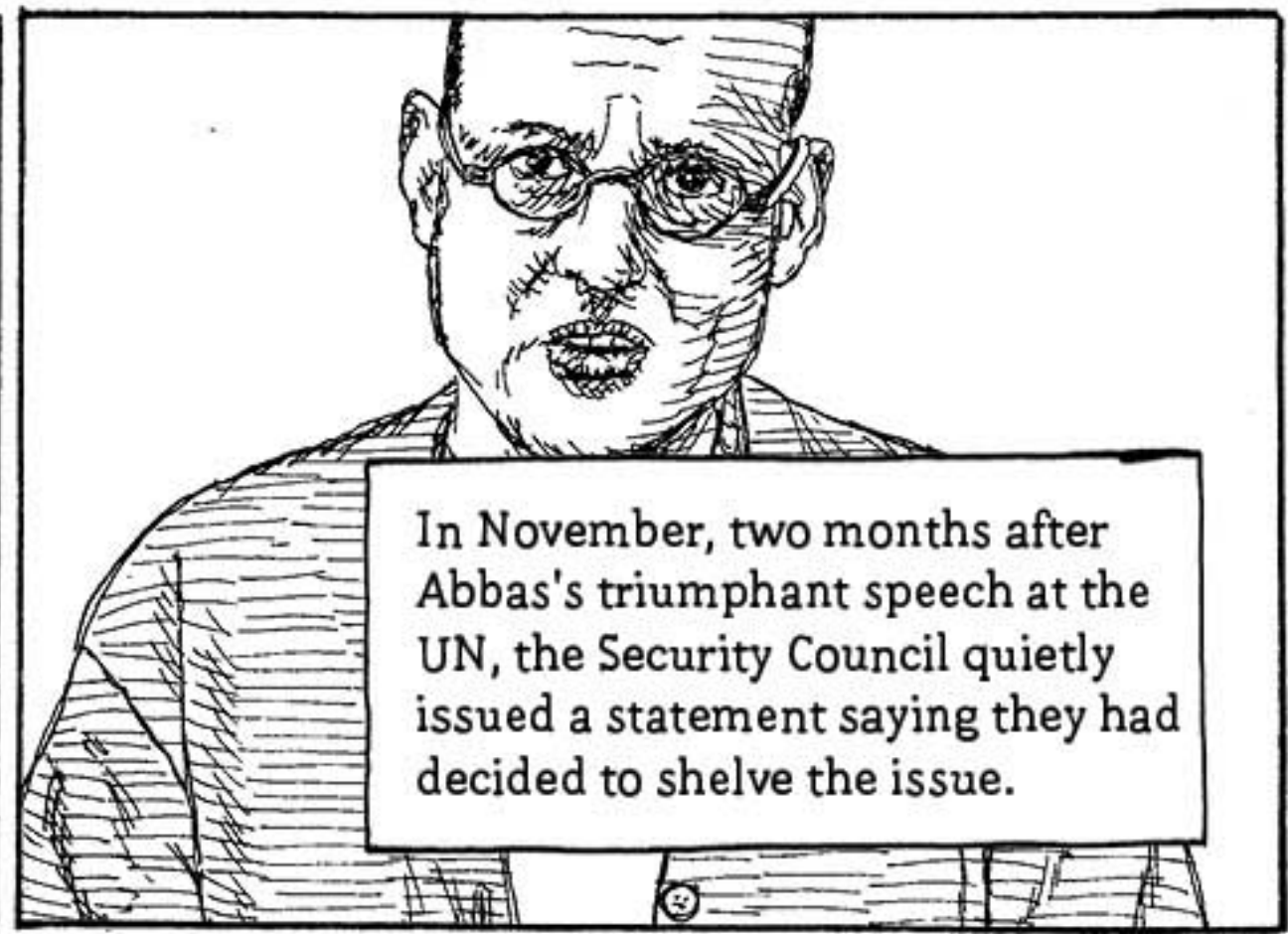
These difference were both immediately apparent and generally elusive. On the one hand, little had changed; on the other, everything was different. They resulted from both external and internal factors.

The previous September, after many months of threats, the Palestinian Authority had formally requested statehood status at the UN. Predictably, both Israel and the US strenuously opposed this move, which from an international relations perspective put them in an embarrassing spot.

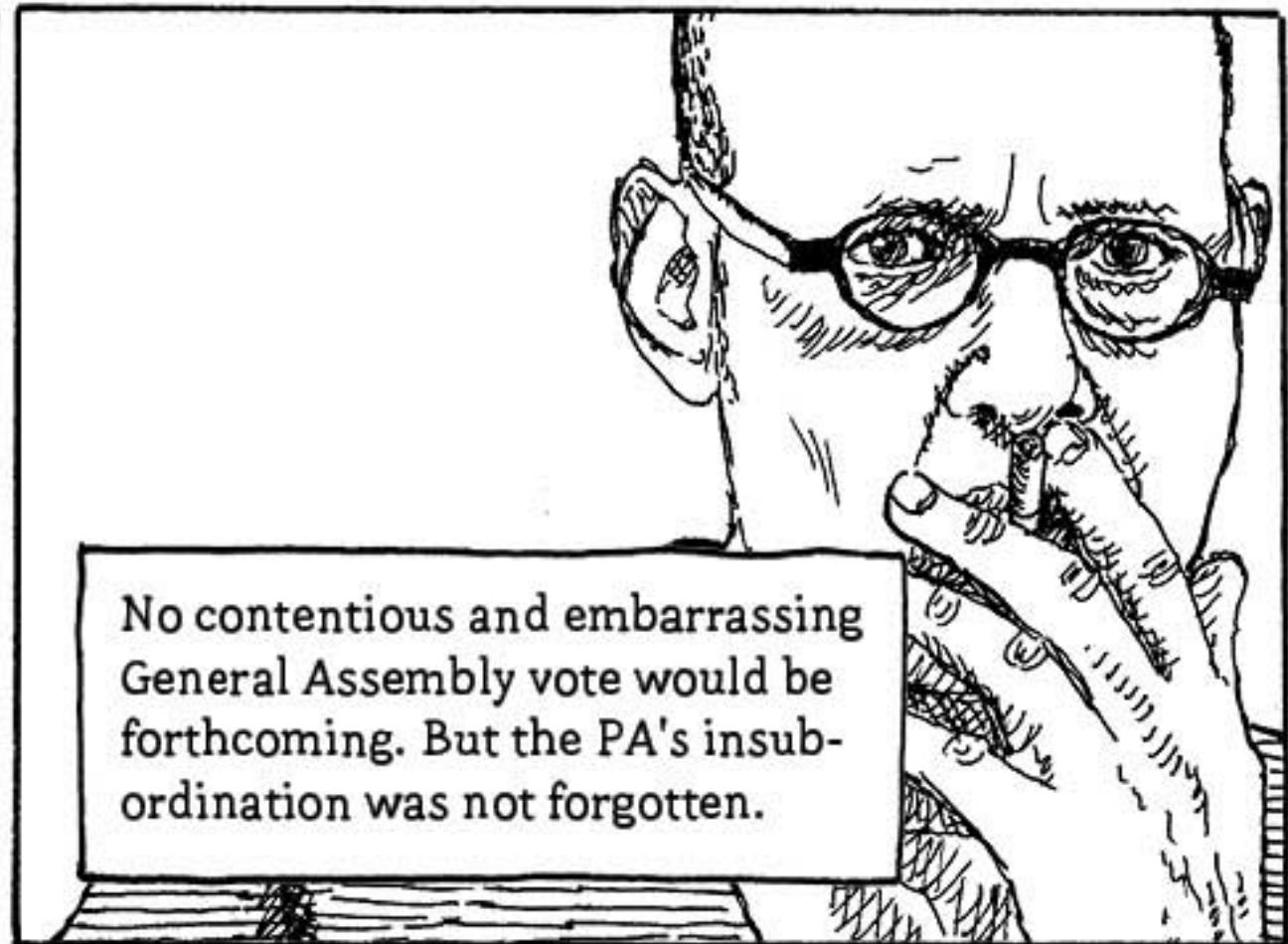
PALESTINE



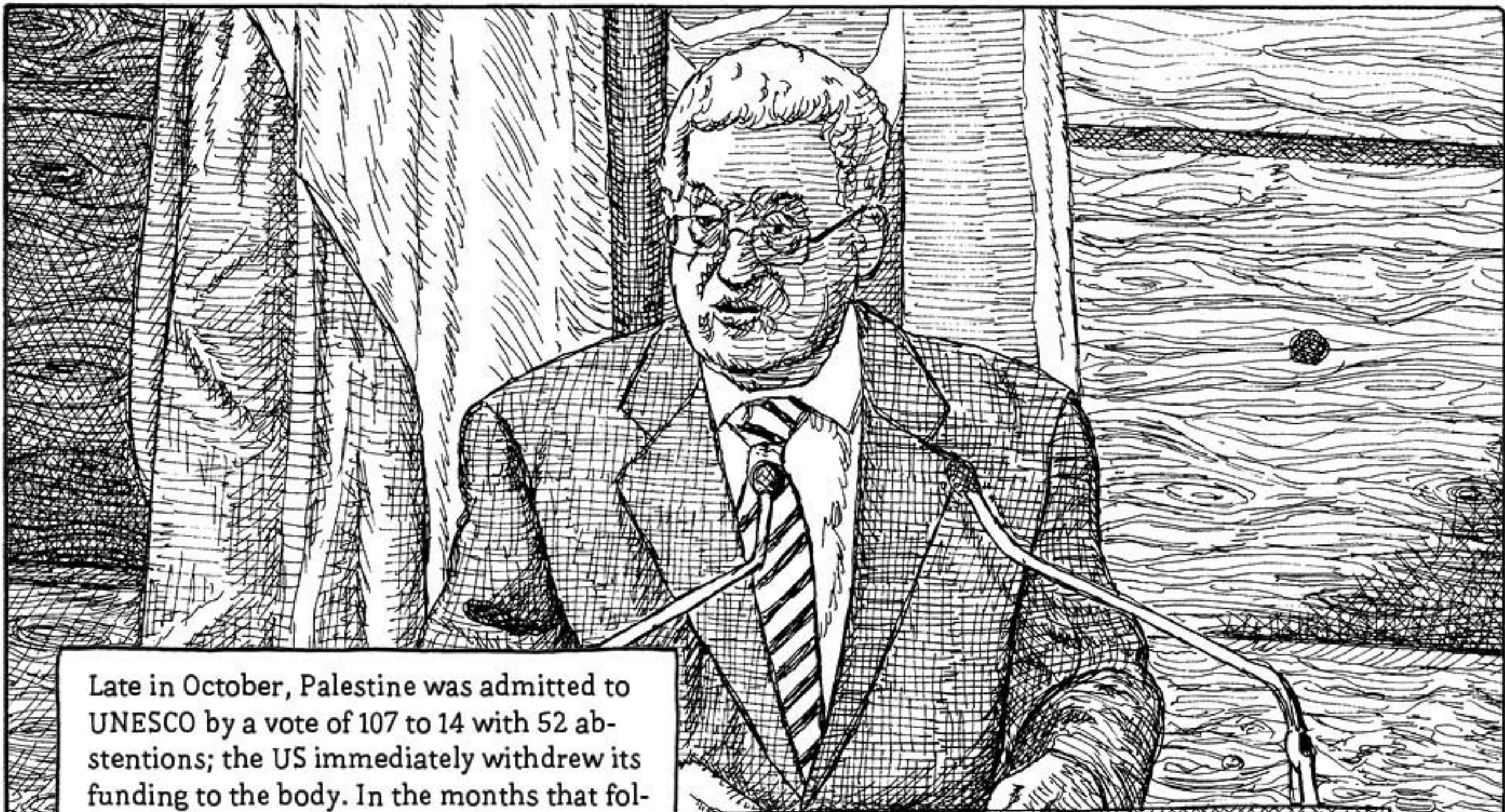
The false crisis that followed involved negotiating a compromise between the PA's need to appear to be sticking to its promise to act unilaterally and the United States' need to avoid vetoing the matter in the Security Council, and thus calling into question President Obama's recent embrace of the Arab world.



In November, two months after Abbas's triumphant speech at the UN, the Security Council quietly issued a statement saying they had decided to shelve the issue.



No contentious and embarrassing General Assembly vote would be forthcoming. But the PA's insubordination was not forgotten.

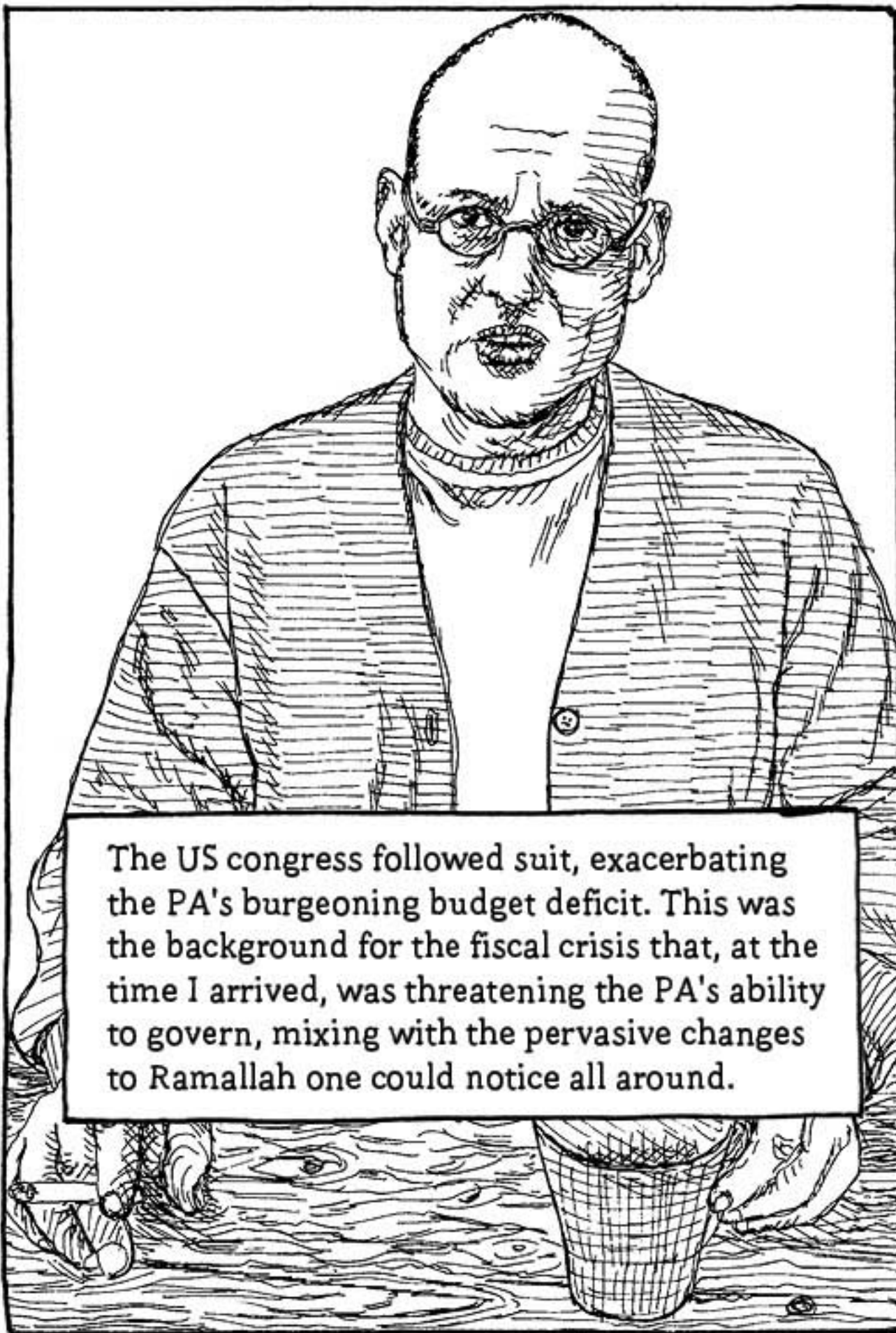


Late in October, Palestine was admitted to UNESCO by a vote of 107 to 14 with 52 abstentions; the US immediately withdrew its funding to the body. In the months that followed, European donors cut aid.

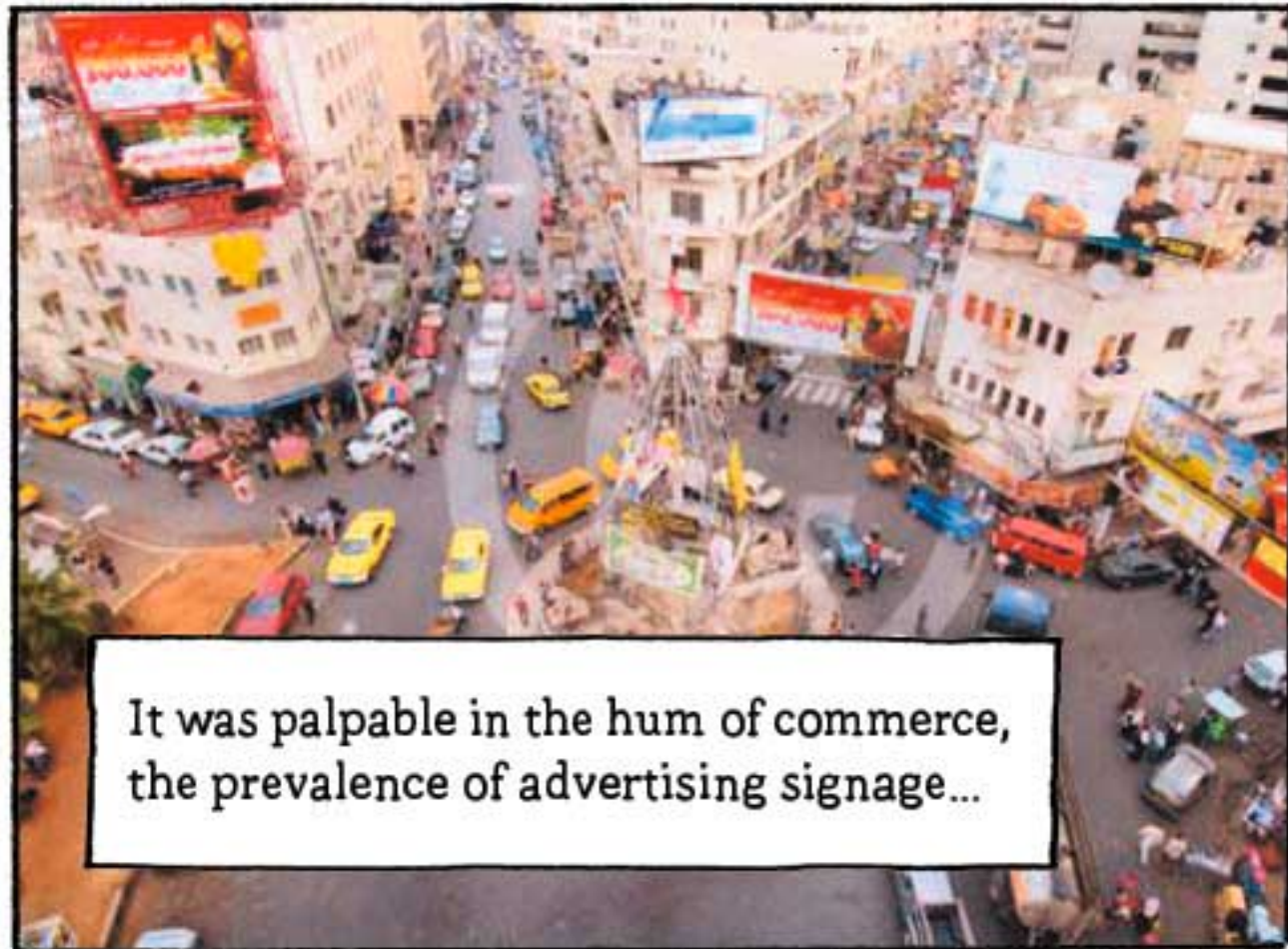


UNESCO

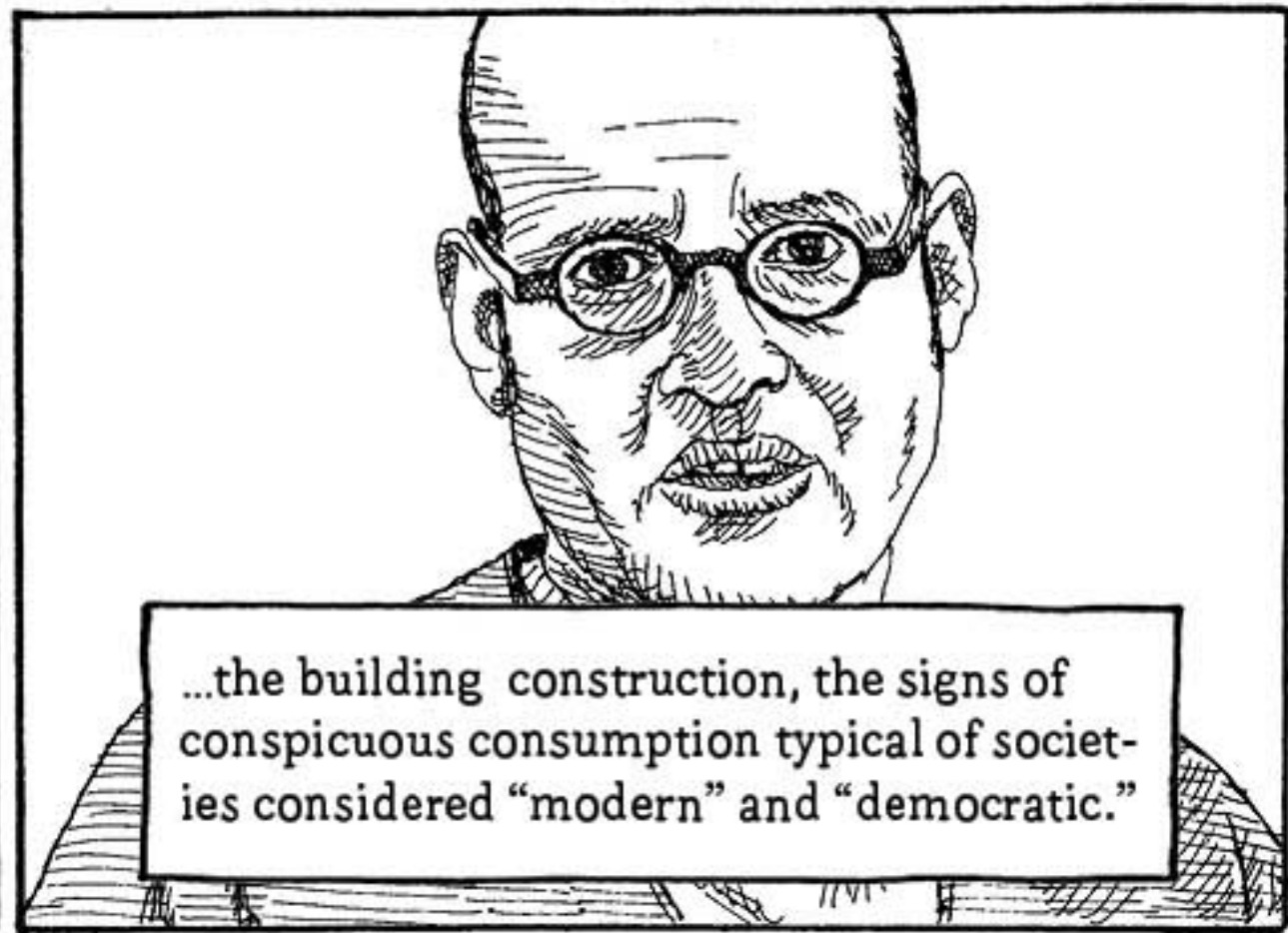
www.unesco.org



The US congress followed suit, exacerbating the PA's burgeoning budget deficit. This was the background for the fiscal crisis that, at the time I arrived, was threatening the PA's ability to govern, mixing with the pervasive changes to Ramallah one could notice all around.



It was palpable in the hum of commerce, the prevalence of advertising signage...

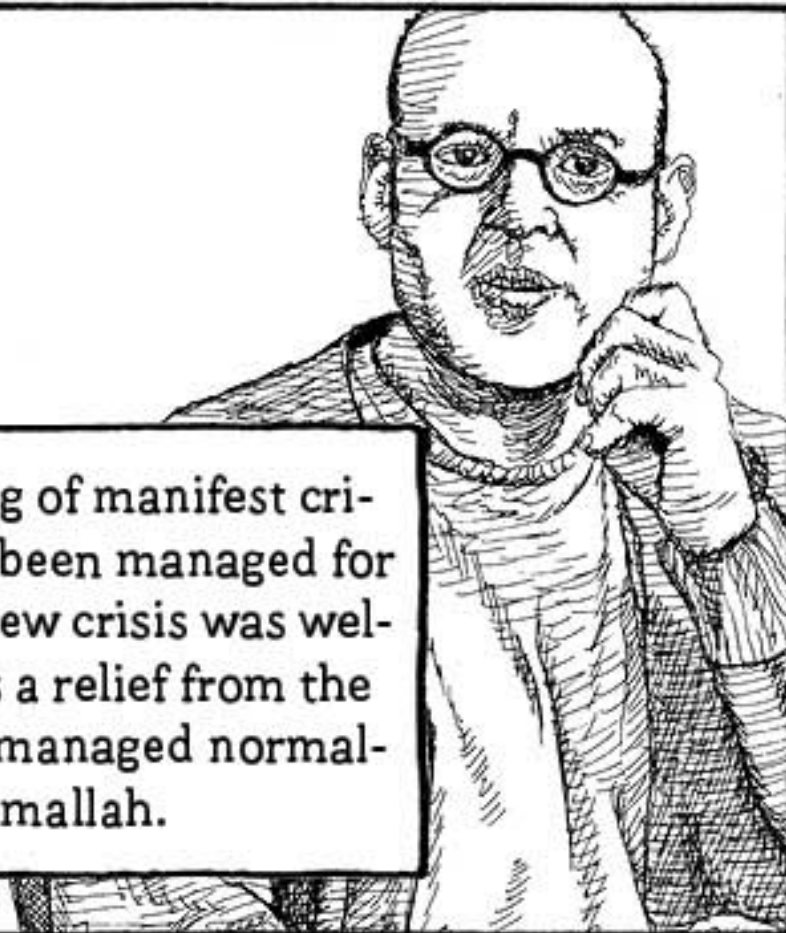


...the building construction, the signs of conspicuous consumption typical of societies considered "modern" and "democratic."

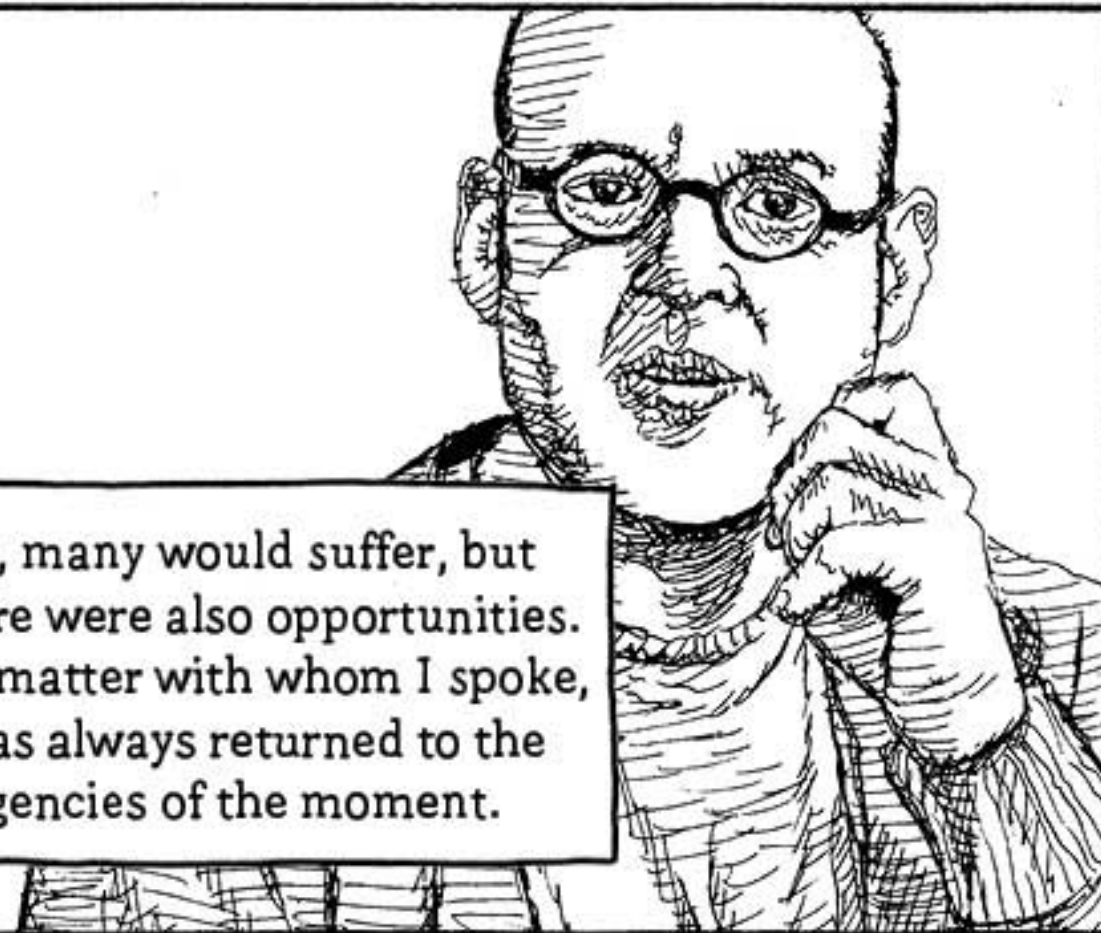
There was a Kentucky Fried Chicken and a Pizza Hut where last summer a friend and I had walked in the ruins of an old villa.



There was a feeling of manifest crisis, but crisis had been managed for so long that this new crisis was welcomed by some as a relief from the customary hyper-managed normalcy of post-Oslo Ramallah.




Yes, many would suffer, but there were also opportunities. No matter with whom I spoke, I was always returned to the exigencies of the moment.



PRELUDE





Toufic Hadad, King George Hotel,
East Jerusalem, February 2012:

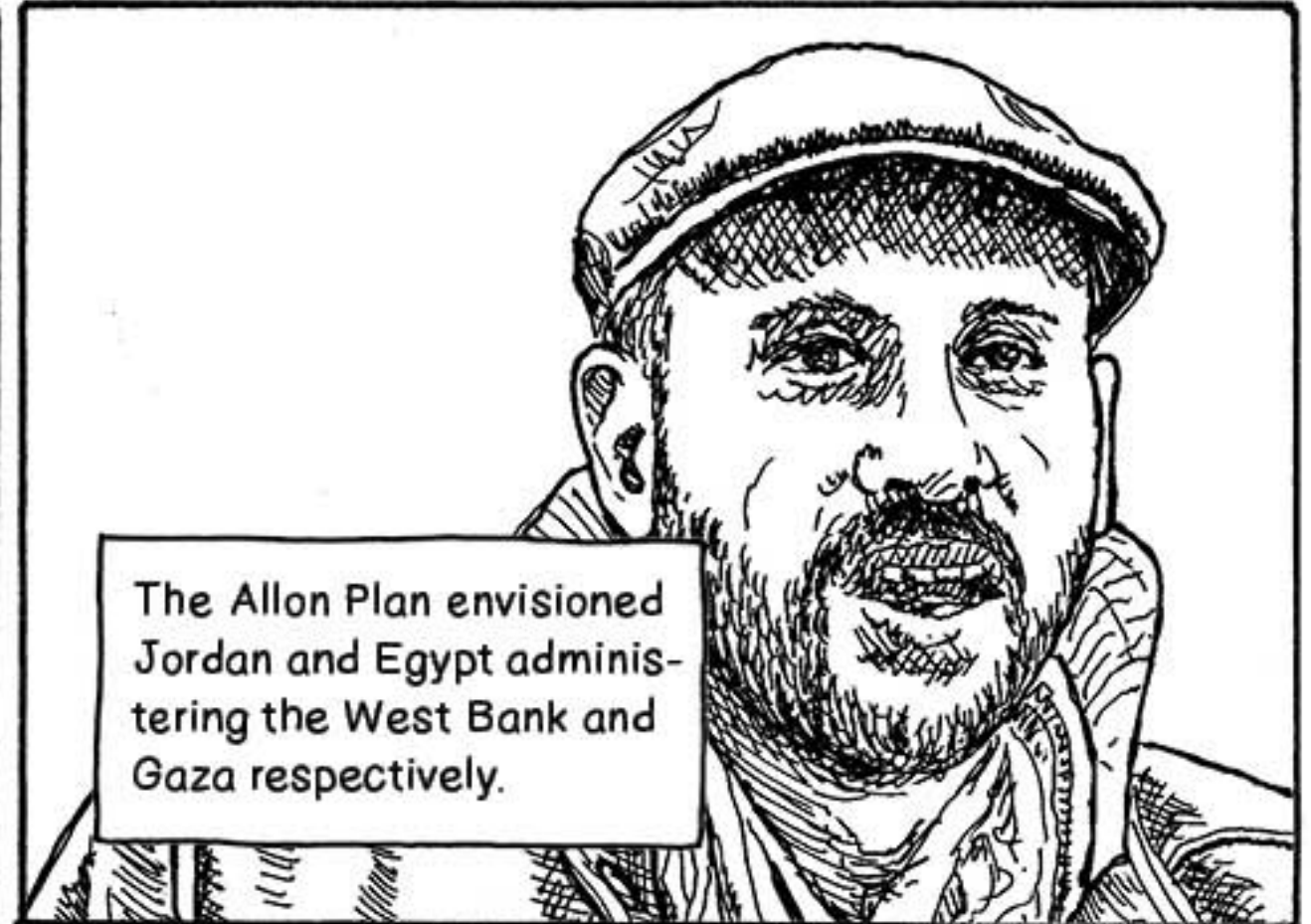
In 1967, one month after the occupa-
tion took place, Moshe Dayan, who was
the Minister of Defense, outlined the
basic parameters of how Israel would
deal with the West Bank and Gaza.



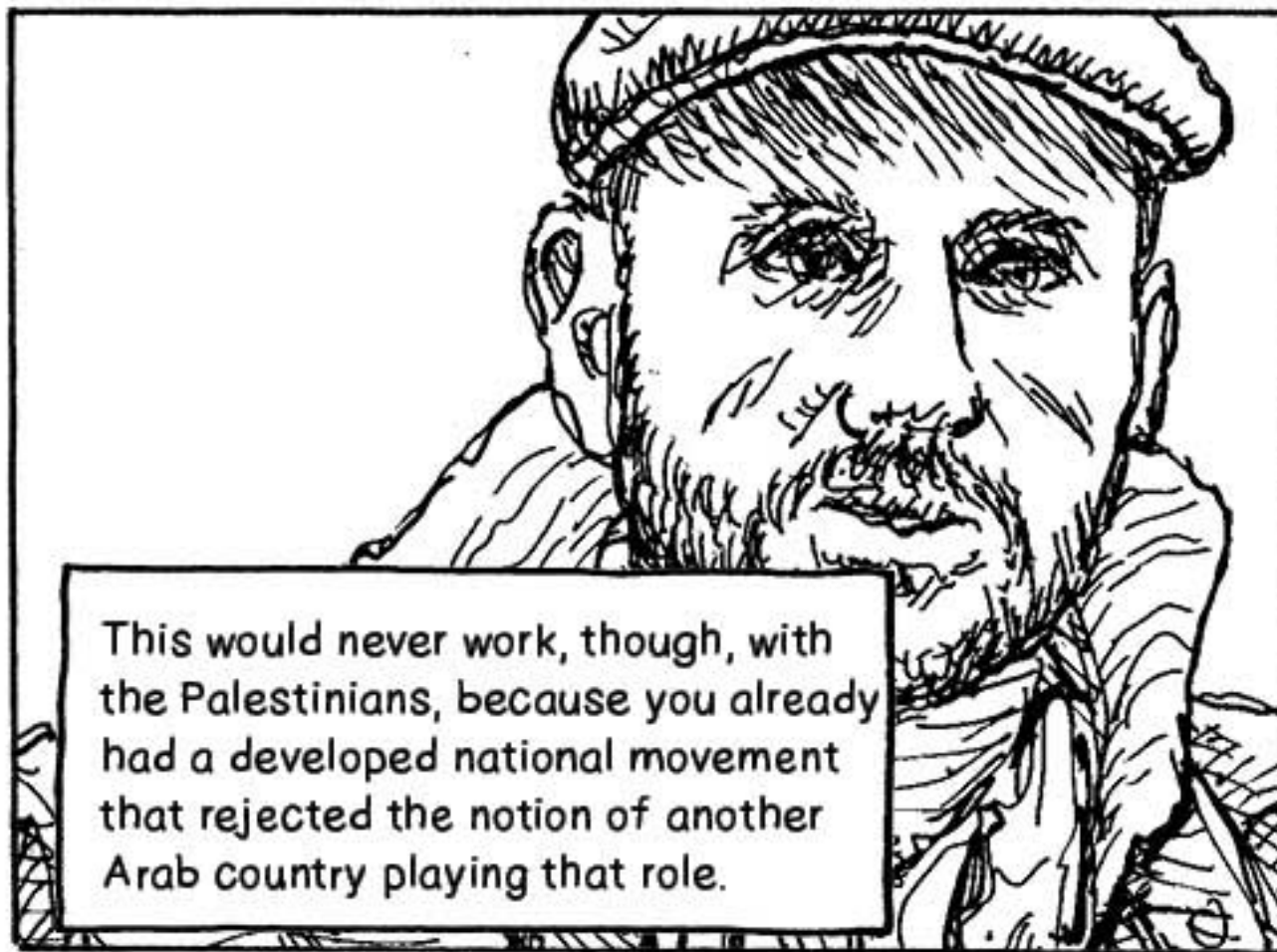
The basic idea was this: he said, "We want these lands, we don't want to give them back. We want the resources on them—we have this problem with the Palestinians, what are we going to do about it? Well, we're going to try to create some form of autonomy and have somebody else administer it."



This is known as the Allon Plan.



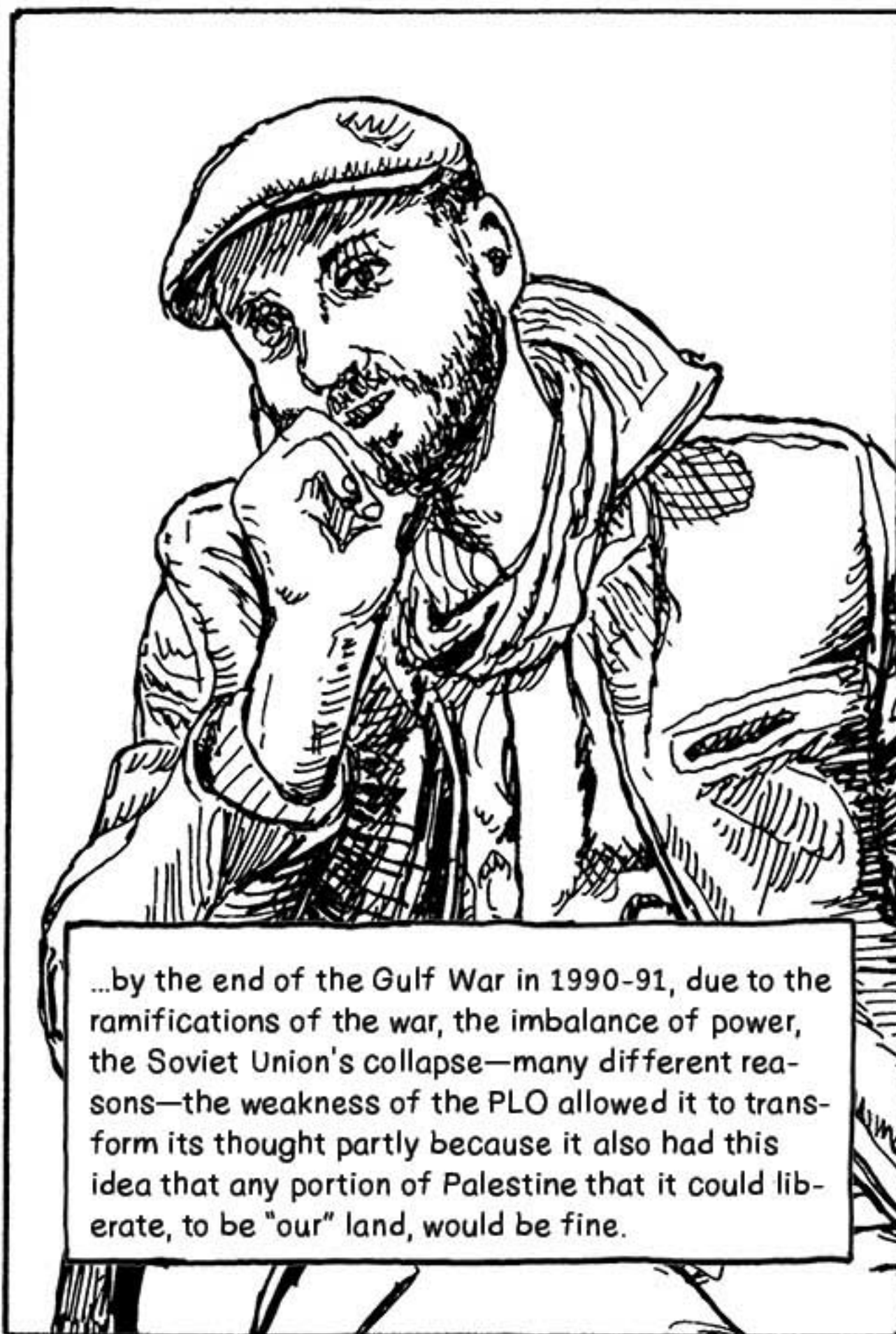
The Allon Plan envisioned Jordan and Egypt administering the West Bank and Gaza respectively.



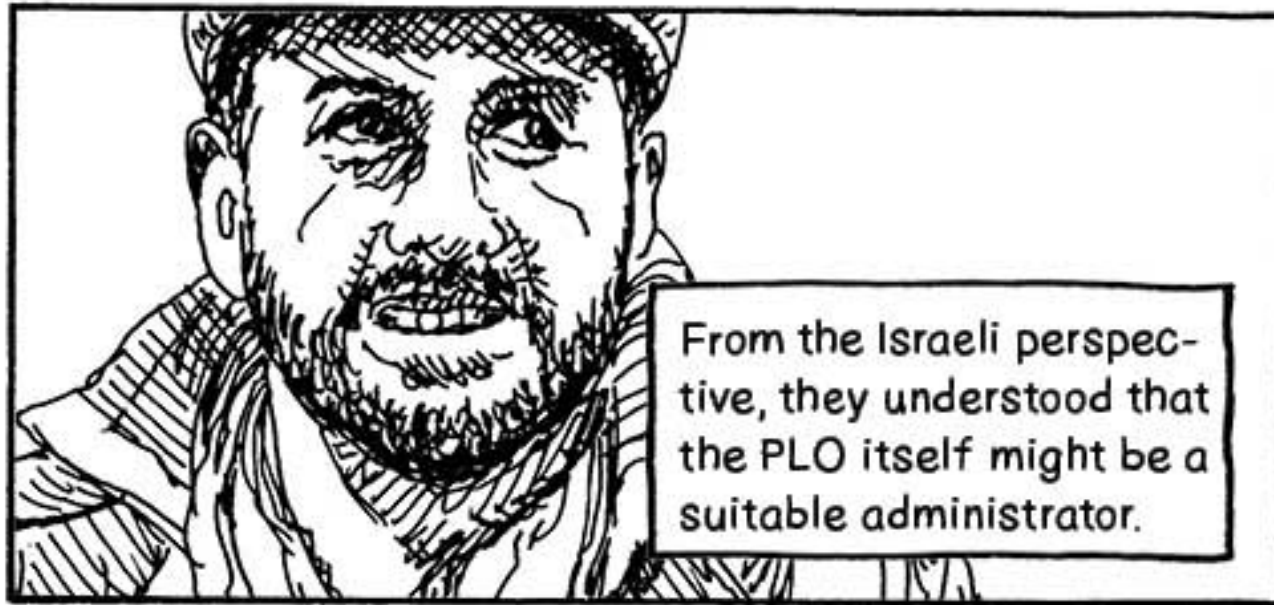
This would never work, though, with the Palestinians, because you already had a developed national movement that rejected the notion of another Arab country playing that role.



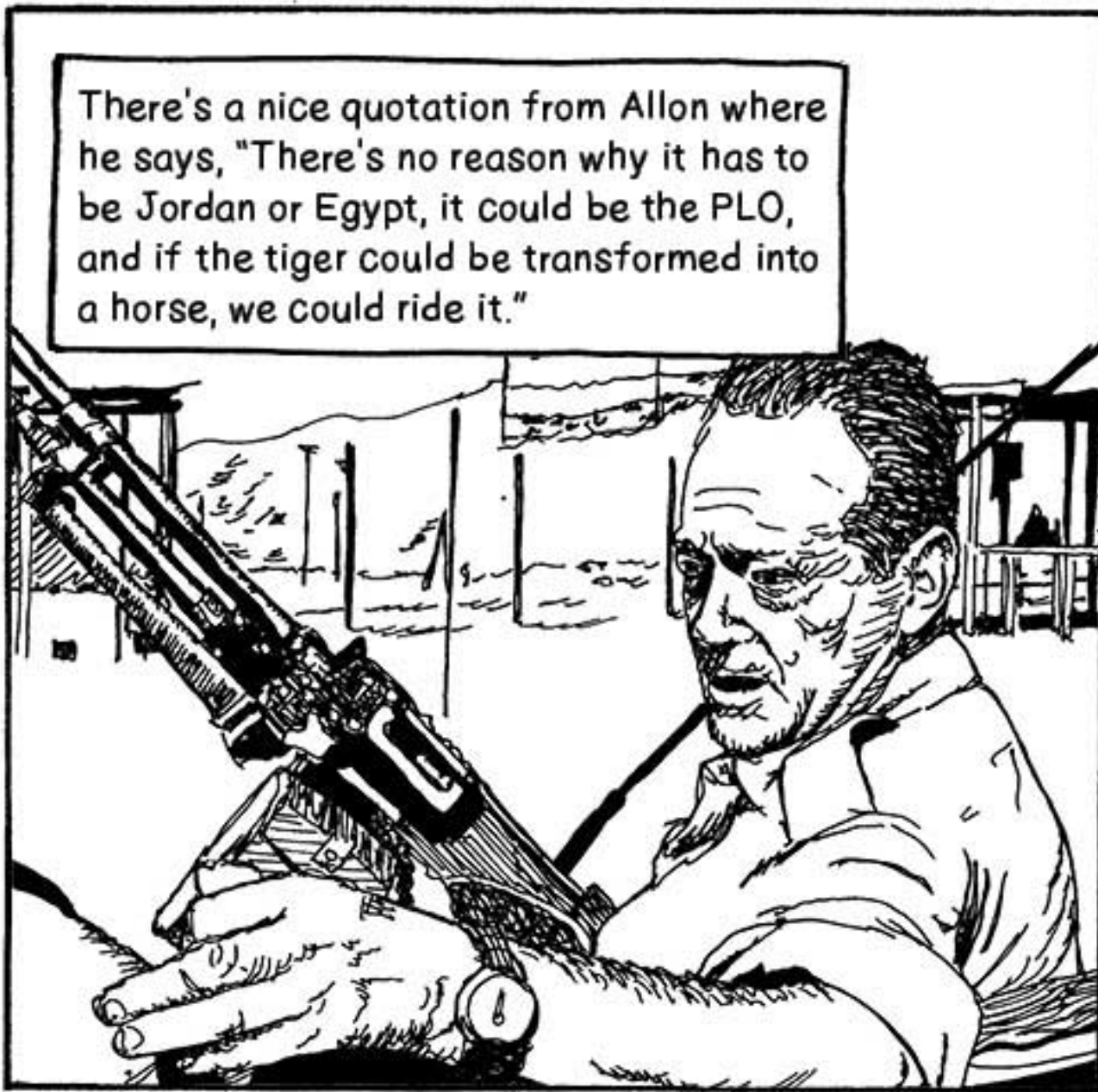
What happened is this...



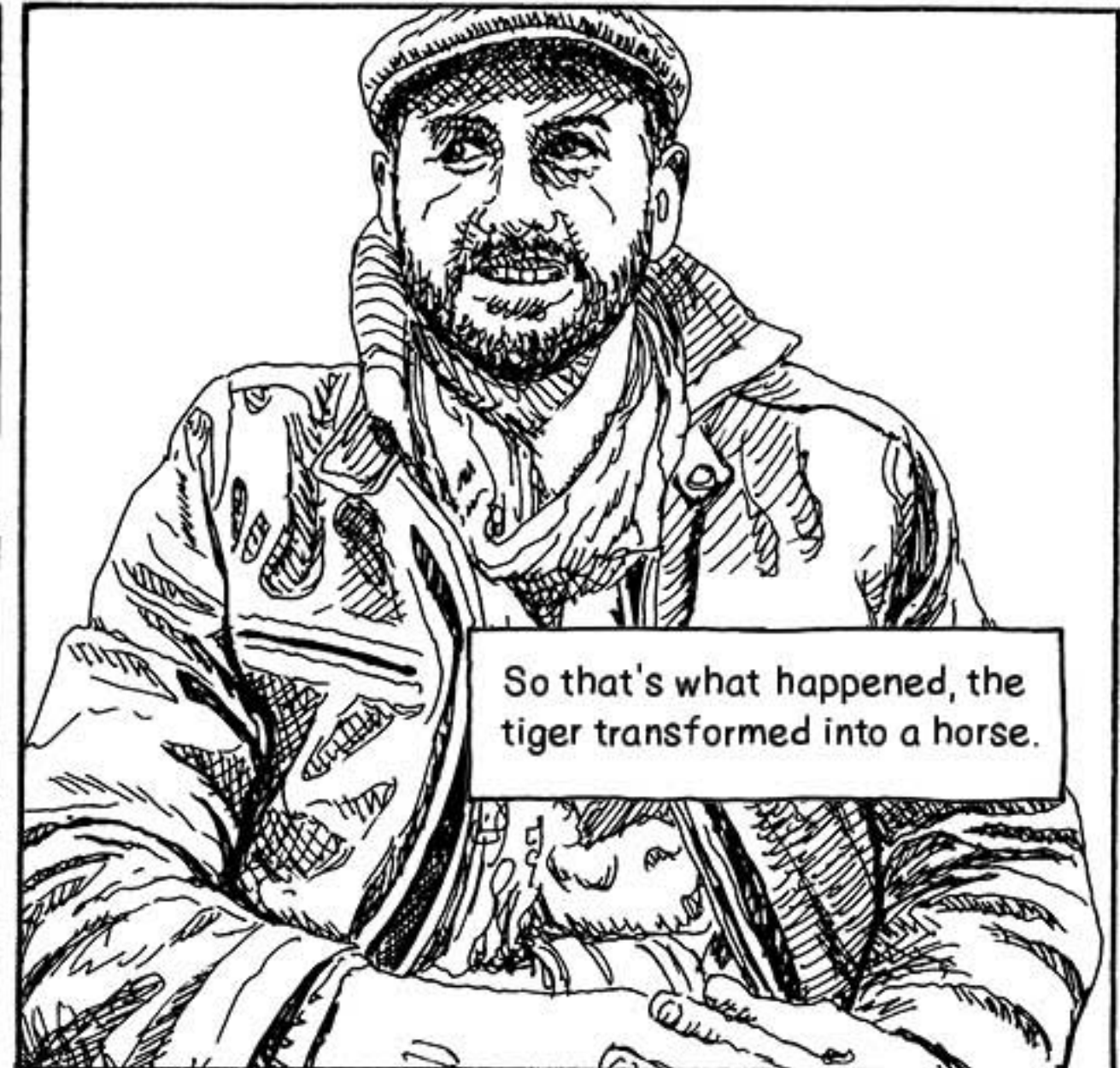
...by the end of the Gulf War in 1990-91, due to the ramifications of the war, the imbalance of power, the Soviet Union's collapse—many different reasons—the weakness of the PLO allowed it to transform its thought partly because it also had this idea that any portion of Palestine that it could liberate, to be "our" land, would be fine.



From the Israeli perspective, they understood that the PLO itself might be a suitable administrator.



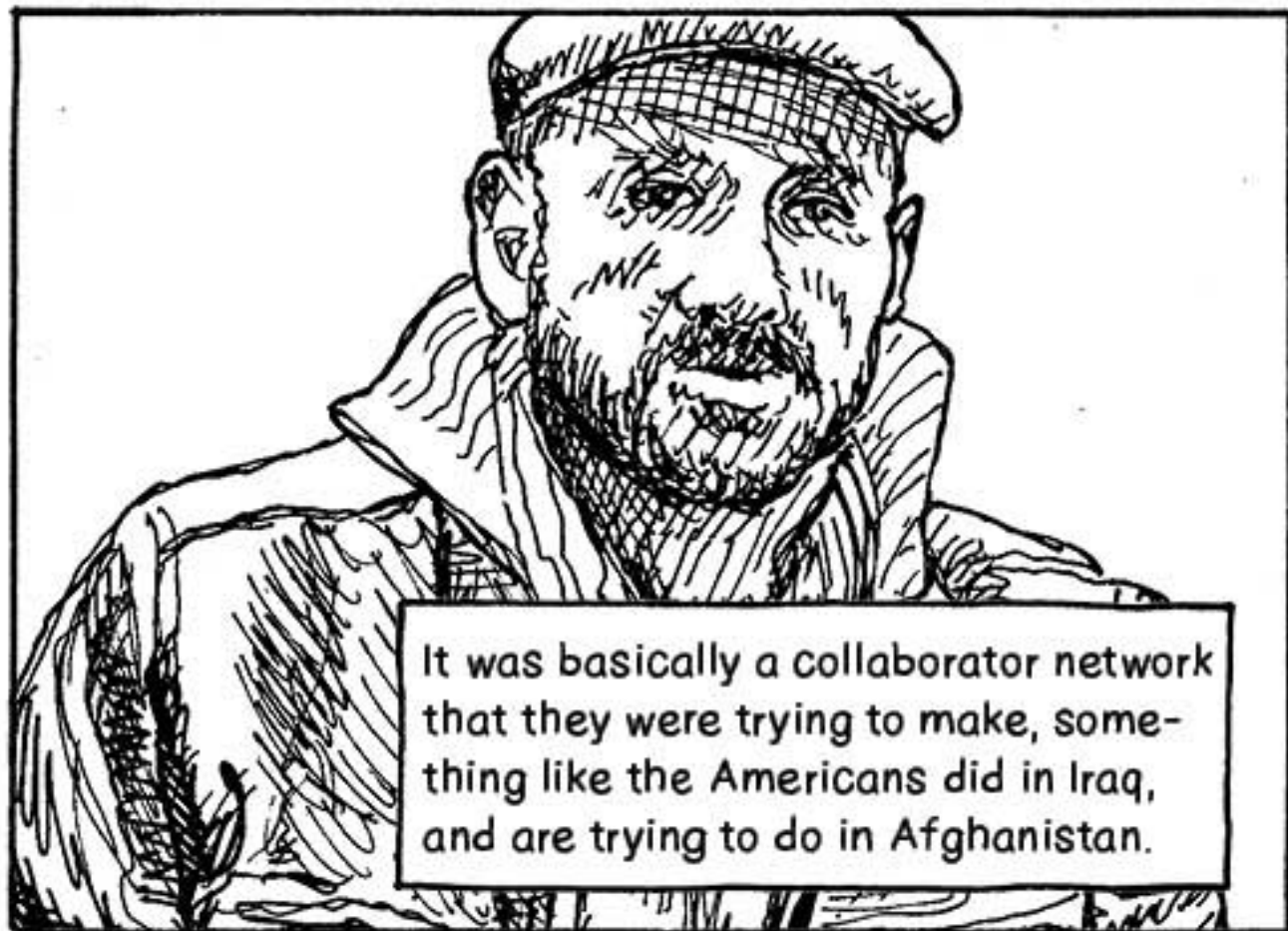
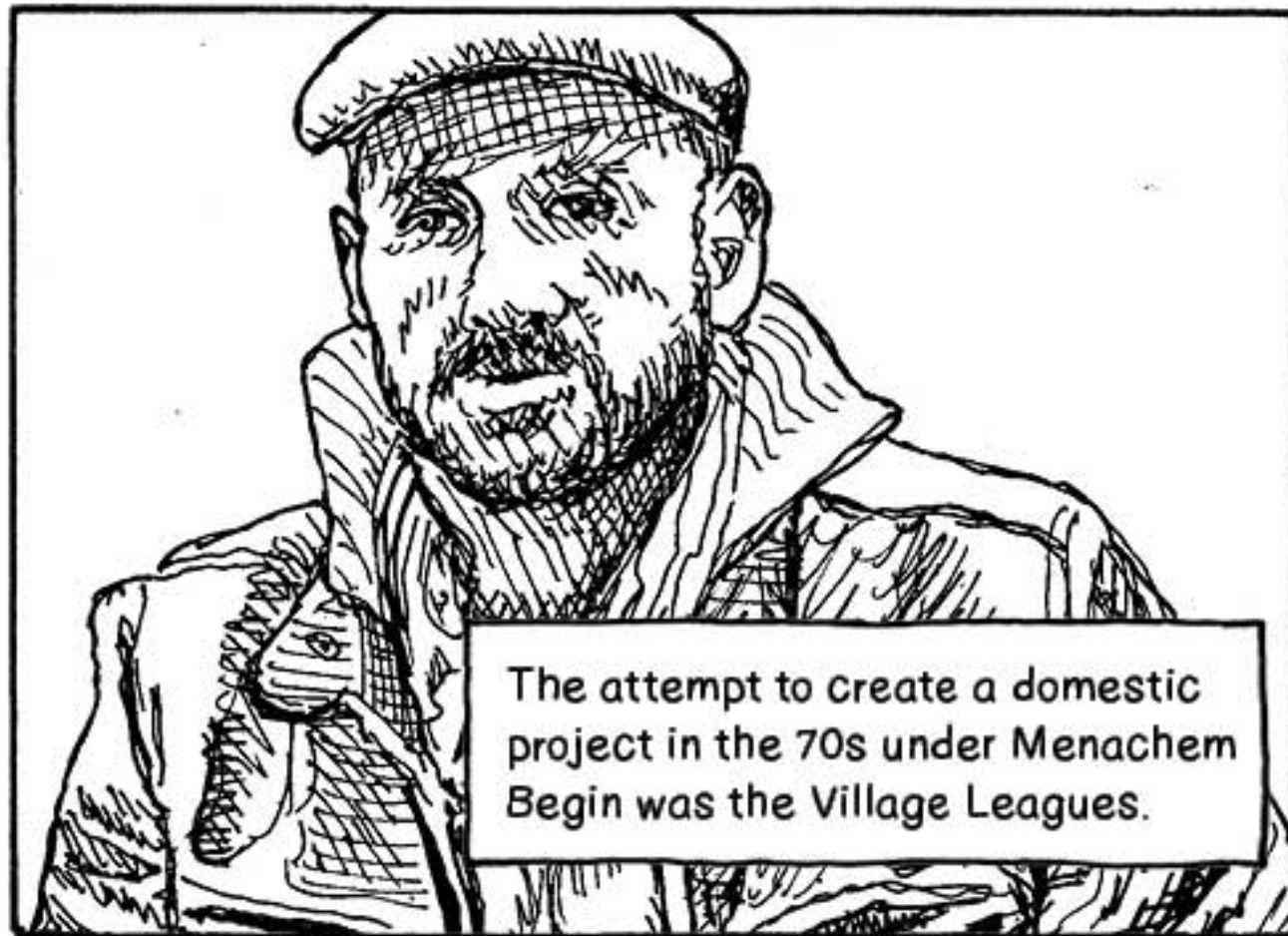
There's a nice quotation from Allon where he says, "There's no reason why it has to be Jordan or Egypt, it could be the PLO, and if the tiger could be transformed into a horse, we could ride it."

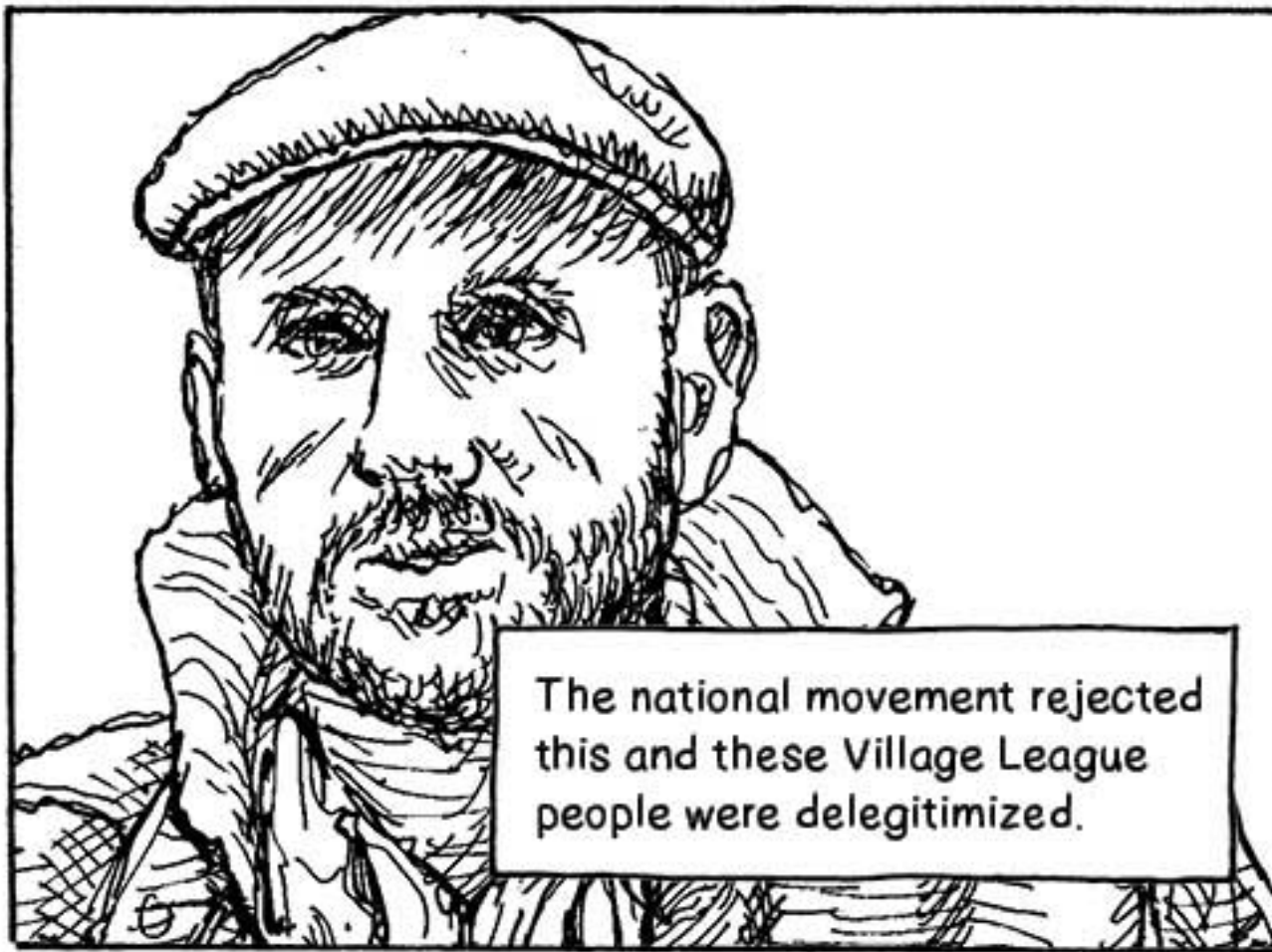


So that's what happened, the tiger transformed into a horse.



Its radicalism was defanged through this long process.

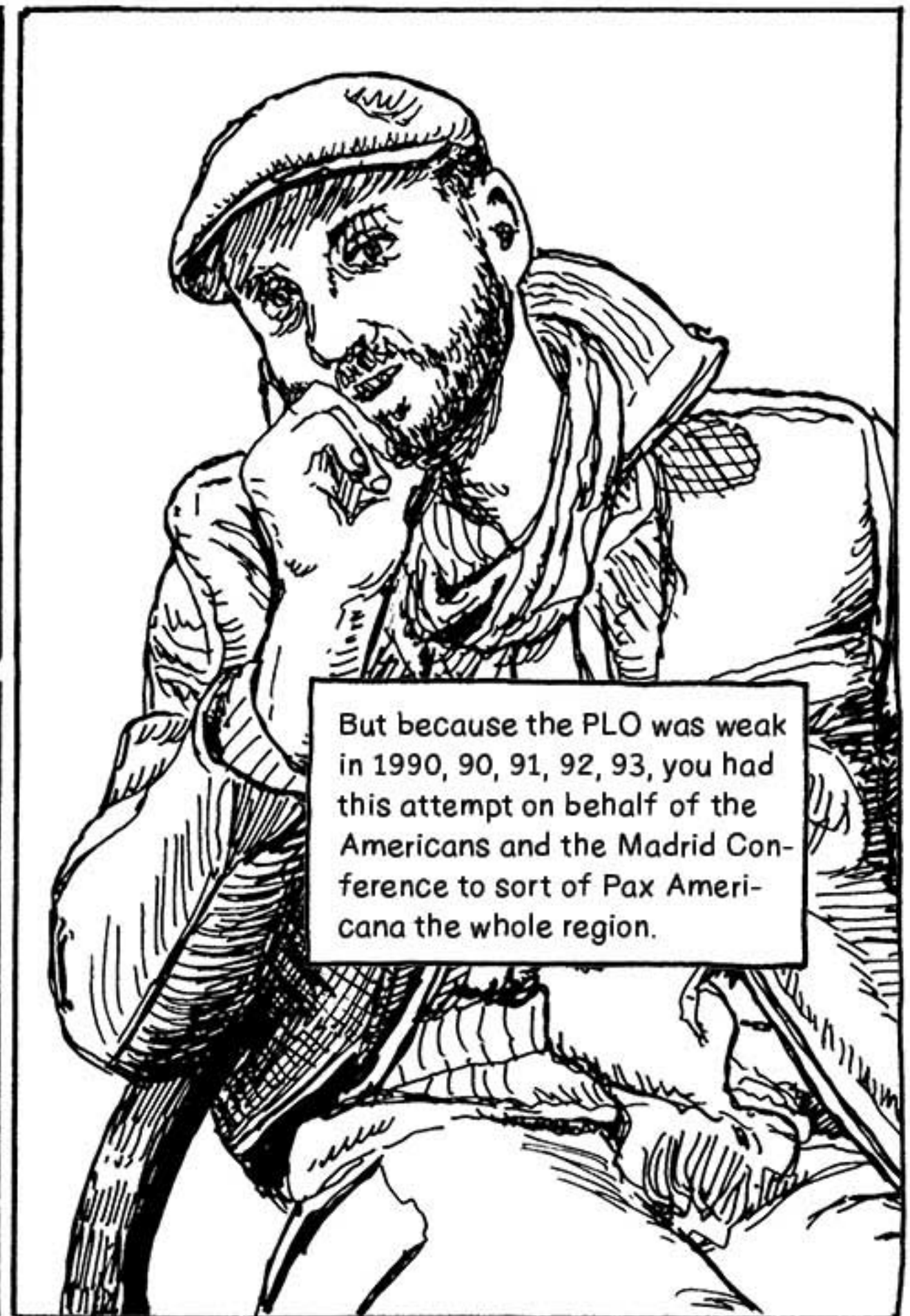




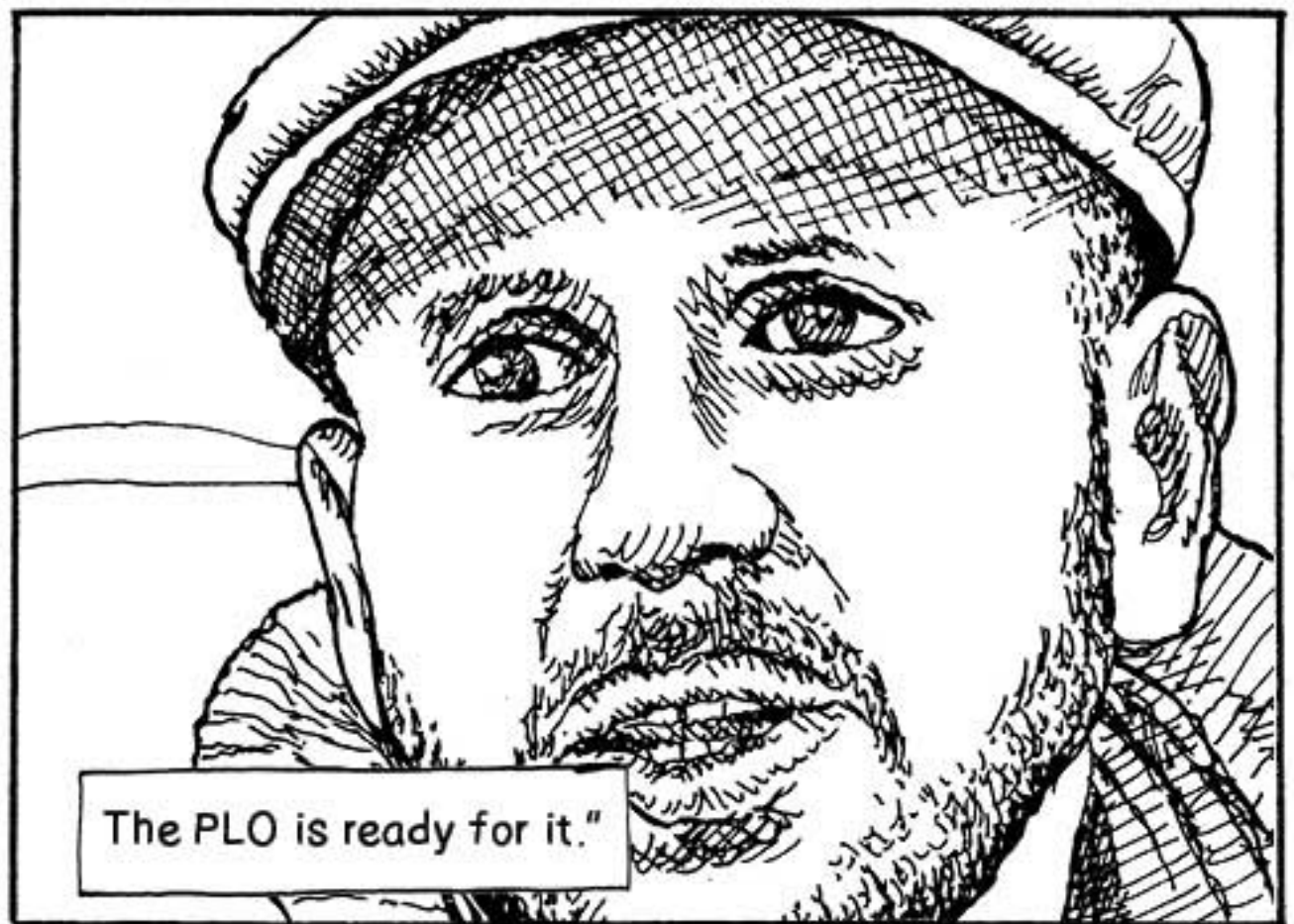
The national movement rejected this and these Village League people were delegitimized.



So that project failed.

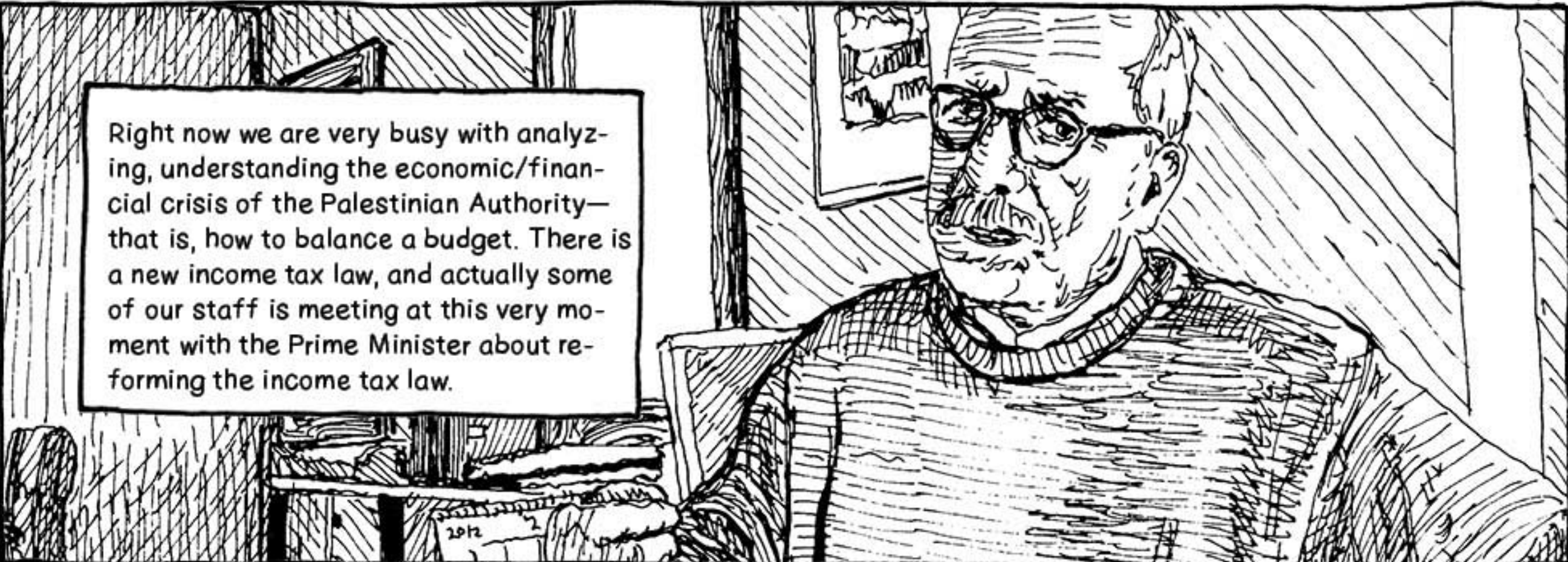


But because the PLO was weak in 1990, 90, 91, 92, 93, you had this attempt on behalf of the Americans and the Madrid Conference to sort of Pax Americana the whole region.

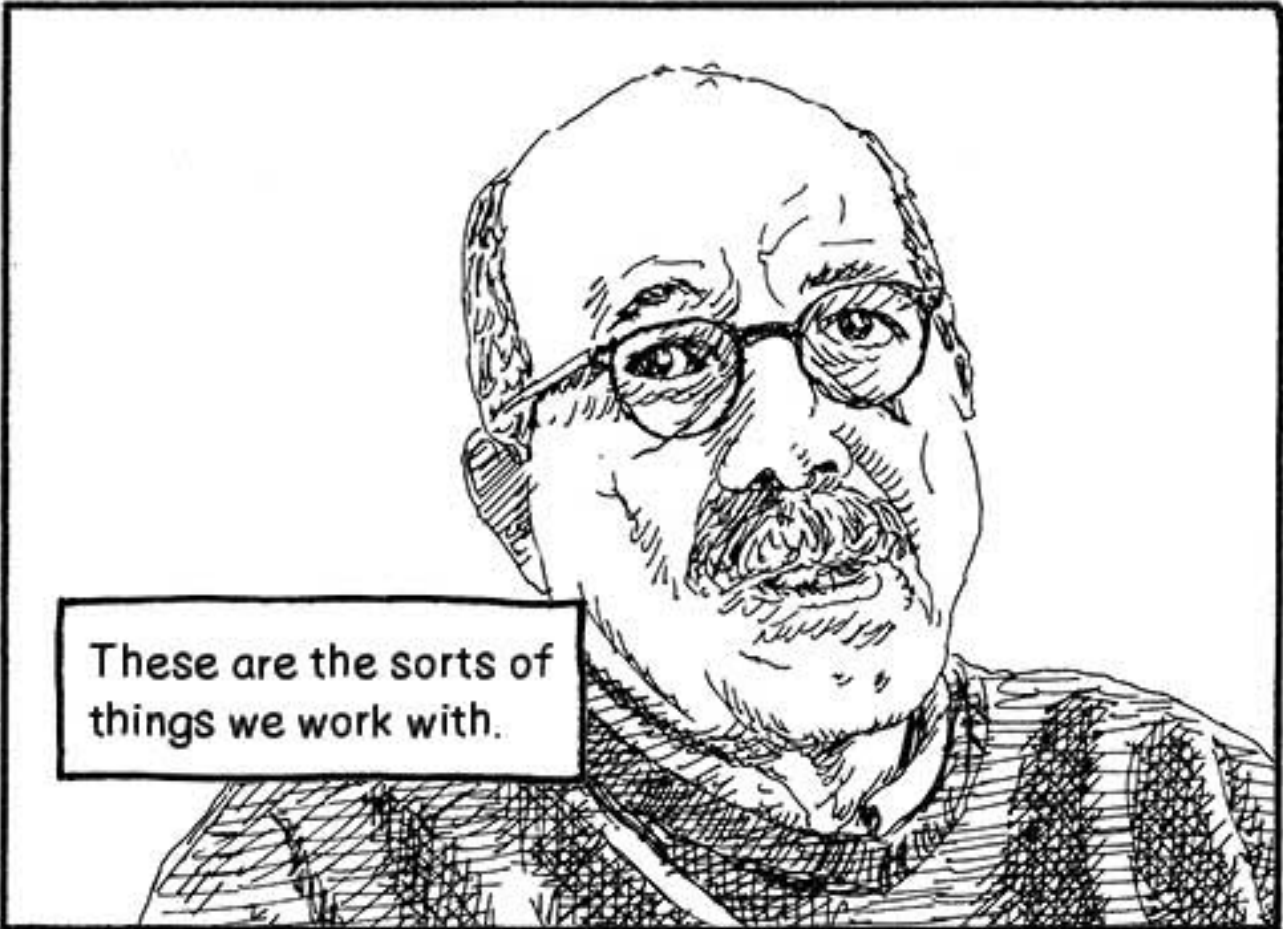


Nu'man Kanafani, in the offices of MAS
(Palestine Economic Policy Research
Institute), Ramallah, February 2012:

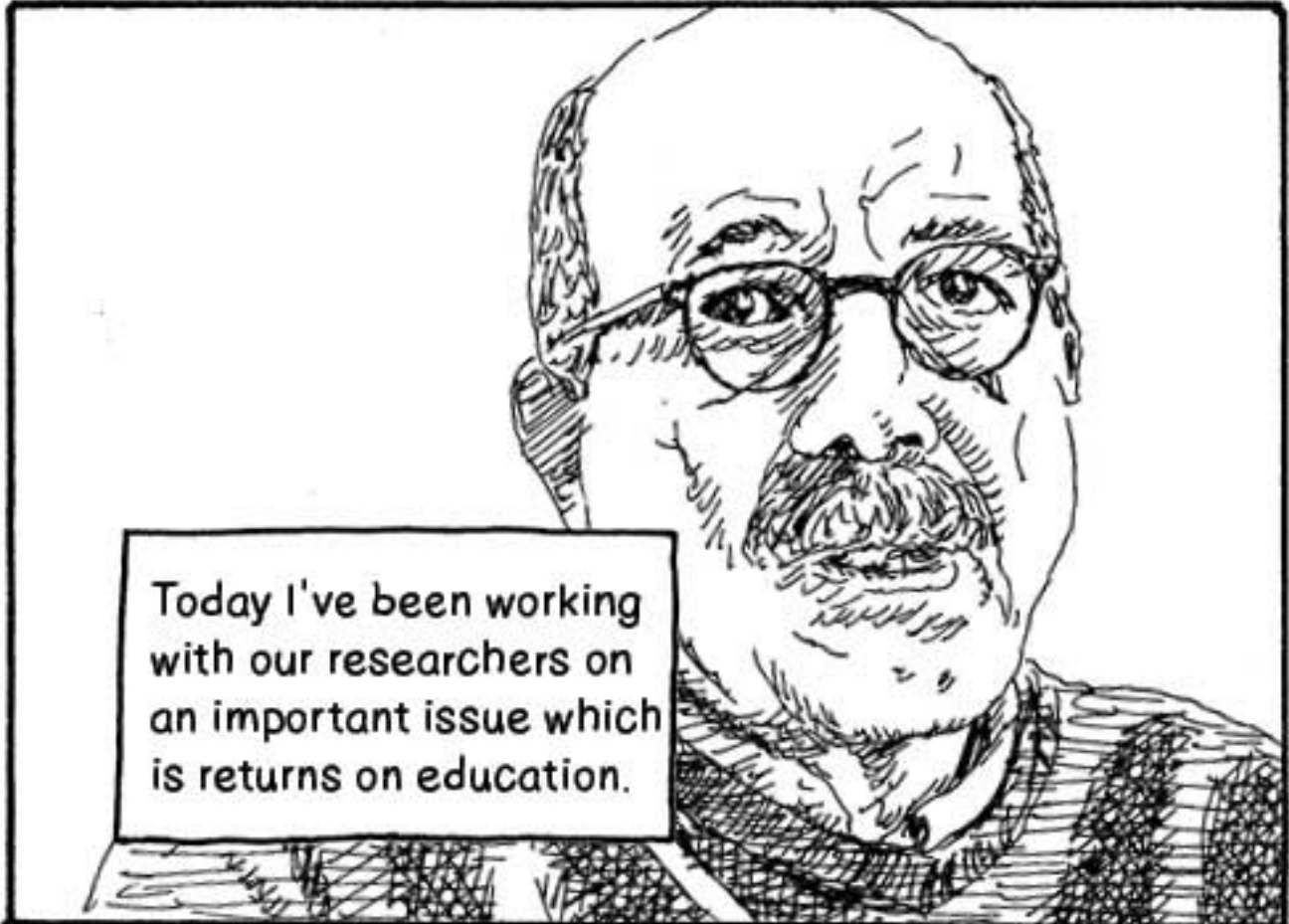
I'm an economist, and what we do
here is economic research; policy
issues related to the performance
of the economy, the relation with
Israel, the potential for developing
the economy.

A black and white line drawing of a man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a sweater, sitting at a desk in an office. He is looking towards the left. A speech bubble is positioned to his left. On the desk in front of him, there is a calendar page showing the date '2012' and the number '2'.

Right now we are very busy with analyzing, understanding the economic/financial crisis of the Palestinian Authority—that is, how to balance a budget. There is a new income tax law, and actually some of our staff is meeting at this very moment with the Prime Minister about reforming the income tax law.

A close-up black and white line drawing of the man's face. He is wearing glasses and has a mustache. A speech bubble is positioned to his left.

These are the sorts of things we work with.

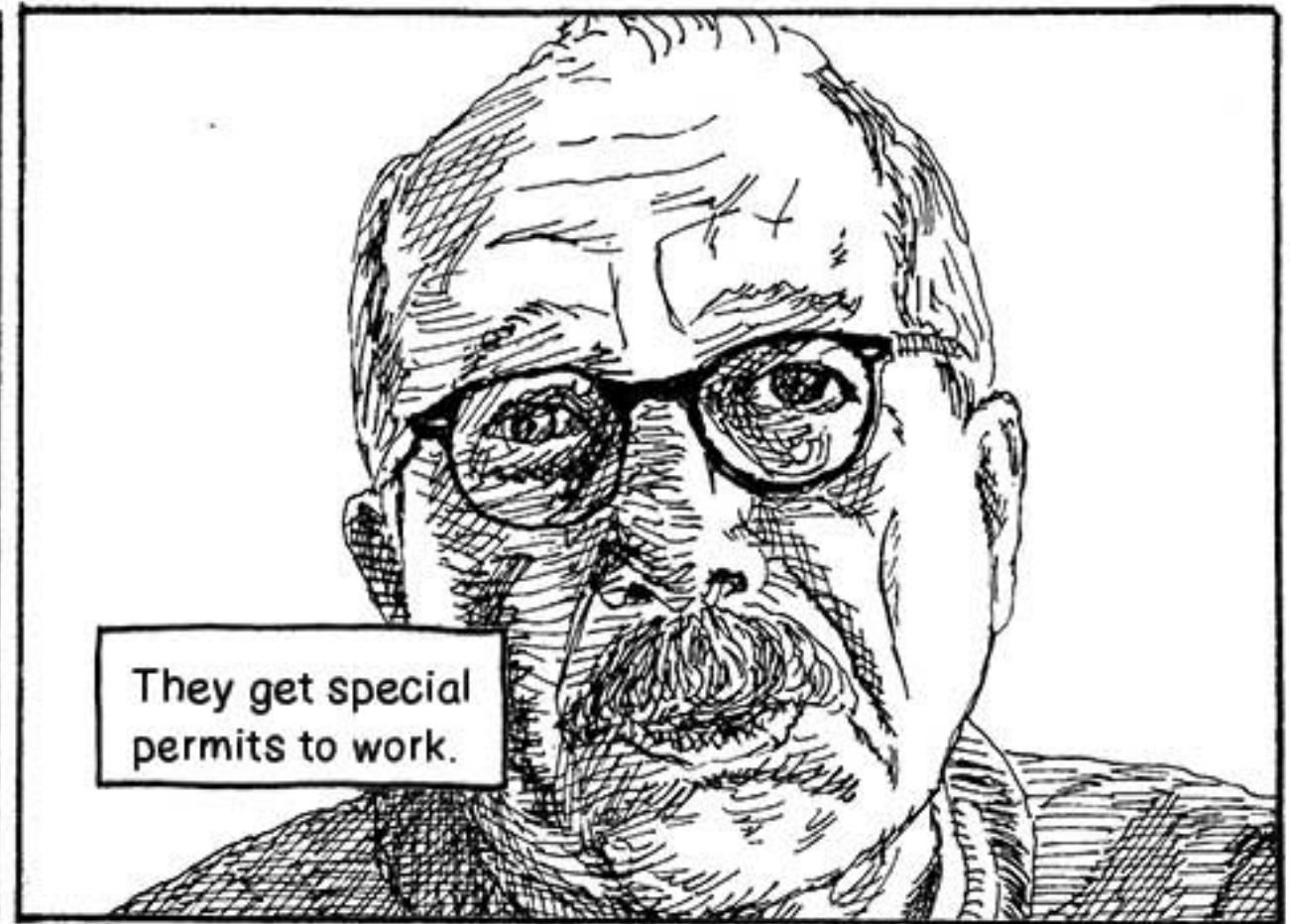
A close-up black and white line drawing of the man's face. He is wearing glasses and has a mustache. A speech bubble is positioned to his left.

Today I've been working with our researchers on an important issue which is returns on education.

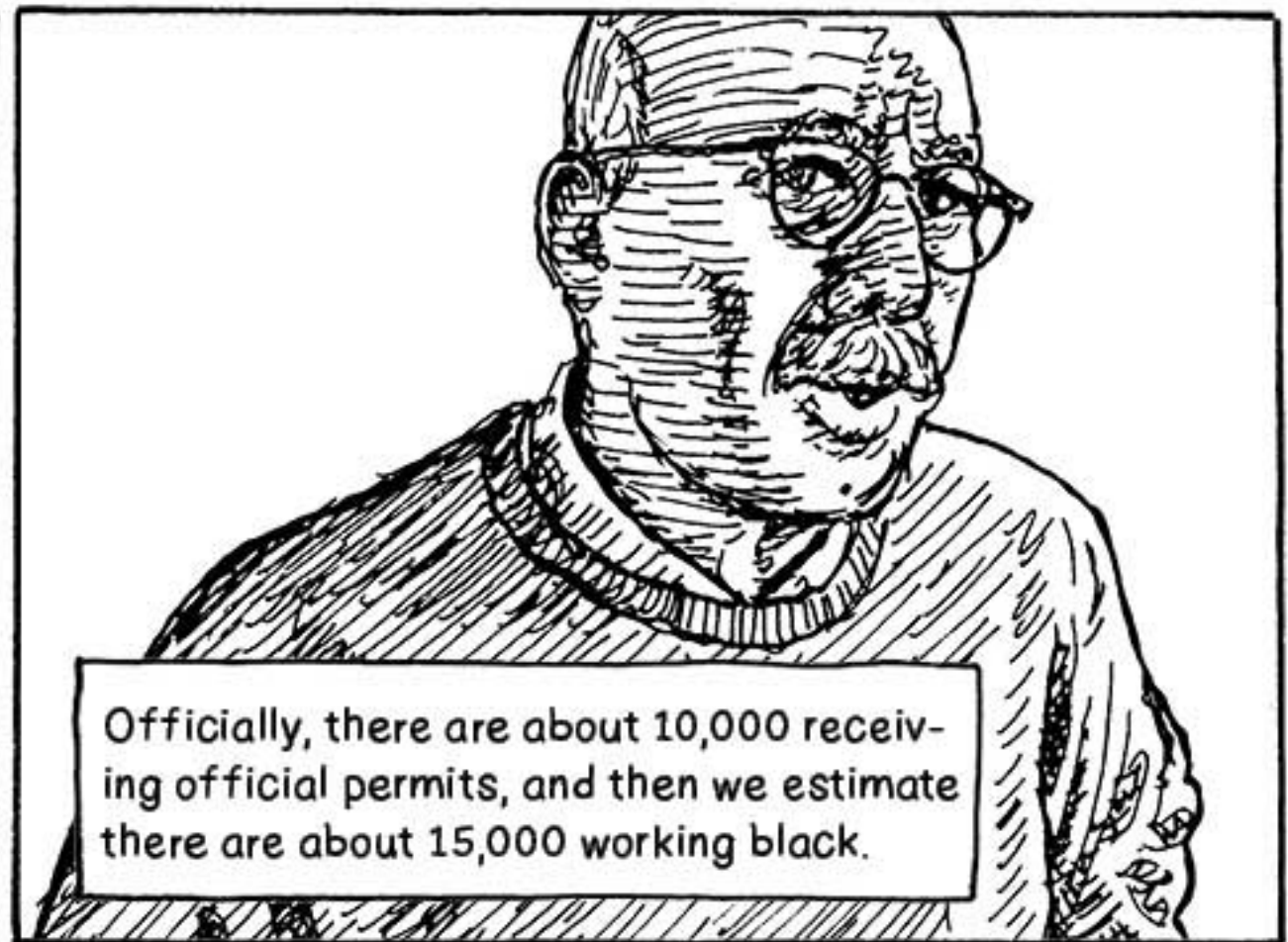
Because of our proximity to the Israeli market, there are serious distortions on the returns on education because non-skilled labor can go and work in Israel and earn relatively higher wages than university graduates receive here in Ramallah. And this distorts the labor market and reduces the returns on education.

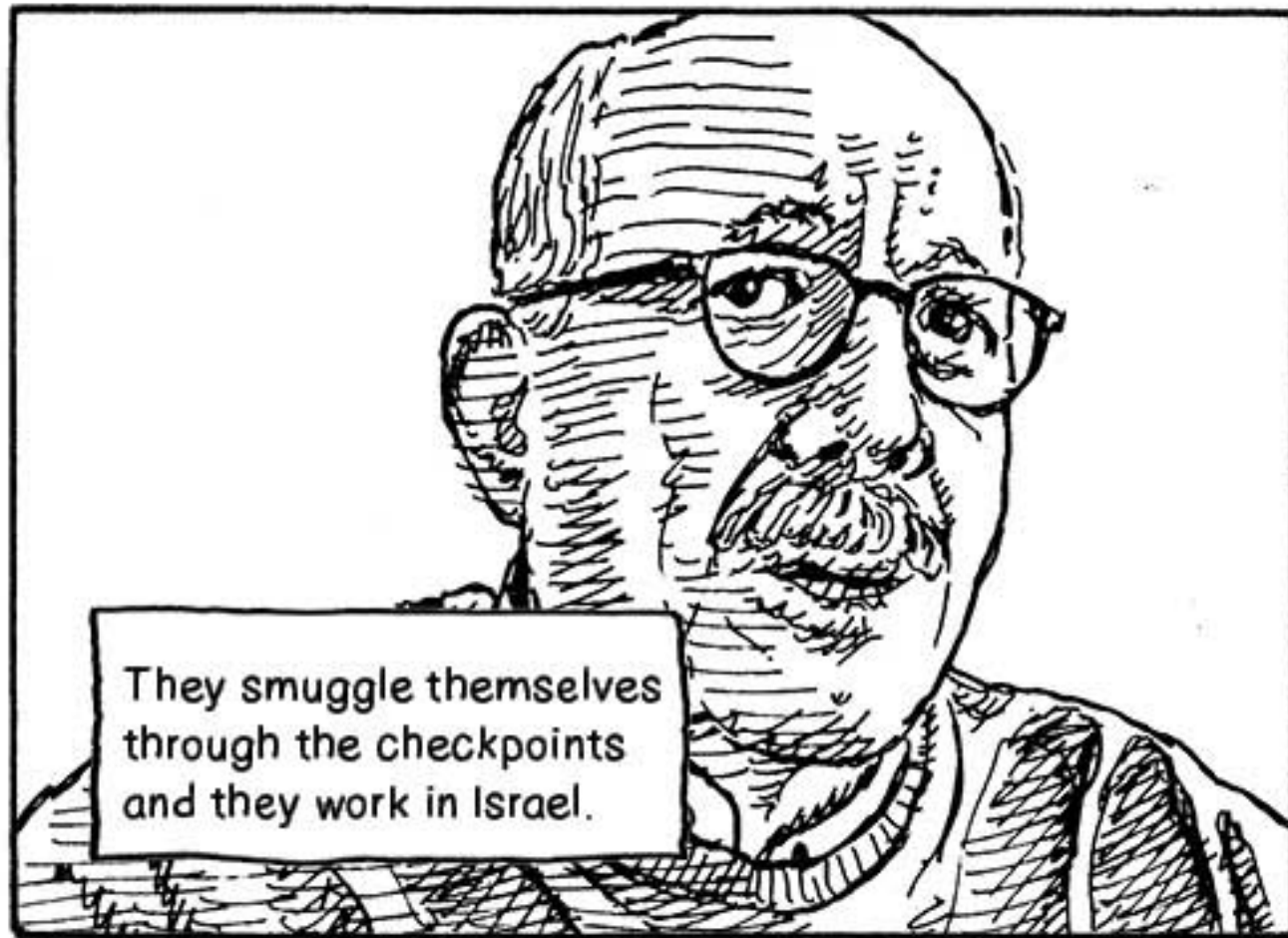


They get special permits to work.

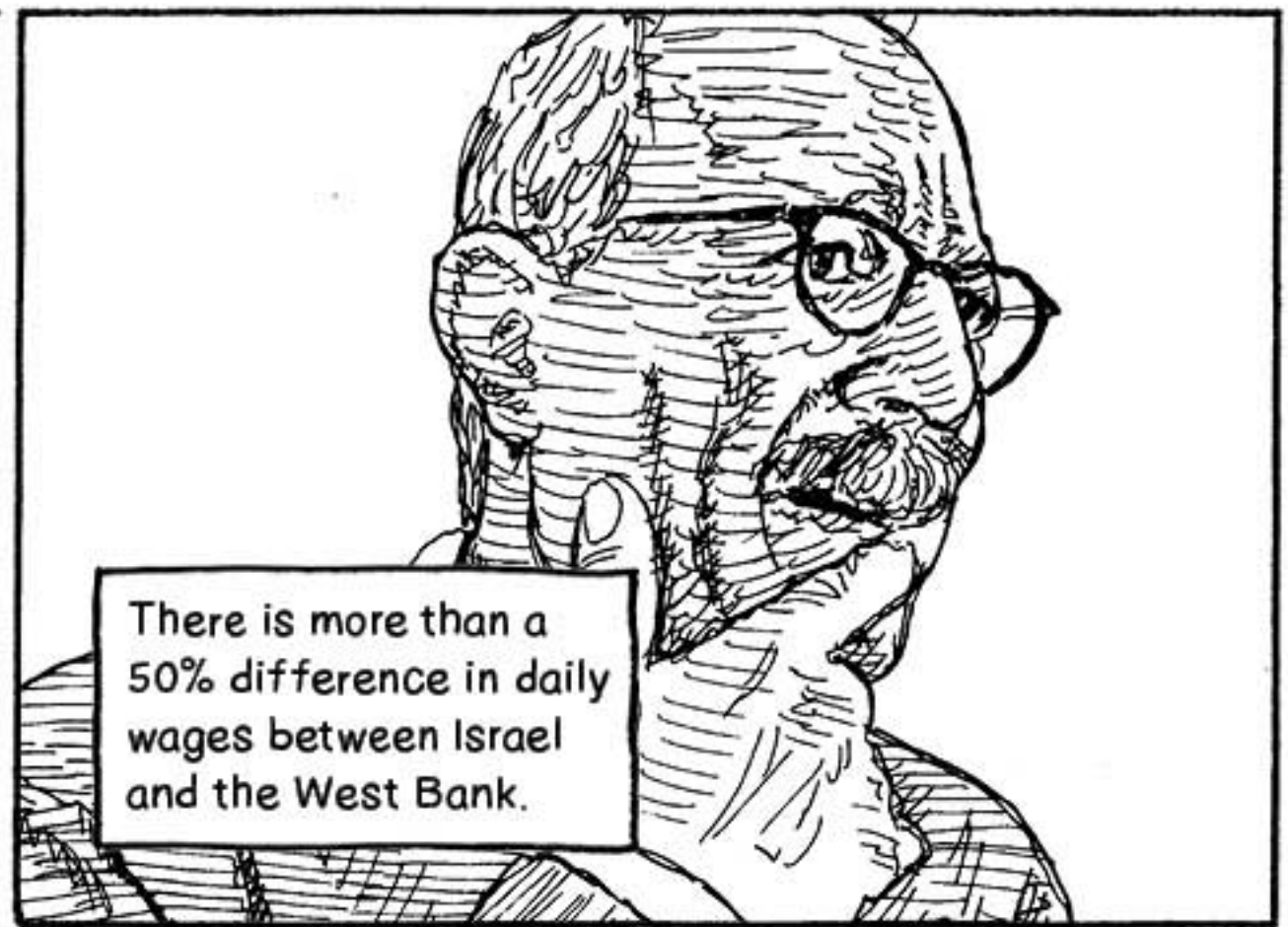


Officially, there are about 10,000 receiving official permits, and then we estimate there are about 15,000 working black.

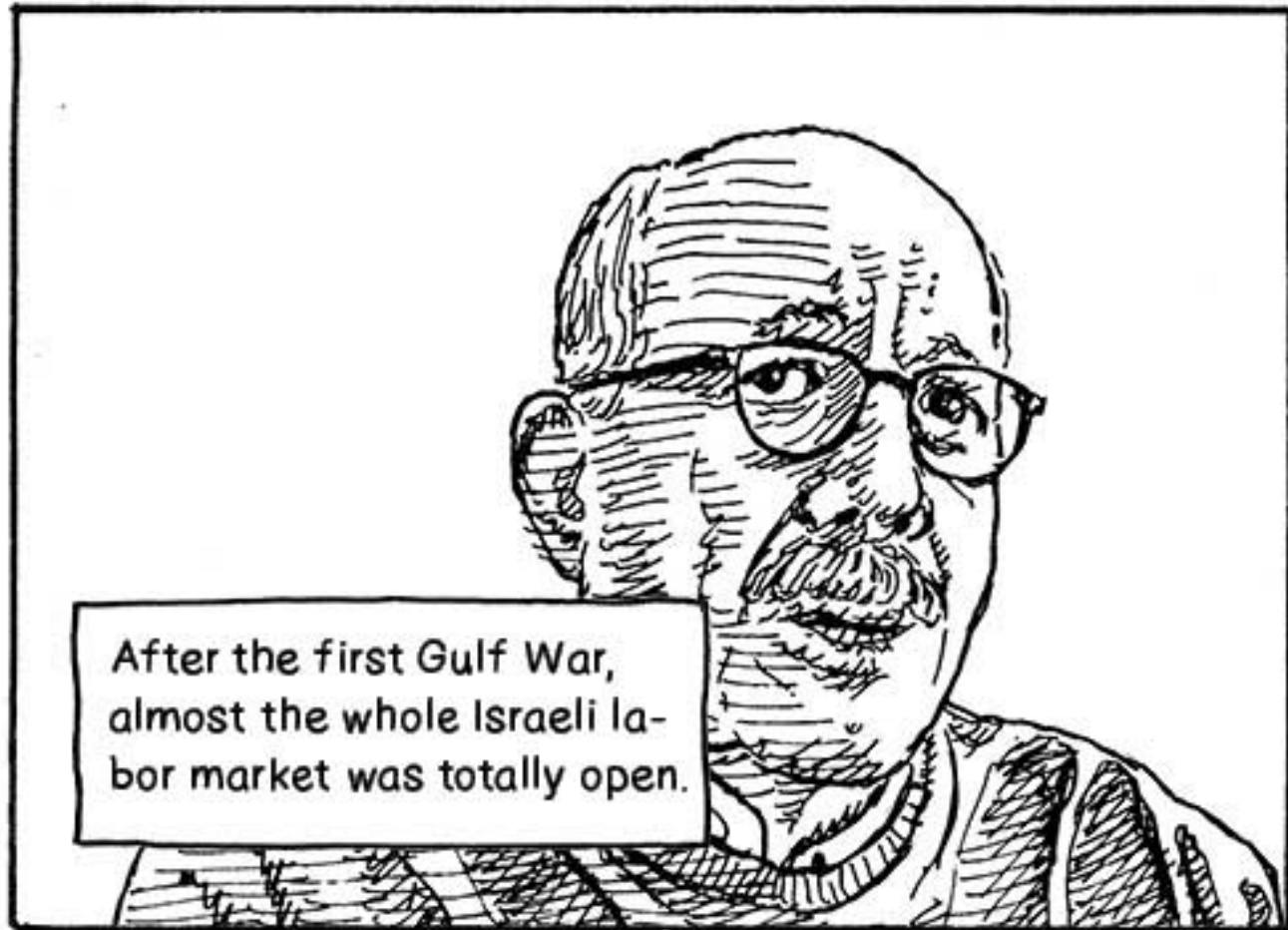




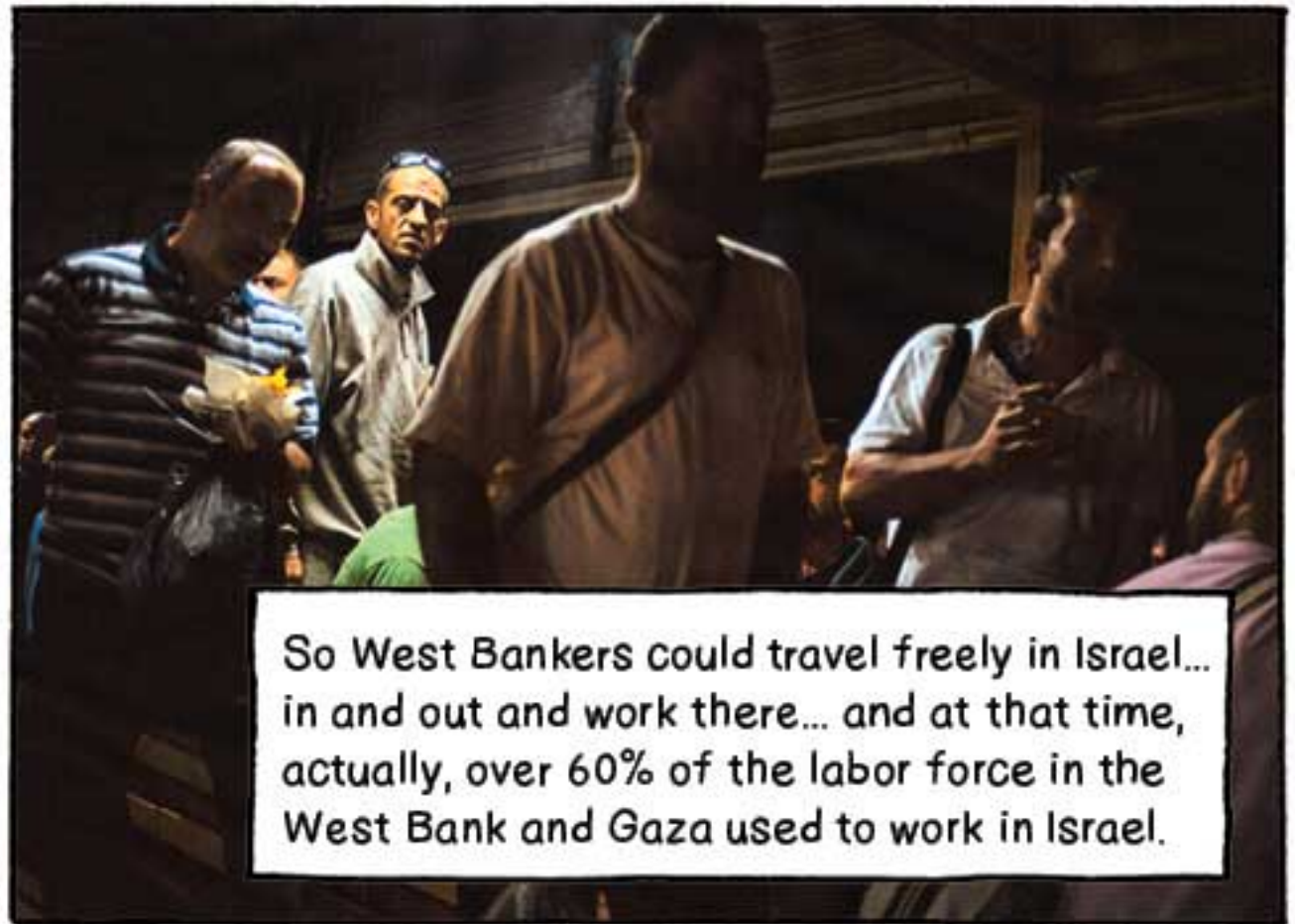
They smuggle themselves through the checkpoints and they work in Israel.



There is more than a 50% difference in daily wages between Israel and the West Bank.



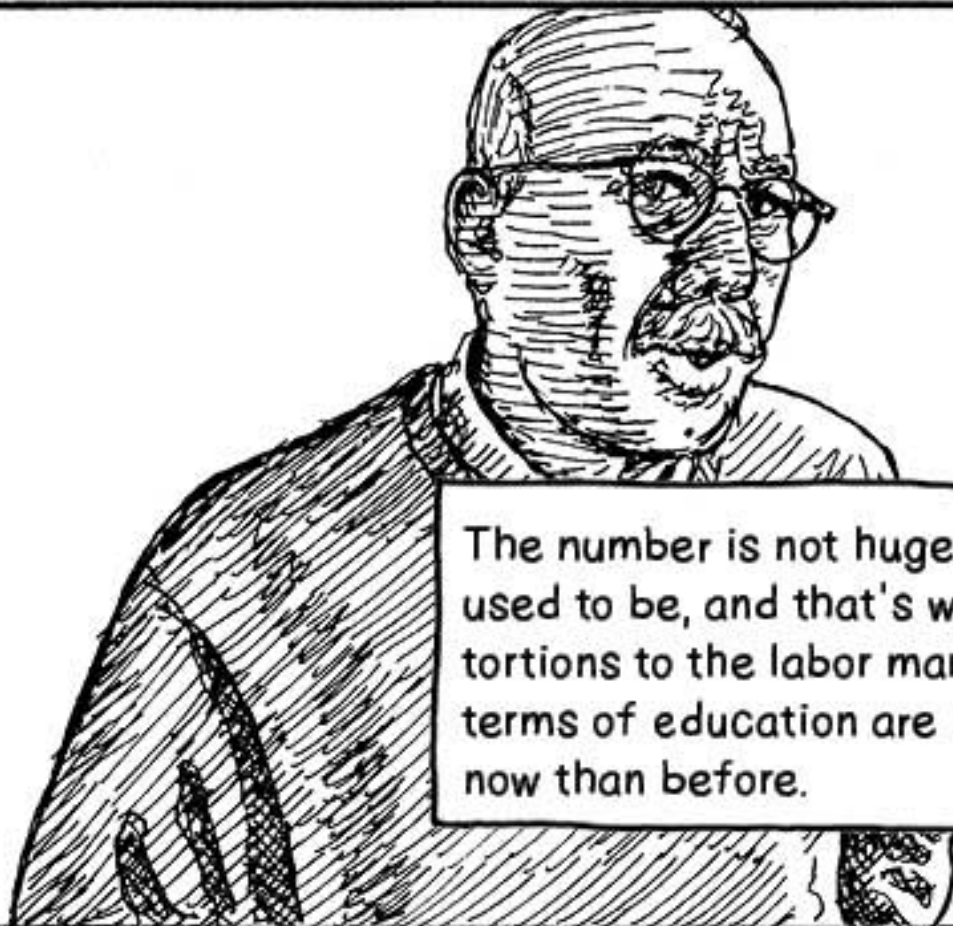
After the first Gulf War, almost the whole Israeli labor market was totally open.



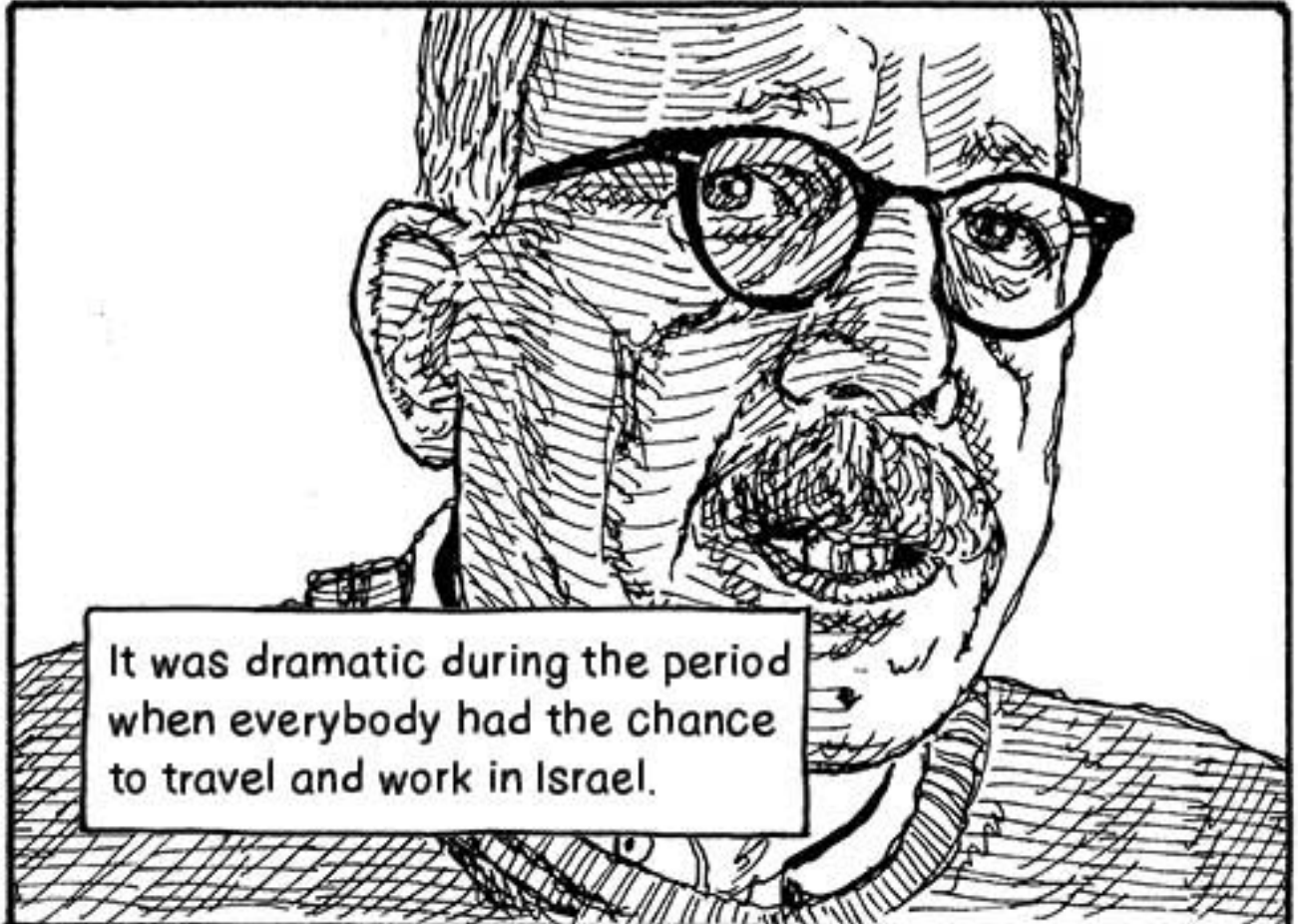
So West Bankers could travel freely in Israel... in and out and work there... and at that time, actually, over 60% of the labor force in the West Bank and Gaza used to work in Israel.



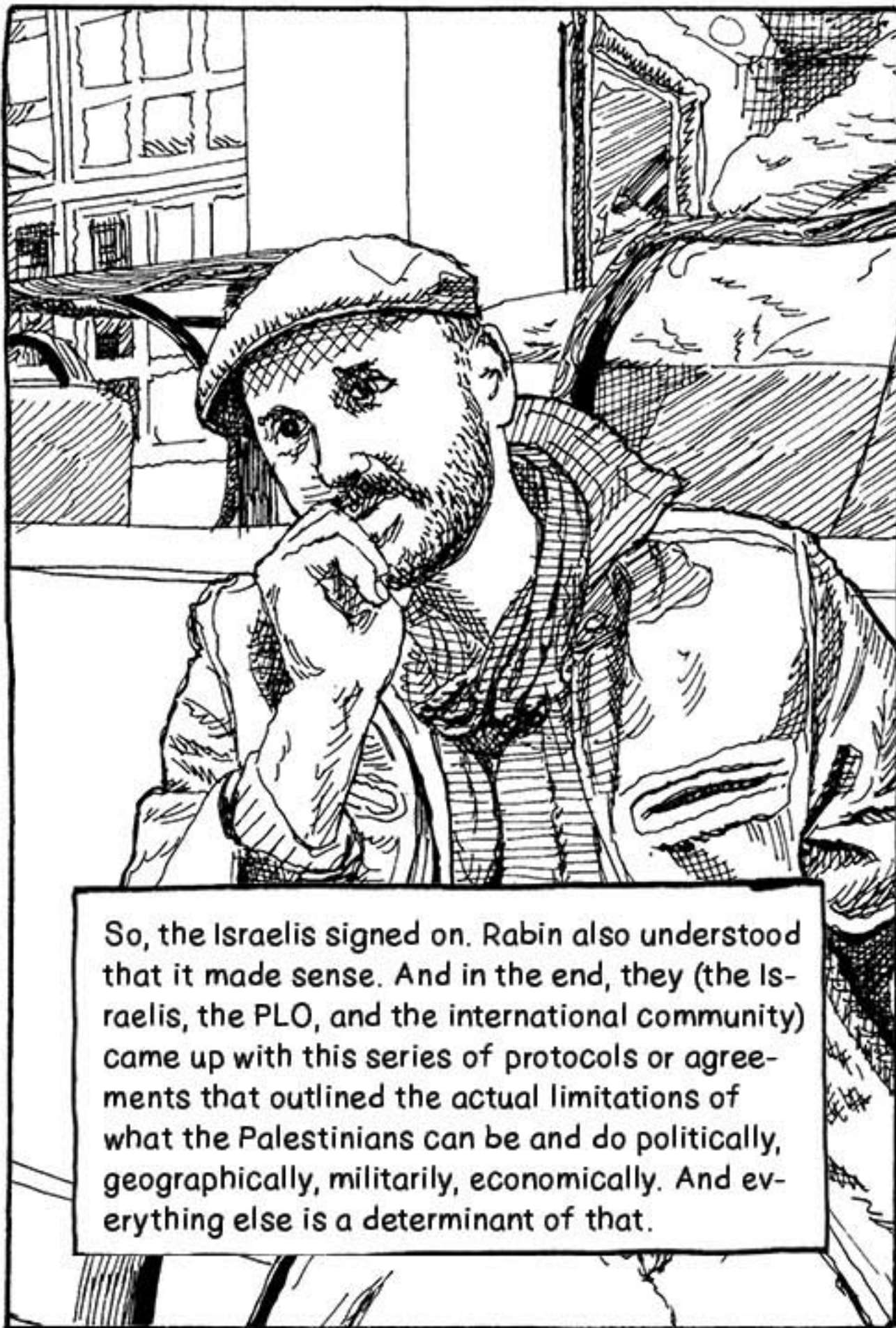
The restrictions started from the first Gulf War in the 90s, and then in 1994 borders were established and movement became more limited. Still, the numbers remained relatively high until the Second Intifada. I mean now we estimate there are all in all about 30,000 people working in Israel—black and official.



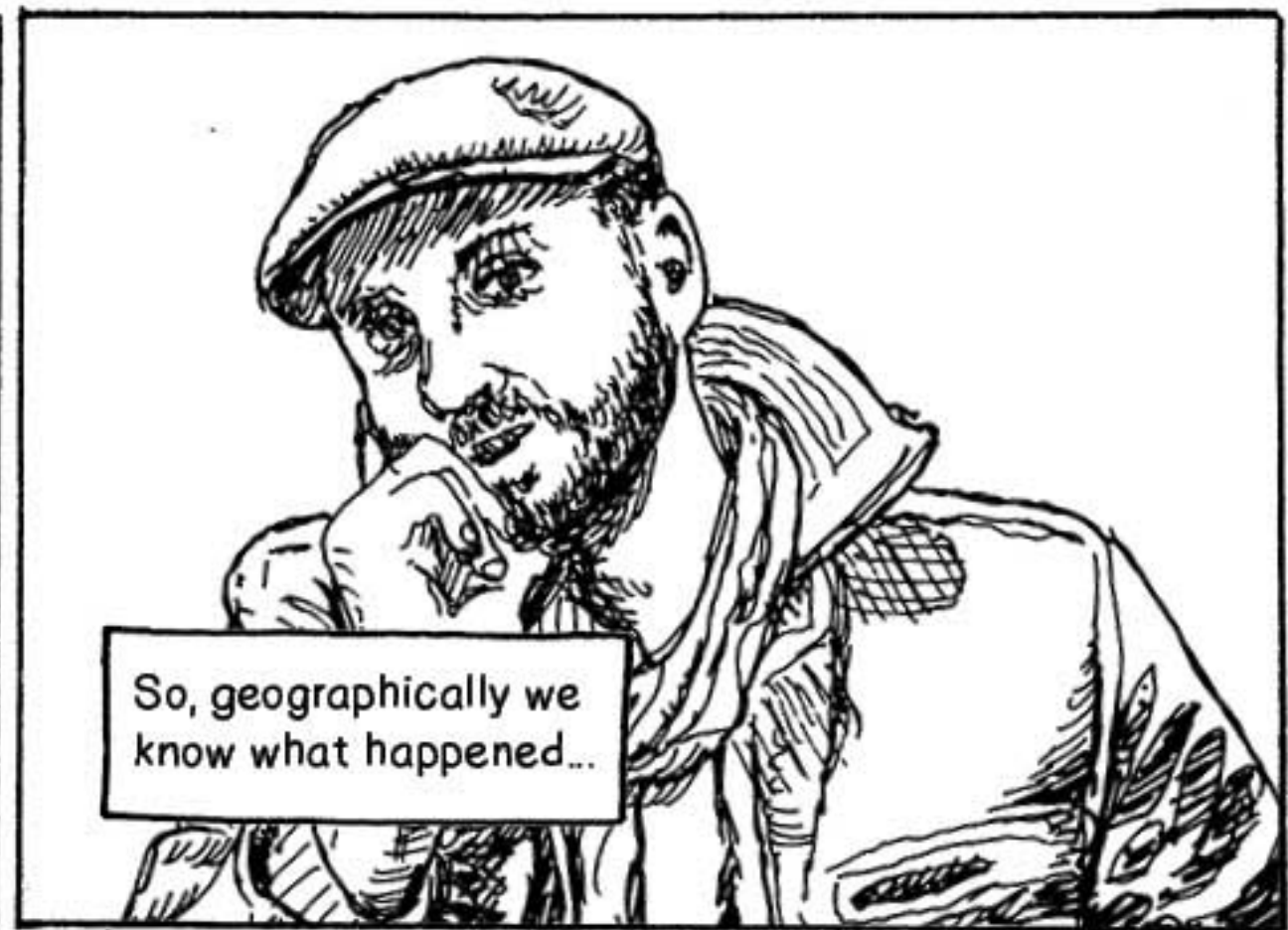
The number is not huge like it used to be, and that's why distortions to the labor market in terms of education are less now than before.



It was dramatic during the period when everybody had the chance to travel and work in Israel.



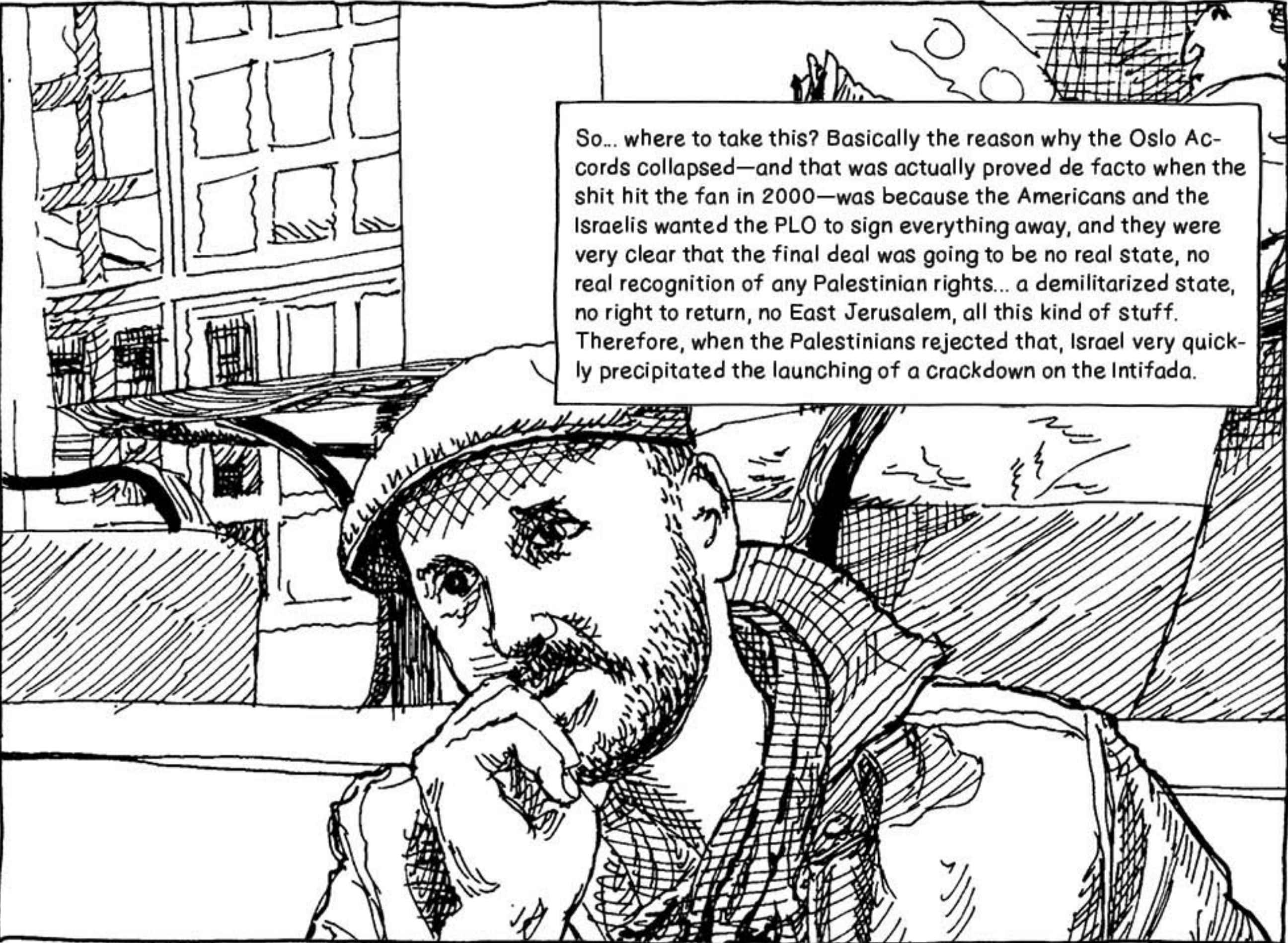
So, the Israelis signed on. Rabin also understood that it made sense. And in the end, they (the Israelis, the PLO, and the international community) came up with this series of protocols or agreements that outlined the actual limitations of what the Palestinians can be and do politically, geographically, militarily, economically. And everything else is a determinant of that.



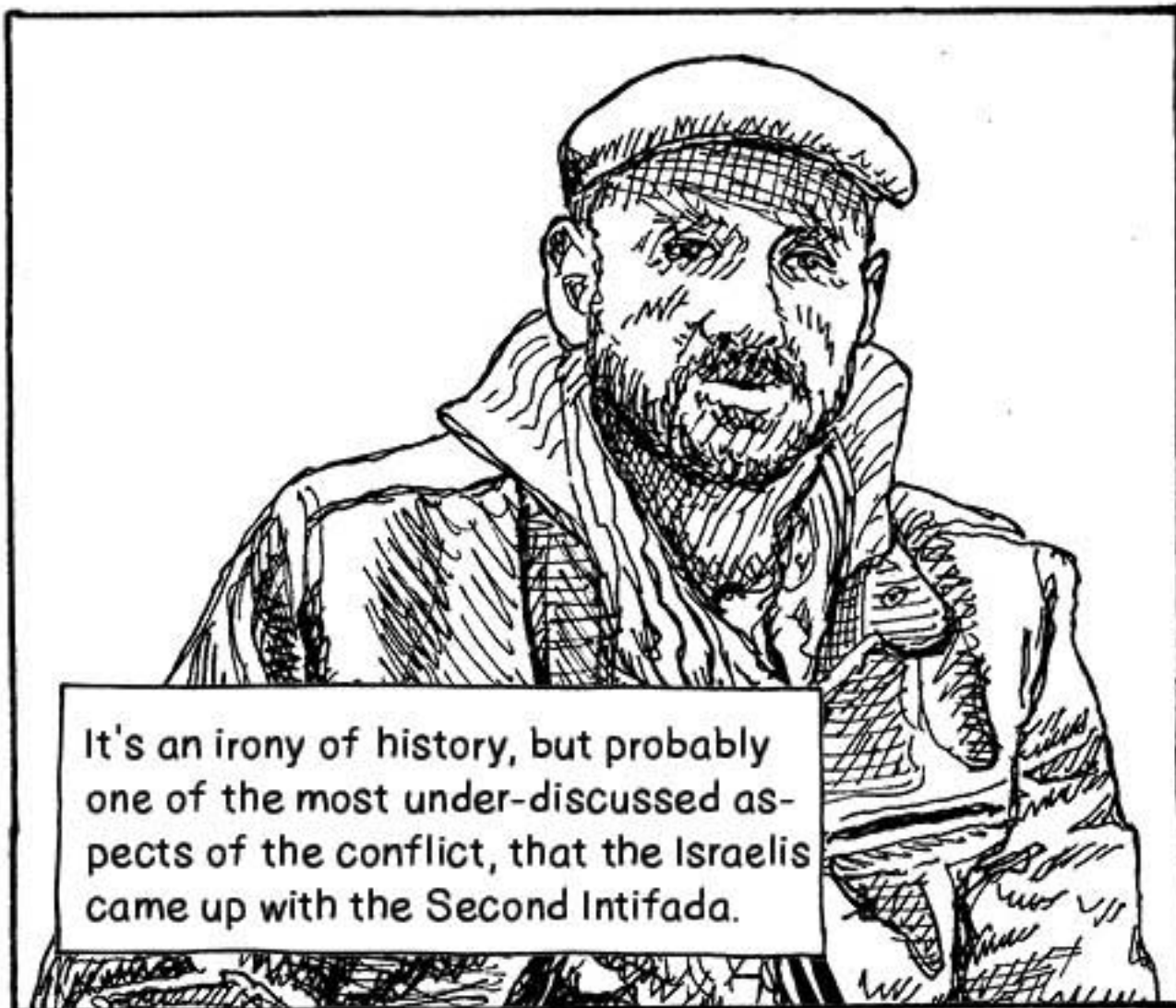
So, geographically we know what happened...



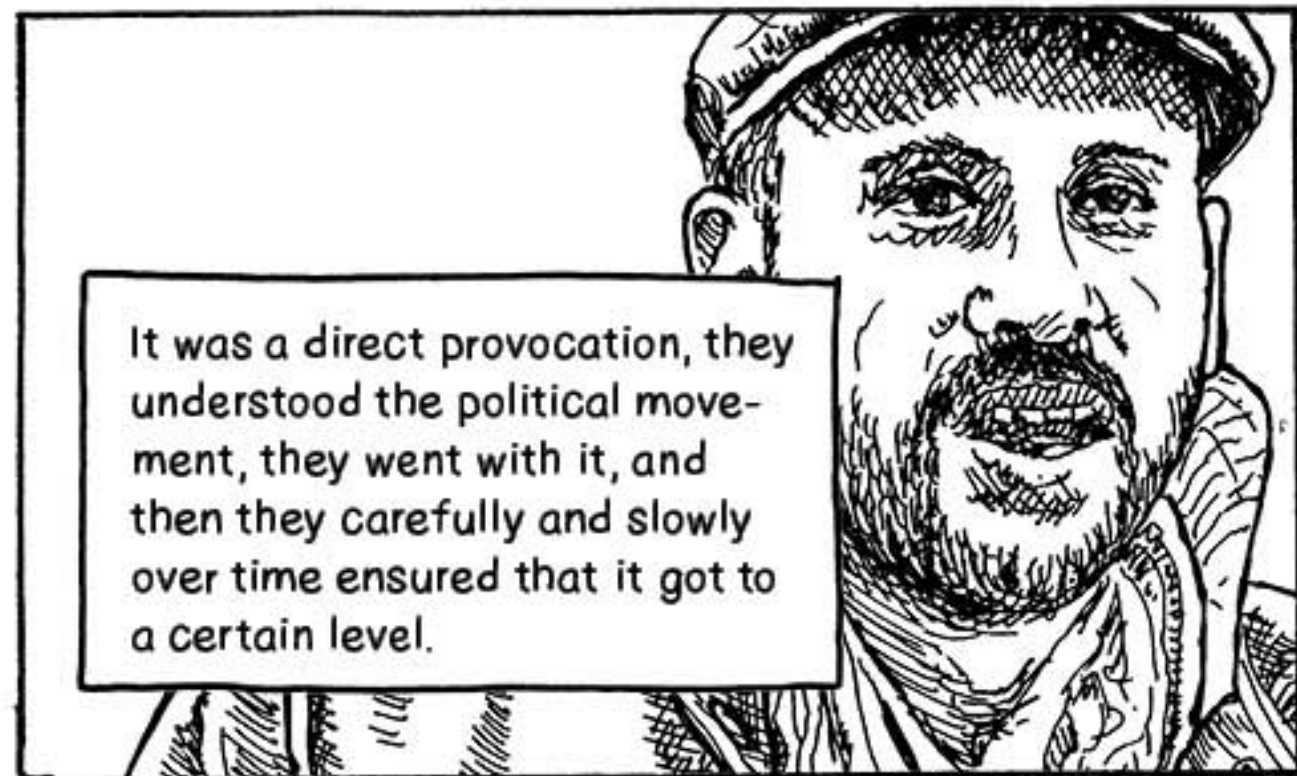
...they created these islands in which the PA don't really have any weapons, and are controlled by the Israelis from the outside, with all the access roads controlled.



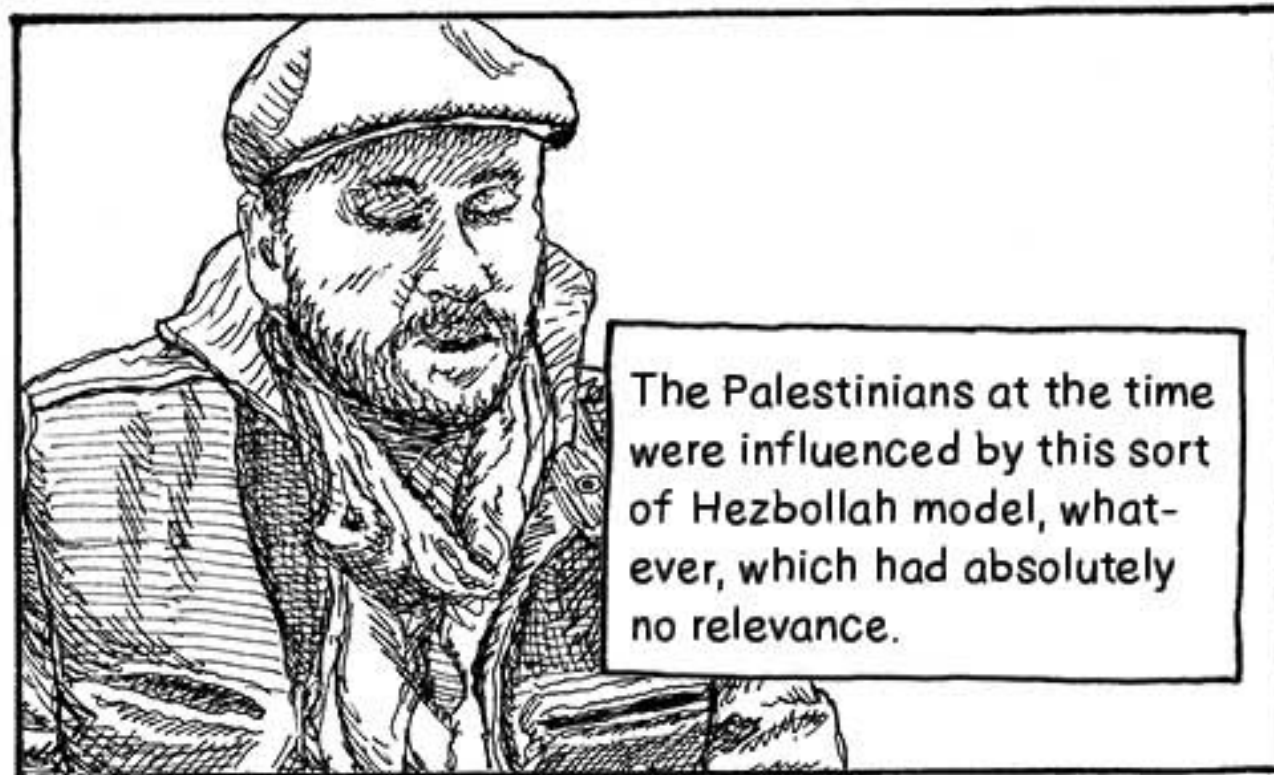
So... where to take this? Basically the reason why the Oslo Accords collapsed—and that was actually proved de facto when the shit hit the fan in 2000—was because the Americans and the Israelis wanted the PLO to sign everything away, and they were very clear that the final deal was going to be no real state, no real recognition of any Palestinian rights... a demilitarized state, no right to return, no East Jerusalem, all this kind of stuff. Therefore, when the Palestinians rejected that, Israel very quickly precipitated the launching of a crackdown on the Intifada.



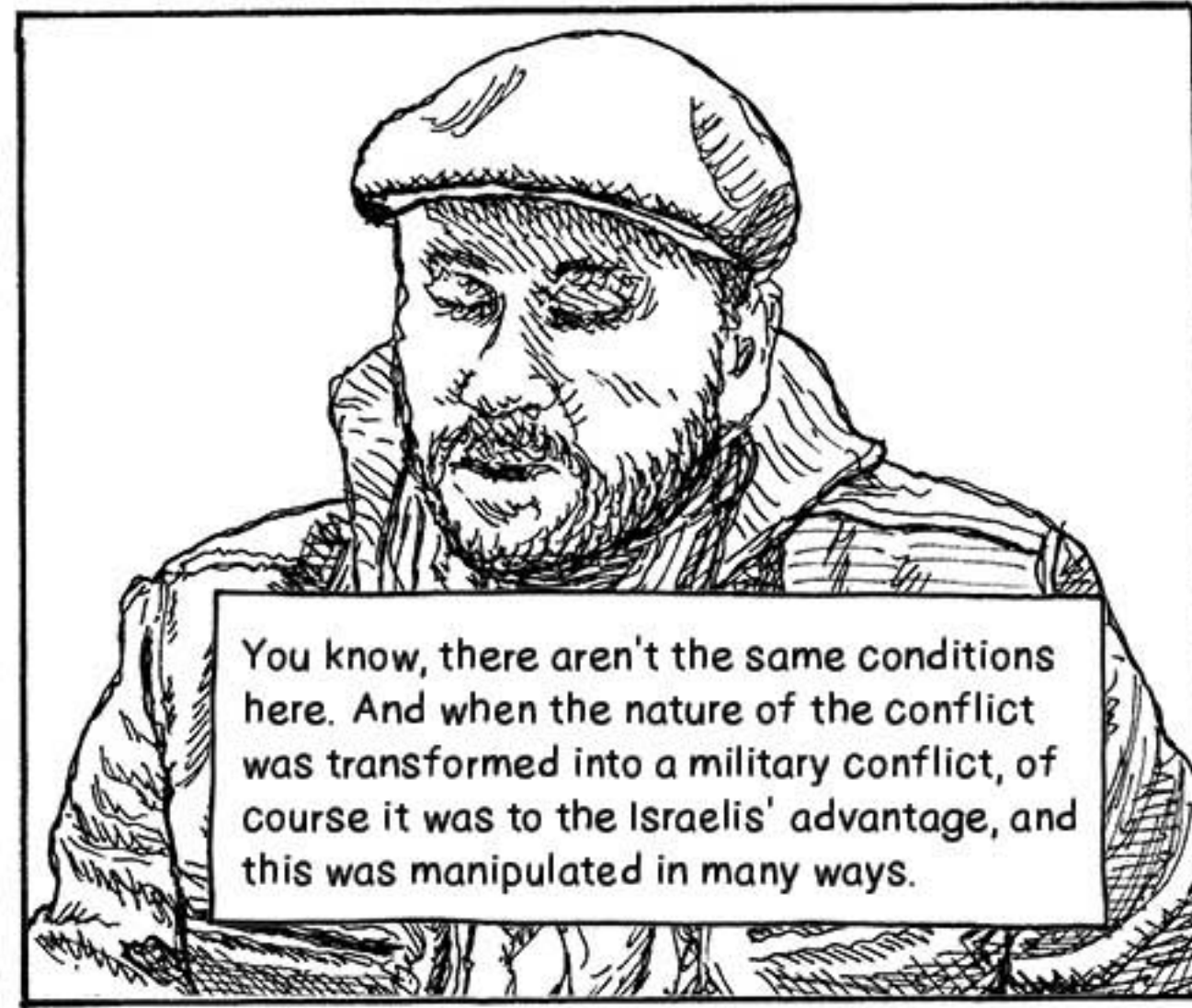
It's an irony of history, but probably one of the most under-discussed aspects of the conflict, that the Israelis came up with the Second Intifada.



It was a direct provocation, they understood the political movement, they went with it, and then they carefully and slowly over time ensured that it got to a certain level.



The Palestinians at the time were influenced by this sort of Hezbollah model, whatever, which had absolutely no relevance.



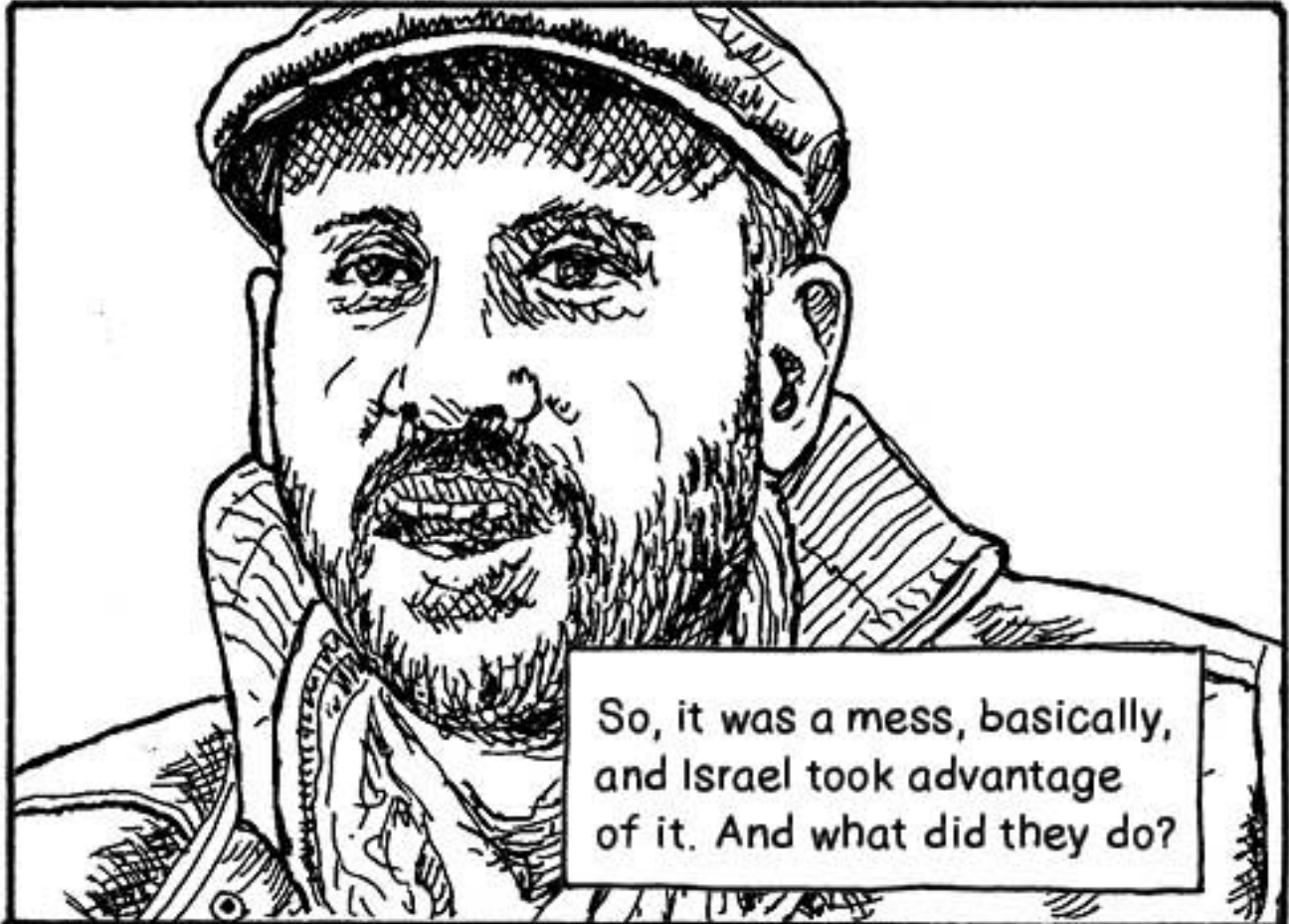
You know, there aren't the same conditions here. And when the nature of the conflict was transformed into a military conflict, of course it was to the Israelis' advantage, and this was manipulated in many ways.



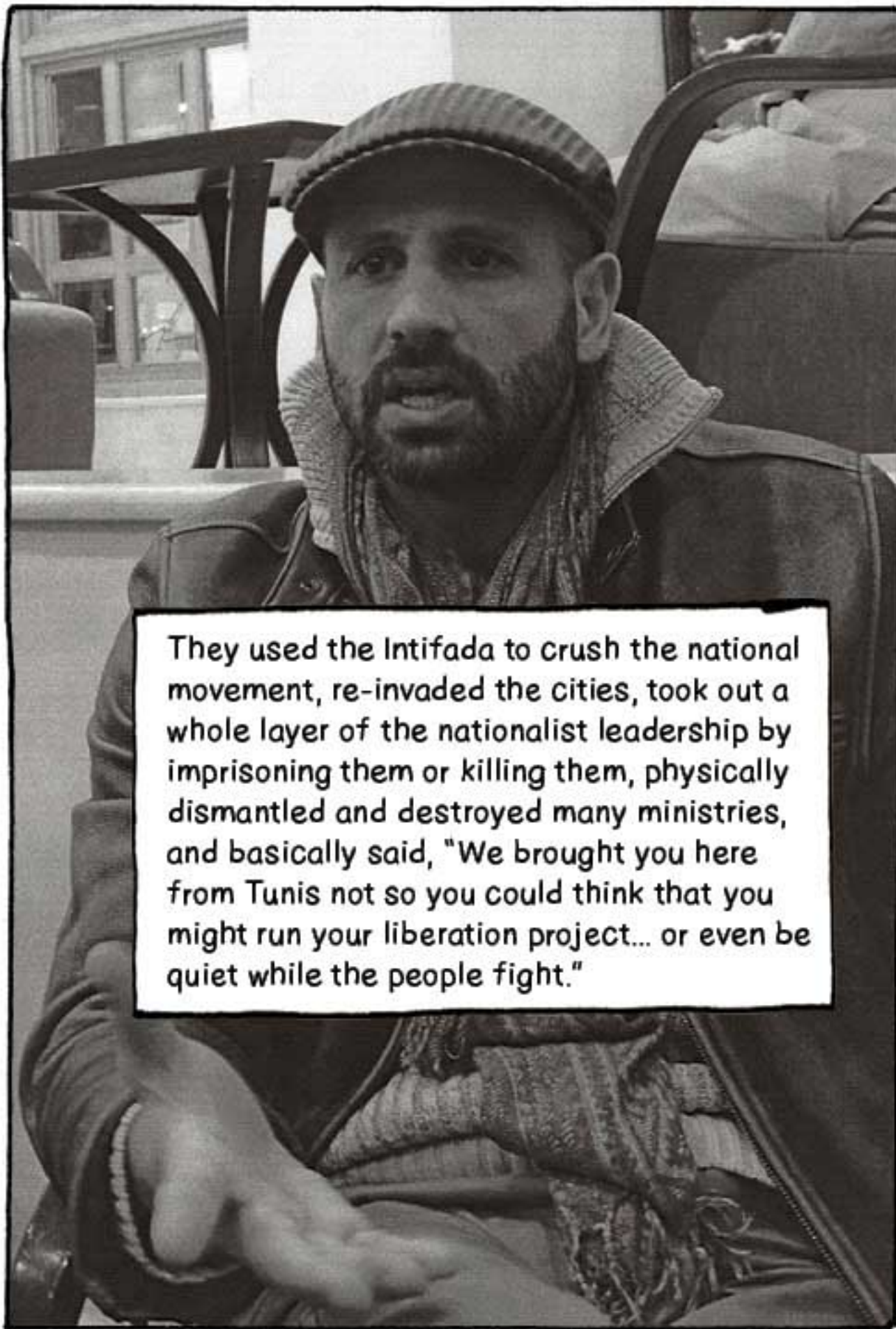
The Palestinians, because their social fabric and their political organizing— everything—had sort of weakened and collapsed over the period of the Oslo process, they were too disorganized to launch a consistent, united campaign for anything. Everyone had their own strategy: some wanted to fight, some wanted to negotiate, some wanted to fire rockets, some wanted to commit suicide.



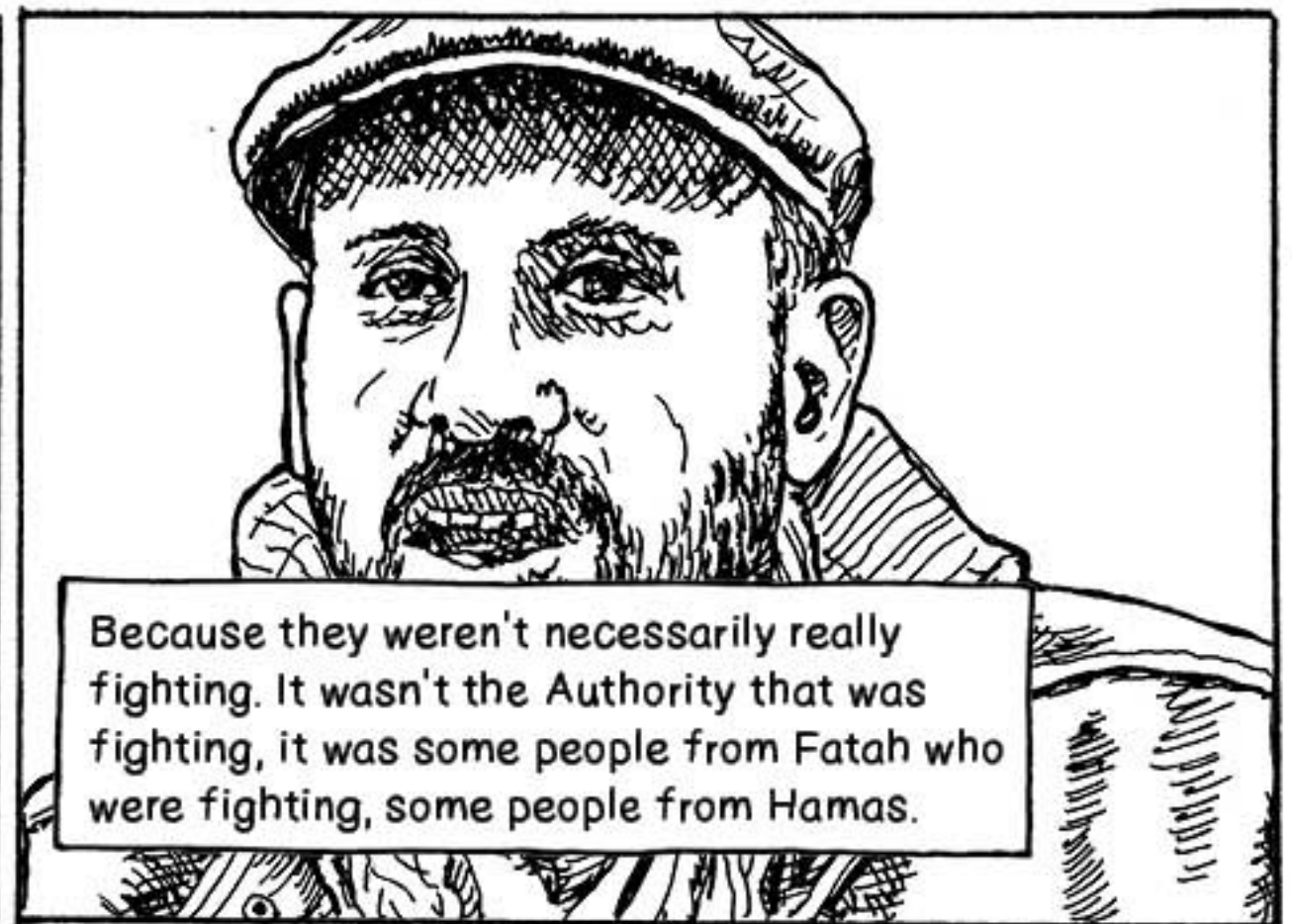
There were a million different strategies going on. The Israelis were unified: they had one army; they had very clear messaging—we're against terror. All this 9/11 stuff also helped.



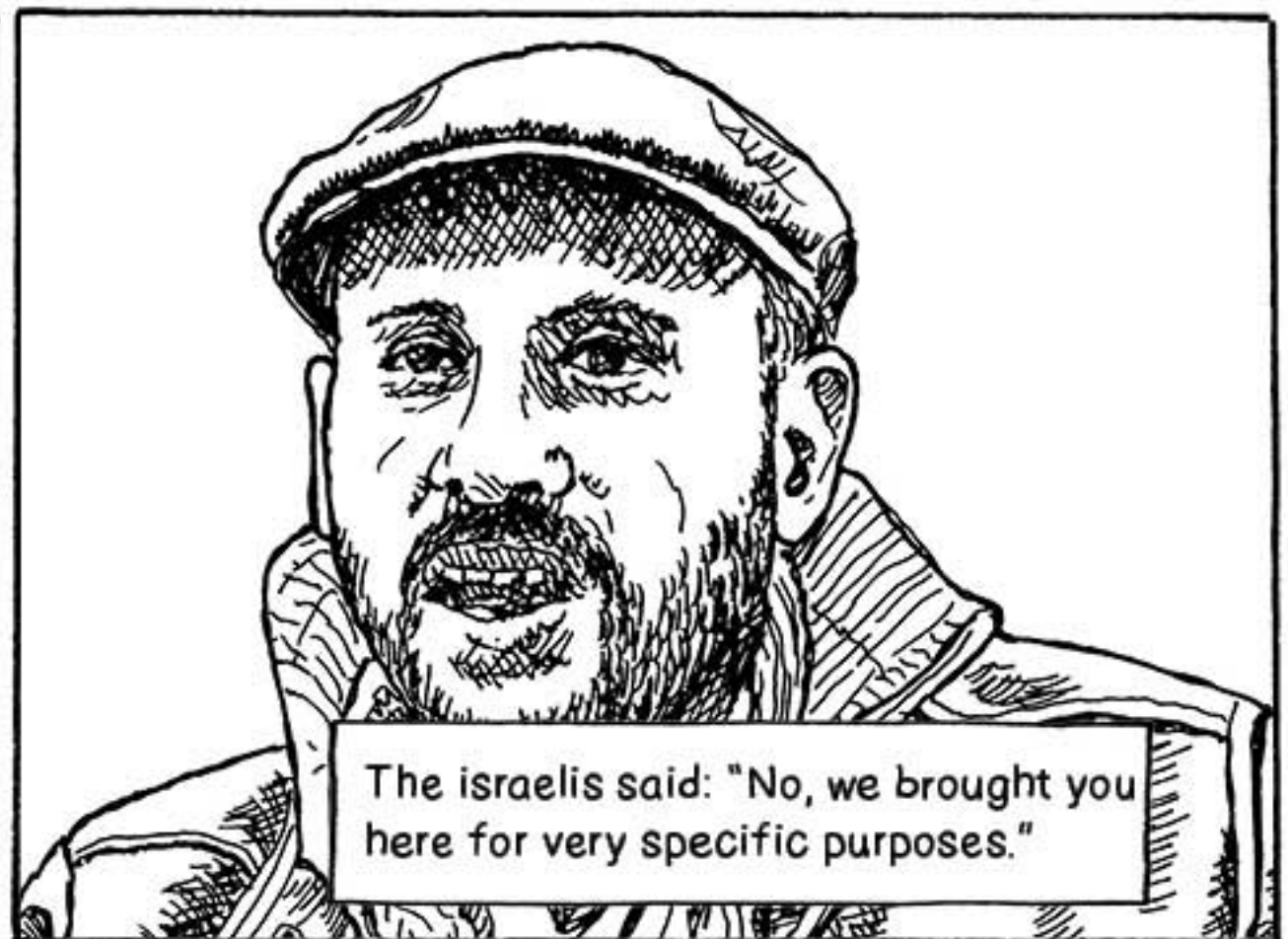
So, it was a mess, basically, and Israel took advantage of it. And what did they do?



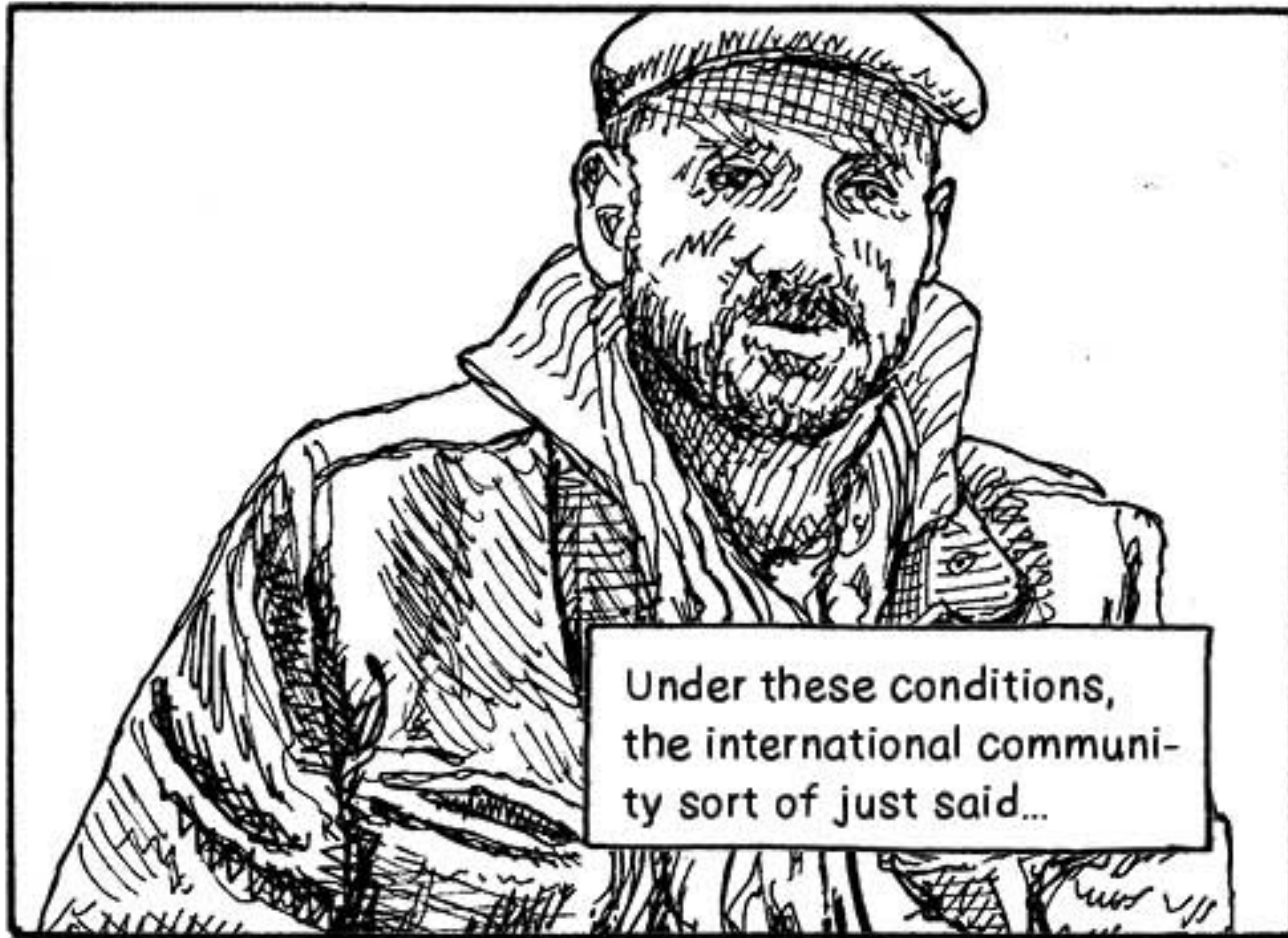
They used the Intifada to crush the national movement, re-invaded the cities, took out a whole layer of the nationalist leadership by imprisoning them or killing them, physically dismantled and destroyed many ministries, and basically said, "We brought you here from Tunis not so you could think that you might run your liberation project... or even be quiet while the people fight."



Because they weren't necessarily really fighting. It wasn't the Authority that was fighting, it was some people from Fatah who were fighting, some people from Hamas.



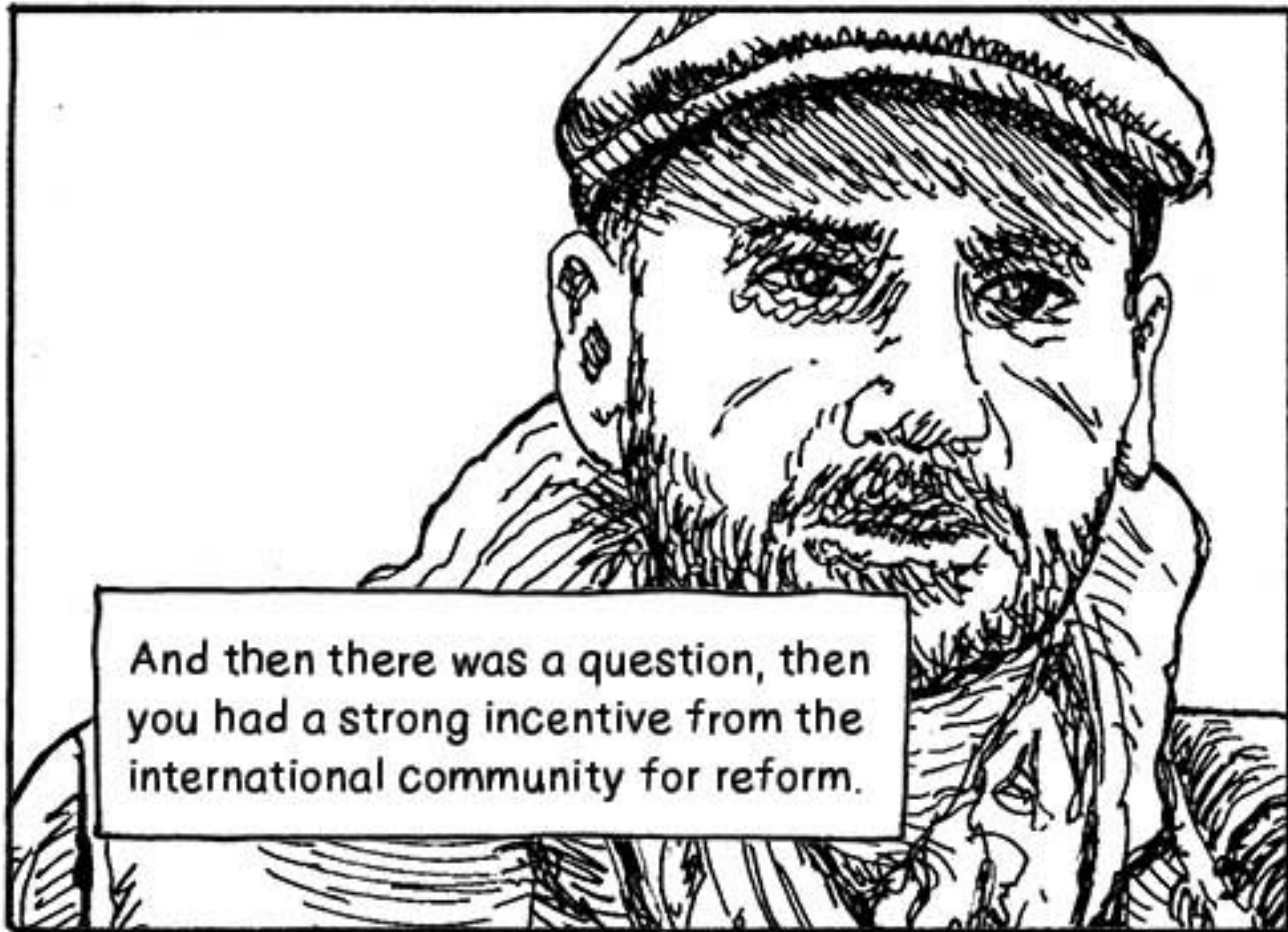
The israelis said: "No, we brought you here for very specific purposes."



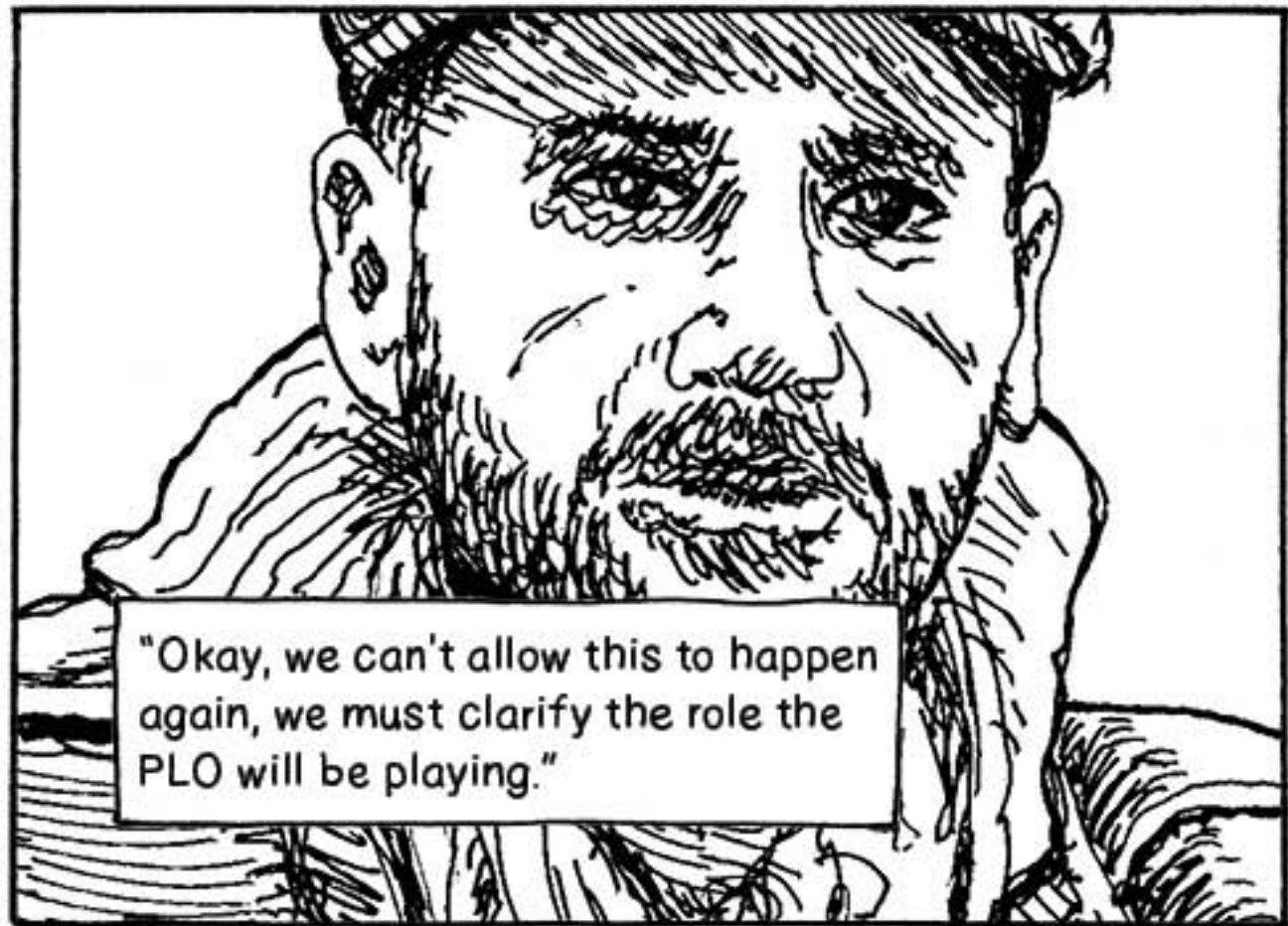
Under these conditions,
the international communi-
ty sort of just said...



"Okay, Israel came in and
they clobbered the heads of
the Palestinians militarily."

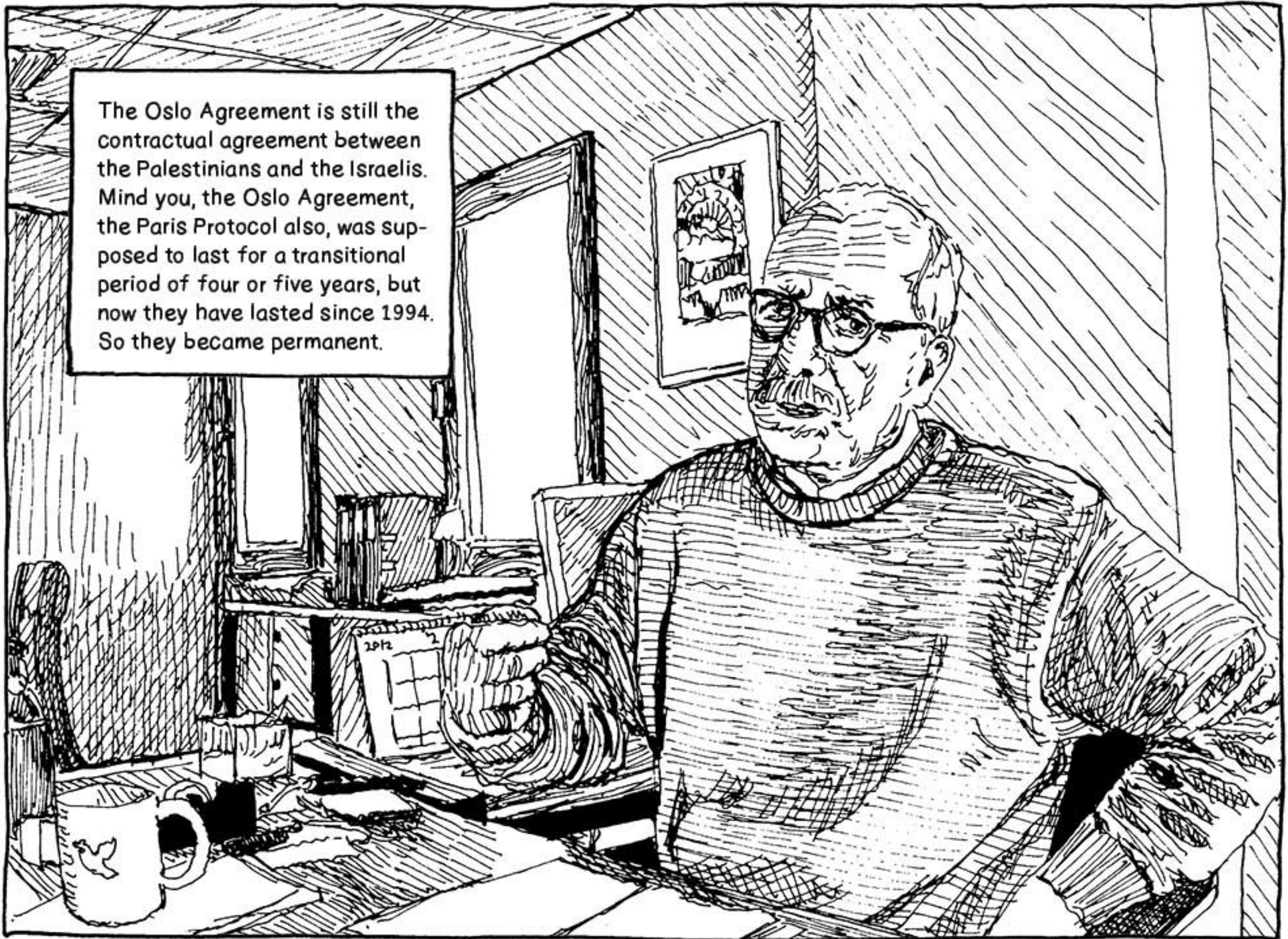


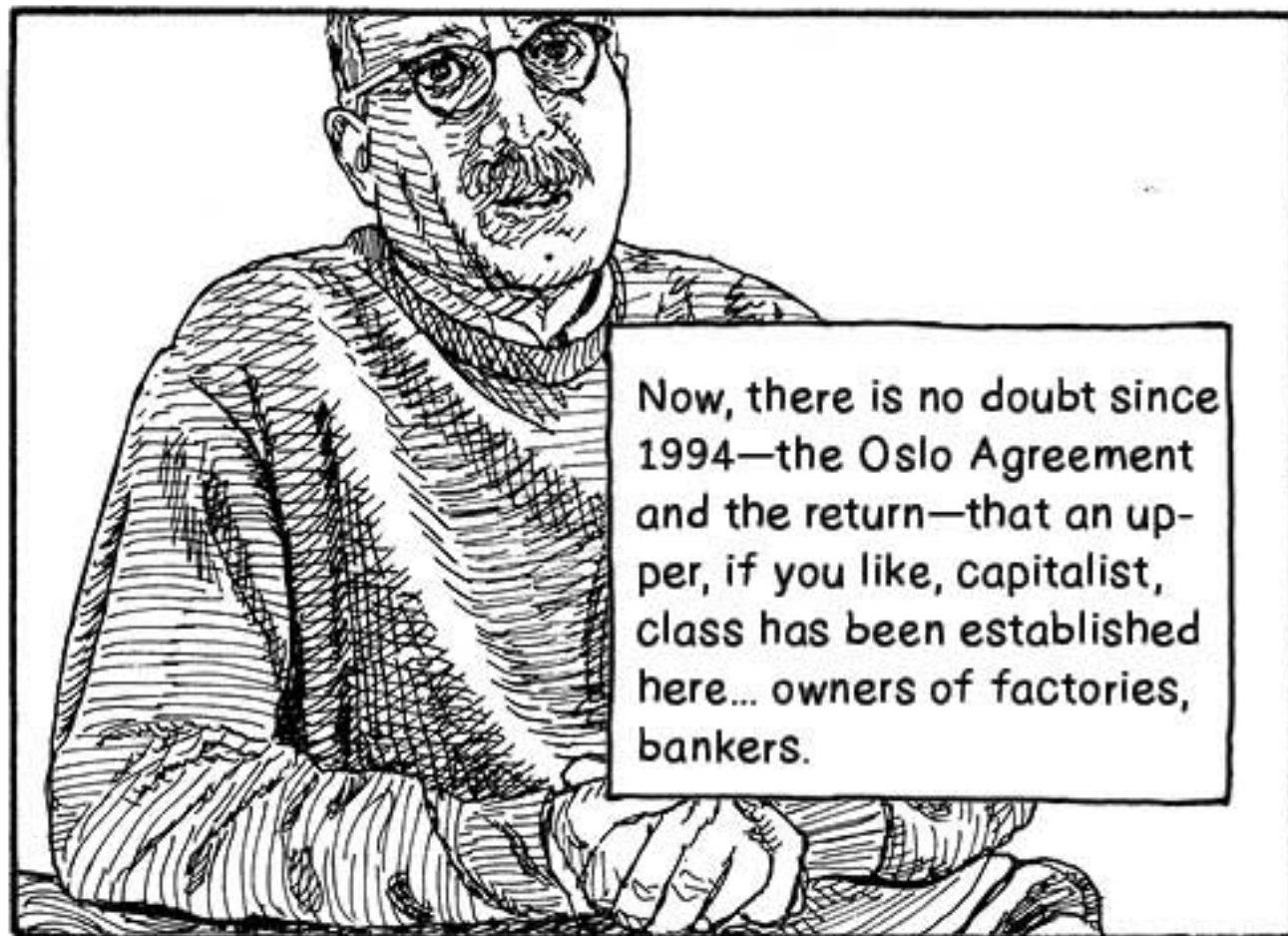
And then there was a question, then
you had a strong incentive from the
international community for reform.



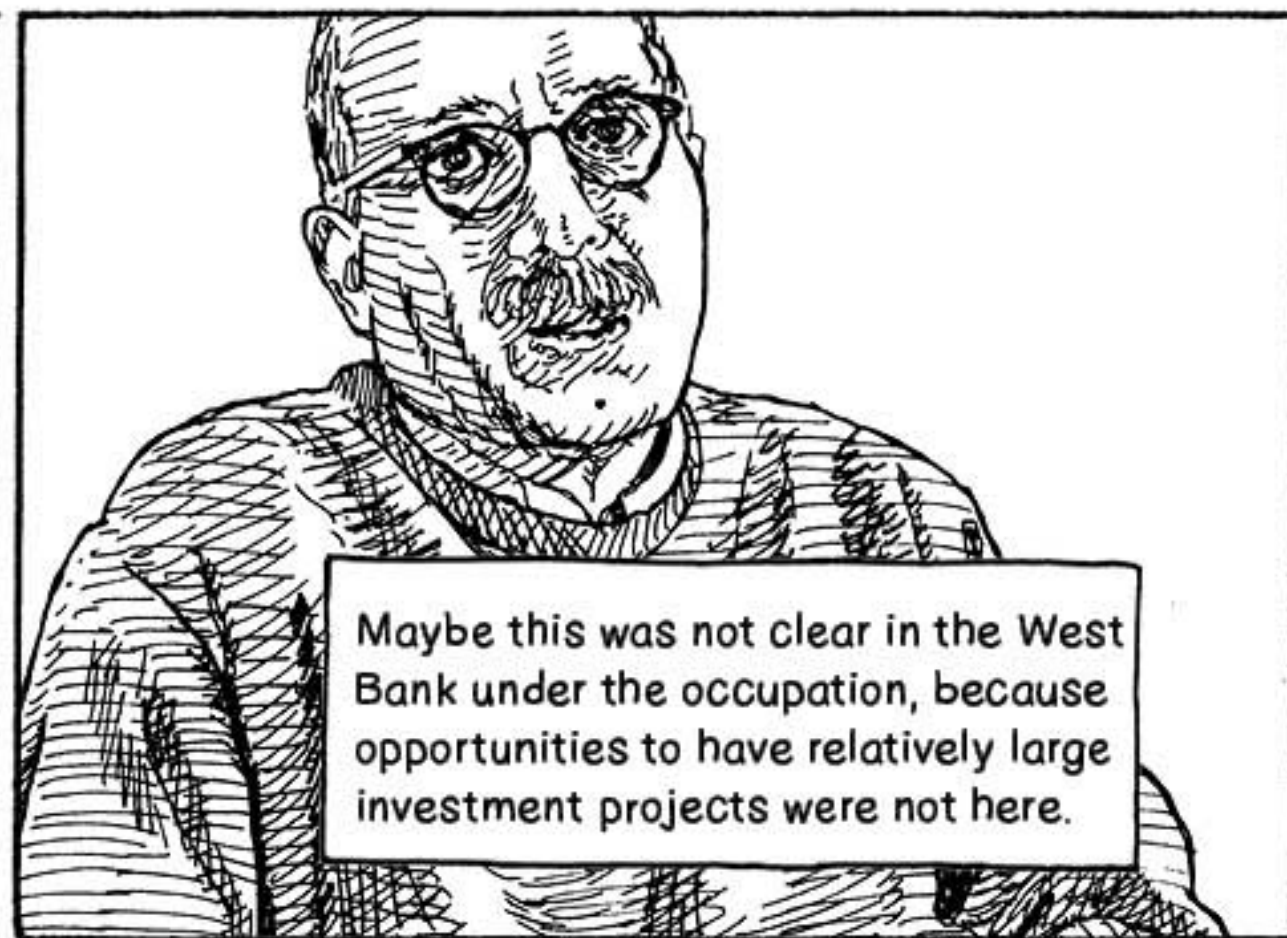
"Okay, we can't allow this to happen
again, we must clarify the role the
PLO will be playing."

The Oslo Agreement is still the contractual agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Mind you, the Oslo Agreement, the Paris Protocol also, was supposed to last for a transitional period of four or five years, but now they have lasted since 1994. So they became permanent.

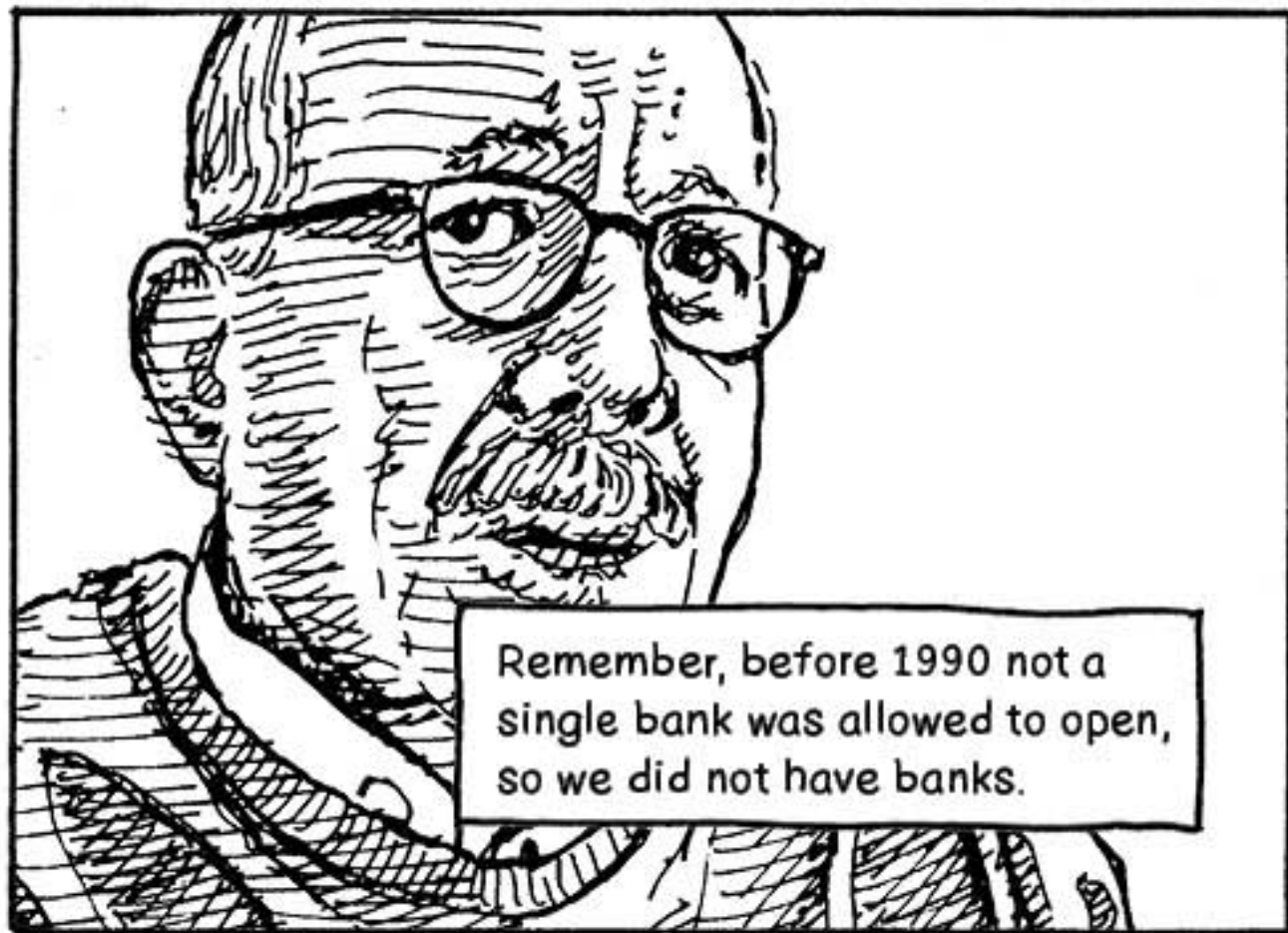




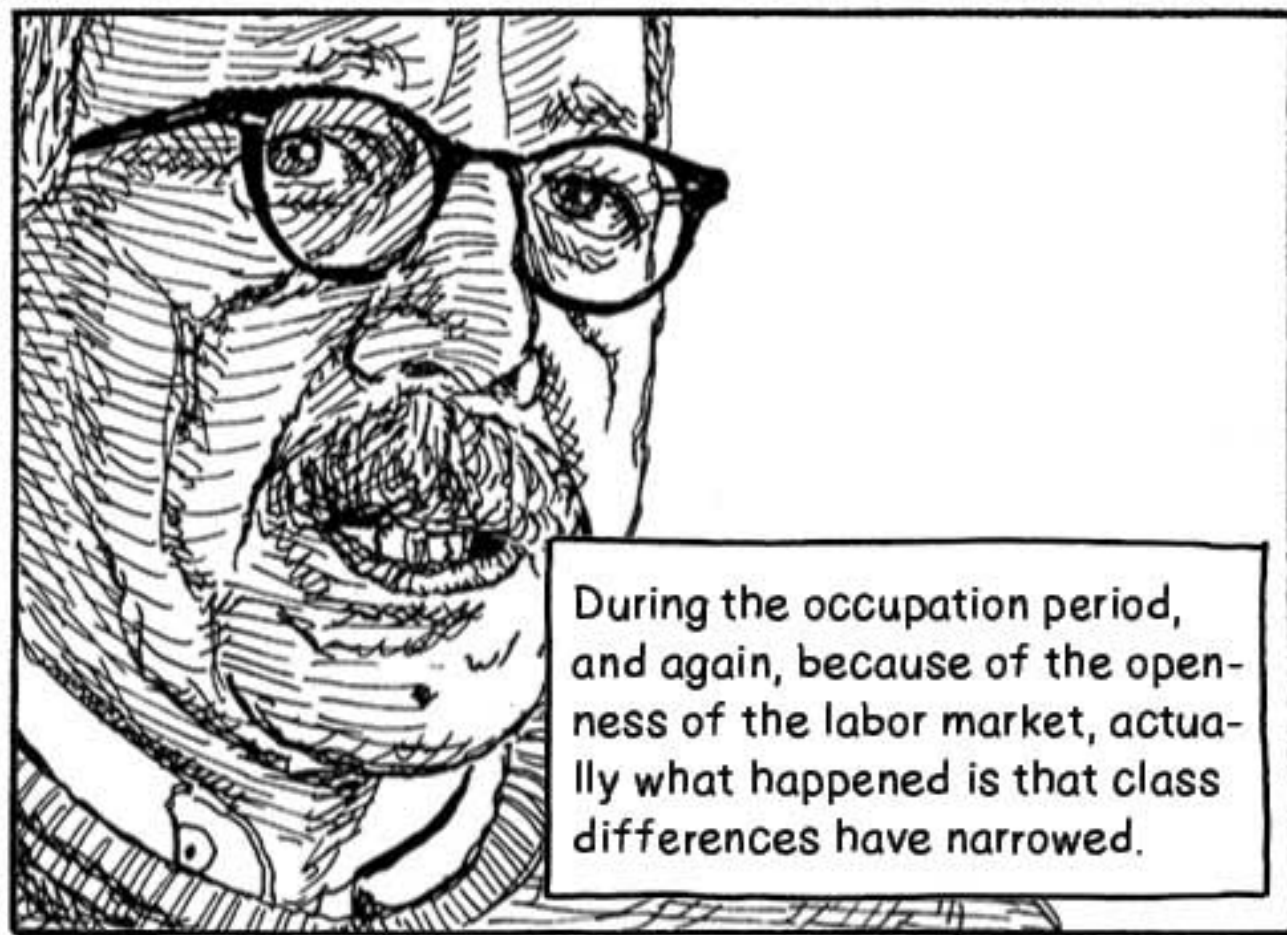
Now, there is no doubt since 1994—the Oslo Agreement and the return—that an upper, if you like, capitalist, class has been established here... owners of factories, bankers.



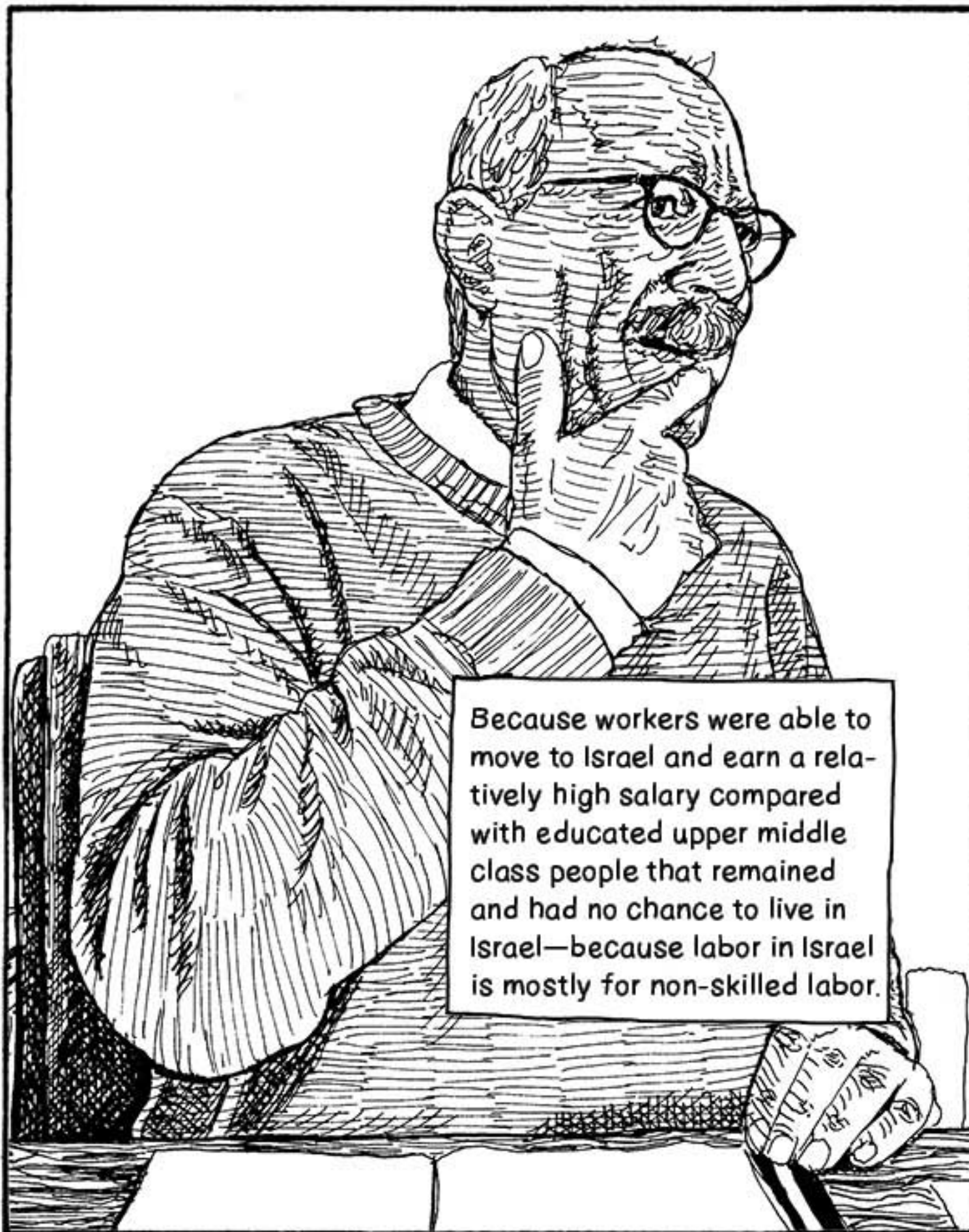
Maybe this was not clear in the West Bank under the occupation, because opportunities to have relatively large investment projects were not here.



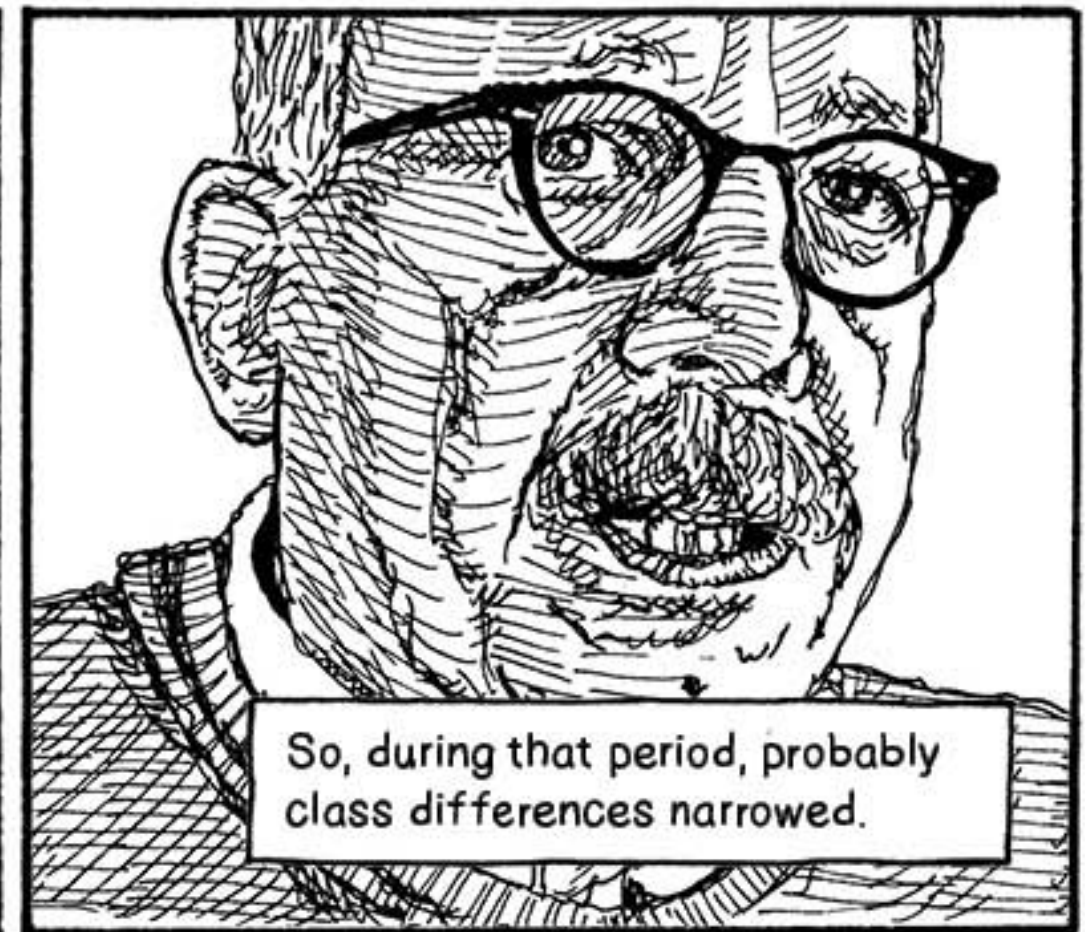
Remember, before 1990 not a single bank was allowed to open, so we did not have banks.



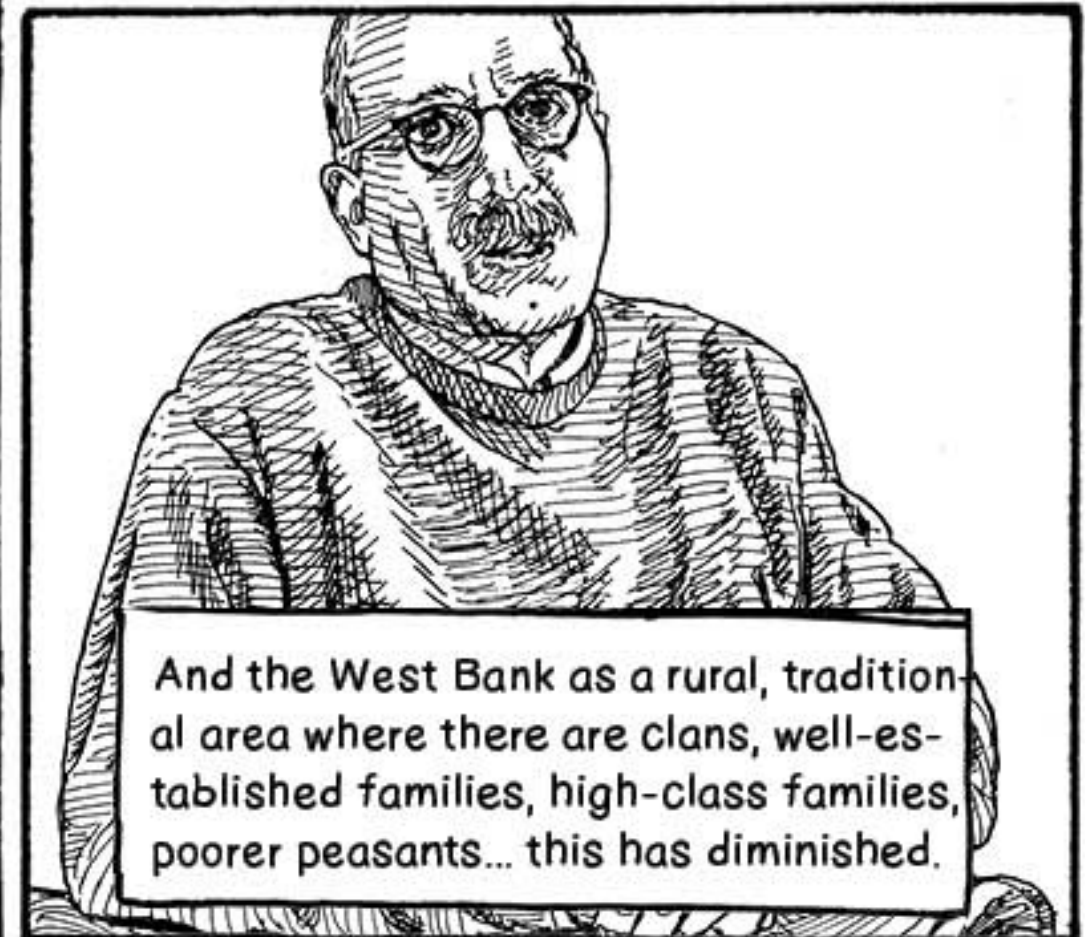
During the occupation period, and again, because of the openness of the labor market, actually what happened is that class differences have narrowed.



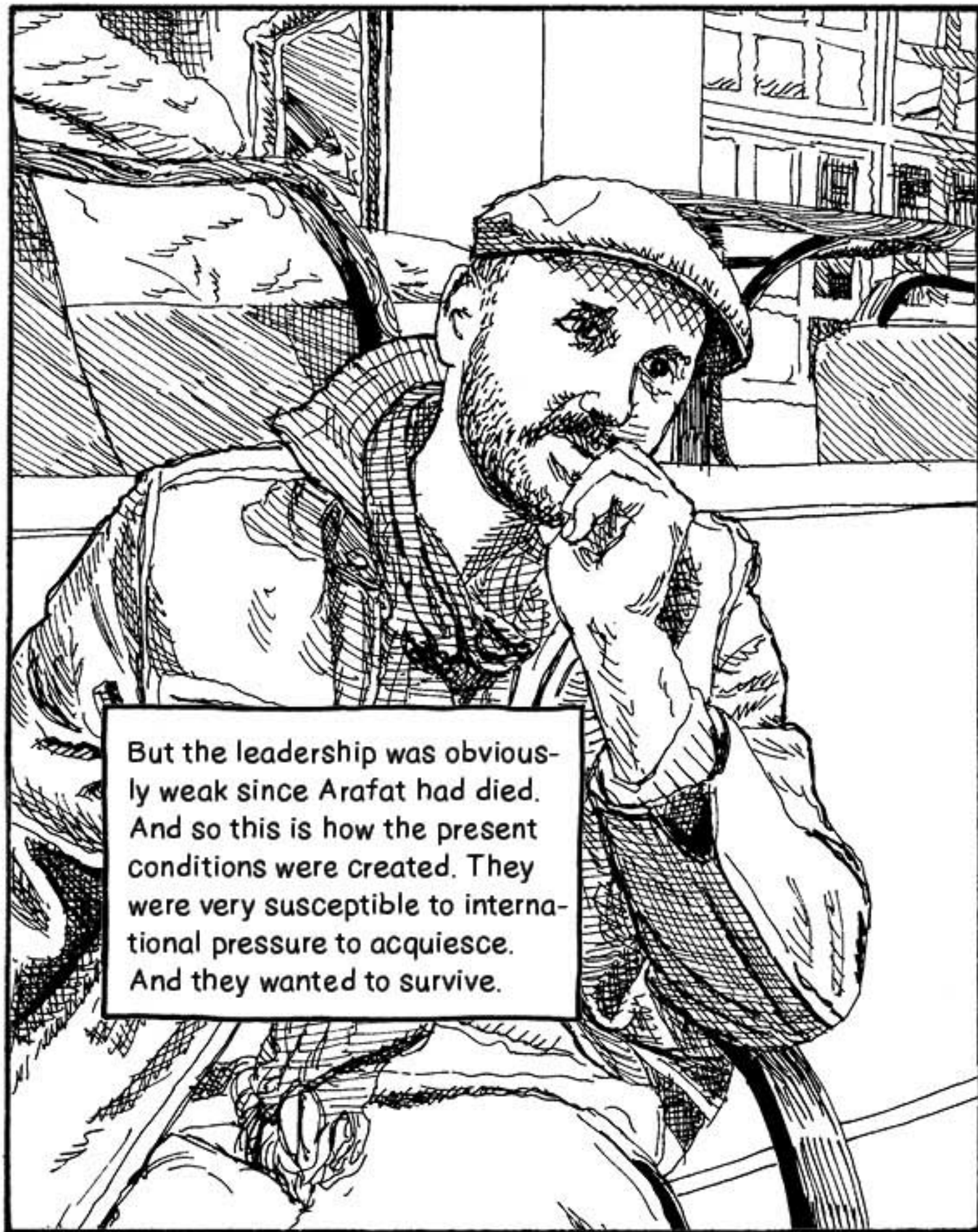
Because workers were able to move to Israel and earn a relatively high salary compared with educated upper middle class people that remained and had no chance to live in Israel—because labor in Israel is mostly for non-skilled labor.



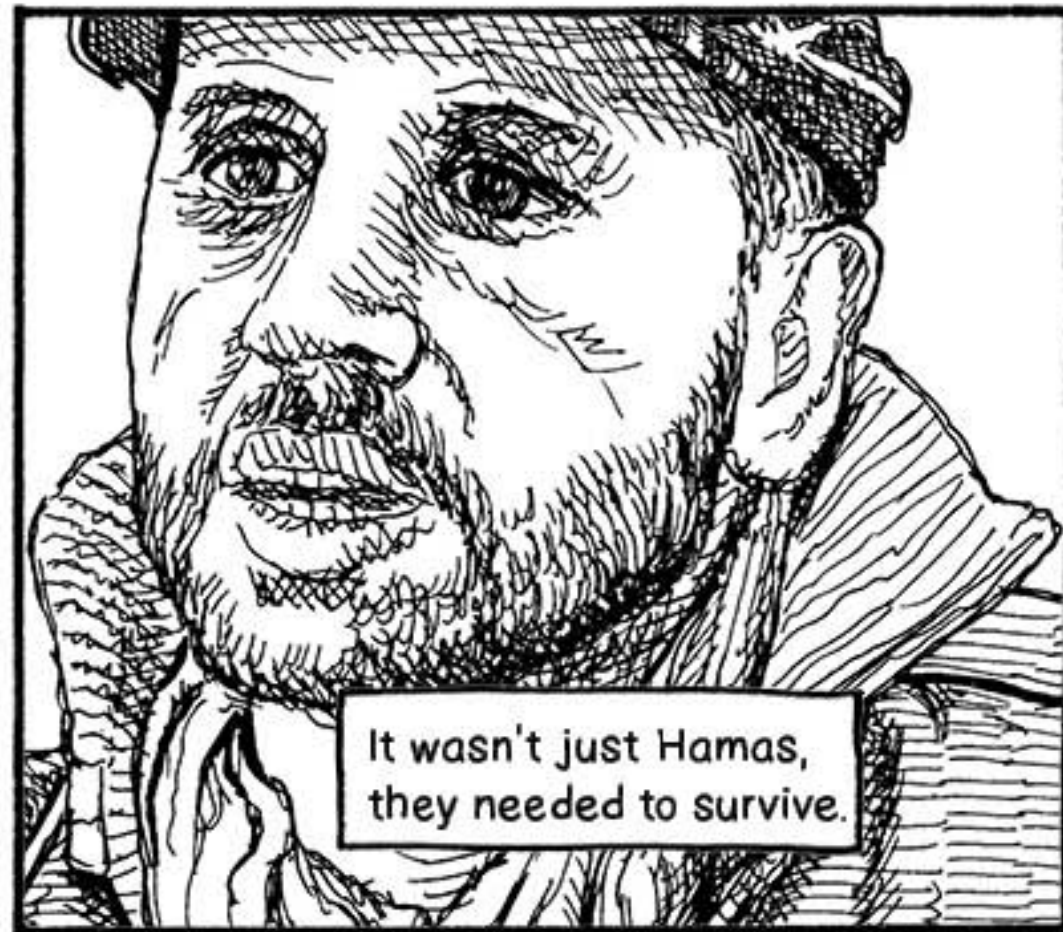
So, during that period, probably class differences narrowed.



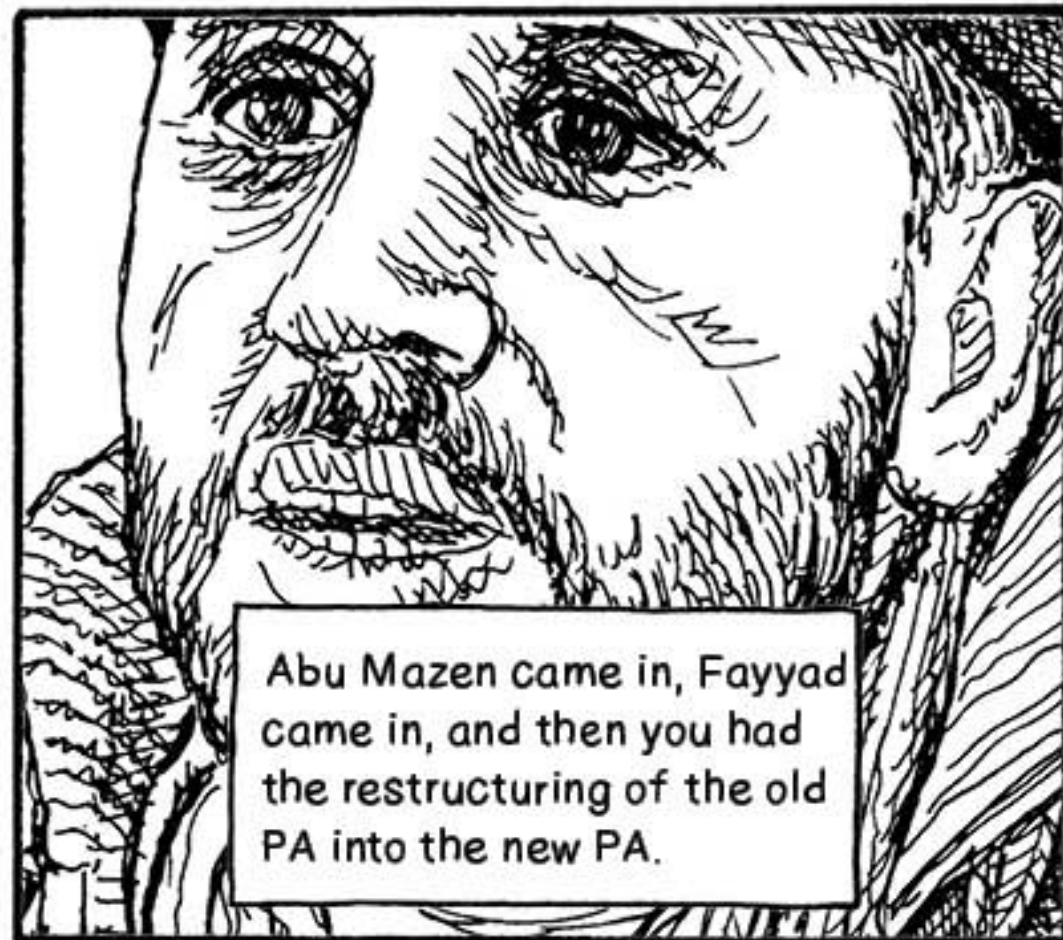
And the West Bank as a rural, traditional area where there are clans, well-established families, high-class families, poorer peasants... this has diminished.



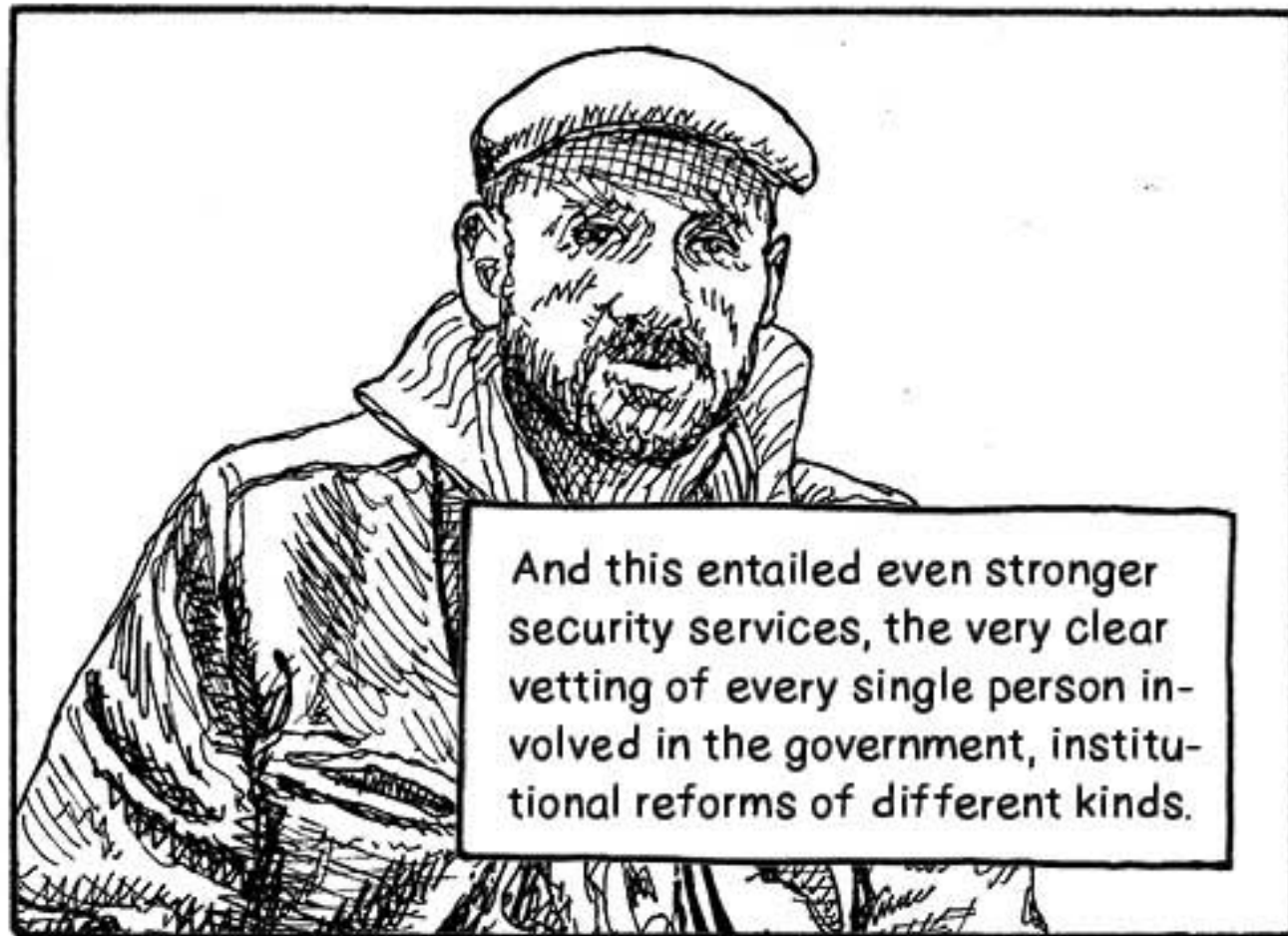
But the leadership was obviously weak since Arafat had died. And so this is how the present conditions were created. They were very susceptible to international pressure to acquiesce. And they wanted to survive.



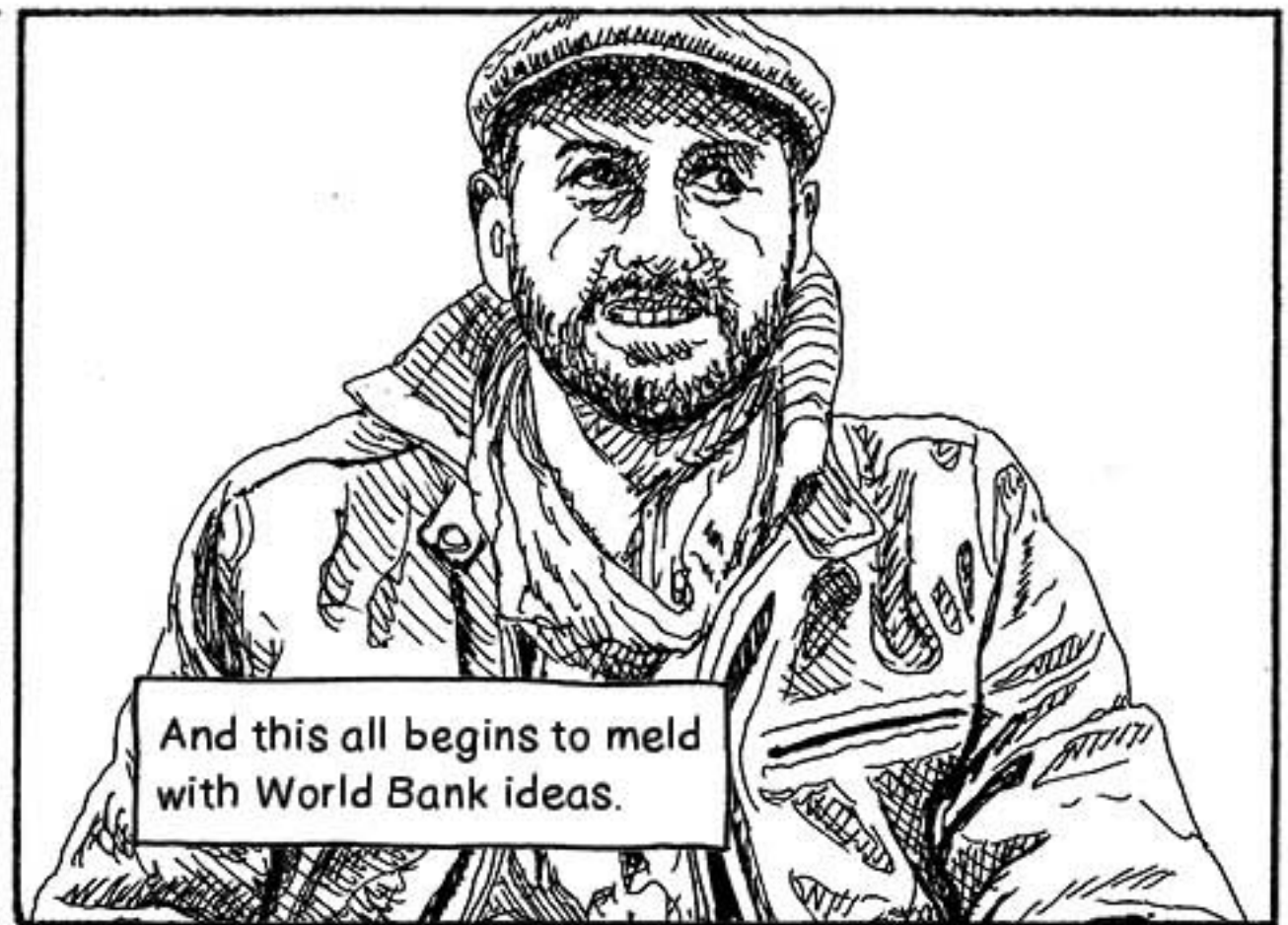
It wasn't just Hamas, they needed to survive.



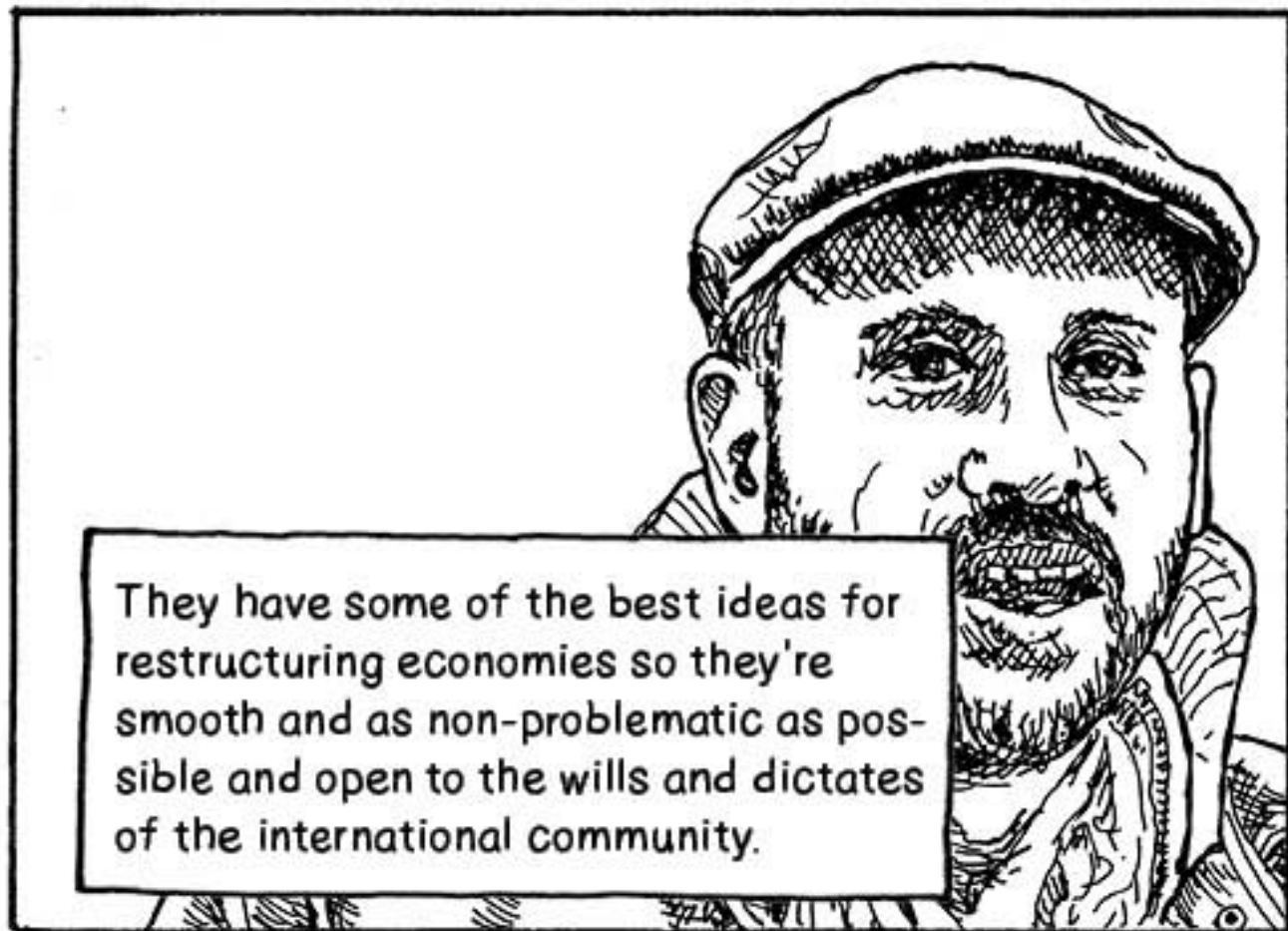
Abu Mazen came in, Fayyad came in, and then you had the restructuring of the old PA into the new PA.



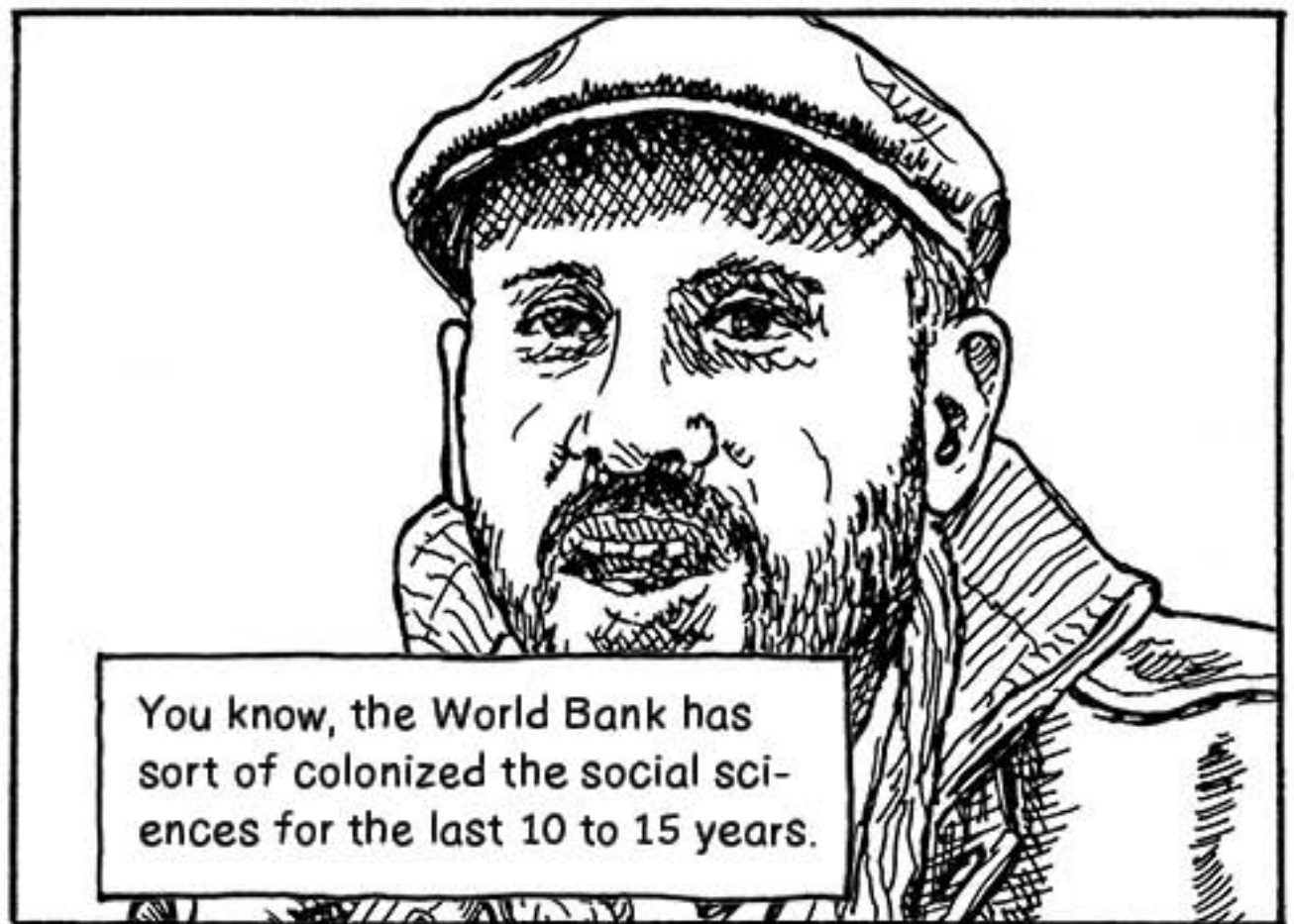
And this entailed even stronger security services, the very clear vetting of every single person involved in the government, institutional reforms of different kinds.



And this all begins to meld with World Bank ideas.



They have some of the best ideas for restructuring economies so they're smooth and as non-problematic as possible and open to the wills and dictates of the international community.



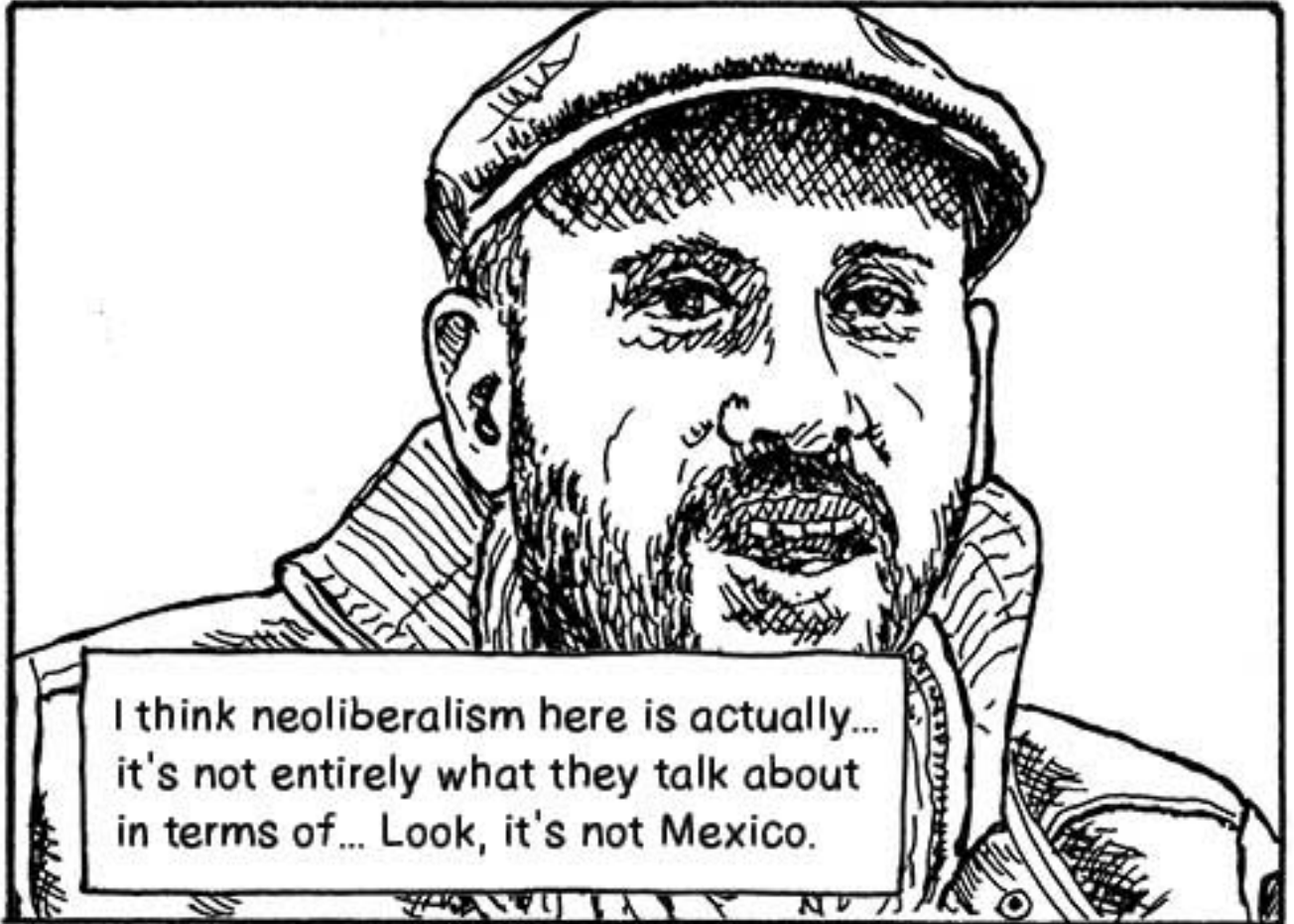
You know, the World Bank has sort of colonized the social sciences for the last 10 to 15 years.



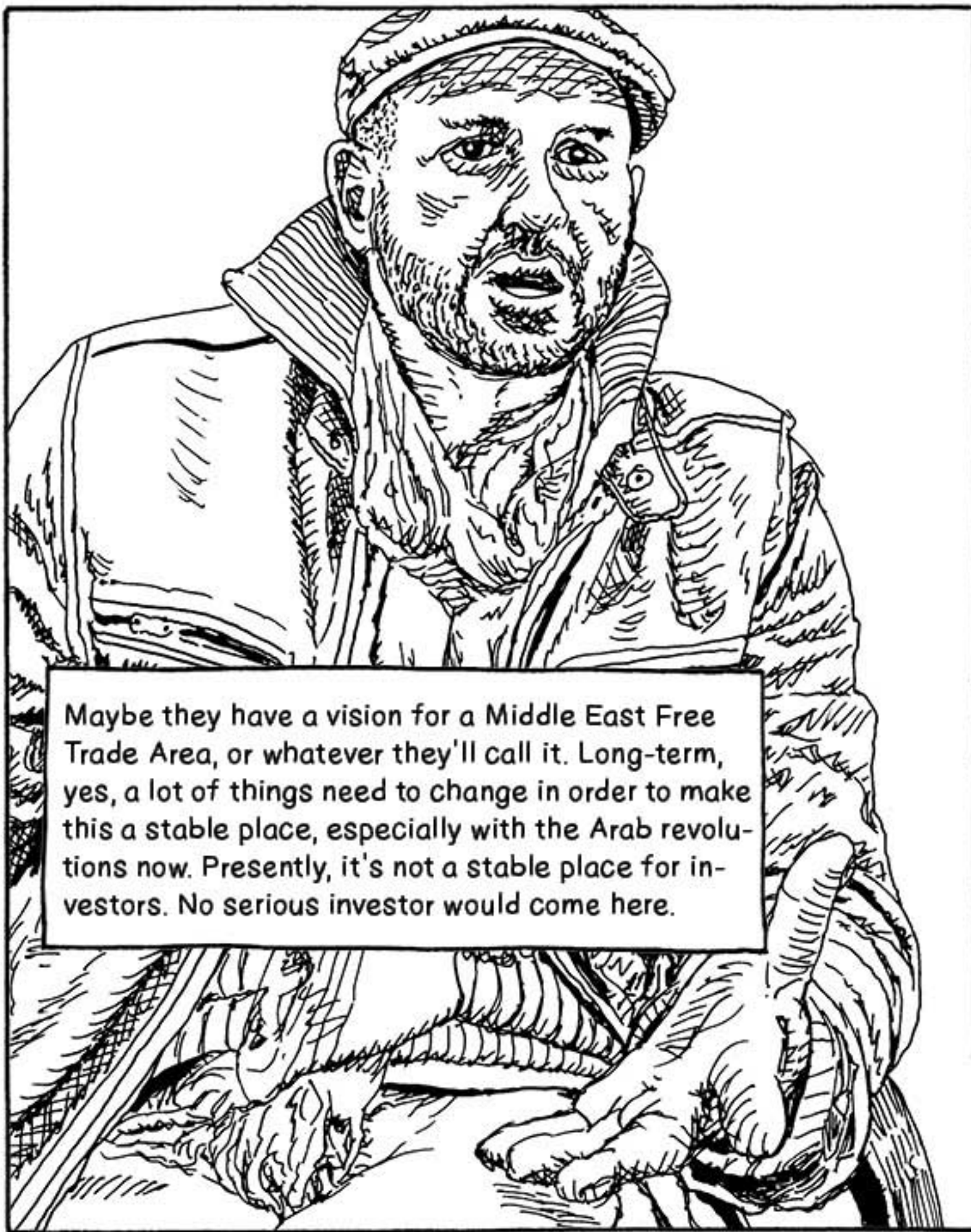
They don't think about neo-liberalism in terms of the ten-point-plan of Jamison or whatever... just in terms of tariffs or privatization. It's a much more holistic social transformative process. And they have the conditions here in Palestine to do it. And they had a former IMF banker to try and implement these things.



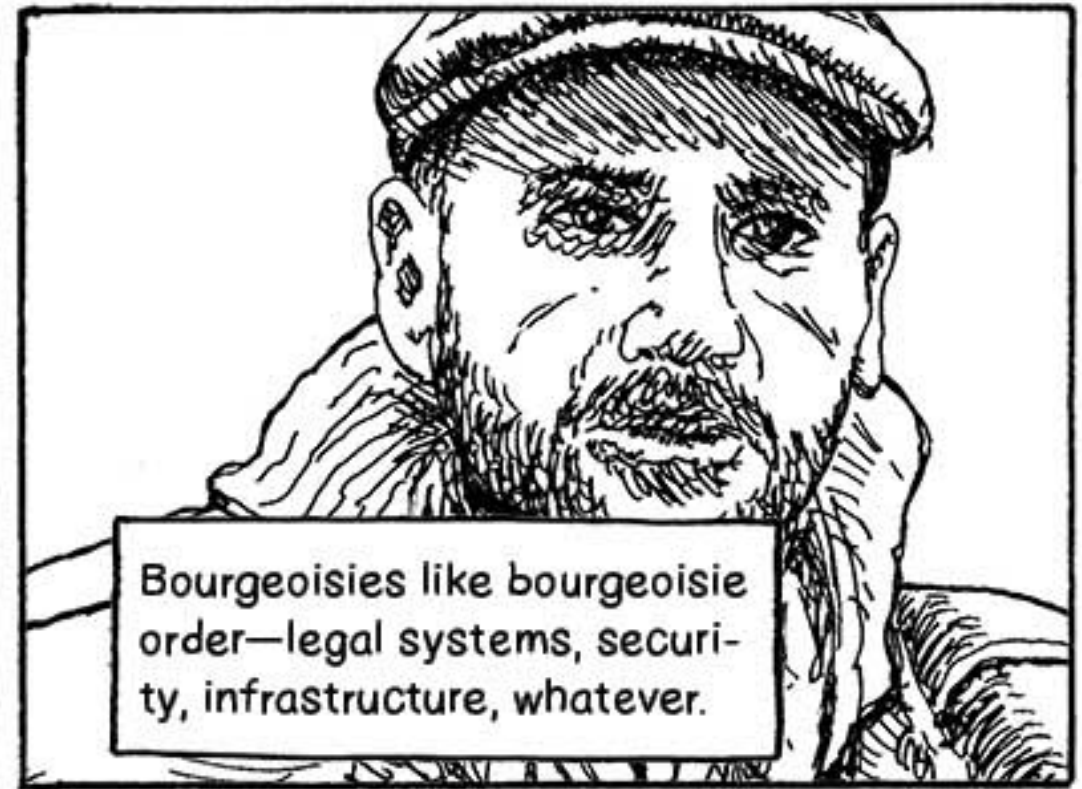
And so that's what you have. That's basically it. That's sort of the background you need on the neoliberal project.



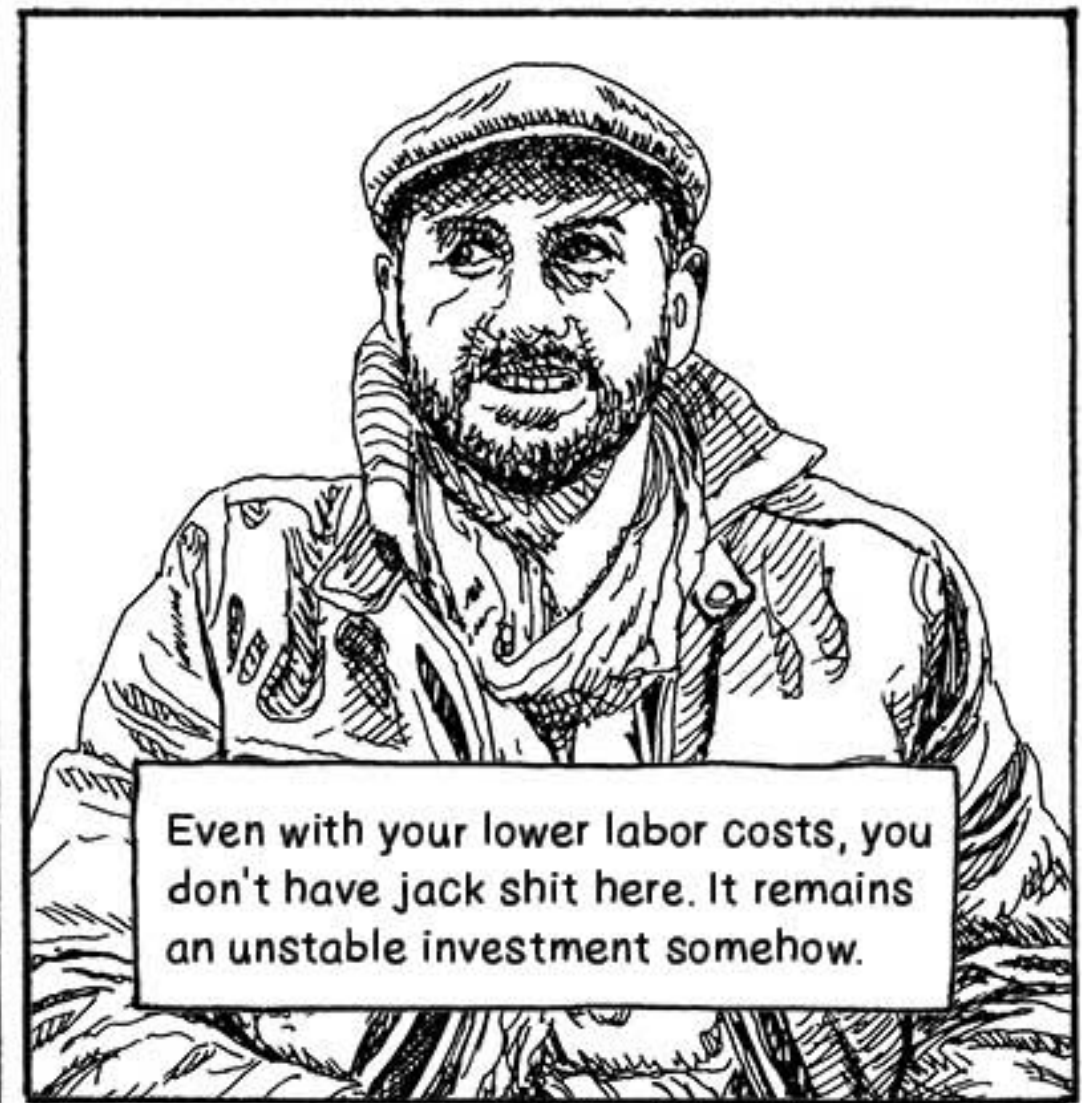
I think neoliberalism here is actually... it's not entirely what they talk about in terms of... Look, it's not Mexico.



Maybe they have a vision for a Middle East Free Trade Area, or whatever they'll call it. Long-term, yes, a lot of things need to change in order to make this a stable place, especially with the Arab revolutions now. Presently, it's not a stable place for investors. No serious investor would come here.



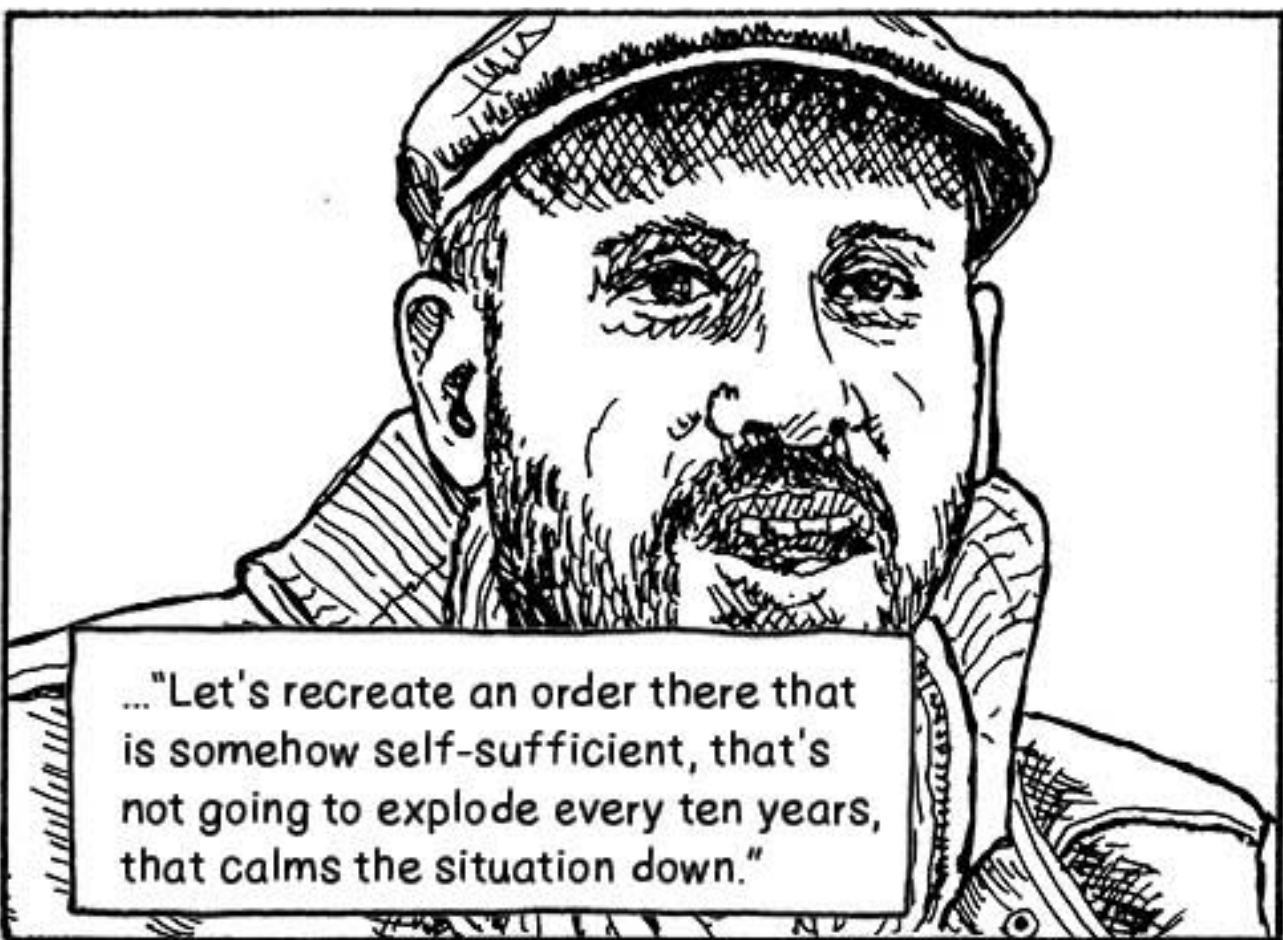
Bourgeoisies like bourgeoisie order—legal systems, security, infrastructure, whatever.



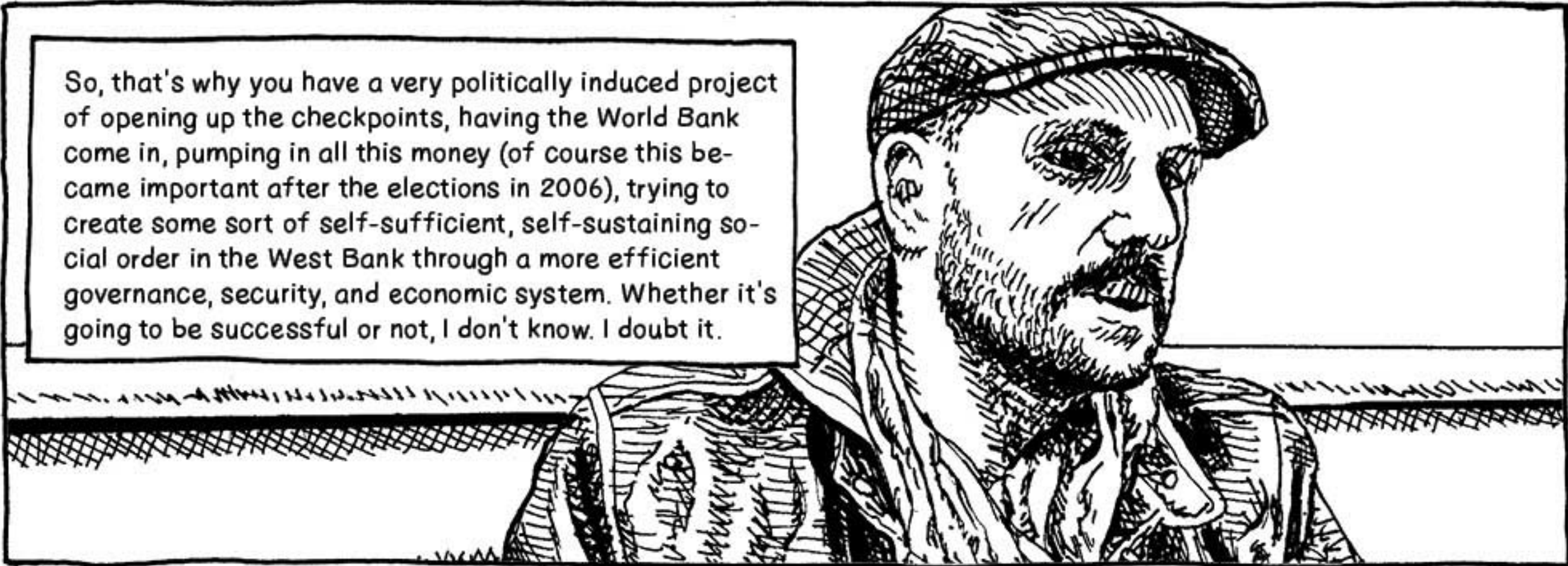
Even with your lower labor costs, you don't have jack shit here. It remains an unstable investment somehow.



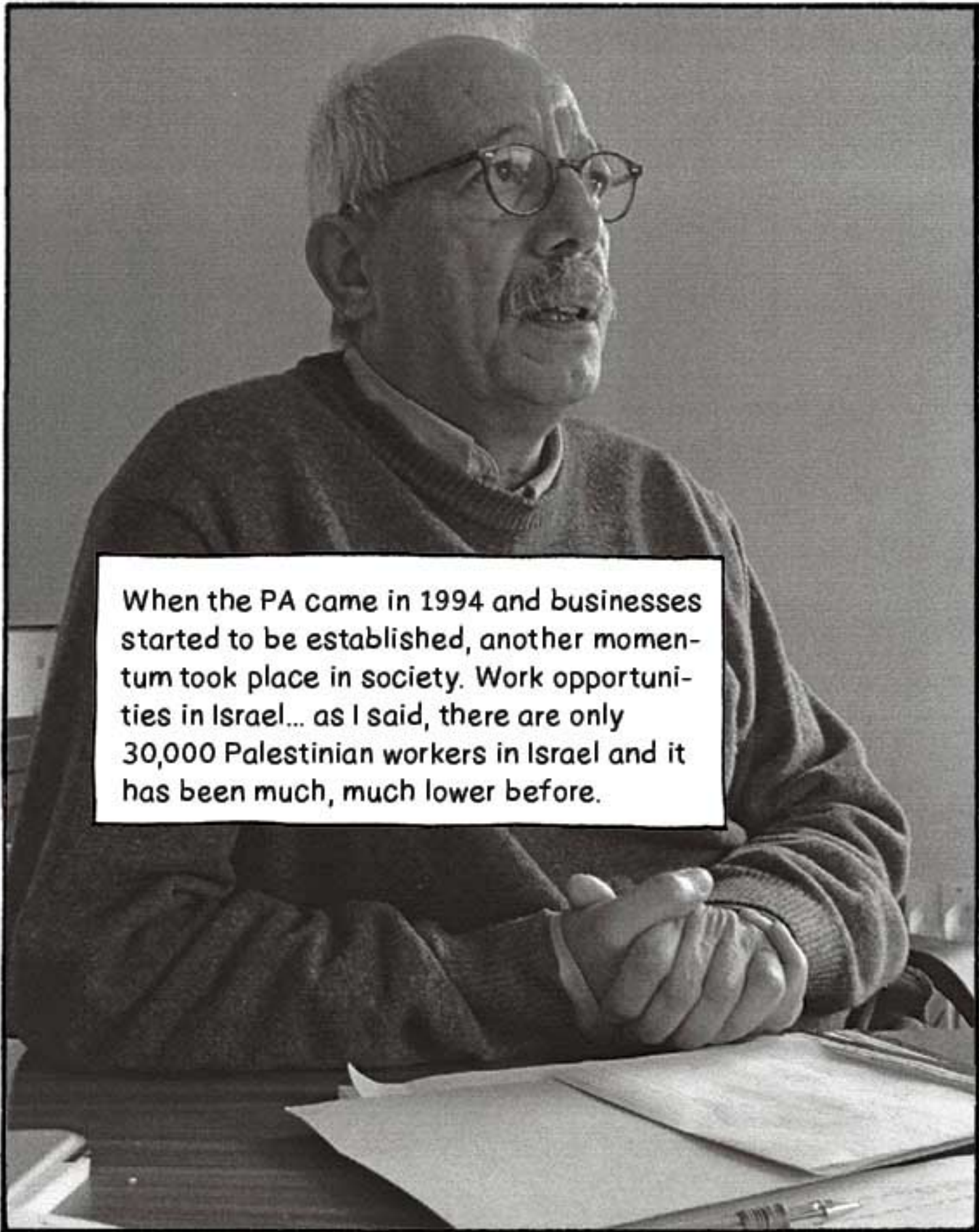
Long-term, yes, maybe we can create a system, but at present it's kind of like...



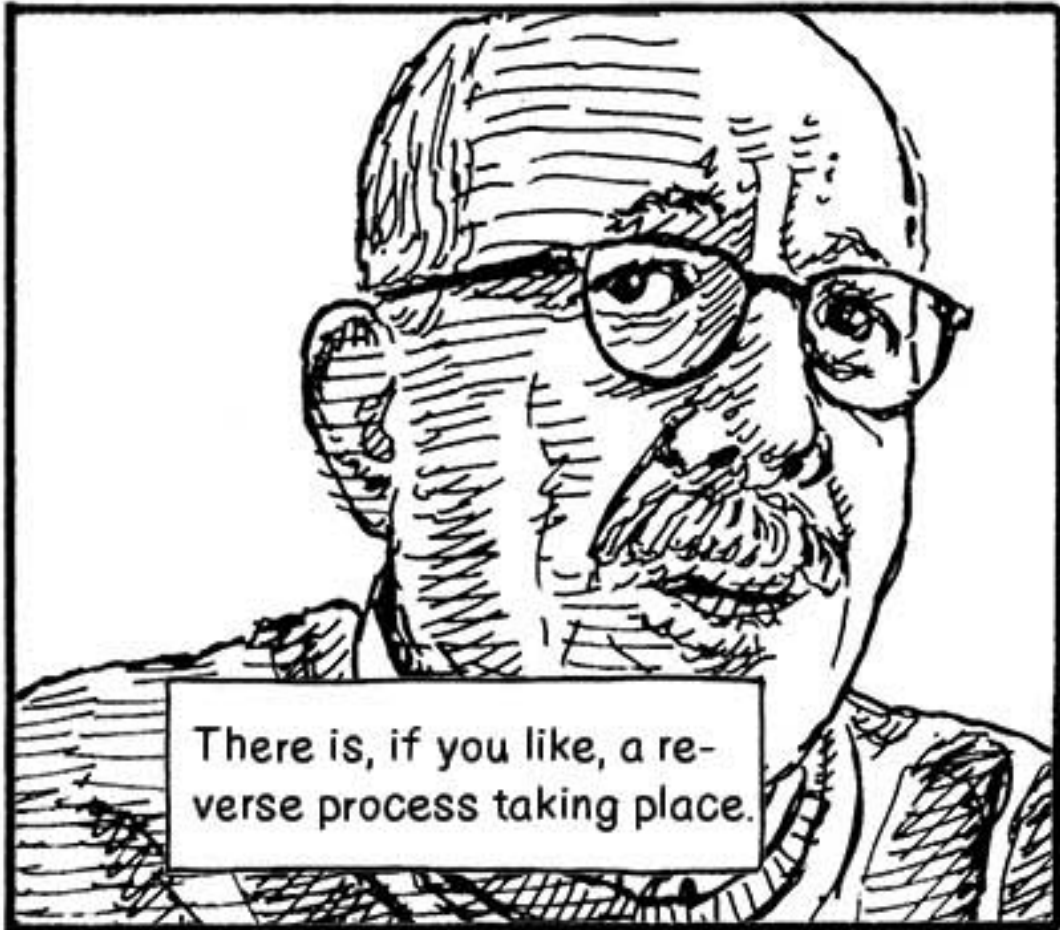
... "Let's recreate an order there that is somehow self-sufficient, that's not going to explode every ten years, that calms the situation down."



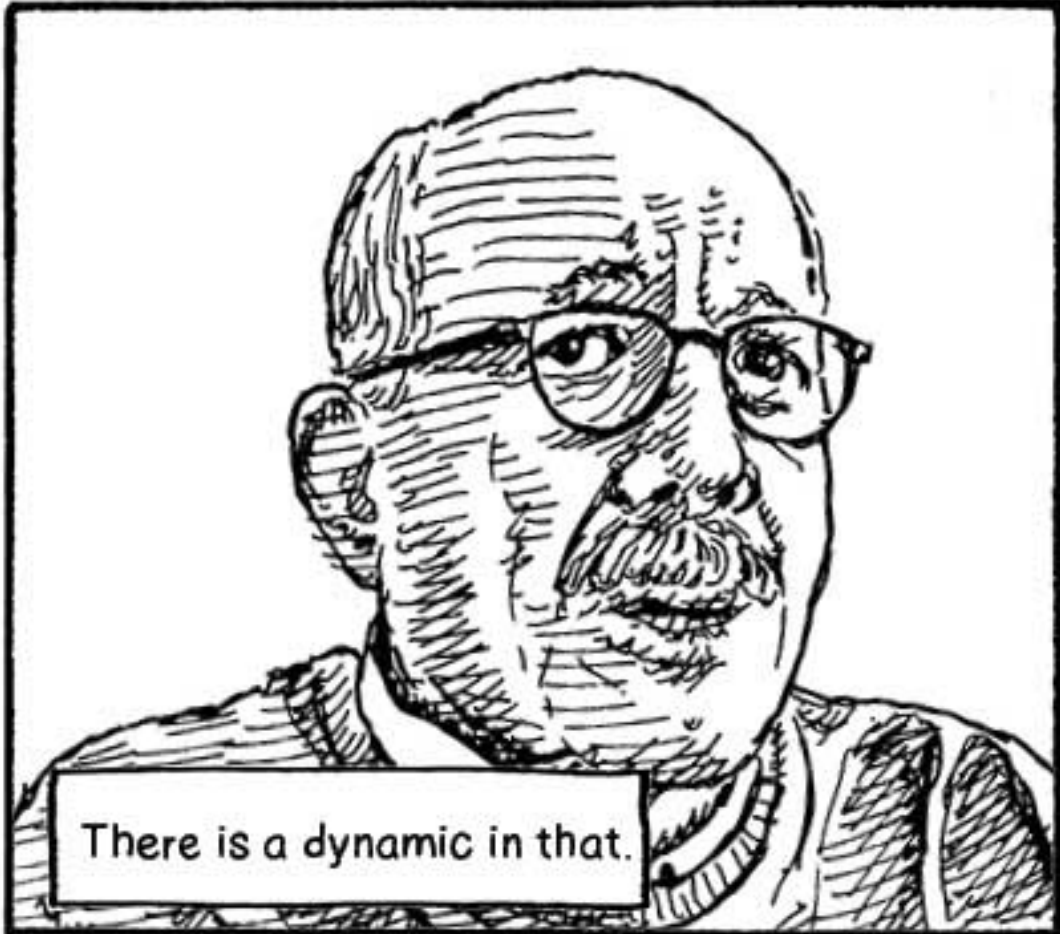
So, that's why you have a very politically induced project of opening up the checkpoints, having the World Bank come in, pumping in all this money (of course this became important after the elections in 2006), trying to create some sort of self-sufficient, self-sustaining social order in the West Bank through a more efficient governance, security, and economic system. Whether it's going to be successful or not, I don't know. I doubt it.



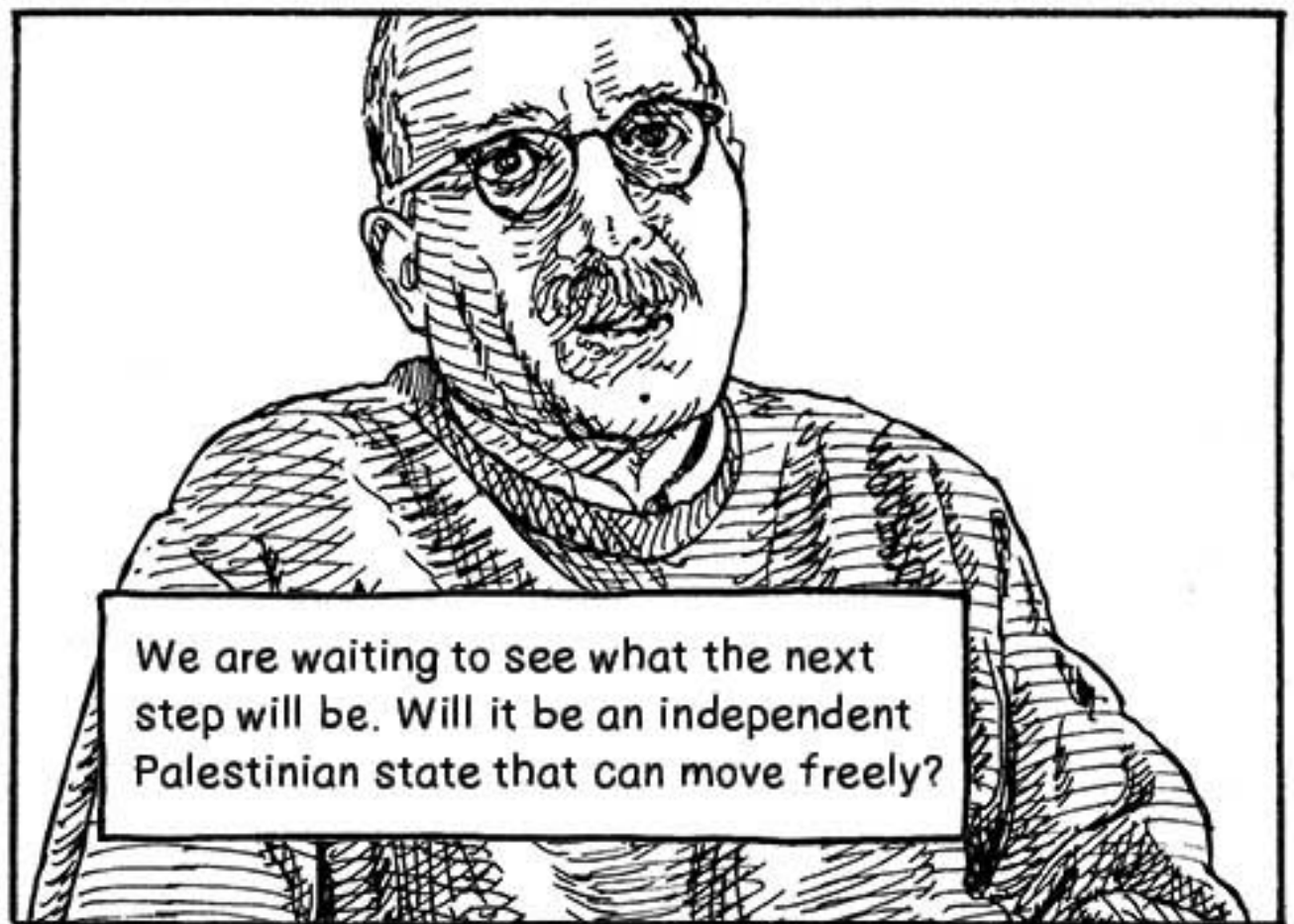
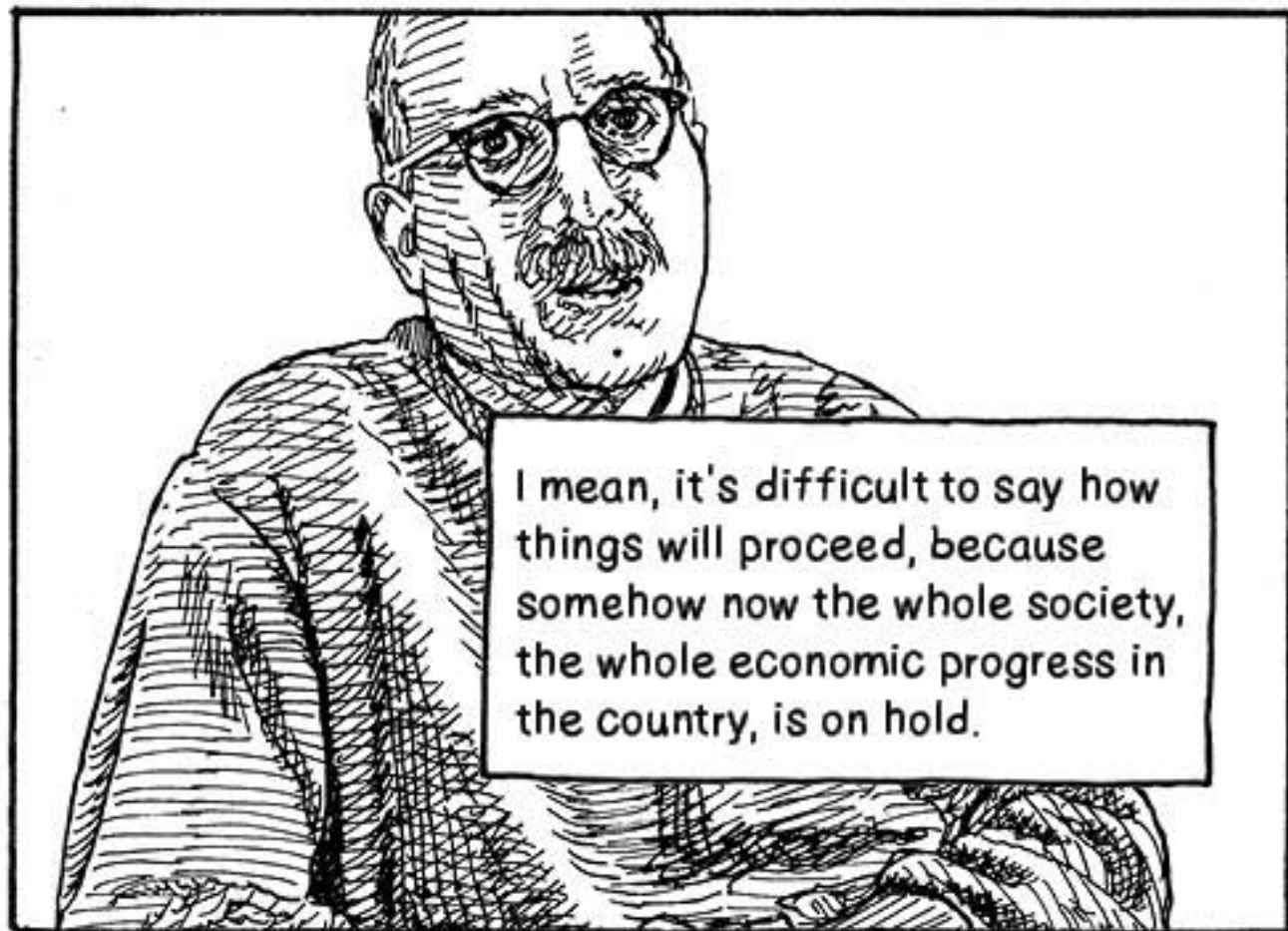
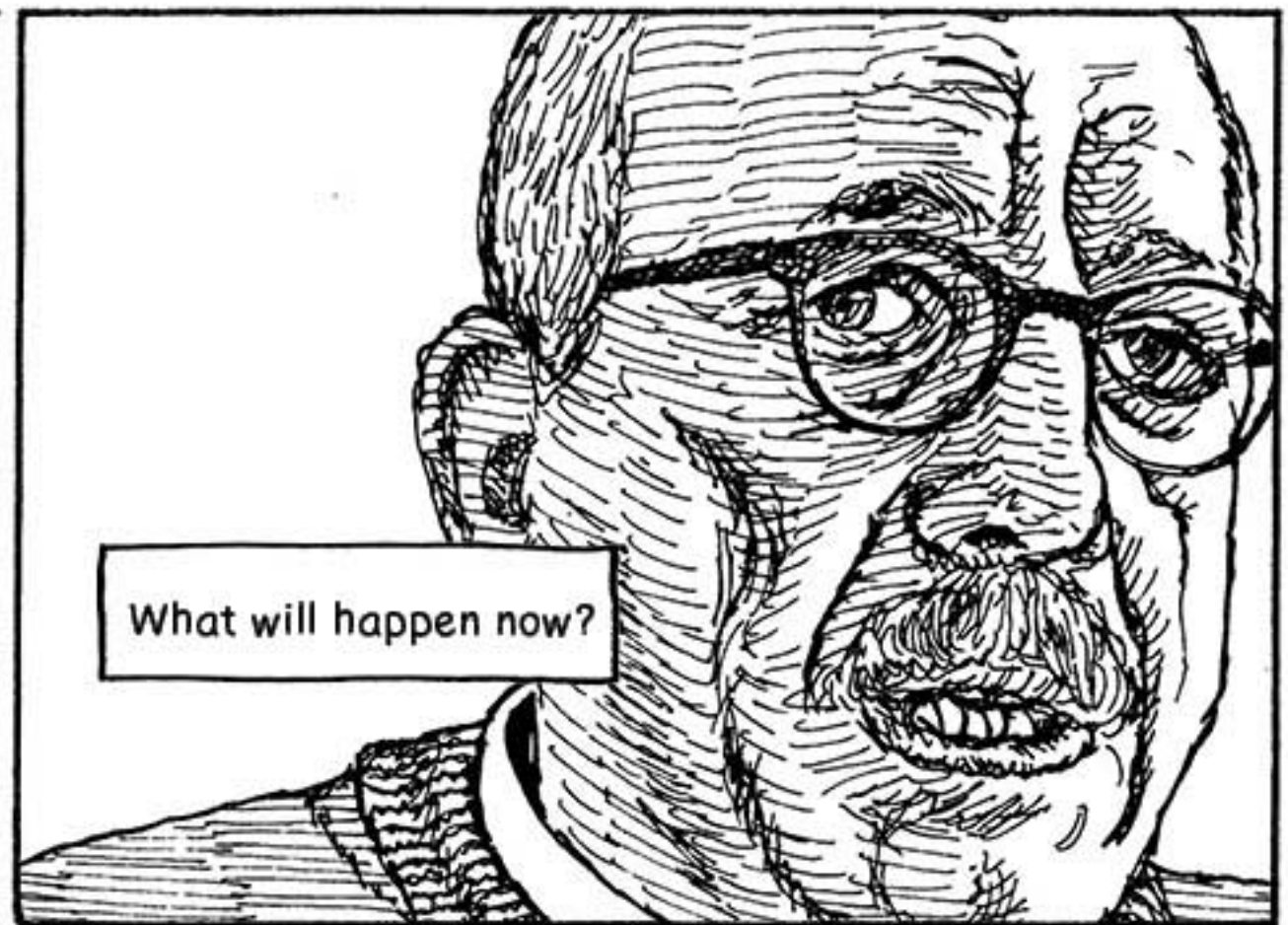
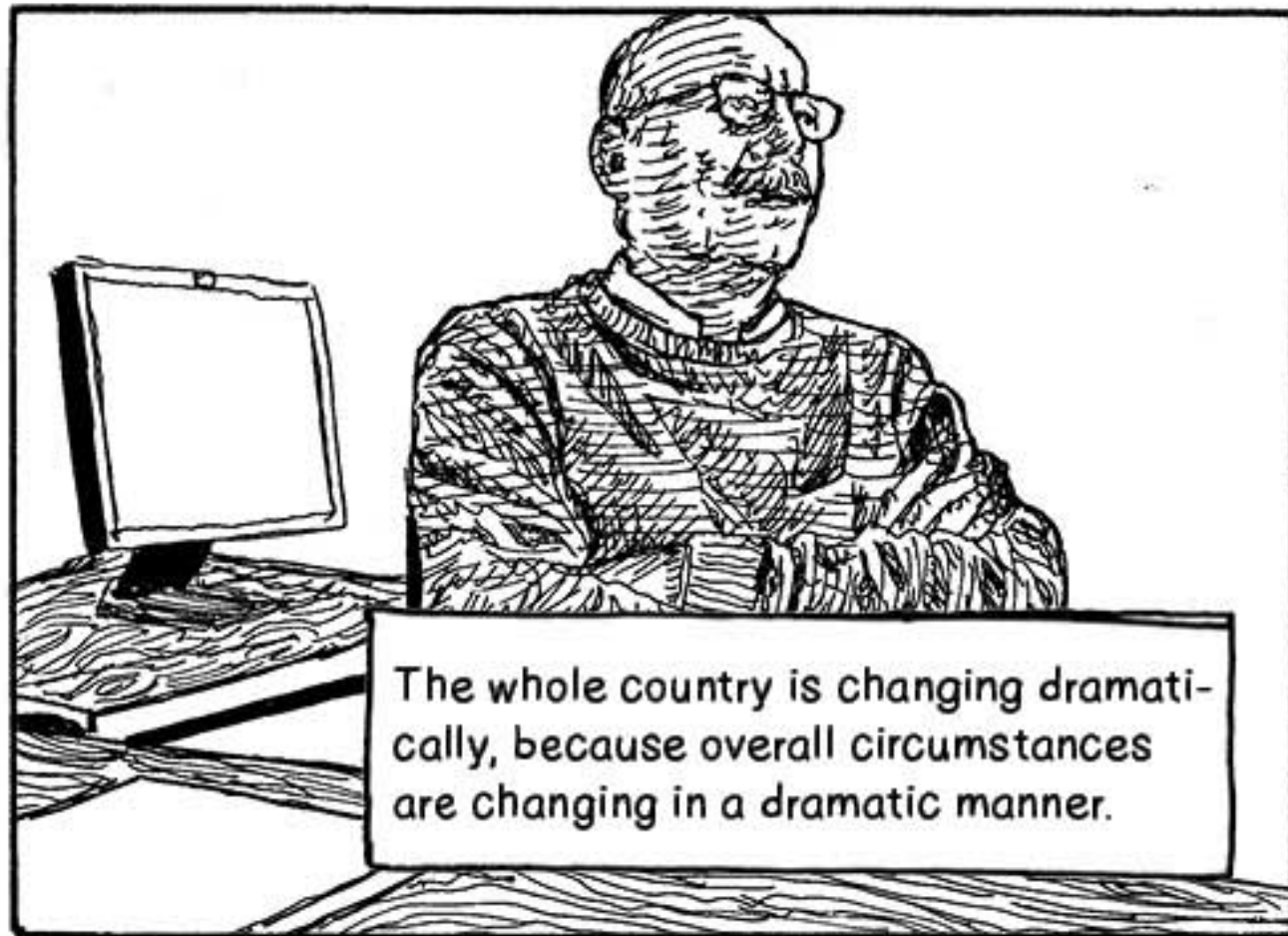
When the PA came in 1994 and businesses started to be established, another momentum took place in society. Work opportunities in Israel... as I said, there are only 30,000 Palestinian workers in Israel and it has been much, much lower before.



There is, if you like, a reverse process taking place.

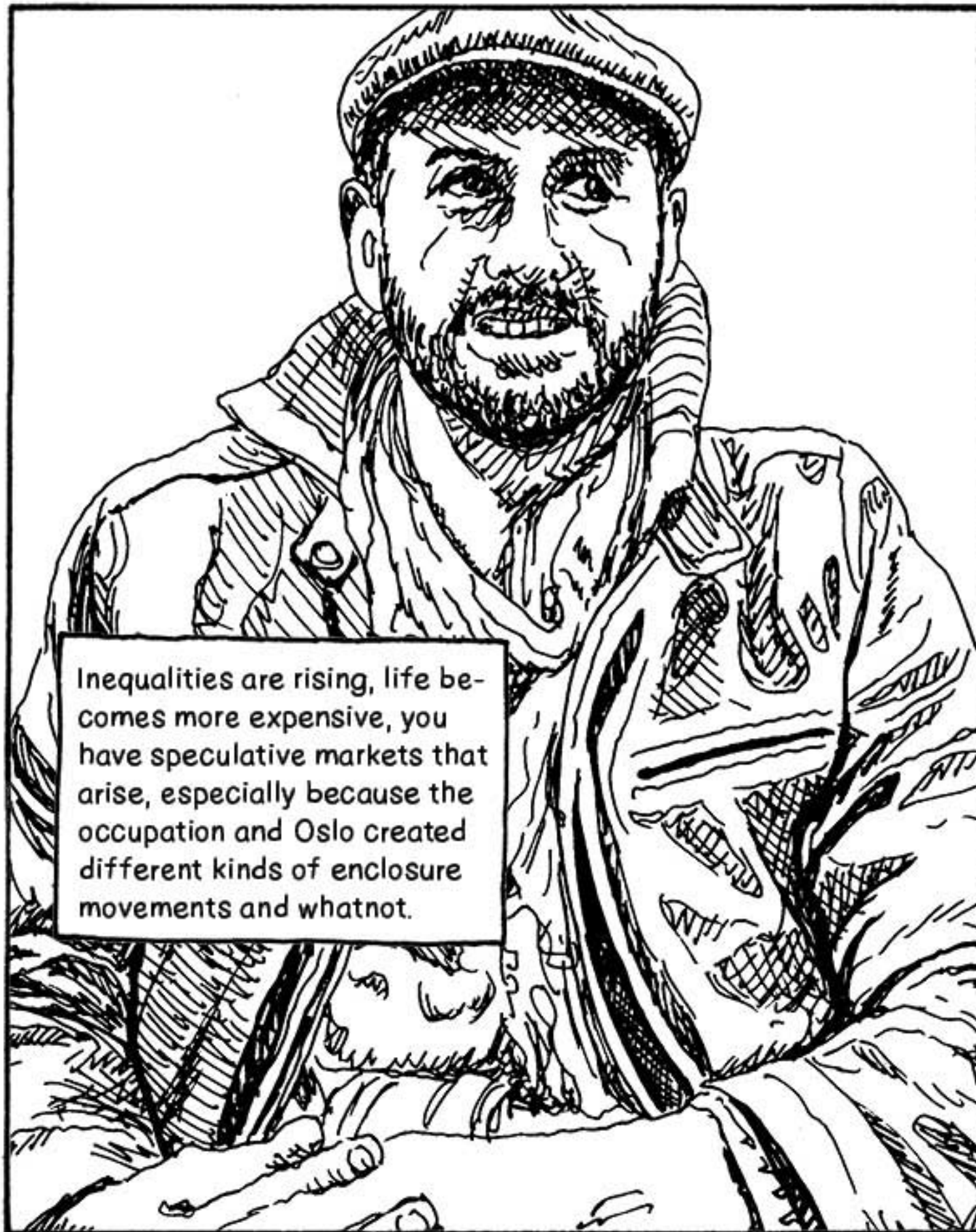


There is a dynamic in that.





Of course, in the end it's a political problem here, it requires political solutions. Also the kinds of policies they implement long-term are like neo-liberal practices in certain areas. I mean, if you're really just opening the country to big capital, not everyone can benefit. It's very clear that there are big sharks and small fry and most people aren't going to benefit.



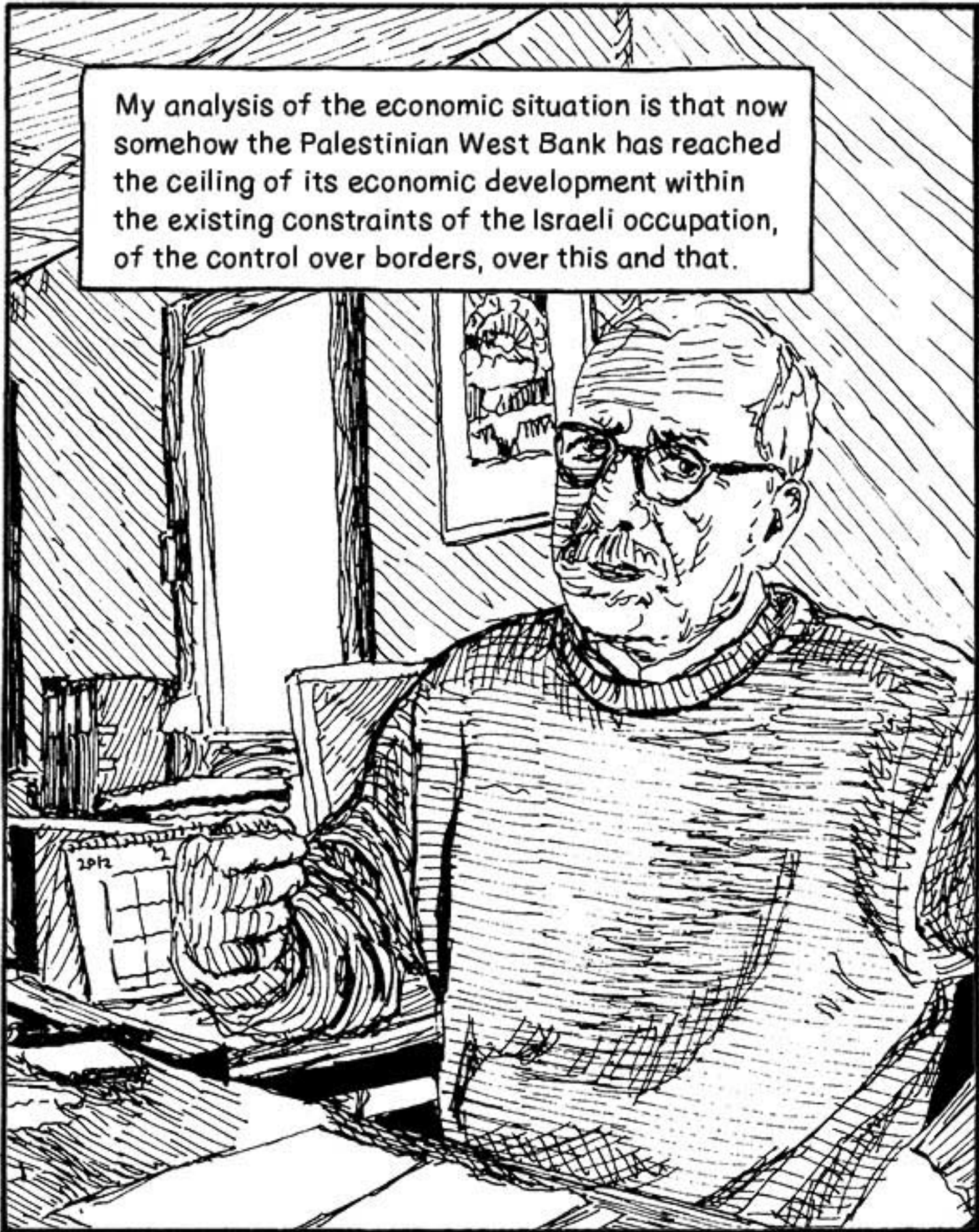
Inequalities are rising, life becomes more expensive, you have speculative markets that arise, especially because the occupation and Oslo created different kinds of enclosure movements and whatnot.



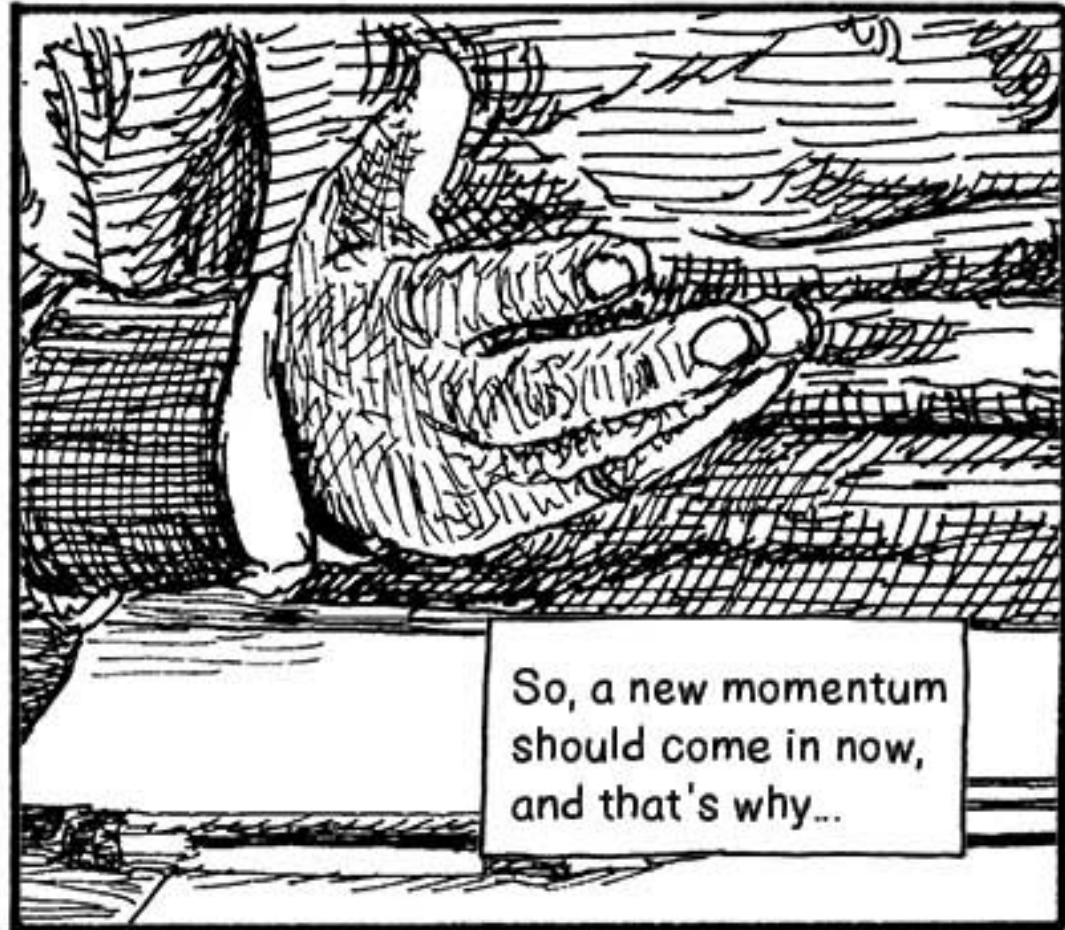
And so, people will eventually be priced out and alienated and all this sort of stuff, and it creates its own enemies.



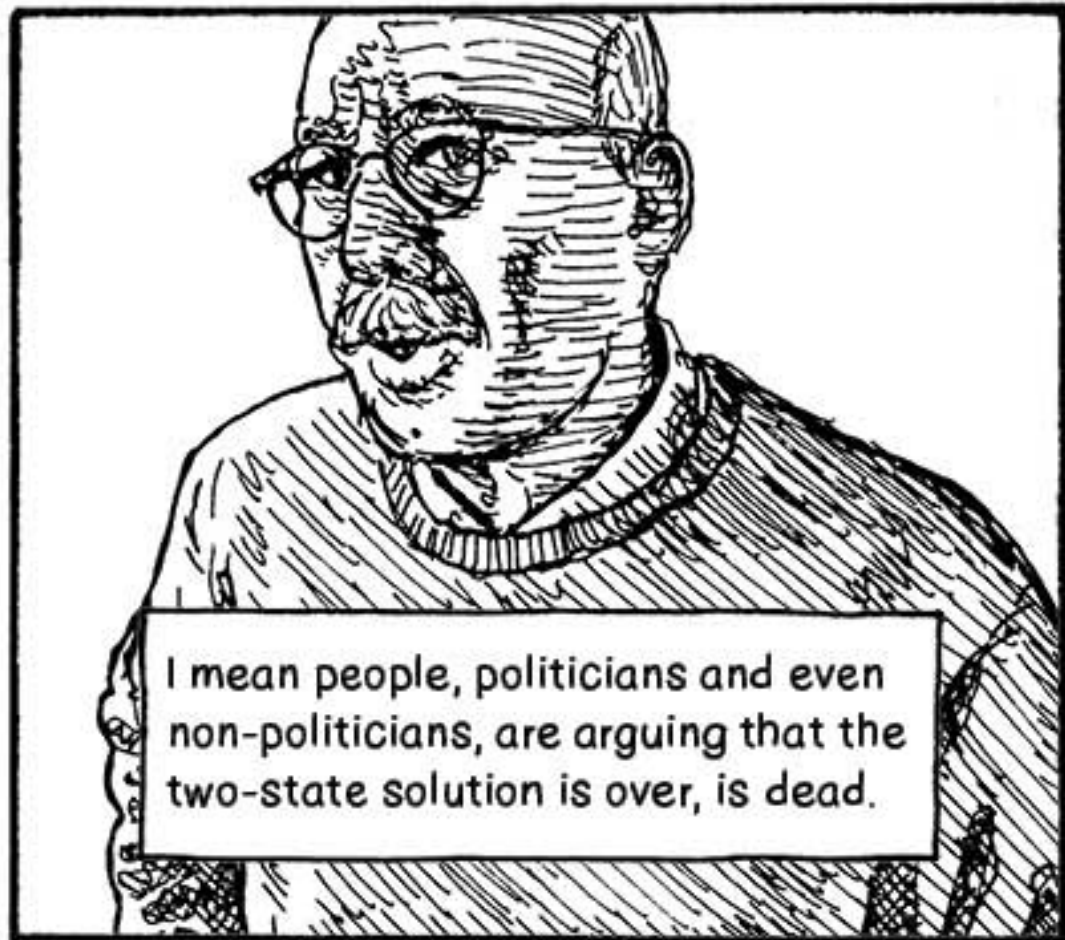
That's basically what I would say about it. You have Picasso in Palestine in this context: what does it mean?



My analysis of the economic situation is that now somehow the Palestinian West Bank has reached the ceiling of its economic development within the existing constraints of the Israeli occupation, of the control over borders, over this and that.



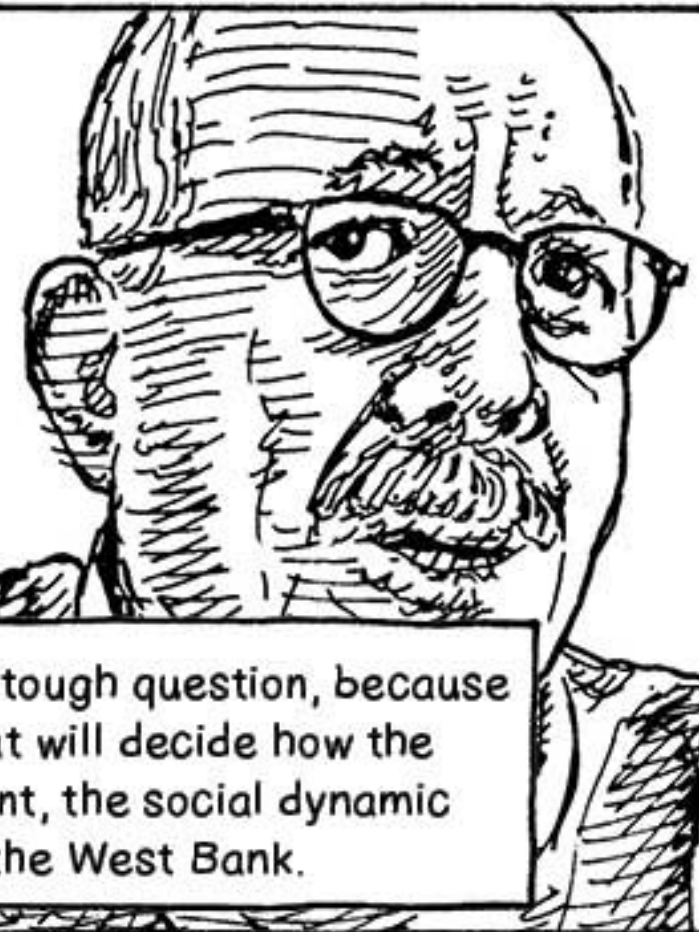
So, a new momentum should come in now, and that's why...



I mean people, politicians and even non-politicians, are arguing that the two-state solution is over, is dead.



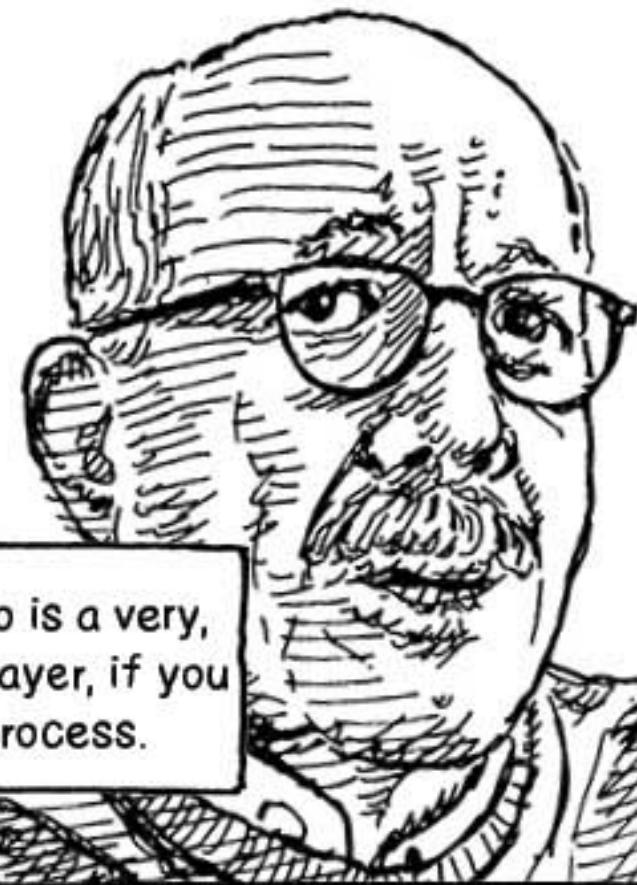
OK, maybe. Maybe it's dead, but what will come instead of it?



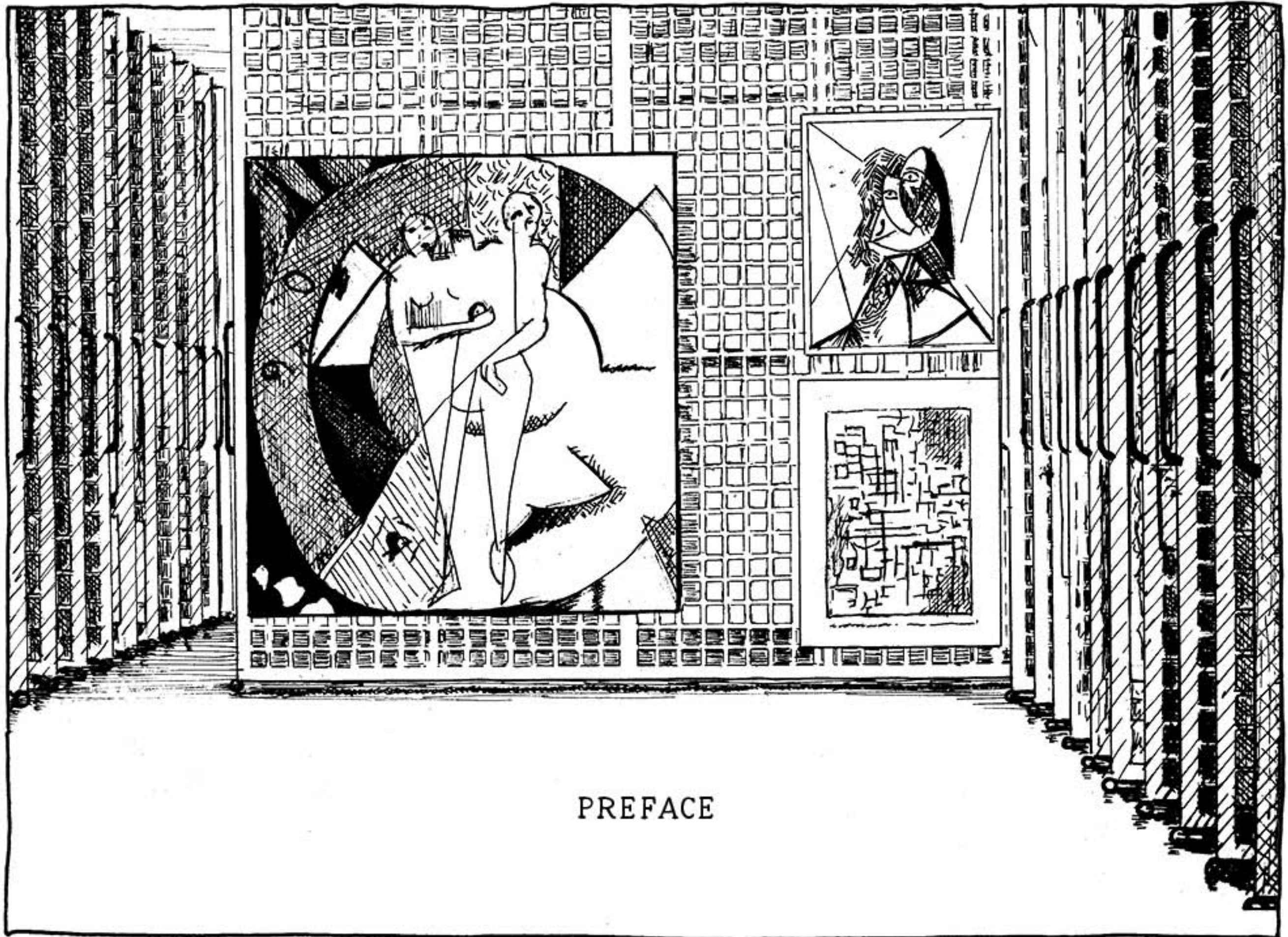
And that's the tough question, because that's also what will decide how the social movement, the social dynamic will change in the West Bank.



Now where does Picasso come inside all of this? I don't know.



Then Picasso is a very, very small player, if you like, in this process.



PREFACE



As I asked before, when can we say our story begins? Does it begin in 1943, when Picasso painted the *Buste de femme*? Or the spring of 1948 when the State of Israel was declared? One could journey still further back in time, to the inception of artistic modernity or to the beginnings of Zionism, and tell again the whole complicated story of Zionism's origins in European anti-Semitism and colonial adventuring. Any one of these events might suffice, and one might put forward equally good arguments for beginning at any of these points, or earlier still.

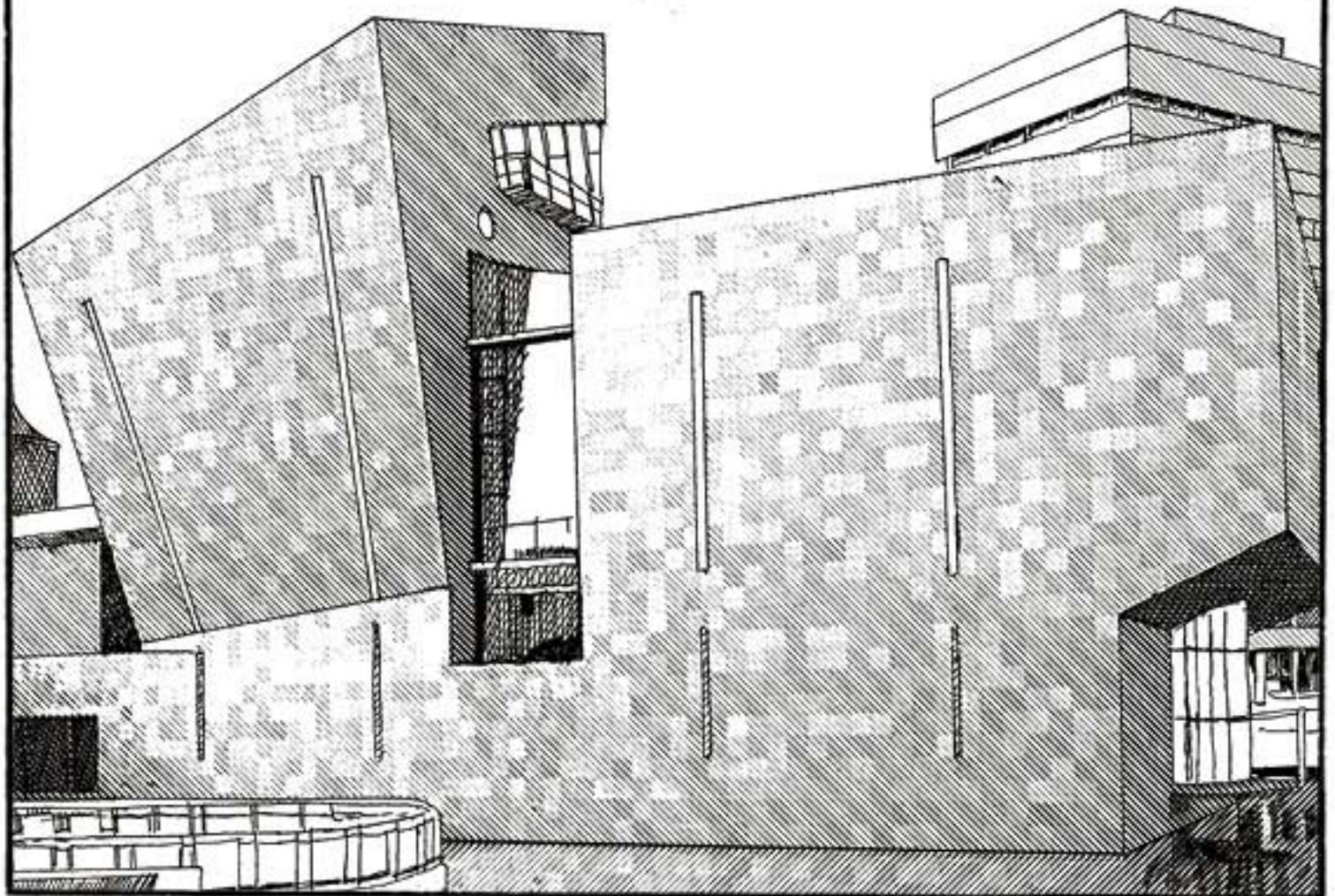
But for the sake of convention, let us remain in the present day, the most proximate beginning of our story.

Khaled Hourani, the International Academy of Art Palestine. Ramallah, February 2012:



The idea was easier than the procedure itself. It started like a joke.

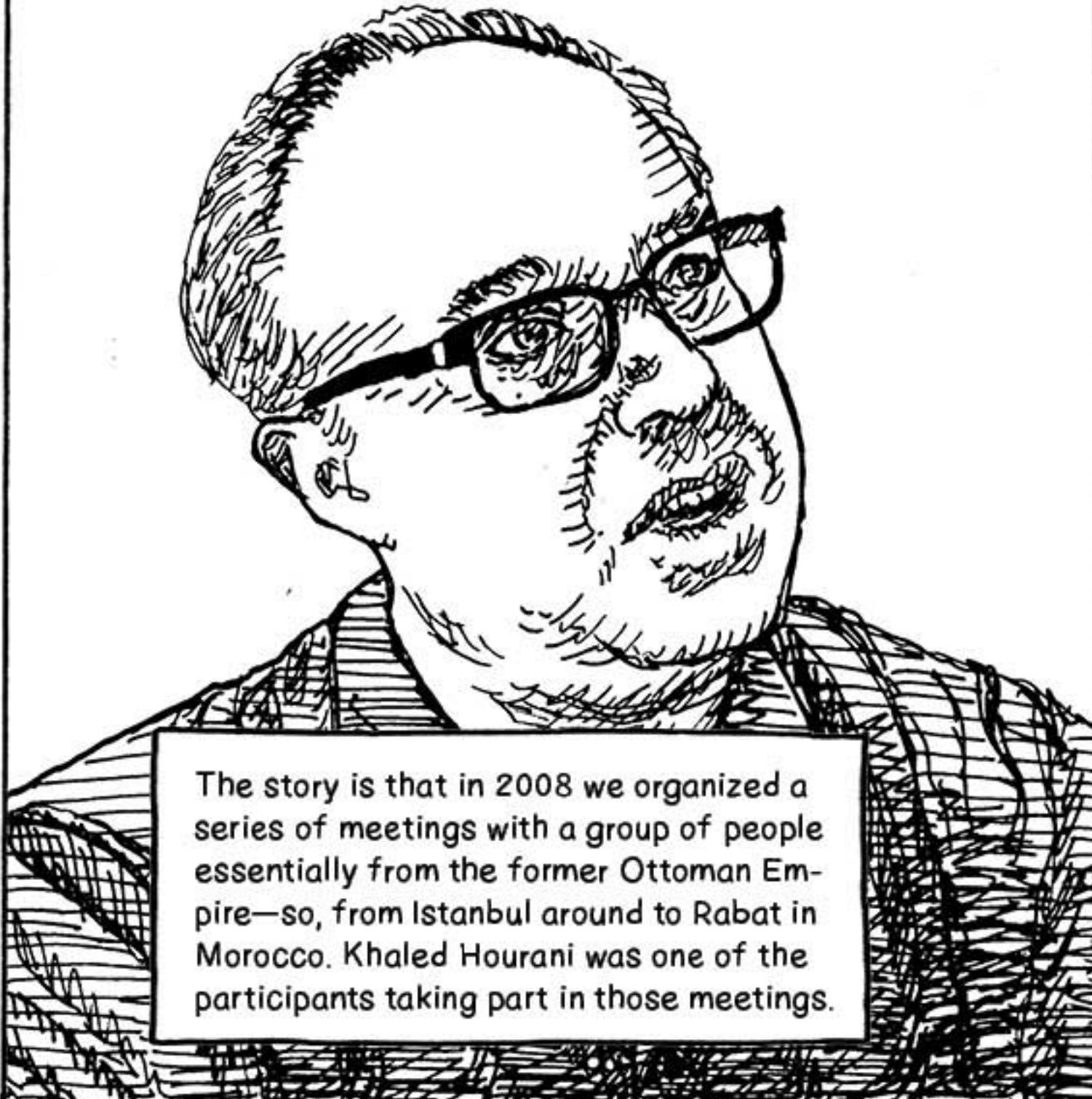
I was on a visit to the Van Abbemuseum three years ago, and we made a tour with the director and others of the rear of the museum. We were visiting the administration room, the collection, and they were explaining the policy of exhibitions—how they send artworks or parts of their collection to other countries, to other museums.



And I was asking myself on the way out,
why not include Palestine as one of the
countries that a Picasso or another art
piece—a masterpiece—had visited?



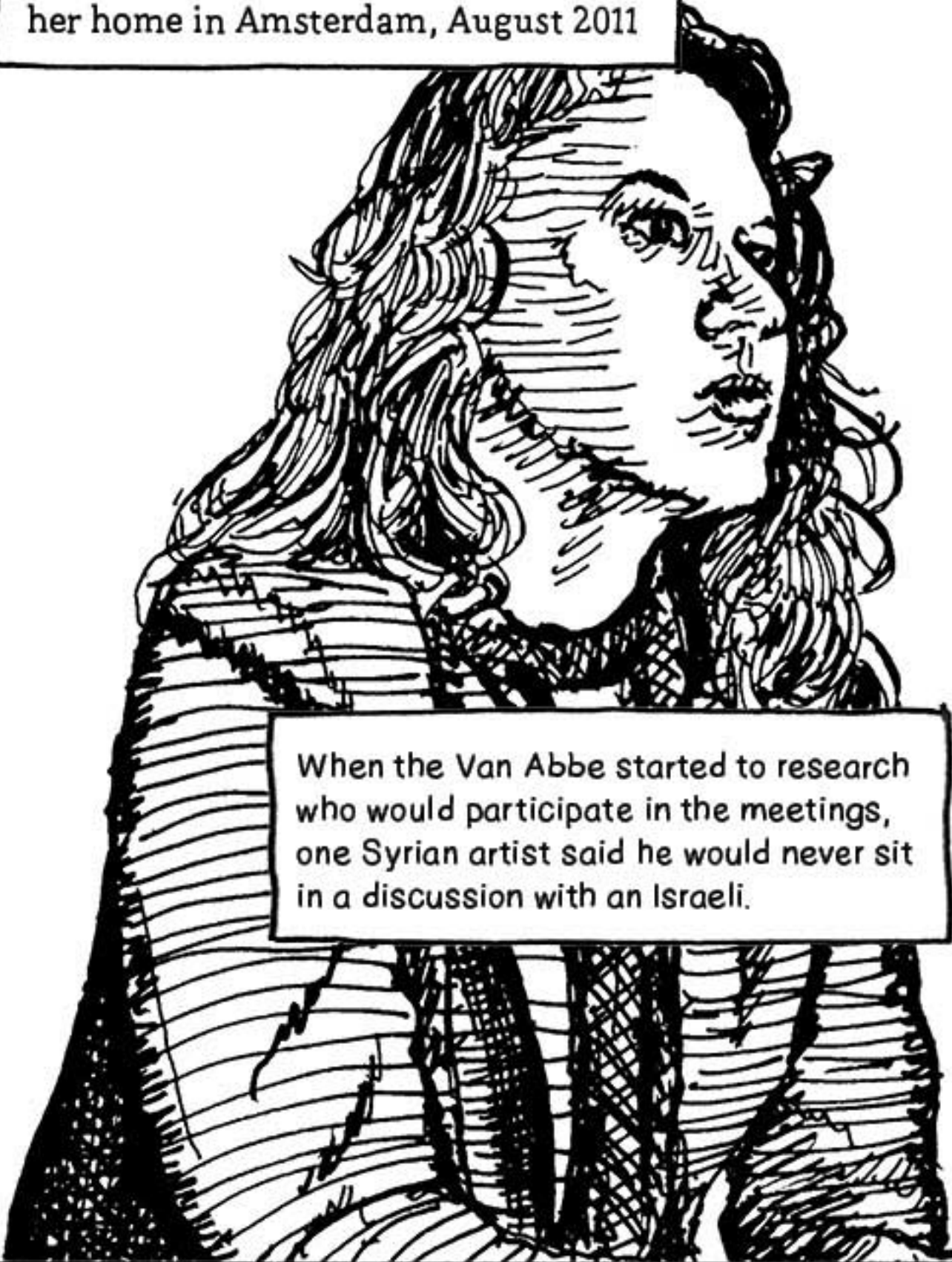
Charles Esche, speaking over Skype while vacationing in Ljubljana, July 2011:



The story is that in 2008 we organized a series of meetings with a group of people essentially from the former Ottoman Empire—so, from Istanbul around to Rabat in Morocco. Khaled Hourani was one of the participants taking part in those meetings.


Galit Eilat, an Israeli curator hired by the Van Abbe early in 2010, also attended these sessions. Gareis and Salewski's article in *Die Zeit* states: "Some of the Arabs did not at first want to sit with her."






Galit Eilat, speaking over Skype from her home in Amsterdam, August 2011

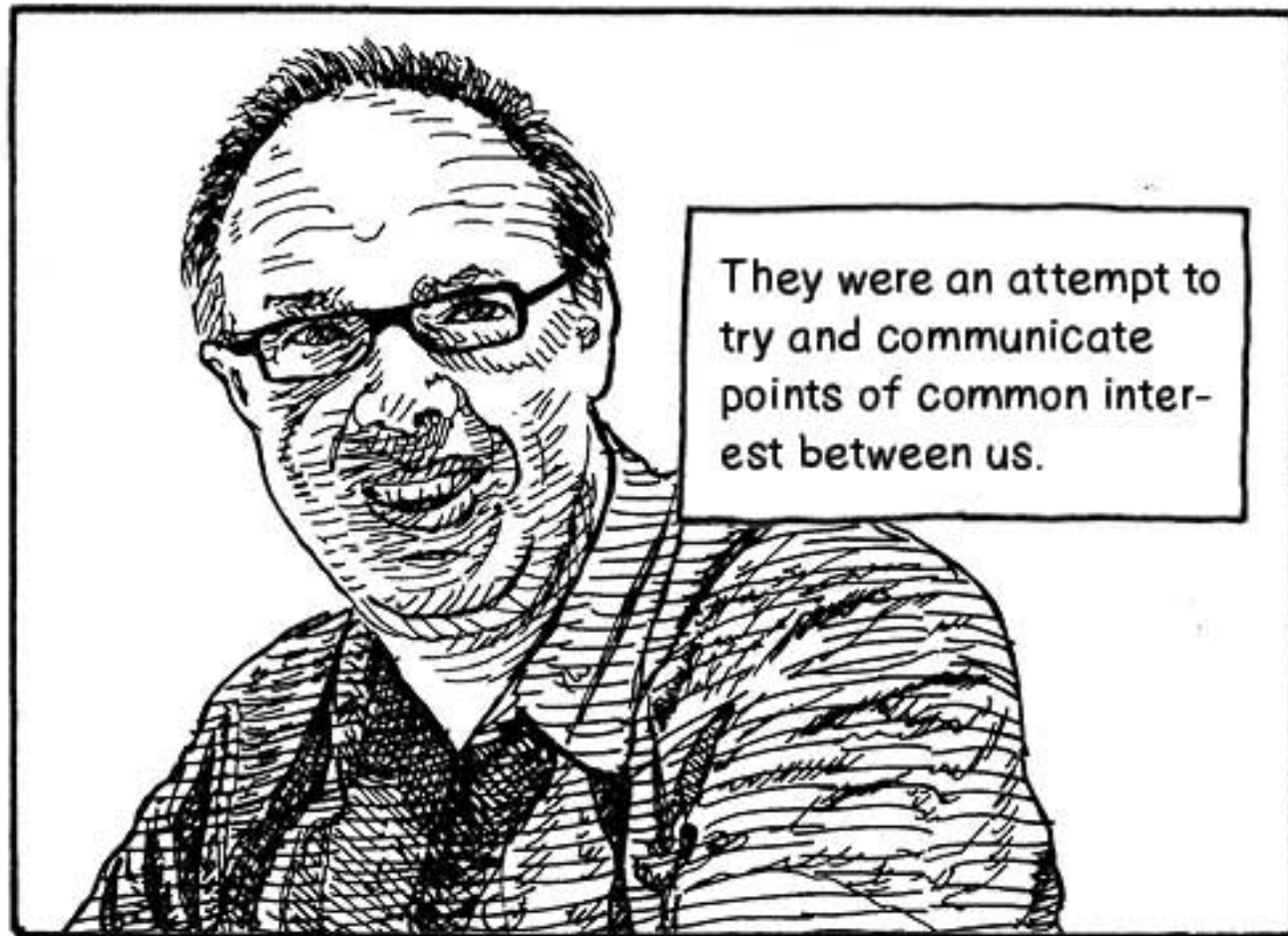
When the Van Abbe started to research who would participate in the meetings, one Syrian artist said he would never sit in a discussion with an Israeli.



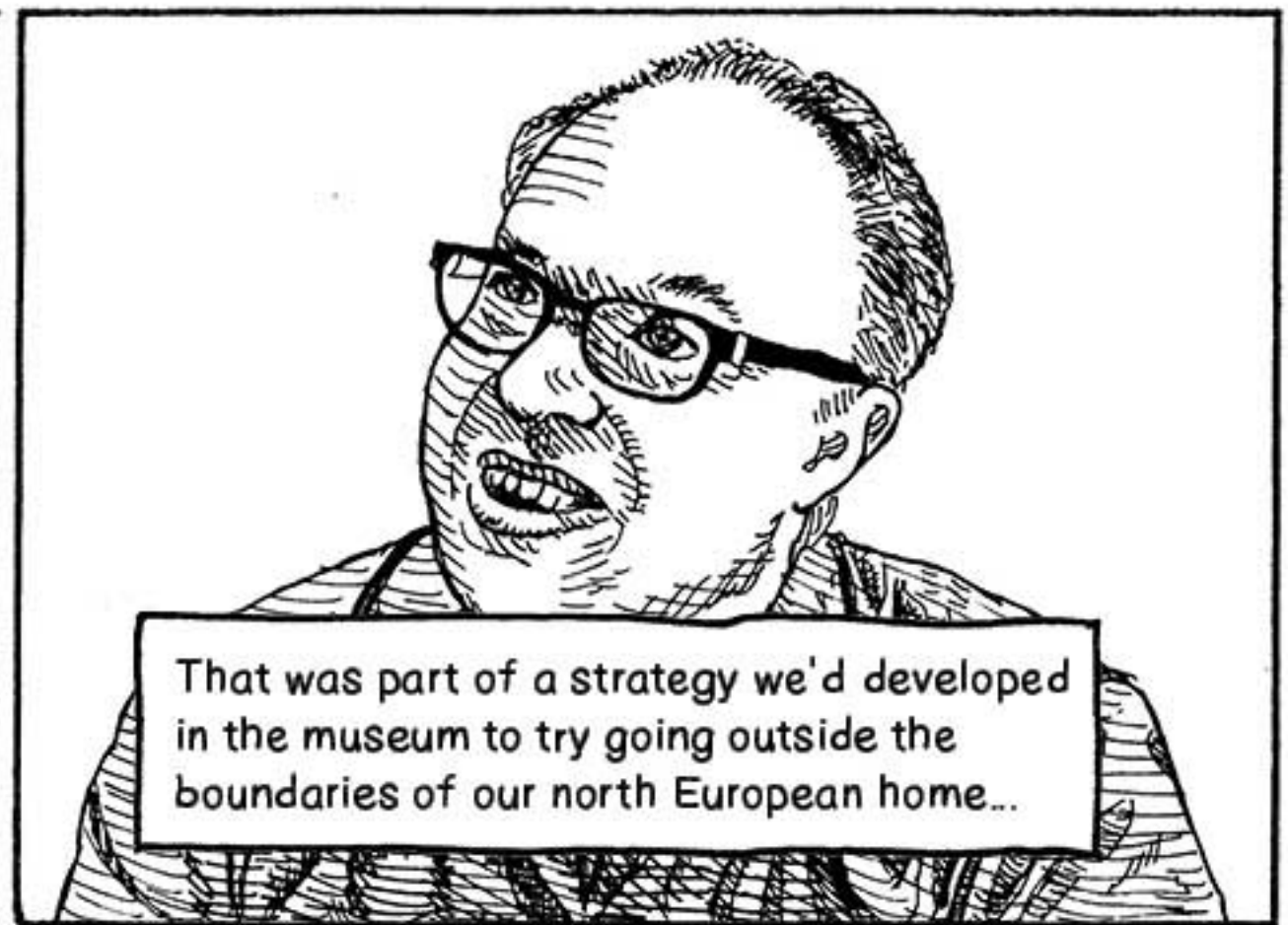
And Khaled wrote to him and said, "Come on, I'm sitting with her, and you're boycotting her."



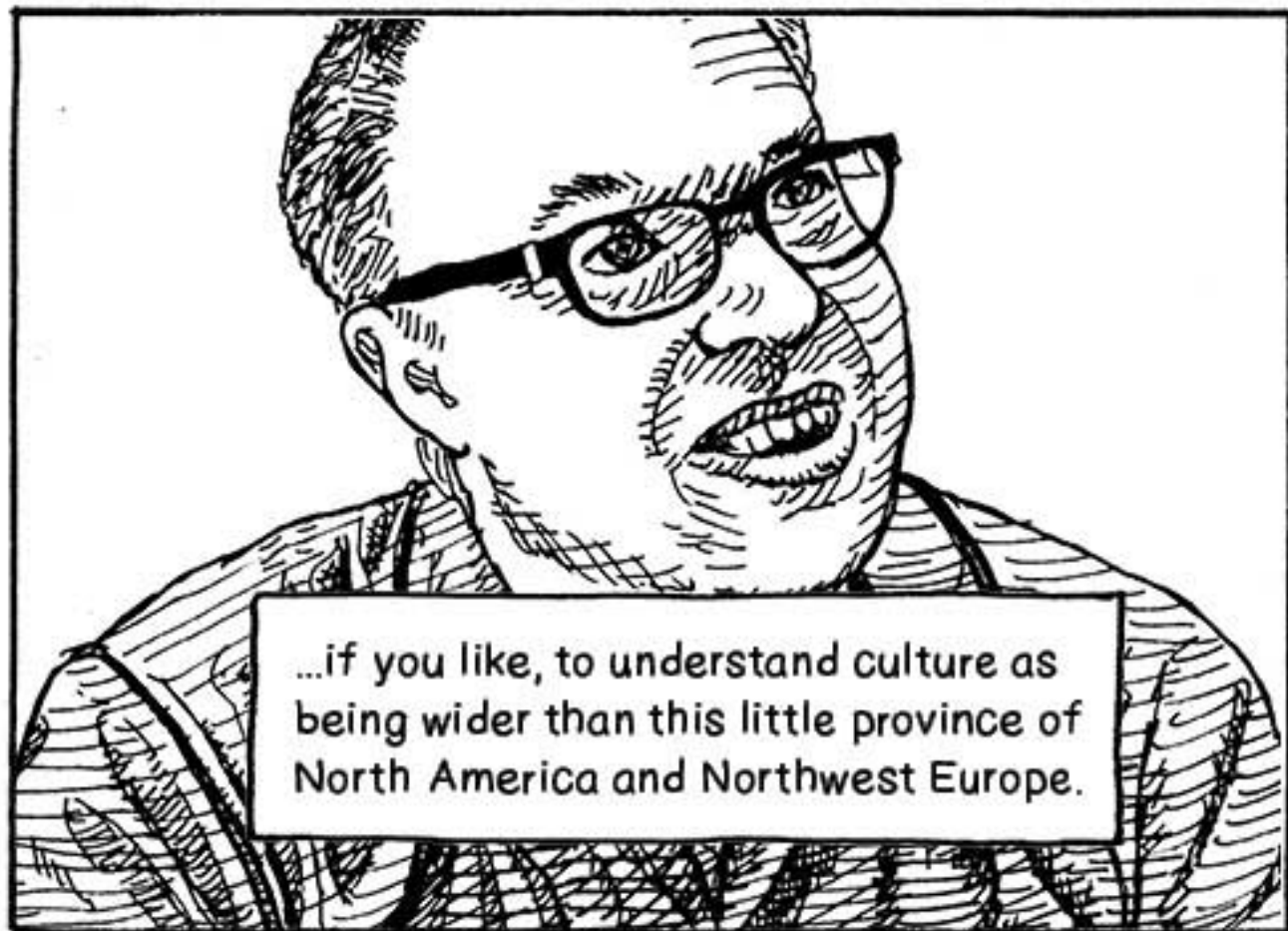
These meetings did not really have an agenda.



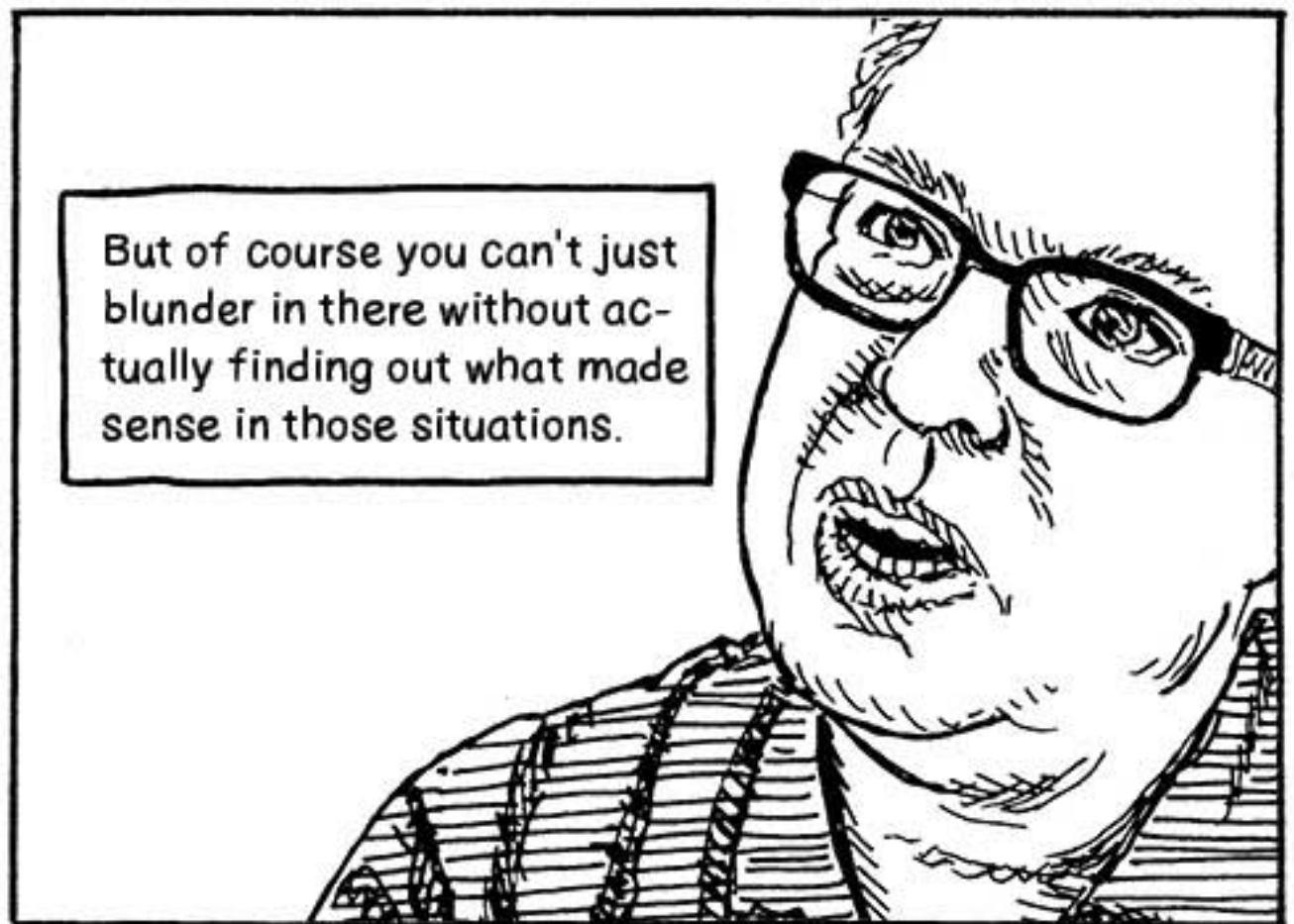
They were an attempt to try and communicate points of common interest between us.



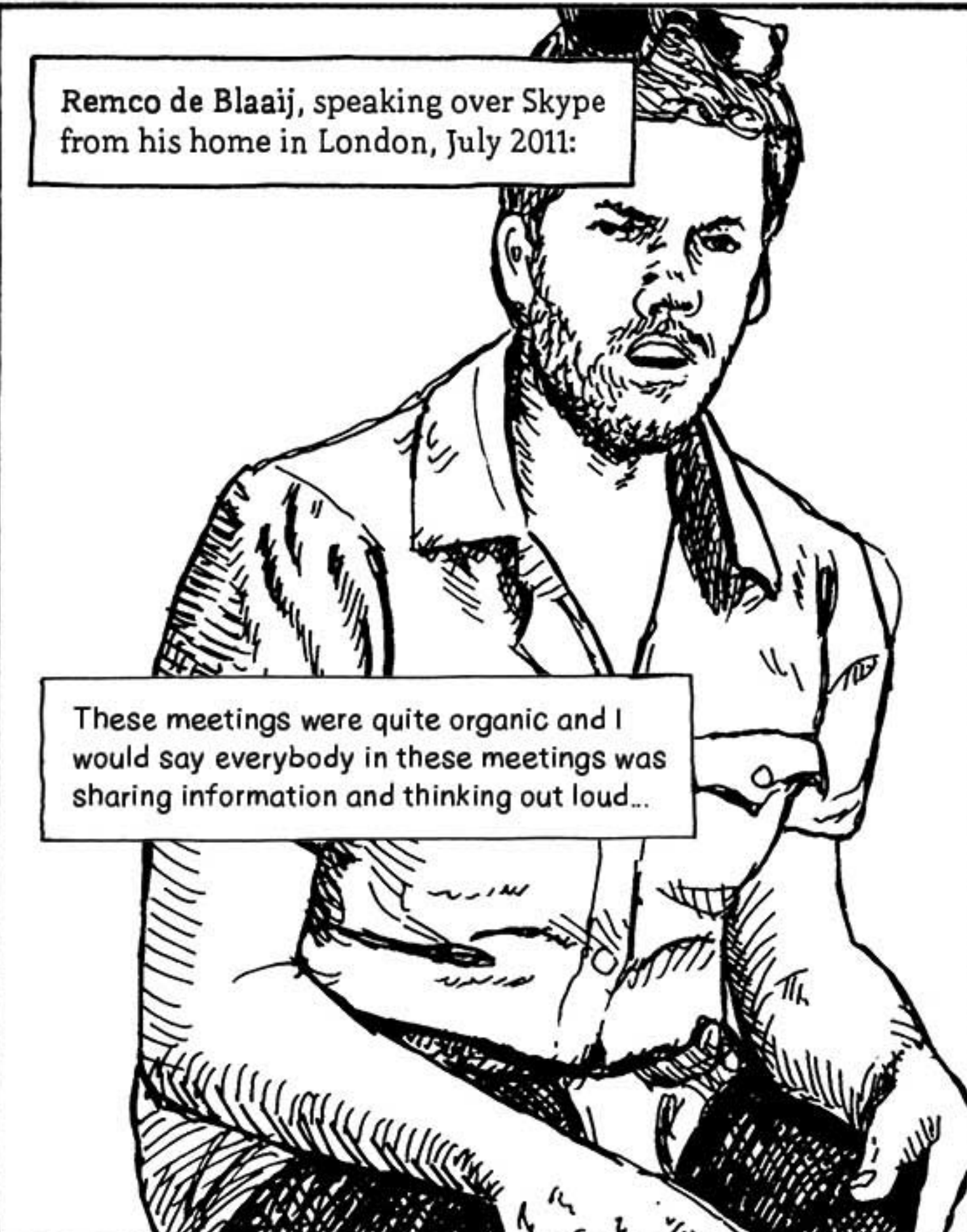
That was part of a strategy we'd developed in the museum to try going outside the boundaries of our north European home...



...if you like, to understand culture as being wider than this little province of North America and Northwest Europe.

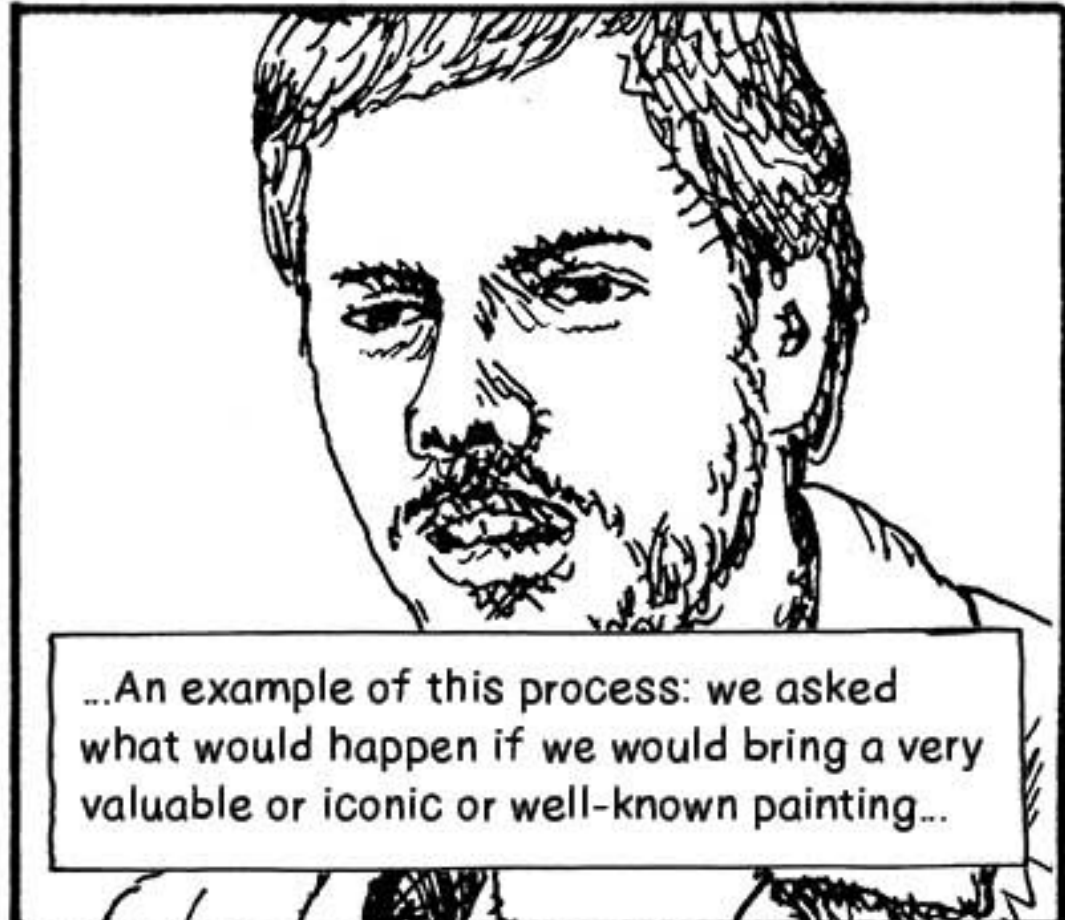


But of course you can't just blunder in there without actually finding out what made sense in those situations.

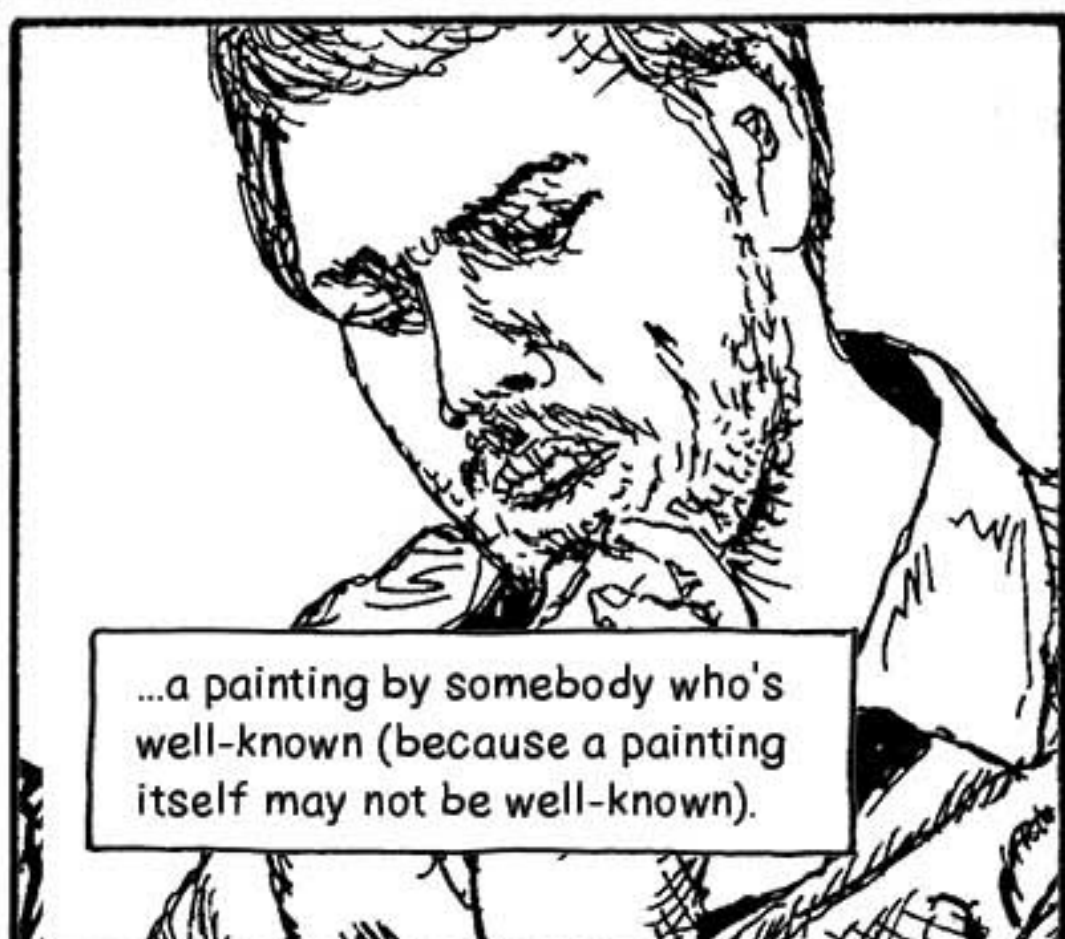


Remco de Blaaij, speaking over Skype
from his home in London, July 2011:

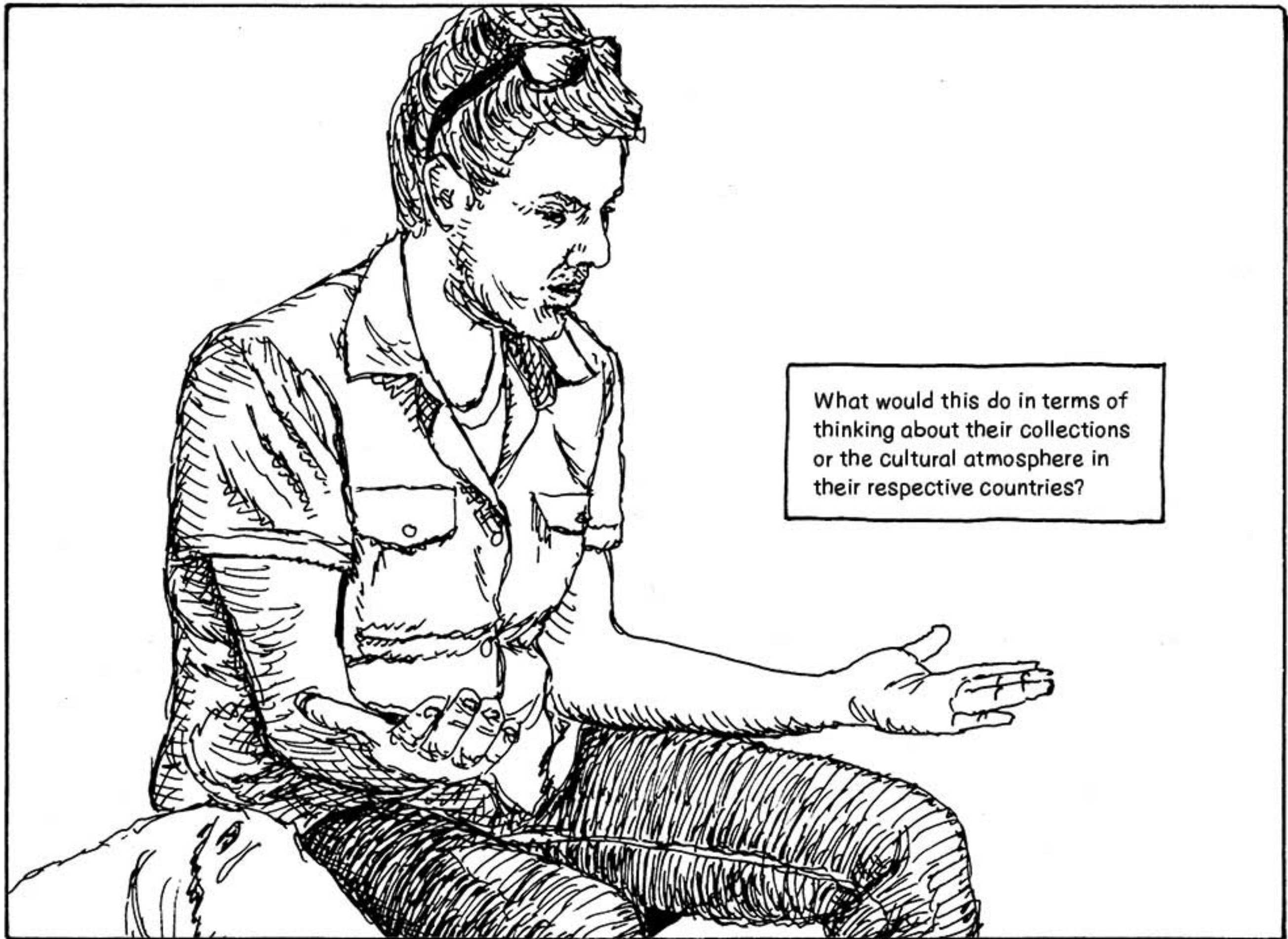
These meetings were quite organic and I
would say everybody in these meetings was
sharing information and thinking out loud...



...An example of this process: we asked
what would happen if we would bring a very
valuable or iconic or well-known painting...



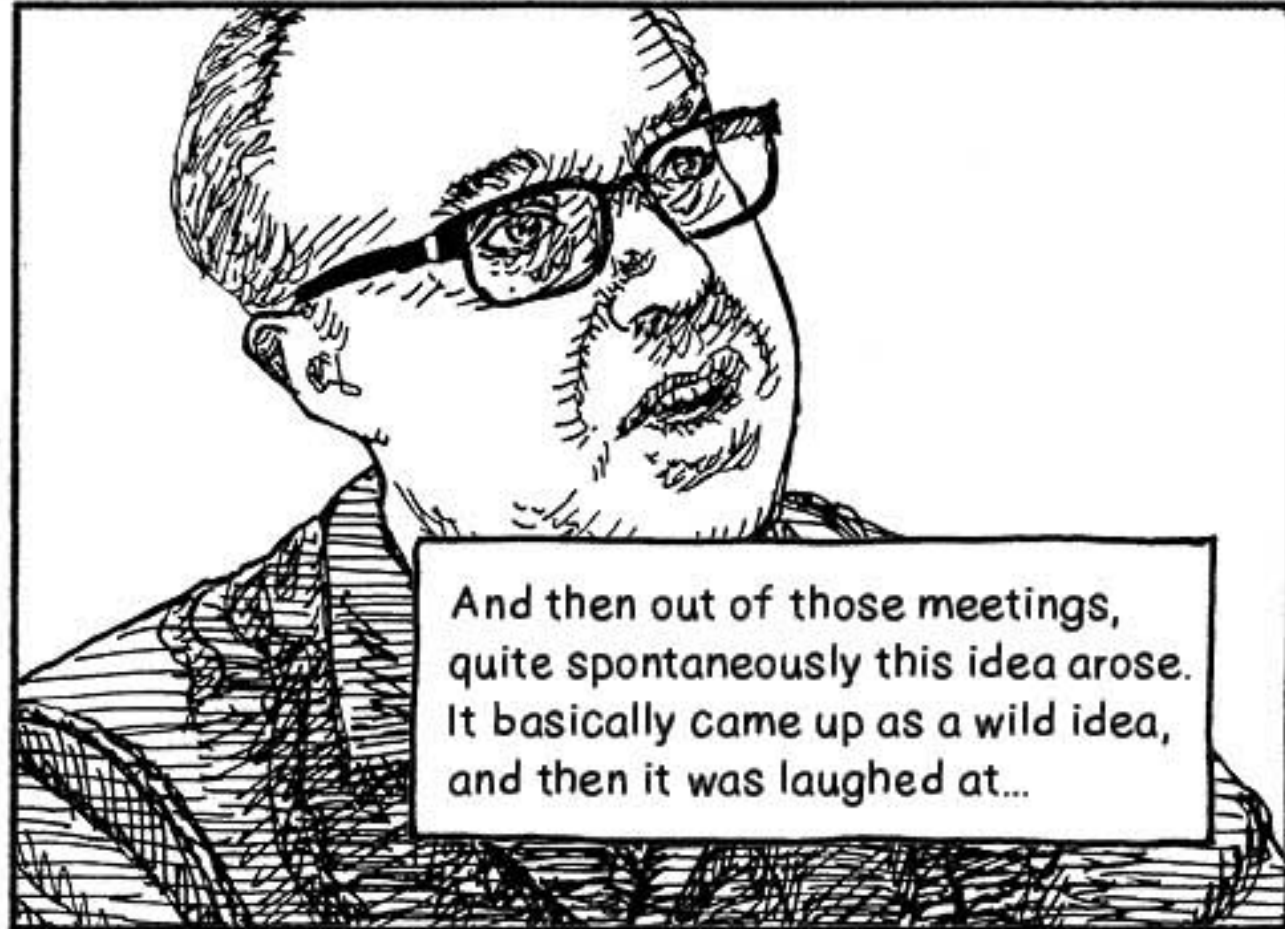
...a painting by somebody who's
well-known (because a painting
itself may not be well-known).



What would this do in terms of thinking about their collections or the cultural atmosphere in their respective countries?



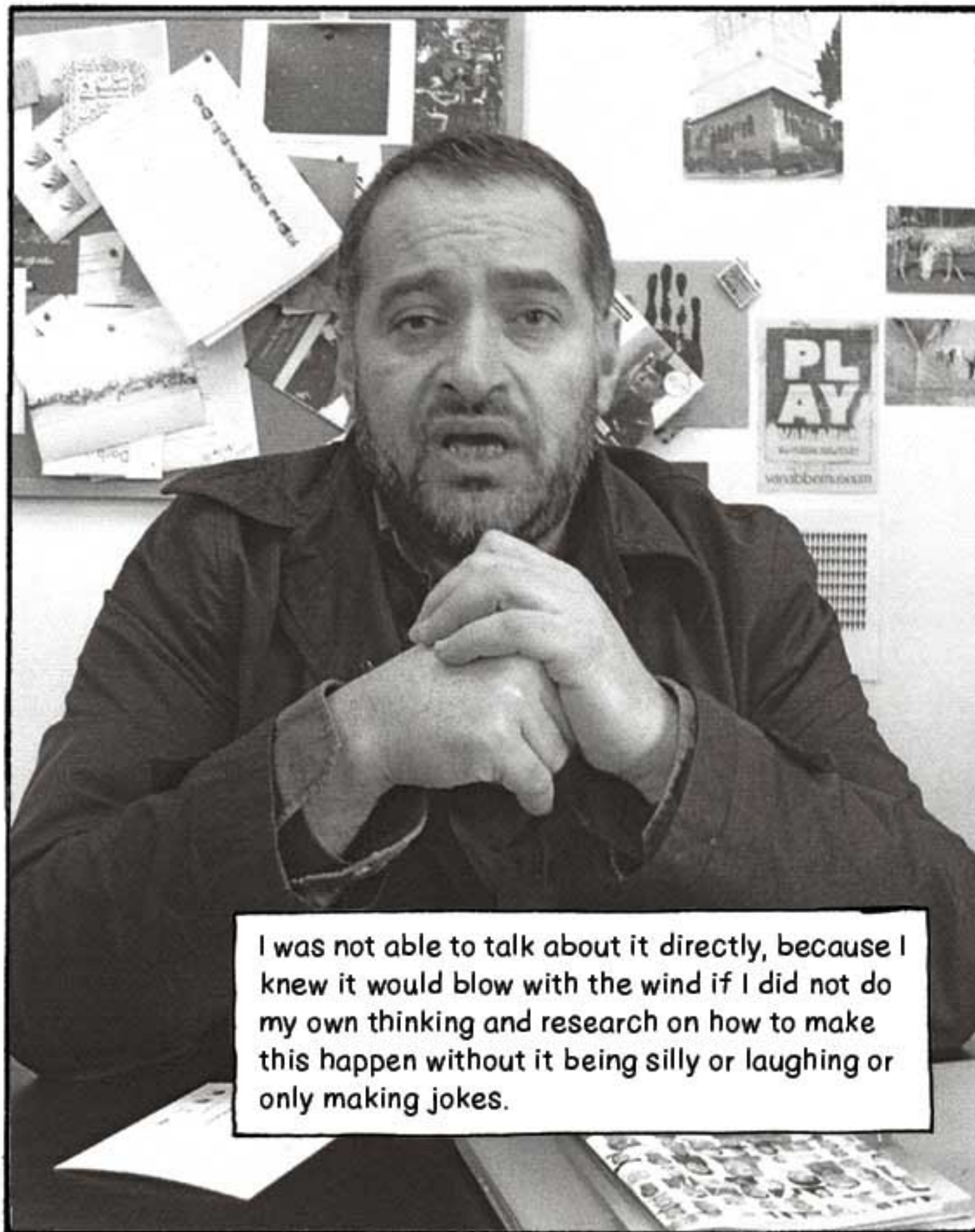
So it was kind of an open conversation, and as you do in these brainstorming events, this idea of bringing a Picasso to Palestine popped up as kind of a ridiculous example that you use in order to test yourself. There was a lot of laughter, because at first it seemed like a totally unrealistic idea.



And then out of those meetings, quite spontaneously this idea arose. It basically came up as a wild idea, and then it was laughed at...



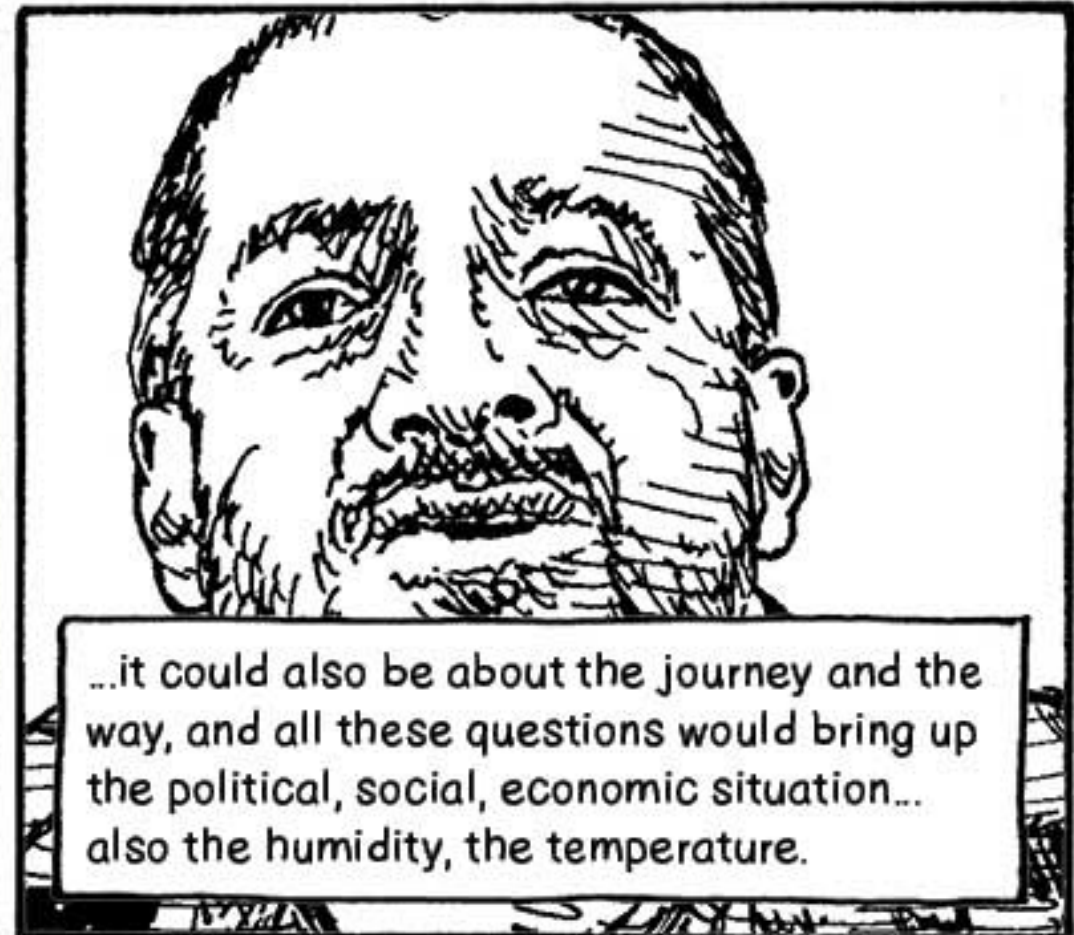
"Oh yeah that would be amazing!"—but not really taken seriously.



I was not able to talk about it directly, because I knew it would blow with the wind if I did not do my own thinking and research on how to make this happen without it being silly or laughing or only making jokes.



And after I thought about the idea, I was thinking that this might not be just a project about Picasso coming to Palestine...



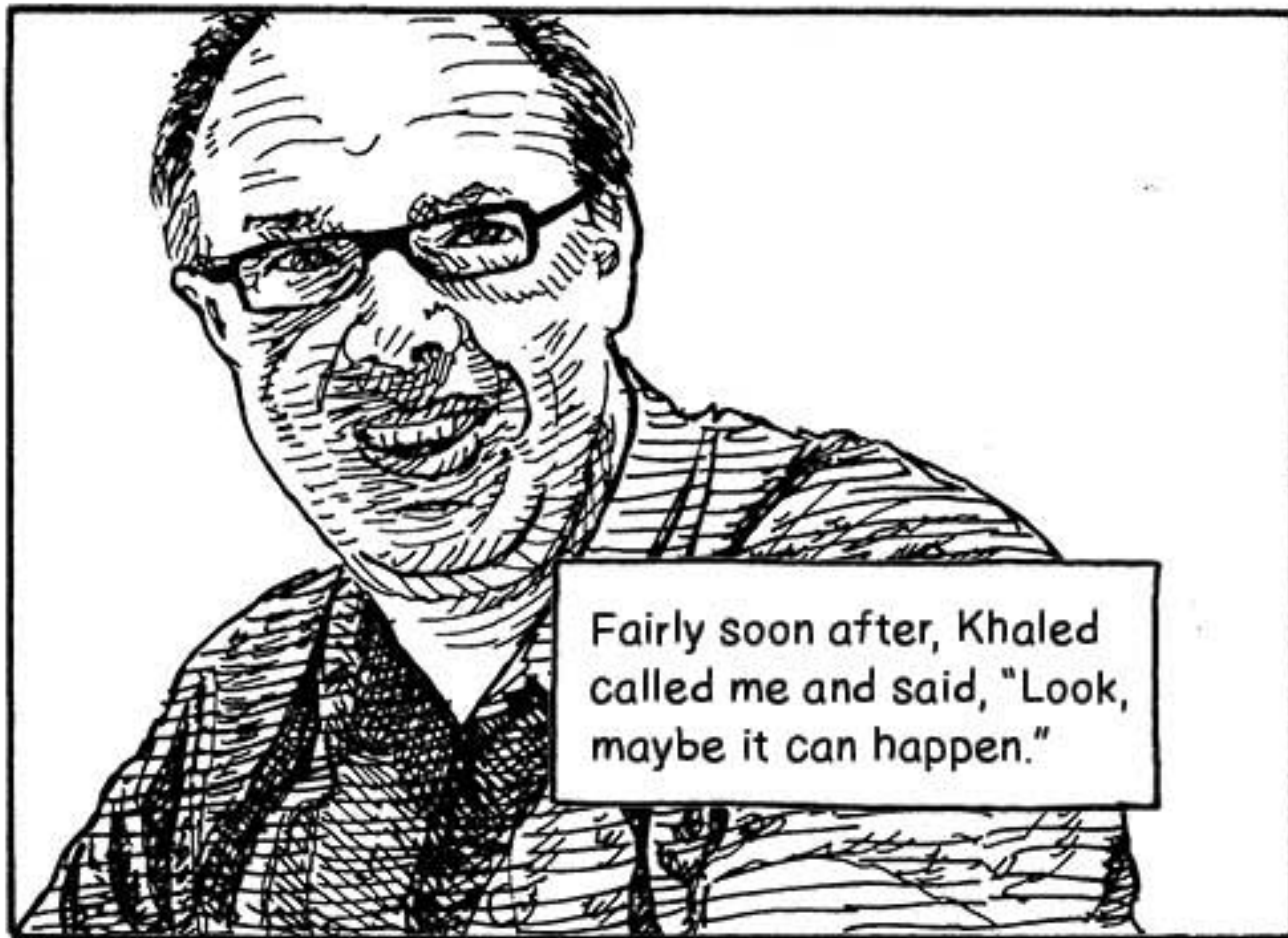
...it could also be about the journey and the way, and all these questions would bring up the political, social, economic situation... also the humidity, the temperature.



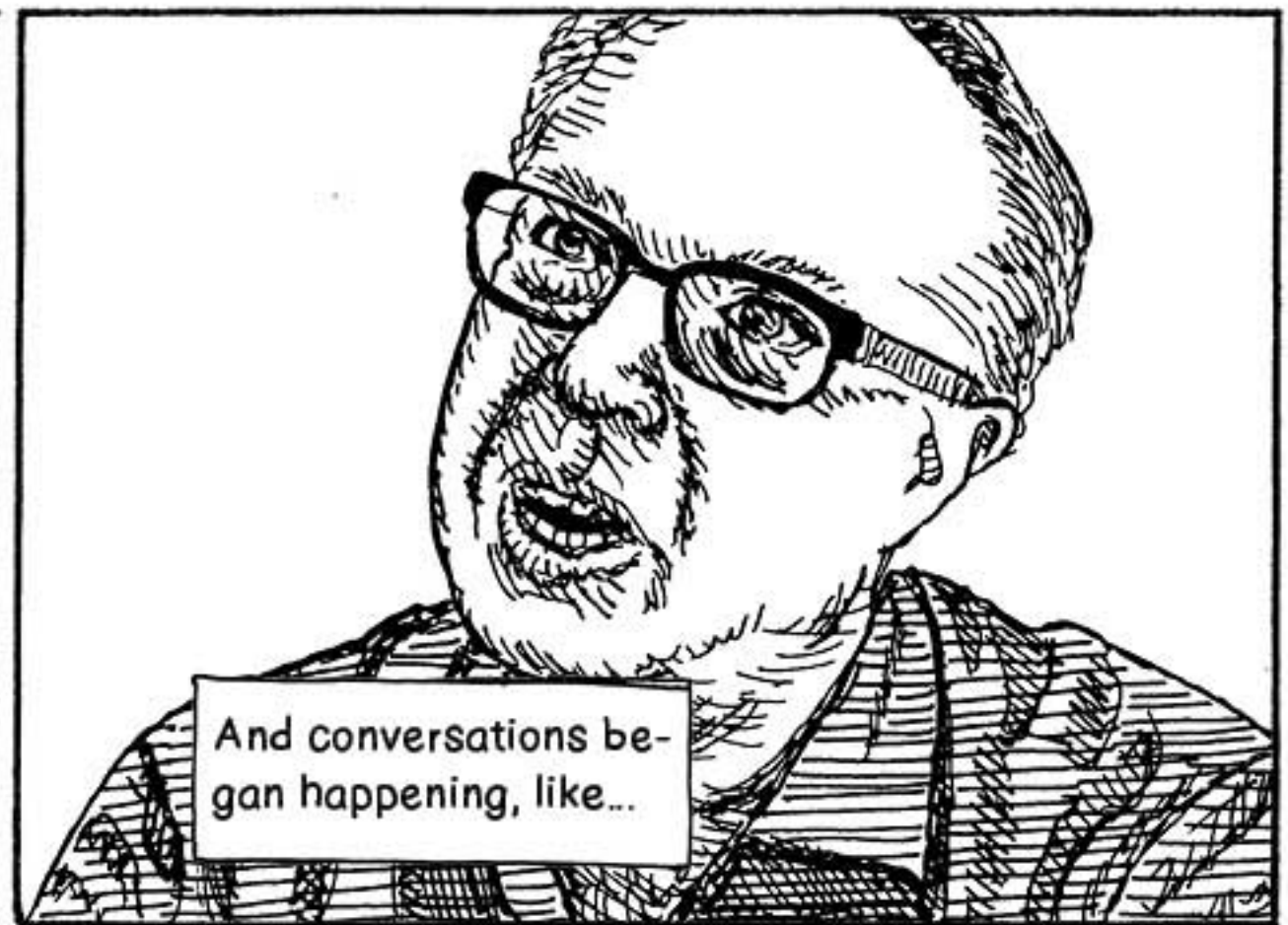
So I decided, yes, it's a good idea. I don't think if Picasso were to go to Kuwait or Abu Dhabi that would make it an art project.



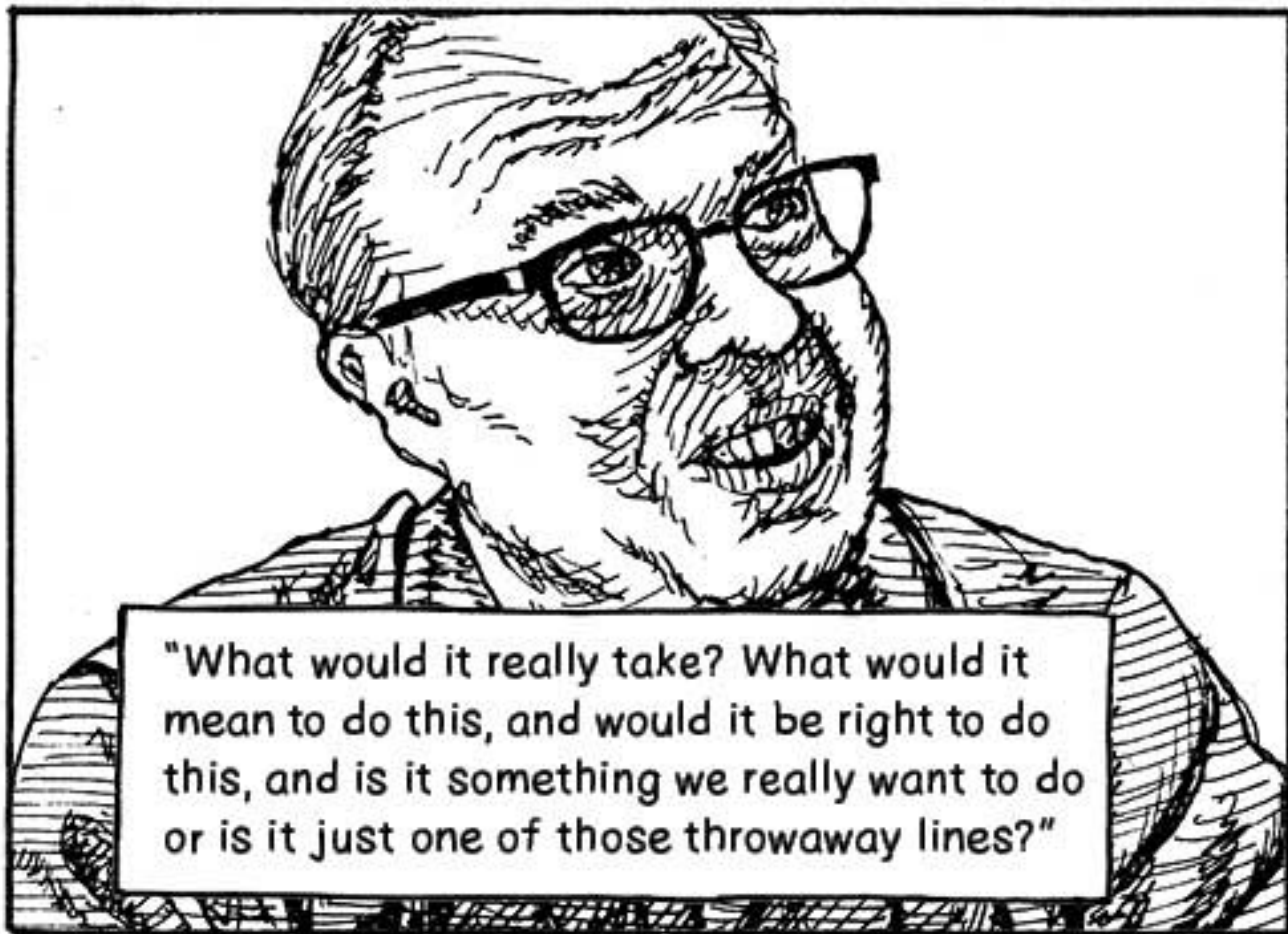
SOMETHING
WE WANTED TO DO



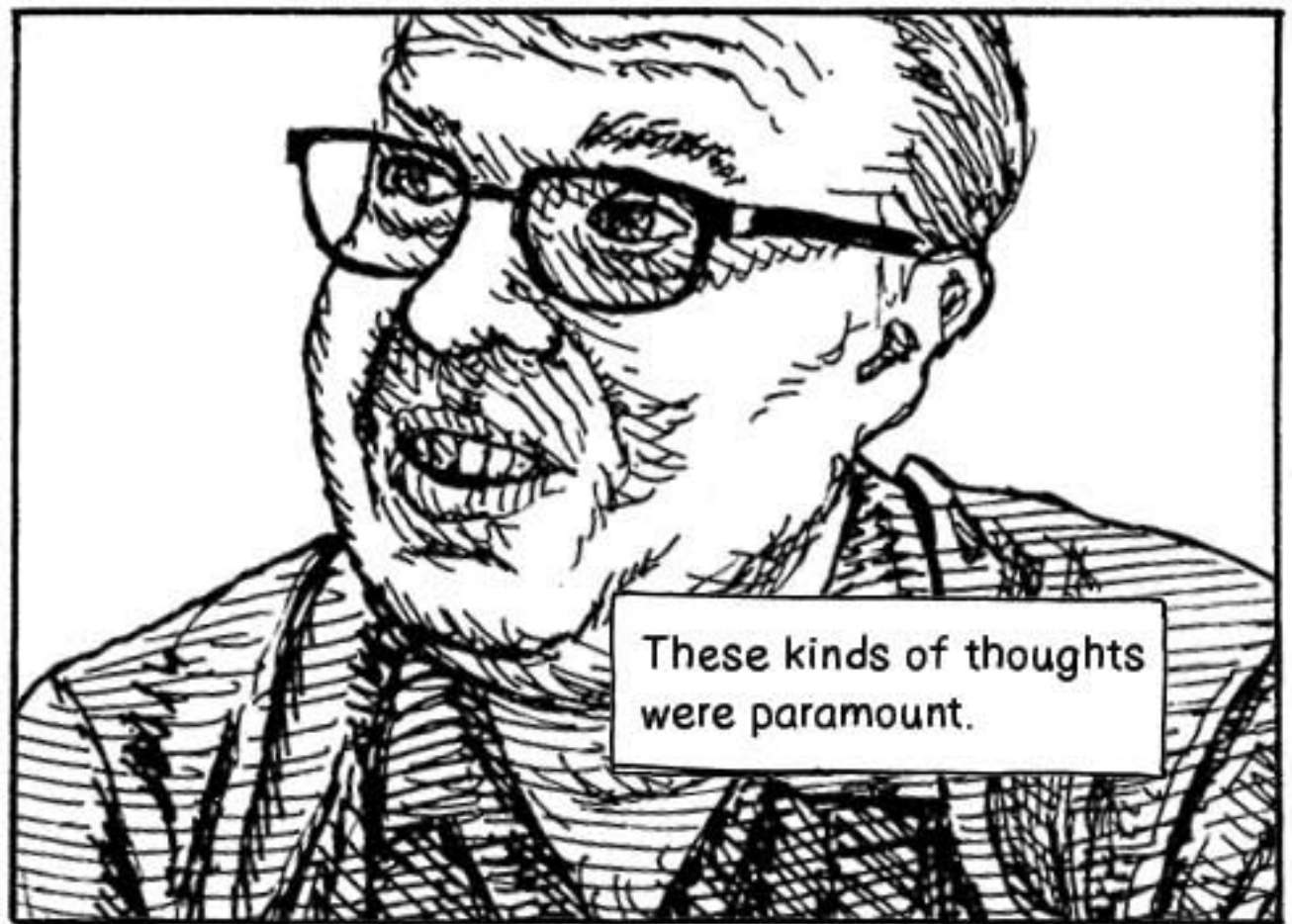
Fairly soon after, Khaled called me and said, "Look, maybe it can happen."



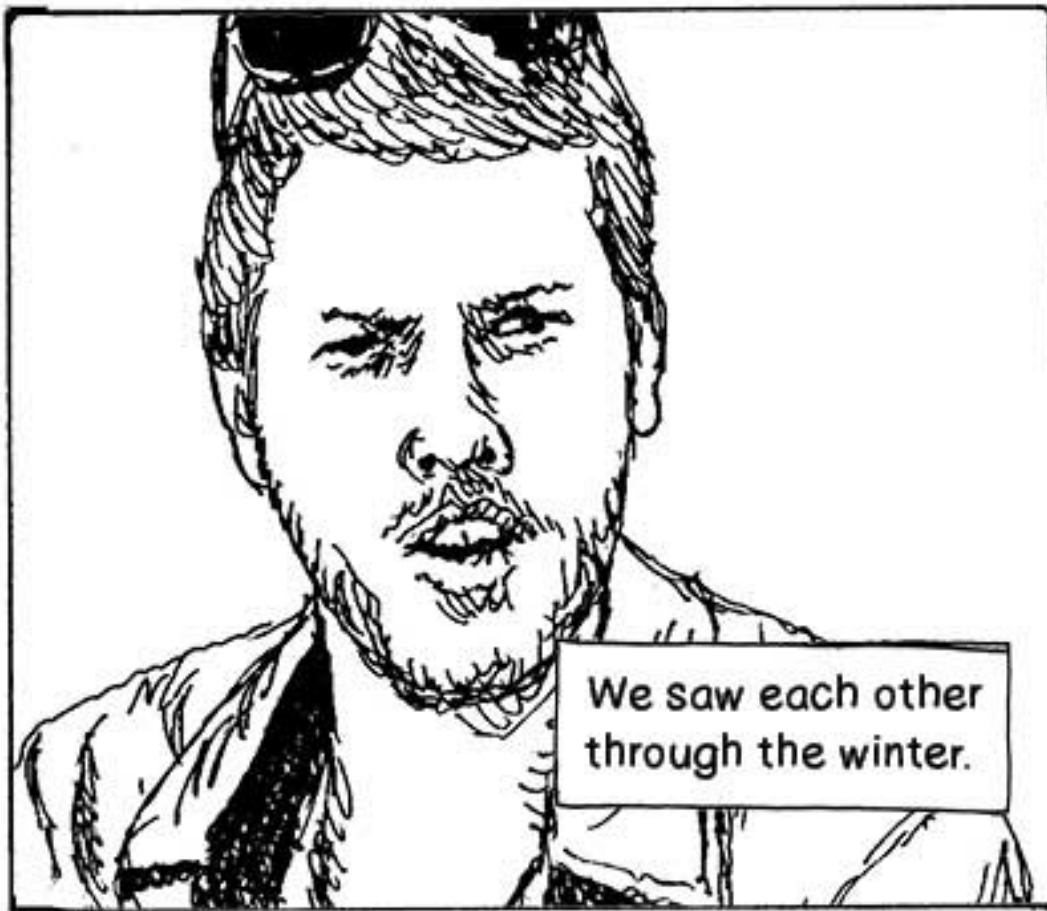
And conversations began happening, like...



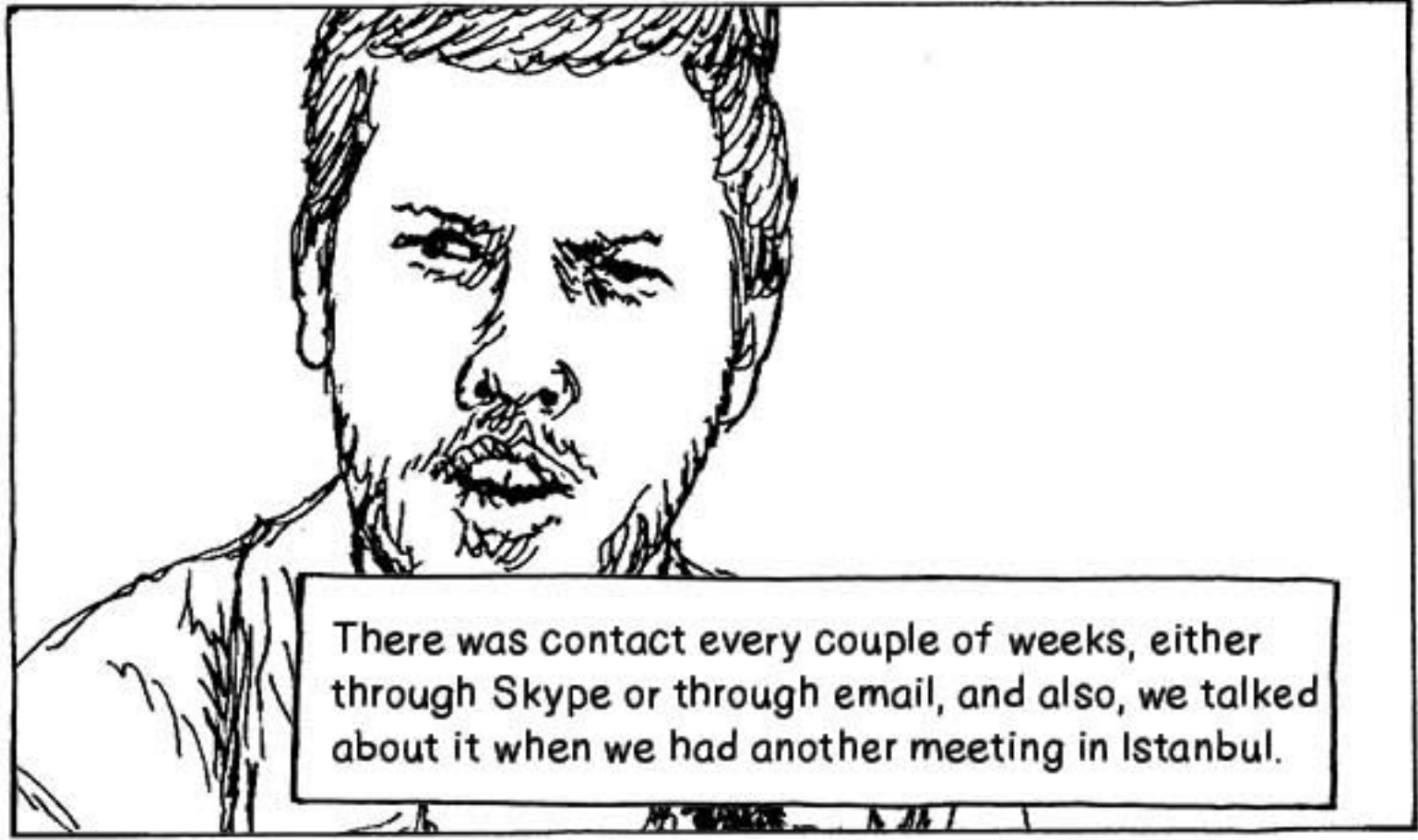
"What would it really take? What would it mean to do this, and would it be right to do this, and is it something we really want to do or is it just one of those throwaway lines?"



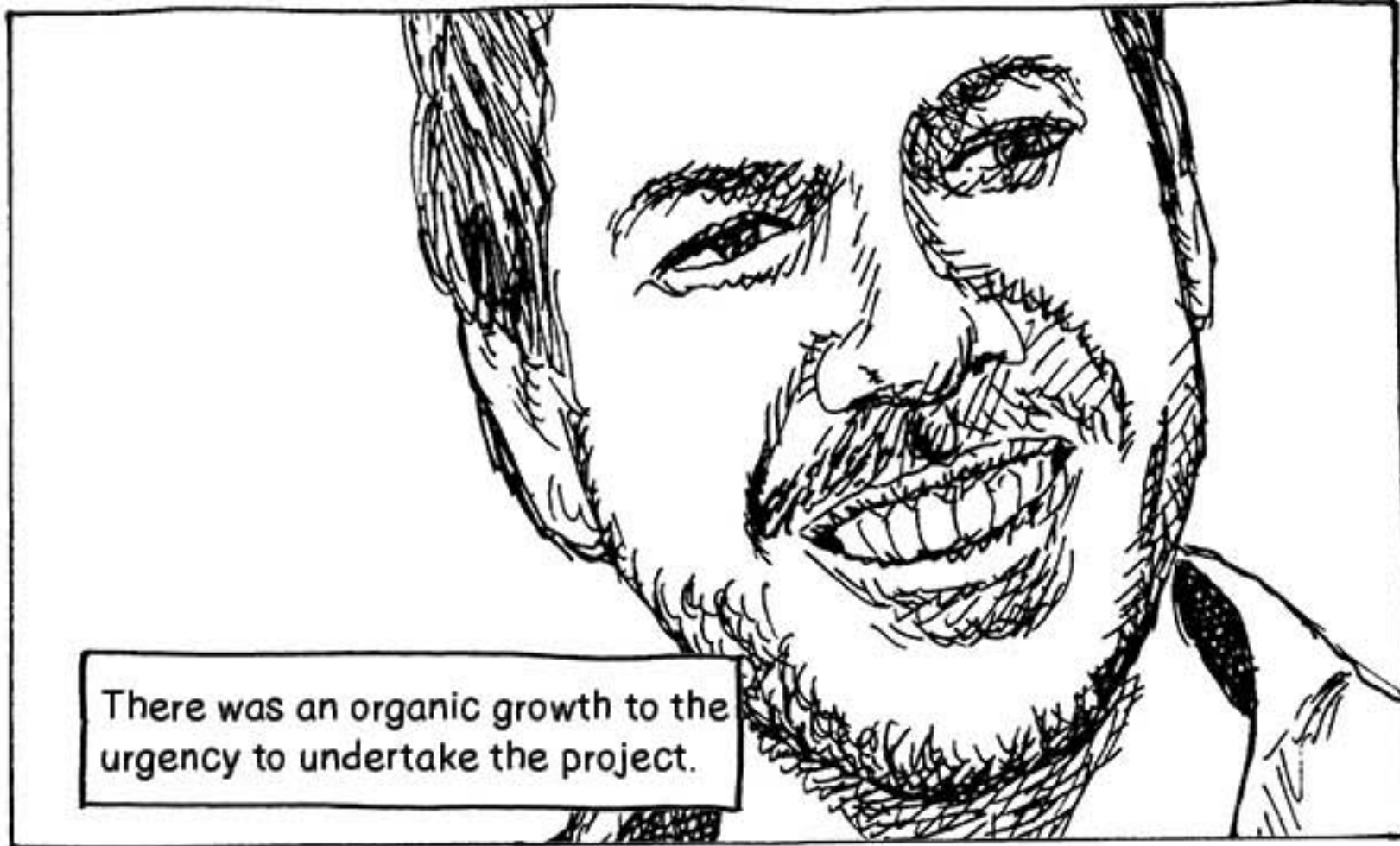
These kinds of thoughts were paramount.



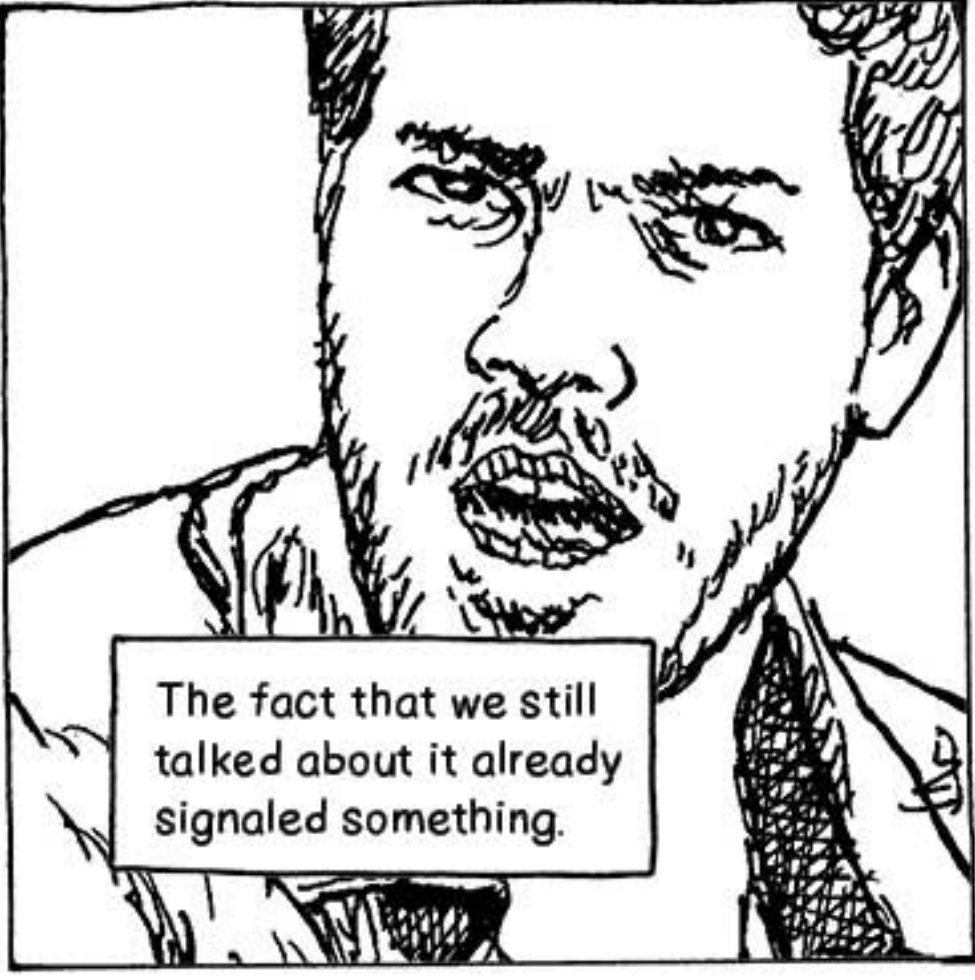
We saw each other through the winter.



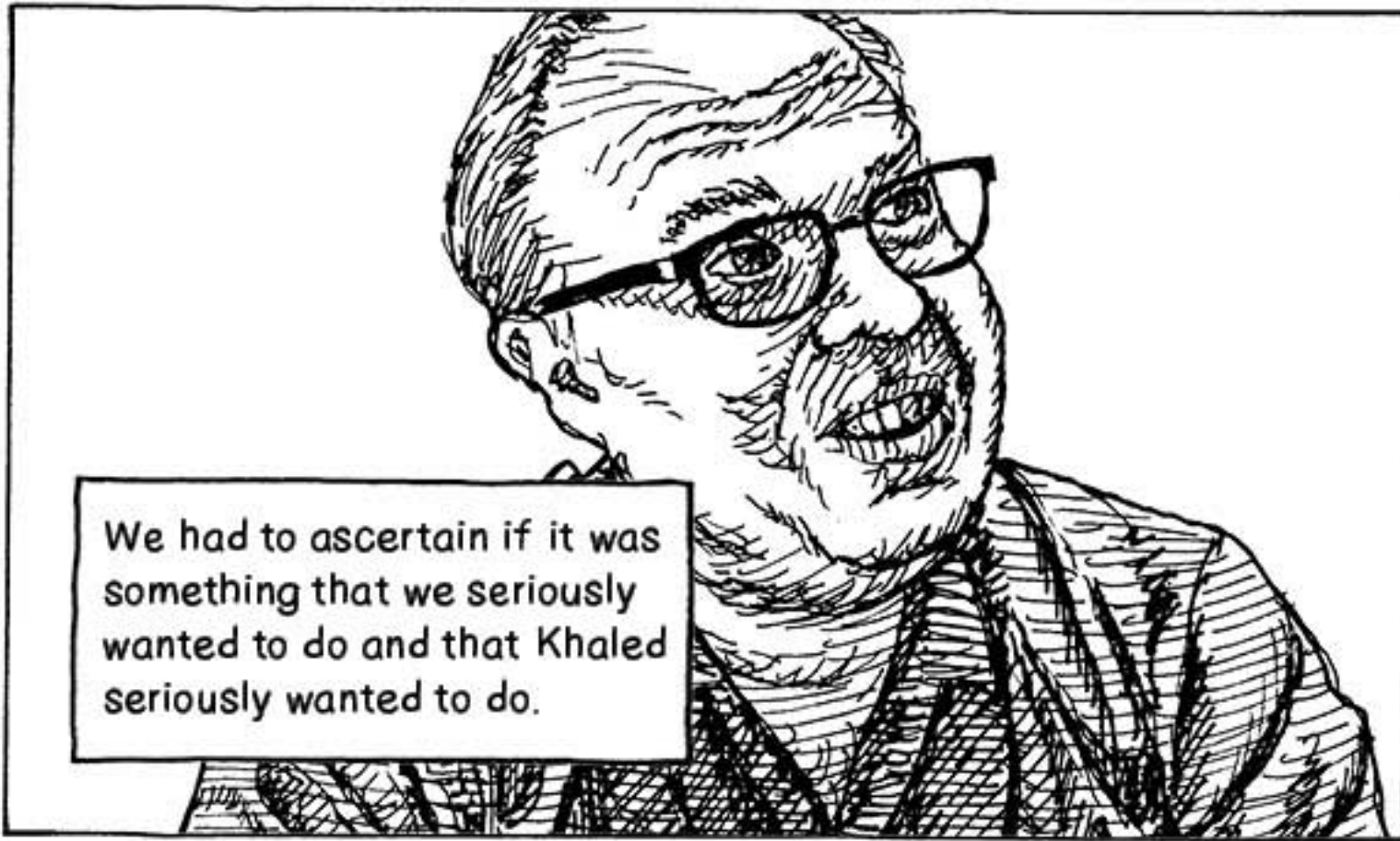
There was contact every couple of weeks, either through Skype or through email, and also, we talked about it when we had another meeting in Istanbul.



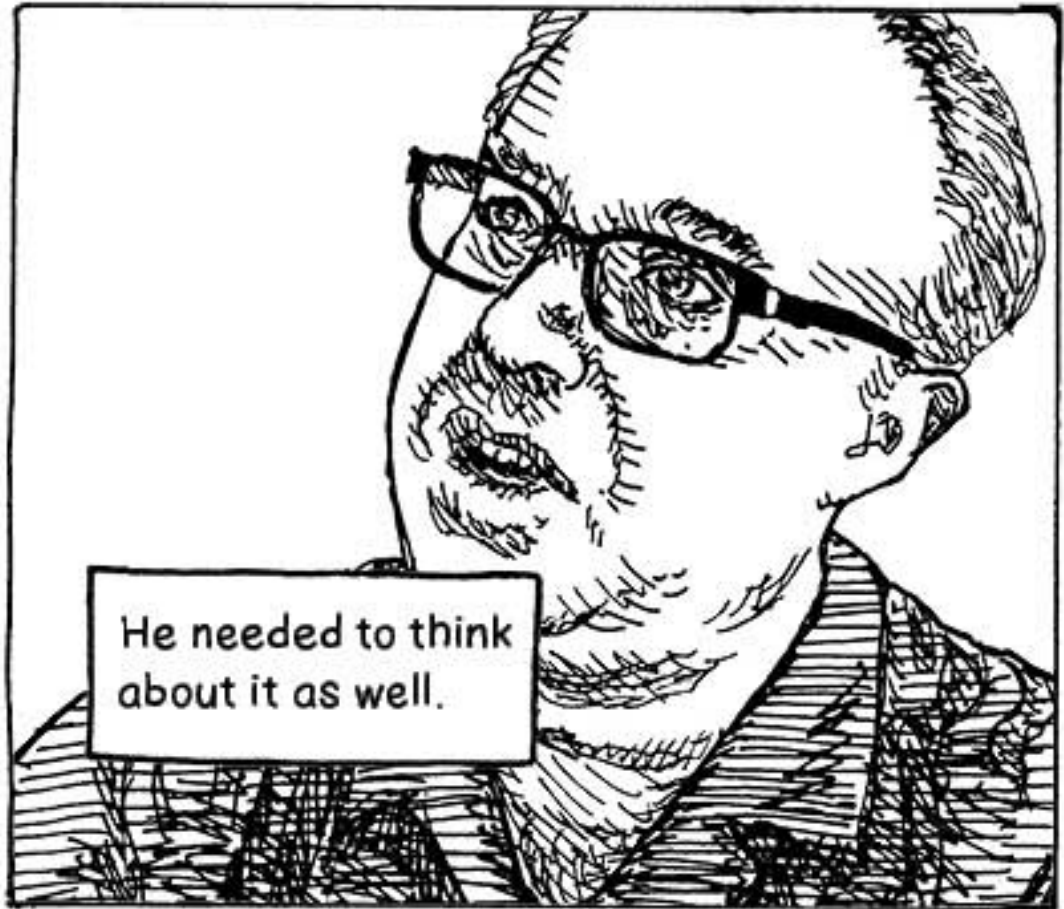
There was an organic growth to the urgency to undertake the project.



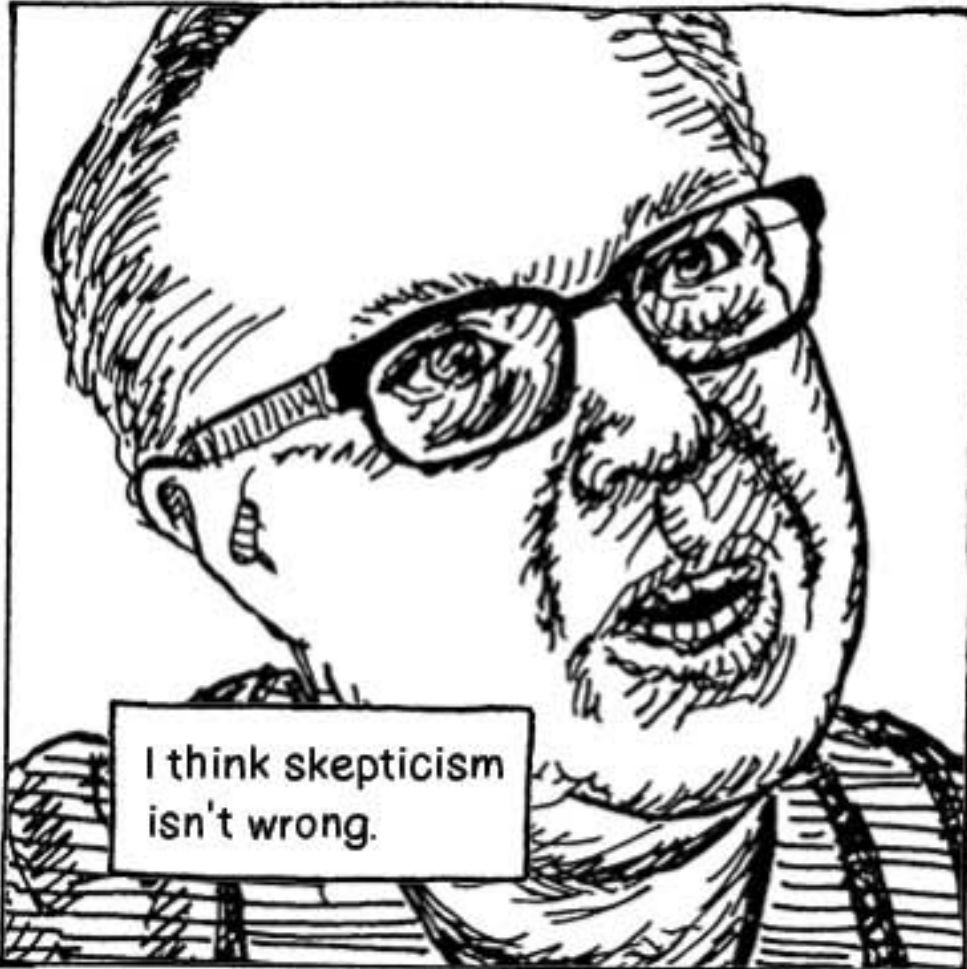
The fact that we still talked about it already signaled something.



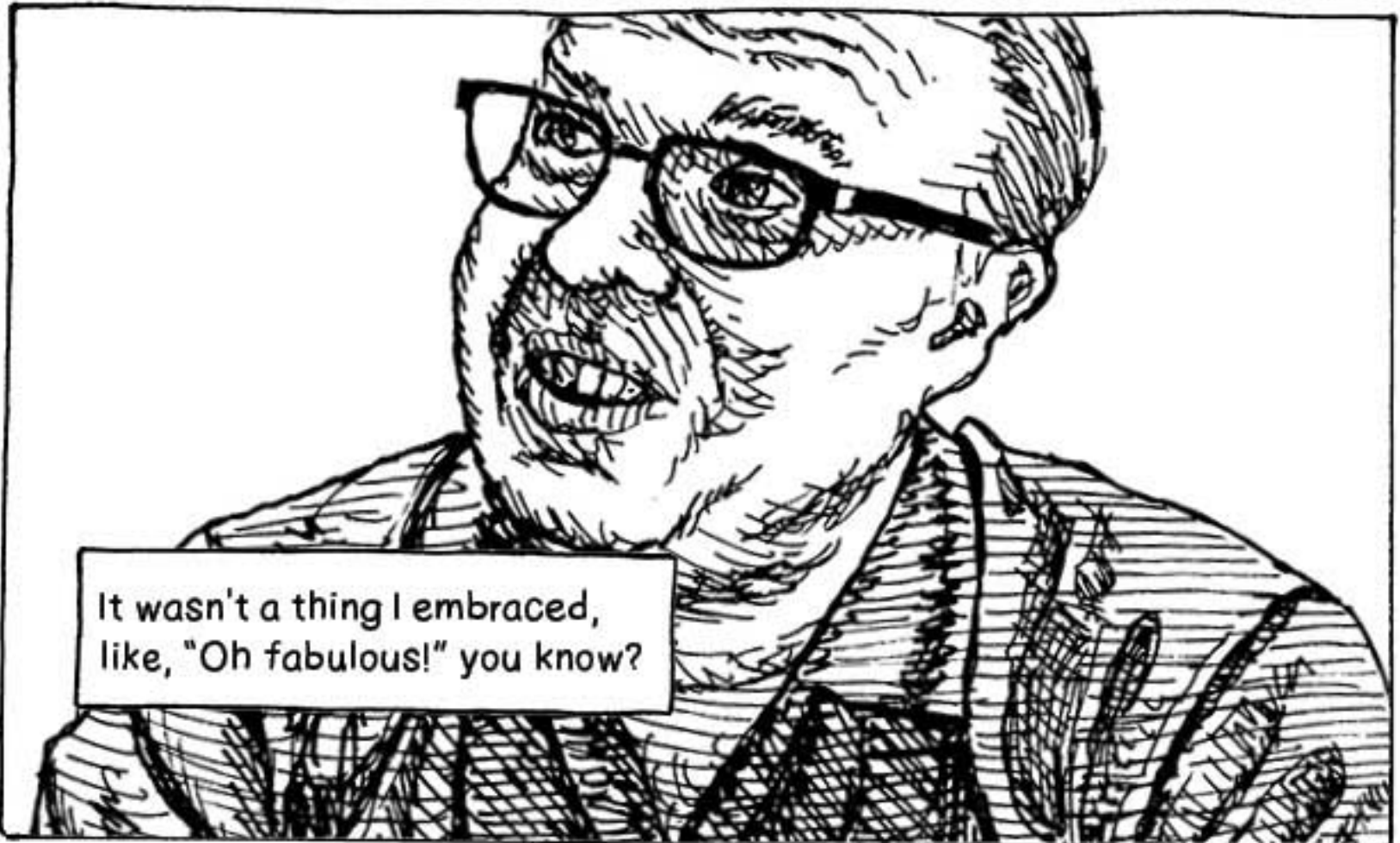
We had to ascertain if it was something that we seriously wanted to do and that Khaled seriously wanted to do.



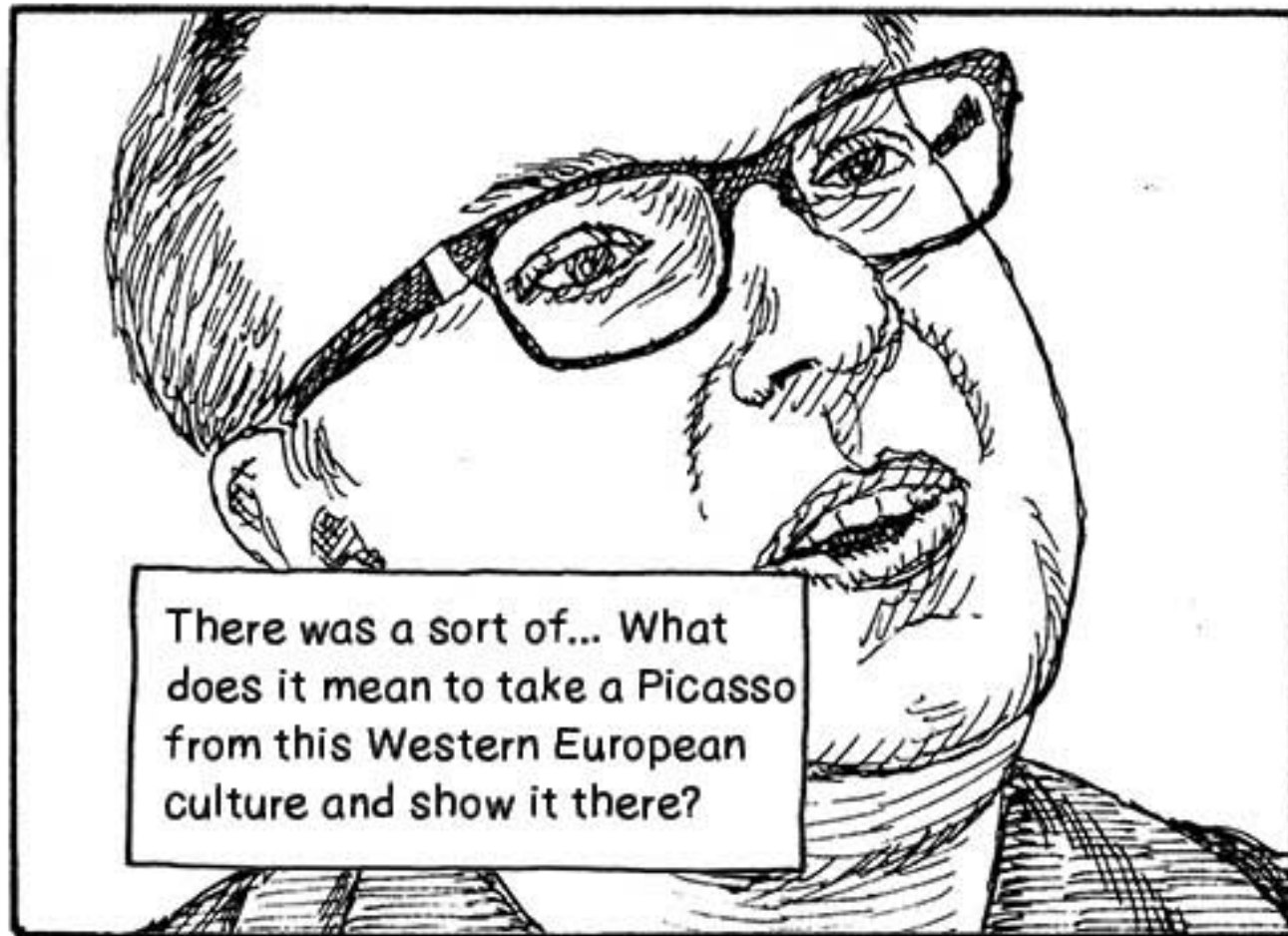
He needed to think about it as well.



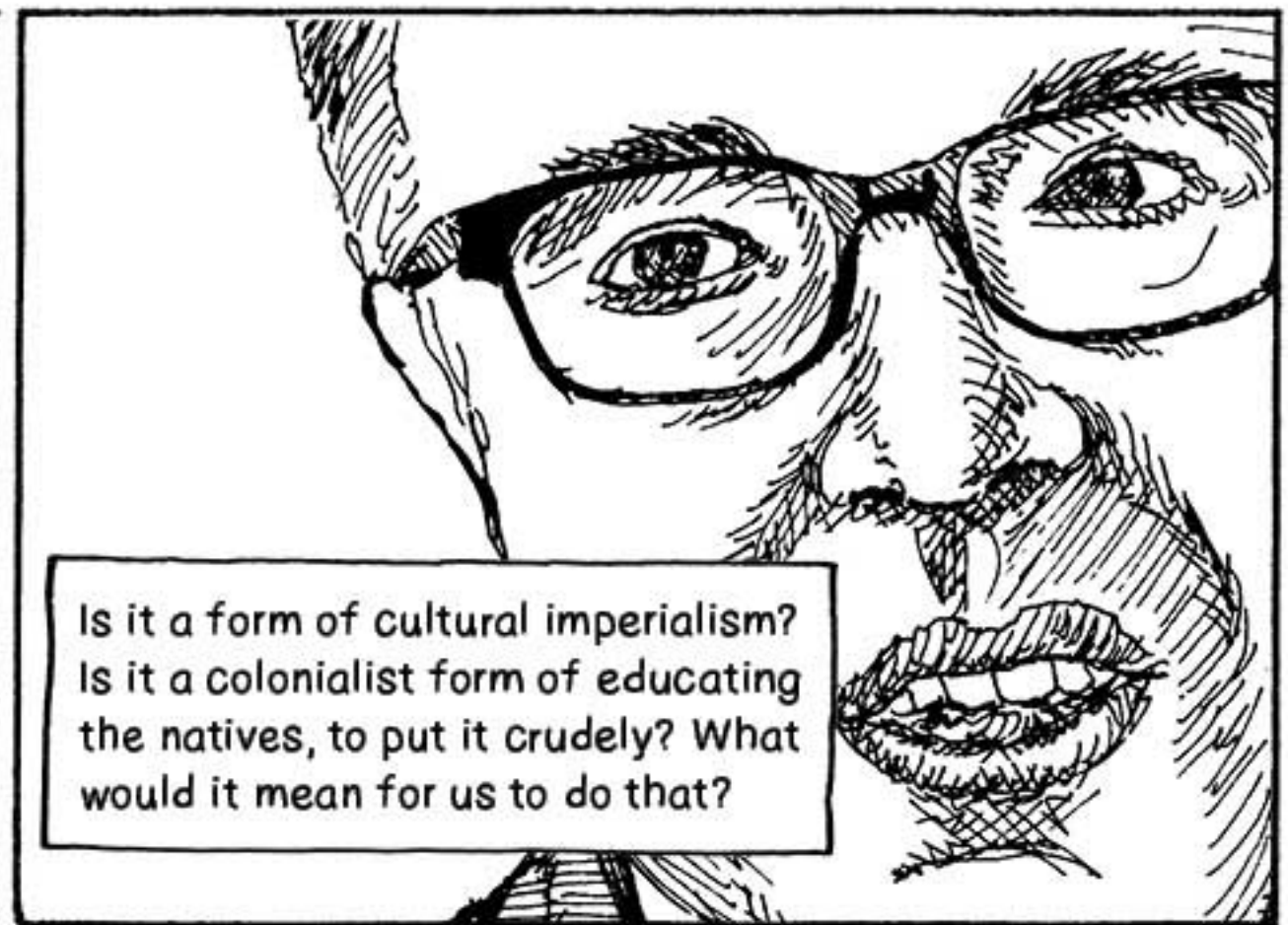
I think skepticism isn't wrong.



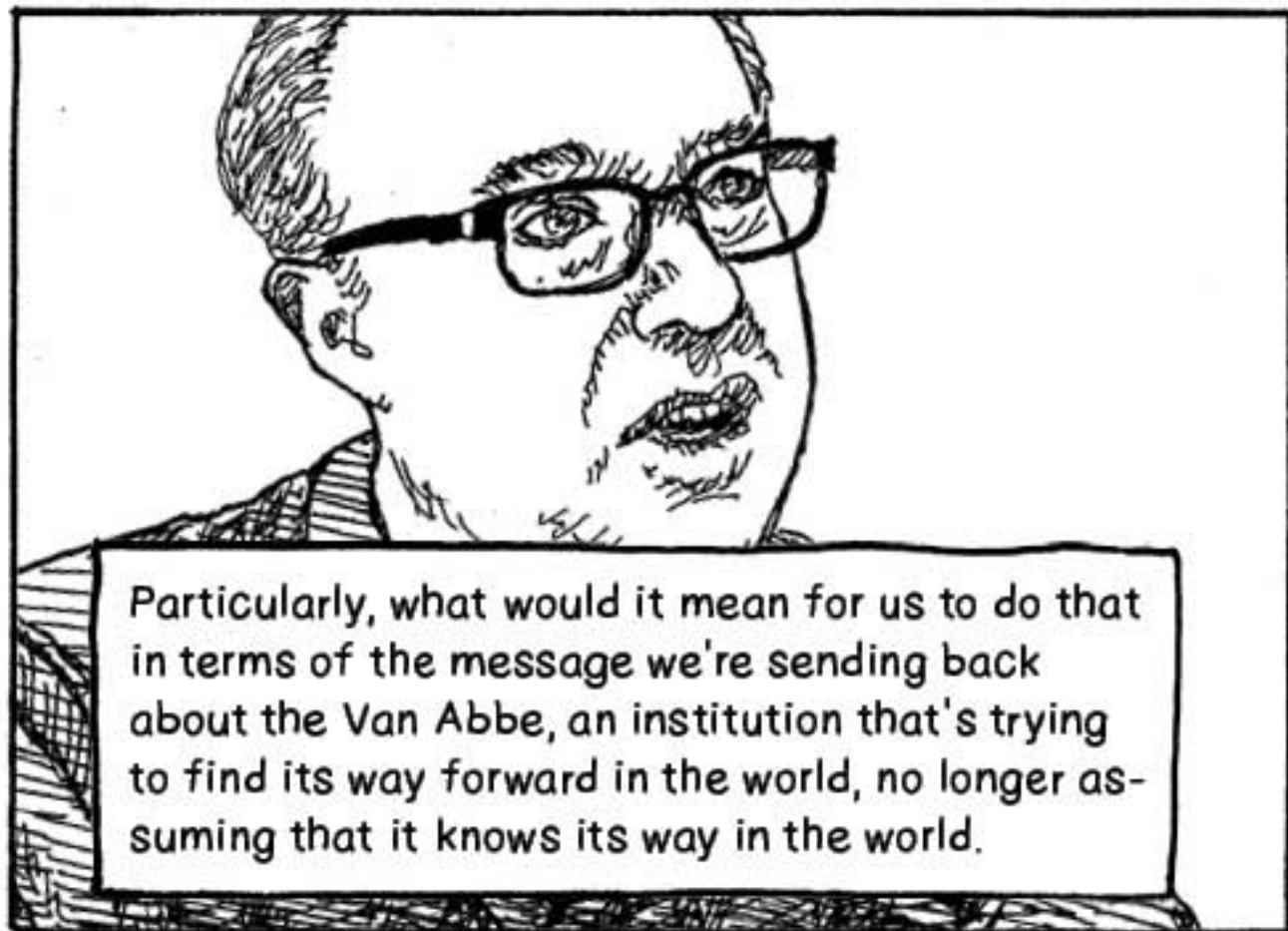
It wasn't a thing I embraced, like, "Oh fabulous!" you know?



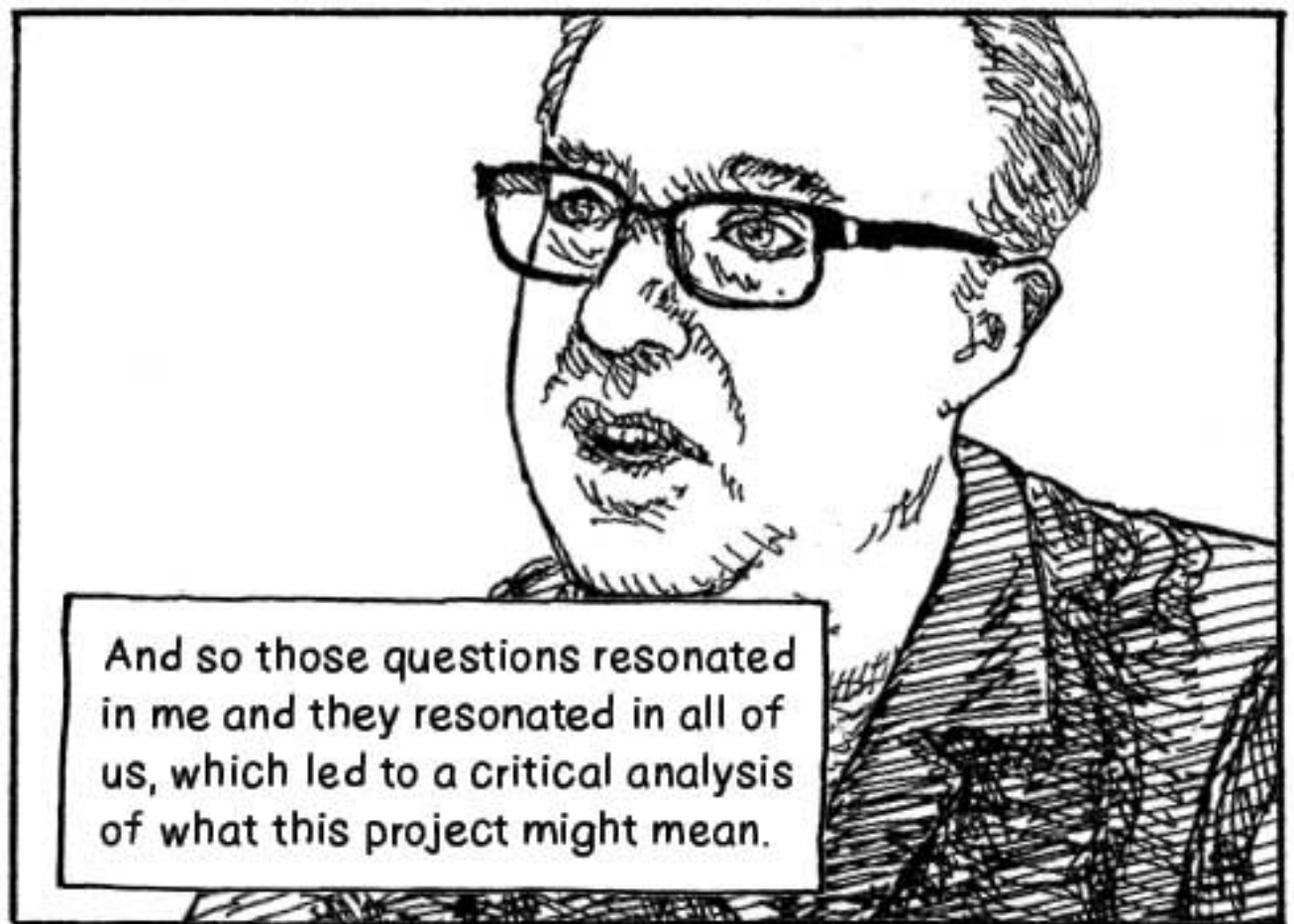
There was a sort of... What does it mean to take a Picasso from this Western European culture and show it there?



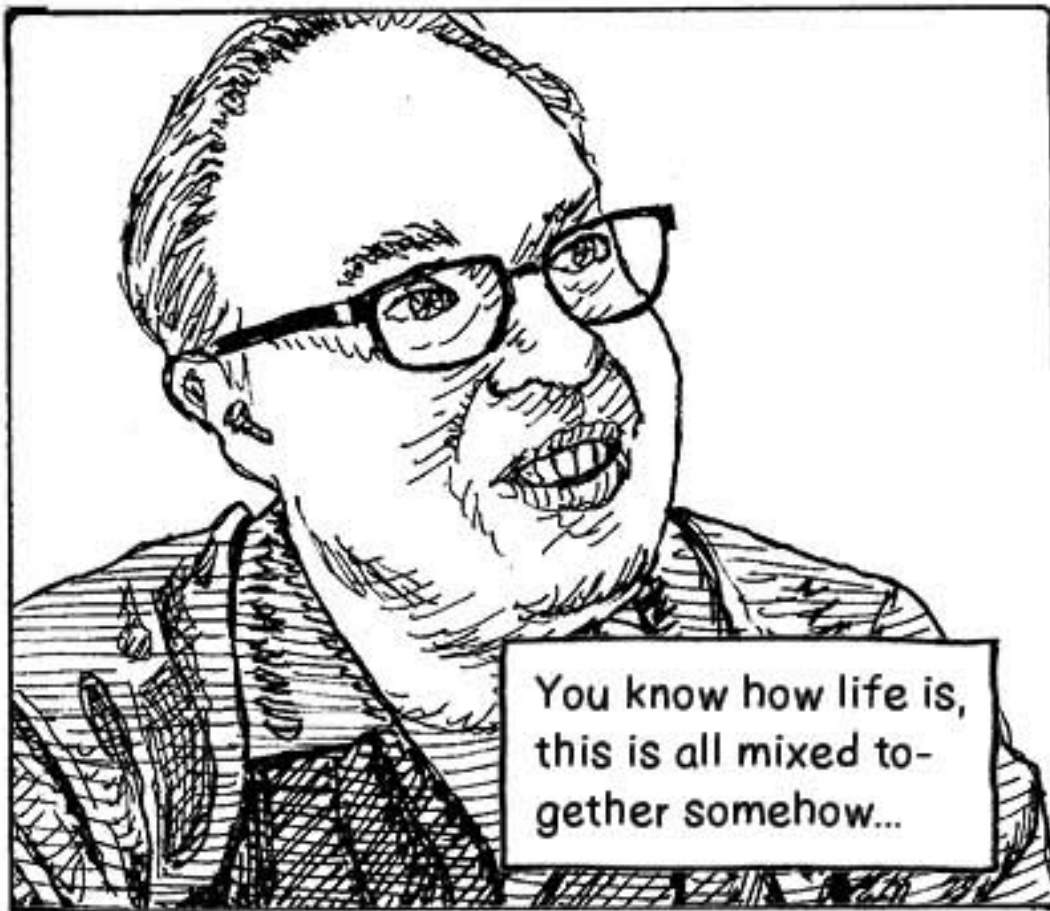
Is it a form of cultural imperialism? Is it a colonialist form of educating the natives, to put it crudely? What would it mean for us to do that?



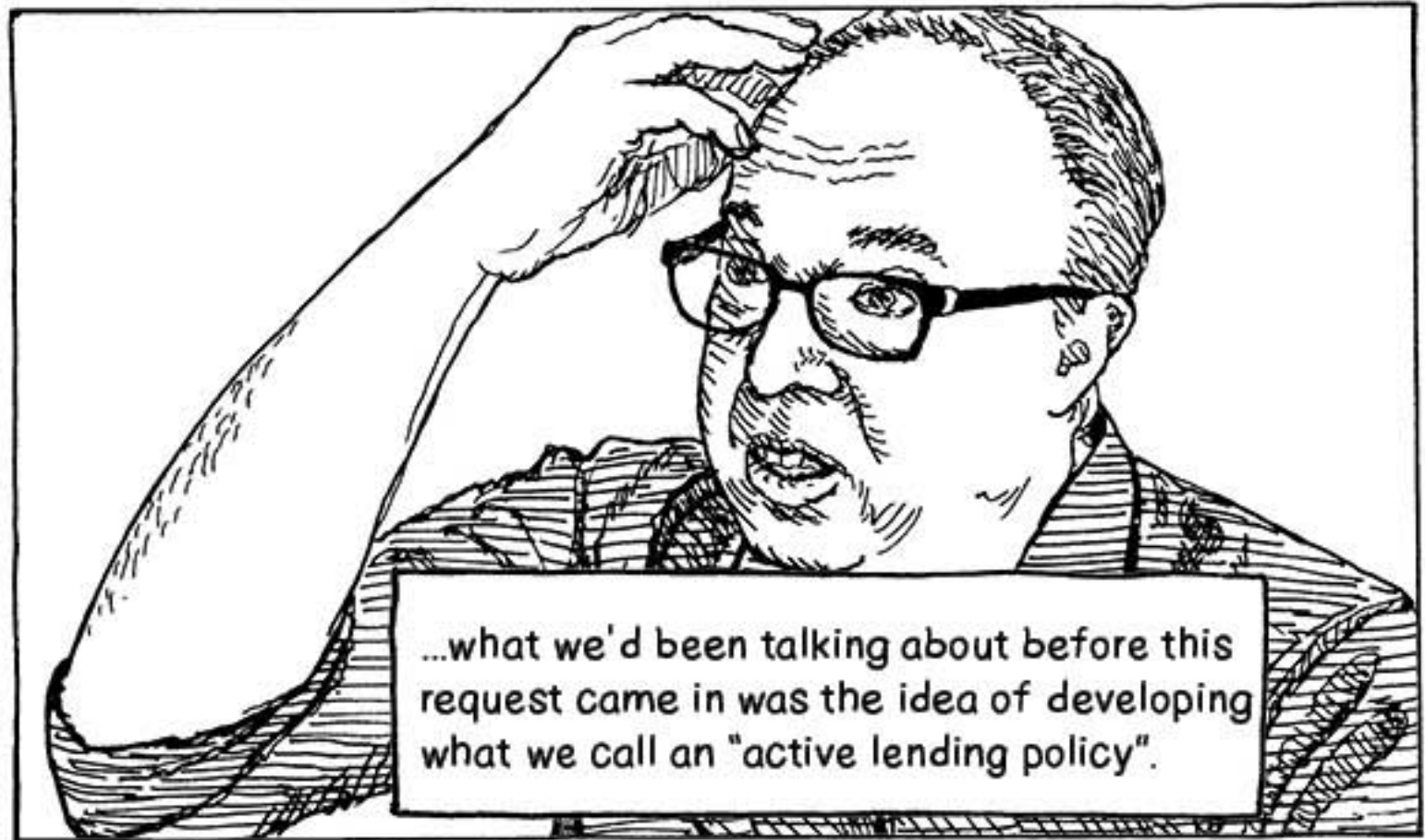
Particularly, what would it mean for us to do that in terms of the message we're sending back about the Van Abbe, an institution that's trying to find its way forward in the world, no longer assuming that it knows its way in the world.



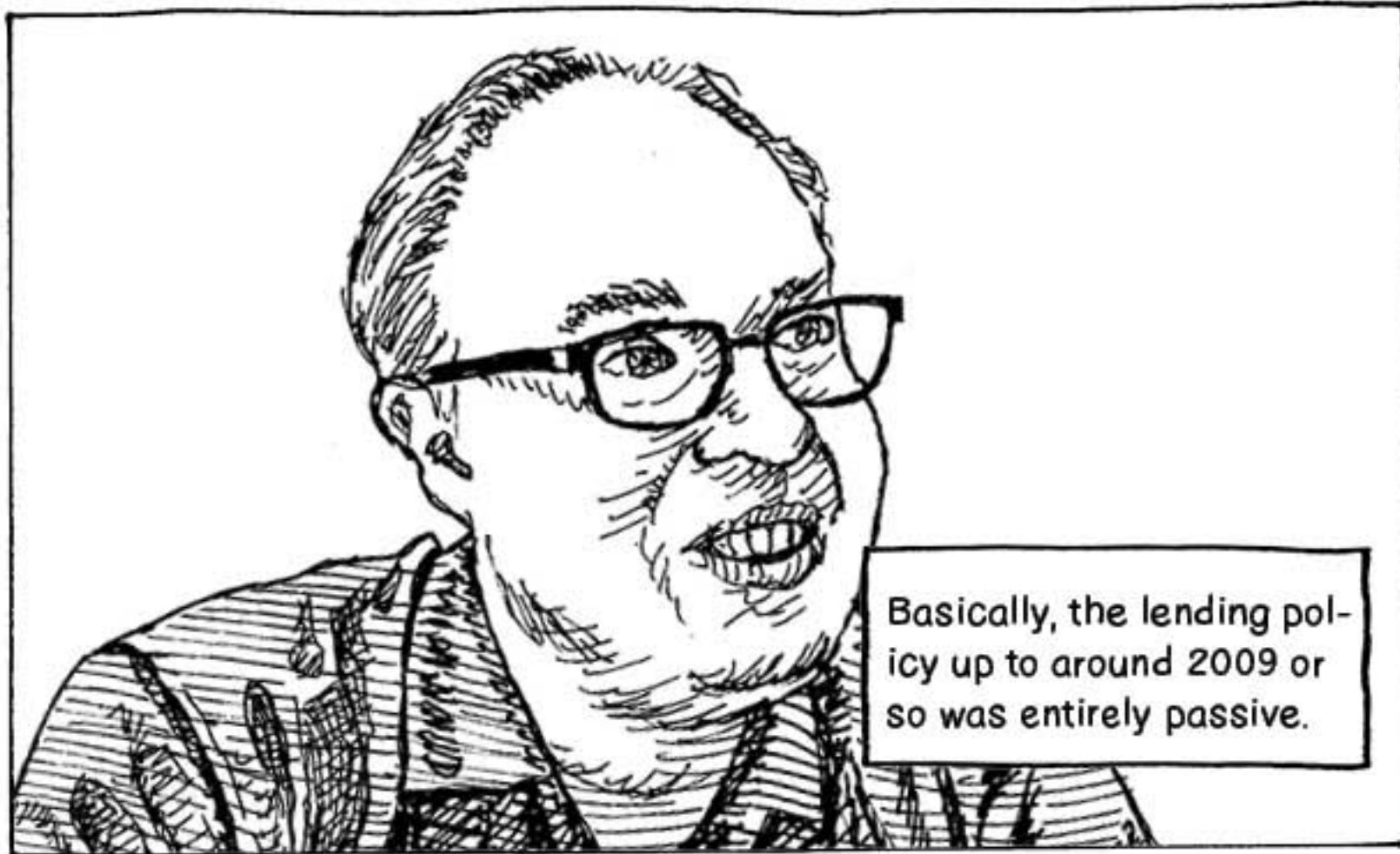
And so those questions resonated in me and they resonated in all of us, which led to a critical analysis of what this project might mean.



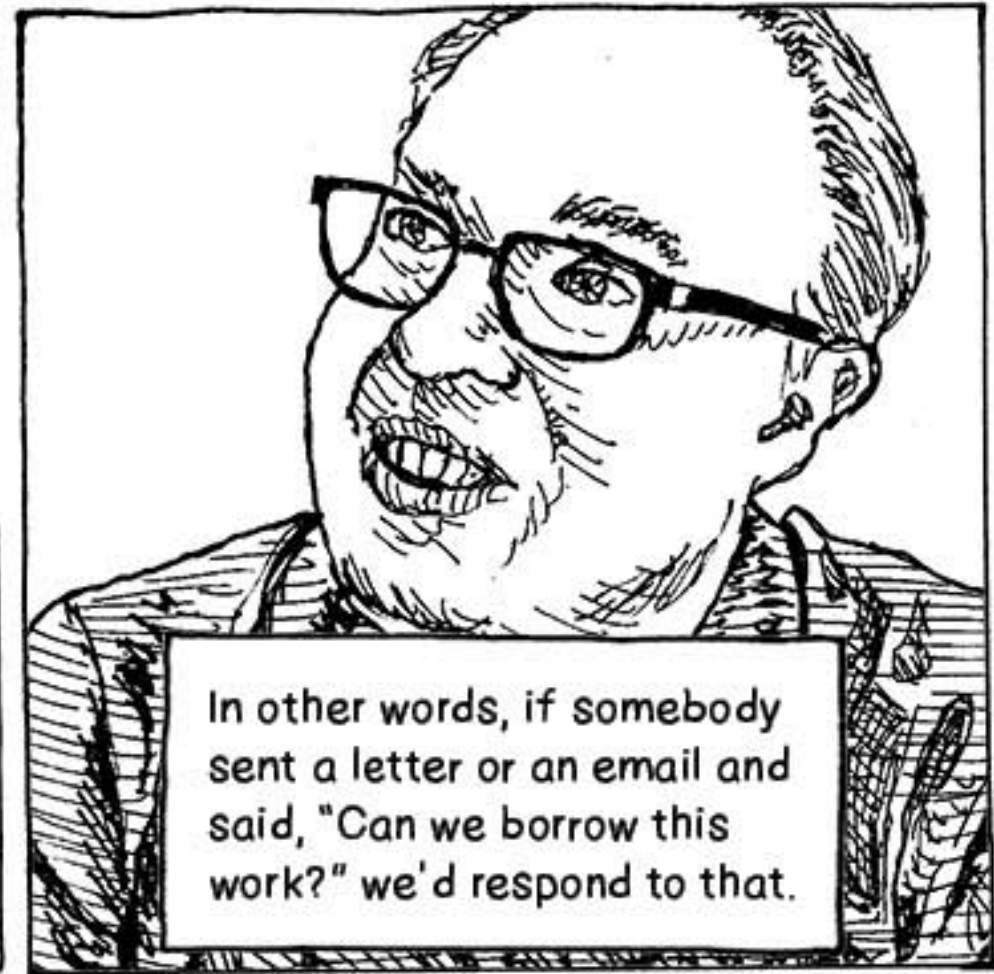
You know how life is, this is all mixed together somehow...



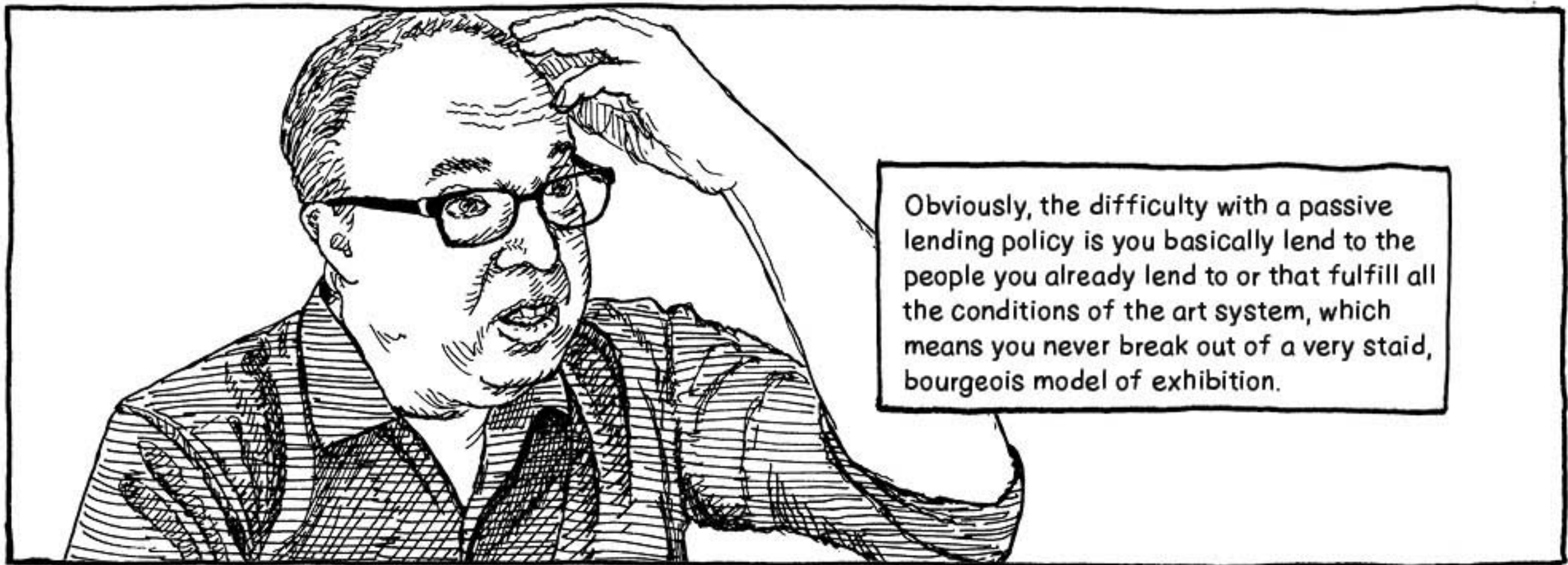
...what we'd been talking about before this request came in was the idea of developing what we call an "active lending policy".



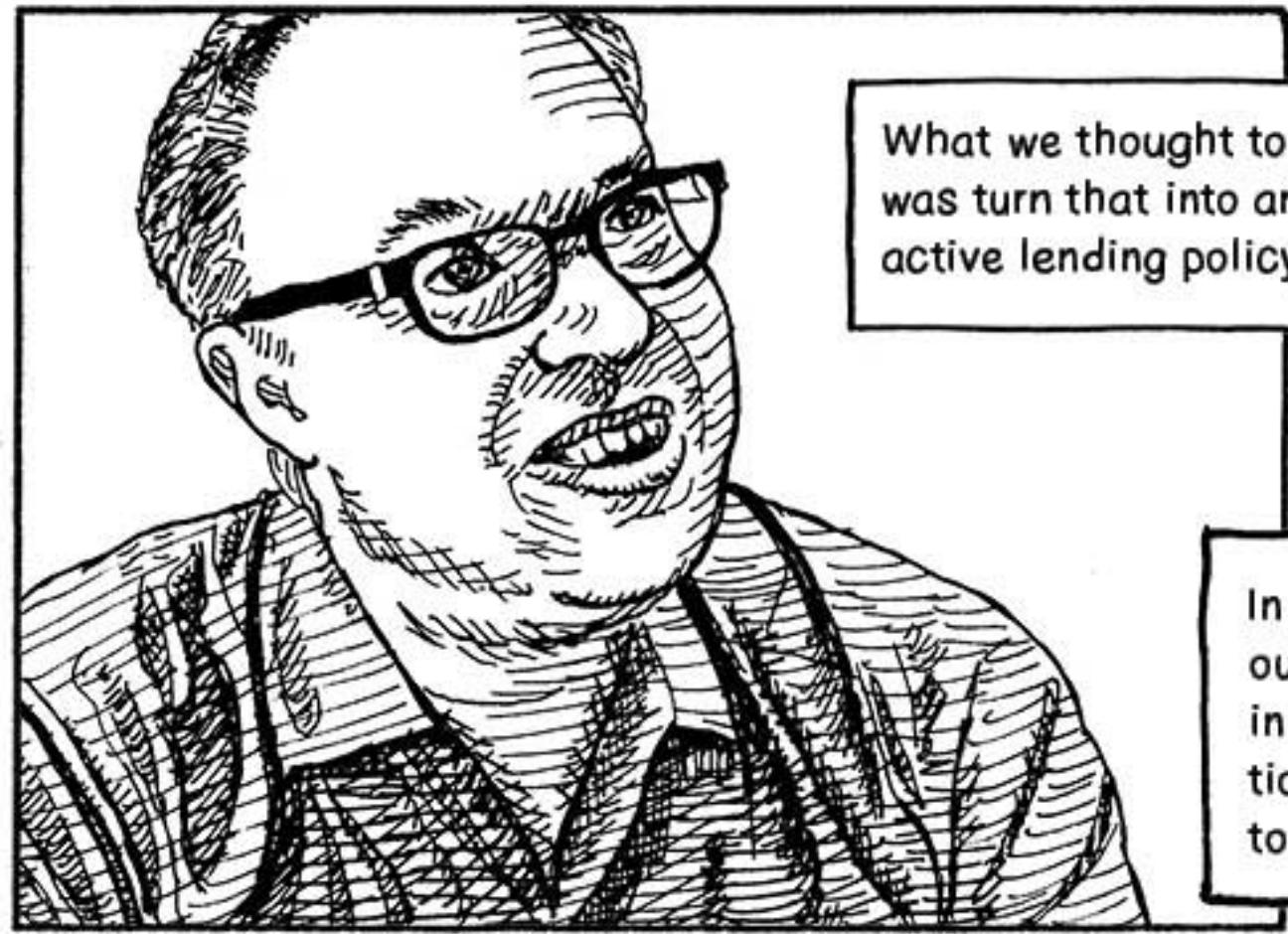
Basically, the lending policy up to around 2009 or so was entirely passive.



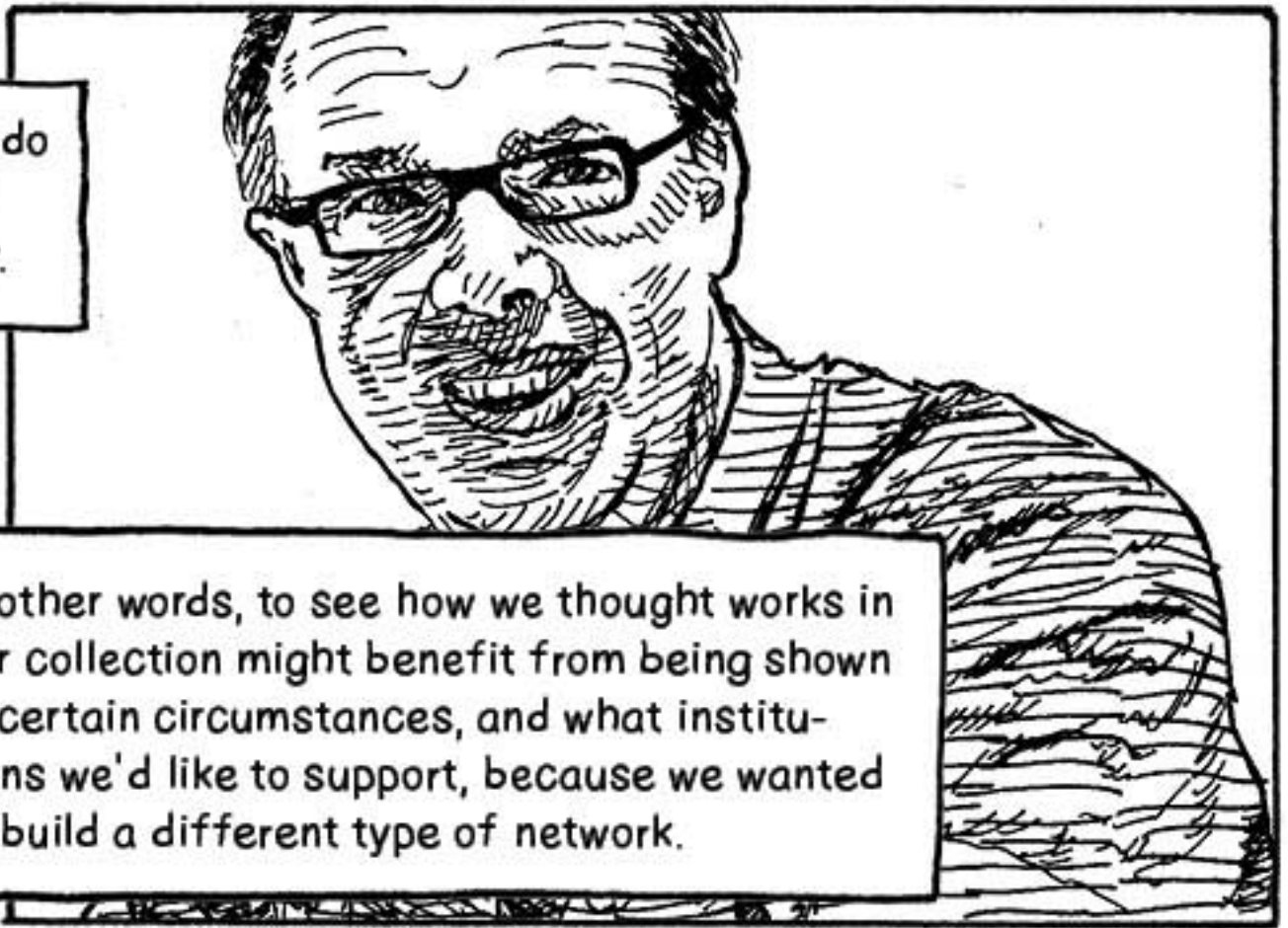
In other words, if somebody sent a letter or an email and said, "Can we borrow this work?" we'd respond to that.



Obviously, the difficulty with a passive lending policy is you basically lend to the people you already lend to or that fulfill all the conditions of the art system, which means you never break out of a very staid, bourgeois model of exhibition.



What we thought to do was turn that into an active lending policy.



In other words, to see how we thought works in our collection might benefit from being shown in certain circumstances, and what institutions we'd like to support, because we wanted to build a different type of network.

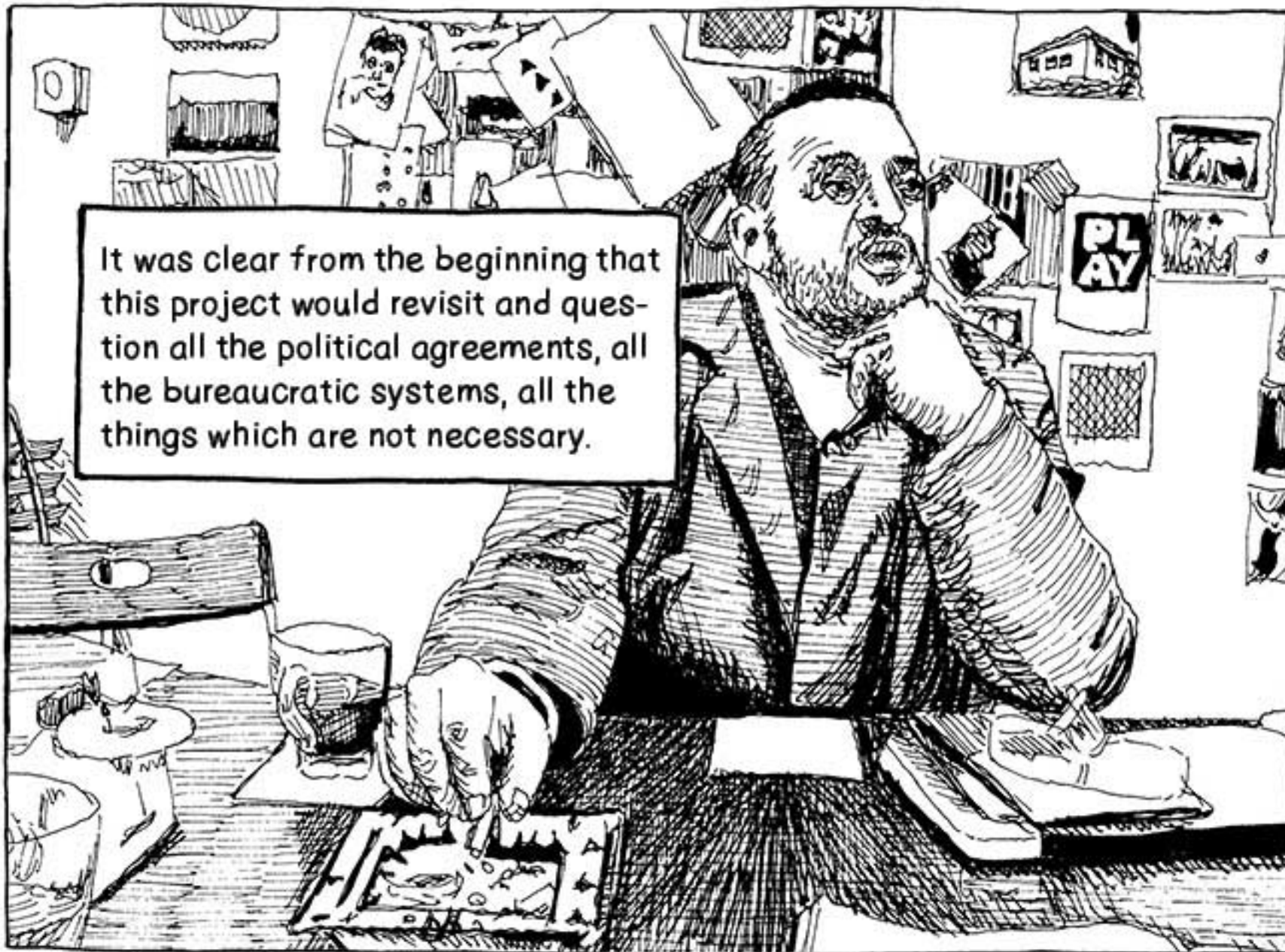


Was the intention behind an “active lending policy” simply a calculated gamble with the Van Abbemusuem's collection, a reflected type of philanthropy? Would Christiane Berndes, Director and Curator of the Van Abbe collection, consent to the idea if she did not also see a benefit over and above such an act's political implications? Something else was at stake, something to do with the value of the collection. Do not interpret the use of this term to construe monetary value alone, cultural value and prestige are also at stake—a different sort of leveraging of a museum's collection than what is typically implied by this phrase.

This something had to do with “aura,” with reinvesting the painting with an auratic potential no longer possible in a Western context.



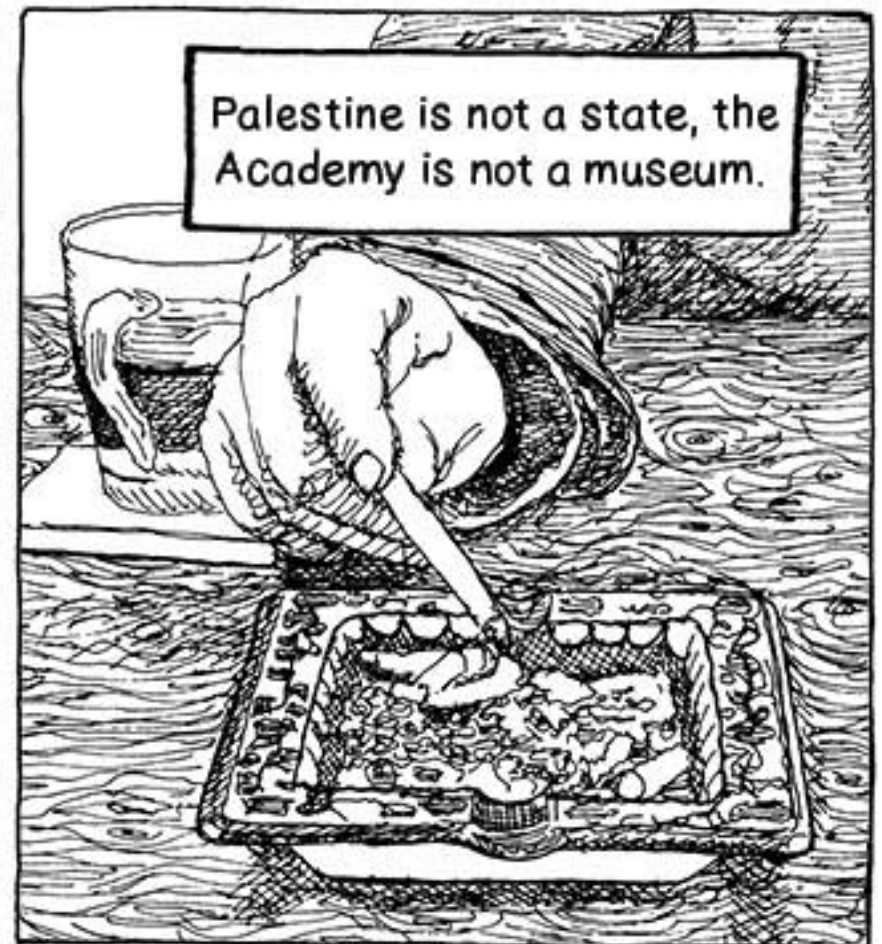
DIFFERENT IMPLICATIONS



It was clear from the beginning that this project would revisit and question all the political agreements, all the bureaucratic systems, all the things which are not necessary.



All these details were for us to learn.

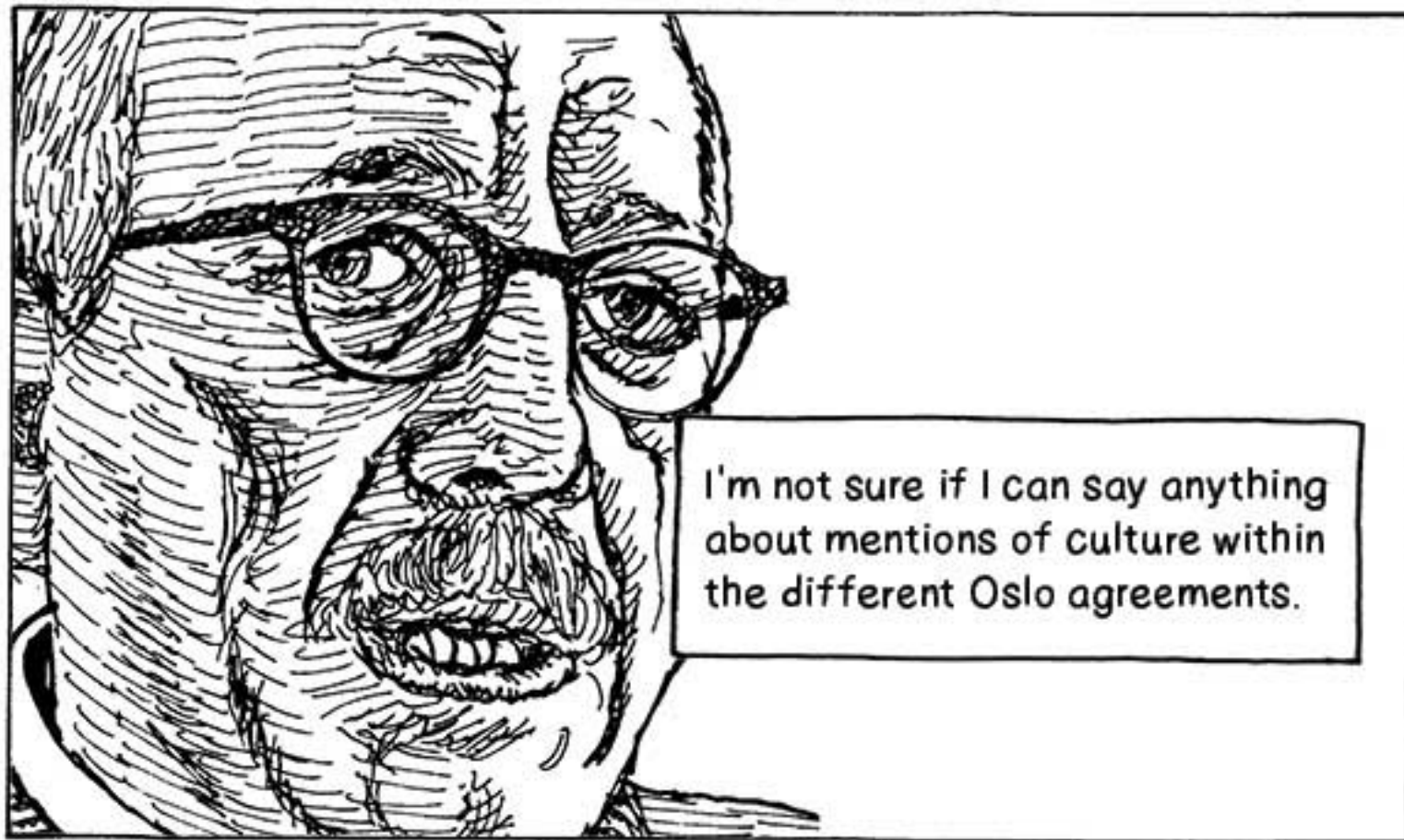


Palestine is not a state, the Academy is not a museum.

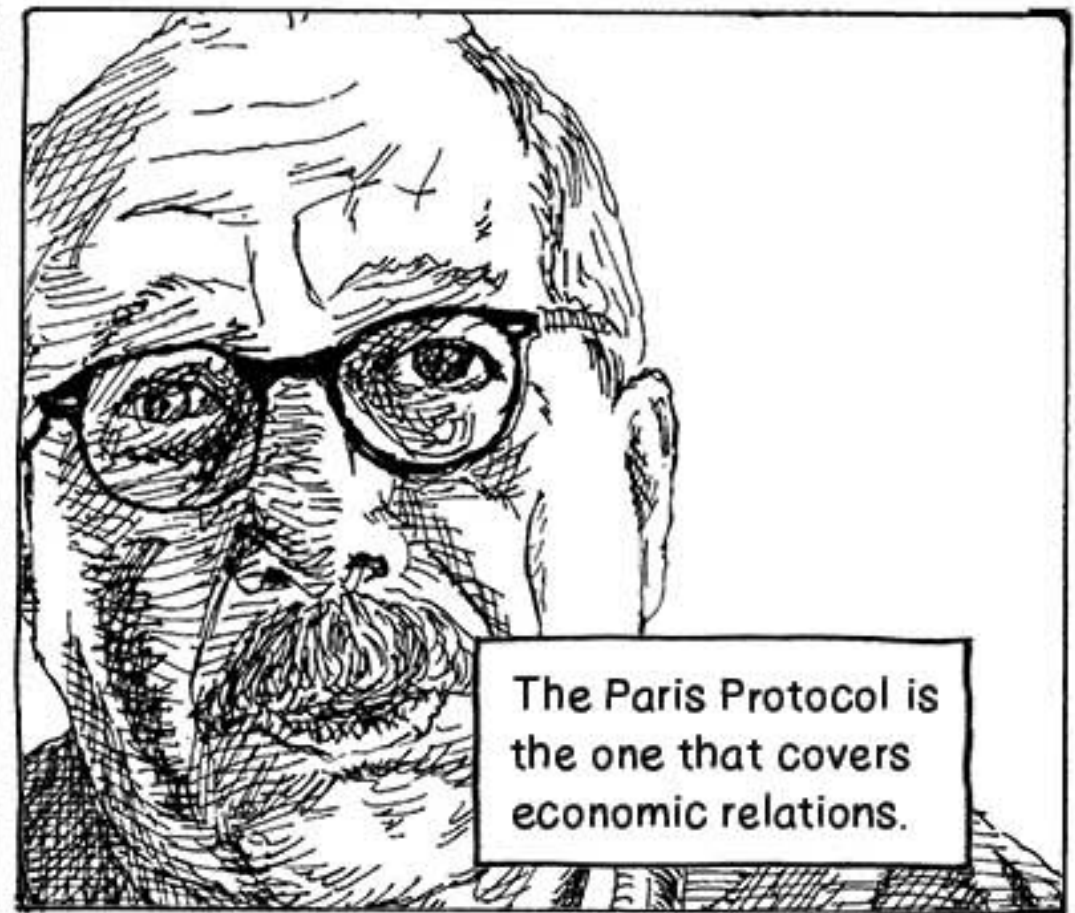


It was also clear from the beginning that for an insurance company to get involved in such a risky kind of situation... usually there might be a government invited or a connection with a museum who would bring some of their collection to be exhibited and guarantee the safety of the work, but in this case, this was not the situation.

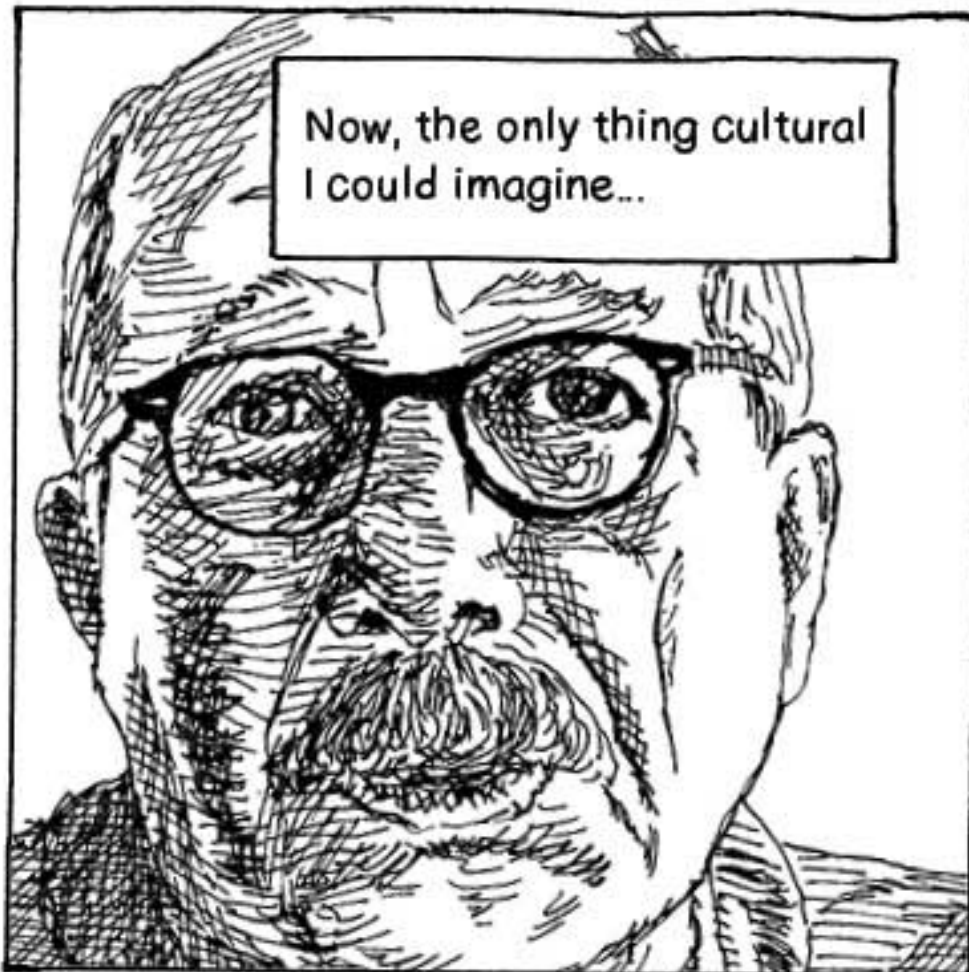




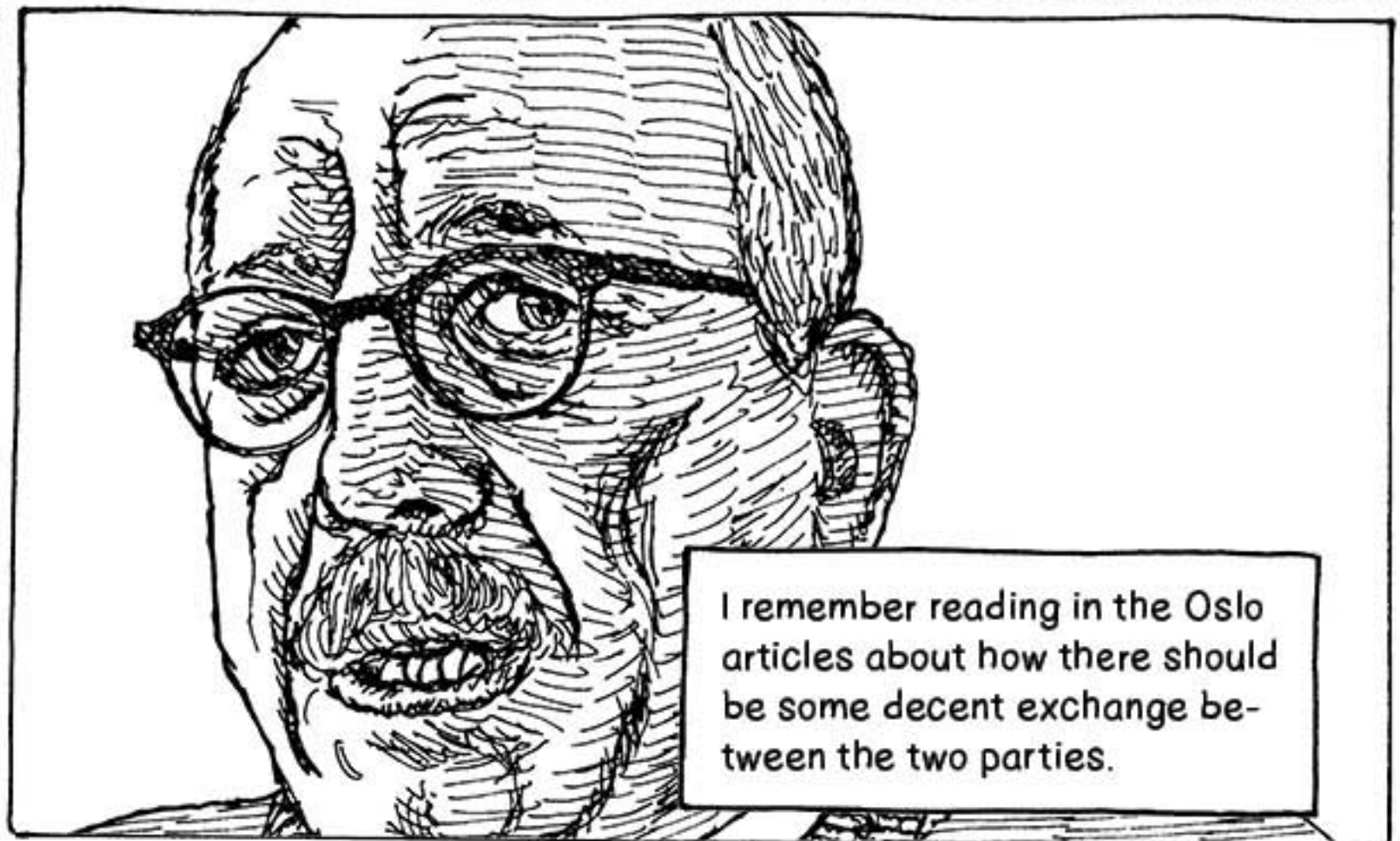
I'm not sure if I can say anything about mentions of culture within the different Oslo agreements.



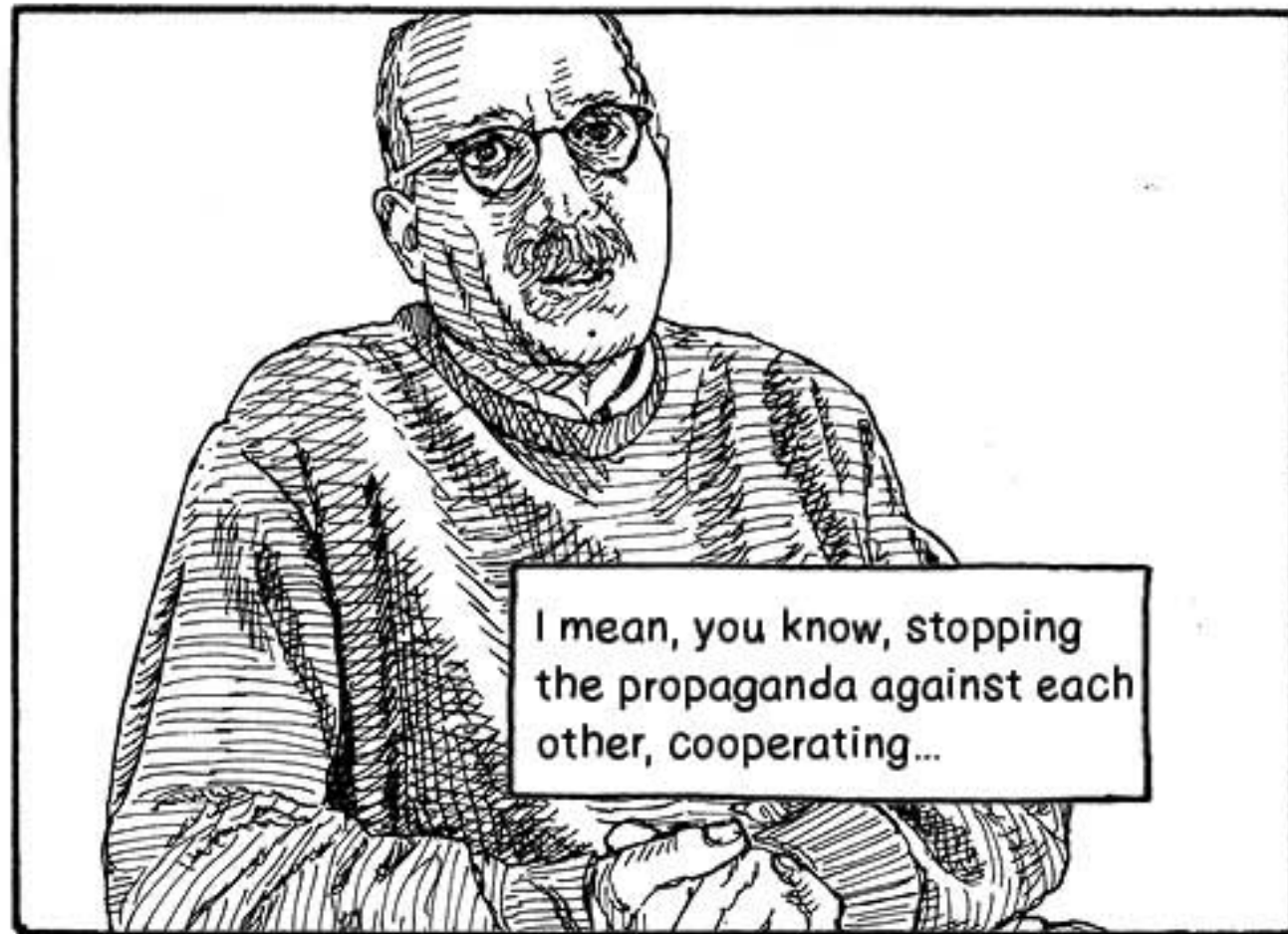
The Paris Protocol is the one that covers economic relations.



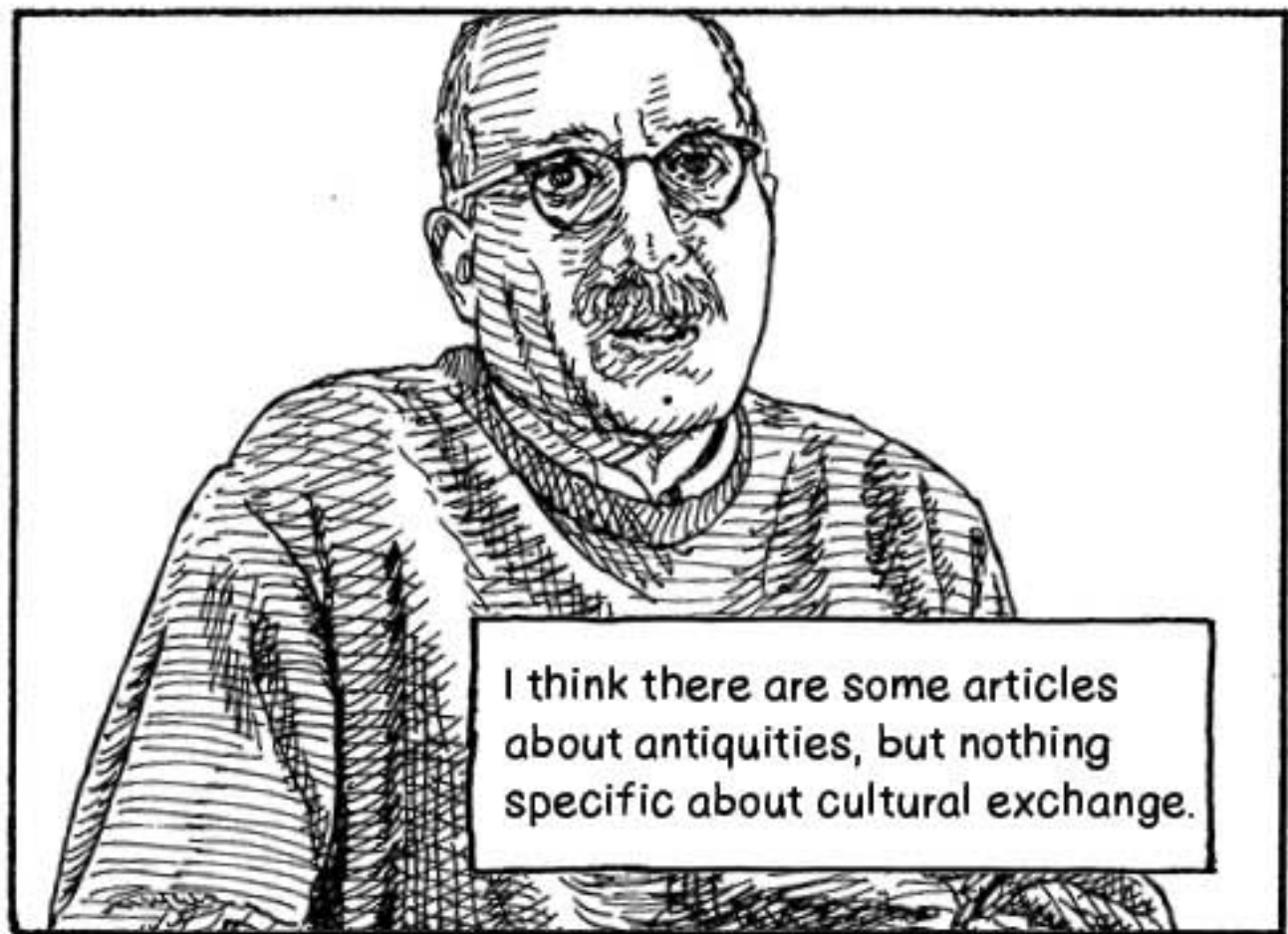
Now, the only thing cultural I could imagine...



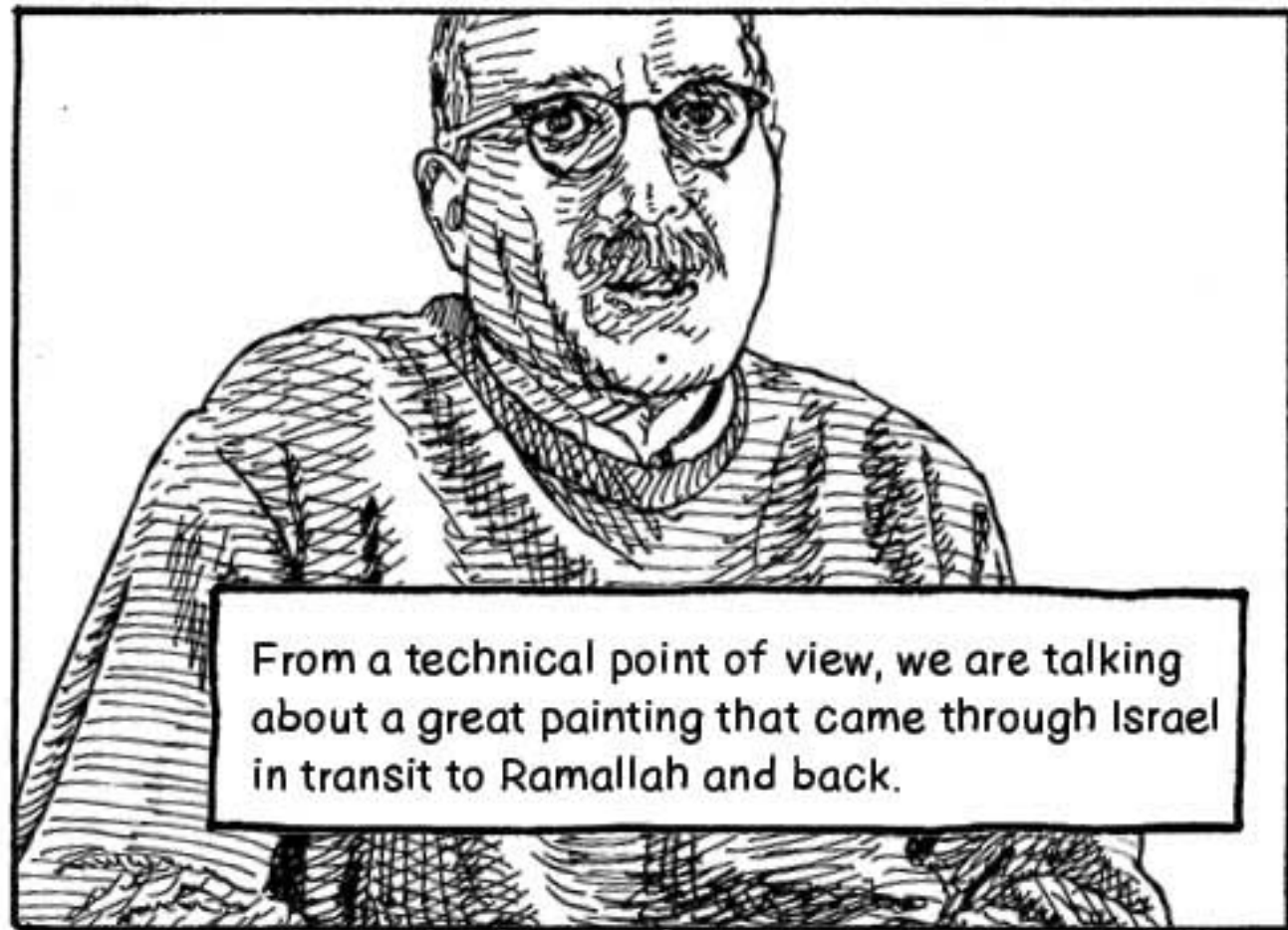
I remember reading in the Oslo articles about how there should be some decent exchange between the two parties.



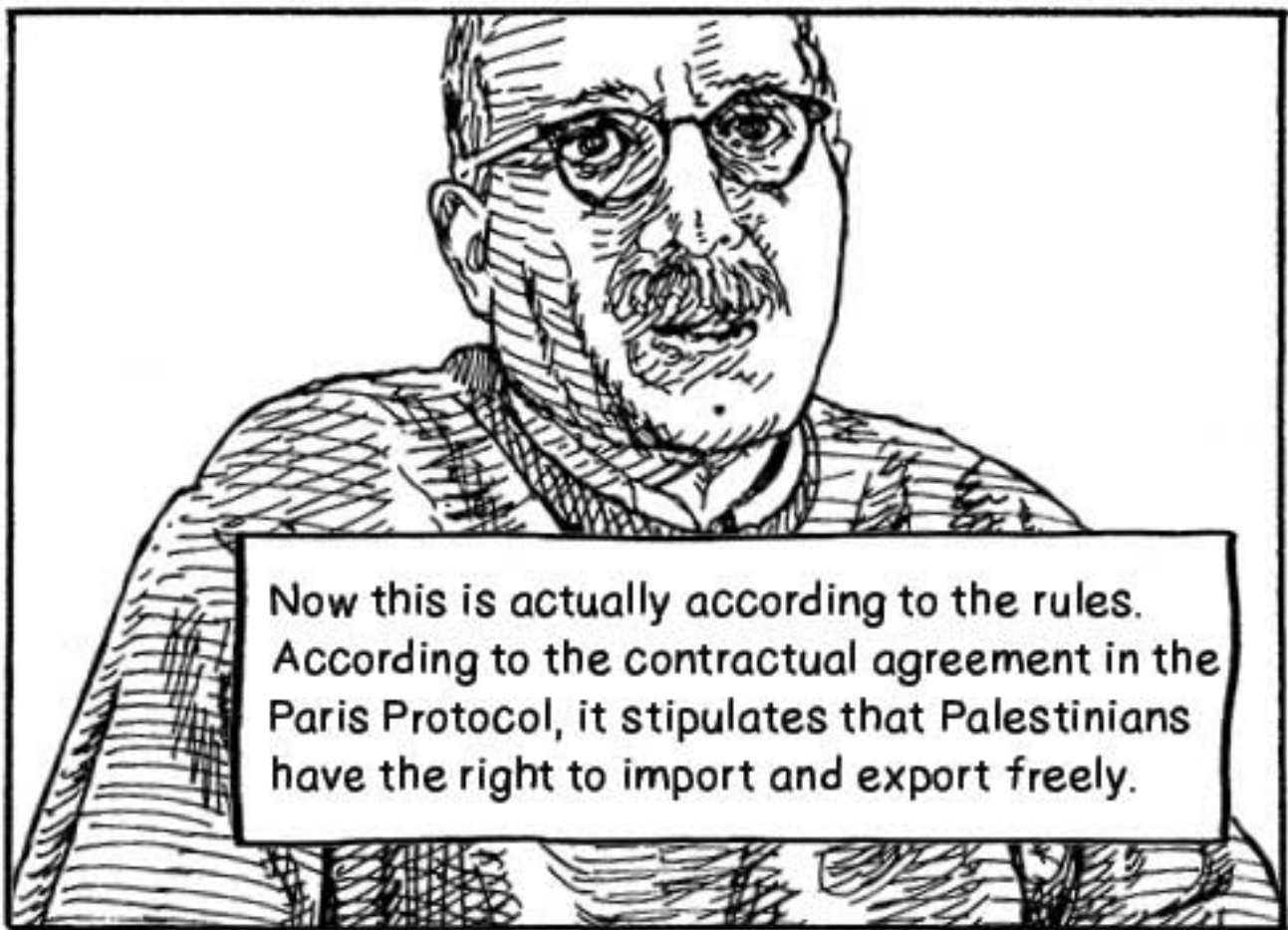
I mean, you know, stopping the propaganda against each other, cooperating...



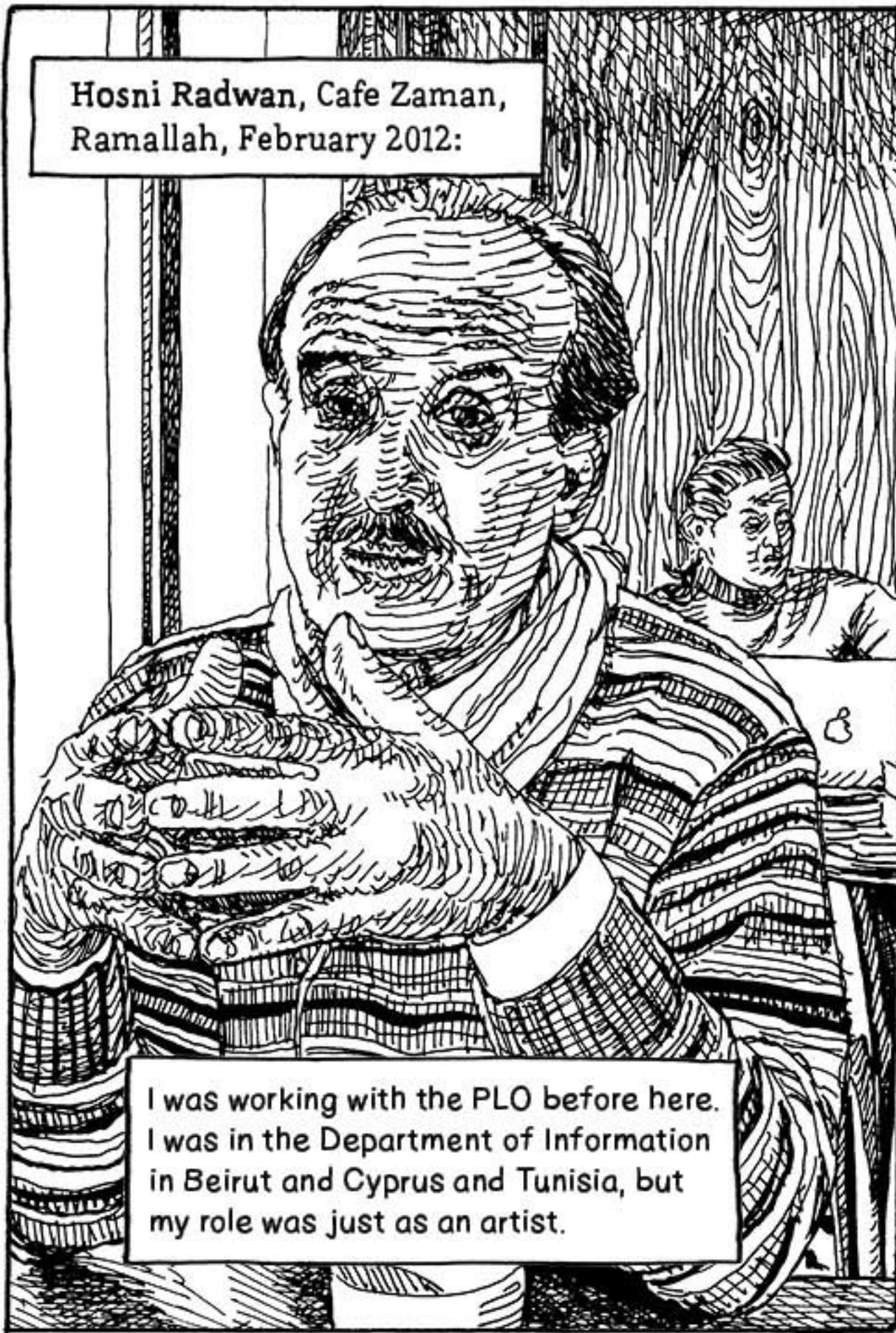
I think there are some articles about antiquities, but nothing specific about cultural exchange.



From a technical point of view, we are talking about a great painting that came through Israel in transit to Ramallah and back.

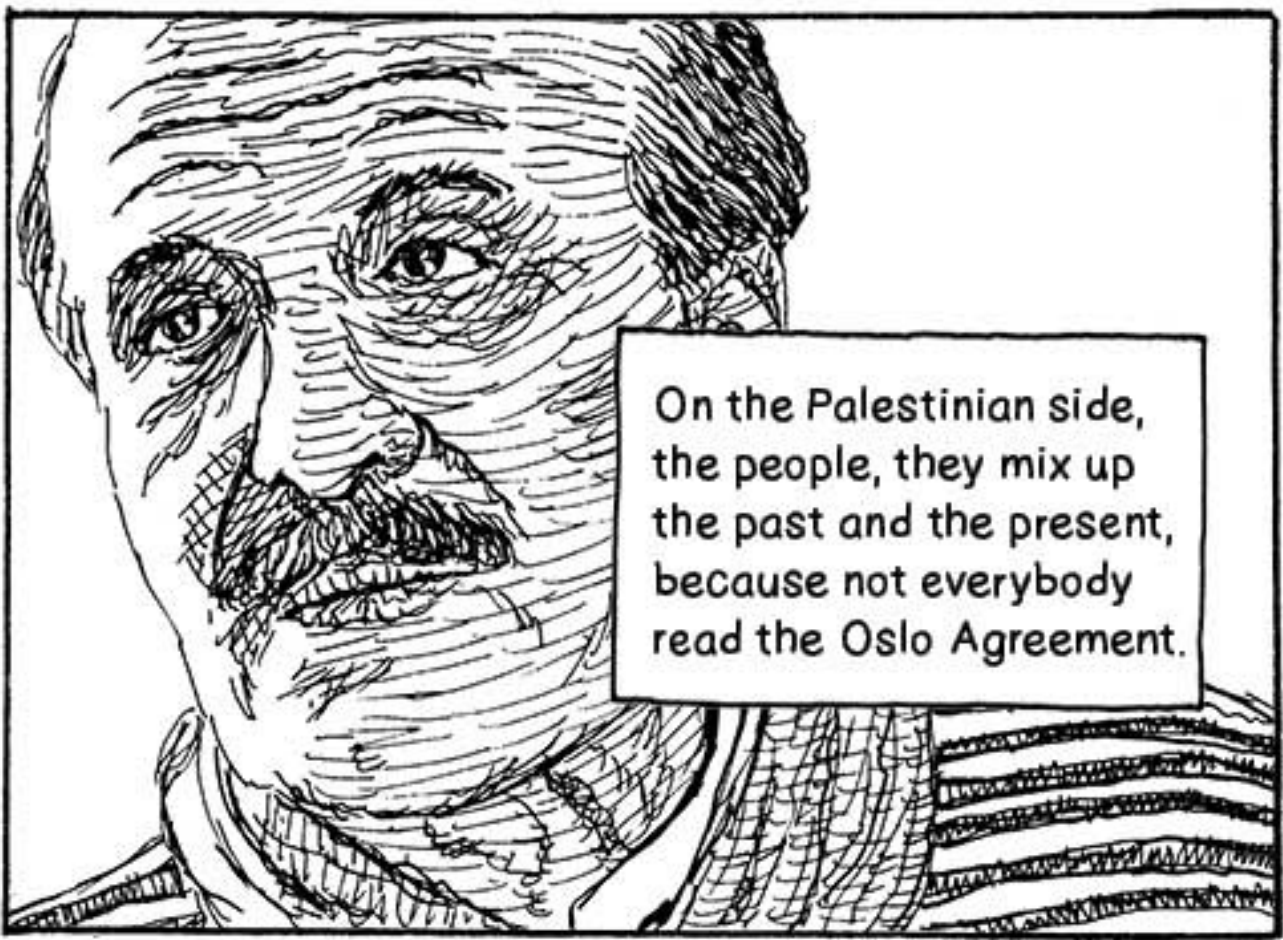


Now this is actually according to the rules. According to the contractual agreement in the Paris Protocol, it stipulates that Palestinians have the right to import and export freely.

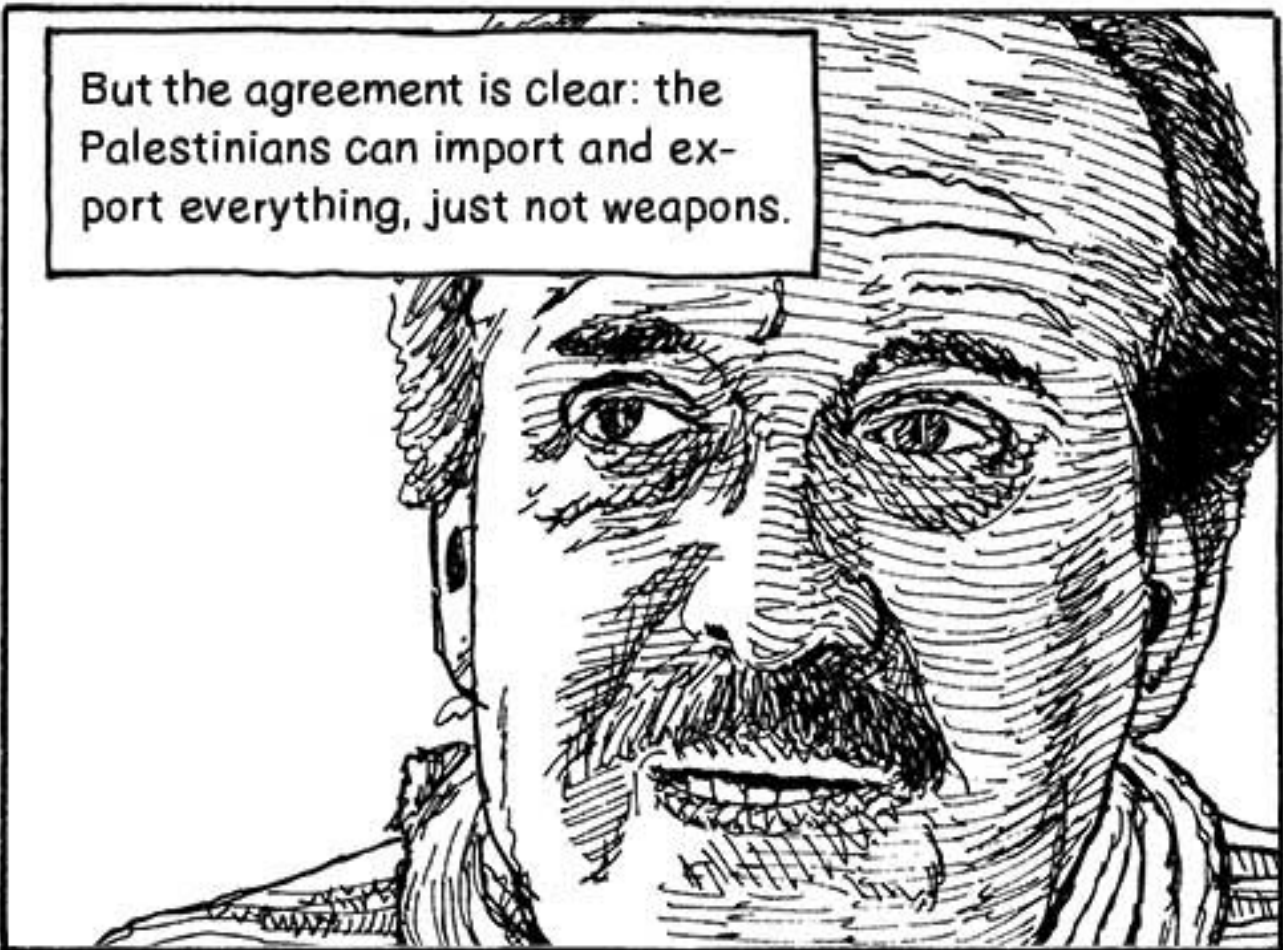


Hosni Radwan, Cafe Zaman,
Ramallah, February 2012:

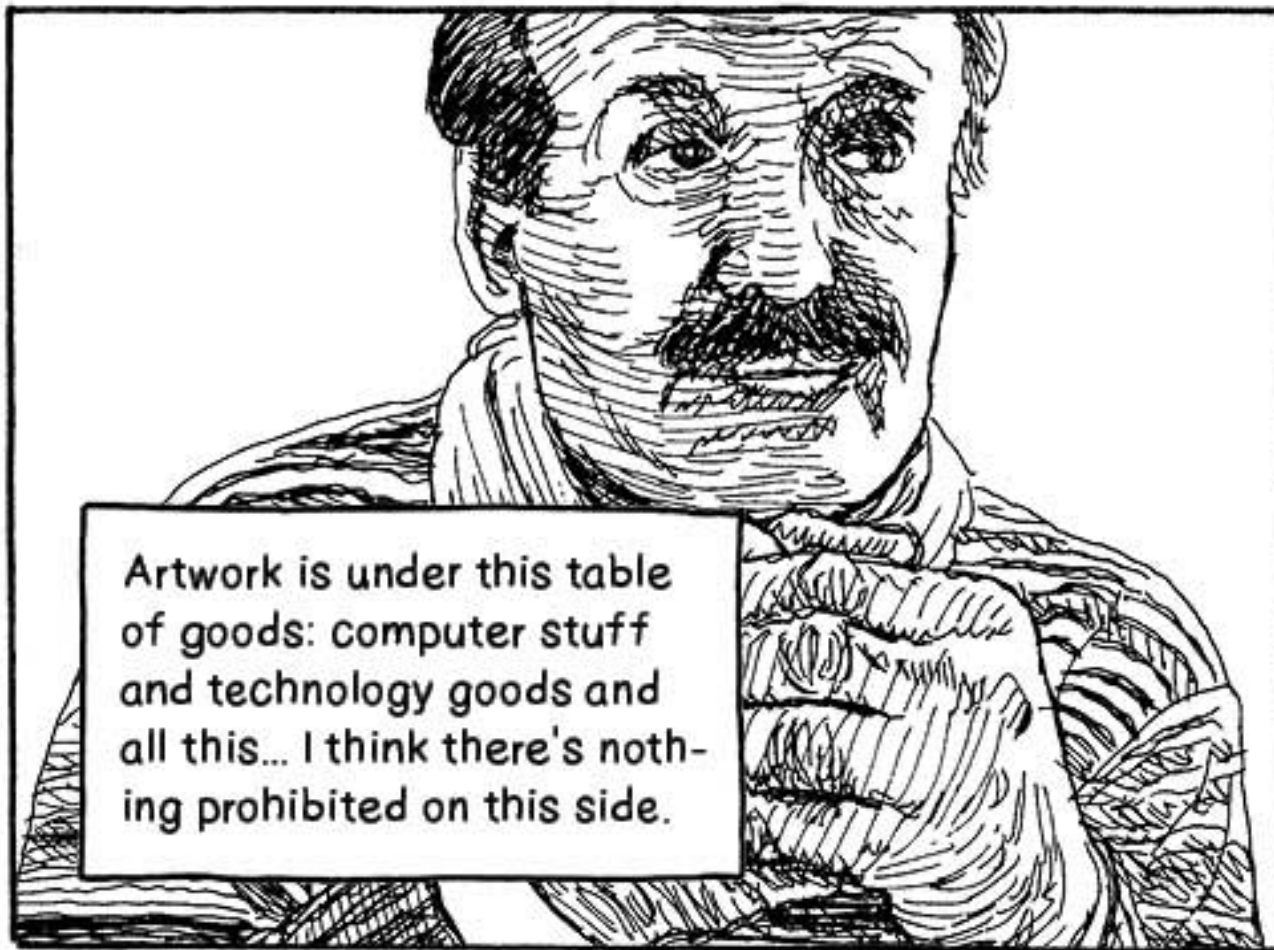
I was working with the PLO before here.
I was in the Department of Information
in Beirut and Cyprus and Tunisia, but
my role was just as an artist.



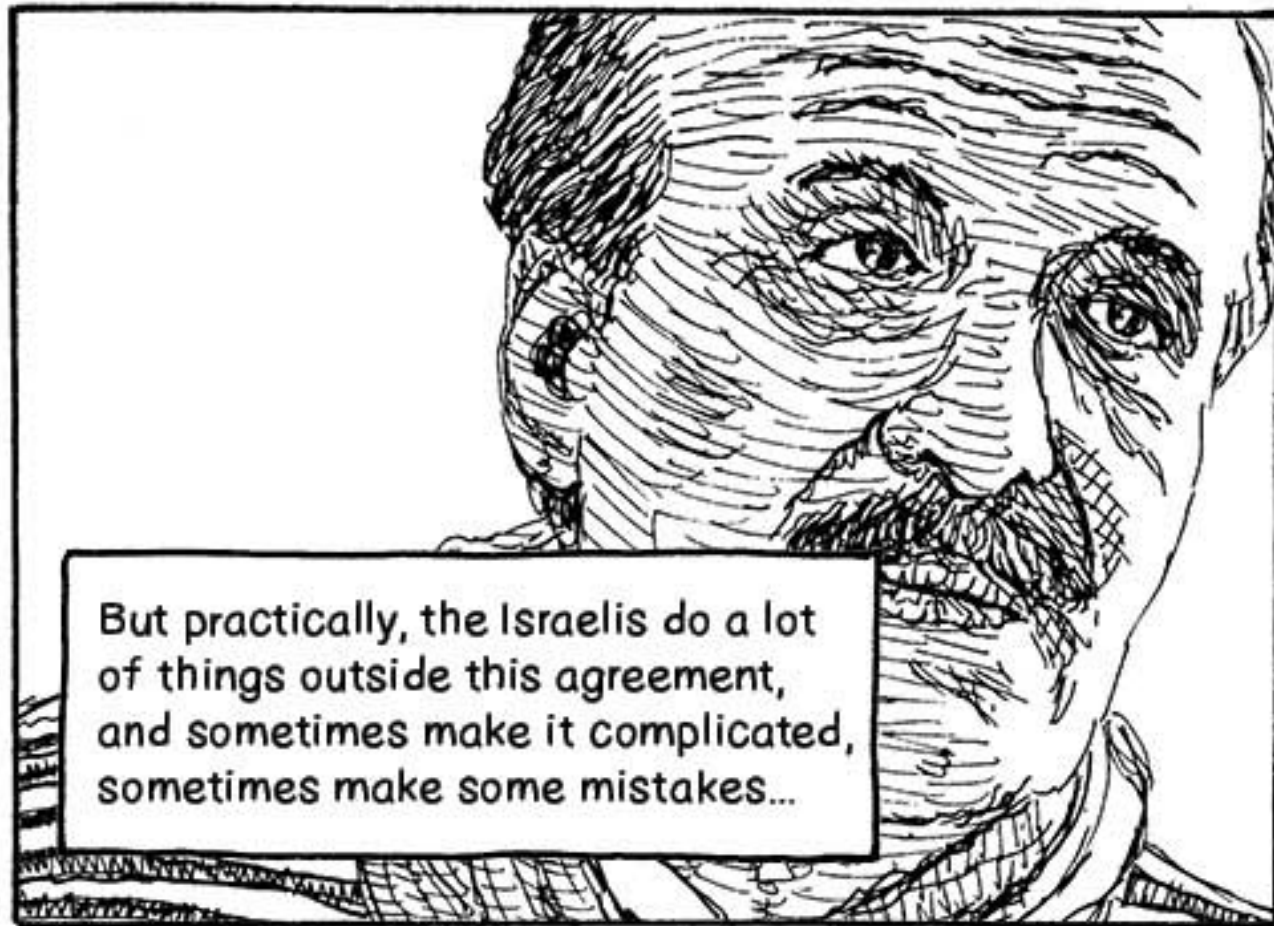
On the Palestinian side,
the people, they mix up
the past and the present,
because not everybody
read the Oslo Agreement.



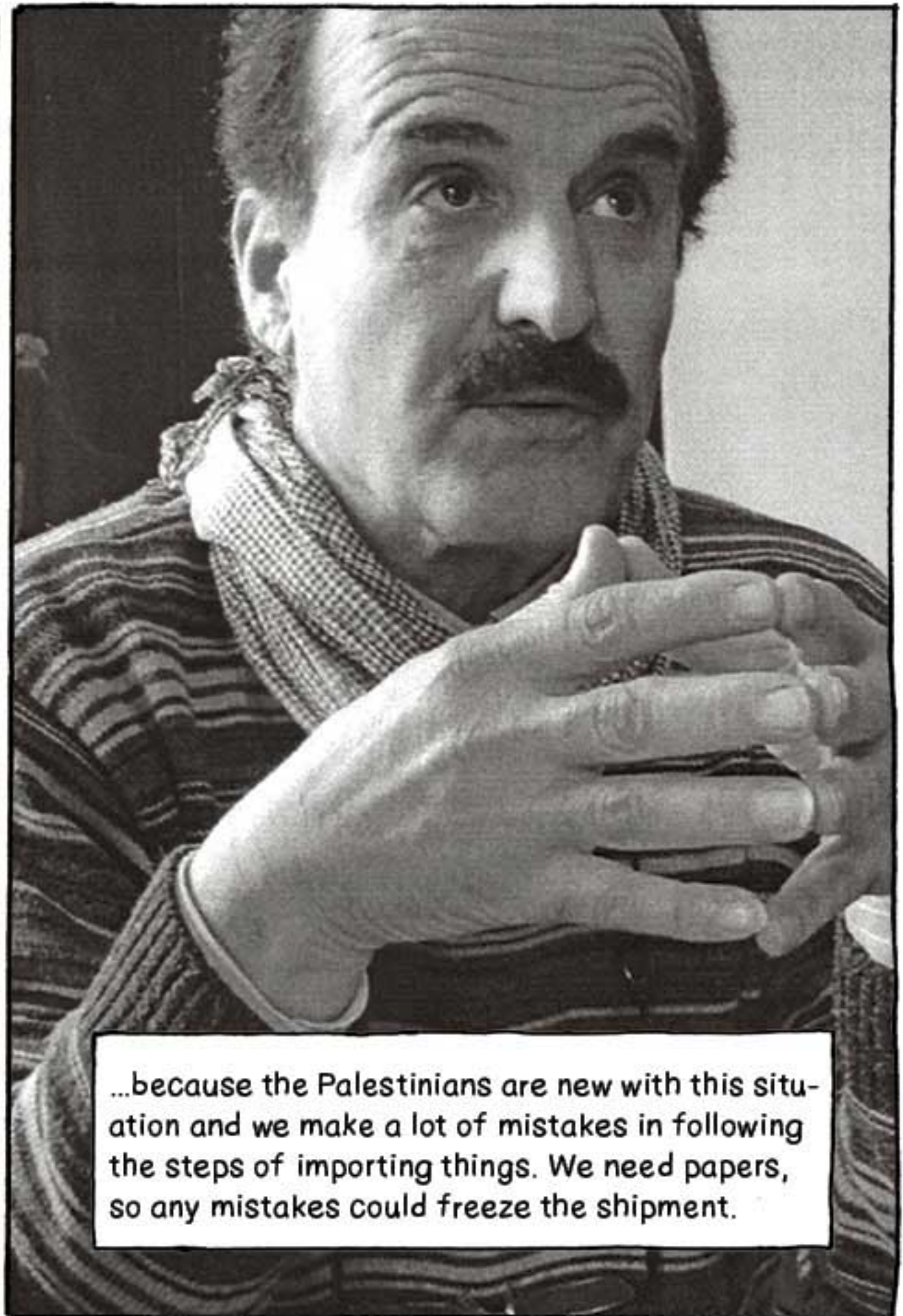
But the agreement is clear: the
Palestinians can import and ex-
port everything, just not weapons.



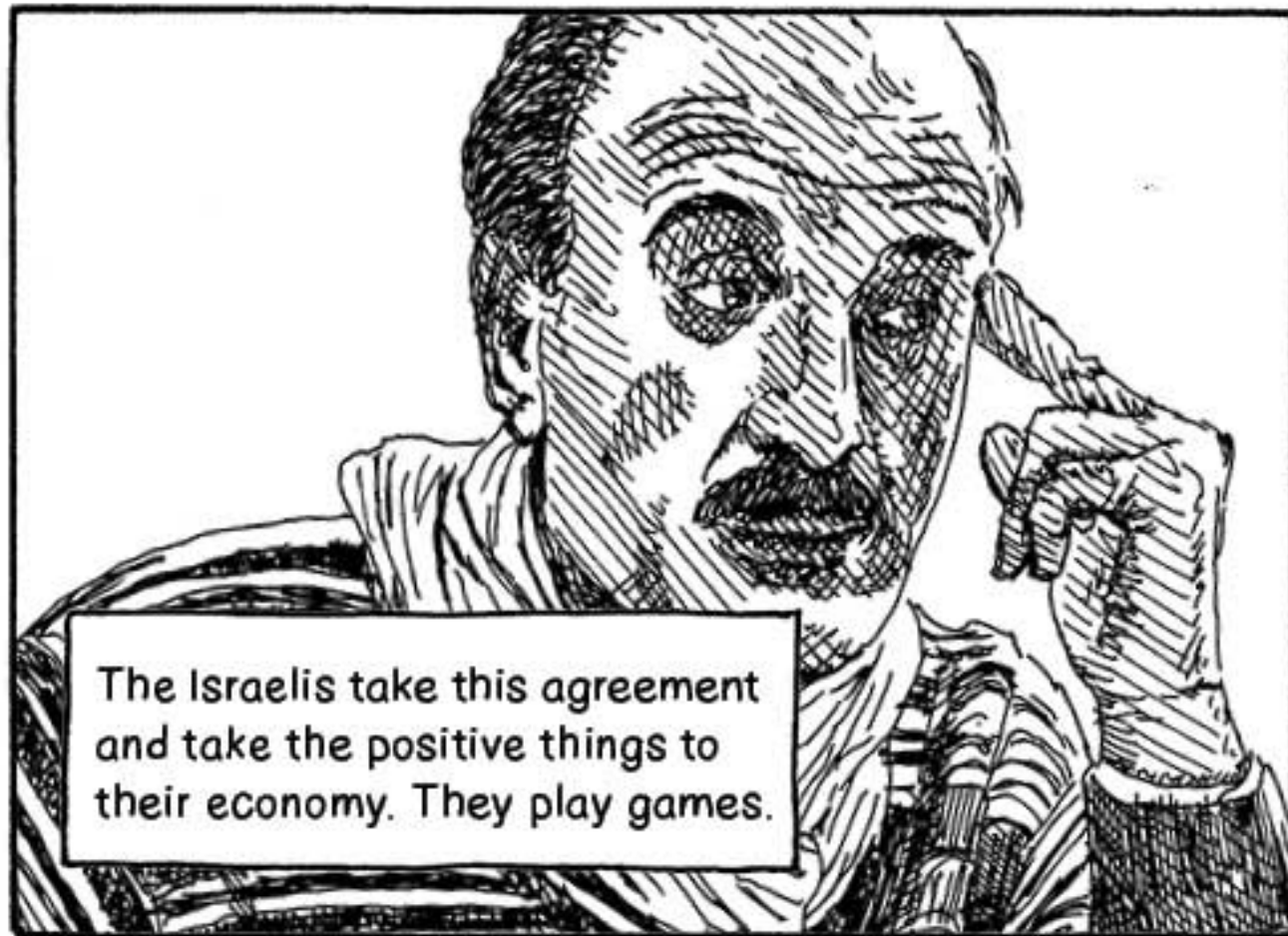
Artwork is under this table of goods: computer stuff and technology goods and all this... I think there's nothing prohibited on this side.



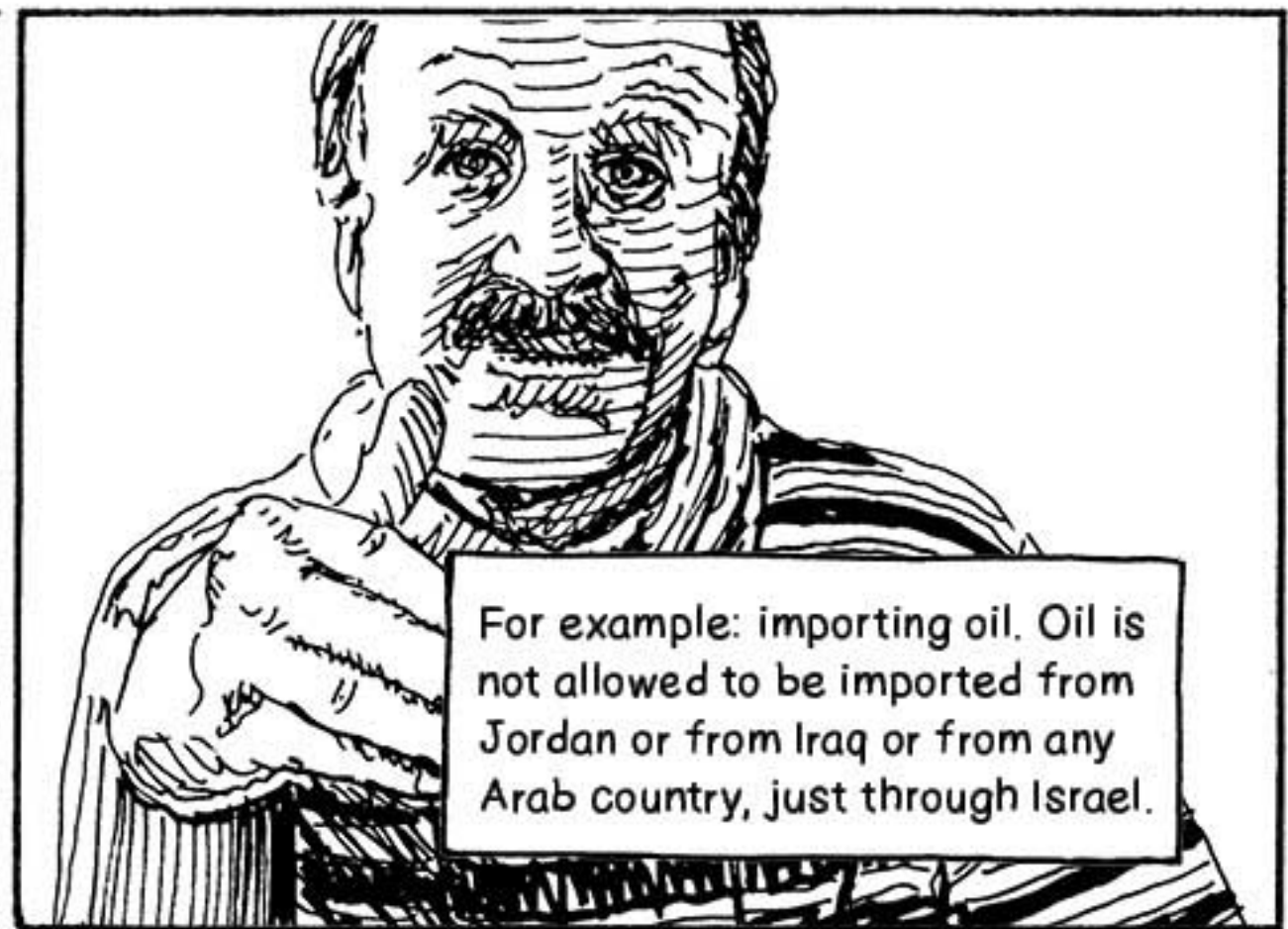
But practically, the Israelis do a lot of things outside this agreement, and sometimes make it complicated, sometimes make some mistakes...



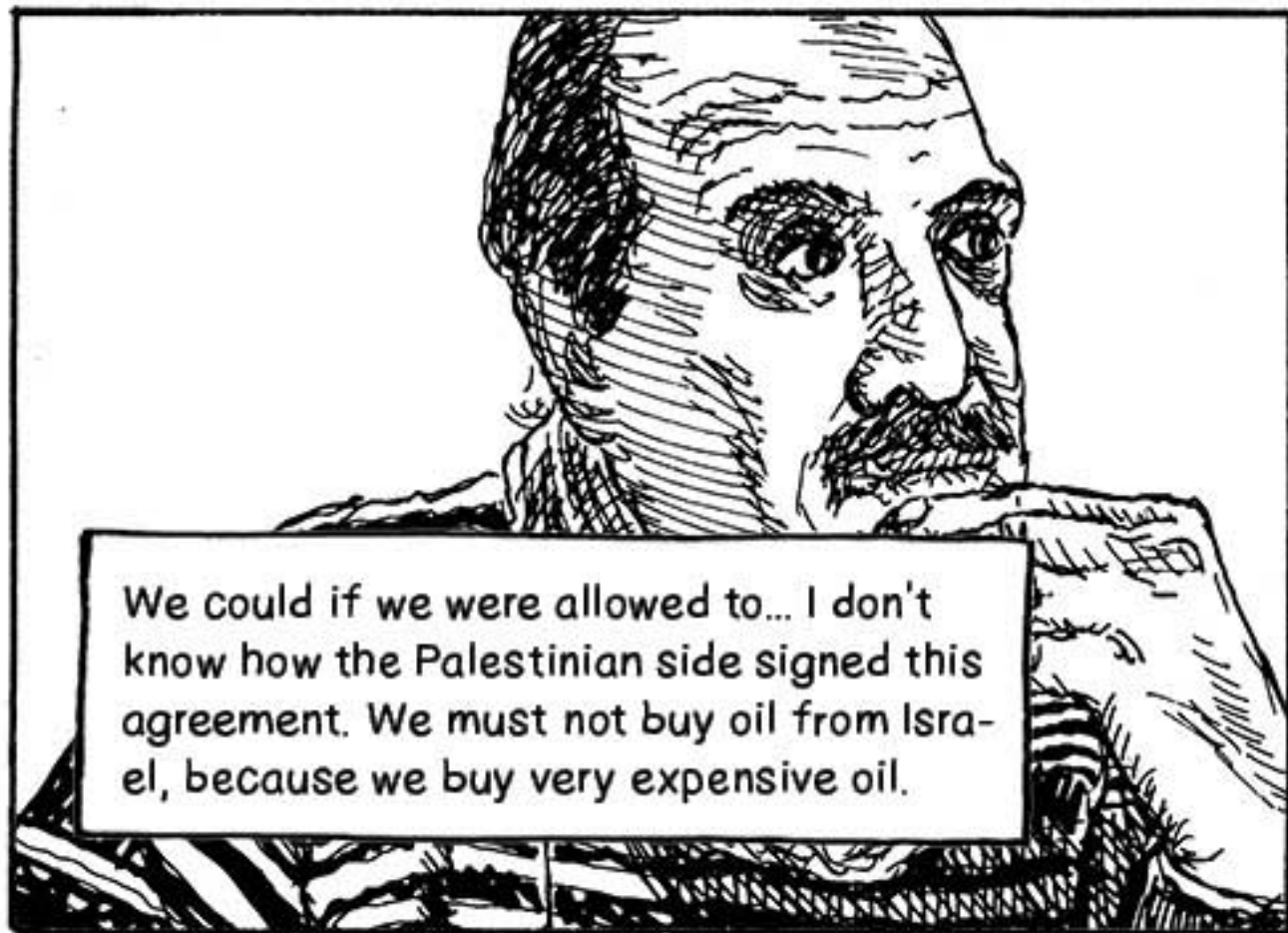
...because the Palestinians are new with this situation and we make a lot of mistakes in following the steps of importing things. We need papers, so any mistakes could freeze the shipment.



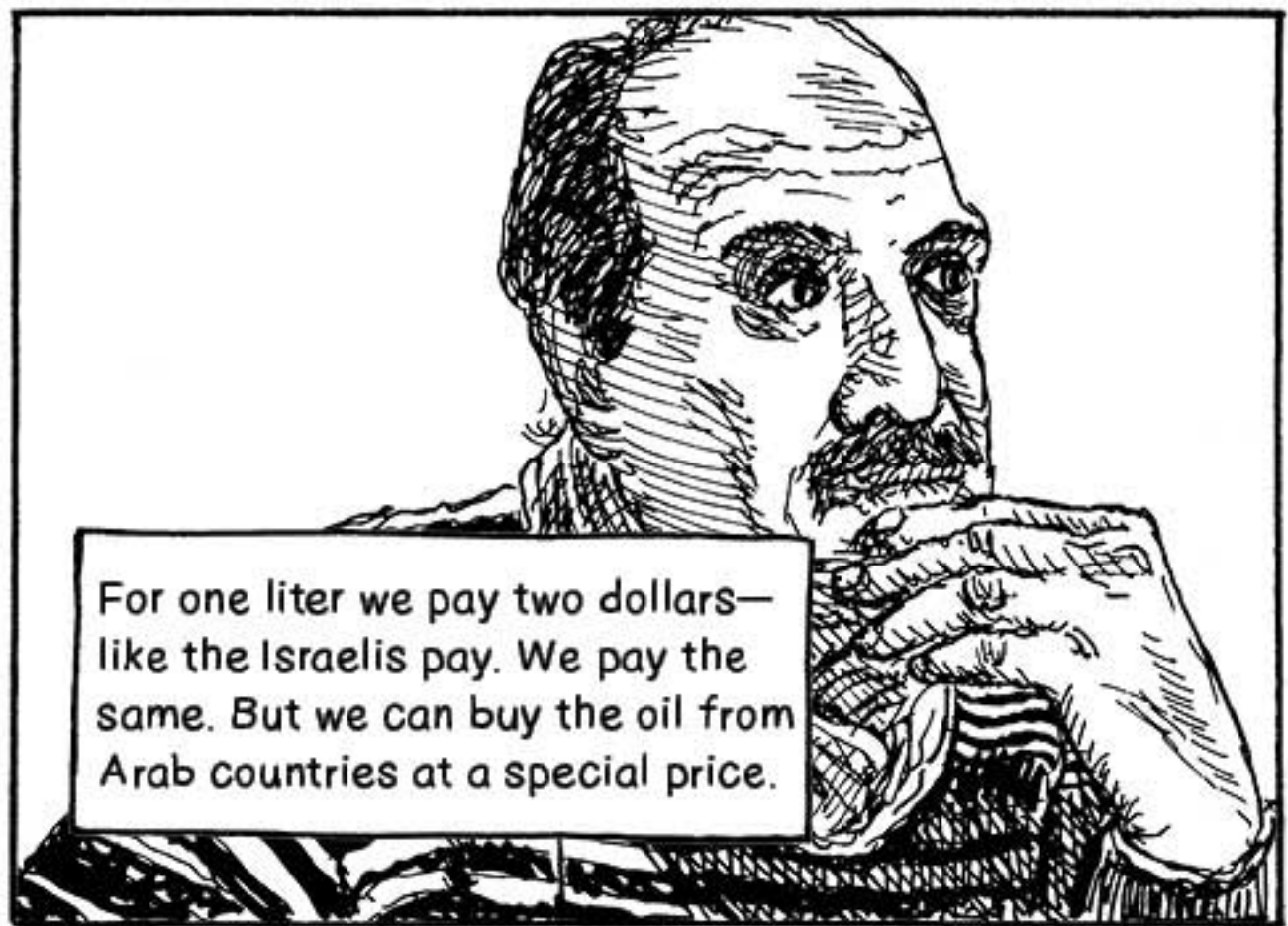
The Israelis take this agreement and take the positive things to their economy. They play games.



For example: importing oil. Oil is not allowed to be imported from Jordan or from Iraq or from any Arab country, just through Israel.

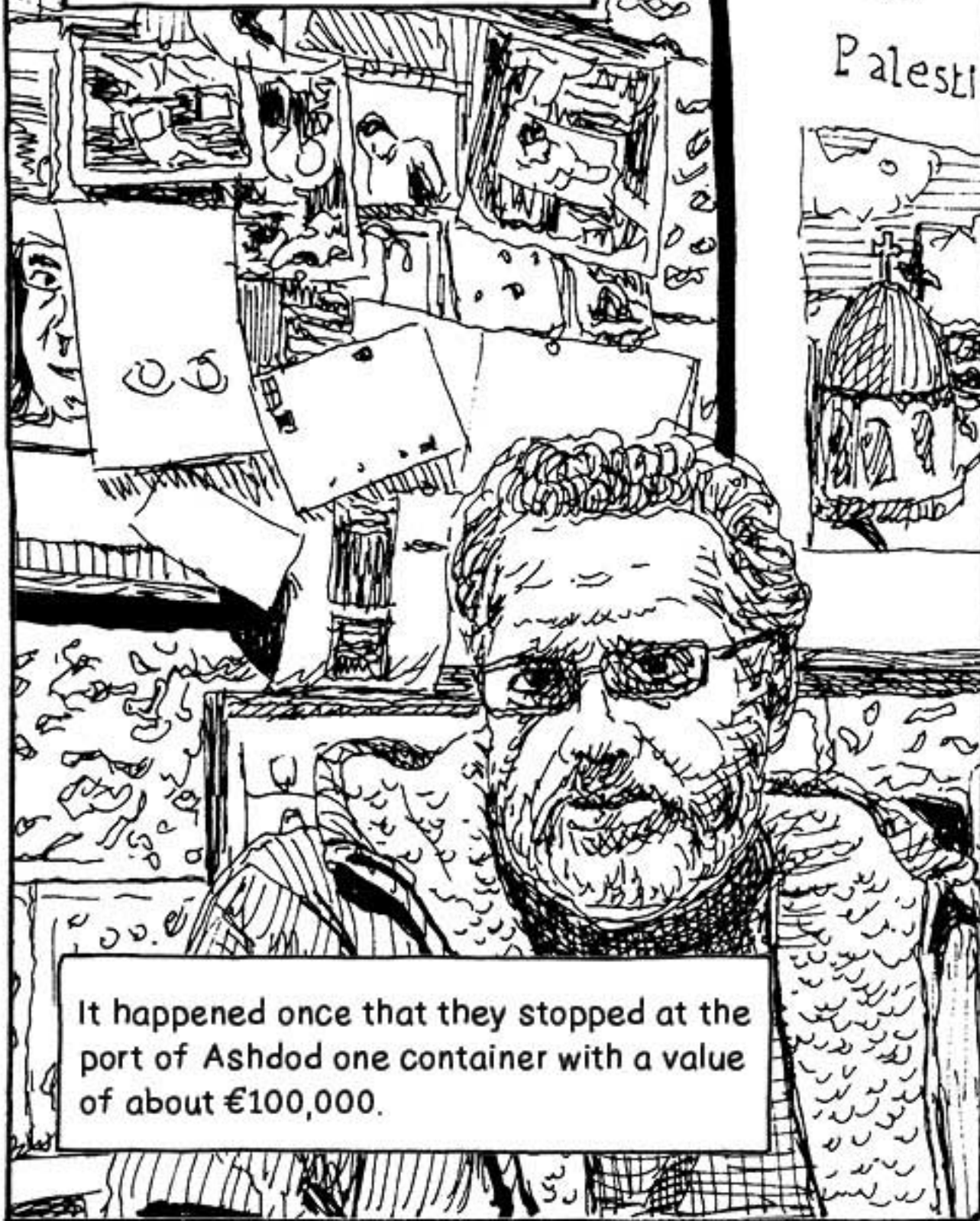


We could if we were allowed to... I don't know how the Palestinian side signed this agreement. We must not buy oil from Israel, because we buy very expensive oil.

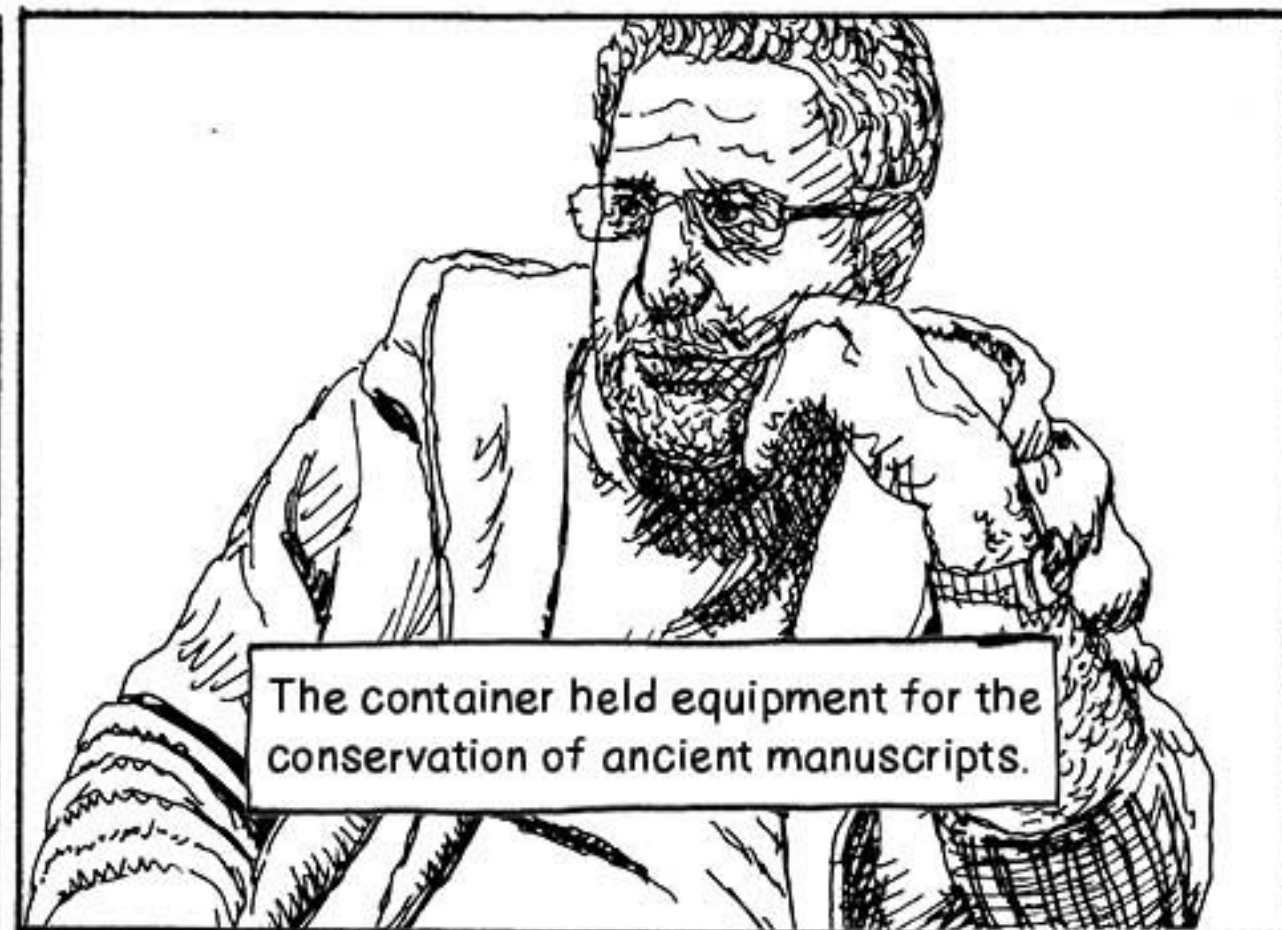


For one liter we pay two dollars—like the Israelis pay. We pay the same. But we can buy the oil from Arab countries at a special price.

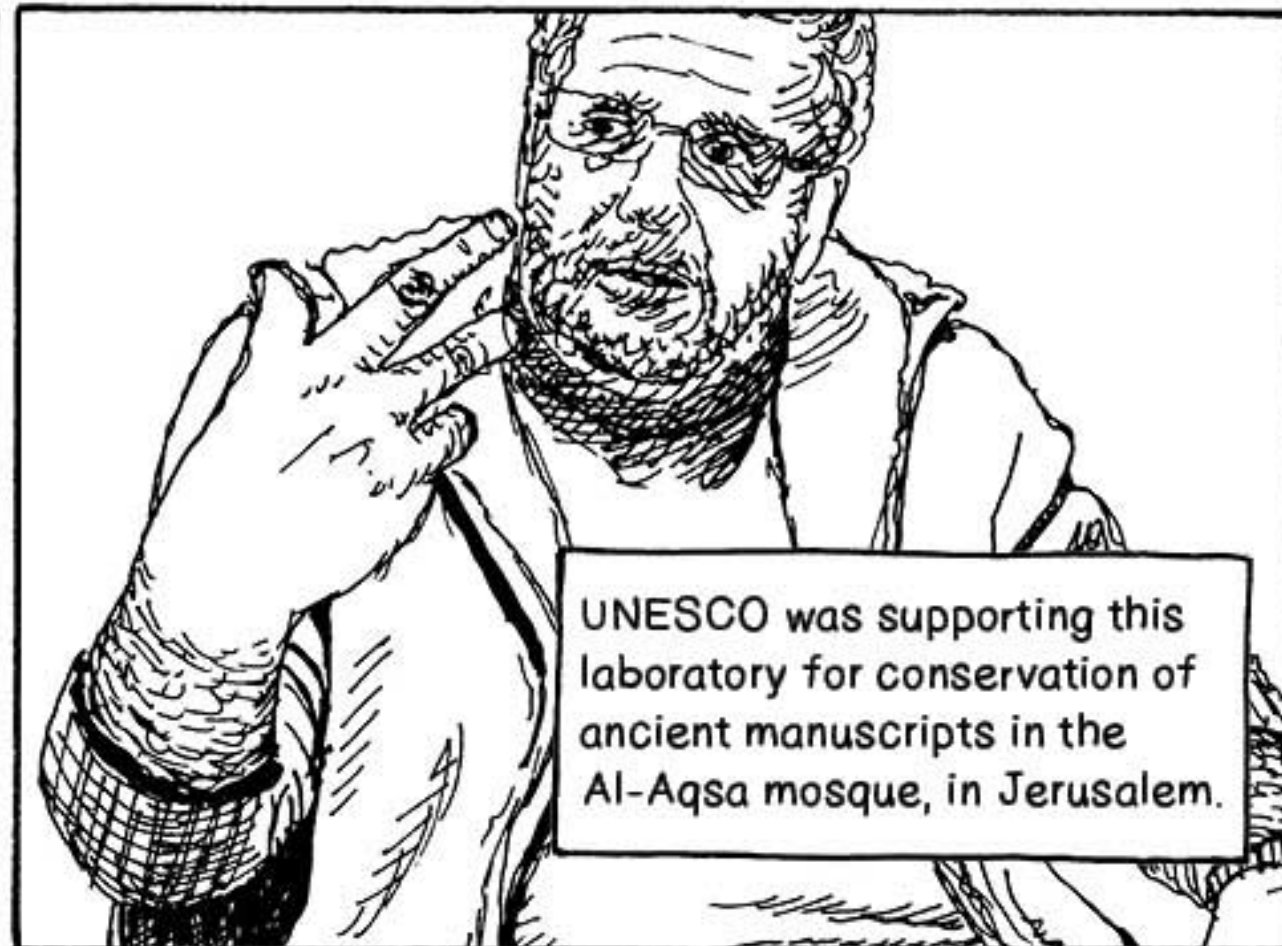
Giovanni Fontana Antonelli
in his office at UNESCO,
Ramallah, February 2012:



It happened once that they stopped at the port of Ashdod one container with a value of about €100,000.



The container held equipment for the conservation of ancient manuscripts.

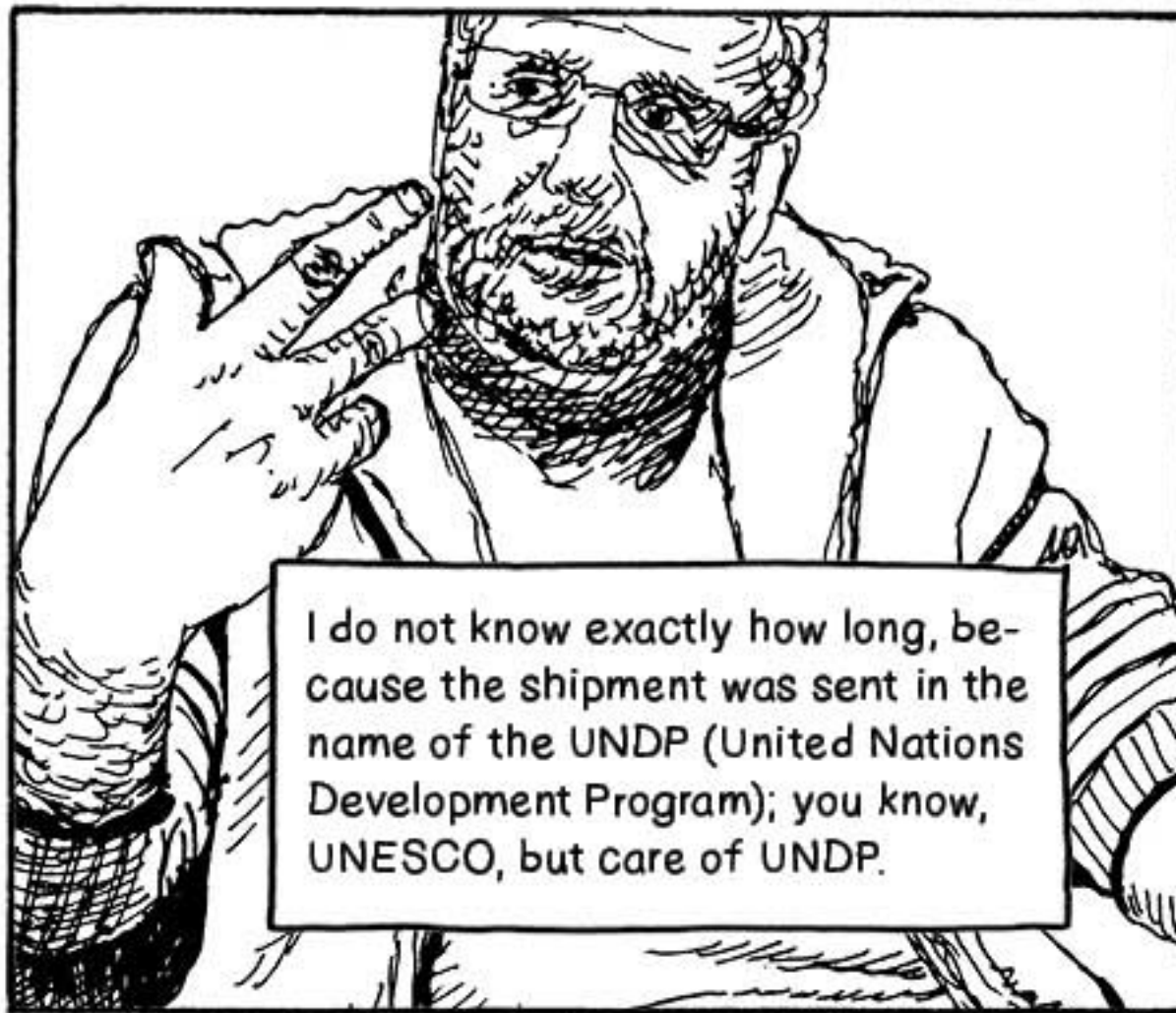


UNESCO was supporting this laboratory for conservation of ancient manuscripts in the Al-Aqsa mosque, in Jerusalem.

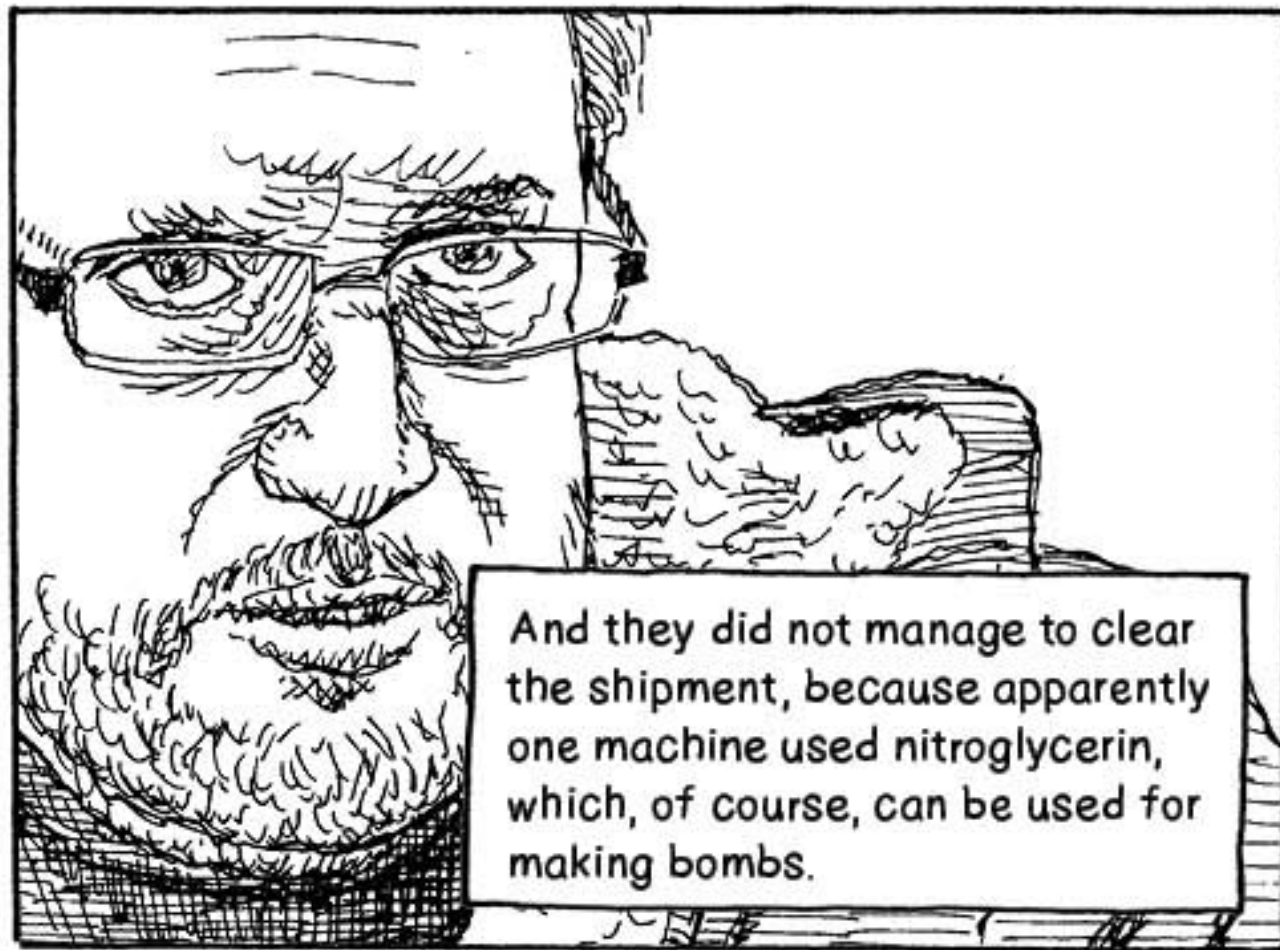
This is a project managed by UNESCO headquarters, not by this office—because we cannot work in Jerusalem. But the container was stopped in the port for about three years.



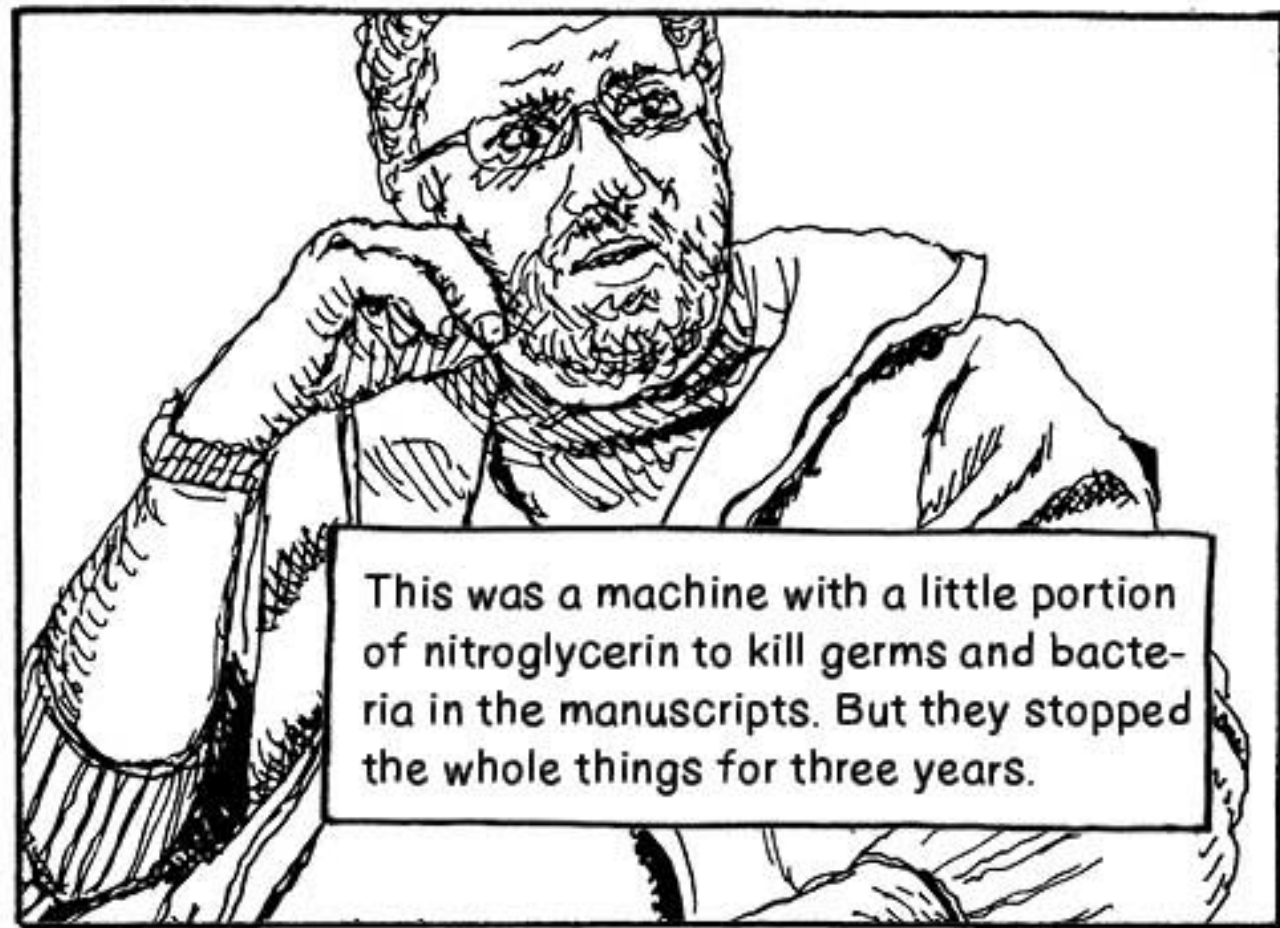
I am not very sure about it, the exact dates. Maybe two and half years or so.



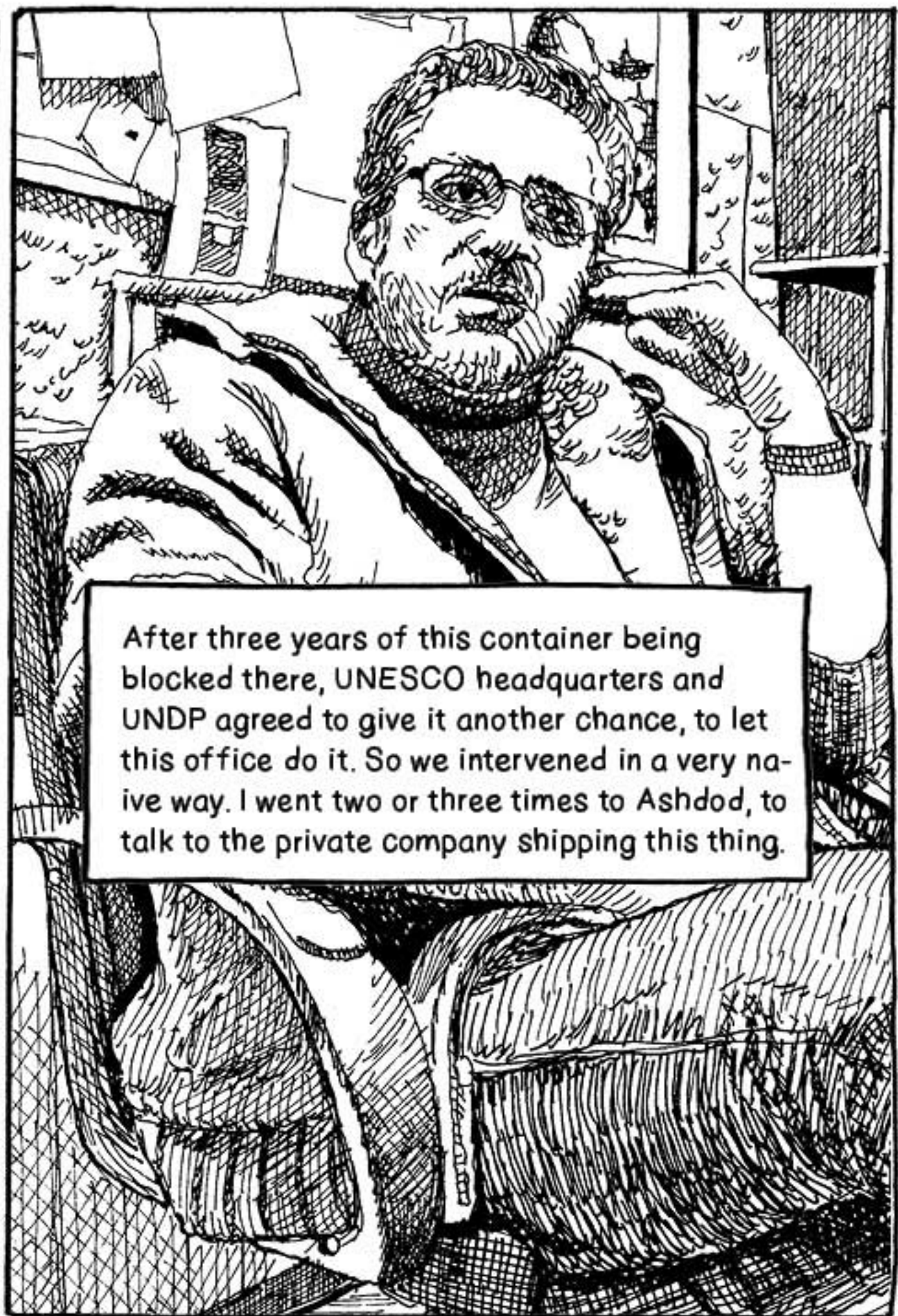
I do not know exactly how long, because the shipment was sent in the name of the UNDP (United Nations Development Program); you know, UNESCO, but care of UNDP.



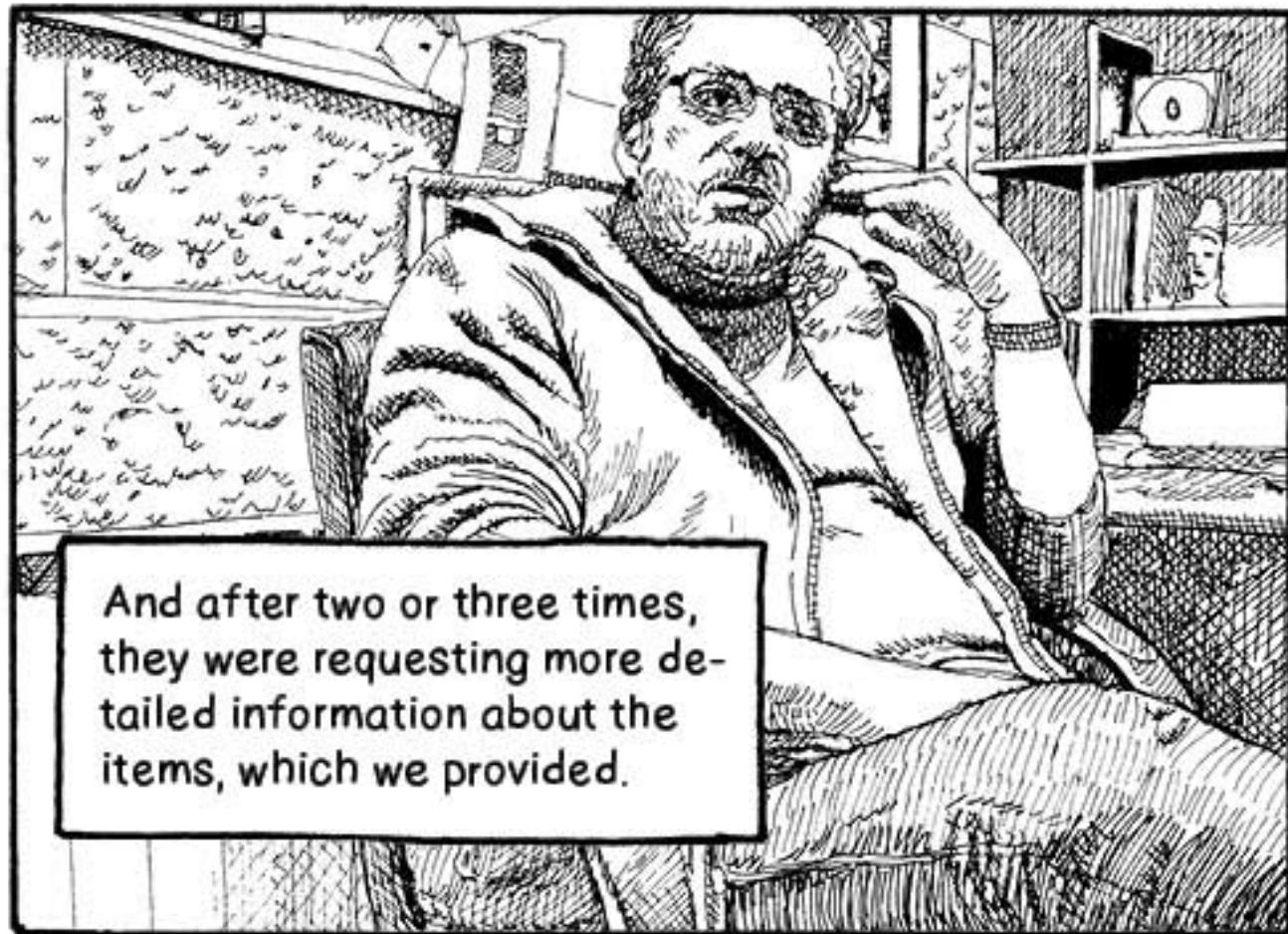
And they did not manage to clear the shipment, because apparently one machine used nitroglycerin, which, of course, can be used for making bombs.



This was a machine with a little portion of nitroglycerin to kill germs and bacteria in the manuscripts. But they stopped the whole things for three years.



After three years of this container being blocked there, UNESCO headquarters and UNDP agreed to give it another chance, to let this office do it. So we intervened in a very naive way. I went two or three times to Ashdod, to talk to the private company shipping this thing.



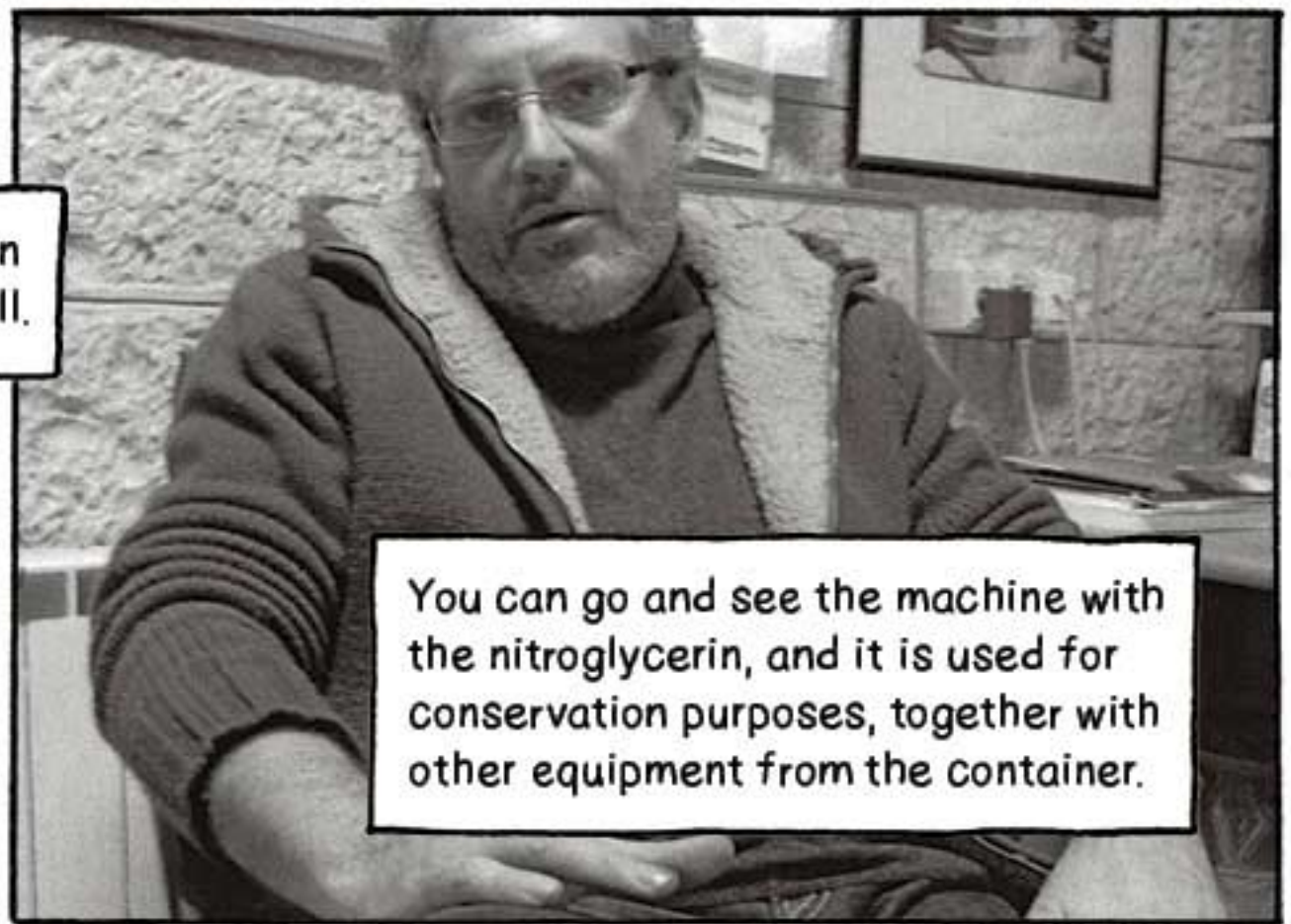
And after two or three times, they were requesting more detailed information about the items, which we provided.



After a few weeks, it was possible to have the container in the manuscript conservation center in Jerusalem.

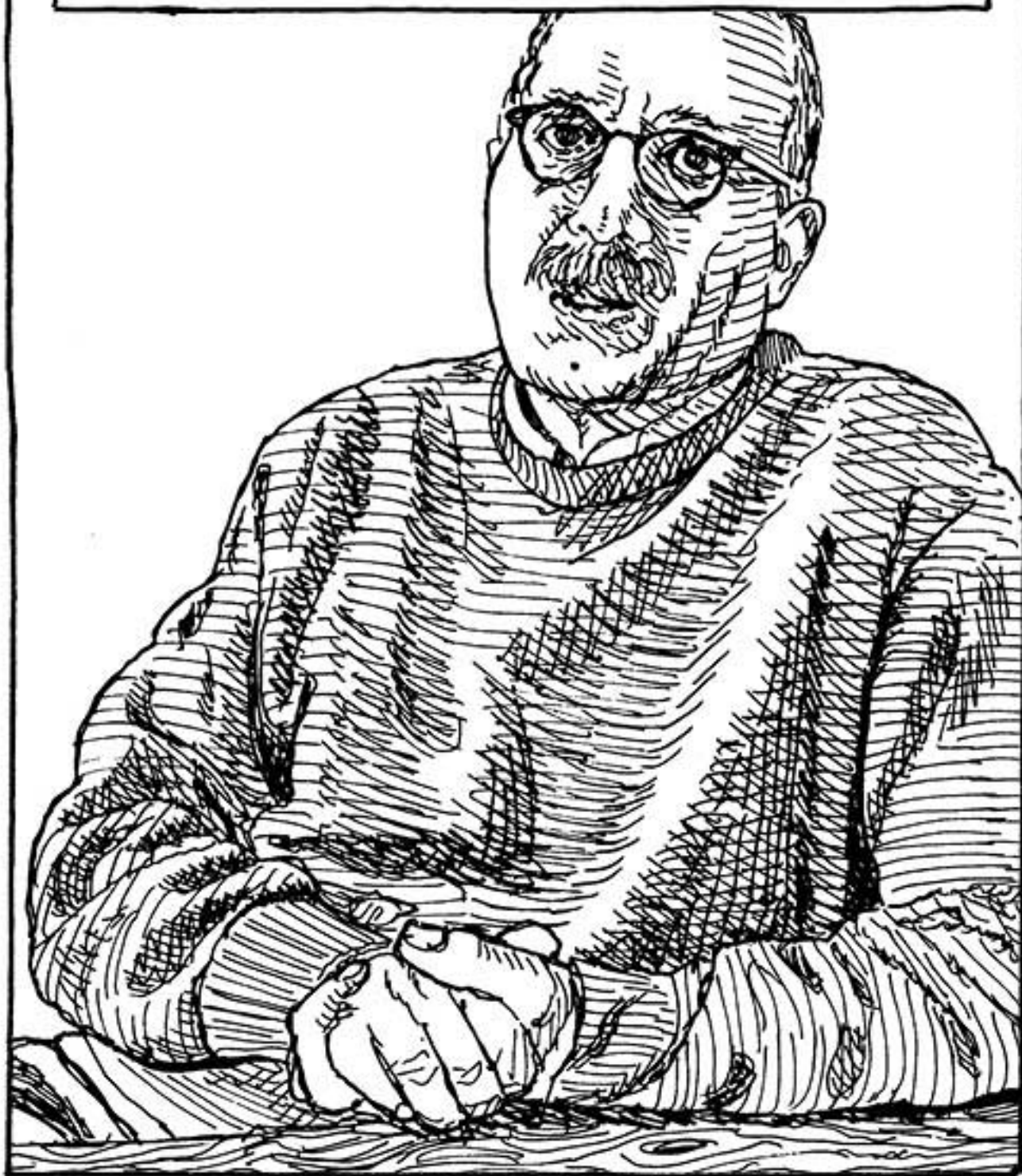


Now the conservation center is working well.

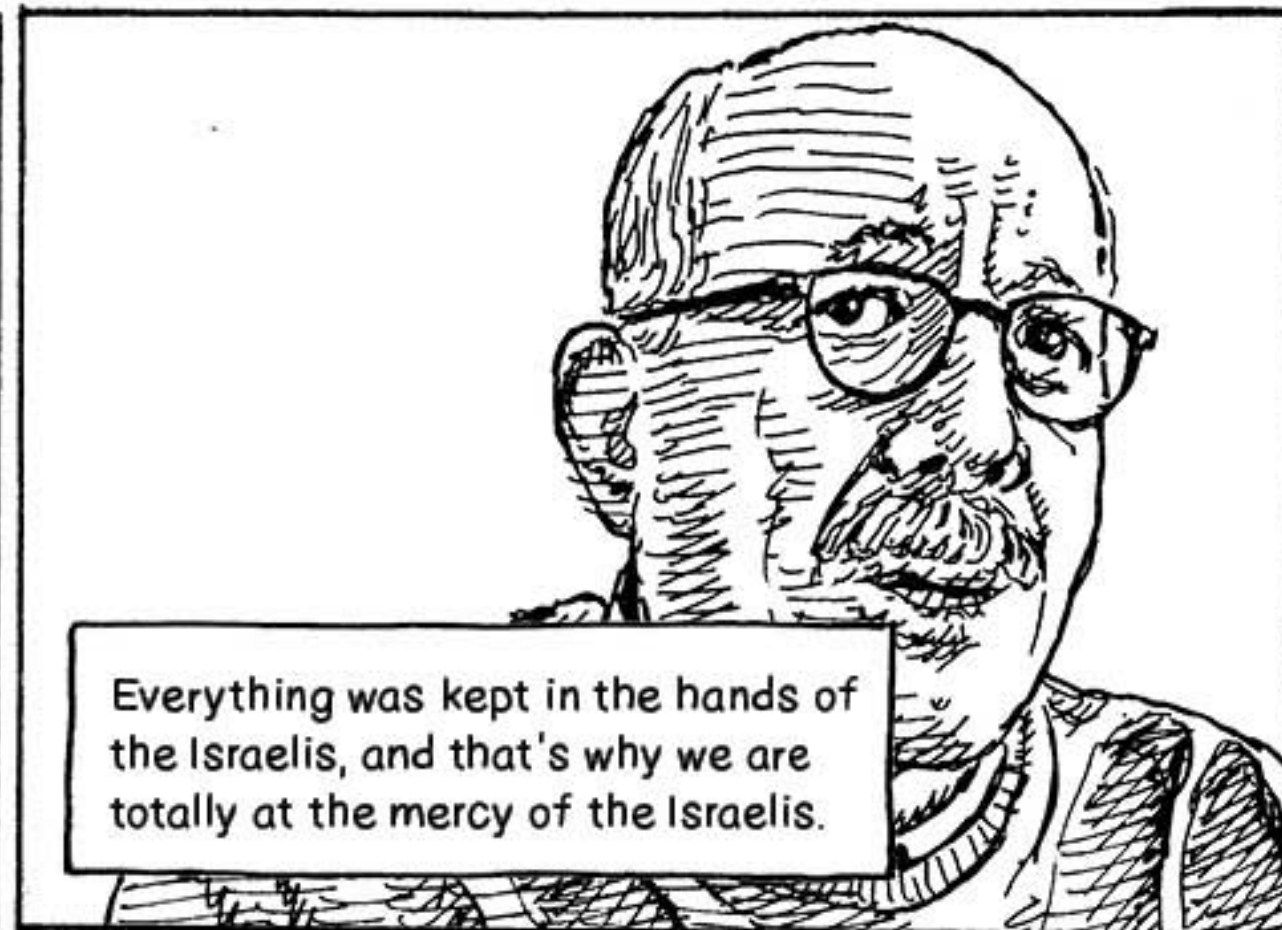


You can go and see the machine with the nitroglycerin, and it is used for conservation purposes, together with other equipment from the container.

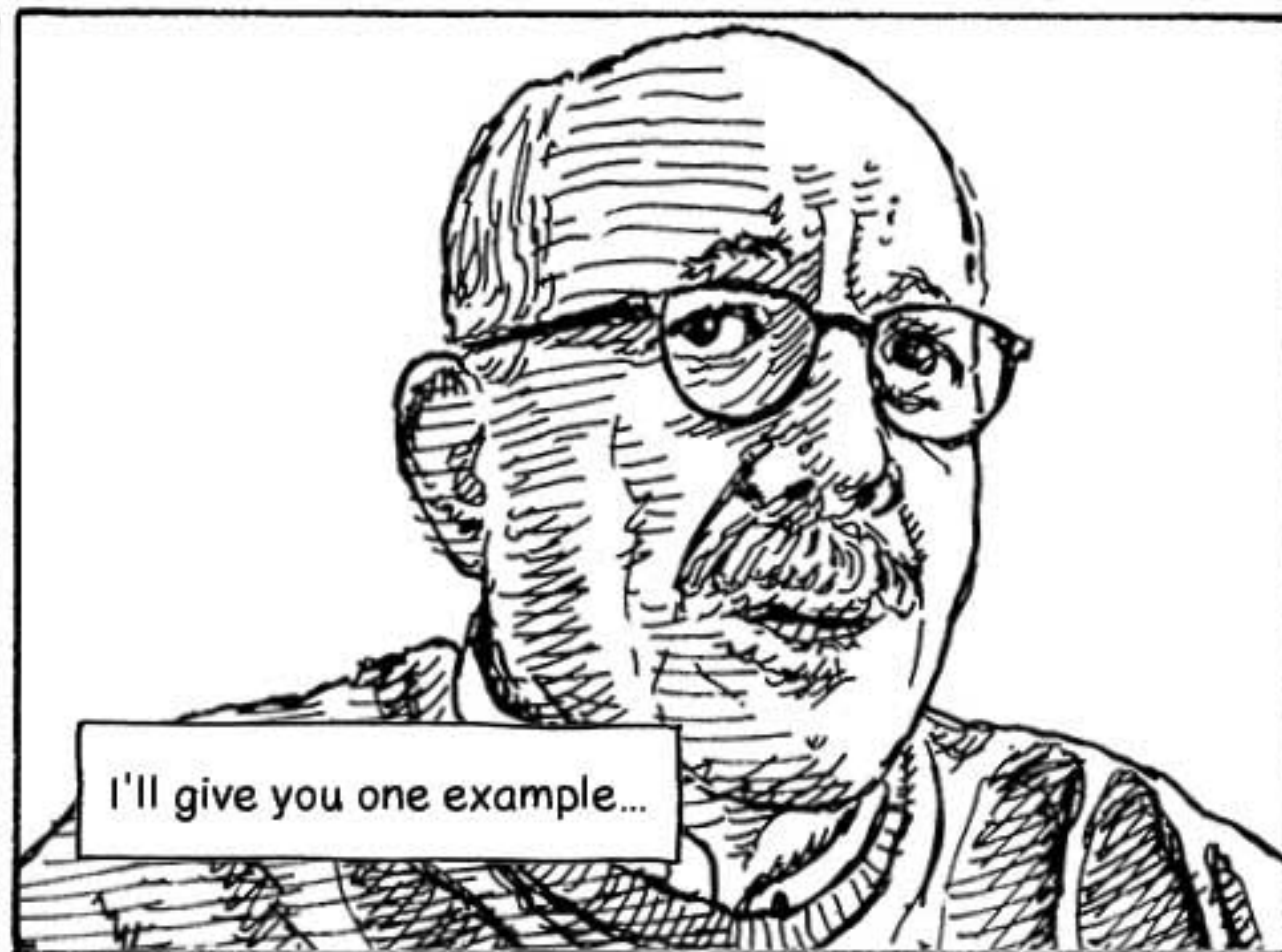
All the policing, all the observation was kept in the hands of the Israelis themselves. I mean, the Israelis did not even allow for mediation by a third party in case there were disagreements, that a third party would come and mediate or arbitrate between the two.

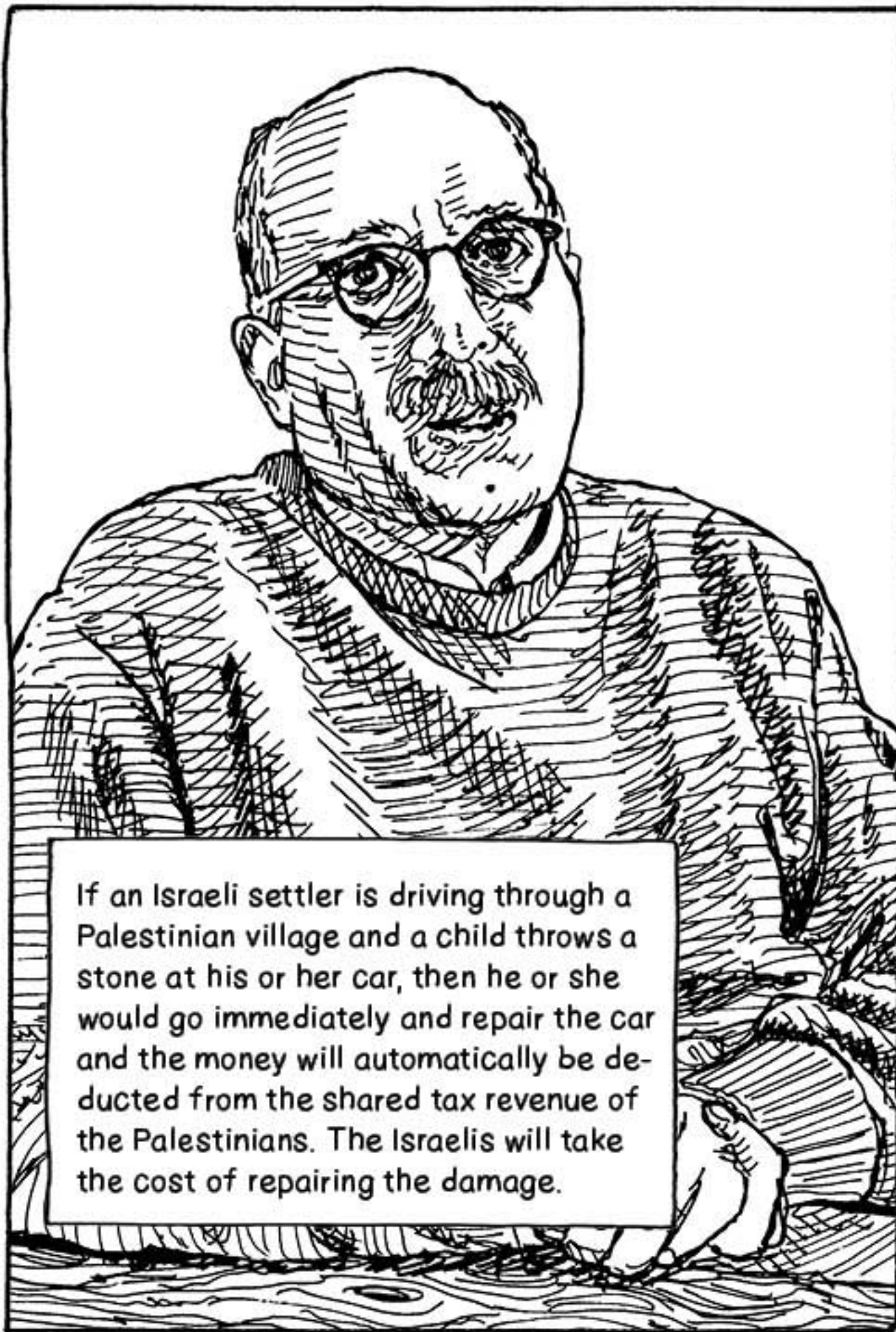


Everything was kept in the hands of the Israelis, and that's why we are totally at the mercy of the Israelis.

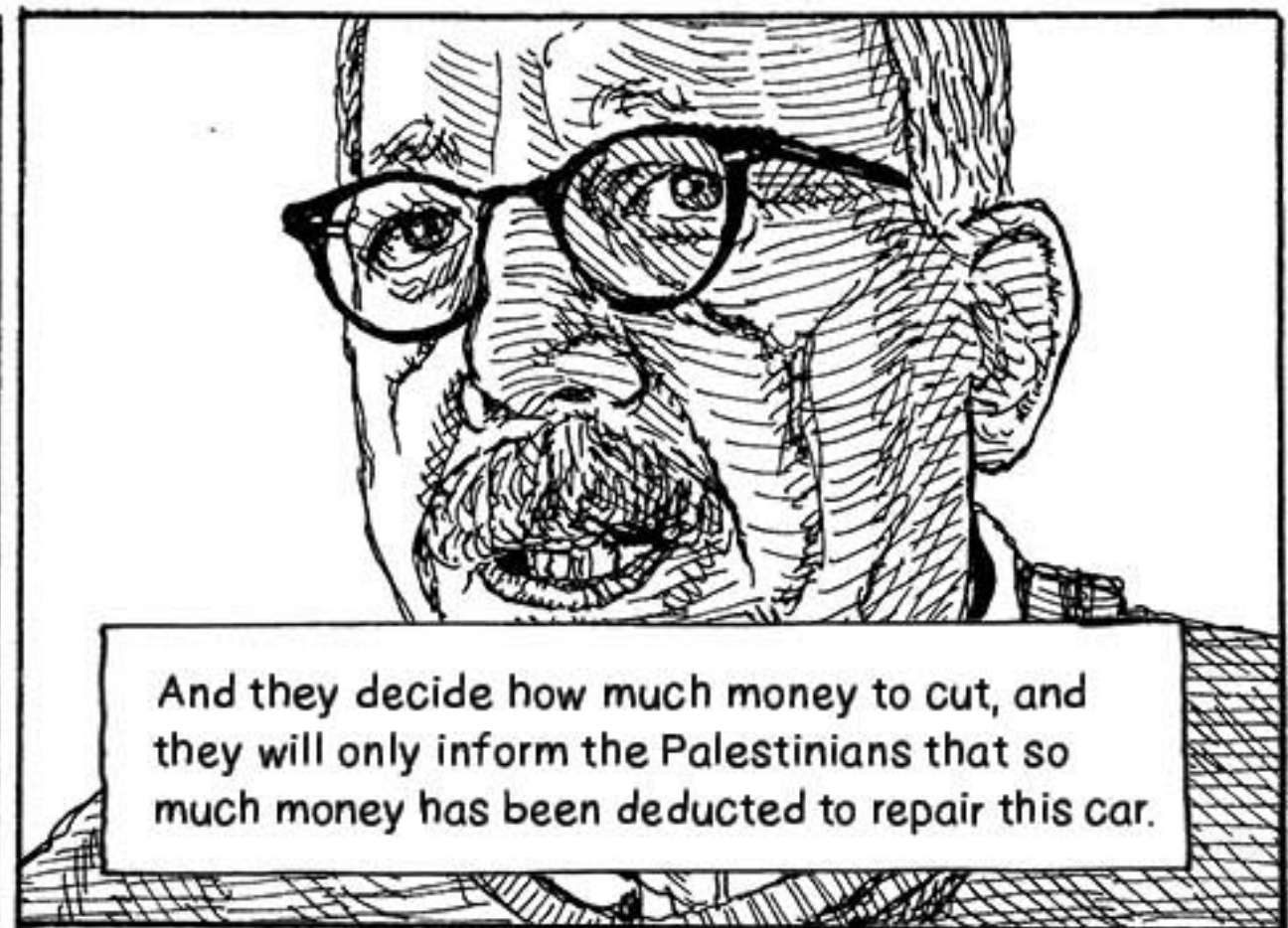


I'll give you one example...





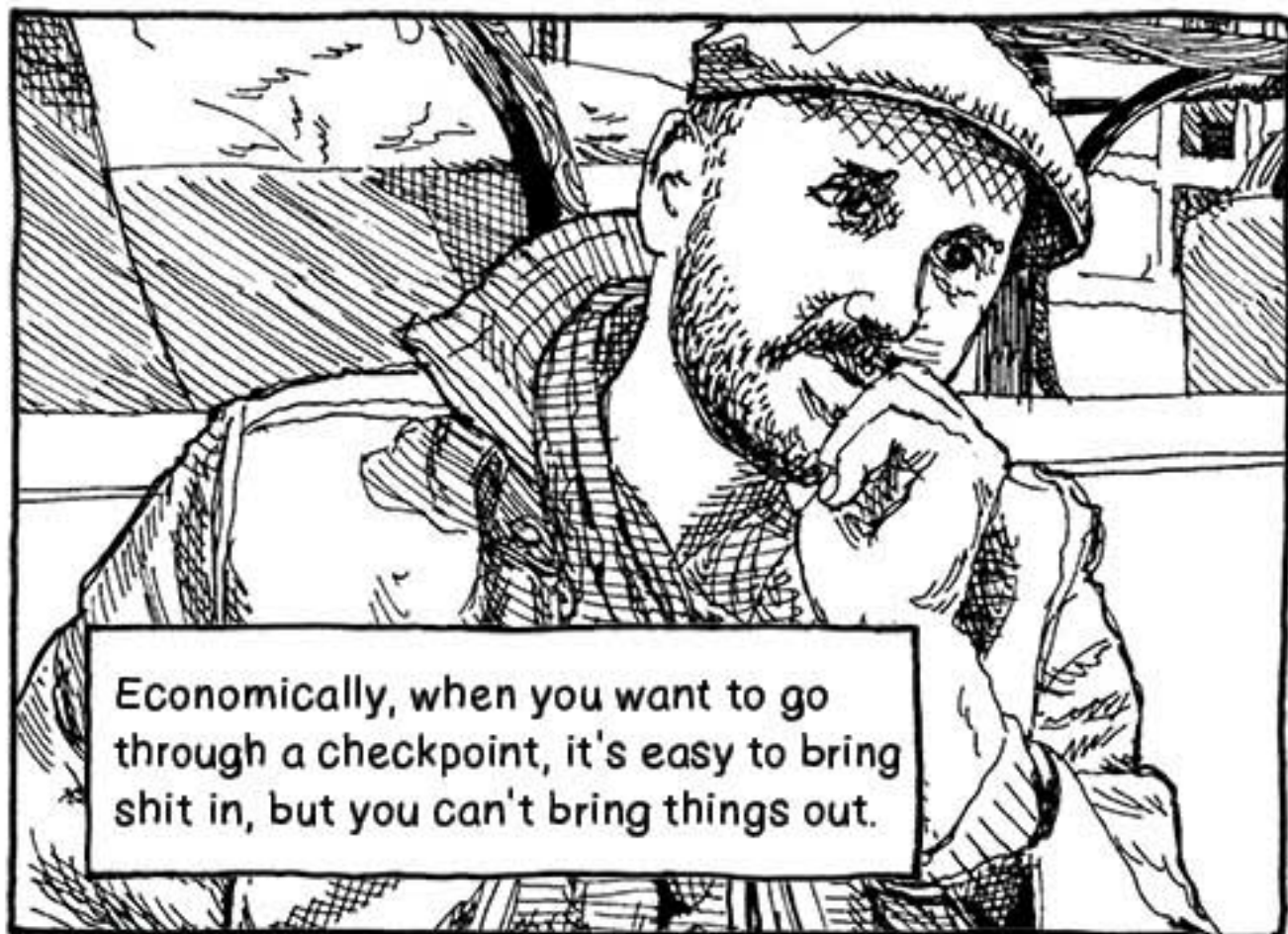
If an Israeli settler is driving through a Palestinian village and a child throws a stone at his or her car, then he or she would go immediately and repair the car and the money will automatically be deducted from the shared tax revenue of the Palestinians. The Israelis will take the cost of repairing the damage.



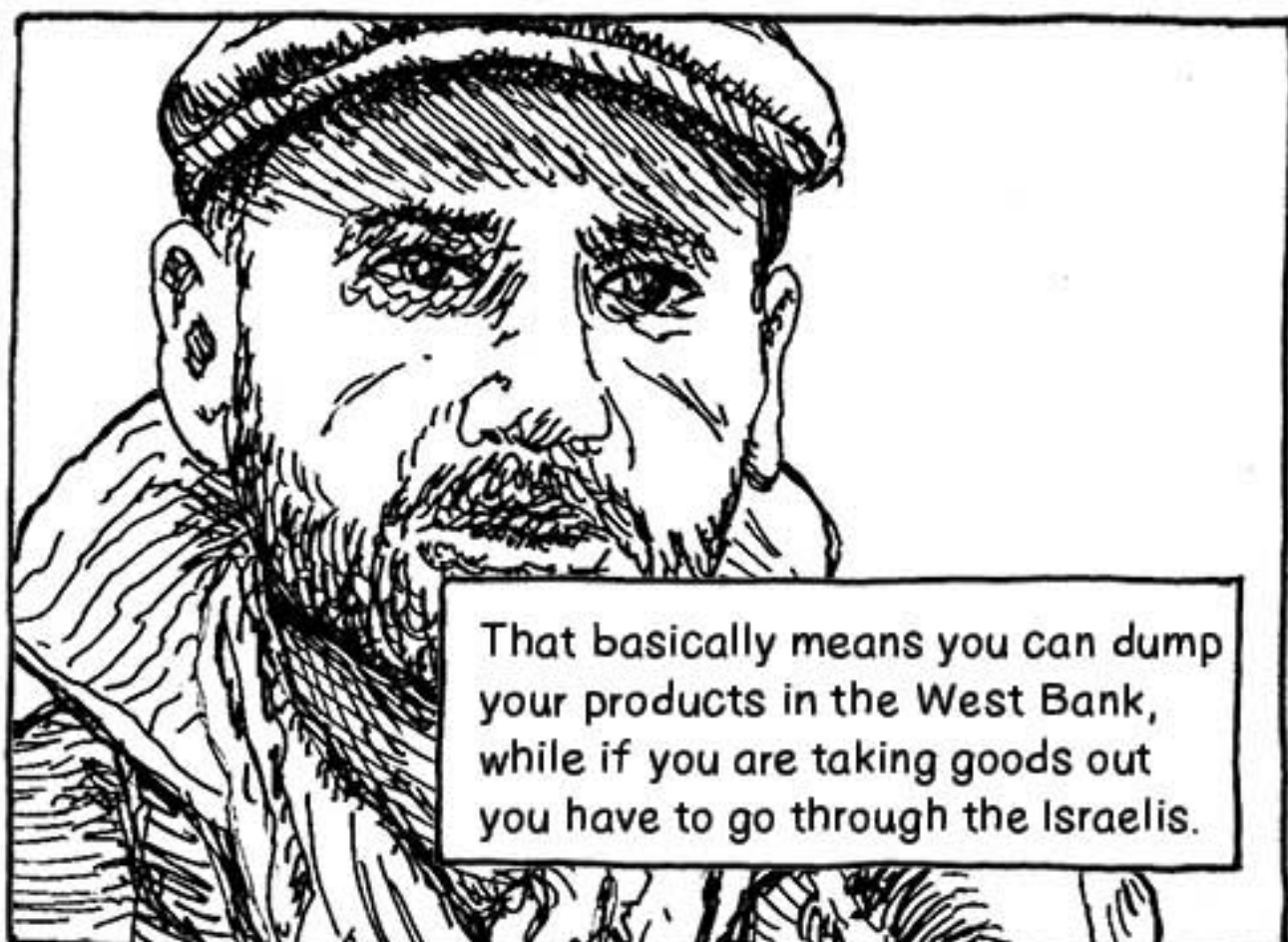
And they decide how much money to cut, and they will only inform the Palestinians that so much money has been deducted to repair this car.



And this will be reduced from our customs, the customs that Palestinians pay and all tariffs.



Economically, when you want to go through a checkpoint, it's easy to bring shit in, but you can't bring things out.



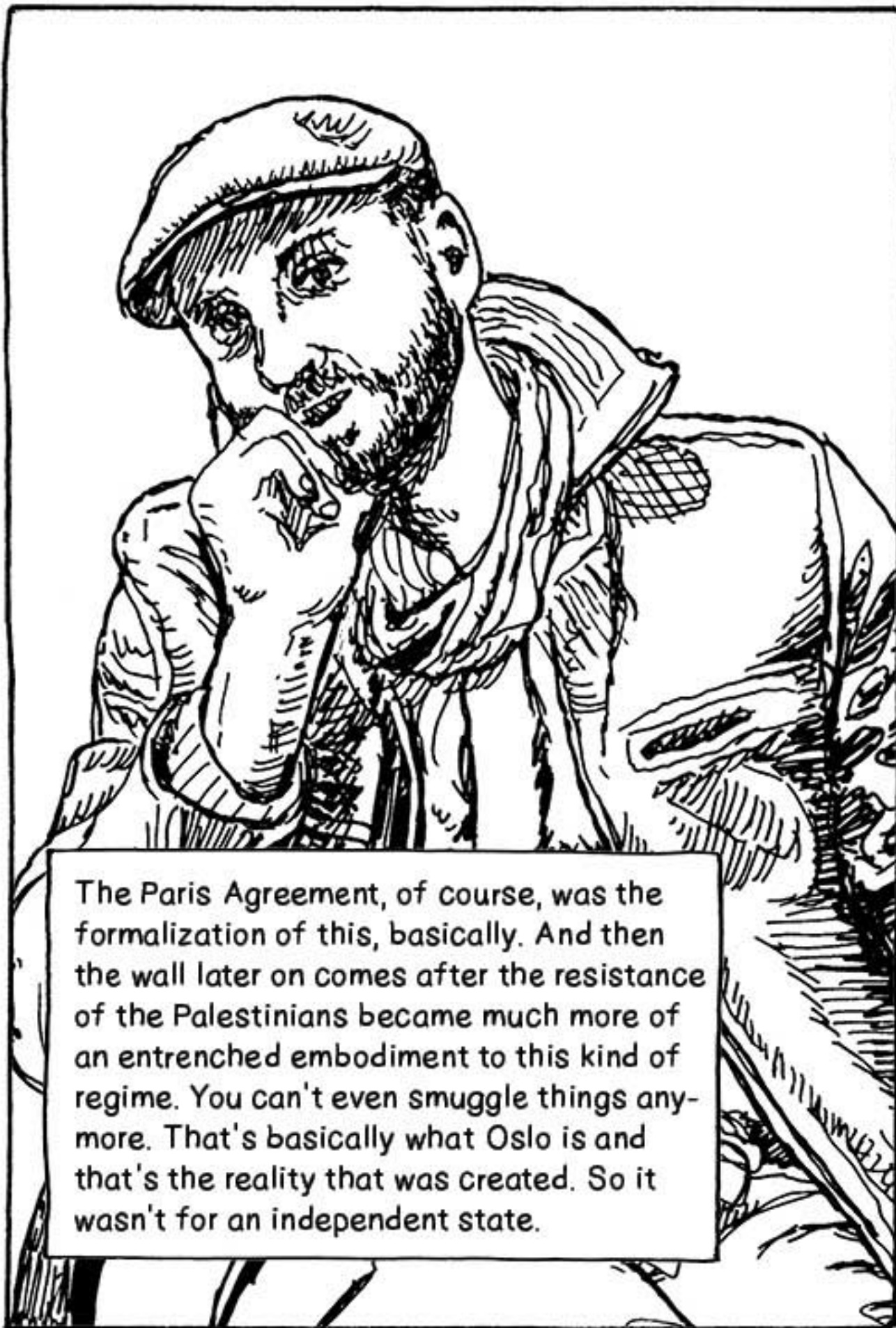
That basically means you can dump your products in the West Bank, while if you are taking goods out you have to go through the Israelis.



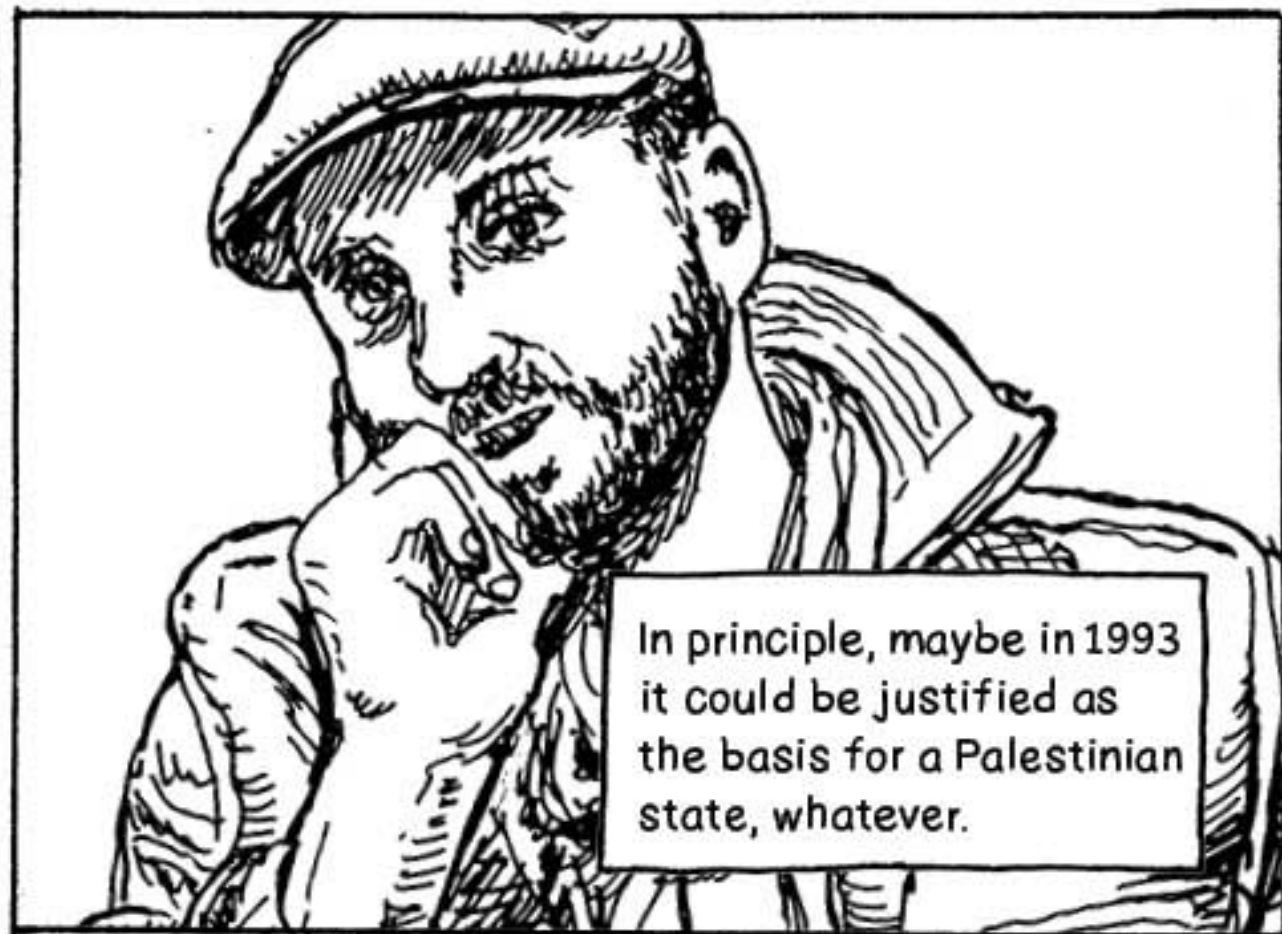
So you can't export anything that's going to compete with Israeli goods.



And that's what it is.



The Paris Agreement, of course, was the formalization of this, basically. And then the wall later on comes after the resistance of the Palestinians became much more of an entrenched embodiment to this kind of regime. You can't even smuggle things anymore. That's basically what Oslo is and that's the reality that was created. So it wasn't for an independent state.

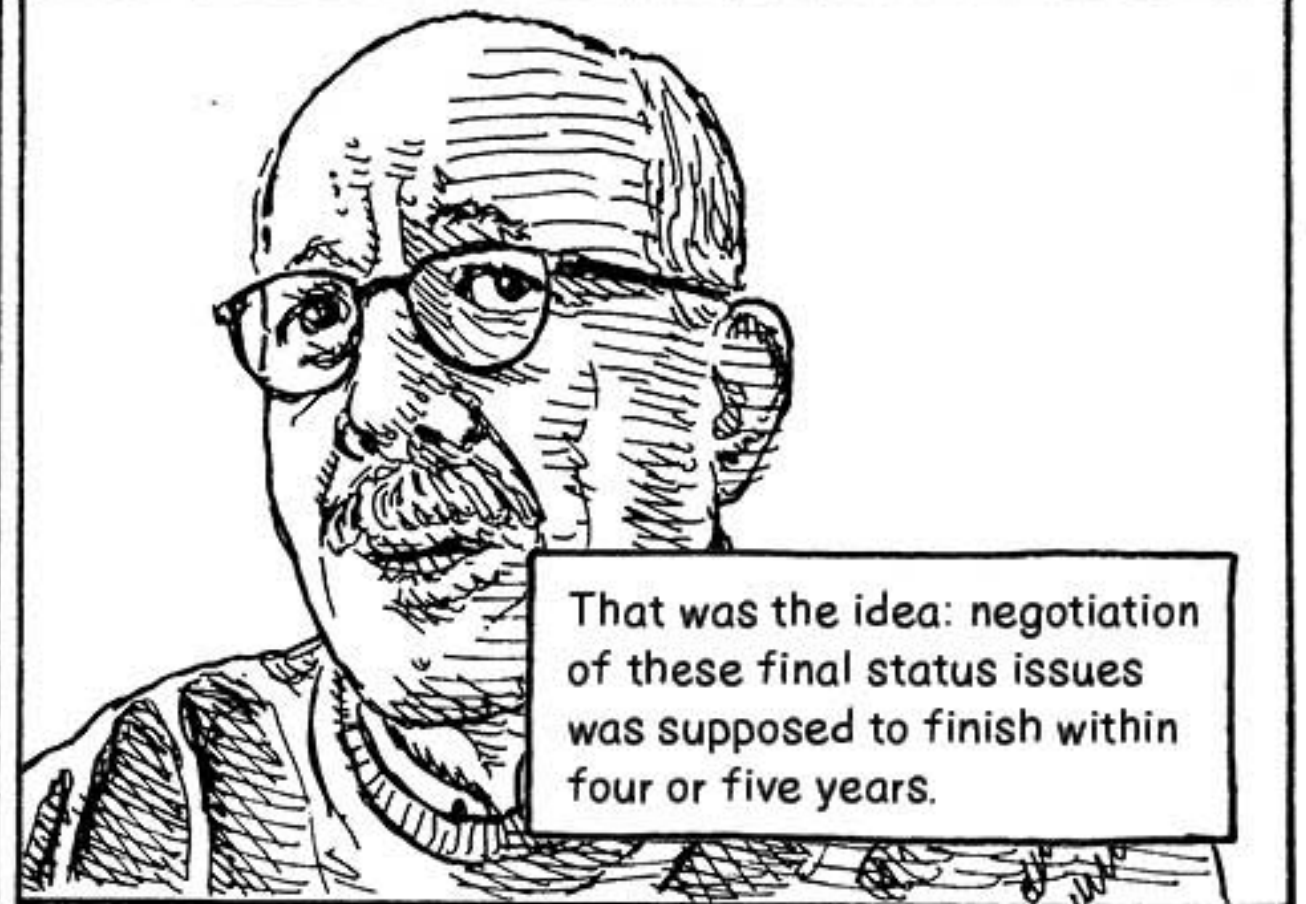


In principle, maybe in 1993 it could be justified as the basis for a Palestinian state, whatever.

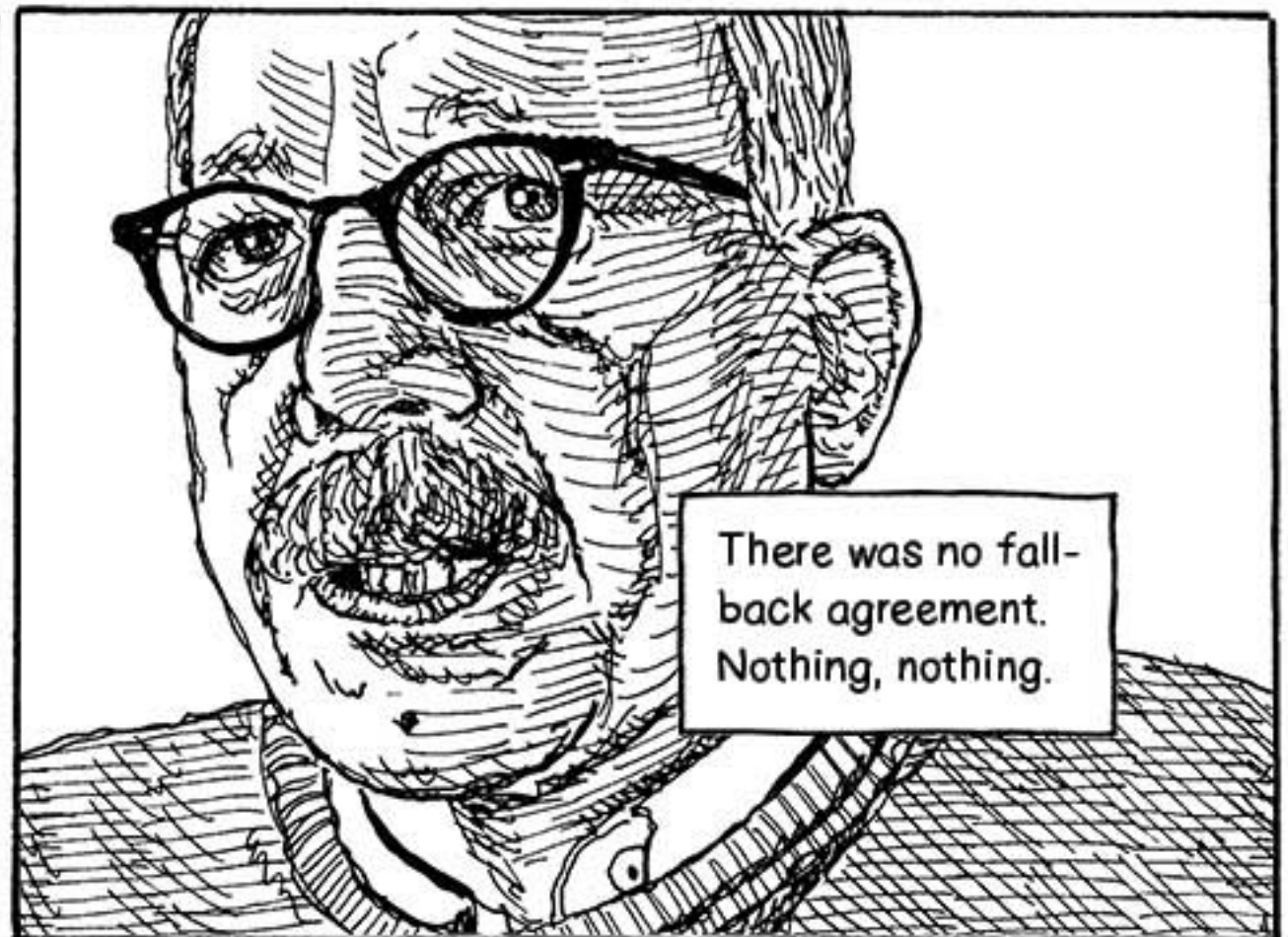


As things turned out it's pretty clear it wasn't, and it couldn't be.

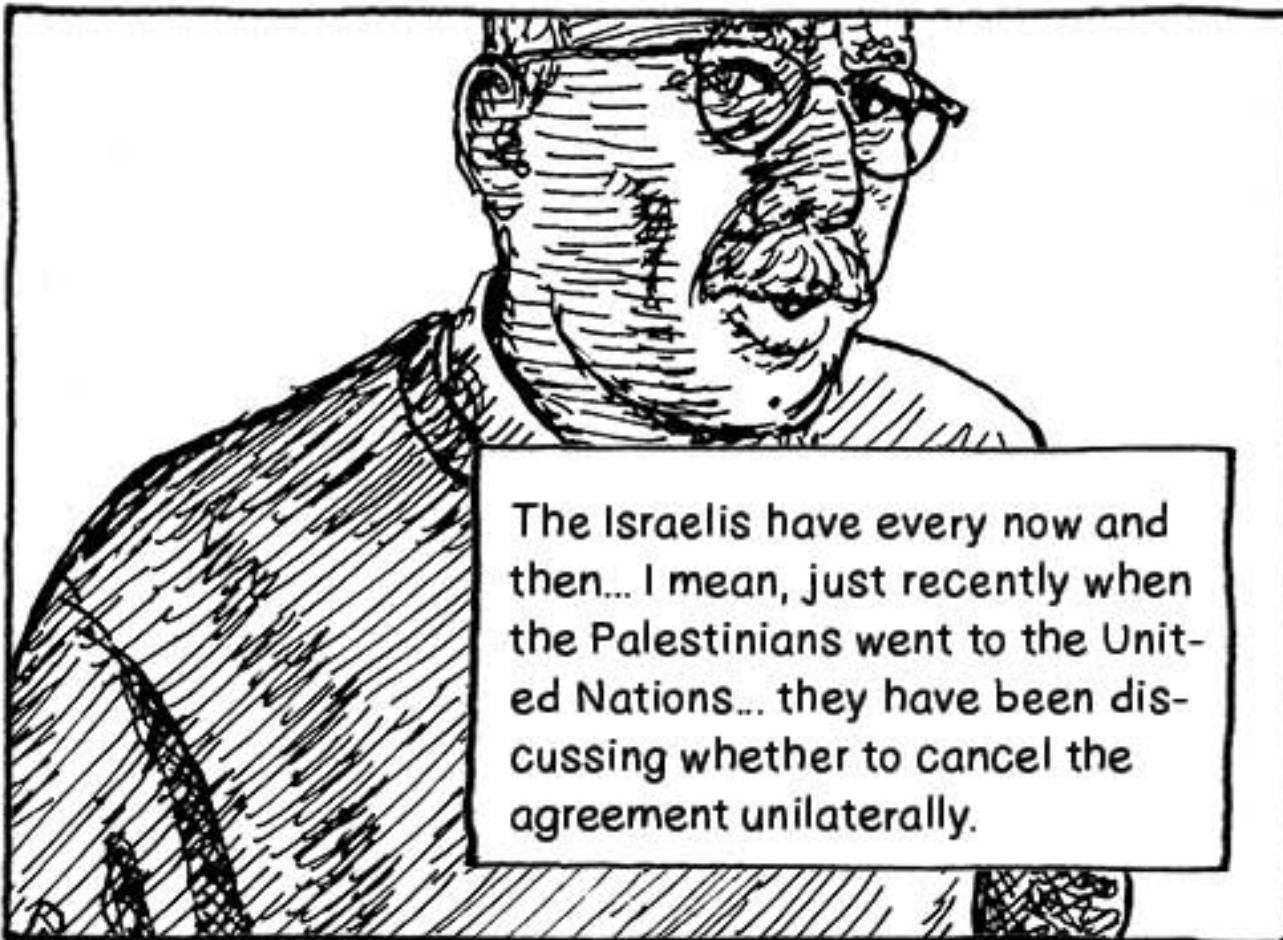
The transitional period was supposed to end with a final agreement of all the issues, including the four or five so-called final status issues—Jerusalem, refugees, water, settlements. As long as agreement on these issues was not reached, then the temporary agreement stayed in force.




That was the idea: negotiation of these final status issues was supposed to finish within four or five years.



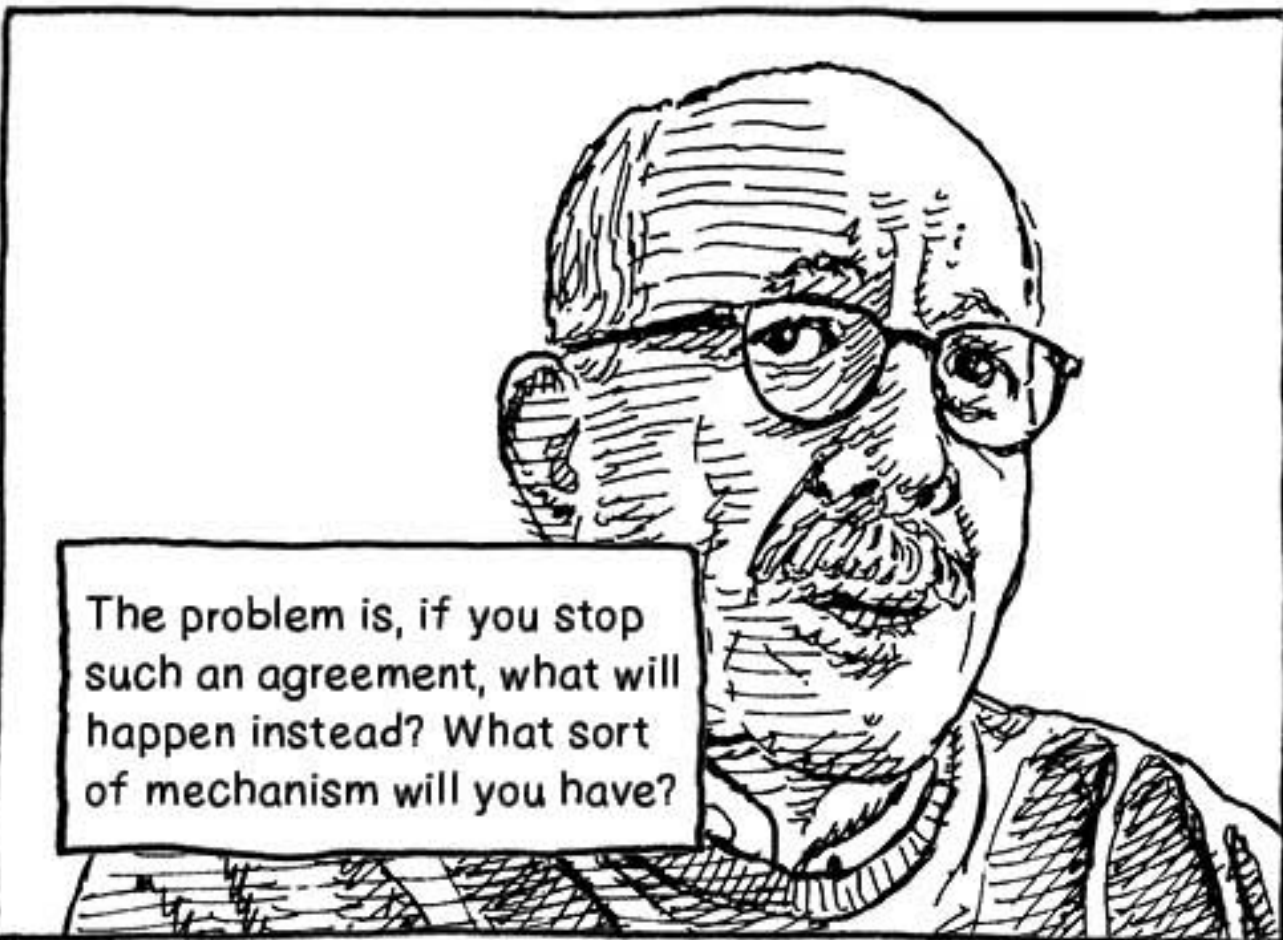
There was no fall-back agreement. Nothing, nothing.



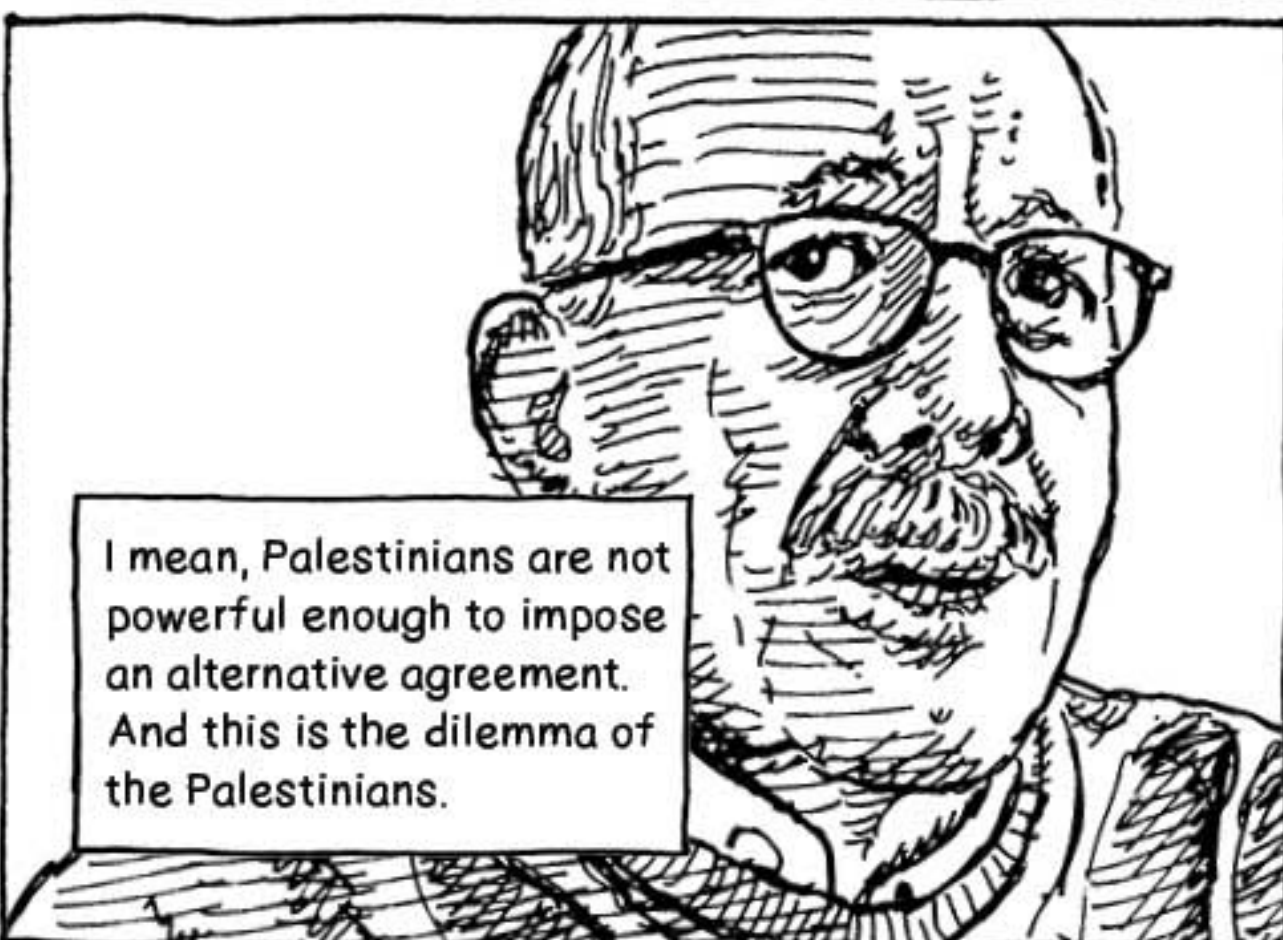
The Israelis have every now and then... I mean, just recently when the Palestinians went to the United Nations... they have been discussing whether to cancel the agreement unilaterally.



Many Palestinians now, they are saying that we should stop the agreement.



The problem is, if you stop such an agreement, what will happen instead? What sort of mechanism will you have?

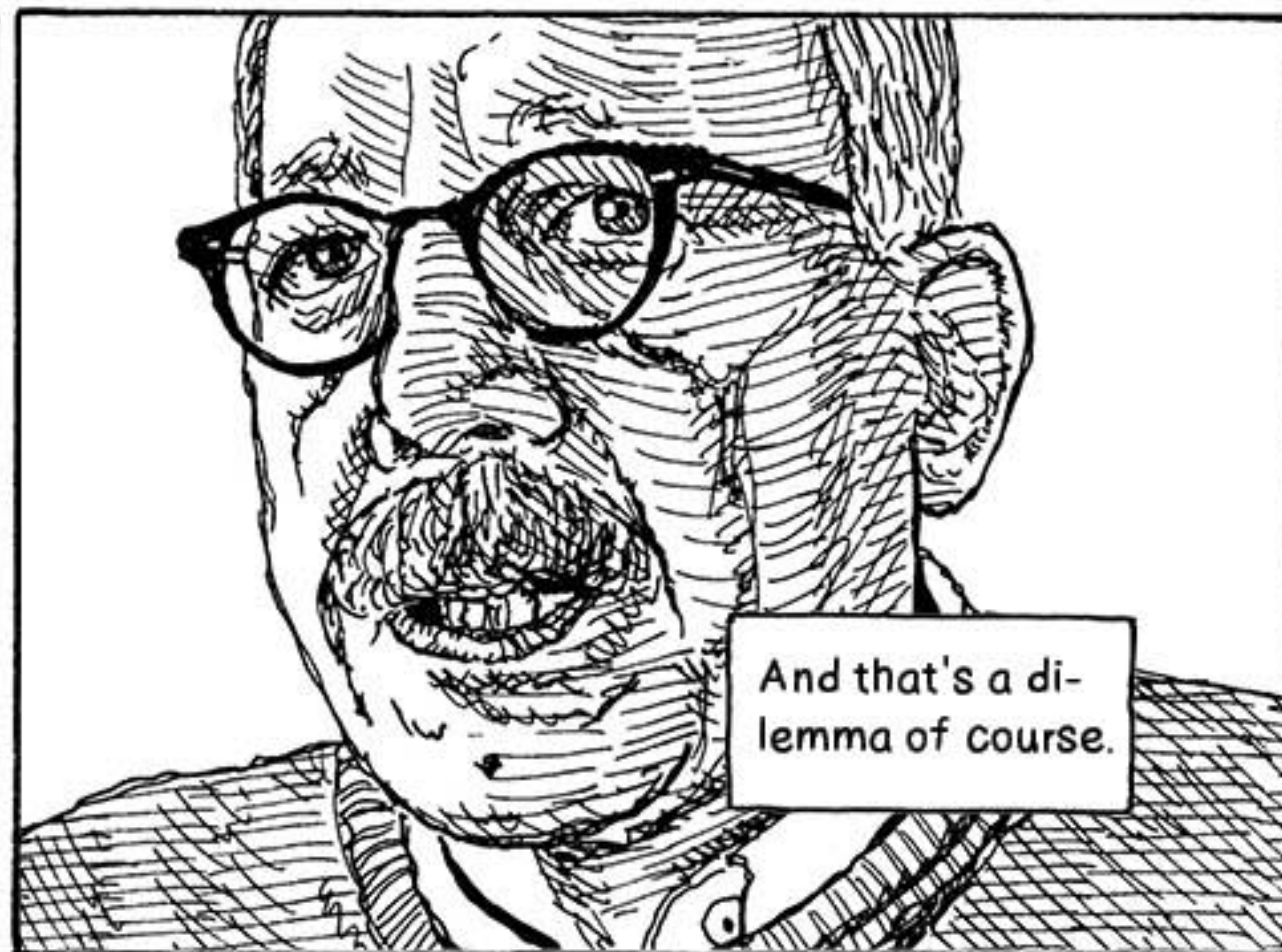


I mean, Palestinians are not powerful enough to impose an alternative agreement. And this is the dilemma of the Palestinians.

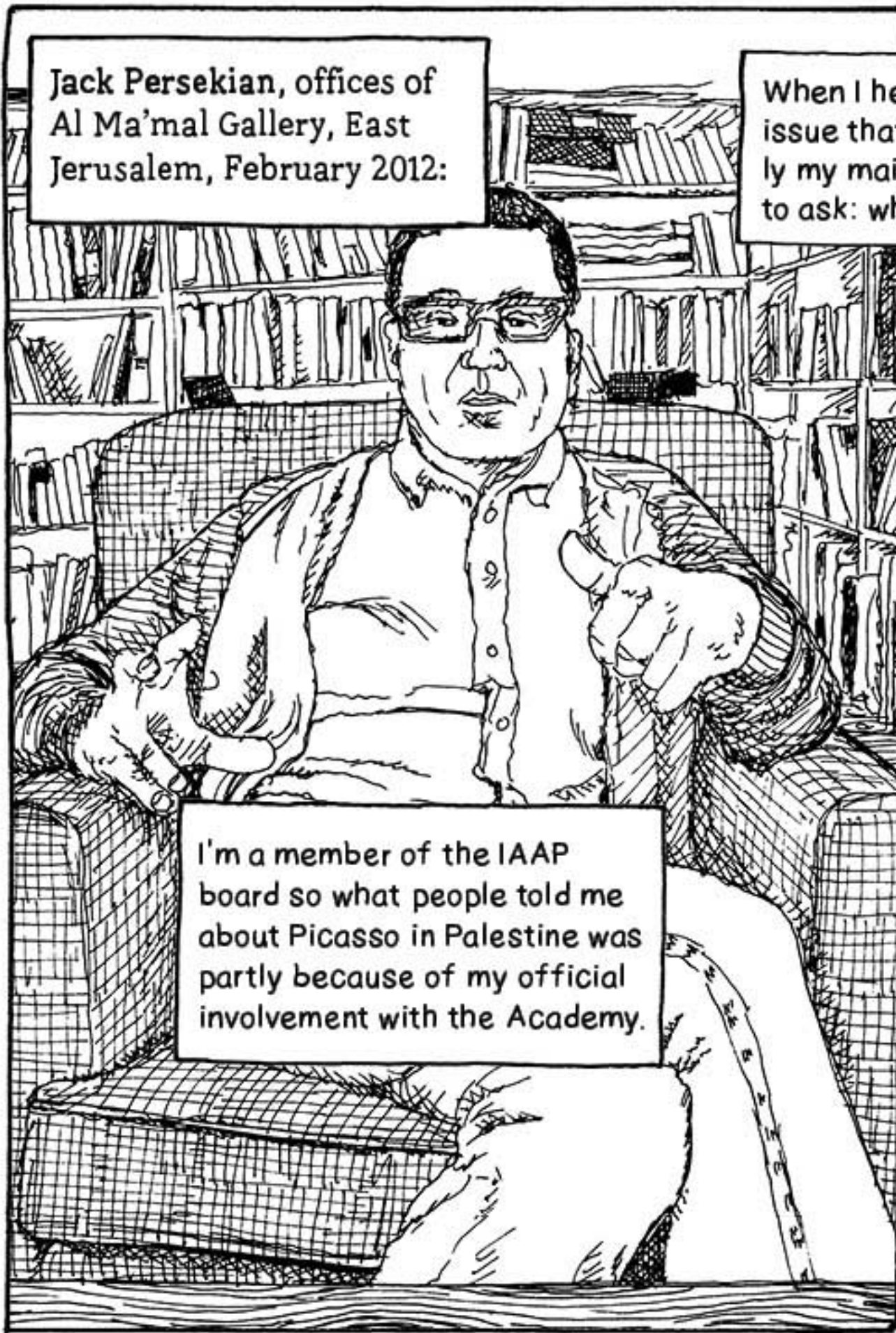
They can see totally that the Paris Protocol is unfair: it has lasted far longer than it was supposed to; we are suffering from fiscal leakage due to the bad arrangement of refunding; we are not able to import and export freely... all of this.



But at the same time, I mean, if you cancel the agreement, you can't force an alternative on the Israelis.



And that's a dilemma of course.

A black and white line drawing of Jack Persekian sitting in a chair in a library. He is wearing glasses and a button-down shirt. He is gesturing with his hands as if speaking. Bookshelves filled with books are visible in the background.

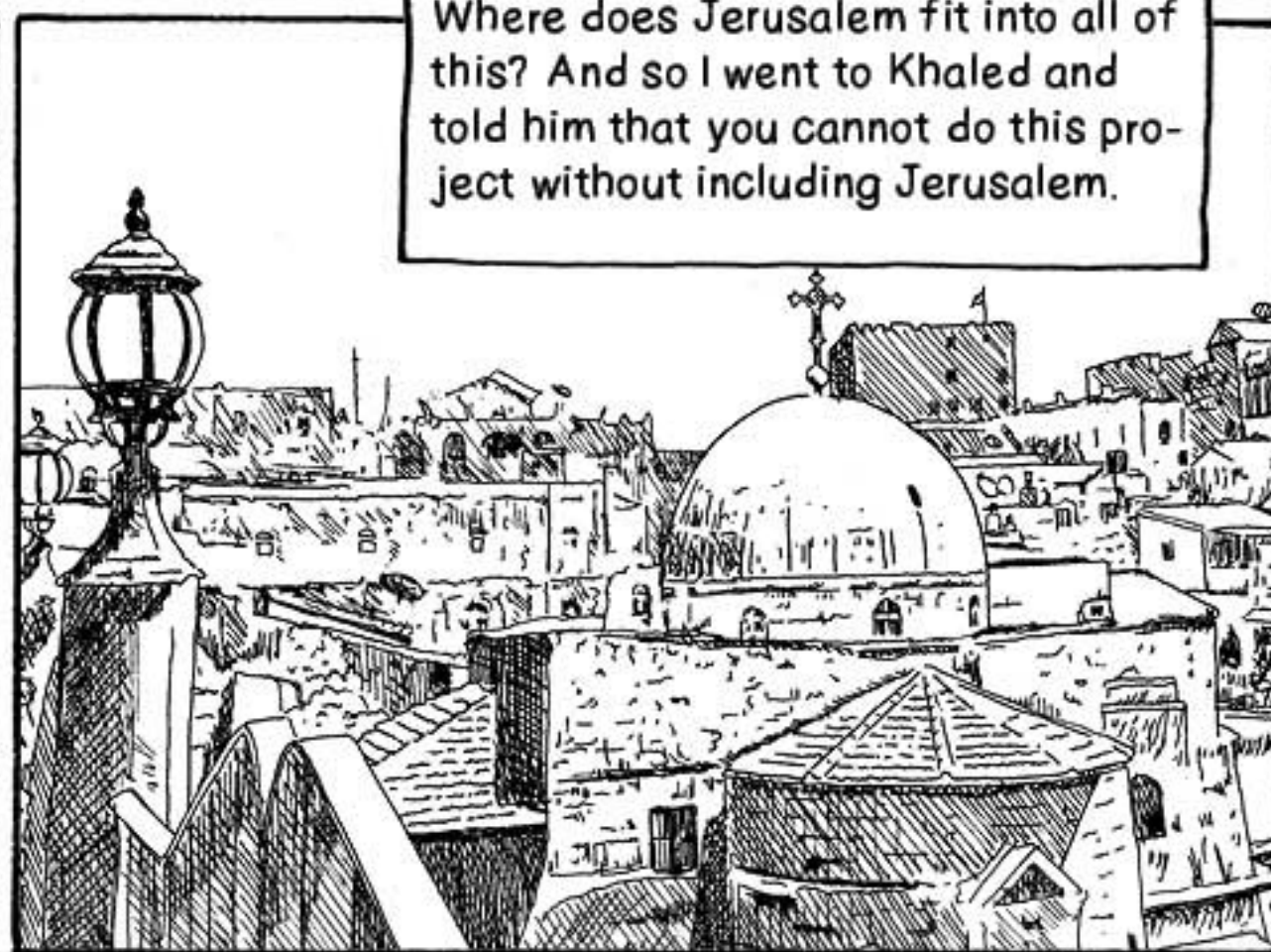
Jack Persekian, offices of Al Ma'mal Gallery, East Jerusalem, February 2012:


When I heard about it, the first issue that came to mind—basically my main preoccupation—was to ask: what about Jerusalem?

I'm a member of the IAAP board so what people told me about Picasso in Palestine was partly because of my official involvement with the Academy.

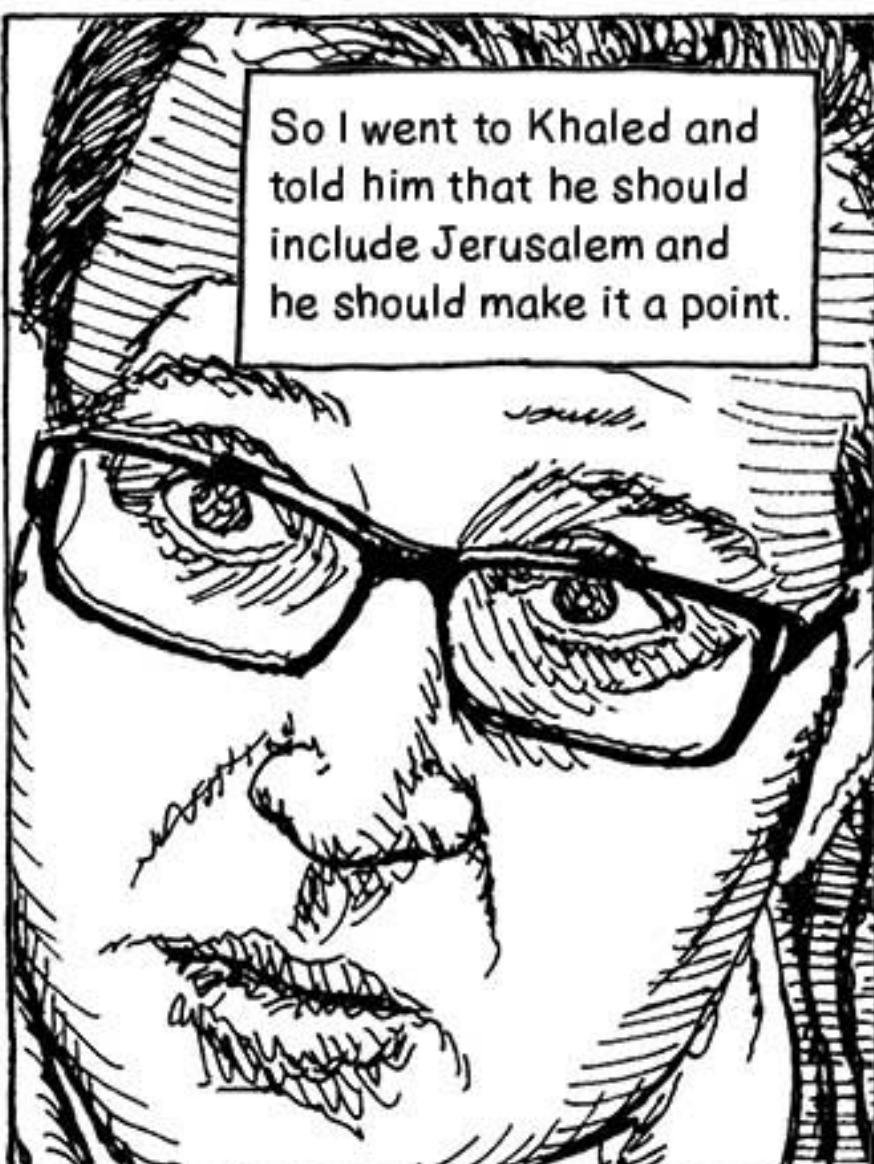


Where does Jerusalem fit into all of this? And so I went to Khaled and told him that you cannot do this project without including Jerusalem.

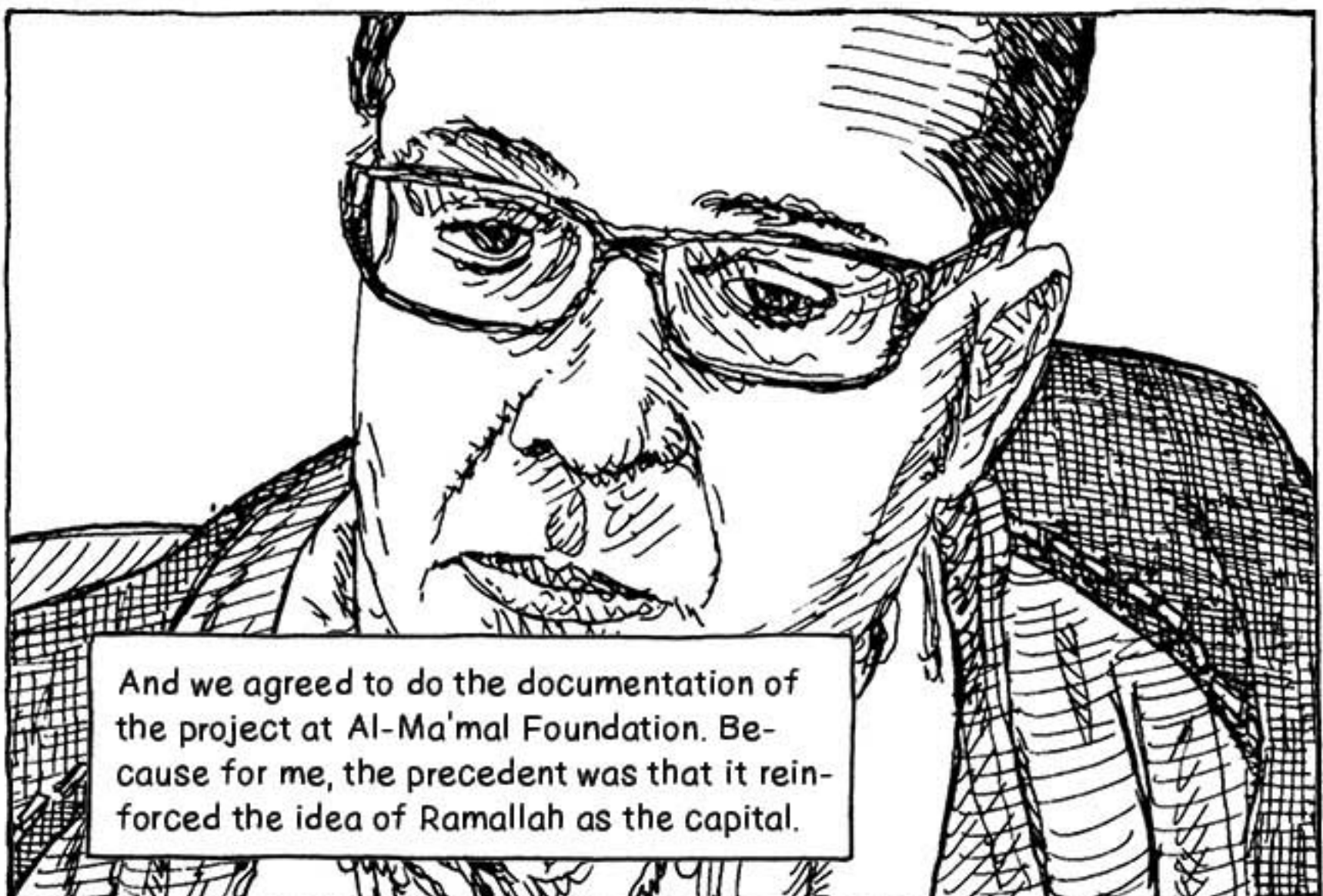


A black and white line drawing of a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a checkered jacket, sitting in a library. Bookshelves filled with books are visible in the background. A speech bubble is positioned to the left of his face.

I mean, you're just playing into the hands of the Oslo people and the Israelis and what they're trying to do if you don't. This should have happened in Jerusalem. They should have brought the painting symbolically to Jerusalem—even though we know that the whole project is a symbolic act.

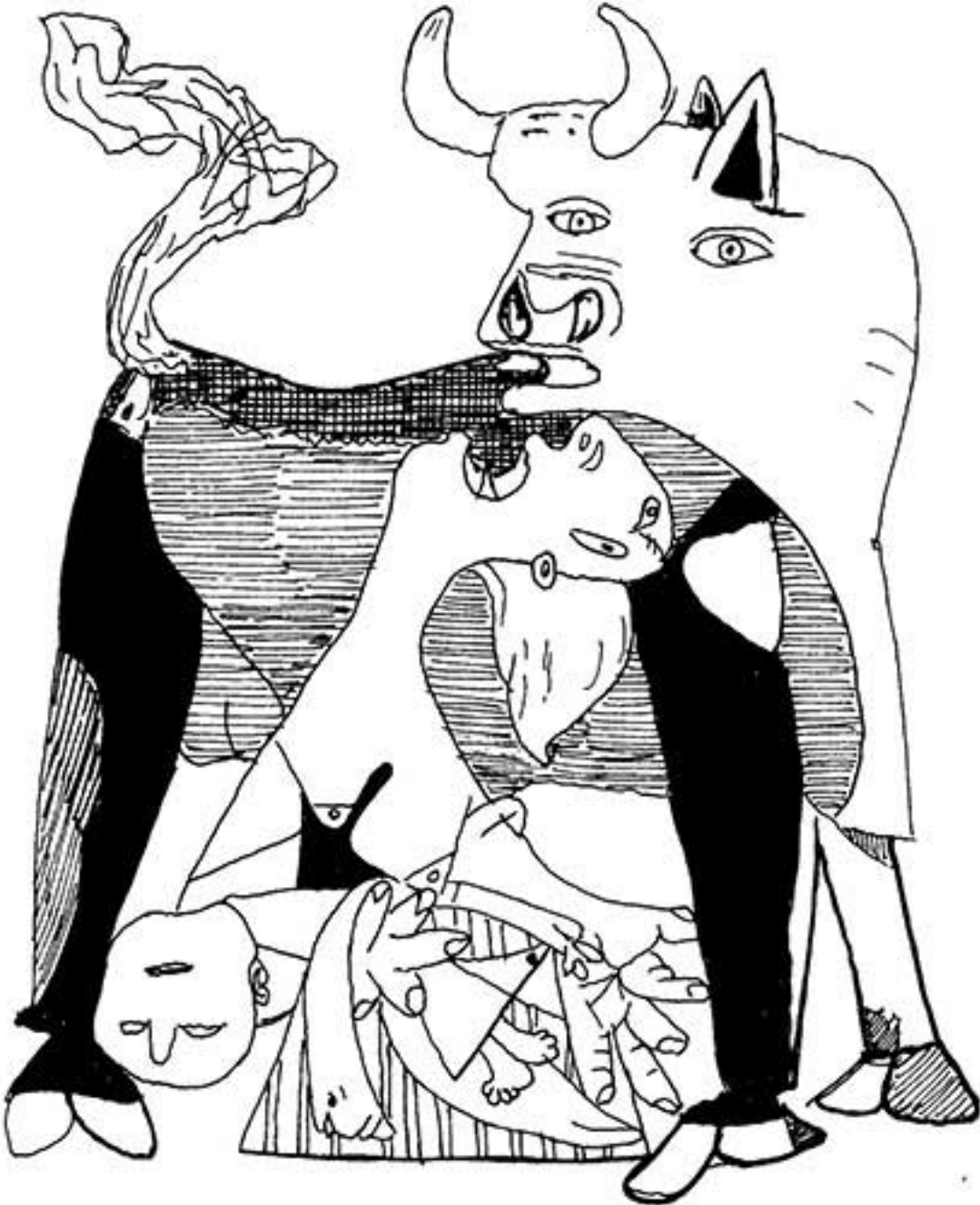
A close-up black and white line drawing of the man's face, showing his eyes behind glasses and his mouth. A speech bubble is located in the upper left corner of the panel.

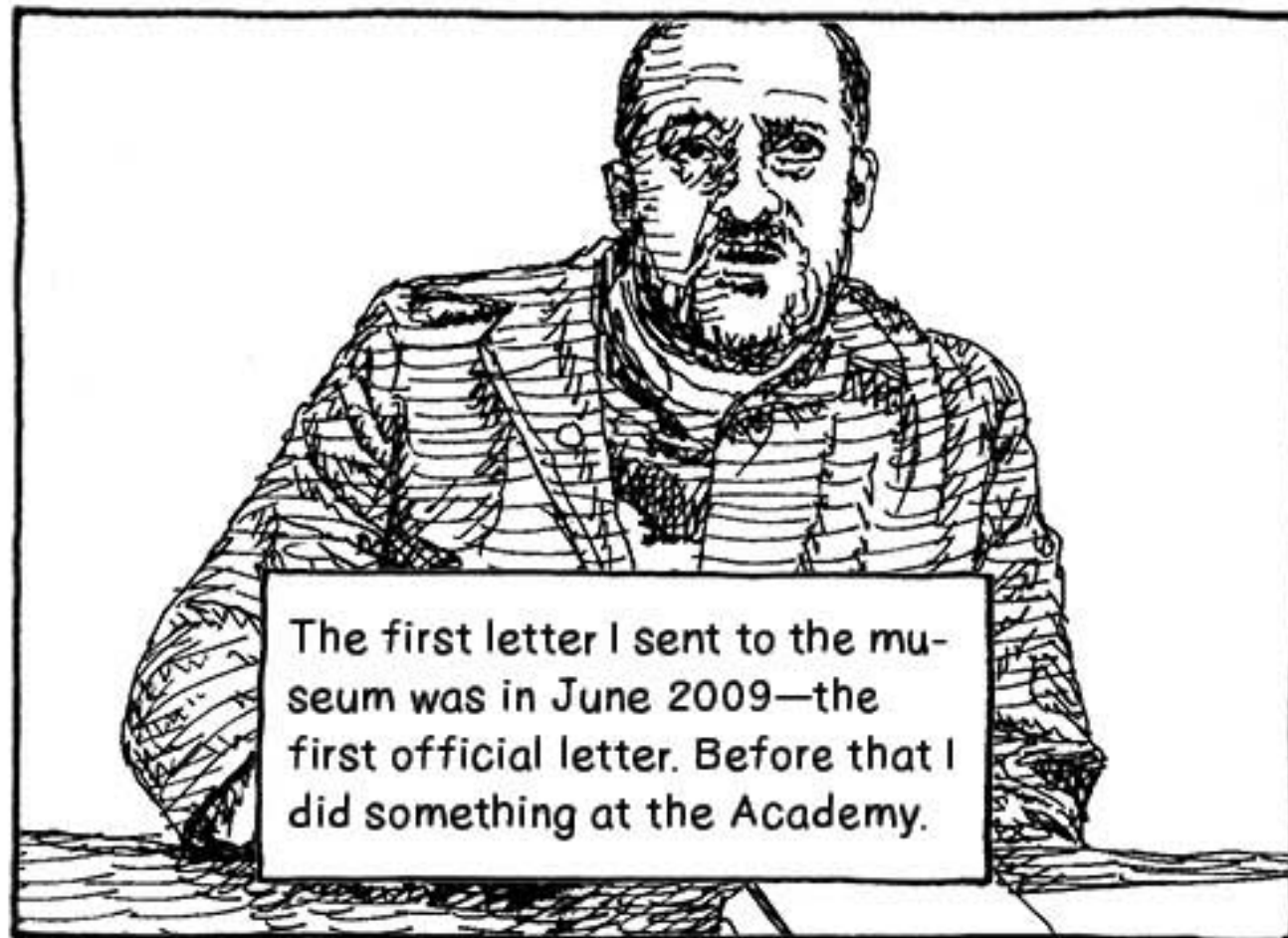
So I went to Khaled and told him that he should include Jerusalem and he should make it a point.

A close-up black and white line drawing of the man's face, showing his eyes behind glasses and his mouth. A speech bubble is located in the lower center of the panel.

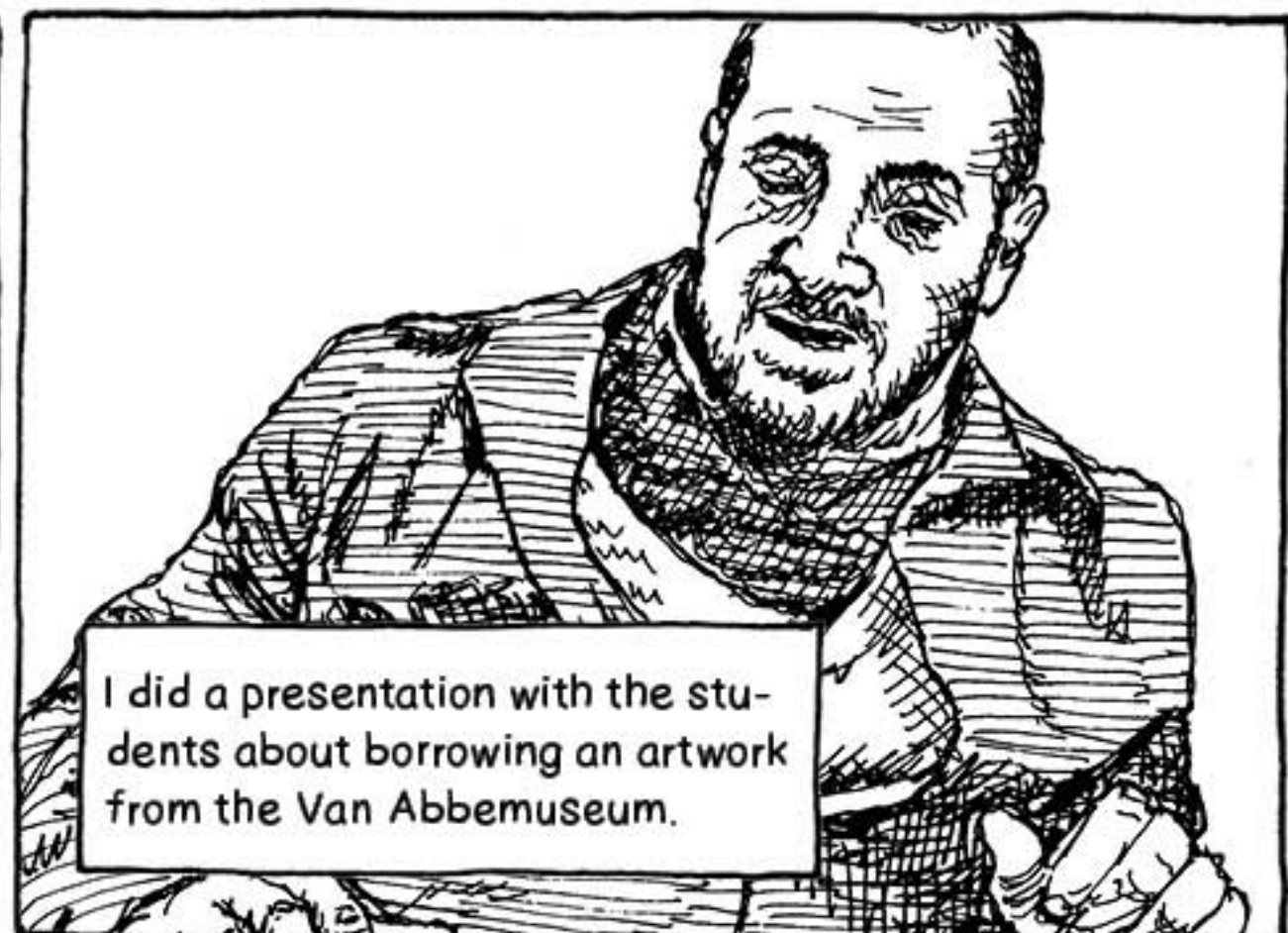
And we agreed to do the documentation of the project at Al-Ma'mal Foundation. Because for me, the precedent was that it reinforced the idea of Ramallah as the capital.

WHY PICASSO?

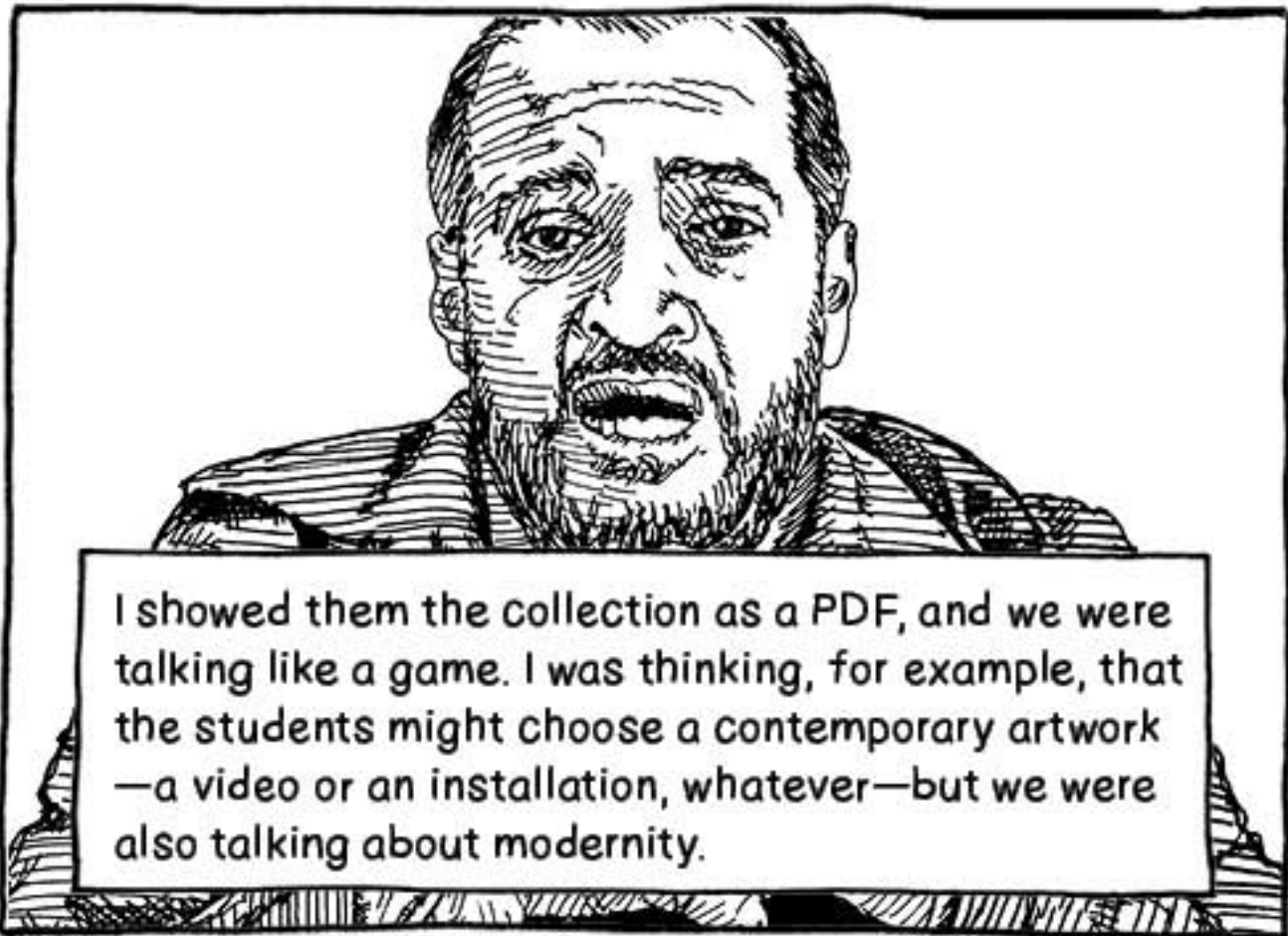




The first letter I sent to the museum was in June 2009—the first official letter. Before that I did something at the Academy.



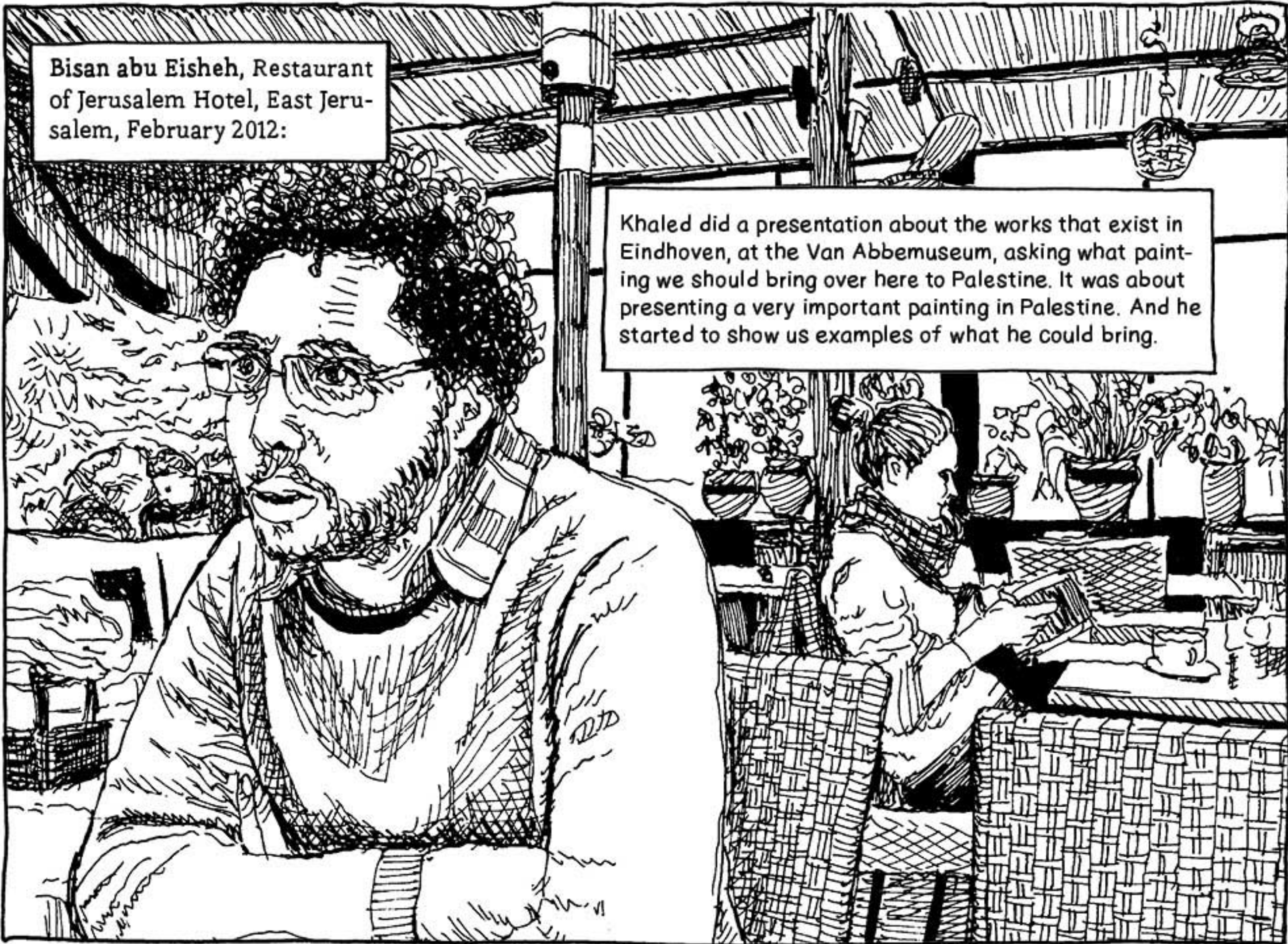
I did a presentation with the students about borrowing an artwork from the Van Abbemuseum.



I showed them the collection as a PDF, and we were talking like a game. I was thinking, for example, that the students might choose a contemporary artwork—a video or an installation, whatever—but we were also talking about modernity.

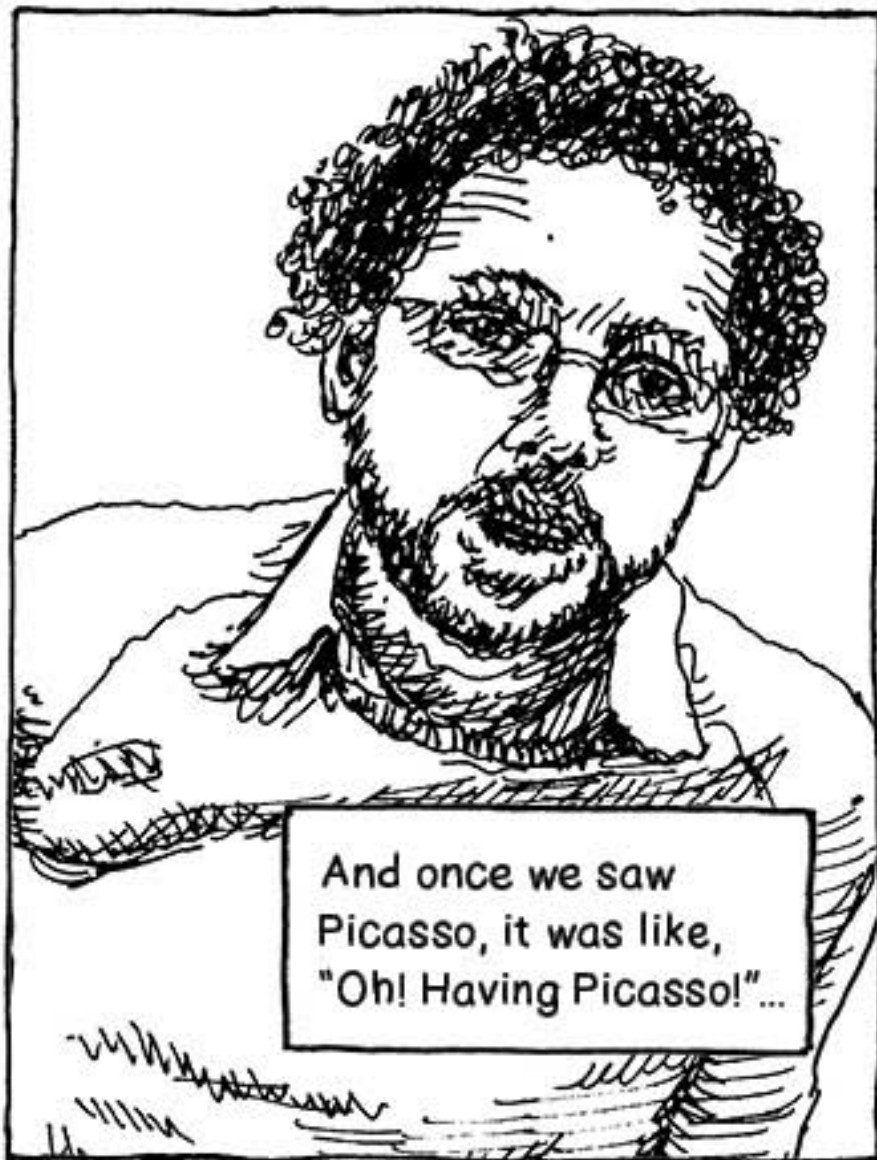


We were talking about how we could use or revisit modernity in contemporary art practice.



Bisan abu Eisheh, Restaurant
of Jerusalem Hotel, East Jeru-
salem, February 2012:

Khaled did a presentation about the works that exist in
Eindhoven, at the Van Abbemuseum, asking what paint-
ing we should bring over here to Palestine. It was about
presenting a very important painting in Palestine. And he
started to show us examples of what he could bring.



And once we saw Picasso, it was like, "Oh! Having Picasso!"...



...Because we had a workshop about Picasso with Gertrud Sandquist.



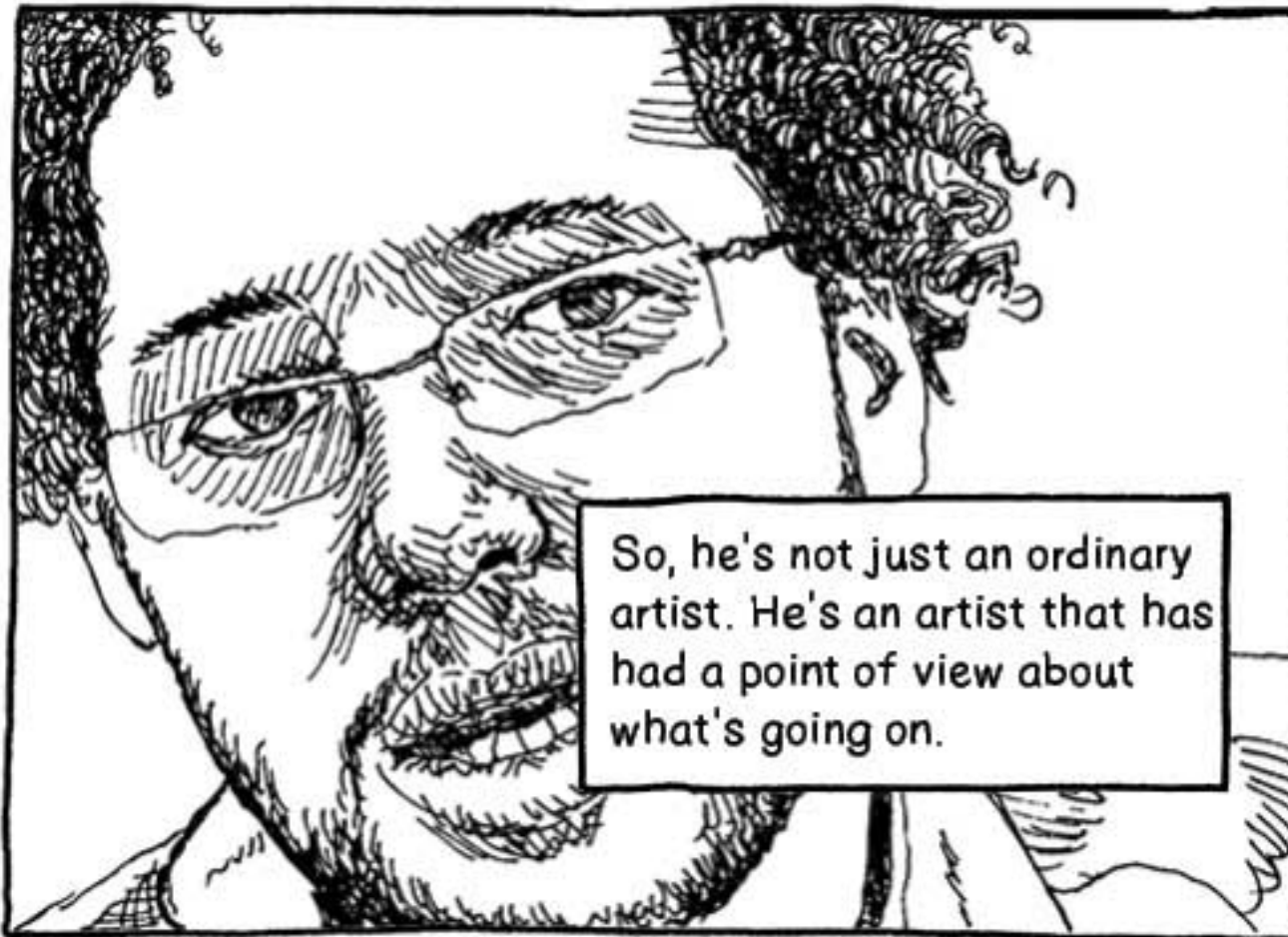
But we picked him not just because he is world-famous. He is an interesting man for a place such as Palestine that is full of politics and where everything that happens relates to politics.



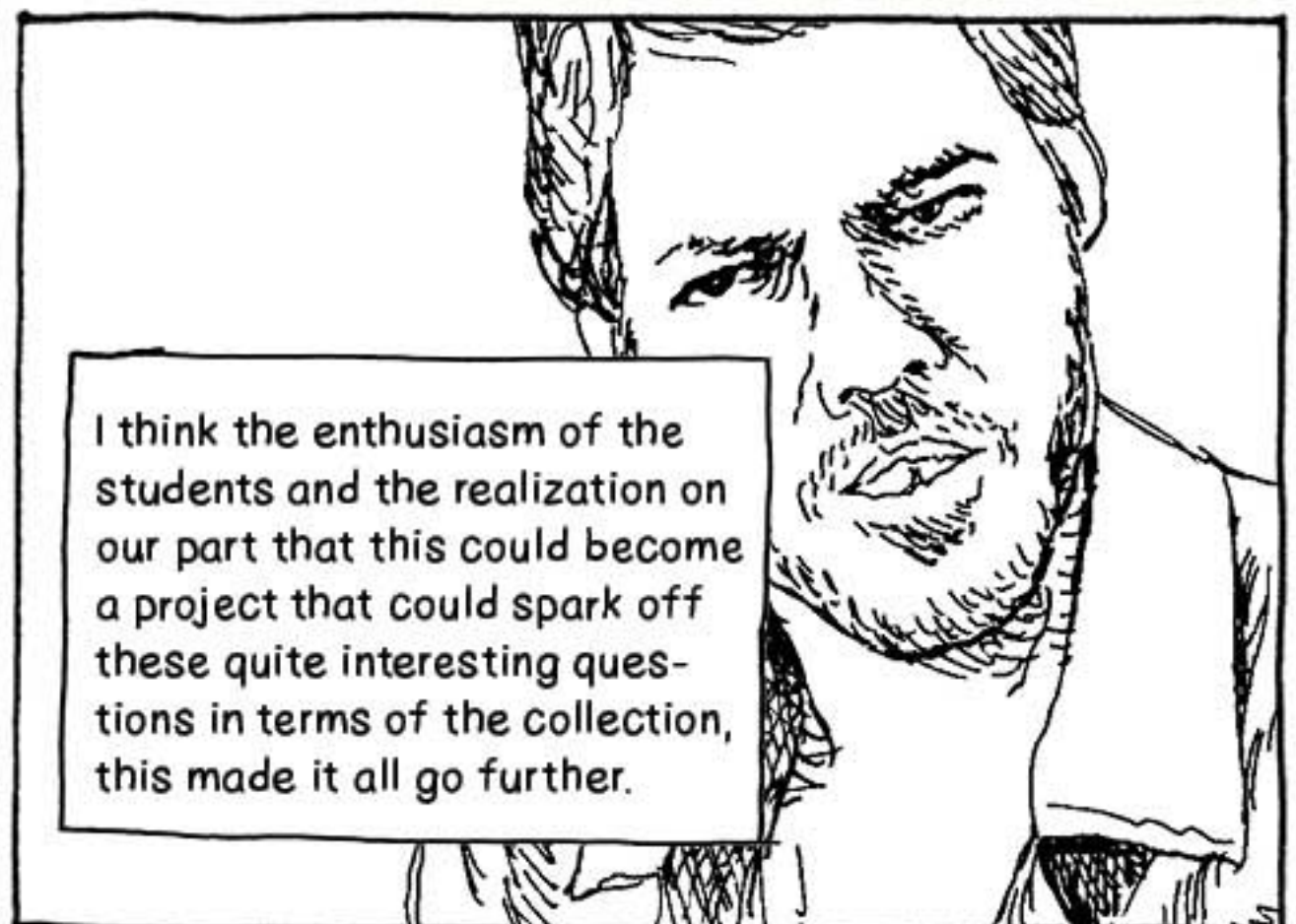
Picasso also has a very political context.



A lot of his paintings reflect on political situations— on the Second World War, and the Civil War in Spain, the massacres that happened.



So, he's not just an ordinary artist. He's an artist that has had a point of view about what's going on.

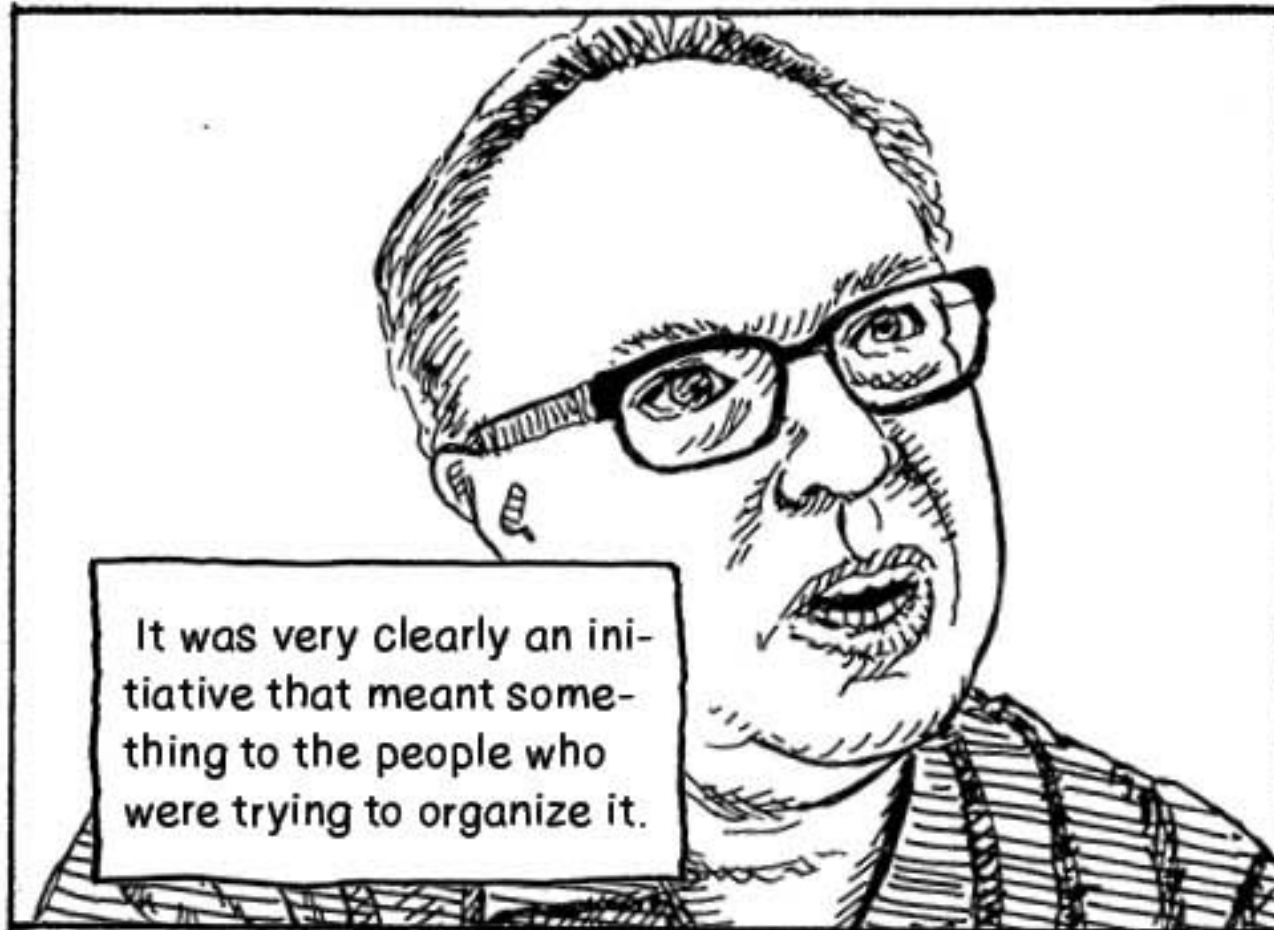


I think the enthusiasm of the students and the realization on our part that this could become a project that could spark off these quite interesting questions in terms of the collection, this made it all go further.

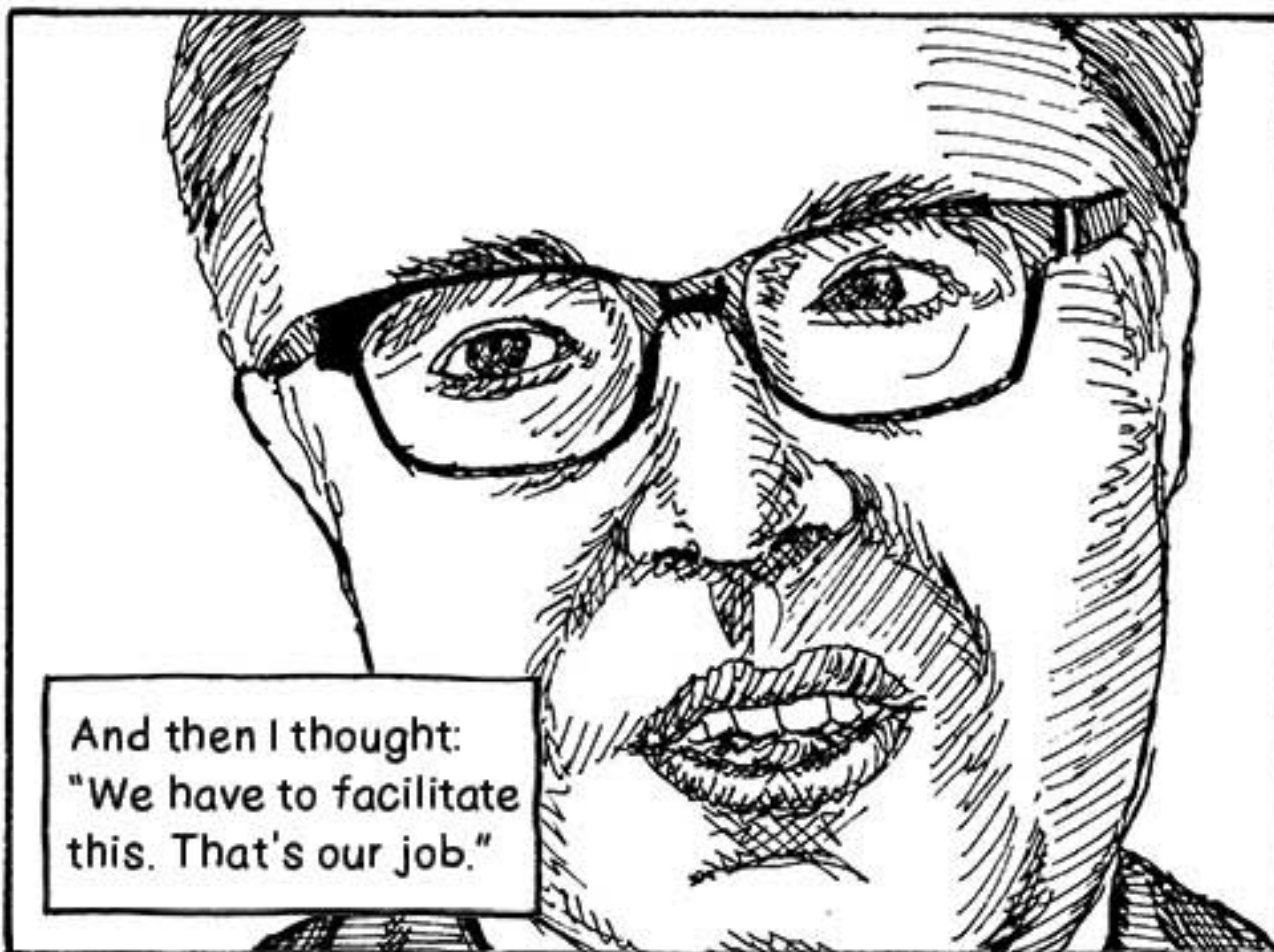
I think one of the crucial things that made me absolutely convinced that we should try and do it if at all possible was the absolute confidence with which Khaled and the students in Ramallah wanted to make this happen: to behave in a way as if the occupation was already overcome, and I think that was a huge and convincing aspect of it.



It was very clearly an initiative that meant something to the people who were trying to organize it.

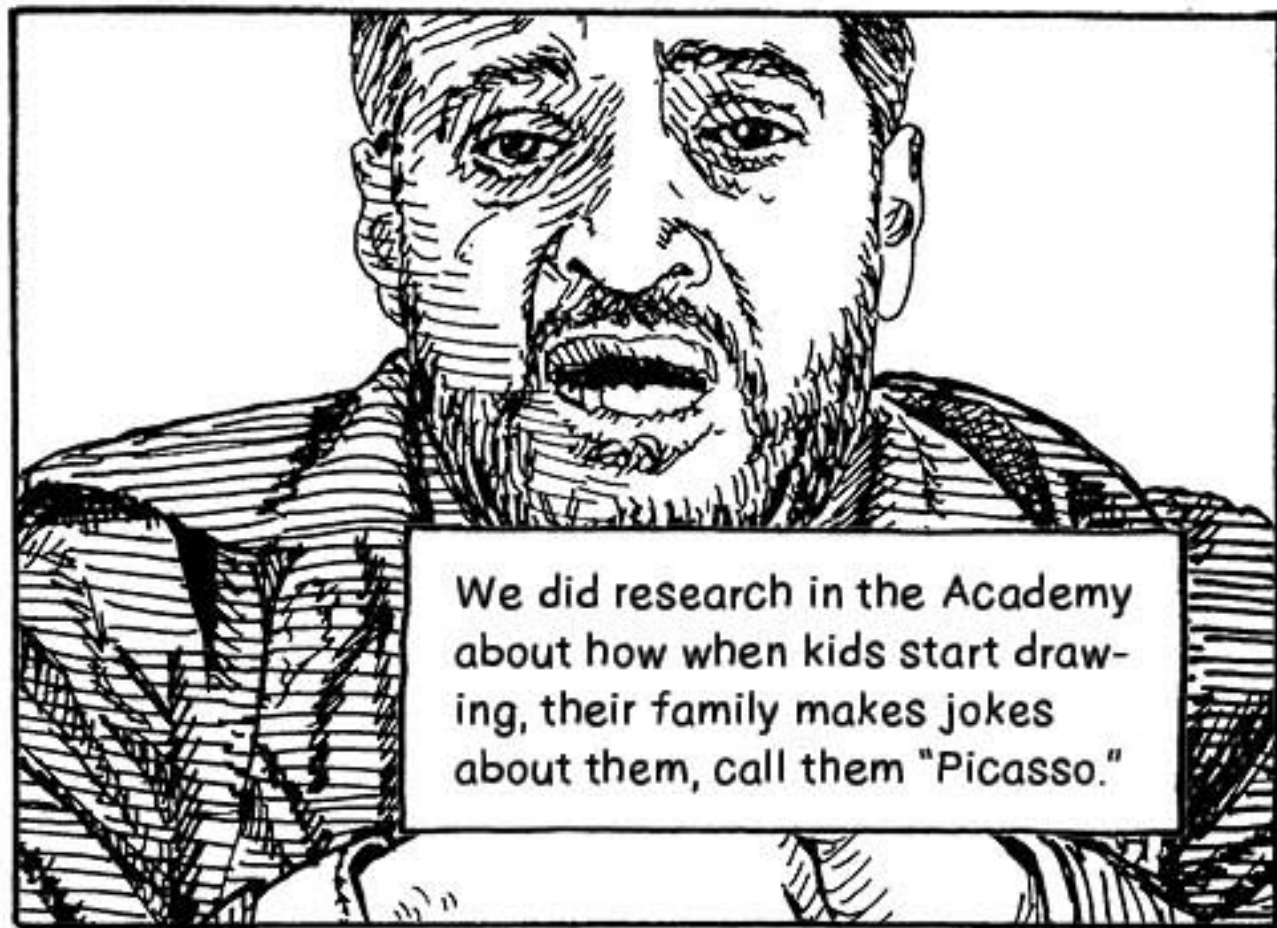


And then I thought: "We have to facilitate this. That's our job."

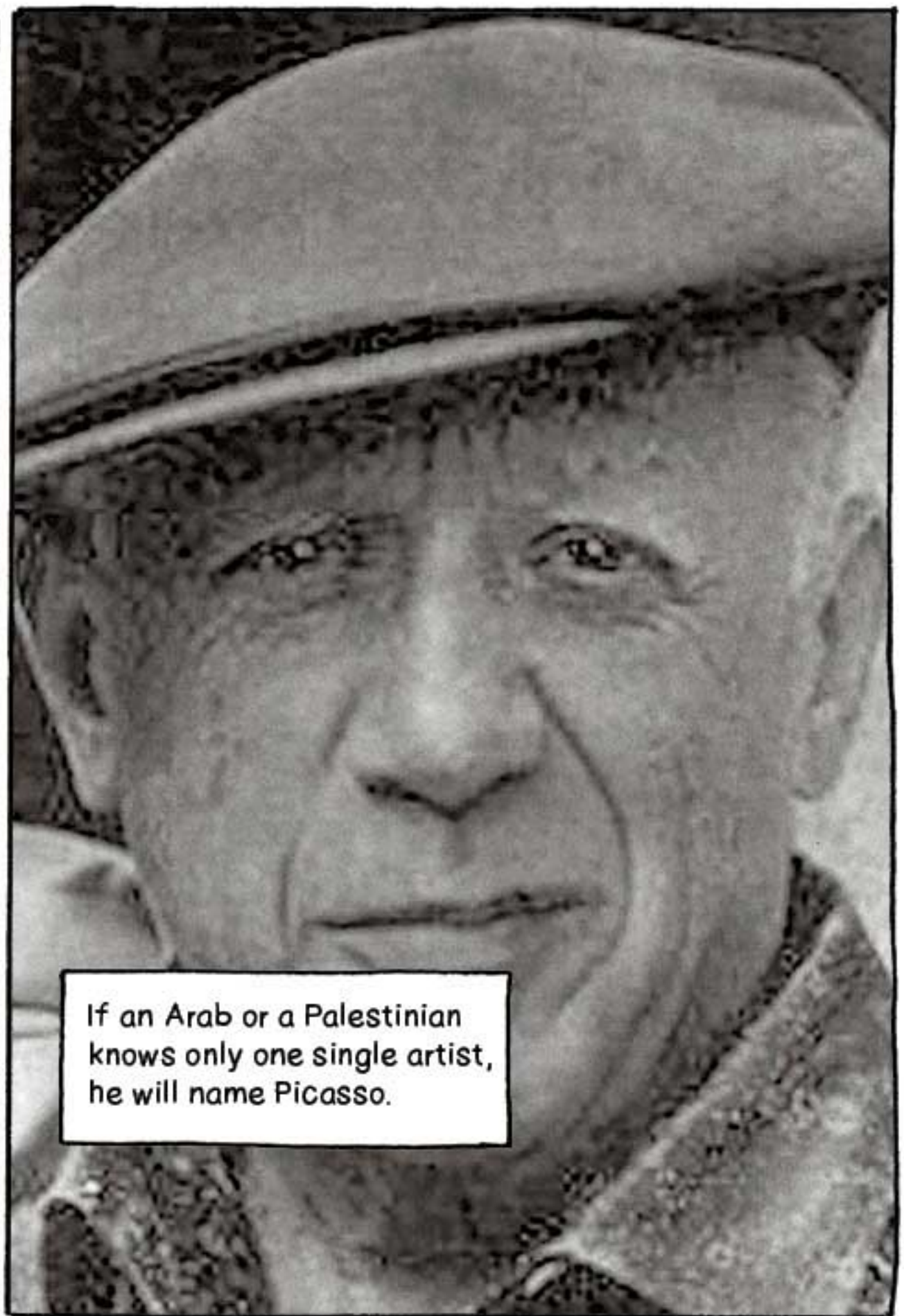




Why Picasso? First, Picasso is the most well-known international artist in the region.



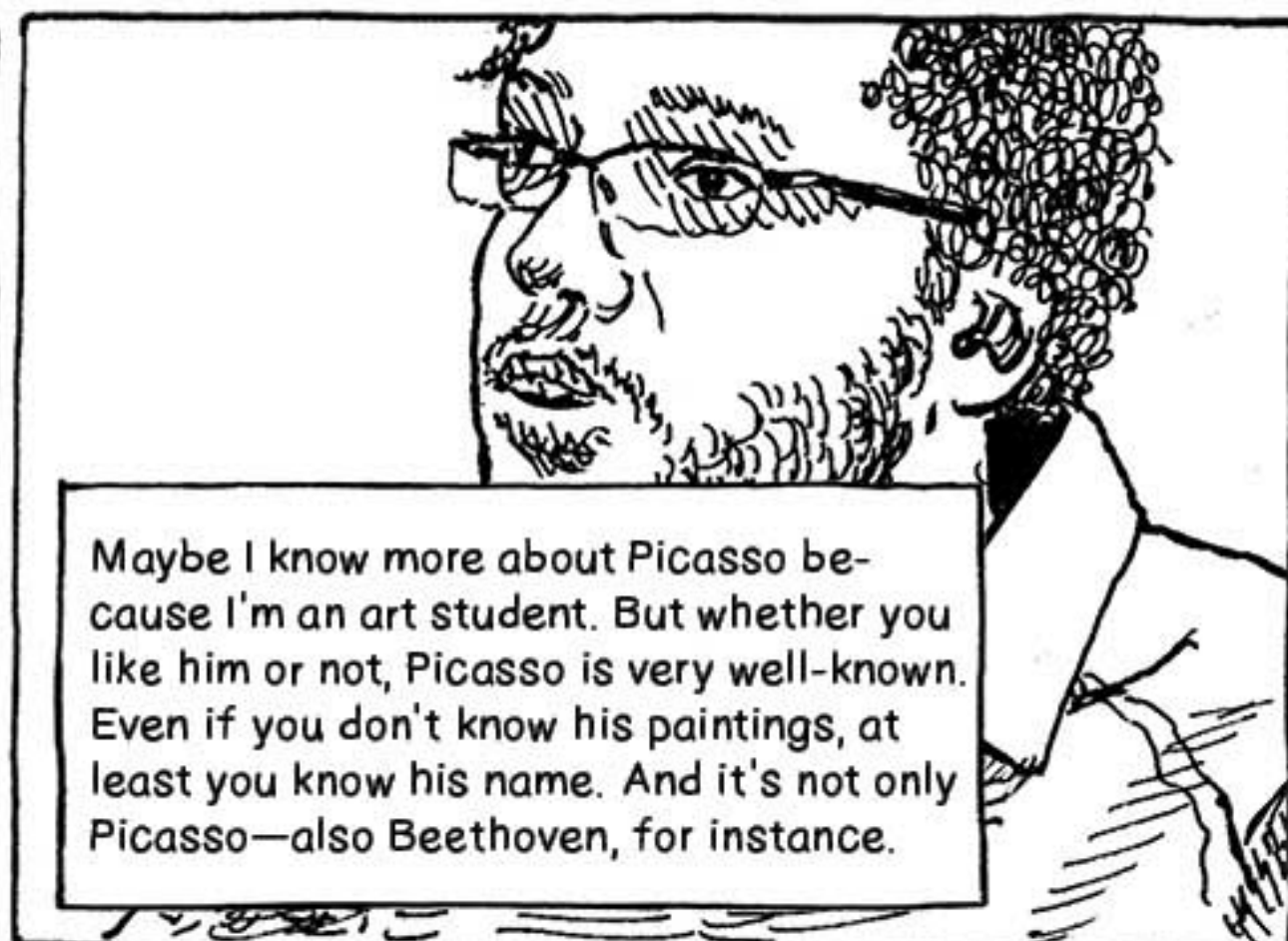
We did research in the Academy about how when kids start drawing, their family makes jokes about them, call them "Picasso."



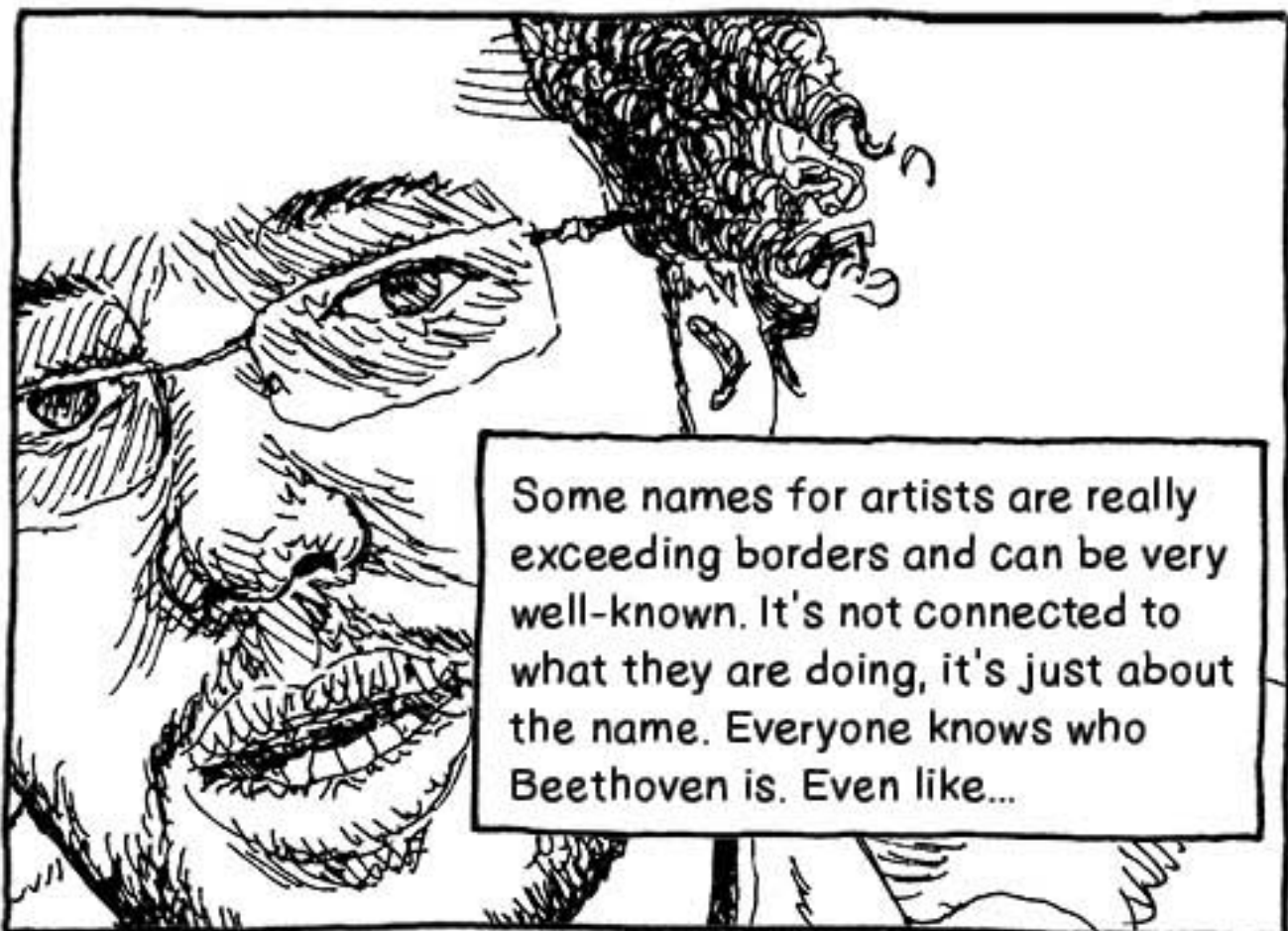
If an Arab or a Palestinian knows only one single artist, he will name Picasso.



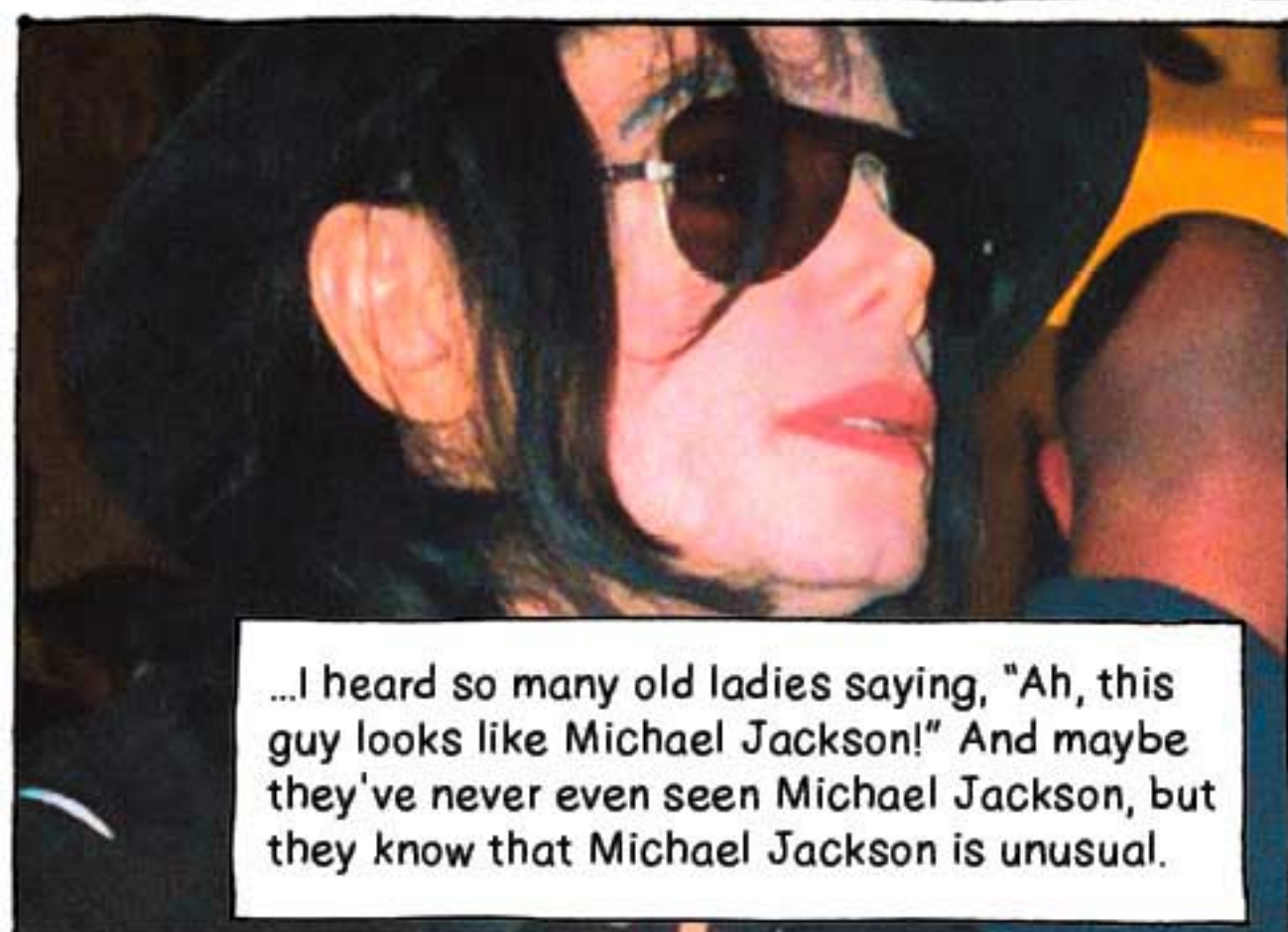
Yeah. I think there are a few artists that are really well-known, whatever field they are working in.



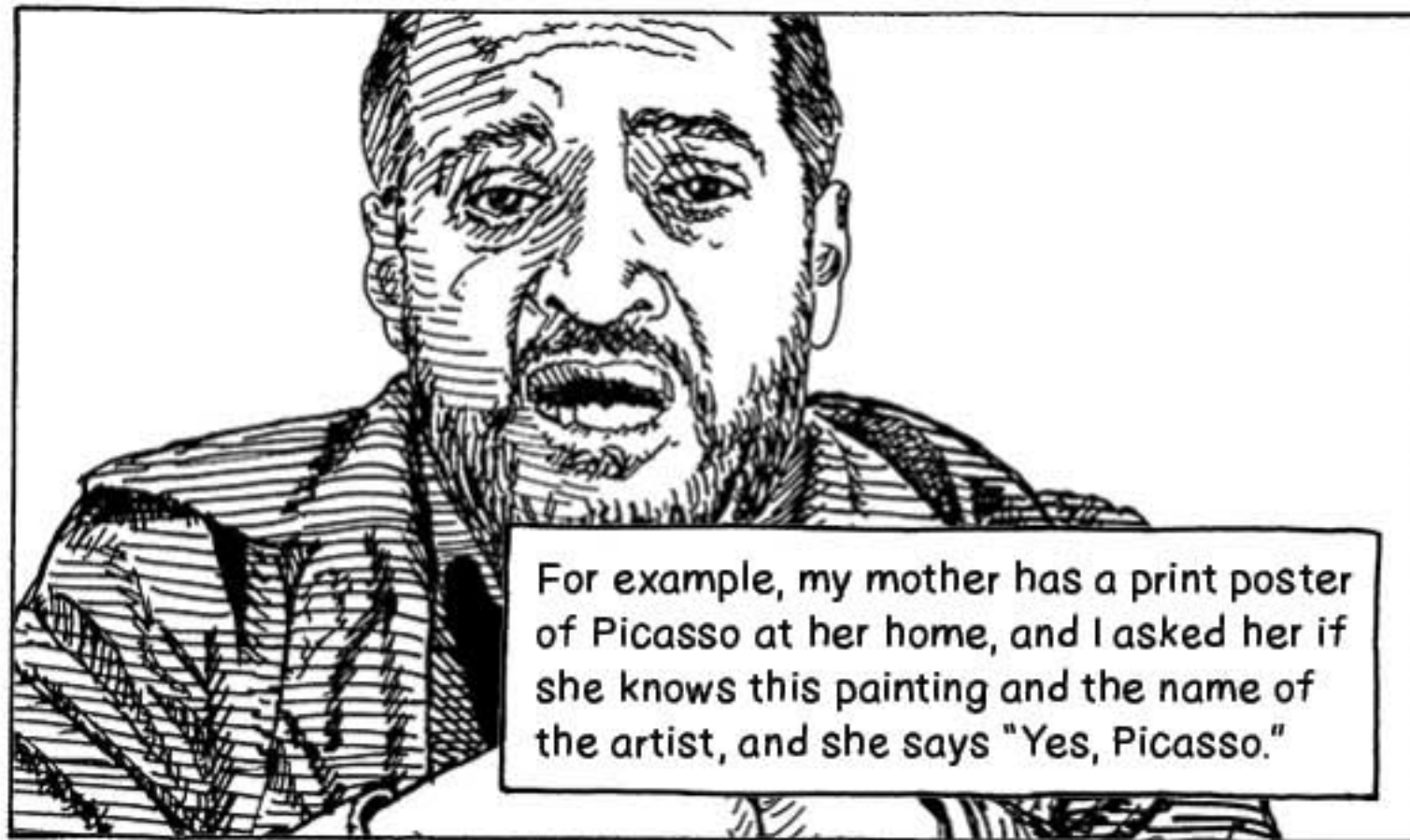
Maybe I know more about Picasso because I'm an art student. But whether you like him or not, Picasso is very well-known. Even if you don't know his paintings, at least you know his name. And it's not only Picasso—also Beethoven, for instance.



Some names for artists are really exceeding borders and can be very well-known. It's not connected to what they are doing, it's just about the name. Everyone knows who Beethoven is. Even like...



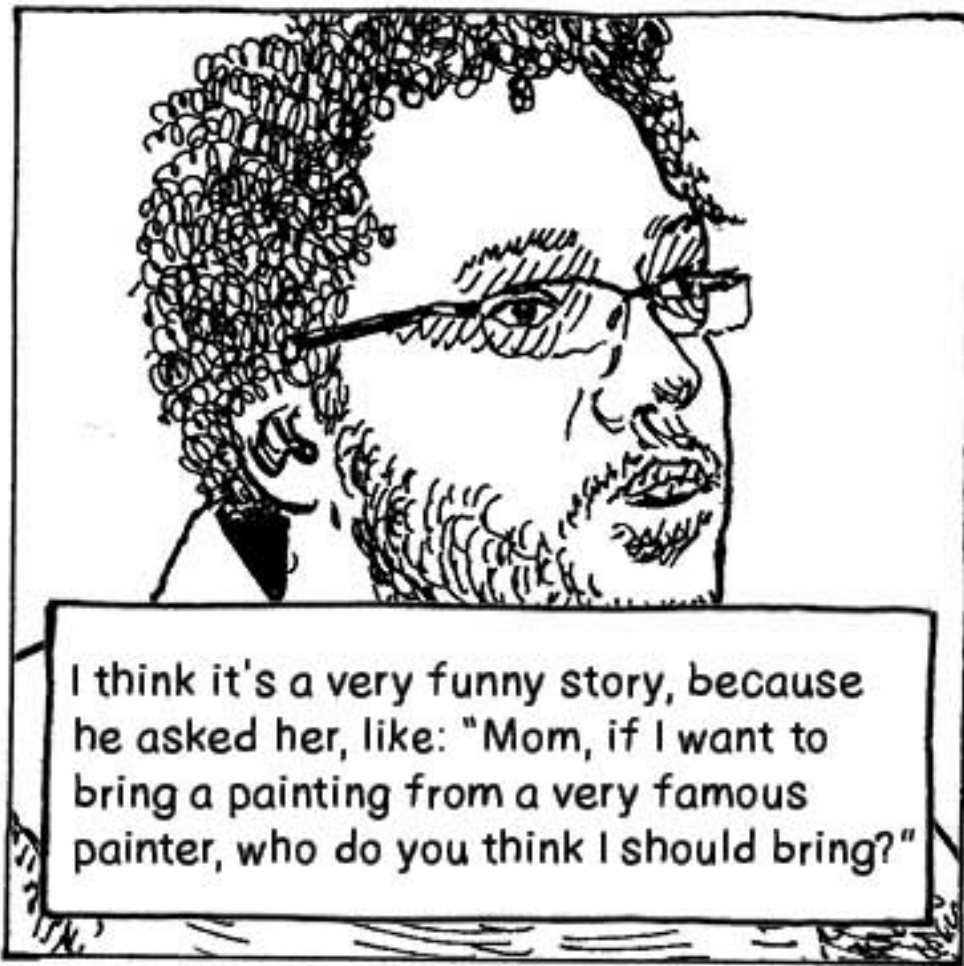
...I heard so many old ladies saying, "Ah, this guy looks like Michael Jackson!" And maybe they've never even seen Michael Jackson, but they know that Michael Jackson is unusual.



For example, my mother has a print poster of Picasso at her home, and I asked her if she knows this painting and the name of the artist, and she says "Yes, Picasso."



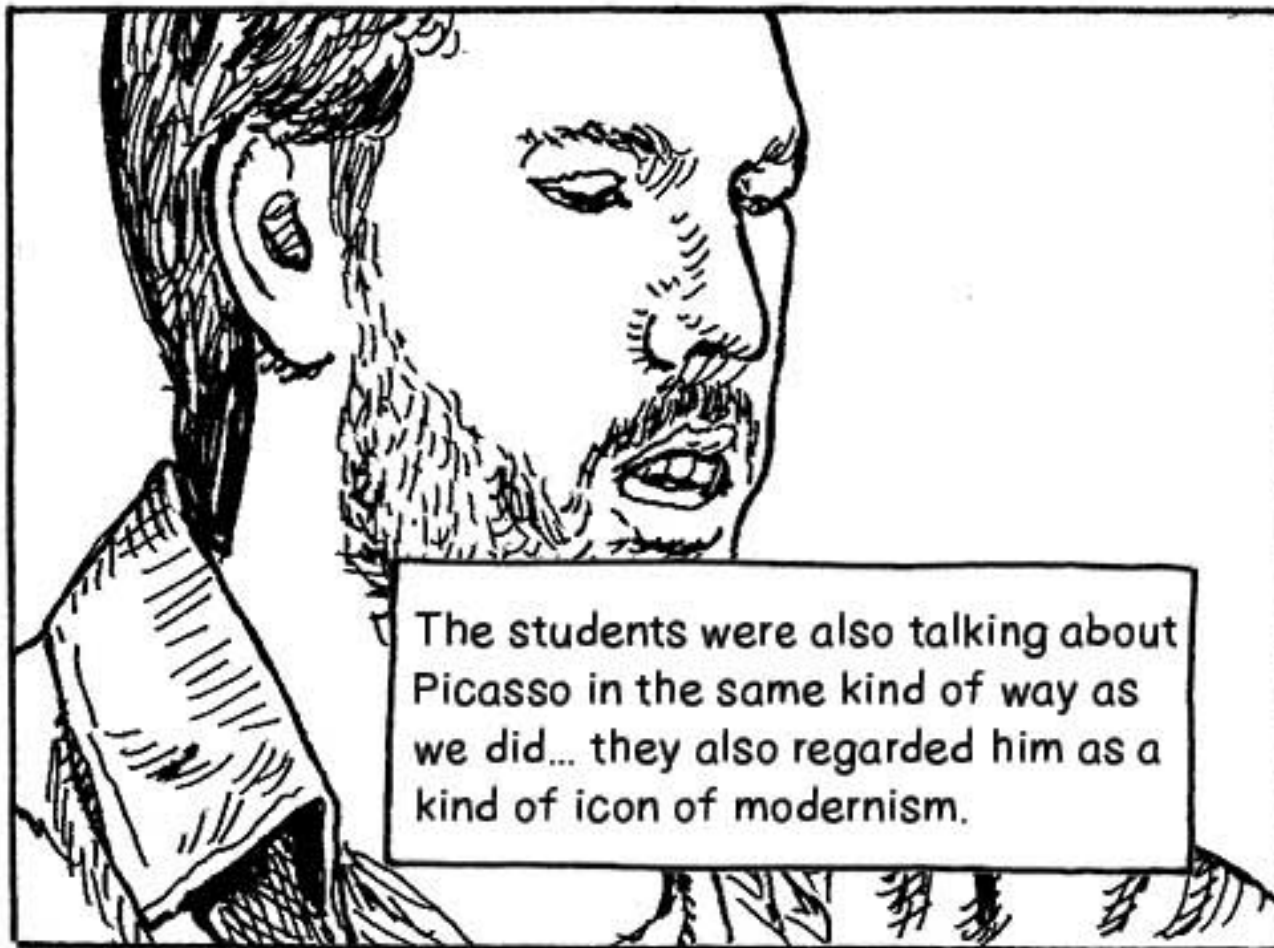
And I was asking her if she knows any other international artist. She mentioned the Mona Lisa.



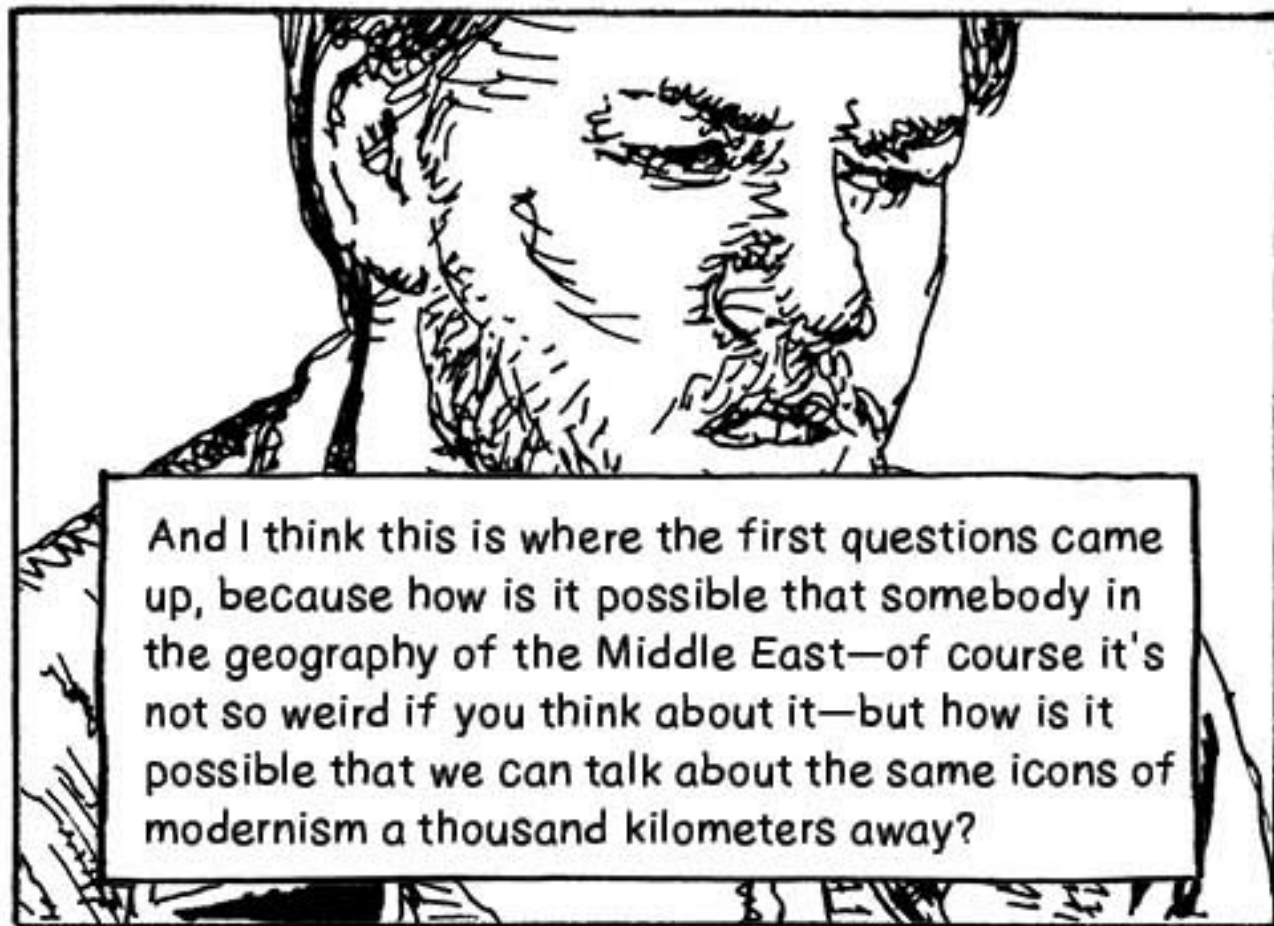
I think it's a very funny story, because he asked her, like: "Mom, if I want to bring a painting from a very famous painter, who do you think I should bring?"



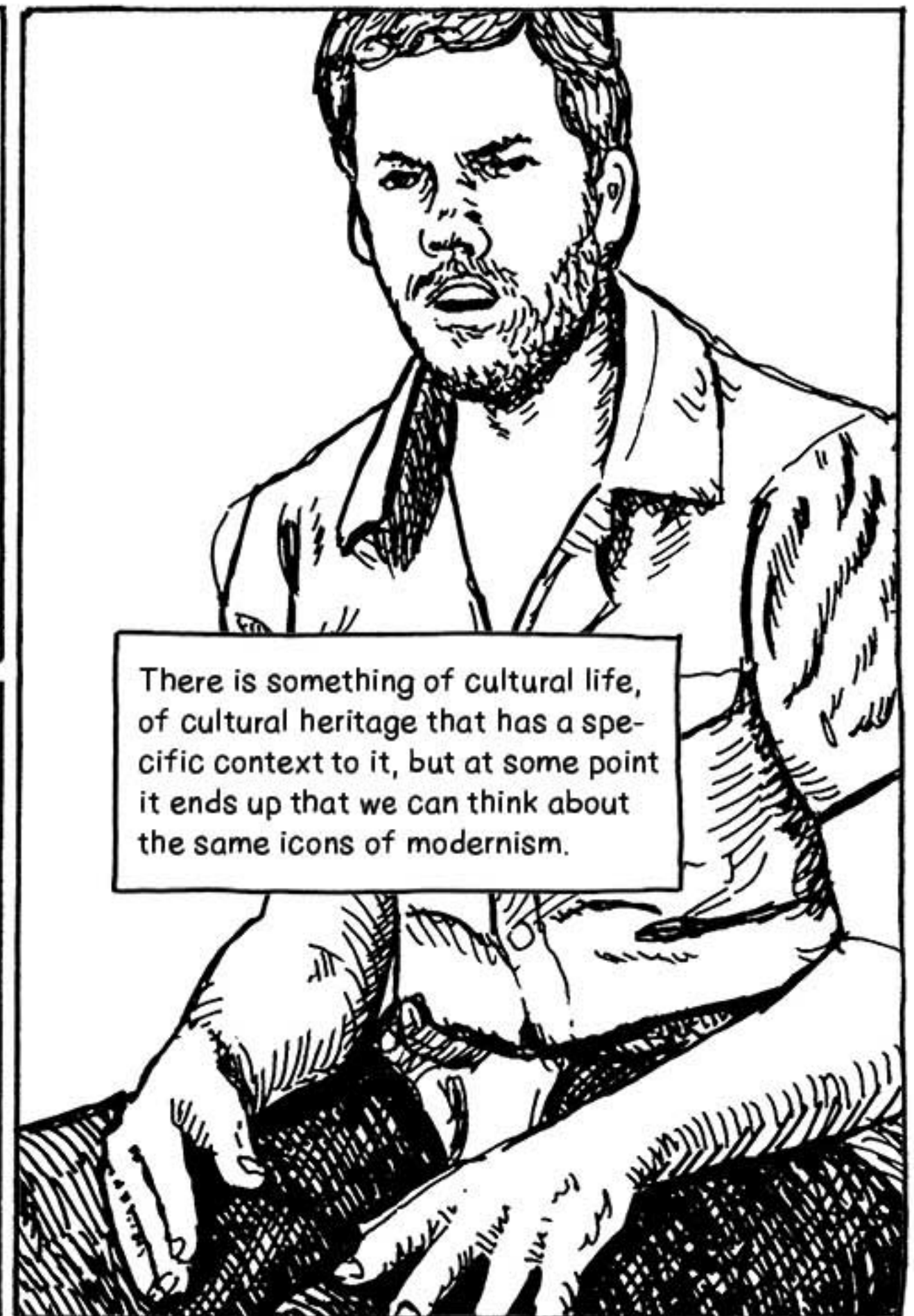
And she said, "The only one I know is Picasso."




The students were also talking about Picasso in the same kind of way as we did... they also regarded him as a kind of icon of modernism.



And I think this is where the first questions came up, because how is it possible that somebody in the geography of the Middle East—of course it's not so weird if you think about it—but how is it possible that we can talk about the same icons of modernism a thousand kilometers away?

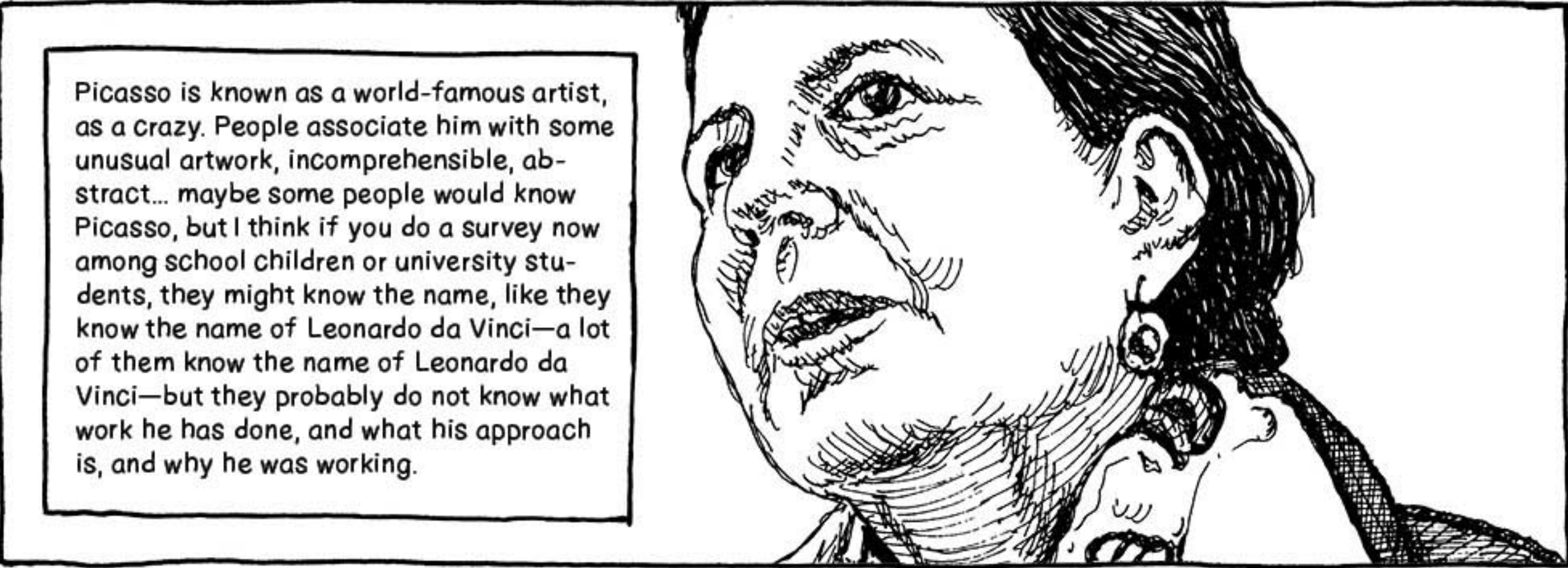


There is something of cultural life, of cultural heritage that has a specific context to it, but at some point it ends up that we can think about the same icons of modernism.



Vera Tamari, speaking over Skype from her home in Ramallah, July 2011:

You'd be surprised, even some very prominent Palestinian artists are not known, even among students that I was teaching at Birzeit. Artists like Sulieman Mansour and Nabil Anani.



Picasso is known as a world-famous artist, as a crazy. People associate him with some unusual artwork, incomprehensible, abstract... maybe some people would know Picasso, but I think if you do a survey now among school children or university students, they might know the name, like they know the name of Leonardo da Vinci—a lot of them know the name of Leonardo da Vinci—but they probably do not know what work he has done, and what his approach is, and why he was working.

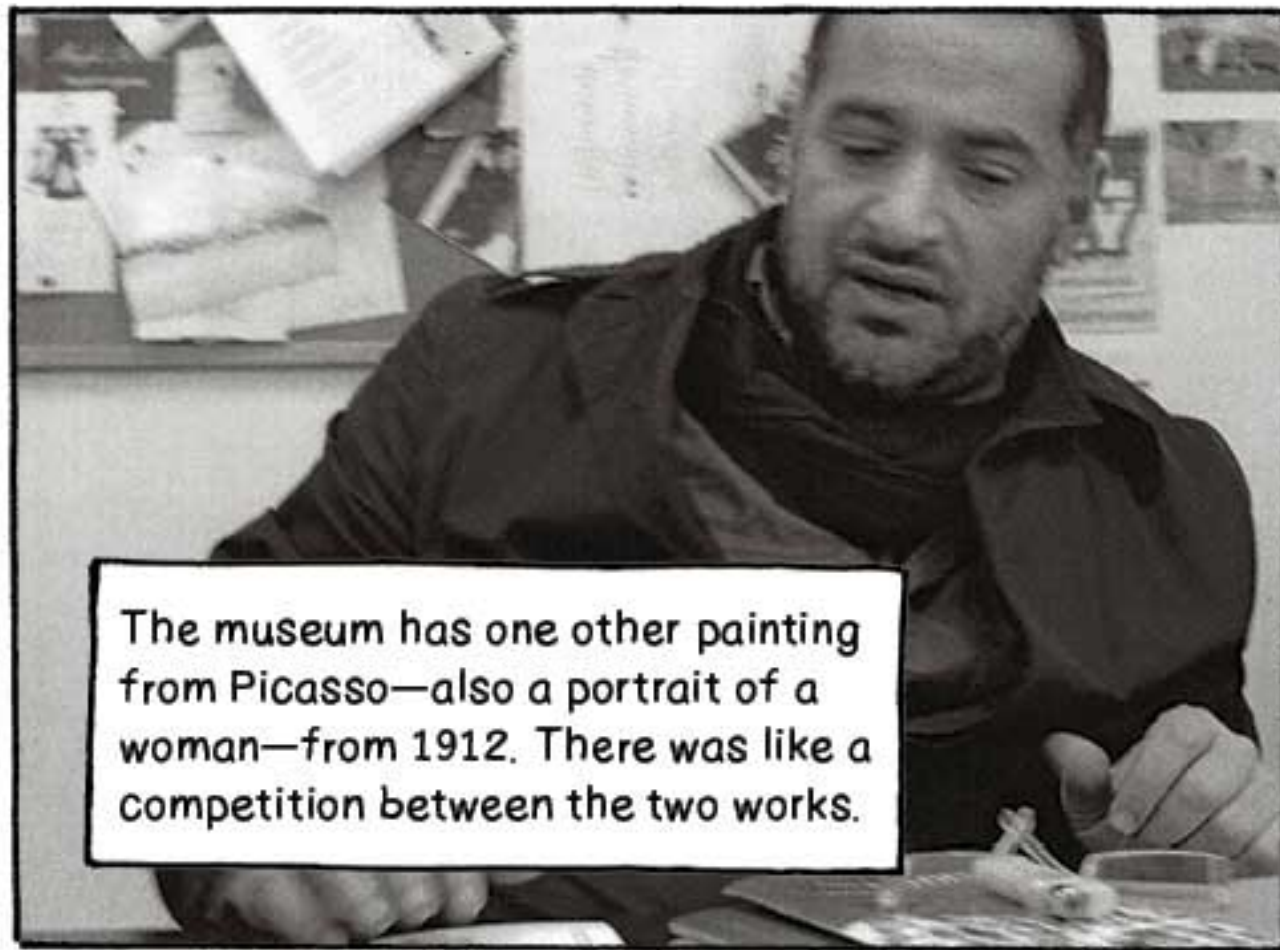


Benjamin said that aura is a function of distance, and the erasure of aura in mechanical reproduction is a function of “the desire of contemporary masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly.” Does digital culture also share something with this tendency of wanting to “bring things closer,” into our homes and onto our computer screens? No one would dispute that the availability of digital material brings with it its own type of remoteness, the ubiquity of binary code.

Given present museological conditions, could it be that something of the digital has crept into the type of experience we have in art museums, especially those purpose-built in the last 30 years? Is there something about the accessibility of digital information that even infects how we see auratic artworks firsthand? Could this digital contagion be most pronounced in modernist works, those artifacts in which a received notion of aura—i.e.,

Benjamin's auratic hand of the artist—would be the most fragile, most at risk of being diminished both by the nature of the contemporary art museum and the surrounding media landscape? Was sending the *Buste de femme* outside of the safe confines of the developed world a way for Esche to replenish the diminished aura of works from the Van Abbe collection? Was replenishing the painting's aura another way of adding value to Picasso?





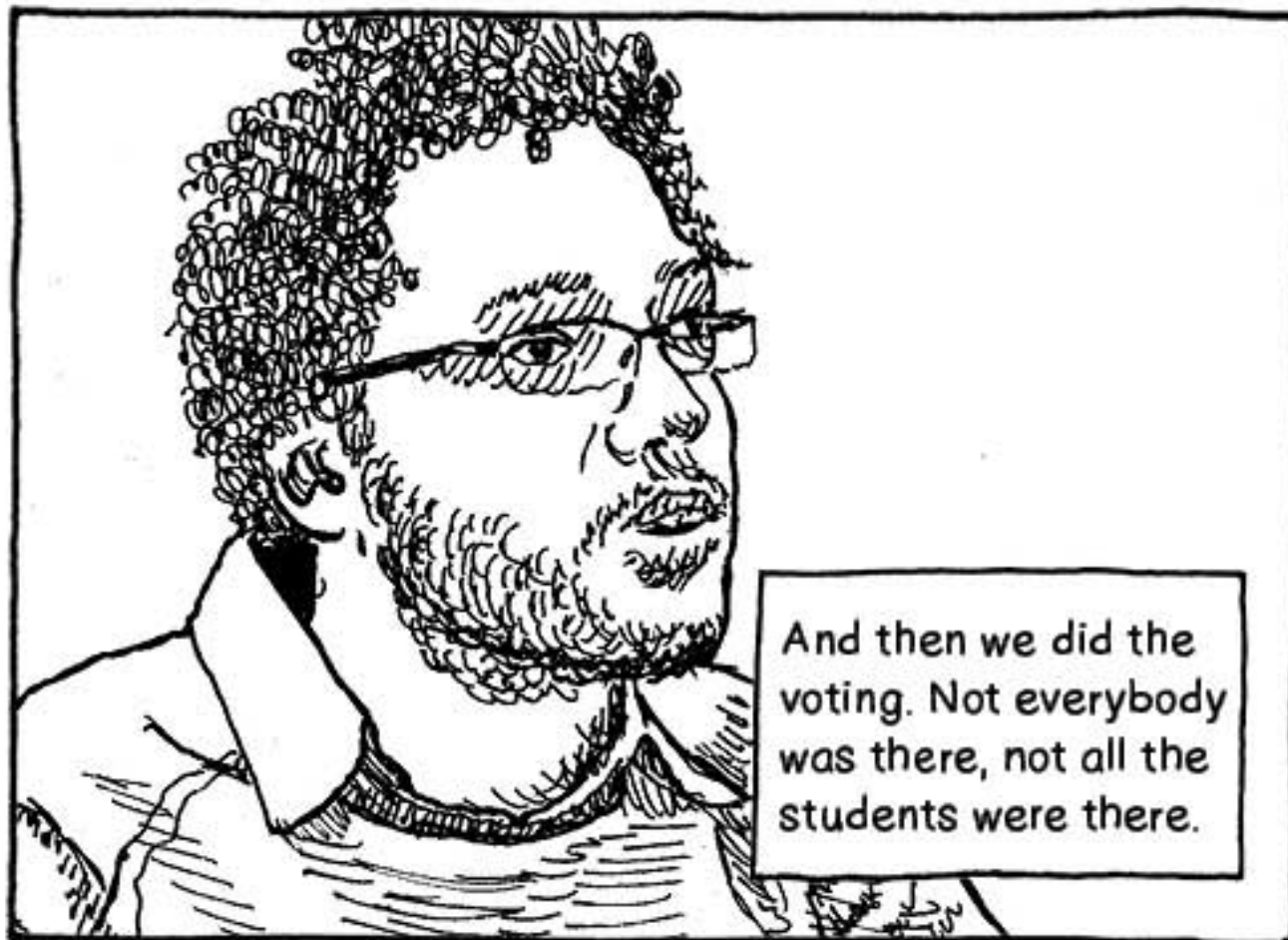
The museum has one other painting from Picasso—also a portrait of a woman—from 1912. There was like a competition between the two works.



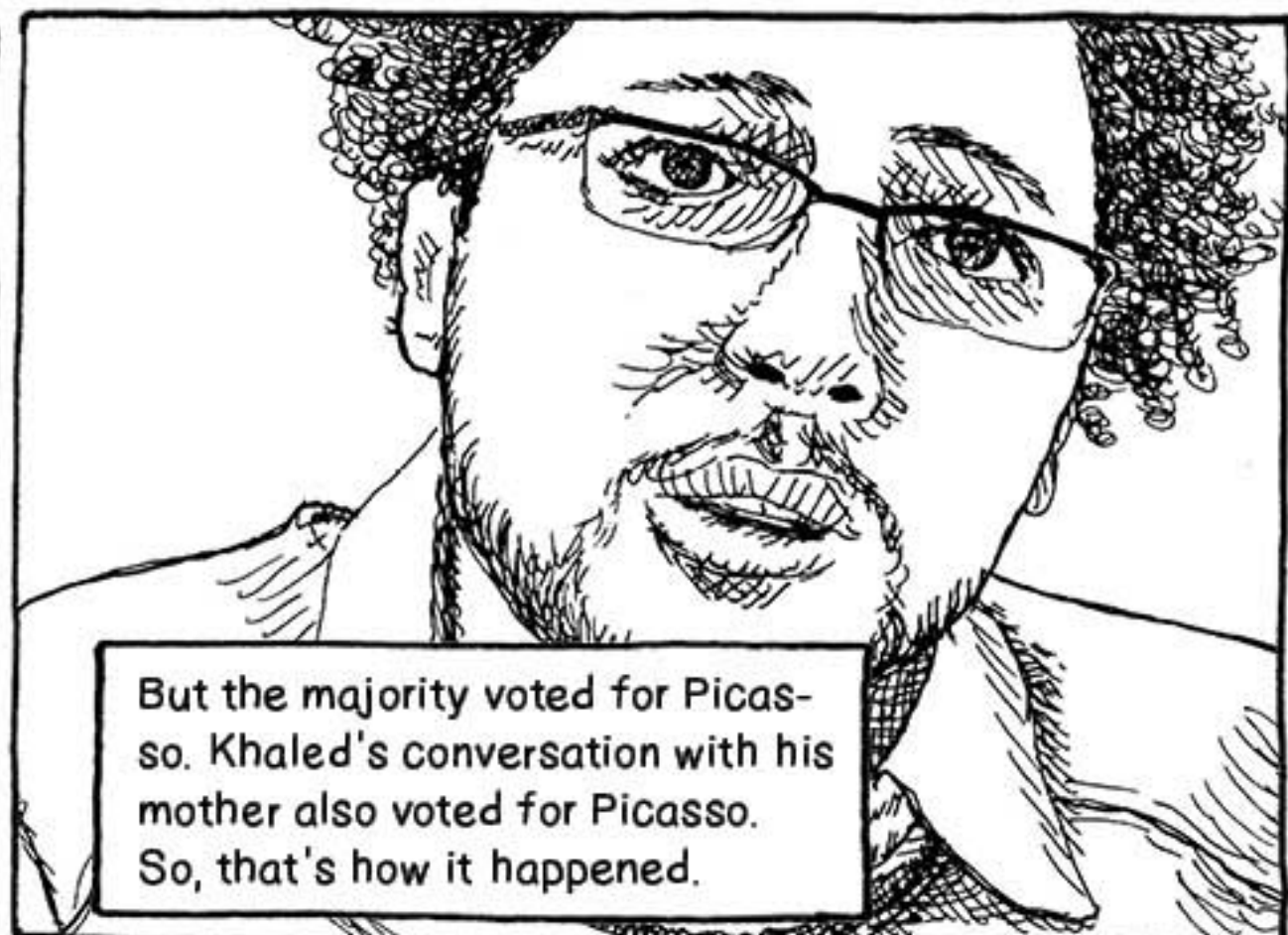
And then we voted and chose the *Buste de femme*.



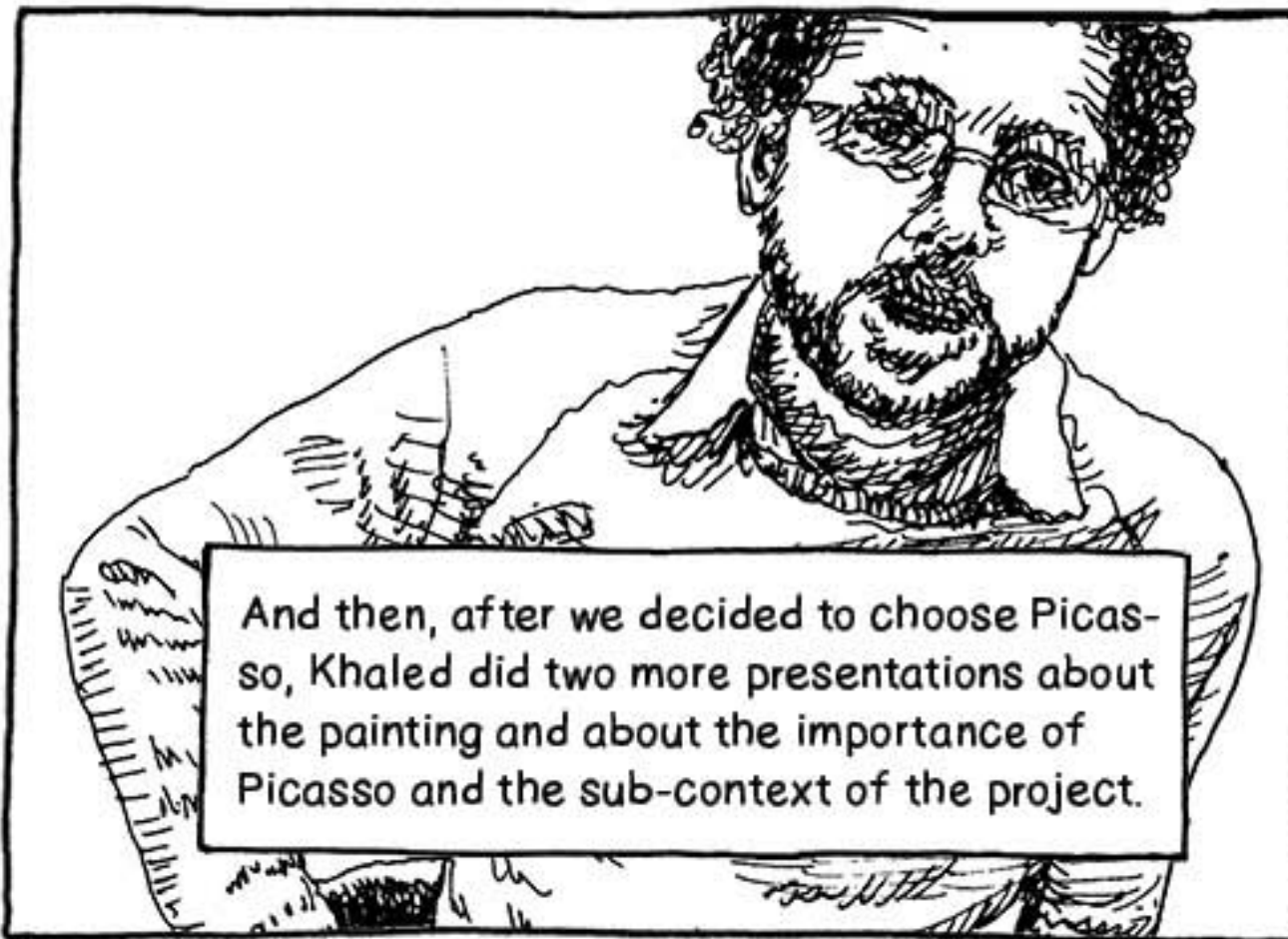
But this one, the *Buste de femme*, as a work from wartime was more representative of Picasso than the one from 1912.



And then we did the voting. Not everybody was there, not all the students were there.



But the majority voted for Picasso. Khaled's conversation with his mother also voted for Picasso. So, that's how it happened.



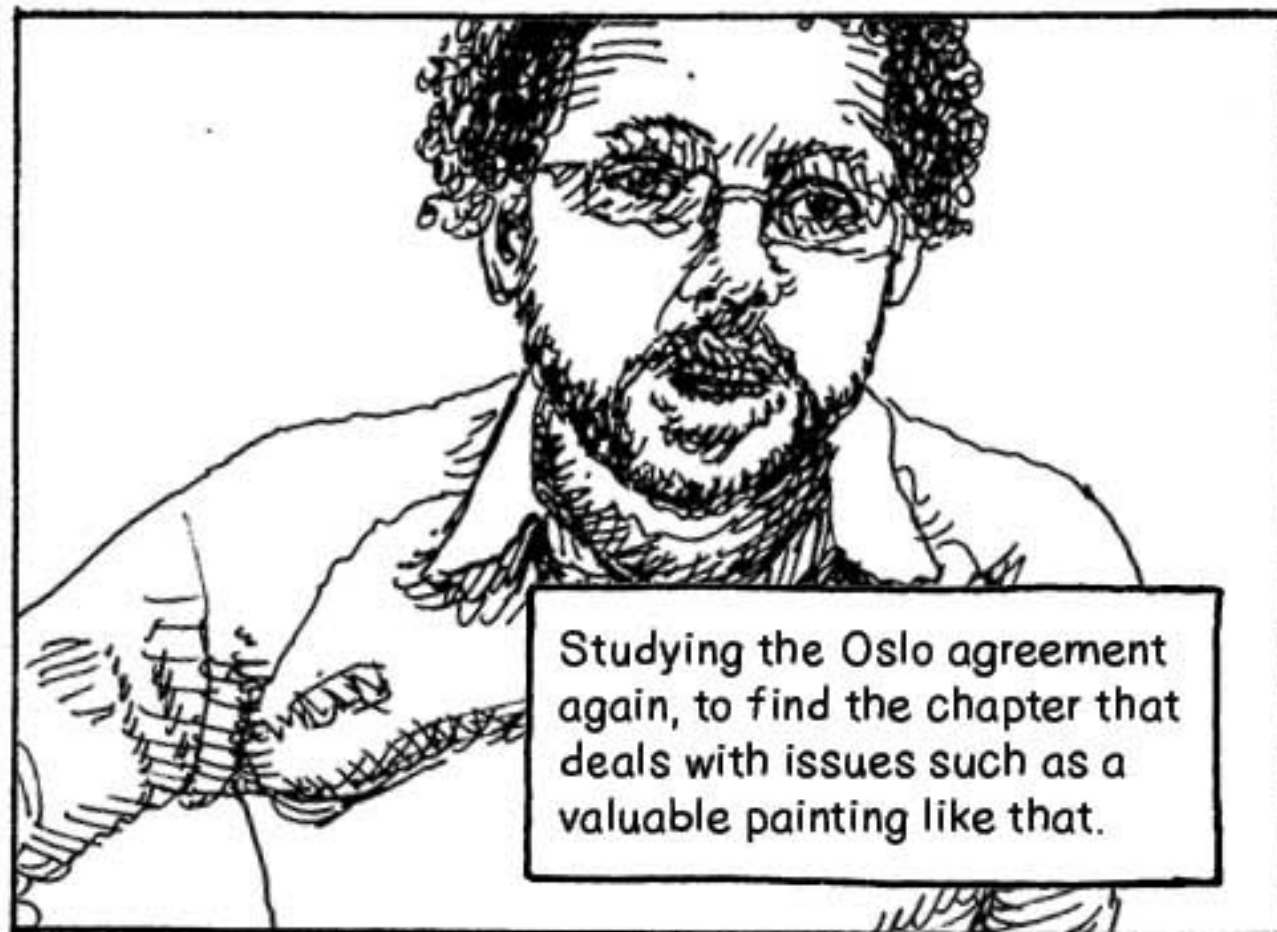
And then, after we decided to choose Picasso, Khaled did two more presentations about the painting and about the importance of Picasso and the sub-context of the project.



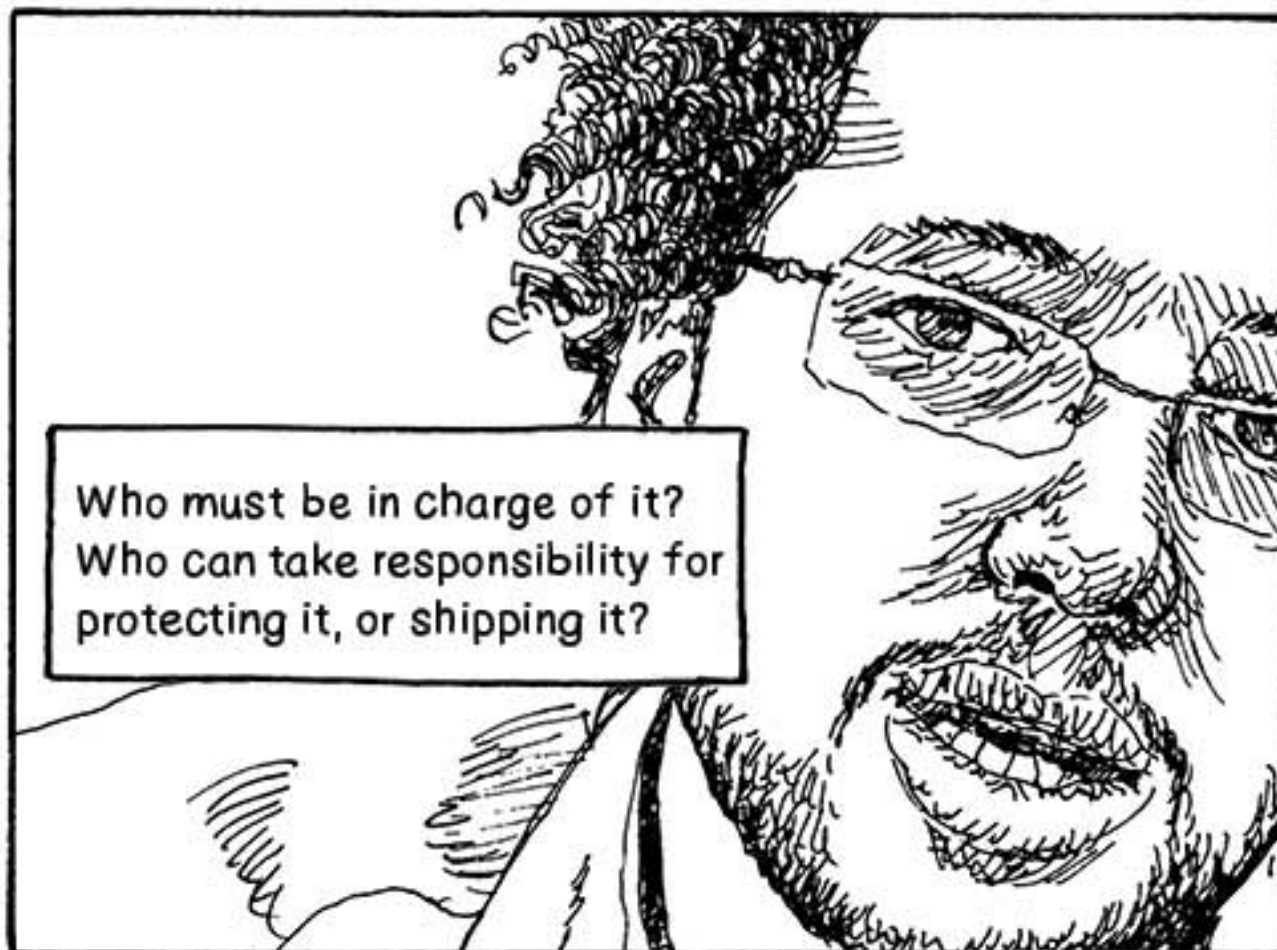
Which is not just taking a painting by someone important and bringing it to Palestine.



It's about... it's a question of asking what is Palestine? And who's bringing this painting? And who's sending this painting? And where is the occupation in this context?

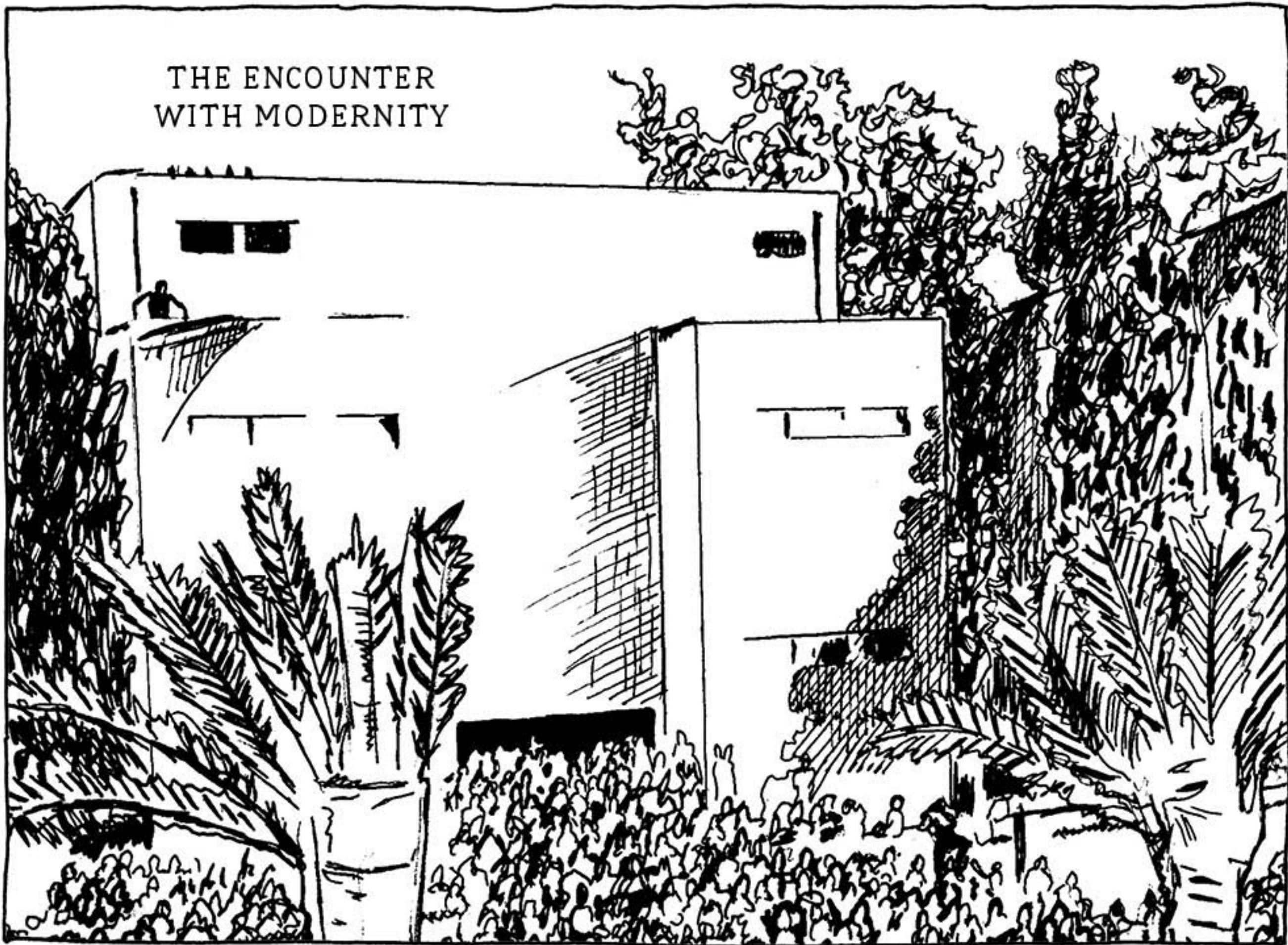


Studying the Oslo agreement again, to find the chapter that deals with issues such as a valuable painting like that.



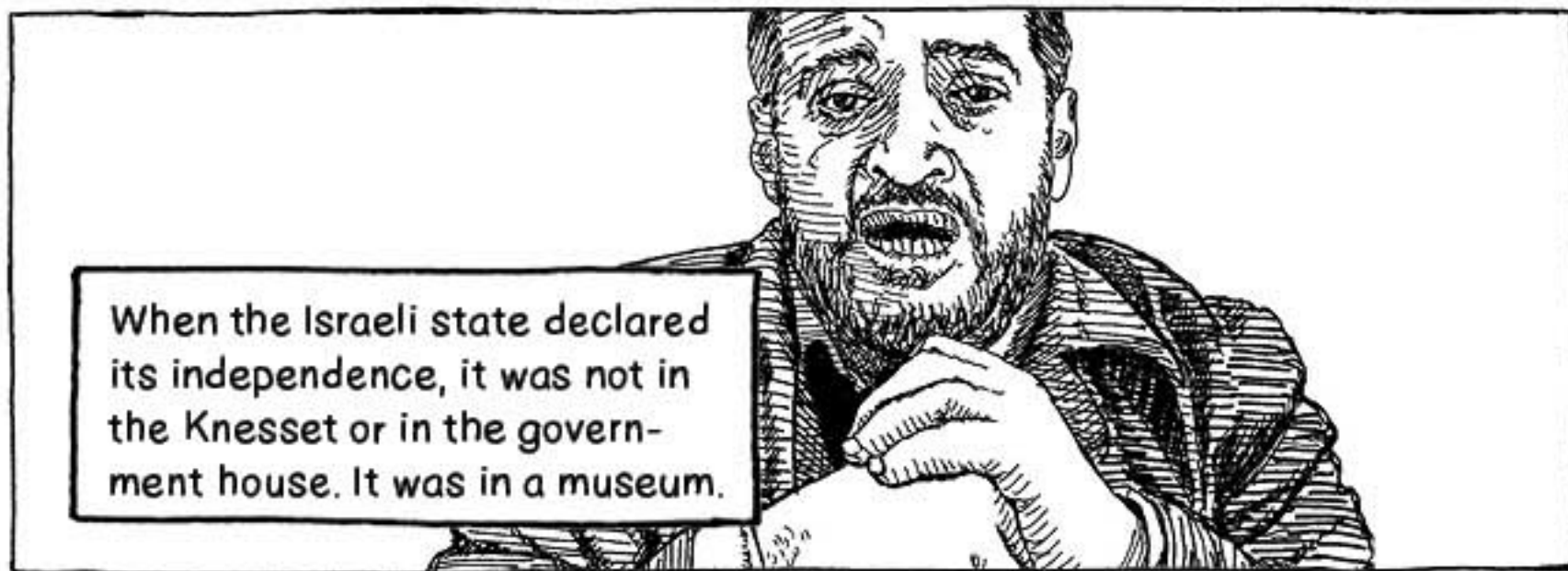
Who must be in charge of it? Who can take responsibility for protecting it, or shipping it?

THE ENCOUNTER
WITH MODERNITY





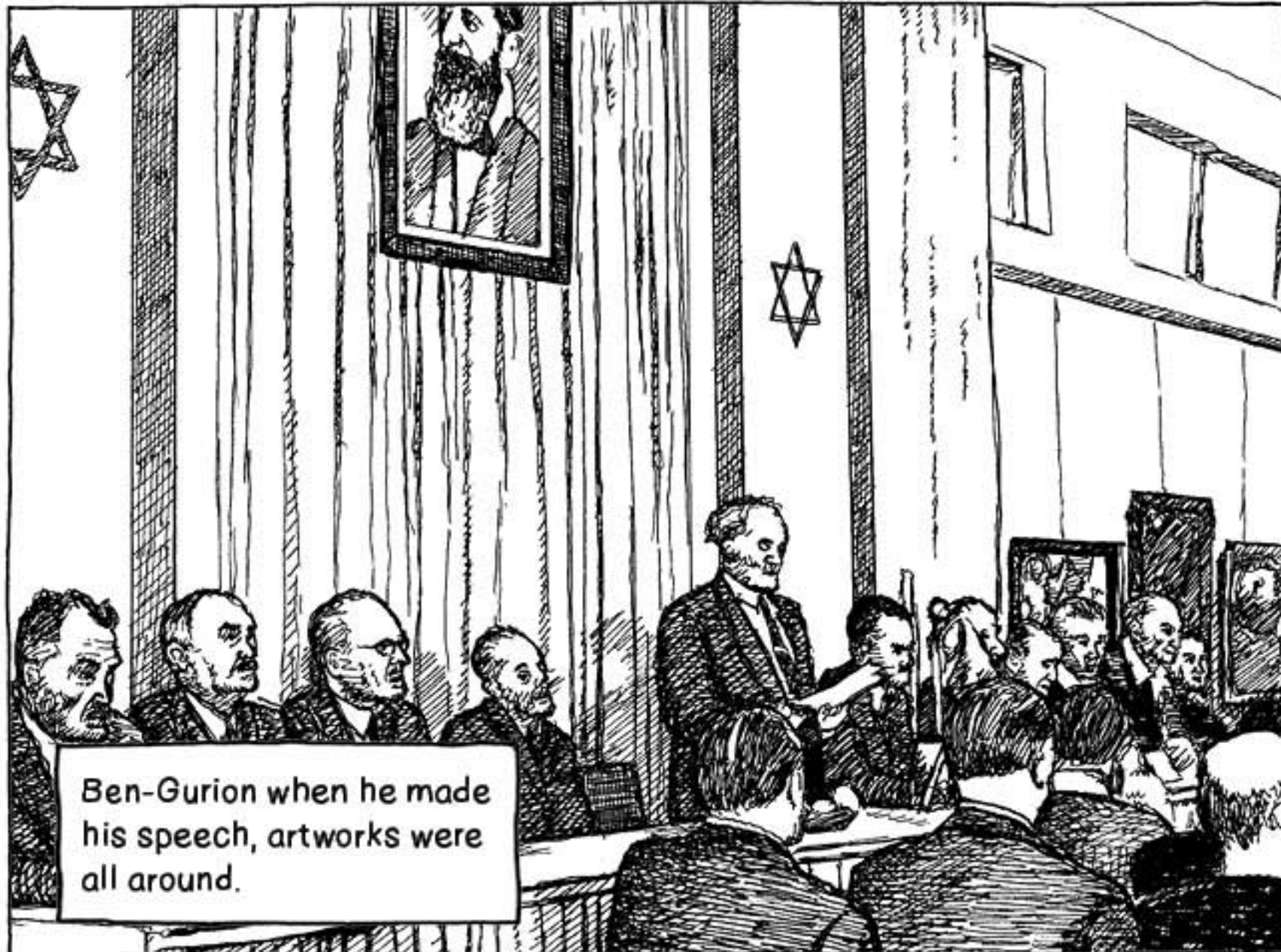
I mean, why should it be unusual to bring a Picasso to Palestine when just 15 kilometers away from Ramallah at the Israel Museum you can see nine Picassos?



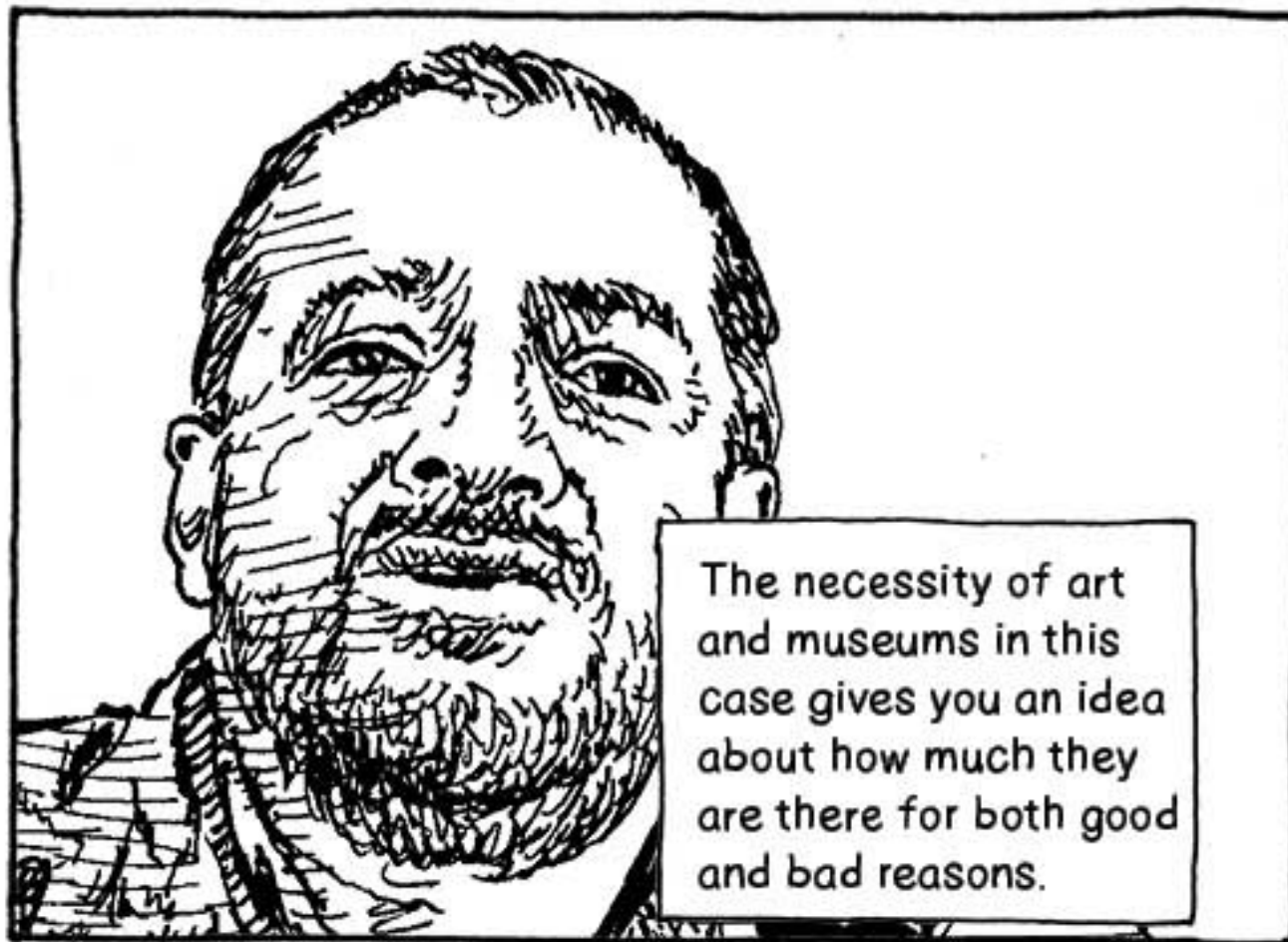
When the Israeli state declared its independence, it was not in the Knesset or in the government house. It was in a museum.



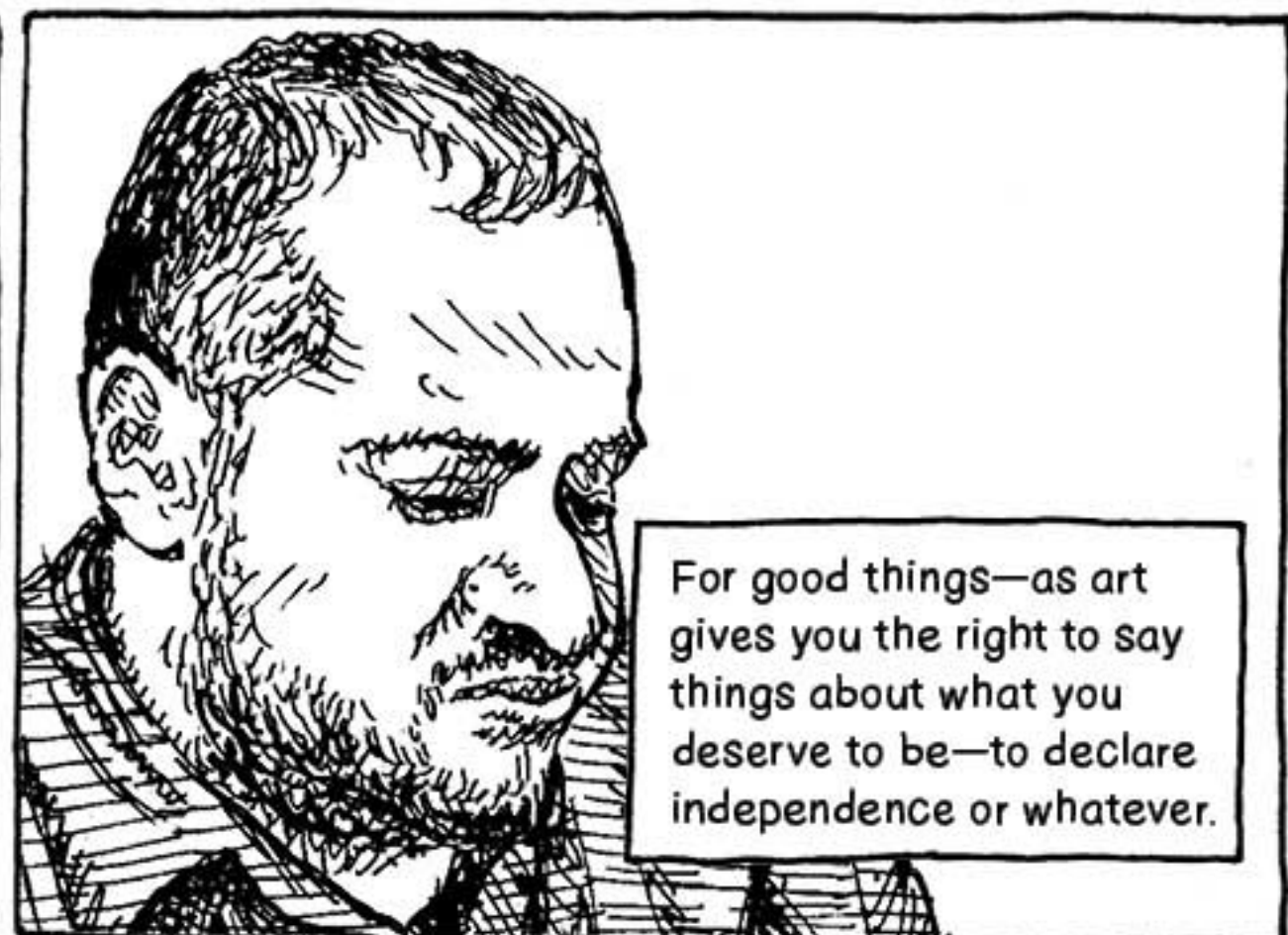
In between these international artists, big names, maybe Picasso was one of them. I'm not sure.



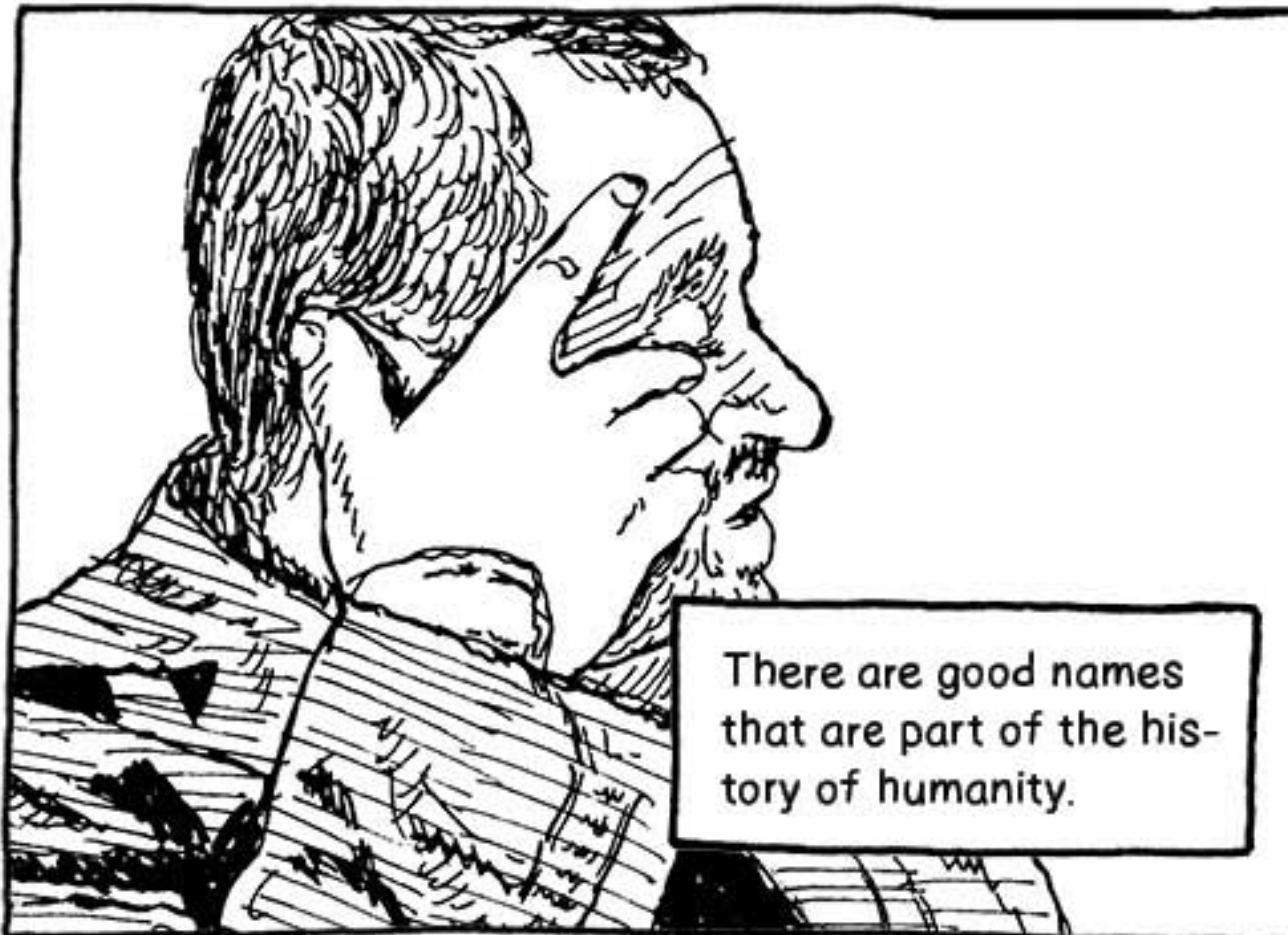
Ben-Gurion when he made his speech, artworks were all around.



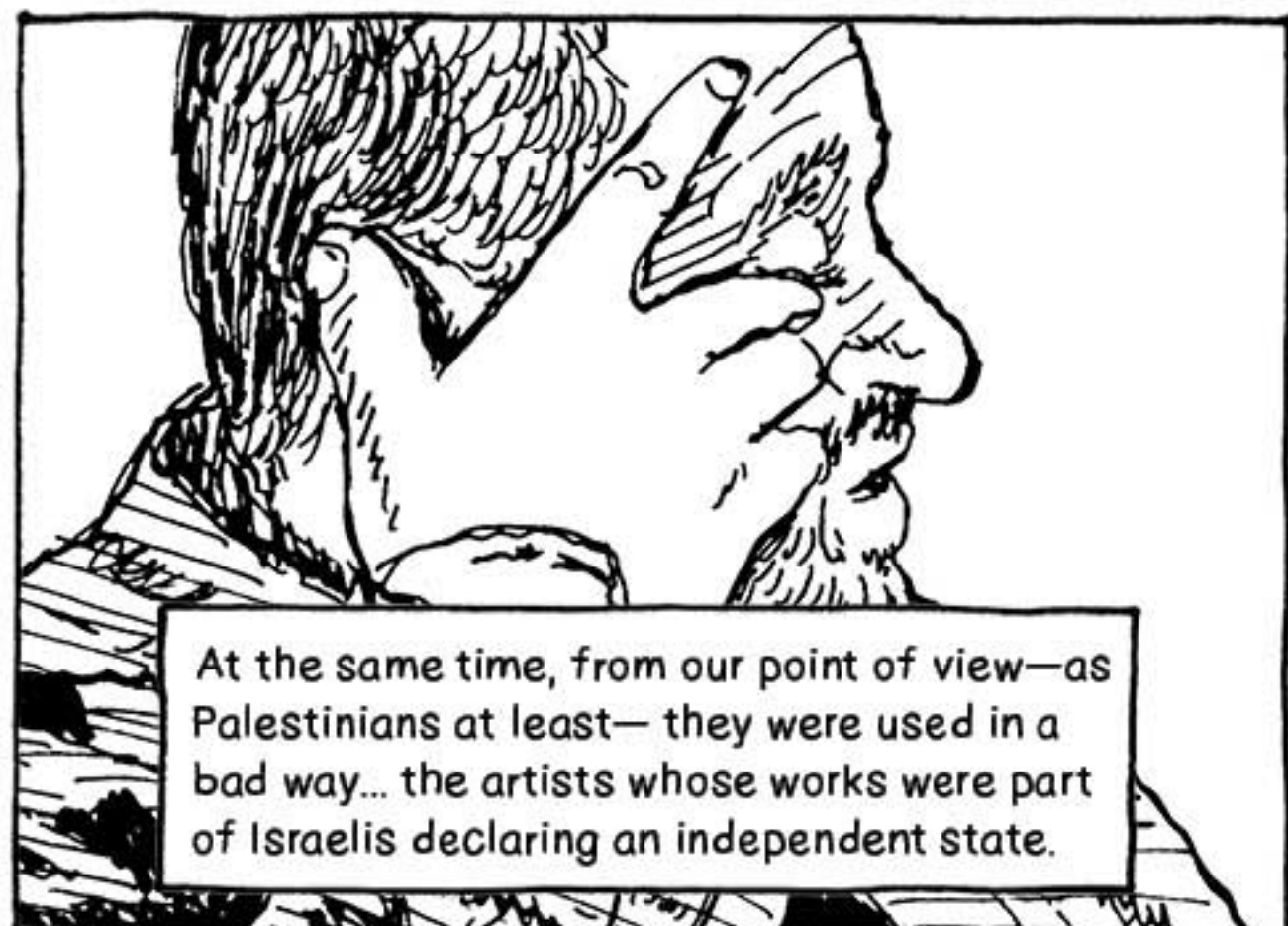
The necessity of art and museums in this case gives you an idea about how much they are there for both good and bad reasons.



For good things—as art gives you the right to say things about what you deserve to be—to declare independence or whatever.



There are good names that are part of the history of humanity.



At the same time, from our point of view—as Palestinians at least—they were used in a bad way... the artists whose works were part of Israelis declaring an independent state.

The state of Israel indeed was declared in a museum, but what exactly was hung on the walls is a different matter. Likely not works by well-known modernist painters, but rather, artists born in Israel or Holocaust survivors. As the legend has it, the day before the state was to be declared, the Israeli leadership approached Otte Wallisch—a Czech artist and graphic designer who had previously worked for the Jewish National Fund in Berlin and who had also designed a series of pre-independence stamps and banknotes—tasking him with



preparing the Tel Aviv Art Museum, a Bauhaus villa donated to the city by a former Tel Aviv mayor, for a signing ceremony. Like other aspects of Israel's founding, this episode is typically portrayed as shambolic, with Wallisch receiving a budget of a mere £150 to stage the ceremony. He located a dust-covered portrait of Theodore Herzl in the cellar of a Jewish institute. He also found two large, rather soiled Zionist flags. These were hung flanking Herzl's portrait, positioned behind the speaker's podium, after first being cleaned. Ringing the room, Wallisch hung paintings from the collection of the Tel Aviv Museum.

On the one hand, modernity as a bureaucratic structure of governance presumed to be transparent and readable to the society—a form of administration that organizes needs, as Henri Lefebvre said, and the means to fulfill them: and on the other, modernity as a collection of aesthetic artifacts in which historical modes of



pictorial representation are called into question, circulated through a market patronized by members of Europe's most liberal and cosmopolitan bourgeoisie, many of them Jewish, and many of whom, some years later, would begin to bequeath works to Israeli institutions.

To wit, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem now has 36 works by Picasso in its collection, most donated or on permanent loan from American or European Jewish collectors. This chronology should not obviate the fact that, historically, Israeli artists, architects, and designers had already aligned themselves with

European modernism, reinforcing the conception of Zionism as a hygienic reform, the aesthetic component of bringing civilization to the natives.

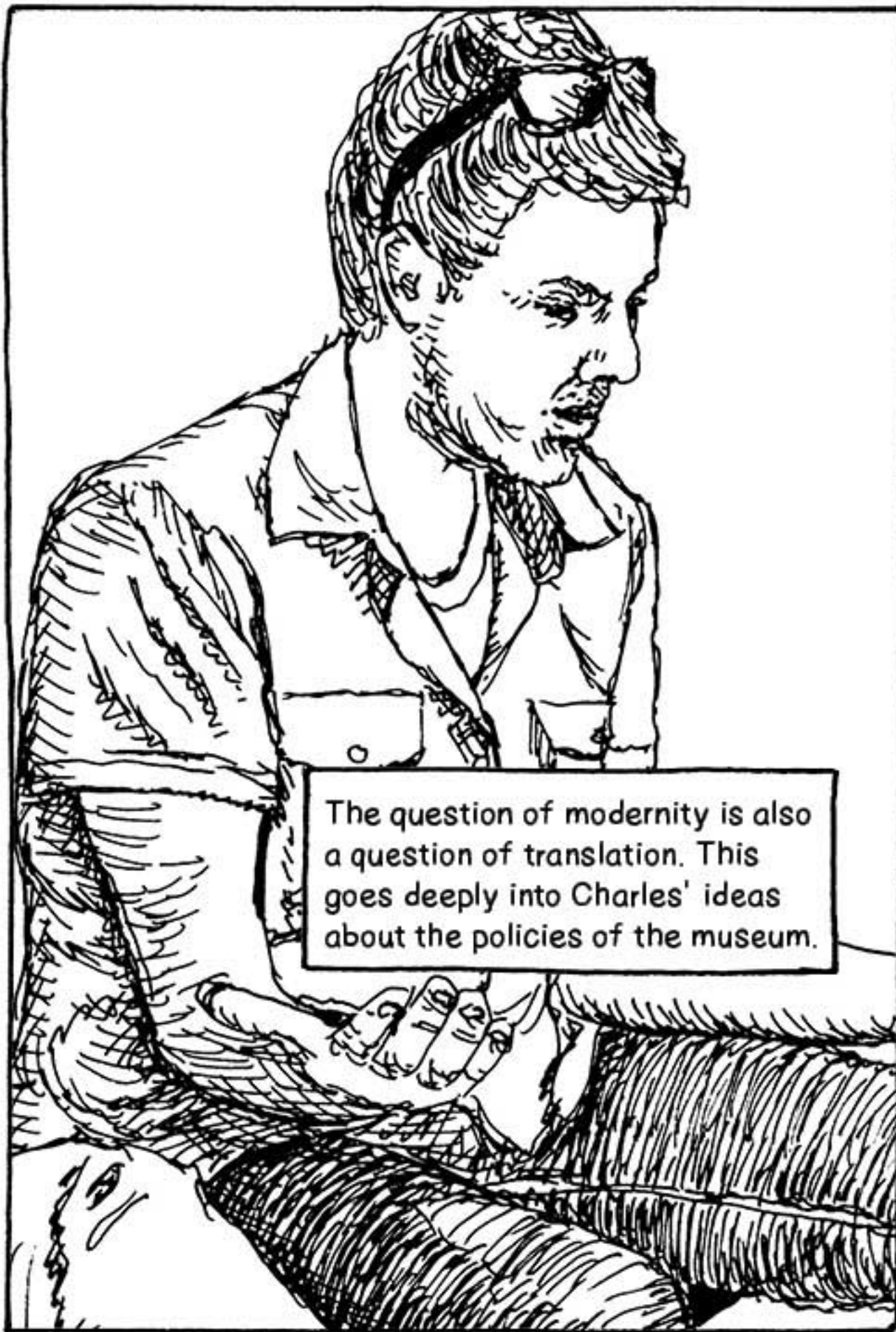
Whether the connection between the foundation of the State of Israel and modern art was purely coincidental, a result of happenstance and contingency or a deliberate alignment of the Israeli state with modernism and the modernist project is the wrong question to ask. It may not even be important if such a plan was in place or not. For even outside of contingency, the connection coheres with the ideology subsequently developed about what Israel is as a state and what kind of values it espouses in contradistinction to those attributed to its Arab neighbors: the former, a "modern," organized state where the functional, regulatory efficacy of bureaucratic institutions (bureaucracies being that other hallmark of modern society) maintains and ensures the state



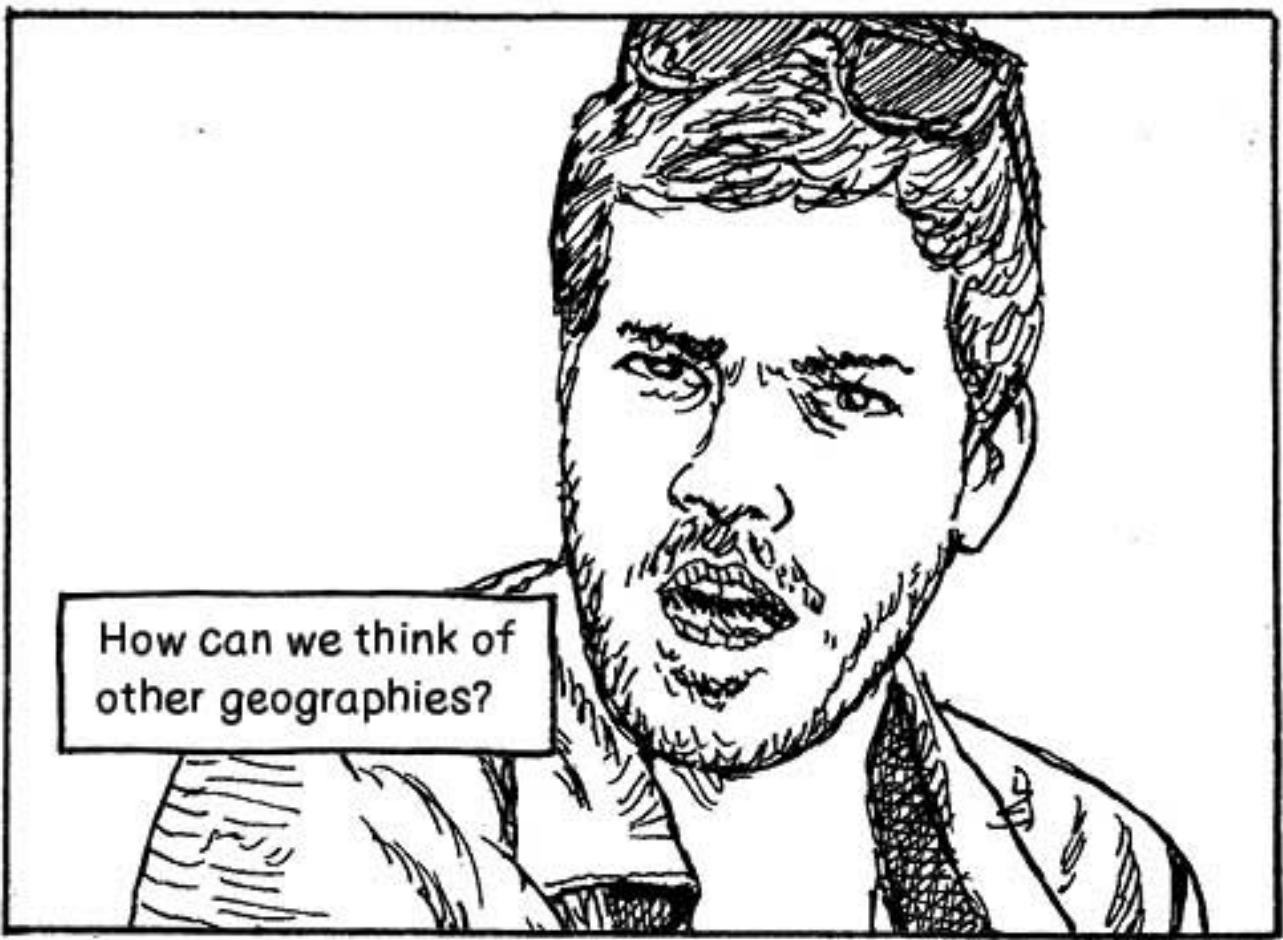


project, and where, even Palestinians living in Israel customarily concede that “things work.” Palestine, on the other hand, while hardly a state, is commonly characterized in different terms; by an organization of state power that remains opaque, a government characterized by inefficiency, disorganization, corruption.

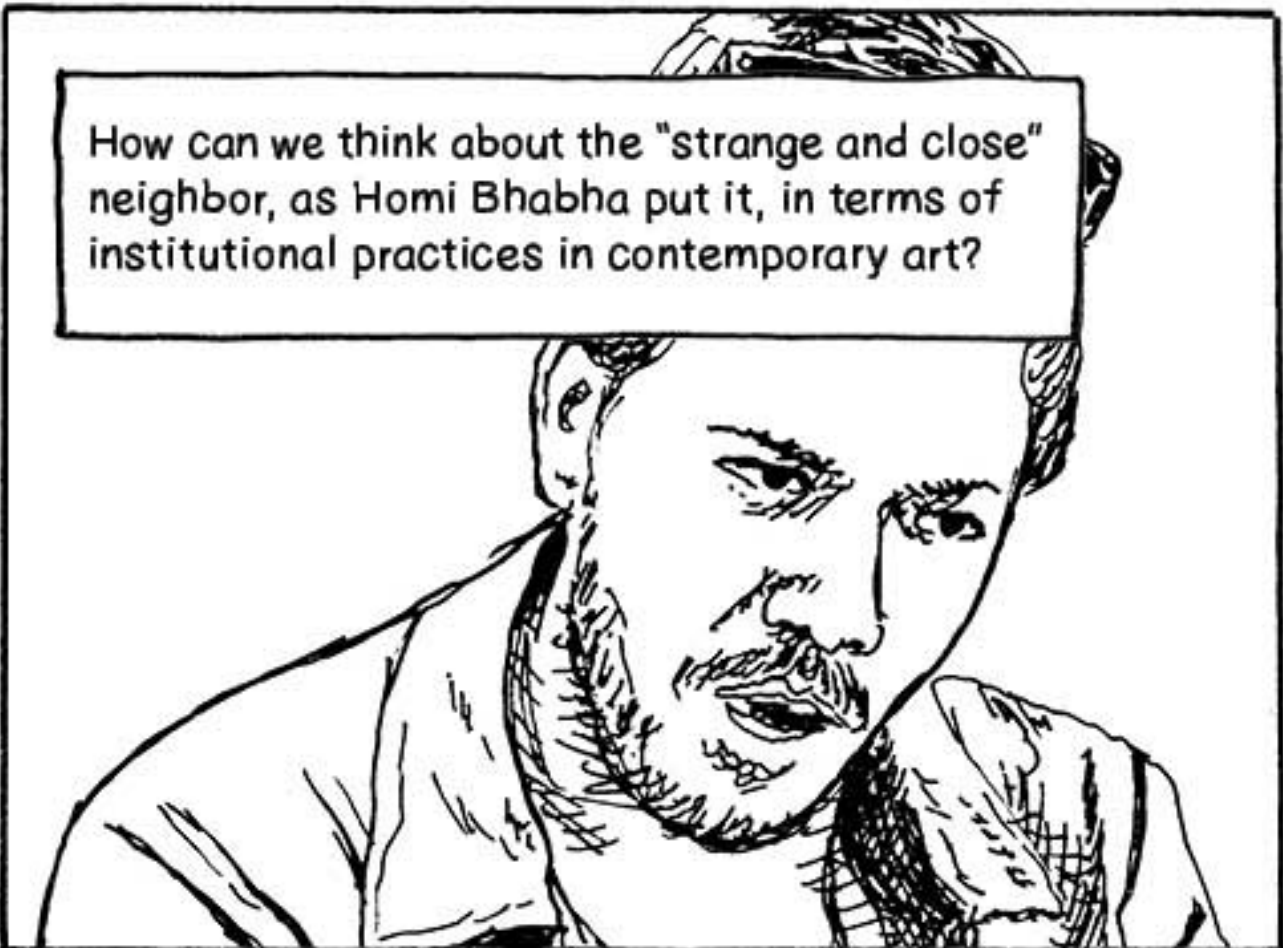
Without the notional link between the State of Israel and artistic modernism, there would be a weaker argument for bringing Picasso to present-day Ramallah. This is one piece in the puzzle—the declaration as precursor and prelude to our story. Another piece concerns how the residue of the notion of aura clings to both national movements and artistic pictures.



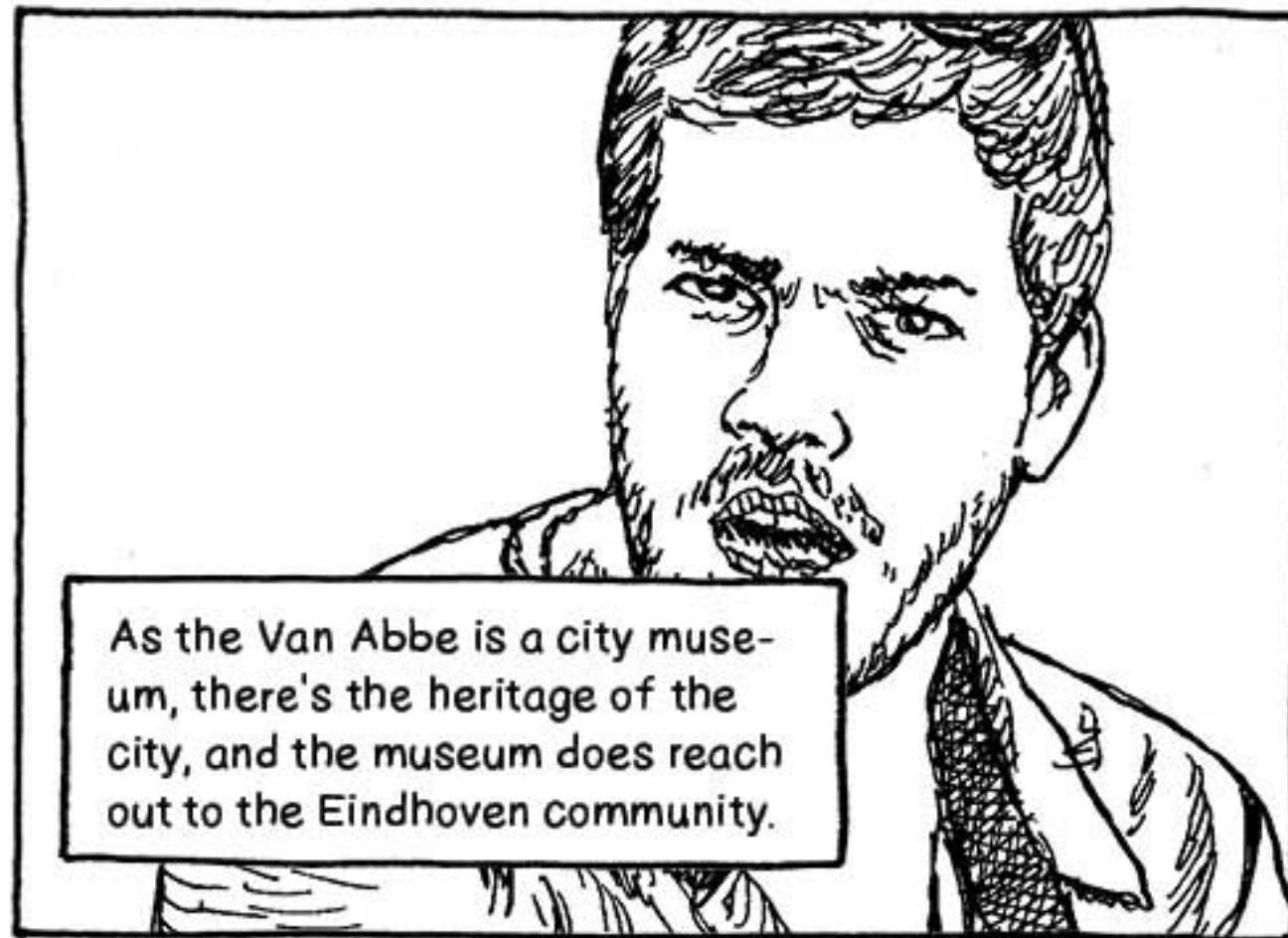
The question of modernity is also a question of translation. This goes deeply into Charles' ideas about the policies of the museum.



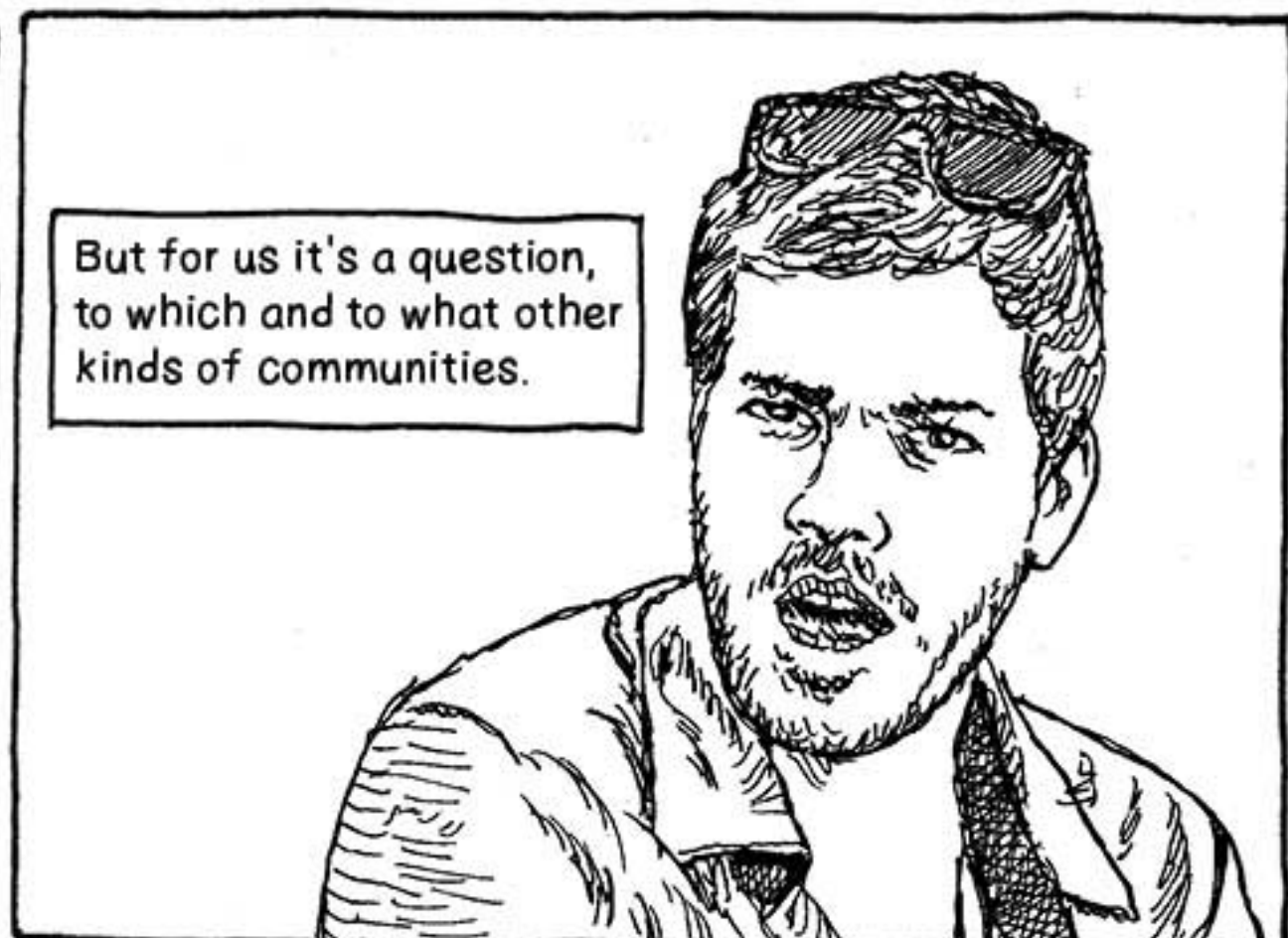
How can we think of other geographies?



How can we think about the "strange and close" neighbor, as Homi Bhabha put it, in terms of institutional practices in contemporary art?



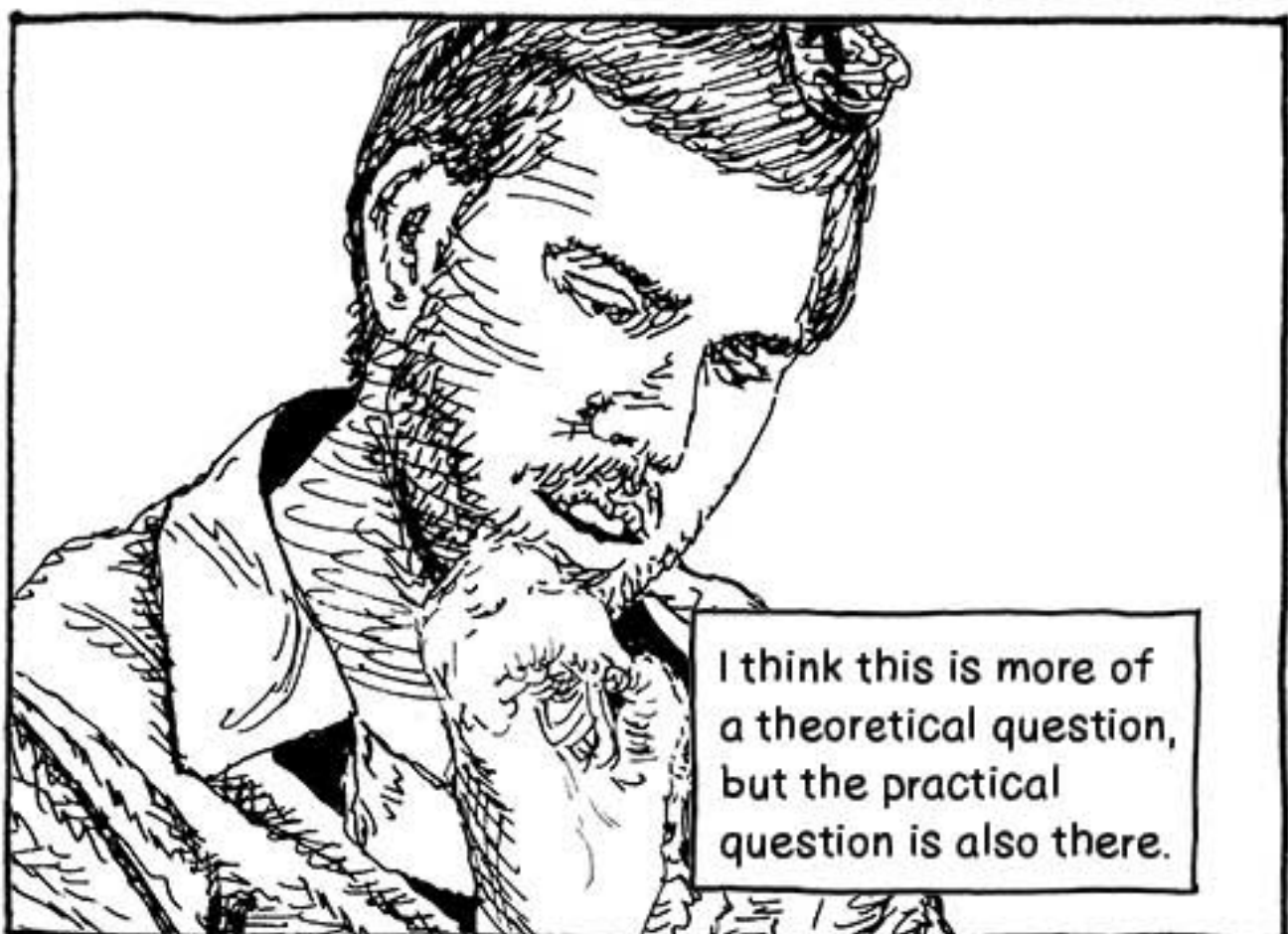
As the Van Abbe is a city museum, there's the heritage of the city, and the museum does reach out to the Eindhoven community.



But for us it's a question, to which and to what other kinds of communities.

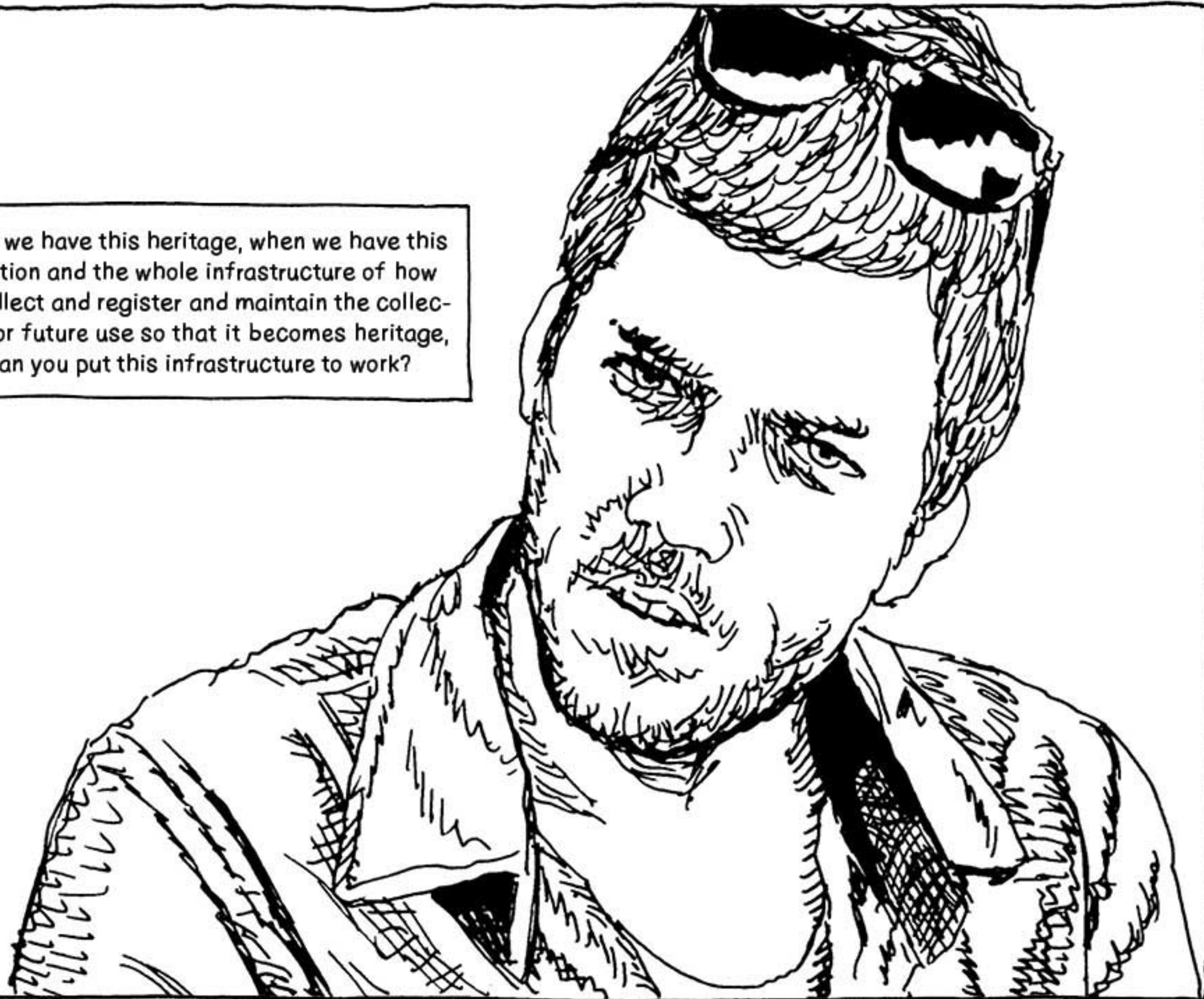


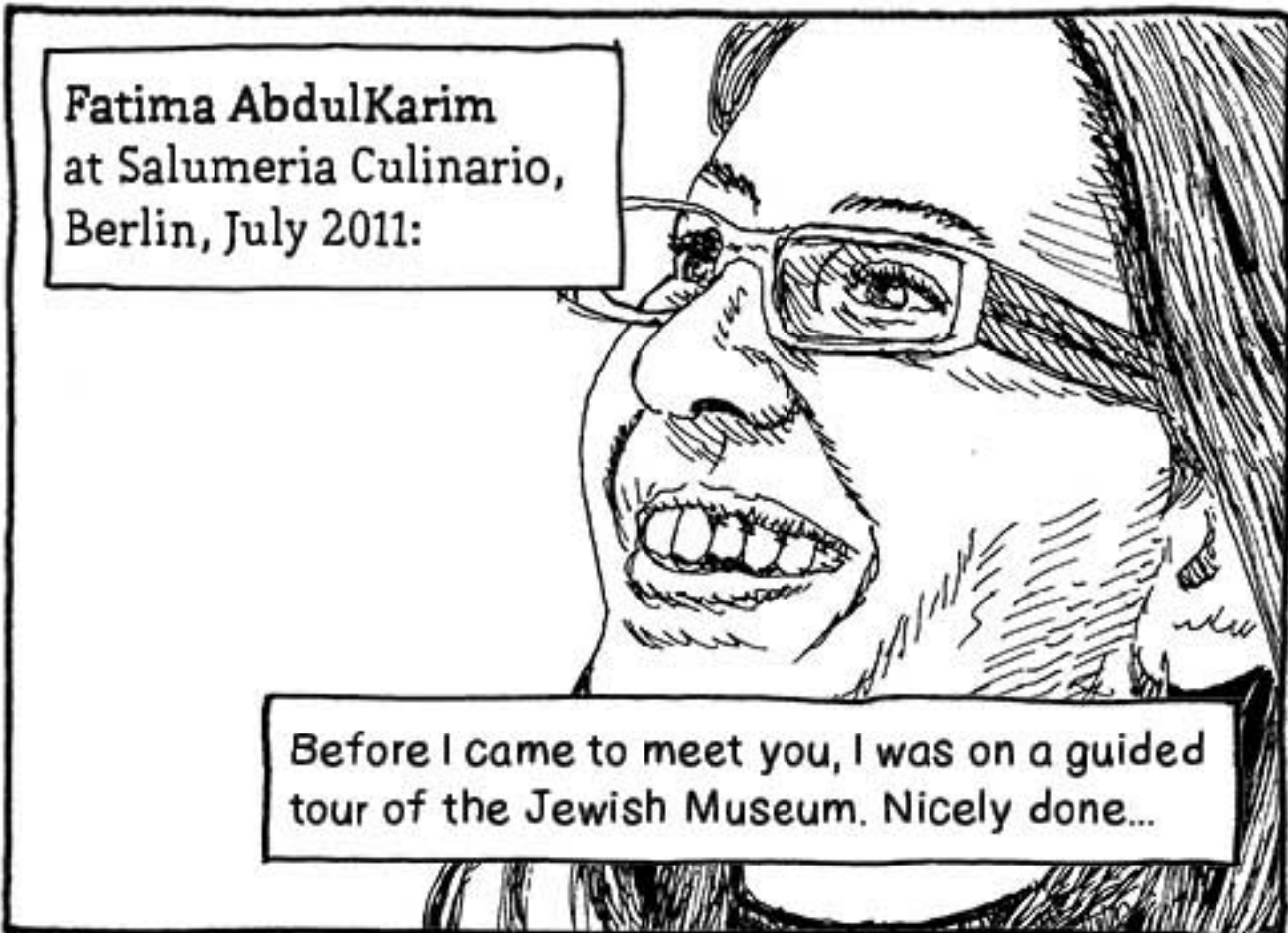
Is it only Eindhoven? Is it only the Dutch? For whom are our exhibitions relevant?



I think this is more of a theoretical question, but the practical question is also there.


When we have this heritage, when we have this collection and the whole infrastructure of how we collect and register and maintain the collection for future use so that it becomes heritage, how can you put this infrastructure to work?






Fatima AbdulKarim
at Salumeria Culinario,
Berlin, July 2011:

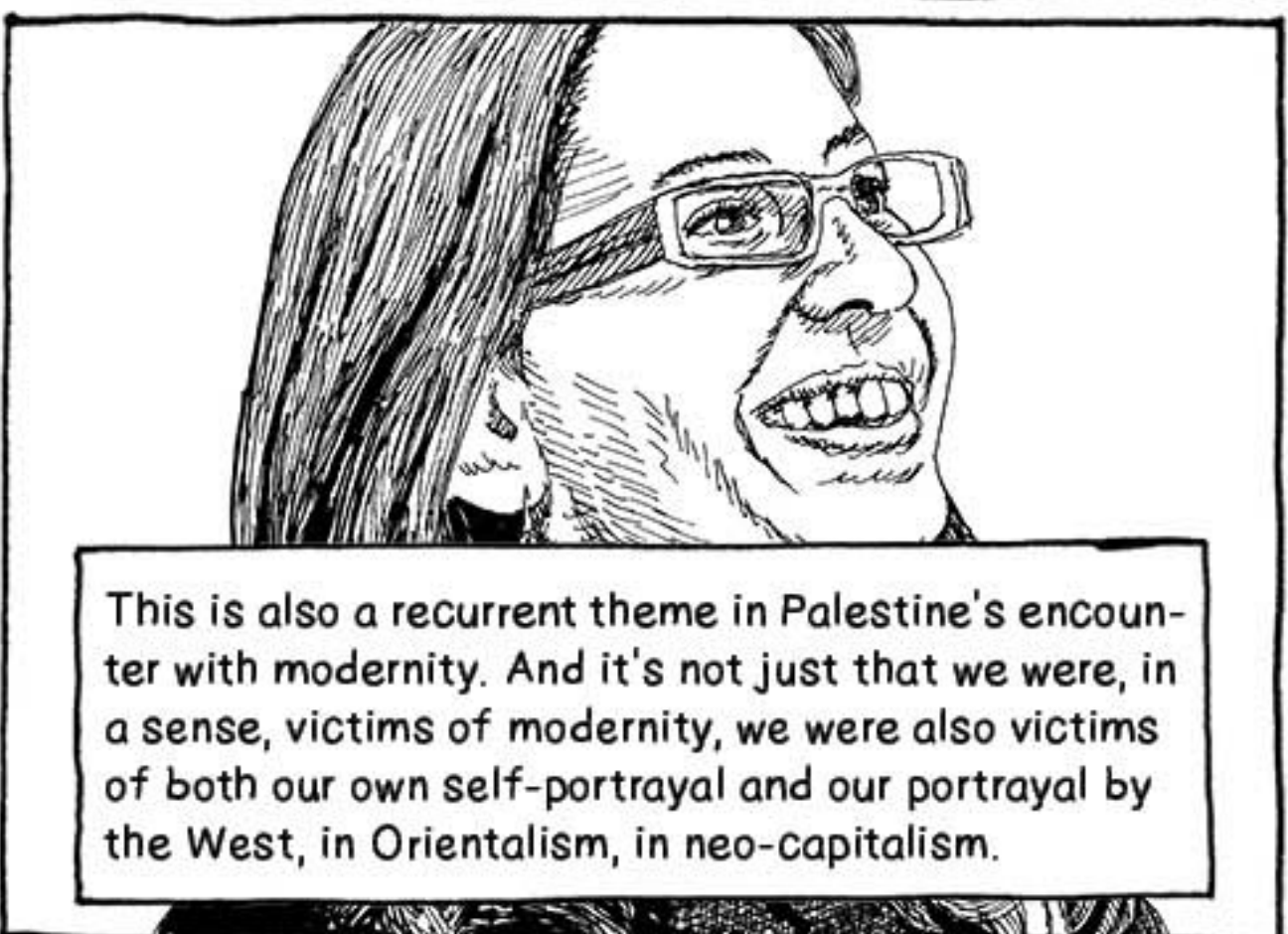
Before I came to meet you, I was on a guided
tour of the Jewish Museum. Nicely done...



Actually, not nicely. I know a lot
more of Jewish history than was
said or what I saw in front of me.



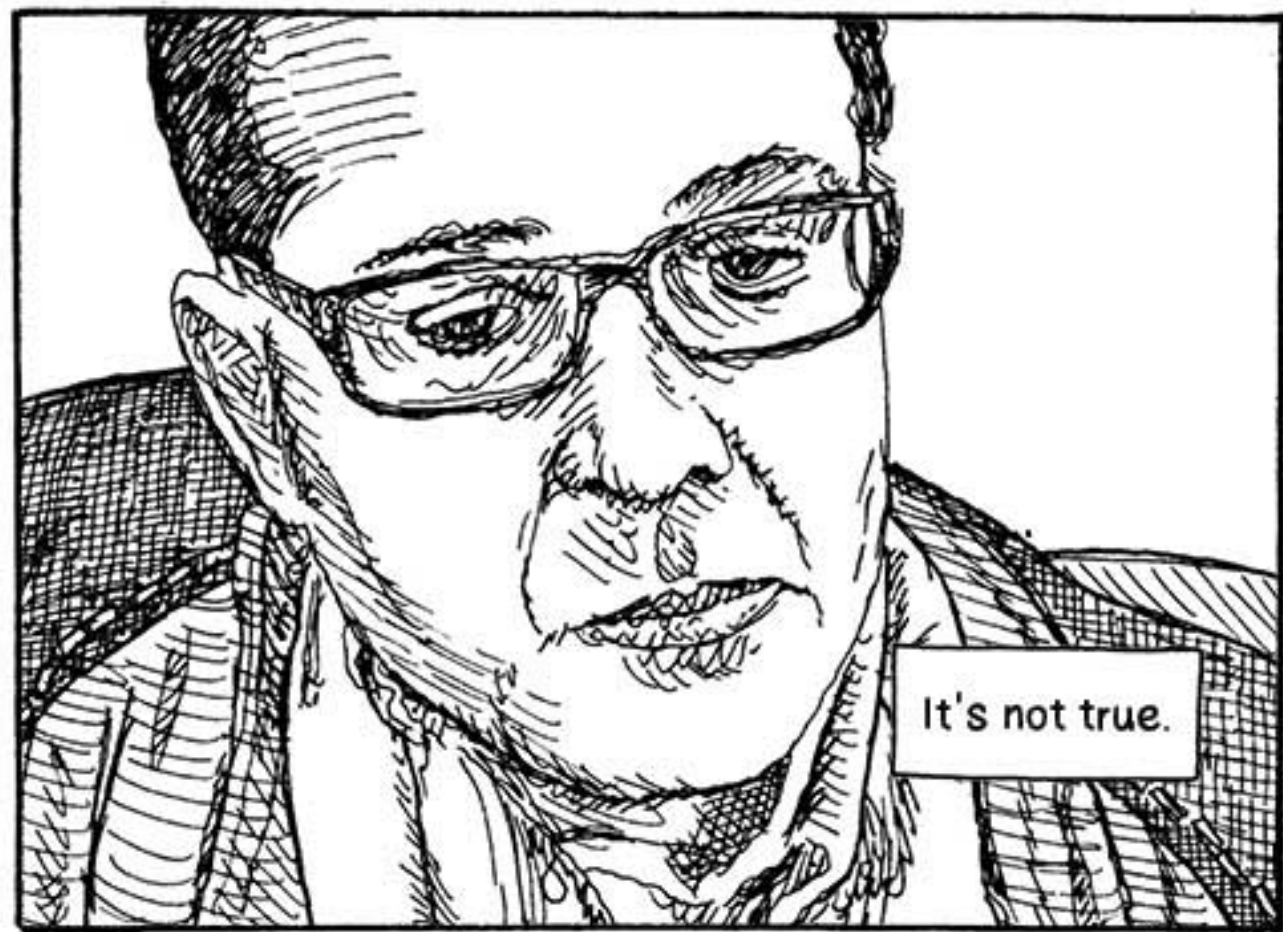
And the thing is, my only relation-
ship with that museum is that I'm
Palestinian: I was nowhere inside.



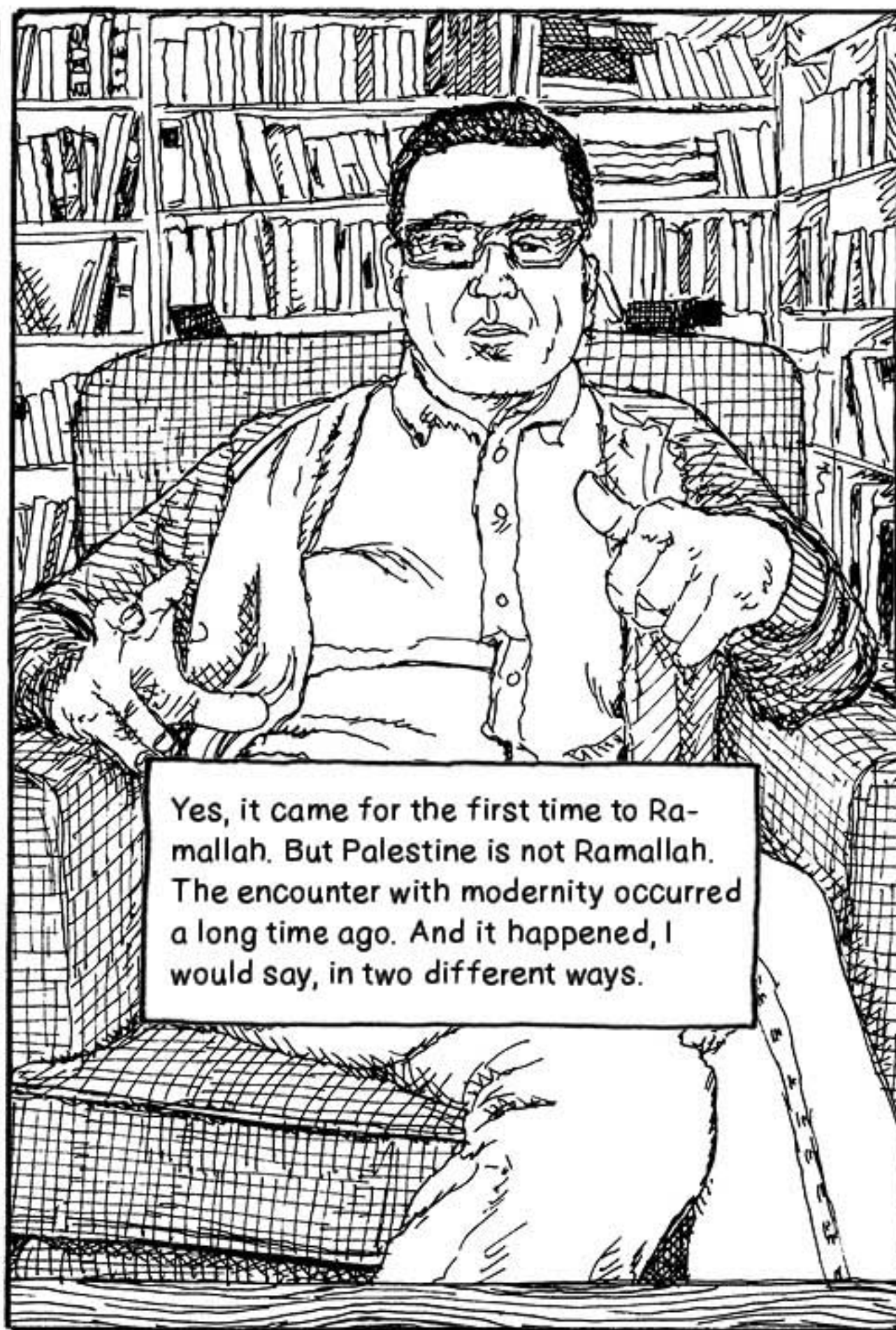
This is also a recurrent theme in Palestine's encoun-
ter with modernity. And it's not just that we were, in
a sense, victims of modernity, we were also victims
of both our own self-portrayal and our portrayal by
the West, in Orientalism, in neo-capitalism.



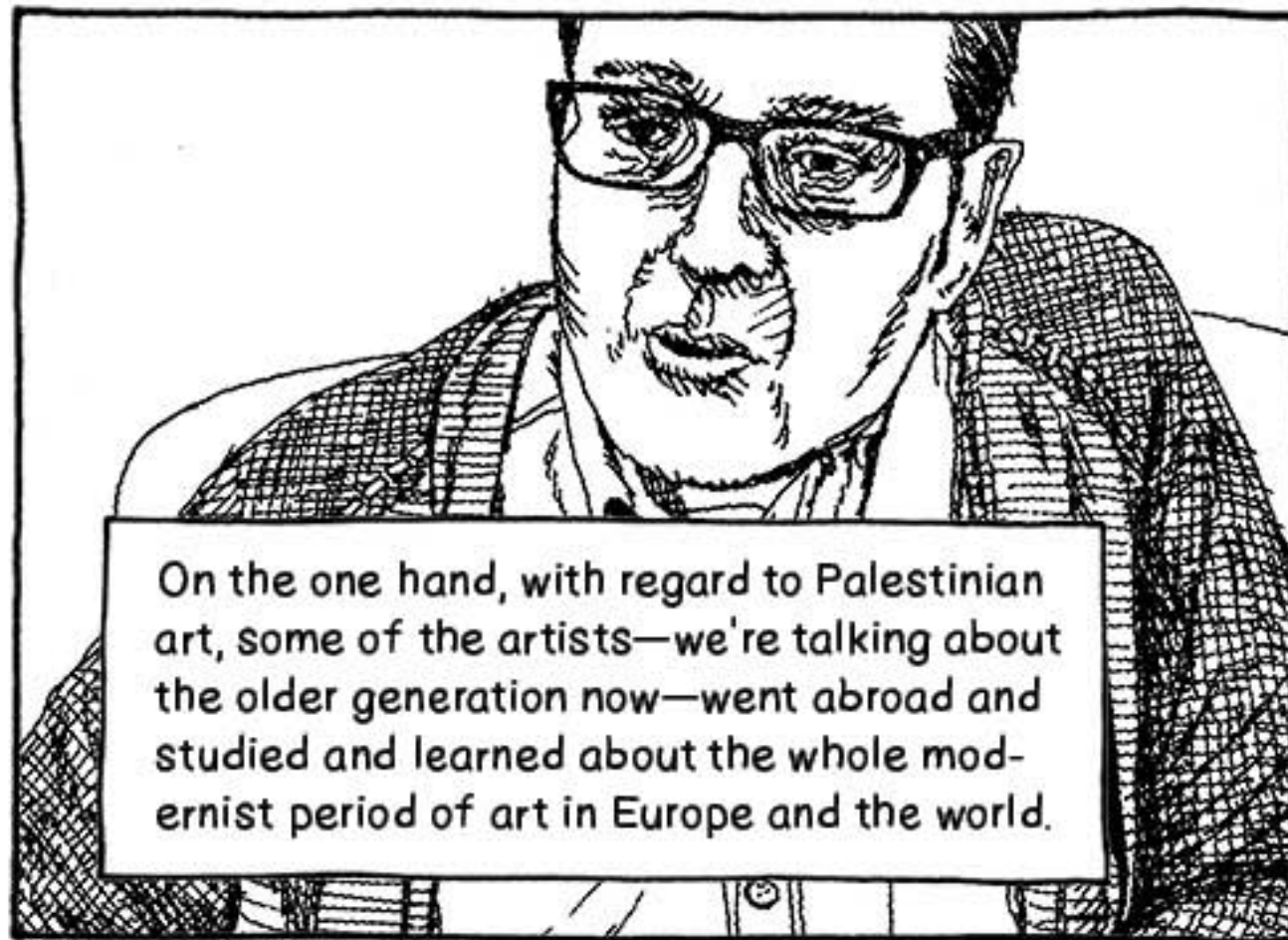
You know, this bringing of a Picasso here is not something that happened for the first time in Palestine.



It's not true.



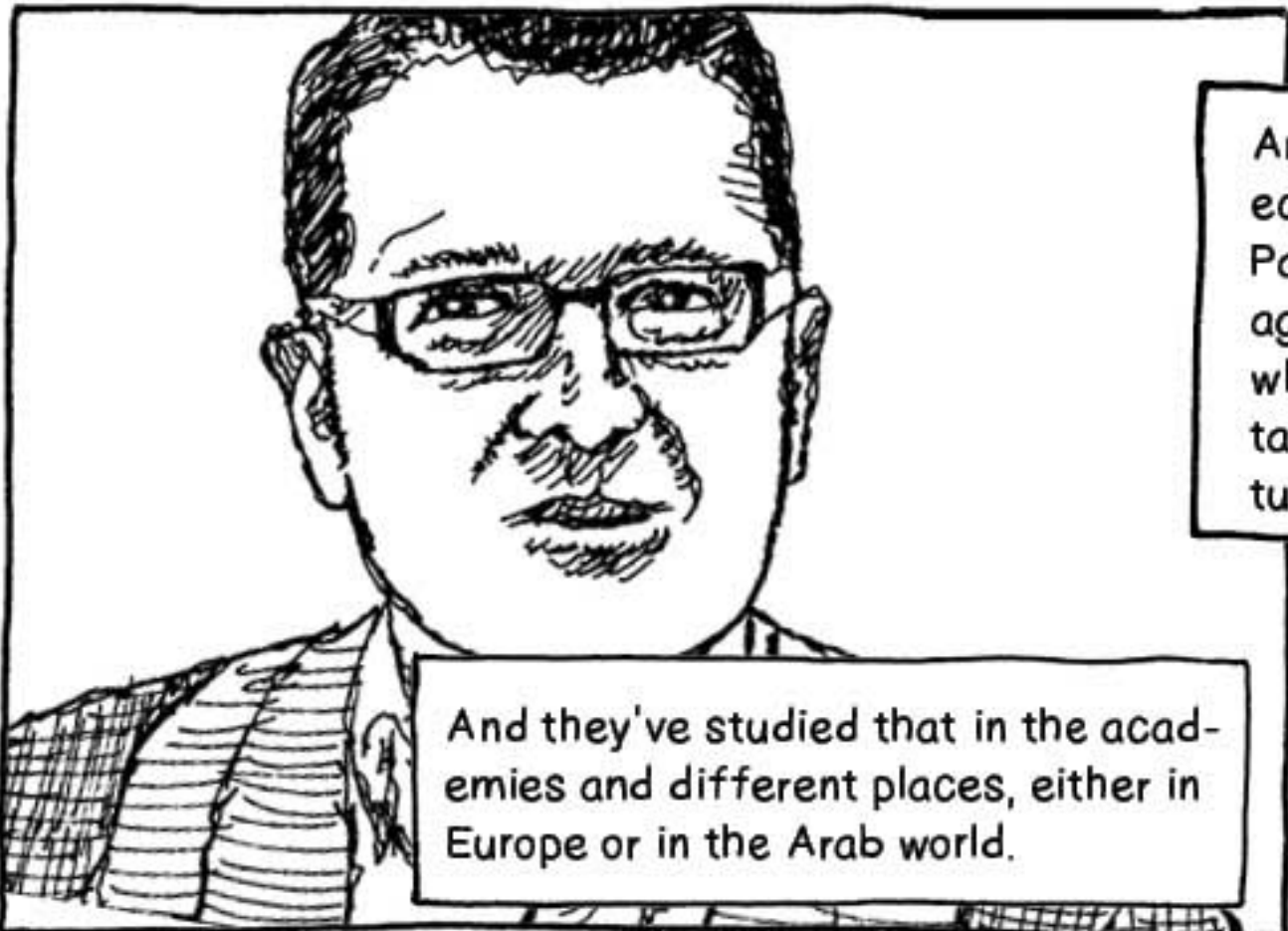
Yes, it came for the first time to Ramallah. But Palestine is not Ramallah. The encounter with modernity occurred a long time ago. And it happened, I would say, in two different ways.



On the one hand, with regard to Palestinian art, some of the artists—we're talking about the older generation now—went abroad and studied and learned about the whole modernist period of art in Europe and the world.



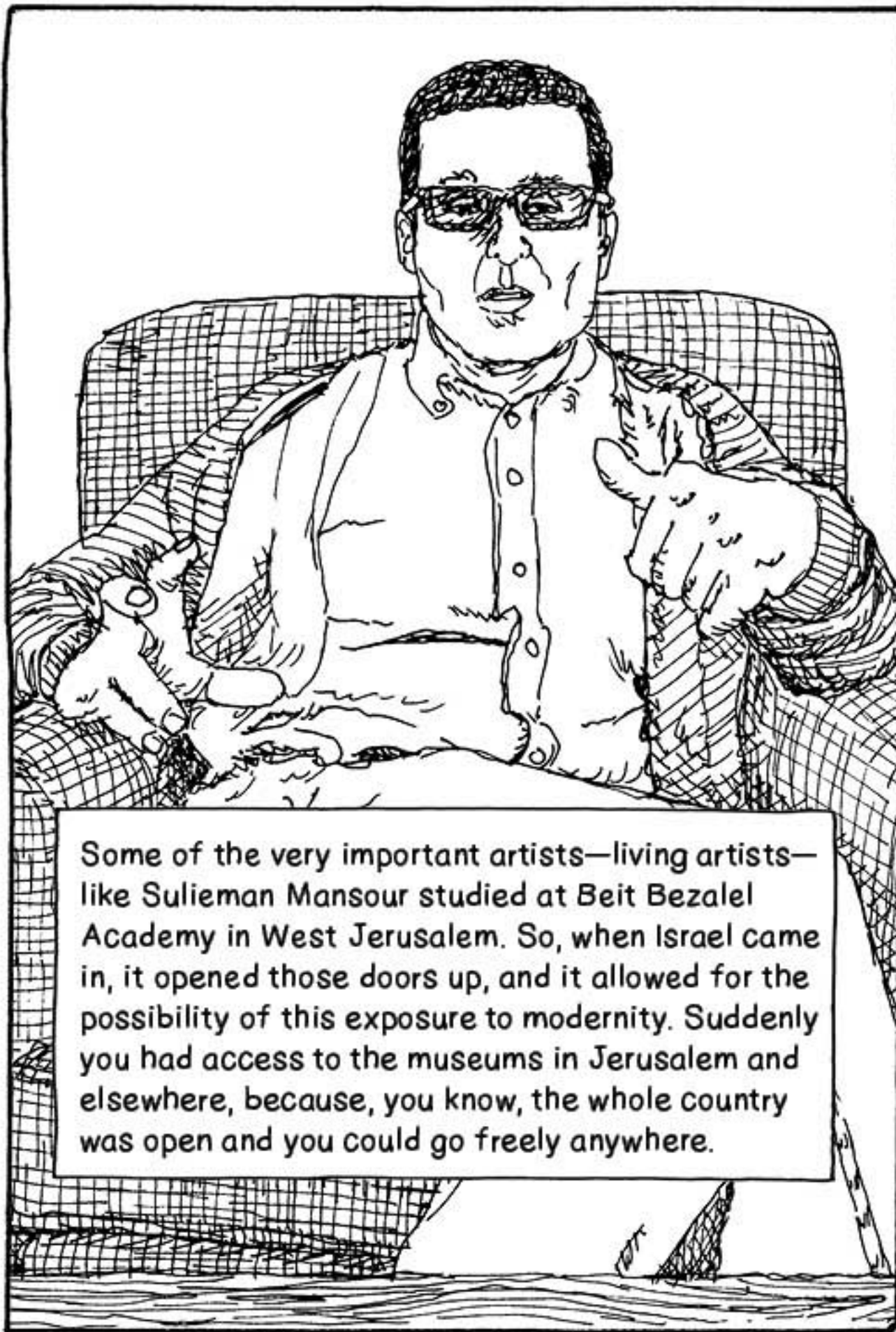
And they encountered Picassos and Matisses and everything.



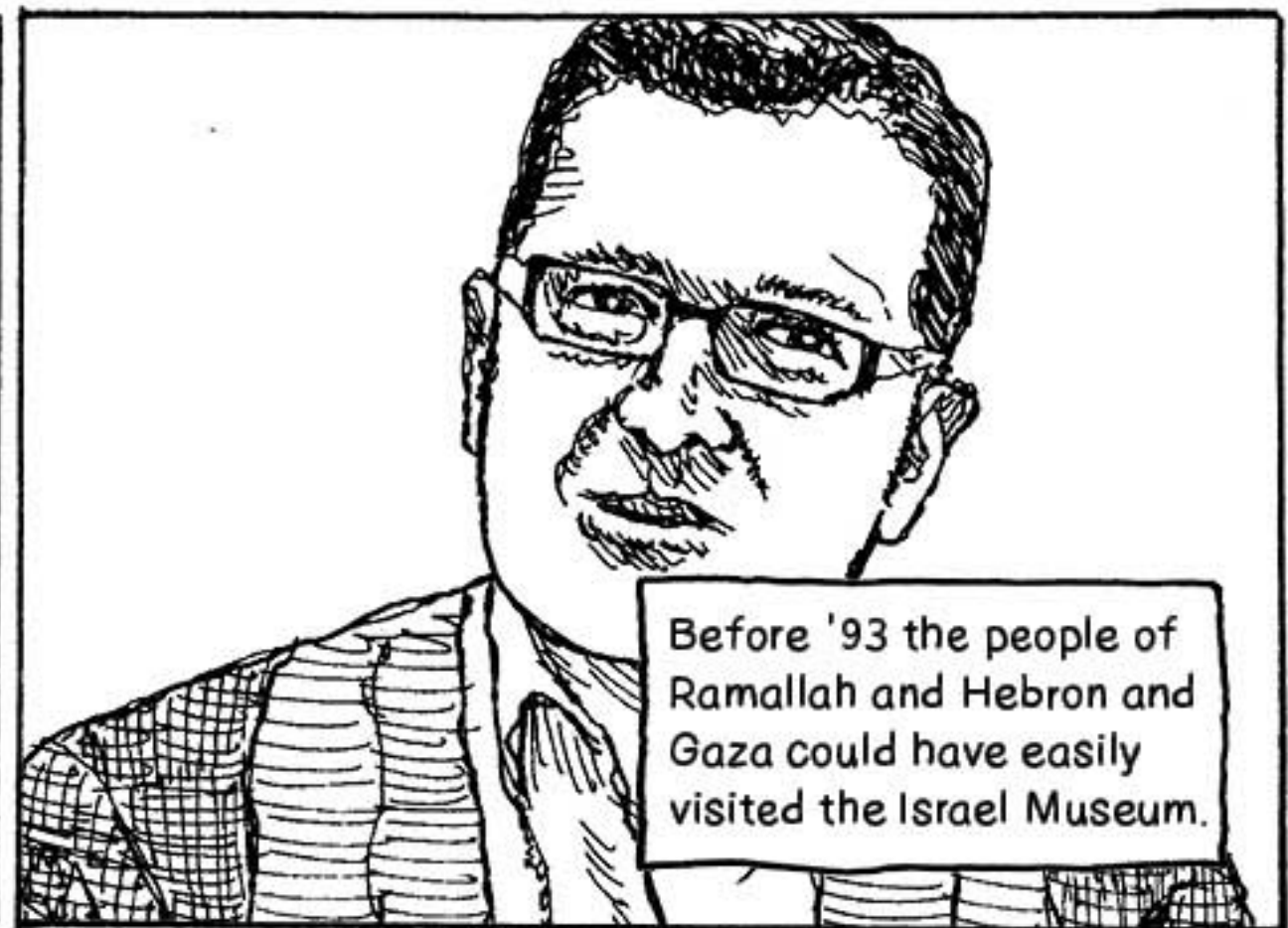
And they've studied that in the academies and different places, either in Europe or in the Arab world.



And on the other side of this equation, I daresay after '67 Palestine was also somehow aggressively invaded by Israelis who brought with them a certain exposure to European culture and modernity.



Some of the very important artists—living artists—like Sulieman Mansour studied at Beit Bezalel Academy in West Jerusalem. So, when Israel came in, it opened those doors up, and it allowed for the possibility of this exposure to modernity. Suddenly you had access to the museums in Jerusalem and elsewhere, because, you know, the whole country was open and you could go freely anywhere.



Before '93 the people of Ramallah and Hebron and Gaza could have easily visited the Israel Museum.



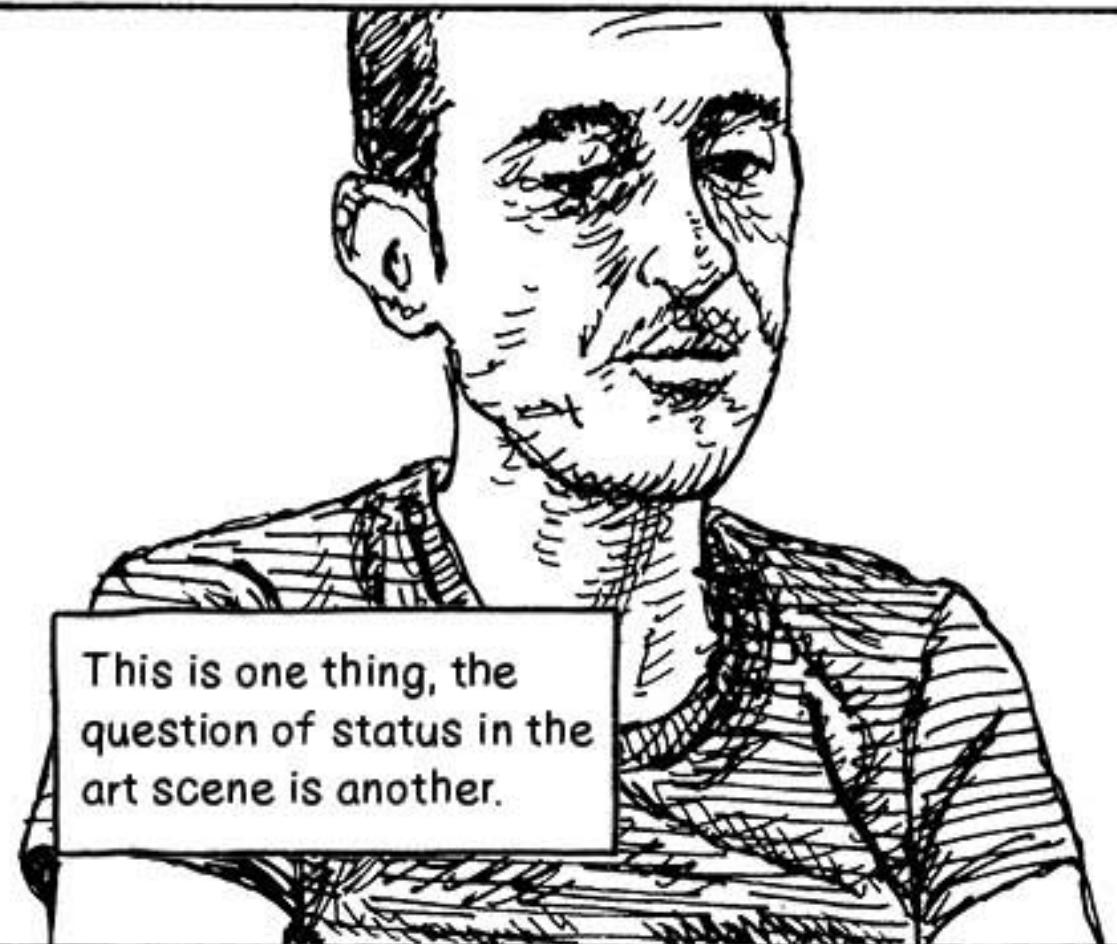
Everybody traded and worked in Israel and did all sorts of things, why not go to the museum? They have a pretty good collection there.

Yazid Anani, courtyard of
Beit Anisa, Ramallah,
February 2012:

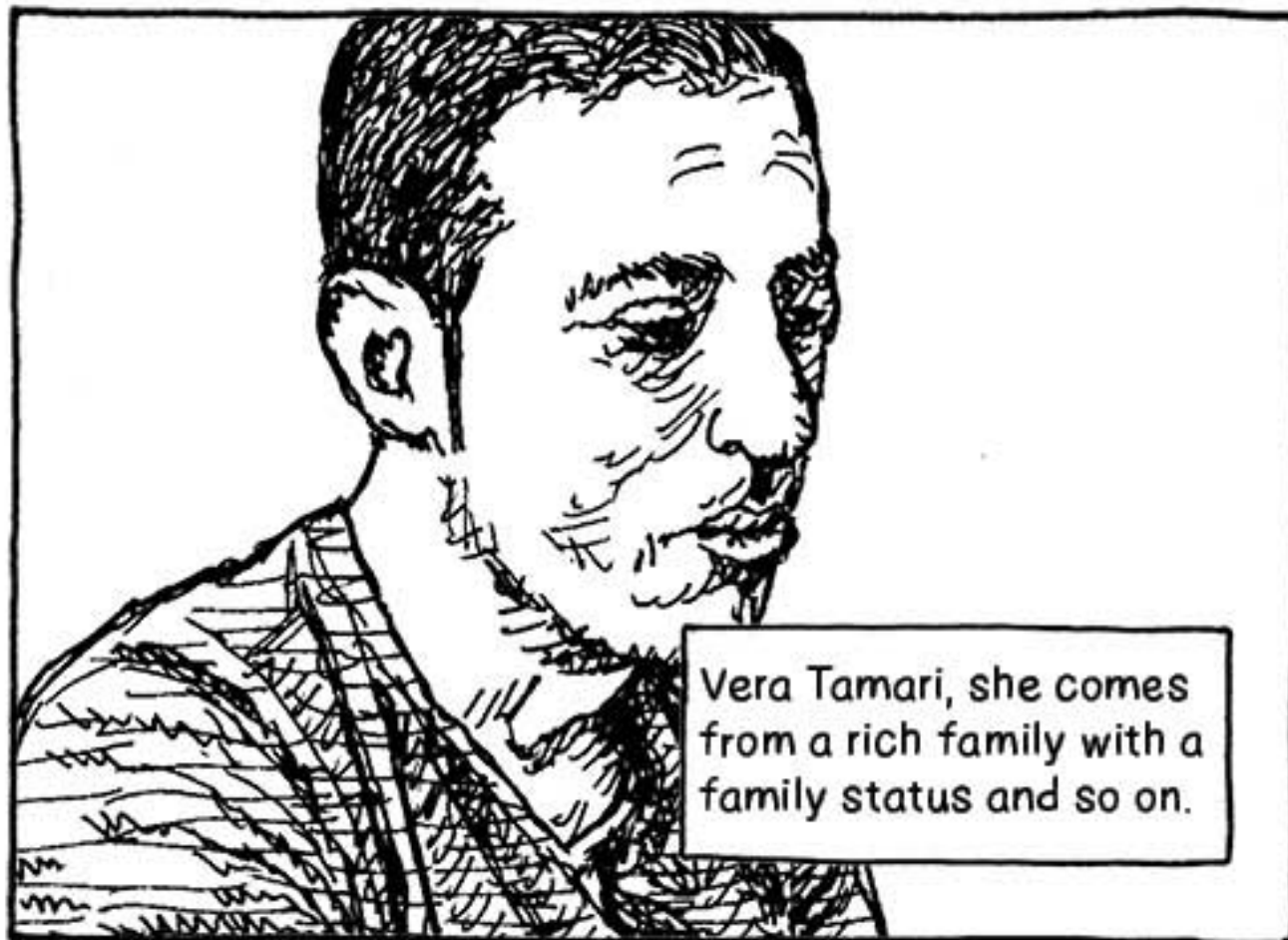
Maybe Jack was really going with
his family. Then you have to really
look at the social classes at that
time. My father is coming from a
village and he's an artist.



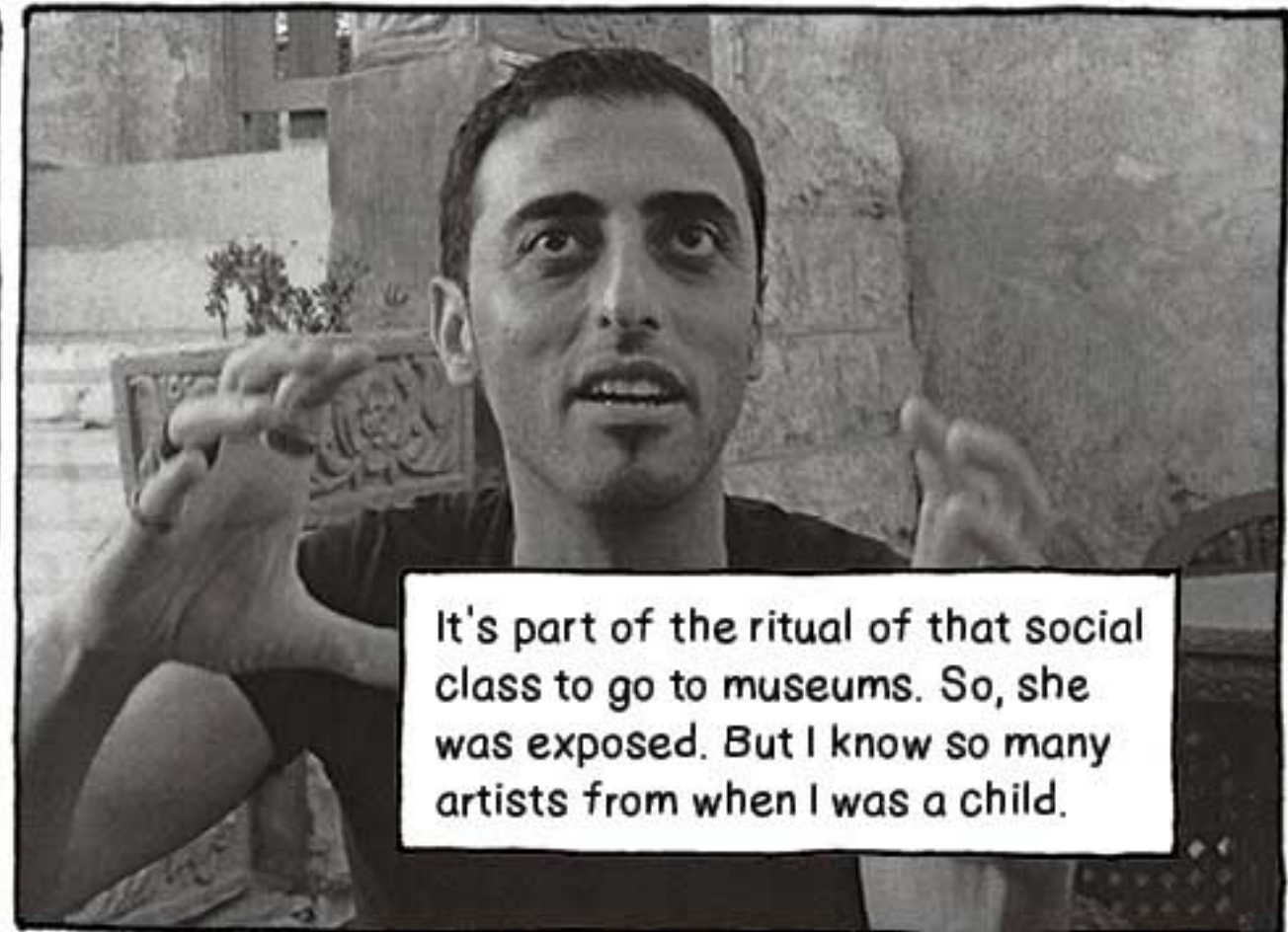
I don't think he was into going to
museums. So, what kind of art,
what kind of social class are you
talking about at that time?



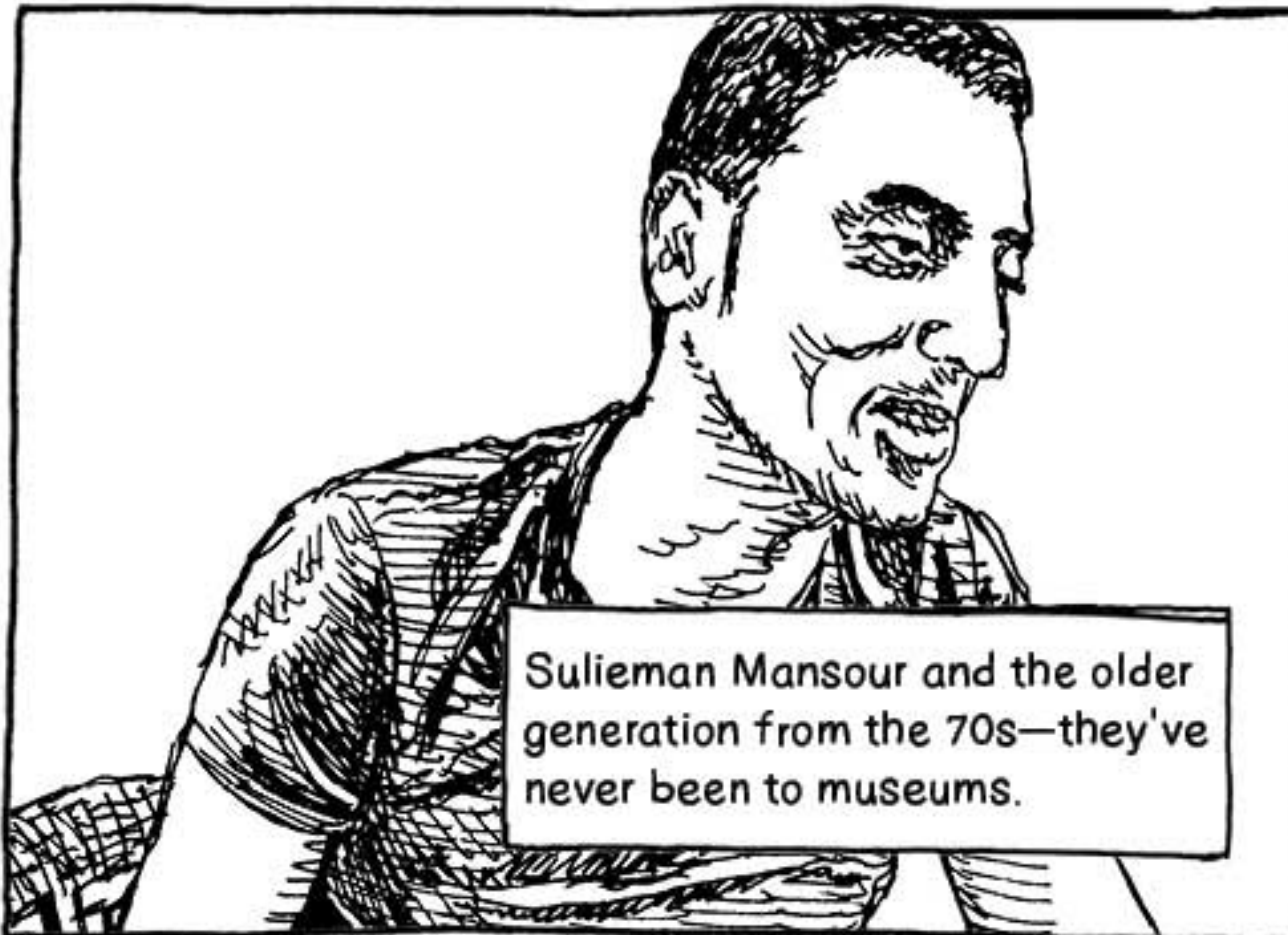
This is one thing, the
question of status in the
art scene is another.



Vera Tamari, she comes from a rich family with a family status and so on.



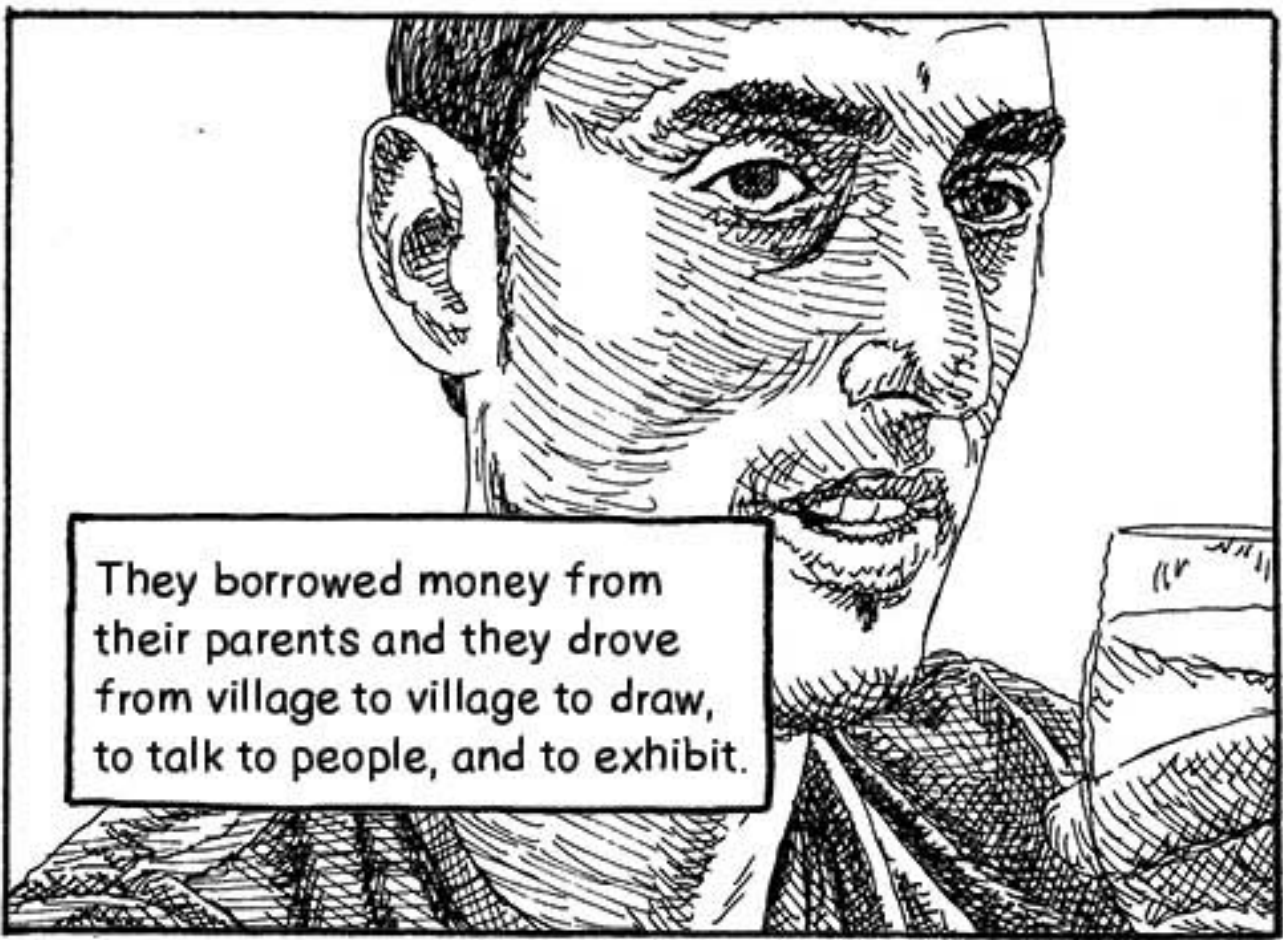
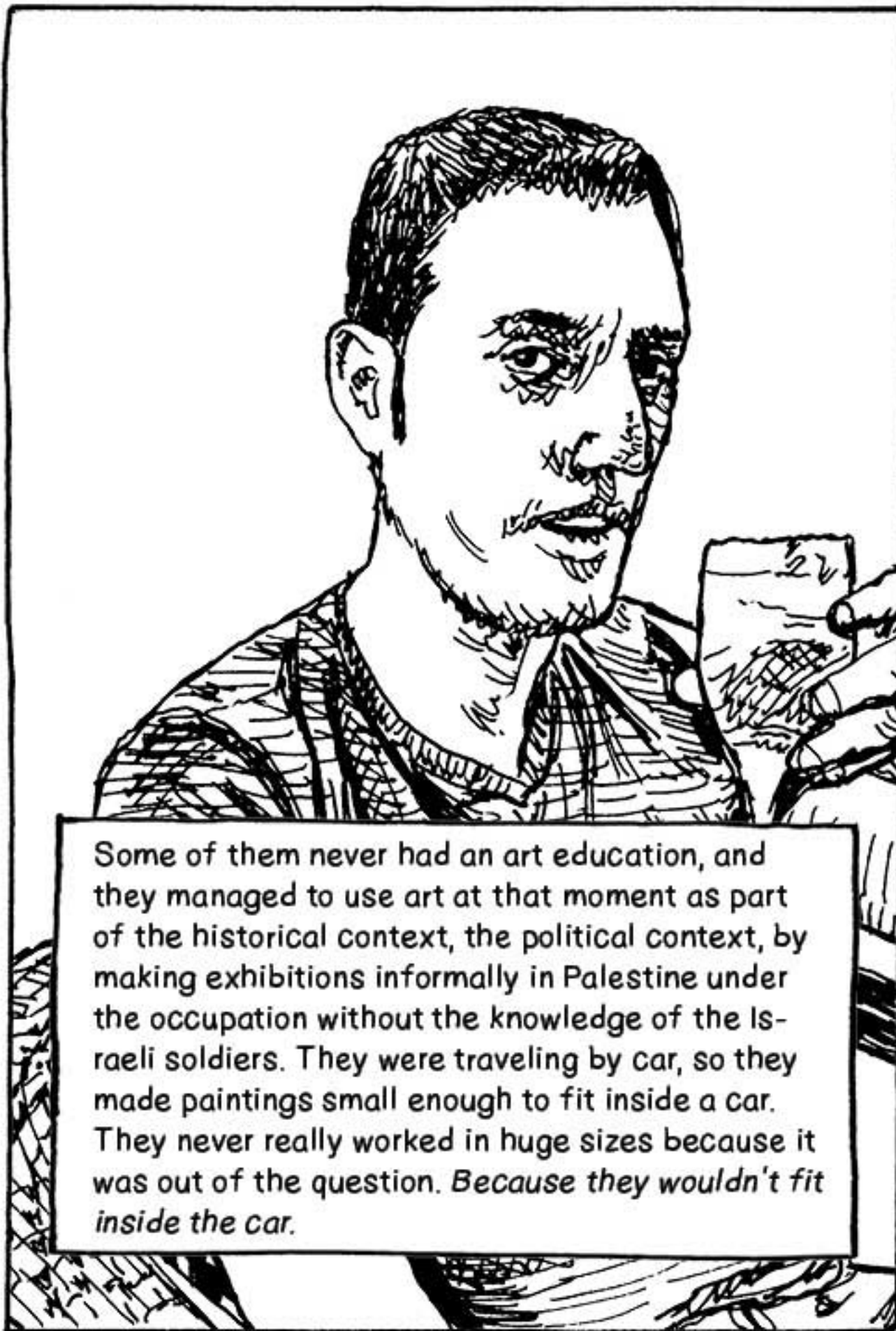
It's part of the ritual of that social class to go to museums. So, she was exposed. But I know so many artists from when I was a child.



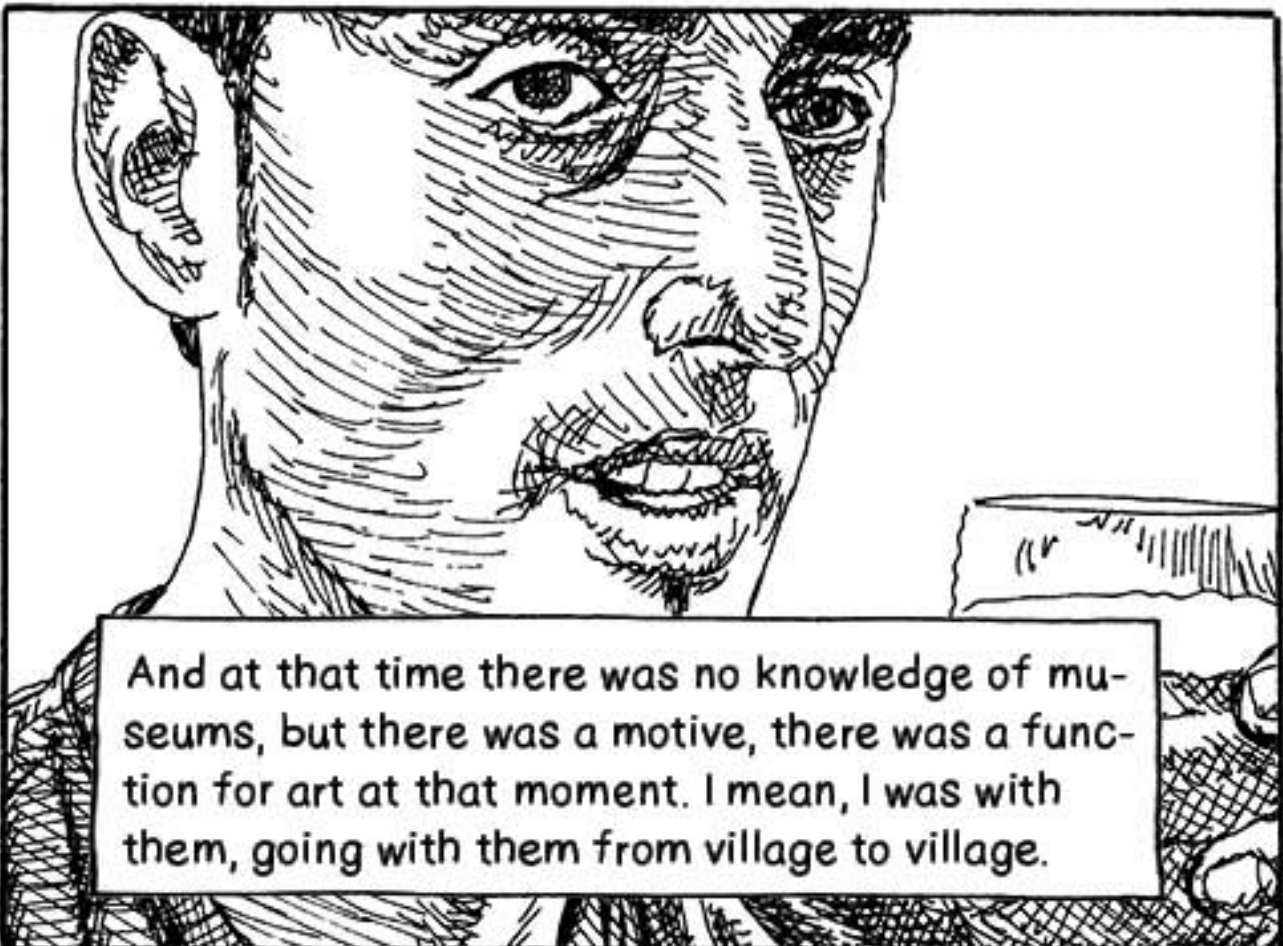
Sulieman Mansour and the older generation from the 70s—they've never been to museums.



They didn't have that kind of social practice of going to a museum.



They borrowed money from their parents and they drove from village to village to draw, to talk to people, and to exhibit.



And at that time there was no knowledge of museums, but there was a motive, there was a function for art at that moment. I mean, I was with them, going with them from village to village.

Some of them never had an art education, and they managed to use art at that moment as part of the historical context, the political context, by making exhibitions informally in Palestine under the occupation without the knowledge of the Israeli soldiers. They were traveling by car, so they made paintings small enough to fit inside a car. They never really worked in huge sizes because it was out of the question. *Because they wouldn't fit inside the car.*



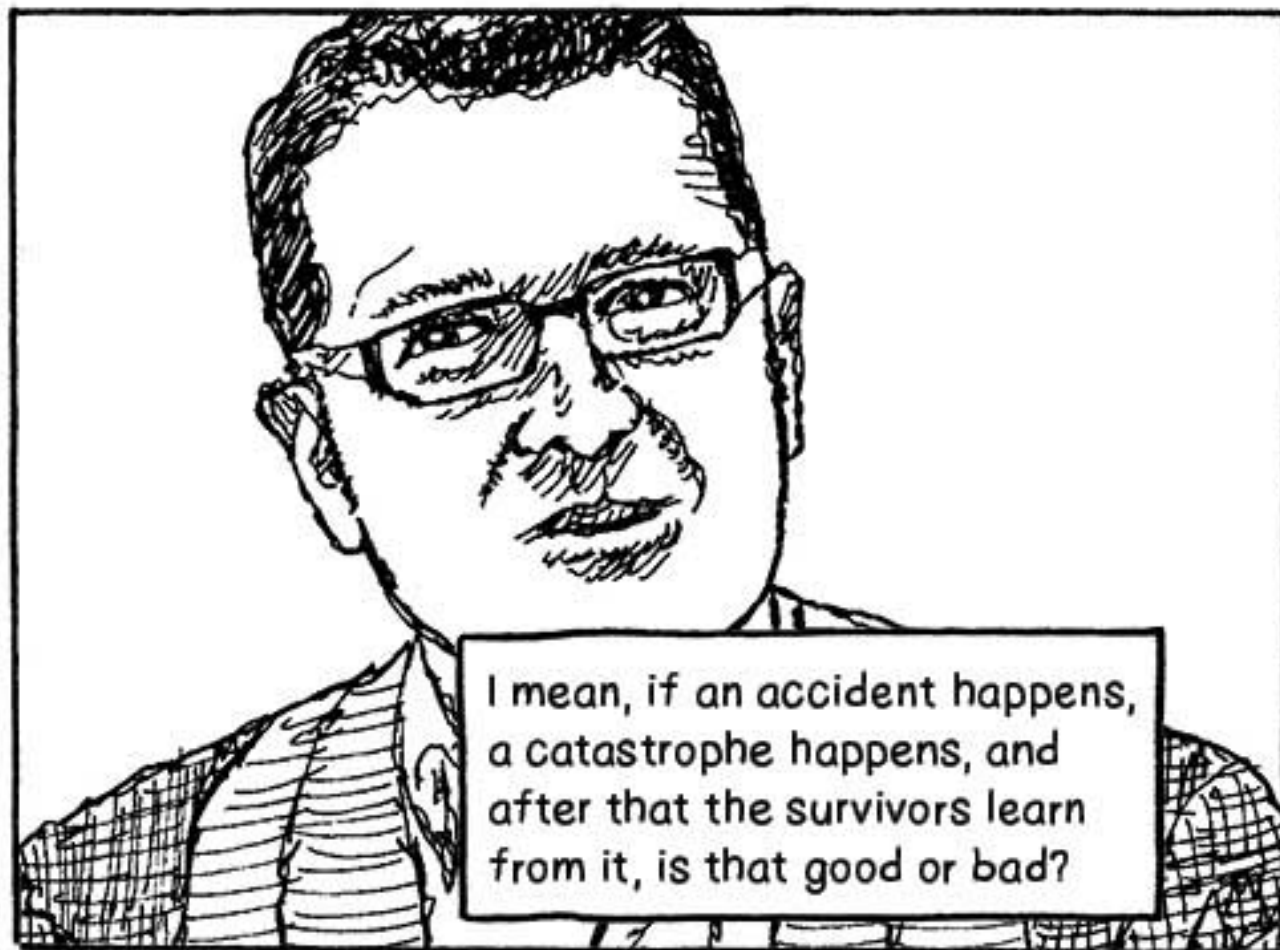
Perhaps the auratic is more flexible than Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer thought. All sorts of mass-produced objects appear from our digital perspective to have aura—photographs, LPs, eight track cassette tapes... Surface noise and overtones, magnetic degeneration, the yellowing of photographic paper and fading of emulsion contribute to aura, because even if the changes are minute, analog recording technology and the instability of chemical printing techniques render even mass-produced objects unstable, with the capacity to gain the patina of age, and with it, the kind of emotional investment once attached to religious icons and singular works of art.

As my friend Fred Dewey put it, what is at stake in thinking about aura concerns the individual's need for meaning, the system's desire to exploit this need, and both the system's and the

individual's inability to fully control the results. Aura is the terrain where this contest is played out.

In the case of Picasso in Palestine, modernity is like a ghost that never leaves your side.

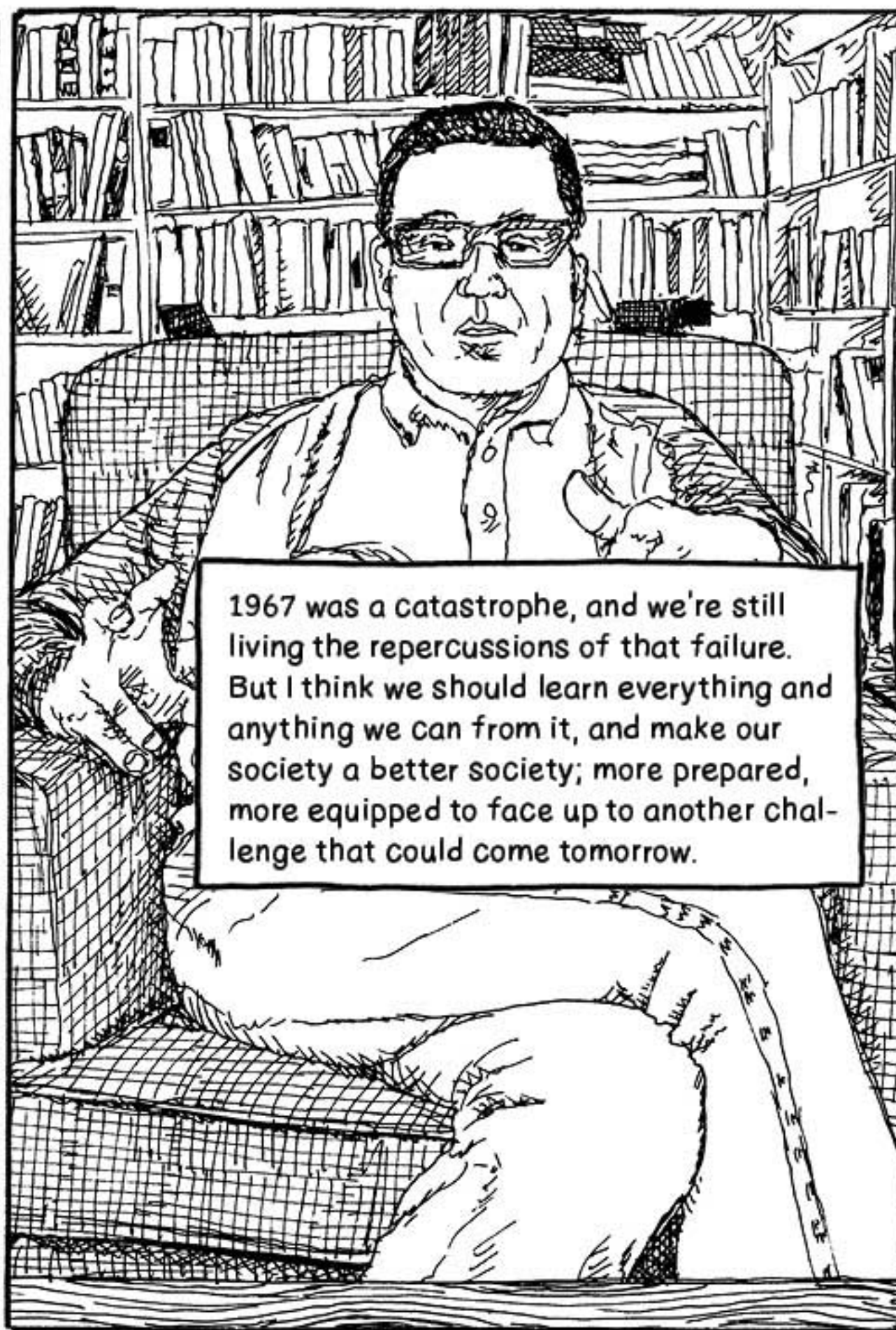




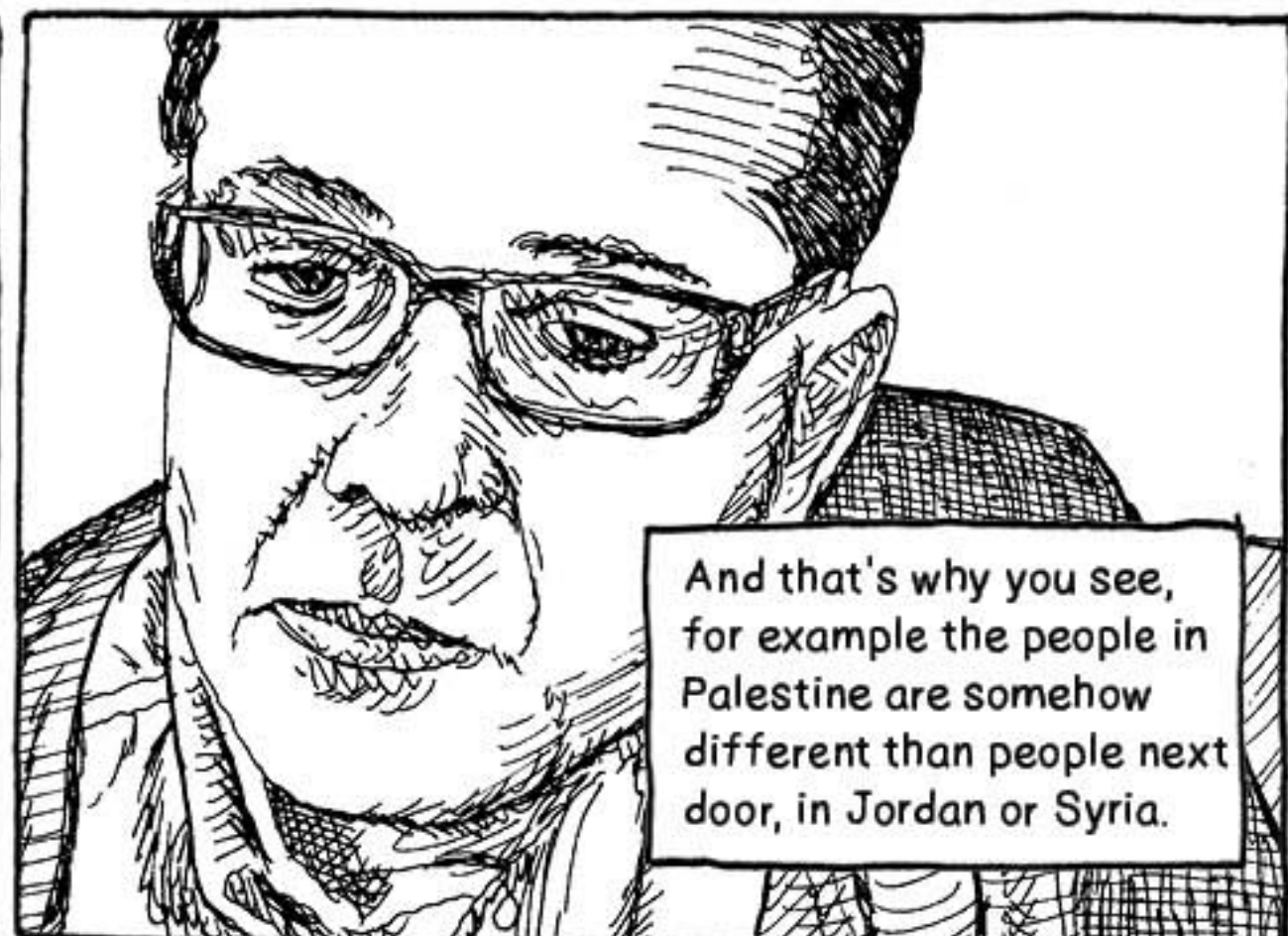
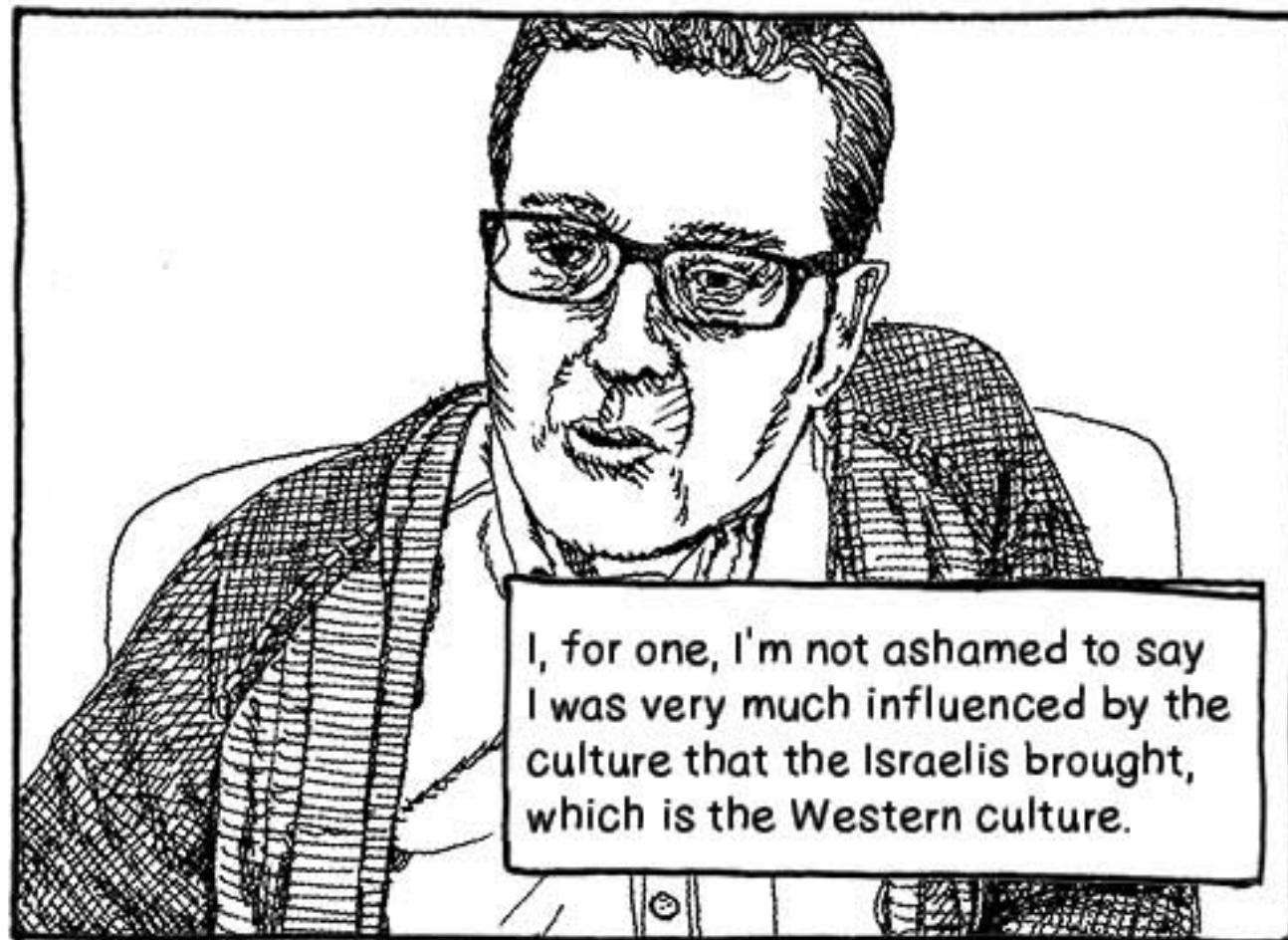
I mean, if an accident happens, a catastrophe happens, and after that the survivors learn from it, is that good or bad?



1967 opened up the country to a completely different culture, and we were very much influenced by it.



1967 was a catastrophe, and we're still living the repercussions of that failure. But I think we should learn everything and anything we can from it, and make our society a better society; more prepared, more equipped to face up to another challenge that could come tomorrow.

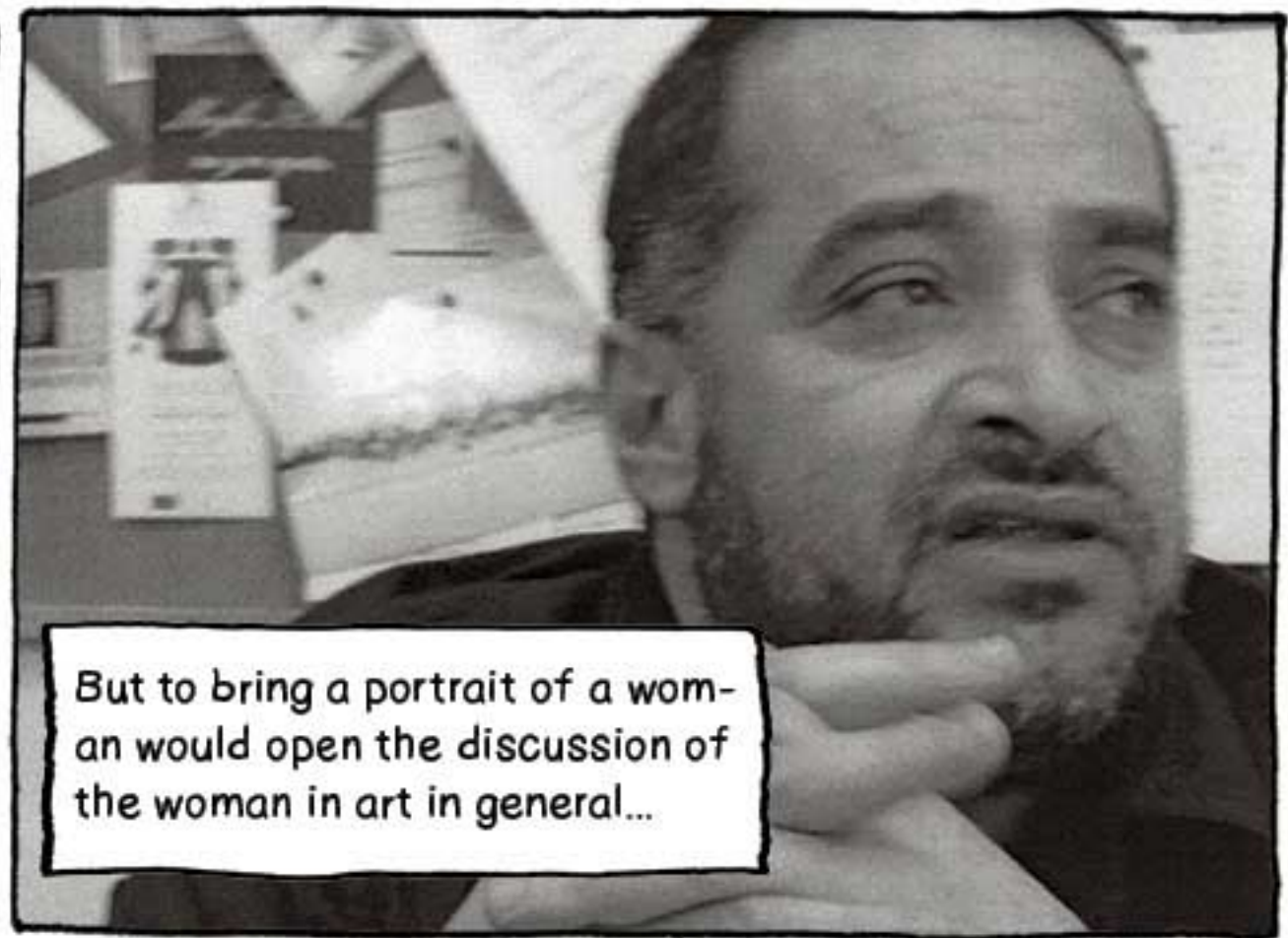


IMAGES OF WOMEN

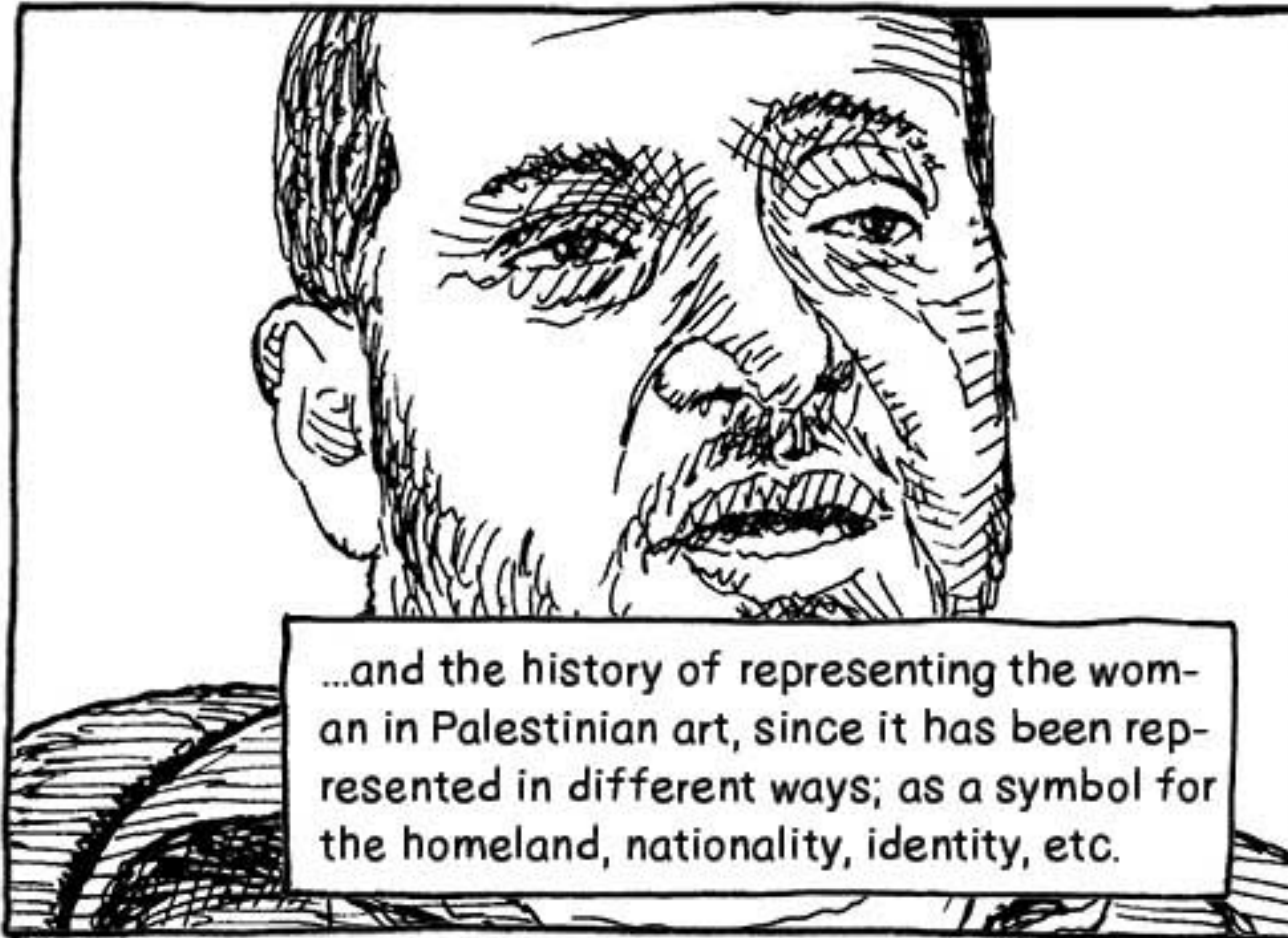




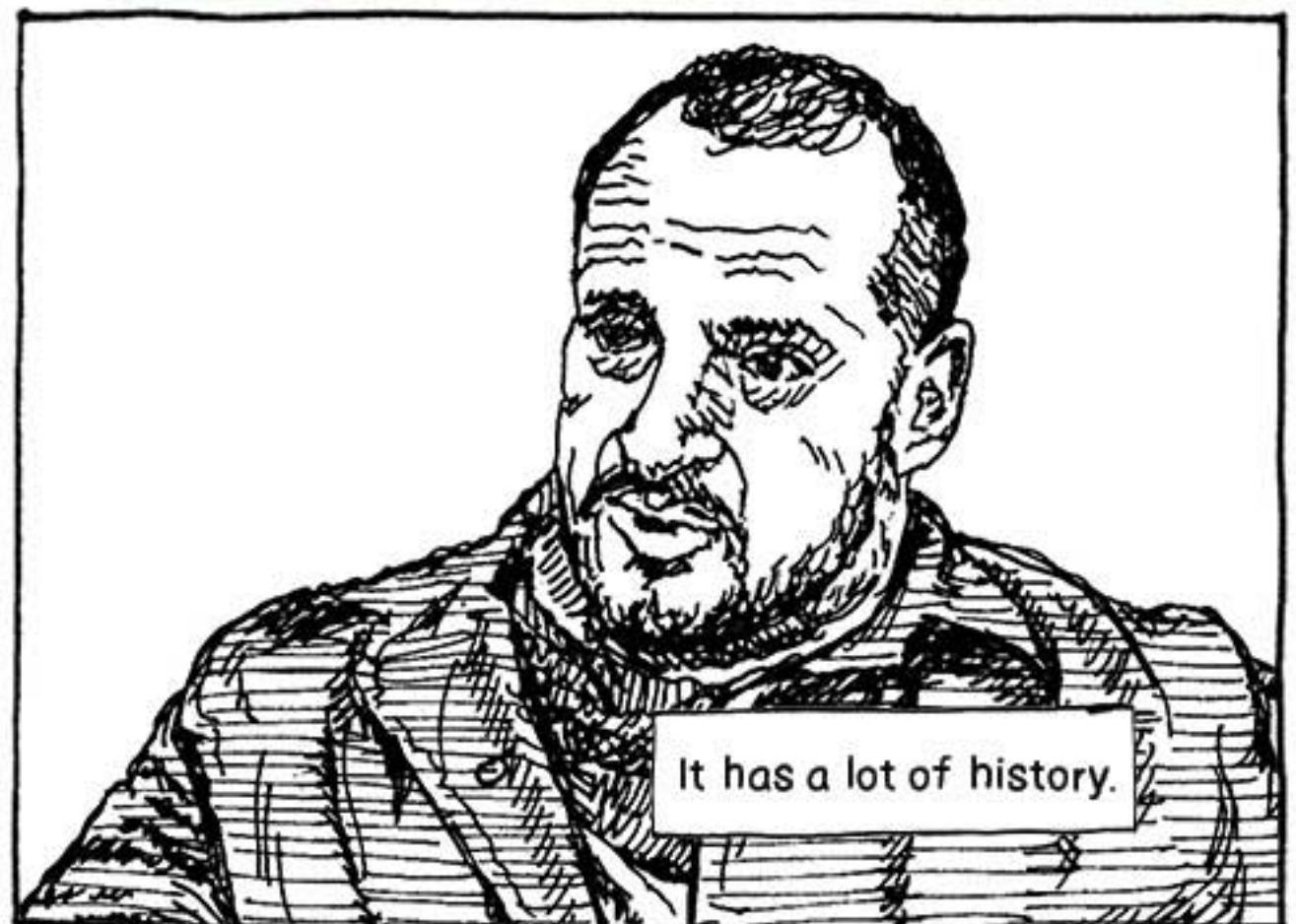
The idea was not to bring a political artwork from Picasso, like a direct political work.



But to bring a portrait of a woman would open the discussion of the woman in art in general...



...and the history of representing the woman in Palestinian art, since it has been represented in different ways; as a symbol for the homeland, nationality, identity, etc.



It has a lot of history.



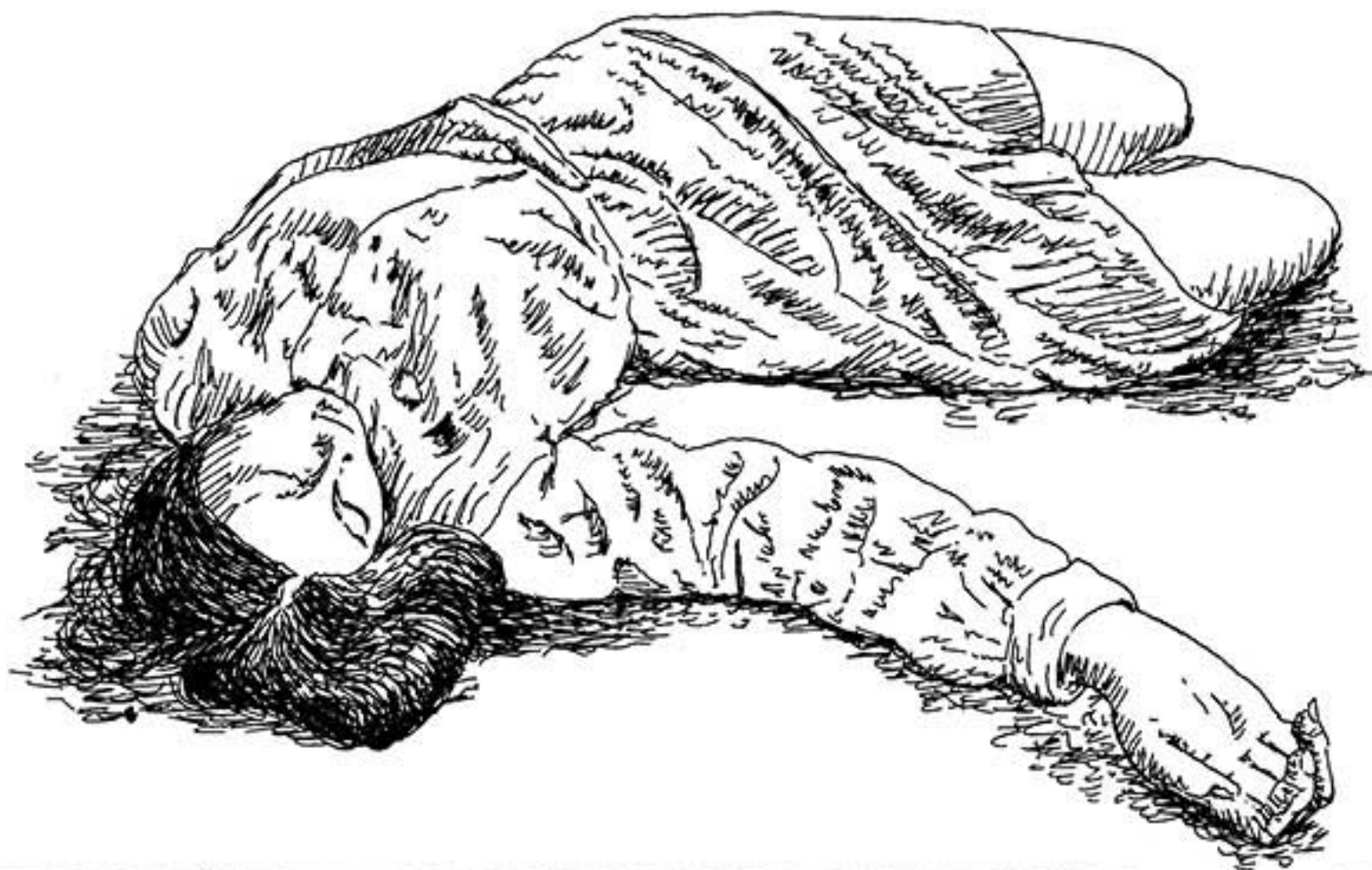
Hourani is referring to the long history of political graphics that began following the Naqba. In the context of the liberation struggle, the woman, especially the mother, especially the expectant mother—the pregnant mother—was a symbol for the concepts Hourani mentions, like statehood and a national, indigenous culture.



It also stood for Sumud—meaning steadfastness or perseverance—a term for the various strategies of passive resistance employed after 1967. The *Buste de femme* is especially in dialogue with Suleiman Mansour's famous painting *Bride of the Homeland*, which portrays the death of Lina Nabulsi, a Nablus schoolgirl killed by Israeli soldiers in 1976 during a school protest. Such was the potency of this image that when a lithographic edition was

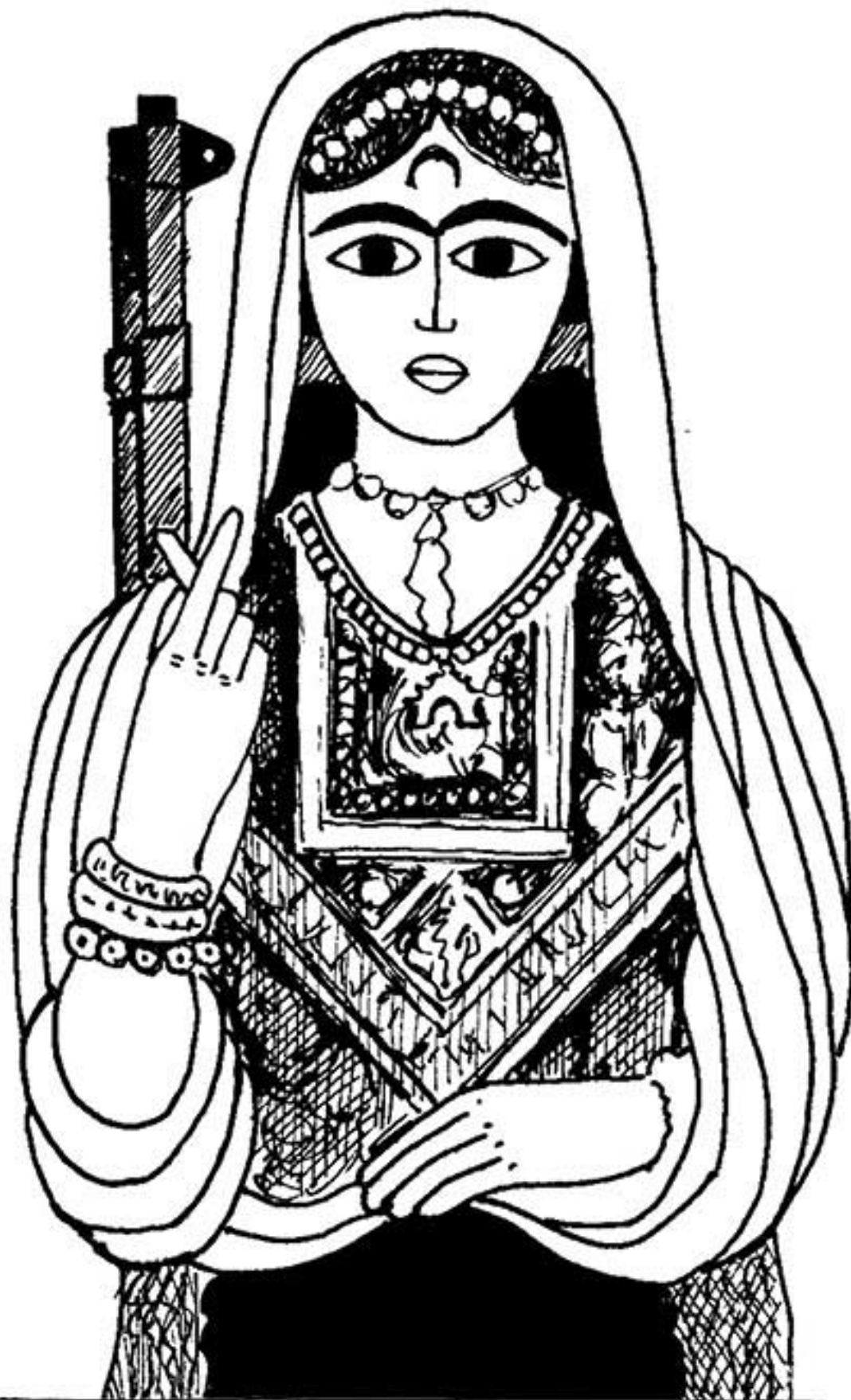
produced and began to be distributed, the Israeli intelligence service immediately seized not only the remaining posters but the original painting as well.

This is one context. Another might be more difficult to consider in the circumstances of the Middle East, where gender relations differ from those in the west, where a more explicit type of patriarchy adheres, even if in the West Bank one finds a secular society with a long



tradition of being so. That said, once removed from the immediate and pressing concerns of a prior political moment, how does the image of the female within the tradition of Palestinian liberation iconography relate to contemporary notions of the picture as a gendered object?

The *Buste de femme* introduces a weird doubling into this equation, being unbecoming, being unheroic, ignoble and to a degree pathetic, vulnerable, and at the same time petrified, transfixed as in fear or alarm. These are not attributes with a high degree of political or cultural cachet in present-day Palestine, despite suiting the reality of the post-Oslo situation. And this... can this relate in any way to the idea of pictures as gendered, as essentially feminine in their passivity before the gaze, anyone's gaze, though it is privileged in our mind's eye as a masculine gaze?



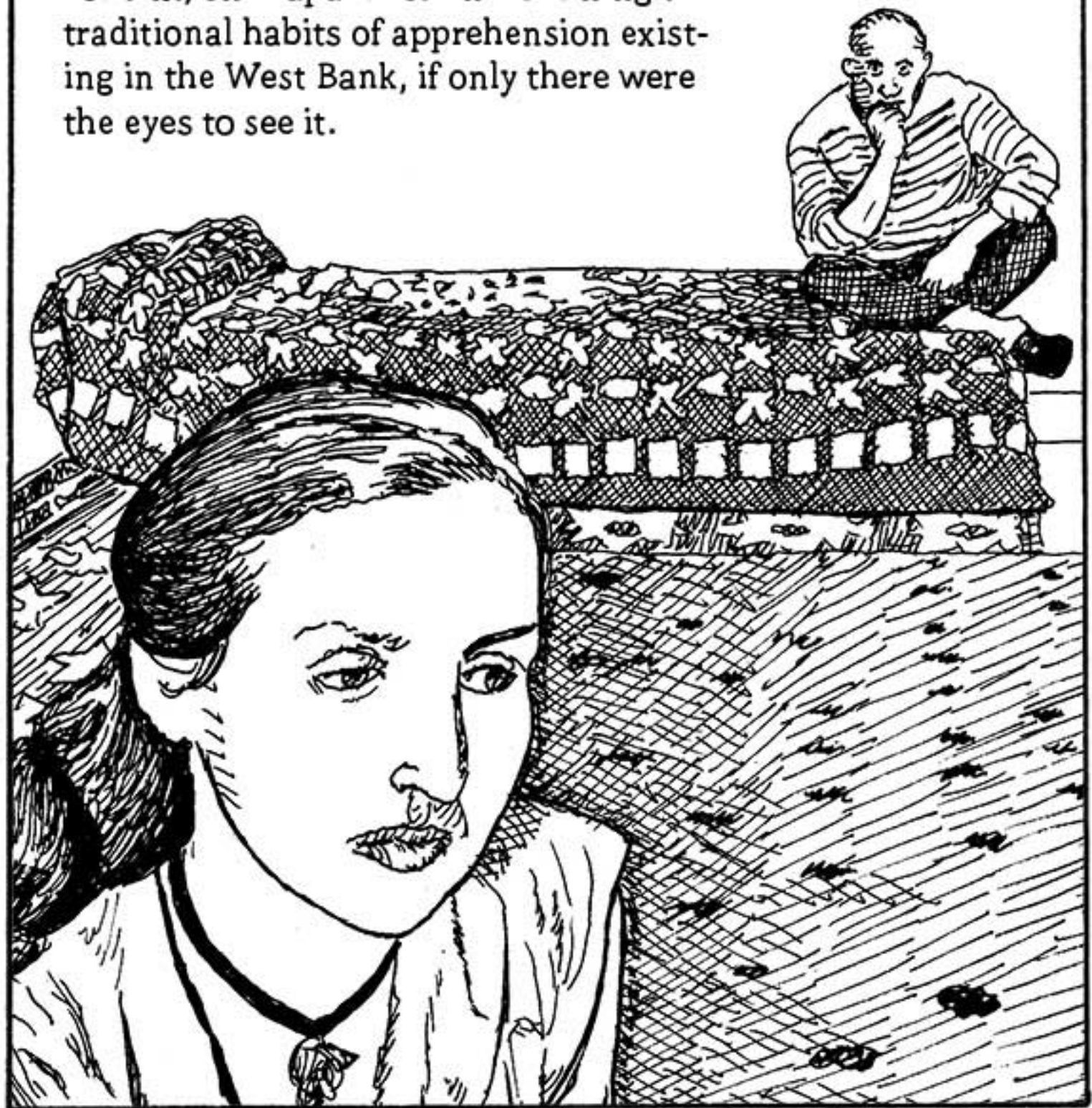
When W.J.T. Mitchell speaks of the picture's inherent passivity, he calls special attention precisely to the picture's stasis, its immobility before the mobile onlooker, endowed as he or she is with agency, capable of moving away or getting closer, of changing position in relation to the painted object. How similar, then, in a parallax movement, is the painting's predicament to the real situation of the Palestinians, stuck as they are in a landscape that is changing beneath their feet even while their own freedom of movement remains curtailed.



More than this, the architecture and hilltop placement of settlement-building over time came to reinforce, even project this sensation of immobility, a view seen through a picture window, a view that is the master's corollary to what is felt outside as an oppressive, omnipresent gaze. Sight lines from settlement apartment houses, as Eyal Weizman has noted, were once intended to serve a strategic and defensive purpose, but over time took on an additional ideological function, the panoramic views of terraces, olive trees, stone houses, and livestock fostering a "constructed way of seeing," reinforcing a habit of mind amongst settlers to regard their surroundings as a "mythical geography" suffused with biblical allusions, a pastoral panoptics re-establishing "the relation between terrain and sacred text." The Palestinians imbedded into this biblical scenery, figuring to settlers as little more than picturesque accouterments caught in a view from a picture window, are like Mitchell's painted figure, deprived entirely of agency in being subjected to an immobilizing, surveilling gaze.

In the double and treble system of signifying relations we are also returned to Picasso's own portrayal of his mistress,

herself an artist. Passing through this new context, a different portrait emerges at the other end, transformed by its exposure to this different social and political context, one capable of undermining the traditional habits of apprehension existing in the West Bank, if only there were the eyes to see it.





But what of the model herself, who remains a cipher within this broader constellation of details? The "person" Françoise Gilot was far from the received notion of the 'muse' as a passive figure who's virtue lies in mediating inspiration for the male artist. At 21 she had already taken degrees from the Sorbonne and Cambridge, and was struggling in Rennes under her father's insistence she study law—although her true passion was art, which she had studied under the tutelage of her mother, and later, her mother's teacher, one Mlle. Meuge. Gilot met Picasso in a restaurant in 1943, and later that year sat for the portrait displayed 70 years later in Ramallah: there was a forty-year difference in age between them. They moved in together after the war, having two children before splitting a decade later. Eleven years later, Gilot wrote a book on their relationship—"Life with Picasso"—which he attempted to suppress.

Gilot resumed her art career in addition to working as an educator, organizer, art critic, and designer for theater. Remarkably, Françoise Gilot is still living, last exhibiting her work in 2012. To the best of my knowledge, she has not commented publicly on this recent use of her image.



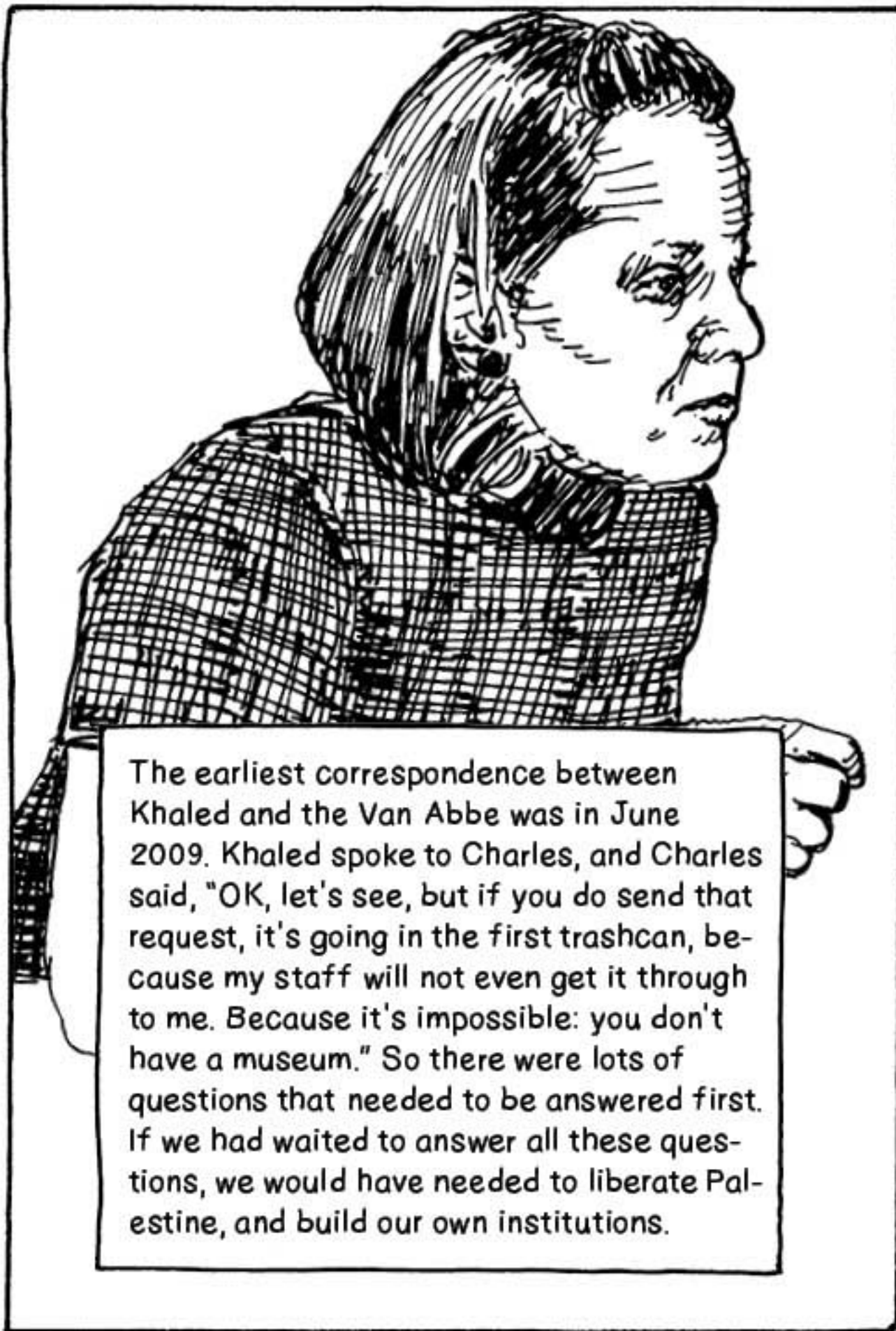
THE LETTER





The Academy of Art's official loan request to the Van Abbemuseum arrived in July 2009. It provided assurances that "the Academy realizes full responsibility for adequate exhibition conditions and guaranteeing (the painting's safe return to the collection of the Van Abbemuseum." Delivered to the museum's library, the letter was duly stamped and filed, with copies distributed to Charles Esche and collection director Christiane Berndes.

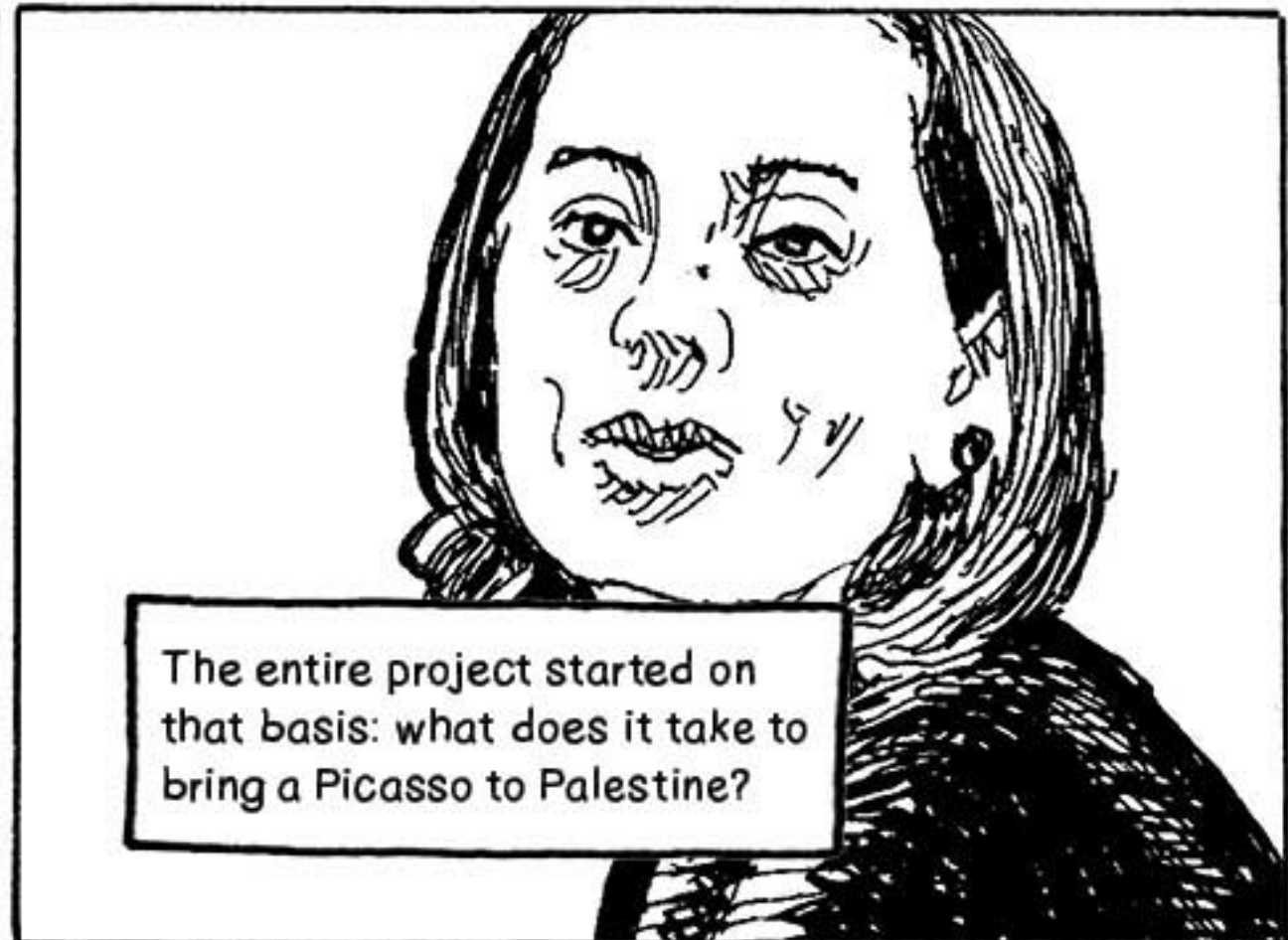




The earliest correspondence between Khaled and the Van Abbe was in June 2009. Khaled spoke to Charles, and Charles said, "OK, let's see, but if you do send that request, it's going in the first trashcan, because my staff will not even get it through to me. Because it's impossible: you don't have a museum." So there were lots of questions that needed to be answered first. If we had waited to answer all these questions, we would have needed to liberate Palestine, and build our own institutions.



What turned things around is that actually Charles was forward enough to say, "Let's see what it takes."

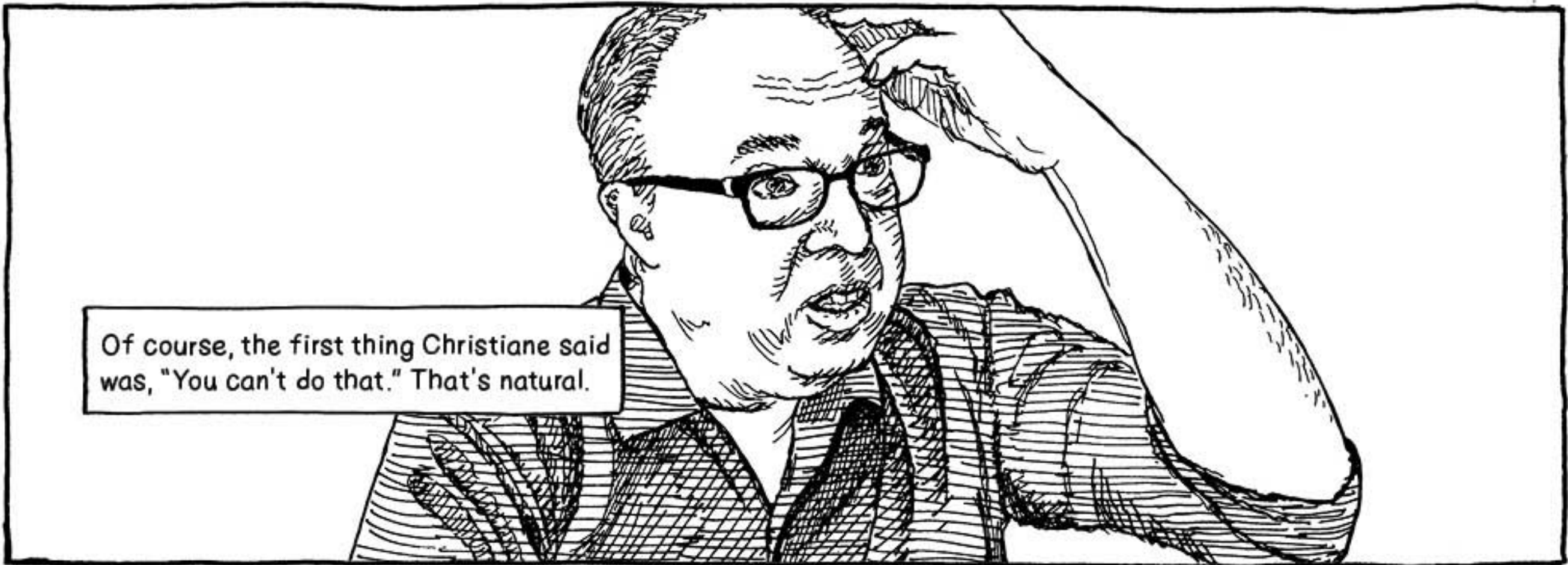


The entire project started on that basis: what does it take to bring a Picasso to Palestine?

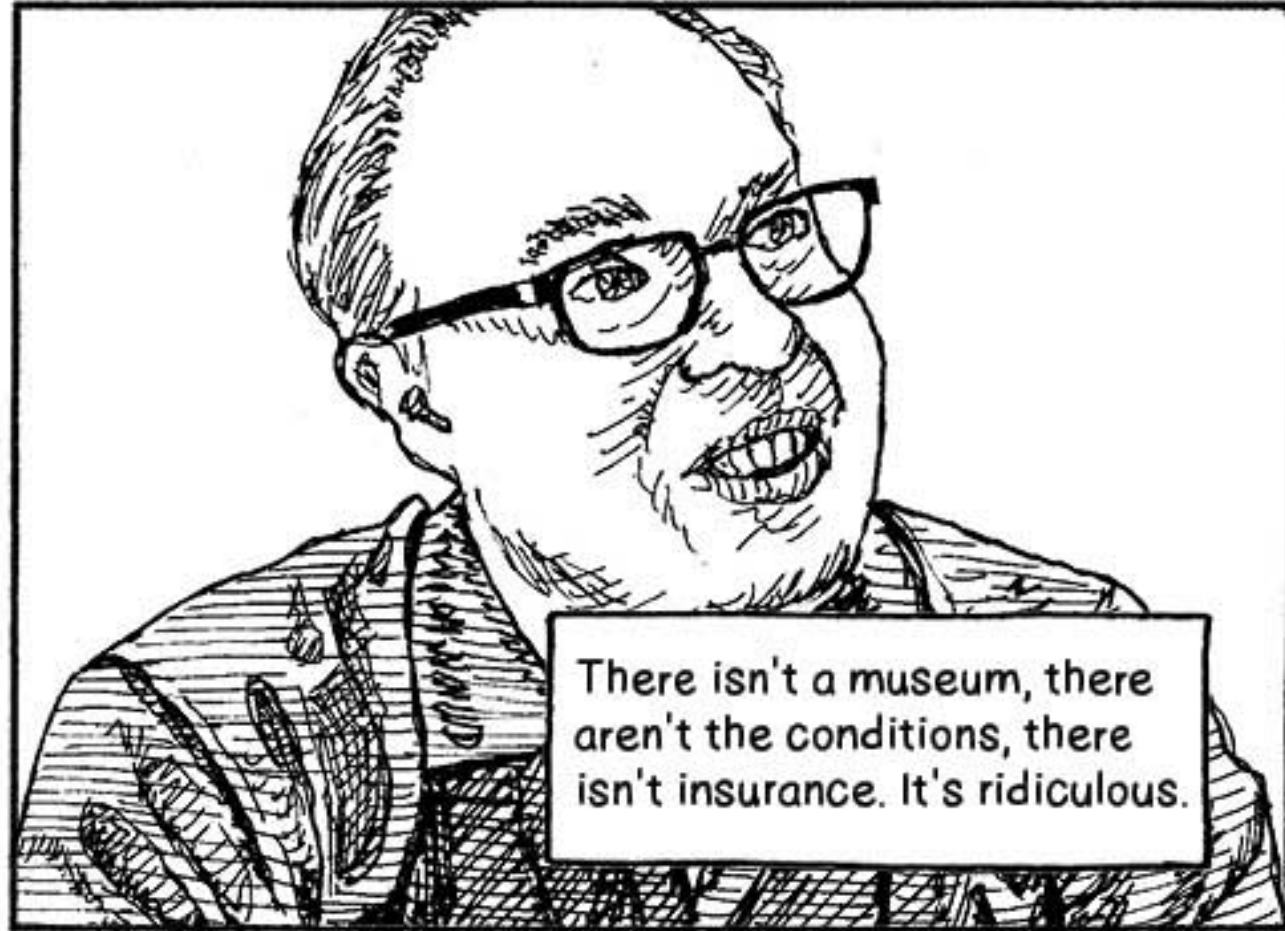


According to *Die Zeit*, when Berndes read the letter, she immediately phoned Esche, shouting into the receiver so loudly Esche had to withdraw his mobile phone from his ear. When I visited the Van Abbe in February, it was immediately plain this incident was the sort of journalistic embellishment that contributes drama to a story at the expense of an accurate depiction of institutional facts: Berndes' office is directly across the hall from the room where Charles Esche has his desk. But I never had the opportunity to confirm this incident with Christiane Berndes, as she refused to speak to me on record, except to say she considered it "too soon" for any analysis of the project.

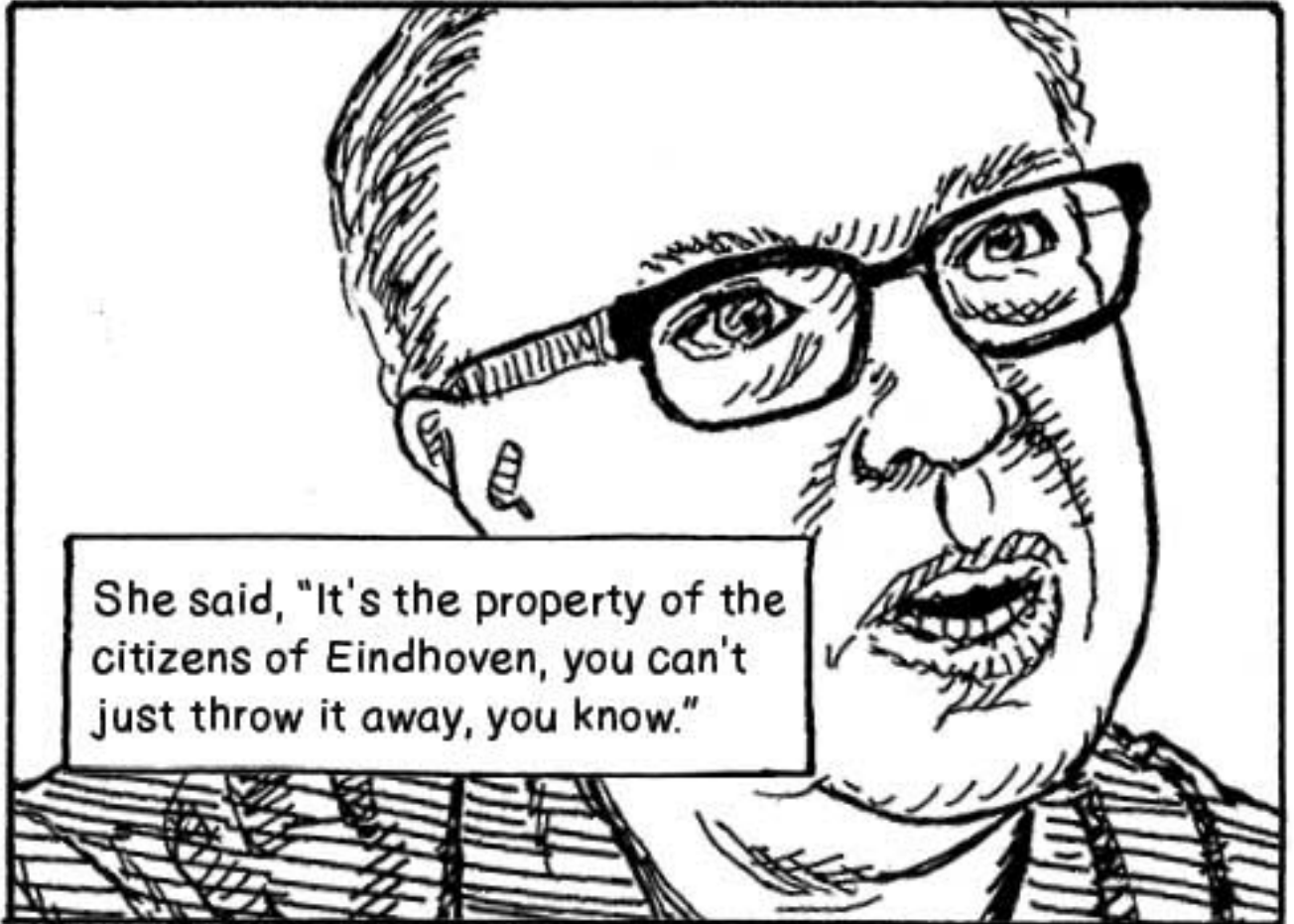




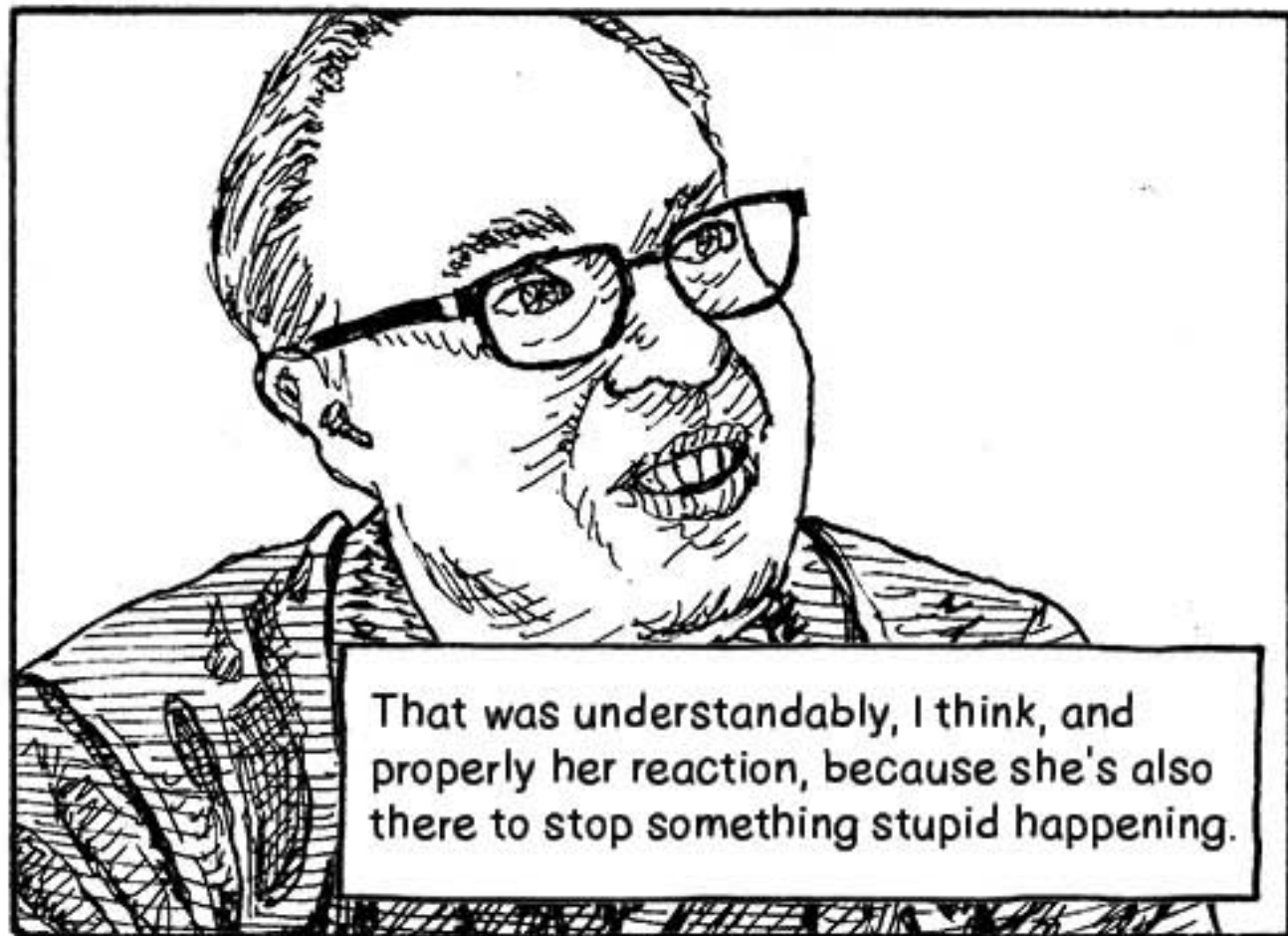
Of course, the first thing Christiane said was, "You can't do that." That's natural.



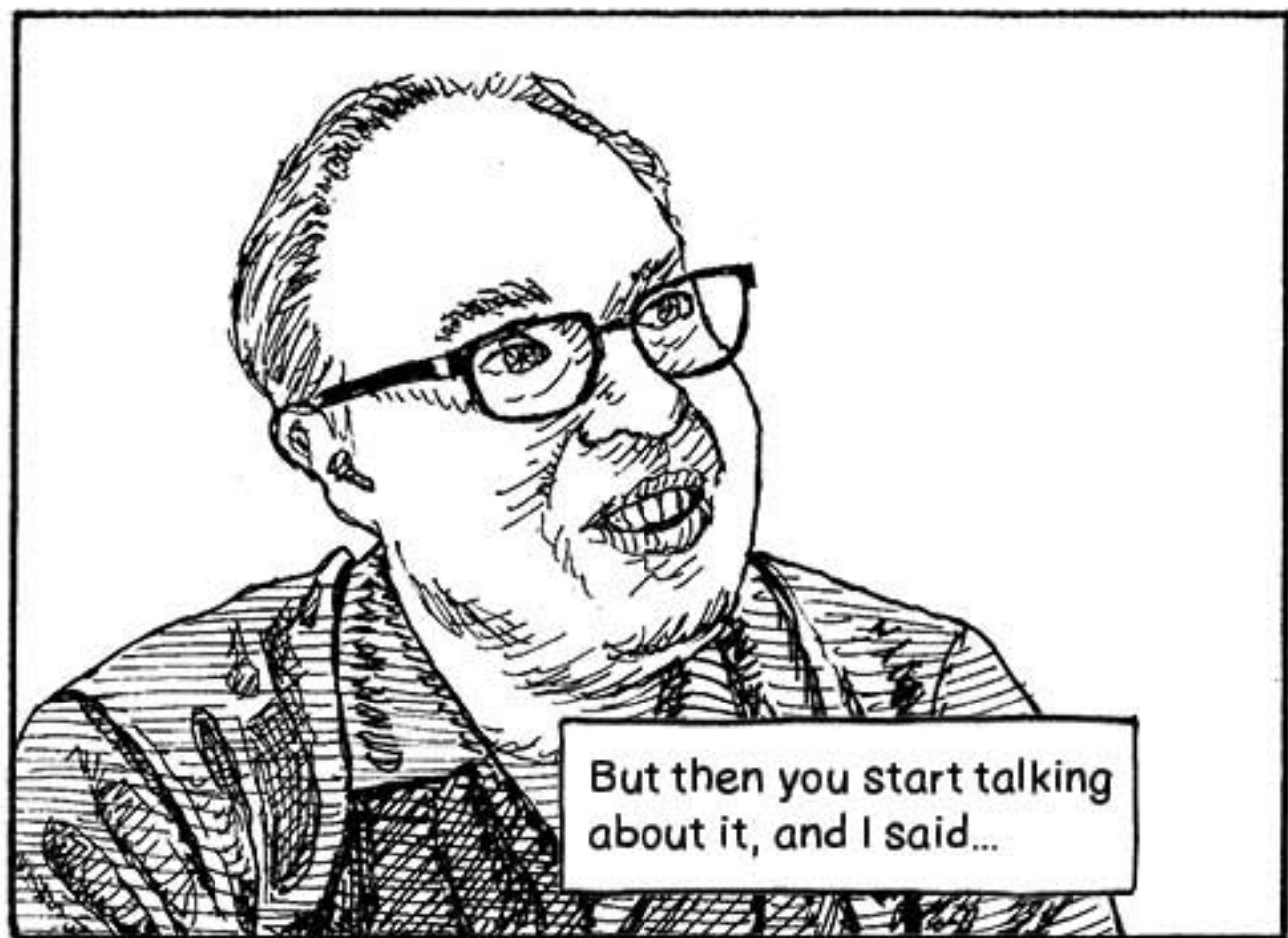
There isn't a museum, there aren't the conditions, there isn't insurance. It's ridiculous.



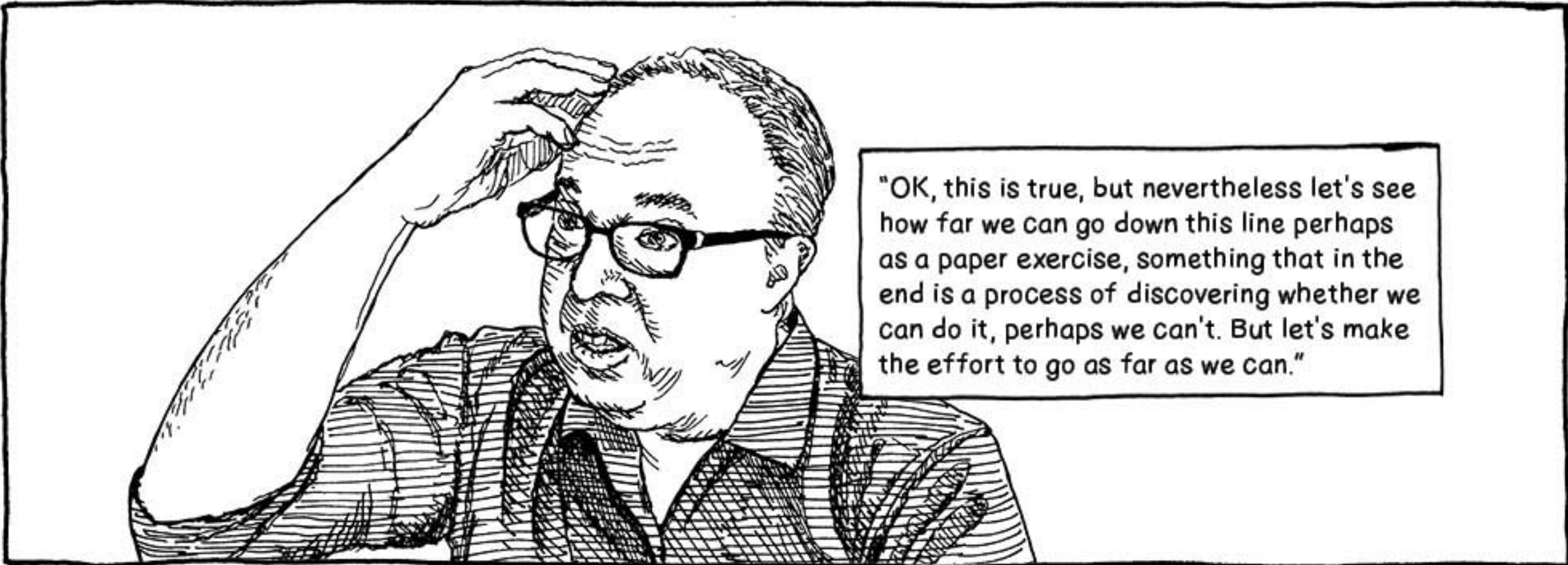
She said, "It's the property of the citizens of Eindhoven, you can't just throw it away, you know."



That was understandably, I think, and properly her reaction, because she's also there to stop something stupid happening.

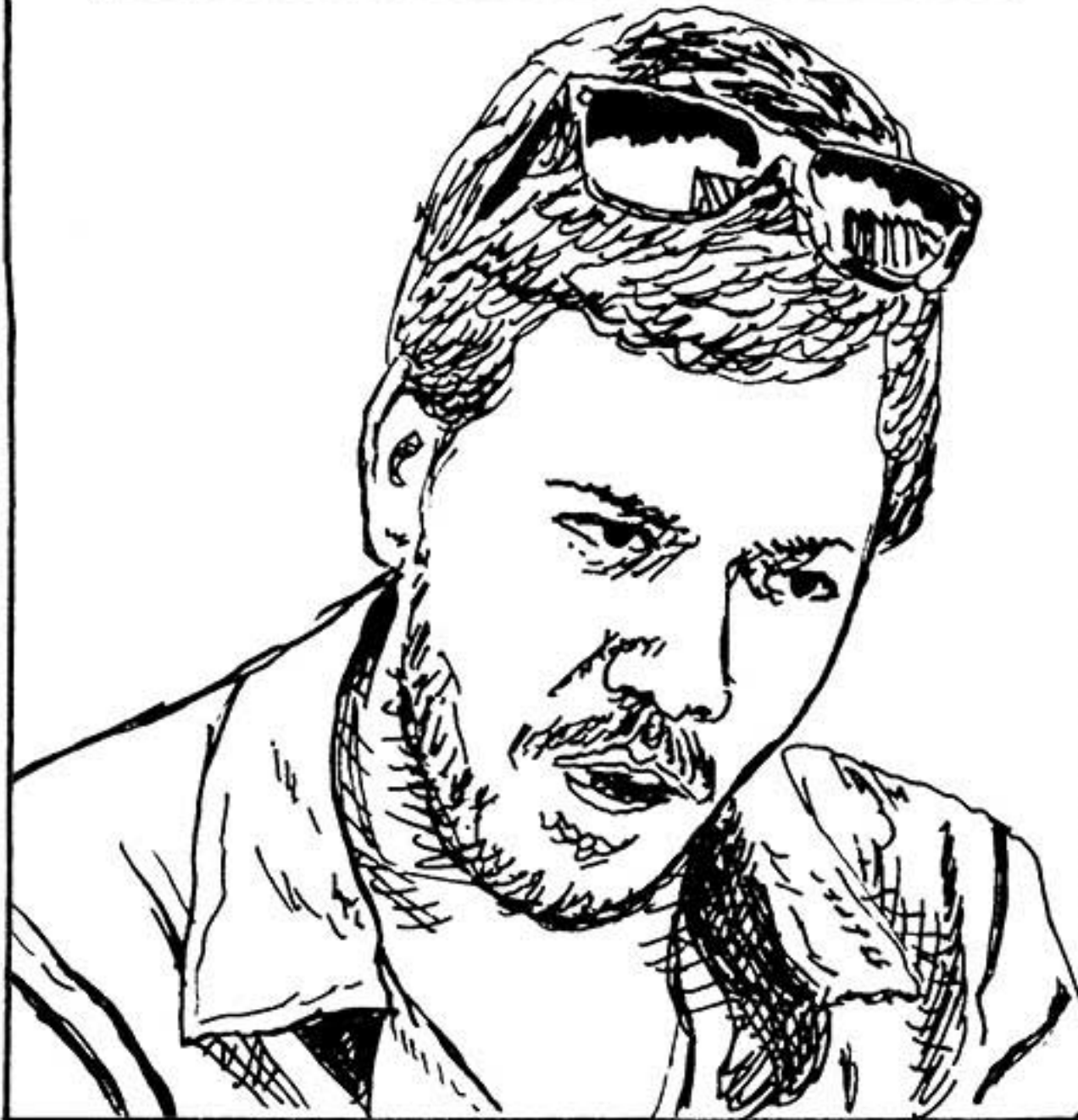


But then you start talking about it, and I said...

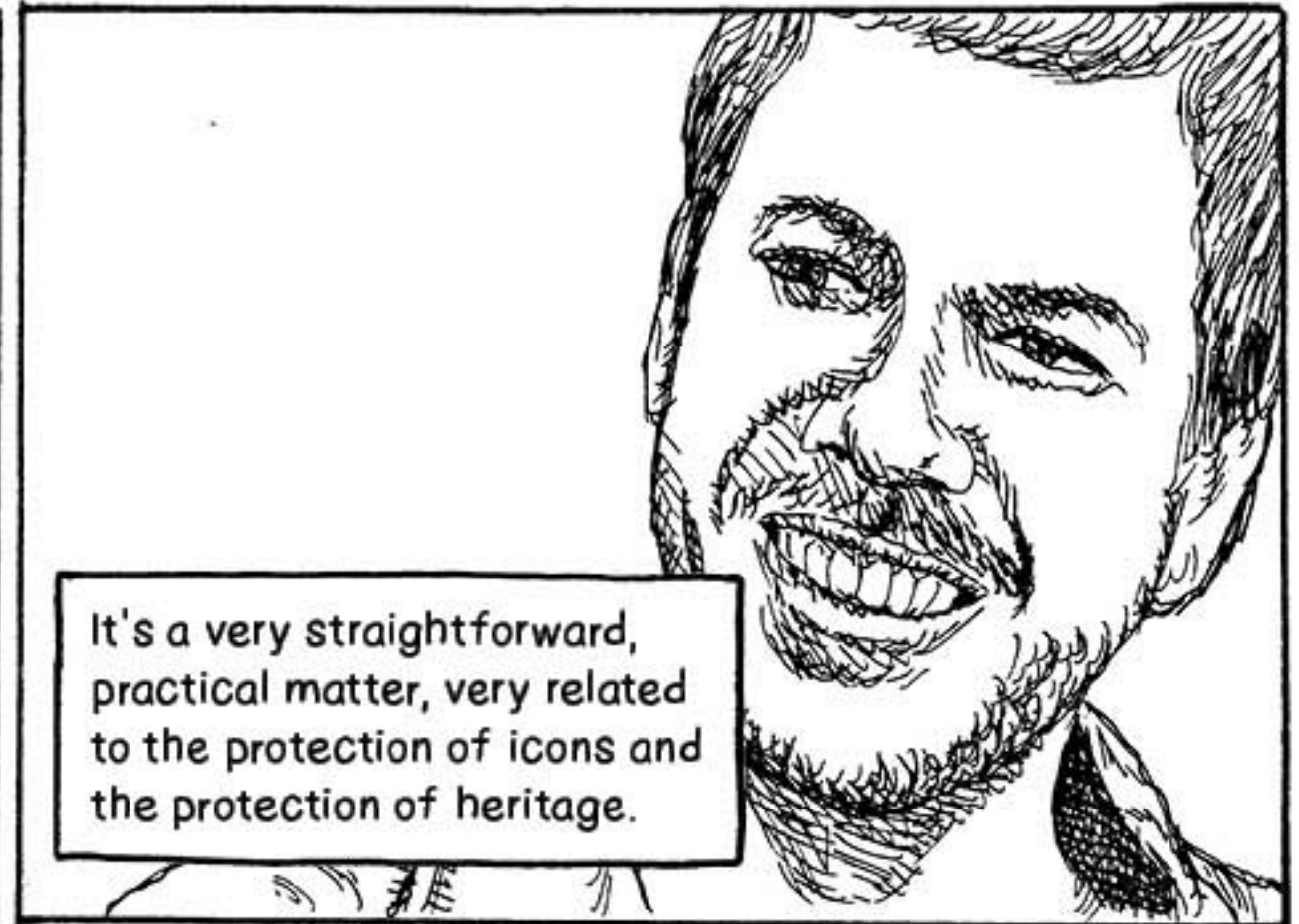


"OK, this is true, but nevertheless let's see how far we can go down this line perhaps as a paper exercise, something that in the end is a process of discovering whether we can do it, perhaps we can't. But let's make the effort to go as far as we can."

I think Charles was kind of subtle in preparing Christiane for the questions that would come out of it. And of course, Christiane has a very clear mandate in terms of being curator of the collection, and that is to protect it from damage—and I'm also talking about weather and stuff like this.

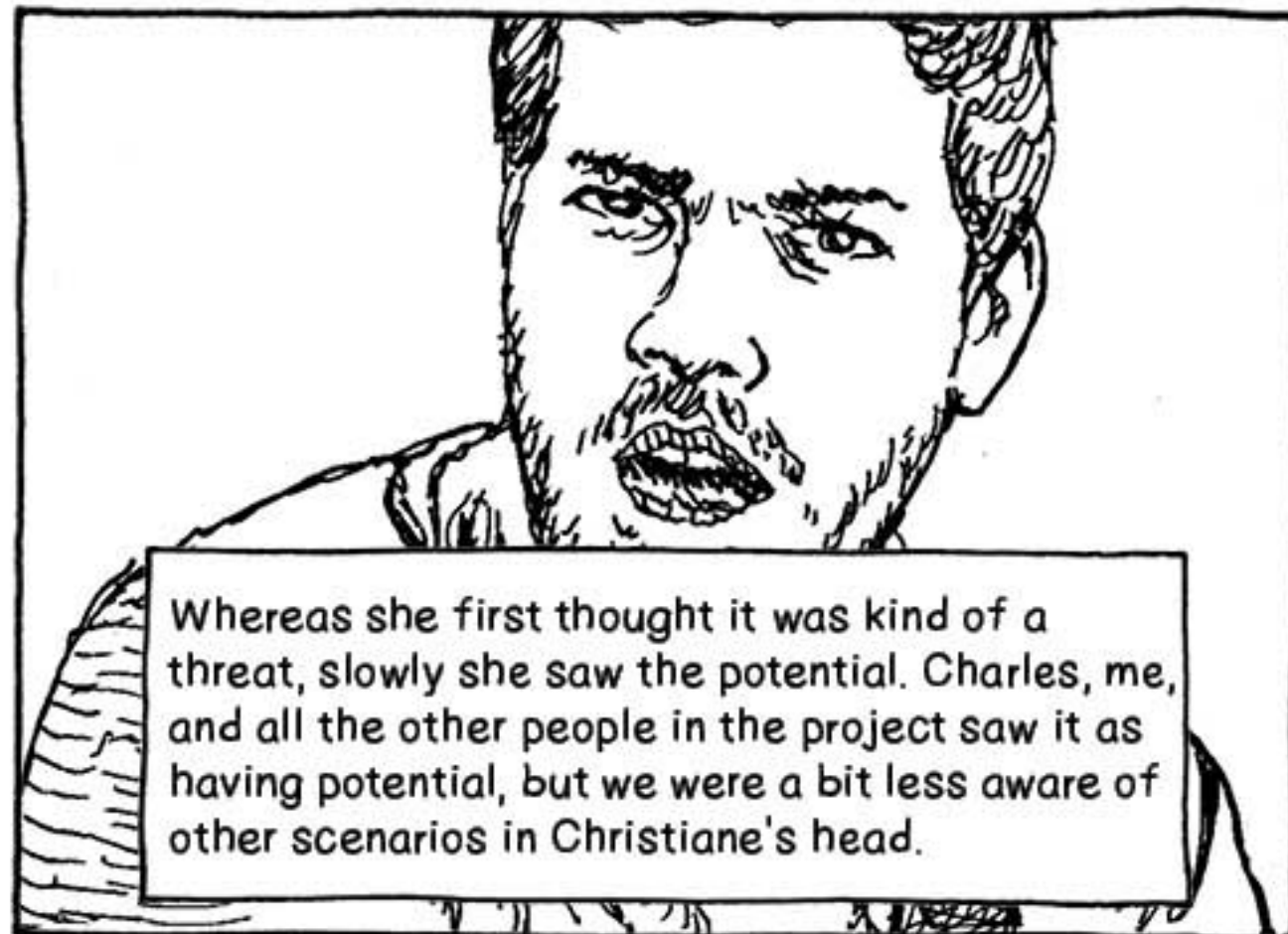


It's a very straightforward, practical matter, very related to the protection of icons and the protection of heritage.

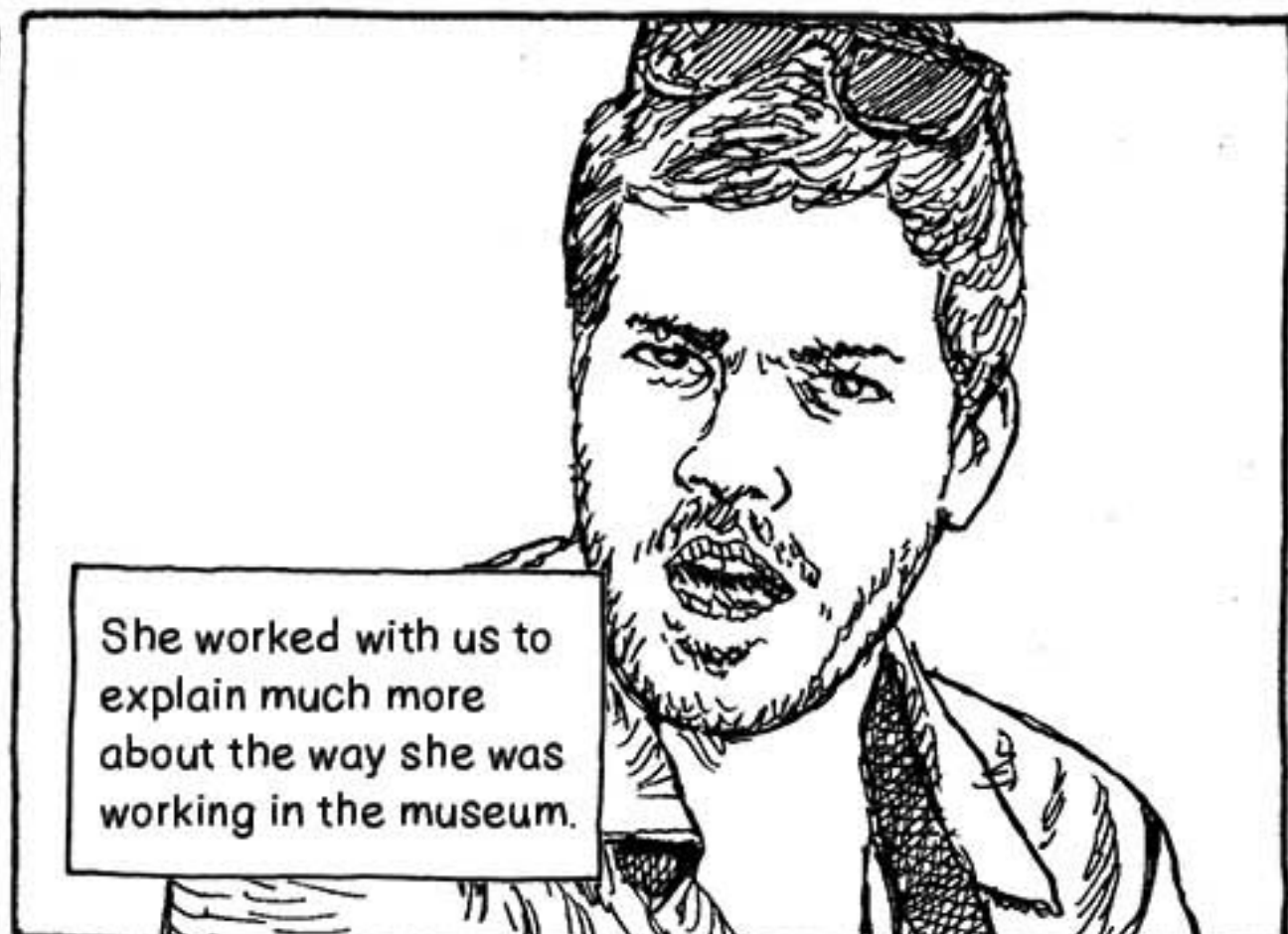


So, the questions that were holding her back, I think these were gradually shifted by Charles and also by Khaled's visits to Eindhoven.

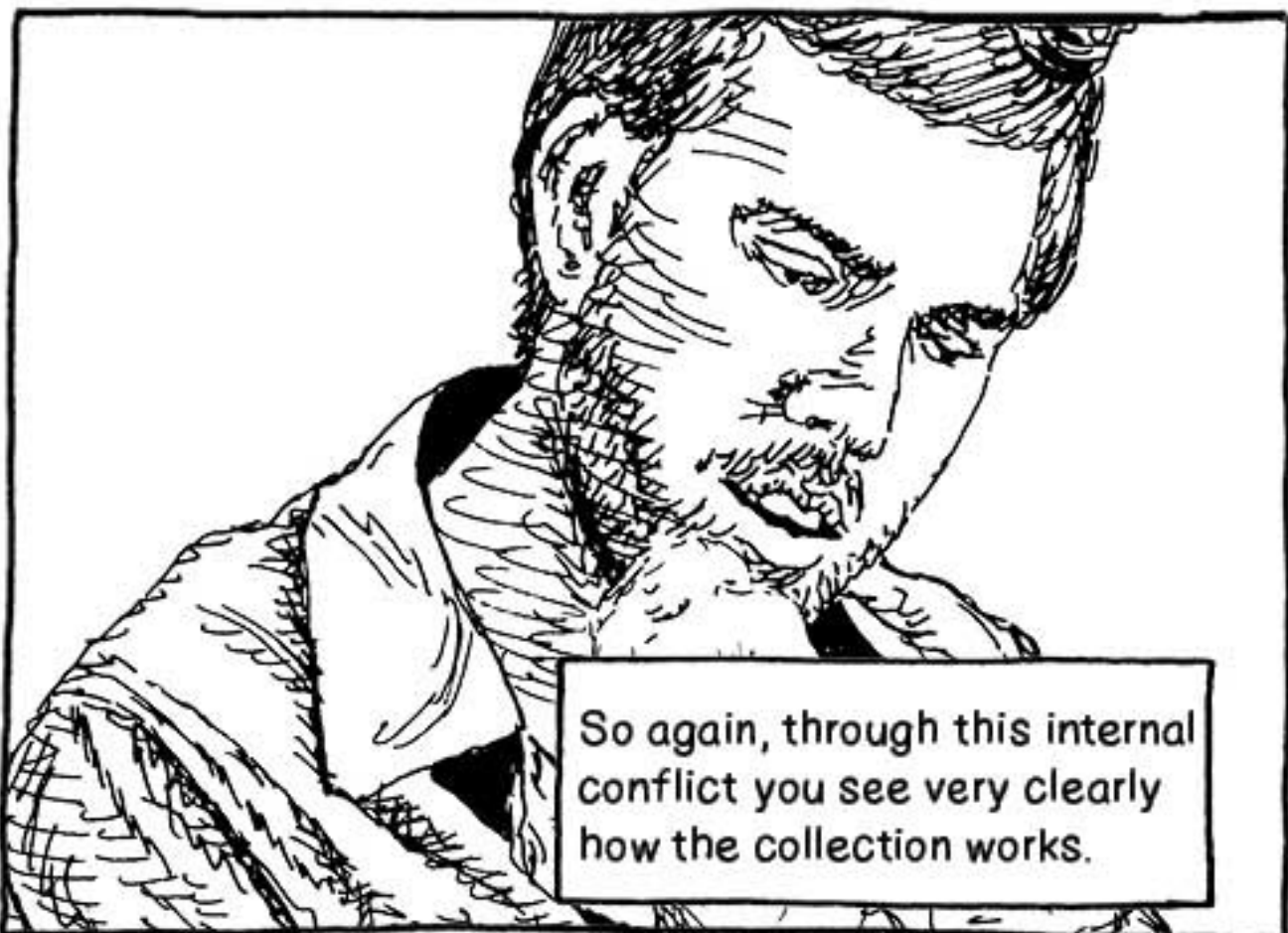




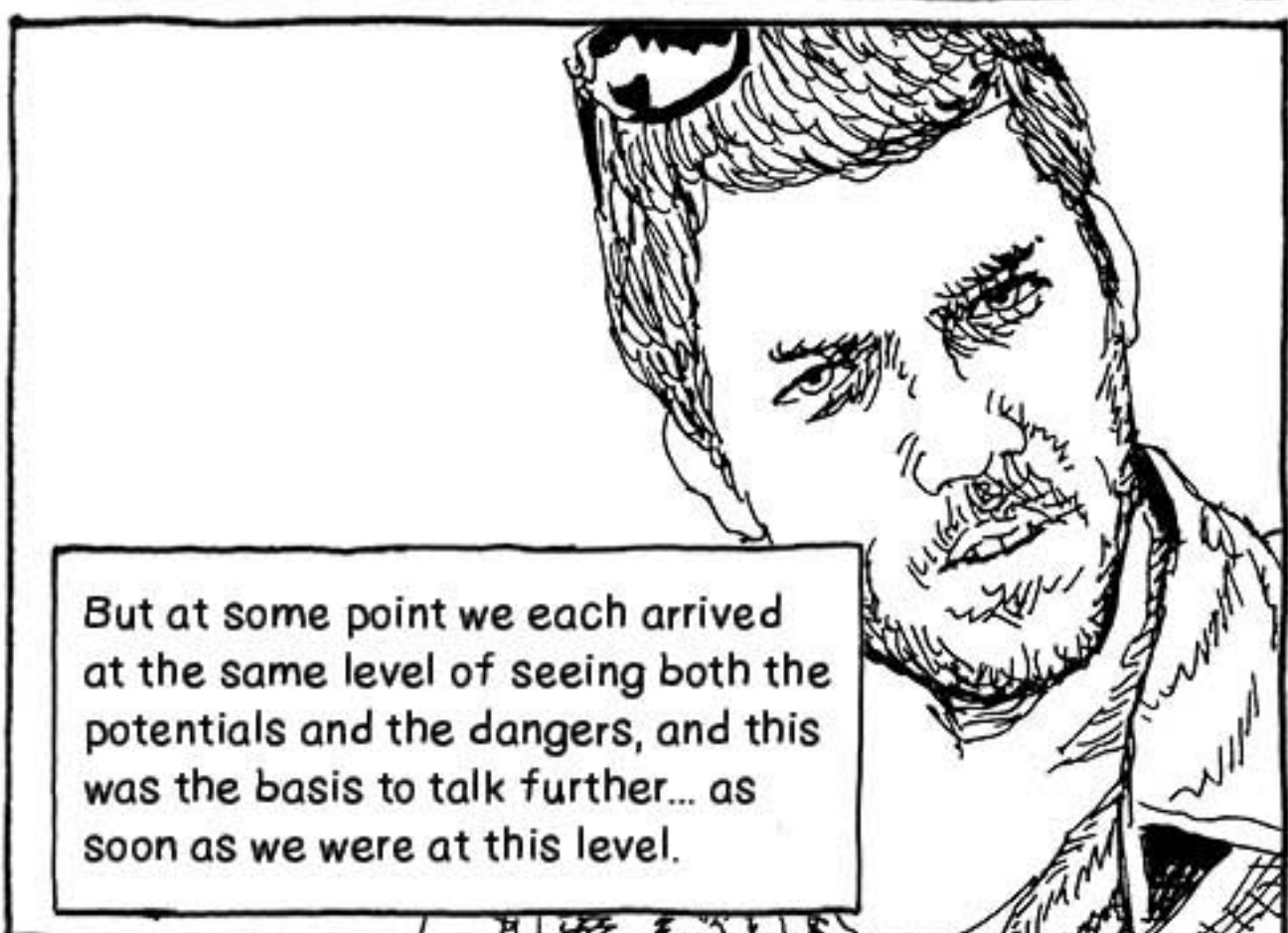
Whereas she first thought it was kind of a threat, slowly she saw the potential. Charles, me, and all the other people in the project saw it as having potential, but we were a bit less aware of other scenarios in Christiane's head.



She worked with us to explain much more about the way she was working in the museum.



So again, through this internal conflict you see very clearly how the collection works.




But at some point we each arrived at the same level of seeing both the potentials and the dangers, and this was the basis to talk further... as soon as we were at this level.


Bettine Verkuijen, Van Abbemuseum,
Eindhoven, January 2012:



Their letter was dated July 7. We responded in November 2009, and I've explained—to other people as well—why this took so long. Well, normally we always have a big pile of requests and things take a while before responding. So, we responded in November. I wasn't involved yet.

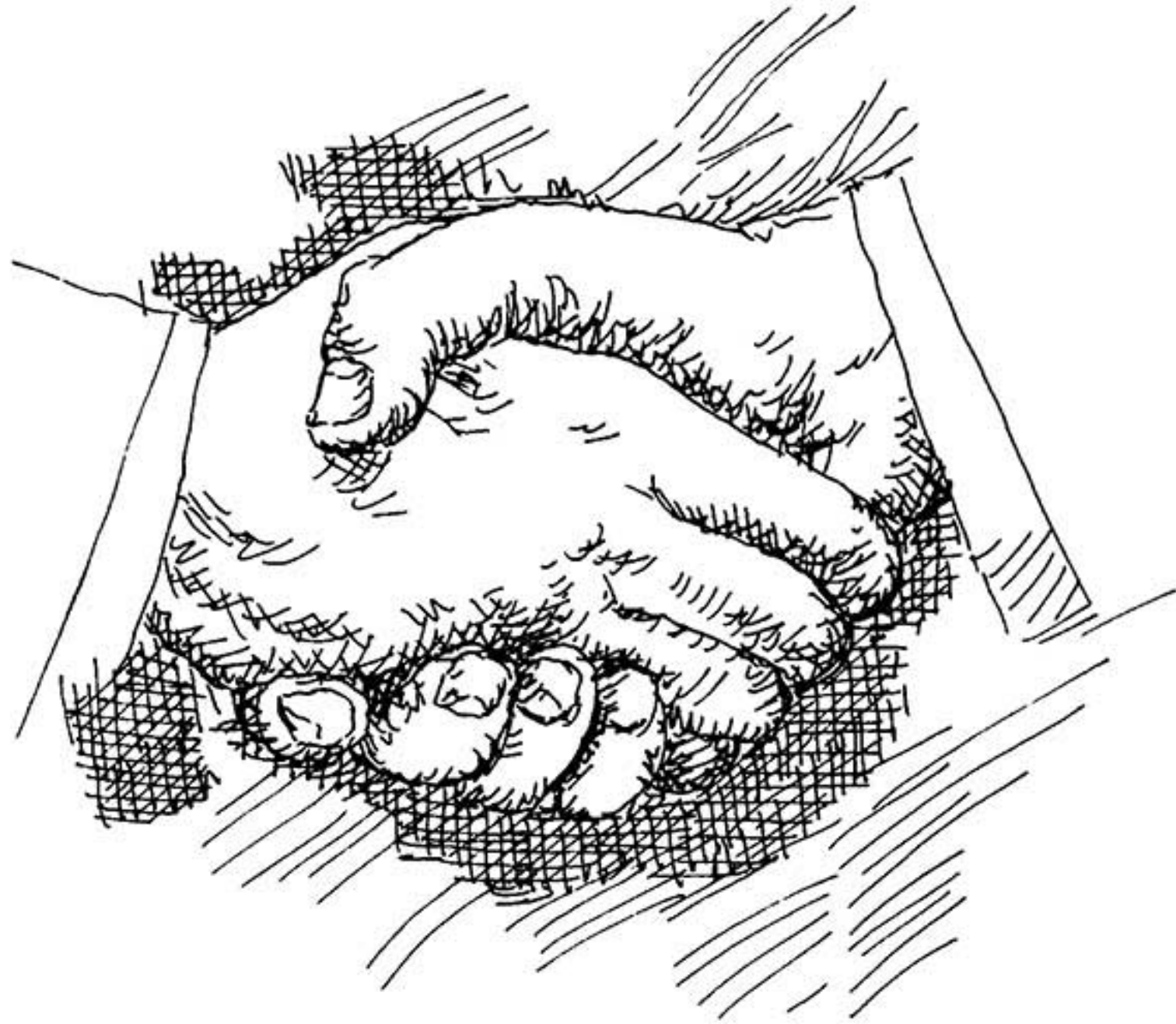


I was told by Christiane that there will be a project with the Picasso going to Palestine, a research project, so perhaps at one stage you should go there, or maybe you will talk to the insurance and be filmed.



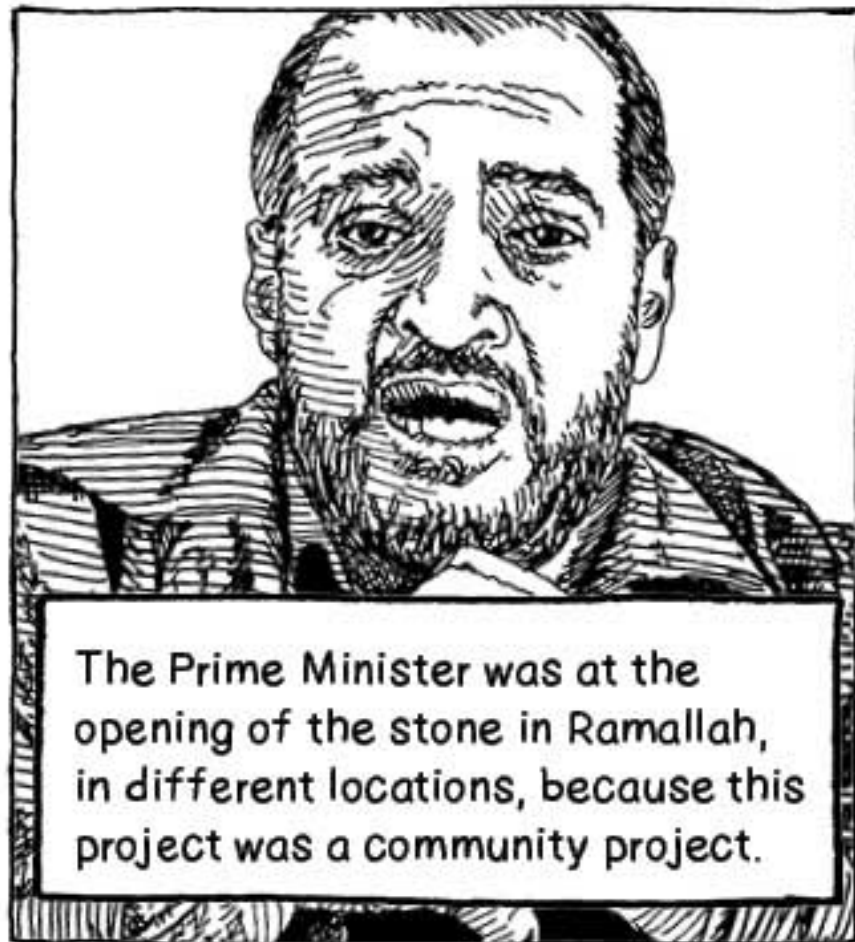
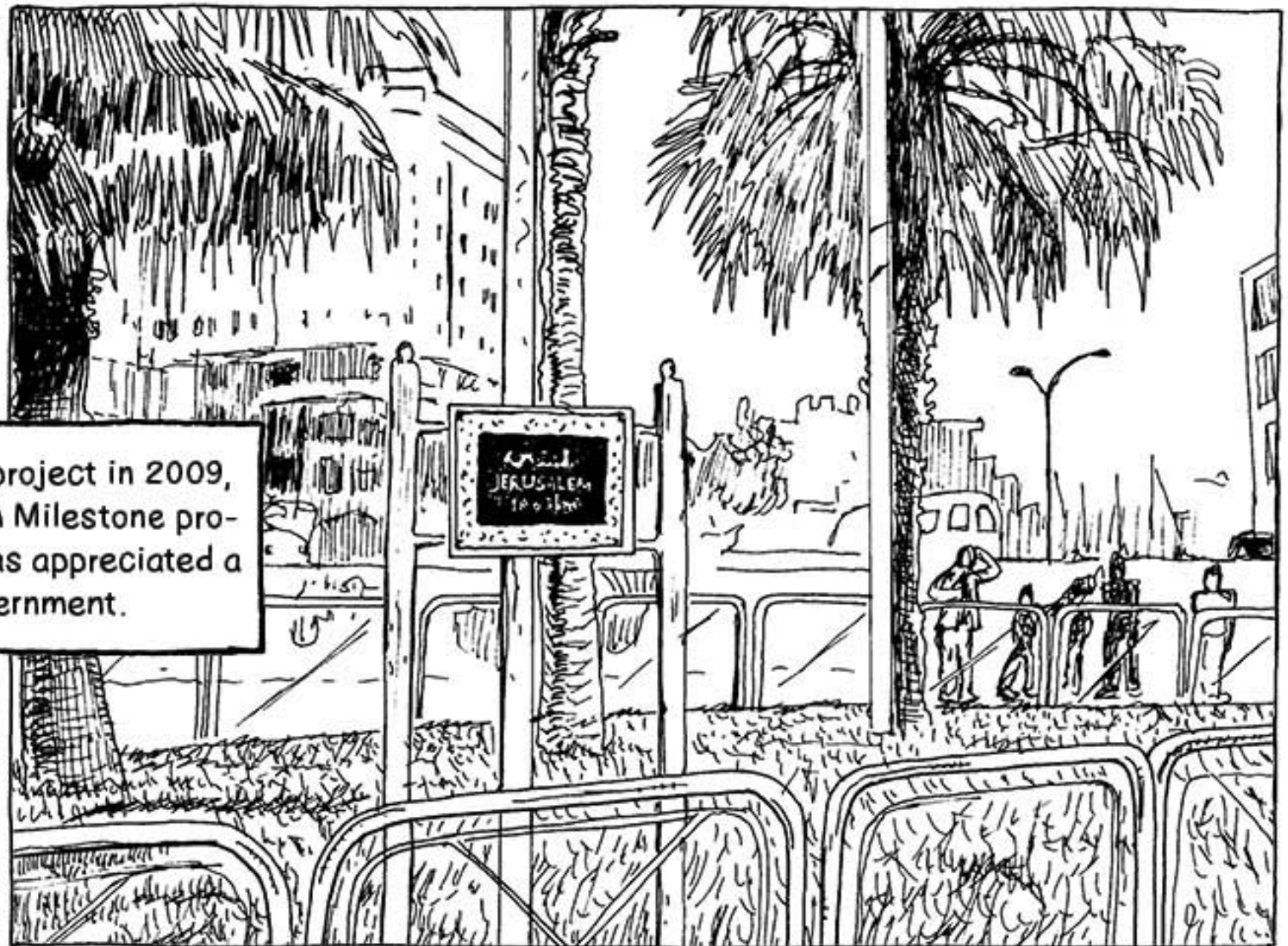
But in our response, we said, more or less, "We will look into it."

CONNECTIONS

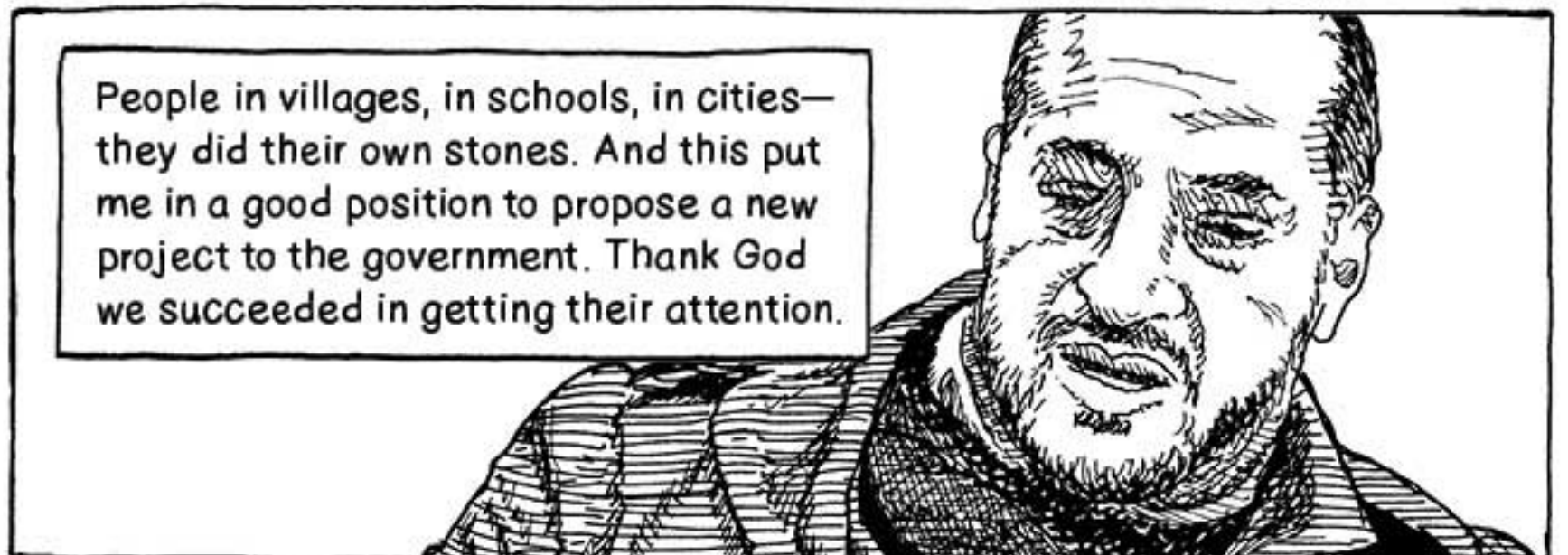





I was doing a project in 2009, the Jerusalem Milestone project, and it was appreciated a lot by the government.



The Prime Minister was at the opening of the stone in Ramallah, in different locations, because this project was a community project.



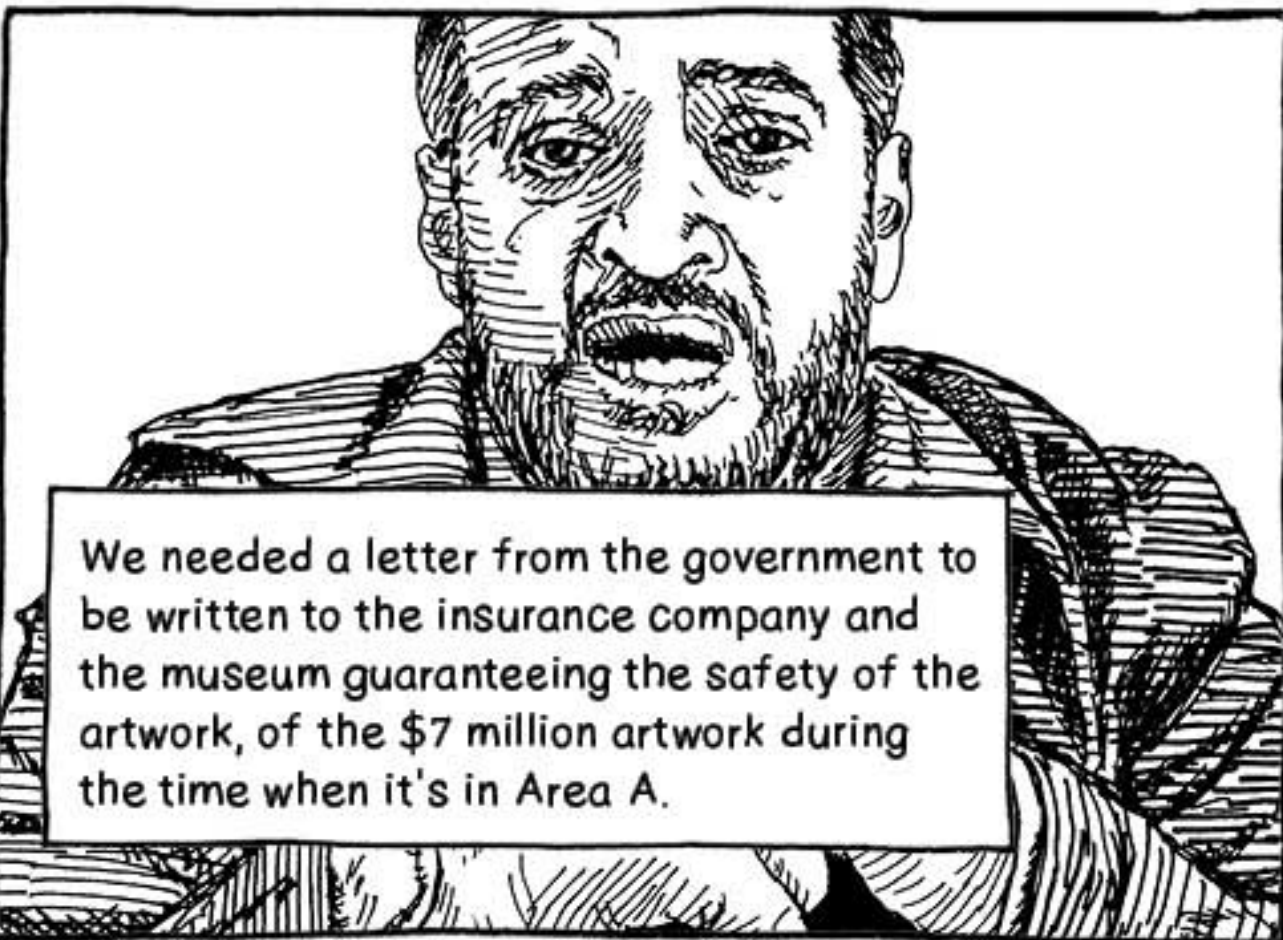
People in villages, in schools, in cities—they did their own stones. And this put me in a good position to propose a new project to the government. Thank God we succeeded in getting their attention.



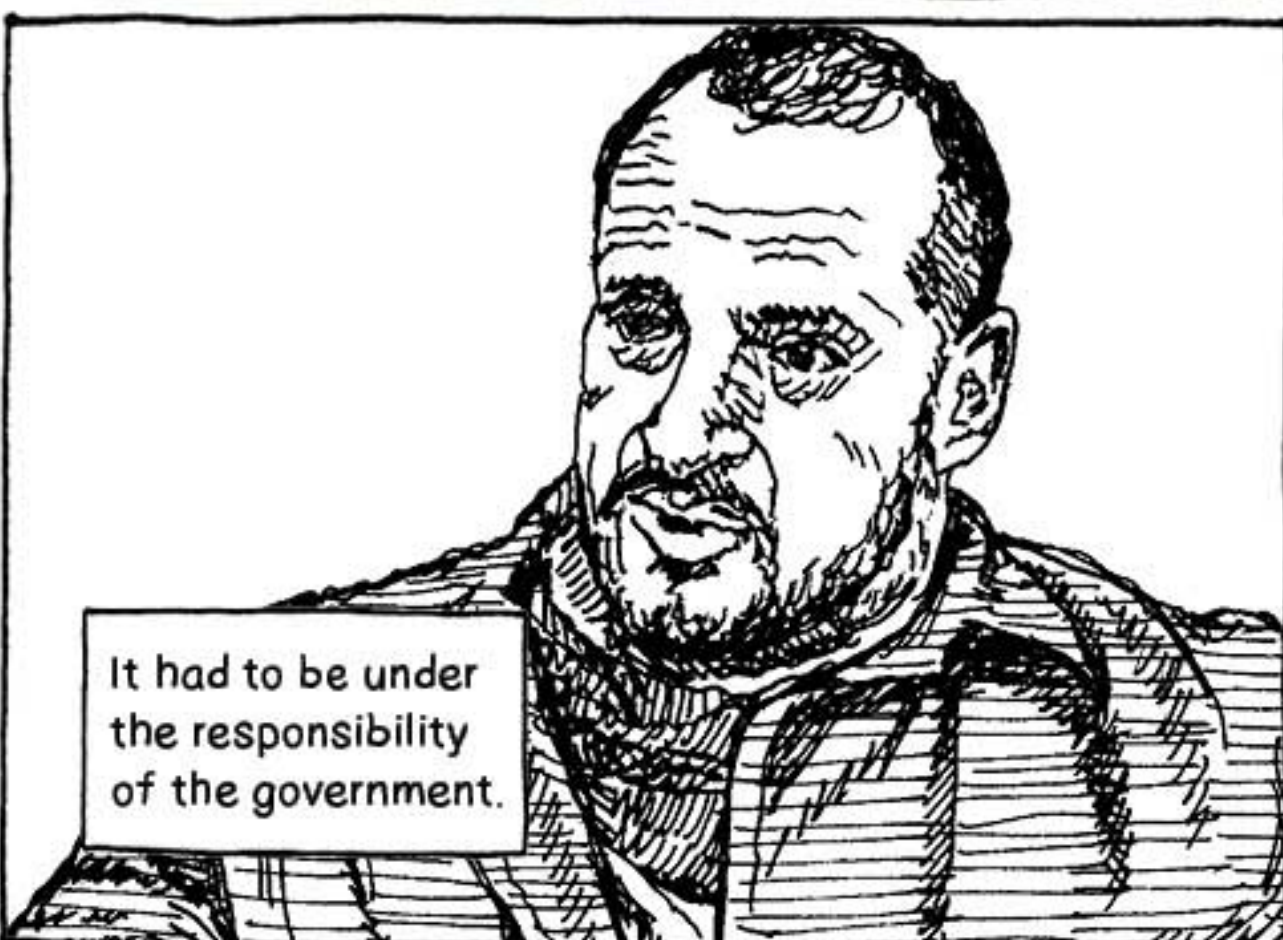
So, I proposed my Picasso project to the Prime Minister.



We had a logistic need.



We needed a letter from the government to be written to the insurance company and the museum guaranteeing the safety of the artwork, of the \$7 million artwork during the time when it's in Area A.



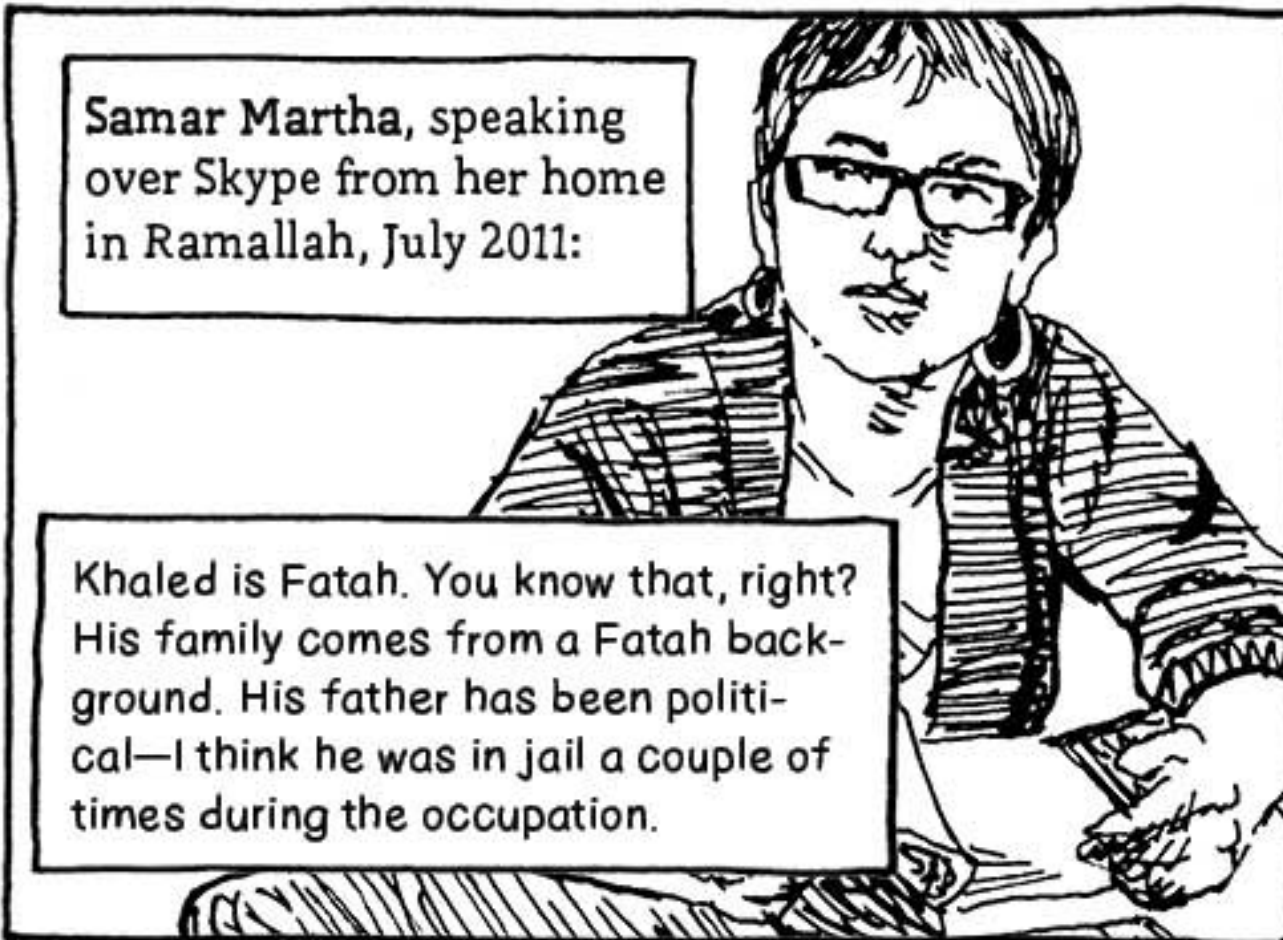
It had to be under the responsibility of the government.



That Hourani had such access to the PA merits further explanation. Born in Hebron into a large refugee family, Hourani is no stranger to politics or politicians. Among his twenty-one siblings, several have been politically active. Hourani, his siblings and father all served time in Israeli jails during the First Intifada. Hourani himself took membership first in the Communist Party at the beginning of his university education, and subsequently joined the Popular Front (PFLF) before forgoing membership in any party.


Hourani began his art career producing fairly conventional paintings and sculptures but has moved progressively towards curatorial and interventionist work in the vein of third generation institutional critique artists like Jens Haaning and Maria Eichhorn. And whether out of a natural bent for eclecticism or necessity or a combination of both, like other intellectuals and

culture workers in the West Bank, his professional activities encompass many fields. He has written plays, curated exhibitions, worked as a consultant, and in advertising. His CV lists multiple directorships and board memberships, which, besides his current post at the IAAP, includes tenure at the Palestinian Association for Contemporary Art, the Palestinian Artist League, Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, as well as a lengthy spell as Director of the Plastic Arts in the Palestinian Ministry of Culture. He is, by all indications, a man familiar with the machinery of bureaucratic power and party politics, demonstrating how his artistic identity is inflected by party affiliation in a manner seldom seen today in the West.




Samar Martha, speaking over Skype from her home in Ramallah, July 2011:

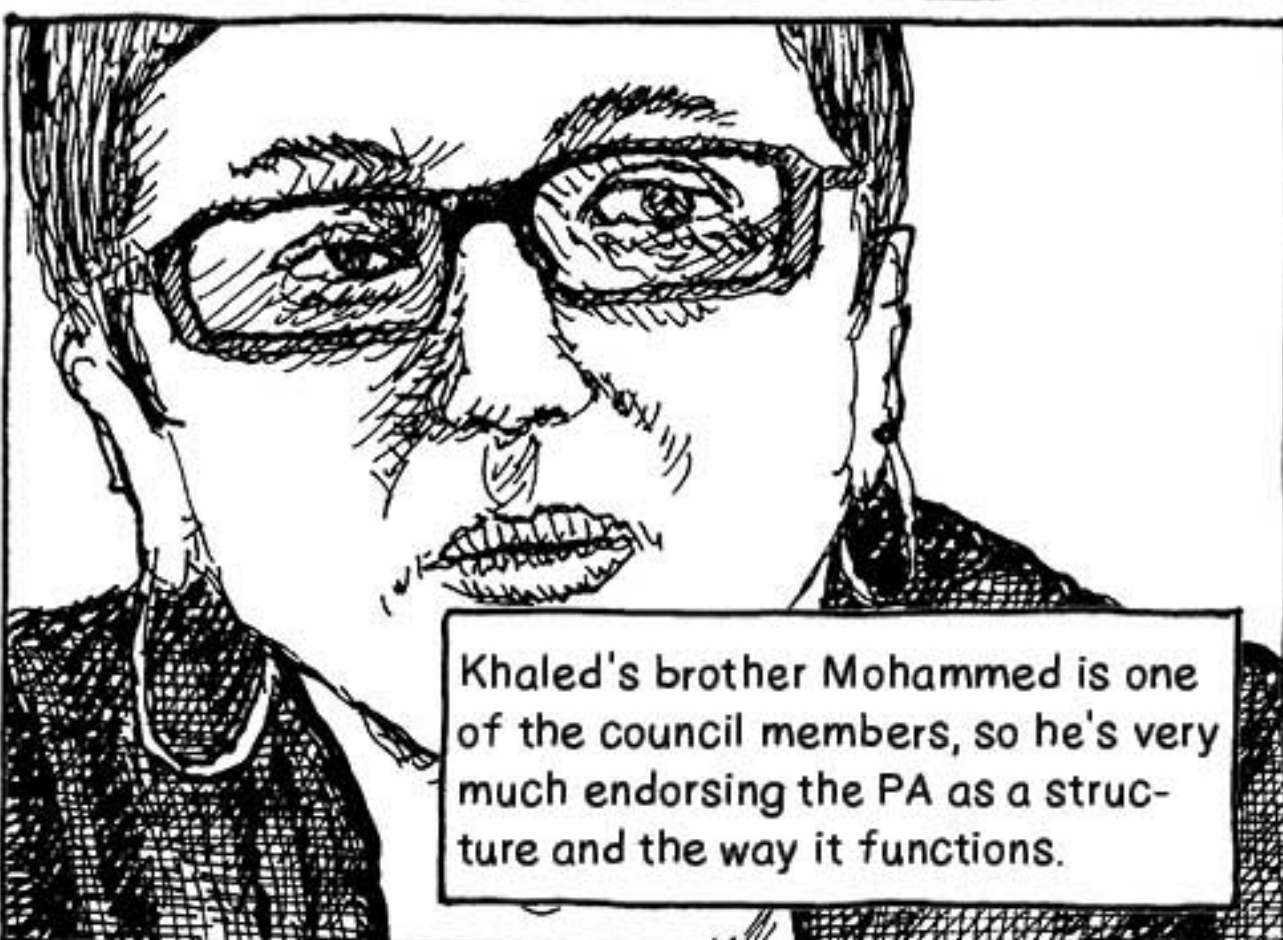
Khaled is Fatah. You know that, right? His family comes from a Fatah background. His father has been political—I think he was in jail a couple of times during the occupation.



Khaled was in jail, I think, during the First Intifada; his brother Wafa was in jail.



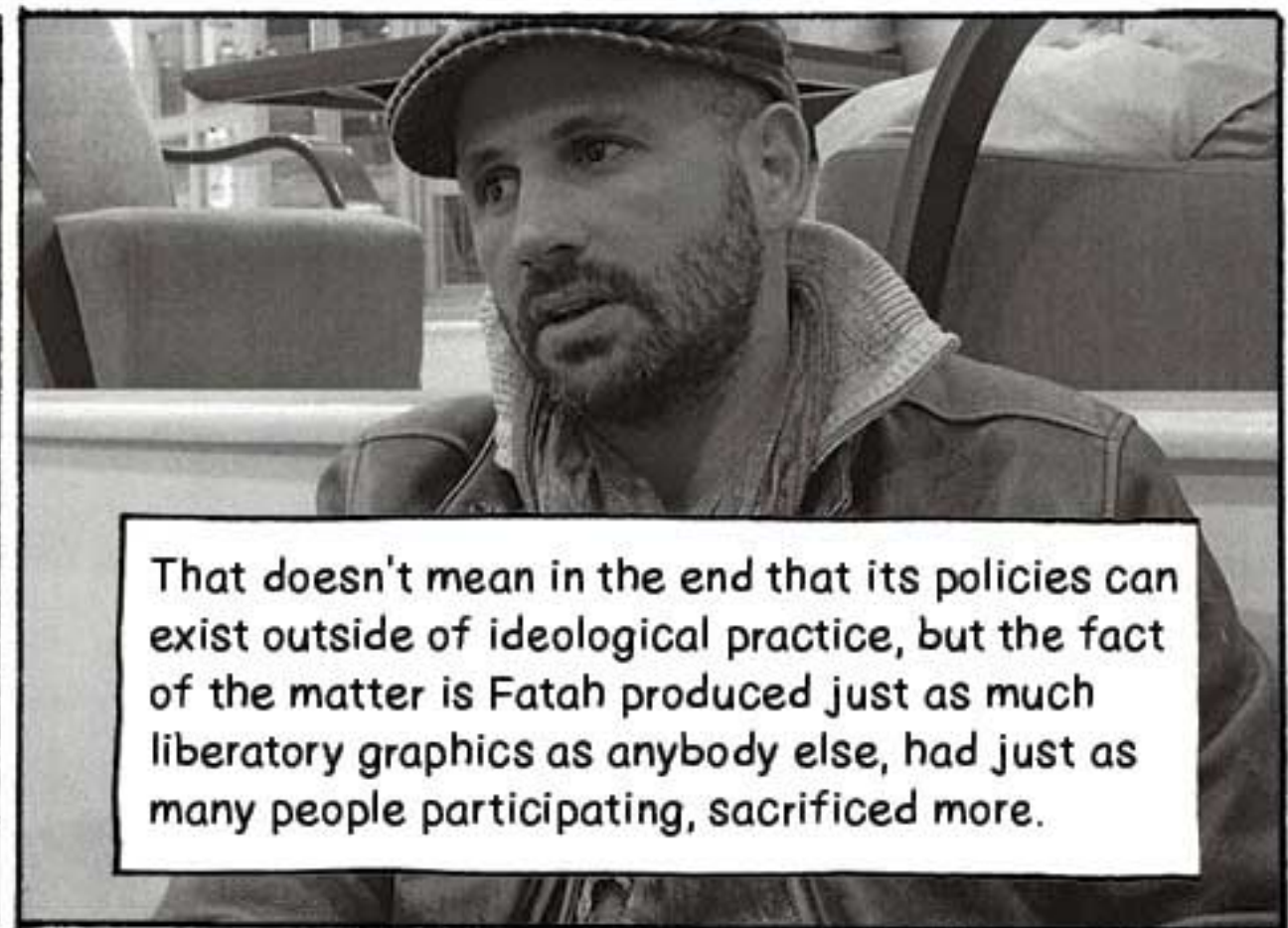
Mohammed was in jail. Most of them were quite active in the First and Second Intifada.



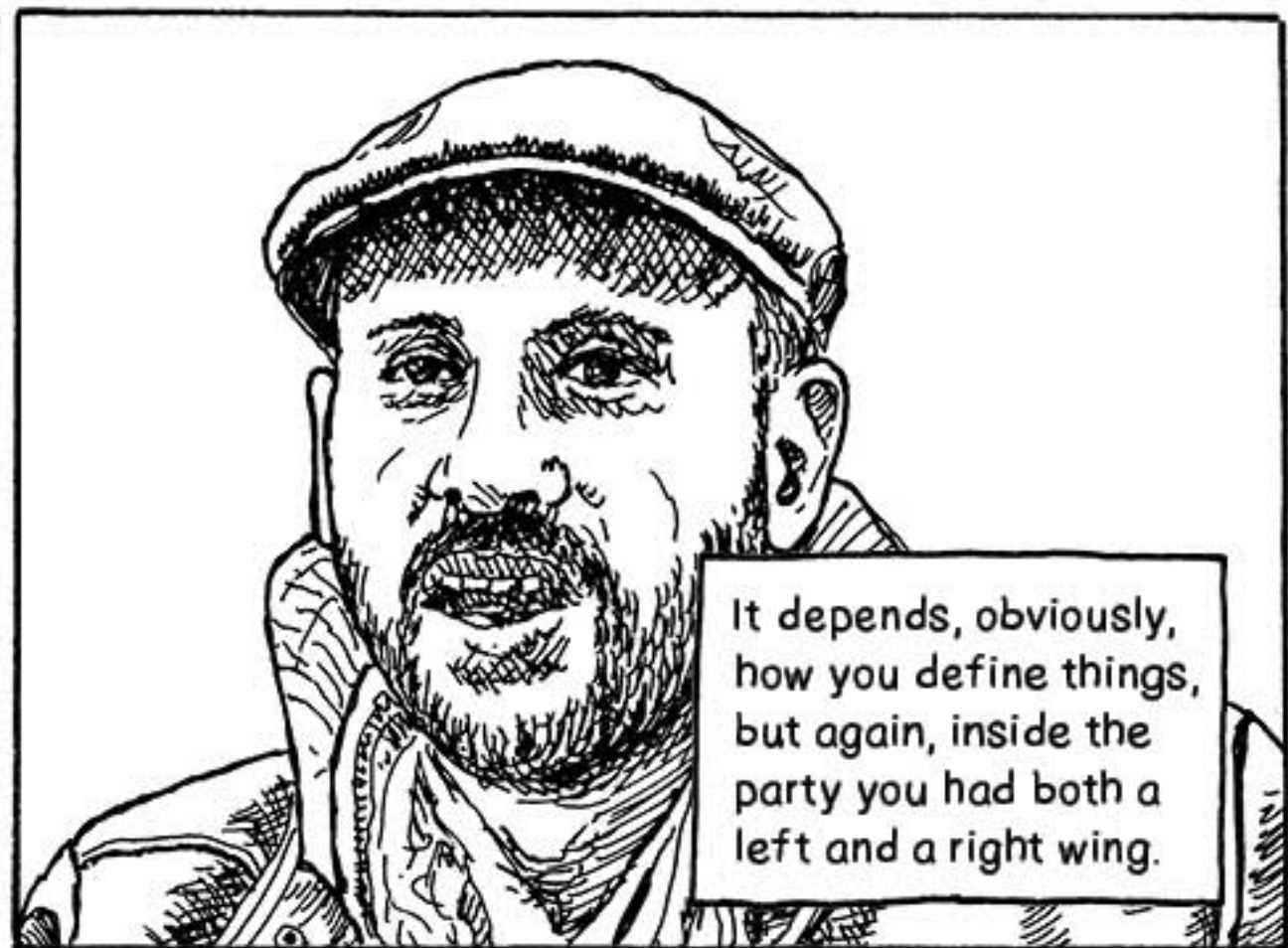
Khaled's brother Mohammed is one of the council members, so he's very much endorsing the PA as a structure and the way it functions.



Fatah wasn't part of an Arab nationalist movement per se, although many of them had Arab Nationalist elements. Fatah always included contradictory elements in its approach. It was an alliance of different political actors and social and political visions. It had a left wing, it had a right wing, they also had Islamist elements, and they coexisted inside the party. In fact, one of the notions of Fatah was that it was a non-ideological movement.



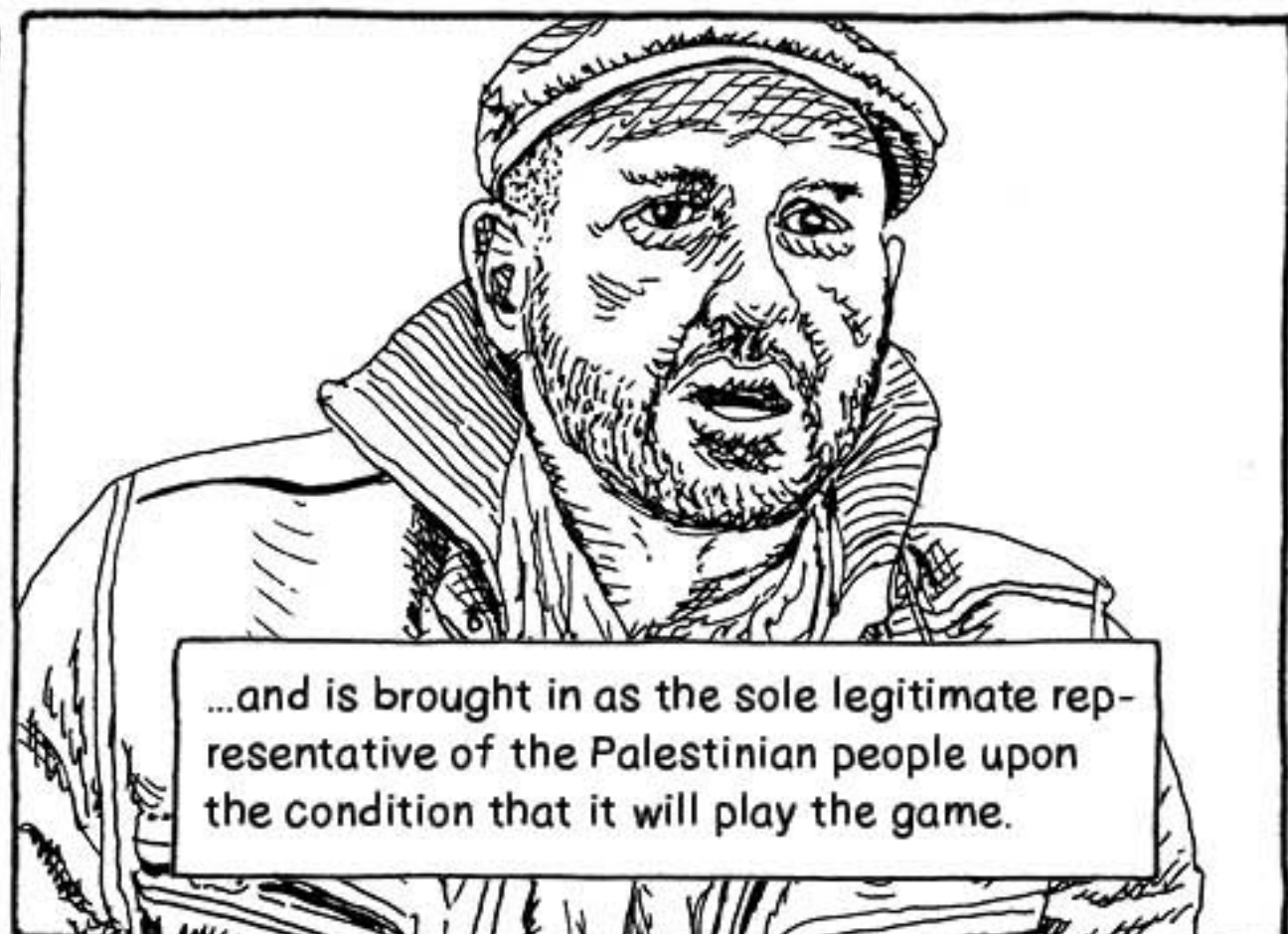
That doesn't mean in the end that its policies can exist outside of ideological practice, but the fact of the matter is Fatah produced just as much liberatory graphics as anybody else, had just as many people participating, sacrificed more.



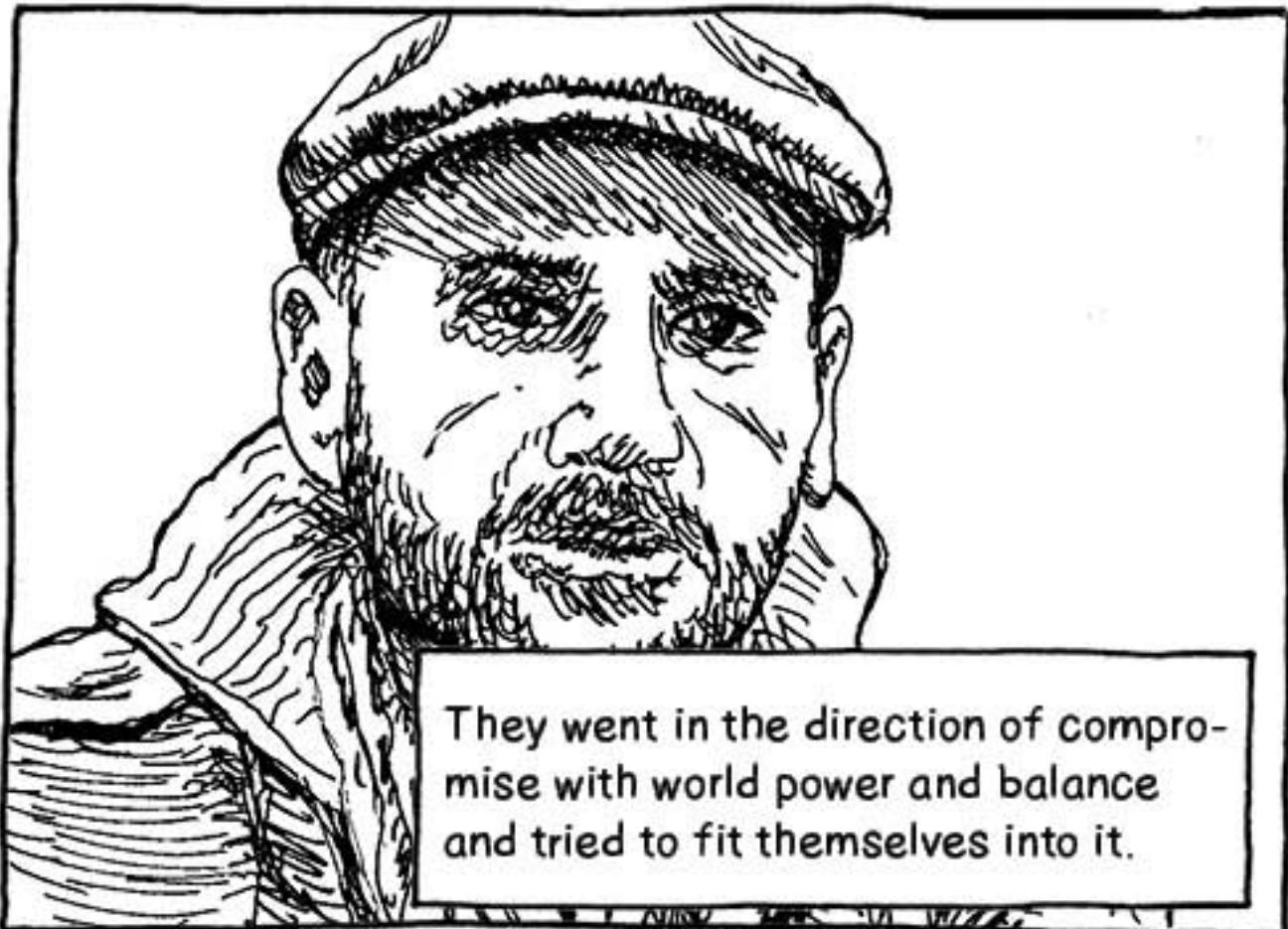
It depends, obviously, how you define things, but again, inside the party you had both a left and a right wing.



After the 1973 war, you have a pivotal moment where Fatah basically rides high on the post '73 reality...



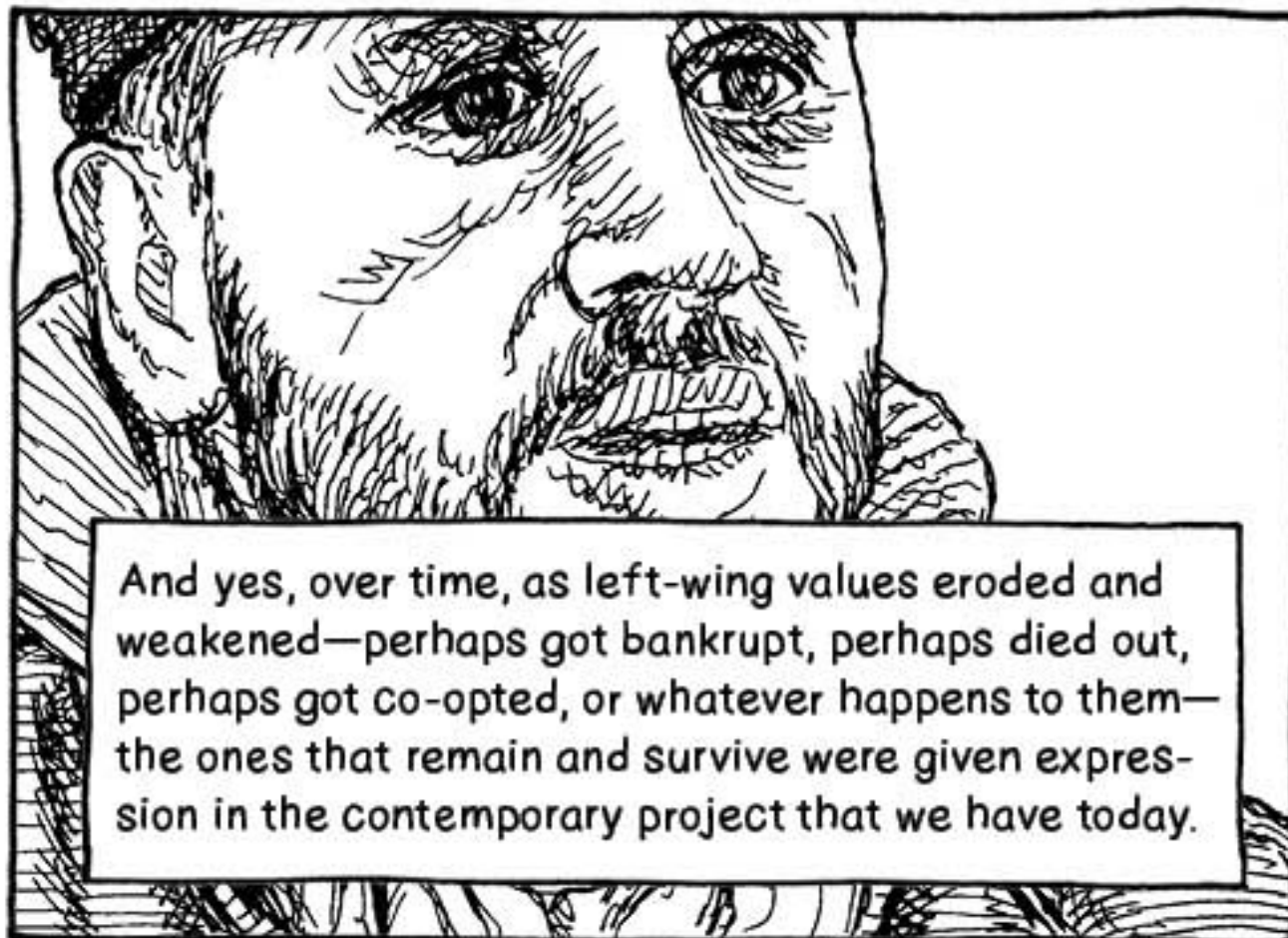
...and is brought in as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people upon the condition that it will play the game.



They went in the direction of compromise with world power and balance and tried to fit themselves into it.



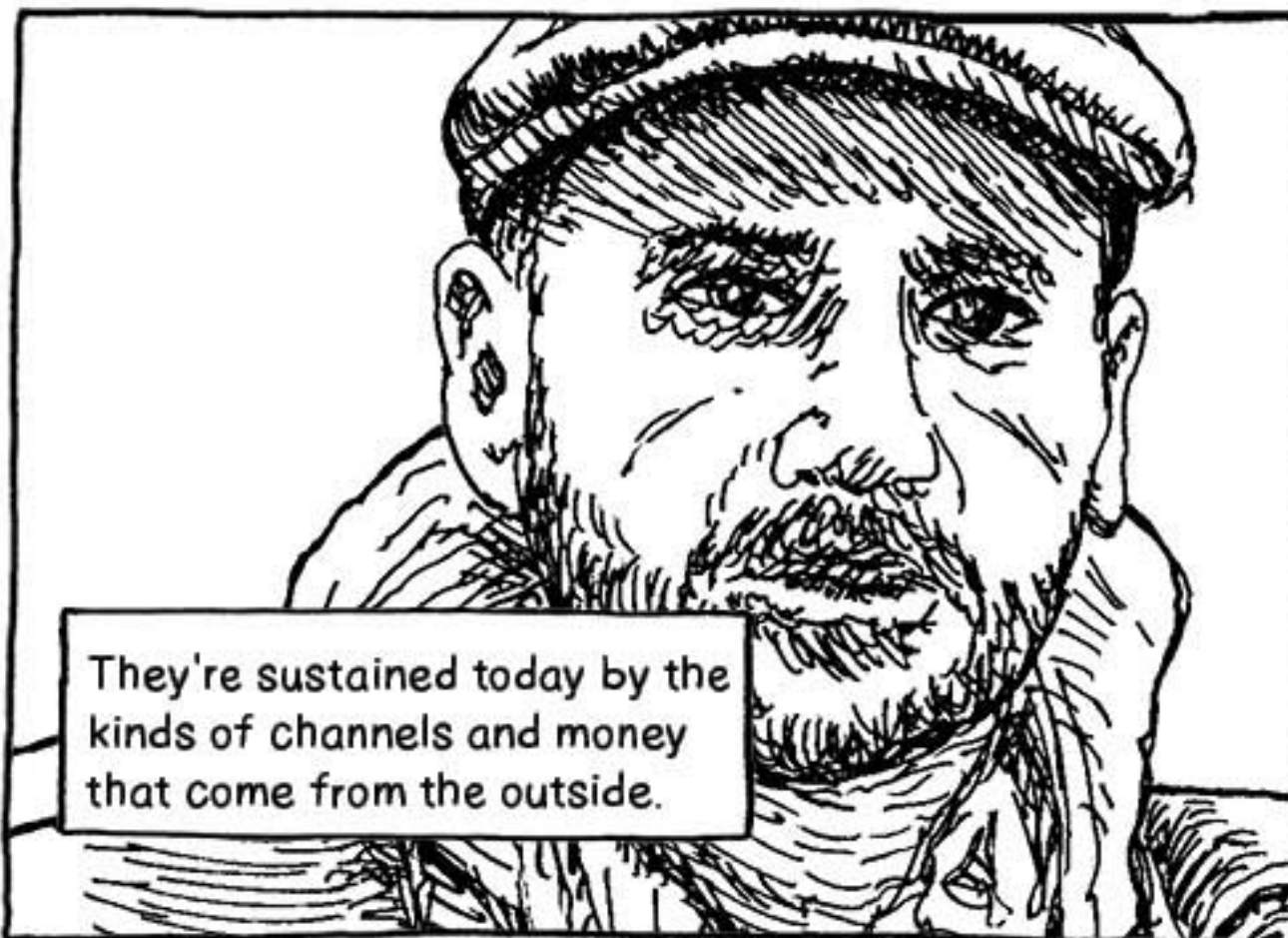
It was a realpolitik, non-ideological approach in a way.



And yes, over time, as left-wing values eroded and weakened—perhaps got bankrupt, perhaps died out, perhaps got co-opted, or whatever happens to them—the ones that remain and survive were given expression in the contemporary project that we have today.



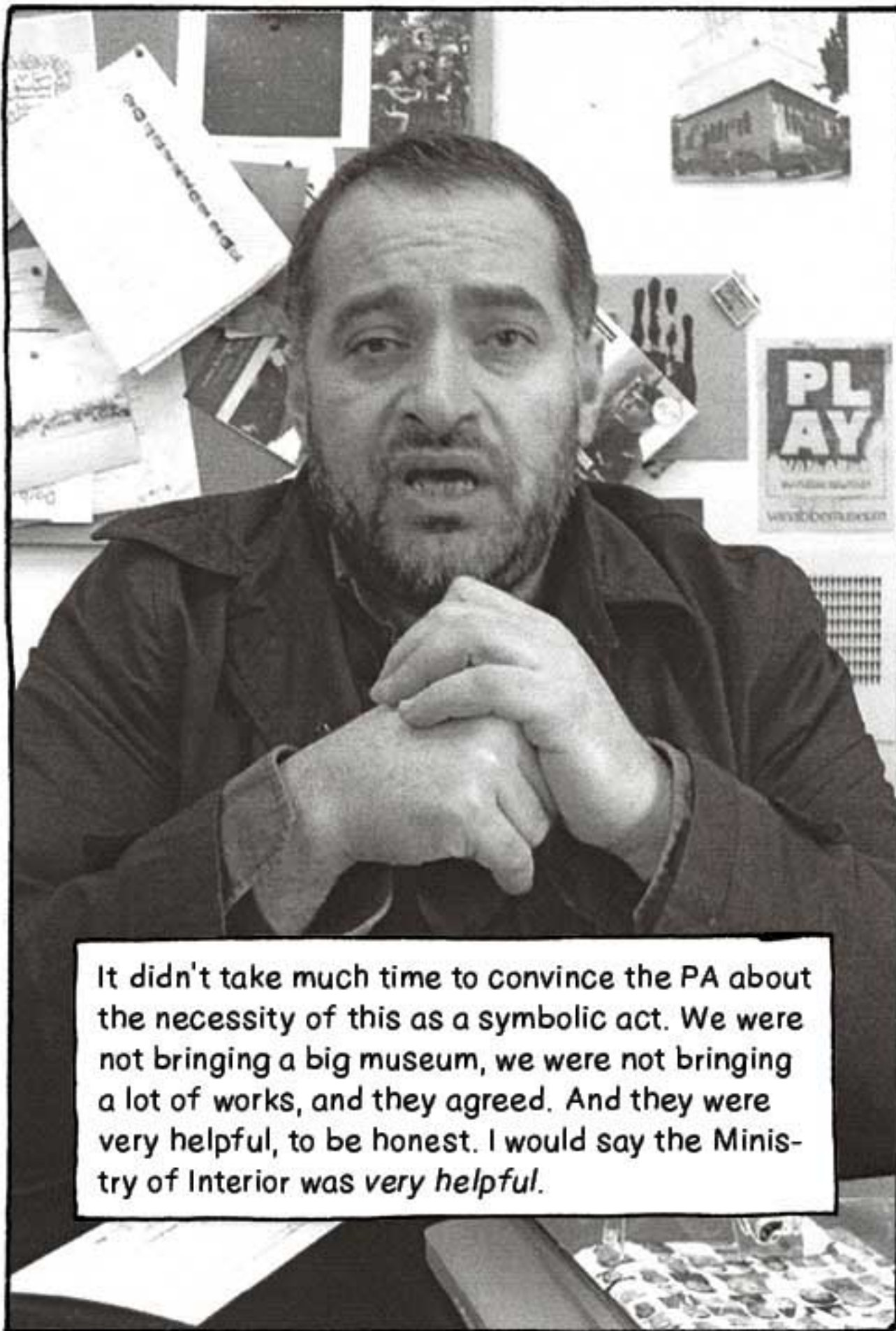
They are the ones we see.



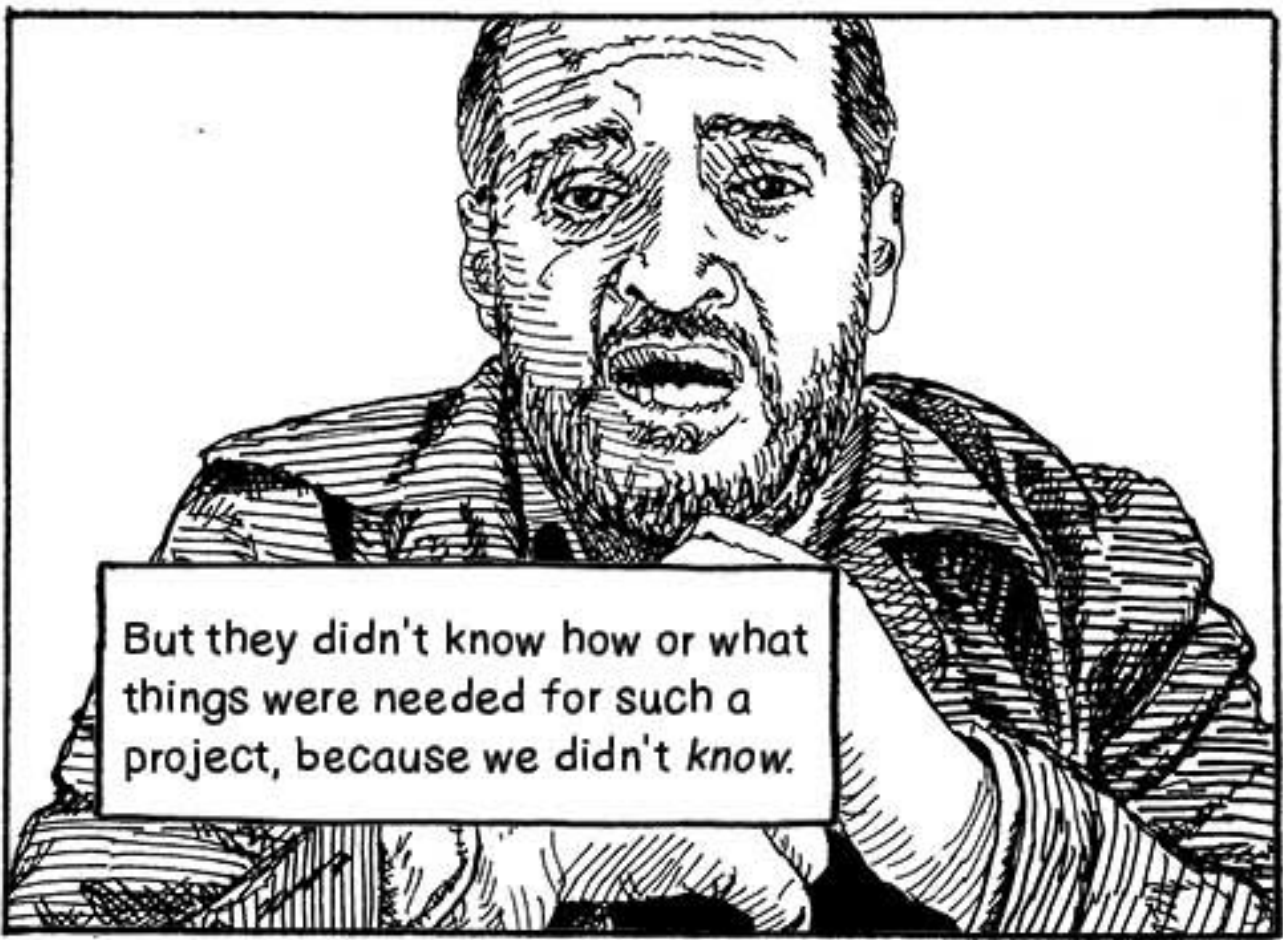
They're sustained today by the kinds of channels and money that come from the outside.



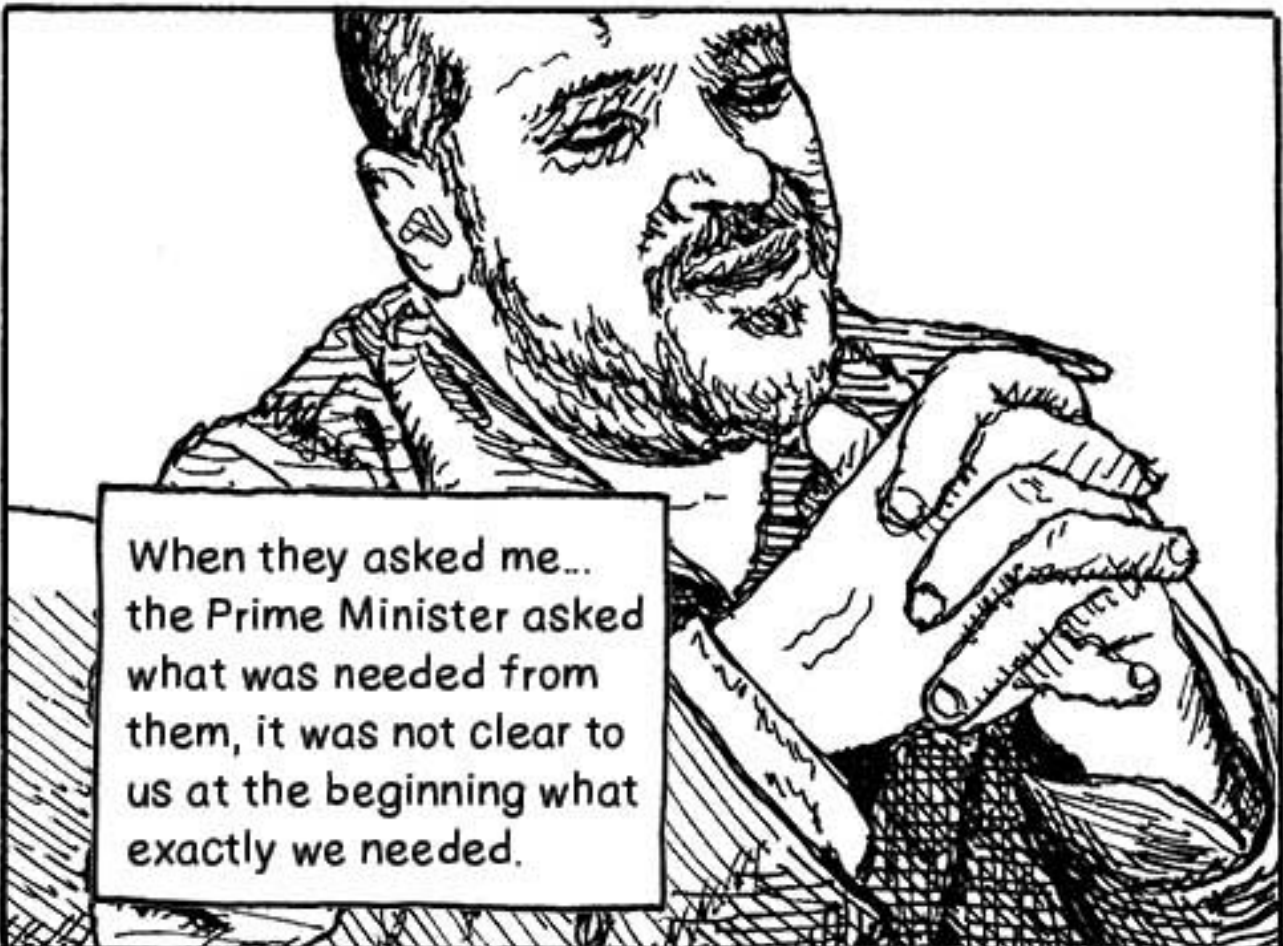
You can say that, yes.



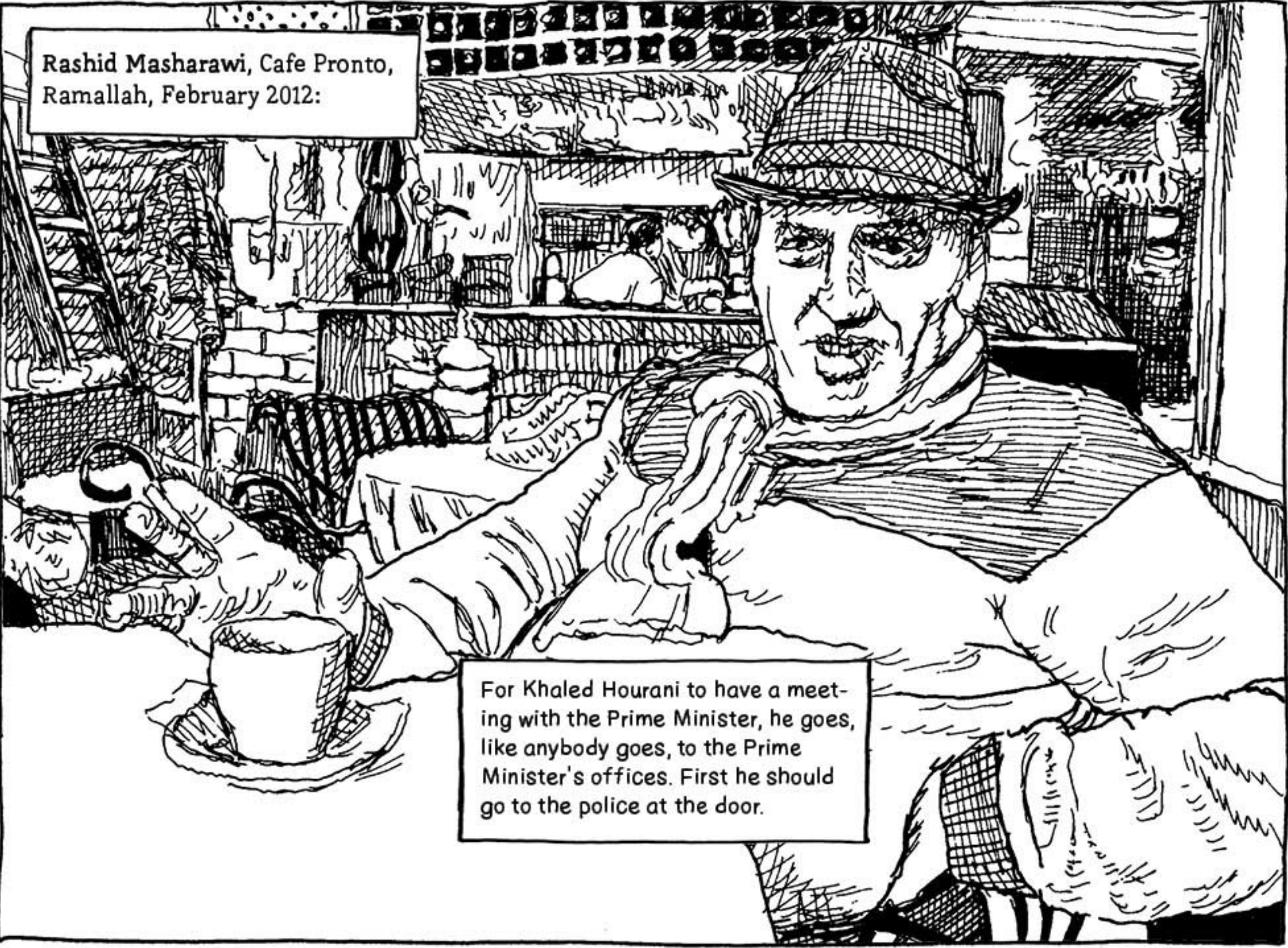
It didn't take much time to convince the PA about the necessity of this as a symbolic act. We were not bringing a big museum, we were not bringing a lot of works, and they agreed. And they were very helpful, to be honest. I would say the Ministry of Interior was *very helpful*.



But they didn't know how or what things were needed for such a project, because we didn't *know*.

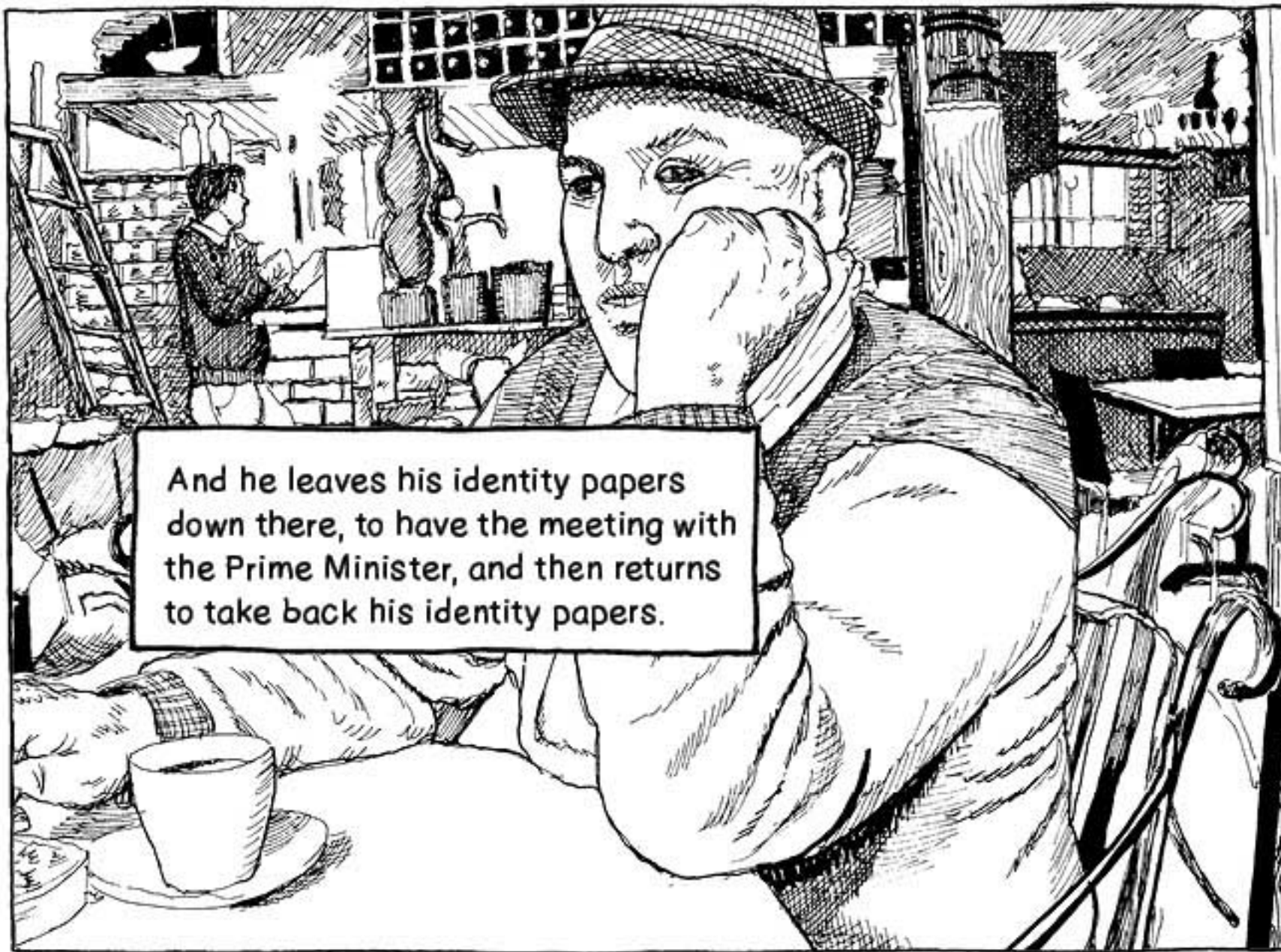


When they asked me... the Prime Minister asked what was needed from them, it was not clear to us at the beginning what exactly we needed.

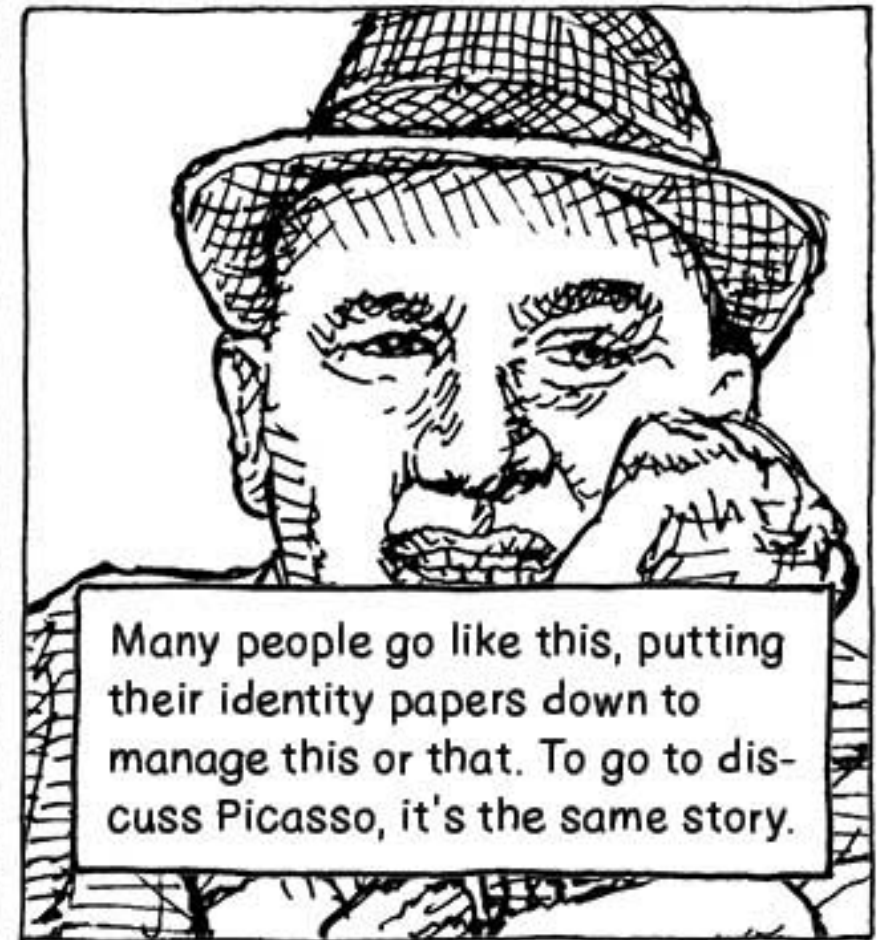


Rashid Masharawi, Cafe Pronto,
Ramallah, February 2012:

For Khaled Hourani to have a meet-
ing with the Prime Minister, he goes,
like anybody goes, to the Prime
Minister's offices. First he should
go to the police at the door.



And he leaves his identity papers down there, to have the meeting with the Prime Minister, and then returns to take back his identity papers.



Many people go like this, putting their identity papers down to manage this or that. To go to discuss Picasso, it's the same story.



Police sitting there, you come to the window. "I want to enter the building," you say.



So, I filmed all those things, which also demonstrates how things happen here.



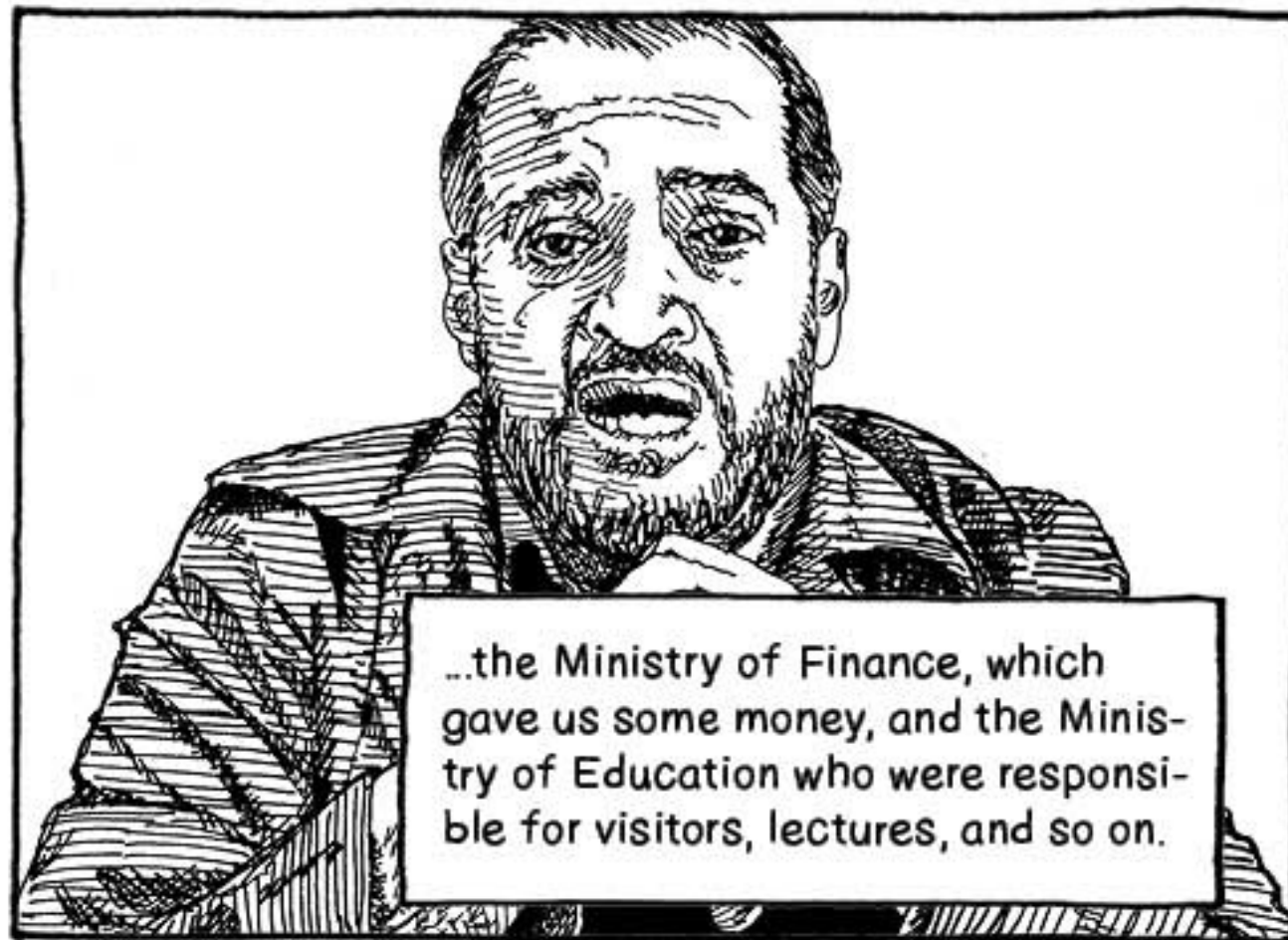
Besides the Prime Minister's office, the Picasso in Palestine project was on the agenda of a committee meeting, and they wrote a letter for three different ministries to be involved...



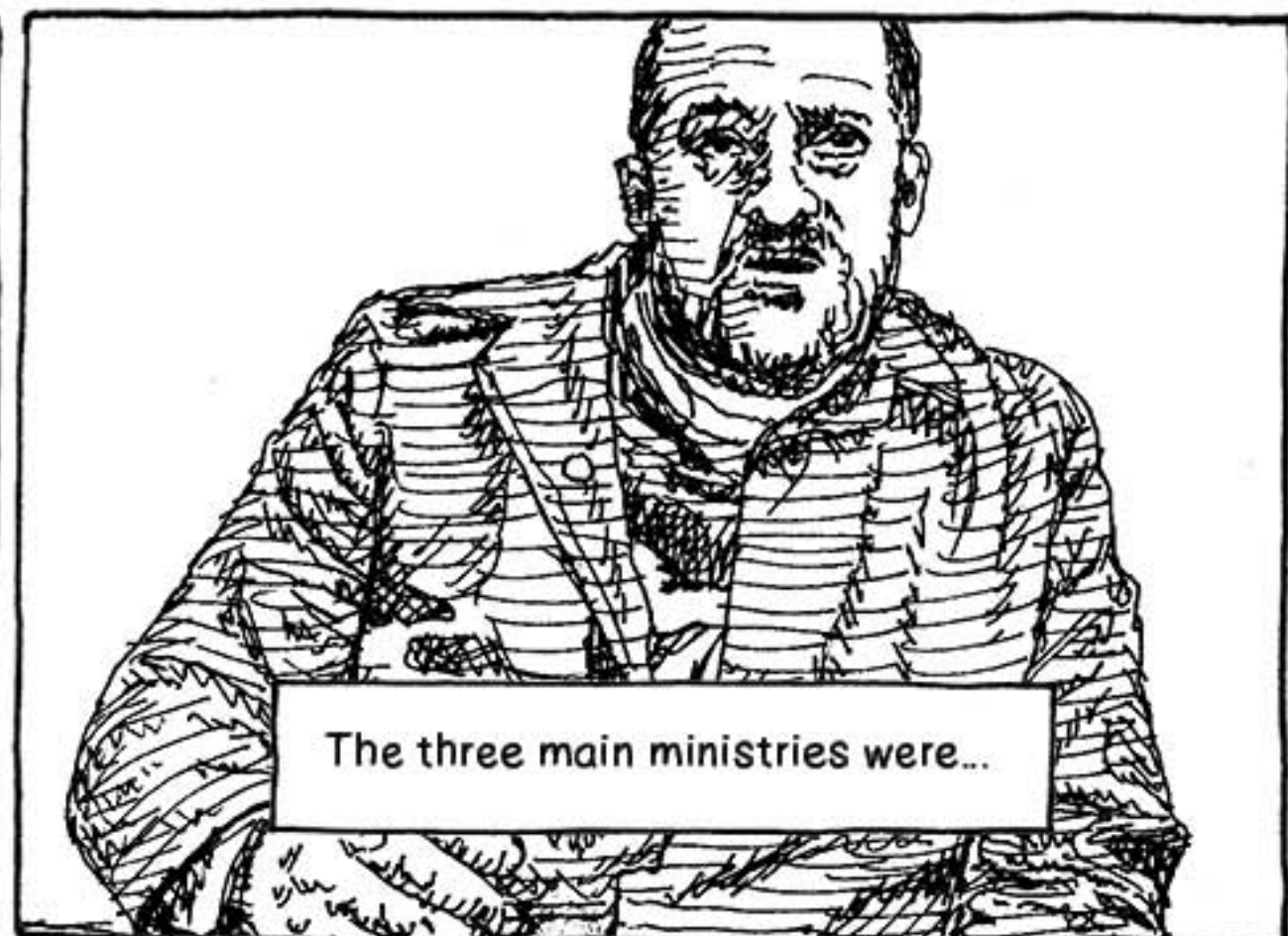
The Ministry of Culture to provide all the logistics, the Ministry of Interior for the security guards, and the Ministry of Civilian Affairs, which was responsible for communicating with the Israelis.



Then there were two ministries which were involved in other ways...



...the Ministry of Finance, which gave us some money, and the Ministry of Education who were responsible for visitors, lectures, and so on.



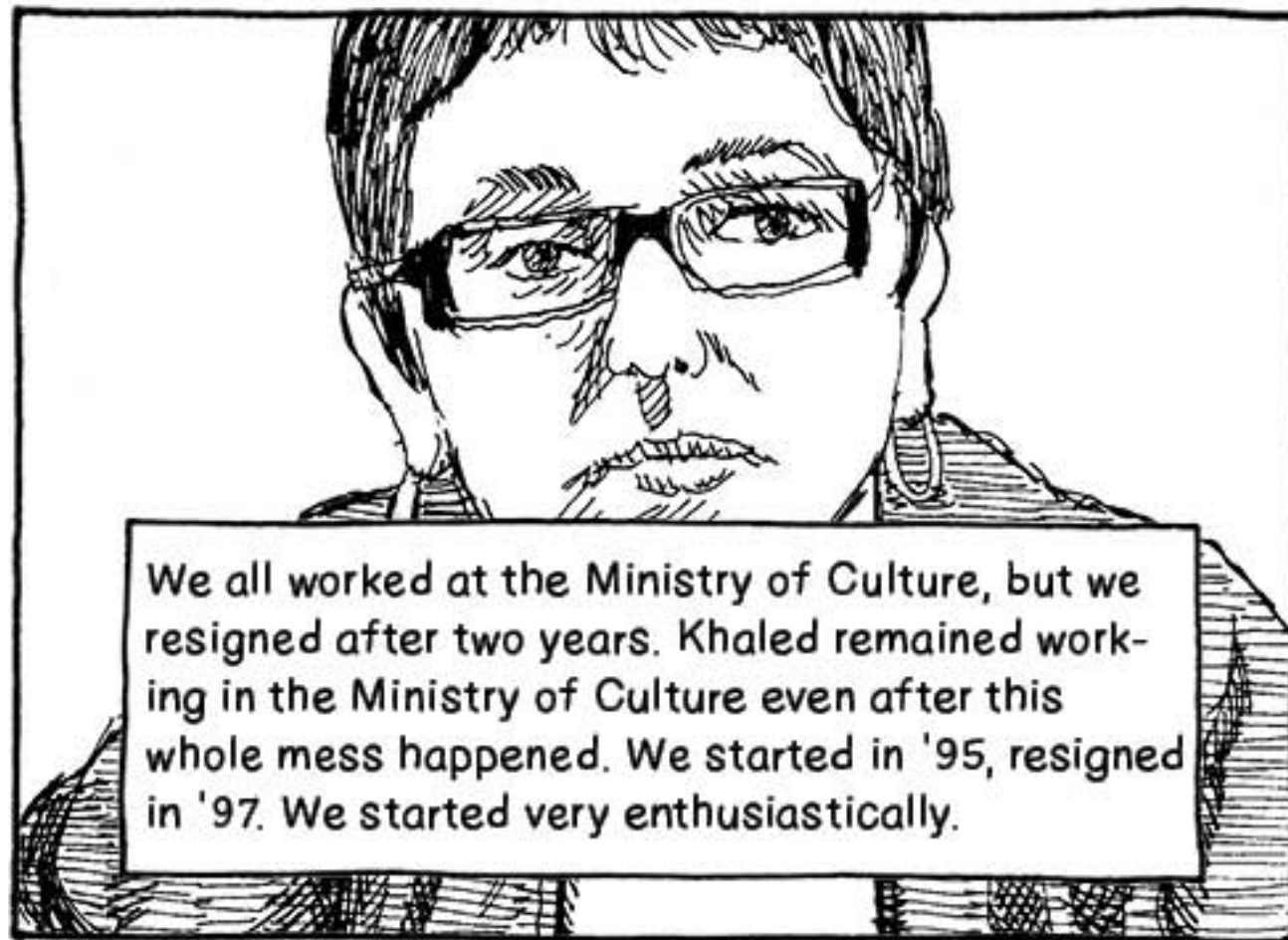
The three main ministries were...



...Interior, Civil Affairs, and the Ministry of Culture. And I would say they were all very supportive.



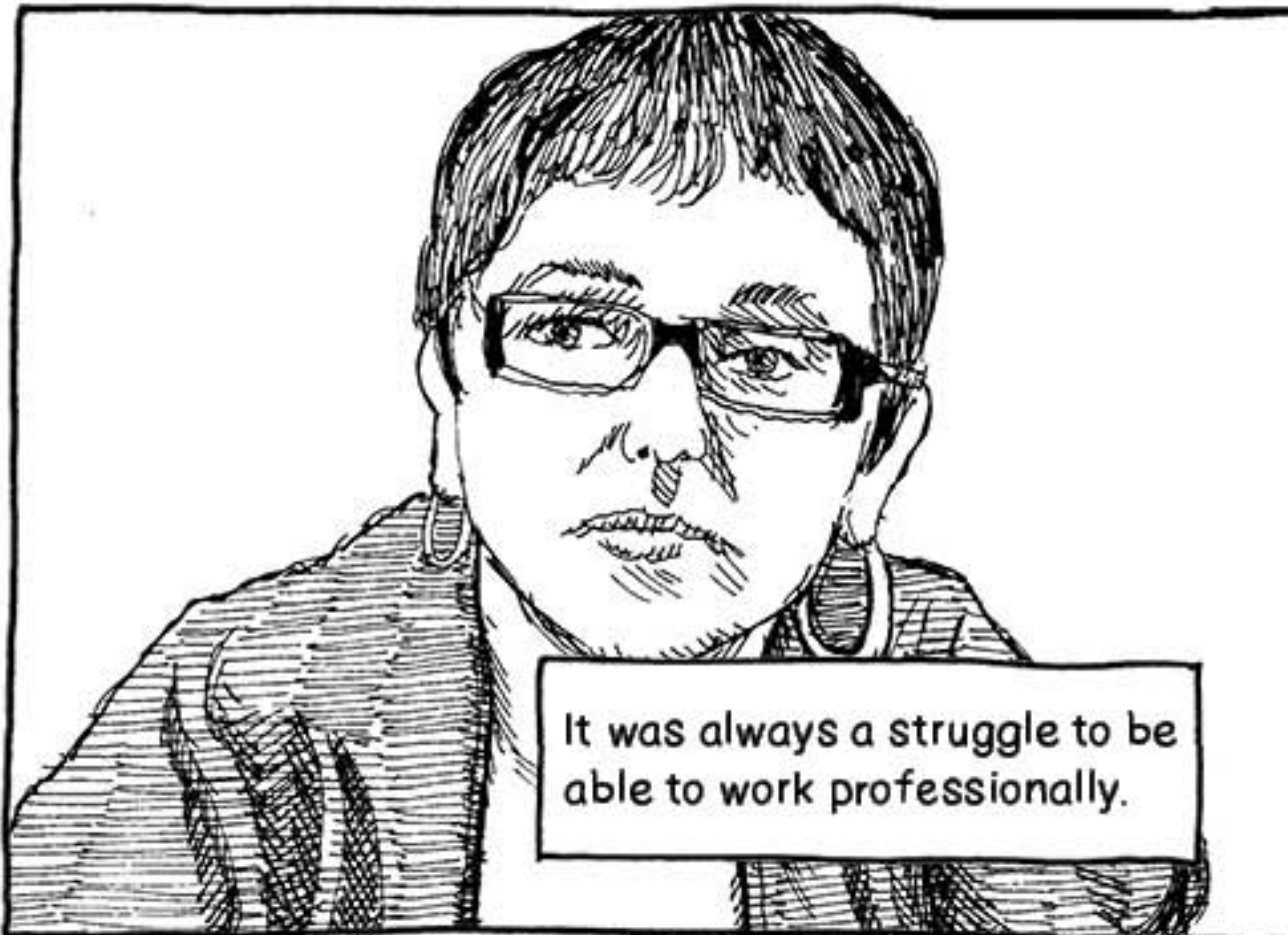
We called the Ministry of Culture many times if there was a need to communicate with other Palestinian institutions, like the VAT office.



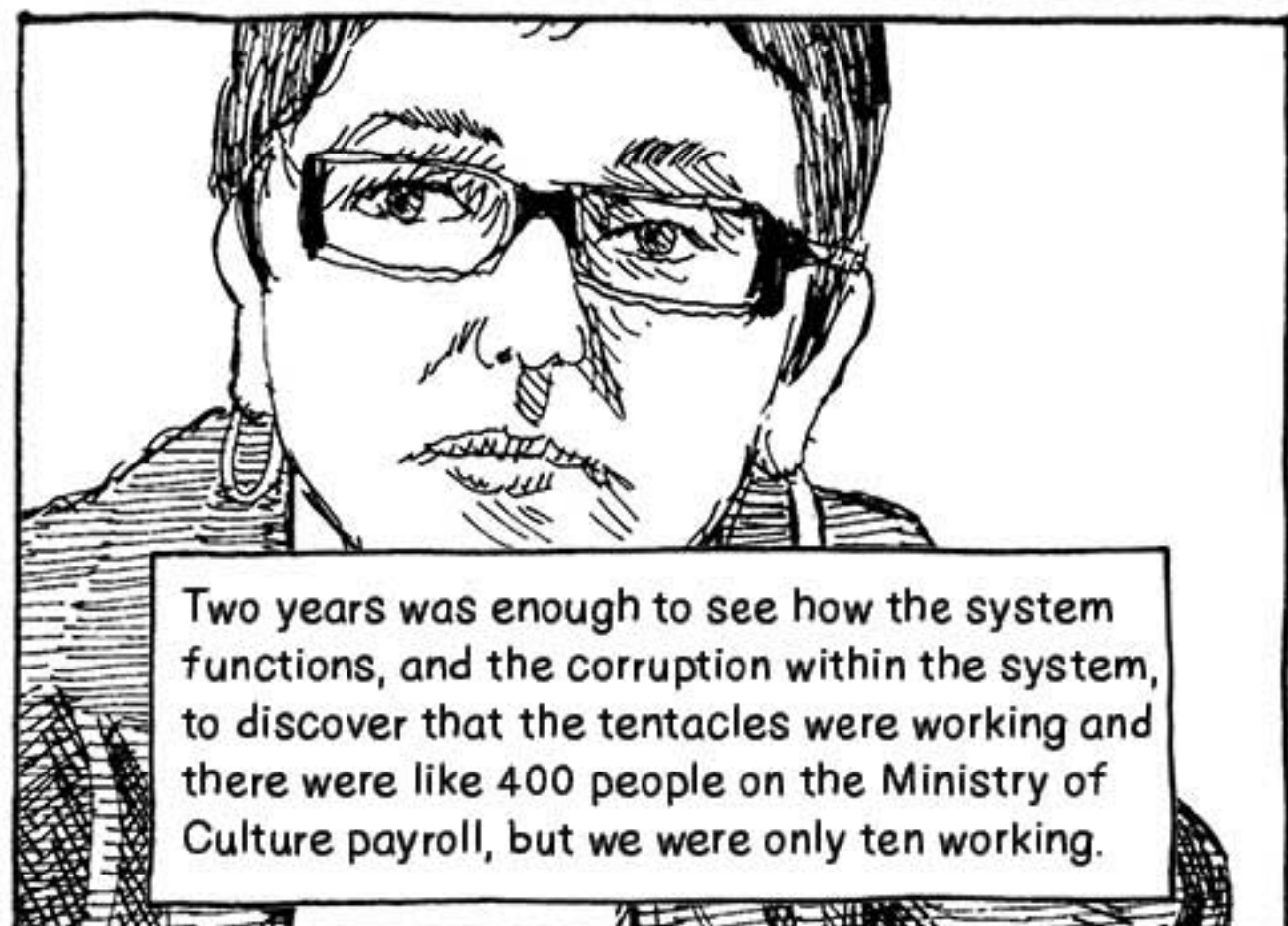
We all worked at the Ministry of Culture, but we resigned after two years. Khaled remained working in the Ministry of Culture even after this whole mess happened. We started in '95, resigned in '97. We started very enthusiastically.



We wanted to build a proper structure for culture. Honestly, it took us only two years to discover that we couldn't really do much—me, Jack, Yassir—especially as people coming from outside the political affiliations.

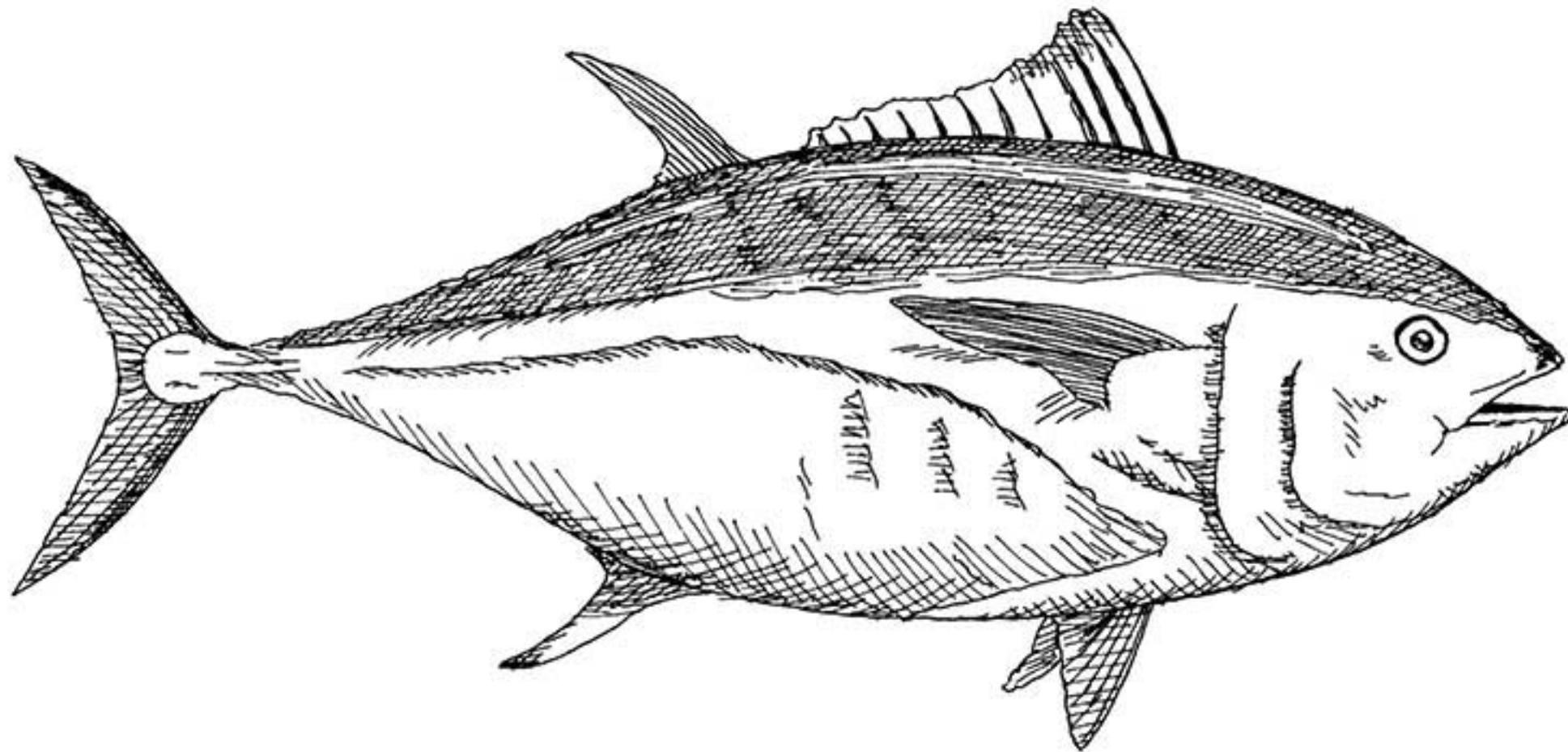


It was always a struggle to be able to work professionally.



Two years was enough to see how the system functions, and the corruption within the system, to discover that the tentacles were working and there were like 400 people on the Ministry of Culture payroll, but we were only ten working.

THE SEARCH FOR INSURANCE

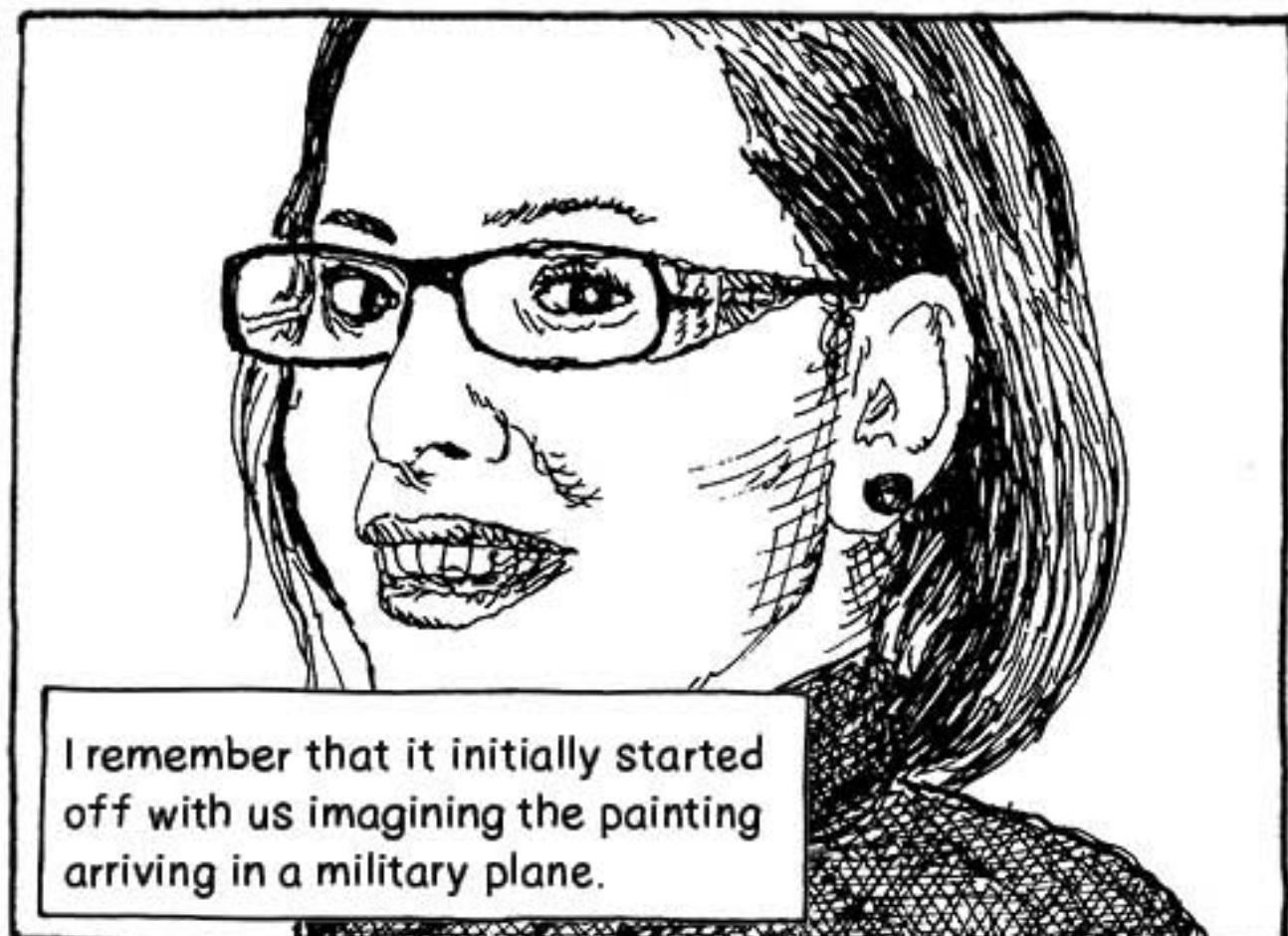




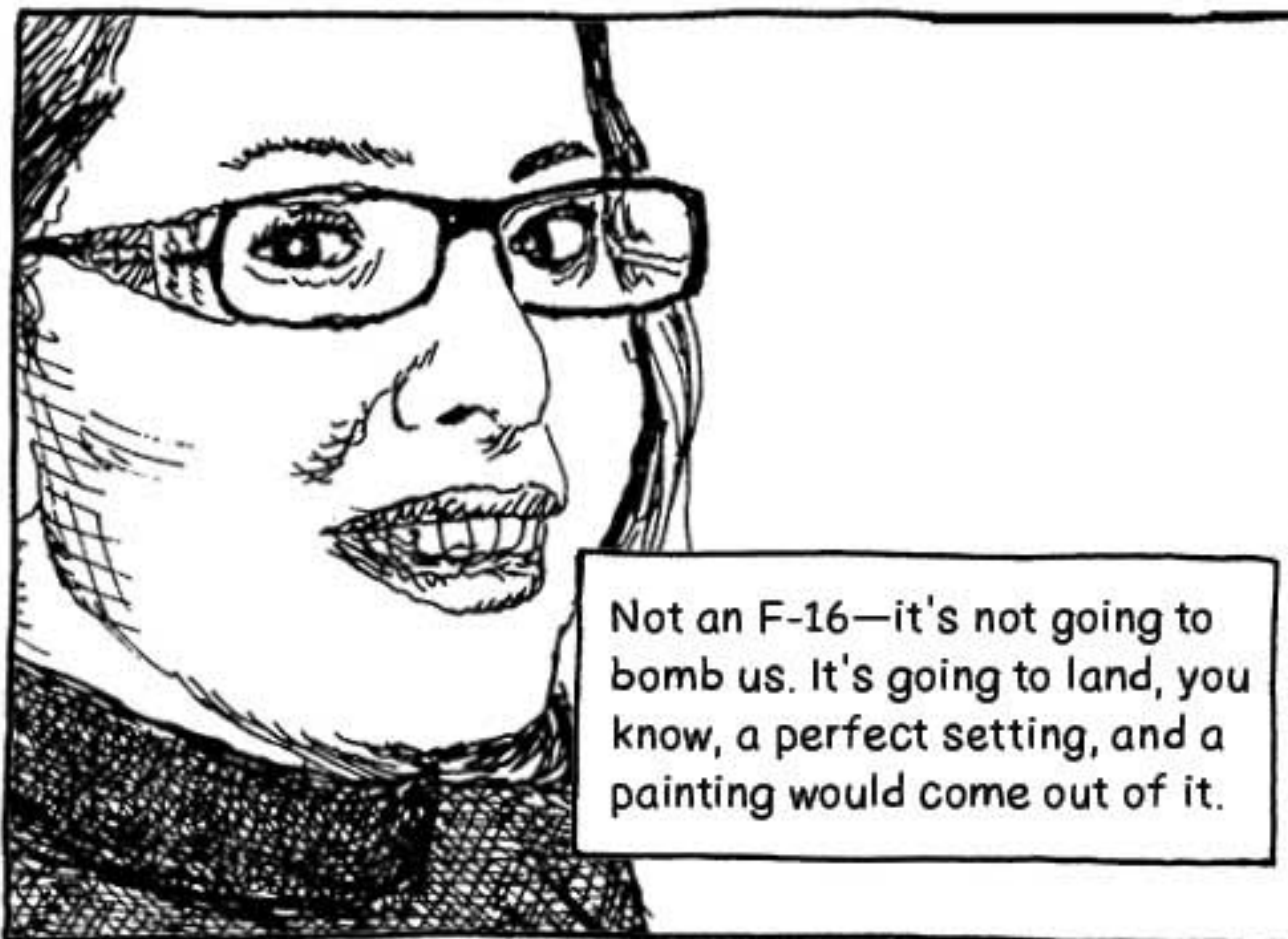
I knew Khaled from working at the Academy. When I was a student, I worked as a translator and was also working at the Academy doing media coordination and event management. At the time the Picasso project was starting up, I was looking for a job. I was out of the government—it didn't work out in a way that satisfied me. It was in the spring of 2009 when Khaled and I first spoke about the Picasso Project.



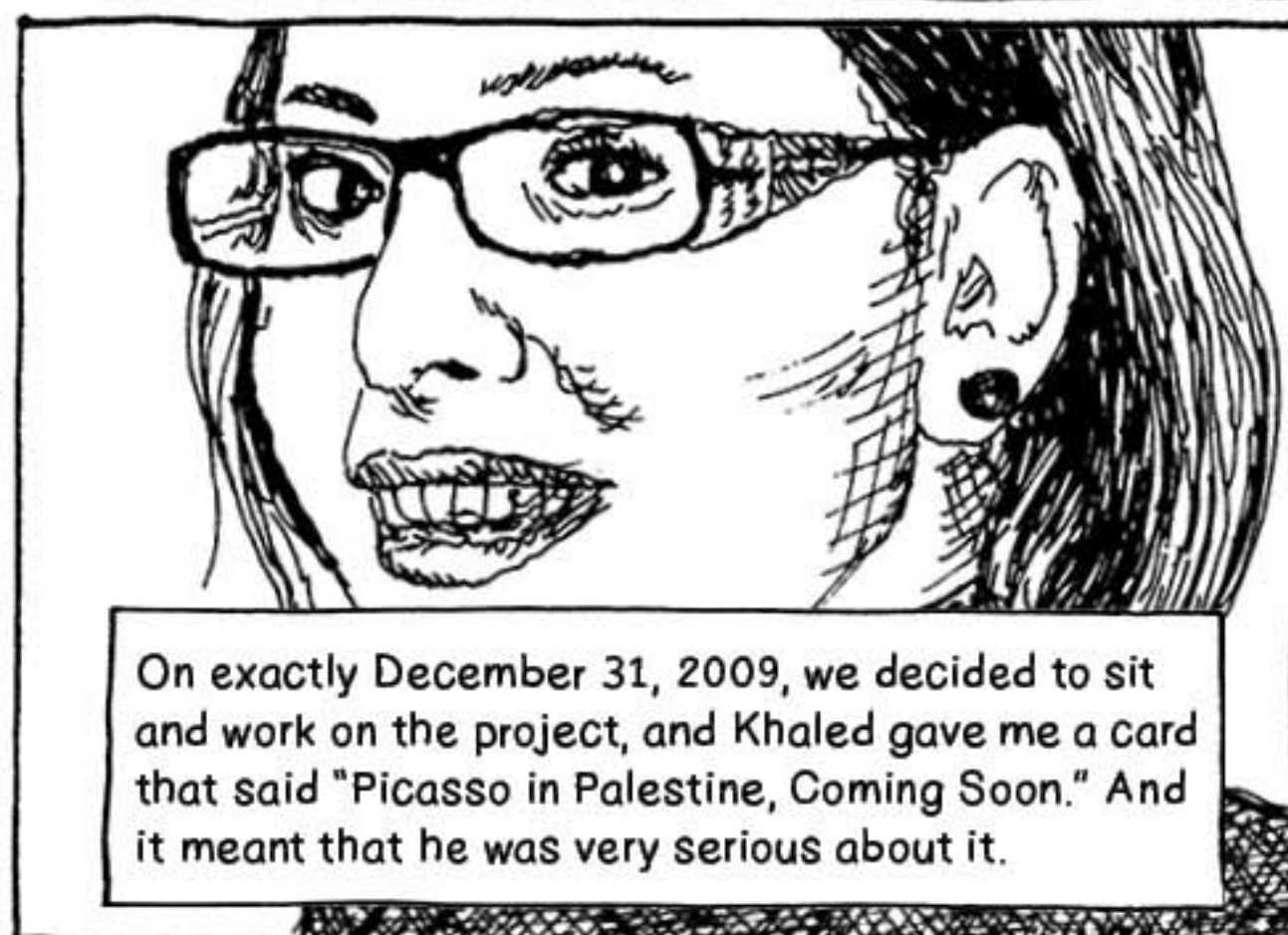
This was also around the time Khaled installed his Jerusalem Milestone project.



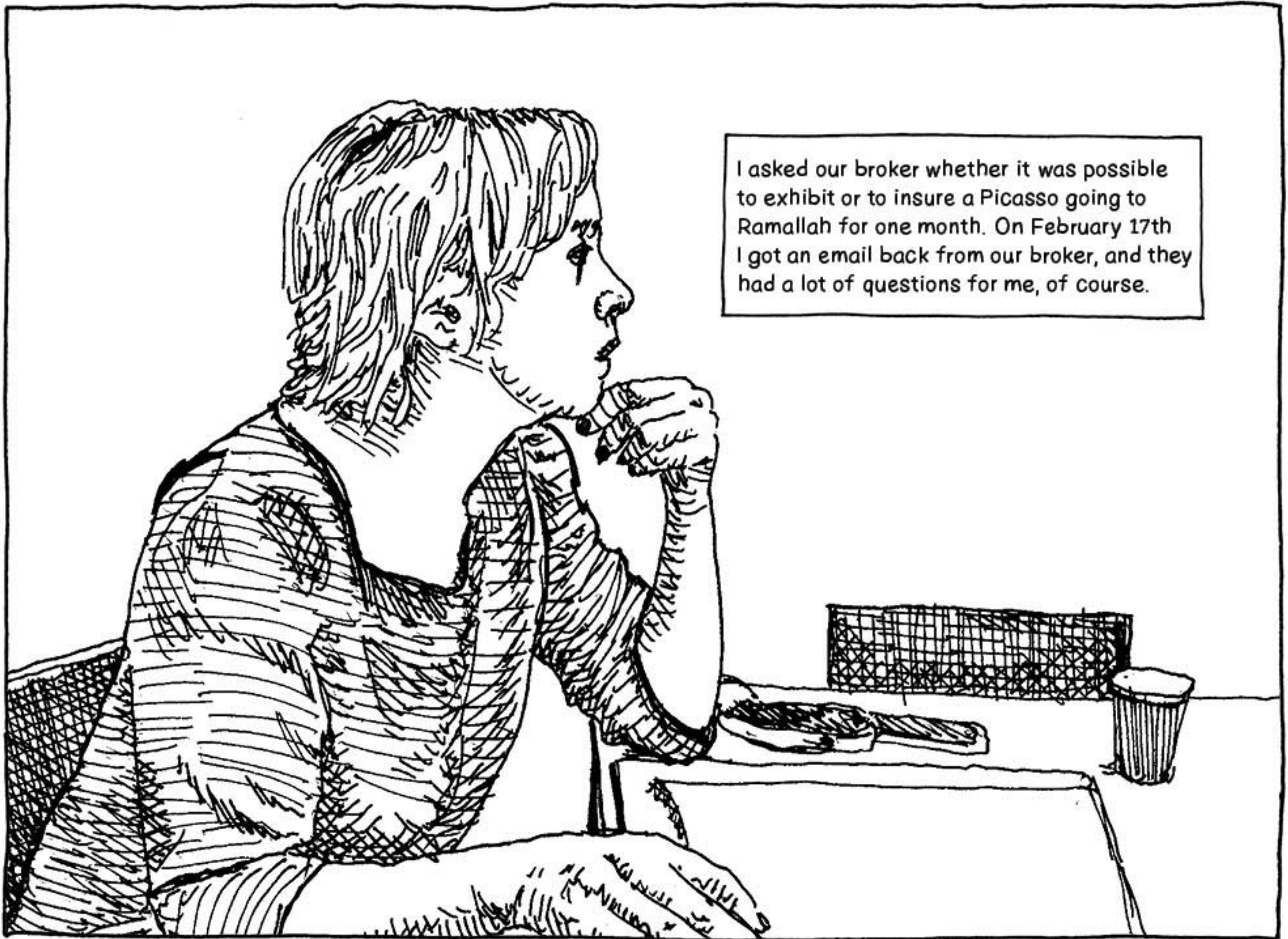
I remember that it initially started off with us imagining the painting arriving in a military plane.



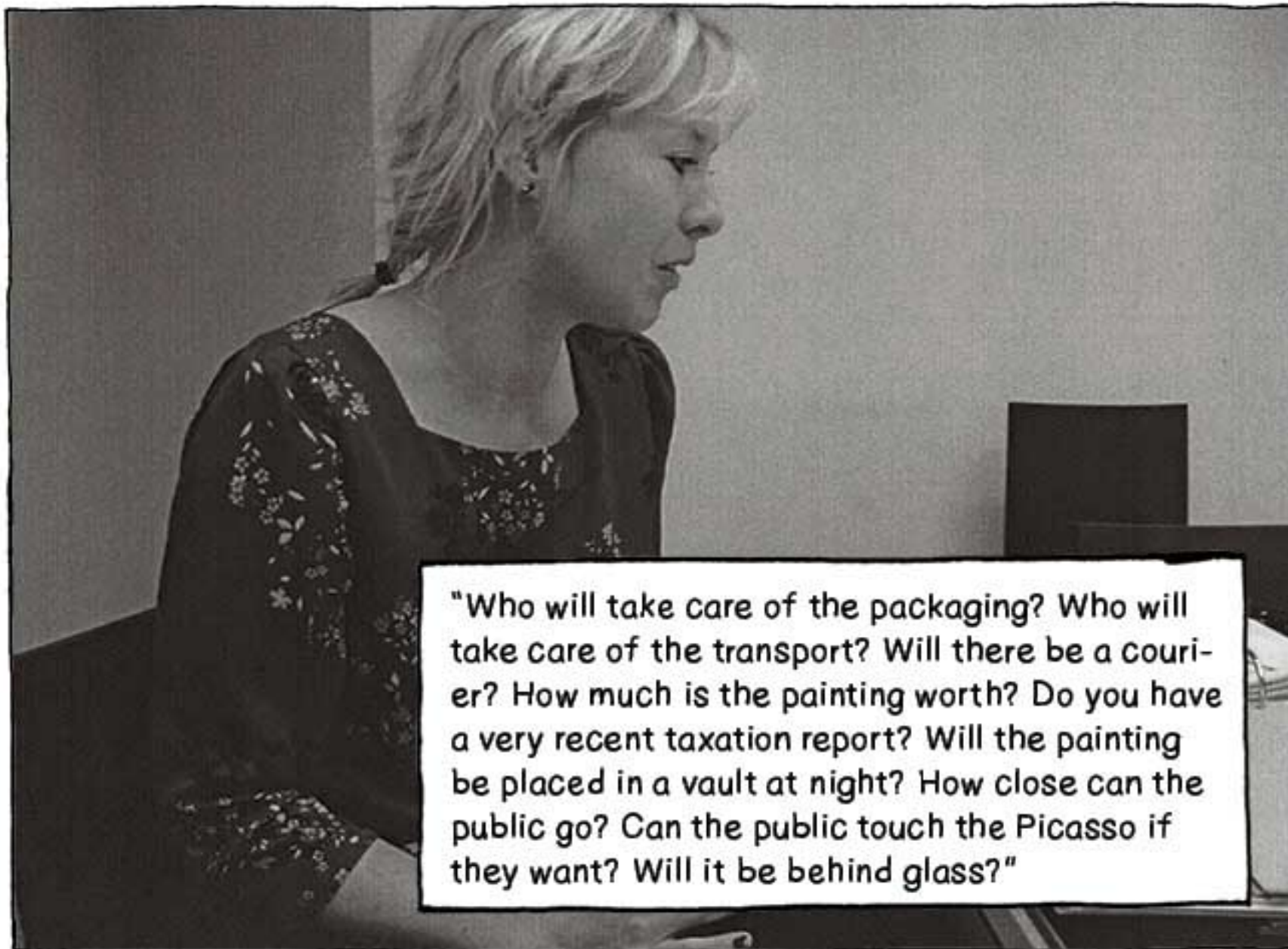
Not an F-16—it's not going to bomb us. It's going to land, you know, a perfect setting, and a painting would come out of it.



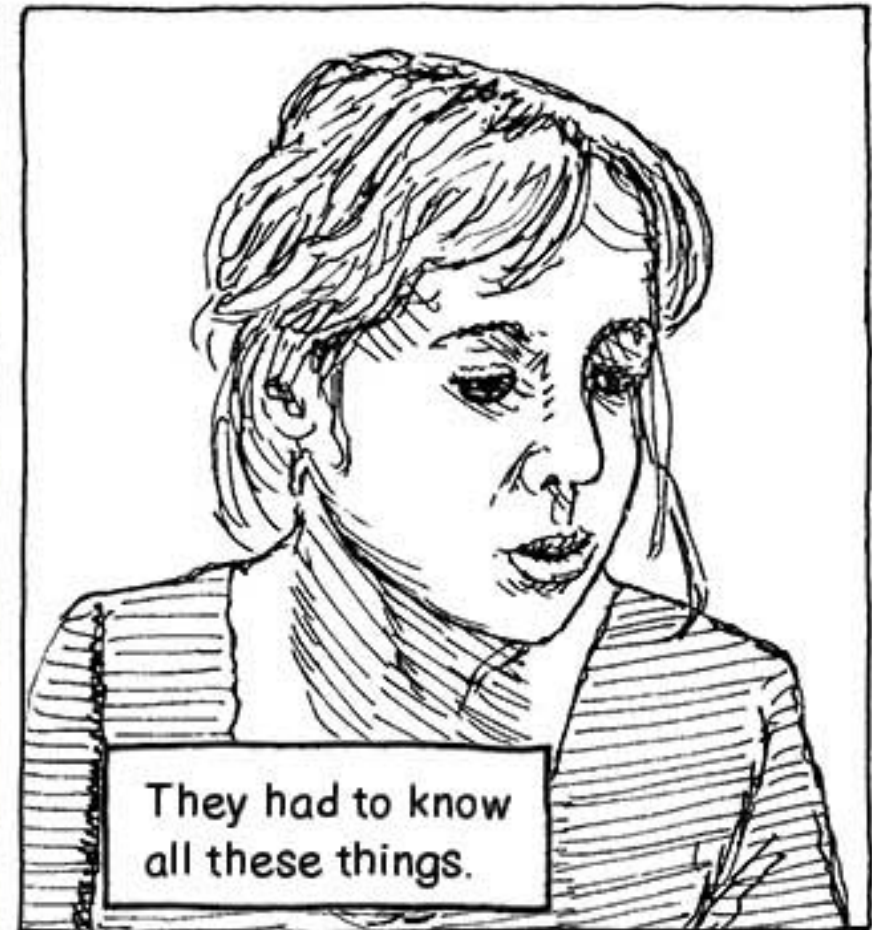
On exactly December 31, 2009, we decided to sit and work on the project, and Khaled gave me a card that said "Picasso in Palestine, Coming Soon." And it meant that he was very serious about it.



I asked our broker whether it was possible to exhibit or to insure a Picasso going to Ramallah for one month. On February 17th I got an email back from our broker, and they had a lot of questions for me, of course.



"Who will take care of the packaging? Who will take care of the transport? Will there be a courier? How much is the painting worth? Do you have a very recent taxation report? Will the painting be placed in a vault at night? How close can the public go? Can the public touch the Picasso if they want? Will it be behind glass?"



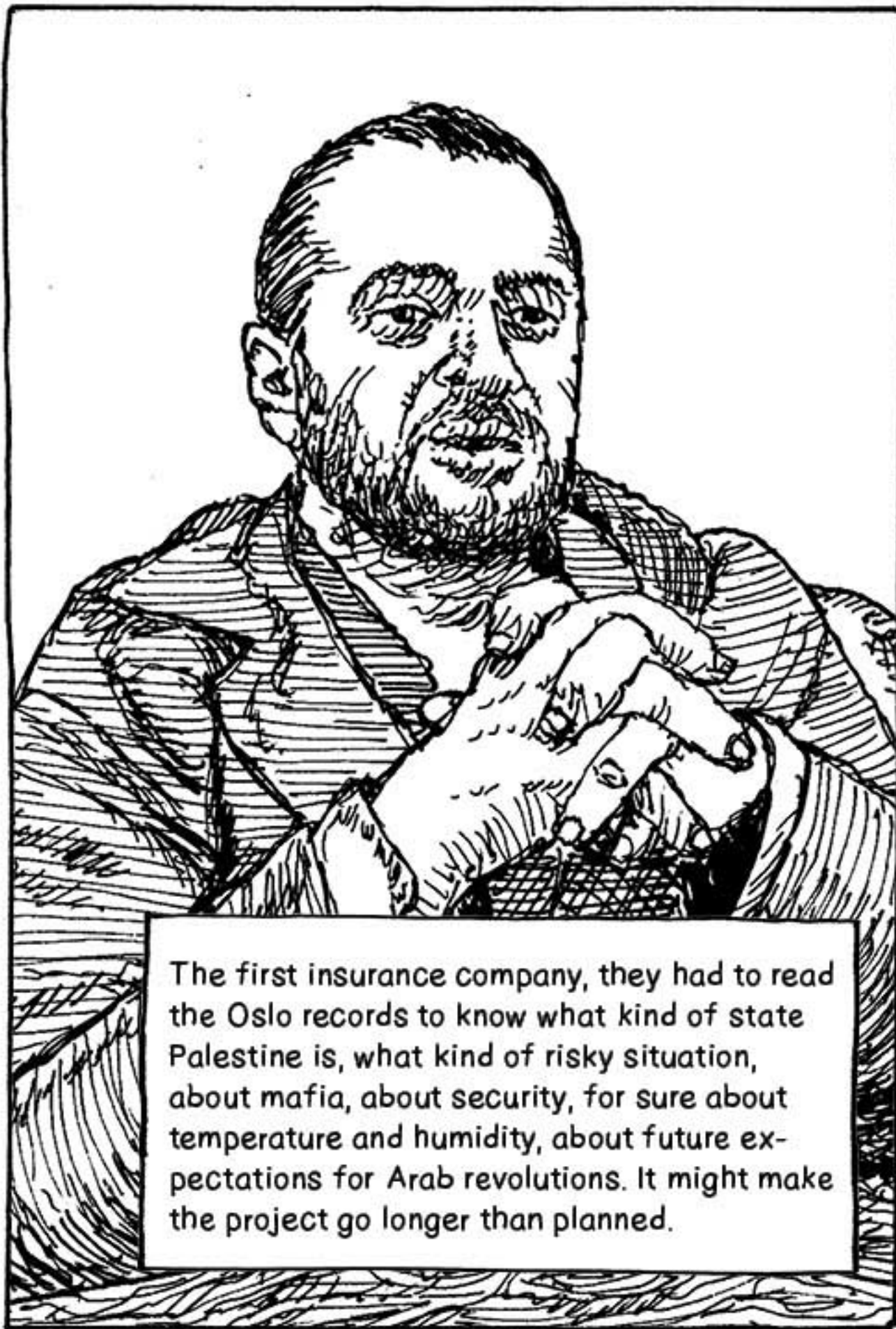
They had to know all these things.



So, I told them some answers were no, some were yes. Like: how close to the Picasso can the public go? Well, it should be exposed the same way as it is here; we don't have lines here, we don't have glass.



We just have guards and we have a camera system.



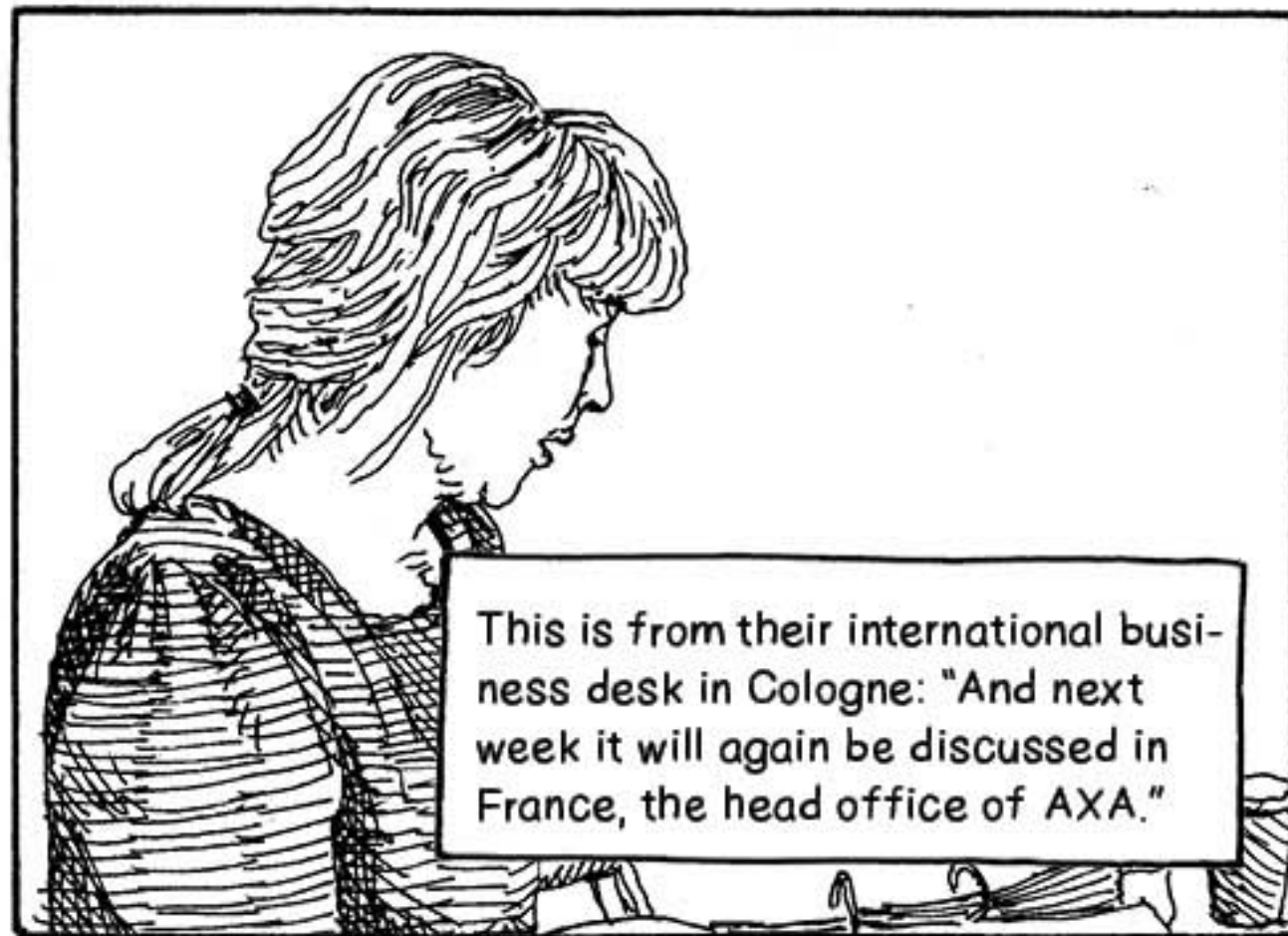
The first insurance company, they had to read the Oslo records to know what kind of state Palestine is, what kind of risky situation, about mafia, about security, for sure about temperature and humidity, about future expectations for Arab revolutions. It might make the project go longer than planned.



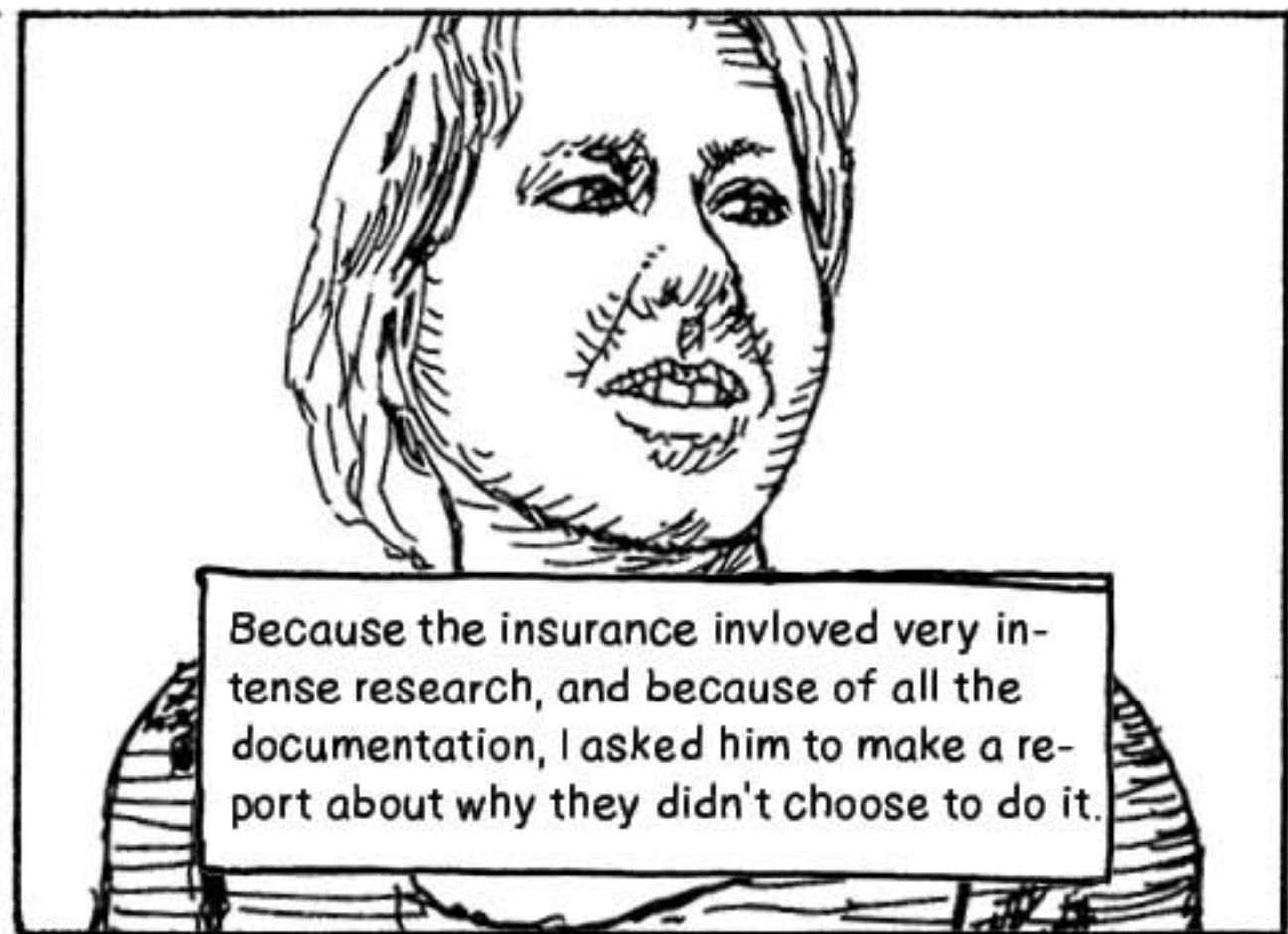
Then what happened? Well, it took a while before our broker, AEK, asked AXArt, which is the biggest art insurer, at least here in Holland.



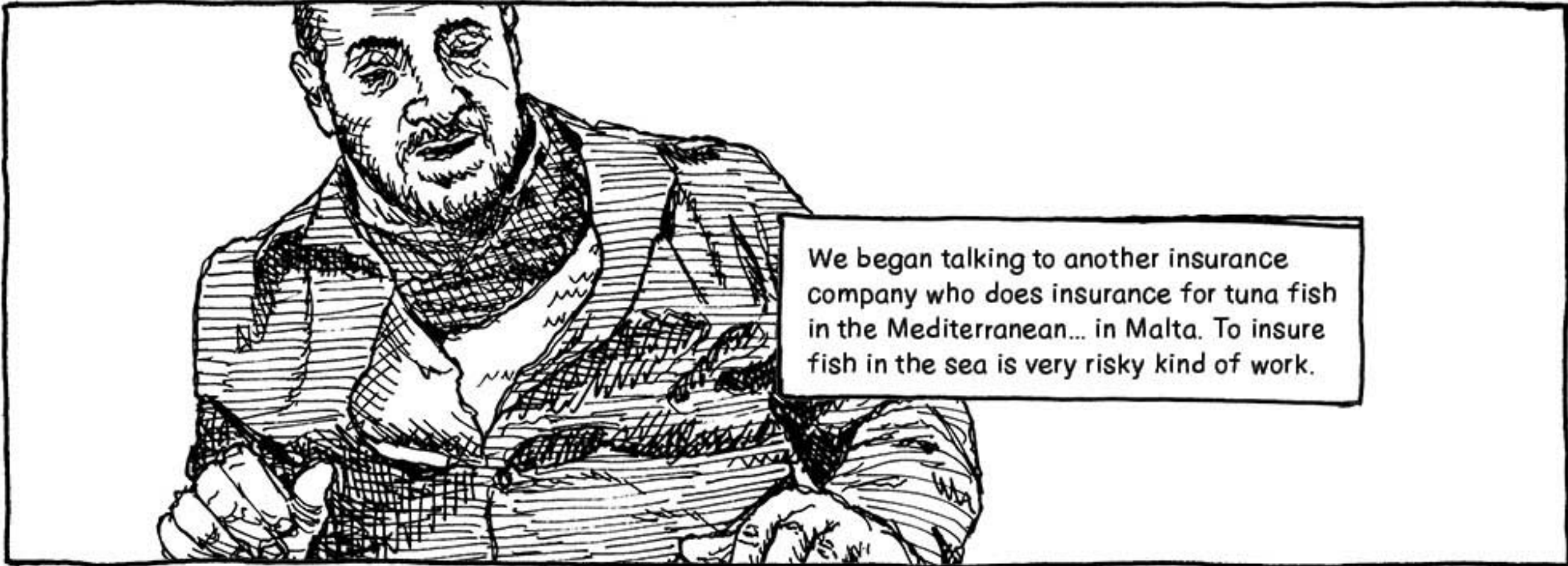
And he did ask. Well, two weeks later, AXA said no.



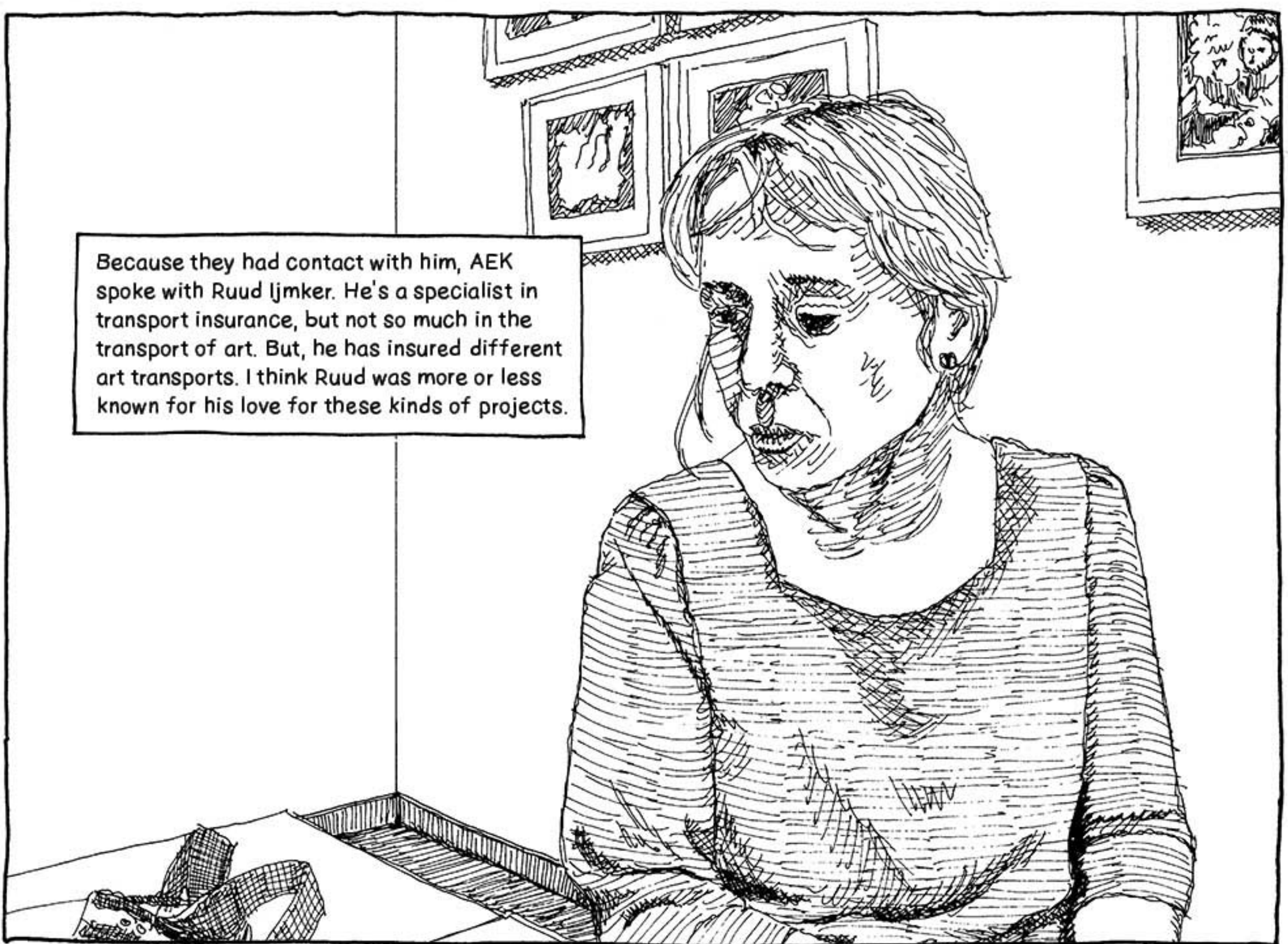
This is from their international business desk in Cologne: "And next week it will again be discussed in France, the head office of AXA."



Because the insurance involved very intense research, and because of all the documentation, I asked him to make a report about why they didn't choose to do it.

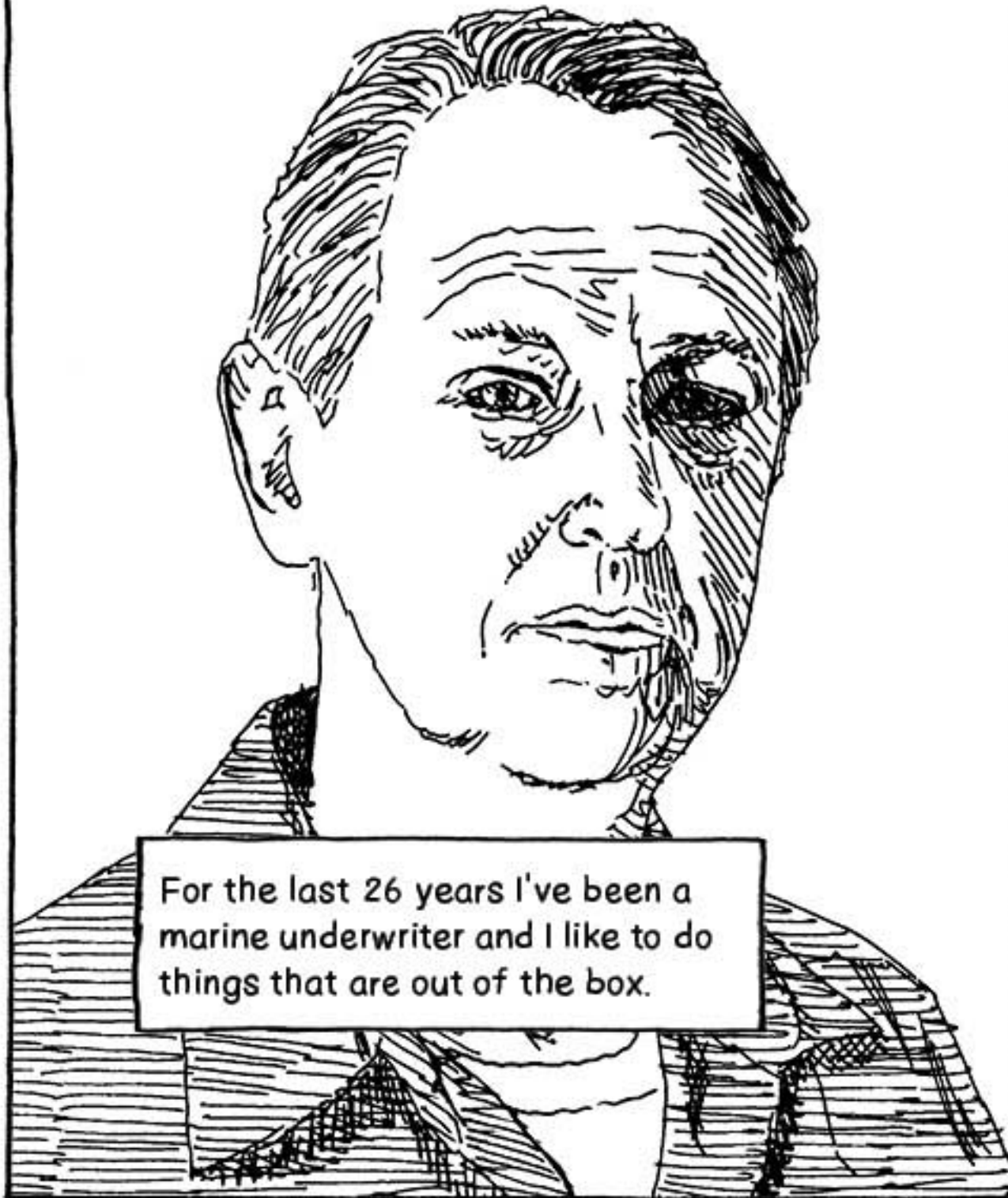


We began talking to another insurance company who does insurance for tuna fish in the Mediterranean... in Malta. To insure fish in the sea is very risky kind of work.

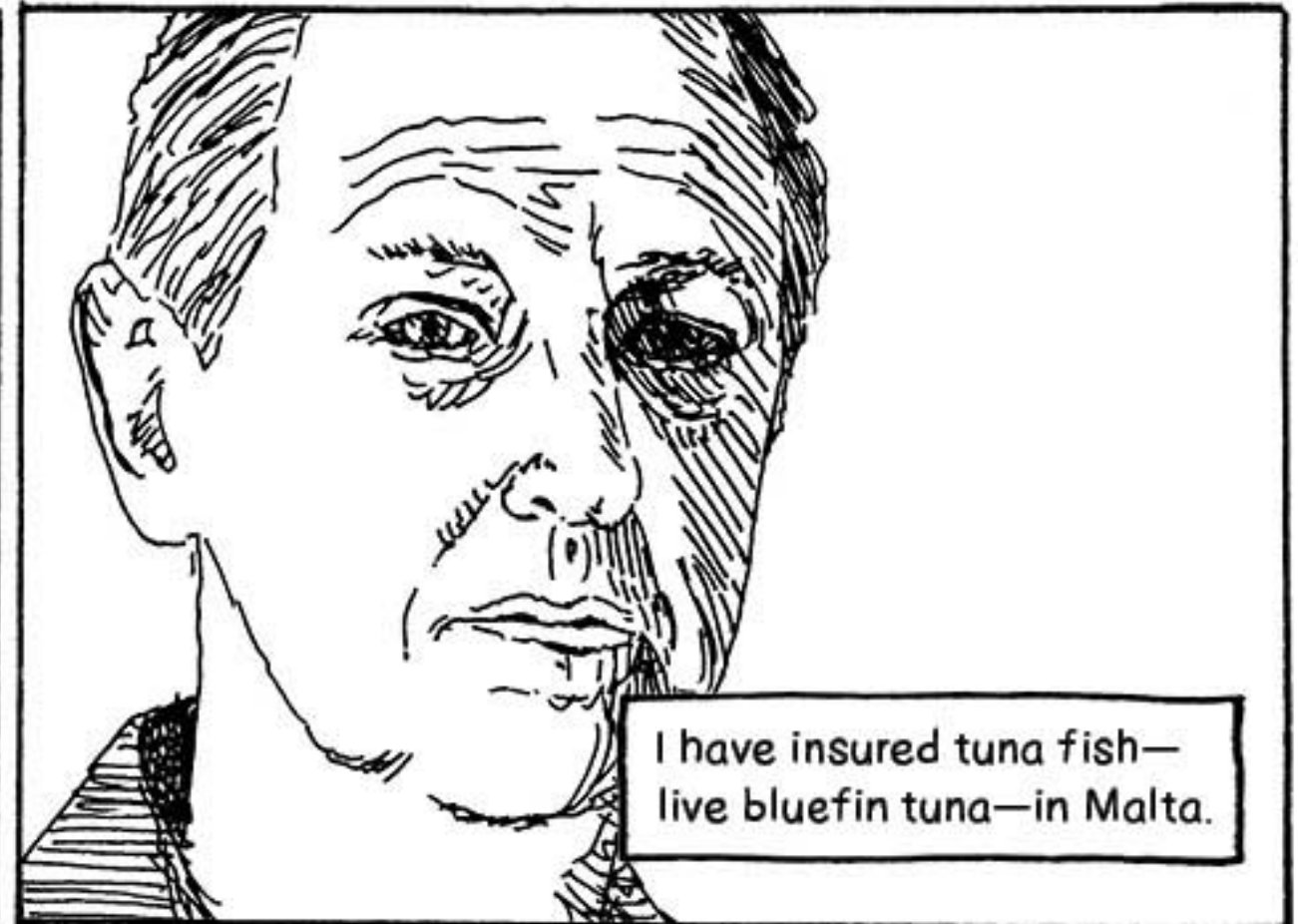


Because they had contact with him, AEK spoke with Ruud Ijmker. He's a specialist in transport insurance, but not so much in the transport of art. But, he has insured different art transports. I think Ruud was more or less known for his love for these kinds of projects.

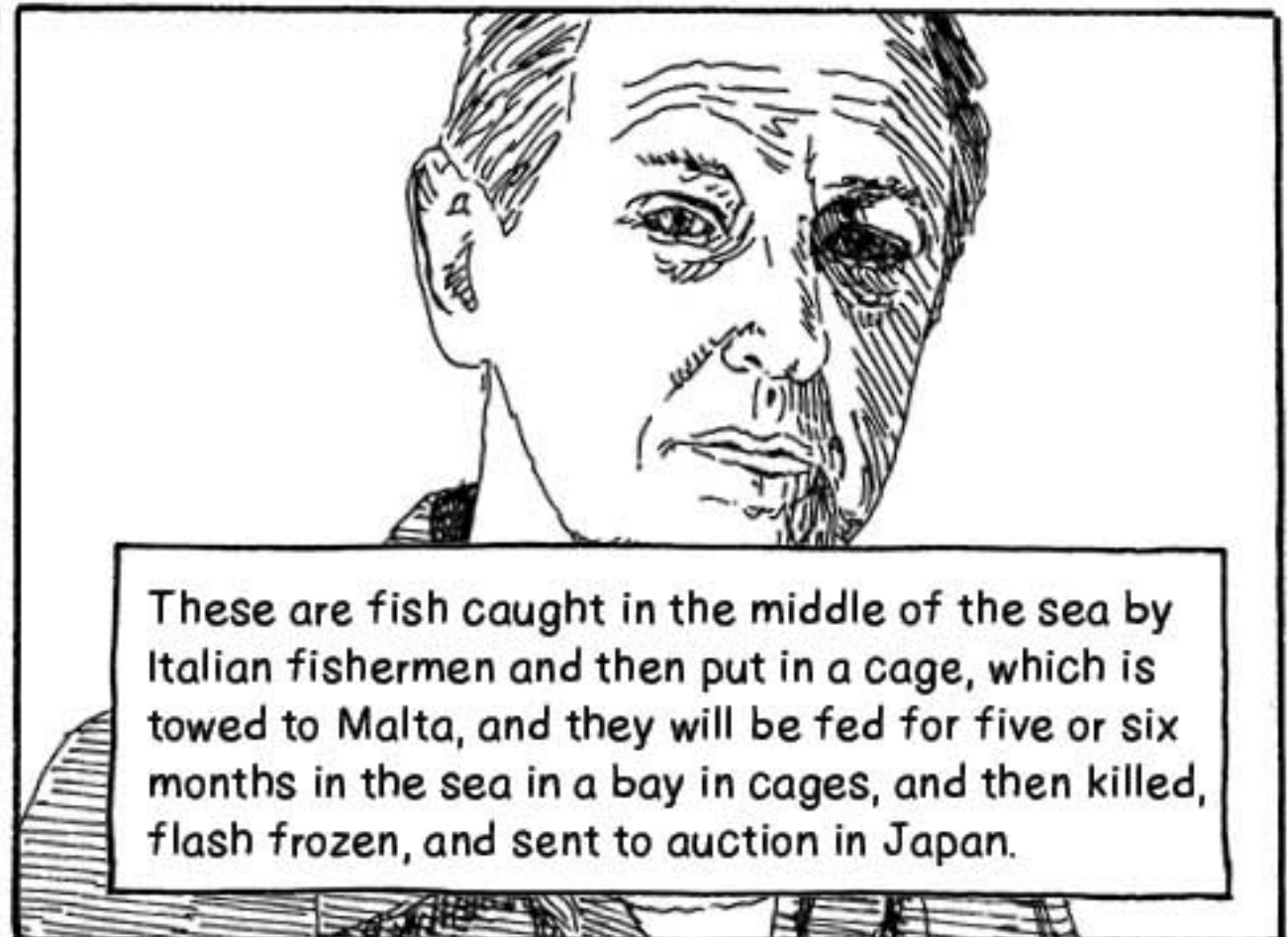
Ruud Ijmker, speaking over Skype from his office in Amsterdam, March 2012:



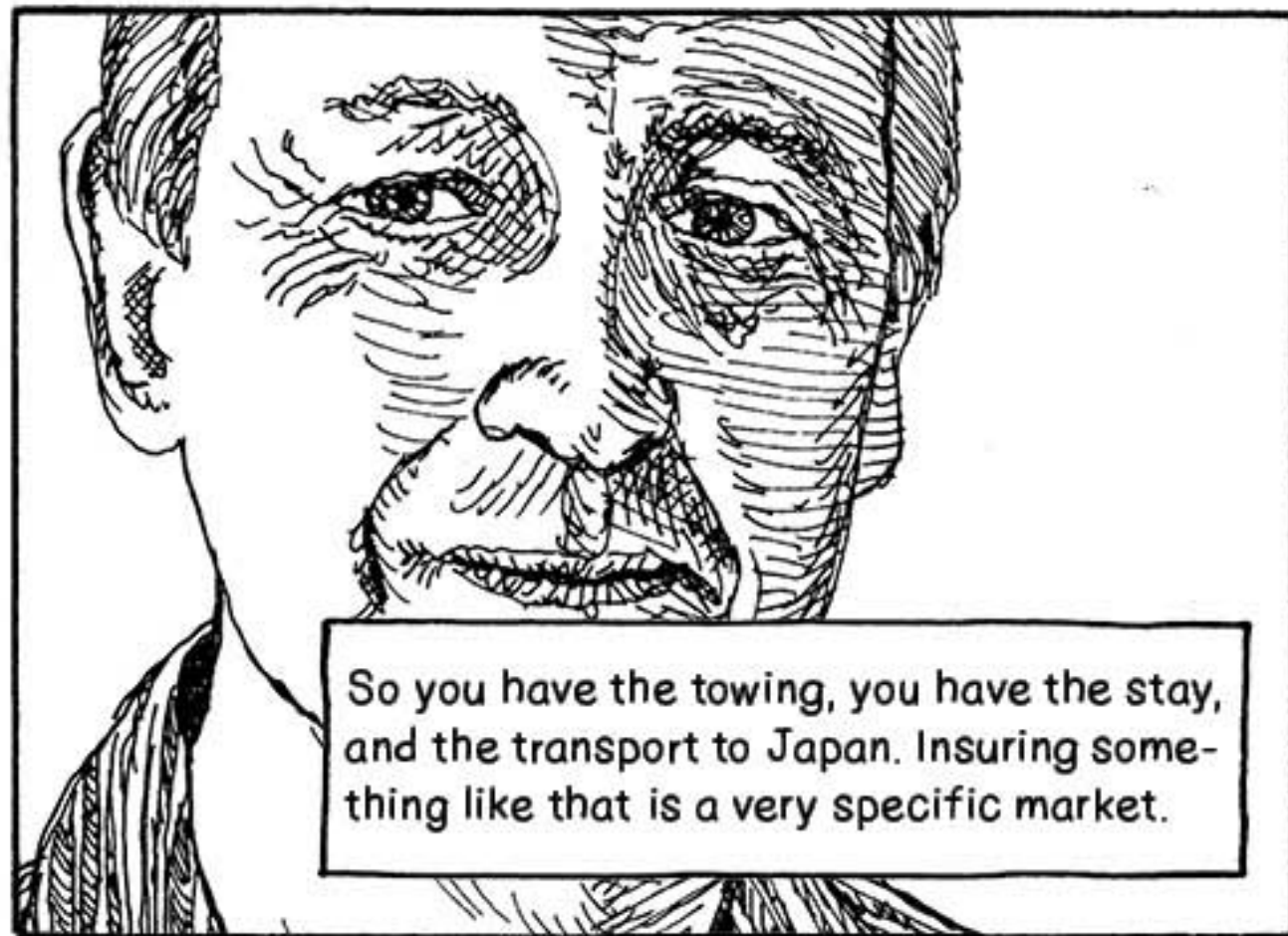
For the last 26 years I've been a marine underwriter and I like to do things that are out of the box.



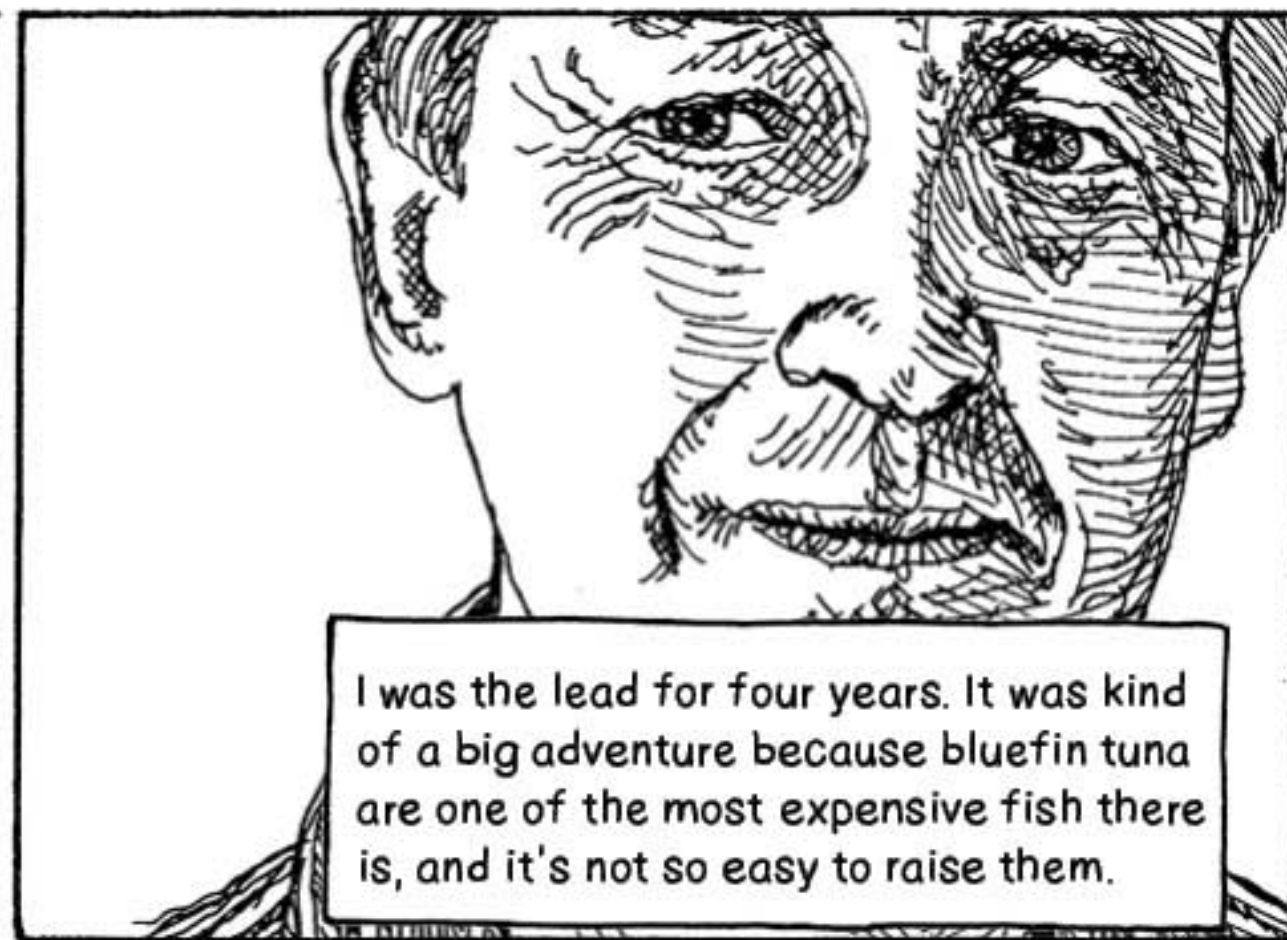
I have insured tuna fish—live bluefin tuna—in Malta.



These are fish caught in the middle of the sea by Italian fishermen and then put in a cage, which is towed to Malta, and they will be fed for five or six months in the sea in a bay in cages, and then killed, flash frozen, and sent to auction in Japan.



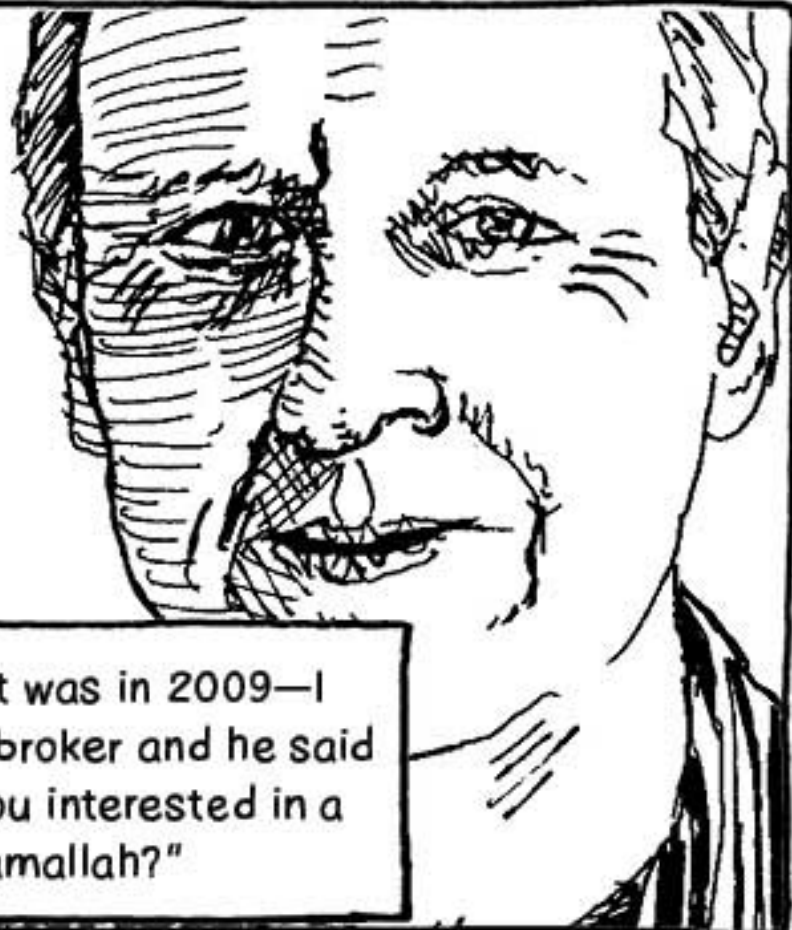
So you have the towing, you have the stay, and the transport to Japan. Insuring something like that is a very specific market.



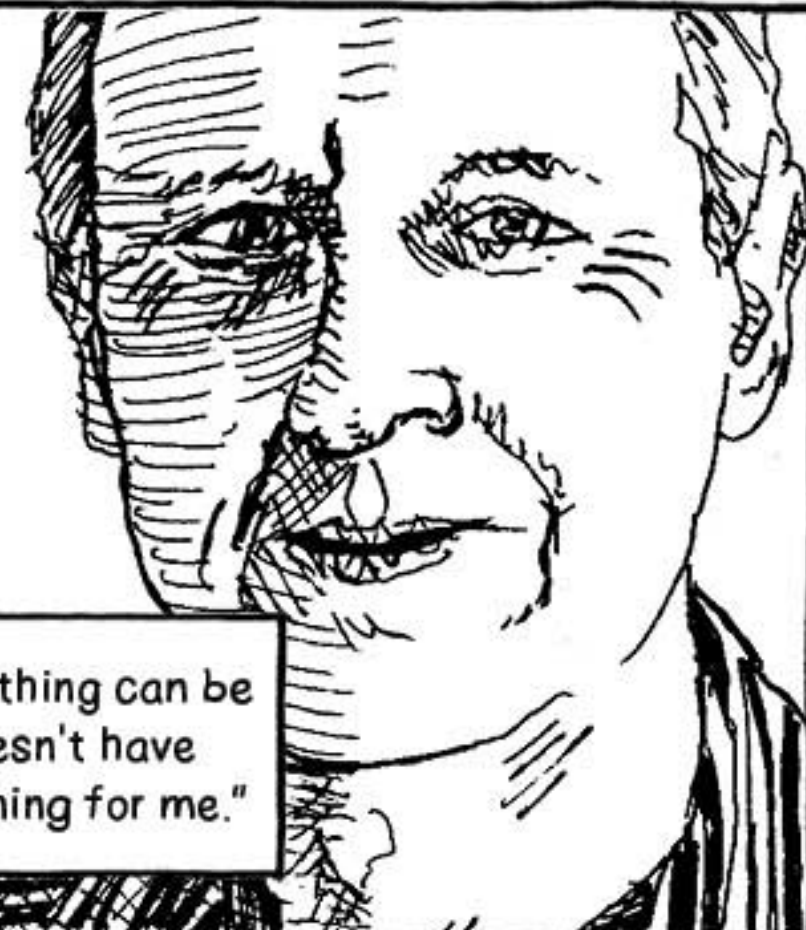
I was the lead for four years. It was kind of a big adventure because bluefin tuna are one of the most expensive fish there is, and it's not so easy to raise them.



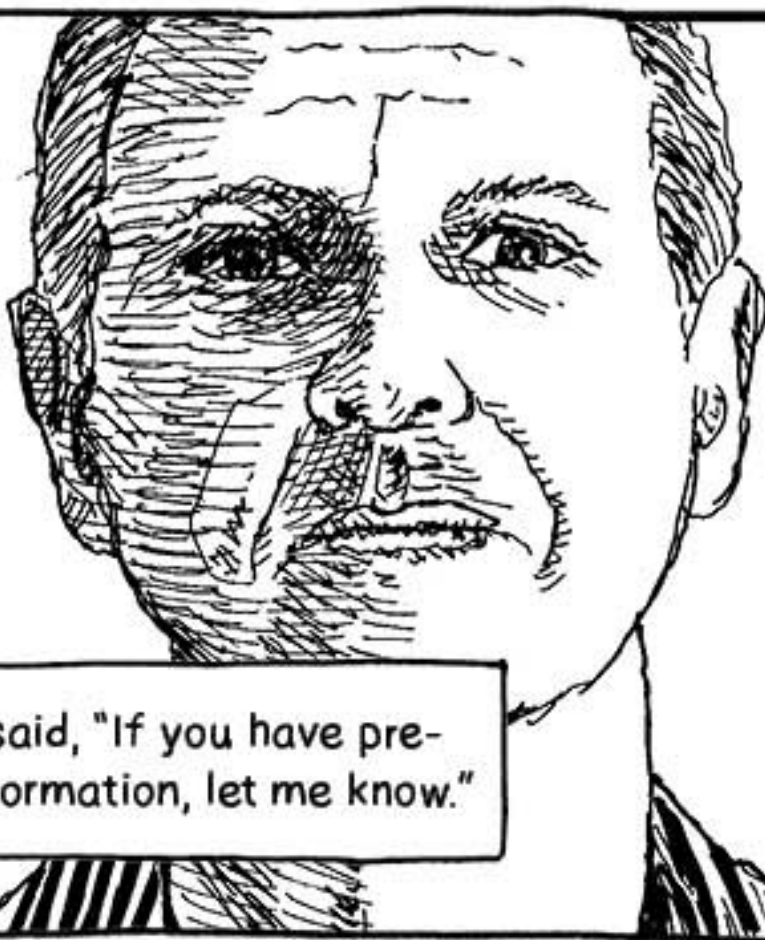
I am working on the Insurance Bourse, and normally my business, the marine business, is doing things that some other people won't do. We do things for which there is no special product. In general we don't work with application forms, so we have a much more open mind when looking at risks in general, even when these are risks outside the marine area. We can create solutions for unusual risks from scratch. Our attitude is: "Ok, if we can earn some money, why not? Let's hear the story."



One night—I think it was in 2009—I was in a bar with a broker and he said to me, "Ruud, are you interested in a painting going to Ramallah?"



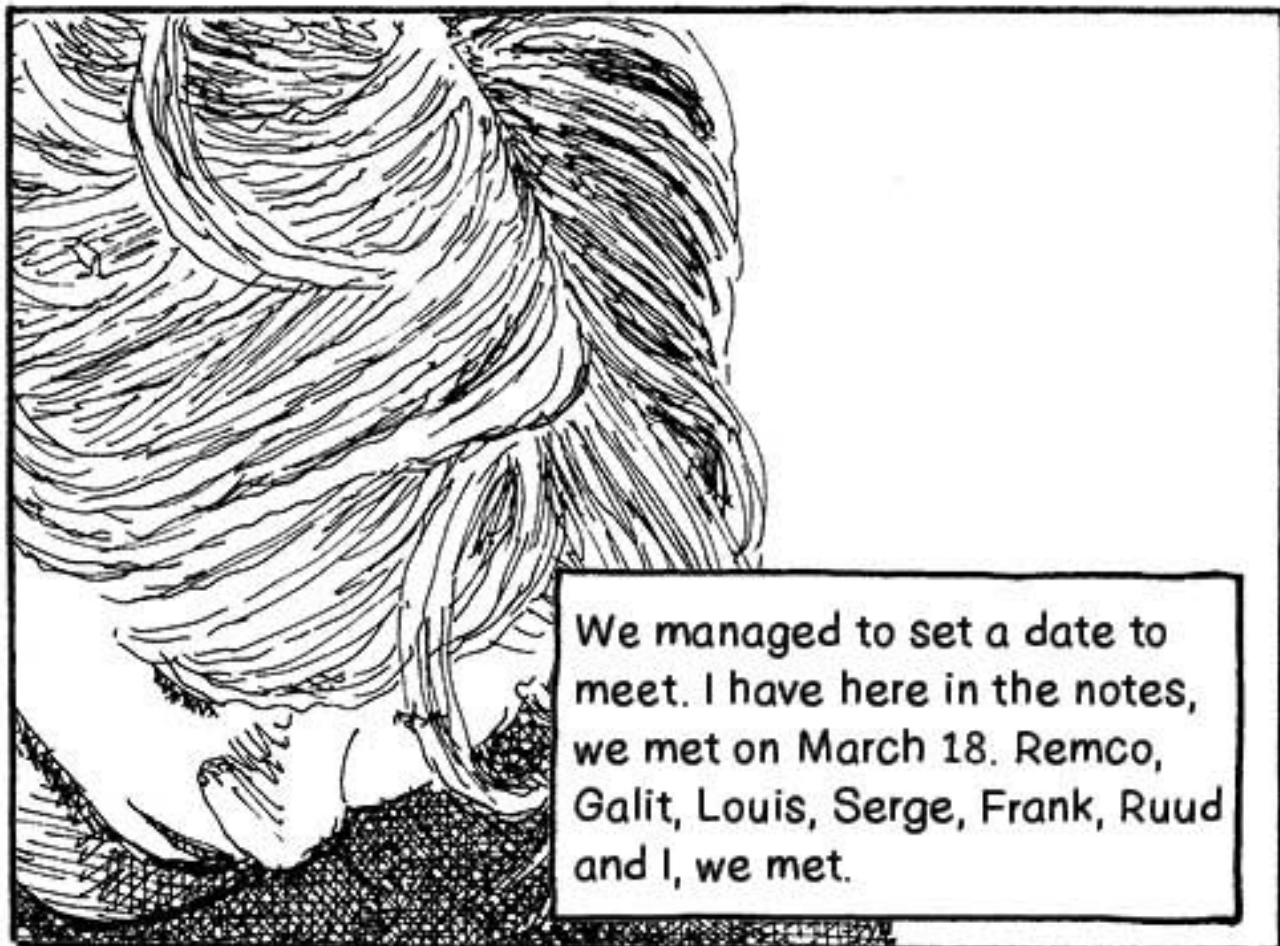
And I said, "Everything can be insured, but it doesn't have any specific meaning for me."



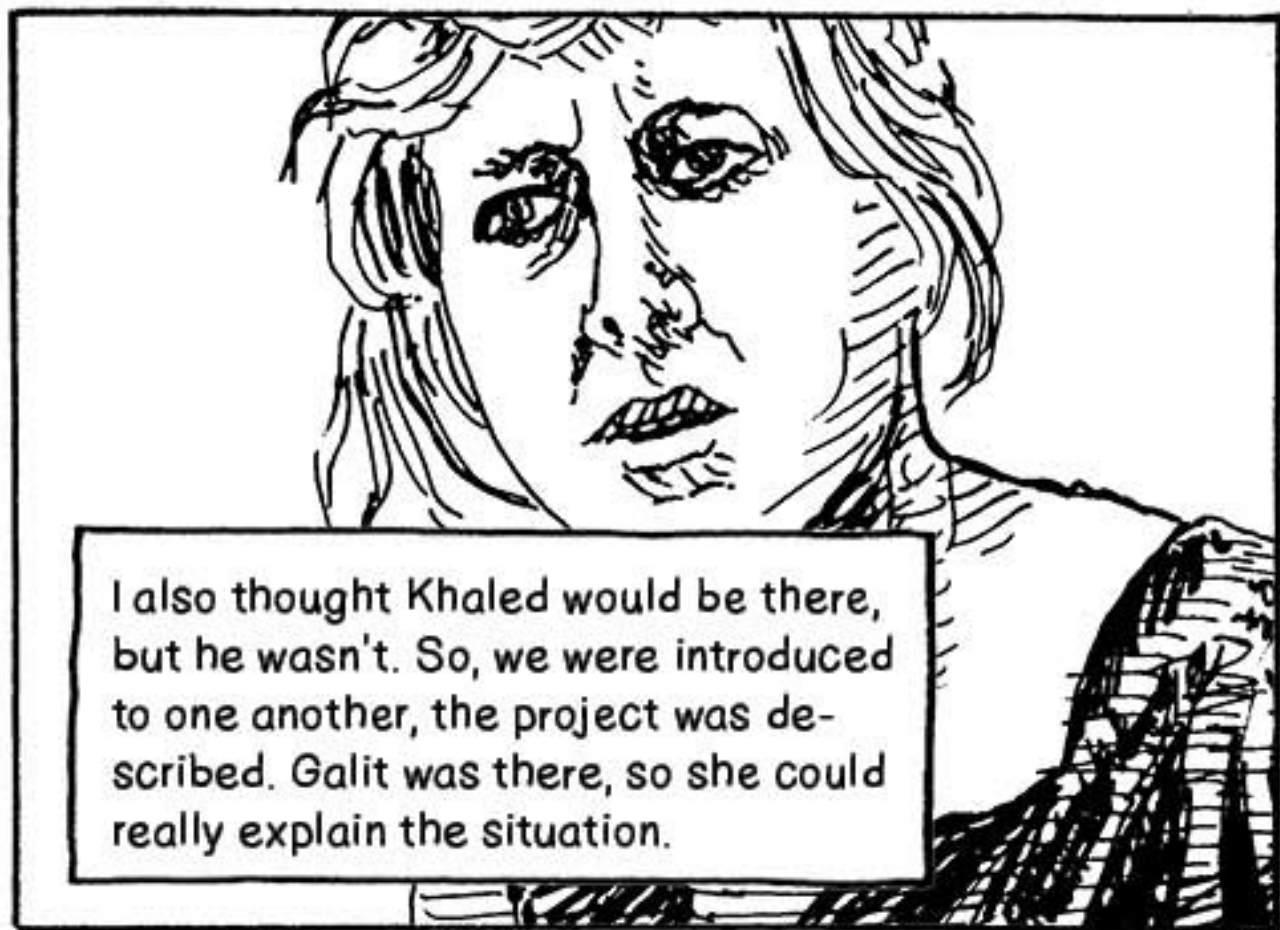
Then I said, "If you have precise information, let me know."



Six months later I believe, something like that, the broker said, "Now it's becoming a serious request. There are people coming over from Ramallah, and there will be an official meeting at the Van Abbemuseum. It will be recorded on film." And I said, "OK, no problem."

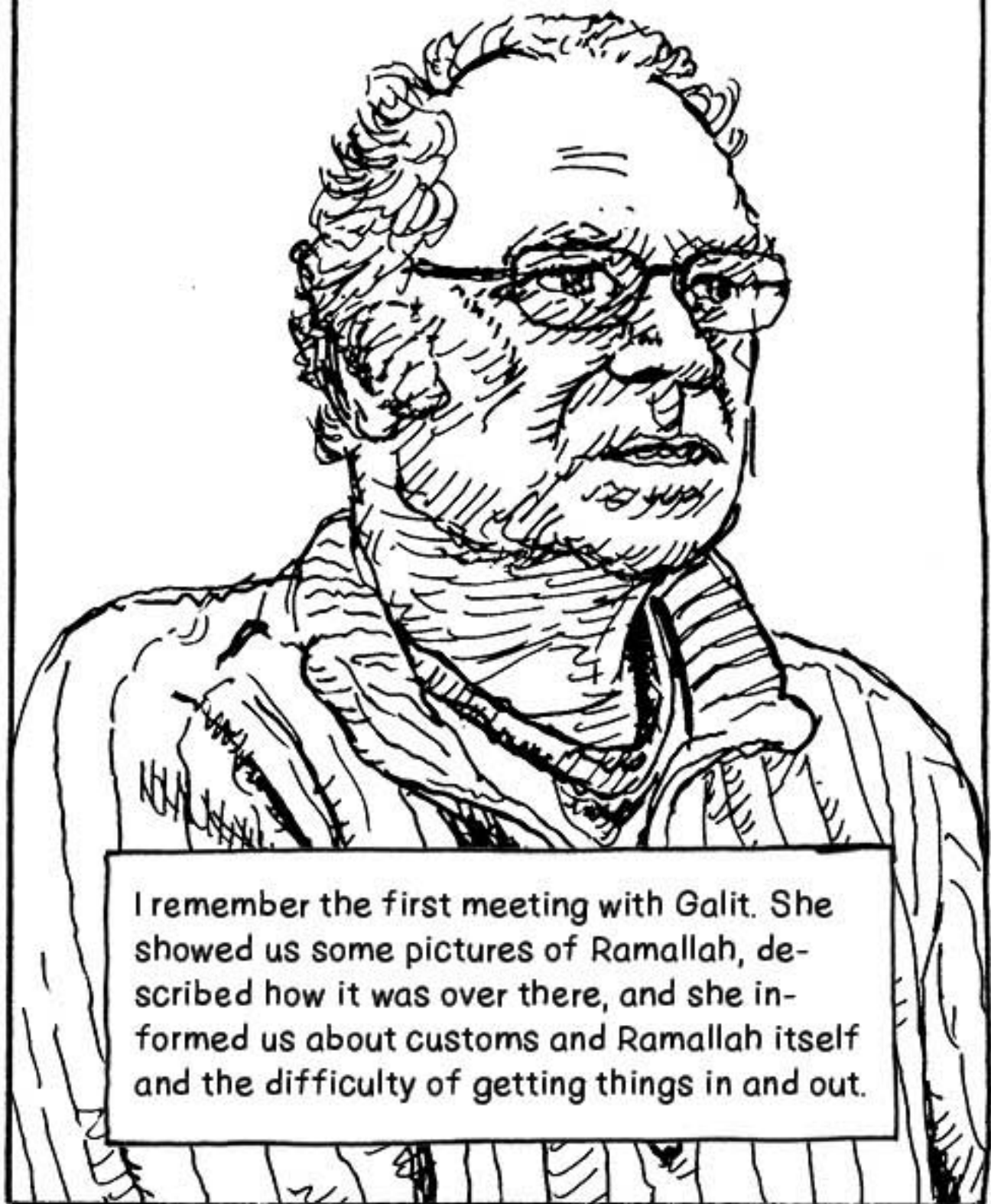


We managed to set a date to meet. I have here in the notes, we met on March 18. Remco, Galit, Louis, Serge, Frank, Ruud and I, we met.

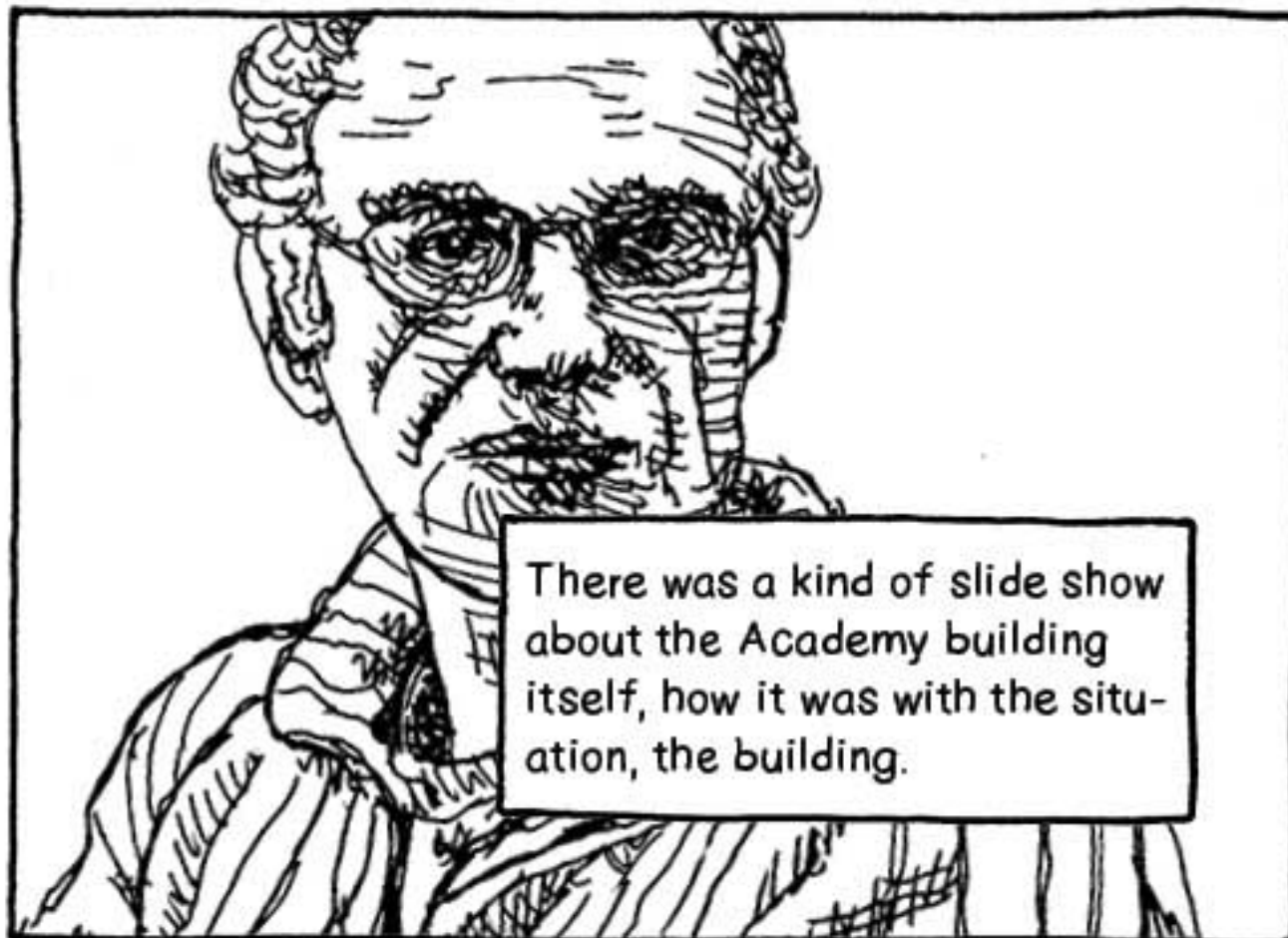


I also thought Khaled would be there, but he wasn't. So, we were introduced to one another, the project was described. Galit was there, so she could really explain the situation.

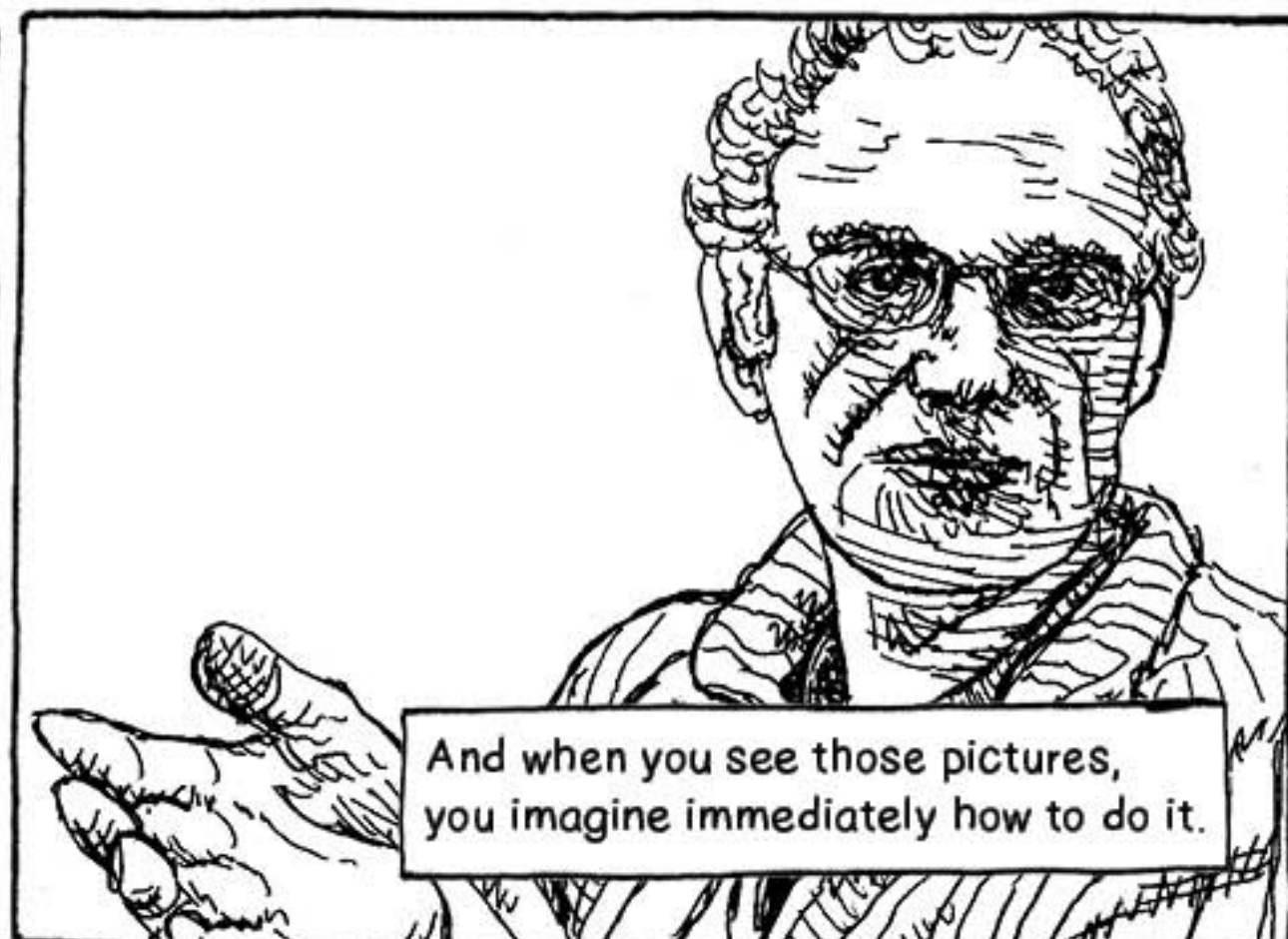
Louis Baltussen, Van Abbemuseum, January 2012:



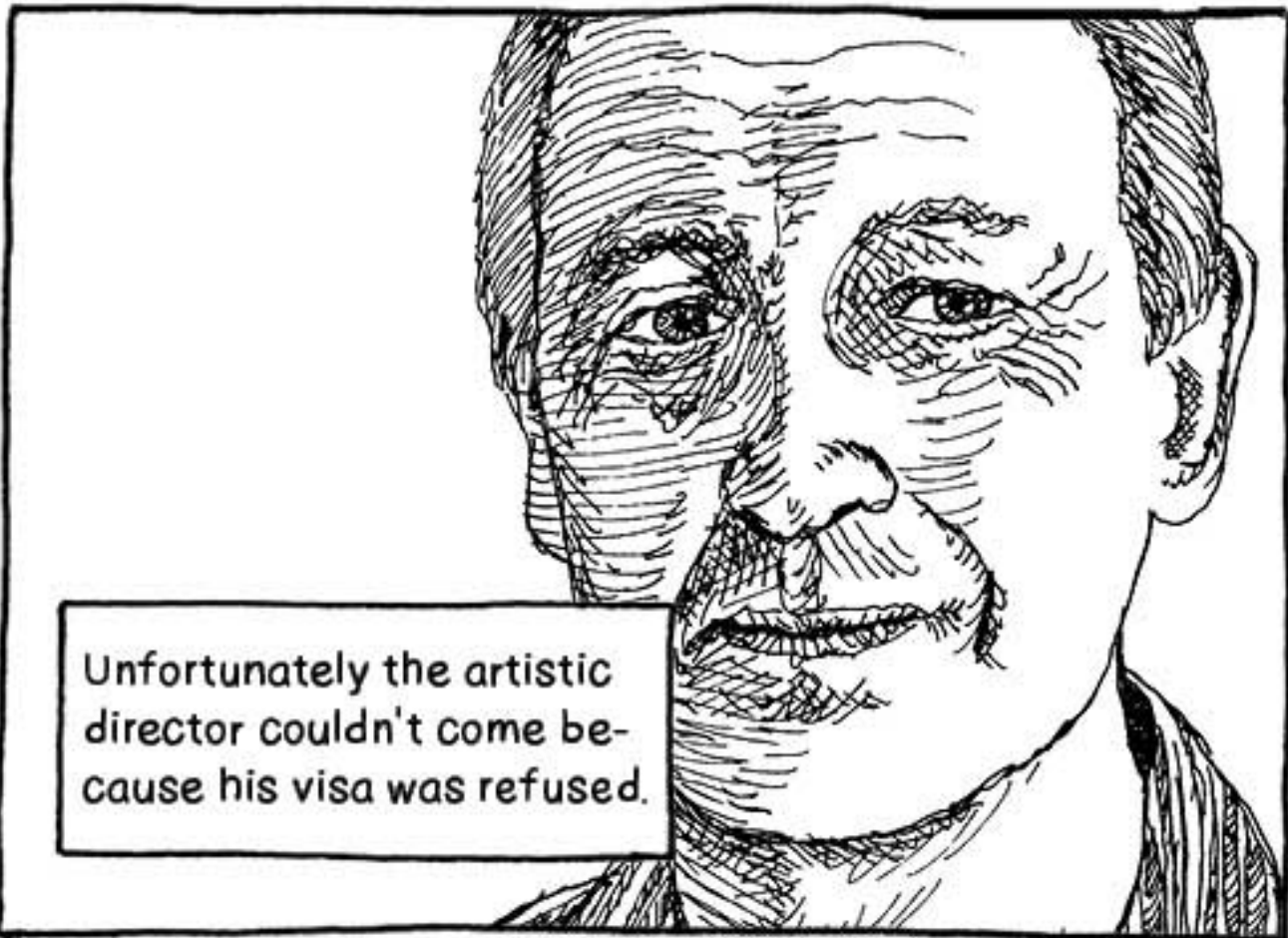
I remember the first meeting with Galit. She showed us some pictures of Ramallah, described how it was over there, and she informed us about customs and Ramallah itself and the difficulty of getting things in and out.



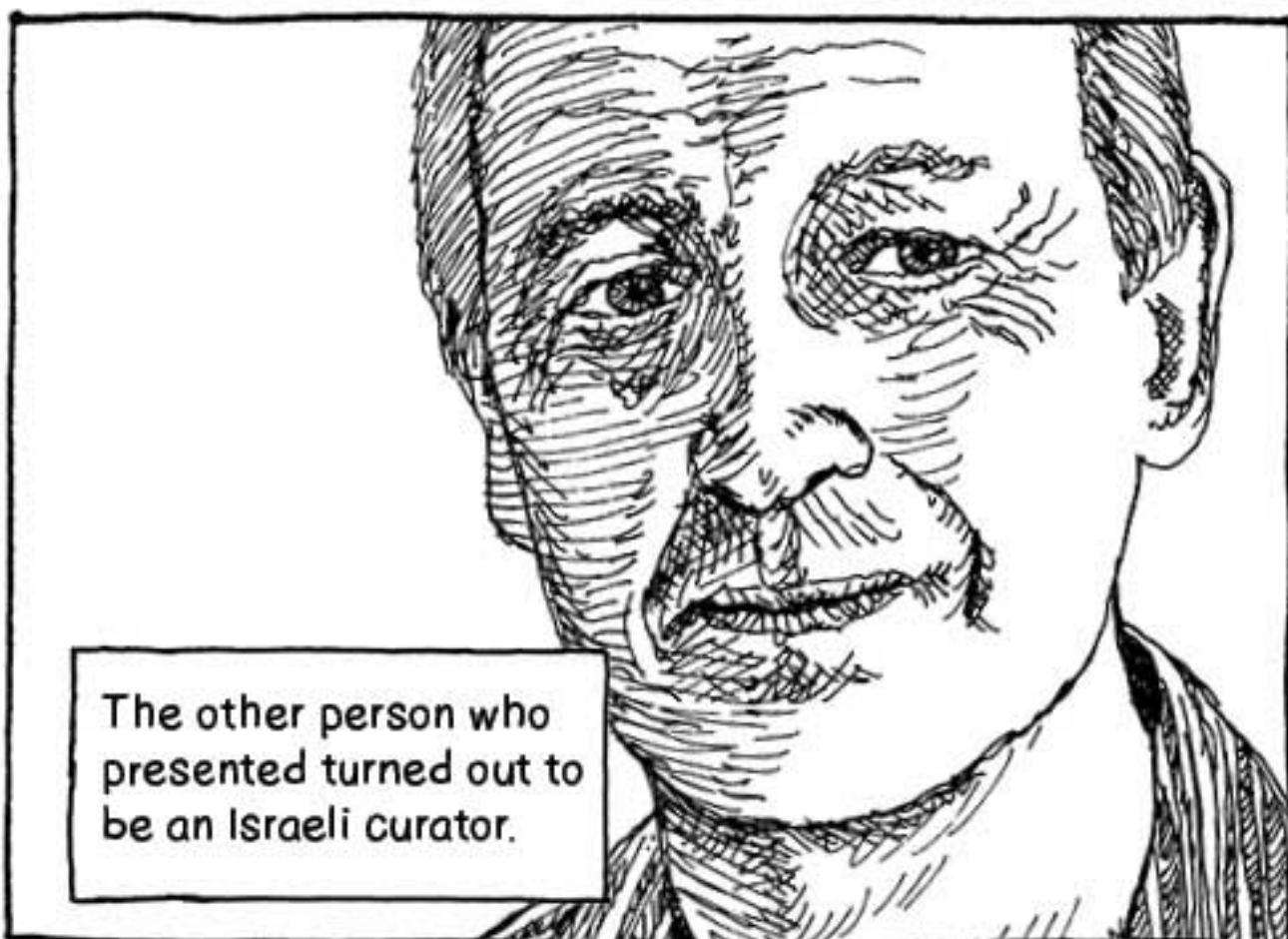
There was a kind of slide show about the Academy building itself, how it was with the situation, the building.



And when you see those pictures, you imagine immediately how to do it.



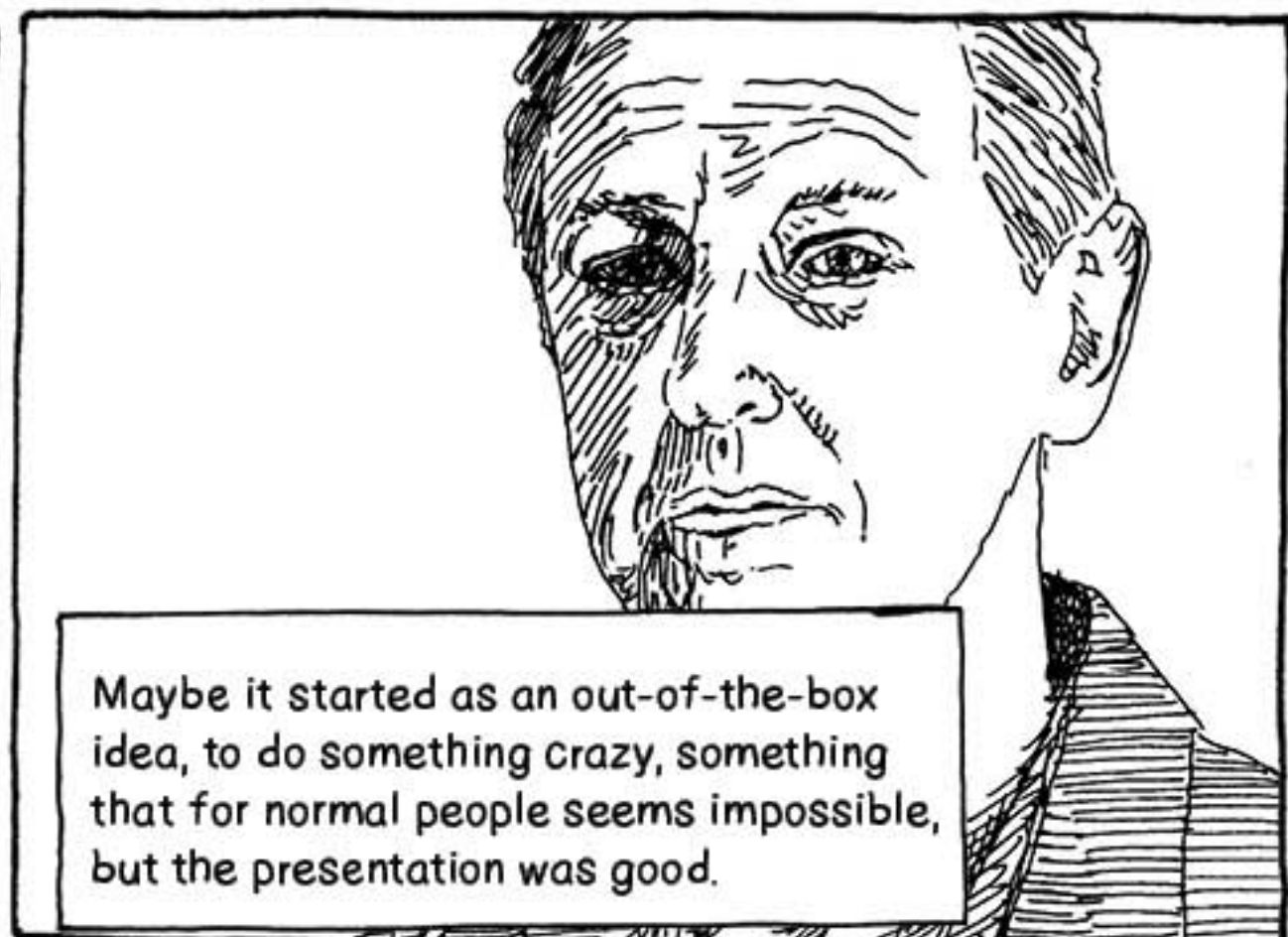
Unfortunately the artistic director couldn't come because his visa was refused.



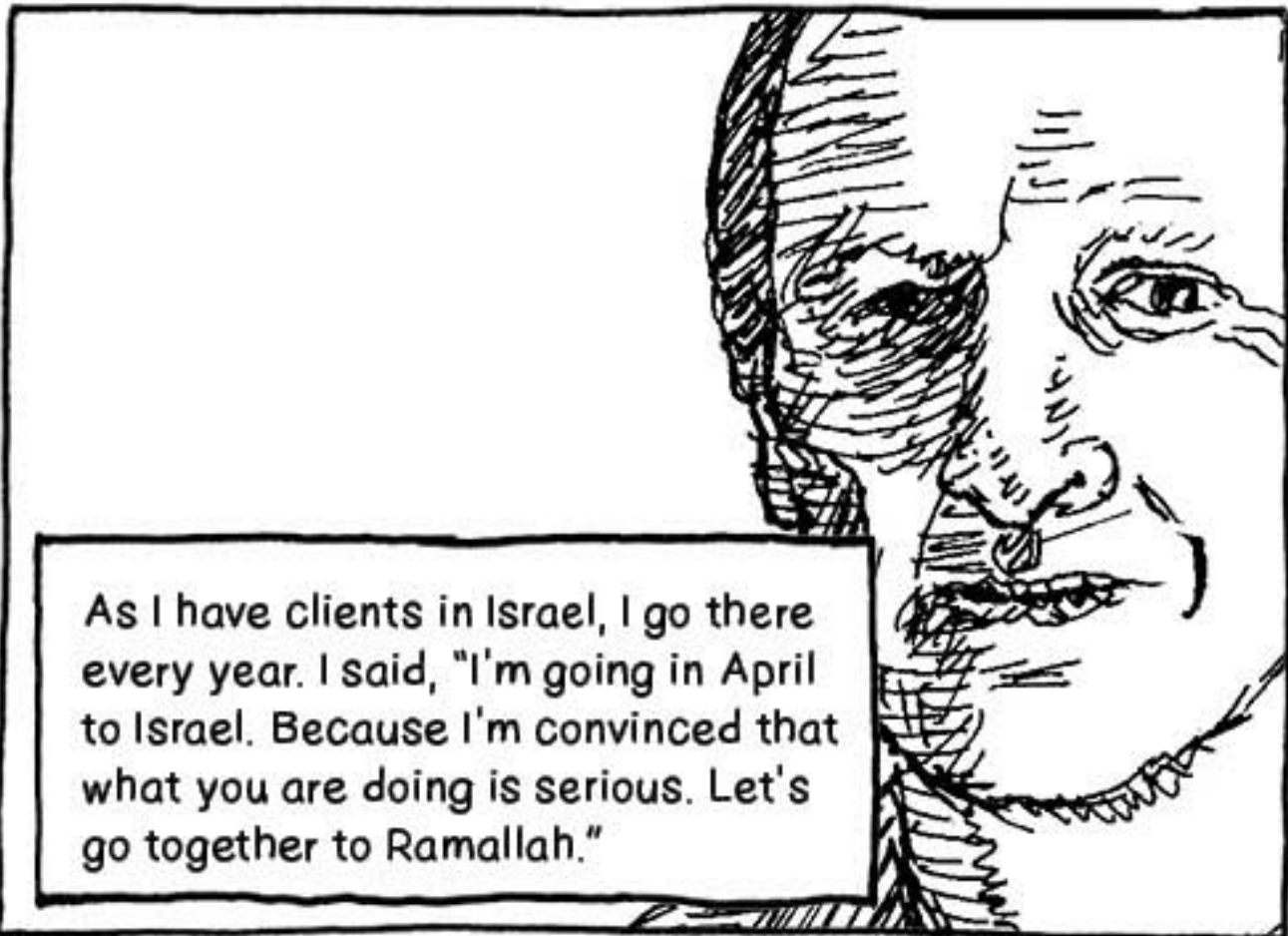
The other person who presented turned out to be an Israeli curator.



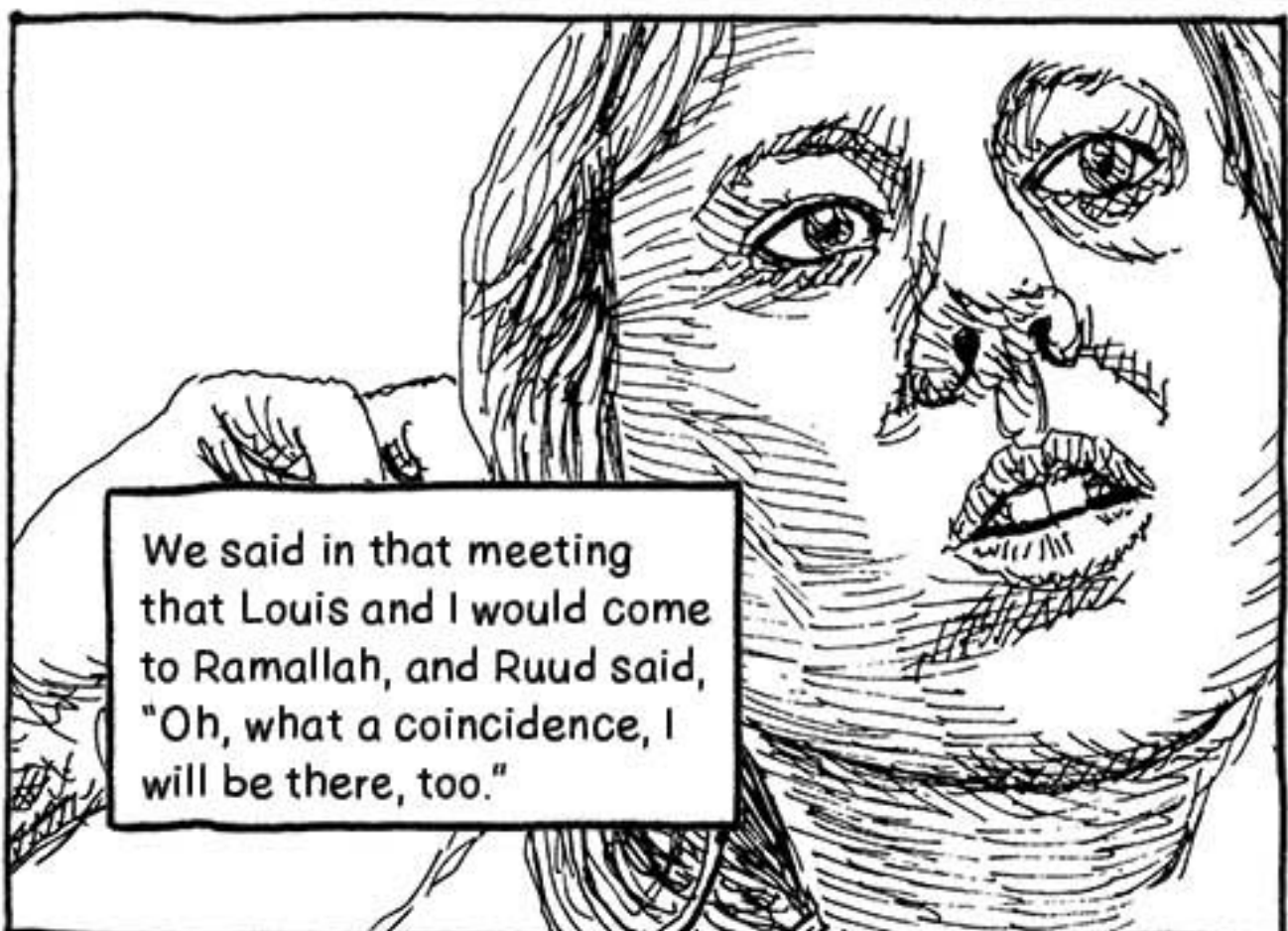
She made a very good presentation. It was quite serious.



Maybe it started as an out-of-the-box idea, to do something crazy, something that for normal people seems impossible, but the presentation was good.

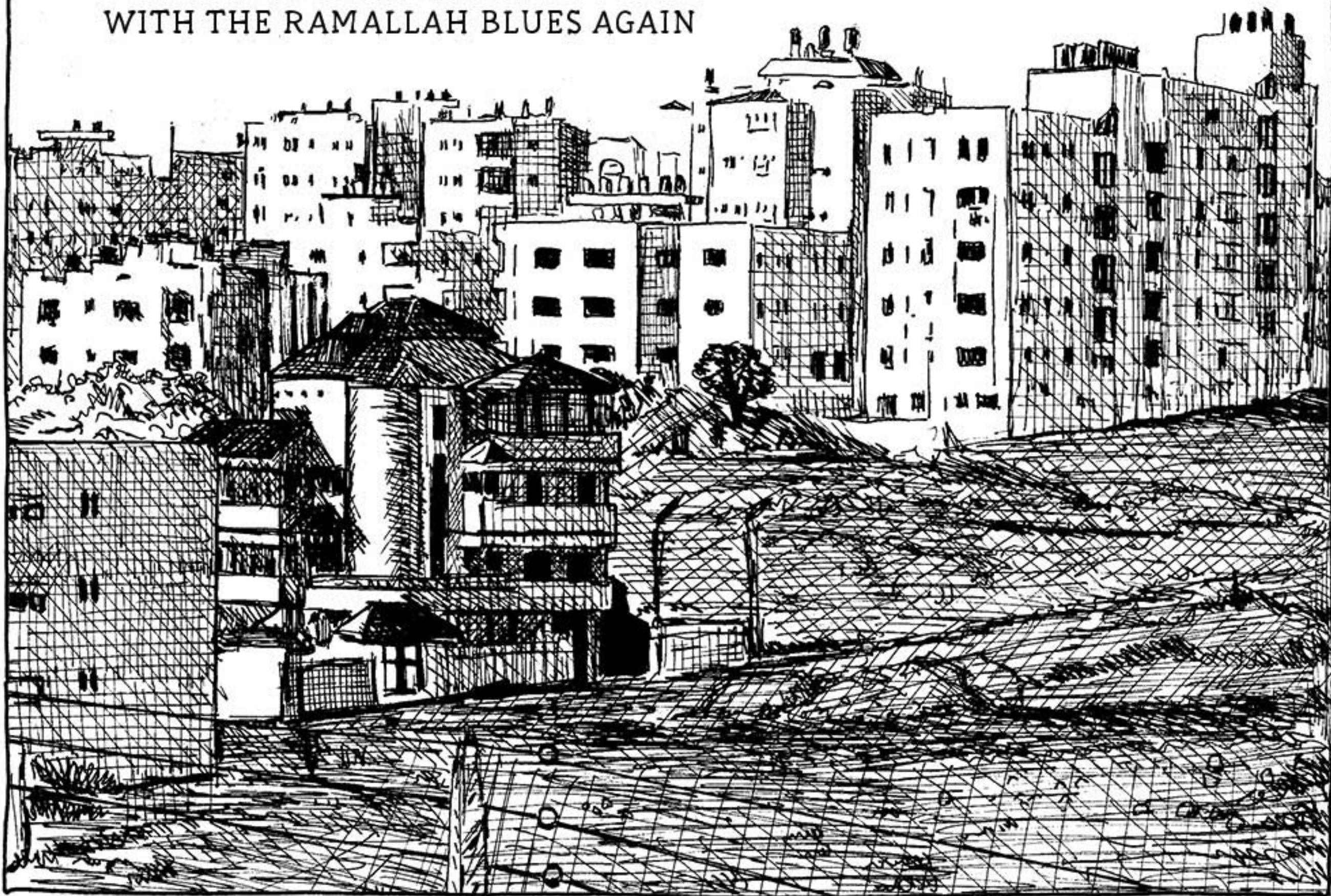


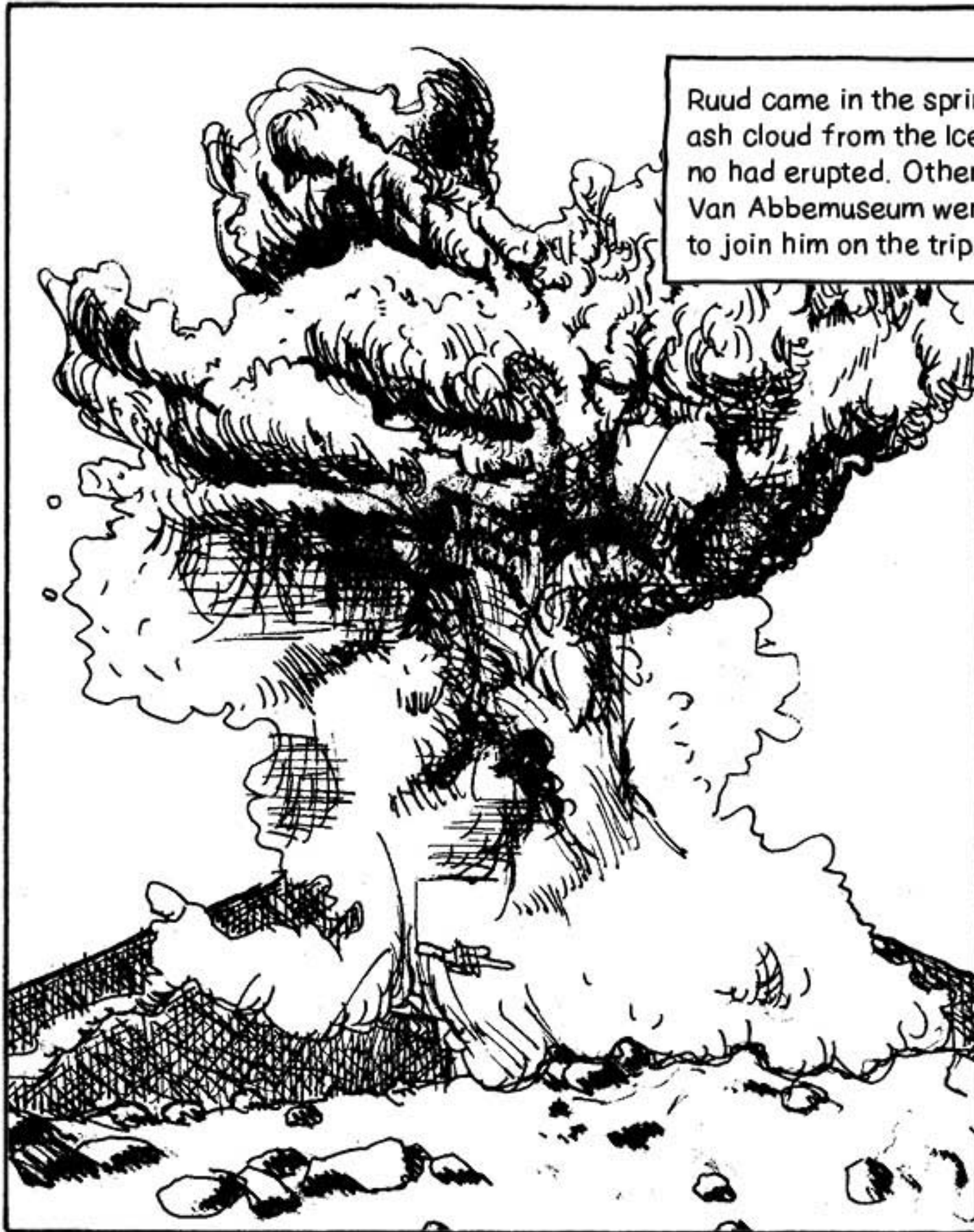
As I have clients in Israel, I go there every year. I said, "I'm going in April to Israel. Because I'm convinced that what you are doing is serious. Let's go together to Ramallah."



We said in that meeting that Louis and I would come to Ramallah, and Ruud said, "Oh, what a coincidence, I will be there, too."

STUCK IN ISRAEL
WITH THE RAMALLAH BLUES AGAIN

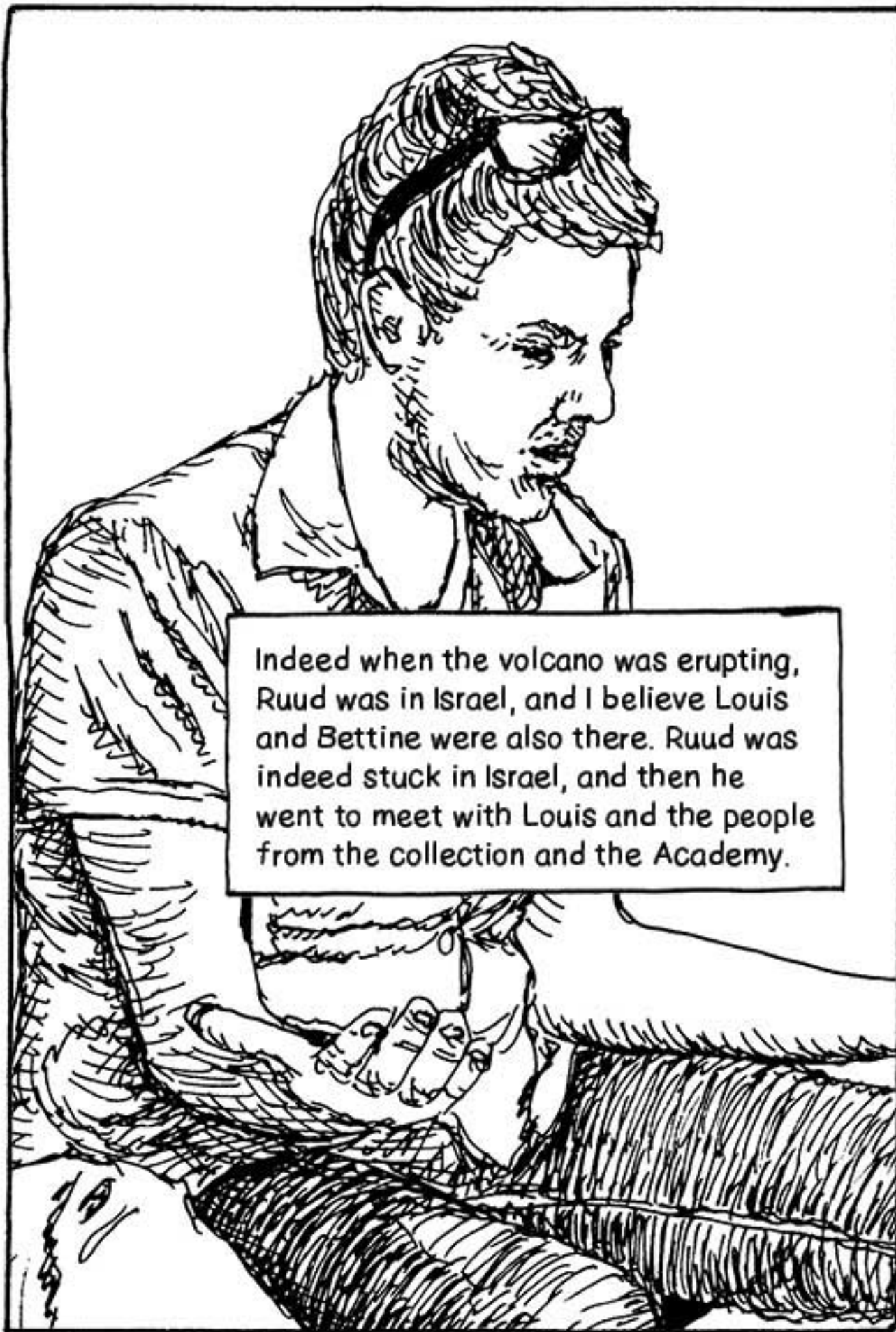




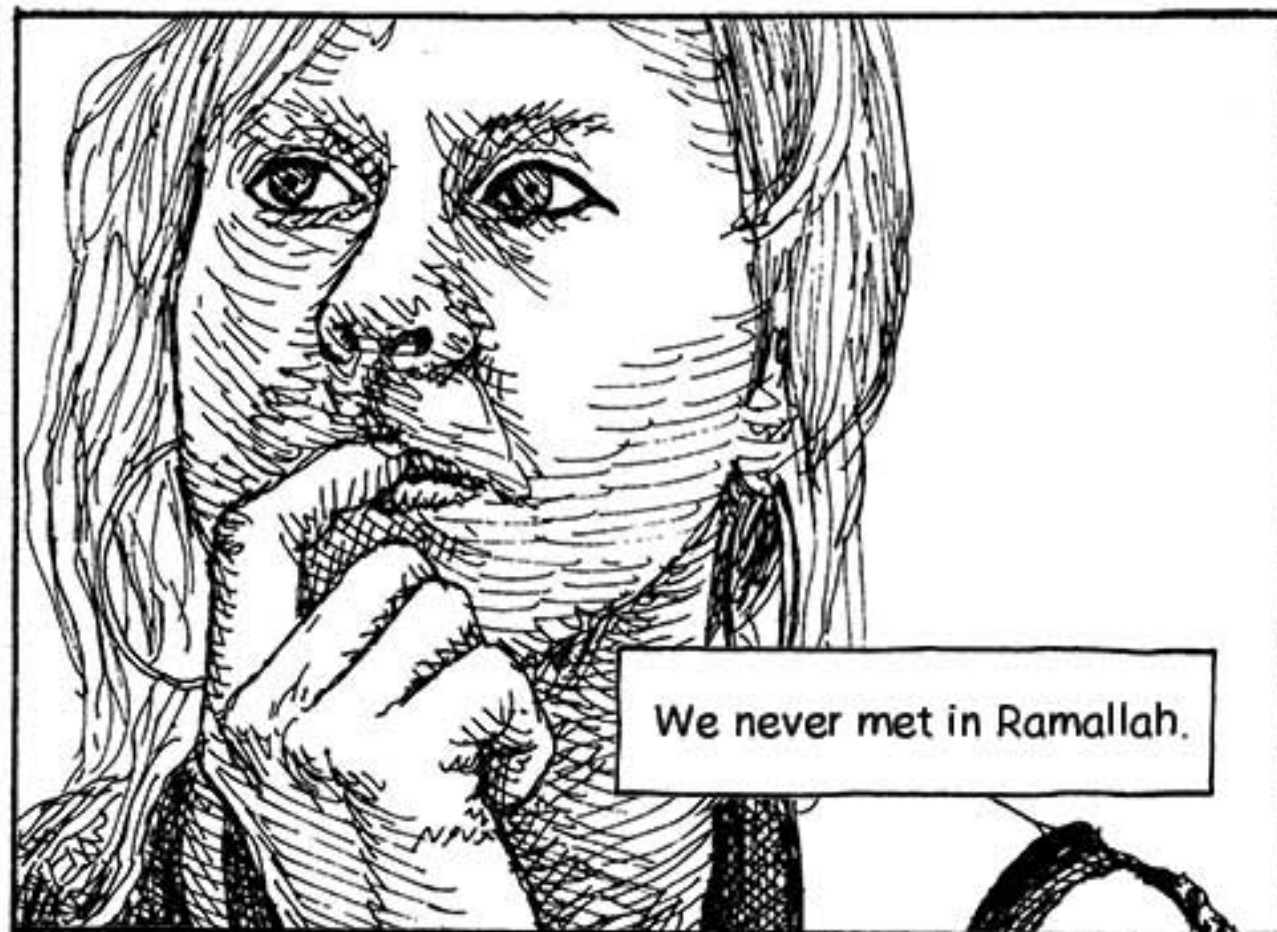
Ruud came in the spring when the ash cloud from the Icelandic volcano had erupted. Others from the Van Abbemuseum were supposed to join him on the trip.



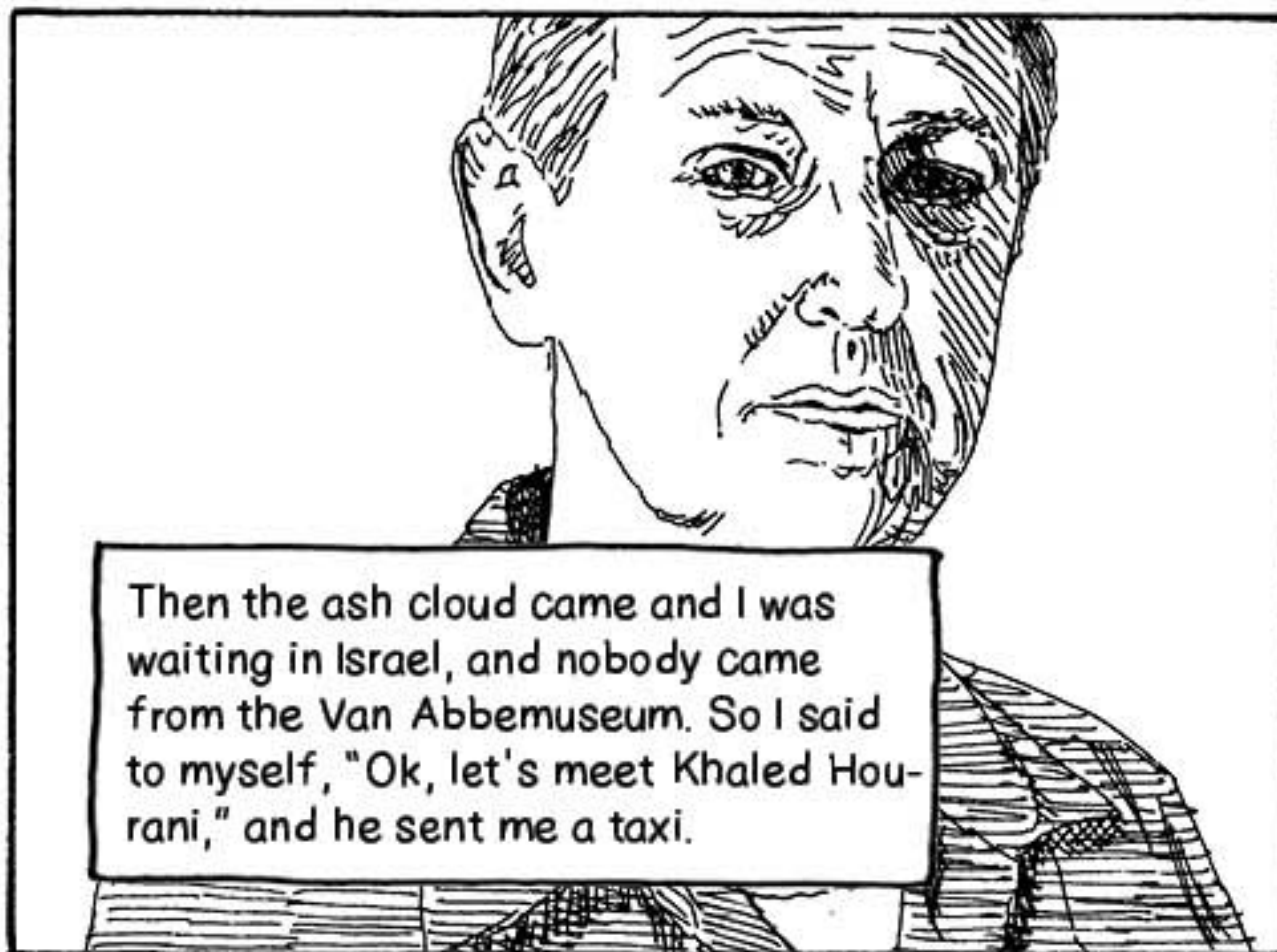
They couldn't make it because they were stuck at the airport.



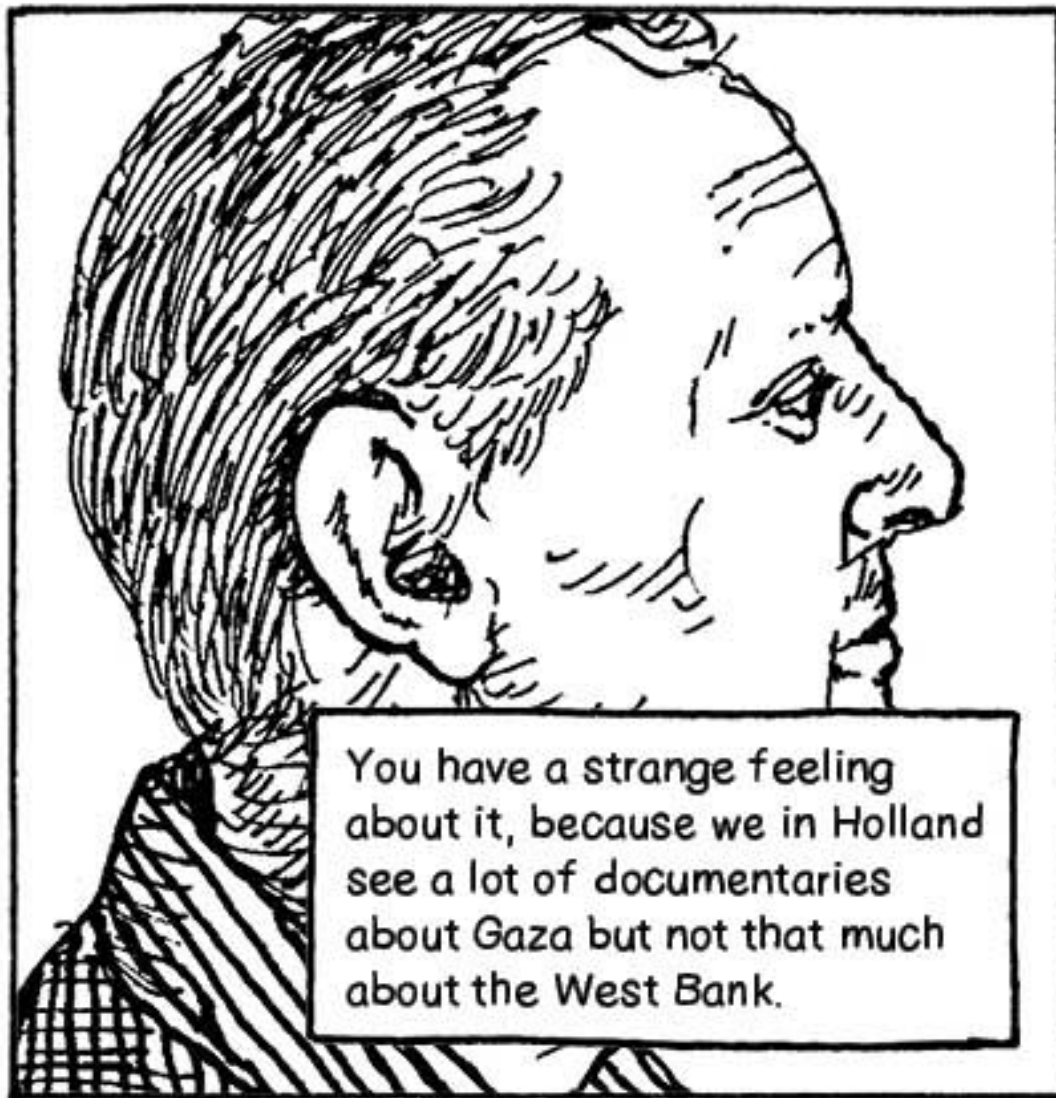
Indeed when the volcano was erupting, Ruud was in Israel, and I believe Louis and Bettine were also there. Ruud was indeed stuck in Israel, and then he went to meet with Louis and the people from the collection and the Academy.



We never met in Ramallah.



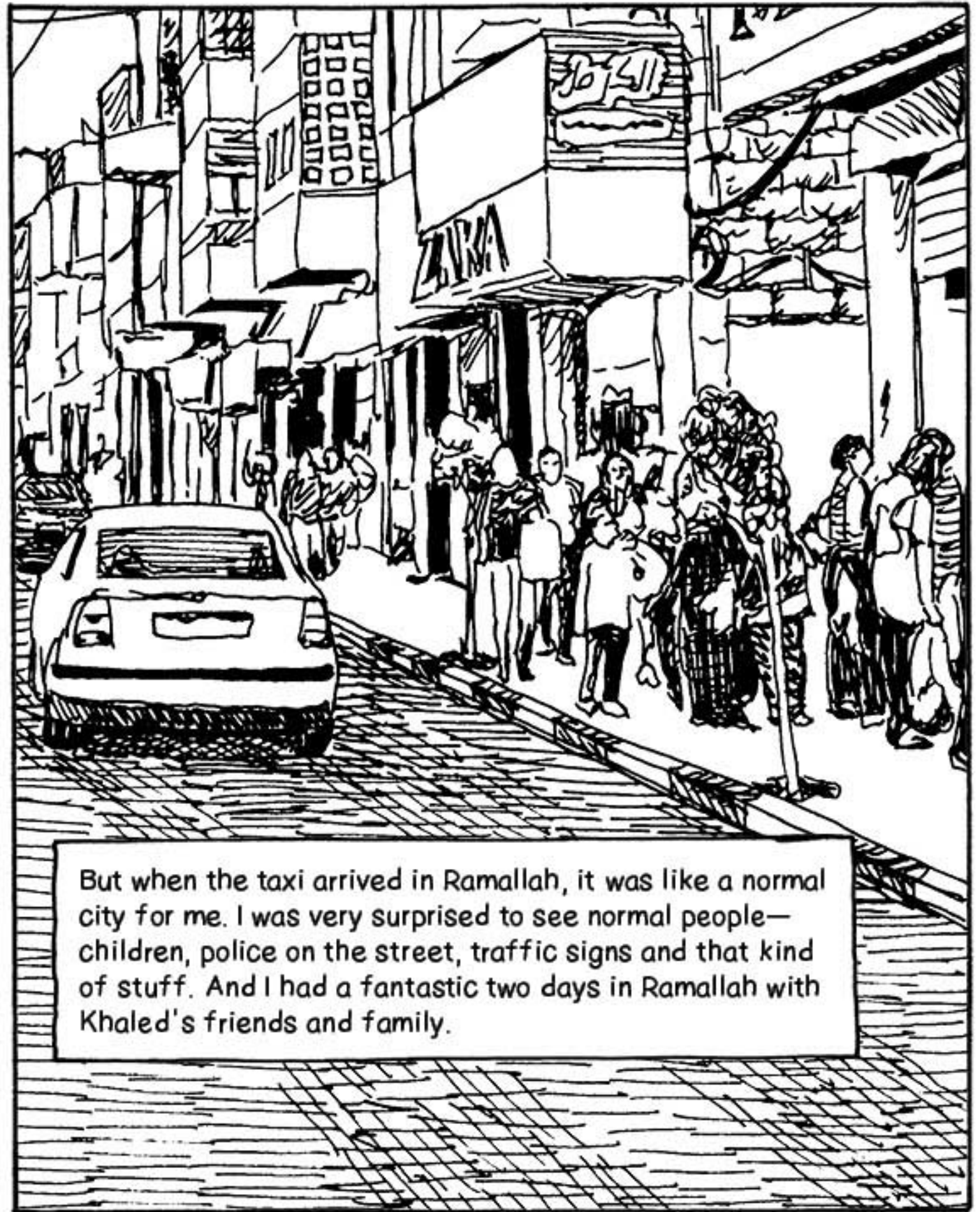
Then the ash cloud came and I was waiting in Israel, and nobody came from the Van Abbemuseum. So I said to myself, "Ok, let's meet Khaled Hourani," and he sent me a taxi.



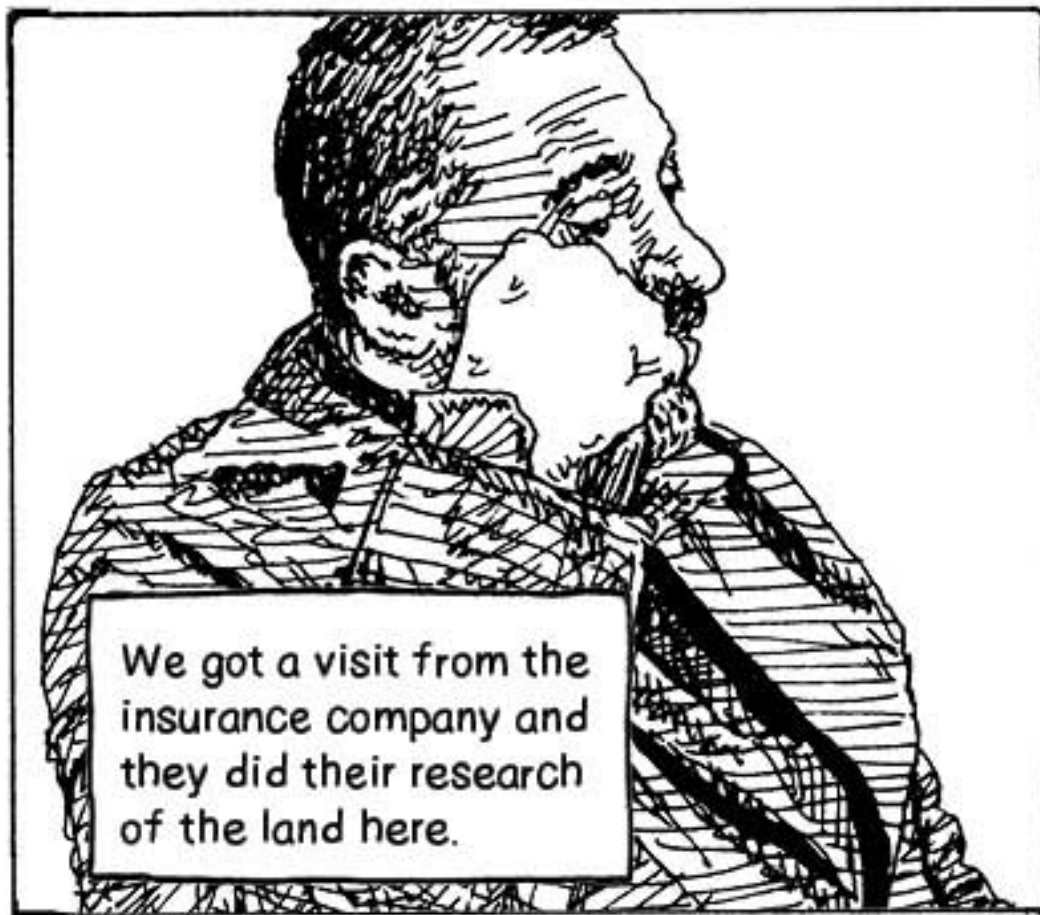
You have a strange feeling about it, because we in Holland see a lot of documentaries about Gaza but not that much about the West Bank.



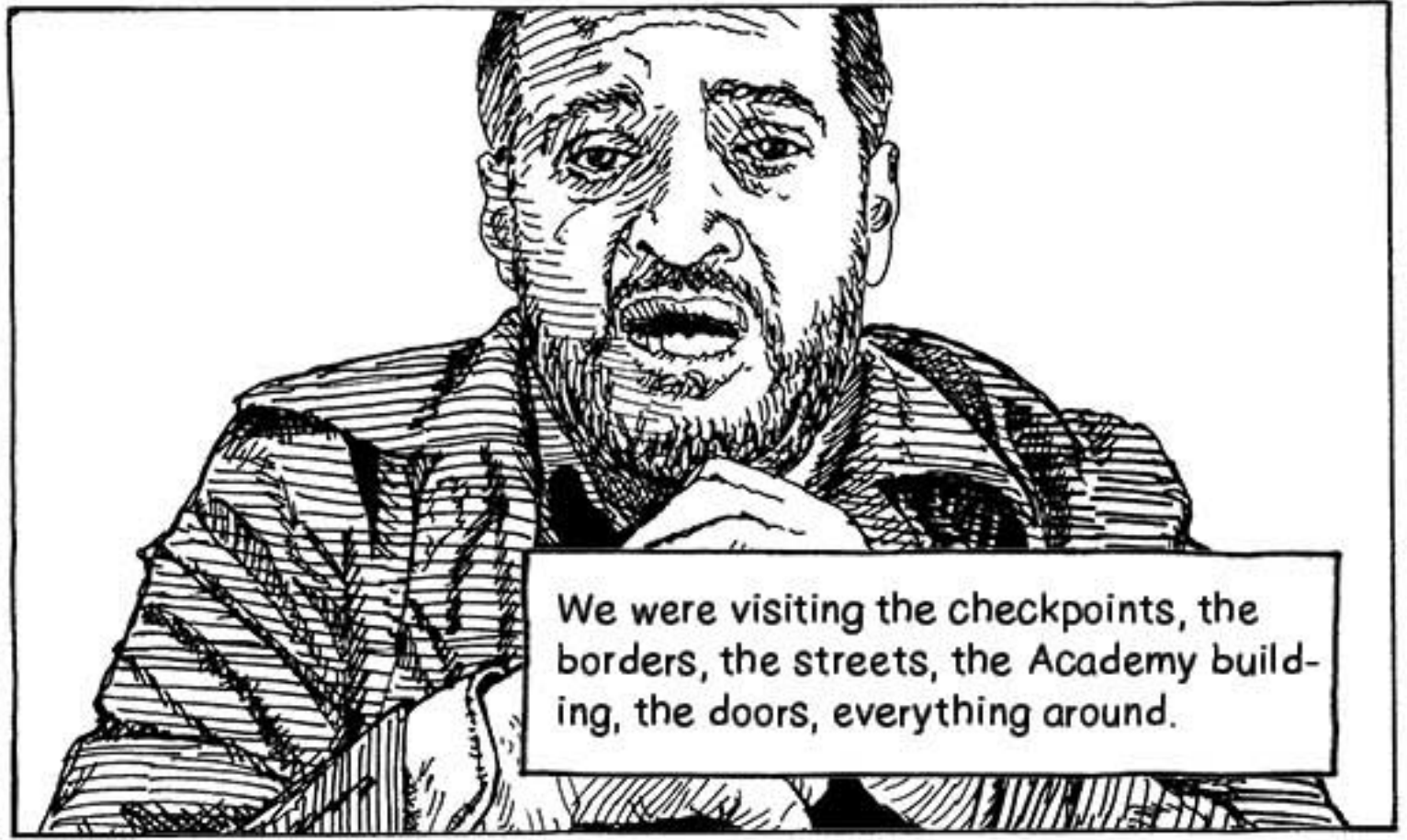
So, sitting in a taxi alone gives you not a good feeling in your stomach. You're not sure what will be waiting for you in Palestine.



But when the taxi arrived in Ramallah, it was like a normal city for me. I was very surprised to see normal people—children, police on the street, traffic signs and that kind of stuff. And I had a fantastic two days in Ramallah with Khaled's friends and family.



We got a visit from the insurance company and they did their research of the land here.



We were visiting the checkpoints, the borders, the streets, the Academy building, the doors, everything around.



Ruud Ijmker came, we toured around. It was very important for Ruud to ask, "What if it were stolen? Whose responsibility is that? Whose quotes do we go to? What is the governing law?"



We wanted to give a good impression about this area.



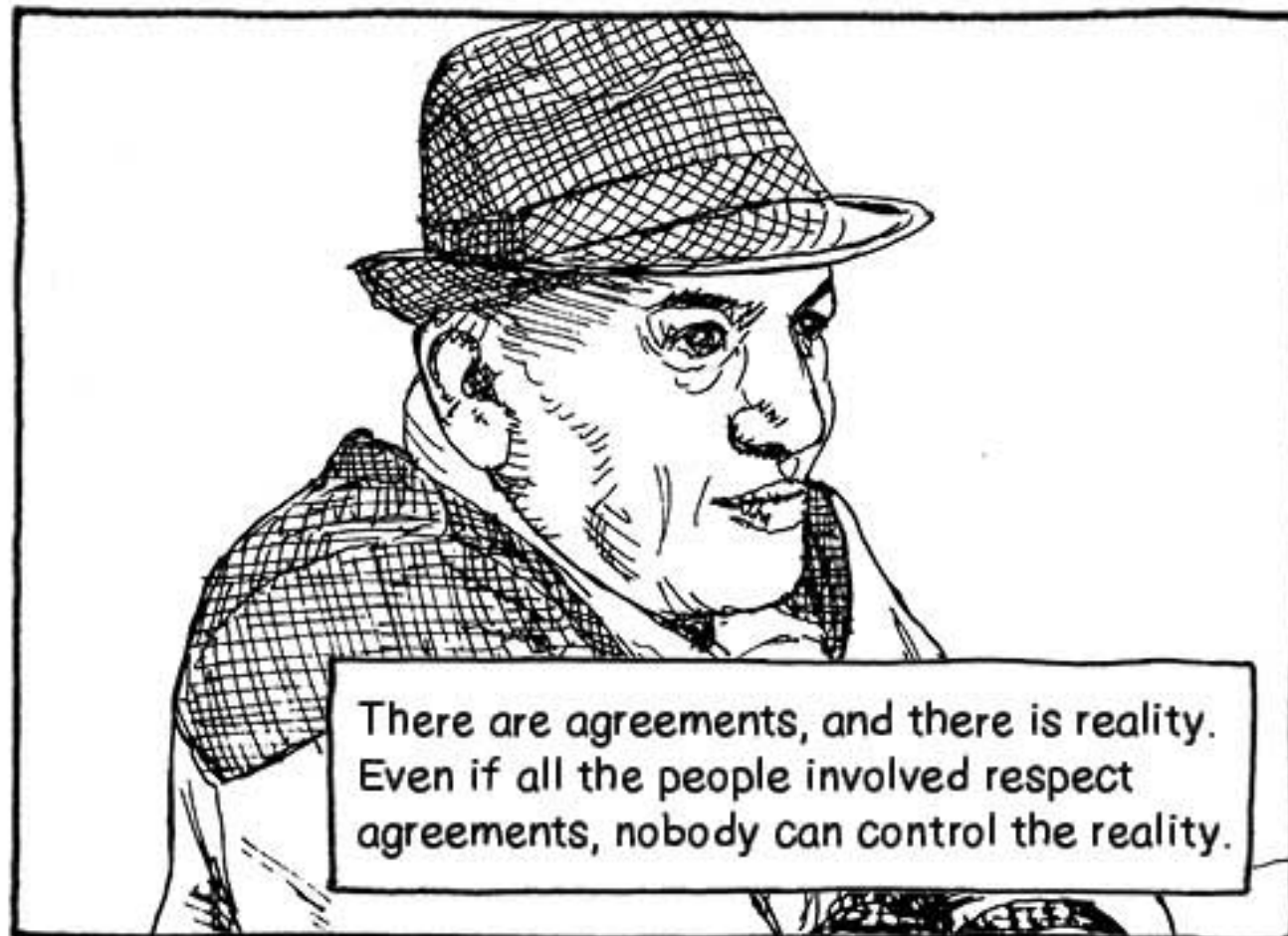
No problem. Everything's fine. Secure. We have the Palestinian police. But we know that for three years they made a siege around Yasser Arafat here. It means anything can happen tomorrow. No guarantee about anything here. You can make the arrangement with the Palestinian Minister of the Interior, who controls the police and all this.



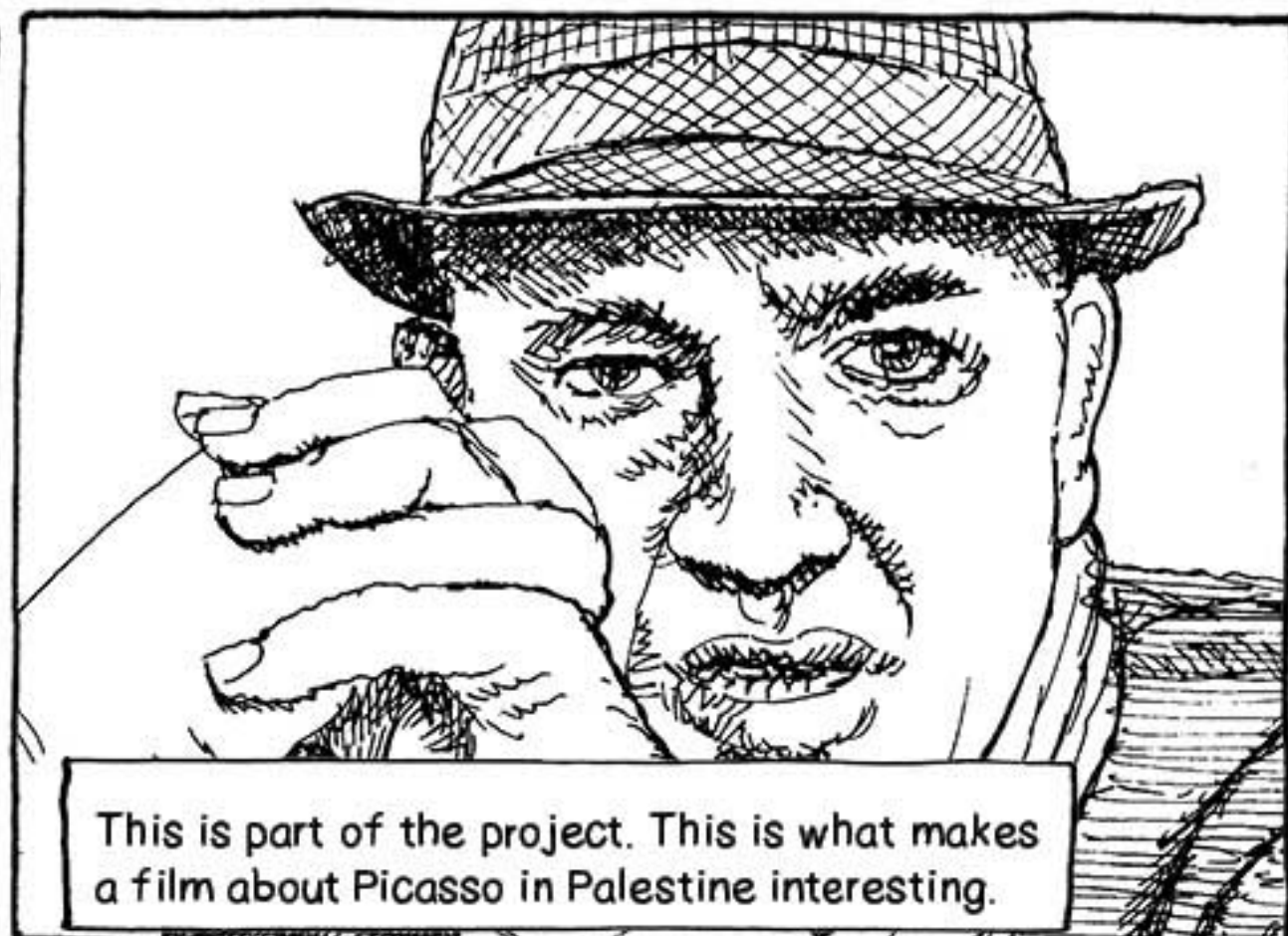
And the day after, he is not Minister anymore. This is easy. And the other people maybe don't know what you are talking about.



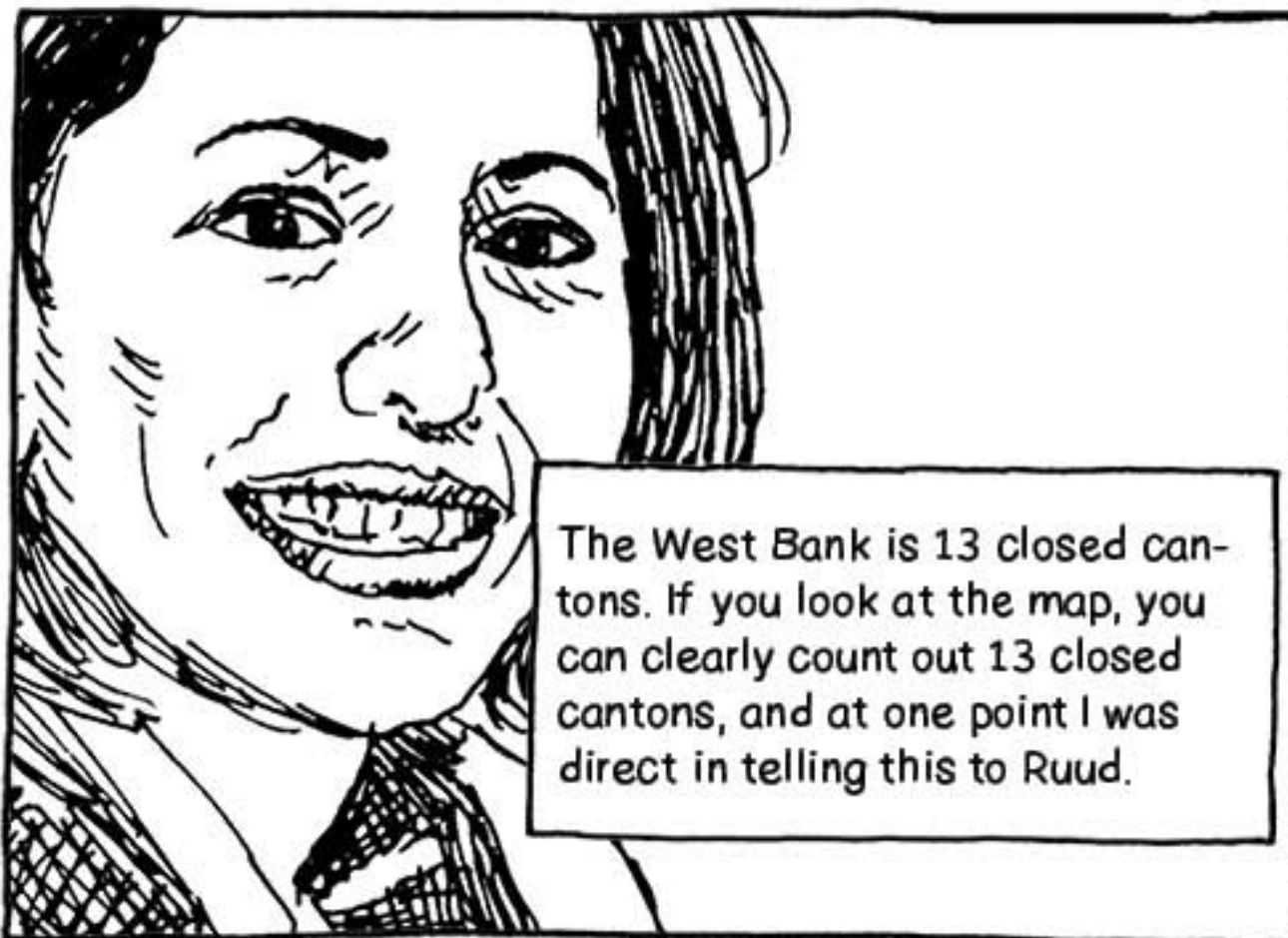
Maybe they say, "What Picasso? You are crazy!"



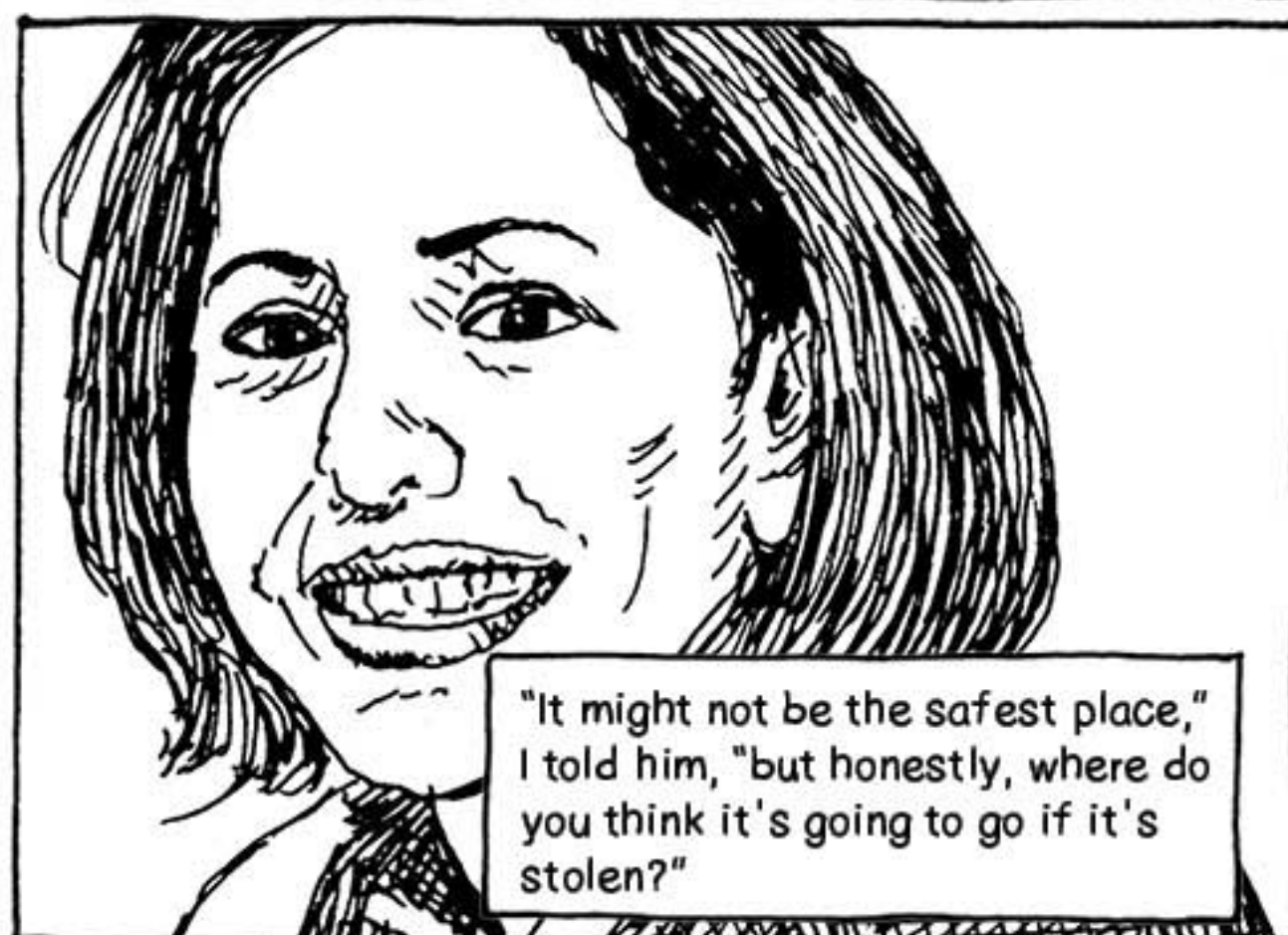
There are agreements, and there is reality. Even if all the people involved respect agreements, nobody can control the reality.



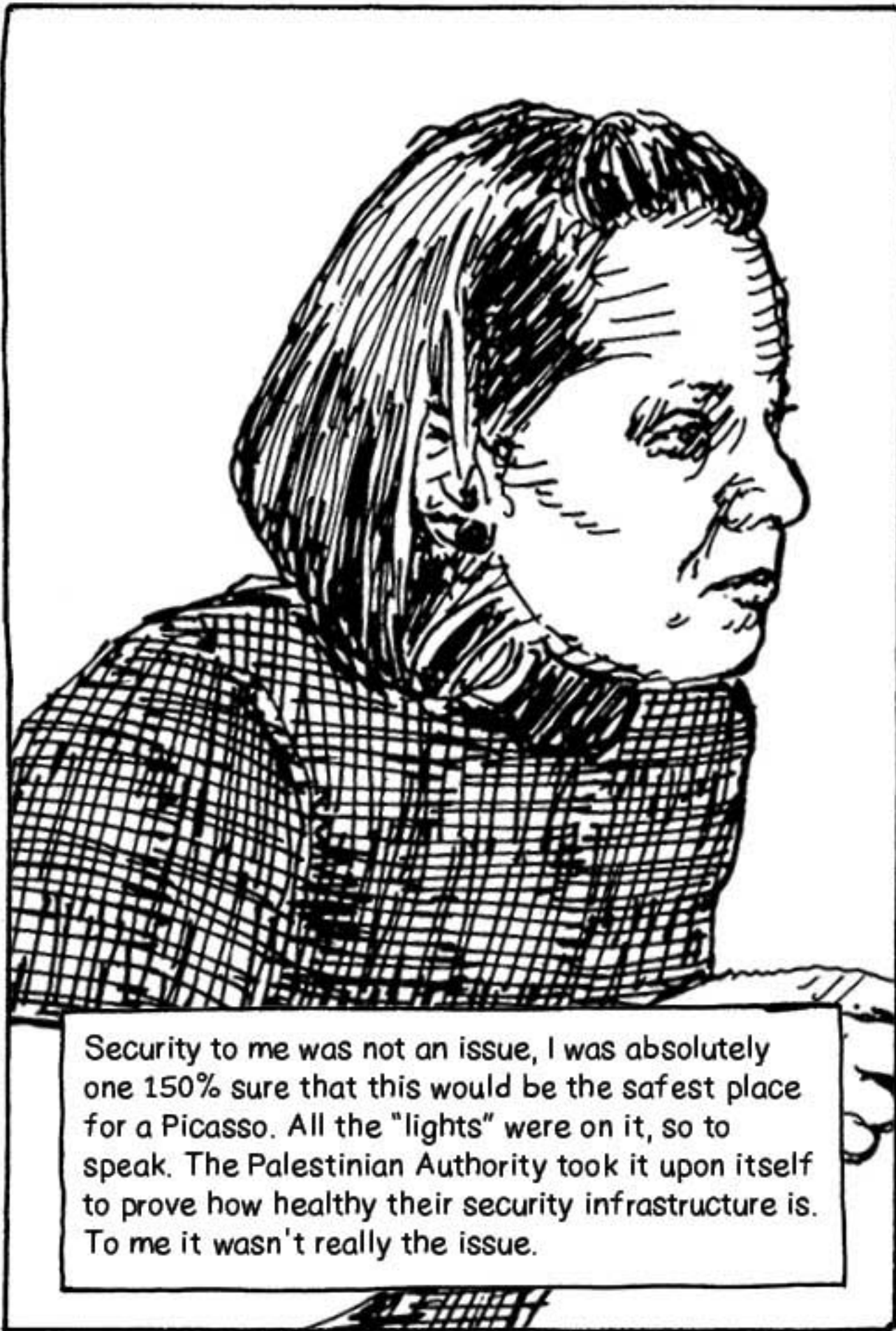
This is part of the project. This is what makes a film about Picasso in Palestine interesting.



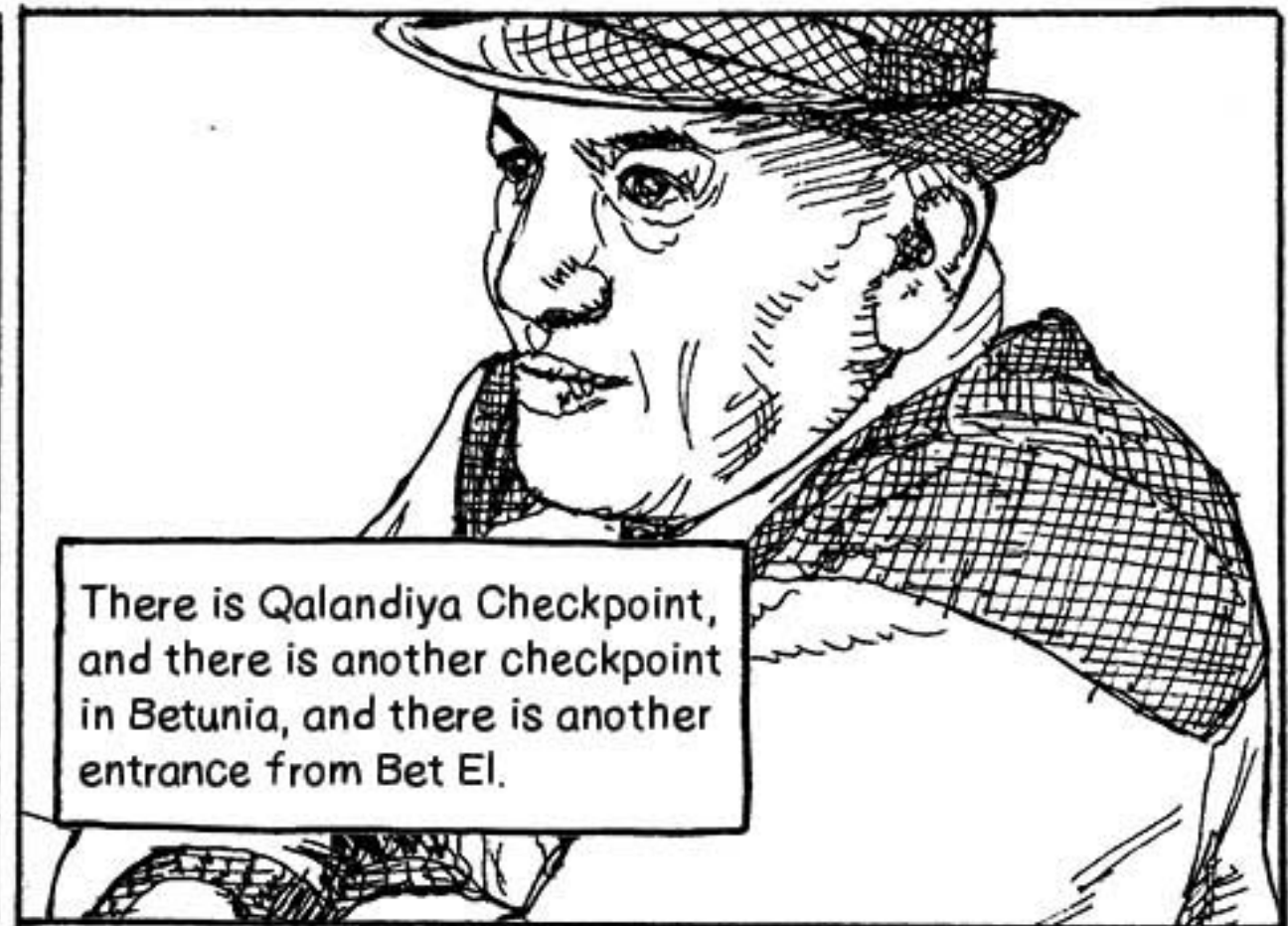
The West Bank is 13 closed cantons. If you look at the map, you can clearly count out 13 closed cantons, and at one point I was direct in telling this to Ruud.



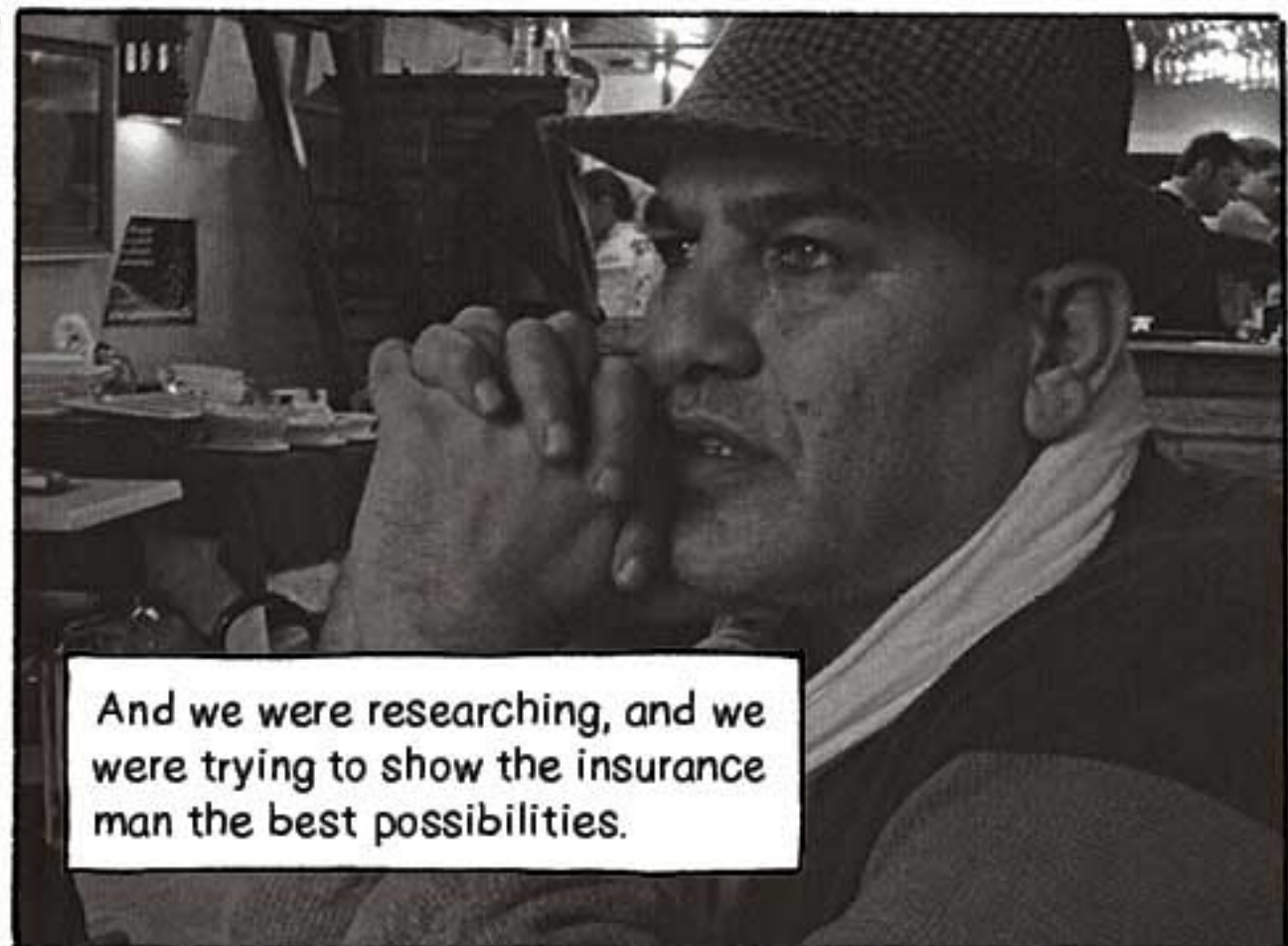
"It might not be the safest place," I told him, "but honestly, where do you think it's going to go if it's stolen?"



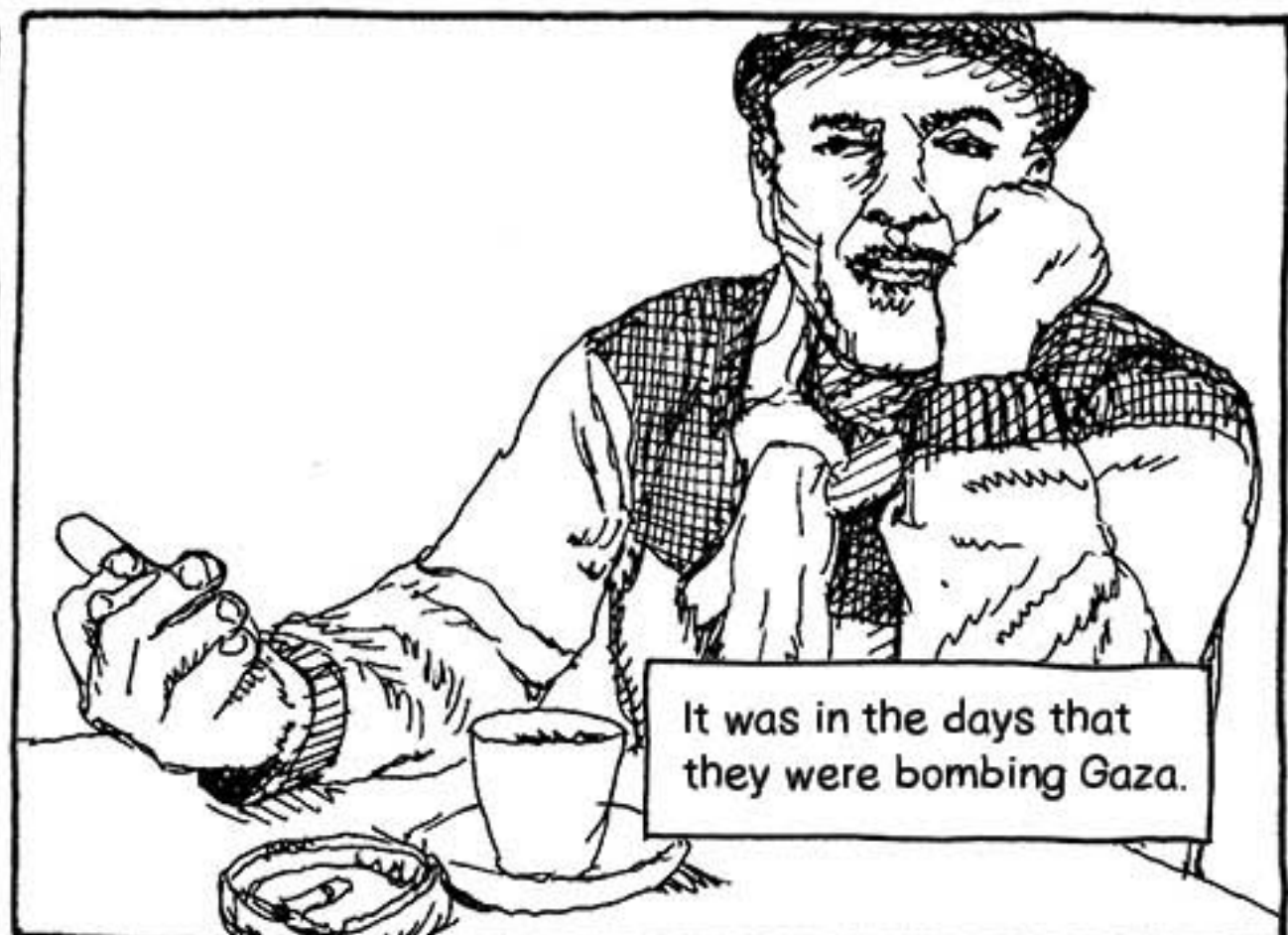
Security to me was not an issue, I was absolutely one 150% sure that this would be the safest place for a Picasso. All the "lights" were on it, so to speak. The Palestinian Authority took it upon itself to prove how healthy their security infrastructure is. To me it wasn't really the issue.

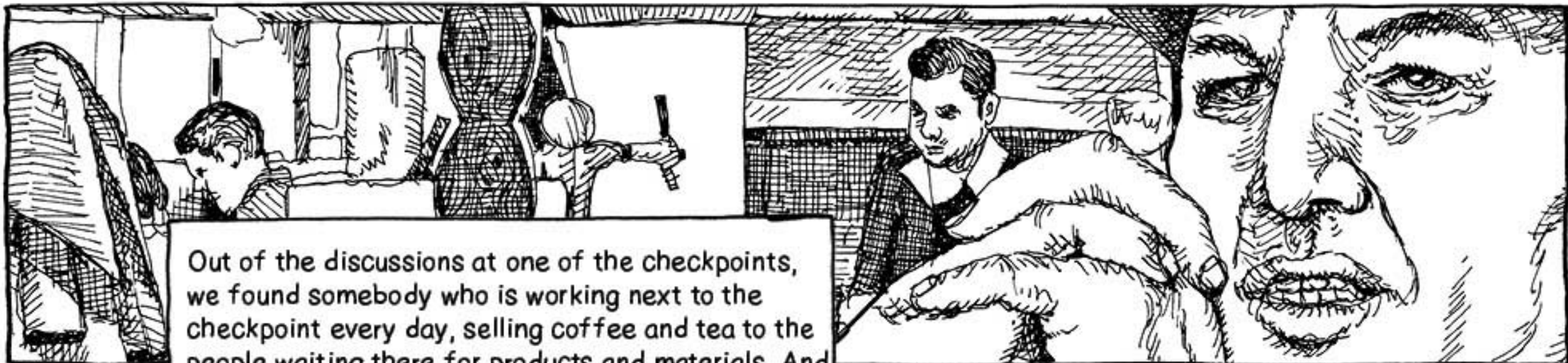


There is Qalandiya Checkpoint, and there is another checkpoint in Betunia, and there is another entrance from Bet El.

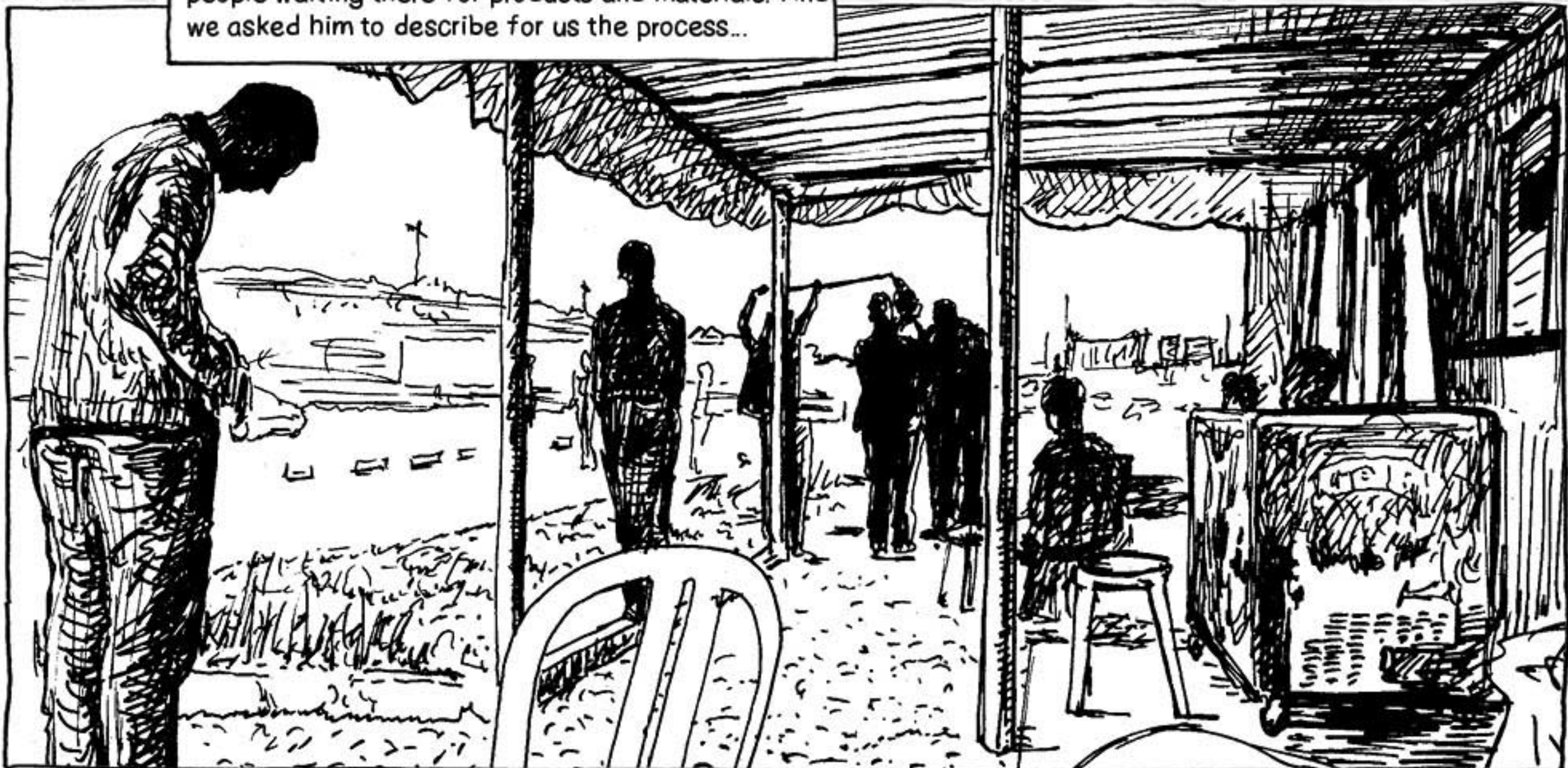


And we were researching, and we were trying to show the insurance man the best possibilities.





Out of the discussions at one of the checkpoints, we found somebody who is working next to the checkpoint every day, selling coffee and tea to the people waiting there for products and materials. And we asked him to describe for us the process...

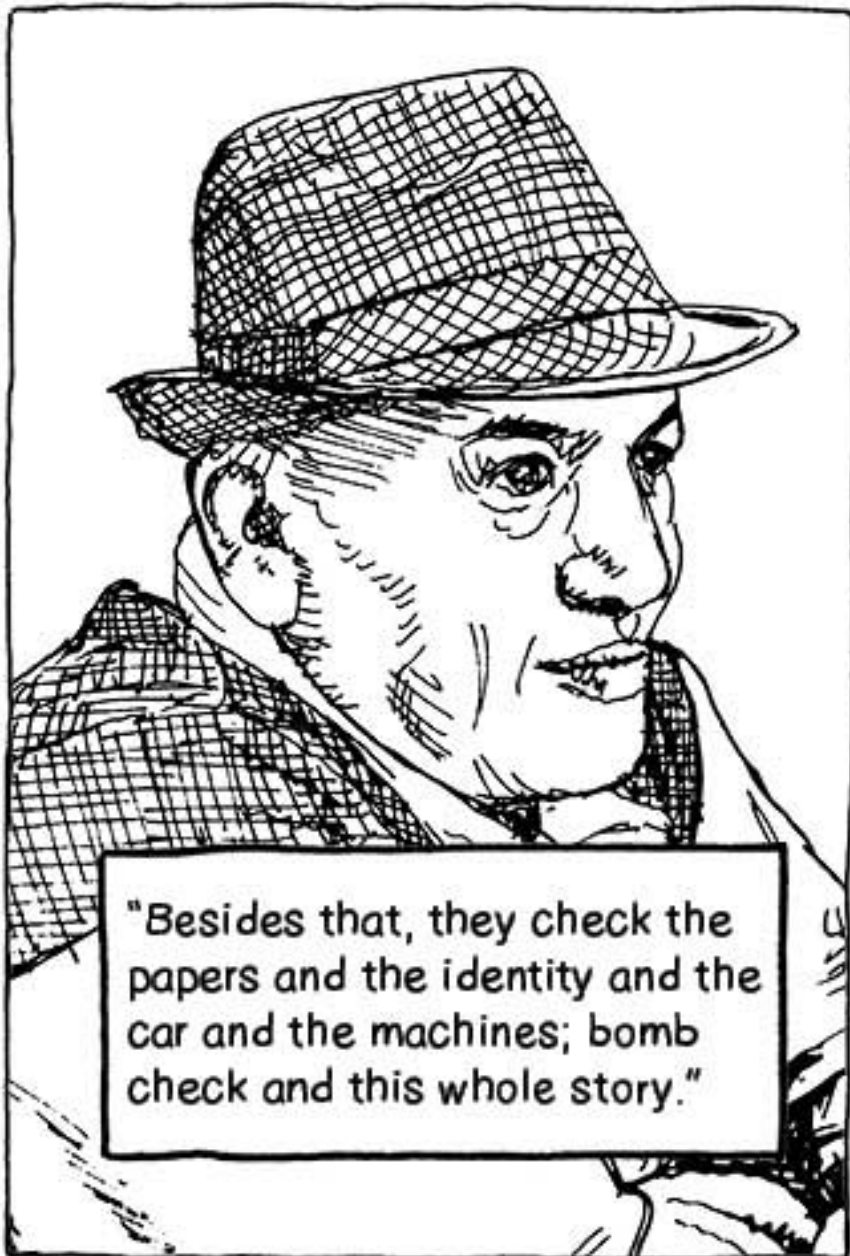




"Ok, a car comes in from over here, it goes out from there."



"What happens during this time?"



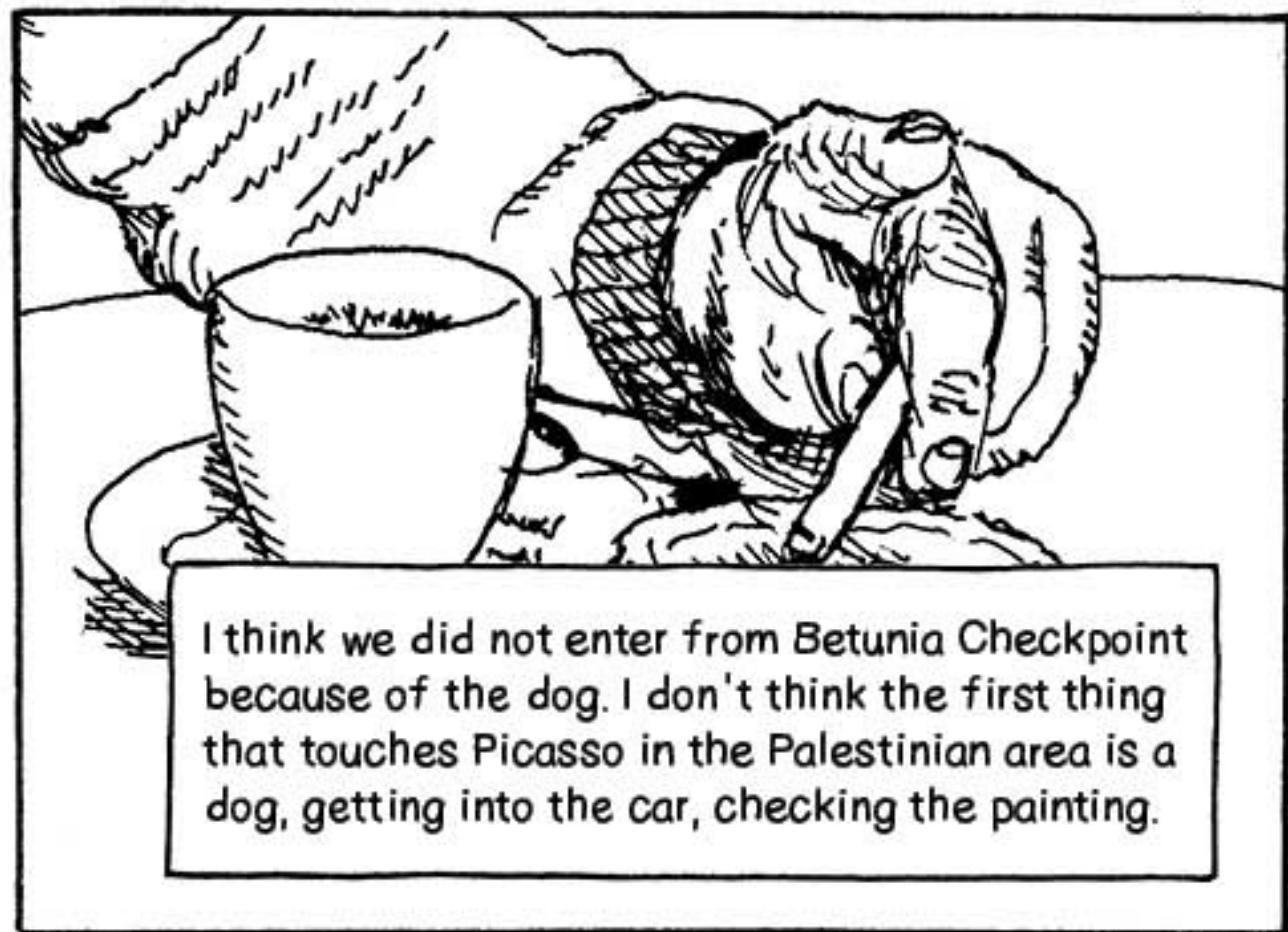
"Besides that, they check the papers and the identity and the car and the machines; bomb check and this whole story."



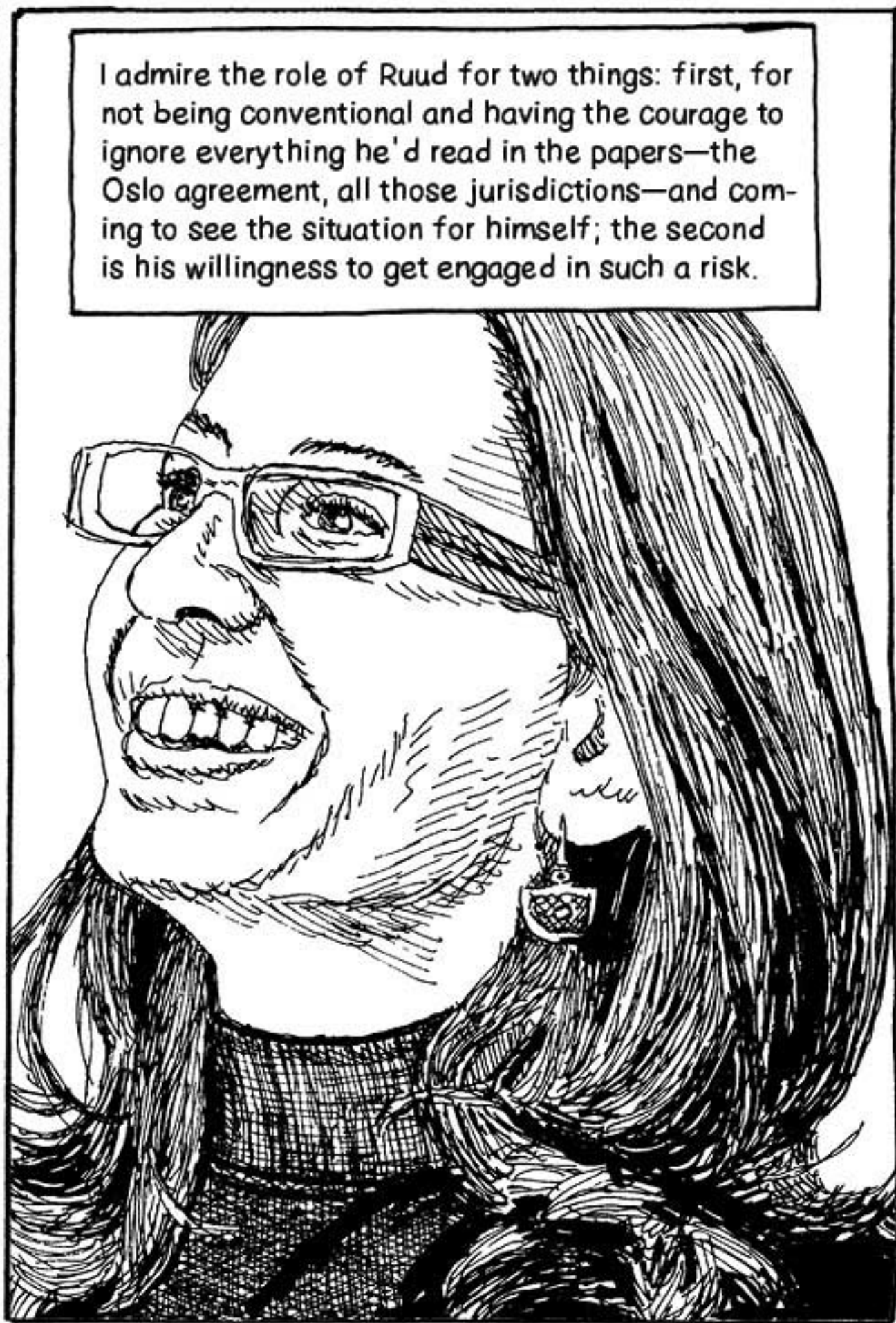
There is a process where they put a dog in the car to smell for bombs.



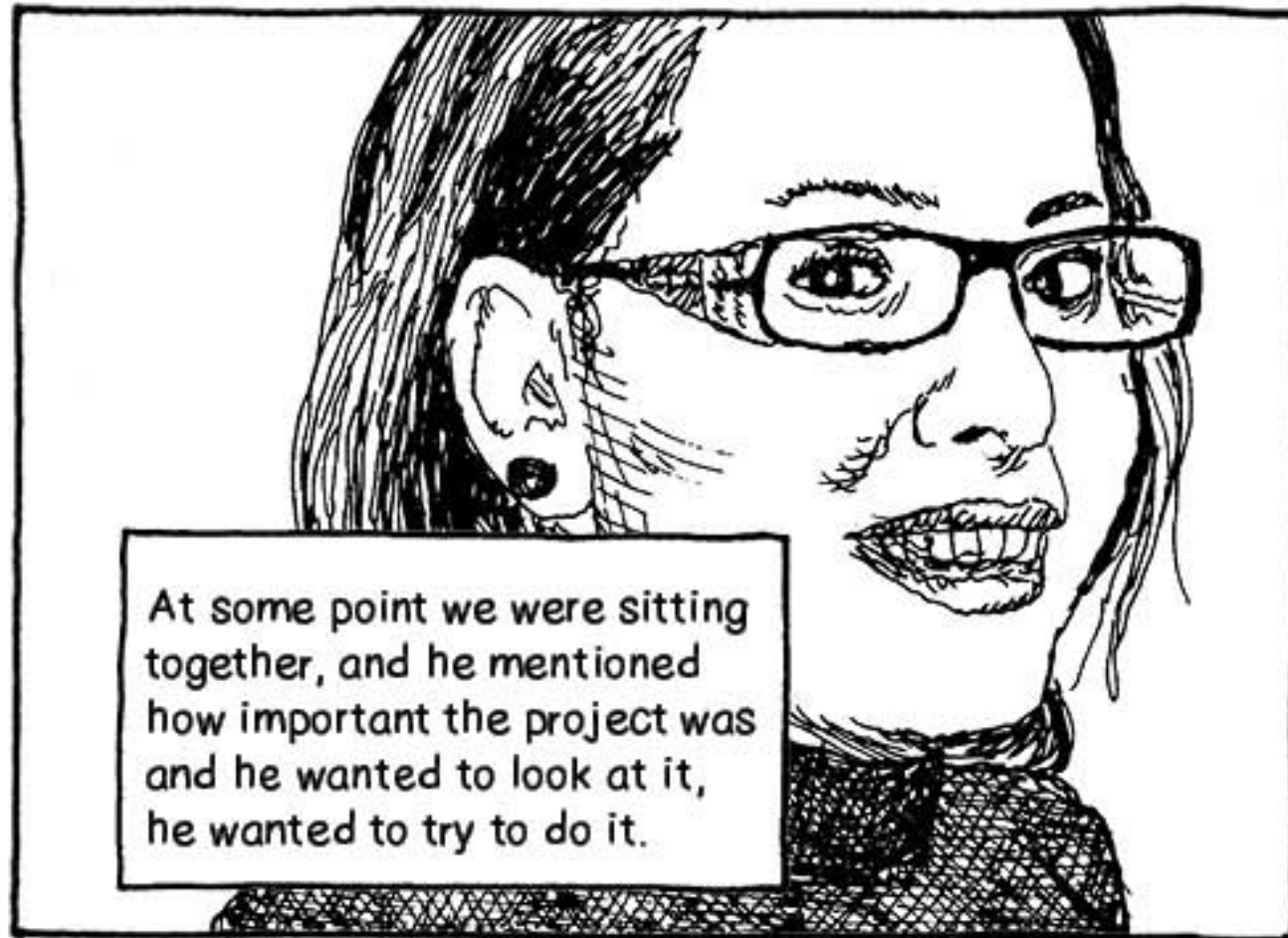
I translate this to the insurance man as a joke, to be funny—because we decided that we are not going to enter from there.



I think we did not enter from Betunia Checkpoint because of the dog. I don't think the first thing that touches Picasso in the Palestinian area is a dog, getting into the car, checking the painting.



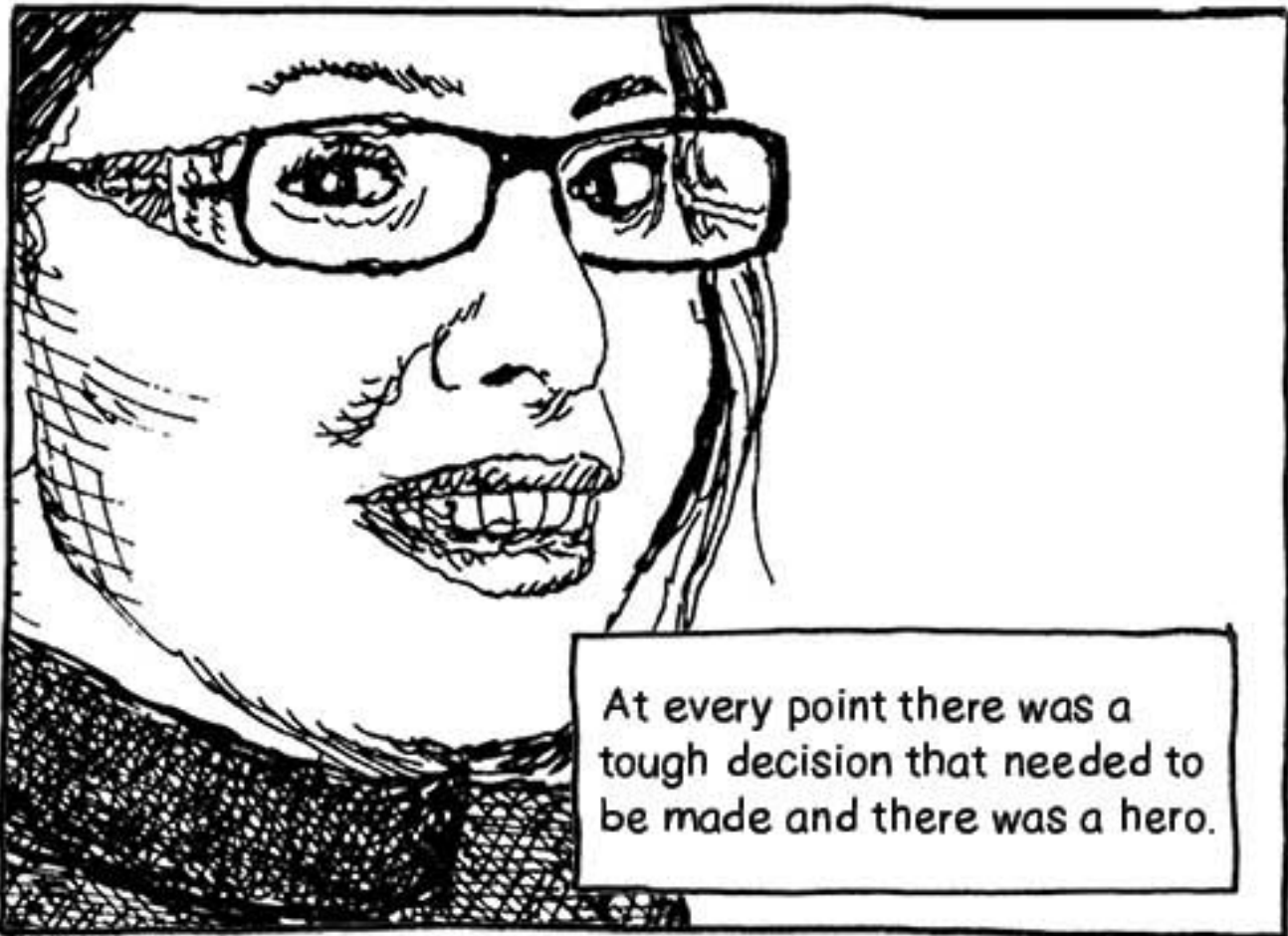
I admire the role of Ruud for two things: first, for not being conventional and having the courage to ignore everything he'd read in the papers—the Oslo agreement, all those jurisdictions—and coming to see the situation for himself; the second is his willingness to get engaged in such a risk.



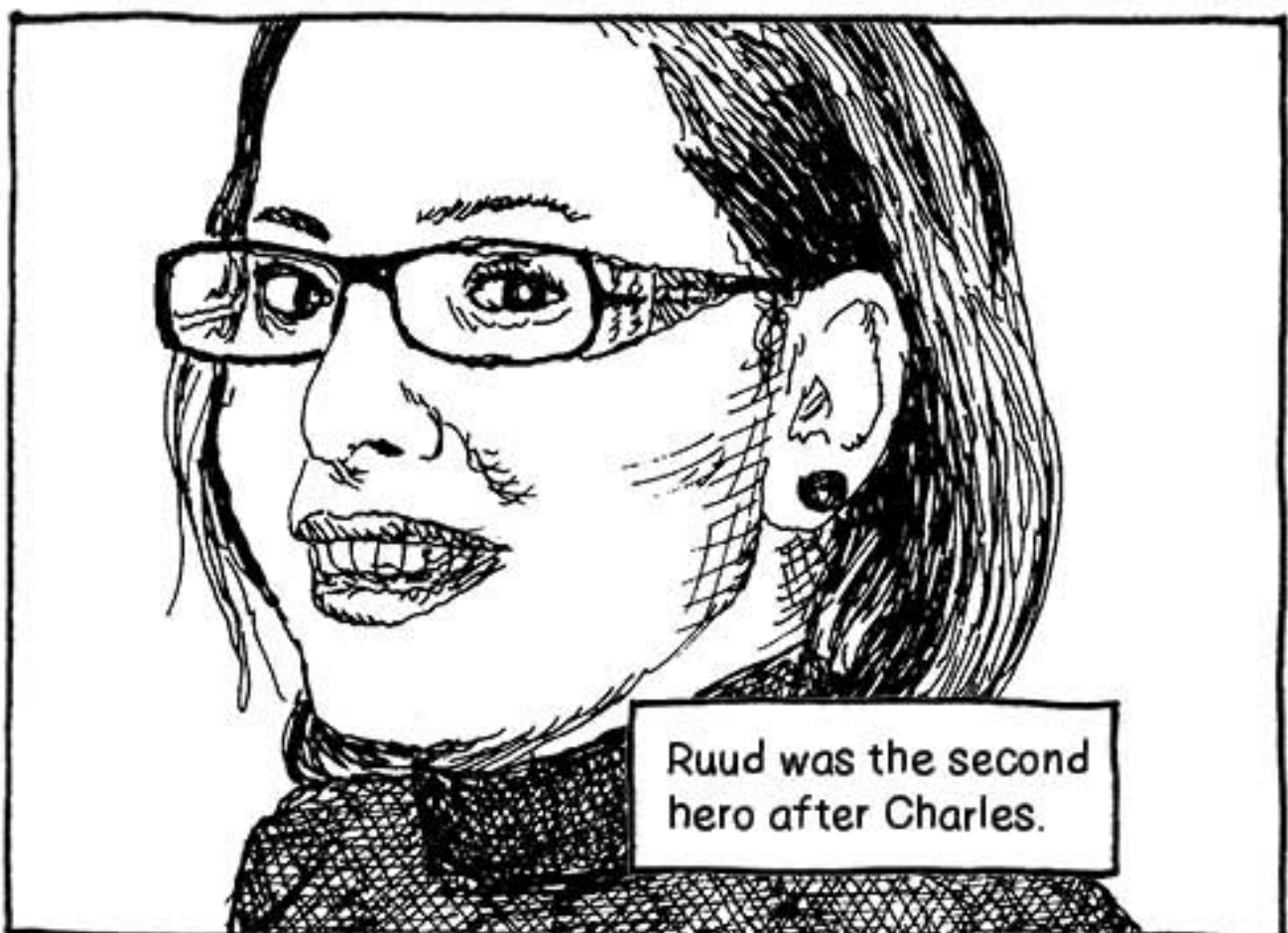
At some point we were sitting together, and he mentioned how important the project was and he wanted to look at it, he wanted to try to do it.



This was not expected from a regular insurance executive.



At every point there was a tough decision that needed to be made and there was a hero.

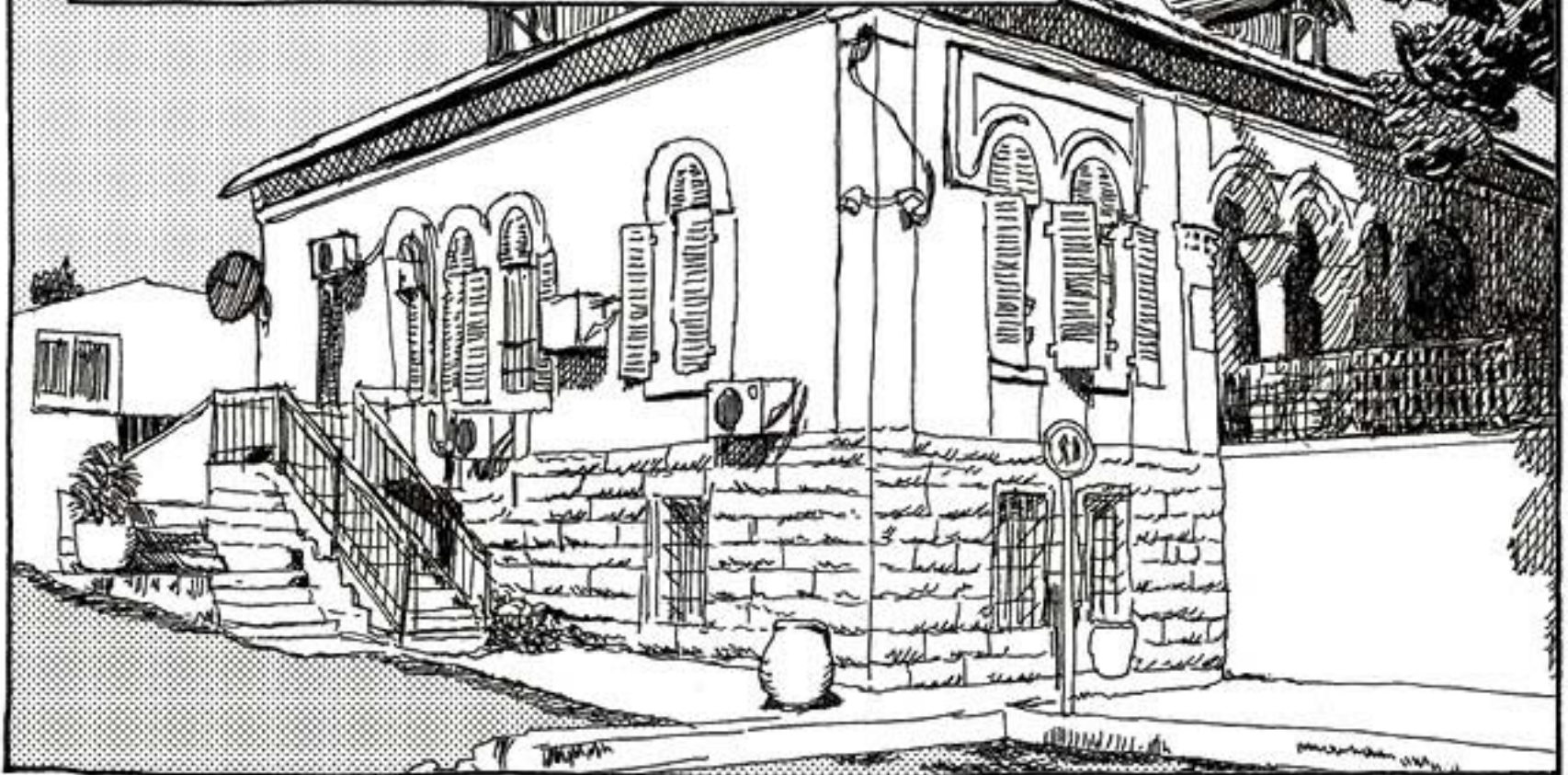


Ruud was the second hero after Charles.



For them it was, yeah, a really nice project—not only for the painting but also for the philosophy related to the painting. So having been there and discussed things, I said...

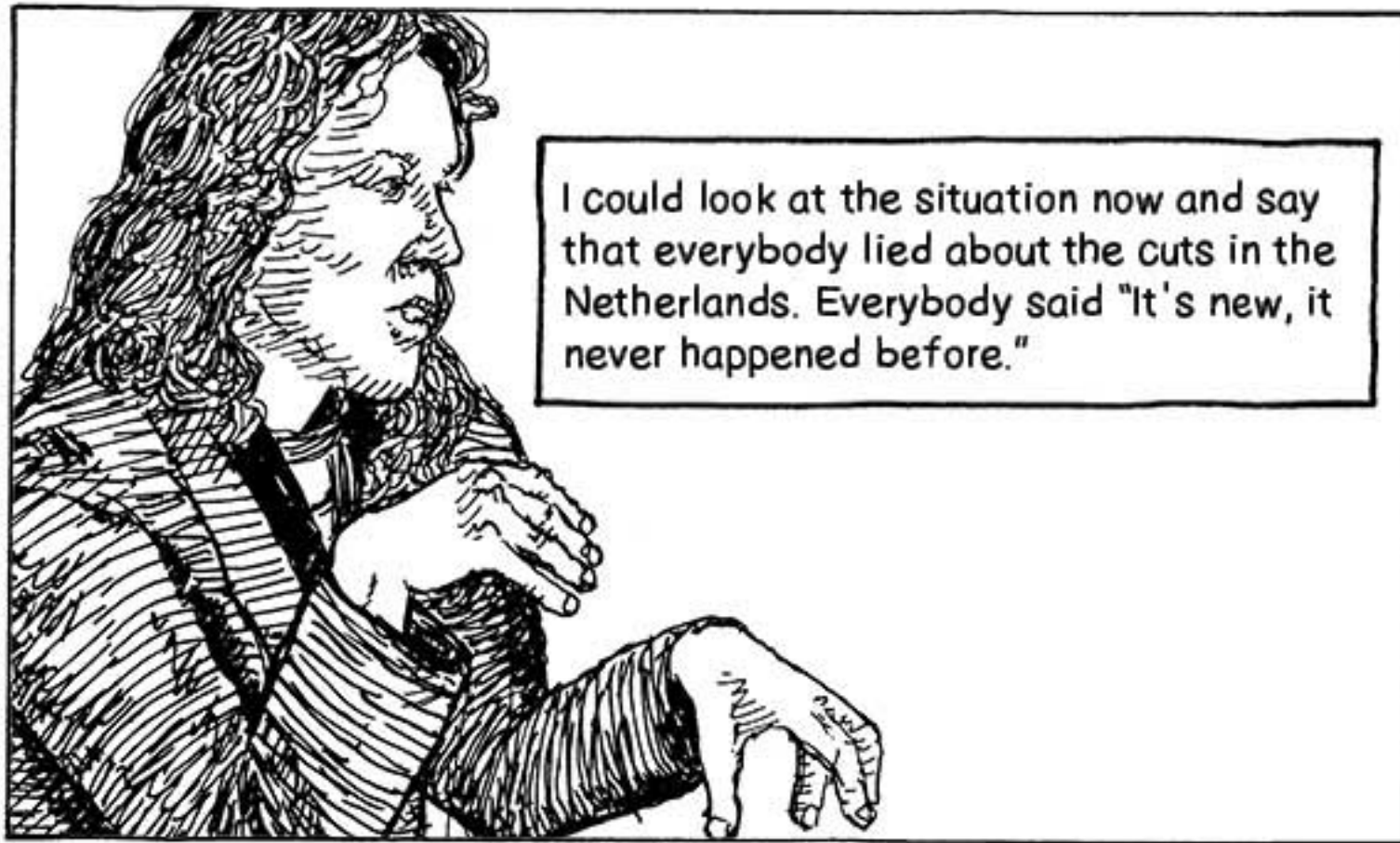
...“It's a nice building, the former Ministry of Culture, because it has proper fire-loss prevention equipment and it is an old building, very thick...



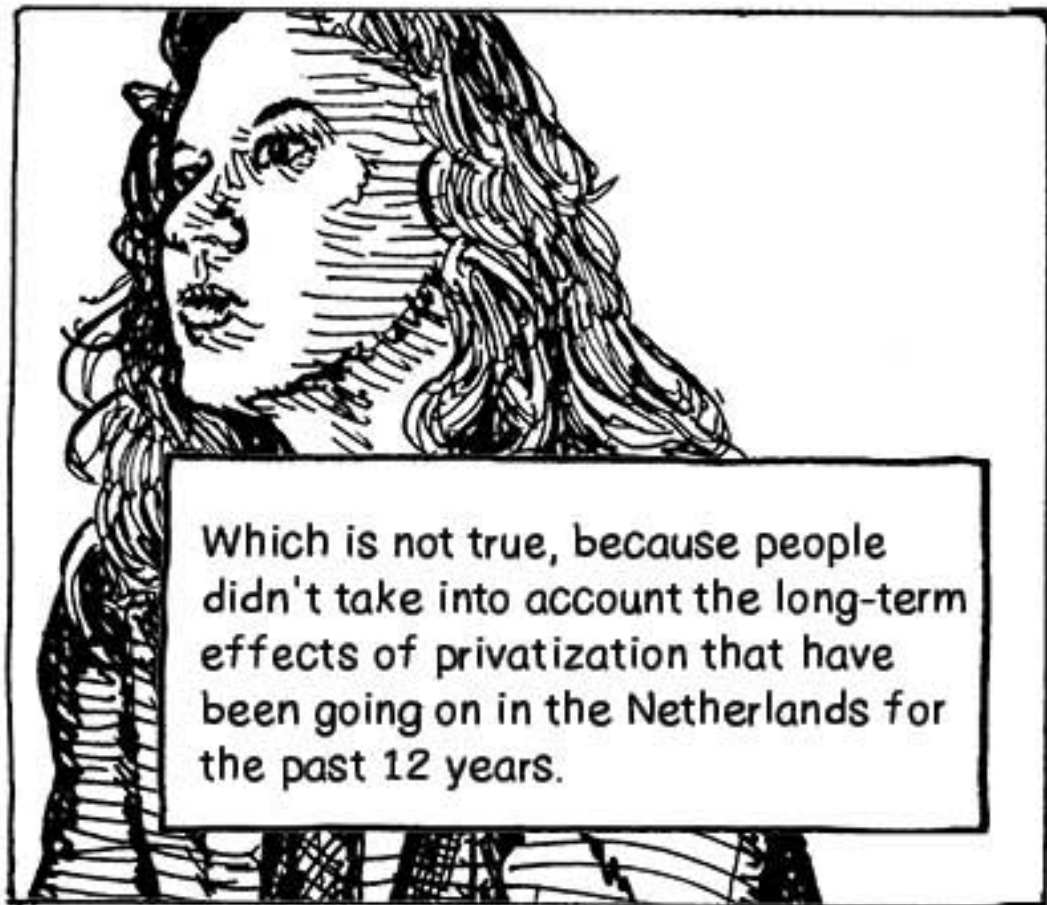
...I think it's acceptable to arrange it and to give you 100% coverage provided at least four armed guards are there 24 hours a day, and certain entries have to be closed and, of course, I have to discuss it internally.”

THE ROLE OF GALIT EILAT





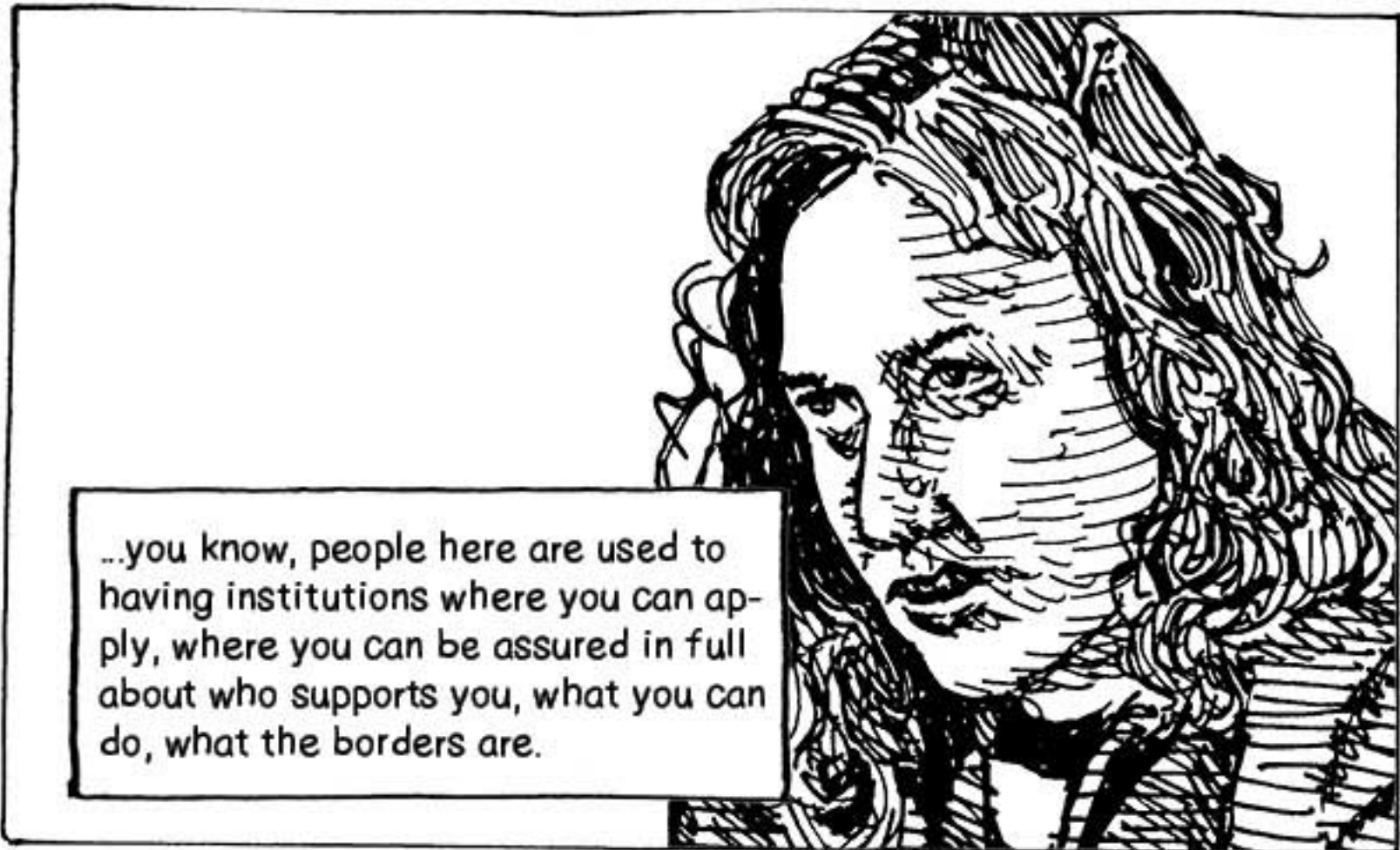
I could look at the situation now and say that everybody lied about the cuts in the Netherlands. Everybody said "It's new, it never happened before."



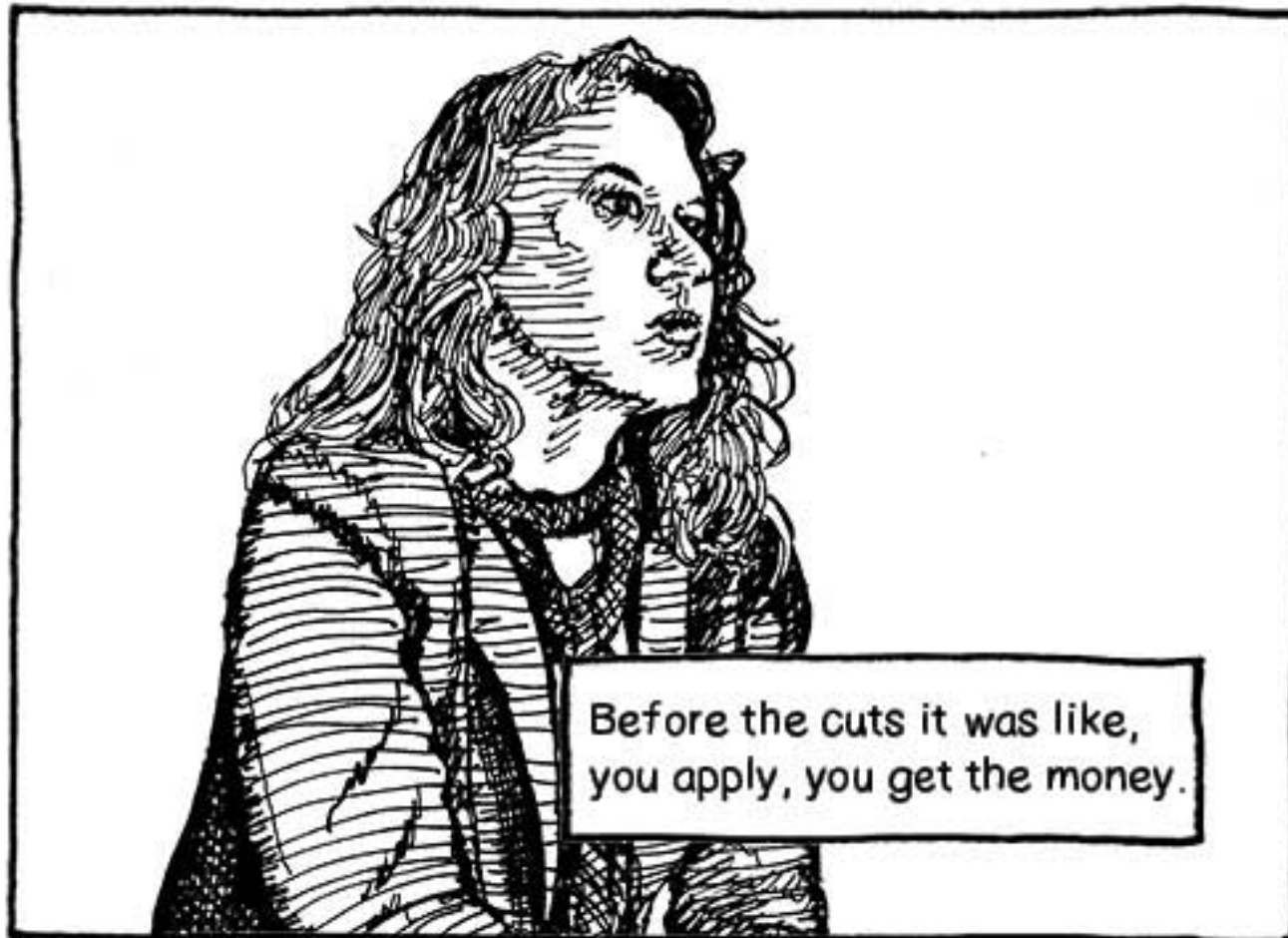
Which is not true, because people didn't take into account the long-term effects of privatization that have been going on in the Netherlands for the past 12 years.



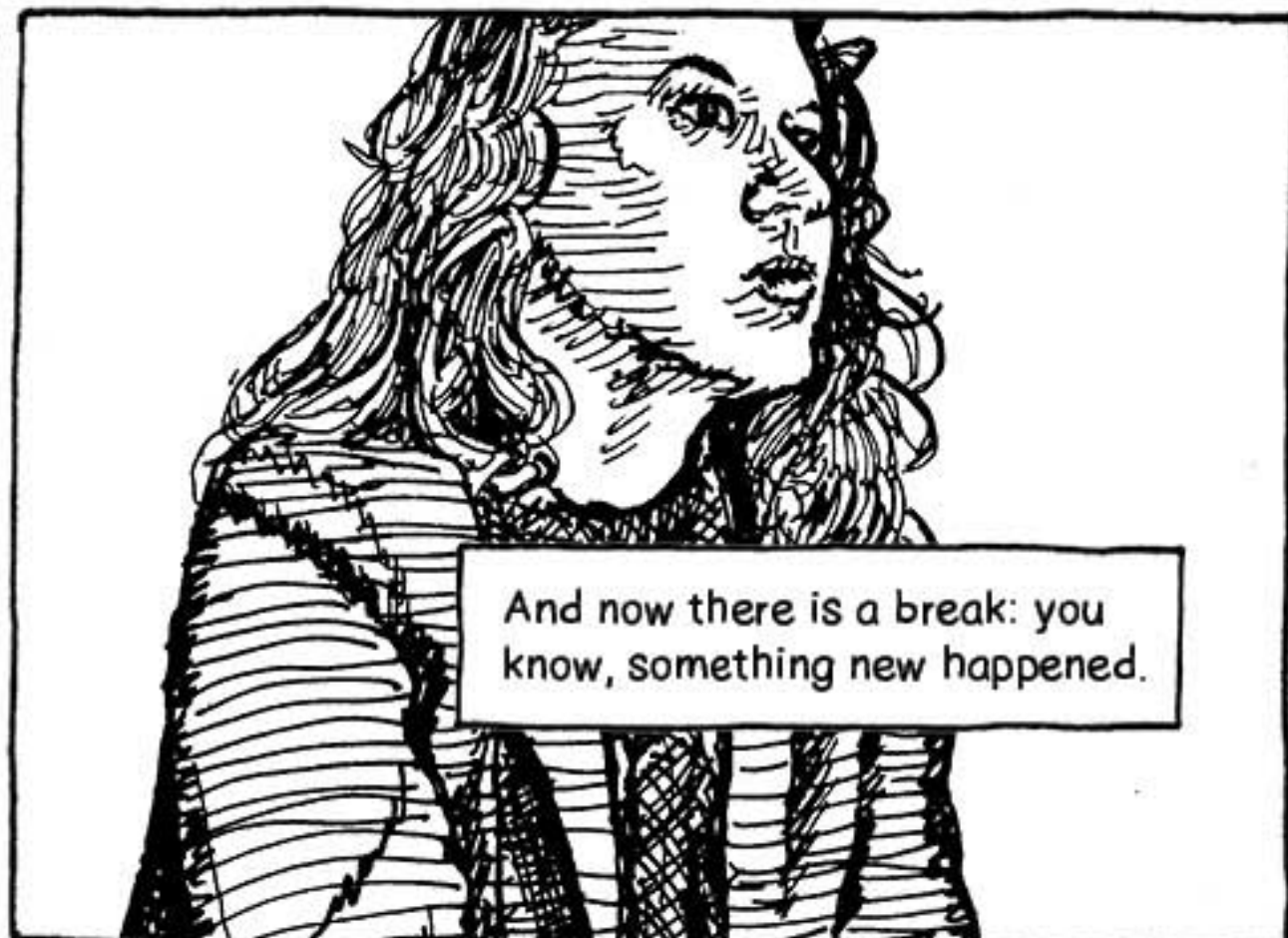
And now it's new and everybody is talking about the cuts, and somehow they're used to working in a different...



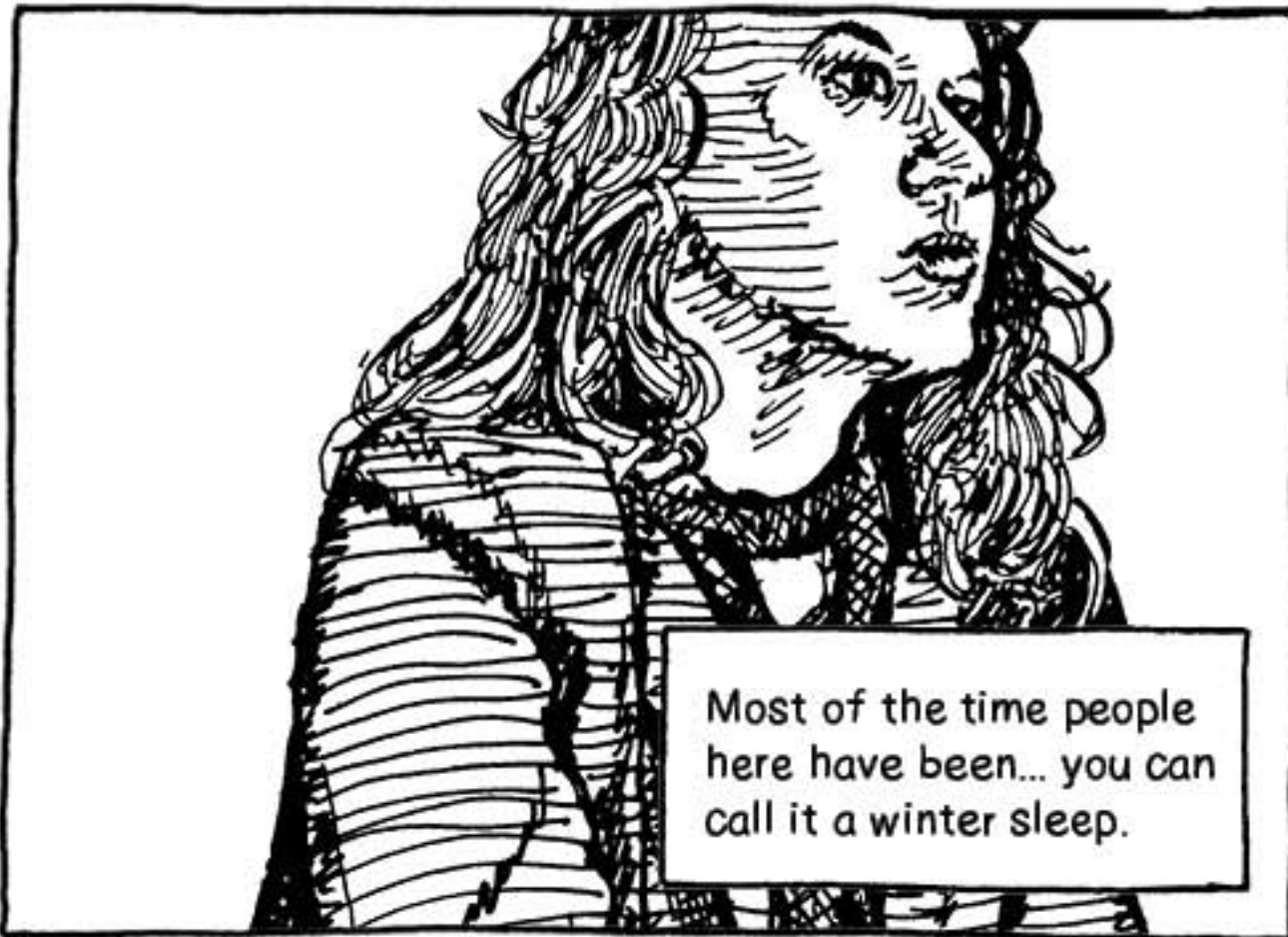
...you know, people here are used to having institutions where you can apply, where you can be assured in full about who supports you, what you can do, what the borders are.



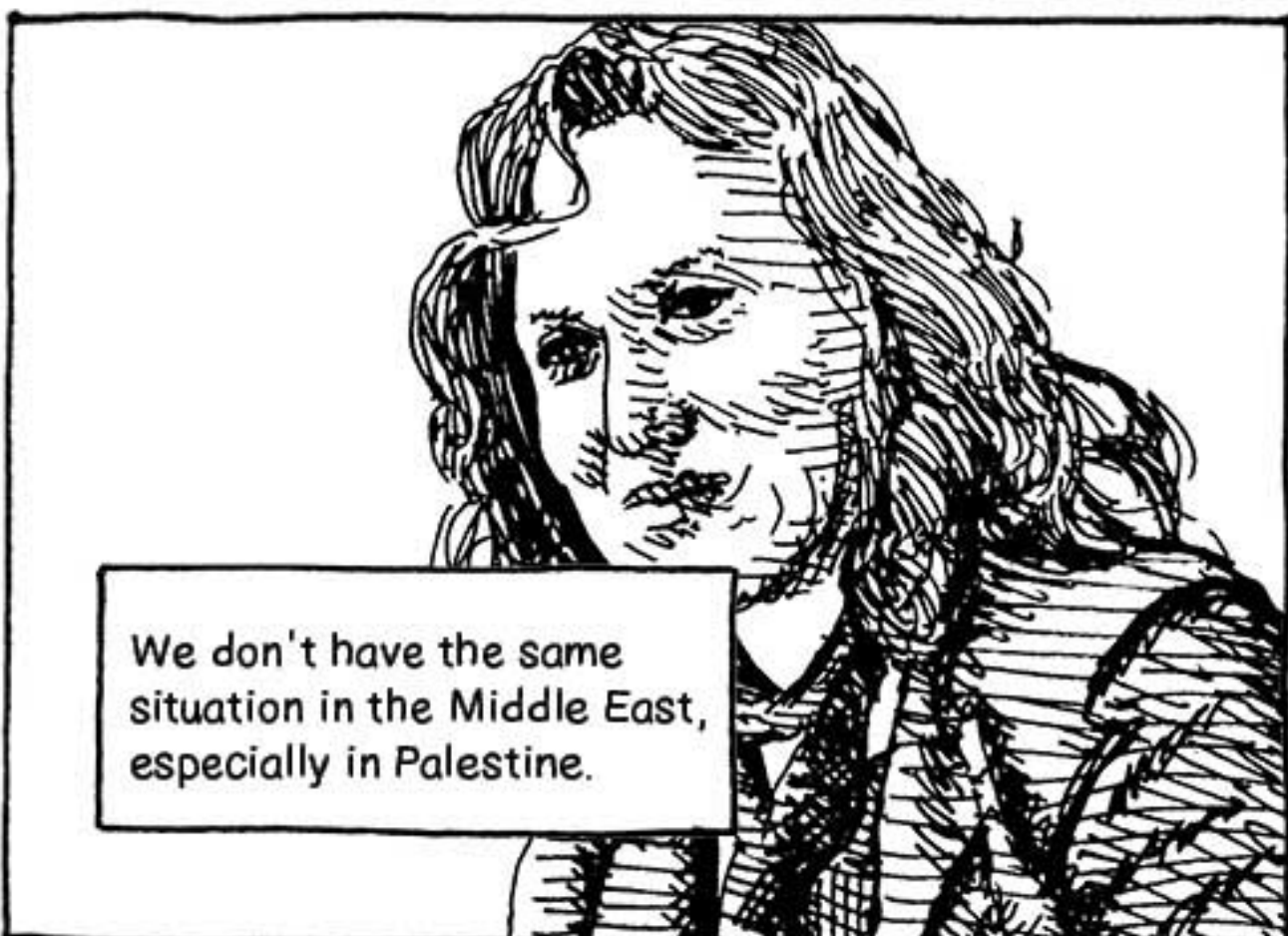
Before the cuts it was like, you apply, you get the money.



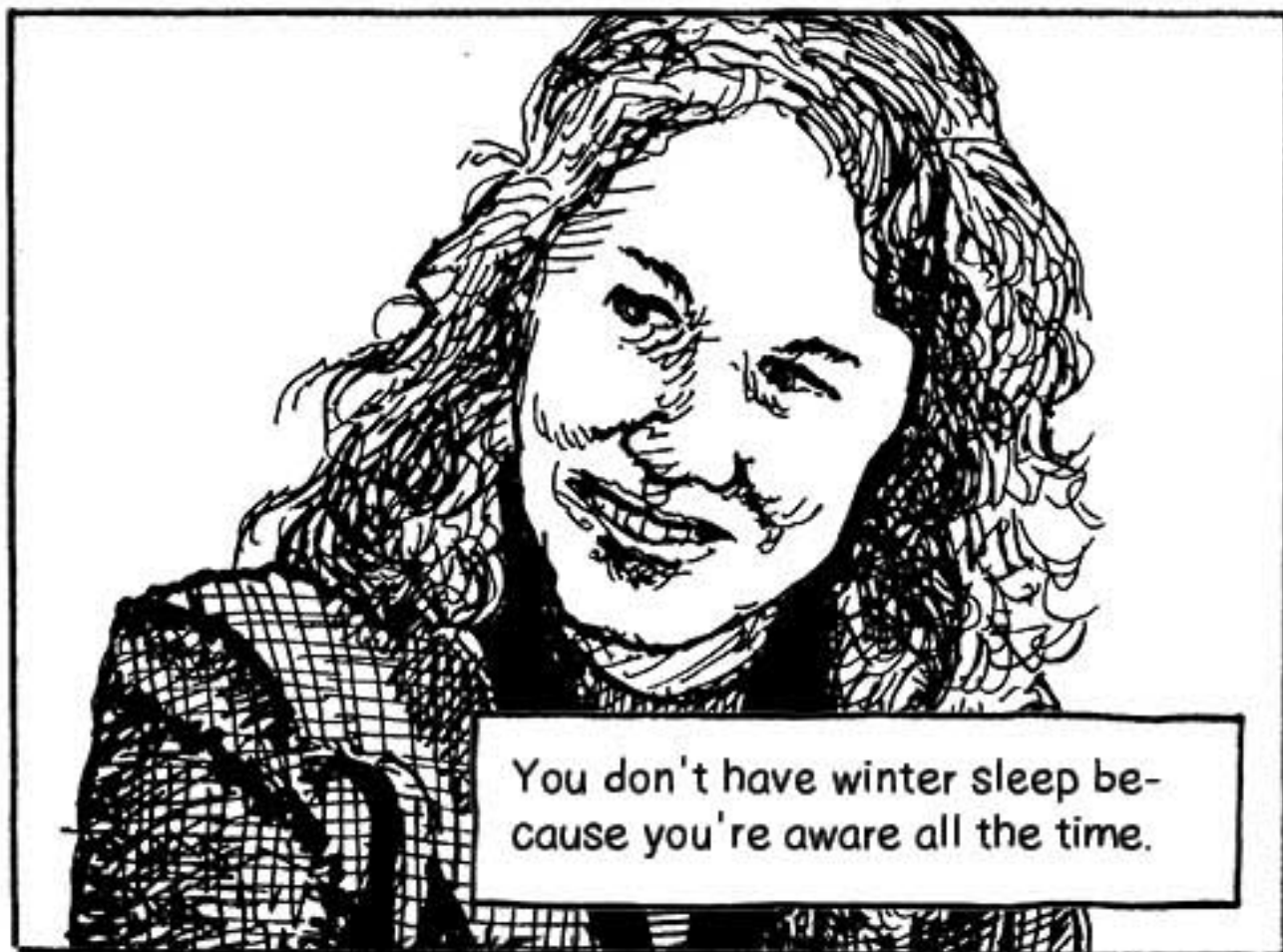
And now there is a break: you know, something new happened.



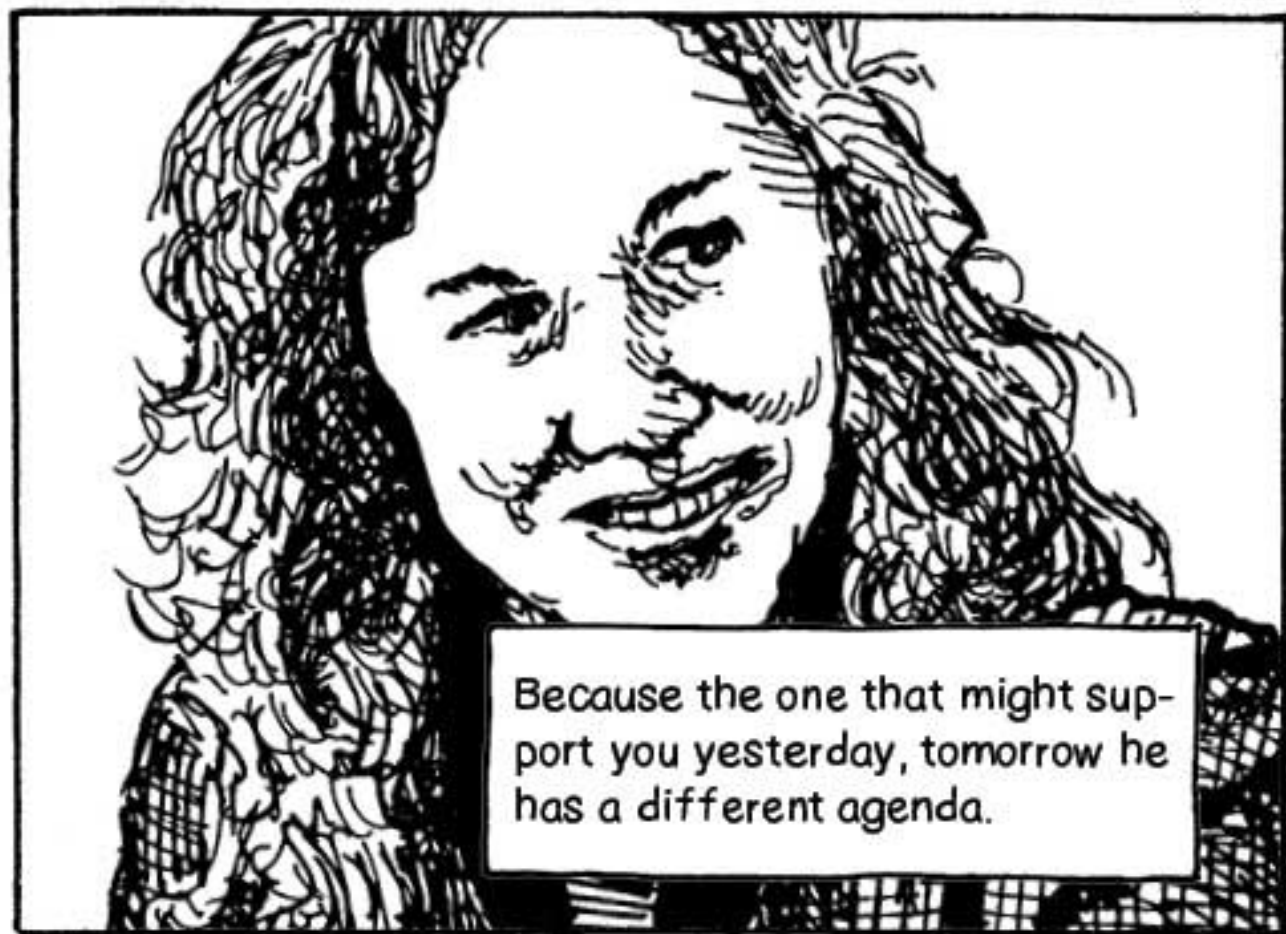
Most of the time people here have been... you can call it a winter sleep.



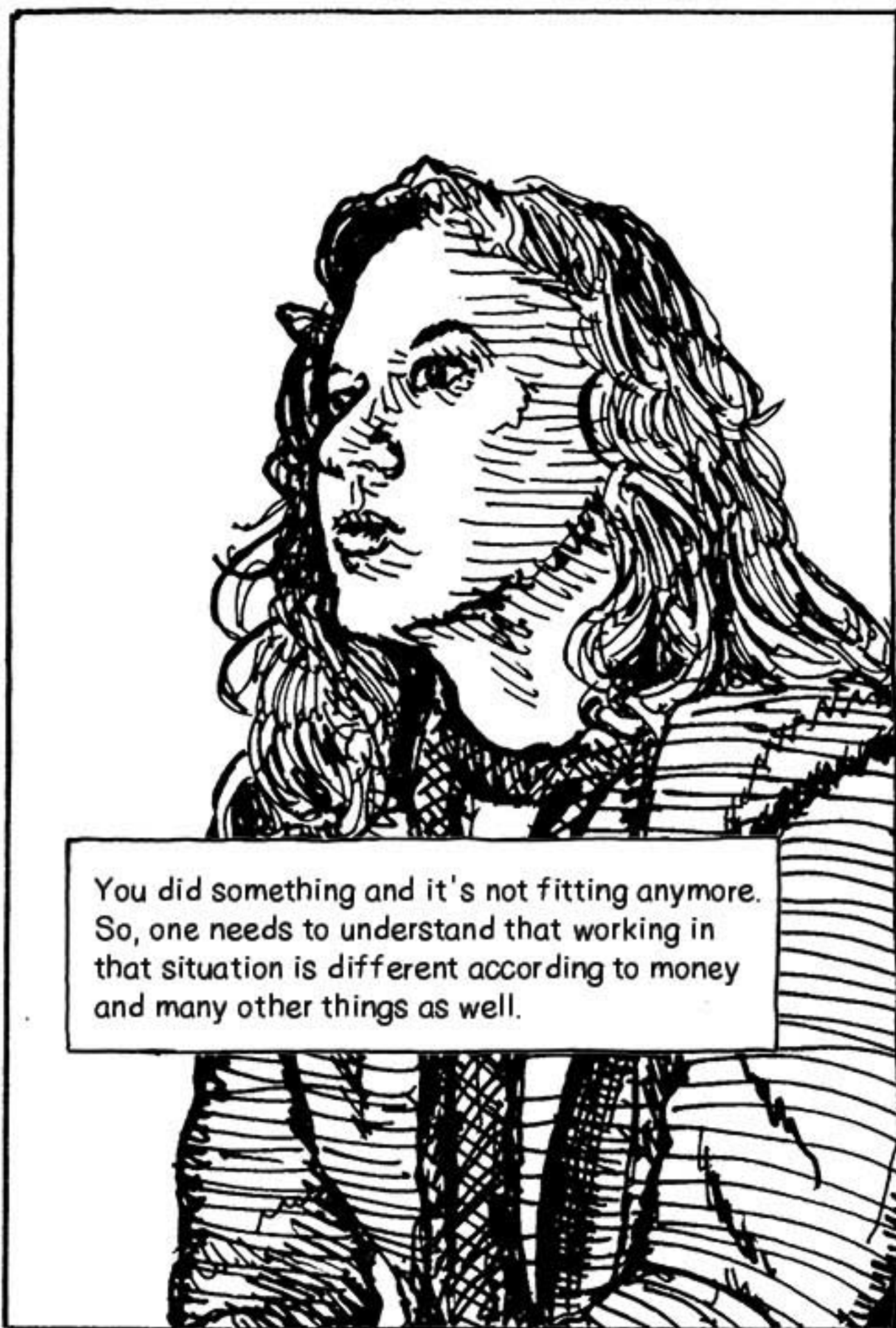
We don't have the same situation in the Middle East, especially in Palestine.



You don't have winter sleep because you're aware all the time.



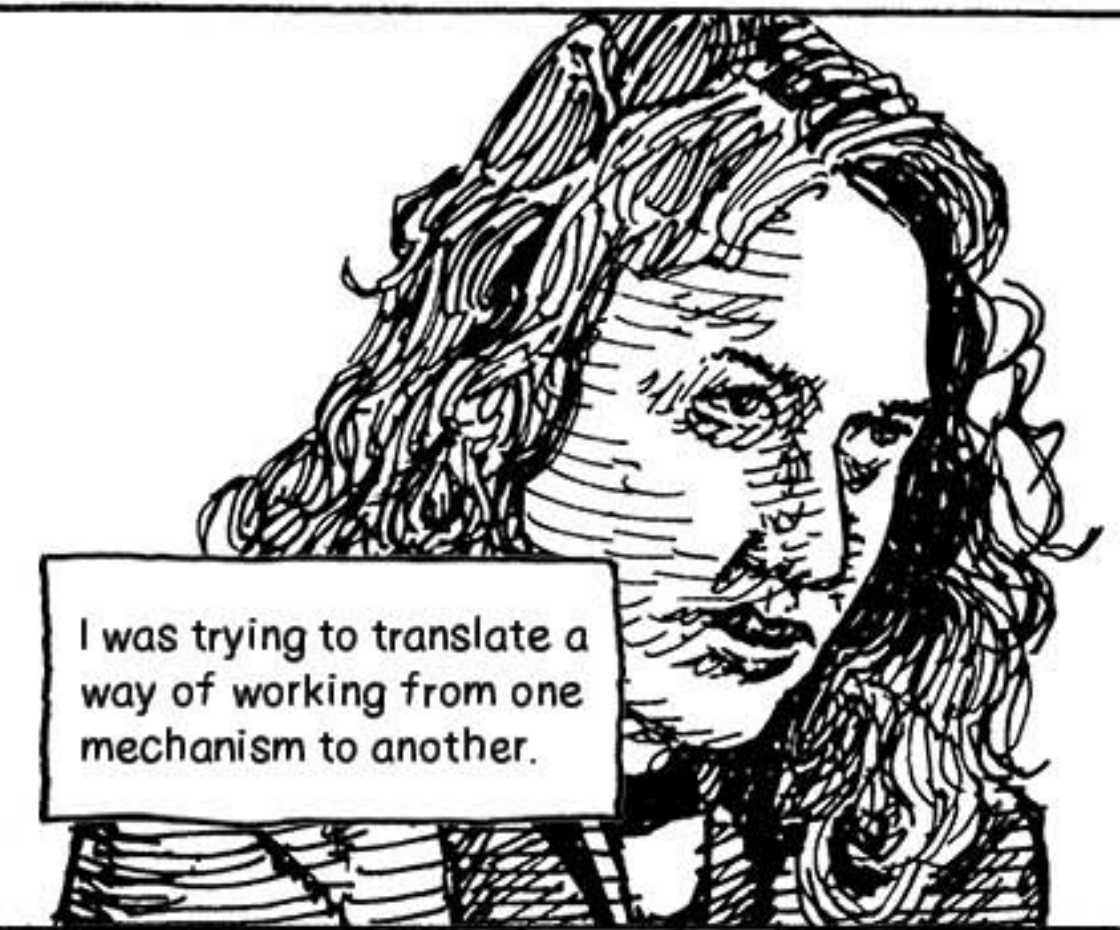
Because the one that might support you yesterday, tomorrow he has a different agenda.



You did something and it's not fitting anymore. So, one needs to understand that working in that situation is different according to money and many other things as well.



I think what I tried to bring to the museum was a perspective on how you work with Palestine or the Middle East—which is different than in Europe.



I was trying to translate a way of working from one mechanism to another.



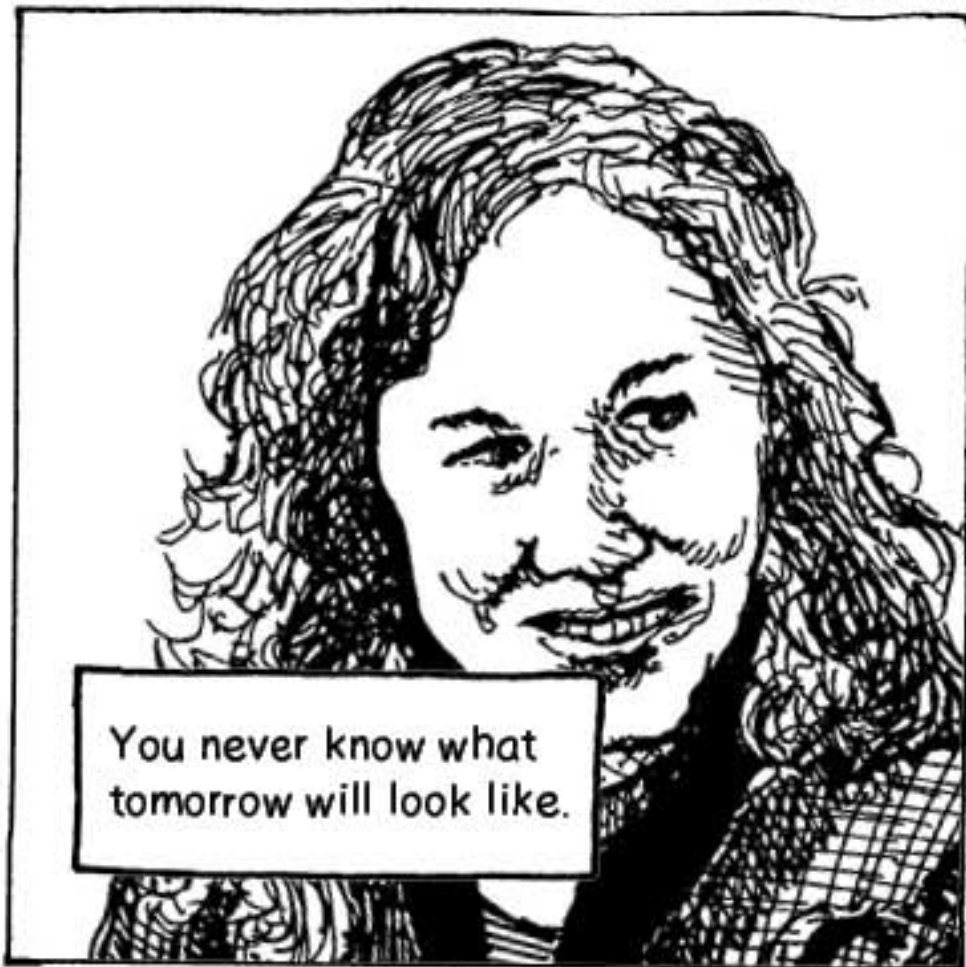
When you want to work in Palestine, you need to understand with whom you're collaborating, where the money comes from, why, what is the agenda of the one that supports you, and also how the unstable situation in Palestine will affect European partners.



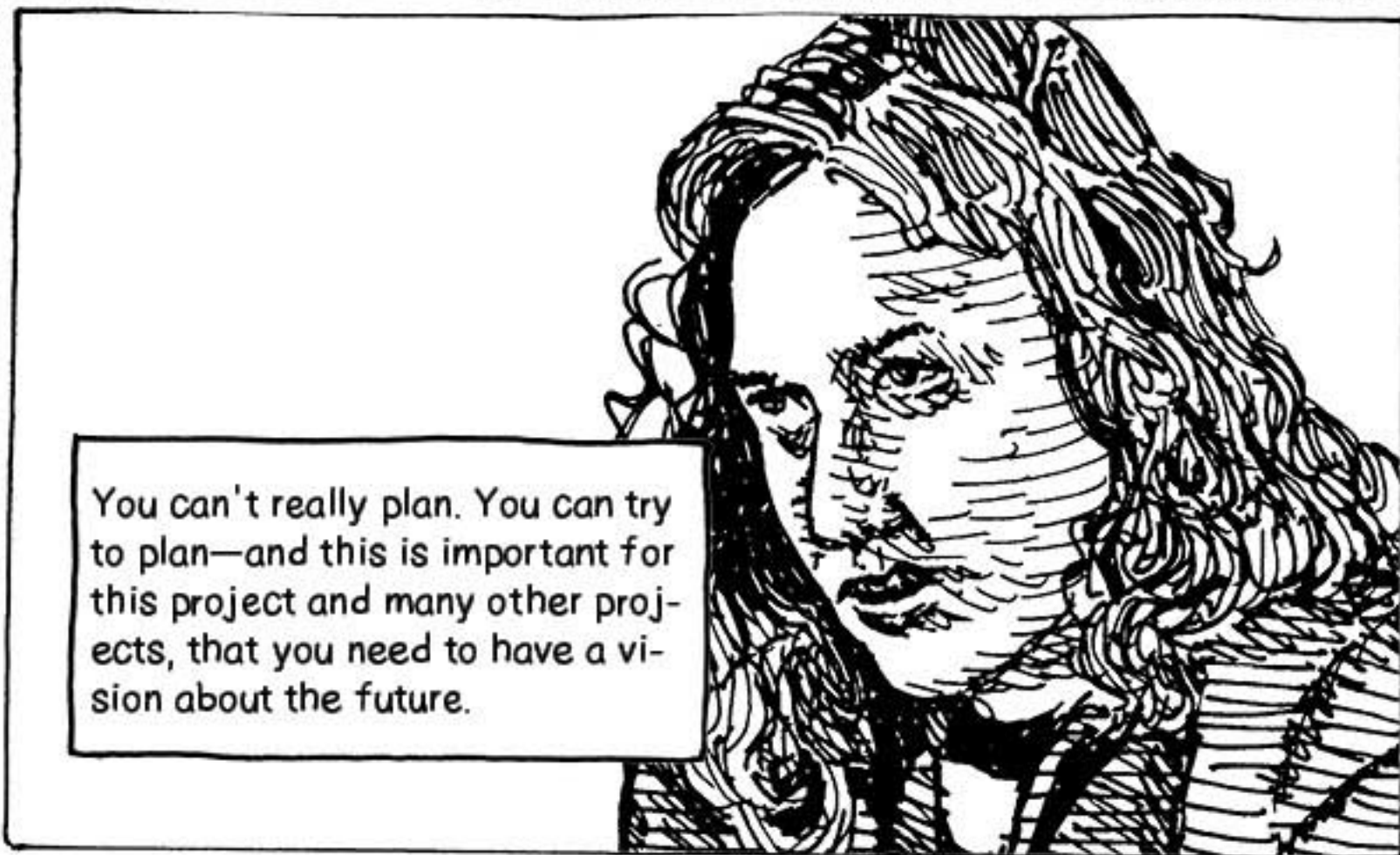
Because here, you have a perspective of 100 years passing and things will continue in the same way somehow.



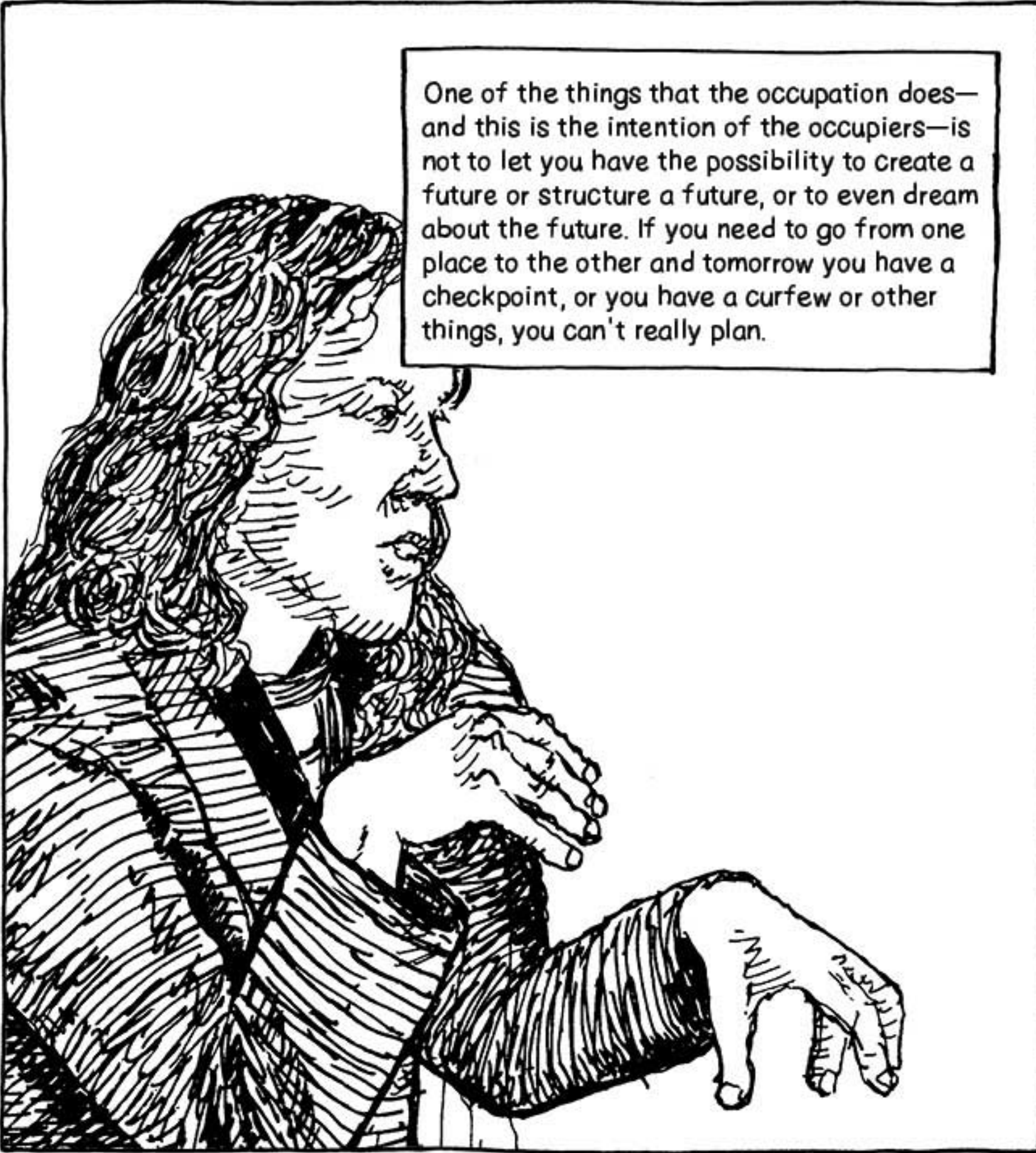
This is Europe. And it's very different in places like Palestine.




You never know what tomorrow will look like.




You can't really plan. You can try to plan—and this is important for this project and many other projects, that you need to have a vision about the future.



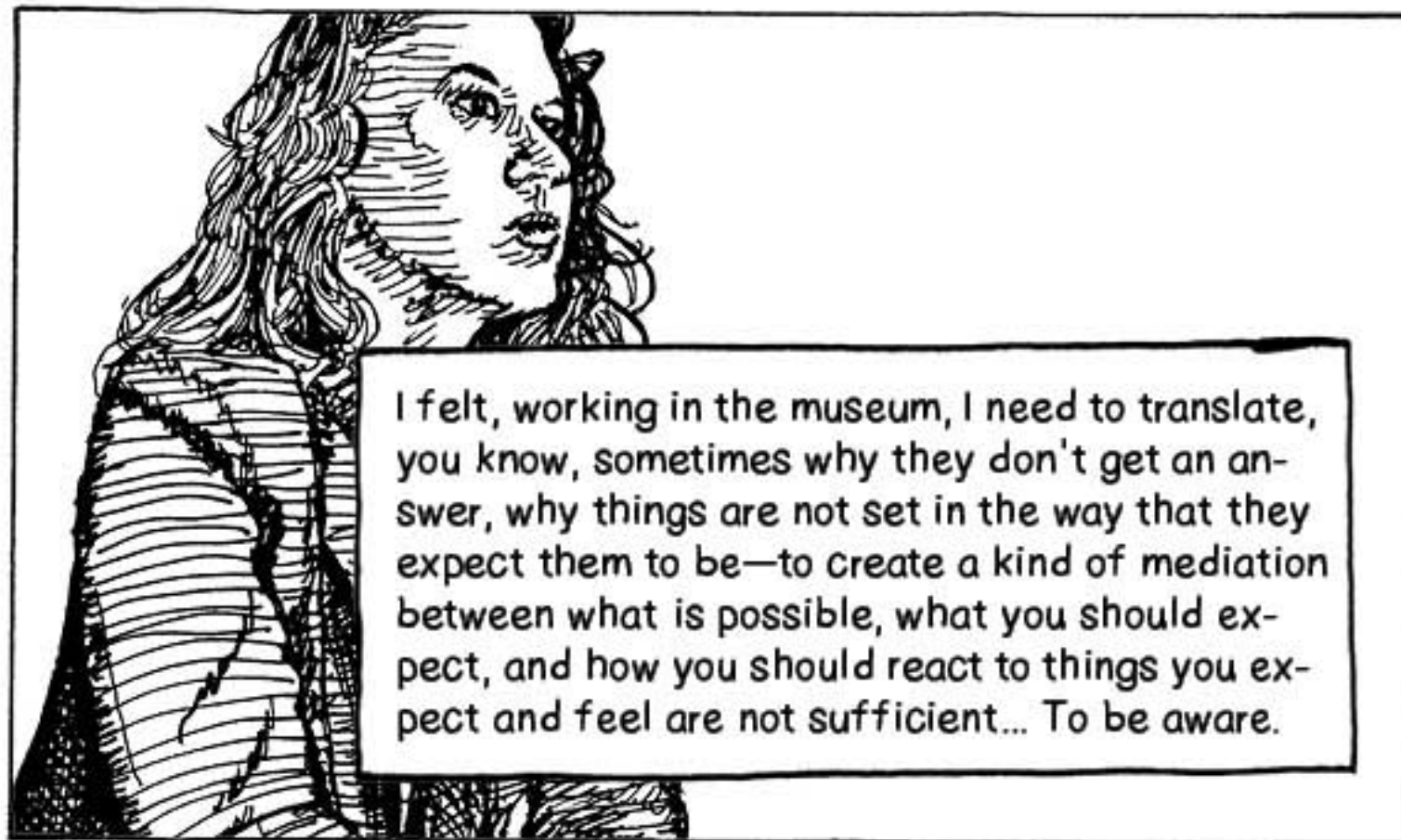
One of the things that the occupation does—and this is the intention of the occupiers—is not to let you have the possibility to create a future or structure a future, or to even dream about the future. If you need to go from one place to the other and tomorrow you have a checkpoint, or you have a curfew or other things, you can't really plan.



You can try to plan, but you know that anything can come, everything can be changed in a minute.



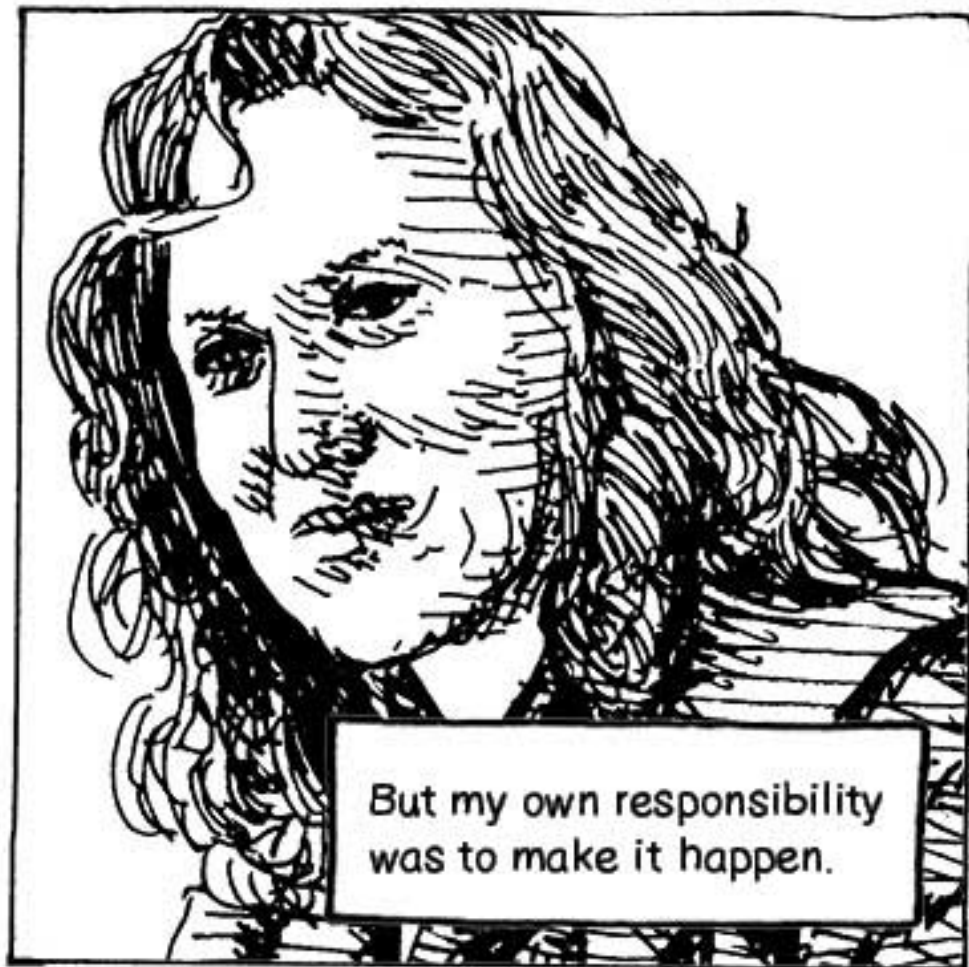
Everything that you do is very limited.



I felt, working in the museum, I need to translate, you know, sometimes why they don't get an answer, why things are not set in the way that they expect them to be—to create a kind of mediation between what is possible, what you should expect, and how you should react to things you expect and feel are not sufficient... To be aware.



My responsibility? I didn't have any responsibility, somehow. I was out of the project.



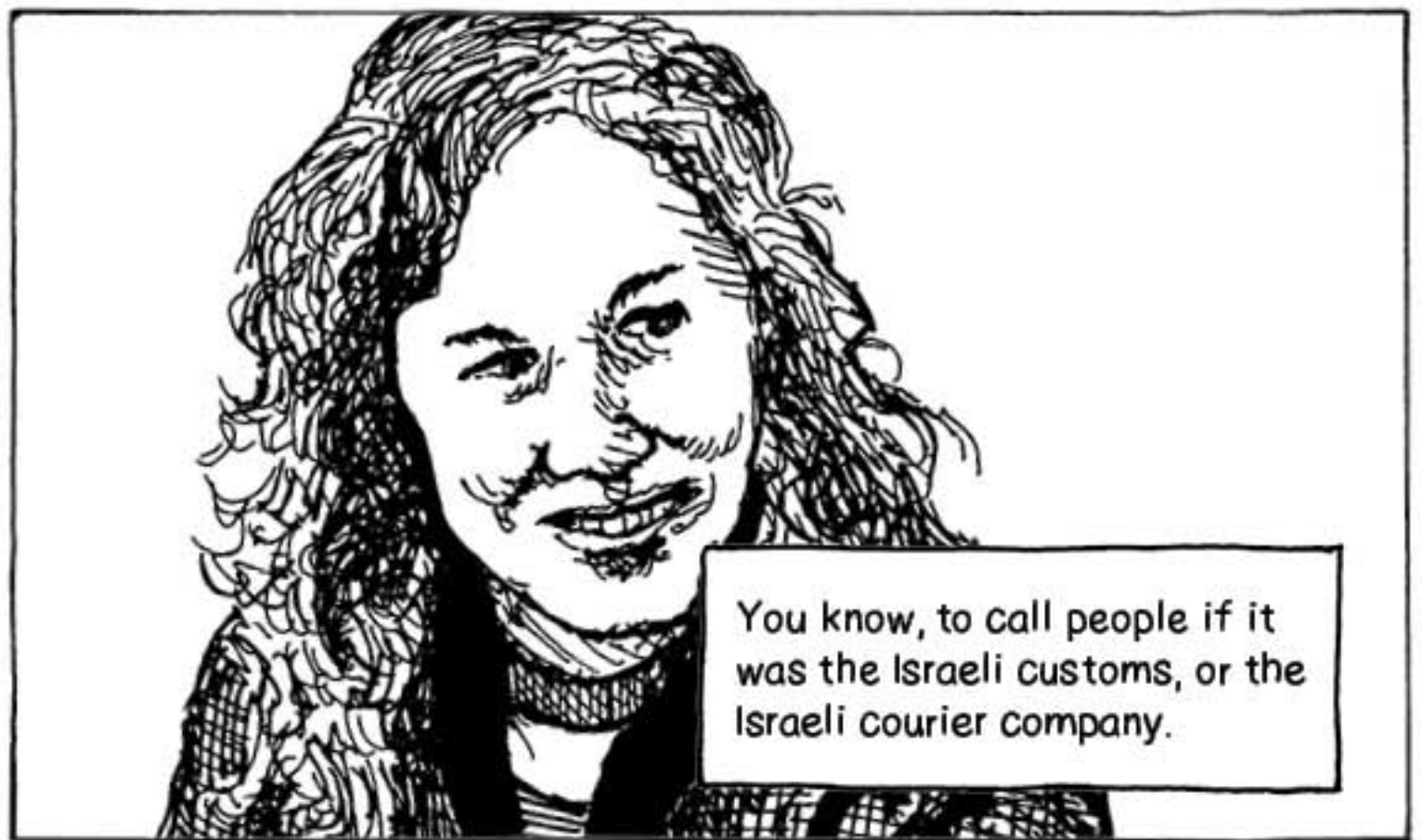
But my own responsibility was to make it happen.



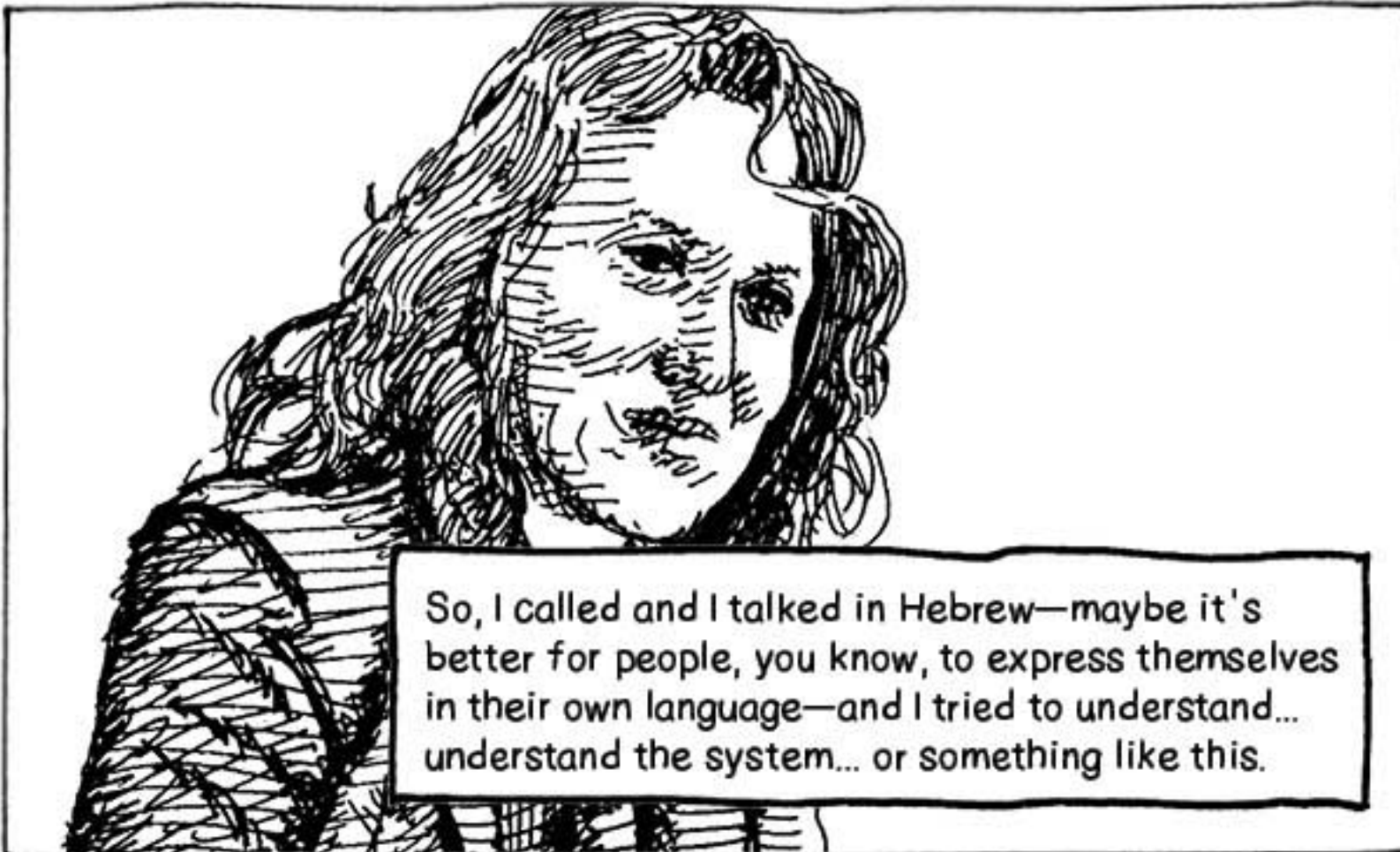
Let's put it this way: it was an operation between the Museum and the Academy.



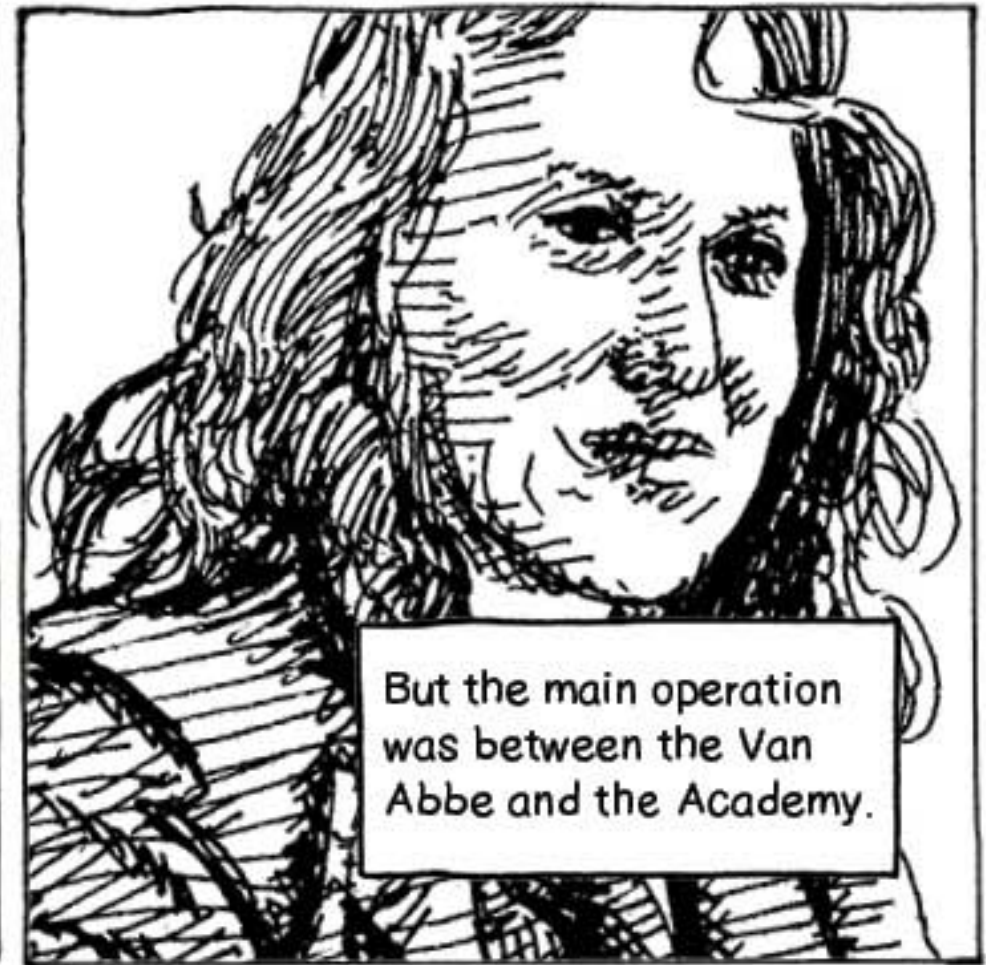
When there was a problem, I tried to be attentive and to help.



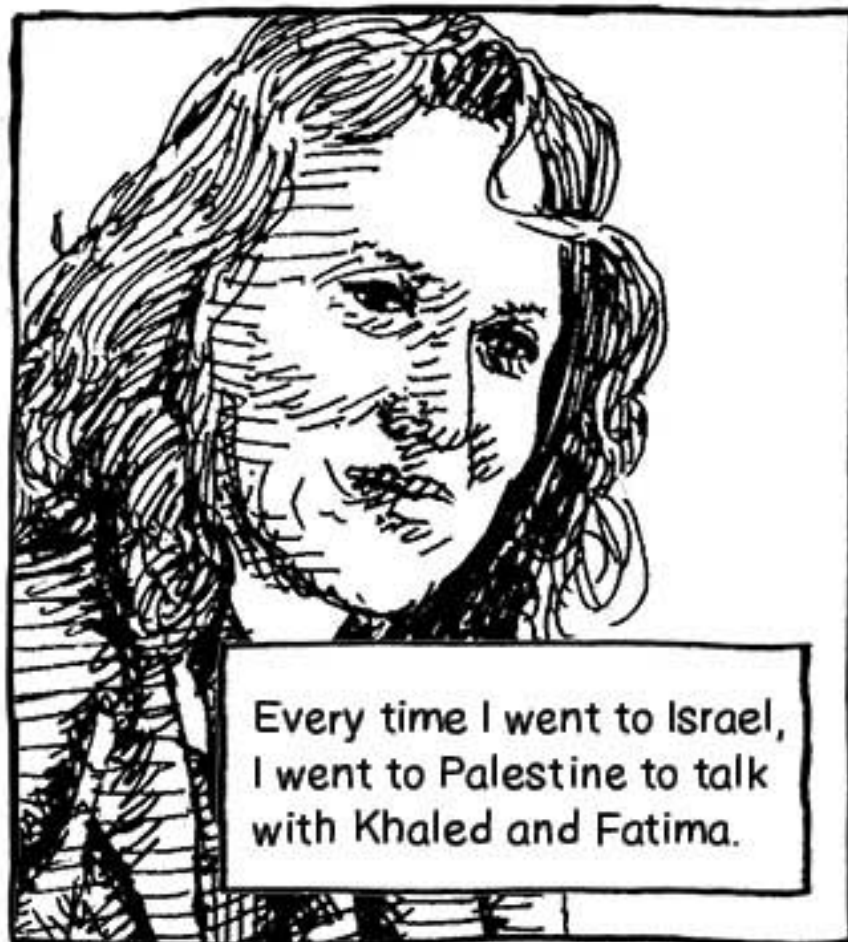
You know, to call people if it was the Israeli customs, or the Israeli courier company.



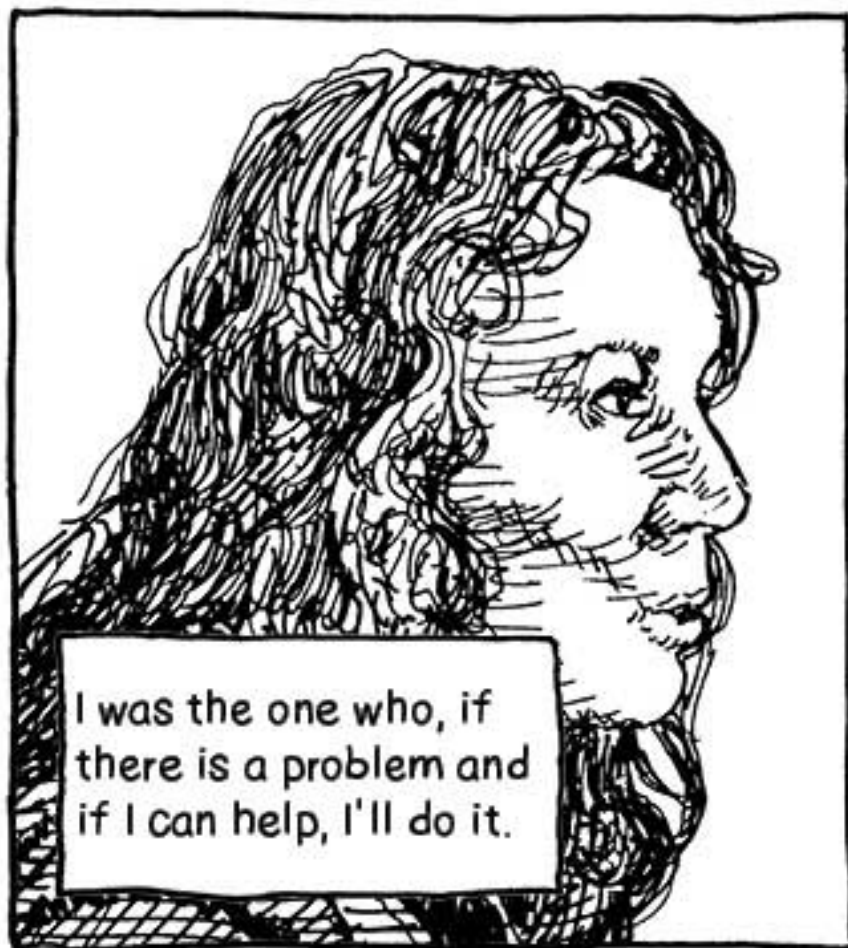
So, I called and I talked in Hebrew—maybe it's better for people, you know, to express themselves in their own language—and I tried to understand... understand the system... or something like this.



But the main operation was between the Van Abbe and the Academy.



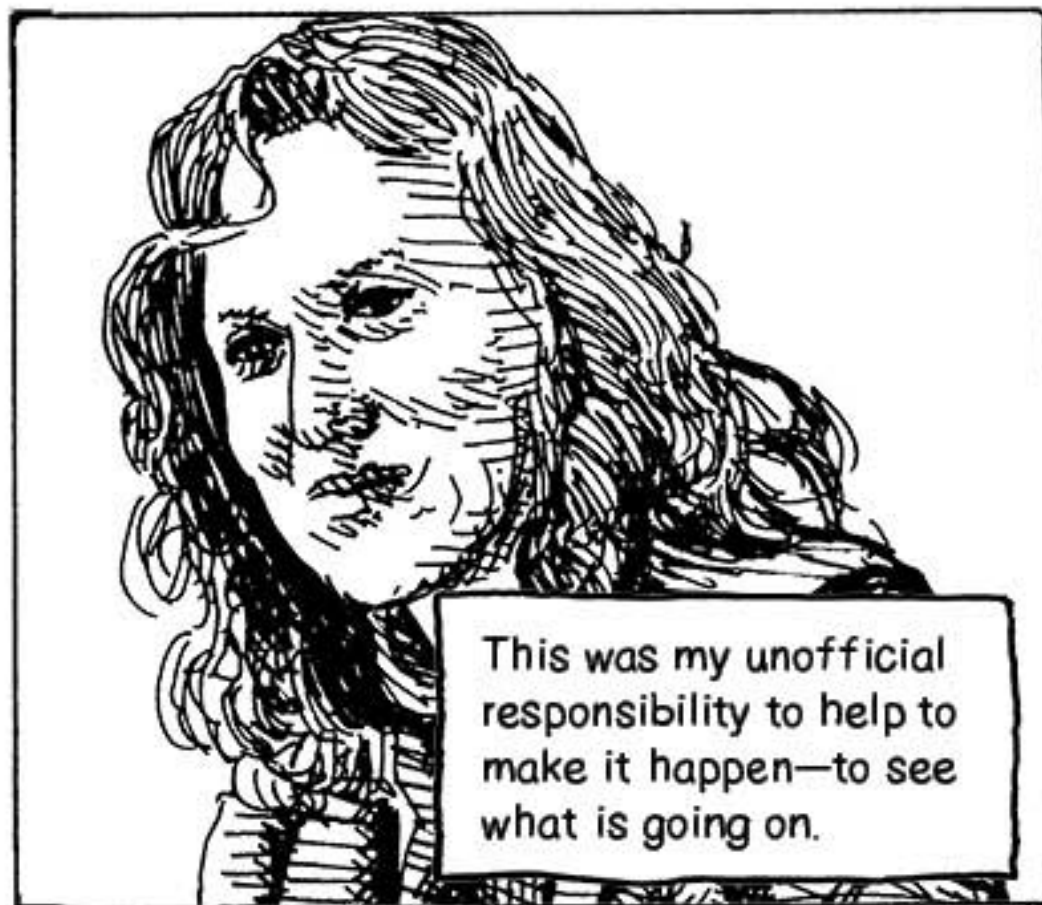
Every time I went to Israel, I went to Palestine to talk with Khaled and Fatima.



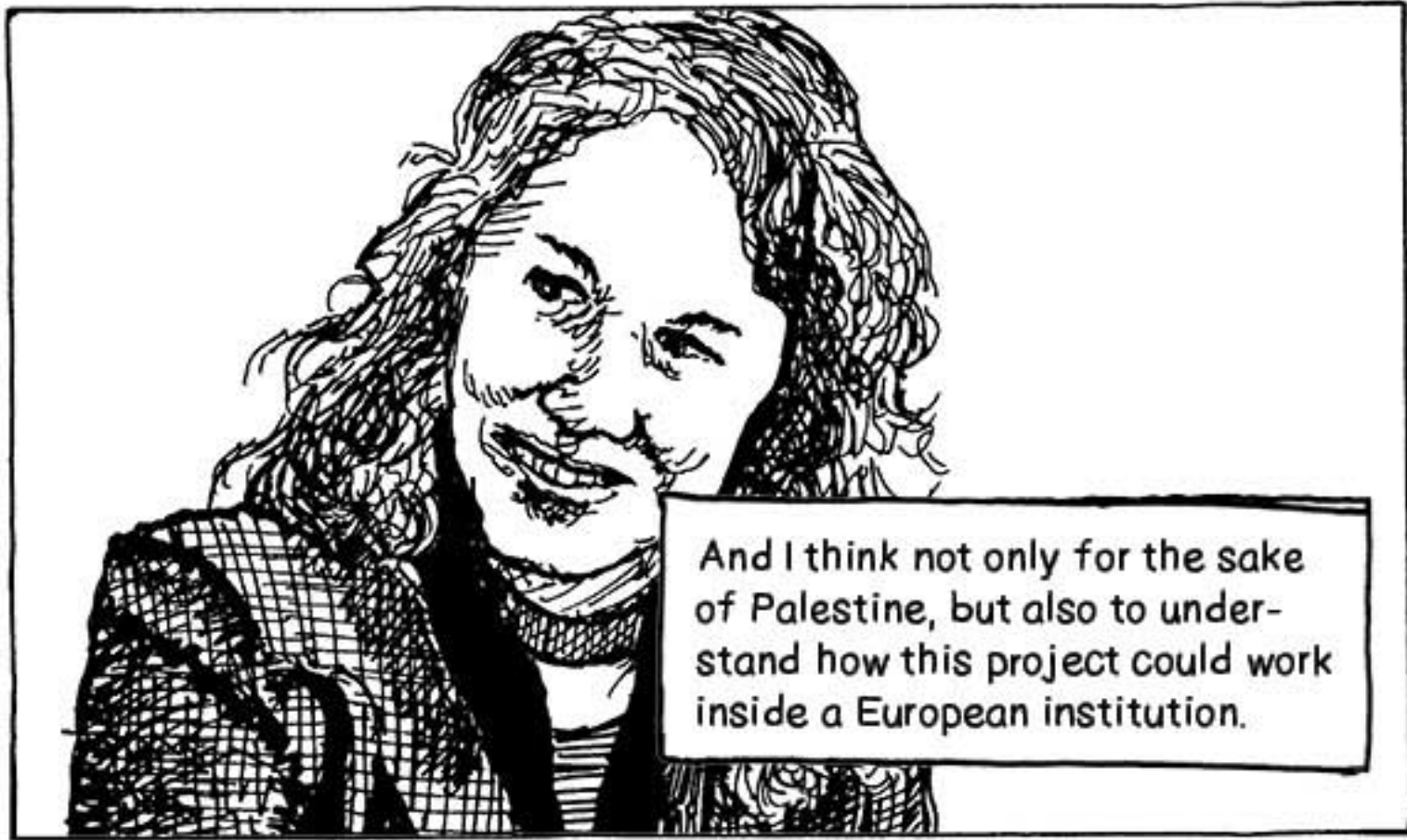
I was the one who, if there is a problem and if I can help, I'll do it.

Because I was a director of an art institution and have worked in this scene in Israel—not just being an Israeli—I was part of the bureaucracy and I can understand it... to whom to write, or how we can help. Because of my experience, that's all.





This was my unofficial responsibility to help to make it happen—to see what is going on.



And I think not only for the sake of Palestine, but also to understand how this project could work inside a European institution.



And what would be the result—not only the result, but the reaction.



You know, how to deal with it.

BETTINE AND LOUIS
IN RAMALLAH

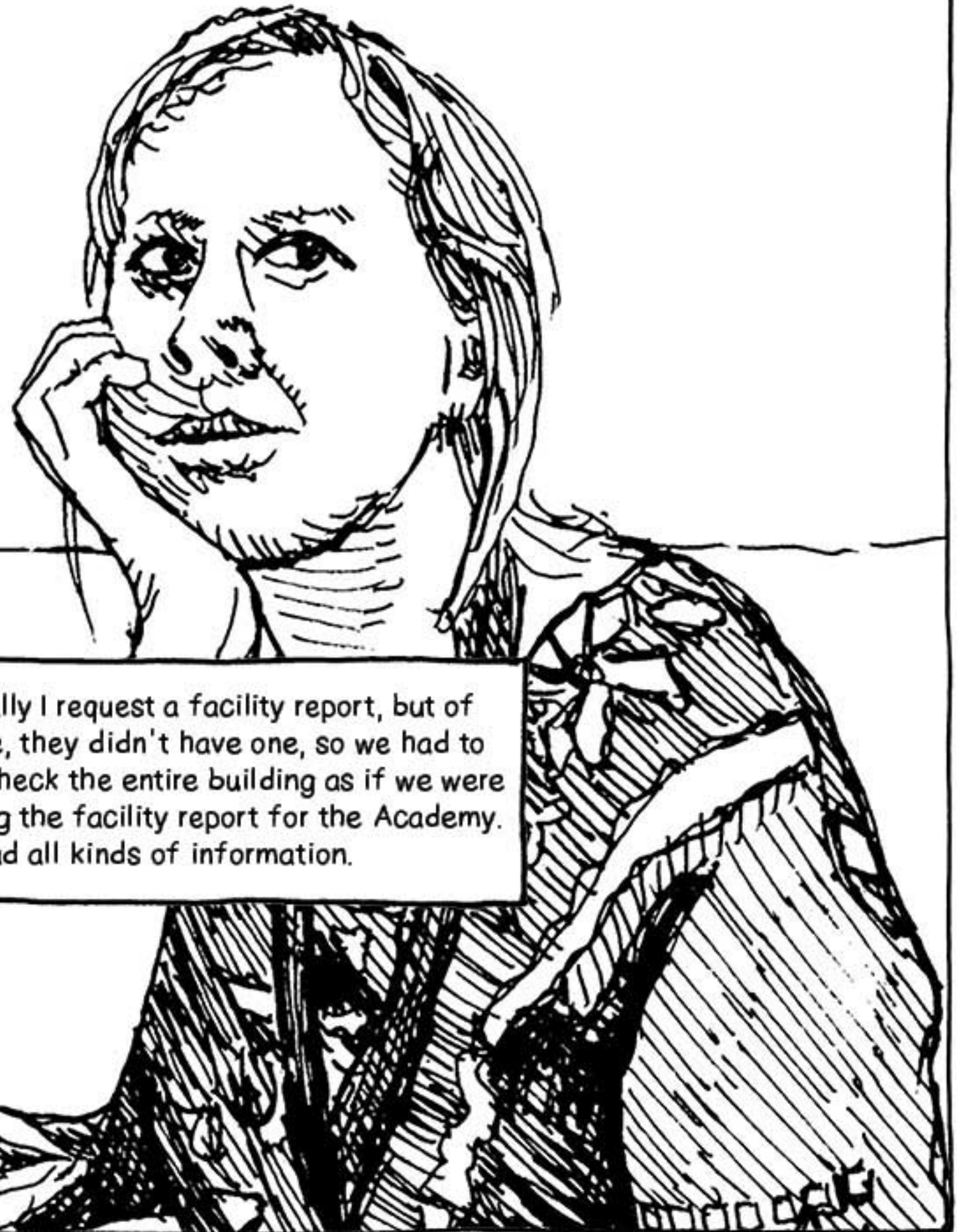




I'm the one responsible for the insurance and the actual transport, and Louis is the physical care-taker of the painting.

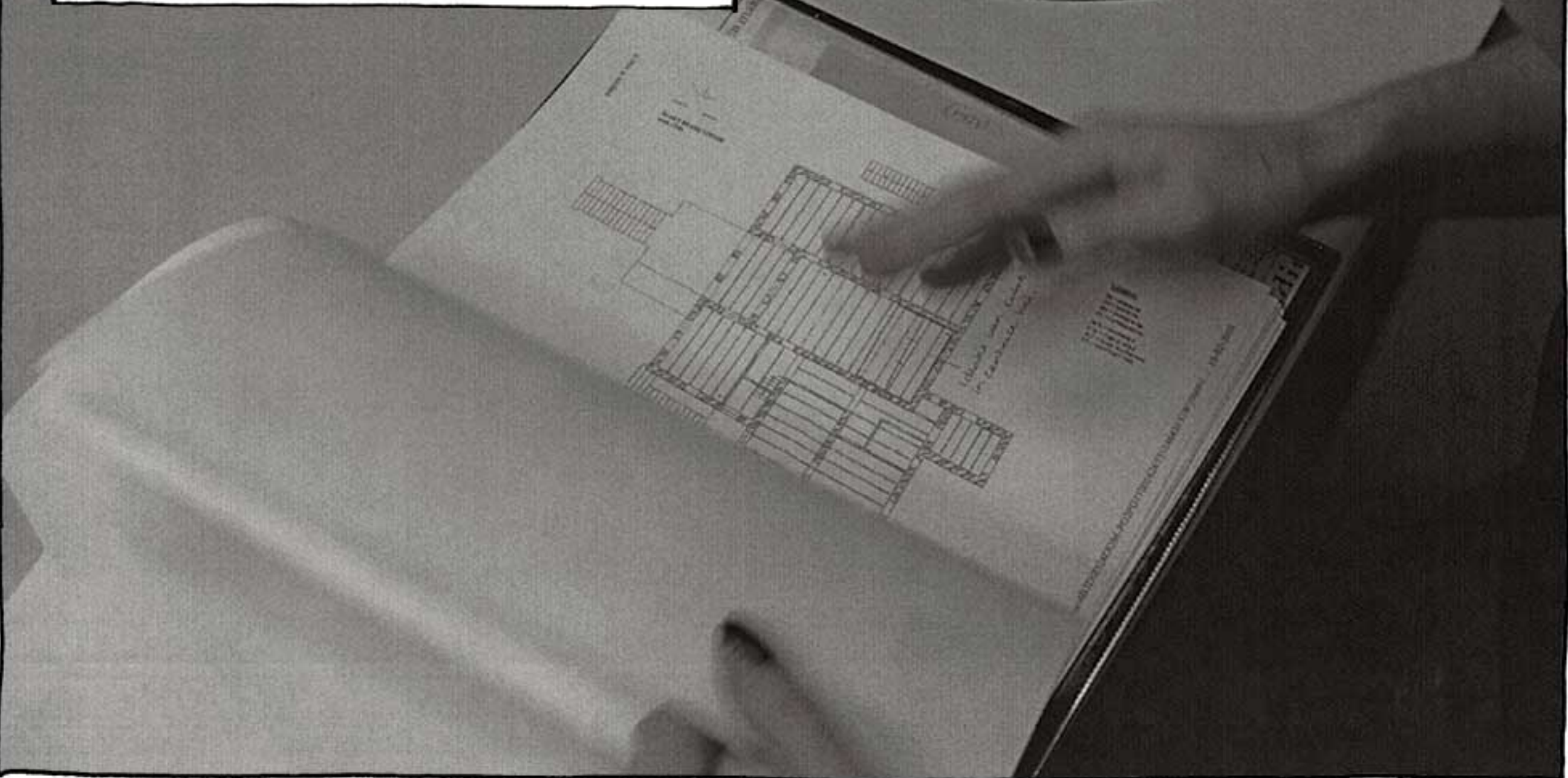



So I look for the security and he looks at the climate, the humidity, and he, for example, would also look at how to get the truck up to the stairs of the Academy.



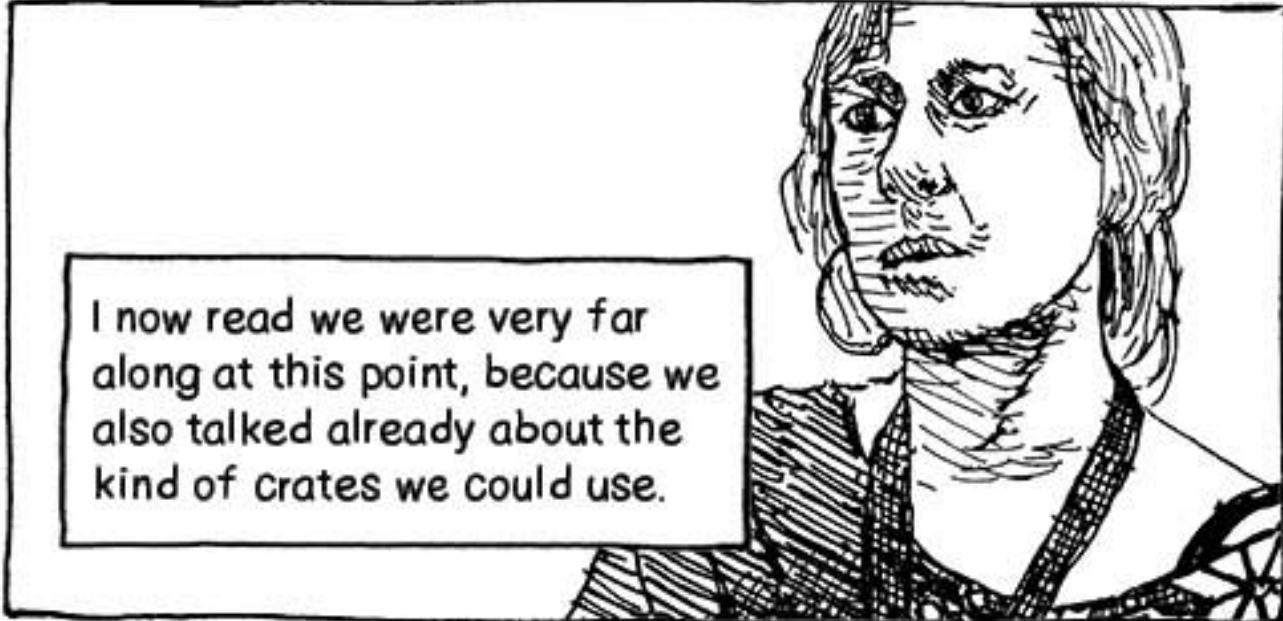
Normally I request a facility report, but of course, they didn't have one, so we had to just check the entire building as if we were making the facility report for the Academy. We had all kinds of information.

They had some drawings, so we could see how you could go around the building, the exits, the stairs that might be a problem for lifting the crate. This was the first set-up of the exhibition room that we got. I also drew some notes: there should be a guard here and a guard here and a camera survey lens here. But then they got an idea that the work would be in a cube, also to stabilize and capture the climate.

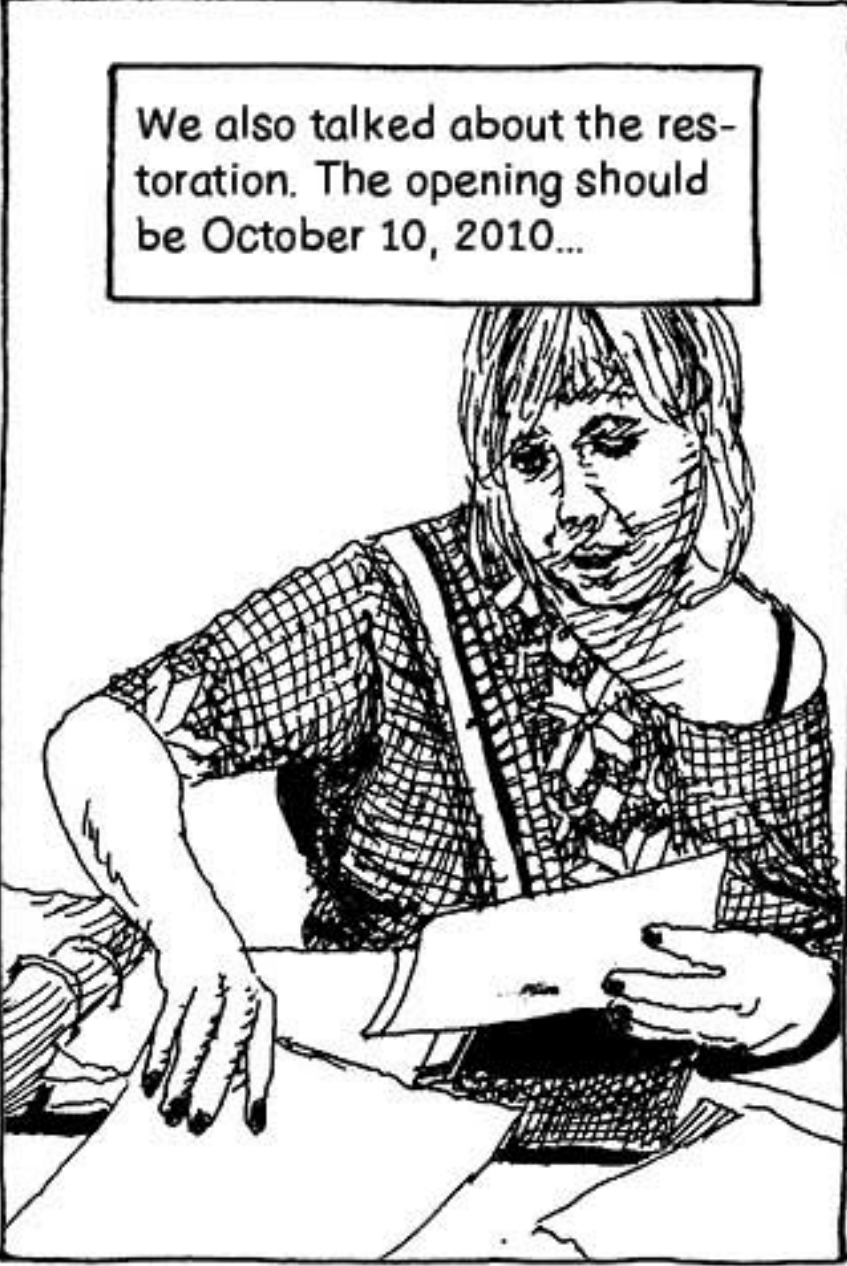




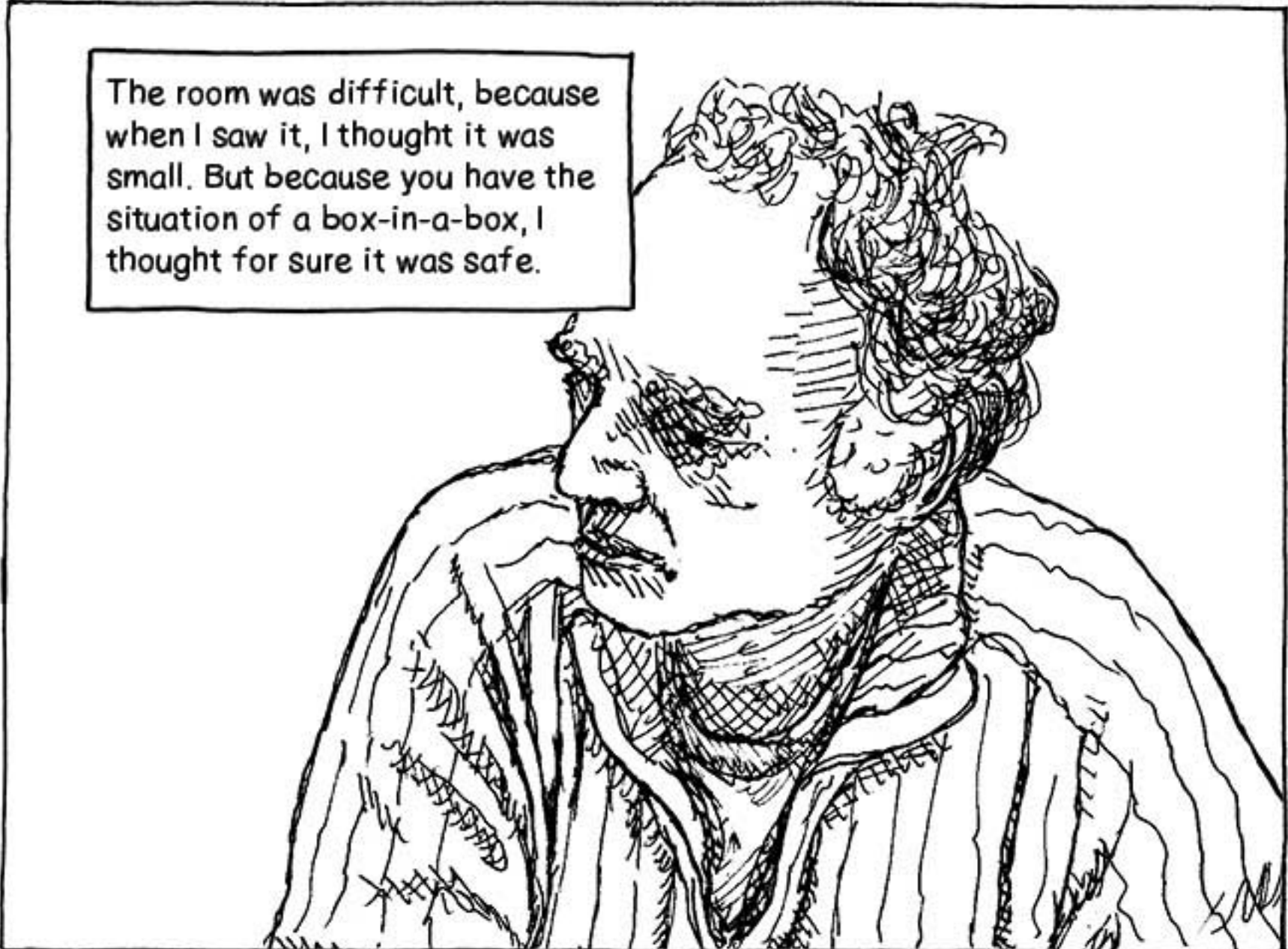
Then we made a report. We also discussed the checkpoints I see already here.



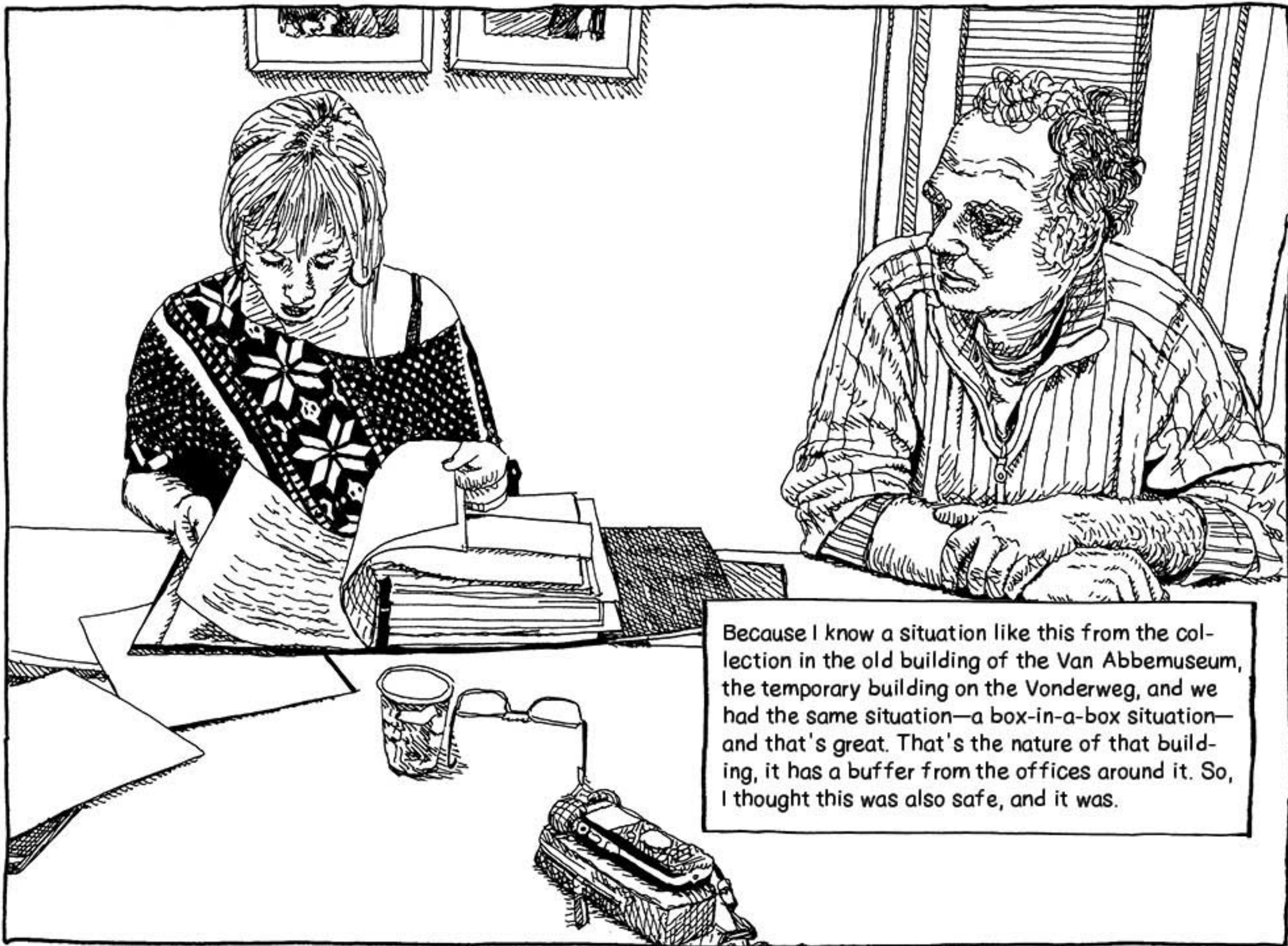
I now read we were very far along at this point, because we also talked already about the kind of crates we could use.



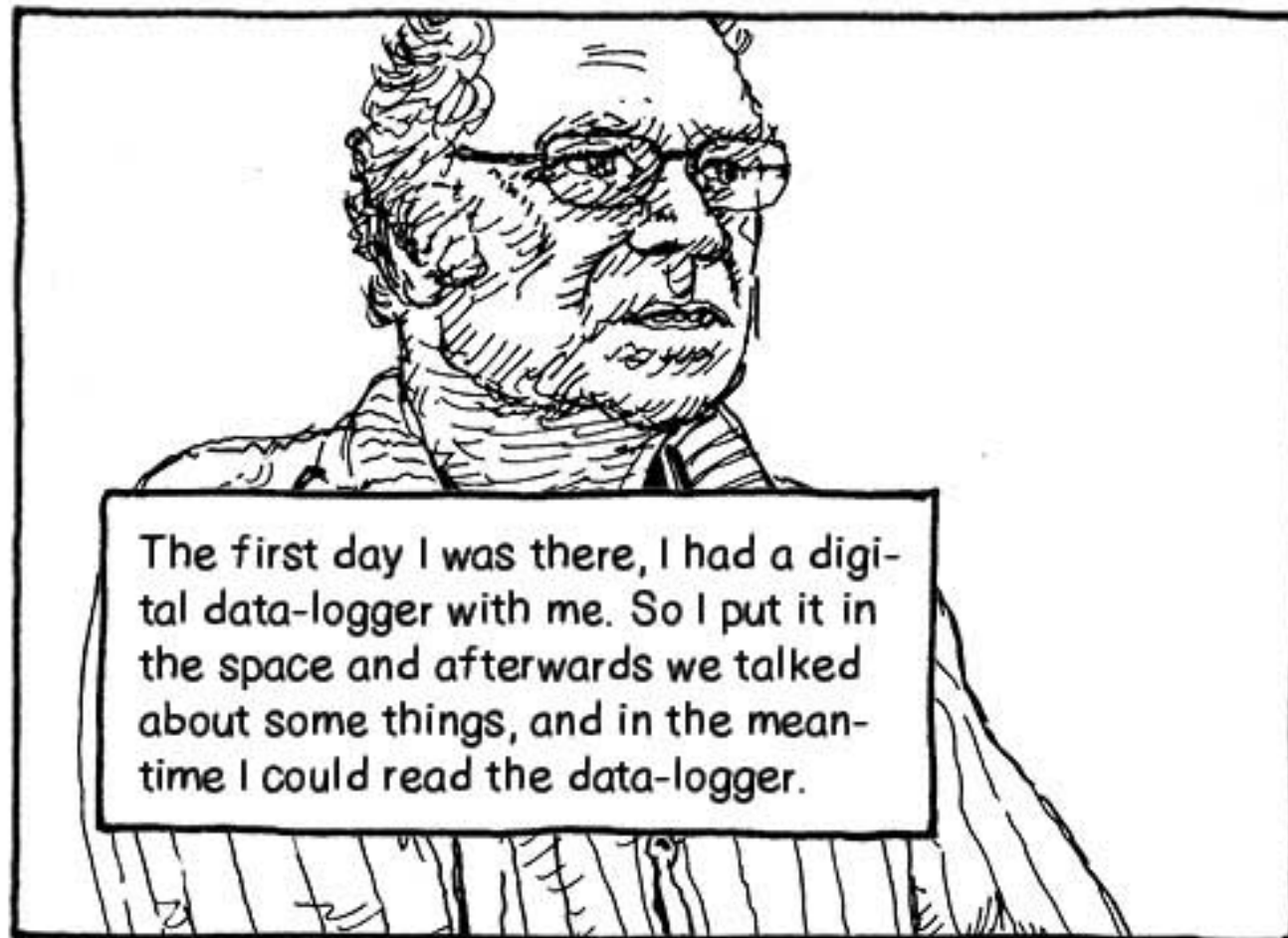
We also talked about the restoration. The opening should be October 10, 2010...



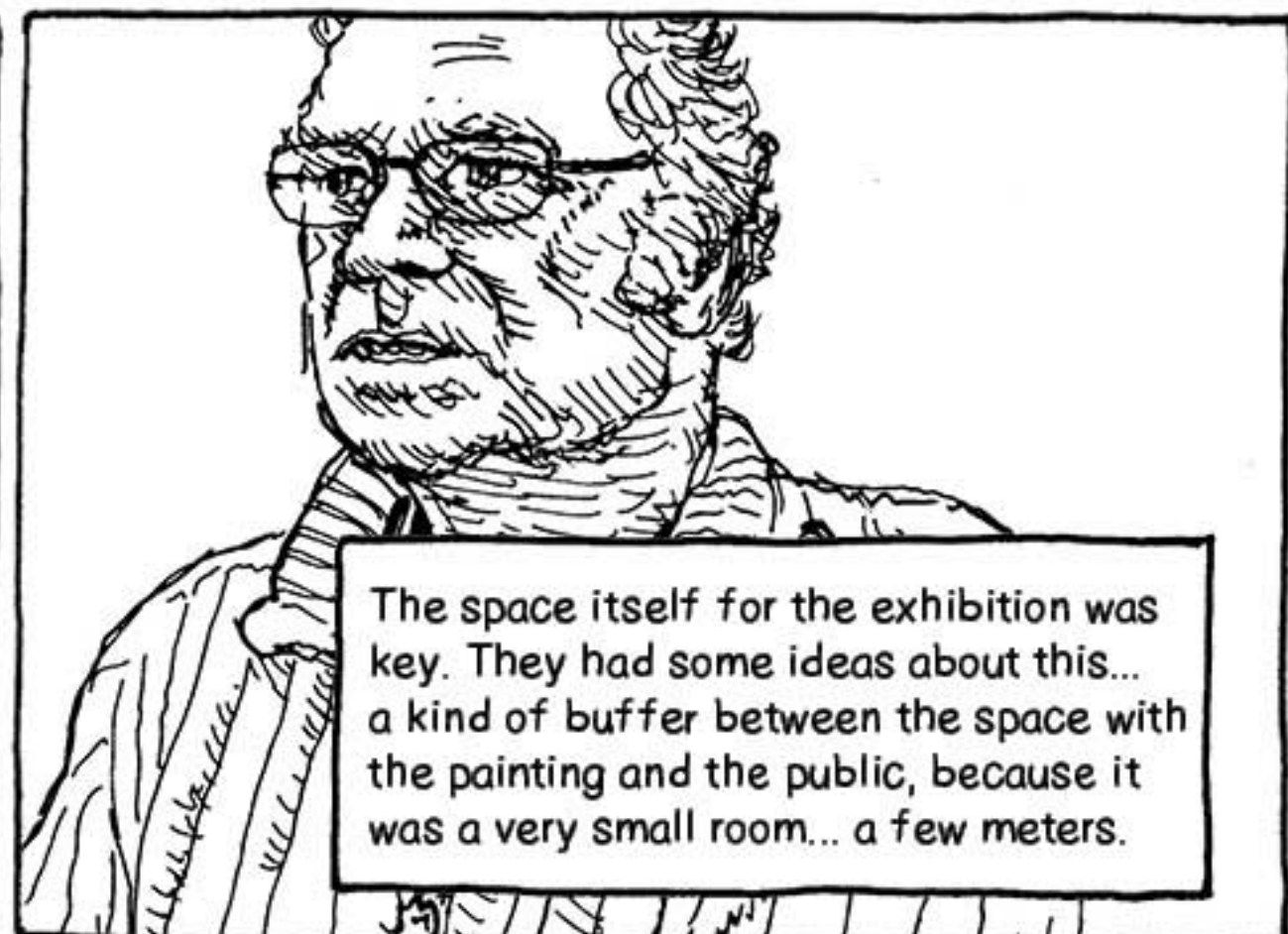
The room was difficult, because when I saw it, I thought it was small. But because you have the situation of a box-in-a-box, I thought for sure it was safe.



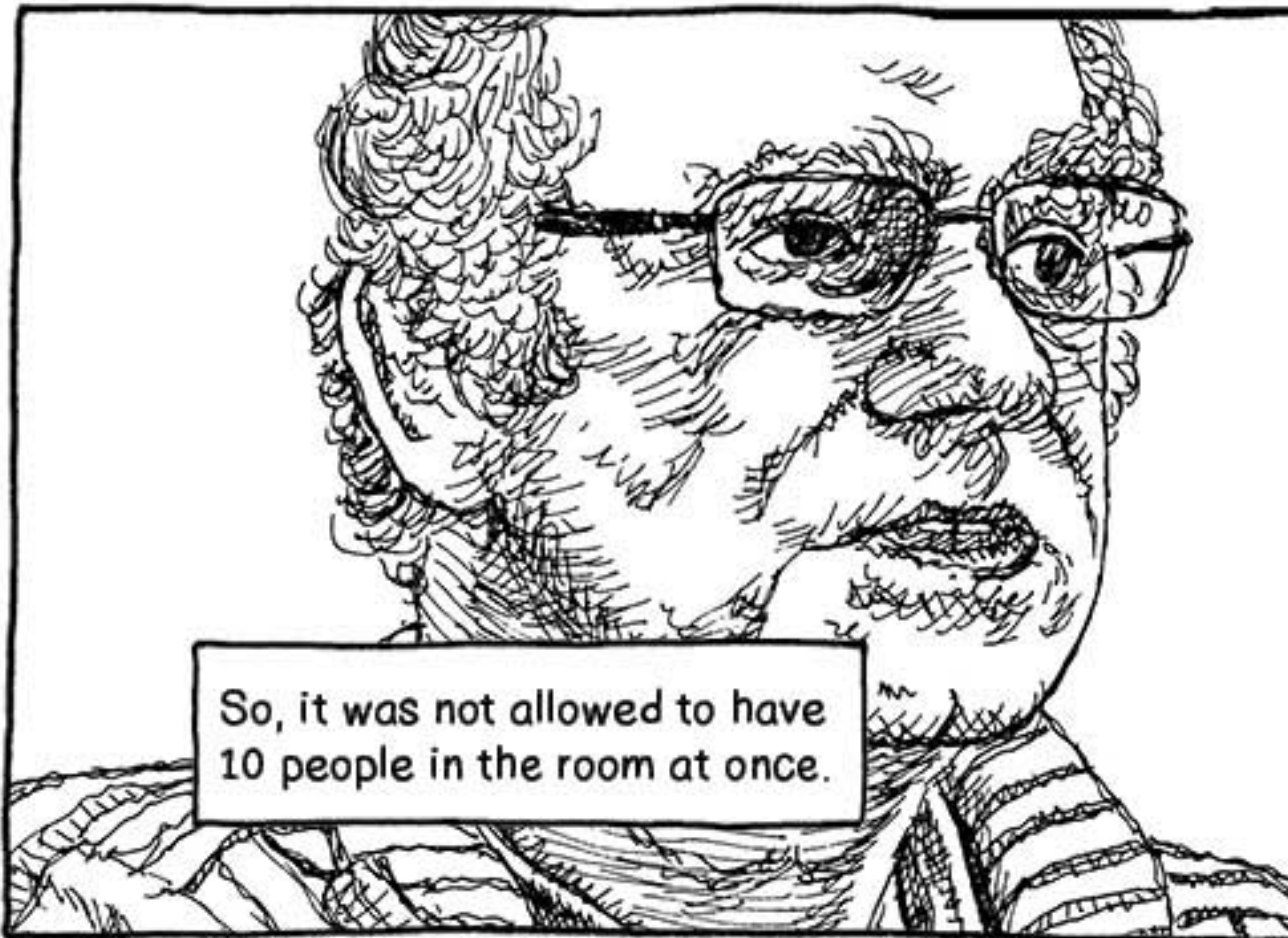
Because I know a situation like this from the collection in the old building of the Van Abbemuseum, the temporary building on the Vonderweg, and we had the same situation—a box-in-a-box situation—and that's great. That's the nature of that building, it has a buffer from the offices around it. So, I thought this was also safe, and it was.



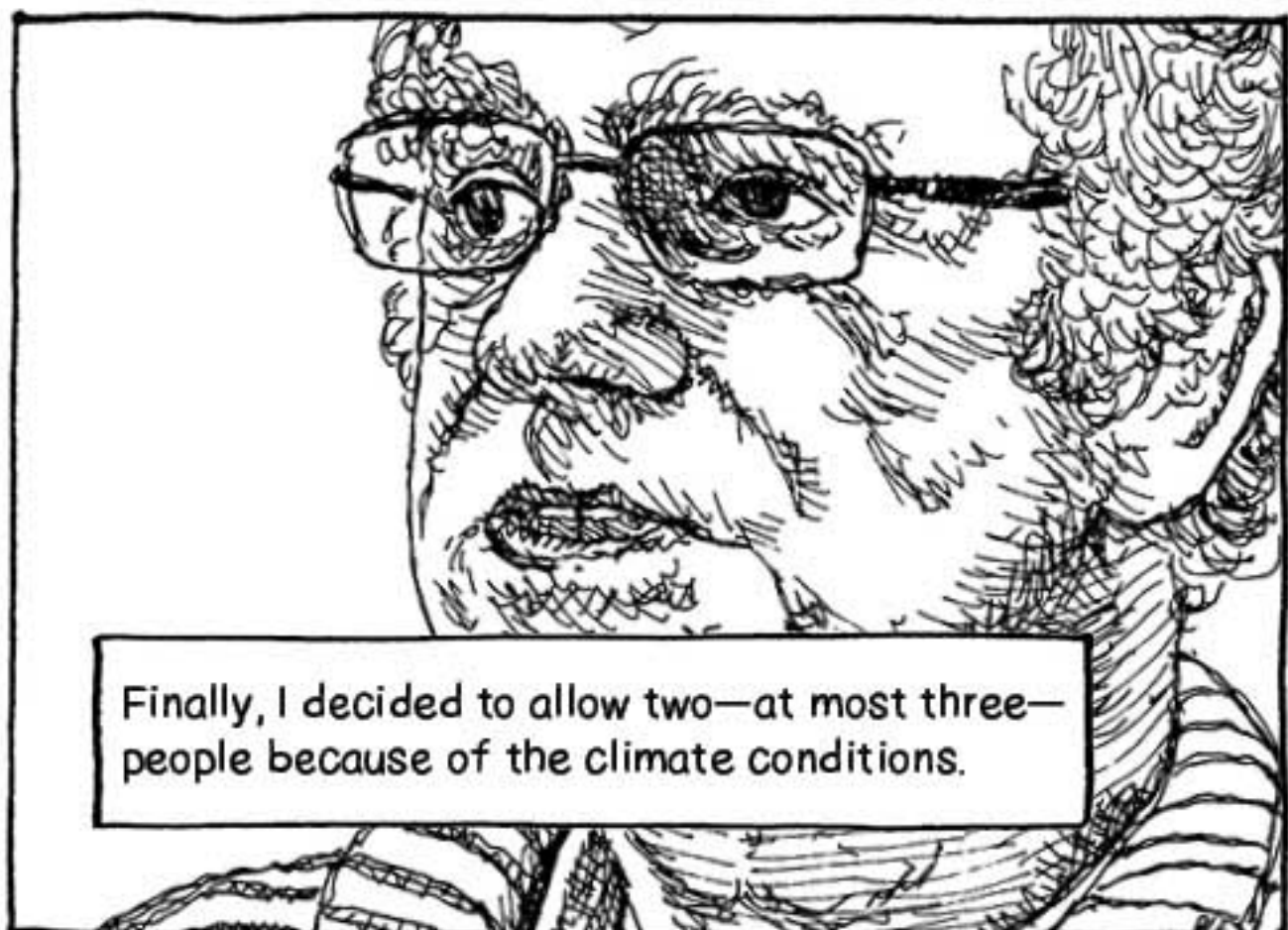
The first day I was there, I had a digital data-logger with me. So I put it in the space and afterwards we talked about some things, and in the meantime I could read the data-logger.



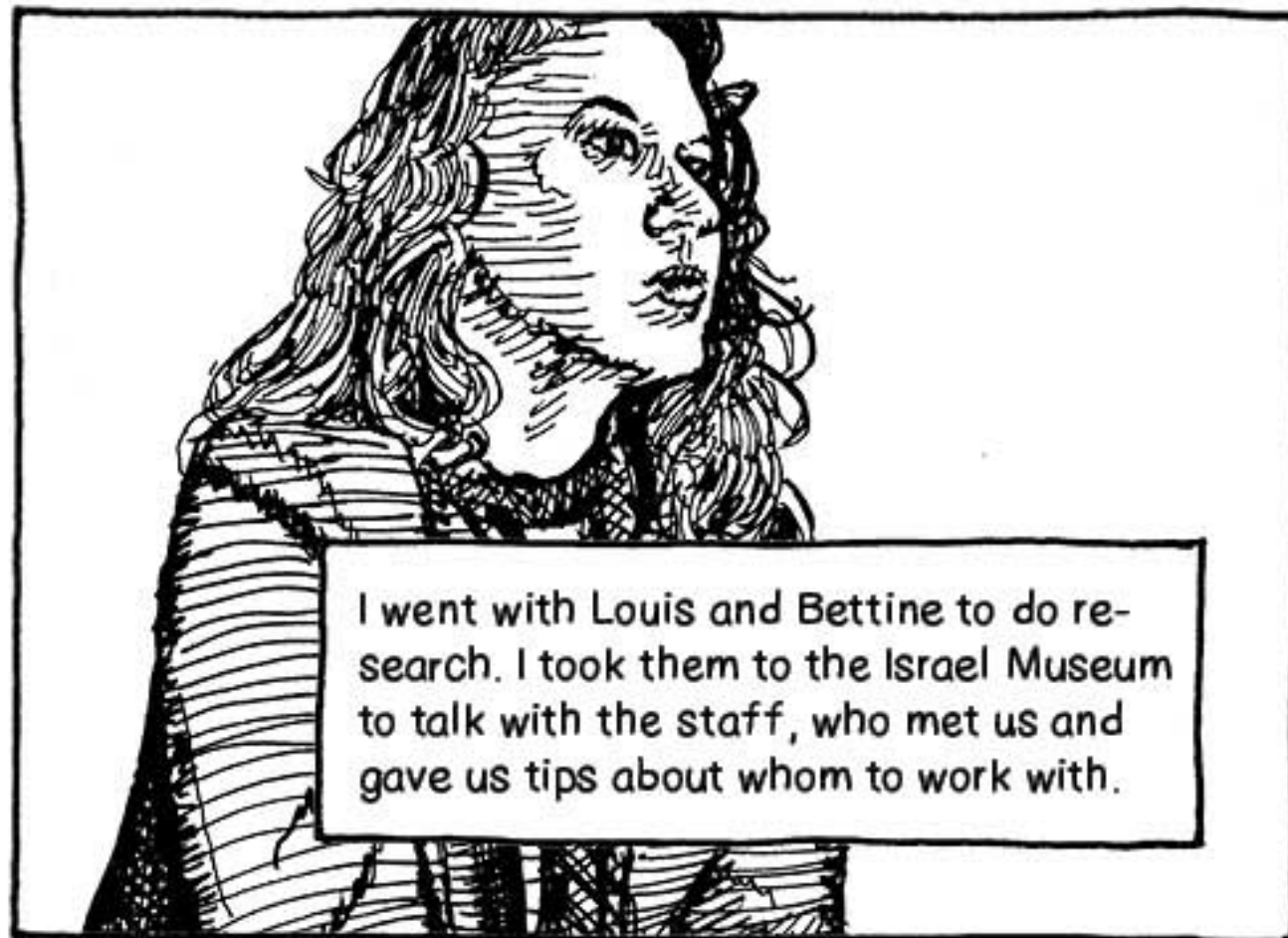
The space itself for the exhibition was key. They had some ideas about this... a kind of buffer between the space with the painting and the public, because it was a very small room... a few meters.



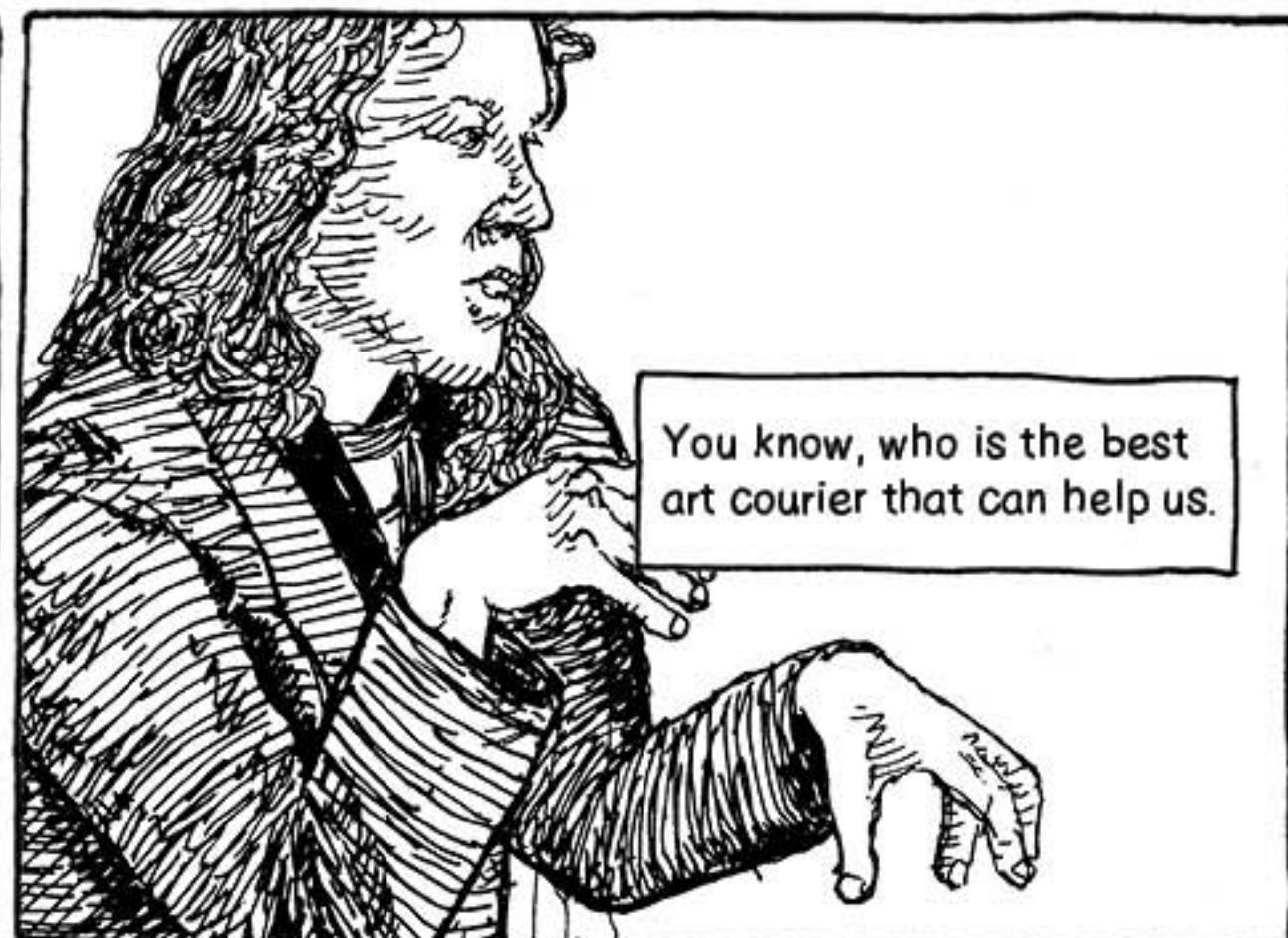
So, it was not allowed to have 10 people in the room at once.



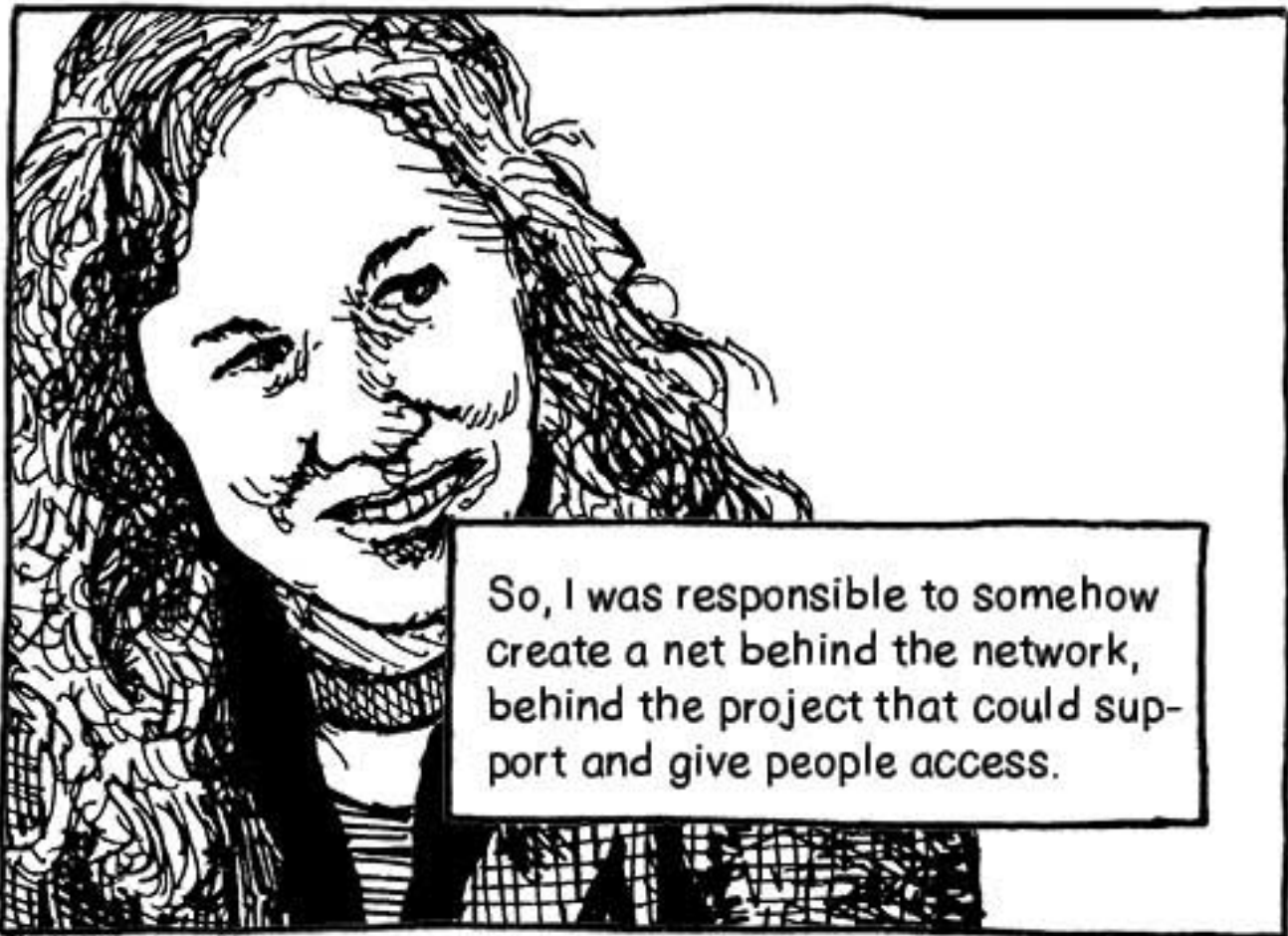
Finally, I decided to allow two—at most three—people because of the climate conditions.



I went with Louis and Bettine to do research. I took them to the Israel Museum to talk with the staff, who met us and gave us tips about whom to work with.



You know, who is the best art courier that can help us.



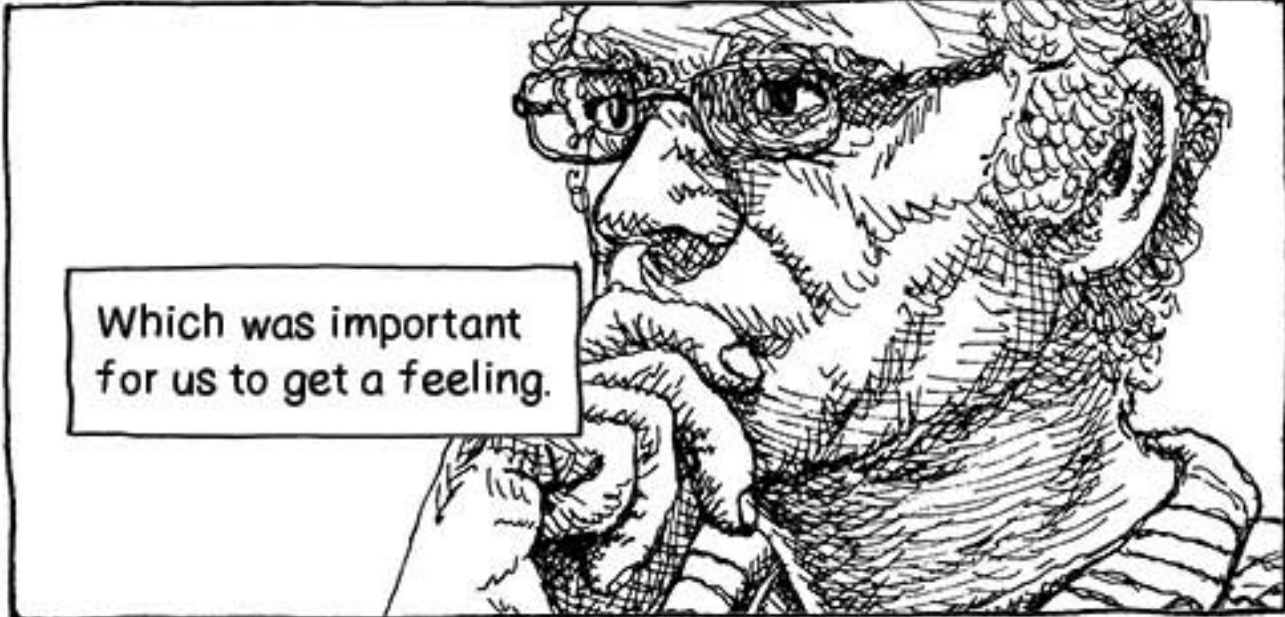
So, I was responsible to somehow create a net behind the network, behind the project that could support and give people access.



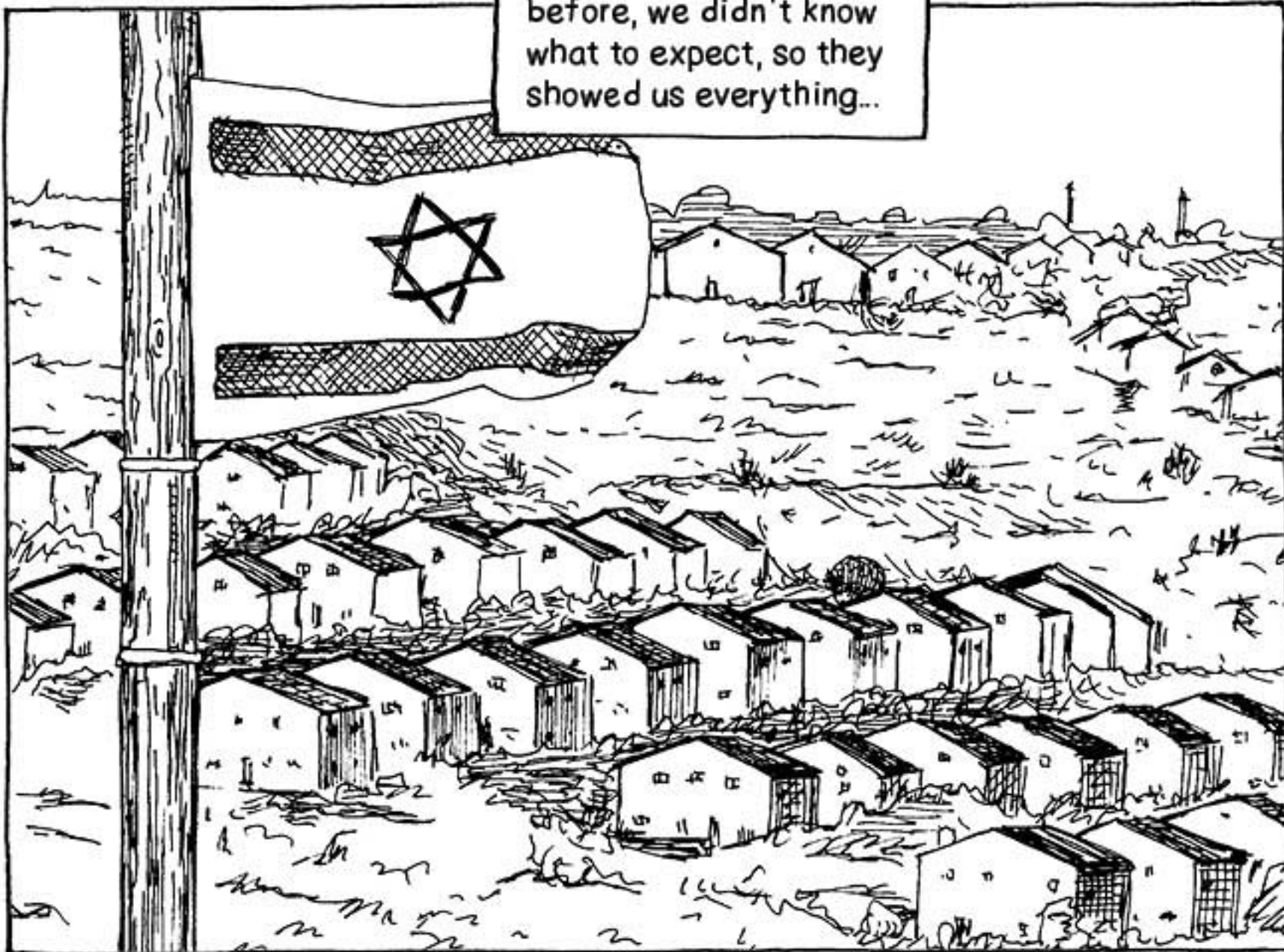
Like, to go with Bettine, go with Louis, to translate things and allow them to work in the way that they know.



Yeah, they were showing us the settlements. We hadn't been to the region before, we didn't know what to expect, so they showed us everything...



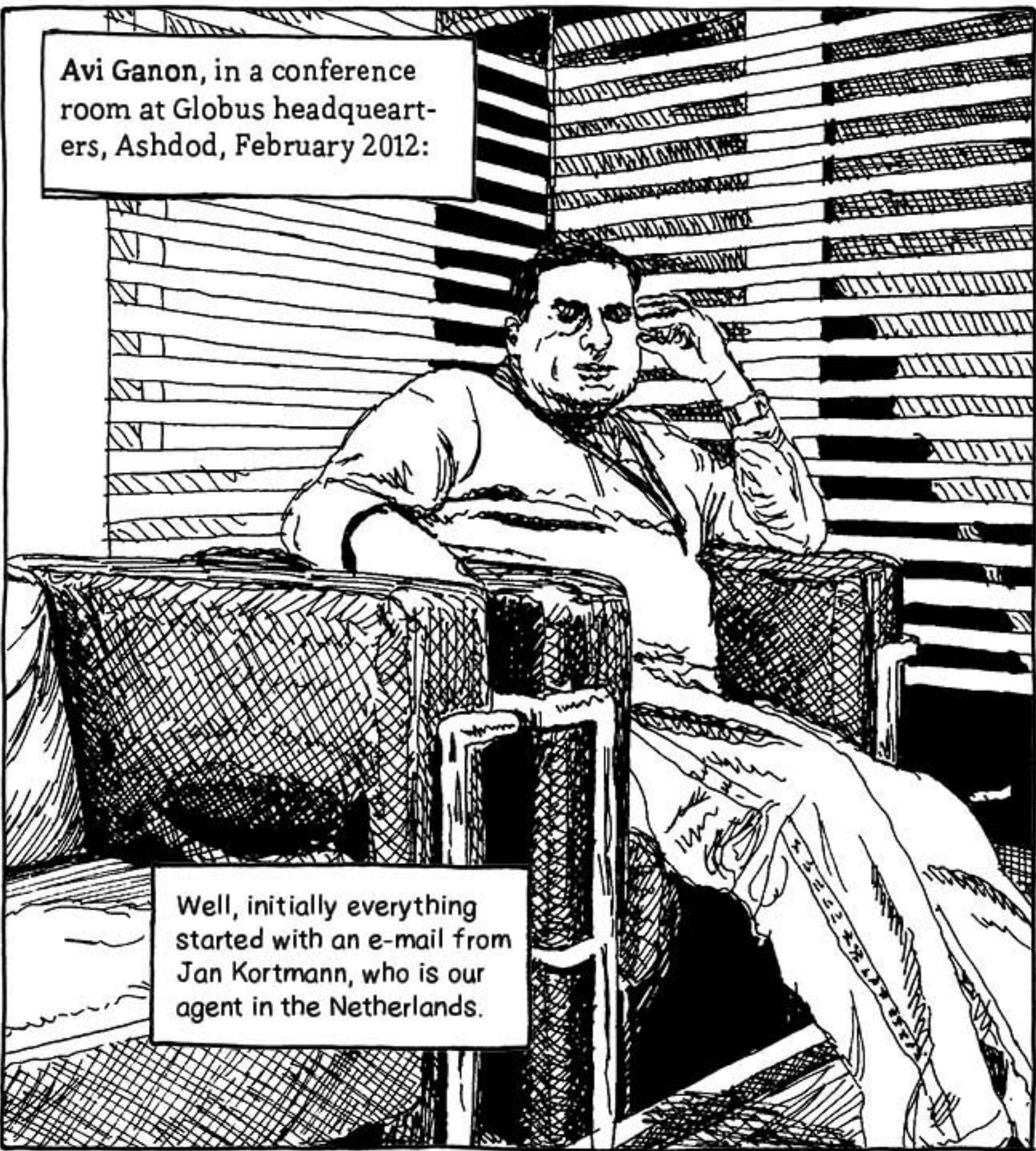
Which was important for us to get a feeling.



We went to the Israeli side and talked to the transporters, to Globus and Transclal.




We talked to two transporters to get as much information as possible, because we felt right away that they were working differently, and they both have connections.

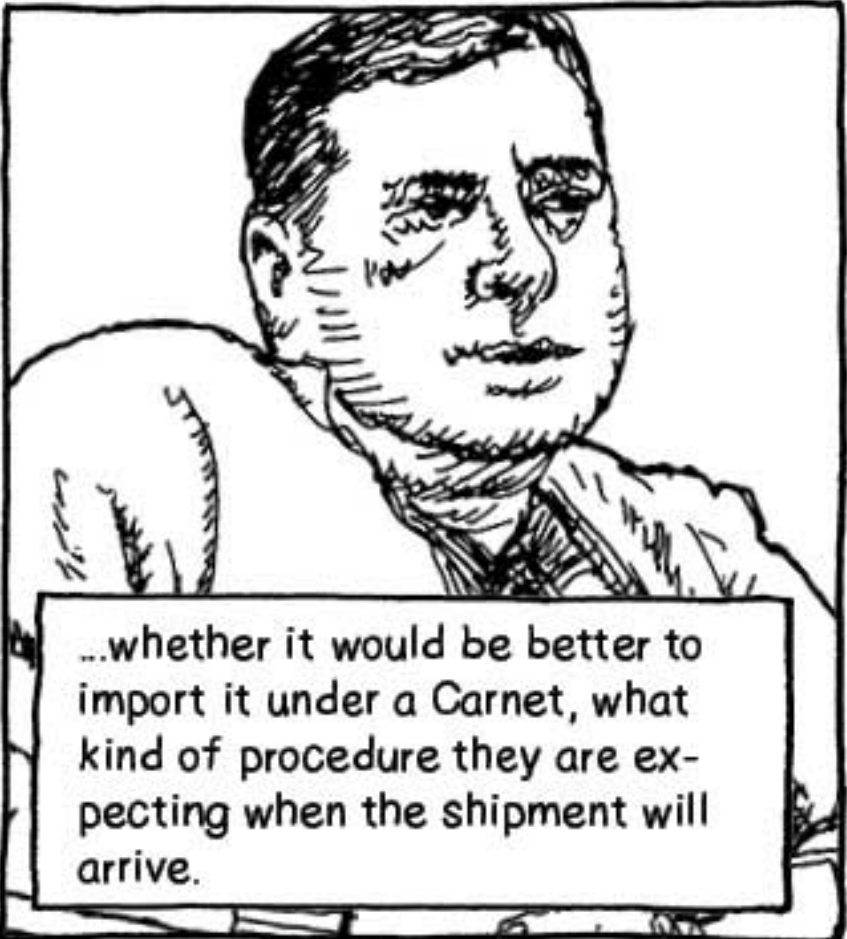


Avi Ganon, in a conference room at Globus headquarters, Ashdod, February 2012:

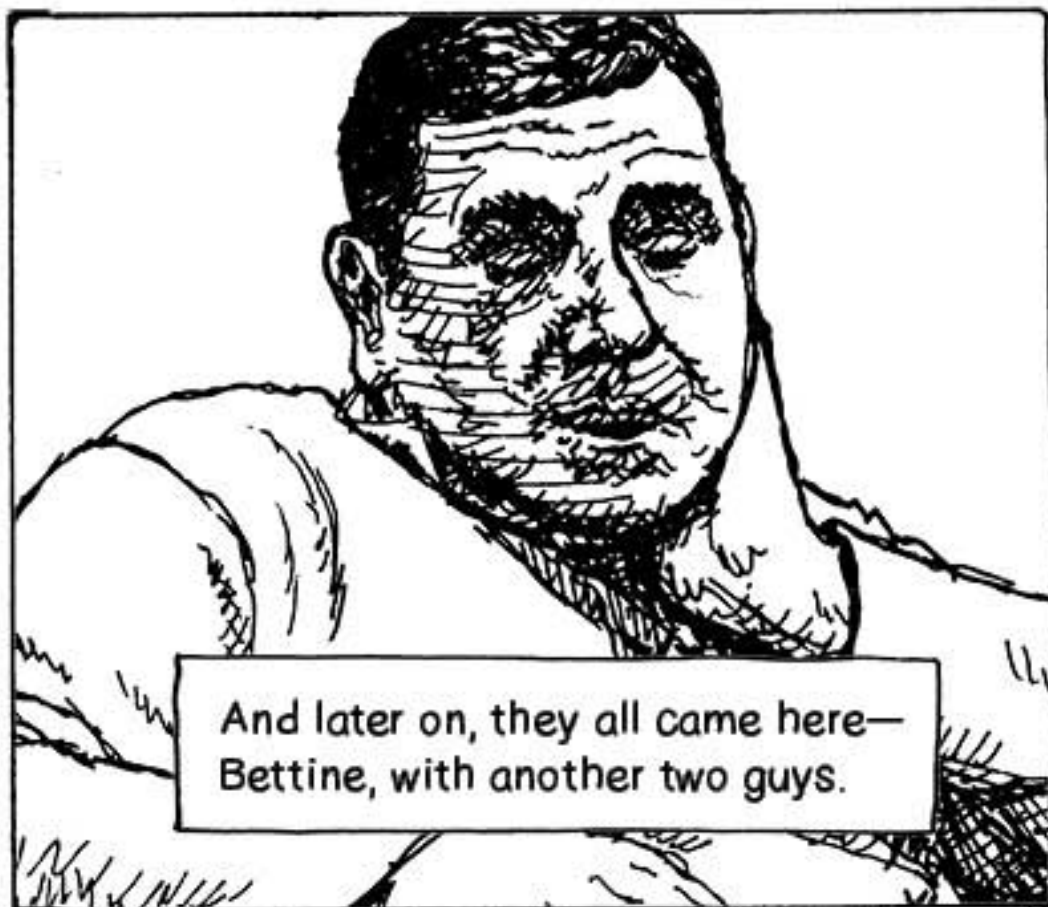
Well, initially everything started with an e-mail from Jan Kortmann, who is our agent in the Netherlands.



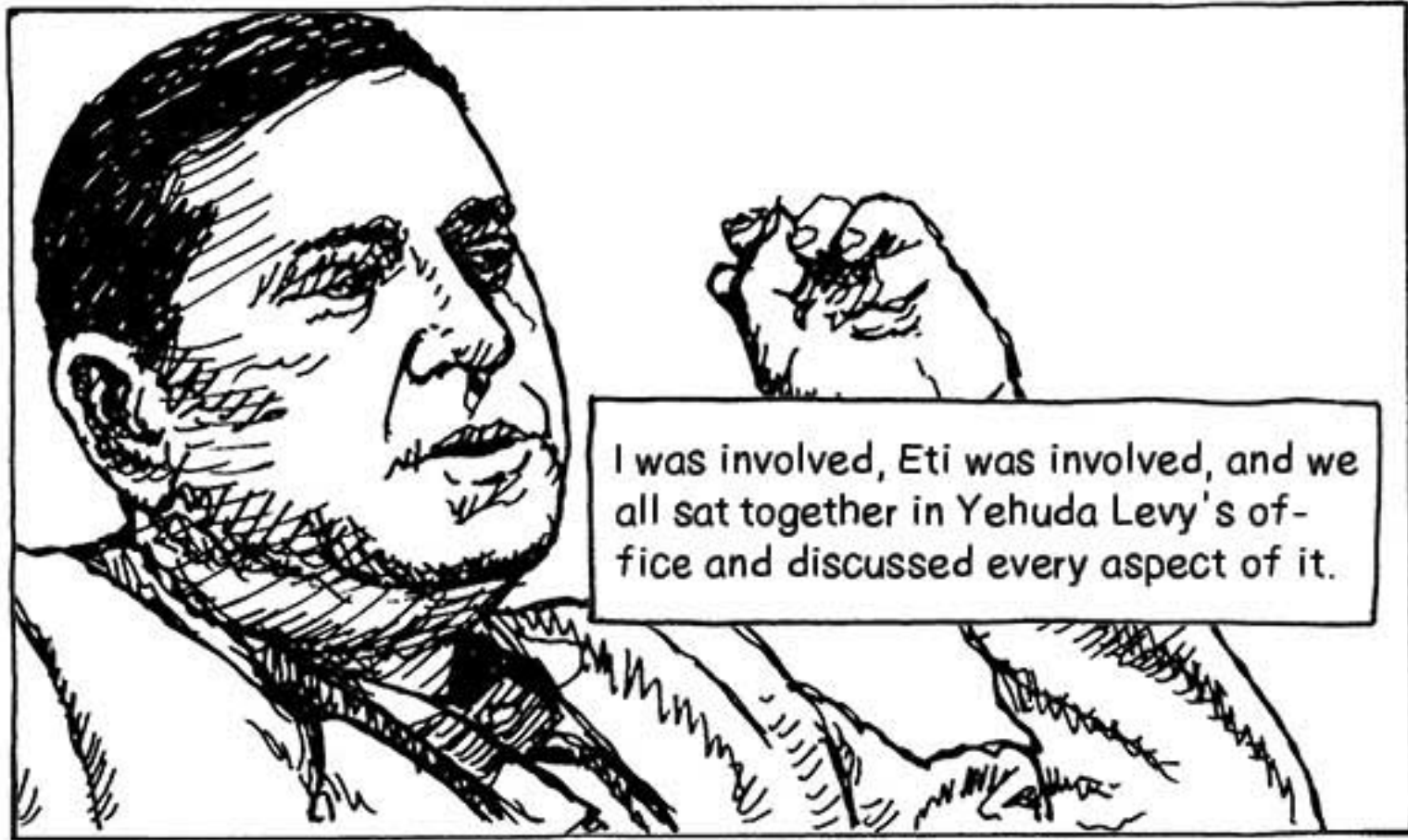
Later on we were contacted by Bettine directly with all kinds of questions about regulations, customs regulations...



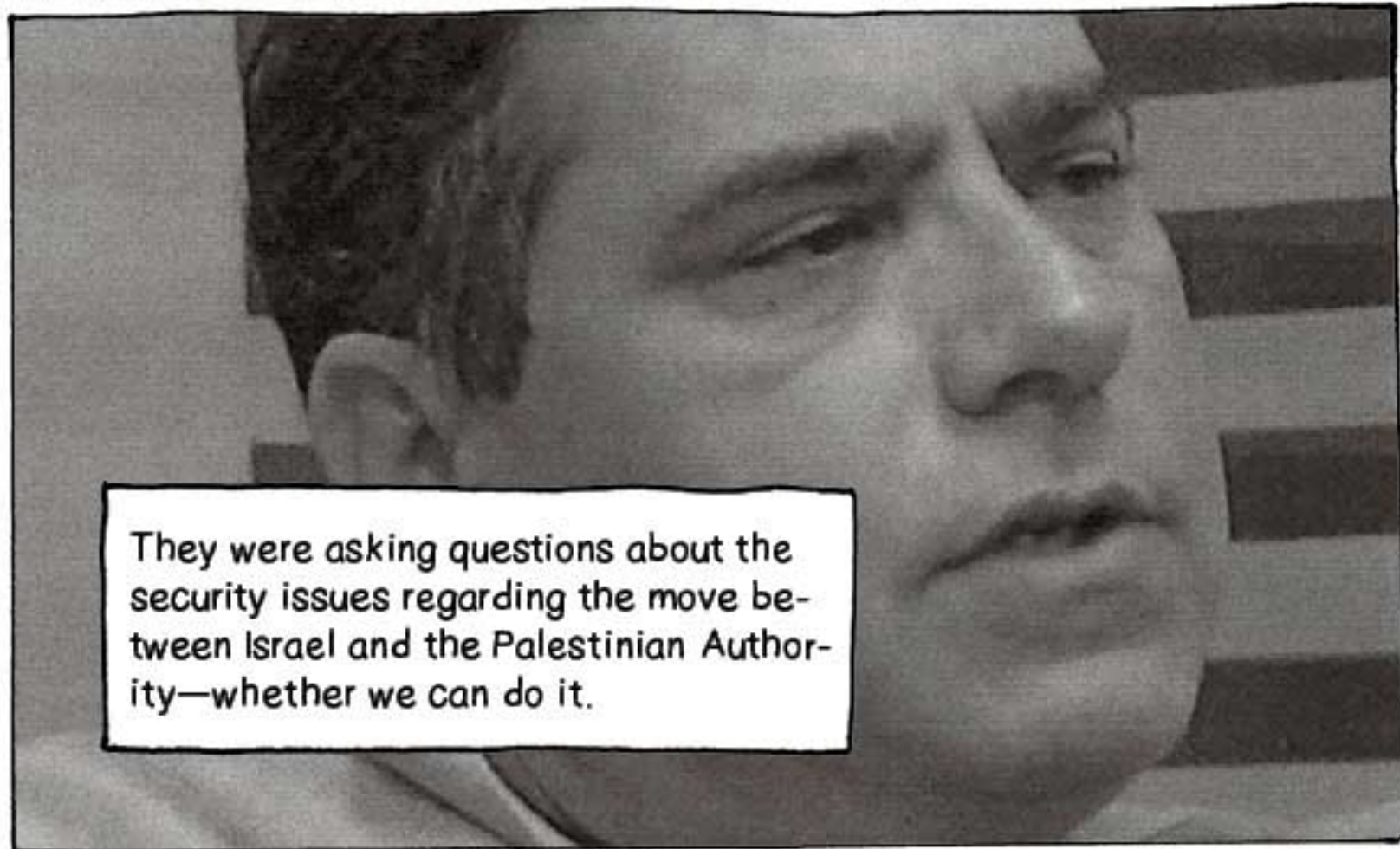
...whether it would be better to import it under a Carnet, what kind of procedure they are expecting when the shipment will arrive.



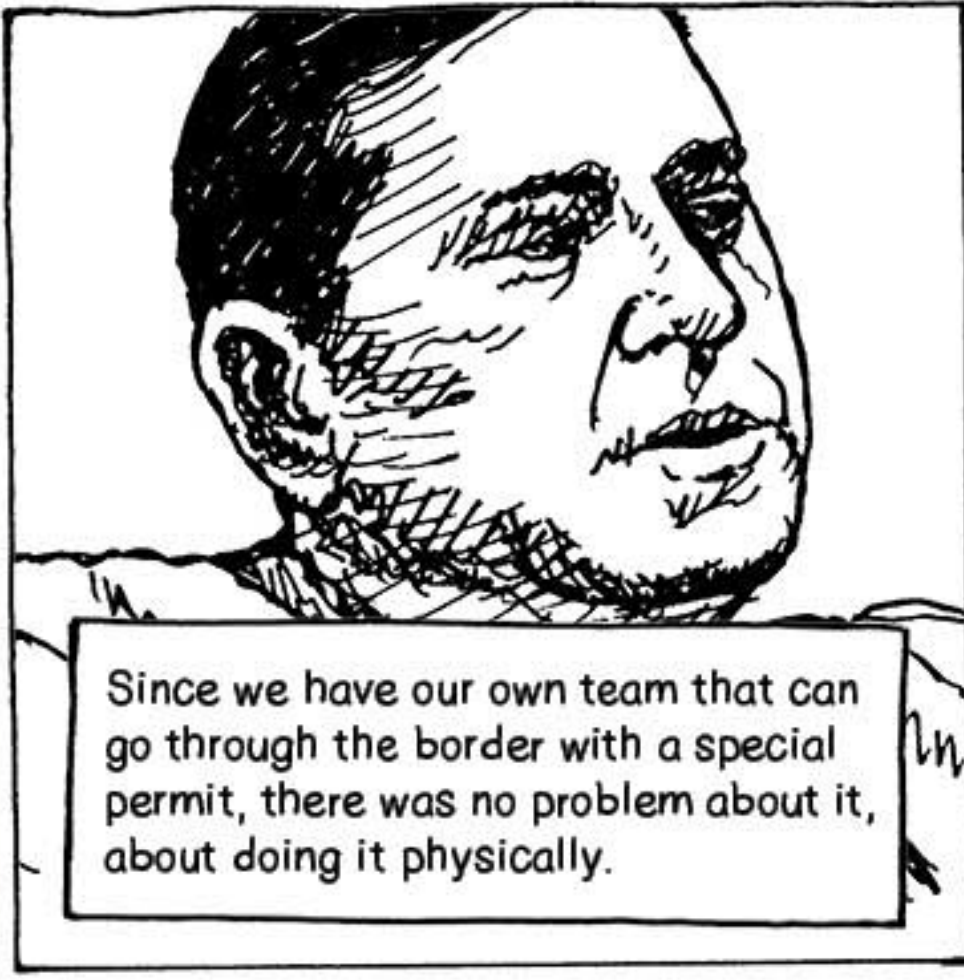
And later on, they all came here—
Bettine, with another two guys.



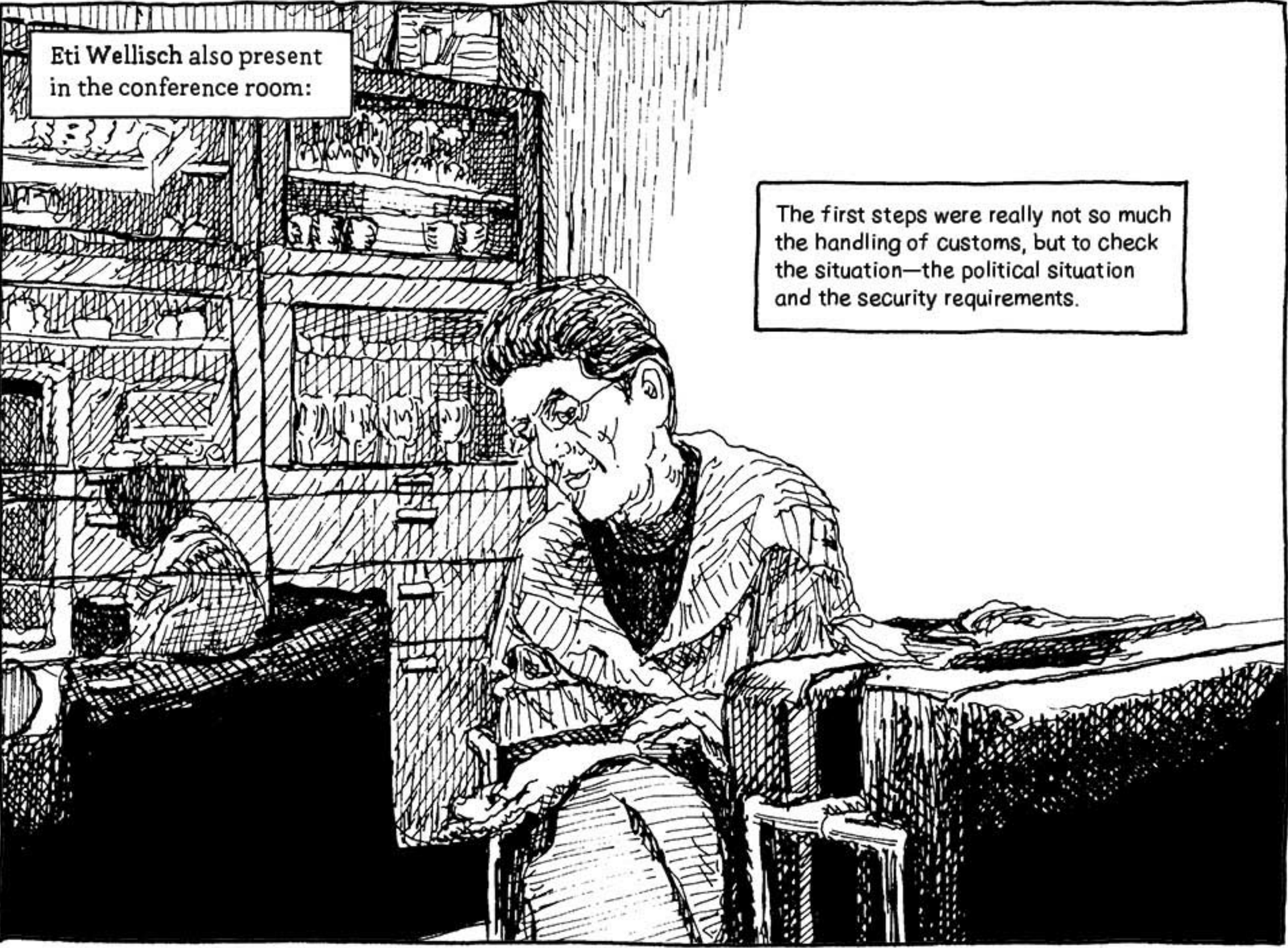
I was involved, Eti was involved, and we
all sat together in Yehuda Levy's of-
fice and discussed every aspect of it.



They were asking questions about the
security issues regarding the move be-
tween Israel and the Palestinian Author-
ity—whether we can do it.

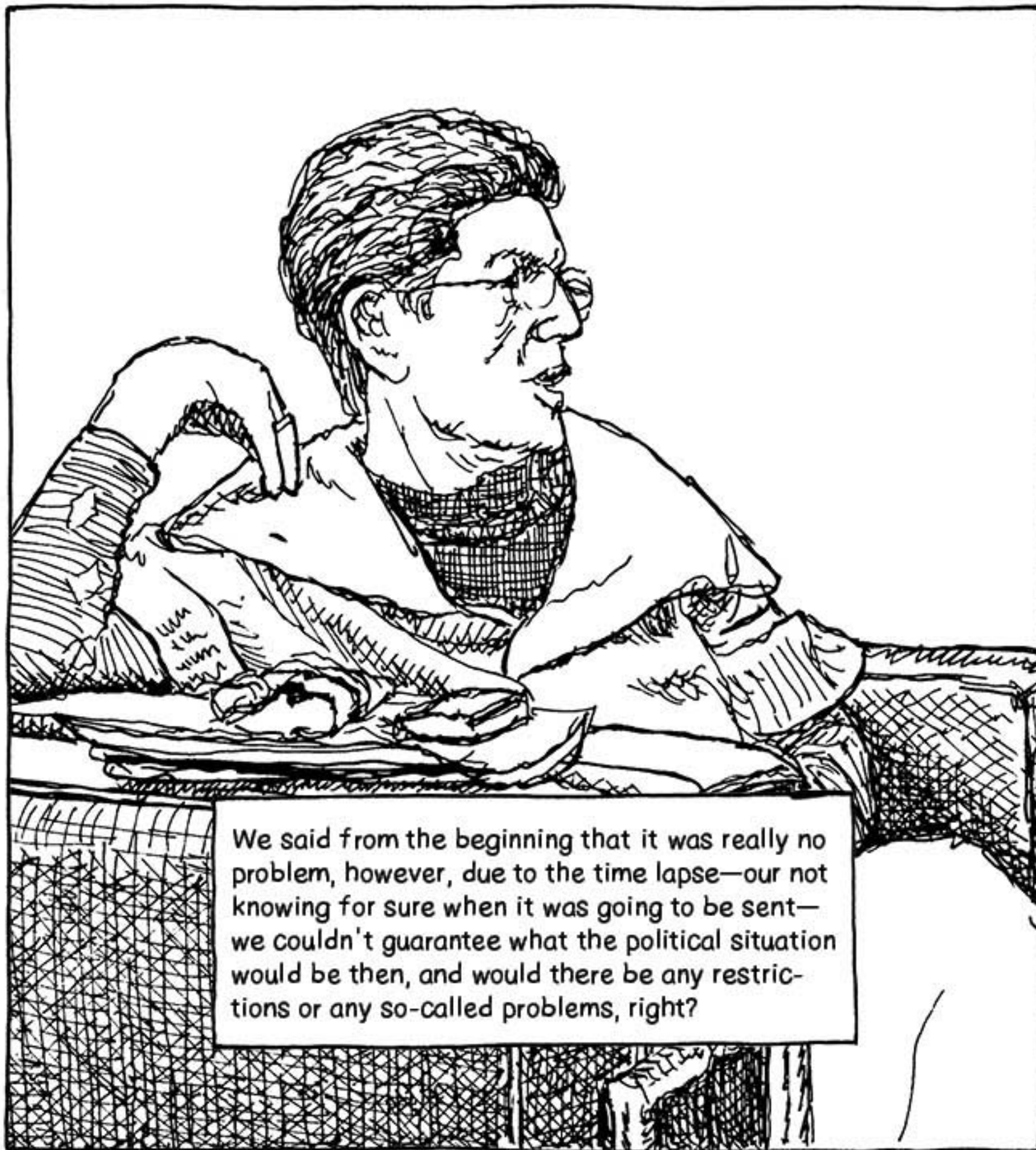


Since we have our own team that can
go through the border with a special
permit, there was no problem about it,
about doing it physically.



Eti Wellisch also present
in the conference room:

The first steps were really not so much
the handling of customs, but to check
the situation—the political situation
and the security requirements.



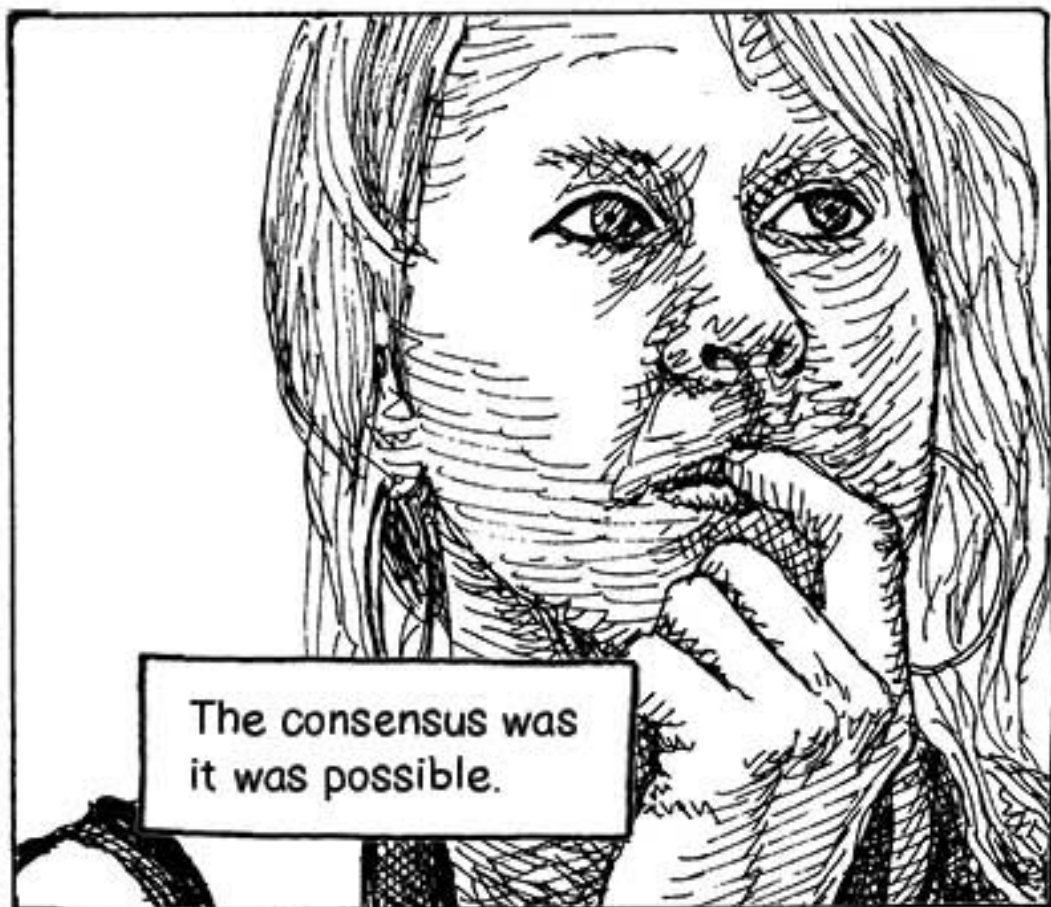
We said from the beginning that it was really no problem, however, due to the time lapse—our not knowing for sure when it was going to be sent—we couldn't guarantee what the political situation would be then, and would there be any restrictions or any so-called problems, right?



There was another company, Transclal, that was very involved with the investigation—we called them because we were finding out if we could make it possible in a good and safe way.



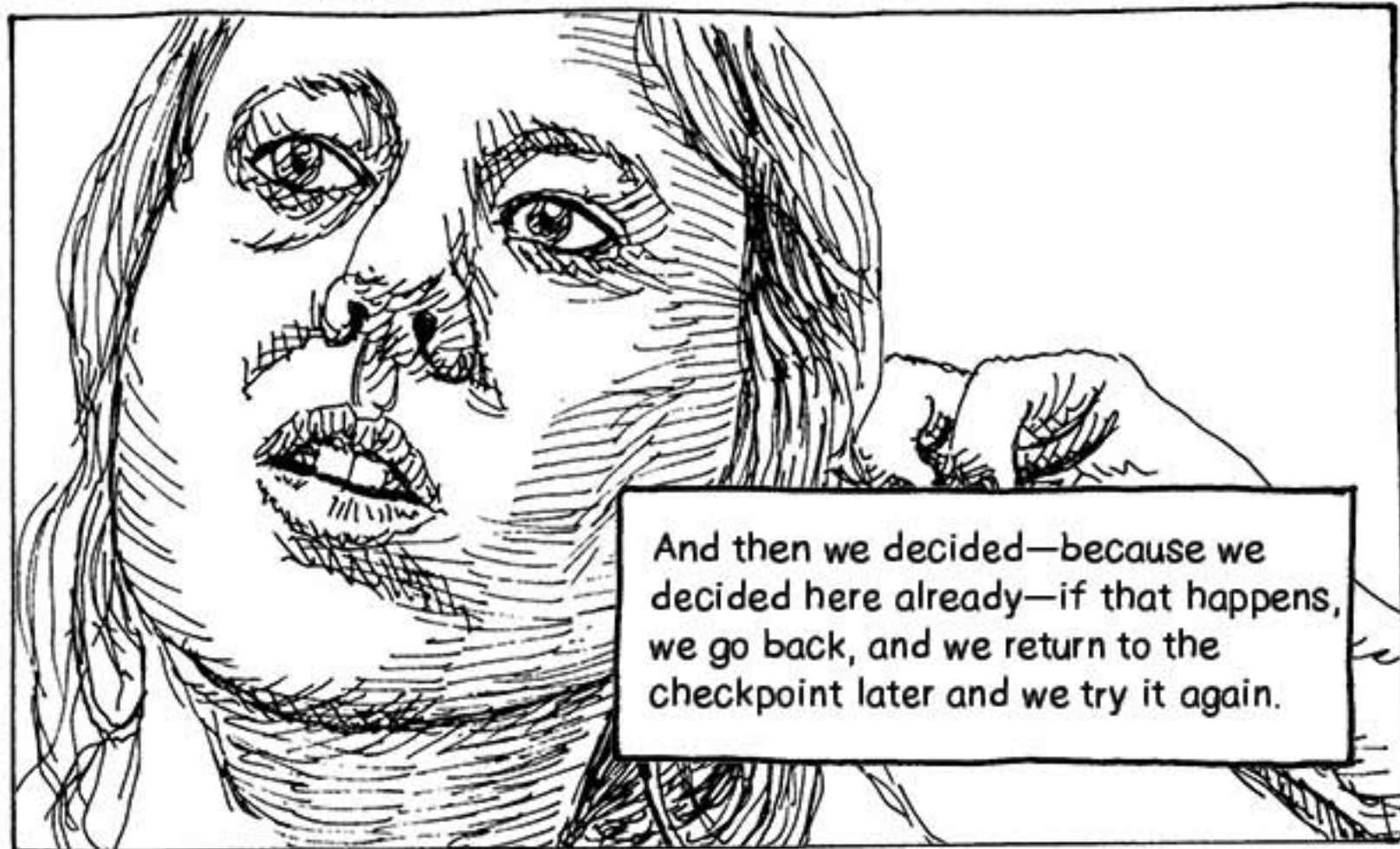
So, they also tried to find out how we could get it there, and inquired about the bank guarantee, and they did a lot of research for us.



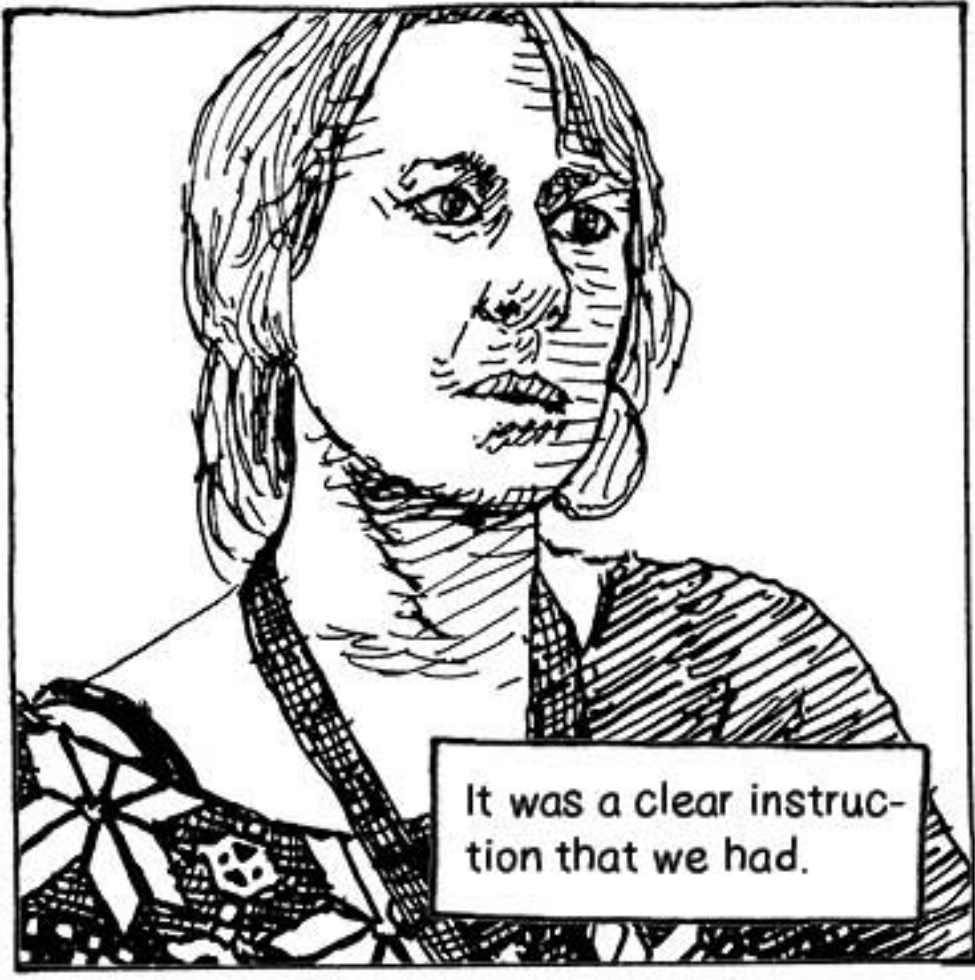
The consensus was it was possible.



But on both sides they were scared about the border situation, because that can be the danger point in the lower level of the chain of command... For example, soldiers.



And then we decided—because we decided here already—if that happens, we go back, and we return to the checkpoint later and we try it again.



It was a clear instruction that we had.

SAMER KAWESMI





There was one individual who worked for both companies. That was Samer.

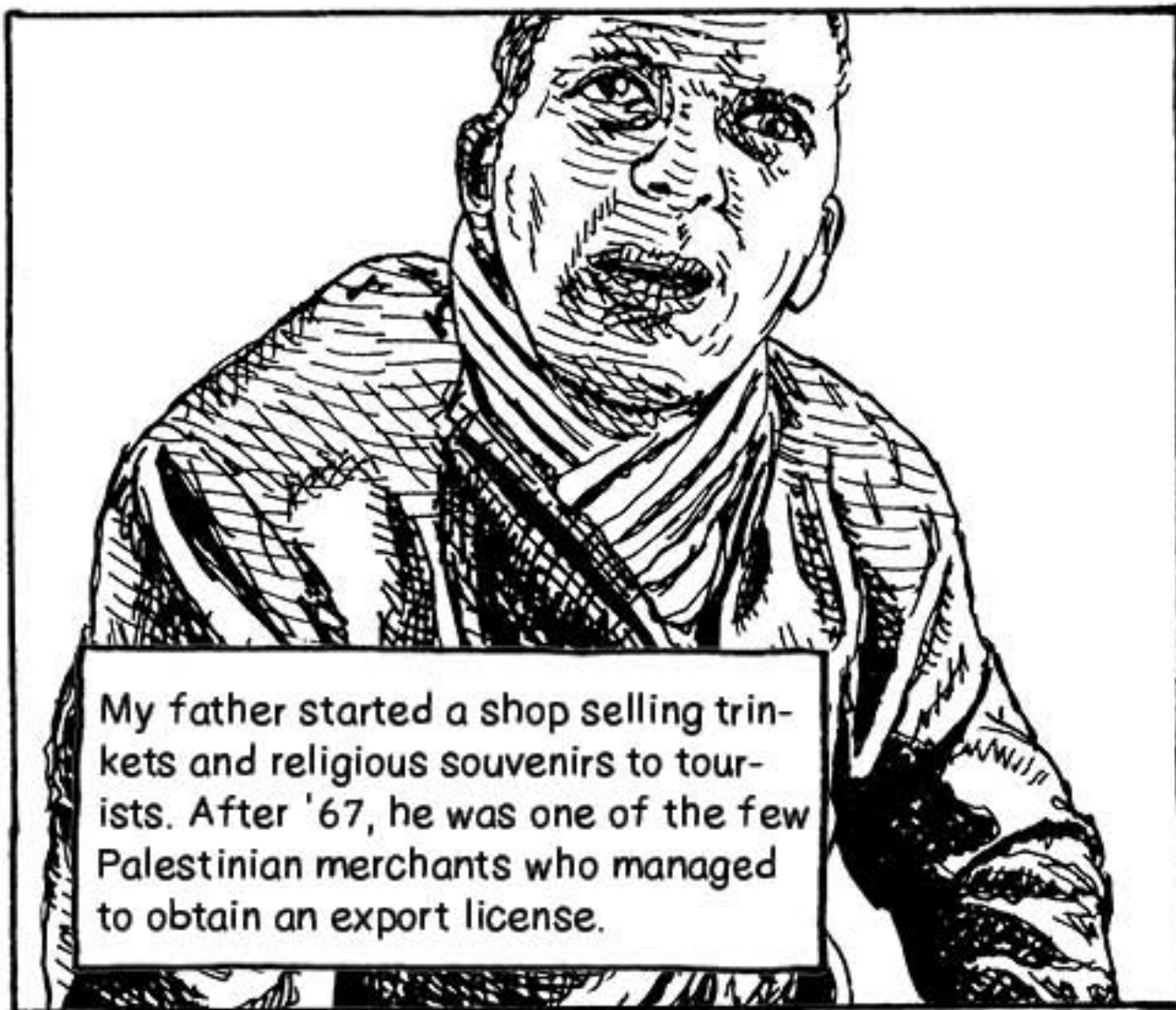


He was a sub-contractor for both of the companies we interviewed.

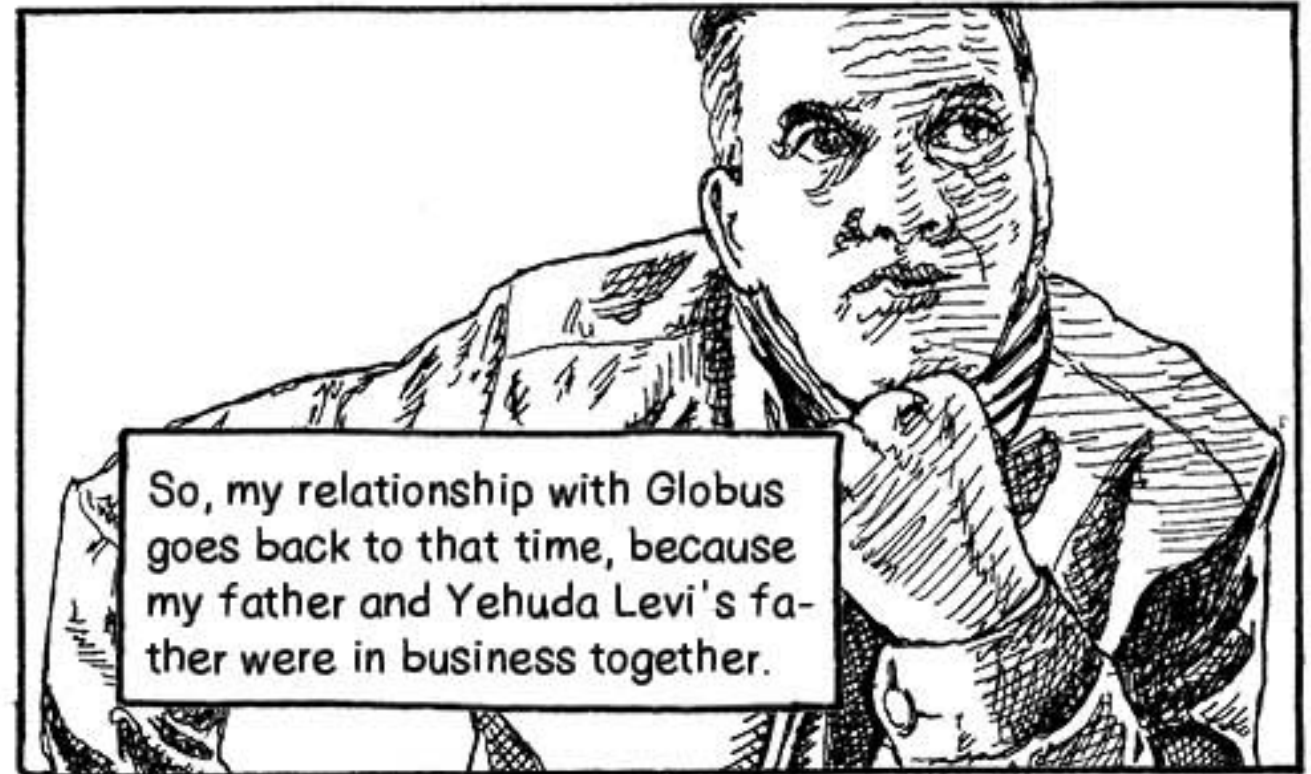


Samer Kawesmi, in an East Jerusalem café, February 2012:

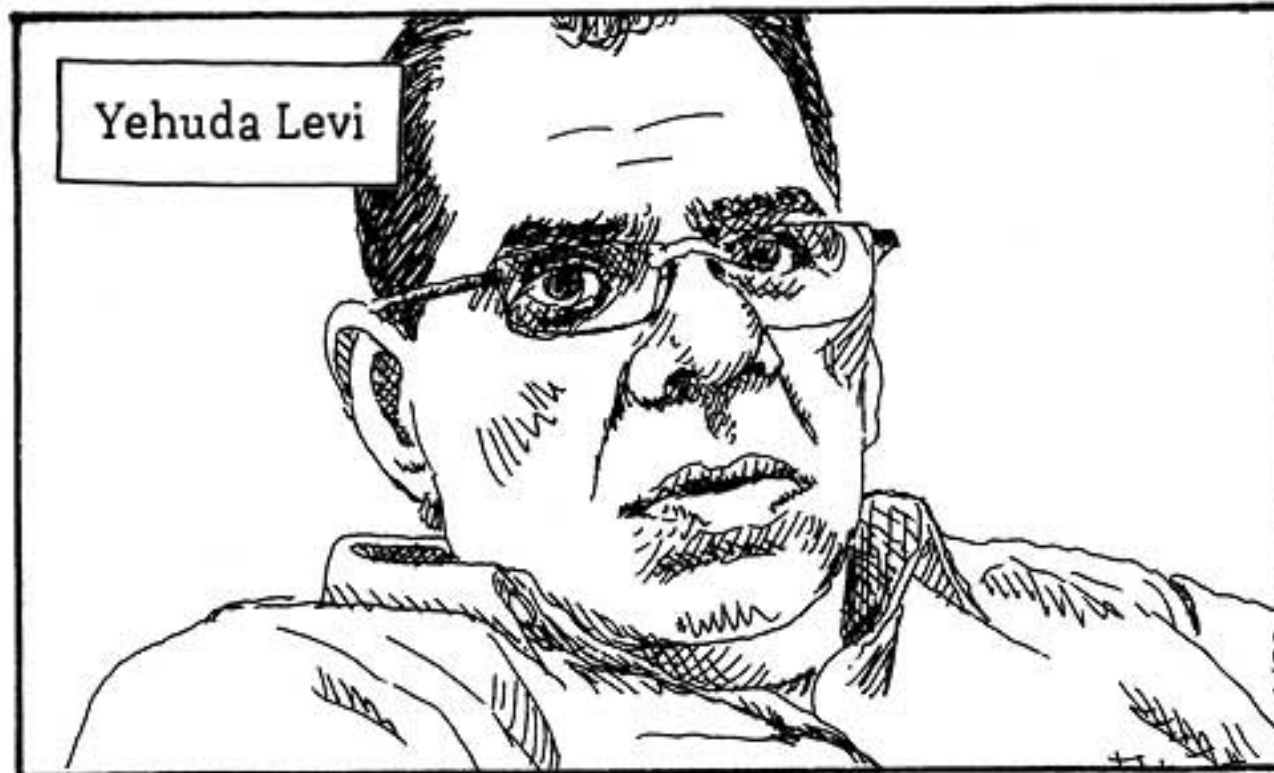
After '48, my family fled its home village—which was destroyed—to Jordan, but then we managed to return to Jerusalem.



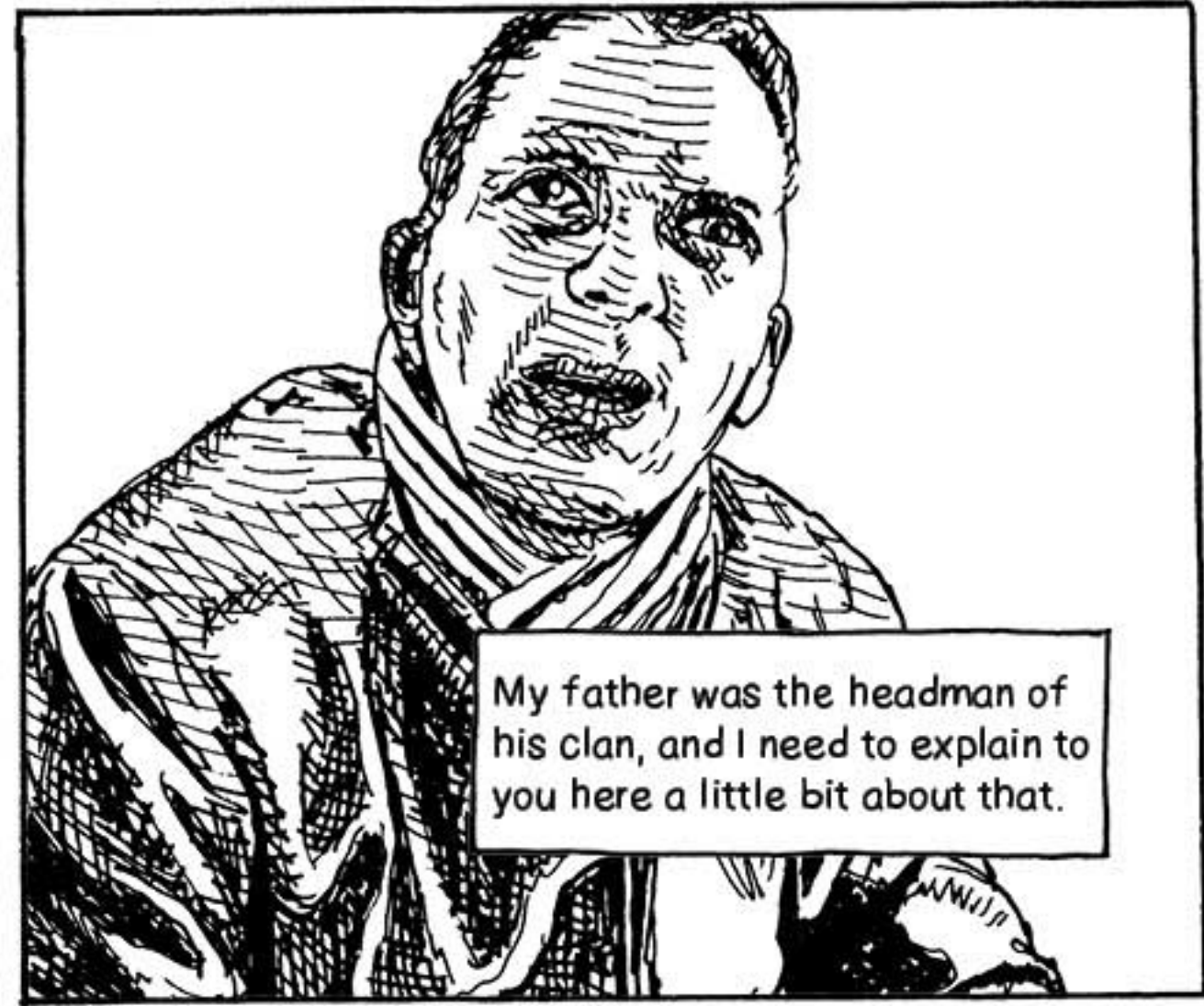
My father started a shop selling trinkets and religious souvenirs to tourists. After '67, he was one of the few Palestinian merchants who managed to obtain an export license.



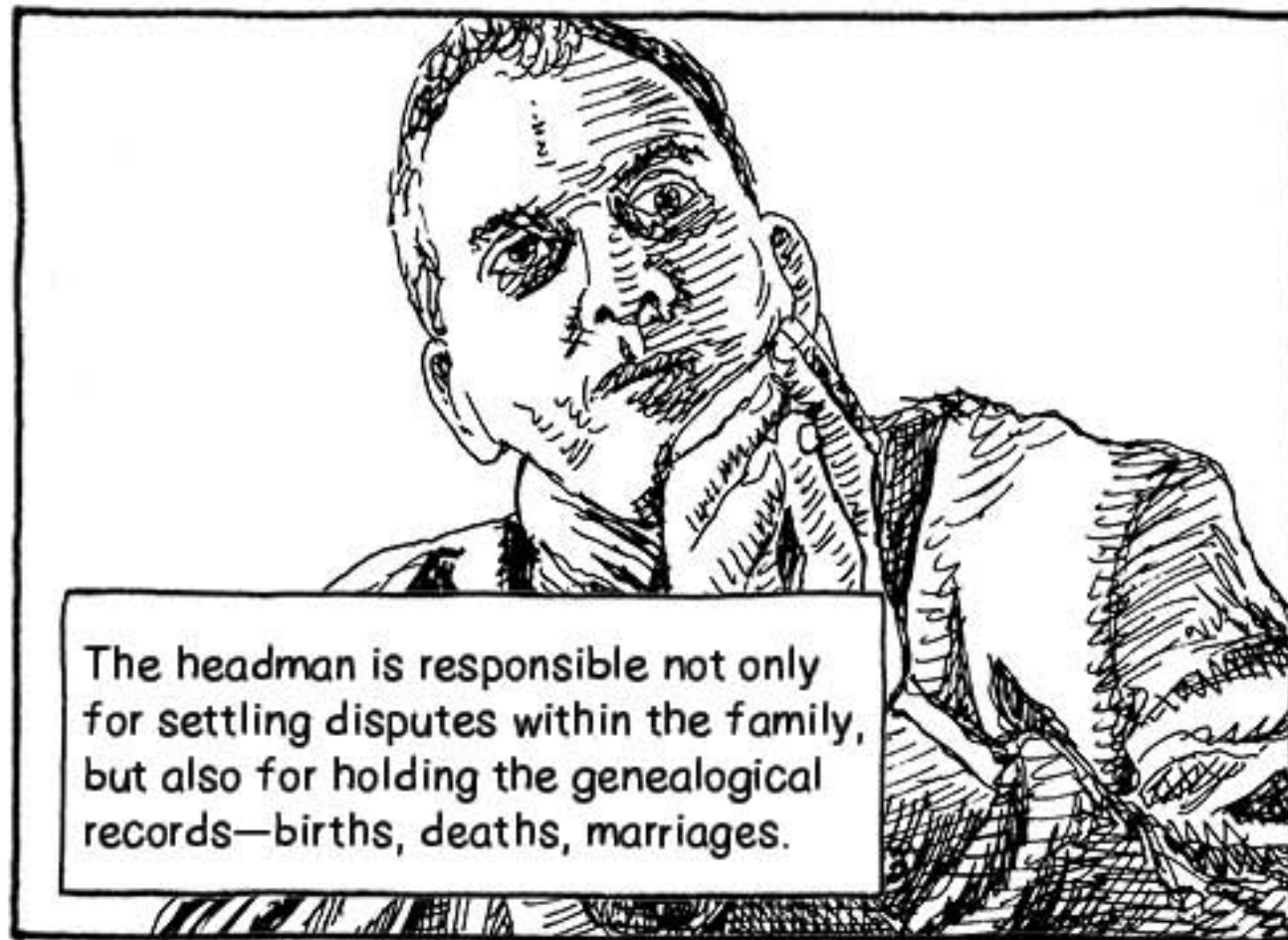
So, my relationship with Globus goes back to that time, because my father and Yehuda Levi's father were in business together.



Yehuda Levi



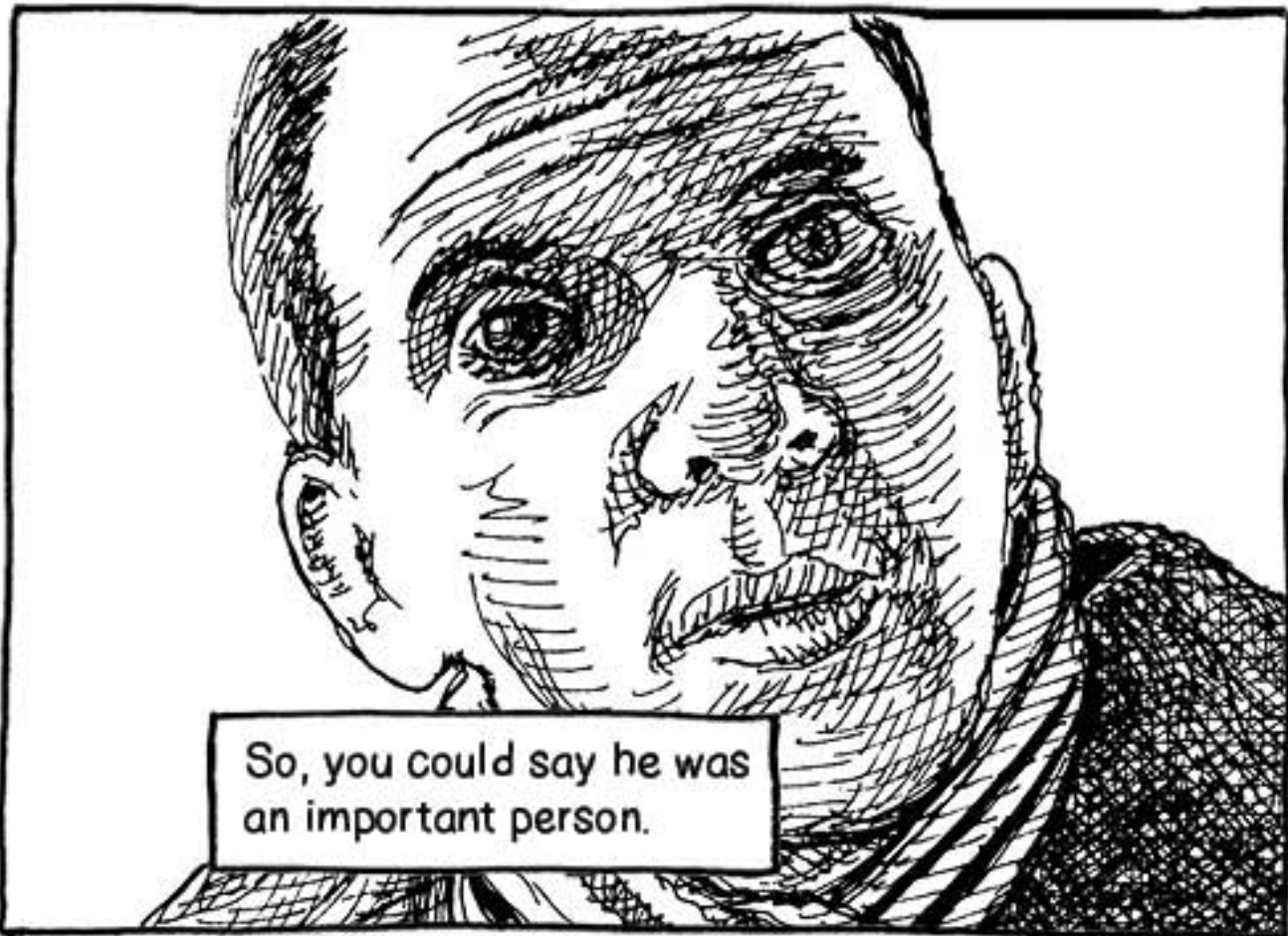
My father was the headman of his clan, and I need to explain to you here a little bit about that.



The headman is responsible not only for settling disputes within the family, but also for holding the genealogical records—births, deaths, marriages.



It's a big responsibility.



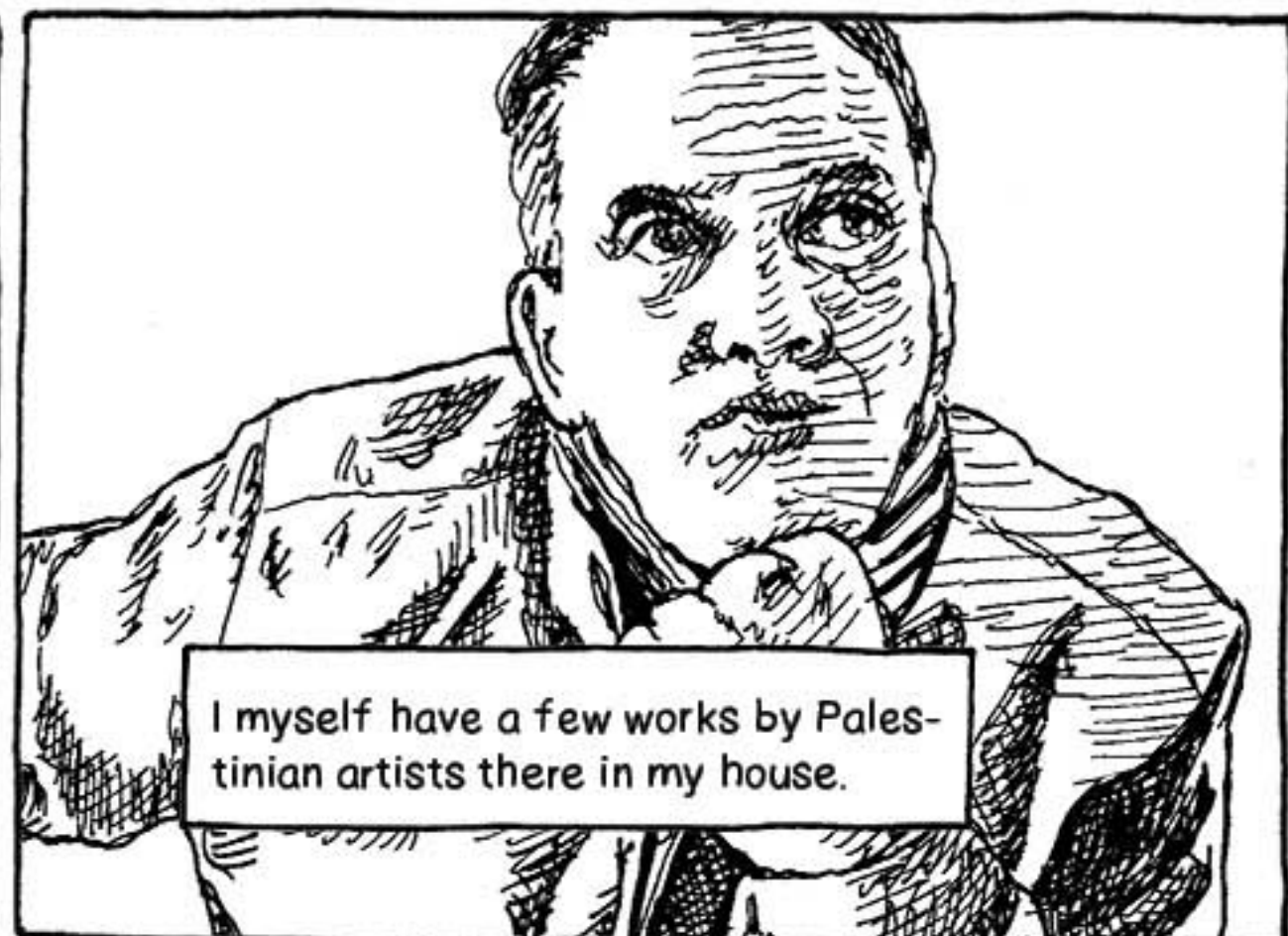
So, you could say he was an important person.



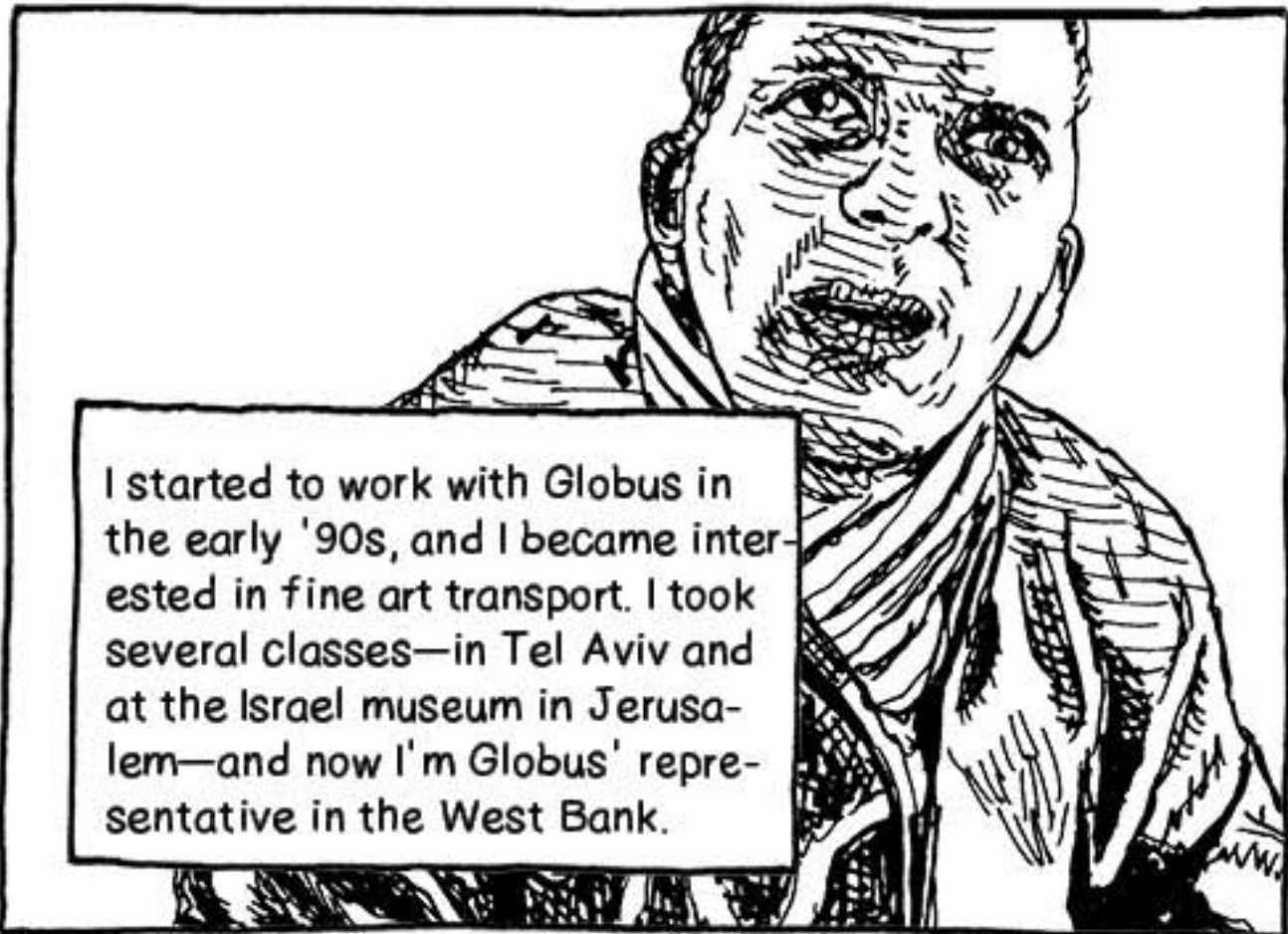
My father also had contact with many Palestinian artists, and as a patriotic duty, he used his export license to help send Palestinian artworks abroad after '67—for exhibitions and things.



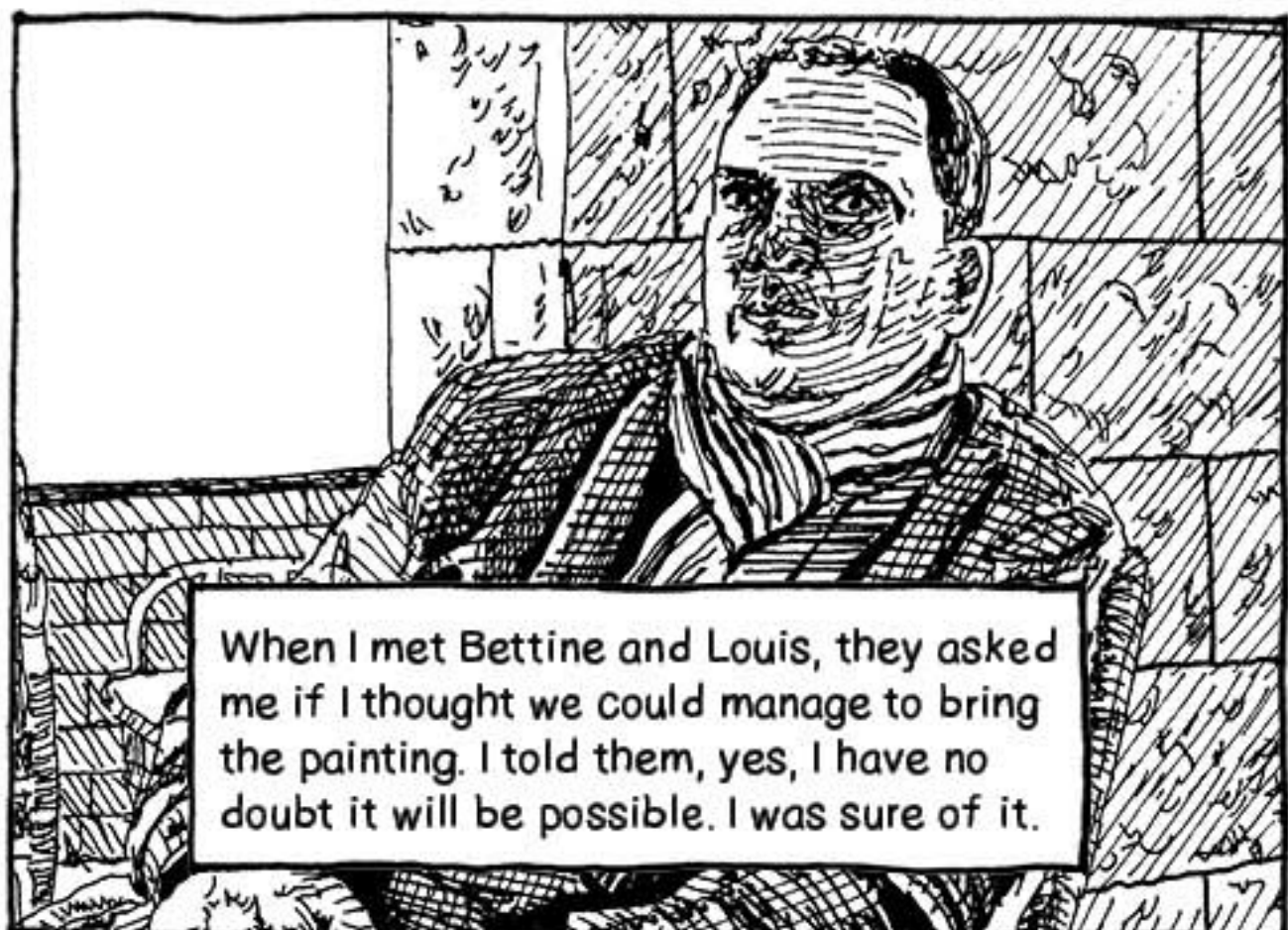
I grew up with Palestinian artworks in our house in Jerusalem.



I myself have a few works by Palestinian artists there in my house.

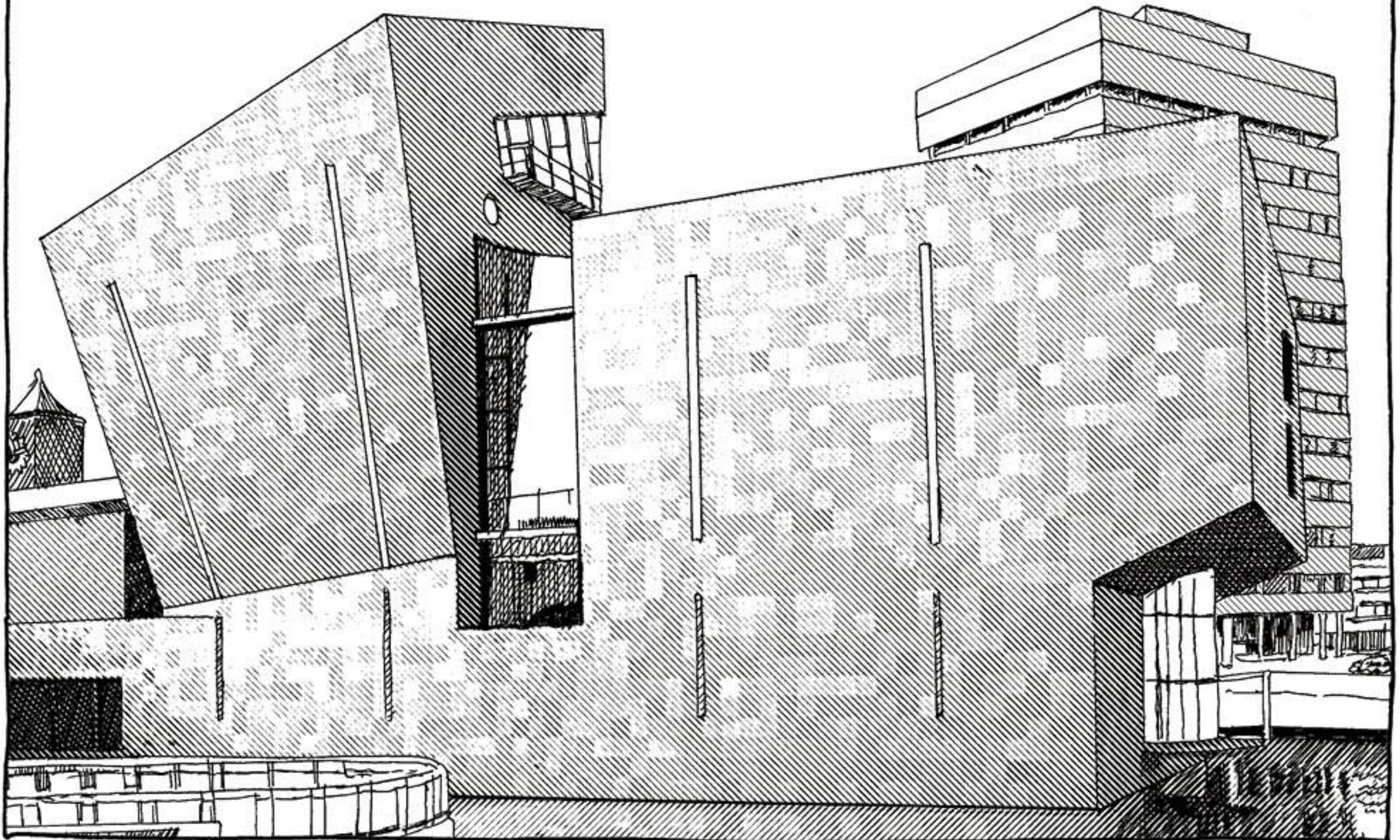


I started to work with Globus in the early '90s, and I became interested in fine art transport. I took several classes—in Tel Aviv and at the Israel museum in Jerusalem—and now I'm Globus' representative in the West Bank.

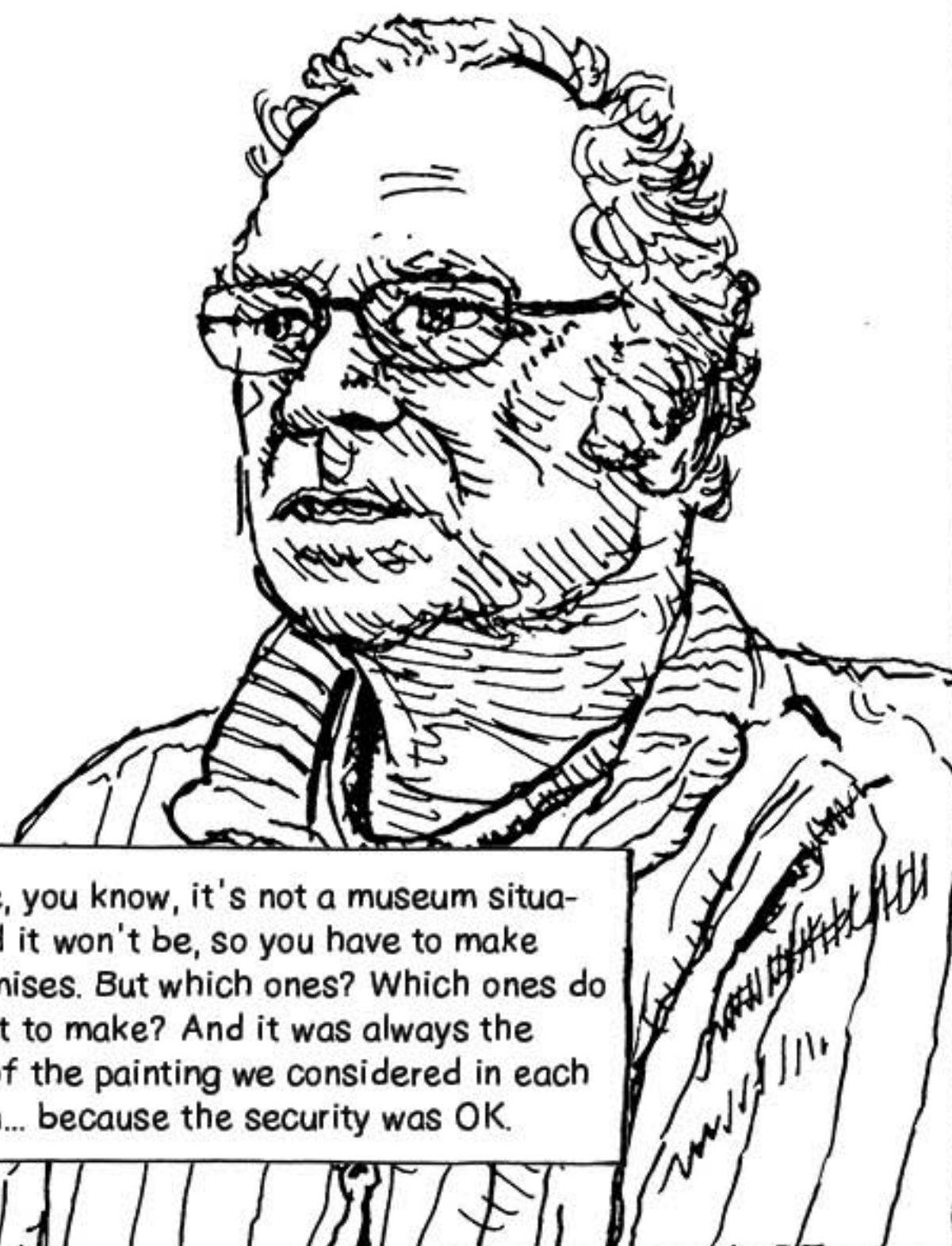


When I met Bettine and Louis, they asked me if I thought we could manage to bring the painting. I told them, yes, I have no doubt it will be possible. I was sure of it.

A REPORT OF FINDINGS



We came back, and we reported our findings, what we saw. Louis thought it would be possible to stabilize the climate there.



Because, you know, it's not a museum situation, and it won't be, so you have to make compromises. But which ones? Which ones do you want to make? And it was always the safety of the painting we considered in each decision... because the security was OK.



Louis thought with a good crate it would be all right, and I had spoken to the transporters and I knew with both of them, one way or another, I would find out how to get there.



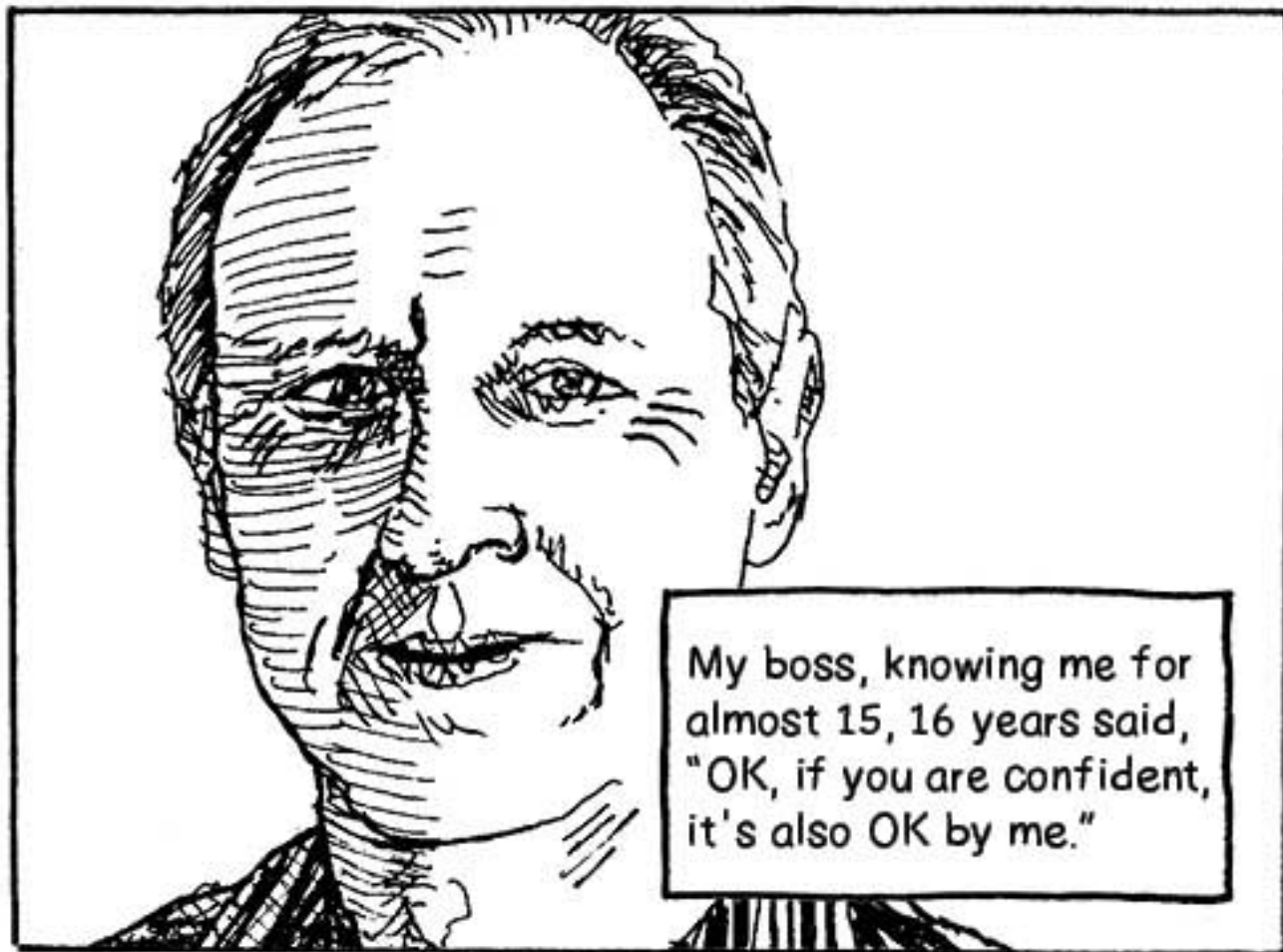
And we discussed all of this with the insurance. Ruud saw the report himself and he agreed. So, we had the insurer.



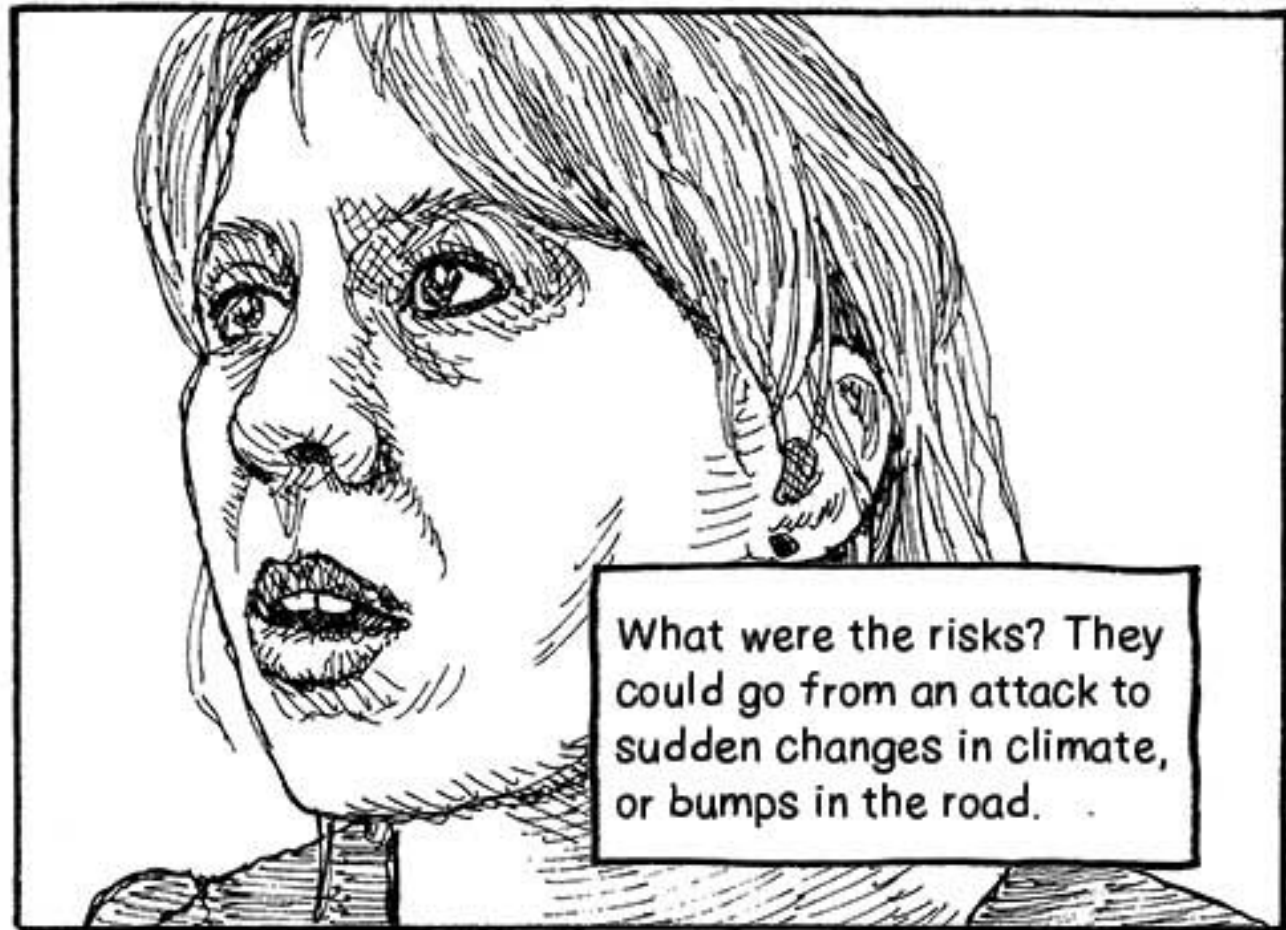
My bosses were happy to follow me in this case, because I've done some other business, fortunately with good results, and this is also, of course, important in starting a new adventure.



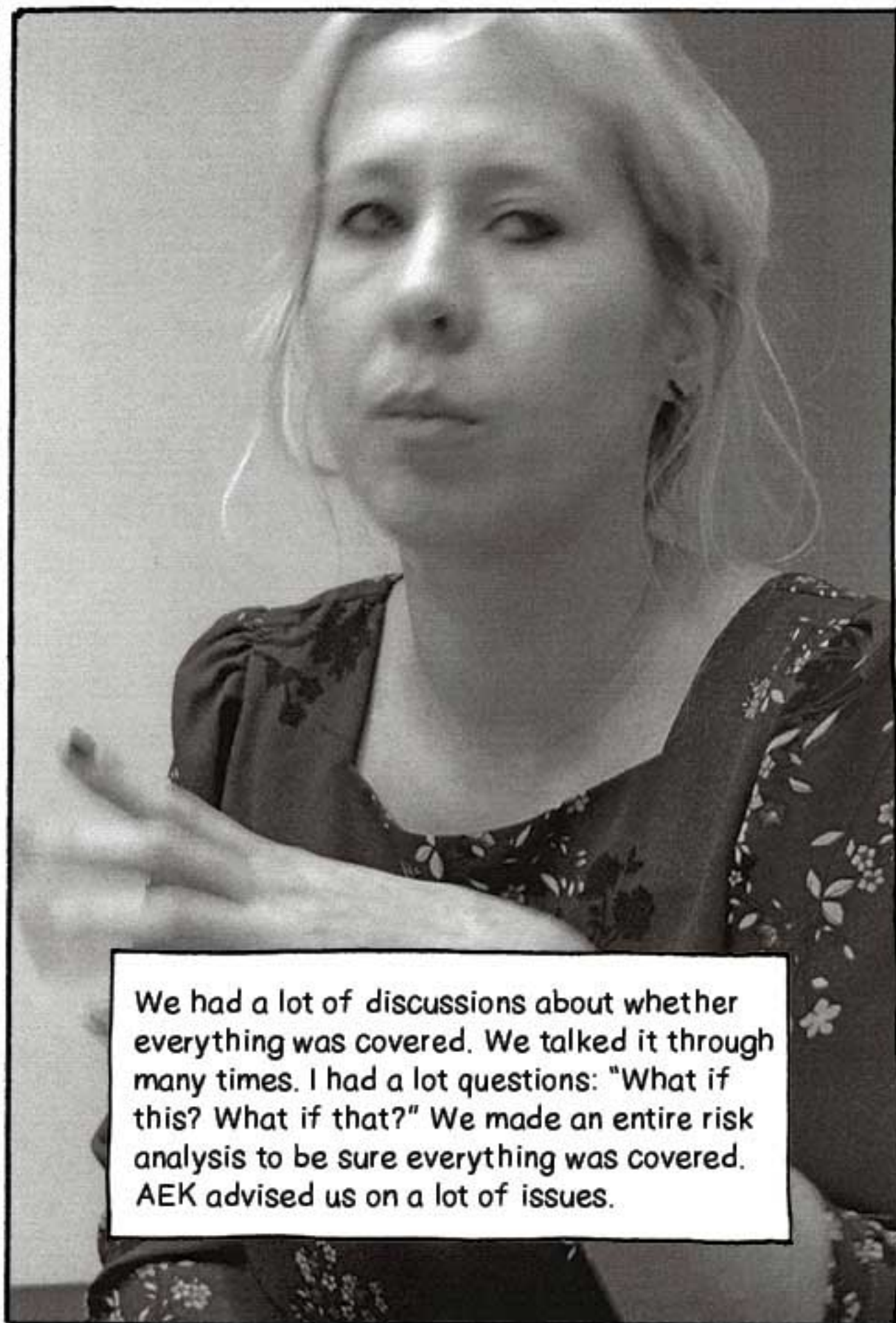
I set down a lot of preventative measures that had to be taken up, otherwise I wouldn't accept insuring it.



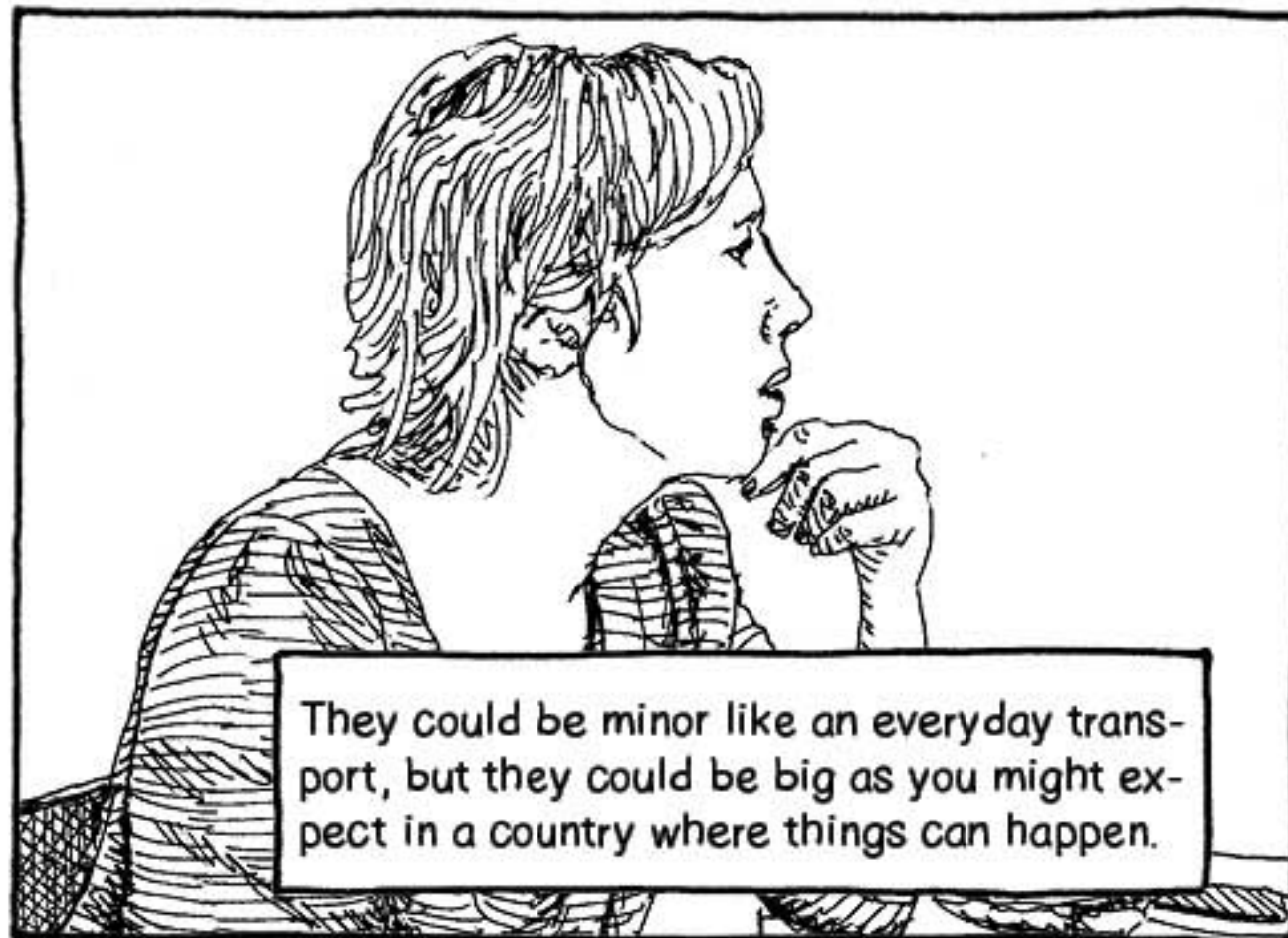
My boss, knowing me for almost 15, 16 years said, "OK, if you are confident, it's also OK by me."



What were the risks? They could go from an attack to sudden changes in climate, or bumps in the road.



We had a lot of discussions about whether everything was covered. We talked it through many times. I had a lot questions: "What if this? What if that?" We made an entire risk analysis to be sure everything was covered. AEK advised us on a lot of issues.



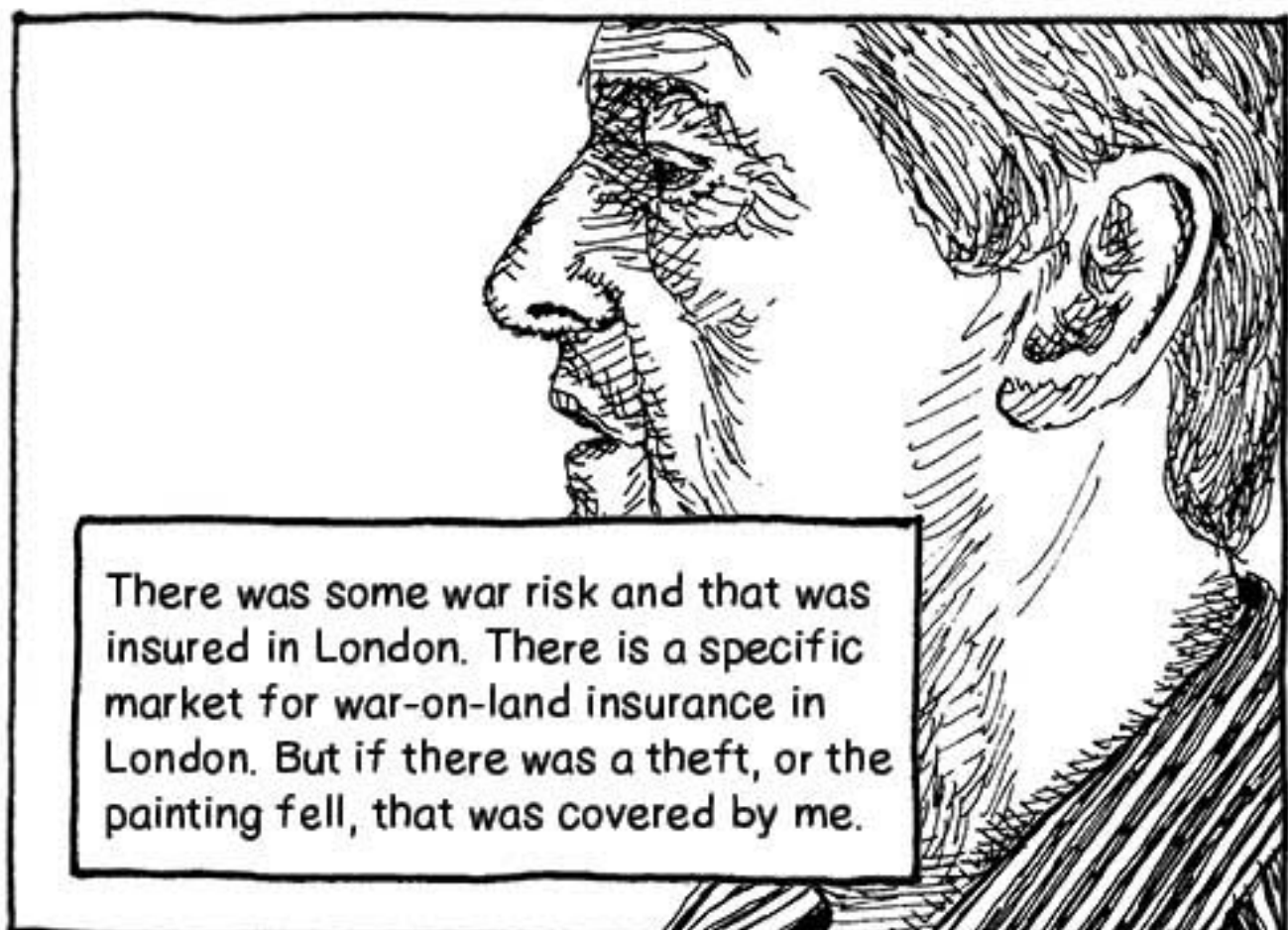
They could be minor like an everyday transport, but they could be big as you might expect in a country where things can happen.



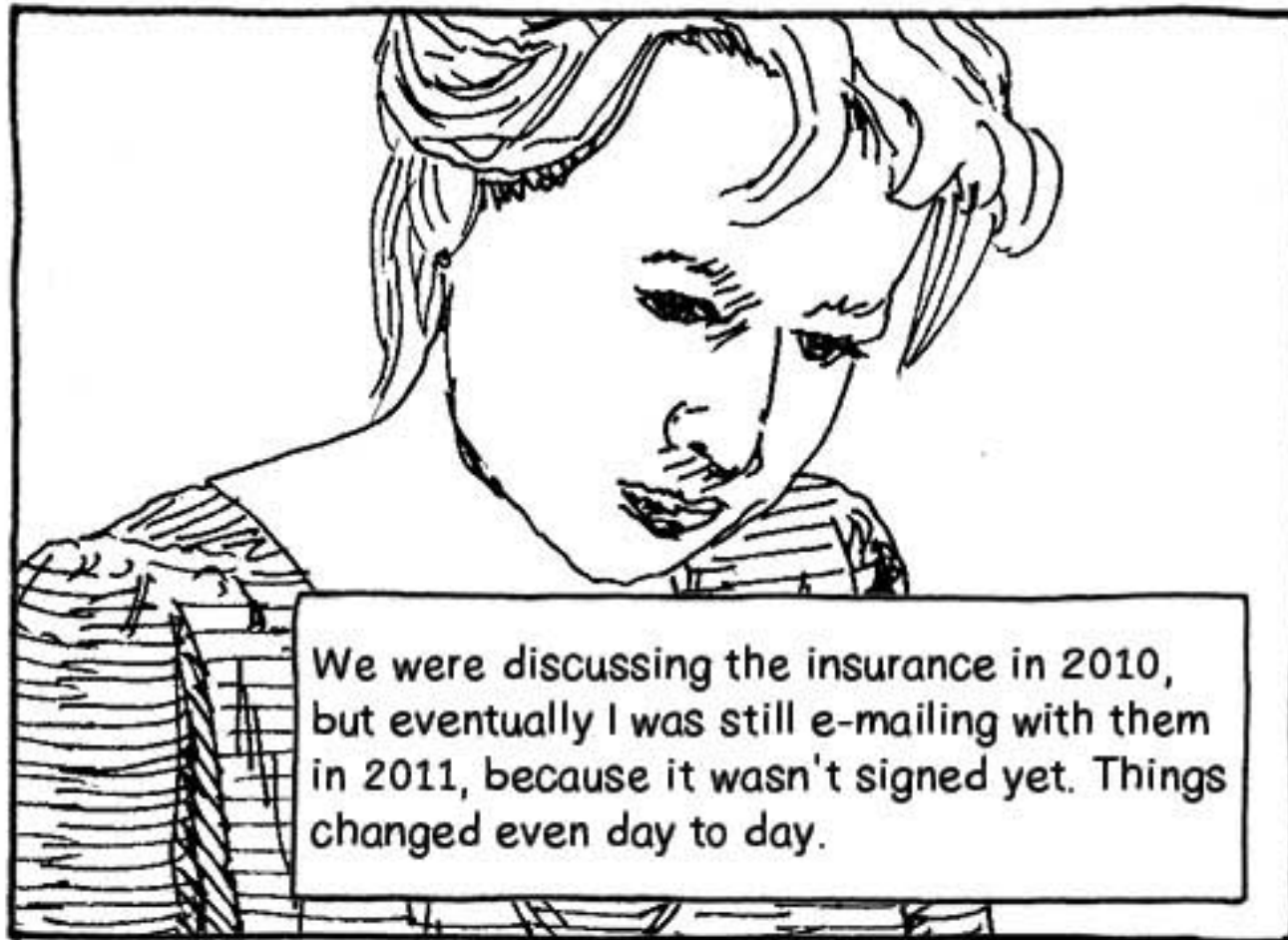
Plus the Arab Spring was coming, so the insurance company was extra-focused on the news.



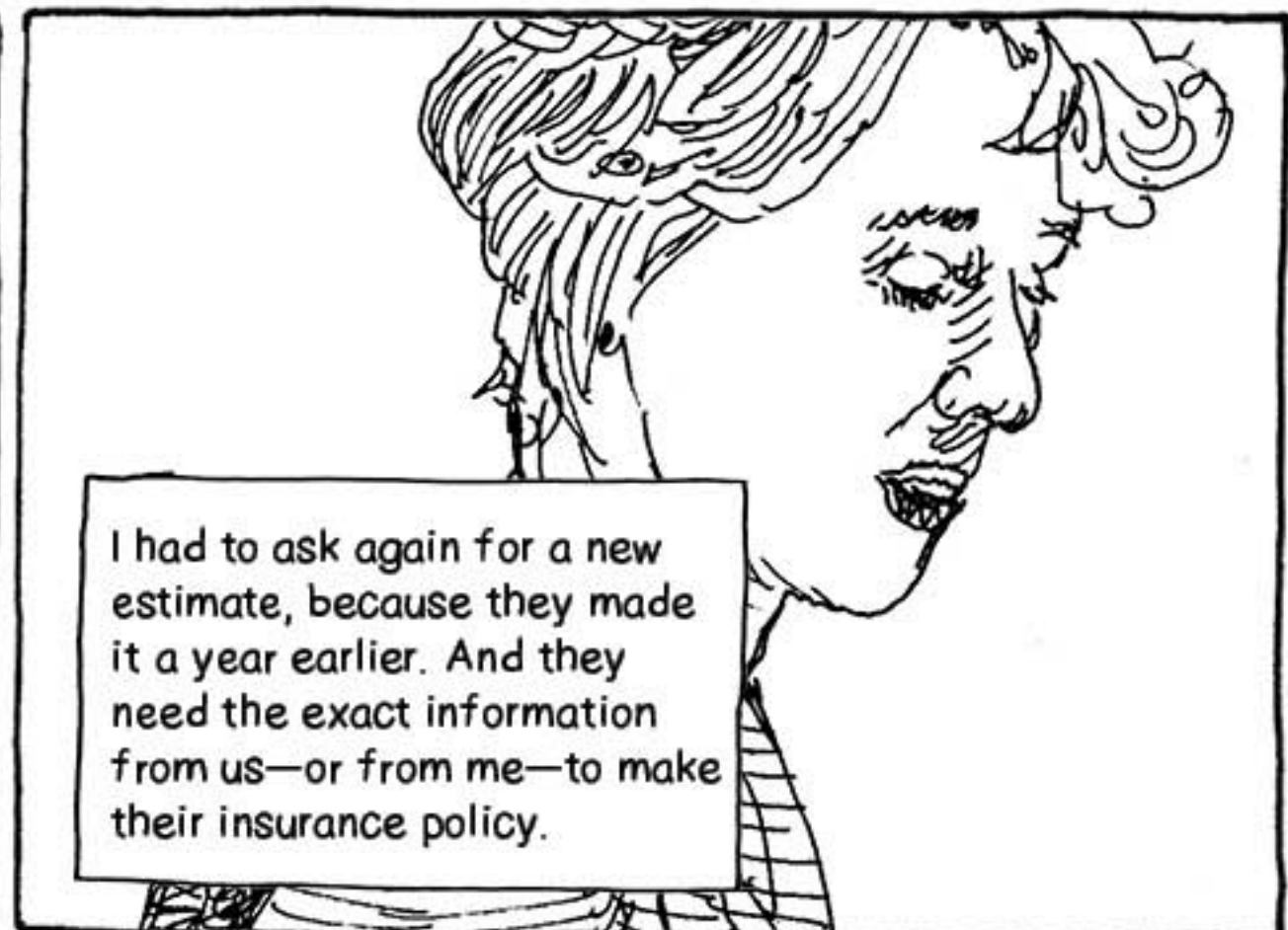
But in the end they still stuck with what we had agreed.



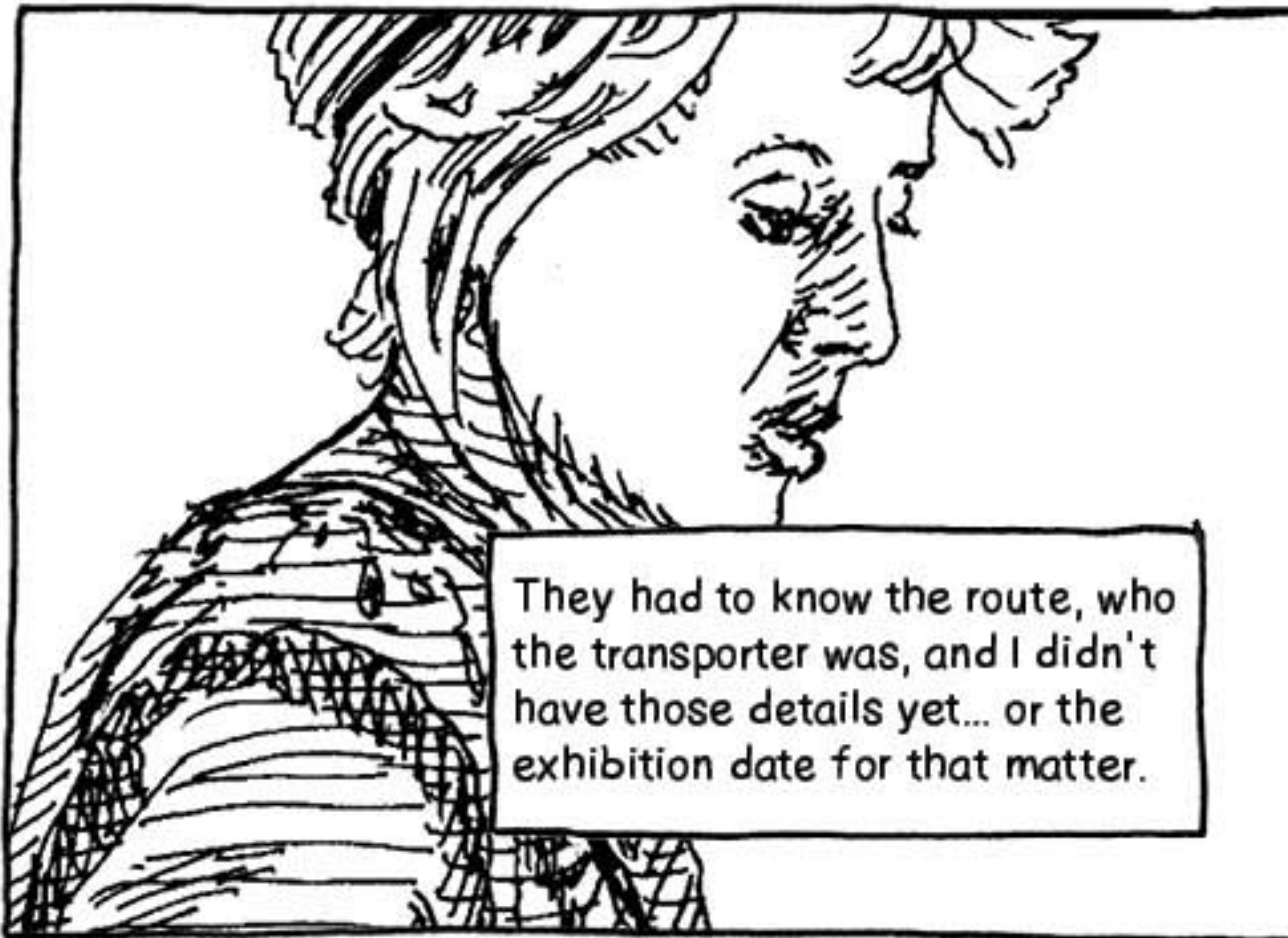
There was some war risk and that was insured in London. There is a specific market for war-on-land insurance in London. But if there was a theft, or the painting fell, that was covered by me.



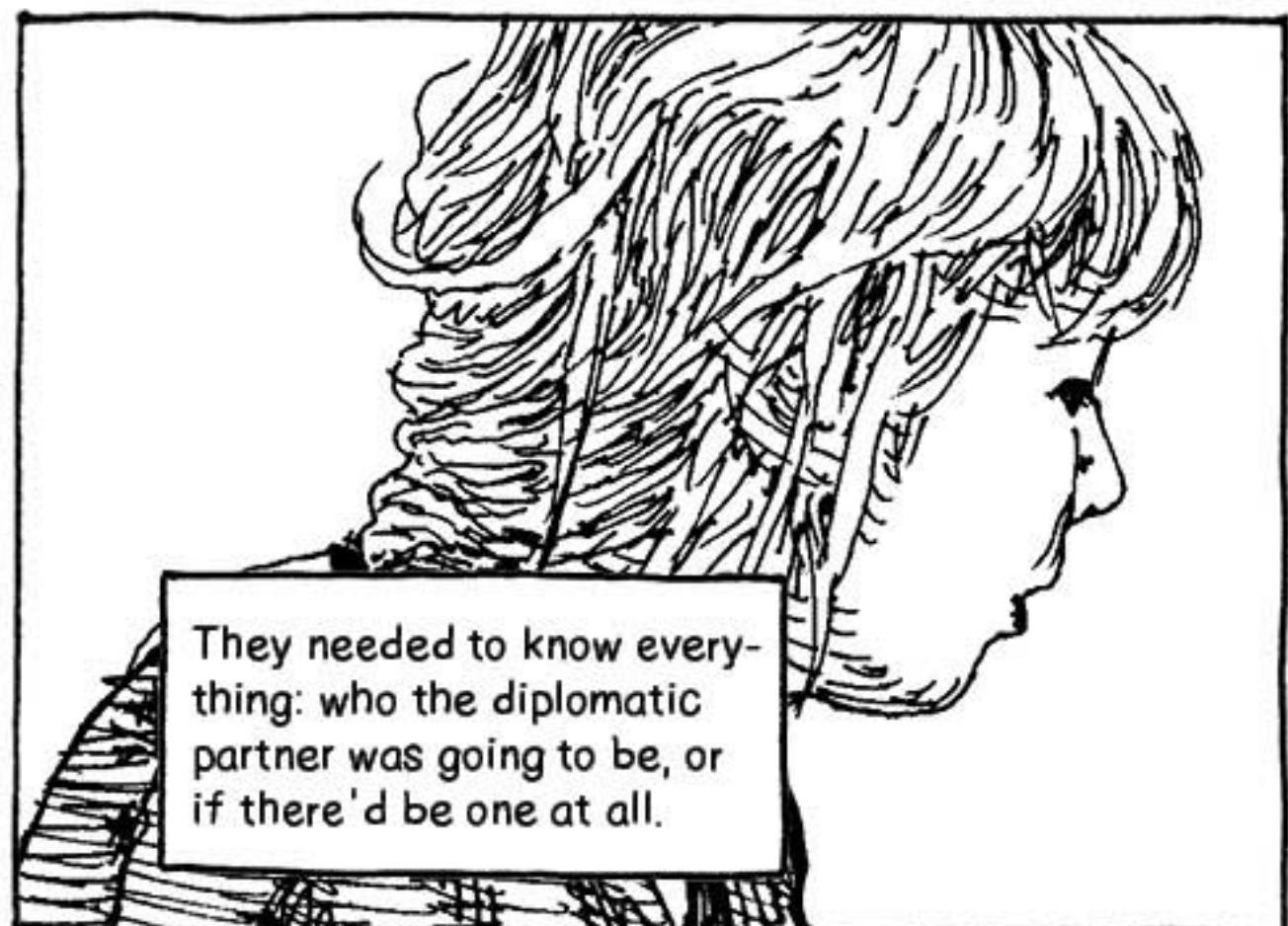
We were discussing the insurance in 2010, but eventually I was still e-mailing with them in 2011, because it wasn't signed yet. Things changed even day to day.



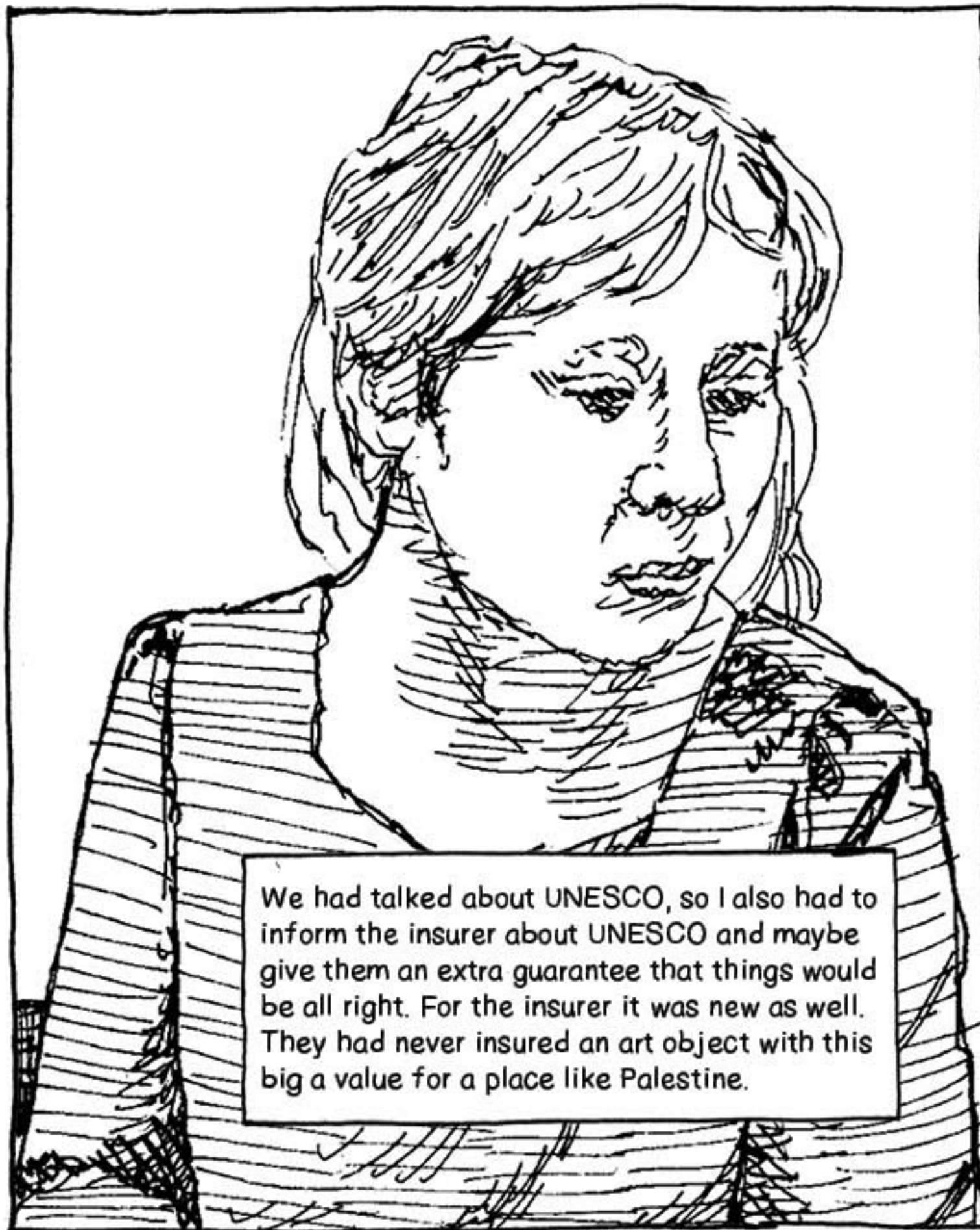
I had to ask again for a new estimate, because they made it a year earlier. And they need the exact information from us—or from me—to make their insurance policy.



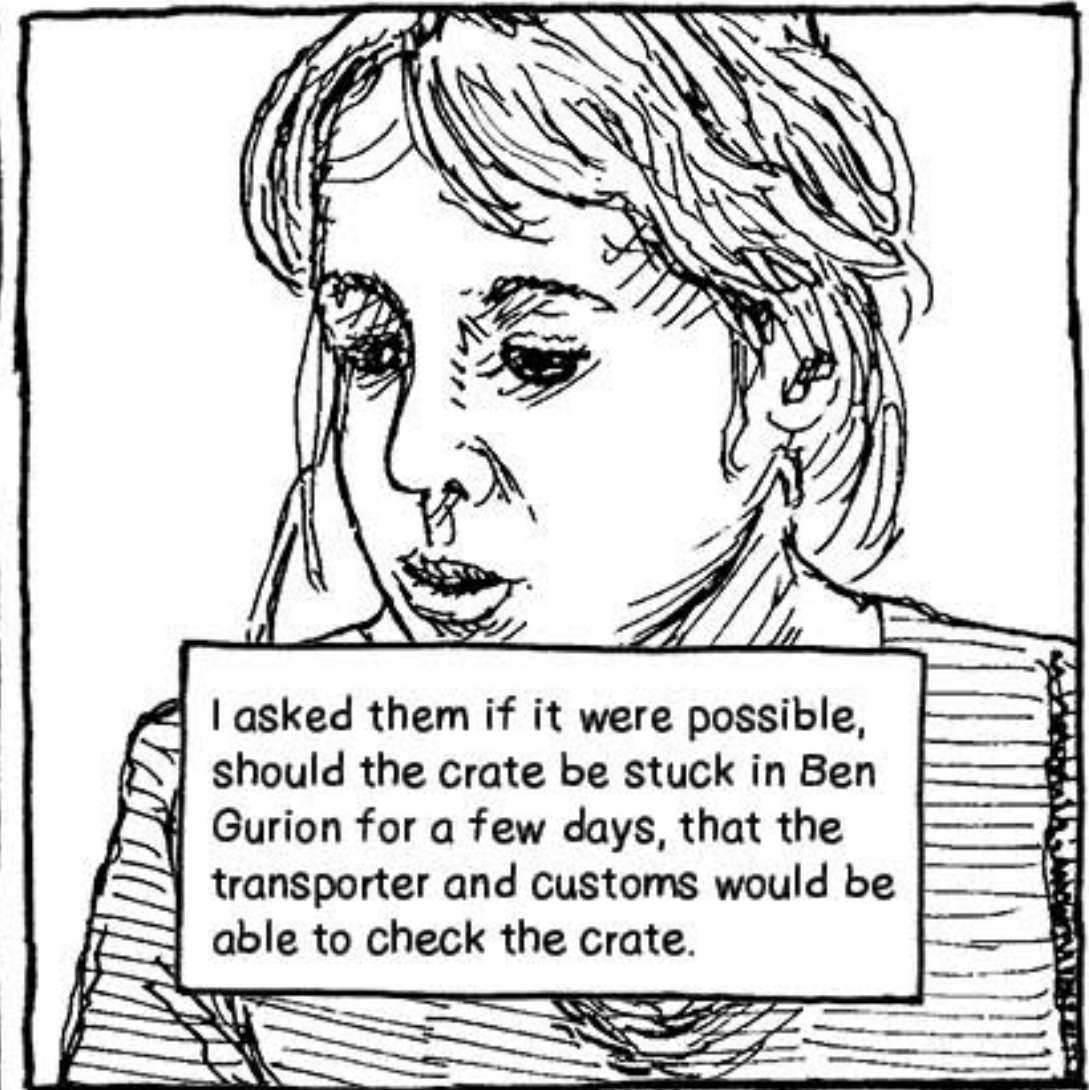
They had to know the route, who the transporter was, and I didn't have those details yet... or the exhibition date for that matter.



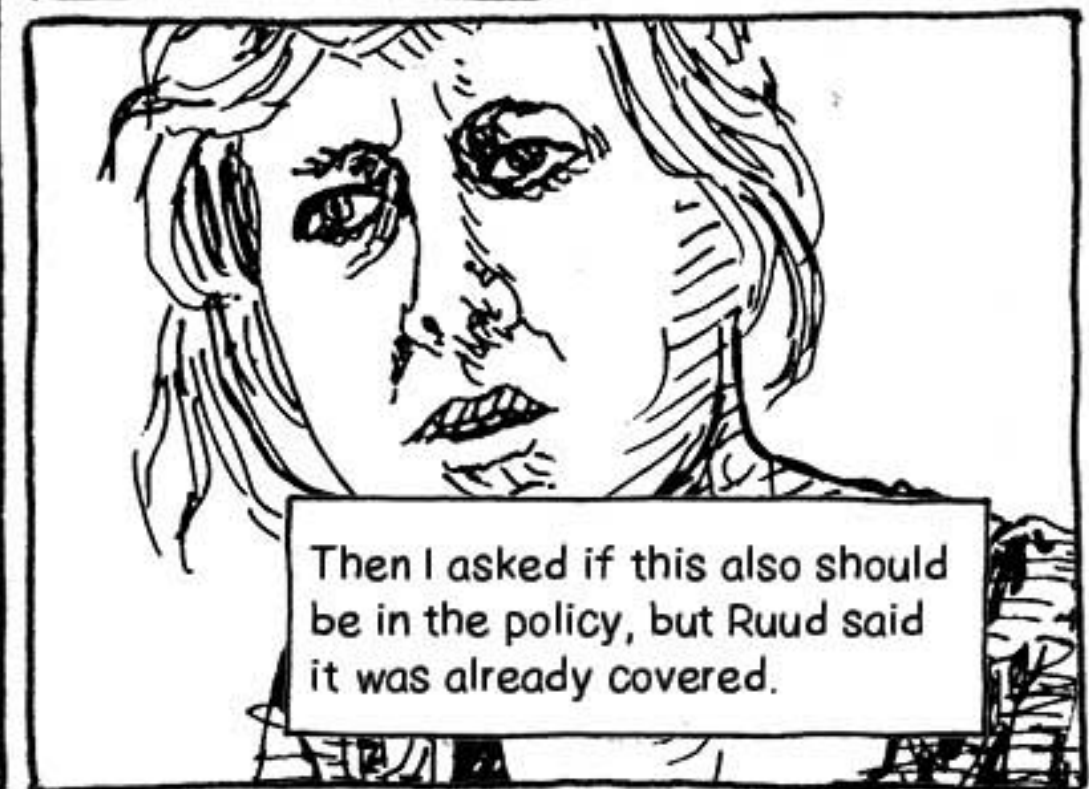
They needed to know everything: who the diplomatic partner was going to be, or if there'd be one at all.



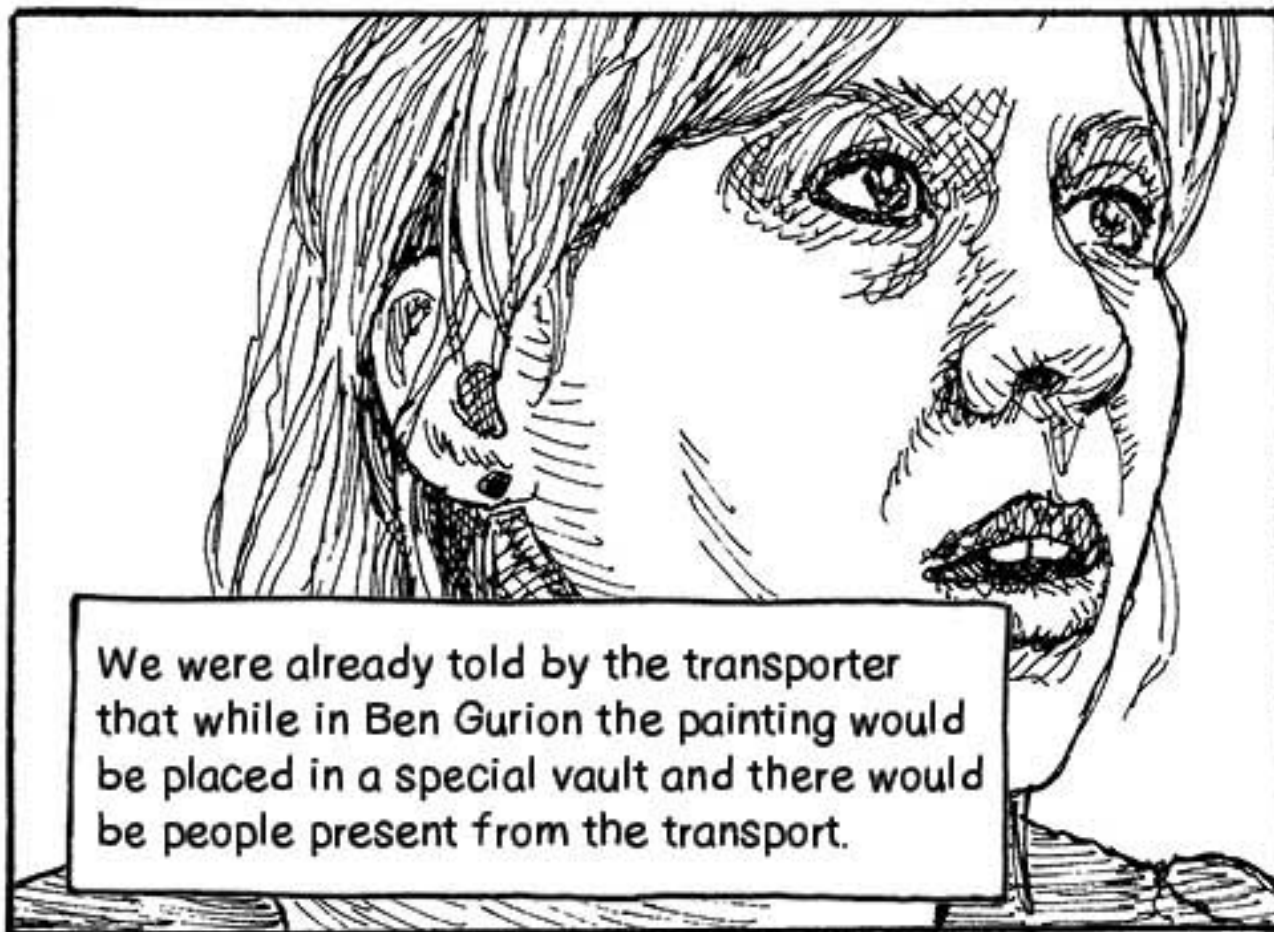
We had talked about UNESCO, so I also had to inform the insurer about UNESCO and maybe give them an extra guarantee that things would be all right. For the insurer it was new as well. They had never insured an art object with this big a value for a place like Palestine.



I asked them if it were possible, should the crate be stuck in Ben Gurion for a few days, that the transporter and customs would be able to check the crate.



Then I asked if this also should be in the policy, but Ruud said it was already covered.

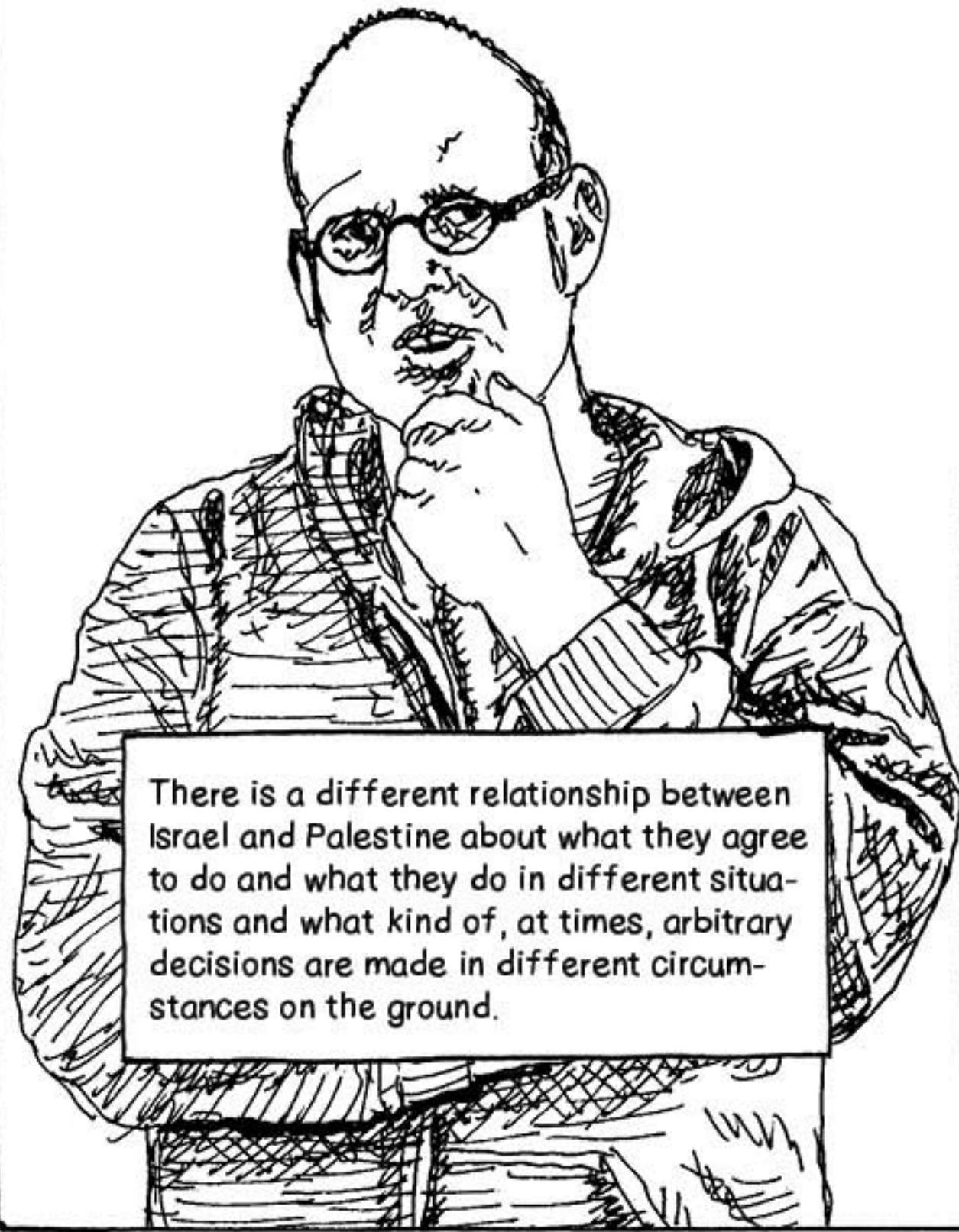


We were already told by the transporter that while in Ben Gurion the painting would be placed in a special vault and there would be people present from the transport.

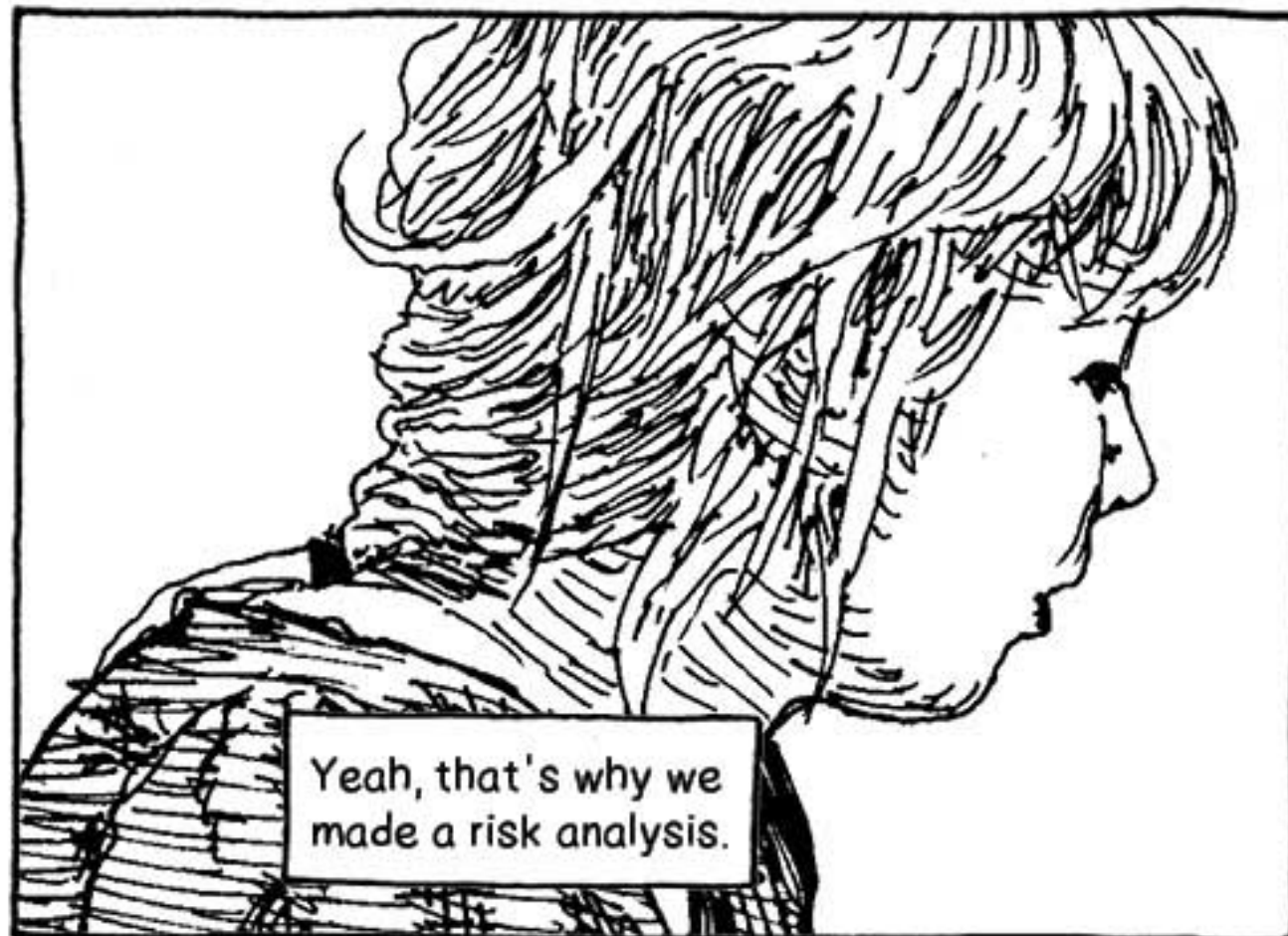


So that part was covered, but we knew none of us could be there...

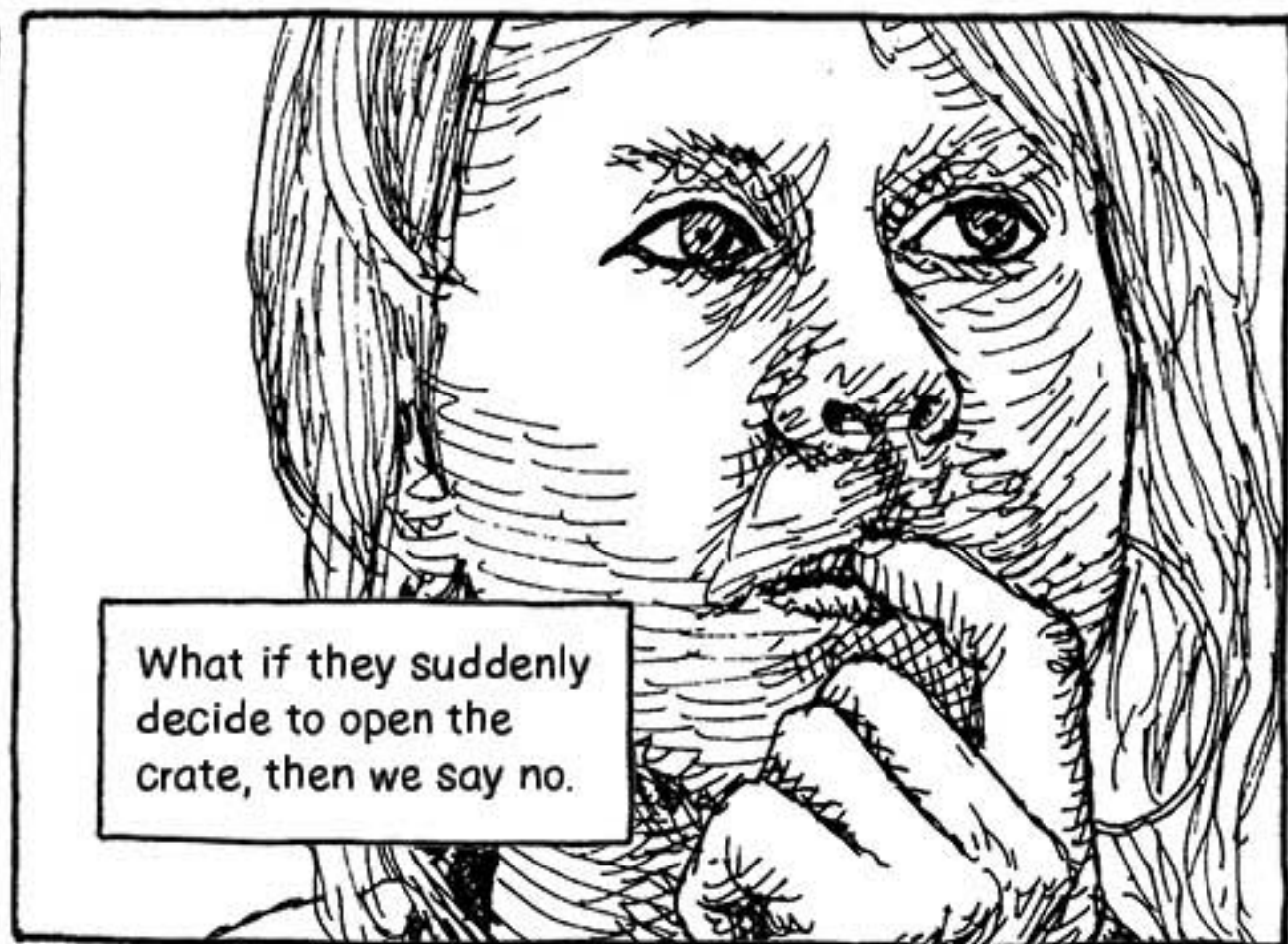
Speaking in the context of interview:



There is a different relationship between Israel and Palestine about what they agree to do and what they do in different situations and what kind of, at times, arbitrary decisions are made in different circumstances on the ground.



Yeah, that's why we made a risk analysis.



What if they suddenly decide to open the crate, then we say no.



We return, we go back. We go back maybe two kilometers, or we go back to Holland.

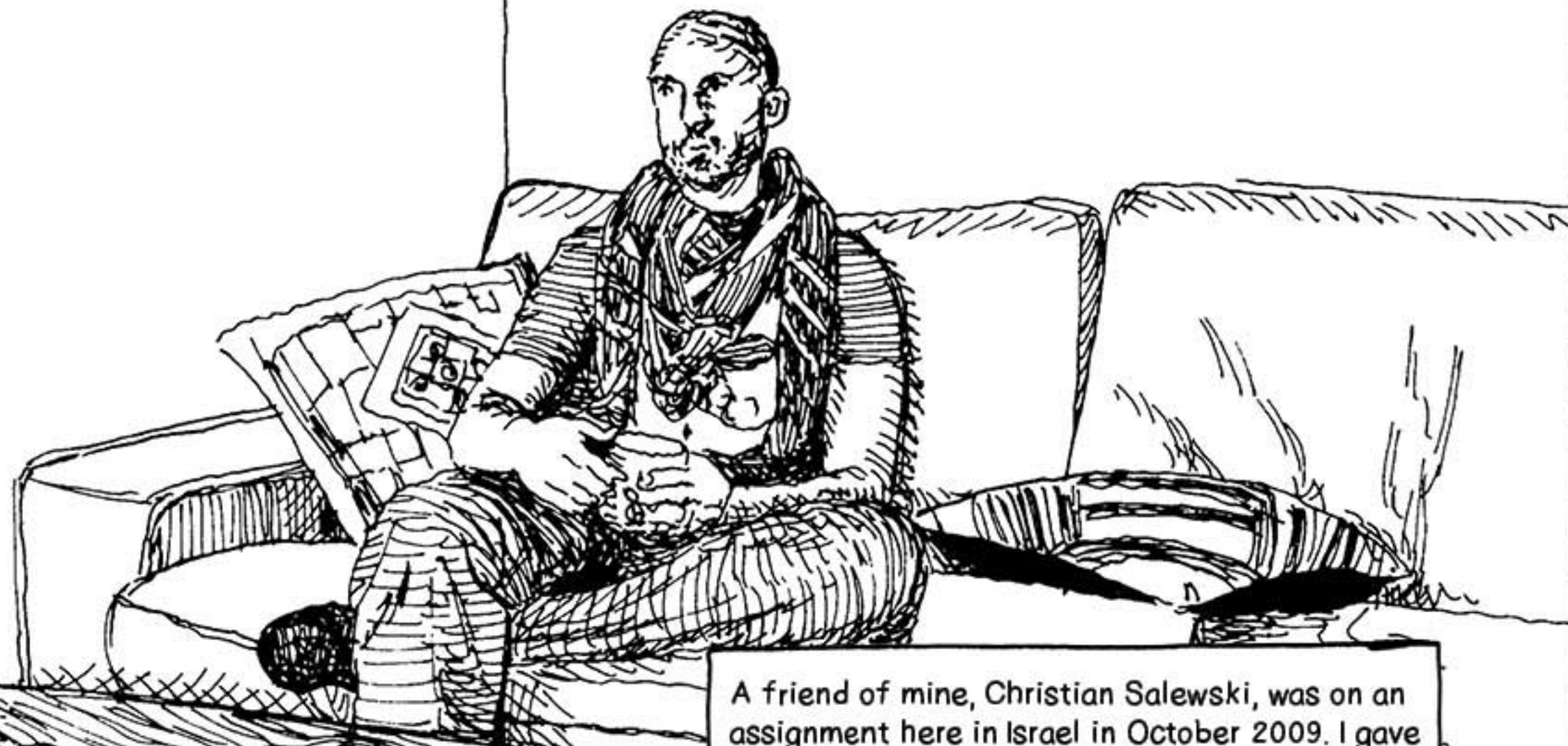


But if we don't want something to happen, we just say, "Stop!"

THE PRESS

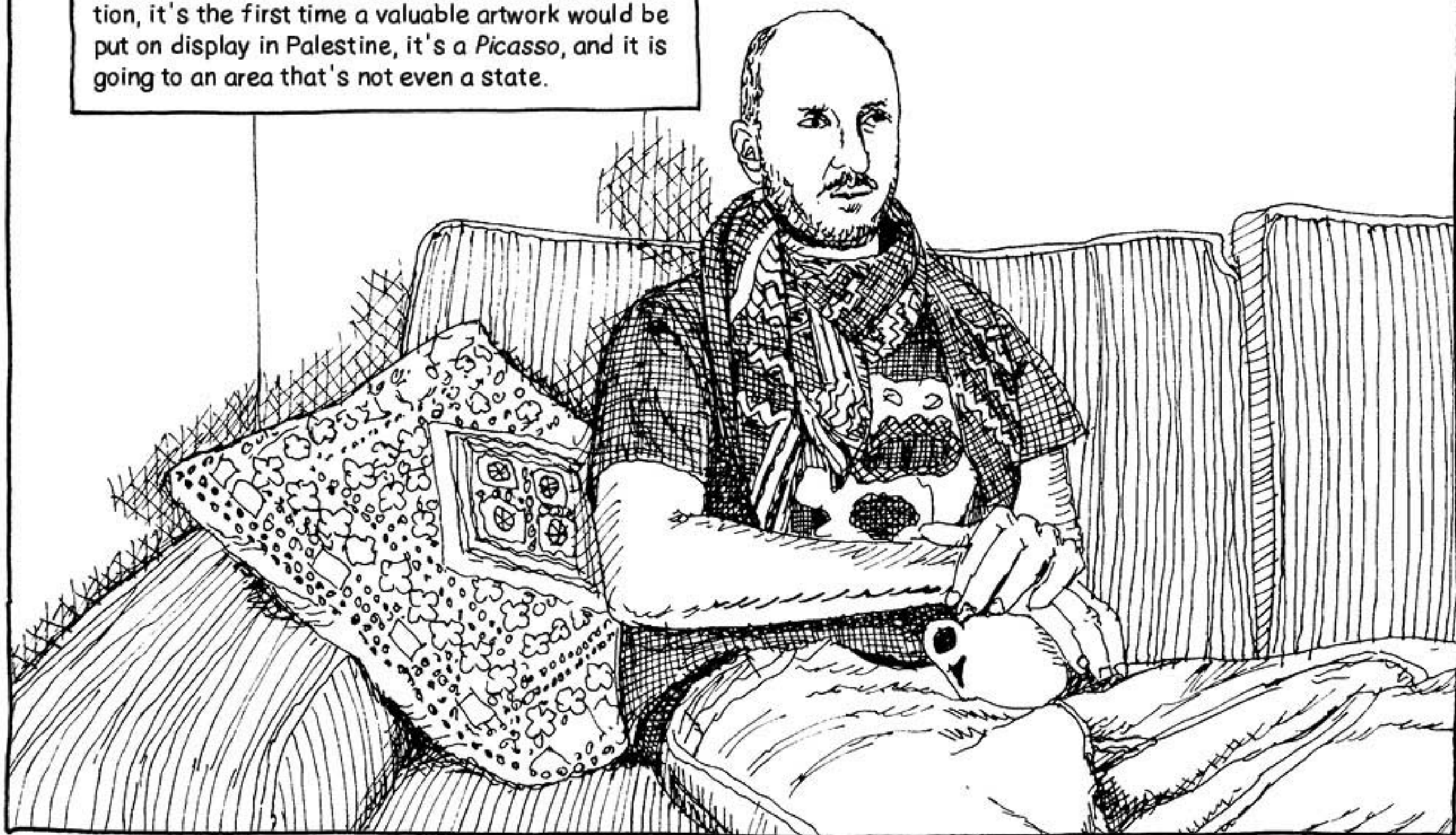


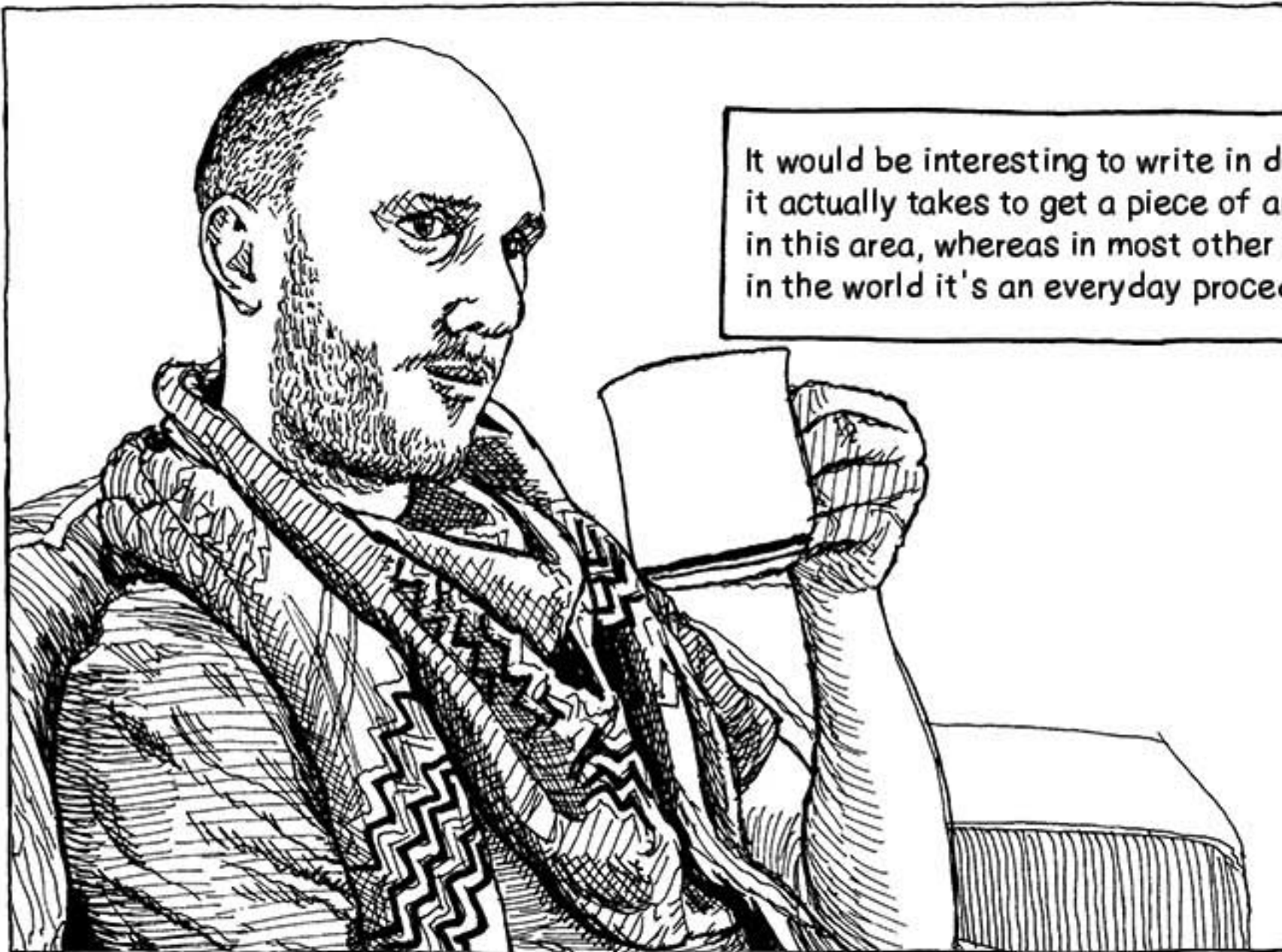
Fredy Gareis, at his apartment in
Tel Aviv, February 2012:



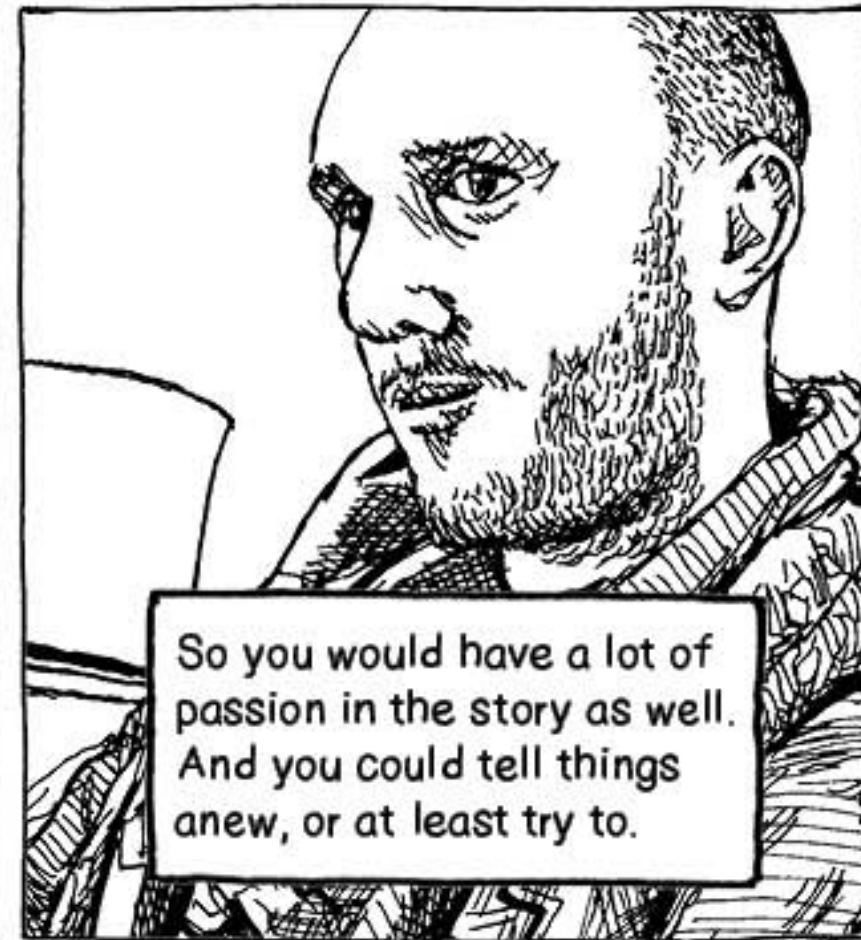
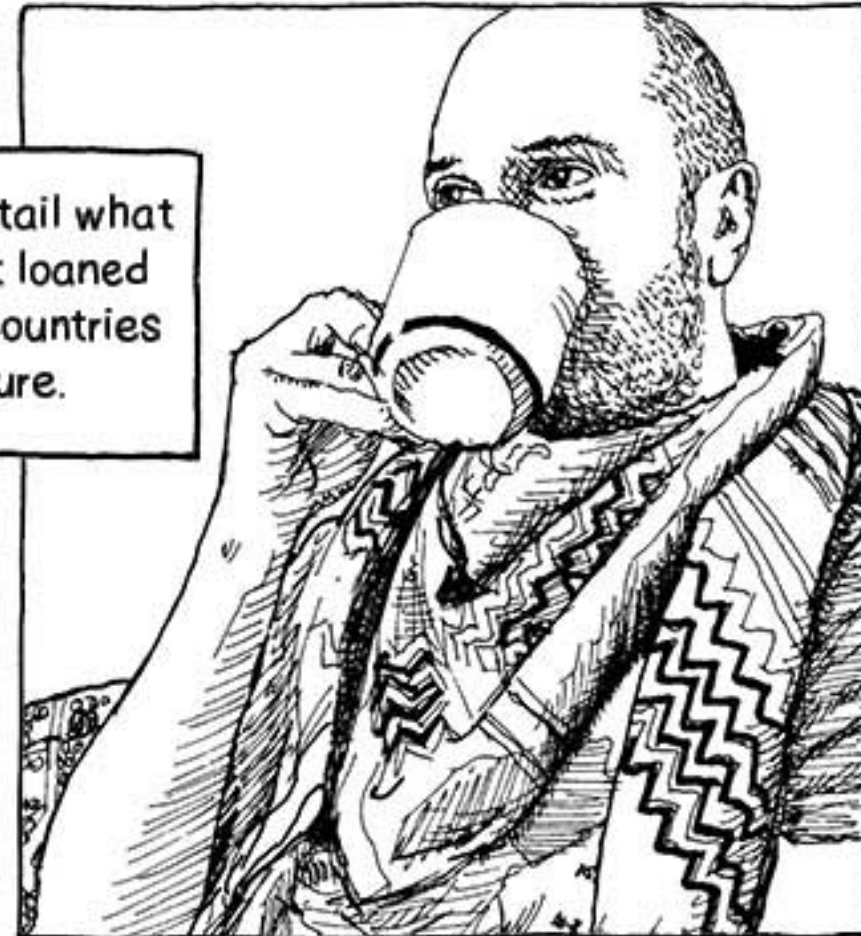
A friend of mine, Christian Salewski, was on an assignment here in Israel in October 2009. I gave him a couple of contacts to call, and one of the contacts he called was a girl who was involved in activism, and she said she was working on a project where a Picasso would come to Palestine.

So we got a couple of beers, and we kind of talked ourselves into it, what kind of great story it would make—because it's one picture, it's not an exhibition, it's the first time a valuable artwork would be put on display in Palestine, it's a *Picasso*, and it is going to an area that's not even a state.





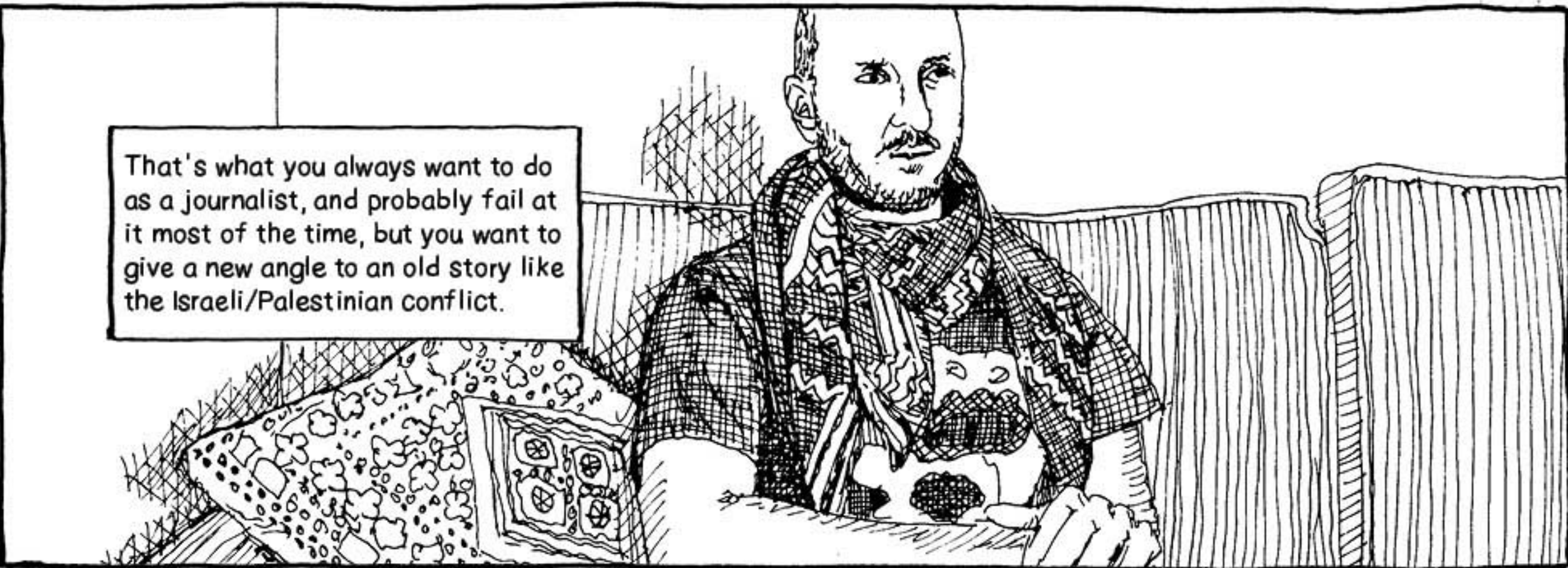
It would be interesting to write in detail what it actually takes to get a piece of art loaned in this area, whereas in most other countries in the world it's an everyday procedure.



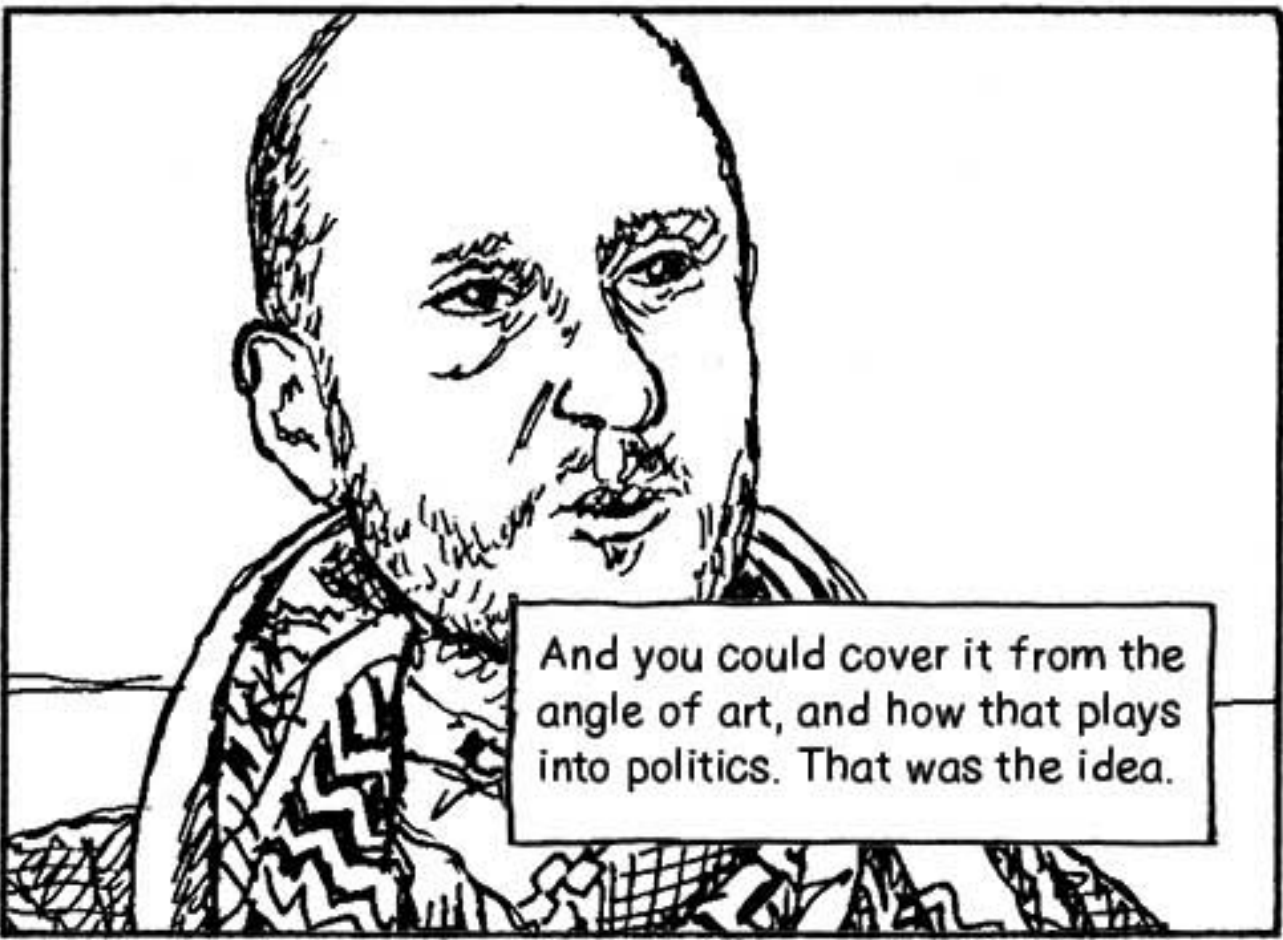
So you would have a lot of passion in the story as well. And you could tell things anew, or at least try to.




The more we talked about it, the cooler we thought the story would be, because what we gathered from the initial research was that a lot of people would be involved who are kind of going out of the way to make this happen.

A black and white line drawing of a man with a beard and a patterned scarf sitting at a table. He is looking towards the camera. On the table in front of him is a laptop. To his left is a patterned bag. The background shows a window with vertical blinds.

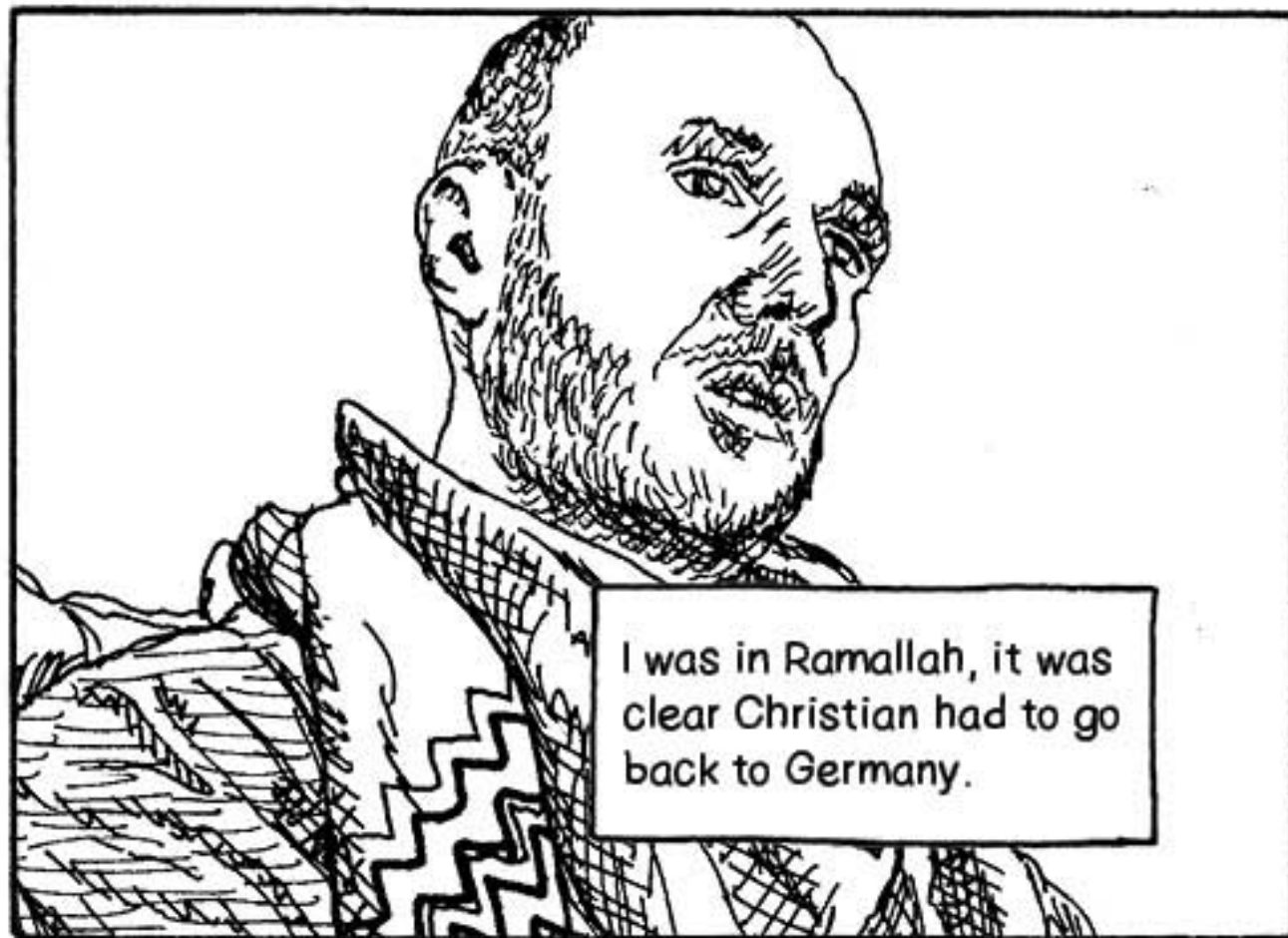
That's what you always want to do as a journalist, and probably fail at it most of the time, but you want to give a new angle to an old story like the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

A close-up black and white line drawing of the man's face. He has a beard and is wearing a patterned scarf. He is looking slightly to the right.

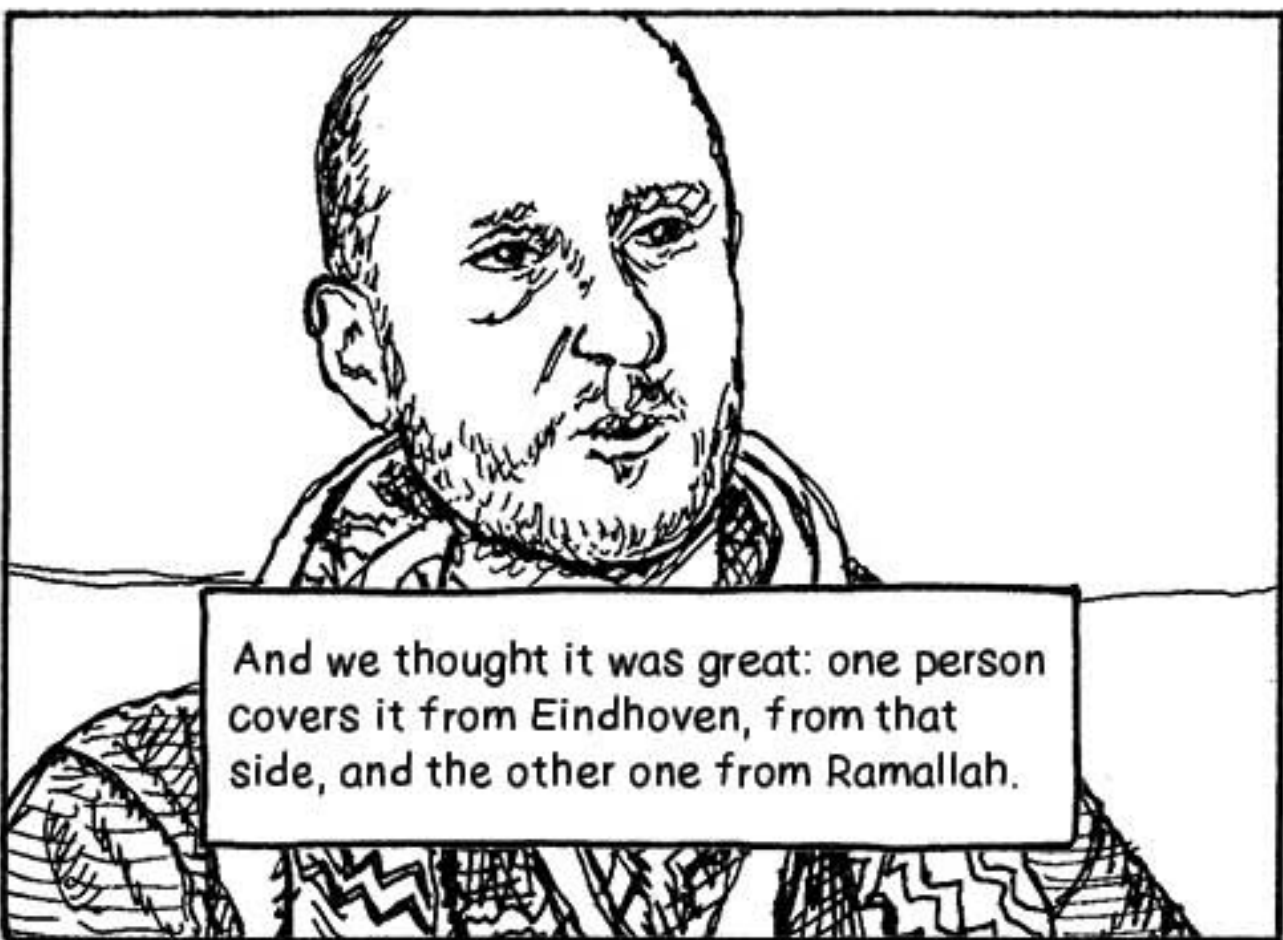
And you could cover it from the angle of art, and how that plays into politics. That was the idea.

A close-up black and white line drawing of the man's face. He has a beard and is wearing a patterned scarf. He is looking slightly to the left.

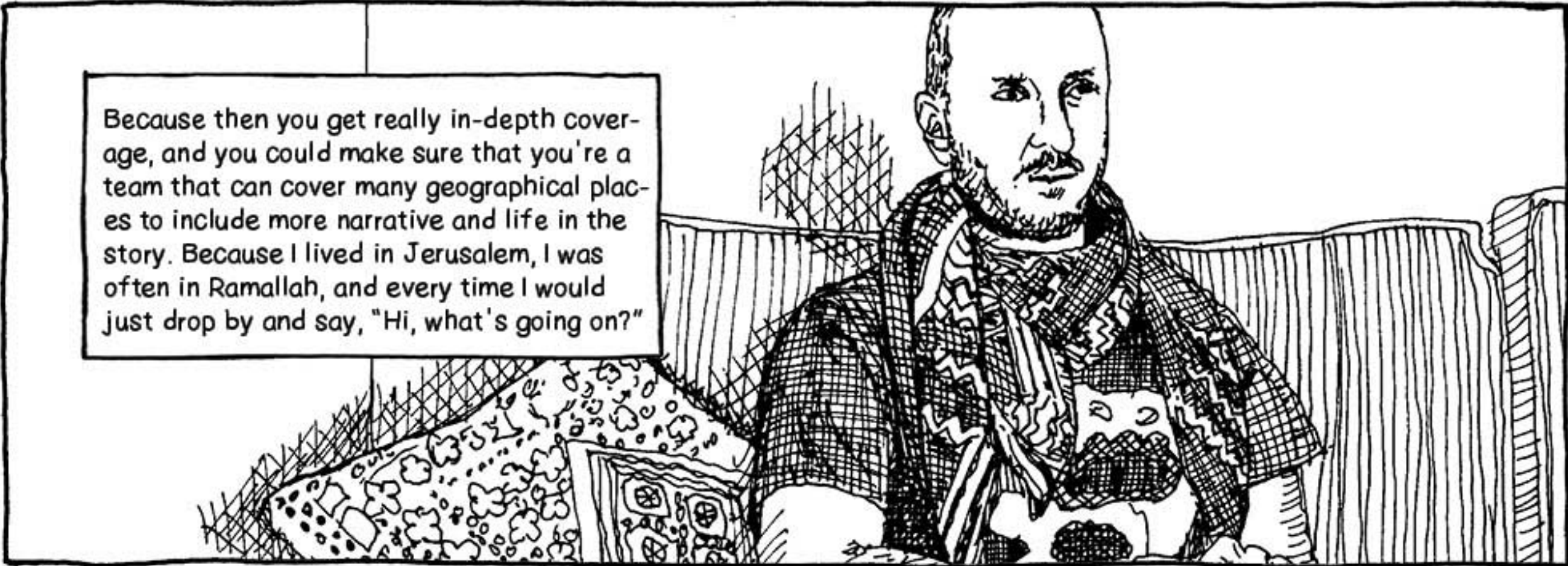
Well, we started tracking the story even before the pitch was approved.



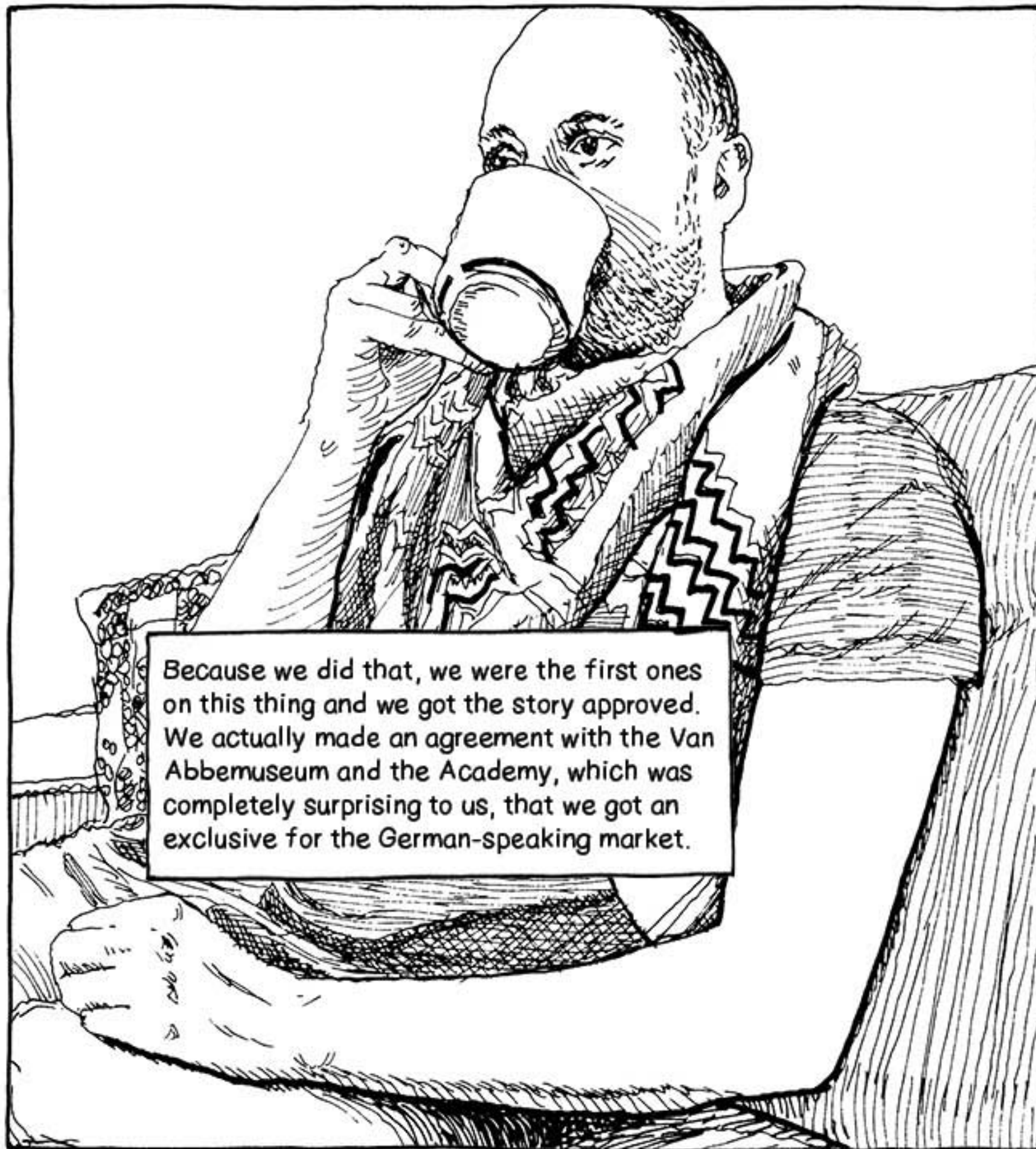
I was in Ramallah, it was clear Christian had to go back to Germany.



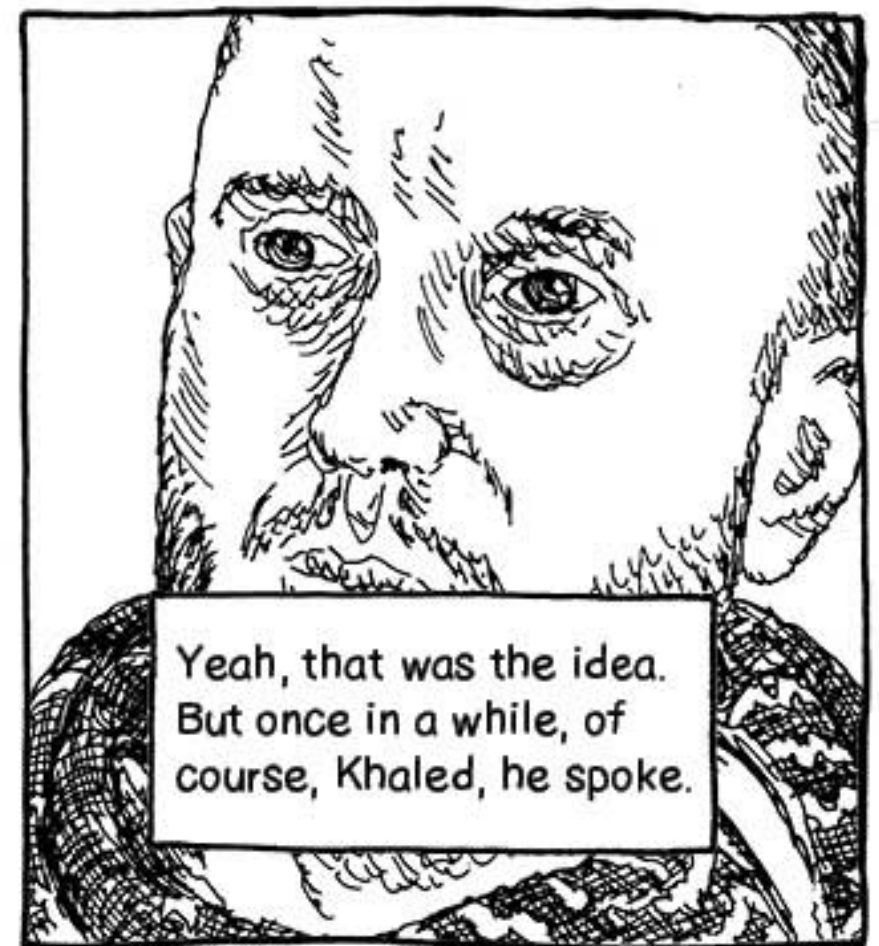
And we thought it was great: one person covers it from Eindhoven, from that side, and the other one from Ramallah.



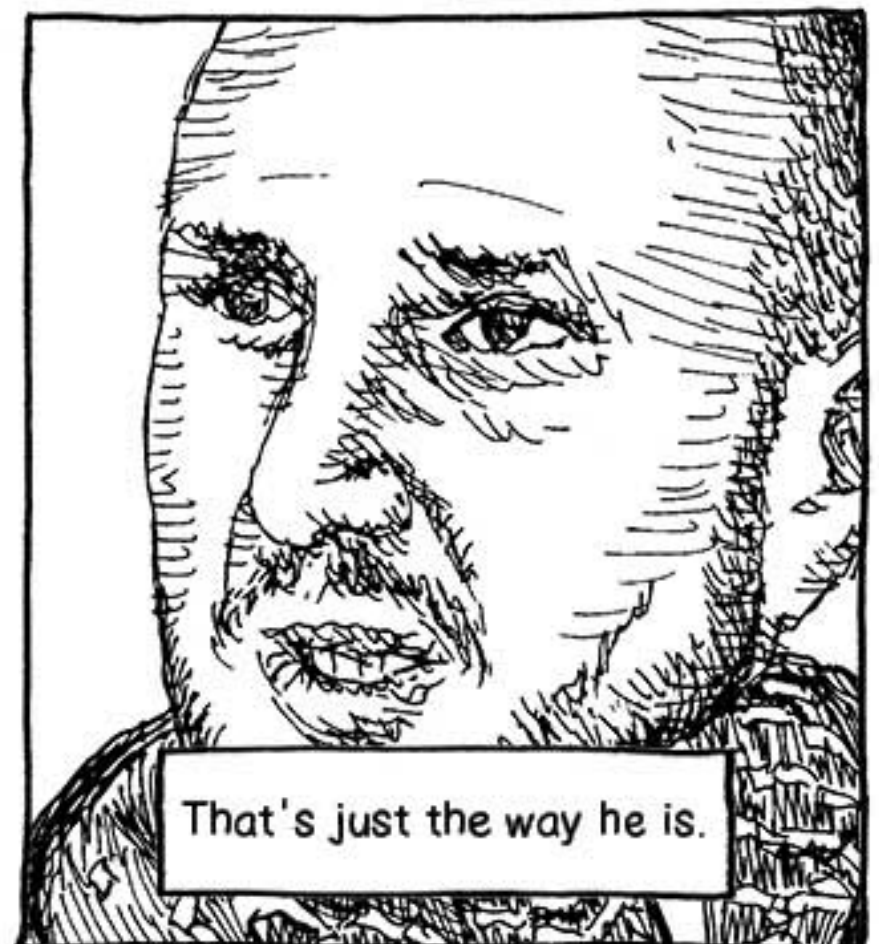
Because then you get really in-depth coverage, and you could make sure that you're a team that can cover many geographical places to include more narrative and life in the story. Because I lived in Jerusalem, I was often in Ramallah, and every time I would just drop by and say, "Hi, what's going on?"



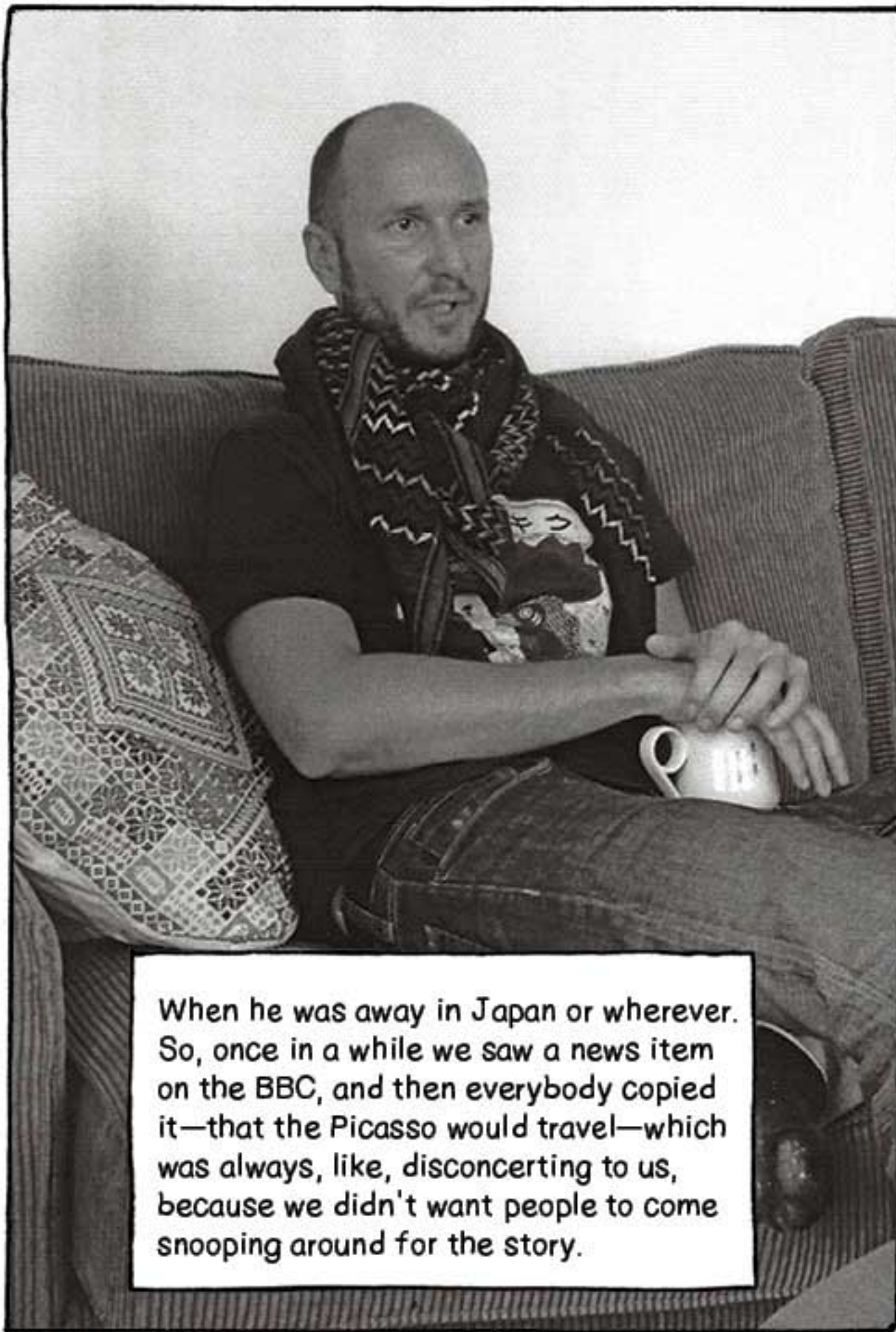
Because we did that, we were the first ones on this thing and we got the story approved. We actually made an agreement with the Van Abbemuseum and the Academy, which was completely surprising to us, that we got an exclusive for the German-speaking market.



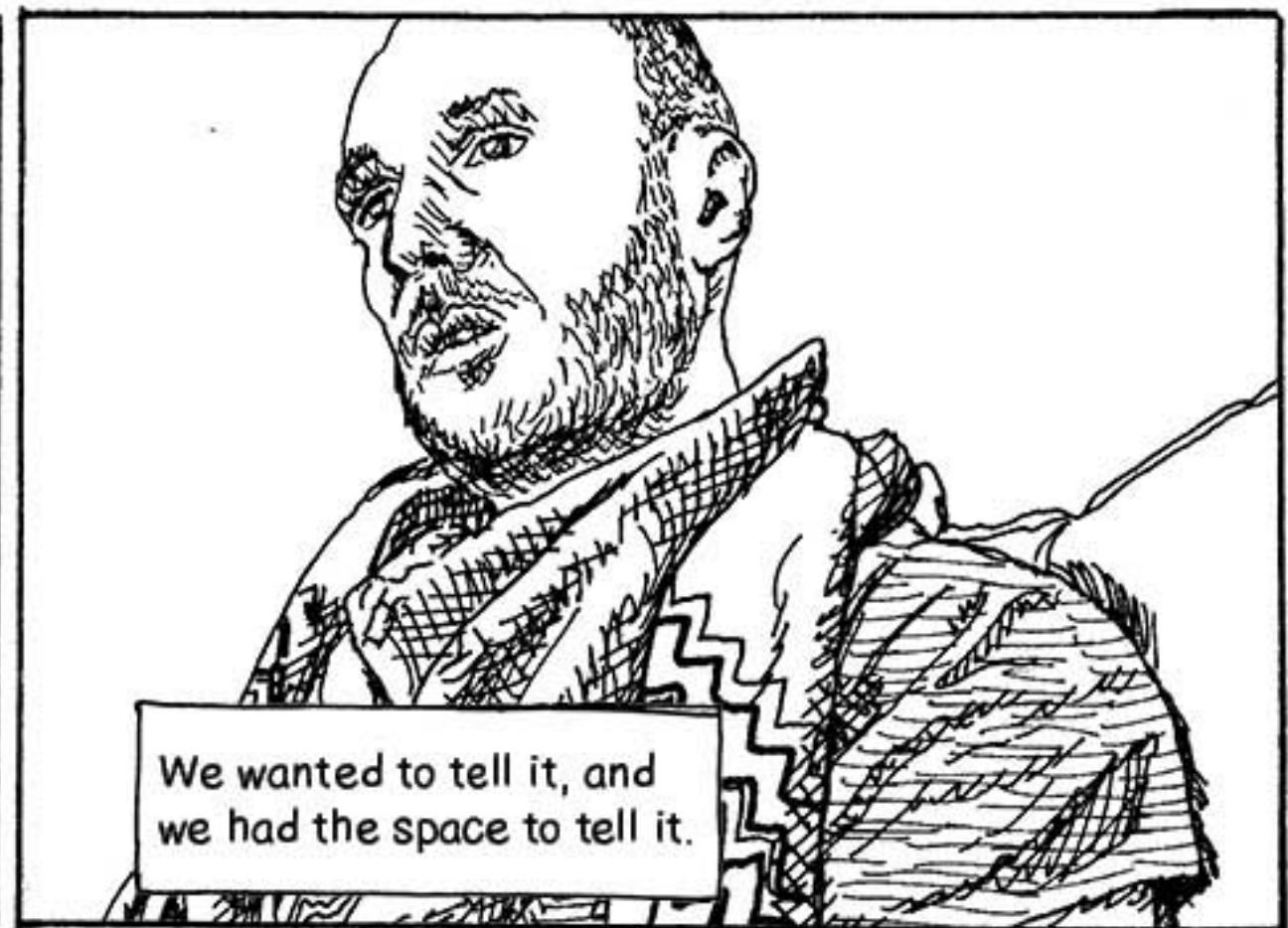
Yeah, that was the idea. But once in a while, of course, Khaled, he spoke.



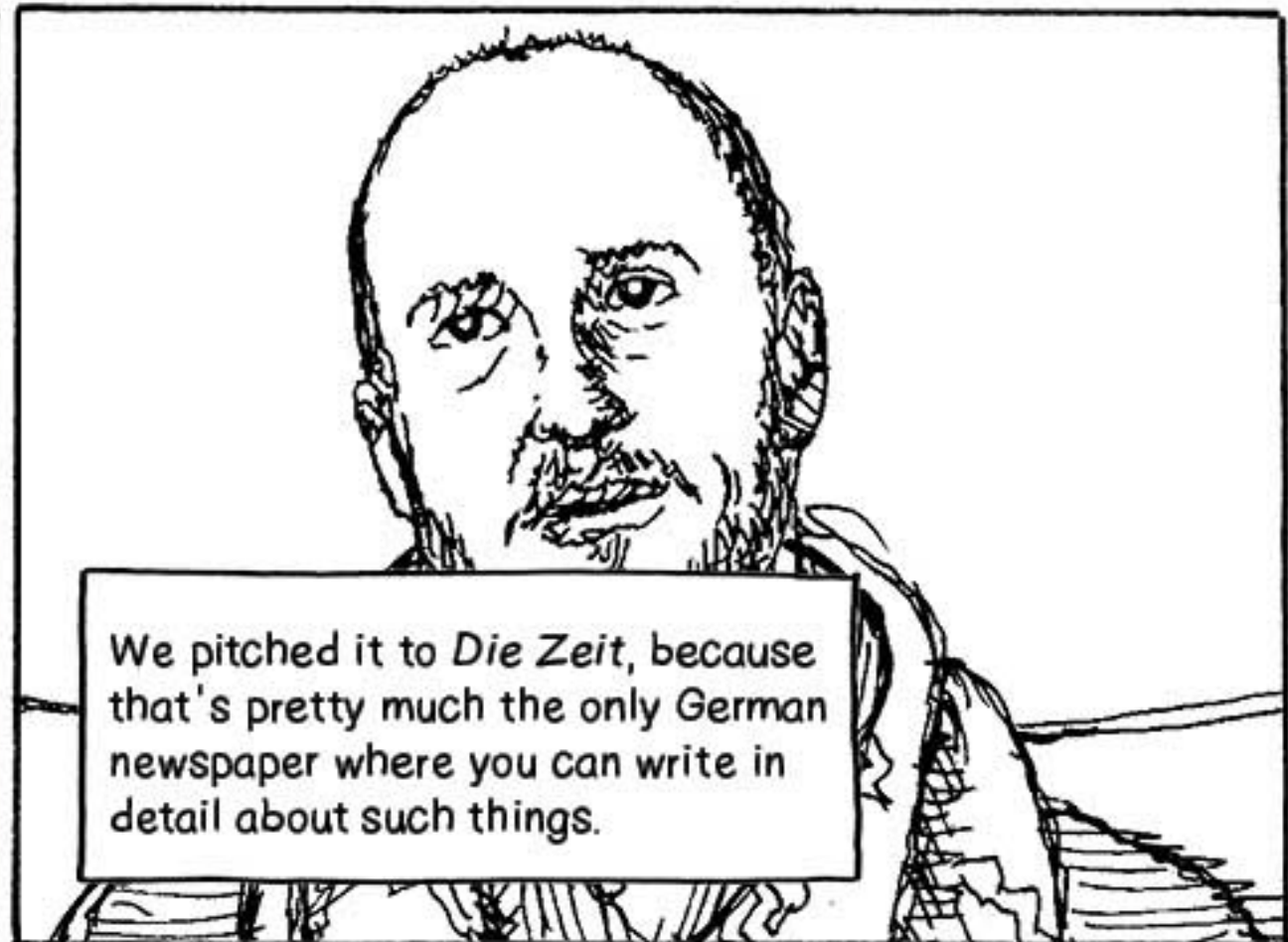
That's just the way he is.



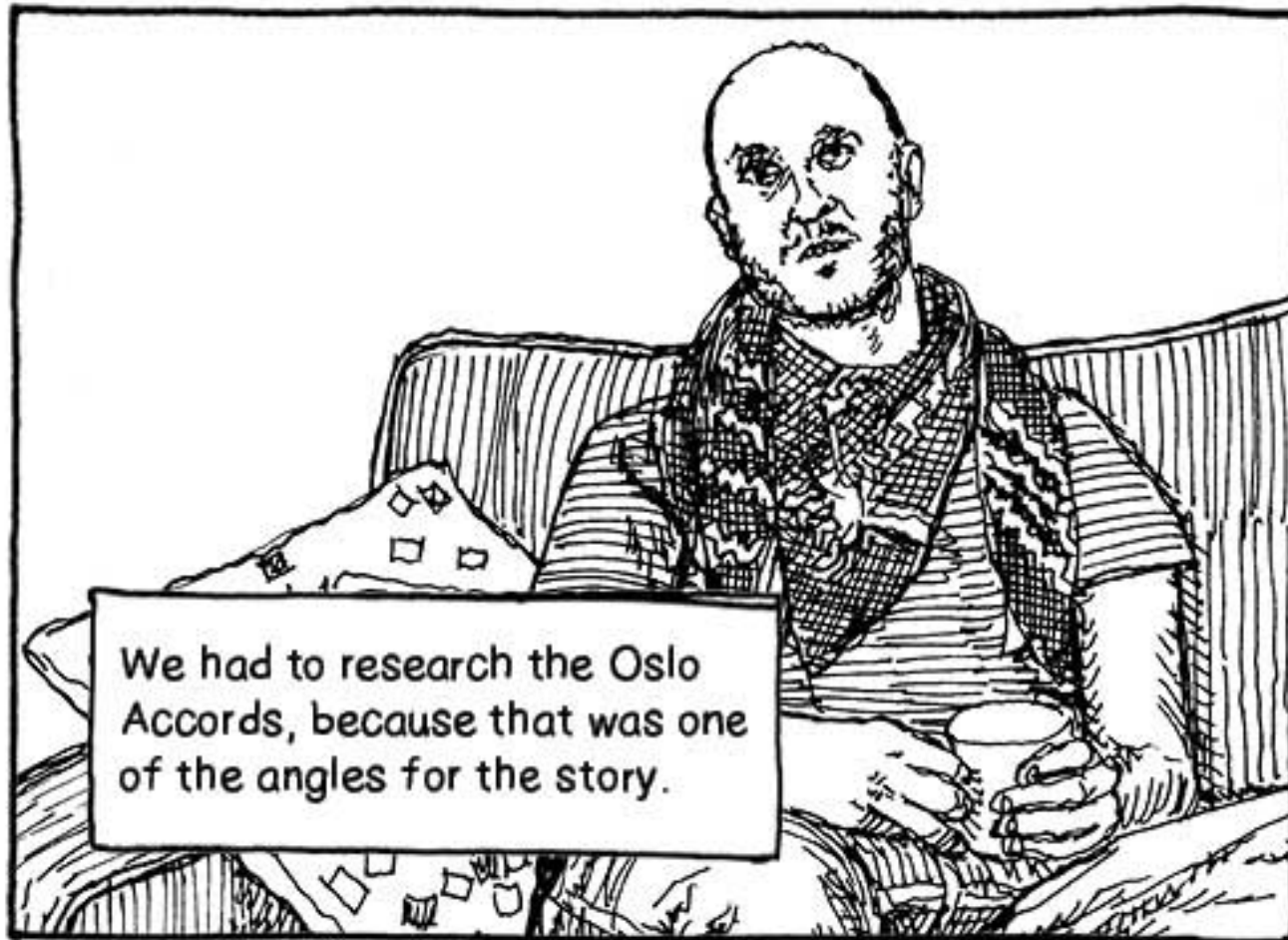
When he was away in Japan or wherever. So, once in a while we saw a news item on the BBC, and then everybody copied it—that the Picasso would travel—which was always, like, disconcerting to us, because we didn't want people to come snooping around for the story.



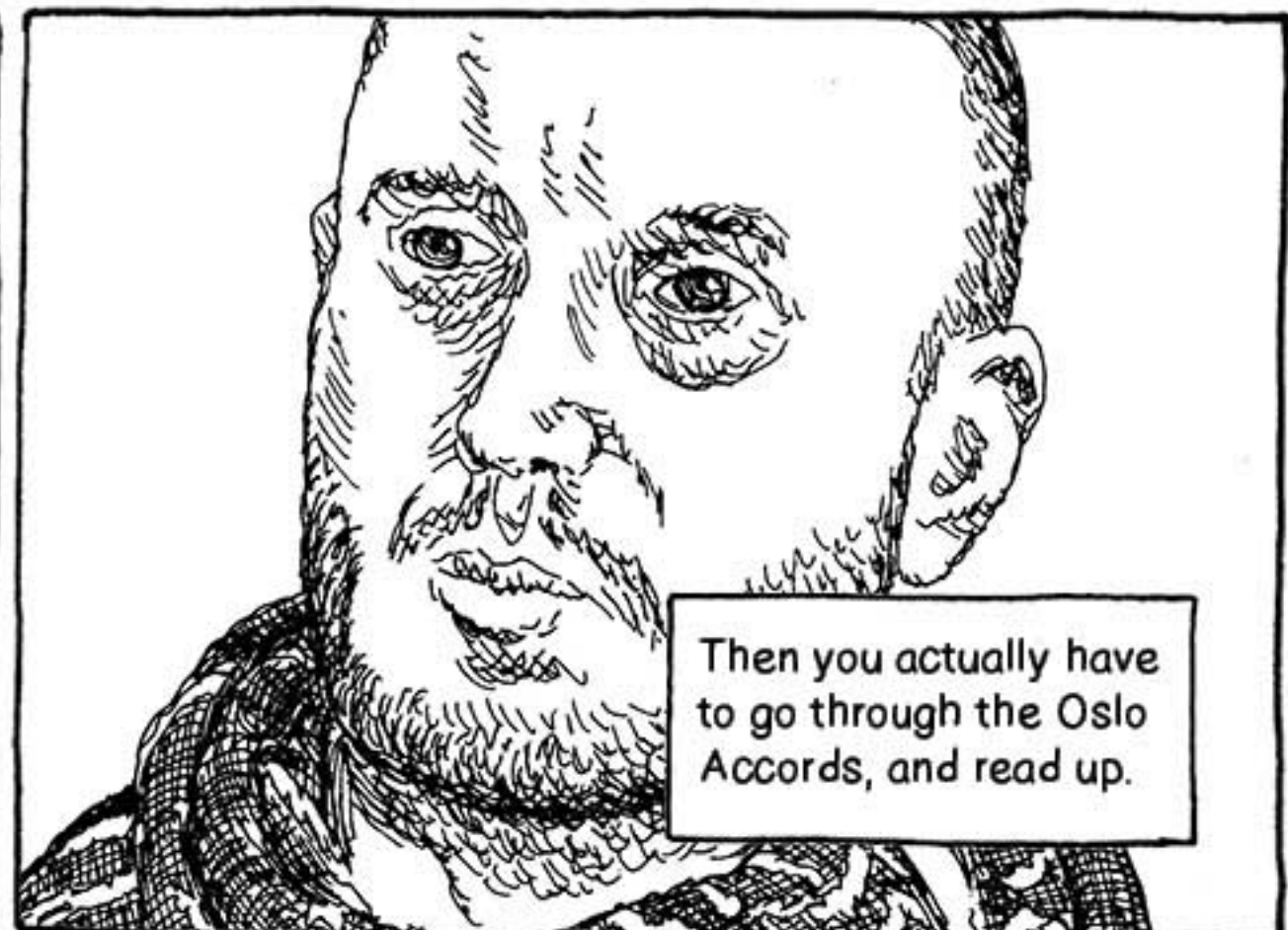
We wanted to tell it, and we had the space to tell it.



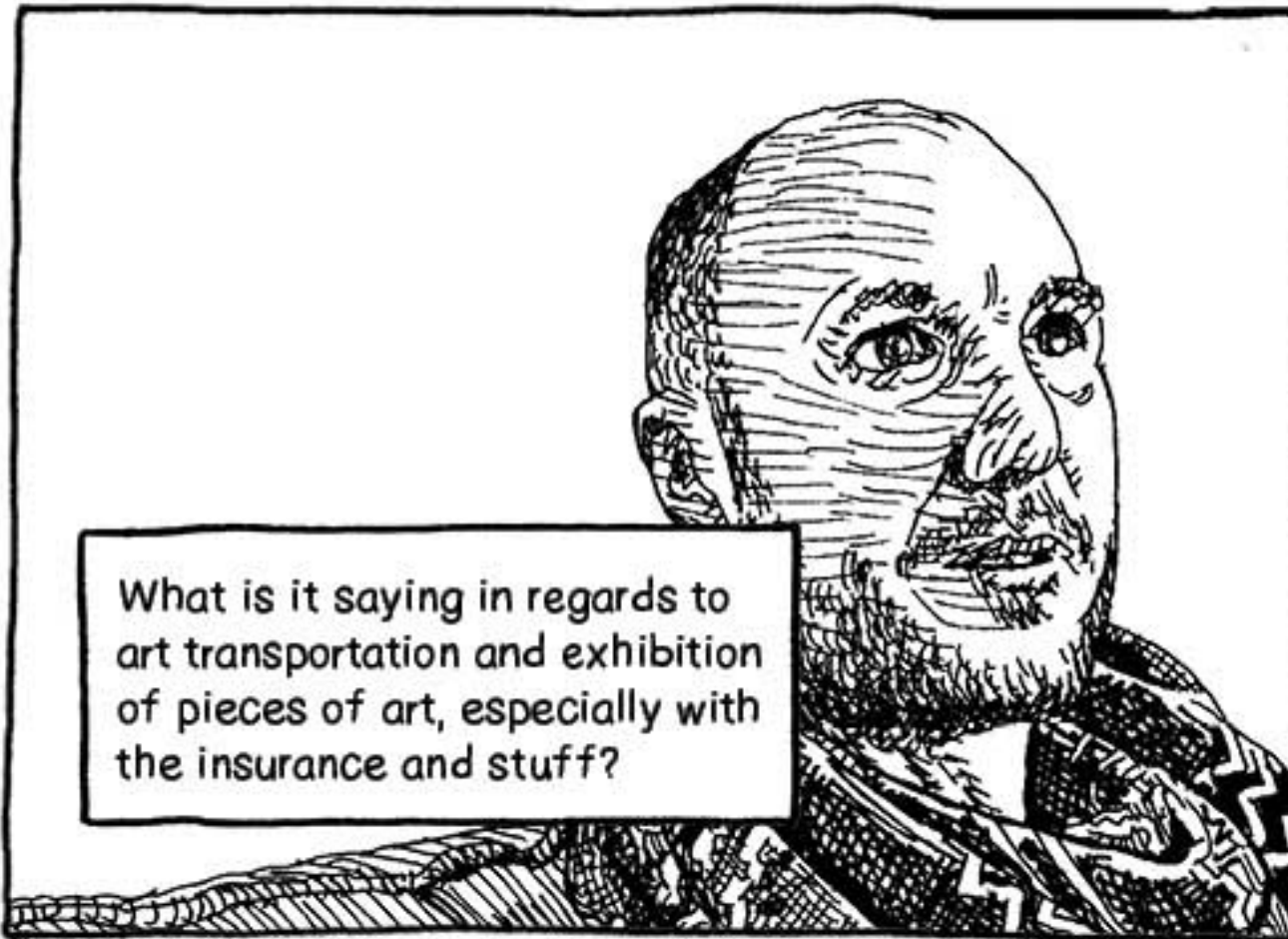
We pitched it to *Die Zeit*, because that's pretty much the only German newspaper where you can write in detail about such things.



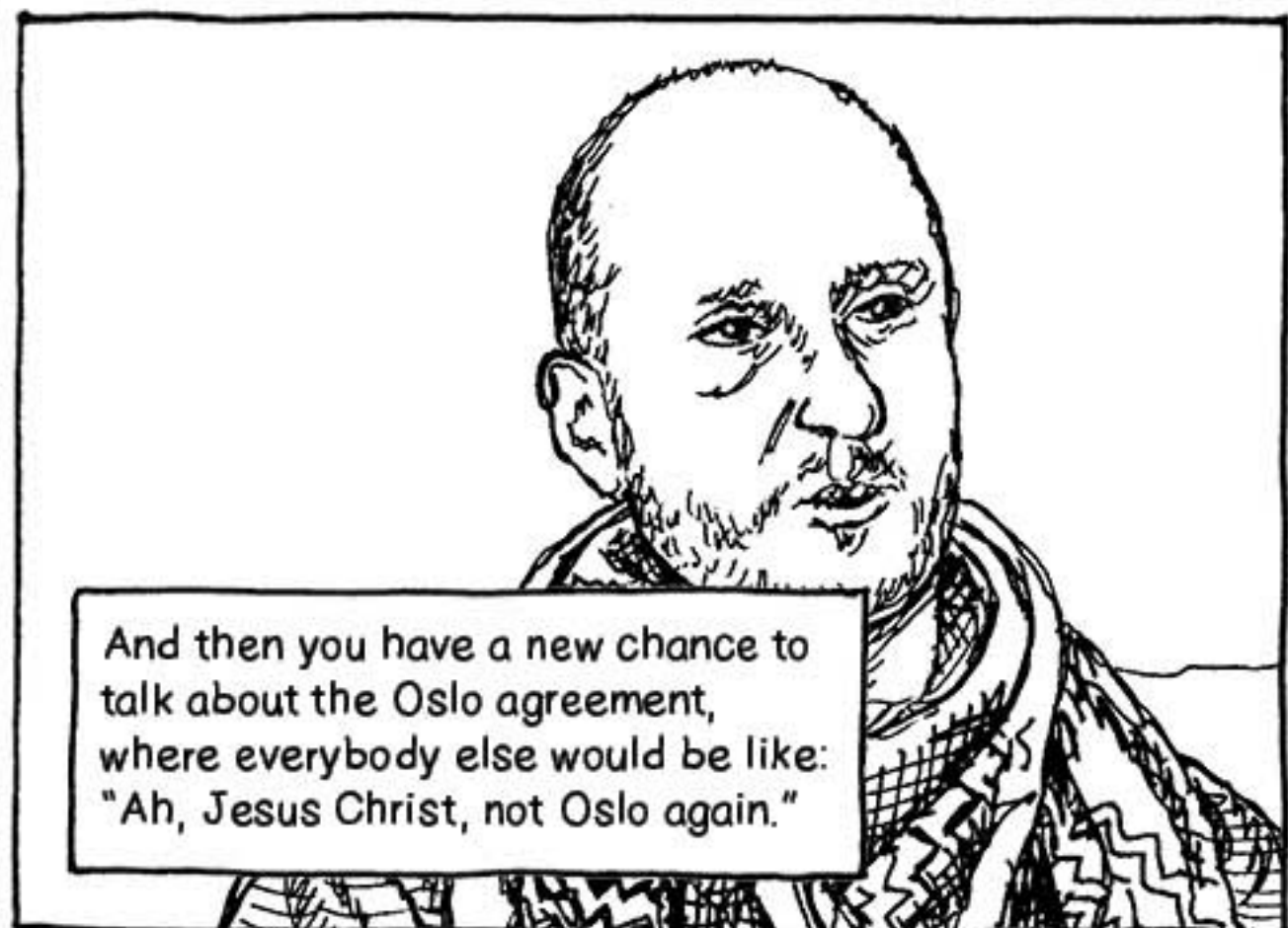
We had to research the Oslo Accords, because that was one of the angles for the story.



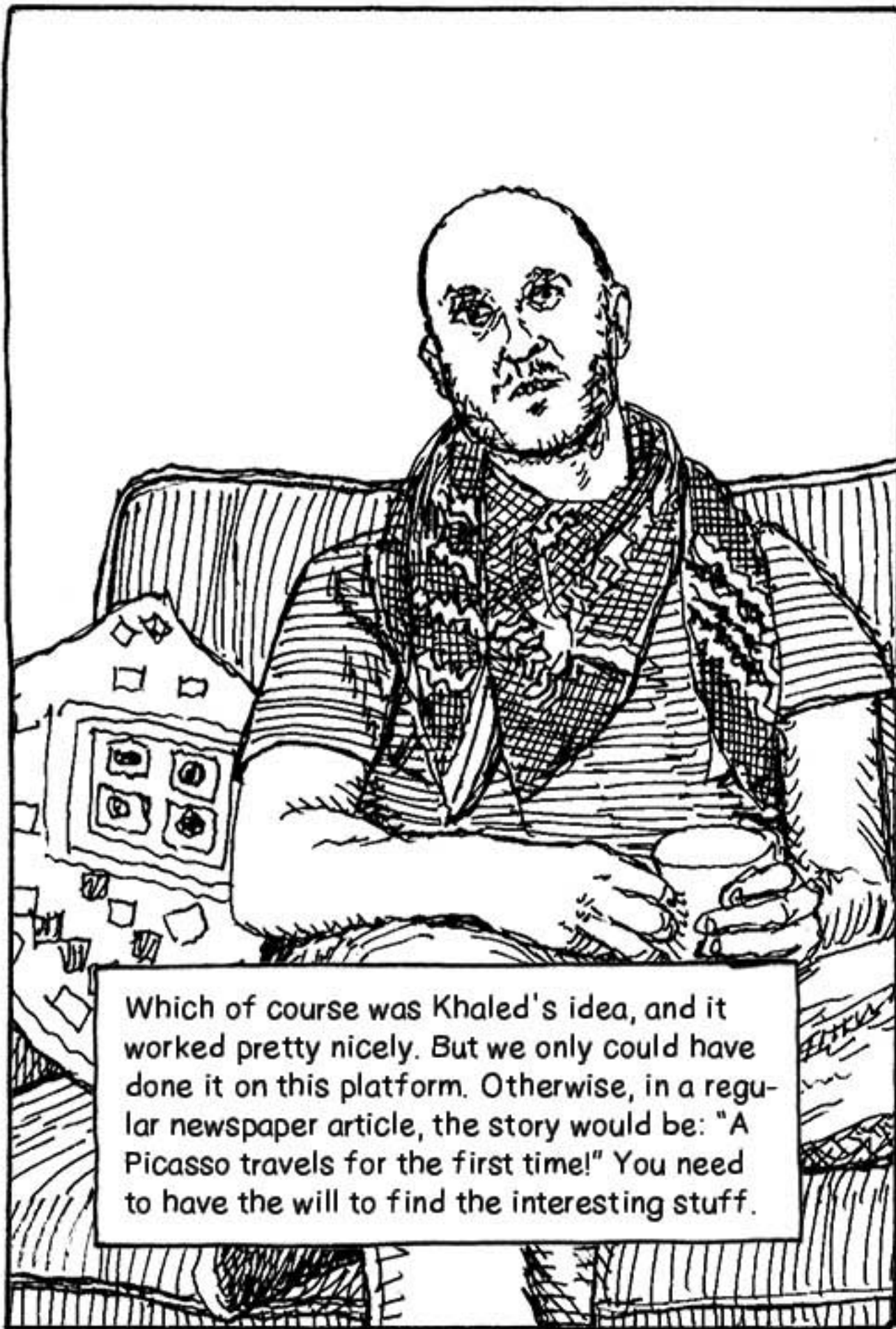
Then you actually have to go through the Oslo Accords, and read up.



What is it saying in regards to art transportation and exhibition of pieces of art, especially with the insurance and stuff?



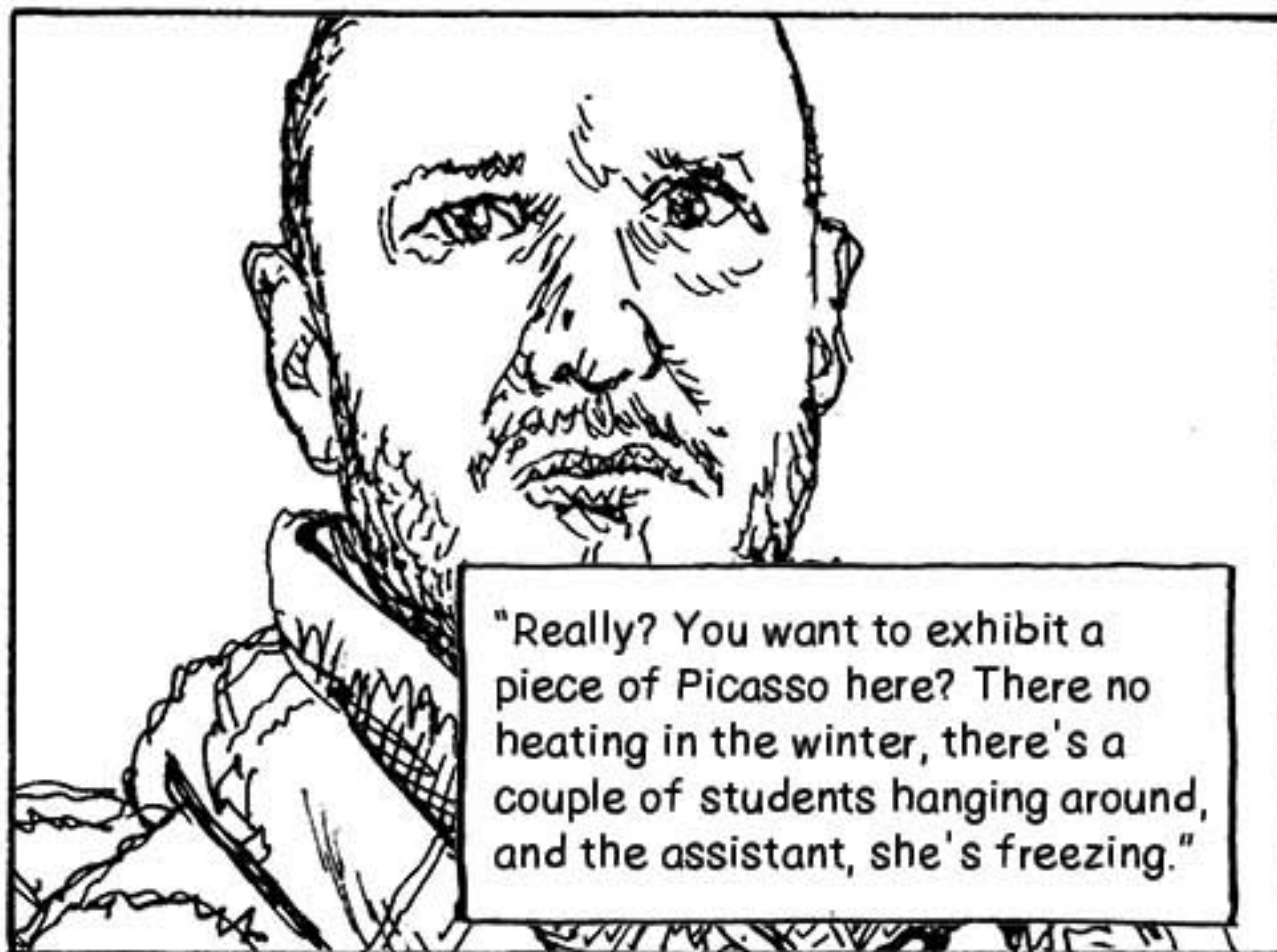
And then you have a new chance to talk about the Oslo agreement, where everybody else would be like: "Ah, Jesus Christ, not Oslo again."



Which of course was Khaled's idea, and it worked pretty nicely. But we only could have done it on this platform. Otherwise, in a regular newspaper article, the story would be: "A Picasso travels for the first time!" You need to have the will to find the interesting stuff.



So in the beginning, especially being there, that was one of the best things, coming back from visiting the Academy, thinking...



"Really? You want to exhibit a piece of Picasso here? There no heating in the winter, there's a couple of students hanging around, and the assistant, she's freezing."

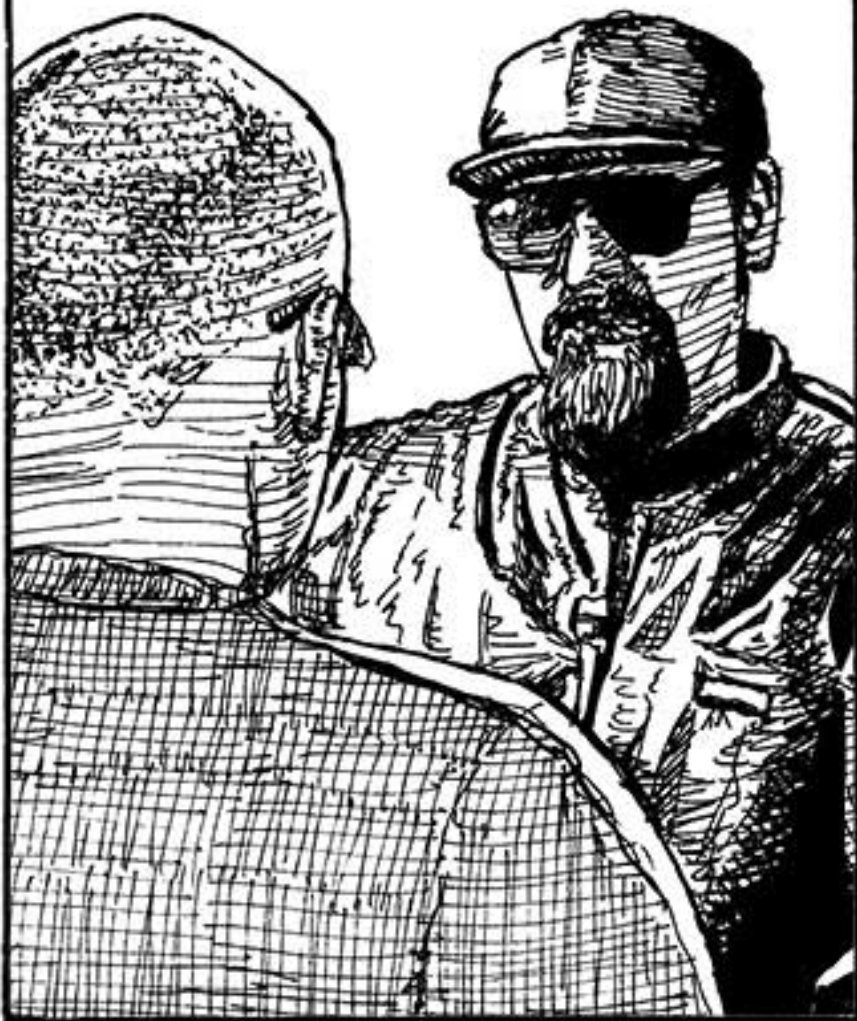
ANOTHER COUNTRY HEARD FROM (PART 1)



In an undisclosed apartment somewhere in Ramallah, three artists who wish to remain anonymous express their views:

MB: When did you first hear about the project?

ALI 1: I'm not really sure. It wasn't like a landmark event, so I'm not really sure. For me, when I first heard about it, it was not like some



kind of... maybe we heard about it...

ALI 2: Probably it was on Facebook or something like that... from the Academy.

ALI 3: I think it doesn't matter, the timing. Maybe we heard in the really early stages.

ALI 1: The discussion came up in the context of this guy saying the hospital didn't have MRIs, and we were talking about what was the cost of bringing the Picasso here, and the absurdity of the fact that the hospitals...

ALI 3: They have the machines, but they don't have the technicians to run them.

ALI 1: They don't have enough CT scan machines, either. So, he was talking about how it's crazy...

ALI 2: This was an intern at the hospital, a German intern at the hospital.

ALI 1: It was in that context, saying this was really gross.

ALI 3: Maybe... maybe this was one of the early times of us discussing the whole project, no?

ALI 2: And of course, one of the first reactions was...

ALI 3: What the fuck! (laughs)



ALI 2: Also in the context of art, it's like really taking us back, the whole idea of the painting, the aura around a singular work, something that is sacred. And so one of the first suggestions made was: let's make a million copies. Let's find out what painting they're bringing and make a million copies of it, and put them all over town. That was one of the ideas, as a reaction to the auratic work...



ALI 1: Trying to do something against the whole capitalist capture of artistry.

ALI 2: We saw it as the Academy taking us back in time.

ALI 3: But this is the whole thing: the Academy was trying to show themselves as really contemporary—whatever—working with young artists doing contemporary art, and then taking us back 100 years by bringing this old painting to a museum, referring to Benjamin, whatever. It was a bit shocking. And then things started to be more clear: this project is a very personal project by Khaled Hourani.



ALI 2: We didn't know at the beginning it was an art project.

ALI 1: We knew that the Academy was involved, obviously. We didn't know in the beginning it was an art project—that we found out later. And then, of course, we thought someone should really steal the painting.

ALI 3: Just steal the painting.

ALI 2: And then we thought, why don't we put on masks, make a copy of the painting, and film a video.



ALI 1: We wanted to take the painting hostage!

ALI 2: Put masks on, film a video and say we want this much money, and put it on YouTube, and try to create a scandal.

ALI 3: This is referring to all these videos that come from Iraq.

ALI 2: And actually it was around the time that the Vittorio Arrigoni kidnapping happened and Juliano Mer-Khamis got killed in Jenin, which happened in the same span of four or five days.



ALI 3: Which brings you into this kind of thinking about kidnapping the painting and all the money involved in this project. People started to talk.

ALI 2: It started to become clear there was a spectacle happening.

ALI 1: A lot of people were thinking about how they could kind of sabotage the whole thing. But then we found out there was a film being made.



ALI 2: And we thought, why make a kidnap video or these posters? Because they'll just use it for the film.

ALI 3: The people who were filmed in this promotional video, they had this sentence questioning Picasso in Palestine... question mark. "Is it real?" The actors behaved as if they were surprised... "Is it really happening?" Somehow it gives you this feeling that Palestinians will never have the chance to see a Picasso, which I find really ridiculous.



Then they took most of the artists in Gaza, and there was this one scene of all them sitting beside the sea, and all of them in one voice saying, "Picasso in Palestine!"

ALI 2: This is in one of the ads. Which is ridiculous because they're in Gaza, right? So they won't see it.

M: Ads on television?

B: You can see it on the Internet.

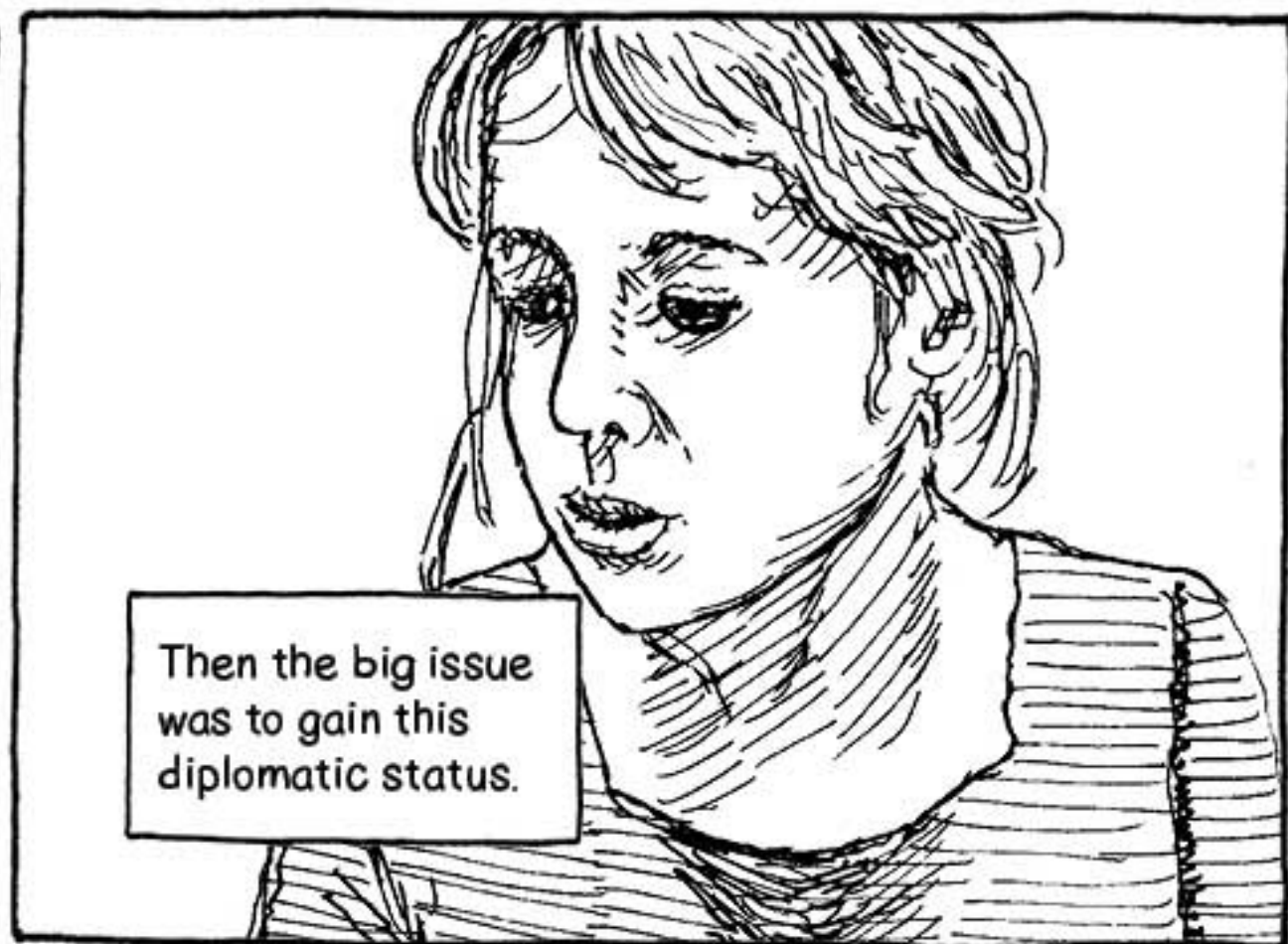


WAITING: DIPLOMATIC COVER (PART 1)





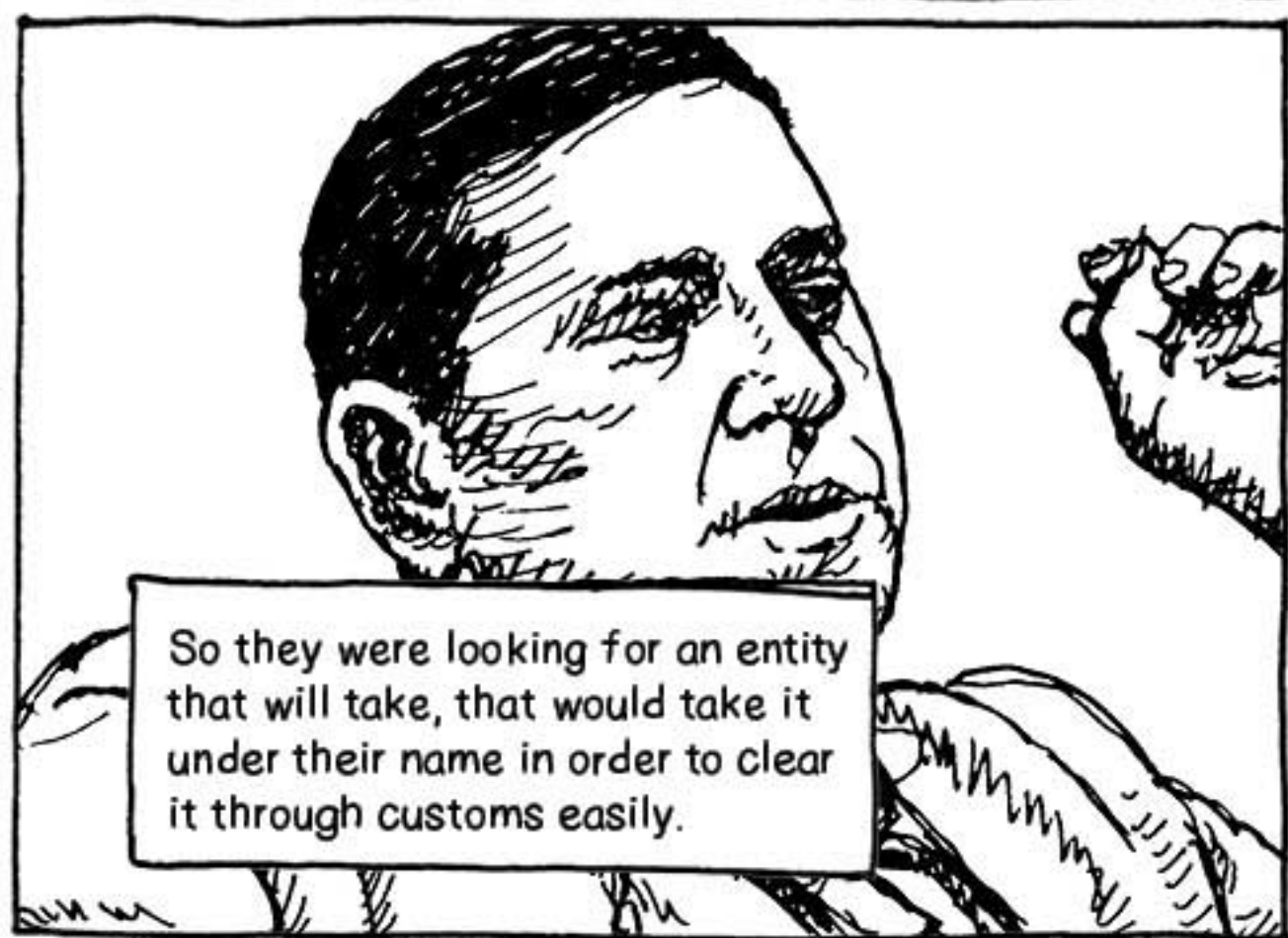
We made a report and we discussed it with the insurance. Ruud saw it himself and agreed, so we had an insurer.



Then the big issue was to gain this diplomatic status.



They didn't know how the custom procedure would go through.

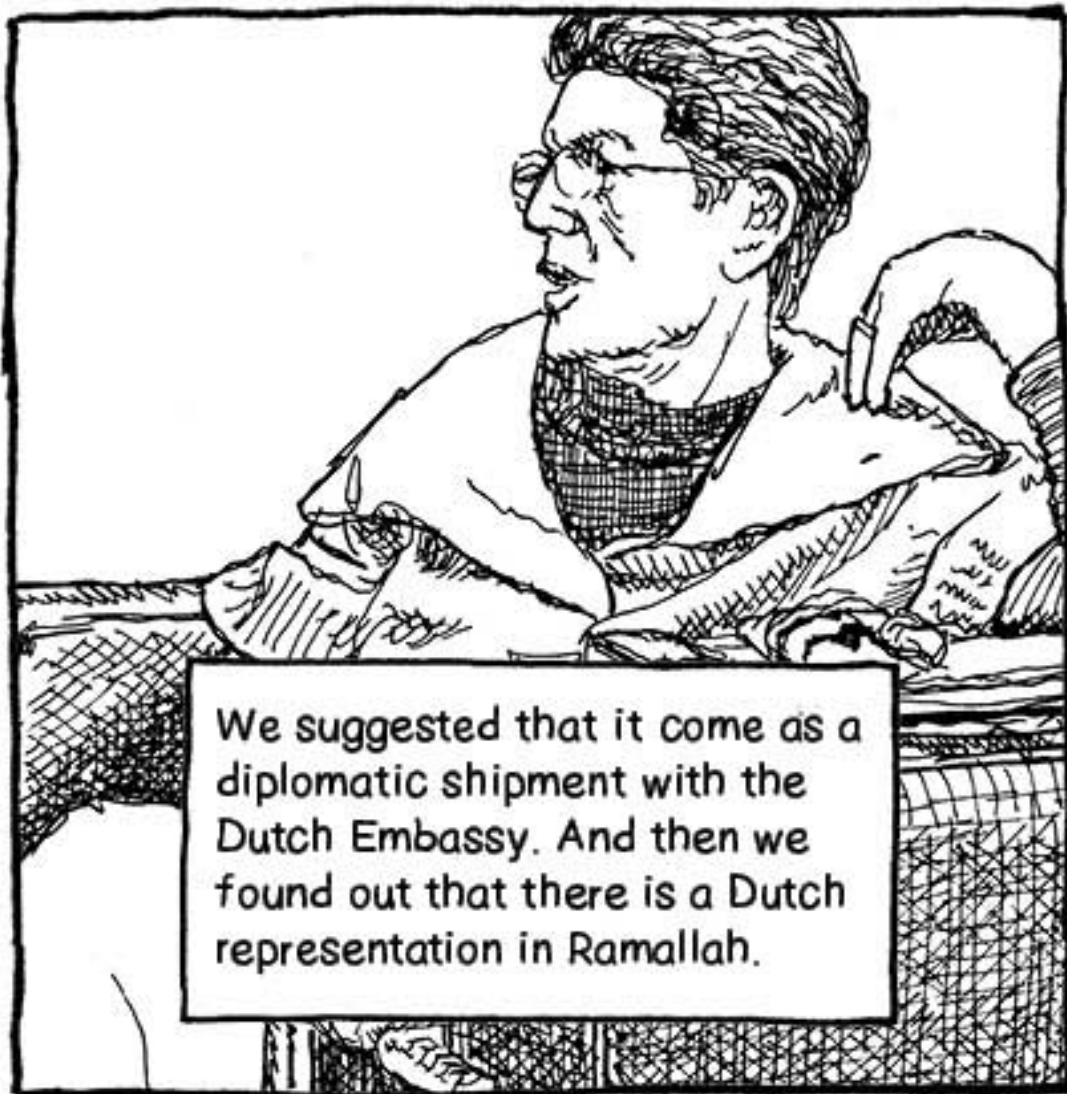


So they were looking for an entity that will take, that would take it under their name in order to clear it through customs easily.

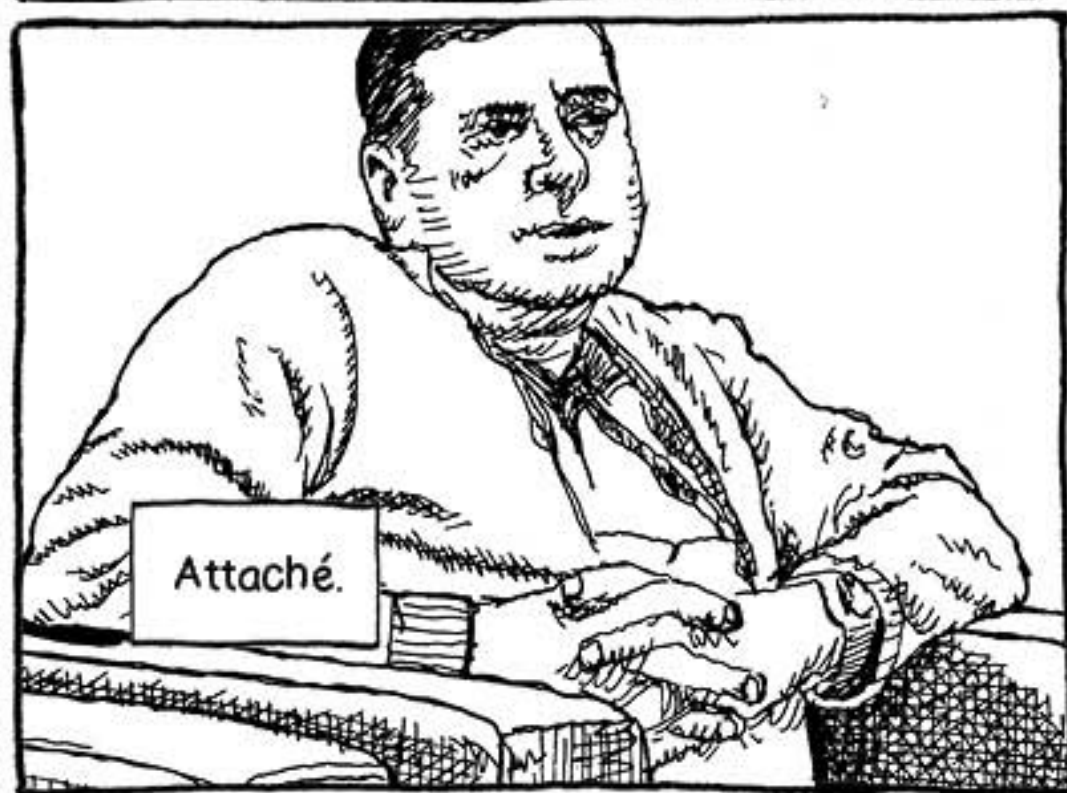
Because from what we found out, the PA couldn't do it. They were not proper importers with customs. We had checked around with our people, with customs in Jerusalem and customs at Ben Gurion, until it was clear that they couldn't be recognized as an importer.



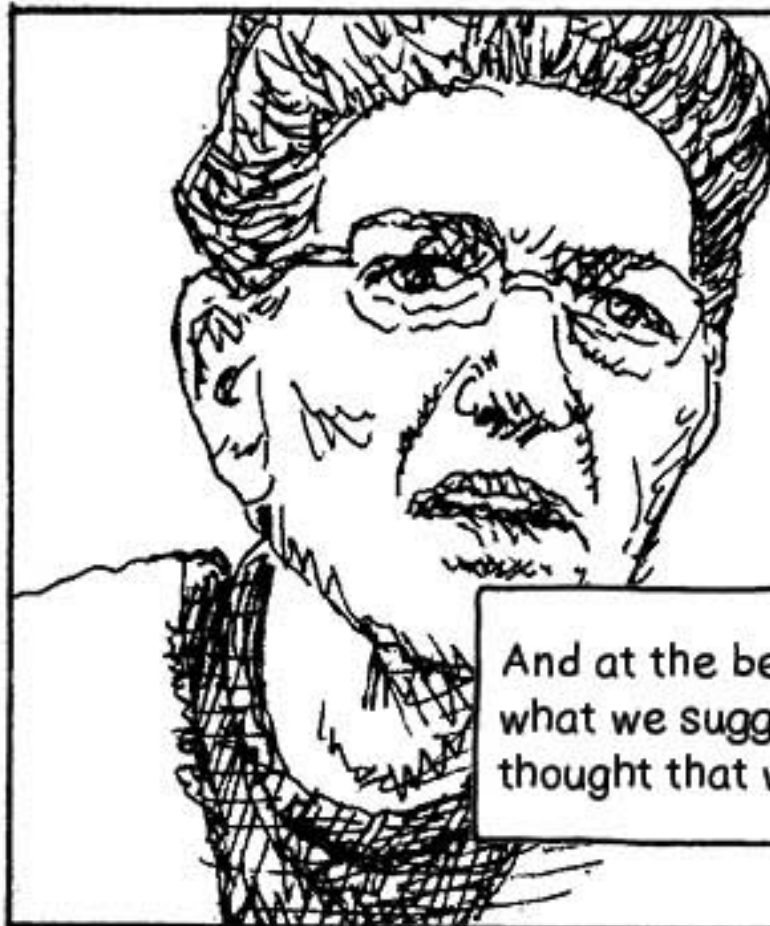
We suggested that it come as a diplomatic shipment with the Dutch Embassy. And then we found out that there is a Dutch representation in Ramallah.



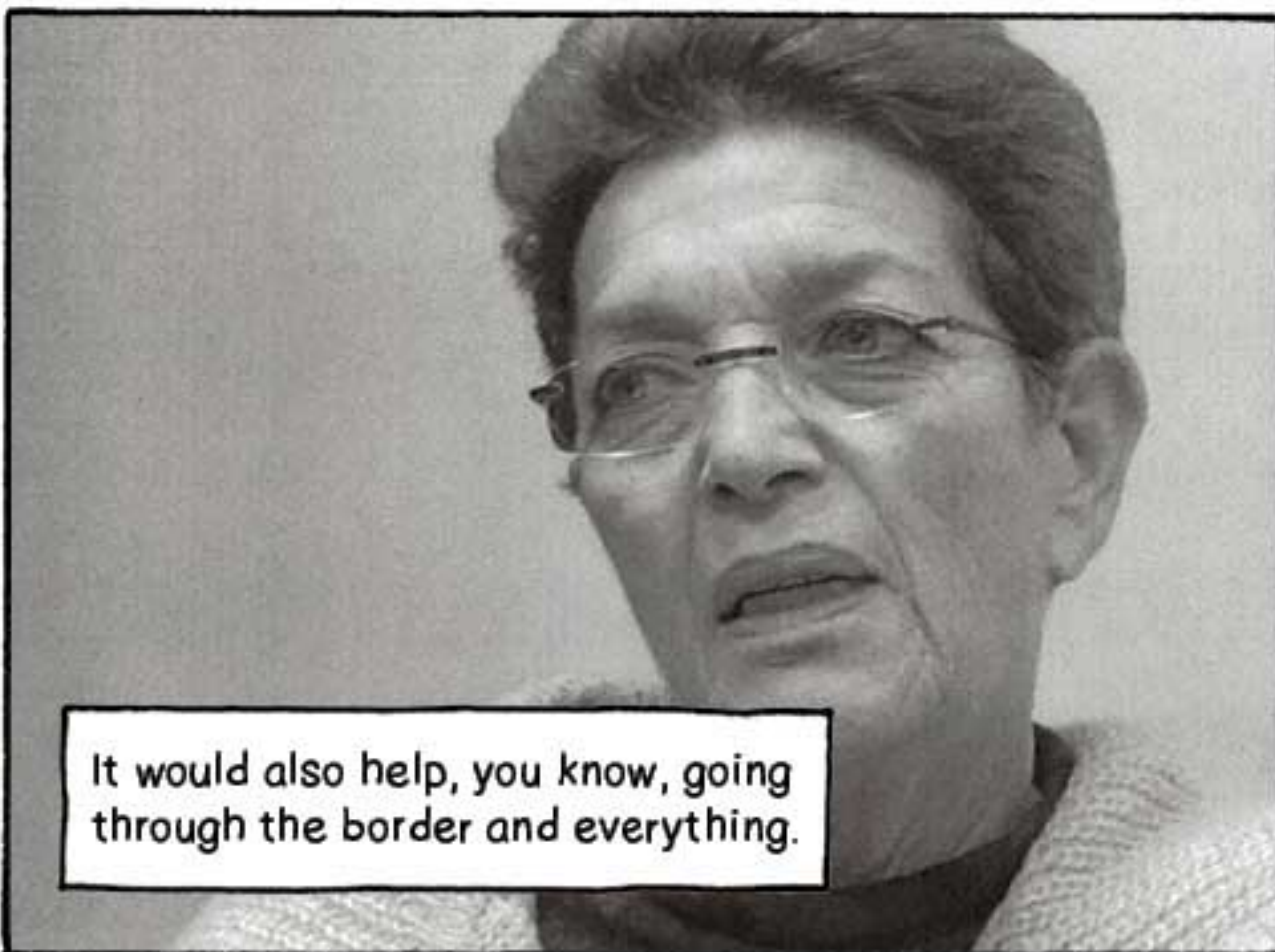
Attaché.



I don't know what their status was, it wasn't attaché. Probably *shu shu* guys or something. That's Hebrew slang for keeping something confidential, not talking about it too much. I'm joking, by the way.



And at the beginning that was what we suggested, because we thought that would be best.



It would also help, you know, going through the border and everything.



At this point we were only acting as consultants, explaining what might possibly work and what might not work.



We were hoping diplomatic status would be the way, also because the art transport companies both told us that was the only way you should and must do it.



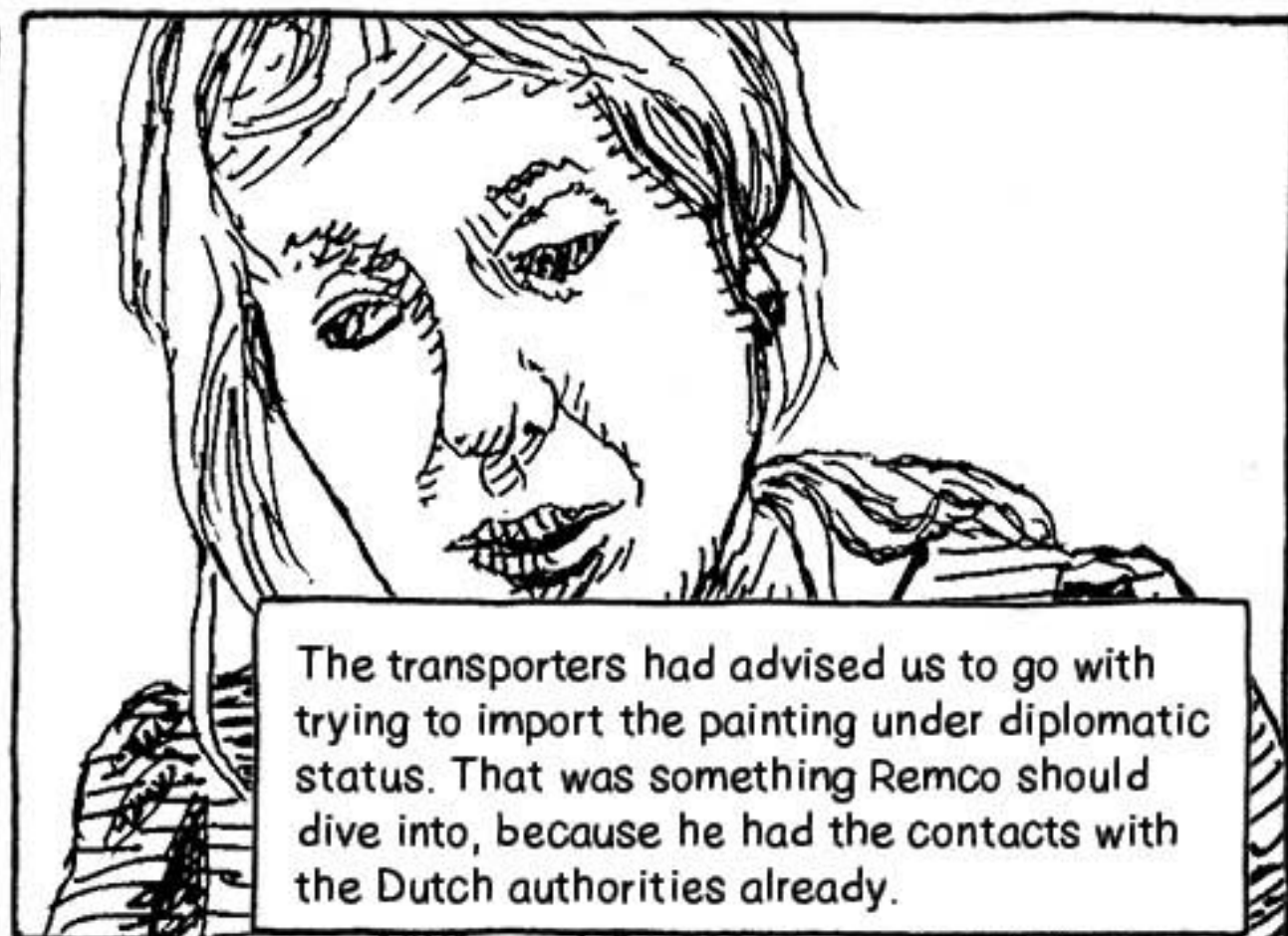
By then, that was the scenario that was in our heads. That was the plan, to obtain diplomatic status.



We also discussed how this would be integrated into the insurance agreement, and then into the transport mechanism.



First we went to the Dutch...



The transporters had advised us to go with trying to import the painting under diplomatic status. That was something Remco should dive into, because he had the contacts with the Dutch authorities already.



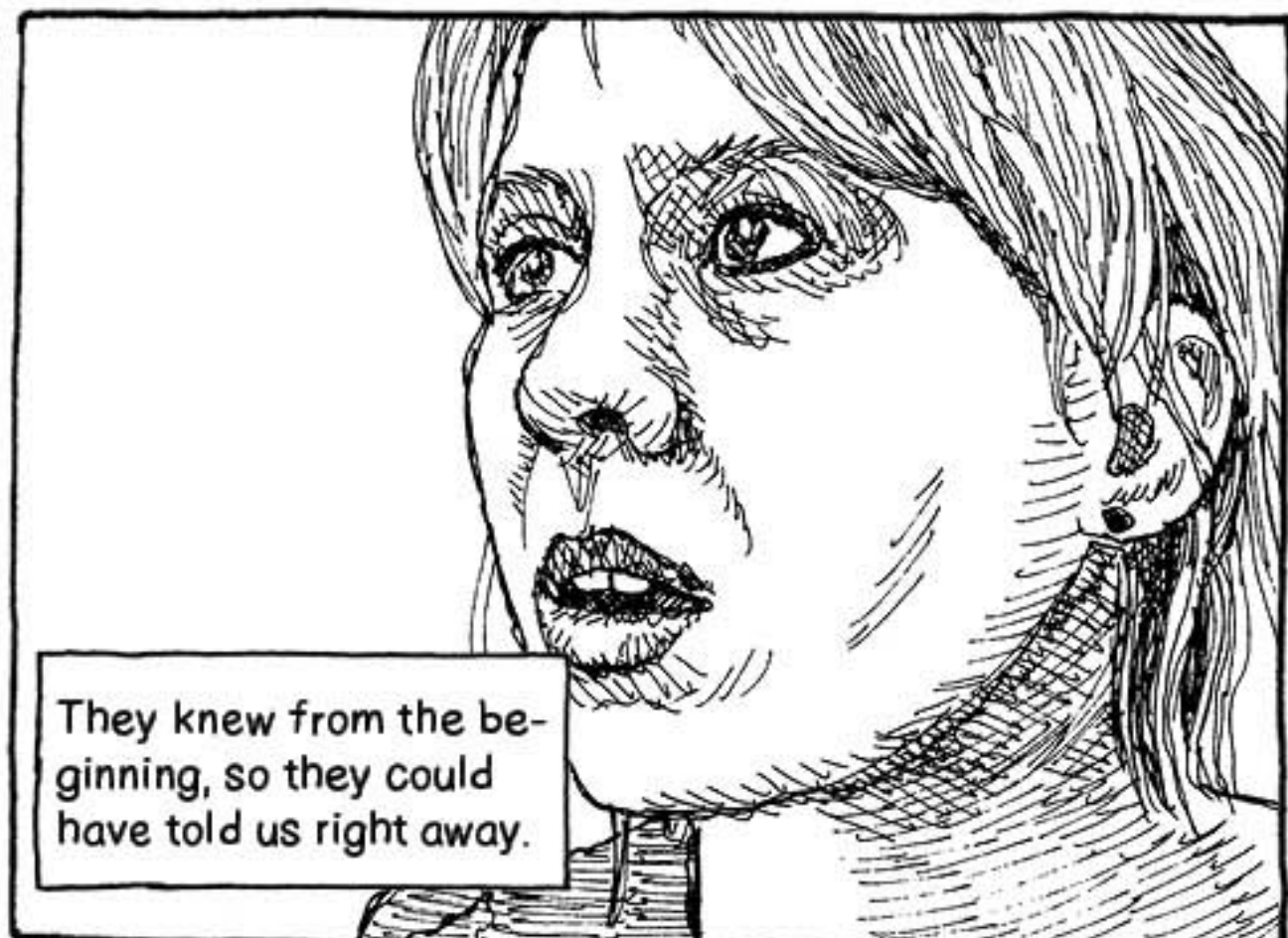
And he tried. We waited a few months for a reply from the diplomats.



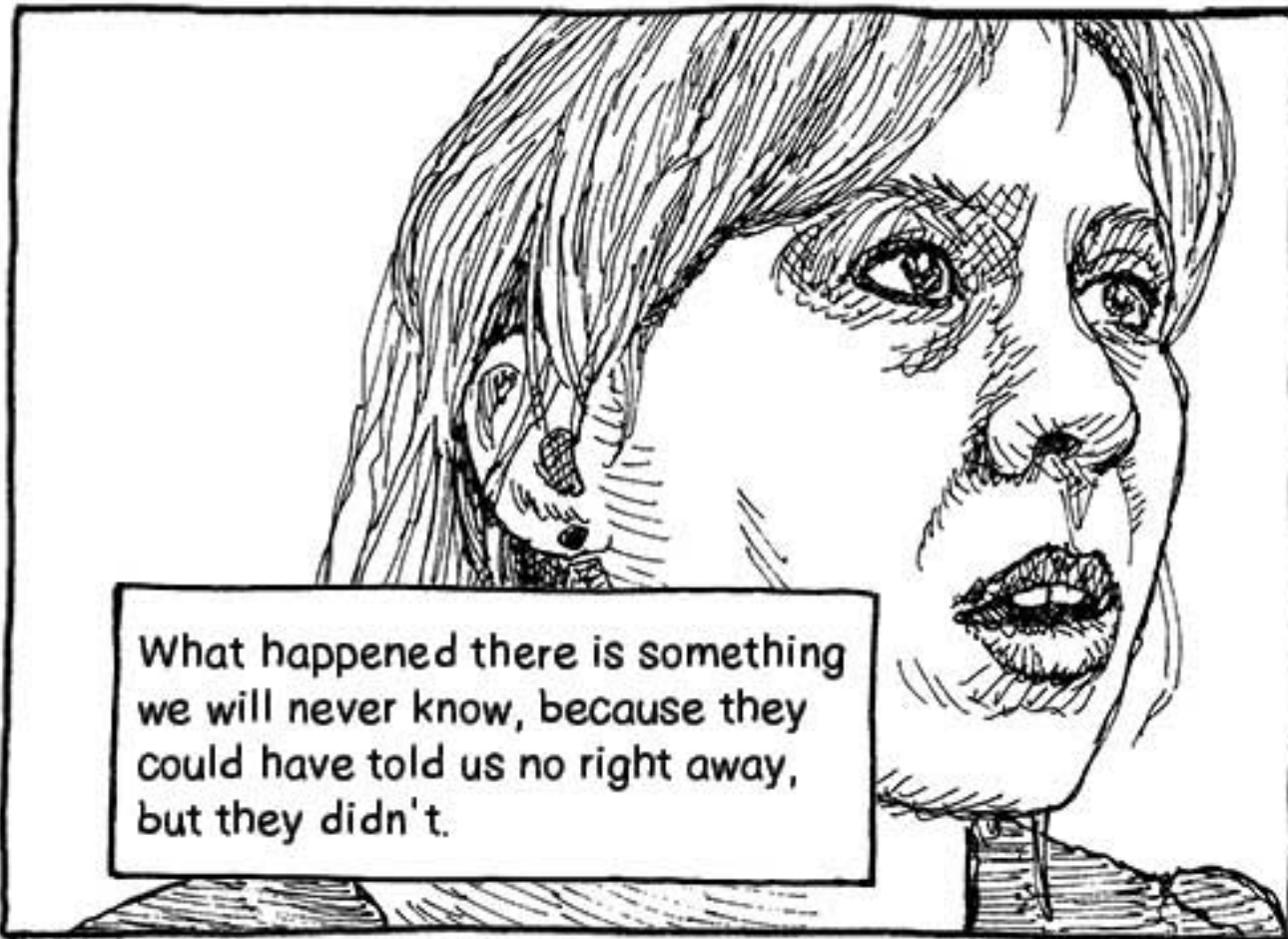
They finally answered that diplomatic goods should be used in diplomatic cases. So, that was off.



Yeah, but they knew from the beginning.



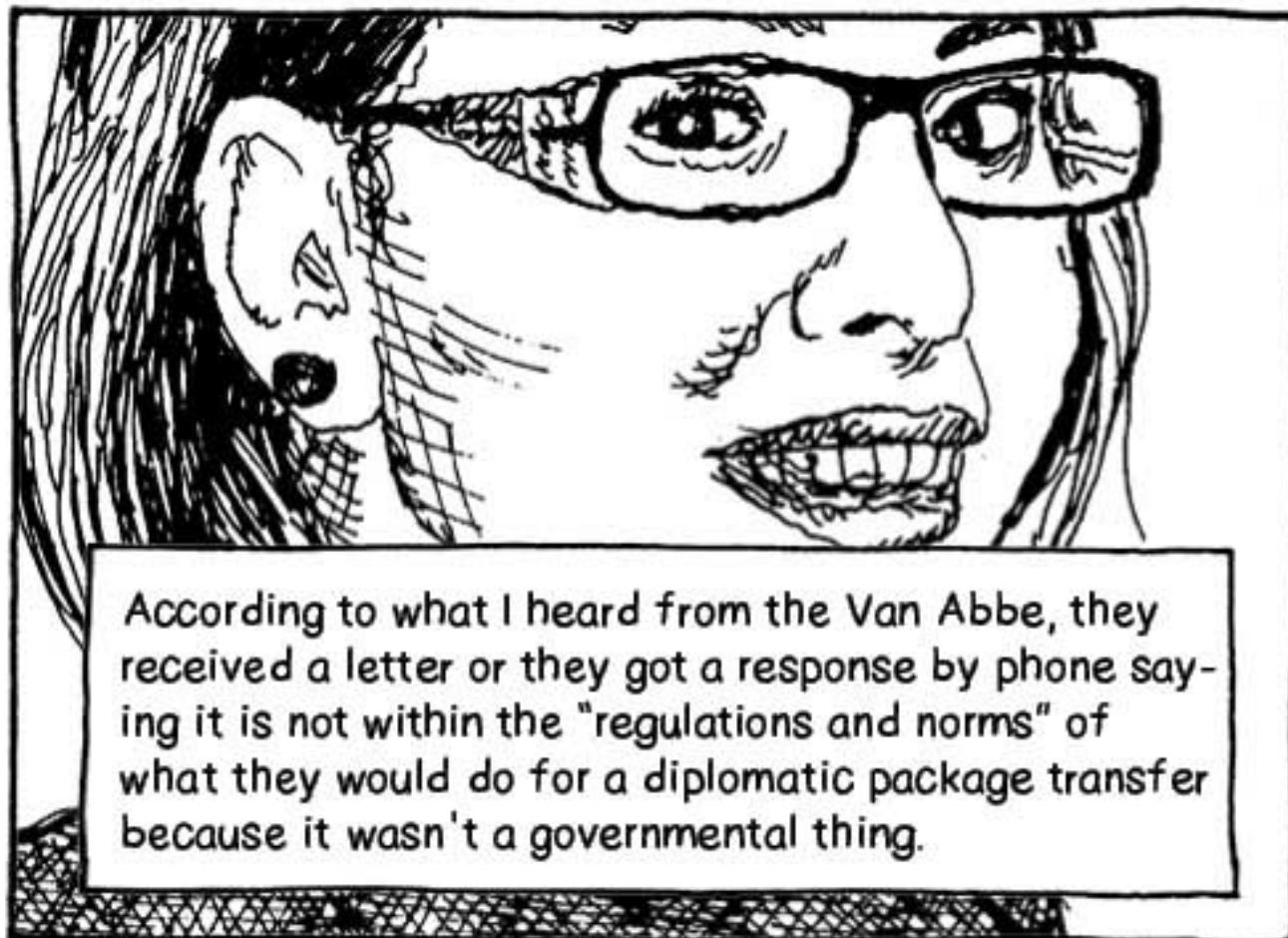
They knew from the beginning, so they could have told us right away.



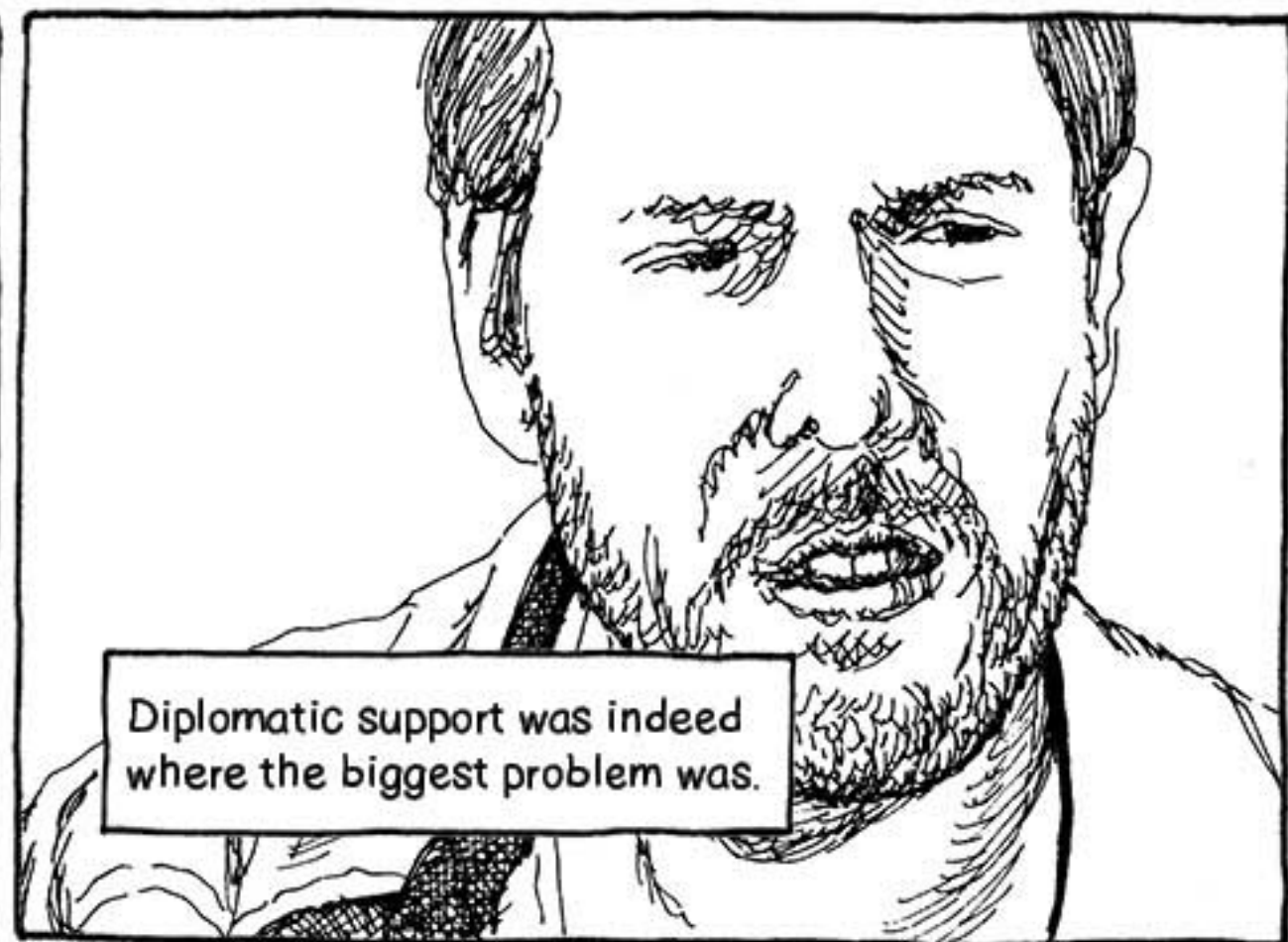
What happened there is something we will never know, because they could have told us no right away, but they didn't.



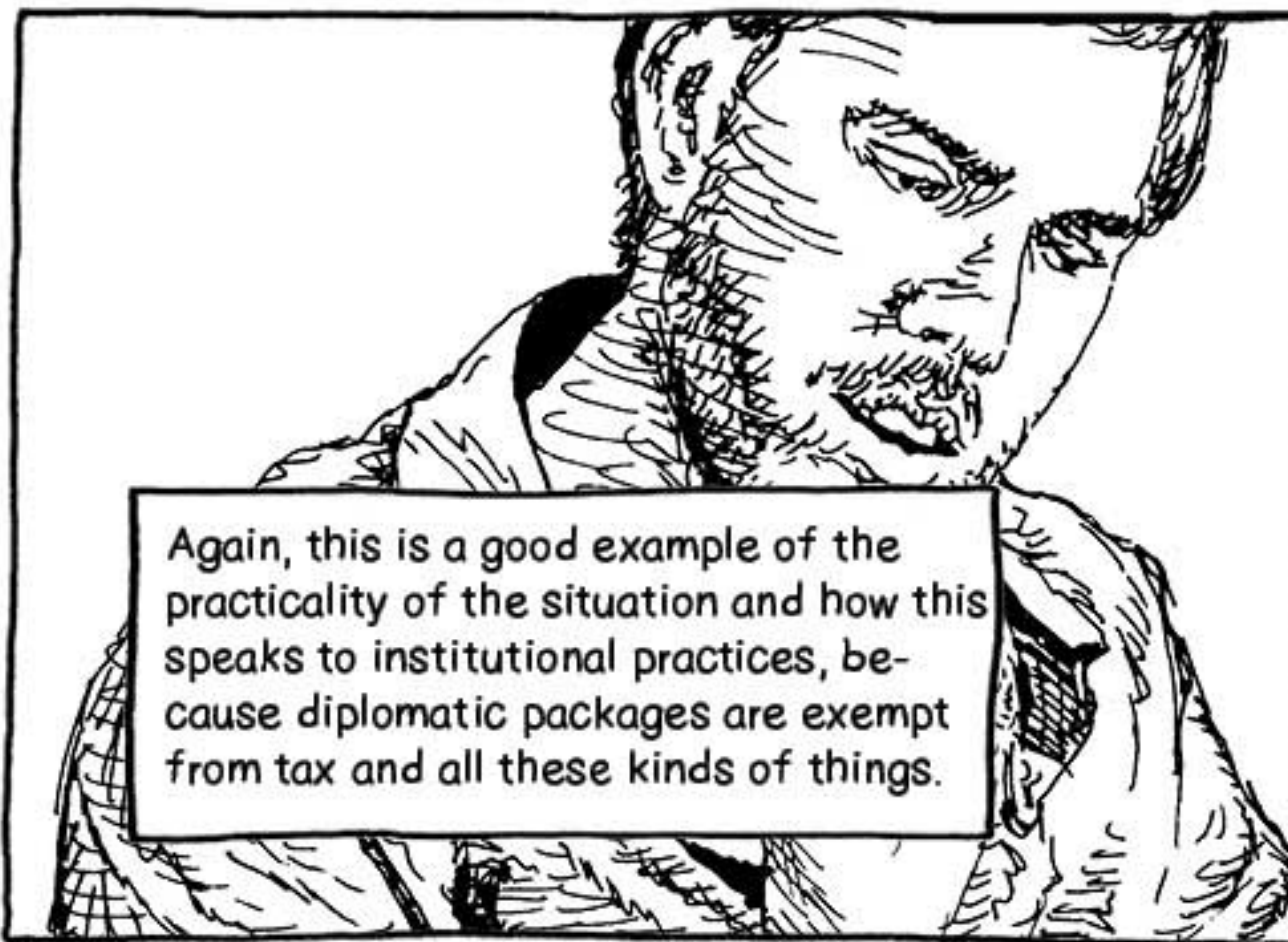
Why did the Dutch refuse to get involved?



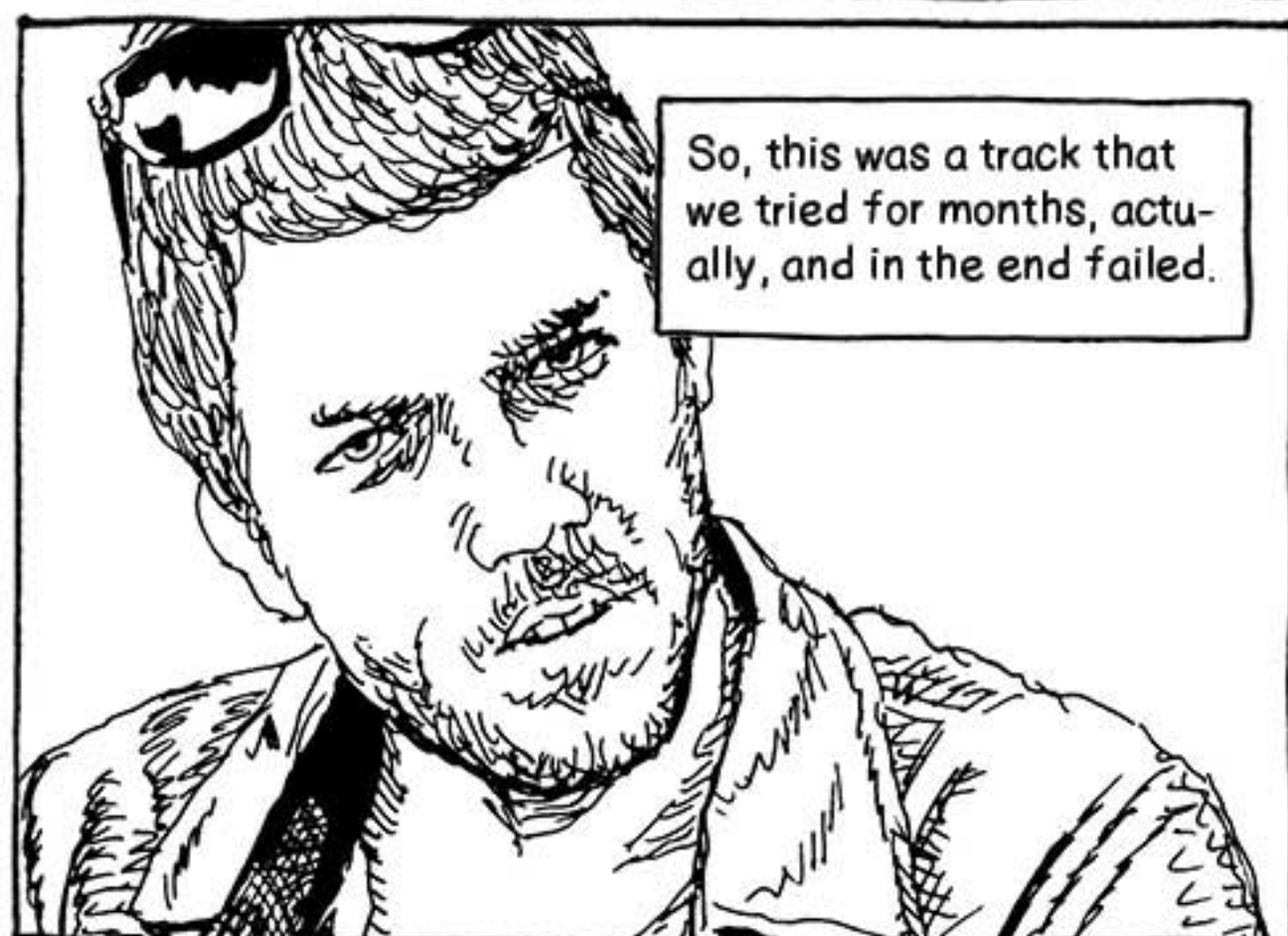
According to what I heard from the Van Abbe, they received a letter or they got a response by phone saying it is not within the "regulations and norms" of what they would do for a diplomatic package transfer because it wasn't a governmental thing.



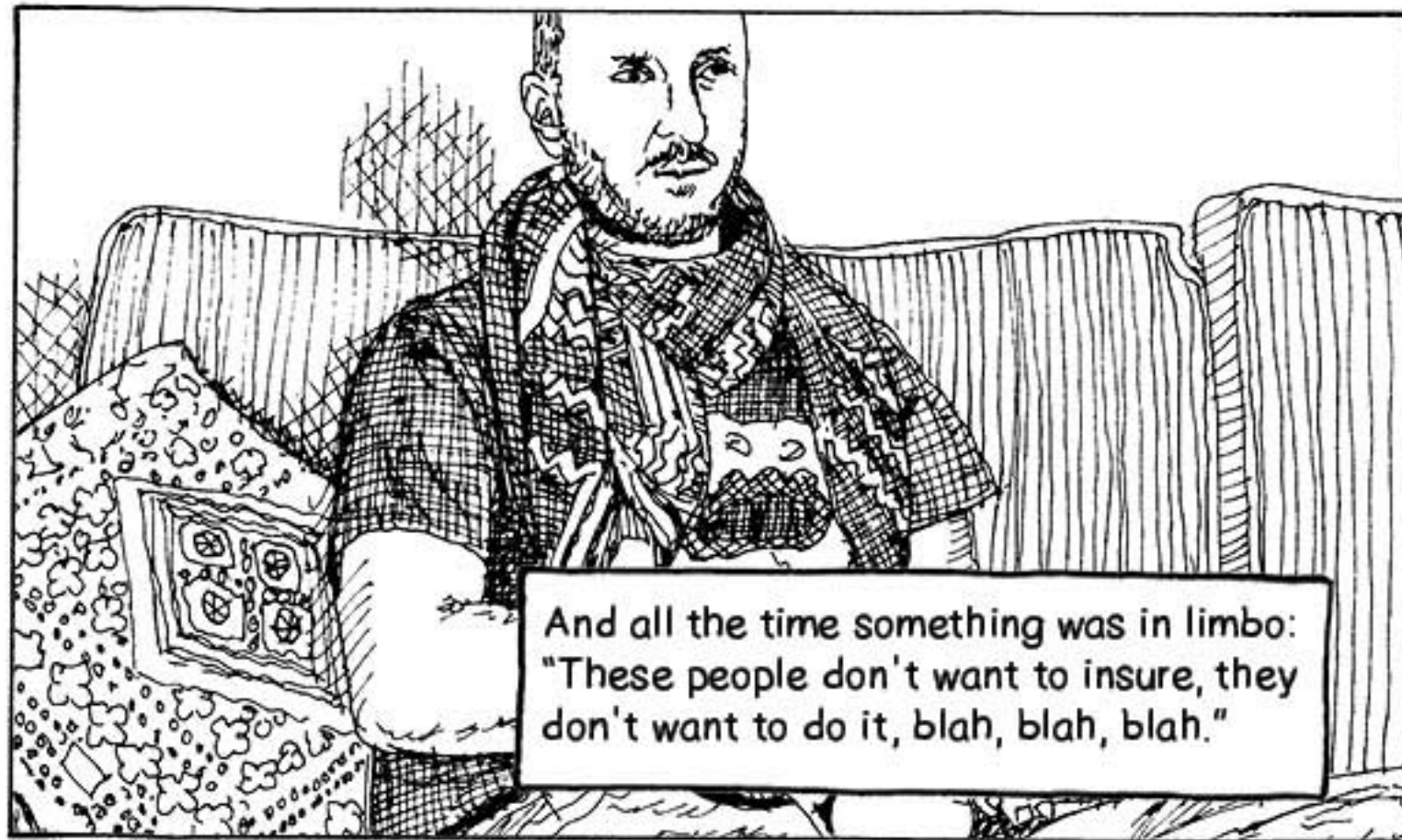
Diplomatic support was indeed where the biggest problem was.



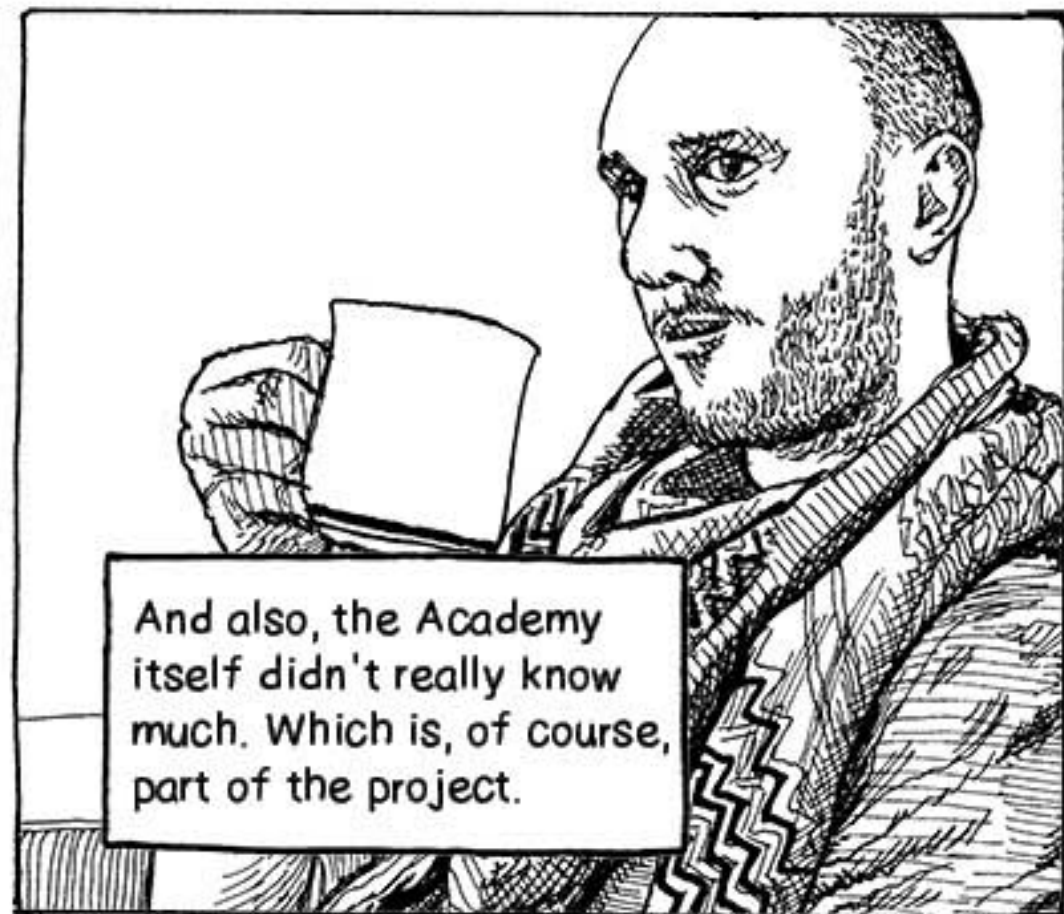
Again, this is a good example of the practicality of the situation and how this speaks to institutional practices, because diplomatic packages are exempt from tax and all these kinds of things.



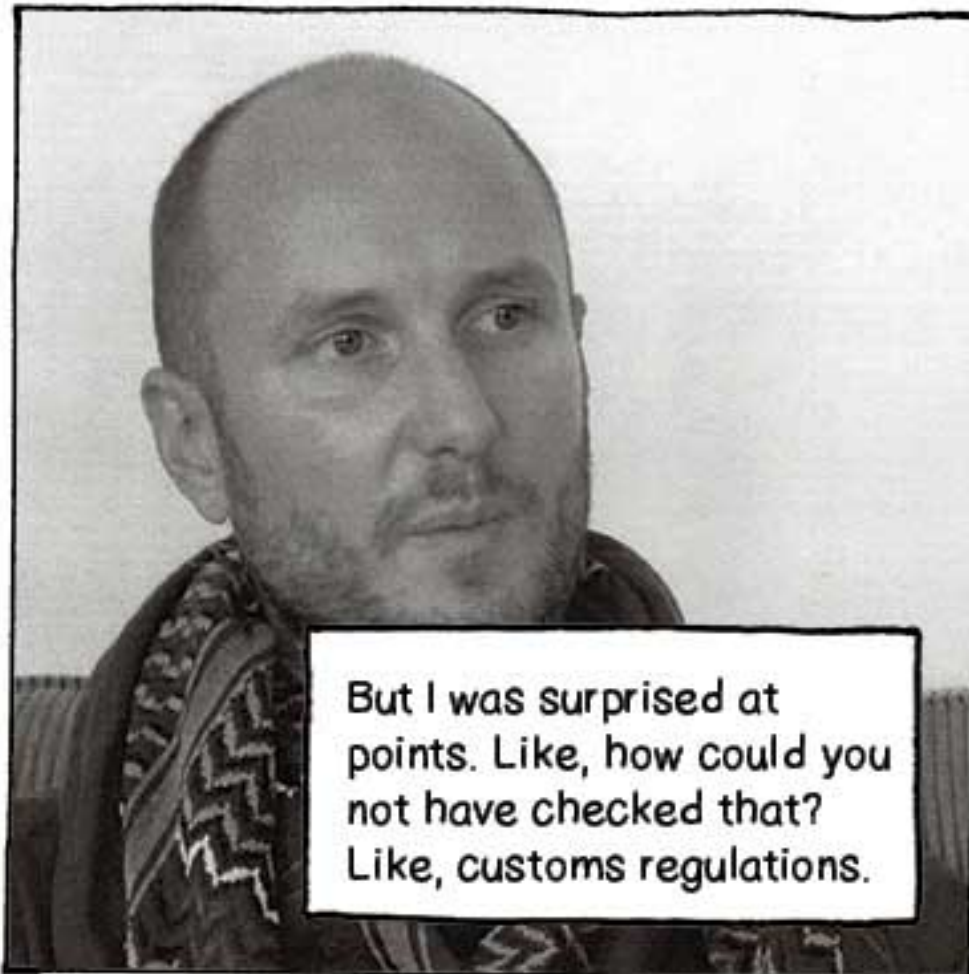
So, this was a track that we tried for months, actually, and in the end failed.



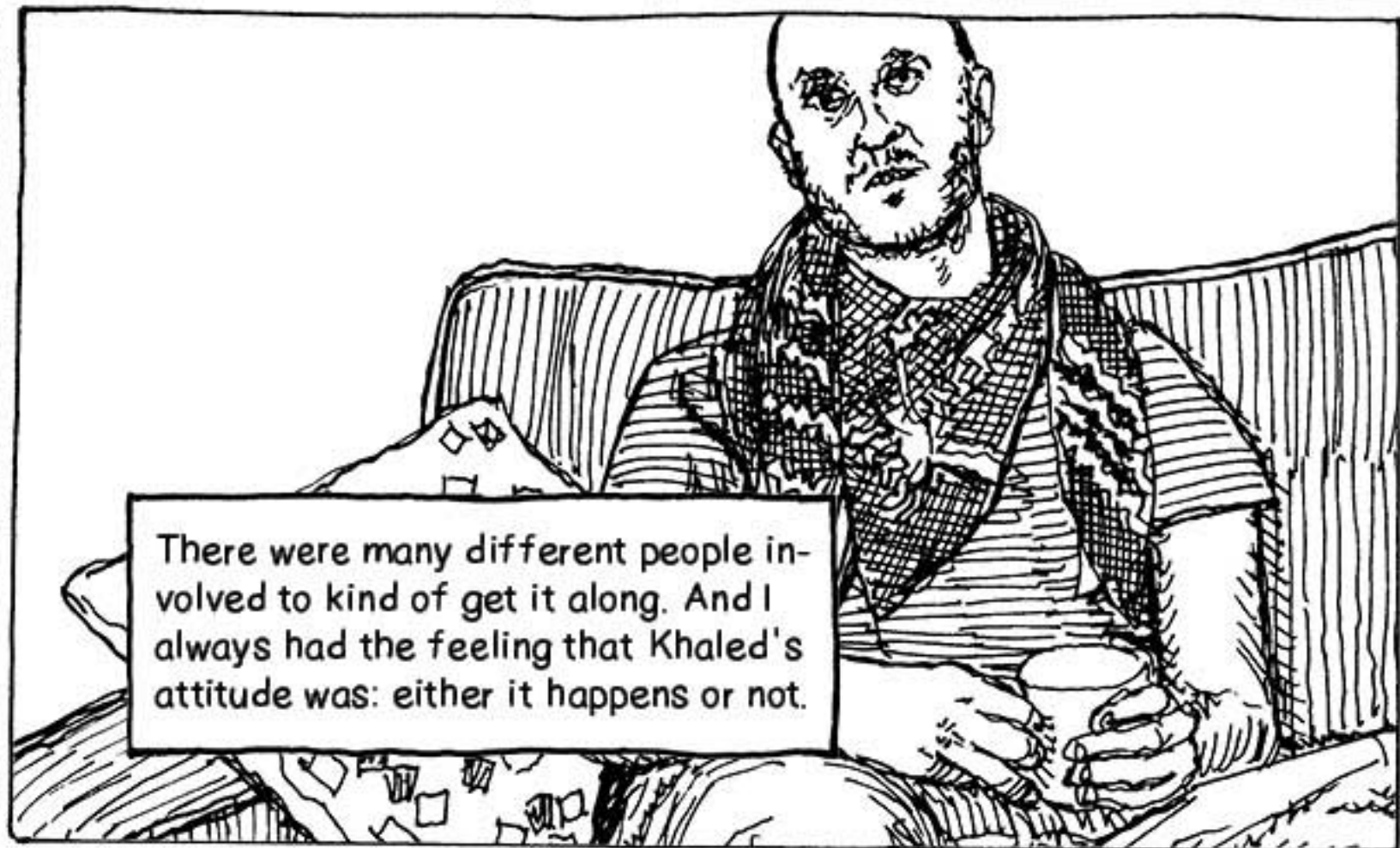
And all the time something was in limbo: "These people don't want to insure, they don't want to do it, blah, blah, blah."



And also, the Academy itself didn't really know much. Which is, of course, part of the project.



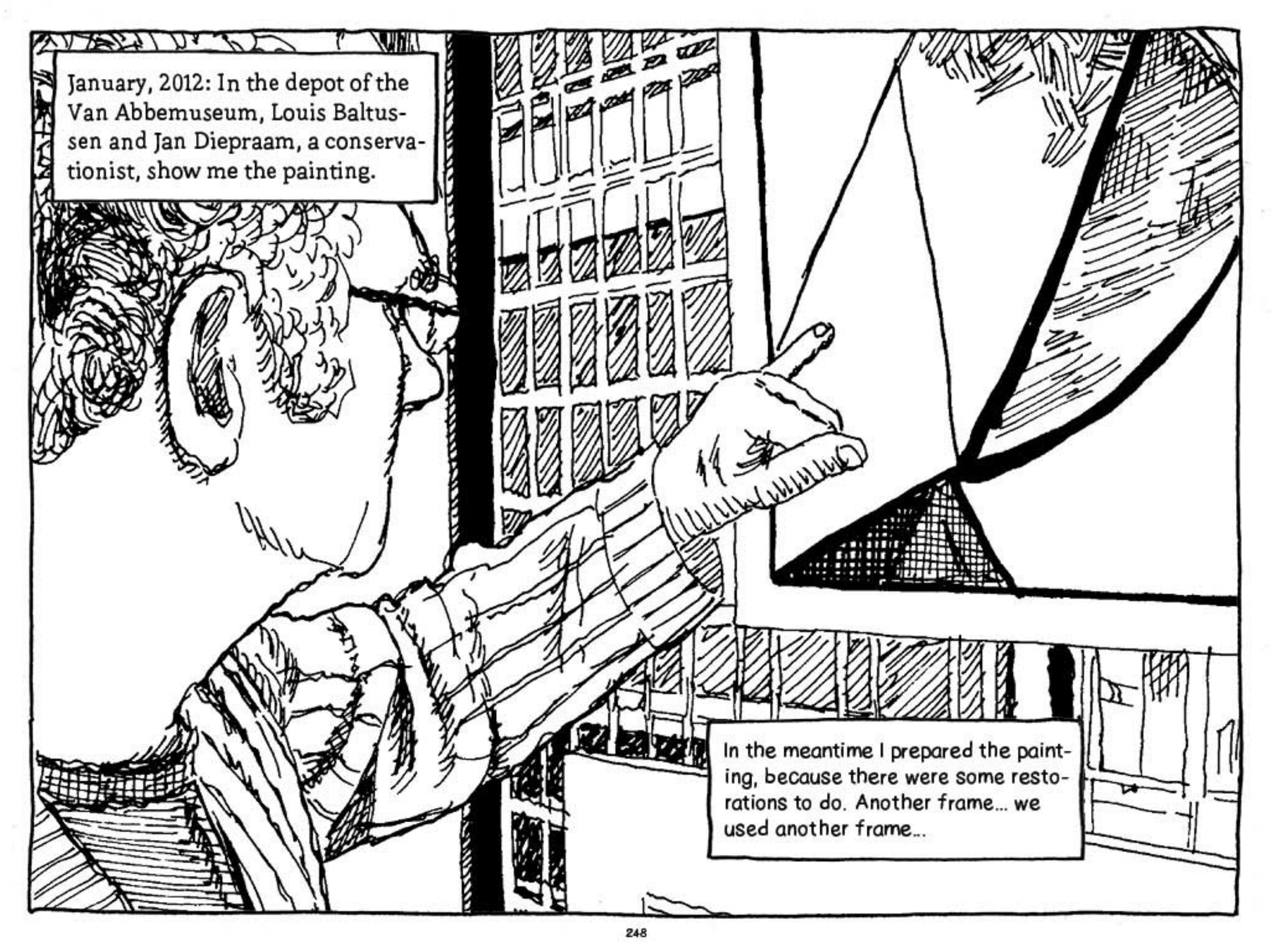
But I was surprised at points. Like, how could you not have checked that? Like, customs regulations.



There were many different people involved to kind of get it along. And I always had the feeling that Khaled's attitude was: either it happens or not.

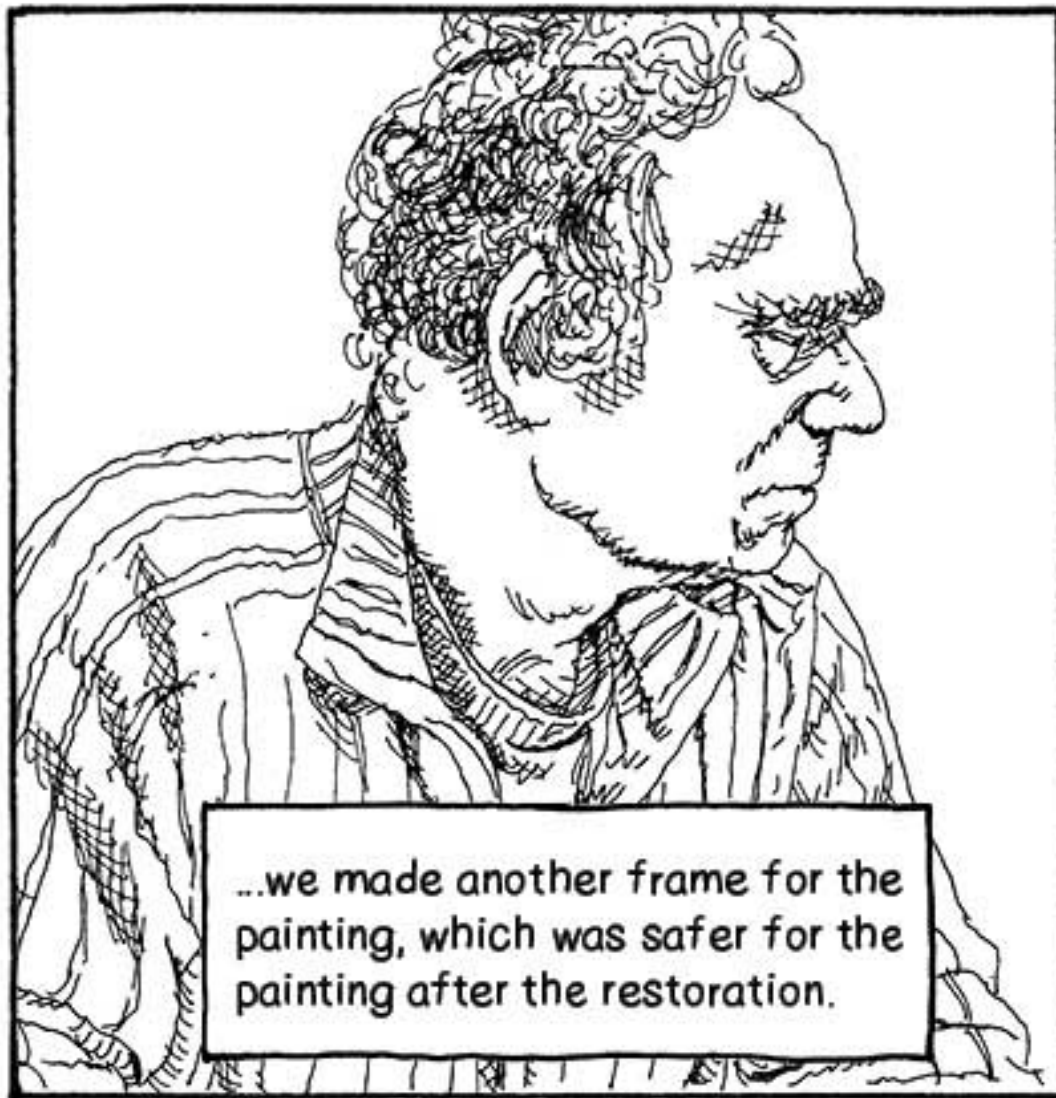


PREPARING THE PAINTING

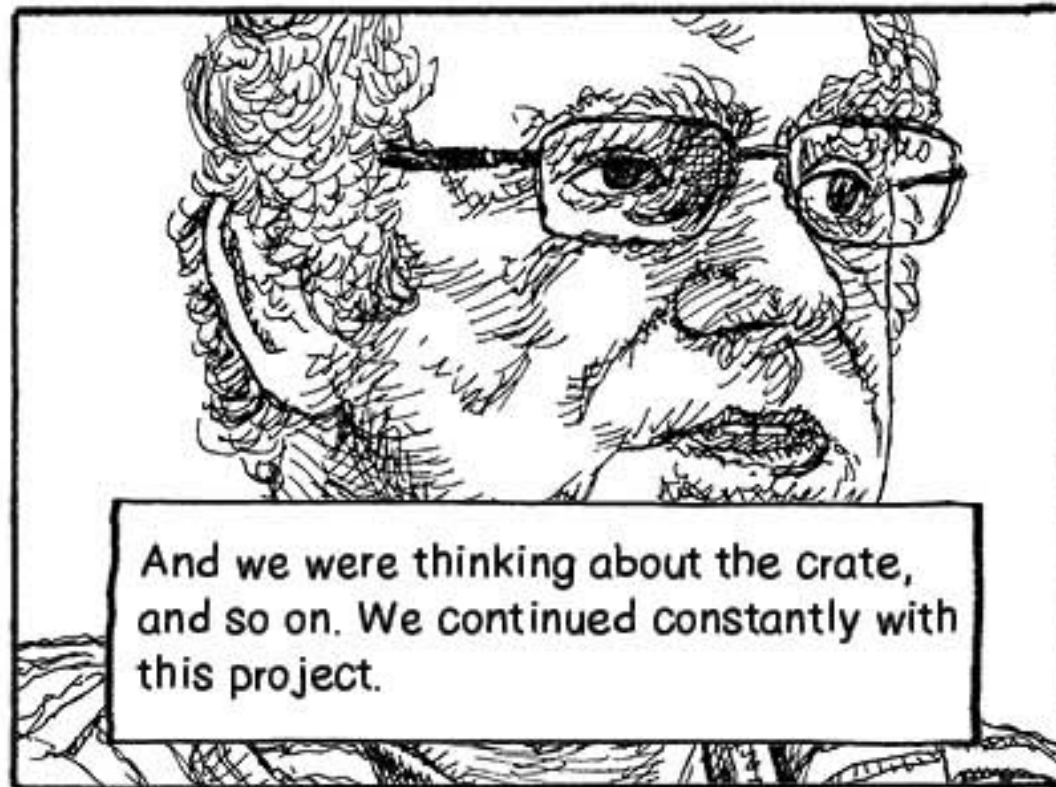


January, 2012: In the depot of the Van Abbemuseum, Louis Baltussen and Jan Diepraam, a conservationist, show me the painting.

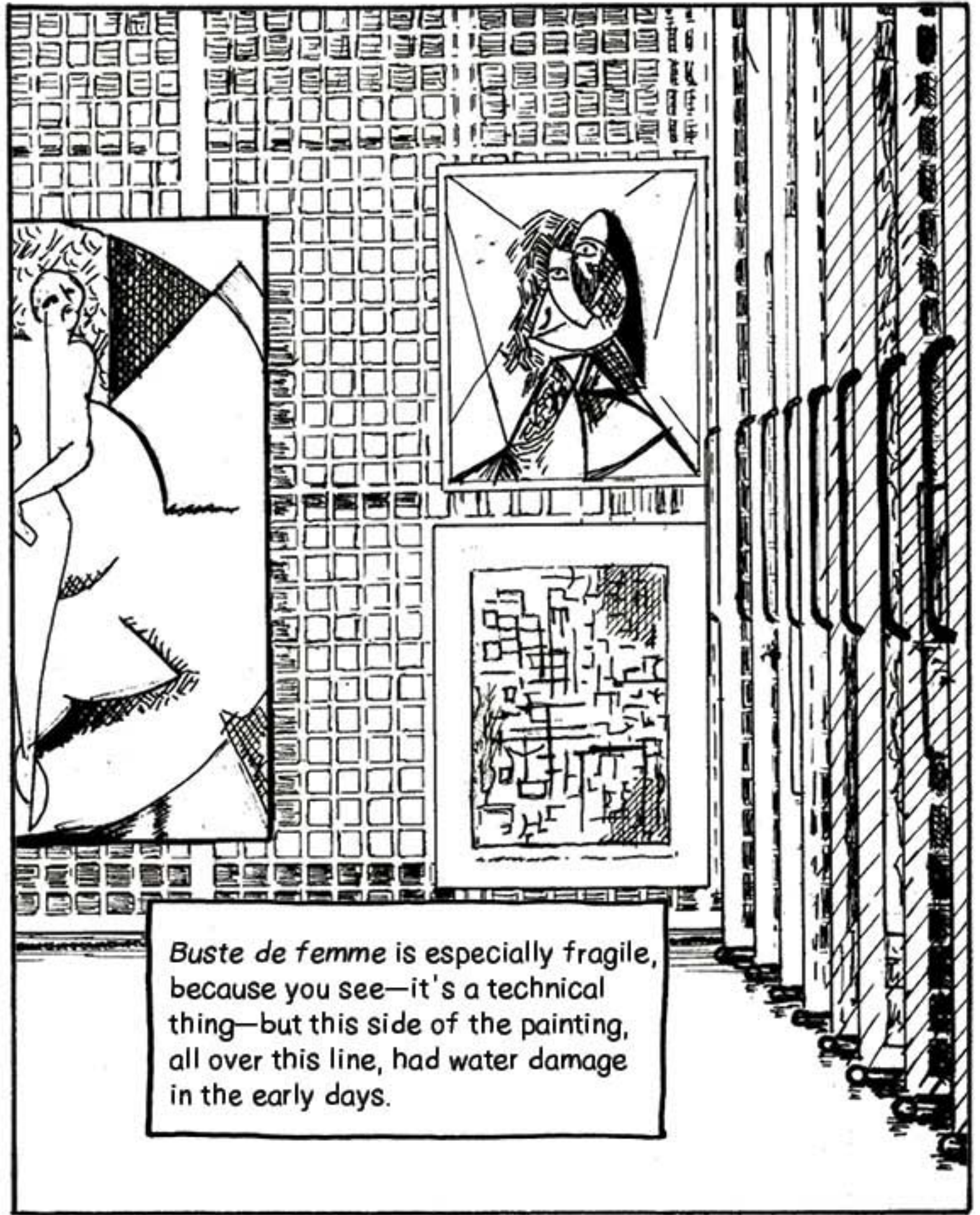
In the meantime I prepared the painting, because there were some restorations to do. Another frame... we used another frame...



...we made another frame for the painting, which was safer for the painting after the restoration.

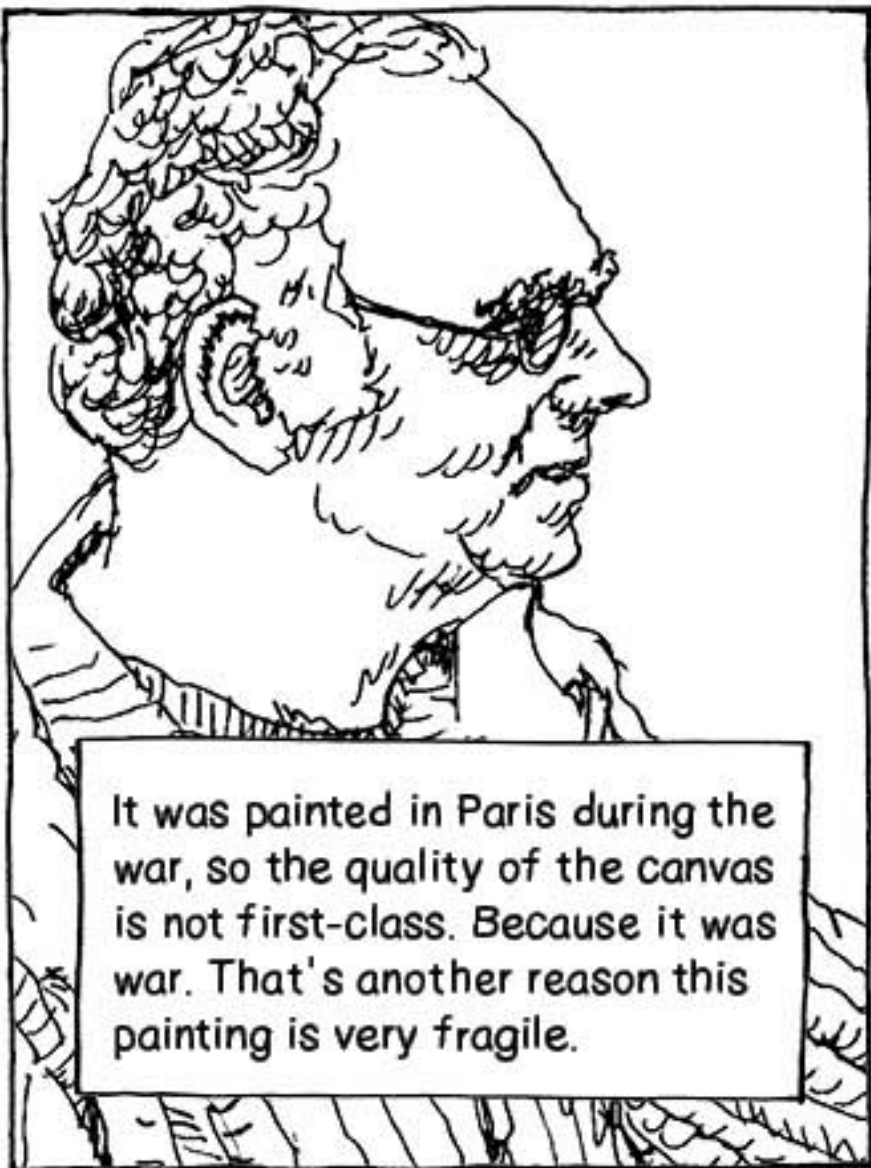


And we were thinking about the crate, and so on. We continued constantly with this project.

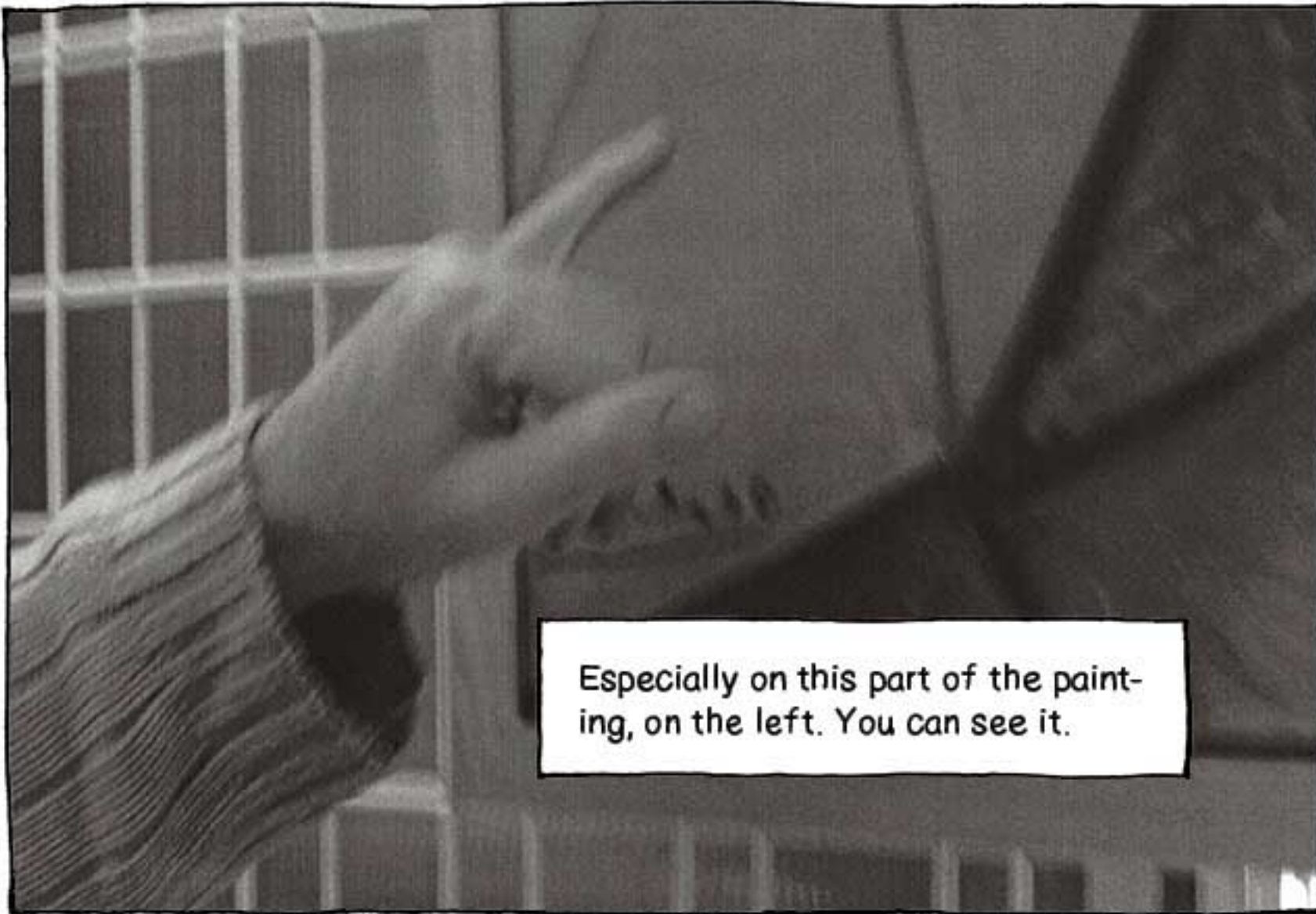


Buste de femme is especially fragile, because you see—it's a technical thing—but this side of the painting, all over this line, had water damage in the early days.

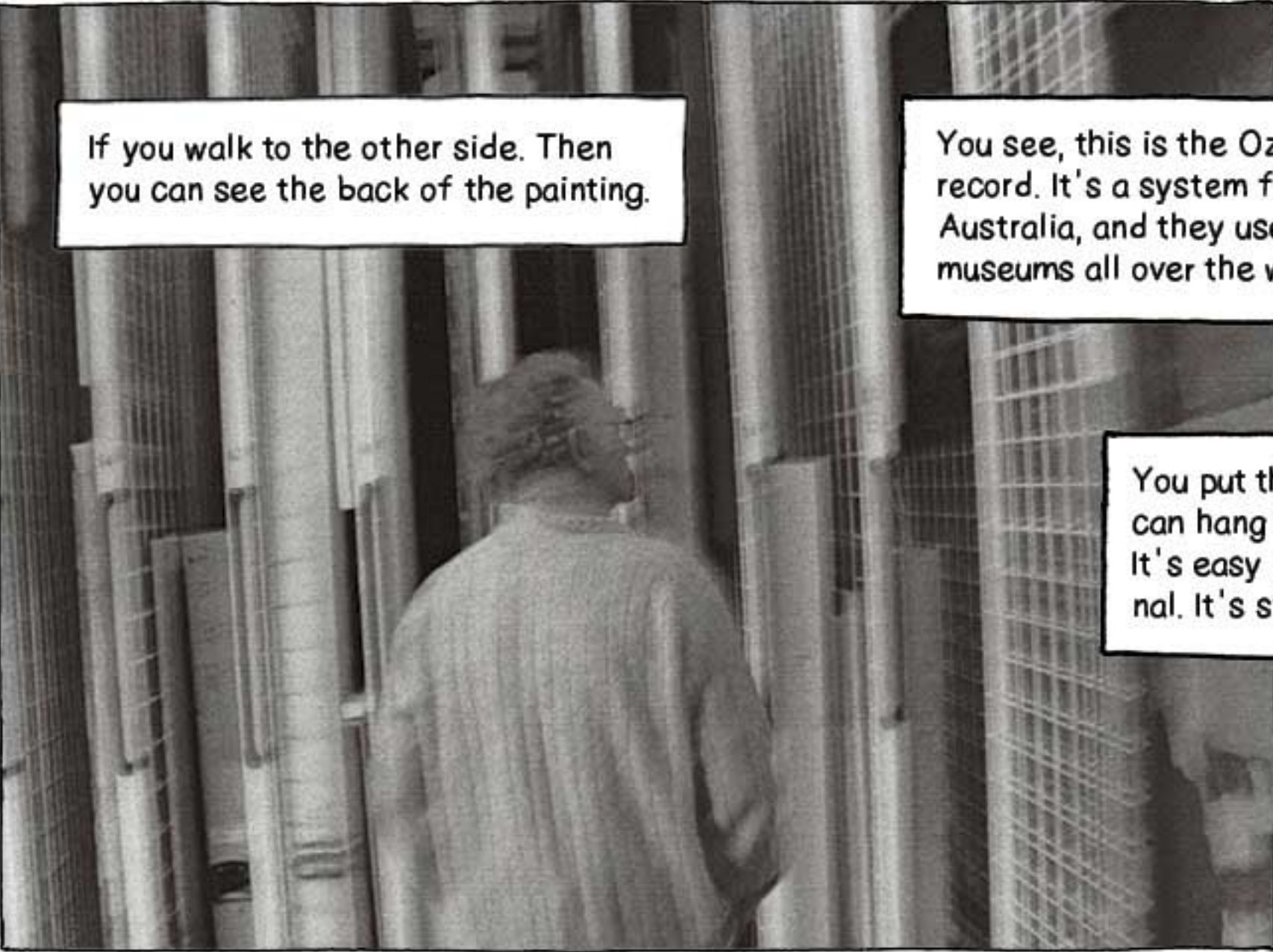
It means that the ground of the canvas is very fragile and with that, of course, the paint layer as well.



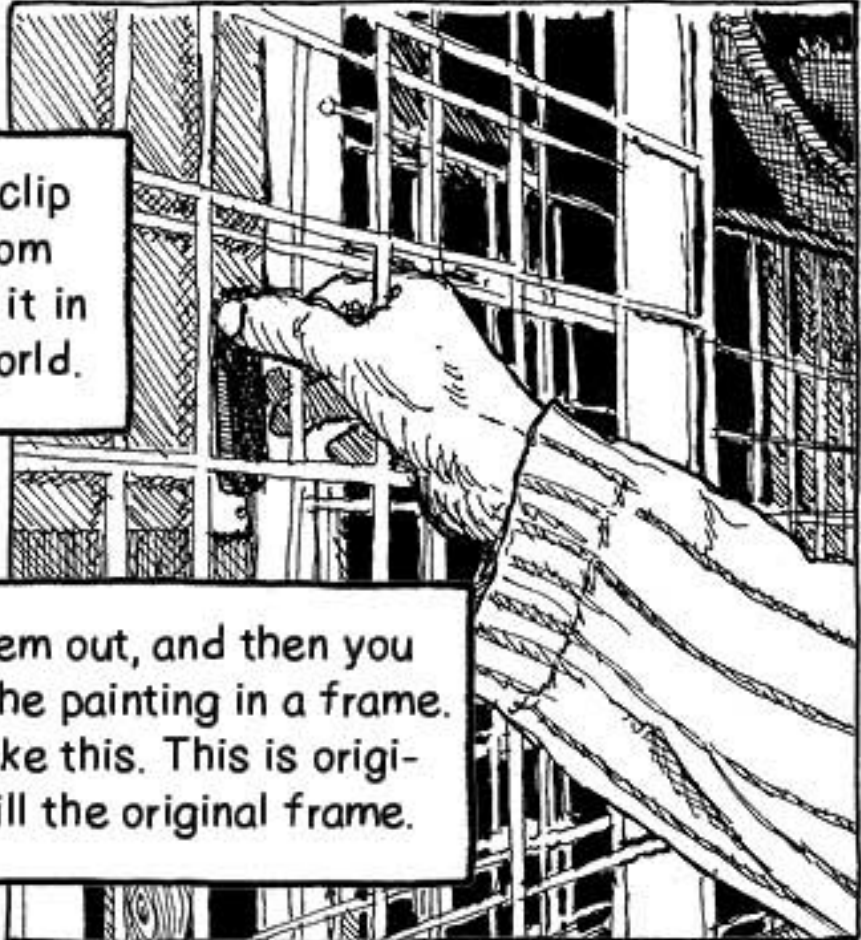
It was painted in Paris during the war, so the quality of the canvas is not first-class. Because it was war. That's another reason this painting is very fragile.



Especially on this part of the painting, on the left. You can see it.




If you walk to the other side. Then you can see the back of the painting.

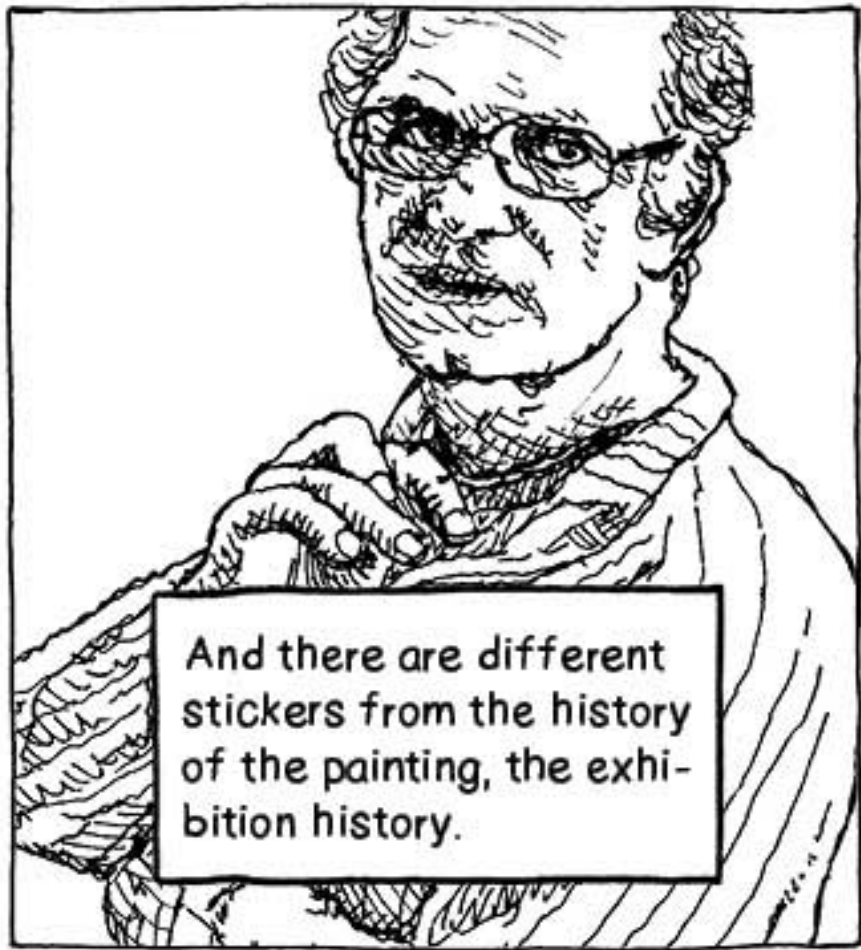


You see, this is the Oz clip record. It's a system from Australia, and they use it in museums all over the world.

You put them out, and then you can hang the painting in a frame. It's easy like this. This is original. It's still the original frame.



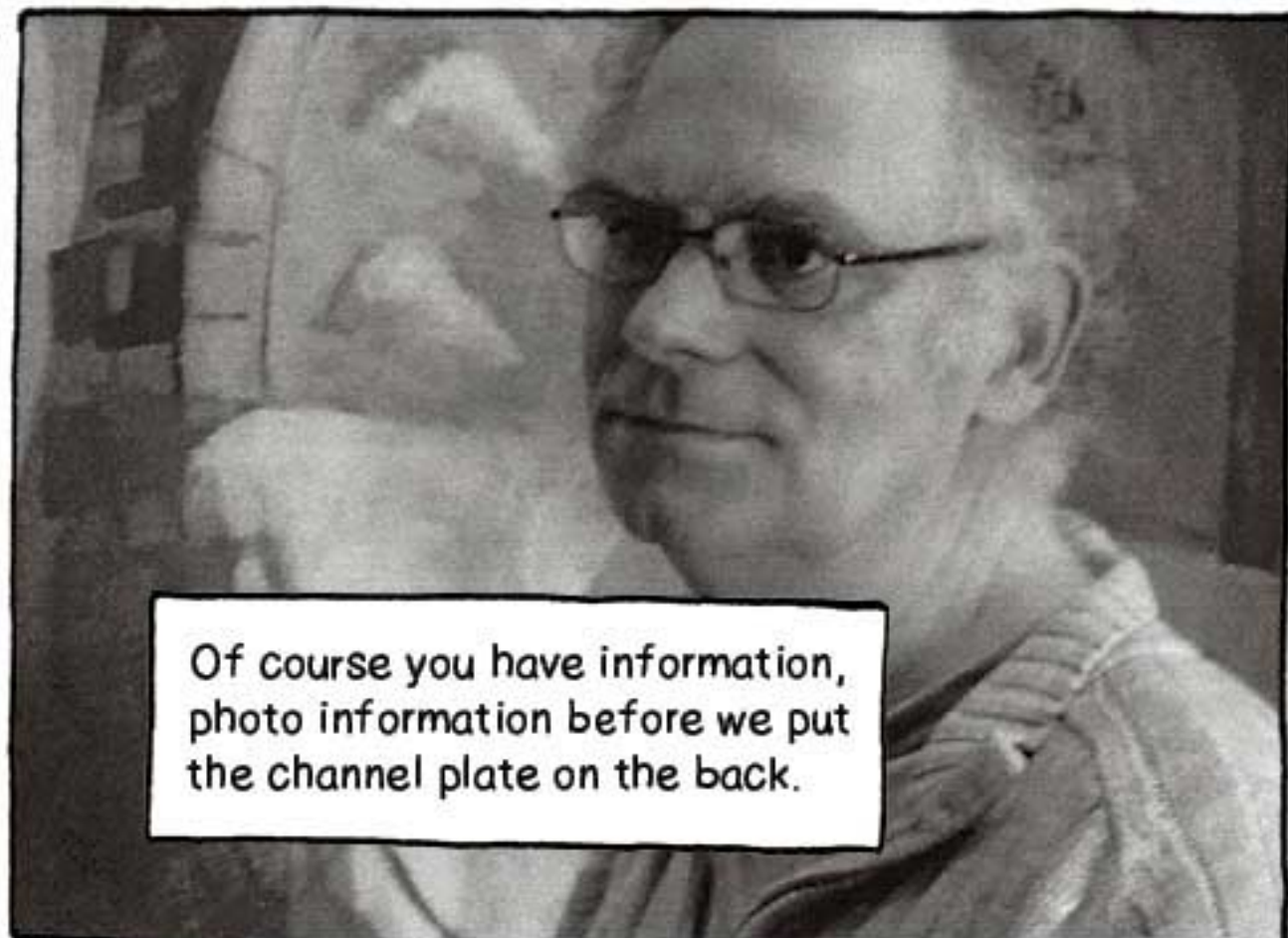
It's the crossbars, from the stretcher.



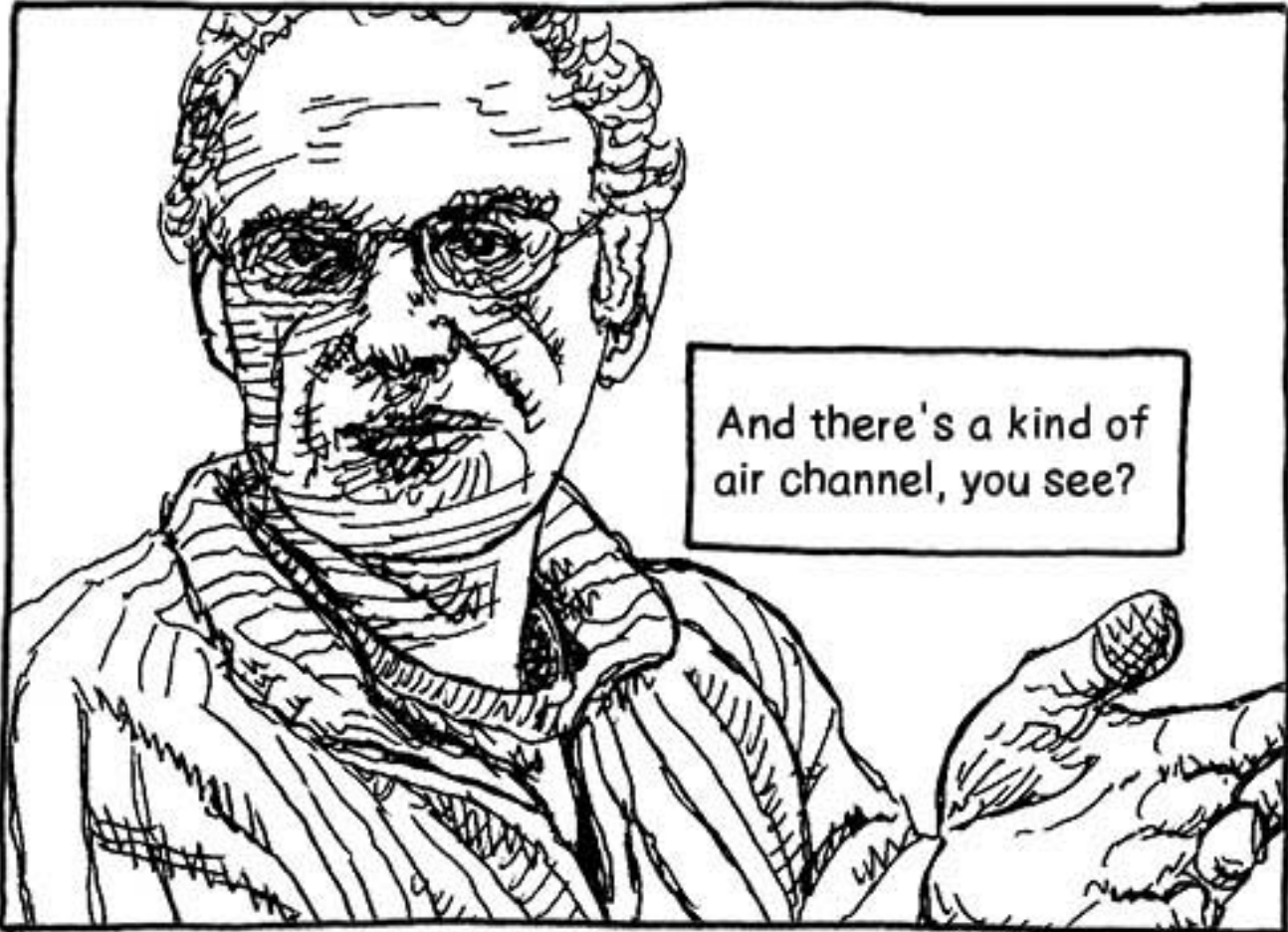
And there are different stickers from the history of the painting, the exhibition history.



Well it's also in other records.
But the stickers you leave on.



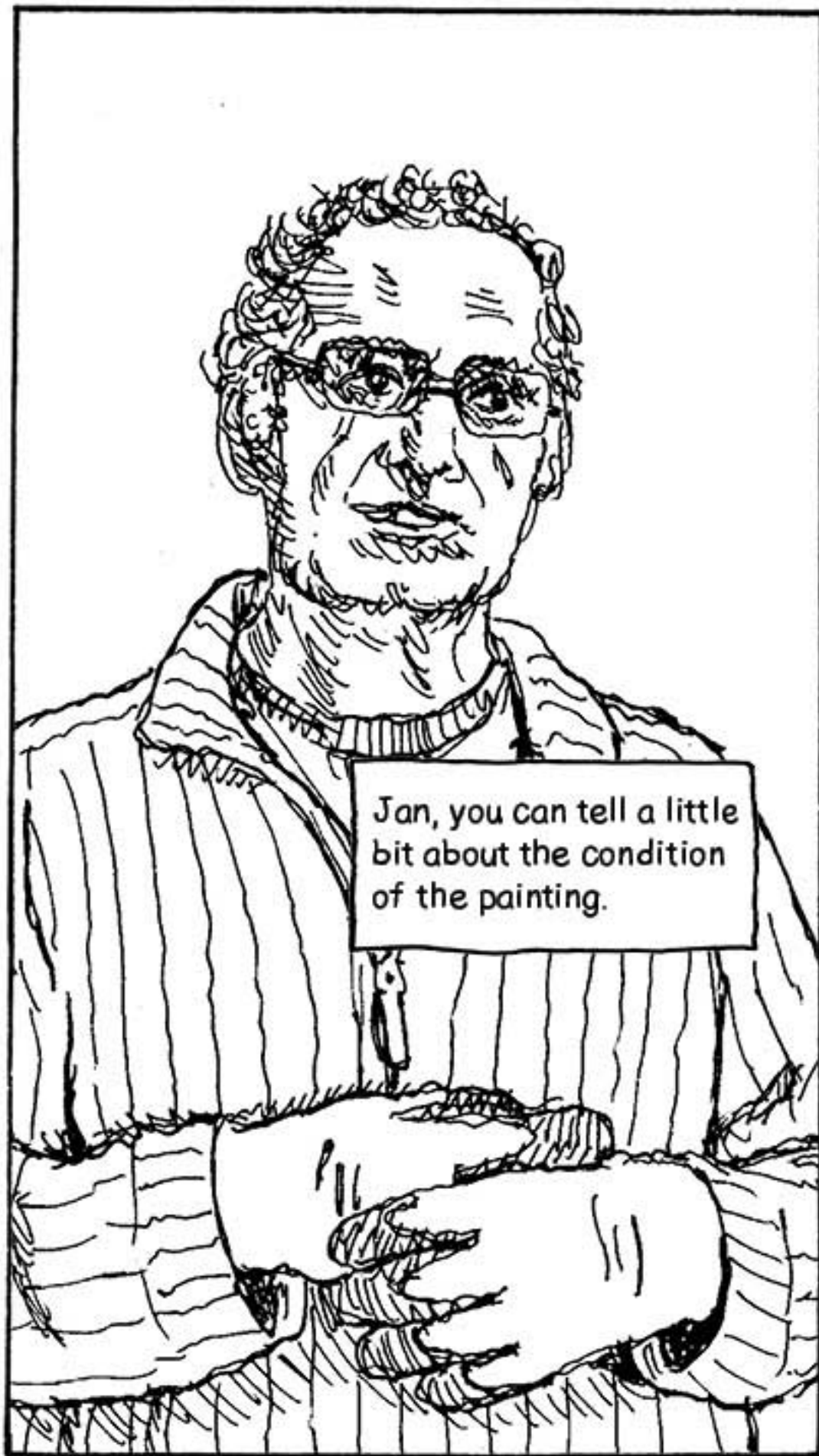
Of course you have information,
photo information before we put
the channel plate on the back.



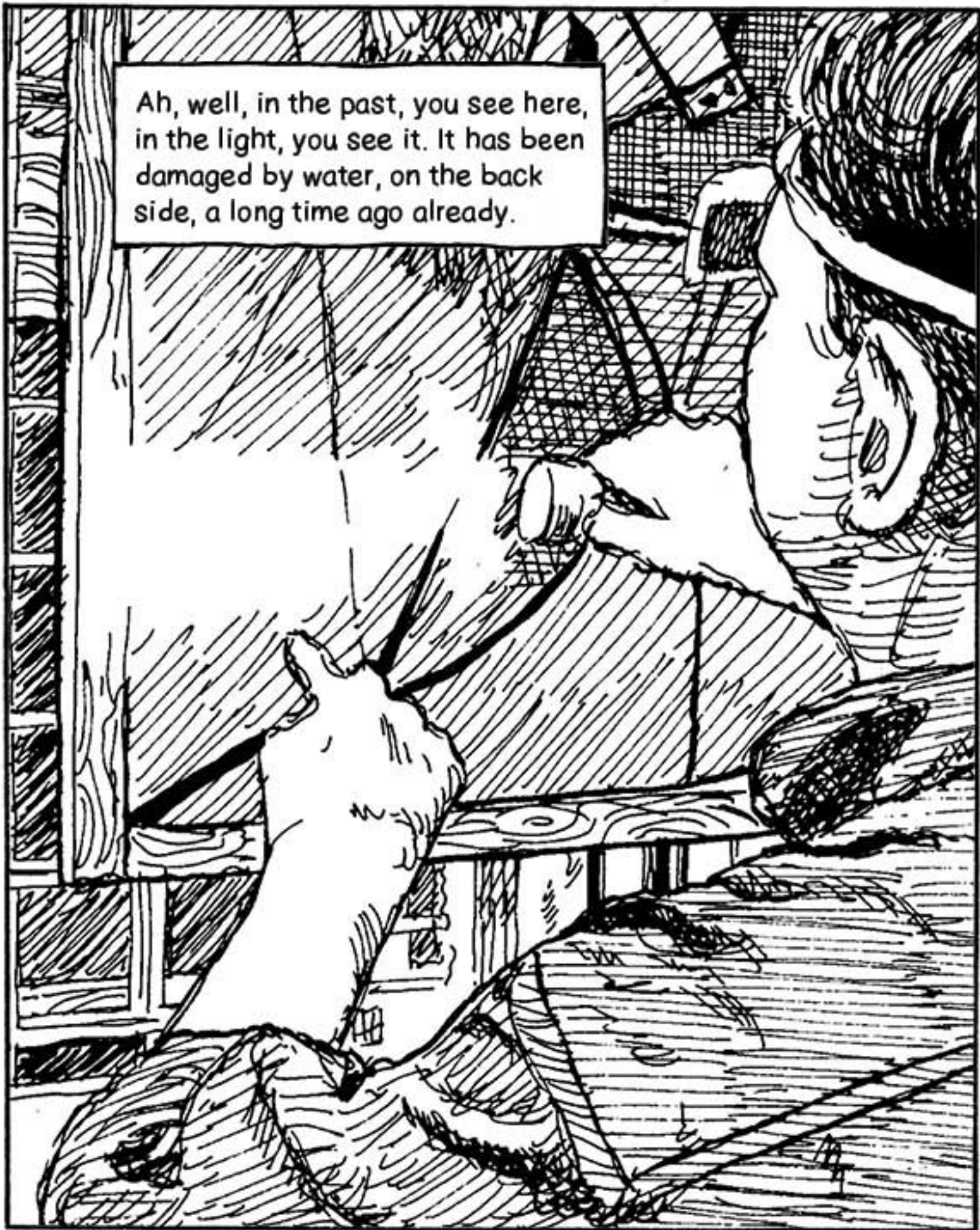
And there's a kind of
air channel, you see?



And we put this aluminum on top
of each, so no insects come in.



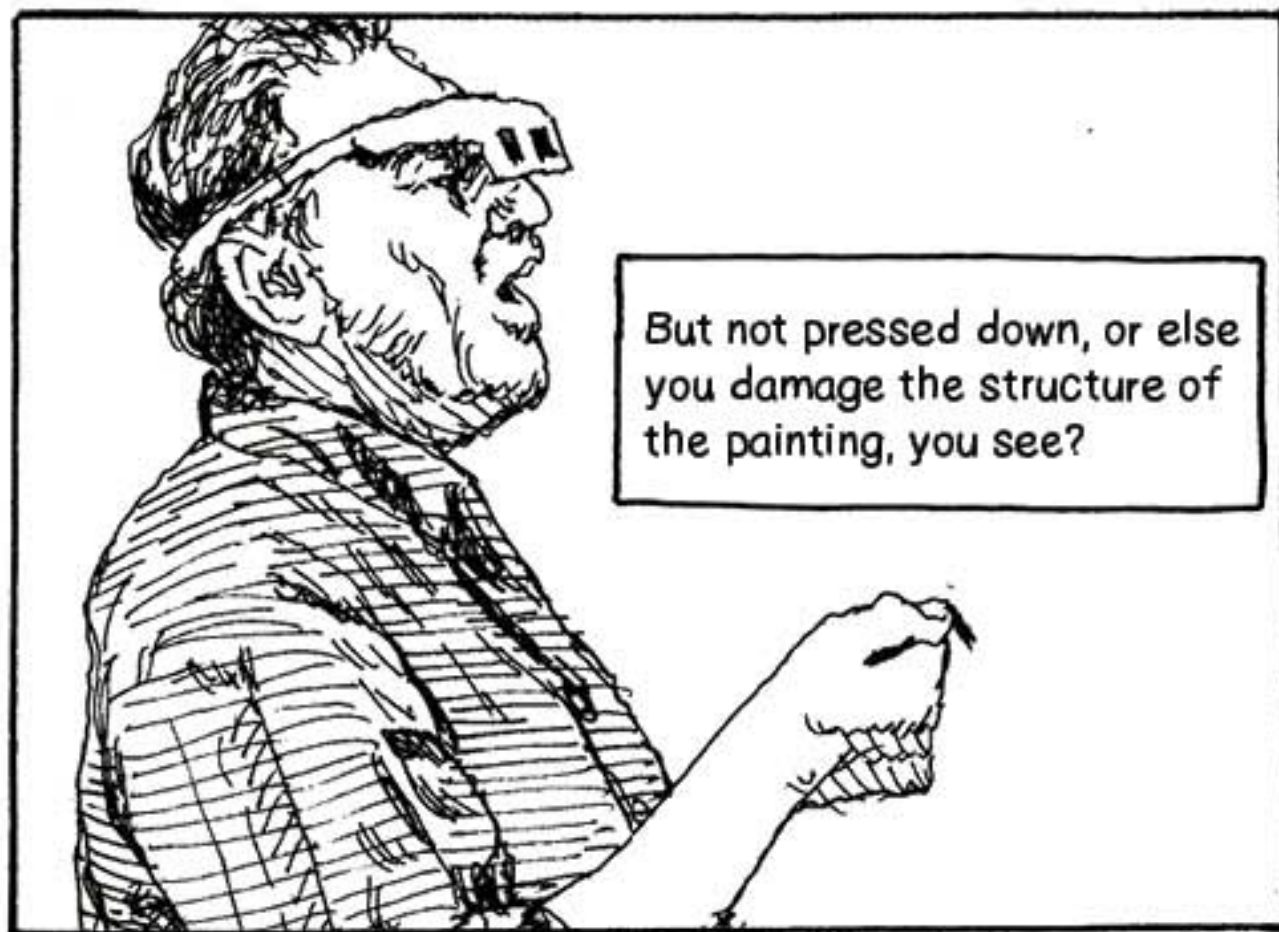
Jan, you can tell a little bit about the condition of the painting.



Ah, well, in the past, you see here, in the light, you see it. It has been damaged by water, on the back side, a long time ago already.



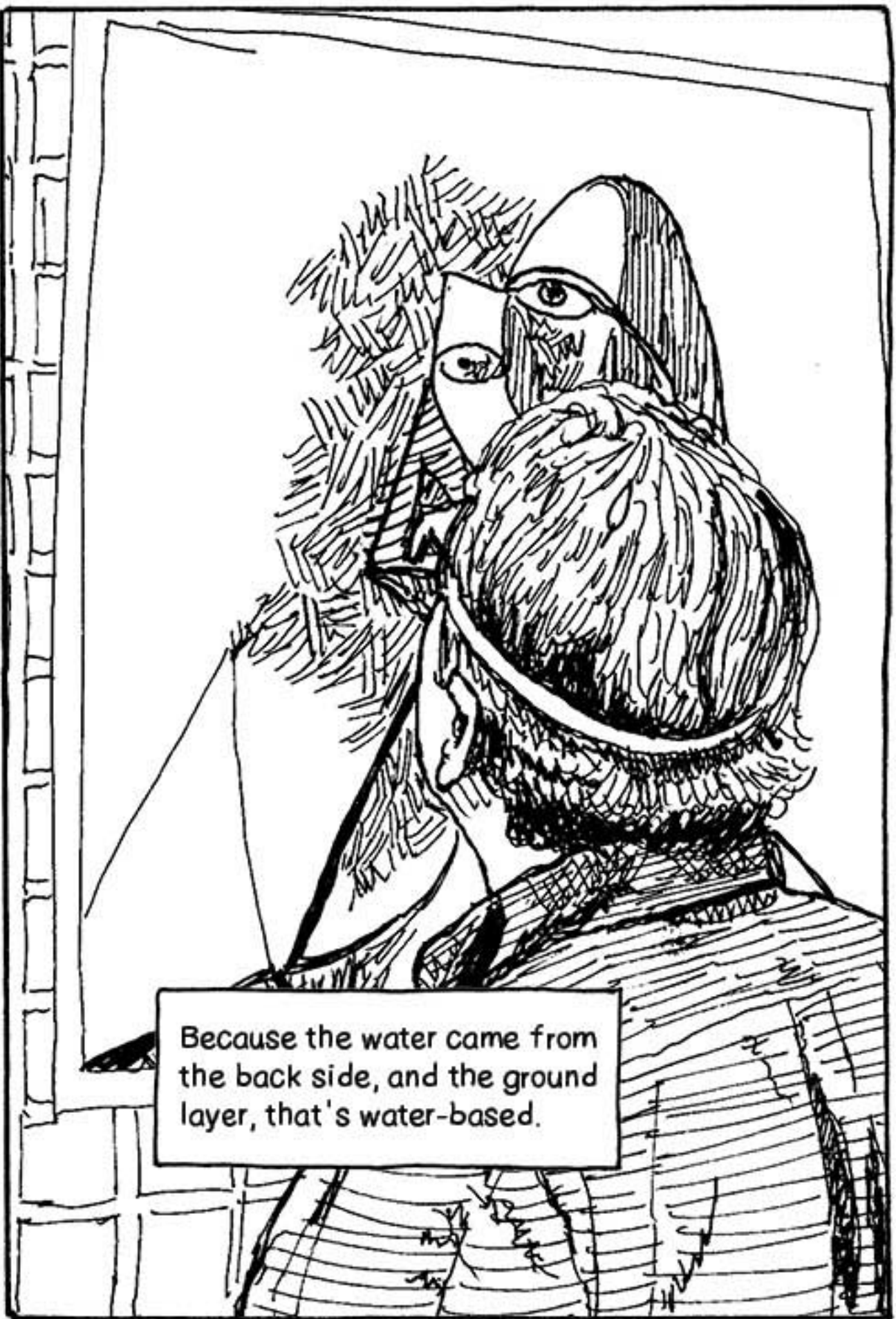
And the upper part here, the paint layer came off, and it's been laid down again.



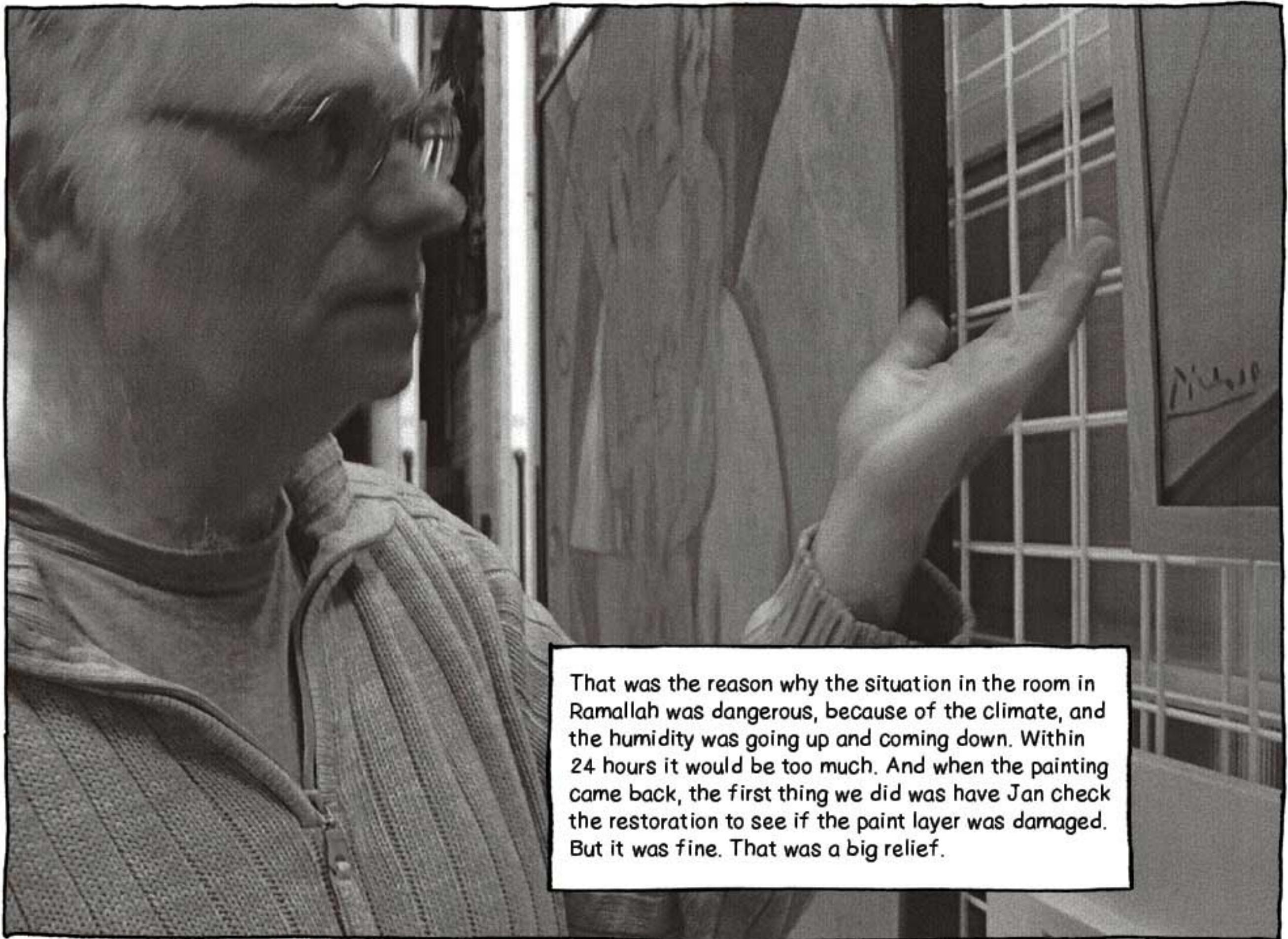
But not pressed down, or else you damage the structure of the painting, you see?



So, you still see it, but it's fixed now. Before it was standing up much more, the paint layer.



Because the water came from the back side, and the ground layer, that's water-based.



That was the reason why the situation in the room in Ramallah was dangerous, because of the climate, and the humidity was going up and coming down. Within 24 hours it would be too much. And when the painting came back, the first thing we did was have Jan check the restoration to see if the paint layer was damaged. But it was fine. That was a big relief.

WAITING: DIPLOMATIC COVER (PART 2)



And then we had to search for other means. Then we found out about the bank guarantee—we have to solve that—and maybe some other diplomatic ways; not the Dutch representatives, but maybe UNESCO.



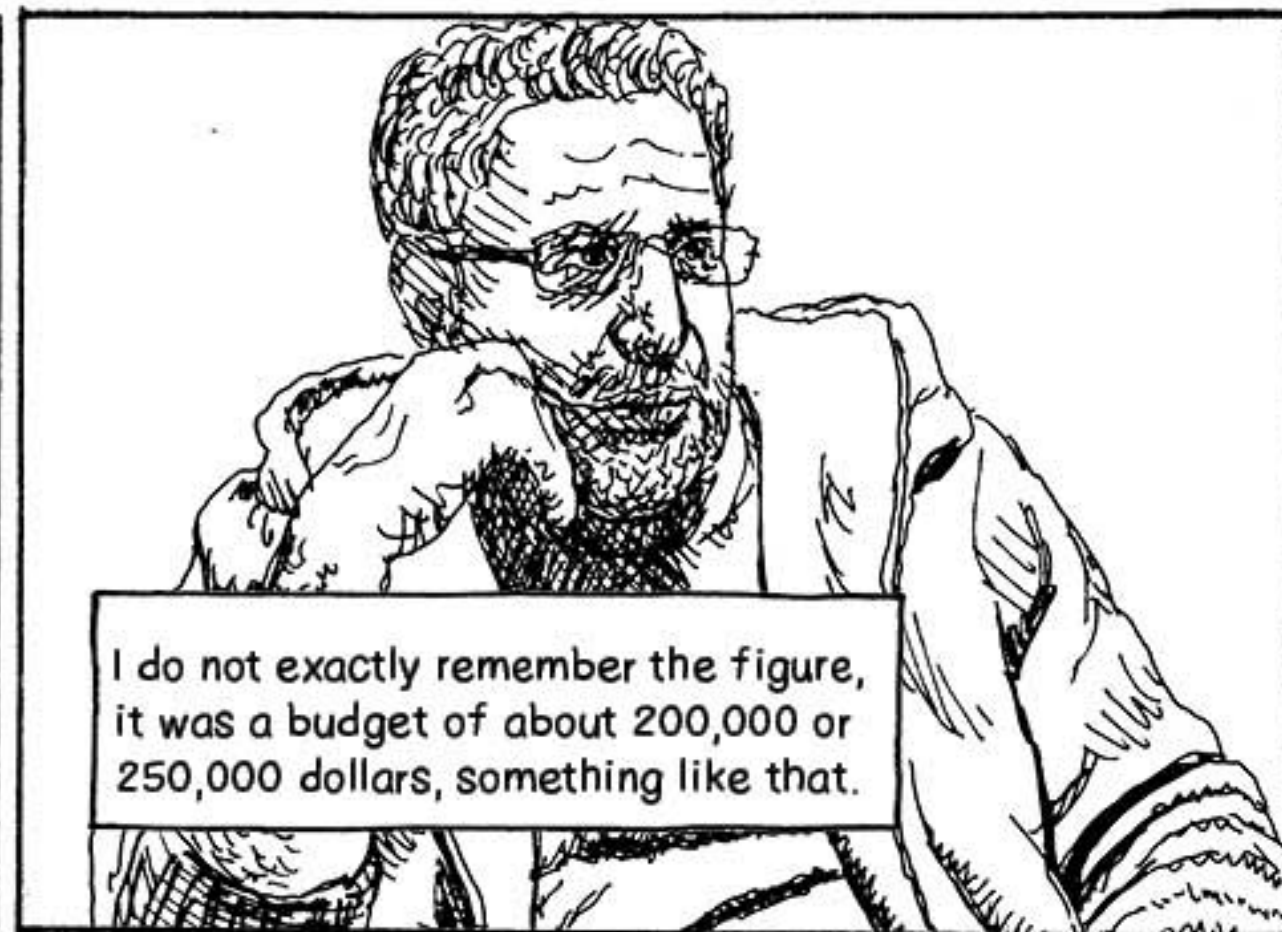
At the beginning... at the very beginning when Khaled came and talked to me, it was basically one year before the painting was displayed in Ramallah.



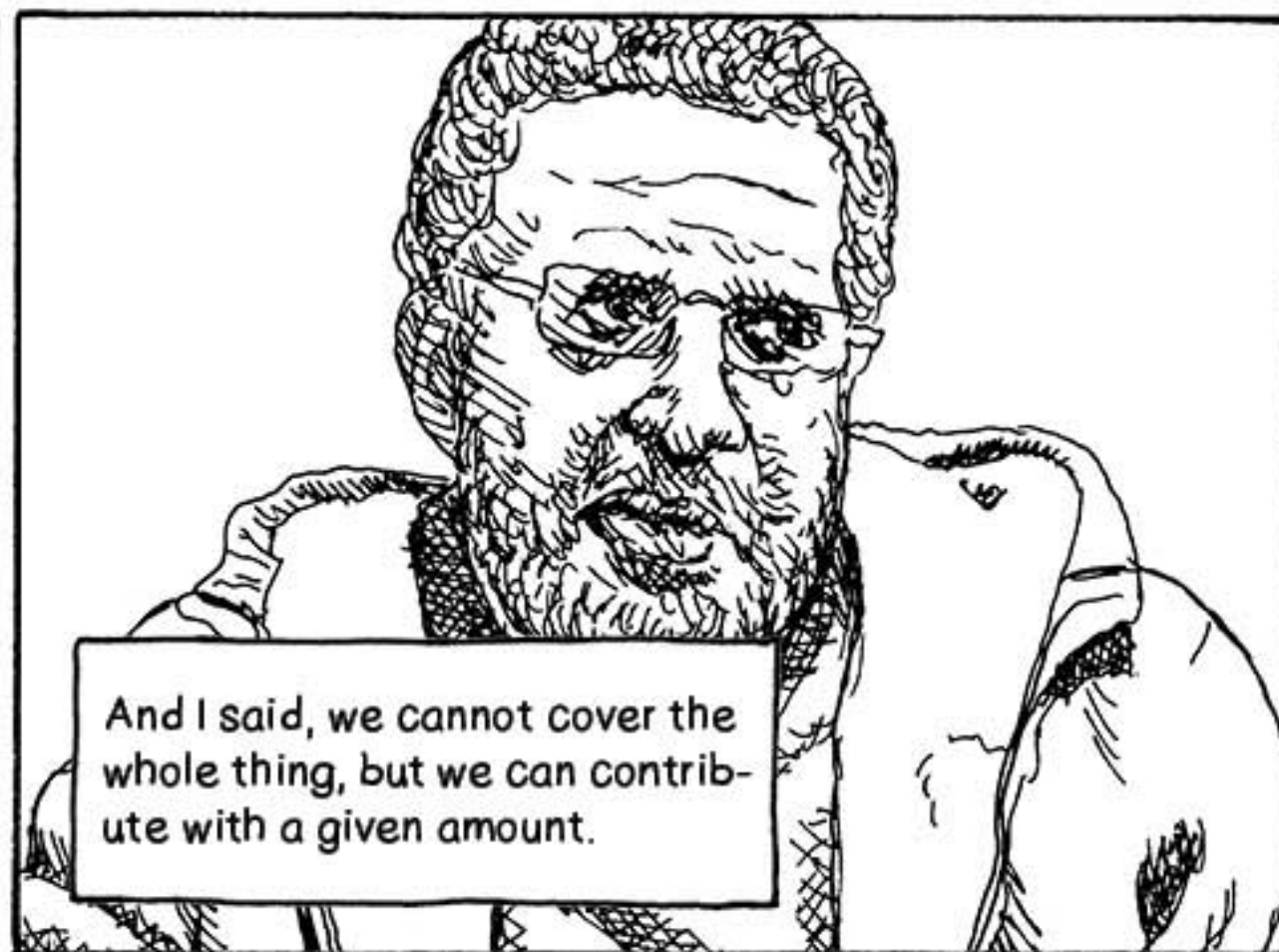
He talked to me mostly about some financial support to cover the expenses.



He came with a budget, a tentative budget, for the security, the transfer, the transportation, setting the room for the display, media coverage, etc.



I do not exactly remember the figure, it was a budget of about 200,000 or 250,000 dollars, something like that.



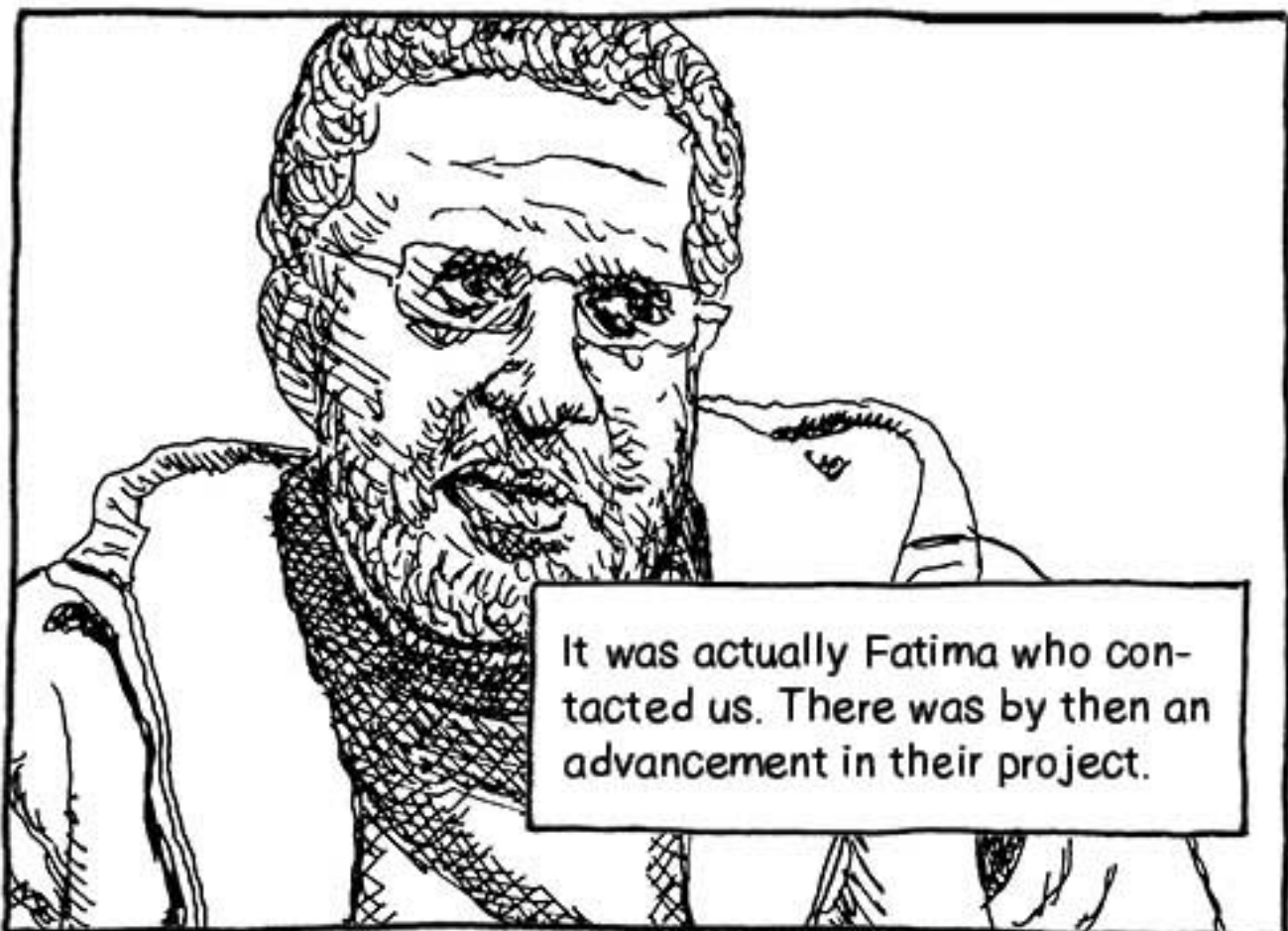
And I said, we cannot cover the whole thing, but we can contribute with a given amount.



But then, to try to recall the story in all its different steps, for a while Khaled disappeared.



I didn't hear anything from him. Maybe they were working, etc. He got in touch with us again roughly six months after our first meeting.



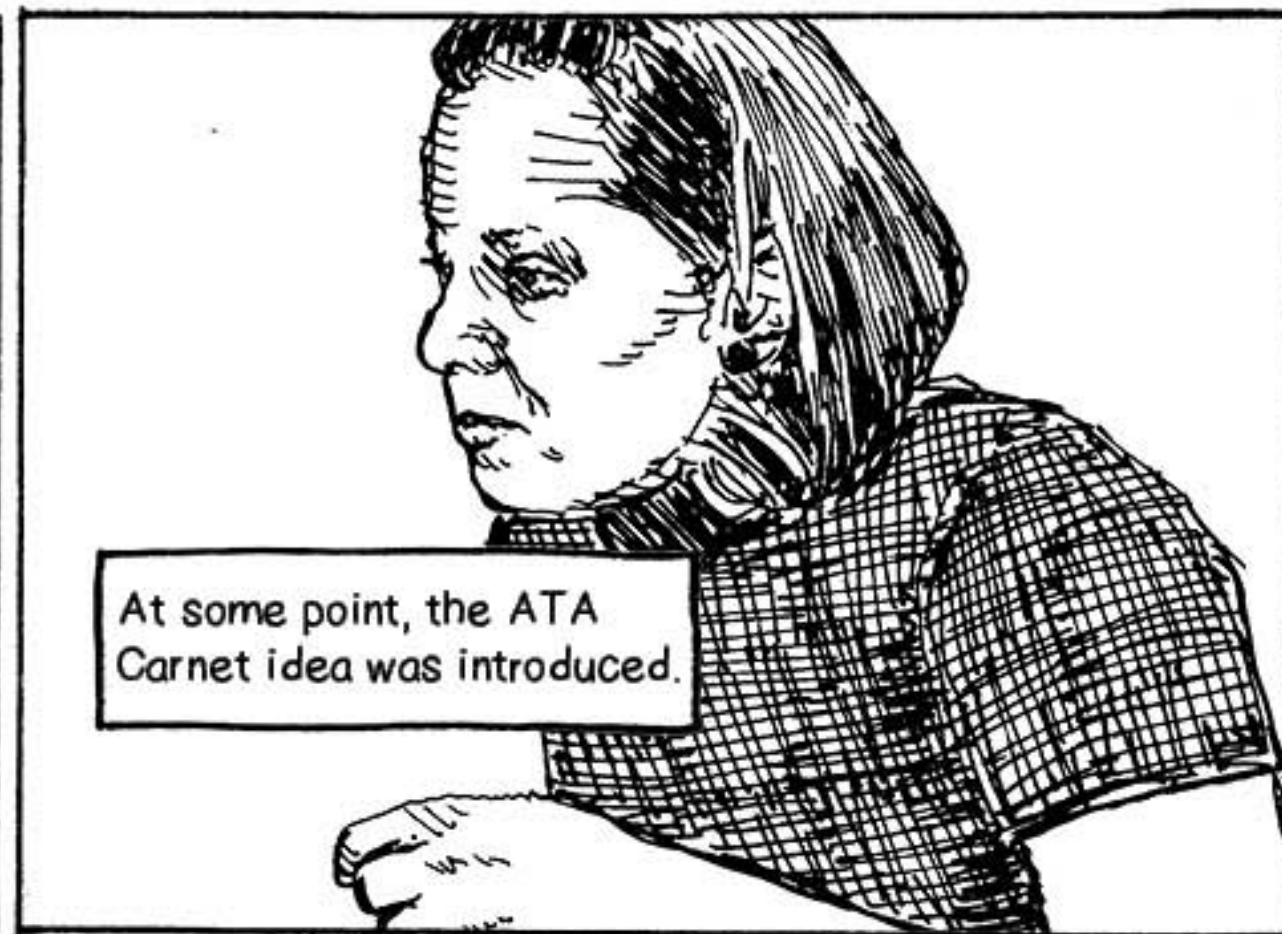
It was actually Fatima who contacted us. There was by then an advancement in their project.



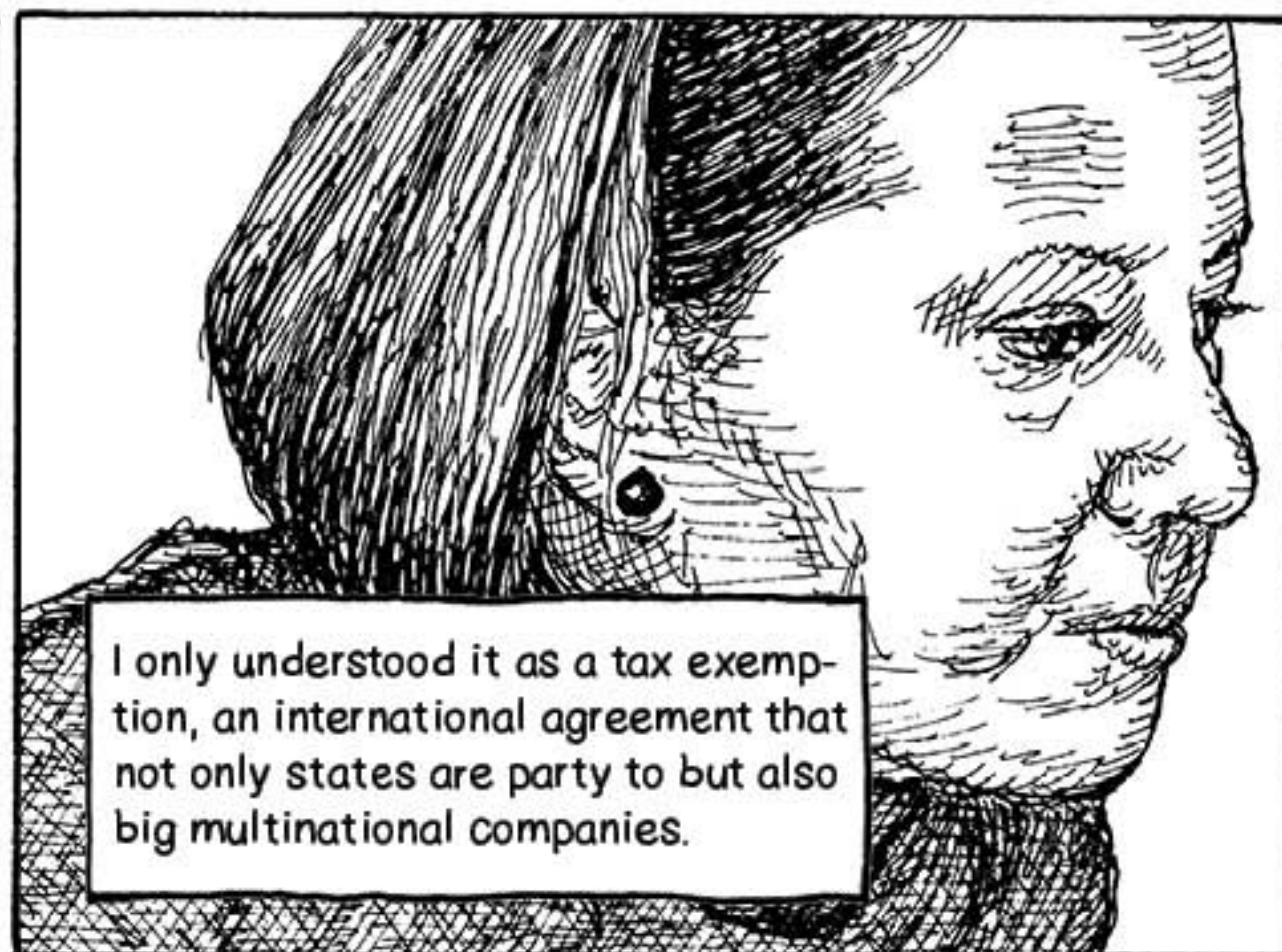
They had already, first of all, secured some funds, from the Prime Minister's office, also in-kind contributions, and some other donors here and there.



Their main concern at that time was how to get the painting here (in addition to some financial things). At that time we started meeting with Fatima, Khaled, Bettine at the Academy... Also at my office here. I enlarged the discussion a bit of course, including UNESCO's administration.



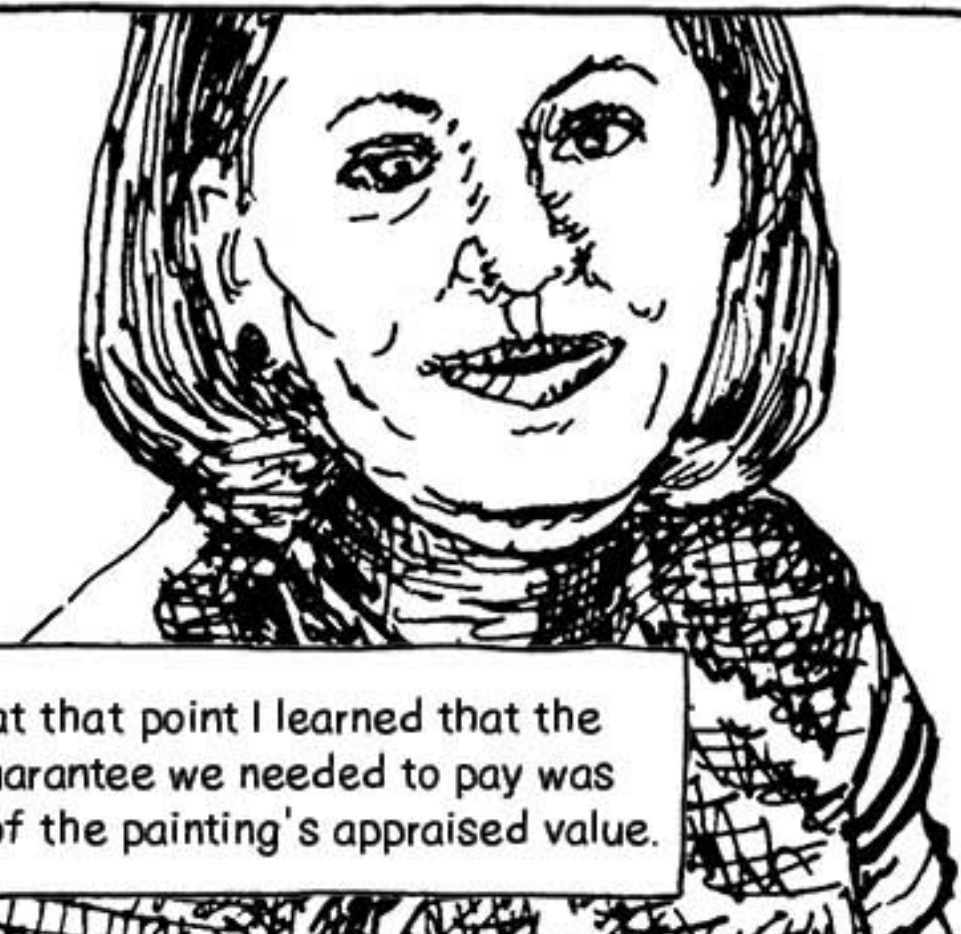
At some point, the ATA Carnet idea was introduced.



I only understood it as a tax exemption, an international agreement that not only states are party to but also big multinational companies.



At that point, Palestine was not a state, Palestine was not a signatory, and no Palestinian company was.



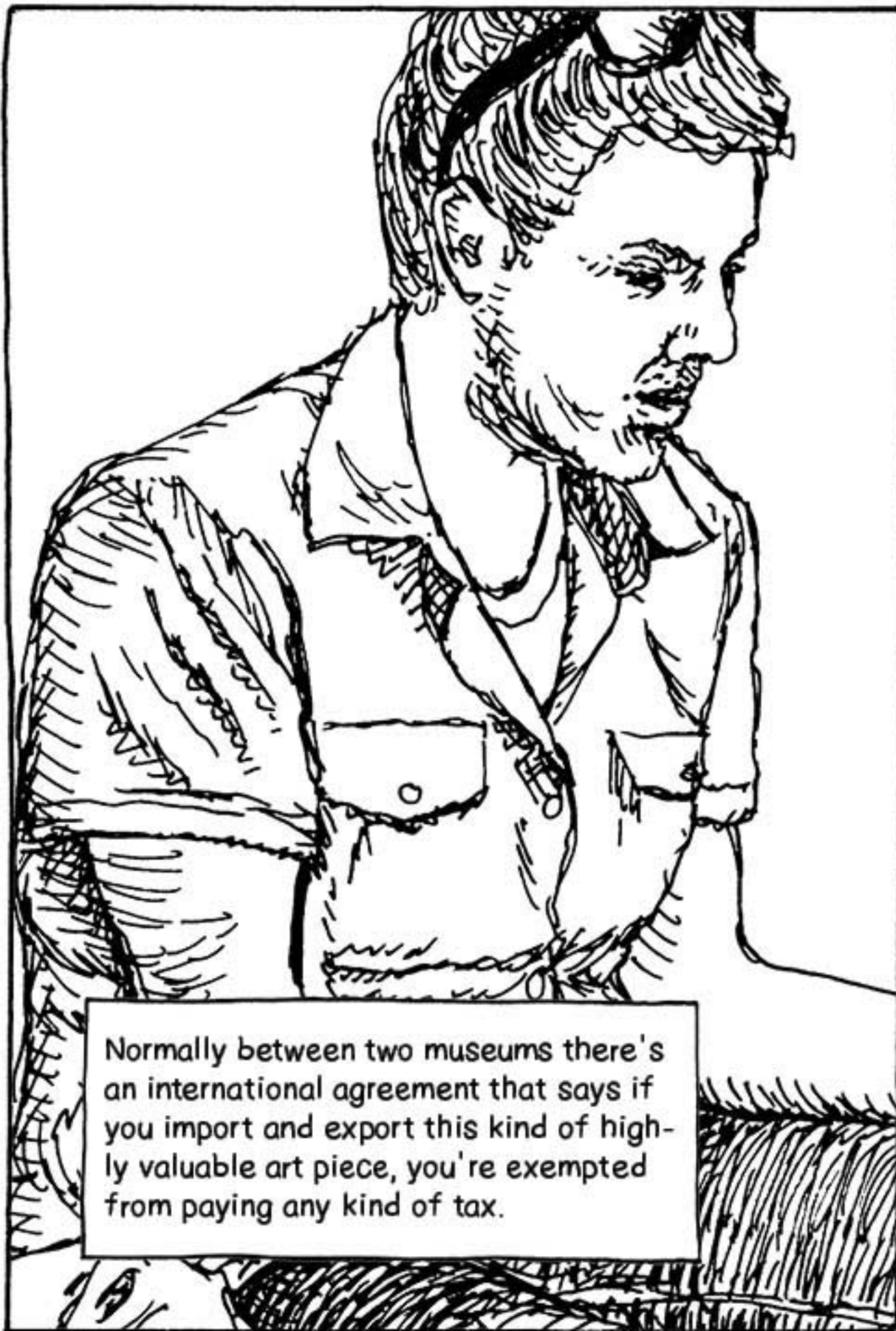
Also at that point I learned that the tax guarantee we needed to pay was 16% of the painting's appraised value.



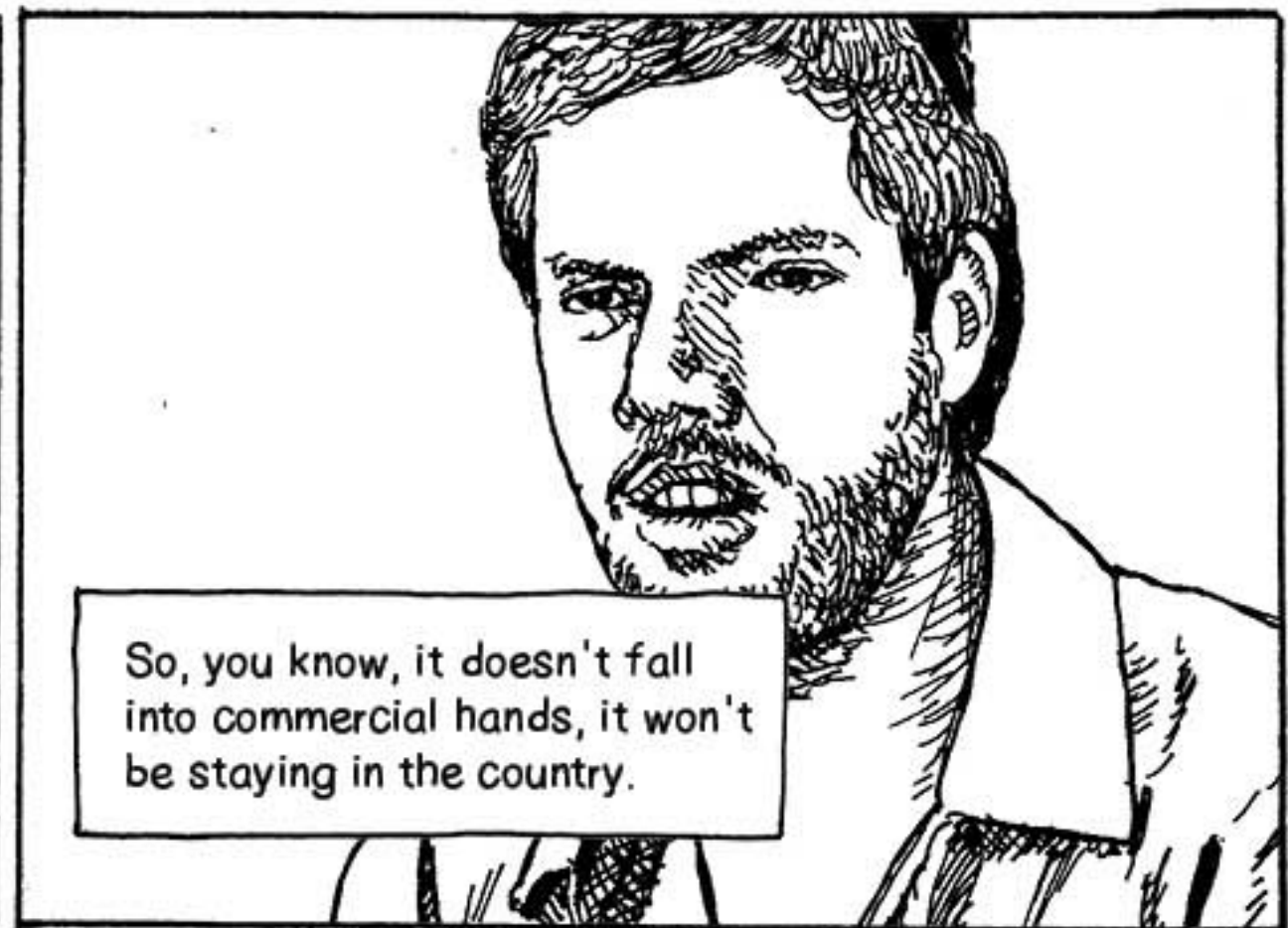
A Carnet is an international document recognized by customs all over.



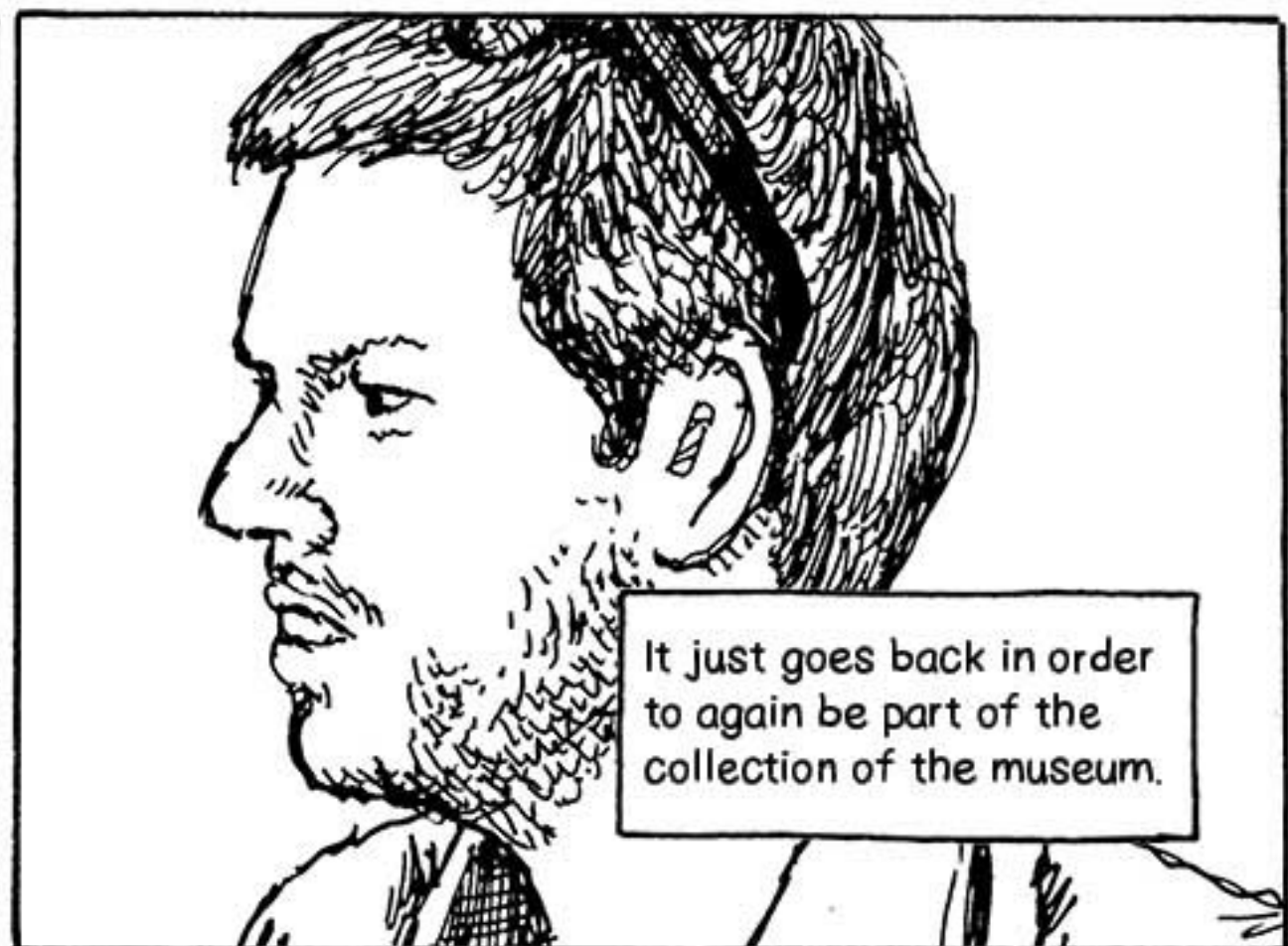
But it has certain requirements.



Normally between two museums there's an international agreement that says if you import and export this kind of highly valuable art piece, you're exempted from paying any kind of tax.



So, you know, it doesn't fall into commercial hands, it won't be staying in the country.



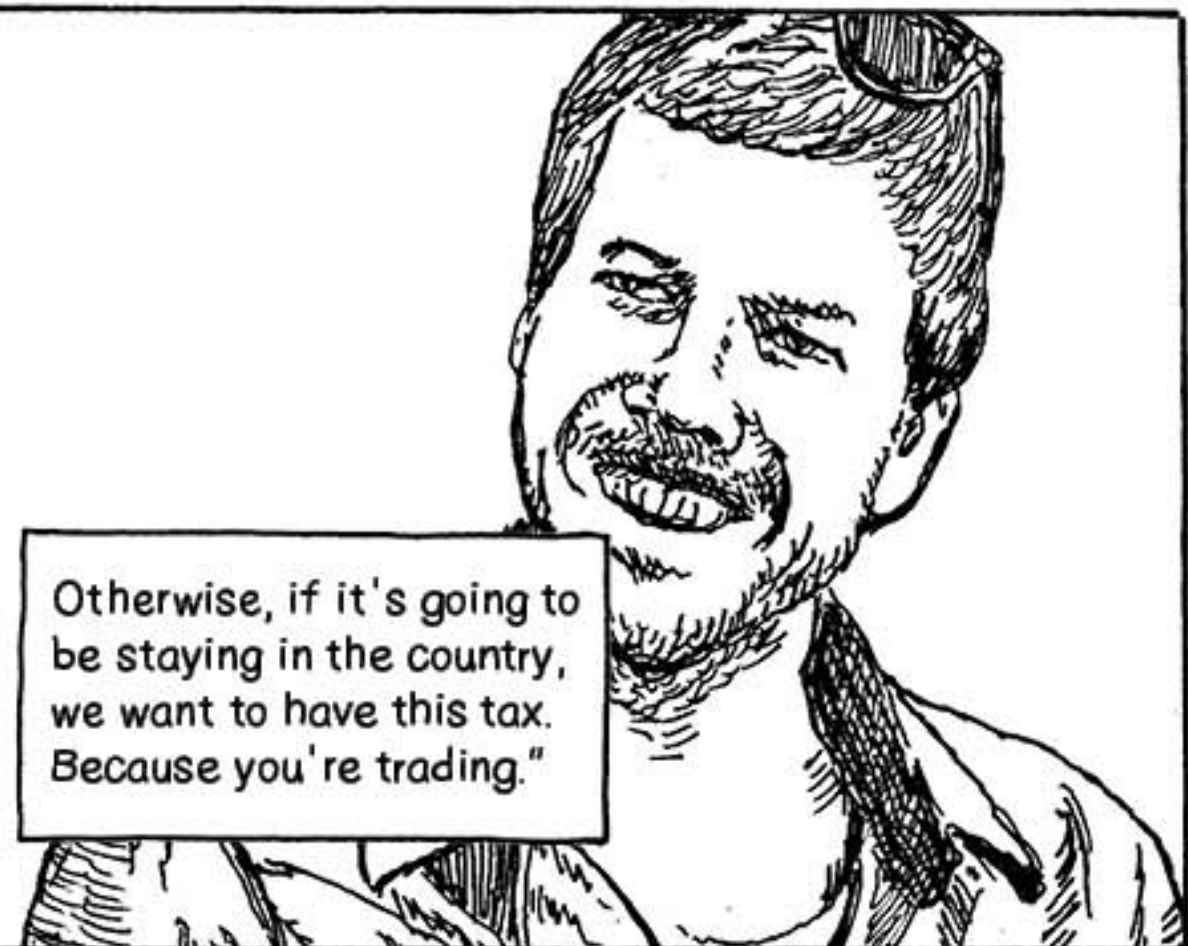
It just goes back in order to again be part of the collection of the museum.

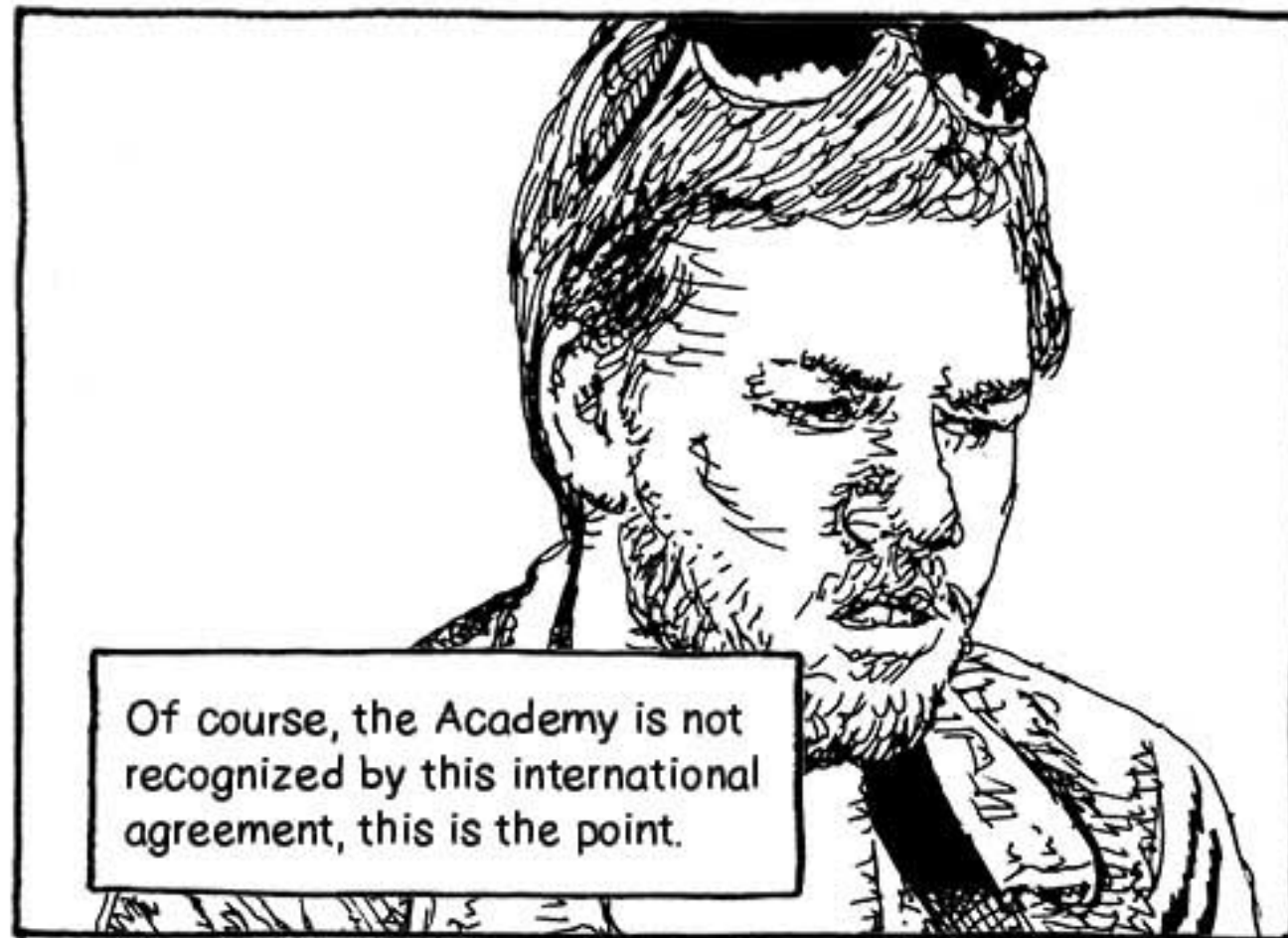
But, what happens if you're not an official museum, if you're not a signatory to this international agreement, then its destination country says, "Okay, it's not an equal exchange, we don't know really what's going to happen. Is it going to stay in the country? Is it there for commercial purposes?"



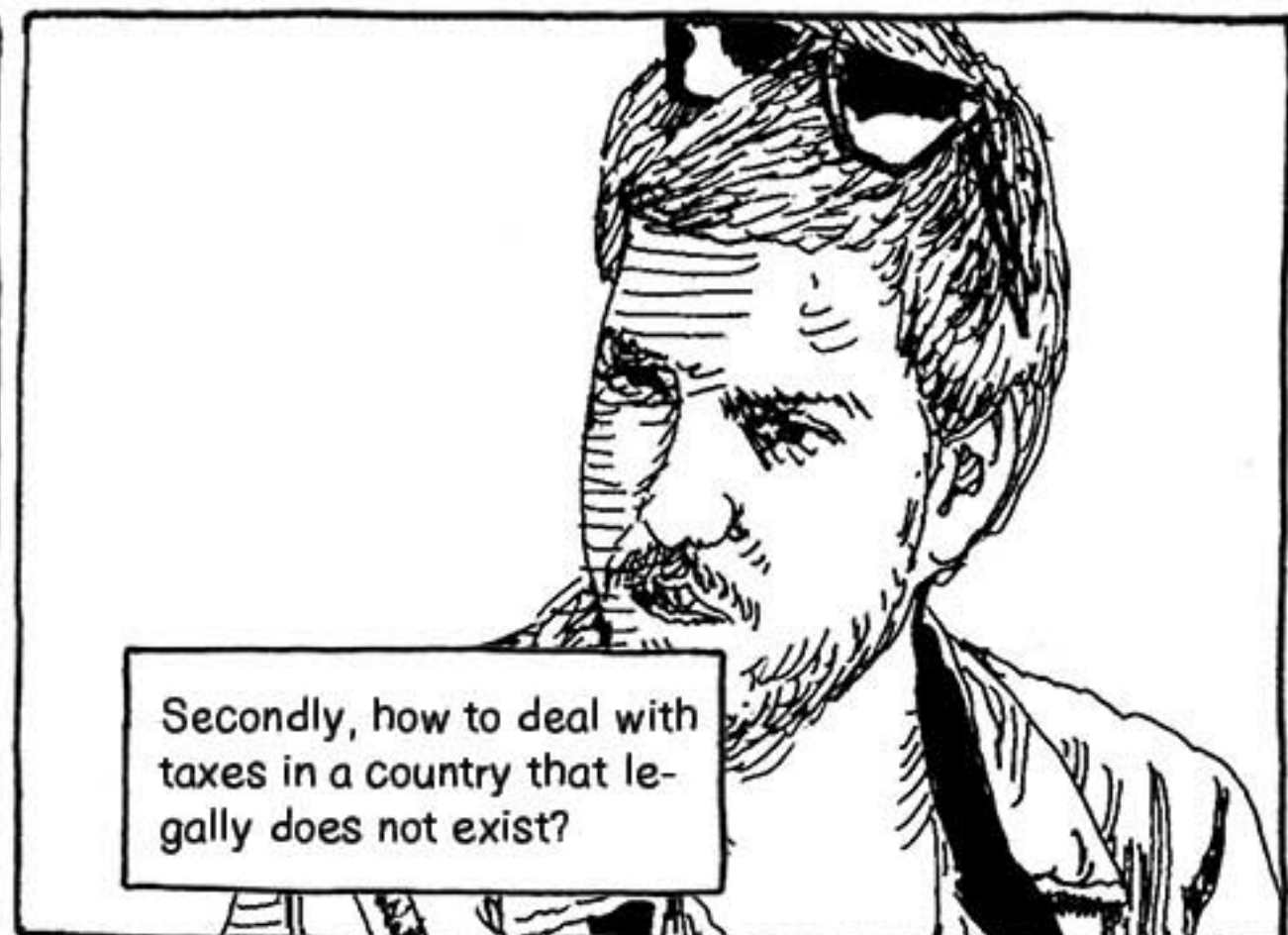
We don't trust it in a way. We want to have a deposit, a certain percentage of the value of what is being sent in order to make sure that it's going to be sent back.

Otherwise, if it's going to be staying in the country, we want to have this tax. Because you're trading."

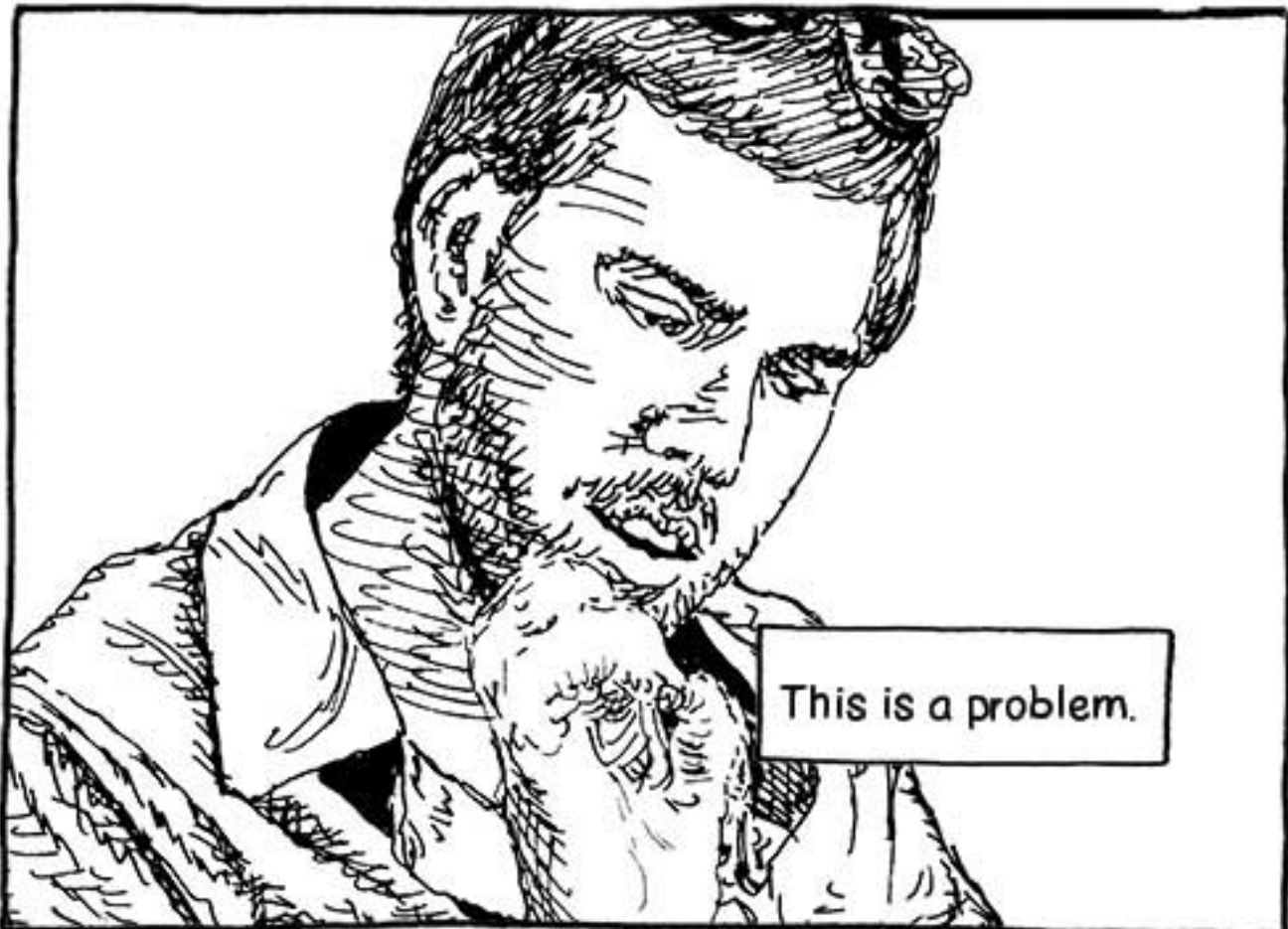




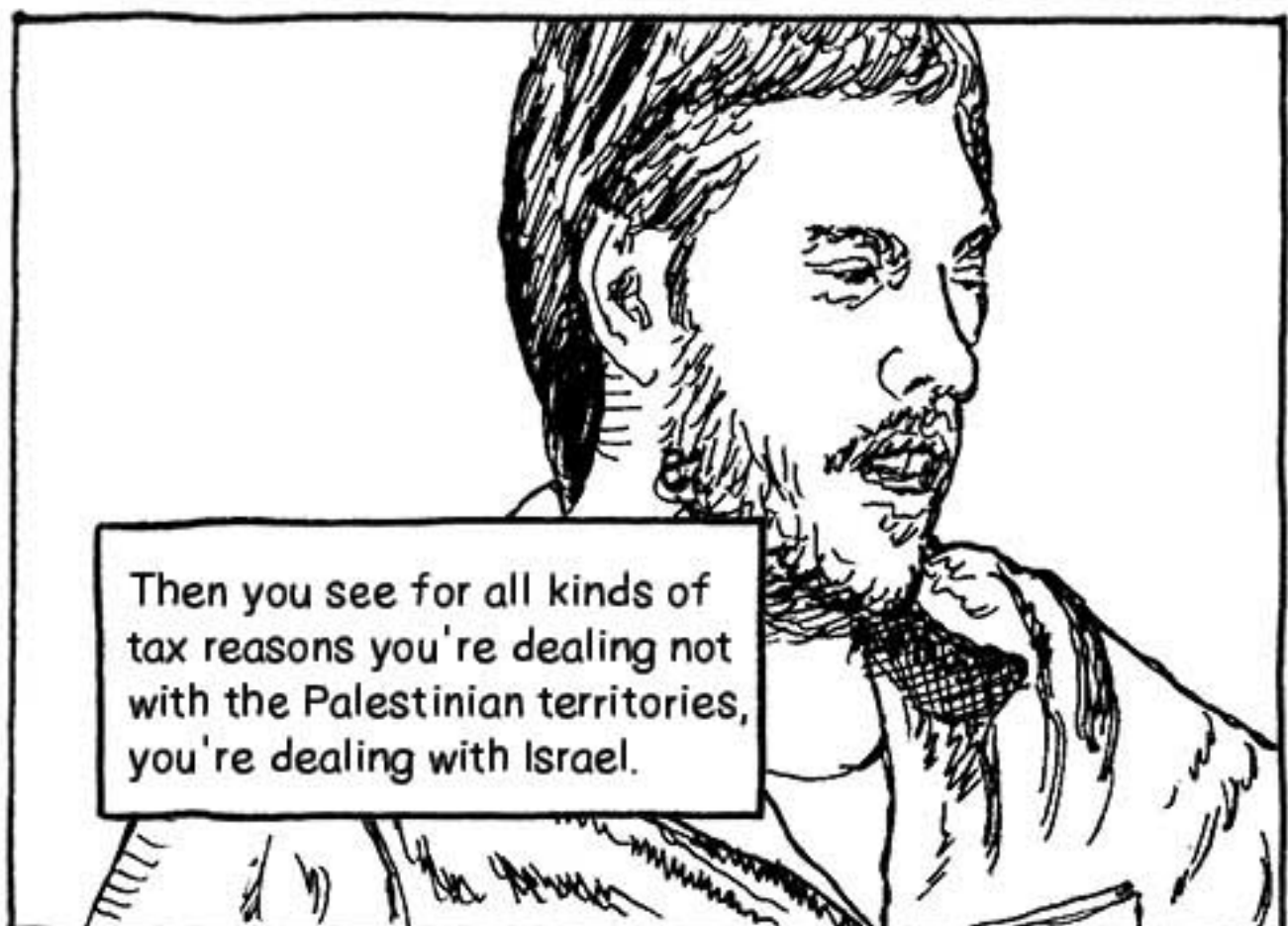
Of course, the Academy is not recognized by this international agreement, this is the point.



Secondly, how to deal with taxes in a country that legally does not exist?

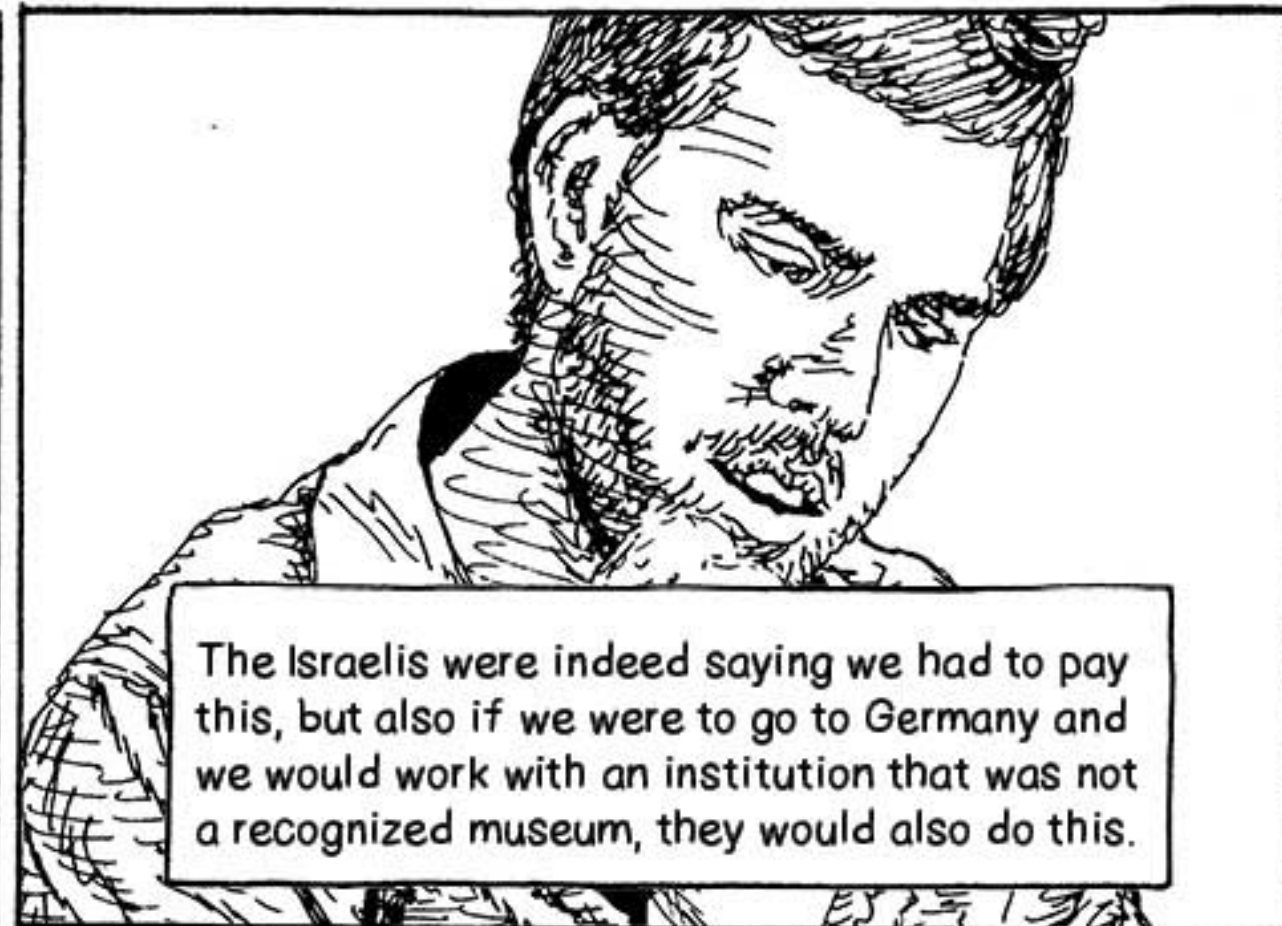


This is a problem.



Then you see for all kinds of tax reasons you're dealing not with the Palestinian territories, you're dealing with Israel.

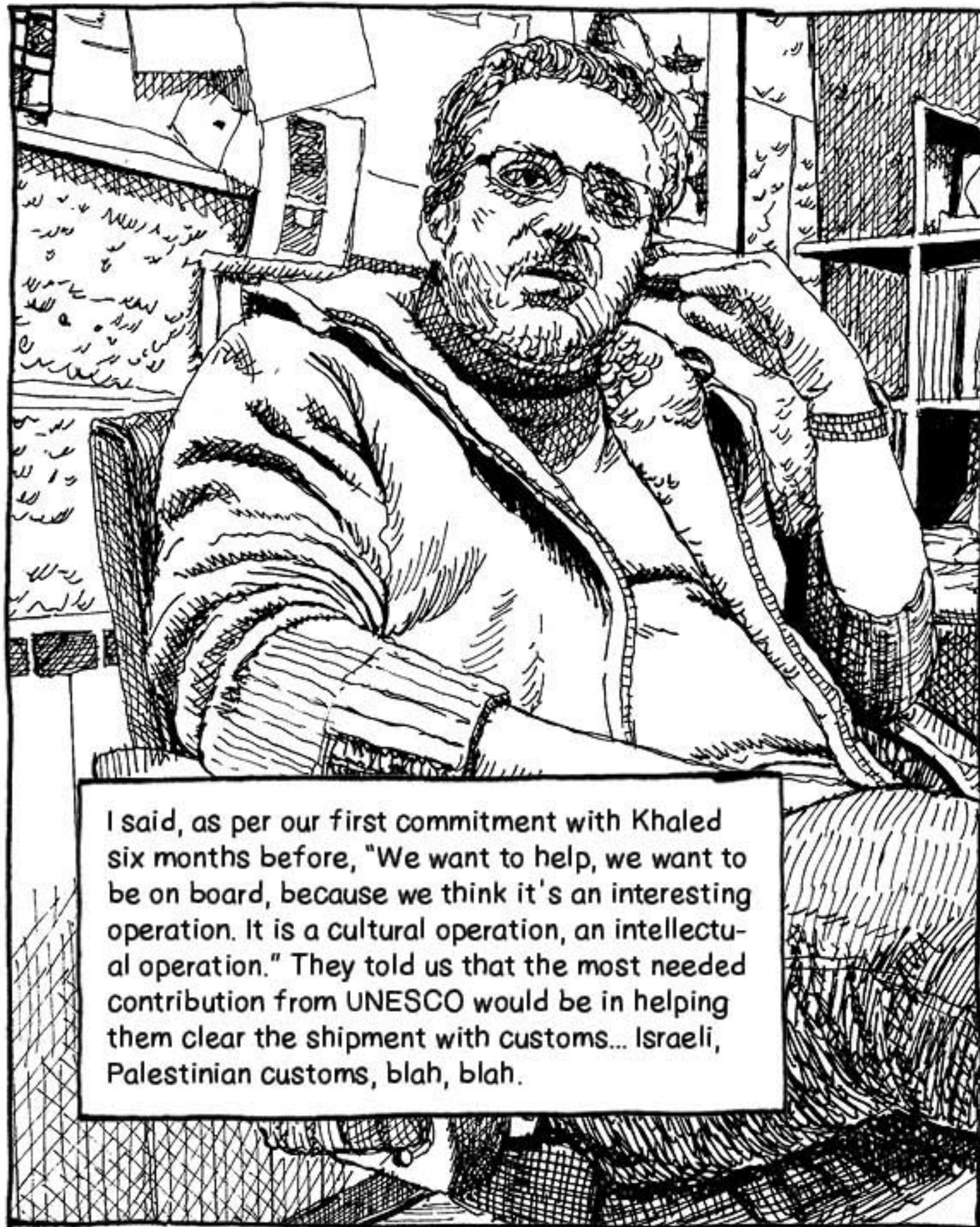
And as the Academy is not an internationally recognized museum... well, it was a big problem for us. It was kind of a large sum that had to be paid or had to be arranged as a deposit and you would not be able to touch the funds for six months. It was kind of a large sum that we couldn't raise.



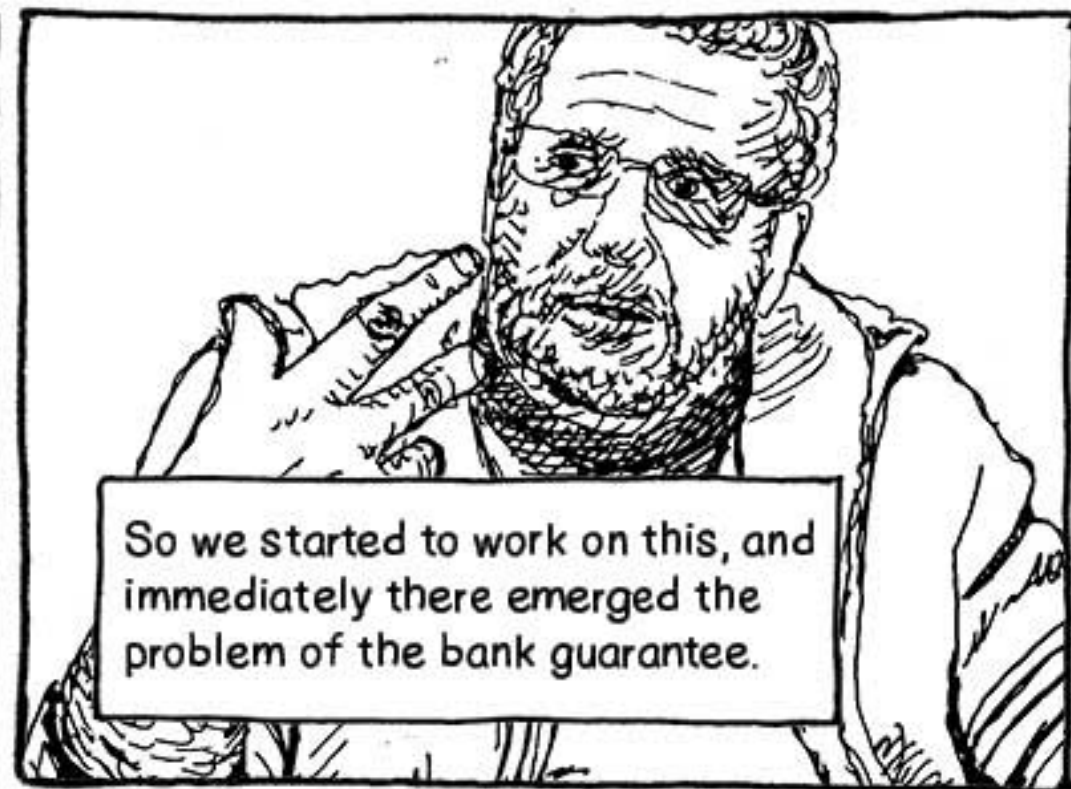
The Israelis were indeed saying we had to pay this, but also if we were to go to Germany and we would work with an institution that was not a recognized museum, they would also do this.



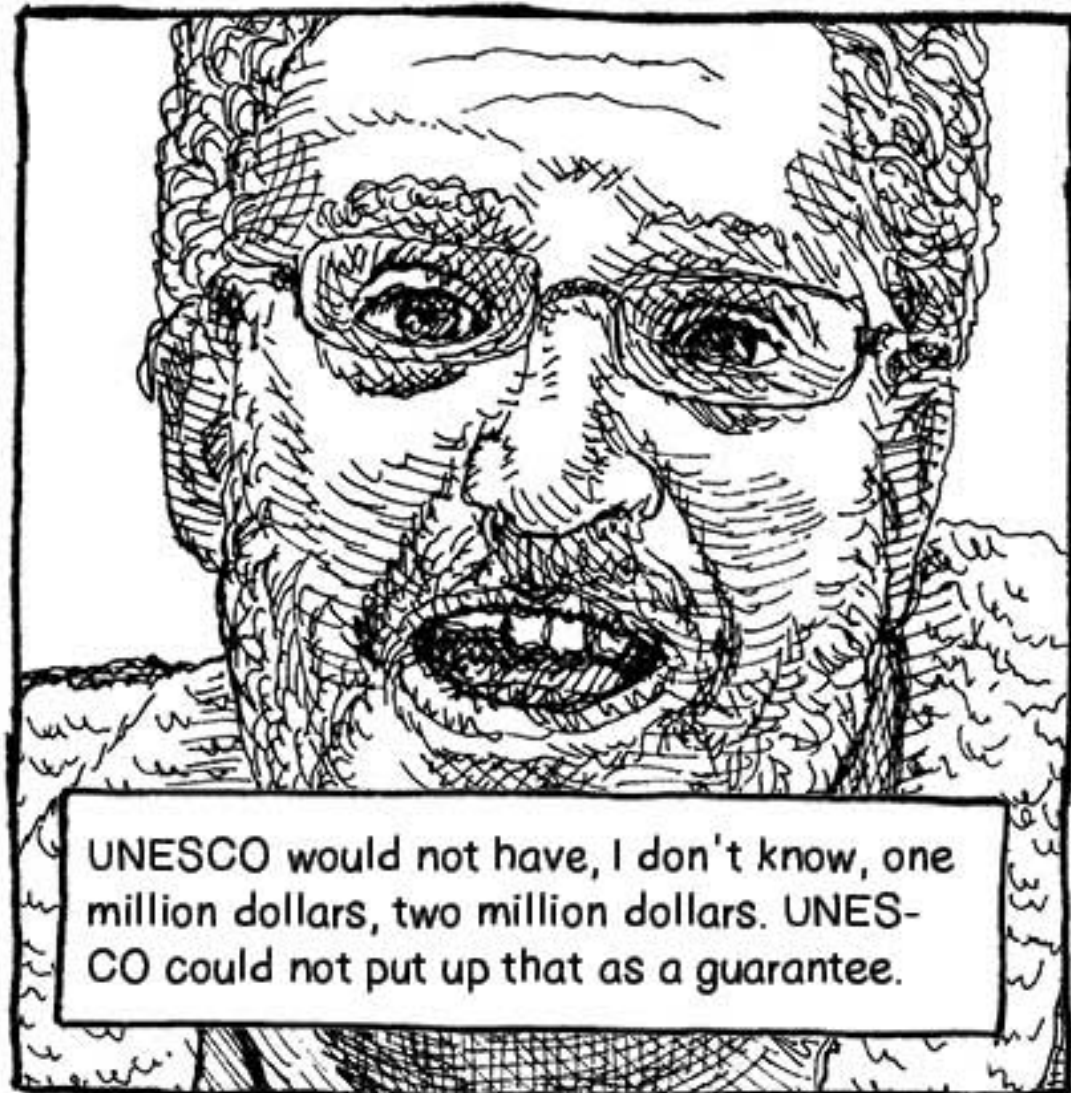
The German authorities would say, "OK, you have to pay this."



I said, as per our first commitment with Khaled six months before, "We want to help, we want to be on board, because we think it's an interesting operation. It is a cultural operation, an intellectual operation." They told us that the most needed contribution from UNESCO would be in helping them clear the shipment with customs... Israeli, Palestinian customs, blah, blah.



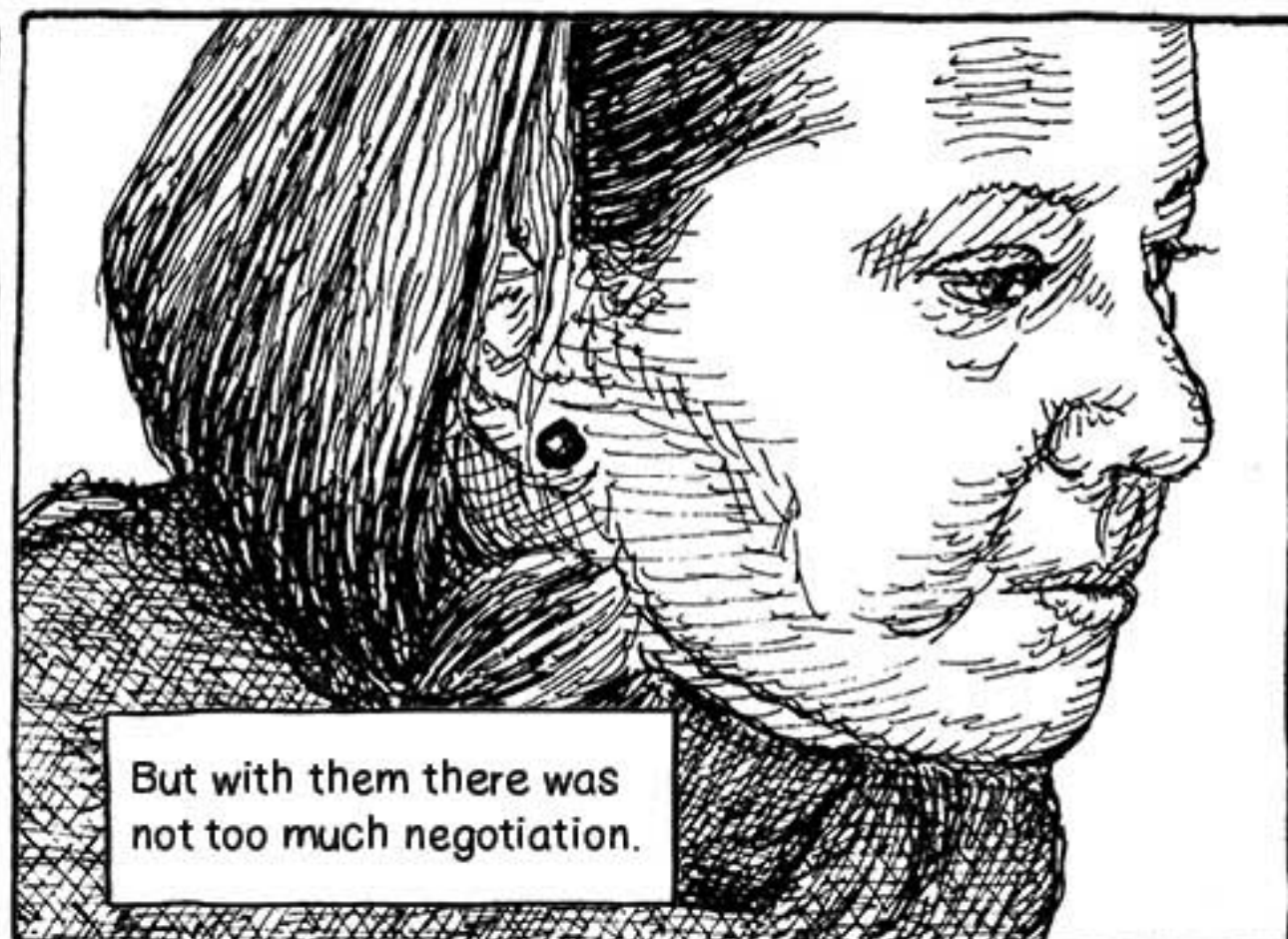
So we started to work on this, and immediately there emerged the problem of the bank guarantee.



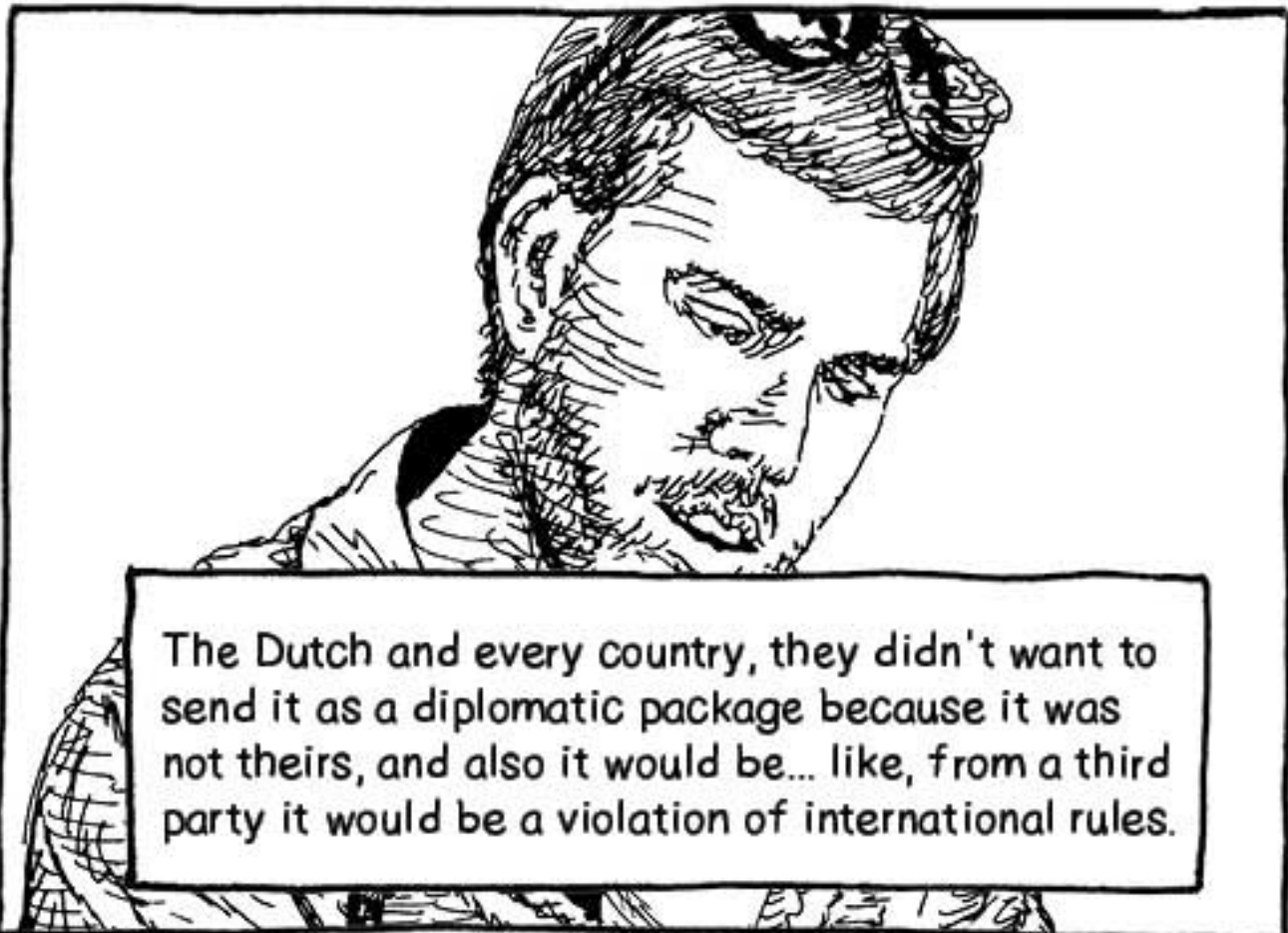
UNESCO would not have, I don't know, one million dollars, two million dollars. UNESCO could not put up that as a guarantee.



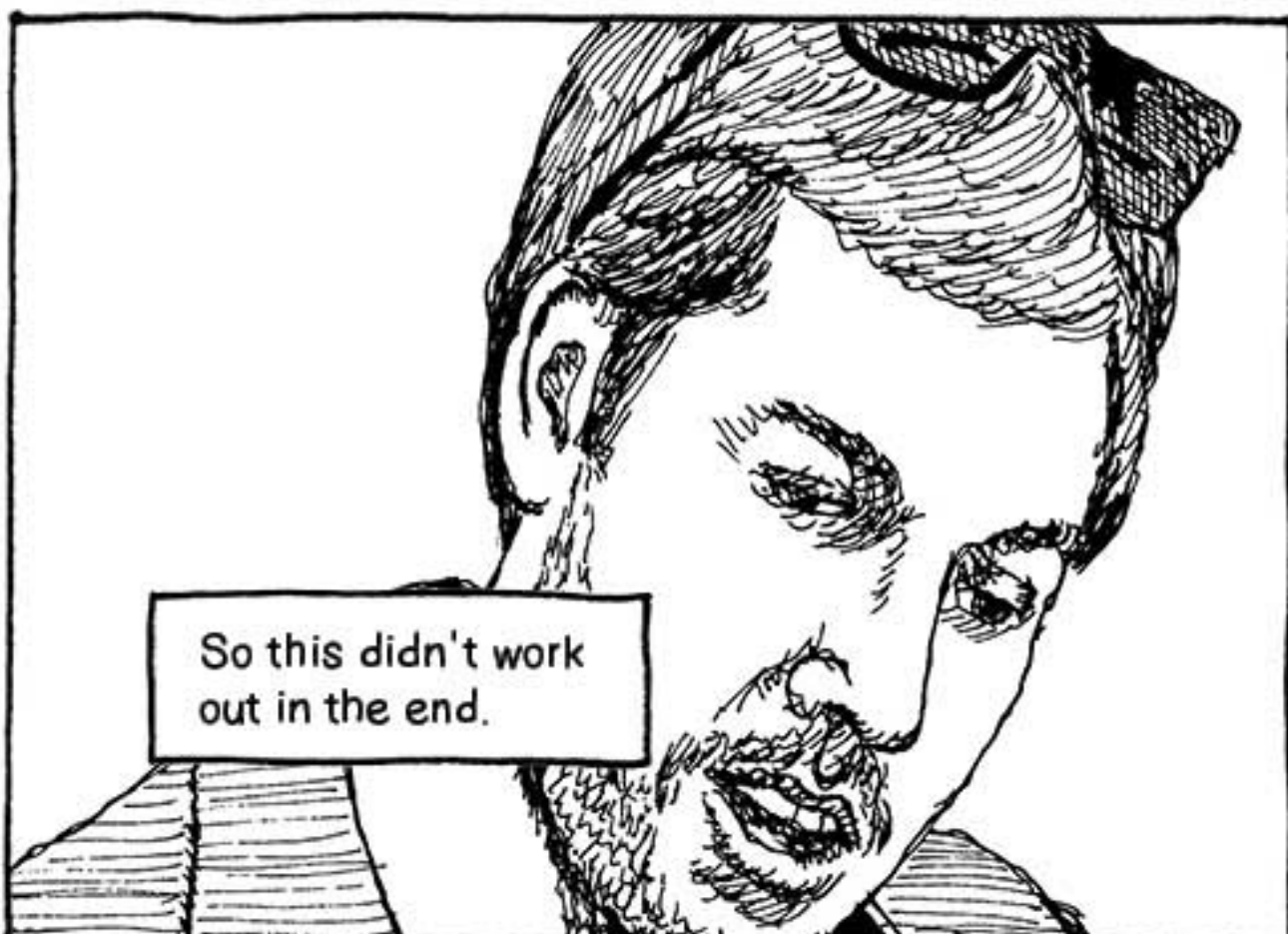
We went to the French,
the Germans, the Spanish
at an early point.



But with them there was
not too much negotiation.



The Dutch and every country, they didn't want to
send it as a diplomatic package because it was
not theirs, and also it would be... like, from a third
party it would be a violation of international rules.



So this didn't work
out in the end.

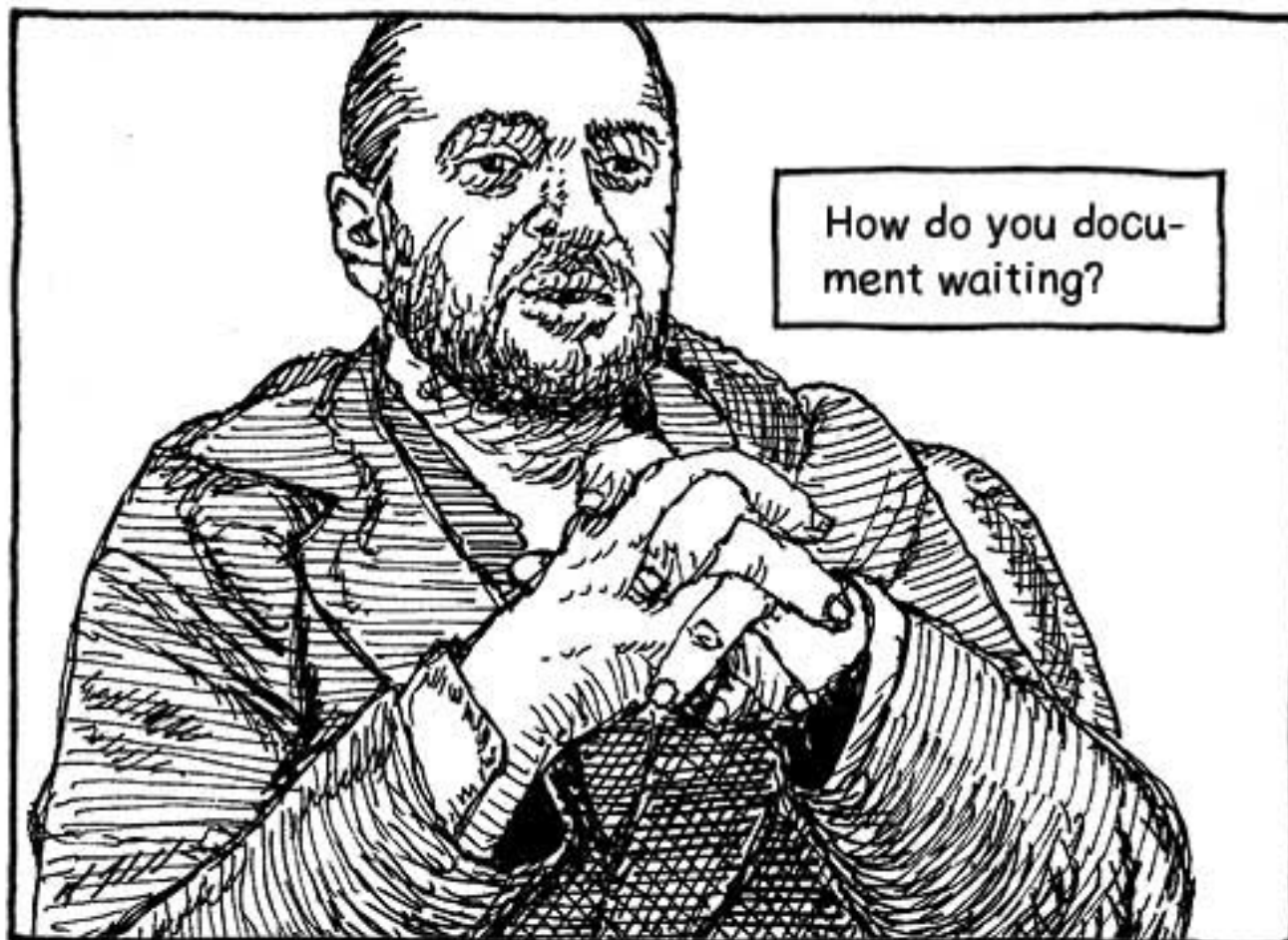
It was constantly back and forth, back and forth, contacts in Ramallah, contacts here. It was a web of people asking questions, answering... a lot of things happening at the same time.



There was a lot of waiting that was involved.



We would send out a letter or an email and months would go by without a response.



How do you document waiting?



This is a part of the project that was difficult to represent.

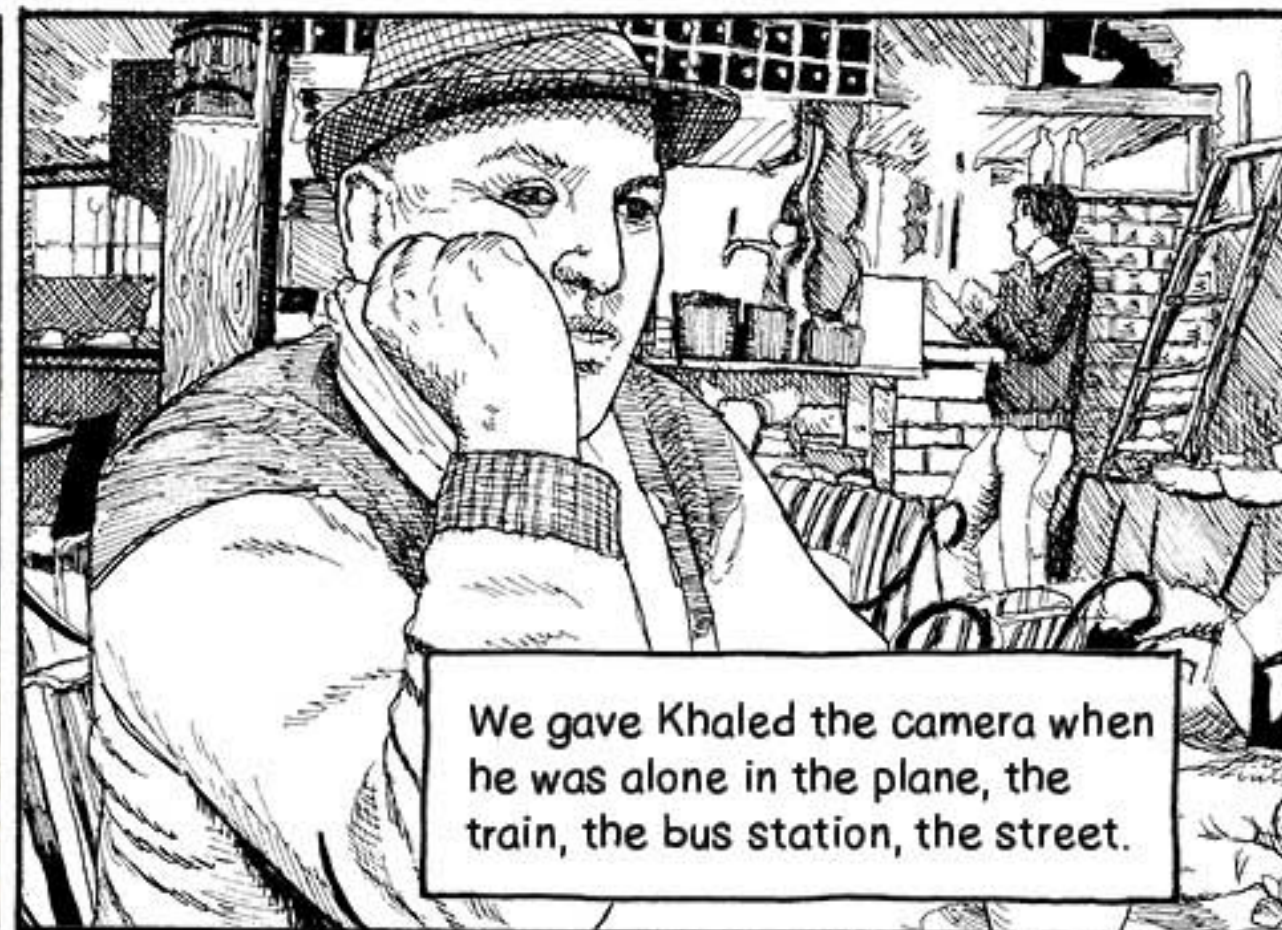


I filmed many telephone calls.



I filmed Skype three times.

I was not in Holland to film, but I had a Dutch cameraman in the museum who filmed for me there.



We gave Khaled the camera when he was alone in the plane, the train, the bus station, the street.

He was filming himself, filming getting into the plane, Royal Jordan Airport, Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam train station, train.



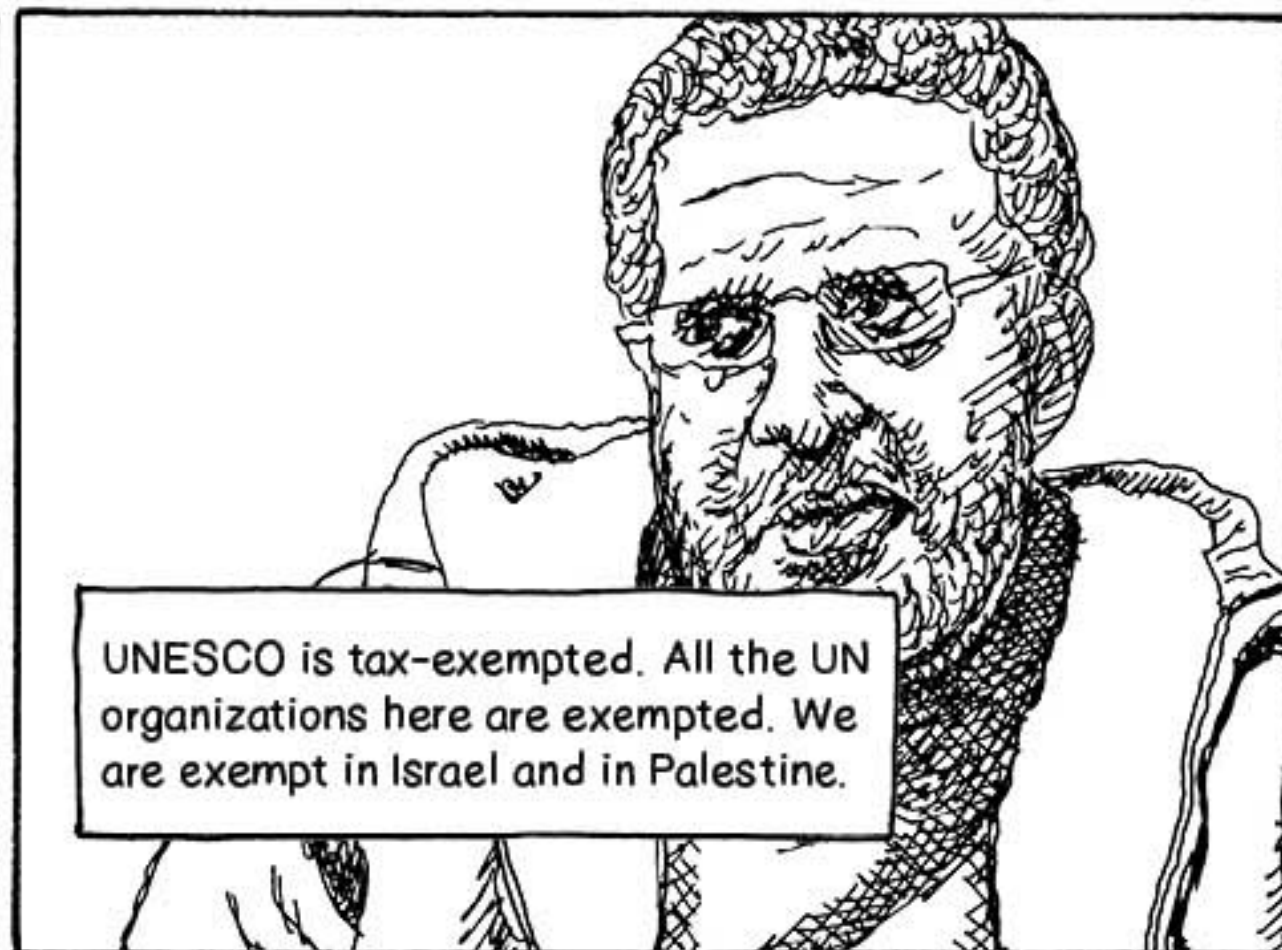
We tried to make the Academy into an official museum. This was another option that we looked into, but this took too much time, and it has to be not only recognized by this international agreement between museums, but also, of course, by the Israeli authorities. So, in the end we didn't use it.



UNESCO's letter was declined by the Israelis in the end.



UNESCO is tax-exempted. All the UN organizations here are exempted. We are exempt in Israel and in Palestine.



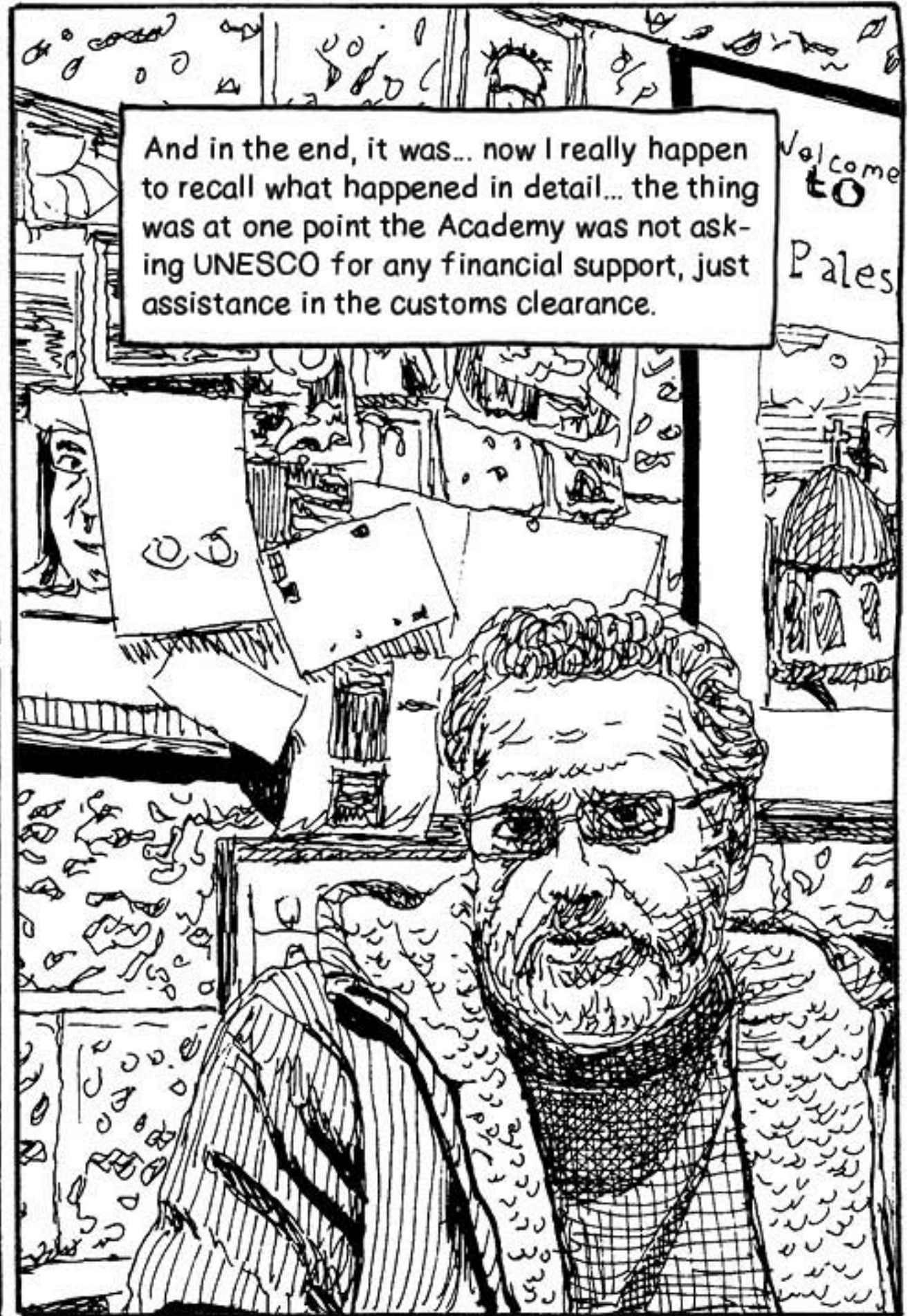


We have our registration number with the Ministry of Finance both in Israel and with the Palestinian Authority. I mobilized our administration (which is not what I'm doing directly on a daily basis), our accountants in the administration who deal with such matters.



And our assistant there in the admin unit started helping us deal with the different customs offices, the Ministry of Finance, etc., etc., to work this out.

And in the end, it was... now I really happen to recall what happened in detail... the thing was at one point the Academy was not asking UNESCO for any financial support, just assistance in the customs clearance.

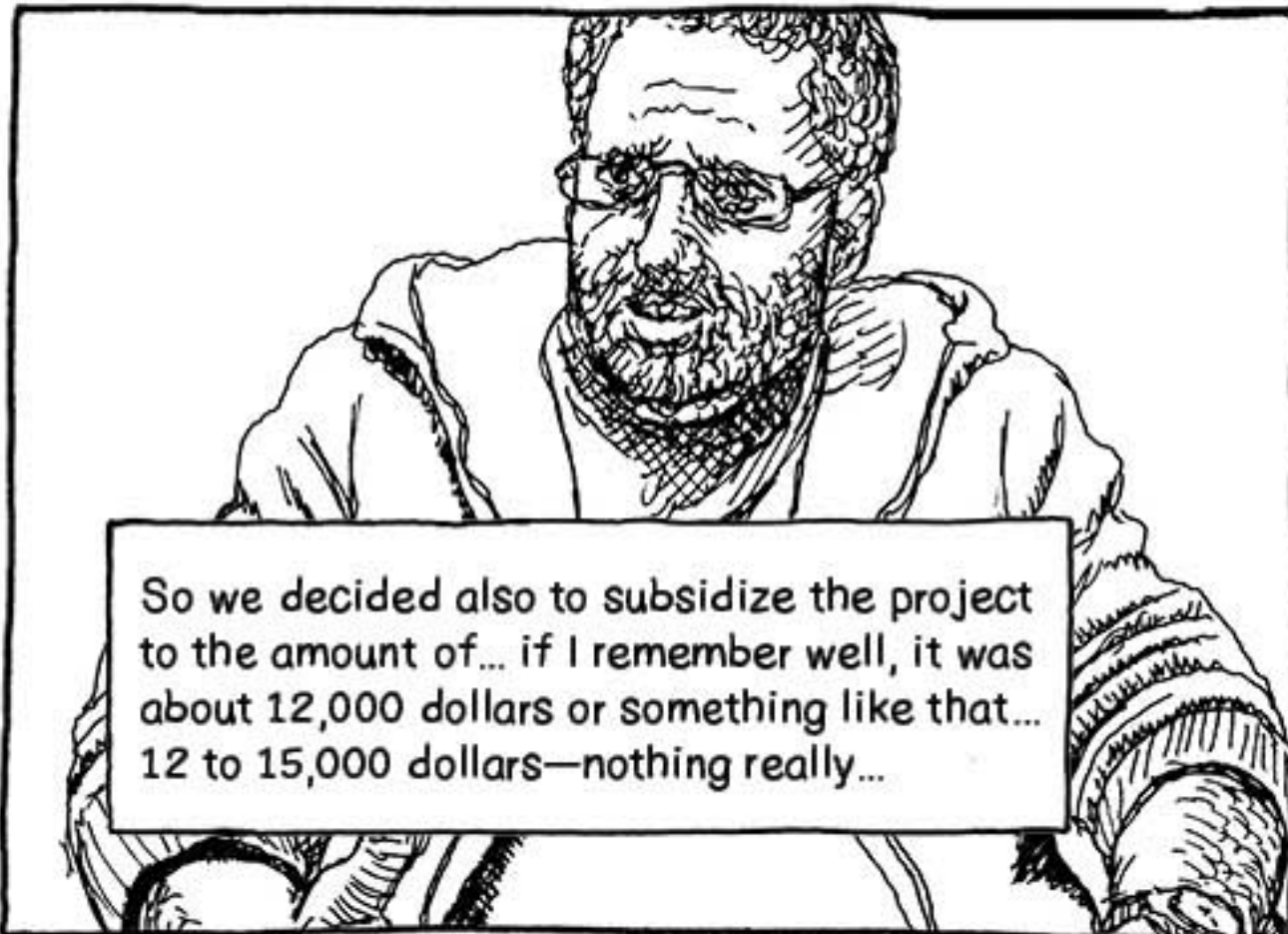




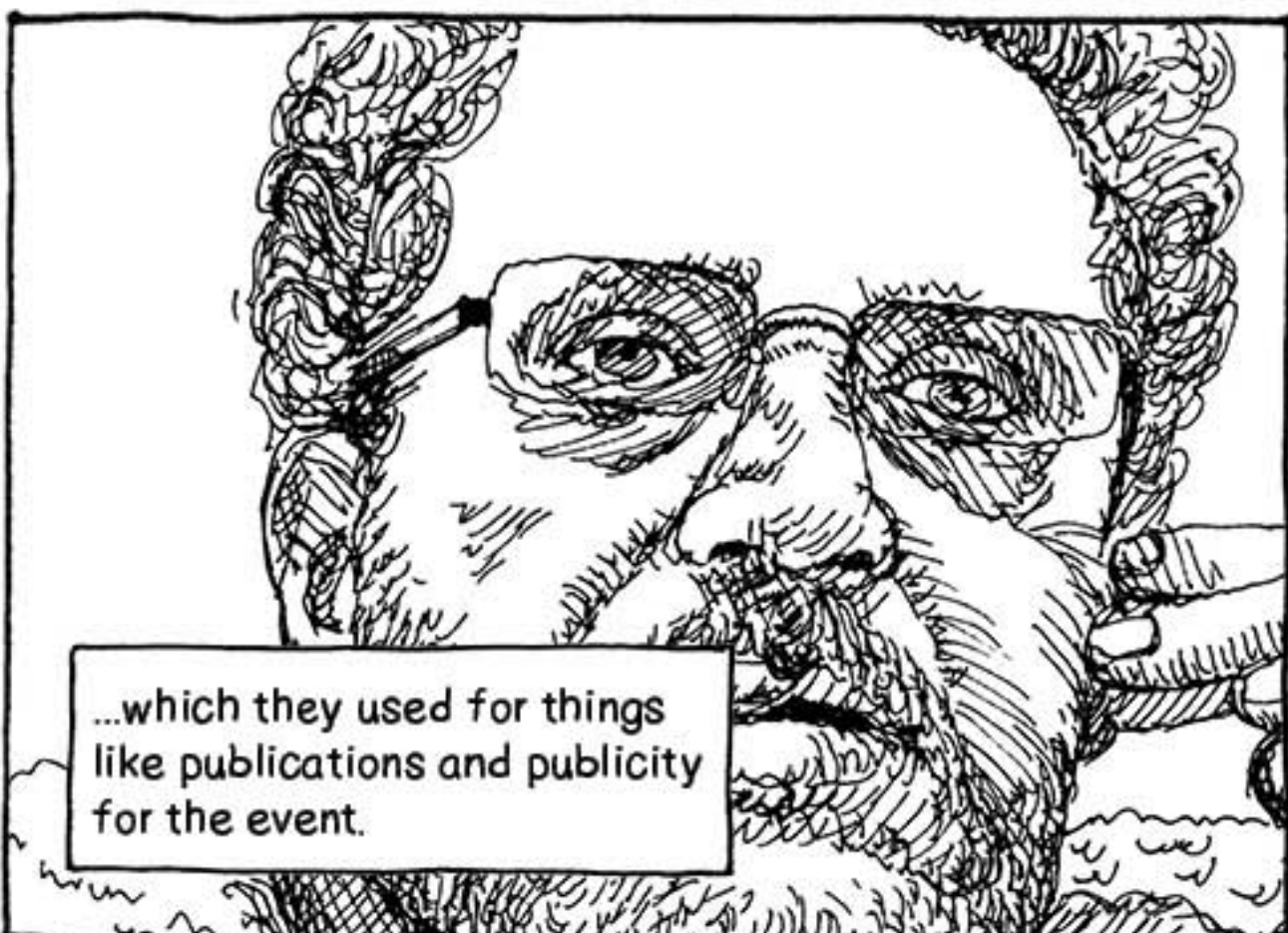
And it was fine with us, but we had to justify our action with everybody here, even if it was a one-dollar contract.



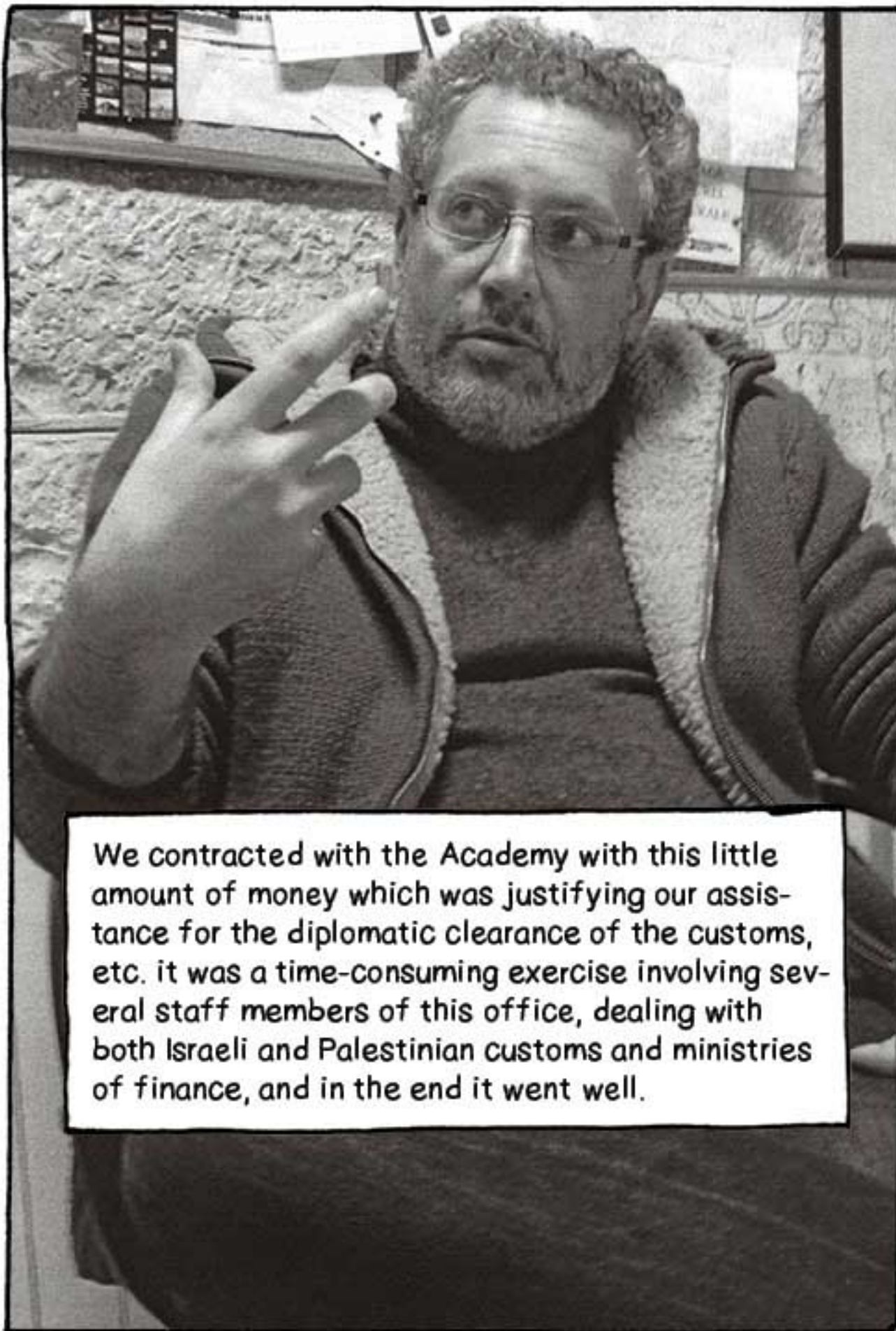
We should be partnering with an organization through a contractual form, which is normal.



So we decided also to subsidize the project to the amount of... if I remember well, it was about 12,000 dollars or something like that... 12 to 15,000 dollars—nothing really...



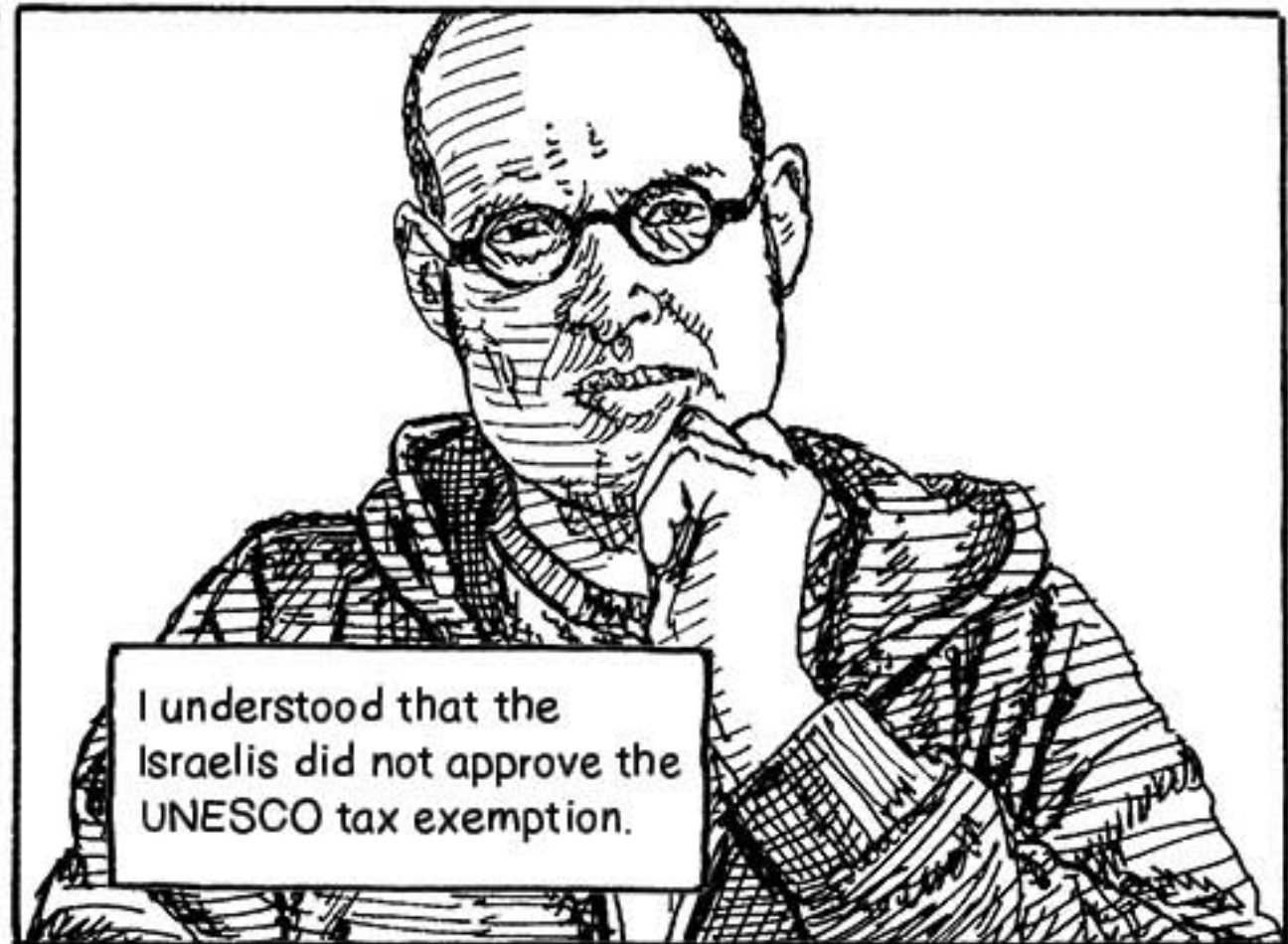
...which they used for things like publications and publicity for the event.



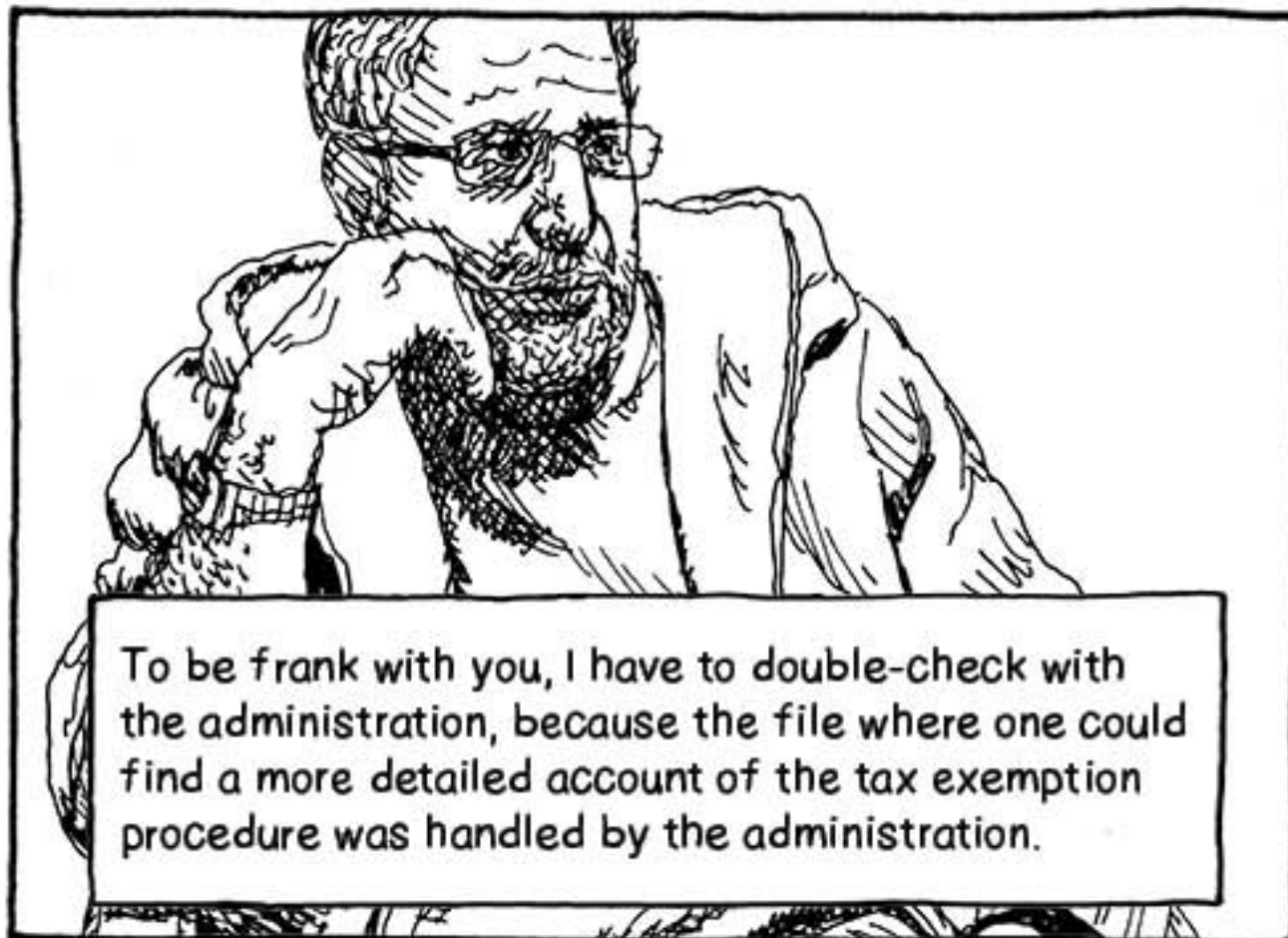
We contracted with the Academy with this little amount of money which was justifying our assistance for the diplomatic clearance of the customs, etc. it was a time-consuming exercise involving several staff members of this office, dealing with both Israeli and Palestinian customs and ministries of finance, and in the end it went well.



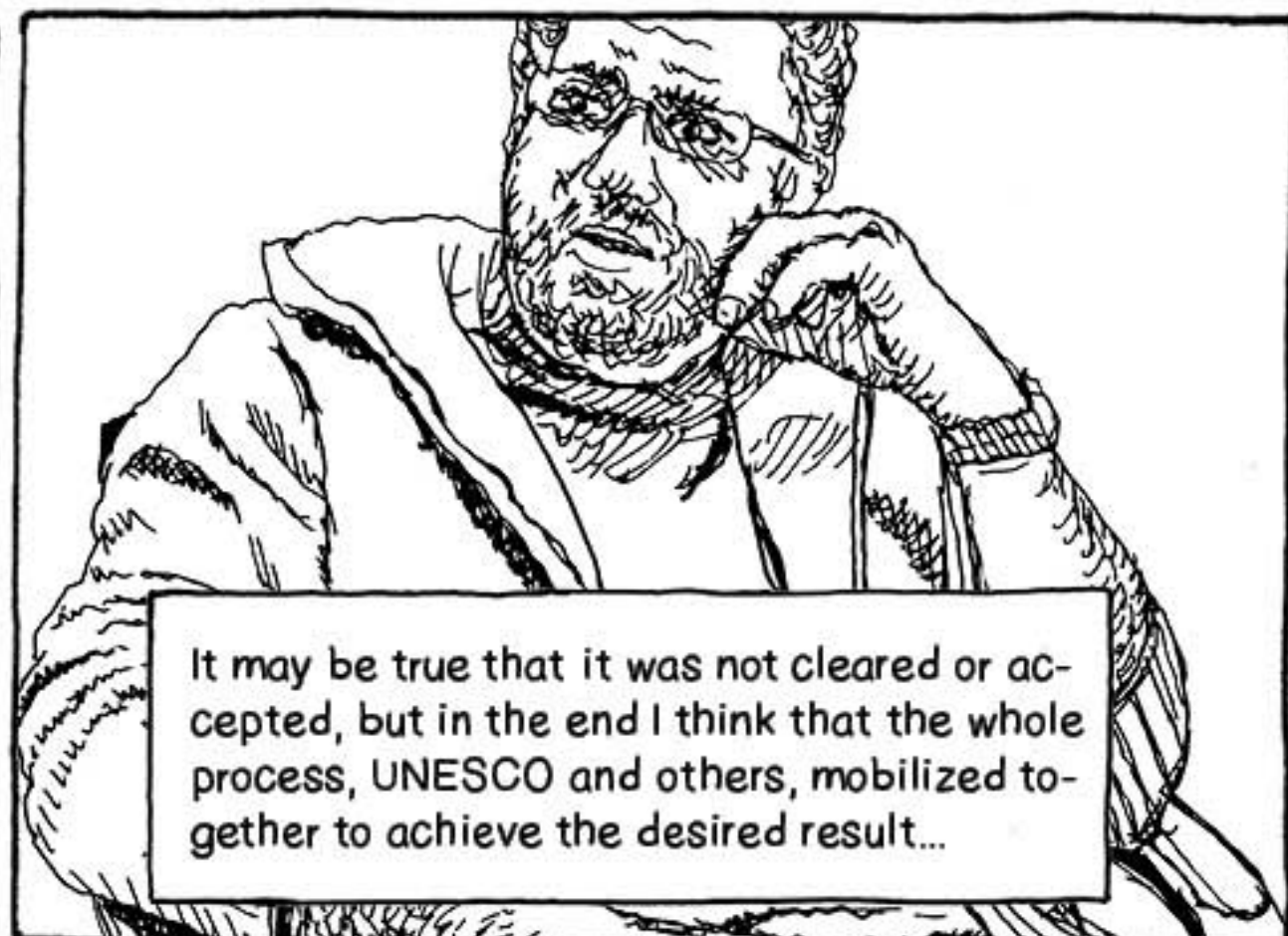
We managed to have the shipment done tax-exempt. This is what happened in the end and the painting arrived here in Ramallah.



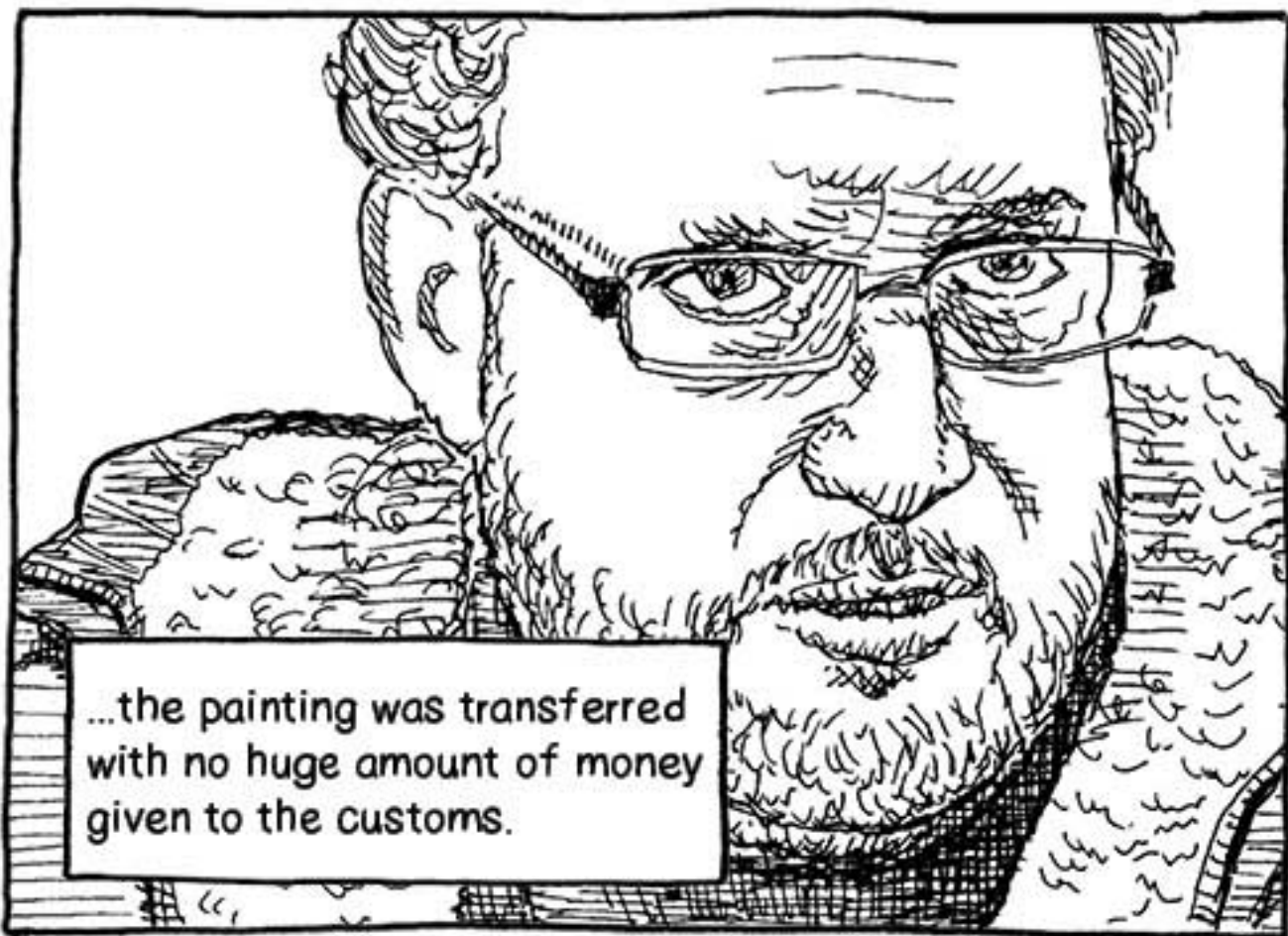
I understood that the Israelis did not approve the UNESCO tax exemption.



To be frank with you, I have to double-check with the administration, because the file where one could find a more detailed account of the tax exemption procedure was handled by the administration.



It may be true that it was not cleared or accepted, but in the end I think that the whole process, UNESCO and others, mobilized together to achieve the desired result...



...the painting was transferred with no huge amount of money given to the customs.



About UNESCO: I think this was very far into the process already and it was taken very seriously.

Yes, I was in touch with Transclal, Fatima with UNESCO, and I think we put UNESCO and Fatima and Transclal all together in contact.



"Once UNESCO or any other diplomatic partner gives its final approval, we need from them a letter of endorsement, a full portfolio of the painting..."



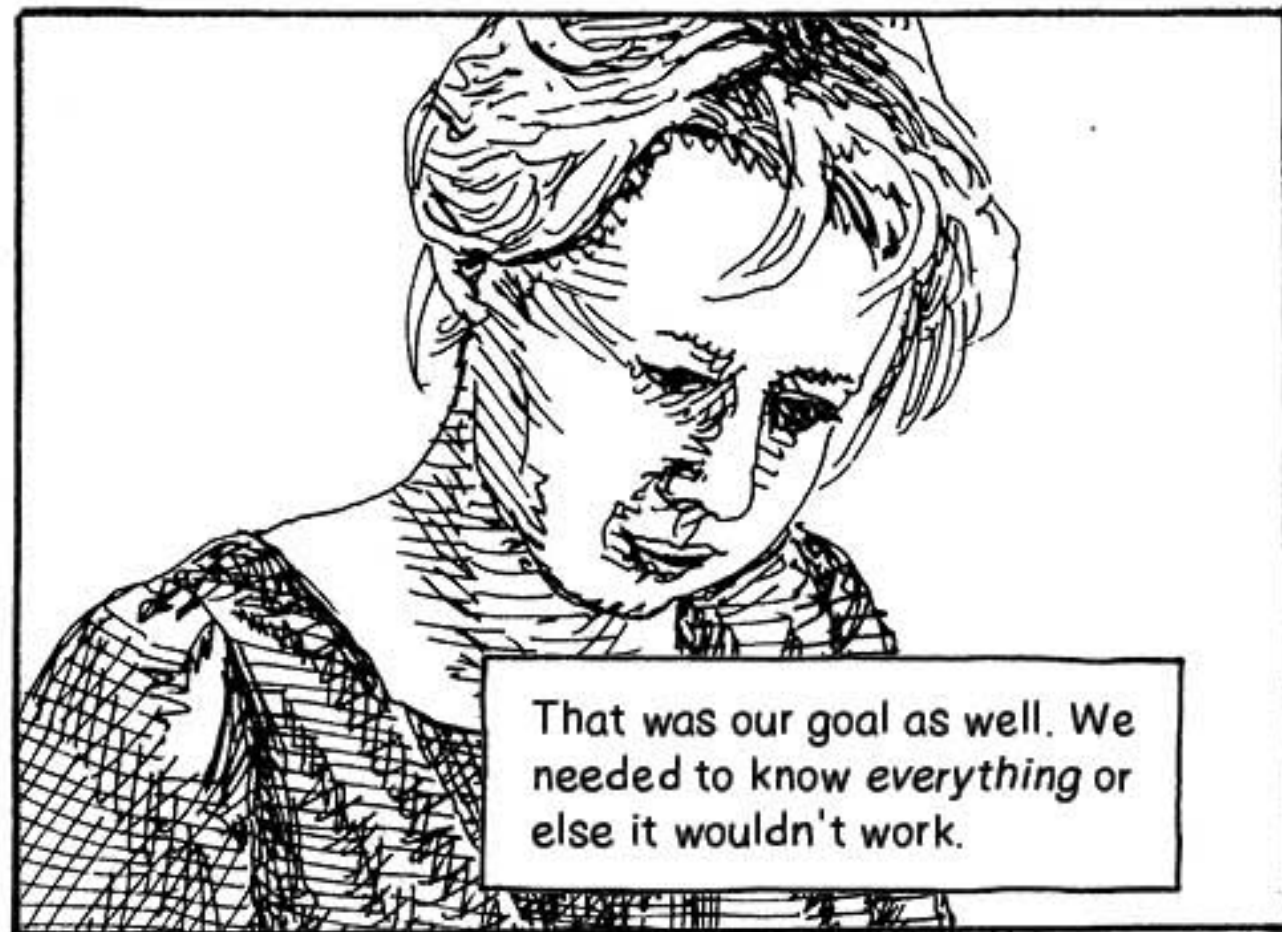
Yes, again she tells what is needed for customs. Once the number is approved, then they need a full portfolio, they need all kinds of details: what's the value, if it's insured, what it looks like, what kind of crate it travels in... all kinds of details.

And Transclal was also in contact with UNESCO to see how to manage, but eventually it was refused.

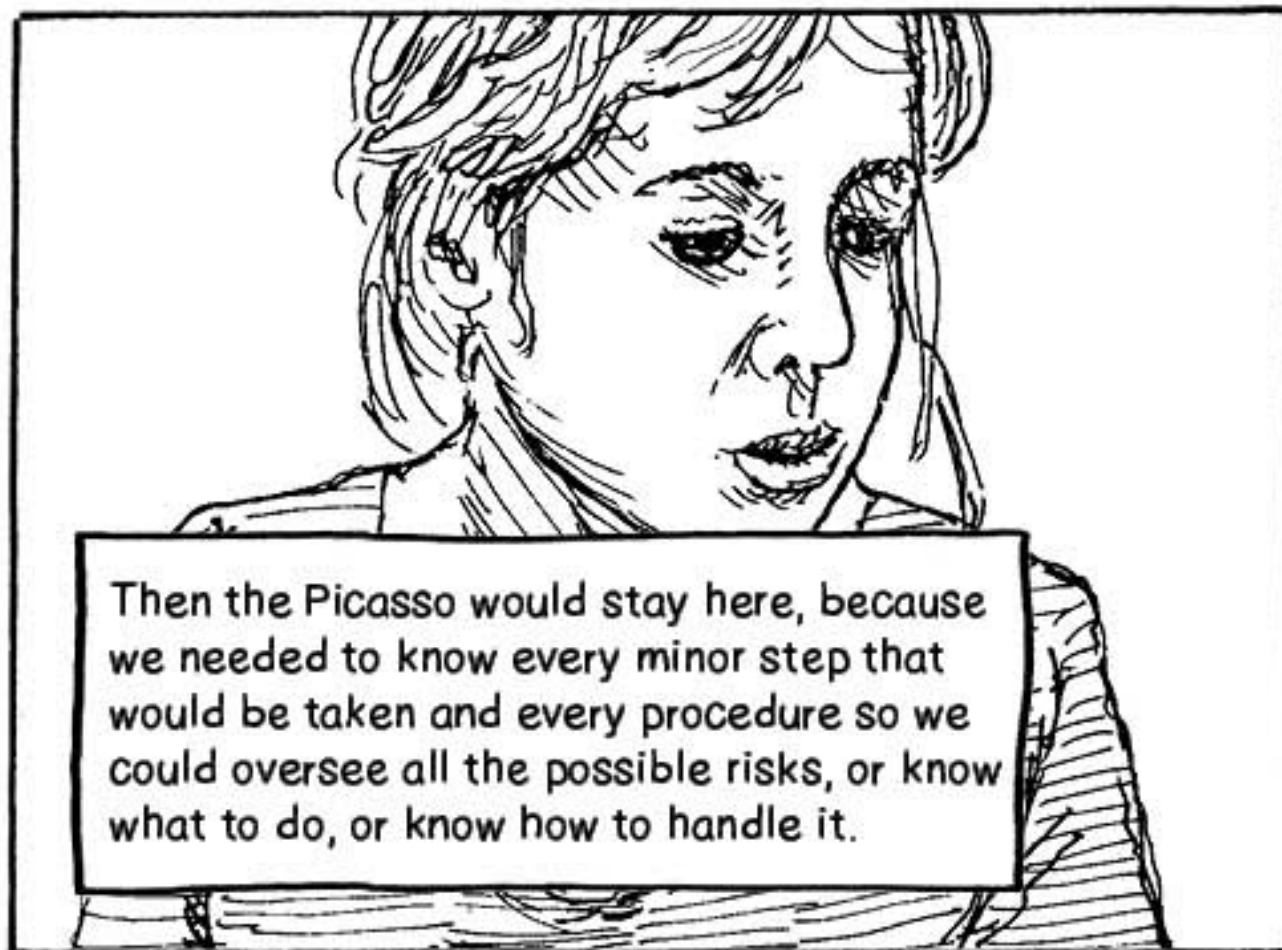


And she also emphasized... "As I explained over the phone, we need to take this step-by-step as we are dealing with a lot of procedures and bureaucracy. It is our wish to be aware of all the necessary requests and demands before the shipment actually arrives."





That was our goal as well. We needed to know *everything* or else it wouldn't work.



Then the Picasso would stay here, because we needed to know every minor step that would be taken and every procedure so we could oversee all the possible risks, or know what to do, or know how to handle it.

By then, a lot of our reading into the governing laws of Palestine/Israel trade—export, import, all of that—was already insufficient, and this is a reflection of a general theme: that Palestinians do not understand to what extent Israel is in dereliction of its legal duties with regard to facilitating trade and commerce with the world at large.

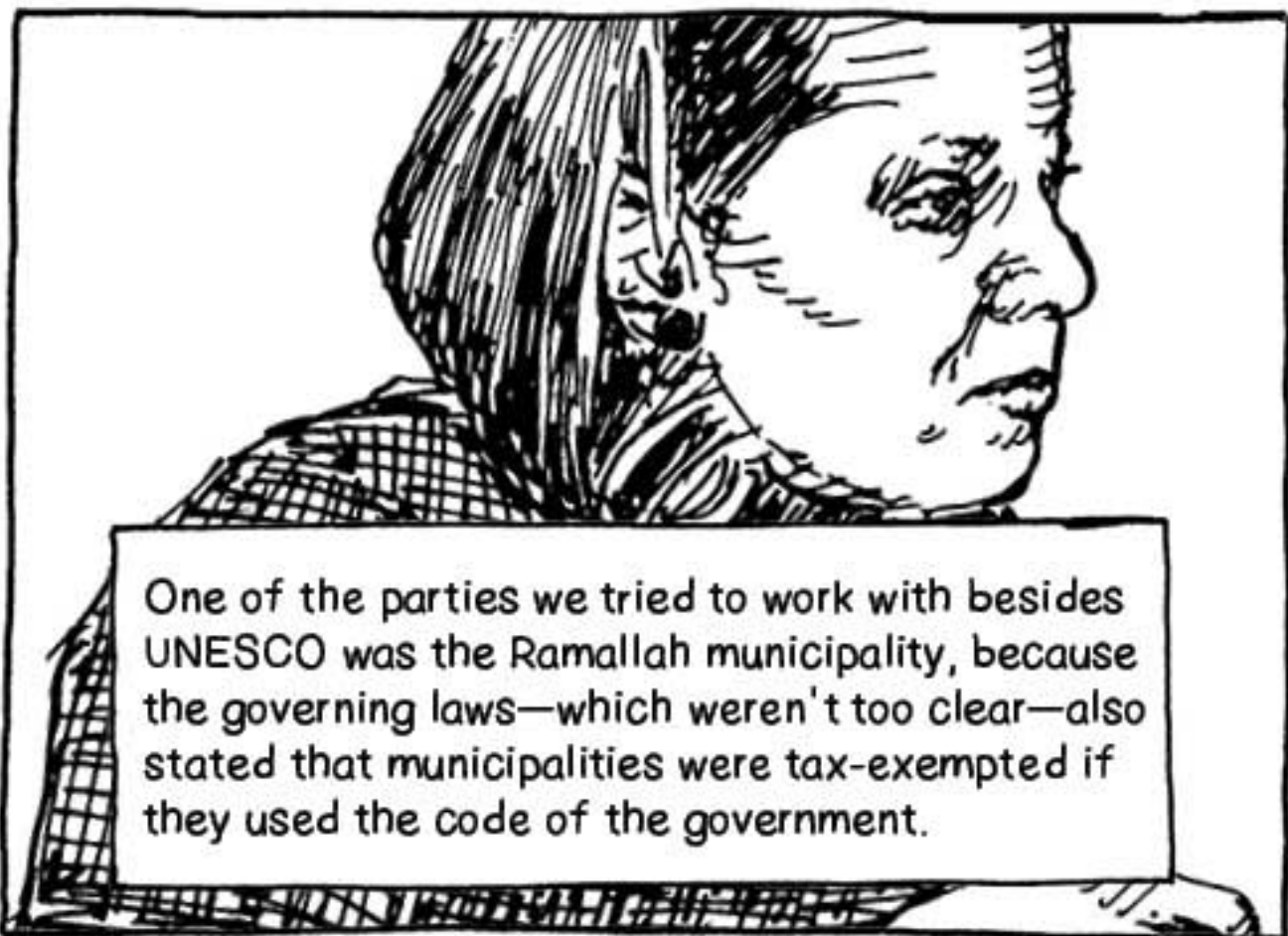




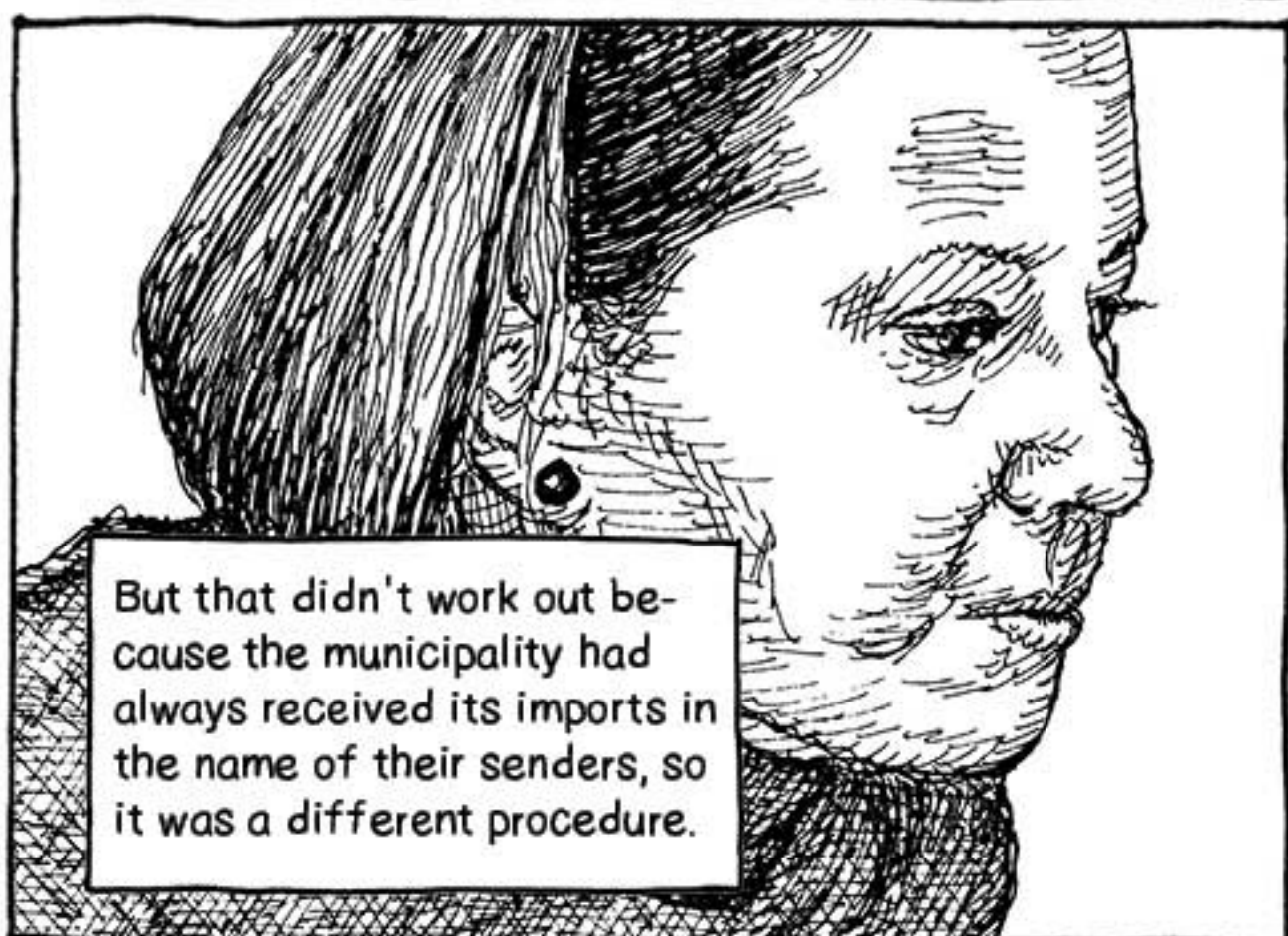
Part of it is we don't know what these are, because the translations are slightly different, governing laws are slightly different.



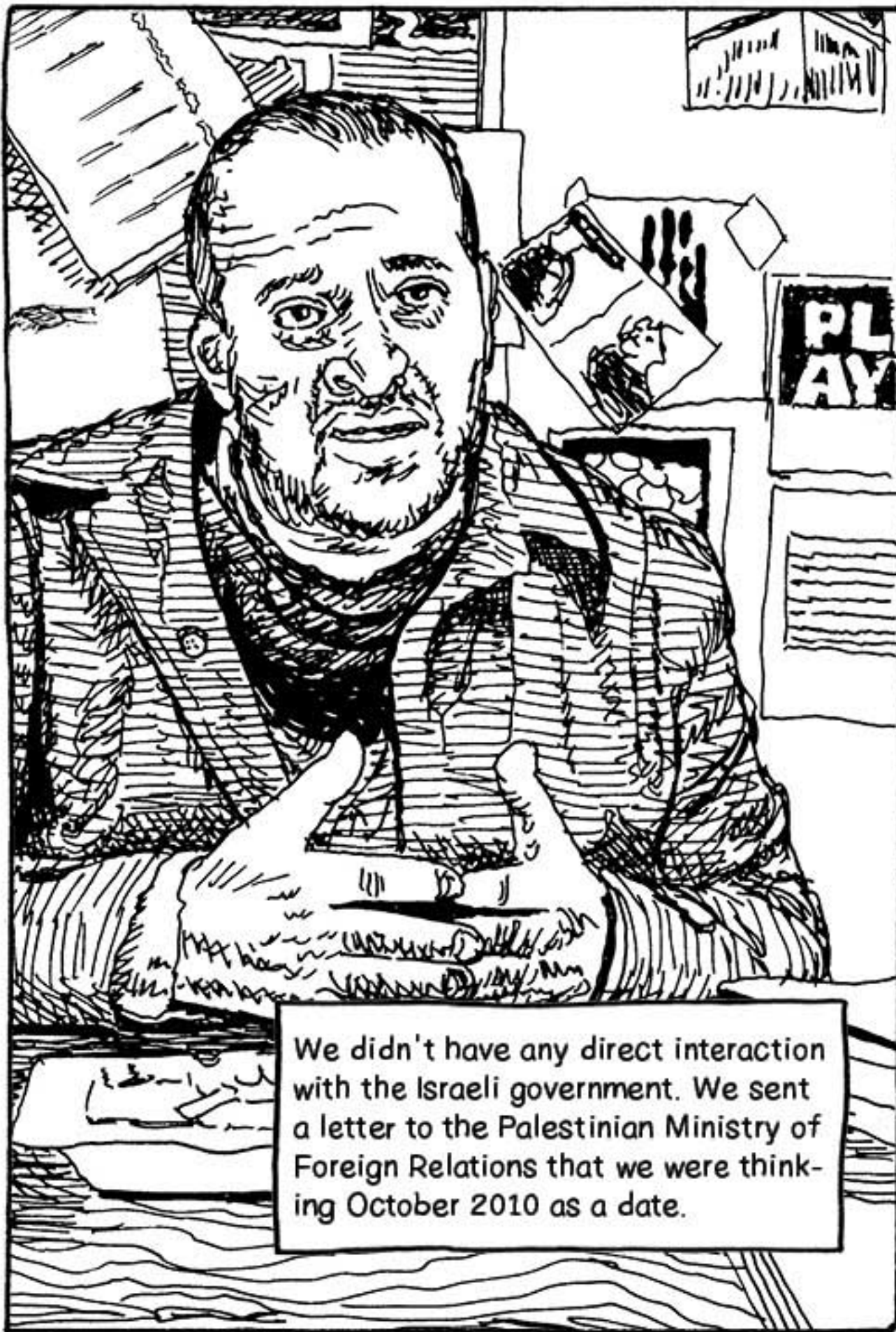
We tried again.



One of the parties we tried to work with besides UNESCO was the Ramallah municipality, because the governing laws—which weren't too clear—also stated that municipalities were tax-exempted if they used the code of the government.



But that didn't work out because the municipality had always received its imports in the name of their senders, so it was a different procedure.



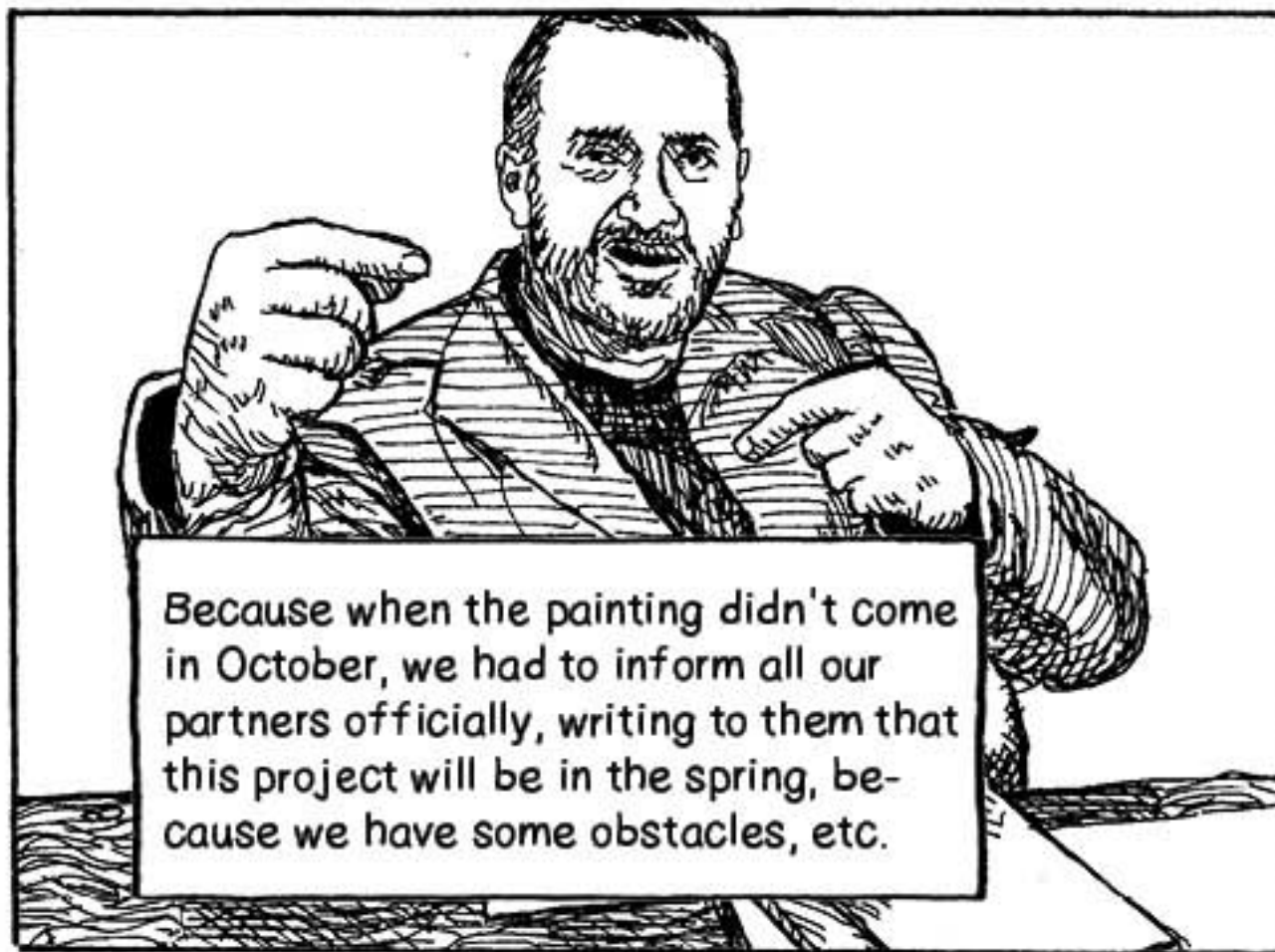
We didn't have any direct interaction with the Israeli government. We sent a letter to the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Relations that we were thinking October 2010 as a date.



They were writing to the Israelis that we want to bring the Picasso to Ramallah and we want to coordinate. We have to inform them.



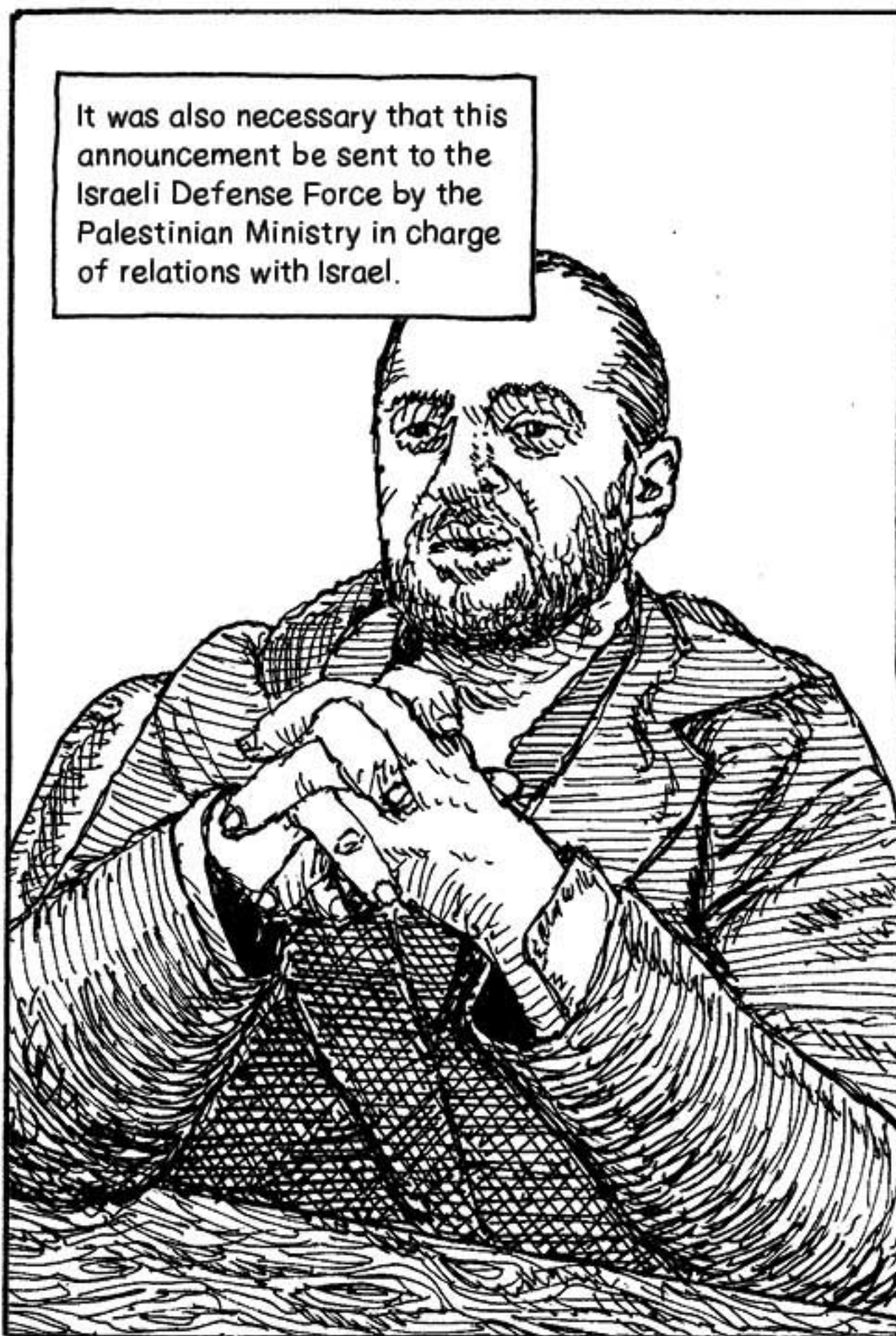
And later on the Israelis kept following this without being asked.



Because when the painting didn't come in October, we had to inform all our partners officially, writing to them that this project will be in the spring, because we have some obstacles, etc.



"We apologize, we hope it will be there, and we will announce the new date."



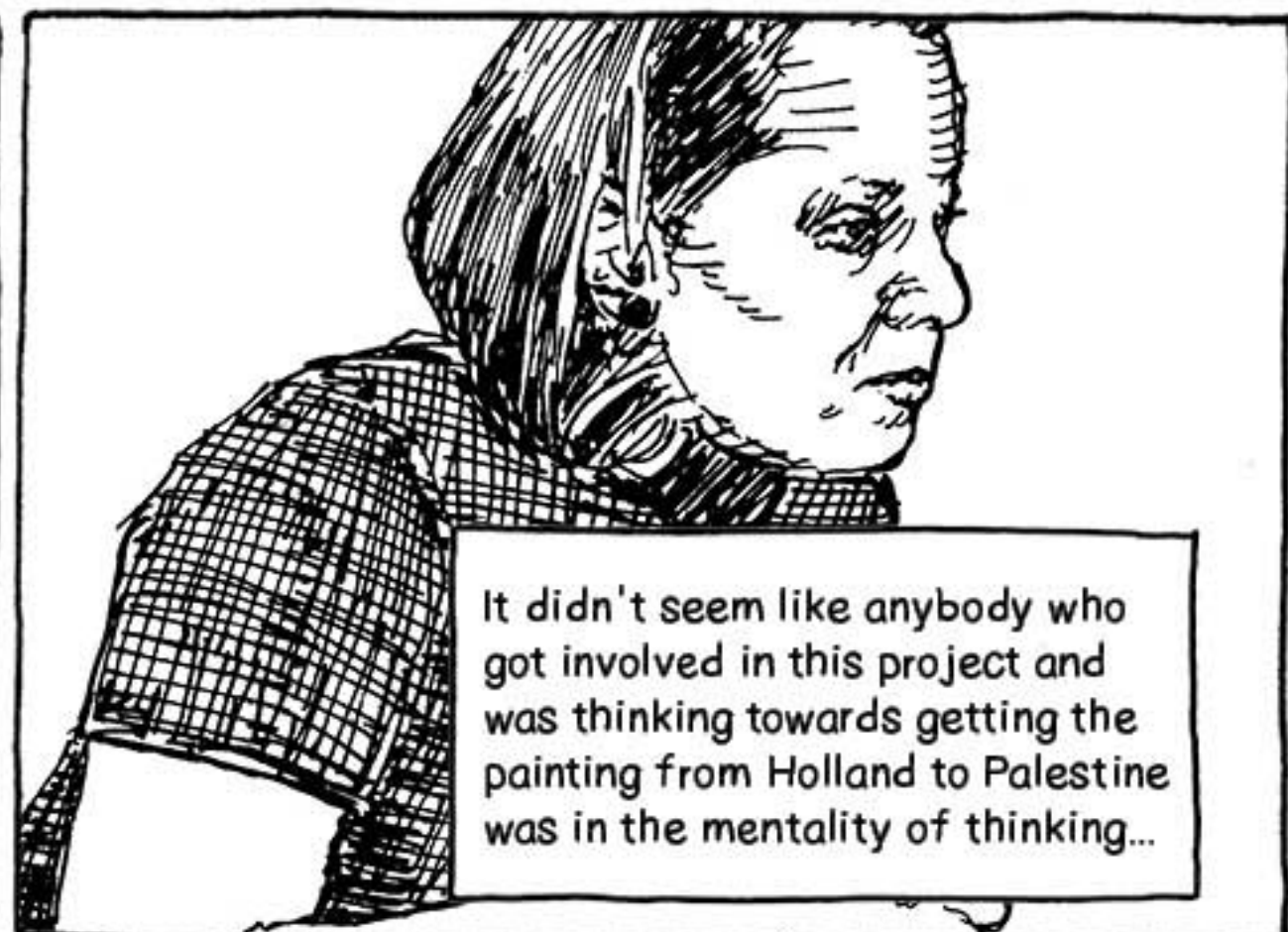
It was also necessary that this announcement be sent to the Israeli Defense Force by the Palestinian Ministry in charge of relations with Israel.

LAST RESORT: THE ATA CARNET

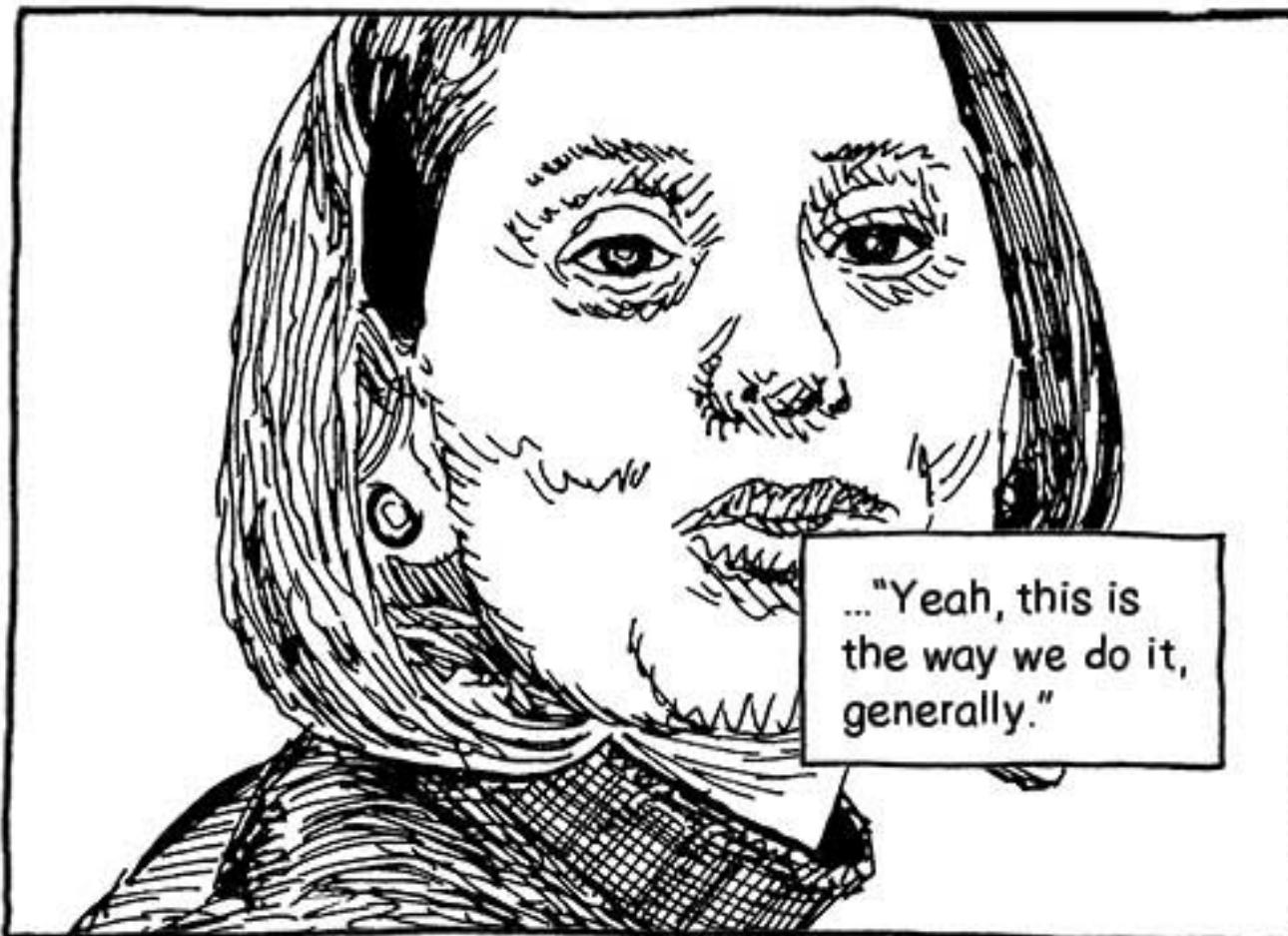




Regarding the ATA
Carnet: I don't know
who knew about it.



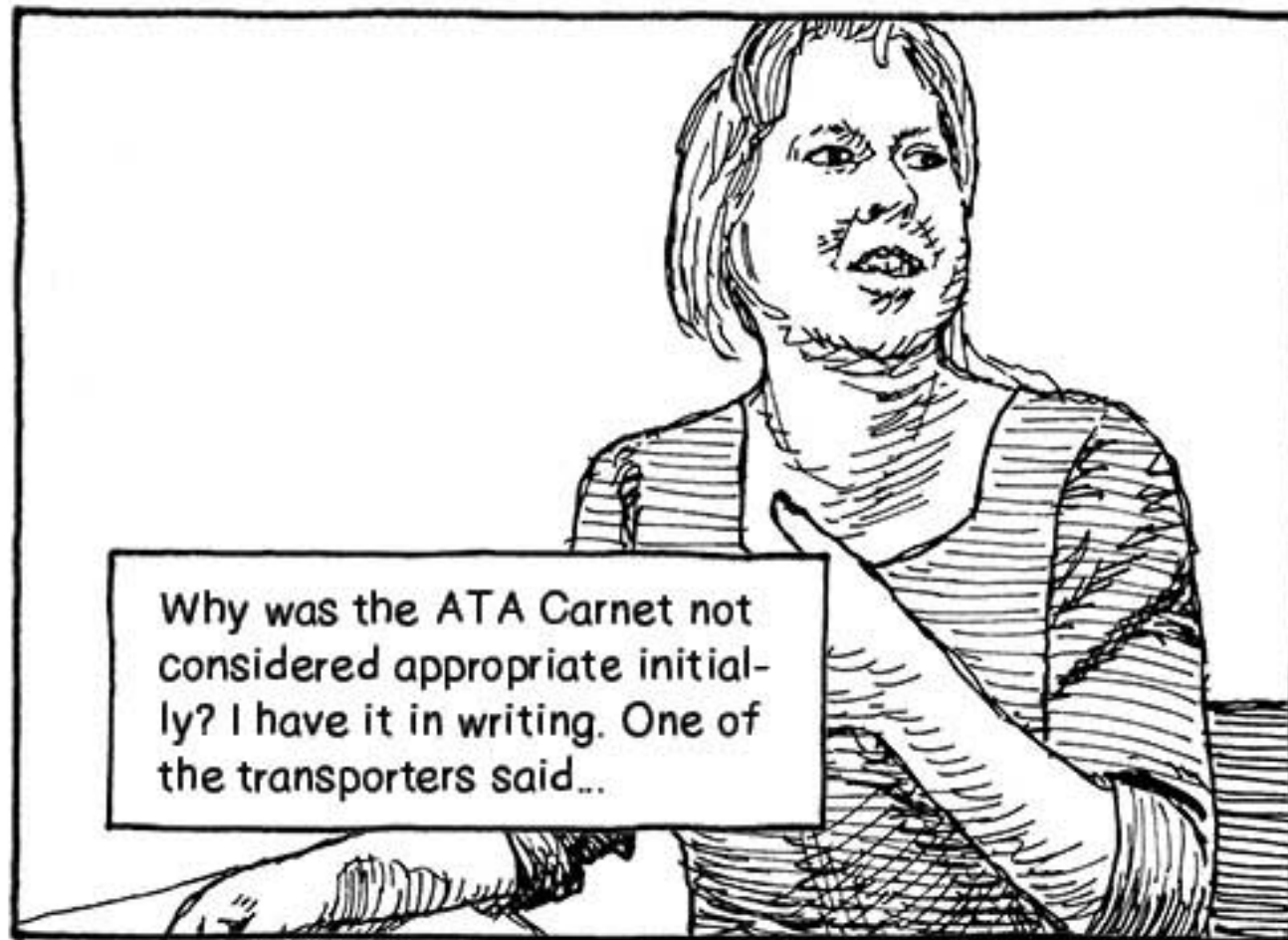
It didn't seem like anybody who
got involved in this project and
was thinking towards getting the
painting from Holland to Palestine
was in the mentality of thinking...



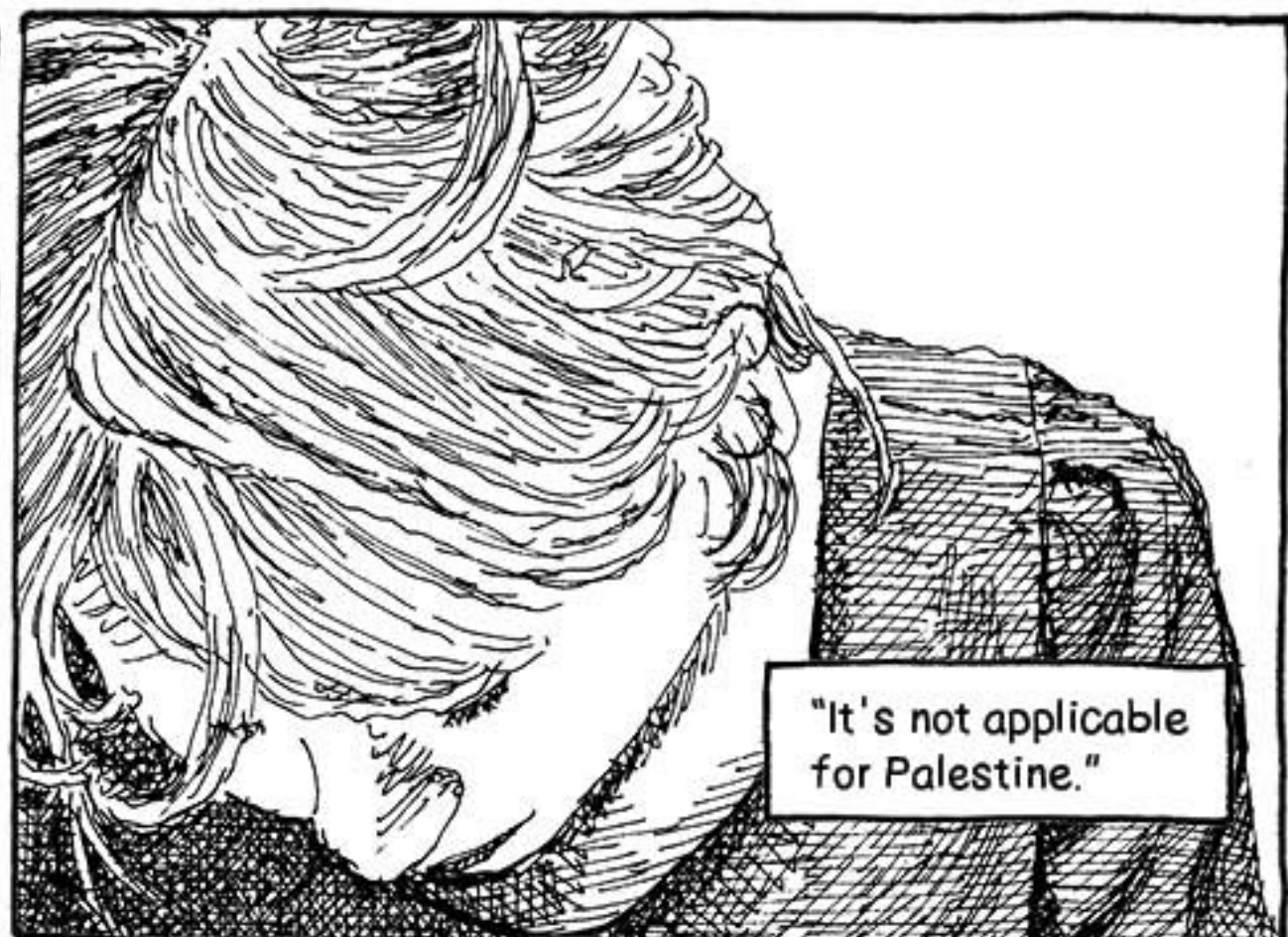
... "Yeah, this is
the way we do it,
generally."



No, everybody was trying
to think of how can we
actually manage such a
different project.



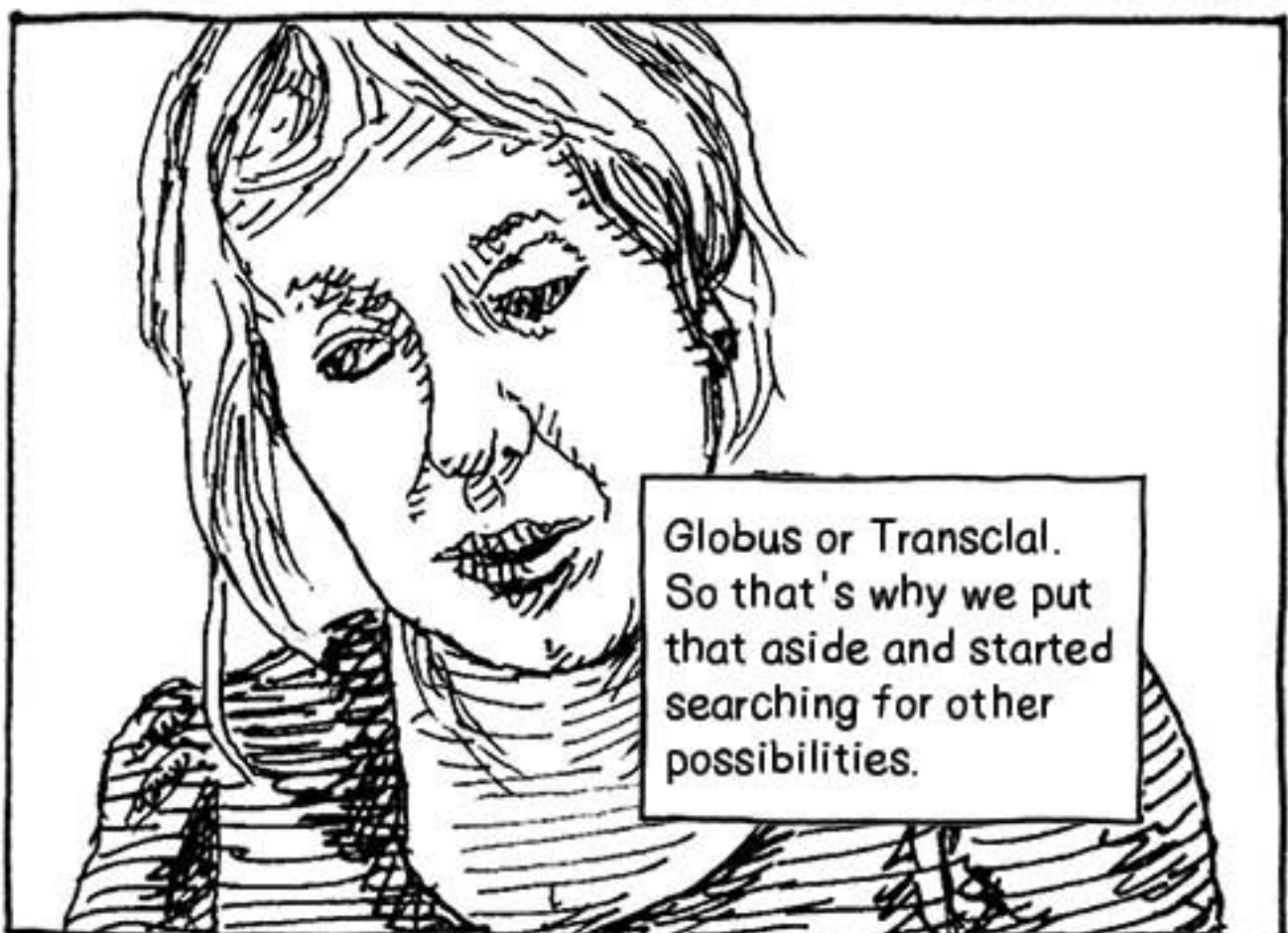
Why was the ATA Carnet not considered appropriate initially? I have it in writing. One of the transporters said...



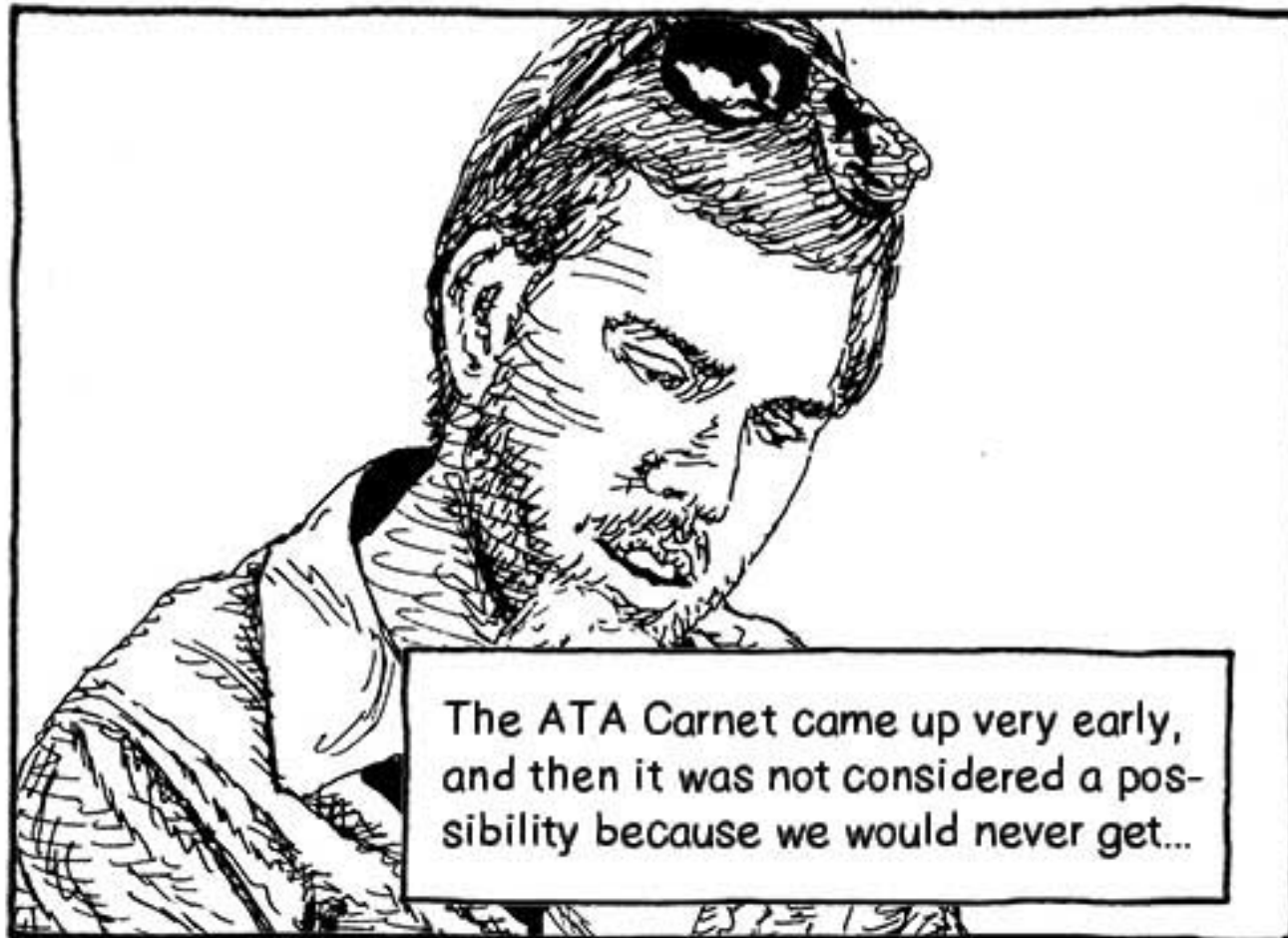
"It's not applicable for Palestine."



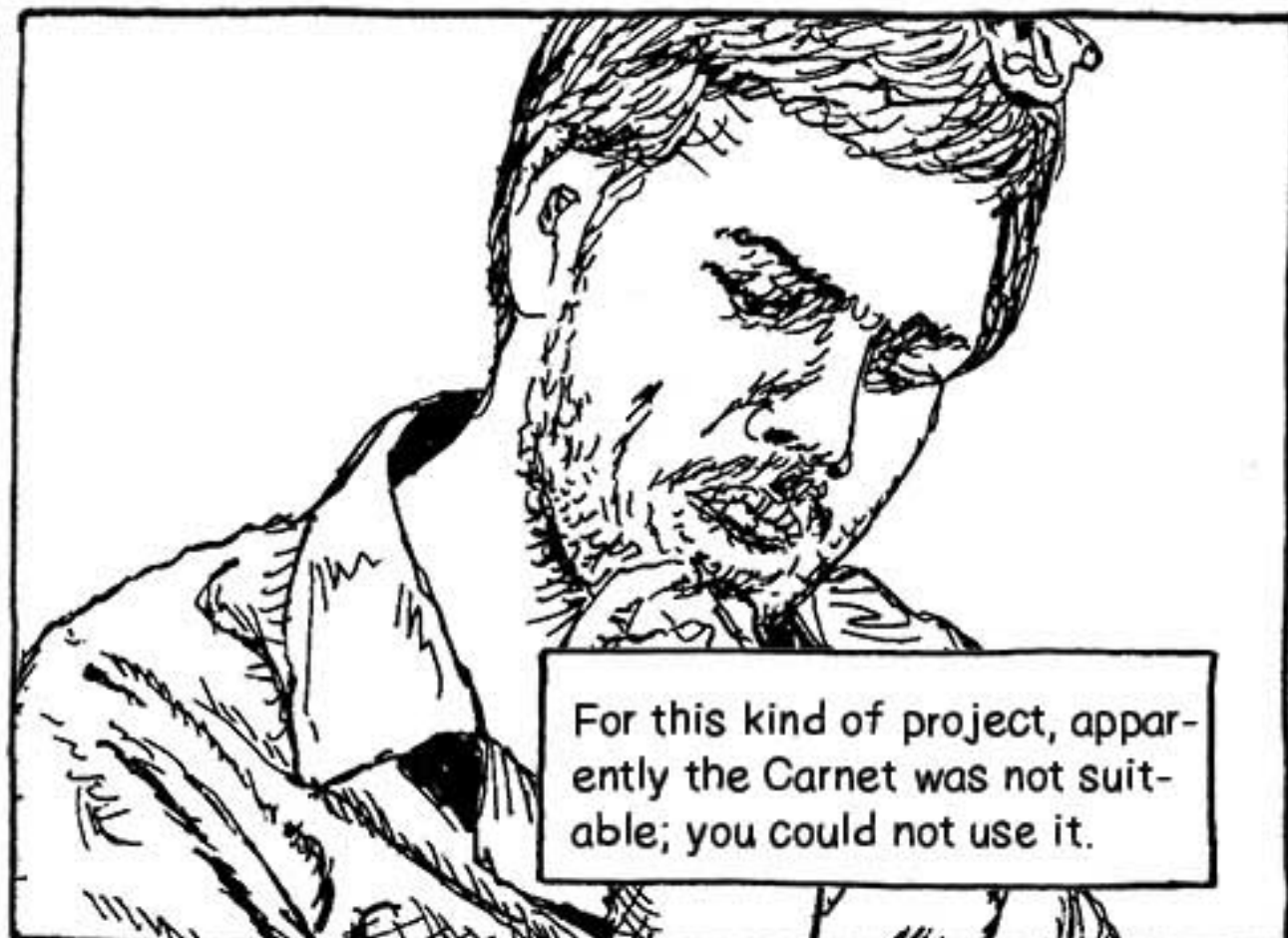
And because it was our first time, we trusted the knowledge and know-how of the experts, and these are the transport agents in Israel.



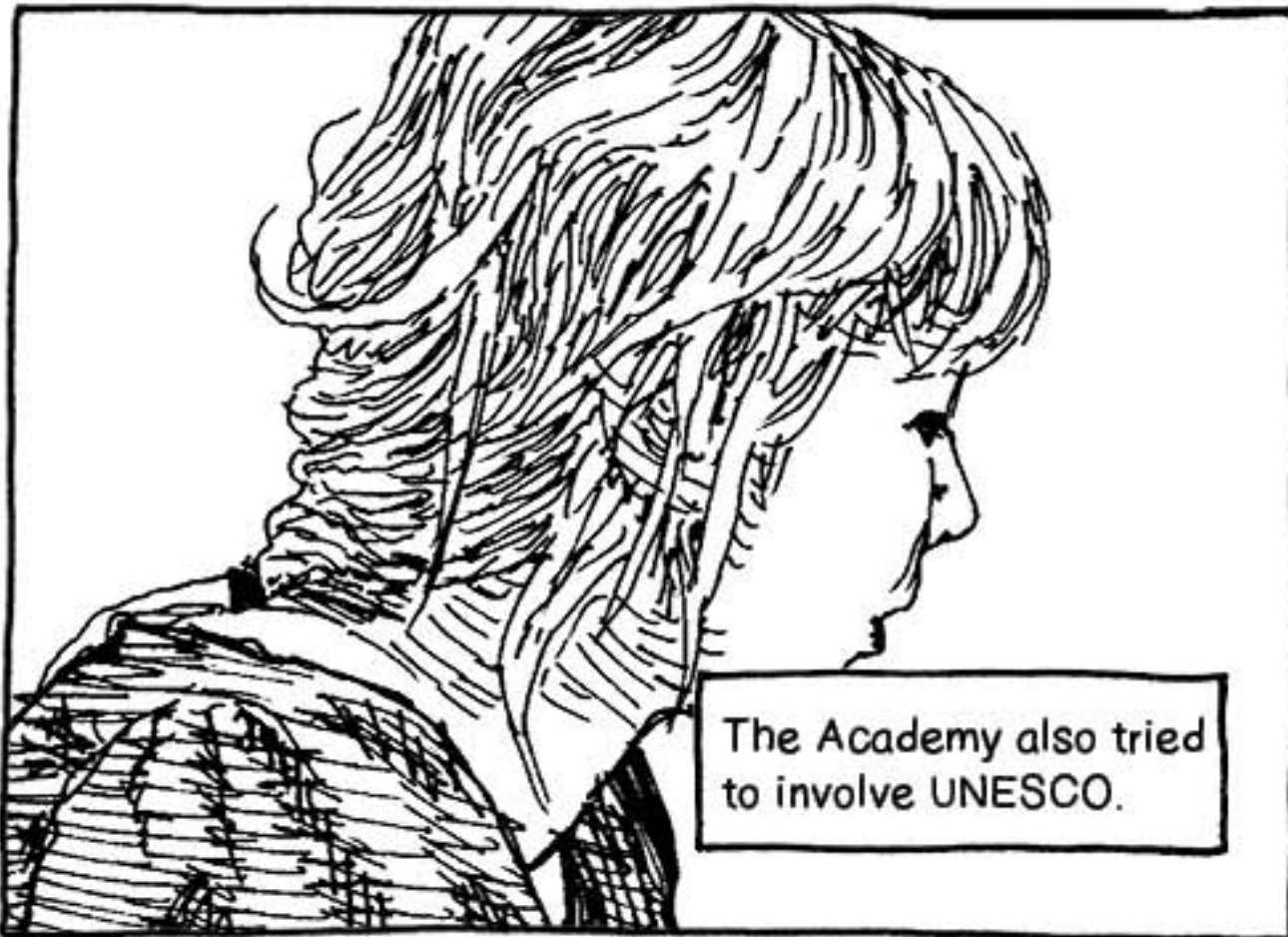
Globus or Transclal. So that's why we put that aside and started searching for other possibilities.



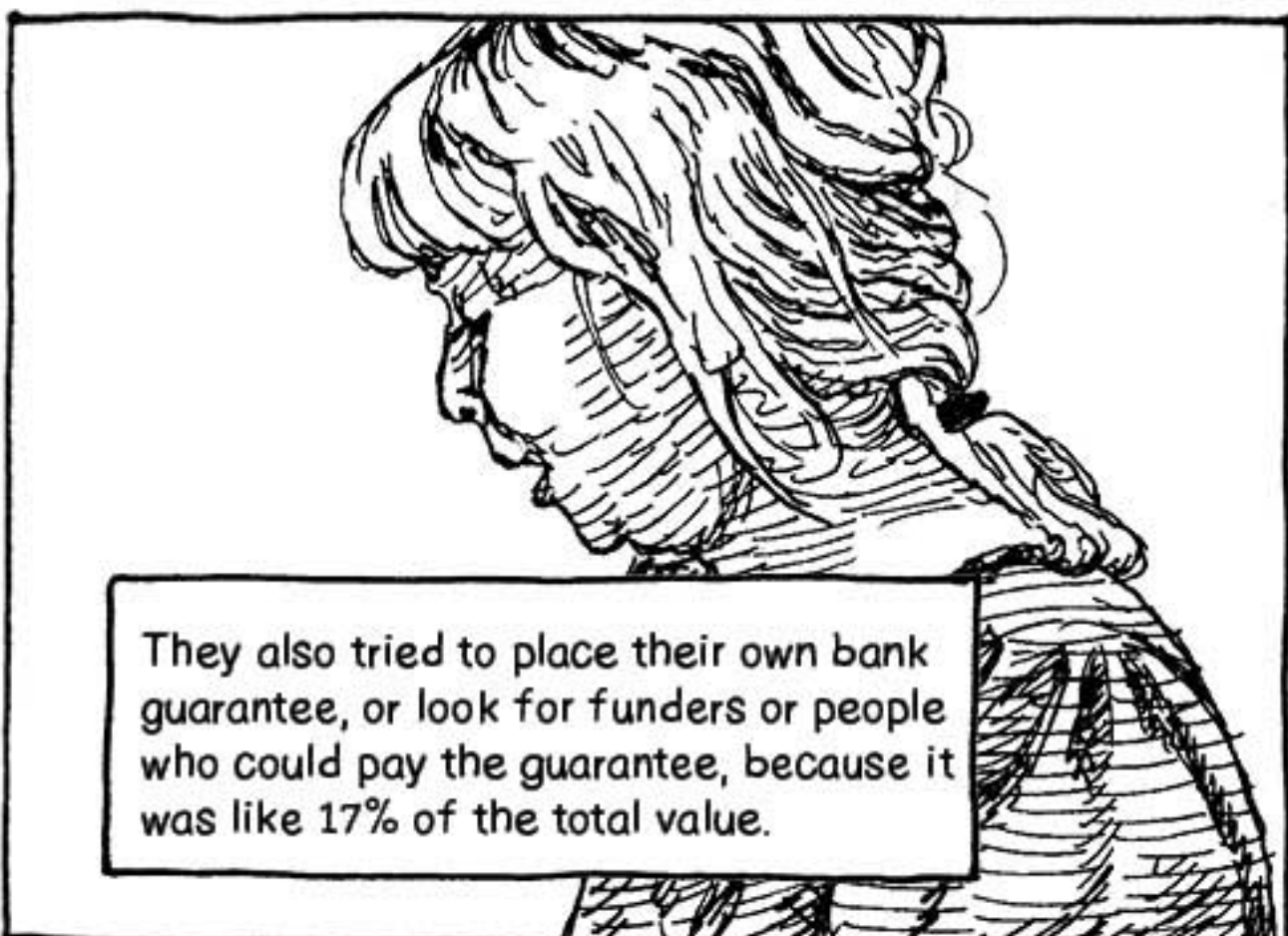
The ATA Carnet came up very early, and then it was not considered a possibility because we would never get...




For this kind of project, apparently the Carnet was not suitable; you could not use it.




The Academy also tried to involve UNESCO.



They also tried to place their own bank guarantee, or look for funders or people who could pay the guarantee, because it was like 17% of the total value.




This was all information from Transclal, asking them to look into some things, and maybe to look for another way to avoid the bank guarantee. And we asked, what exactly is a bank guarantee? Is it cash? Is it just a guarantee? Is it just a loan or something they really need to have and how should it look, or can we do it another way?

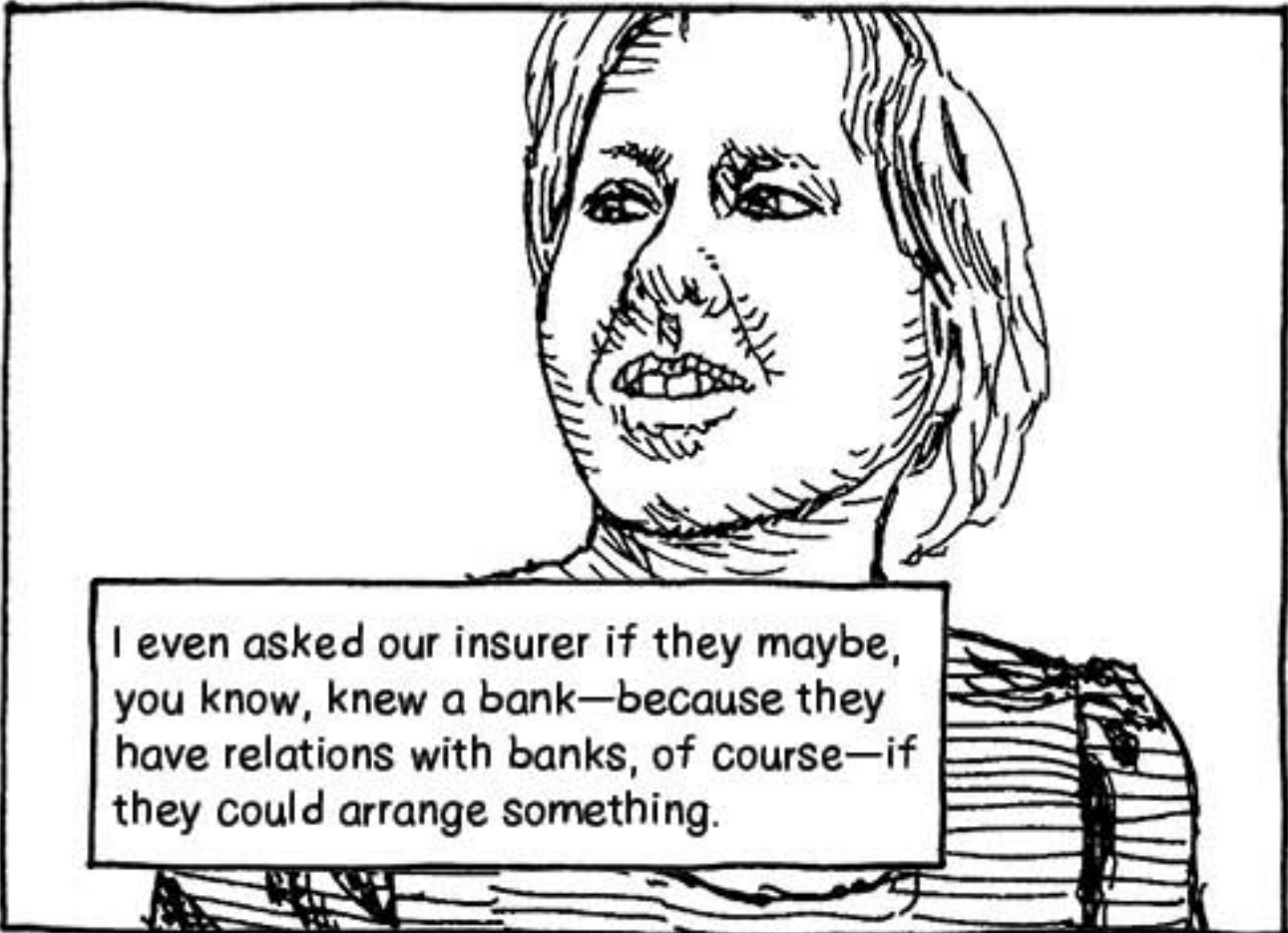


Transclal answered: "A bank guarantee: a bank makes a kind of a contract that says the bank pays in case the obligations are not fulfilled."

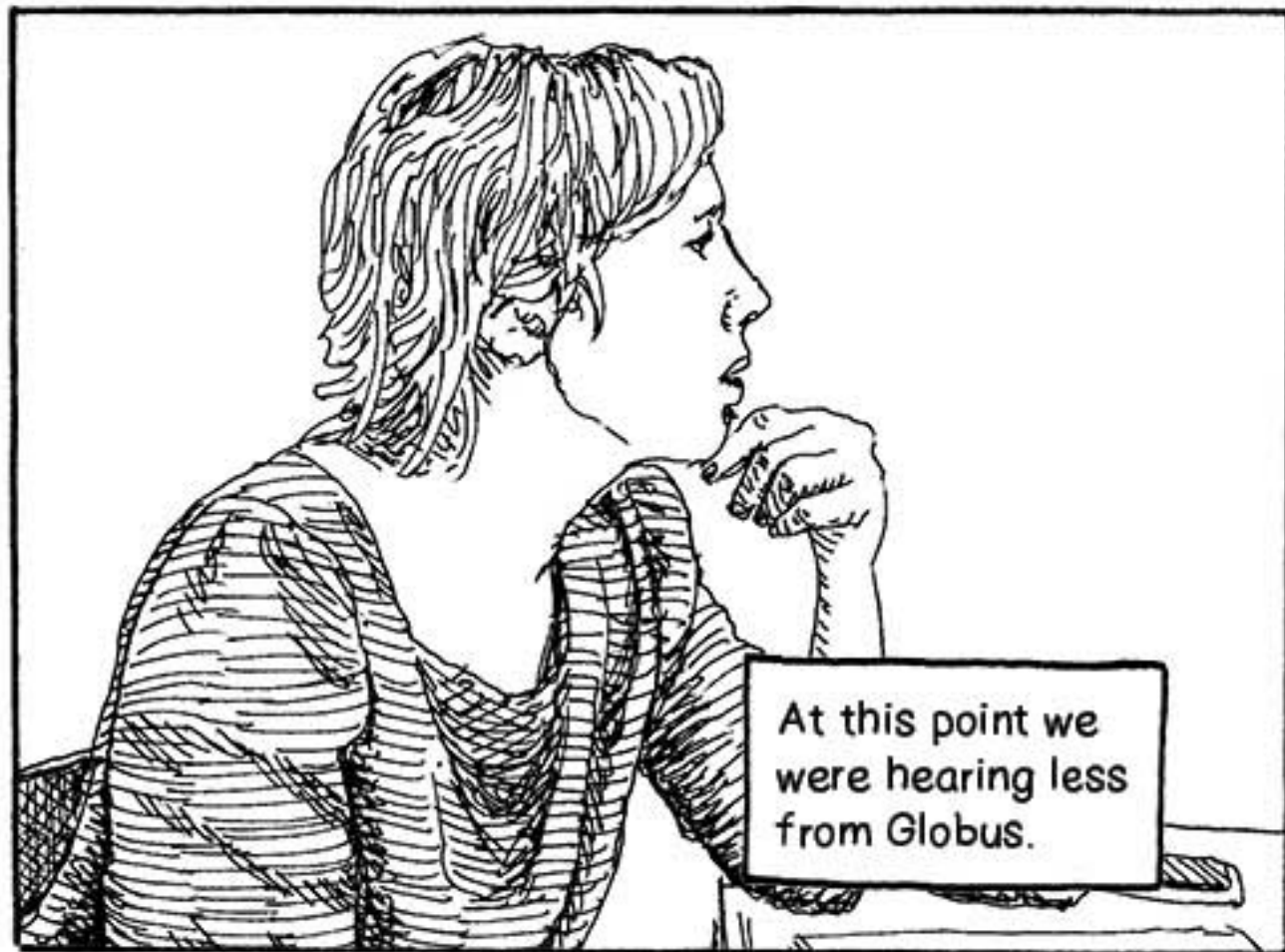
So, the obligation in this case is that the Picasso goes back. The bank charges money for this. Transclal says they cannot supply this, but the receiver must arrange it.



"Don't forget that this work will go to the West Bank—different rules."



I even asked our insurer if they maybe, you know, knew a bank—because they have relations with banks, of course—if they could arrange something.



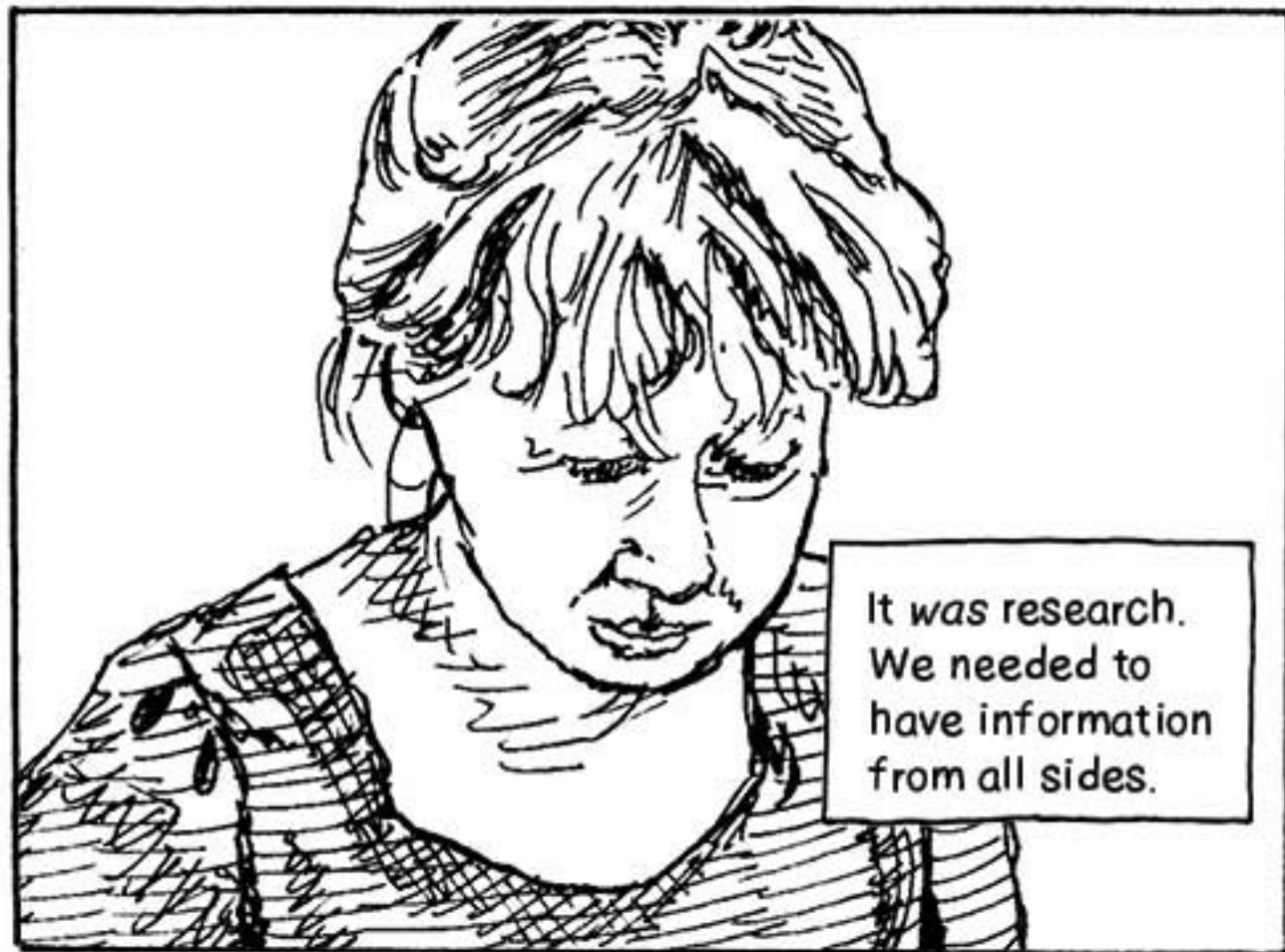
At this point we were hearing less from Globus.



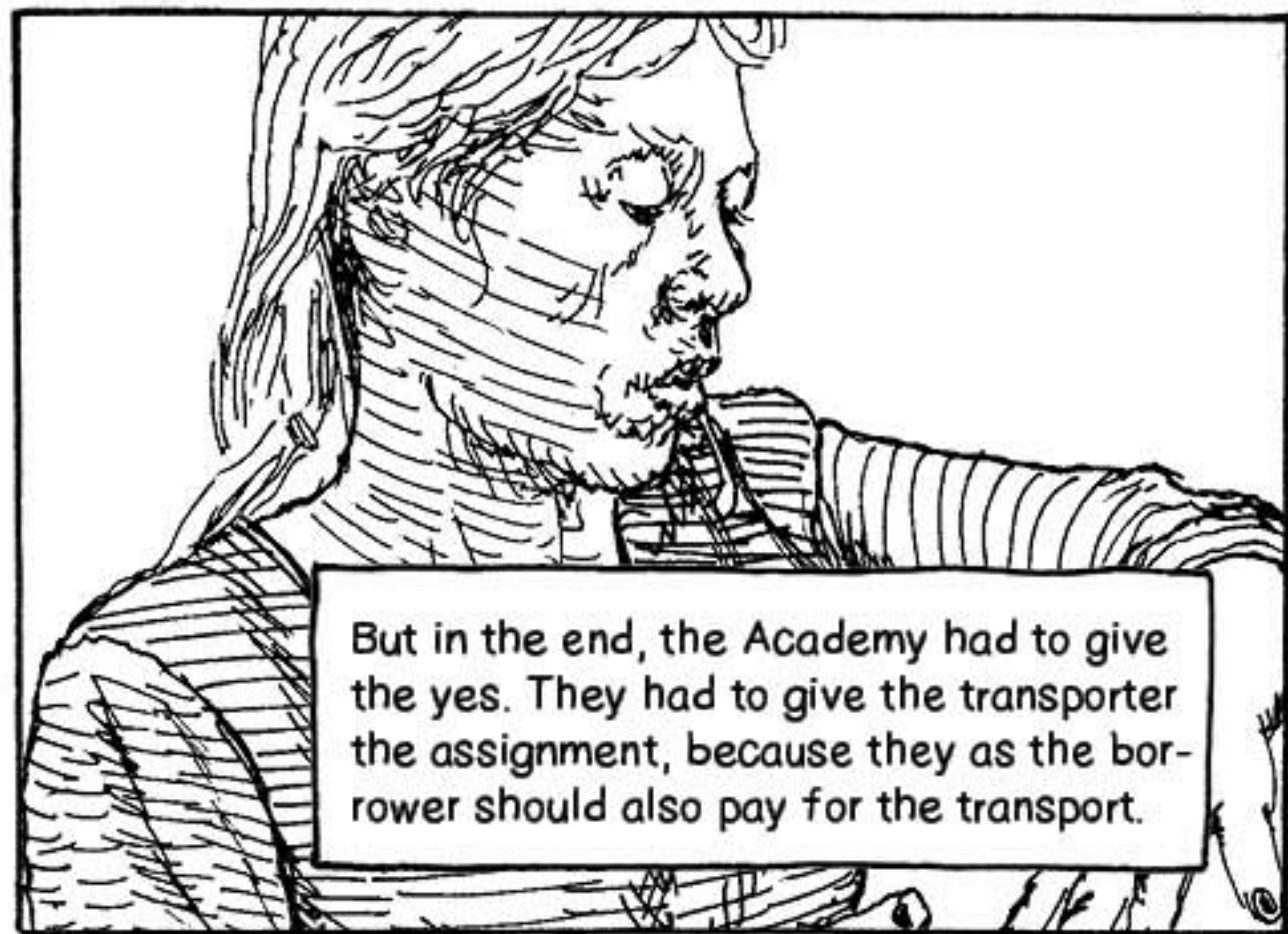
But I wanted to keep all options open, because I heard different information from both sides...



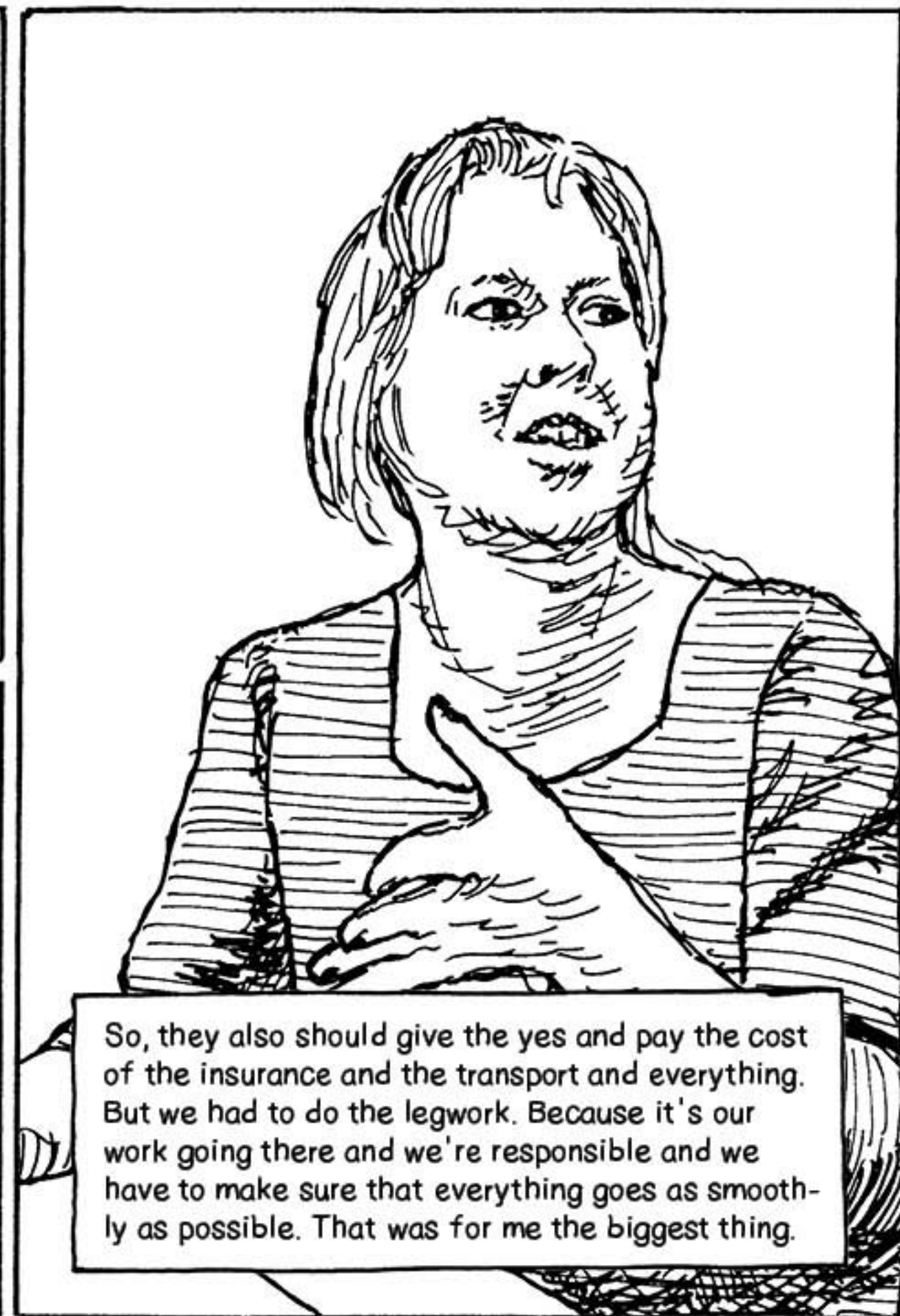
...so I said let's keep this open and I told both transporters that nobody got the job... this is still research, and it was.



It was research.
We needed to
have information
from all sides.



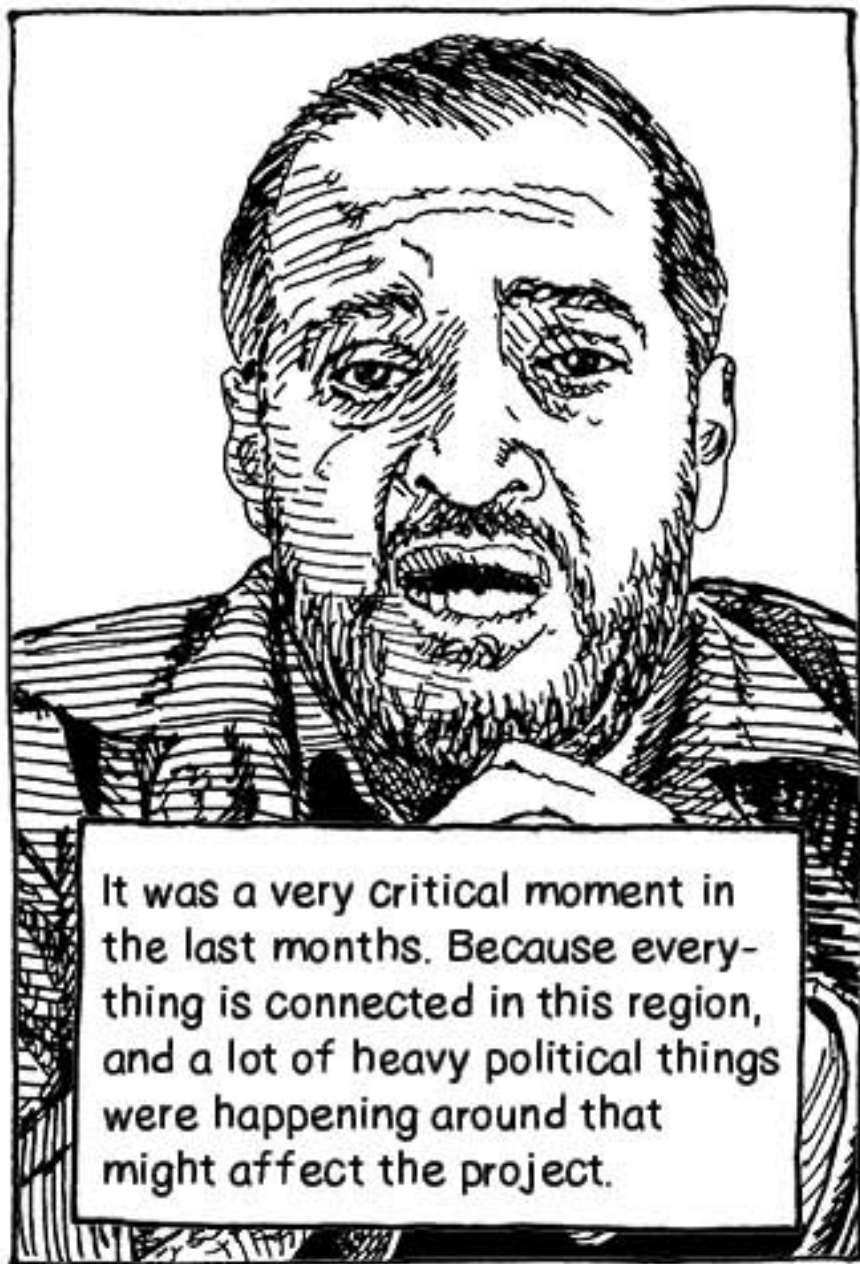
But in the end, the Academy had to give
the yes. They had to give the transporter
the assignment, because they as the bor-
rower should also pay for the transport.



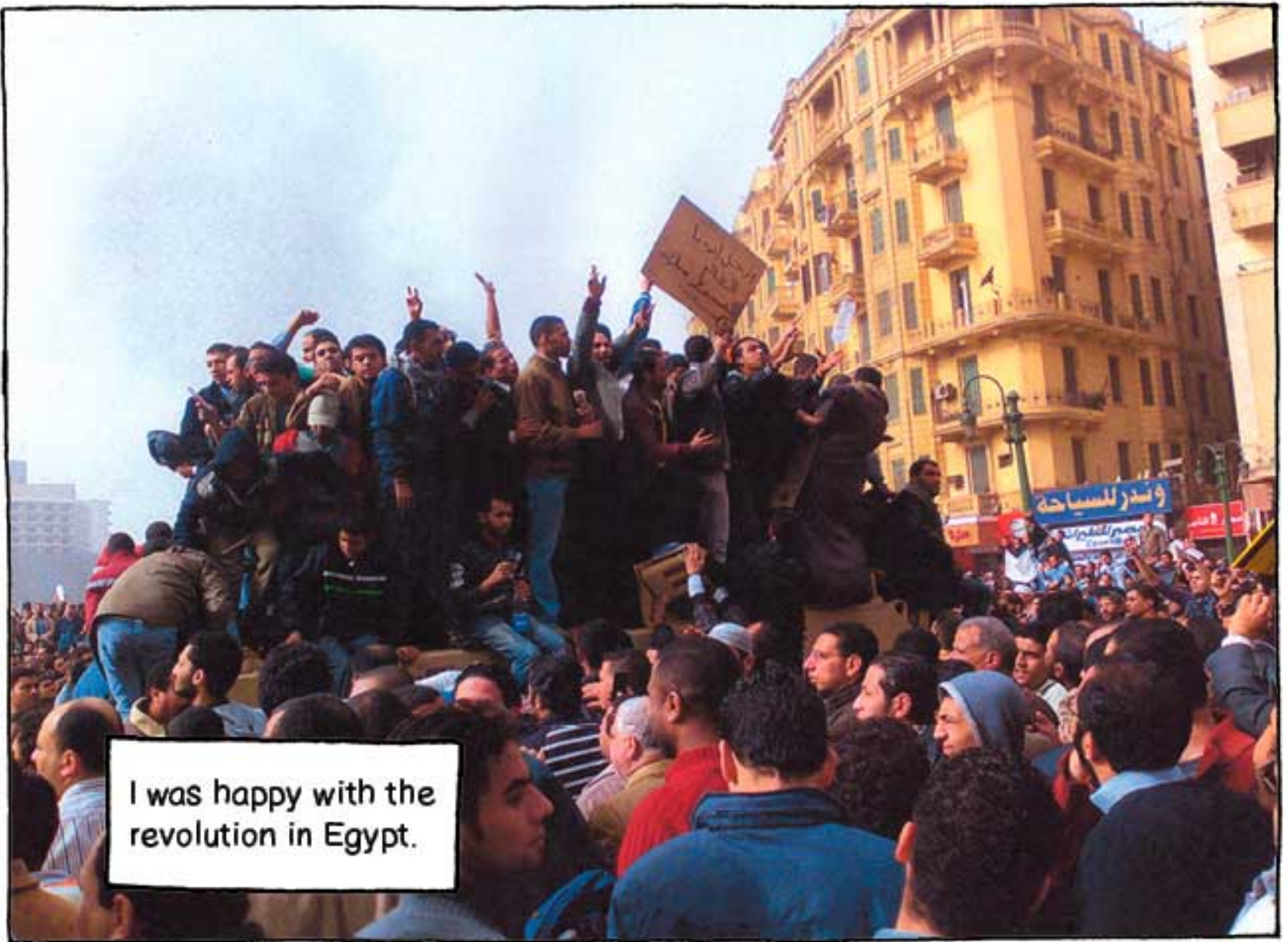
So, they also should give the yes and pay the cost
of the insurance and the transport and everything.
But we had to do the legwork. Because it's our
work going there and we're responsible and we
have to make sure that everything goes as smooth-
ly as possible. That was for me the biggest thing.

VERY CRITICAL
MOMENTS

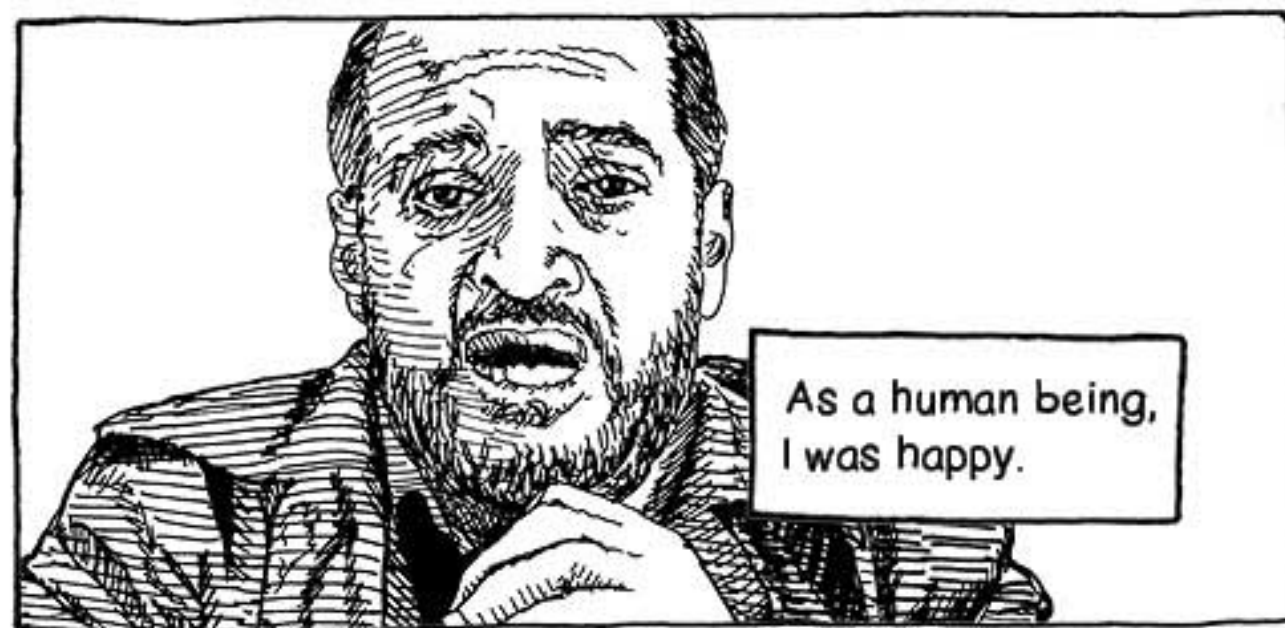




It was a very critical moment in the last months. Because everything is connected in this region, and a lot of heavy political things were happening around that might affect the project.



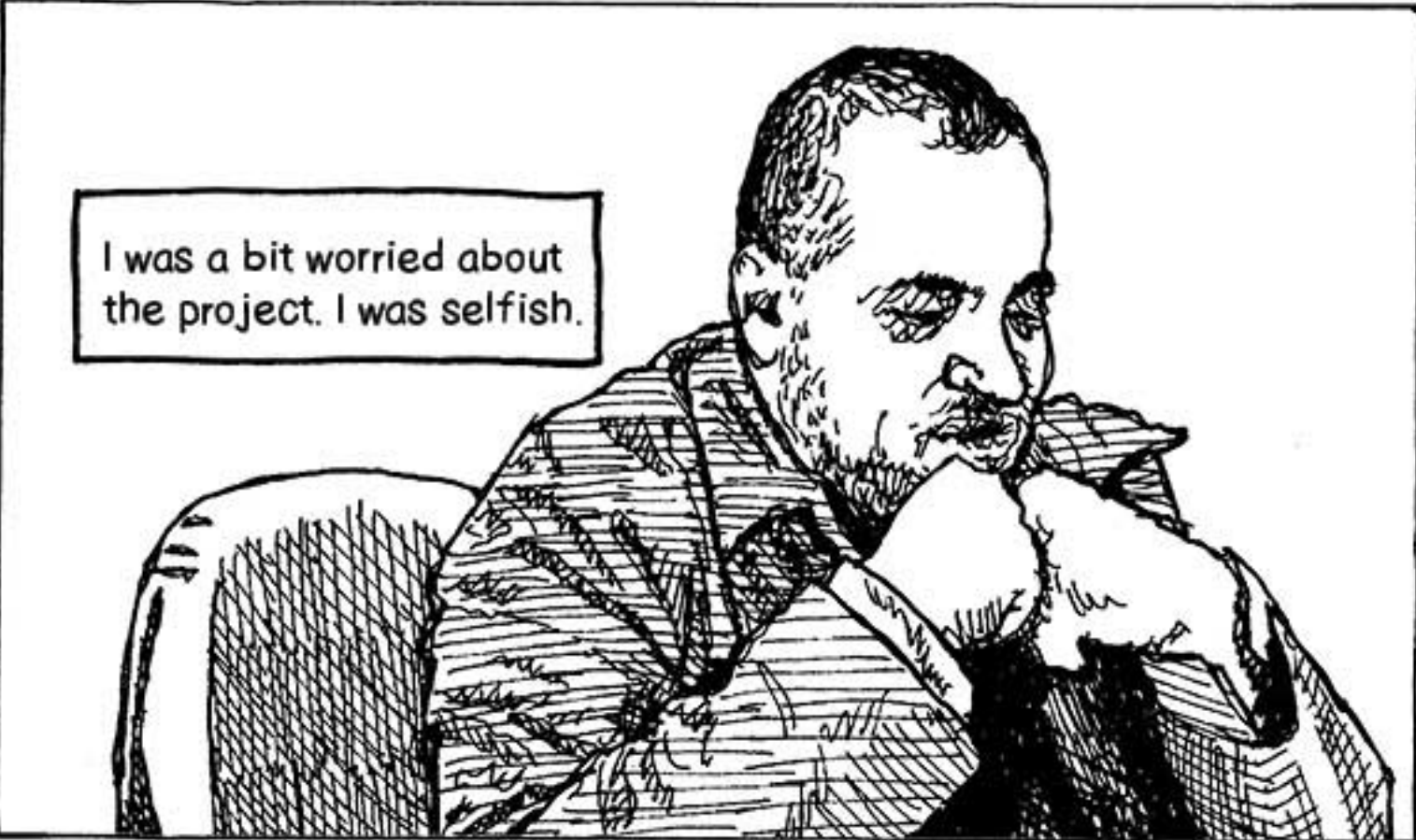
I was happy with the revolution in Egypt.




As a human being, I was happy.




But at the same time, I was afraid.




I was a bit worried about the project. I was selfish.



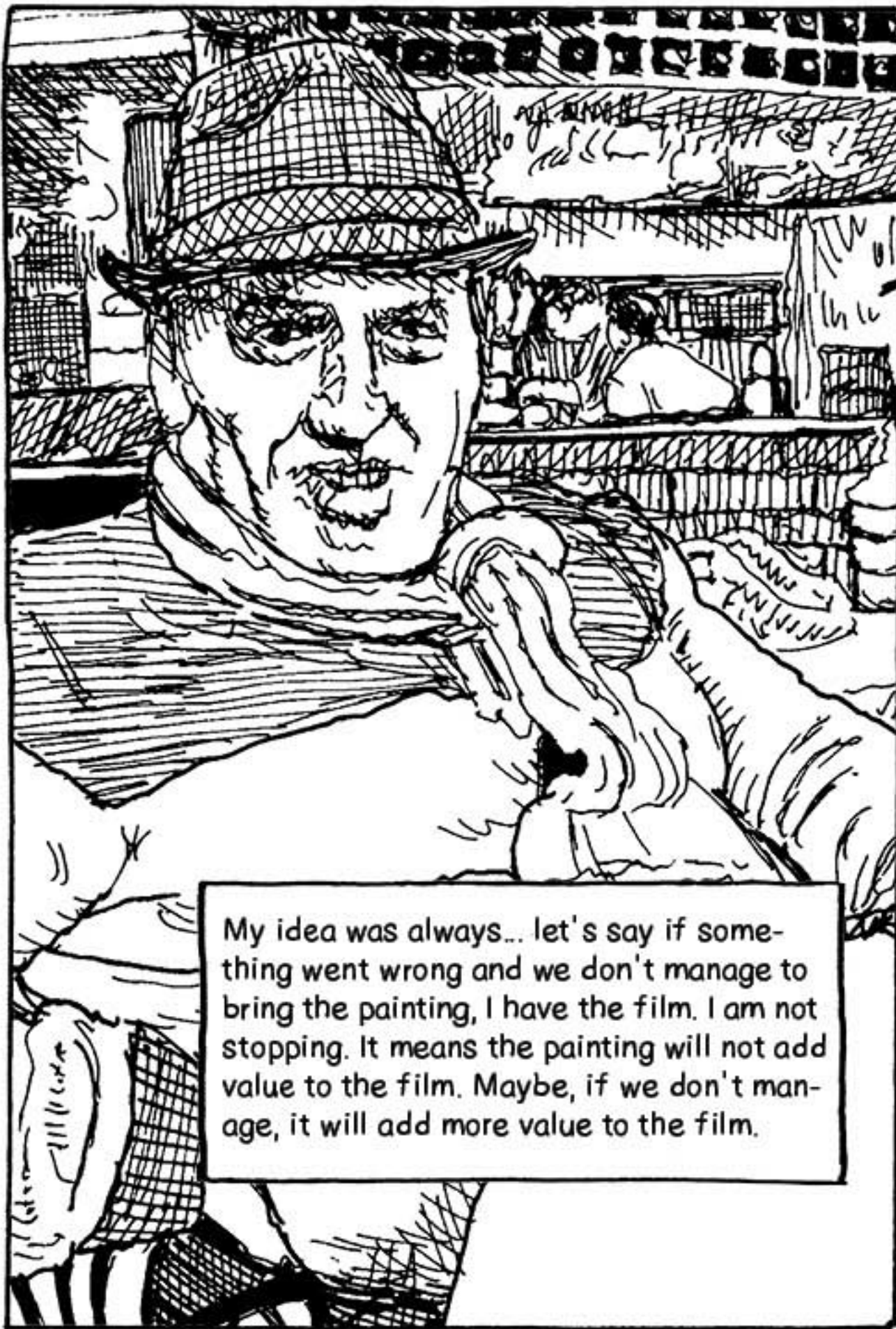
I didn't want things to be upside down, to destroy everything.



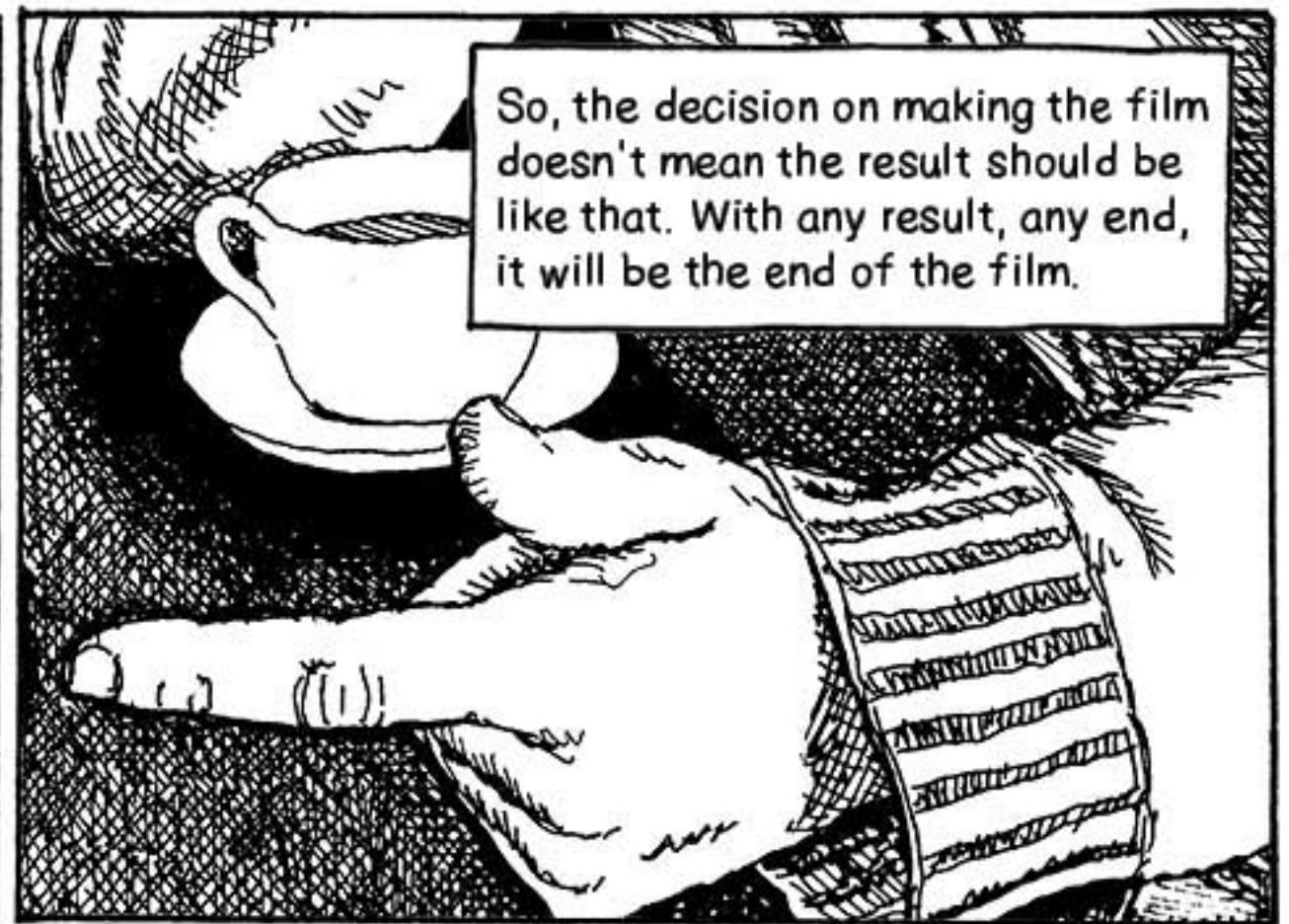
We were fighting to get the *Buste de femme* sent on time.



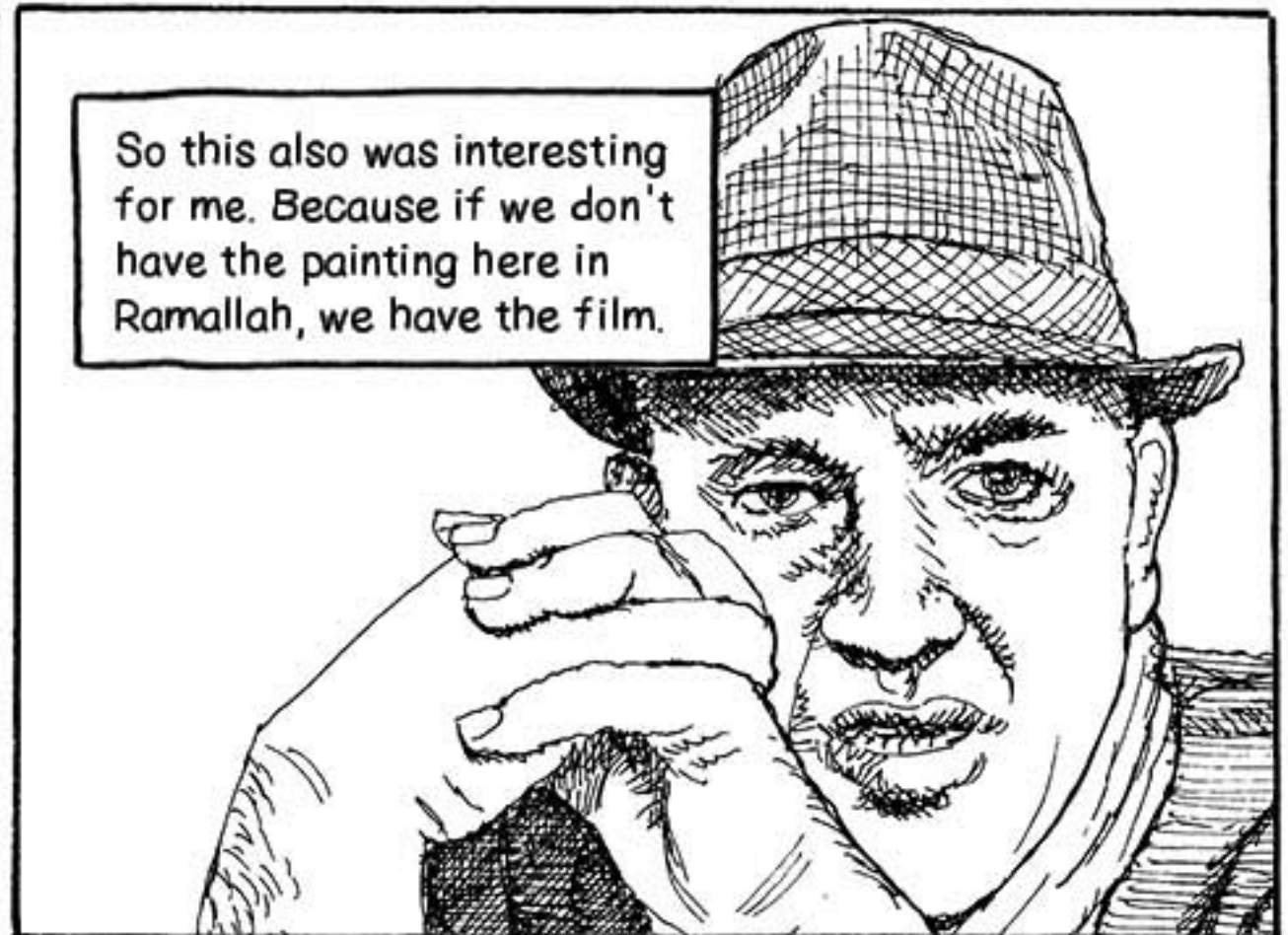
The project would not be possible in a year, this was the critical time.



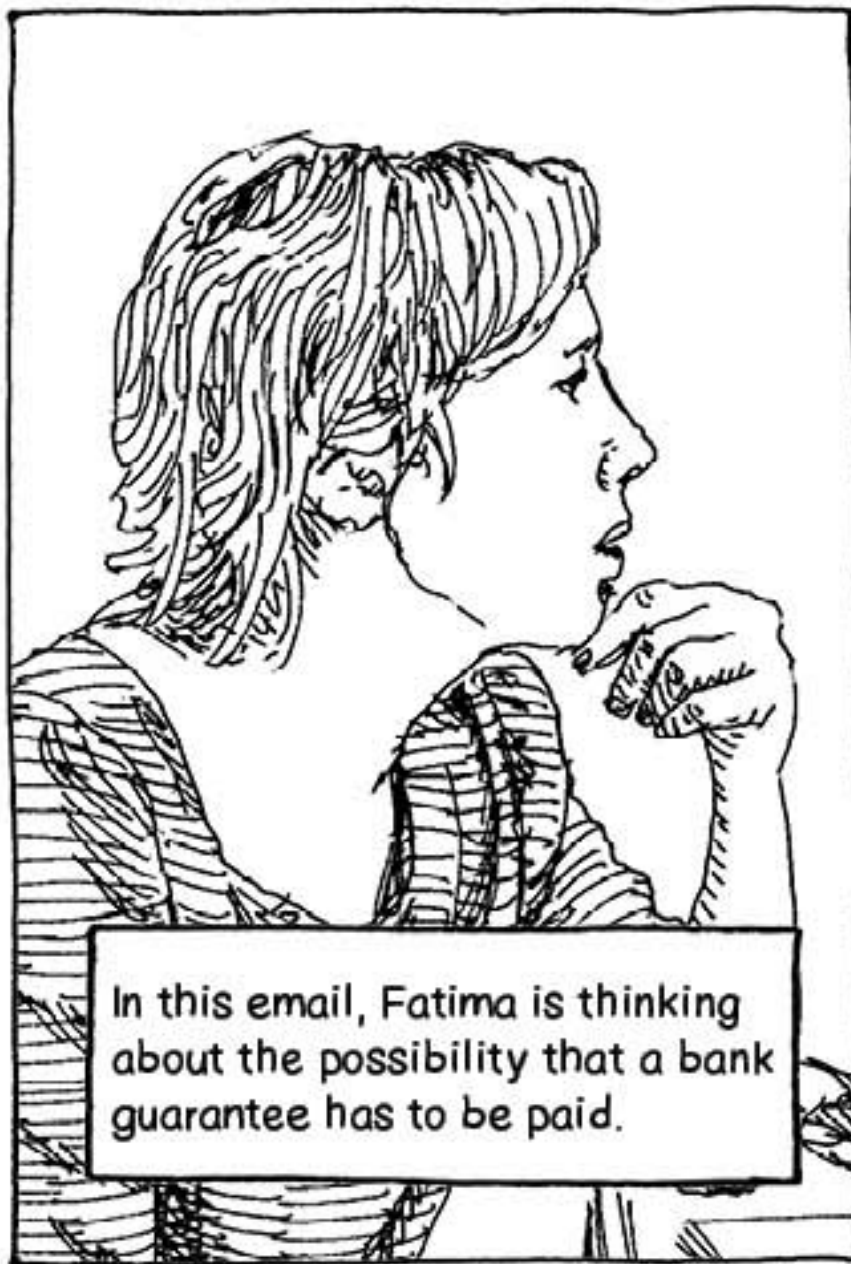
My idea was always... let's say if something went wrong and we don't manage to bring the painting, I have the film. I am not stopping. It means the painting will not add value to the film. Maybe, if we don't manage, it will add more value to the film.



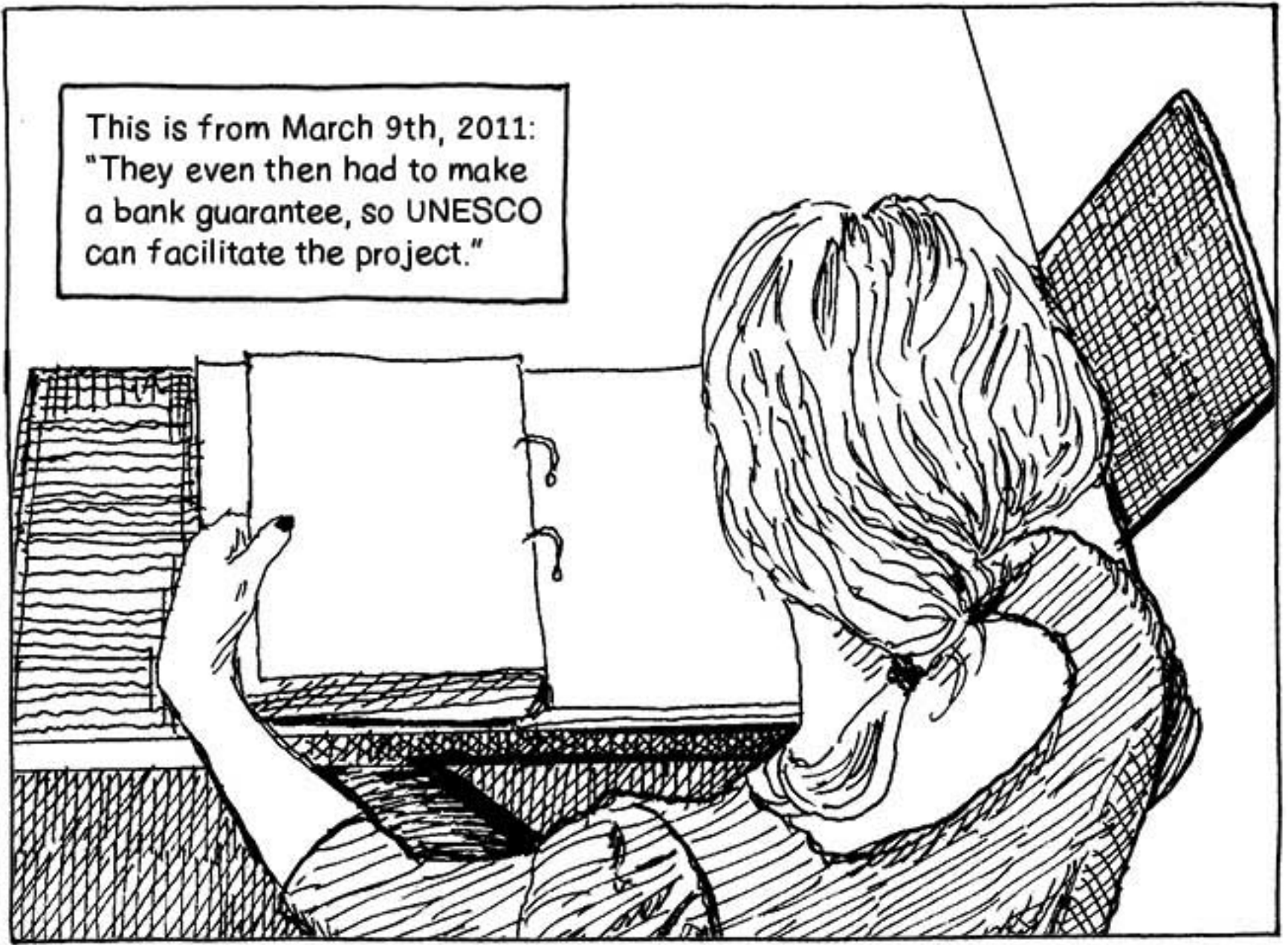
So, the decision on making the film doesn't mean the result should be like that. With any result, any end, it will be the end of the film.



So this also was interesting for me. Because if we don't have the painting here in Ramallah, we have the film.



In this email, Fatima is thinking about the possibility that a bank guarantee has to be paid.



This is from March 9th, 2011: "They even then had to make a bank guarantee, so UNESCO can facilitate the project."



Eventually that was what happened.



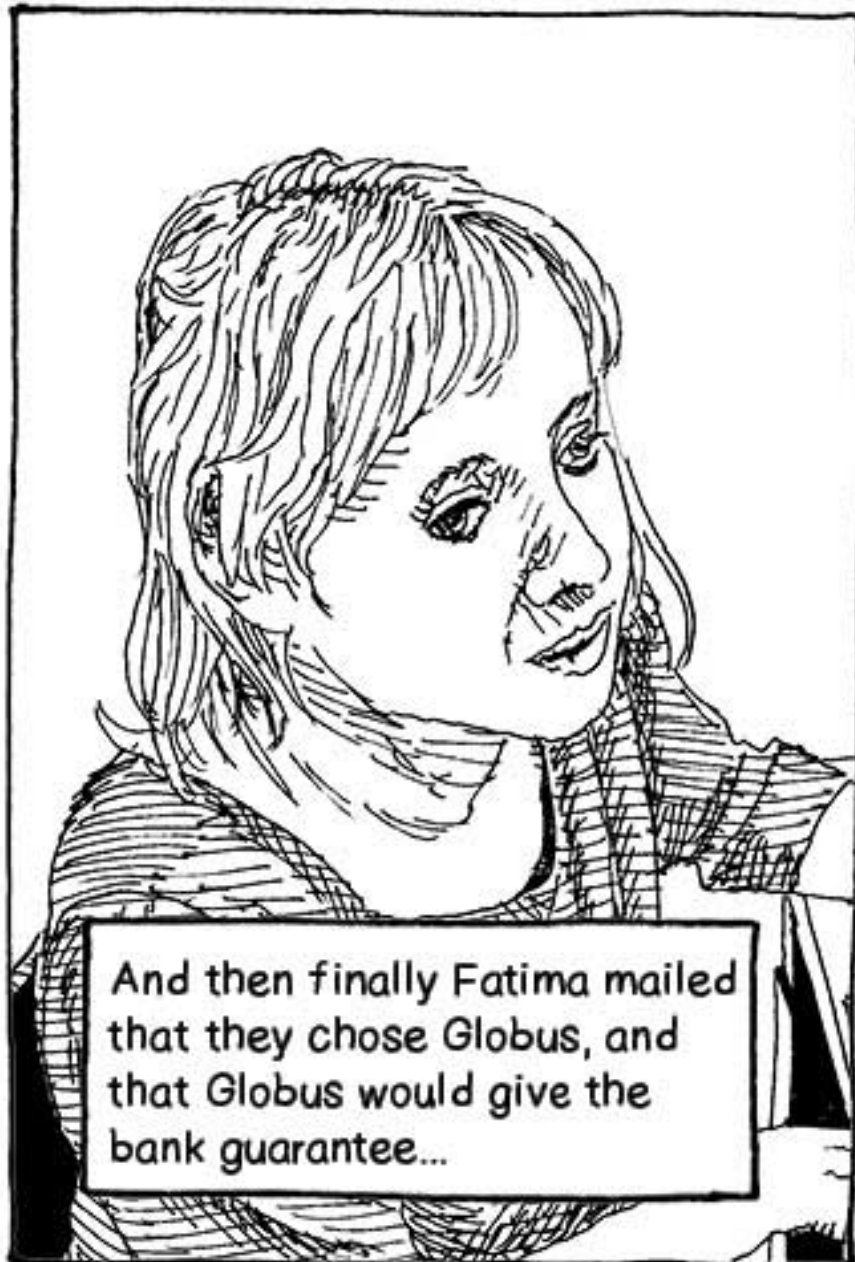
UNESCO facilitates the transport, or was involved, but not in a diplomatic way.



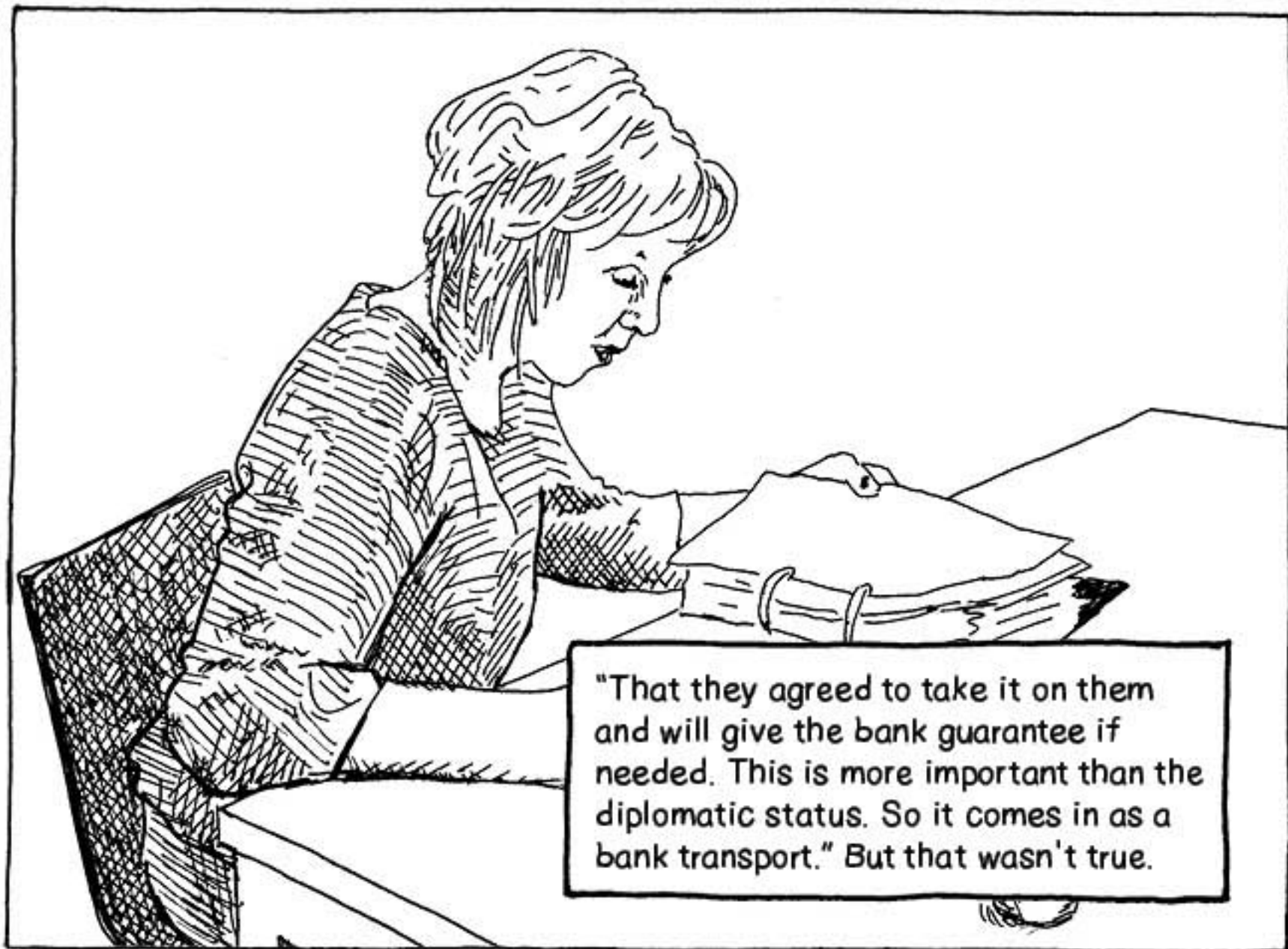
They did have an involvement—I don't know exactly what—and Fatima says they can facilitate the transport.



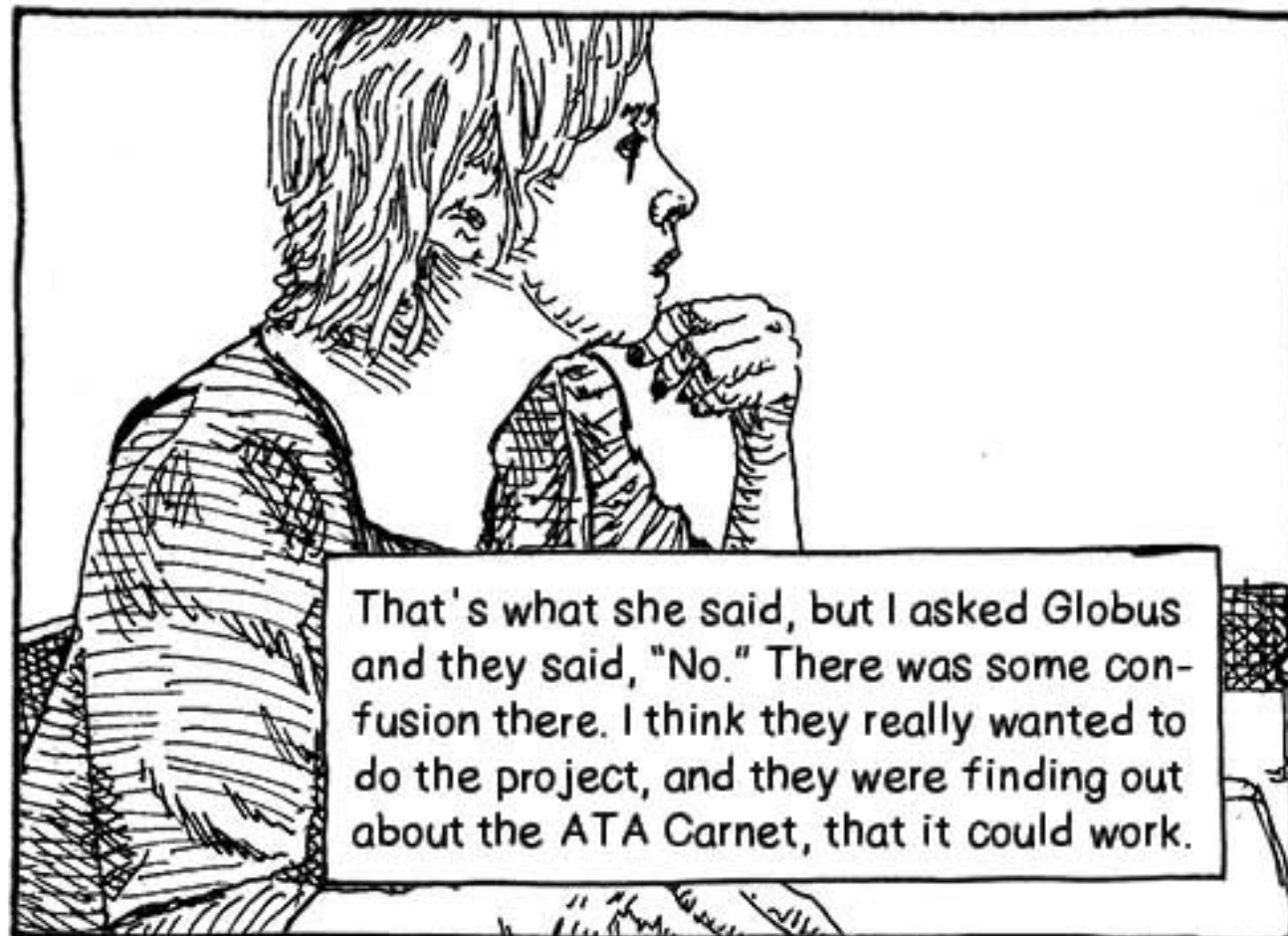
They were a partner. I believe they also sponsored the project.



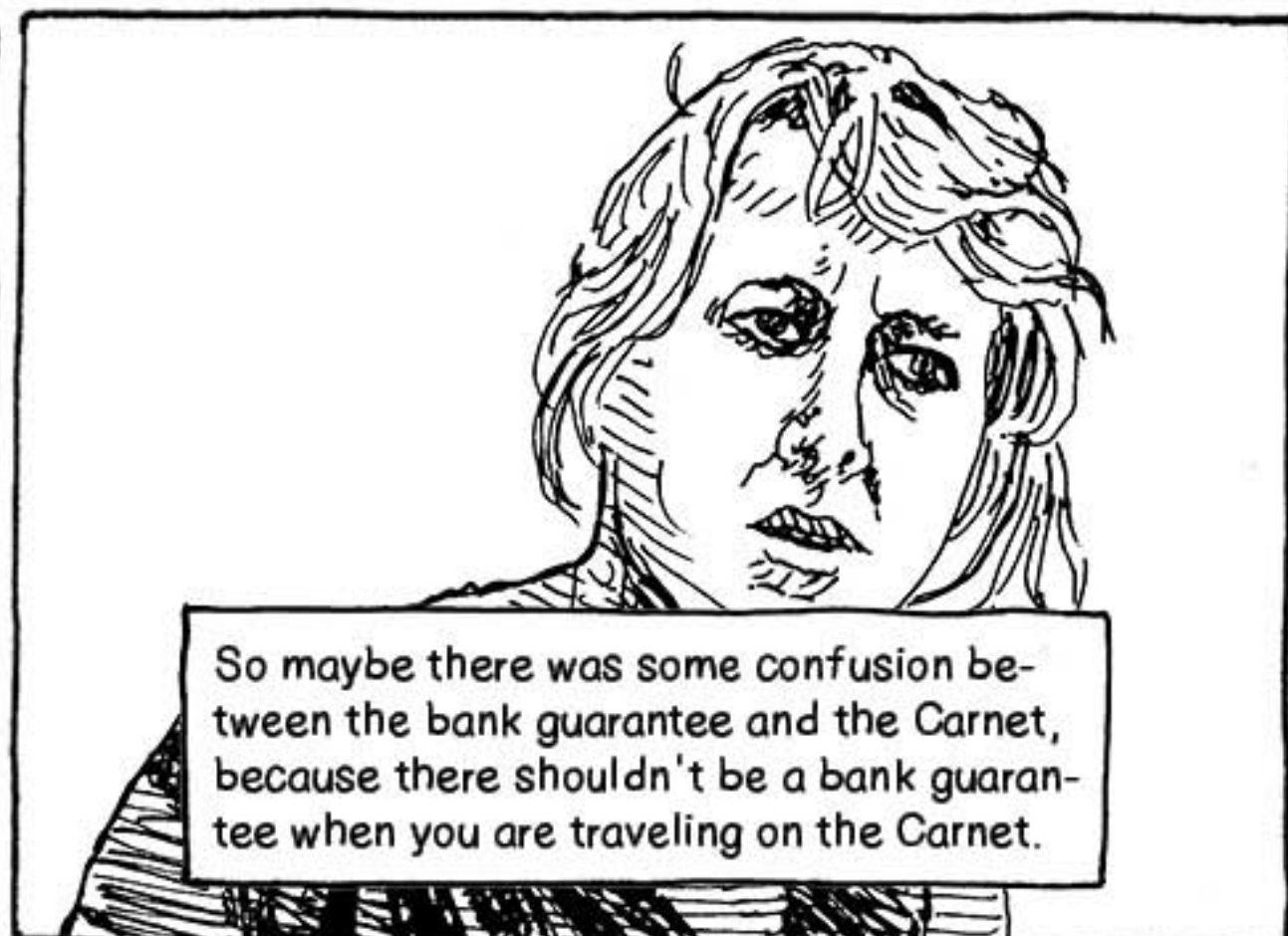
And then finally Fatima mailed that they chose Globus, and that Globus would give the bank guarantee...



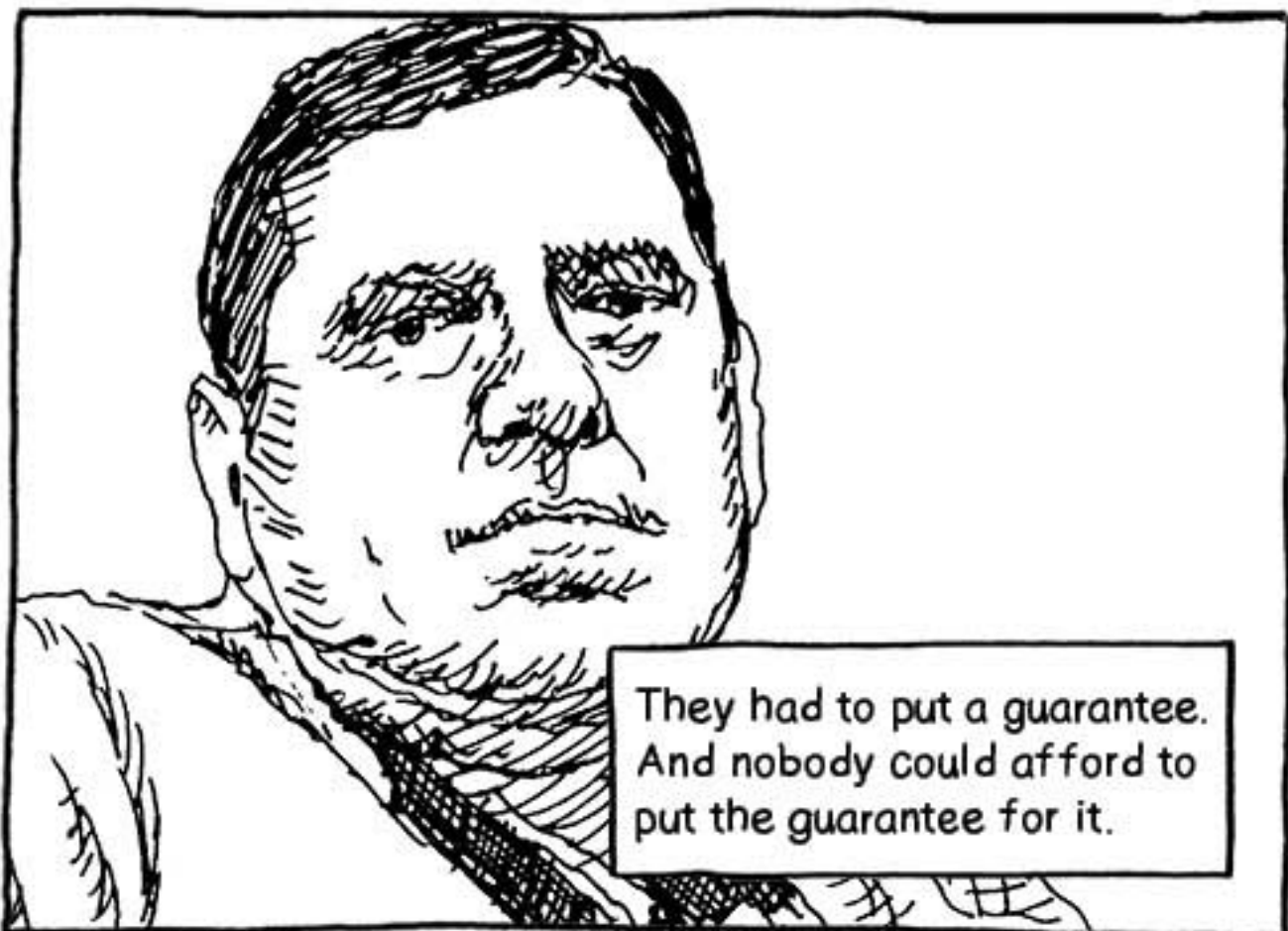
"That they agreed to take it on them and will give the bank guarantee if needed. This is more important than the diplomatic status. So it comes in as a bank transport." But that wasn't true.



That's what she said, but I asked Globus and they said, "No." There was some confusion there. I think they really wanted to do the project, and they were finding out about the ATA Carnet, that it could work.



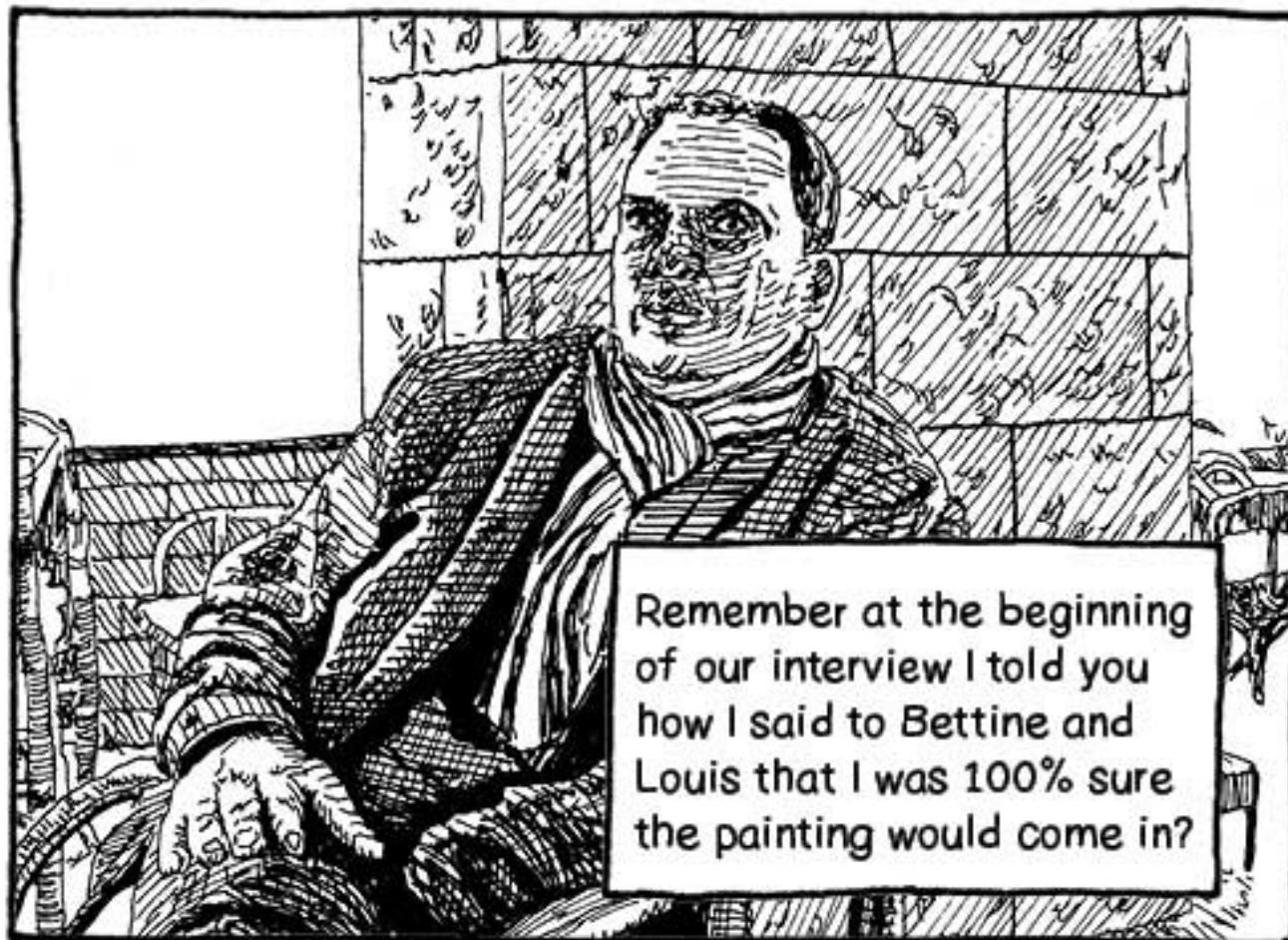
So maybe there was some confusion between the bank guarantee and the Carnet, because there shouldn't be a bank guarantee when you are traveling on the Carnet.



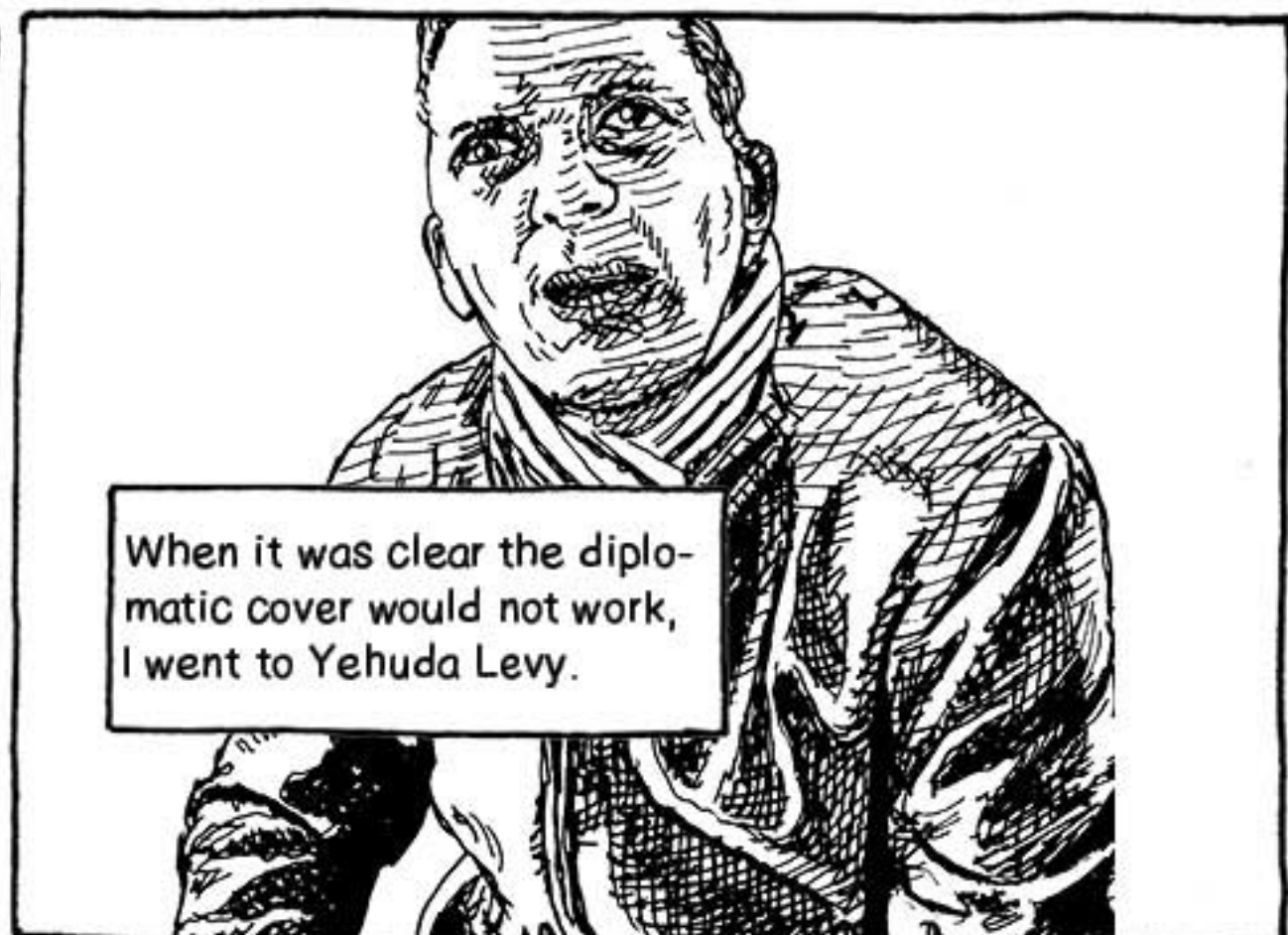
They had to put a guarantee. And nobody could afford to put the guarantee for it.



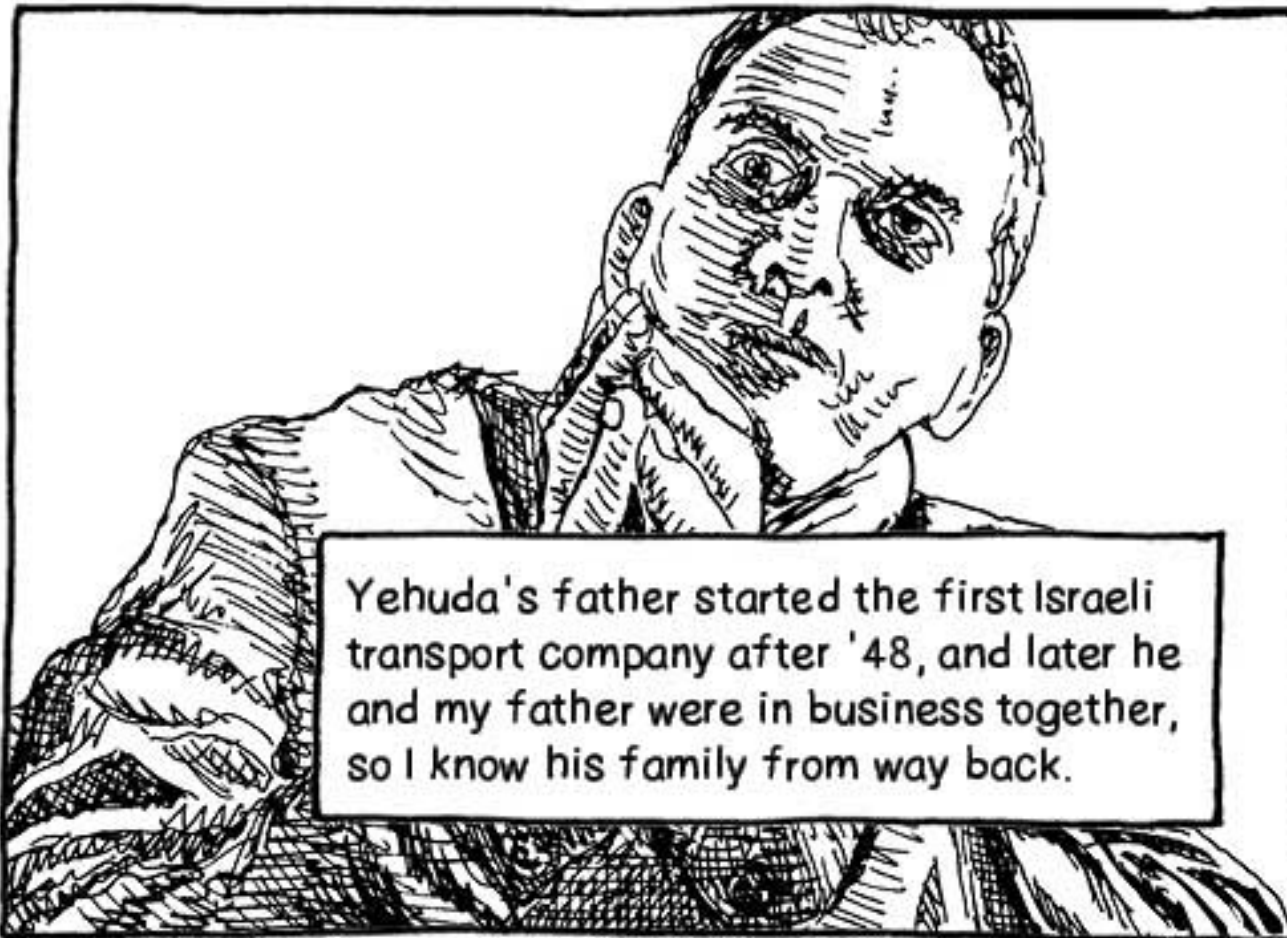
Certainly not us.



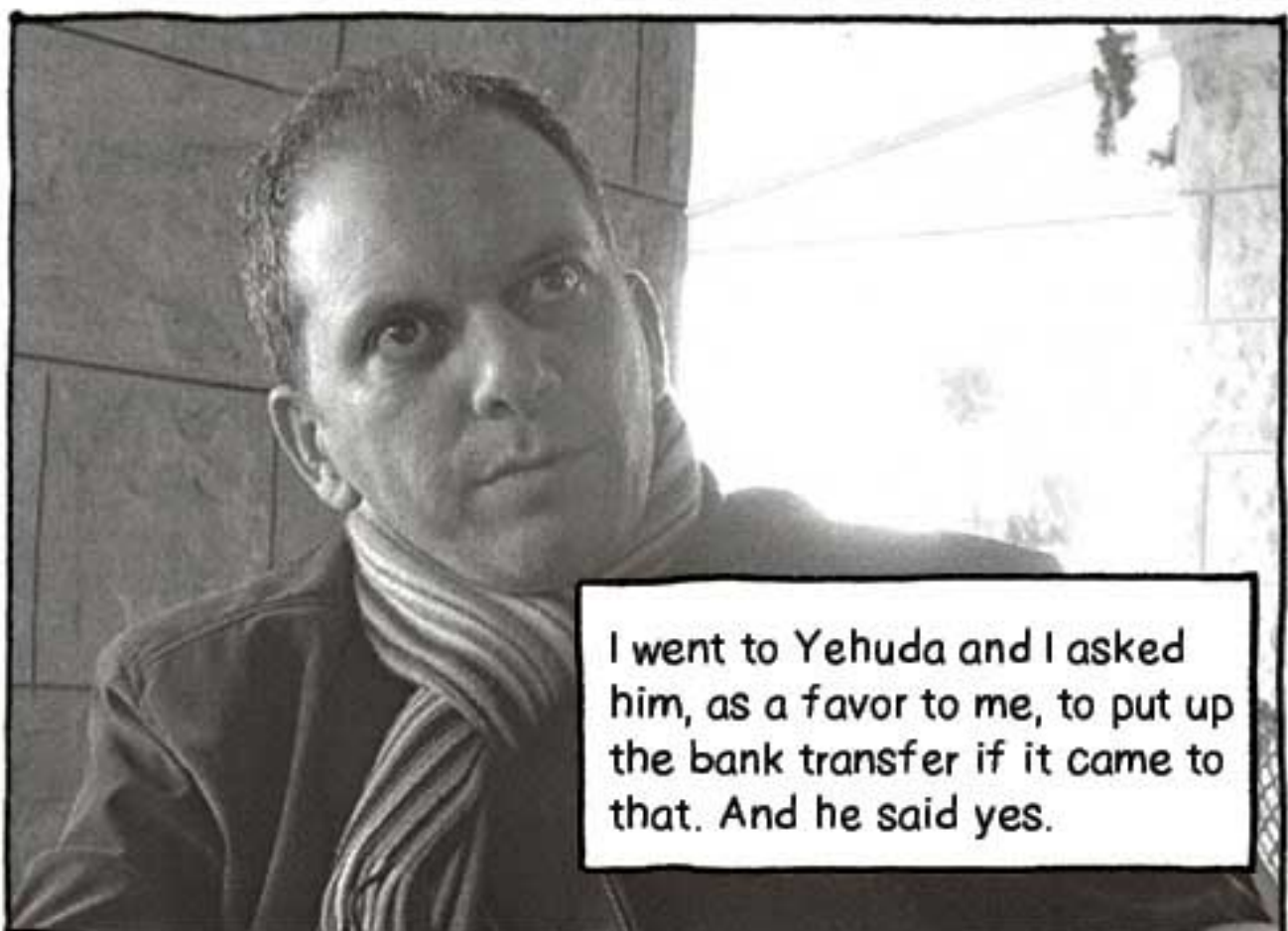
Remember at the beginning of our interview I told you how I said to Bettine and Louis that I was 100% sure the painting would come in?



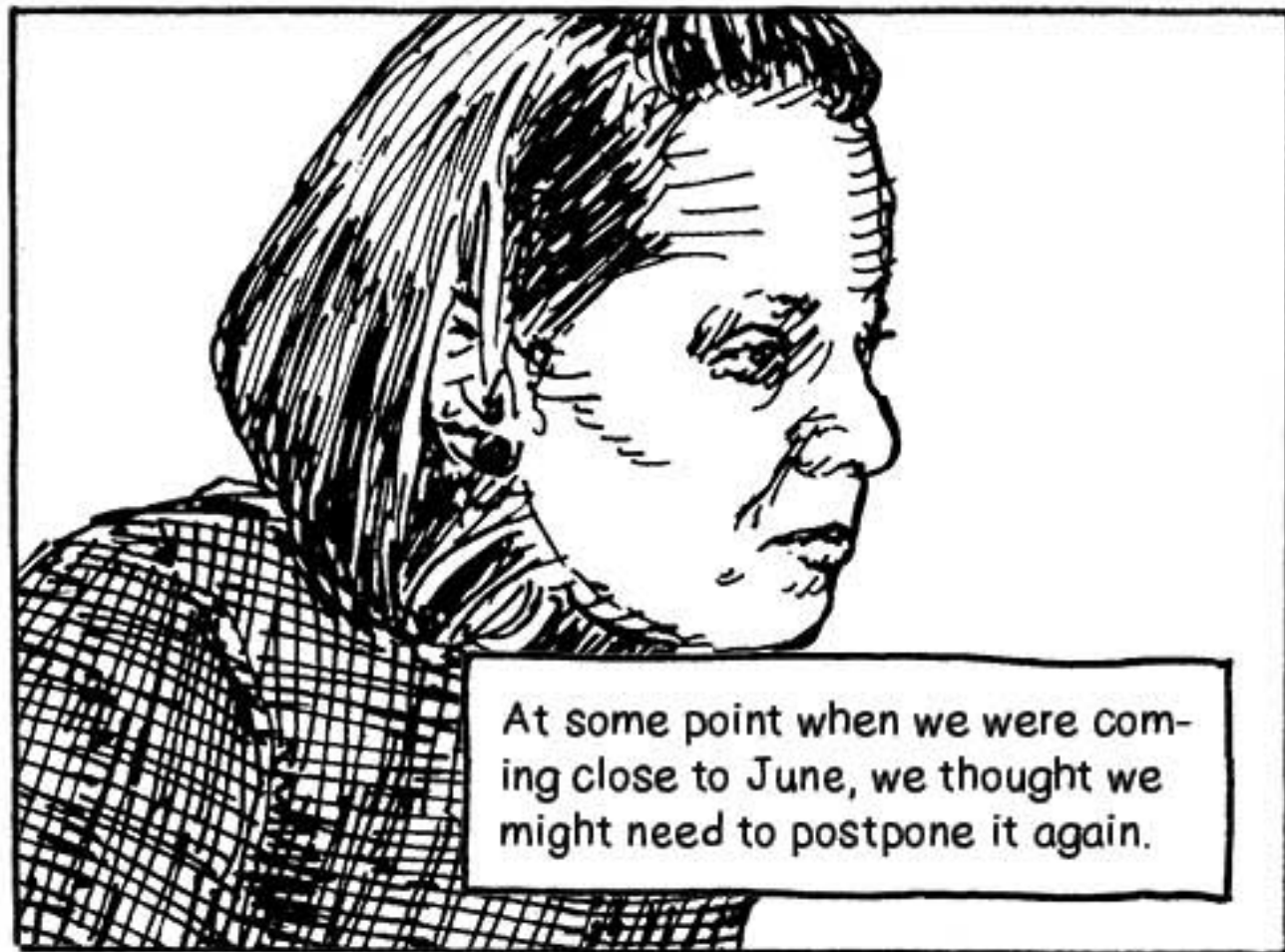
When it was clear the diplomatic cover would not work, I went to Yehuda Levy.



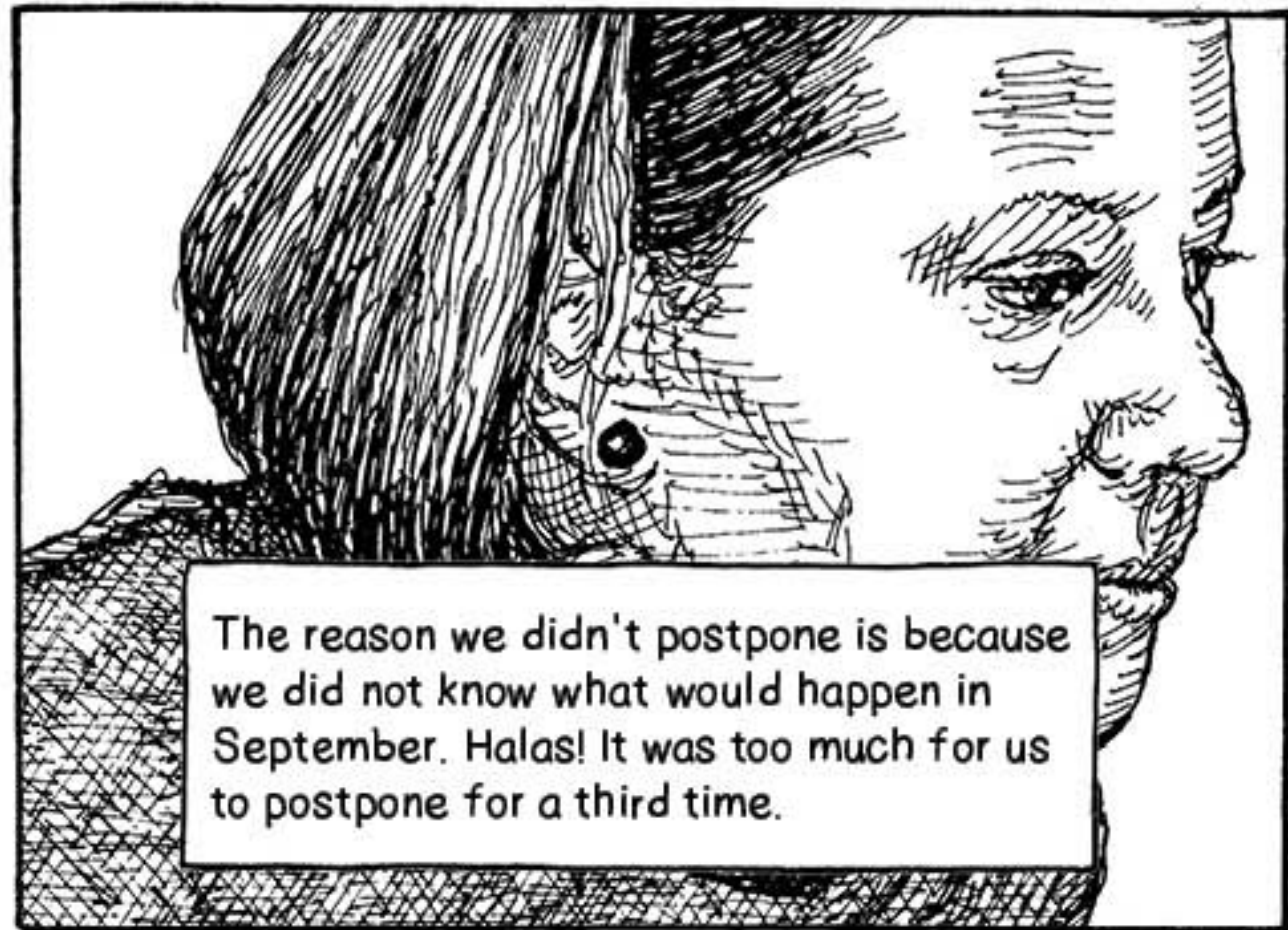
Yehuda's father started the first Israeli transport company after '48, and later he and my father were in business together, so I know his family from way back.



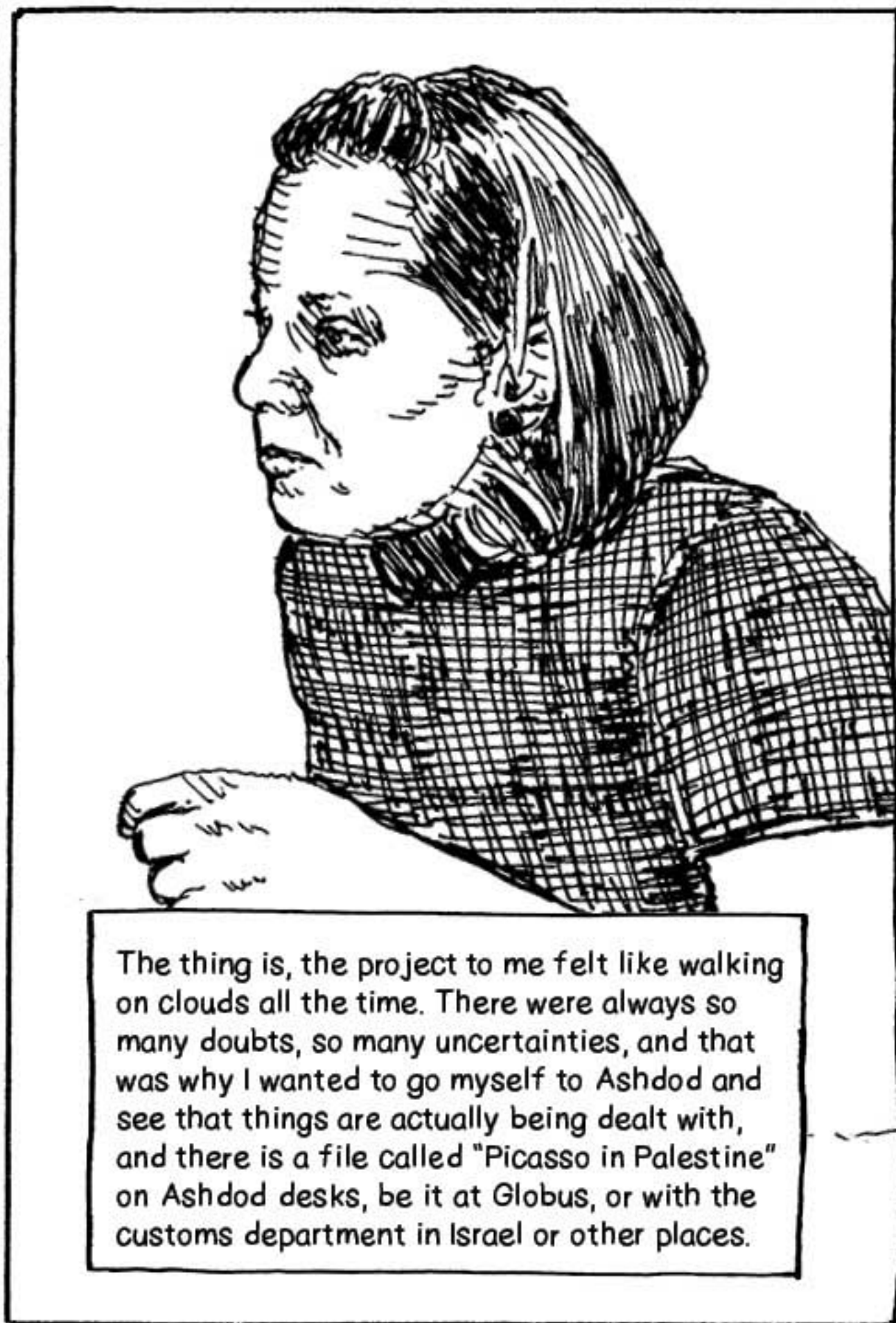
I went to Yehuda and I asked him, as a favor to me, to put up the bank transfer if it came to that. And he said yes.



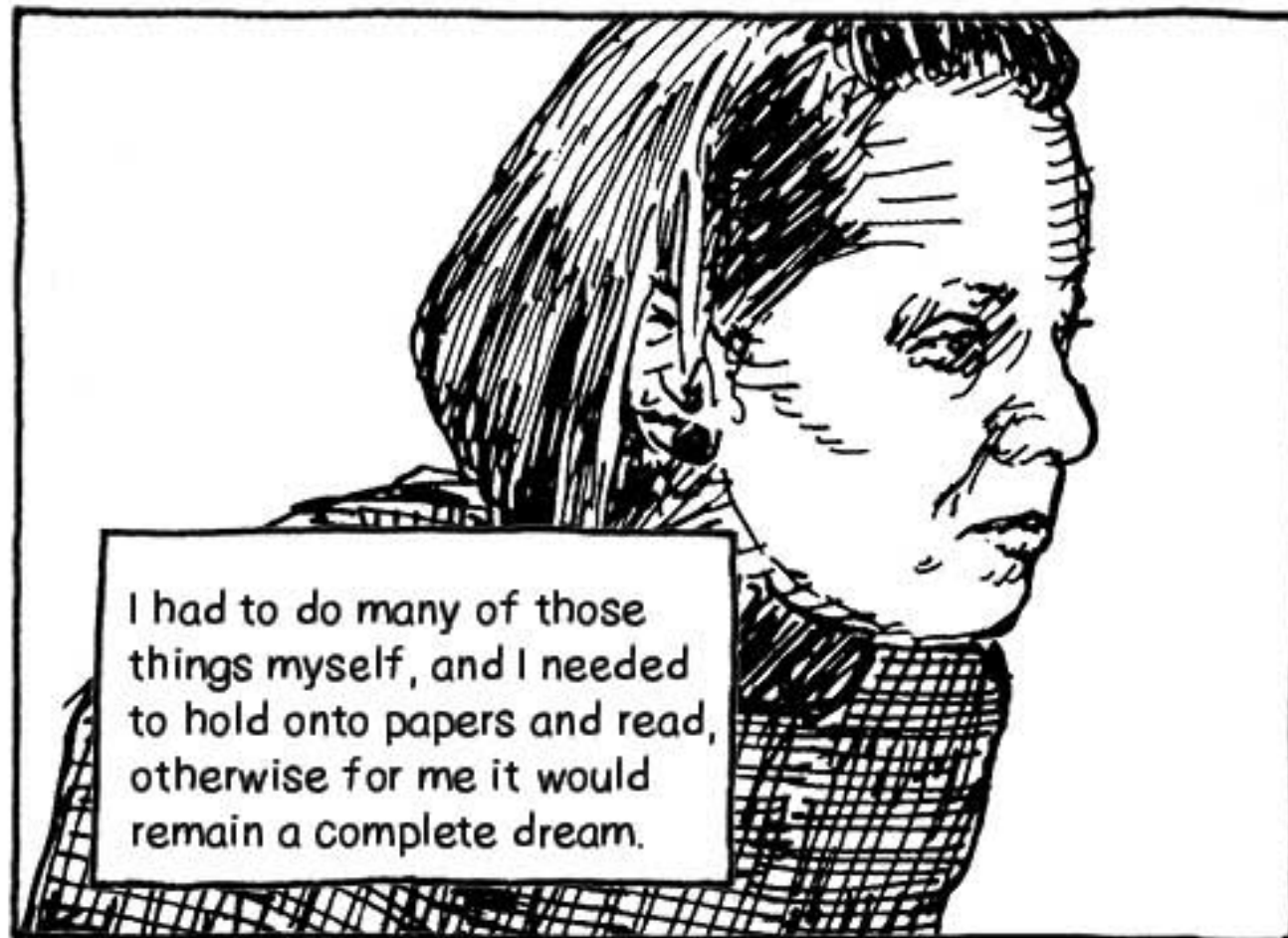
At some point when we were coming close to June, we thought we might need to postpone it again.



The reason we didn't postpone is because we did not know what would happen in September. Halas! It was too much for us to postpone for a third time.



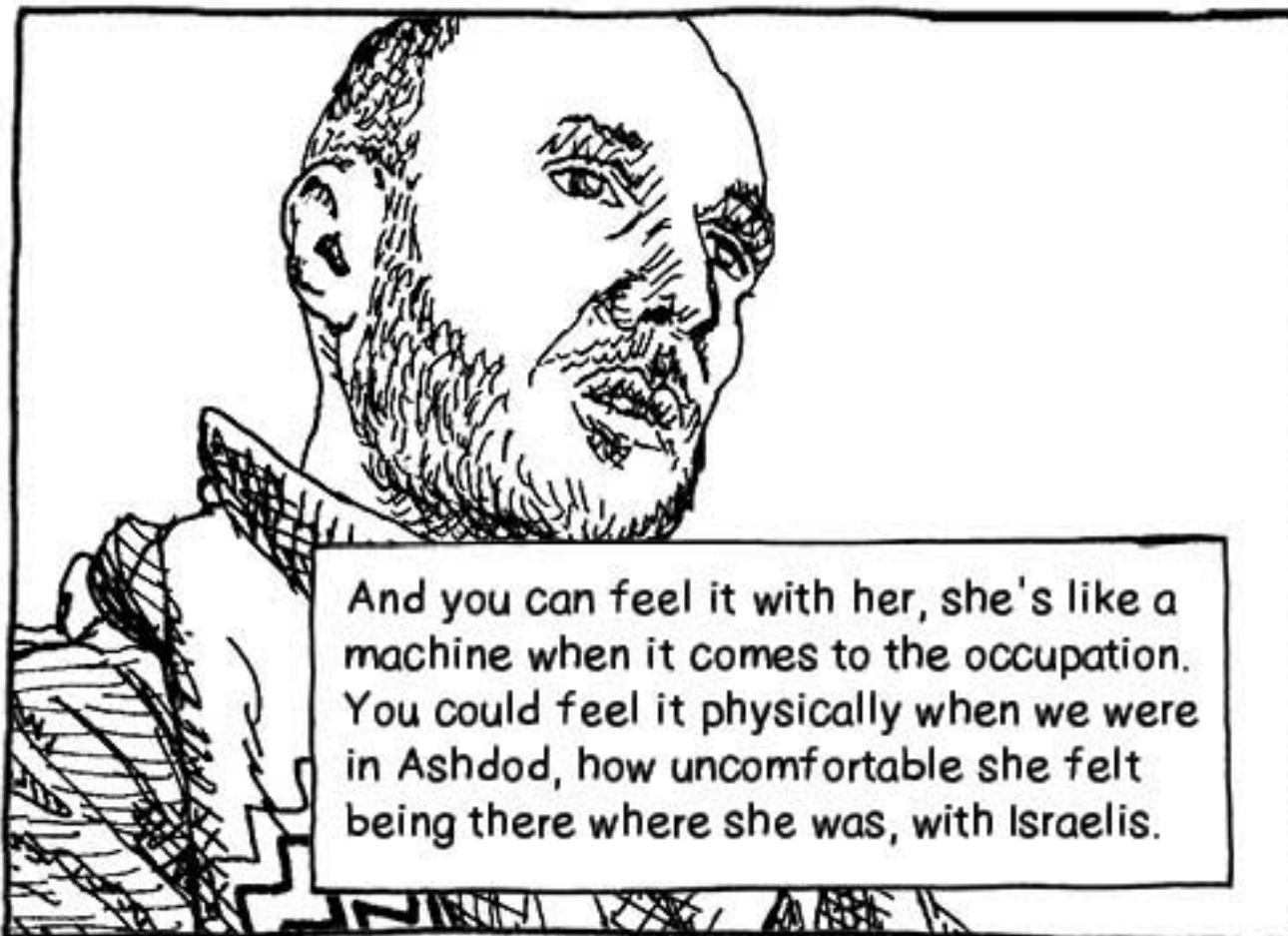
The thing is, the project to me felt like walking on clouds all the time. There were always so many doubts, so many uncertainties, and that was why I wanted to go myself to Ashdod and see that things are actually being dealt with, and there is a file called "Picasso in Palestine" on Ashdod desks, be it at Globus, or with the customs department in Israel or other places.



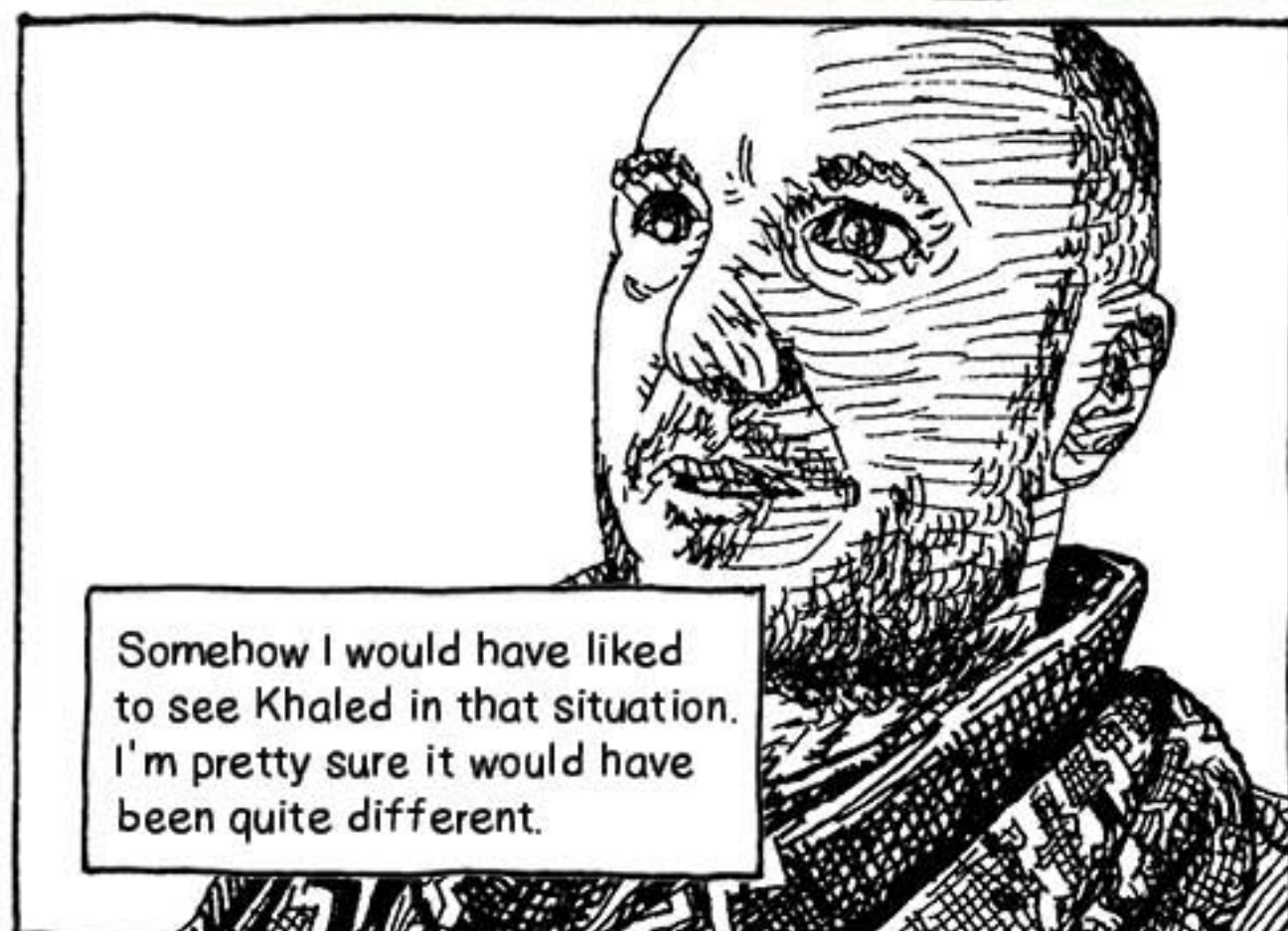
I had to do many of those things myself, and I needed to hold onto papers and read, otherwise for me it would remain a complete dream.



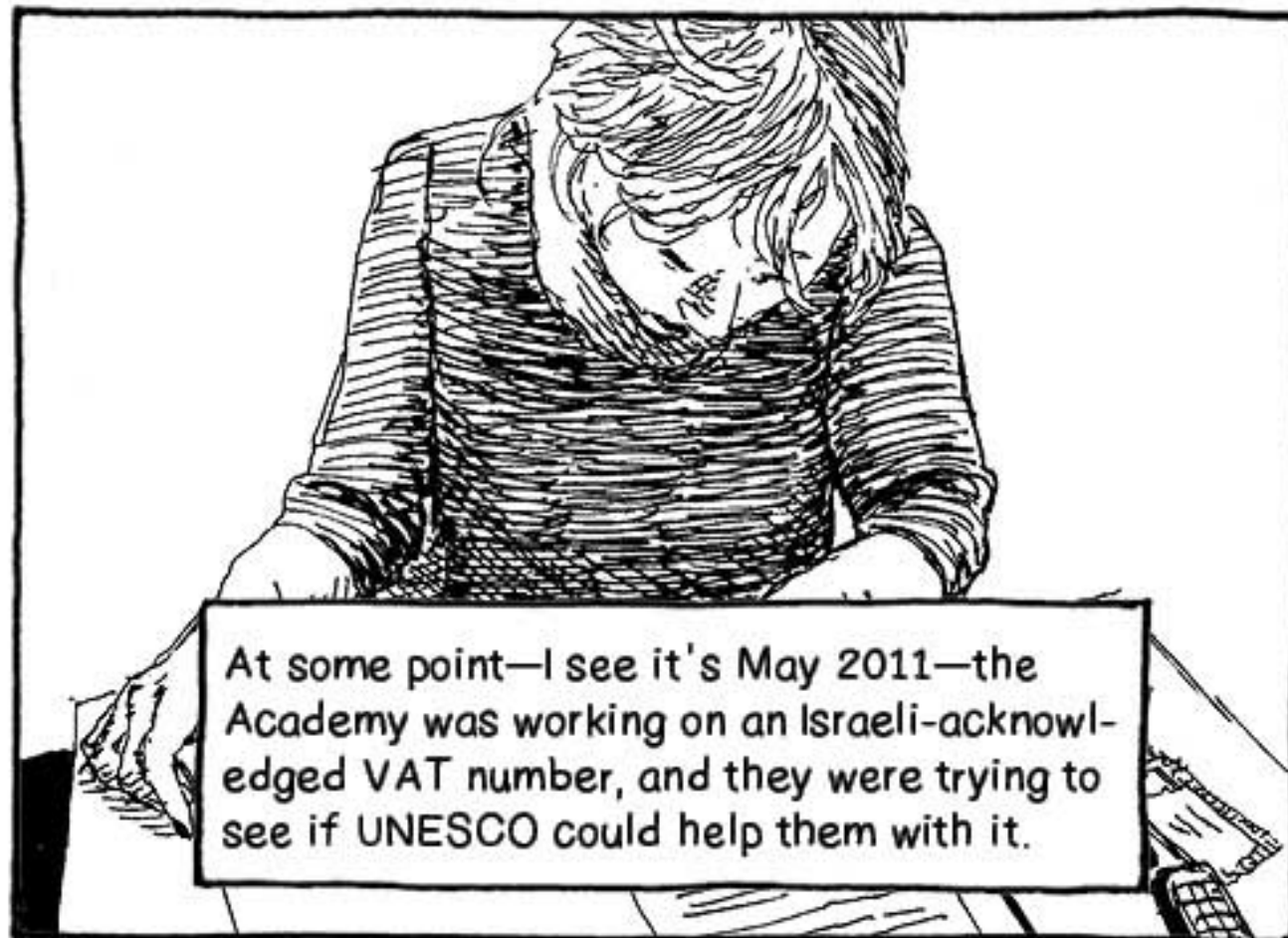
Fatima, she's very activist, right?



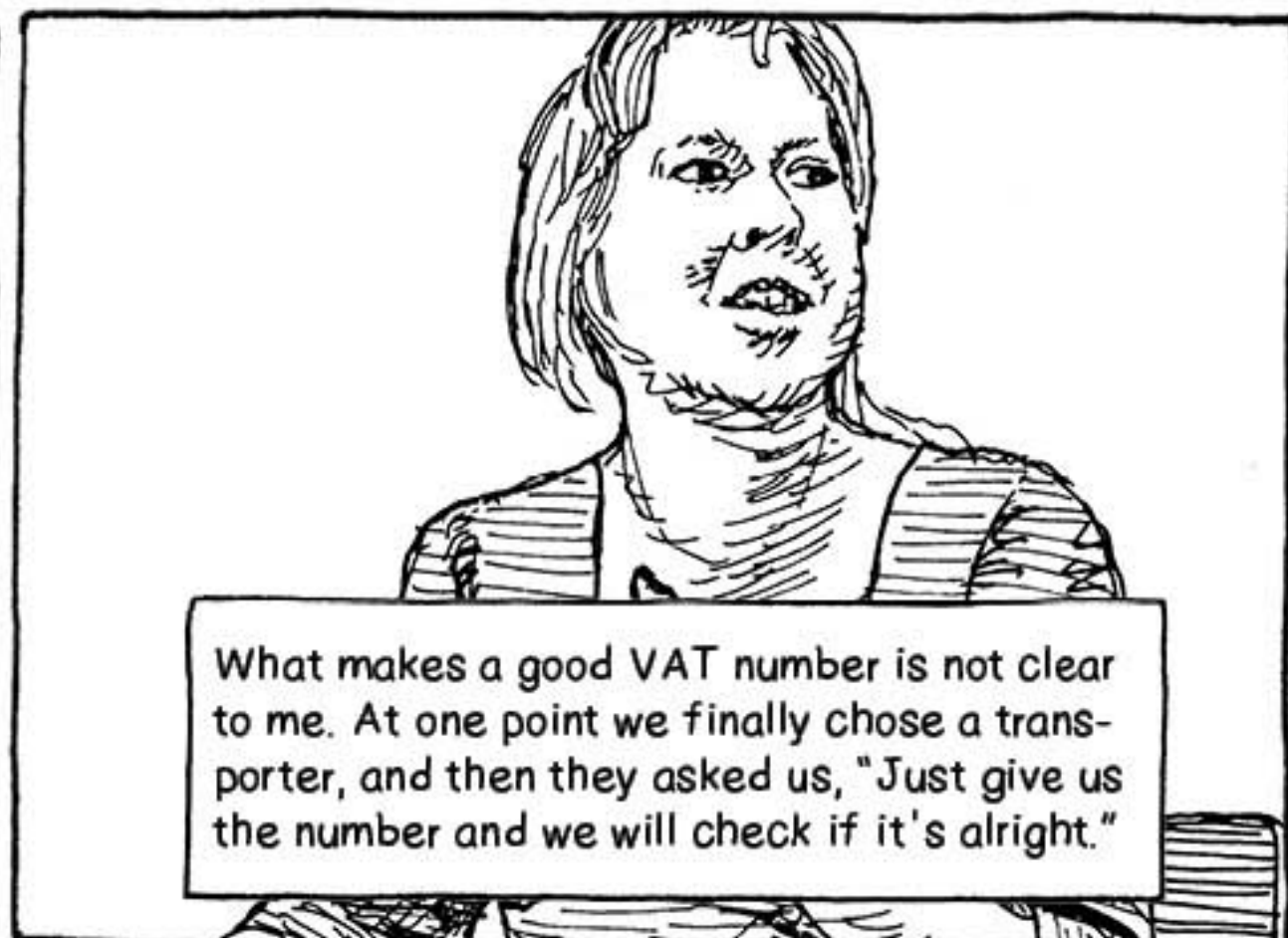
And you can feel it with her, she's like a machine when it comes to the occupation. You could feel it physically when we were in Ashdod, how uncomfortable she felt being there where she was, with Israelis.



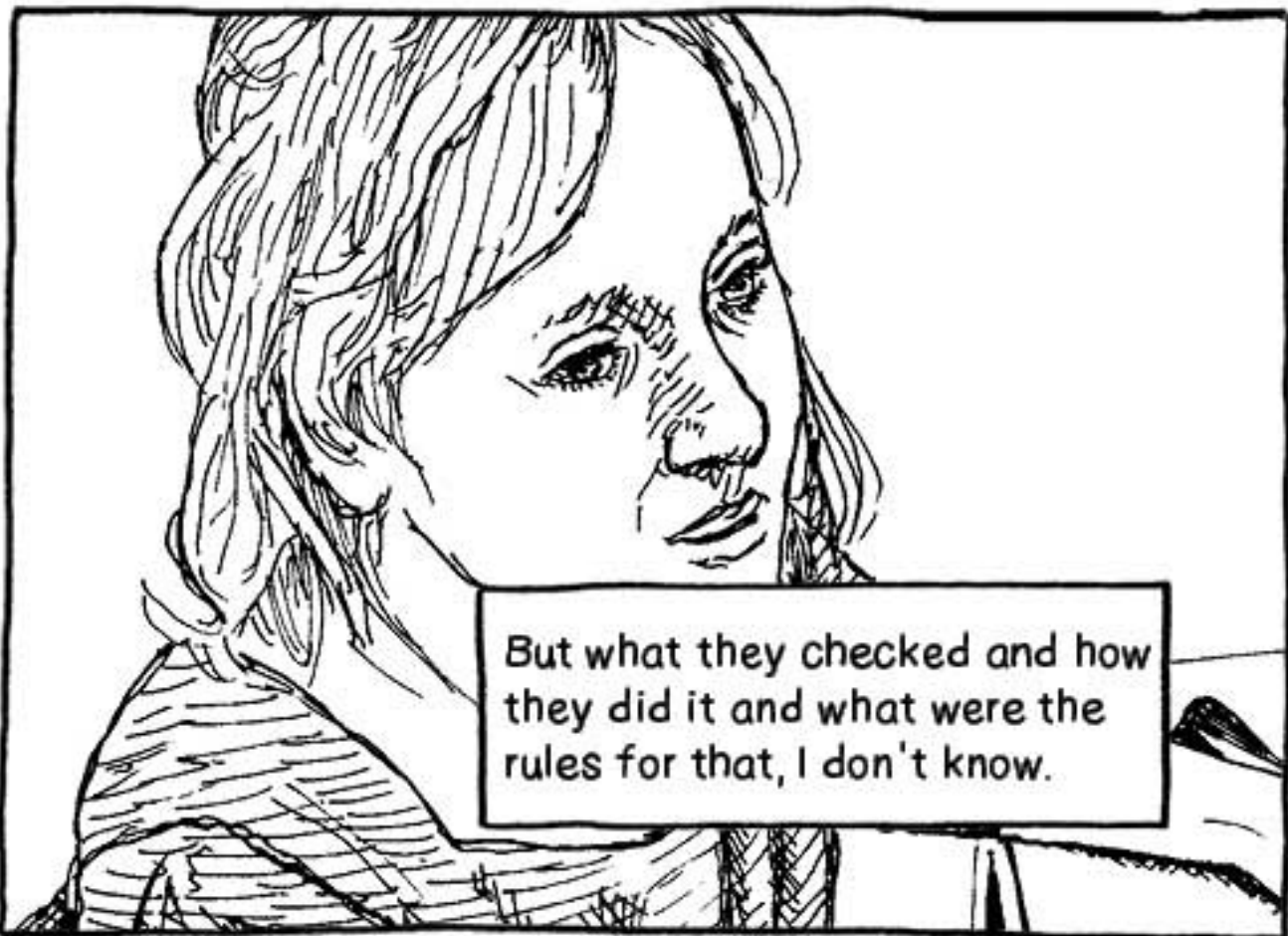
Somehow I would have liked to see Khaled in that situation. I'm pretty sure it would have been quite different.



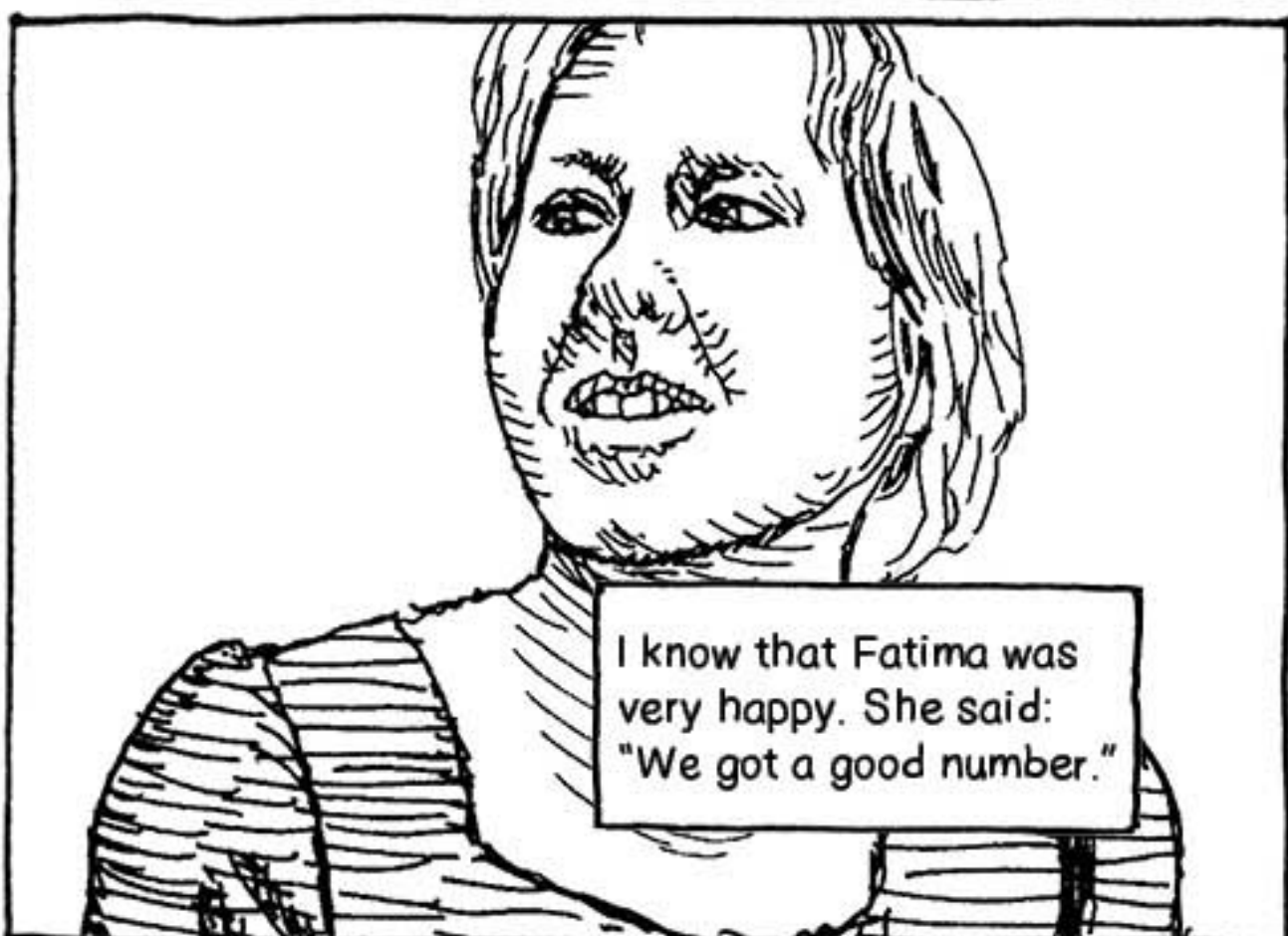
At some point—I see it's May 2011—the Academy was working on an Israeli-acknowledged VAT number, and they were trying to see if UNESCO could help them with it.



What makes a good VAT number is not clear to me. At one point we finally chose a transporter, and then they asked us, "Just give us the number and we will check if it's alright."



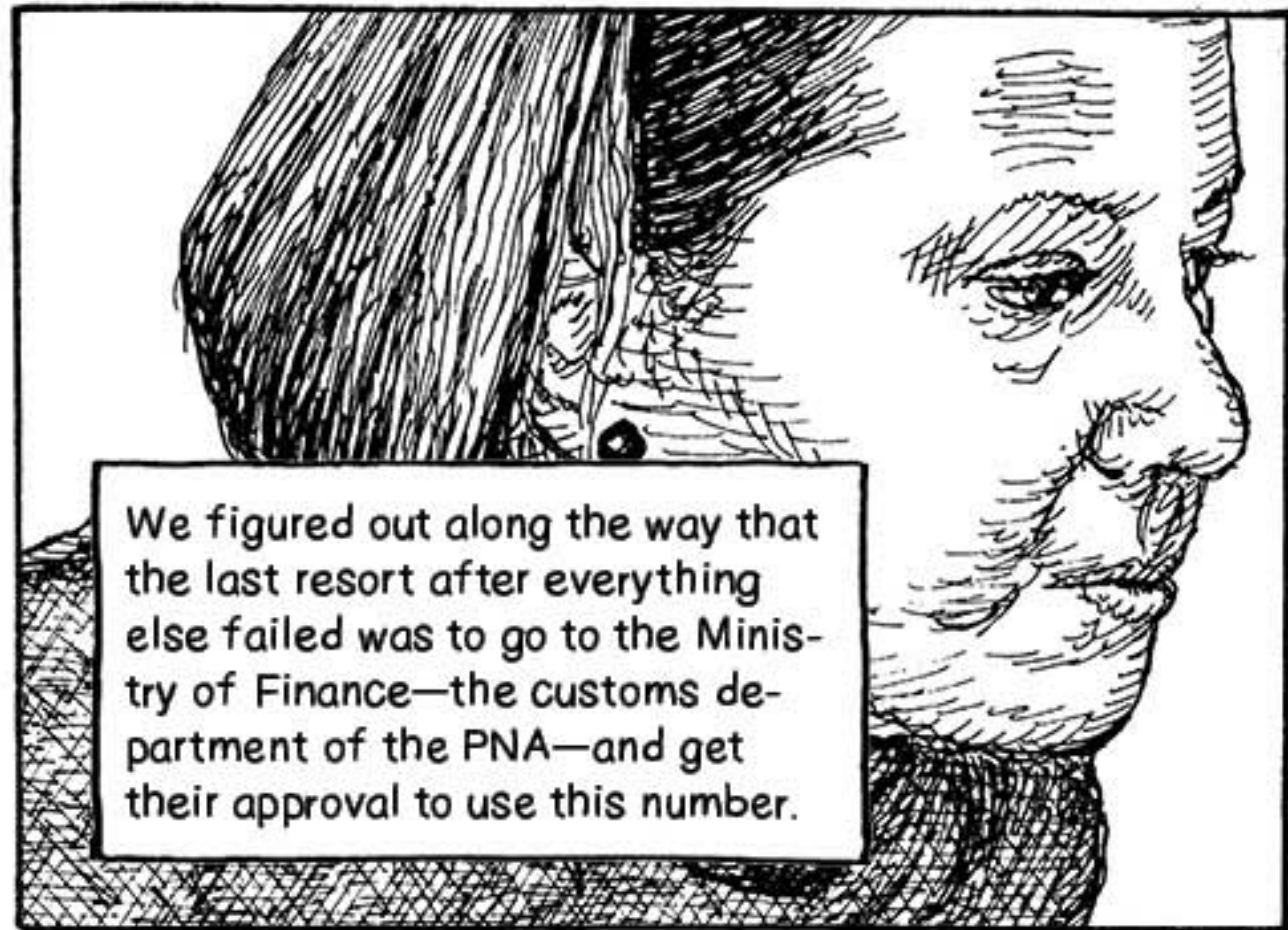
But what they checked and how they did it and what were the rules for that, I don't know.



I know that Fatima was very happy. She said: "We got a good number."



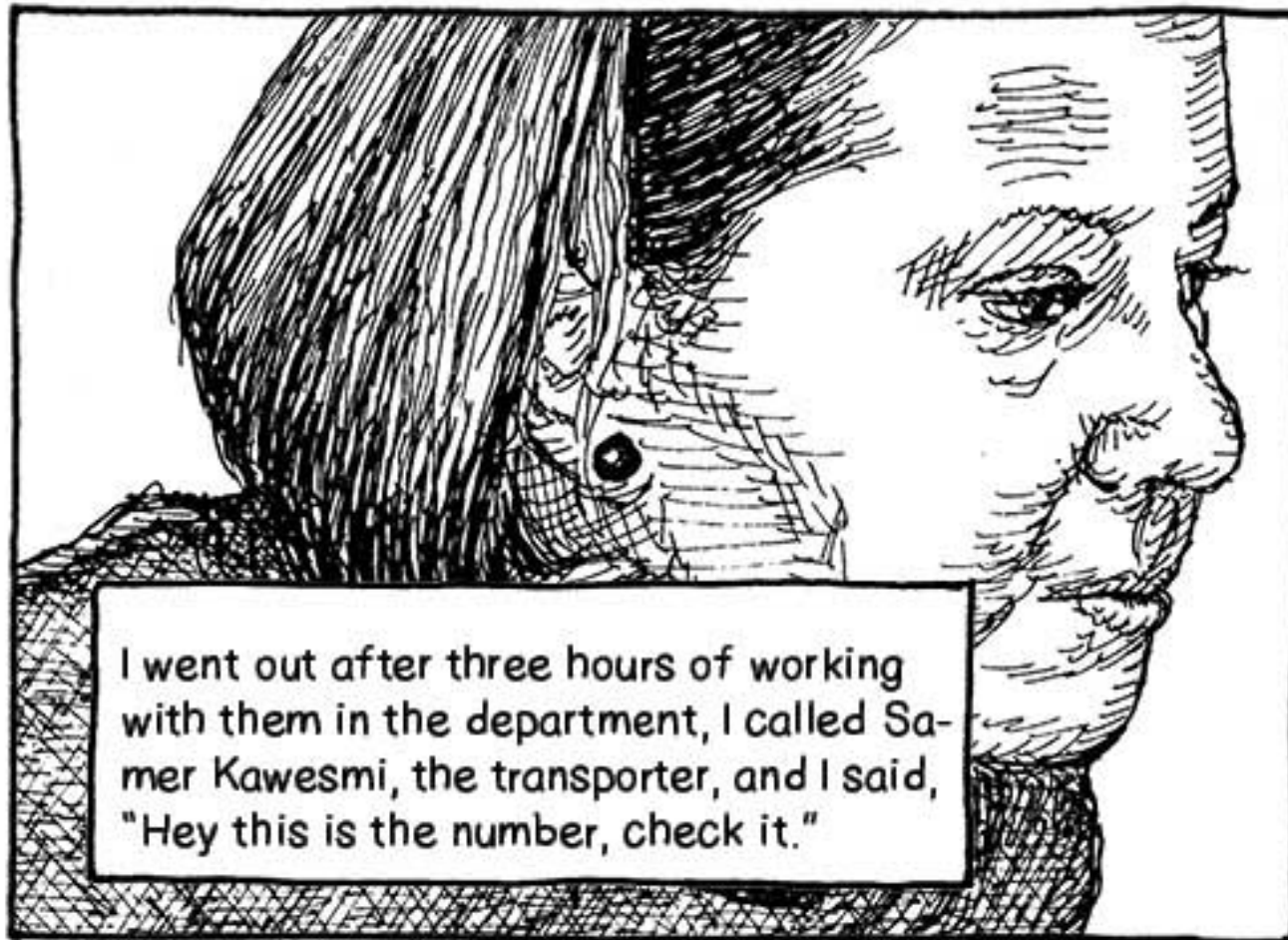
In May we finally got the tax exemption number recognized by the Israeli tax department and customs department from the Palestinian Authority.



We figured out along the way that the last resort after everything else failed was to go to the Ministry of Finance—the customs department of the PNA—and get their approval to use this number.



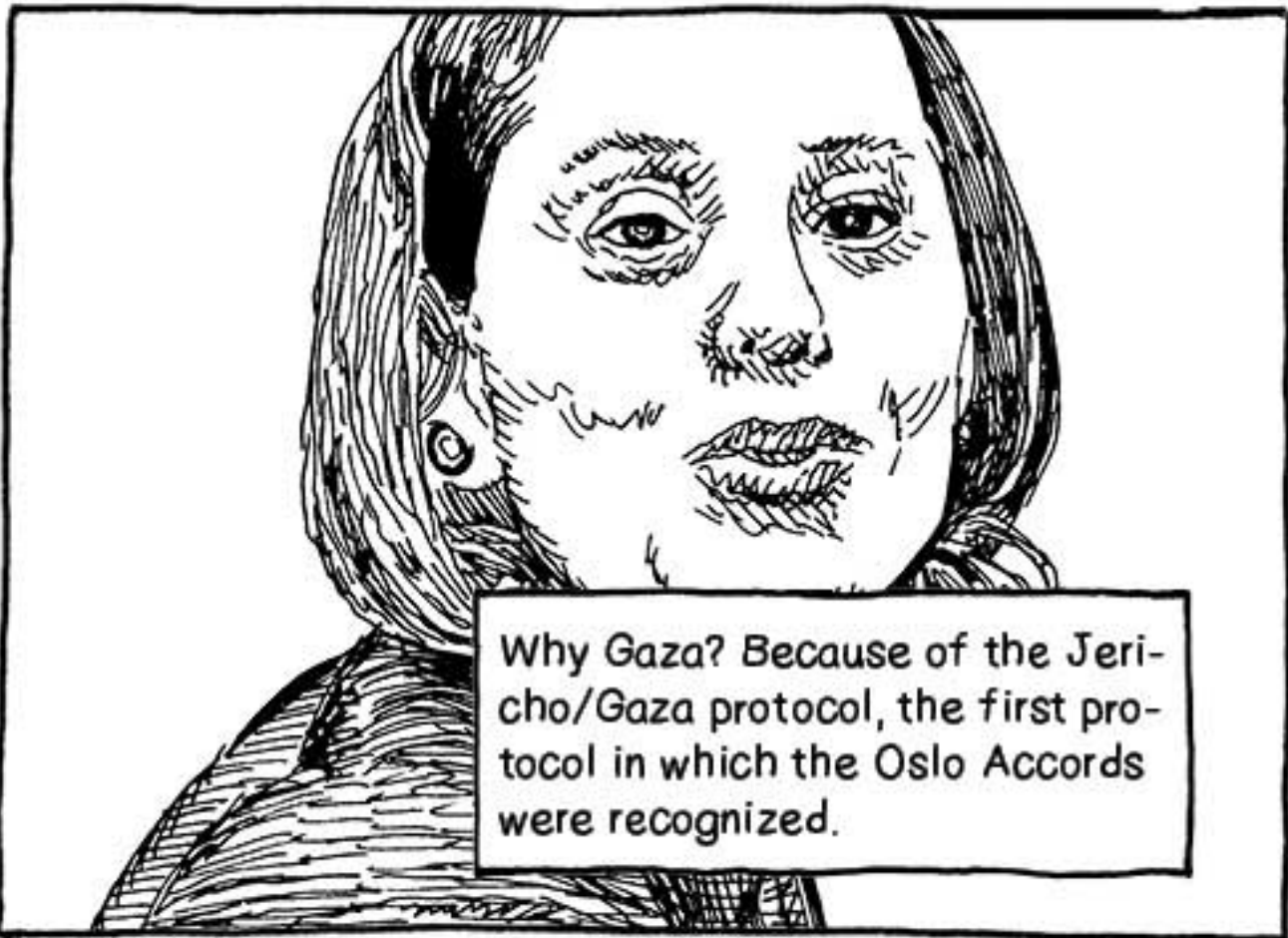
Since already in the earliest stages of Picasso in Palestine we'd received the endorsement of the government and the Prime Minister himself, we got the OK to use their tax number.



I went out after three hours of working with them in the department, I called Samer Kawesmi, the transporter, and I said, "Hey this is the number, check it."



And he got back to me, and he said, "It's working, its perfect, but you know the address that they have is Gaza." And I said, "Fine, let it be sent to Gaza."



Why Gaza? Because of the Jericho/Gaza protocol, the first protocol in which the Oslo Accords were recognized.



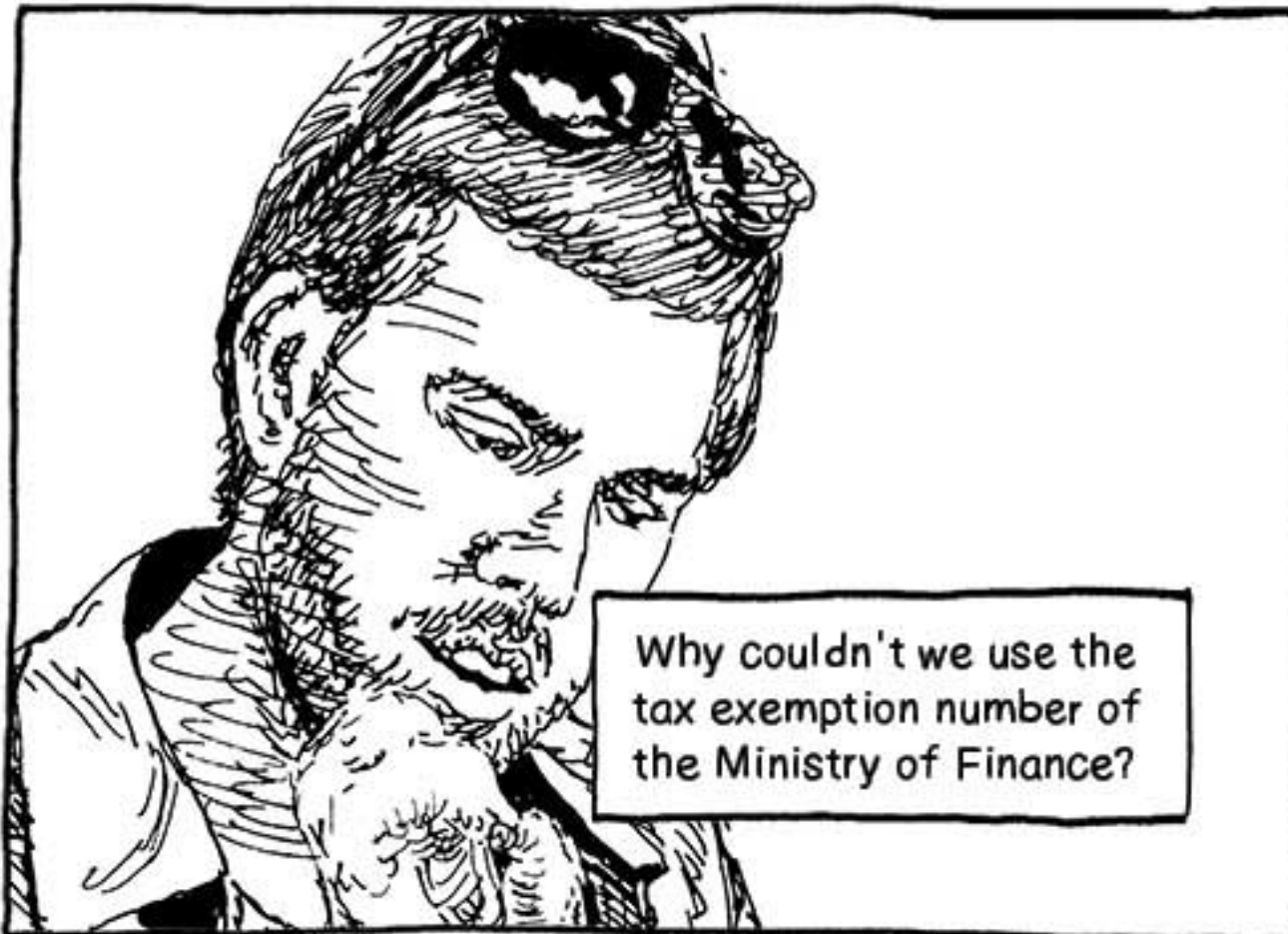
When the PA was established, it was established in Gaza, in 1993.



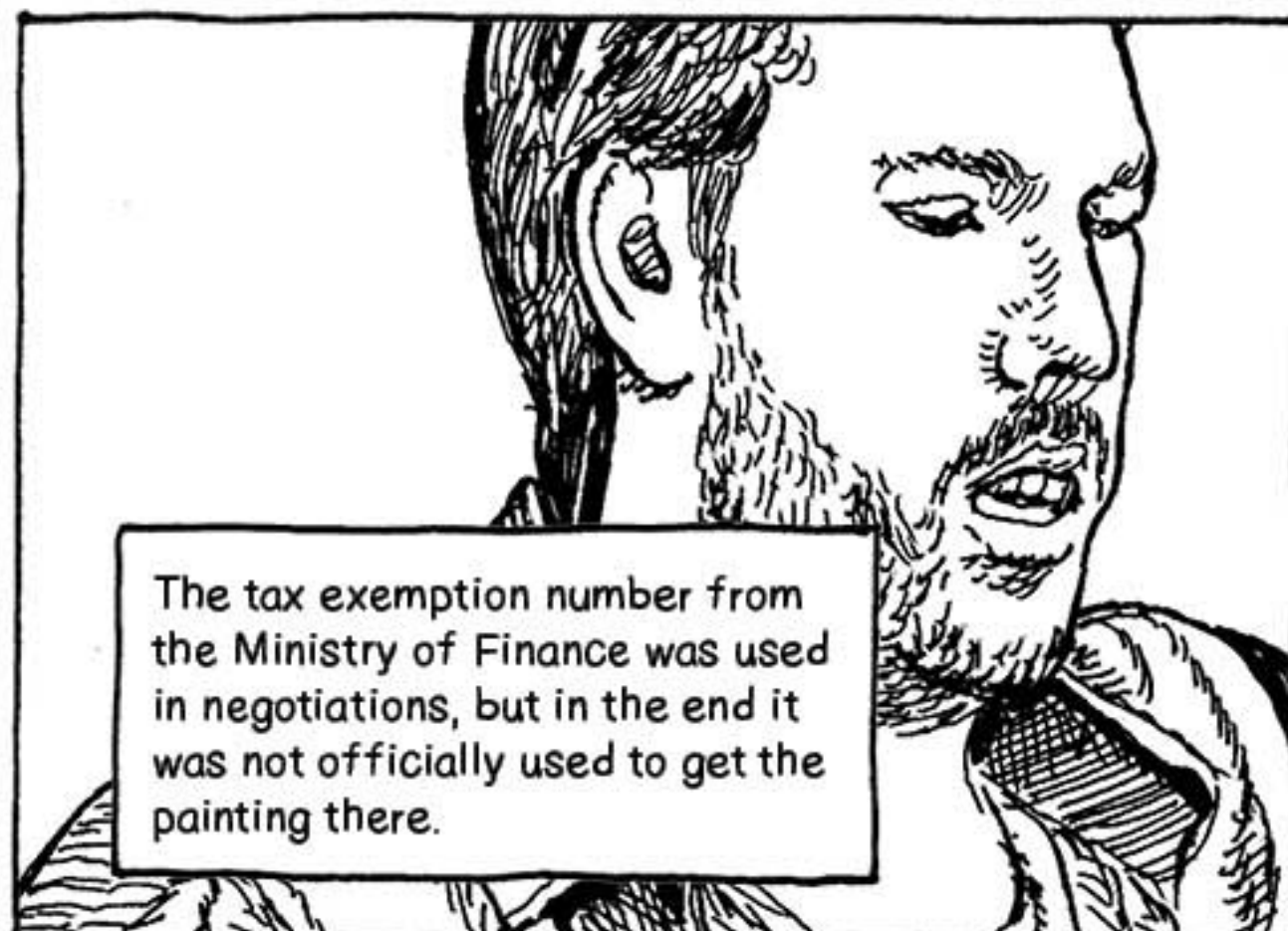
So, the Israelis said, we need a document saying their address is in Ramallah.




I sent them the letterhead from the Ministry of Finance.



Why couldn't we use the tax exemption number of the Ministry of Finance?

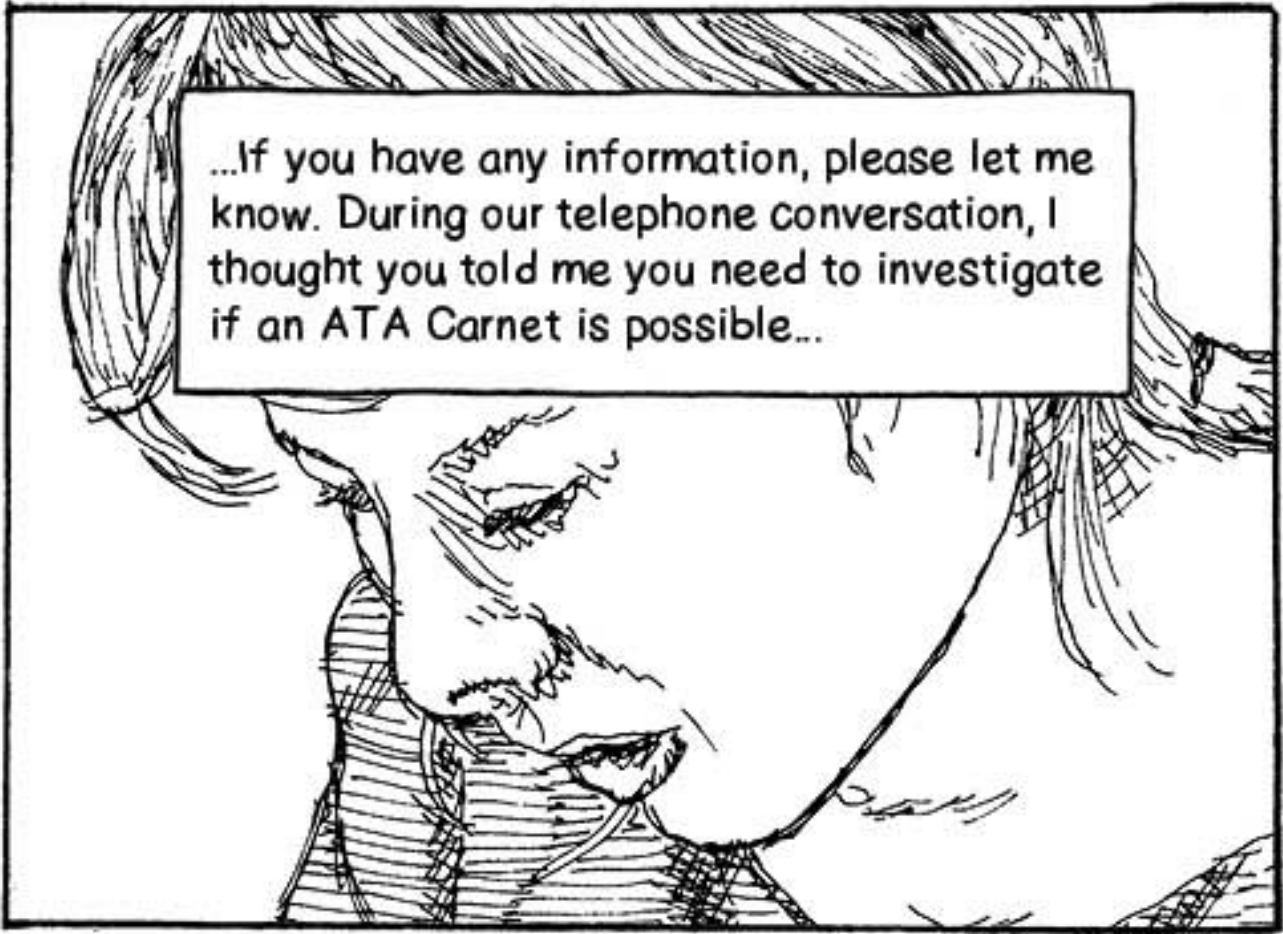


The tax exemption number from the Ministry of Finance was used in negotiations, but in the end it was not officially used to get the painting there.

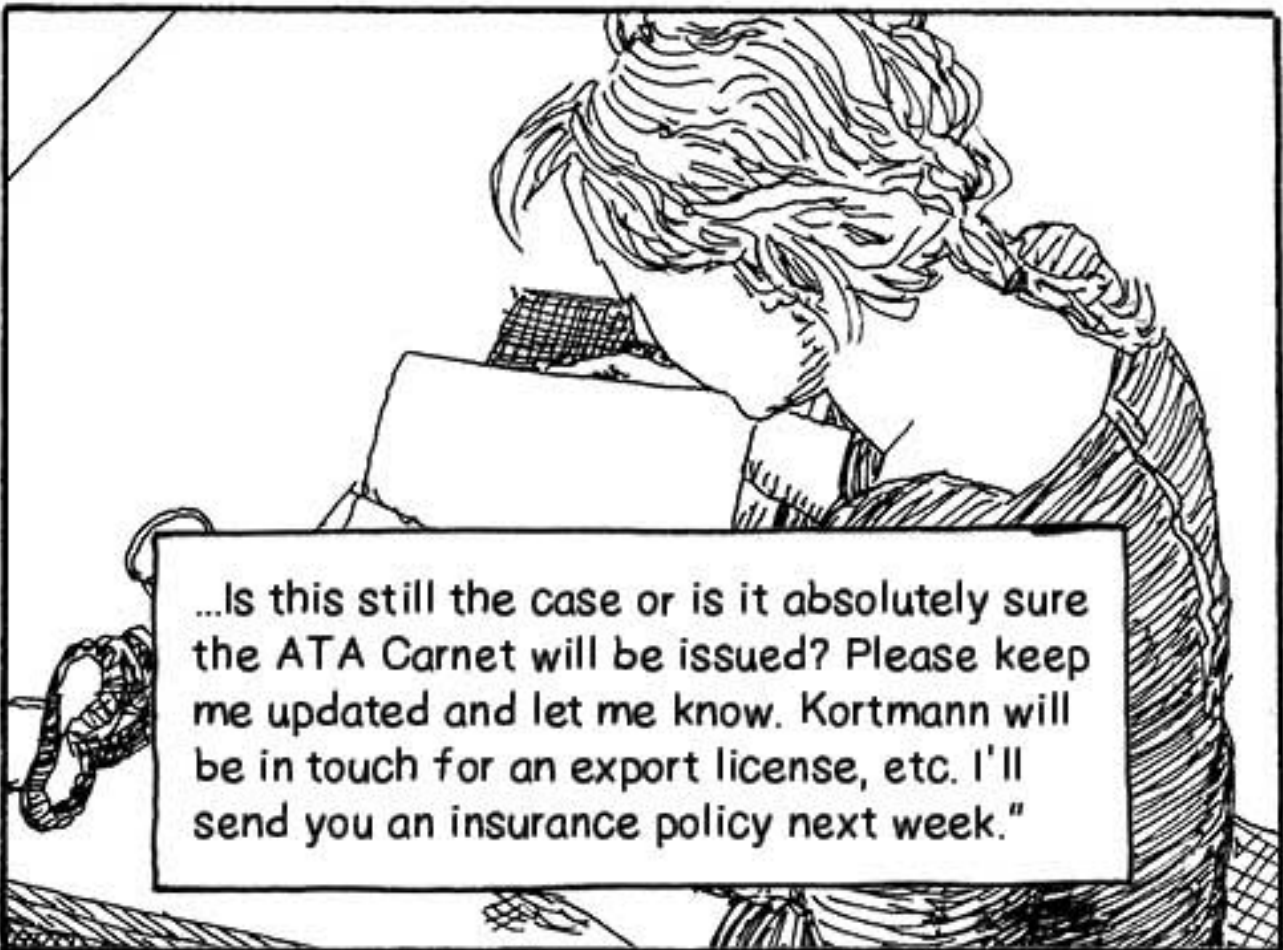
A black and white line drawing of a woman with short, wavy hair, wearing a patterned long-sleeved shirt. She is sitting at a desk, looking down at a large document or book she is holding. On the desk, there is a glass of water and some papers. In the background, there is a window with a small shelf holding two bottles, and a framed picture on the wall.

Things got very complicated around the end of May, it's hard to keep the chronology straight. This e-mail is from May 30:

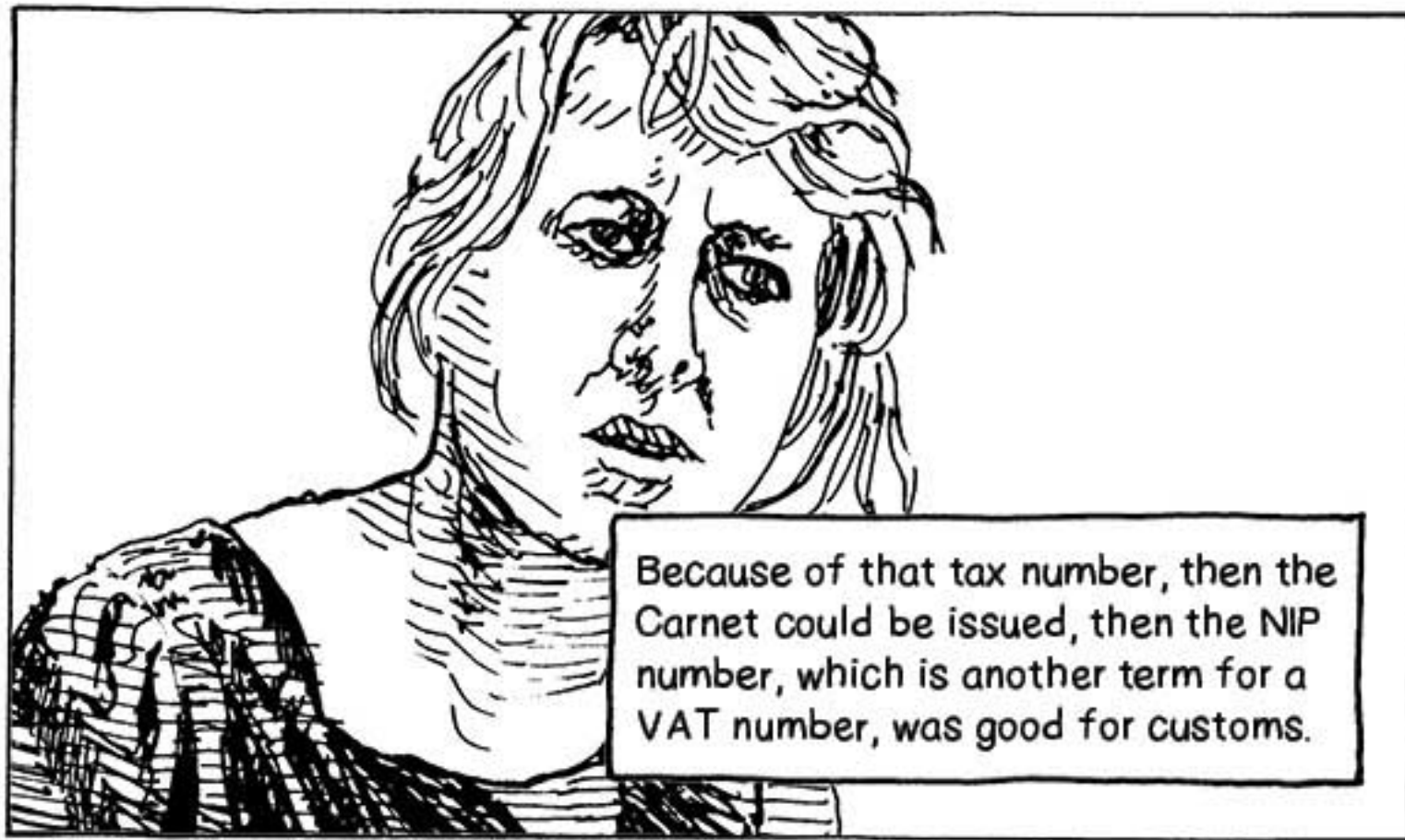
"As I just heard from Fatima, the PNA granted the tax number that will be used for the transport. She asked me to provide the ATA Carnet together with Samer, but as far as I know, the transport agents made this..."

A close-up black and white line drawing of a woman's face, looking slightly to the right. She has short, wavy hair and is wearing a patterned shirt. Her expression is neutral.

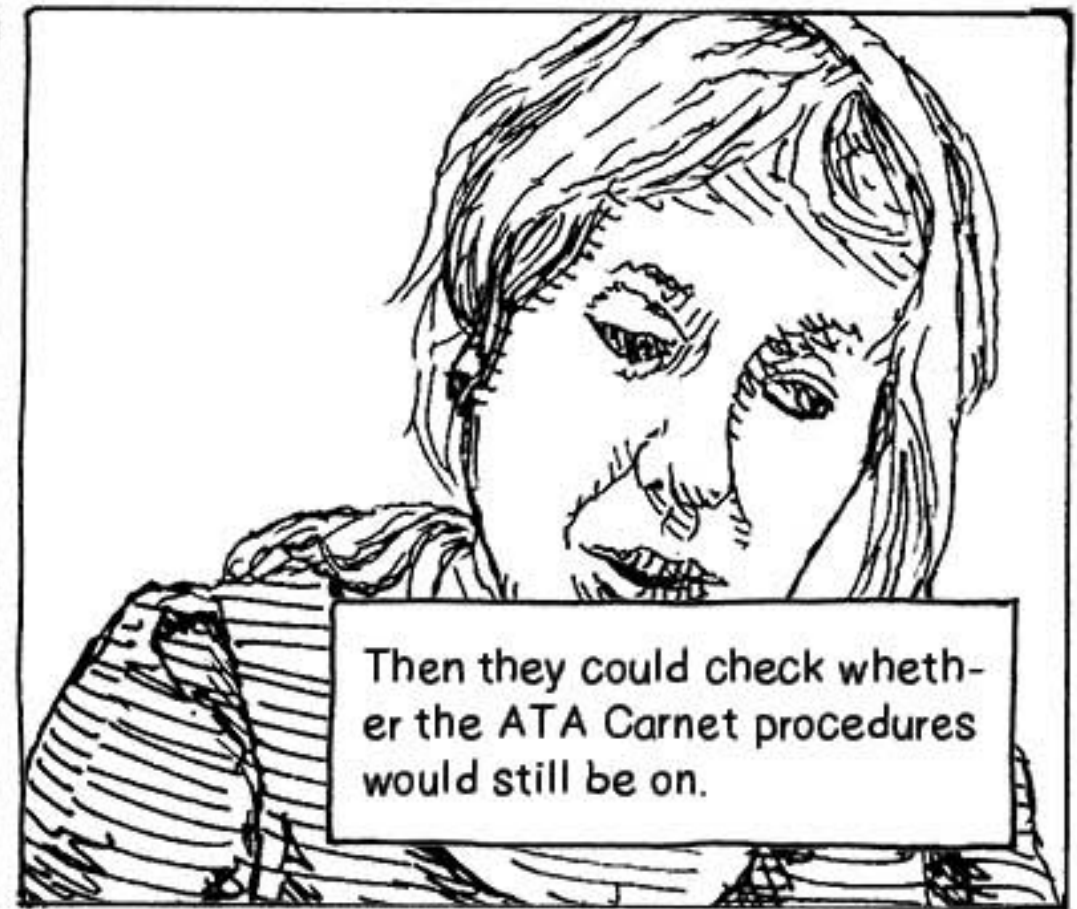
...If you have any information, please let me know. During our telephone conversation, I thought you told me you need to investigate if an ATA Carnet is possible...

A black and white line drawing of a woman with short, wavy hair, wearing a patterned shirt. She is sitting at a desk and talking on a telephone. The telephone is on the left side of the frame. She is looking down at a document on the desk.

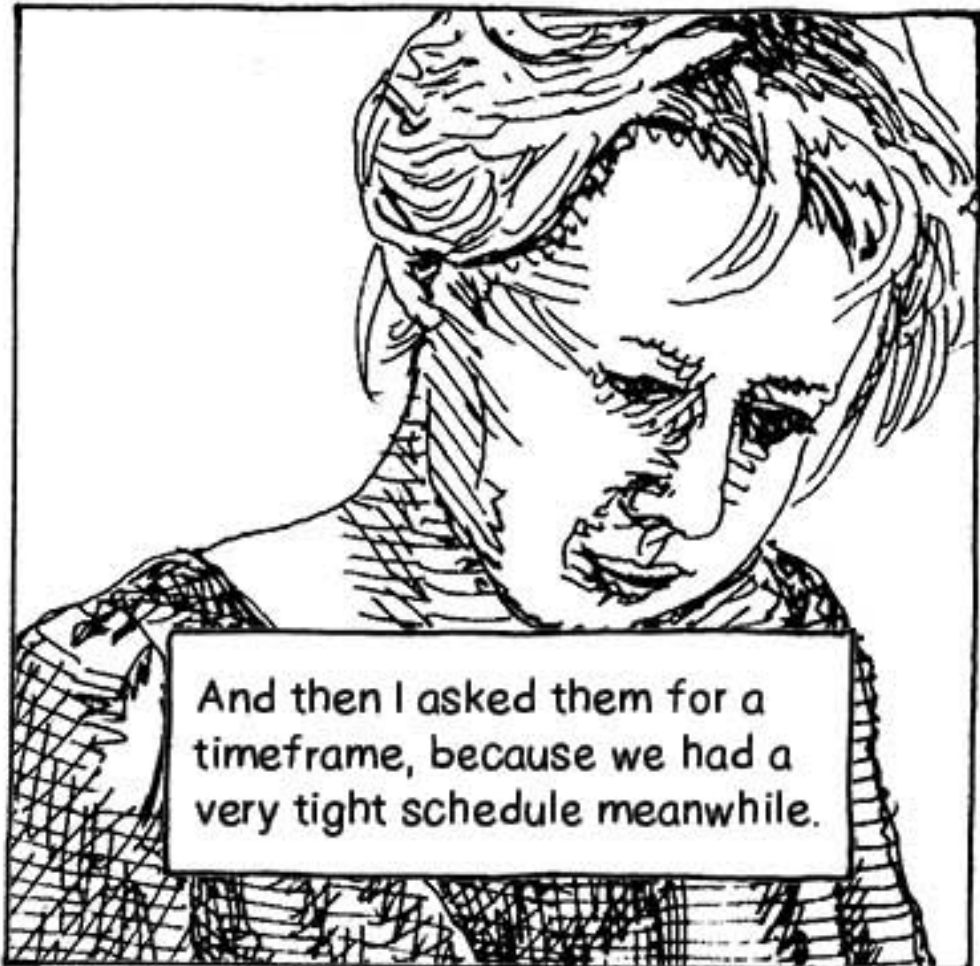
...Is this still the case or is it absolutely sure the ATA Carnet will be issued? Please keep me updated and let me know. Kortmann will be in touch for an export license, etc. I'll send you an insurance policy next week."



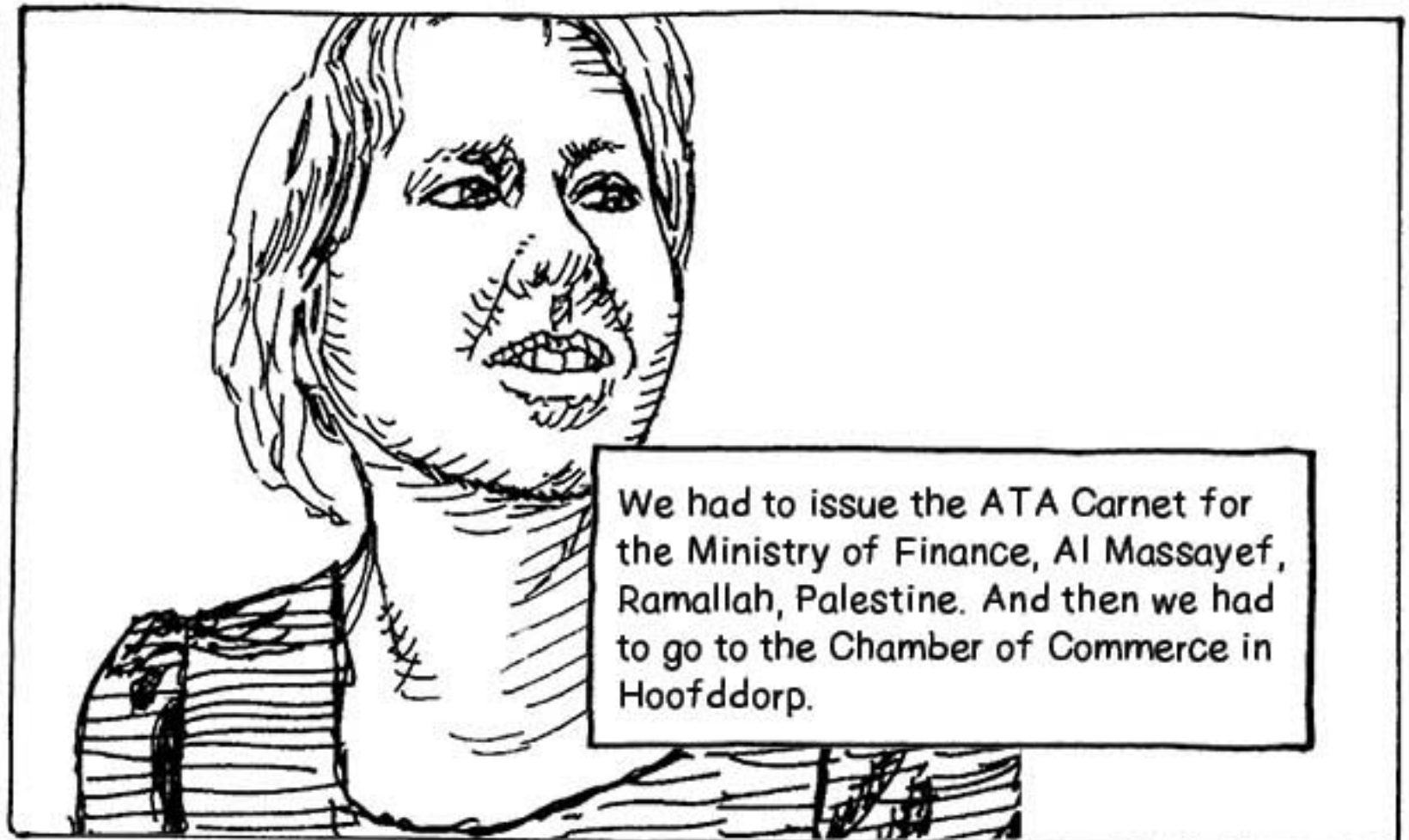
Because of that tax number, then the Carnet could be issued, then the NIP number, which is another term for a VAT number, was good for customs.



Then they could check whether the ATA Carnet procedures would still be on.



And then I asked them for a timeframe, because we had a very tight schedule meanwhile.



We had to issue the ATA Carnet for the Ministry of Finance, Al Massayef, Ramallah, Palestine. And then we had to go to the Chamber of Commerce in Hoofddorp.



The ATA Carnet is made in the country of origin, so I had to give the number and the name to whom it was granted to Kortmann, our transport agent here, and they had to go to the Chamber of Commerce.



They were the ones who applied for it in the end. Even at this late date there was a lot waiting, because Kortmann and Globus hadn't actually gotten the assignment from the Academy.



We were waiting for Fatima to give us the final approval. The Academy had to approve the estimate for the transport. And then they approved everything.

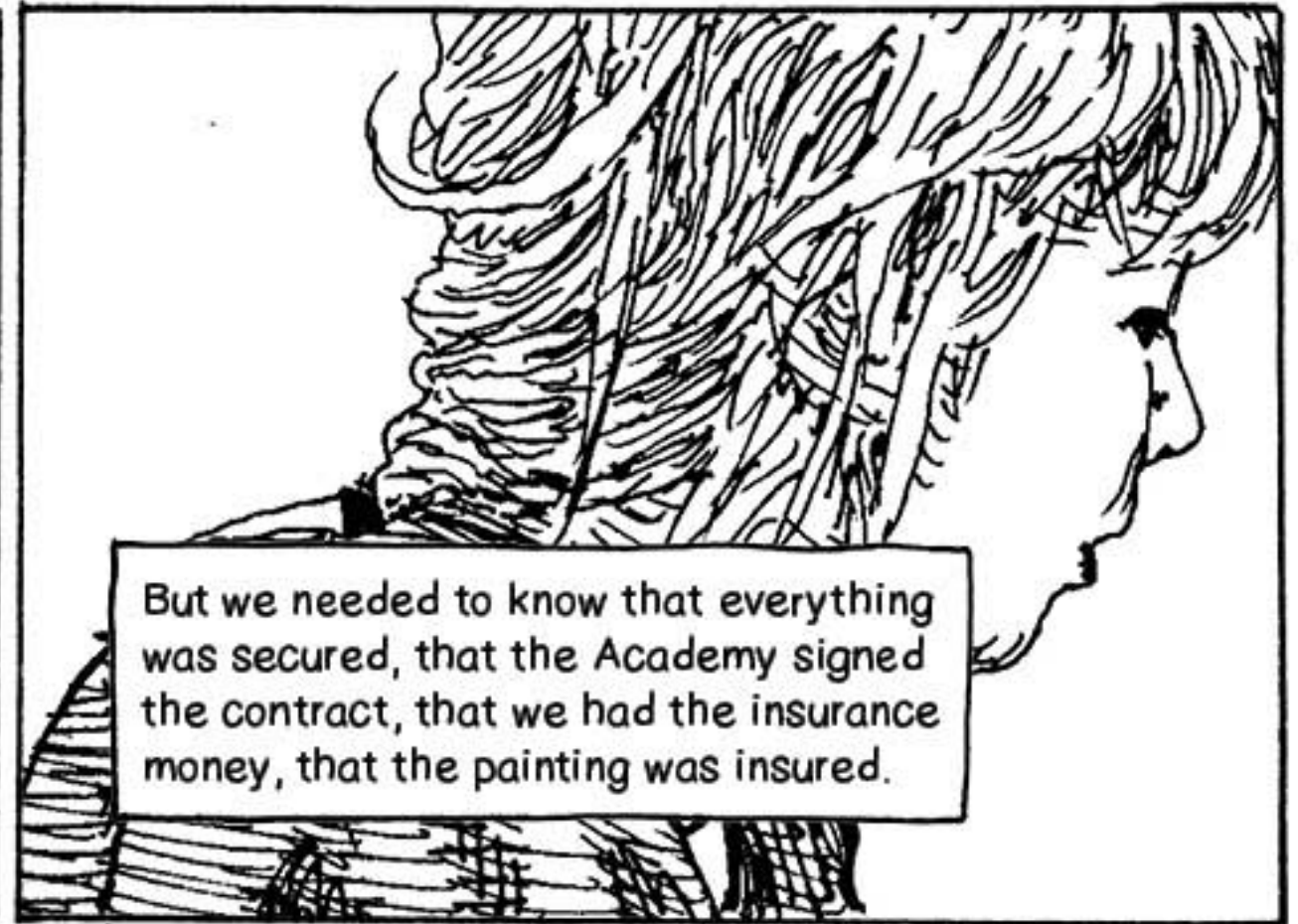


That was on June 9th, fifteen days before the opening.

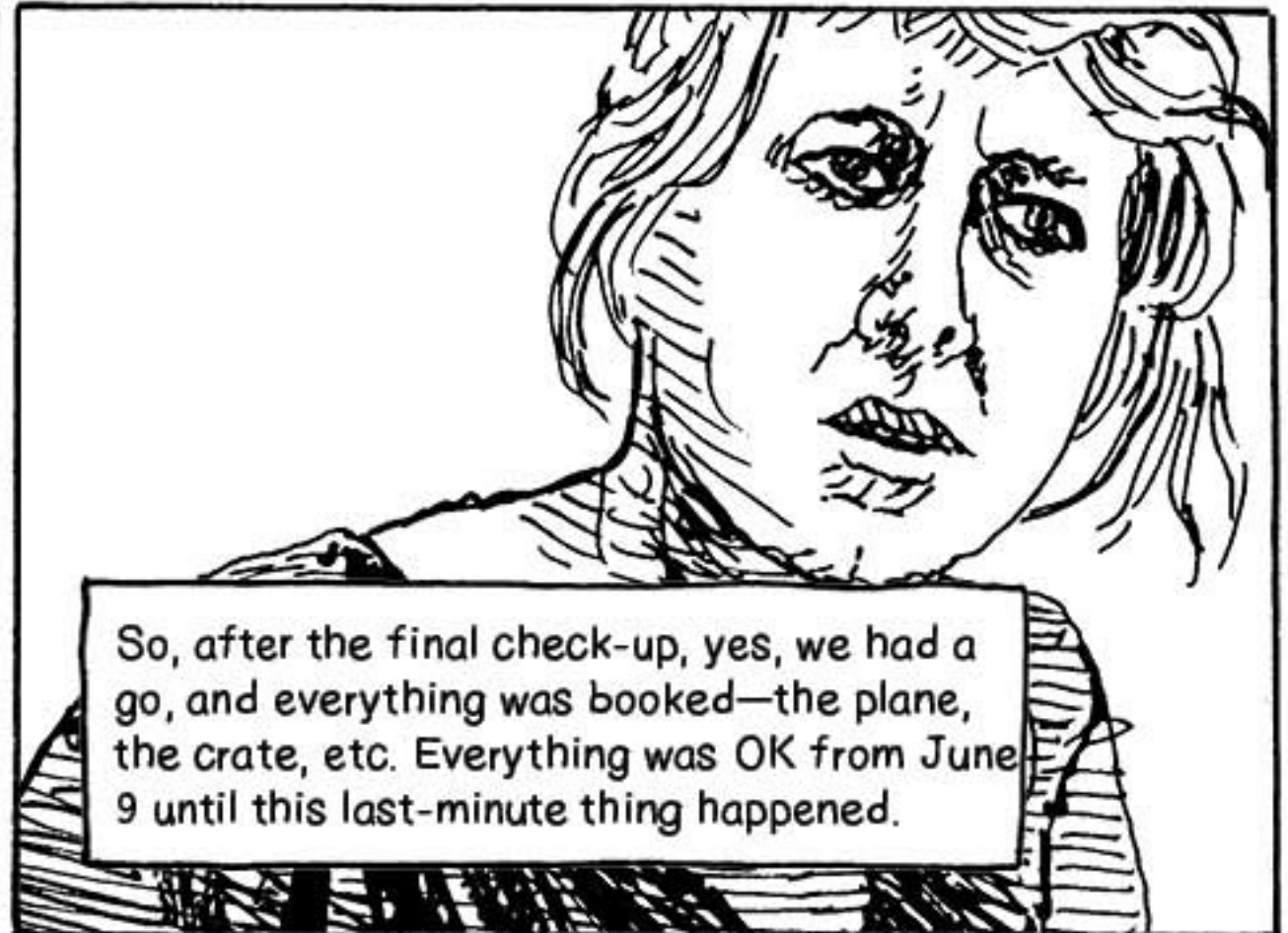
And then we had our final talk here: "Is everything OK?" We Skyped with Louis, who was already in Ramallah: "Louis, is everything OK there? OK, do we know the entire process of transport from door to door? Do we know what we can expect? Do we know what to do when something doesn't go as planned?" We talked through everything and then we agreed, "OK, this is a go."



But we needed to know that everything was secured, that the Academy signed the contract, that we had the insurance money, that the painting was insured.



So, after the final check-up, yes, we had a go, and everything was booked—the plane, the crate, etc. Everything was OK from June 9 until this last-minute thing happened.



THE
LAST-MINUTE
THING





In the end, the week before we were traveling with the painting, it seemed that the ATA Carnet was the only way it would work, actually, without the diplomatic status that we didn't get, without all the other things that we didn't get.



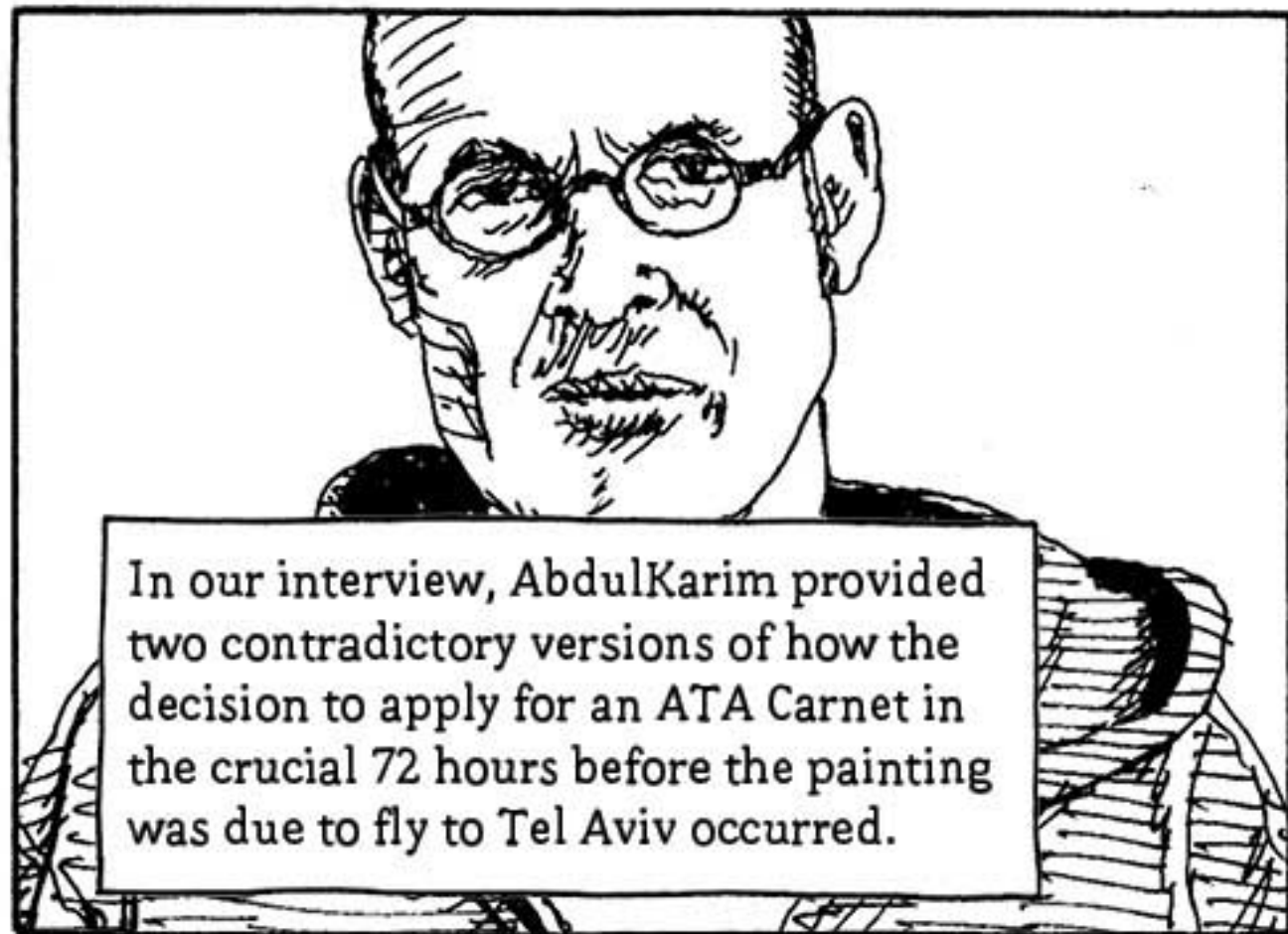
But then, of course, the people who issued this Carnet—that is, the Chamber of Commerce in the Netherlands—also had to be convinced that the painting would go to the Palestinian territories.



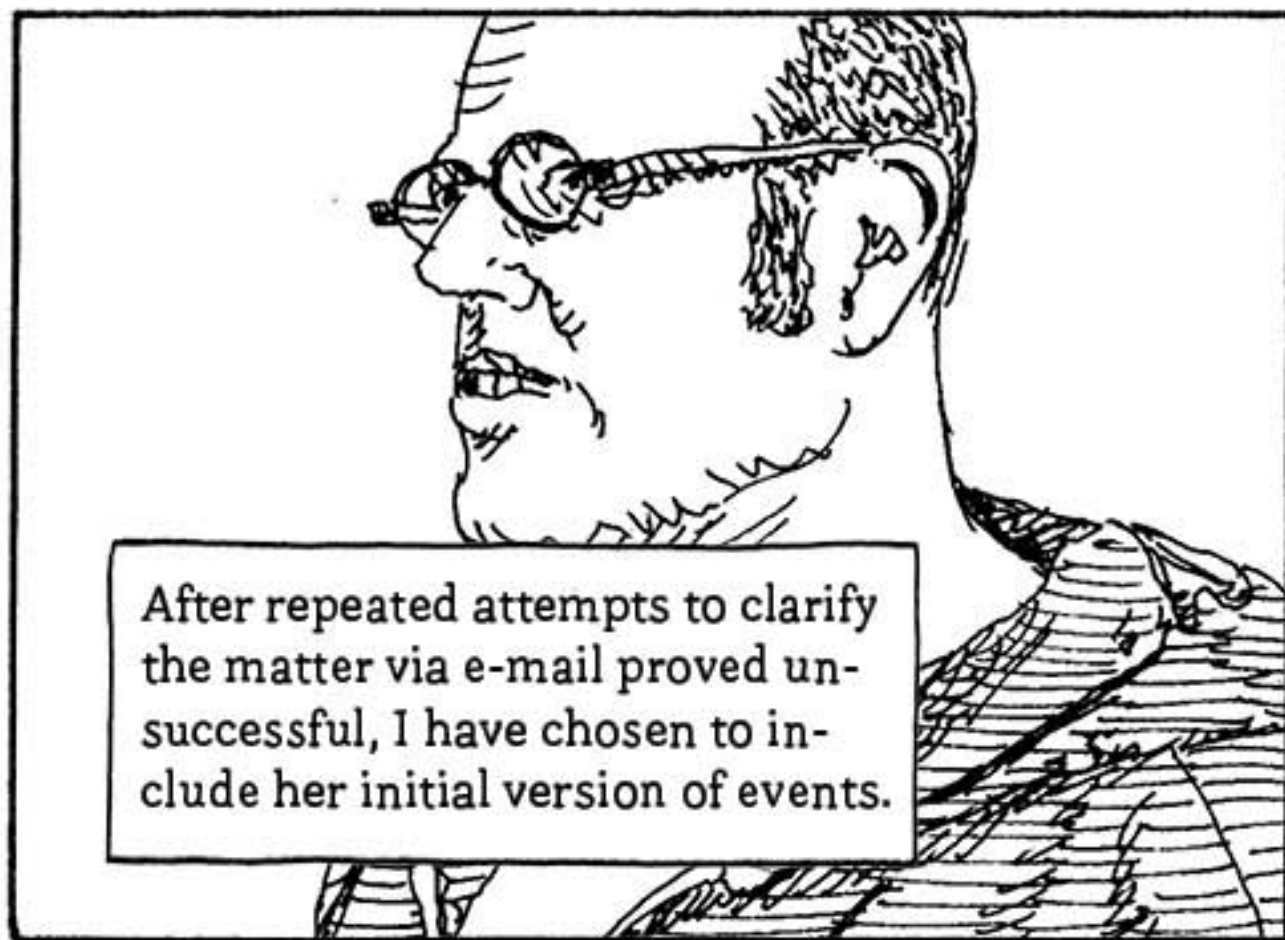
What happened was we discovered we could do an ATA Carnet just like everybody else, and this came in the last moment.



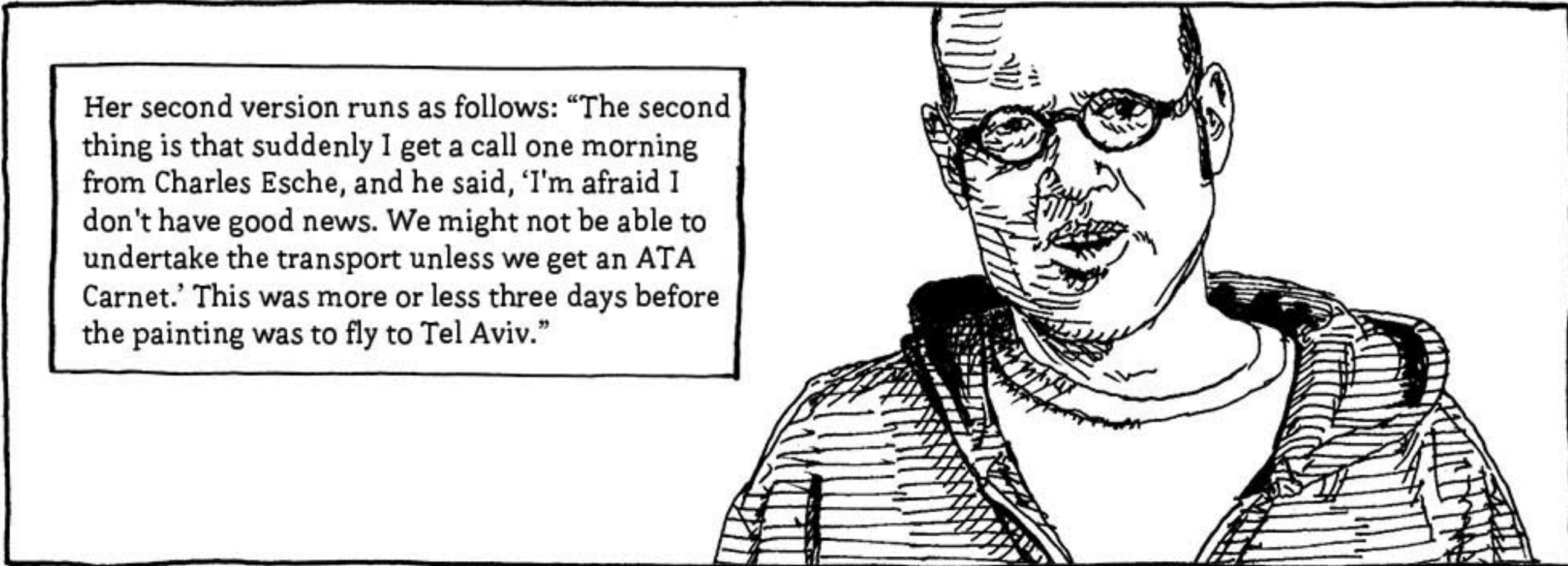
It never came up until that moment, and then we discovered that we are not a signatory but are bound to Israel as a signatory, so we can pass that.



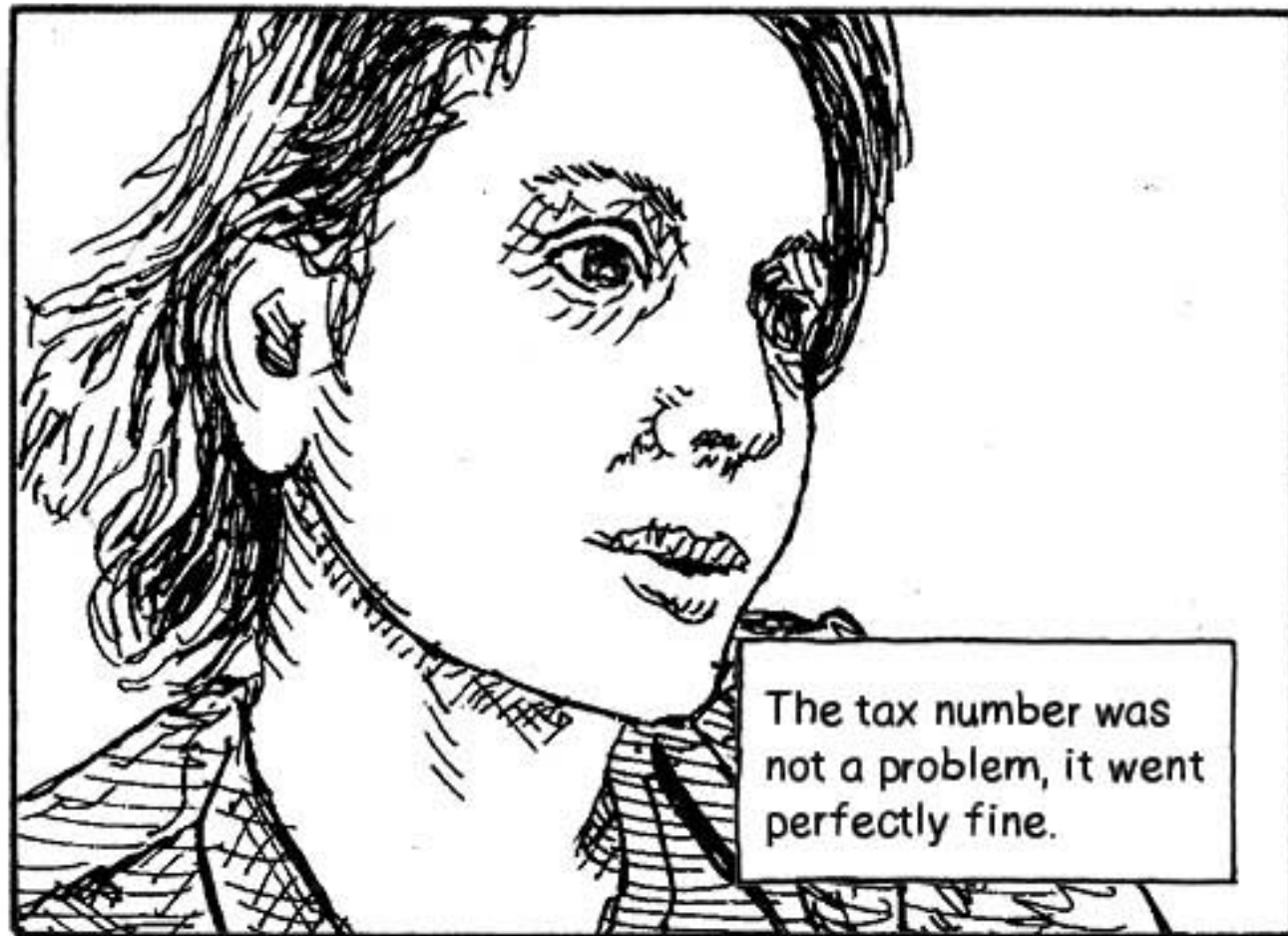
In our interview, AbdulKarim provided two contradictory versions of how the decision to apply for an ATA Carnet in the crucial 72 hours before the painting was due to fly to Tel Aviv occurred.



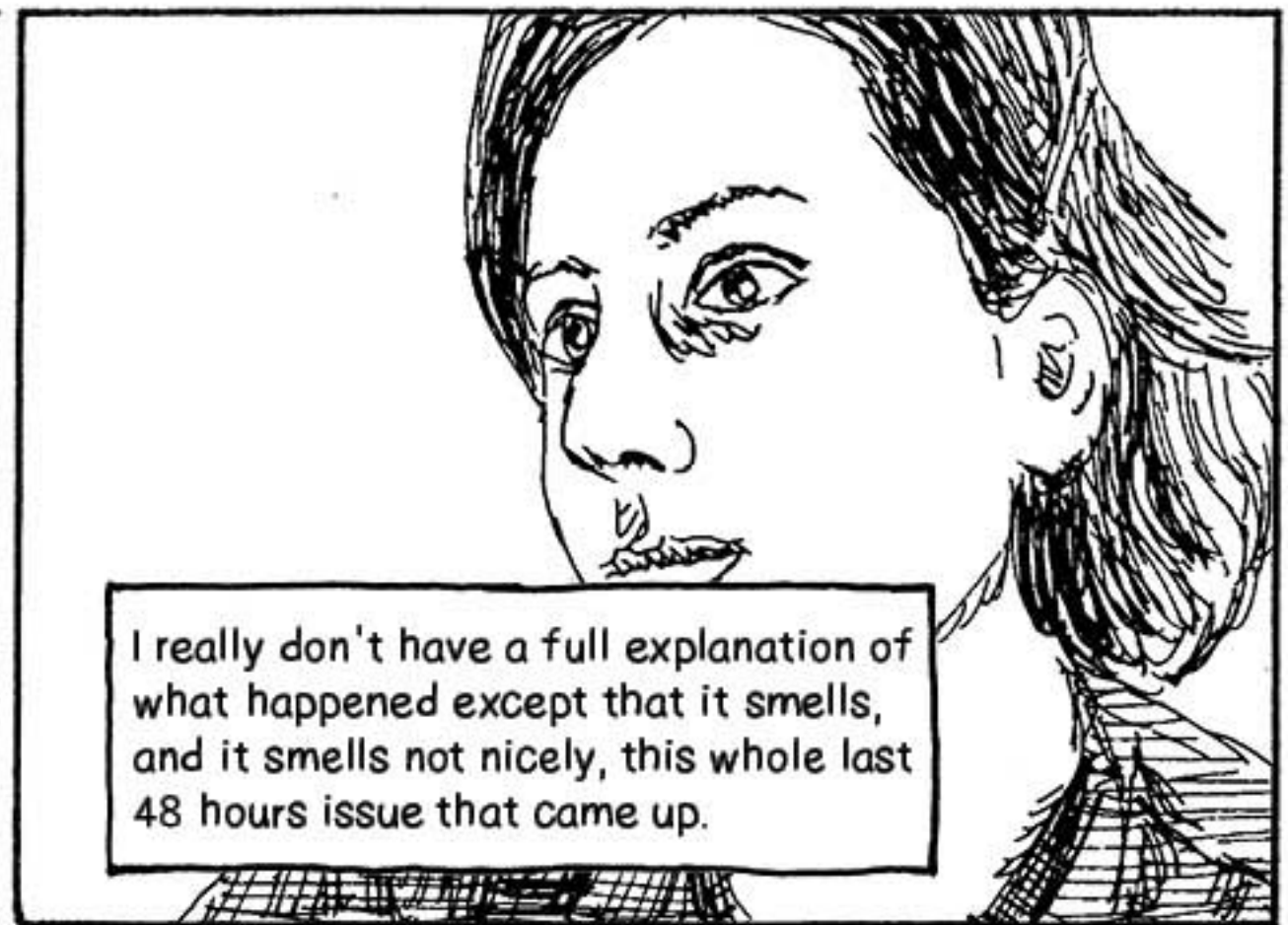
After repeated attempts to clarify the matter via e-mail proved unsuccessful, I have chosen to include her initial version of events.



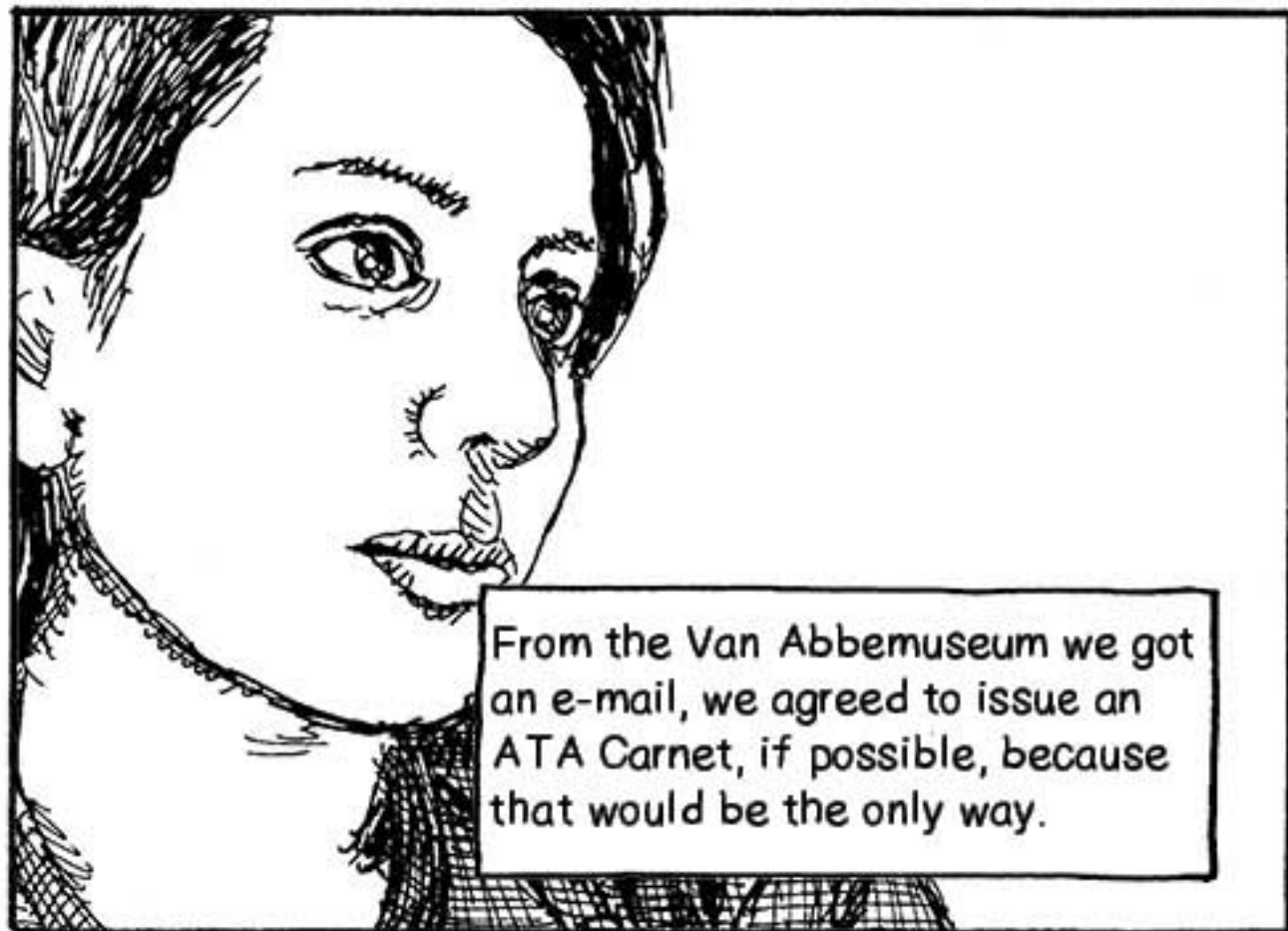
Her second version runs as follows: "The second thing is that suddenly I get a call one morning from Charles Esche, and he said, 'I'm afraid I don't have good news. We might not be able to undertake the transport unless we get an ATA Carnet.' This was more or less three days before the painting was to fly to Tel Aviv."



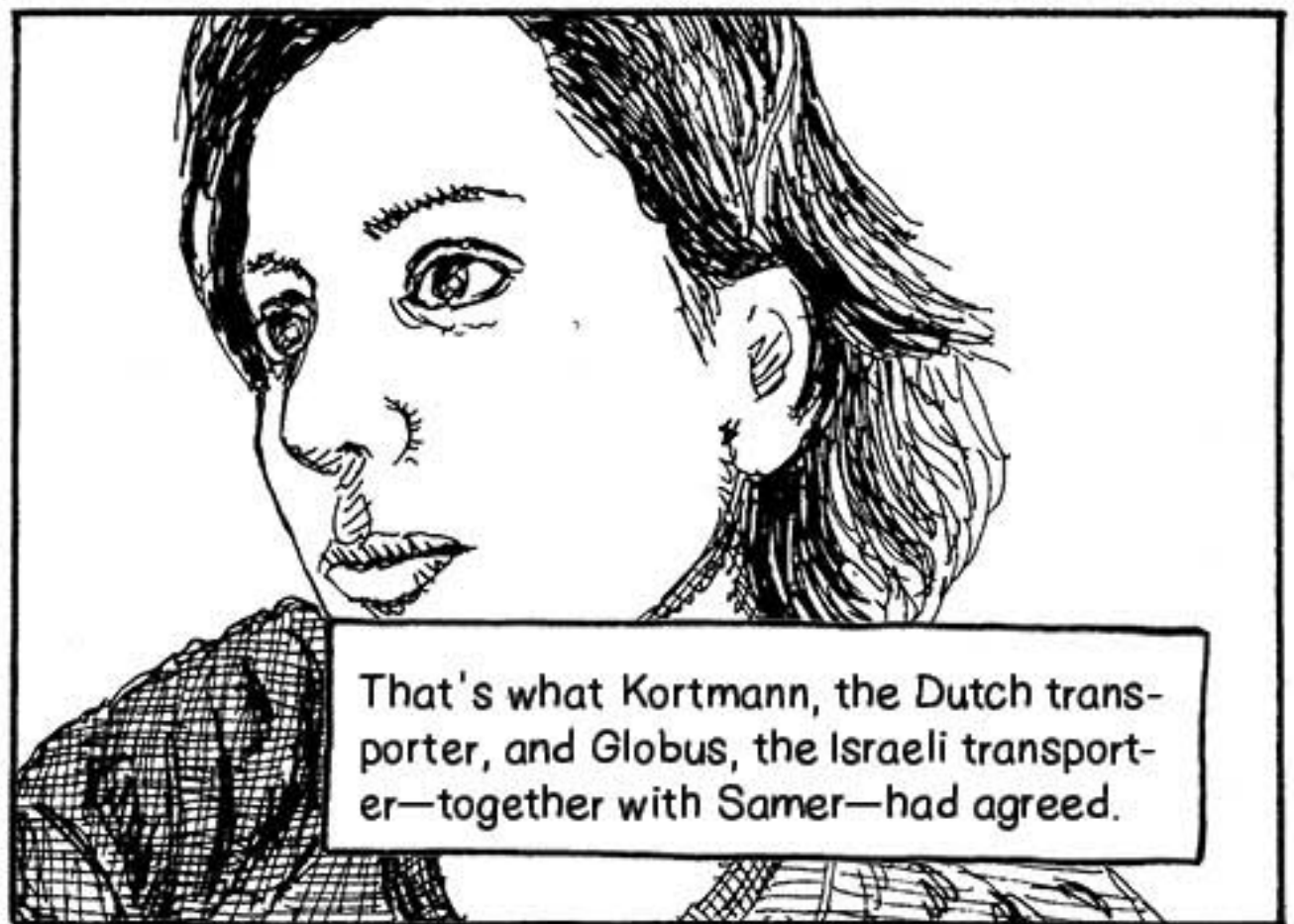
The tax number was not a problem, it went perfectly fine.



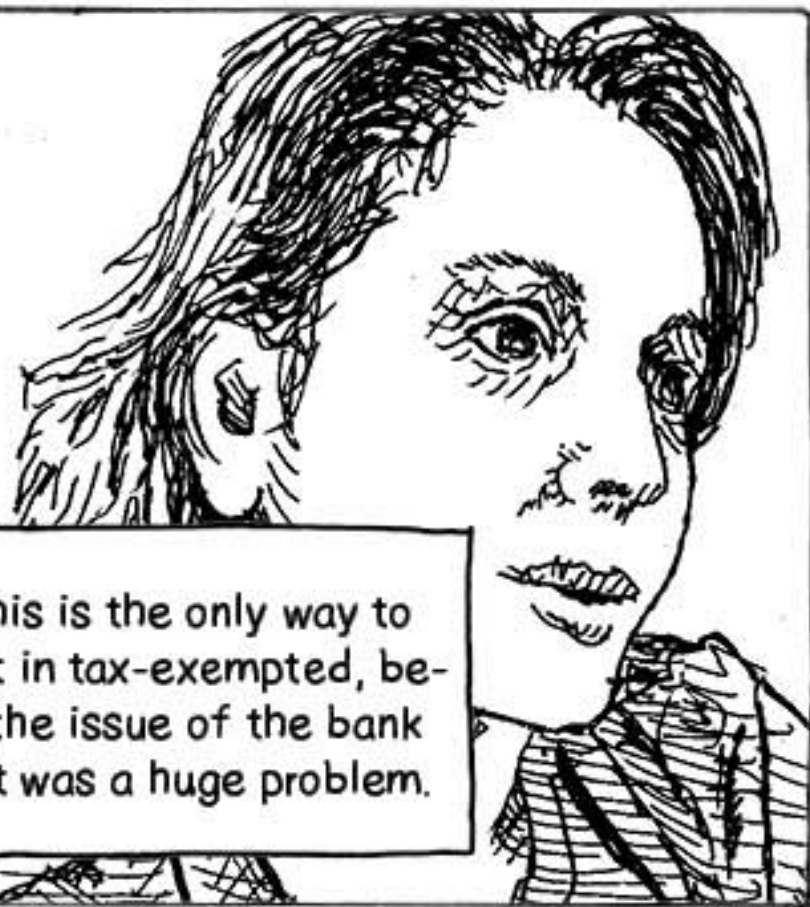
I really don't have a full explanation of what happened except that it smells, and it smells not nicely, this whole last 48 hours issue that came up.



From the Van Abbemuseum we got an e-mail, we agreed to issue an ATA Carnet, if possible, because that would be the only way.



That's what Kortmann, the Dutch transporter, and Globus, the Israeli transporter—together with Samer—had agreed.



That this is the only way to bring it in tax-exempted, because the issue of the bank deposit was a huge problem.



Plus, it was illegal for the Israelis to ask for it.



Since this is coming to Palestine, we need to pay 14.5 % of the value appraised by Christie's to the PA... which would also have been a problem, because we couldn't afford it.



But the Palestinian Ministry of Finance had already decided to overlook it.




During my three hours at the Palestinian customs department, we discovered that paintings are tax exempted, and not even the staff members themselves knew this.



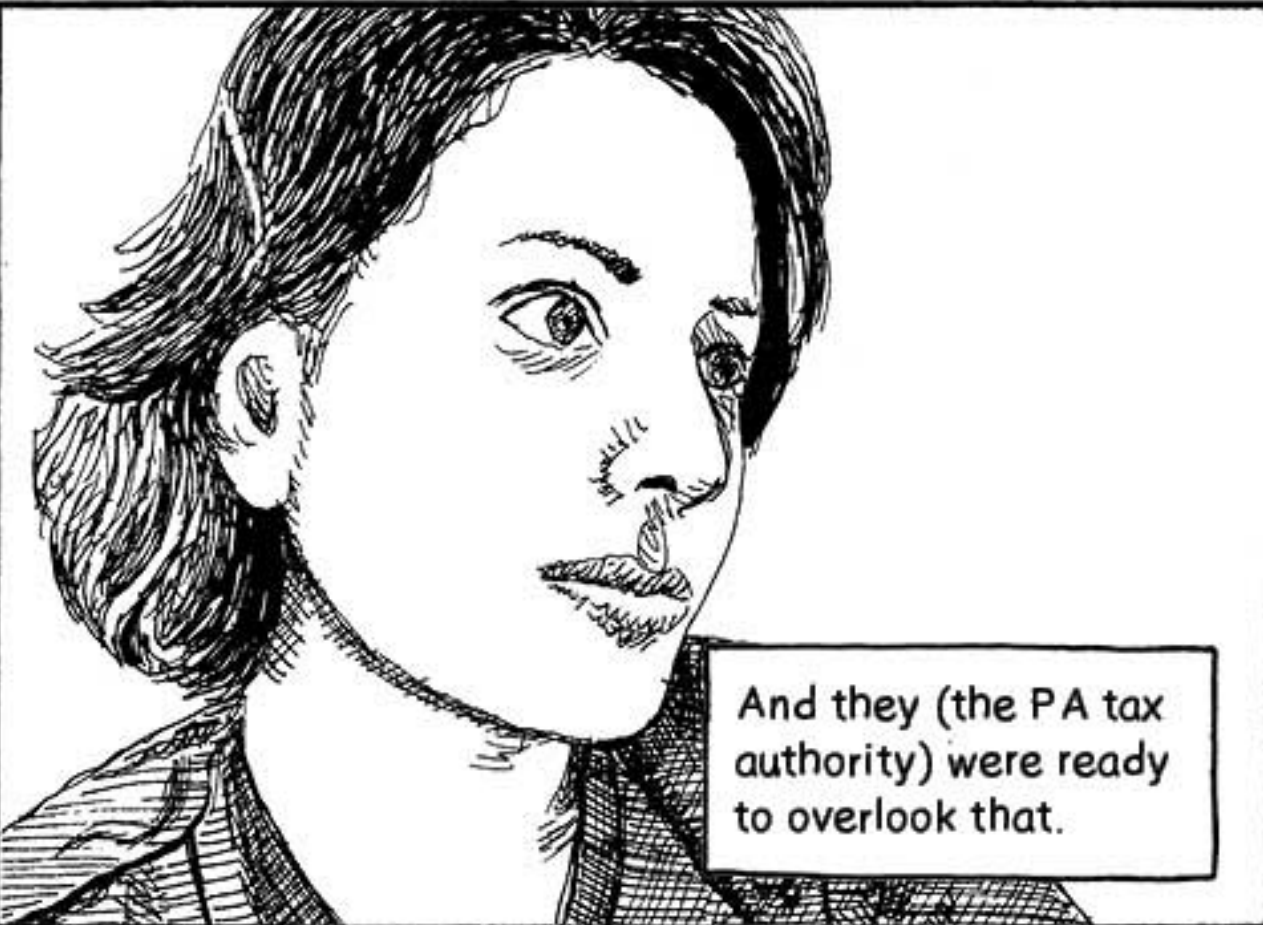
They started looking and looking until they found out.




It was illegal in the first place for the Israelis to ask for the money, but this is the benefit of the doubt for the Israelis that hope it's coming through our borders.



There was a big discussion going on between Sabah Nabulsi, the lady I was working with at the customs department in Palestine, and her Israeli counterpart, who was saying, "No, this is coming to Palestinian territories, it's end destination is Palestinian, therefore, the tax money is requested by us, not you."



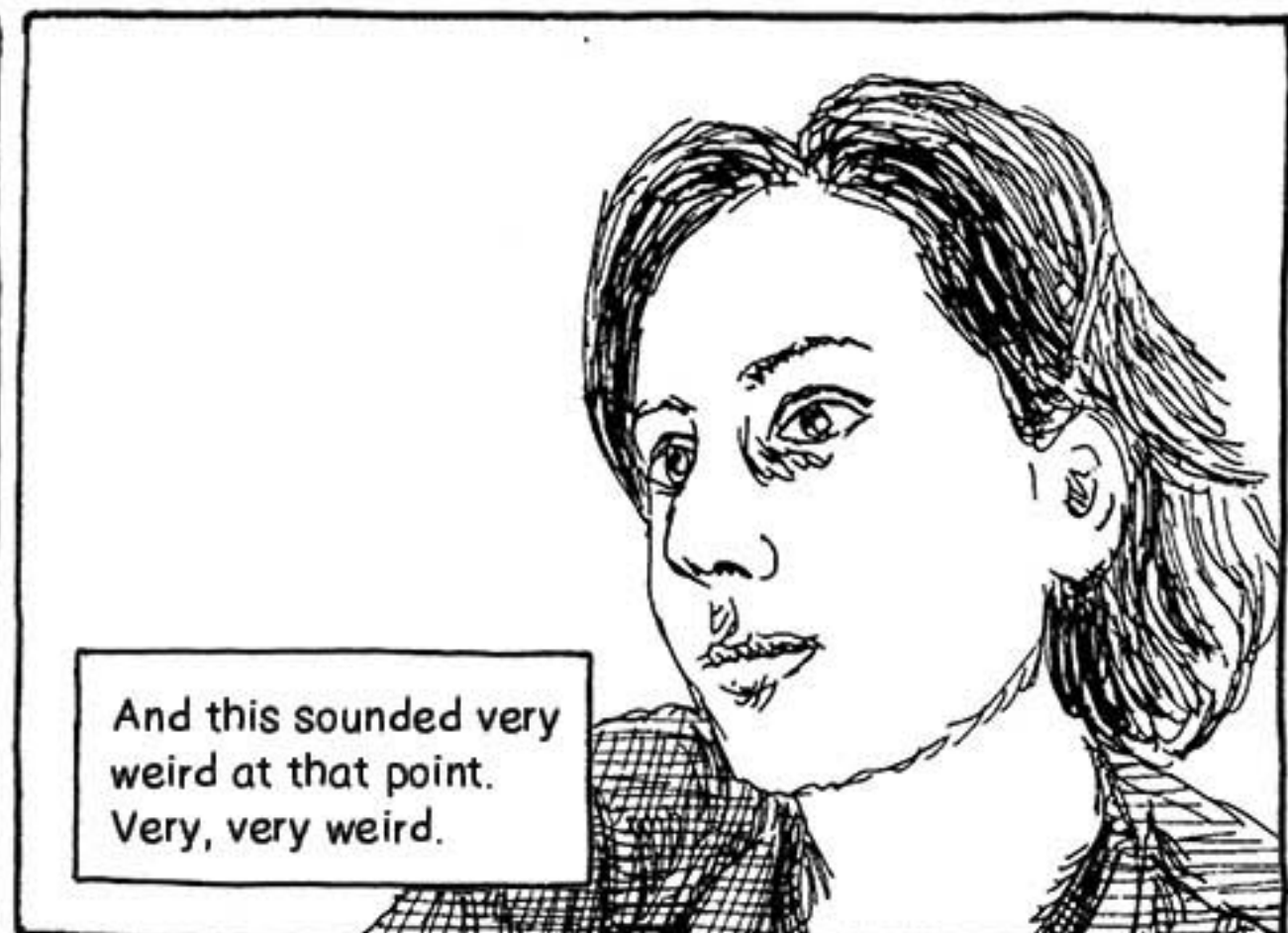
And they (the PA tax authority) were ready to overlook that.



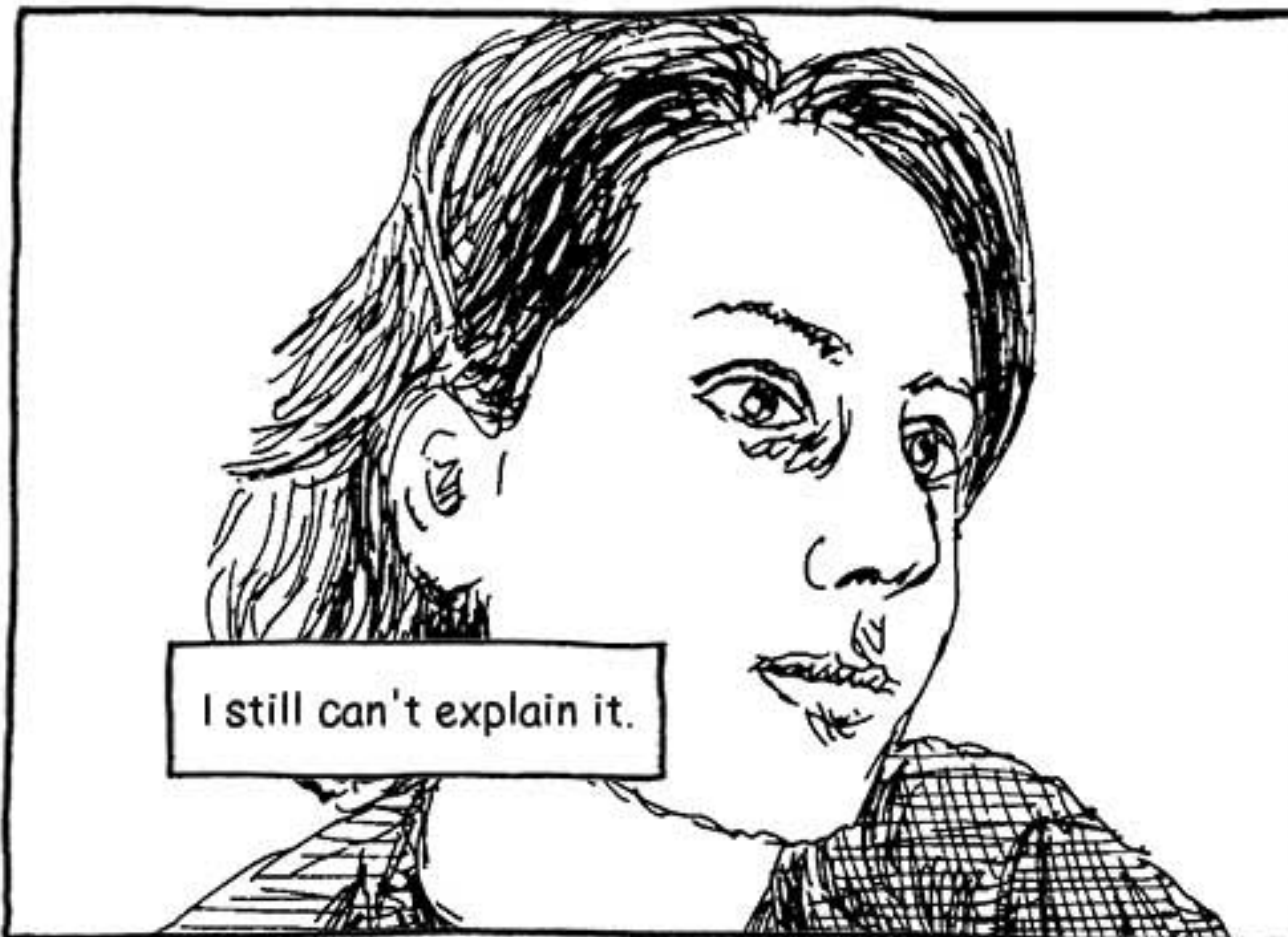
It started to get more complicated towards the painting transport date.



There was a request by the Dutch Chamber of Commerce that we get a letter from the Israelis that they know it is not coming to Israel but to Palestine.



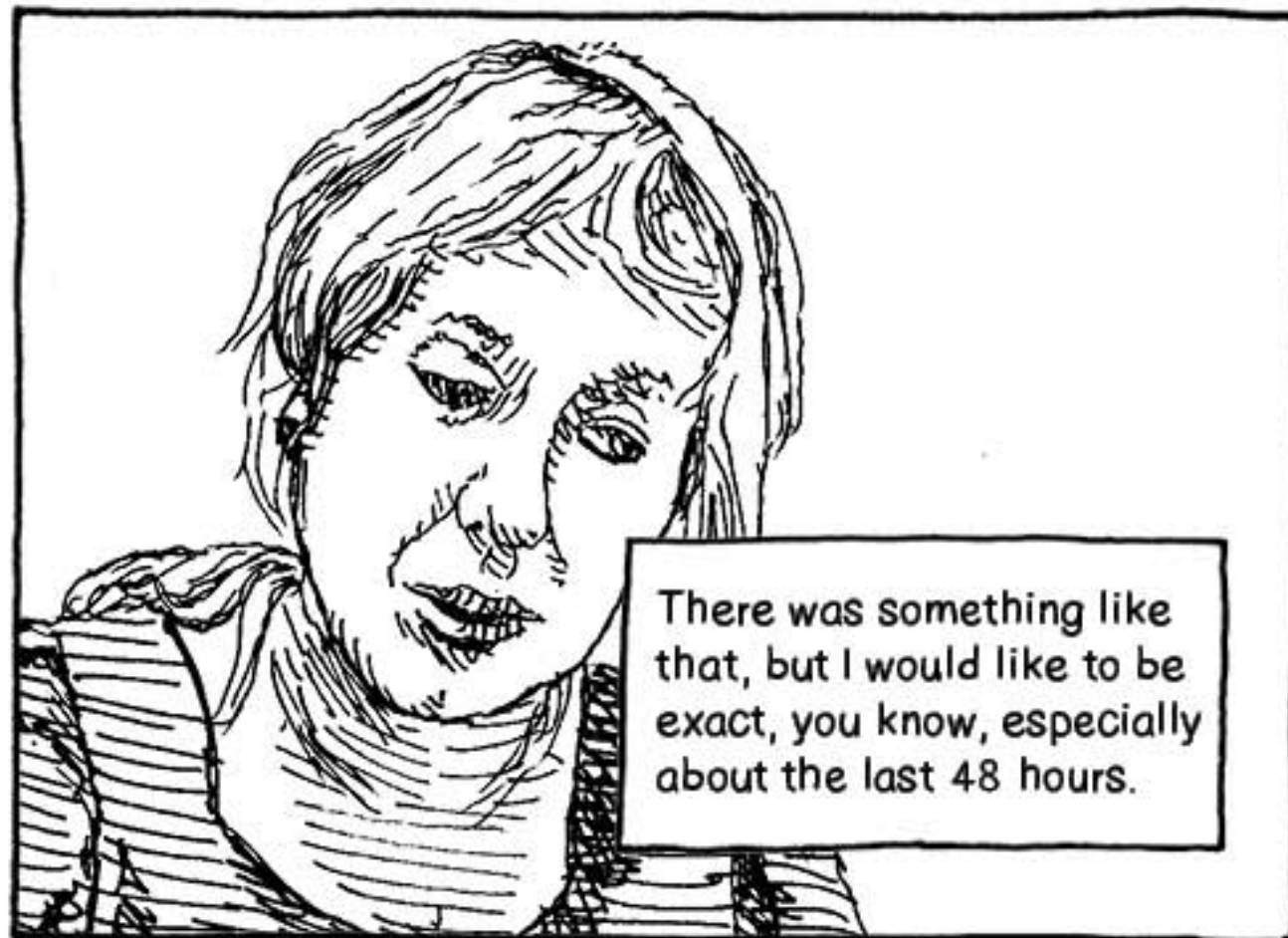
And this sounded very weird at that point. Very, very weird.



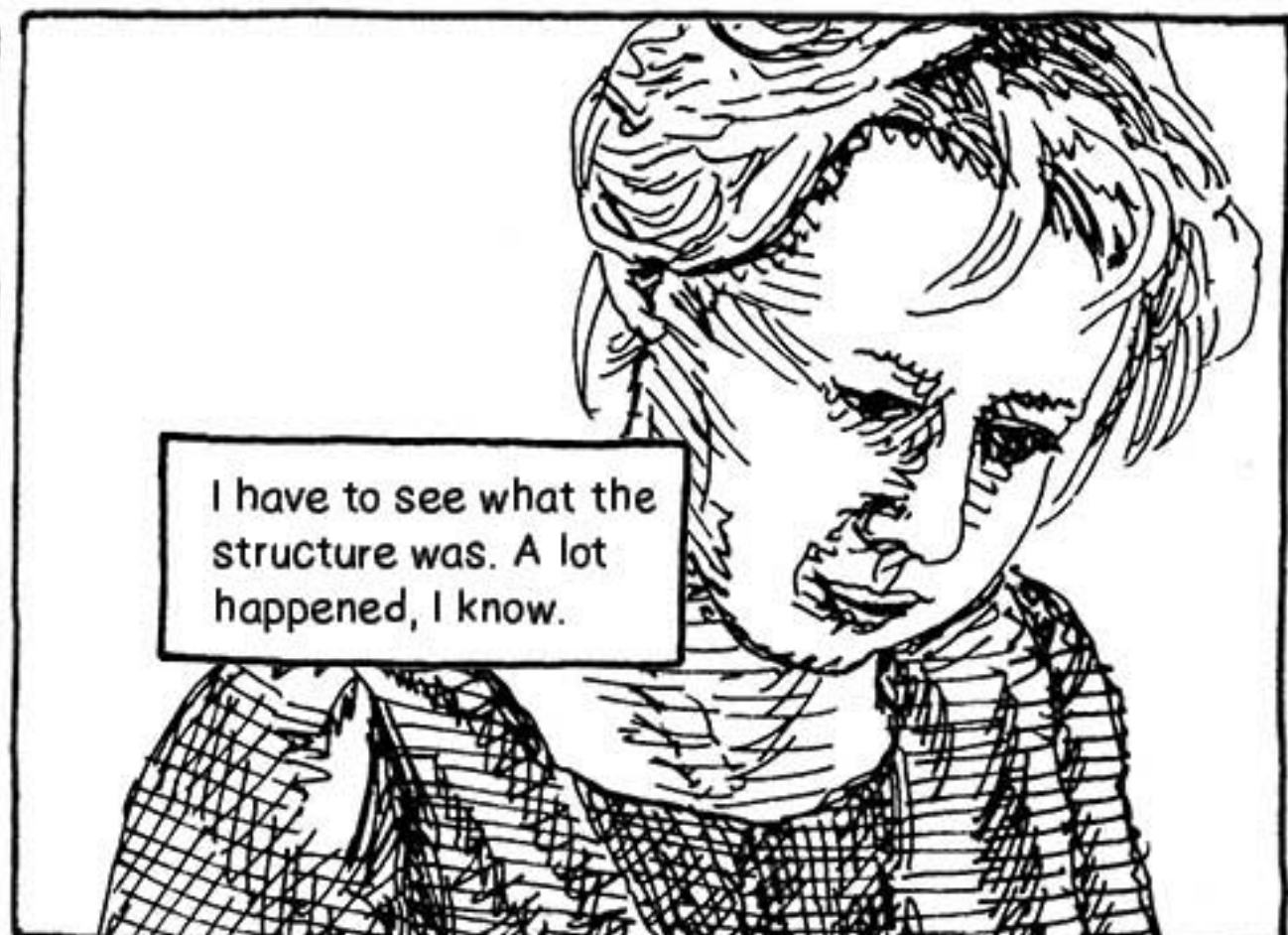
I still can't explain it.



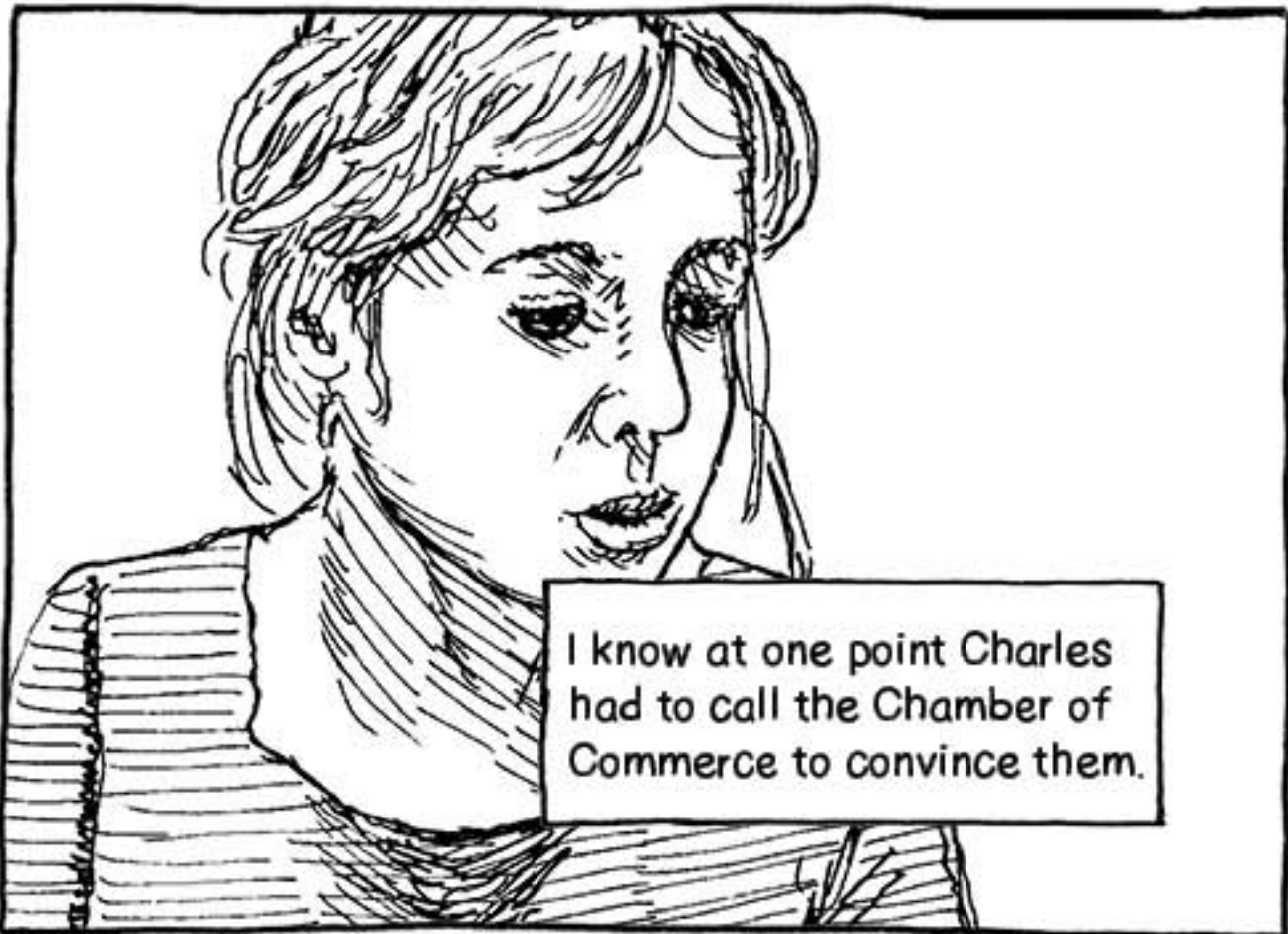
This is one of the things I would still like to return to from this project.



There was something like that, but I would like to be exact, you know, especially about the last 48 hours.



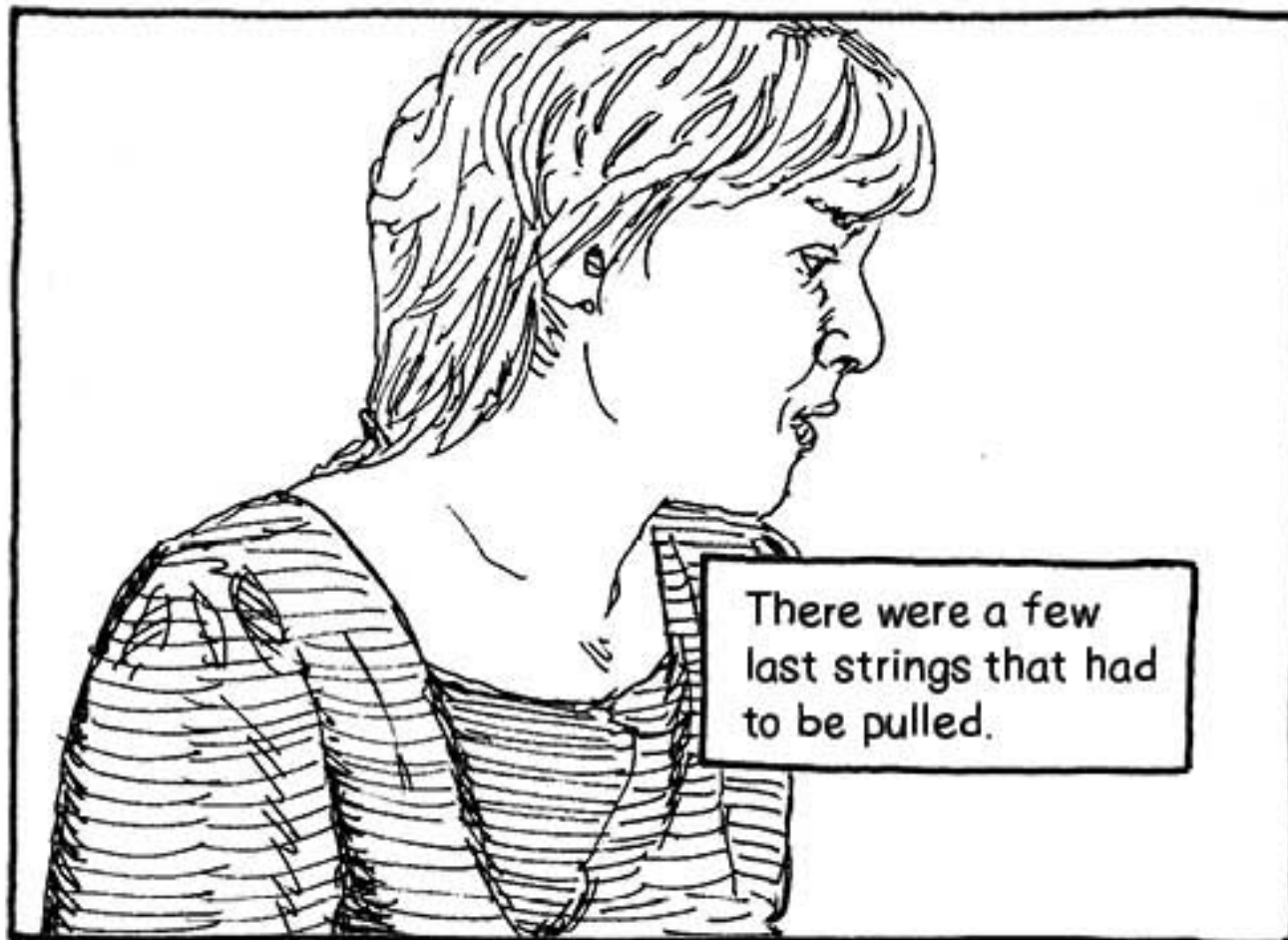
I have to see what the structure was. A lot happened, I know.



I know at one point Charles had to call the Chamber of Commerce to convince them.



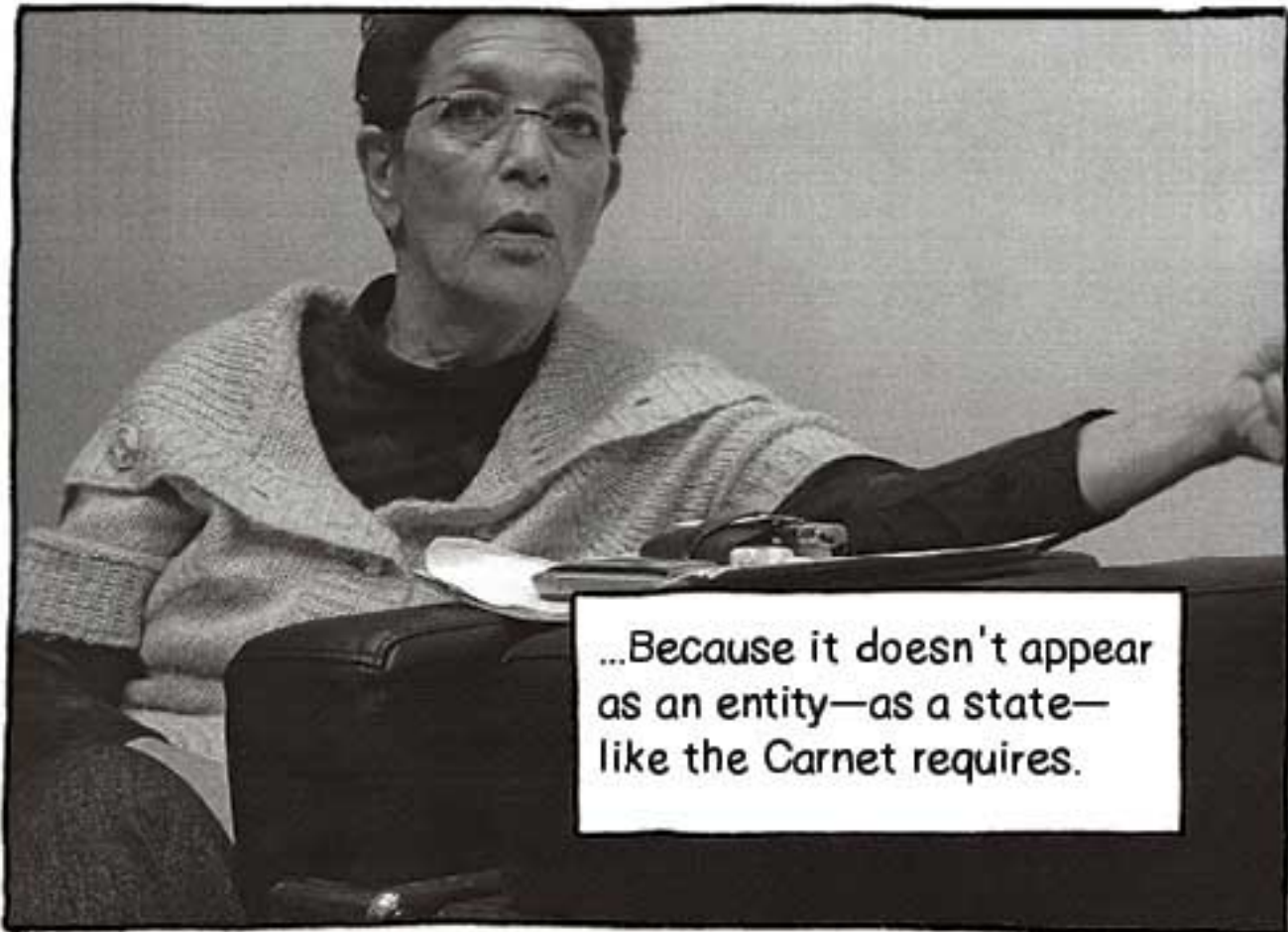
Oh yeah, he was walking around in the office. Oh my God!



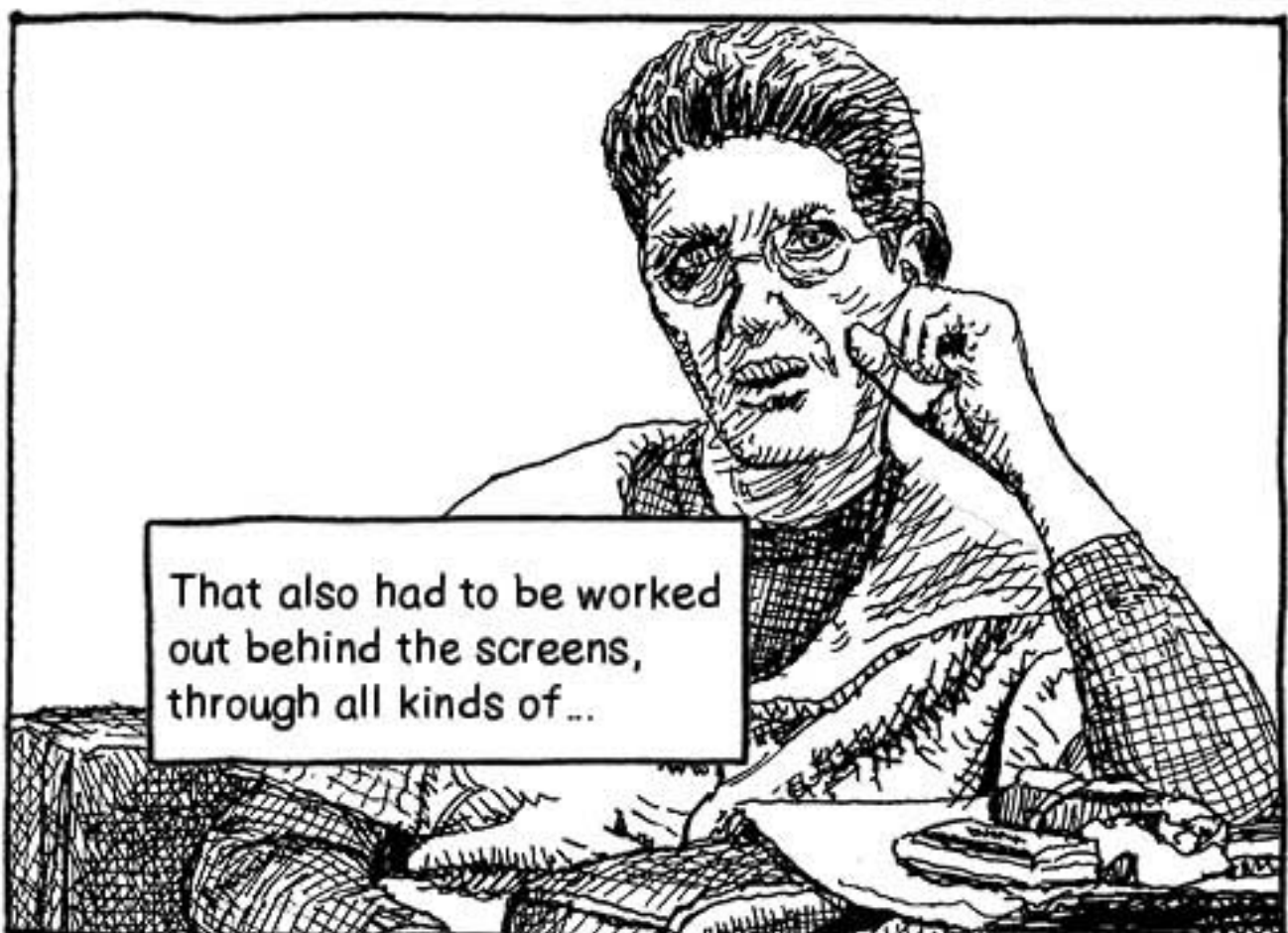
There were a few last strings that had to be pulled.



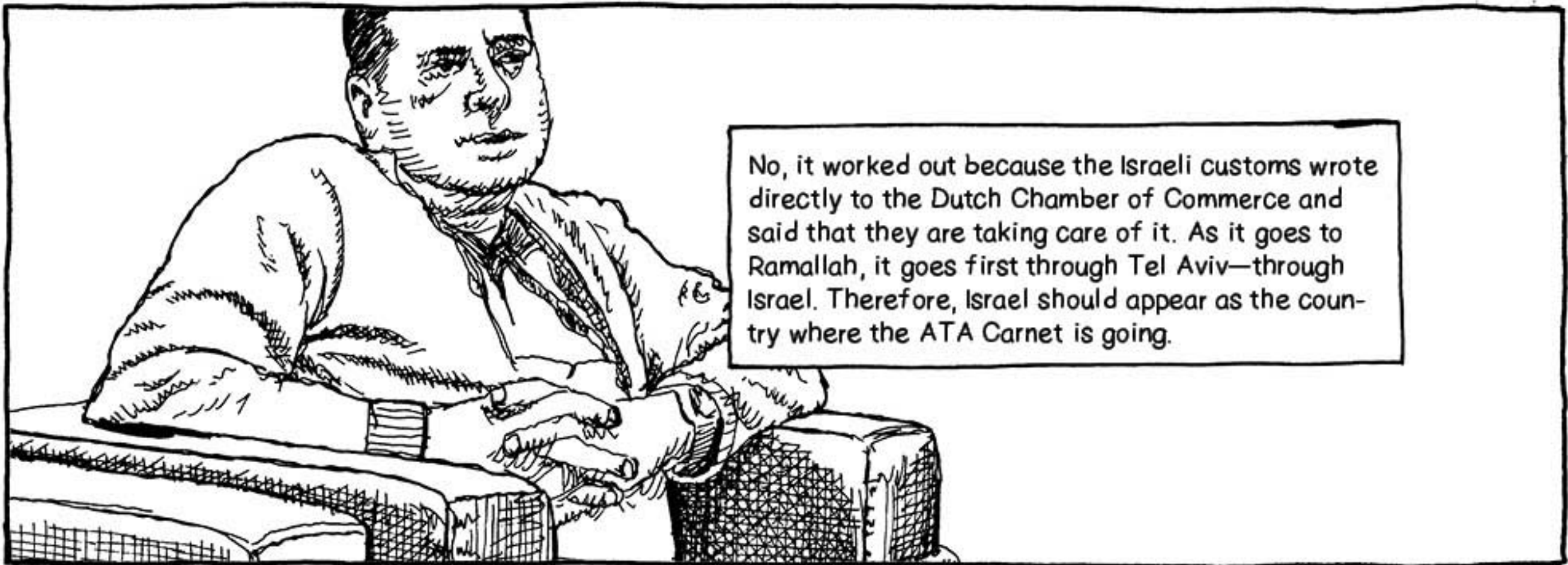
The Palestinian Authority was not recognized by the Dutch Chamber of Commerce where they issued the Carnet...



...Because it doesn't appear as an entity—as a state—like the Carnet requires.



That also had to be worked out behind the screens, through all kinds of...



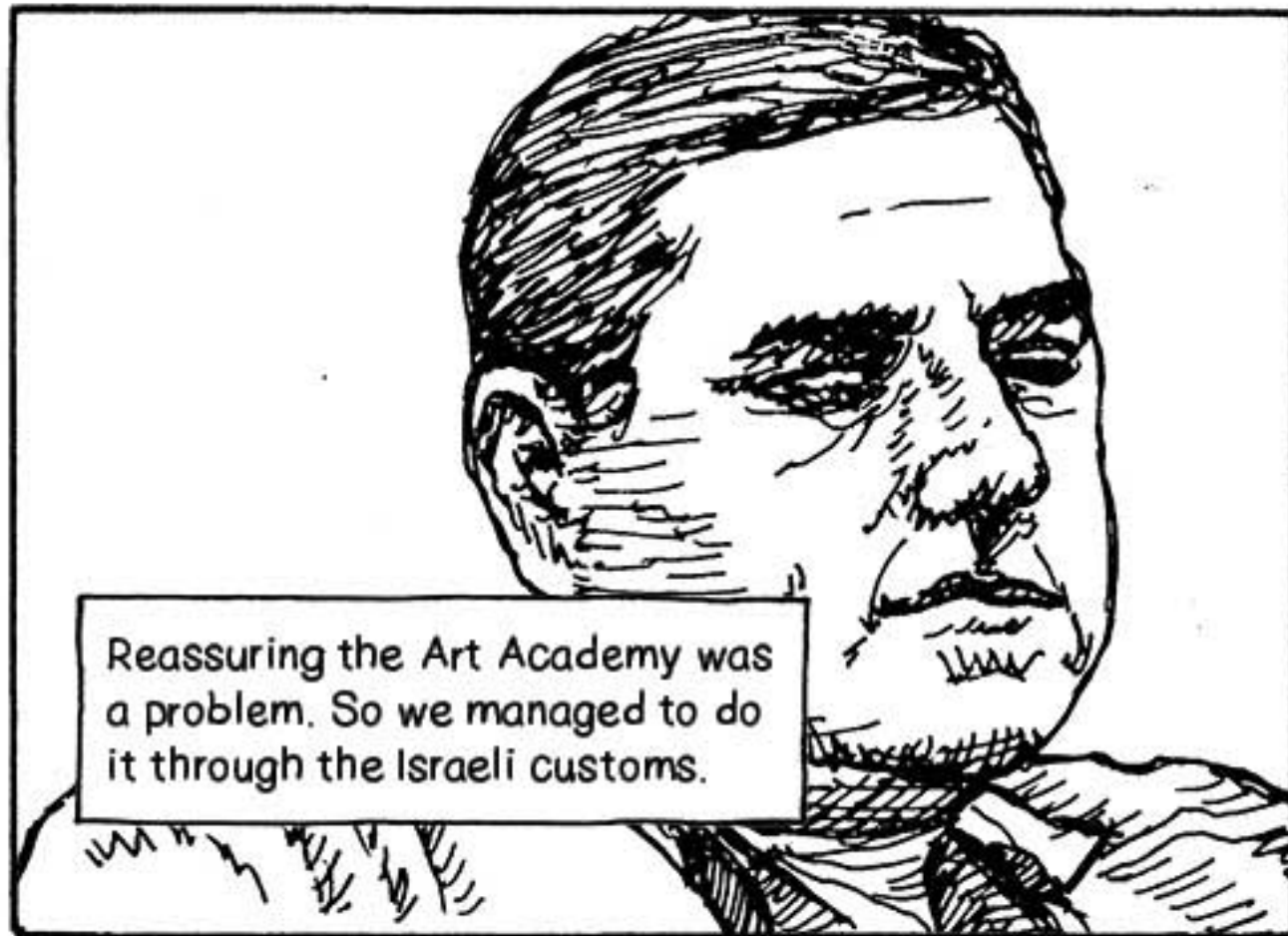
No, it worked out because the Israeli customs wrote directly to the Dutch Chamber of Commerce and said that they are taking care of it. As it goes to Ramallah, it goes first through Tel Aviv—through Israel. Therefore, Israel should appear as the country where the ATA Carnet is going.



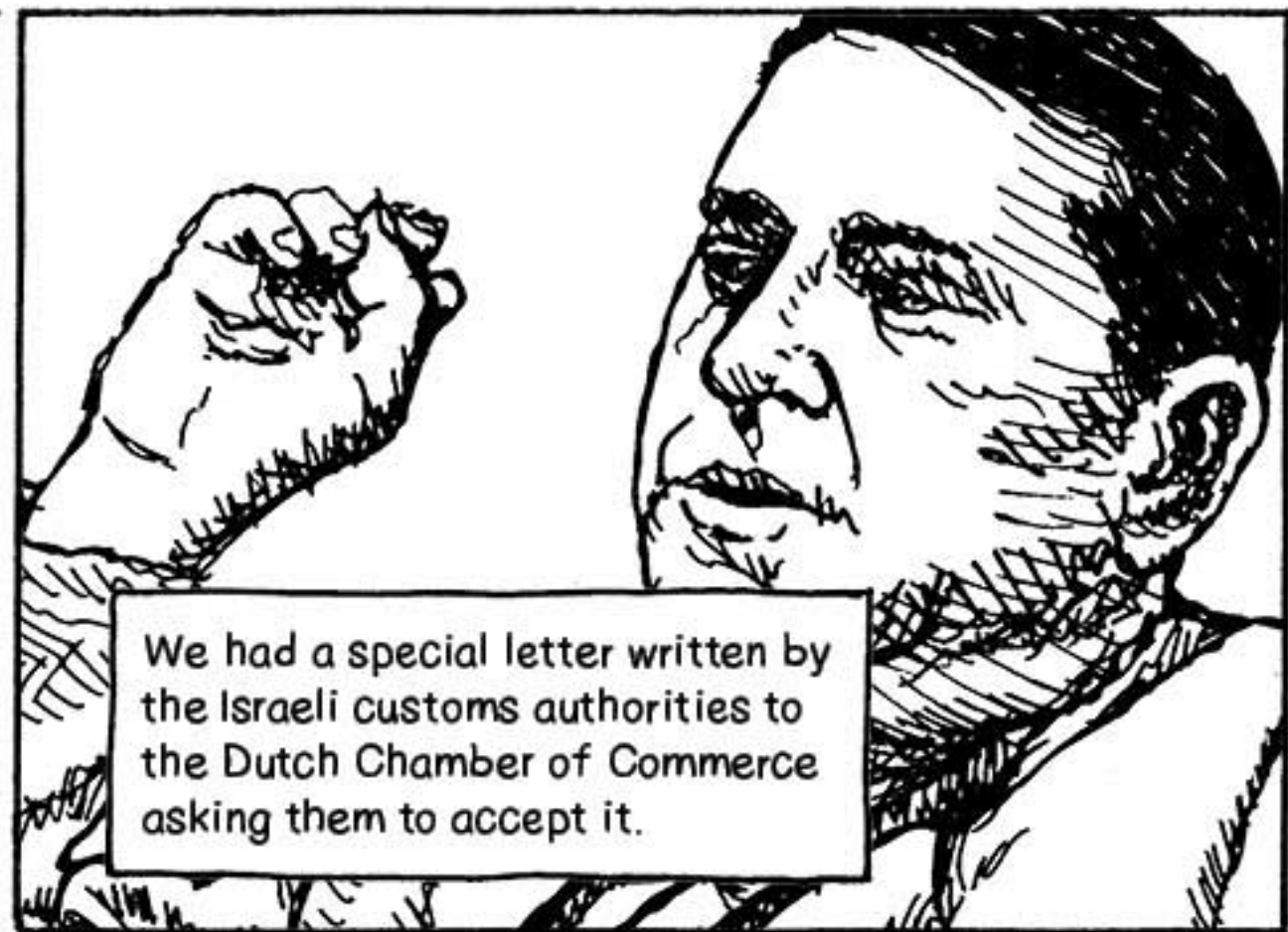
A struggle took place—Israel as the country of destination was not acceptable. But to me, that was clear.



We have no airport, we have no borders whatsoever, and it needed to come through Israeli-controlled borders.



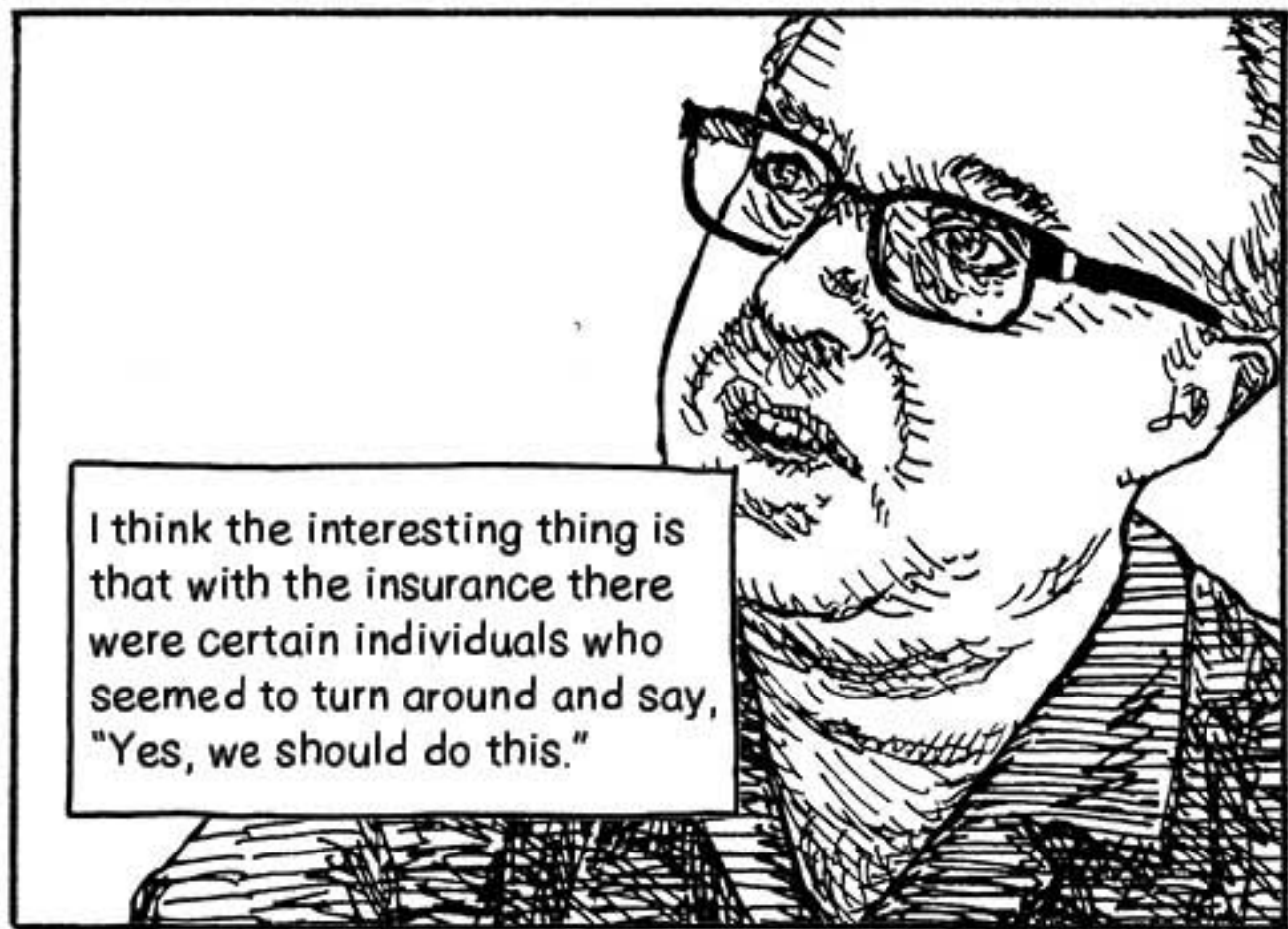
Reassuring the Art Academy was a problem. So we managed to do it through the Israeli customs.



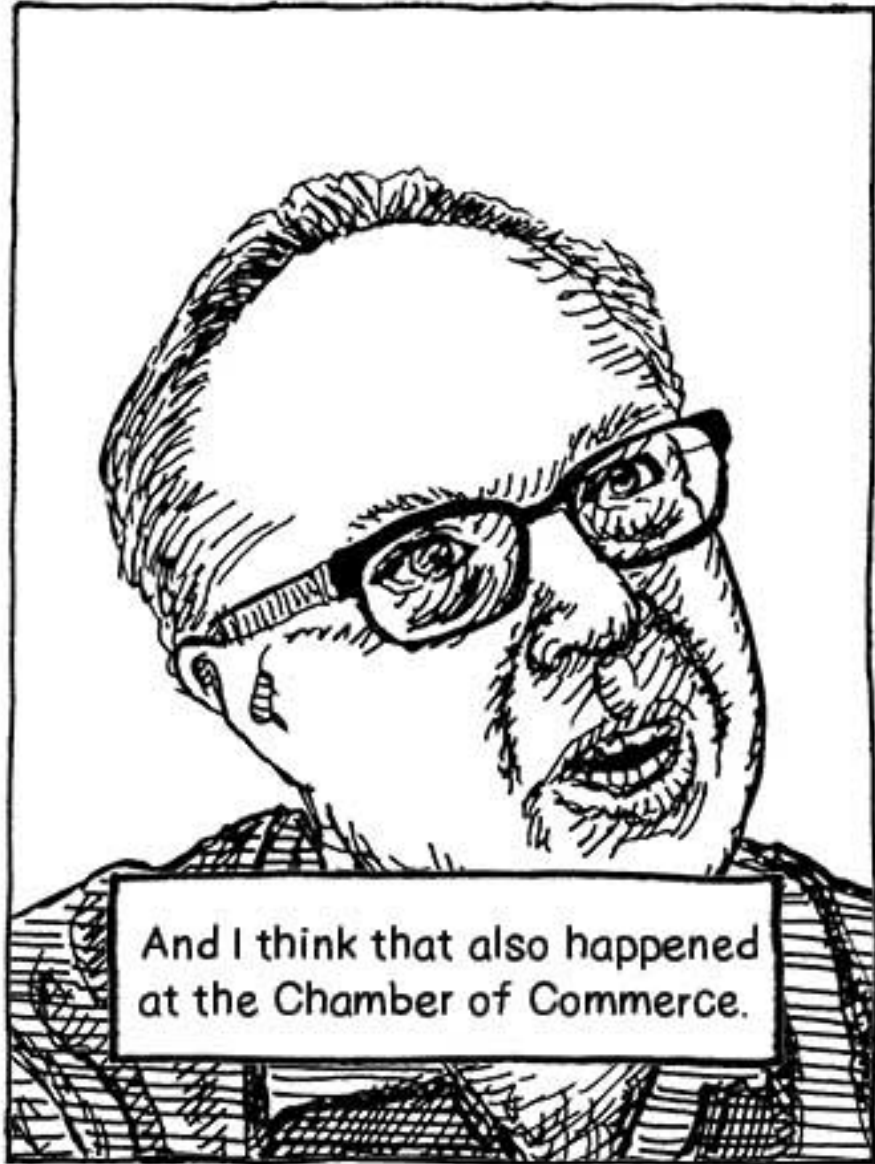
We had a special letter written by the Israeli customs authorities to the Dutch Chamber of Commerce asking them to accept it.



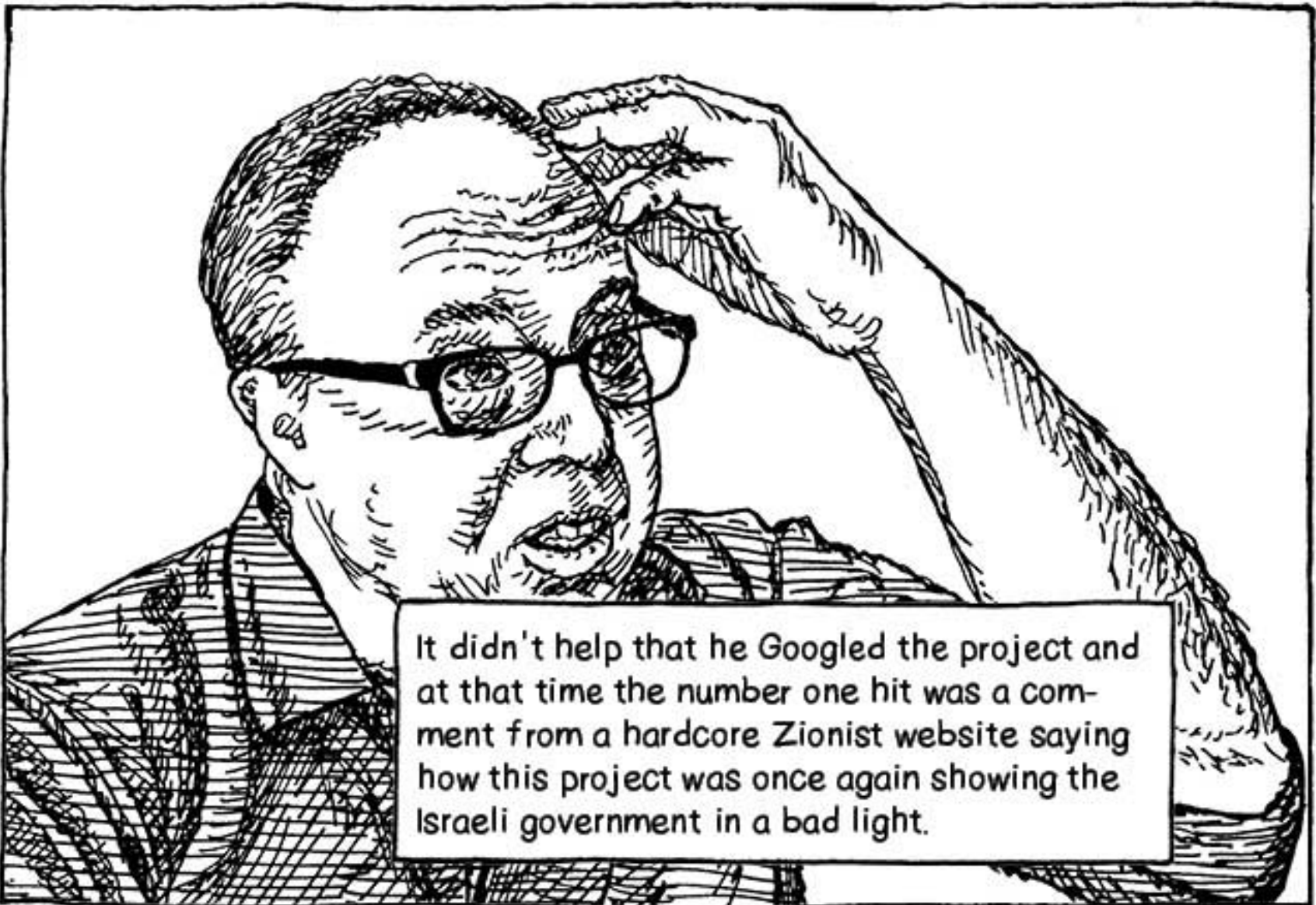
And after that letter, they approved the ATA Carnet over there.



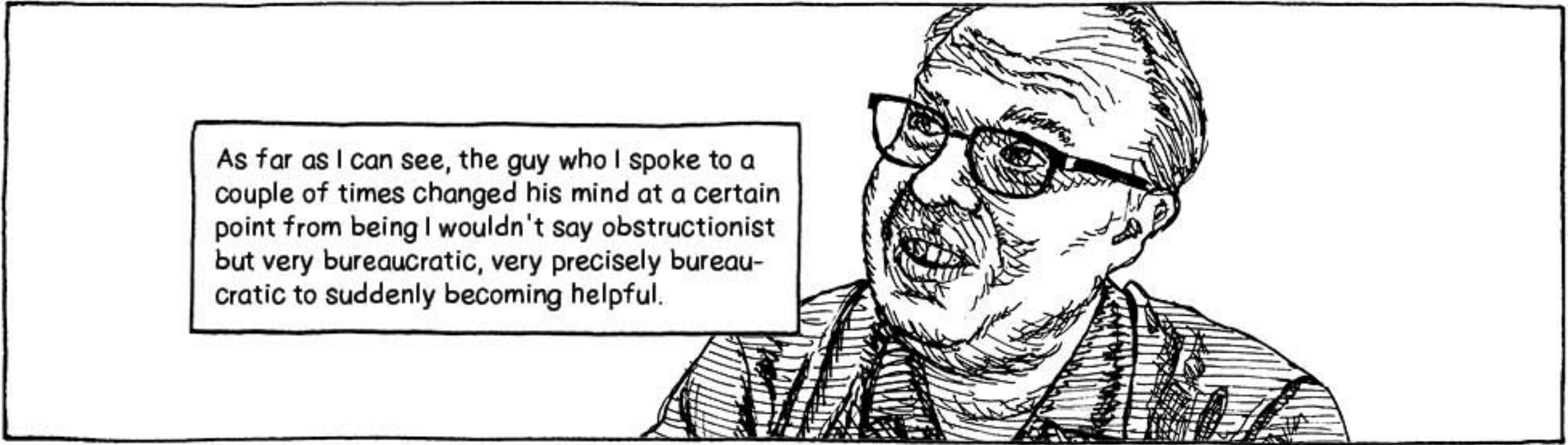
I think the interesting thing is that with the insurance there were certain individuals who seemed to turn around and say, "Yes, we should do this."



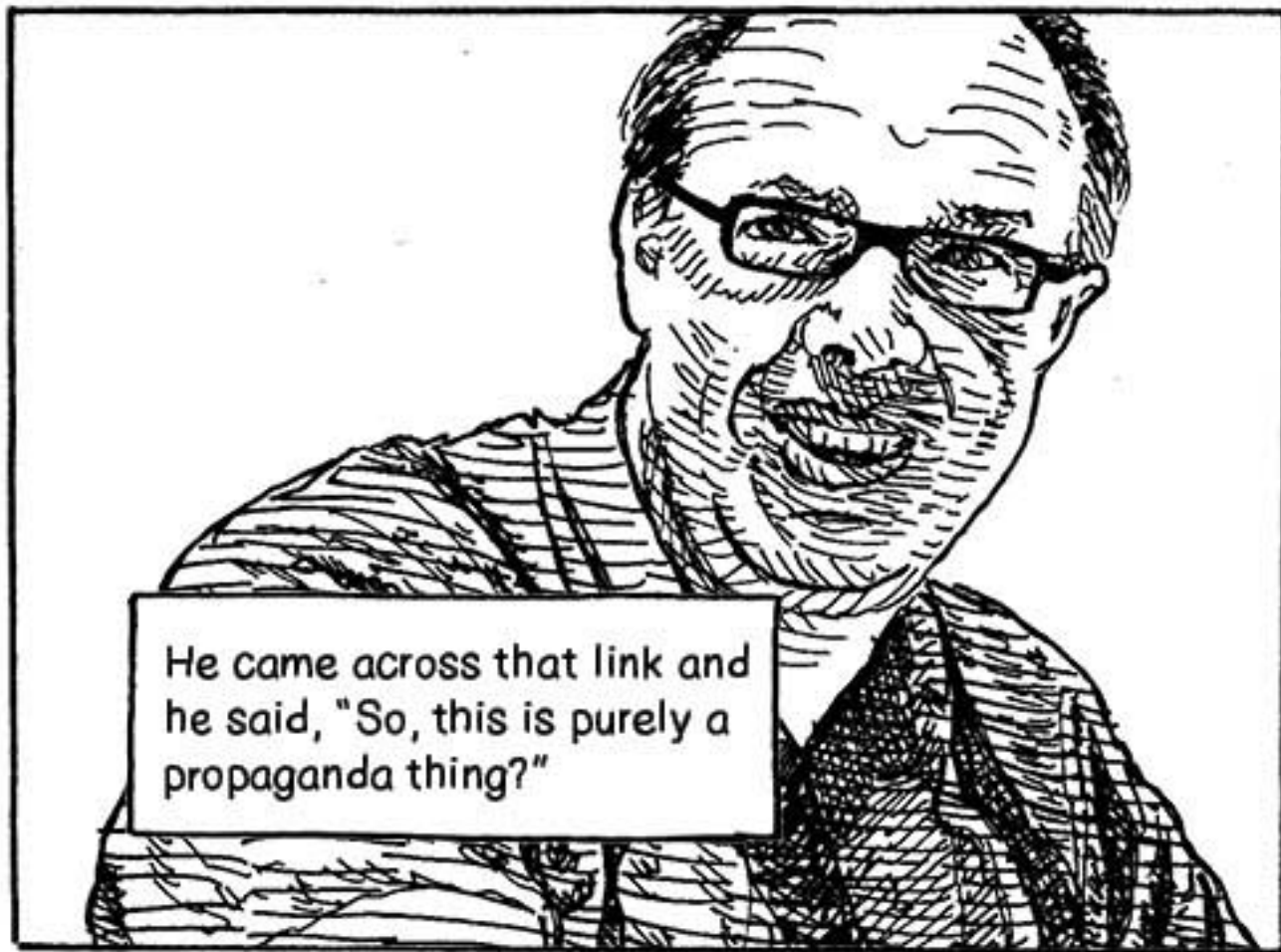
And I think that also happened at the Chamber of Commerce.



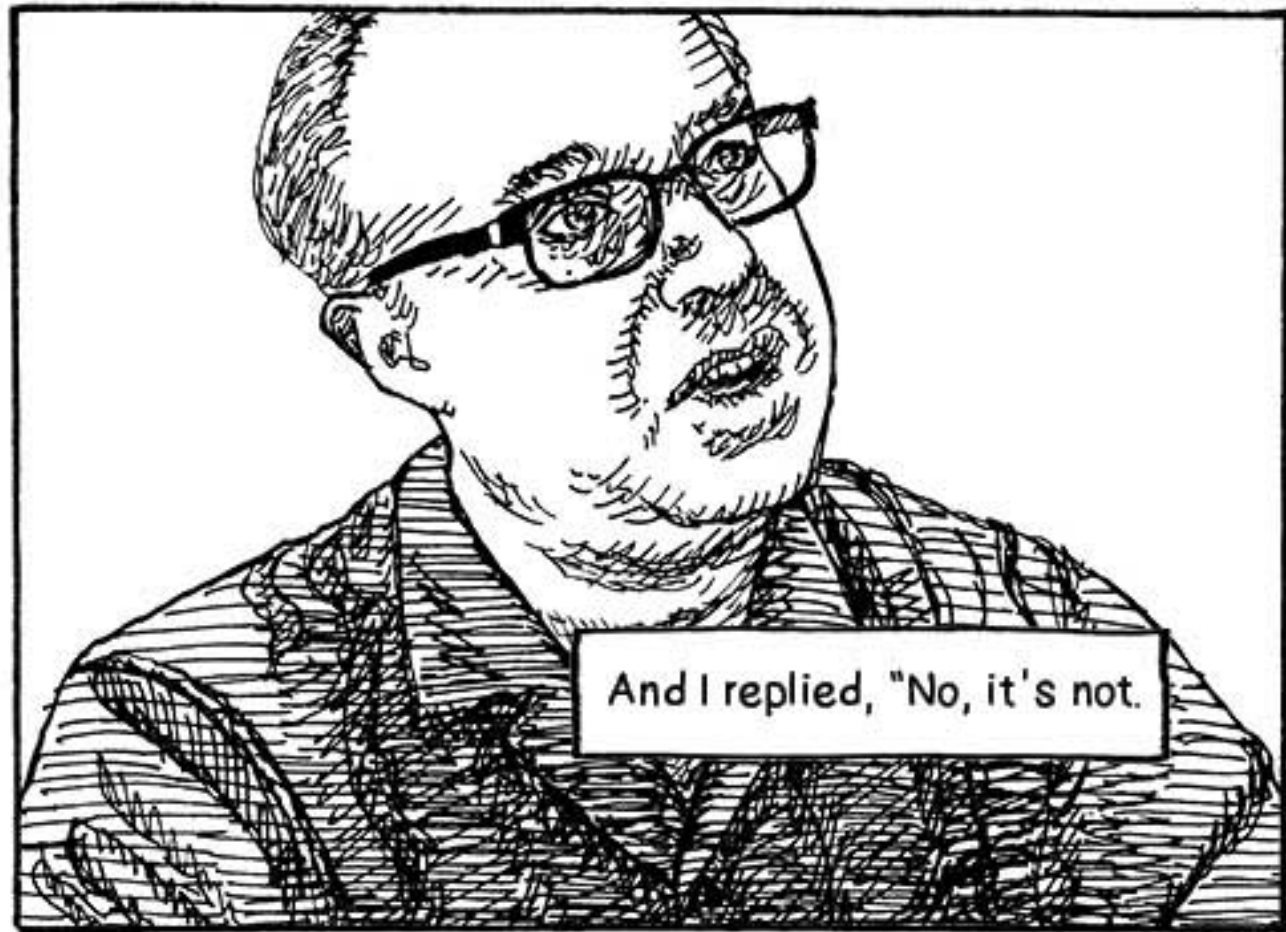
It didn't help that he Googled the project and at that time the number one hit was a comment from a hardcore Zionist website saying how this project was once again showing the Israeli government in a bad light.



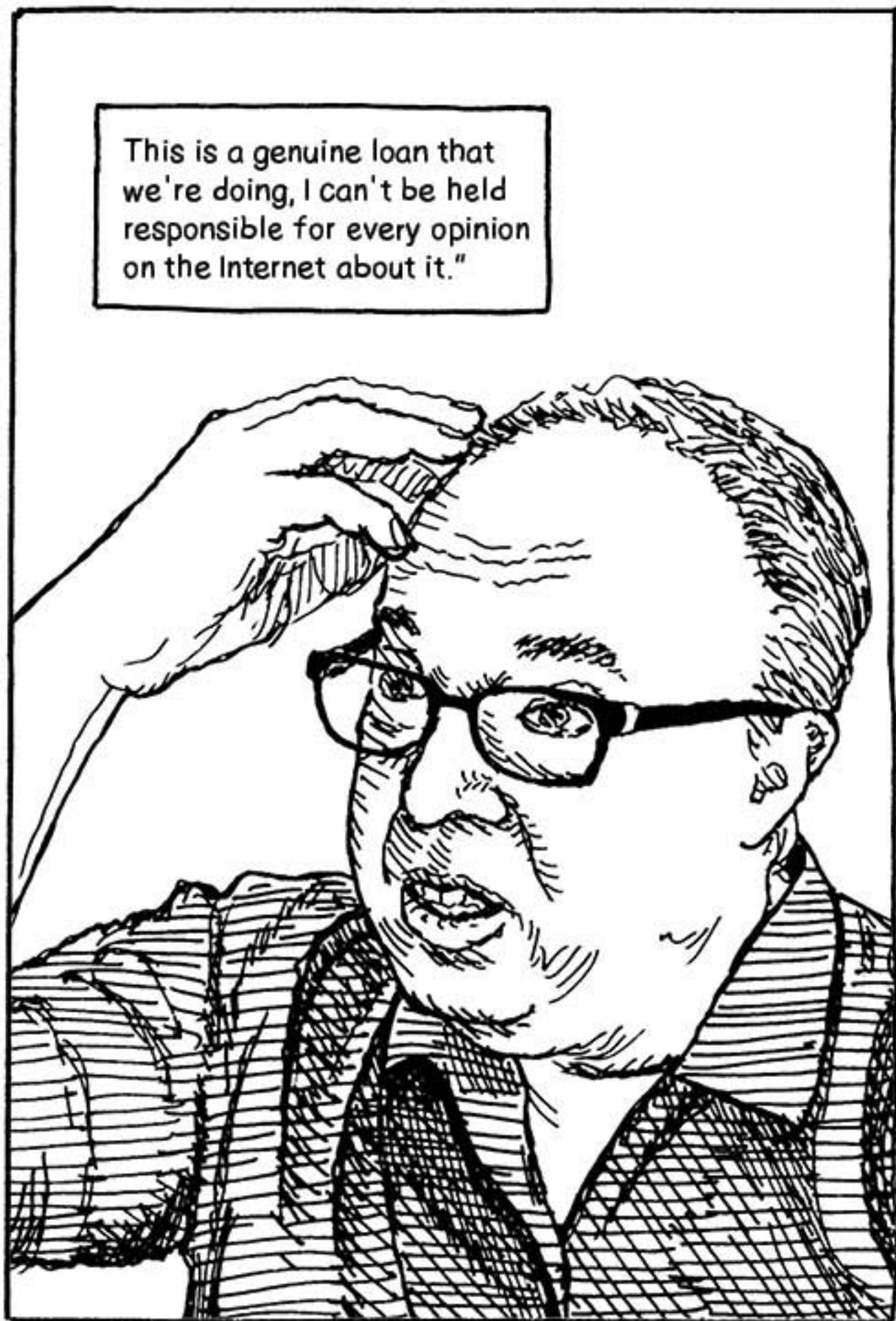
As far as I can see, the guy who I spoke to a couple of times changed his mind at a certain point from being I wouldn't say obstructionist but very bureaucratic, very precisely bureaucratic to suddenly becoming helpful.



He came across that link and he said, "So, this is purely a propaganda thing?"



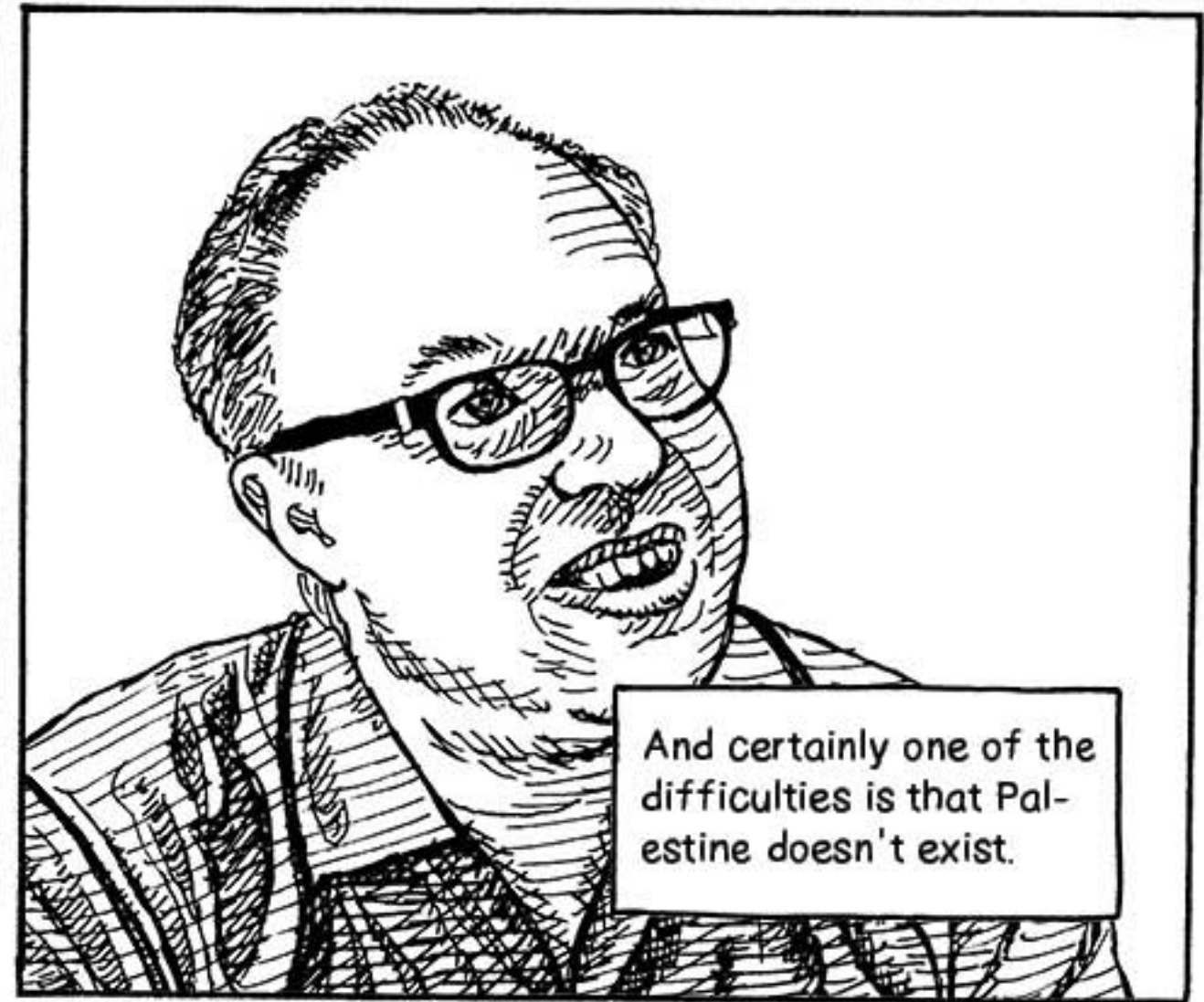
And I replied, "No, it's not."



This is a genuine loan that we're doing, I can't be held responsible for every opinion on the Internet about it."



Clearly, going to Palestine is an issue.



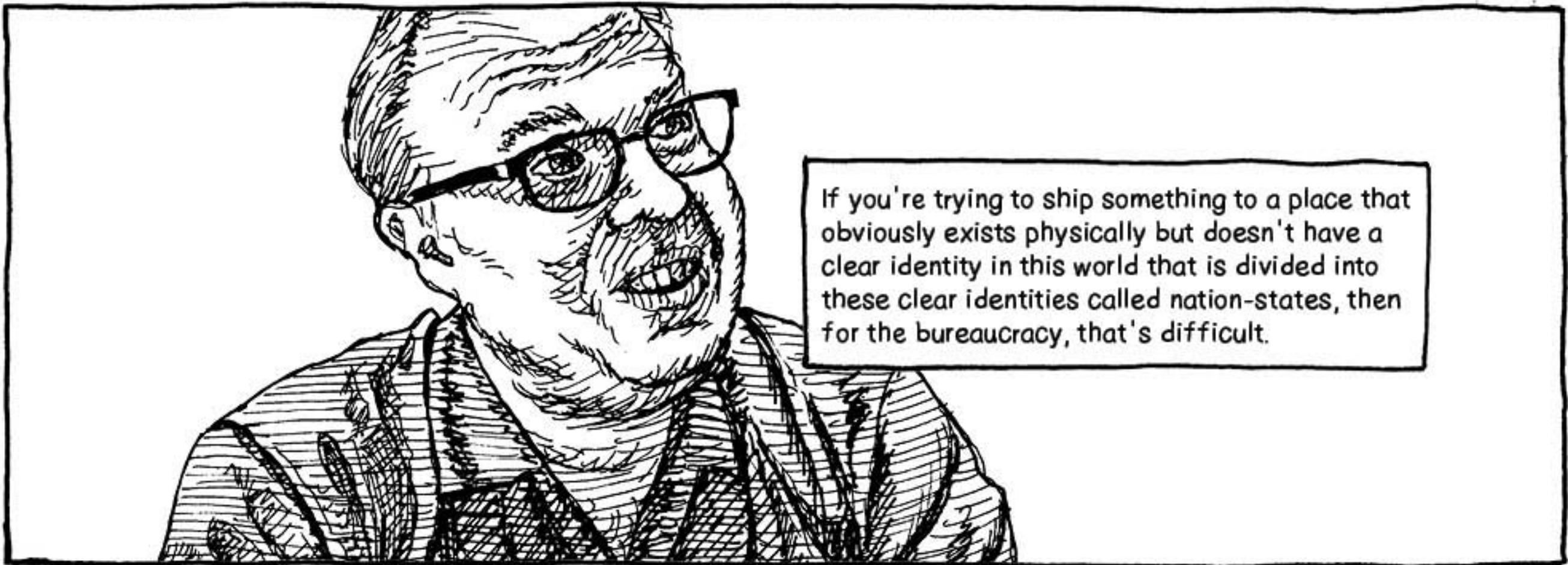
And certainly one of the difficulties is that Palestine doesn't exist.



I mean, it's not Israeli territory, it isn't Jordanian anymore, it's not Lebanese, it's not Egyptian.



So what is it?



If you're trying to ship something to a place that obviously exists physically but doesn't have a clear identity in this world that is divided into these clear identities called nation-states, then for the bureaucracy, that's difficult.



There are developments in the Netherlands that are approaching fascism in ideology...



...but I don't think the Chamber of Commerce in Hoofddorp is part of that.

Esche is referring to a posting on the Zionist blog, *Israel Matzav* from February 22, 2011 in which "Carl in Jerusalem" wrote:



WebAds

Tuesday, February 22, 2011

'Picasso in Palestine' another occasion to bash Israel



Eindhoven's Van Abbe Museum is lending the 1943 canvas *Buste de Femme* to the Ramallah international art academy, and the occasion is being used to **bash Israel** once again.

A film is due to be made of the painting's journey, including the Israeli border and other checkpoints.

And then international audiences will be shown how the 'cruel Israelis' insist on inspecting an 'innocent painting.' This is just another excuse to try to open the checkpoints so that weapons can be smuggled in.

What could go wrong?

Labels: **Picasso, Ramallah**

posted by Carl in Jerusalem @ 12:40 PM

From NYDailyNews.com

0 comments:

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From Around the Web

links to this post:

- [How Texas Became Texas and Why It Matters](#) (The New York Times)

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We got the letter.




I signed the power of attorney for the Globus team members to do all that was necessary, we sent it off...




...and Samer and Globus made things happen in their way.




I would say this letter wasn't necessary at all.



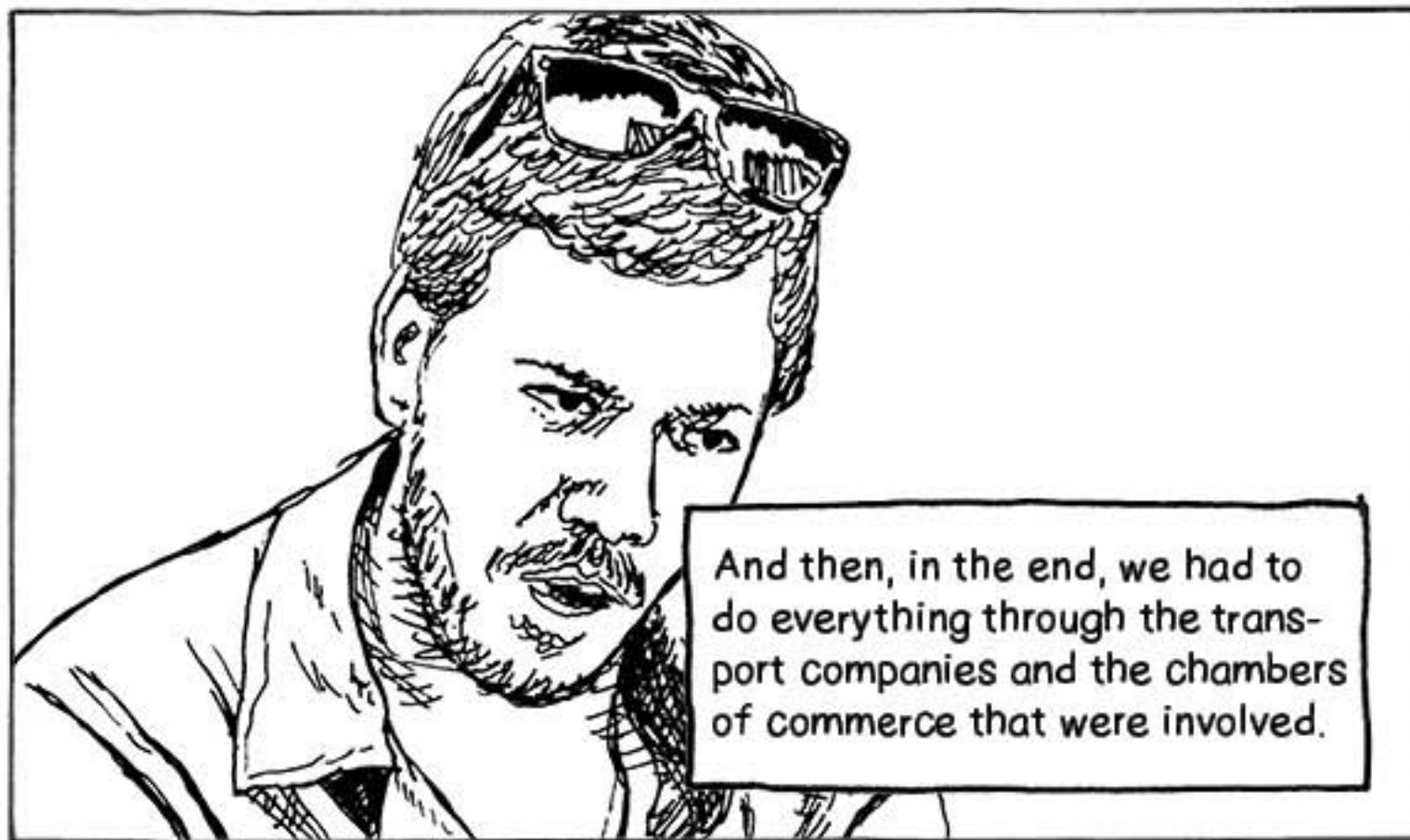
The documents came from an Israeli company that said "proxy company," the proxy country was Israel, and the end destination was Palestine and the declaration of purpose clearly stated that it is in an exhibition taking place at the Academy, which is in Ramallah, not in Tel Aviv, etc.



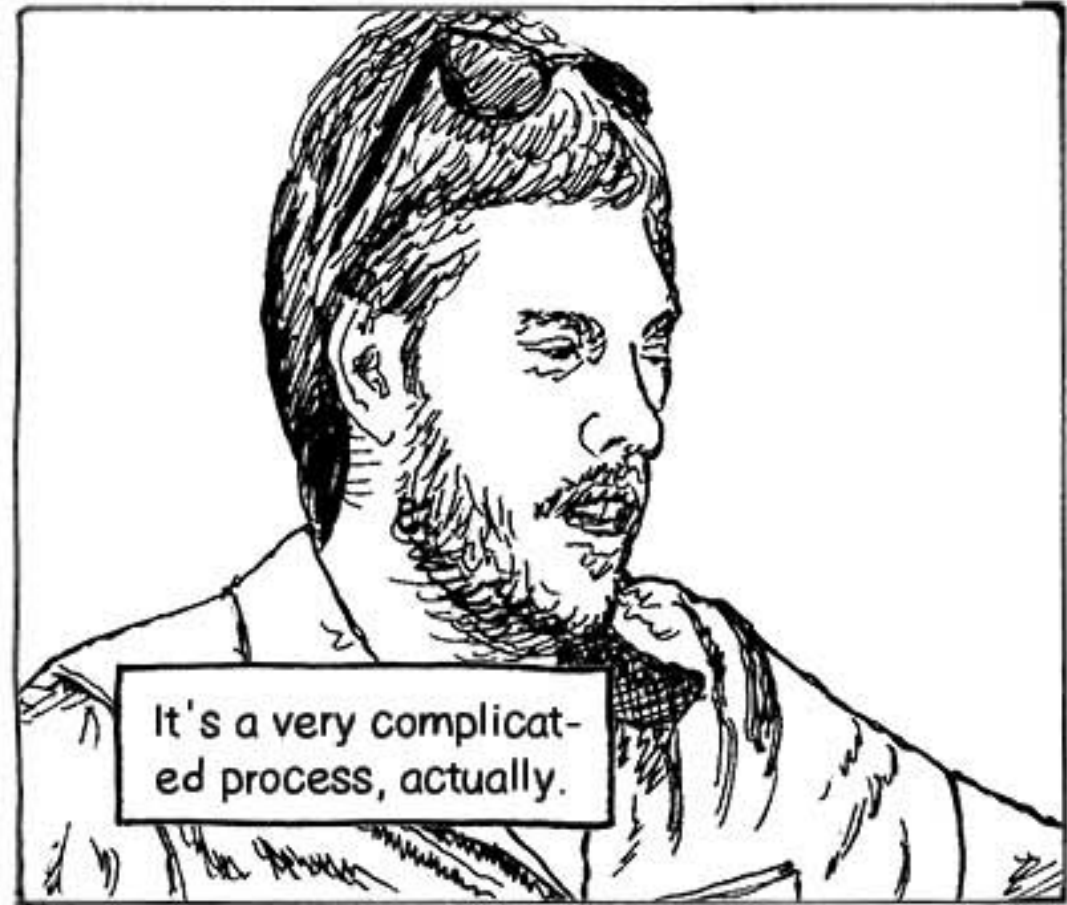
To me, that was really an unreasonable suggestion at that point, but something made them feel uncomfortable.



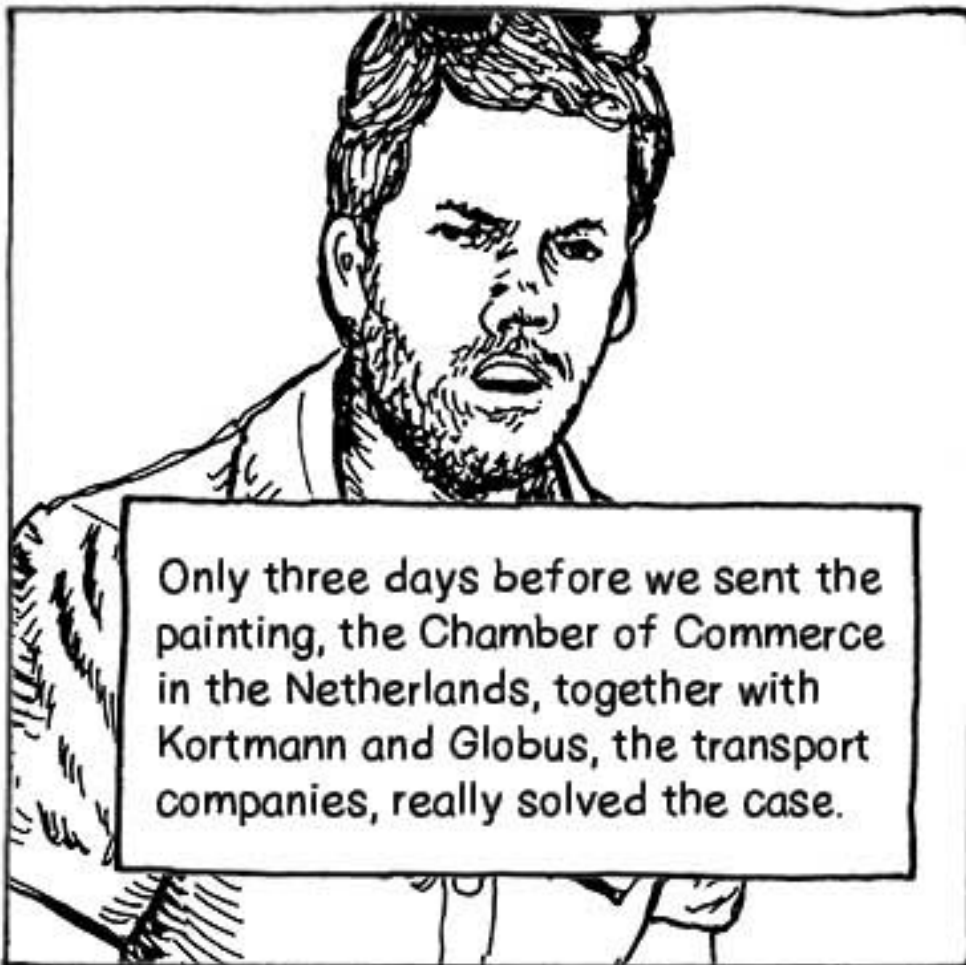
So, I don't know. I really cannot explain it.



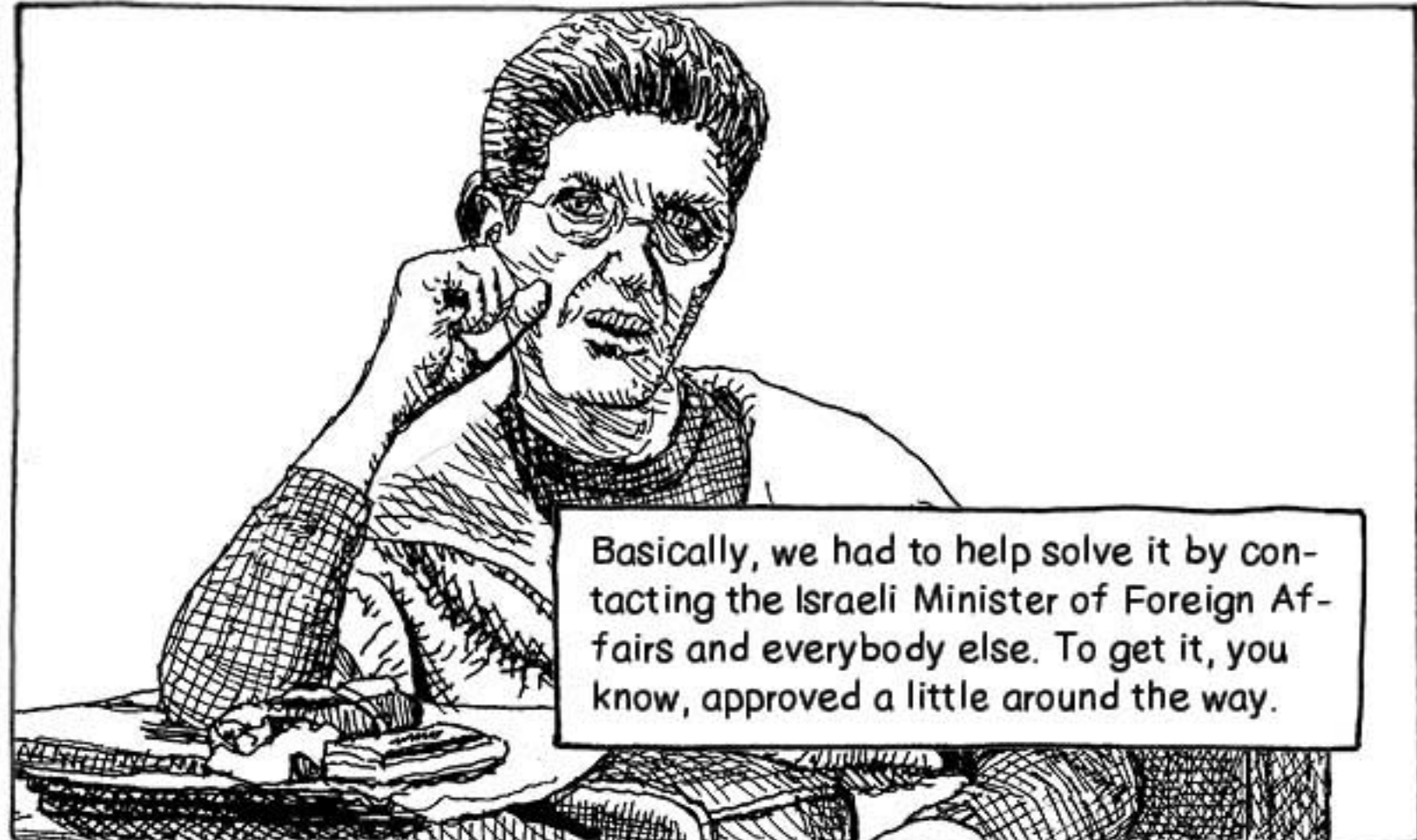
And then, in the end, we had to do everything through the transport companies and the chambers of commerce that were involved.



It's a very complicated process, actually.



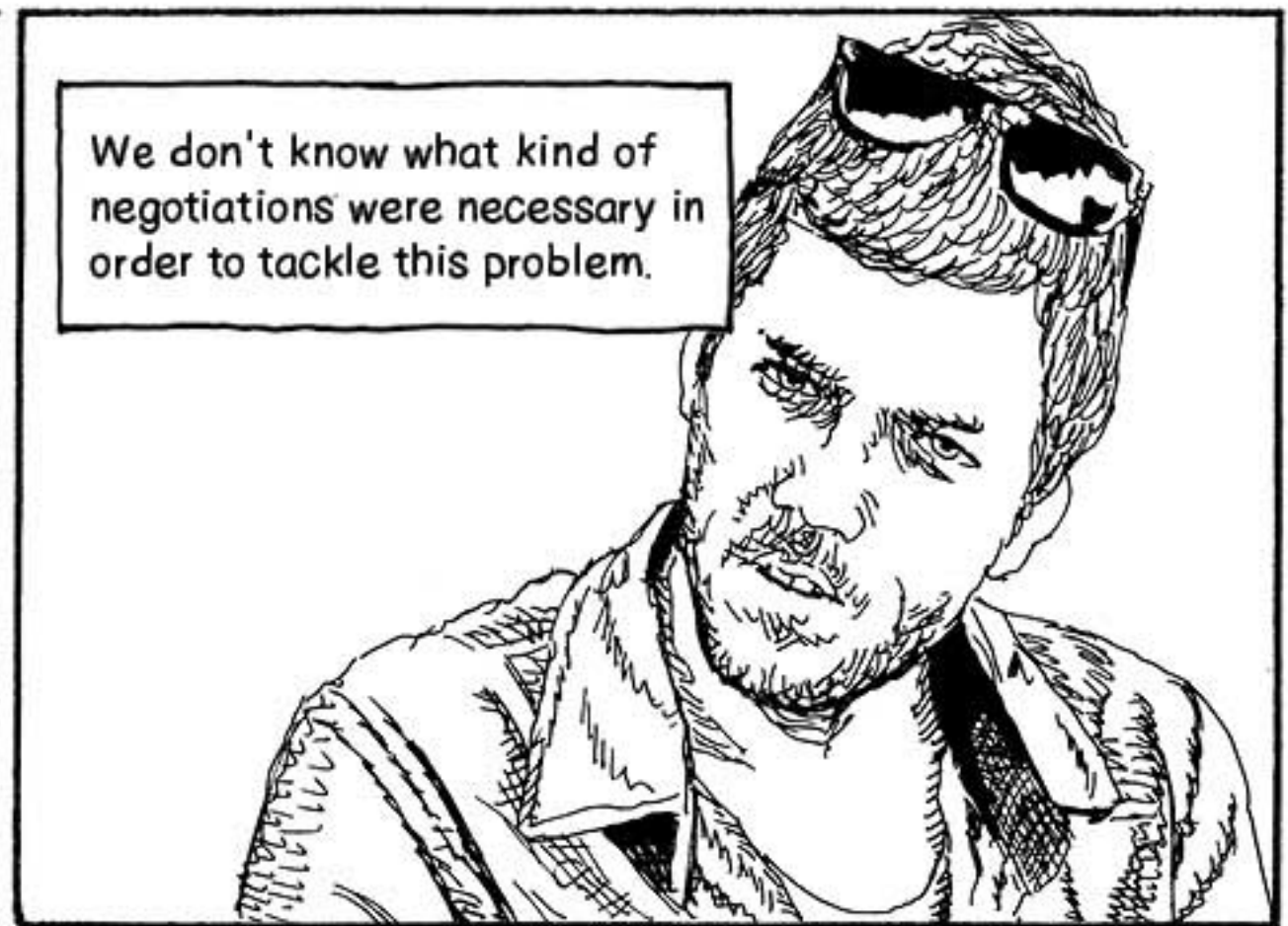
Only three days before we sent the painting, the Chamber of Commerce in the Netherlands, together with Kortmann and Globus, the transport companies, really solved the case.



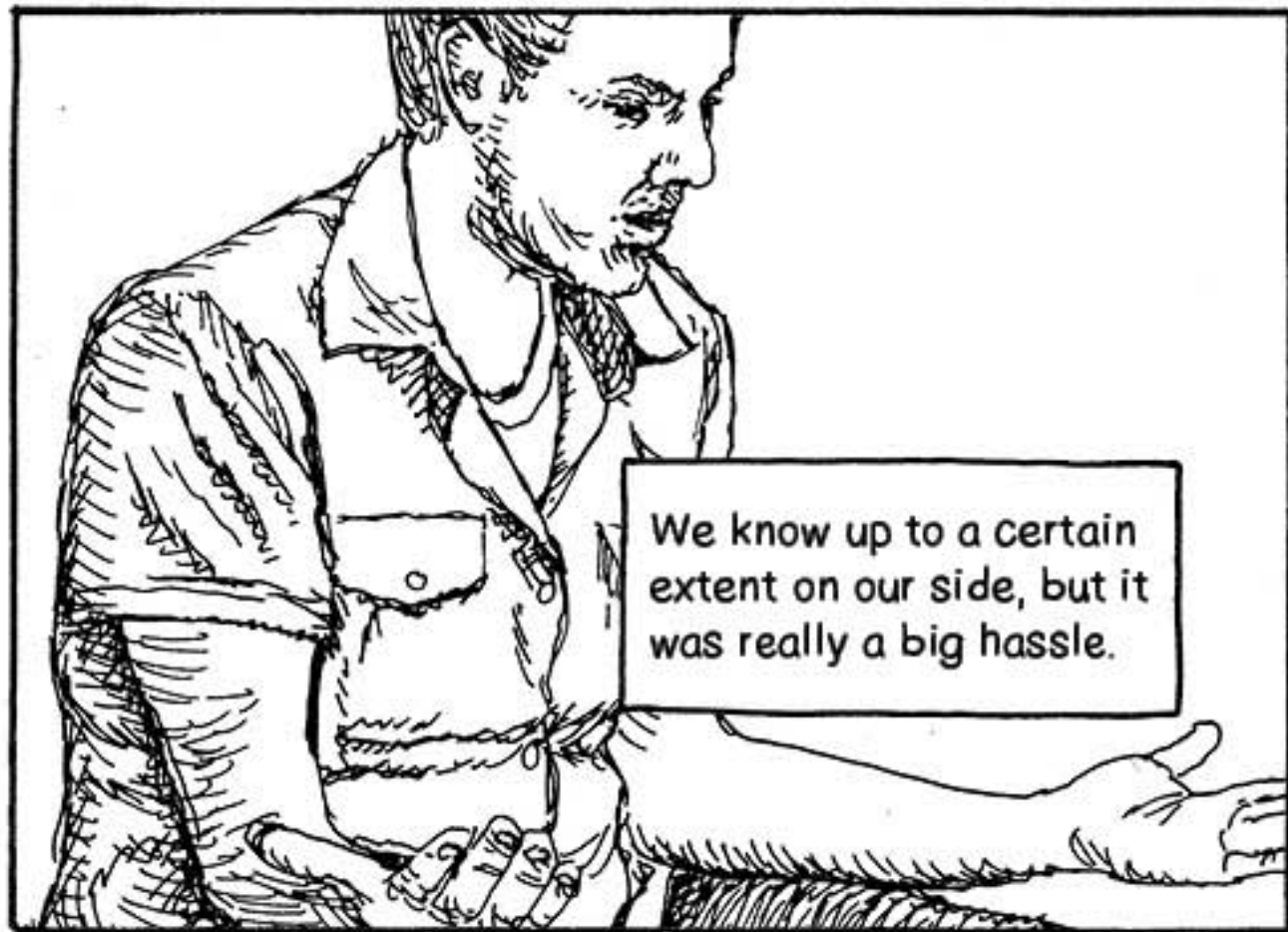
Basically, we had to help solve it by contacting the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs and everybody else. To get it, you know, approved a little around the way.



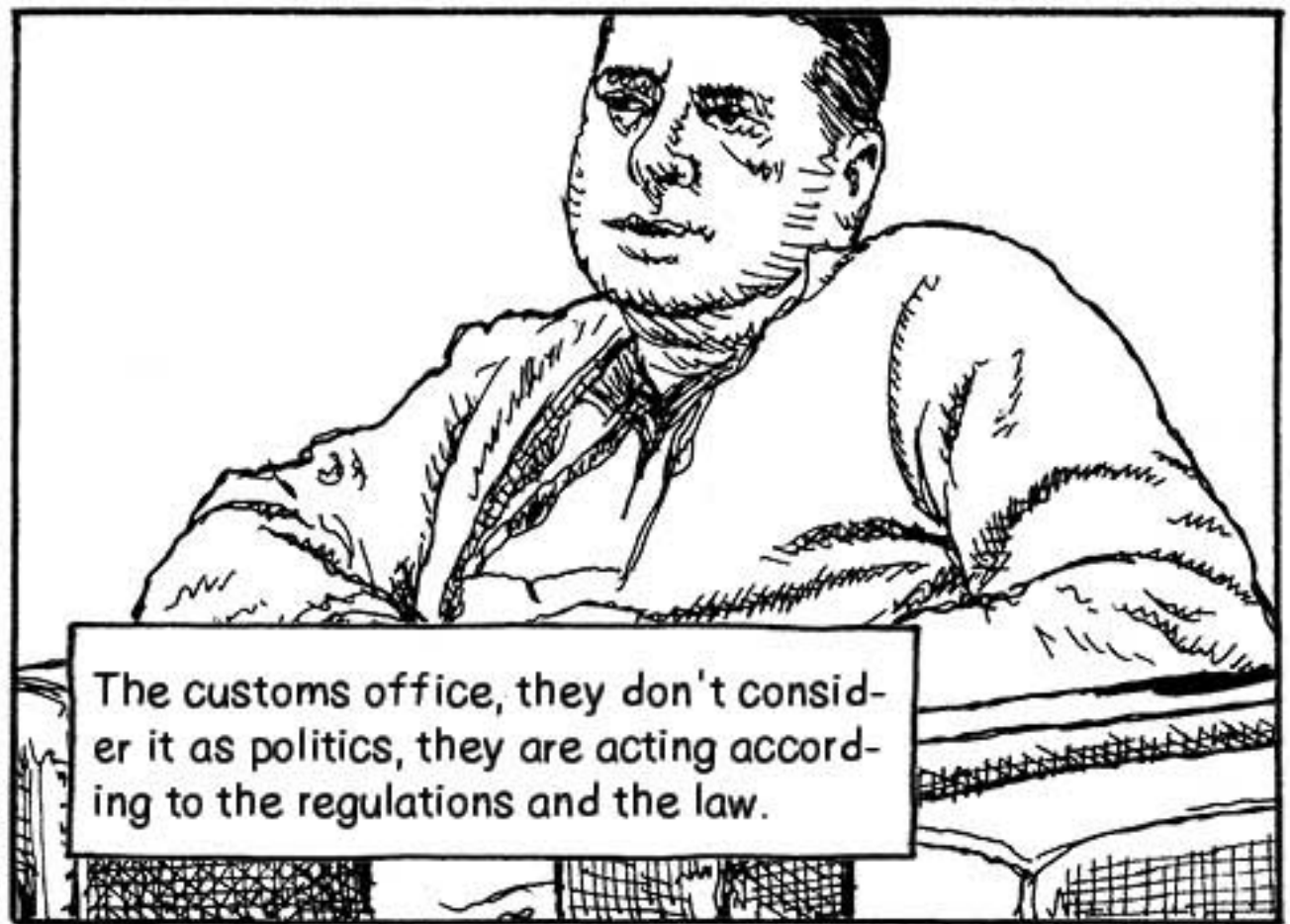
Up until this day, we don't know what happened on the Israeli/Palestinian side.



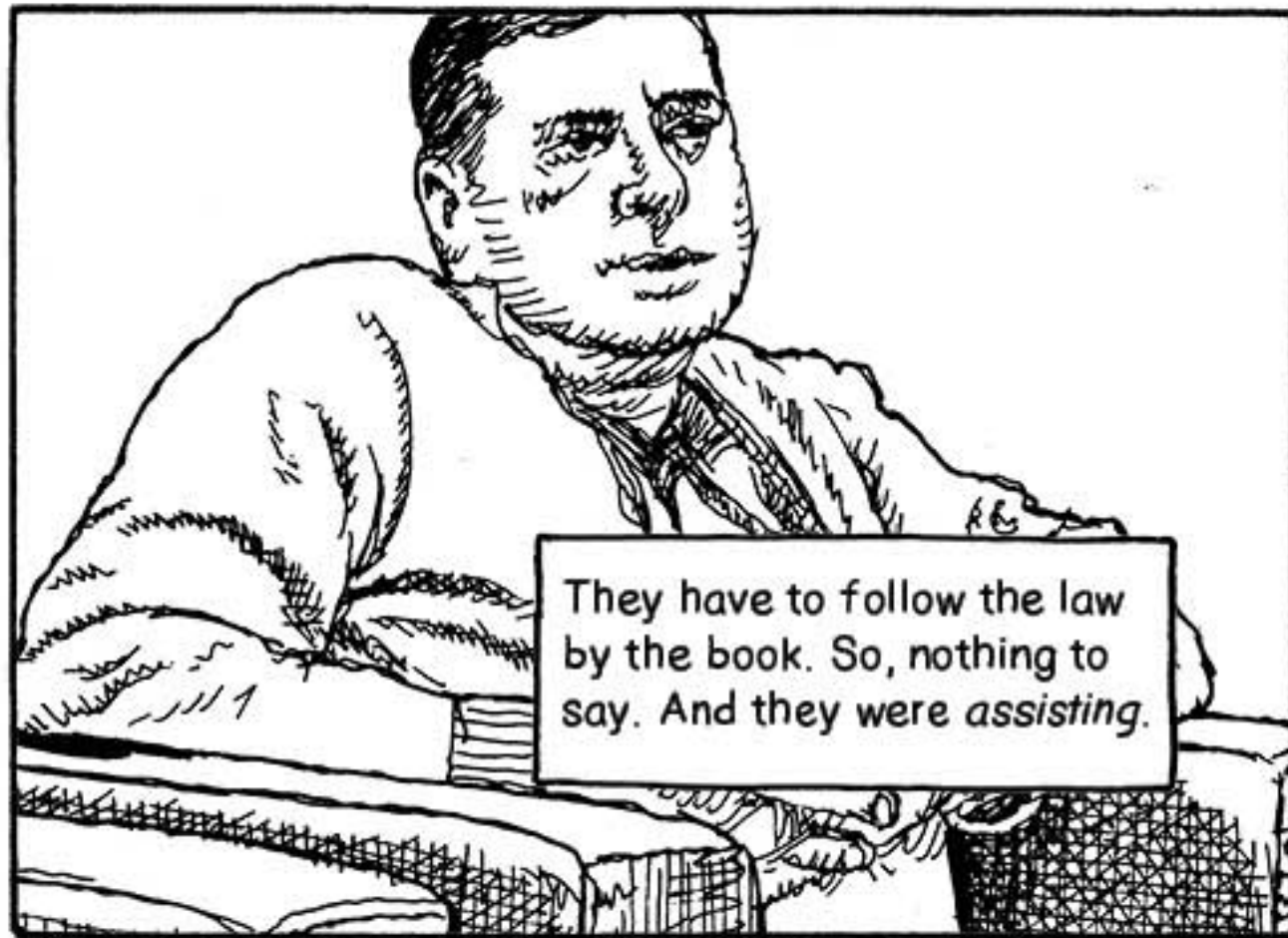
We don't know what kind of negotiations were necessary in order to tackle this problem.



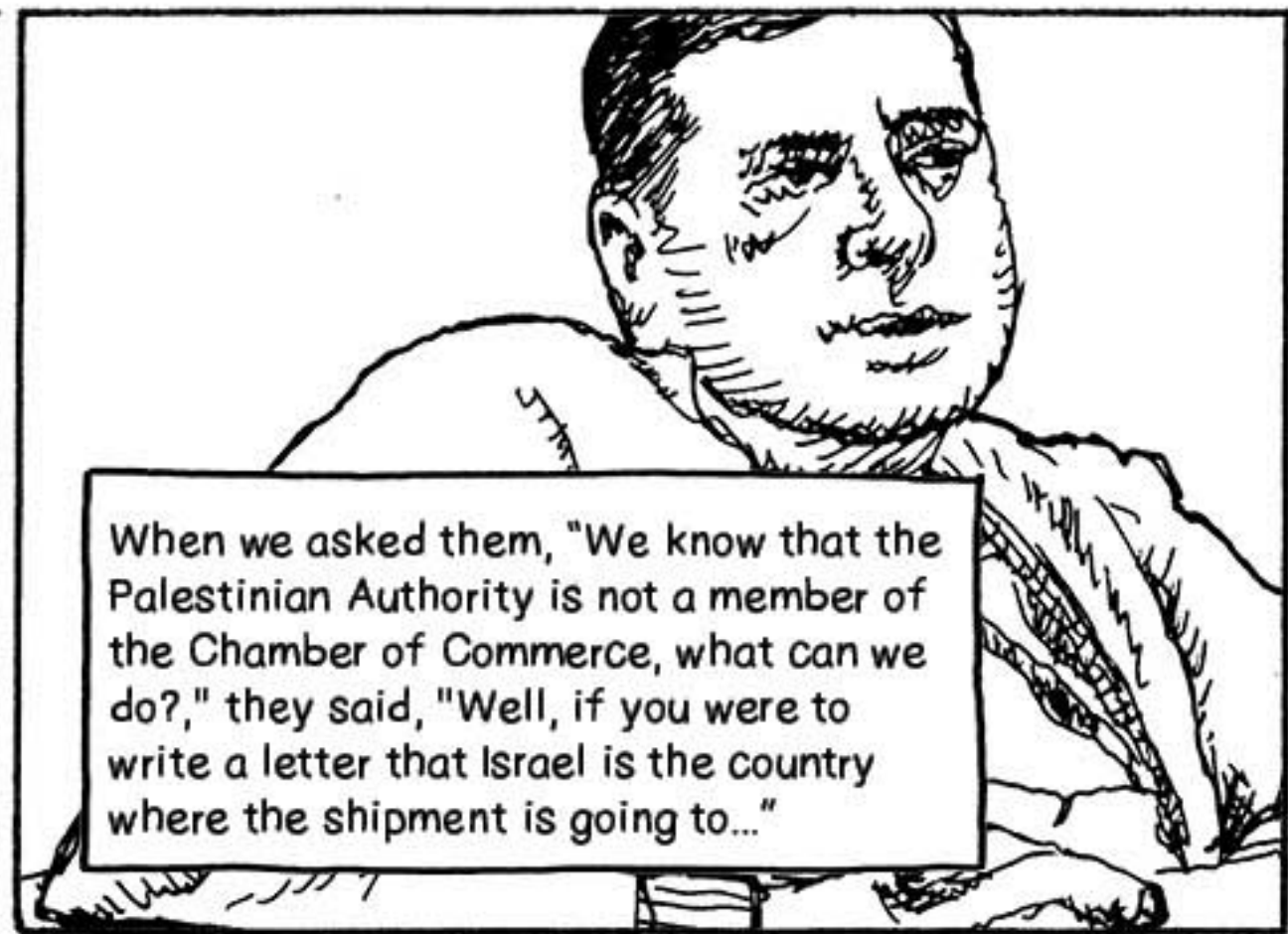
We know up to a certain extent on our side, but it was really a big hassle.



The customs office, they don't consider it as politics, they are acting according to the regulations and the law.



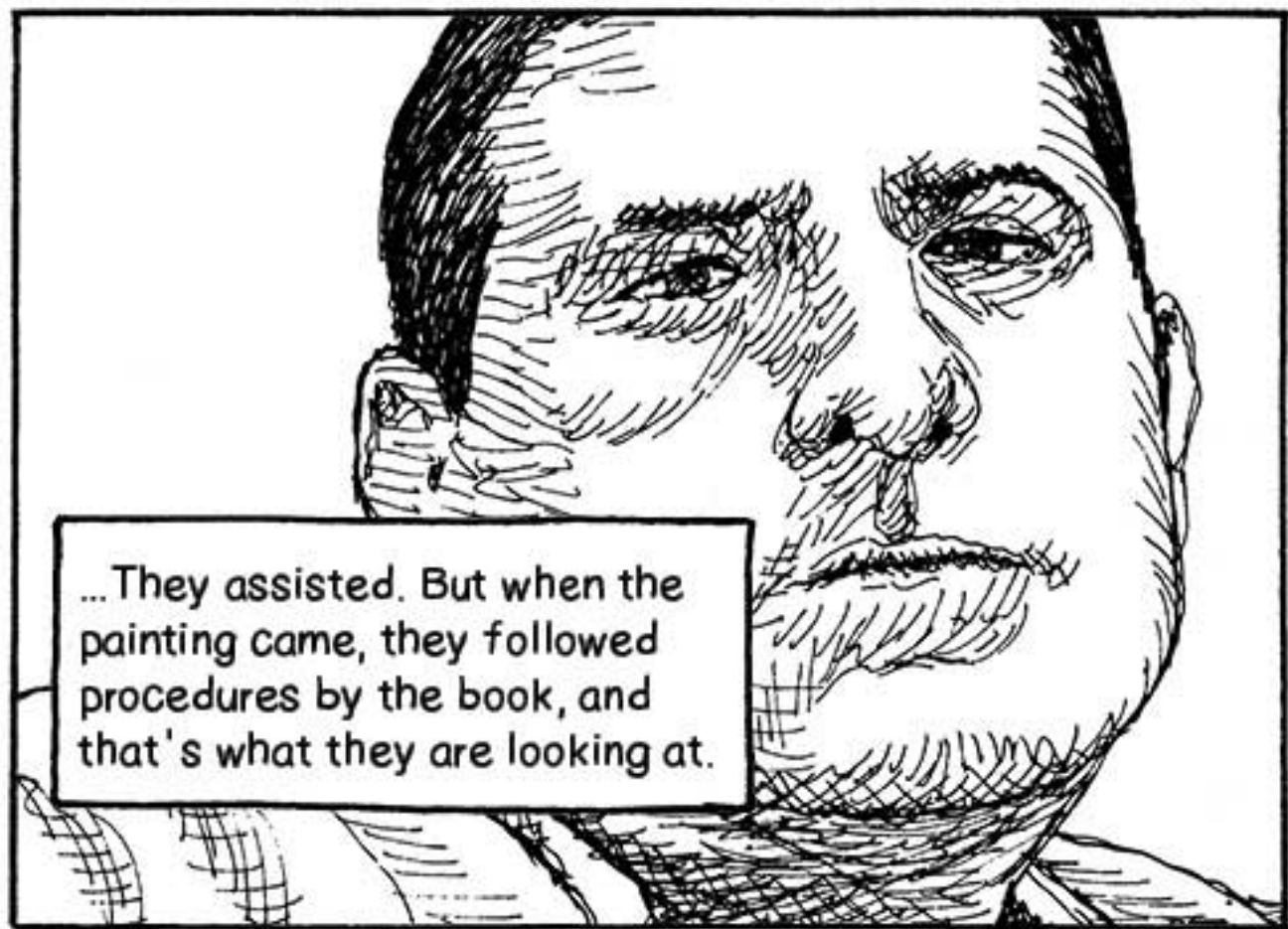
They have to follow the law by the book. So, nothing to say. And they were *assisting*.



When we asked them, "We know that the Palestinian Authority is not a member of the Chamber of Commerce, what can we do?" they said, "Well, if you were to write a letter that Israel is the country where the shipment is going to..."



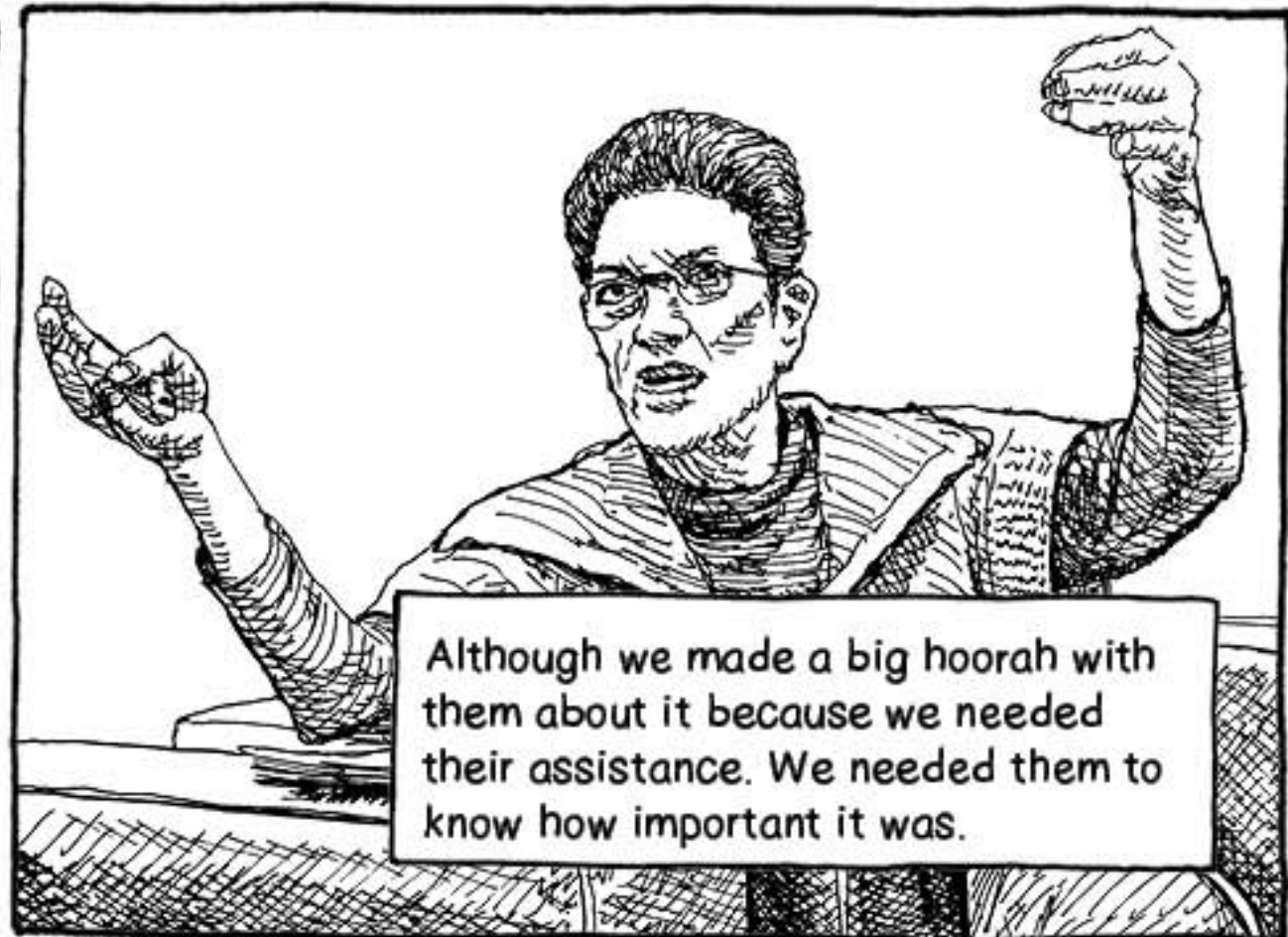
You can say that they helped...



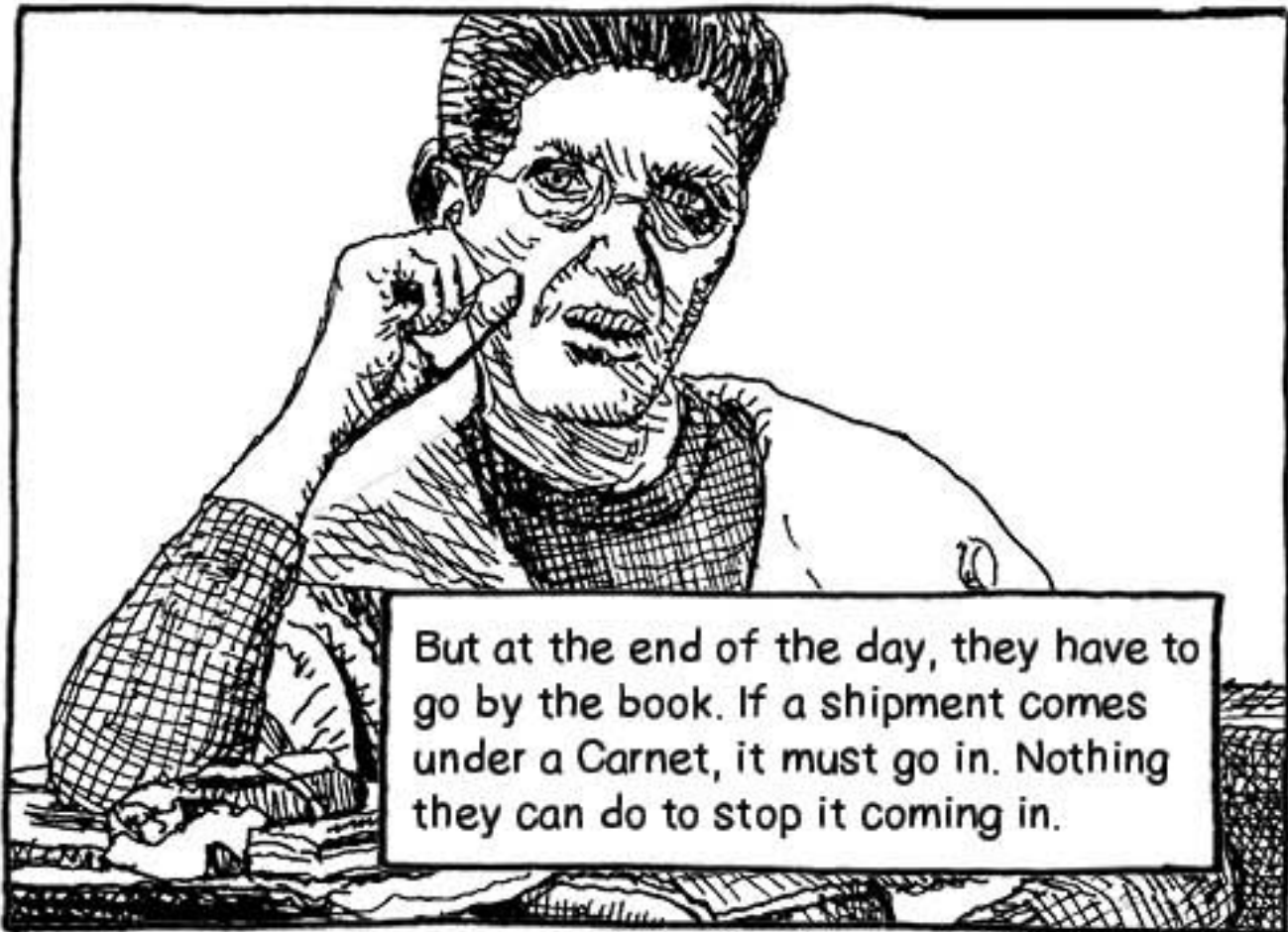
...They assisted. But when the painting came, they followed procedures by the book, and that's what they are looking at.



They were not involved with anything beyond that.



Although we made a big hoorah with them about it because we needed their assistance. We needed them to know how important it was.

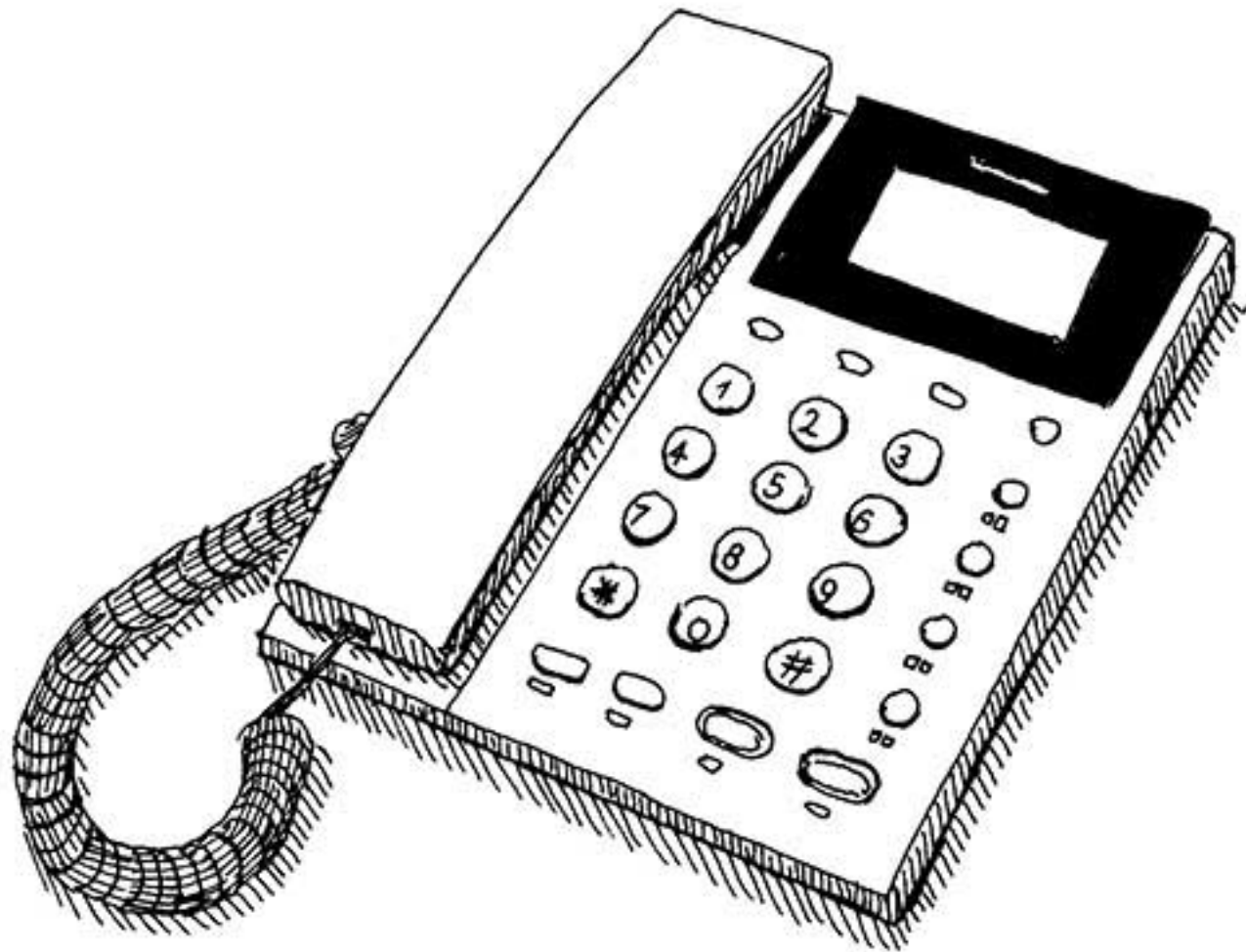


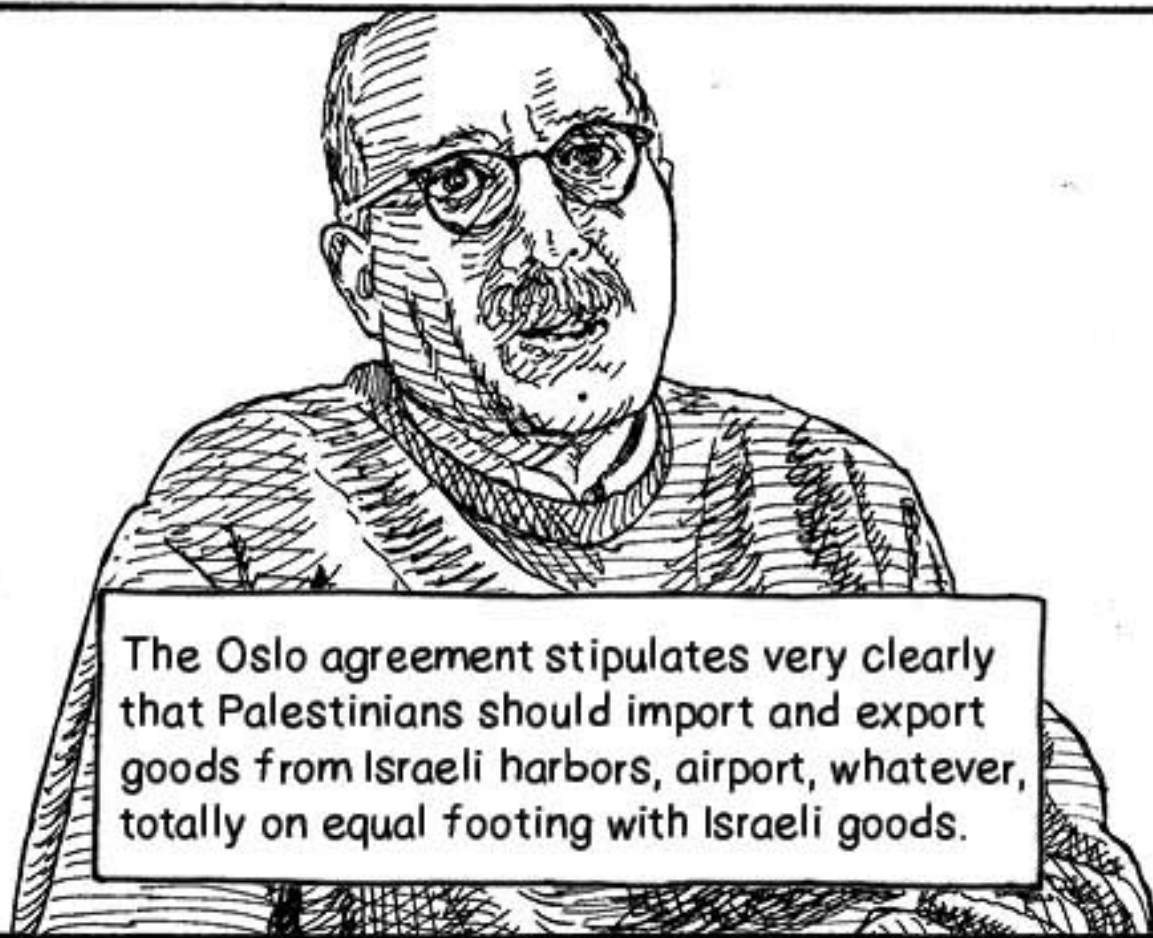
But at the end of the day, they have to go by the book. If a shipment comes under a Carnet, it must go in. Nothing they can do to stop it coming in.



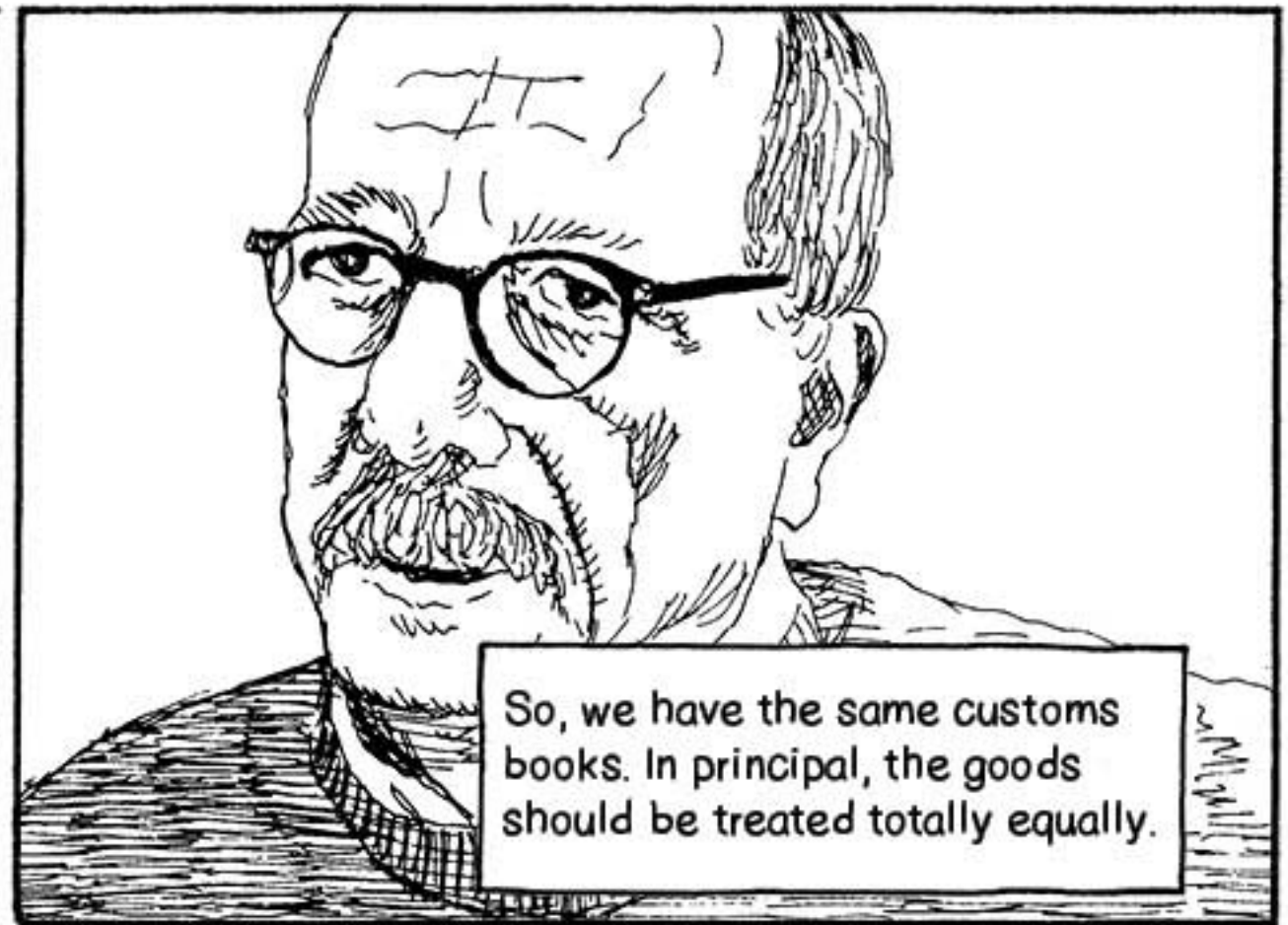
I mean, they can ask for inspection or whatever, but if everything is done by the book, they cannot stop it.

GRAY AREAS...

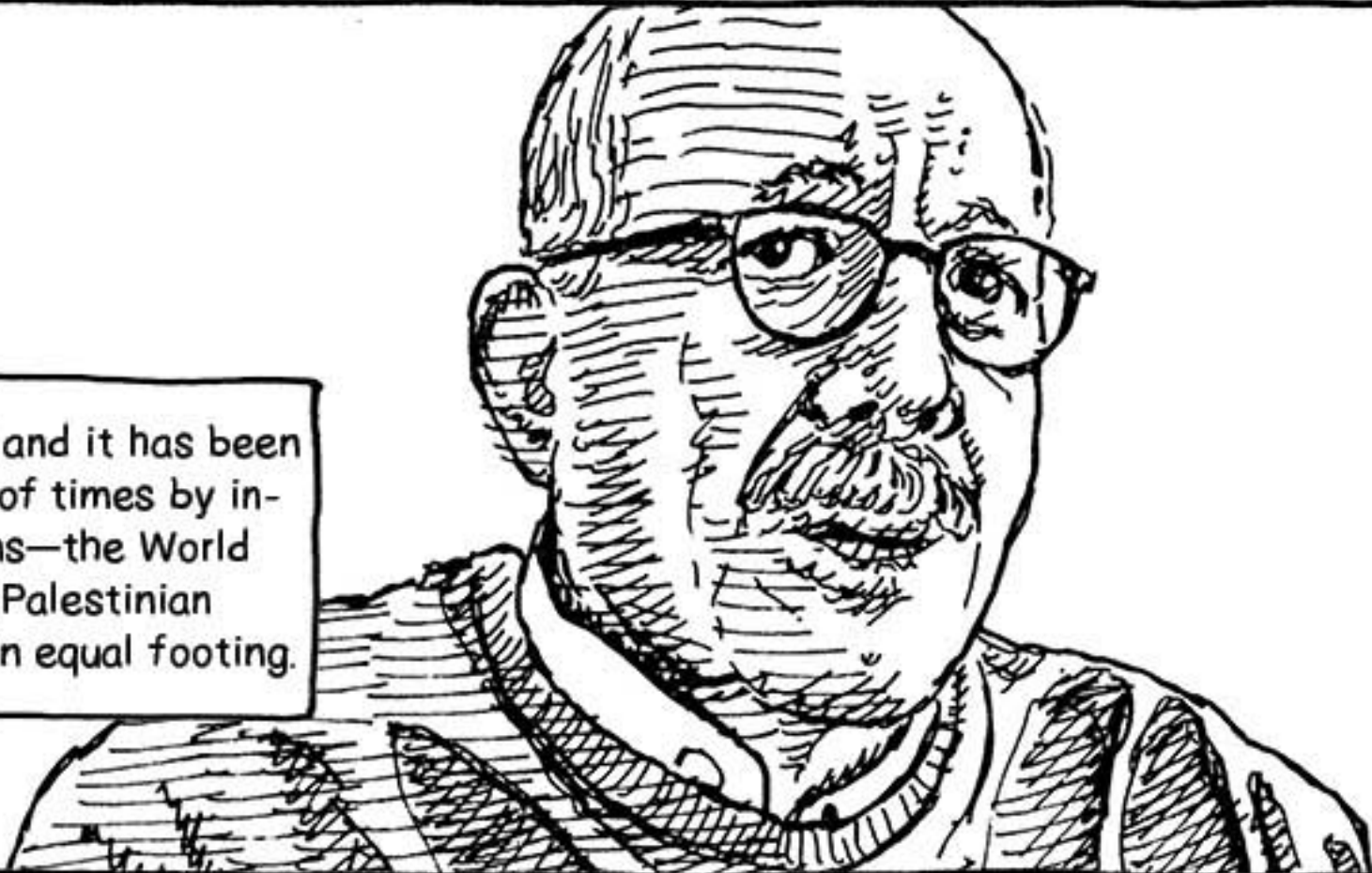




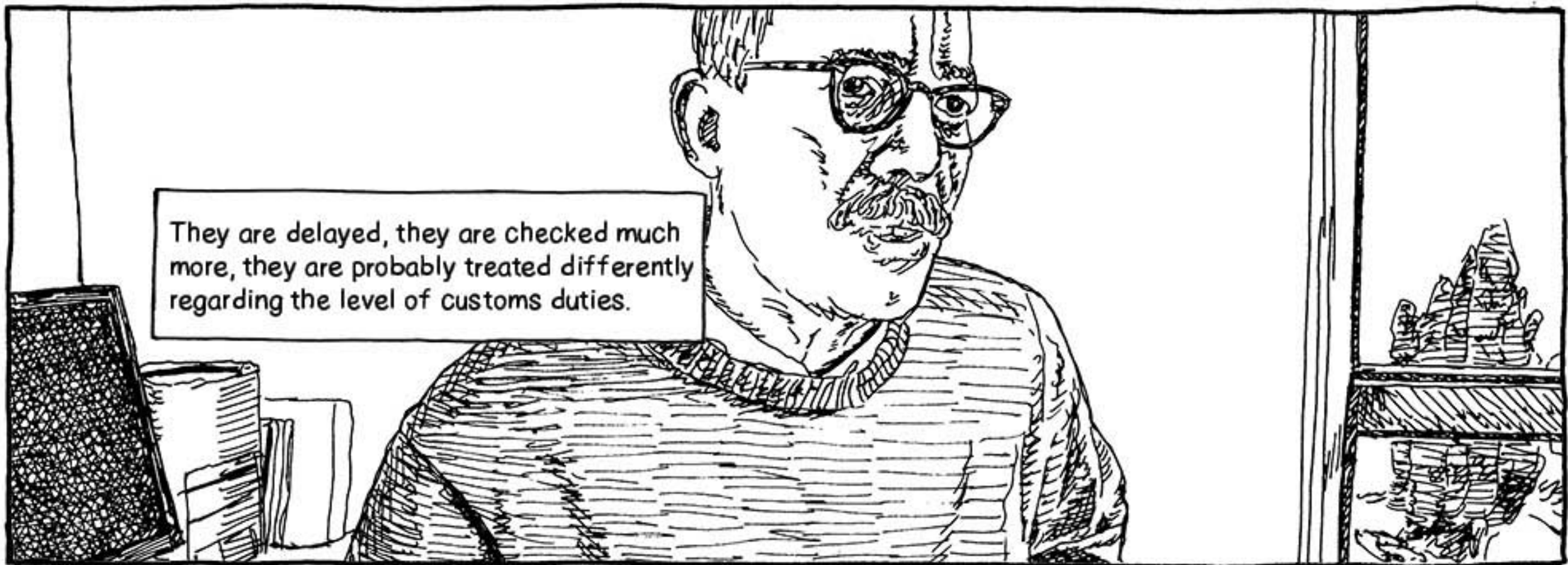
The Oslo agreement stipulates very clearly that Palestinians should import and export goods from Israeli harbors, airport, whatever, totally on equal footing with Israeli goods.



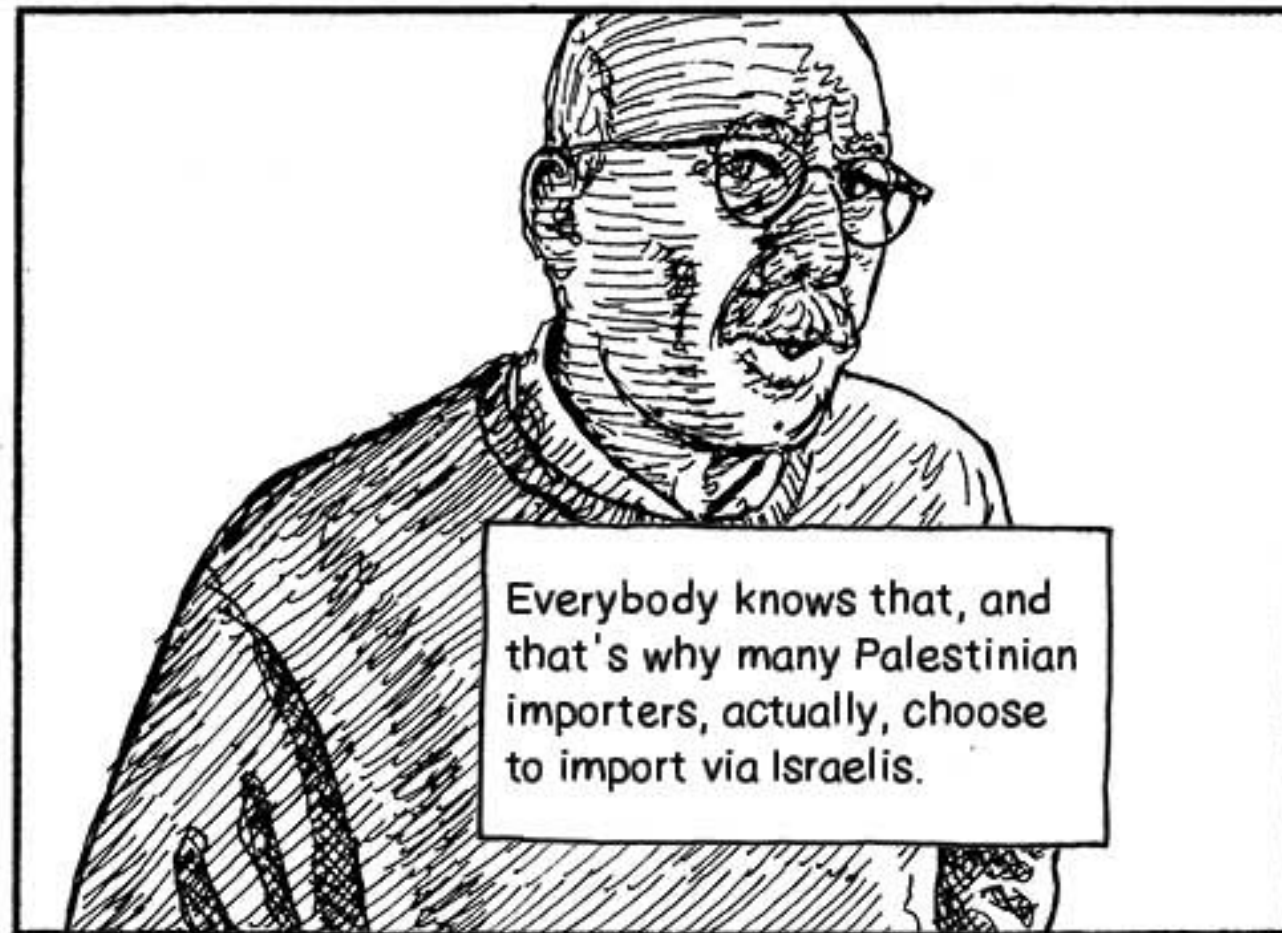
So, we have the same customs books. In principal, the goods should be treated totally equally.



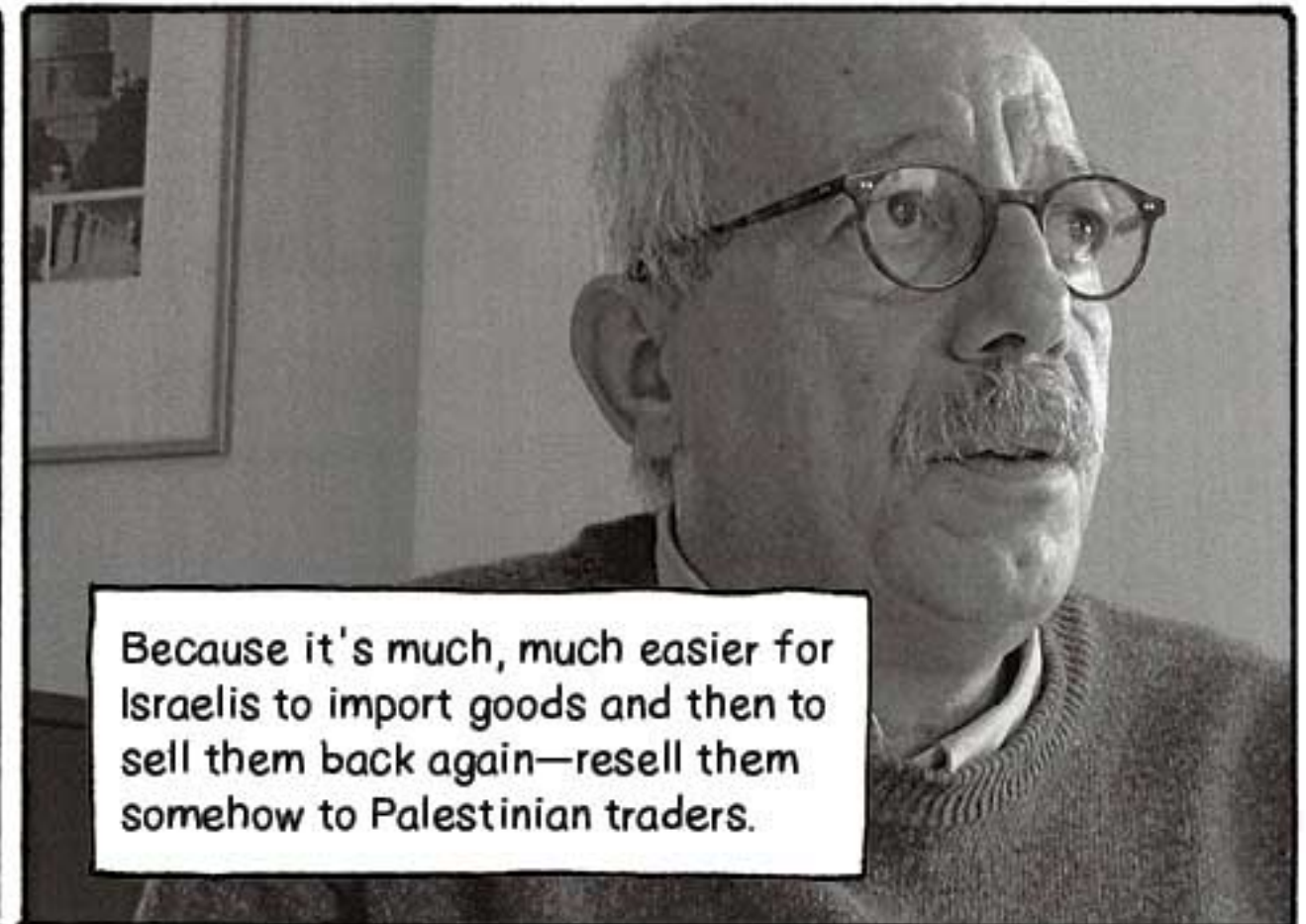
Now, everybody knows and it has been documented hundreds of times by international organizations—the World Bank, everybody—that Palestinian goods are not treated on equal footing.



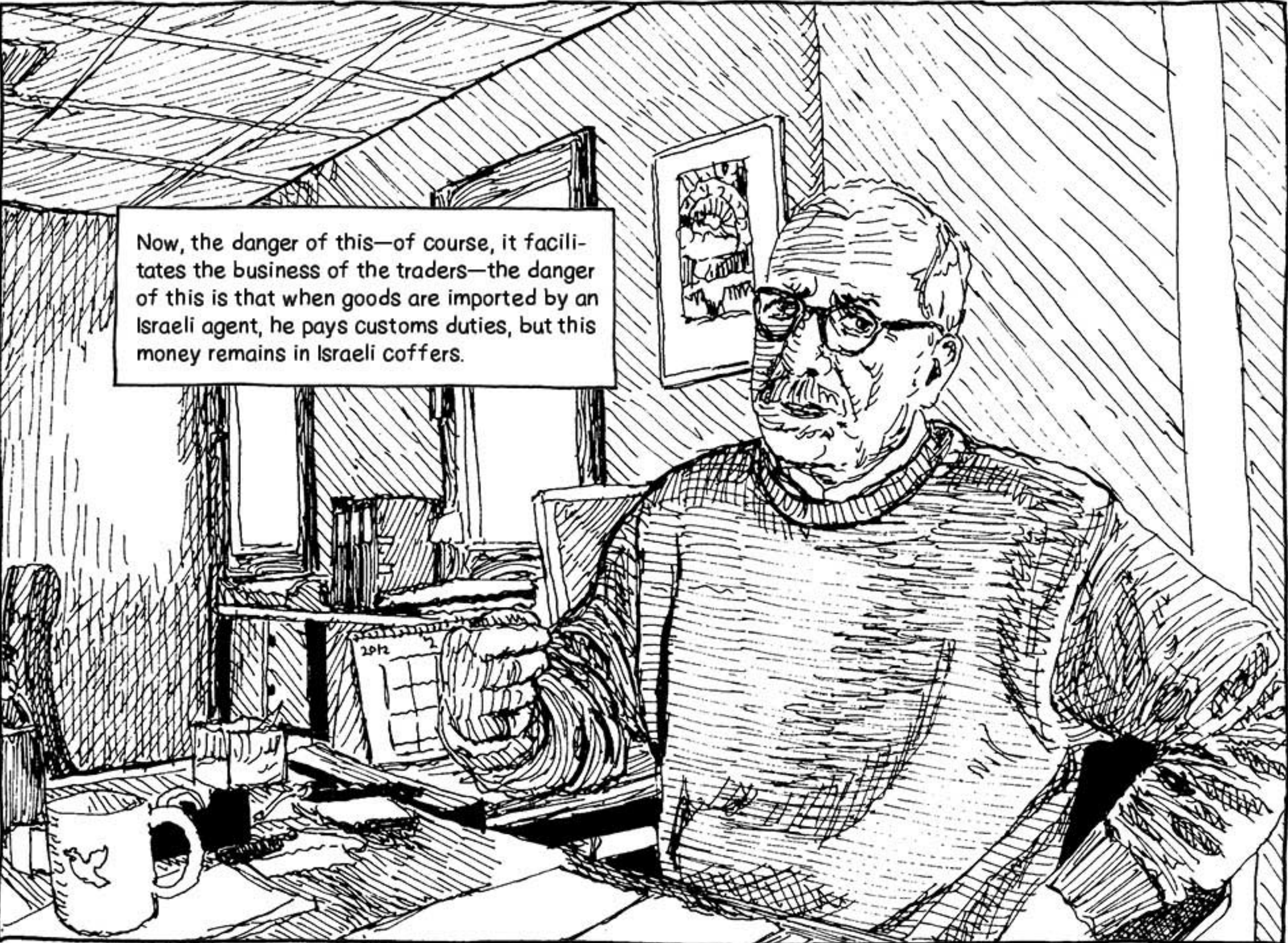
They are delayed, they are checked much more, they are probably treated differently regarding the level of customs duties.



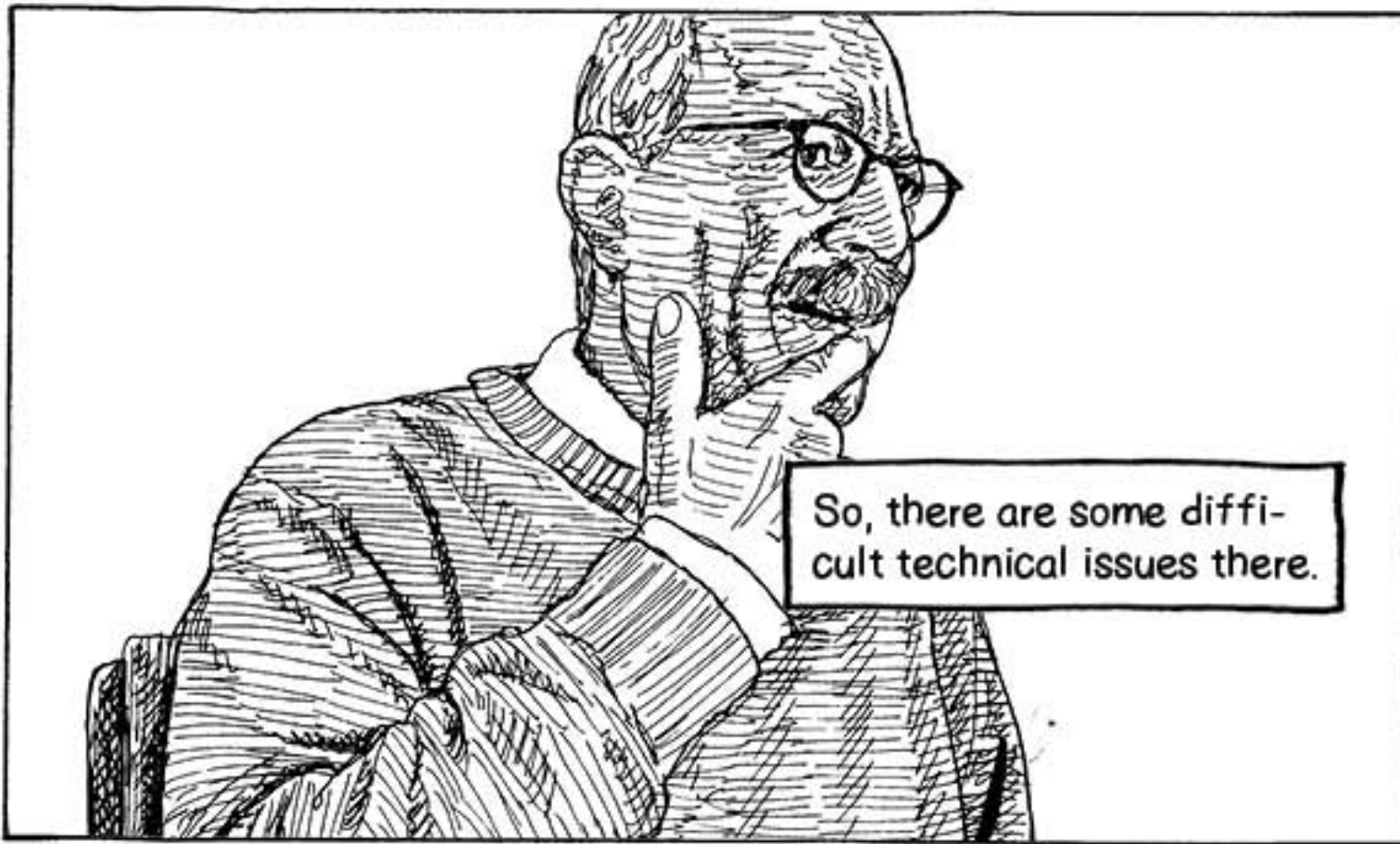
Everybody knows that, and that's why many Palestinian importers, actually, choose to import via Israelis.



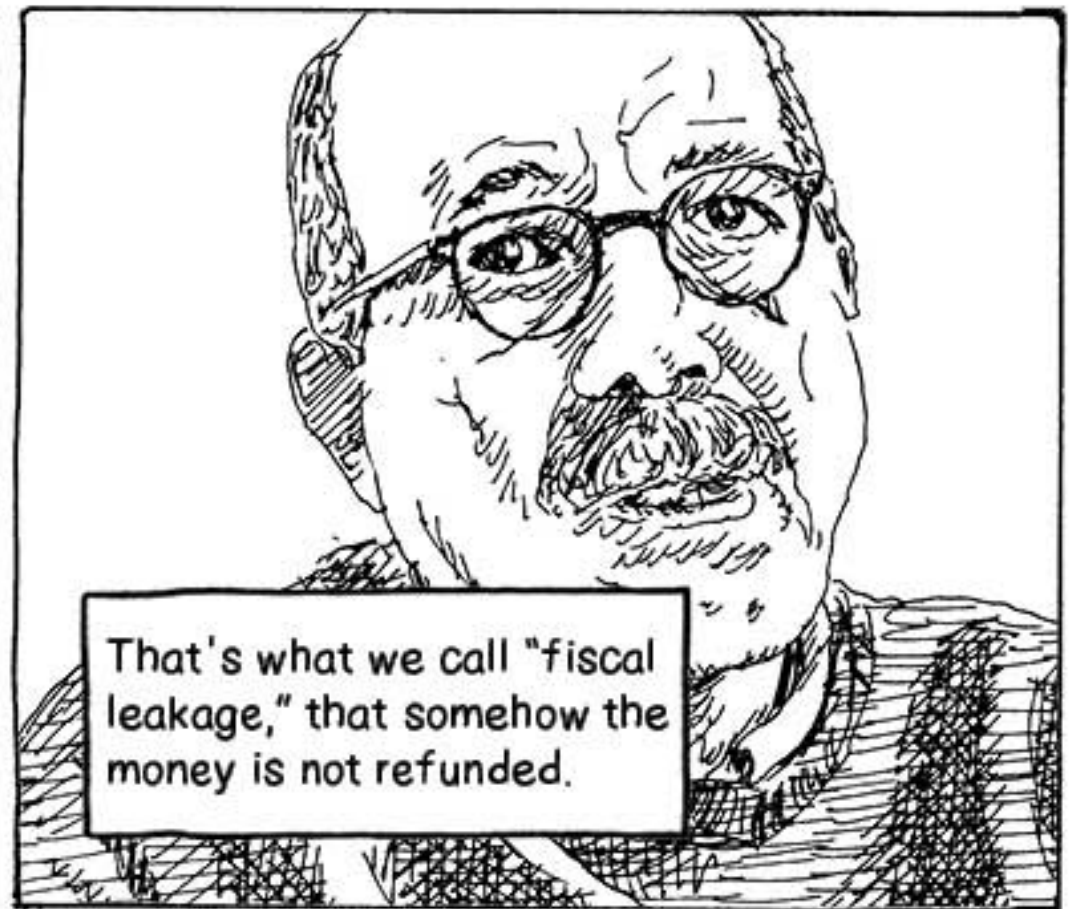
Because it's much, much easier for Israelis to import goods and then to sell them back again—resell them somehow to Palestinian traders.



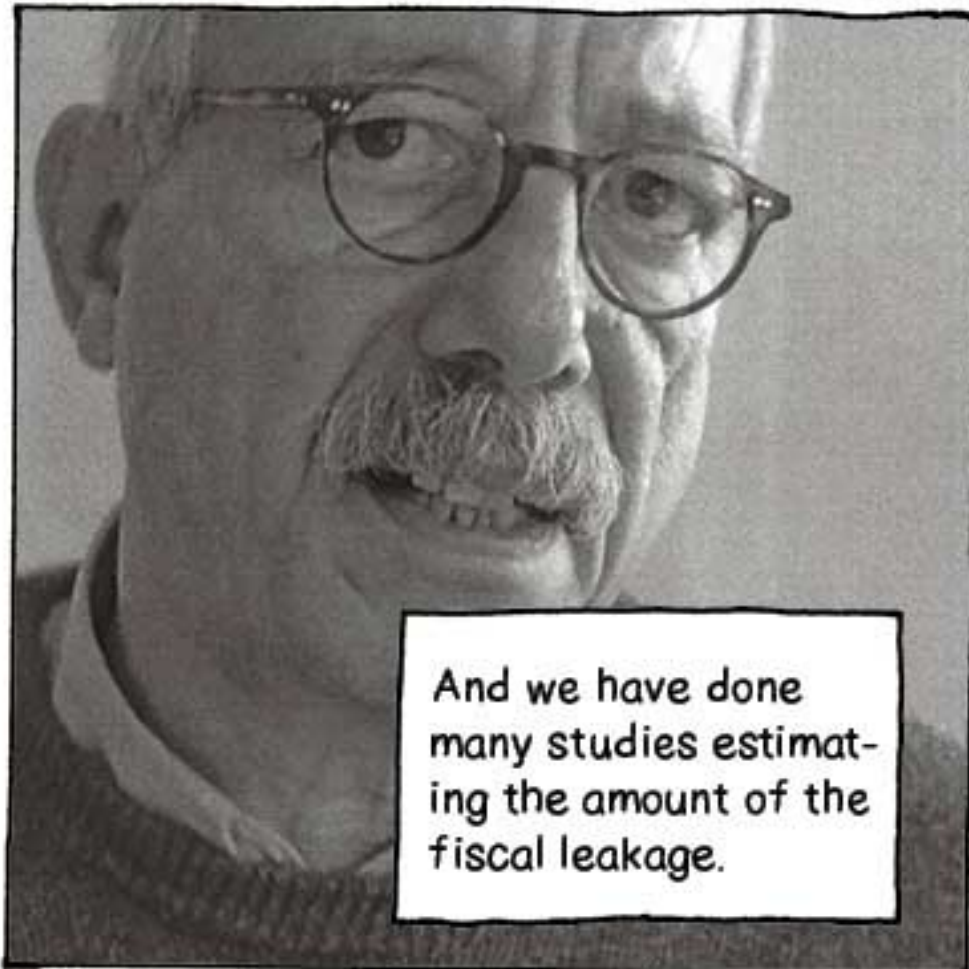
Now, the danger of this—of course, it facilitates the business of the traders—the danger of this is that when goods are imported by an Israeli agent, he pays customs duties, but this money remains in Israeli coffers.



So, there are some difficult technical issues there.



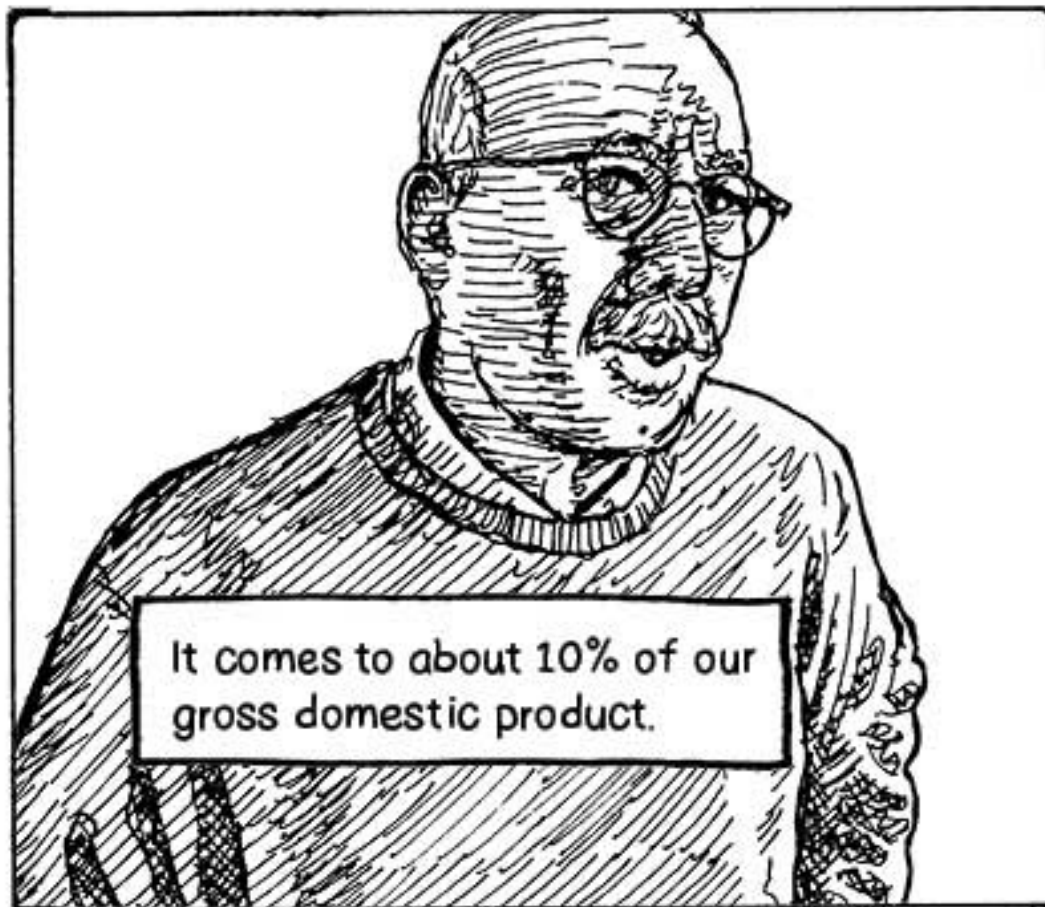
That's what we call "fiscal leakage," that somehow the money is not refunded.



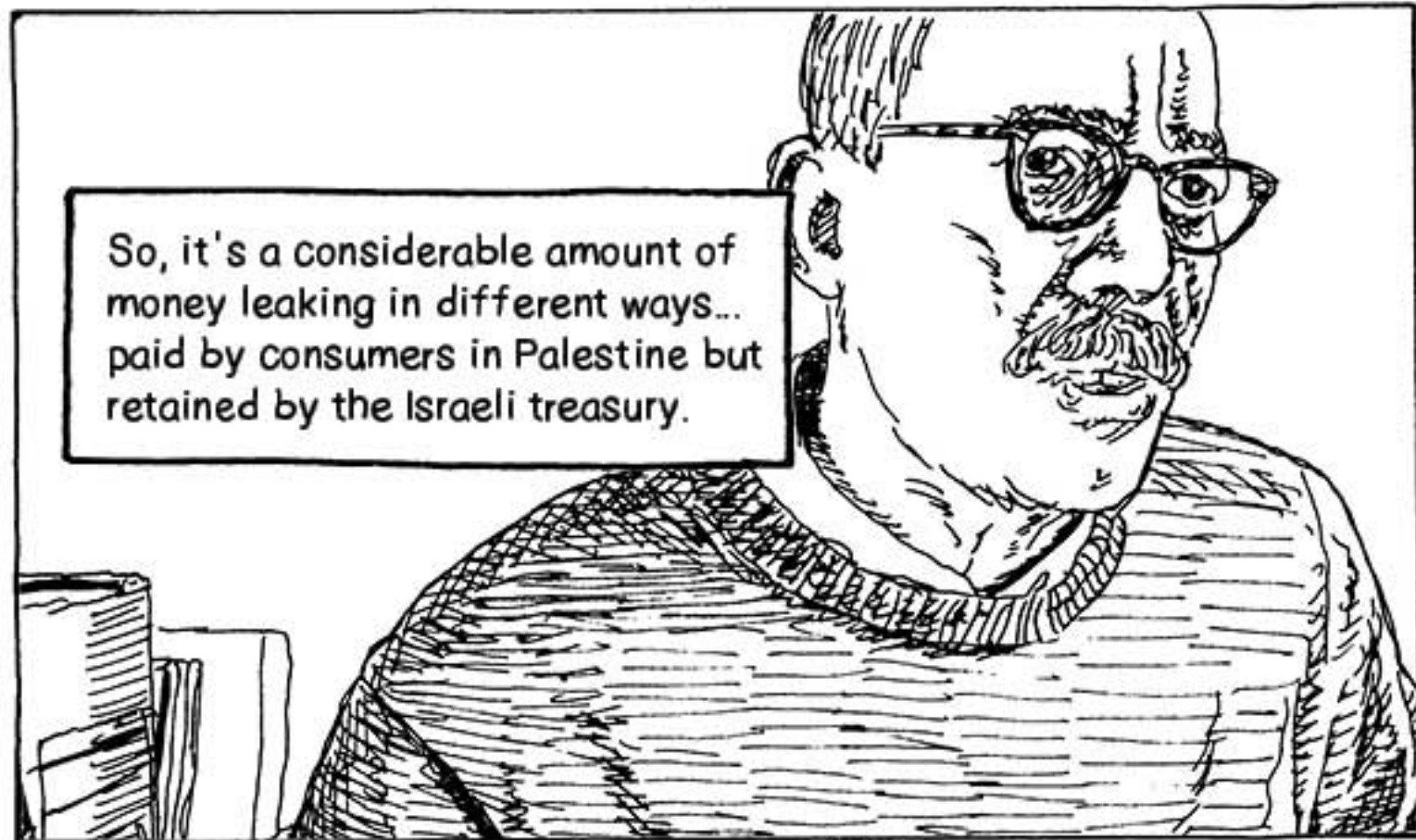
And we have done many studies estimating the amount of the fiscal leakage.



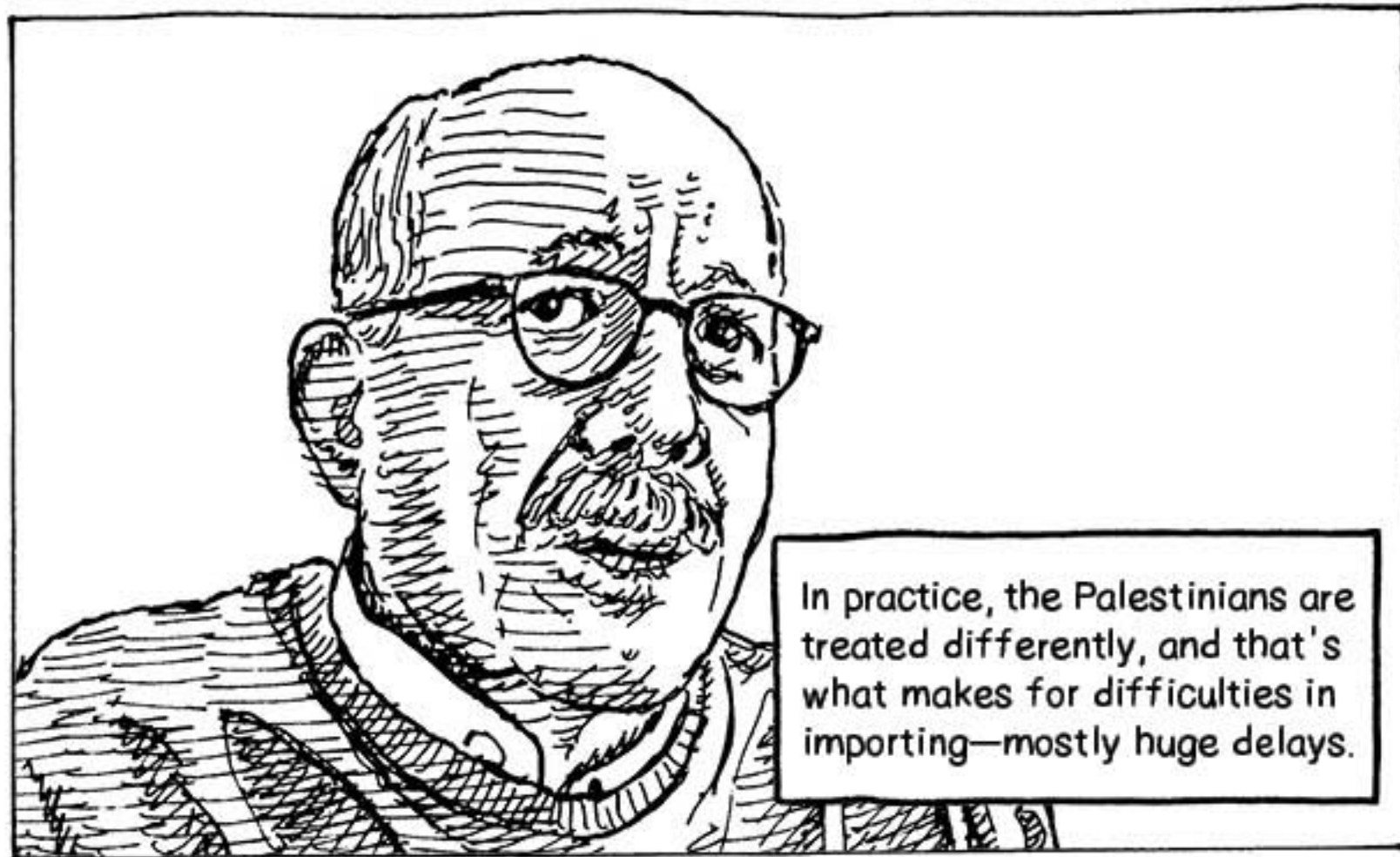
That is how taxes paid by Palestinian consumers actually are retained by Israel.



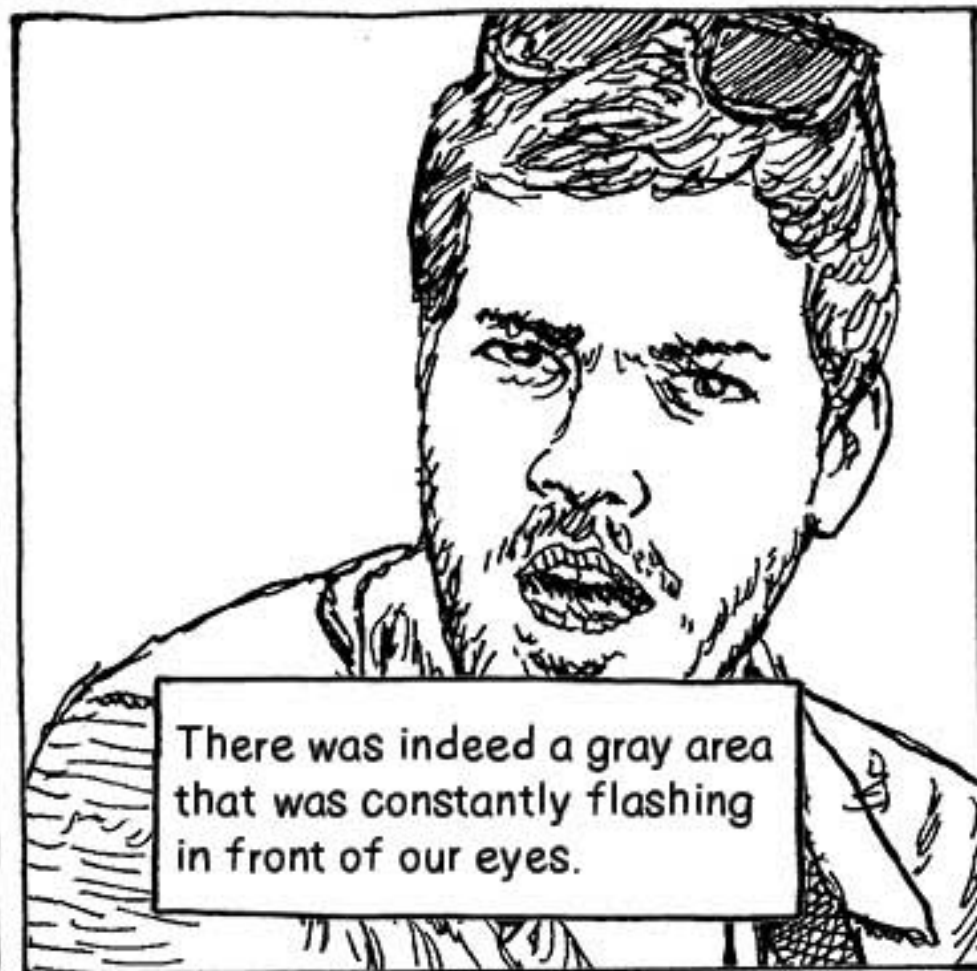
It comes to about 10% of our gross domestic product.



So, it's a considerable amount of money leaking in different ways... paid by consumers in Palestine but retained by the Israeli treasury.



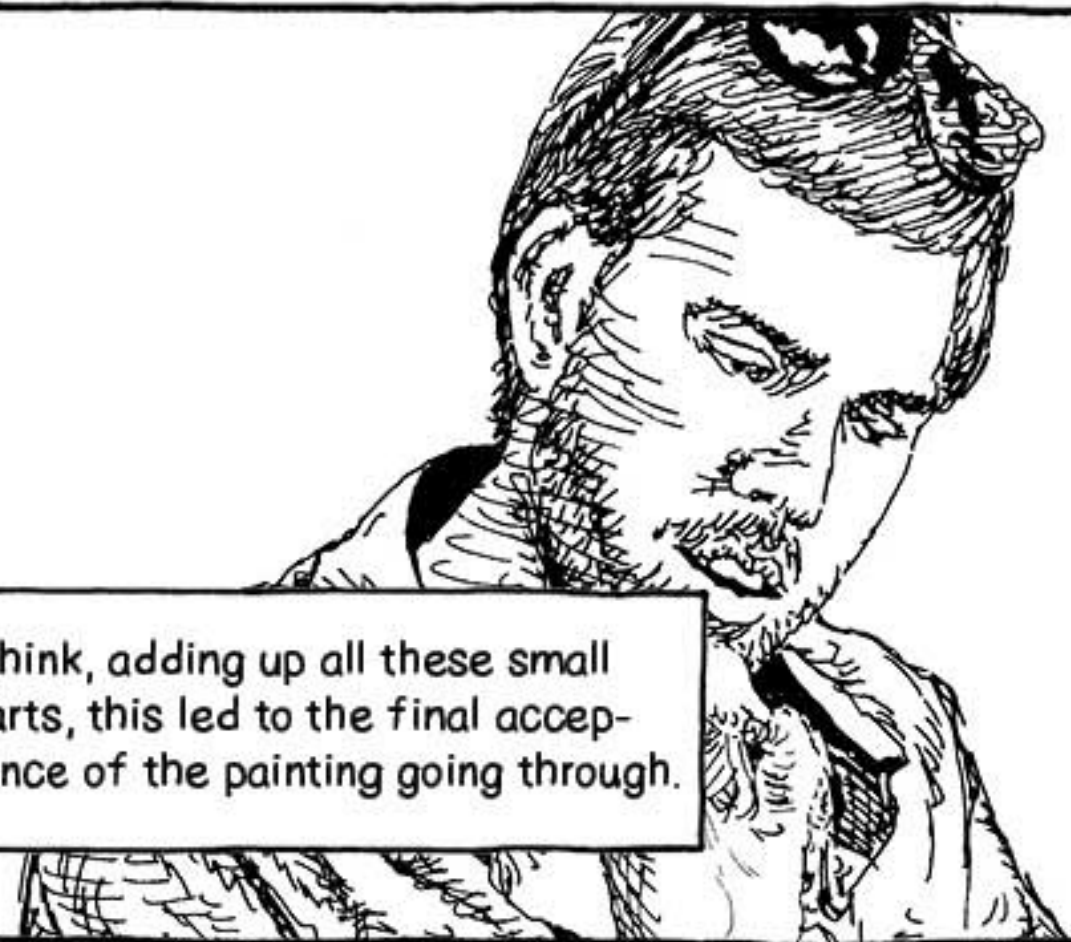
In practice, the Palestinians are treated differently, and that's what makes for difficulties in importing—mostly huge delays.



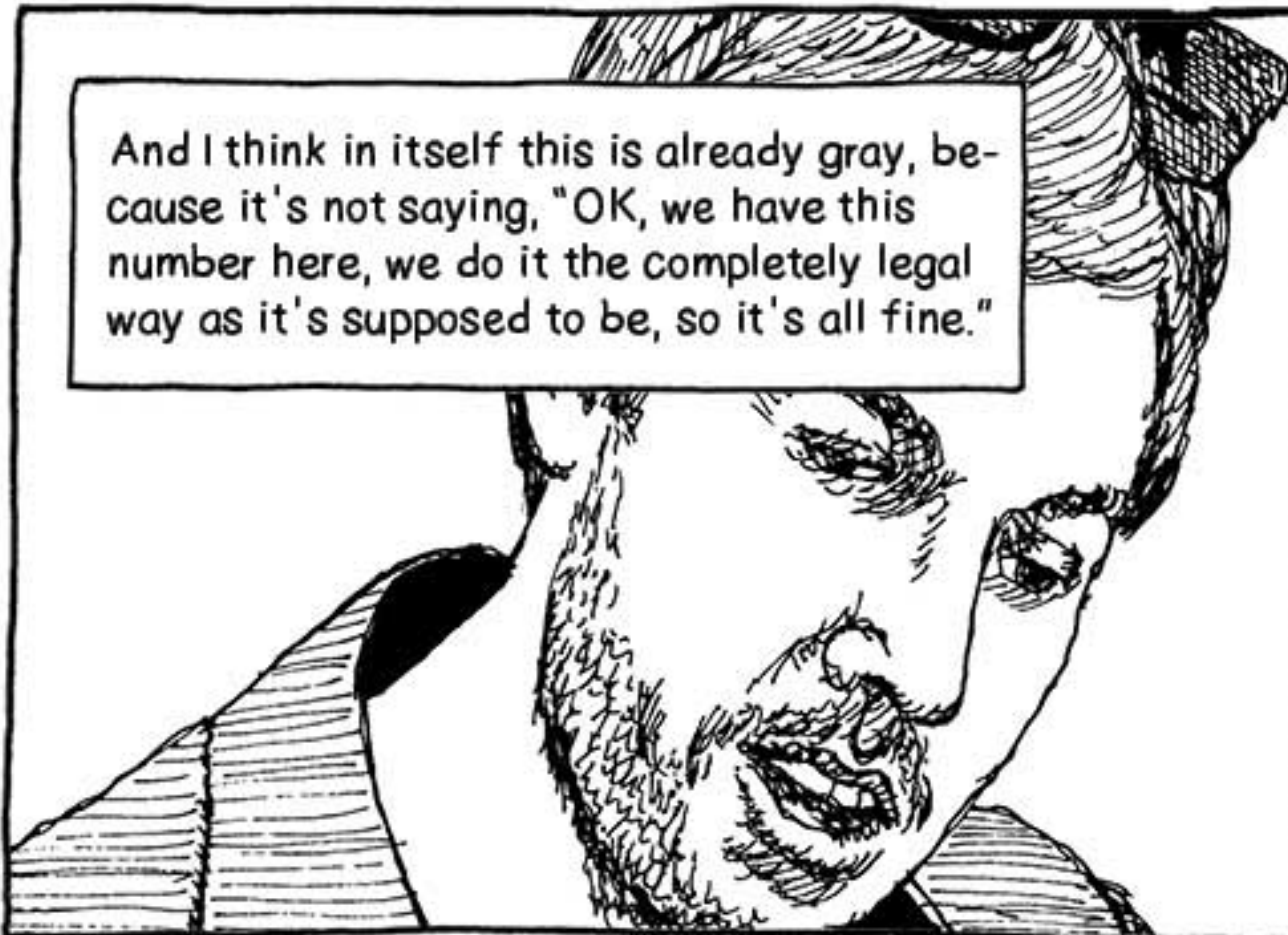
There was indeed a gray area that was constantly flashing in front of our eyes.



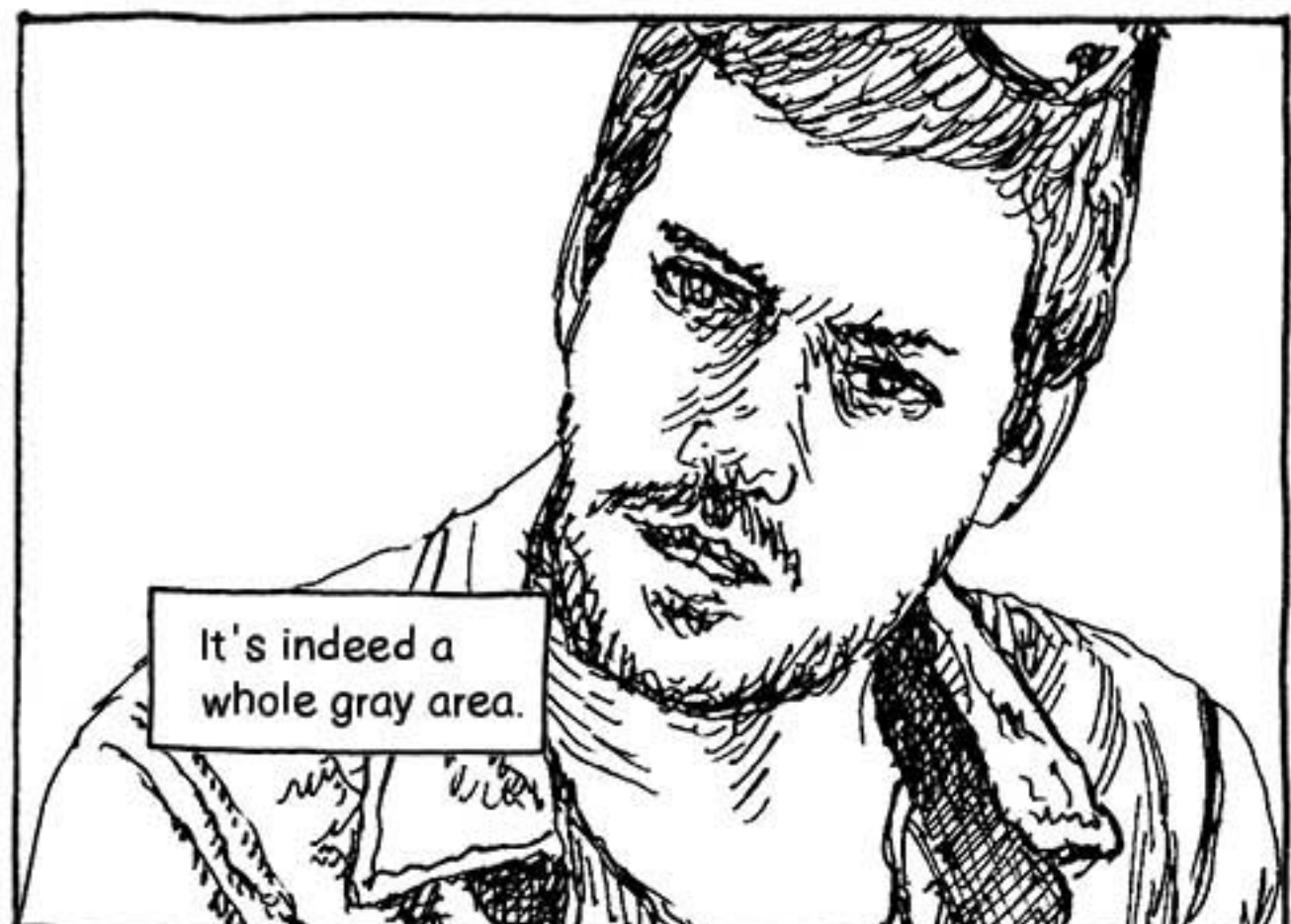
I think in the end it was a combination of having the Ministry of Finance tax number, together with some diplomatic pressure, together with negotiations between the transport company and the Israeli authorities that control goods coming in and out of the West Bank...



I think, adding up all these small parts, this led to the final acceptance of the painting going through.



And I think in itself this is already gray, because it's not saying, "OK, we have this number here, we do it the completely legal way as it's supposed to be, so it's all fine."



It's indeed a whole gray area.



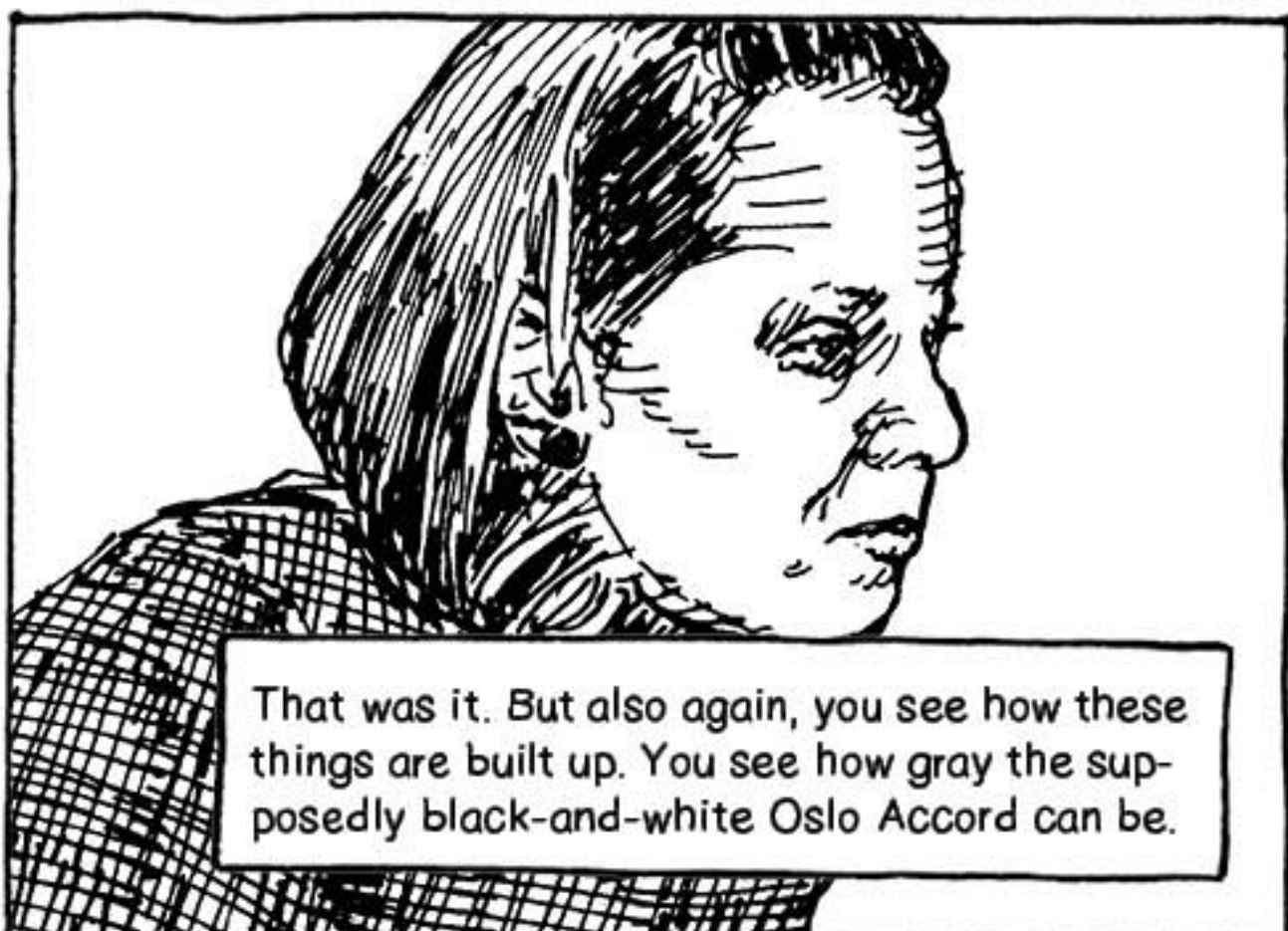
When Picasso in Palestine slowly, slowly became a reality, everything started to surface, including the Chamber of Commerce's fears.



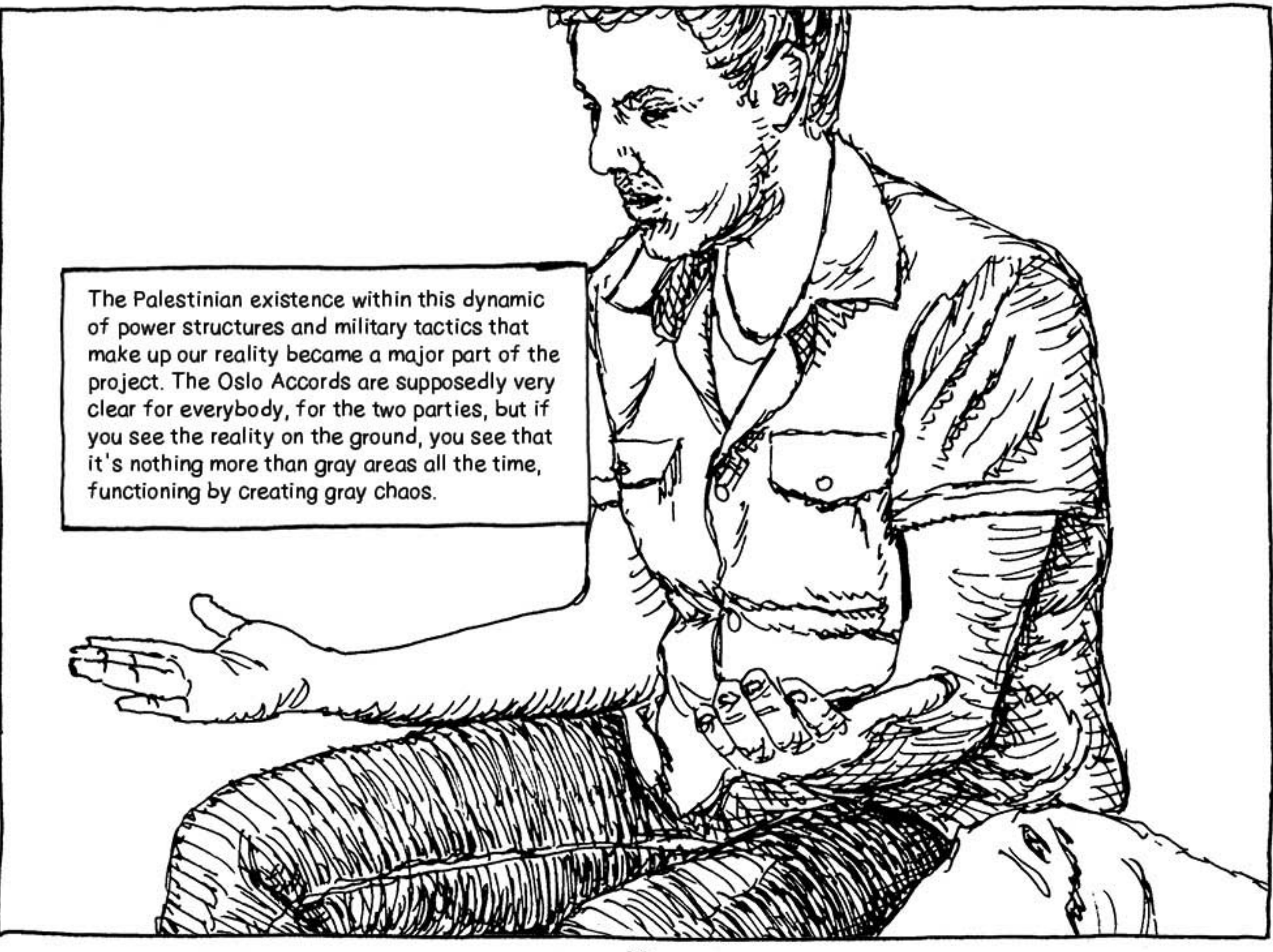
Suddenly the political aspect was a really tough one, and it was looked at from a different angle.



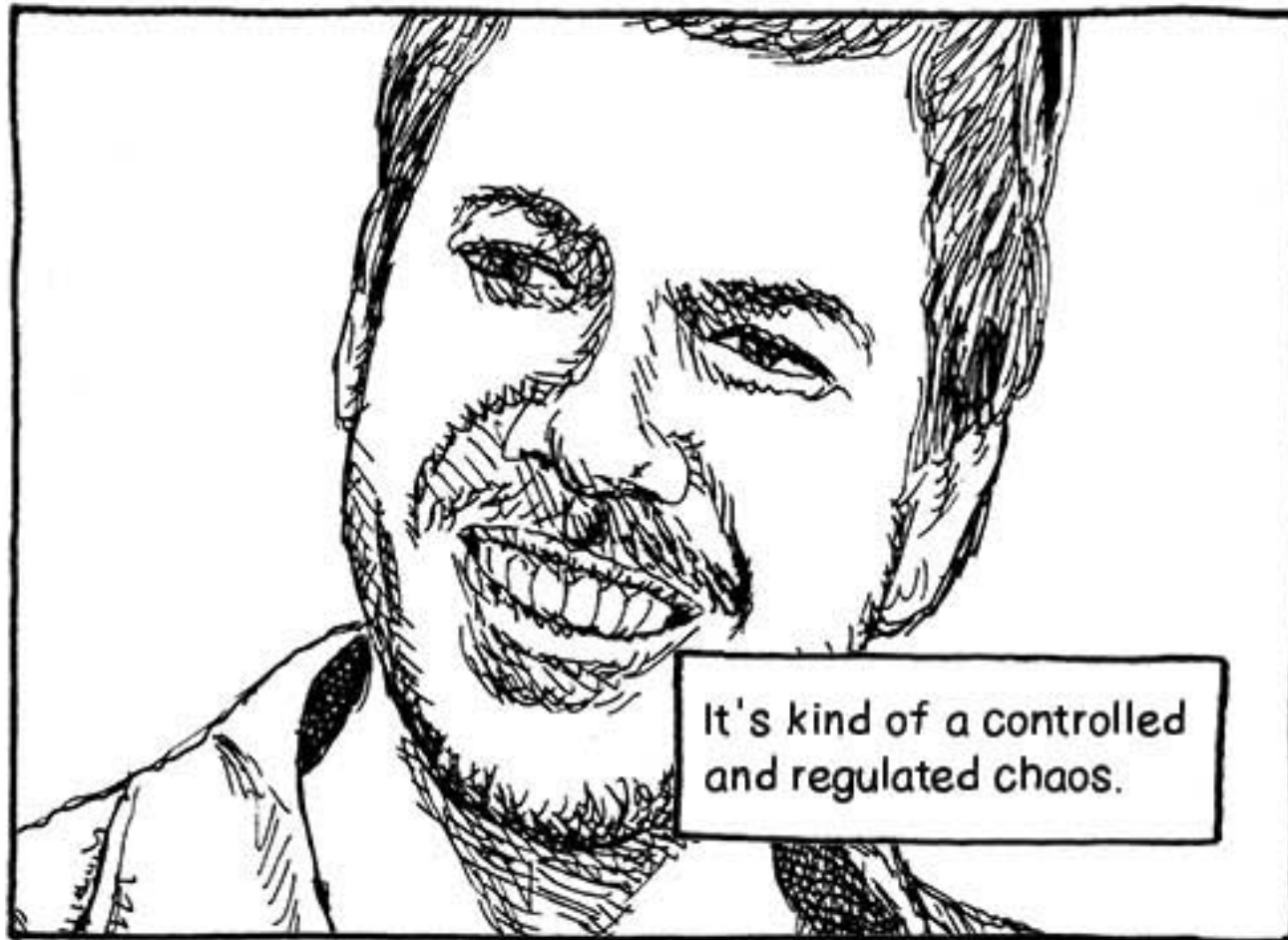
But really, Khaled's idea was strictly to ask, "Why not Palestine?" and "What does it take to bring a Picasso to Palestine?"



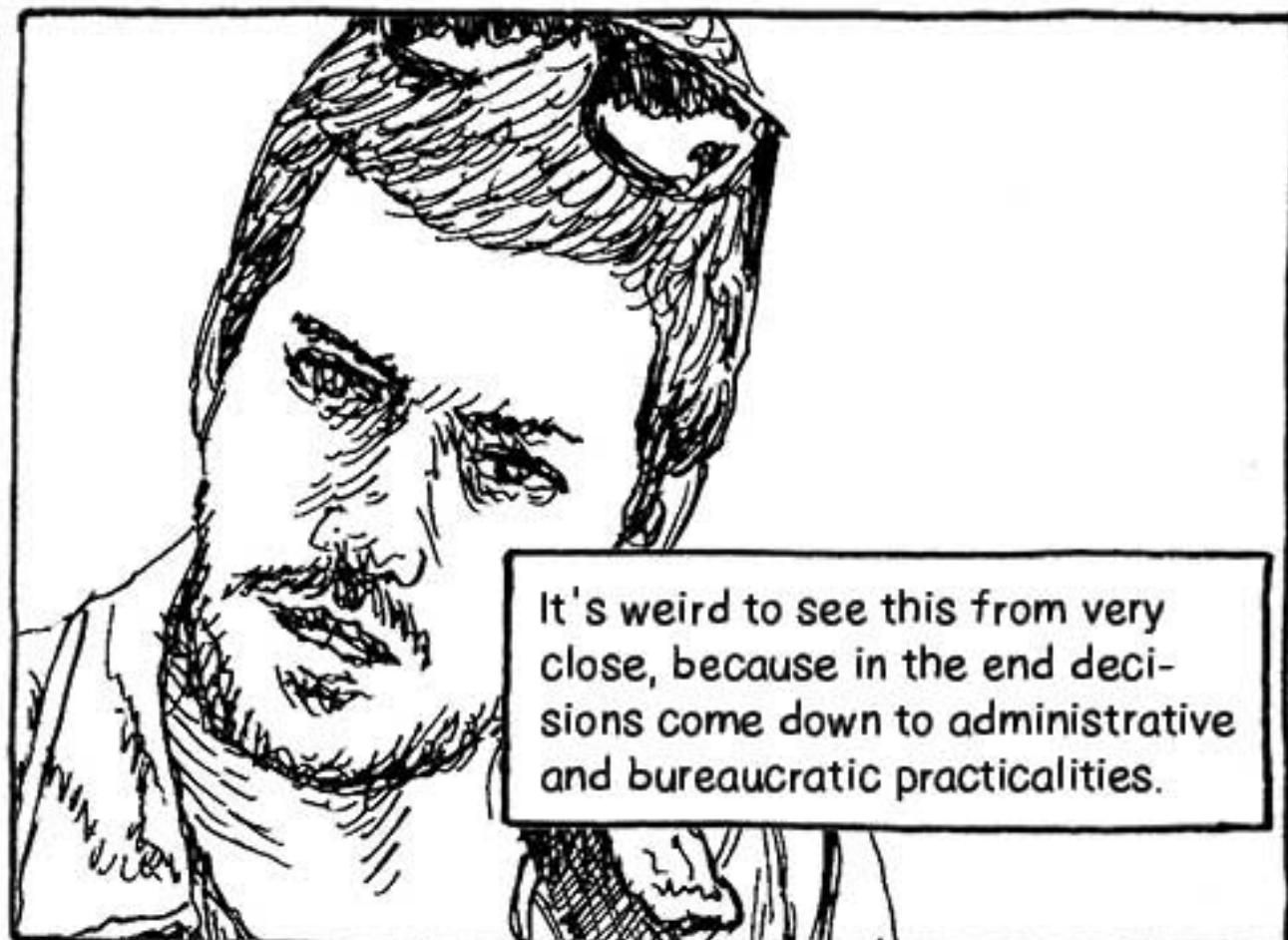
That was it. But also again, you see how these things are built up. You see how gray the supposedly black-and-white Oslo Accord can be.



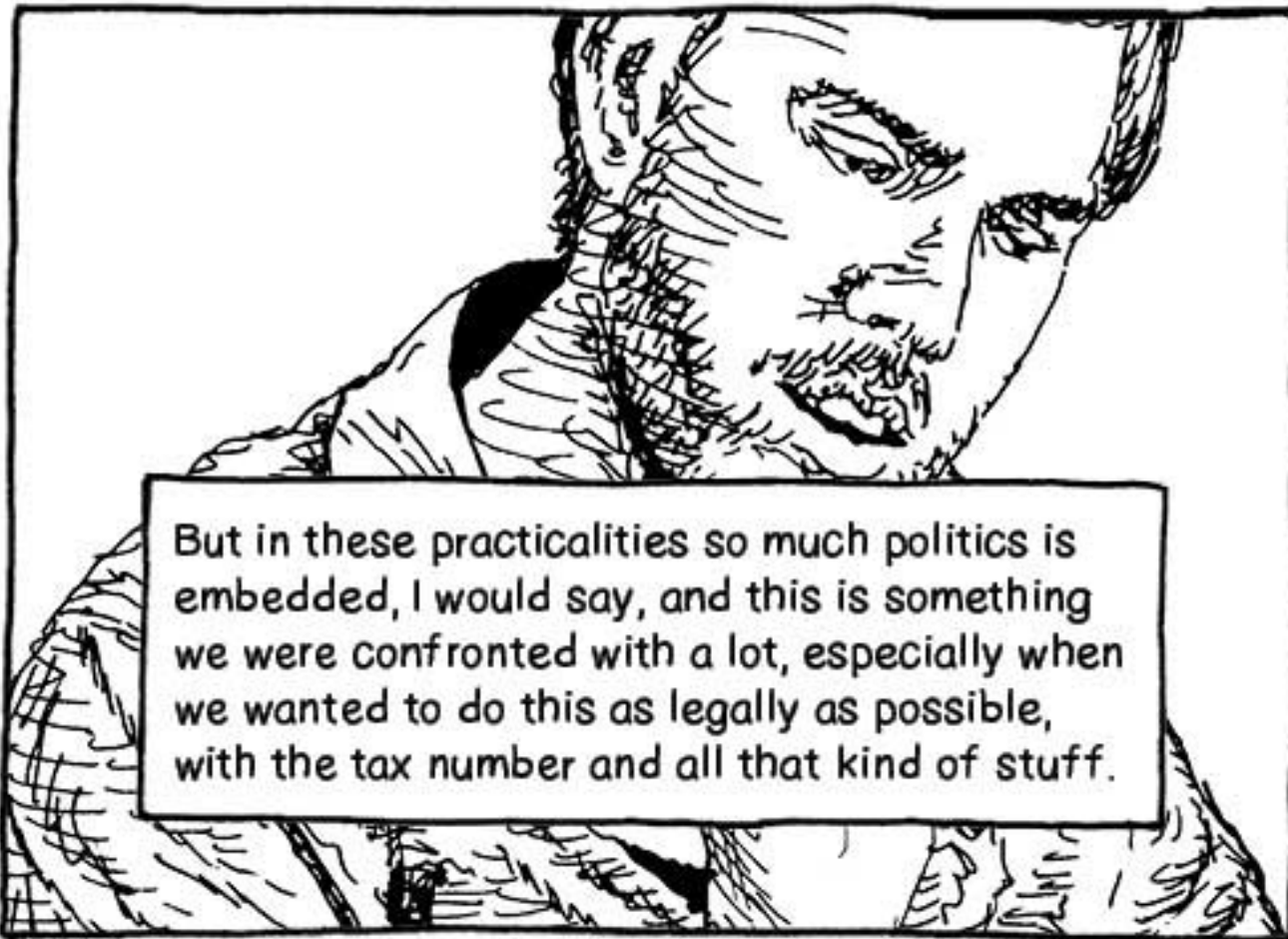
The Palestinian existence within this dynamic of power structures and military tactics that make up our reality became a major part of the project. The Oslo Accords are supposedly very clear for everybody, for the two parties, but if you see the reality on the ground, you see that it's nothing more than gray areas all the time, functioning by creating gray chaos.



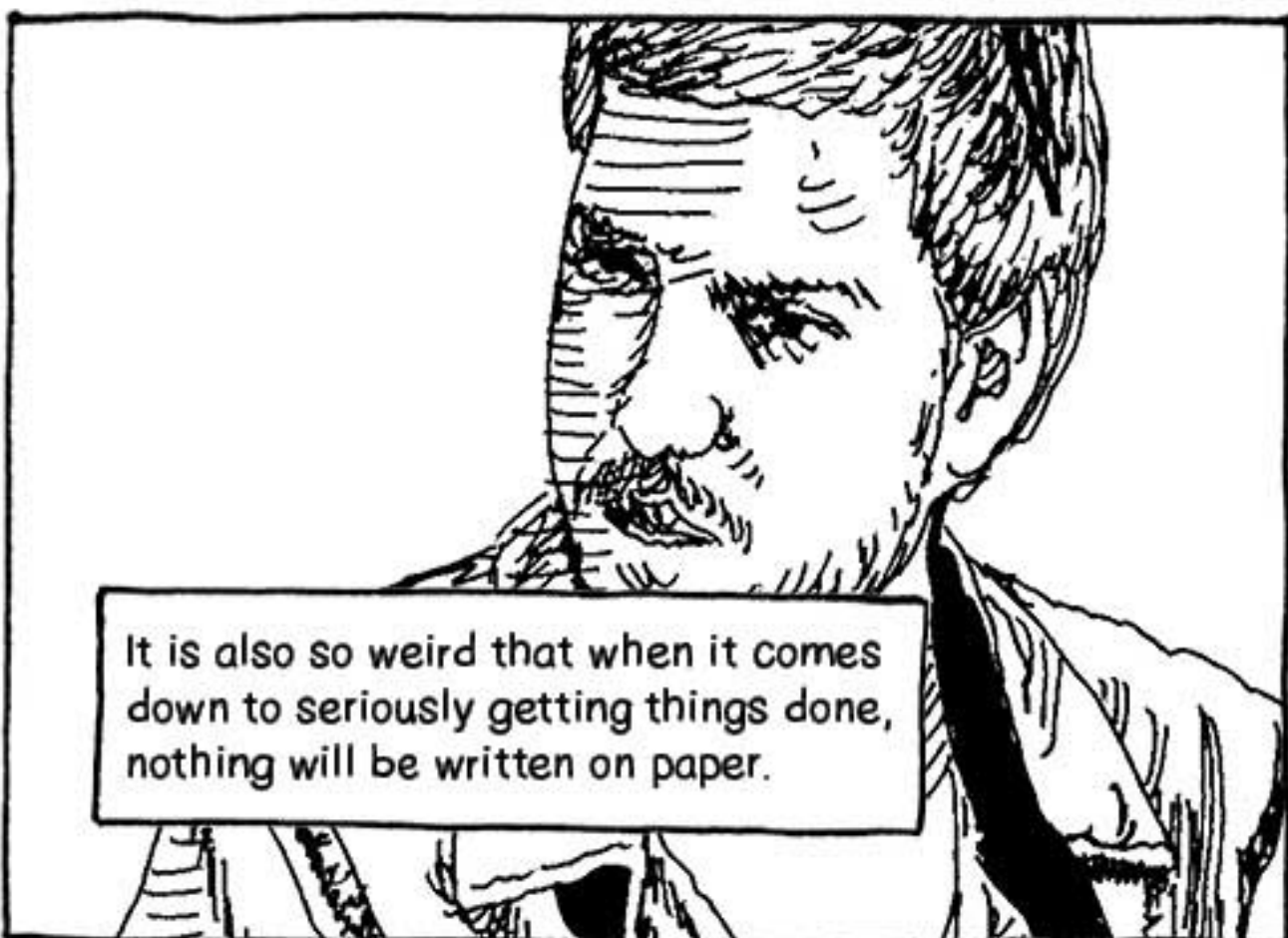
It's kind of a controlled and regulated chaos.



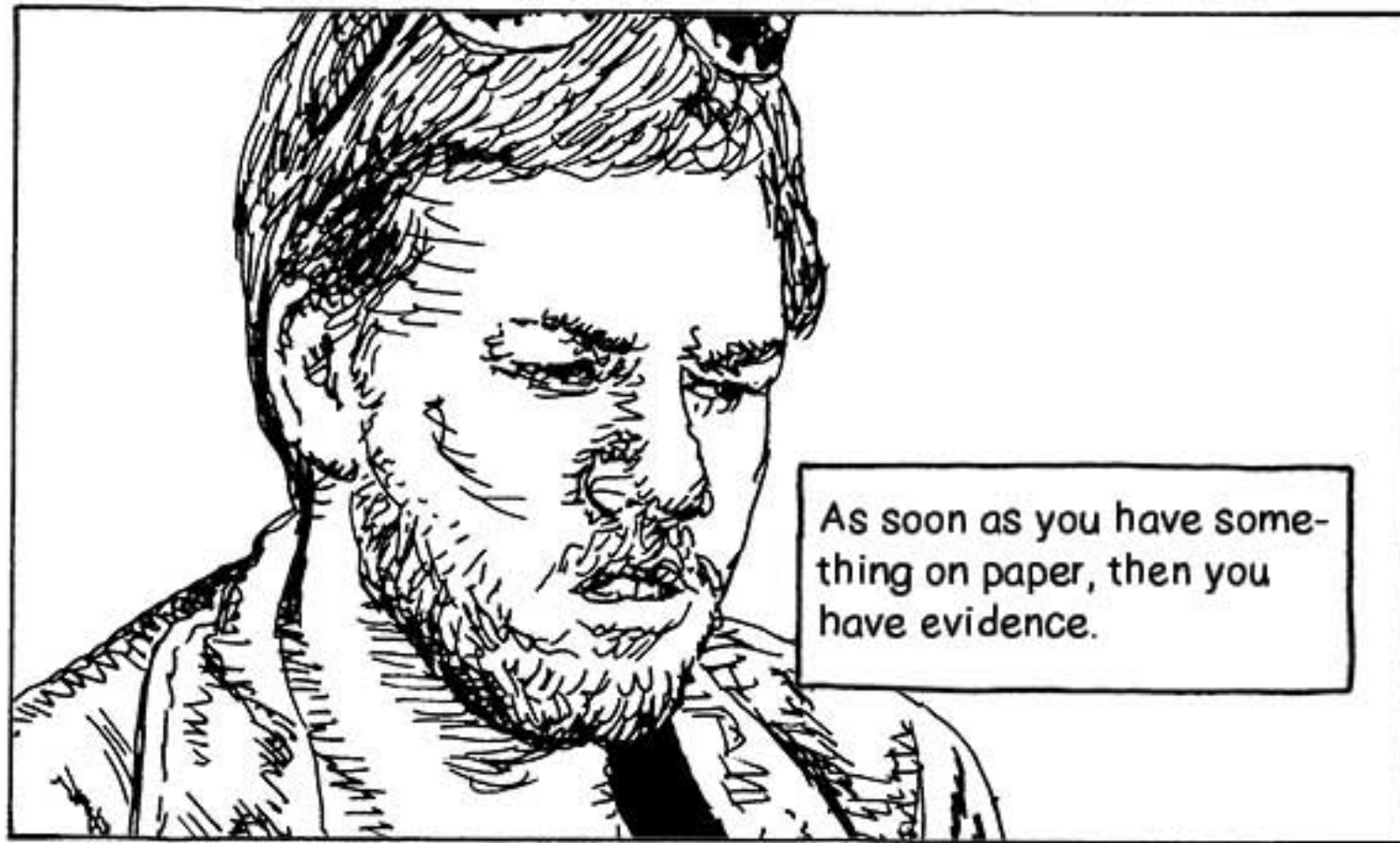
It's weird to see this from very close, because in the end decisions come down to administrative and bureaucratic practicalities.



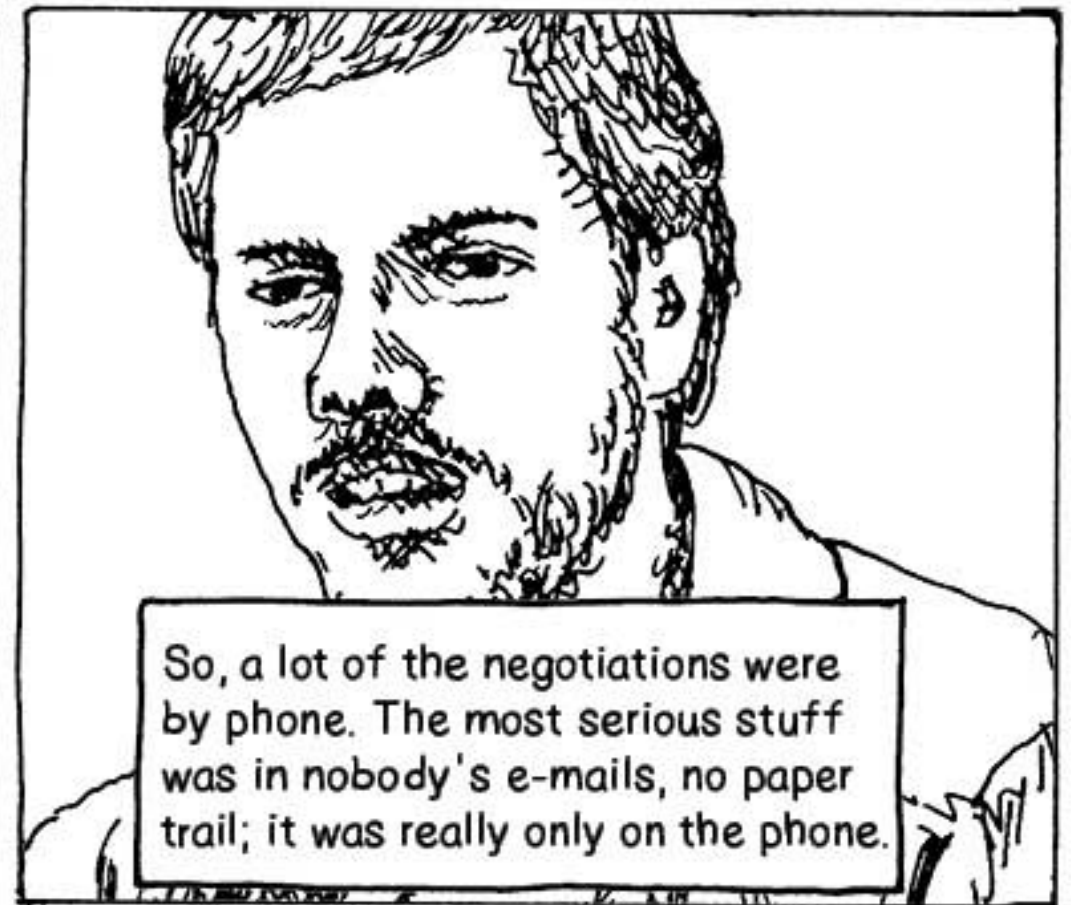
But in these practicalities so much politics is embedded, I would say, and this is something we were confronted with a lot, especially when we wanted to do this as legally as possible, with the tax number and all that kind of stuff.



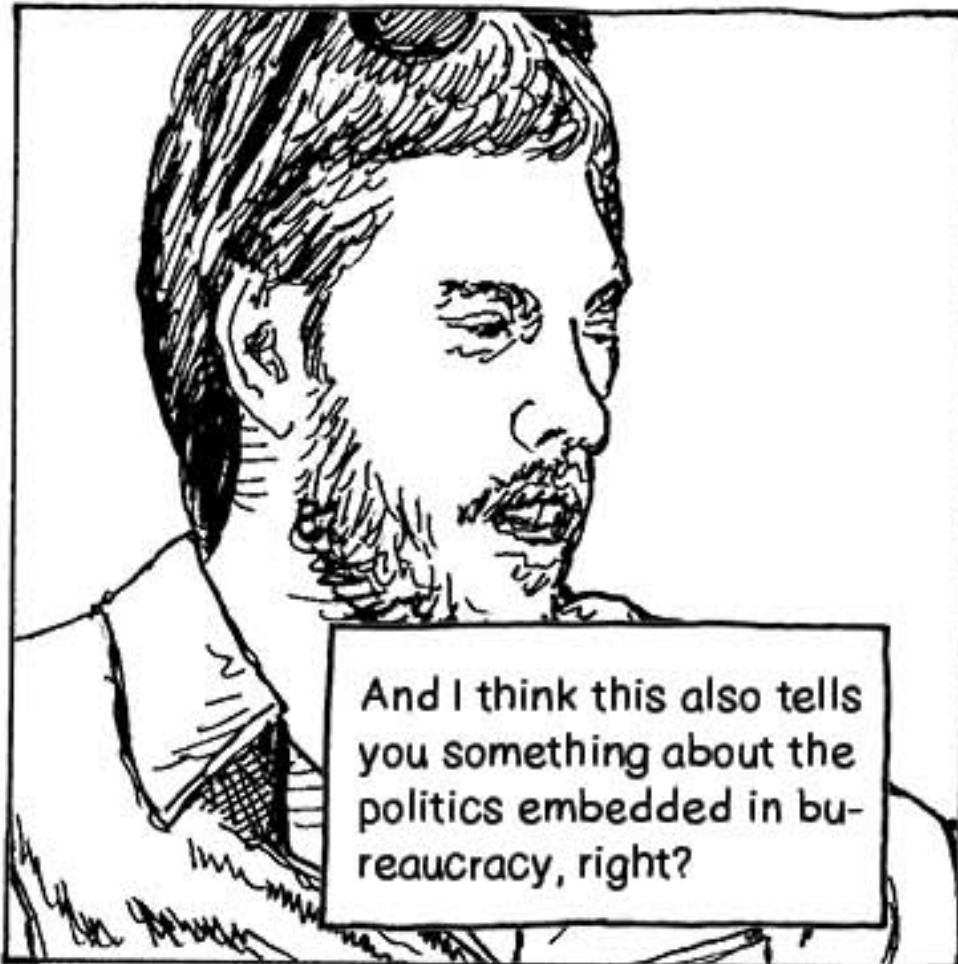
It is also so weird that when it comes down to seriously getting things done, nothing will be written on paper.



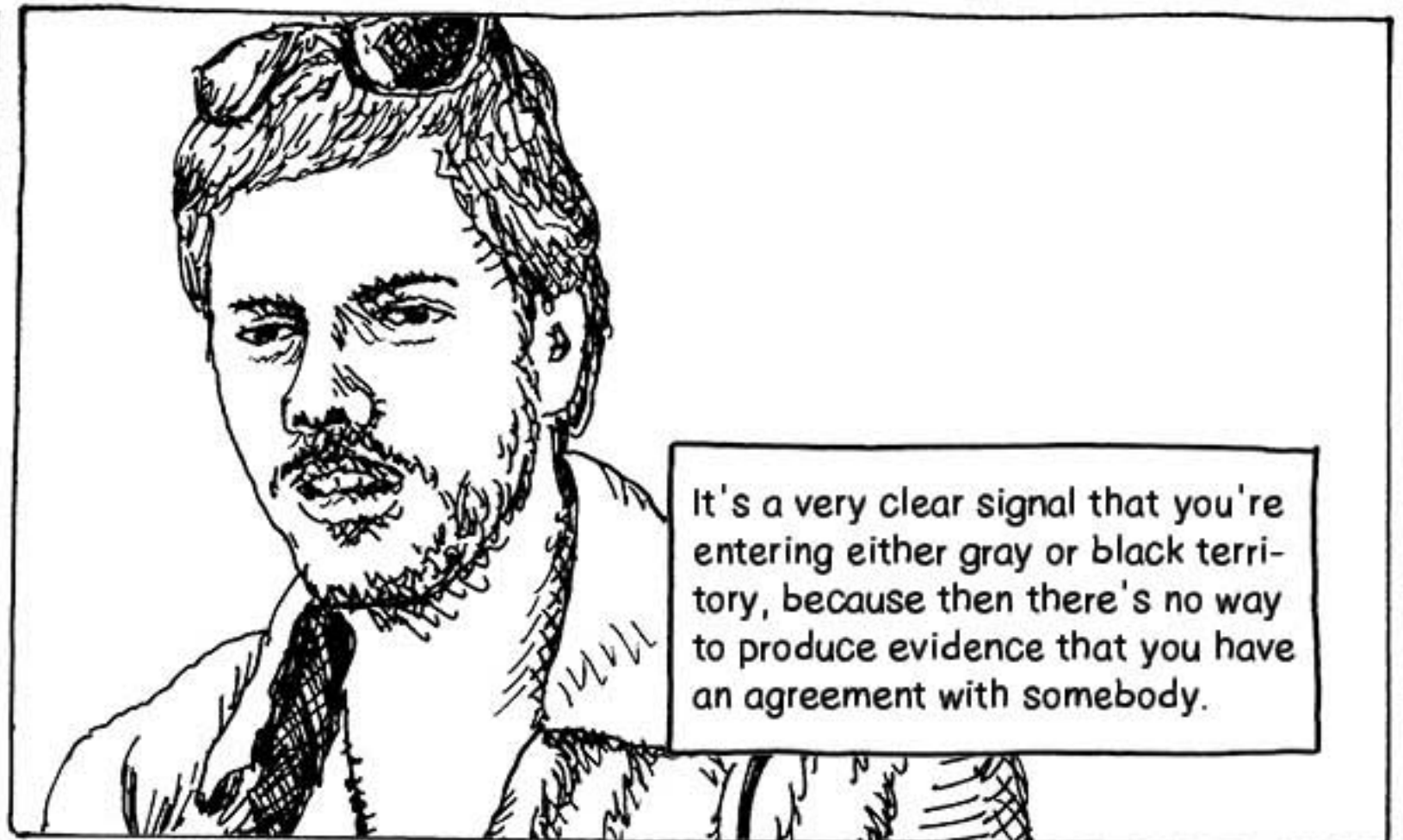
As soon as you have something on paper, then you have evidence.



So, a lot of the negotiations were by phone. The most serious stuff was in nobody's e-mails, no paper trail; it was really only on the phone.



And I think this also tells you something about the politics embedded in bureaucracy, right?



It's a very clear signal that you're entering either gray or black territory, because then there's no way to produce evidence that you have an agreement with somebody.

...AND HEROES

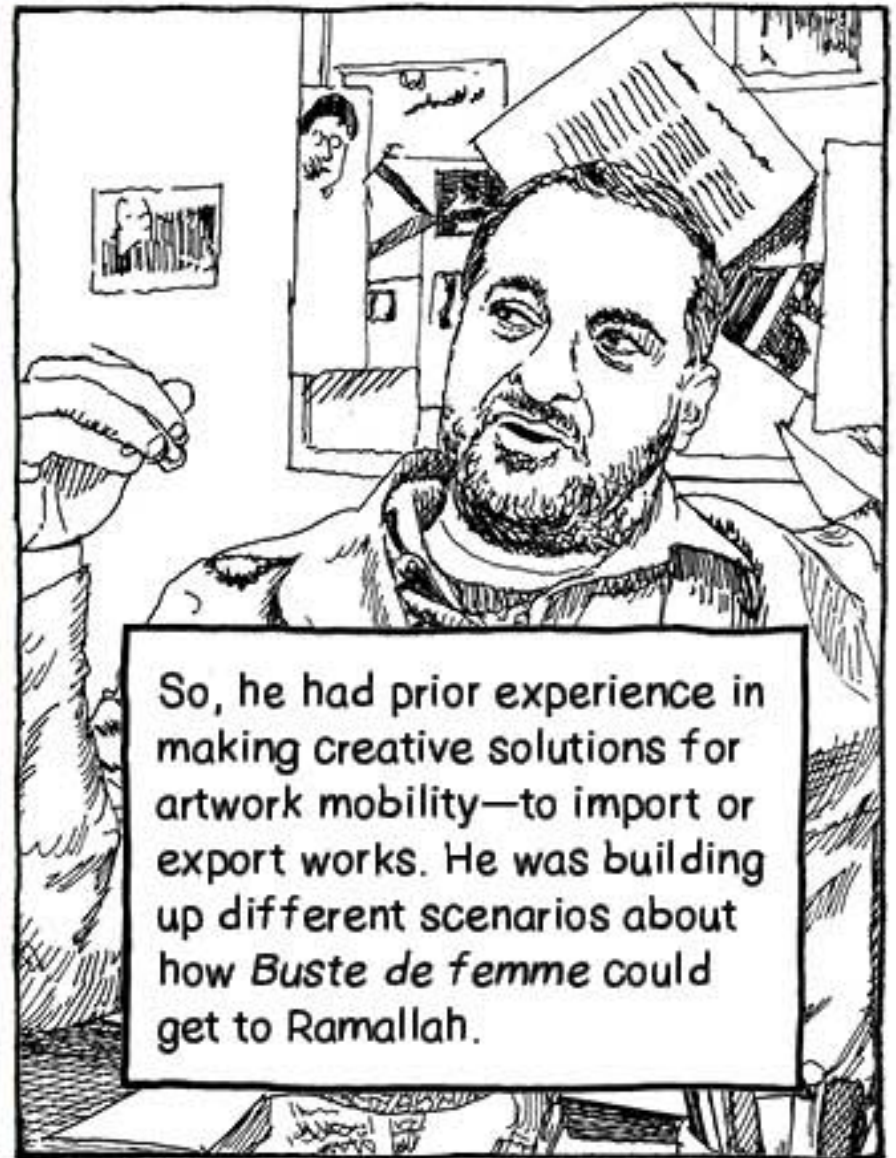




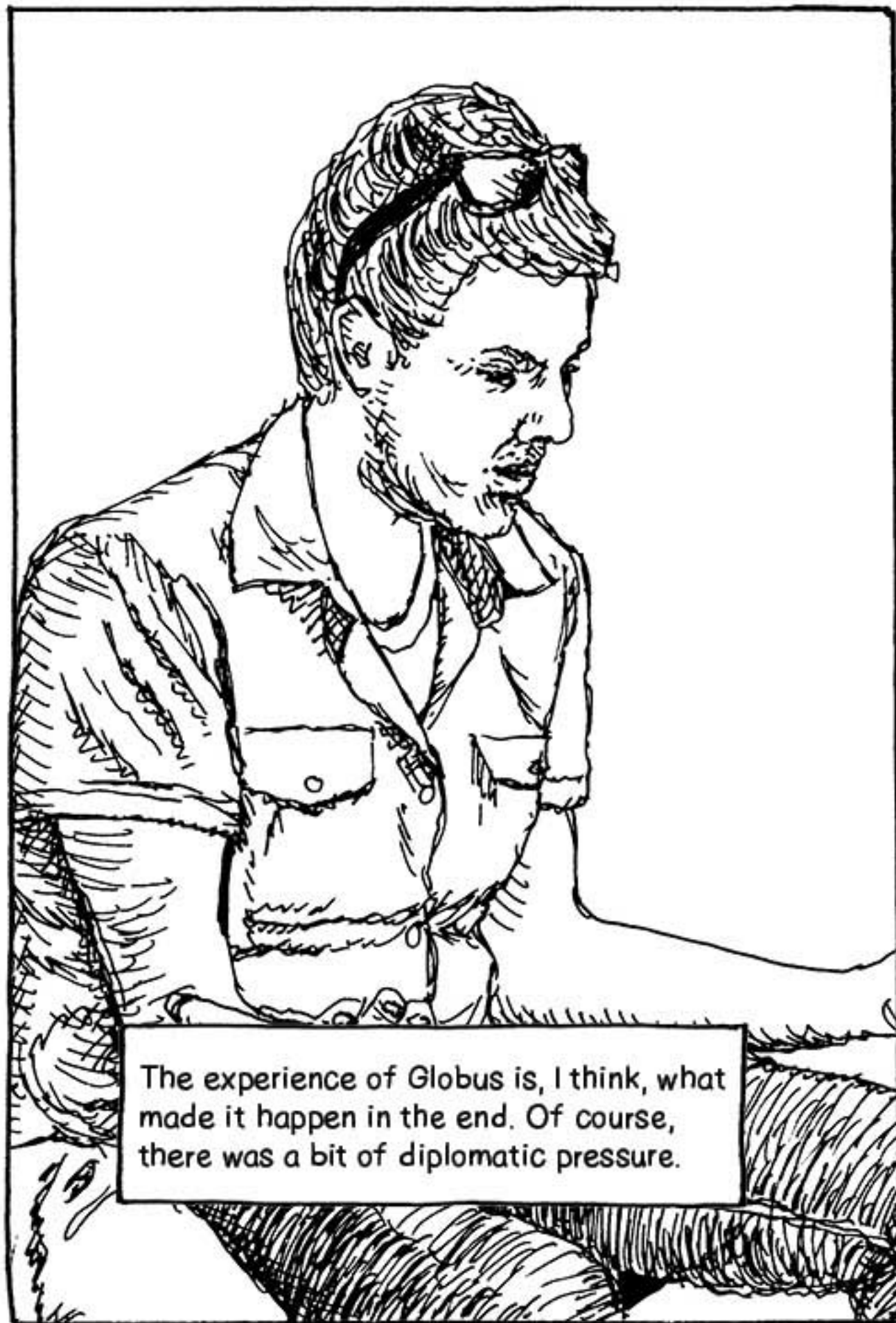
Samer Kawasme—I would say he's the hero of this project.



He was involved with sending Peter Friedl's giraffe from the Qalqilya zoo to Kassel, to Documenta.



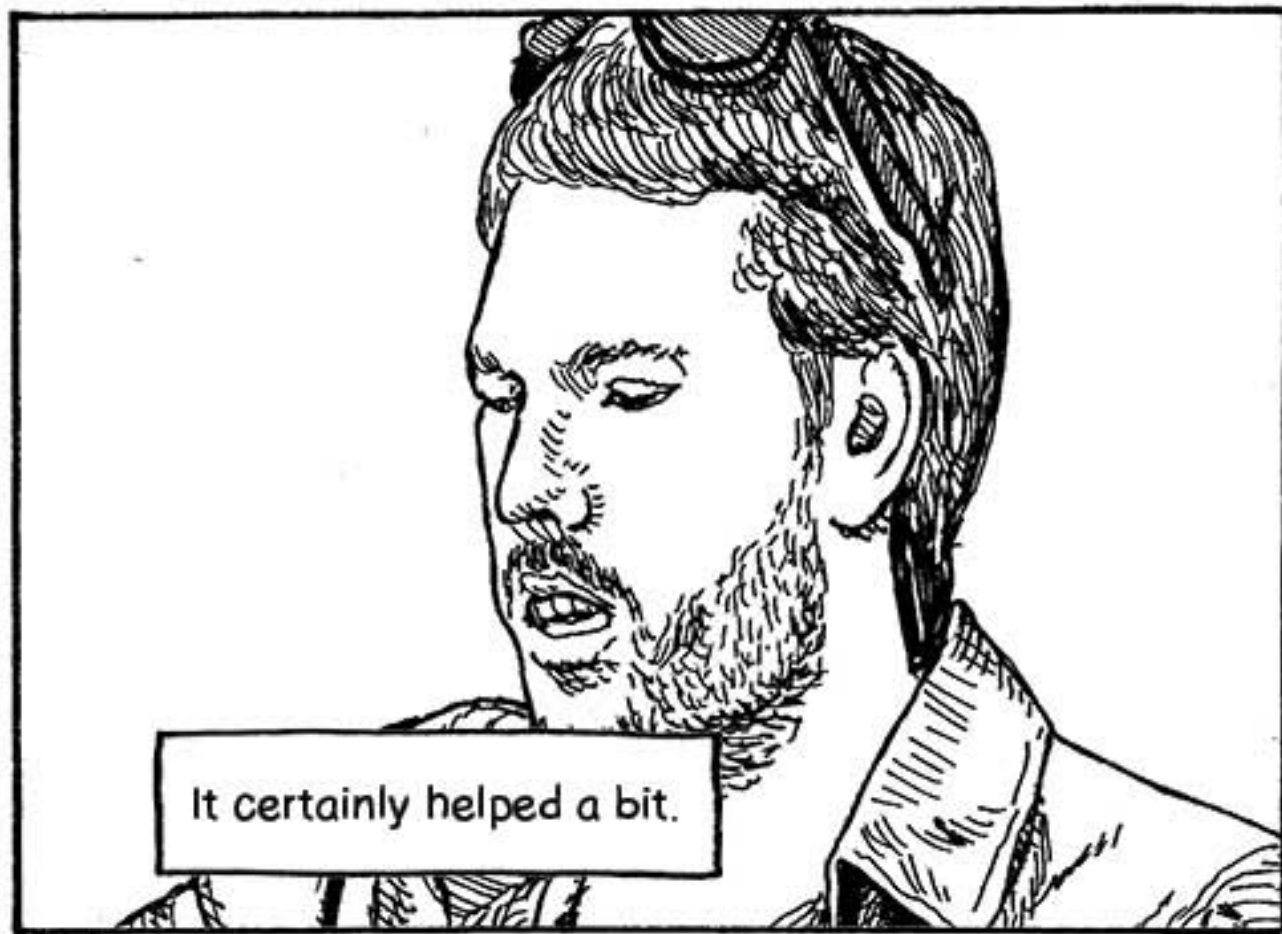
So, he had prior experience in making creative solutions for artwork mobility—to import or export works. He was building up different scenarios about how *Buste de femme* could get to Ramallah.



The experience of Globus is, I think, what made it happen in the end. Of course, there was a bit of diplomatic pressure.



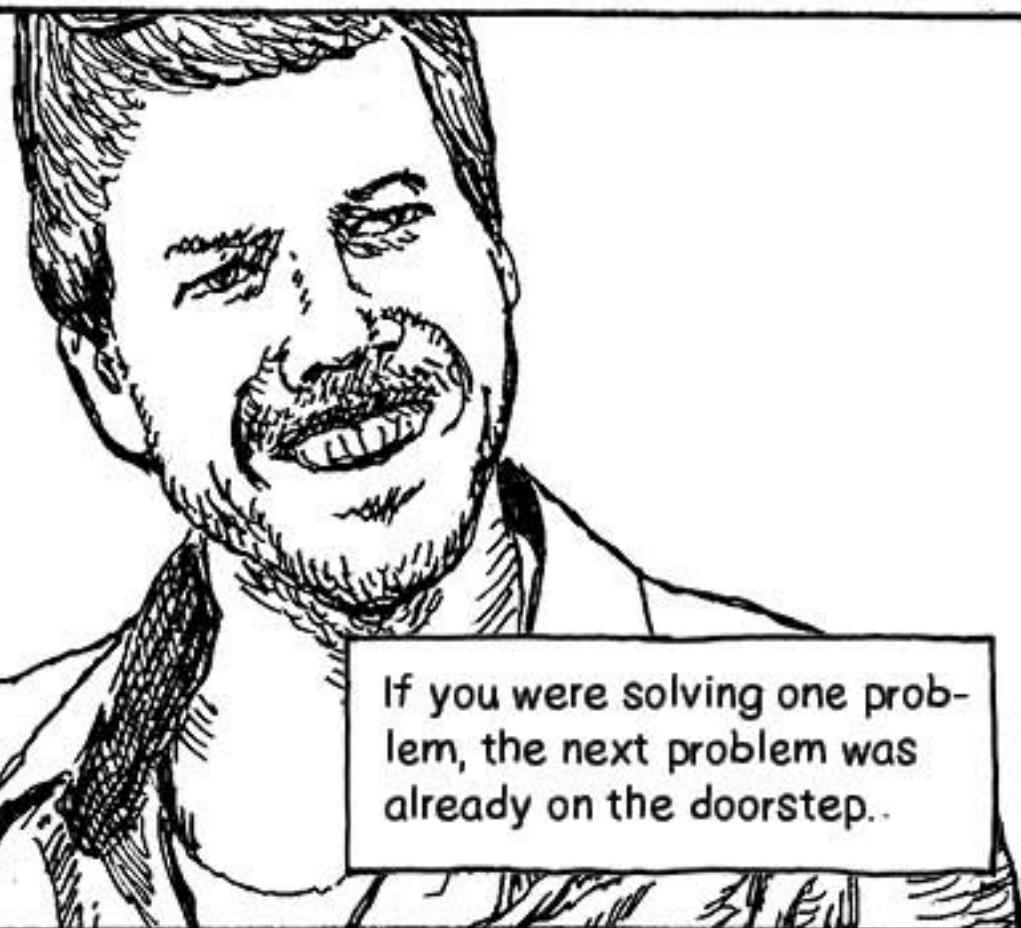
I'm not sure how much it helped in the end.



It certainly helped a bit.



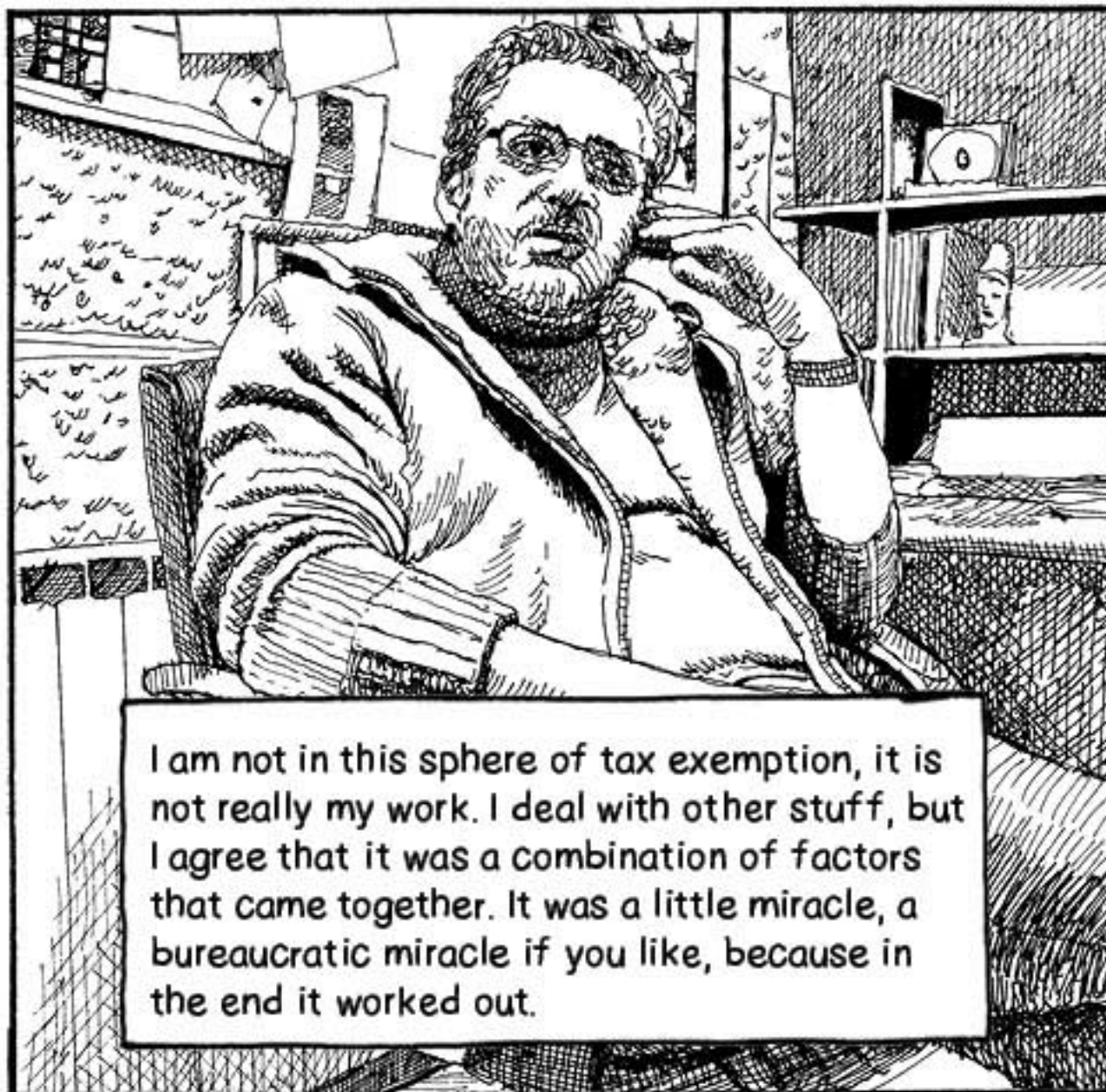
There were so many people involved, it was not that only one person had to be convinced to give a signature here or give a signature there, there were so many people along the line that had to be convinced.



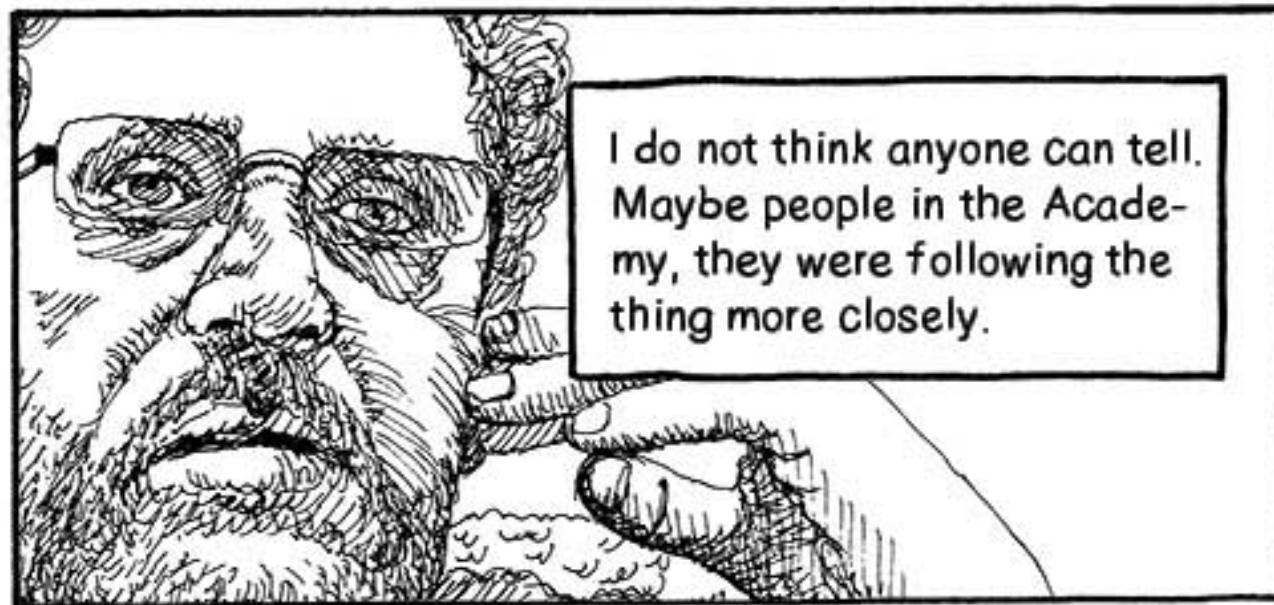
If you were solving one problem, the next problem was already on the doorstep.



So, I think in the end, it was a communal project, but surely Globus on a personal level kind of fixed the job.



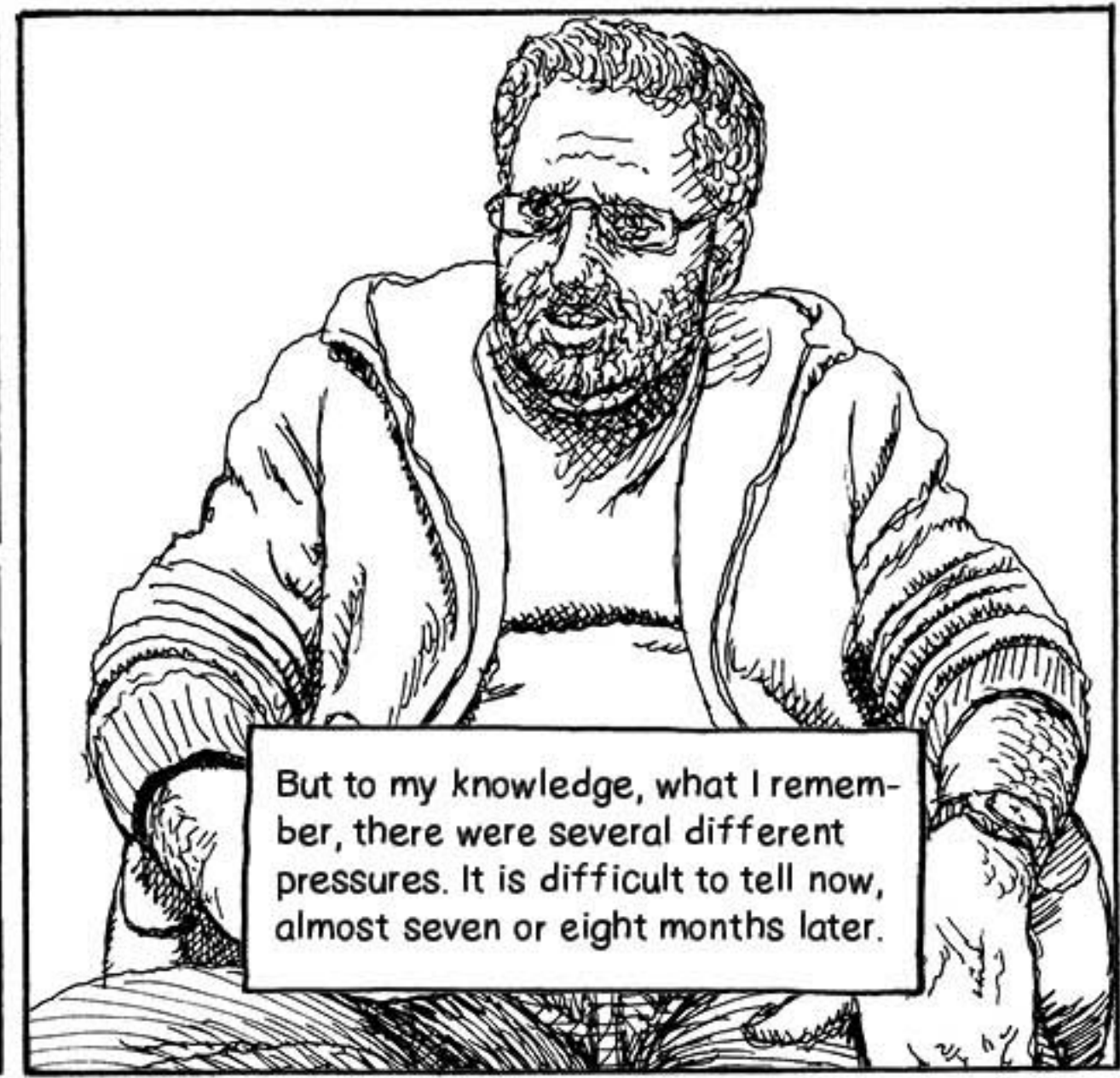
I am not in this sphere of tax exemption, it is not really my work. I deal with other stuff, but I agree that it was a combination of factors that came together. It was a little miracle, a bureaucratic miracle if you like, because in the end it worked out.



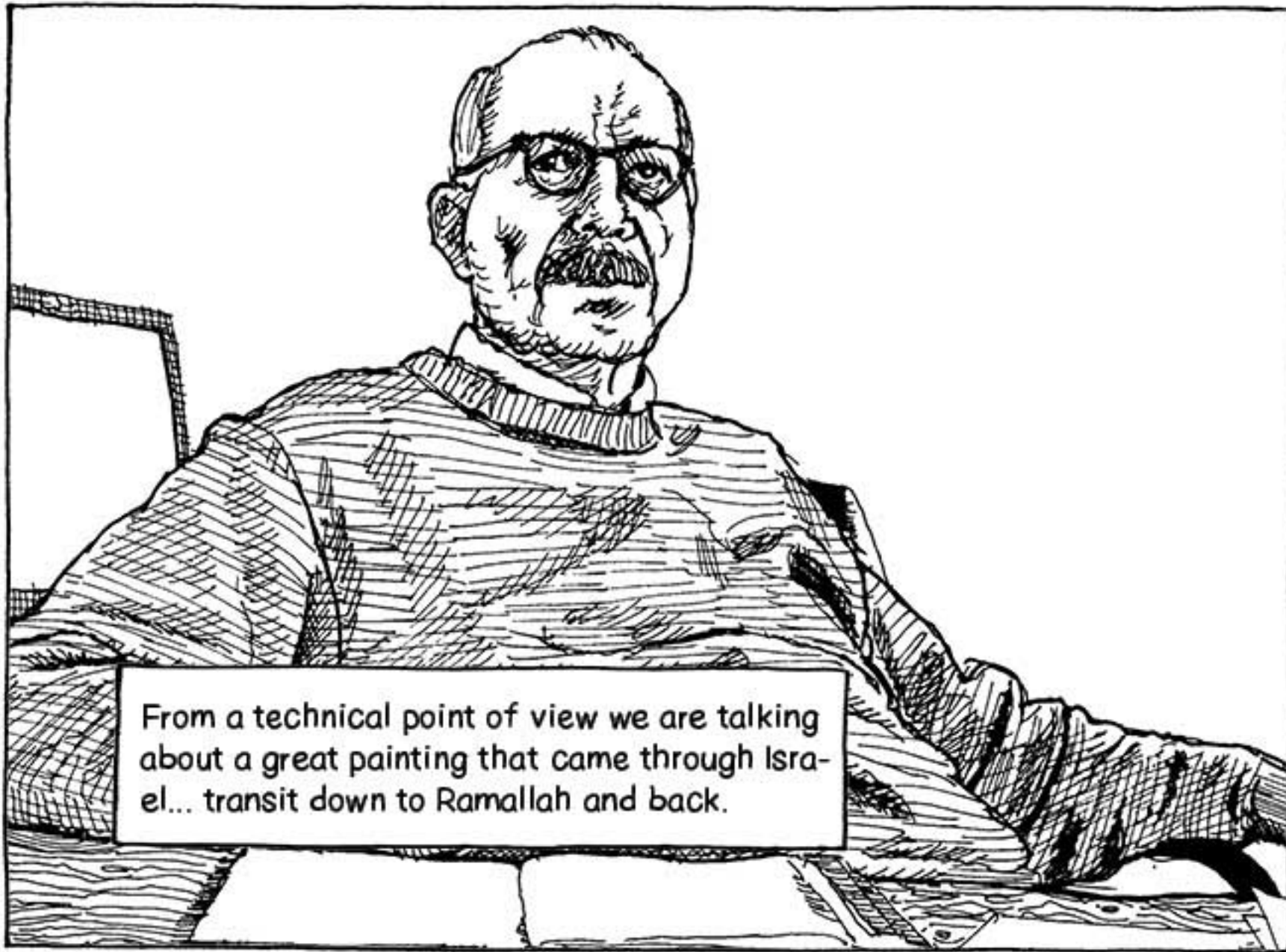
I do not think anyone can tell. Maybe people in the Academy, they were following the thing more closely.



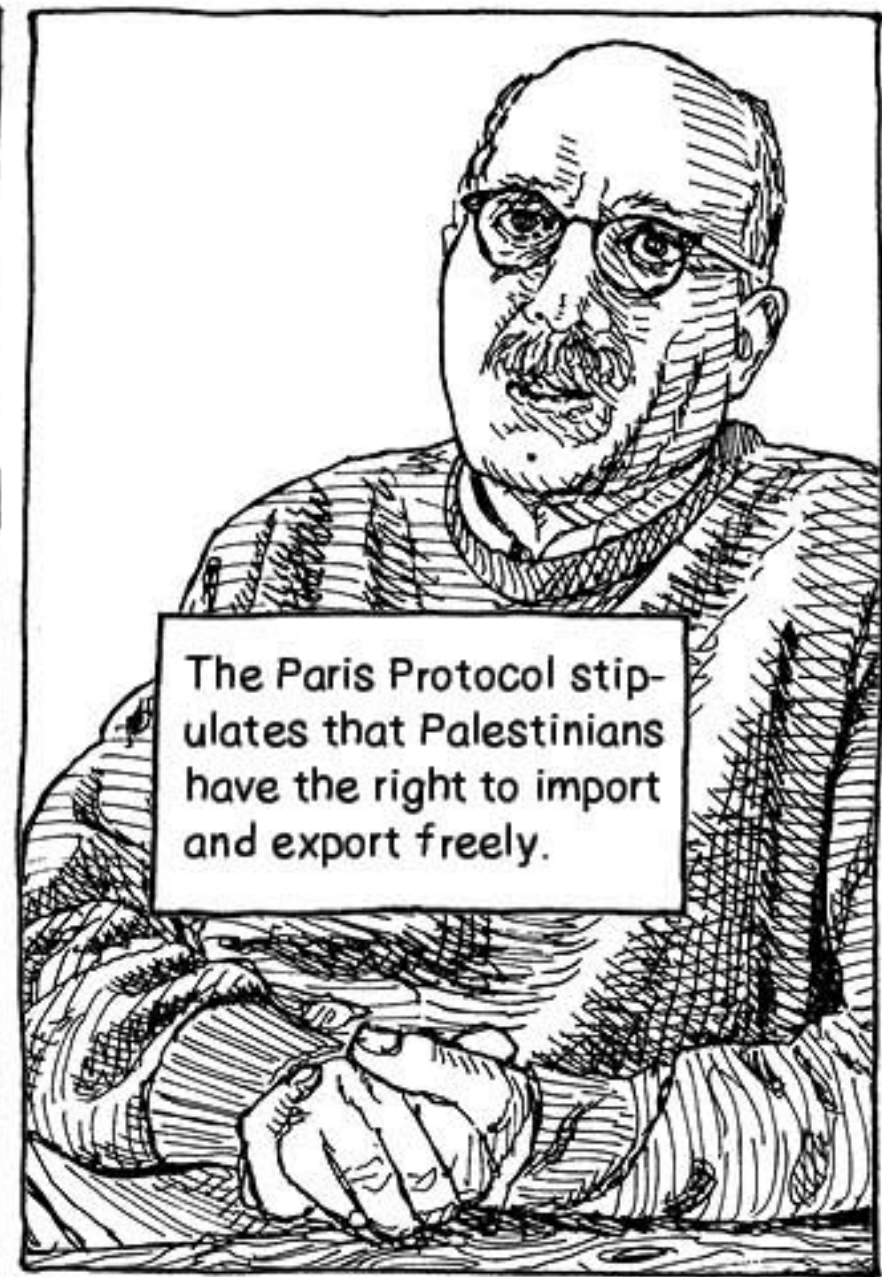
I think that nobody can tell what exactly was the critical element responsible for the shipment entering without paying the bill of lading.



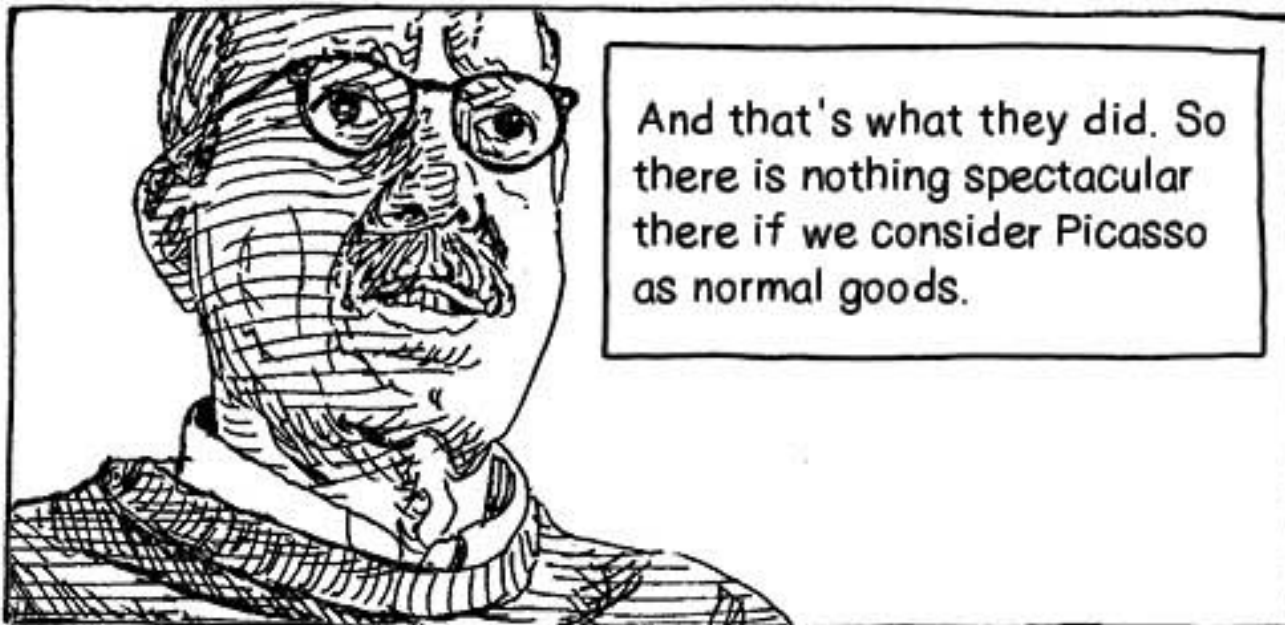
But to my knowledge, what I remember, there were several different pressures. It is difficult to tell now, almost seven or eight months later.



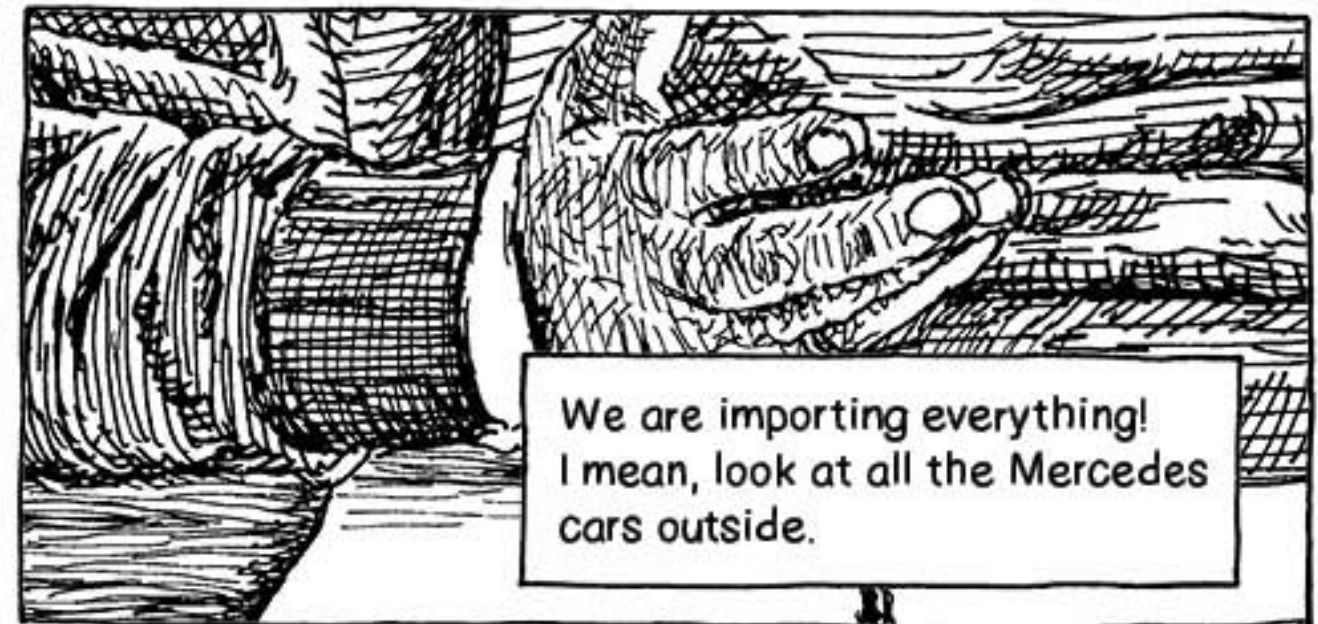
From a technical point of view we are talking about a great painting that came through Israel... transit down to Ramallah and back.



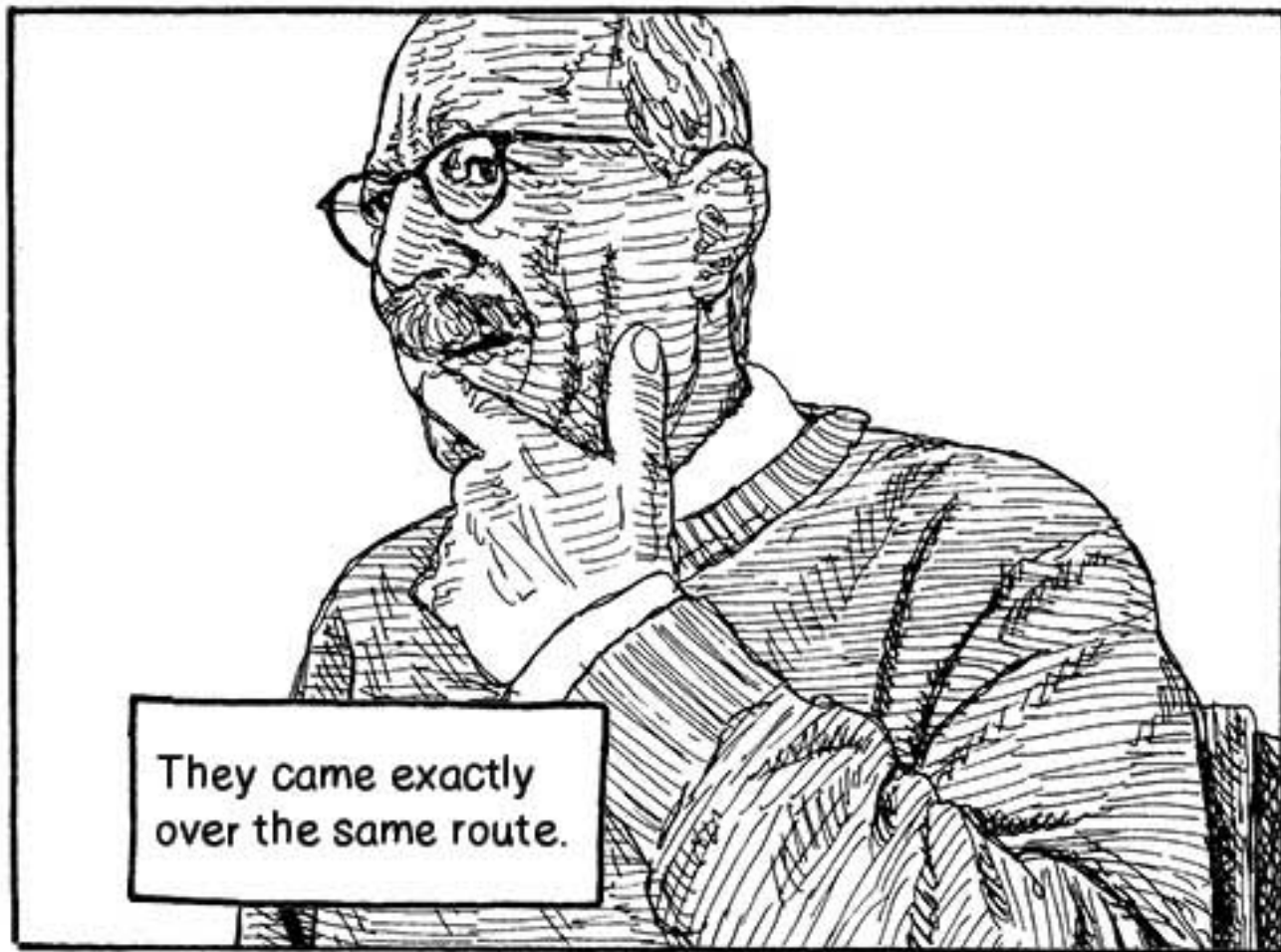
The Paris Protocol stipulates that Palestinians have the right to import and export freely.



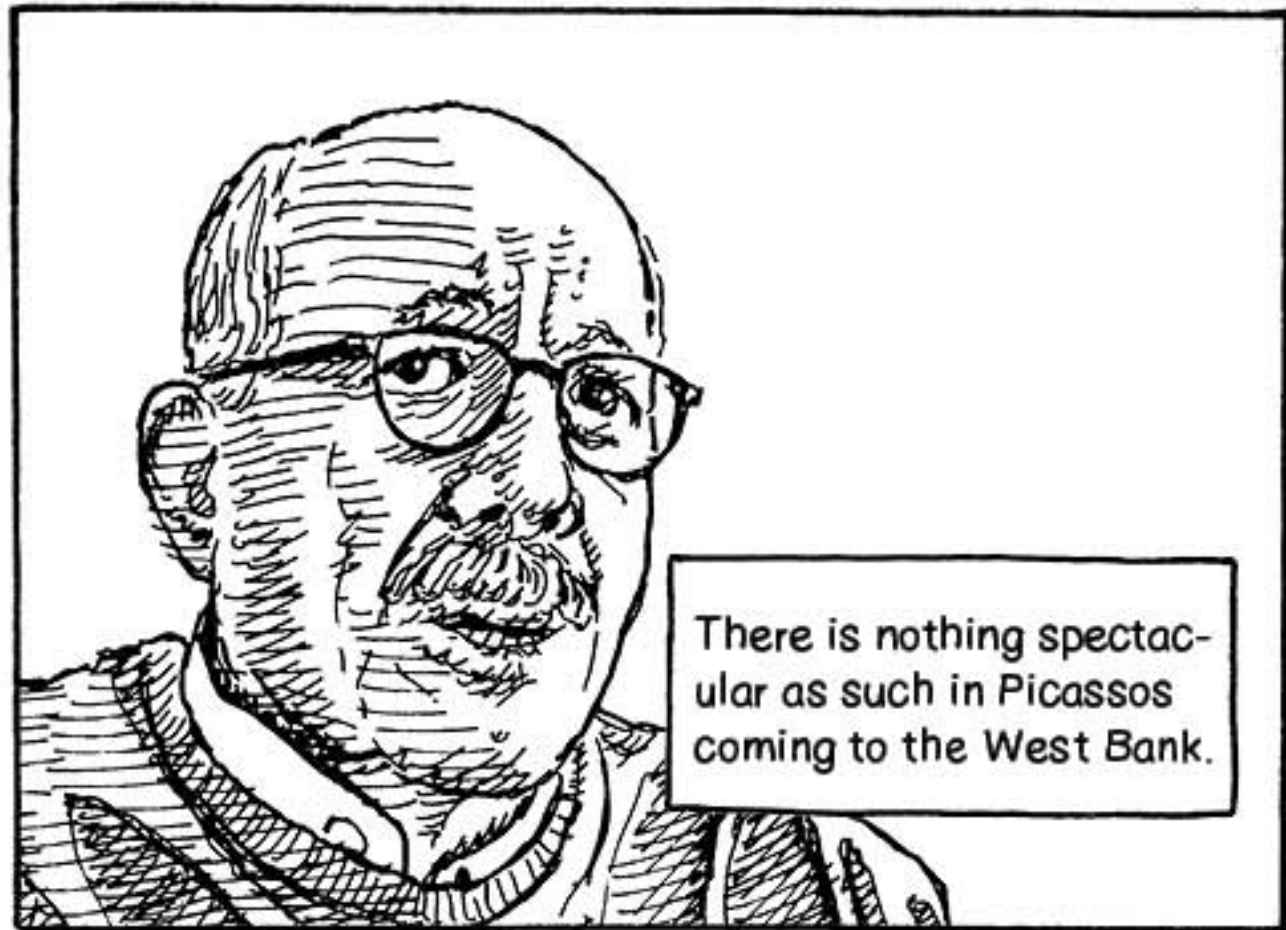
And that's what they did. So there is nothing spectacular there if we consider Picasso as normal goods.



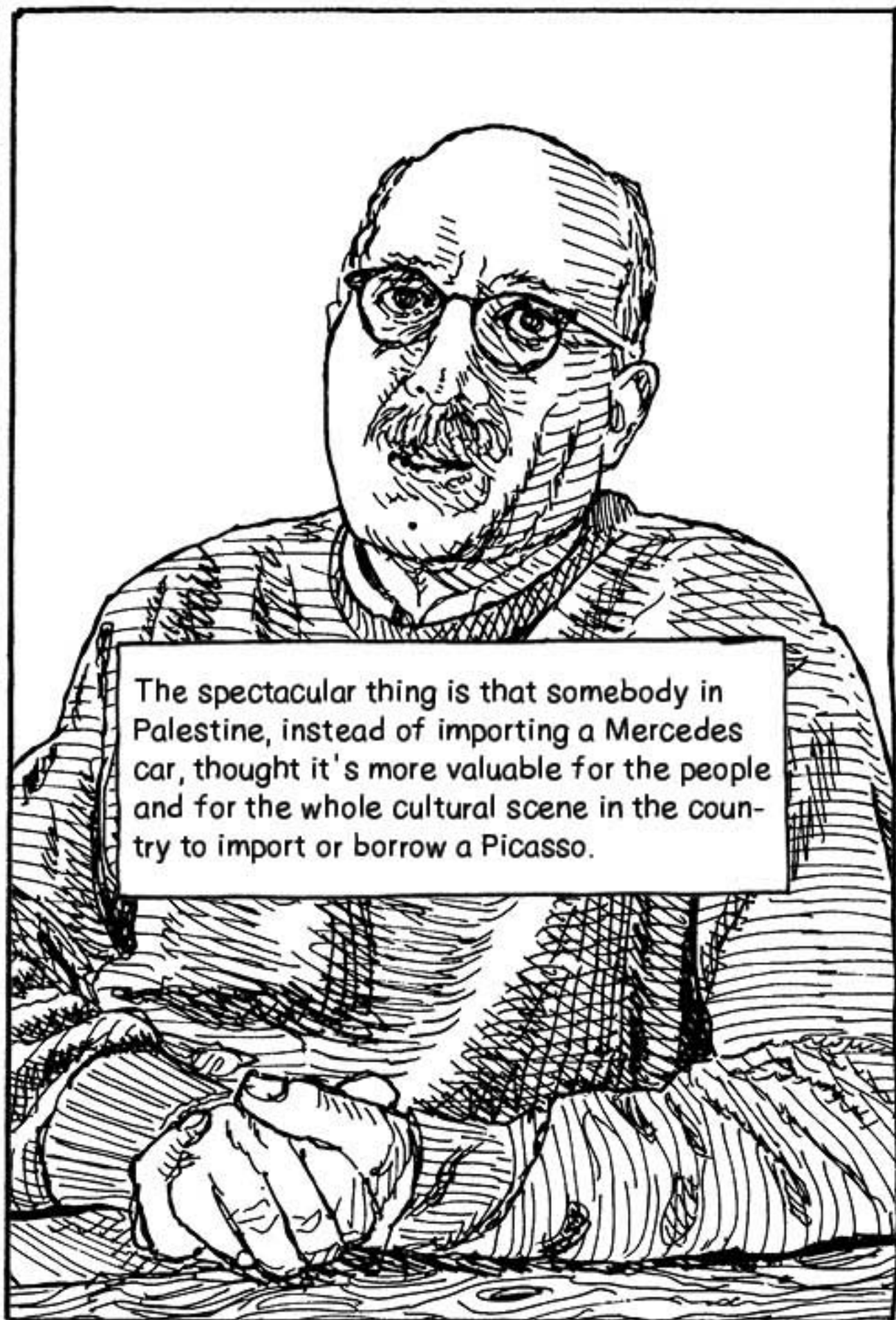
We are importing everything! I mean, look at all the Mercedes cars outside.



They came exactly over the same route.



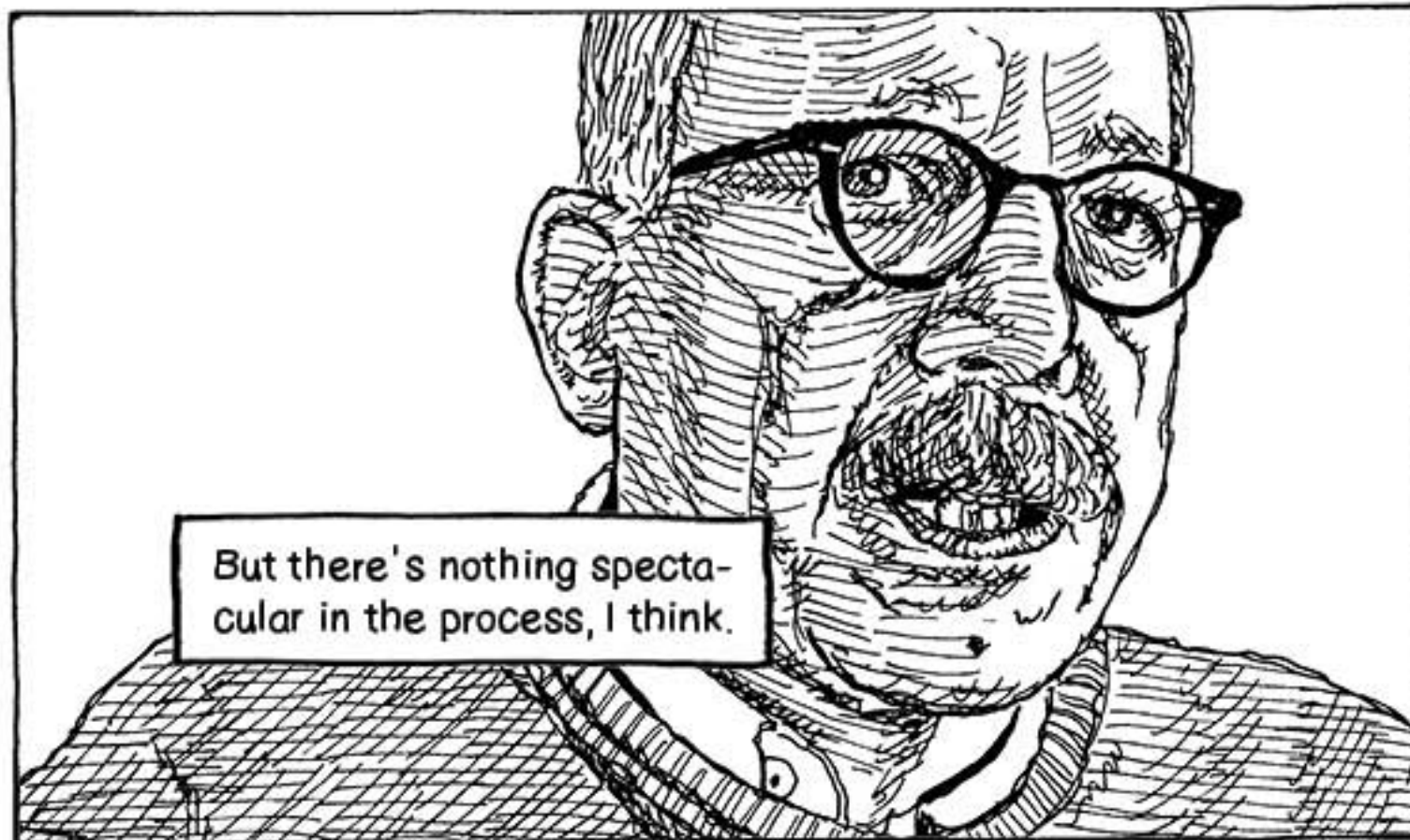
There is nothing spectacular as such in Picassos coming to the West Bank.



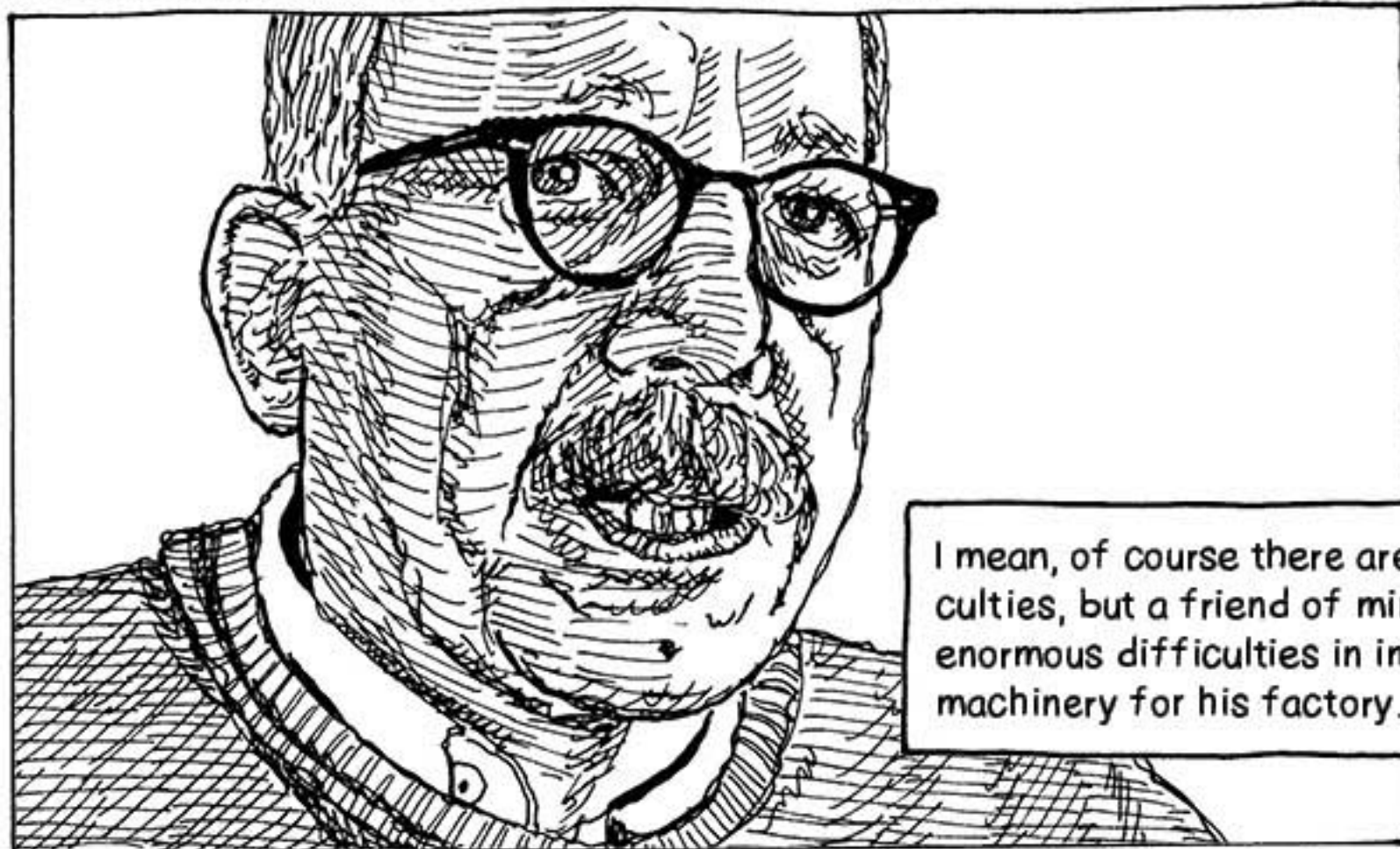
The spectacular thing is that somebody in Palestine, instead of importing a Mercedes car, thought it's more valuable for the people and for the whole cultural scene in the country to import or borrow a Picasso.



That's the spectacular and nice thing about it.



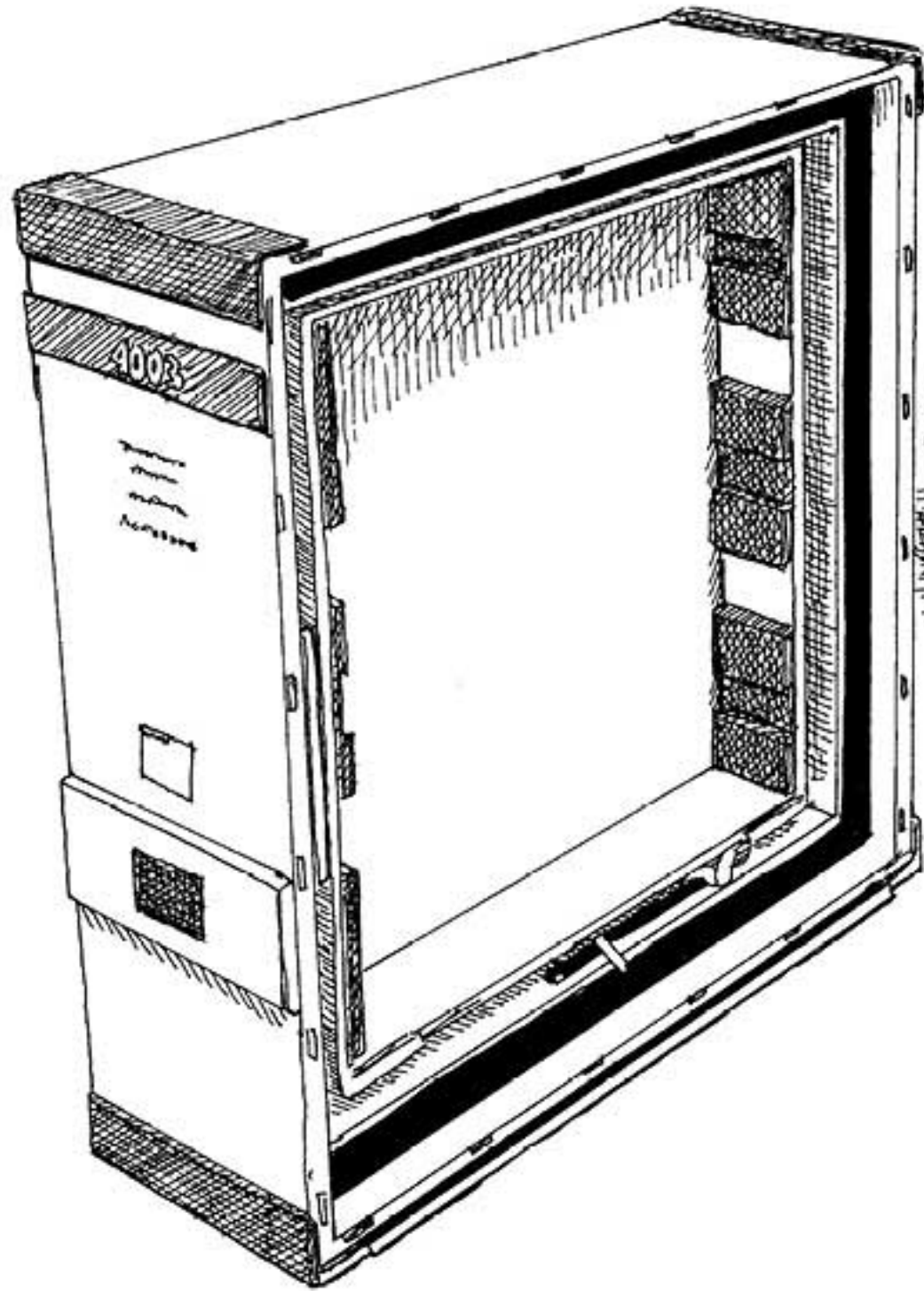
But there's nothing spectacular in the process, I think.



I mean, of course there are difficulties, but a friend of mine has enormous difficulties in importing machinery for his factory.



I mean, nothing new there.



PART TWO



TIME



One of the main protagonists in this project was time—the way we understand time in this region. I was telling you about how we had to create a system for bringing Picasso to Palestine. There's the Western time in general for the museum, the time of Ramadan, and for us, the time with the revolution, the UN vote in September, with everything around us. It's very complicated. Each time agenda went in different directions.

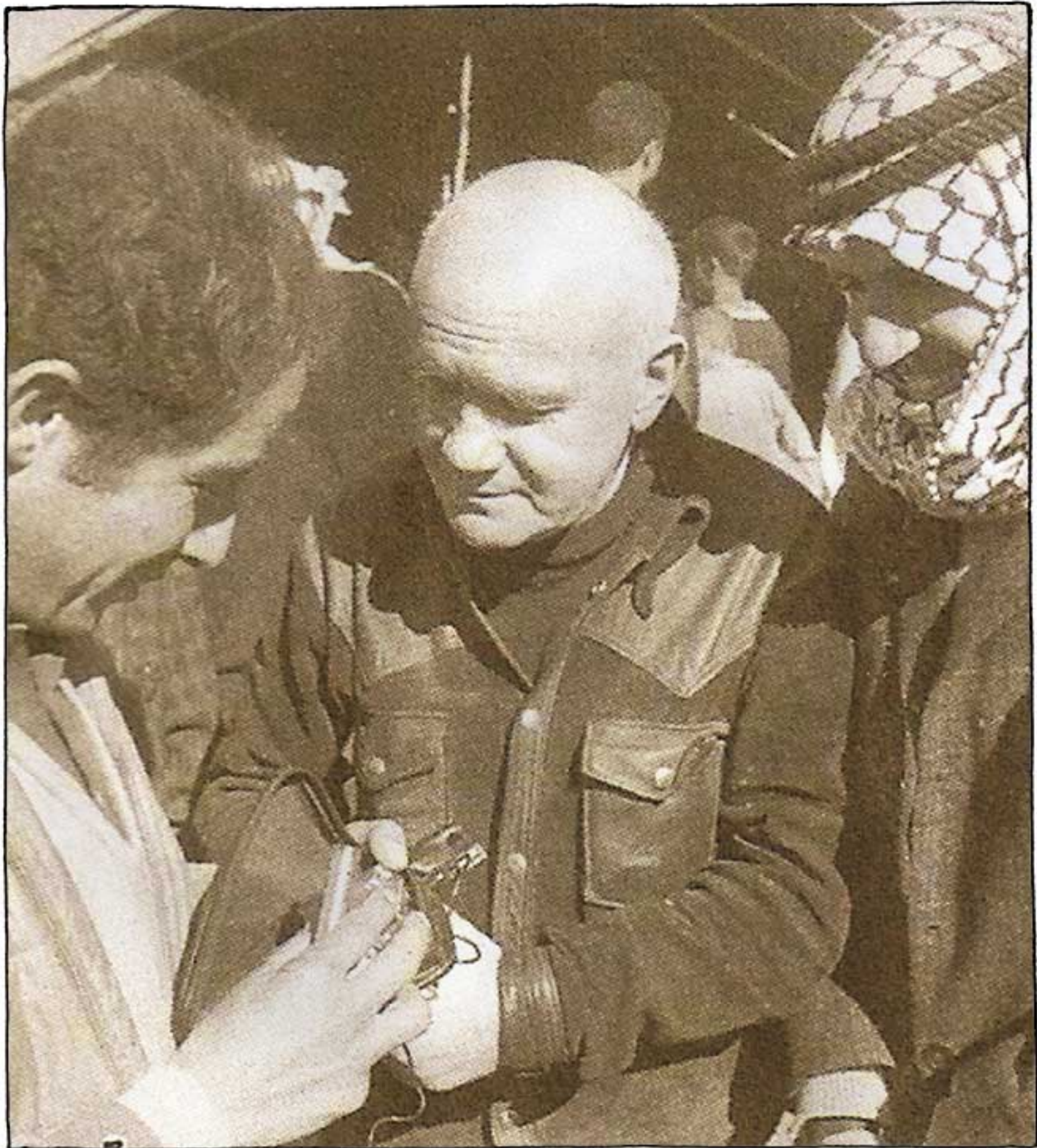


A different, metaphysical time also had to be brought into alignment. Foucault called it the “episteme” and William Carlos Williams, “Paideuma,” both terms for the coherence of a given period as it emerges through individuals working synchronously, collectively or alone, with a stable set of historical references. The opposite is the case for Picasso in Palestine, which works by making overt the nature of the collision of divergent

epochs, divergent political contexts, instituting its own collision of differing cultural moments drawn into a fragile, potentially fissile proximity—the time of high modernity encountering the increasingly stressful present of modern-day Palestine, with its burgeoning consumer culture, its increasingly stratified population, its growing religious conservatism.



These dual times encounter the impasse created by the Oslo Agreement, confront it, witness it but are, apparently, powerless to change or alter it directly—to alter directly a Palestine standing again at a cusp where, as Jean Genet has phrased it, “the time of harvest had been followed by the harvest of time.”

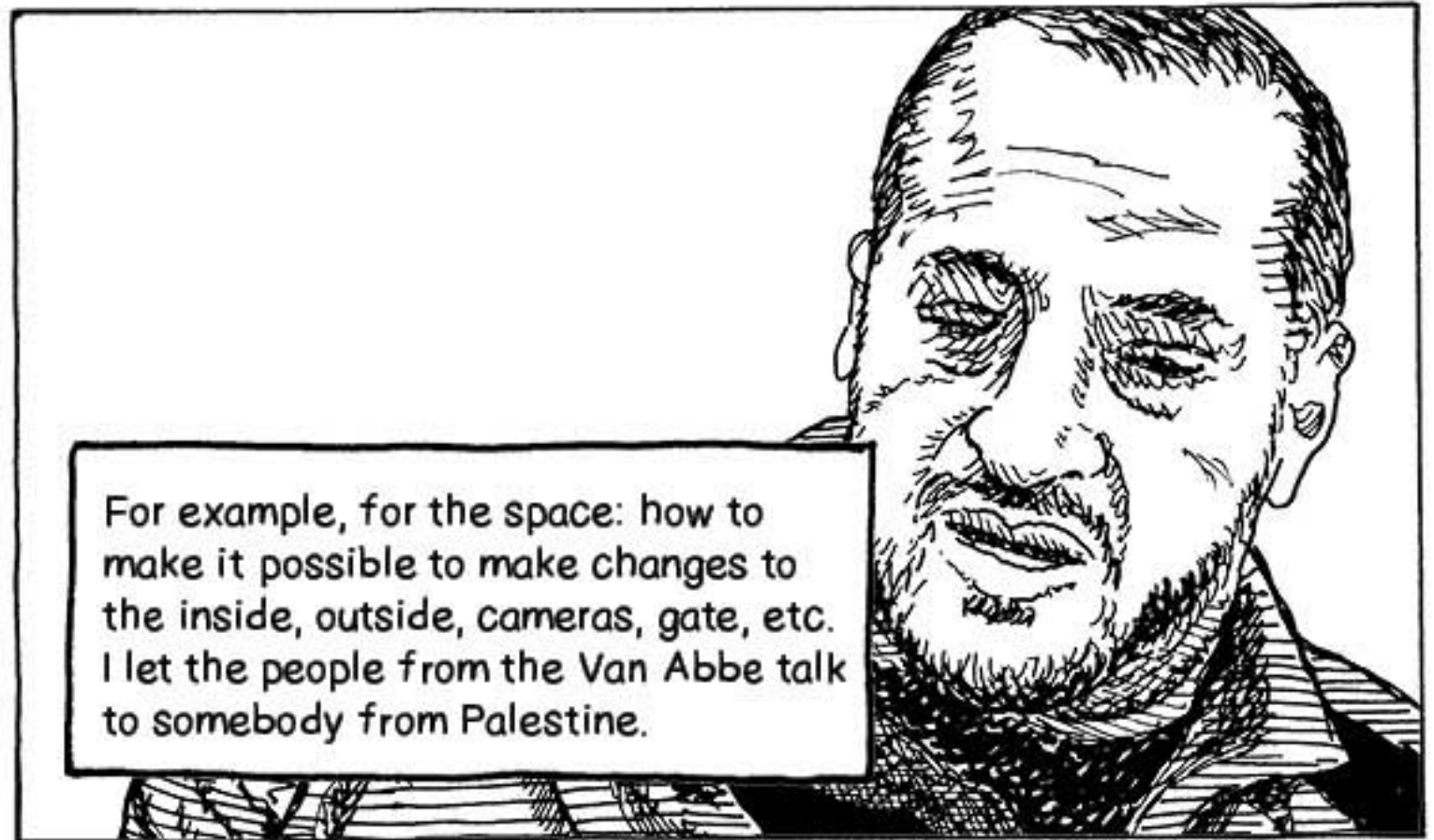


PREPARATIONS





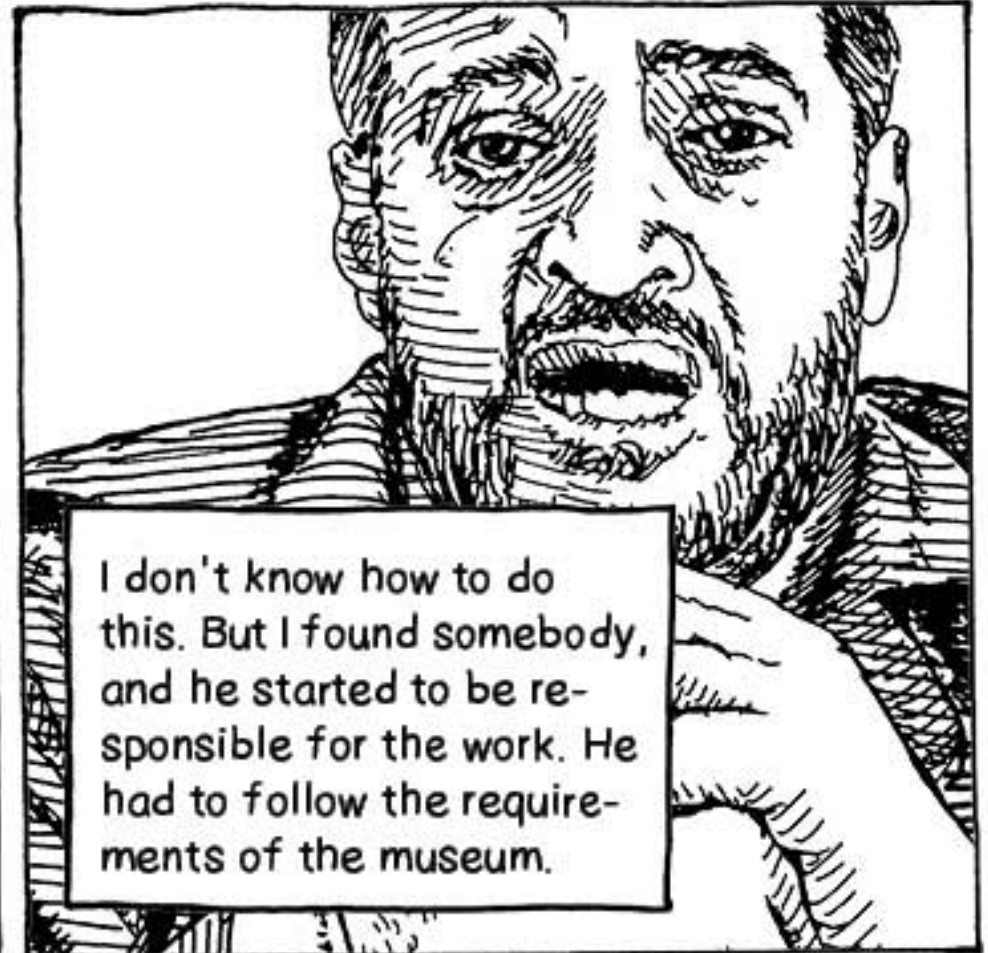
I would say in this project there were many people involved and they all did their work.



For example, for the space: how to make it possible to make changes to the inside, outside, cameras, gate, etc. I let the people from the Van Abbe talk to somebody from Palestine.



I did my best to find someone in Palestine who had a specialization in architecture for museums, for restoration, humidity, temperature.



I don't know how to do this. But I found somebody, and he started to be responsible for the work. He had to follow the requirements of the museum.



What did we need to do to the Academy? We needed to look at the structure to know if we'd be able to carry that huge crate coming onto the veranda: underneath it are the studios of the students. We needed a calamity and emergency plan, a lot of security, and to shut windows and doors. We needed a humidifier, an acclimatized room.



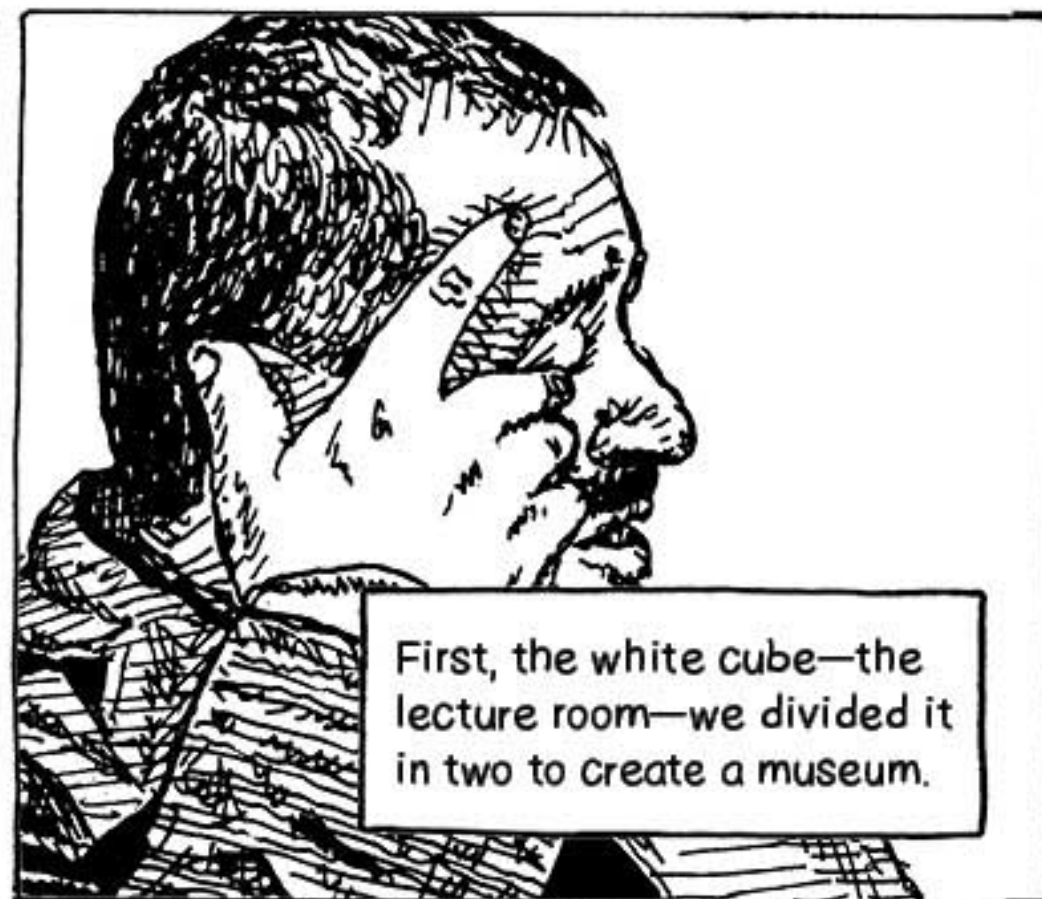
We did not bring in a humidifier, actually. We had more of a manual way of dealing with that.



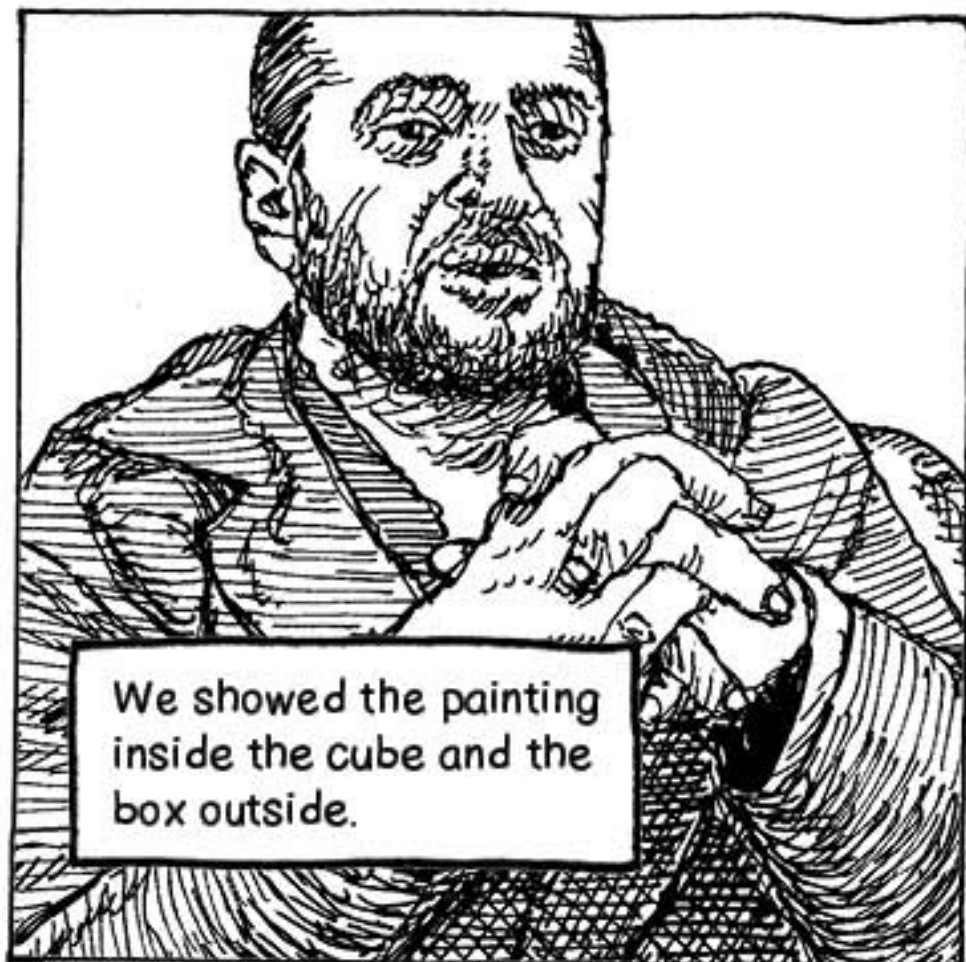
When the humidity was rising, we would open the door slightly, let air circulate. That was a huge responsibility.



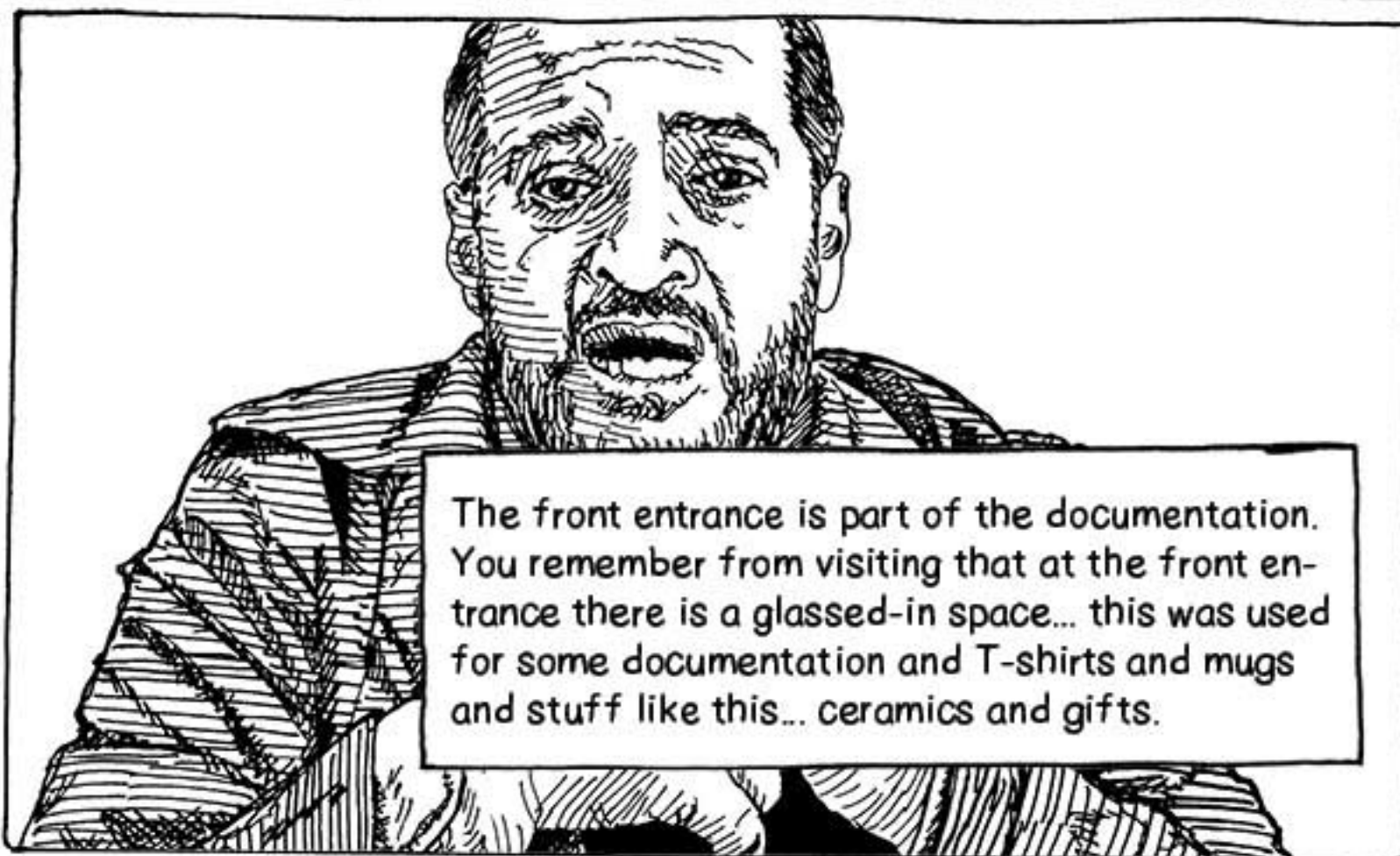
What did we do to create an exhibition space?



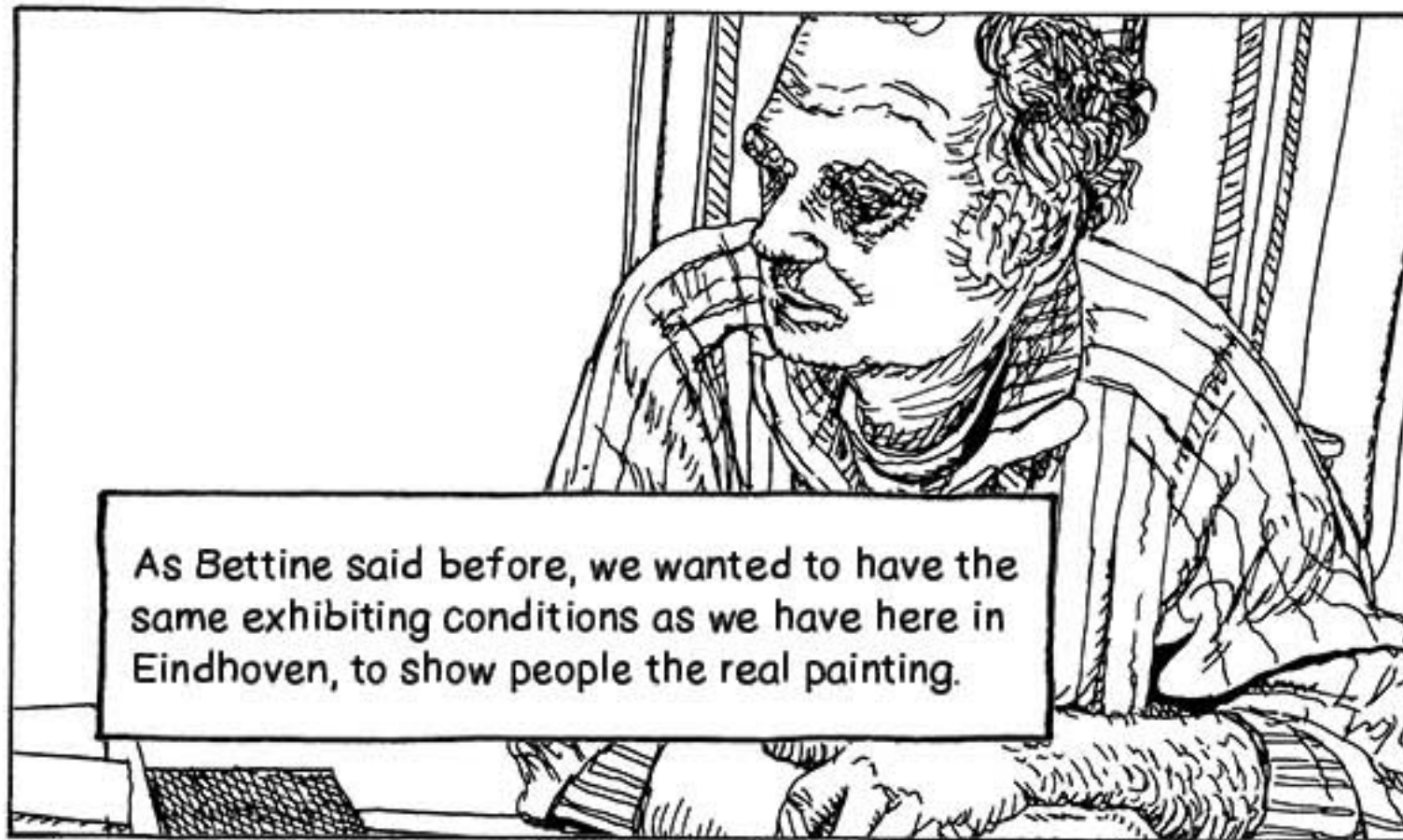
First, the white cube—the lecture room—we divided it in two to create a museum.



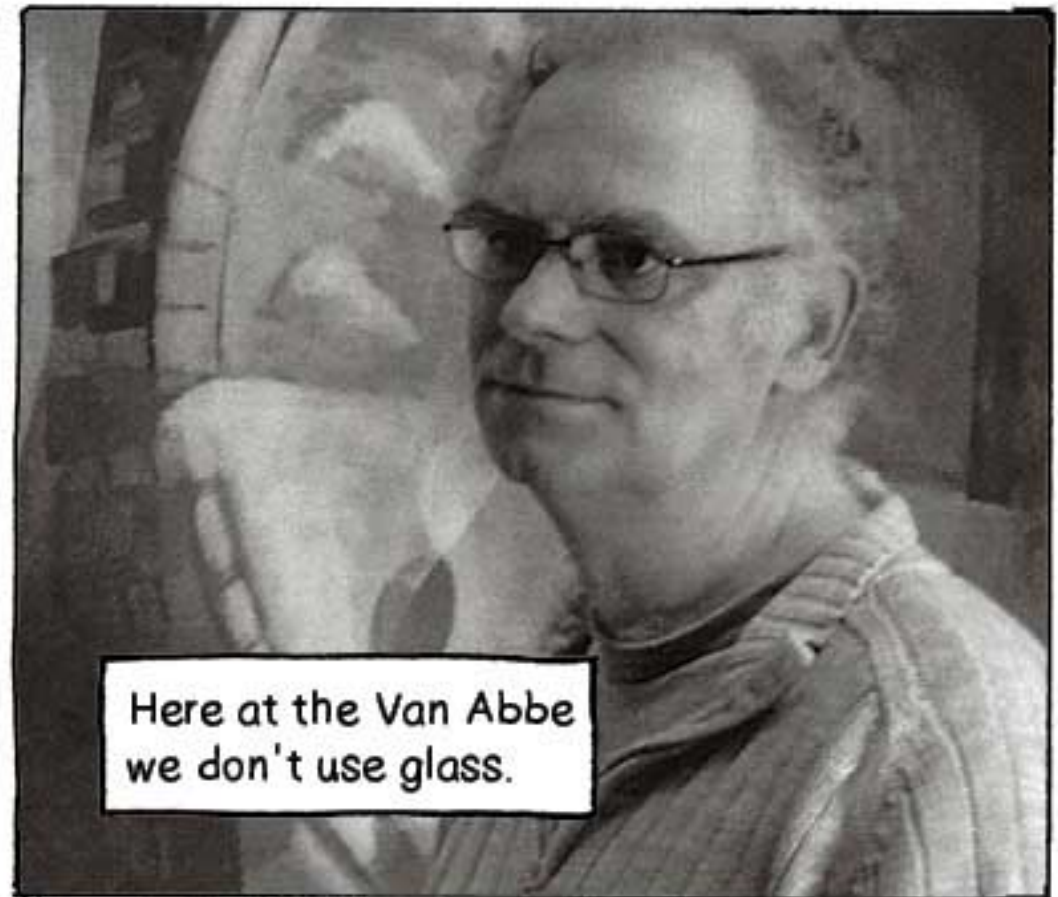
We showed the painting inside the cube and the box outside.



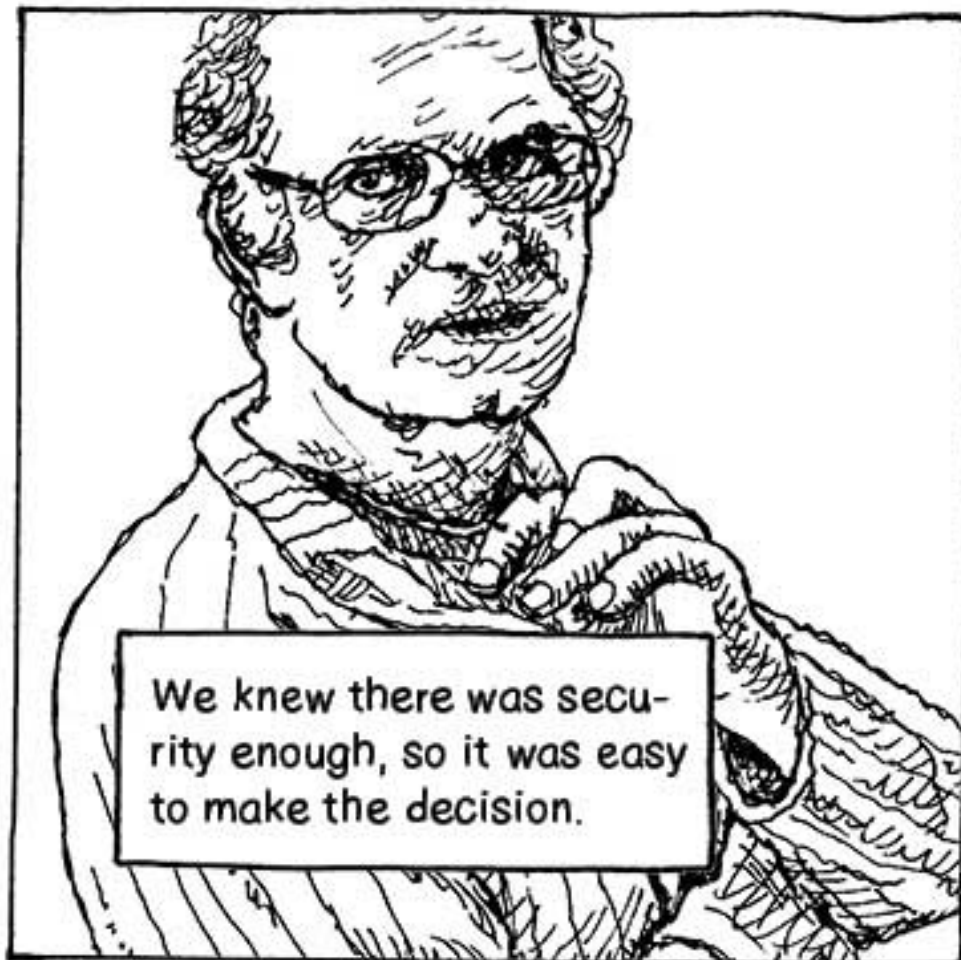
The front entrance is part of the documentation. You remember from visiting that at the front entrance there is a glassed-in space... this was used for some documentation and T-shirts and mugs and stuff like this... ceramics and gifts.



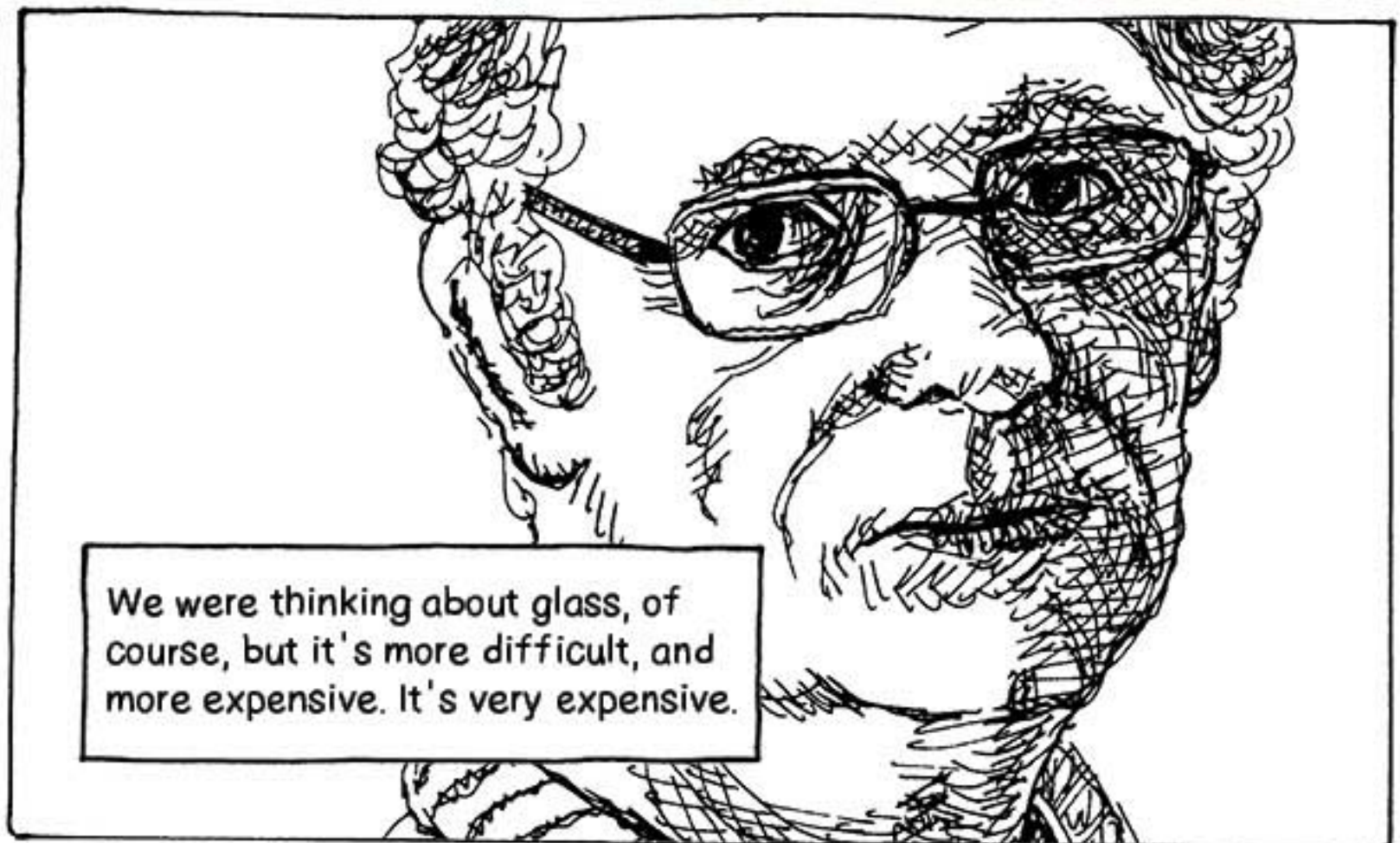
As Bettine said before, we wanted to have the same exhibiting conditions as we have here in Eindhoven, to show people the real painting.



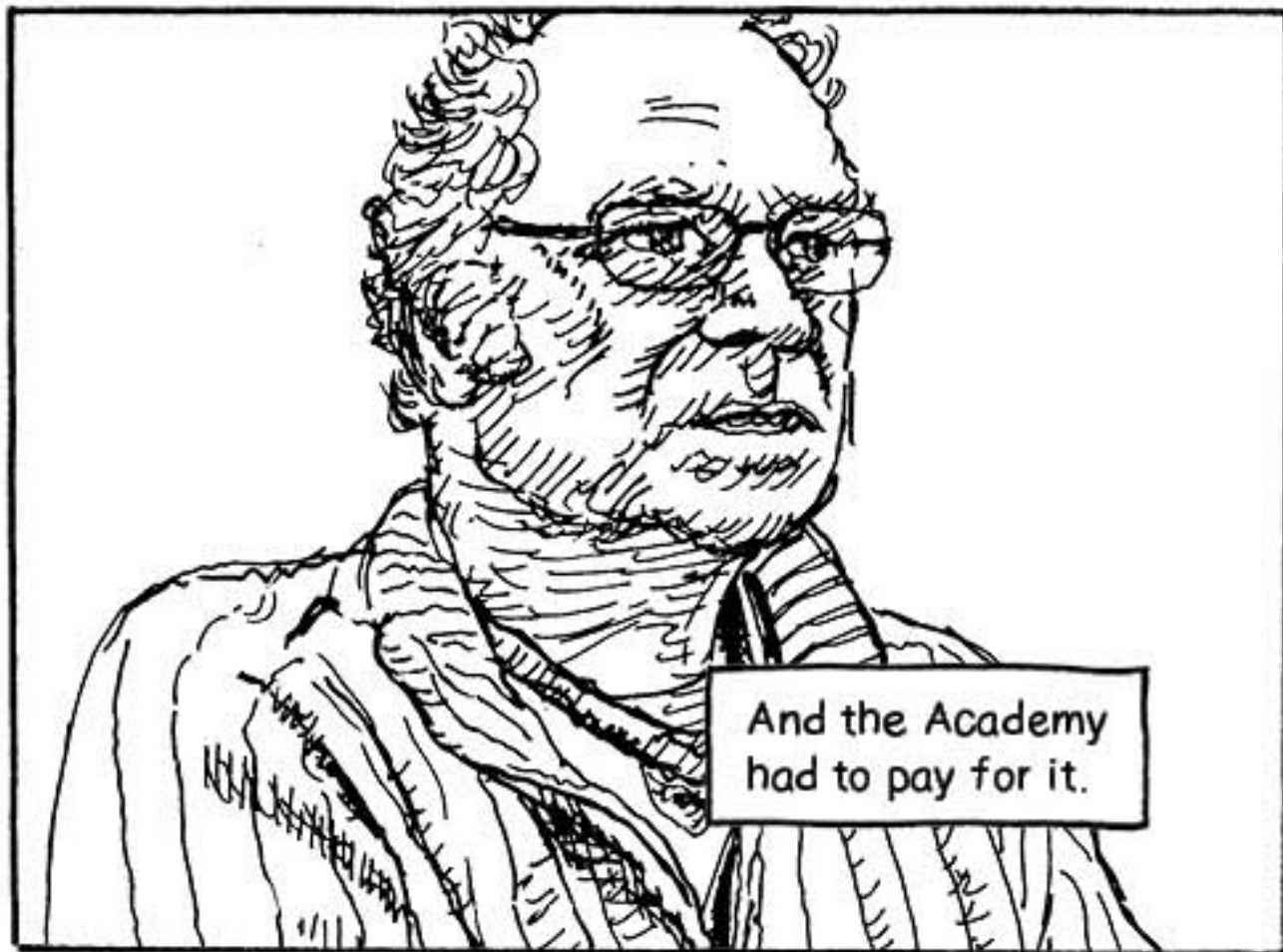
Here at the Van Abbe we don't use glass.



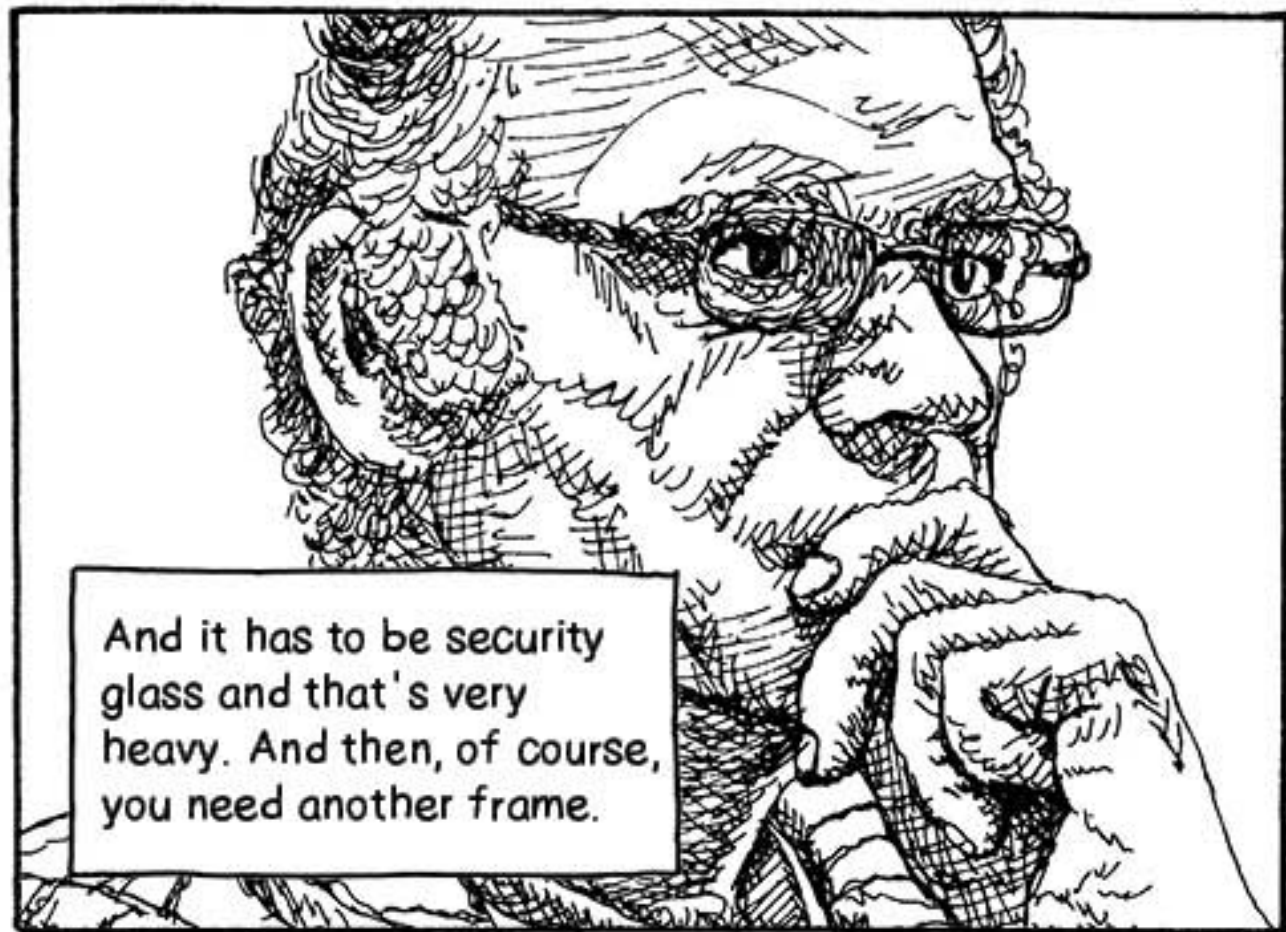
We knew there was security enough, so it was easy to make the decision.



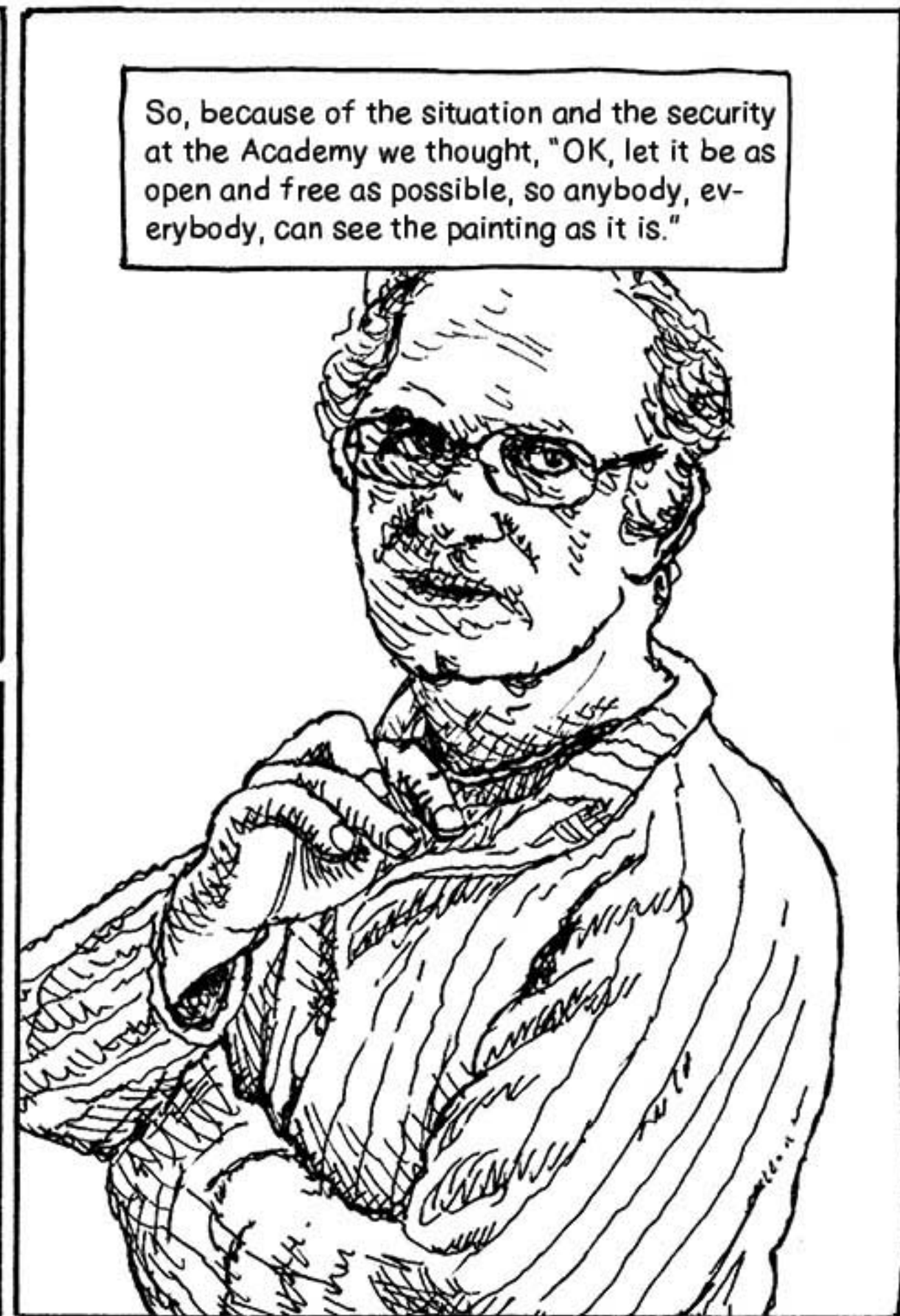
We were thinking about glass, of course, but it's more difficult, and more expensive. It's very expensive.



And the Academy had to pay for it.

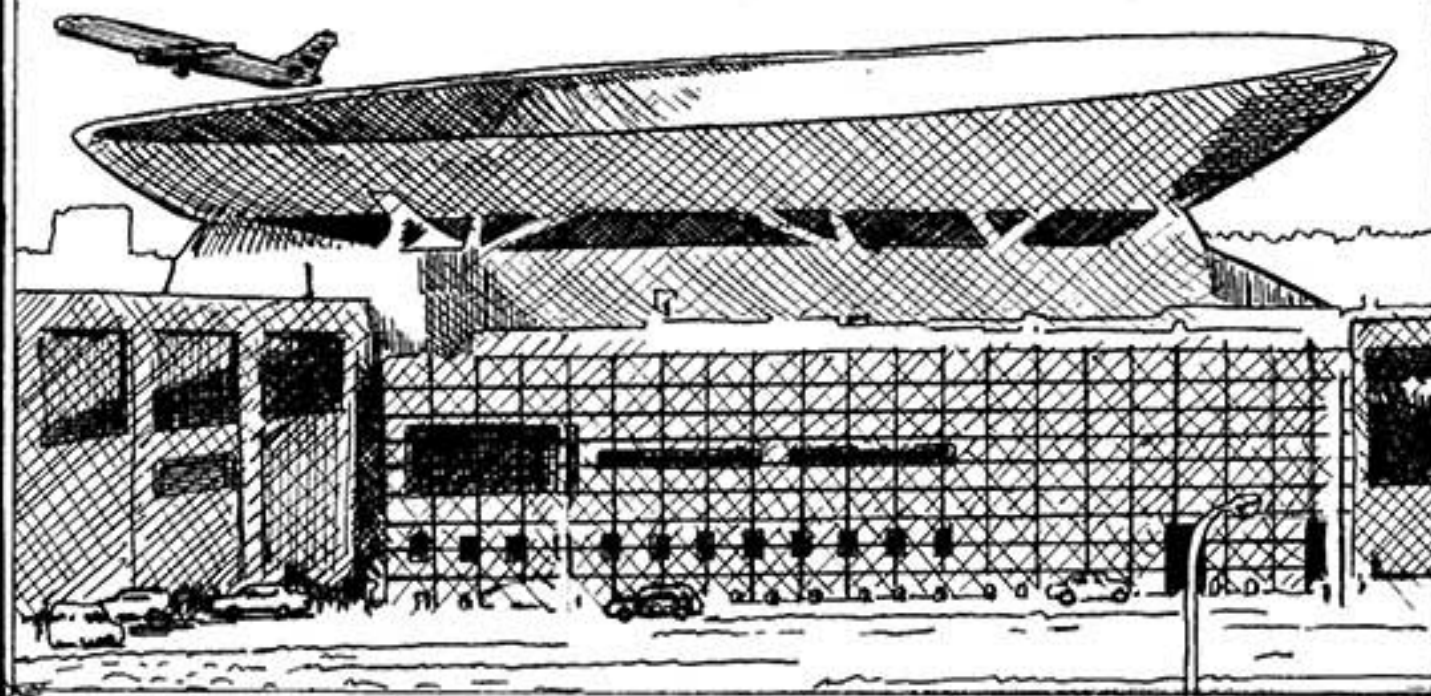


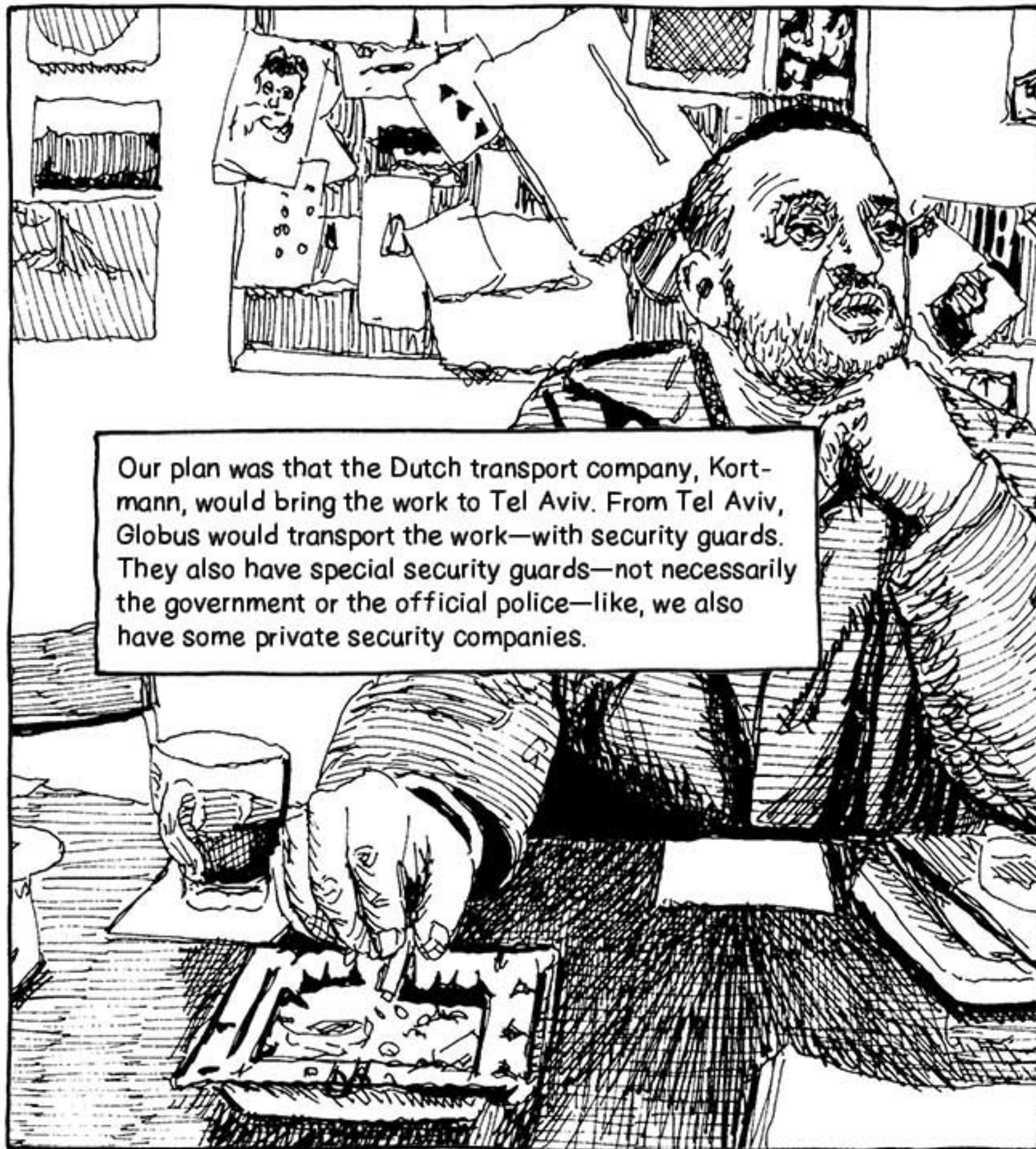
And it has to be security glass and that's very heavy. And then, of course, you need another frame.



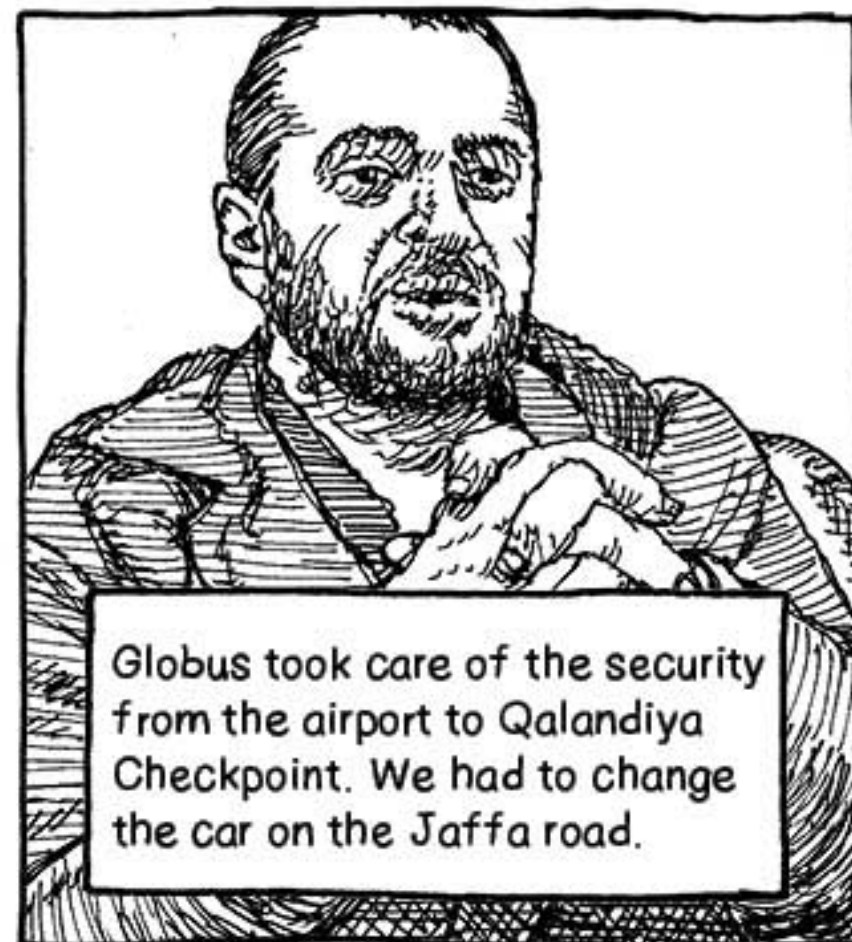
So, because of the situation and the security at the Academy we thought, "OK, let it be as open and free as possible, so anybody, everybody, can see the painting as it is."

PUTTING EVERYBODY
IN THE PICTURE

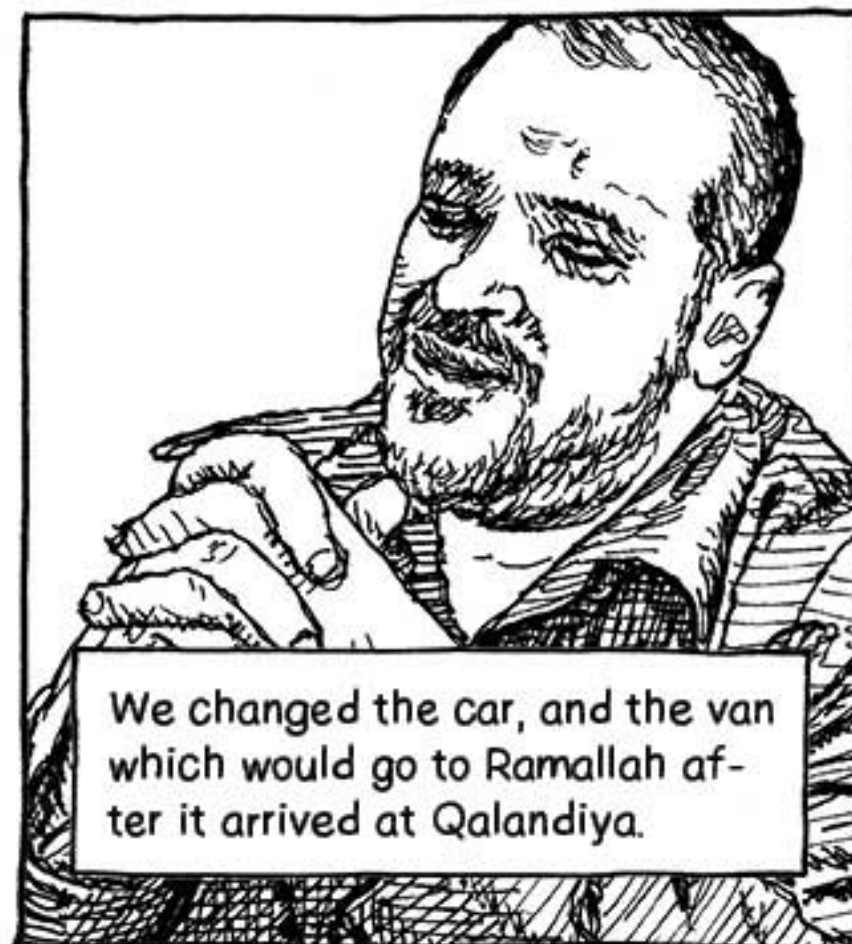




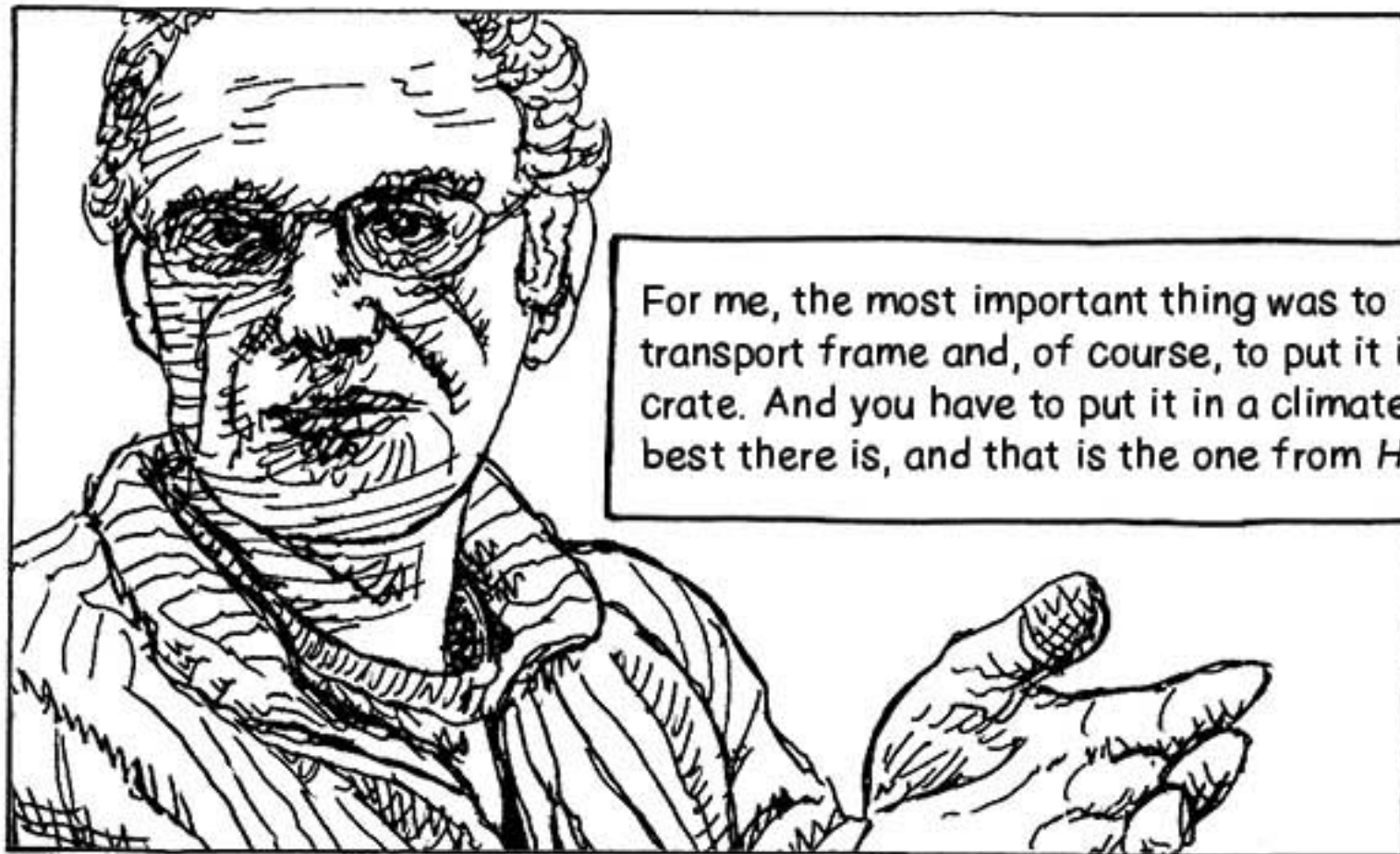
Our plan was that the Dutch transport company, Kortmann, would bring the work to Tel Aviv. From Tel Aviv, Globus would transport the work—with security guards. They also have special security guards—not necessarily the government or the official police—like, we also have some private security companies.



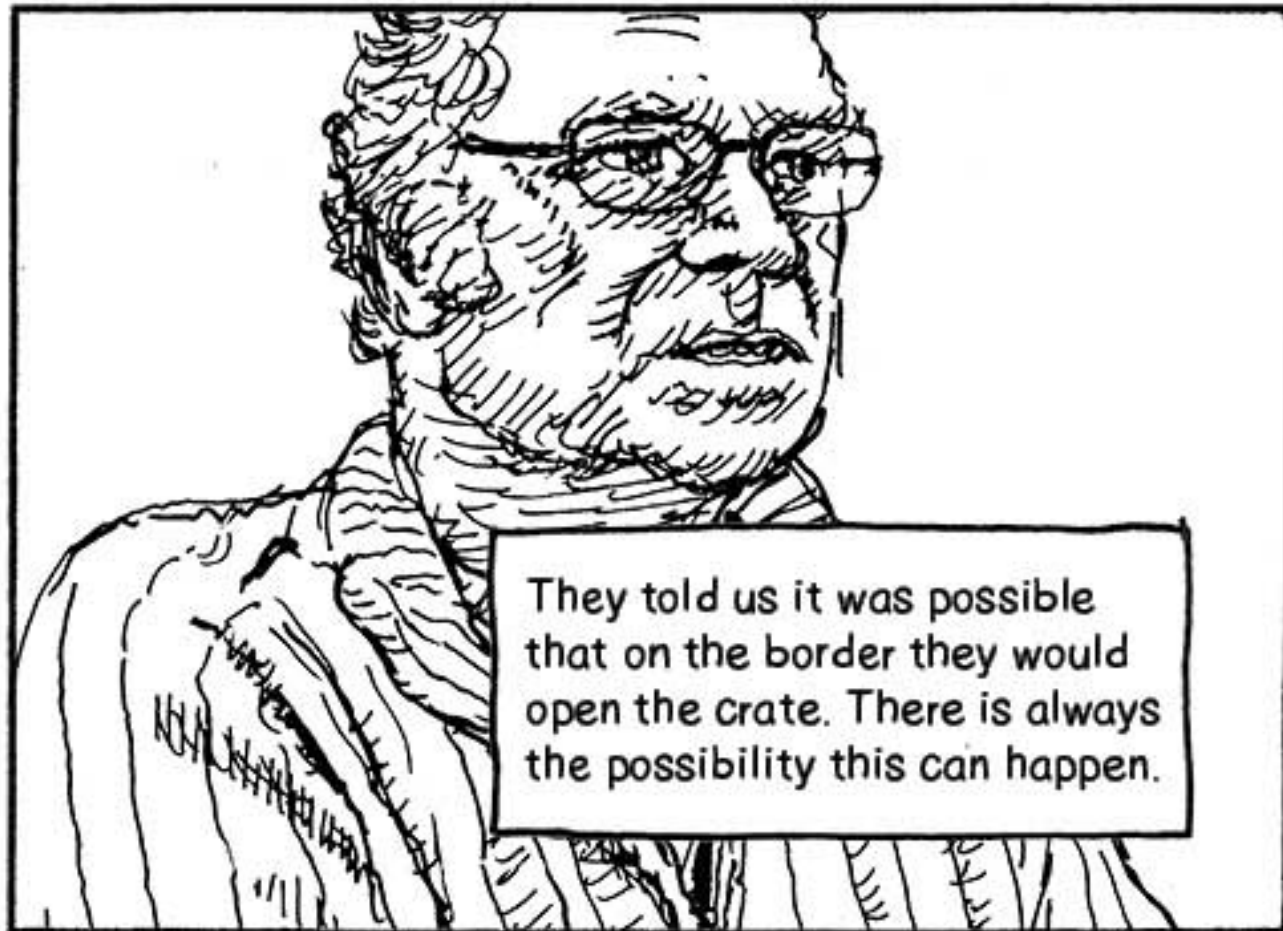
Globus took care of the security from the airport to Qalandiya Checkpoint. We had to change the car on the Jaffa road.



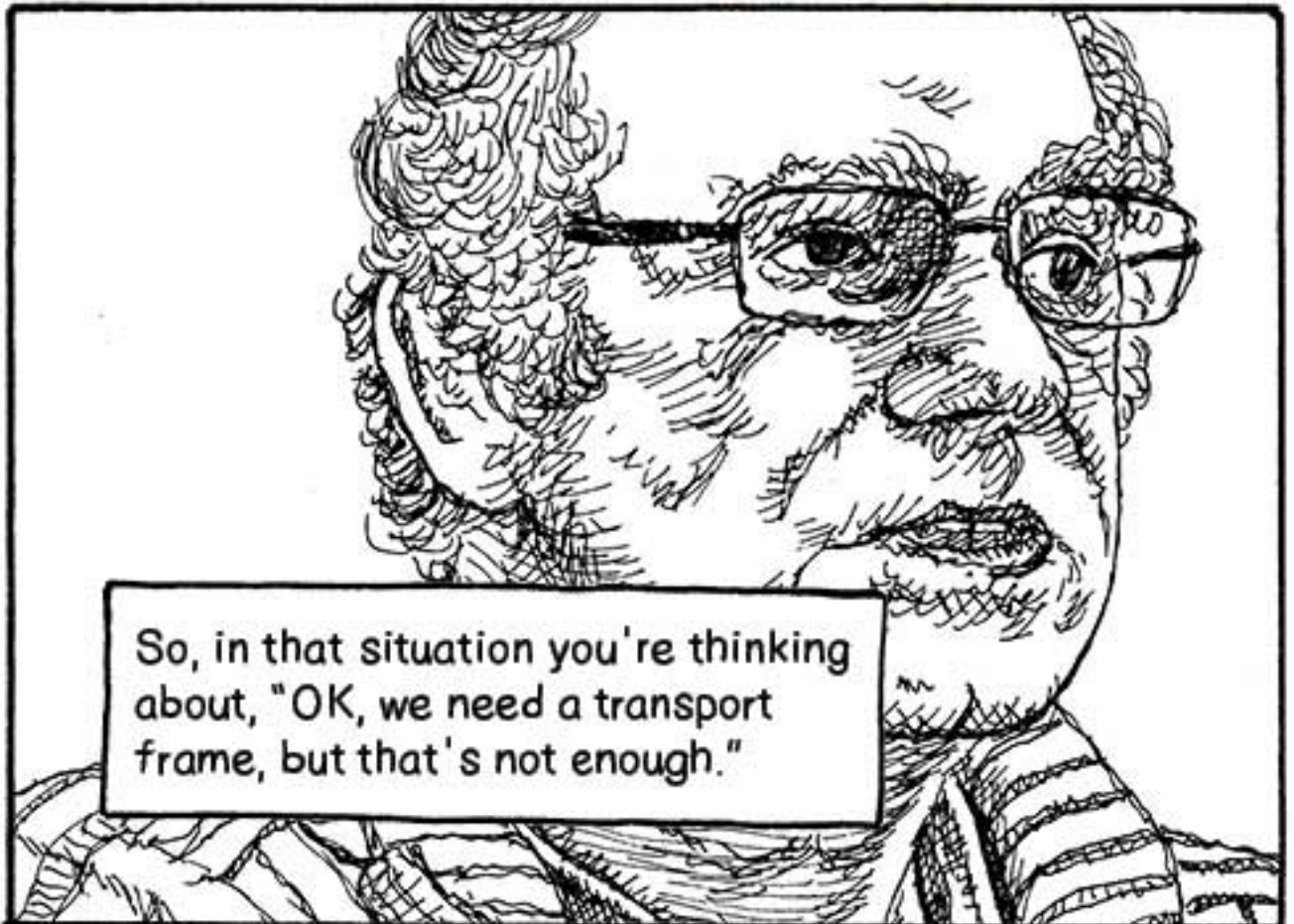
We changed the car, and the van which would go to Ramallah after it arrived at Qalandiya.



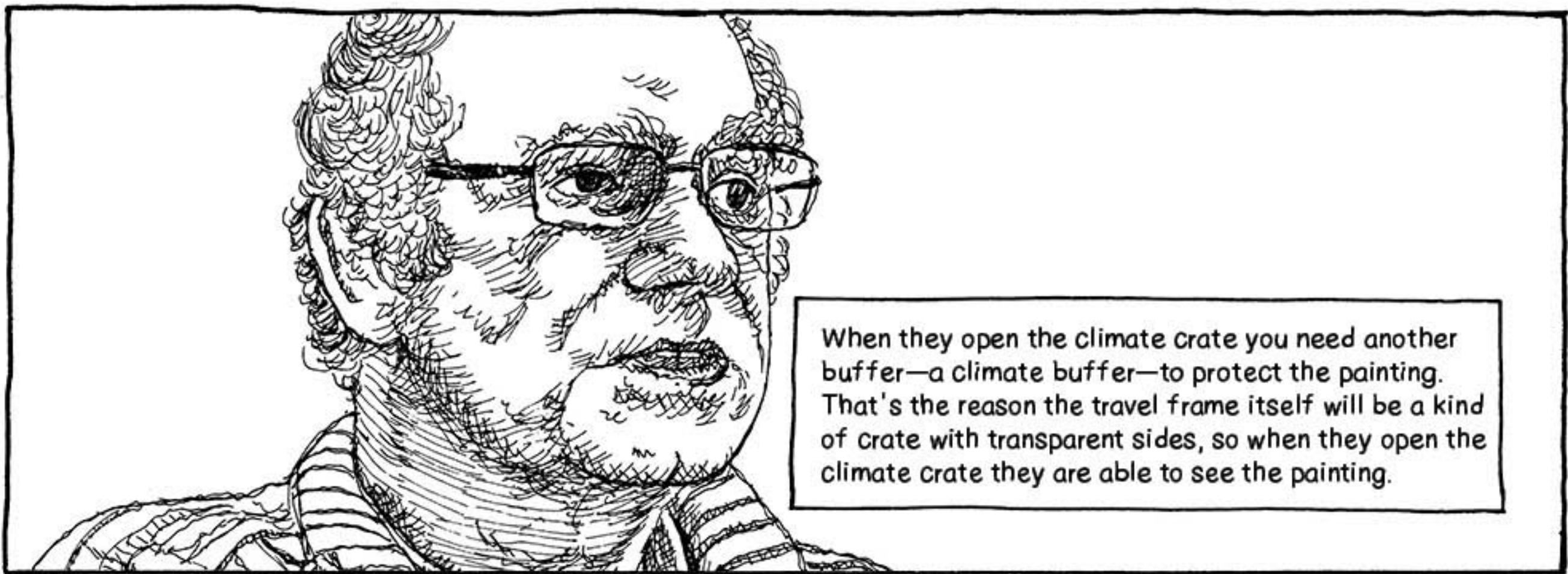
For me, the most important thing was to have a good transport frame and, of course, to put it in a good crate. And you have to put it in a climate crate... the best there is, and that is the one from *Hasenkamp*.



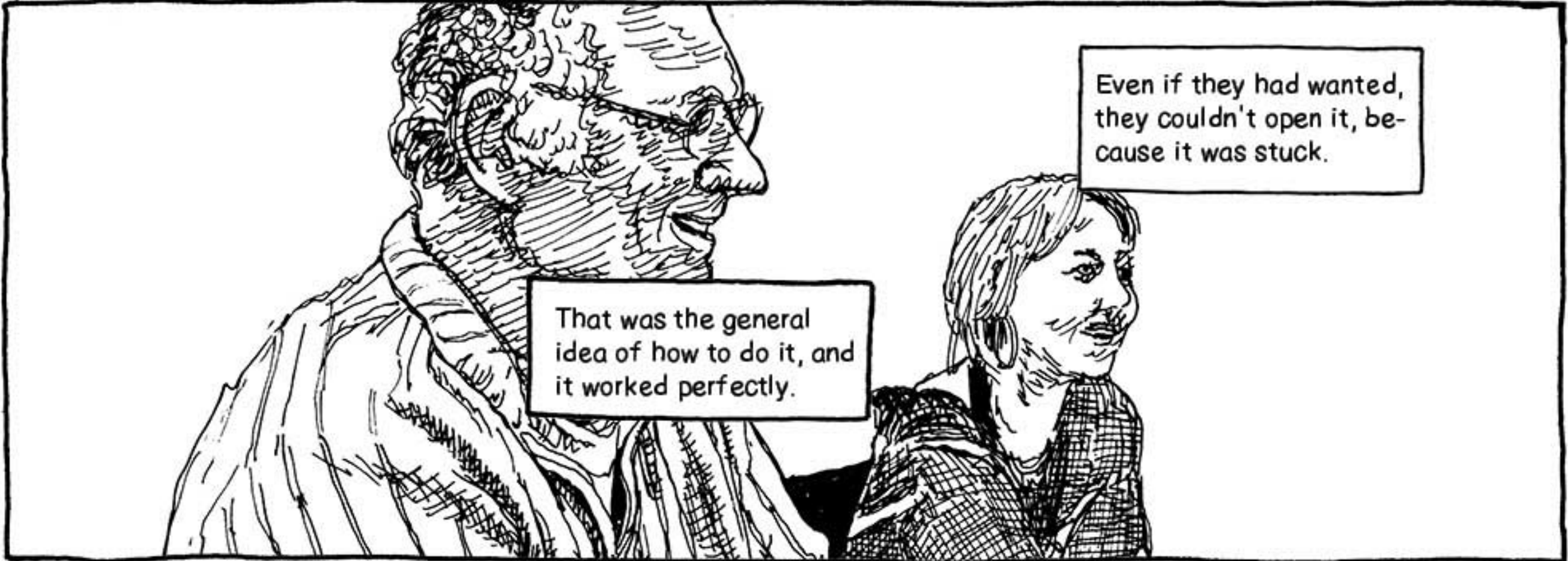
They told us it was possible that on the border they would open the crate. There is always the possibility this can happen.



So, in that situation you're thinking about, "OK, we need a transport frame, but that's not enough."

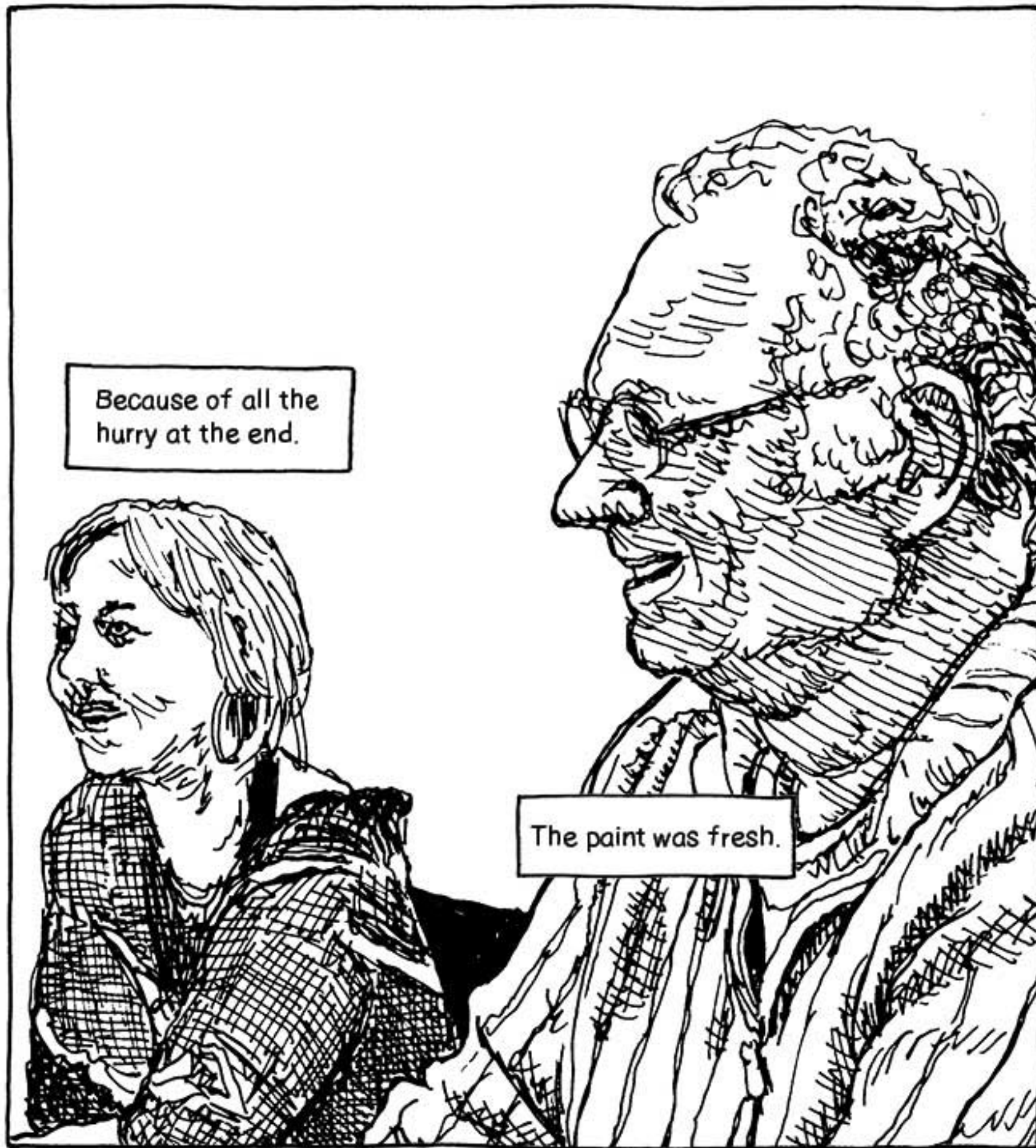


When they open the climate crate you need another buffer—a climate buffer—to protect the painting. That's the reason the travel frame itself will be a kind of crate with transparent sides, so when they open the climate crate they are able to see the painting.



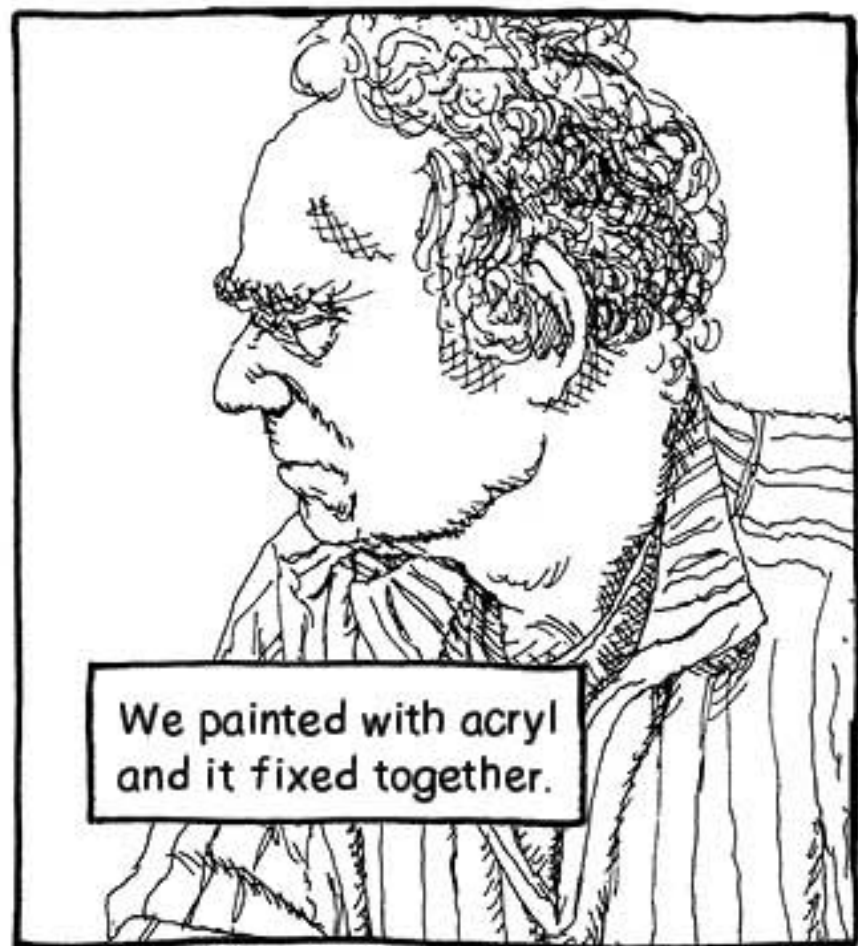
That was the general idea of how to do it, and it worked perfectly.

Even if they had wanted, they couldn't open it, because it was stuck.



Because of all the hurry at the end.

The paint was fresh.



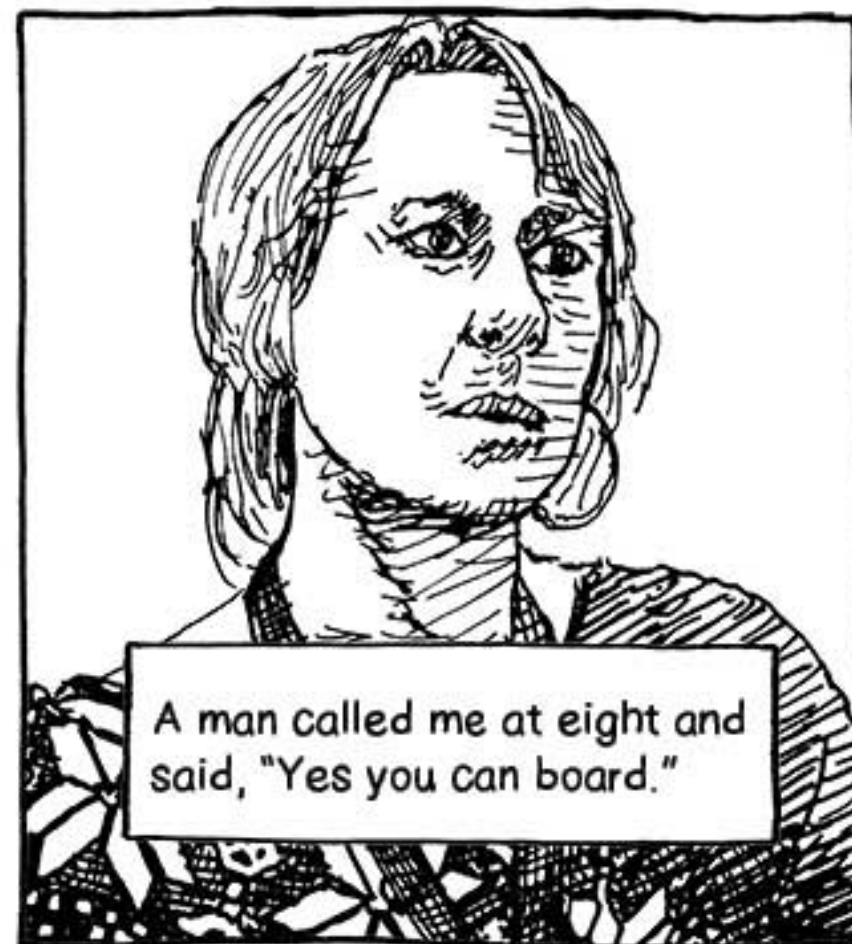
We painted with acryl and it fixed together.



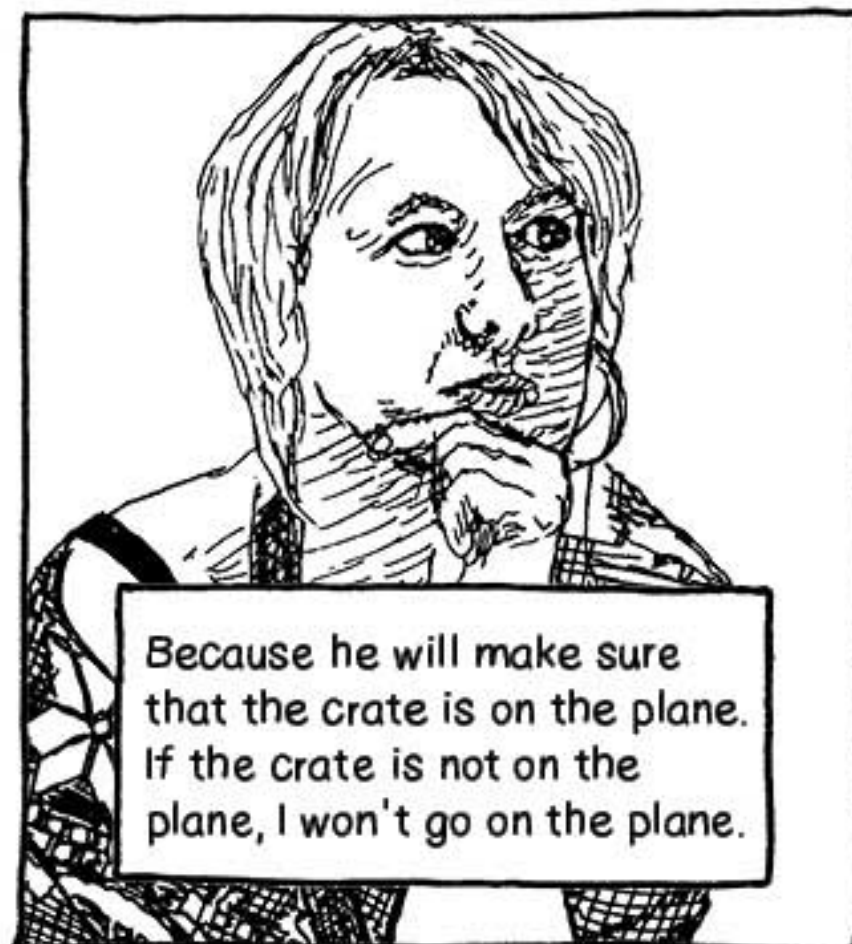
Yeah, it was like glue.



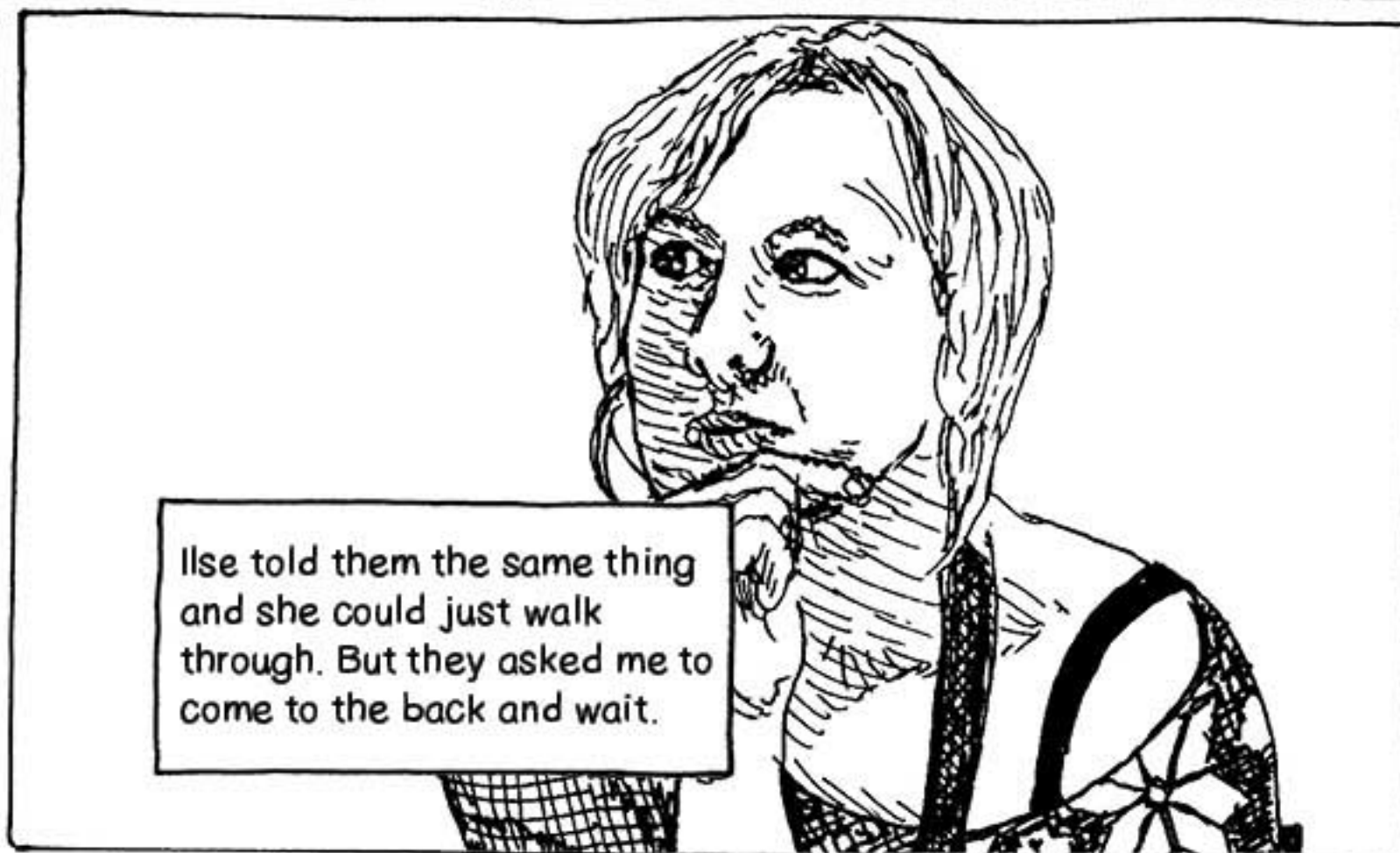
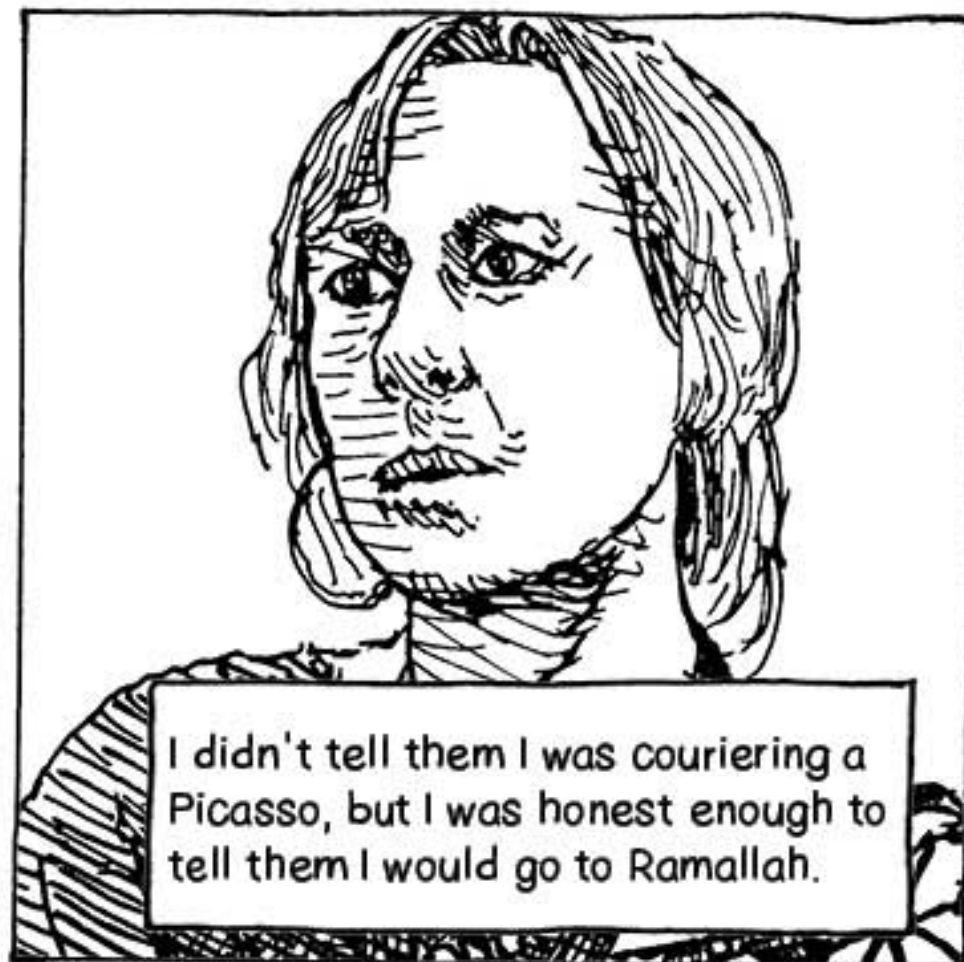
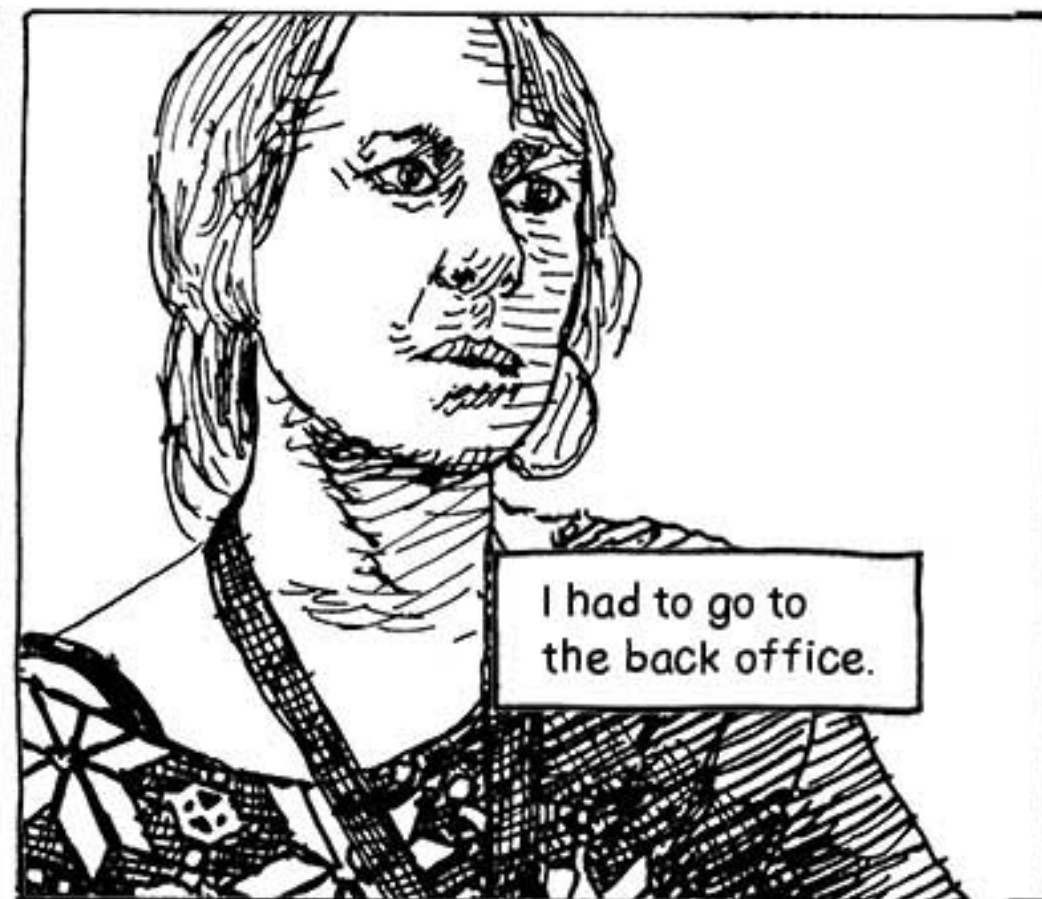
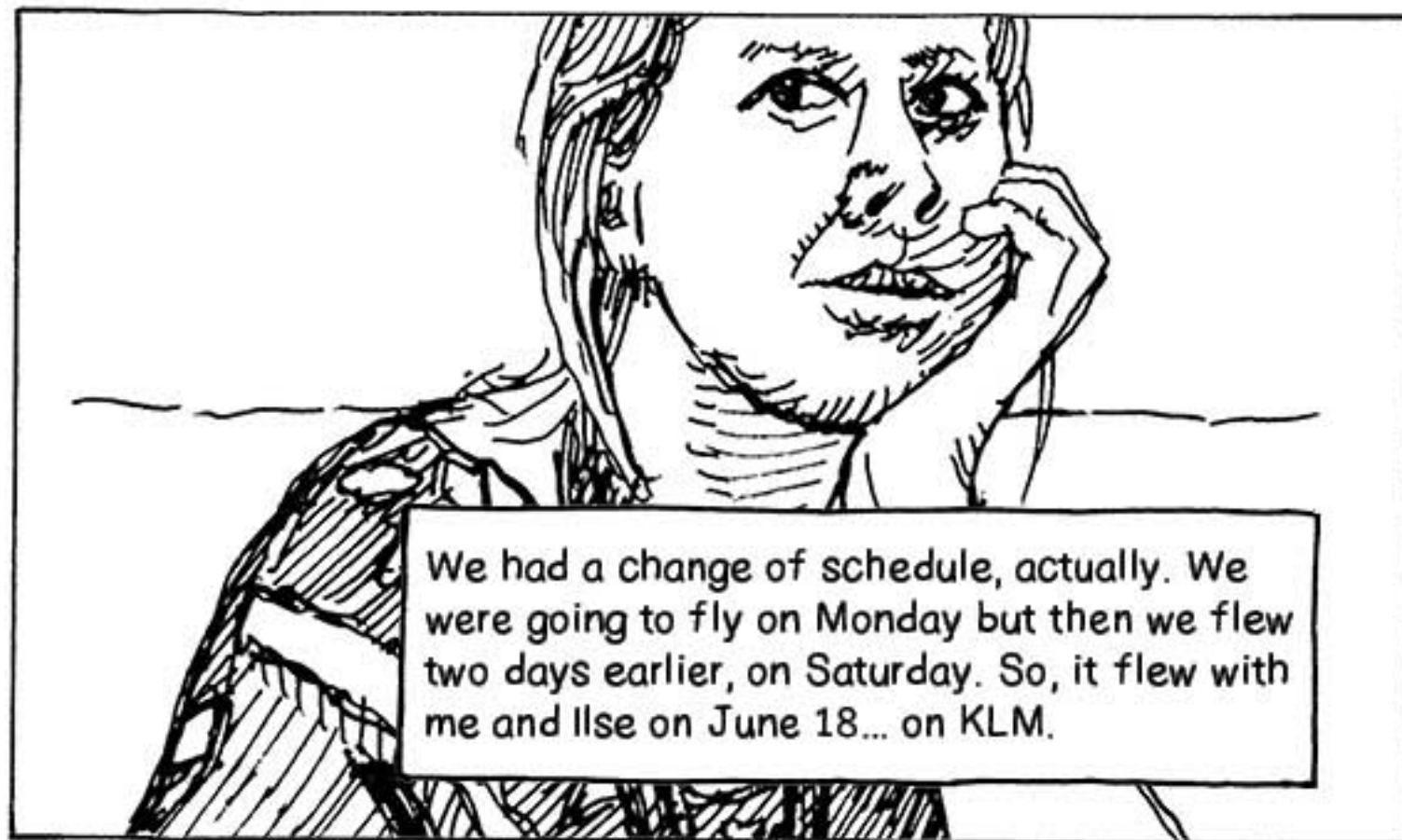
At Schiphol, you go to an area where the crate is going on a pallet, and it goes on pallets with medicine, but you have to check that it won't go on a pallet with something inflammable or a chemical, and that also takes about an hour, and then you have to know exactly which pallet it's on.

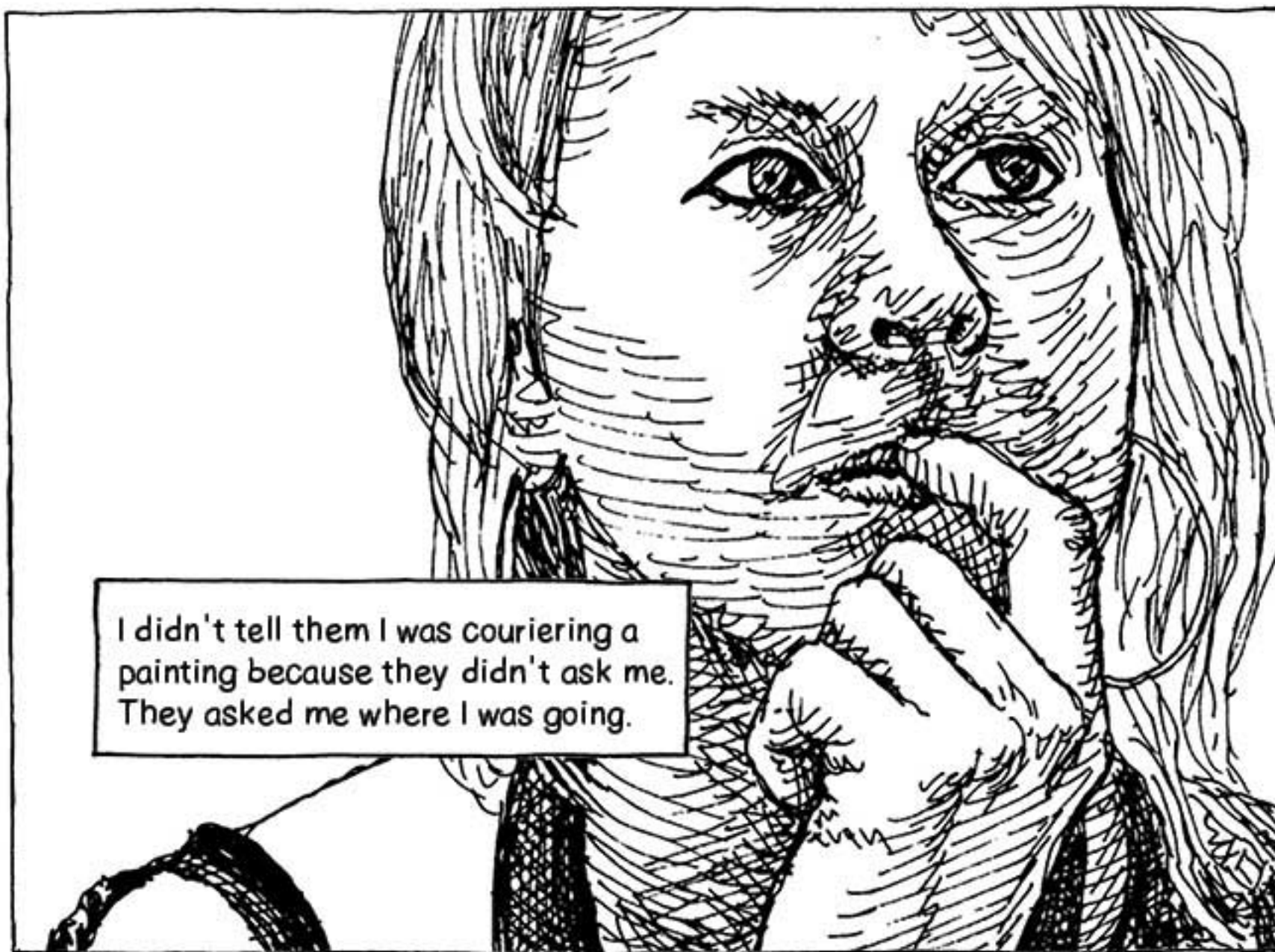


A man called me at eight and said, "Yes you can board."

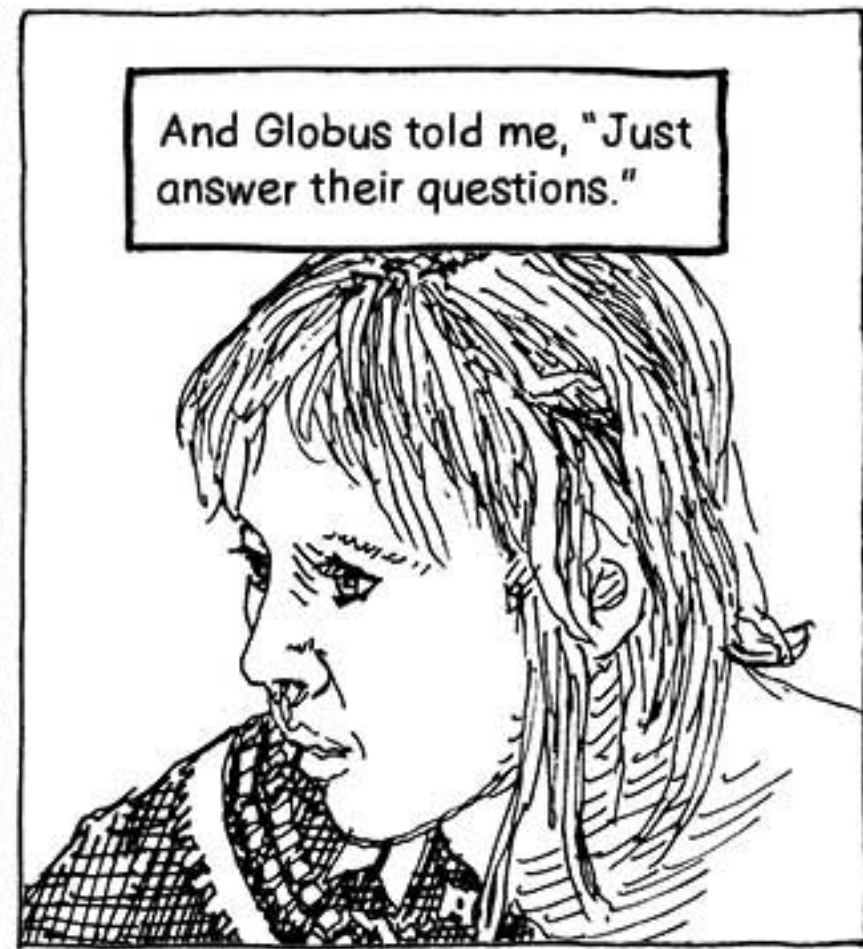


Because he will make sure that the crate is on the plane. If the crate is not on the plane, I won't go on the plane.





I didn't tell them I was couriering a painting because they didn't ask me. They asked me where I was going.



And Globus told me, "Just answer their questions."



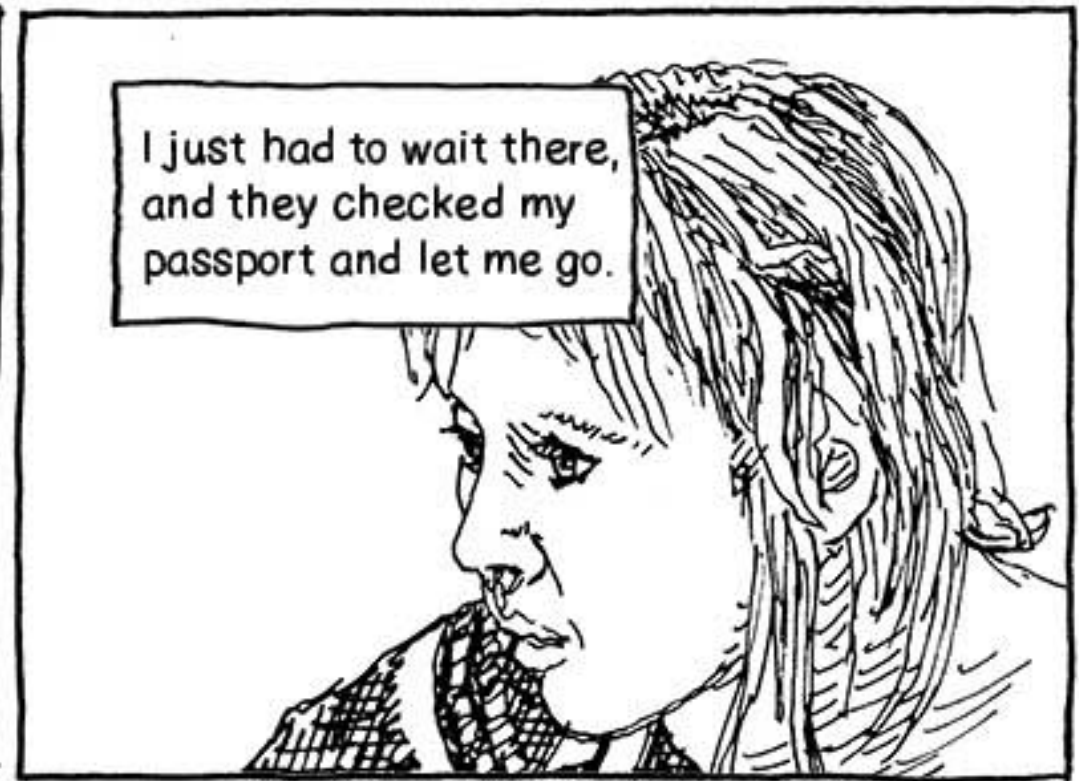
And they asked me something where I couldn't avoid telling them where I was going.



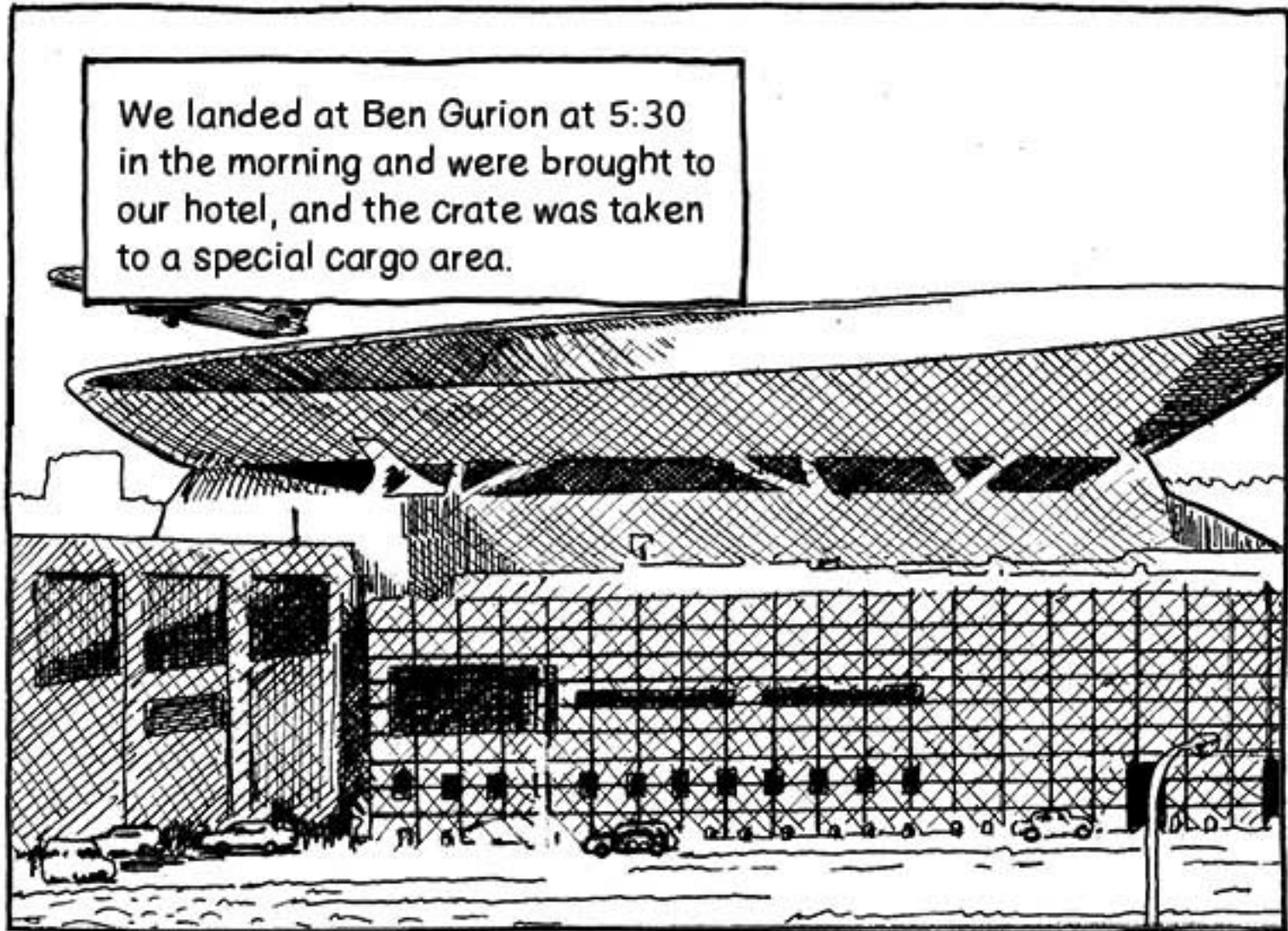
And I thought, "What's illegal about that?"



They got my passport and checked it. I had to wait for ten minutes. They didn't even interrogate me.



I just had to wait there, and they checked my passport and let me go.



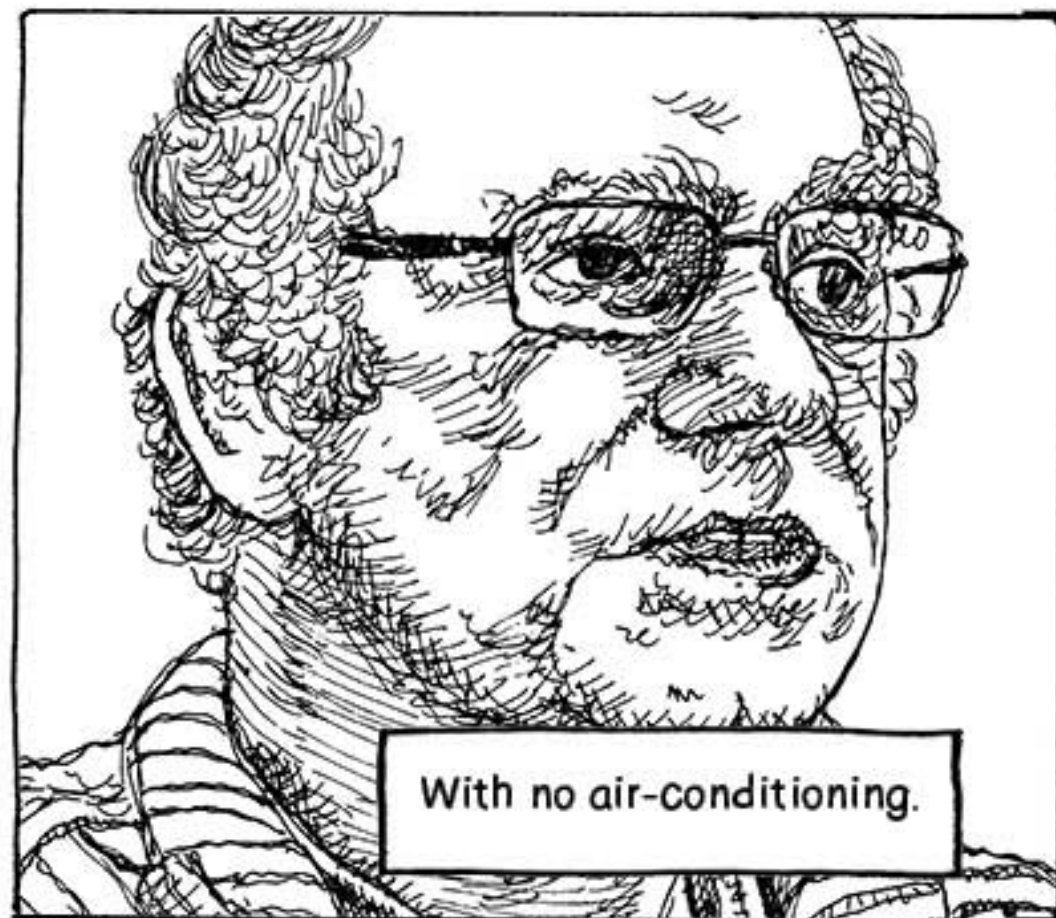
We landed at Ben Gurion at 5:30 in the morning and were brought to our hotel, and the crate was taken to a special cargo area.



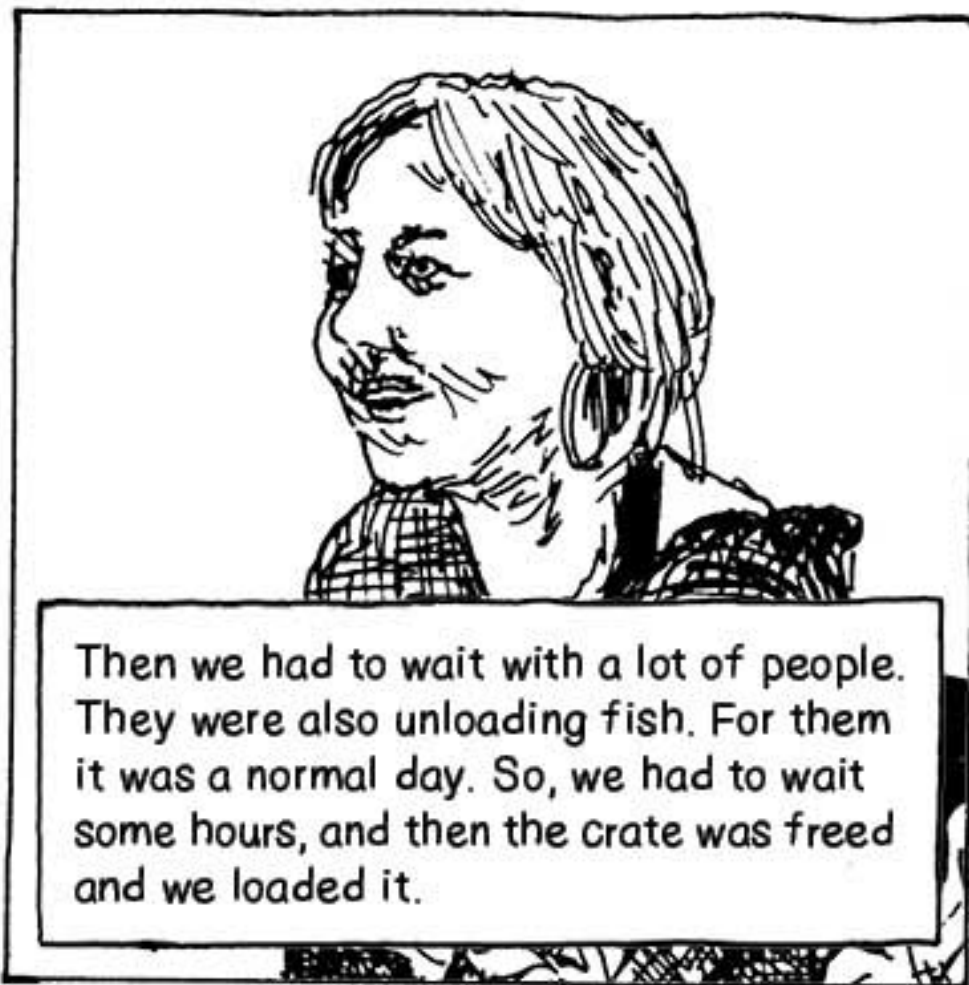
And the next morning at 8, Globus picked it up.



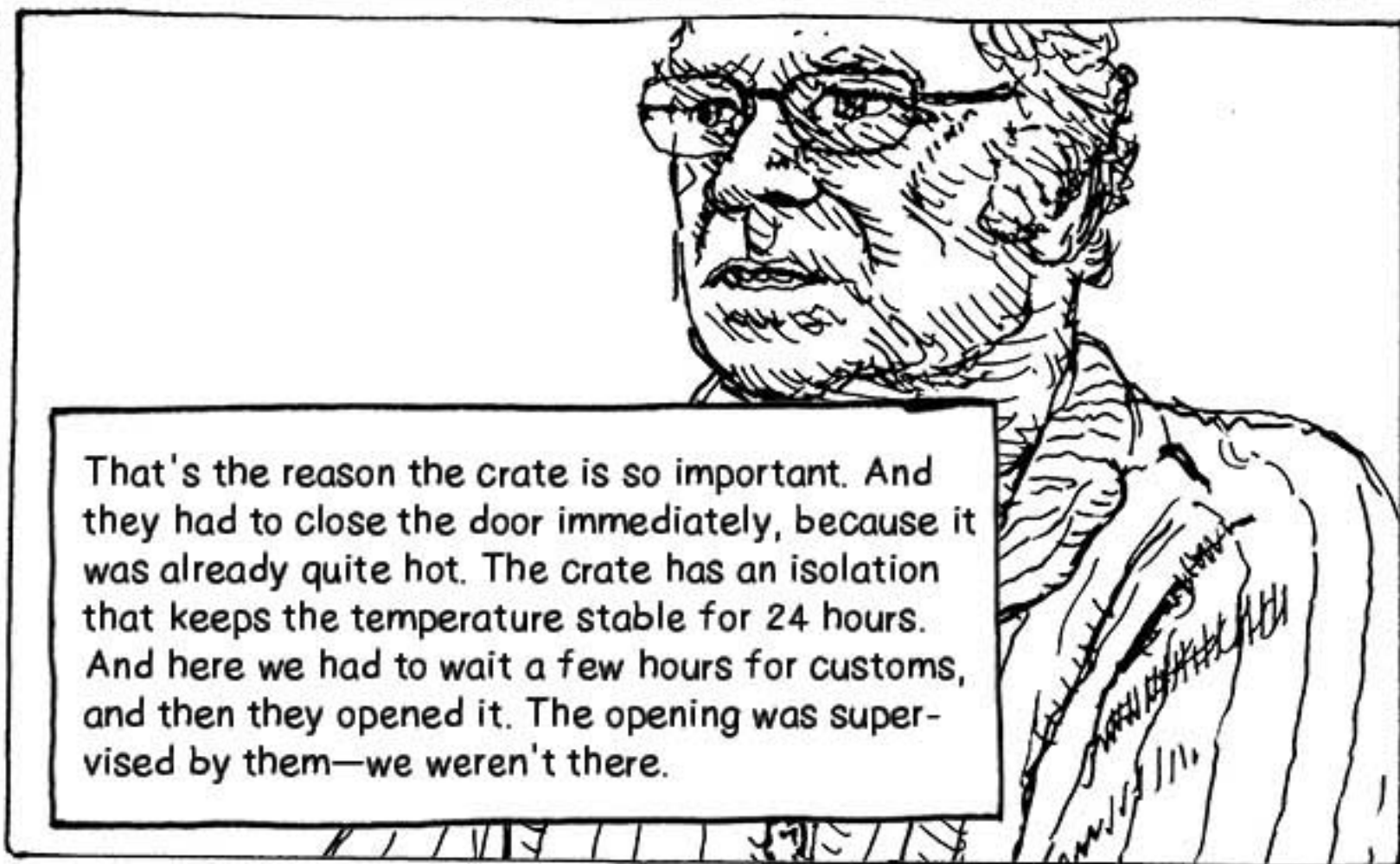
Then we were taken to the cargo hangar at Ben Gurion. We were surprised it was so small.



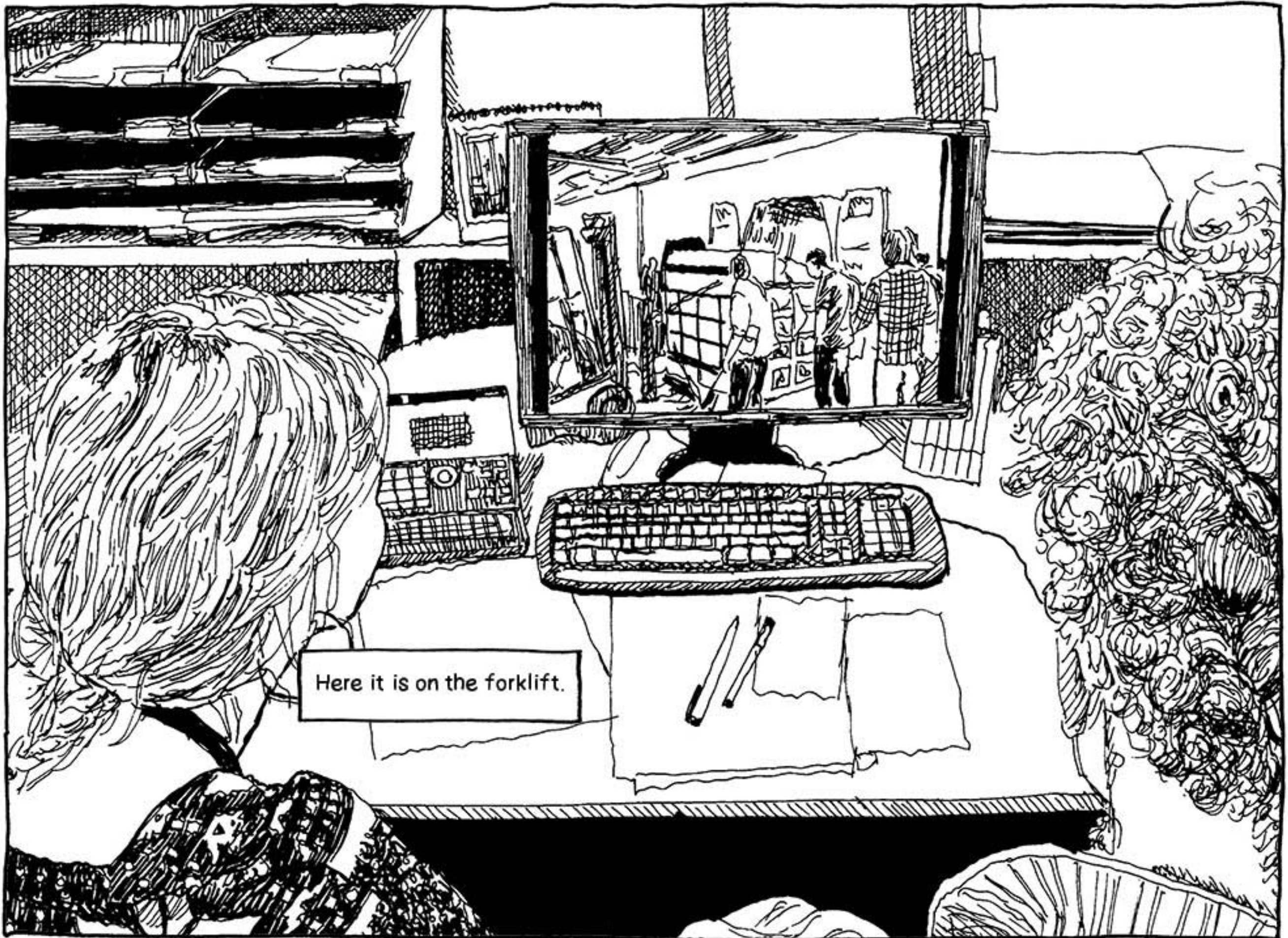
With no air-conditioning.



Then we had to wait with a lot of people. They were also unloading fish. For them it was a normal day. So, we had to wait some hours, and then the crate was freed and we loaded it.



That's the reason the crate is so important. And they had to close the door immediately, because it was already quite hot. The crate has an isolation that keeps the temperature stable for 24 hours. And here we had to wait a few hours for customs, and then they opened it. The opening was supervised by them—we weren't there.



Here it is on the forklift.

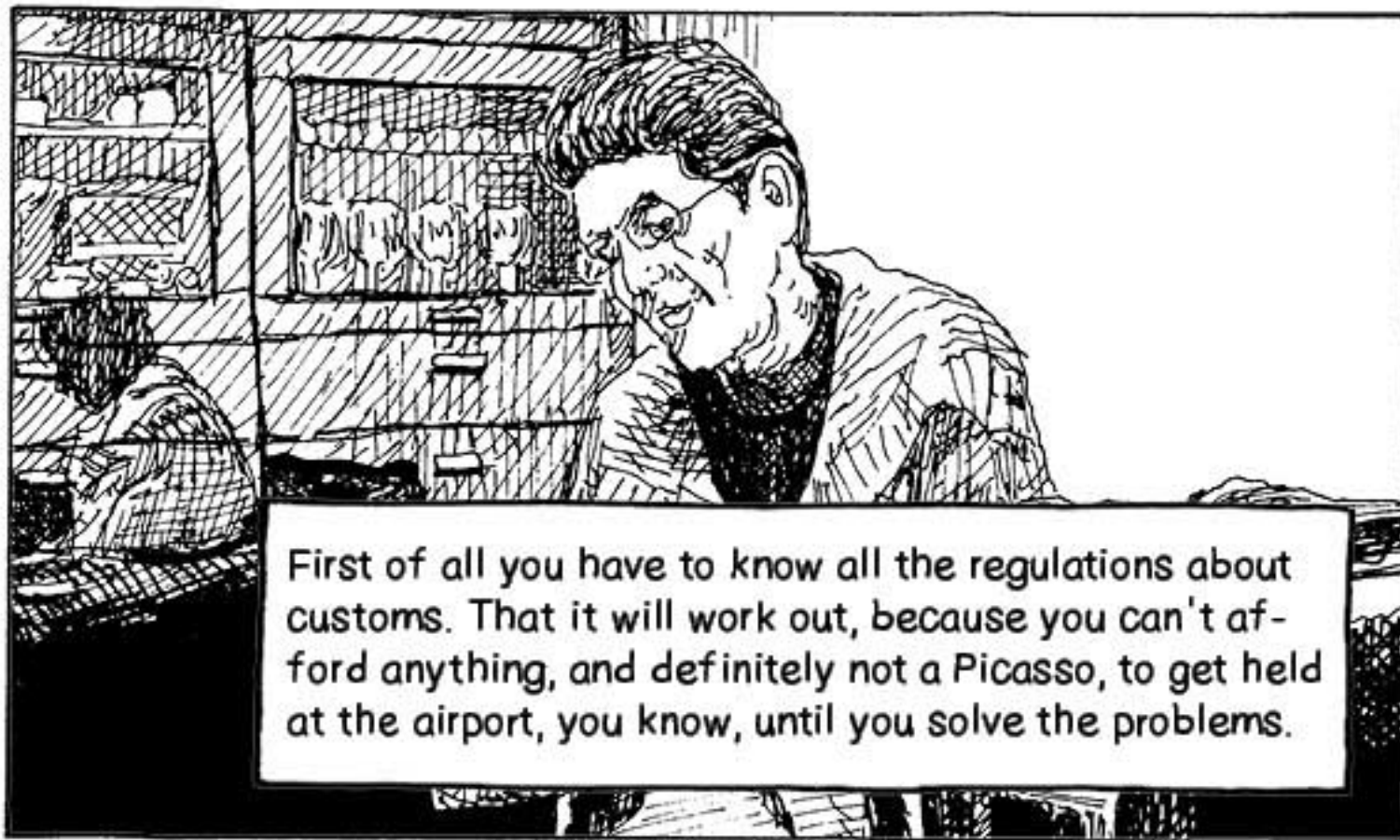
Bettine is referring to a query I had made earlier about Louis's phobic relationship to forklifts as portrayed in Die Zeit. Bettine said at this point that that was not the only case of exaggeration, but refrained from going into detail.

Louis philosophically commented, "They're journalists, so they change some things."



I asked them, "How do you want to load it?" And the forklift operator explained to me what he proposed to do. So, for me it was safe.

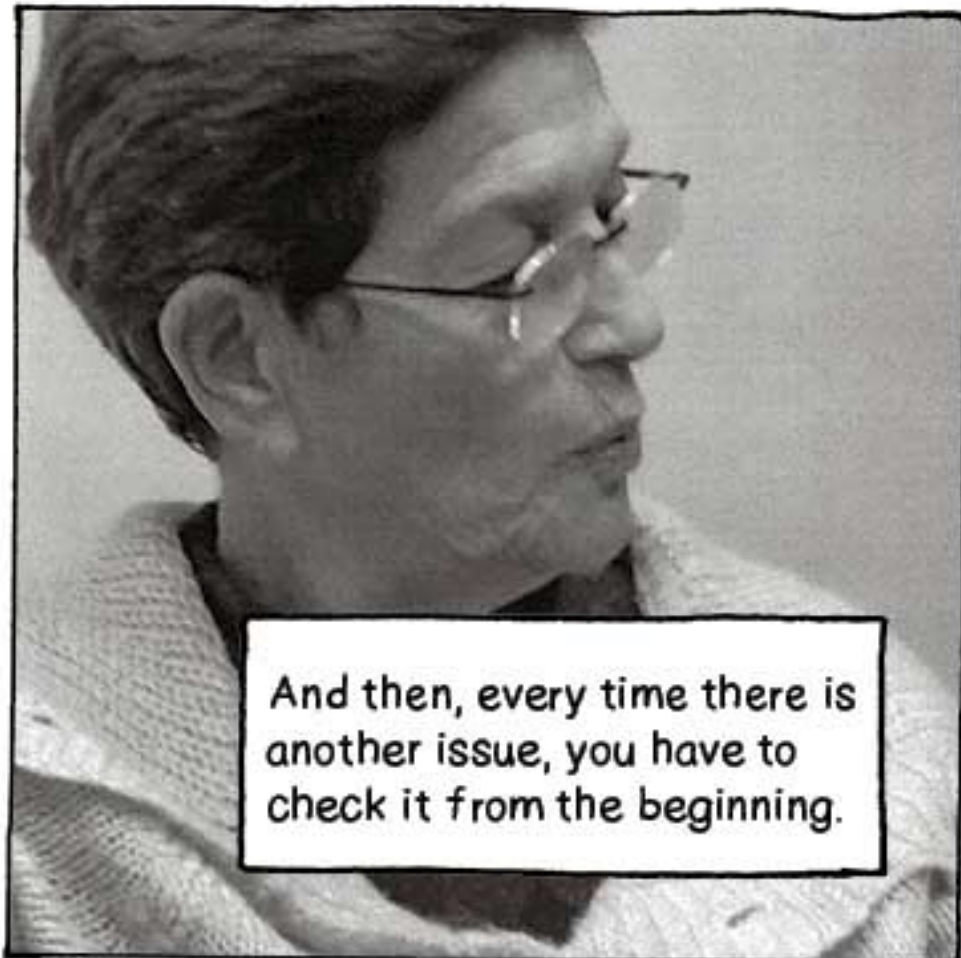




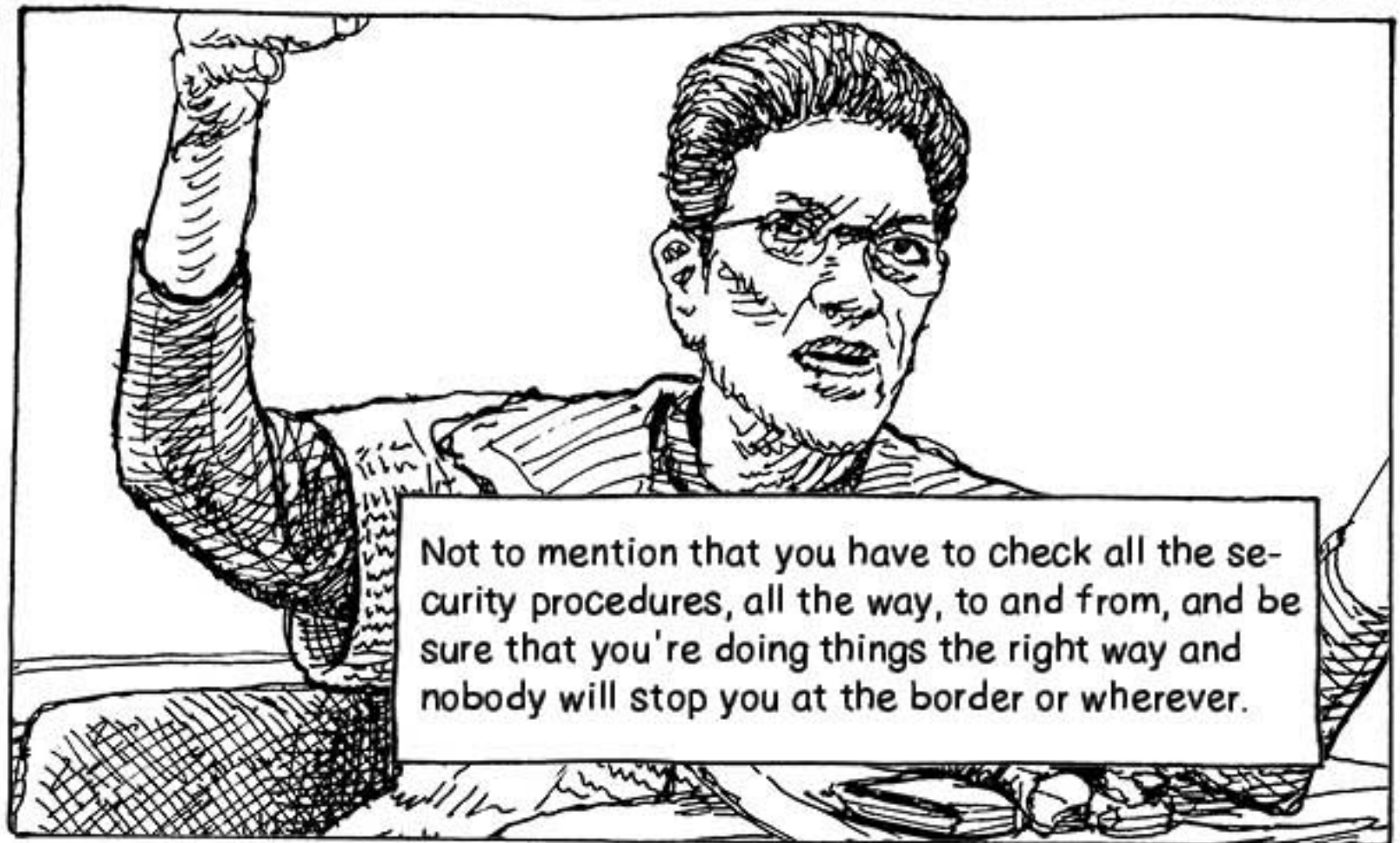
First of all you have to know all the regulations about customs. That it will work out, because you can't afford anything, and definitely not a Picasso, to get held at the airport, you know, until you solve the problems.



So, you have to prepare everything in advance.



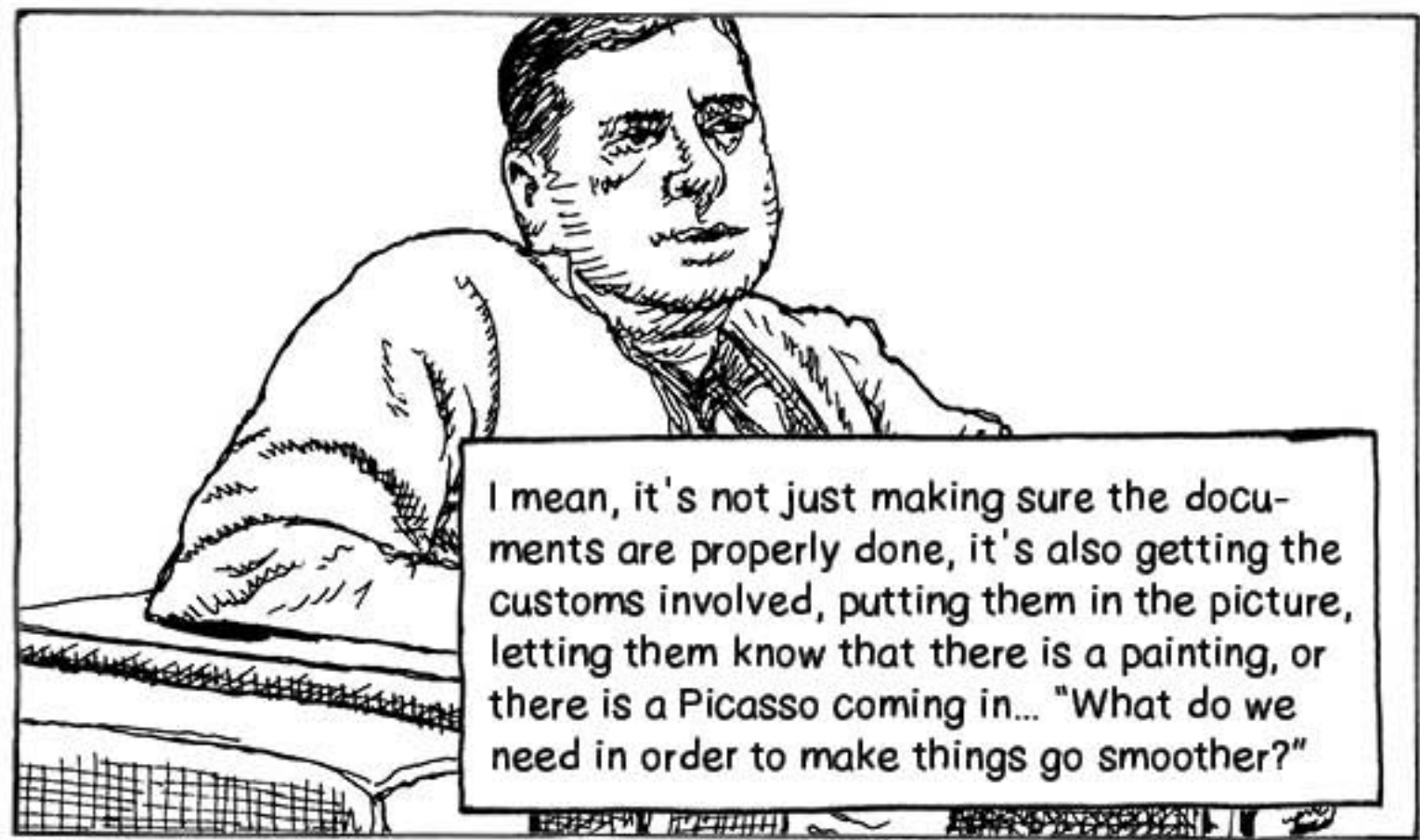
And then, every time there is another issue, you have to check it from the beginning.



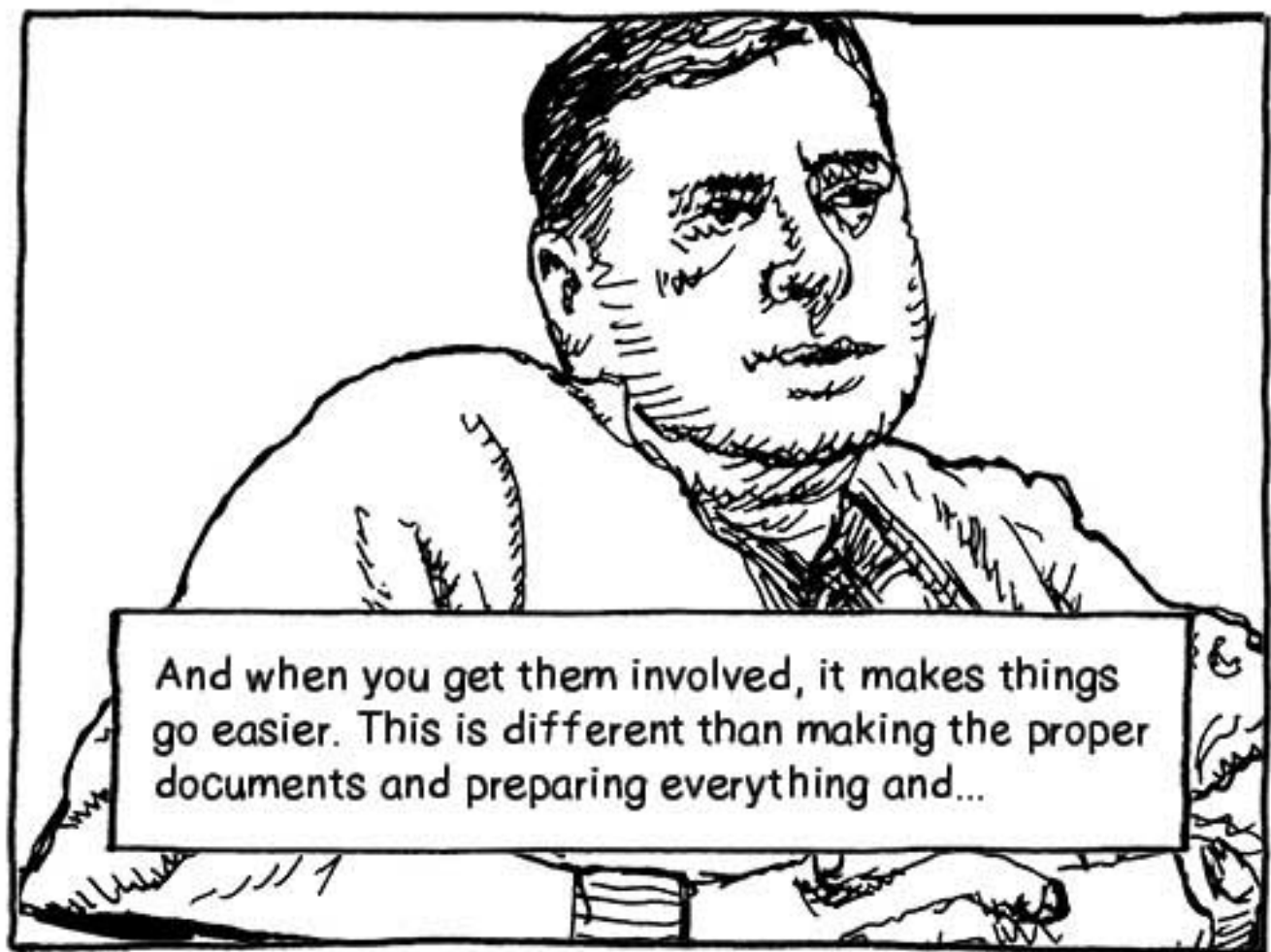
Not to mention that you have to check all the security procedures, all the way, to and from, and be sure that you're doing things the right way and nobody will stop you at the border or wherever.



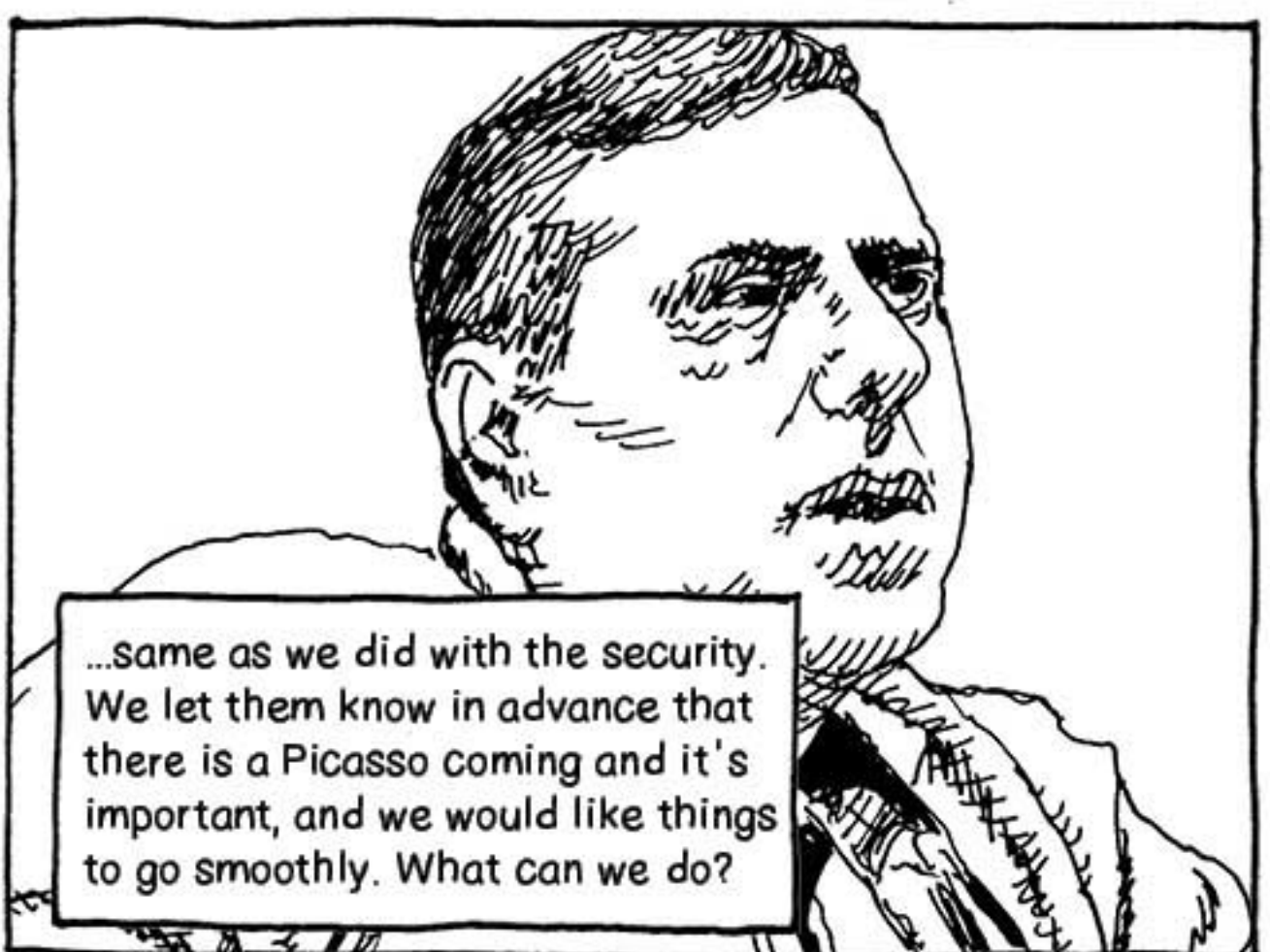
By "making sure" I mean putting everybody involved into the procedure.



I mean, it's not just making sure the documents are properly done, it's also getting the customs involved, putting them in the picture, letting them know that there is a painting, or there is a Picasso coming in... "What do we need in order to make things go smoother?"



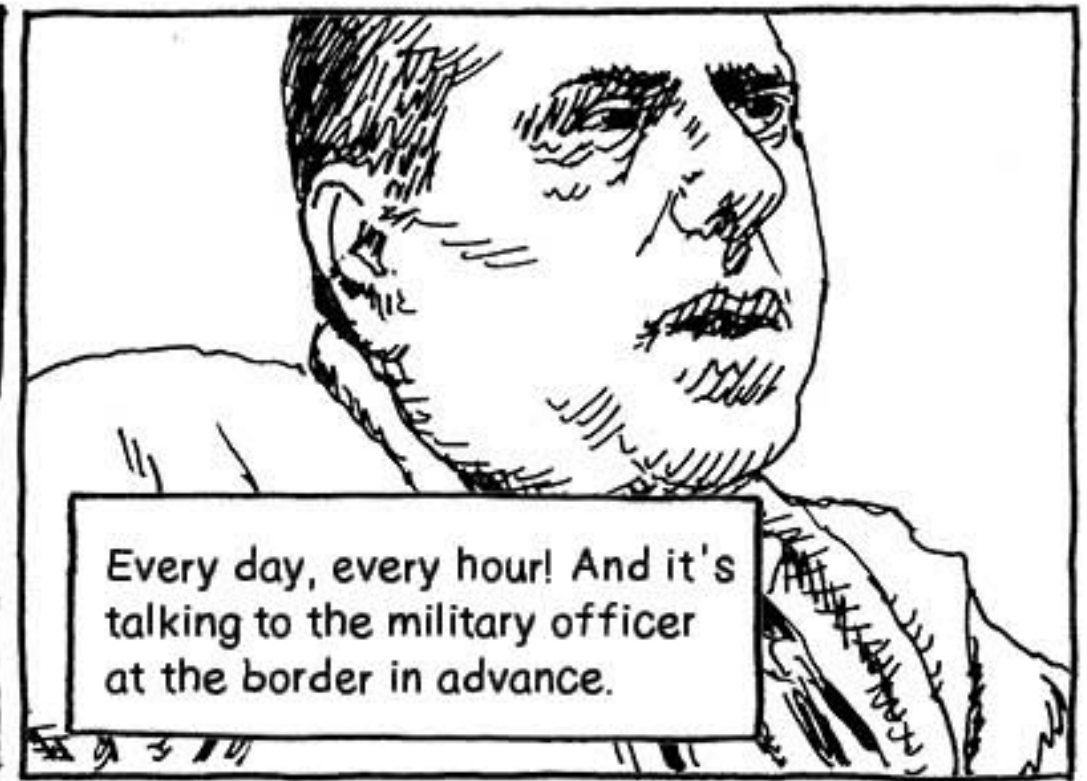
And when you get them involved, it makes things go easier. This is different than making the proper documents and preparing everything and...



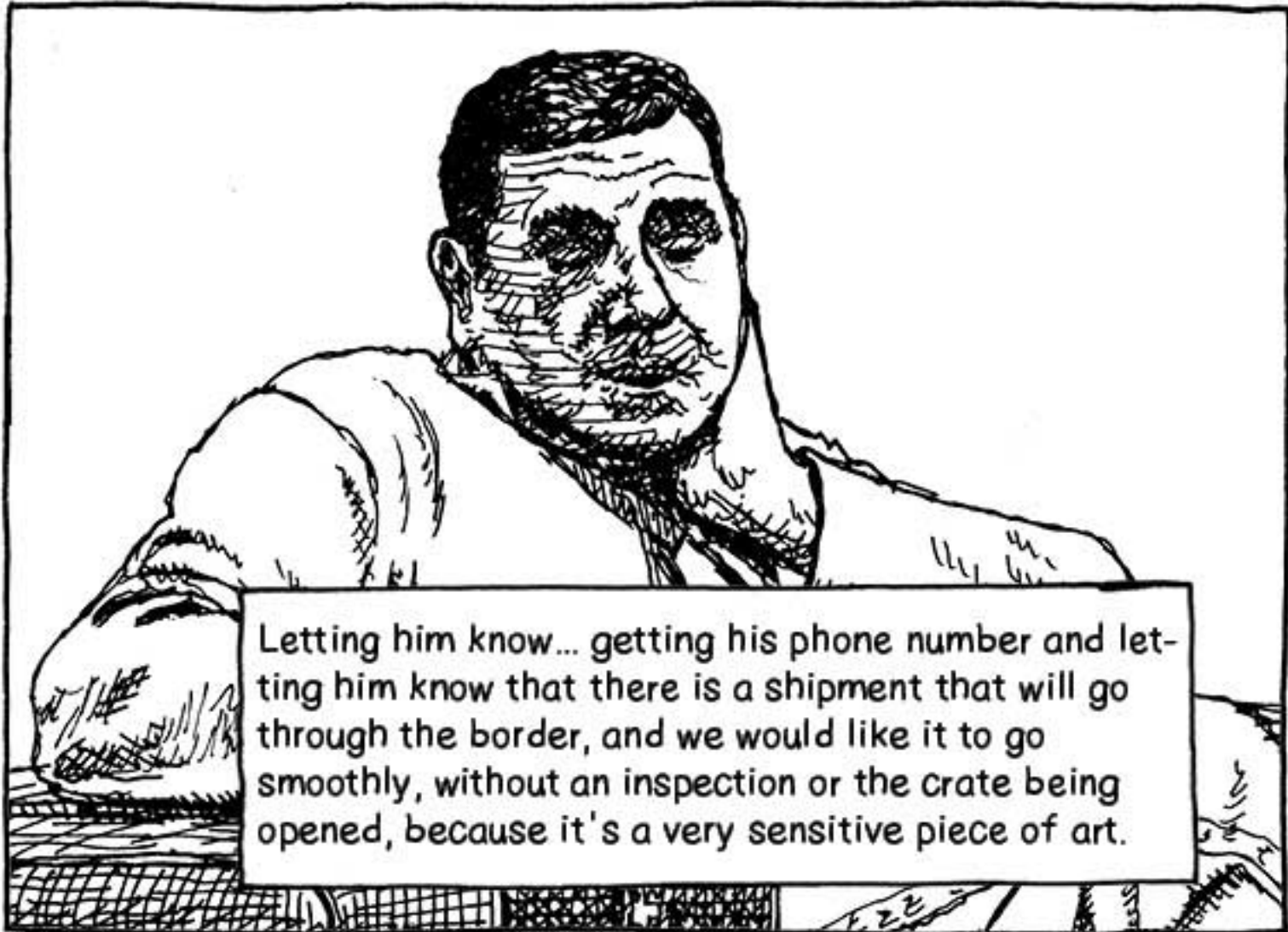
...same as we did with the security. We let them know in advance that there is a Picasso coming and it's important, and we would like things to go smoothly. What can we do?



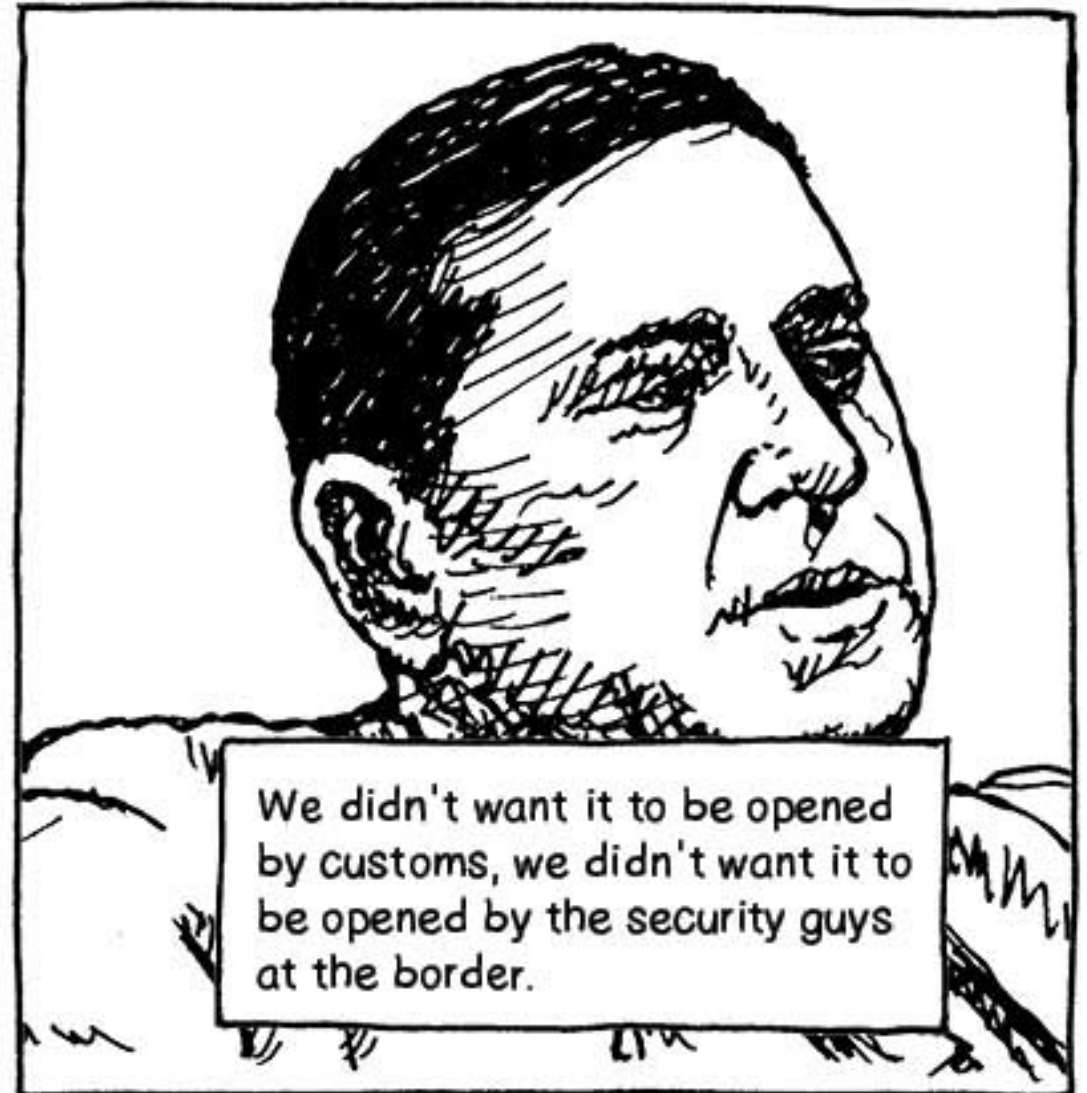
It means calling them every day, every hour...



Every day, every hour! And it's talking to the military officer at the border in advance.



Letting him know... getting his phone number and letting him know that there is a shipment that will go through the border, and we would like it to go smoothly, without an inspection or the crate being opened, because it's a very sensitive piece of art.



We didn't want it to be opened by customs, we didn't want it to be opened by the security guys at the border.



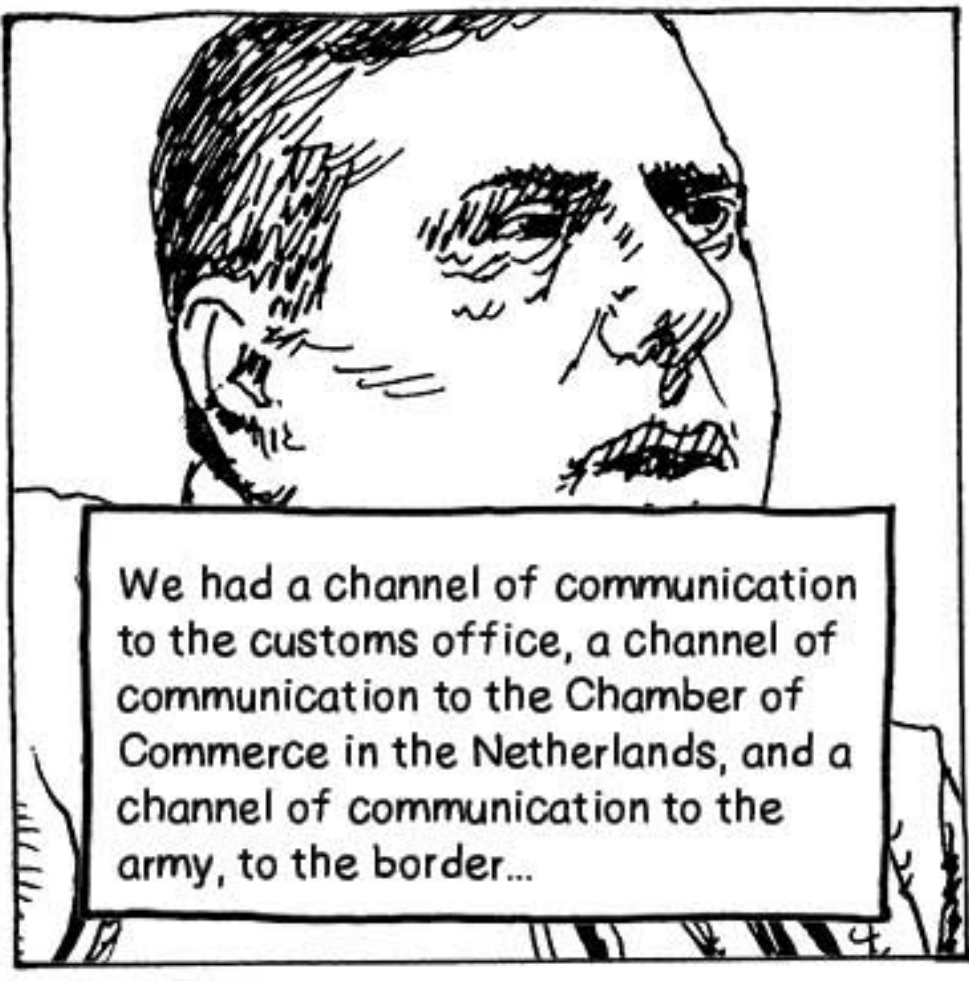
I'm sure that because there were politics involved, nobody wanted to interfere.



So, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the army, nobody wanted to interfere with such an important shipment arriving there.



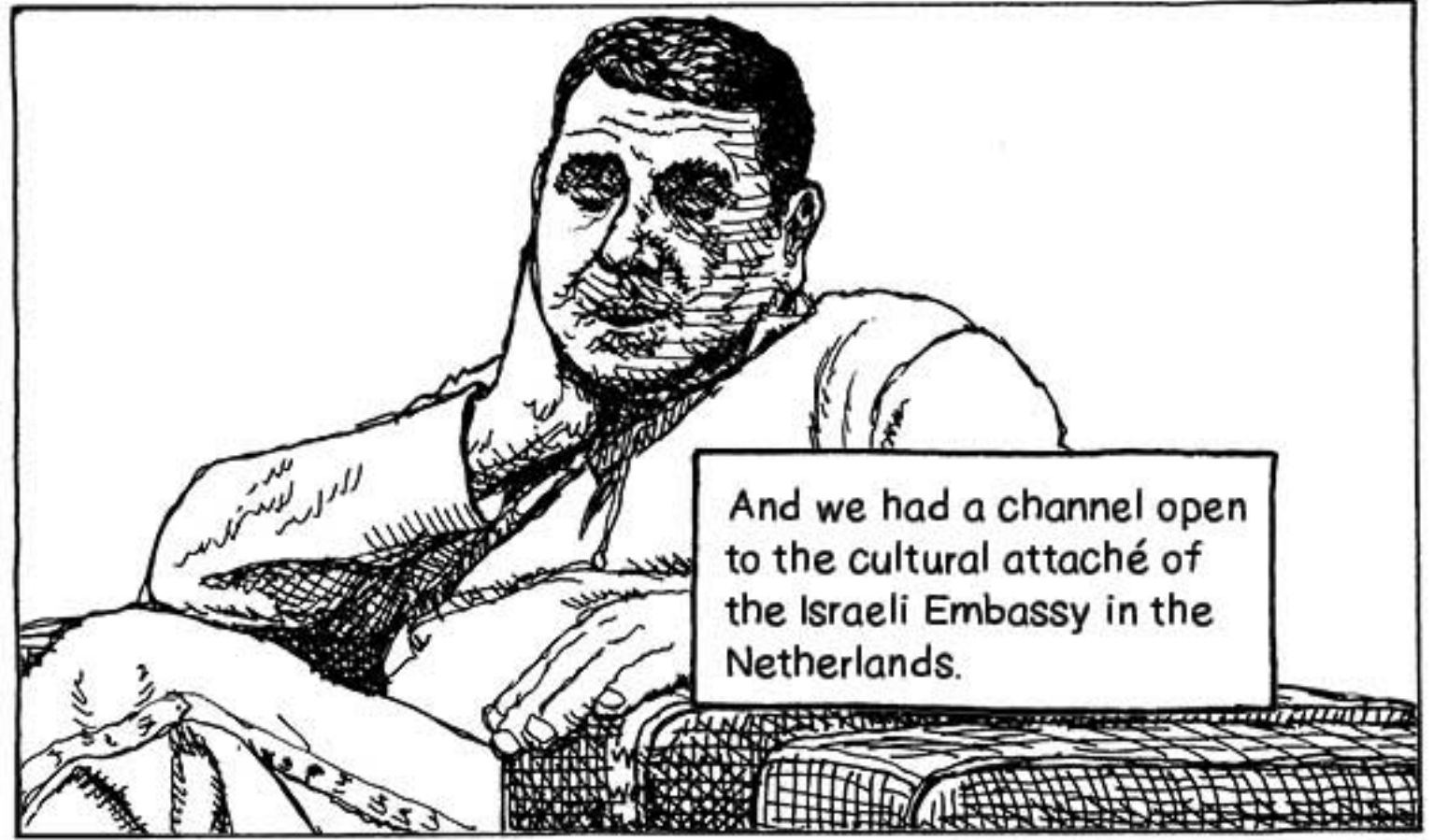
That's why they were all very cooperative—assisting us in doing it.



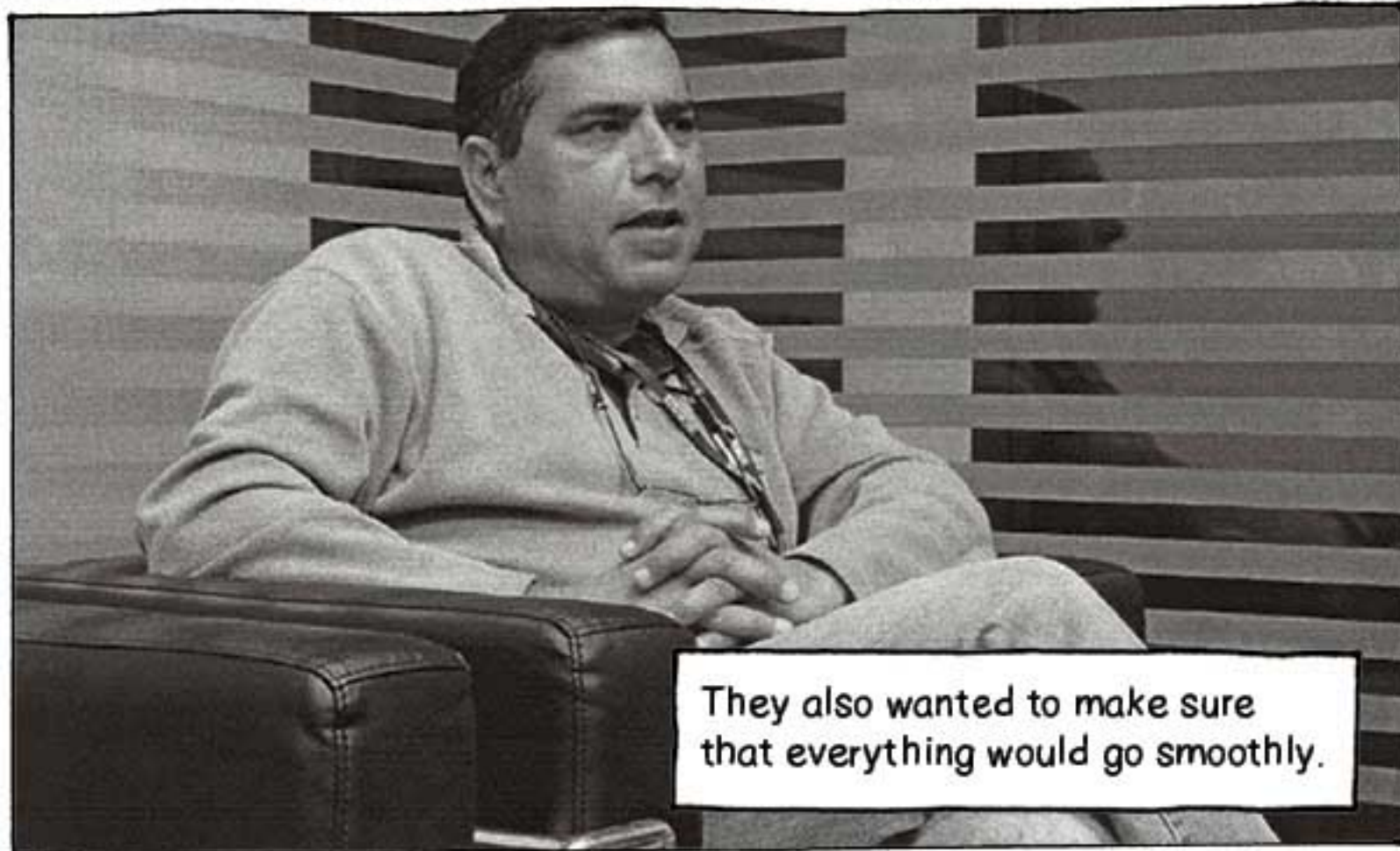
We had a channel of communication to the customs office, a channel of communication to the Chamber of Commerce in the Netherlands, and a channel of communication to the army, to the border...



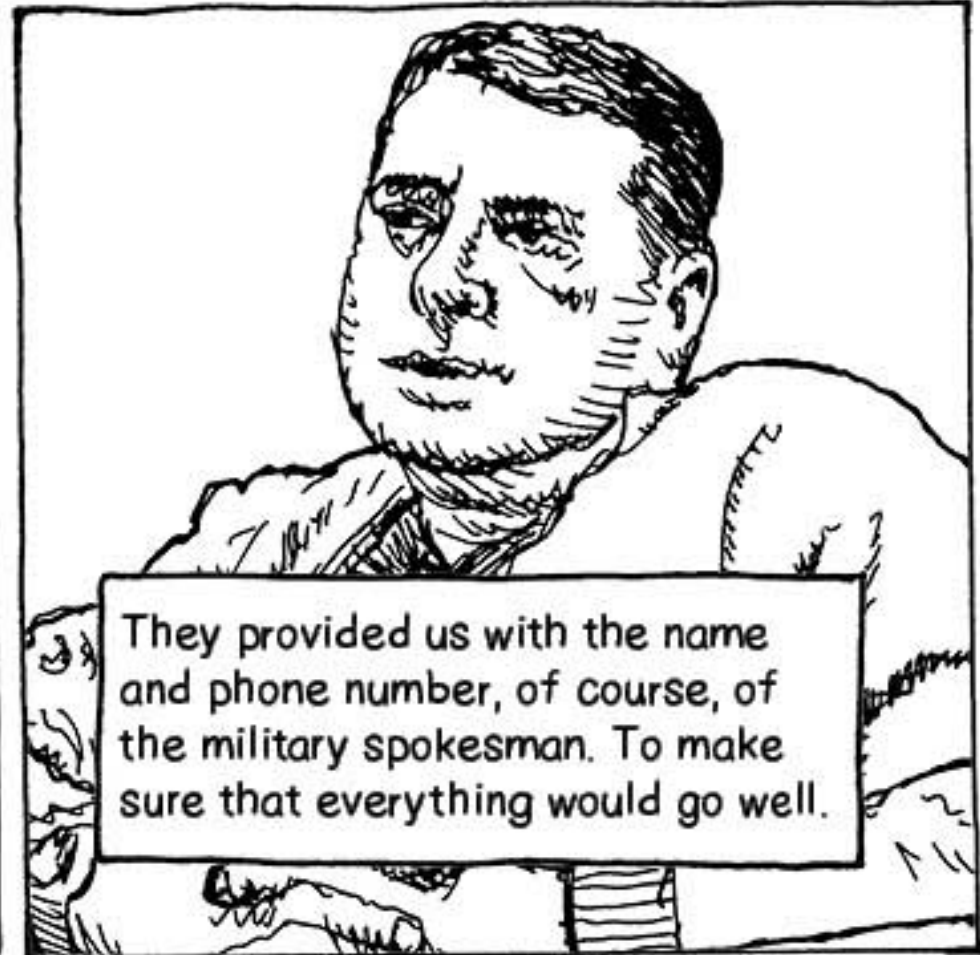
...airport security, too.



And we had a channel open to the cultural attaché of the Israeli Embassy in the Netherlands.



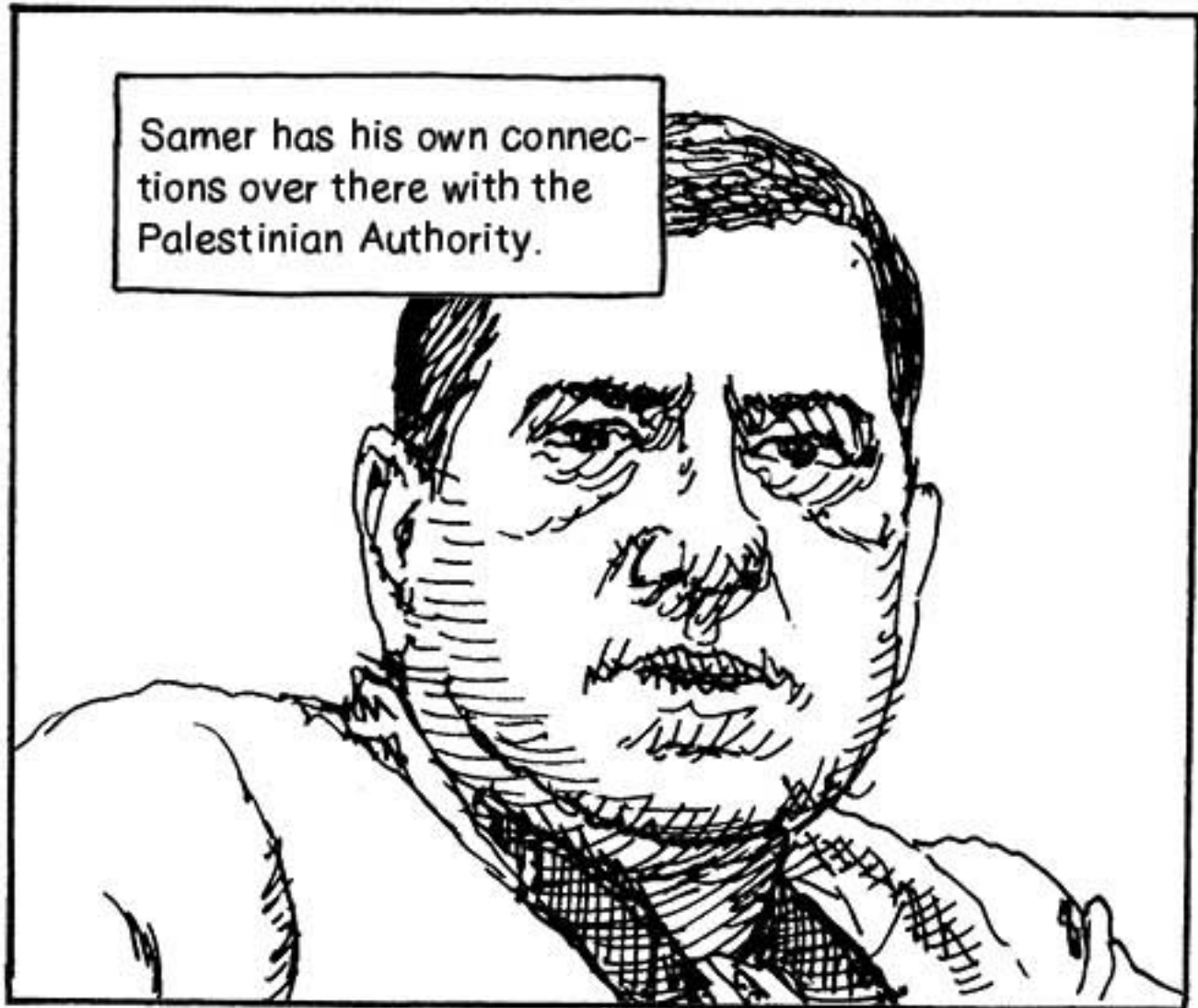
They also wanted to make sure that everything would go smoothly.



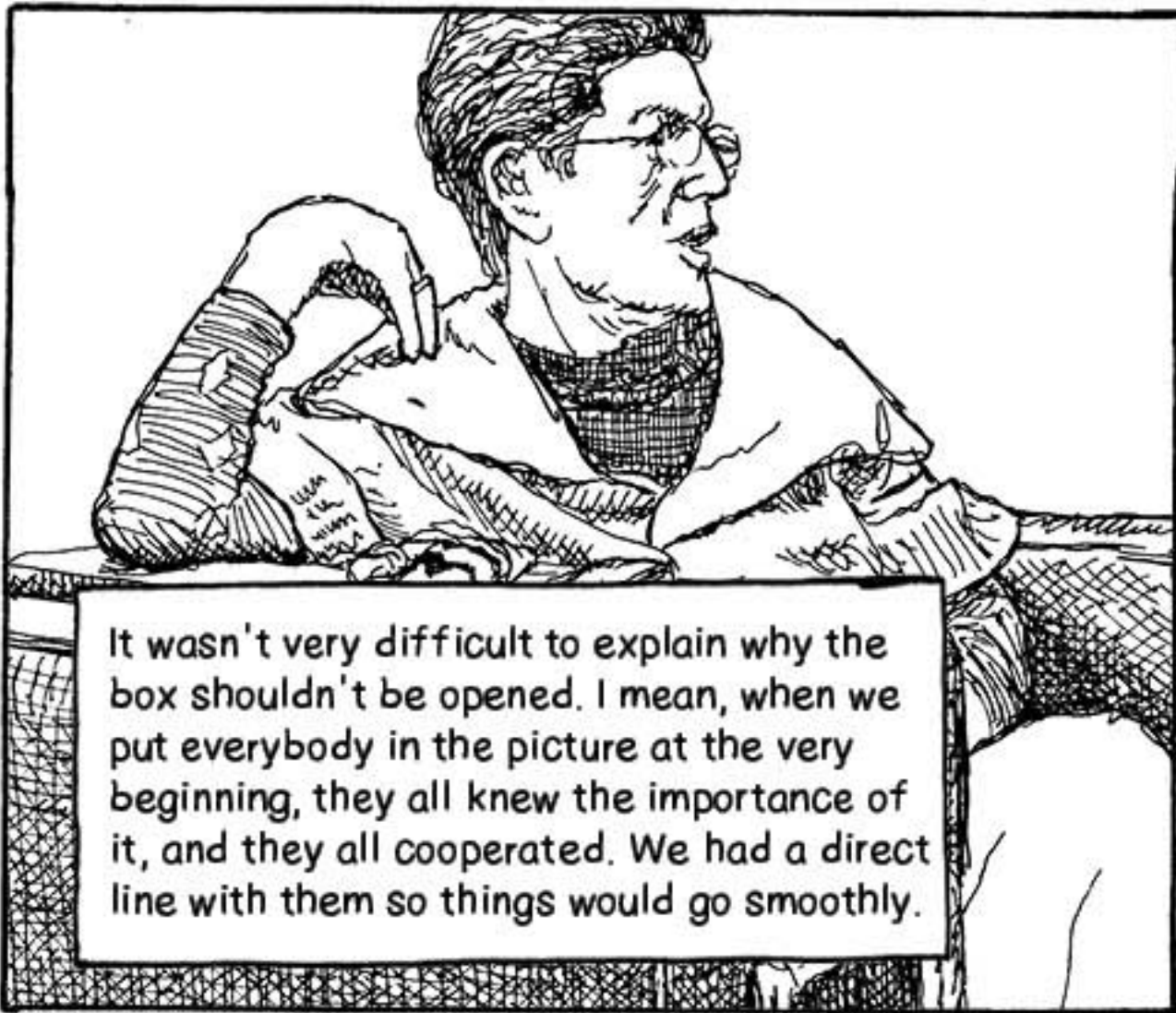
They provided us with the name and phone number, of course, of the military spokesman. To make sure that everything would go well.



And then we had a channel to Samer...



Samer has his own connections over there with the Palestinian Authority.

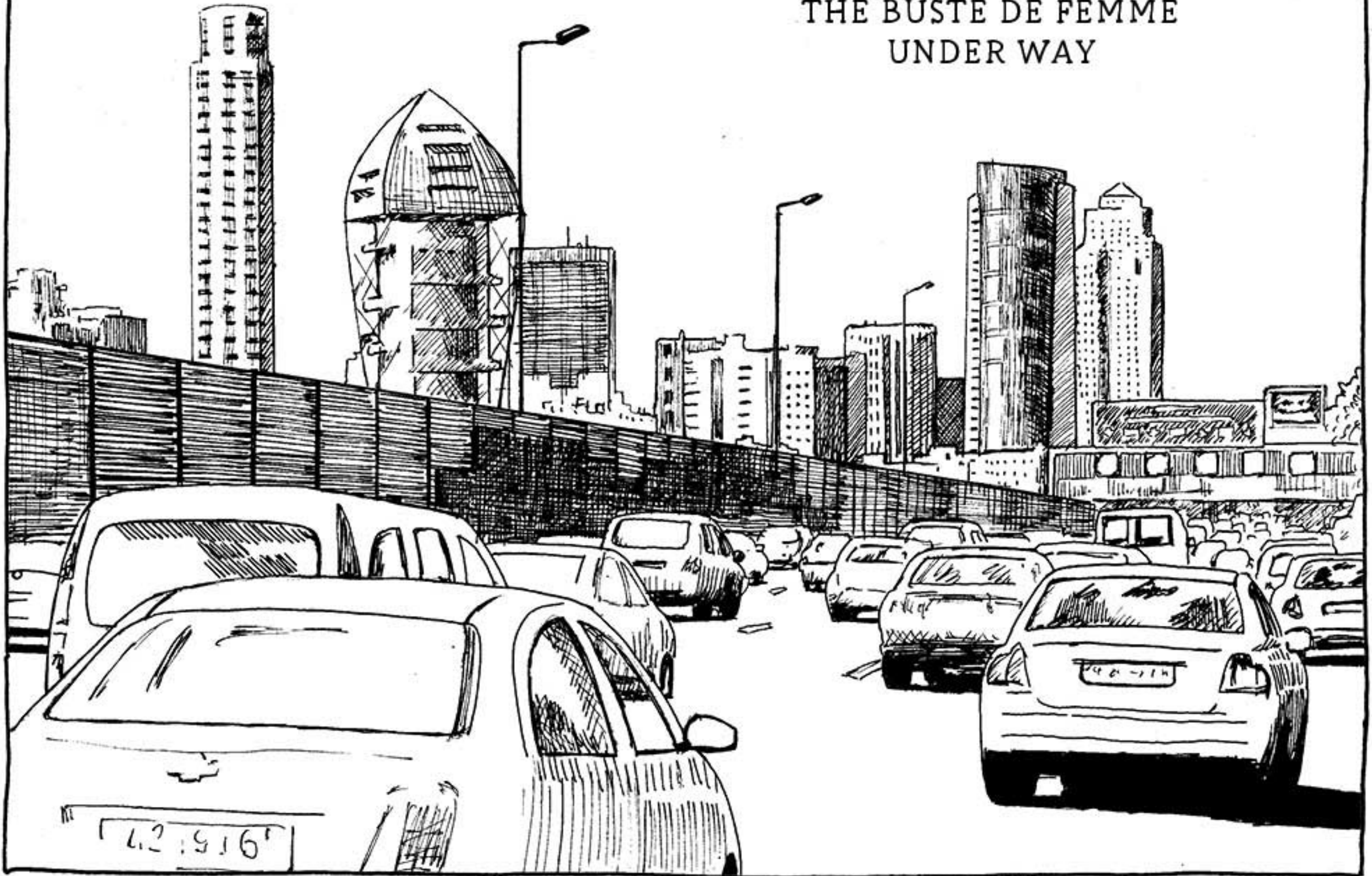


It wasn't very difficult to explain why the box shouldn't be opened. I mean, when we put everybody in the picture at the very beginning, they all knew the importance of it, and they all cooperated. We had a direct line with them so things would go smoothly.



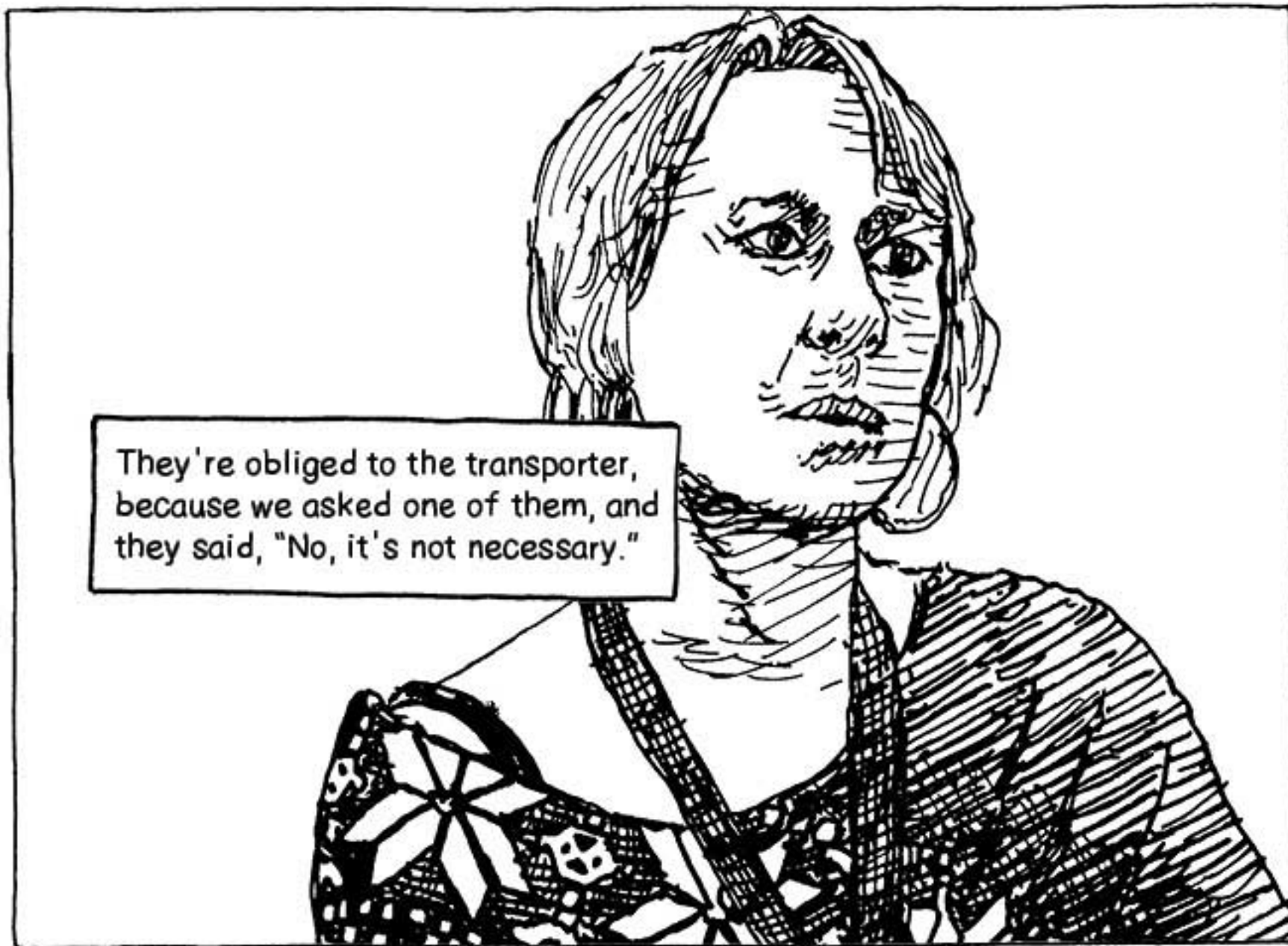
I was talking regularly to the army commander at Qalandiya, and I was very surprised: he was quite helpful.

THE BUSTE DE FEMME
UNDER WAY





We had undercover guards from Ben Gurion to Qalandiya.



They're obliged to the transporter, because we asked one of them, and they said, "No, it's not necessary."



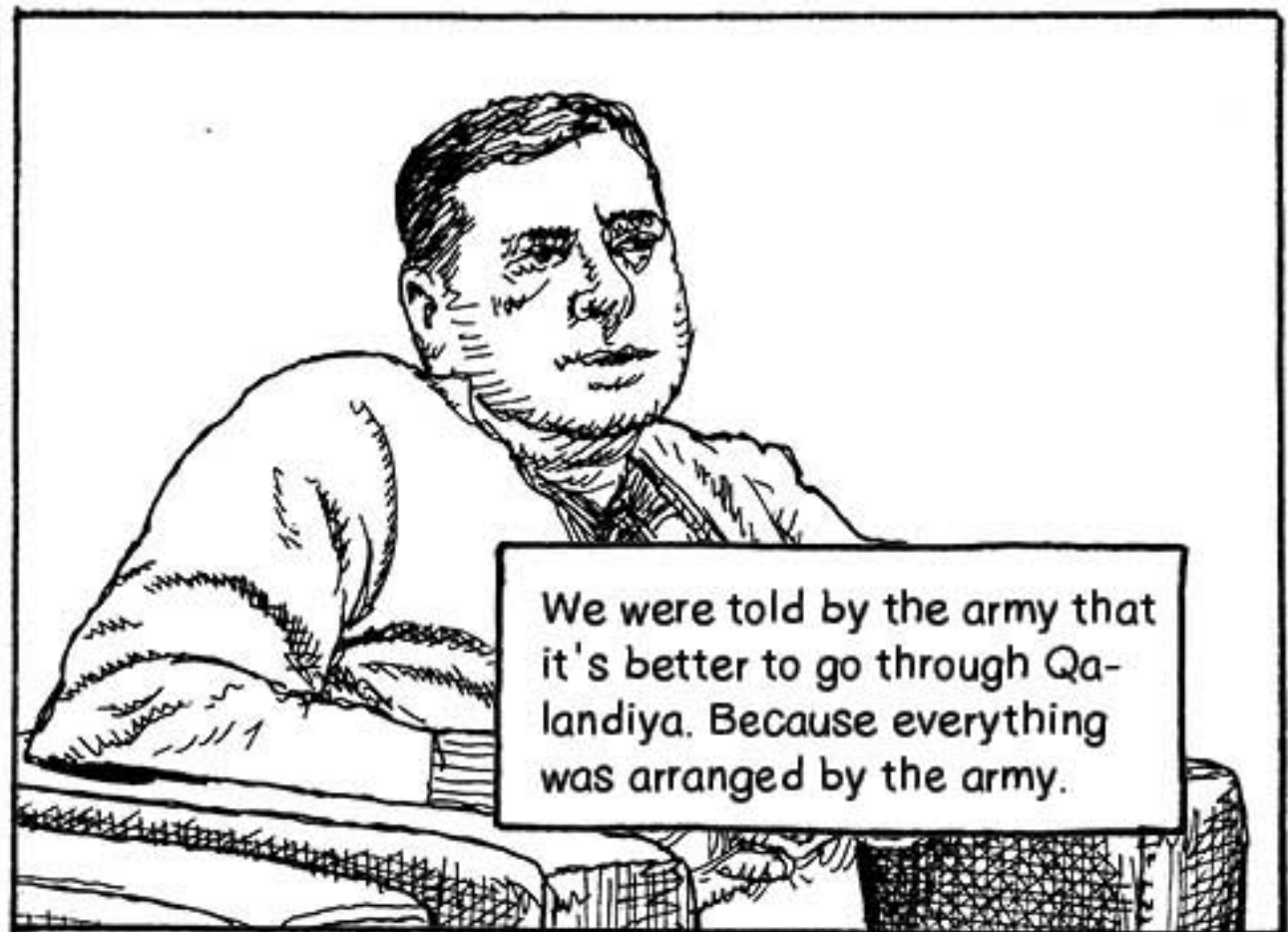
It something that the transport companies say they always have to do.



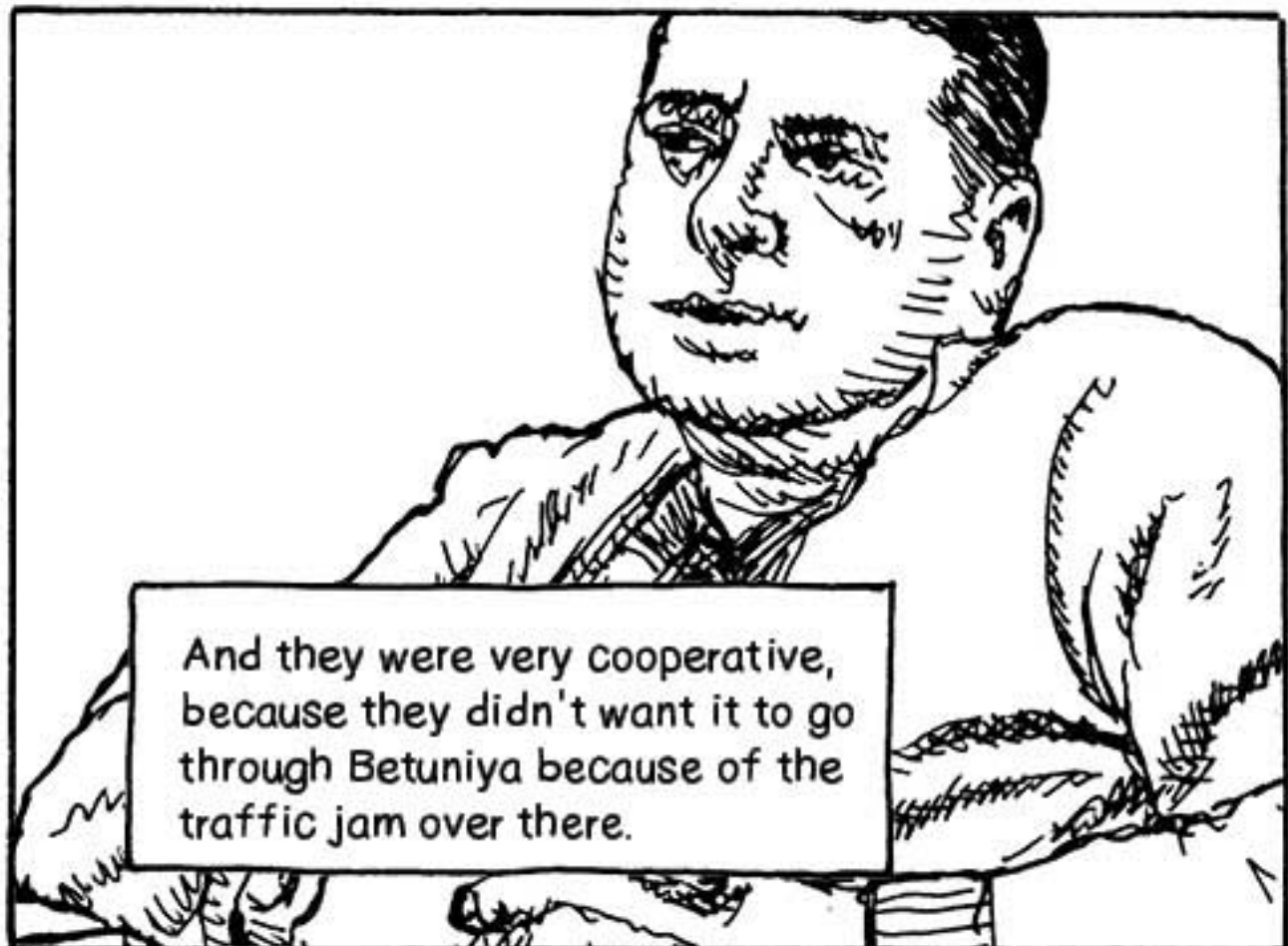
They can't keep that out of their estimate.



One driver took it from the airport, up to the border, and at the border crossing we changed drivers.



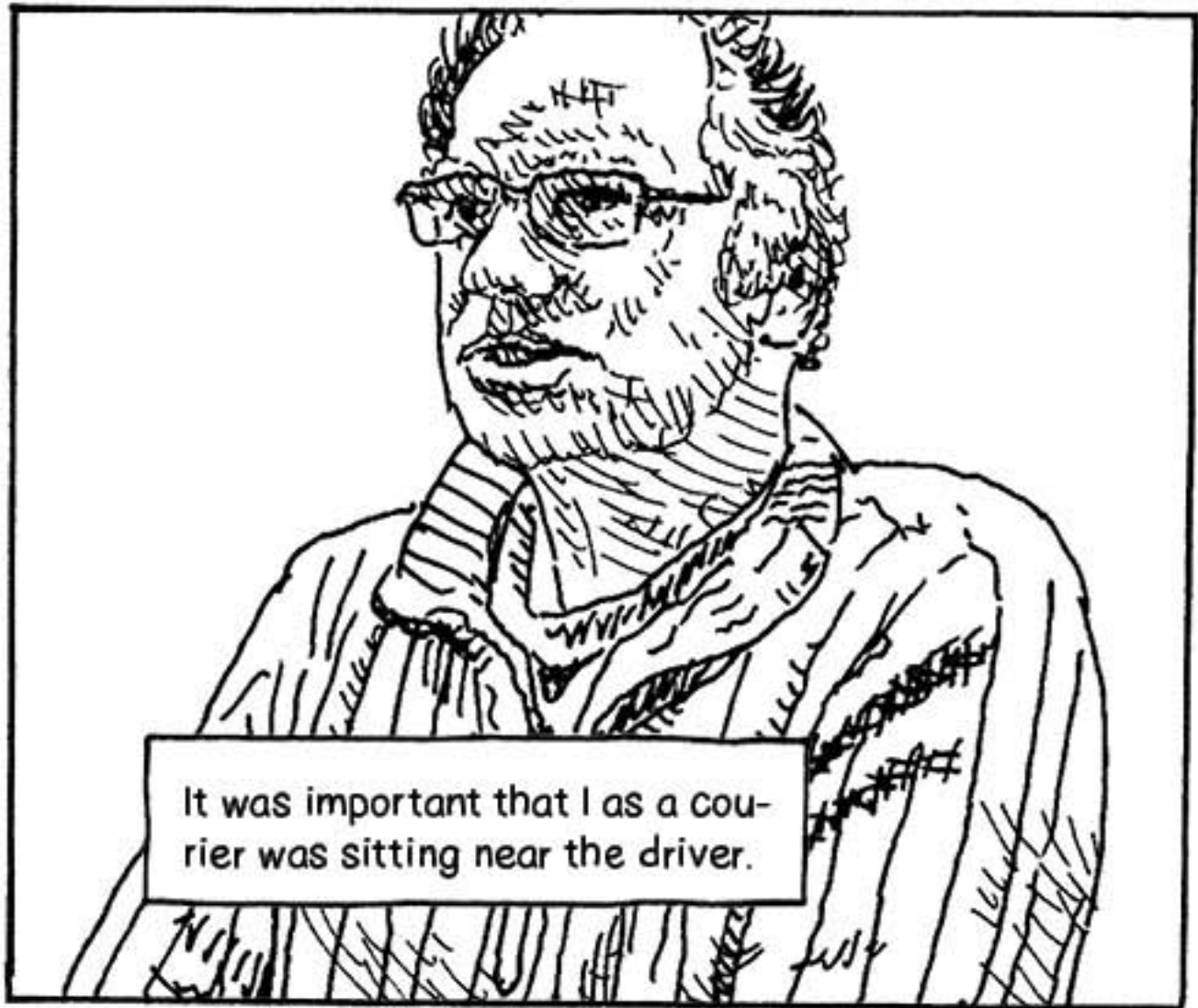
We were told by the army that it's better to go through Qalandiya. Because everything was arranged by the army.



And they were very cooperative, because they didn't want it to go through Betuniya because of the traffic jam over there.



So, they told us, it would be better to go through Qalandiya. And so we did.



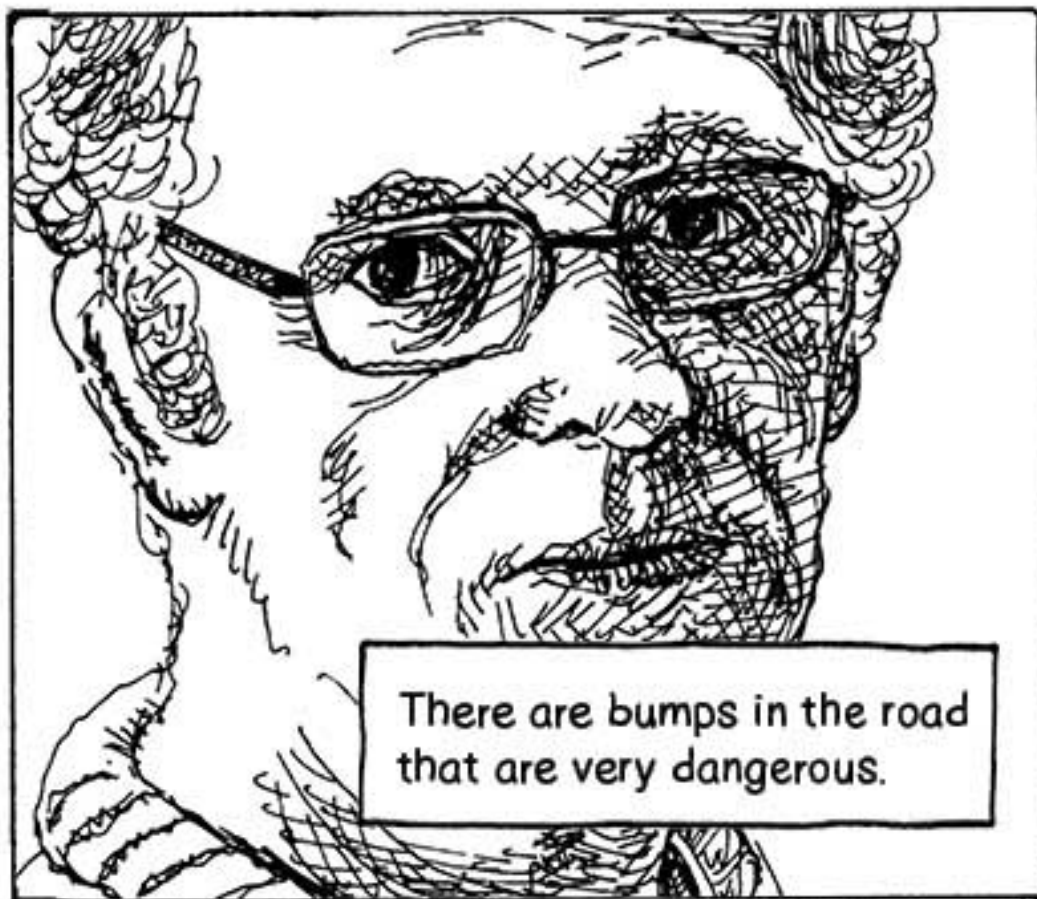
It was important that I as a courier was sitting near the driver.



It was my duty to watch the road.



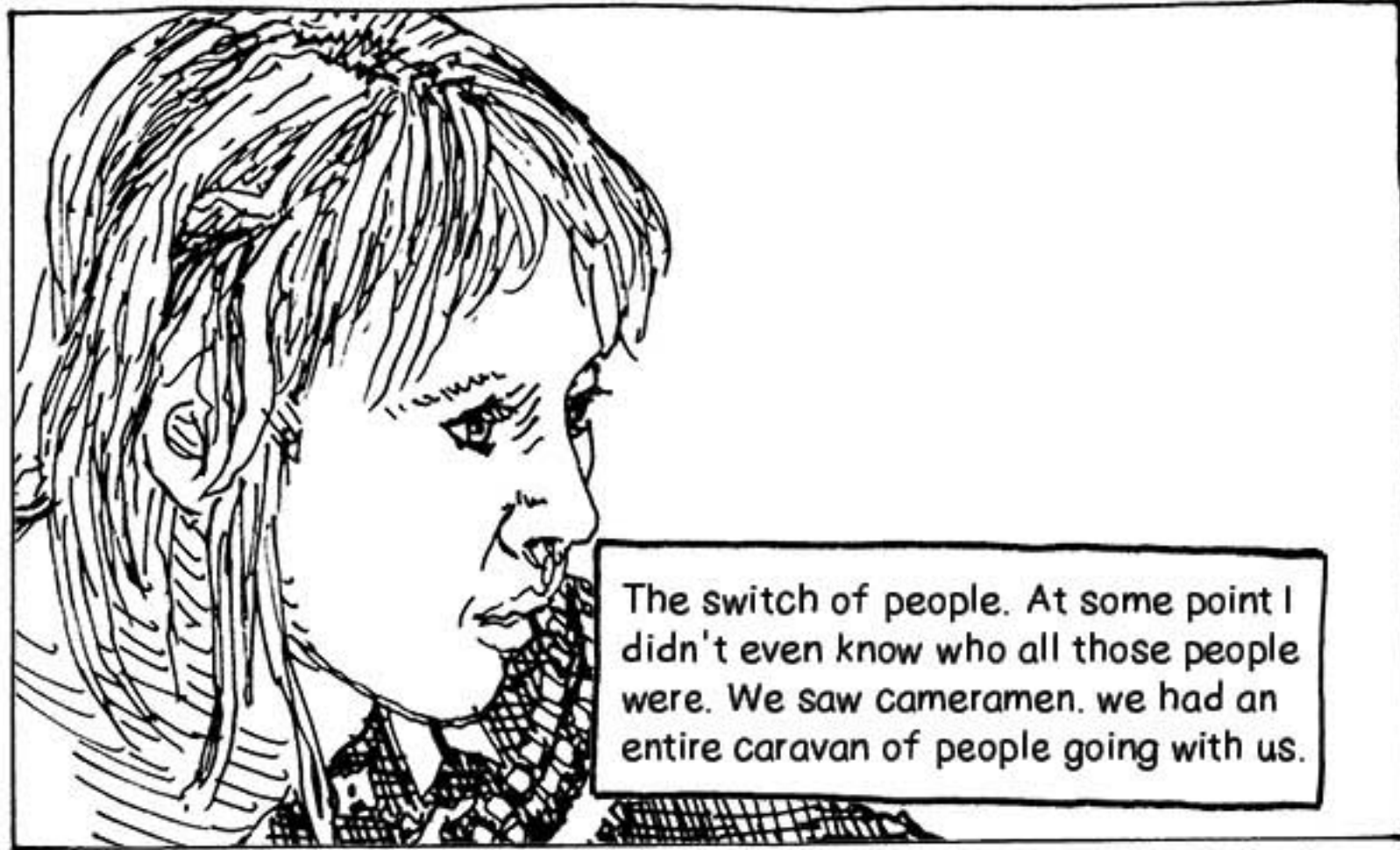
That was for me the most important thing.



There are bumps in the road that are very dangerous.



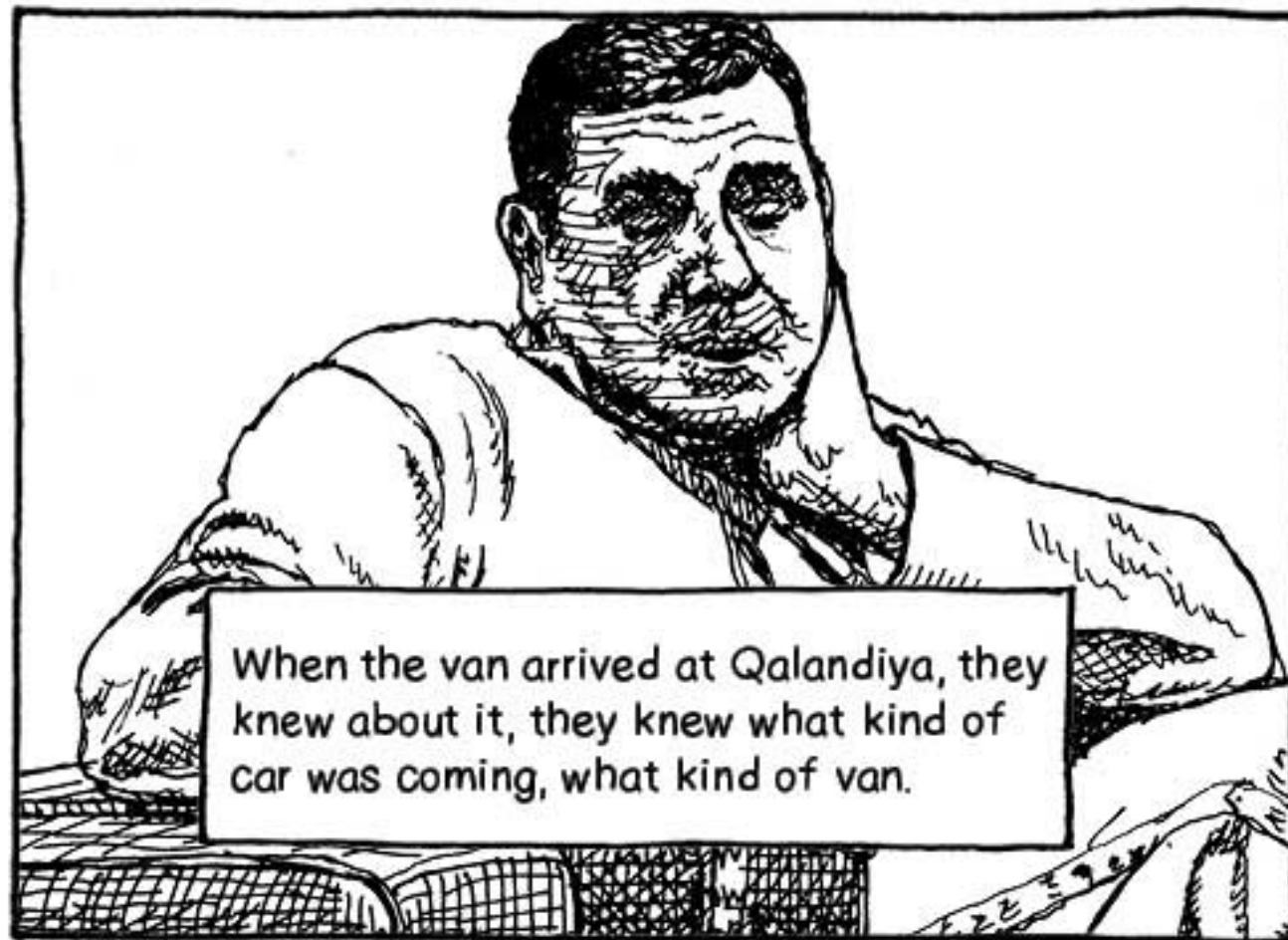
This is the switch...



The switch of people. At some point I didn't even know who all those people were. We saw cameramen. we had an entire caravan of people going with us.



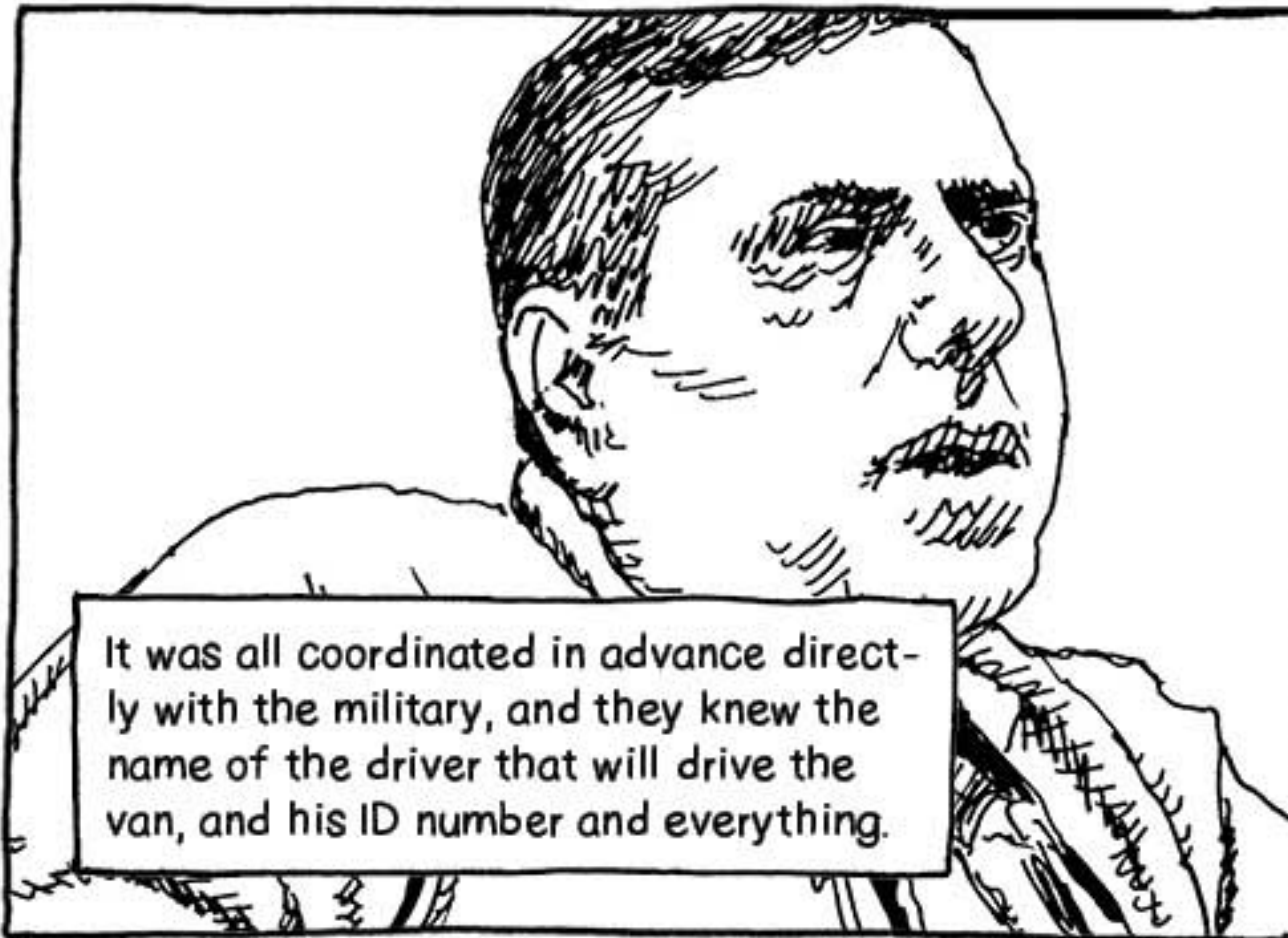
We don't know why but we also said goodbye to a few people who turned around at that point.



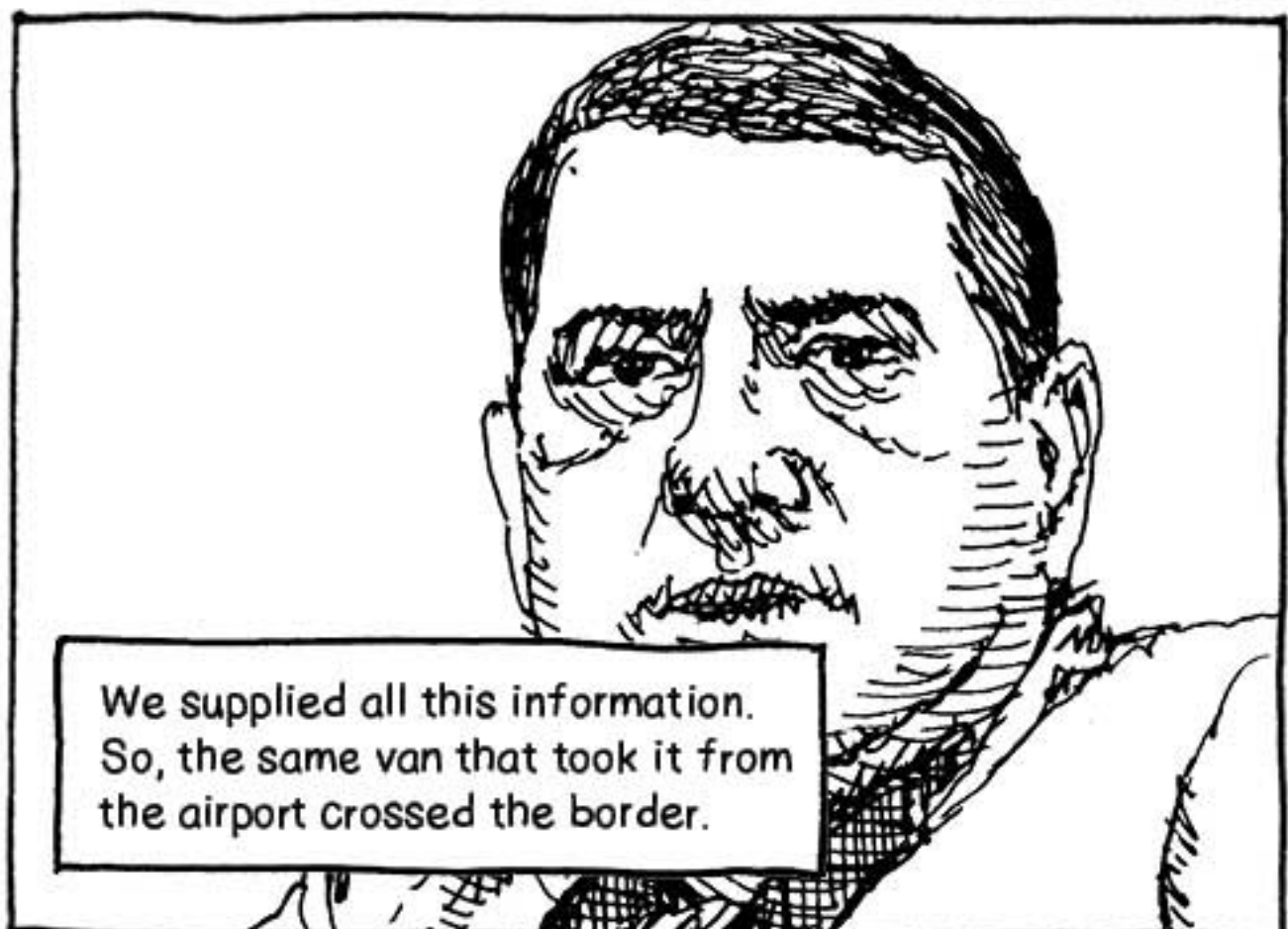
When the van arrived at Qalandiya, they knew about it, they knew what kind of car was coming, what kind of van.



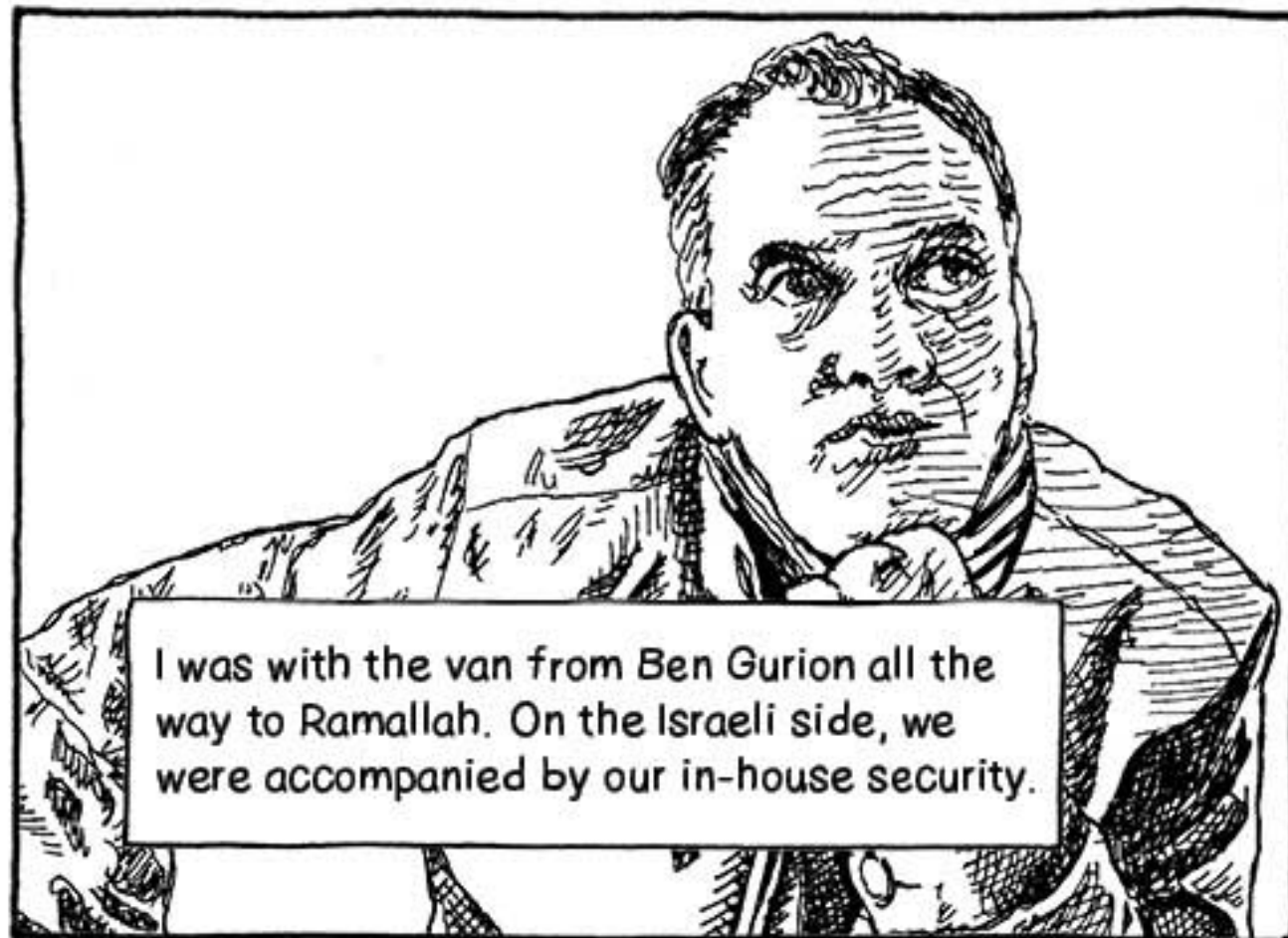
They had the van number and everything.



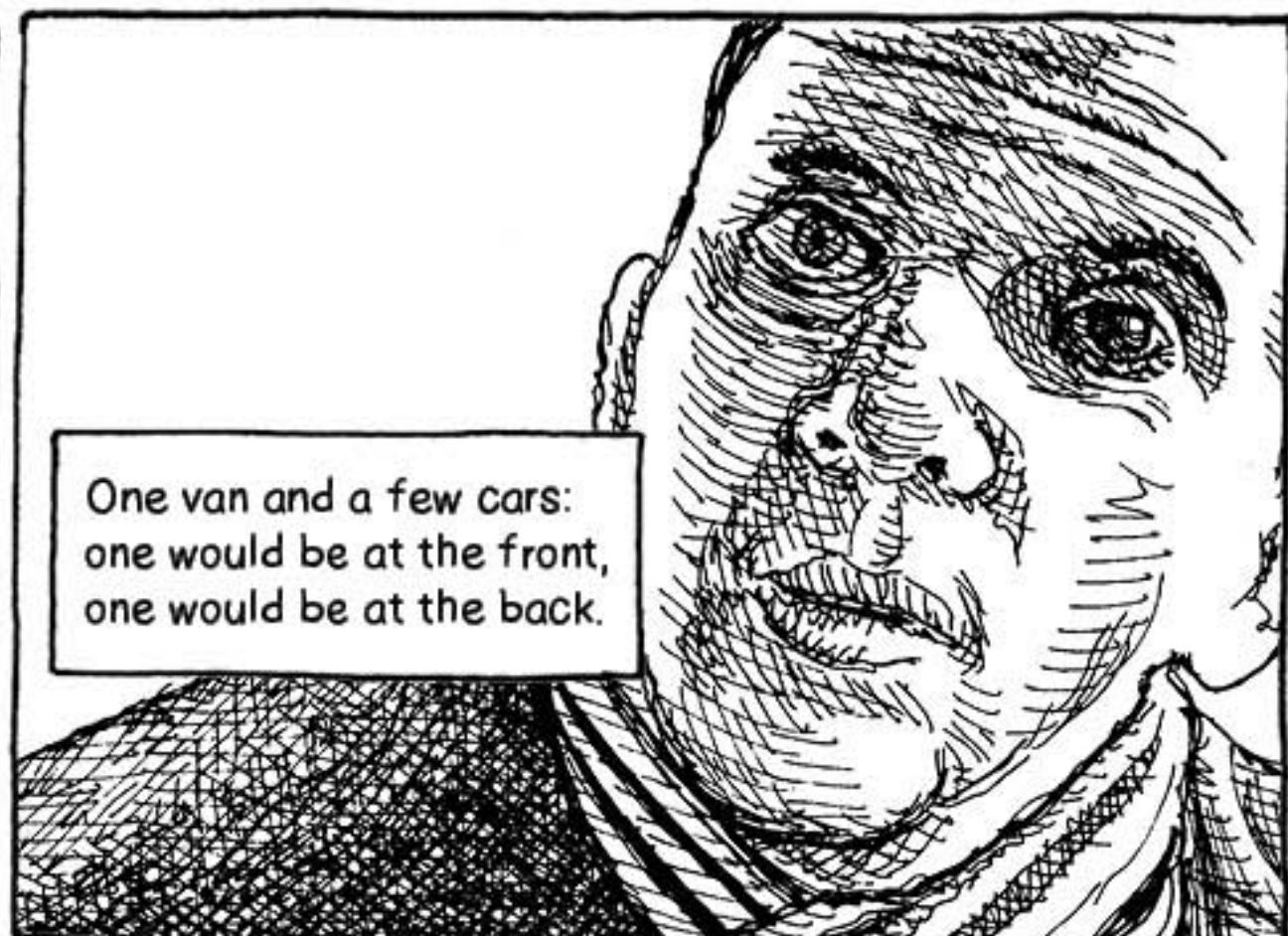
It was all coordinated in advance directly with the military, and they knew the name of the driver that will drive the van, and his ID number and everything.



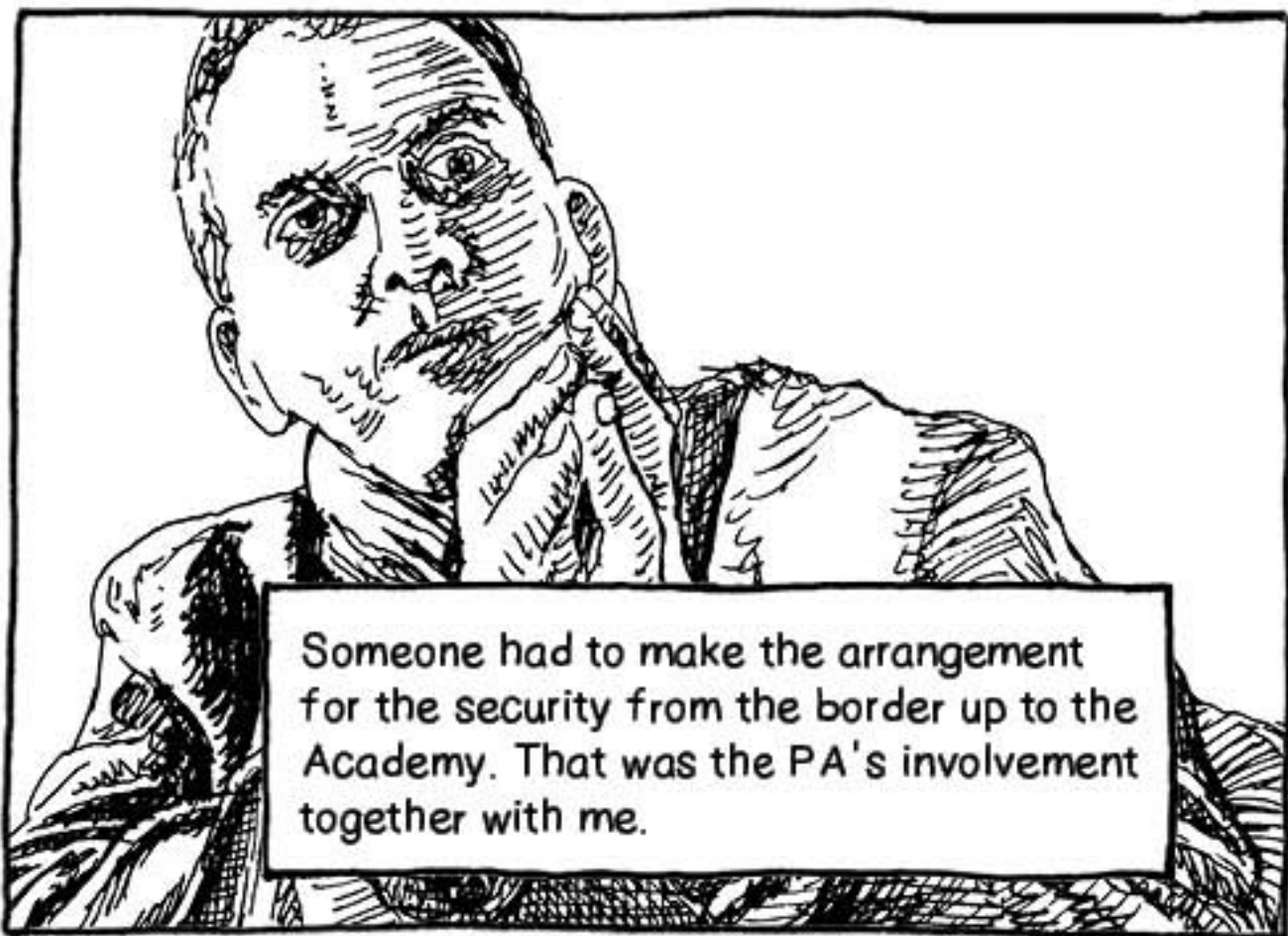
We supplied all this information. So, the same van that took it from the airport crossed the border.



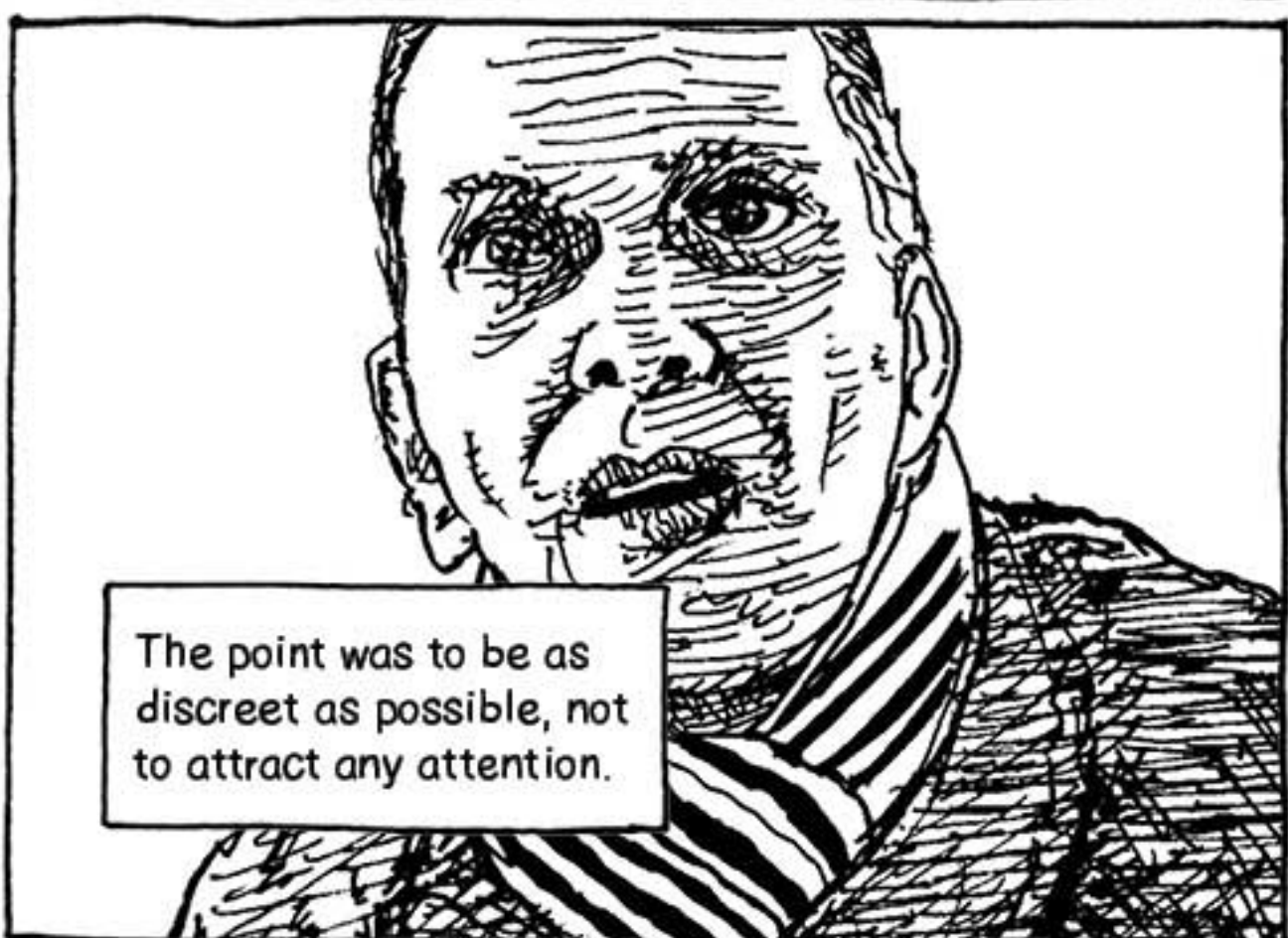
I was with the van from Ben Gurion all the way to Ramallah. On the Israeli side, we were accompanied by our in-house security.



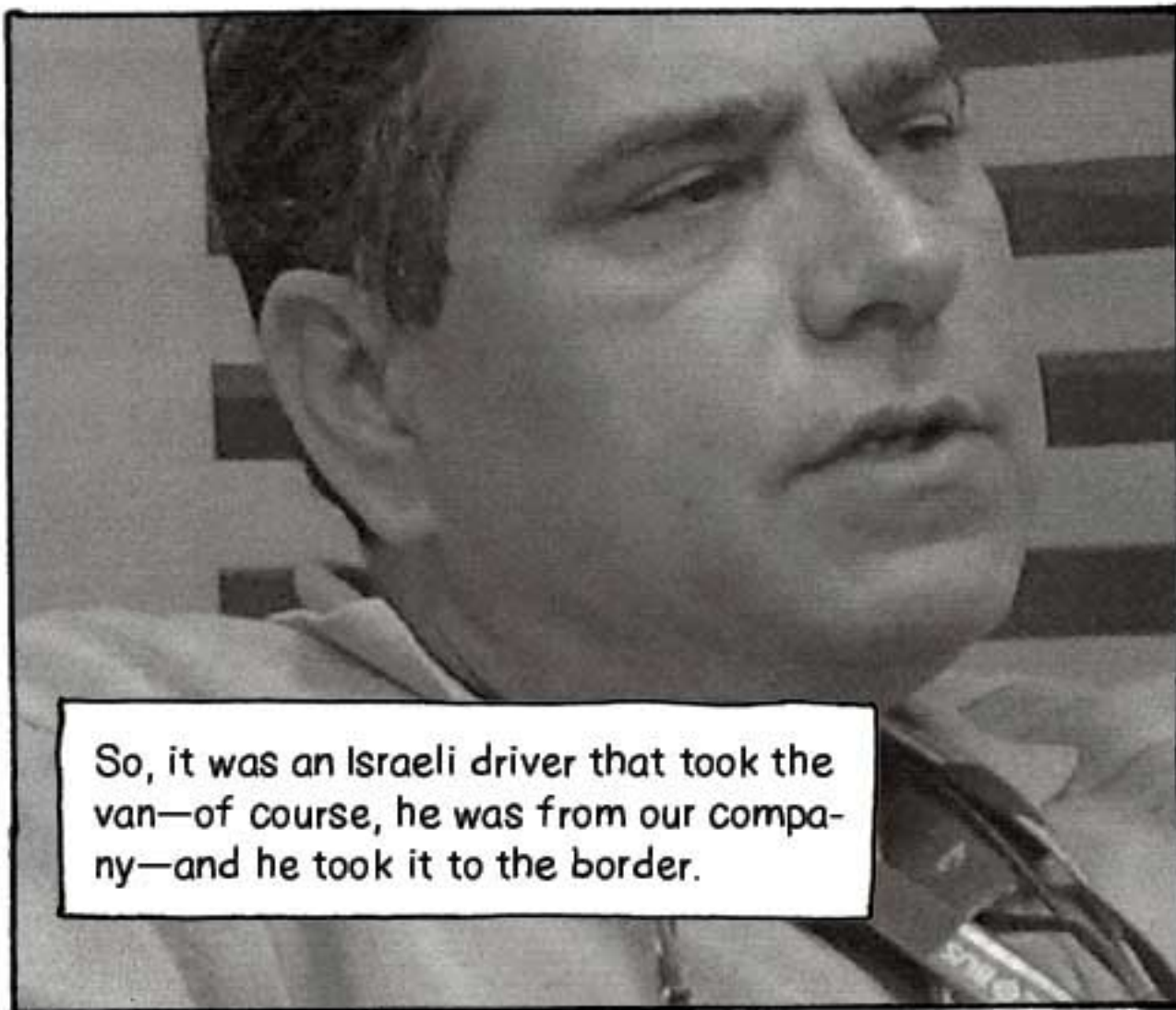
One van and a few cars: one would be at the front, one would be at the back.



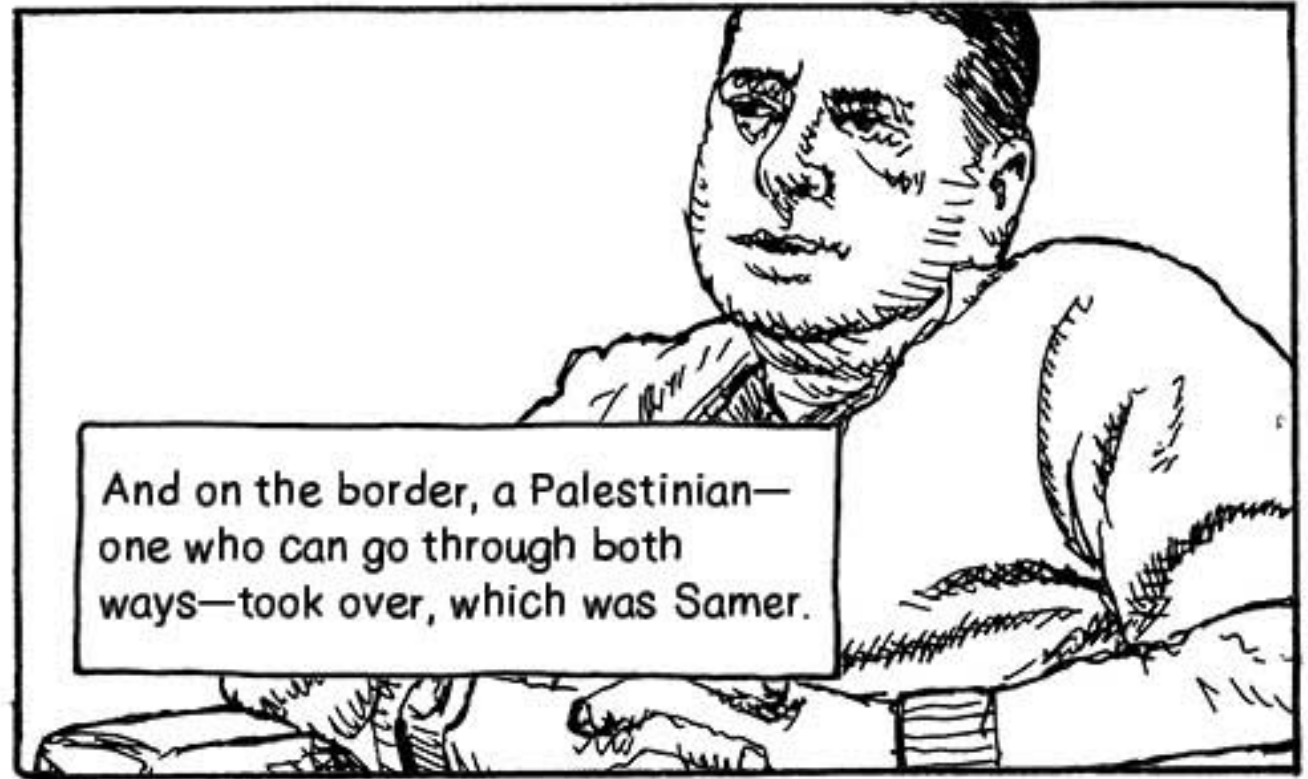
Someone had to make the arrangement for the security from the border up to the Academy. That was the PA's involvement together with me.



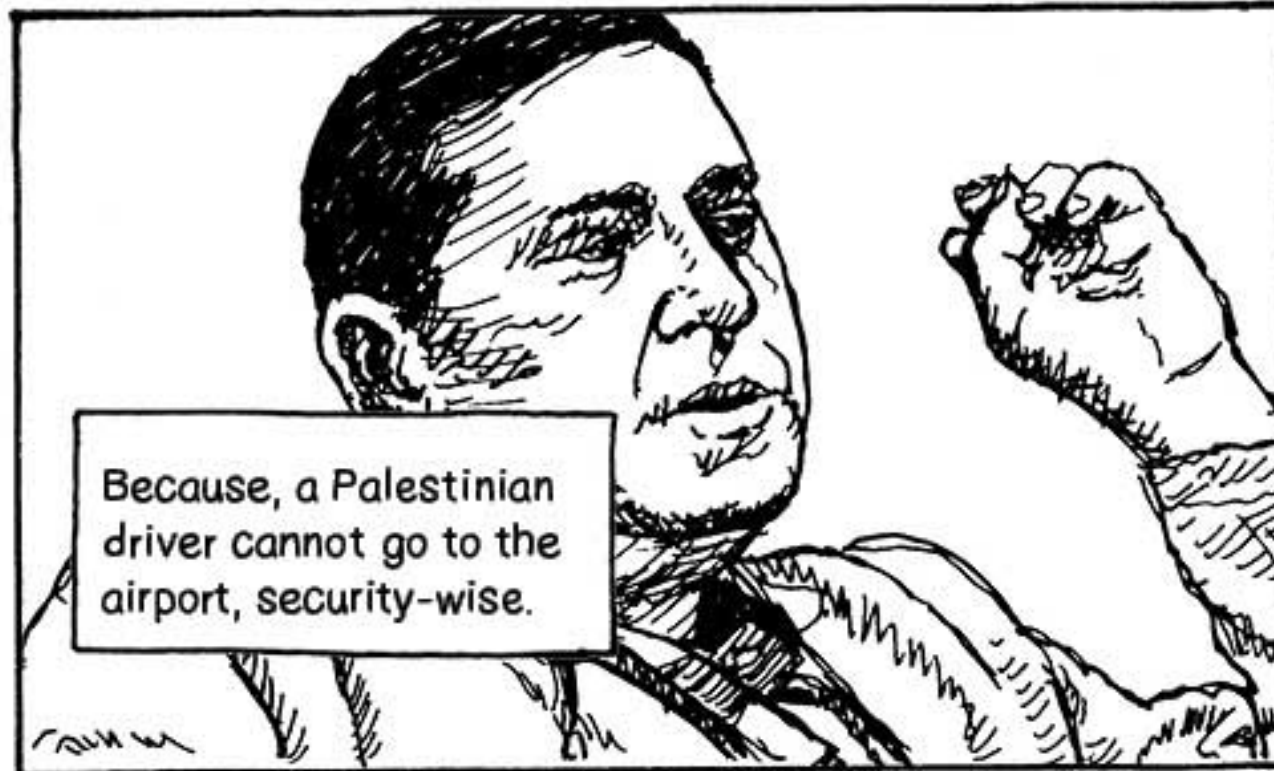
The point was to be as discreet as possible, not to attract any attention.



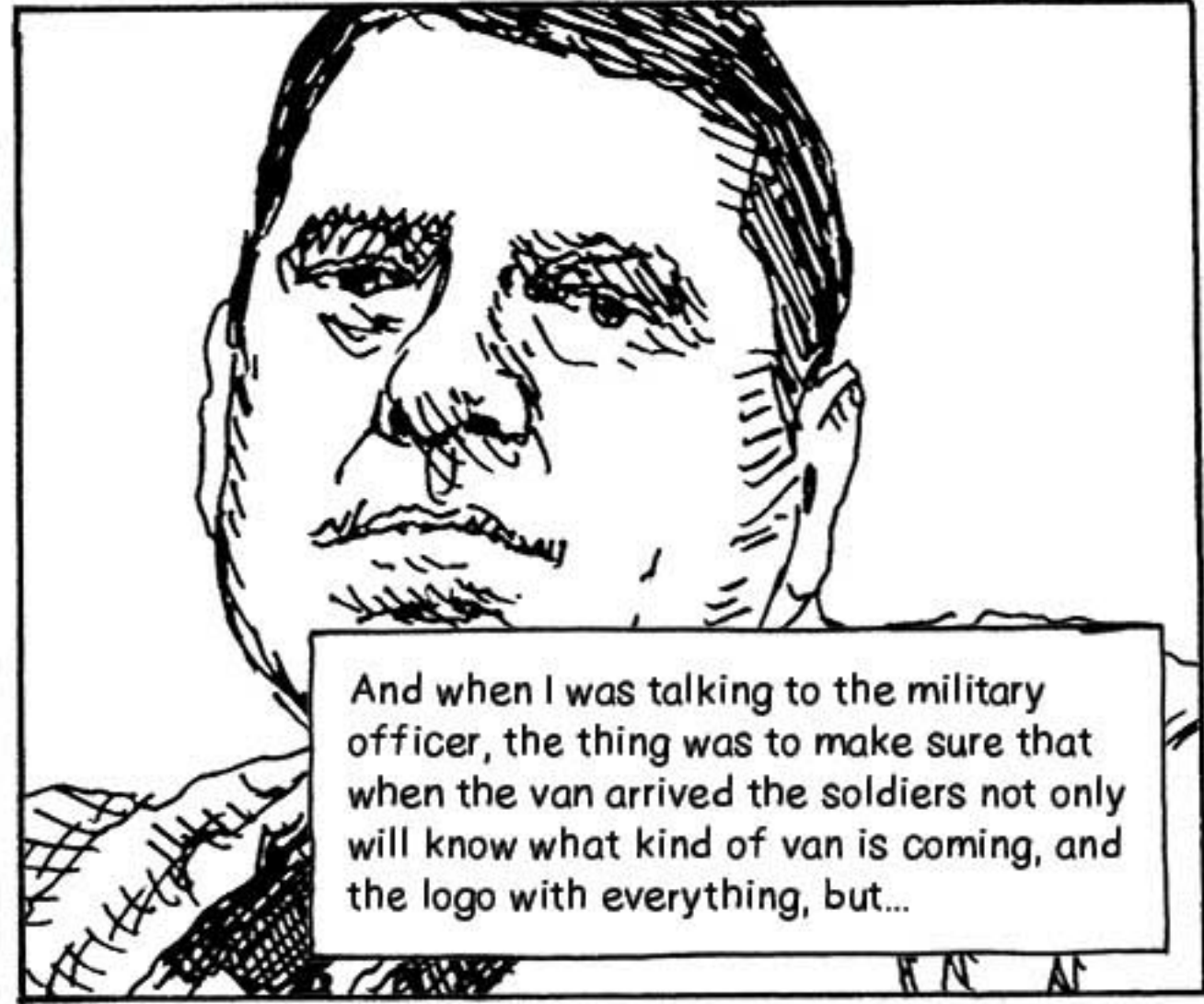
So, it was an Israeli driver that took the van—of course, he was from our company—and he took it to the border.



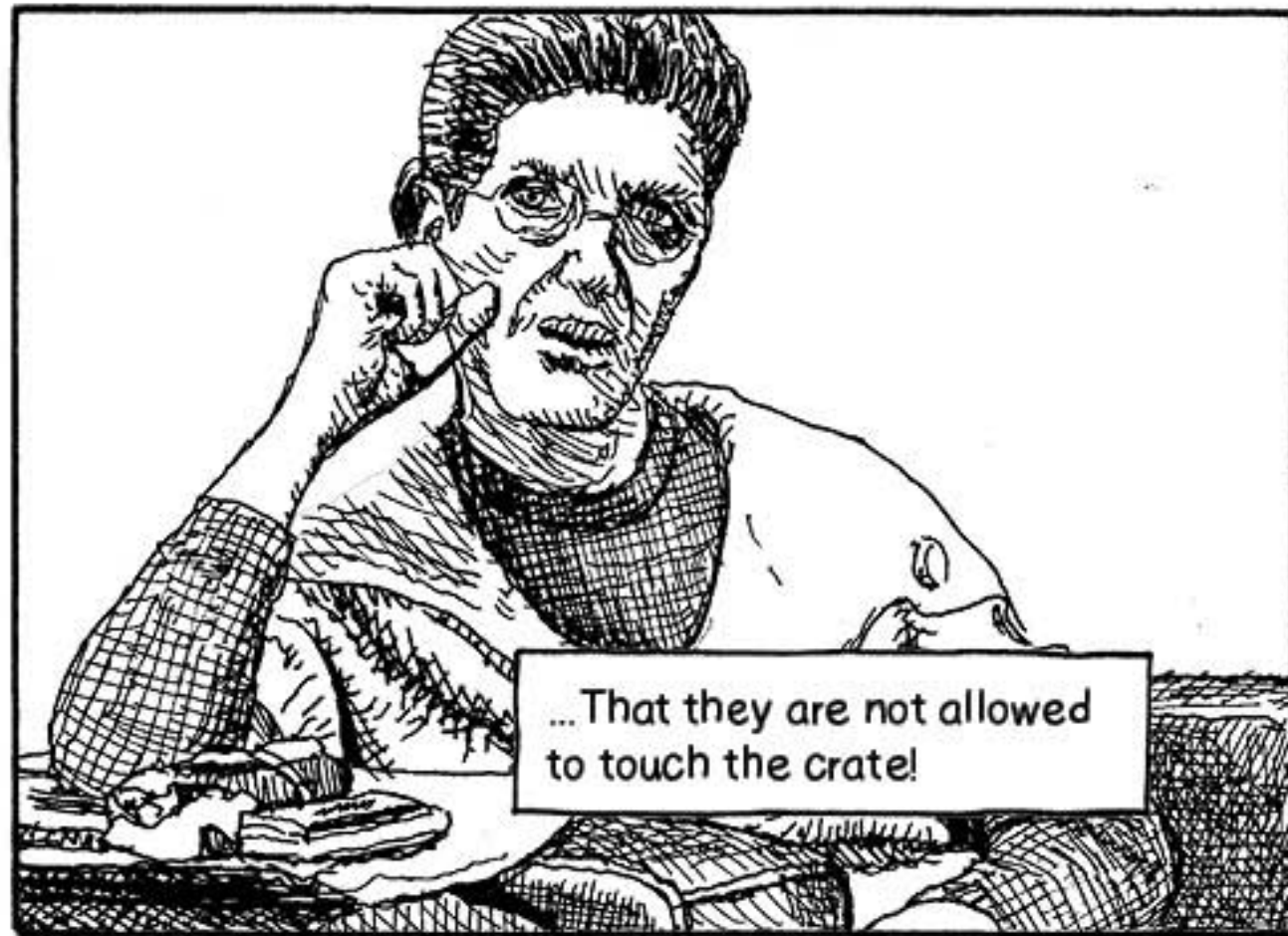
And on the border, a Palestinian—one who can go through both ways—took over, which was Samer.



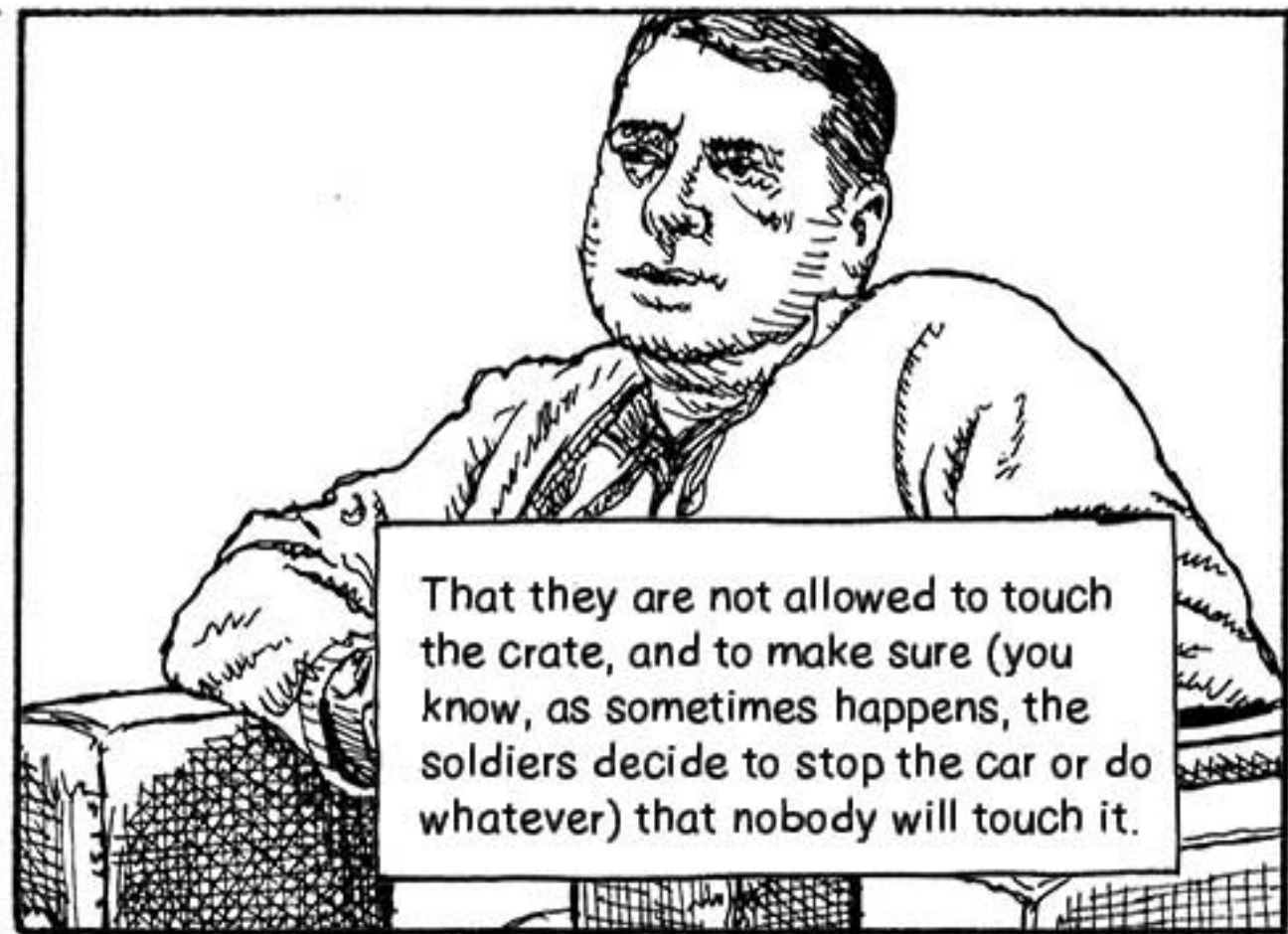
Because, a Palestinian driver cannot go to the airport, security-wise.



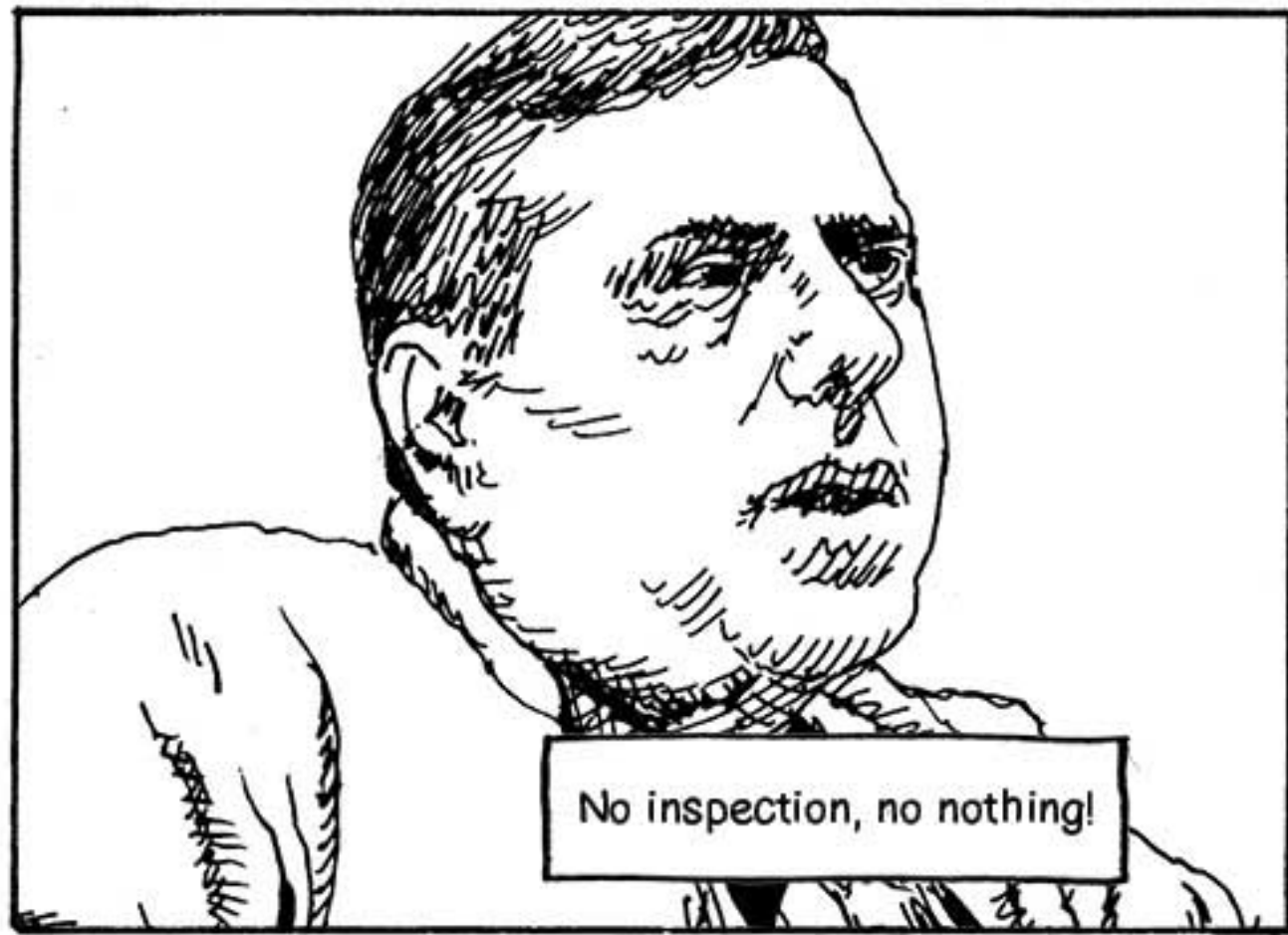
And when I was talking to the military officer, the thing was to make sure that when the van arrived the soldiers not only will know what kind of van is coming, and the logo with everything, but...



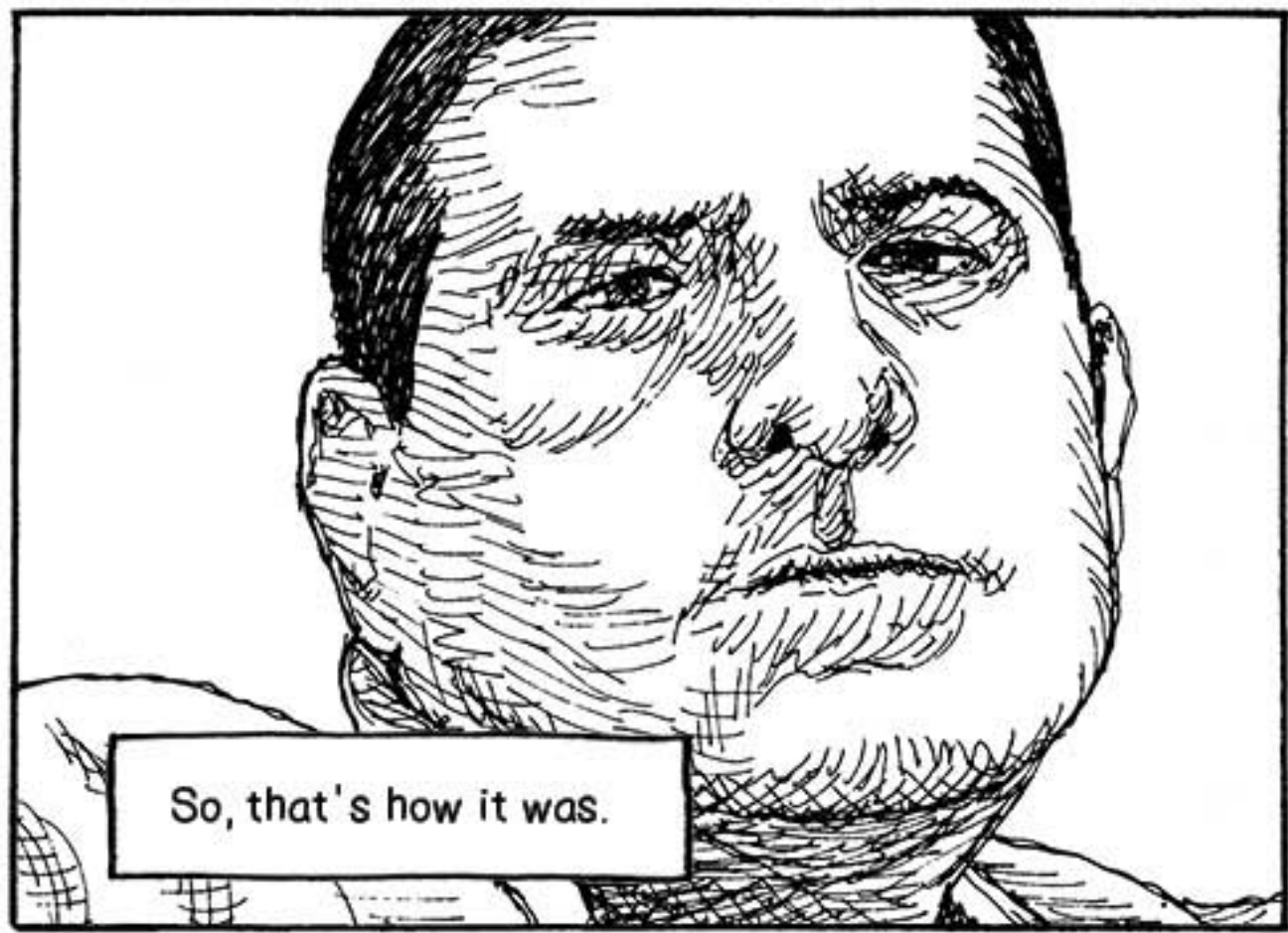
...That they are not allowed to touch the crate!



That they are not allowed to touch the crate, and to make sure (you know, as sometimes happens, the soldiers decide to stop the car or do whatever) that nobody will touch it.



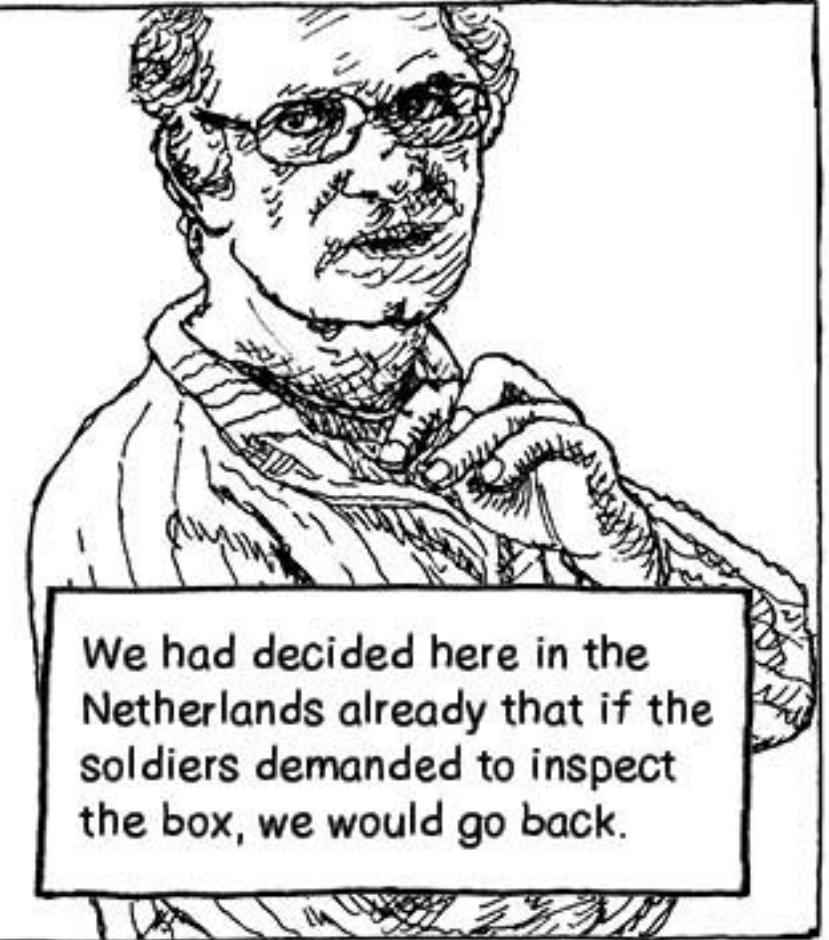
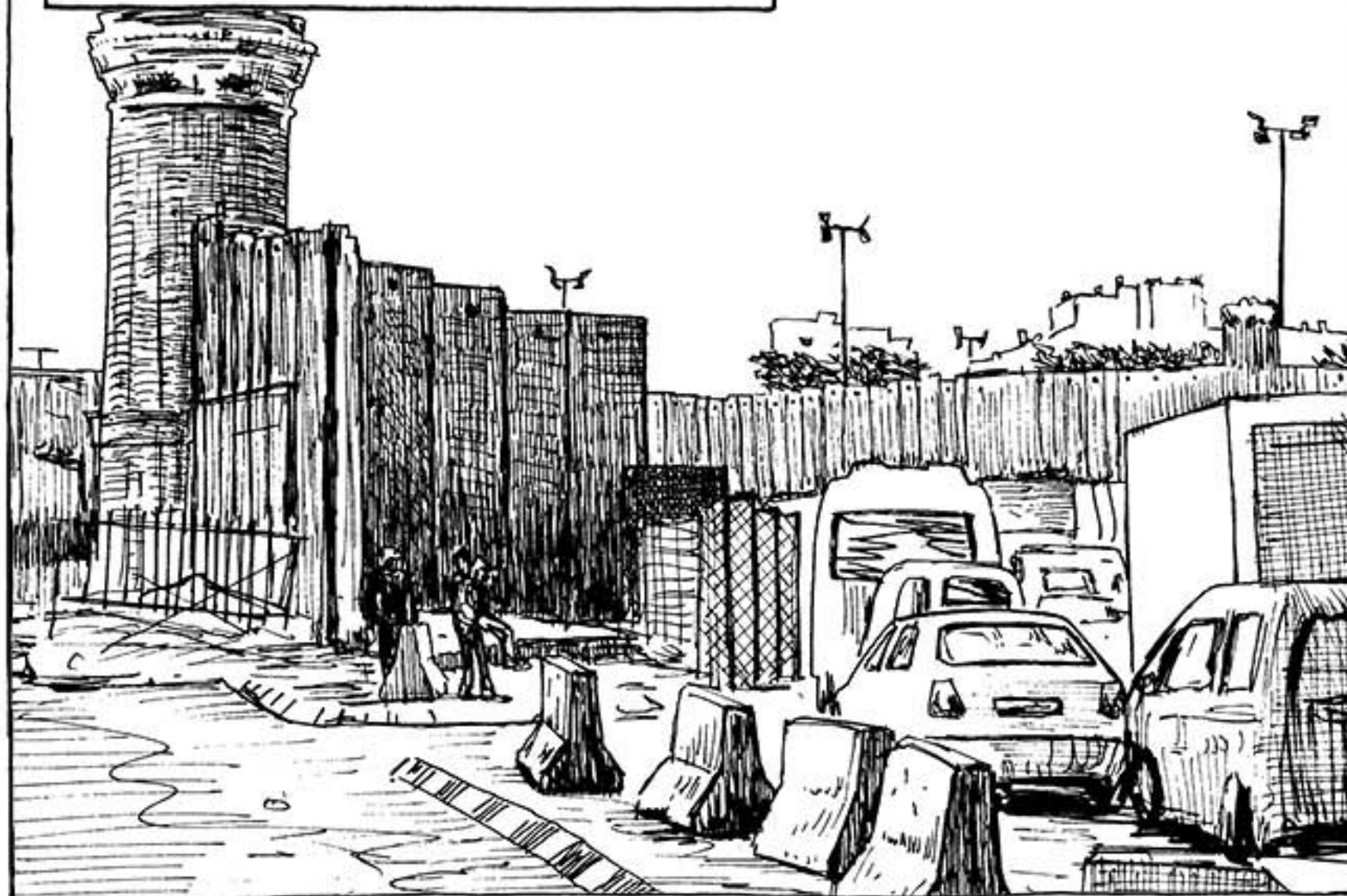
No inspection, no nothing!



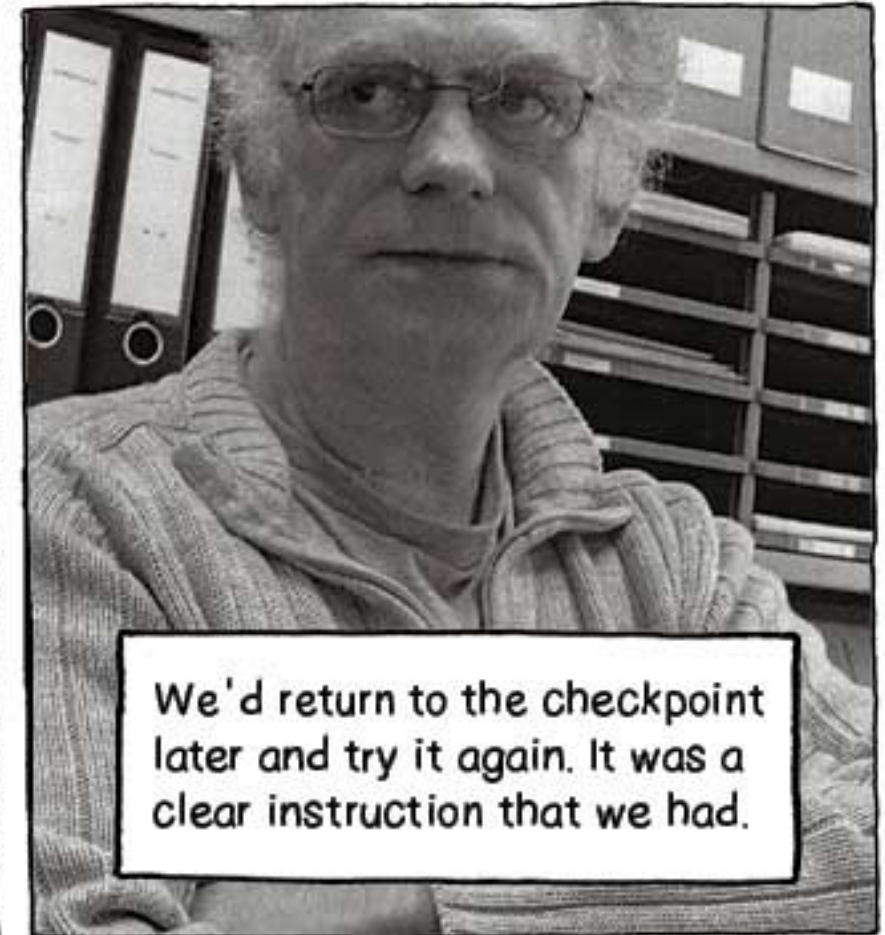
So, that's how it was.



On both sides they were scared about the border situation, because that can be, as I've said before, the danger point in the chain command—for example, soldiers.



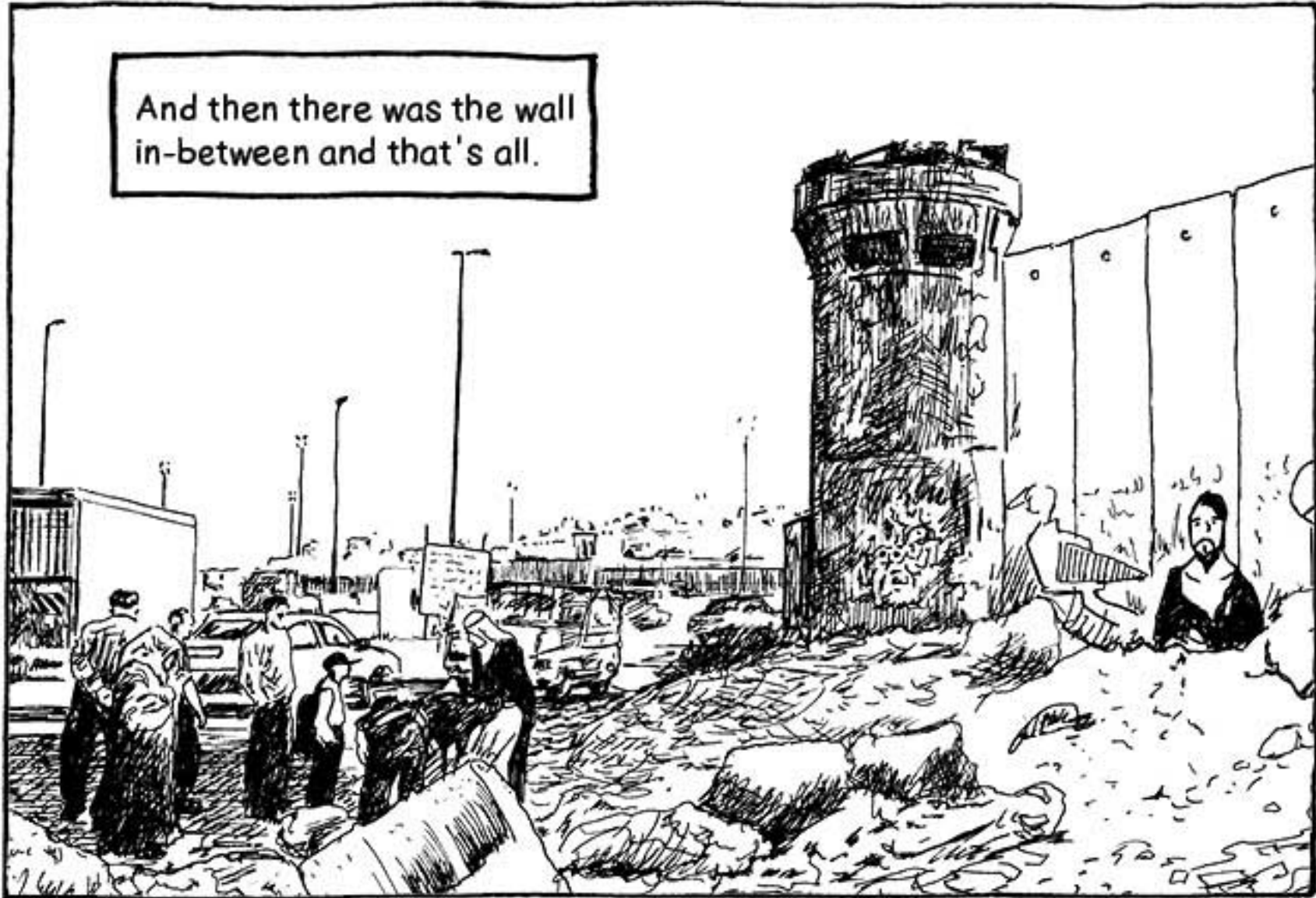
We had decided here in the Netherlands already that if the soldiers demanded to inspect the box, we would go back.



We'd return to the checkpoint later and try it again. It was a clear instruction that we had.



But from Tel Aviv until Qalandiya it's actually a normal situation.



And then there was the wall in-between and that's all.



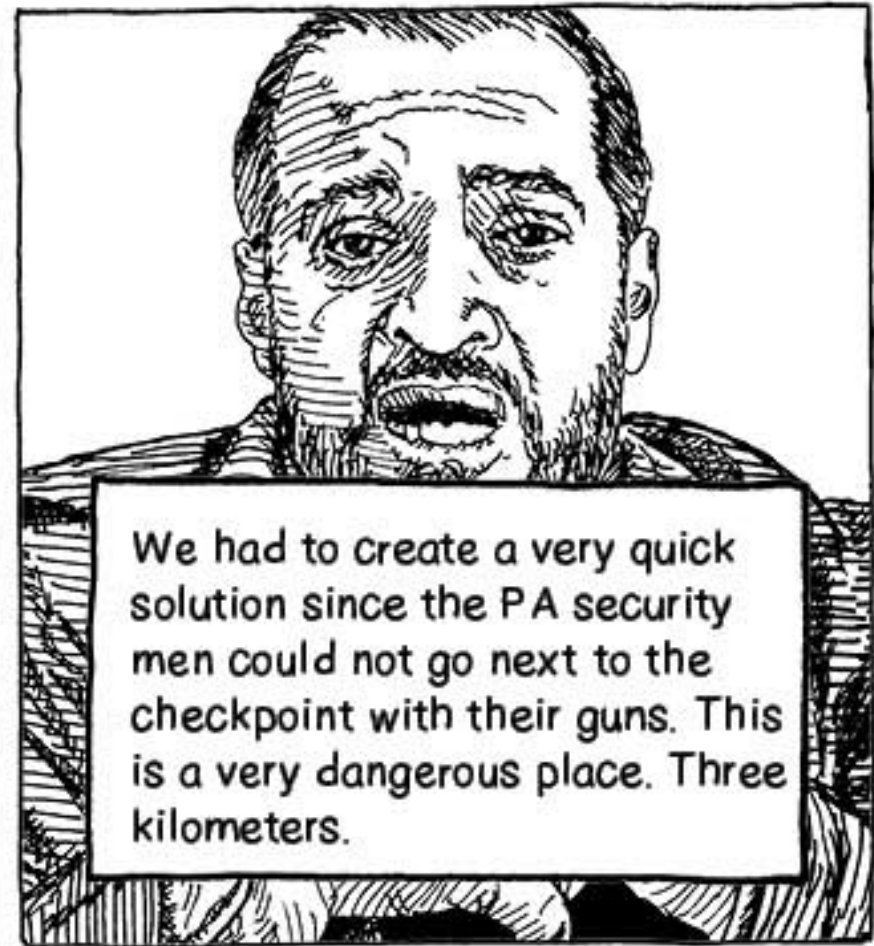
There was one woman-soldier, she wanted to look in the van, but that's all.

CROSSING OVER

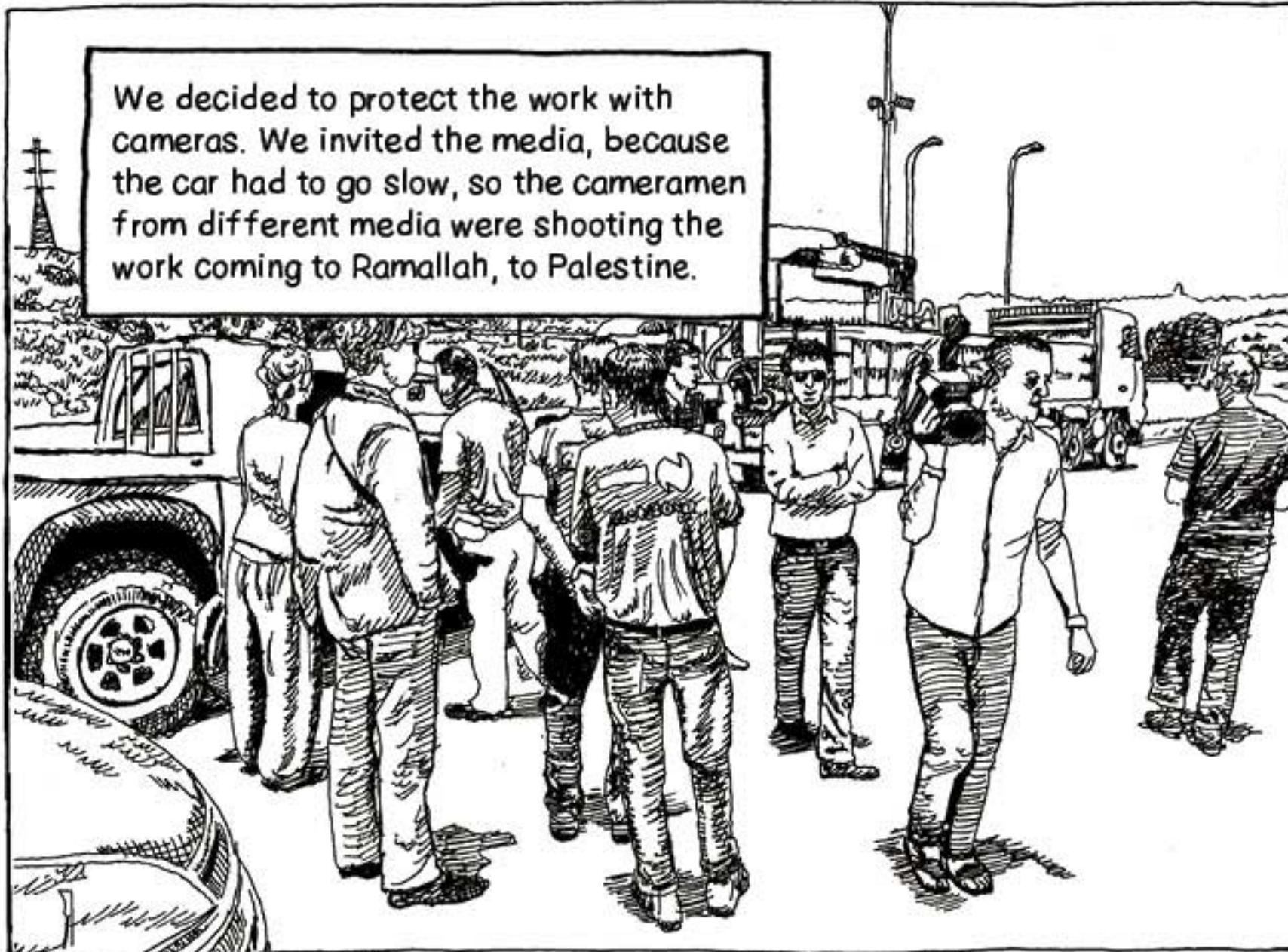




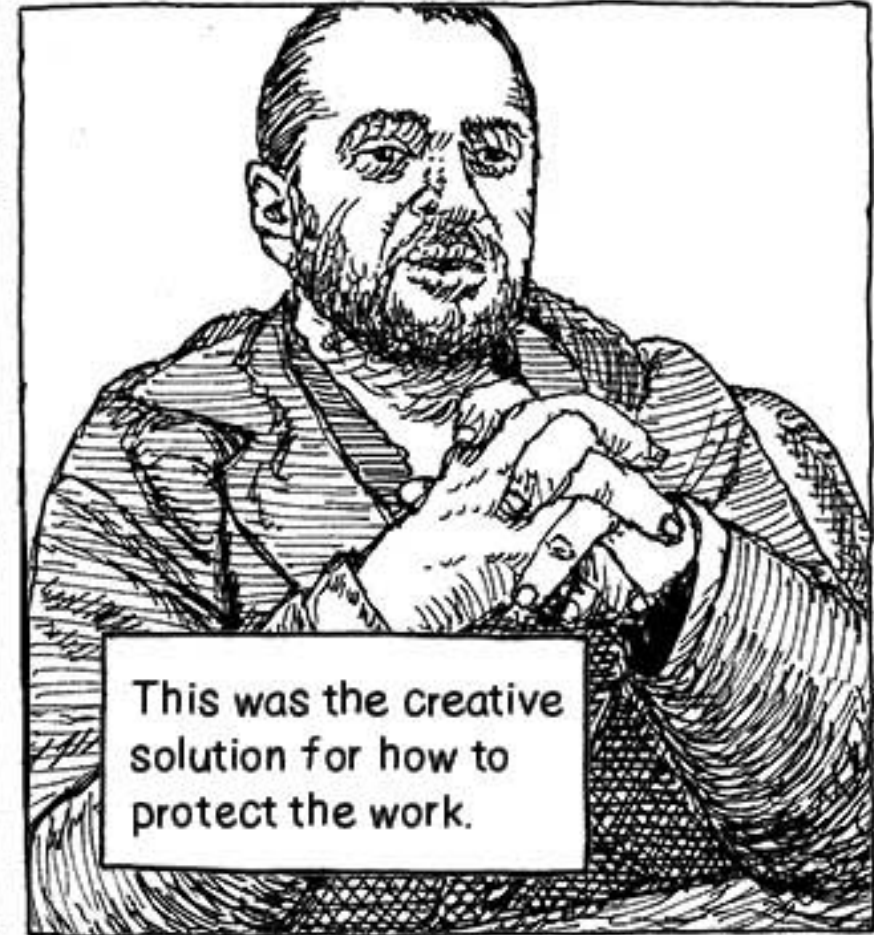
There is a dead area in between Qalandiya Checkpoint and the area where the PA policemen can be with their guns.



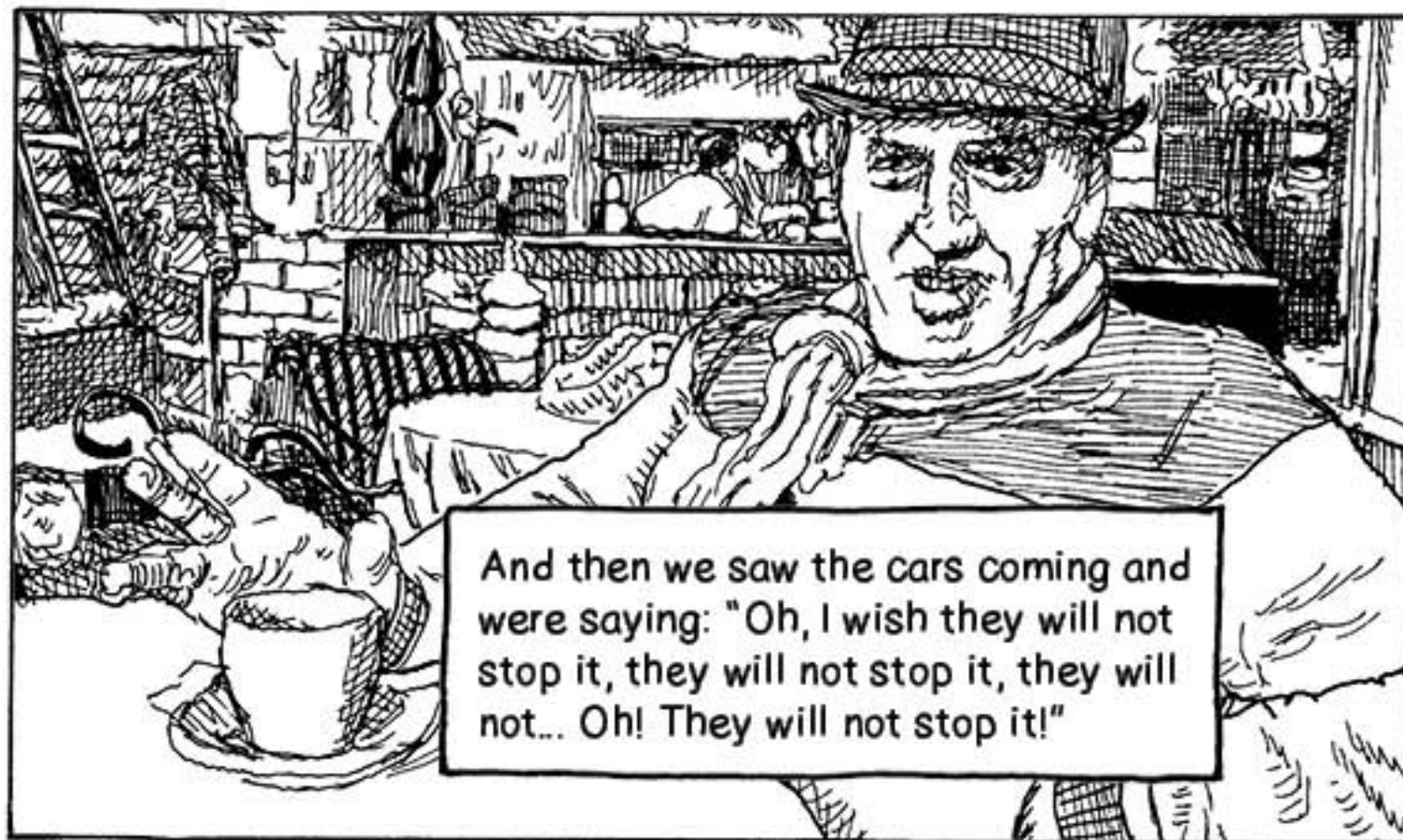
We had to create a very quick solution since the PA security men could not go next to the checkpoint with their guns. This is a very dangerous place. Three kilometers.



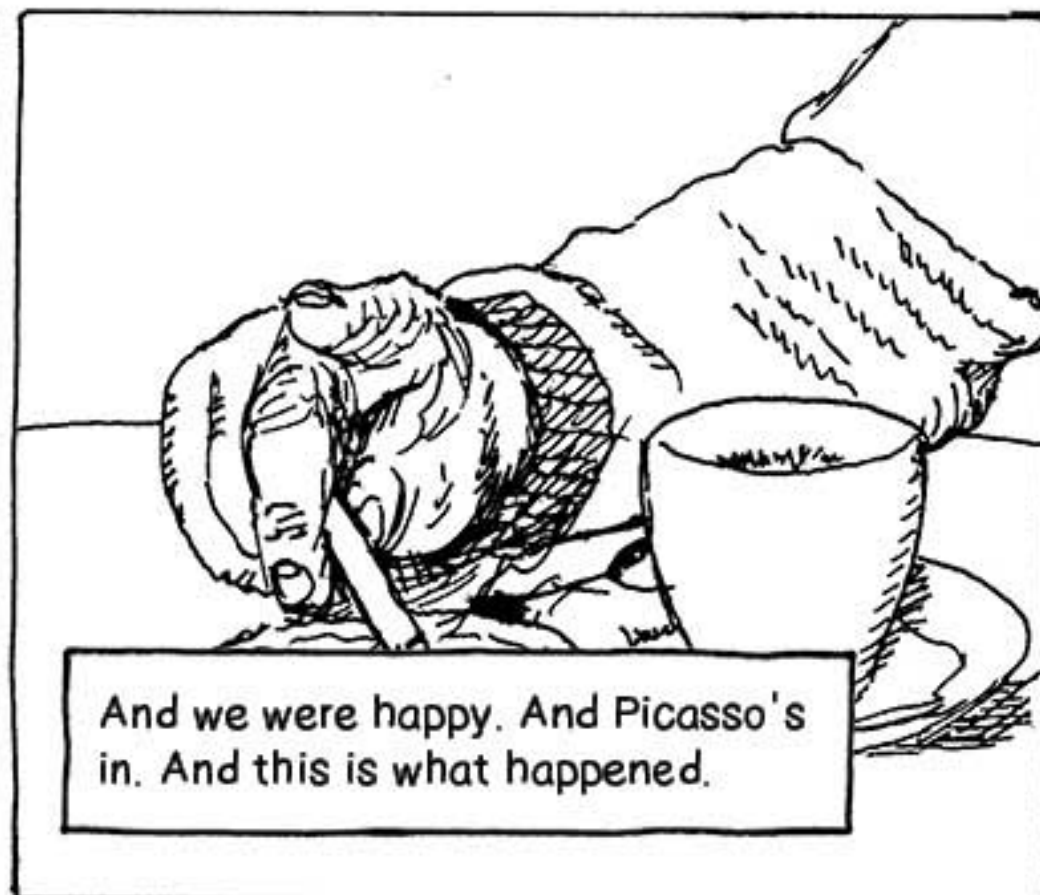
We decided to protect the work with cameras. We invited the media, because the car had to go slow, so the cameramen from different media were shooting the work coming to Ramallah, to Palestine.



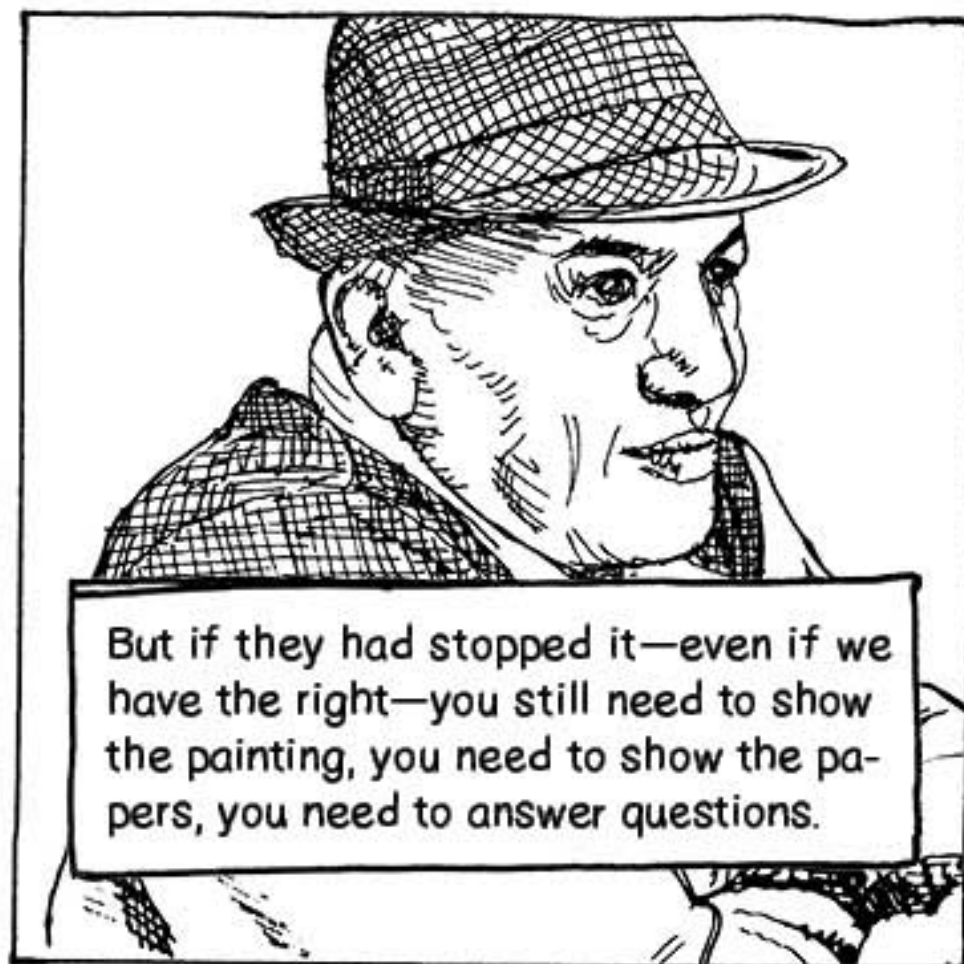
This was the creative solution for how to protect the work.



And then we saw the cars coming and were saying: "Oh, I wish they will not stop it, they will not stop it, they will not... Oh! They will not stop it!"




And we were happy. And Picasso's in. And this is what happened.




But if they had stopped it—even if we have the right—you still need to show the painting, you need to show the papers, you need to answer questions.



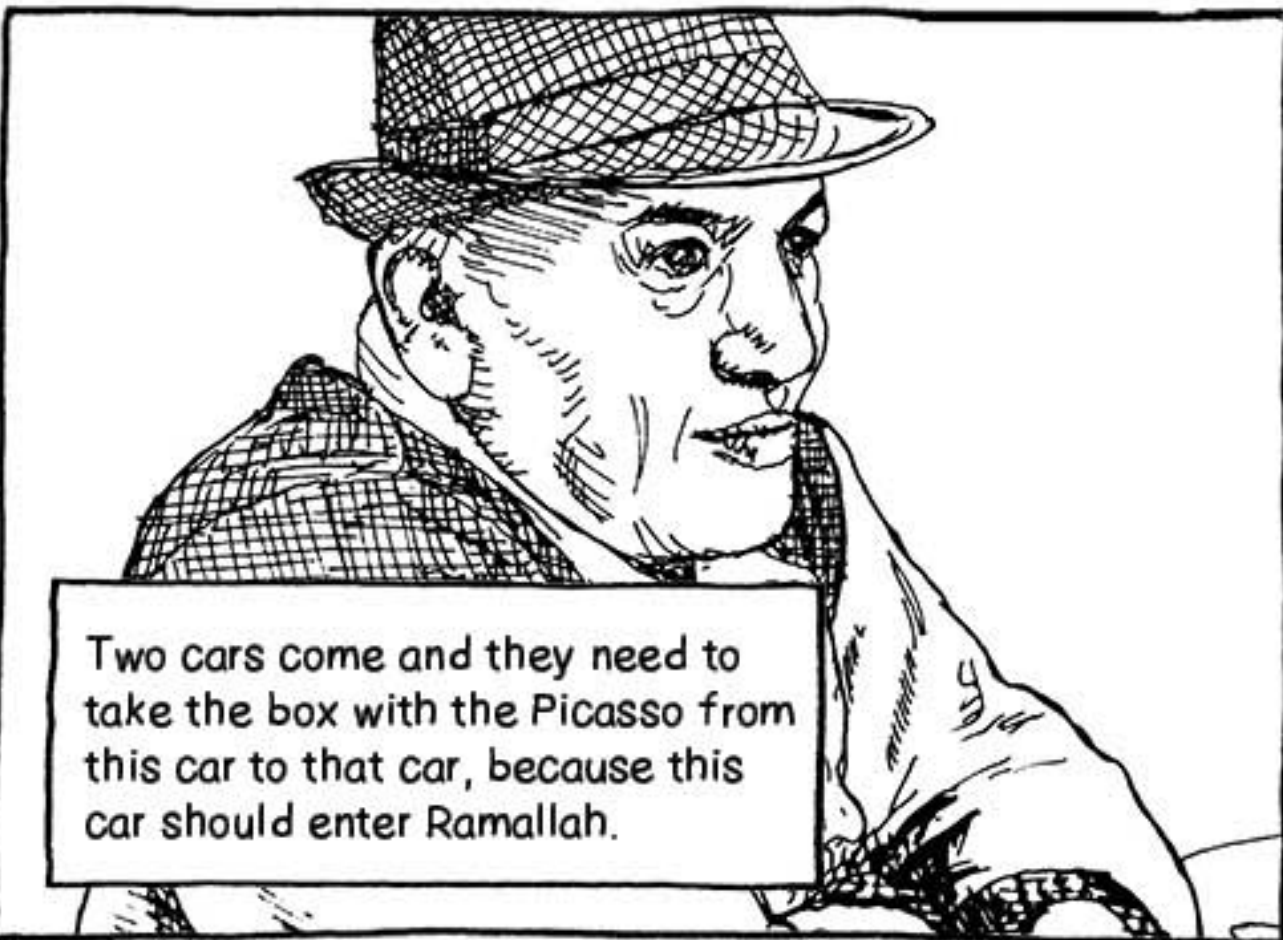
We wanted to avoid this whole story.



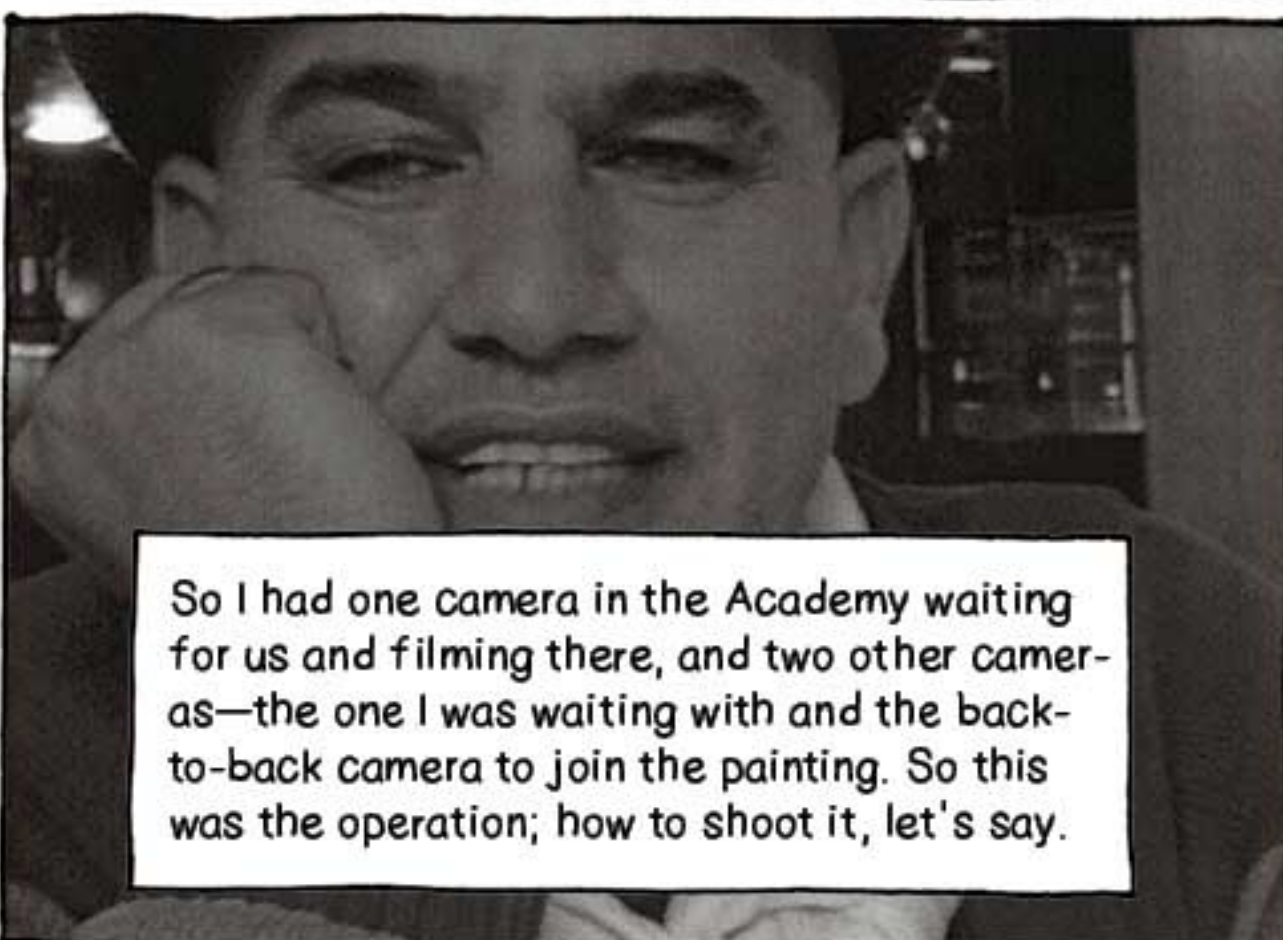
On this day, I had three cameras. One camera was with me and Khaled and others on the Palestinian side of Qalandiya waiting for the painting.



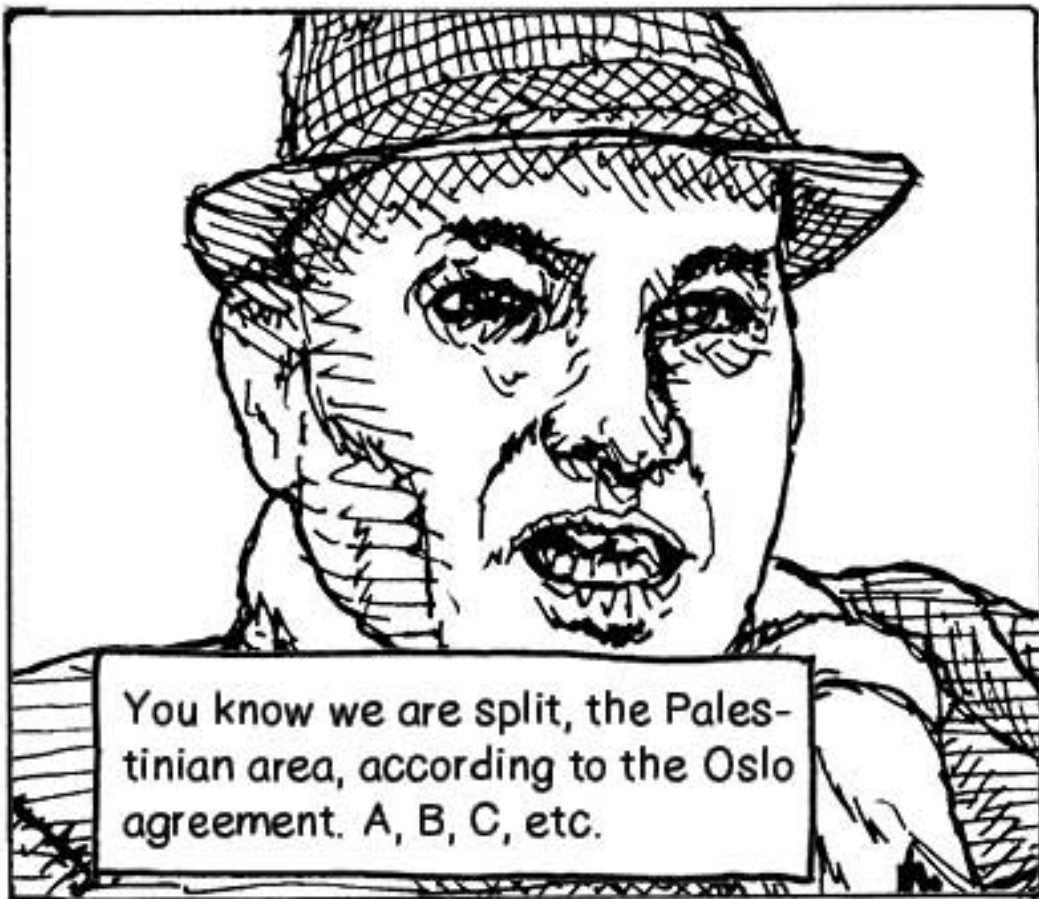
I had a Palestinian from Jerusalem who is a cameraman (because me and Khaled, we are not allowed to go there) waiting in a place called Atarot, where they will make the... we call it "back-to-back".



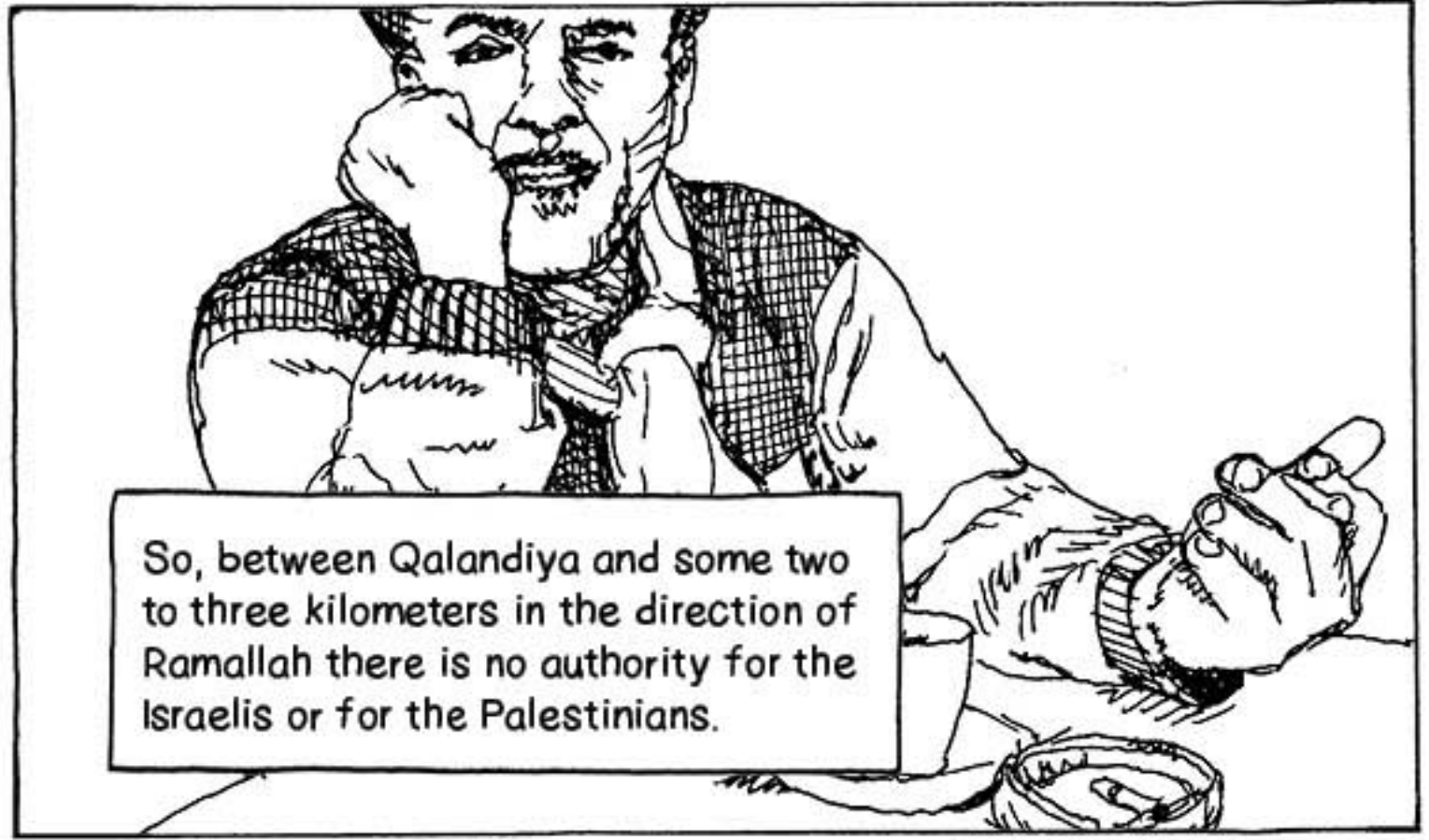
Two cars come and they need to take the box with the Picasso from this car to that car, because this car should enter Ramallah.



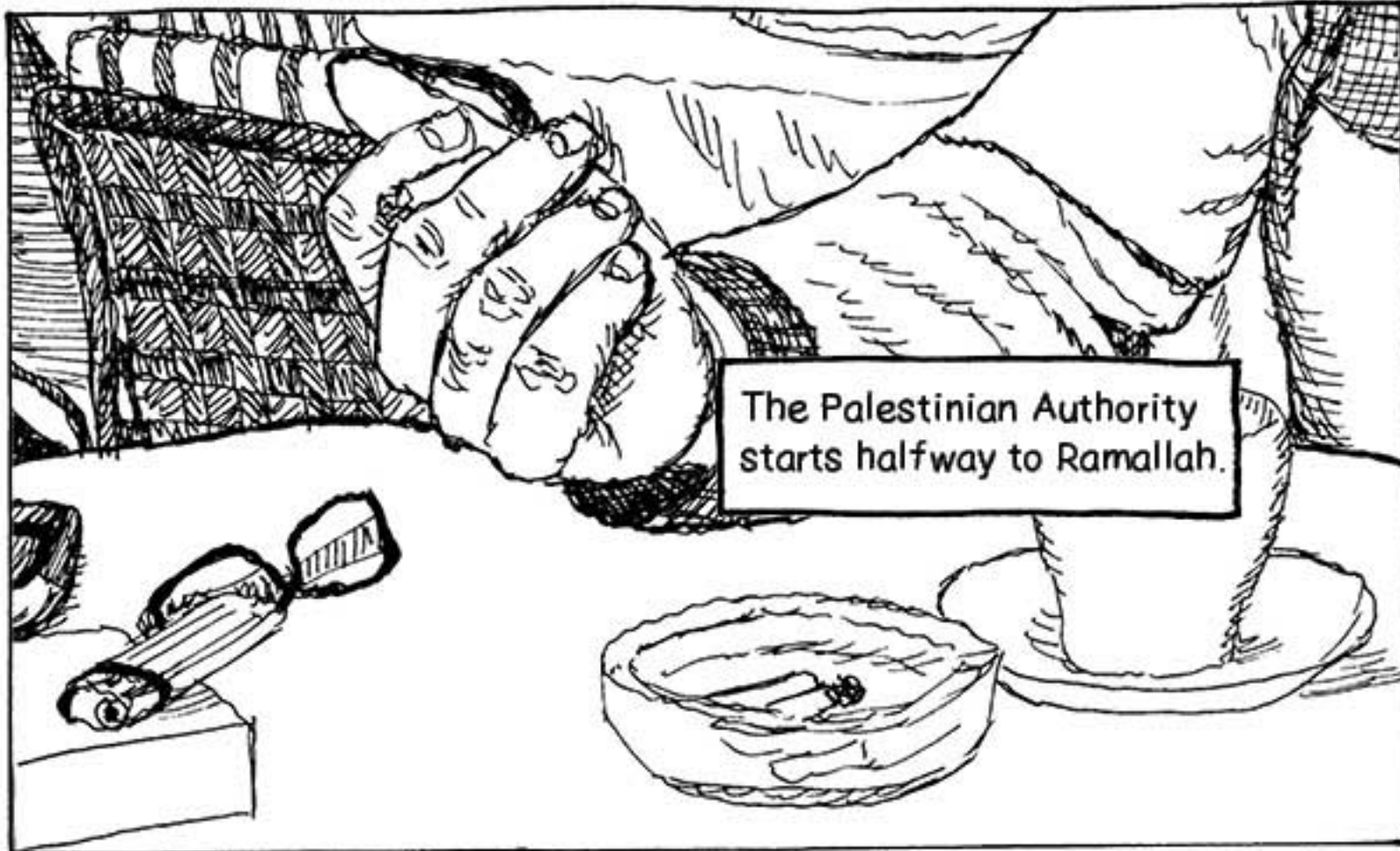
So I had one camera in the Academy waiting for us and filming there, and two other cameras—the one I was waiting with and the back-to-back camera to join the painting. So this was the operation; how to shoot it, let's say.



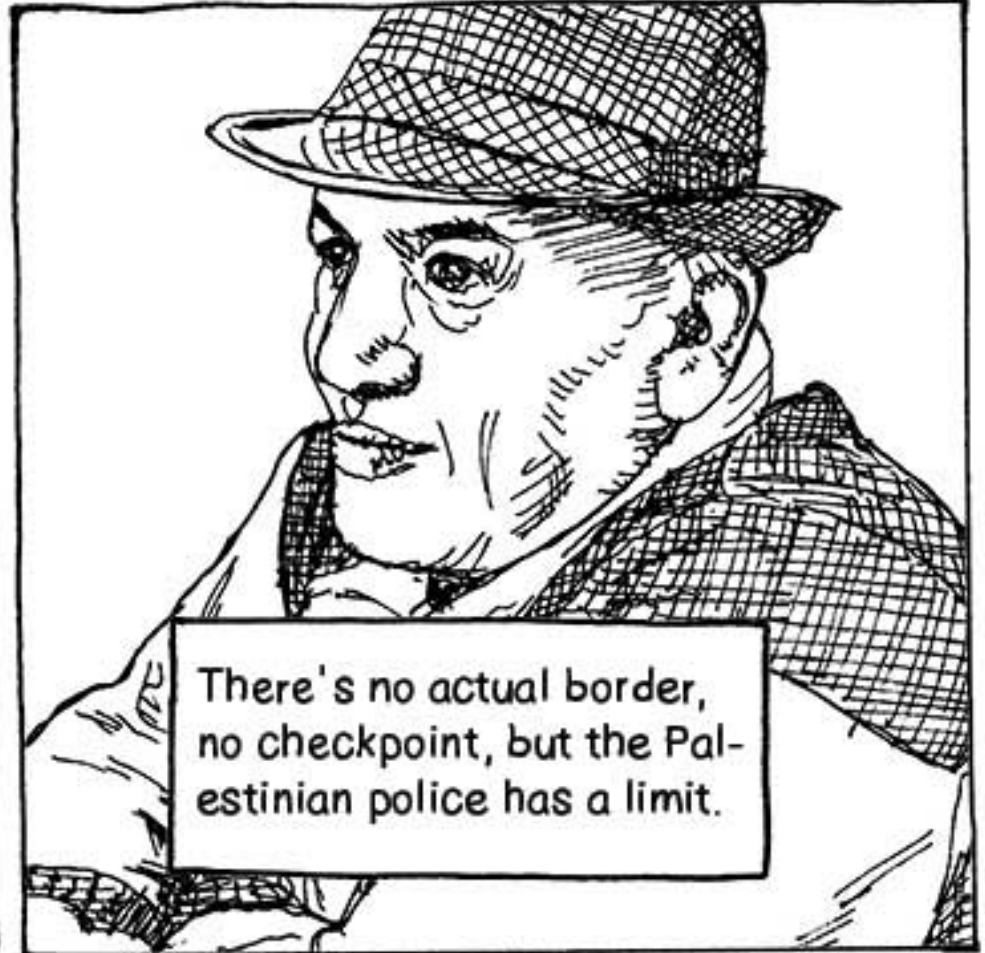
You know we are split, the Palestinian area, according to the Oslo agreement. A, B, C, etc.



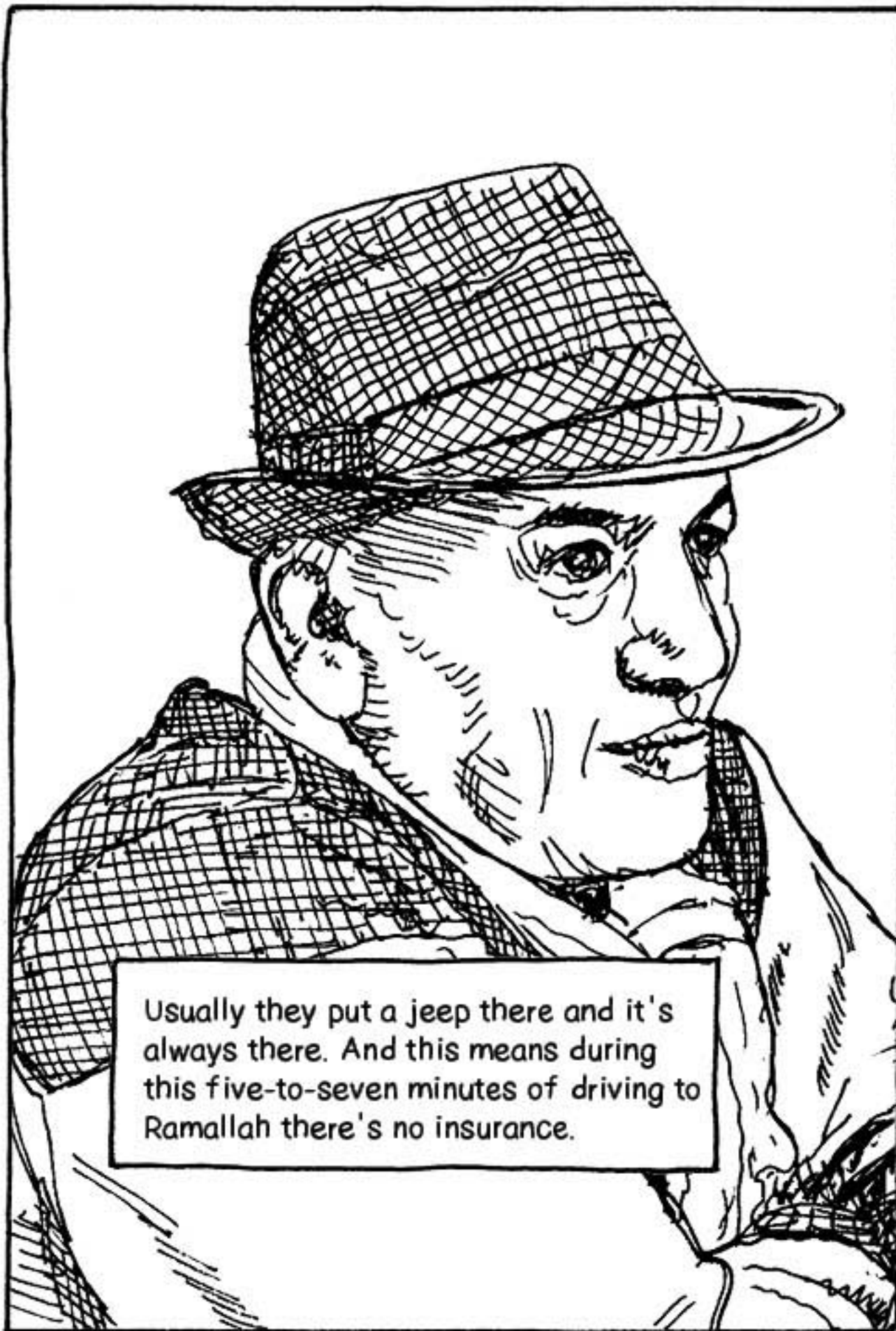
So, between Qalandiya and some two to three kilometers in the direction of Ramallah there is no authority for the Israelis or for the Palestinians.



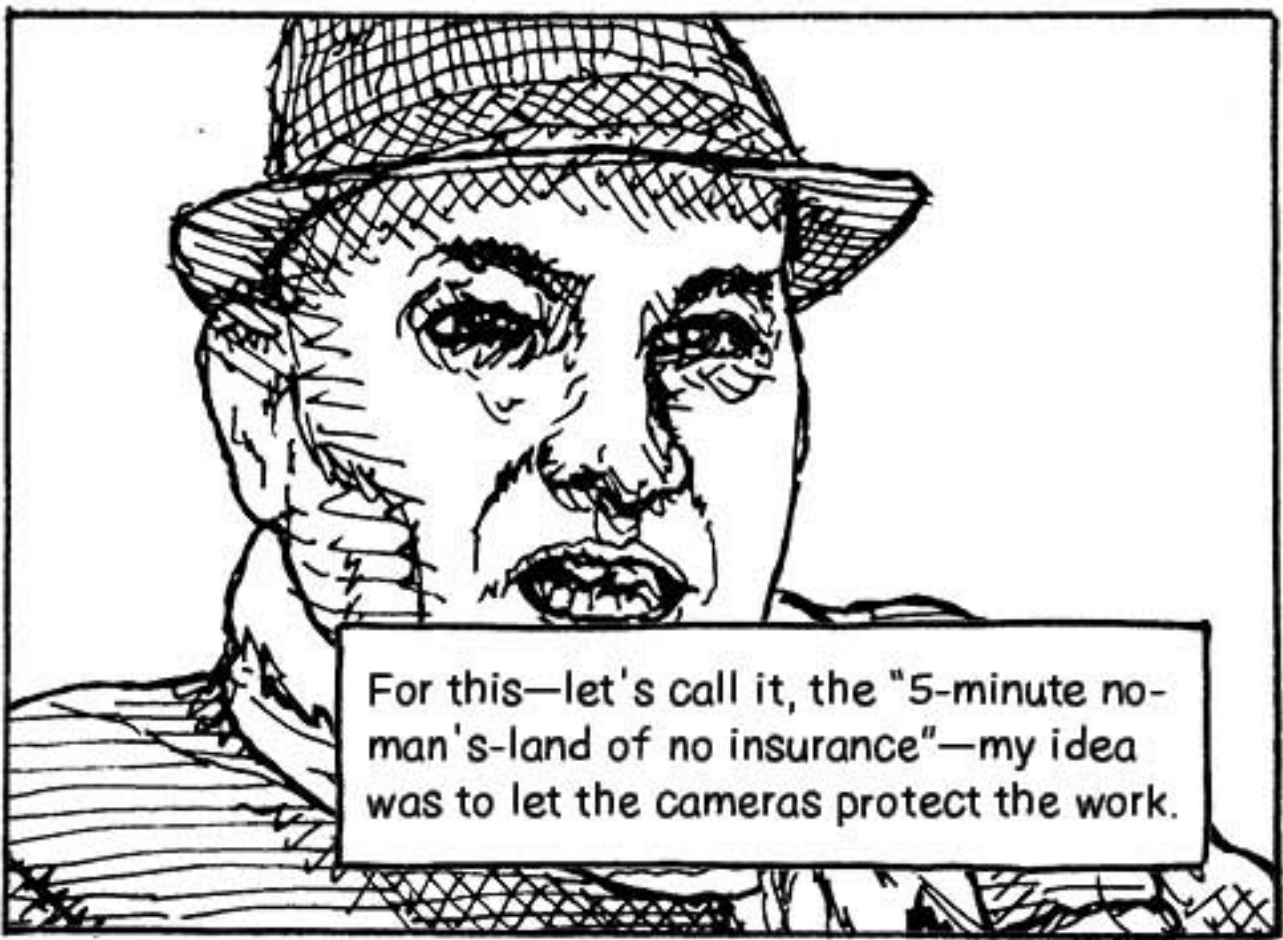
The Palestinian Authority starts halfway to Ramallah.



There's no actual border, no checkpoint, but the Palestinian police has a limit.



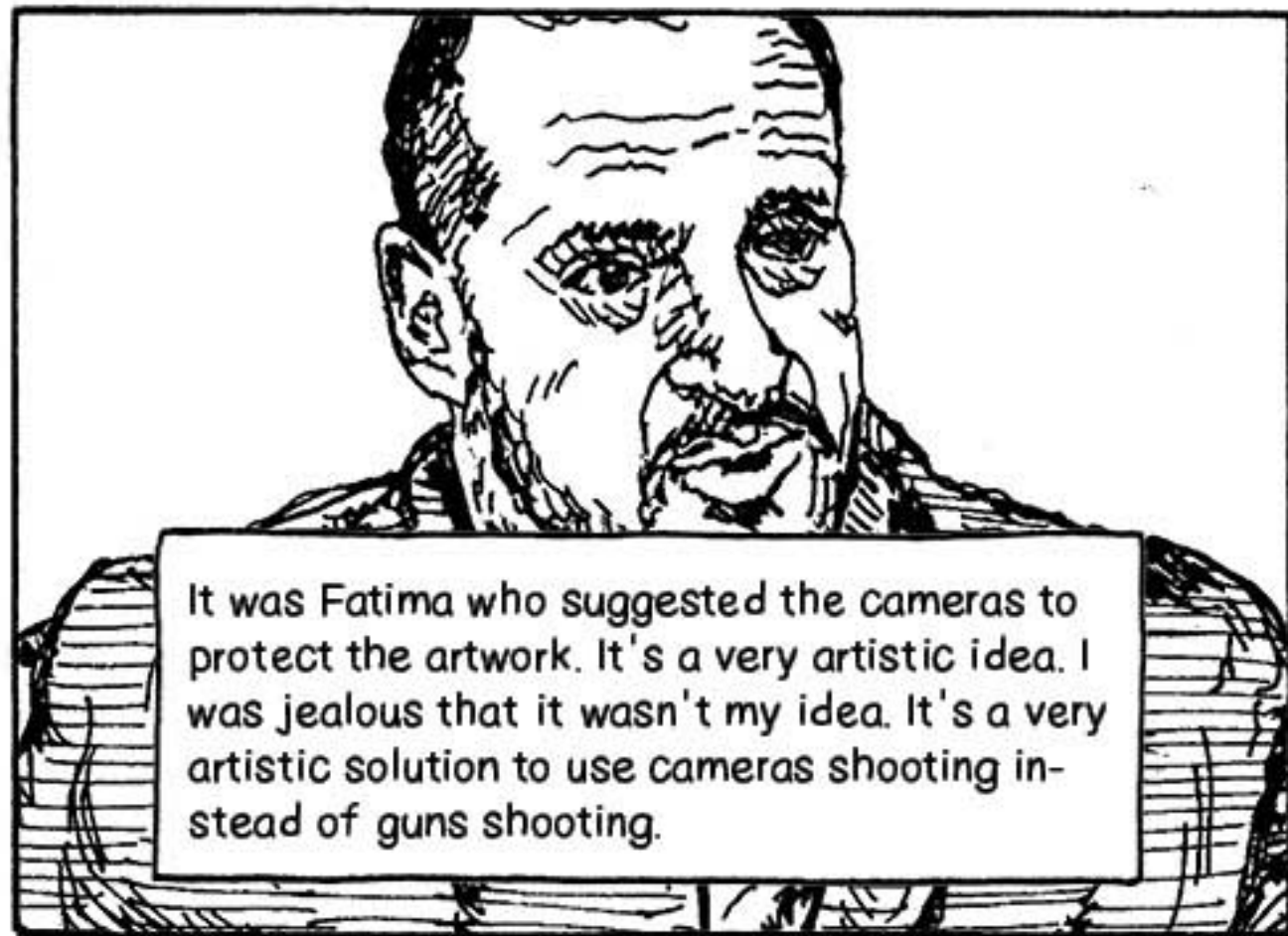
Usually they put a jeep there and it's always there. And this means during this five-to-seven minutes of driving to Ramallah there's no insurance.



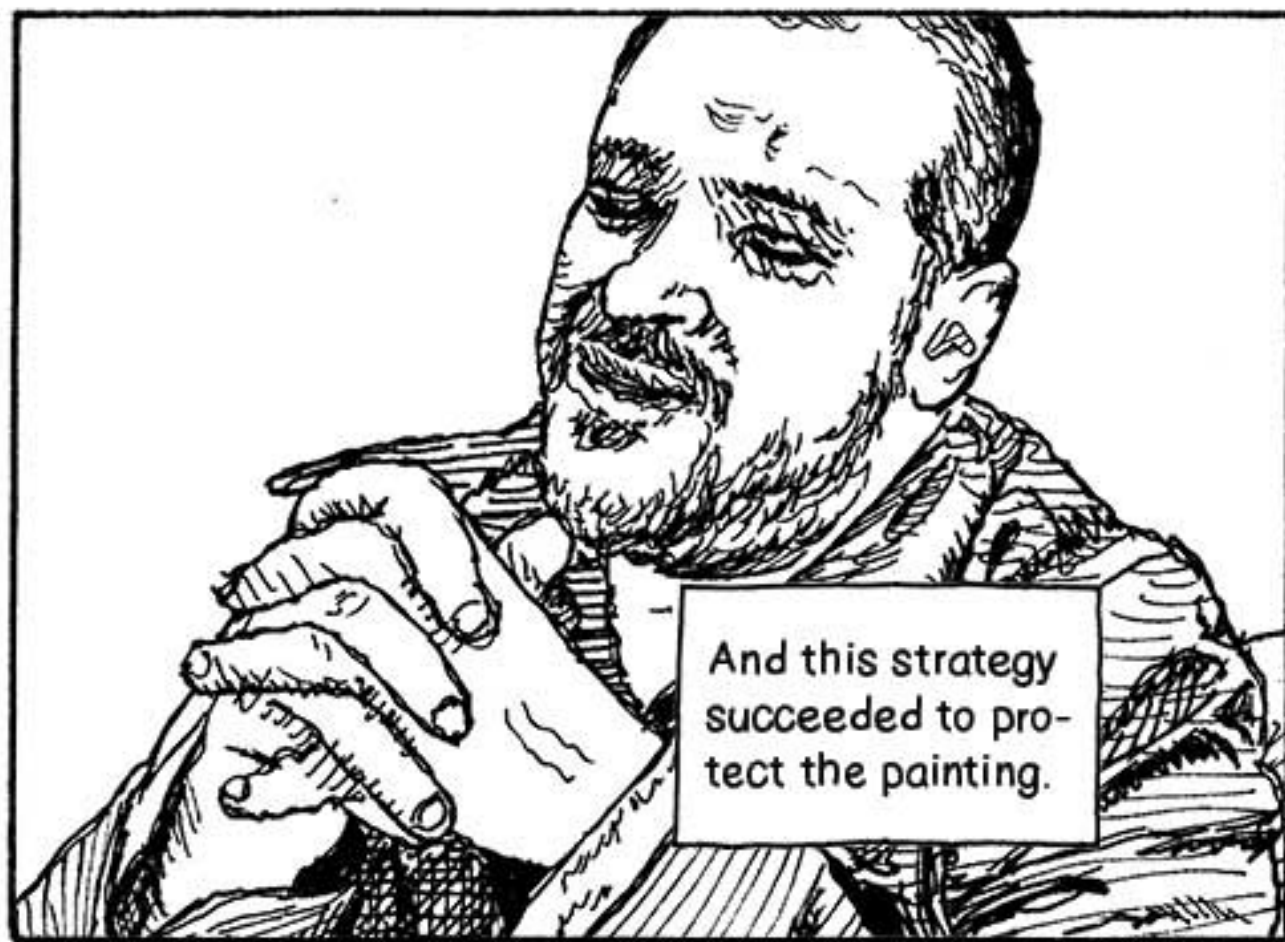
For this—let's call it, the "5-minute no-man's-land of no insurance"—my idea was to let the cameras protect the work.



Since everything is filmed, nothing could happen.



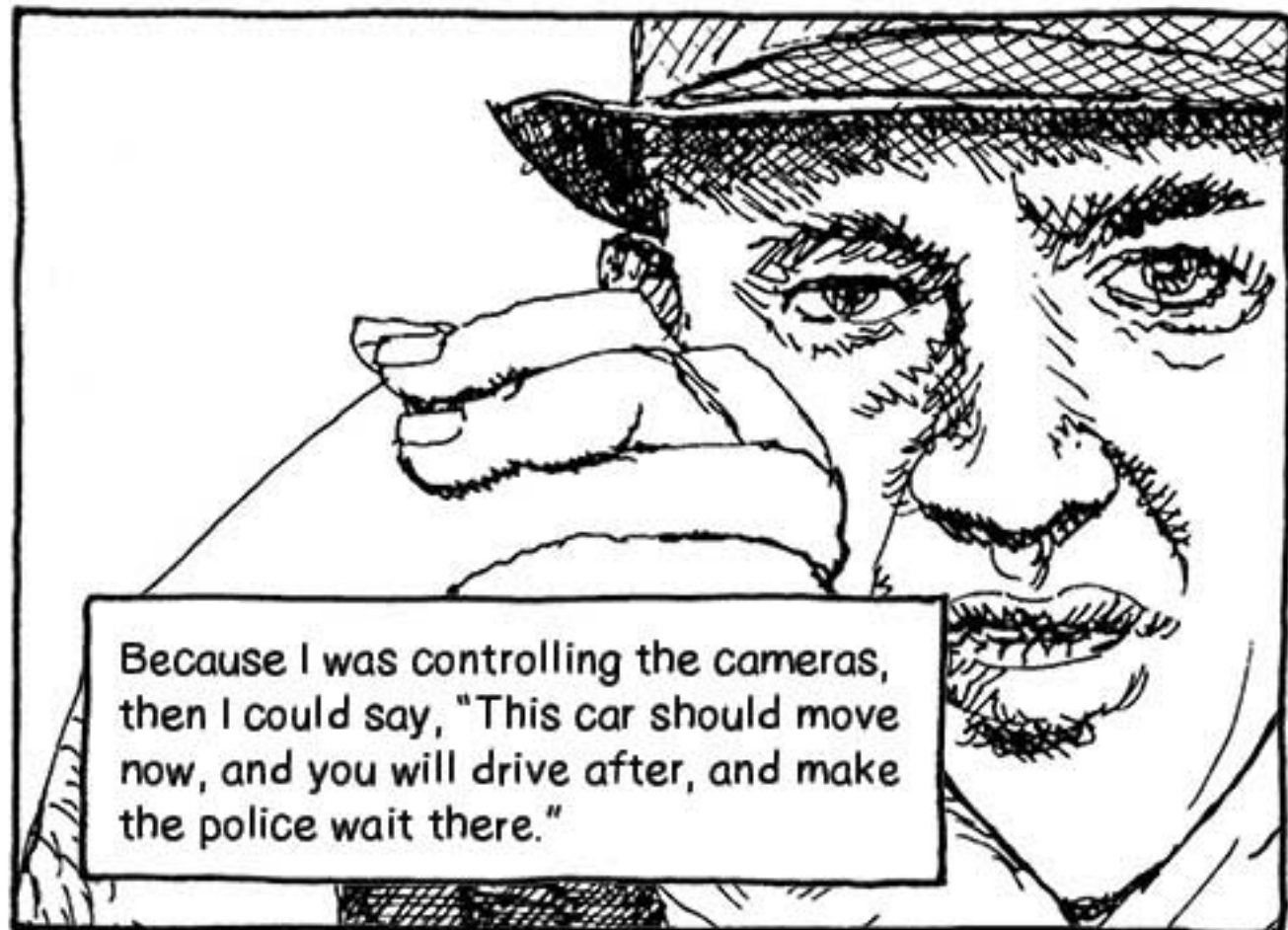
It was Fatima who suggested the cameras to protect the artwork. It's a very artistic idea. I was jealous that it wasn't my idea. It's a very artistic solution to use cameras shooting instead of guns shooting.



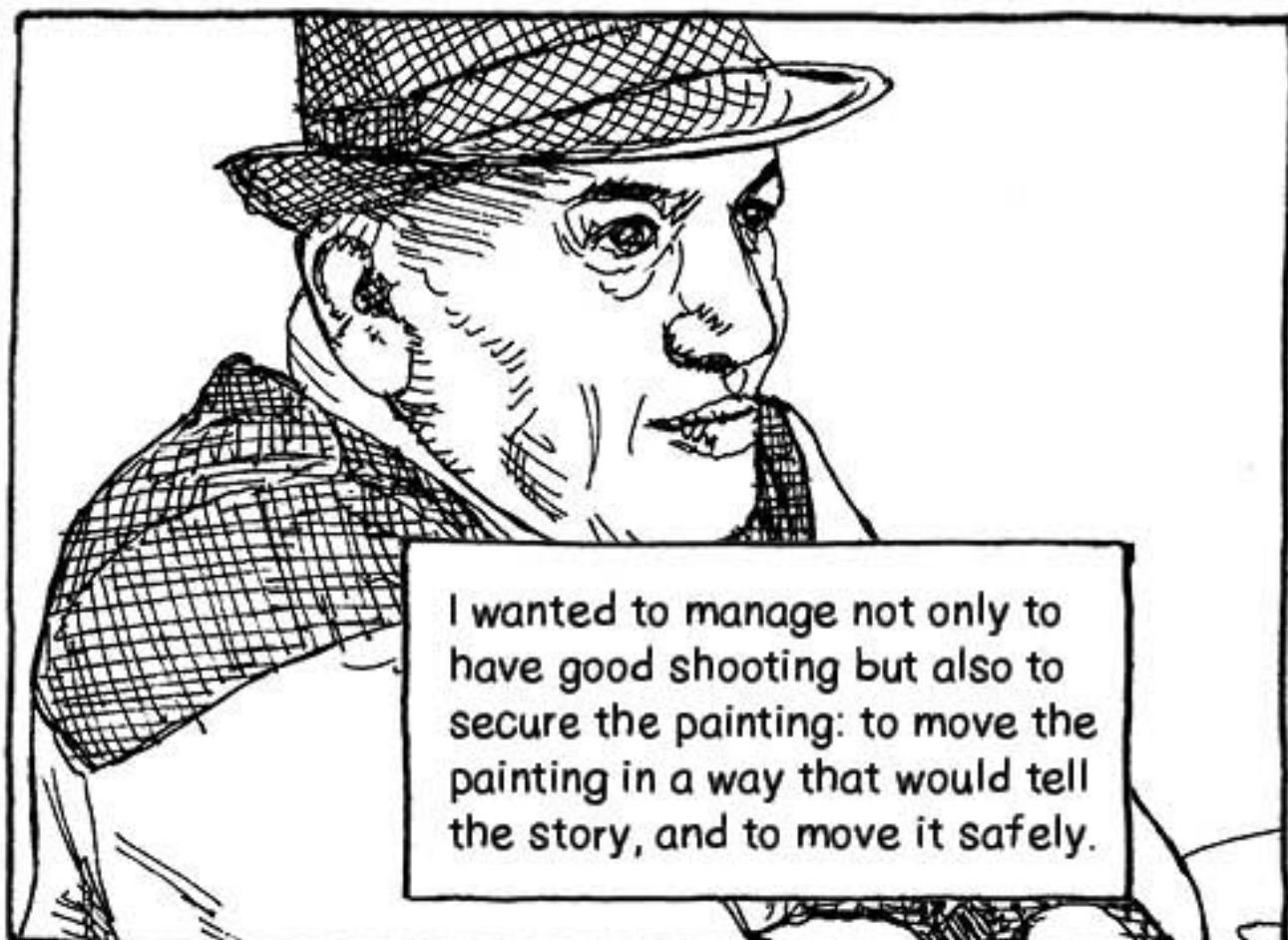
And this strategy succeeded to protect the painting.



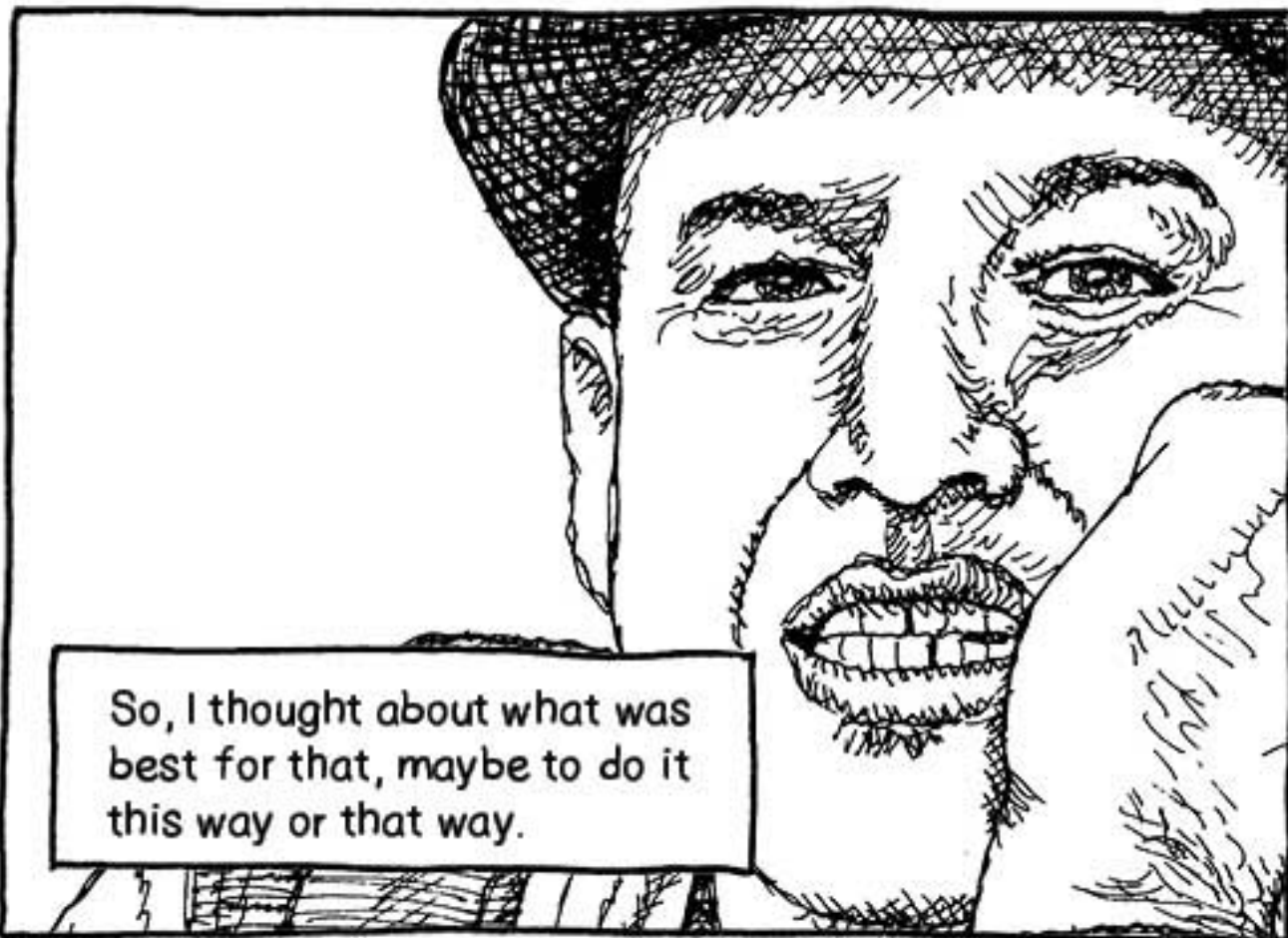
Because there's no stupid mafia who will attack a van when it's live on Al Jazeera and CNN.



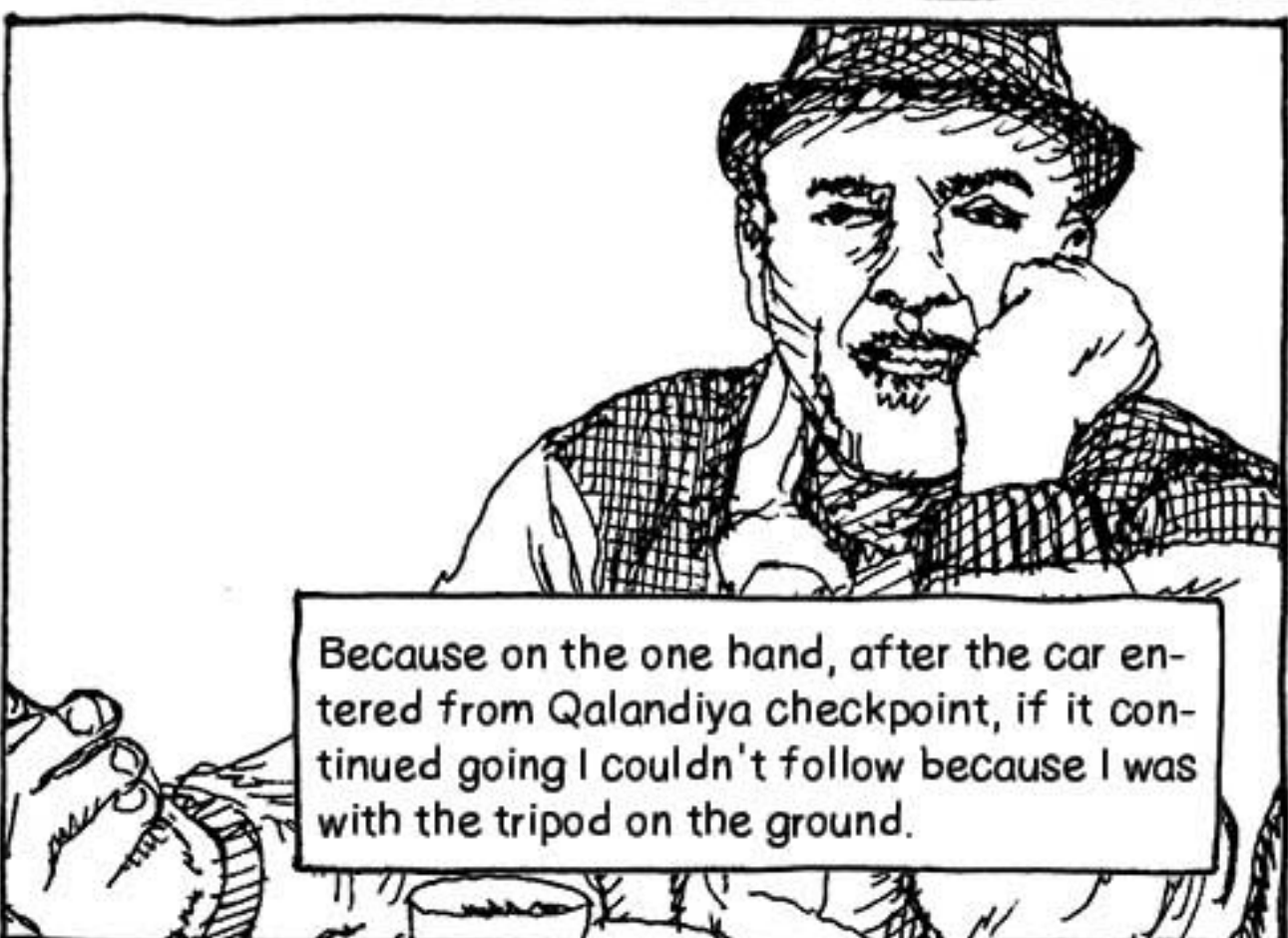
Because I was controlling the cameras, then I could say, "This car should move now, and you will drive after, and make the police wait there."



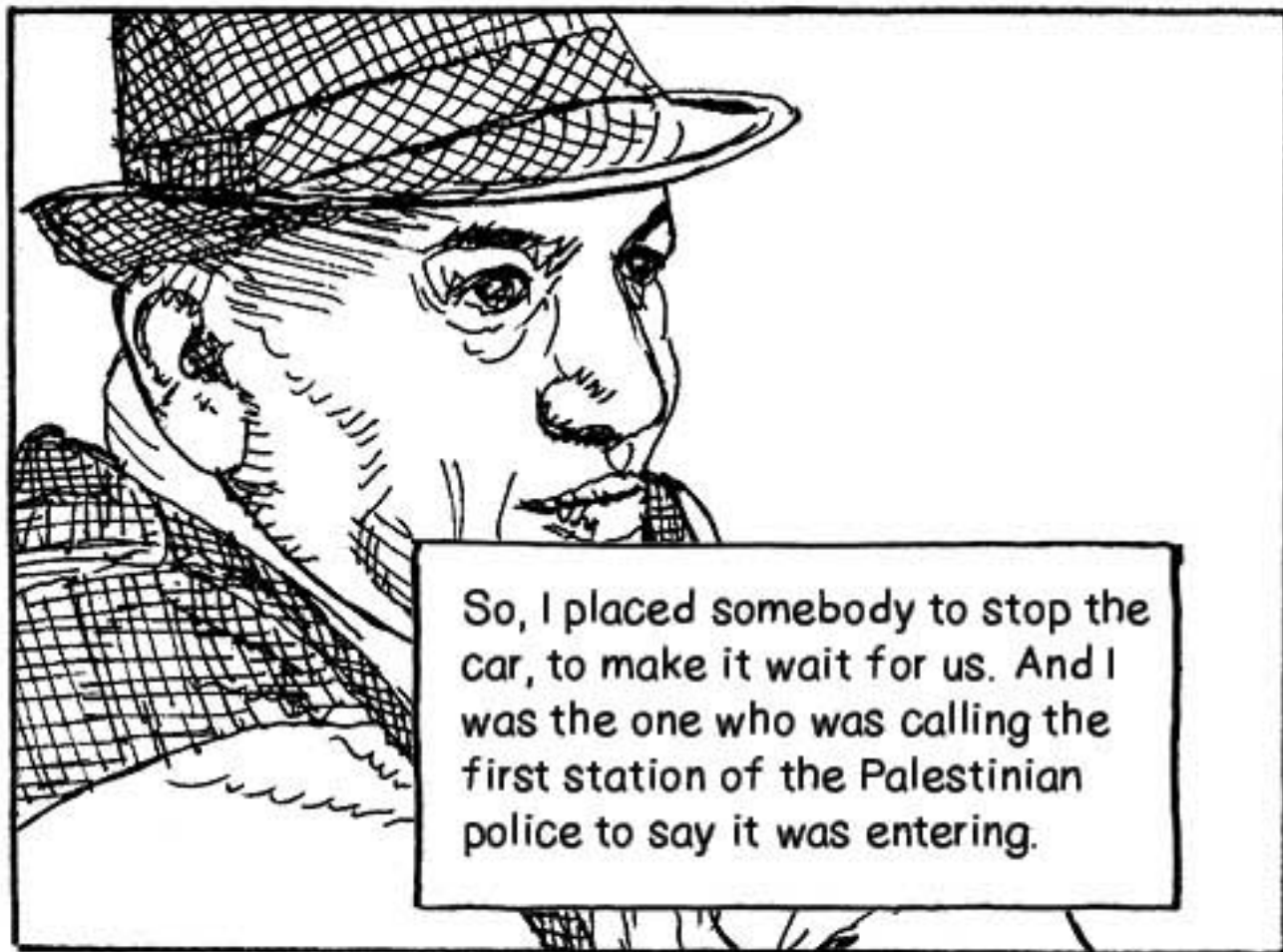
I wanted to manage not only to have good shooting but also to secure the painting: to move the painting in a way that would tell the story, and to move it safely.

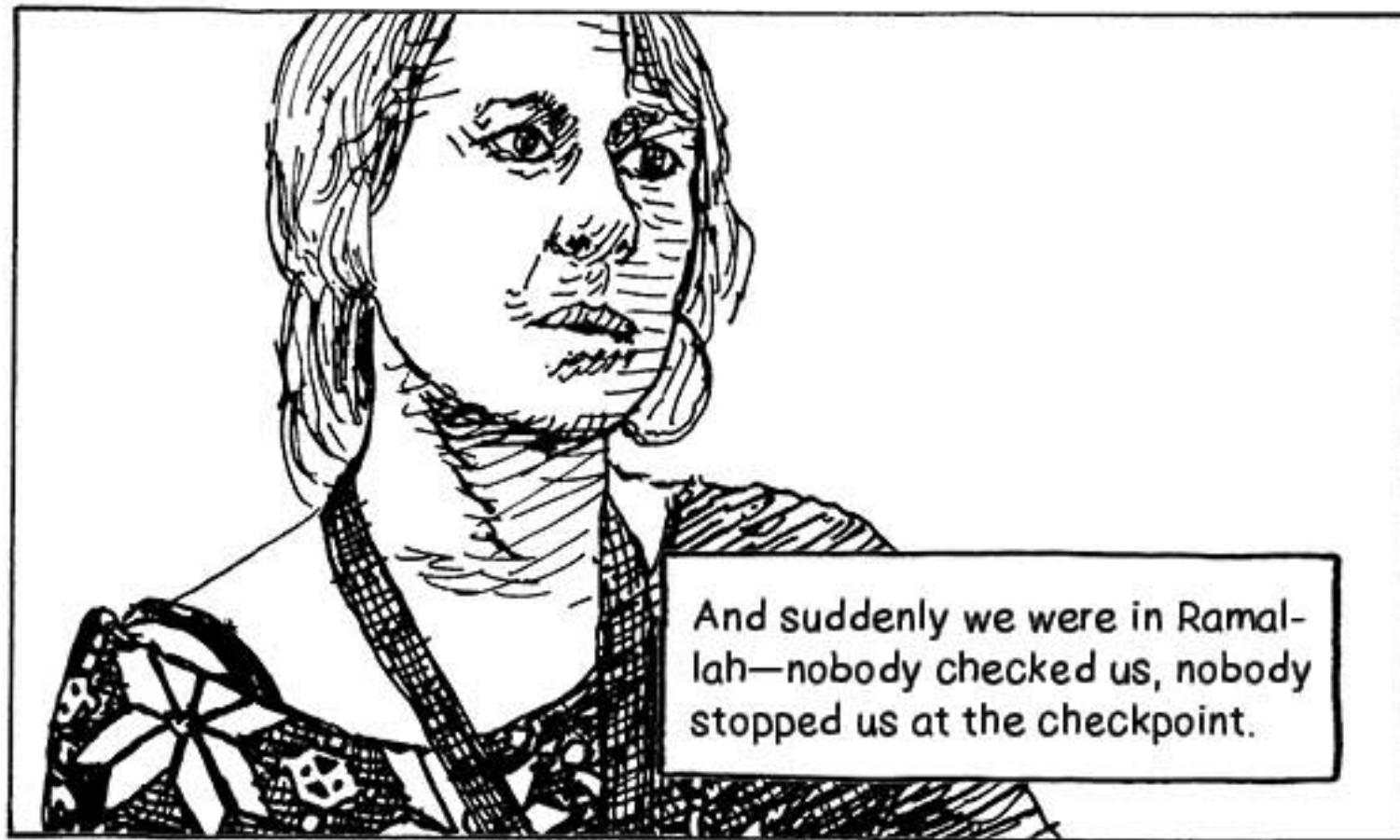


So, I thought about what was best for that, maybe to do it this way or that way.

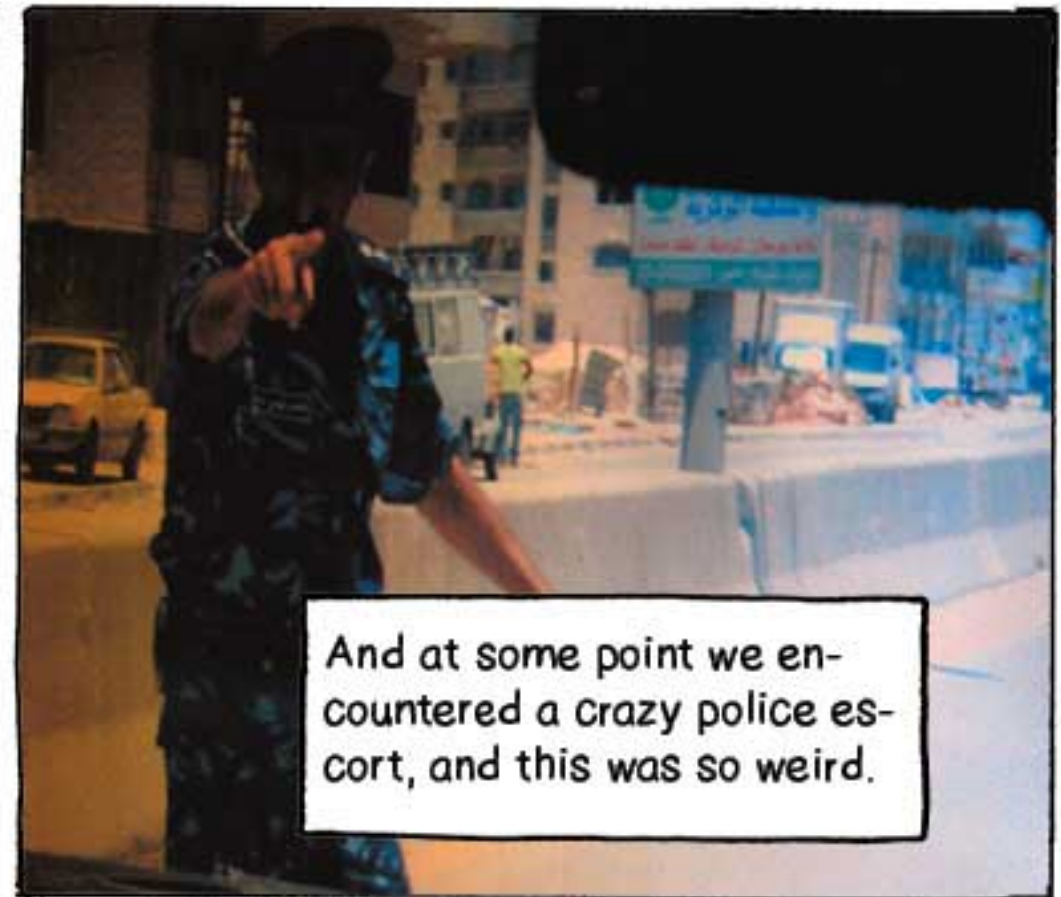


Because on the one hand, after the car entered from Qalandiya checkpoint, if it continued going I couldn't follow because I was with the tripod on the ground.





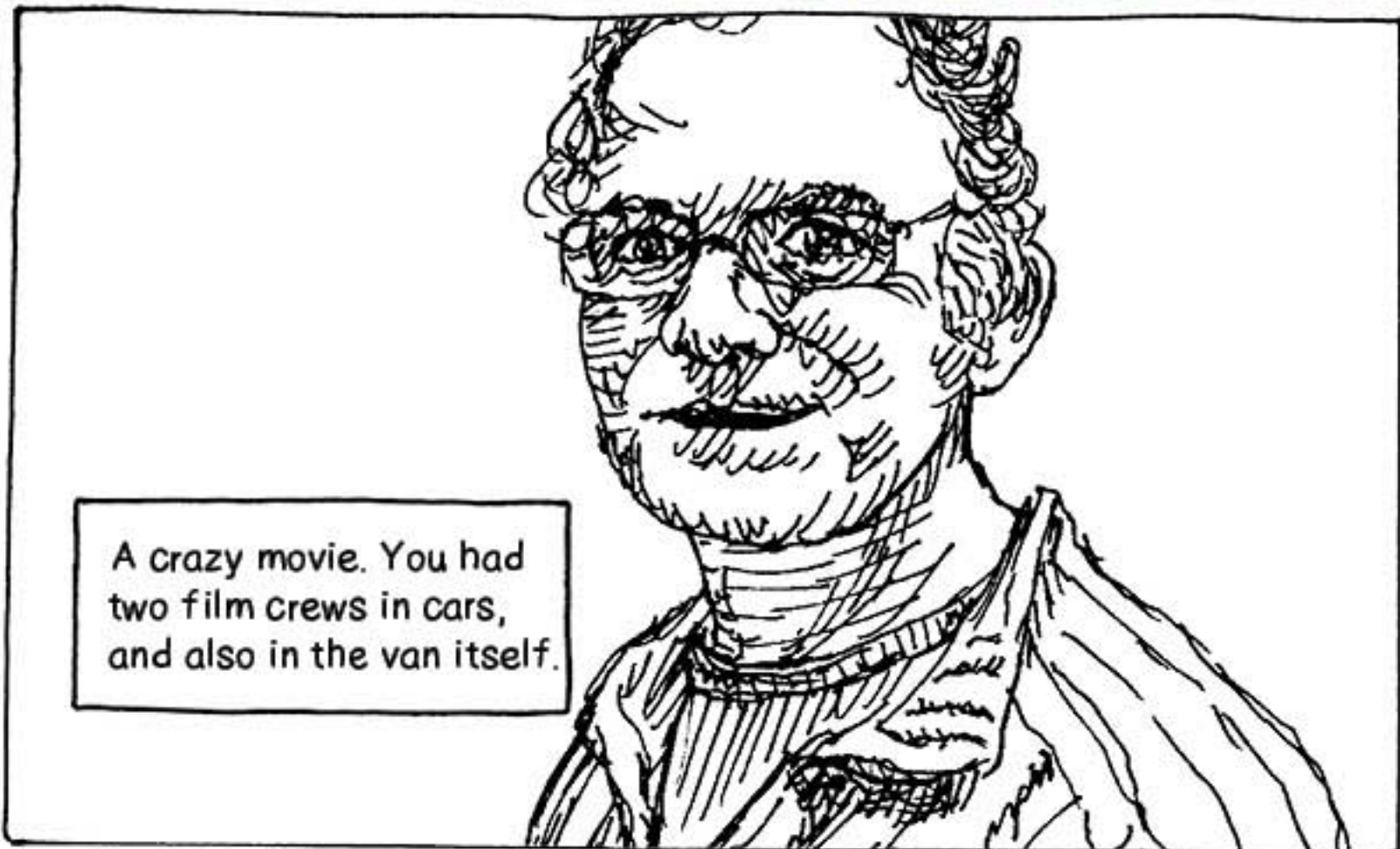
And suddenly we were in Ramallah—nobody checked us, nobody stopped us at the checkpoint.



And at some point we encountered a crazy police escort, and this was so weird.



This was amazing.



A crazy movie. You had two film crews in cars, and also in the van itself.



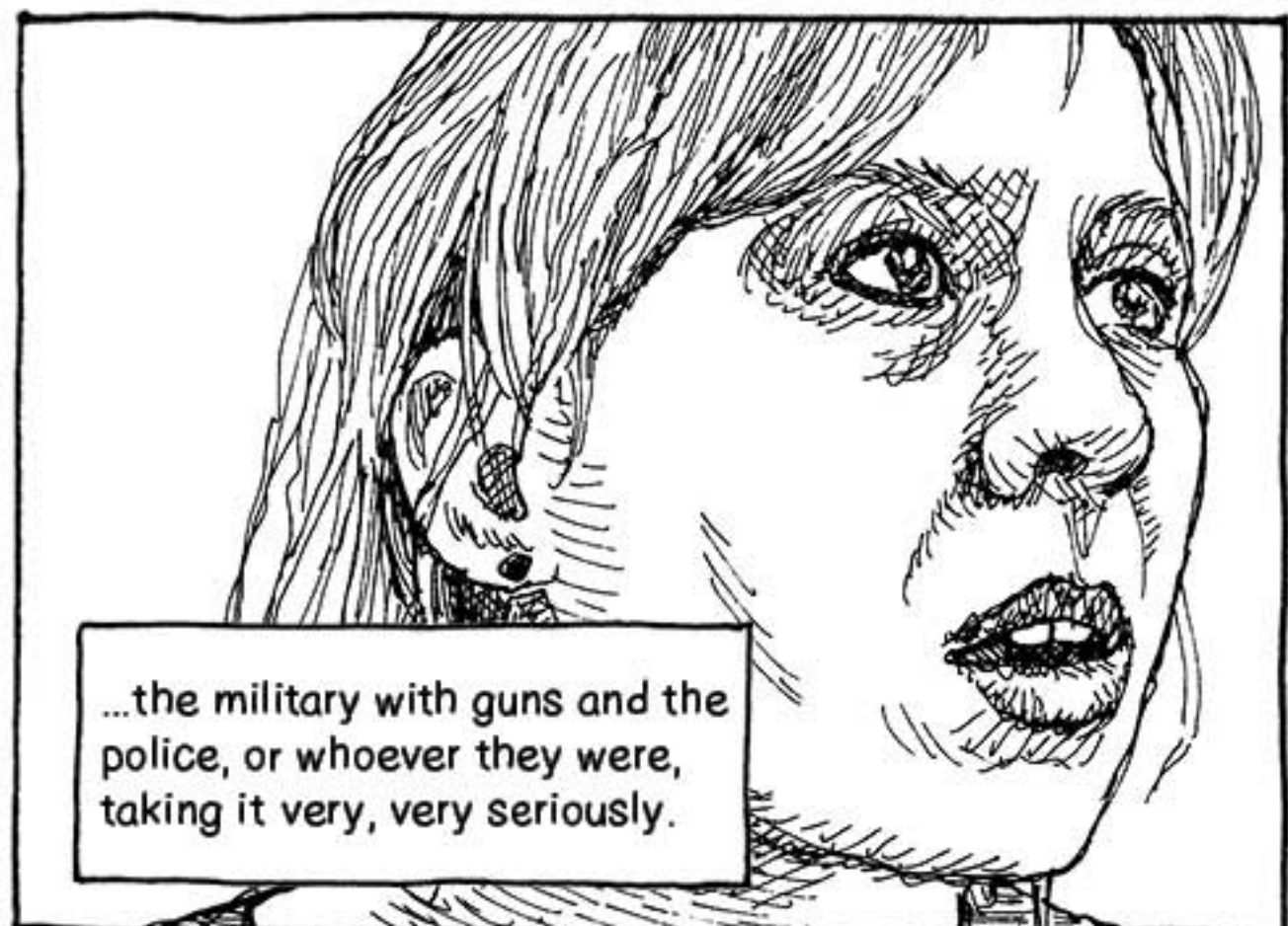
We also had to drive very slowly, so that was also something.



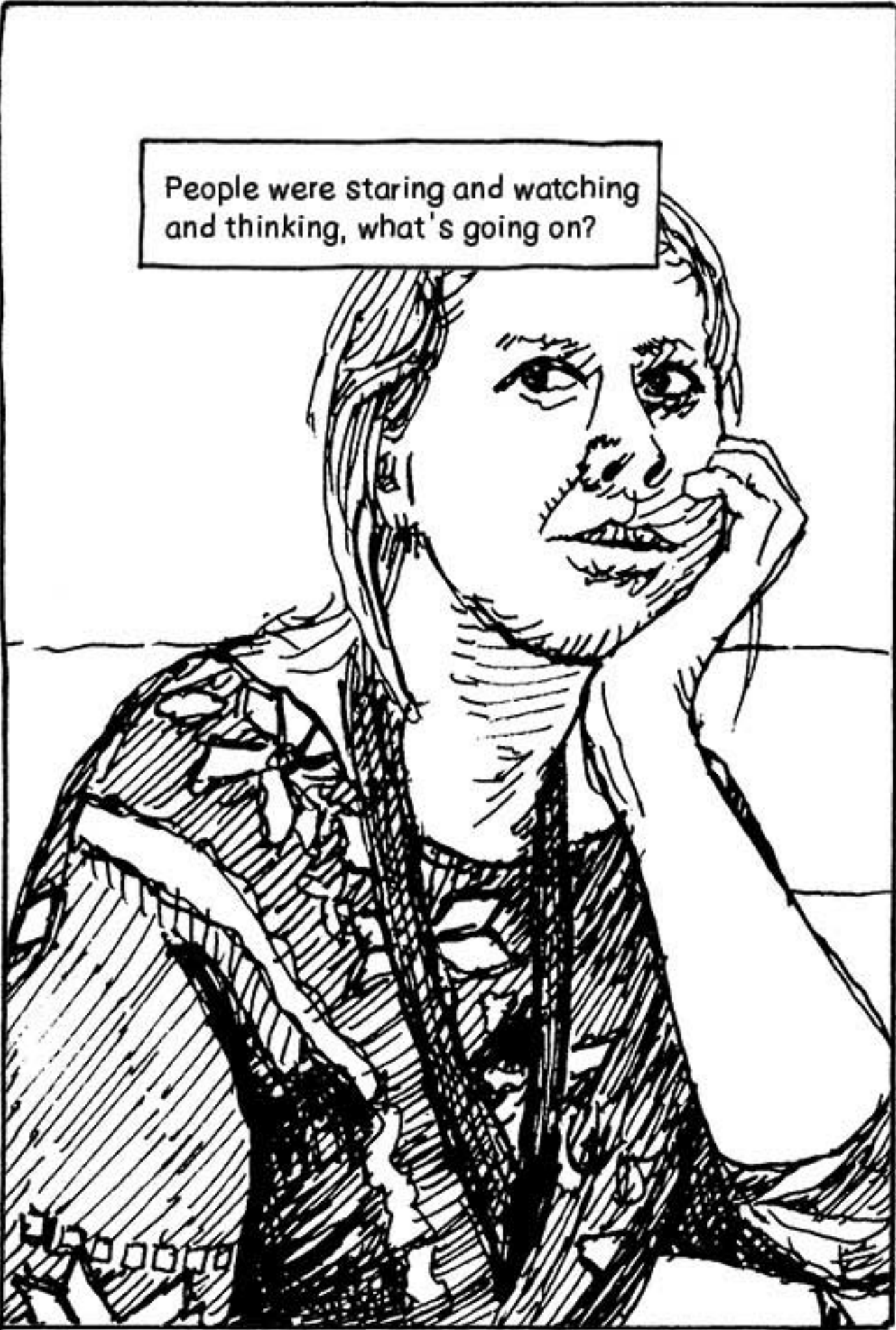
People stared: "Look, what's happening?"




Even though they didn't know it was art, it was very suspicious...




...the military with guns and the police, or whoever they were, taking it very, very seriously.



People were staring and watching
and thinking, what's going on?

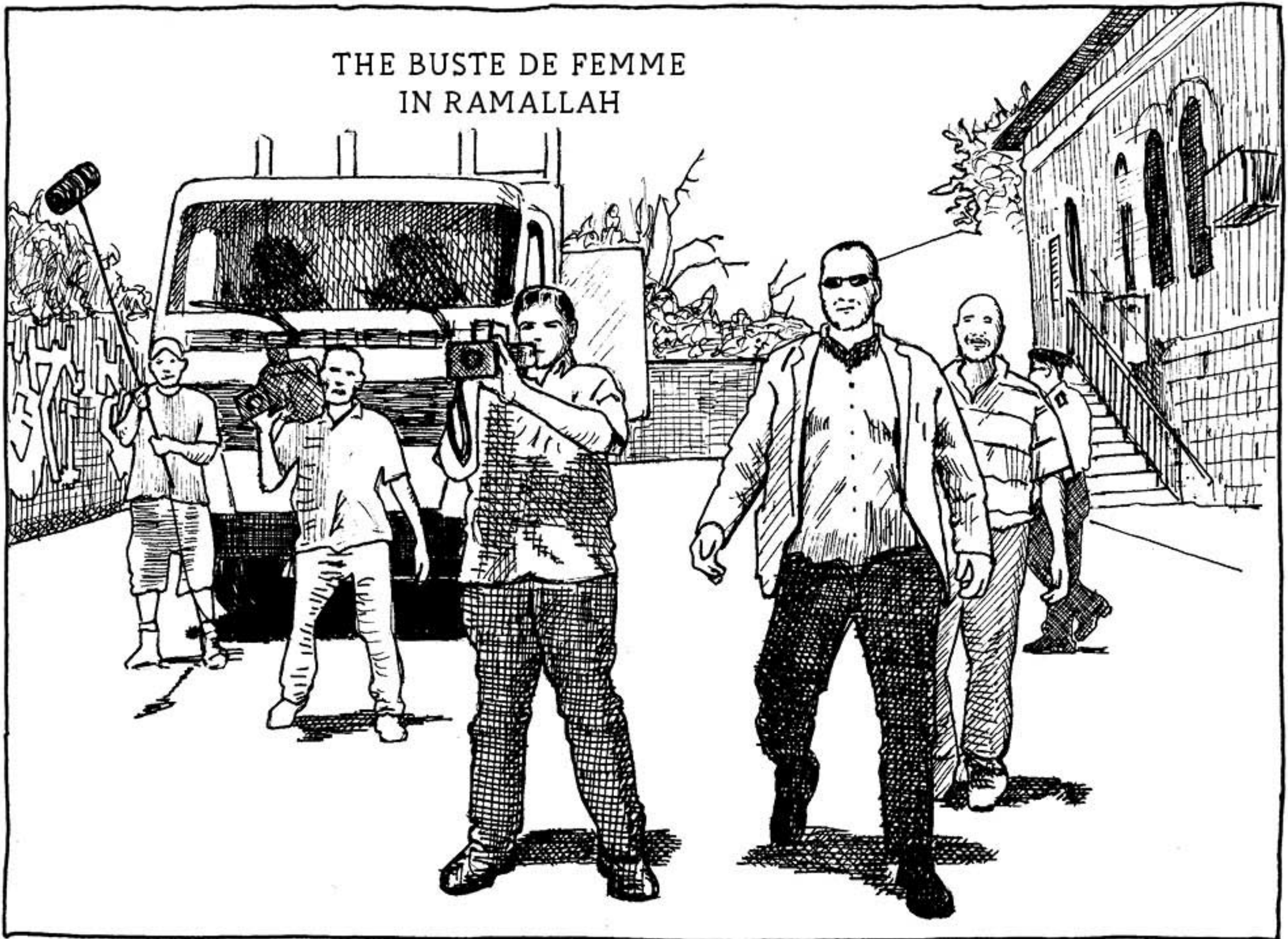


Everybody smiling, and
you could see the press.



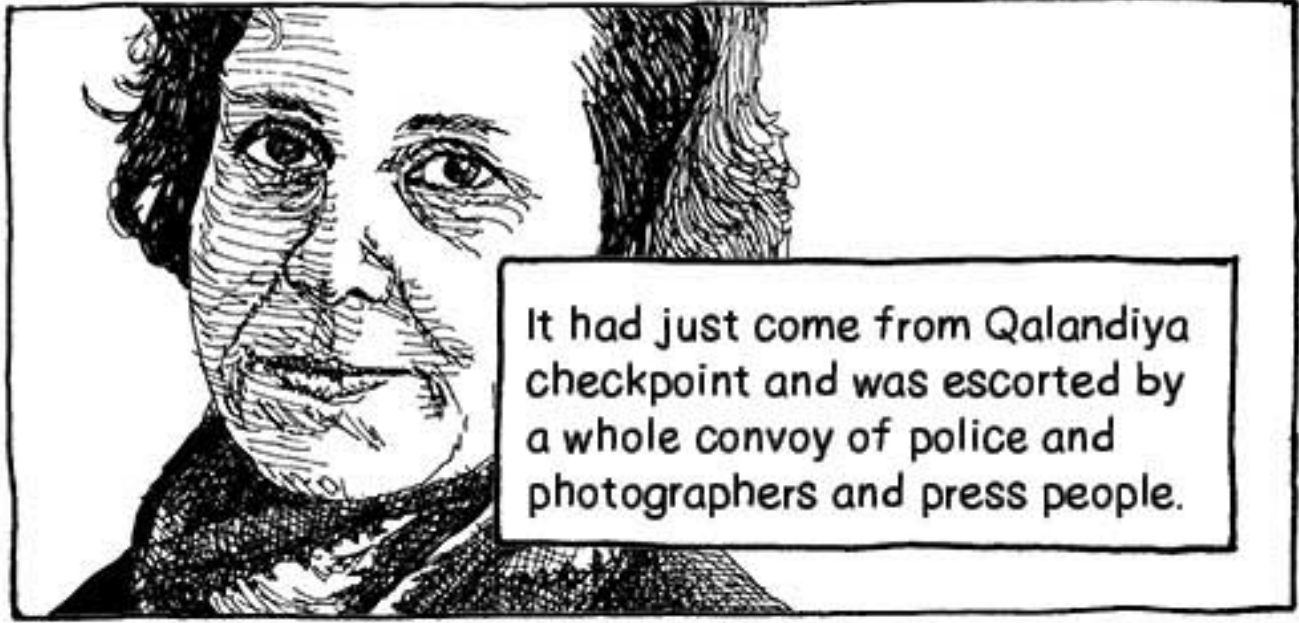
Nothing ever happened like this
before, so it was very special.

THE BUSTE DE FEMME
IN RAMALLAH





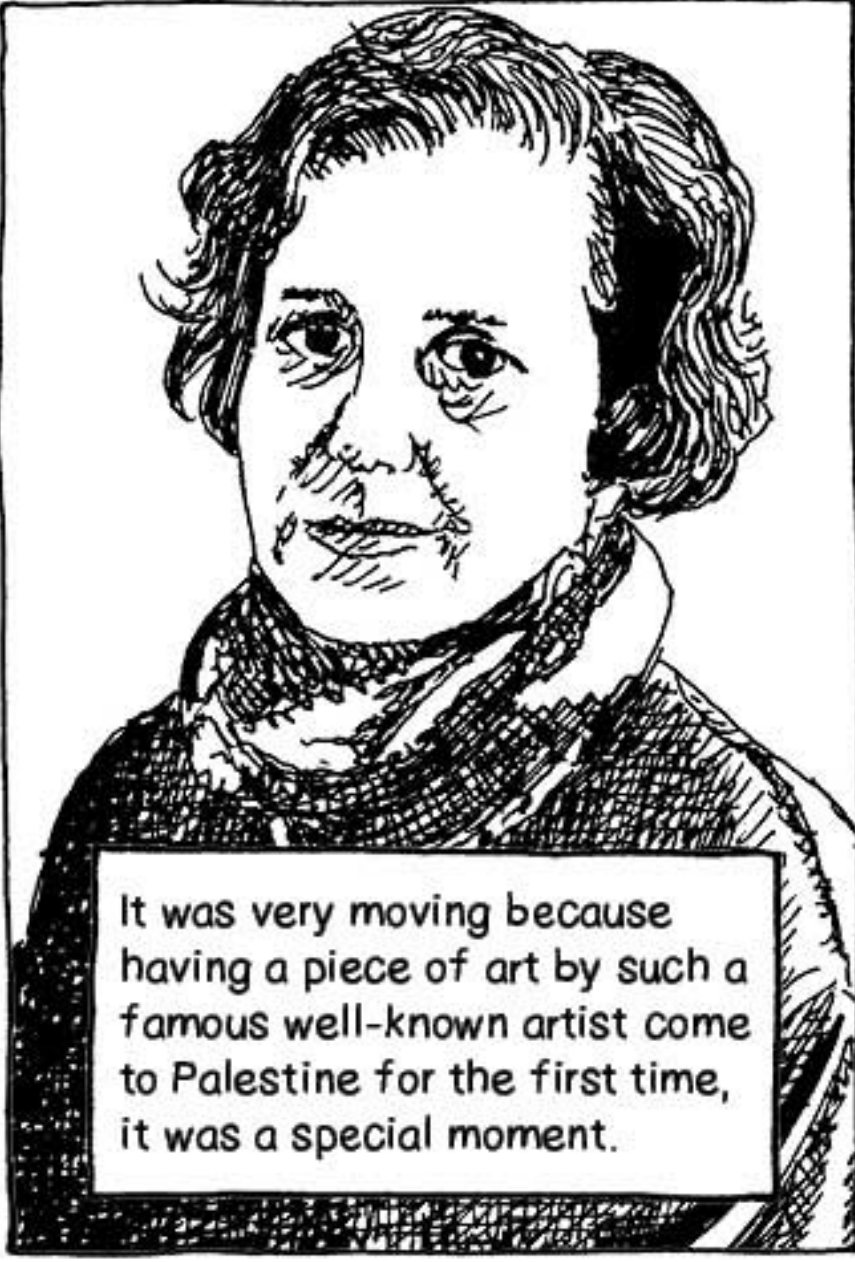
I actually saw the Picasso arriving at the premises of the Academy.



It had just come from Qalandiya checkpoint and was escorted by a whole convoy of police and photographers and press people.



I was there when they moved the crate into the building itself. It was a very moving experience for me. I had chills.



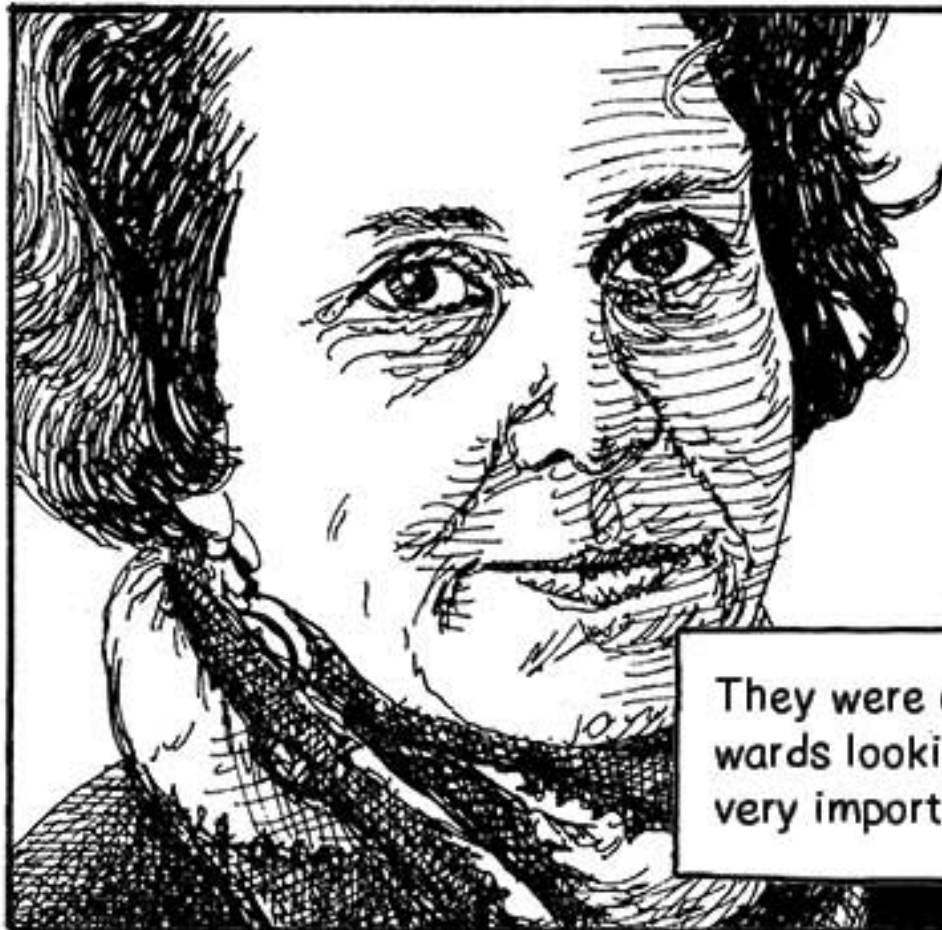
It was very moving because having a piece of art by such a famous well-known artist come to Palestine for the first time, it was a special moment.



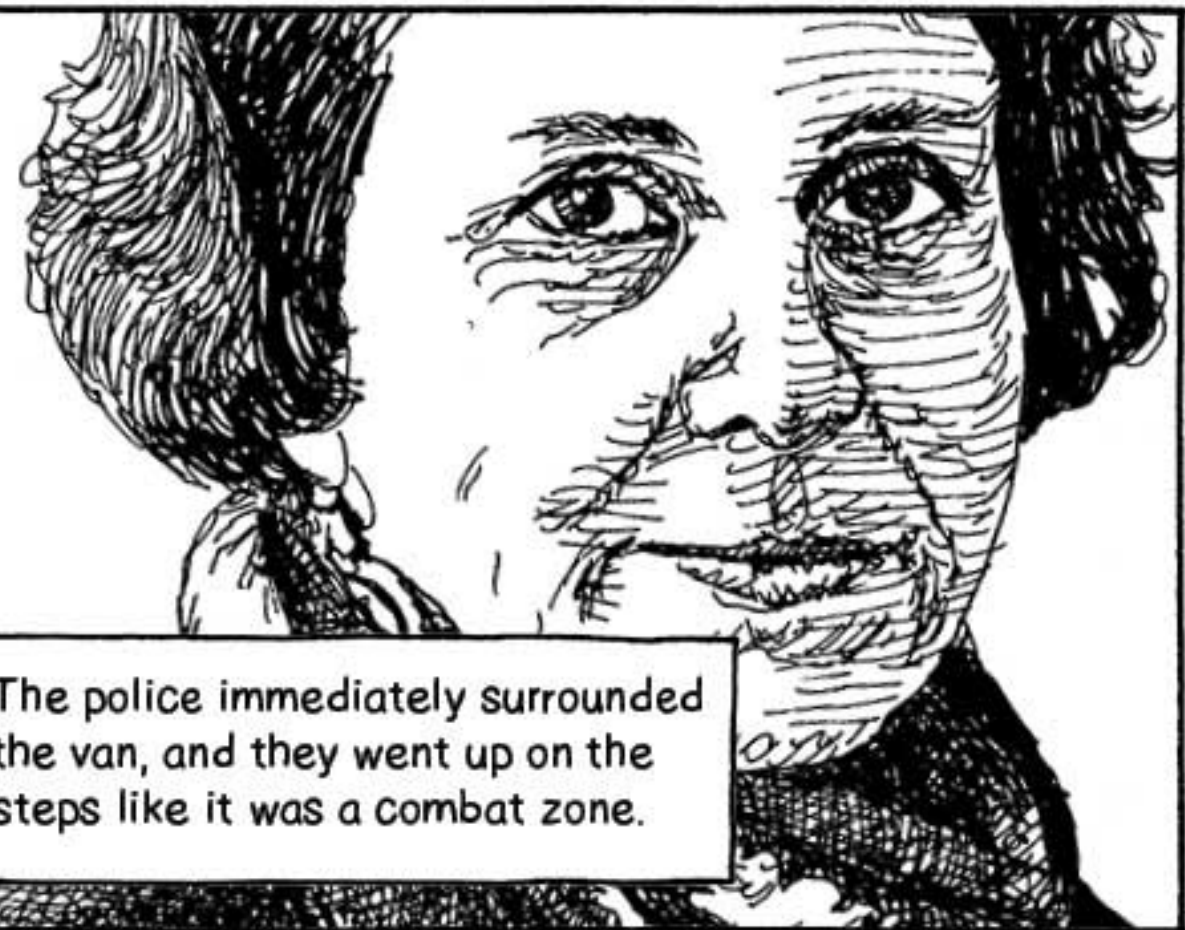
And then it was also moving because all the people around the van—the police people, the shippers, the press people—I don't know how much they knew about the actual artwork...



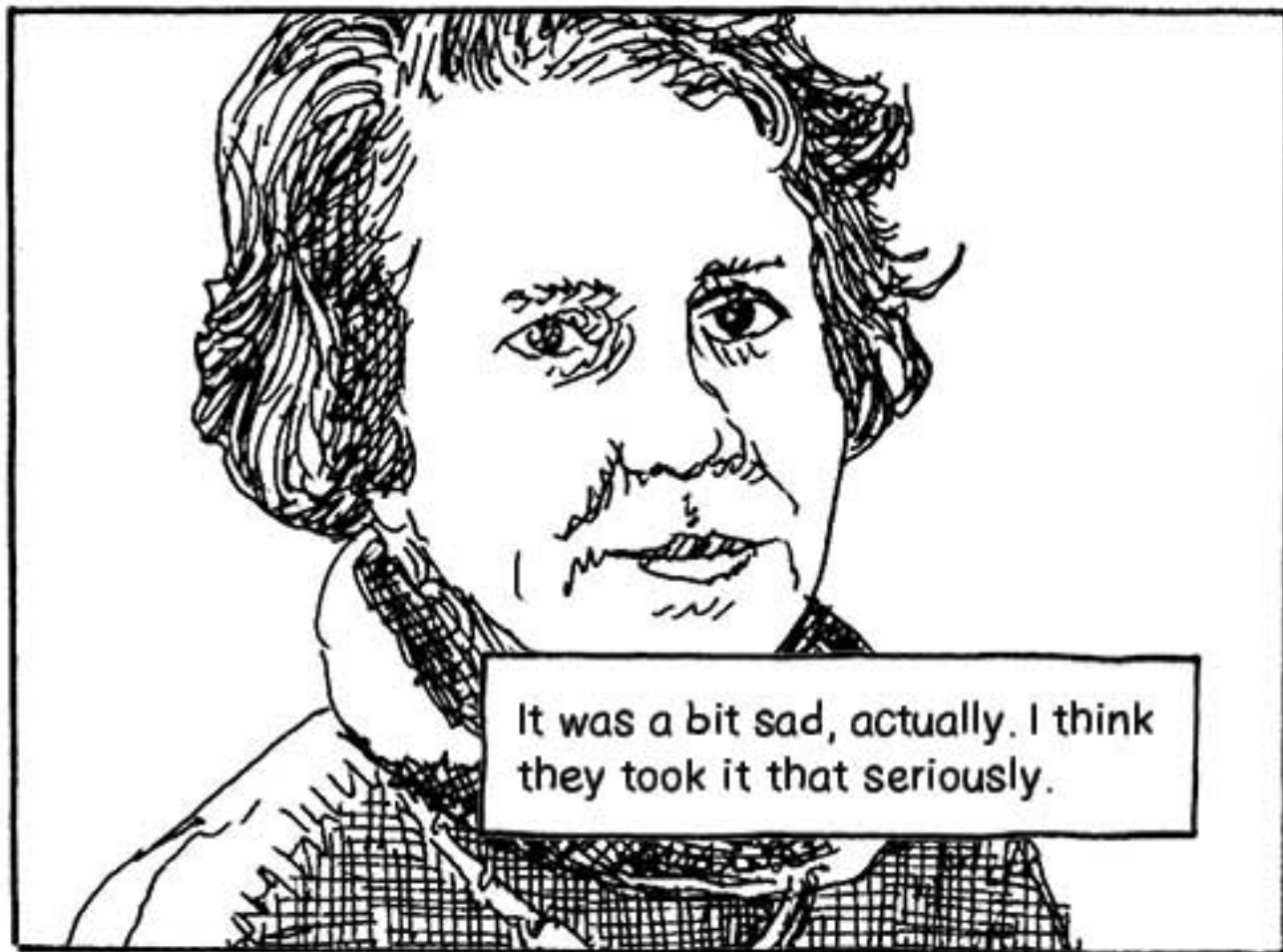
...but the event itself must have been very important for them.



They were oriented towards looking at it as a very important moment.



The police immediately surrounded the van, and they went up on the steps like it was a combat zone.



It was a bit sad, actually. I think they took it that seriously.



They were told this is a precious thing and they have to protect it.

I couldn't see the painting, of course, because they opened the crate only two days later, but the feeling that there was a connection between myself as a person who is able to go and visit museums abroad and see artworks within their natural setting...



That the painting managed to come here to Palestine despite all odds...





Noise as another name for everything recorded yet unnecessary to the recording itself, the background noise usually filtered out in postproduction...

On his blog, the poet, philosopher and human rights campaigner Patrick MacManus (who died two months later) wrote: "On that same day, at almost exactly the same hour that the valuable painting arrived at the showroom in Ramallah, bulldozers of the Israeli Defense Forces made their way to the tiny village of Bir Al-Ad in the South Hebron Hills, and in less than an hour demolished its miserable huts, destroyed sacks of animal food, uprooted plants and shrubs, leaving behind heaps of rubble and 90 homeless people. The nearby caves, also used for housing, were on this occasion not demolished, but the soldiers made sure to cut and sever the electricity cables which the inhabitants had installed to light them. 'You here don't deserve to

have electricity!' said one of the soldiers to a resident who dared to protest."

Should one place these details inside the picture or outside it? Ethically speaking, is there a view that should not also include every synchronous contingent detail? Or does that not also include the historical overdetermination framing this unlikely, untimely, providential event... of a Picasso painting arriving in Ramallah?

Picture noise, occlusion, sight...

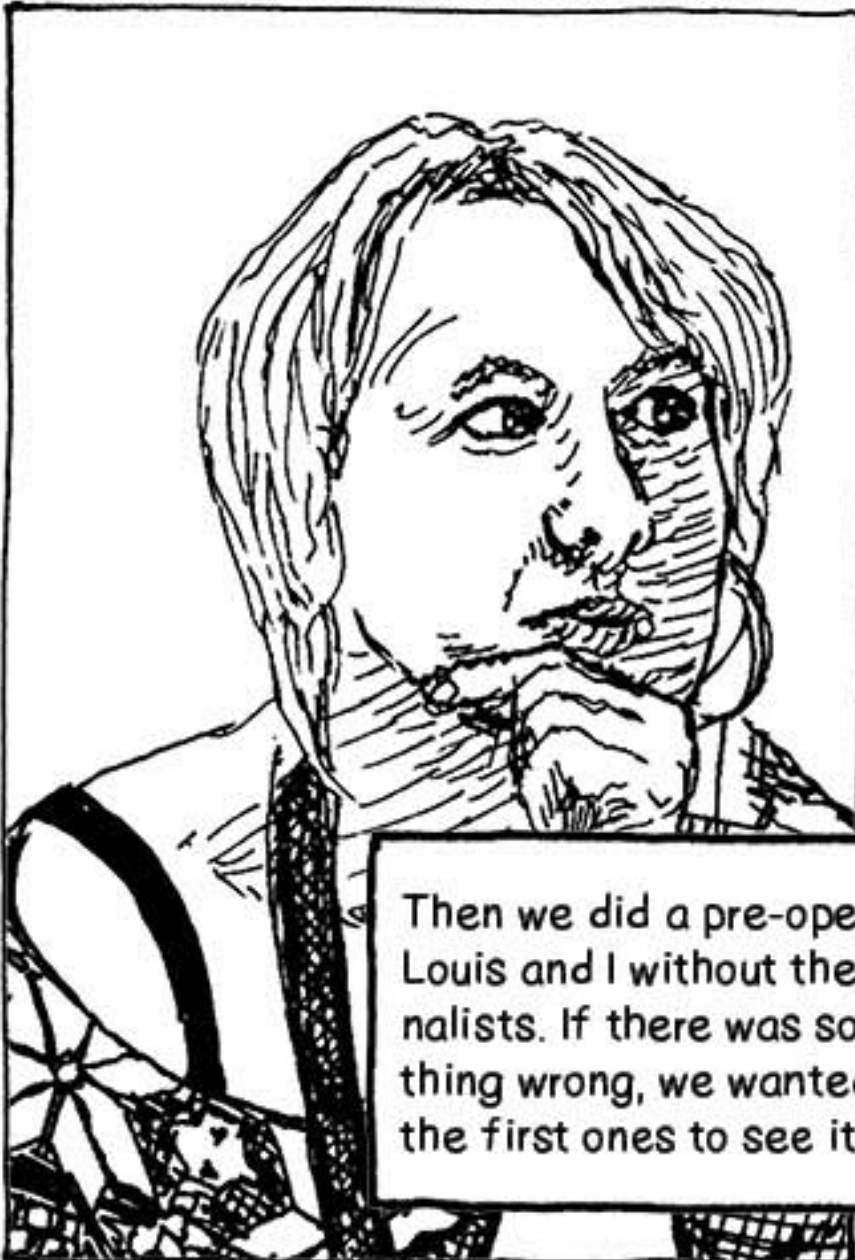
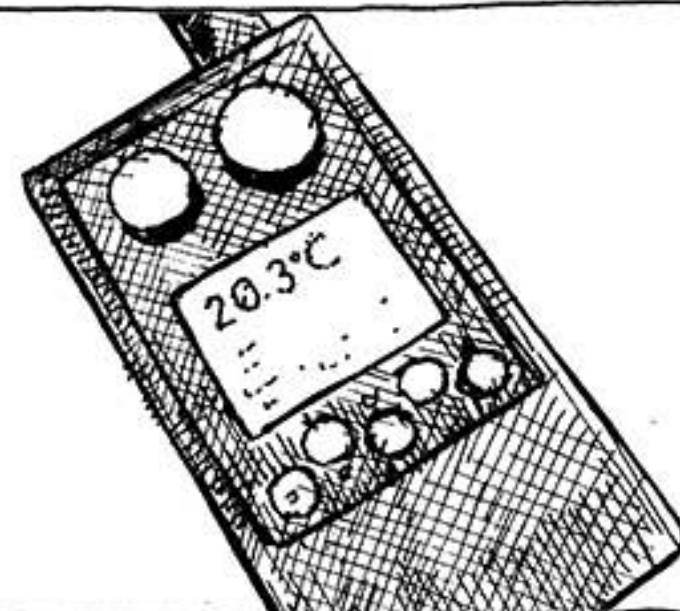


THE BOX INSIDE
THE BOX INSIDE THE ROOM

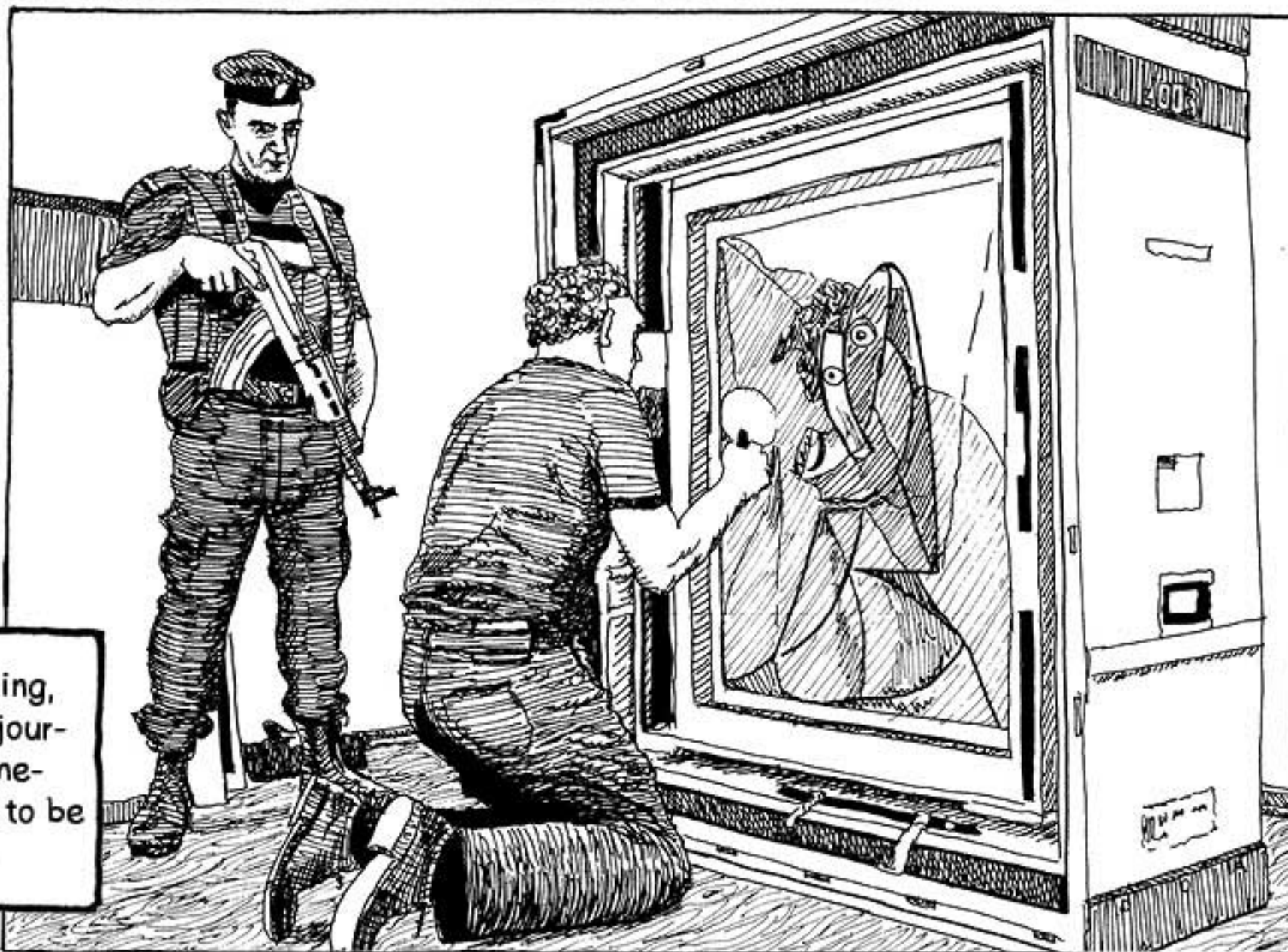


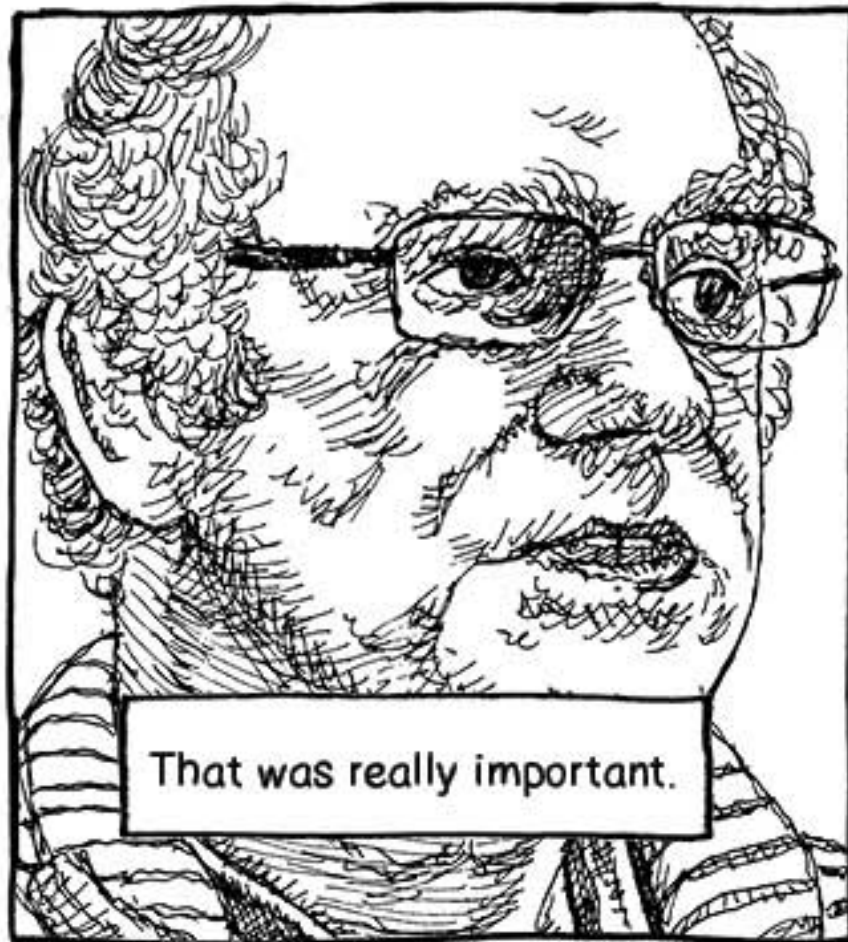


This was the situation. The box is inside the room, and the humidity is going up very fast. So the crate has to stay for 24 hours up there. So in this situation it's OK.

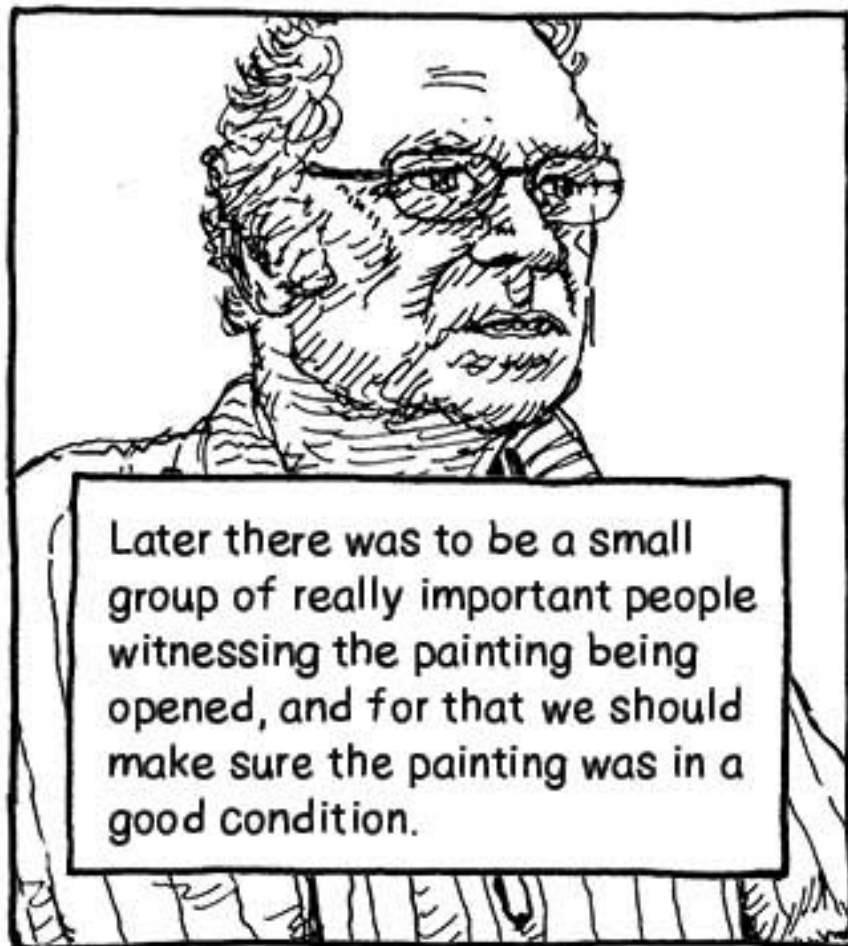


Then we did a pre-opening, Louis and I without the journalists. If there was something wrong, we wanted to be the first ones to see it.





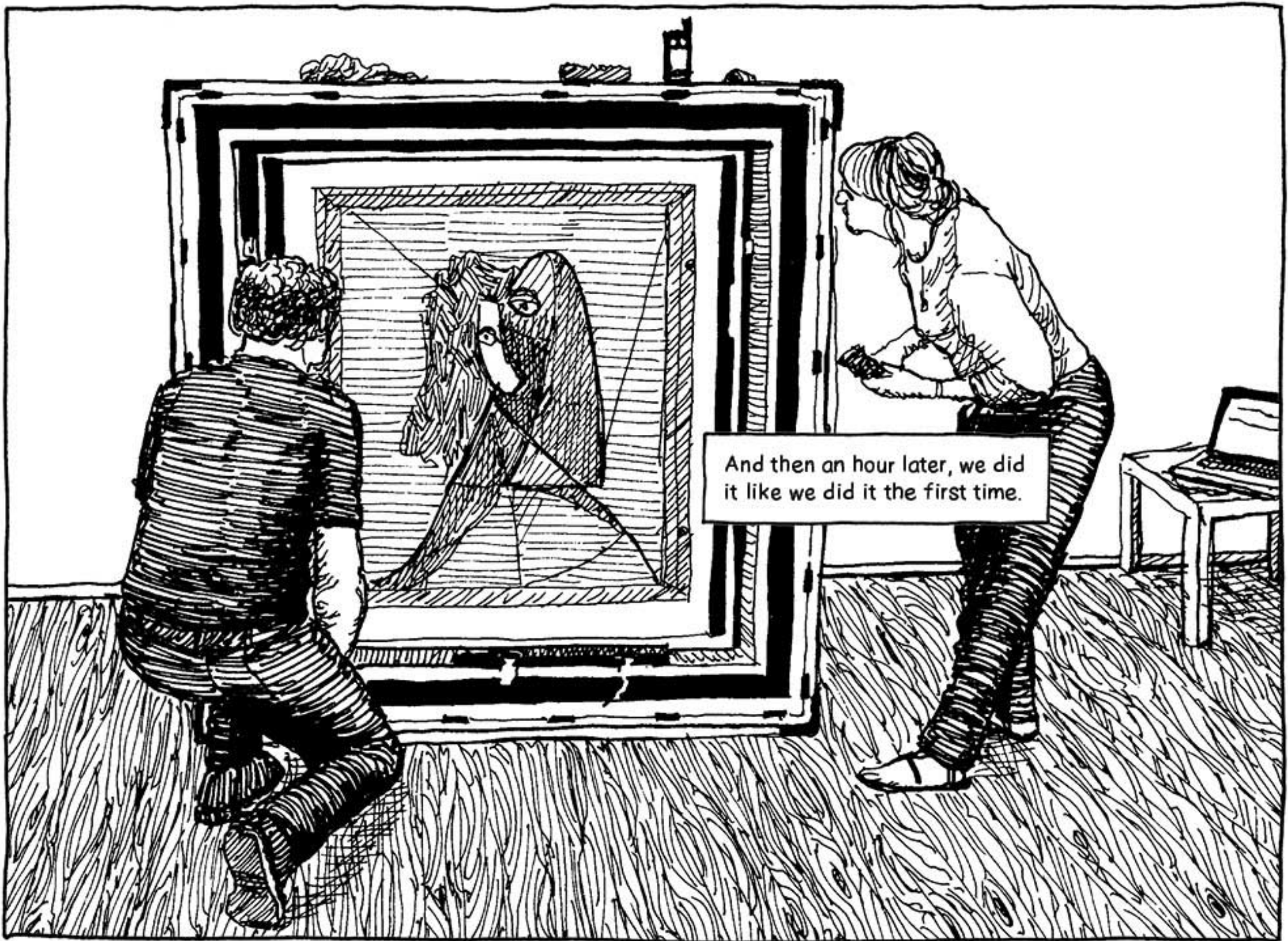
That was really important.



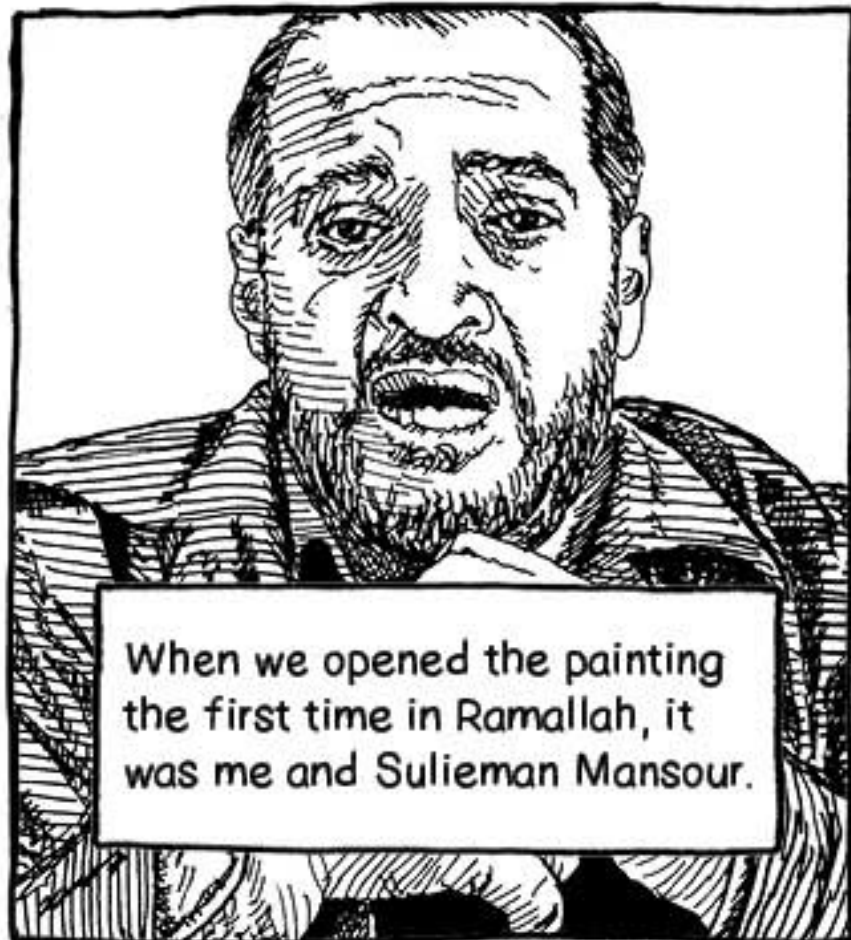
Later there was to be a small group of really important people witnessing the painting being opened, and for that we should make sure the painting was in a good condition.



We needed to communicate several times about the situation. Everything was OK, so we closed it. And then we knew it was safe.



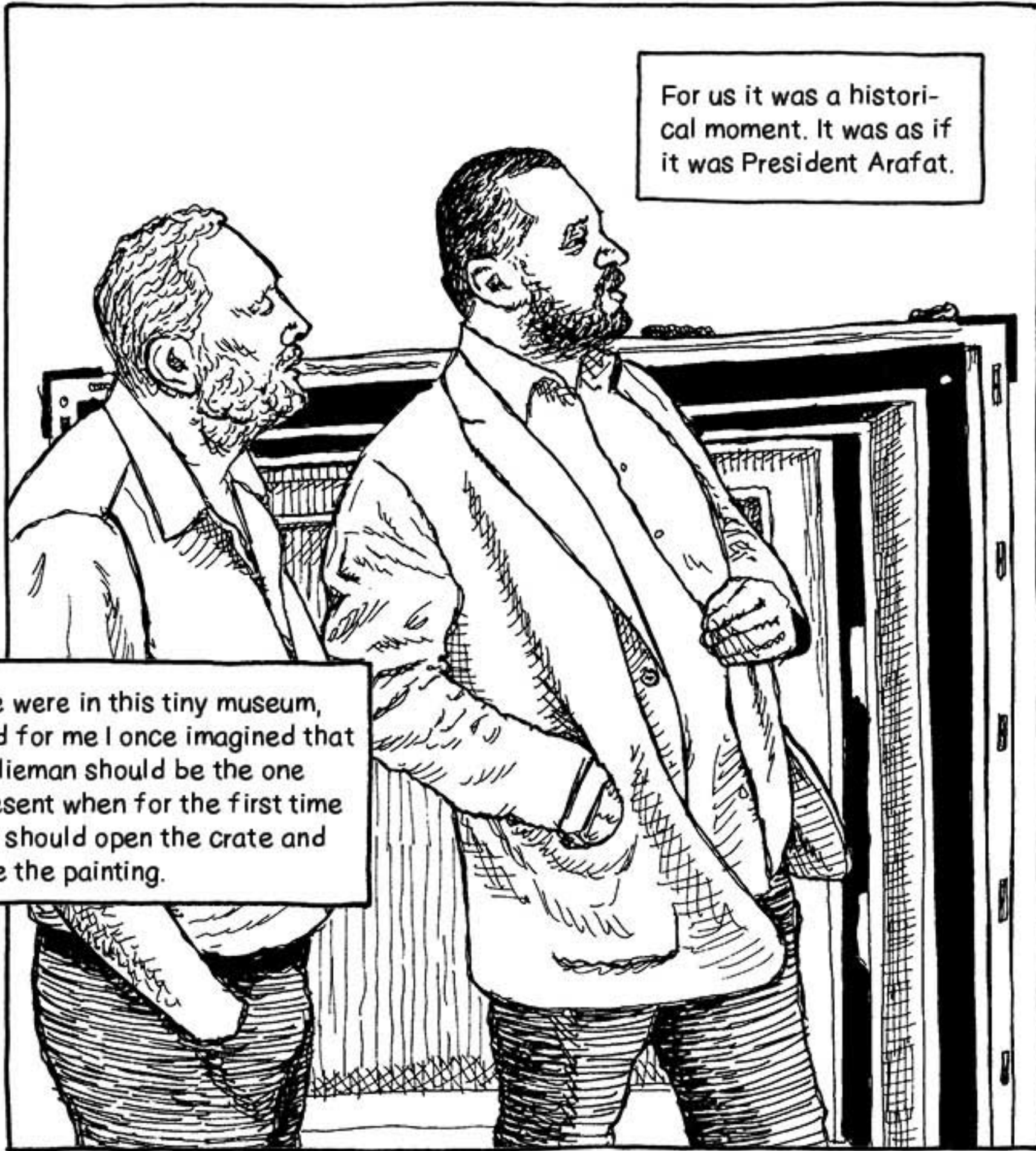
And then an hour later, we did it like we did it the first time.



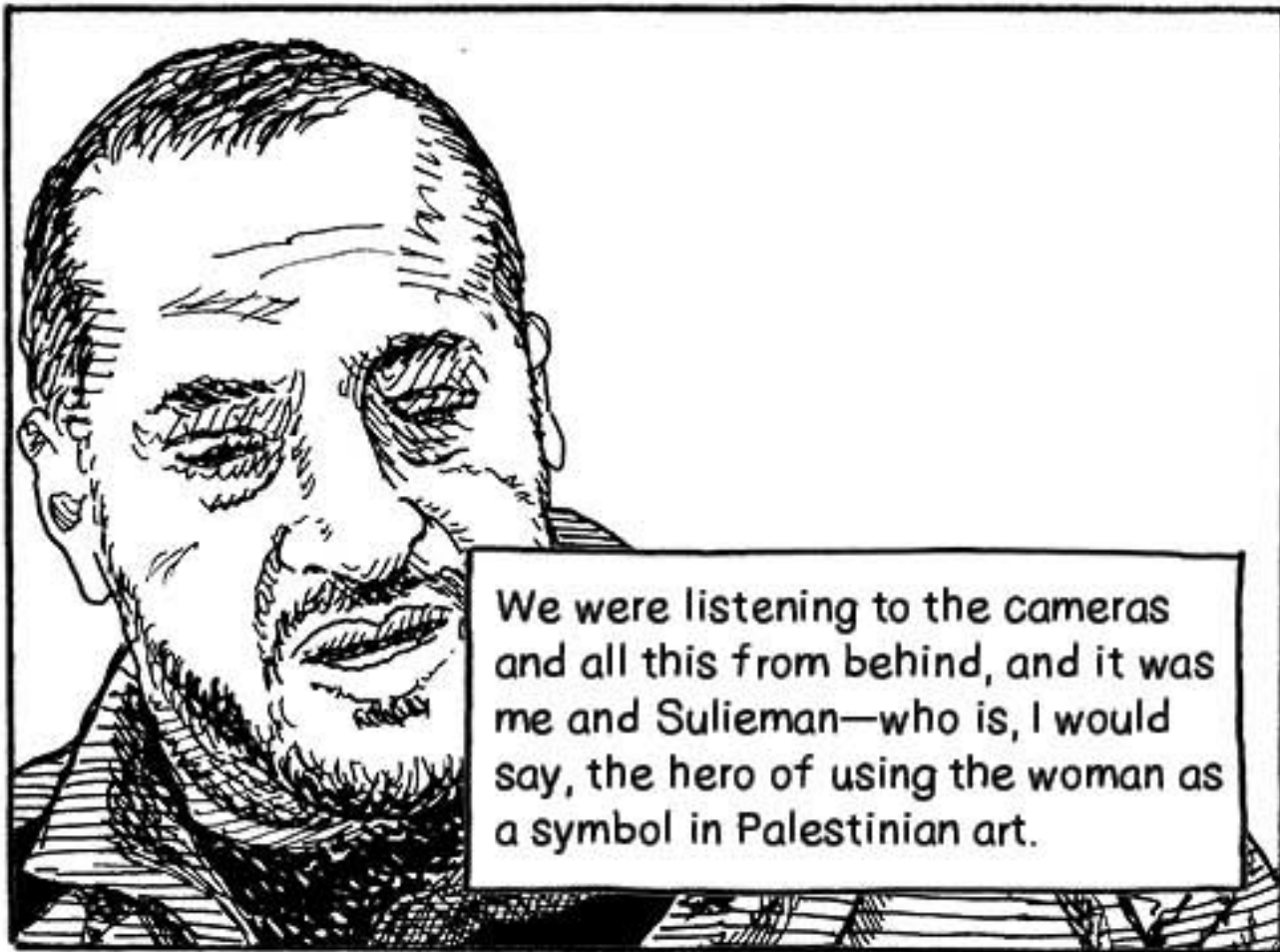
When we opened the painting the first time in Ramallah, it was me and Sulieman Mansour.



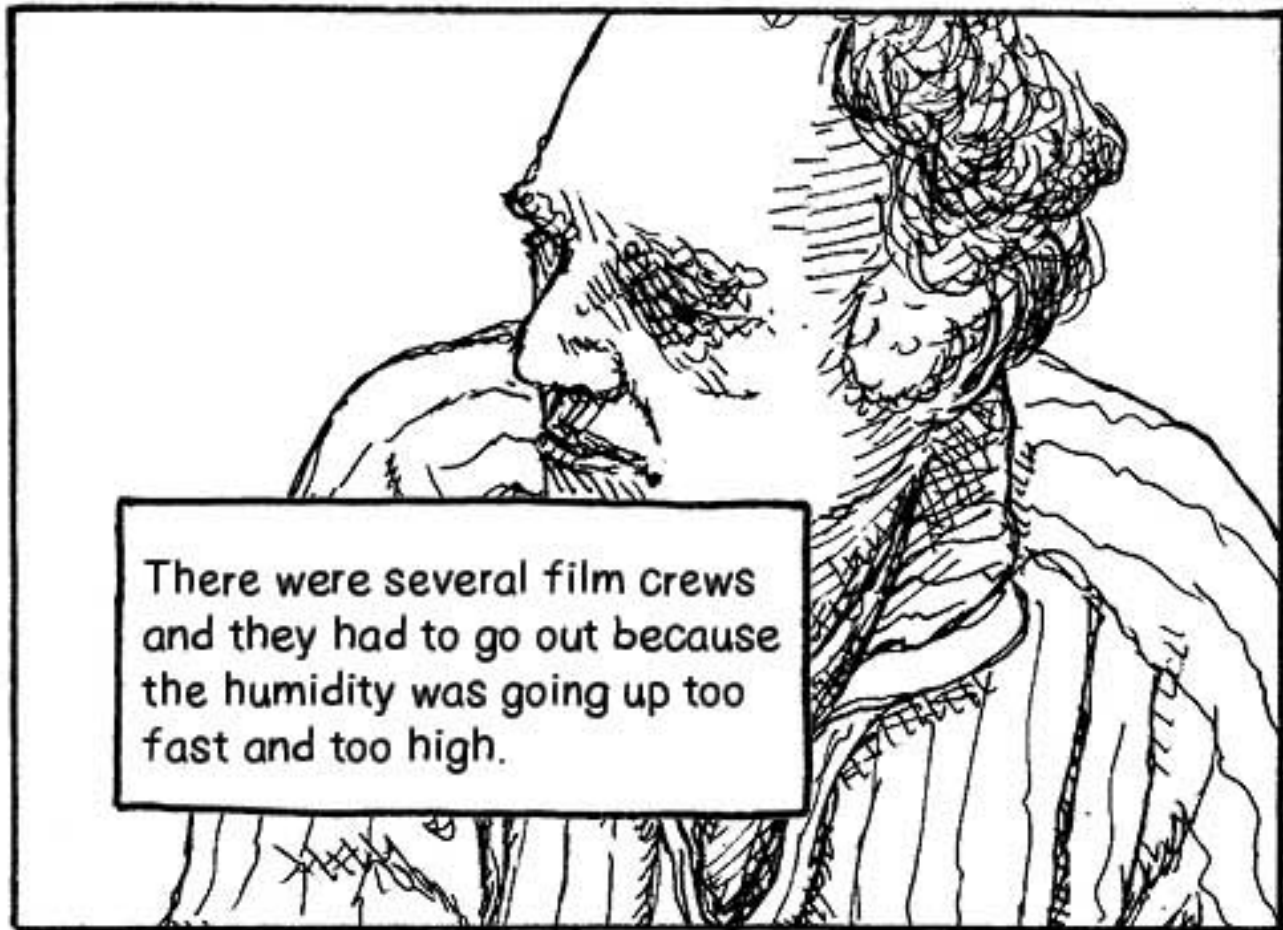
We were in this tiny museum, and for me I once imagined that Sulieman should be the one present when for the first time we should open the crate and see the painting.



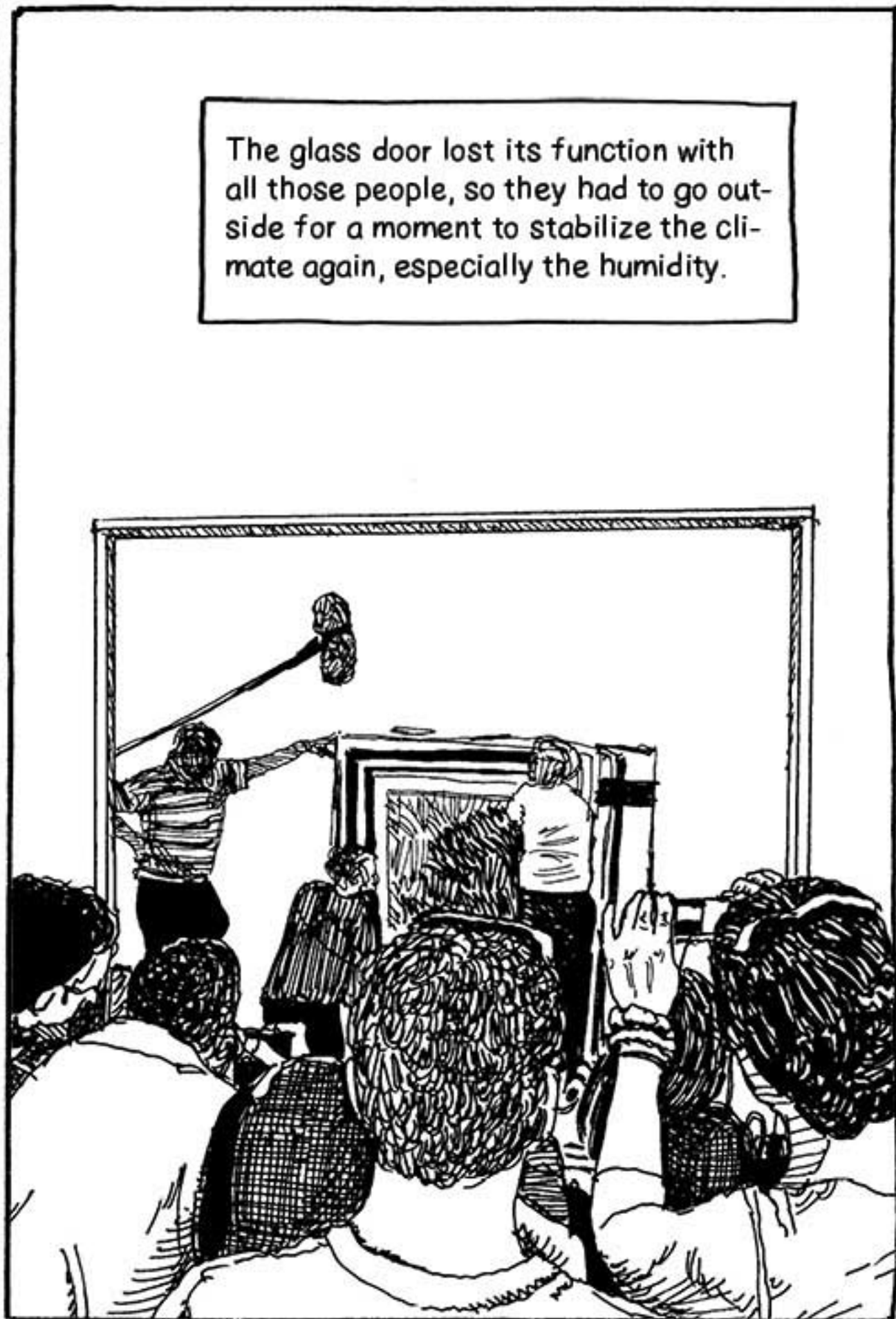
For us it was a historical moment. It was as if it was President Arafat.



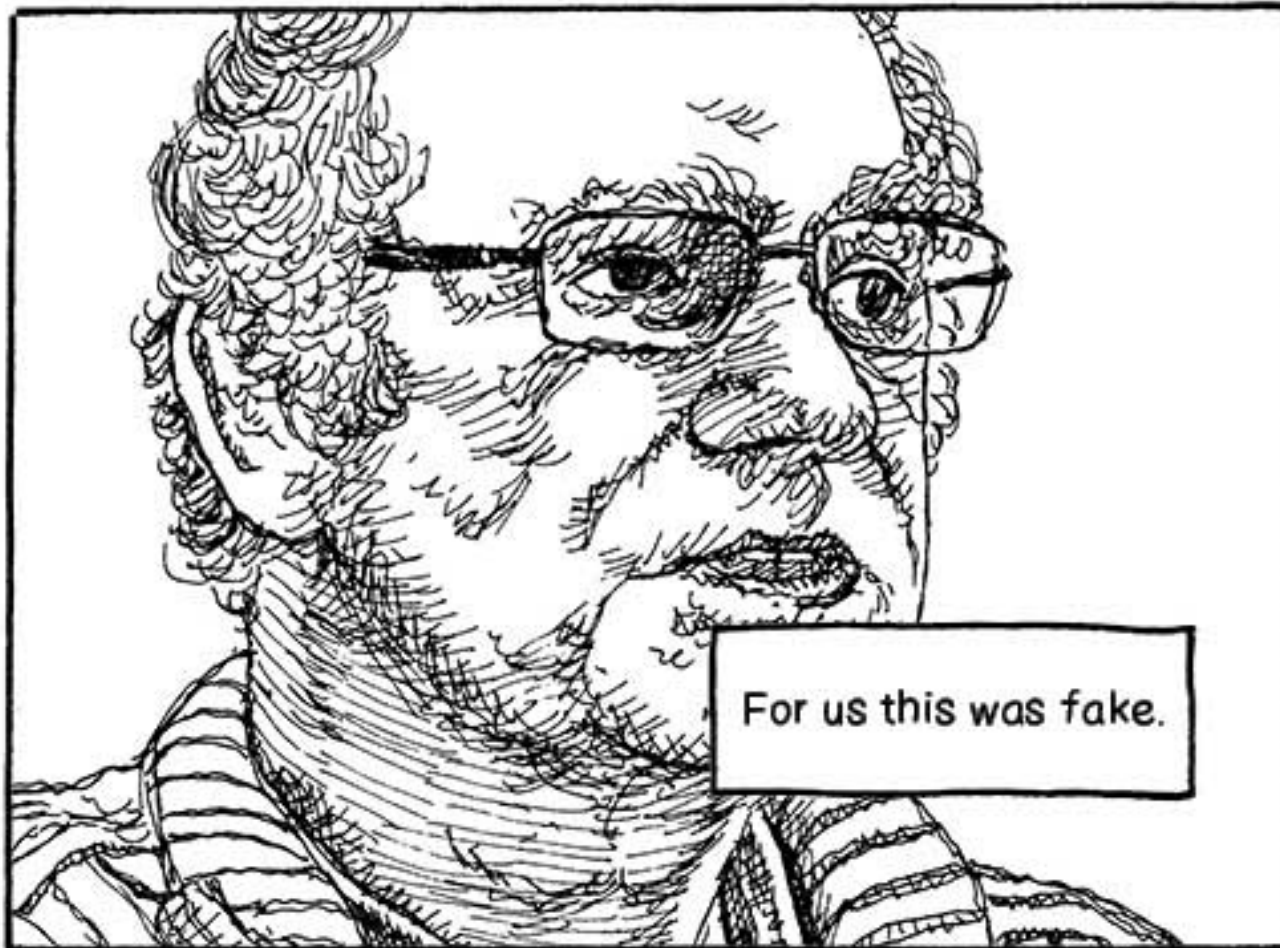
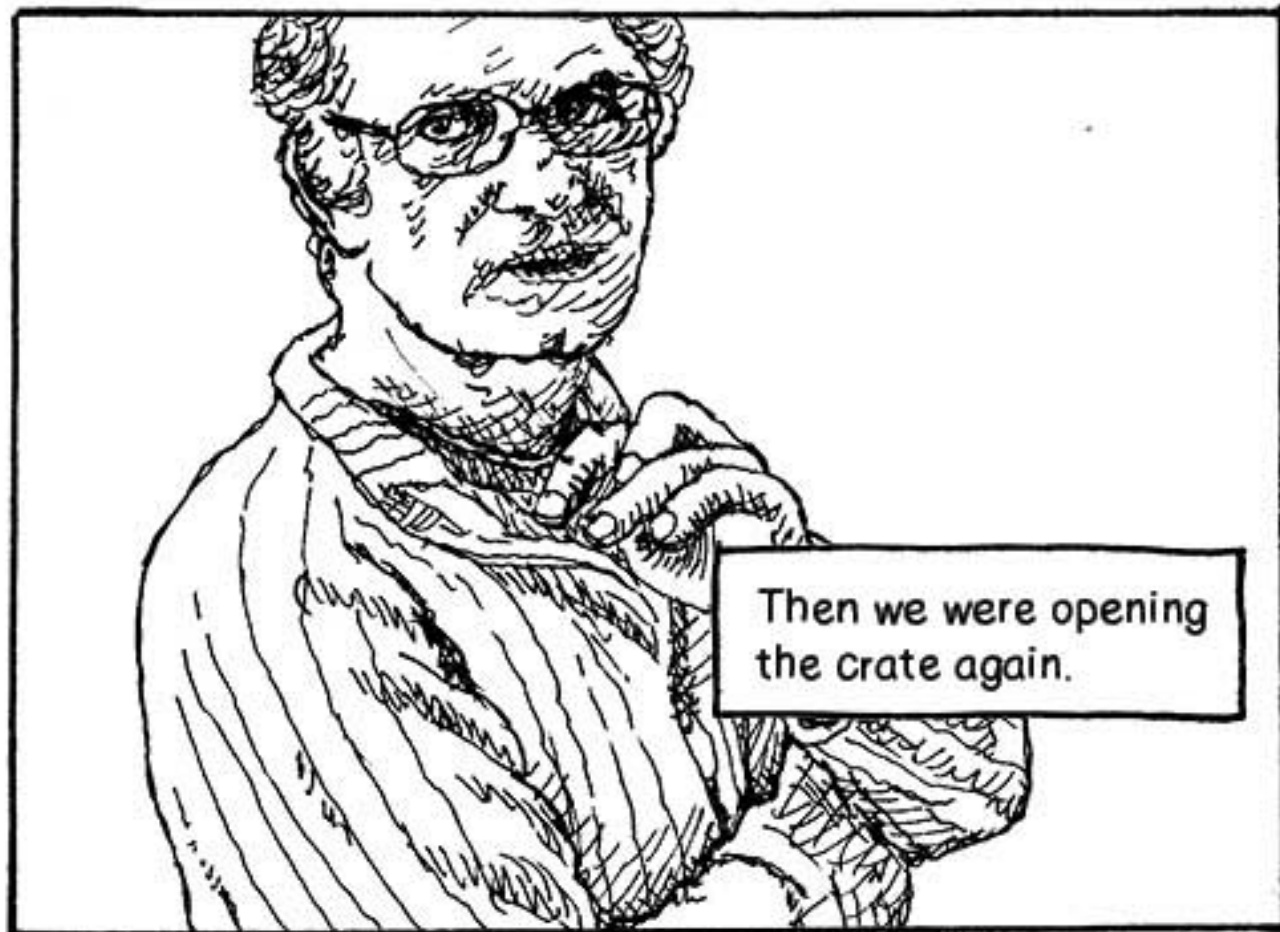
We were listening to the cameras and all this from behind, and it was me and Sulieman—who is, I would say, the hero of using the woman as a symbol in Palestinian art.



There were several film crews and they had to go out because the humidity was going up too fast and too high.



The glass door lost its function with all those people, so they had to go outside for a moment to stabilize the climate again, especially the humidity.





OPENING
FESTIVITIES



Khaled had said the opening was scheduled to avoid the uncertainty predicted to follow the scheduled UN vote on statehood. Instead it confronted the looming economic uncertainty precipitated by the anticipated vote—the threatened reductions in aid by foreign donors, the threatened withholding of tax receipts by Israel. (The Israelis and the foreign donors were already displeased by PA reconciliation talks with Hamas.)

To plug projected budget shortfalls, the PA had begun to consider docking the pay of government workers and initiating a new sales tax. This had only increased the general and pervasive anxiety, and these eventualities—threatened but not yet imminent—comprised the ground on which the *Buste de femme* arrived.

This sub-context was present at the opening, framing the opening's festivities. As always, it was the more financially vul-

nerable who were most painfully aware of possible ironies in Picasso's arrival. In this sense, the opening was not so much singular as multiple, an event not simply perceived differently, but actually a different event according to one's position within it.





The opening was amazing.
It was an amazing opening.



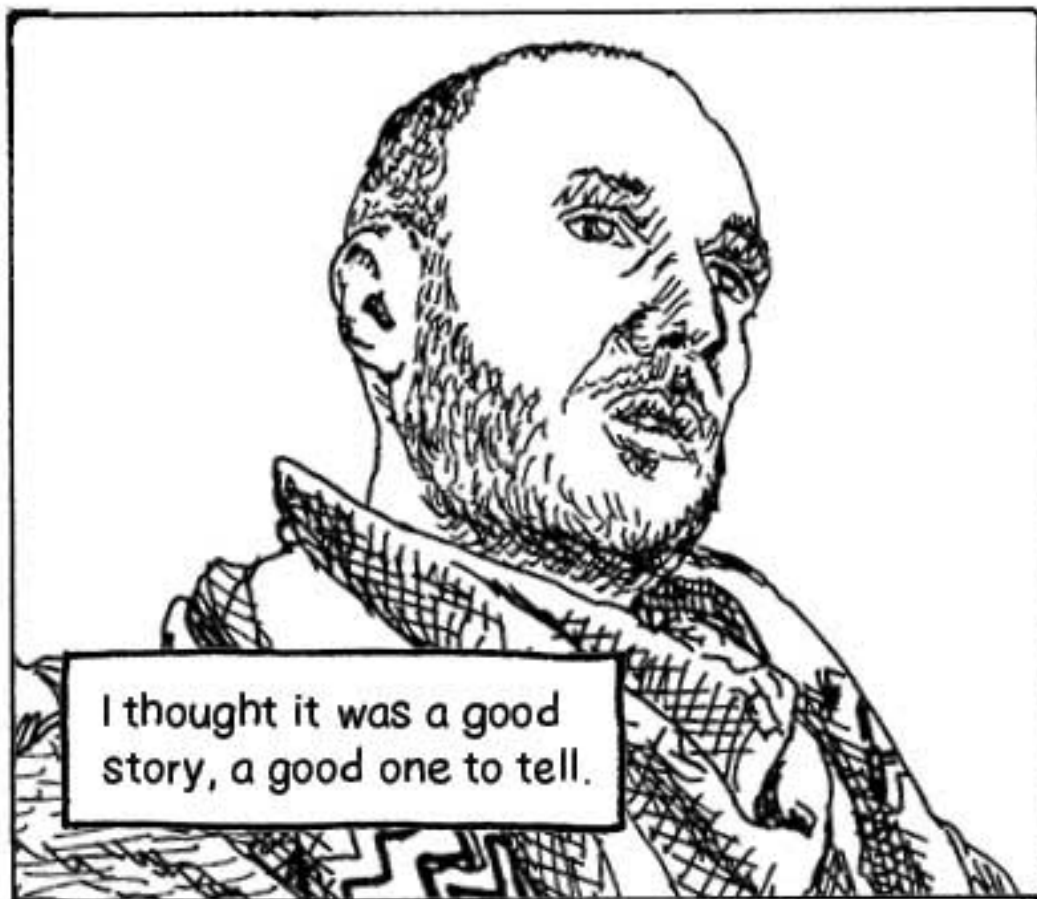
It was so crowded, and
everybody was so excited.



Although it was only one
painting, it was really a
project that was exciting.



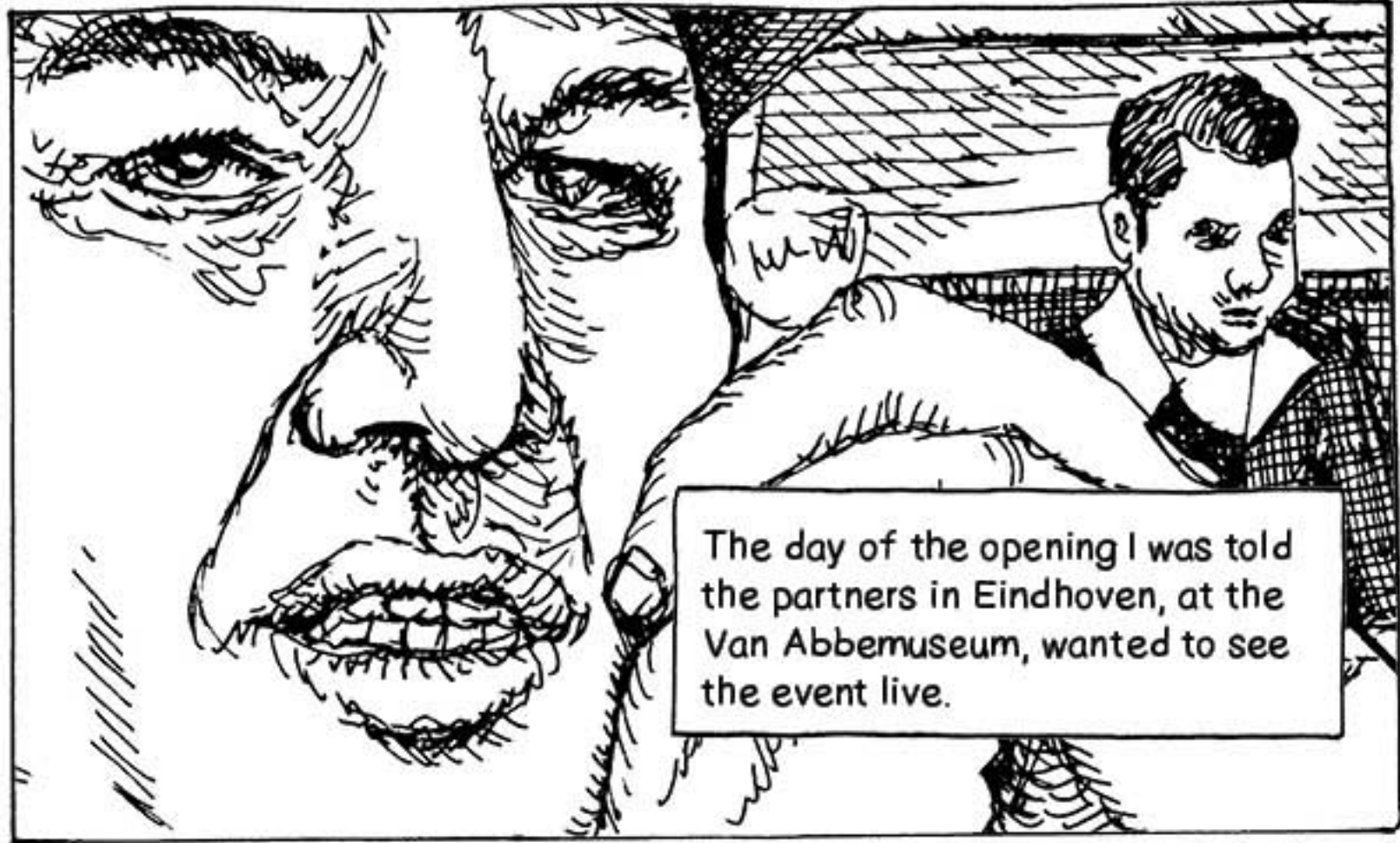
One of the reasons we did it
was for Palestinians to have a
physical encounter with this
painting, and I think you could
really sense the project suc-
ceeded in this respect.



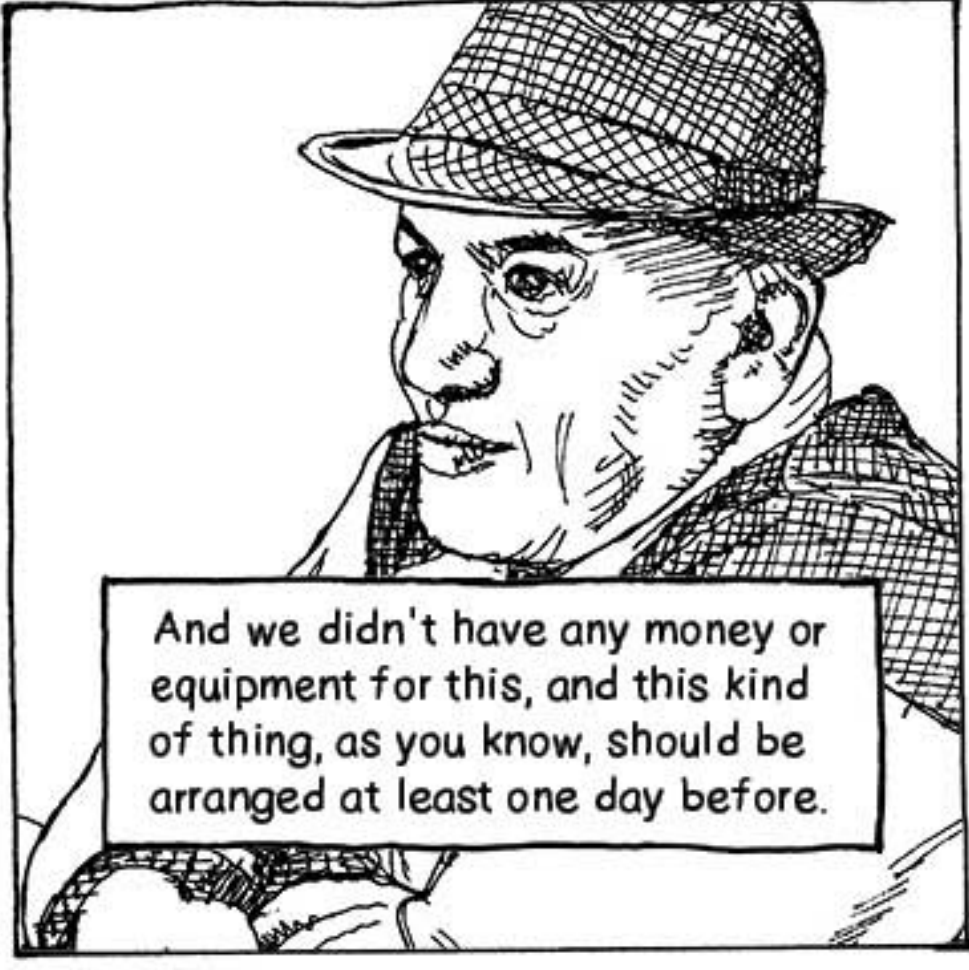
I thought it was a good story, a good one to tell.



And then finally—we kept it under wraps for so long—at the opening, I was pretty surprised that there was next to no media presence... at least none of the Germans.



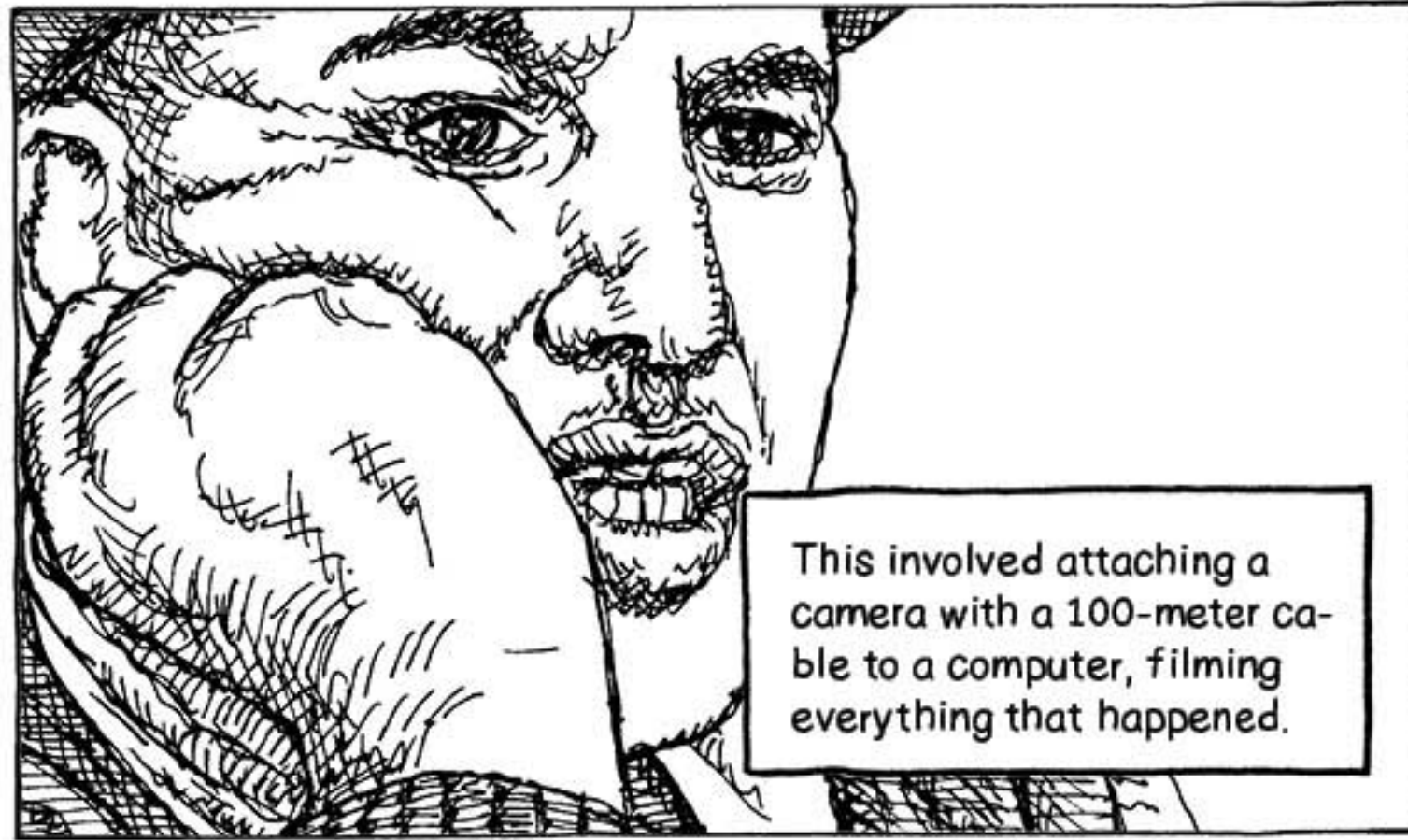
The day of the opening I was told the partners in Eindhoven, at the Van Abbemuseum, wanted to see the event live.



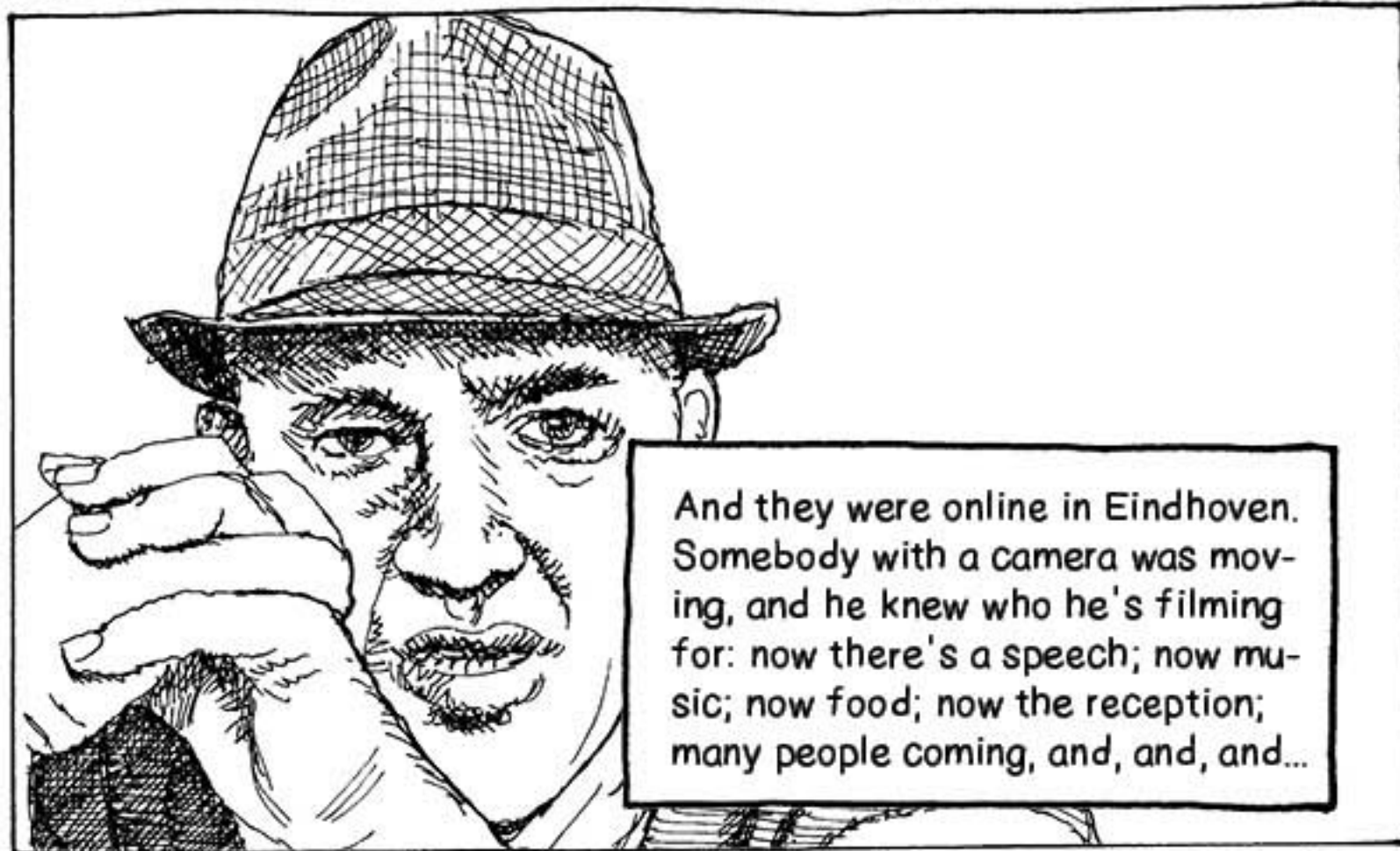
And we didn't have any money or equipment for this, and this kind of thing, as you know, should be arranged at least one day before.



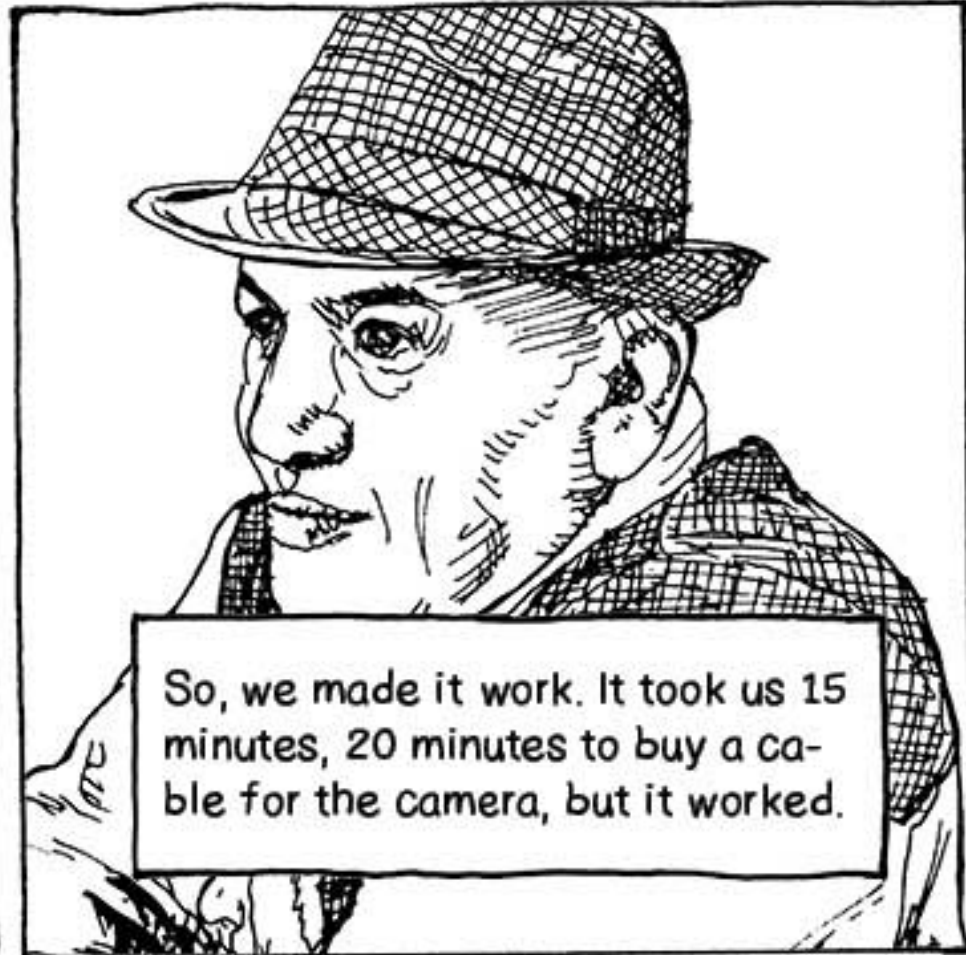
I solved the problem by using Skype in a very primitive way.



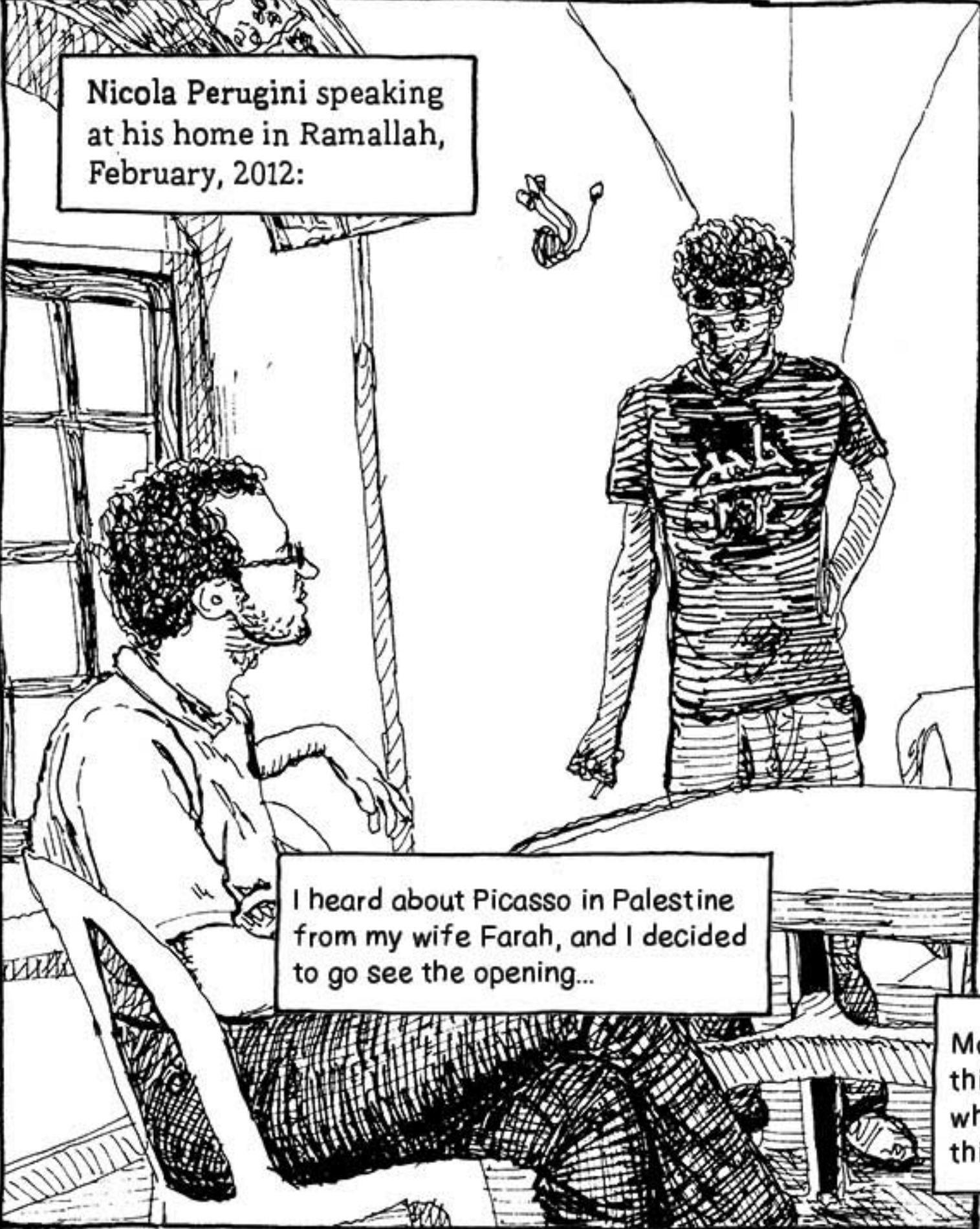
This involved attaching a camera with a 100-meter cable to a computer, filming everything that happened.



And they were online in Eindhoven. Somebody with a camera was moving, and he knew who he's filming for: now there's a speech; now music; now food; now the reception; many people coming, and, and, and...




So, we made it work. It took us 15 minutes, 20 minutes to buy a cable for the camera, but it worked.

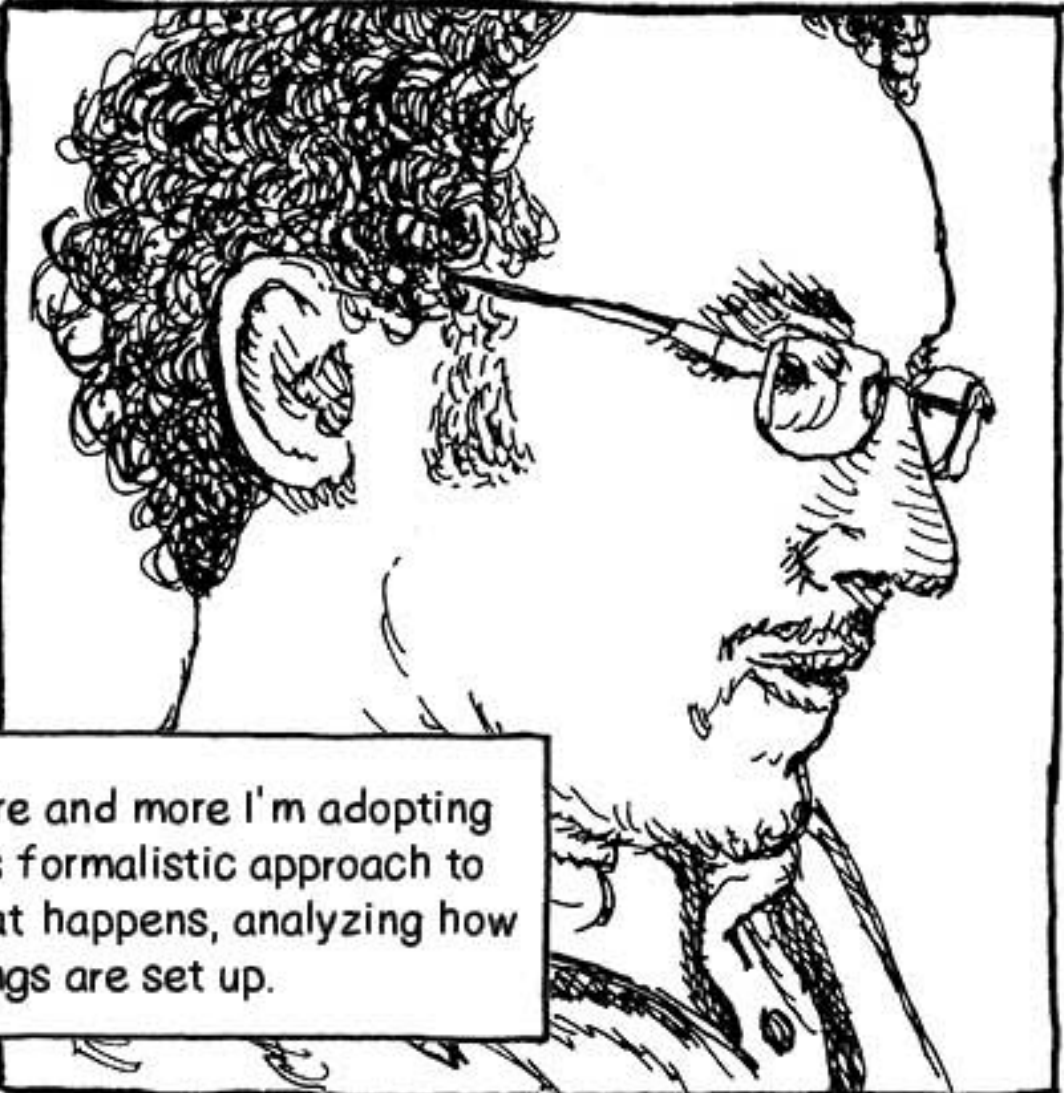


Nicola Perugini speaking
at his home in Ramallah,
February, 2012:

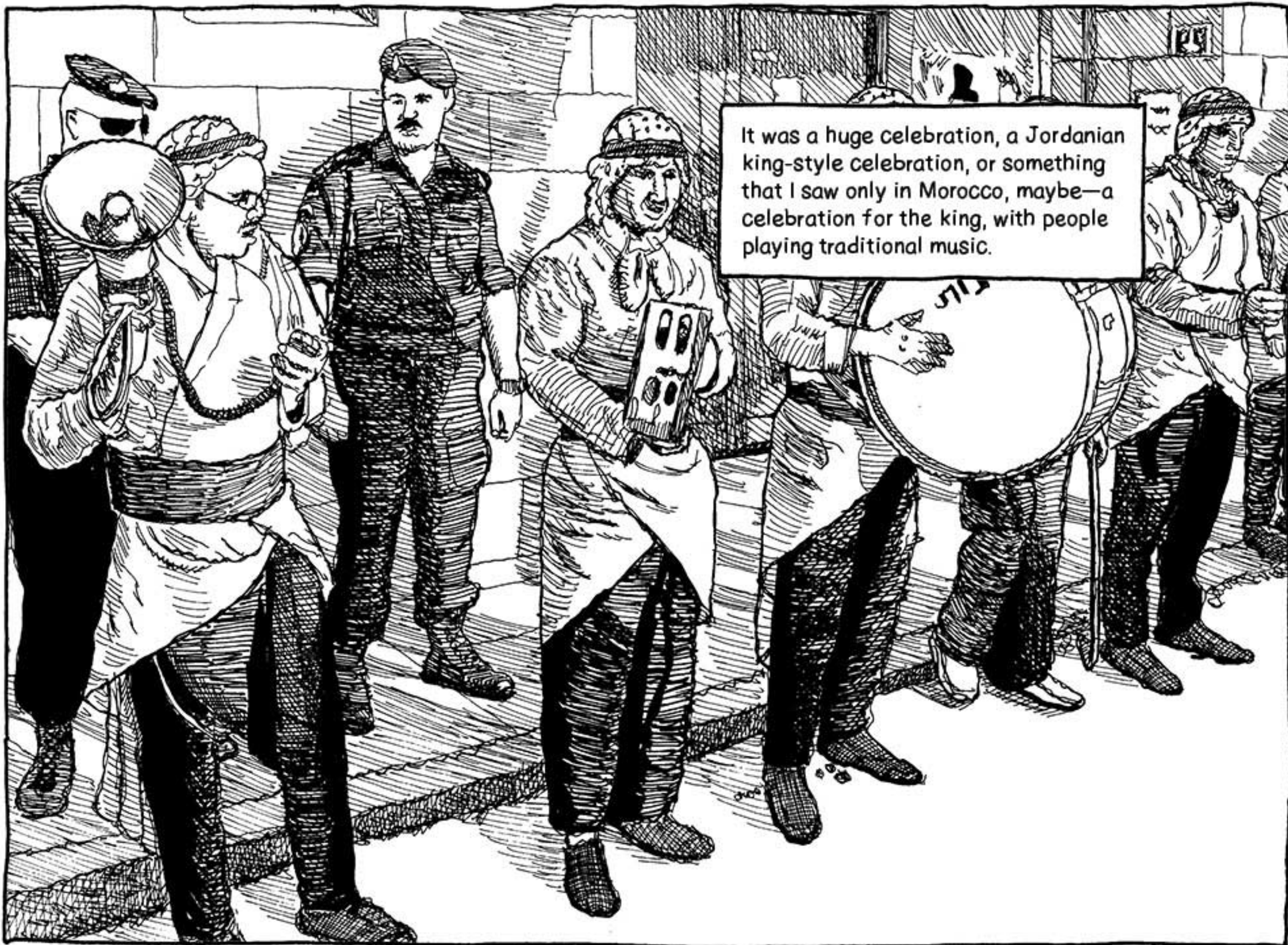
I heard about Picasso in Palestine
from my wife Farah, and I decided
to go see the opening...



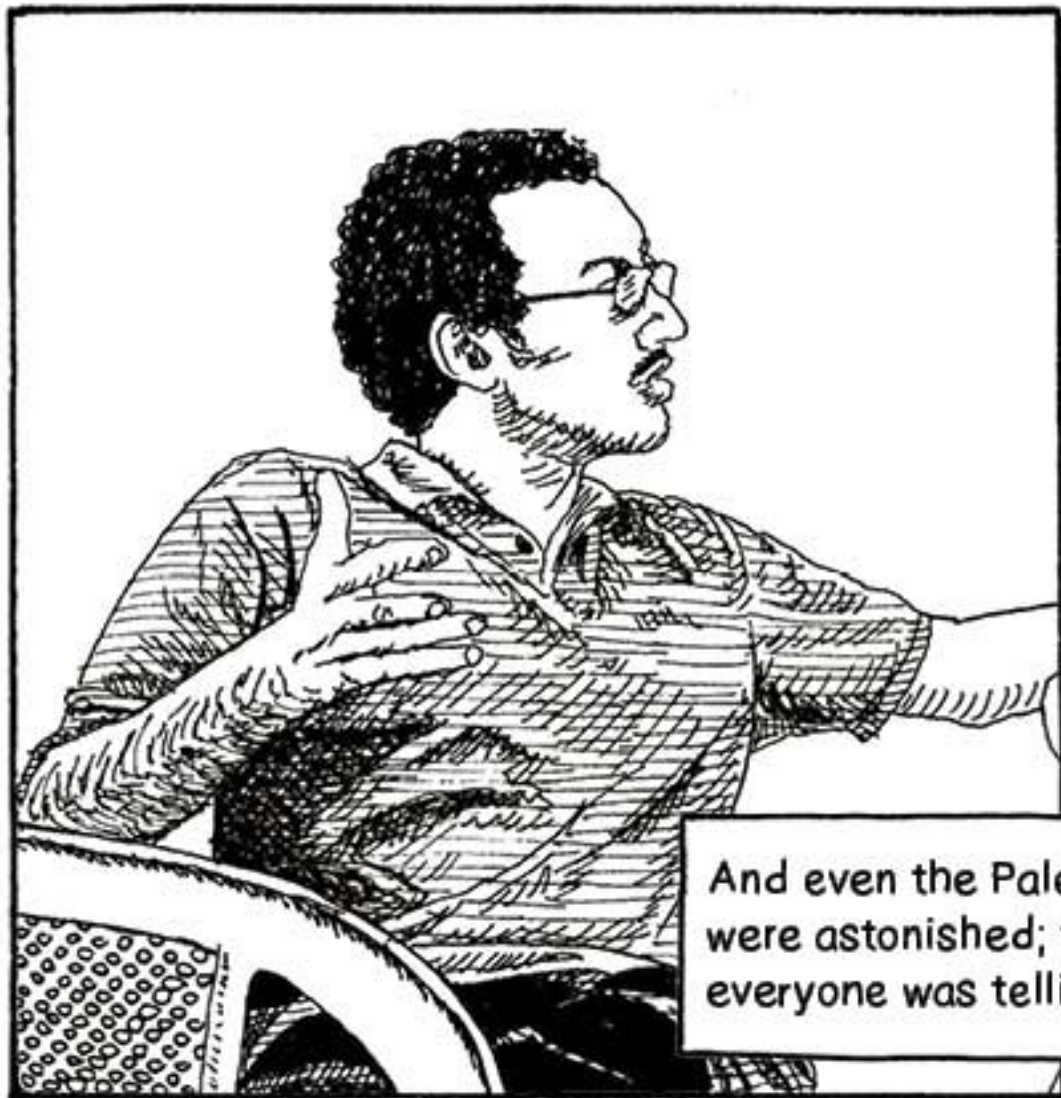
...more for the setting
than the content itself.



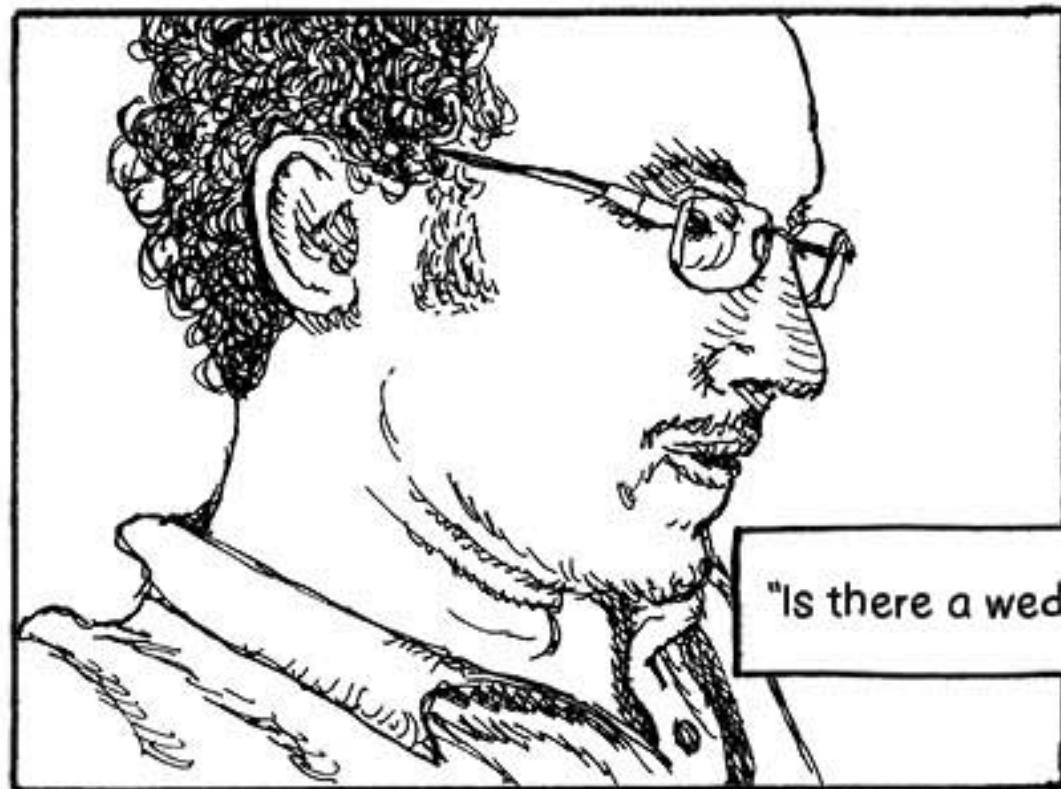
More and more I'm adopting
this formalistic approach to
what happens, analyzing how
things are set up.



It was a huge celebration, a Jordanian king-style celebration, or something that I saw only in Morocco, maybe—a celebration for the king, with people playing traditional music.



And even the Palestinians were astonished; the joke everyone was telling was...

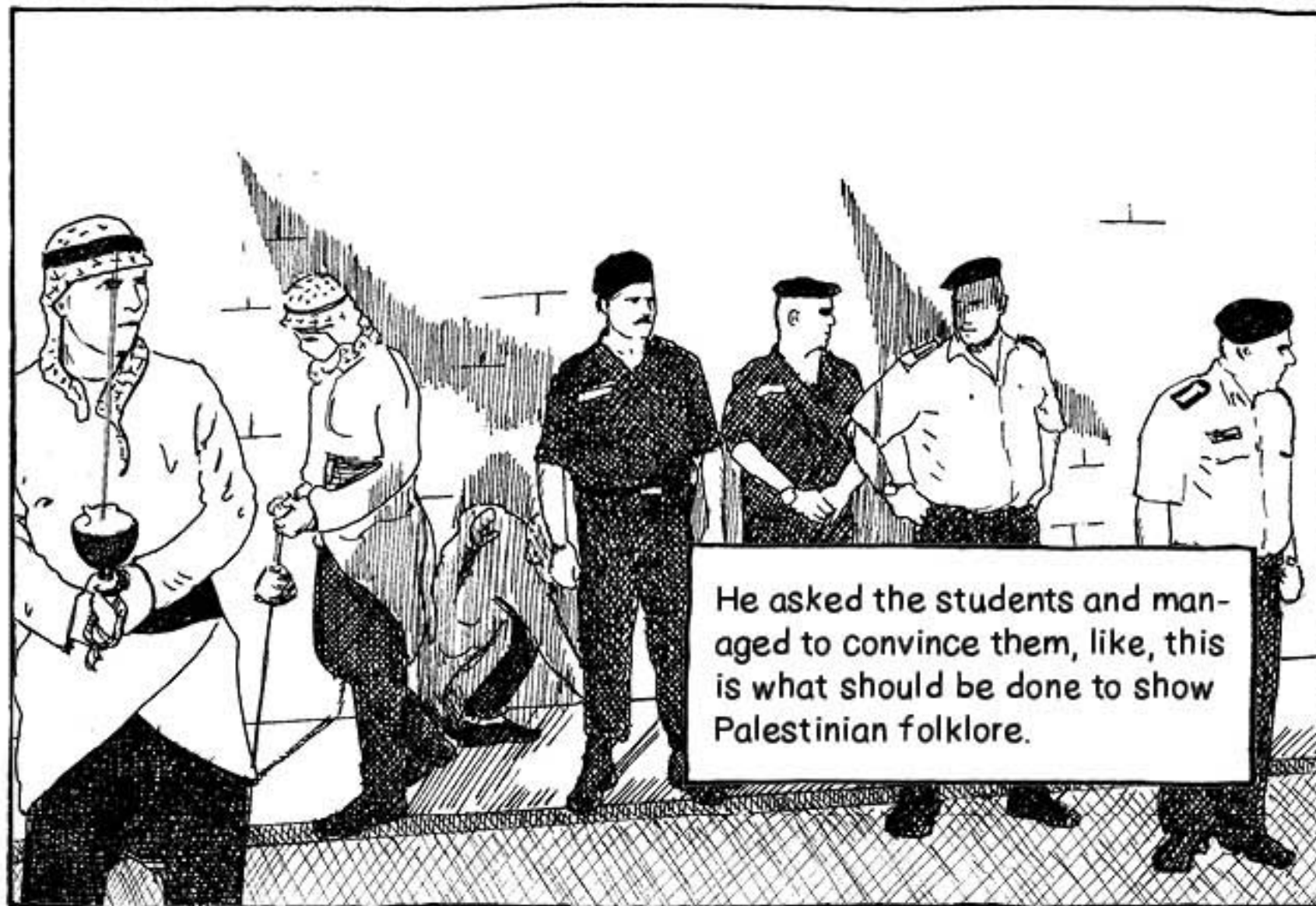


"Is there a wedding today?"

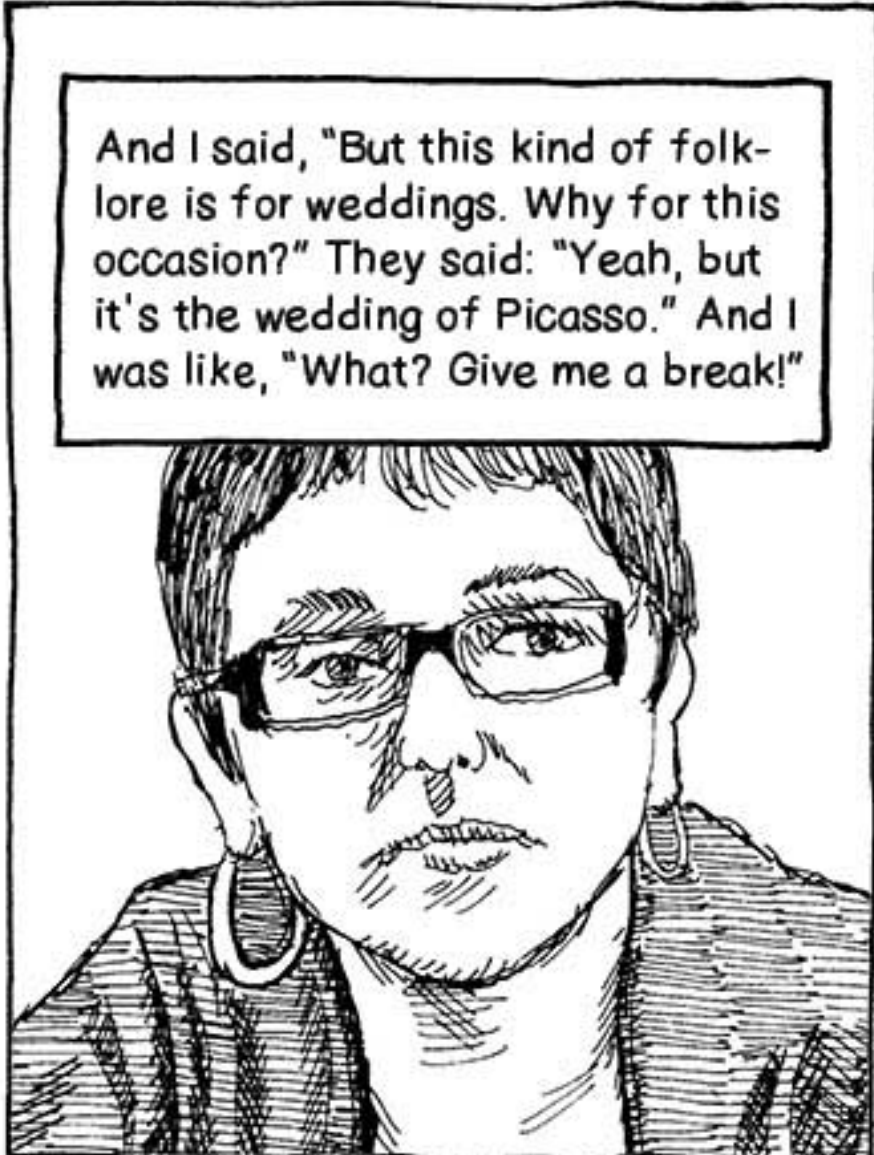




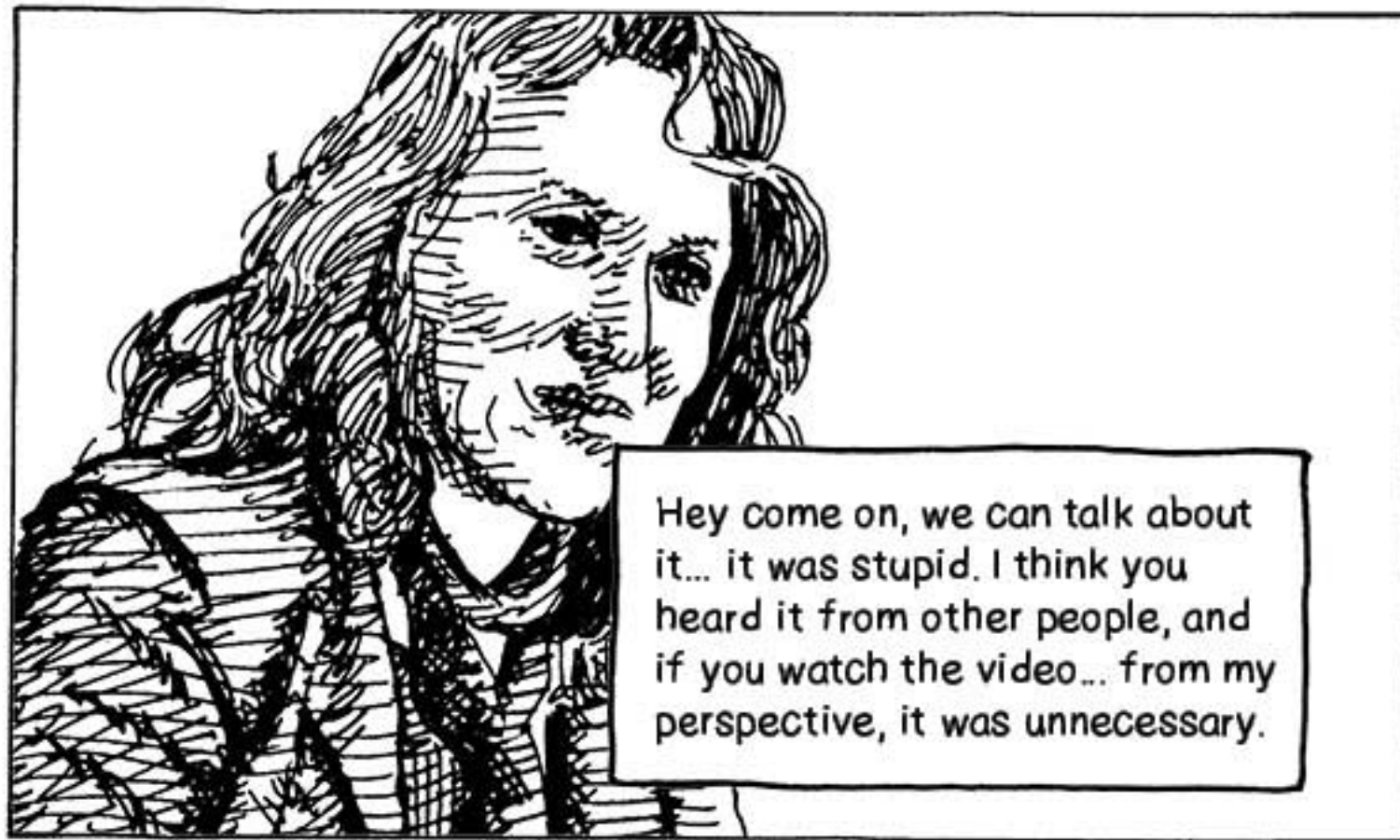
All this party that was staged, it was Khaled's organization. Because we were totally shocked and I asked the students, "Who decided to do this?" It was Khaled who decided to do it.



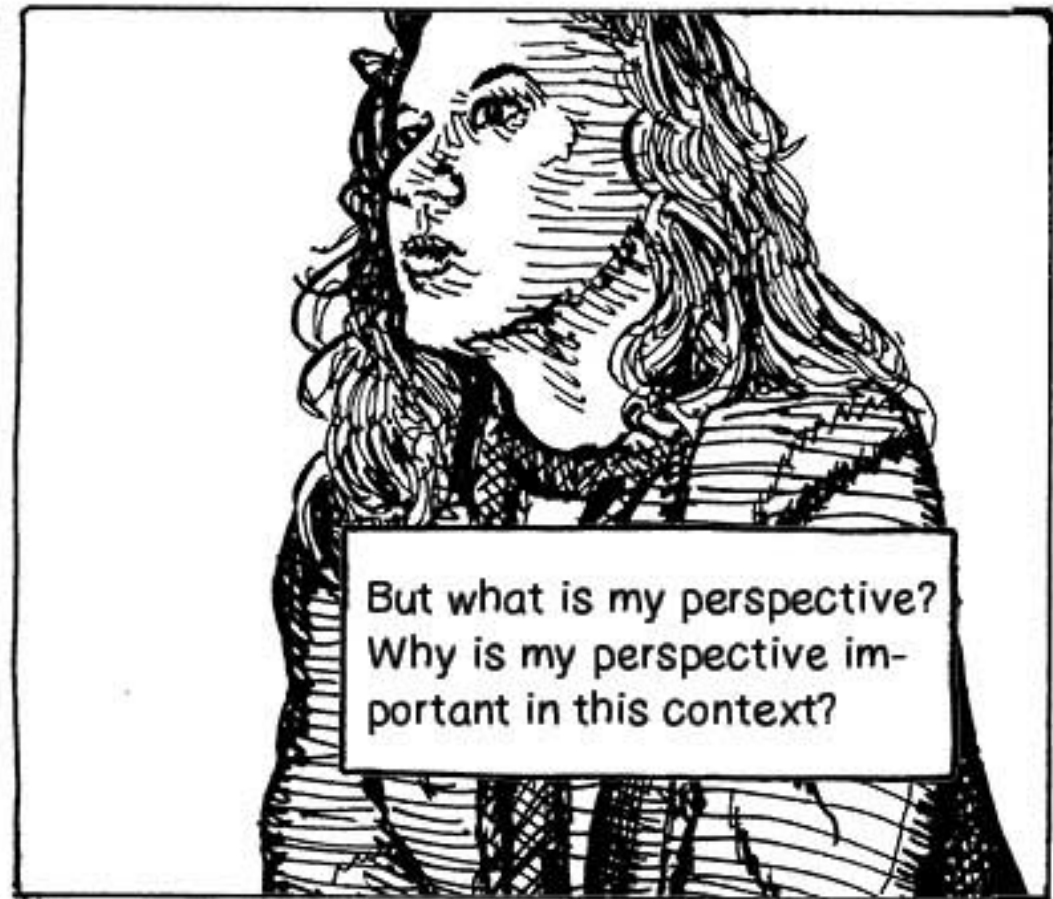
He asked the students and managed to convince them, like, this is what should be done to show Palestinian folklore.



And I said, "But this kind of folklore is for weddings. Why for this occasion?" They said: "Yeah, but it's the wedding of Picasso." And I was like, "What? Give me a break!"



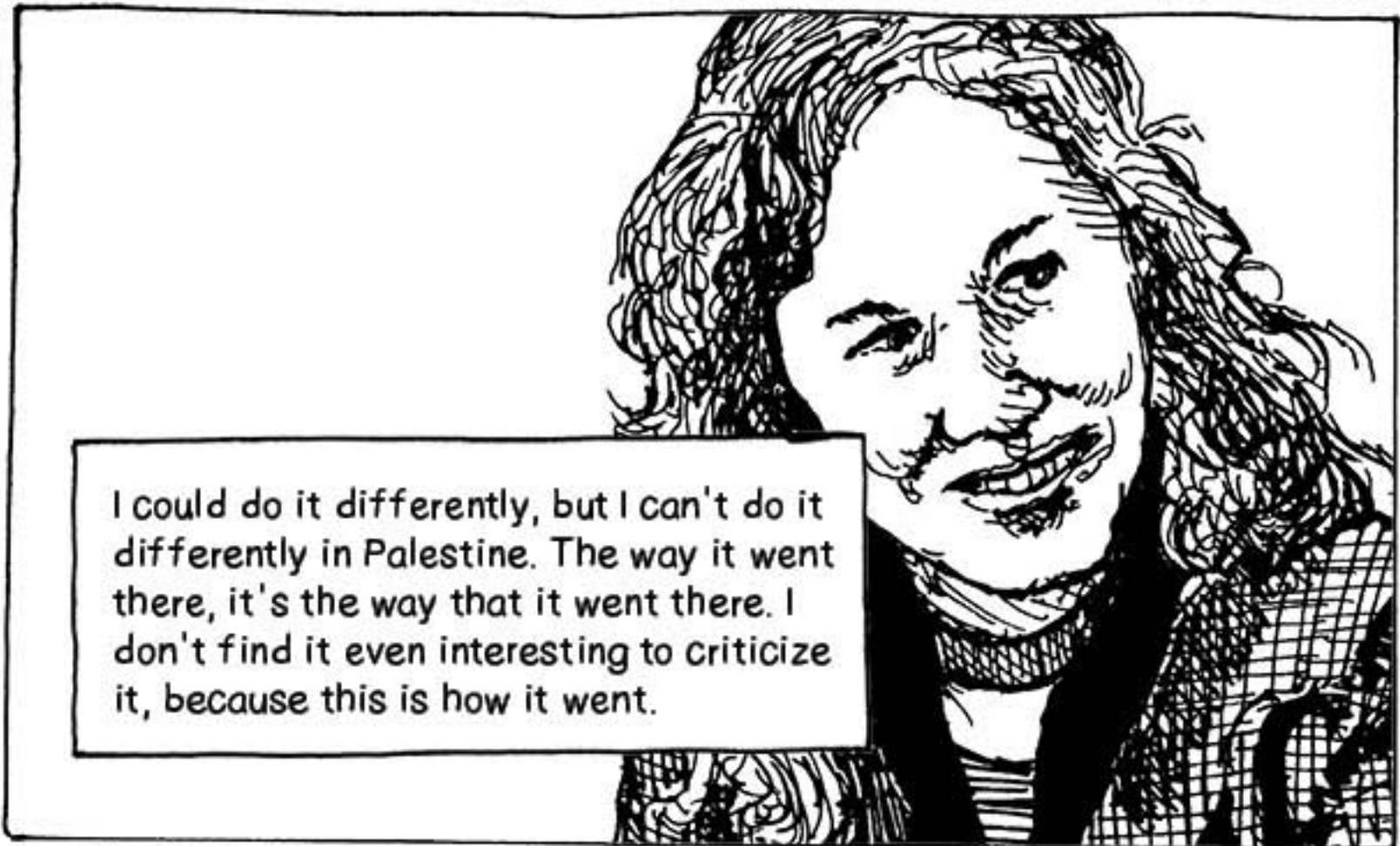
Hey come on, we can talk about it... it was stupid. I think you heard it from other people, and if you watch the video... from my perspective, it was unnecessary.



But what is my perspective? Why is my perspective important in this context?



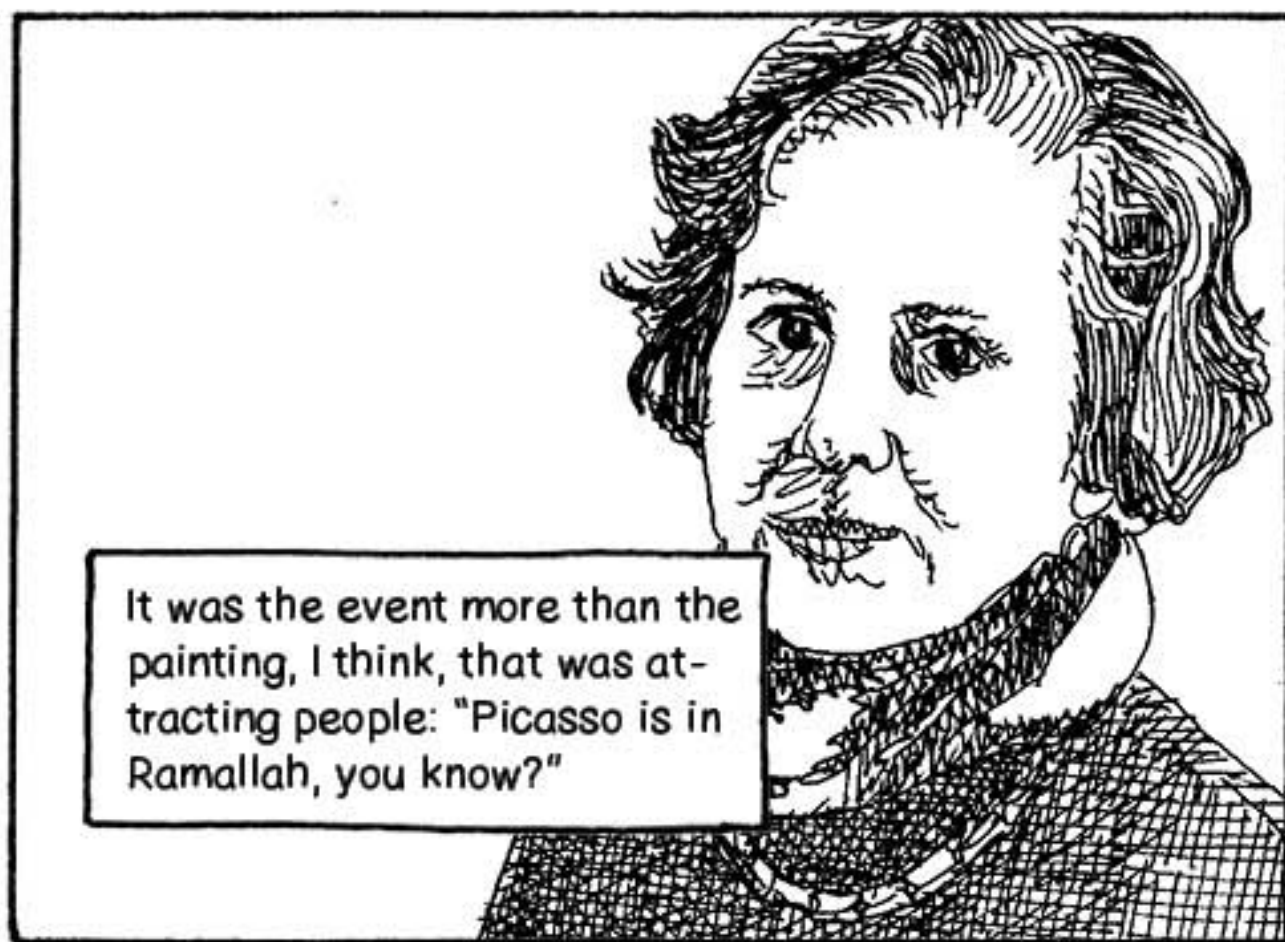
You know, the project was not for me; it was for others. So others should judge it.



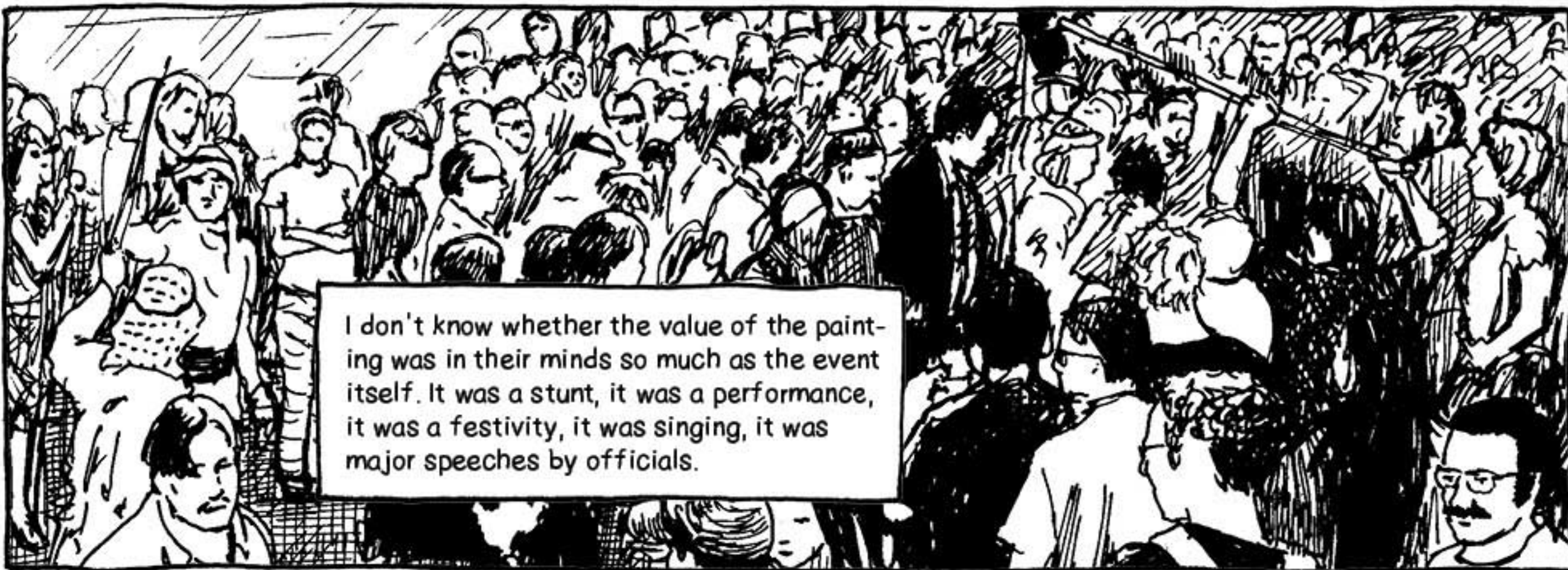
I could do it differently, but I can't do it differently in Palestine. The way it went there, it's the way that it went there. I don't find it even interesting to criticize it, because this is how it went.



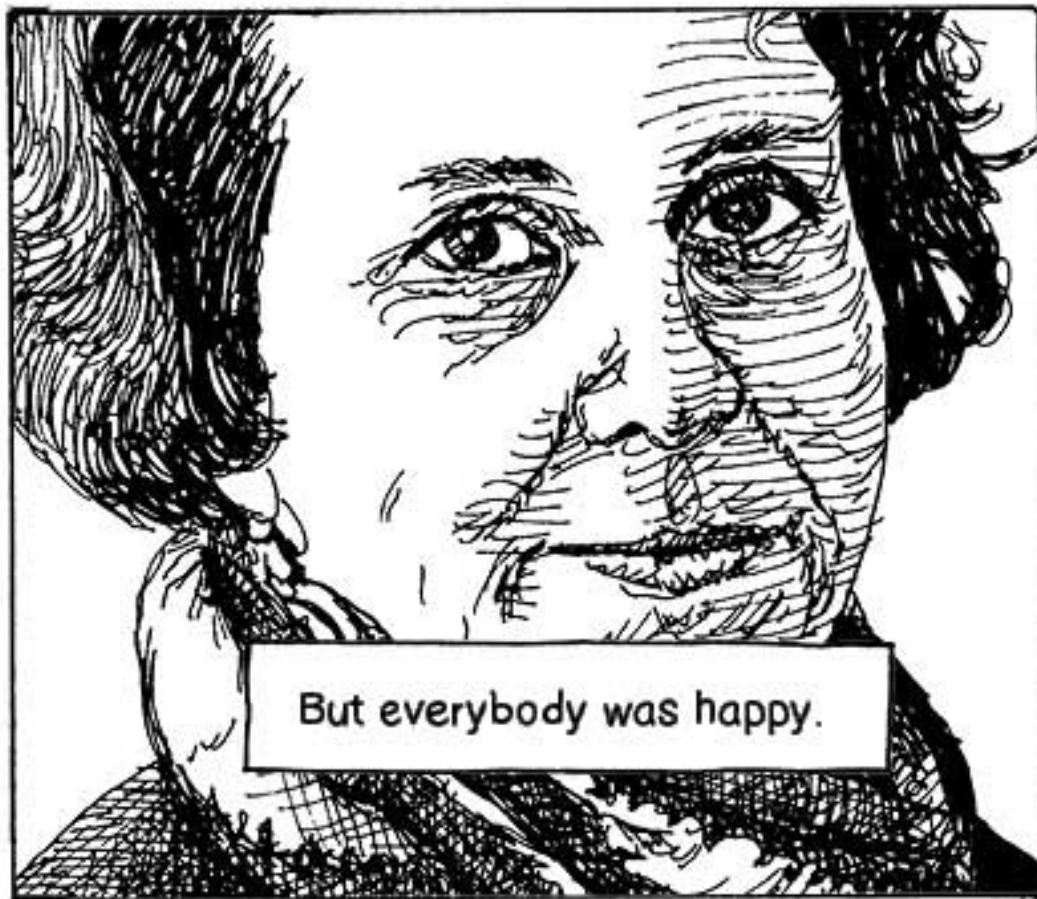
I went to the opening.
It was a bit of a fiesta.



It was the event more than the
painting, I think, that was at-
tracting people: "Picasso is in
Ramallah, you know?"



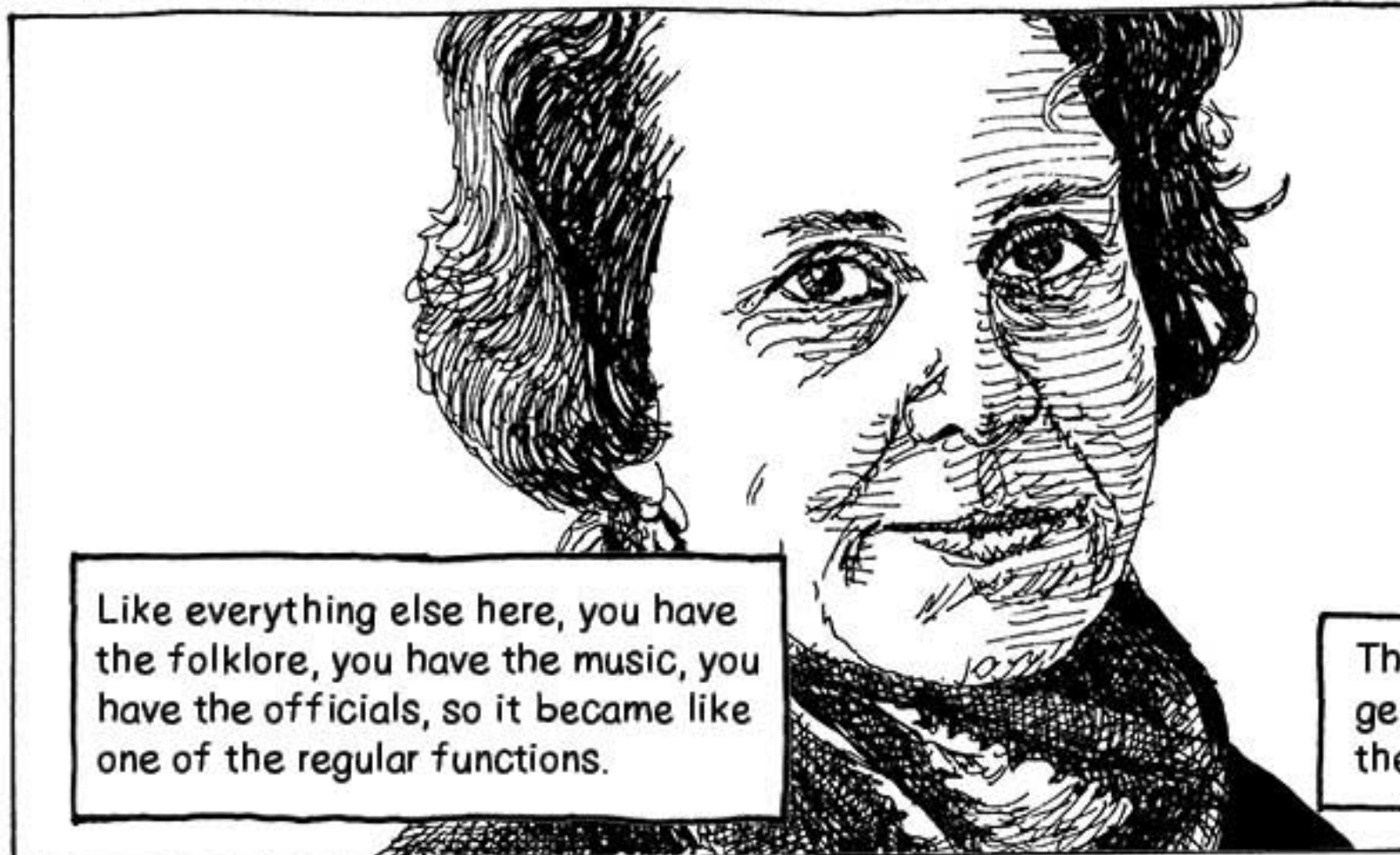
I don't know whether the value of the paint-
ing was in their minds so much as the event
itself. It was a stunt, it was a performance,
it was a festivity, it was singing, it was
major speeches by officials.



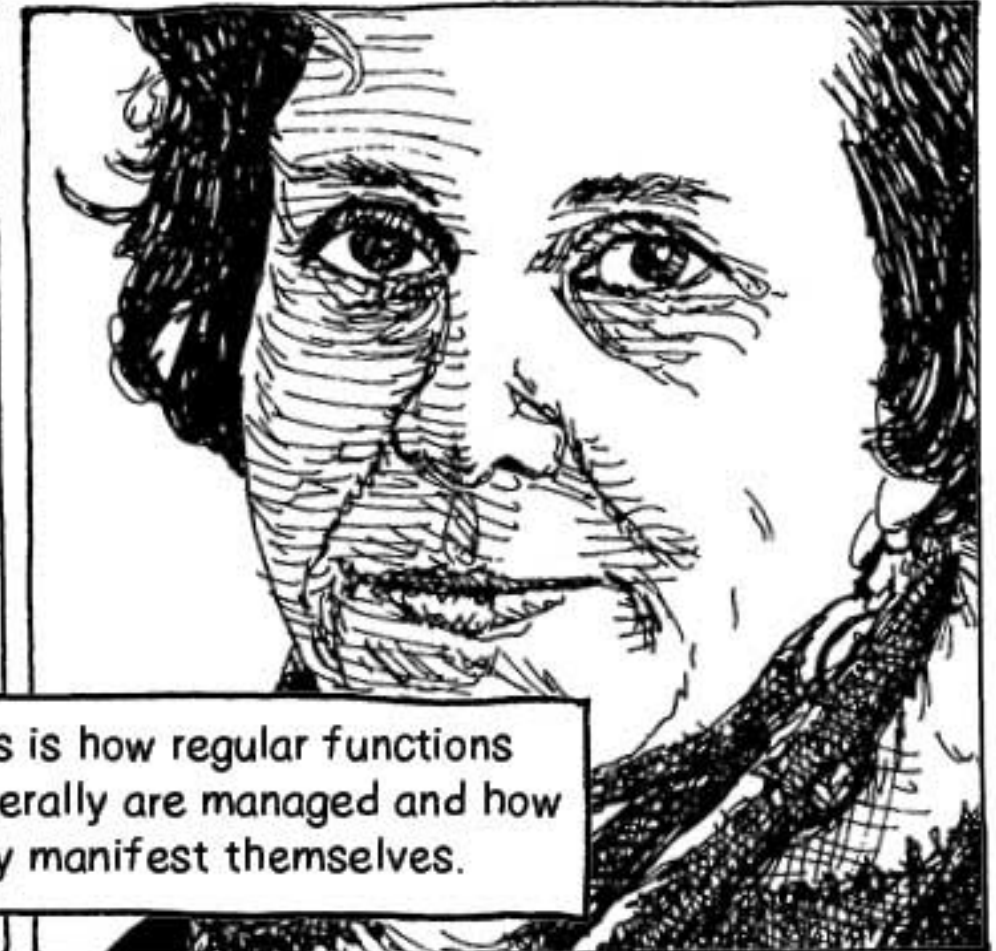
But everybody was happy.




I can understand why people would be critical, but I would take it with a sense of joviality myself.



Like everything else here, you have the folklore, you have the music, you have the officials, so it became like one of the regular functions.



This is how regular functions generally are managed and how they manifest themselves.



Dalia Taha, Cafe Pronto,
Ramallah, February 2012:

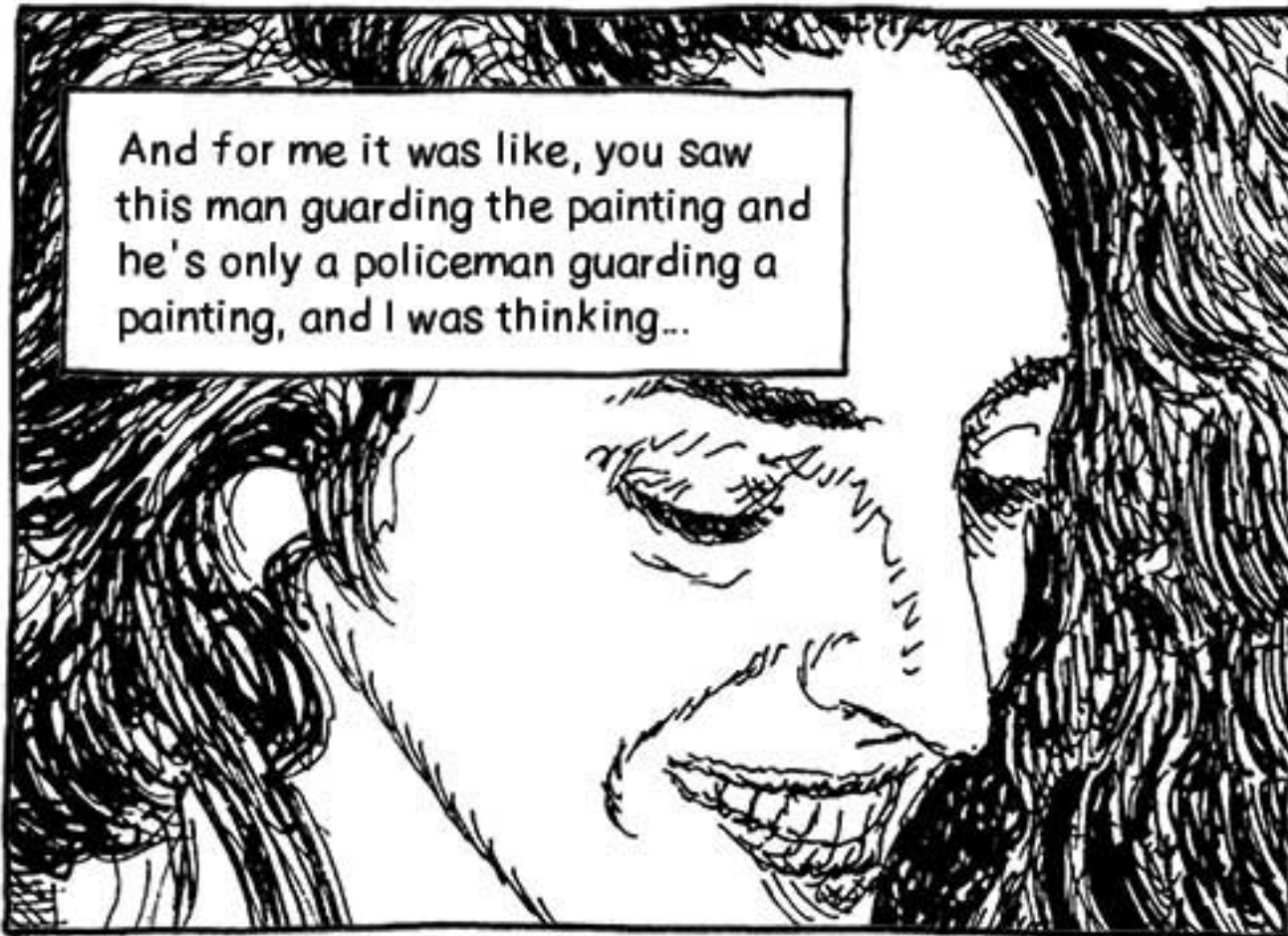
I was interested in the stories of the people who are faceless or voiceless, you know? What was going on with them? You know, people outside Ramallah are not interested in Picasso or art exhibitions.



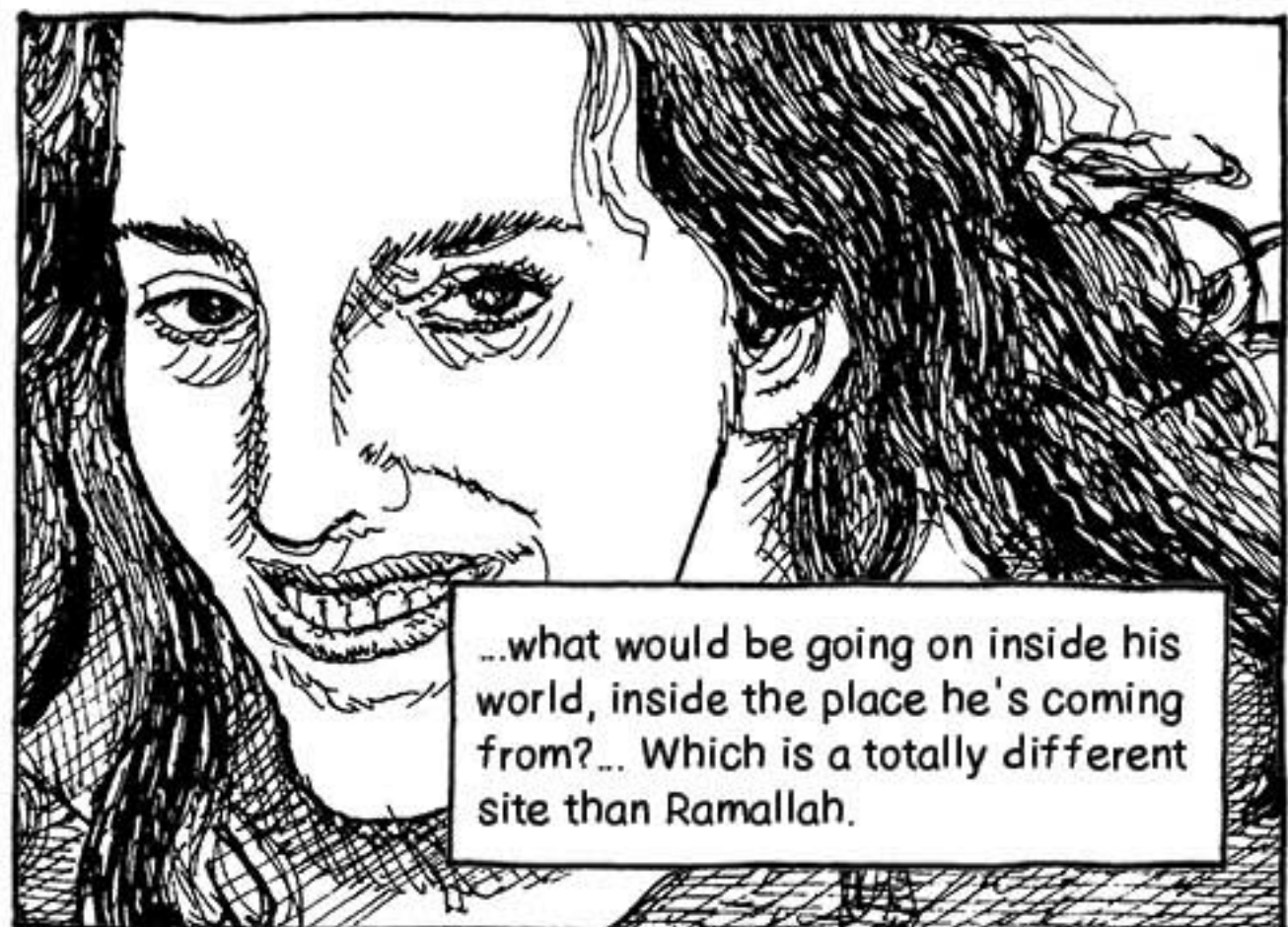
This was the starting point for me.



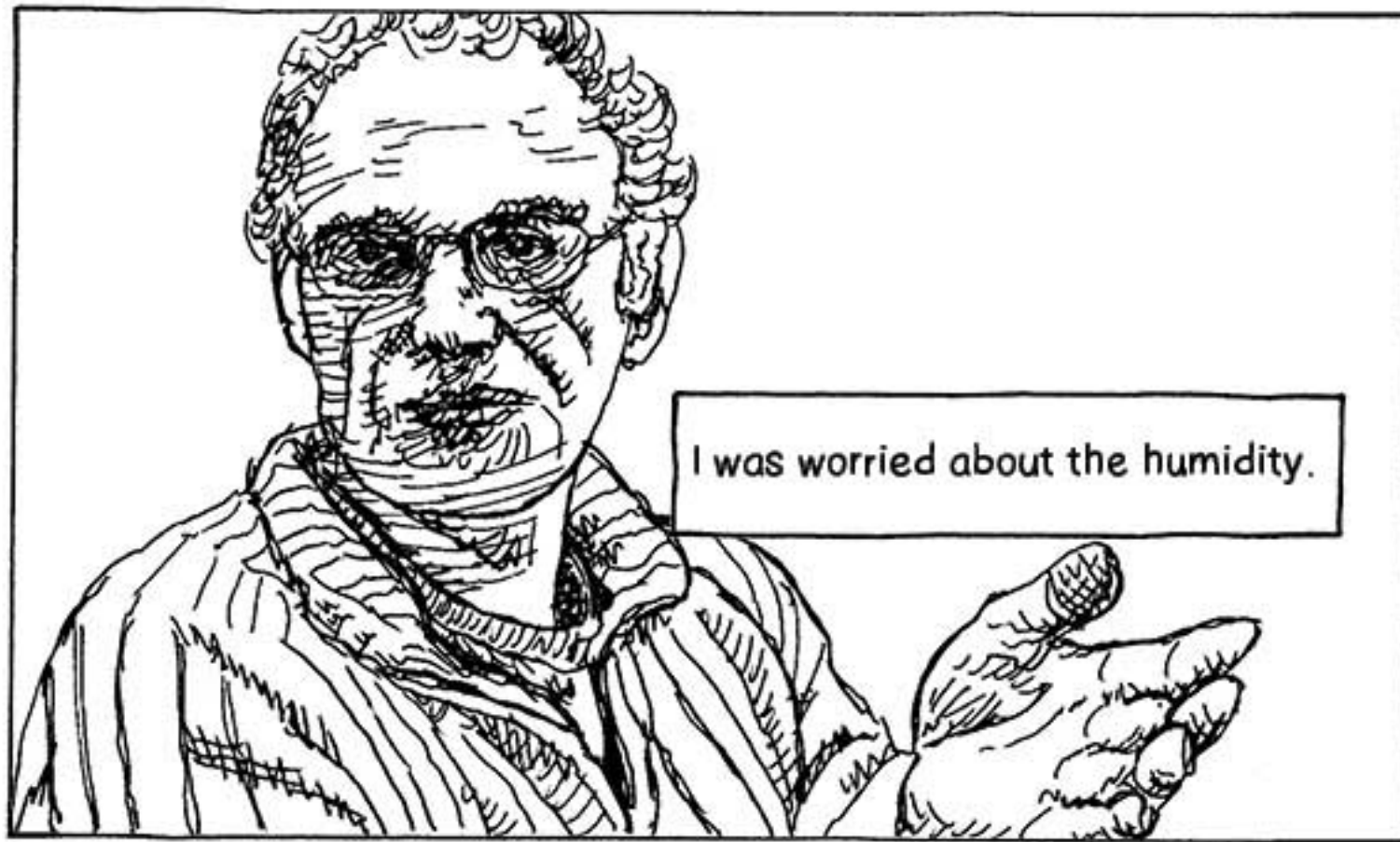
Like, the man who was nervously guarding the painting.



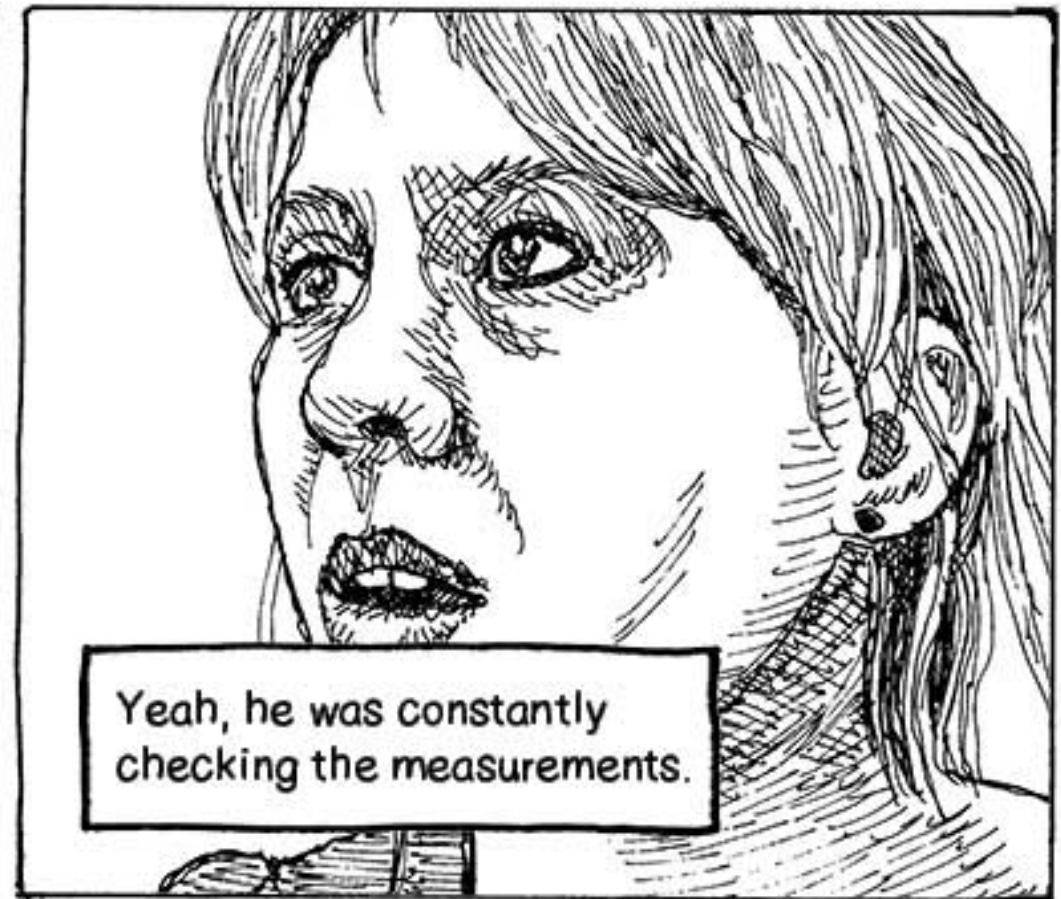
And for me it was like, you saw this man guarding the painting and he's only a policeman guarding a painting, and I was thinking...



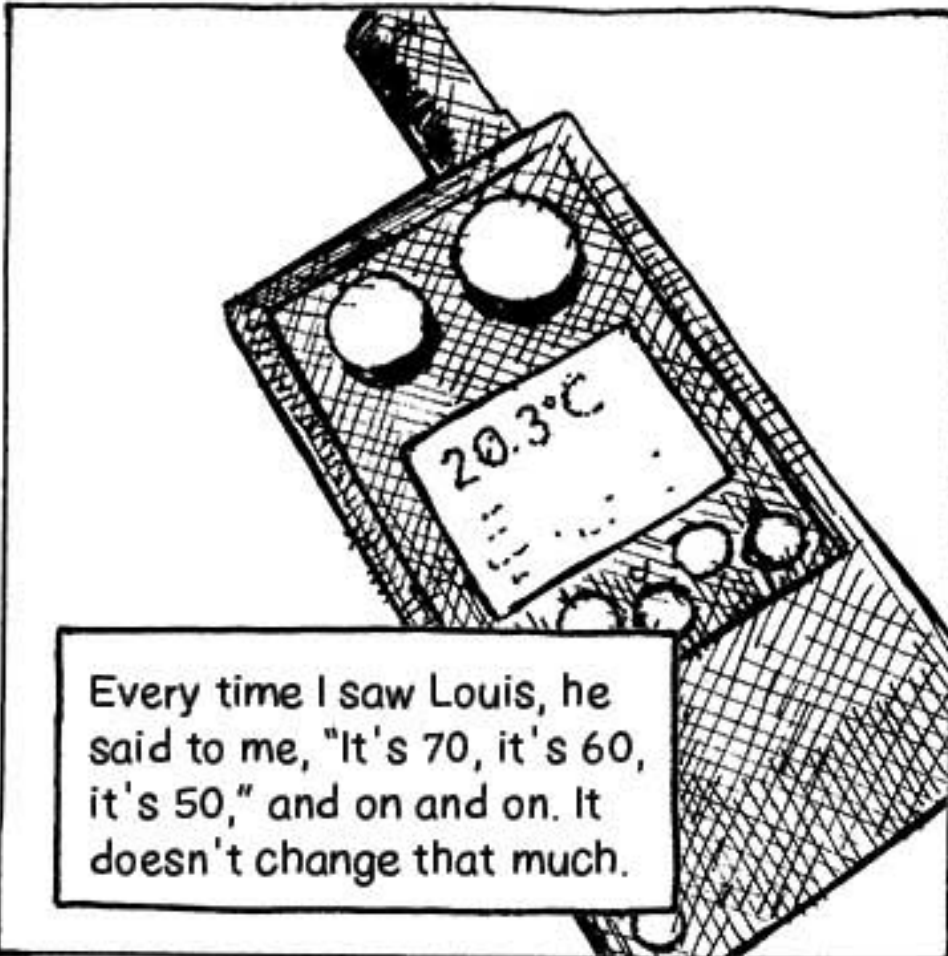
...what would be going on inside his world, inside the place he's coming from?... Which is a totally different site than Ramallah.



I was worried about the humidity.



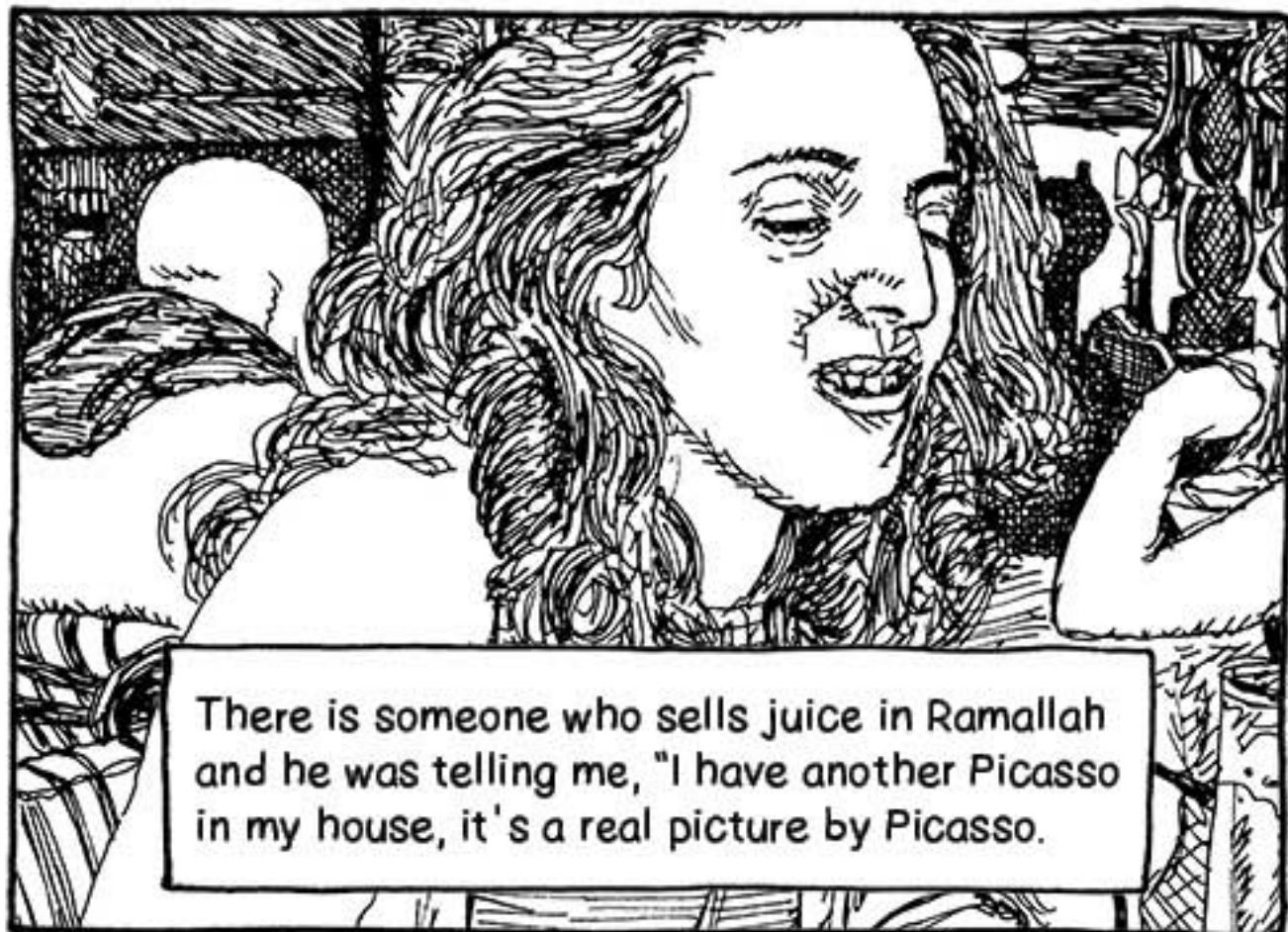
Yeah, he was constantly checking the measurements.



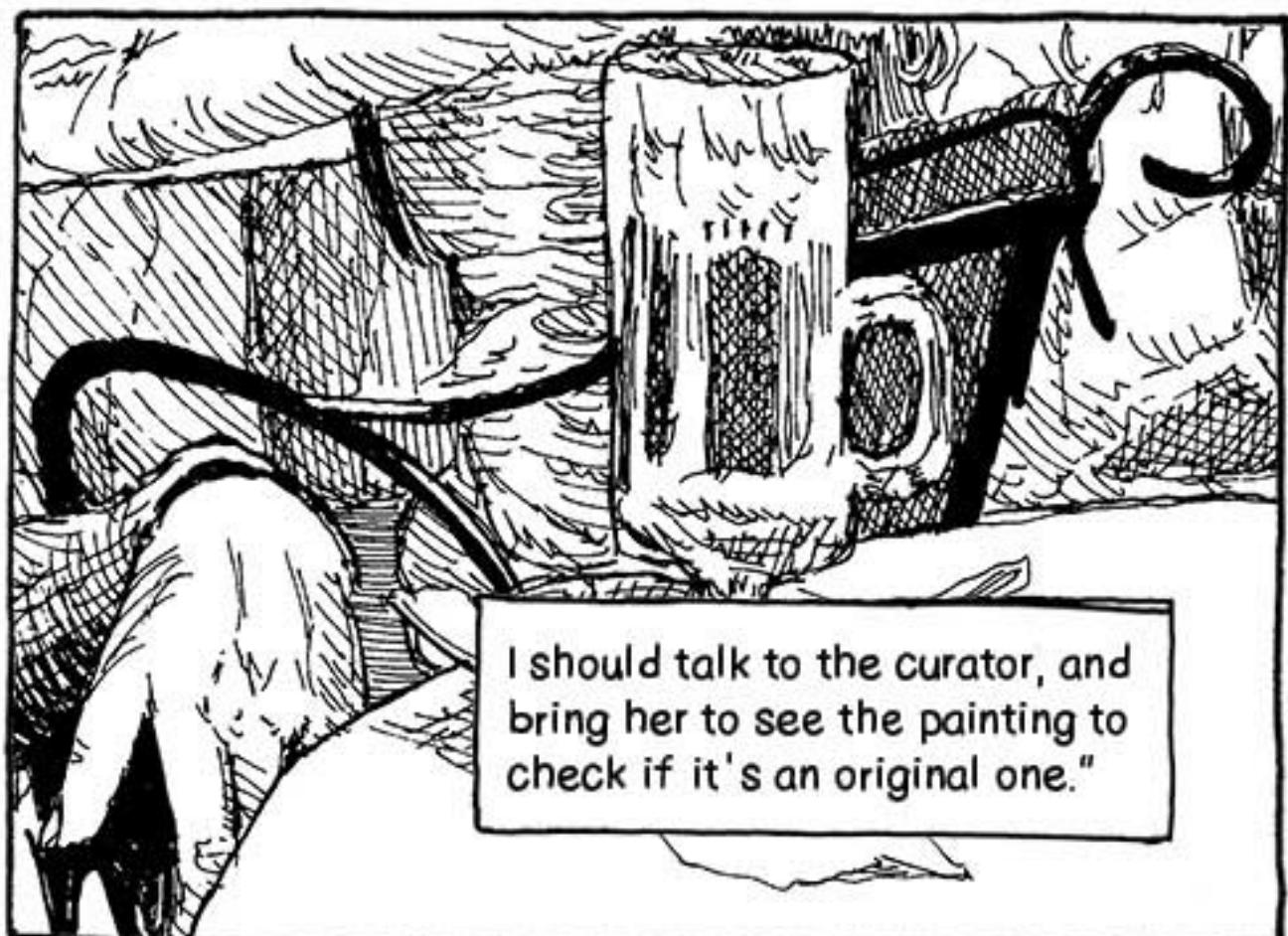
Every time I saw Louis, he said to me, "It's 70, it's 60, it's 50," and on and on. It doesn't change that much.



Everyone was, like, interfering. Even the voiceless people. Everyone had a story to tell about what was going on.



There is someone who sells juice in Ramallah and he was telling me, "I have another Picasso in my house, it's a real picture by Picasso."




I should talk to the curator, and bring her to see the painting to check if it's an original one."



And he was talking about the crowd, that he knows everyone there...

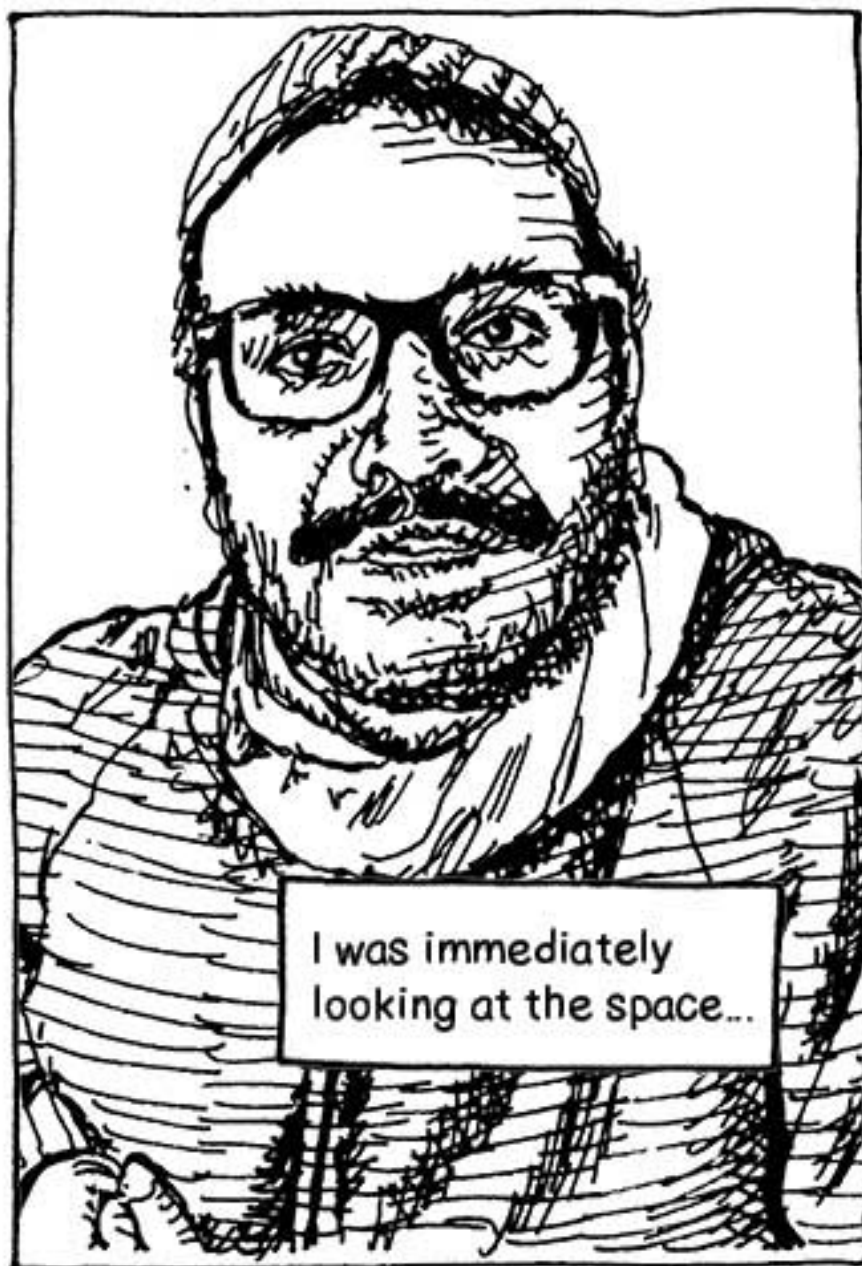


"And this is the woman who drinks orange and banana juice, and that one drinks..."



Yazan Khalili, Cafe Zaman,
Ramallah, February 2012:

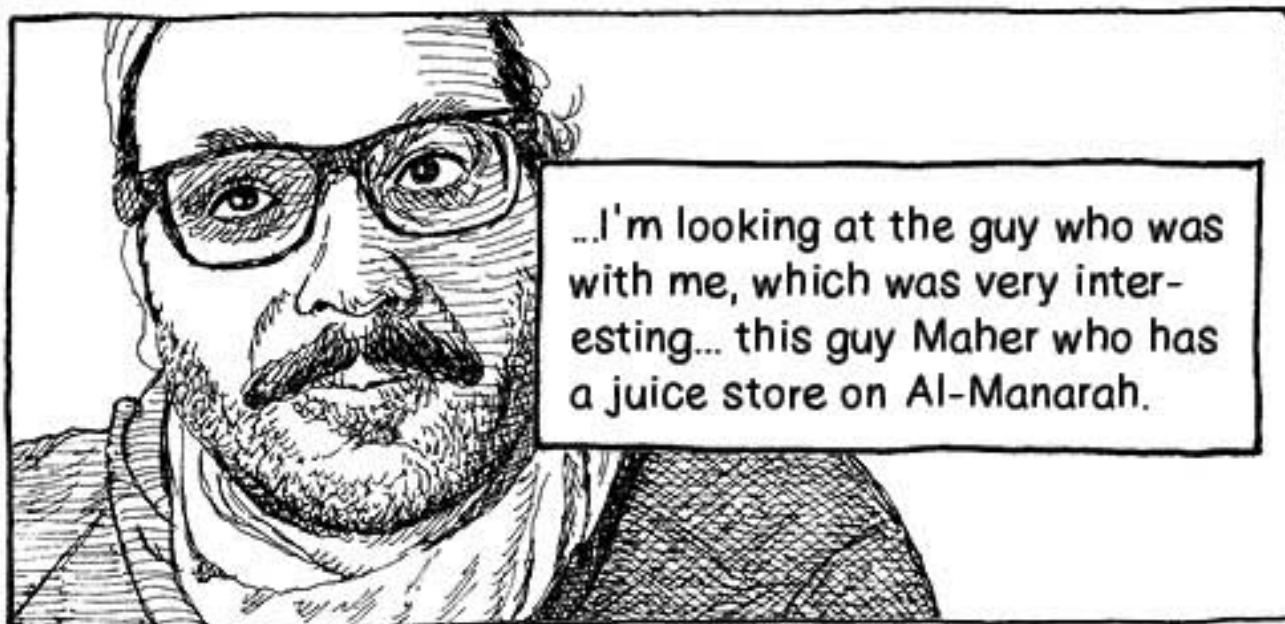
The painting meant nothing to me.
Nothing at all. I couldn't see it. I
couldn't see the painting at all.



I was immediately looking at the space...



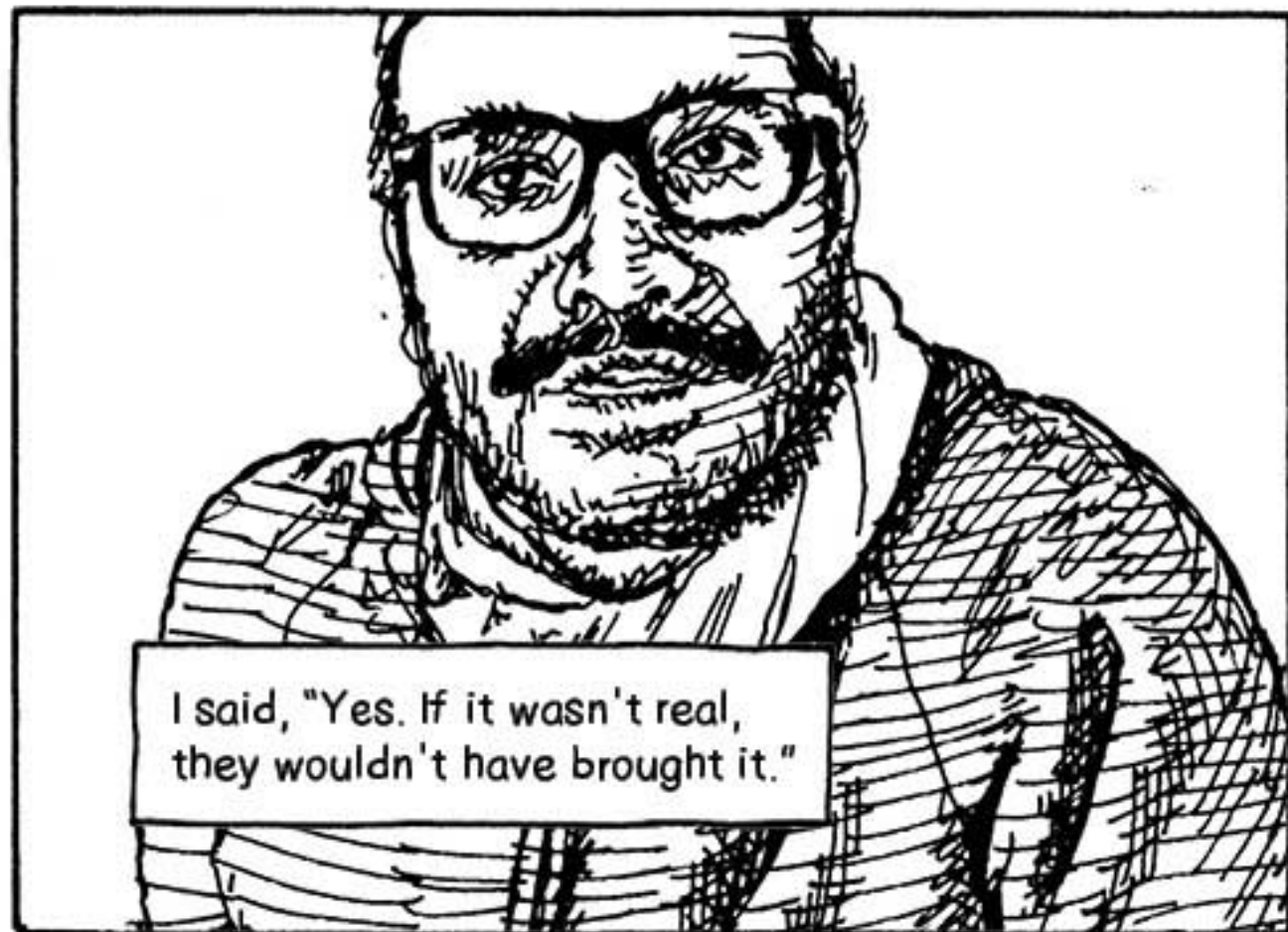
I'm looking at the policemen...



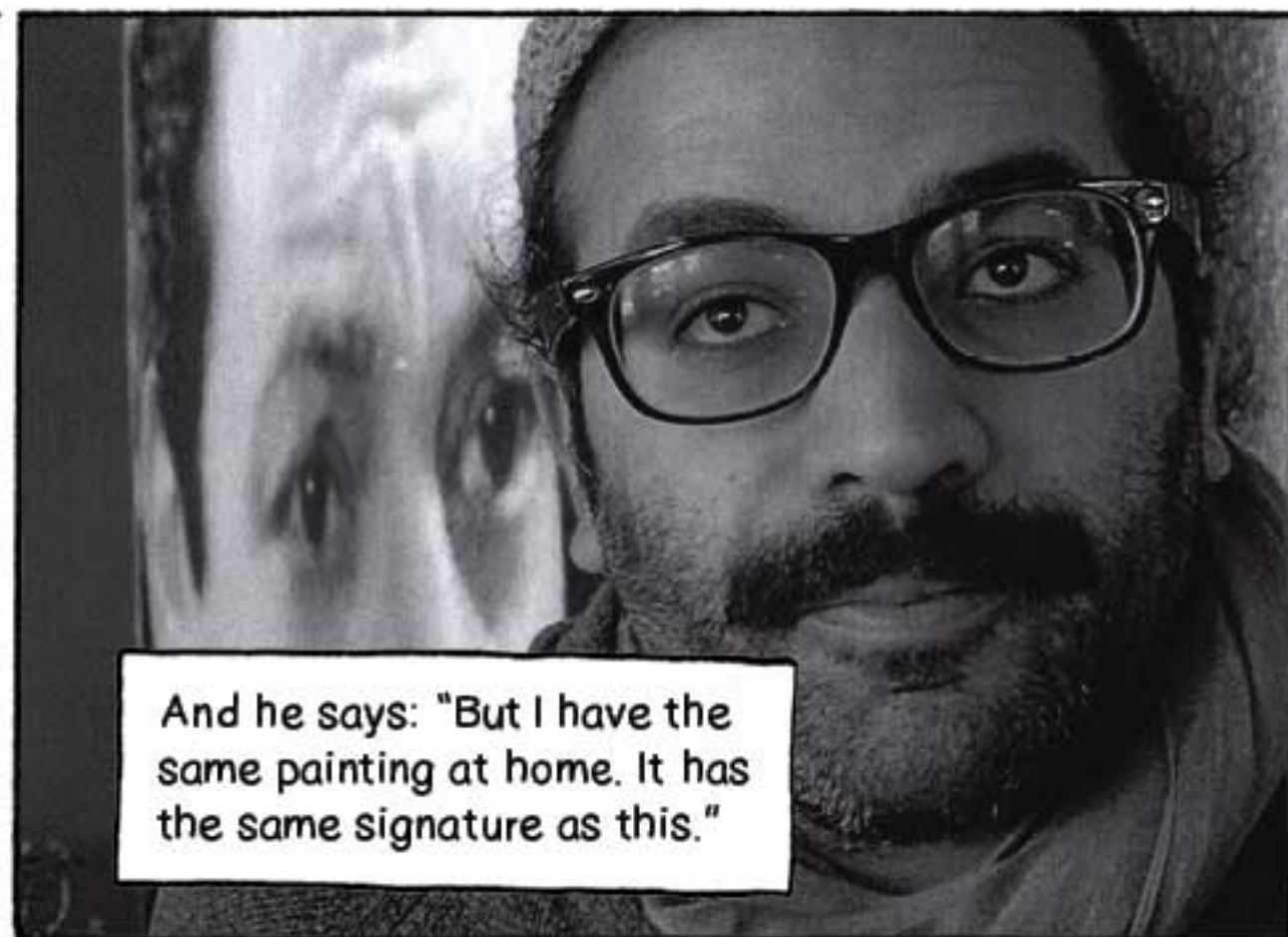
...I'm looking at the guy who was with me, which was very interesting... this guy Maher who has a juice store on Al-Manarah.



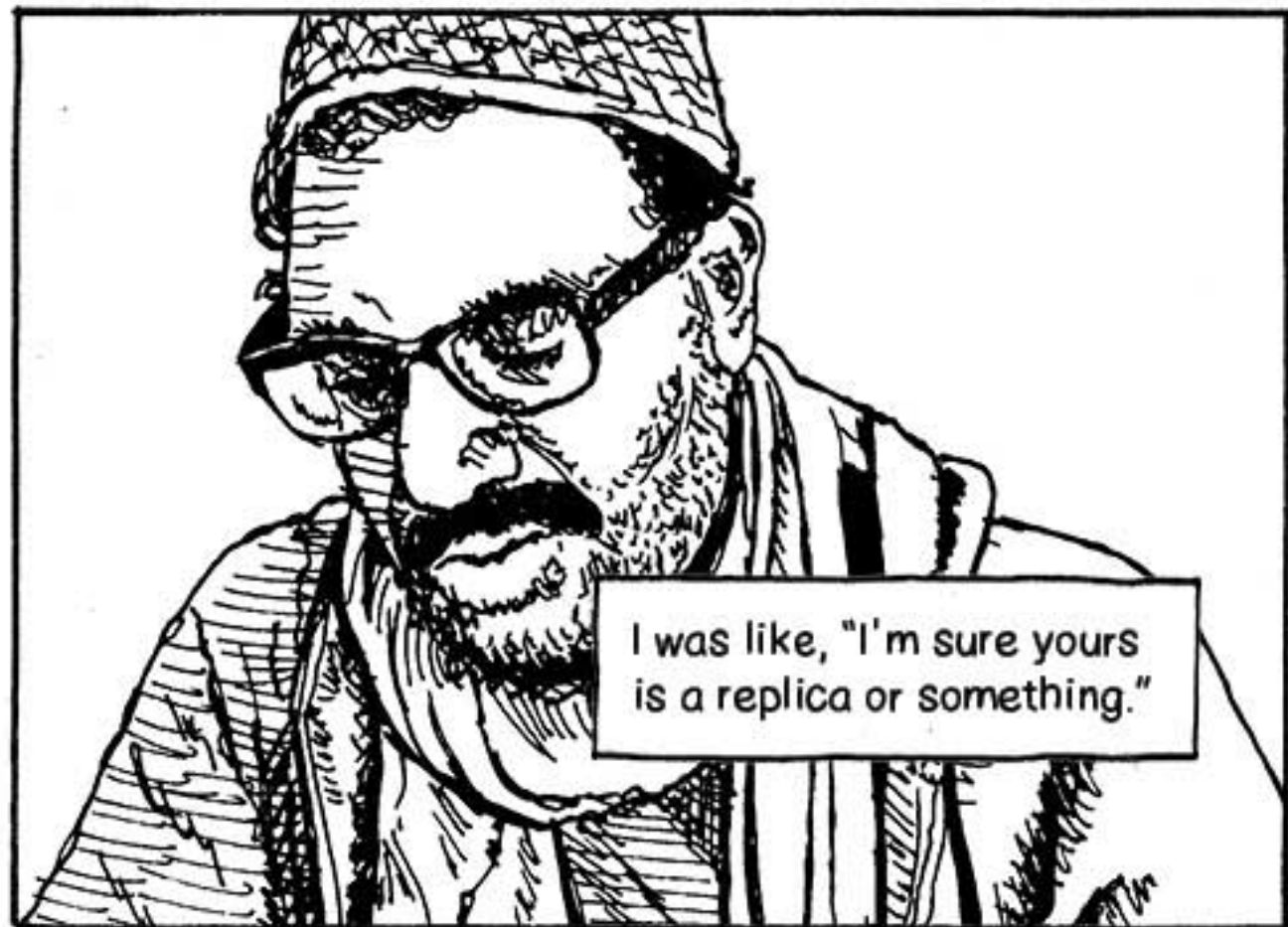
I didn't write that in my story, but as we stood there he said, "Is this real?"



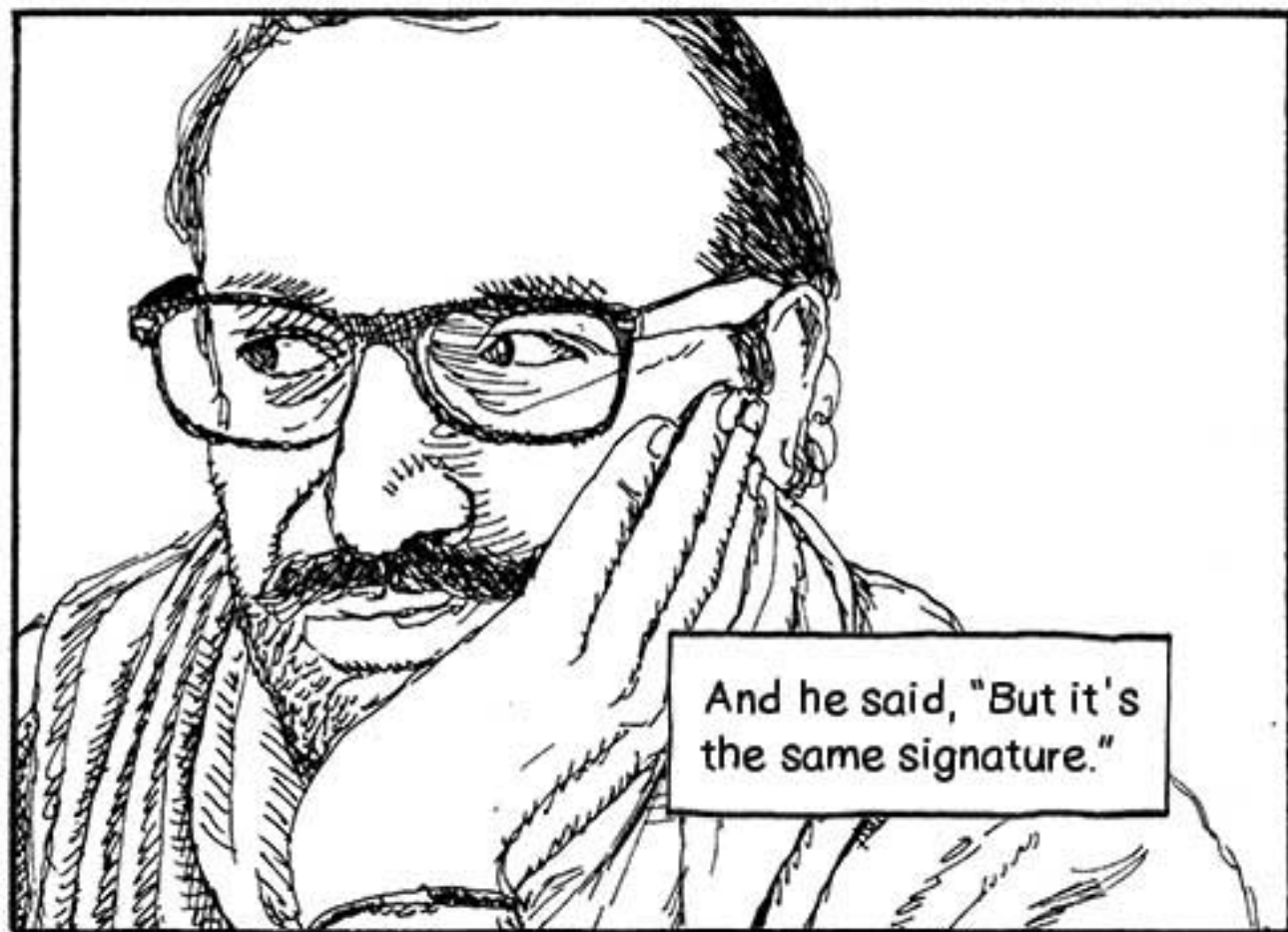
I said, "Yes. If it wasn't real, they wouldn't have brought it."



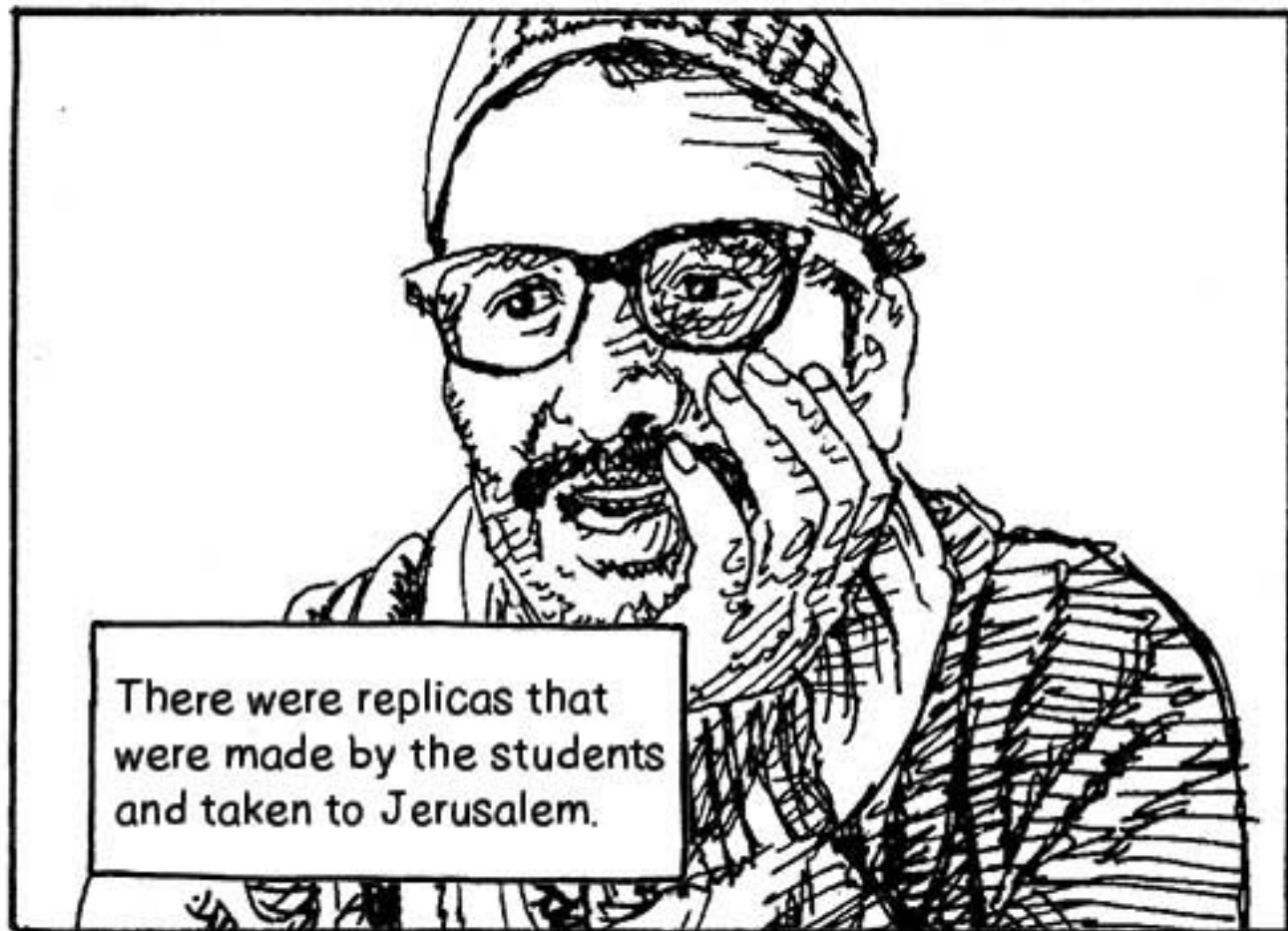
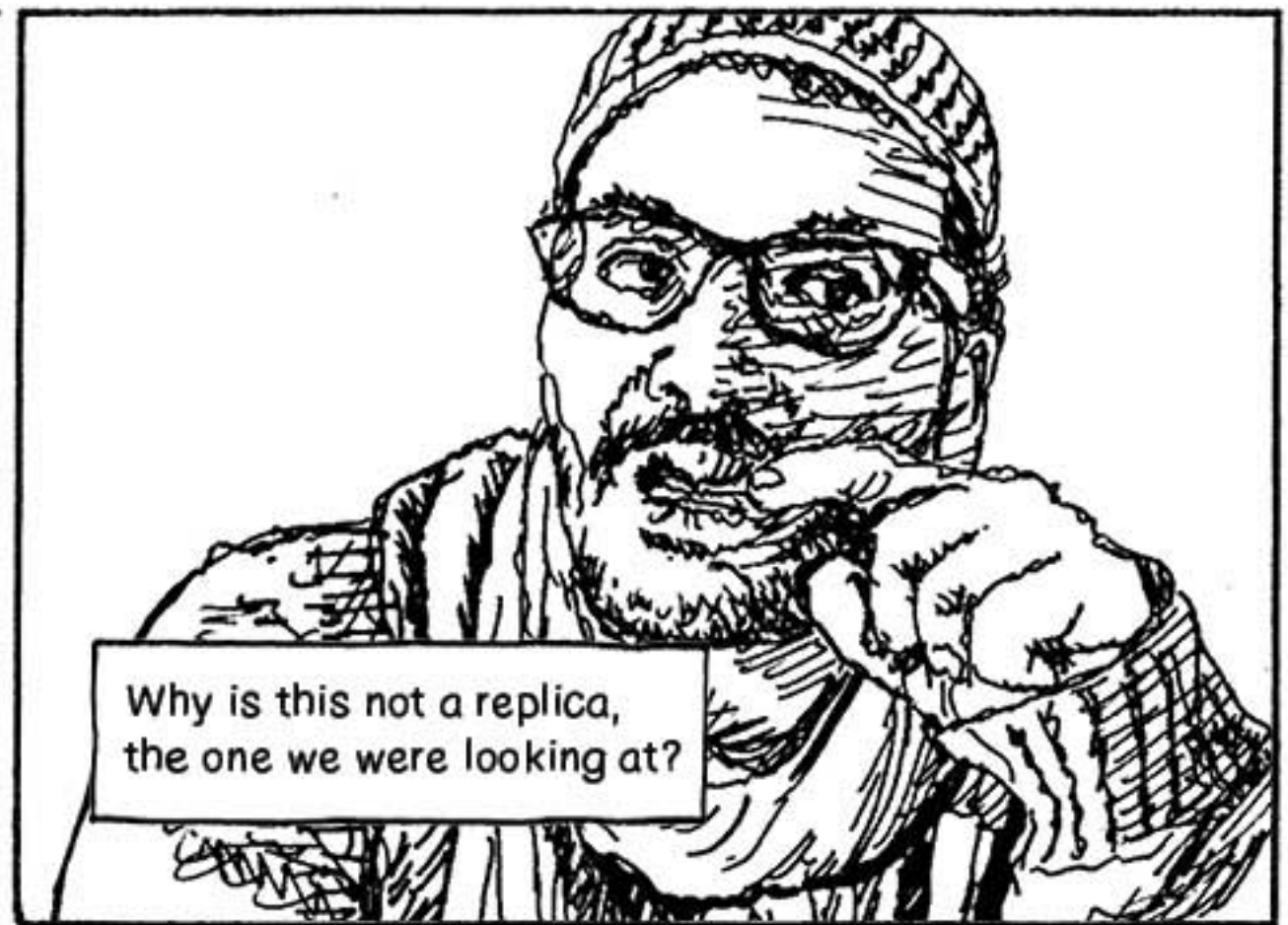
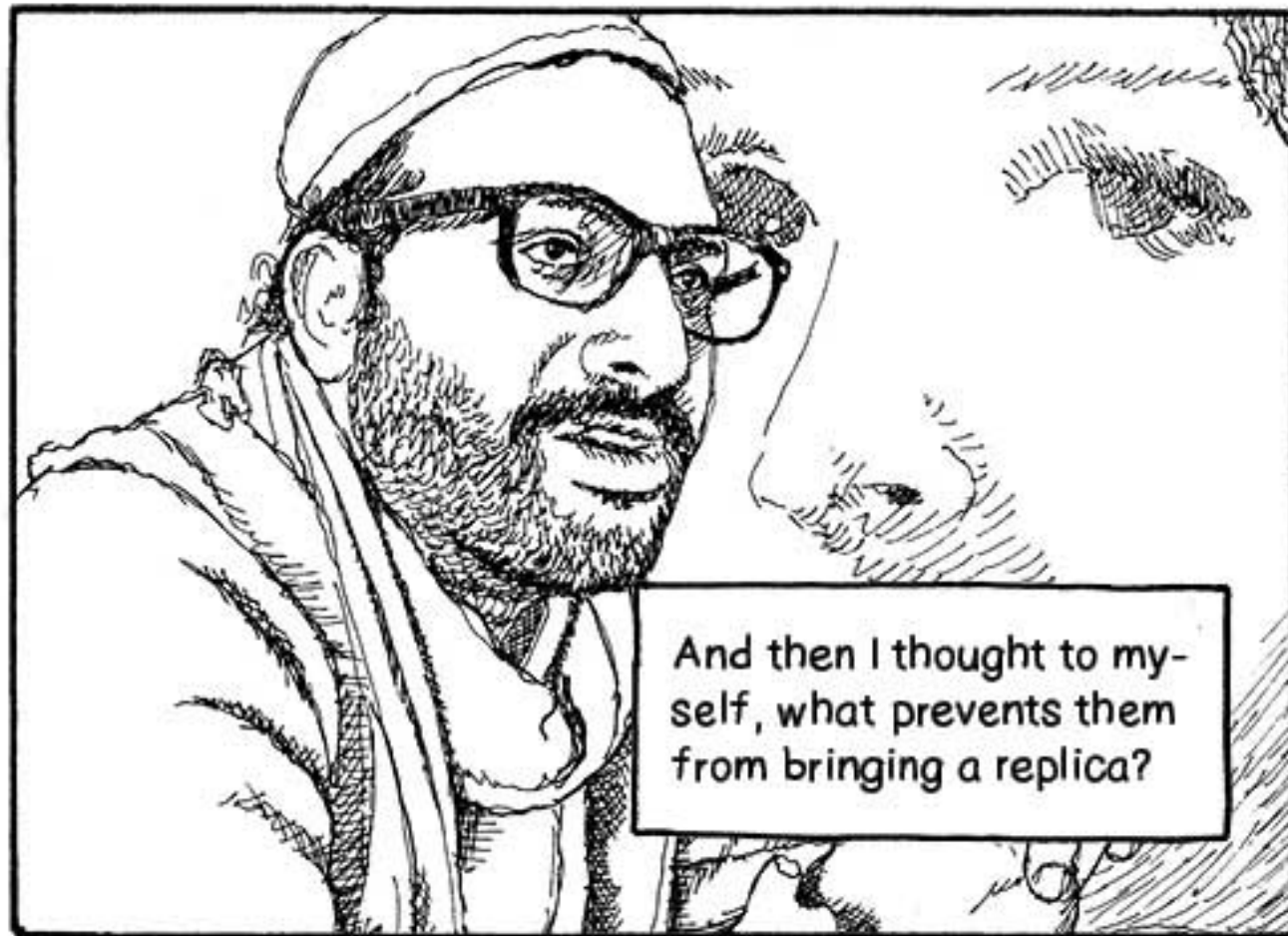
And he says: "But I have the same painting at home. It has the same signature as this."

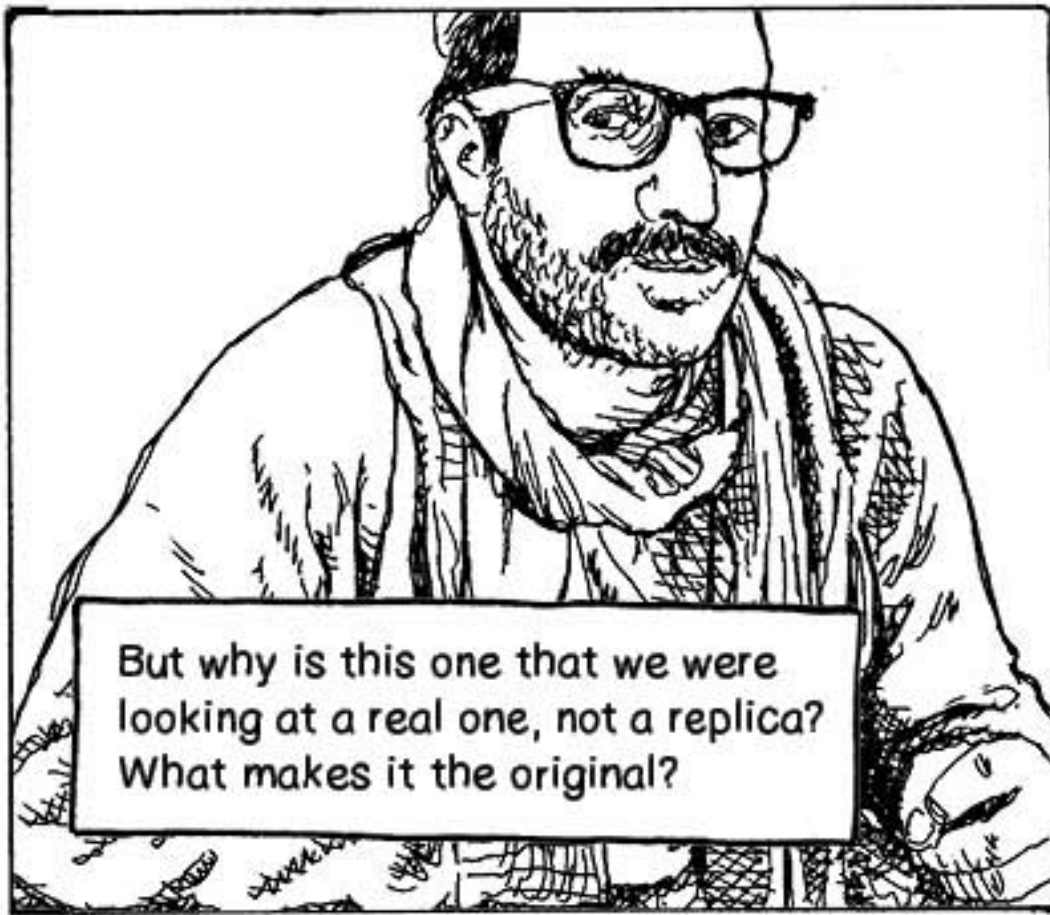


I was like, "I'm sure yours is a replica or something."

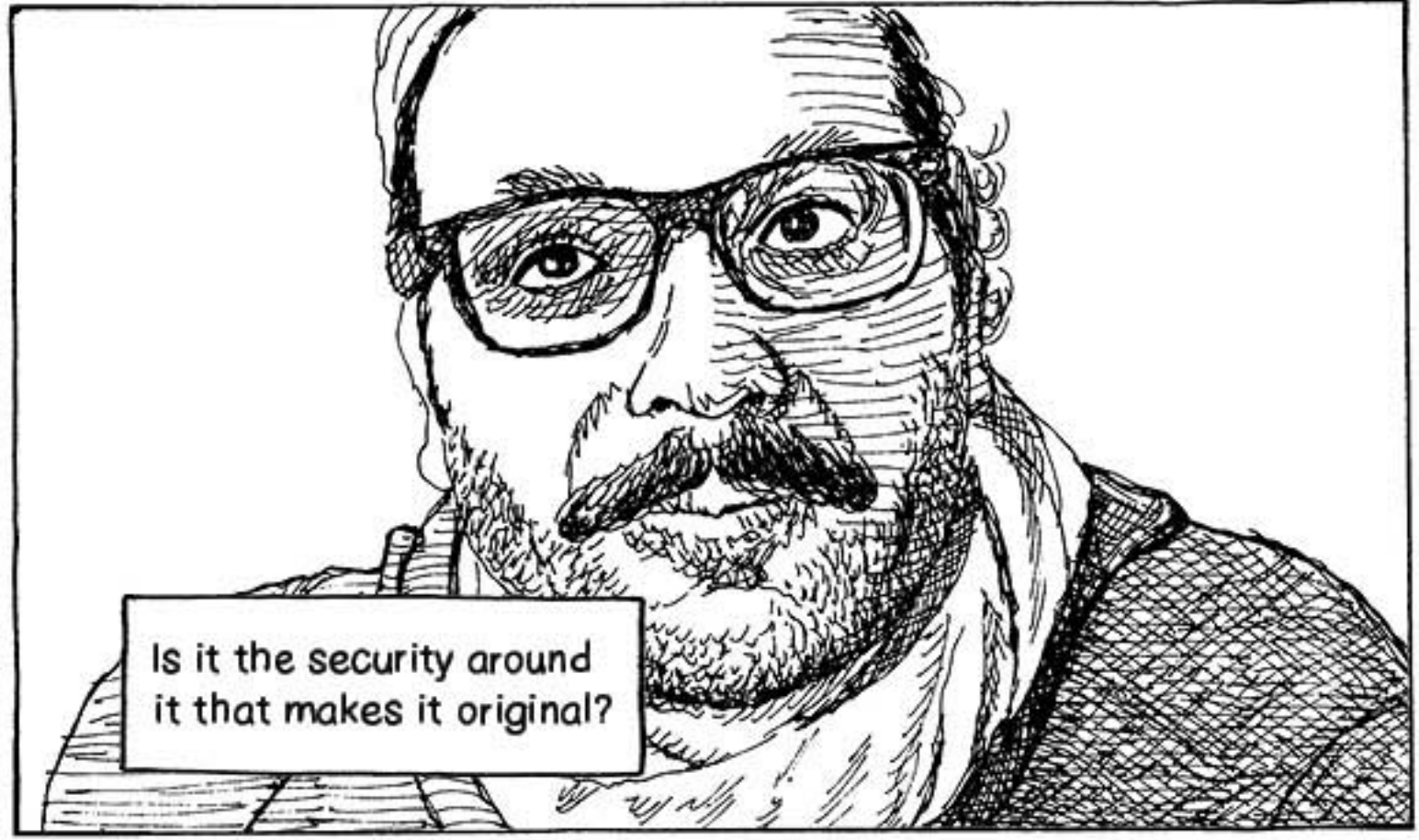


And he said, "But it's the same signature."





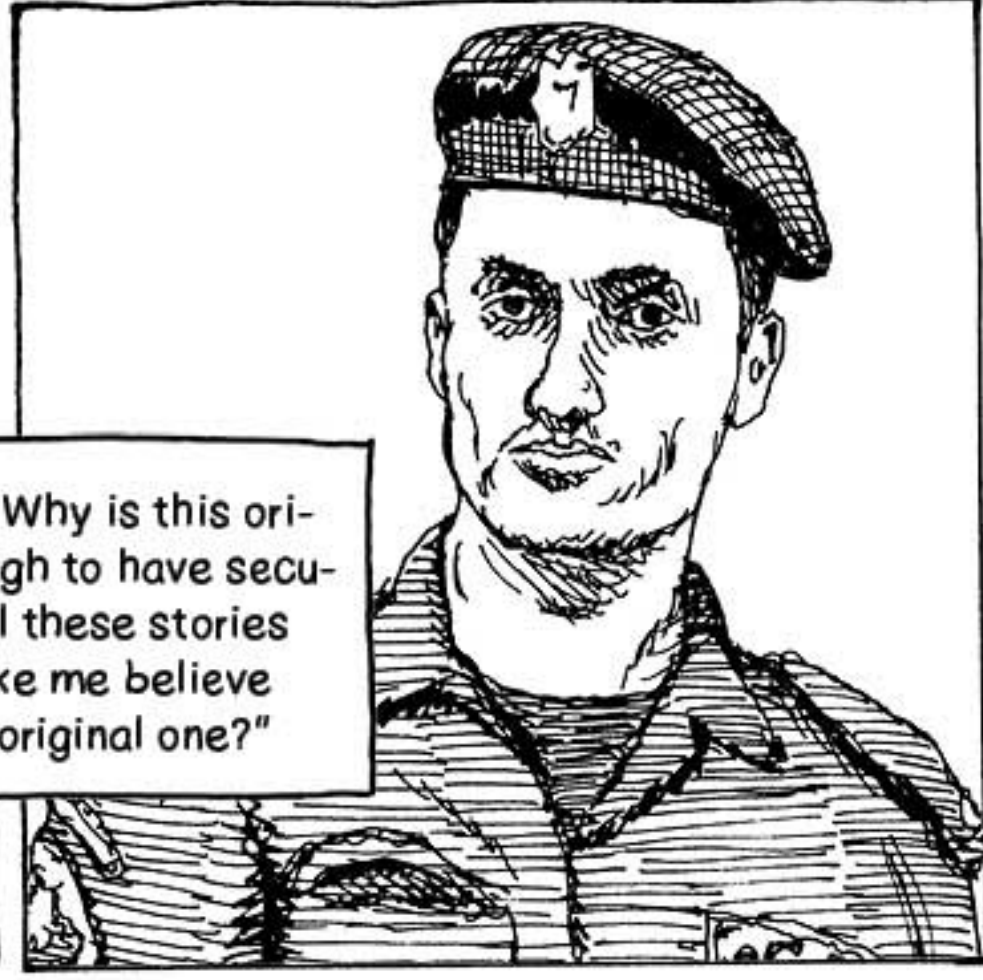
But why is this one that we were looking at a real one, not a replica? What makes it the original?



Is it the security around it that makes it original?



I was thinking: "Why is this original? Is it enough to have security? To have all these stories around it to make me believe that this is the original one?"

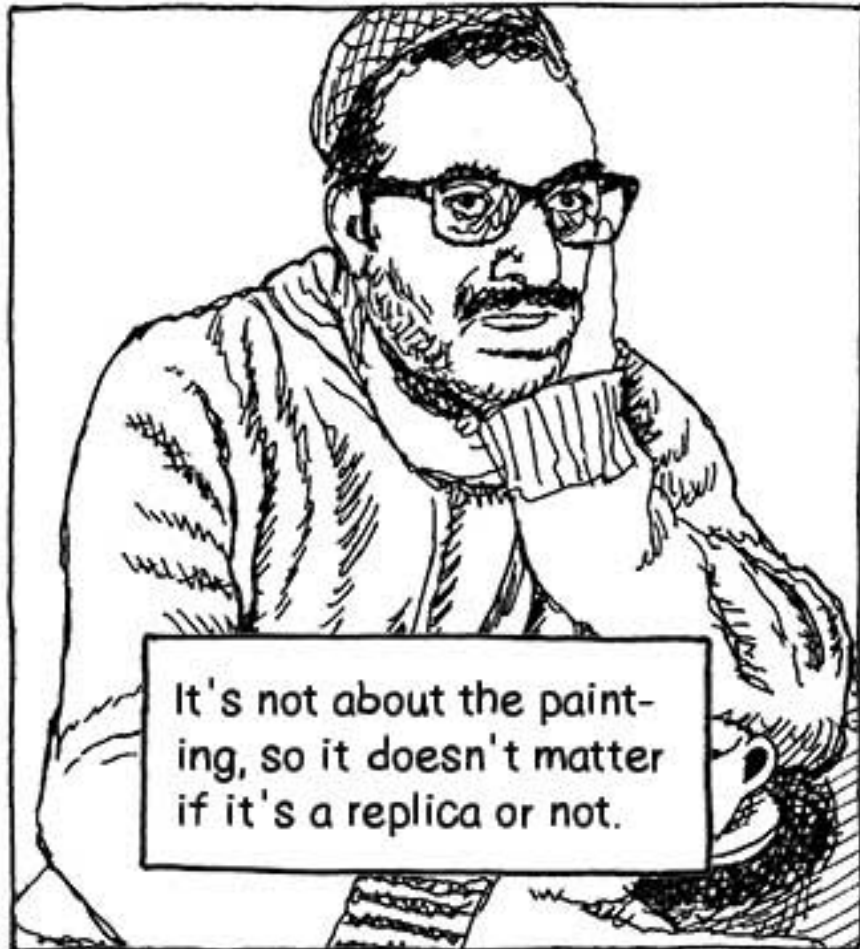




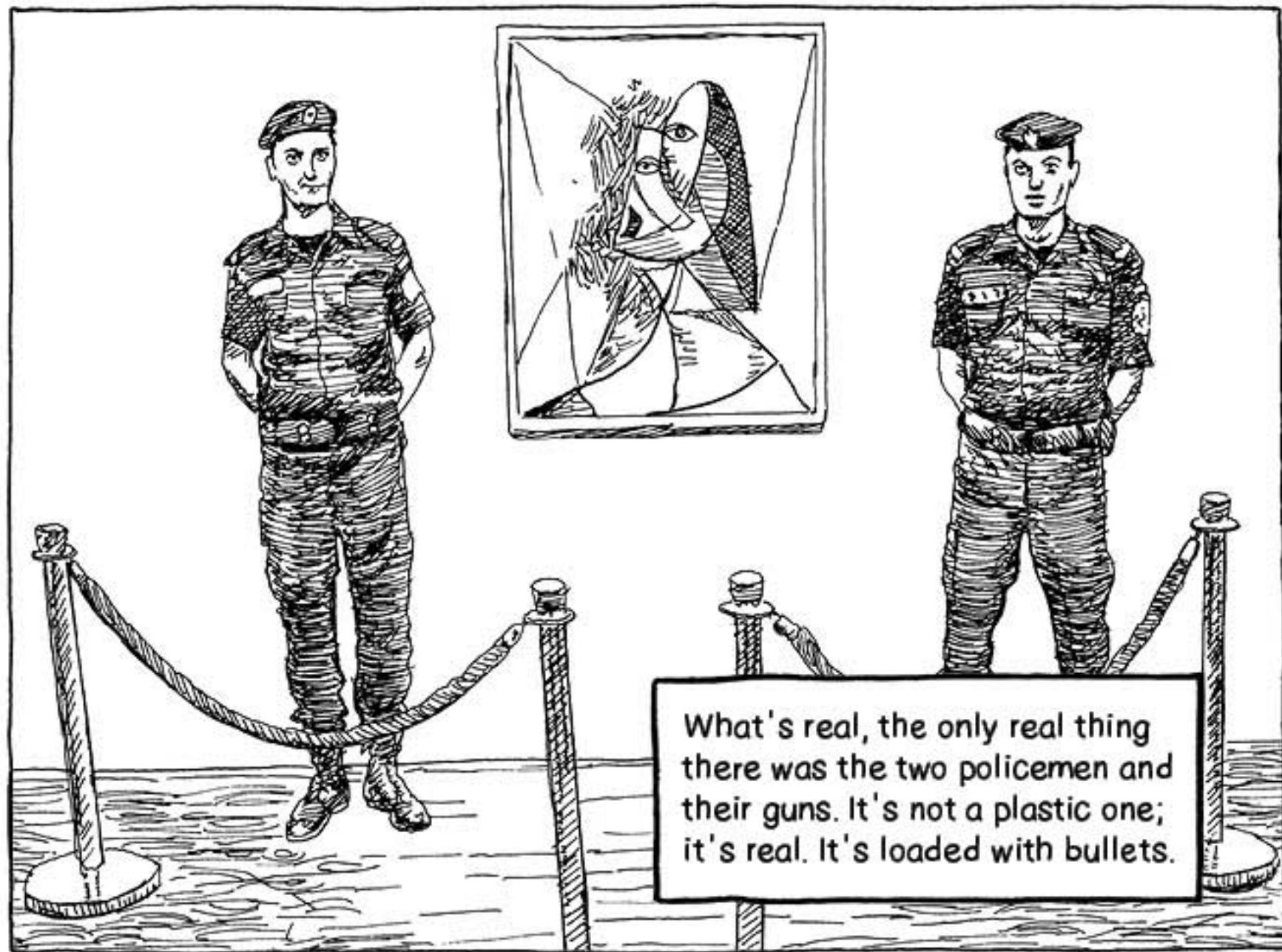
It's a theater.



They make me believe that it's the original one. But again, it's not about this work. It doesn't matter.



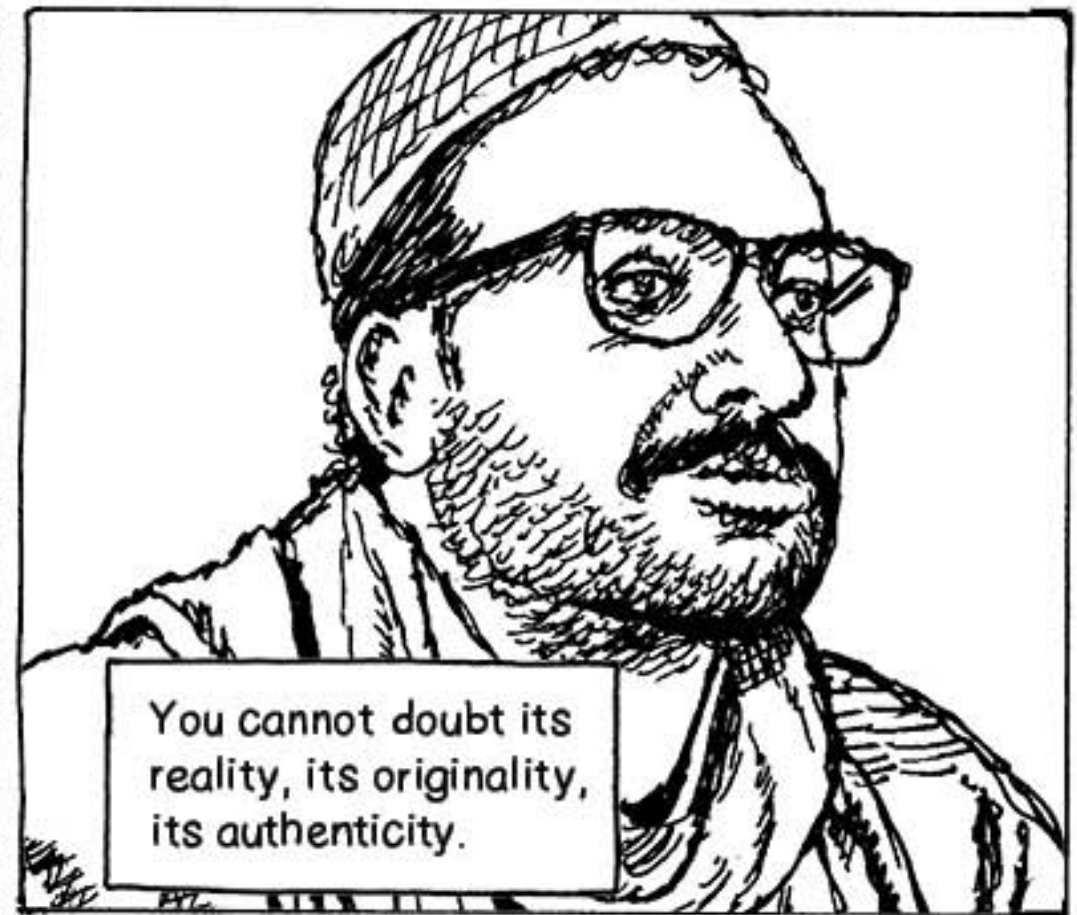
It's not about the painting, so it doesn't matter if it's a replica or not.



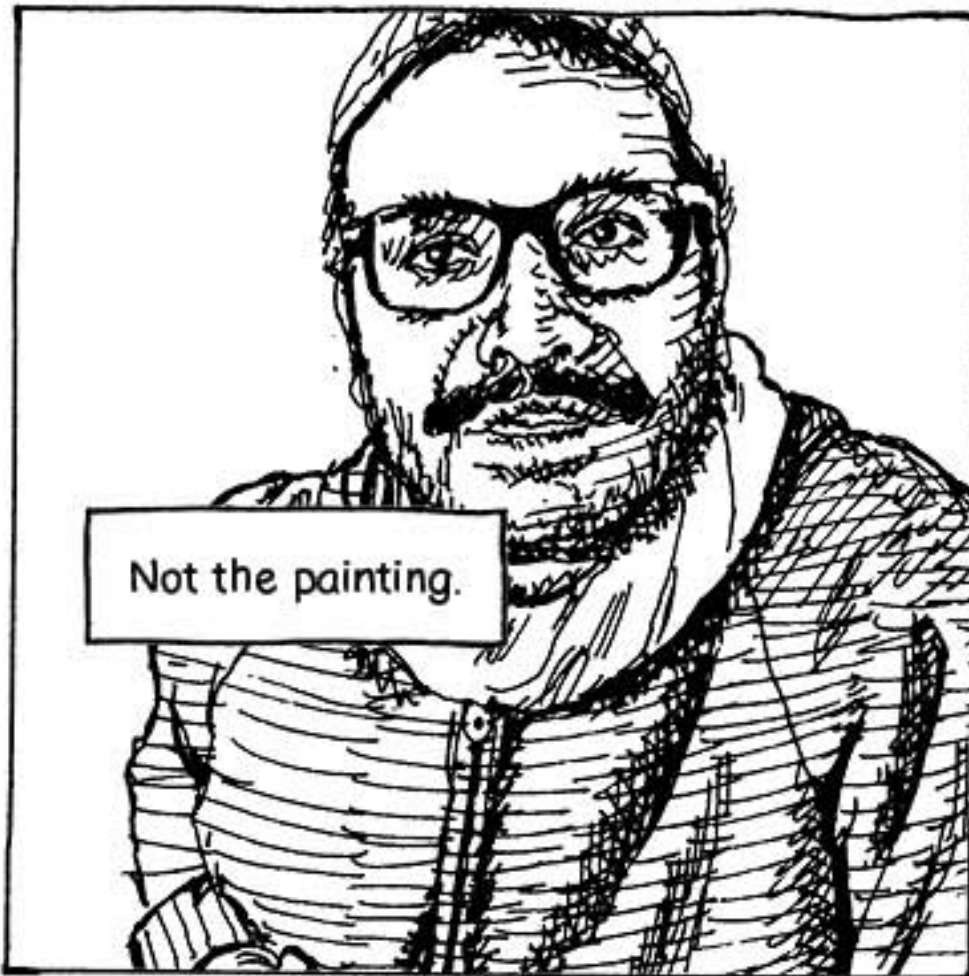
What's real, the only real thing there was the two policemen and their guns. It's not a plastic one; it's real. It's loaded with bullets.



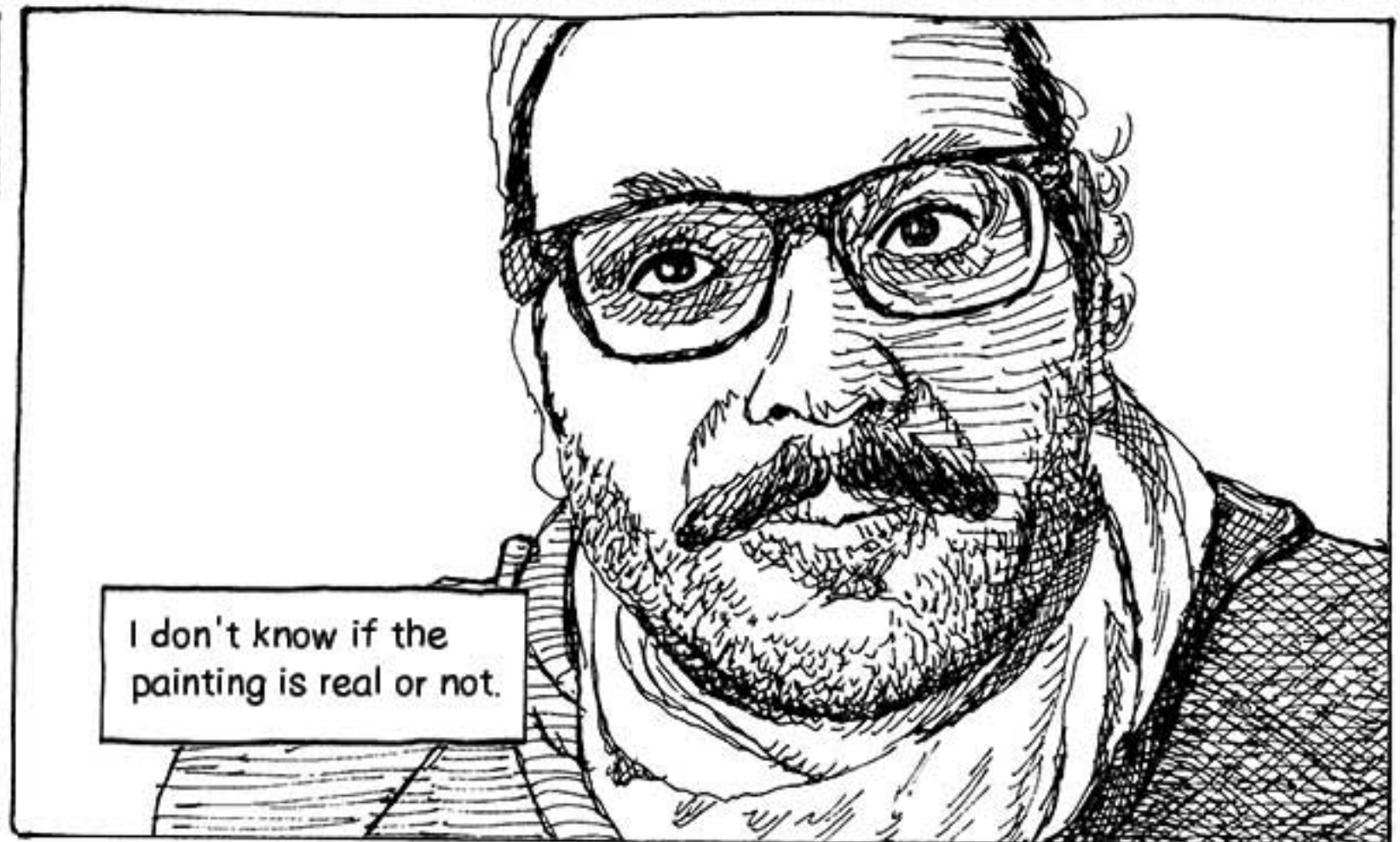
And that's the most
real thing in this.



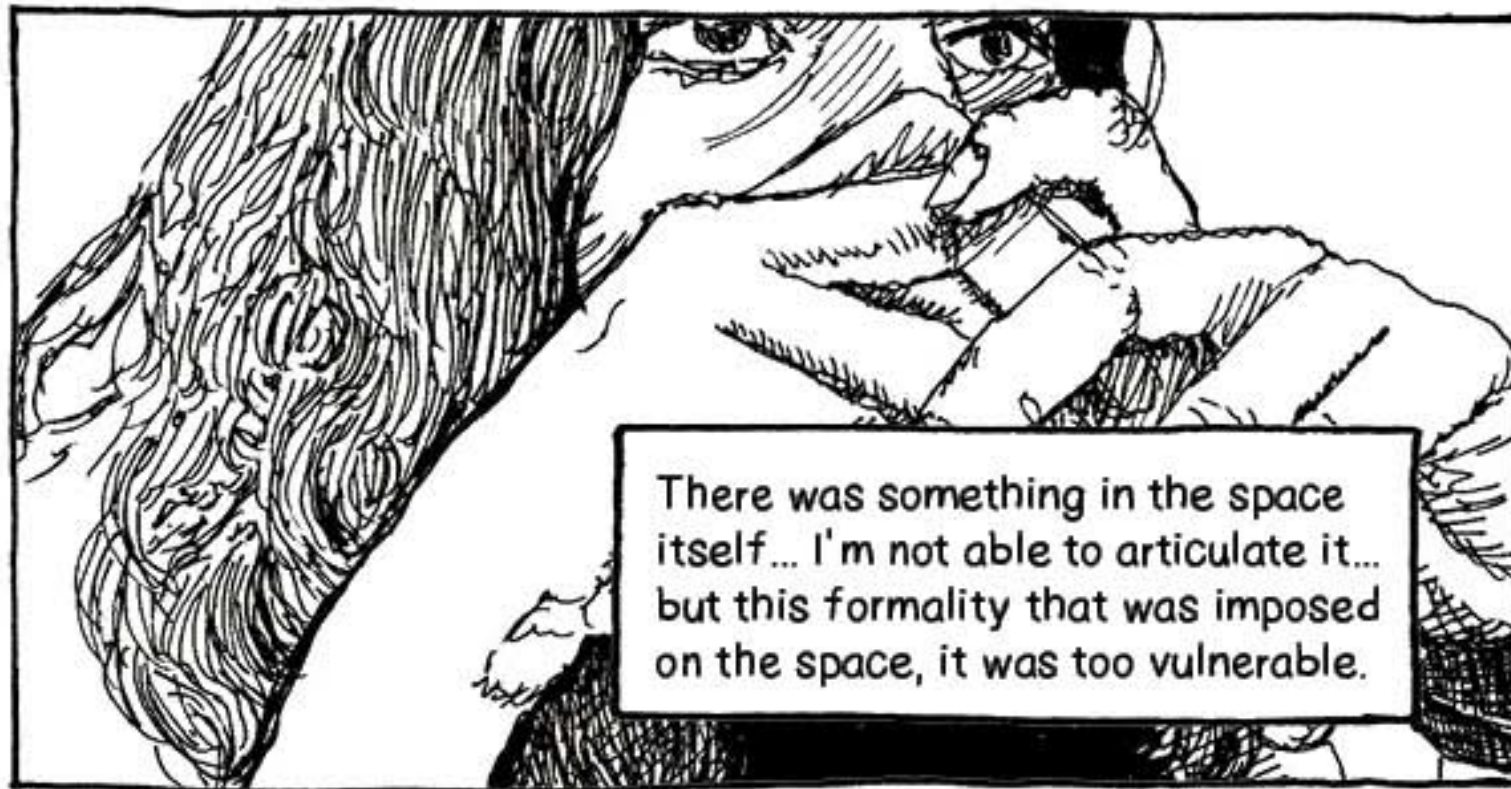
You cannot doubt its
reality, its originality,
its authenticity.



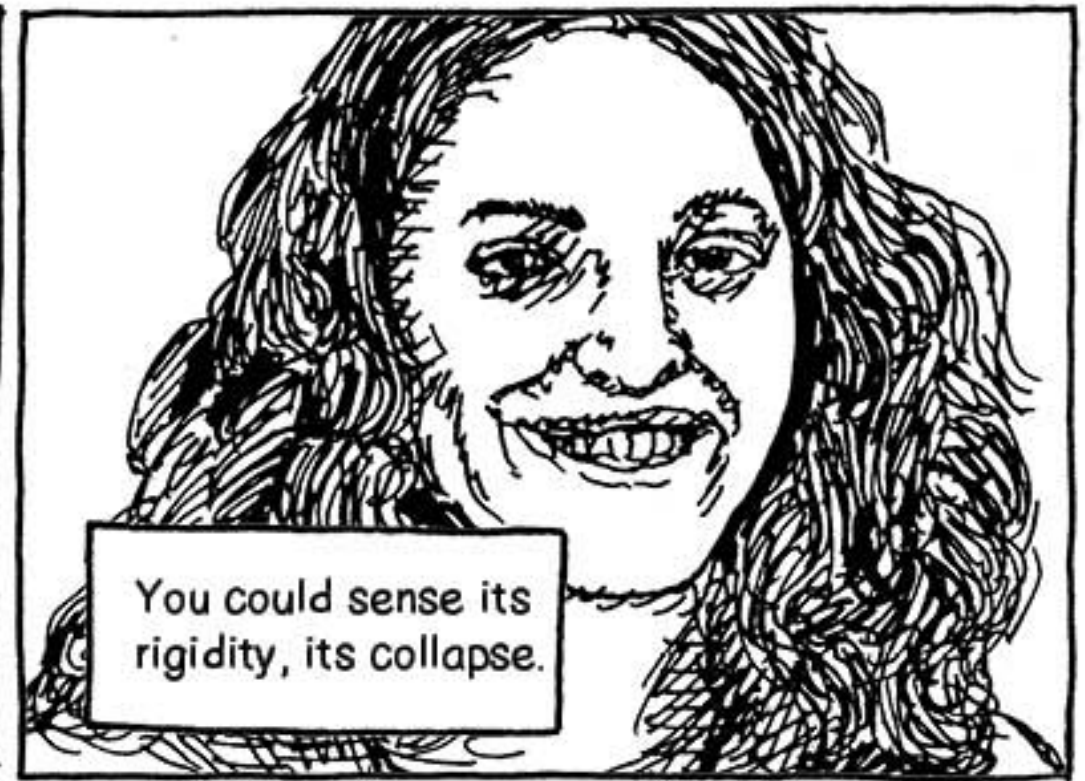
Not the painting.



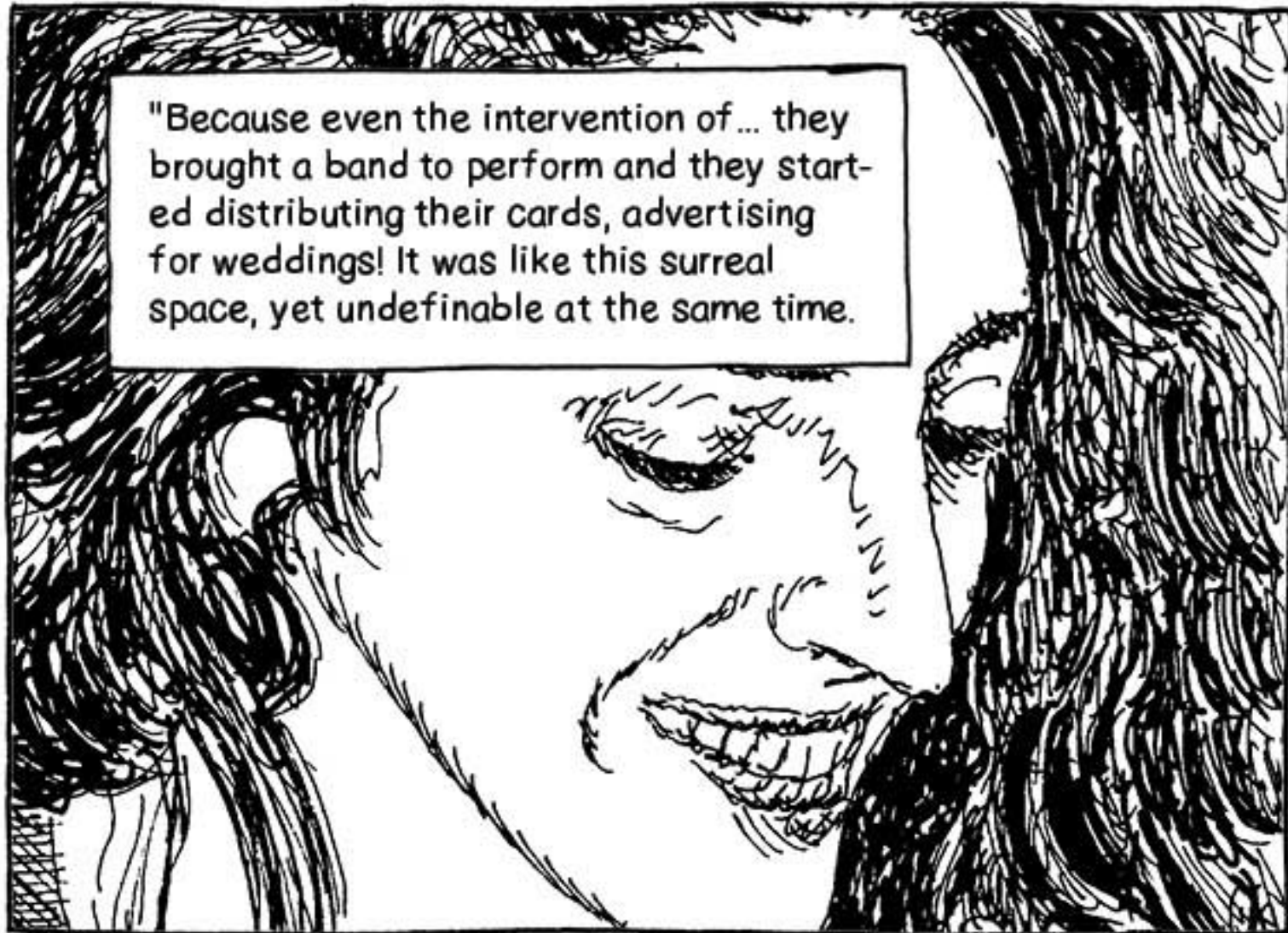
I don't know if the
painting is real or not.



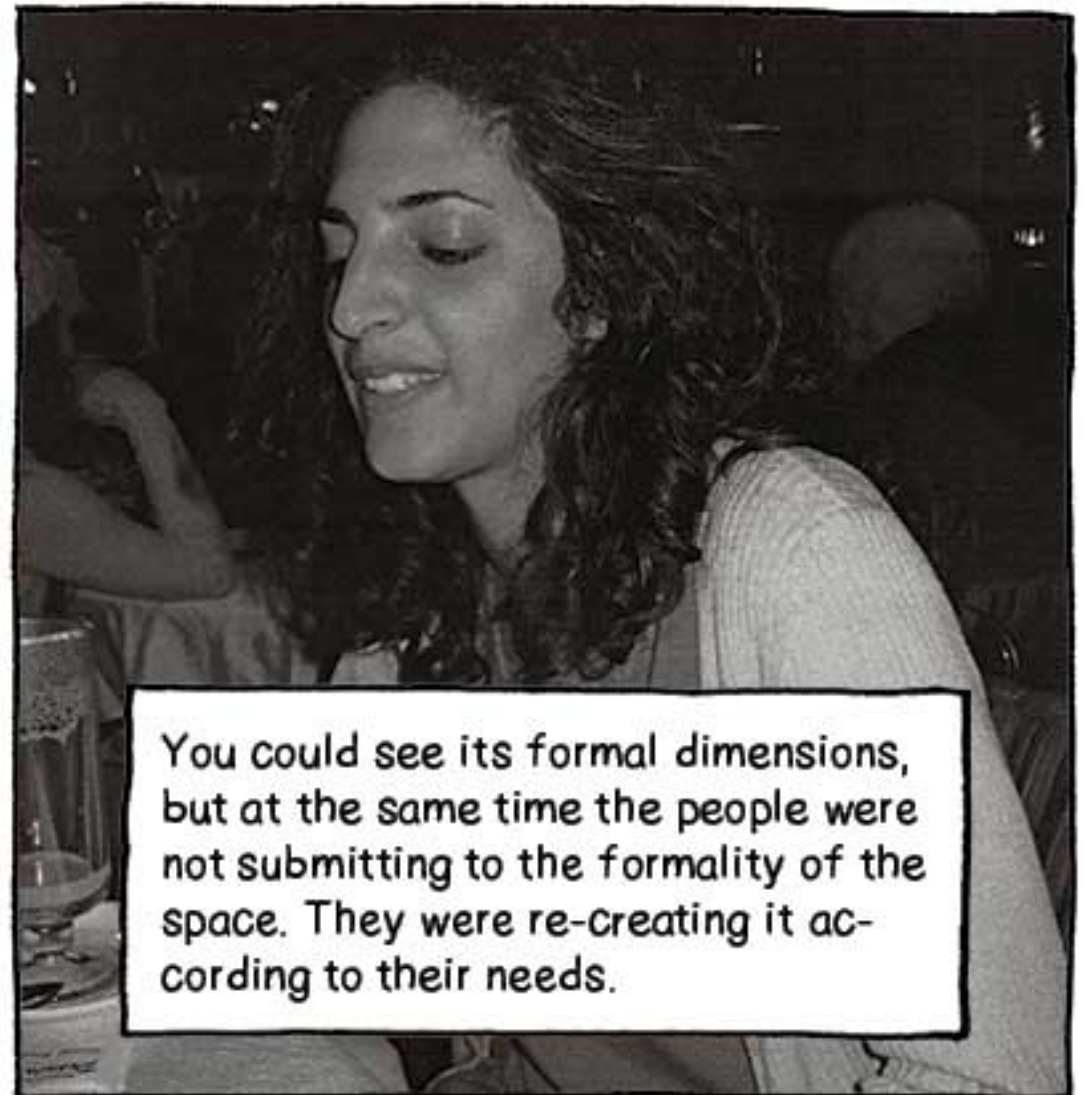
There was something in the space itself... I'm not able to articulate it... but this formality that was imposed on the space, it was too vulnerable.



You could sense its rigidity, its collapse.



"Because even the intervention of... they brought a band to perform and they started distributing their cards, advertising for weddings! It was like this surreal space, yet undefinable at the same time.

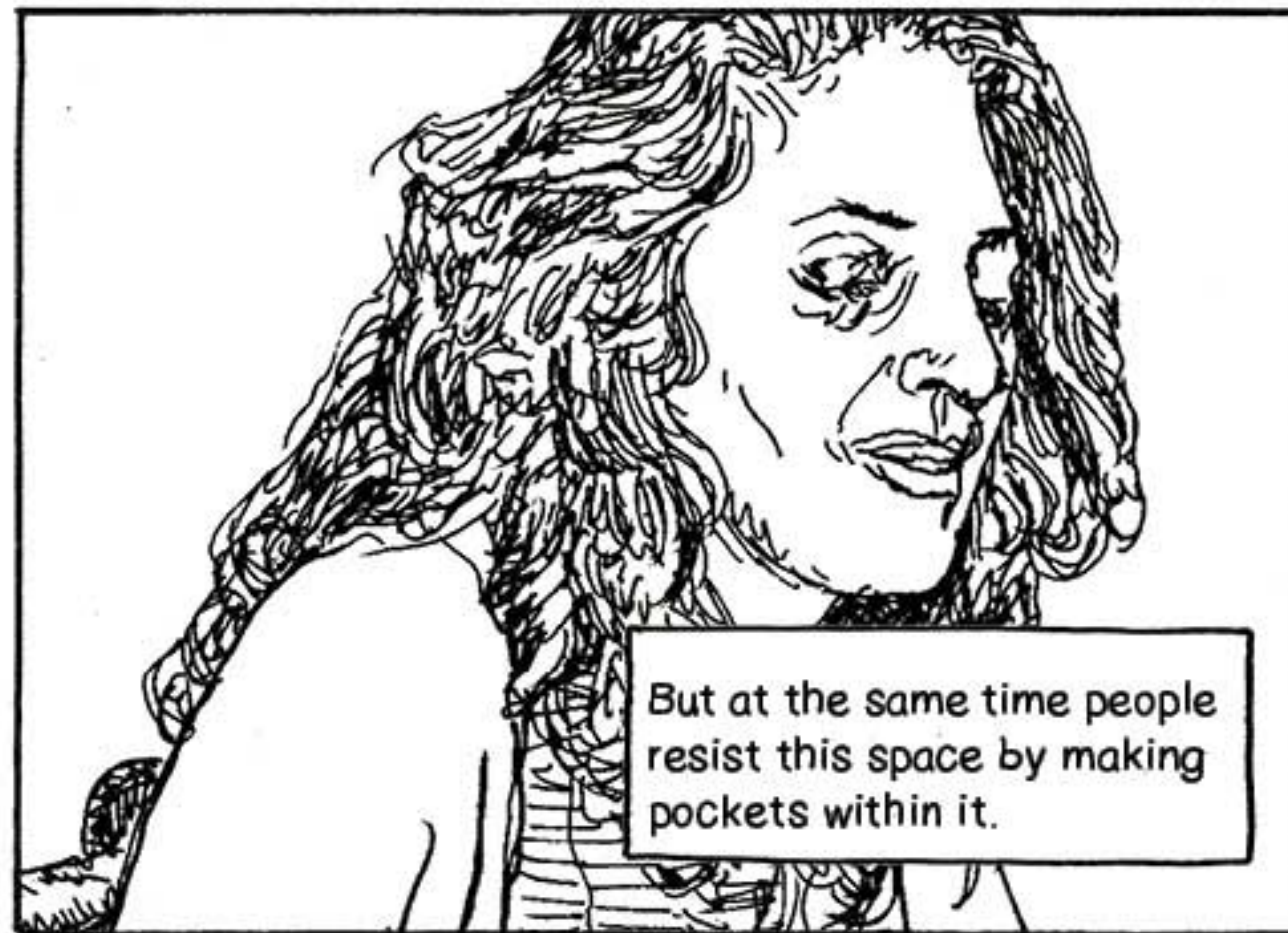


You could see its formal dimensions, but at the same time the people were not submitting to the formality of the space. They were re-creating it according to their needs.

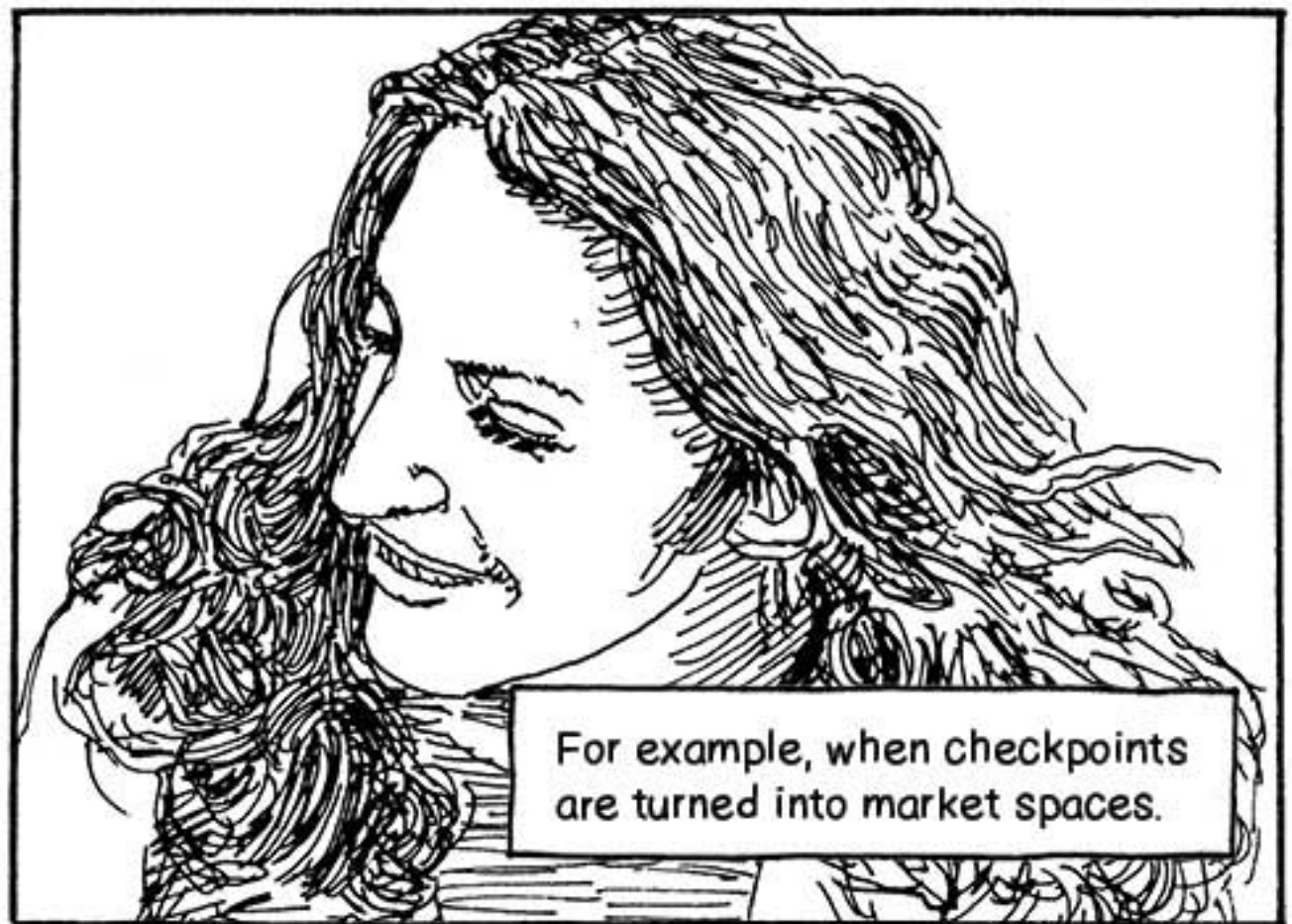


In Palestine there is a kind of space that has a very colonial, authoritative dimension.

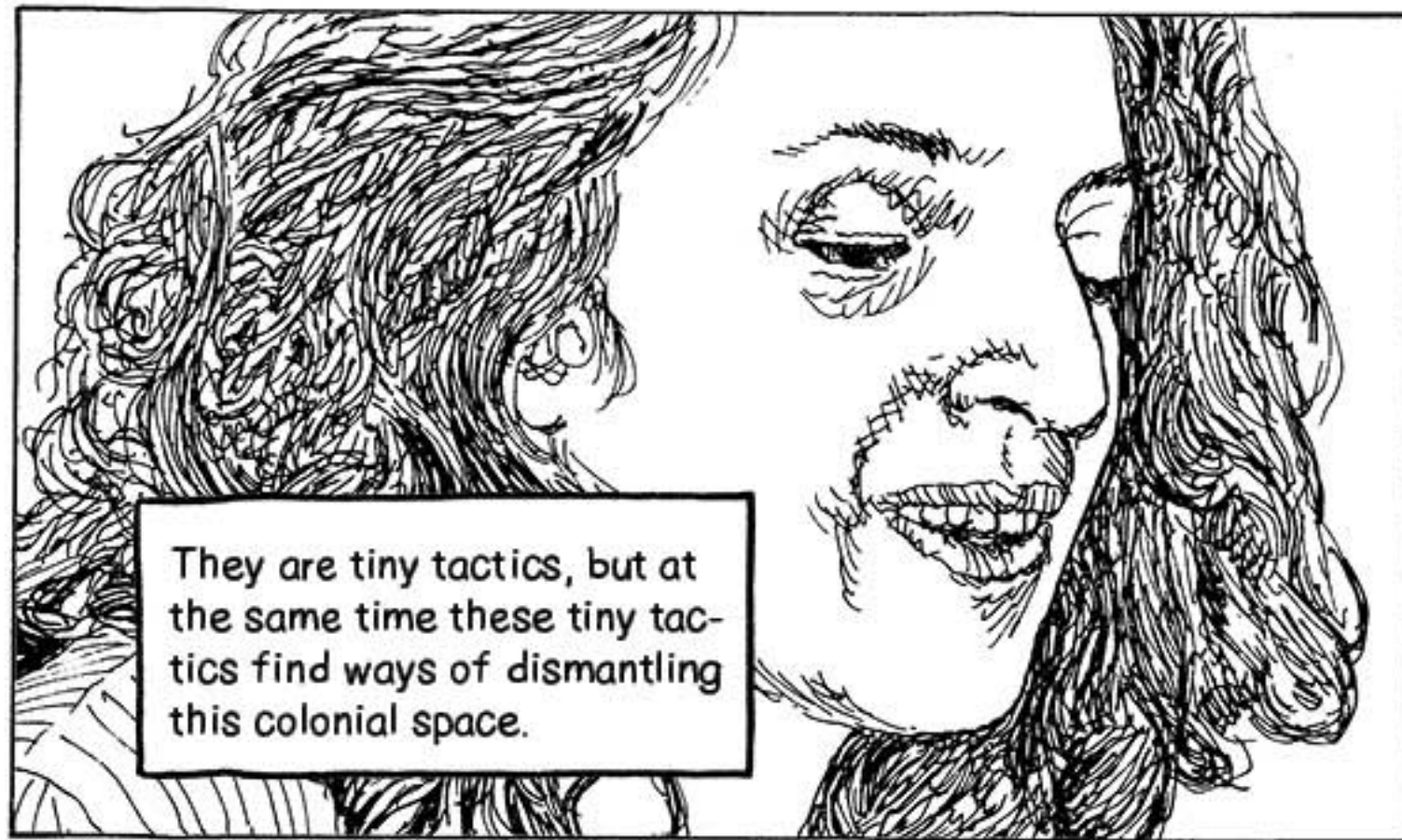
Very controlling towards people.



But at the same time people resist this space by making pockets within it.



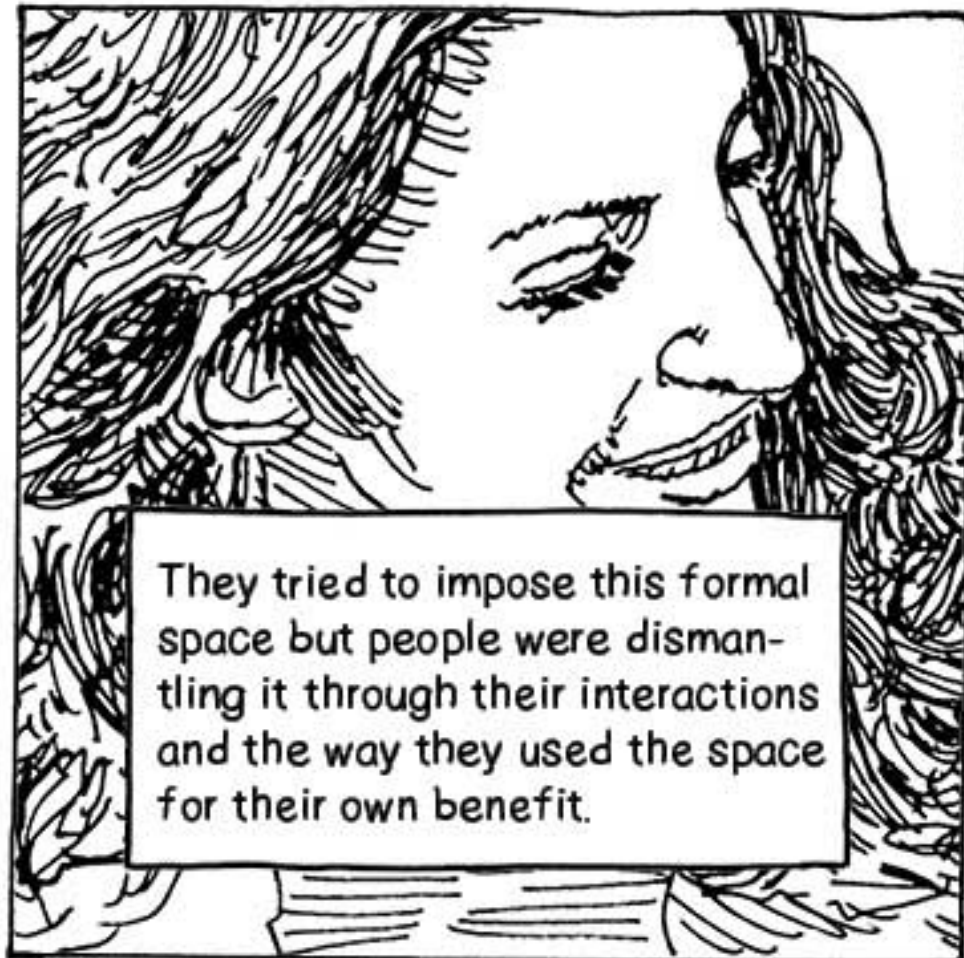
For example, when checkpoints are turned into market spaces.



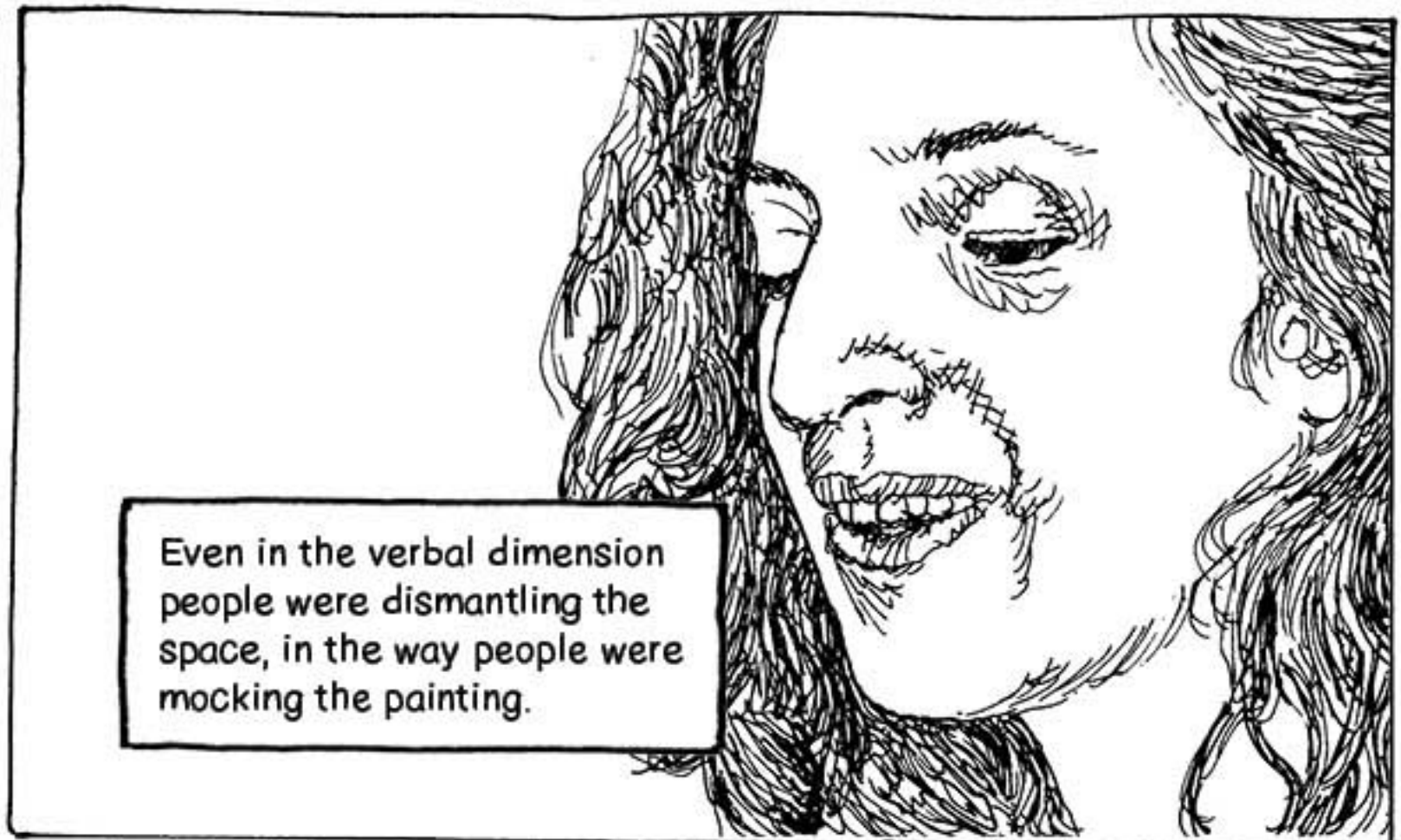
They are tiny tactics, but at the same time these tiny tactics find ways of dismantling this colonial space.



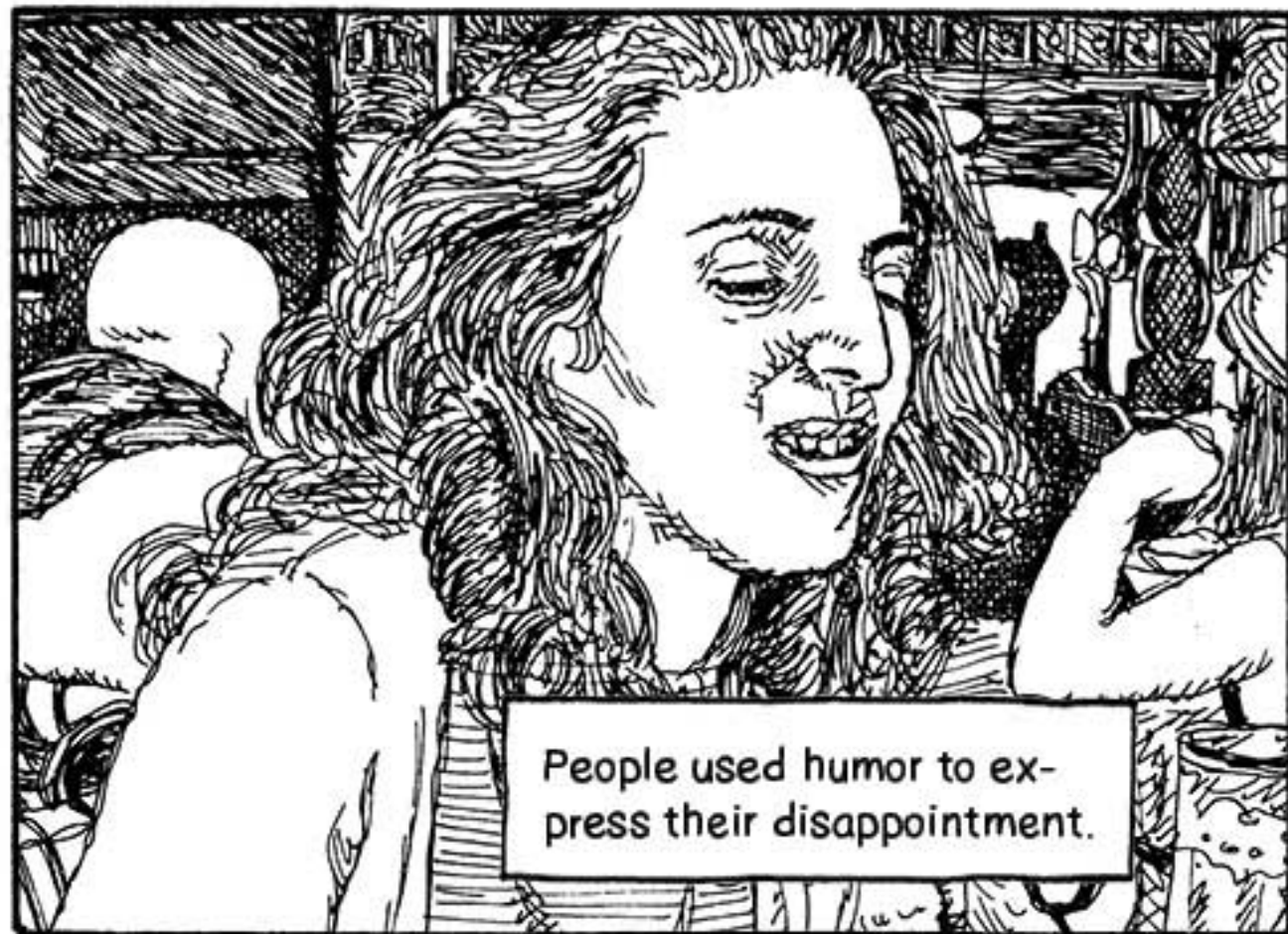
And this applies to Picasso, too.



They tried to impose this formal space but people were dismantling it through their interactions and the way they used the space for their own benefit.



Even in the verbal dimension people were dismantling the space, in the way people were mocking the painting.



People used humor to express their disappointment.



You could feel how sarcastic everyone was, making jokes about everything that was going on.



There was an extreme, intensive state of humor.



What does an artist hope to accomplish in such a situation? Can we measure the effects of such a collision, as if on a seismograph? Record its efficacy? Do we want to ascribe any objective for art? Any teleology? Or does it exist, as Giorgio Agamben once wrote, as a temporal marker, granting “men both the ecstatic dwelling in a more original dimension and the fall into the flight of measurable time.”

The artwork marks a rhythm, states a difference from other temporal durations ... the religious calendar, the calendar of agronomy, the calendar of occupation. Time in the gallery space in Ramallah, standing before the soldiers guarding the painting: is this hermetic space apart from the space of occupation or is it a continuum? We should be forgiven for feeling despair when confronting such questions.

THE BUSTE DE FEMME
INTRUMENTALIZED





What is a reflection if not a means of making a likeness? Pardon me for a moment if I employ academic language in answering this question.

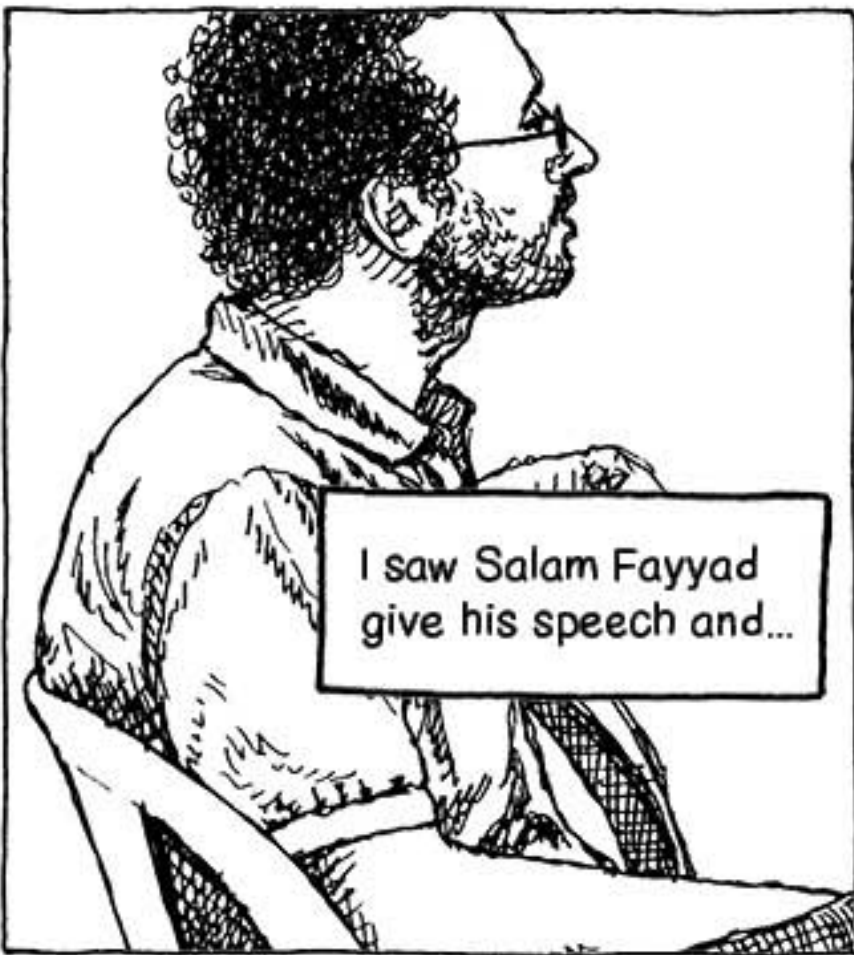
Conceptually, both museum and masterwork rest on a claim identified with prior cultural norms themselves embodying the universal. Any universal claim, however, is staged within a particular context, making it impossible to separate formal and cultural features from one another. Judith Butler has noted how the appropriation of the term “universal” by those who have been excluded from its purview commonly produces a “performative contradiction” that “is not self-cancelling, but exposes the spectral doubling of the concept itself.” The painting in its white cube became a carrier for this doubling, its particular and universal aspects oscillating uneasily between the partiality of the local and the “empty and ineradicable place” of universality itself.

Claimants to the legacy of a still-contested universality, neither Picasso nor Palestine escape the shadow of both.

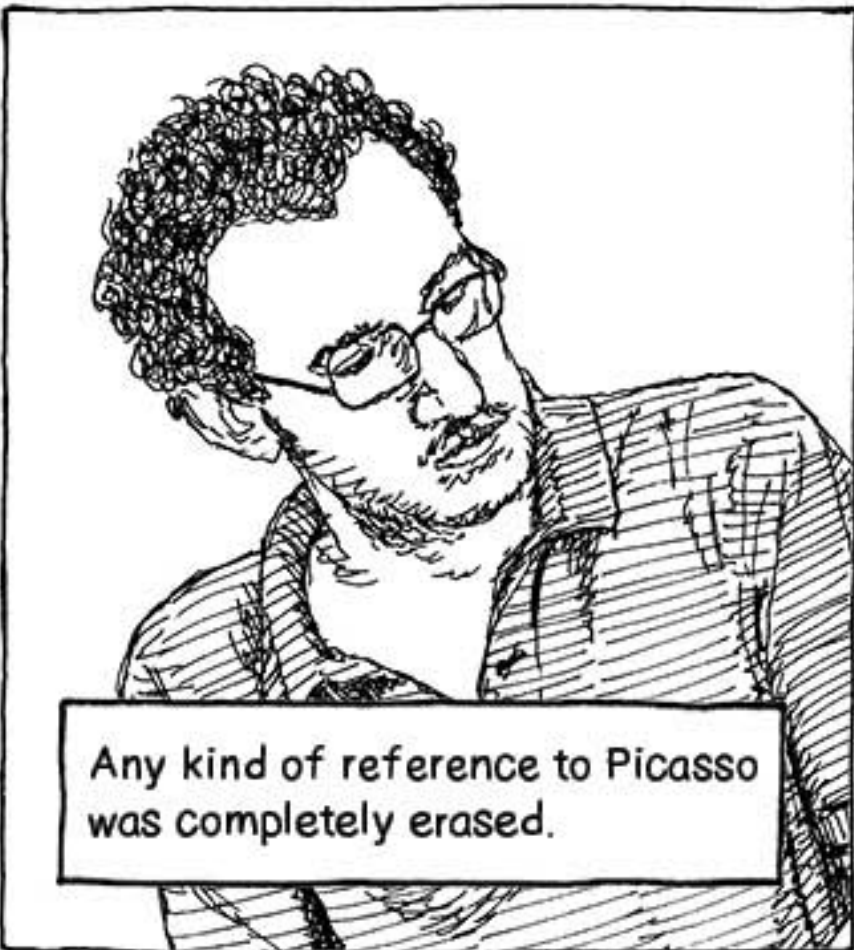


A case in point: the displeasure expressed by many over the folkloric Palestine of the fellah with its traditional music and dancing deployed at the opening celebration might have been the result of this mixing of codes, amalgamating particular universals and universal particulars. But as time went by, I came to suspect Hourani's staging of the opening was a deliberate effort to tweak the sensibilities of the more Westernized Palestinian *culturati* to make precisely this point.

But creating a structure so labile to various interpretations also opens such a structure to instrumentalizing itself.



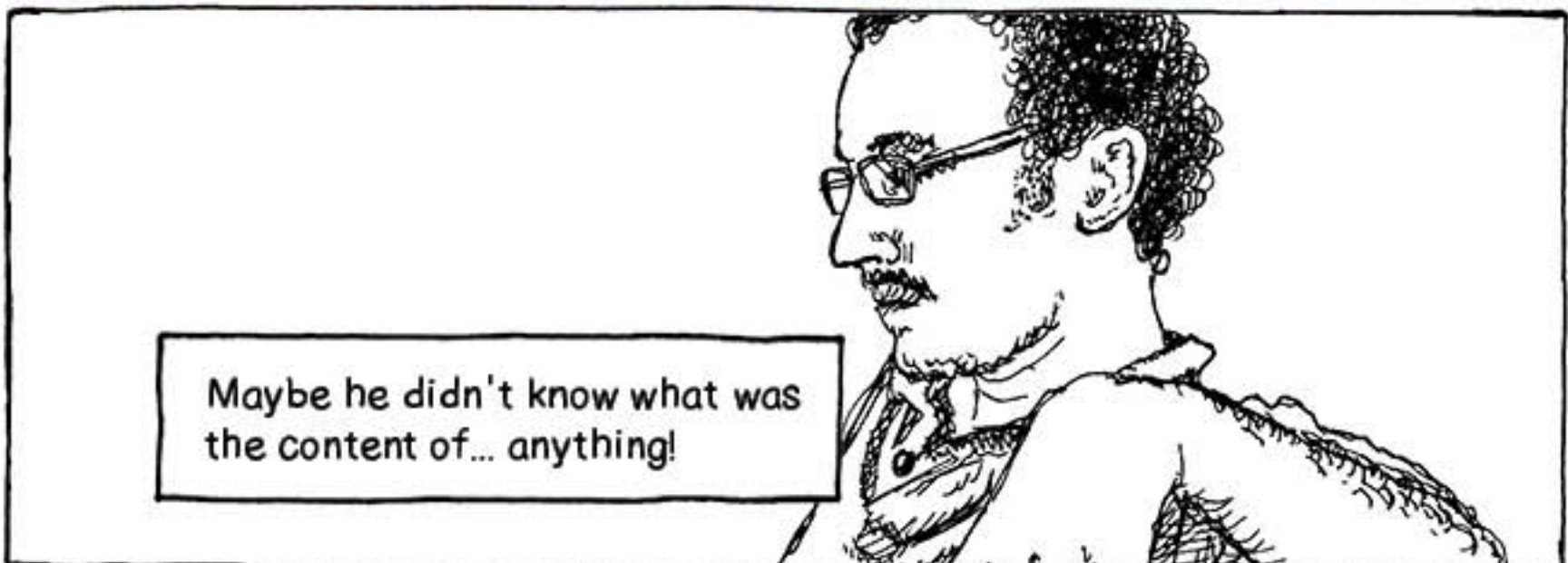
I saw Salam Fayyad give his speech and...



Any kind of reference to Picasso was completely erased.



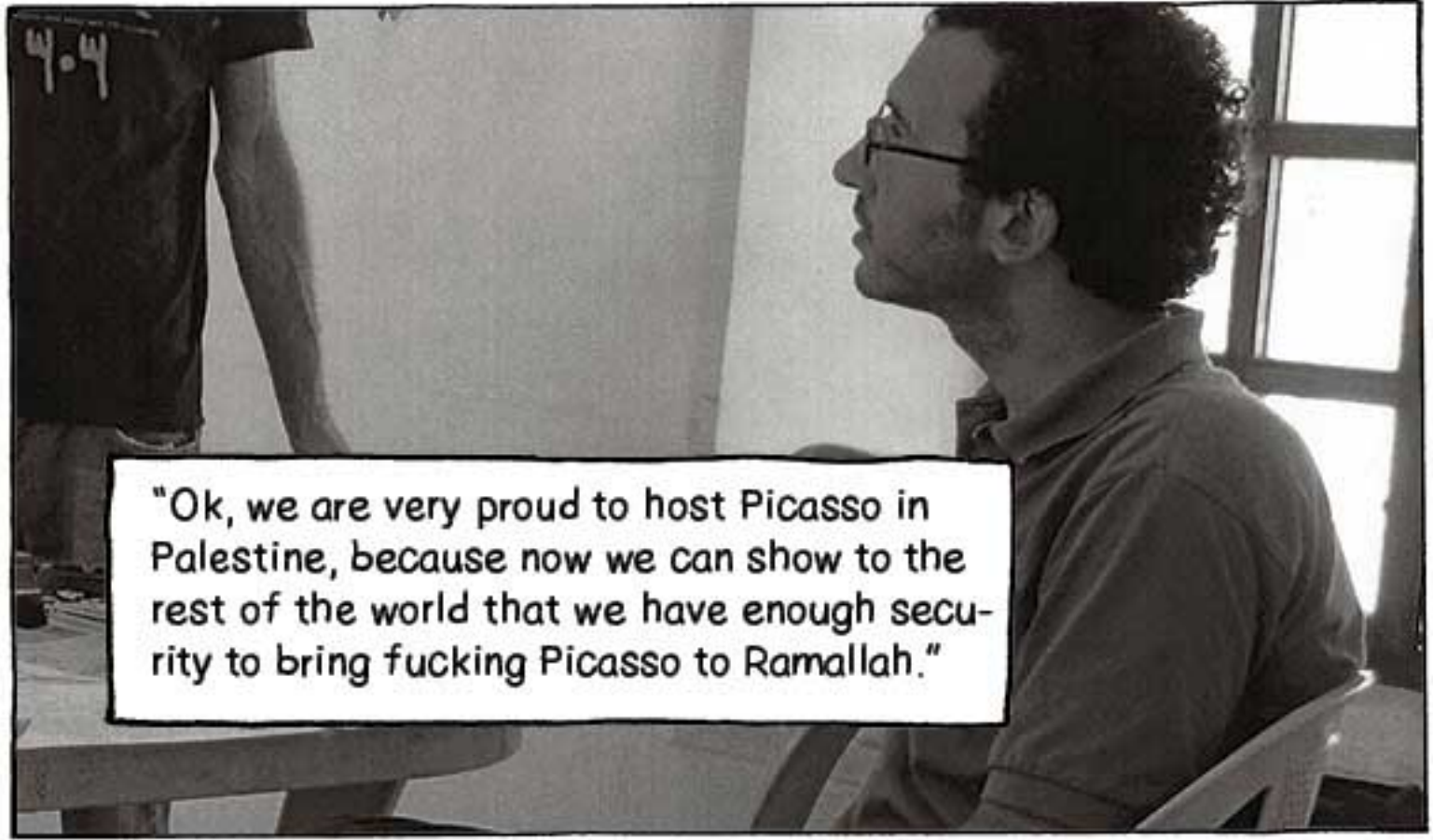
...he didn't mention anything about the cultural value of Picasso.



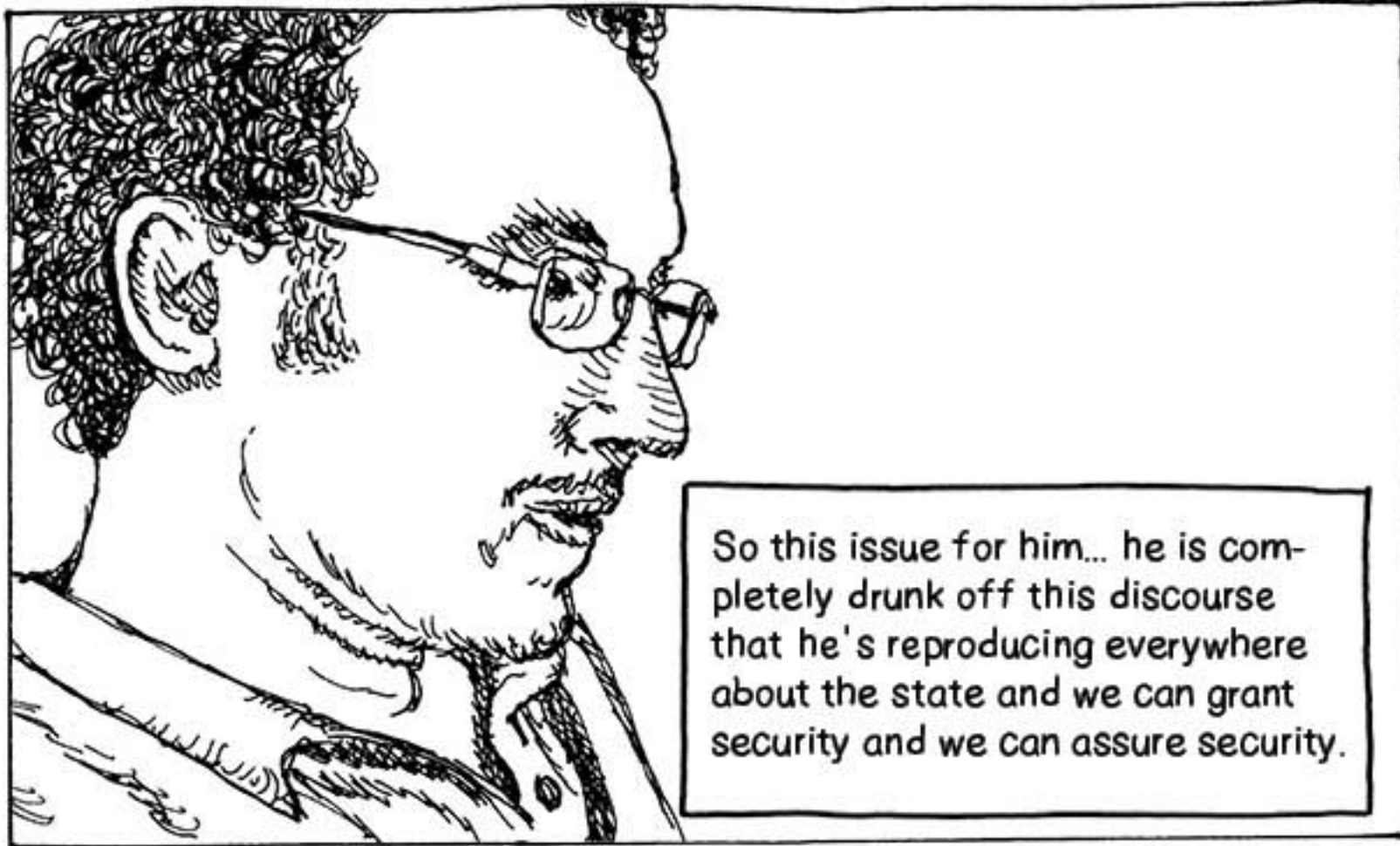
Maybe he didn't know what was the content of... anything!



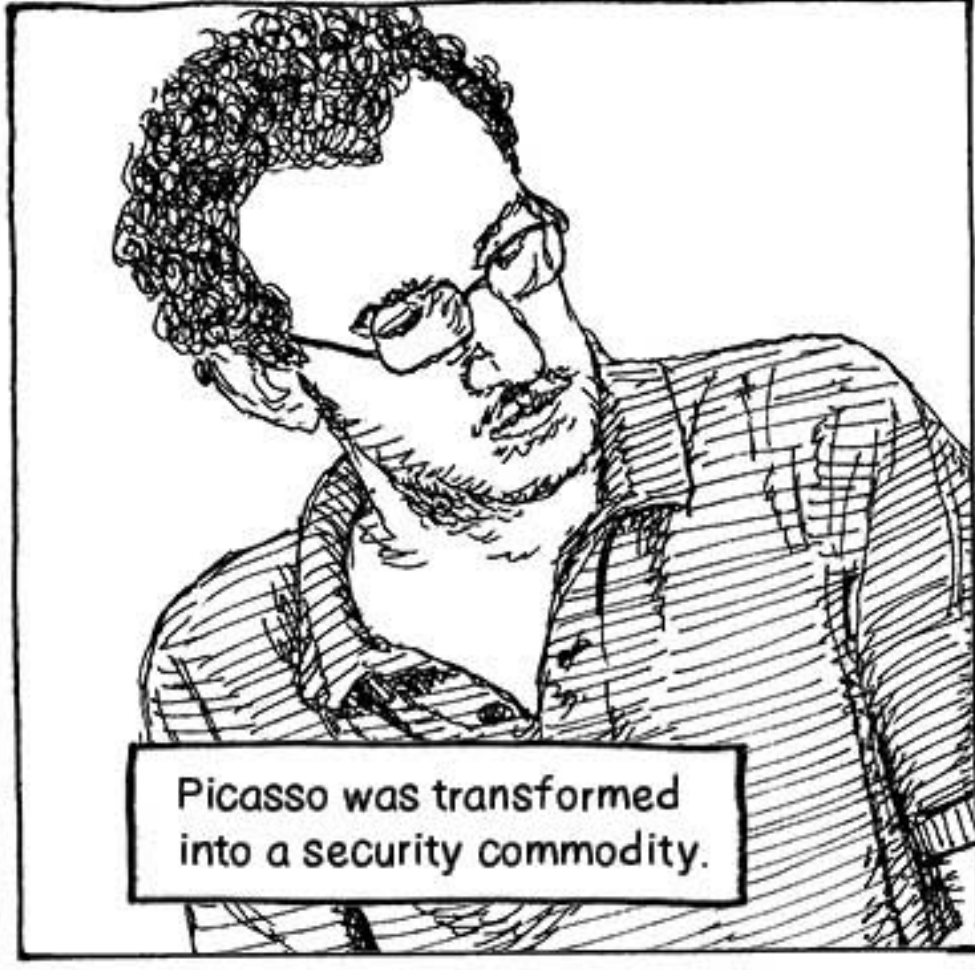
It was simply a mirror discourse about security...



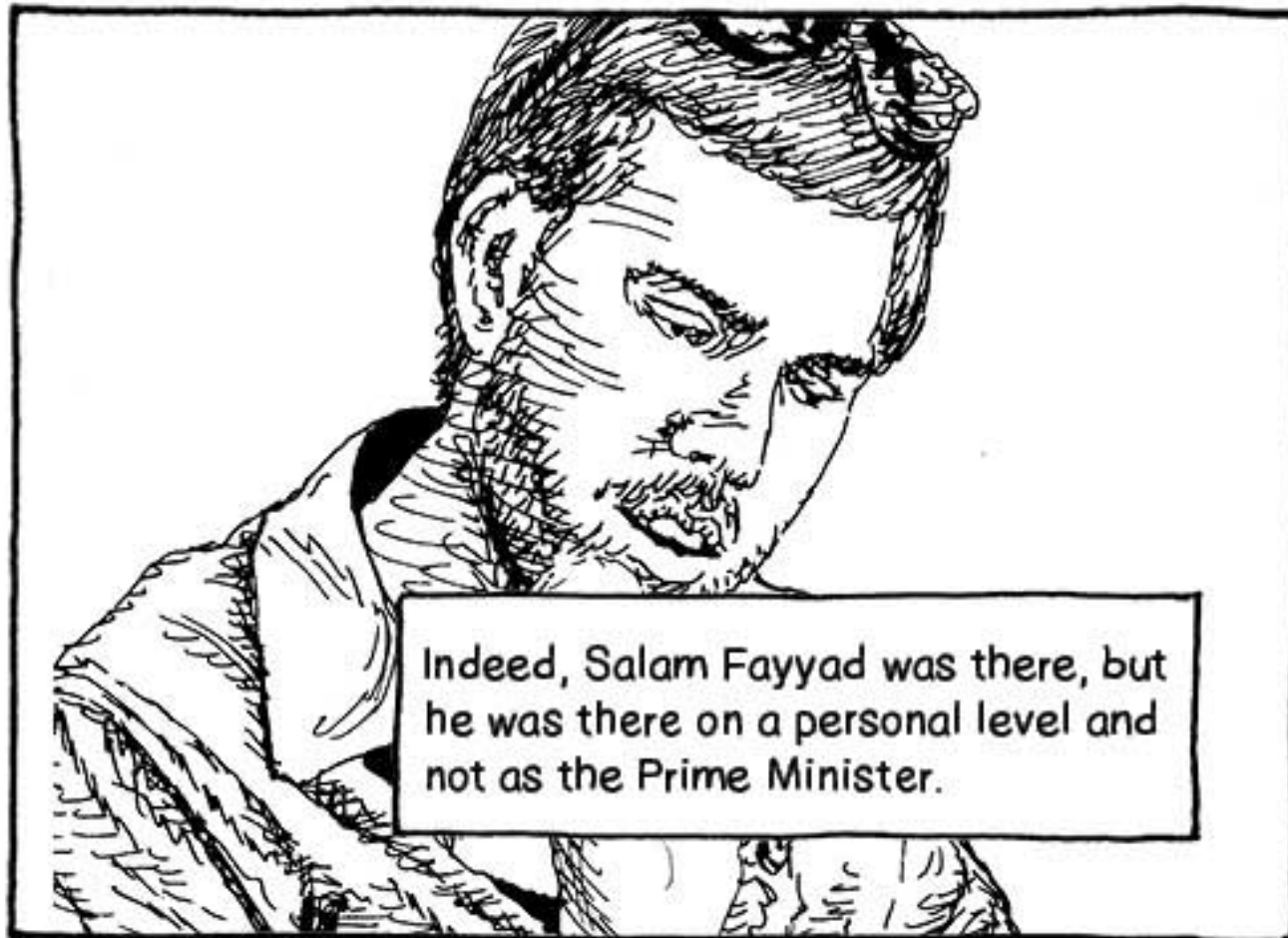
"Ok, we are very proud to host Picasso in Palestine, because now we can show to the rest of the world that we have enough security to bring fucking Picasso to Ramallah."



So this issue for him... he is completely drunk off this discourse that he's reproducing everywhere about the state and we can grant security and we can assure security.



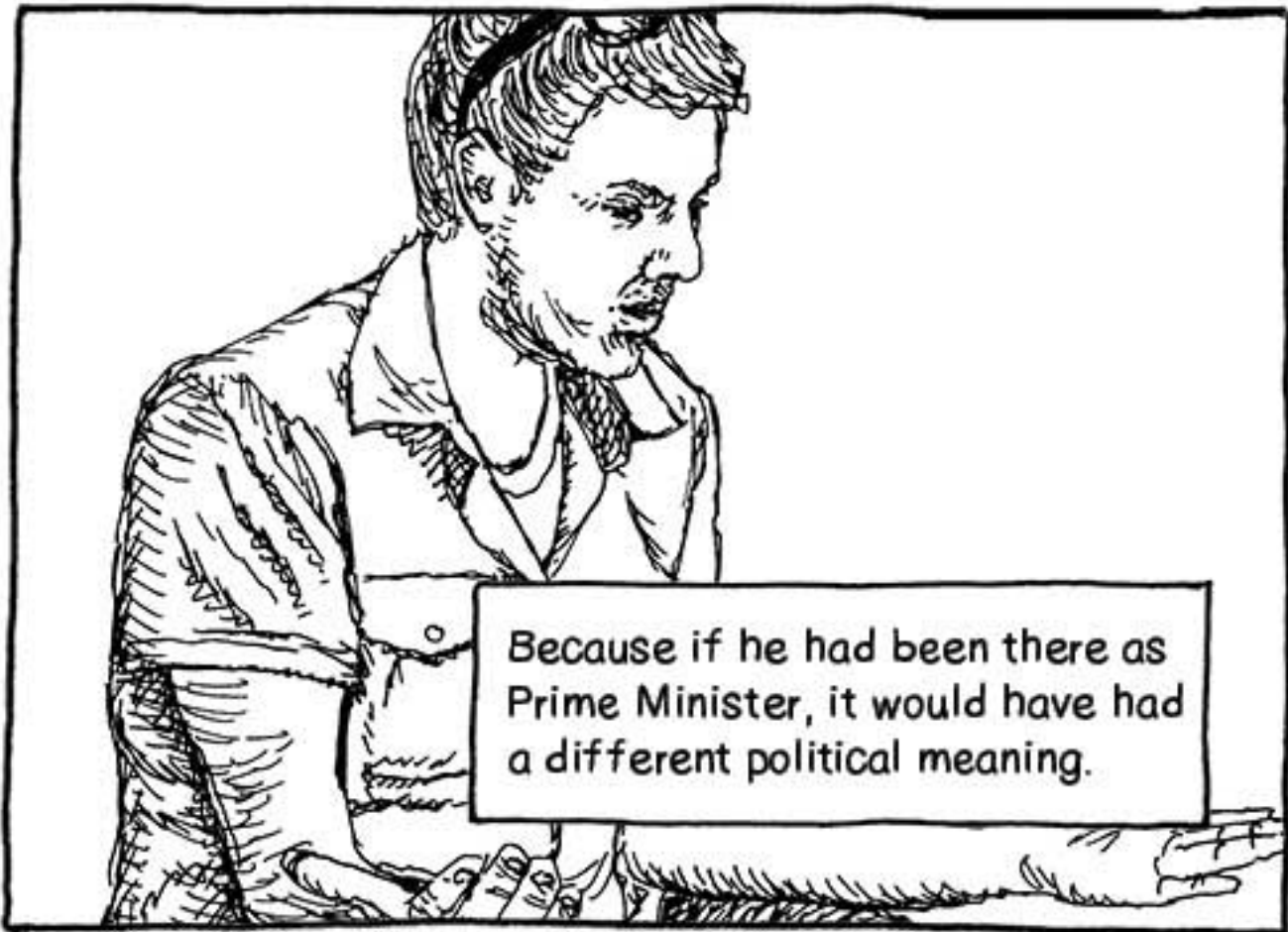
Picasso was transformed into a security commodity.



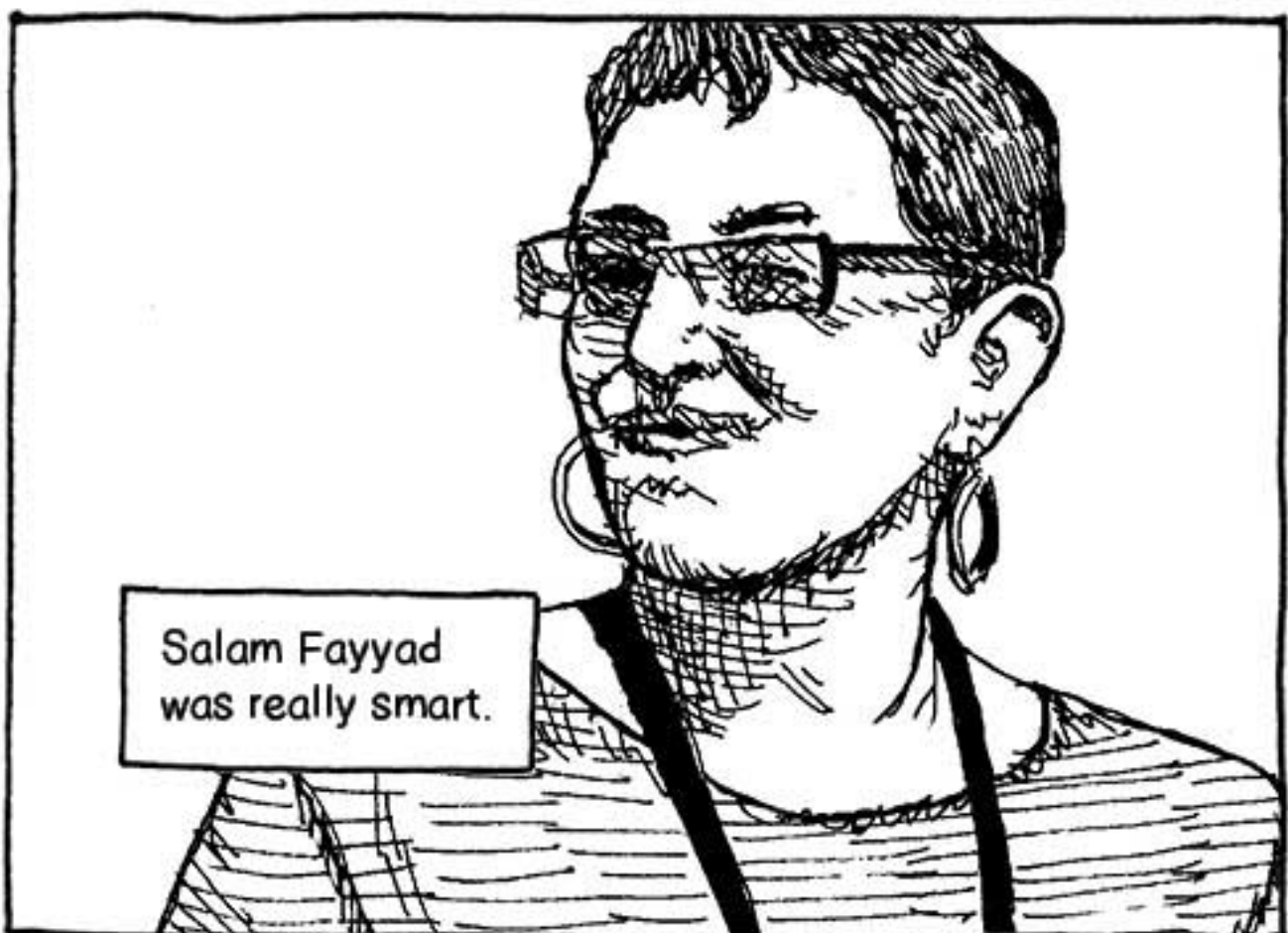
Indeed, Salam Fayyad was there, but he was there on a personal level and not as the Prime Minister.



I think this is merely a detail, but it's an important detail I would say.



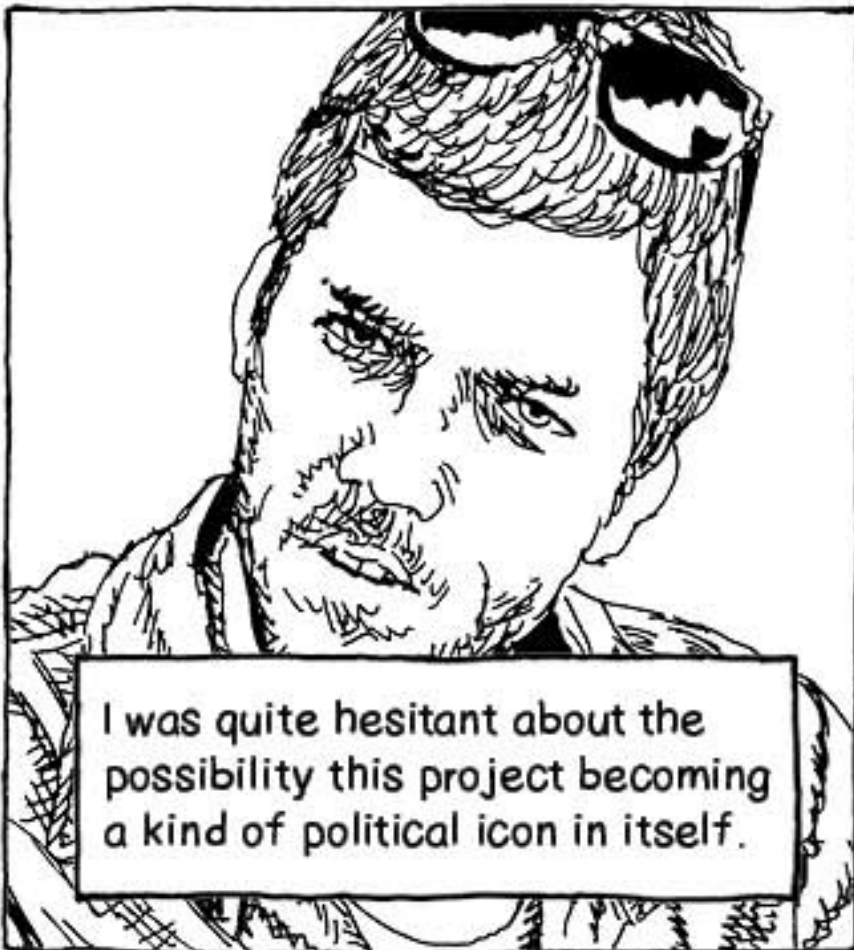
Because if he had been there as Prime Minister, it would have had a different political meaning.



Salam Fayyad was really smart.



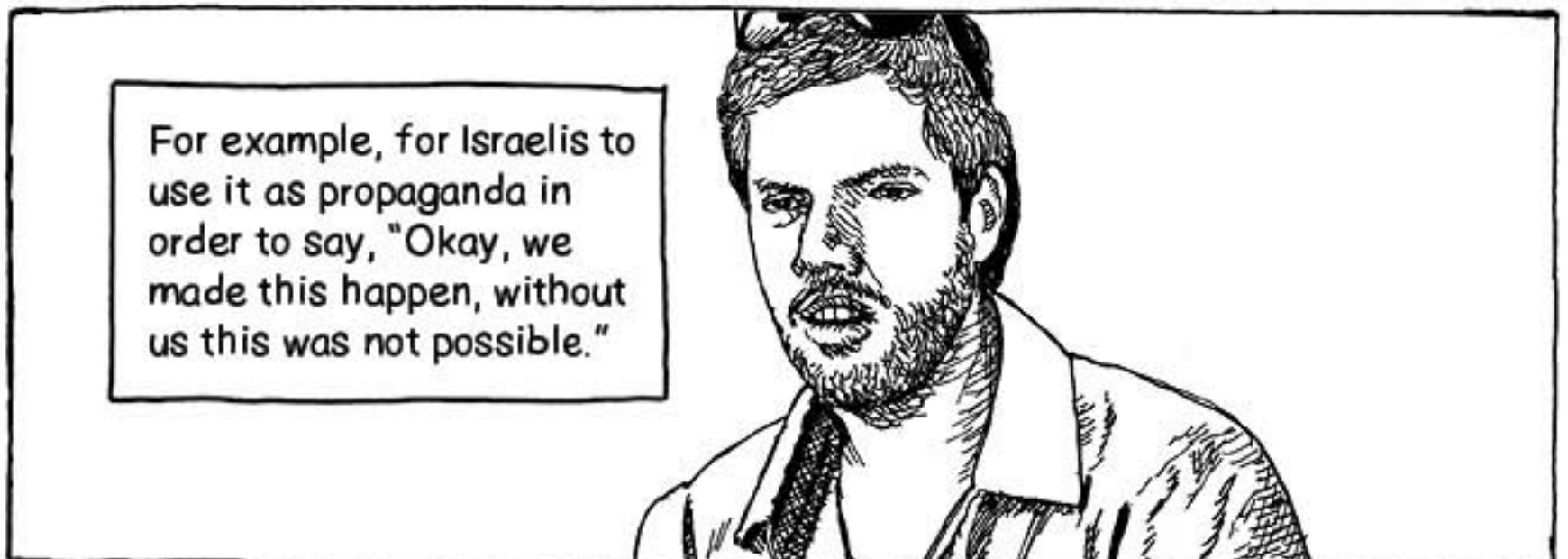
At the end of his speech, he said something.



I was quite hesitant about the possibility this project becoming a kind of political icon in itself.



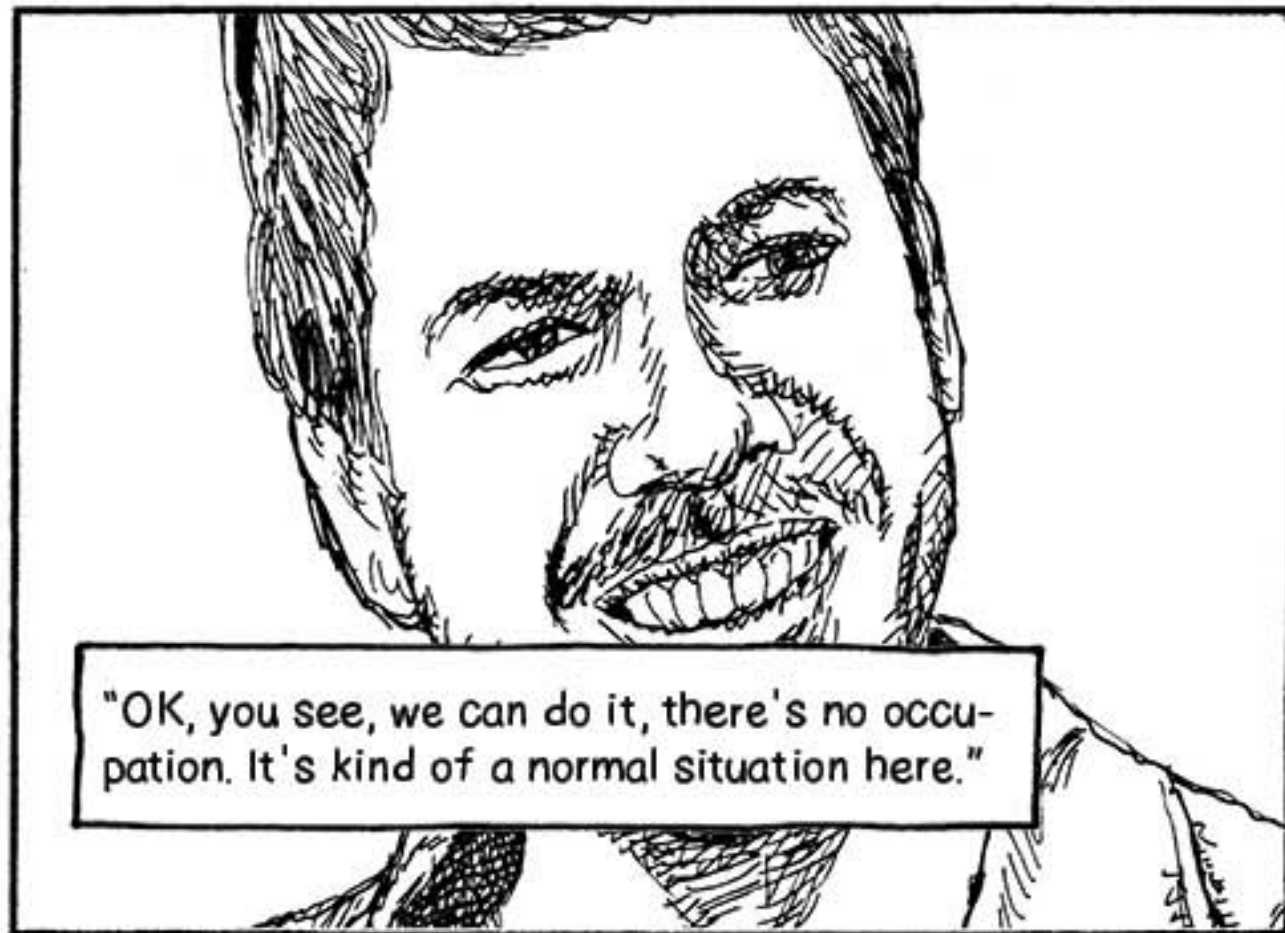
He said: "I have nothing to do with this music and this folkloric dance. I have come here to celebrate the wedding of Charles Esche and Khaled Hourani."



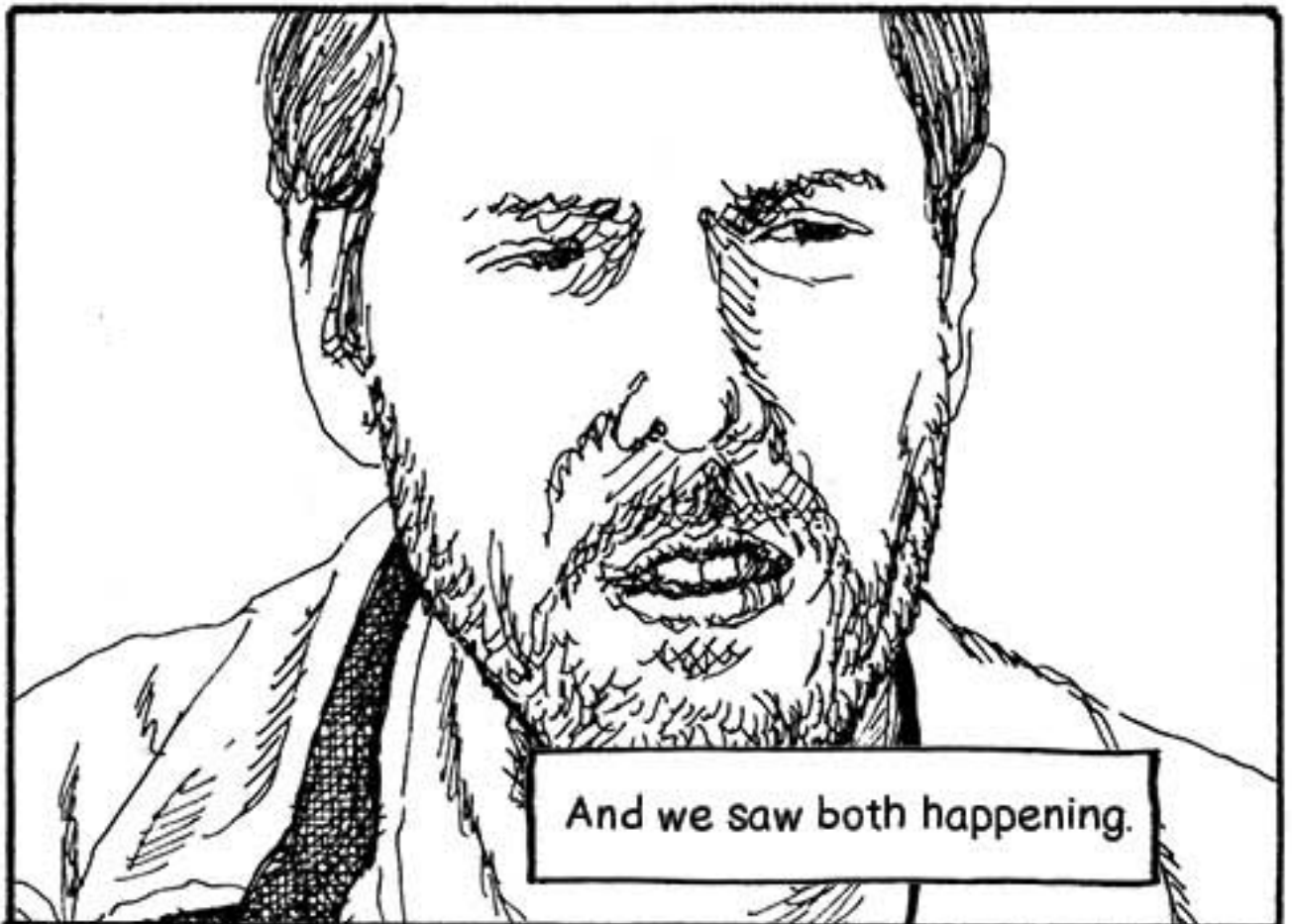
For example, for Israelis to use it as propaganda in order to say, "Okay, we made this happen, without us this was not possible."



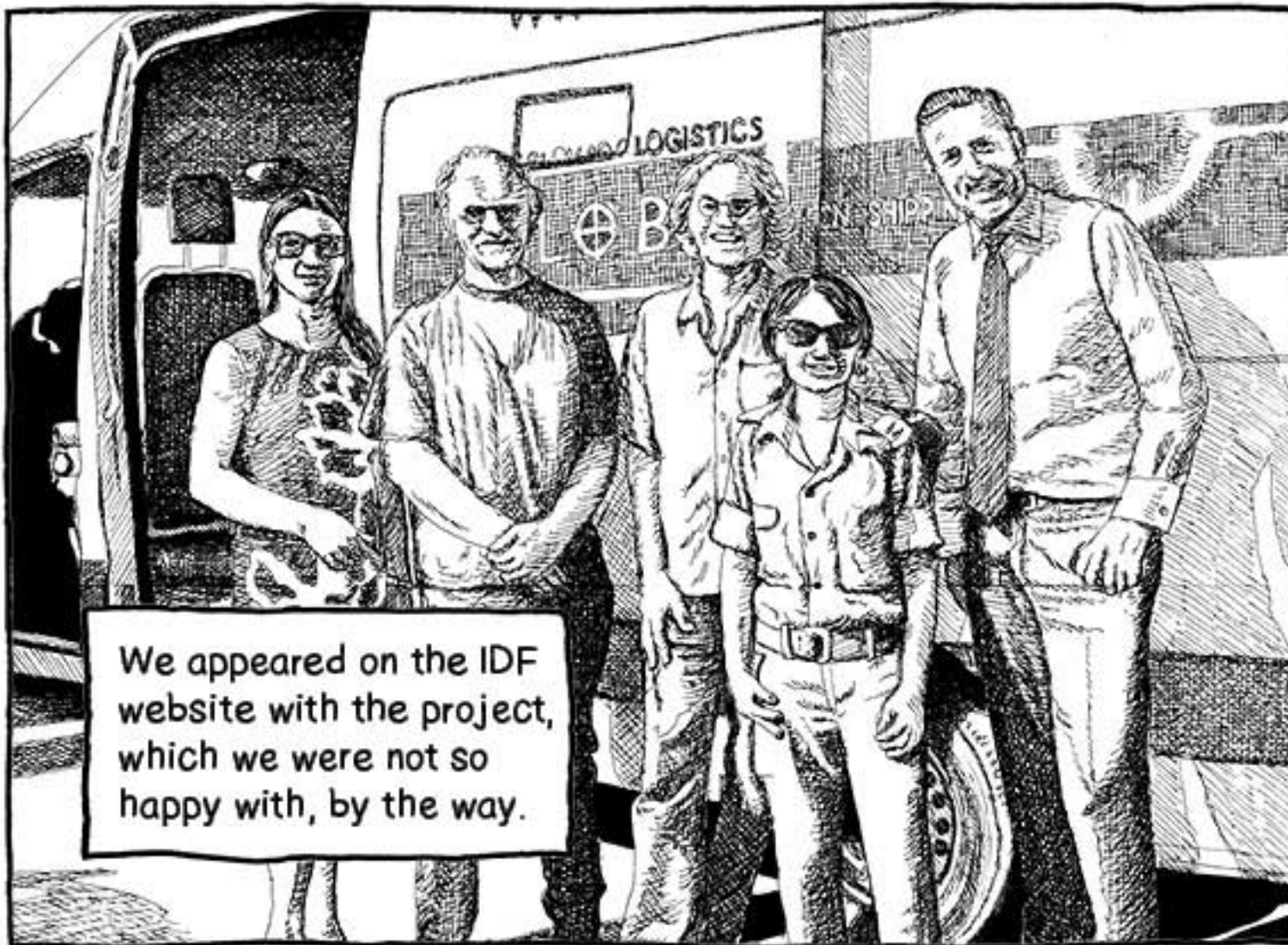
On the other hand, we didn't want to have a Palestinian entity grabbing the opportunity to say...



"OK, you see, we can do it, there's no occupation. It's kind of a normal situation here."



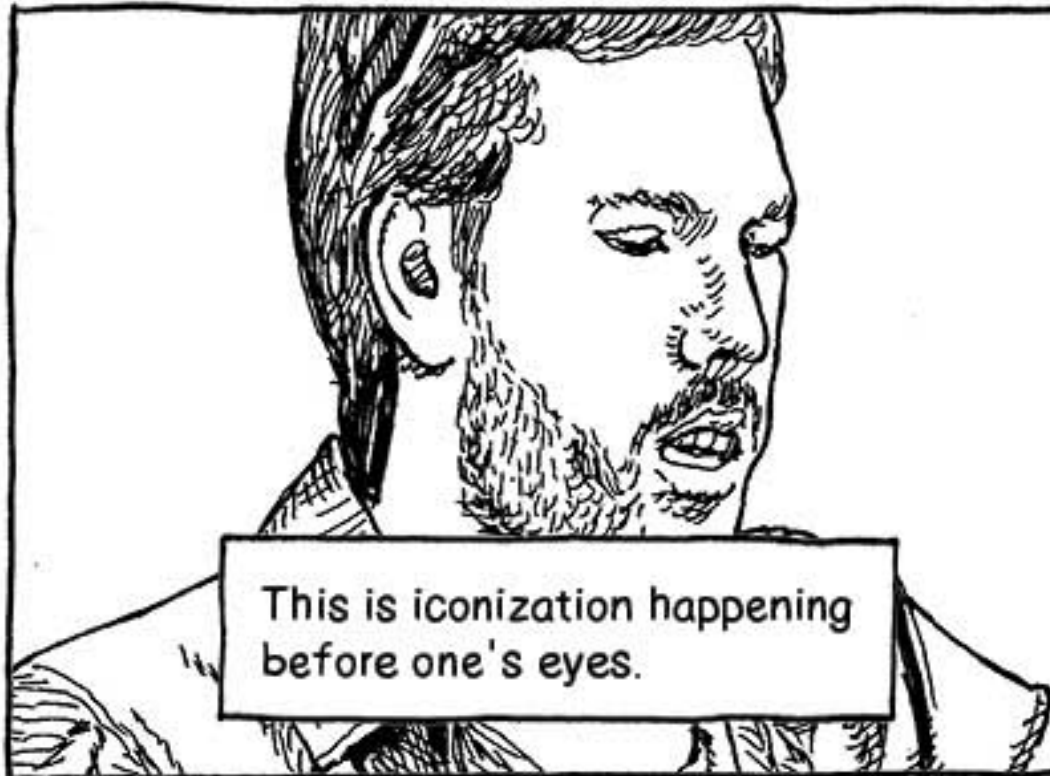
And we saw both happening.



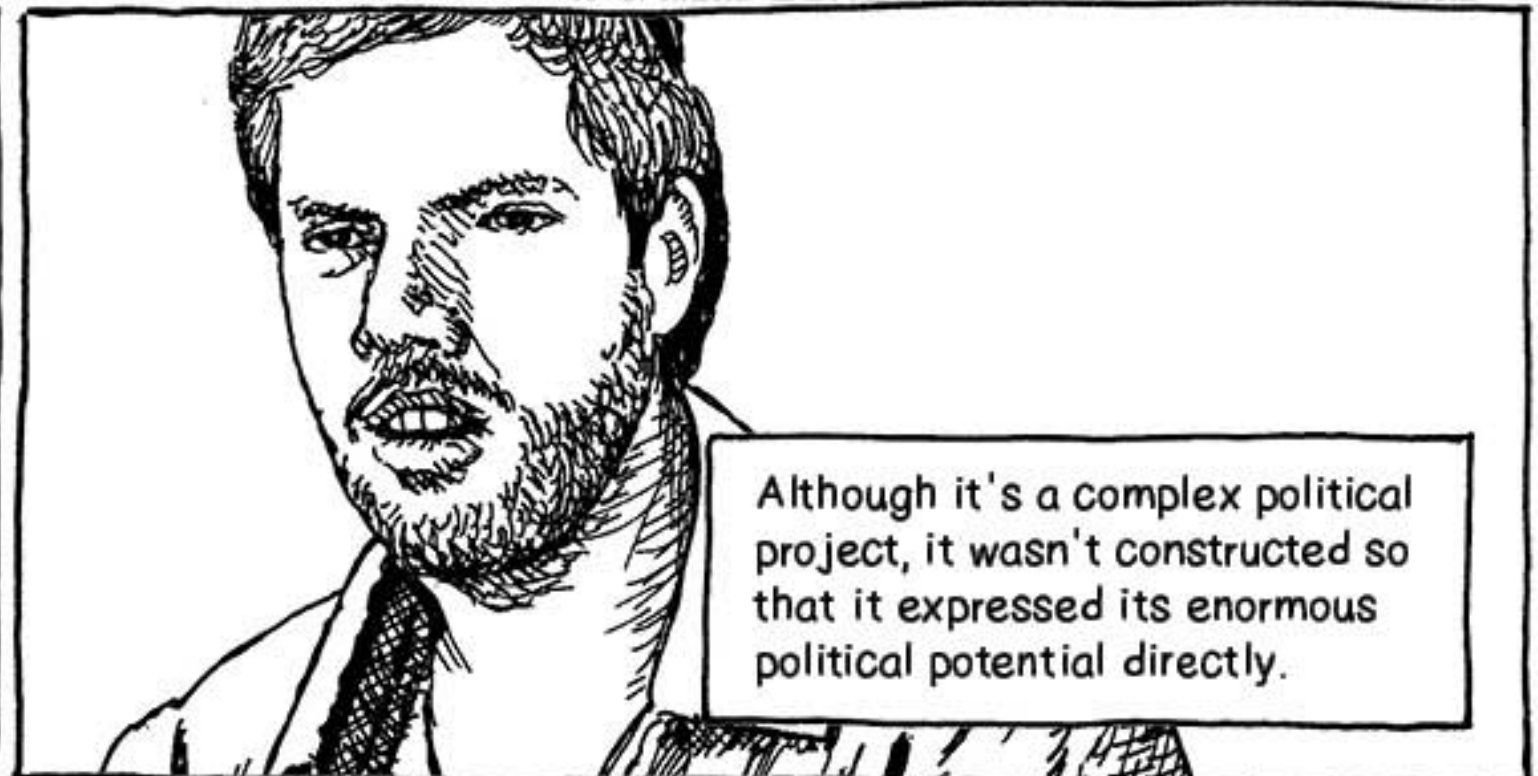
We appeared on the IDF website with the project, which we were not so happy with, by the way.



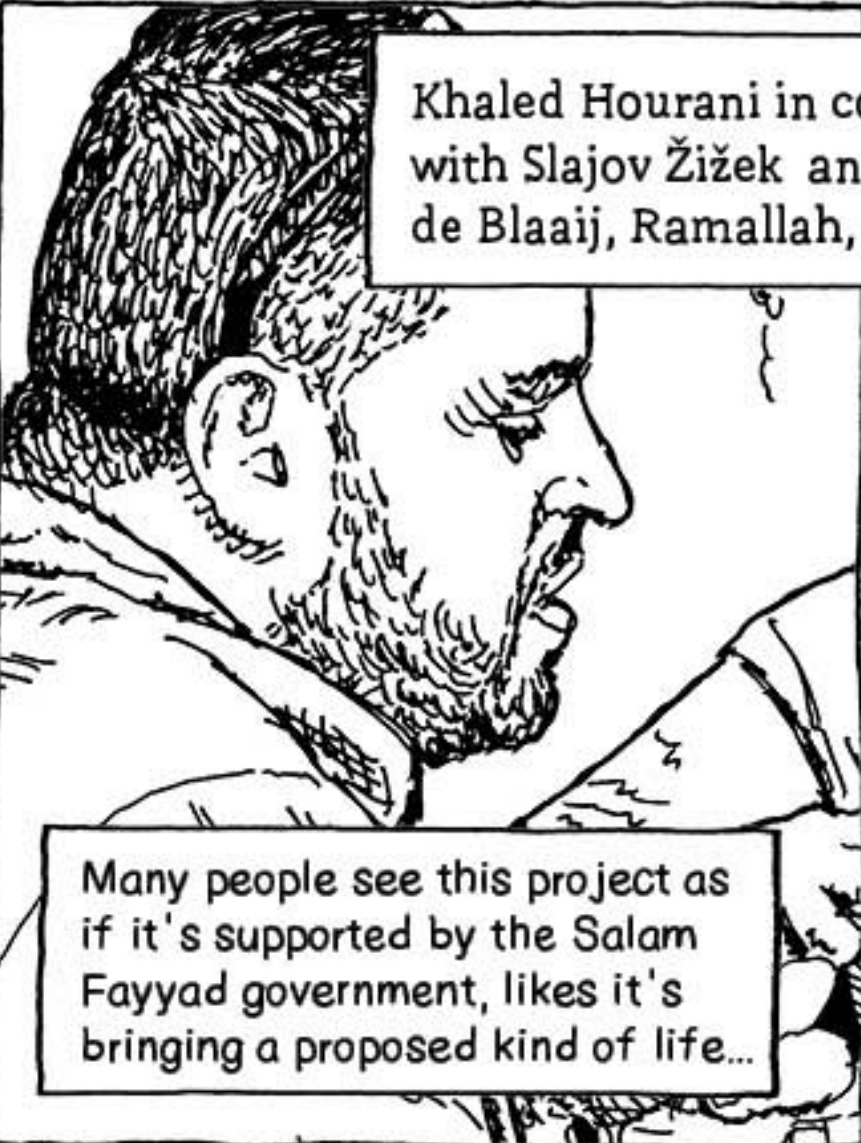
It was these kinds of things that we wanted to avoid.



This is iconization happening before one's eyes.




Although it's a complex political project, it wasn't constructed so that it expressed its enormous political potential directly.

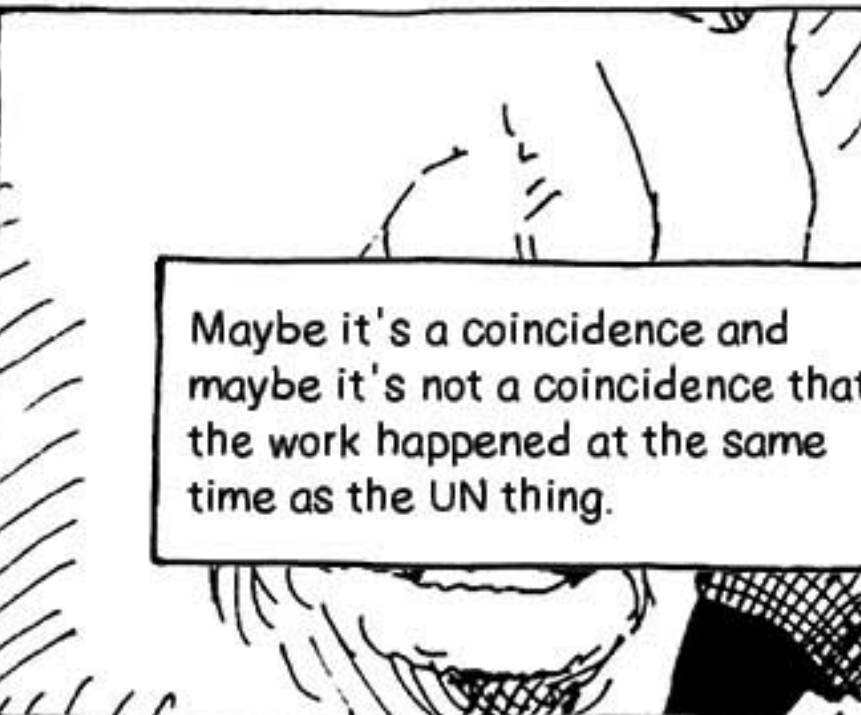


Khaled Hourani in conversation
with Slavoj Žižek and Remco
de Blaaij, Ramallah, June 2011:

Many people see this project as
if it's supported by the Salam
Fayyad government, likes it's
bringing a proposed kind of life...



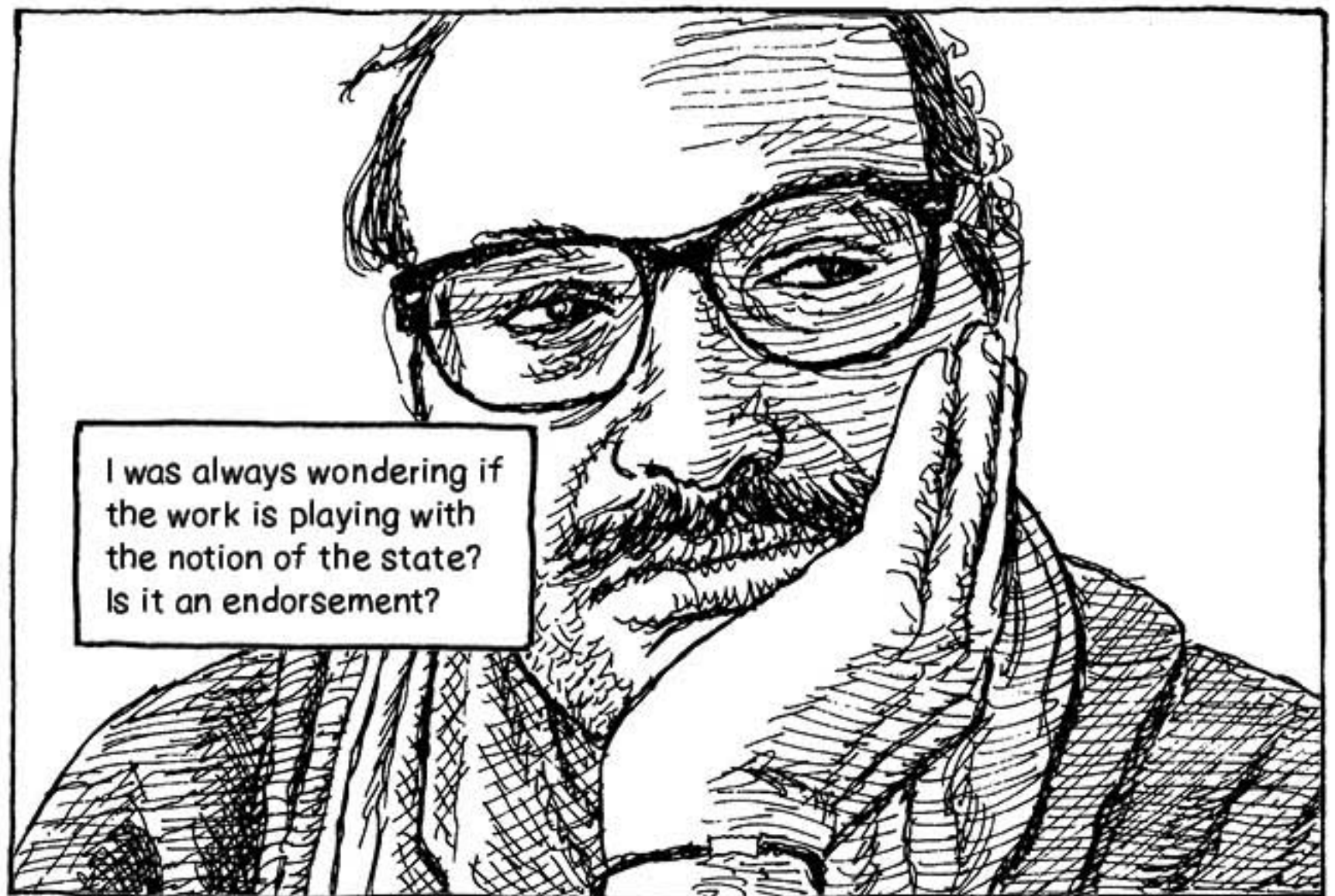
...where we could build institutions, we
could make art museums, government...
prepare everything for a state coming
in the future. I'm not against this.



Maybe it's a coincidence and
maybe it's not a coincidence that
the work happened at the same
time as the UN thing.



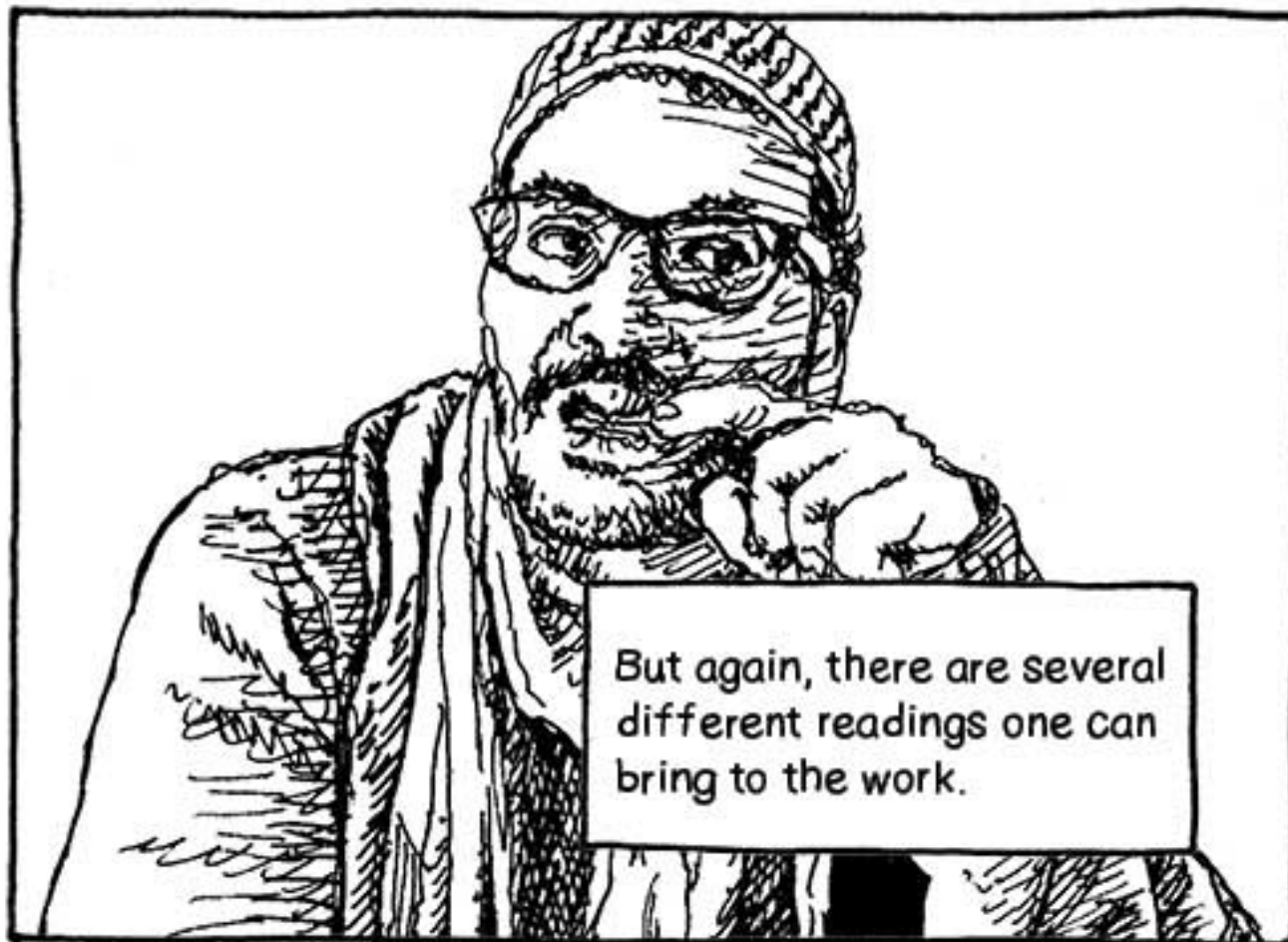
I don't know.



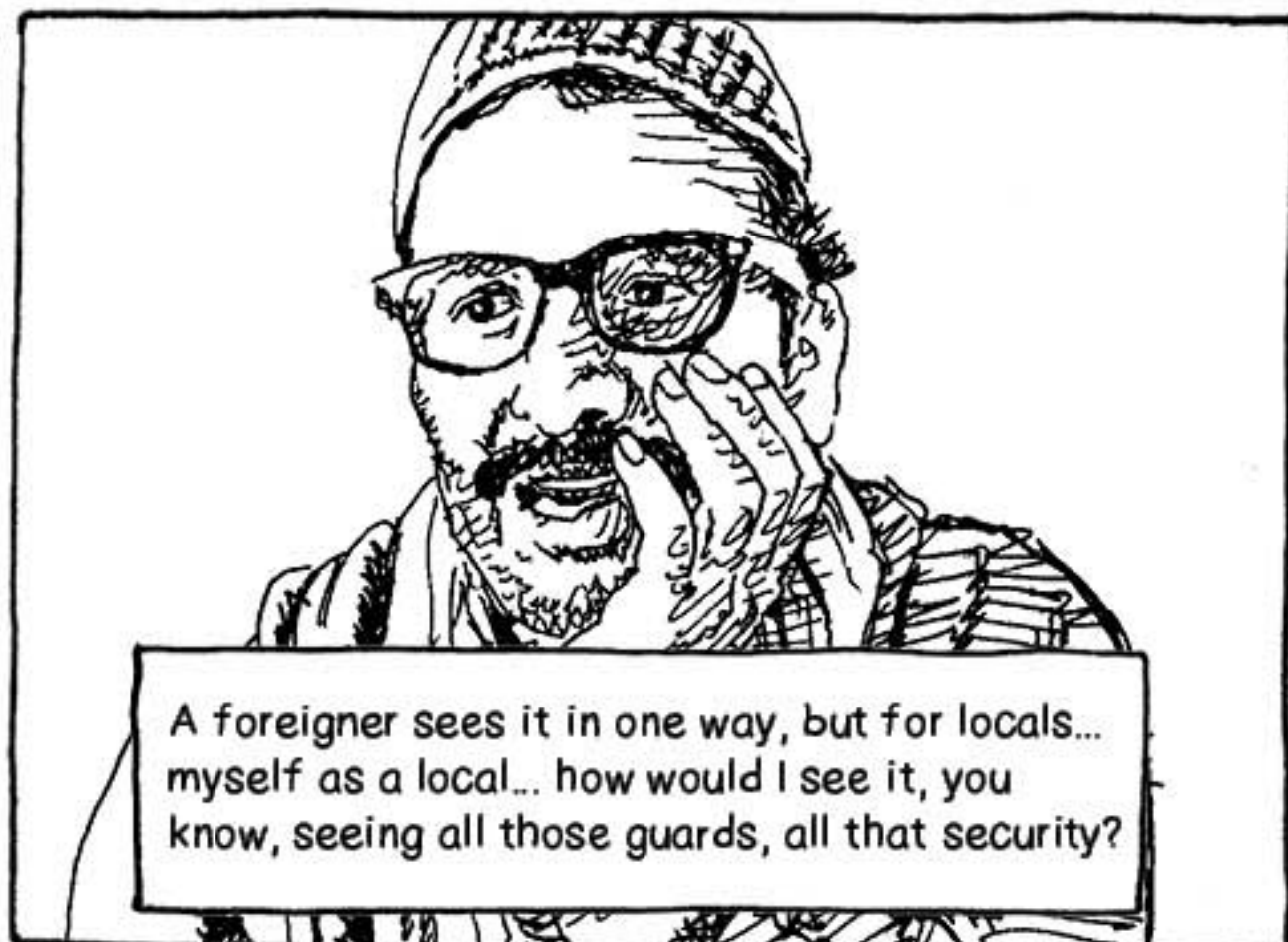
I was always wondering if the work is playing with the notion of the state? Is it an endorsement?



My question was mainly about the security, because nothing in the state allows the insurance company or the painting's owners—you know, the Van Abbemuseum—to bring it unless there's enough security.



But again, there are several different readings one can bring to the work.

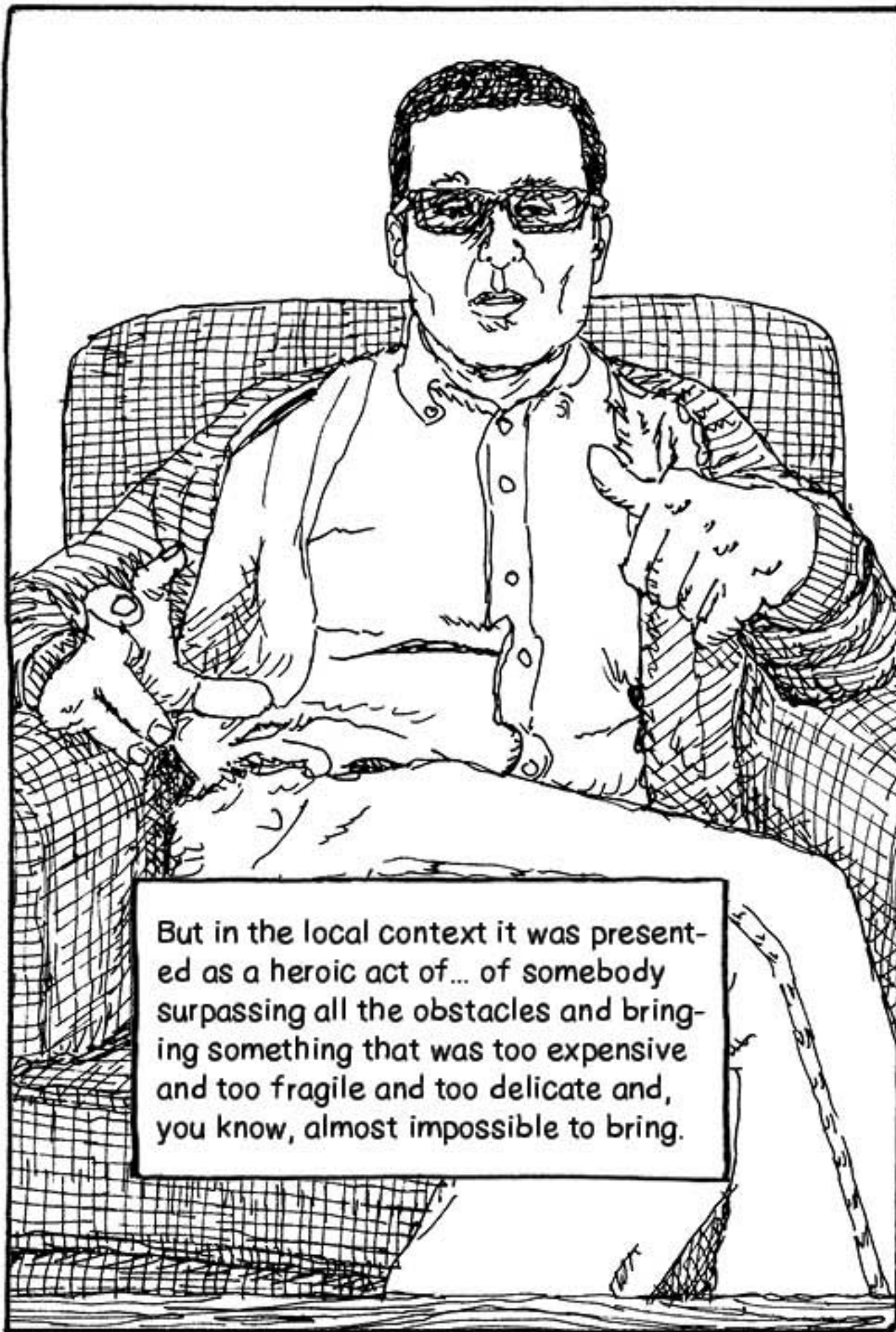


A foreigner sees it in one way, but for locals... myself as a local... how would I see it, you know, seeing all those guards, all that security?

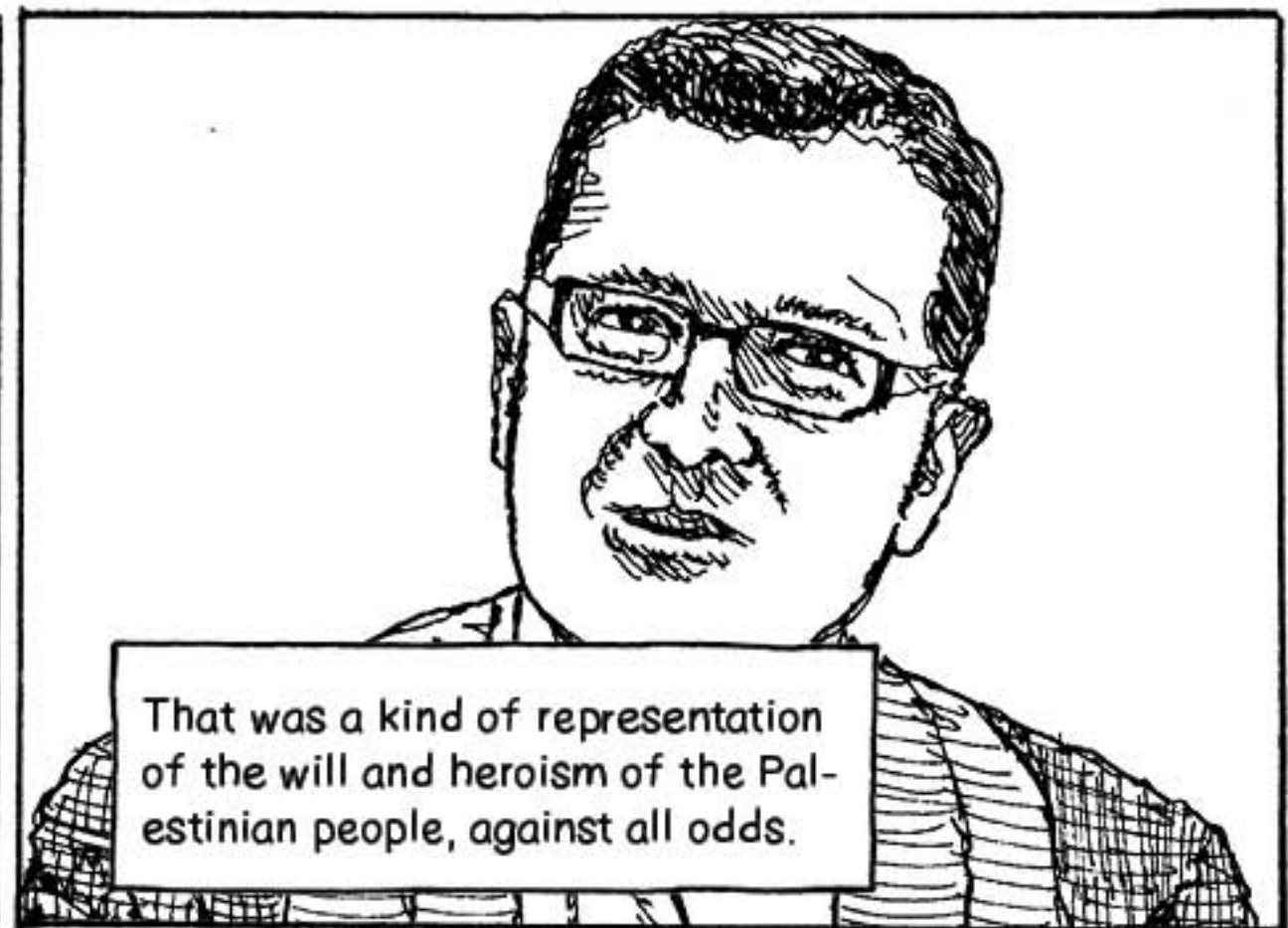


This is why the whole idea of the documentation and the presentation of the documentation is more important than the actual piece.

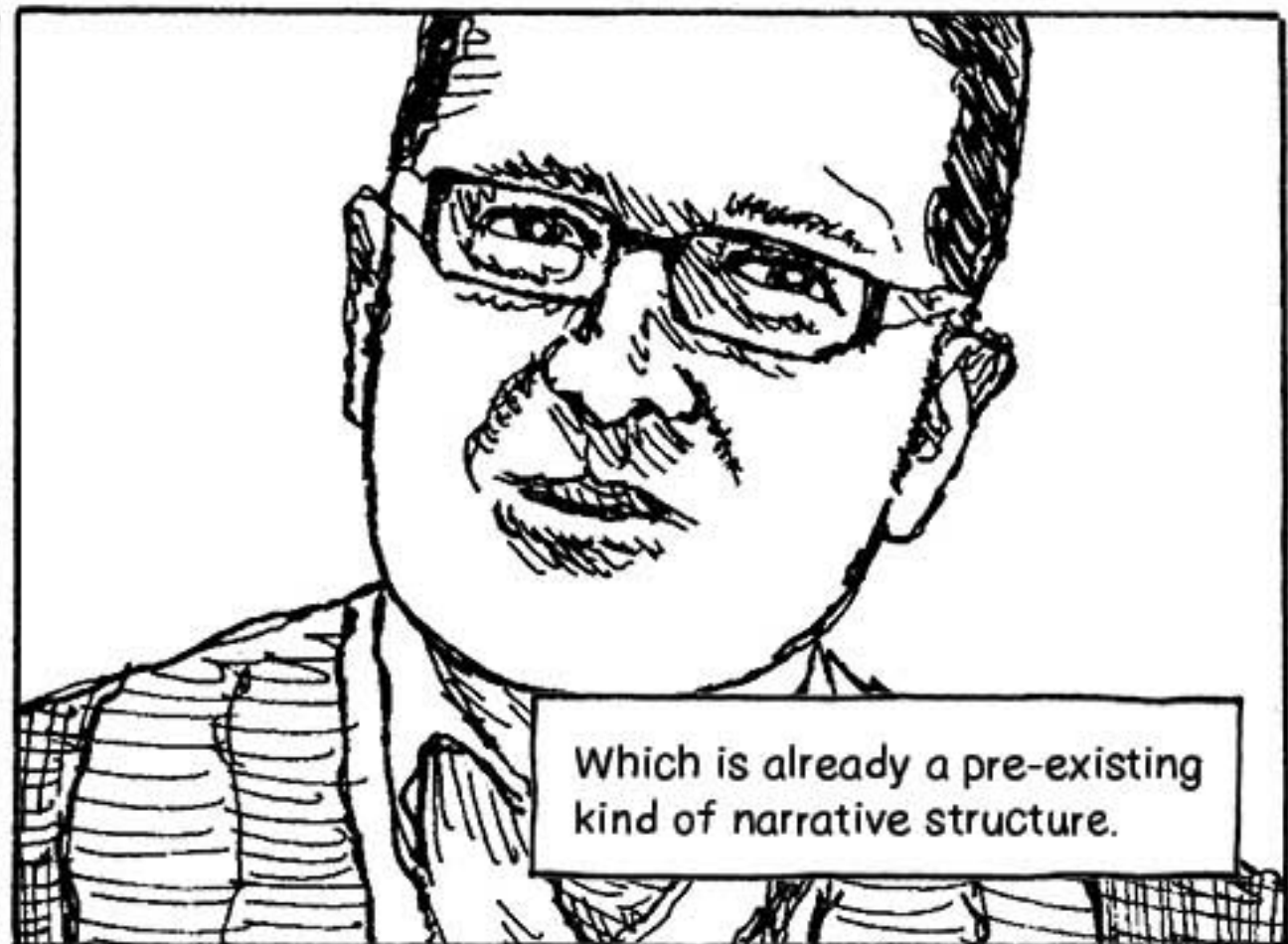
And, as I said before, we're still waiting to see the film.



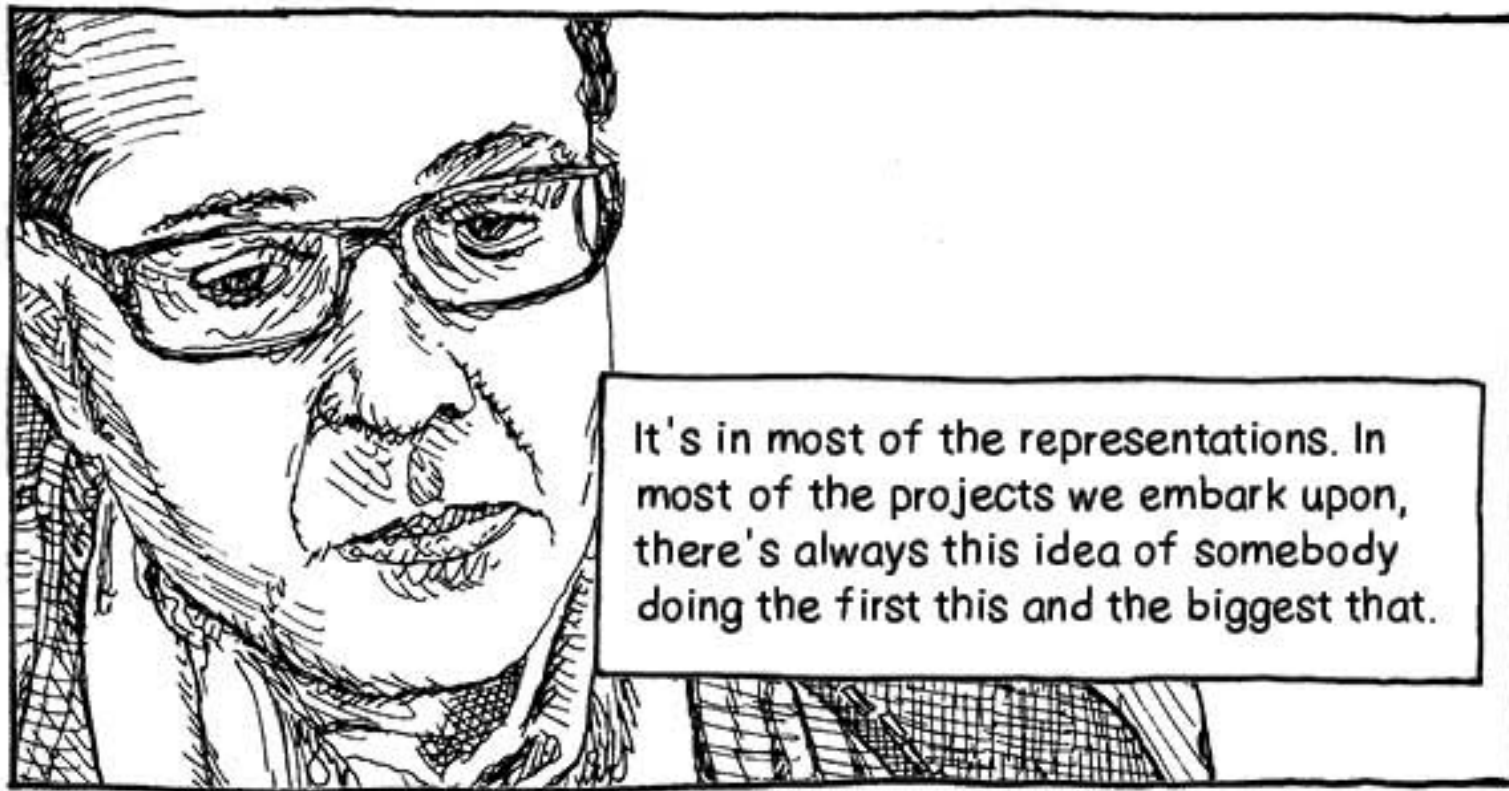
But in the local context it was presented as a heroic act of... of somebody surpassing all the obstacles and bringing something that was too expensive and too fragile and too delicate and, you know, almost impossible to bring.



That was a kind of representation of the will and heroism of the Palestinian people, against all odds.



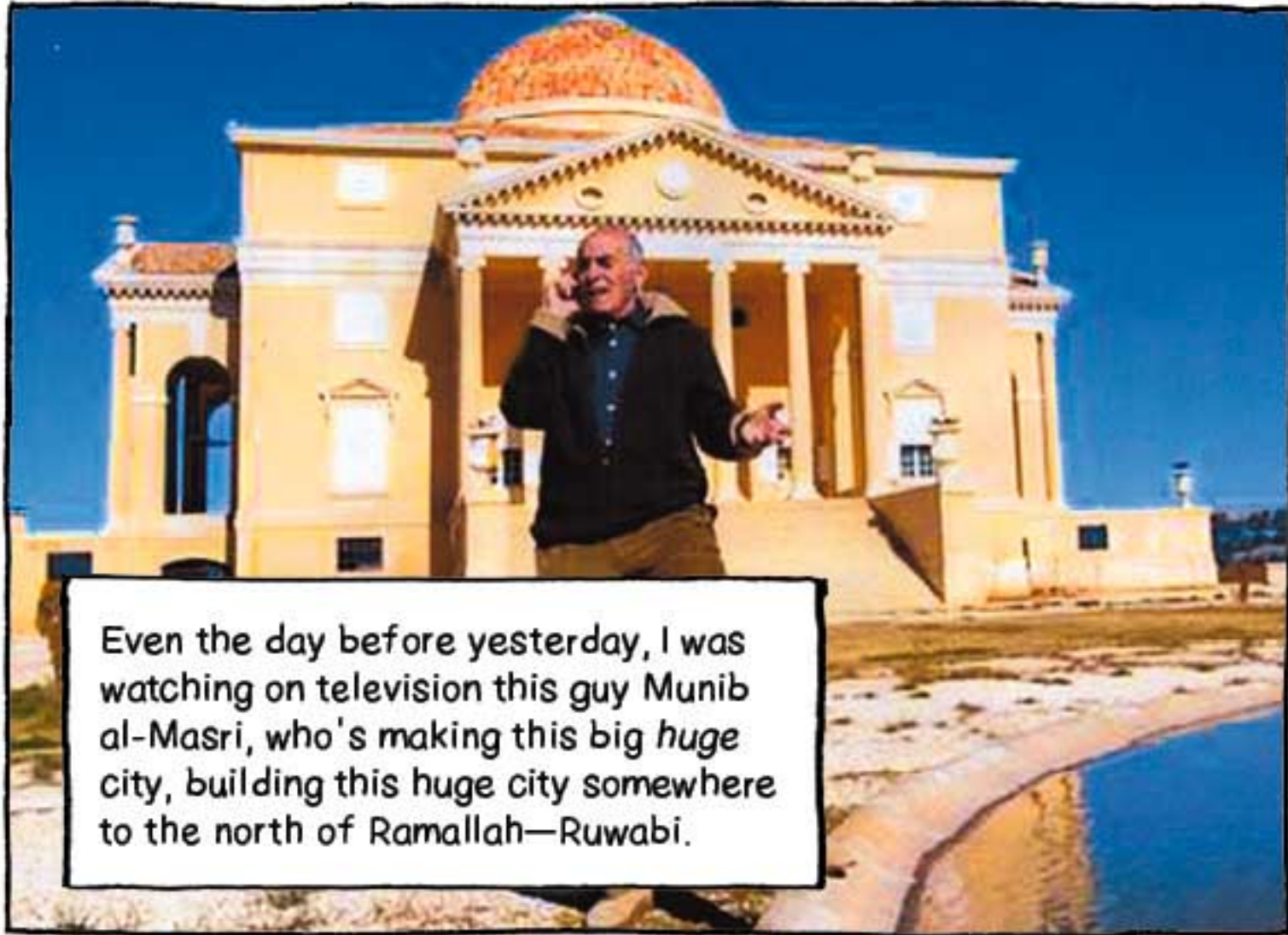
Which is already a pre-existing kind of narrative structure.



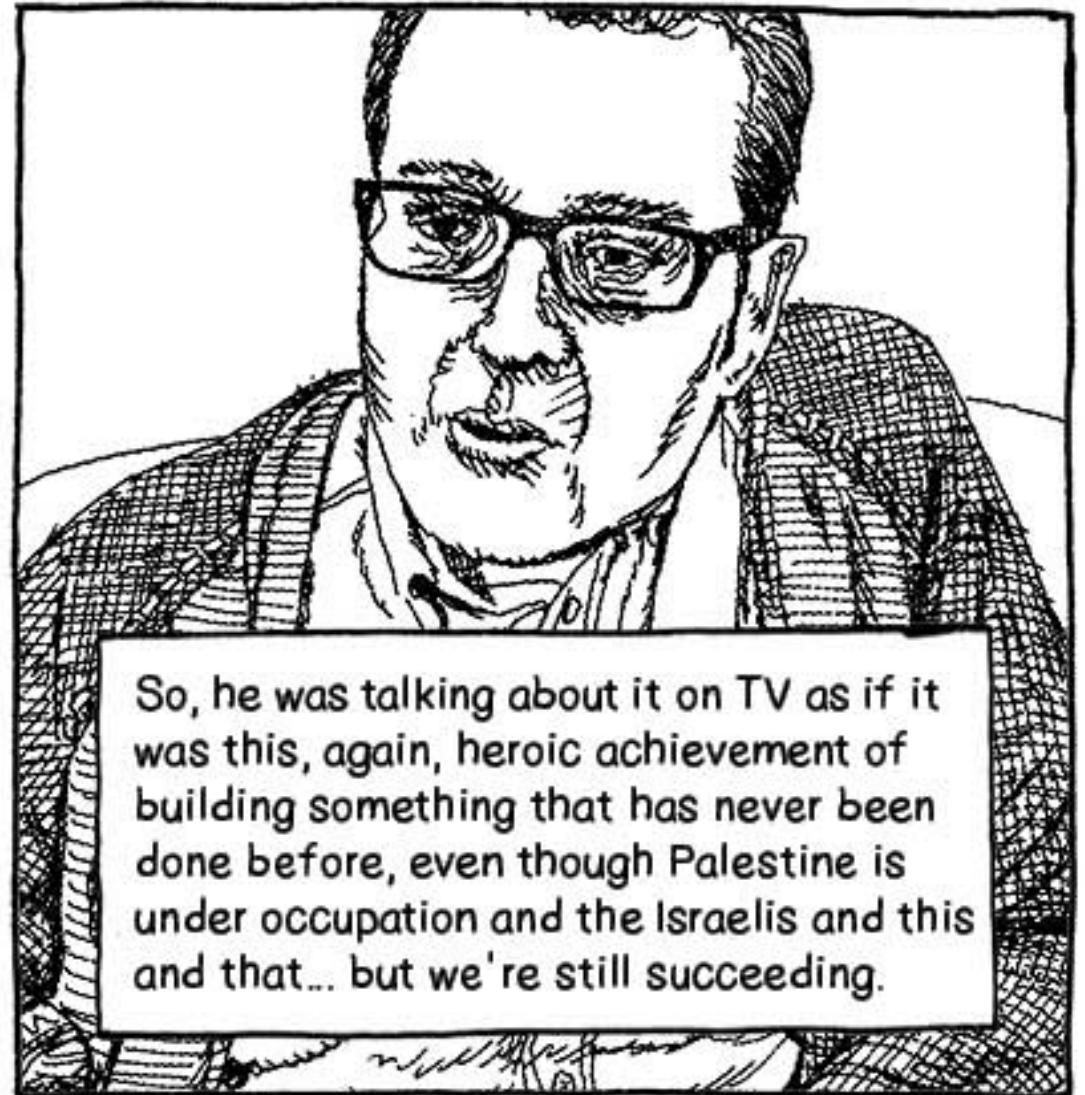
It's in most of the representations. In most of the projects we embark upon, there's always this idea of somebody doing the first this and the biggest that.




In any project.



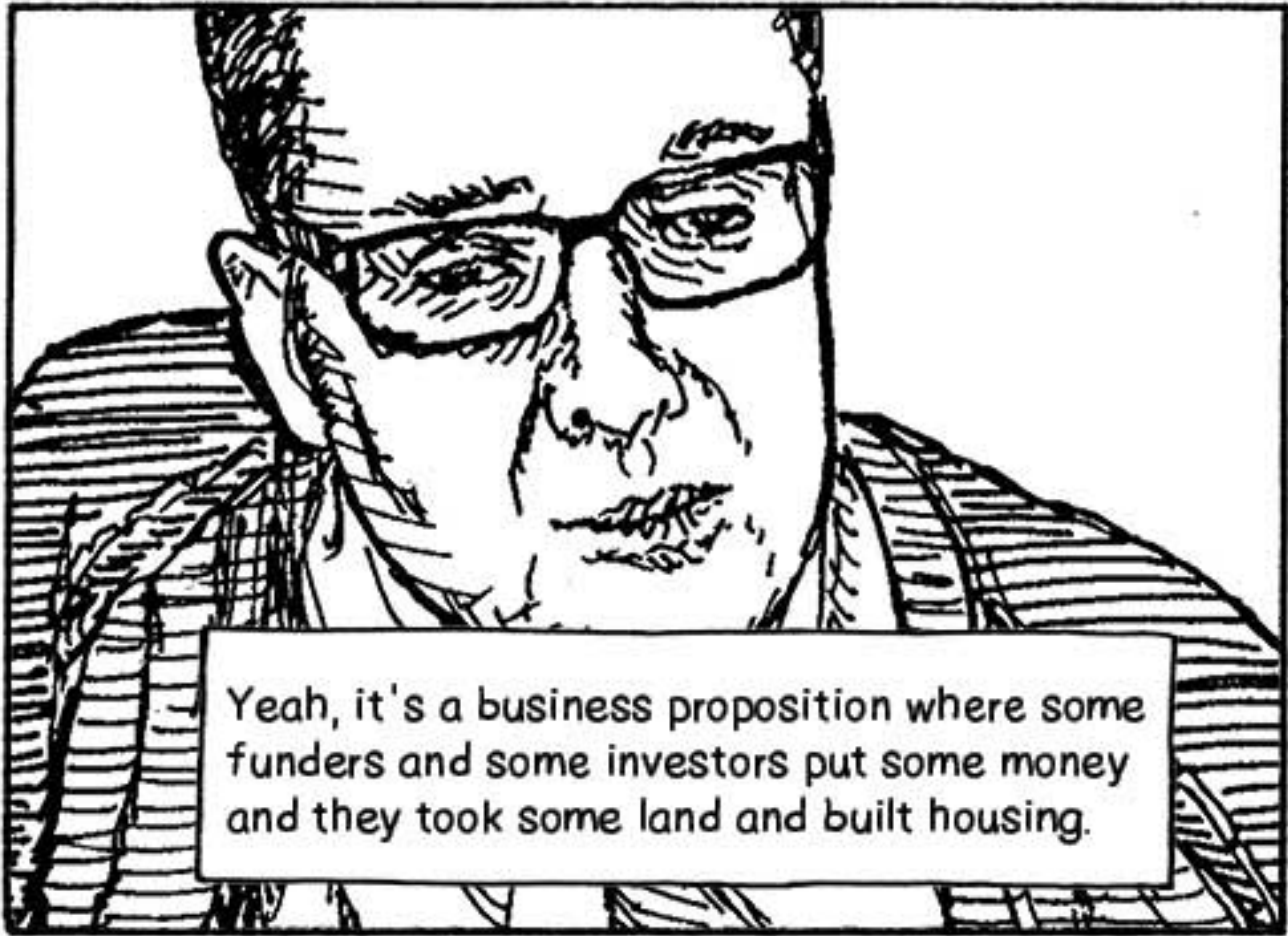
Even the day before yesterday, I was watching on television this guy Munib al-Masri, who's making this big huge city, building this huge city somewhere to the north of Ramallah—Ruwabi.



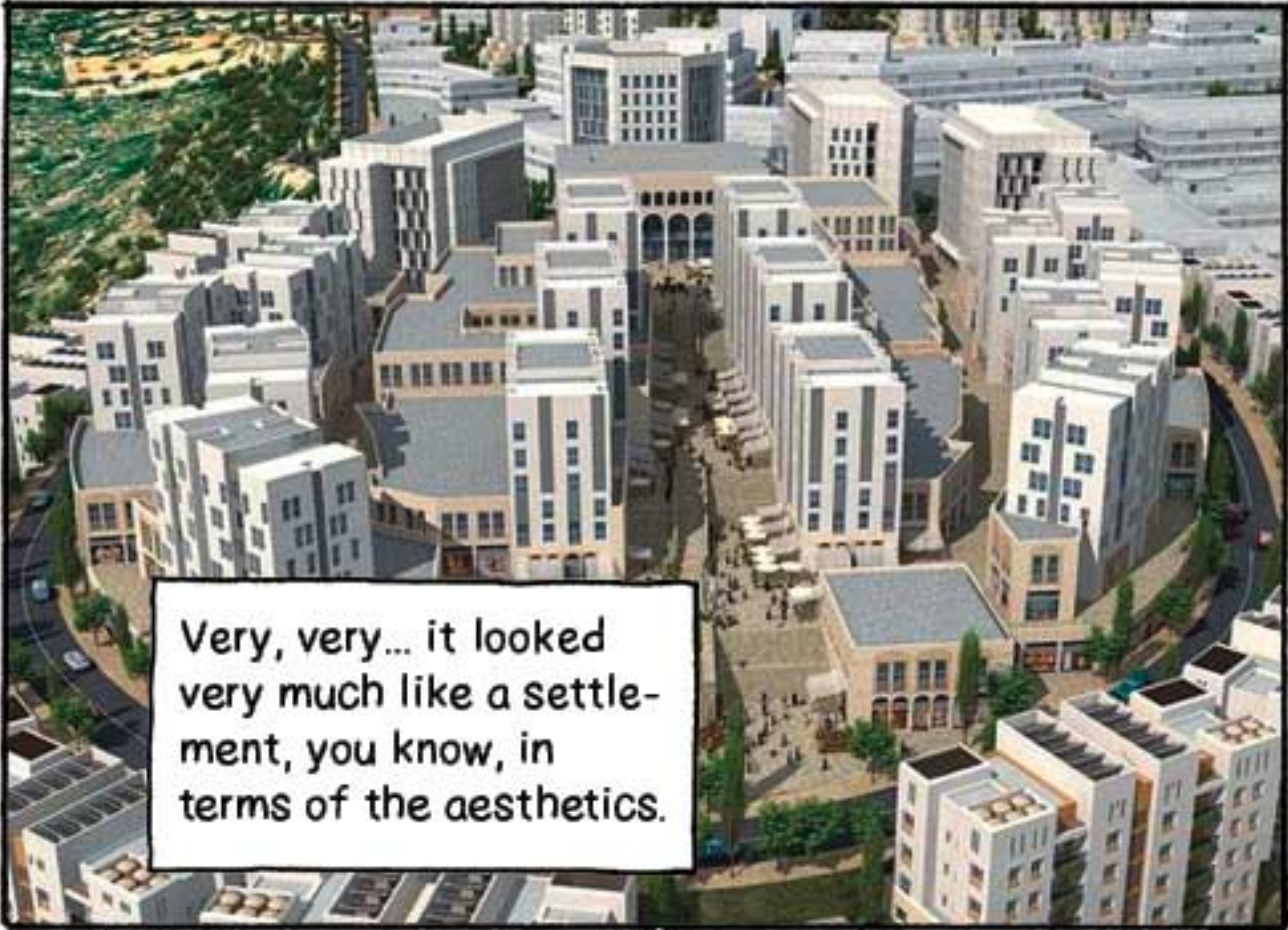
So, he was talking about it on TV as if it was this, again, heroic achievement of building something that has never been done before, even though Palestine is under occupation and the Israelis and this and that... but we're still succeeding.




Bottom line, it's a business, you know?



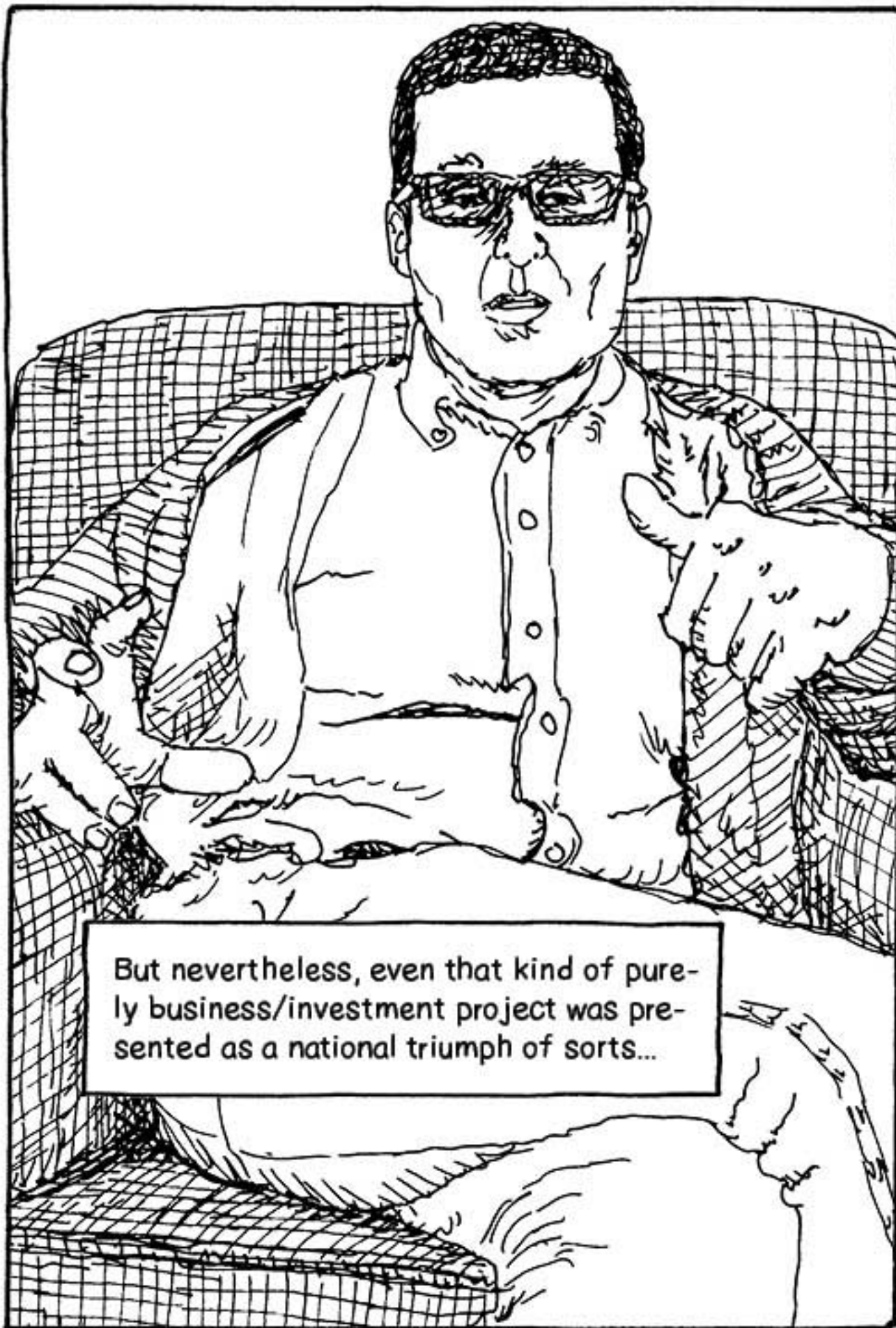
Yeah, it's a business proposition where some funders and some investors put some money and they took some land and built housing.



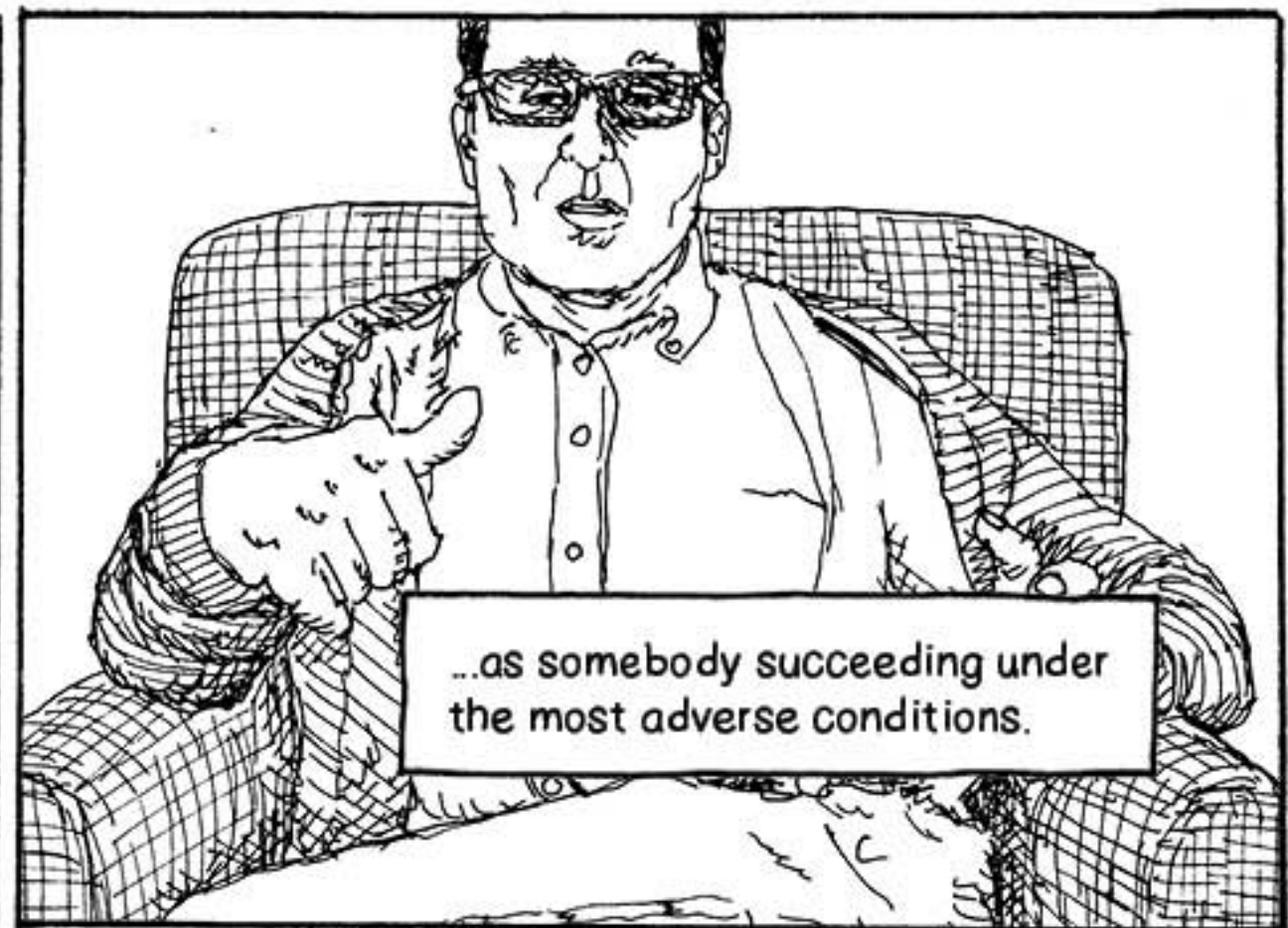
Very, very... it looked very much like a settlement, you know, in terms of the aesthetics.



Which scared me.
Which really scared me.



But nevertheless, even that kind of purely business/investment project was presented as a national triumph of sorts...

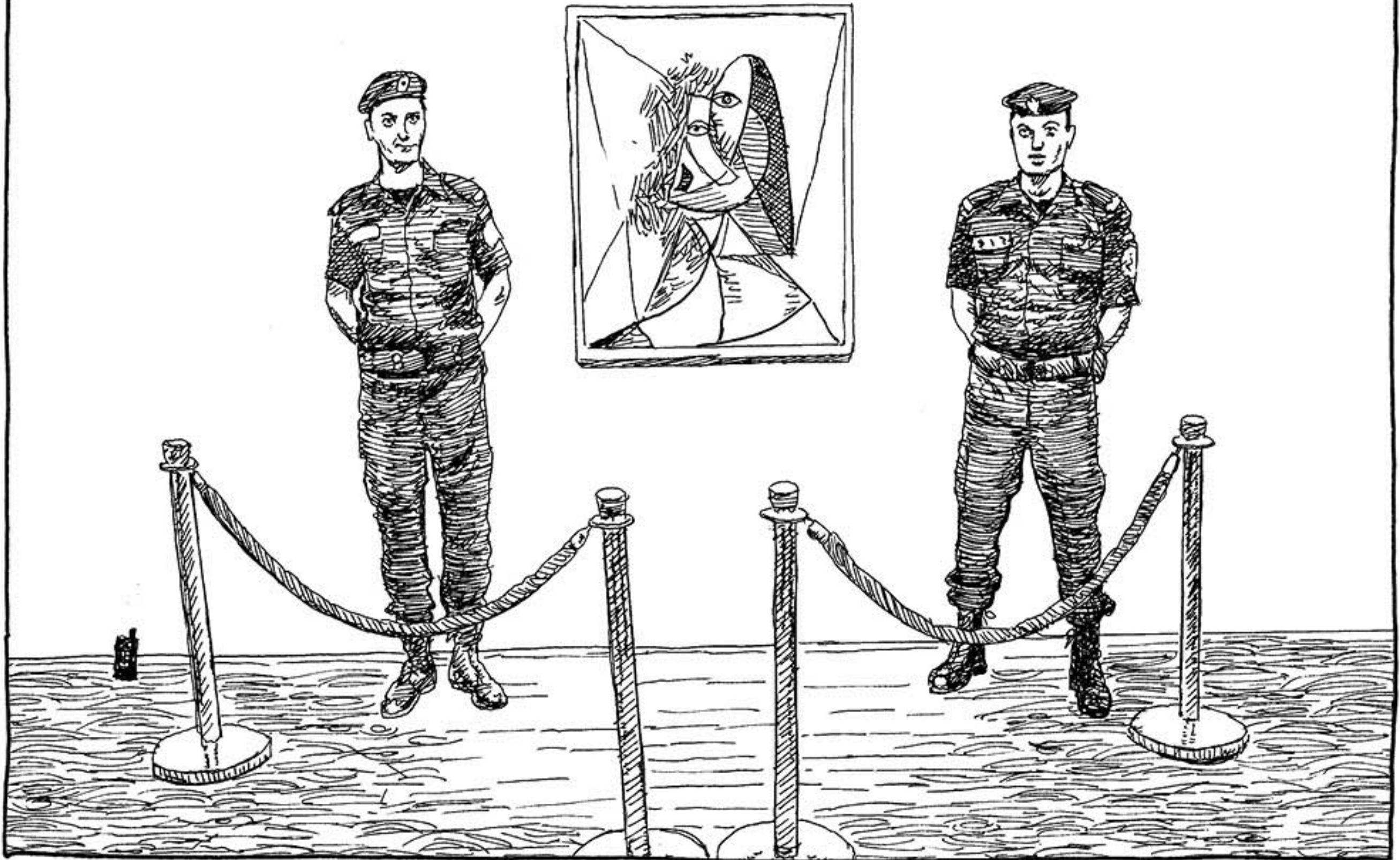


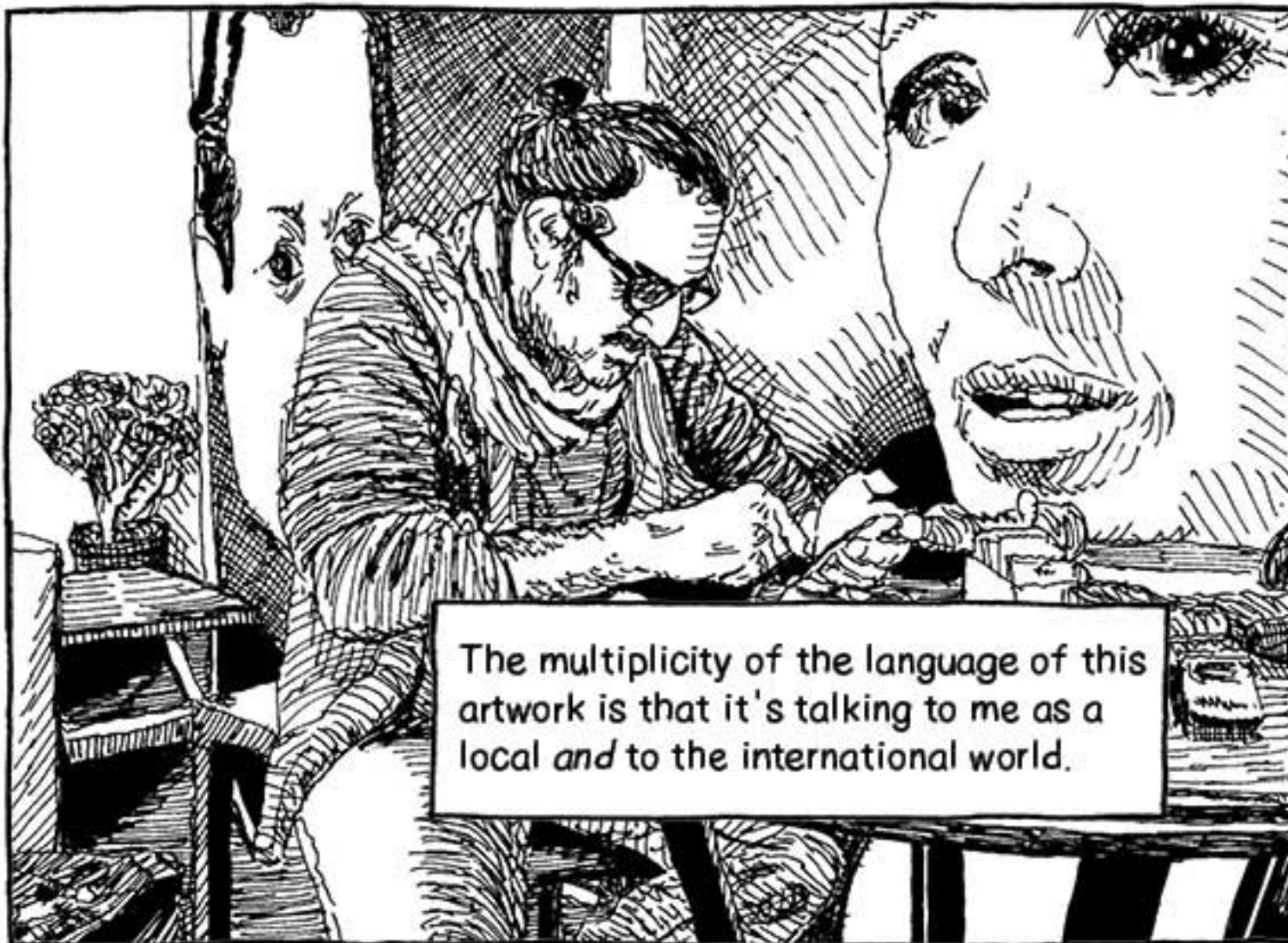
...as somebody succeeding under the most adverse conditions.



You know, you need to take these narratives with a grain of salt, right?

THE BUSTE DE FEMME AND
THE STATE OF PALESTINE AS SECURITY APPARATUS

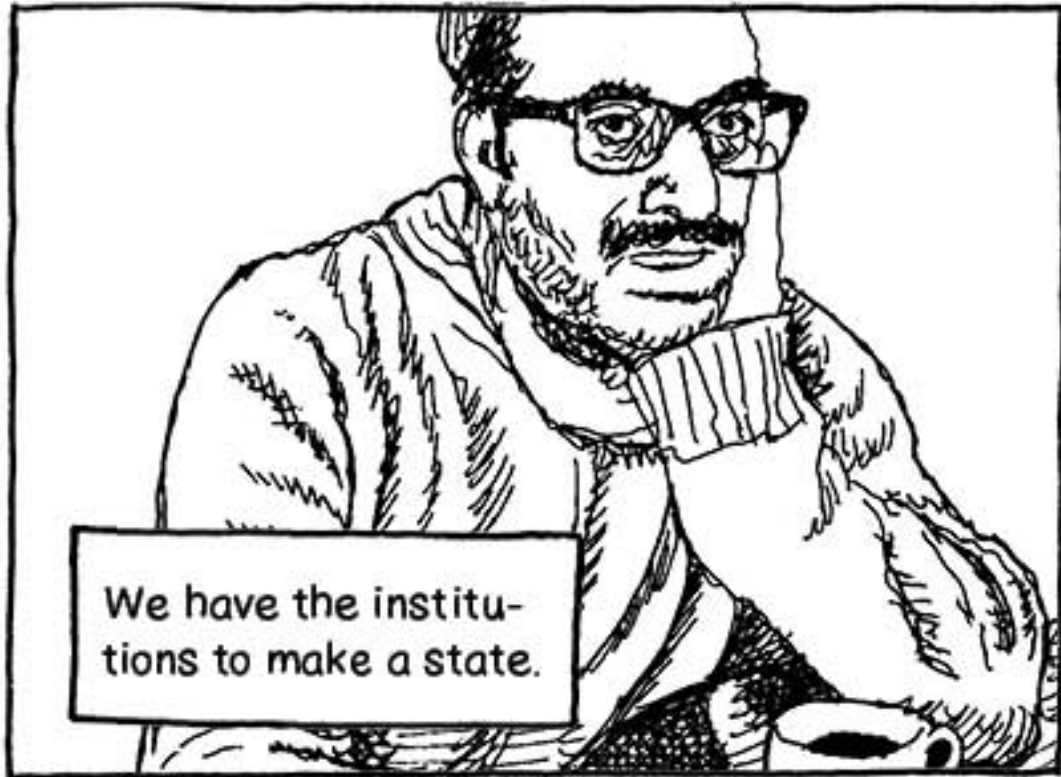




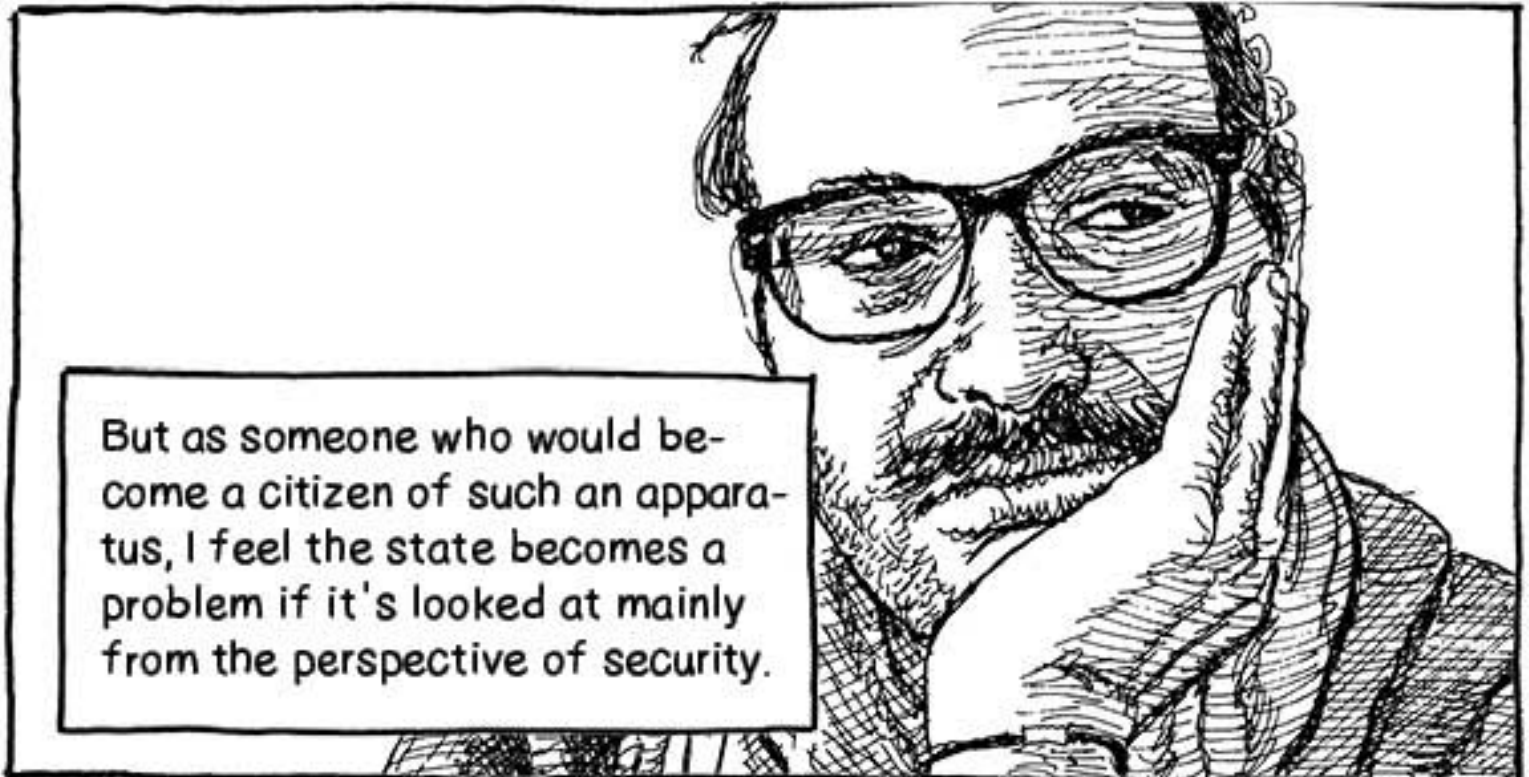
The multiplicity of the language of this artwork is that it's talking to me as a local *and* to the international world.



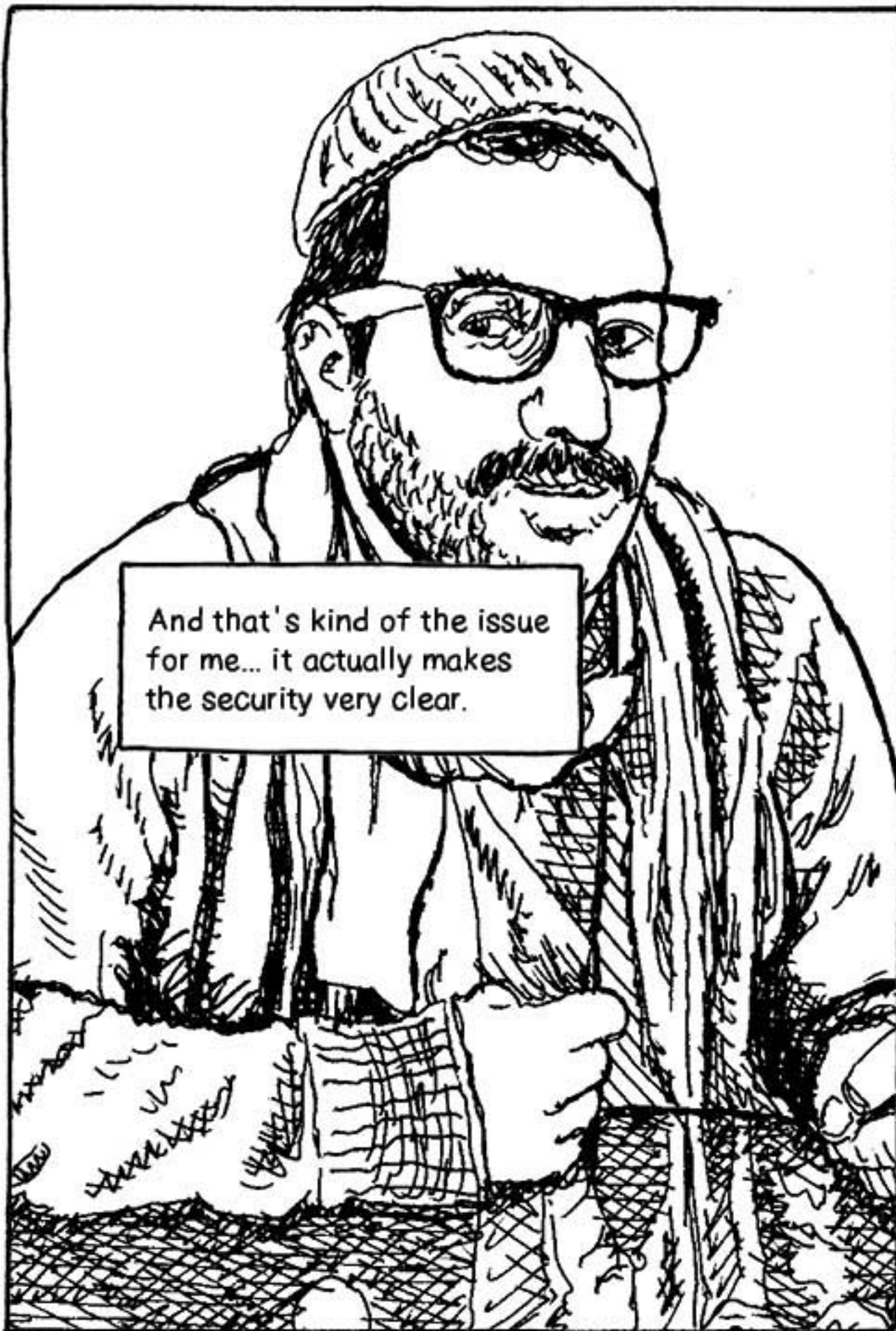
Look, we have the approach to a state—which is significant.



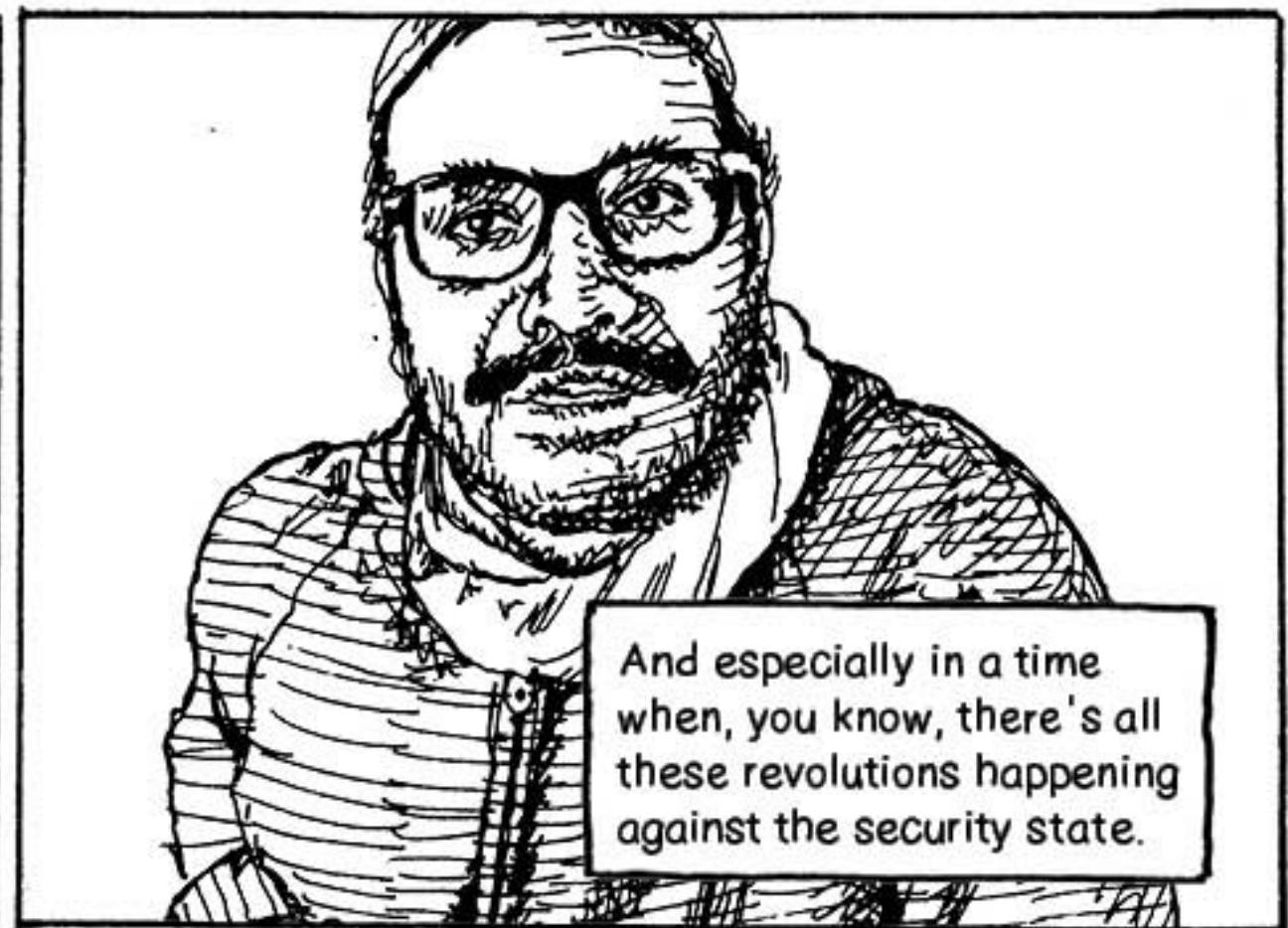
We have the institutions to make a state.



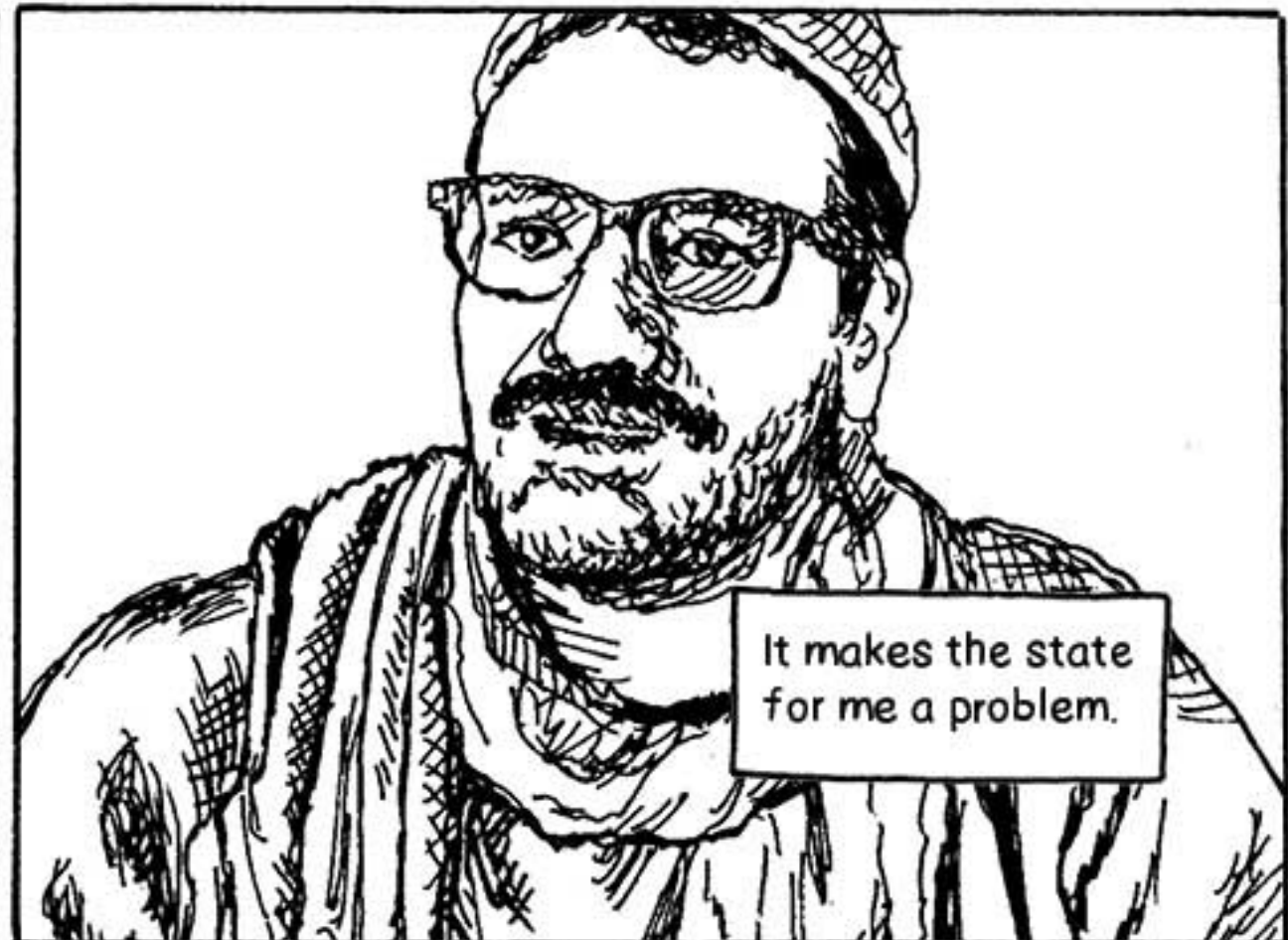
But as someone who would become a citizen of such an apparatus, I feel the state becomes a problem if it's looked at mainly from the perspective of security.



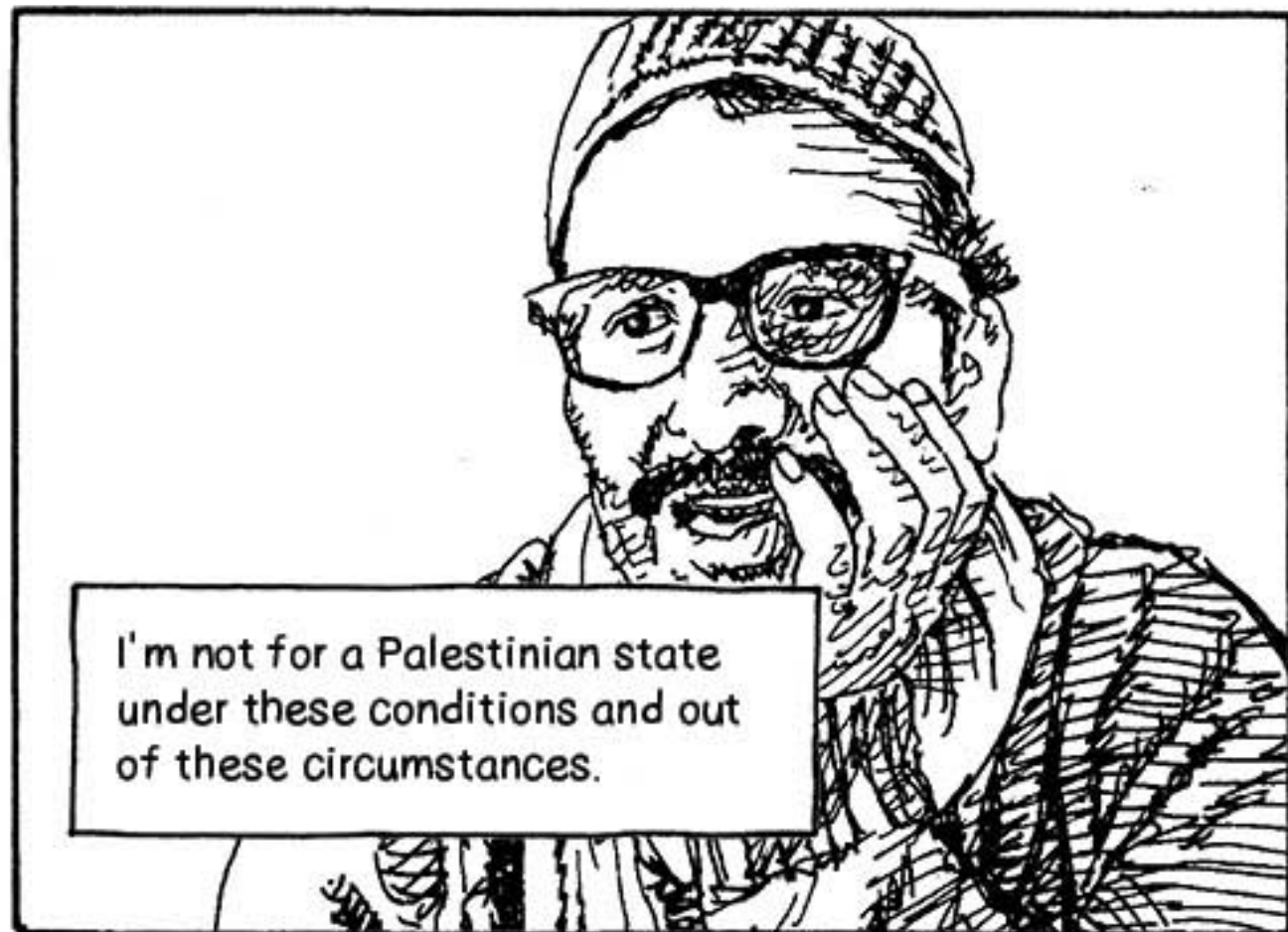
And that's kind of the issue for me... it actually makes the security very clear.



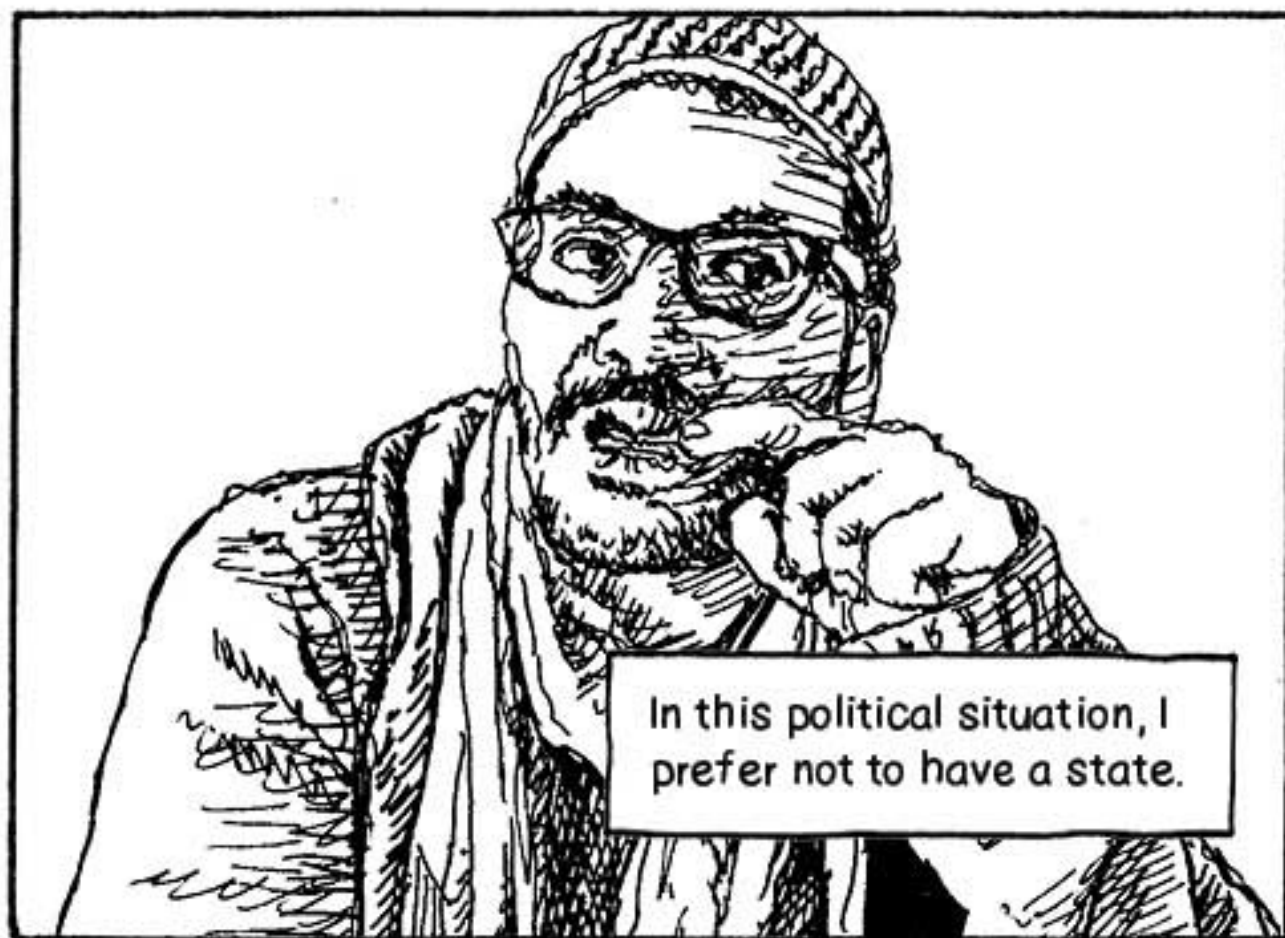
And especially in a time when, you know, there's all these revolutions happening against the security state.



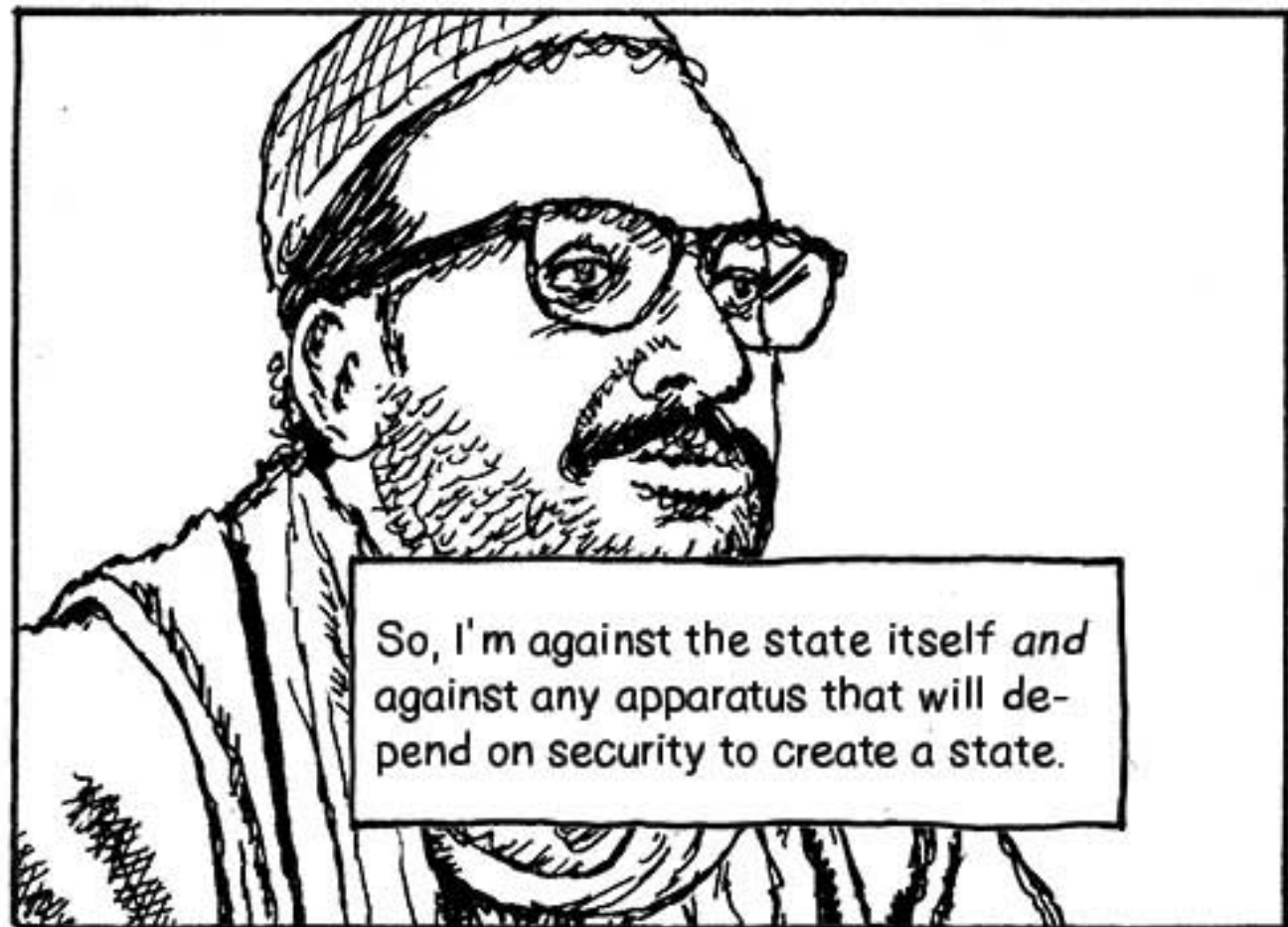
It makes the state for me a problem.



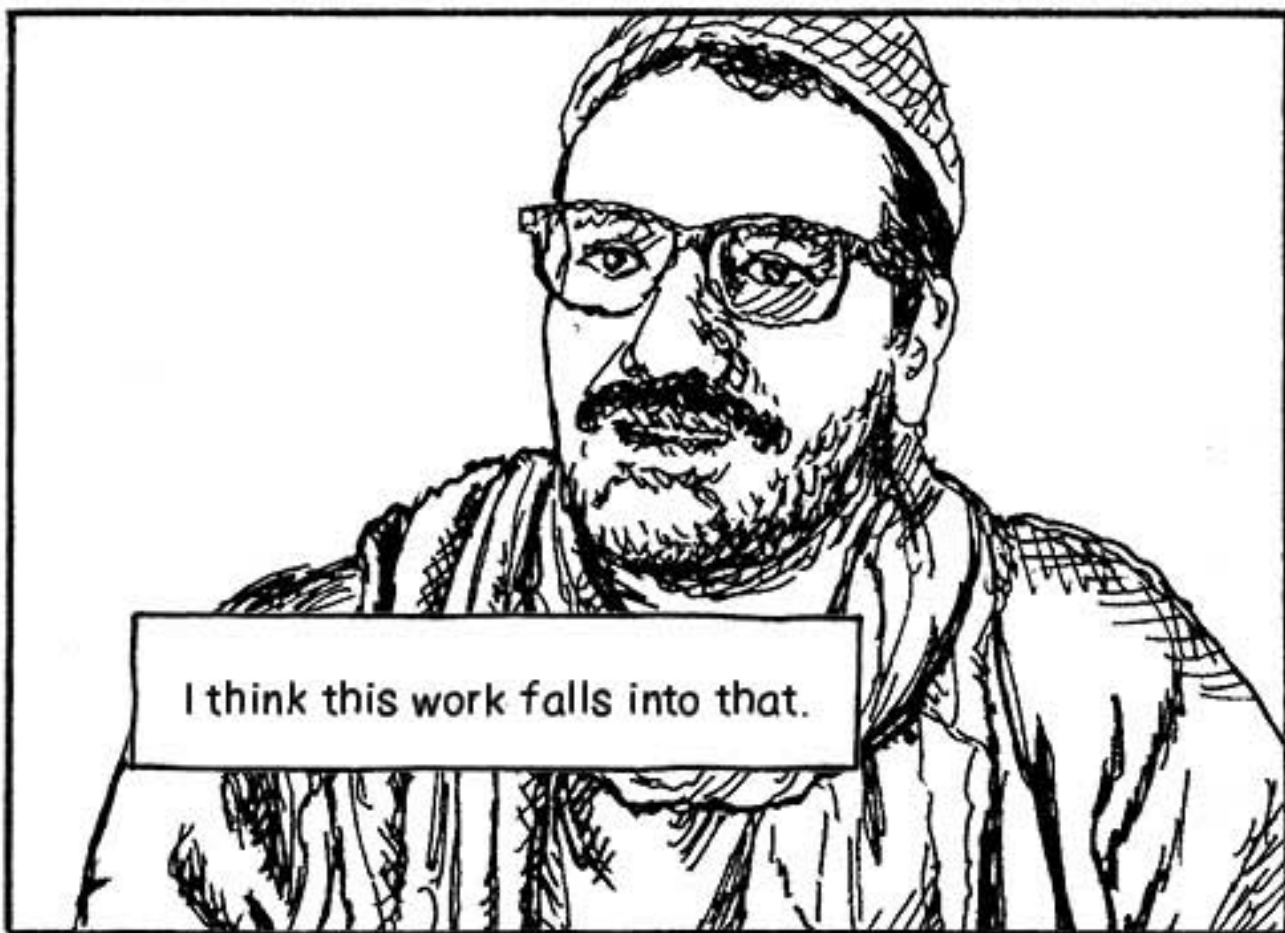
I'm not for a Palestinian state under these conditions and out of these circumstances.



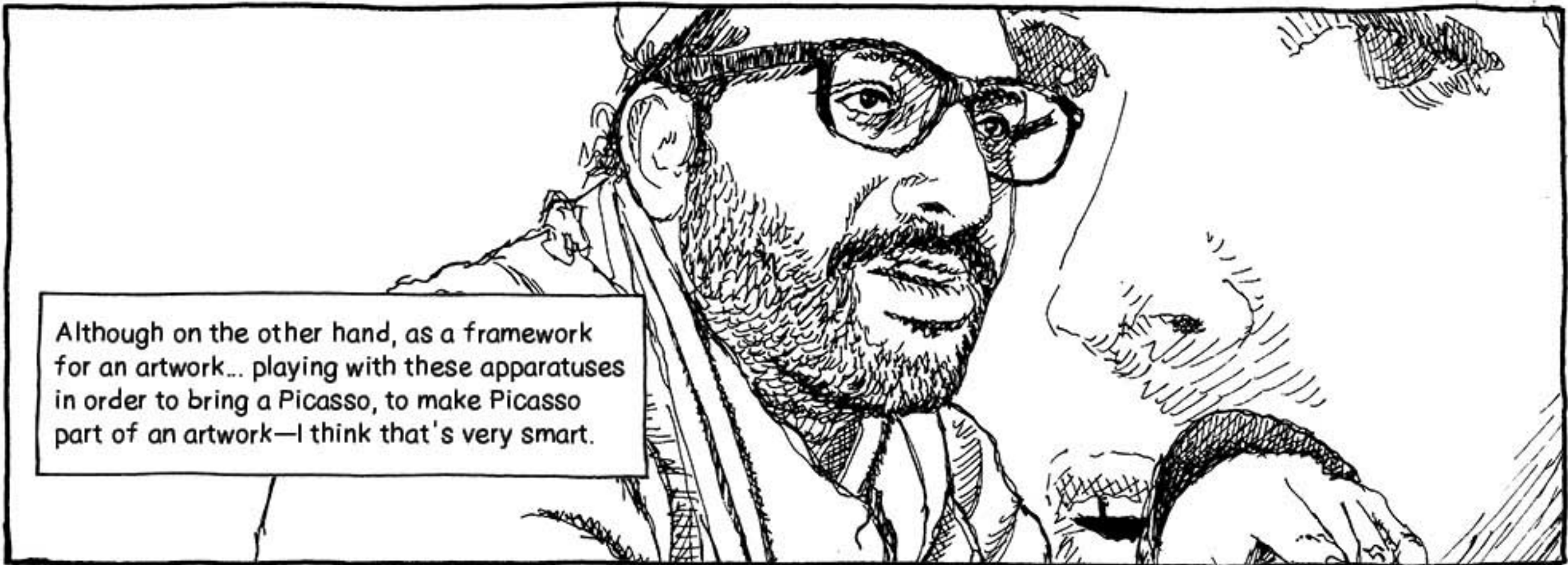
In this political situation, I prefer not to have a state.



So, I'm against the state itself *and* against any apparatus that will depend on security to create a state.



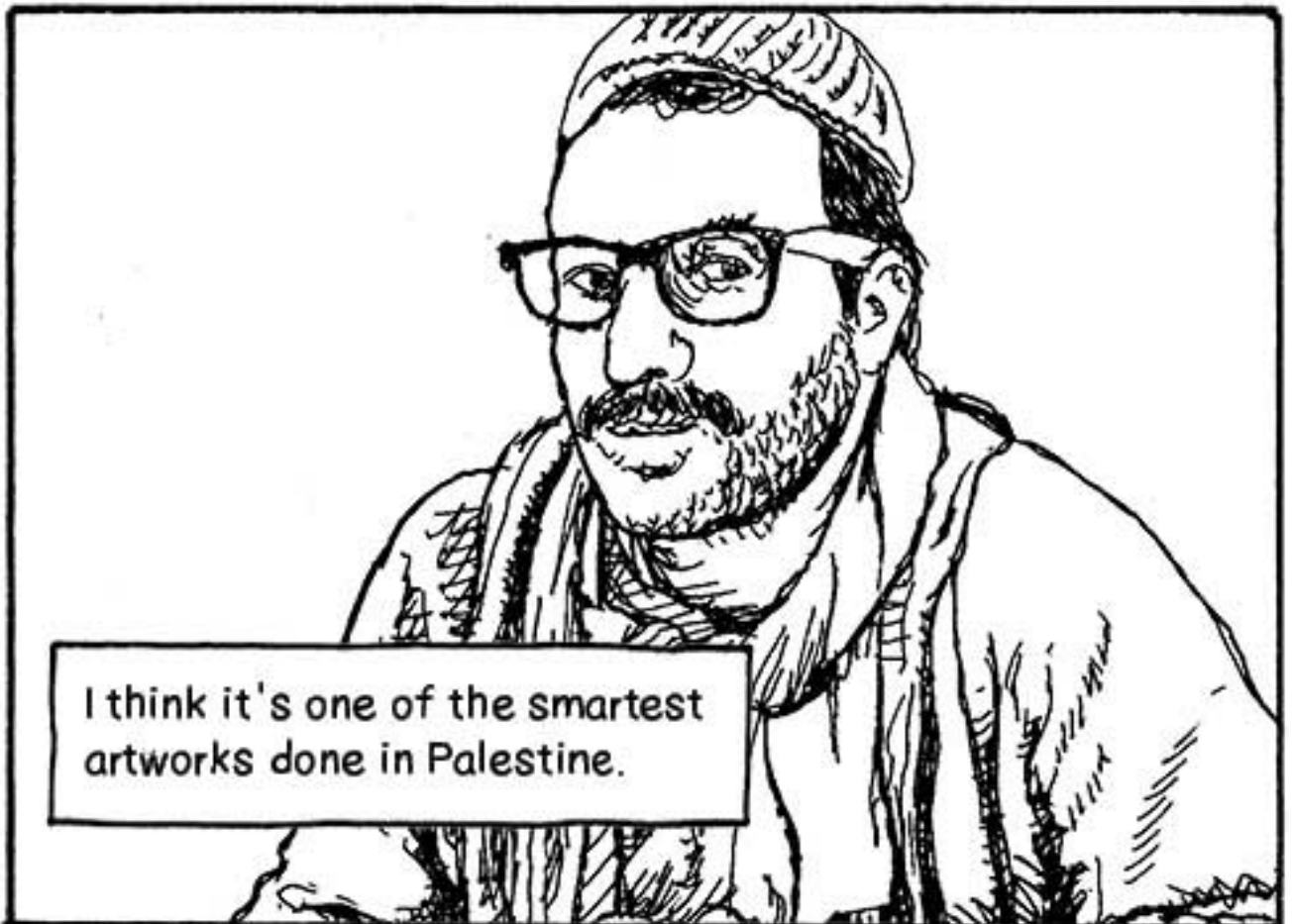
I think this work falls into that.



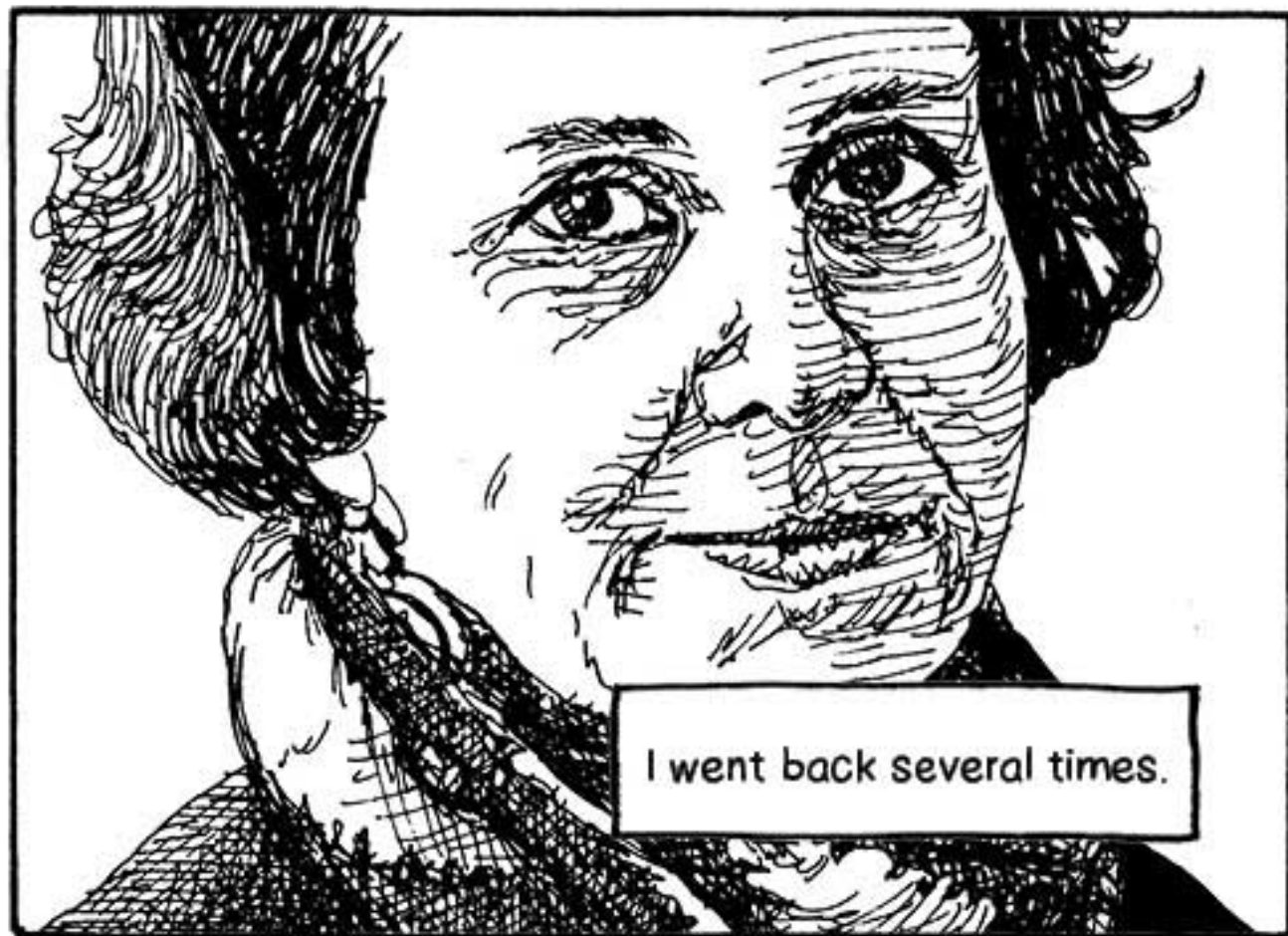
Although on the other hand, as a framework for an artwork... playing with these apparatuses in order to bring a Picasso, to make Picasso part of an artwork—I think that's very smart.



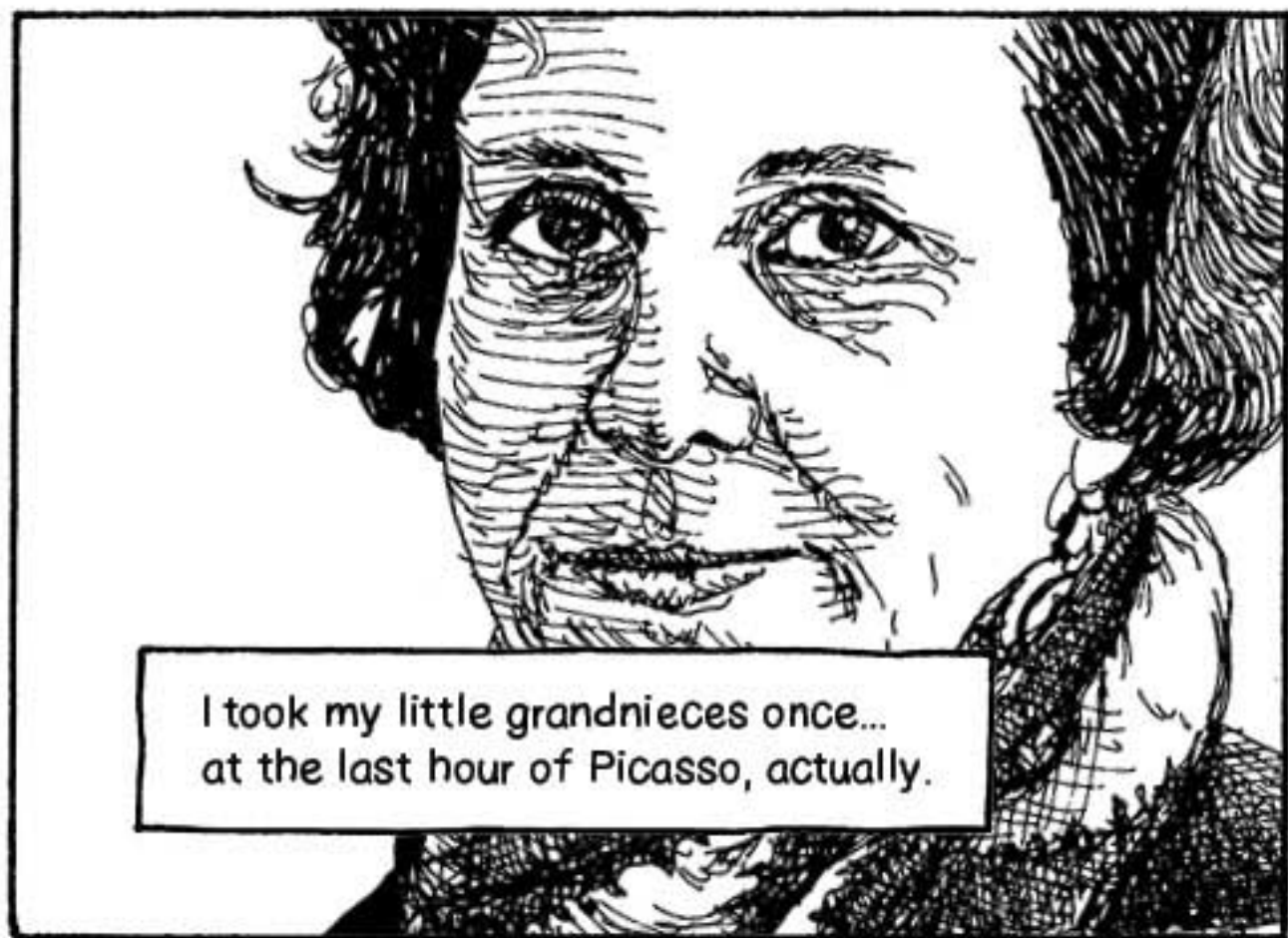
It's not a simple project.



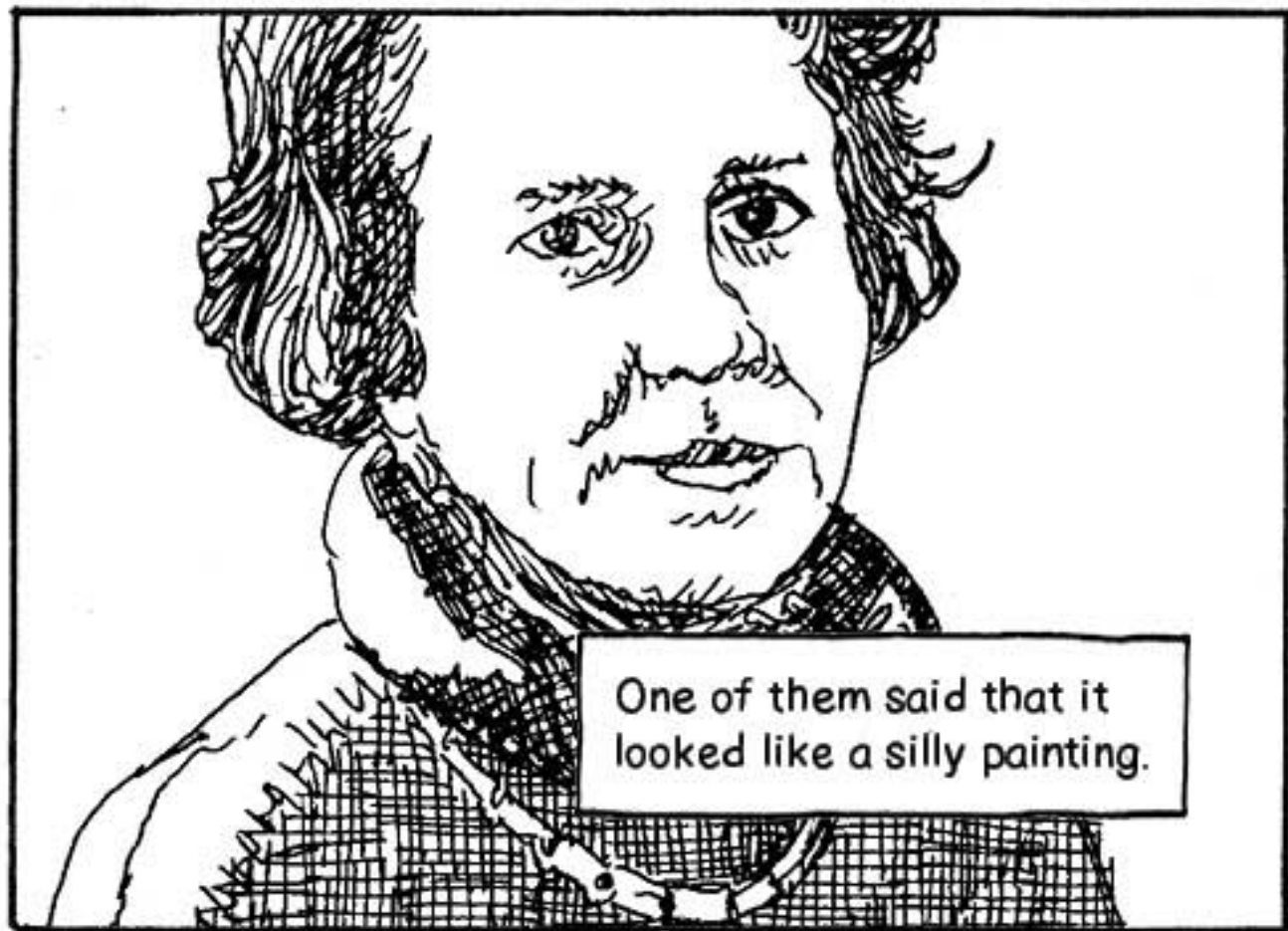
I think it's one of the smartest artworks done in Palestine.



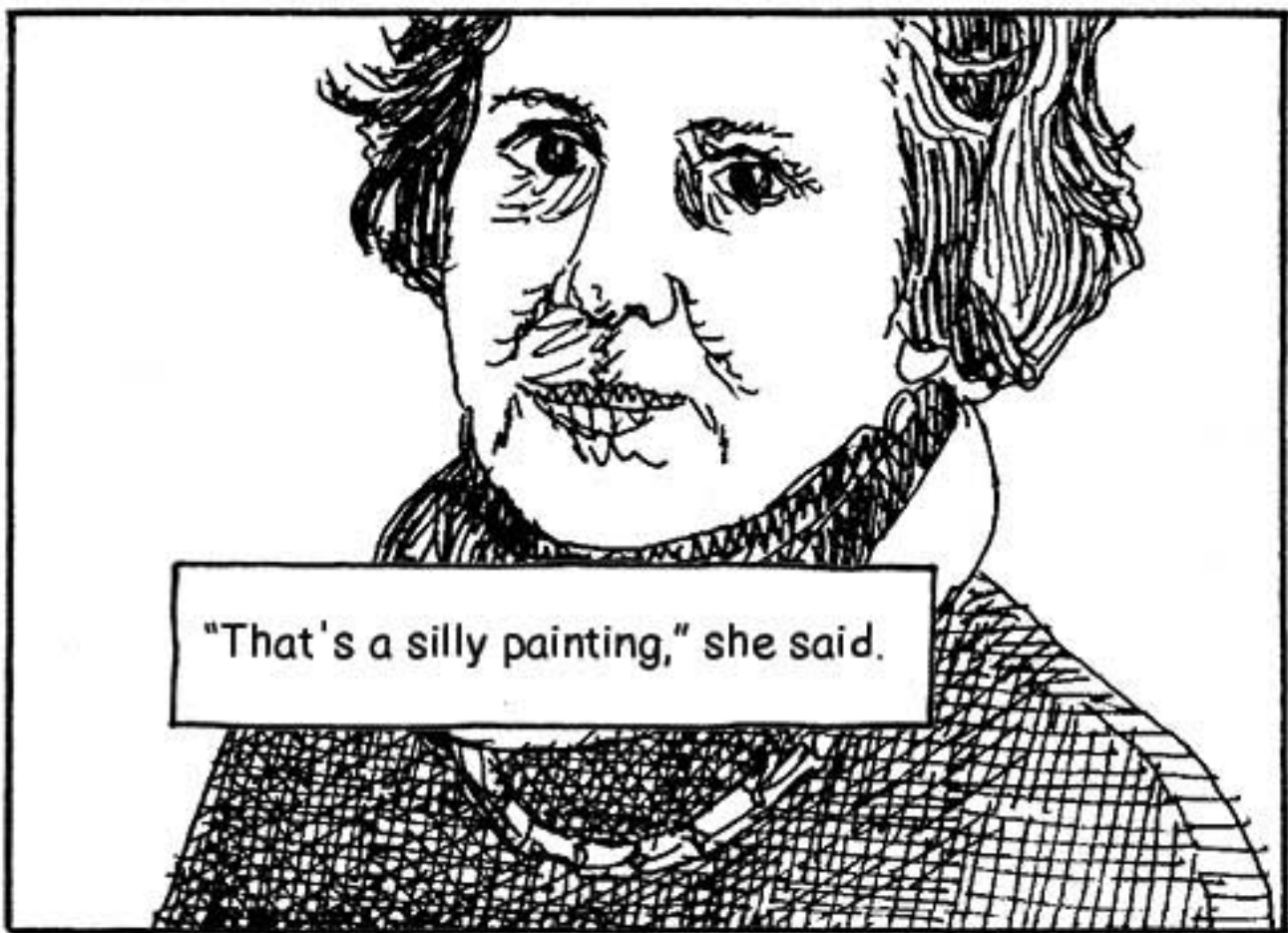
I went back several times.



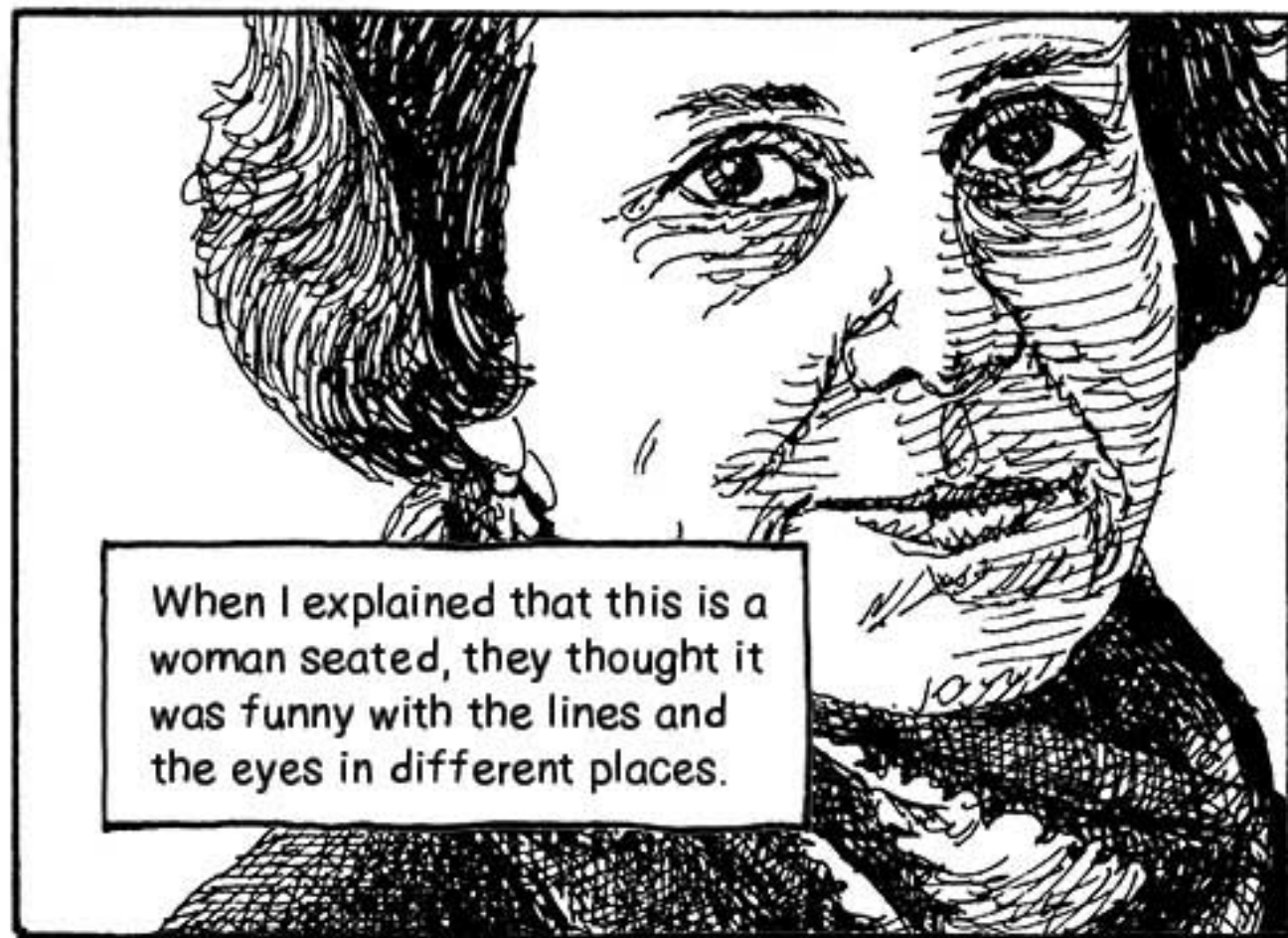
I took my little grandnieces once...
at the last hour of Picasso, actually.



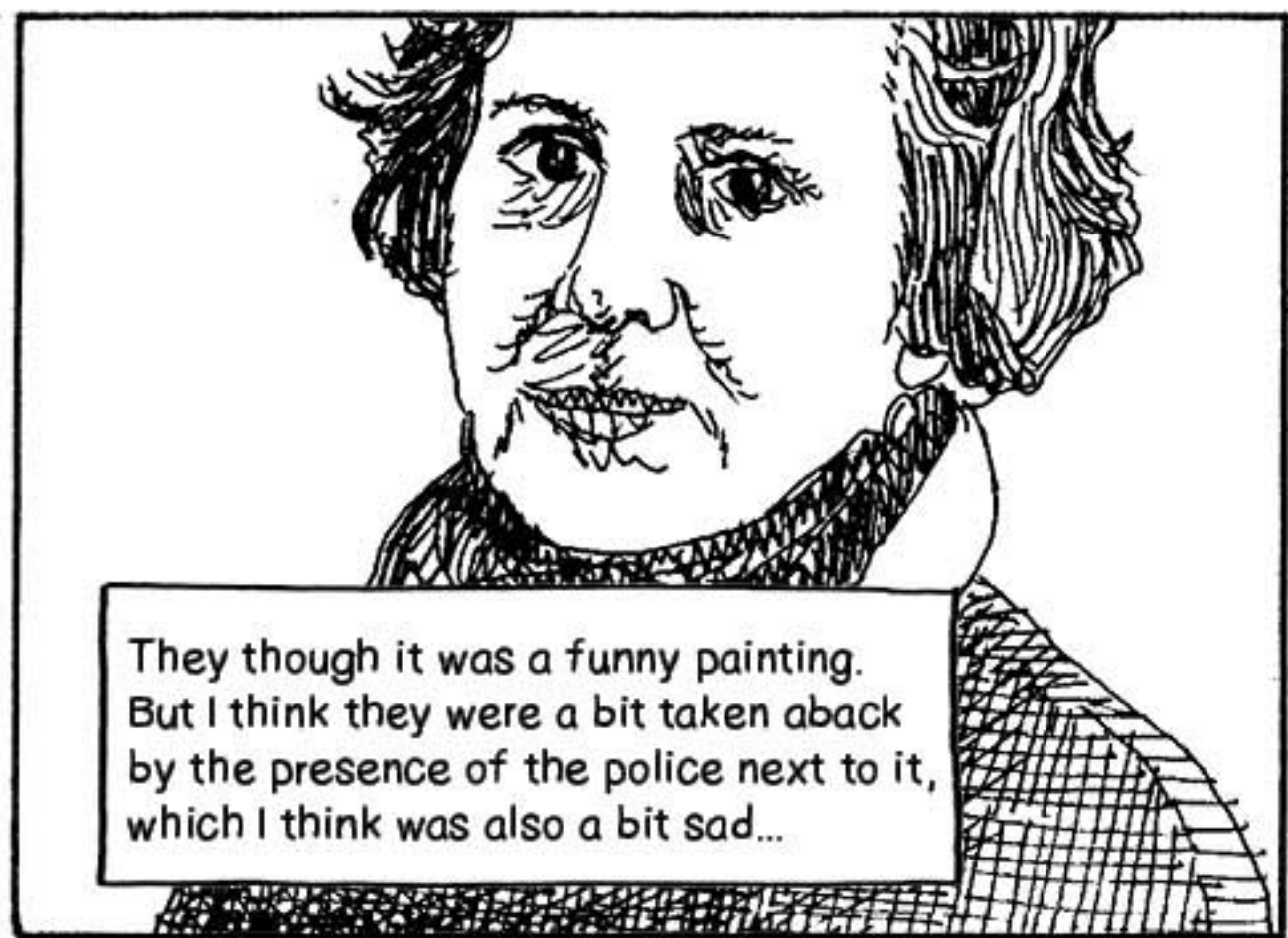
One of them said that it
looked like a silly painting.



"That's a silly painting," she said.



When I explained that this is a woman seated, they thought it was funny with the lines and the eyes in different places.



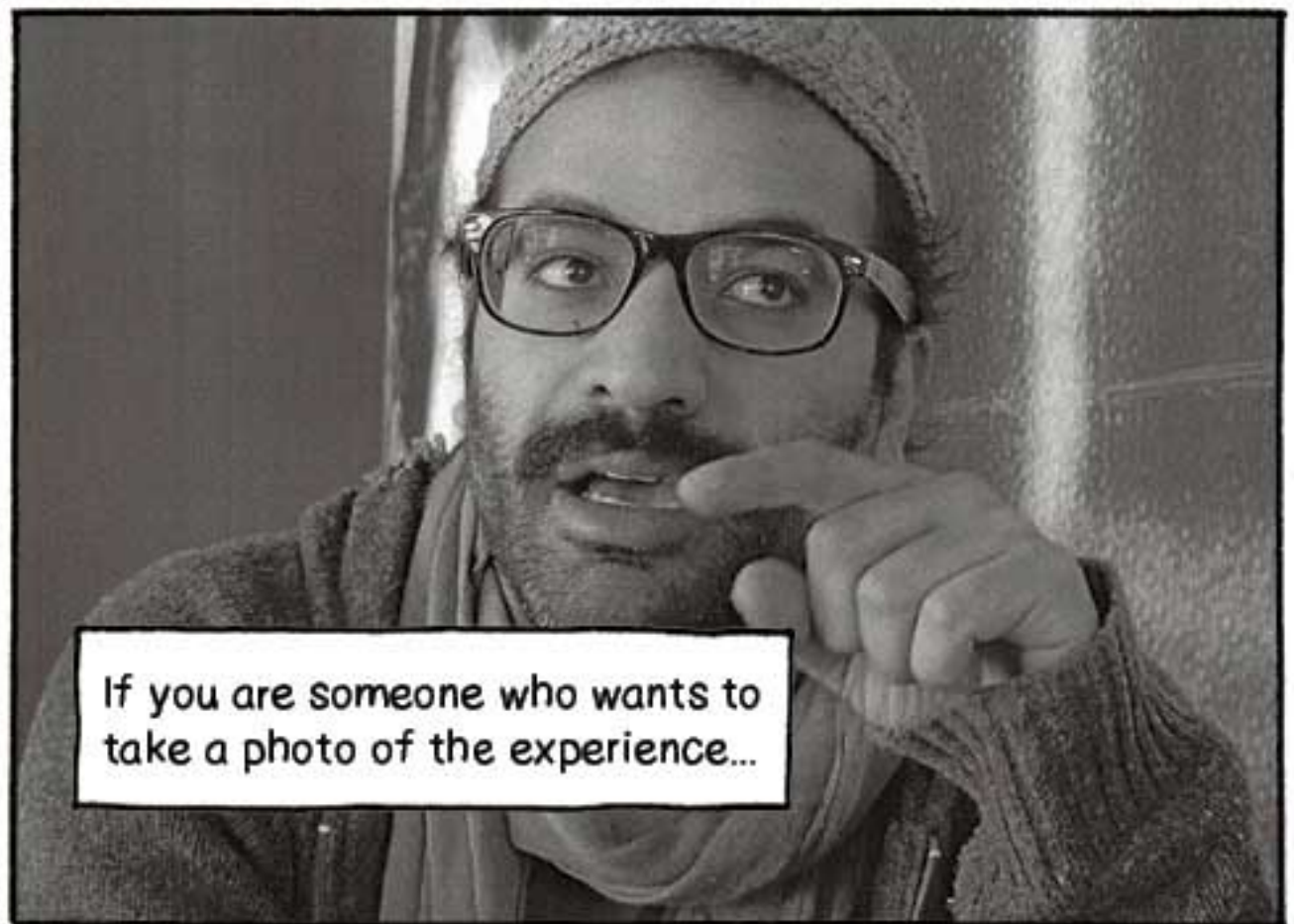
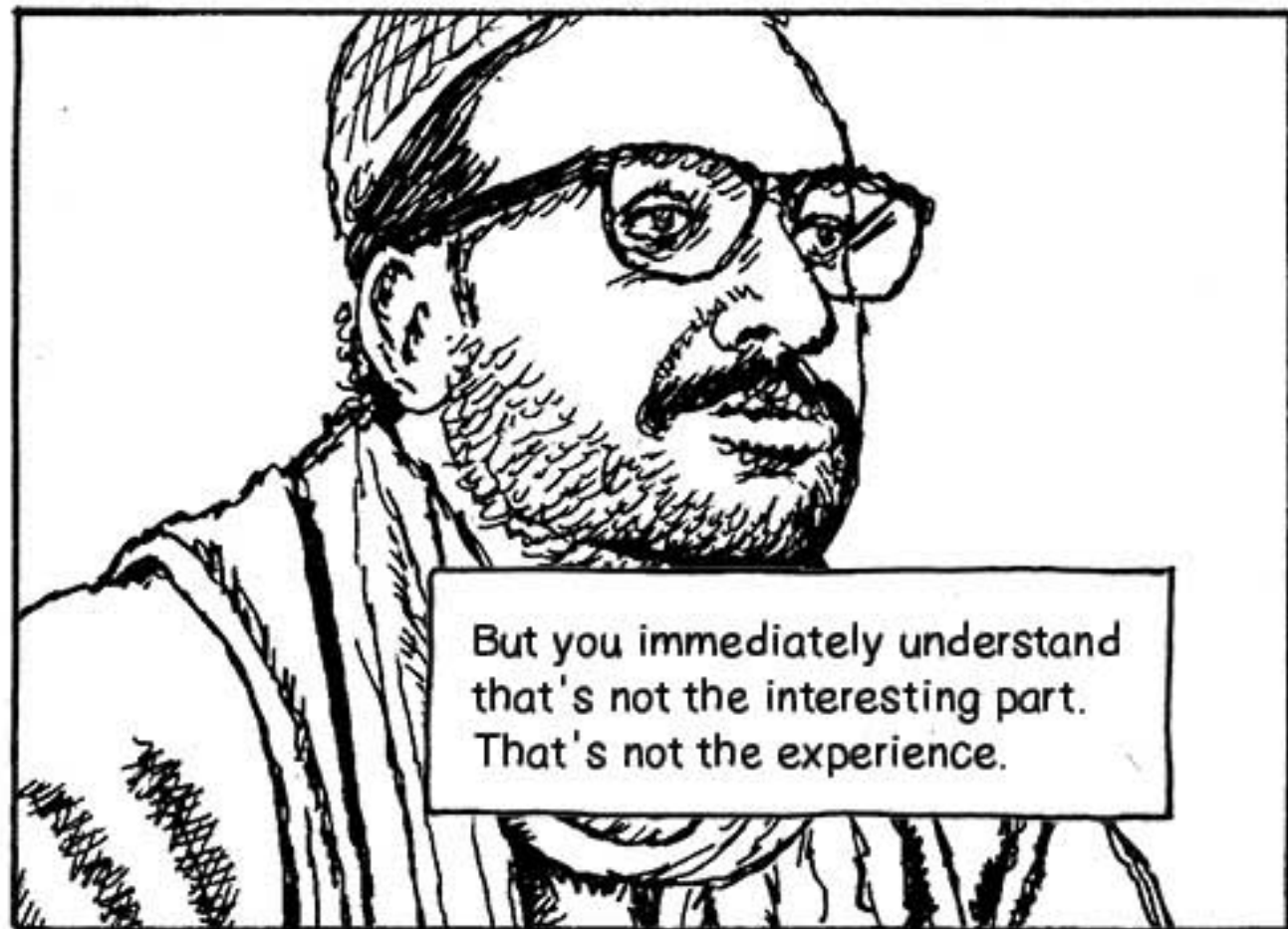
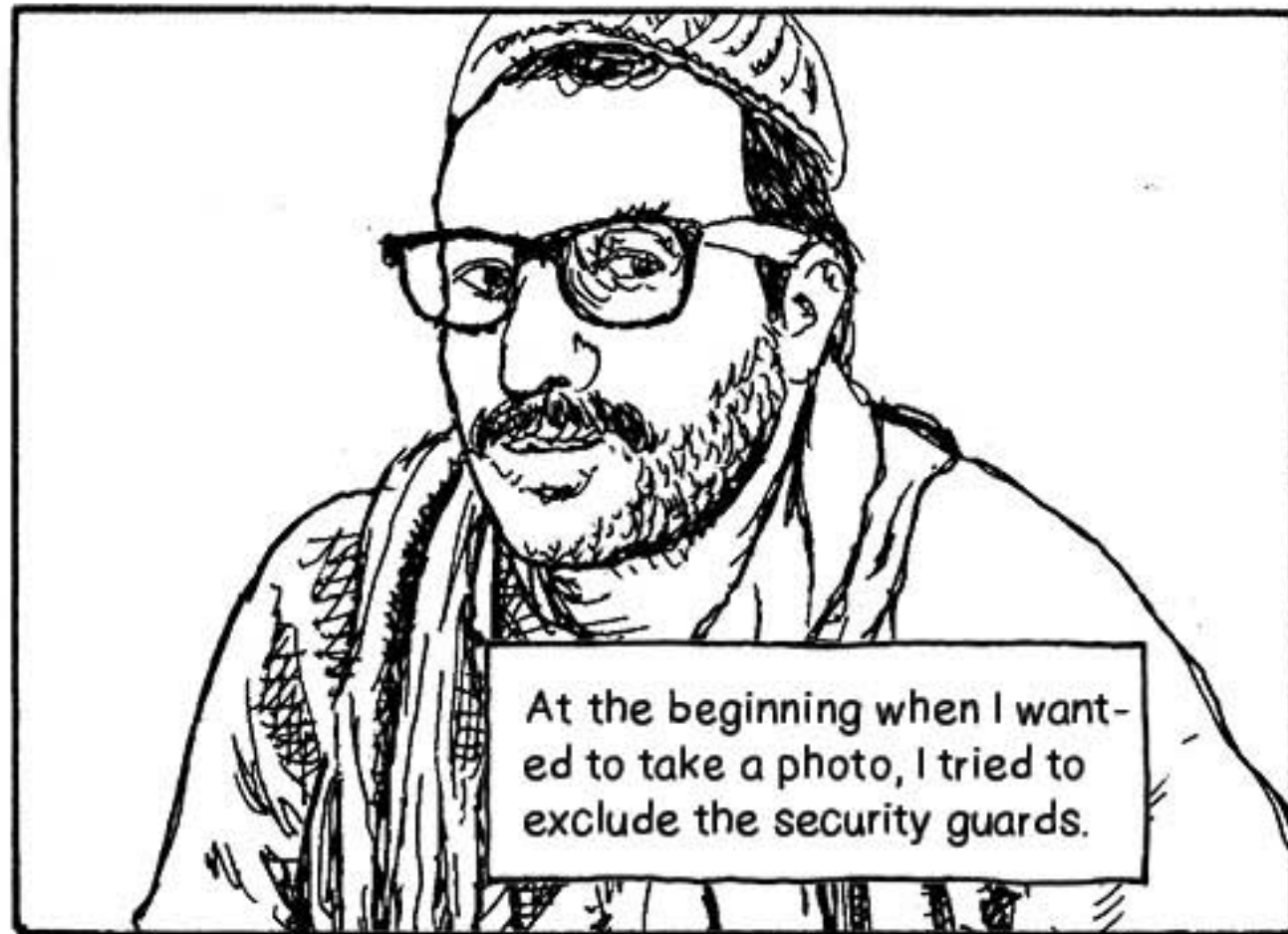
They thought it was a funny painting. But I think they were a bit taken aback by the presence of the police next to it, which I think was also a bit sad...



...seeing the presence of two policemen for the duration of the month, standing on guard next to the work.



There was monitoring, there were cameras. That could have been enough. But maybe it put the painting more in context with where we are in Palestine.

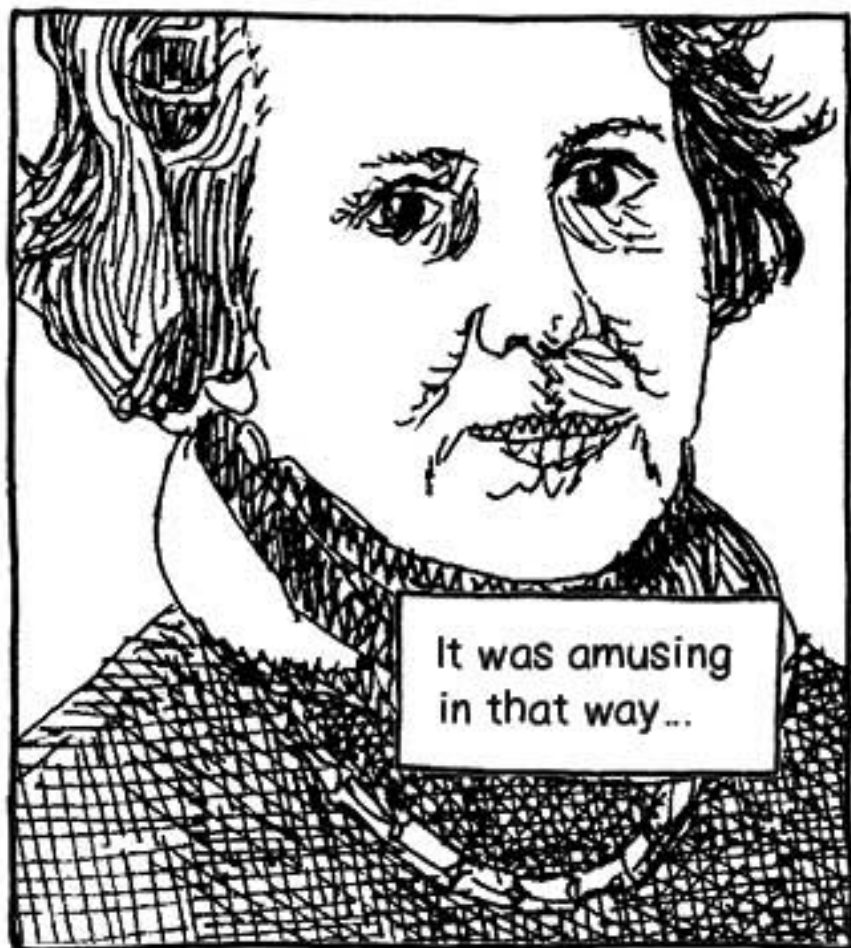




...you would take a photo of the painting with the security.



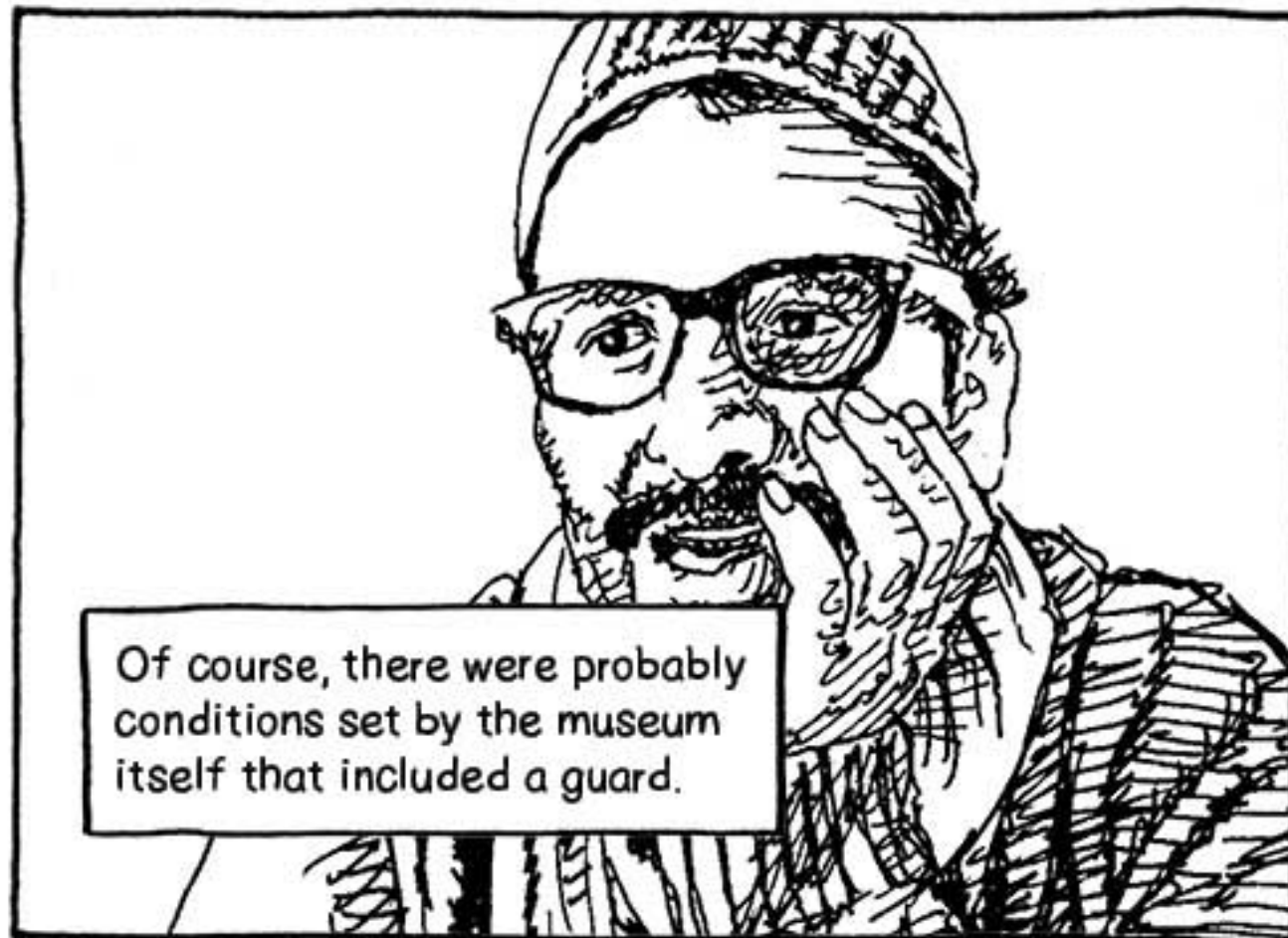
The colors of the policeman's uniform blended so much with the colors of the painting.



It was amusing in that way...



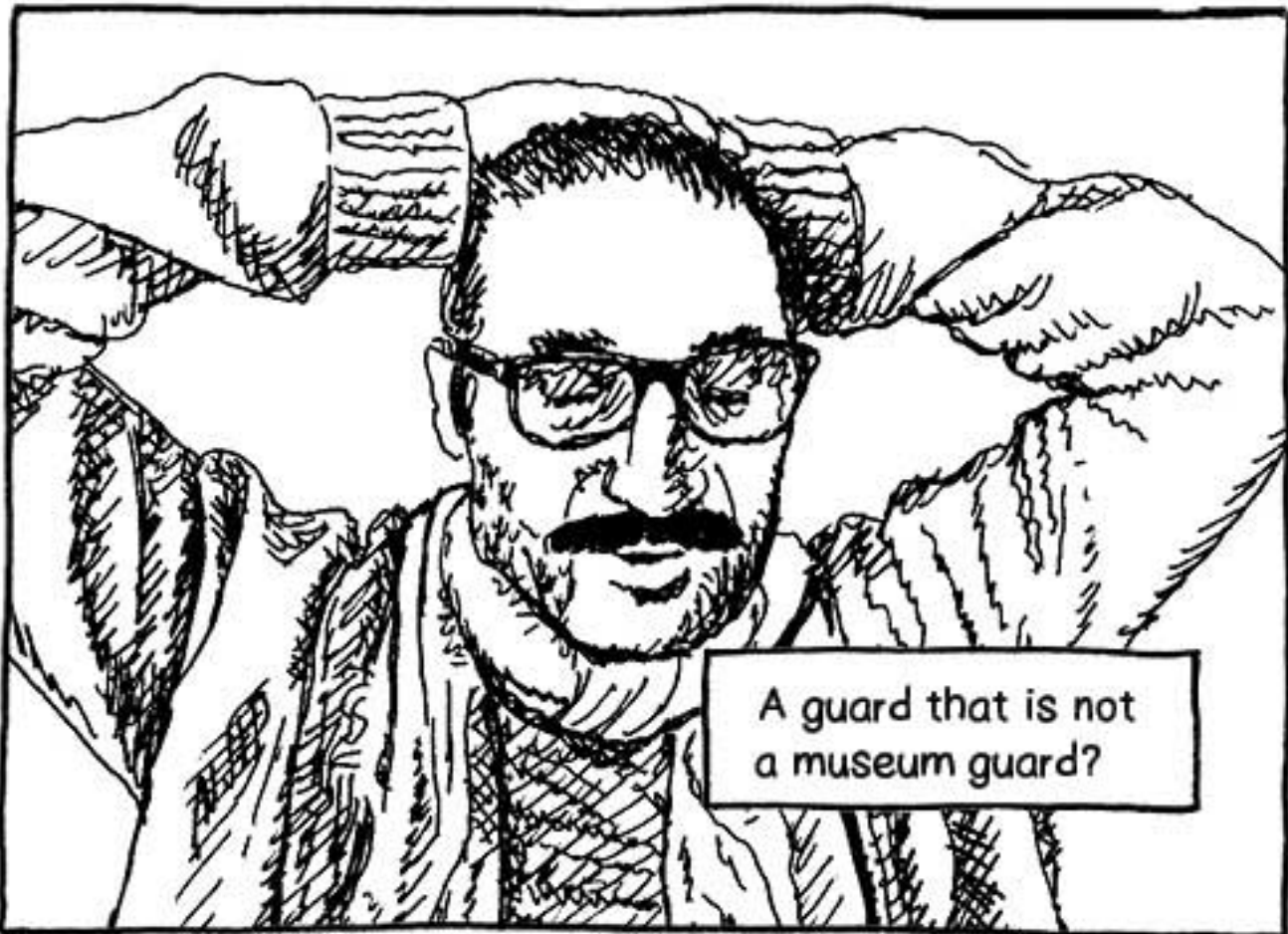
...the dark dull greens and black. I felt it was like that.



Of course, there were probably conditions set by the museum itself that included a guard.



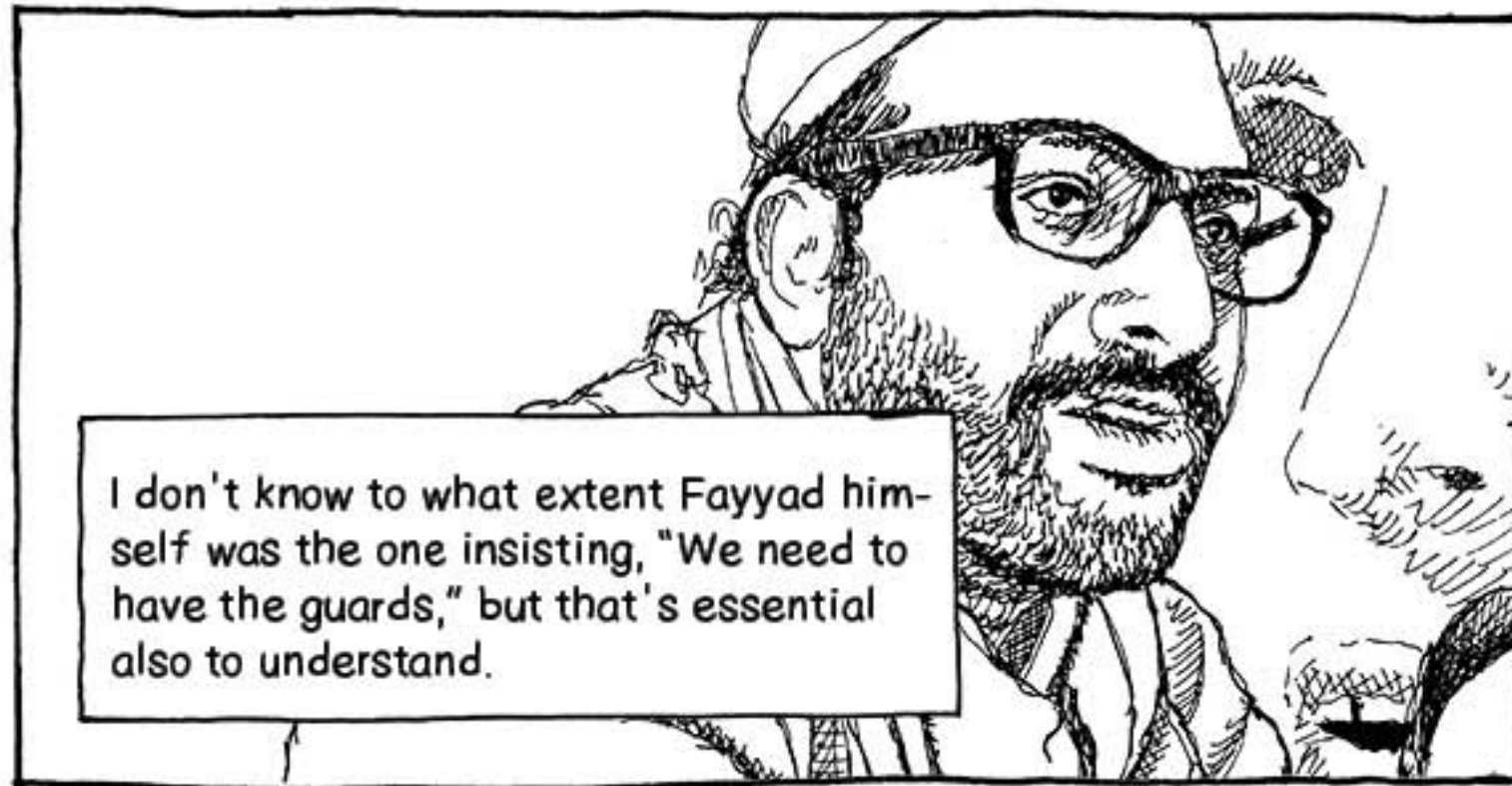
But again: a guard with a gun?



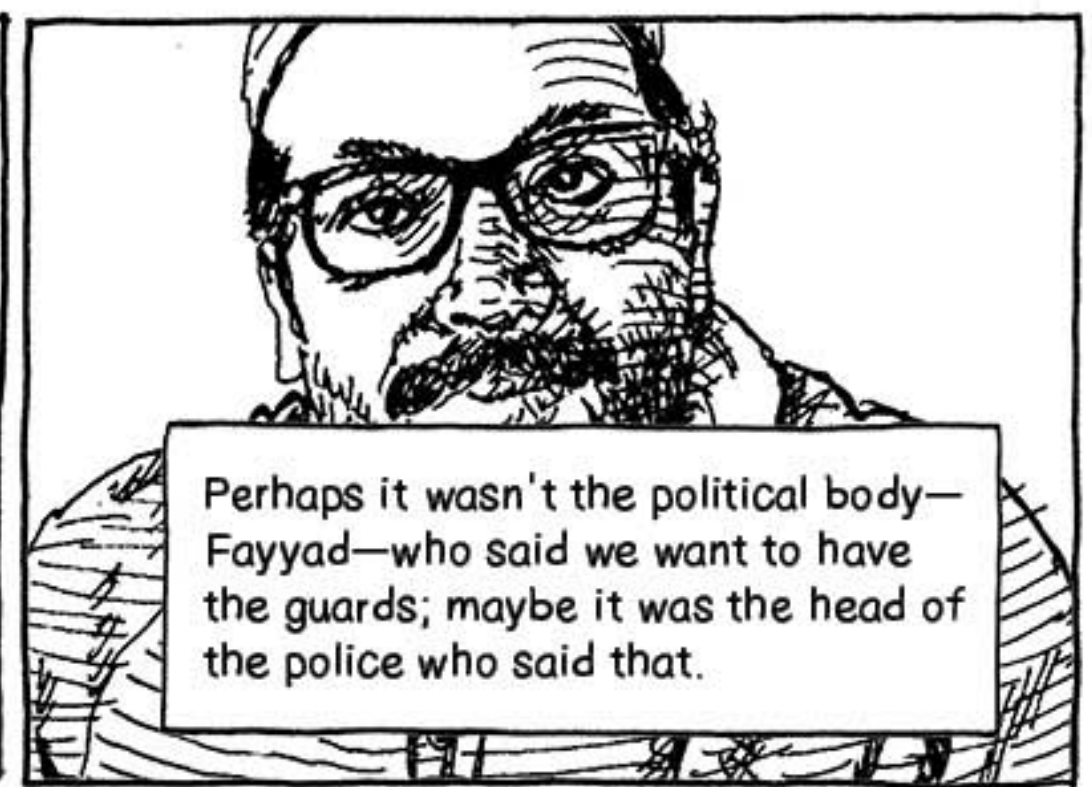
A guard that is not a museum guard?



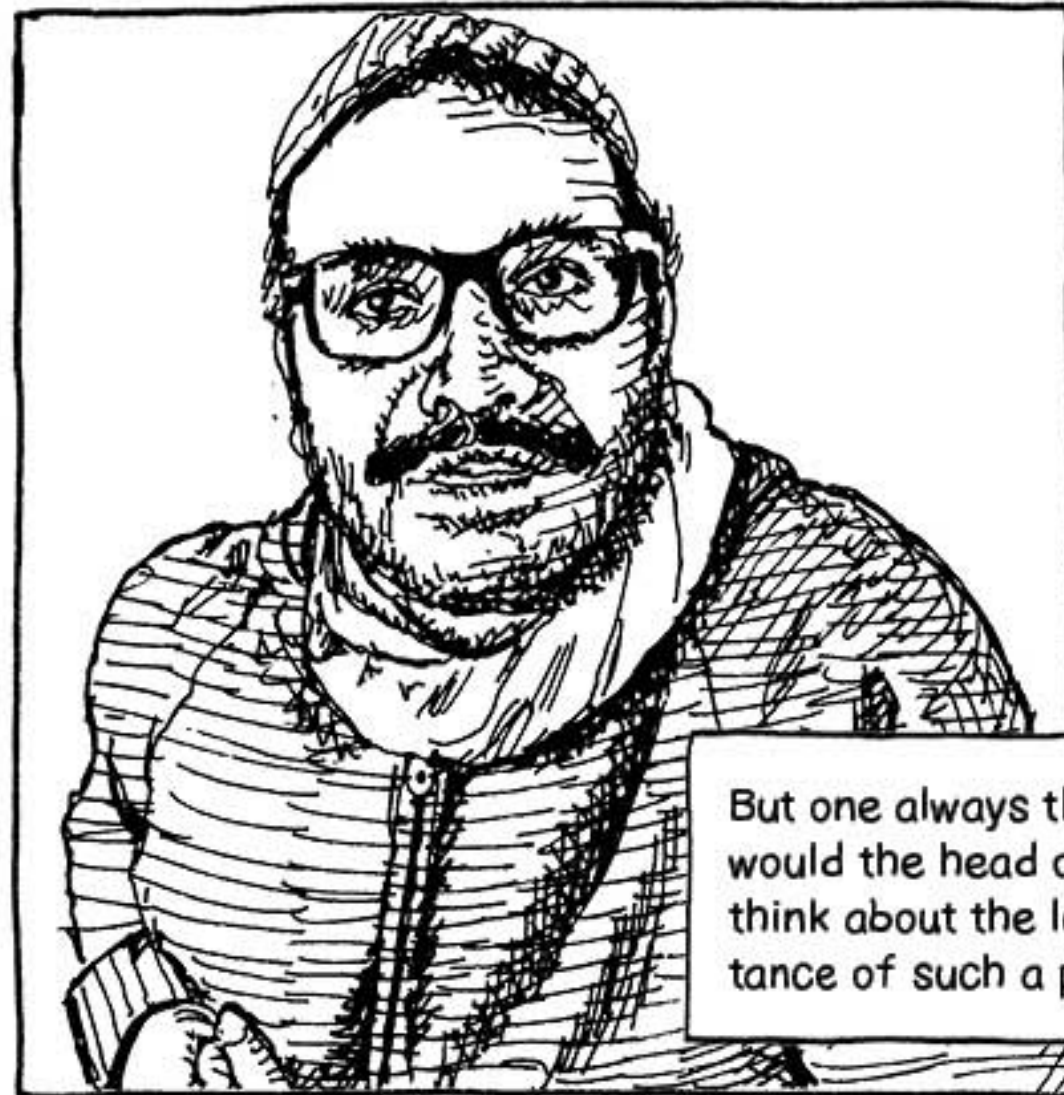
This is a state guard, you know?



I don't know to what extent Fayyad himself was the one insisting, "We need to have the guards," but that's essential also to understand.

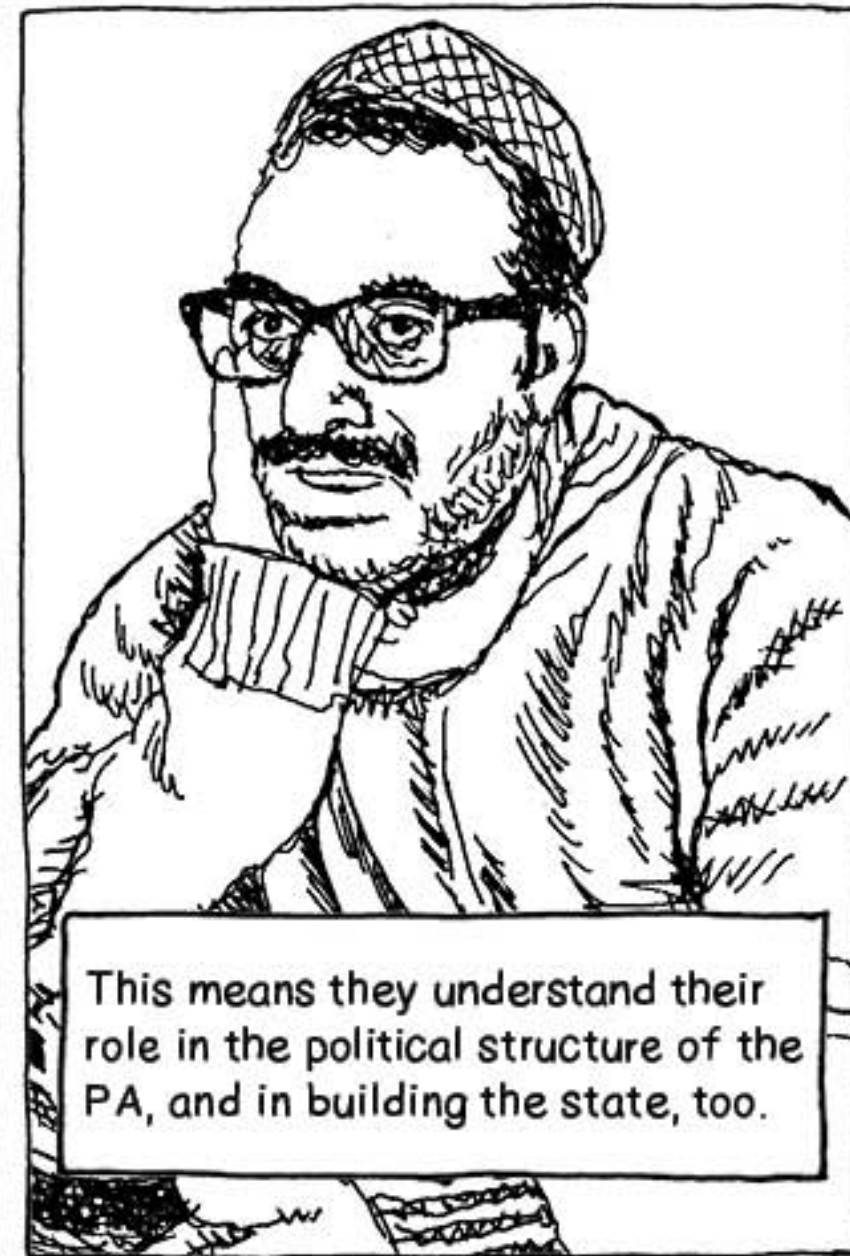
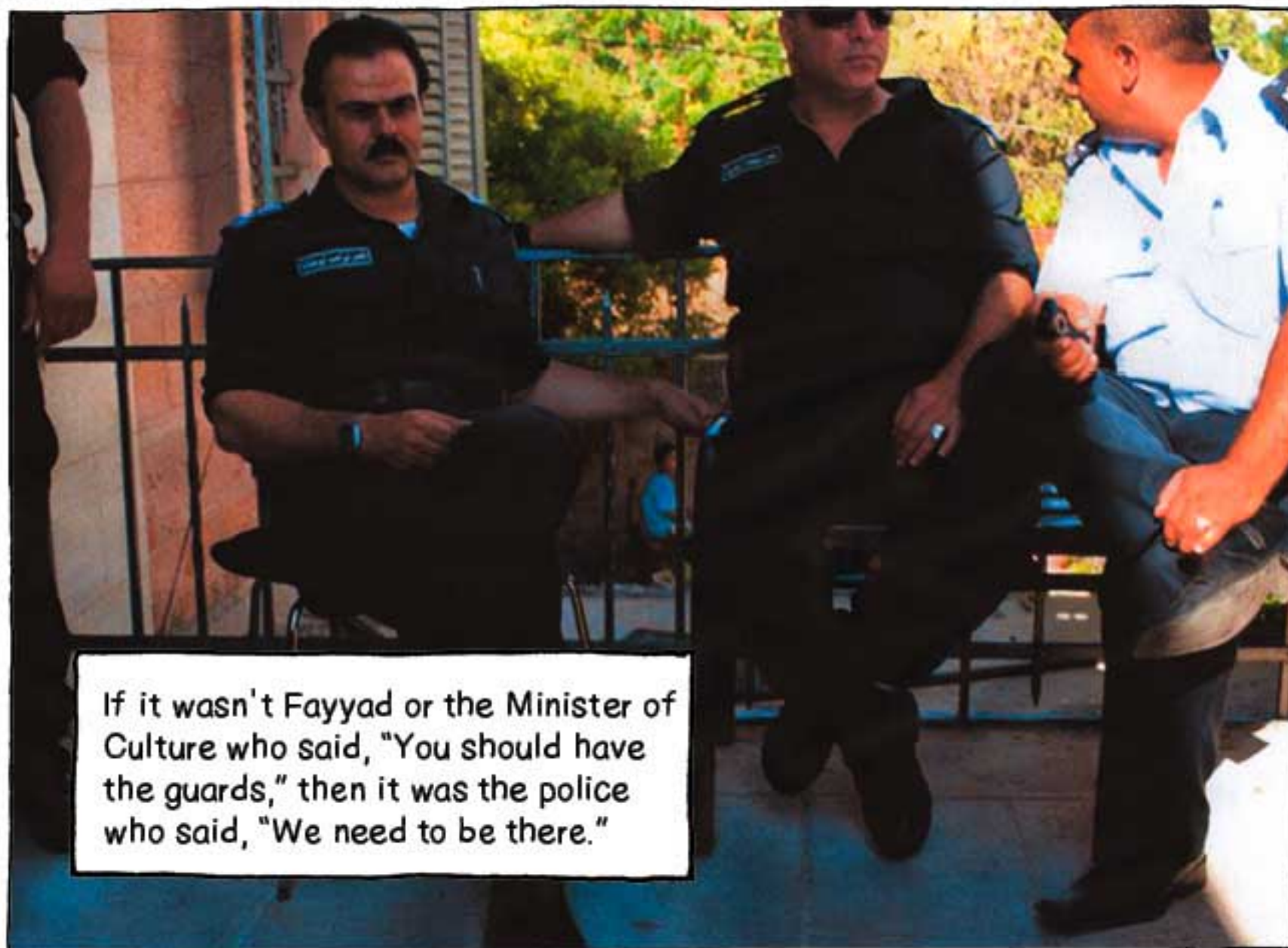
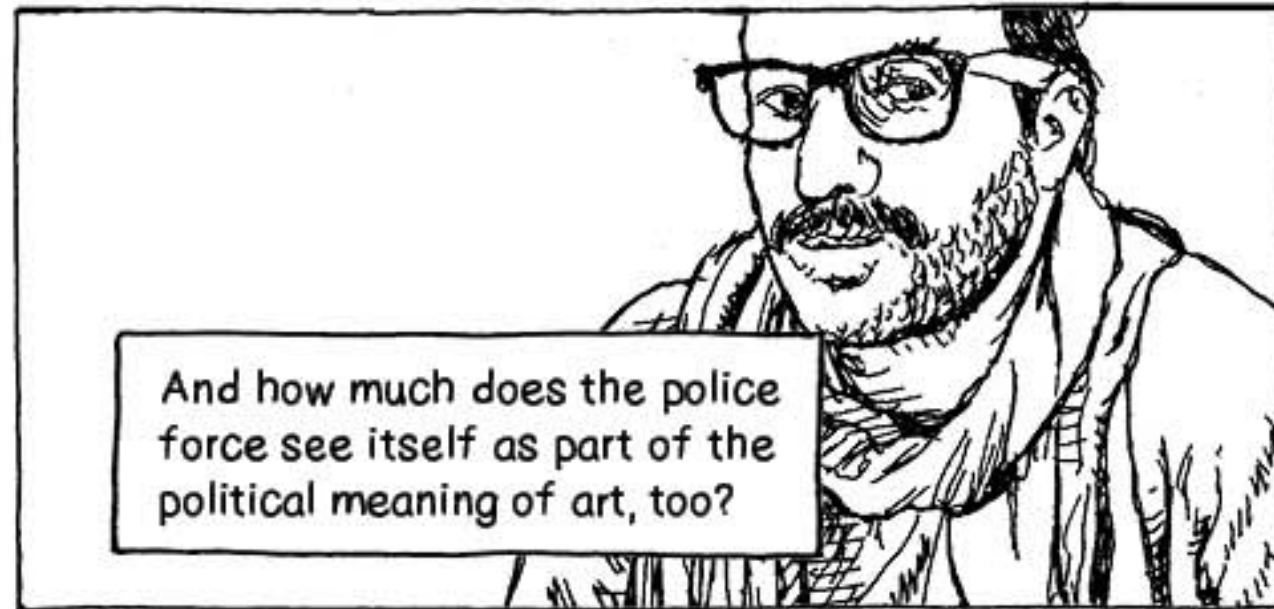
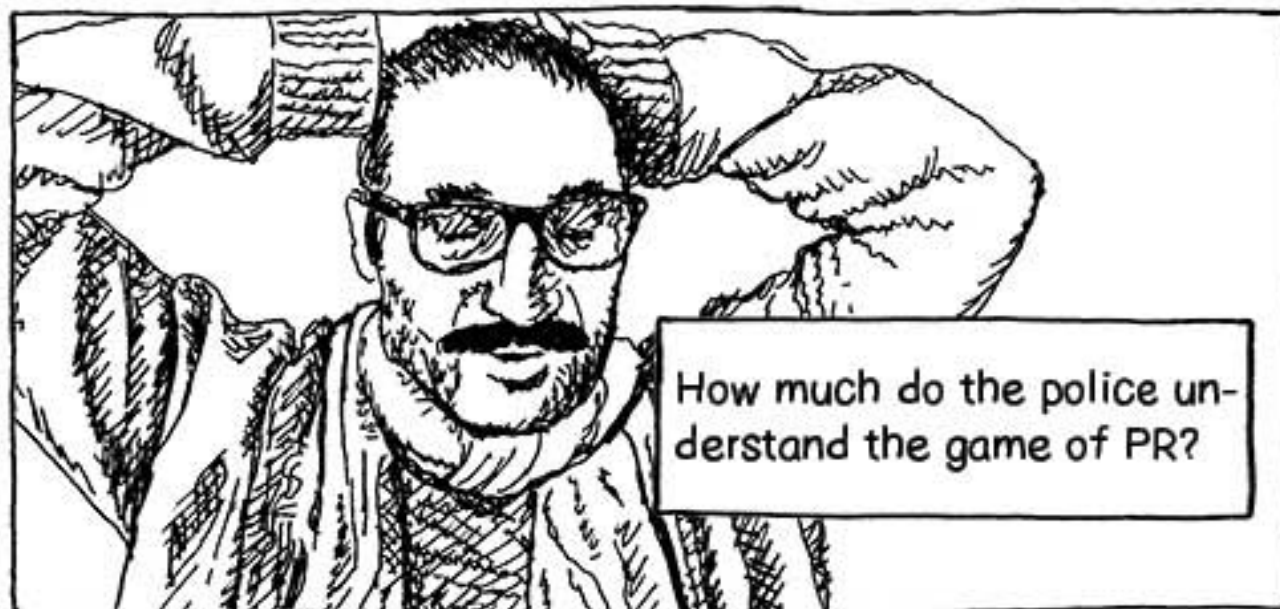


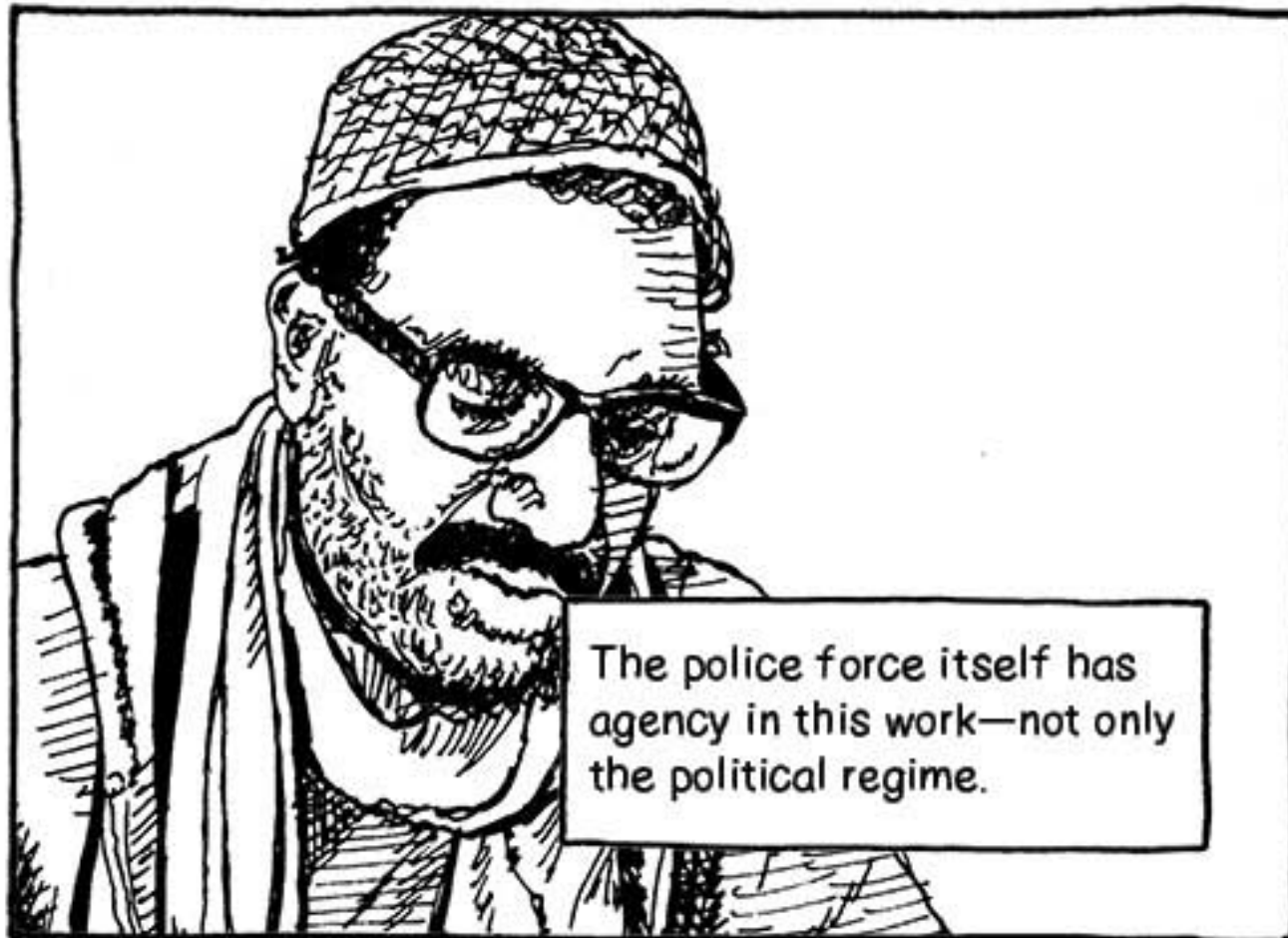
Perhaps it wasn't the political body—Fayyad—who said we want to have the guards; maybe it was the head of the police who said that.



But one always thinks, how much would the head of the police force think about the long-term importance of such a photograph?



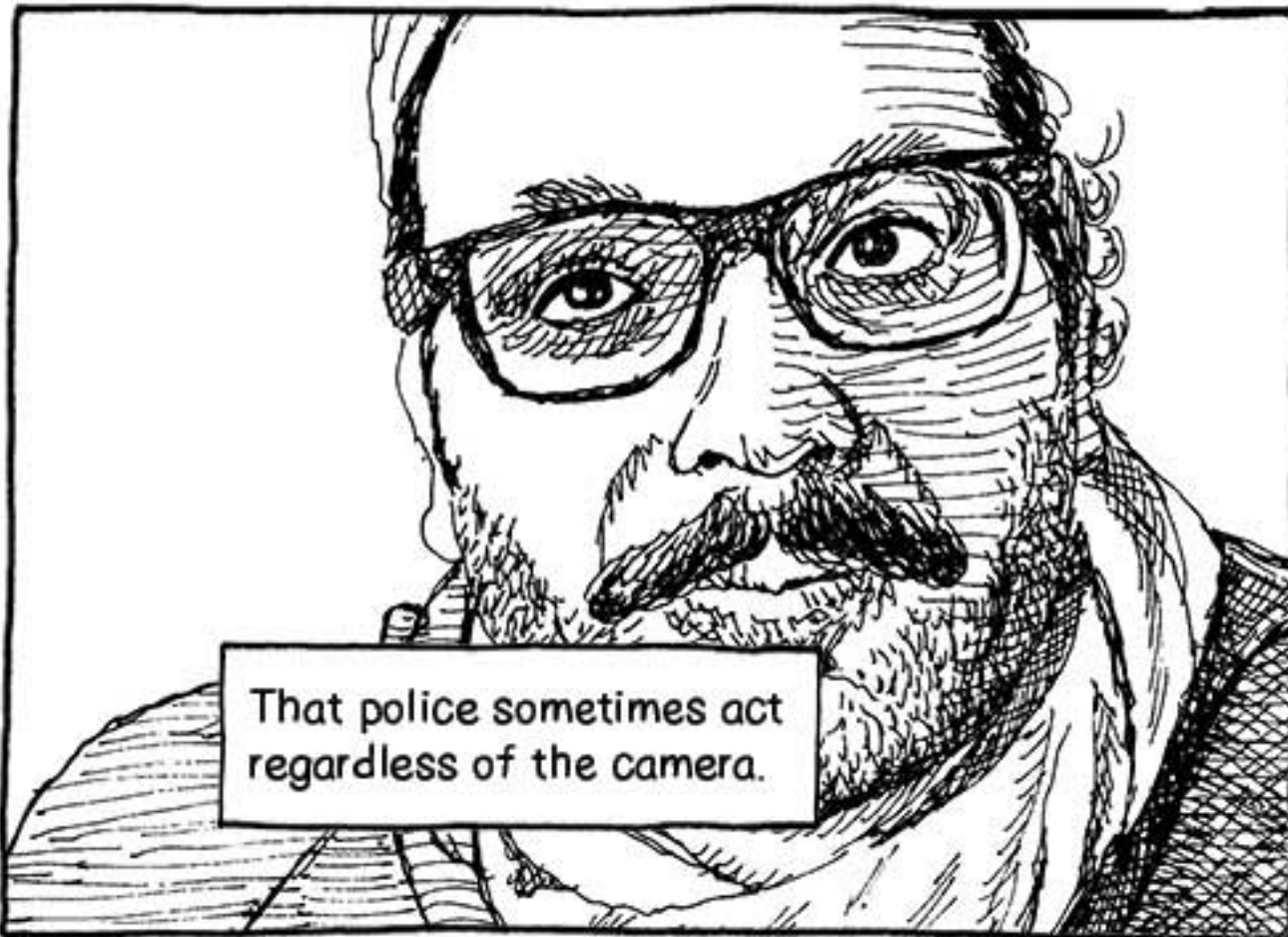




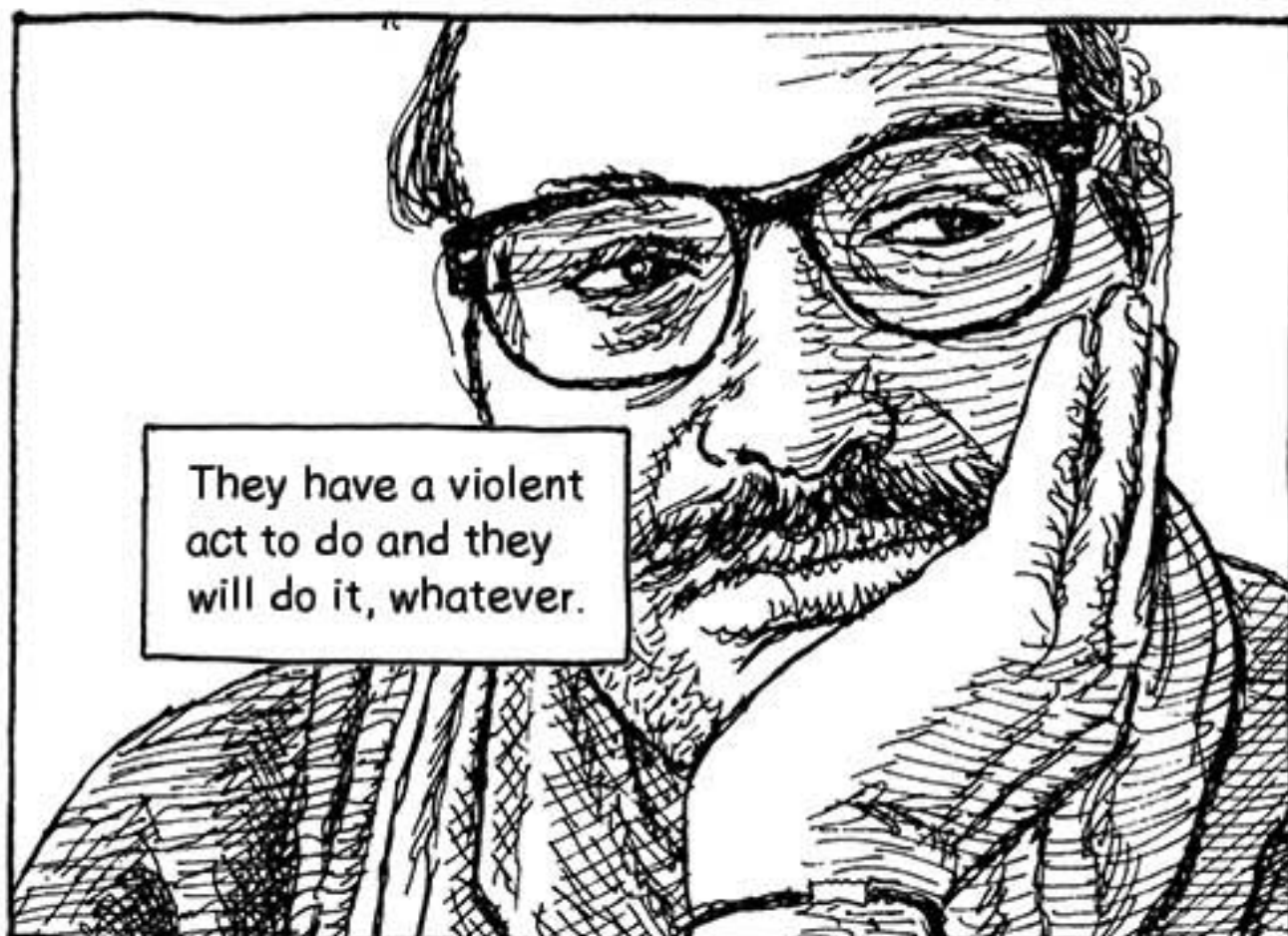
The police force itself has agency in this work—not only the political regime.



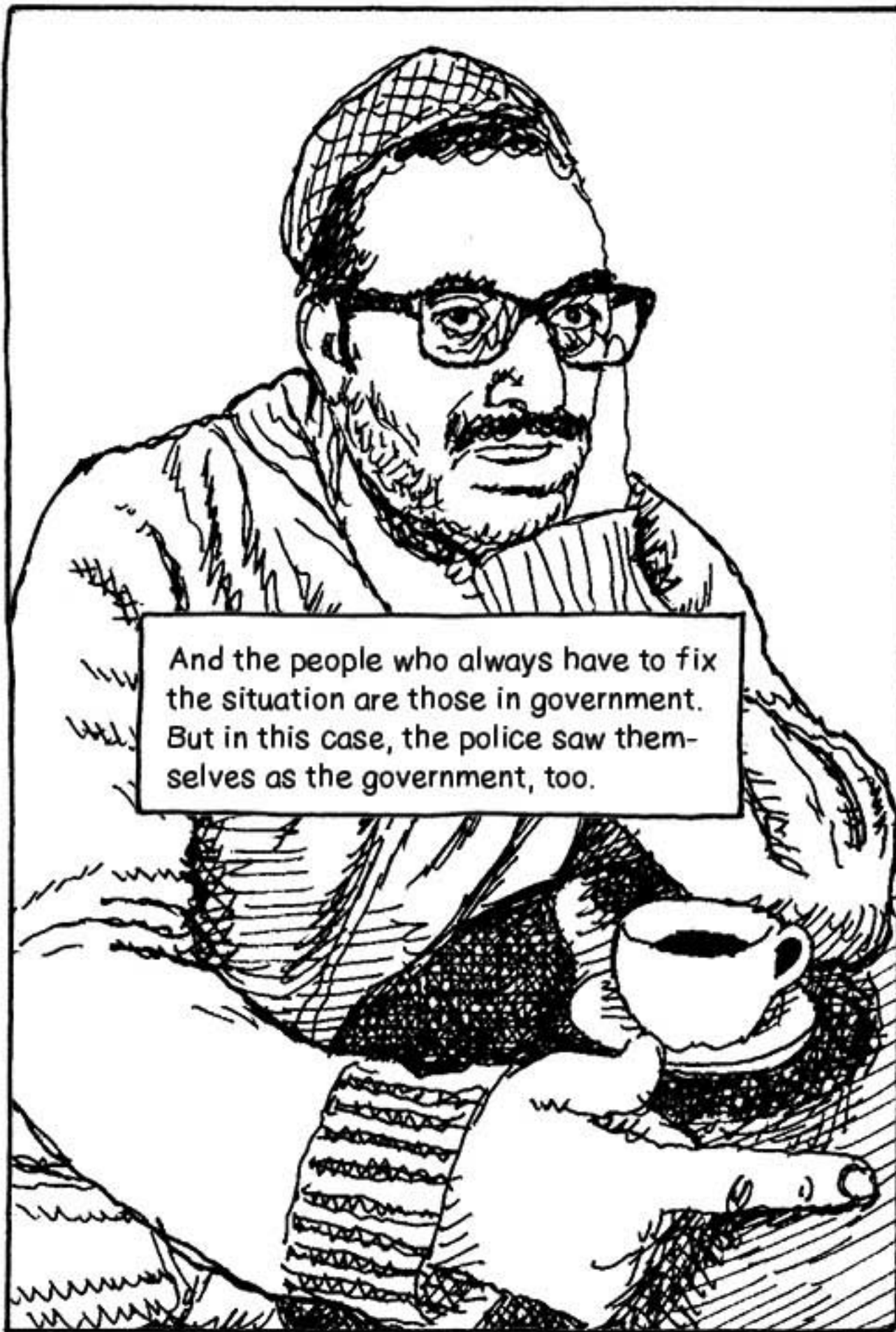
And I think... look at Egypt, for instance, or any dictatorship... these kinds of Arab regimes.



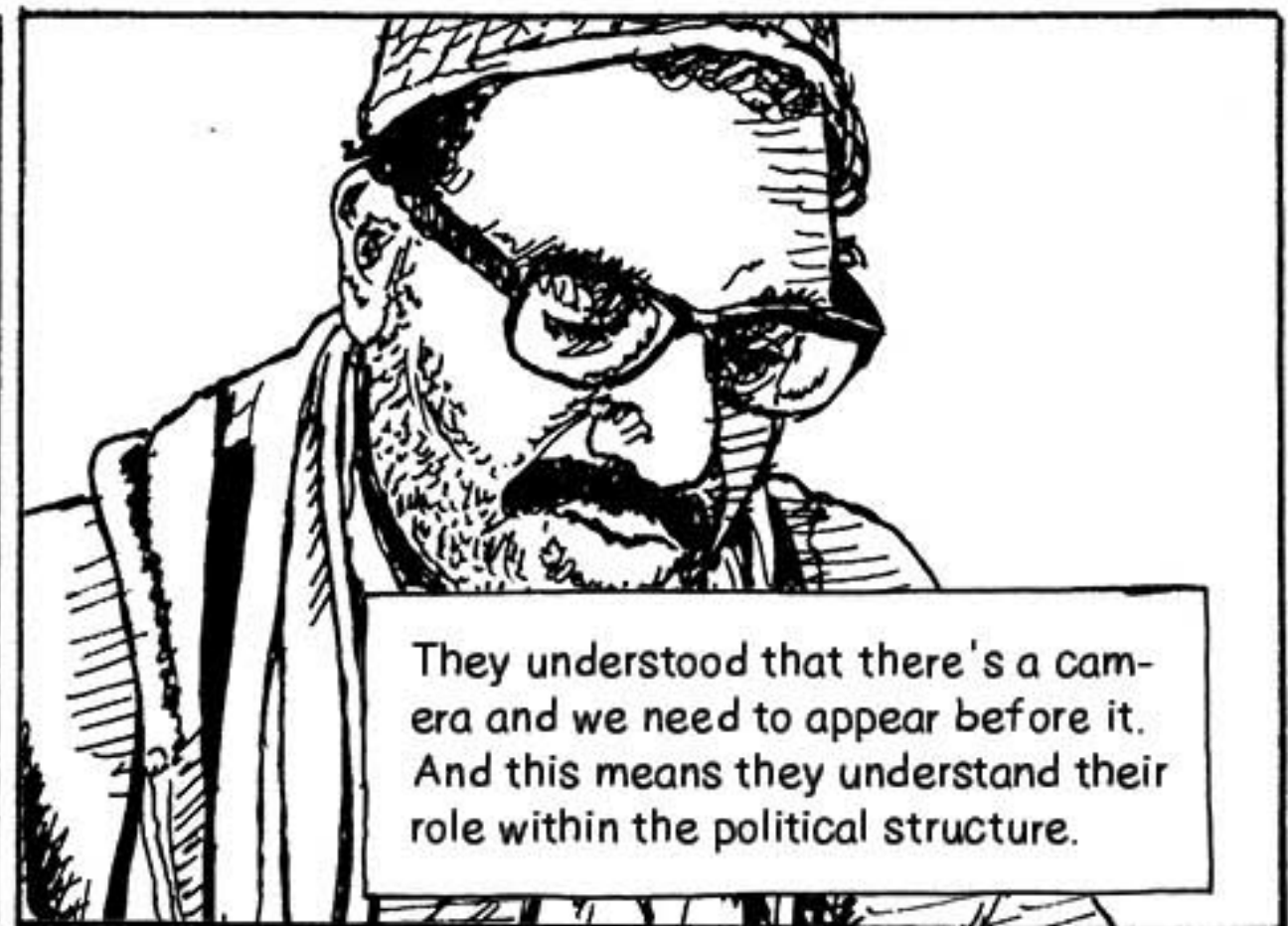
That police sometimes act regardless of the camera.



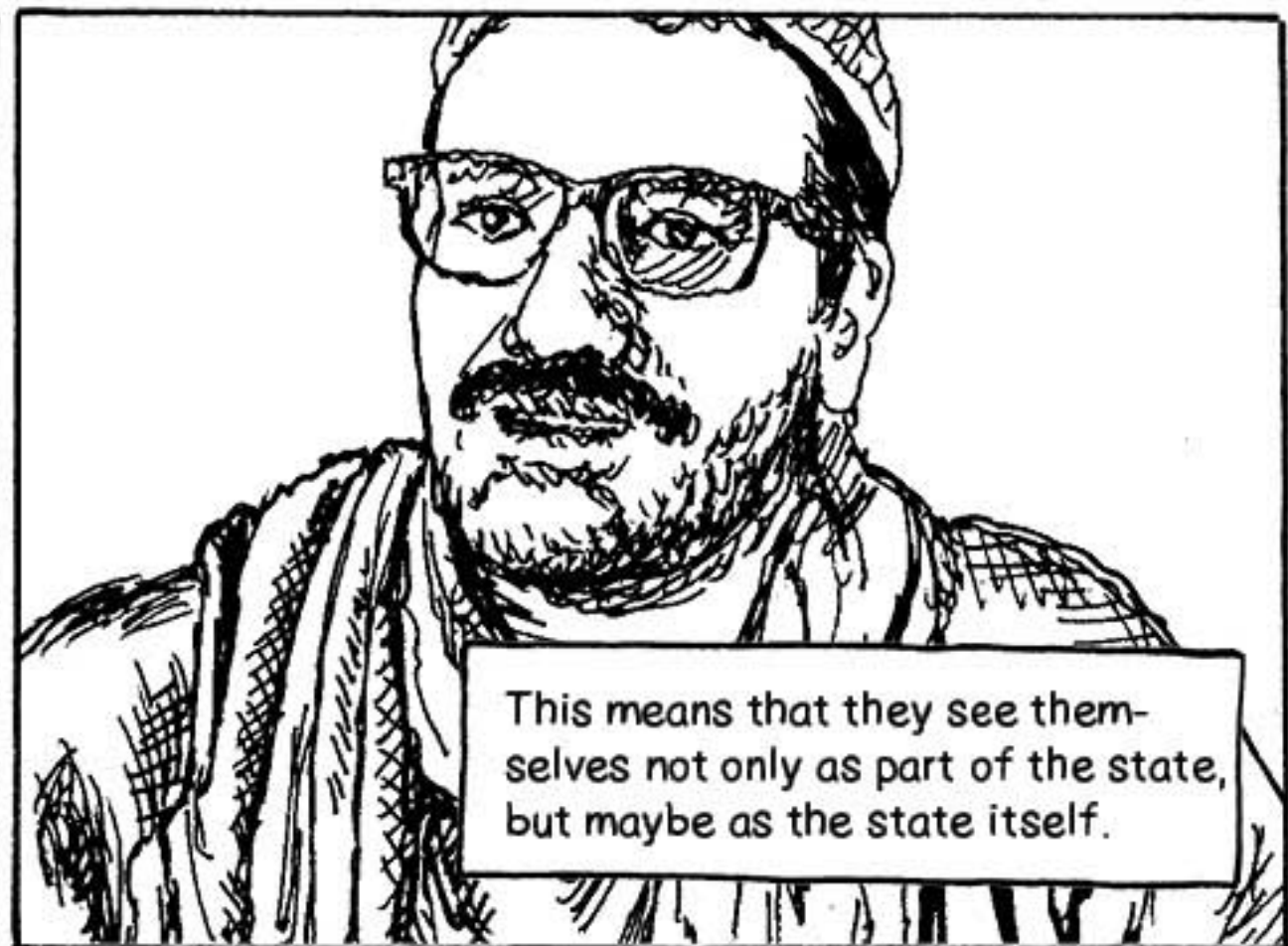
They have a violent act to do and they will do it, whatever.



And the people who always have to fix the situation are those in government. But in this case, the police saw themselves as the government, too.

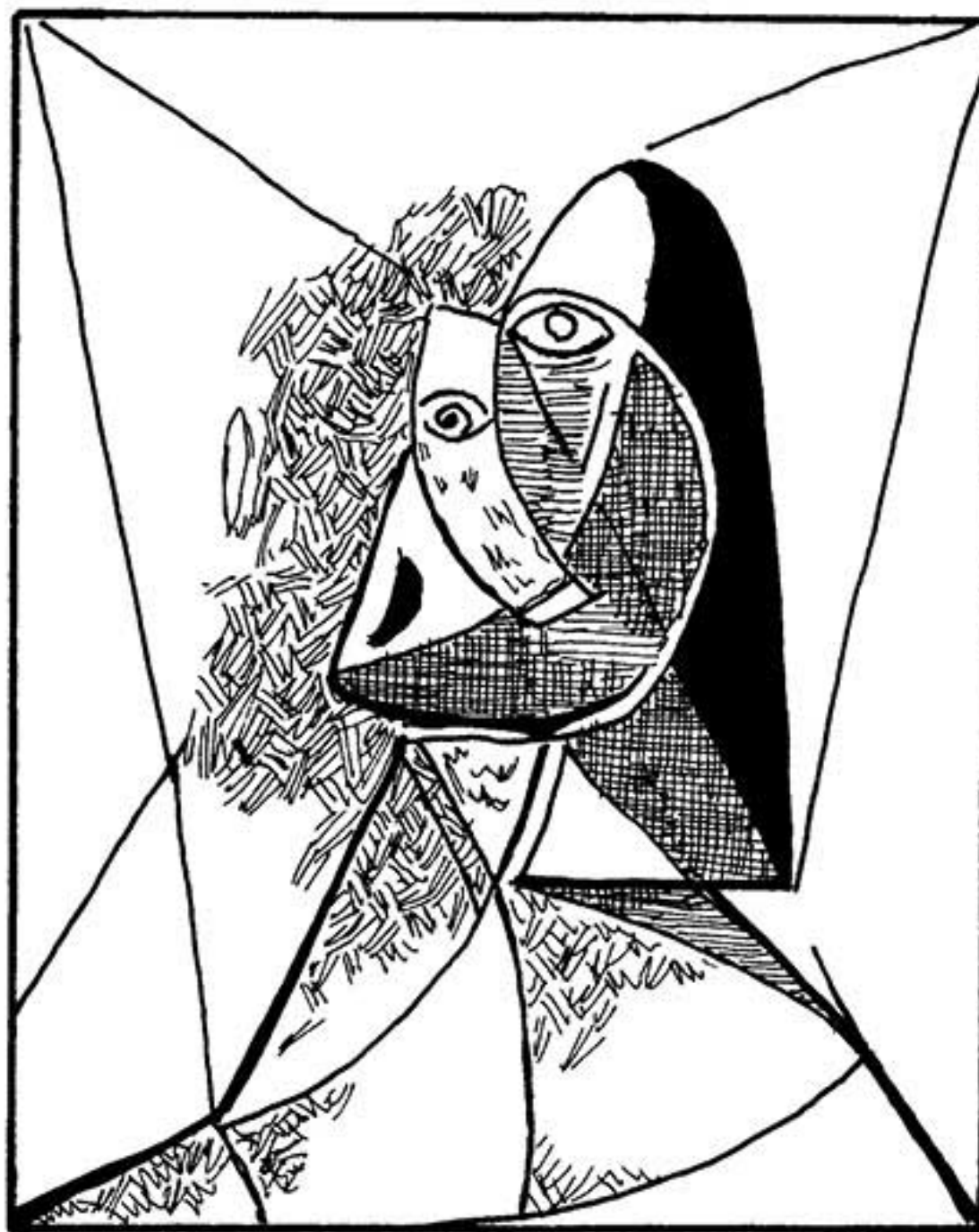


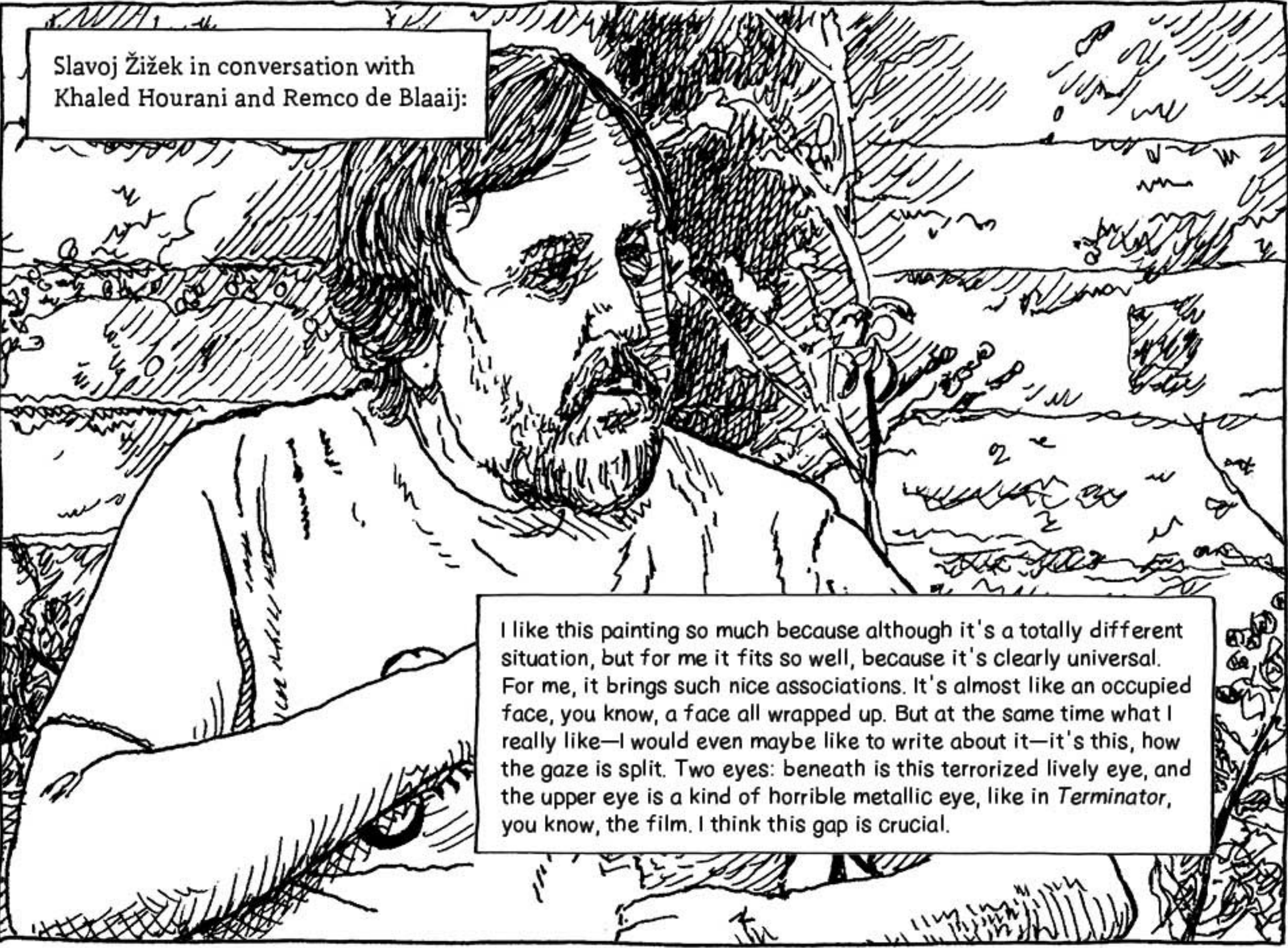
They understood that there's a camera and we need to appear before it. And this means they understand their role within the political structure.



This means that they see themselves not only as part of the state, but maybe as the state itself.

WHAT ABOUT THE PAINTING?





Slavoj Žižek in conversation with
Khaled Hourani and Remco de Blaaij:

I like this painting so much because although it's a totally different situation, but for me it fits so well, because it's clearly universal. For me, it brings such nice associations. It's almost like an occupied face, you know, a face all wrapped up. But at the same time what I really like—I would even maybe like to write about it—it's this, how the gaze is split. Two eyes: beneath is this terrorized lively eye, and the upper eye is a kind of horrible metallic eye, like in *Terminator*, you know, the film. I think this gap is crucial.



The question that has gone unasked is: what does the *Buste de femme* itself want? The art historian W. J. T. Mitchell has observed that the default position of images is feminine. Spectatorship is constructed by making the image a bearer of a scrutinizing male gaze. What a picture wants, says Mitchell, is to switch places with the viewer: to exchange the passive acceptance of a look for the capacity to capture the beholder's attention, turning "him" into an image. "This effect," says Mitchell, "is perhaps the clearest demonstration we have that the power of pictures and of women are modeled on one another and that this is a model of both pictures and women that is abject, mutilated, and castrated.

The power they want is manifested as lack, not as possession." Kaja Silverman might agree with Mitchell in asserting that this sort of viewership is gendered, or that the gaze as such has ideologically become gendered with the female figure obliged to "bear the burden of specularly so that the look of her male counterpart can be aligned with the camera."





Sometimes when we were too busy the security guards would be guiding people and explaining things and showing them the crate. I overheard them one night—I told this already to a *Guardian* reporter—talking to each other, saying, "Man, this is a woman who is carrying her child and running away from war."



And the other guard asks, "How do you know that?"



And the first guard says, "Look, she has two eyes: one is on her baby and one is on the war." And the other guy settled for this explanation.

We had a data-logger set up so we could monitor it over the Internet, and after the opening Louis began to notice there were strange spikes in the humidity happening in the middle of the night.



So, we called up the Academy and asked them to check the security camera, and it turns out the guards who were stationed outside were going in and out to look at the painting.



You could see them on the camera, talking in front of the painting.

Perhaps in Palestine even the most affirmative project involuntarily lends itself to producing this sort of lack as a spectral double of its own aspirations, as if every catastrophe since the Naqba is already inscribed in the cultural atmosphere as a structural condition for becoming. Perhaps the painting's overlooked desire mirrors that of Palestinians themselves: for a state, for restitution, for a museum in which to enshrine this state to come as a portrait, and by doing so, rehabilitate a wounded machismo that has forsaken the primacy of the dominating masculine gaze. After all, Palestine and Palestinians are more accustomed to having their person subjected to manifold surveillance regimes, and to seeing their territory reorganized in line with the Panopticon logic of the occupation.



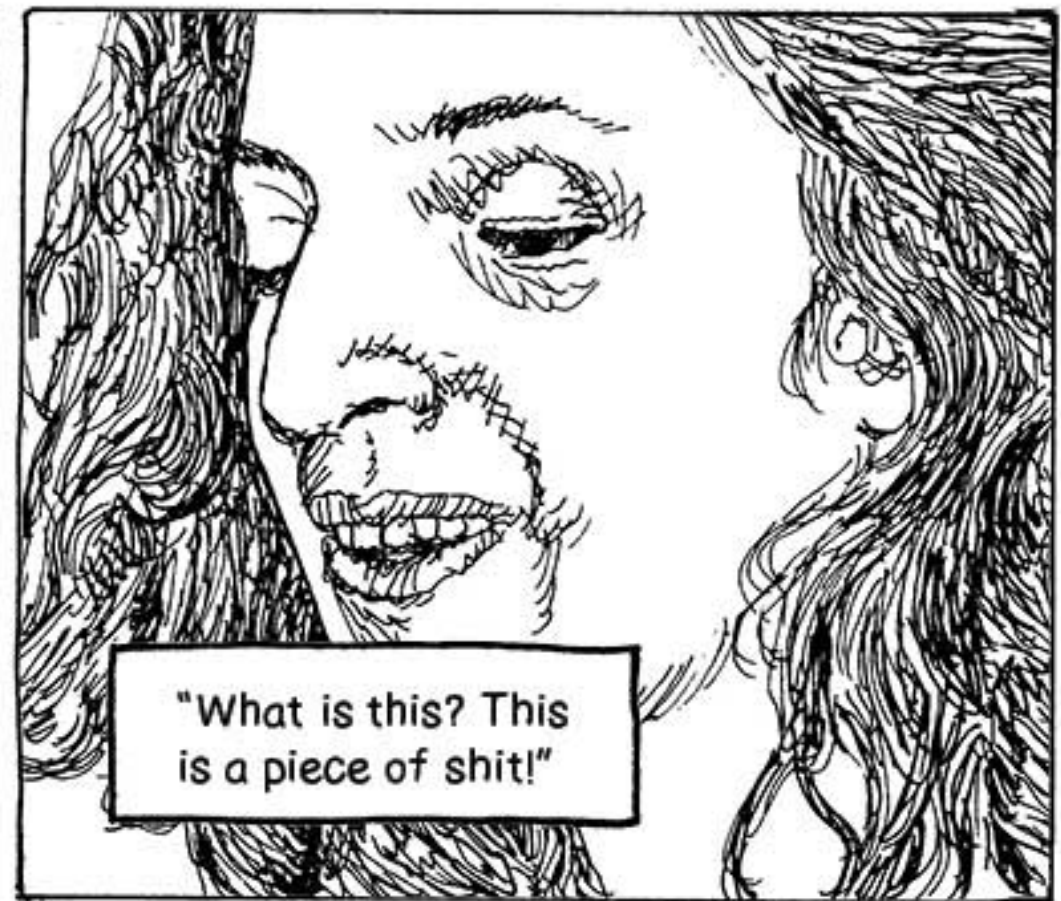
Palestine, prefigured as a woman within the tradition of resistance iconography, now appears as a portrait without semblance, split within itself, and splitting, too, the vision of the spectators, their gaze oscillating between the painting and the guards with their weapons.

Aligning sight with the photographic apparatus would also be to attribute to the guards a kind of transvestism; as if they, too, had become feminized by the camera's gaze, the look of the museum viewer.





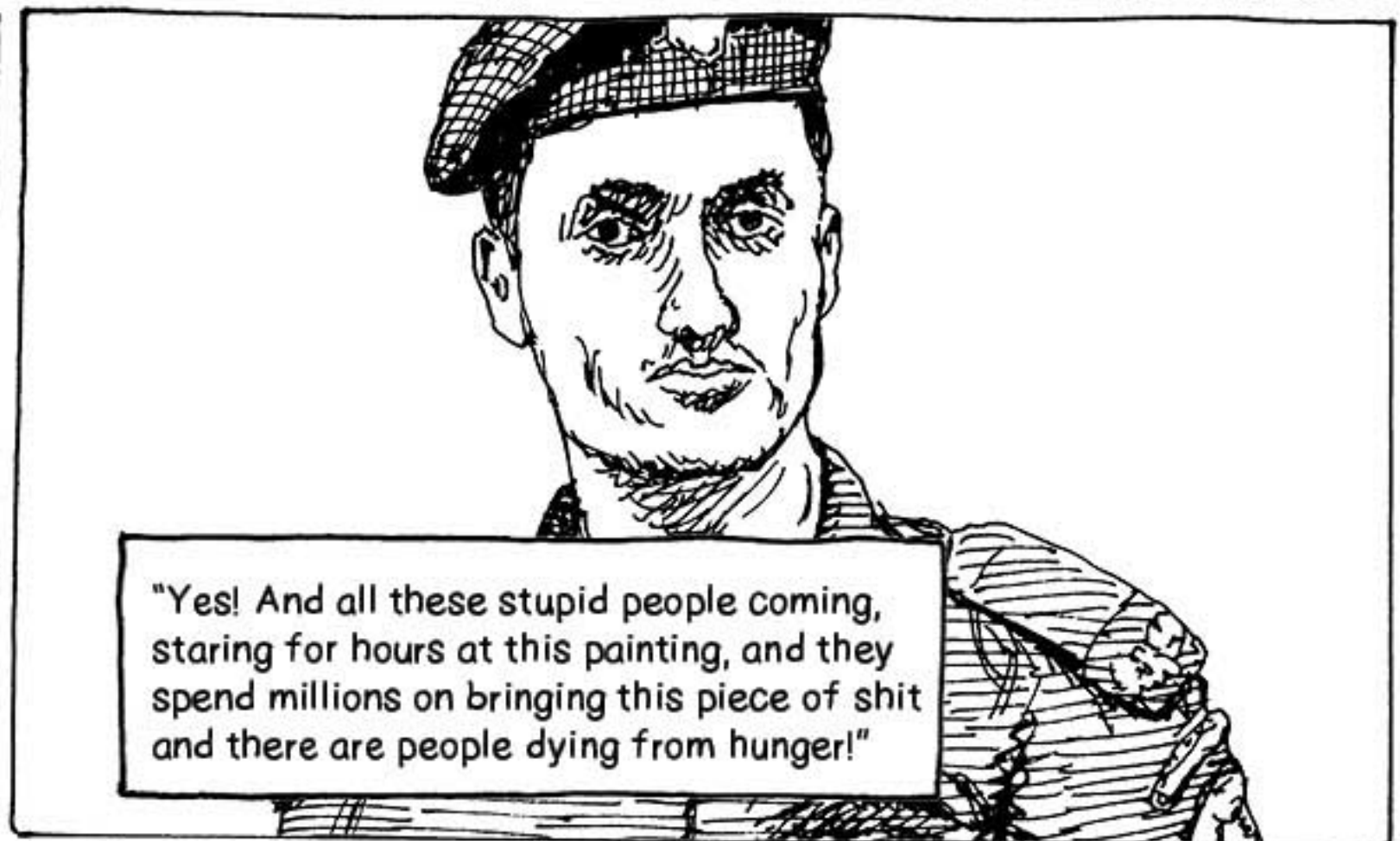
A friend, she took her father to see the painting, and he was there alone with his daughter, and he started mocking the painting and telling his daughter...



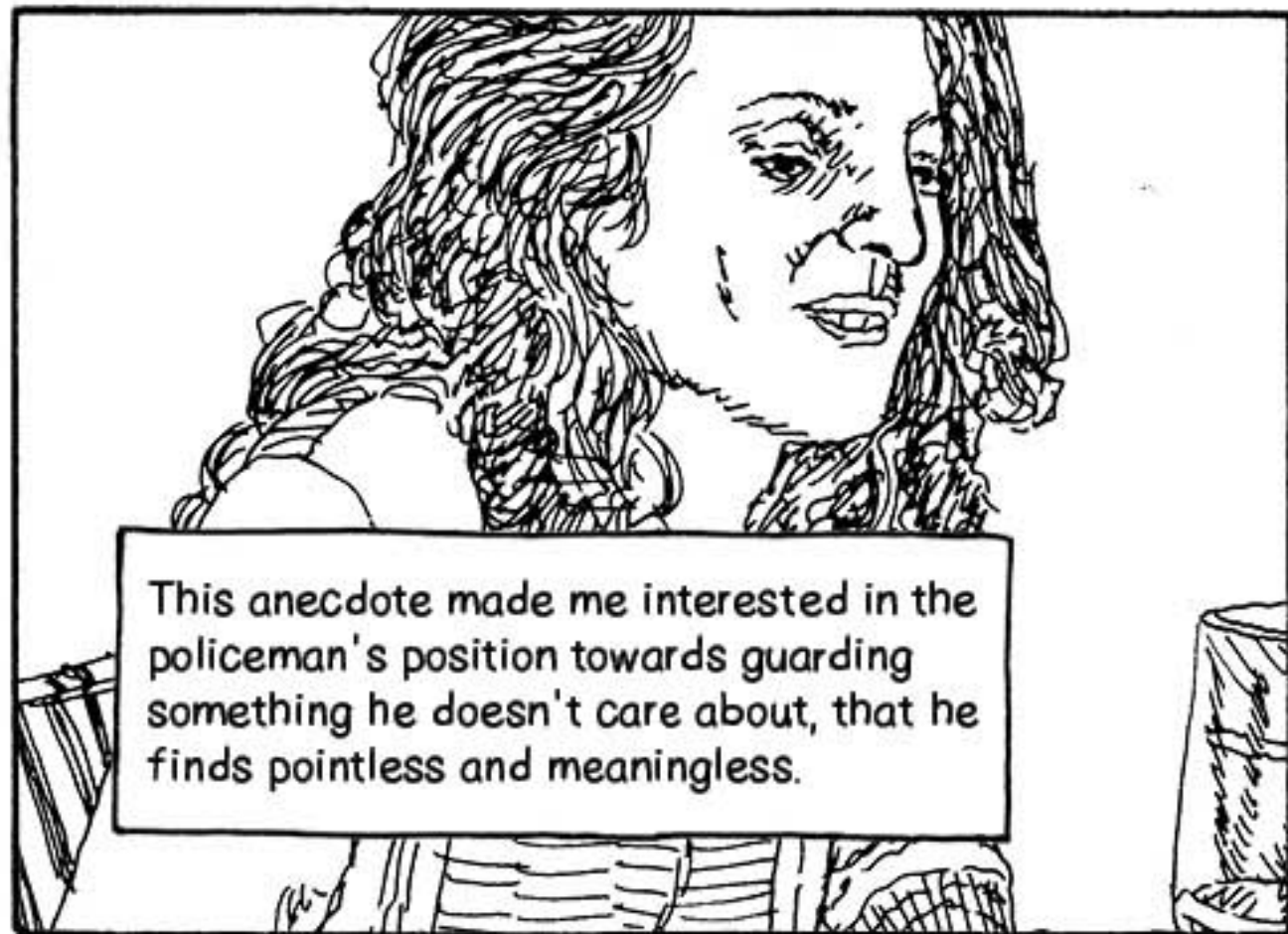
"What is this? This is a piece of shit!"



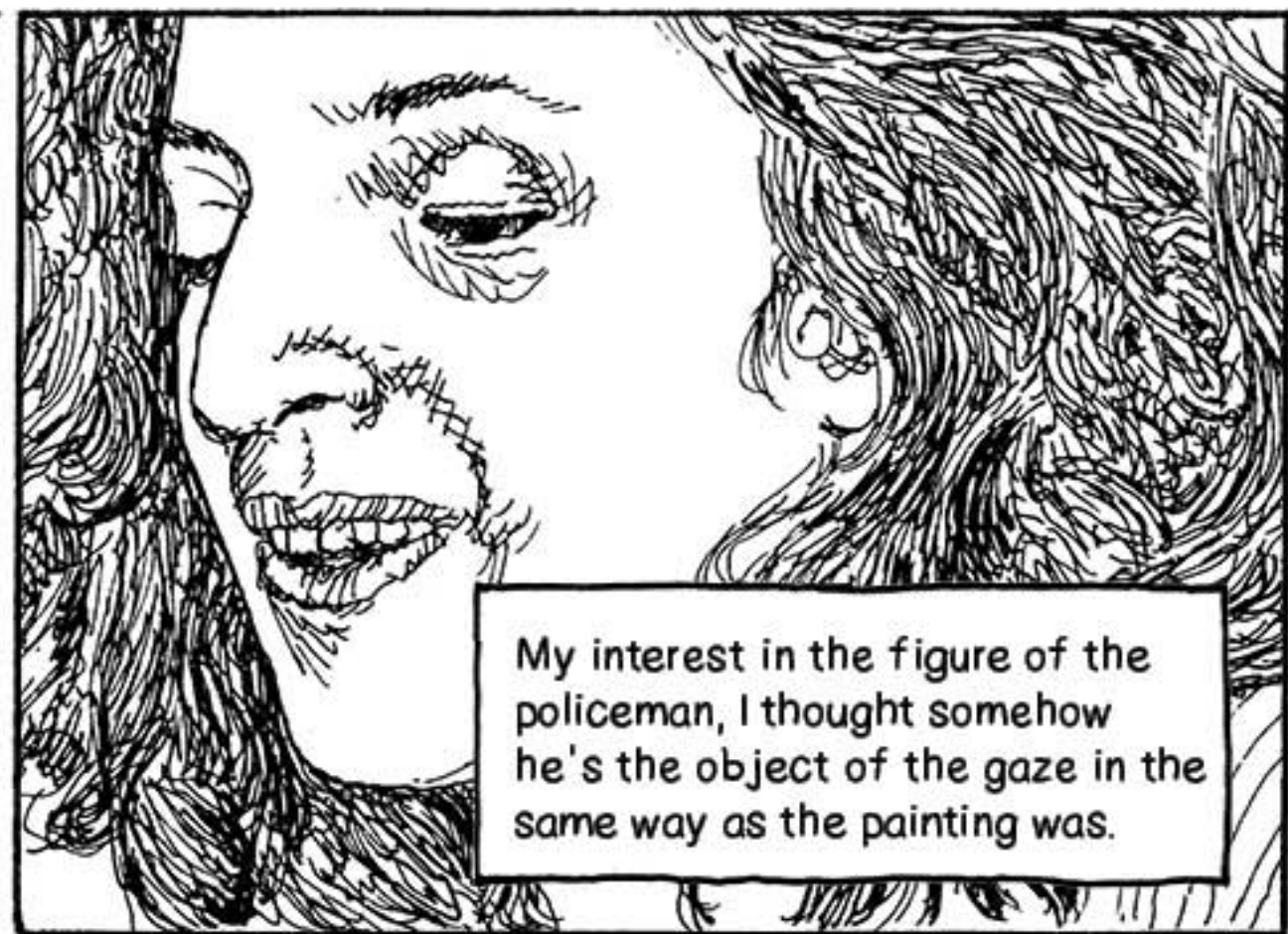
So, for the first time the policeman found someone who expressed his frustration, and he said...



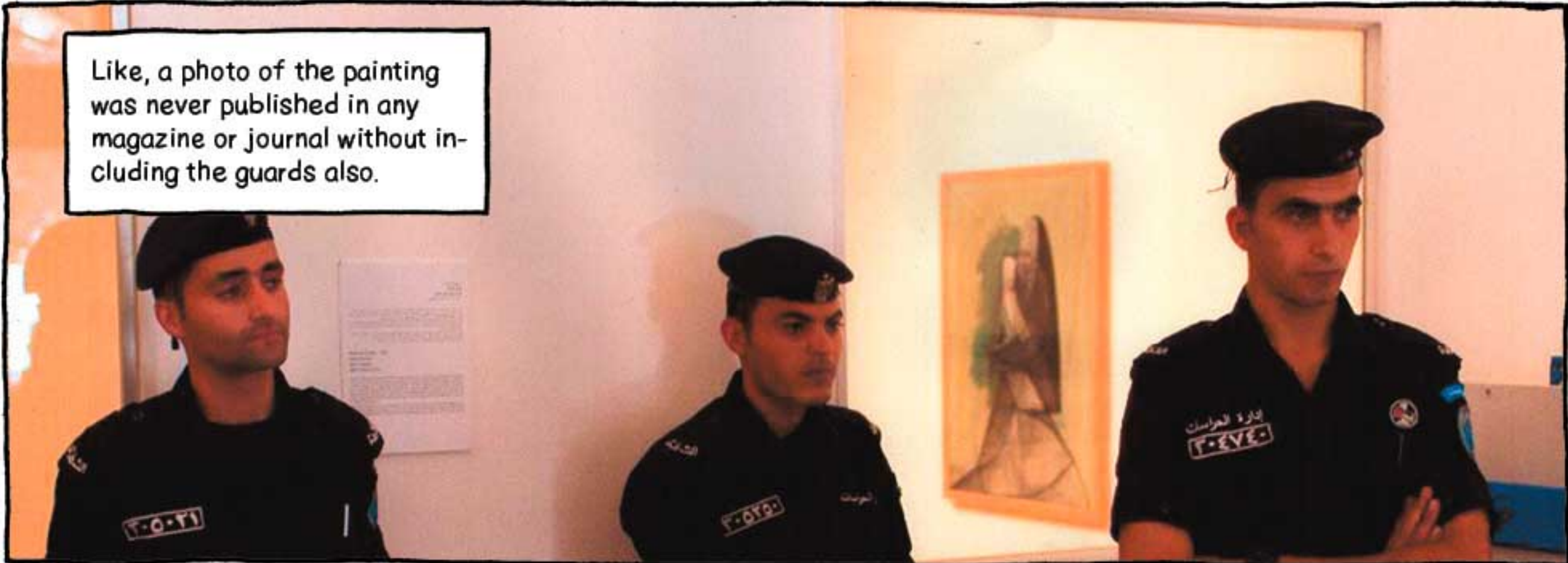
"Yes! And all these stupid people coming, staring for hours at this painting, and they spend millions on bringing this piece of shit and there are people dying from hunger!"



This anecdote made me interested in the policeman's position towards guarding something he doesn't care about, that he finds pointless and meaningless.



My interest in the figure of the policeman, I thought somehow he's the object of the gaze in the same way as the painting was.



Like, a photo of the painting was never published in any magazine or journal without including the guards also.



That's why I was interested in writing something about the guard: even the Palestinians treated him like an object—he's a symbol for the state... blah, blah, blah... he doesn't have his personal voice.



Living symbols that are treated as representations of things, they also have their own stories as well.



Anyone who has spent time in Palestine knows how deeply engrained is the tendency to redeem loss by turning it into iconography. As Jean Genet observed, the disappearance of the fighter, of the martyr, elicits the filling of a gap: "As if there were a hole where the fedayee disappeared, a drawing, a photograph, any sort of portrait, seems to call him back in every sense." Every martyrdom poster participates in this process, a habit that perhaps goes back to the Naqba itself, and the transformation of a lost country into a set of symbols: the door, the key, the olive tree... Judith Butler writes, "To claim that the universal has not yet been articulated is to insist that the 'not yet' is proper to an understanding of the universal itself: That which remains 'unrealized' by the universal constitutes it essentially."

What is "called back" by the image of the *Buste de femme* is not similar to Genet's lost fedayeen, but a resemblance yet to emerge. And yet, how easy to forget how these symbols are constituted not out of this gap Genet speaks of, but inside it, built upon the flesh of people who once lived or remain alive even as their image was transformed into an icon.



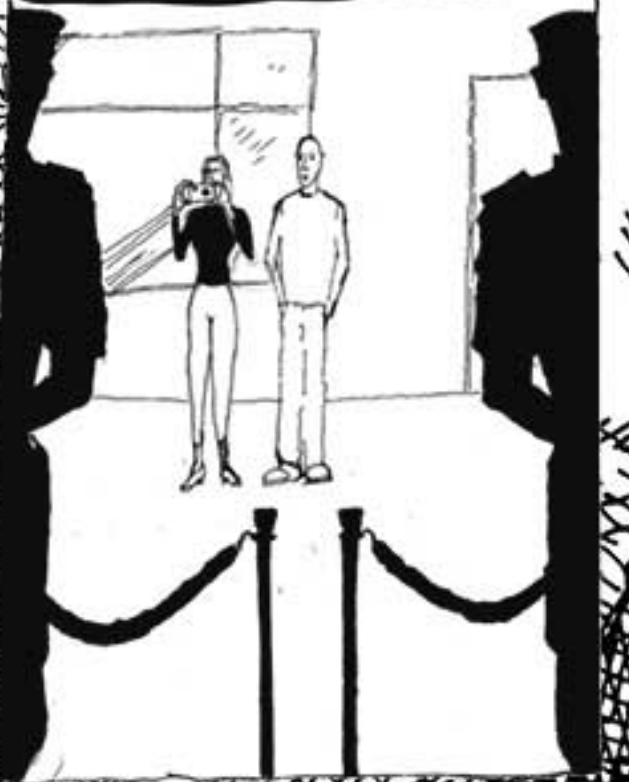
THE STORY OF THE POLICEMAN'S WIFE





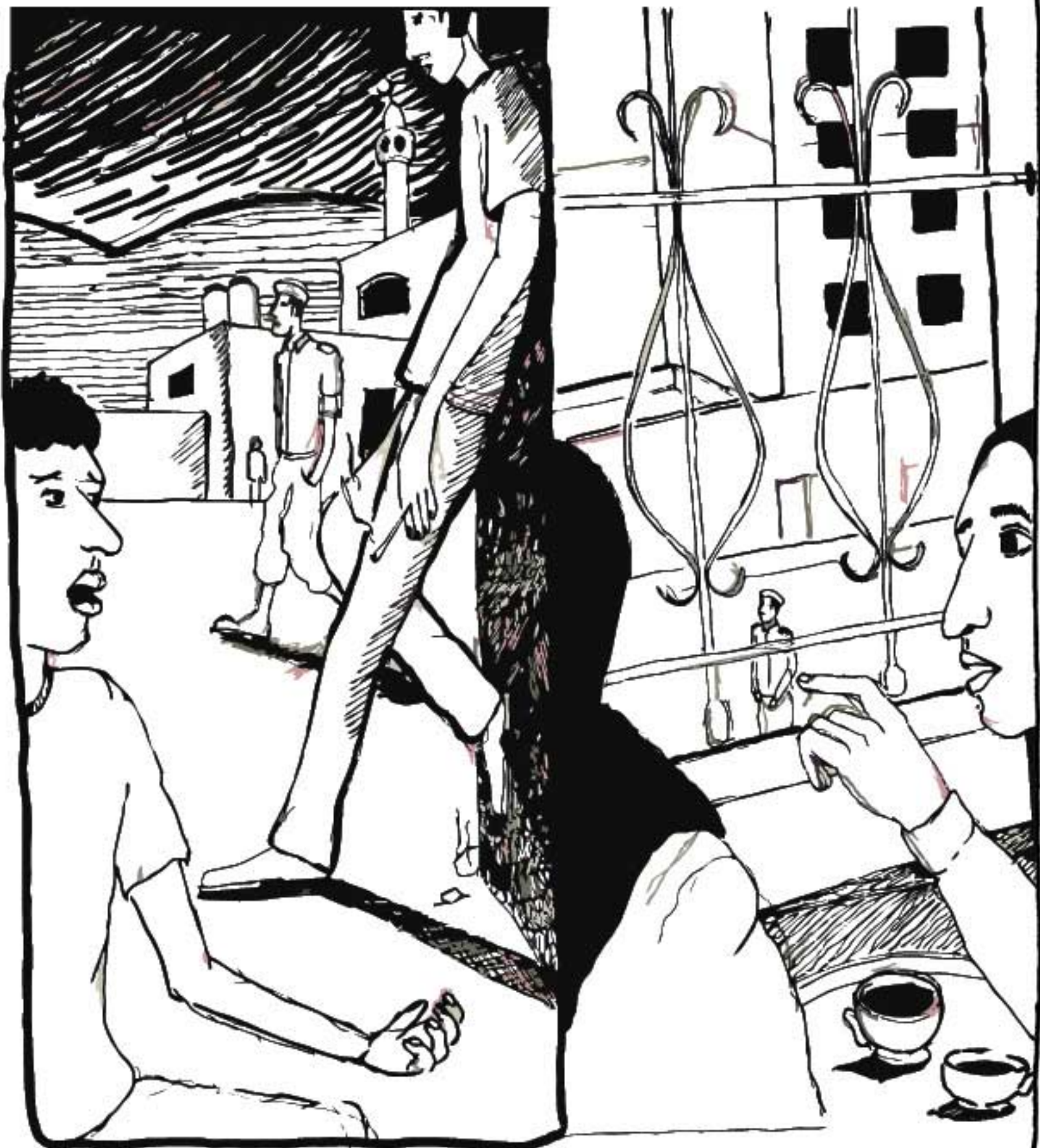
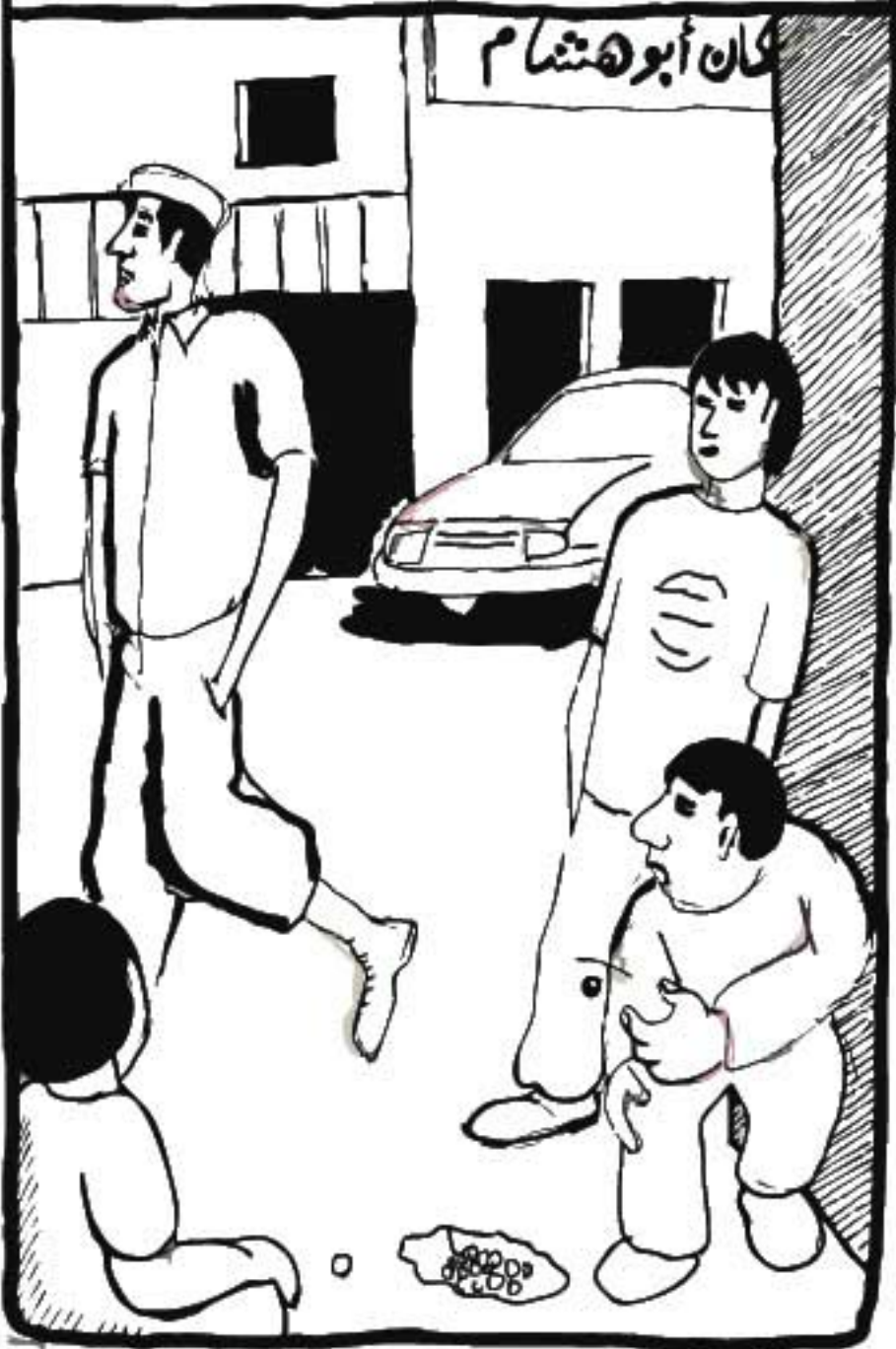
So the story goes like this:

SO, THE POLICEMAN
GUARDING THE PAINTING,



... HE IS FROM A VILLAGE
NEARRAMALLAH.

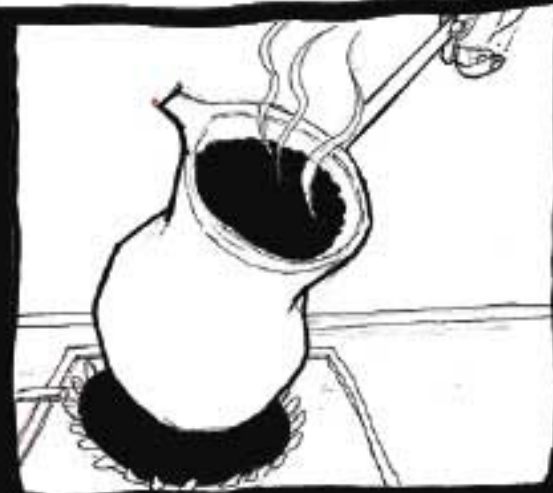
AND IN THE VILLAGE, RUMOURS SPREAD THAT THIS MAN HAS BEEN APPOINTED TO THIS HIGHLY PRESTIGIOUS JOB, WHICH IS GUARDING THIS FAMOUS, IMPORTANT PAINTING THAT CAME FROM EUROPE.



THE STORY STARTS DURING THE PICASSO EXHIBIT IN RAMALLAH, AND THERE WERE SOME MUGS WITH PICASSO WRITTEN ON IT.



AND HIS WIFE IS VERY HAPPY ABOUT IT, AND IS SHOWING OFF AND VERY PROUD IN FRONT OF ALL THE NEIGHBORS.



SO, THIS MORNING, INSTEAD OF HAVING HER MORNING COFFEE AND USING HER USUAL RED MUG, SHE TAKES THE PICASSO ONE.



AND SHE'S VERY HAPPY AND EXCITED AND VERY PROUD OF HER HUSBAND.

AND SHE'S TRYING, SHE KEEPS ASKING HIM TO TAKE HER TO SEE THE PAINTING HE'S GUARDING.



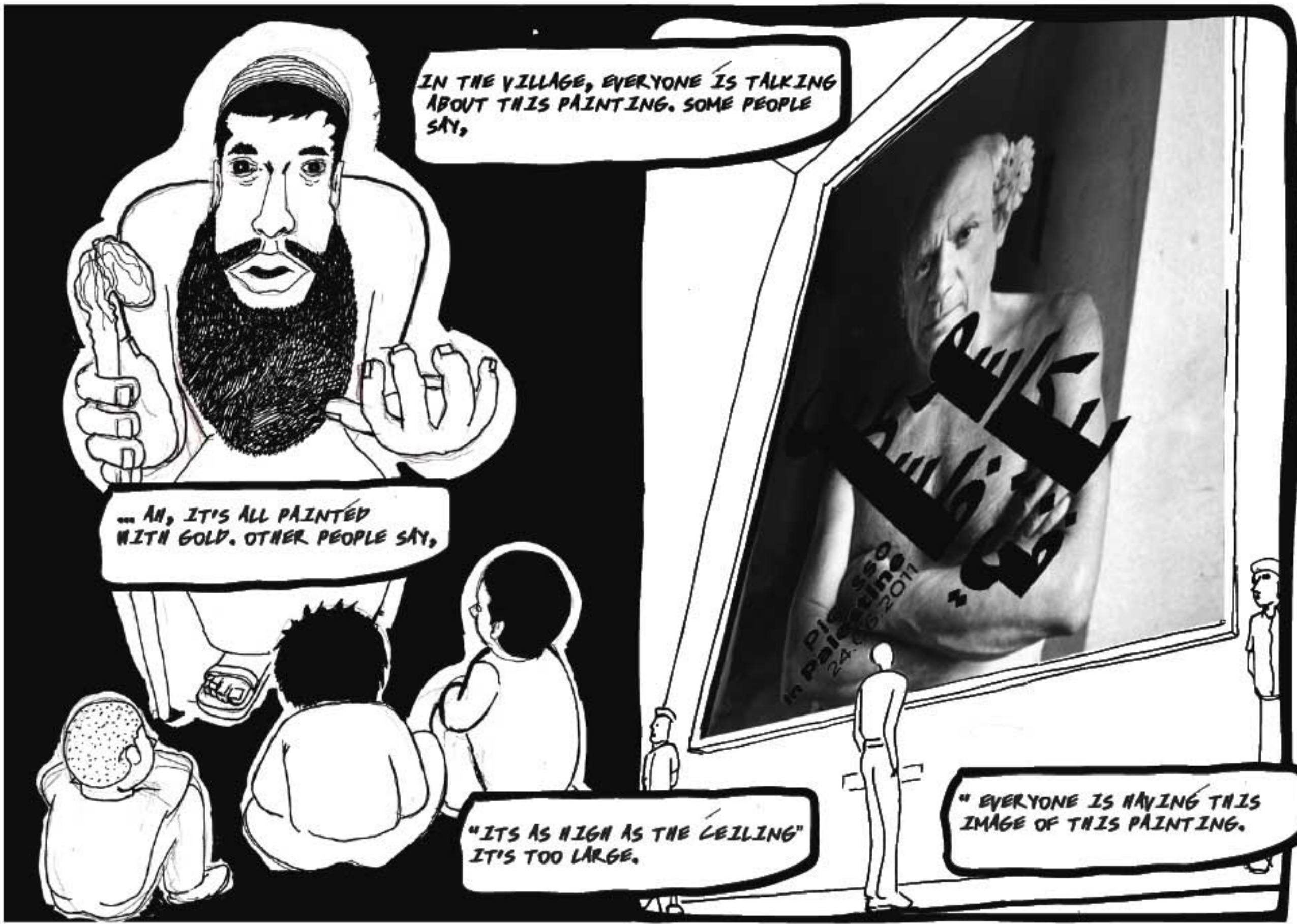
BUT HE REFUSES, BECAUSE HE'S VERY ASHAMED OF IT.

IN THE VILLAGE, EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT THIS PAINTING. SOME PEOPLE SAY,

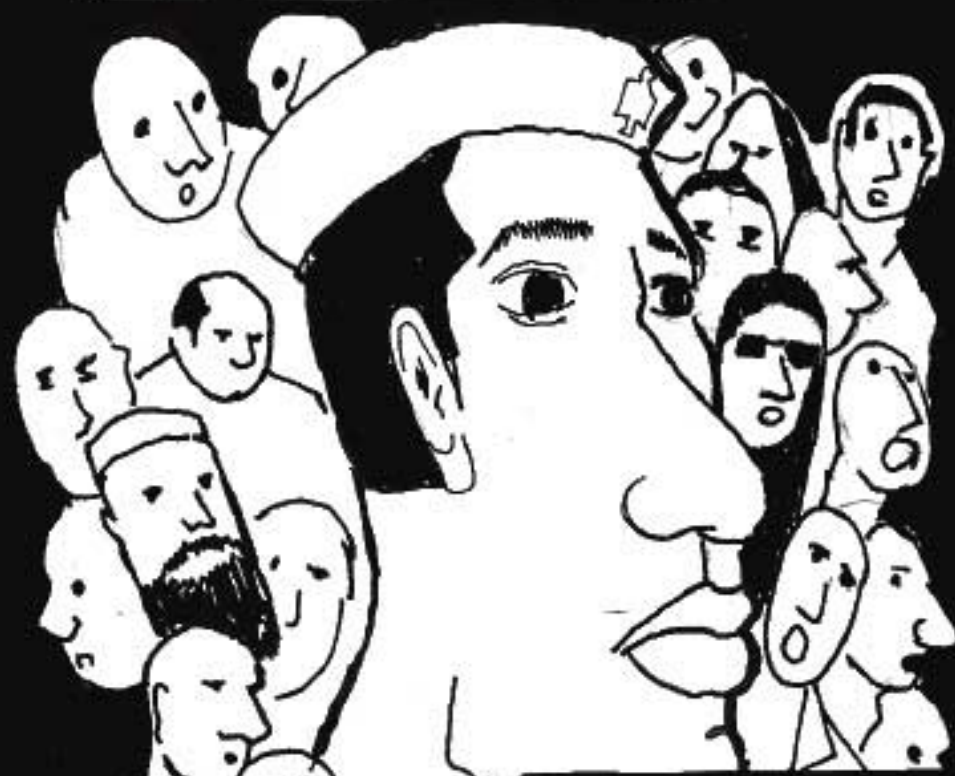
... AH, IT'S ALL PAINTED WITH GOLD. OTHER PEOPLE SAY,

"IT'S AS HIGH AS THE CEILING" IT'S TOO LARGE.

"EVERYONE IS HAVING THIS IMAGE OF THIS PAINTING."



SO, HE'S VERY HAPPY ABOUT ALL THE ATTENTION HE'S GETTING BUT ...



... AT THE SAME TIME, HE'S VERY ASHAMED OF THIS VERY TINY AND MEANINGLESS PAINTING HE'S GUARDING. SO HE DOESN'T WANT ANYONE TO COME AND SEE IT.



ANYWAY, THE WIFE DECIDES THAT SHE WILL GO AND SEE THE PAINTING WITHOUT TELLING HER HUSBAND.

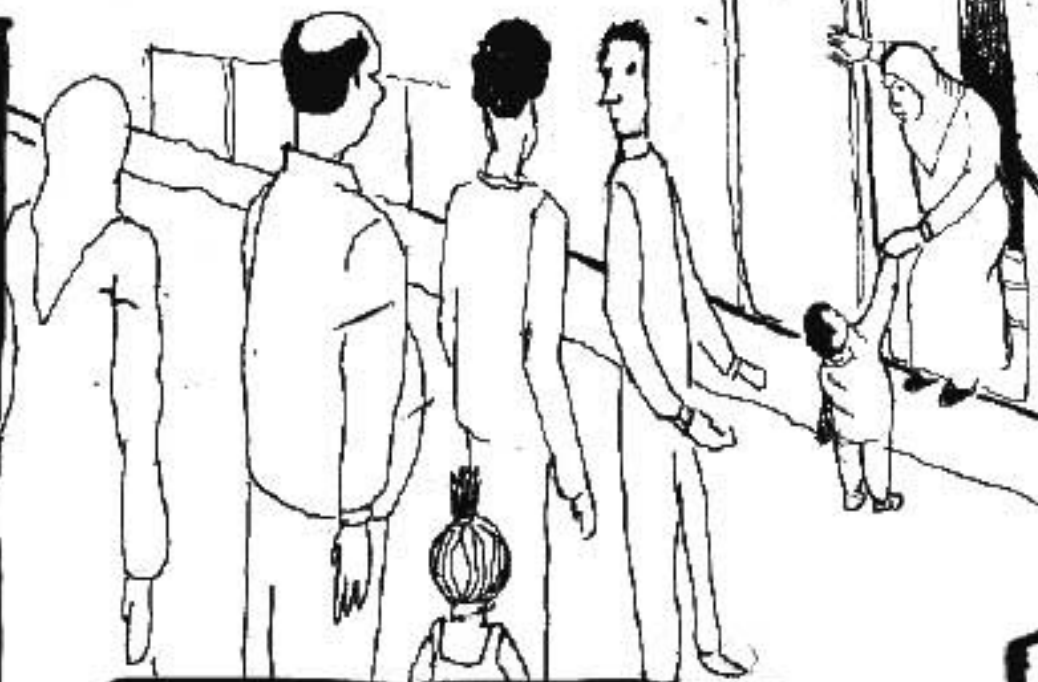
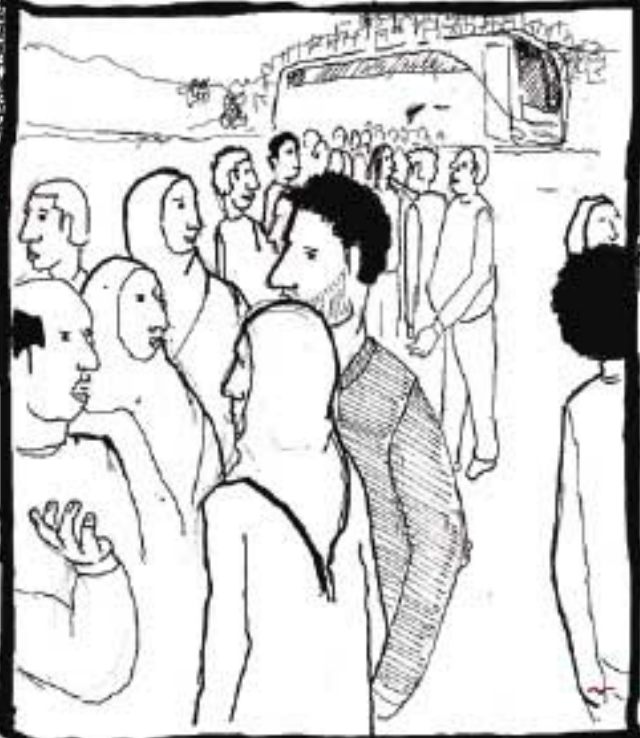


... SHE TELLS HER NEIGHBOR, AND HER NEIGHBOR TELLS ANOTHER NEIGHBOR,



YOU KNOW, PEOPLE OUTSIDE RAMALLAH, WHEN THEY ARE ENGAGED THEY COME TO RAMALLAH LIKE A ROMANTIC HAPPY COUPLE AND HAVE ICE CREAM OR SHARMA.

IN THE BEGINNING, PEOPLE ARE TALKING TOGETHER WITH ONE ANOTHER ...



... AND ALL THE NEIGHBORHOOD DECIDES TO TAKE A BUS AND GO ON A TRIP TO SEE THIS PAINTING AND FIND OUT WHO'S IMAGINATION IS RIGHT.



and only go to Ramallah to go to the doctor or take the children to the doctor or buy them clothes or something like this.

But once they are married, they stop having these kinds of trips,

BUT LATER THE COUPLES ARE ONLY TALKING WITH EACH OTHER,



ONCE THE VILLAGERS TAKE THE BUS, THEY REALIZE IT'S THE FIRST TIME SINCE A VERY LONG TIME AGO THAT EVERY MAN WITH HIS WIFE IS GOING ALONE ON SUCH A TRIP.



ONCE THEY ARRIVE AT THE ACADEMY, THEY HAVE TO STAND IN LINE,

AND THEY ALLOW ONLY TWO PEOPLE AT A TIME TO GO AND SEE THE PAINTING.

THEY ARE STANDING TWO-BY-TWO TOGETHER.

AT THIS MOMENT, EACH COUPLE HAS ARRIVED AT THE CLIMAX IN THEIR ENJOYMENT OF TALKING WITH EACH OTHER,

AND INSTEAD OF GOING UP TO THE PAINTING,

... THEY START LEAVING THE ACADEMY FROM THE MAIN GATE

... INTO THE EXHIBITION OF THE CITY TO SPEND TIME,

AND THE GUARD'S WIFE STANDS ALONE, AND SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO,

AND SHE'S NOW AFRAID IF SHE GOES TO SEE HER HUSBAND, HE WILL ASK HER,

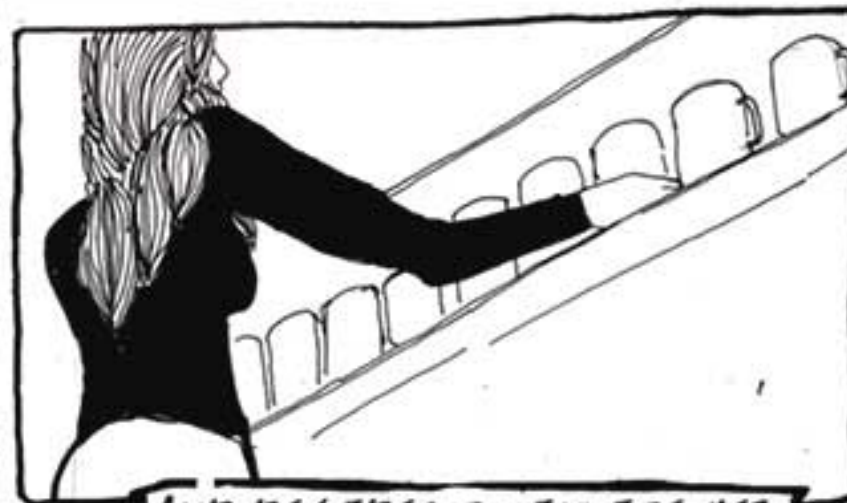


"HOW DID YOU COME AND WHERE DID YOU LEAVE THE CHILDREN? EVERYTHING."

SO, SHE GOES AND SHE BUYS ANOTHER TWO MUGS OF THE PICASSO IN RAMALLAH TO COMPLETE THE SET,



SO, SHE GOES AND SHE BUYS ANOTHER TWO MUGS OF THE PICASSO IN RAMALLAH TO COMPLETE THE SET,



AND DECIDES TO INVITE HER NEIGHBORS THE NEXT DAY TO TELL THEM ABOUT THE GREAT PICTURE SHE SAW,

...which she didn't see. No one sees it



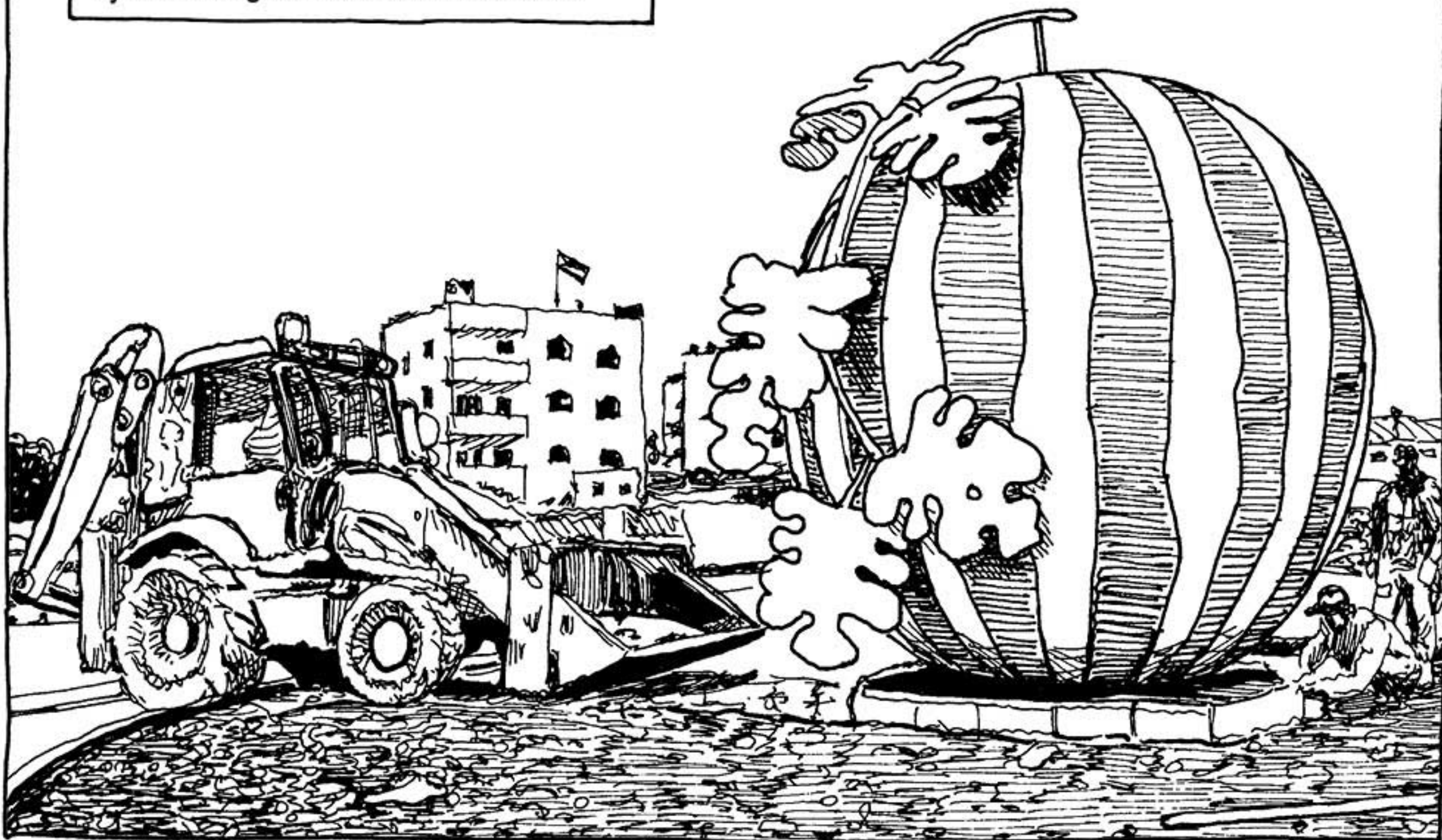
THE BOYCOTT





As a practical matter, how Picaso in Palestine negotiated the issue of the boycott on cooperation with Israeli institutions is one place where firsthand knowledge is invaluable. That is the only way to even begin understanding the paradoxical nature of the West Bank's political reality. The boycott is in force: indeed, buying an Israeli mobile phone card in Ramallah or anywhere else in the West Bank is next to impossible. Yet, walk into any grocery store, deli or produce market in the West Bank, and inevitably you will find an abundance of Israeli goods. This tacit acknowledgement of the boycott's practical limitations has its occulted side. For instance, there is a higher degree of cooperation between the IDF and the PA on security matters than the latter would ever be comfortable openly broadcasting, and whenever evidence of this becomes manifest, a scandal erupts.

This contradiction between Palestinian will for self-governance and Israel's domination of the West Bank economy can be illustrated by something as banal as watermelons.



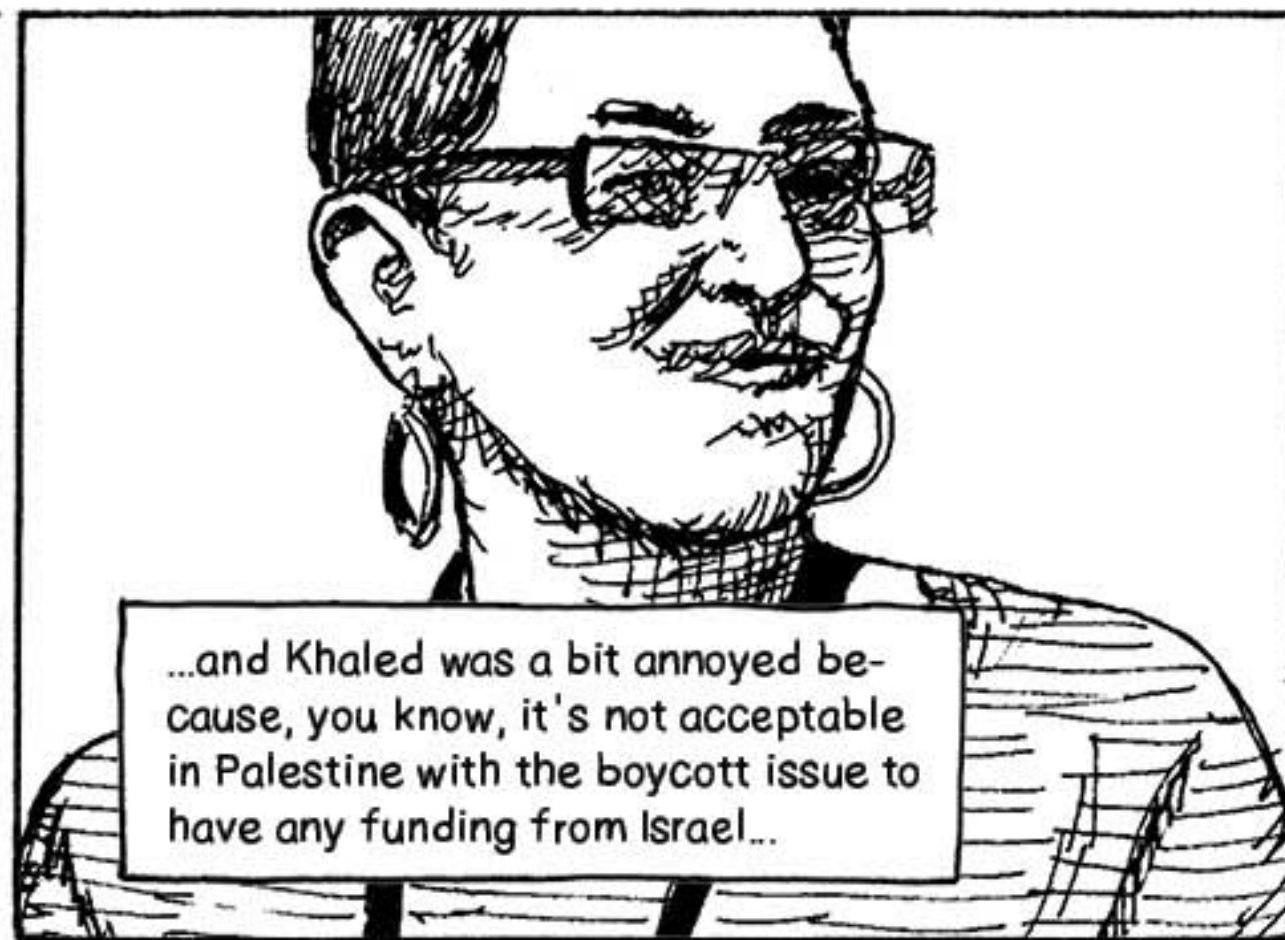
The West Bank was once famous for its watermelons. Back when it was illegal to display a Palestinian flag, the watermelon, with its green exterior, white rind, red fruit, and black seeds, was substituted for the Palestinian flag. But in more recent times, West Bank farmers have started to be outpriced by their Israeli competitors and most of the watermelons one finds for sale in the West Bank today are Israeli-grown. Far from being absolute, the boycott must tolerate Israeli control over the West Bank economy at many levels.

Still, in the cultural sphere, the boycott's enforcement is less ambiguous. When we spoke, Samar Martha told me the issue came up directly in the two days of "Picasso Talks" following the opening. These talks had been sponsored by Outset, a British arts charity.

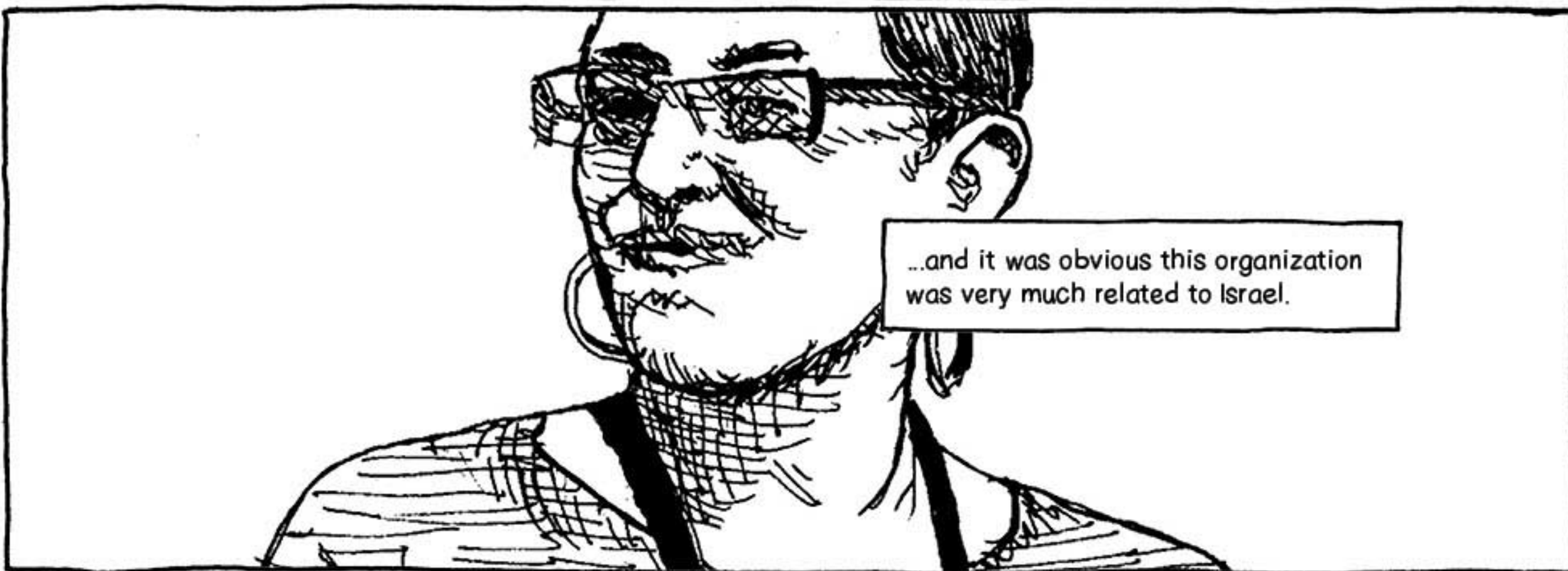




The only heated debate was about funding...



...and Khaled was a bit annoyed because, you know, it's not acceptable in Palestine with the boycott issue to have any funding from Israel...

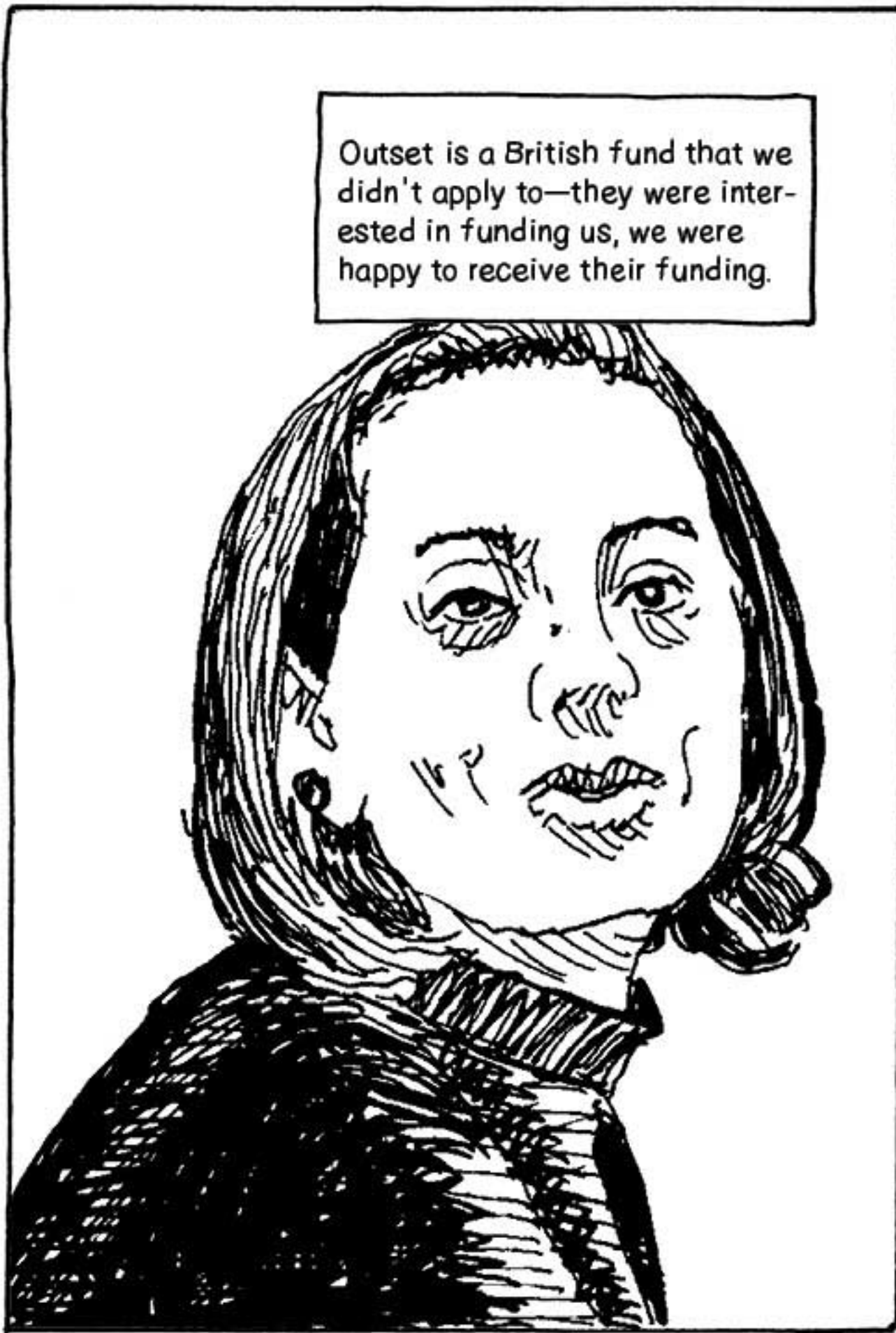


...and it was obvious this organization was very much related to Israel.




Outset was founded by two Israeli expatriates, Candida Gertler and Yanna Peel (formerly a Goldman Sachs banker and a journalist respectively), and its mission is to help fund art purchases by museums. It maintains offices in London, Munich, Tel Aviv, and Mumbai. Because their husbands are extremely wealthy, Gertler and Peel tend to keep a low profile. A few weeks after I talked to Samar Martha, I was able to ask Fatima AbdulKarim about Outset and its relationship to Israel.






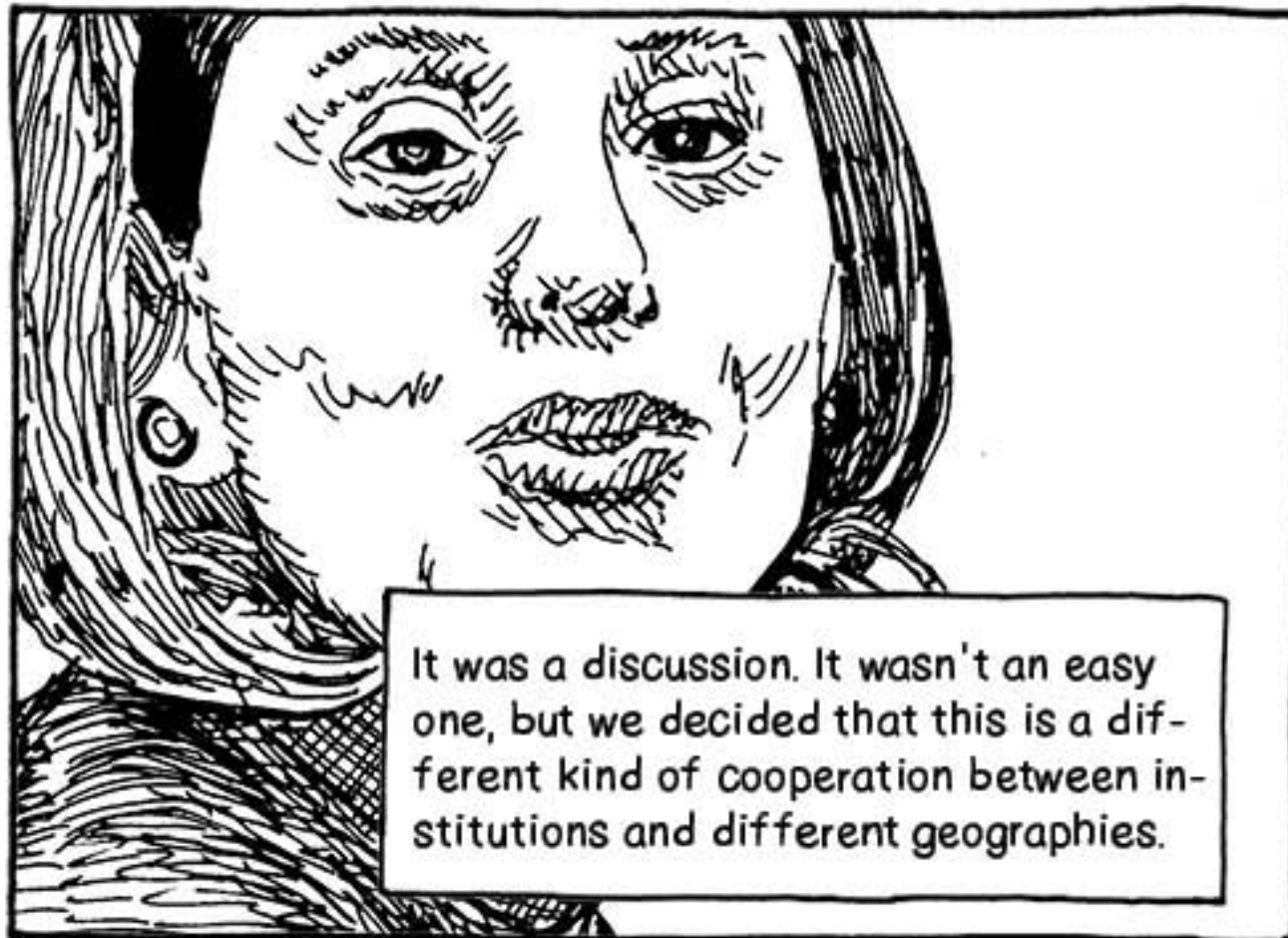
Outset is a British fund that we didn't apply to—they were interested in funding us, we were happy to receive their funding.



Their money went into the Picasso talks, and the Picasso talks were set and planned by the IAAP, the Academy.



It was unconditional funding. Our guests were the ones invited.



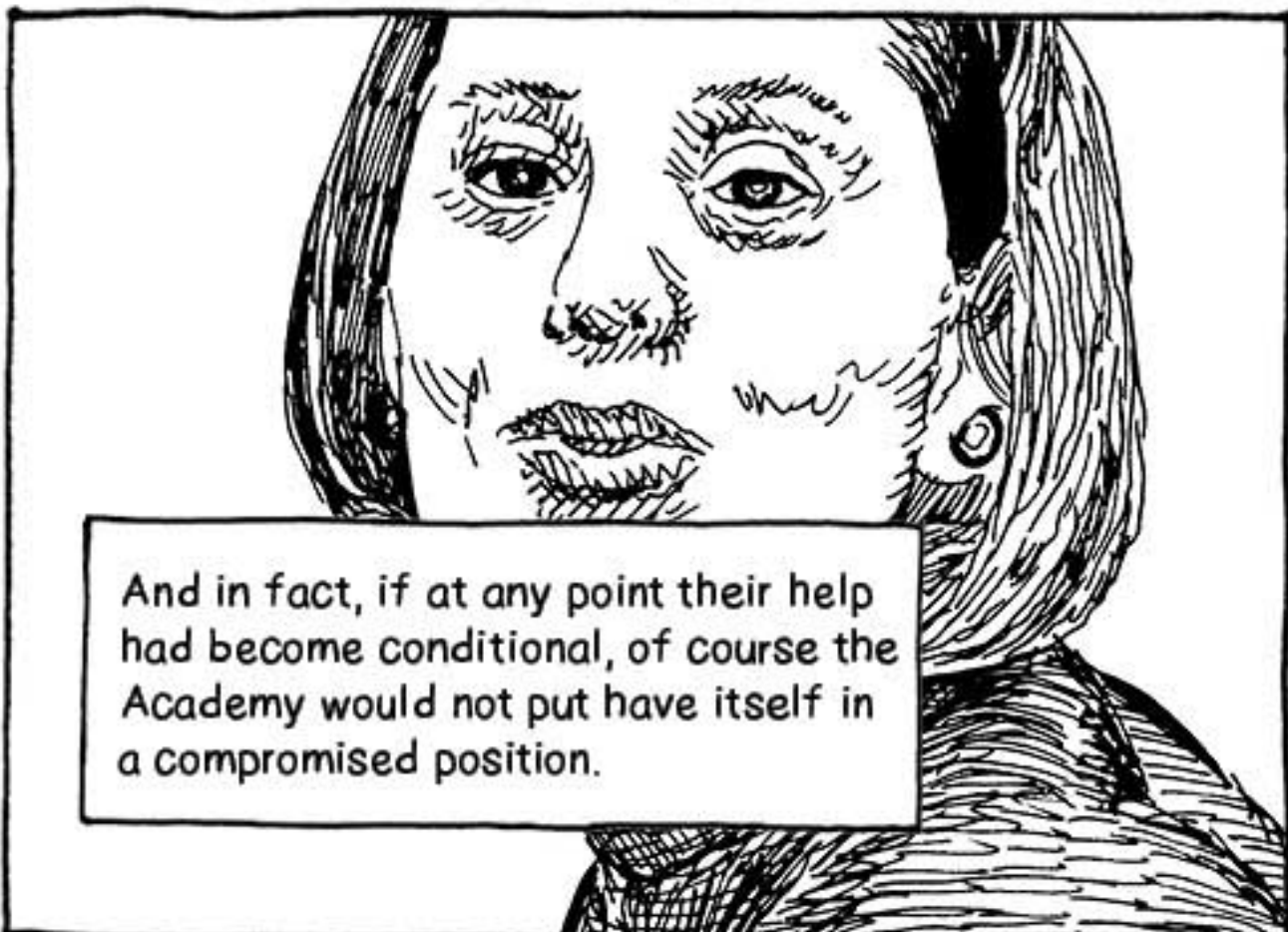
It was a discussion. It wasn't an easy one, but we decided that this is a different kind of cooperation between institutions and different geographies.



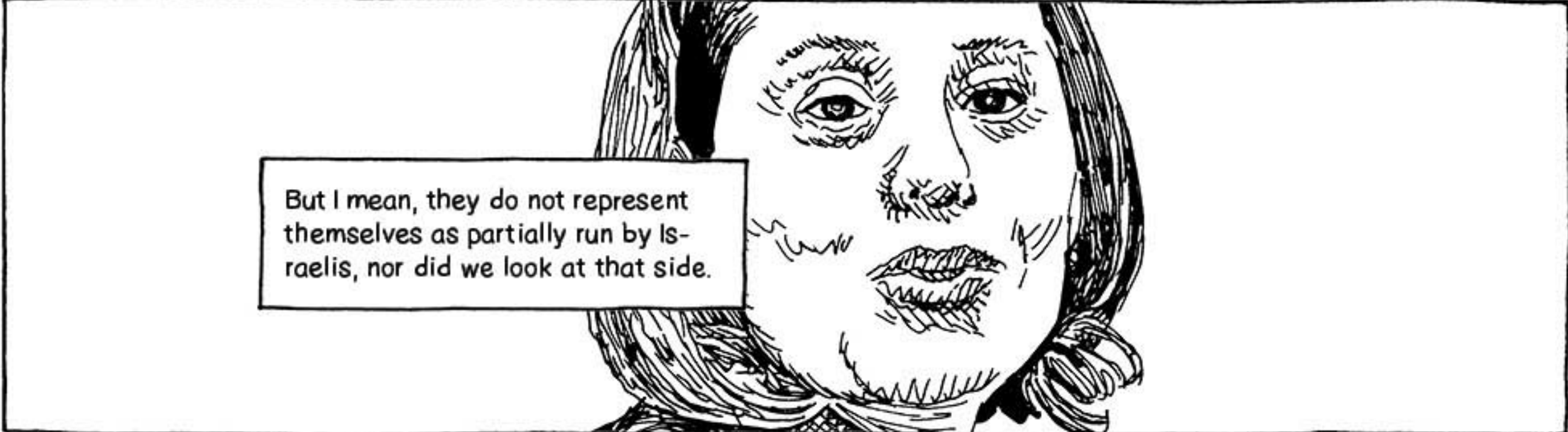
And I think... look at Egypt, for instance, or any dictatorship these kinds of Arab regimes.




We did not look at them as partly run by Israelis with whatever agenda.




And in fact, if at any point their help had become conditional, of course the Academy would not put have itself in a compromised position.

A close-up, black and white line drawing of a woman's face. She has shoulder-length hair and is looking slightly to the right. A speech bubble is positioned over the left side of her face.

But I mean, they do not represent themselves as partially run by Israelis, nor did we look at that side.

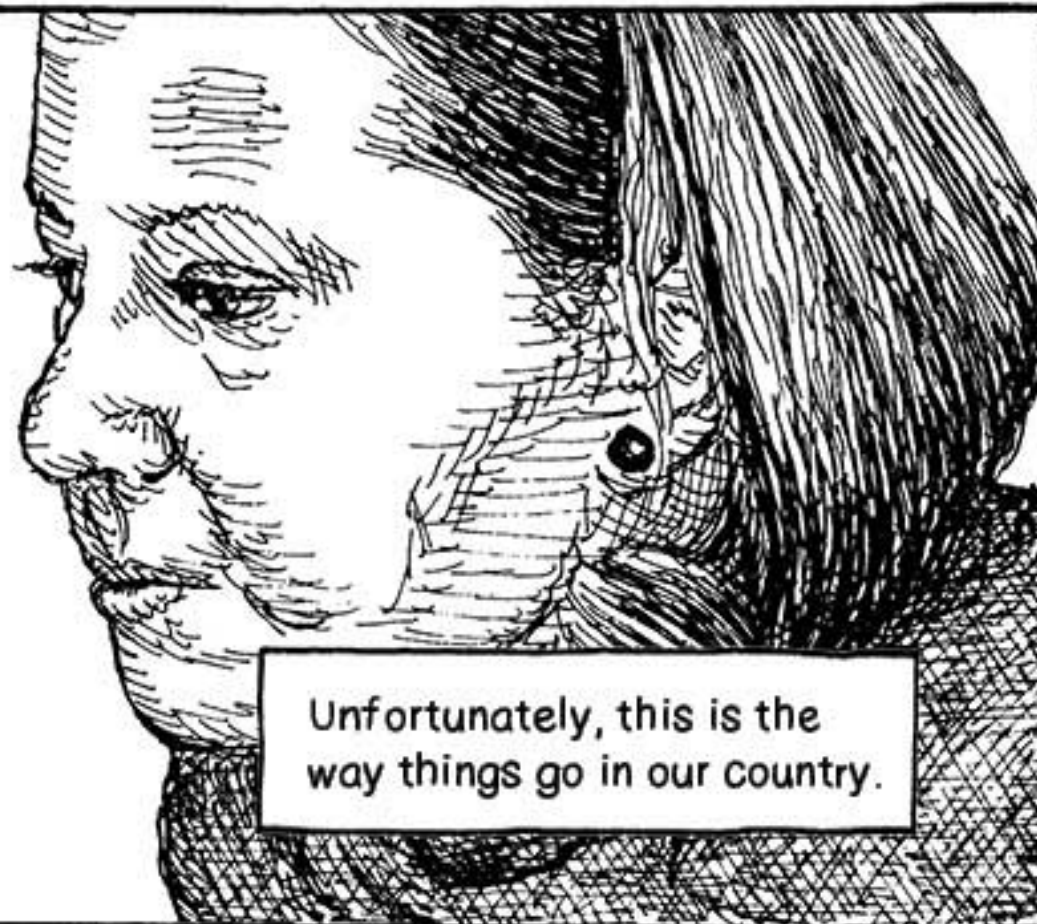
A close-up, black and white line drawing of a woman's face, similar to the first panel. She is looking slightly to the right. A speech bubble is positioned over the right side of her face.

So, this is what I feel about the involvement of Outset, which came by coincidence, and is perfectly fitting...

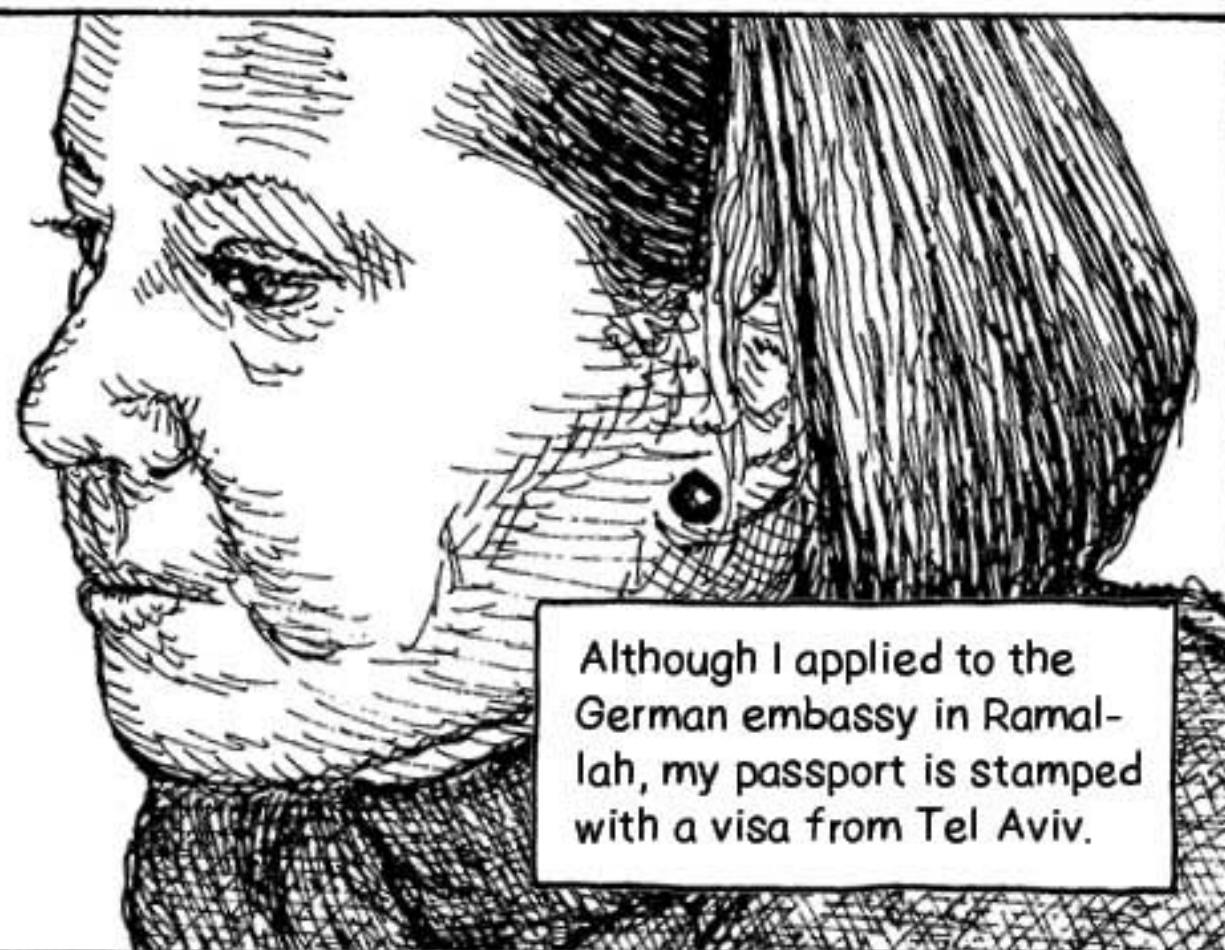
A close-up, black and white line drawing of a woman's face, similar to the previous panels. She is looking slightly to the right. A speech bubble is positioned at the bottom of the panel.

I don't see any problem with it.

They do have an office in Tel Aviv, sponsored by Leumi Bank, but that is an affiliated office—just like UNESCO has an office in Tel Aviv and the Goethe Institute has an office in Tel Aviv.



Unfortunately, this is the way things go in our country.



Although I applied to the German embassy in Ramallah, my passport is stamped with a visa from Tel Aviv.

THE QUESTION OF JERUSALEM





For a story in which absence, presence, and missed encounters constitute the main plot points, there is one absence that was at once glaringly visible and scarcely registered: the question of Jerusalem. From the West Bank, Jerusalem has increasingly become like the Mediterranean Sea—an elusive, forbidden presence one can vaguely see on a clear day.

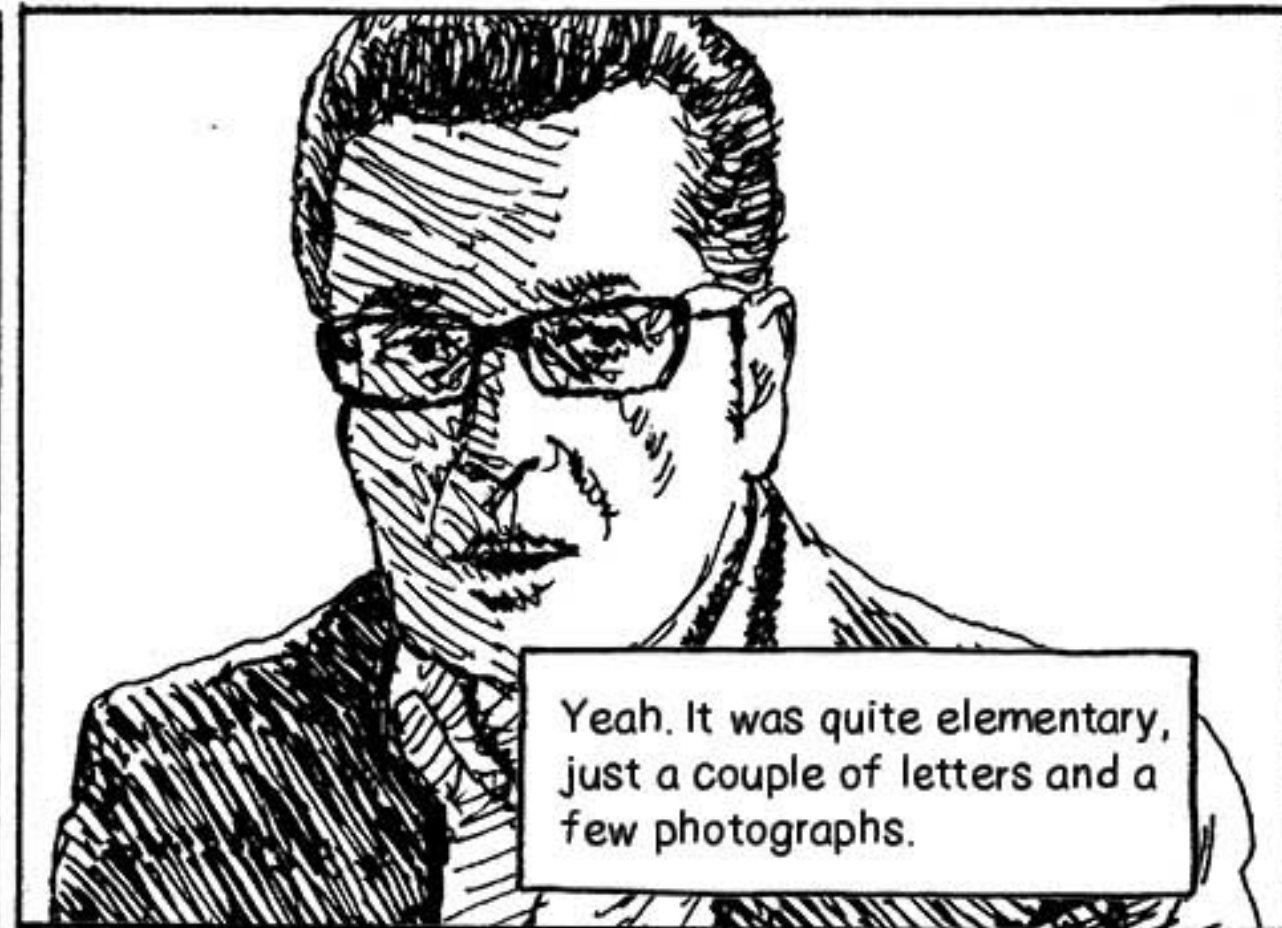
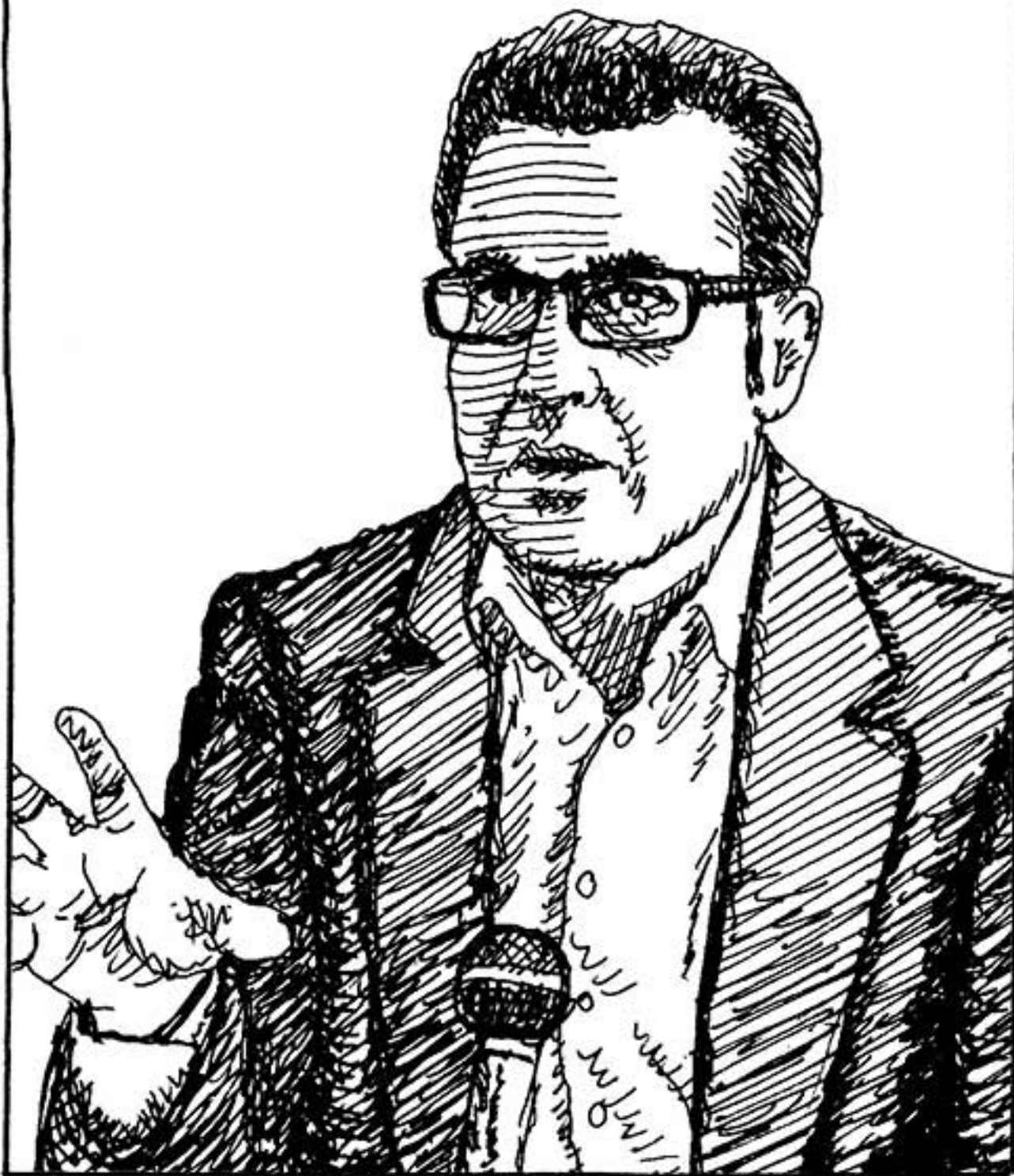
But when something is not available in a tangible, concrete sense, it begins to recede, becomes abstract, and then slowly loses its meaningfulness, as if expunged from everyday consciousness. The Mediterranean is scarcely visible from Ramallah... it is easy to see Jerusalem.

When I sat down in Eindhoven with Bettine Verkuijlen to look at the project documentation, the forms and e-mails she had collected filled an enormous binder. I had always felt the promise in the project was exactly the revelation of how it came

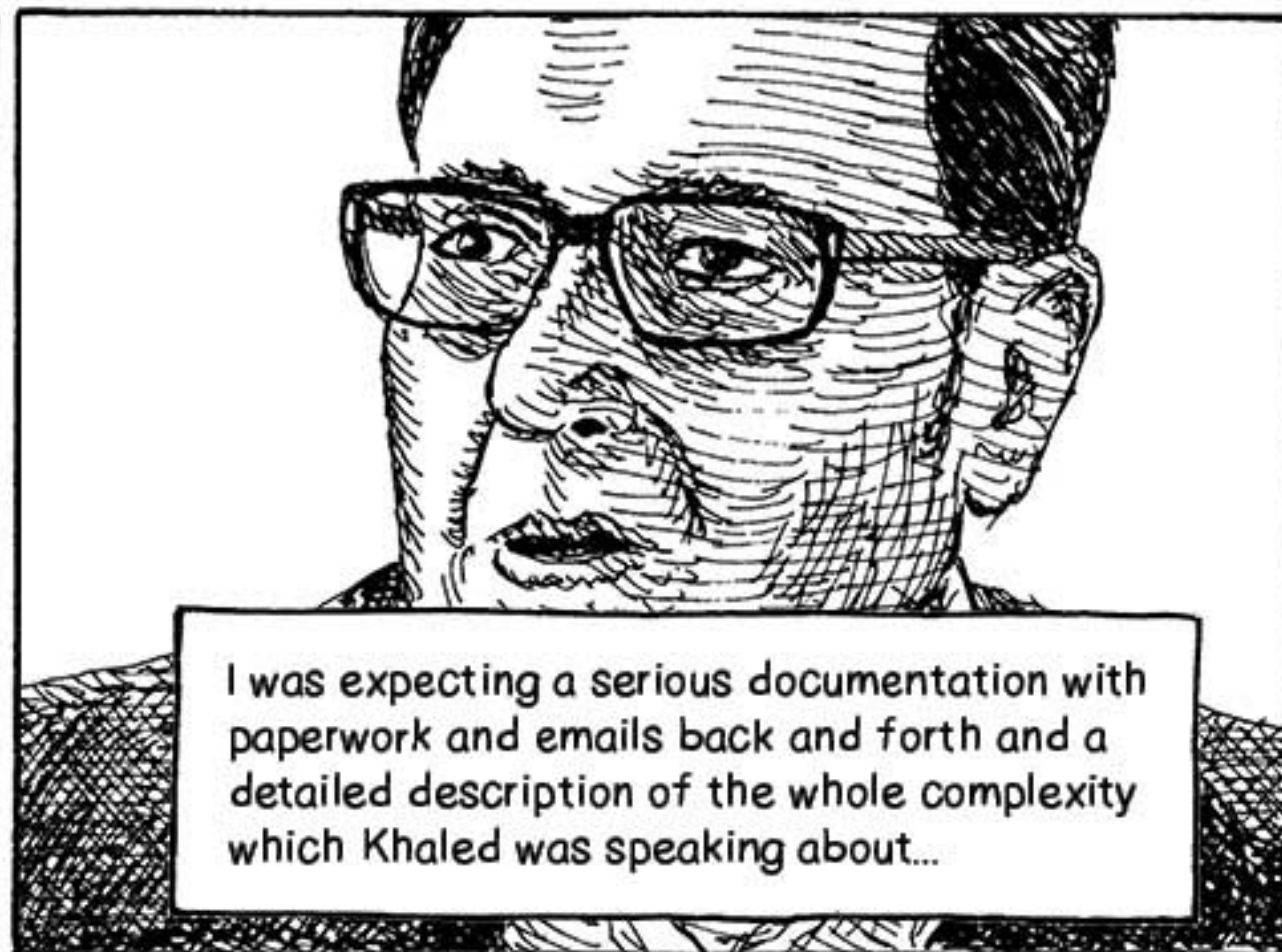
into being on this bureaucratic level, how it navigated the bureaucracy of occupation. I had presumed this material would be on display at Al-Ma'mal Foundation in Jerusalem, that viewers would get some approximation of what I myself was seeing.



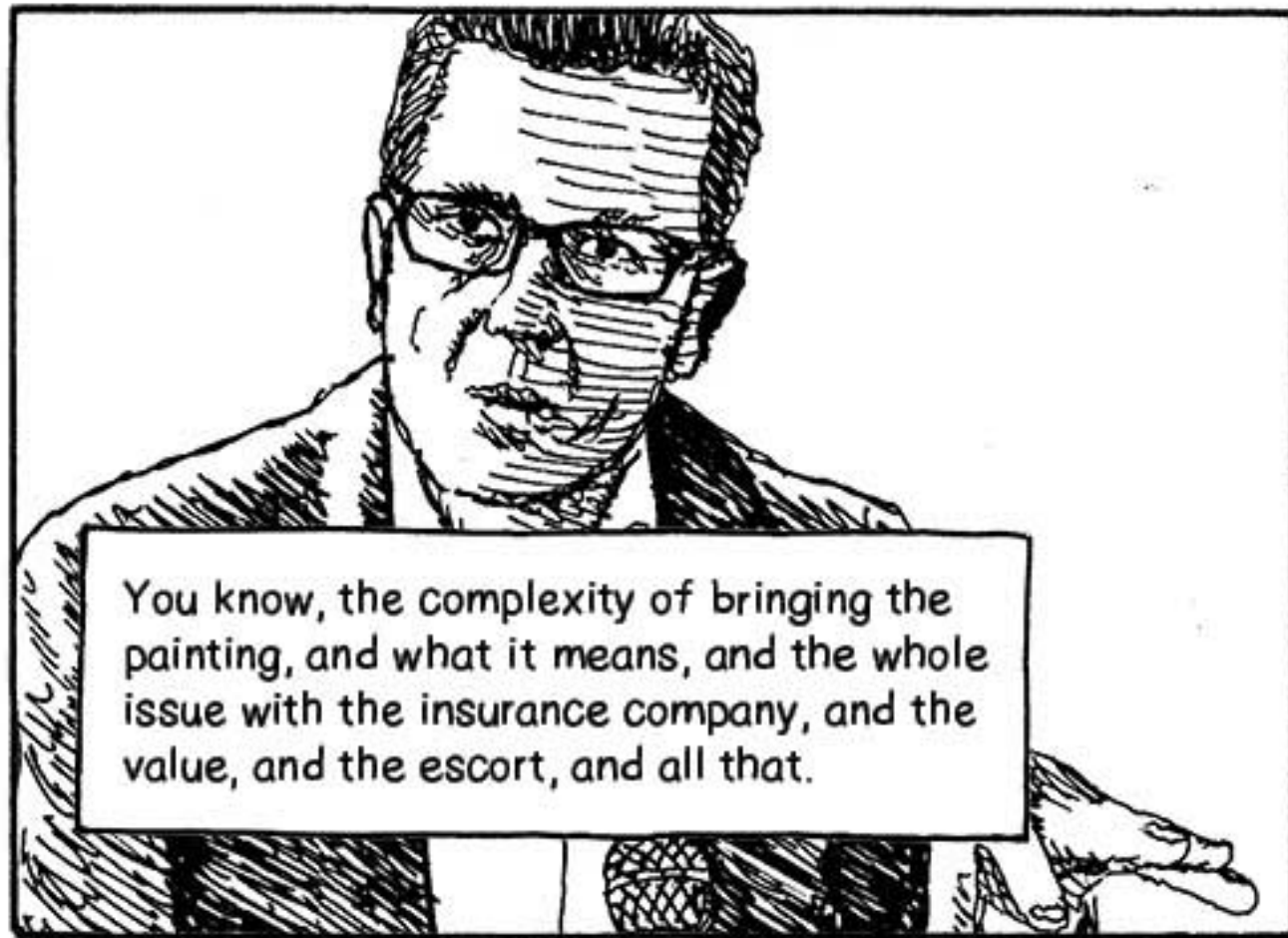
I should maybe say honestly what was a bit disappointing was the fact that even though the whole notion of the process was very important, the documentation was pretty basic.



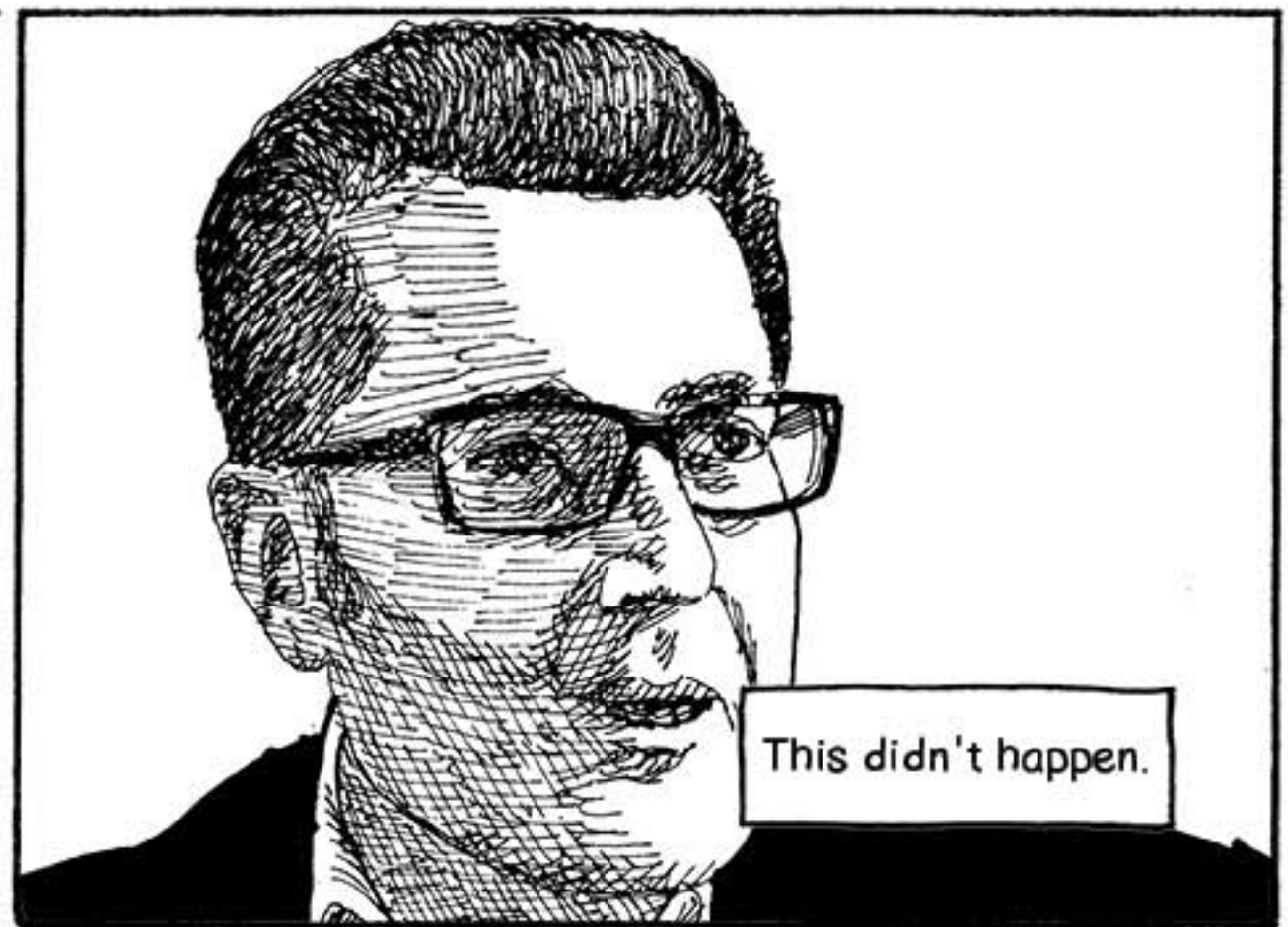
Yeah. It was quite elementary, just a couple of letters and a few photographs.



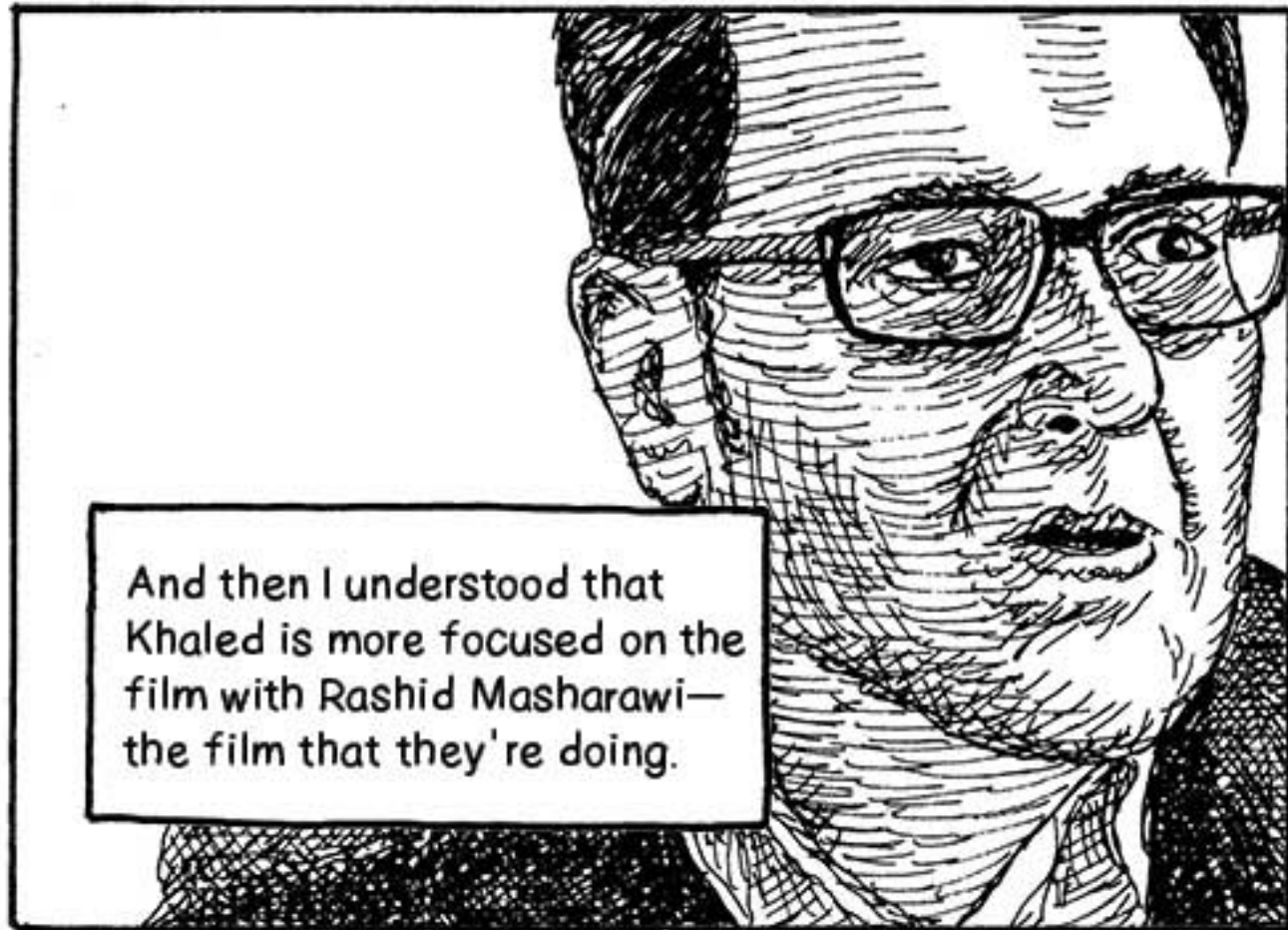
I was expecting a serious documentation with paperwork and emails back and forth and a detailed description of the whole complexity which Khaled was speaking about...



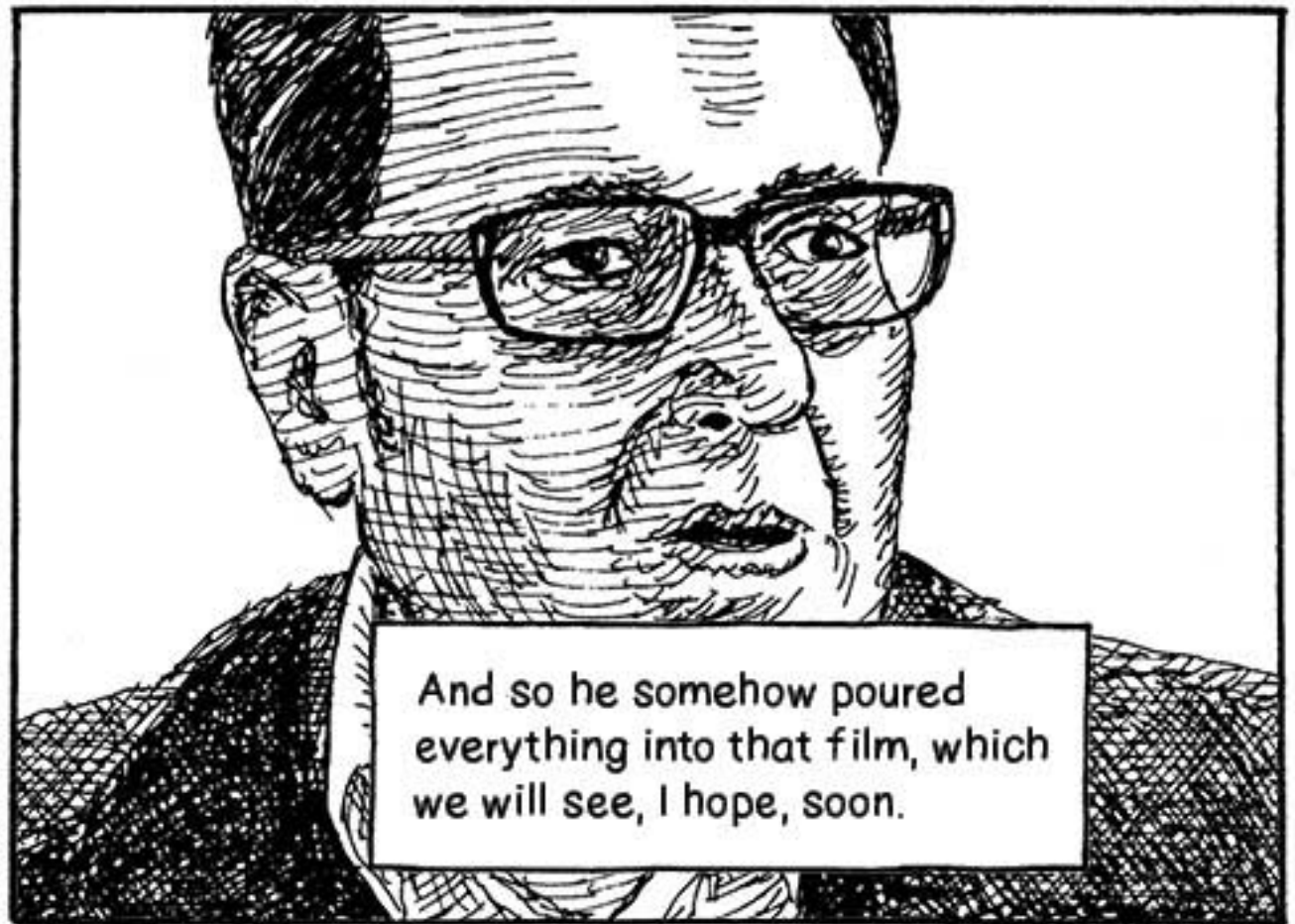
You know, the complexity of bringing the painting, and what it means, and the whole issue with the insurance company, and the value, and the escort, and all that.



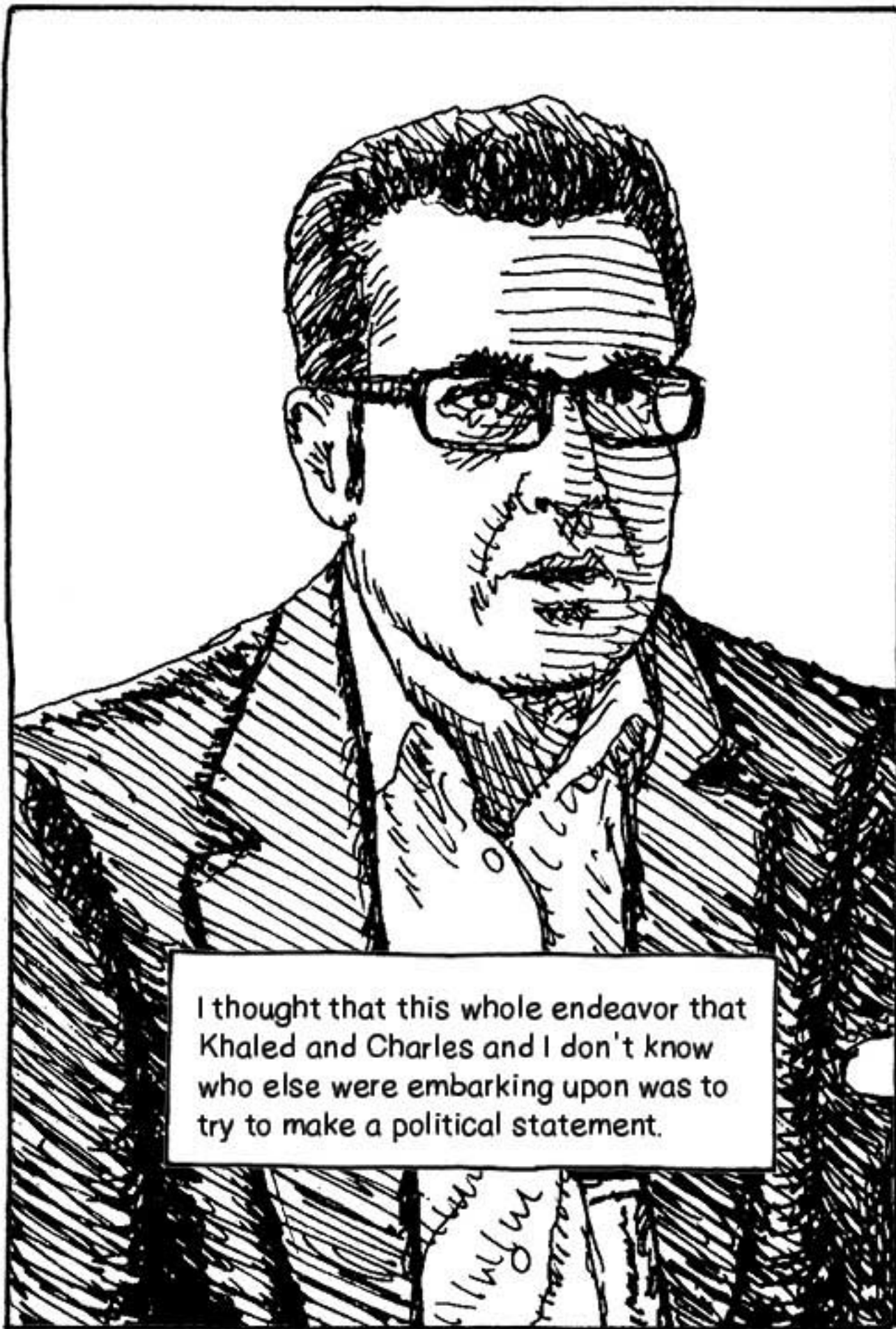
This didn't happen.



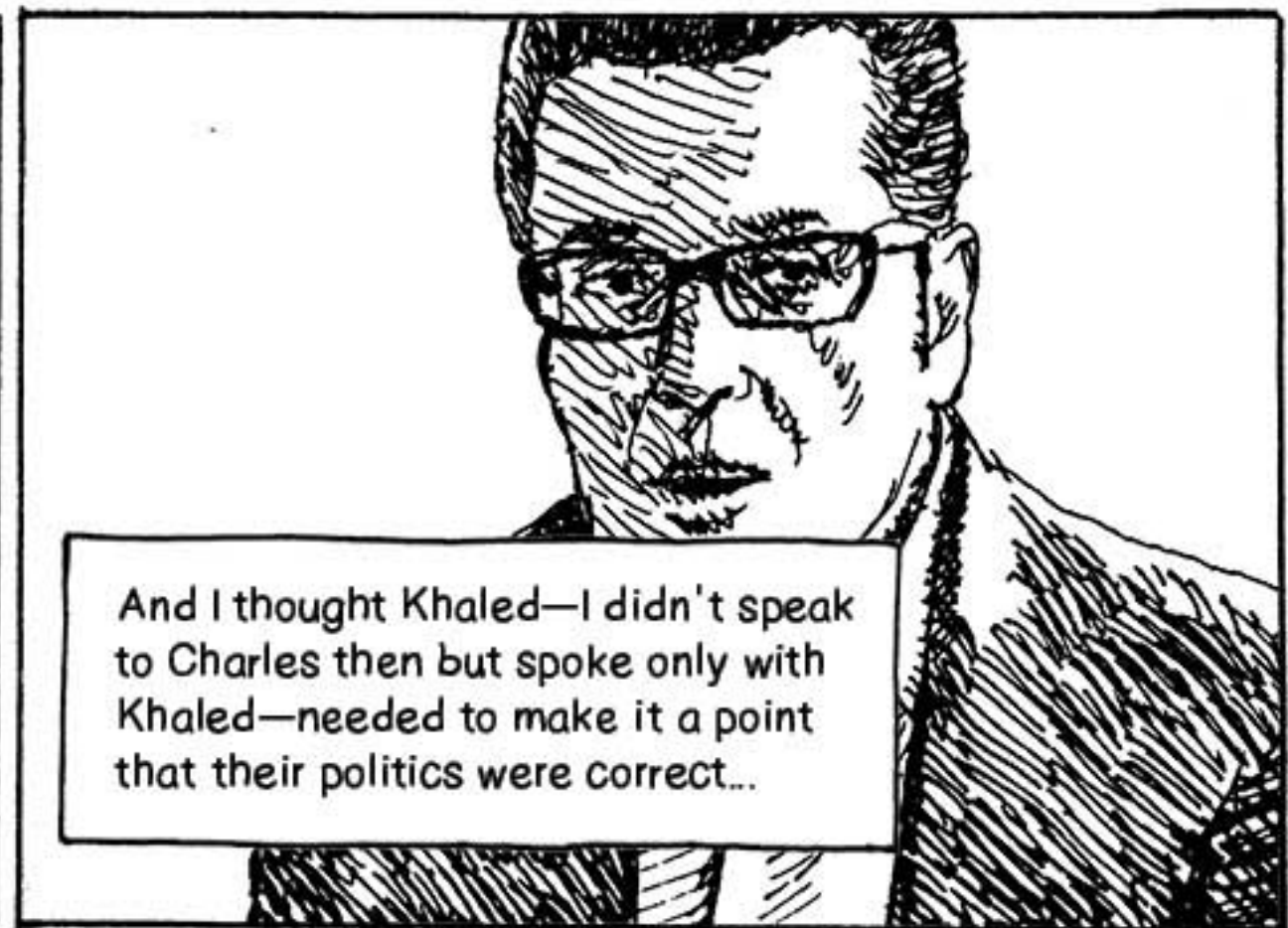
And then I understood that Khaled is more focused on the film with Rashid Masharawi—the film that they're doing.



And so he somehow poured everything into that film, which we will see, I hope, soon.



I thought that this whole endeavor that Khaled and Charles and I don't know who else were embarking upon was to try to make a political statement.



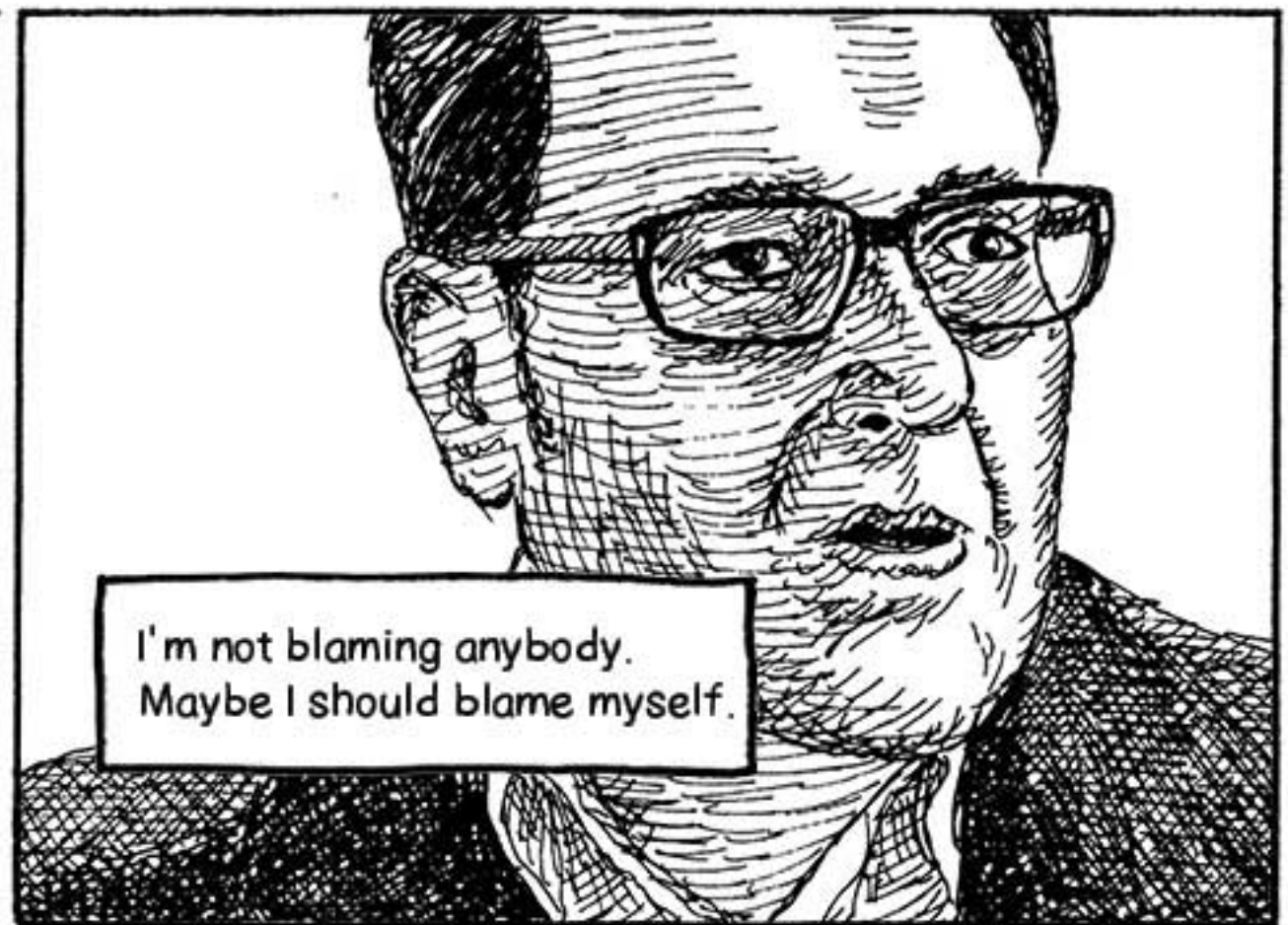
And I thought Khaled—I didn't speak to Charles then but spoke only with Khaled—needed to make it a point that their politics were correct...



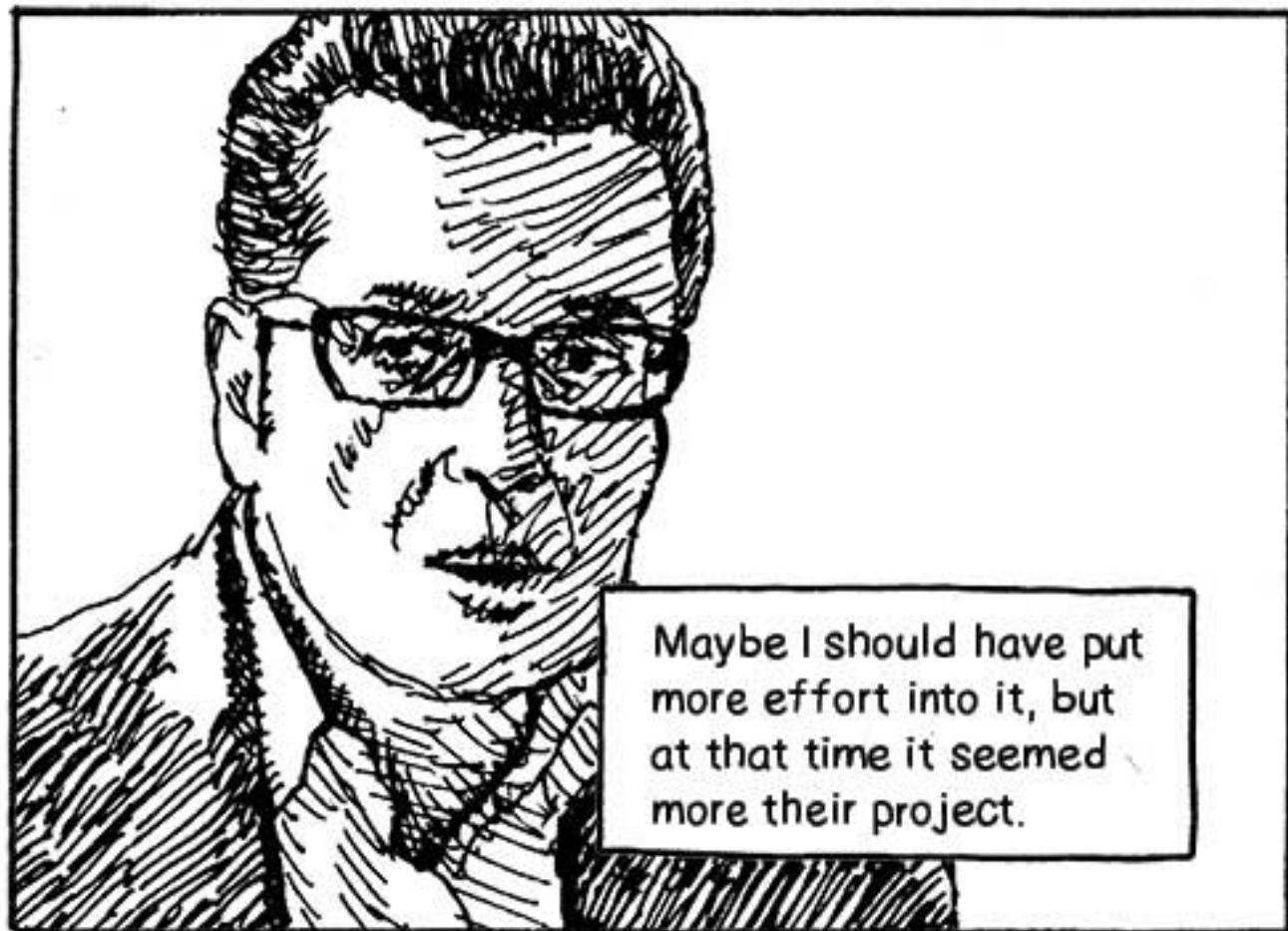
...that they're aware of what they're basically telling the people.



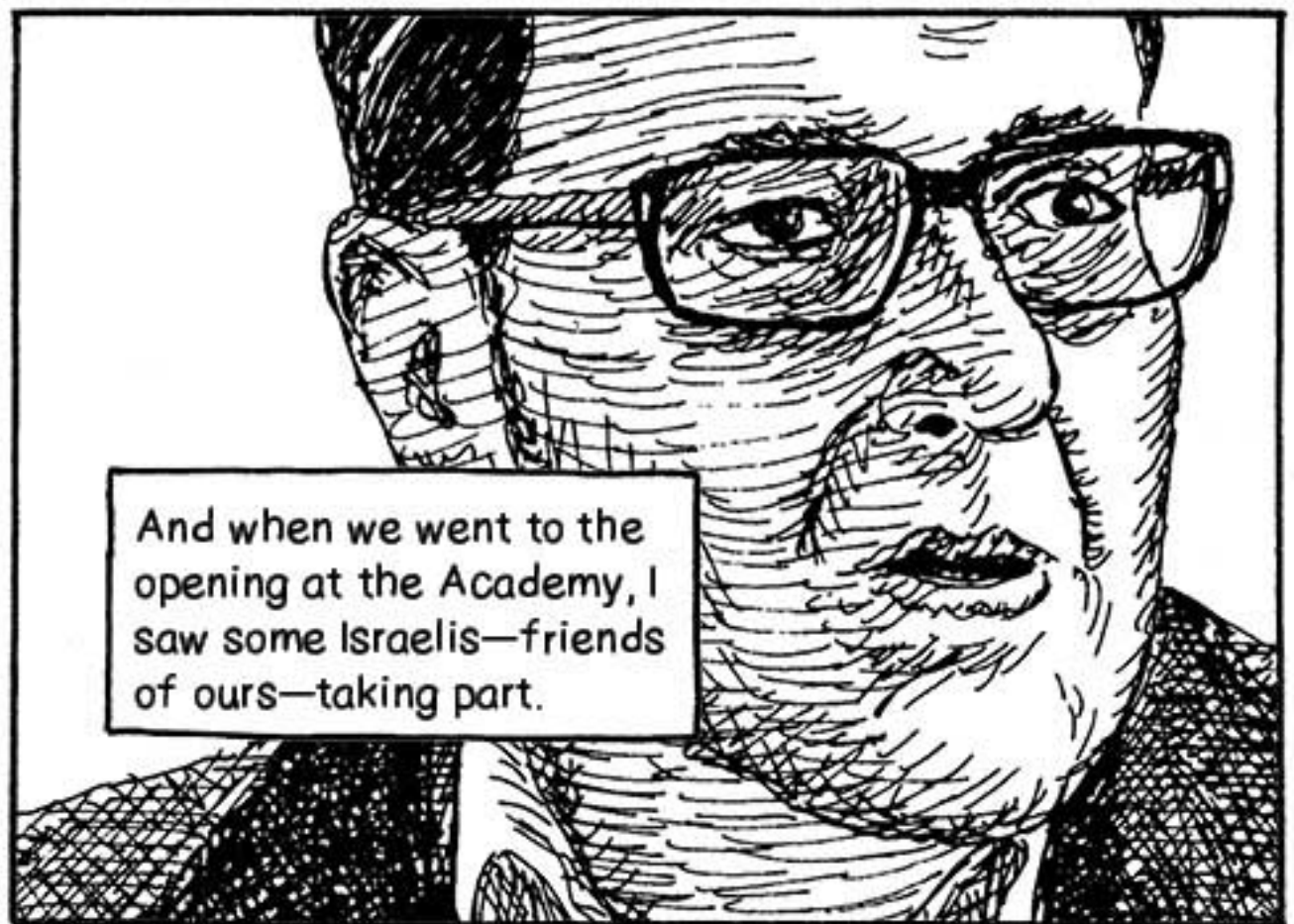
Unfortunately this did not happen.



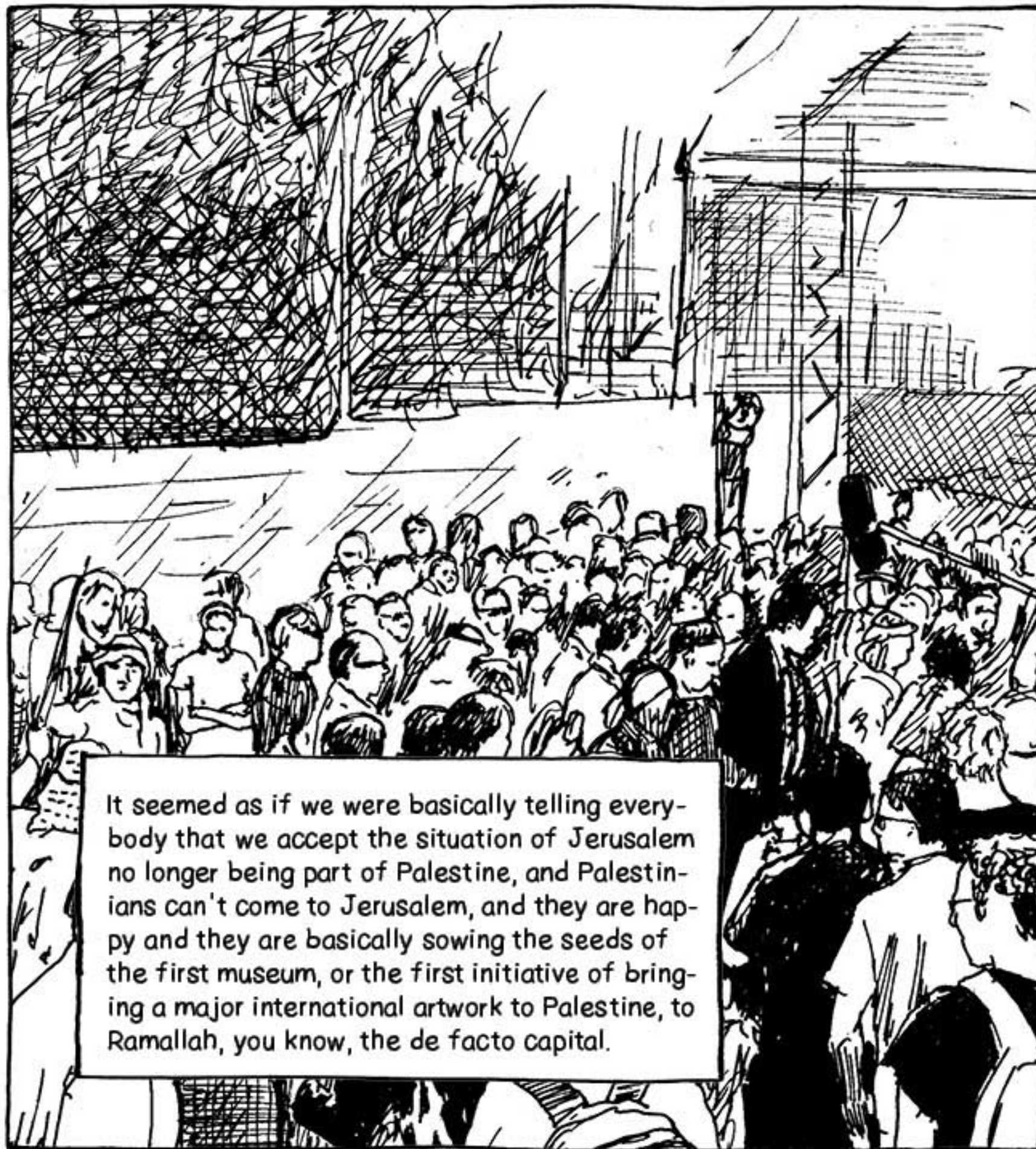
I'm not blaming anybody.
Maybe I should blame myself.



Maybe I should have put
more effort into it, but
at that time it seemed
more their project.



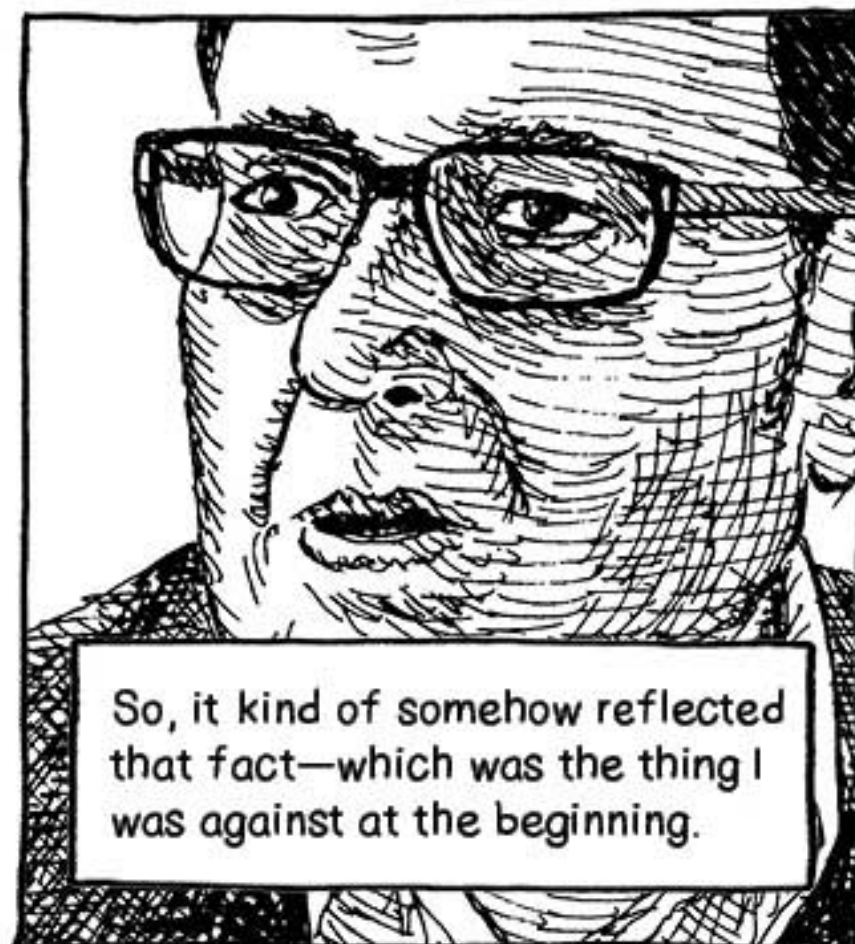
And when we went to the
opening at the Academy, I
saw some Israelis—friends
of ours—taking part.



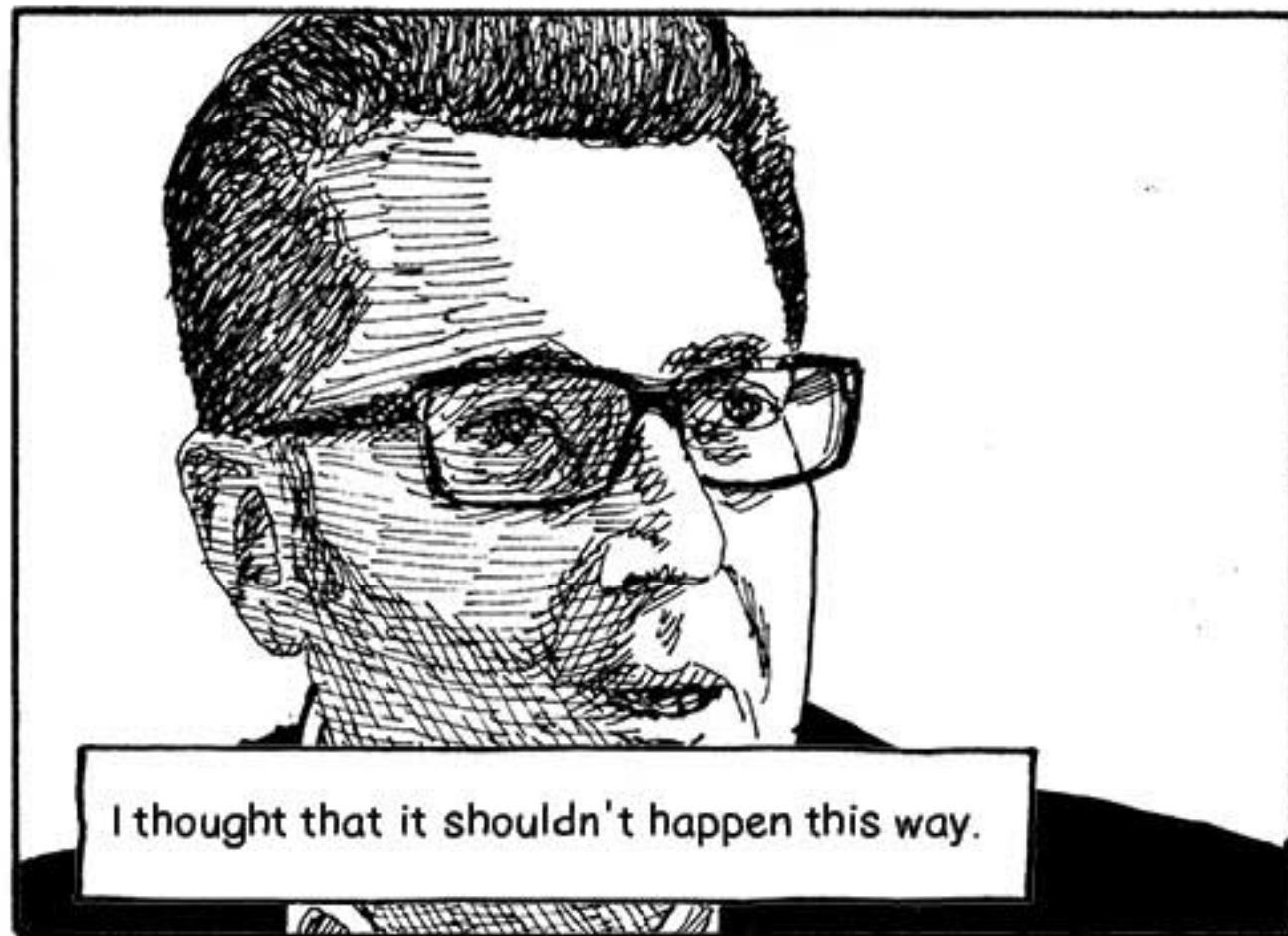
It seemed as if we were basically telling everybody that we accept the situation of Jerusalem no longer being part of Palestine, and Palestinians can't come to Jerusalem, and they are happy and they are basically sowing the seeds of the first museum, or the first initiative of bringing a major international artwork to Palestine, to Ramallah, you know, the de facto capital.



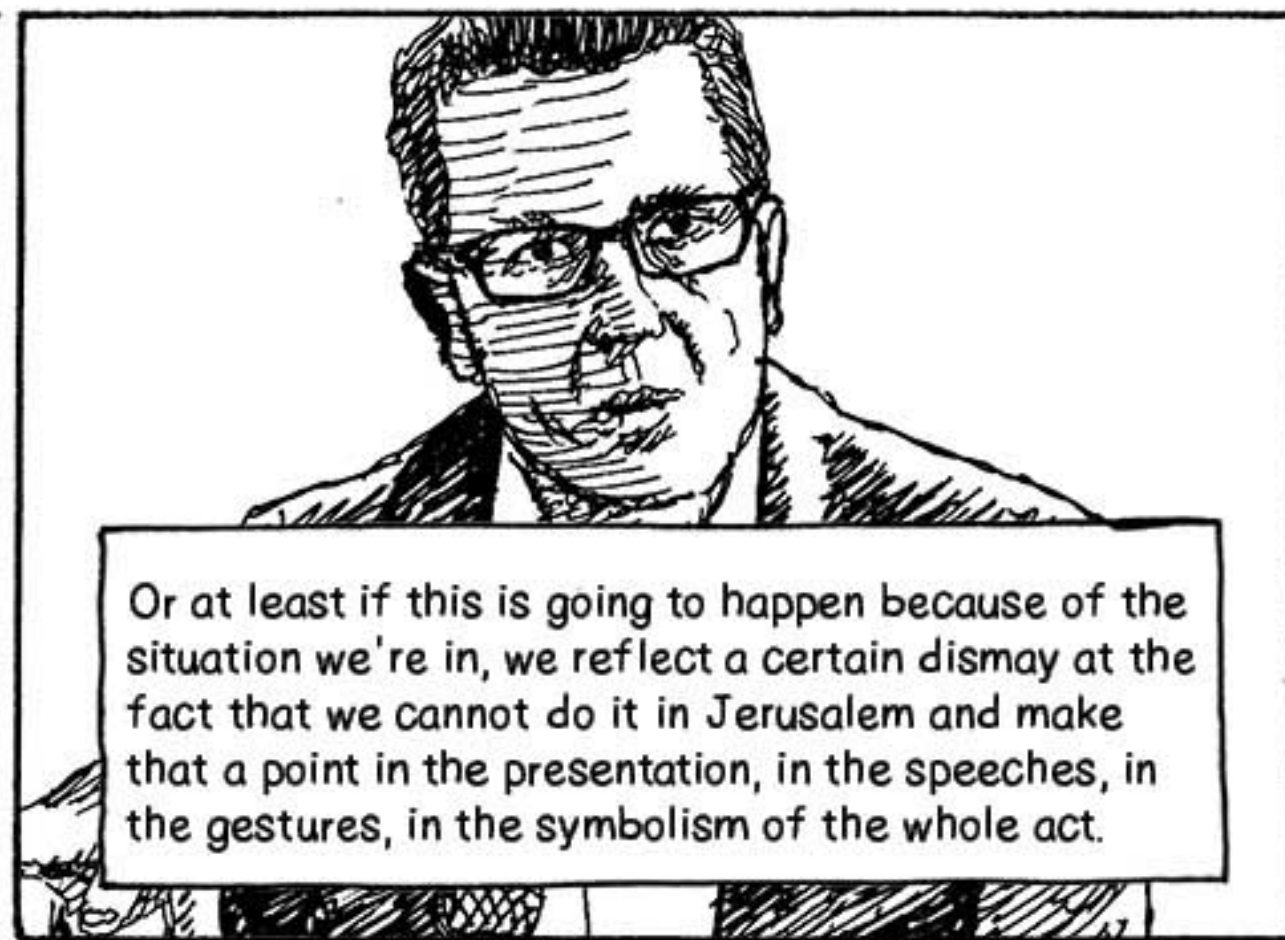
And then the Prime Minister was there and everybody was there.



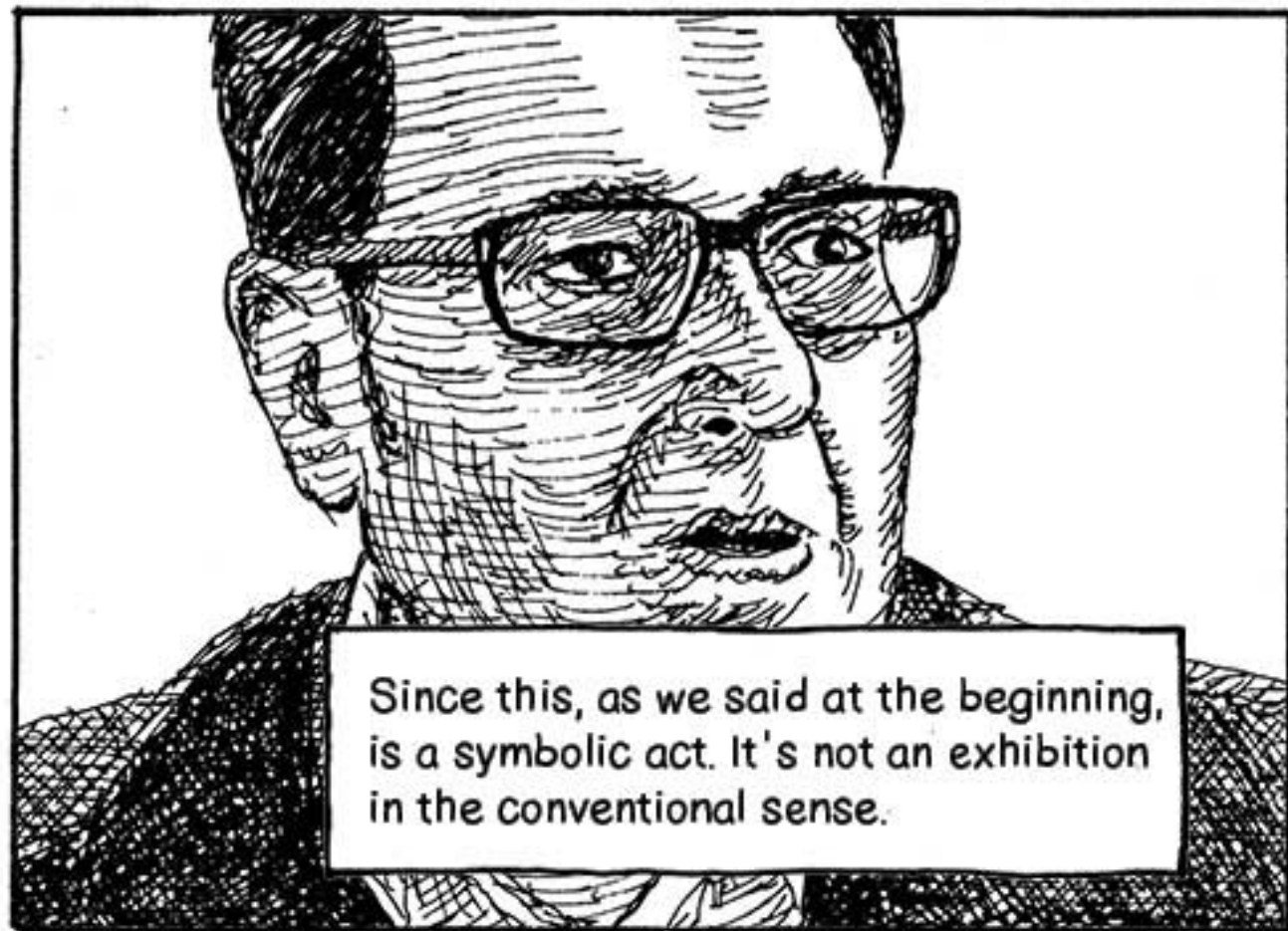
So, it kind of somehow reflected that fact—which was the thing I was against at the beginning.



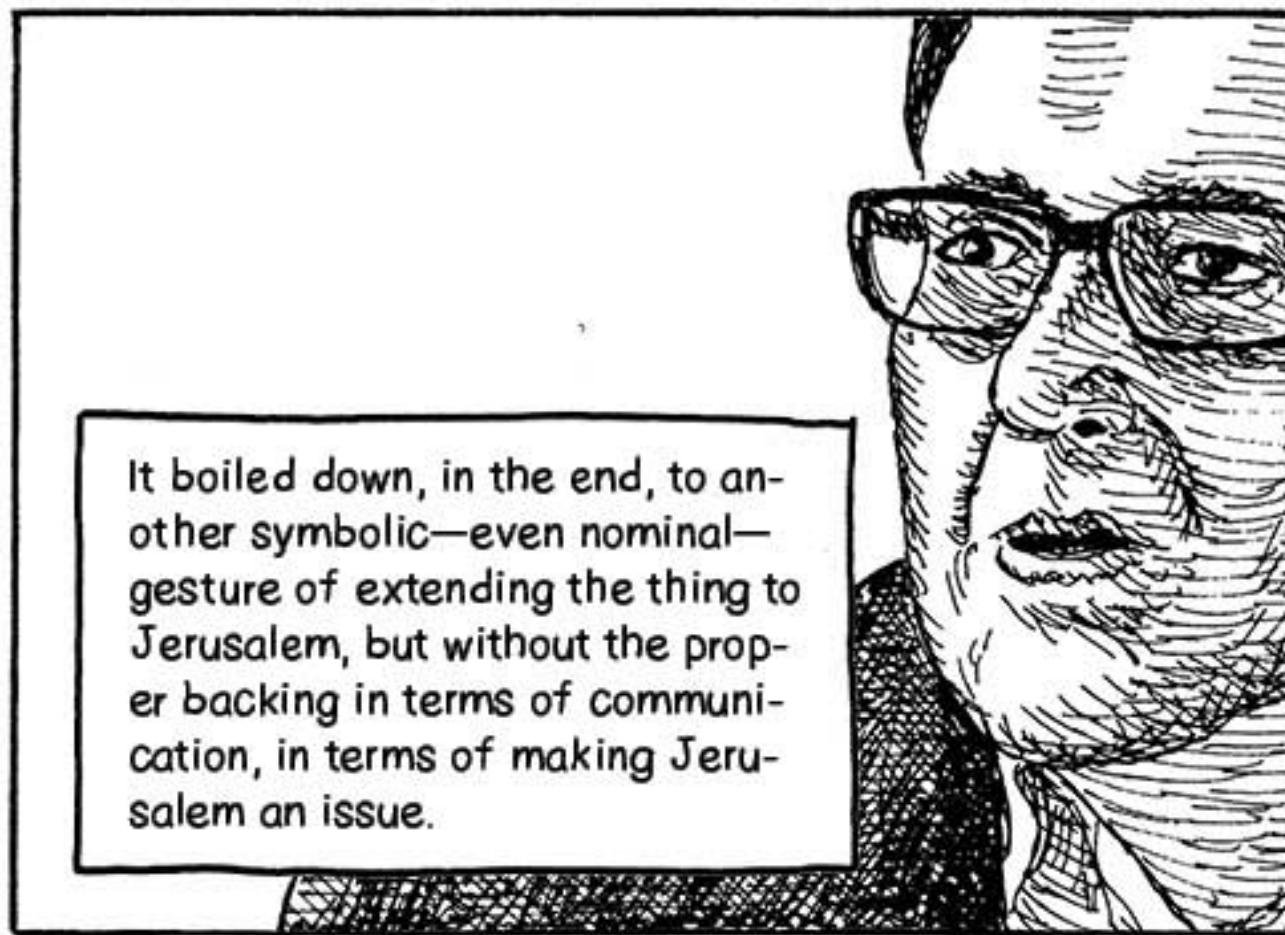
I thought that it shouldn't happen this way.



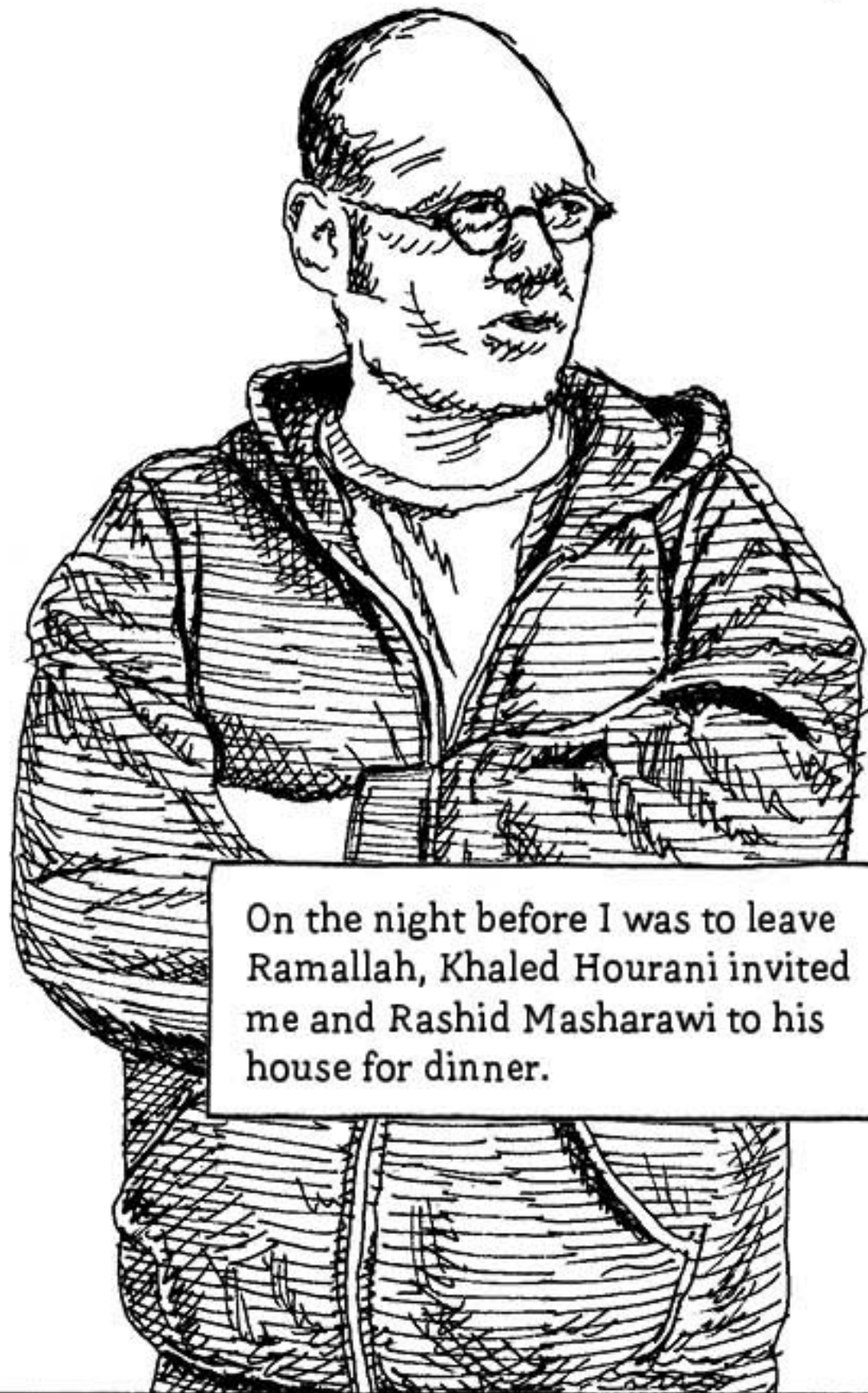
Or at least if this is going to happen because of the situation we're in, we reflect a certain dismay at the fact that we cannot do it in Jerusalem and make that a point in the presentation, in the speeches, in the gestures, in the symbolism of the whole act.



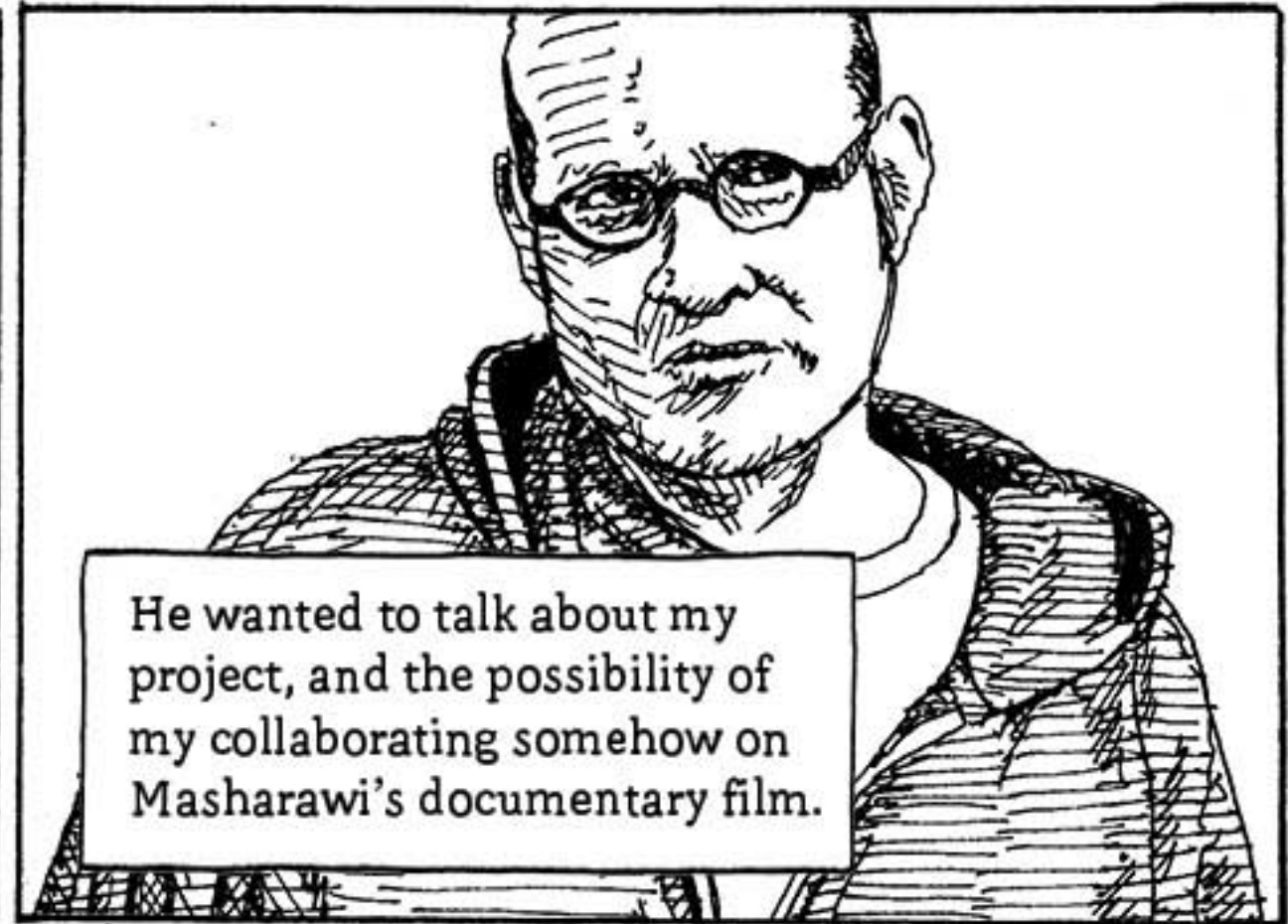
Since this, as we said at the beginning, is a symbolic act. It's not an exhibition in the conventional sense.



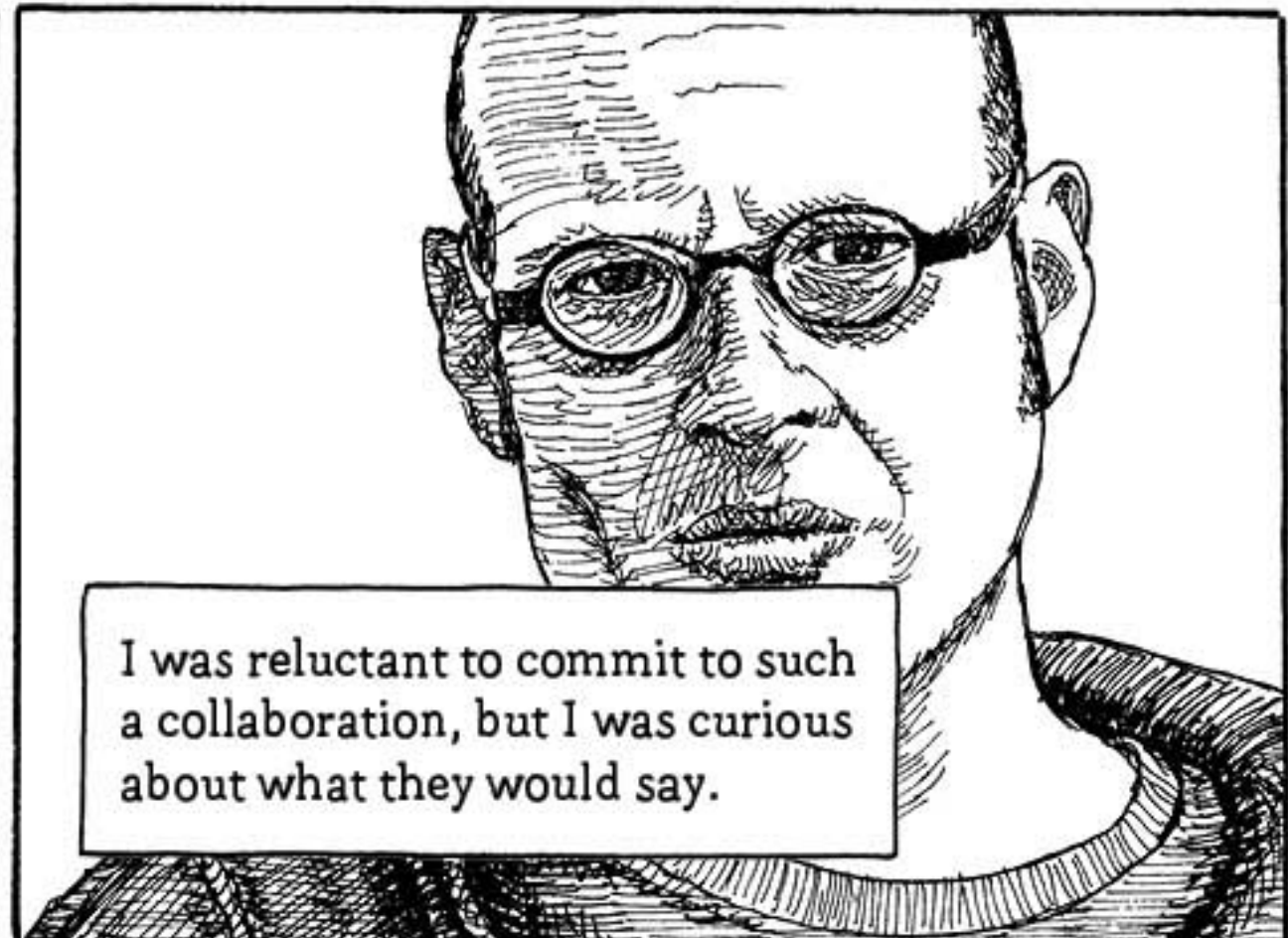
It boiled down, in the end, to another symbolic—even nominal—gesture of extending the thing to Jerusalem, but without the proper backing in terms of communication, in terms of making Jerusalem an issue.



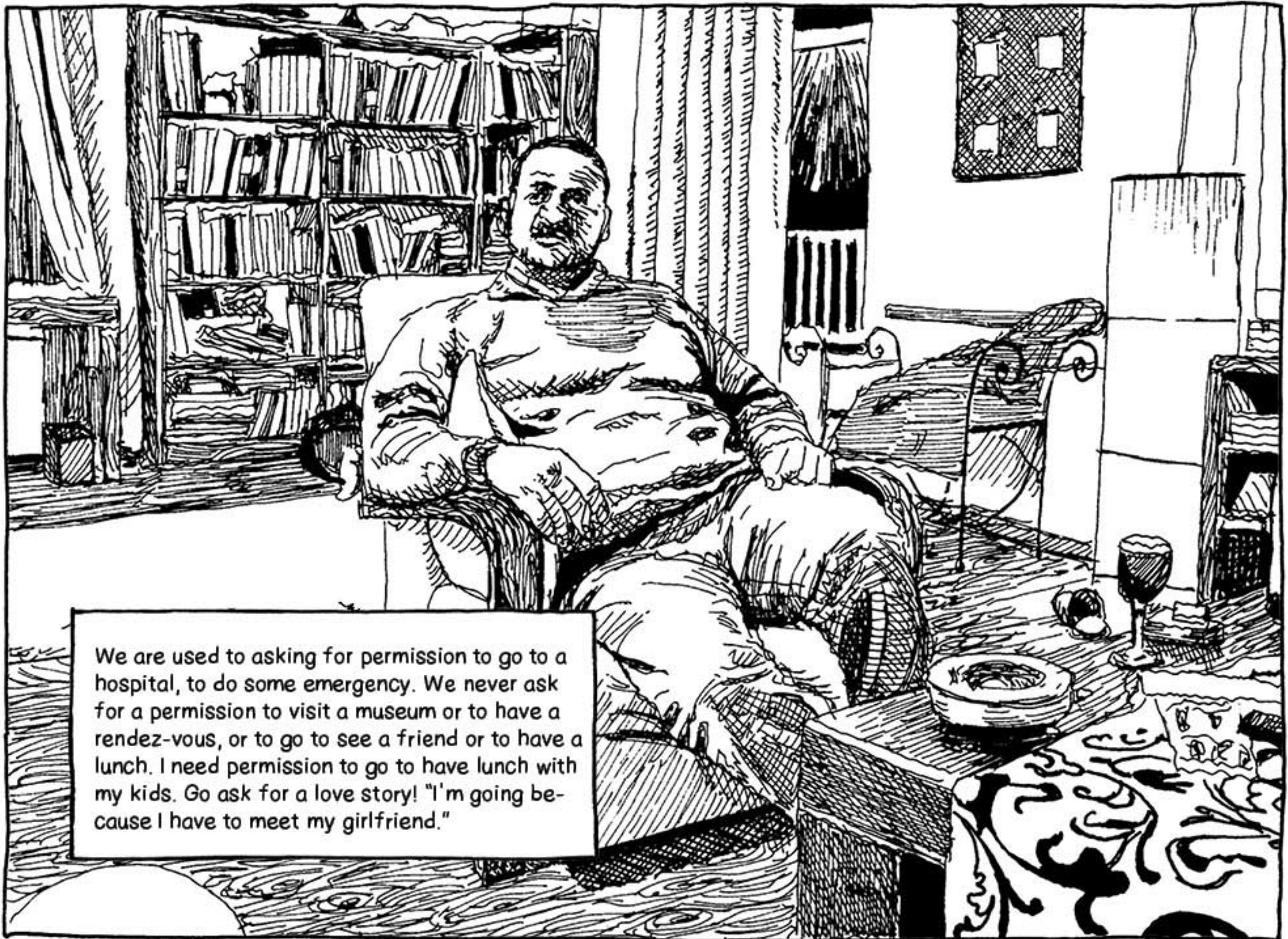
On the night before I was to leave Ramallah, Khaled Hourani invited me and Rashid Masharawi to his house for dinner.



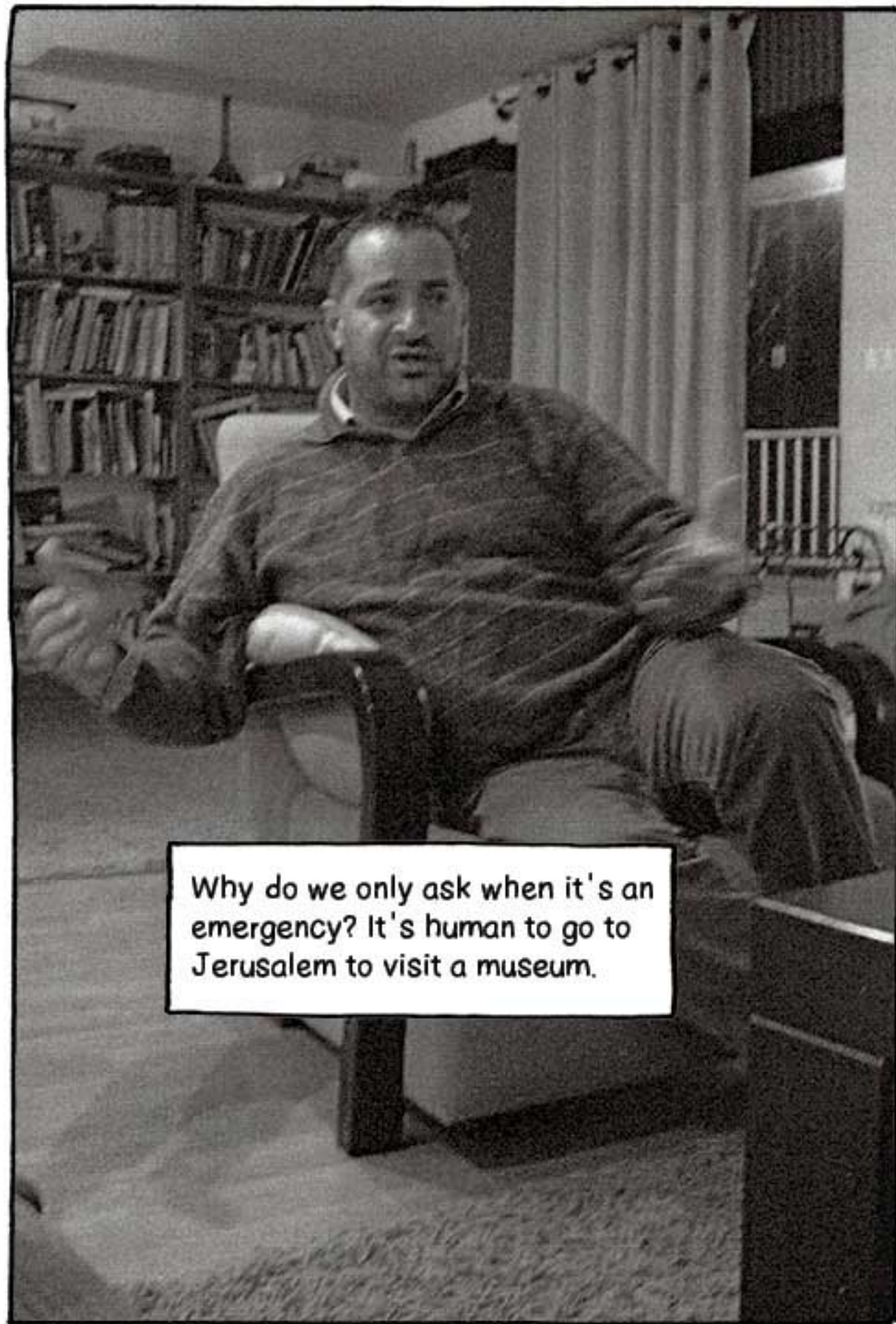
He wanted to talk about my project, and the possibility of my collaborating somehow on Masharawi's documentary film.



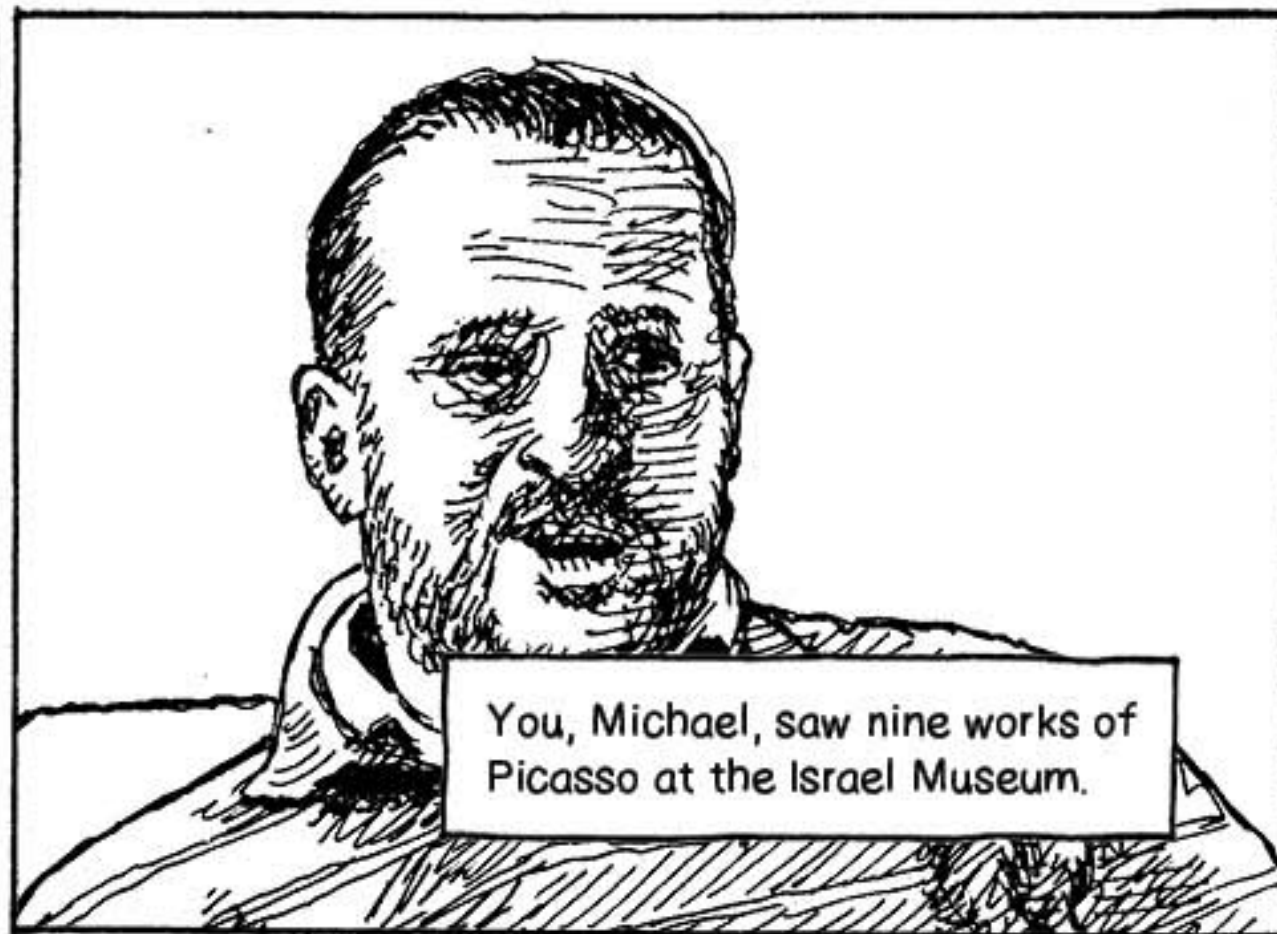
I was reluctant to commit to such a collaboration, but I was curious about what they would say.



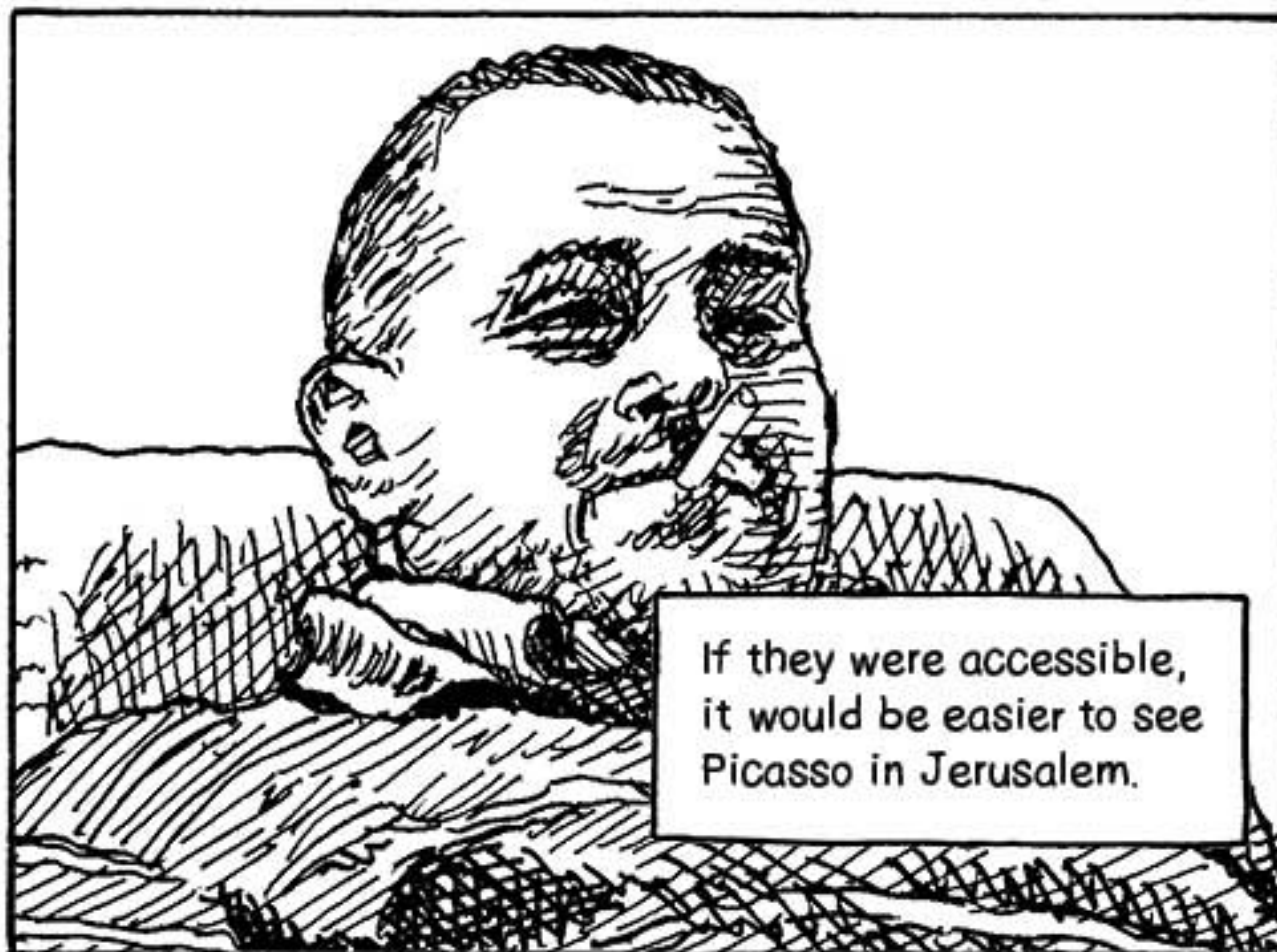
We are used to asking for permission to go to a hospital, to do some emergency. We never ask for a permission to visit a museum or to have a rendez-vous, or to go to see a friend or to have a lunch. I need permission to go to have lunch with my kids. Go ask for a love story! "I'm going because I have to meet my girlfriend."



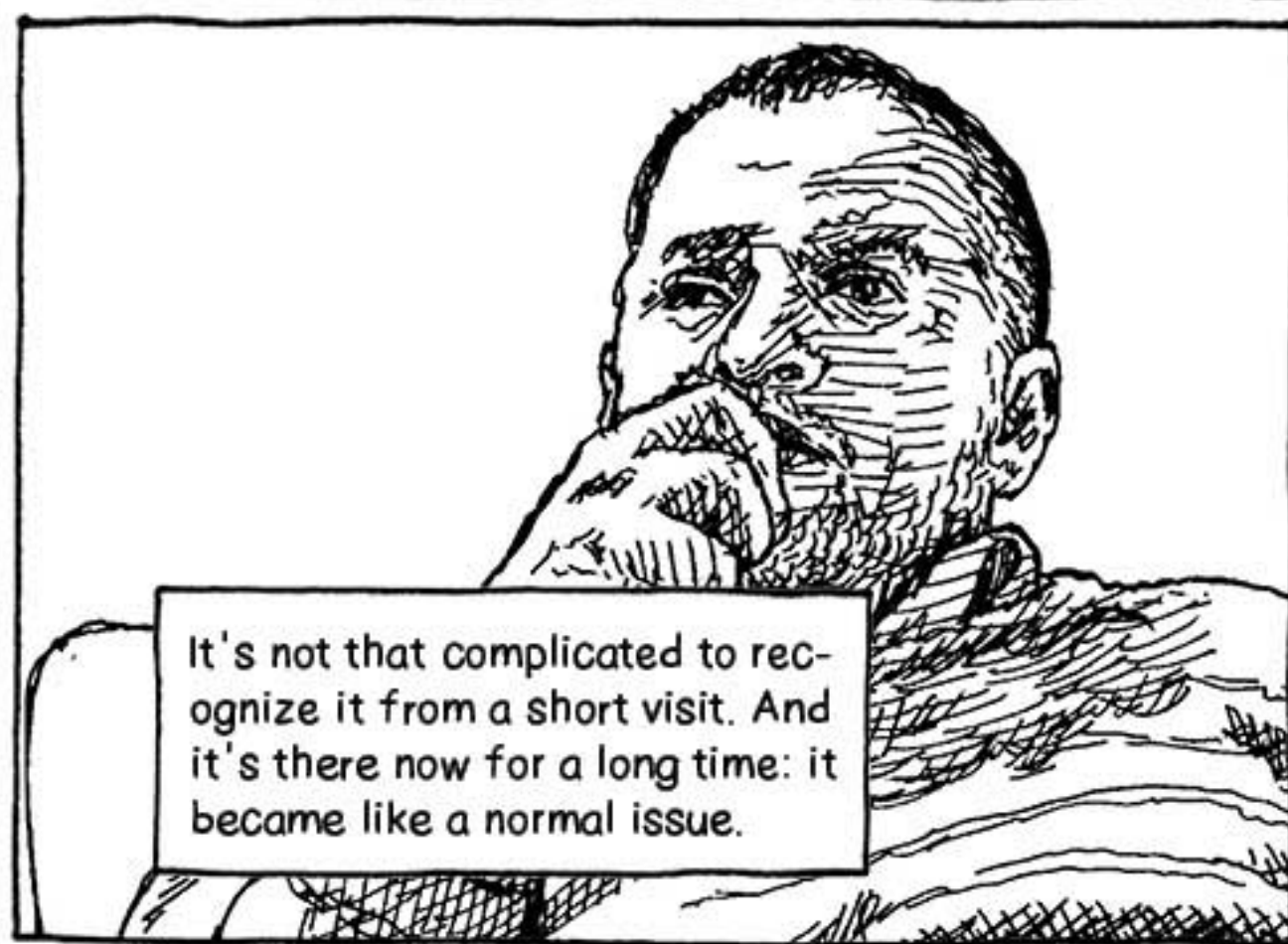
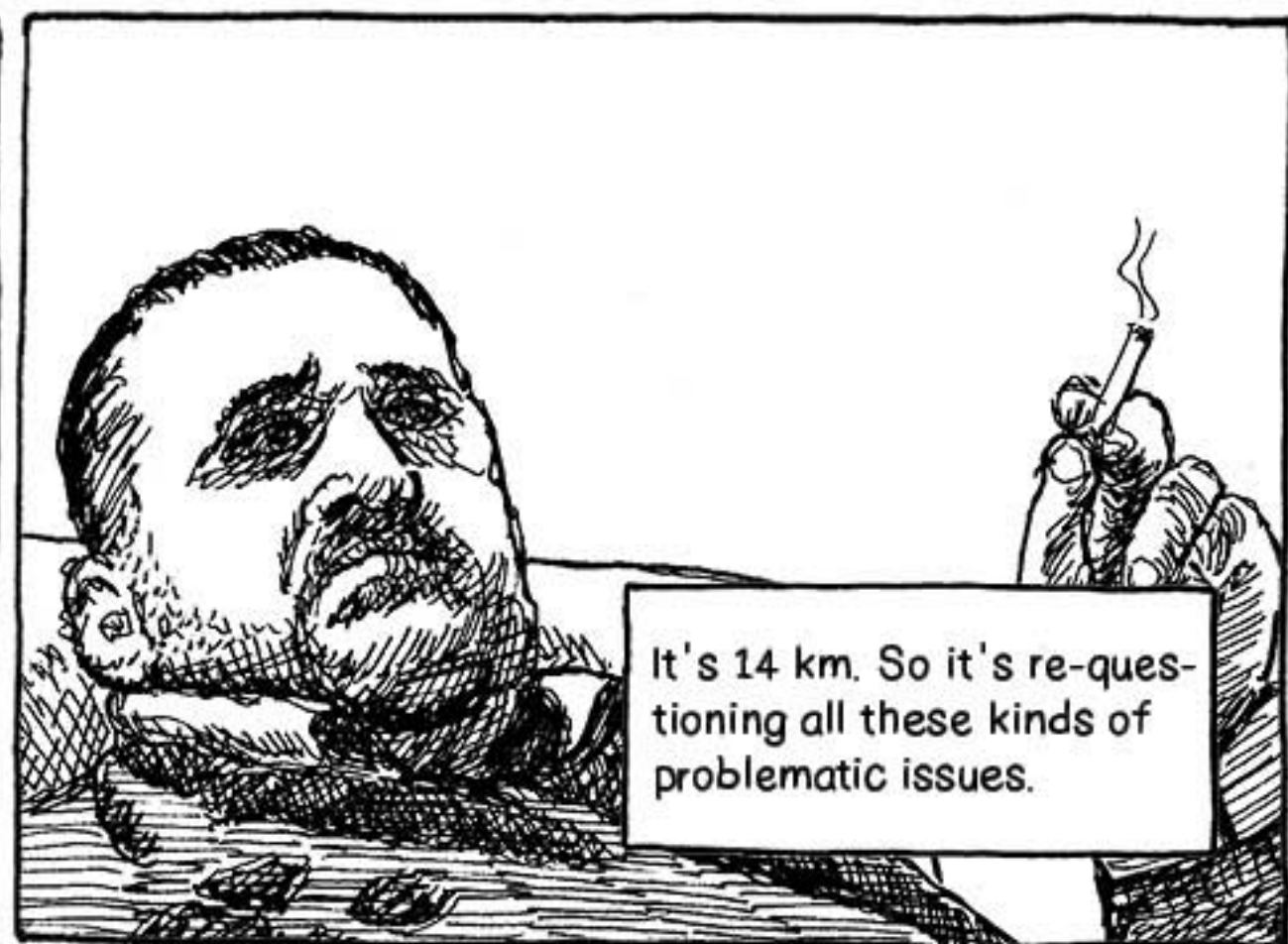
Why do we only ask when it's an emergency? It's human to go to Jerusalem to visit a museum.

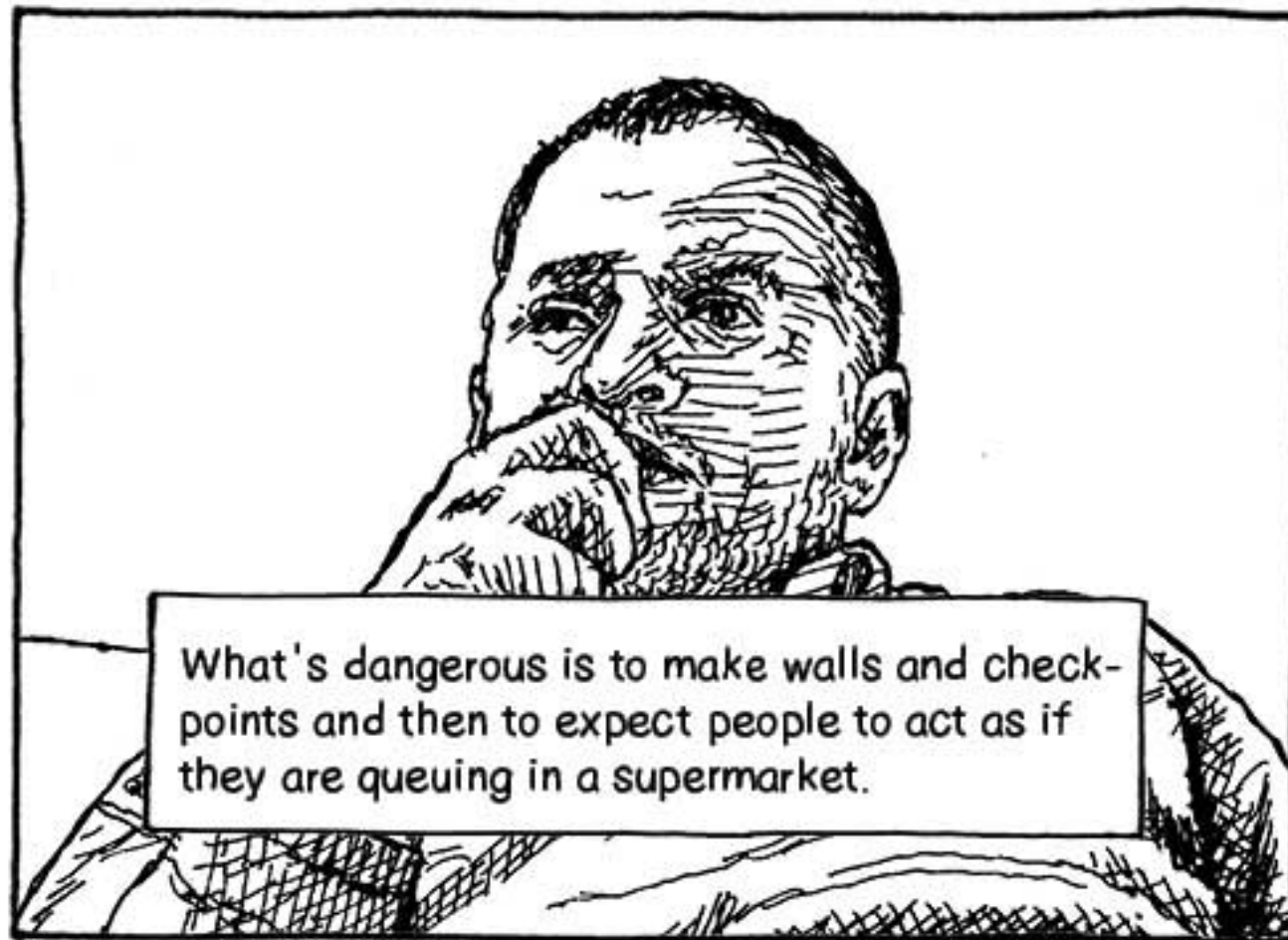


You, Michael, saw nine works of Picasso at the Israel Museum.

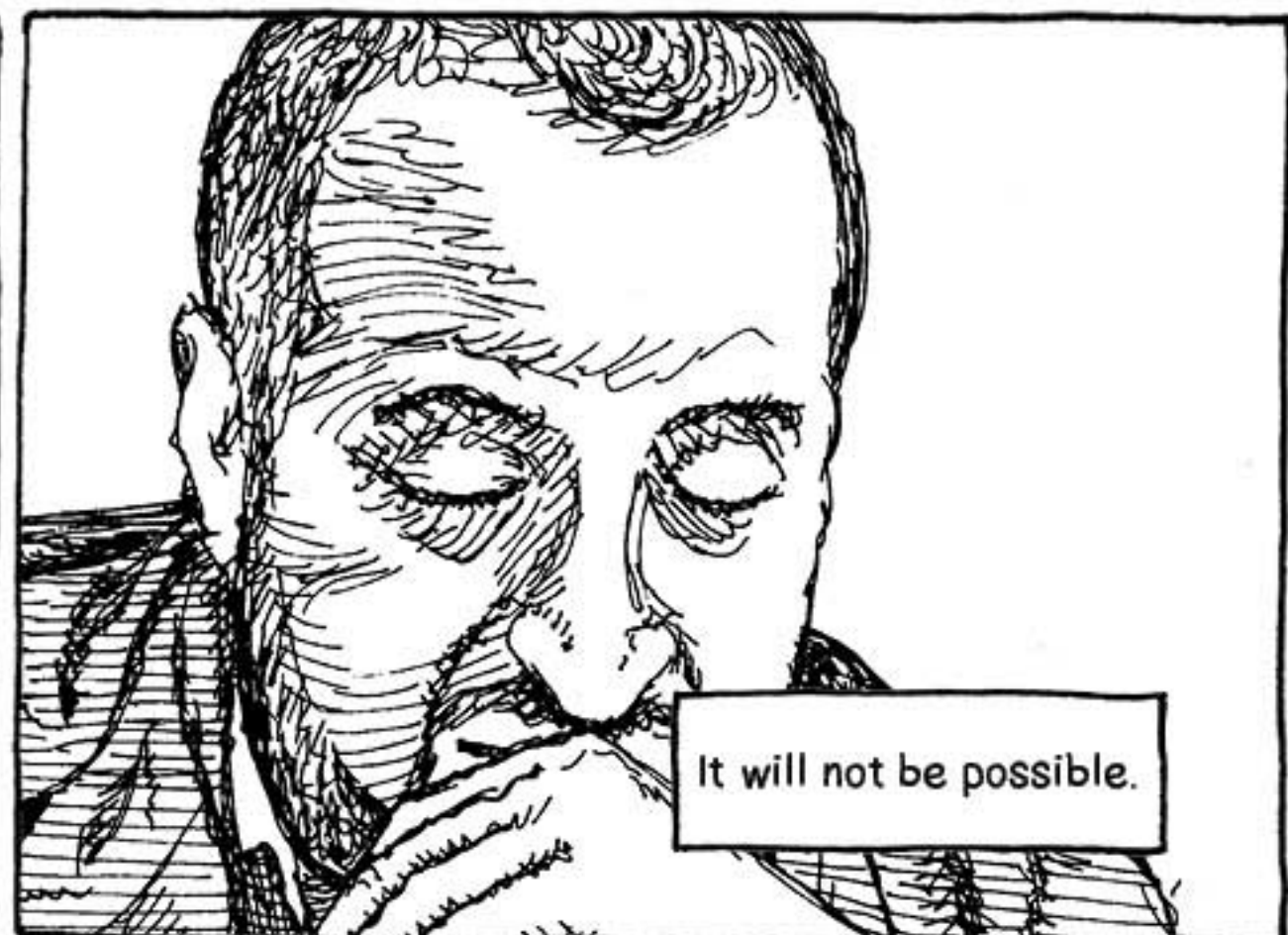


If they were accessible, it would be easier to see Picasso in Jerusalem.

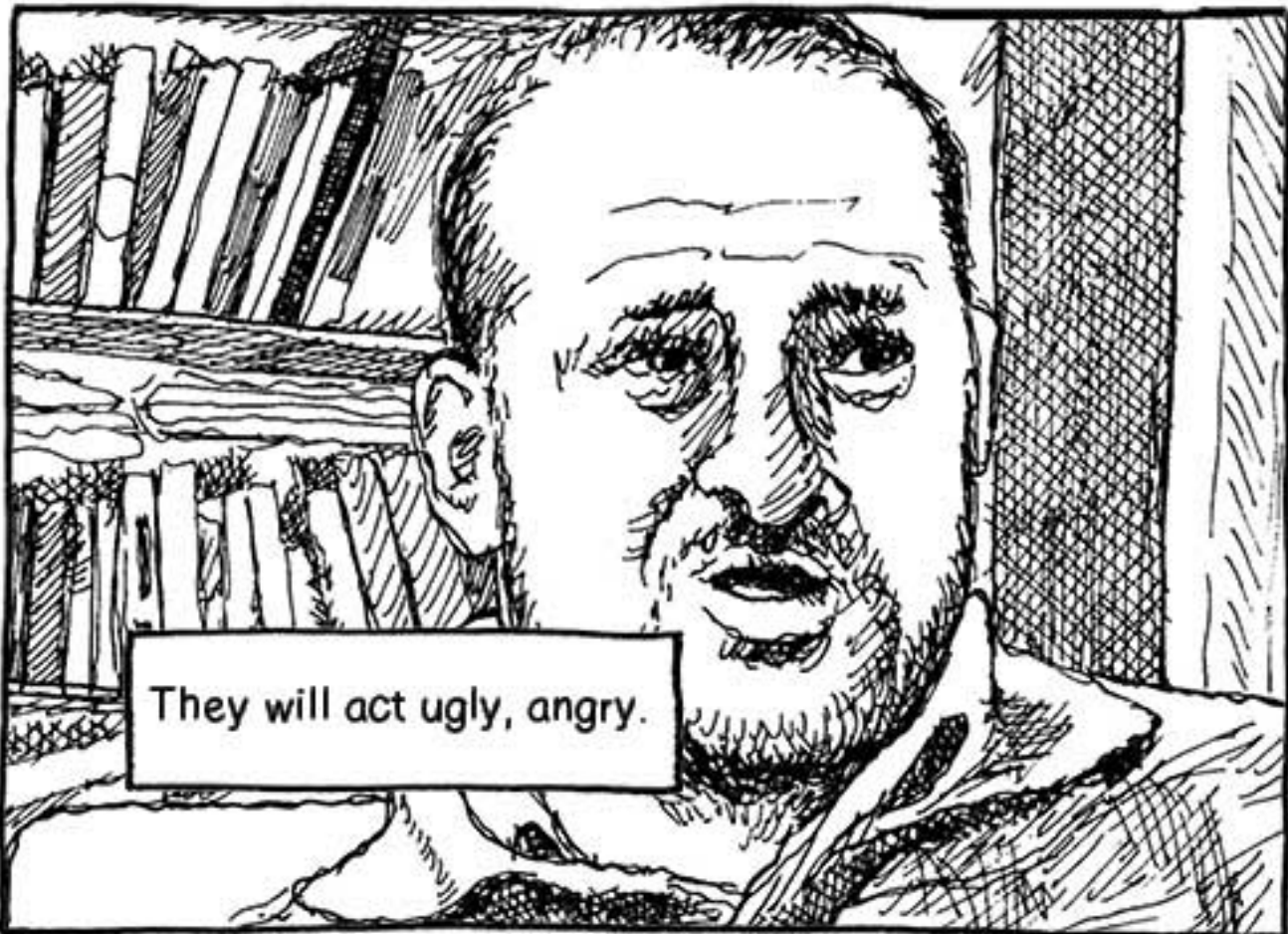




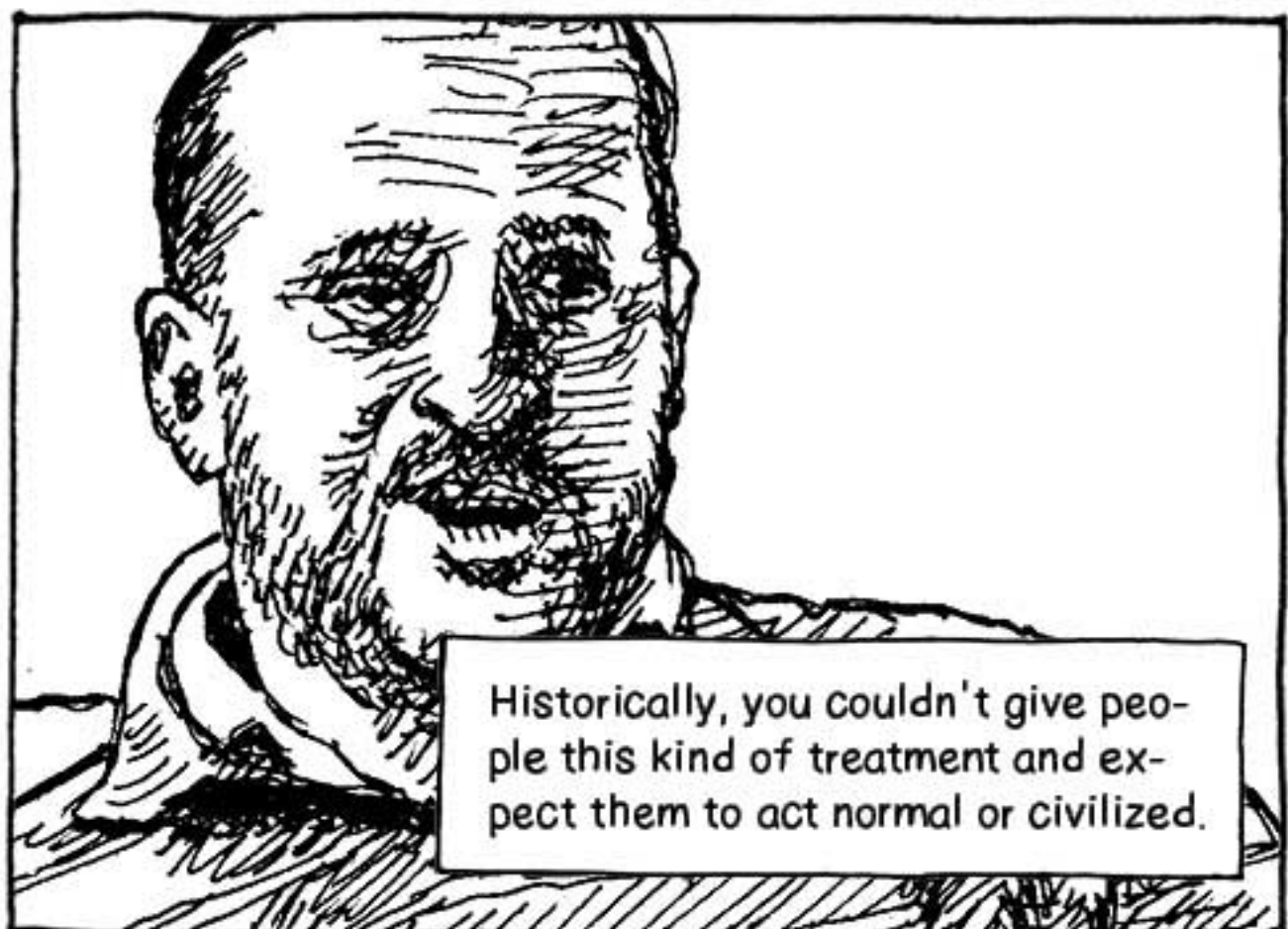
What's dangerous is to make walls and checkpoints and then to expect people to act as if they are queuing in a supermarket.



It will not be possible.



They will act ugly, angry.



Historically, you couldn't give people this kind of treatment and expect them to act normal or civilized.

I once was invited
to a talk in Cholon.



And I succeeded in
getting permission
to travel in Israel.

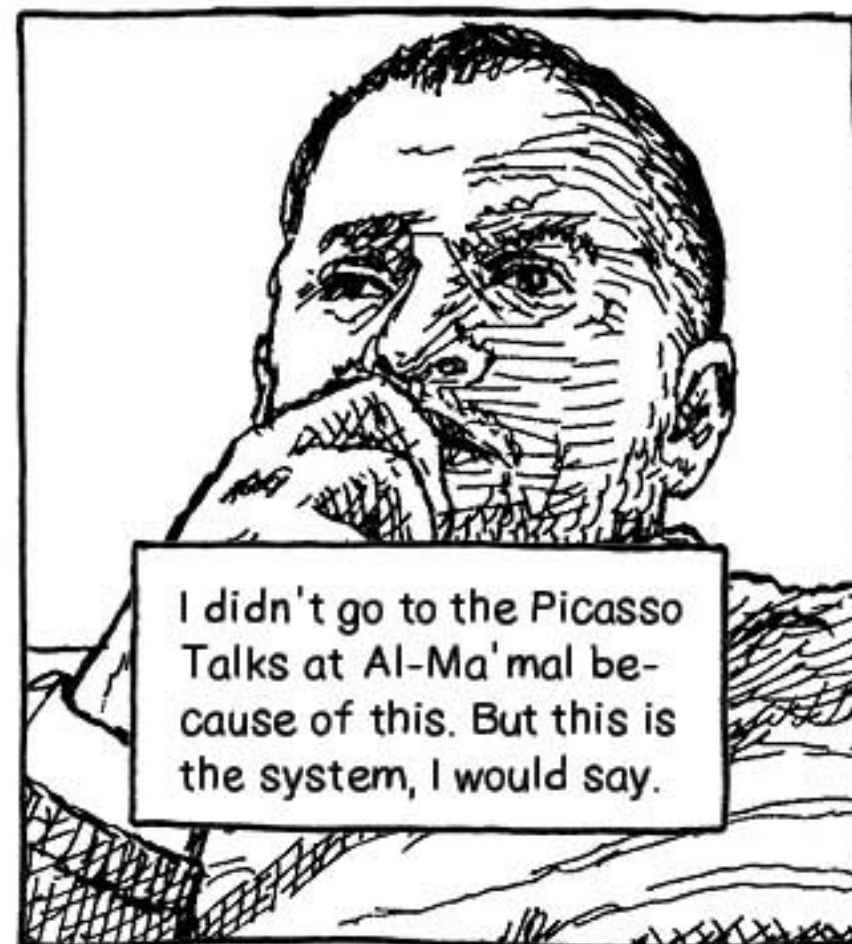


But I didn't go to the talk,
I went to see my kids.

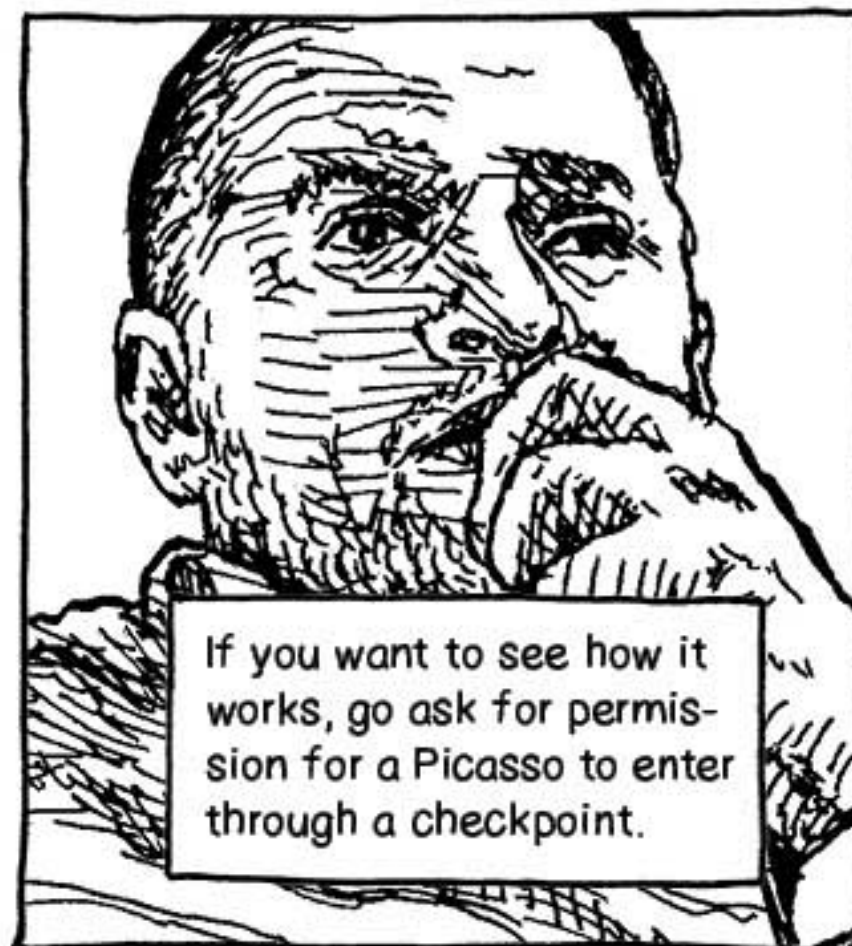




When Digital Art Lab called me, I told them, "This is a one-day permission. Let the audience know that I didn't attend because the permission is only for one day. I could come tomorrow, if you succeed in getting another permission. I will not go to give an art talk if I only have 8 hours to go to Tel Aviv."

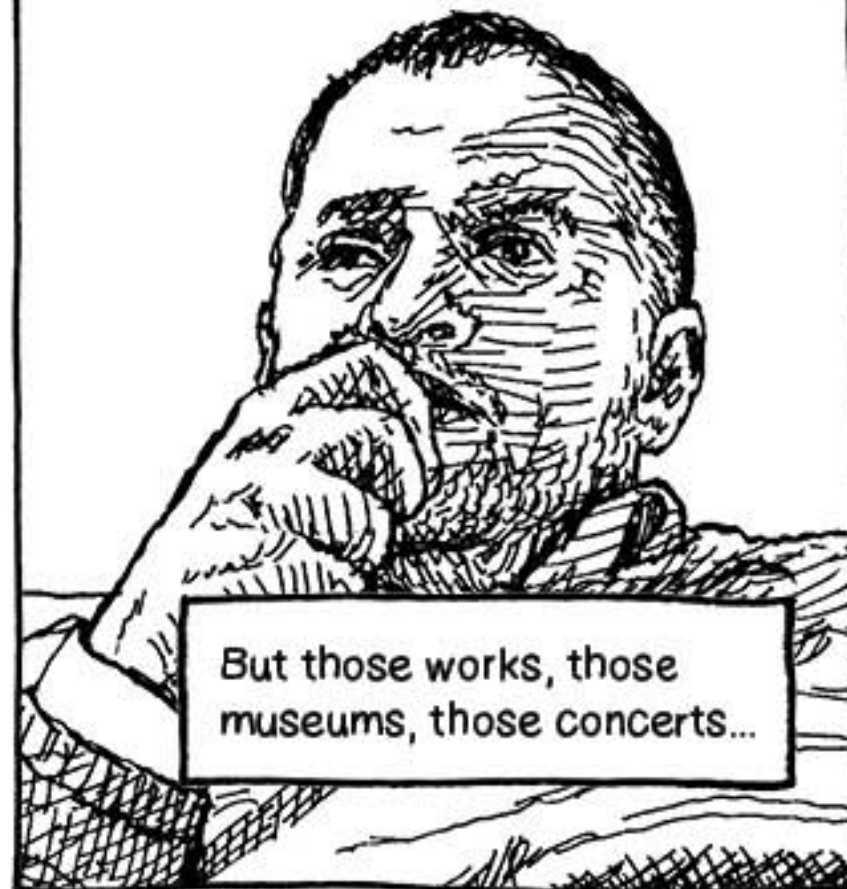


I didn't go to the Picasso Talks at Al-Ma'mal because of this. But this is the system, I would say.



If you want to see how it works, go ask for permission for a Picasso to enter through a checkpoint.

For me, it tells more, because the system tries to create an image in this region that, for example, Israeli museums and the art scene there belong to Europe, to a Western kind of attitude, and they are part of that scene.

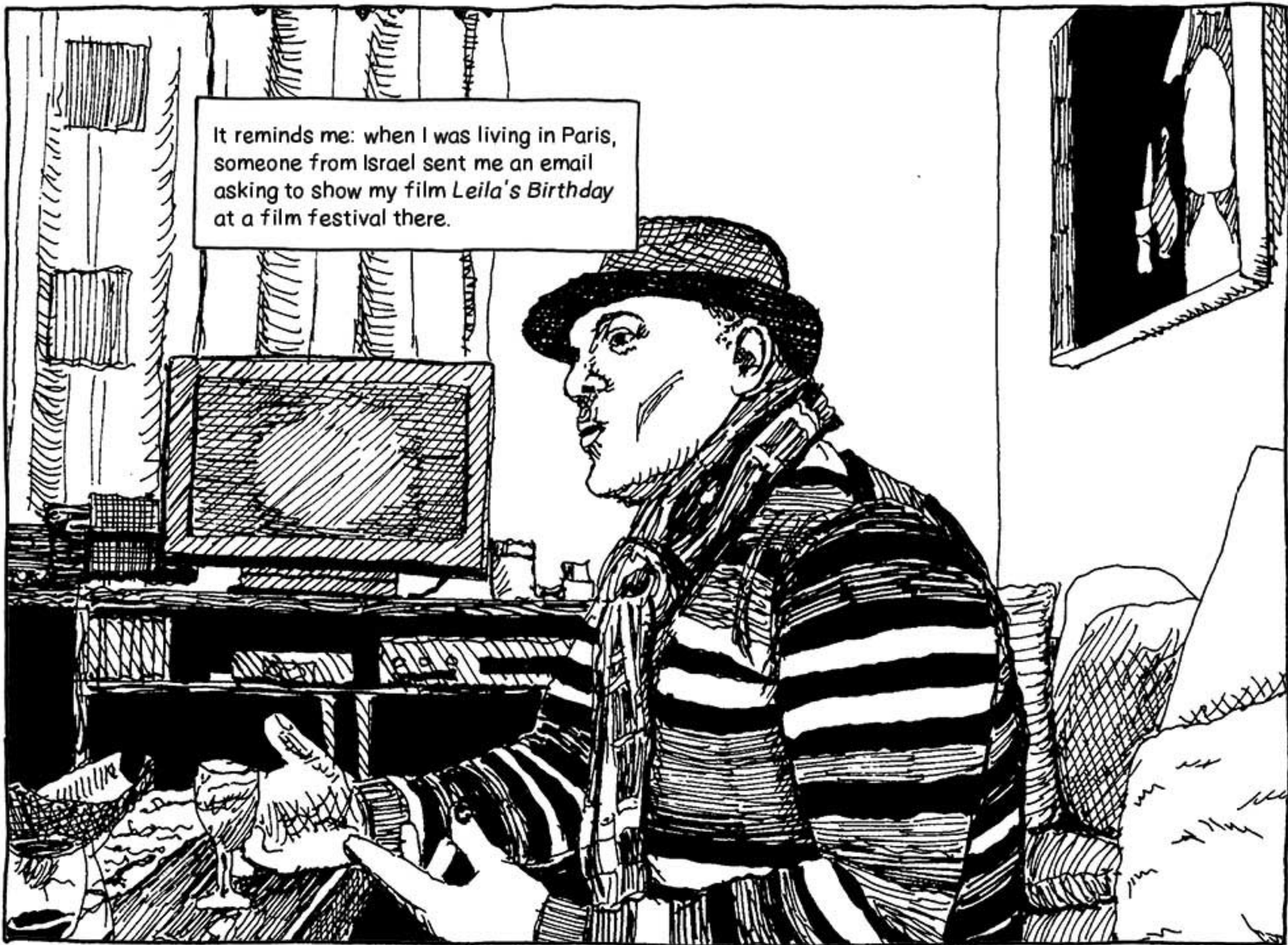


But those works, those museums, those concerts...



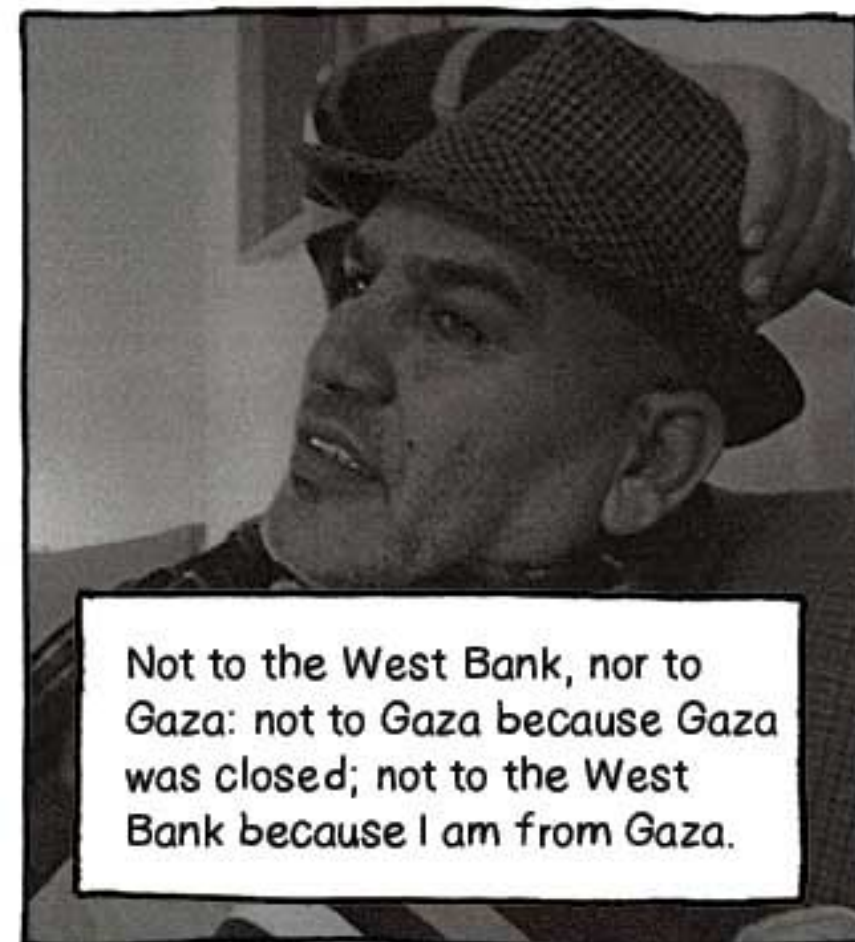
...they're not available for the region.

It reminds me: when I was living in Paris,
someone from Israel sent me an email
asking to show my film *Leila's Birthday*
at a film festival there.





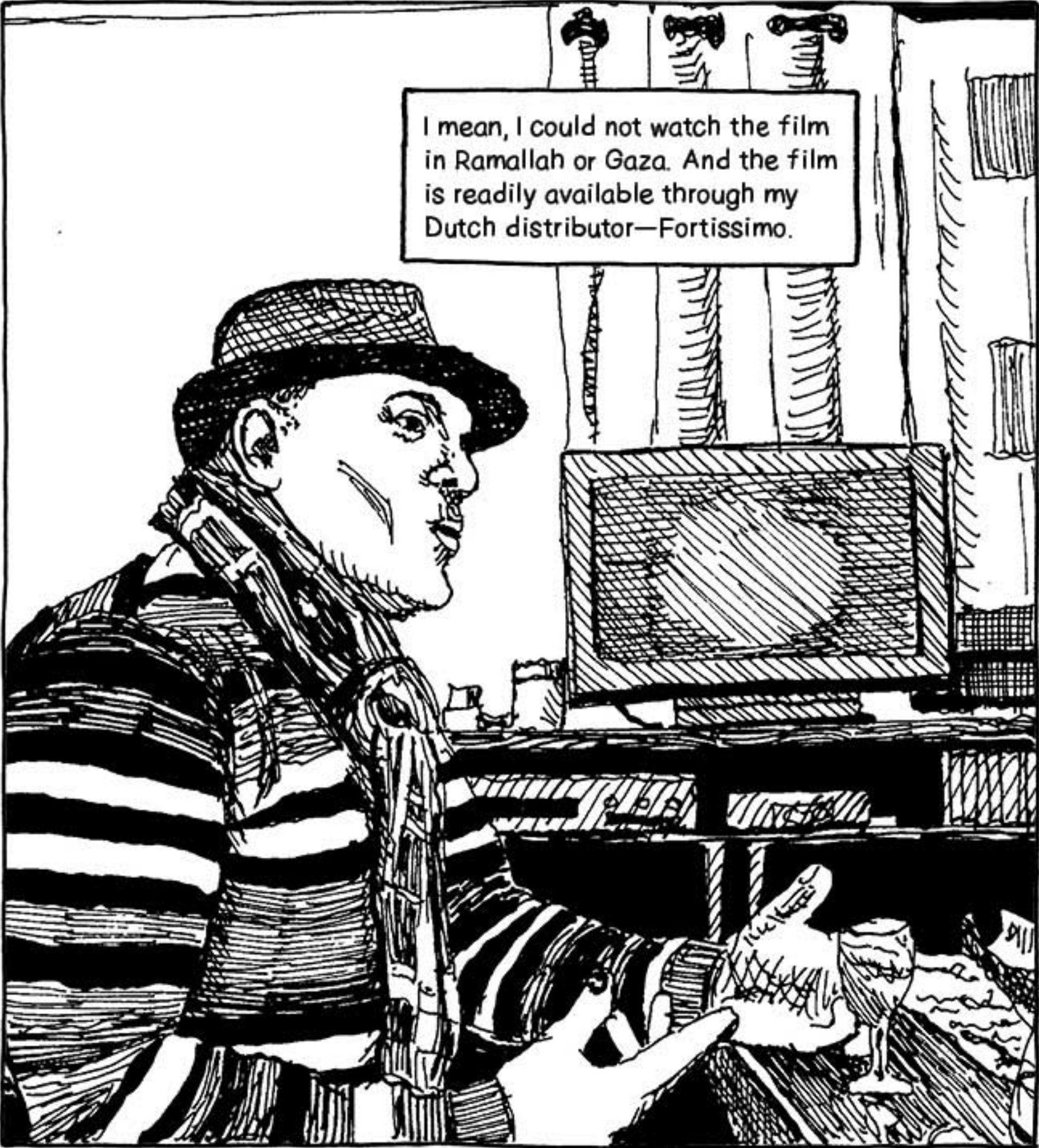
But I was not allowed to come here.



Not to the West Bank, nor to Gaza: not to Gaza because Gaza was closed; not to the West Bank because I am from Gaza.




How could I agree if I could not go to Ramallah?

A black and white illustration of a man in a striped shirt and a hat, seen from the side, talking to another man. The second man is sitting at a desk with a computer monitor. The background shows a room with a window and some equipment.

I mean, I could not watch the film in Ramallah or Gaza. And the film is readily available through my Dutch distributor—Fortissimo.

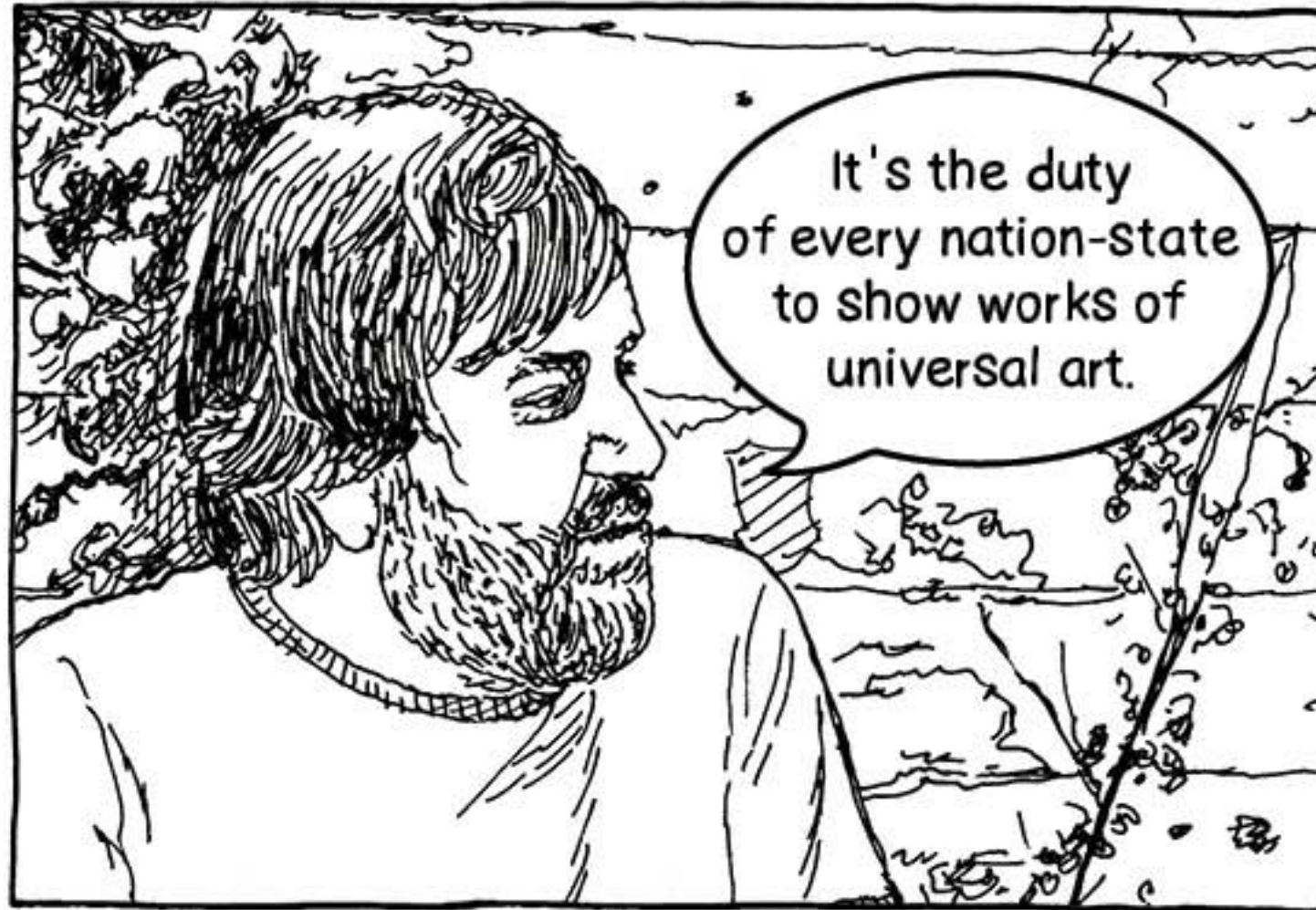
A close-up black and white illustration of the man in the hat, looking slightly to the right. He has a mustache and is wearing a thick scarf.

So, for sure I did not agree.

A black and white illustration of the man in the hat, shown in profile, smoking a cigarette. He is wearing a striped shirt and a hat.

To make this screening, they should solve so many problems beforehand.

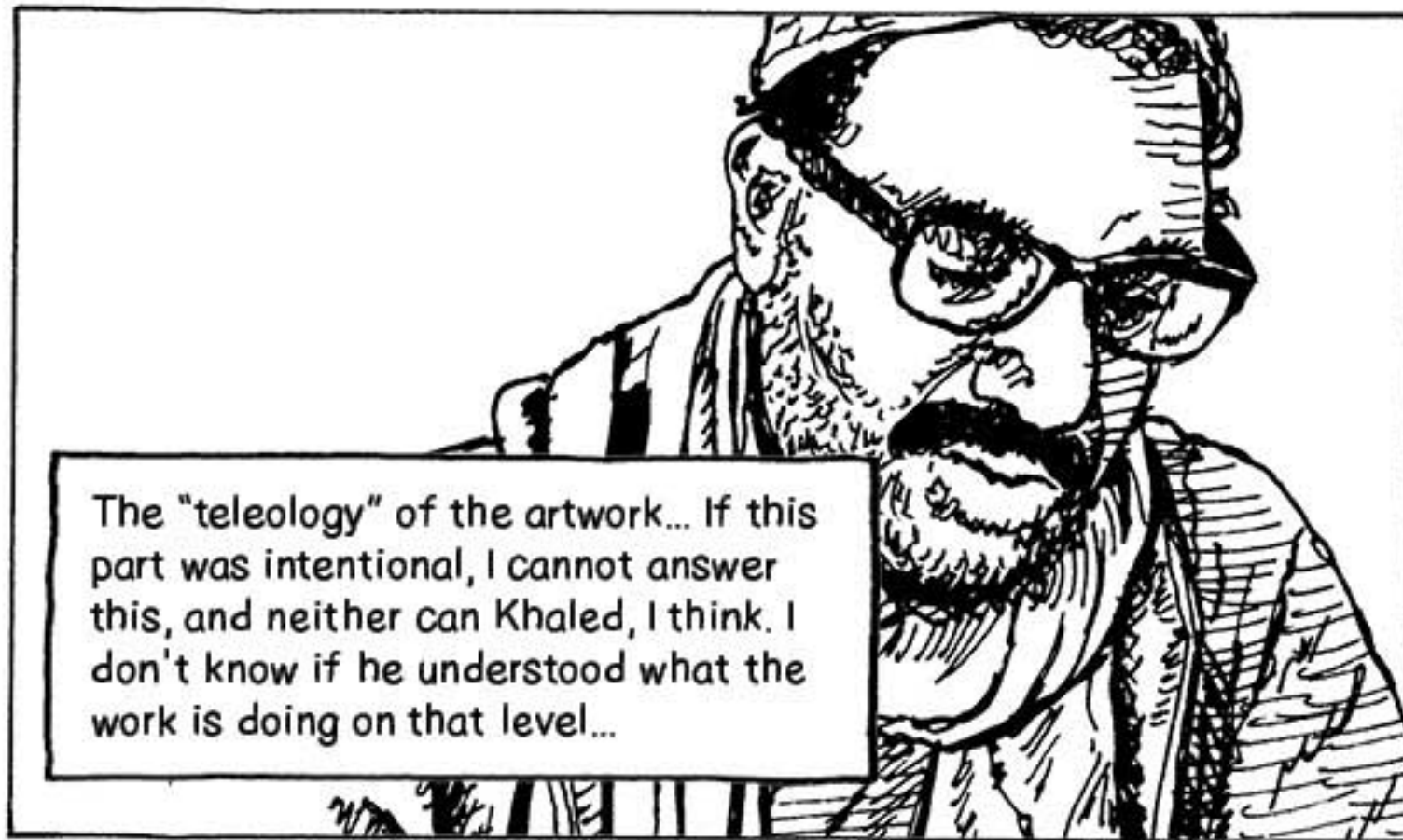
MODERNITY'S ARROW



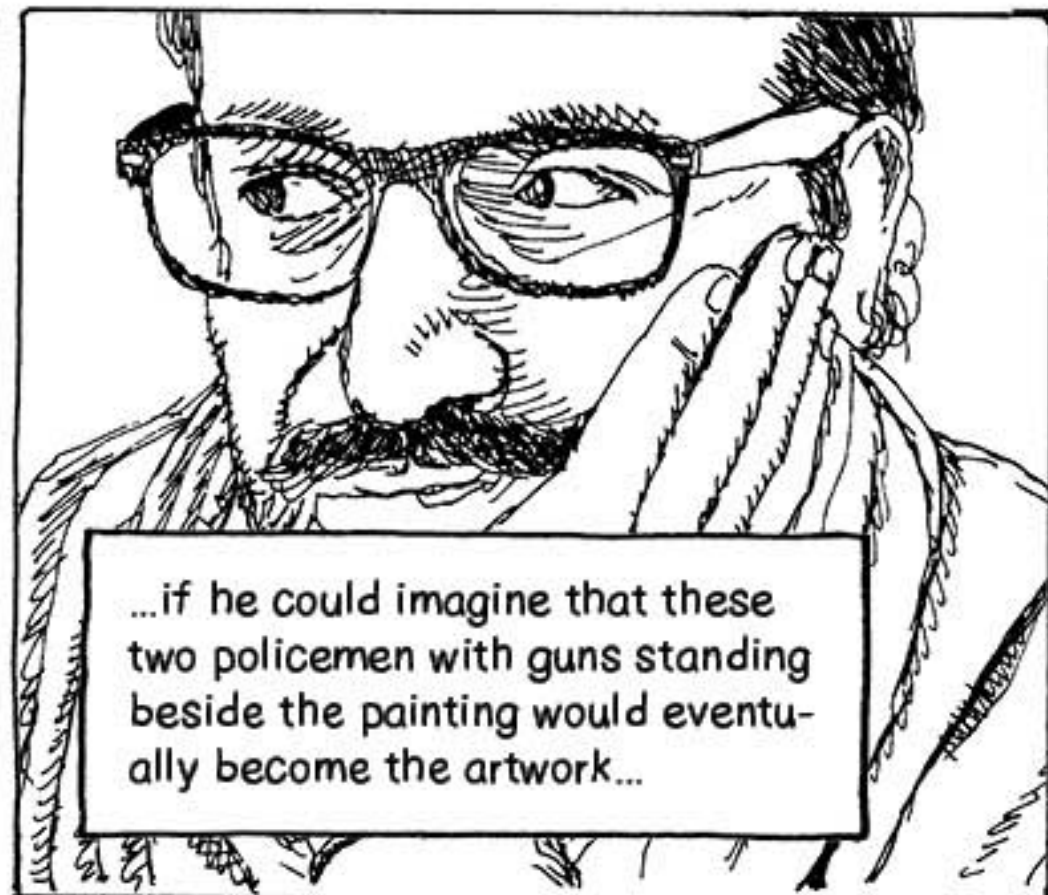


The state is not a postmodern thing. The contemporary notion of the state emerged from modernity, from Picasso, from Matisse, from Corbusier. The official ideology of the modern state coincides precisely with the high period of artistic modernity, from the turn of the century to the beginning of fascism.

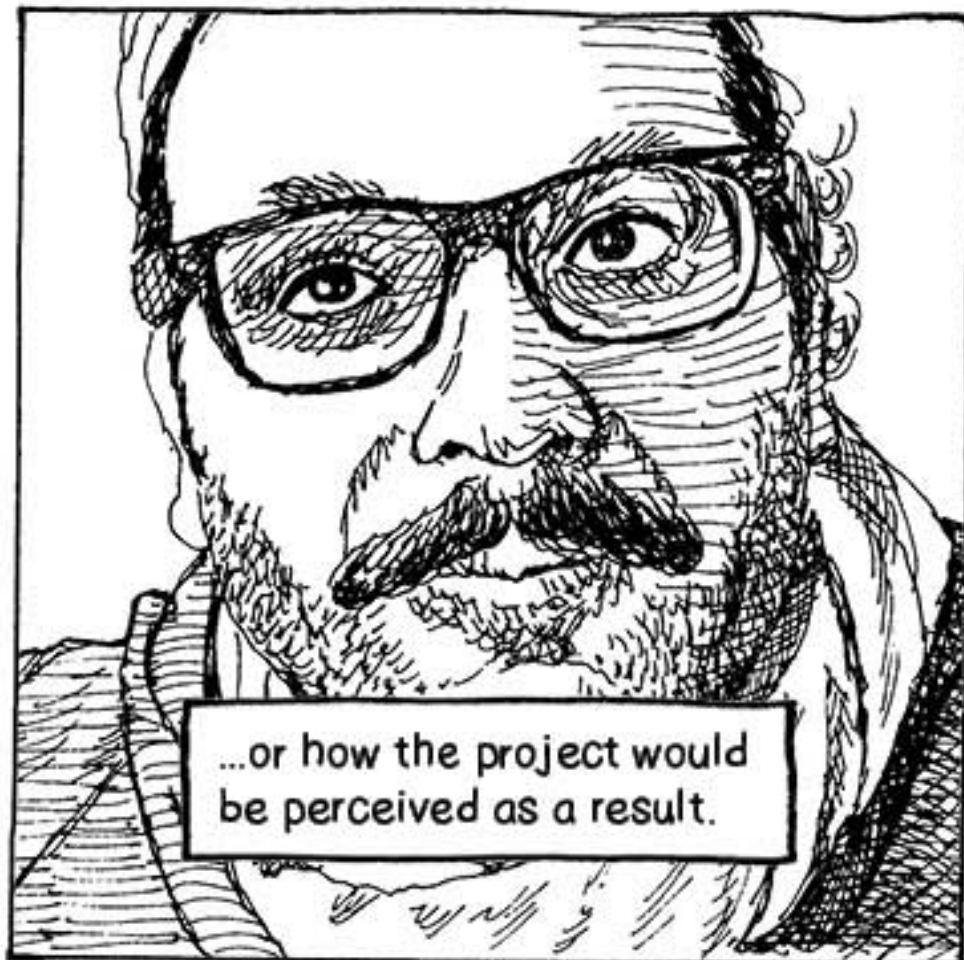
But why is it that a modern artwork appears so apposite for the current political moment in the West Bank? Why does it seem so fitting to the discourse of security and statehood? And why do the soldiers standing guard appear so well-matched to the painting? Picasso said of his war-time paintings that although he did not paint the war, he liked to think the war was in his paintings. Now, perhaps for the first time, the war was right there, in the occluded off-screen reality, the place right outside the frame. The war was right there, next to the painting.



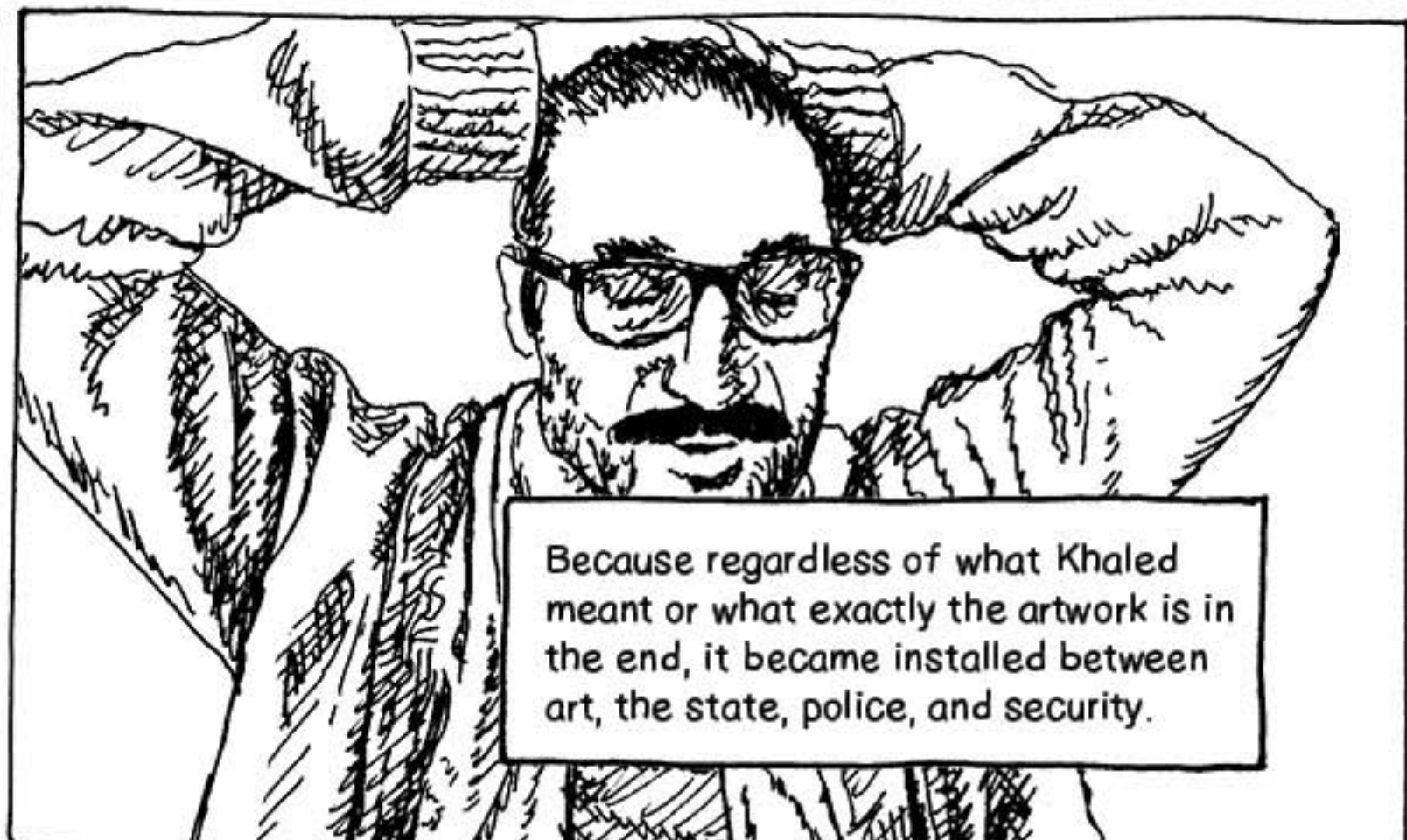
The "teleology" of the artwork... If this part was intentional, I cannot answer this, and neither can Khaled, I think. I don't know if he understood what the work is doing on that level...



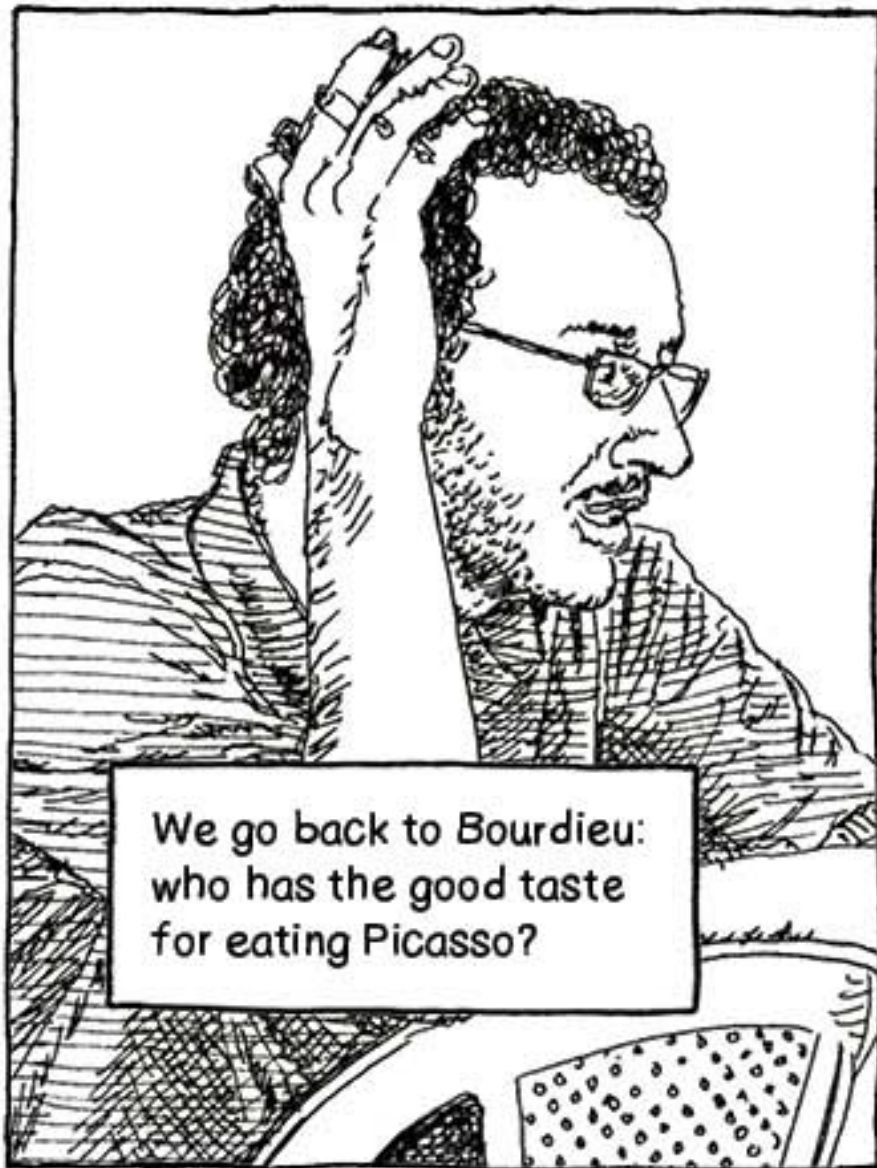
...if he could imagine that these two policemen with guns standing beside the painting would eventually become the artwork...



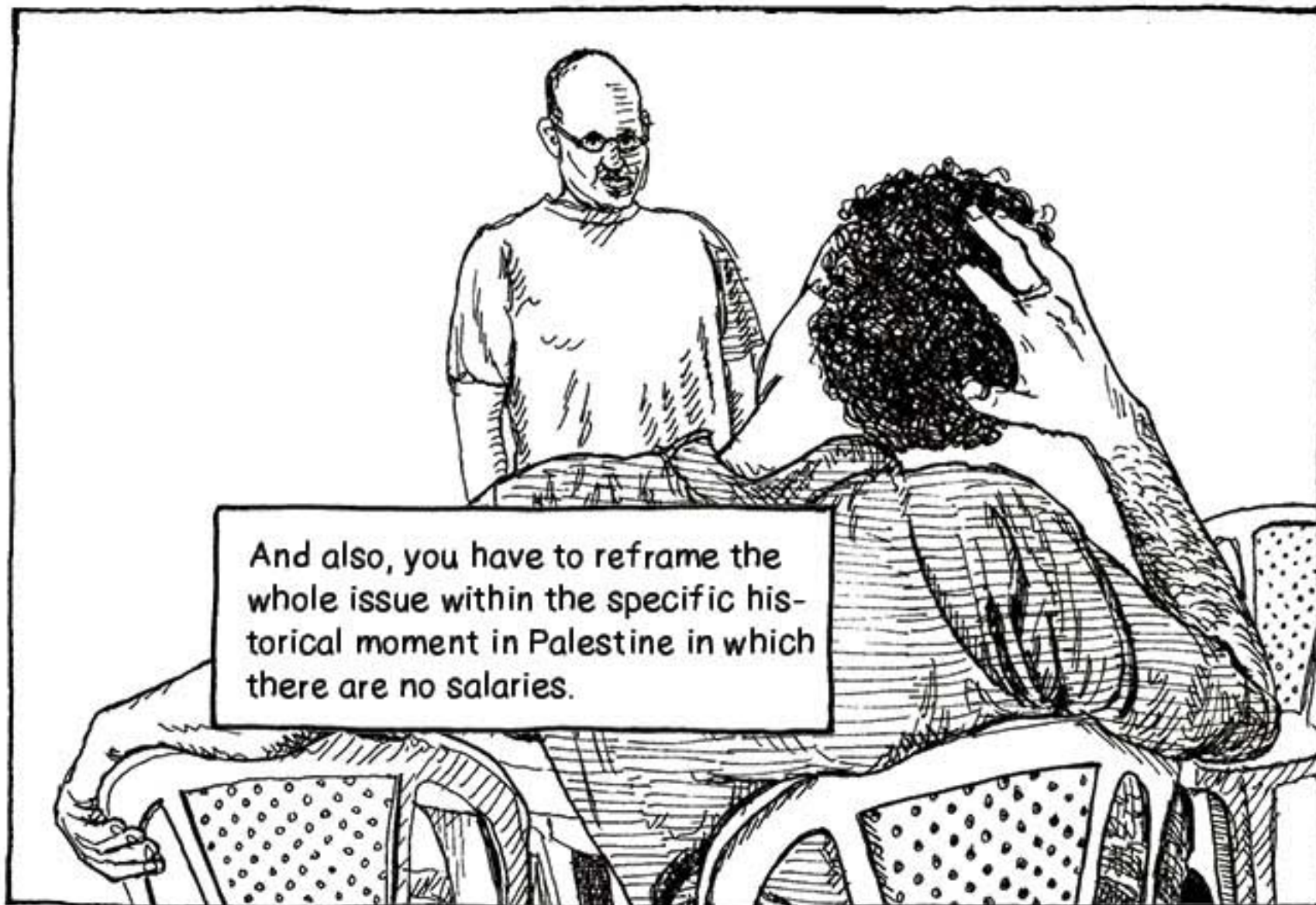
...or how the project would be perceived as a result.



Because regardless of what Khaled meant or what exactly the artwork is in the end, it became installed between art, the state, police, and security.



We go back to Bourdieu:
who has the good taste
for eating Picasso?



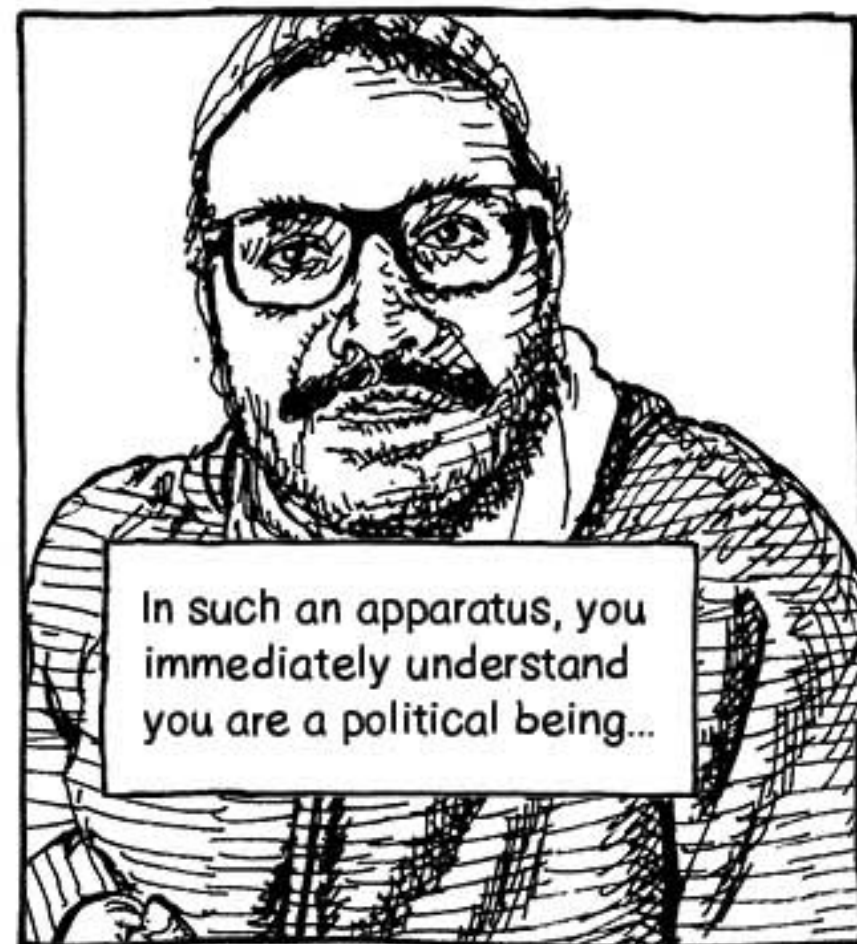
And also, you have to reframe the
whole issue within the specific his-
torical moment in Palestine in which
there are no salaries.



So even if you look at it from an-
other perspective, you recognize
the fact that there is a class struc-
ture in the configuration of the
event—let's describe it like that.



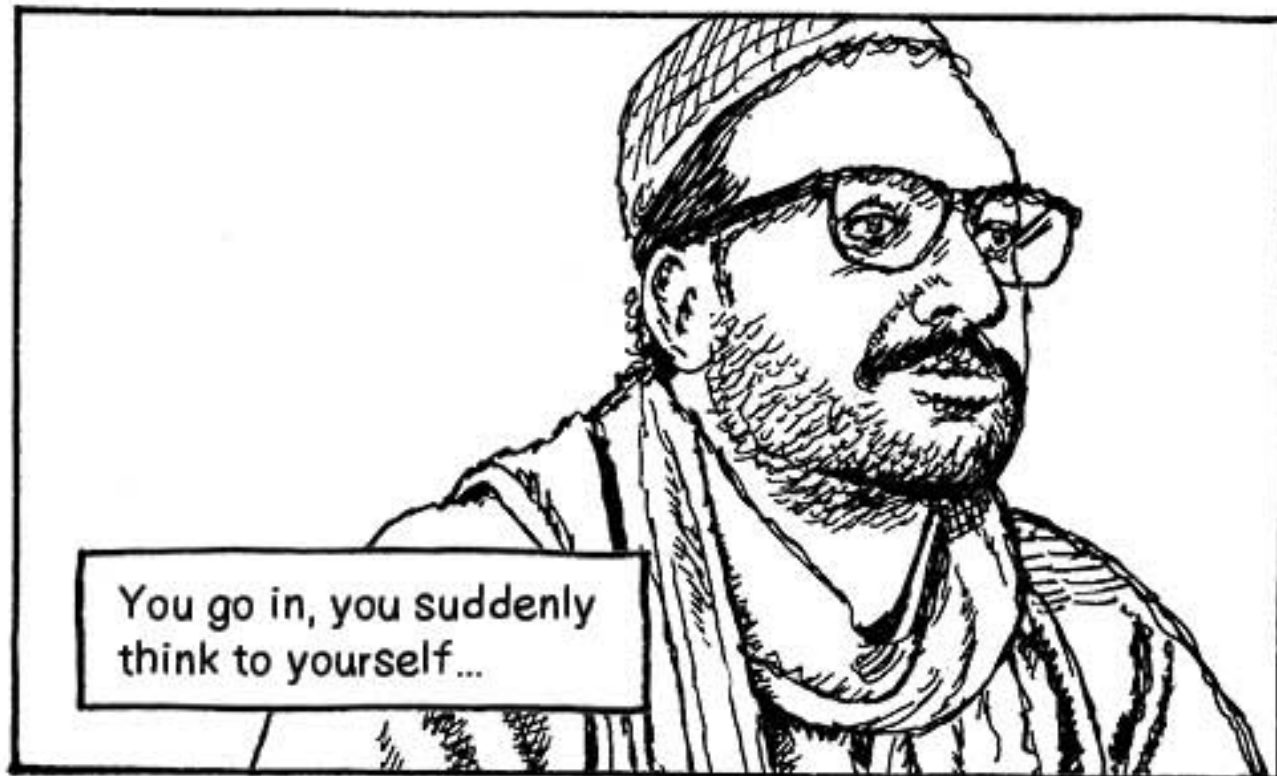
Being in that space makes you a political being and therefore you have to act towards it in a political way: not in a distanced way; not in a passive way, or as if you are merely looking at an artwork.



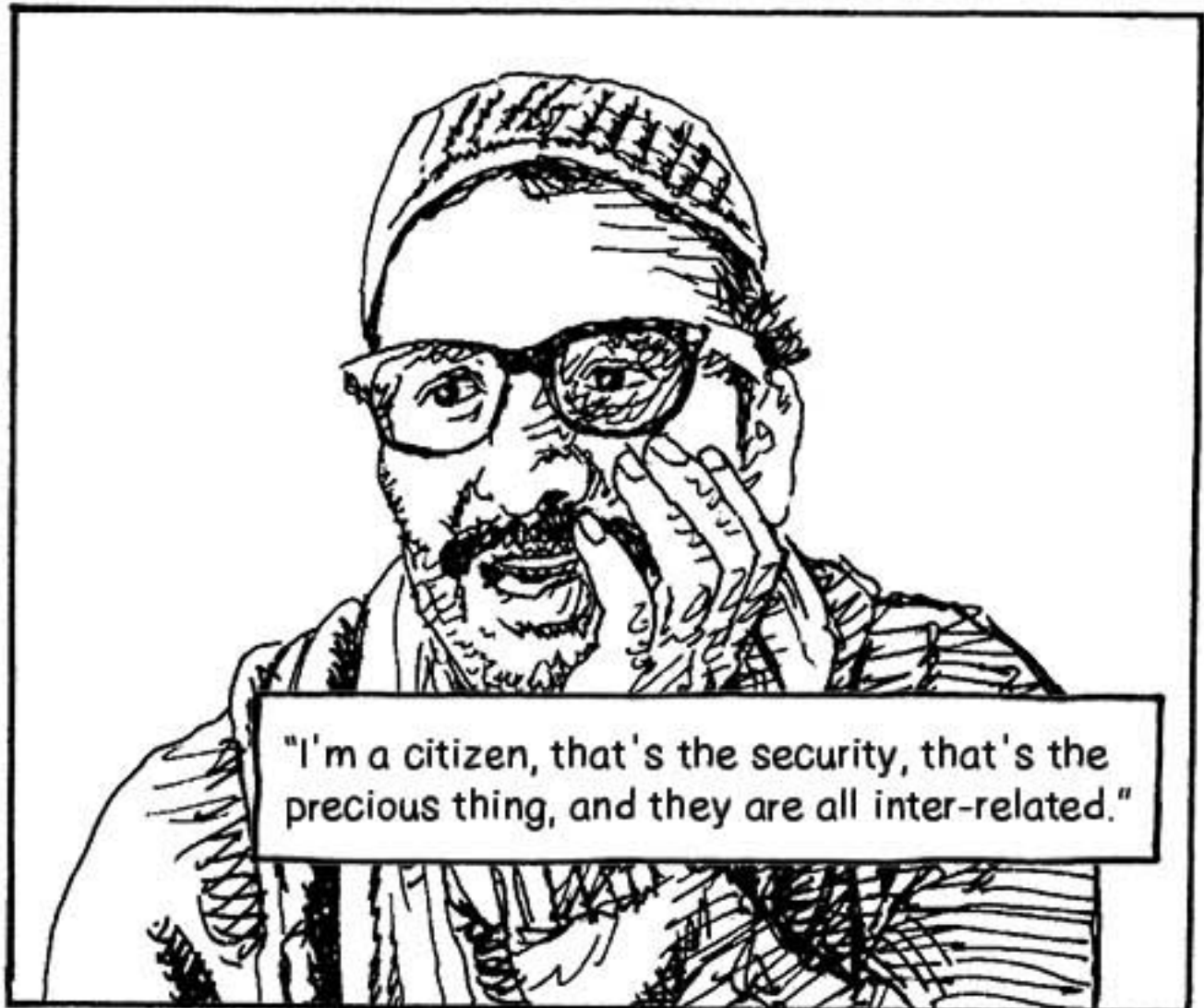
In such an apparatus, you immediately understand you are a political being...



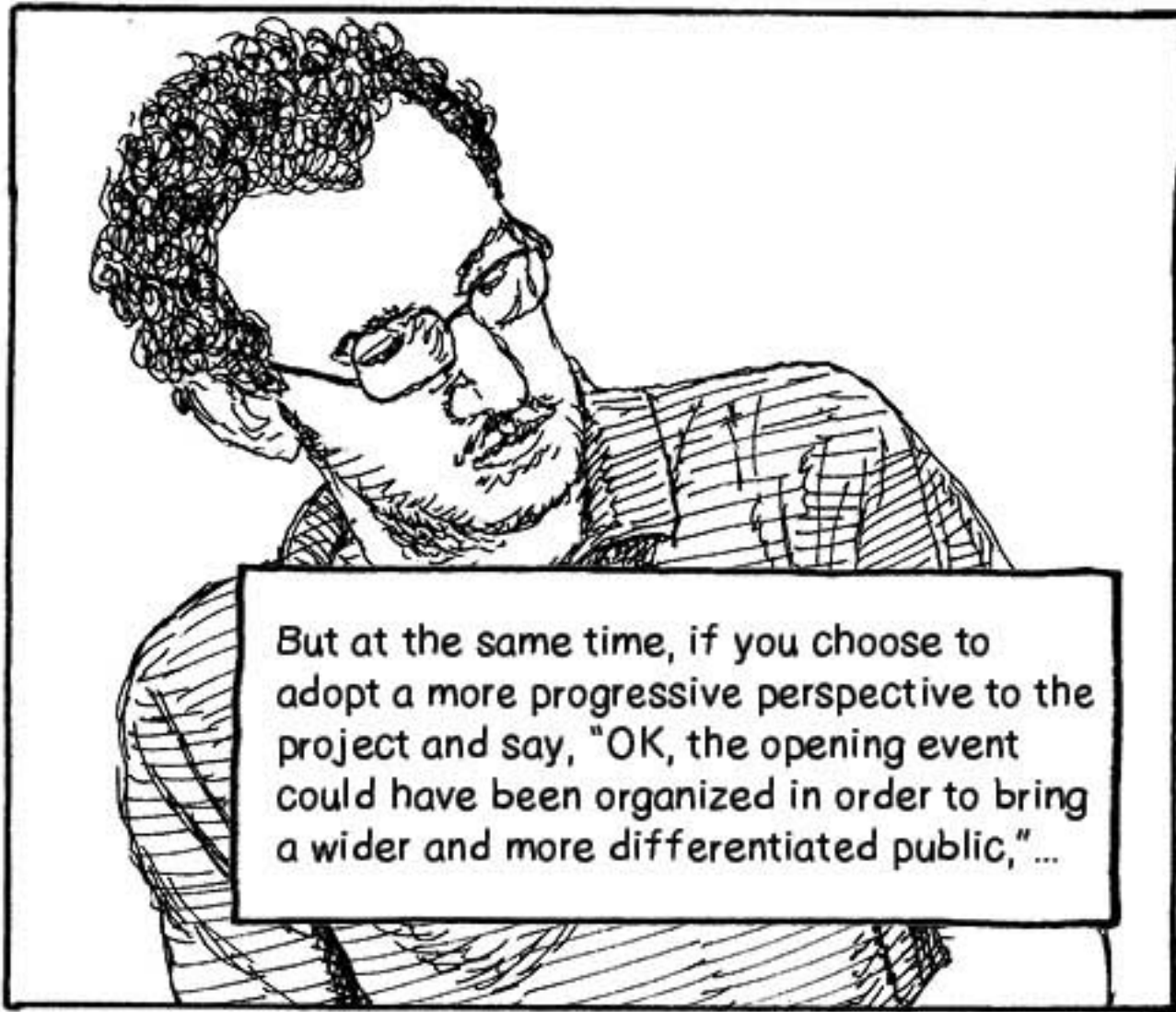
...you fall into the apparatus when you go inside the Picasso room.



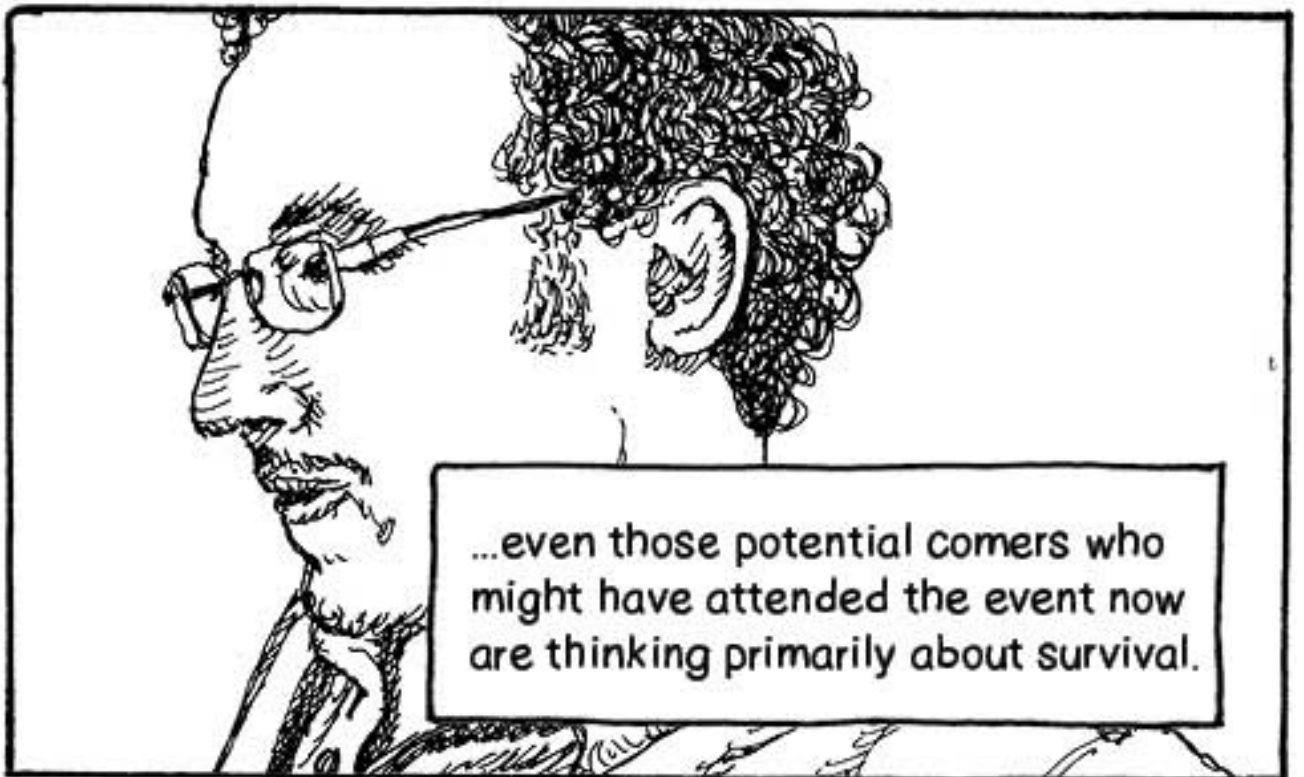
You go in, you suddenly think to yourself...



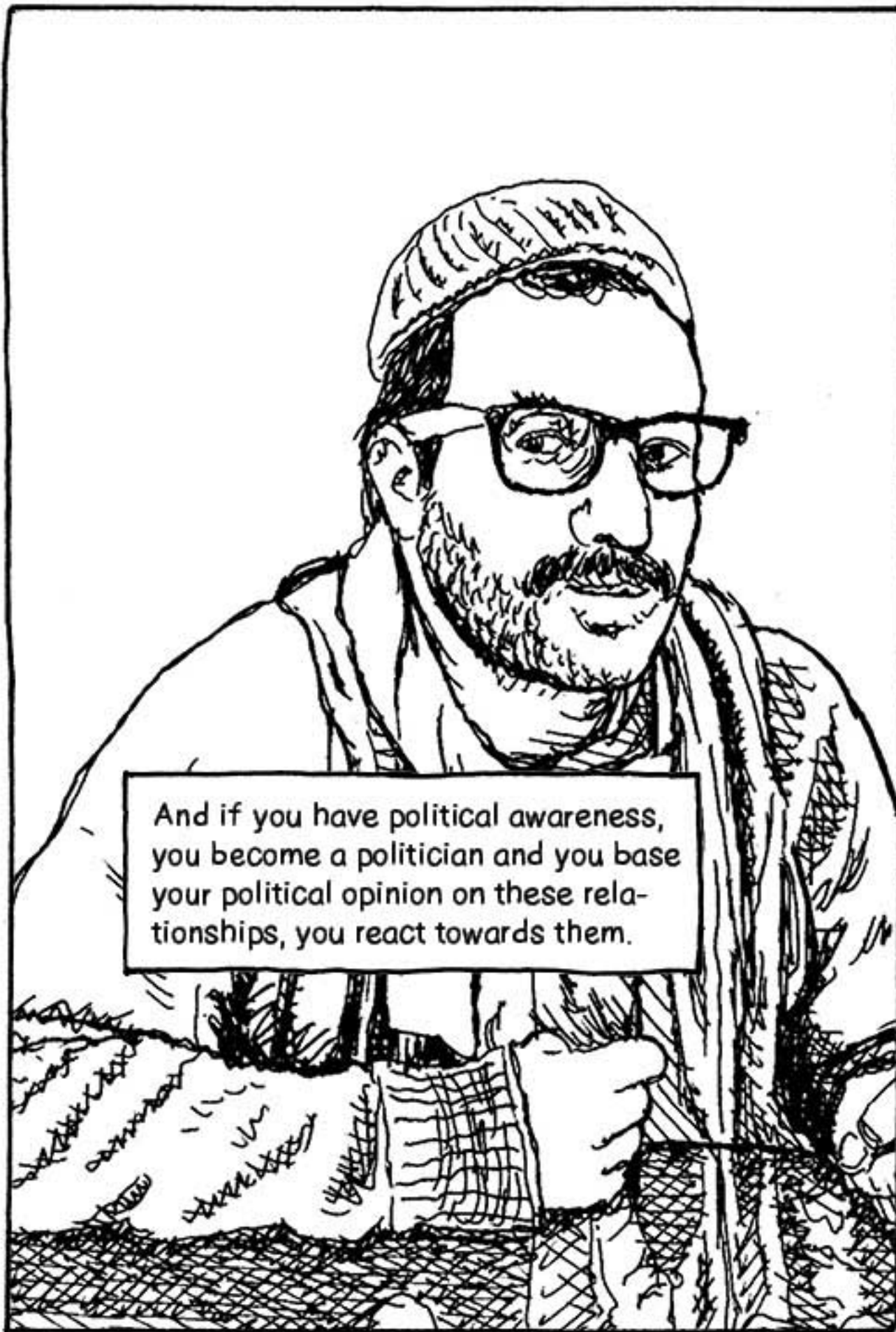
"I'm a citizen, that's the security, that's the precious thing, and they are all inter-related."



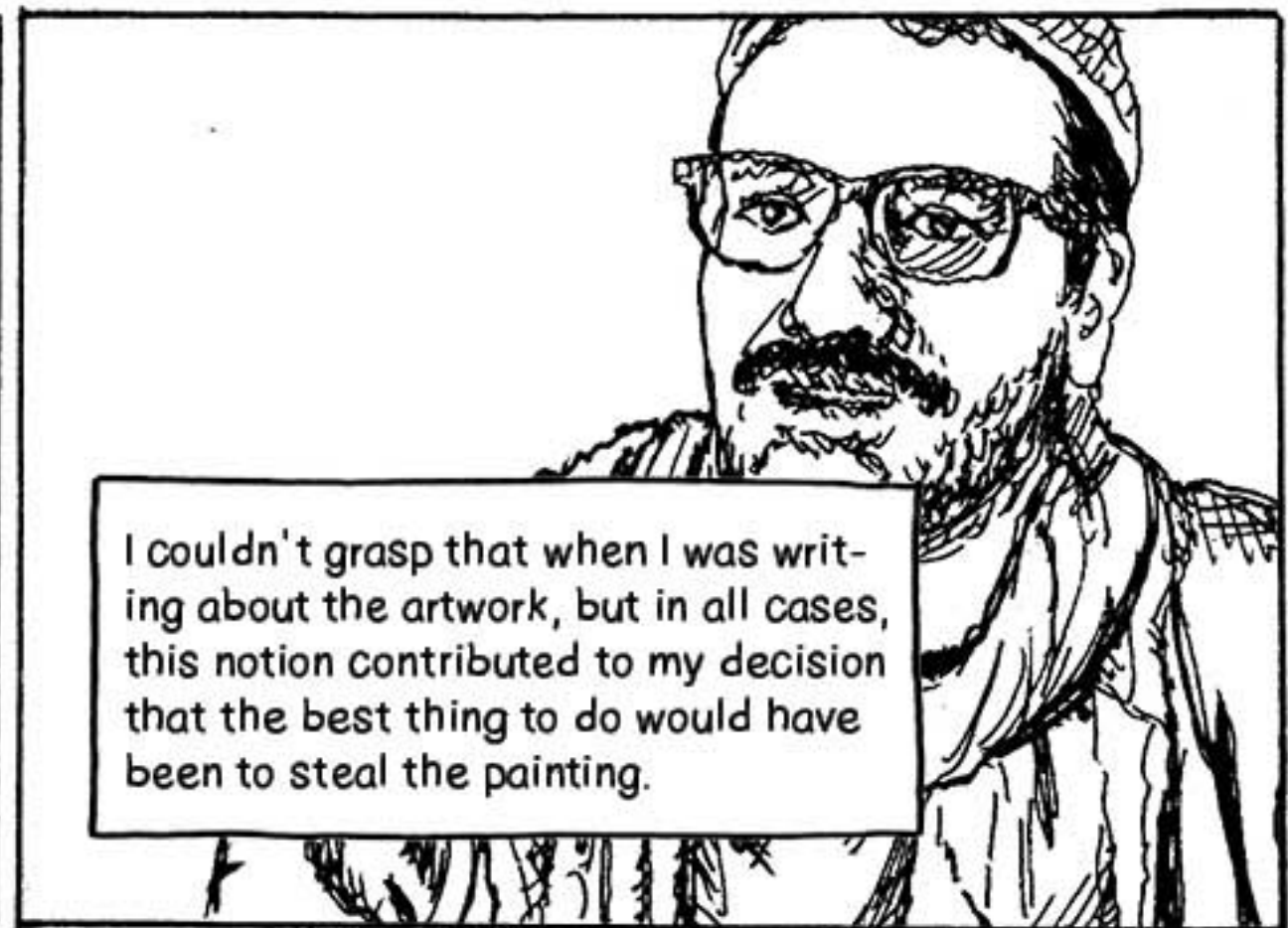
But at the same time, if you choose to adopt a more progressive perspective to the project and say, "OK, the opening event could have been organized in order to bring a wider and more differentiated public,"...



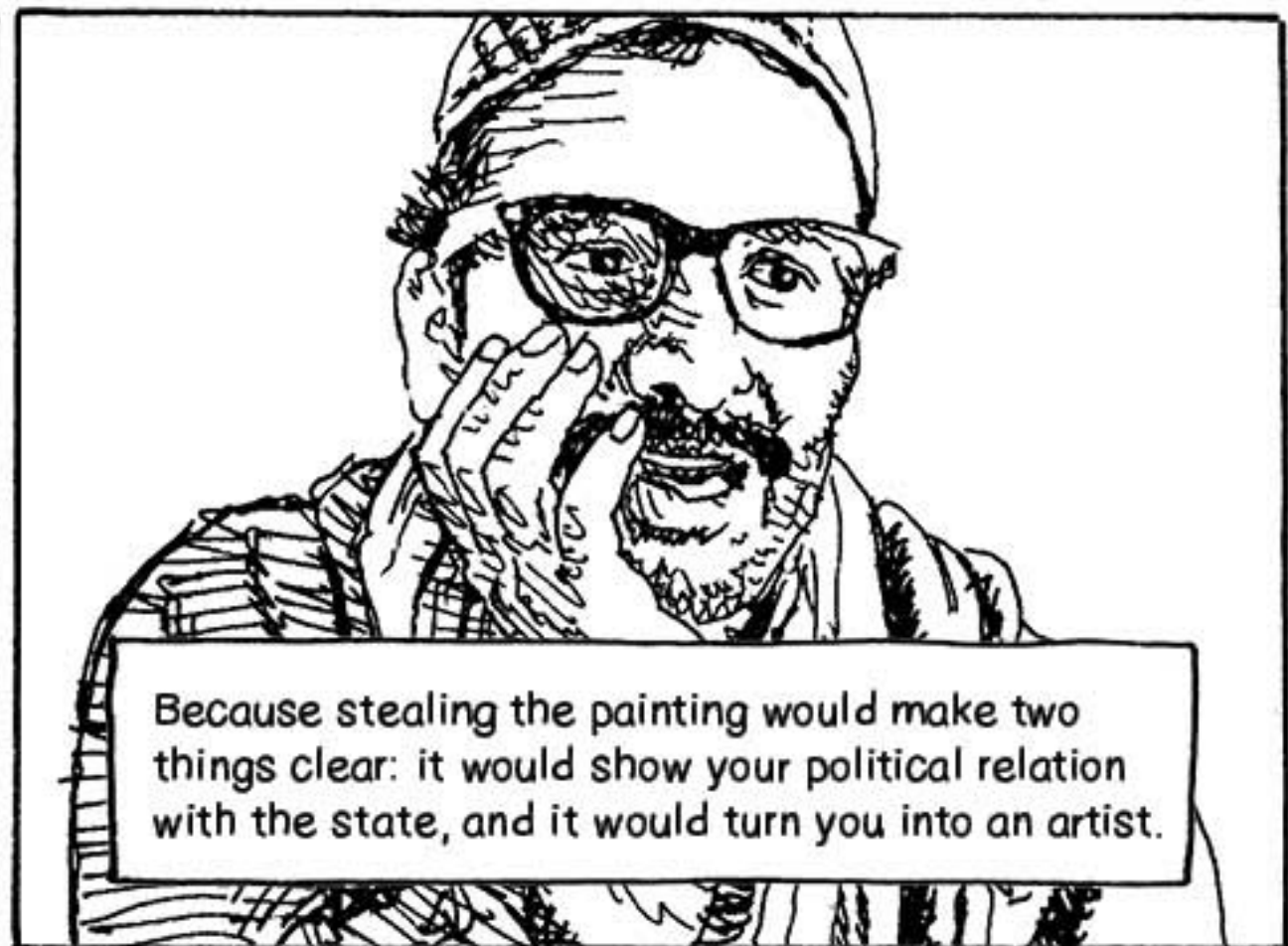
...even those potential comers who might have attended the event now are thinking primarily about survival.



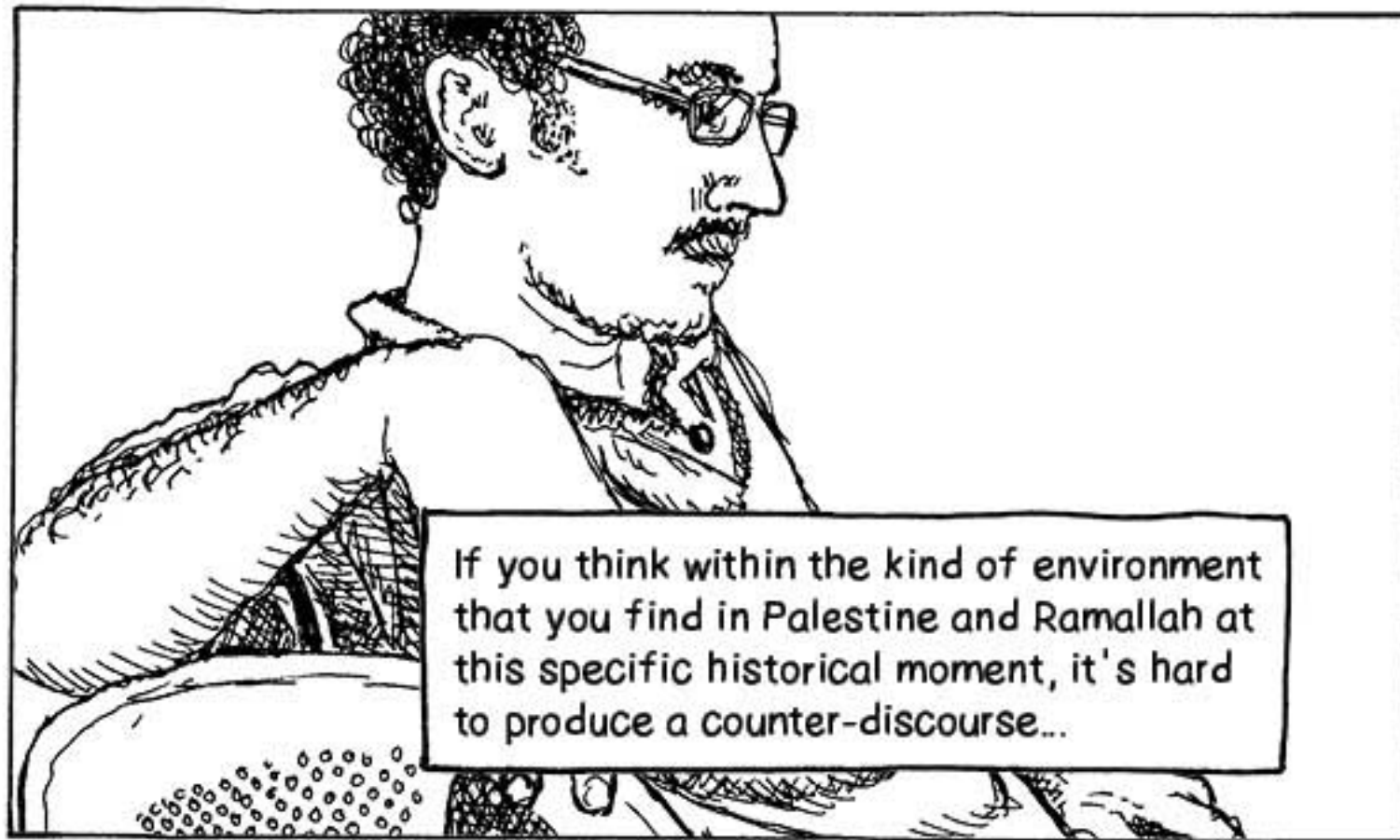
And if you have political awareness, you become a politician and you base your political opinion on these relationships, you react towards them.



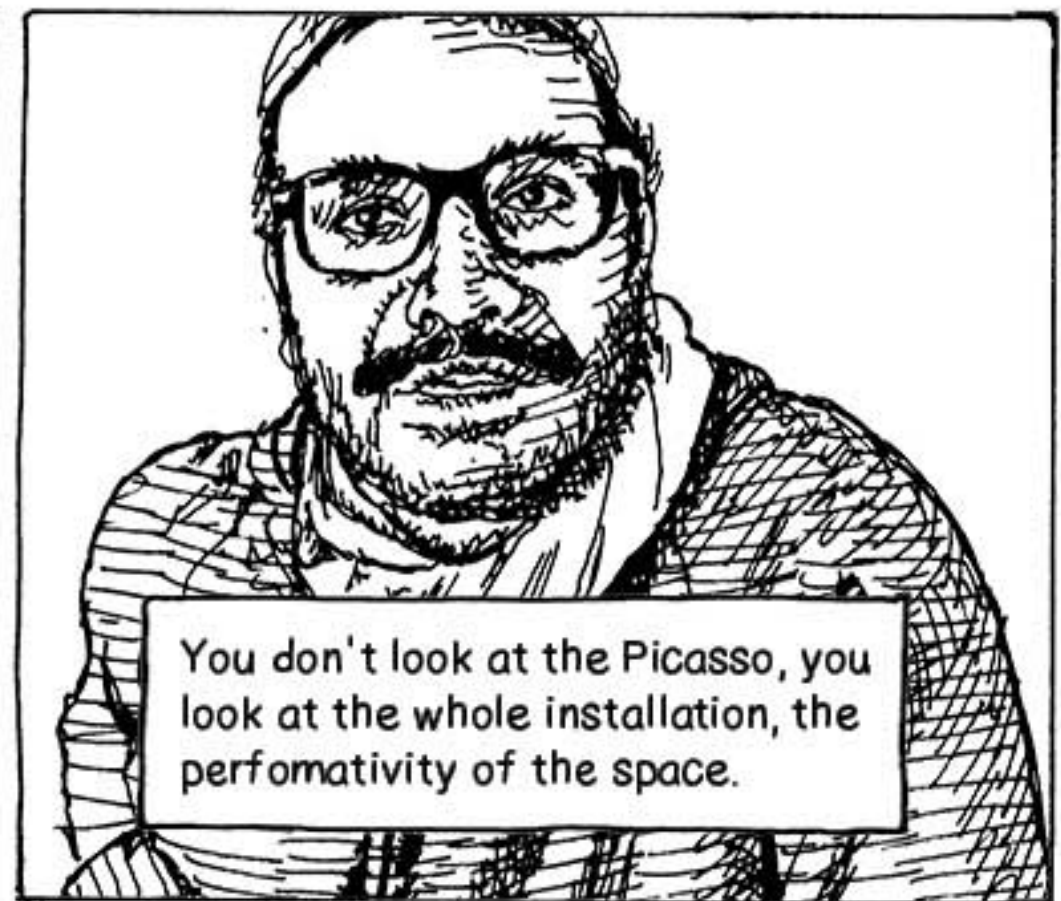
I couldn't grasp that when I was writing about the artwork, but in all cases, this notion contributed to my decision that the best thing to do would have been to steal the painting.



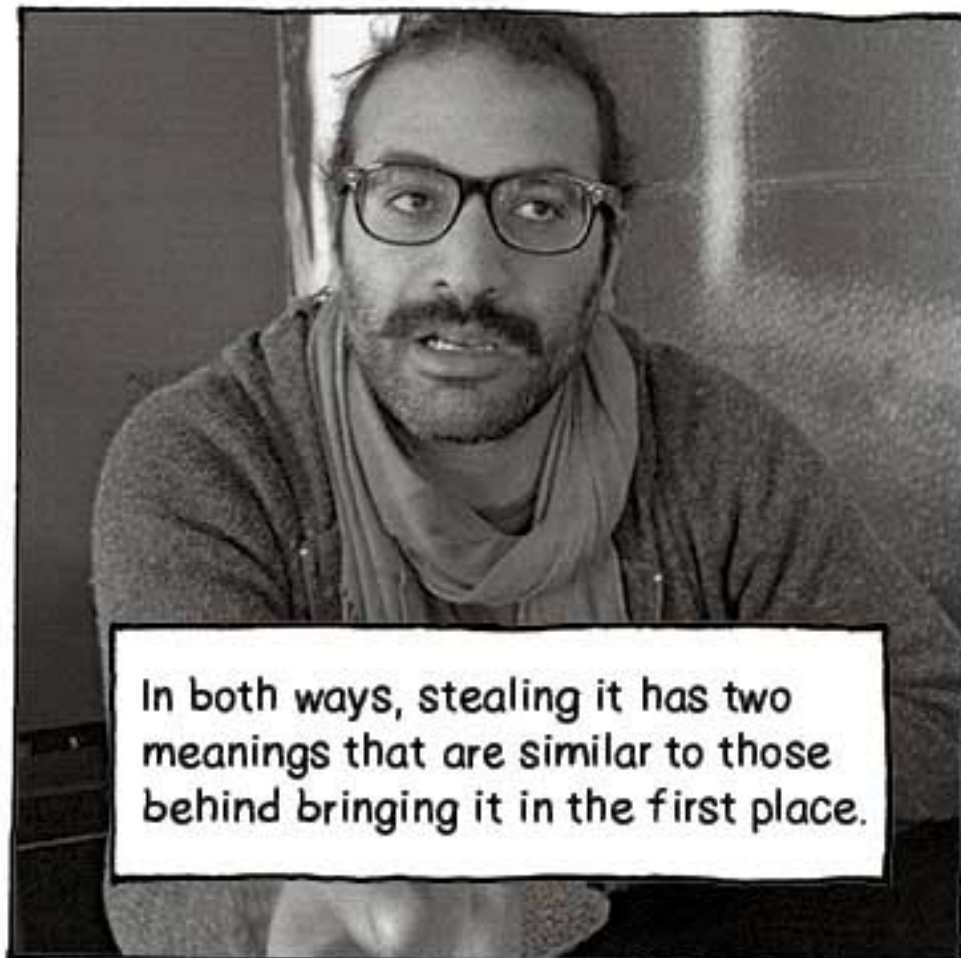
Because stealing the painting would make two things clear: it would show your political relation with the state, and it would turn you into an artist.



If you think within the kind of environment that you find in Palestine and Ramallah at this specific historical moment, it's hard to produce a counter-discourse...



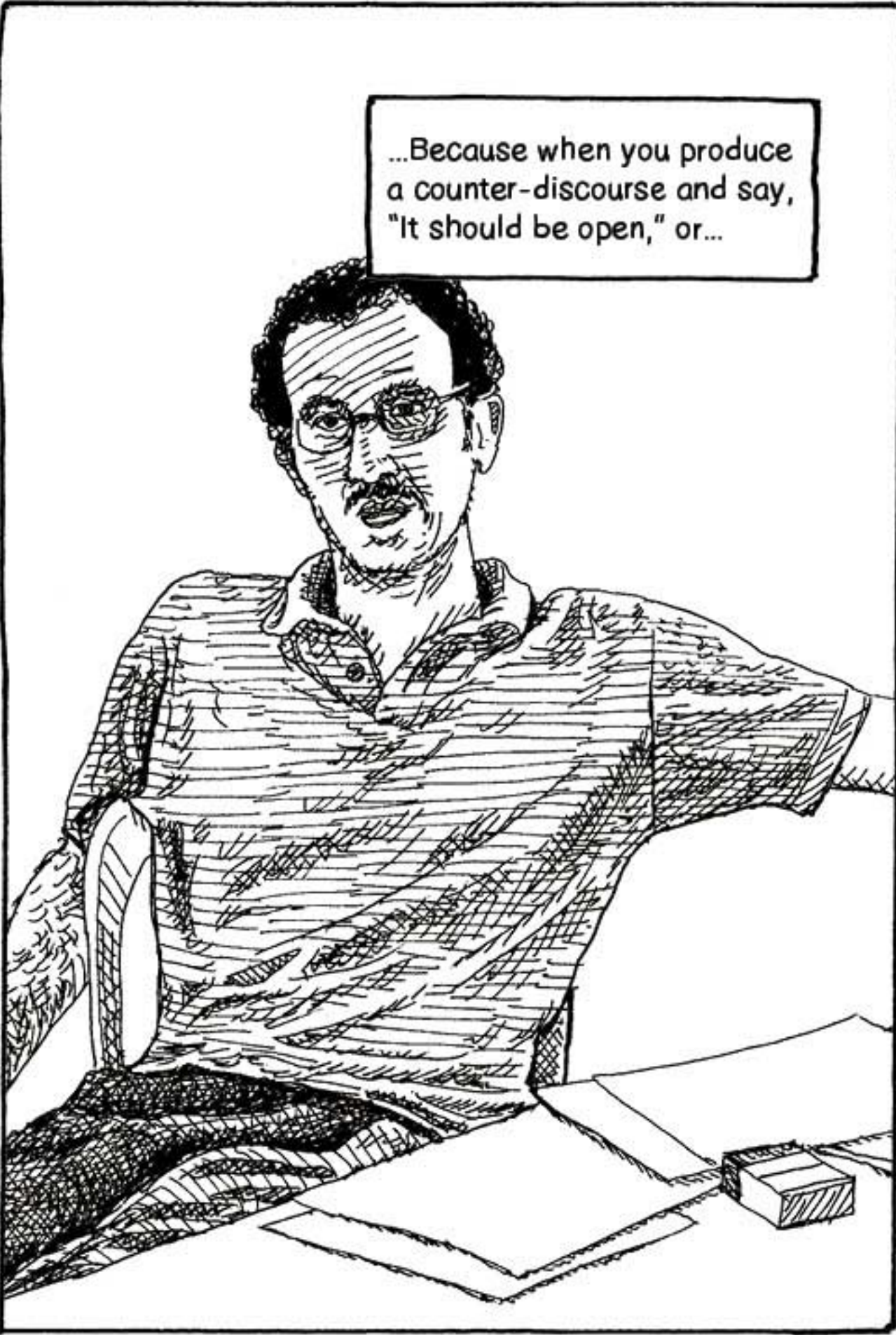
You don't look at the Picasso, you look at the whole installation, the performativity of the space.



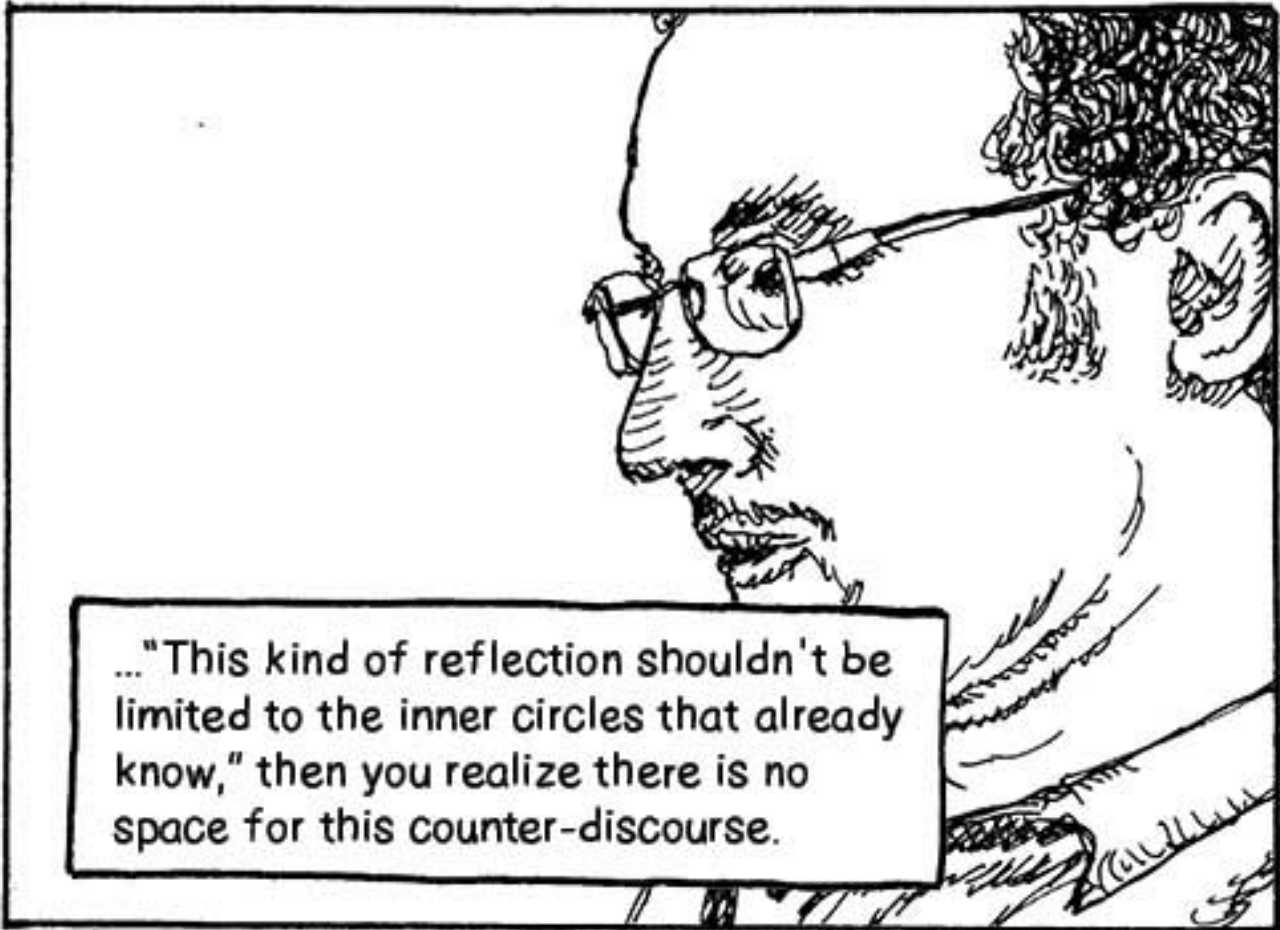
In both ways, stealing it has two meanings that are similar to those behind bringing it in the first place.



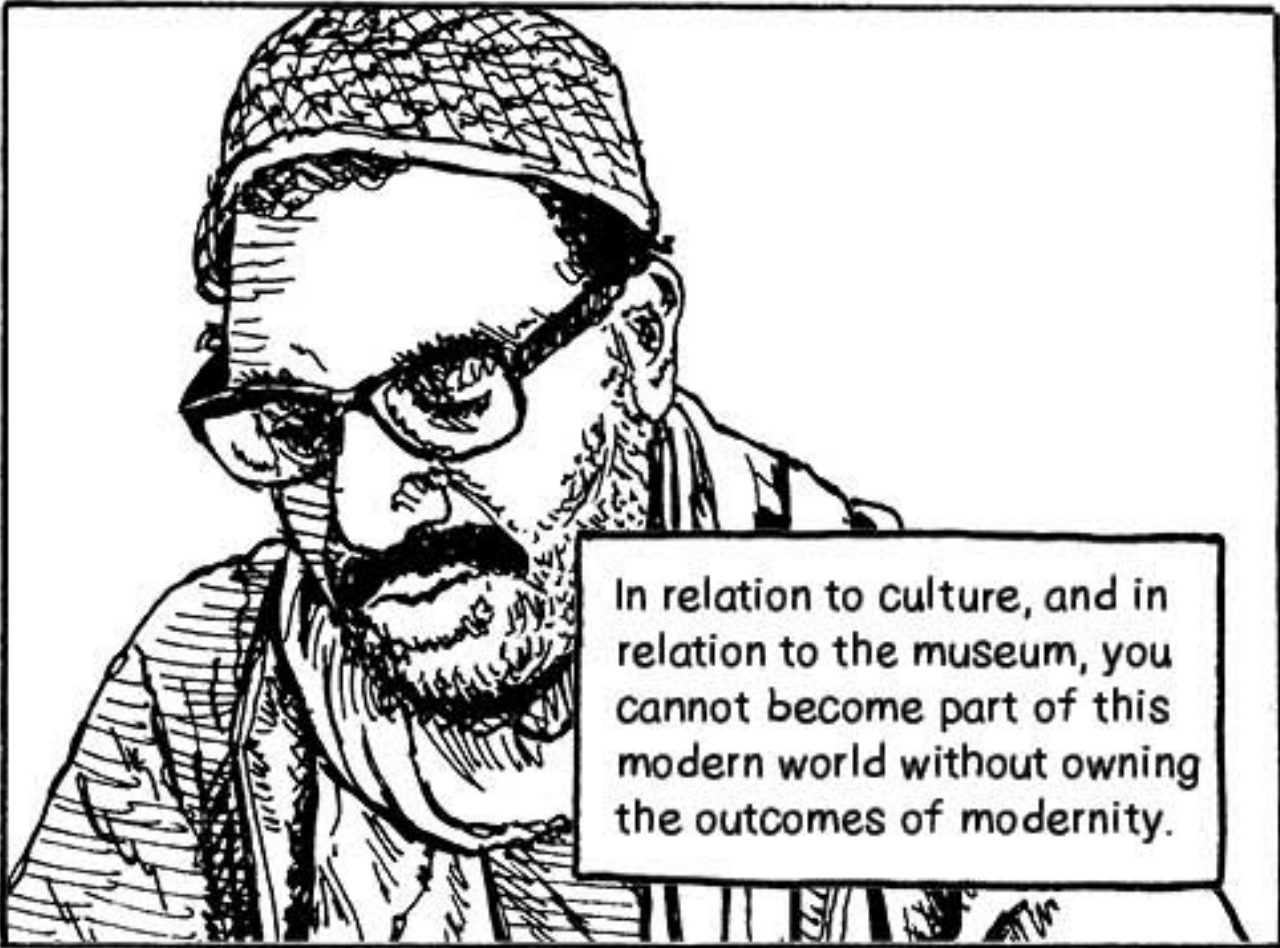
Bringing it is a political and an artistic work, stealing it is a political and an artistic work.



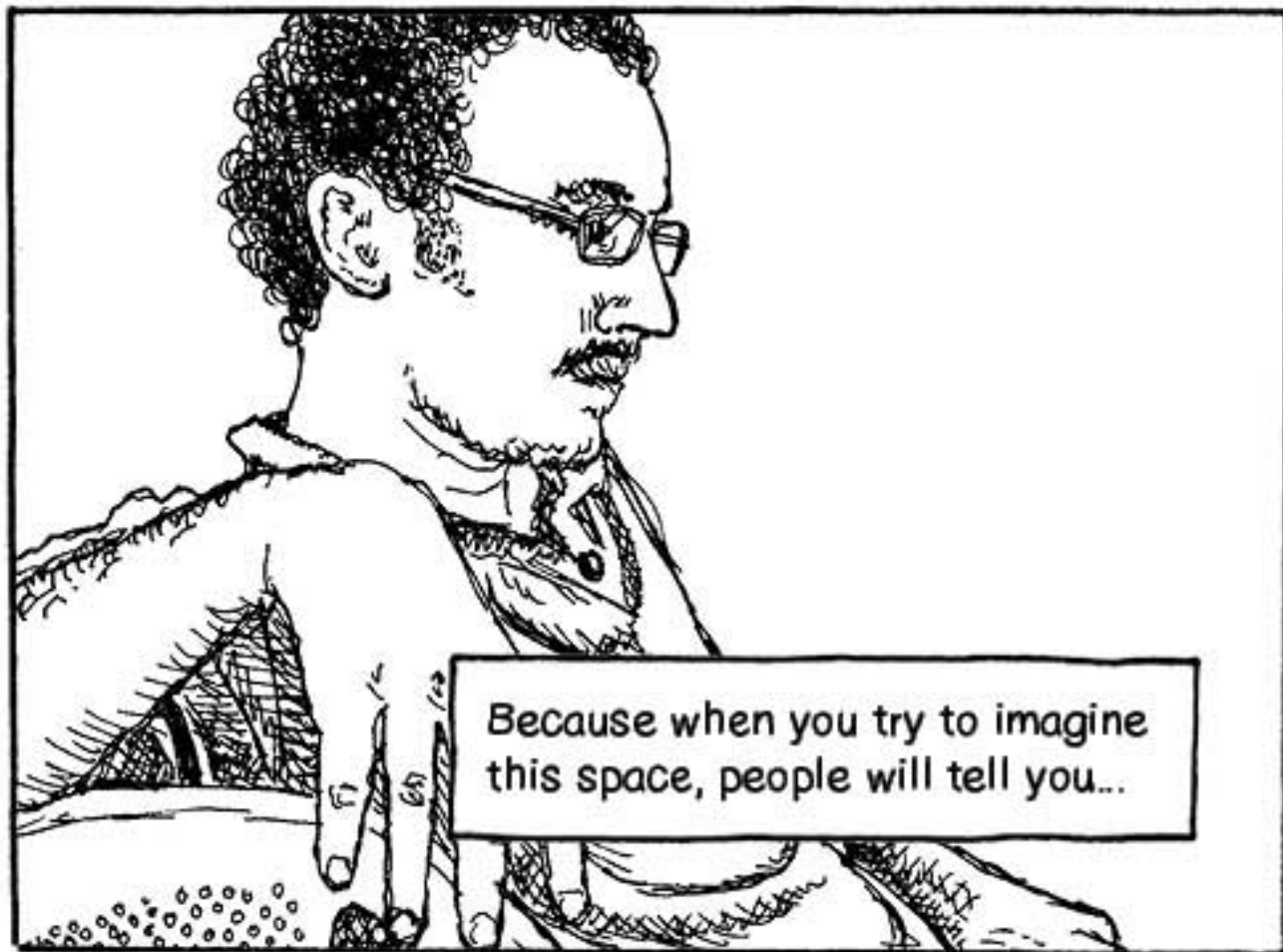
...Because when you produce a counter-discourse and say, "It should be open," or...



... "This kind of reflection shouldn't be limited to the inner circles that already know," then you realize there is no space for this counter-discourse.



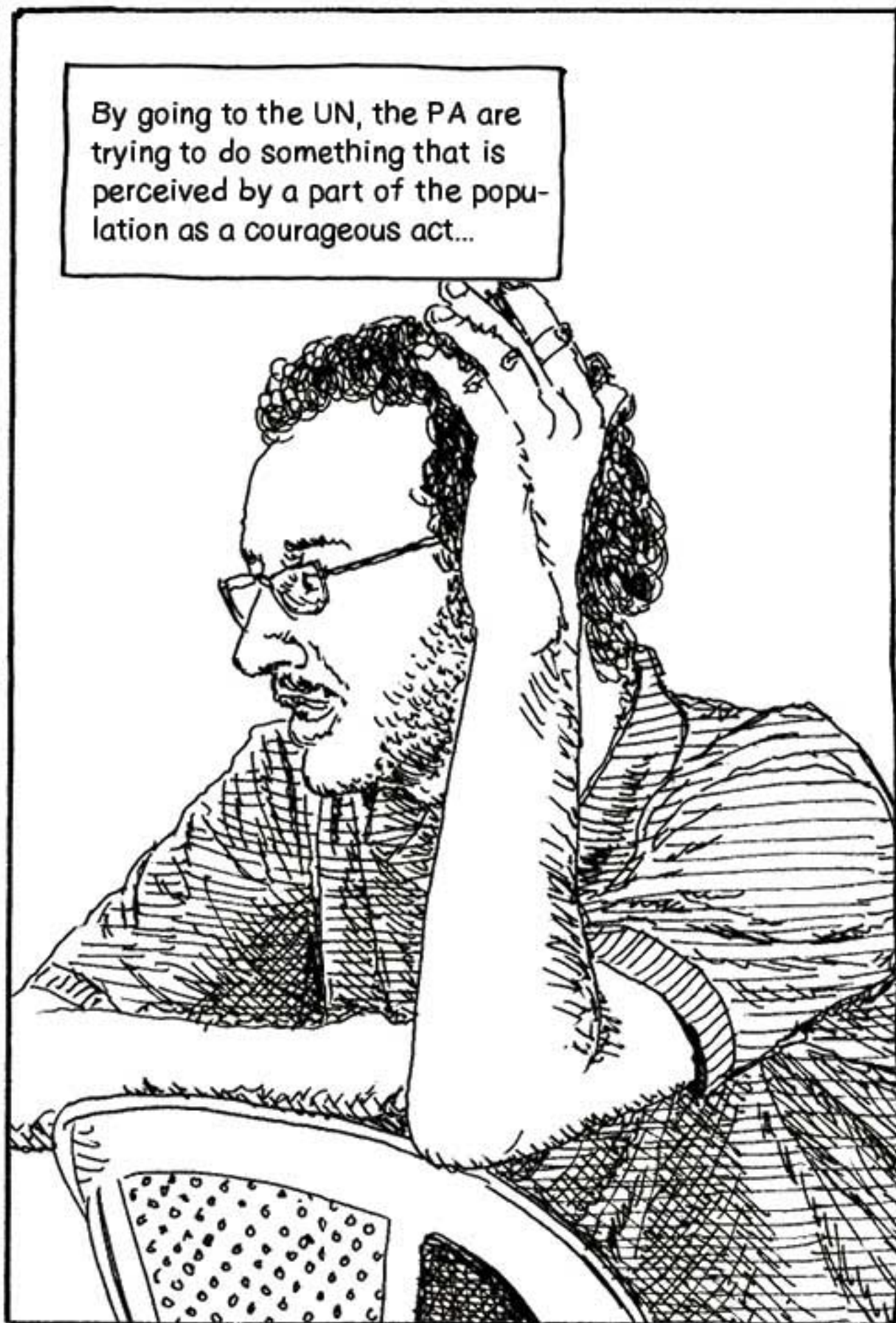
In relation to culture, and in relation to the museum, you cannot become part of this modern world without owning the outcomes of modernity.



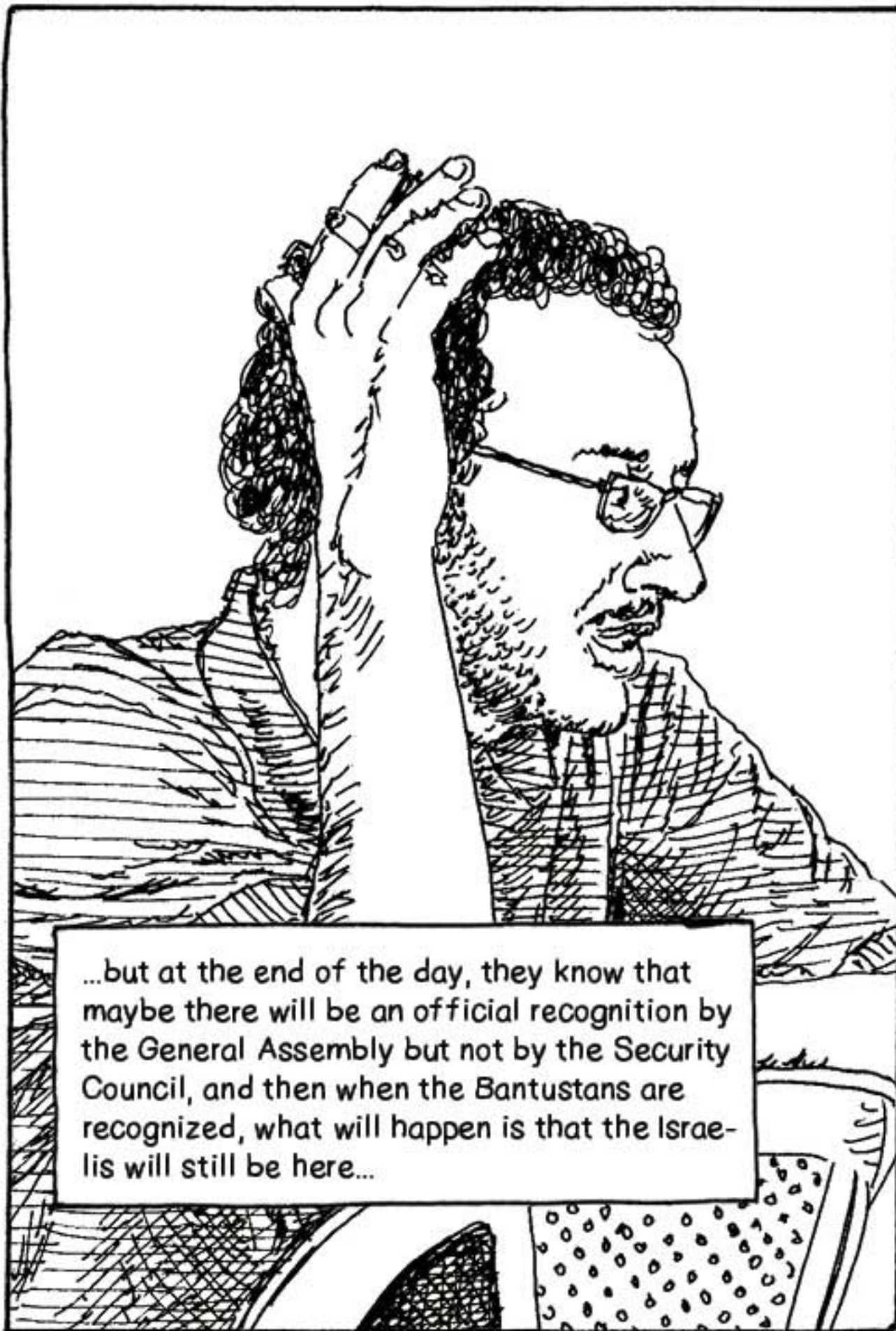
Because when you try to imagine this space, people will tell you...



"We need to eat now, so it's not the time for thinking about spreading culture or talking about access to culture or access to art or access to artistic discourse."



By going to the UN, the PA are trying to do something that is perceived by a part of the population as a courageous act...



...but at the end of the day, they know that maybe there will be an official recognition by the General Assembly but not by the Security Council, and then when the Bantustans are recognized, what will happen is that the Israelis will still be here...



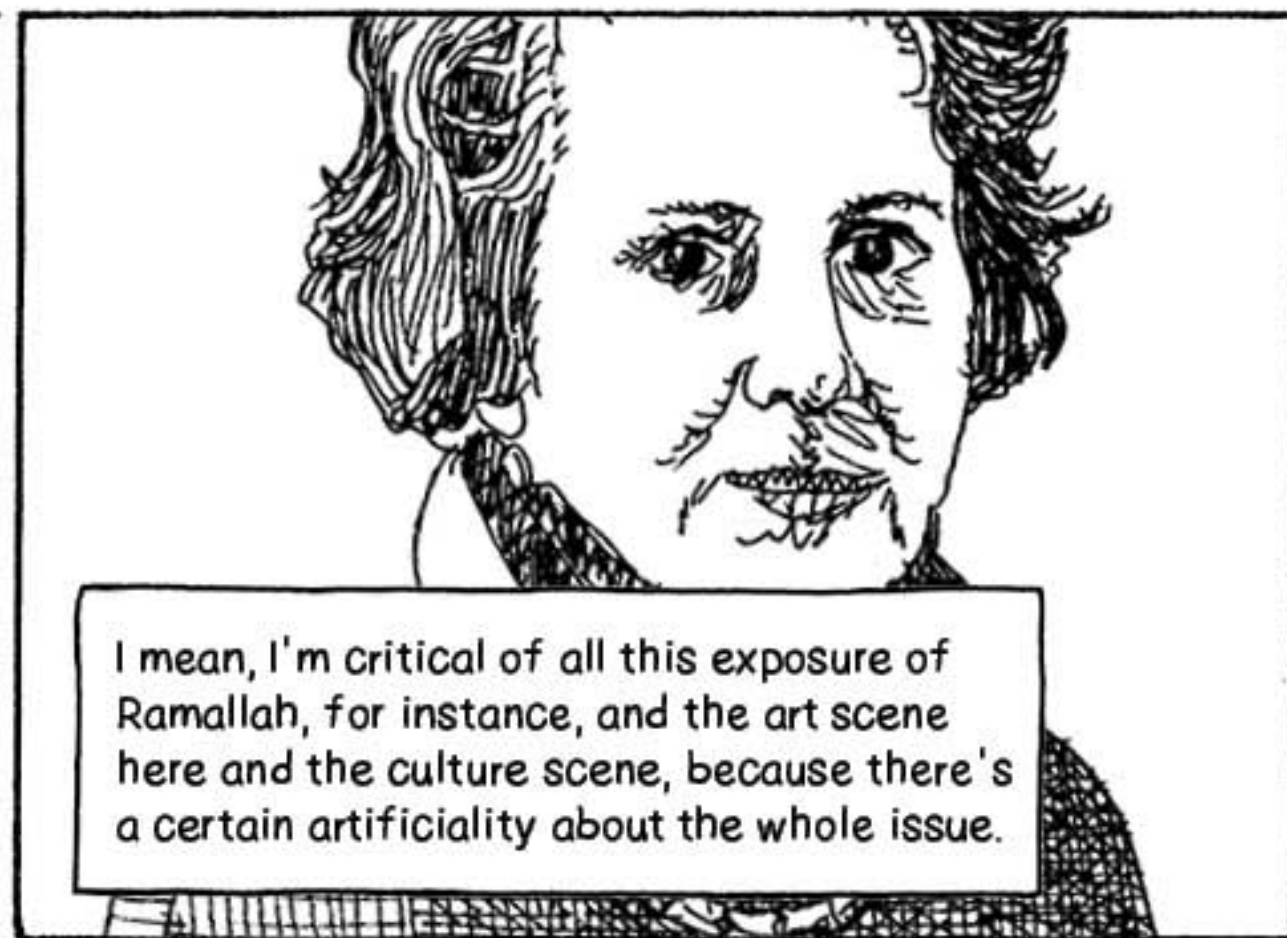
...the settlements will still be here, you have the state recognized and you can't manage it.



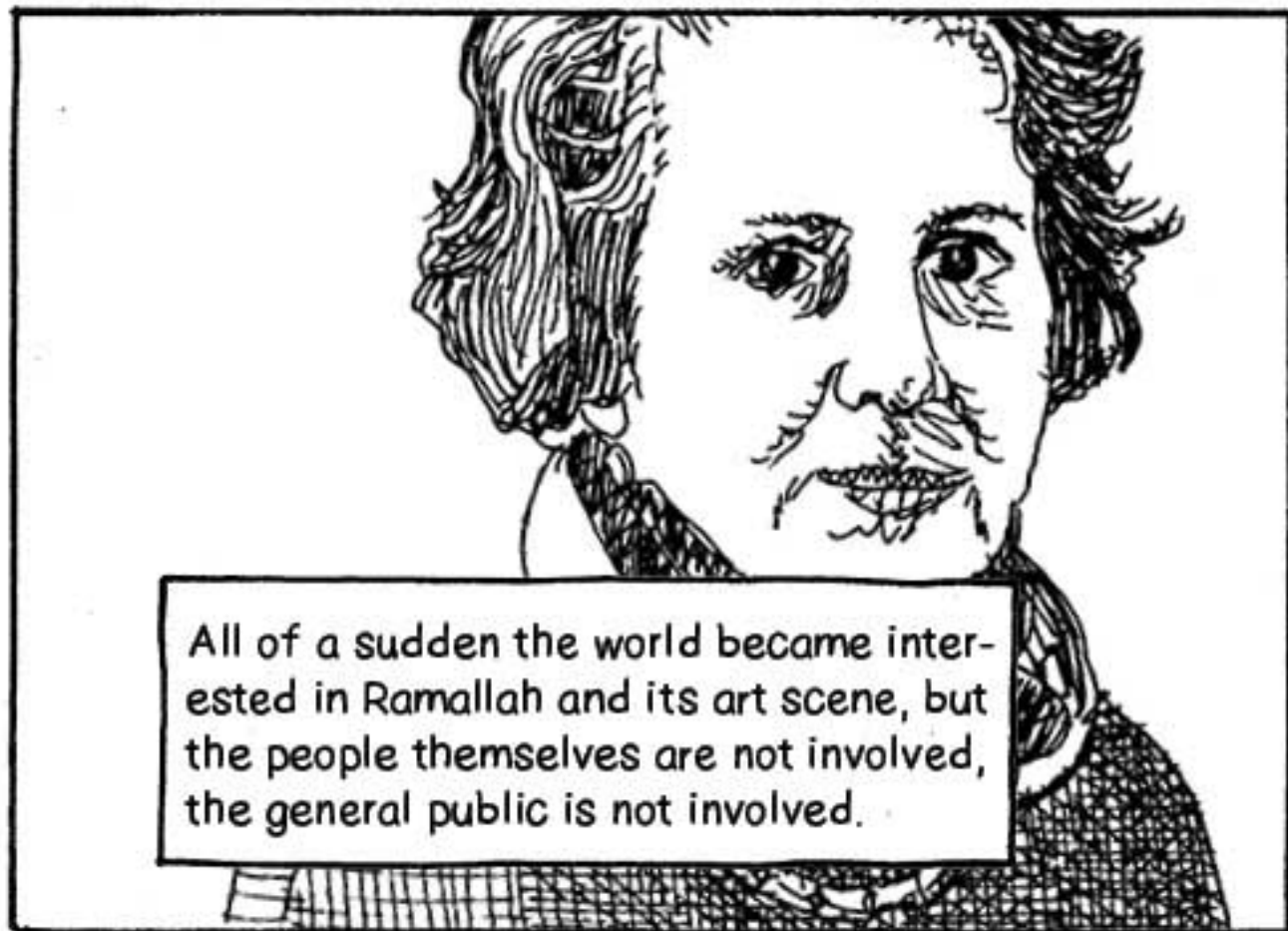
It's like the technocratic discourse going for suicide.



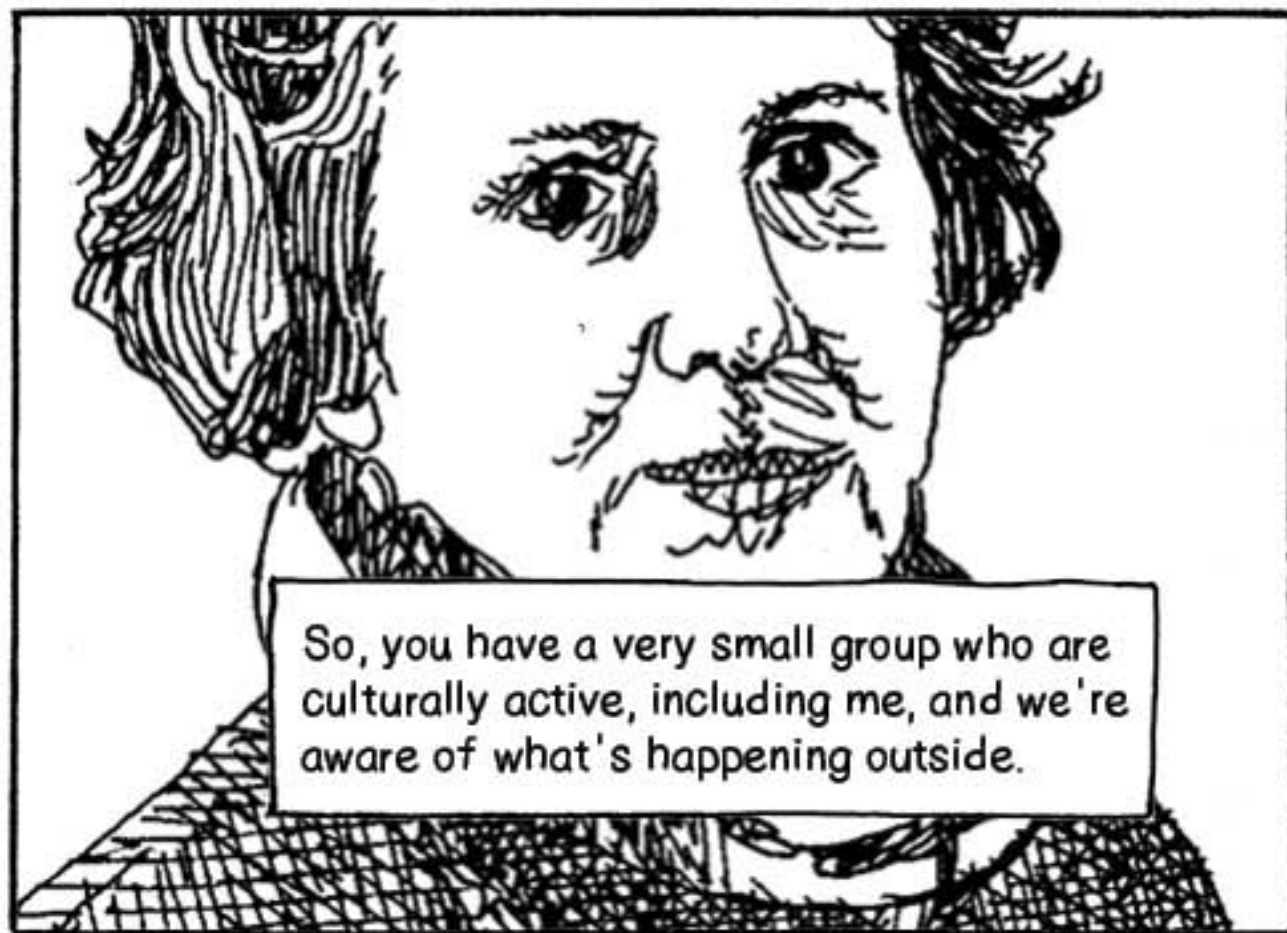
I want to tell you something, Michael:
it's a very difficult time here.



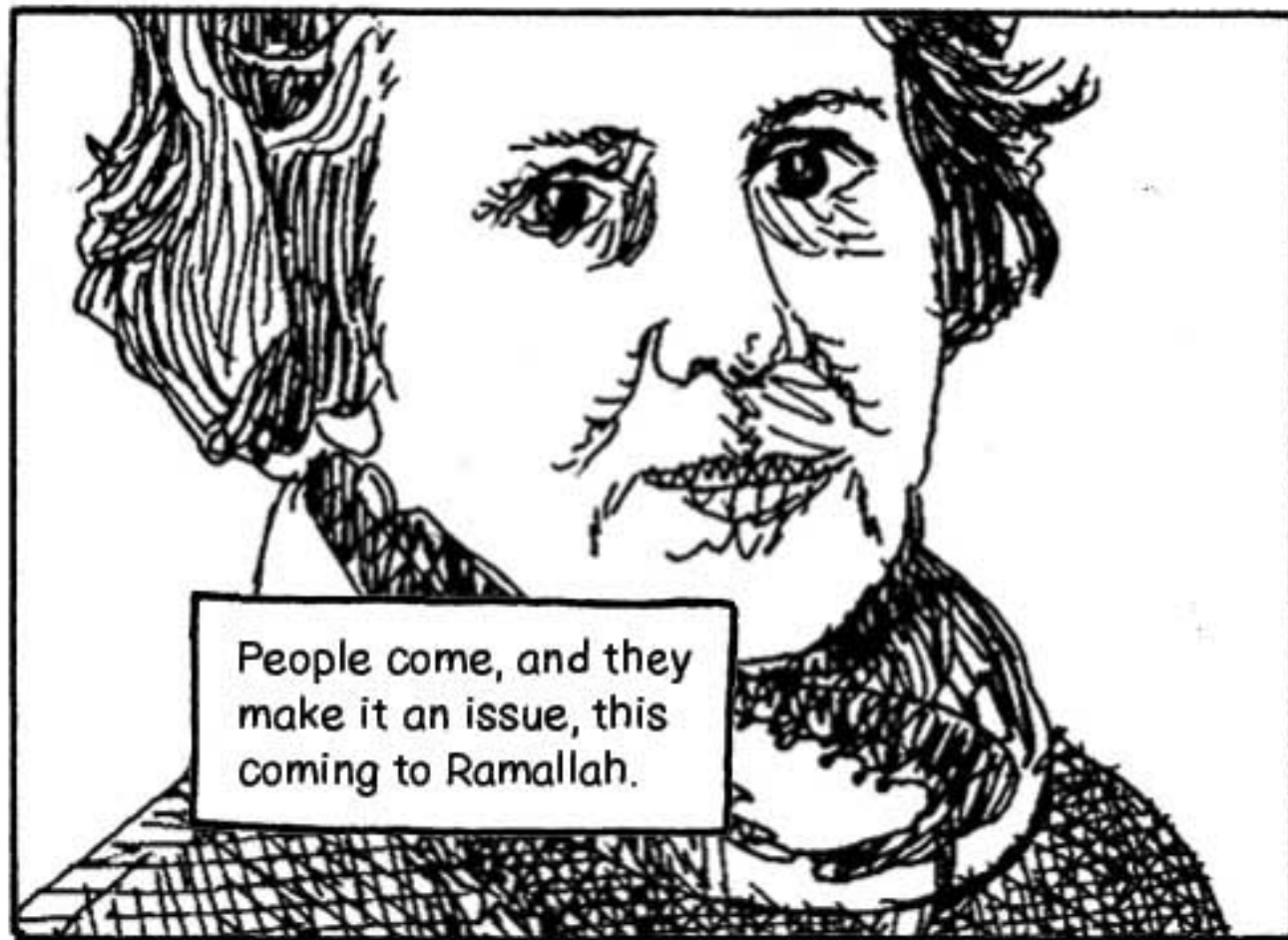
I mean, I'm critical of all this exposure of
Ramallah, for instance, and the art scene
here and the culture scene, because there's
a certain artificiality about the whole issue.



All of a sudden the world became inter-
ested in Ramallah and its art scene, but
the people themselves are not involved,
the general public is not involved.



So, you have a very small group who are
culturally active, including me, and we're
aware of what's happening outside.



People come, and they make it an issue, this coming to Ramallah.



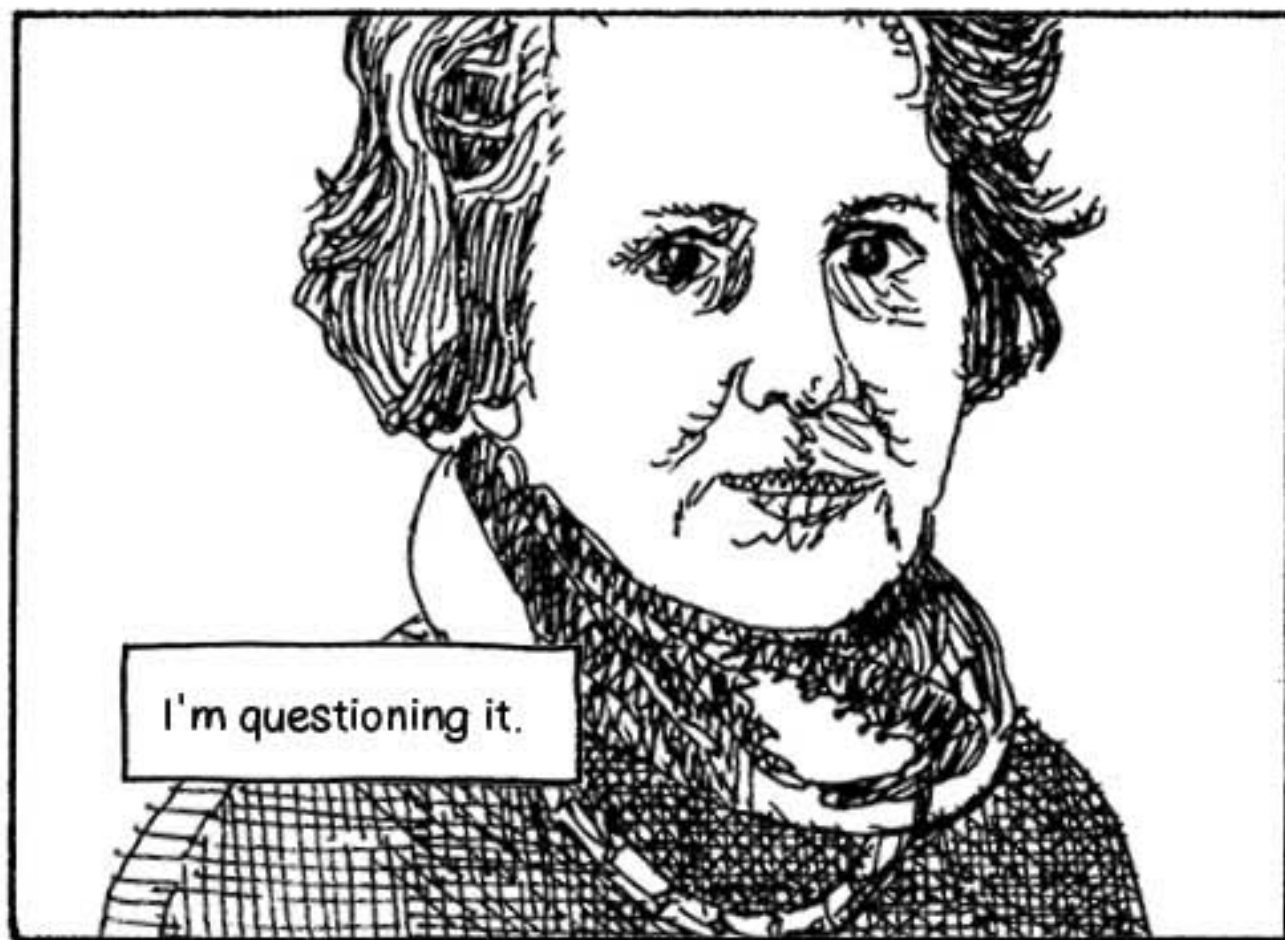
Ramallah is becoming like New York and Paris and Beirut.



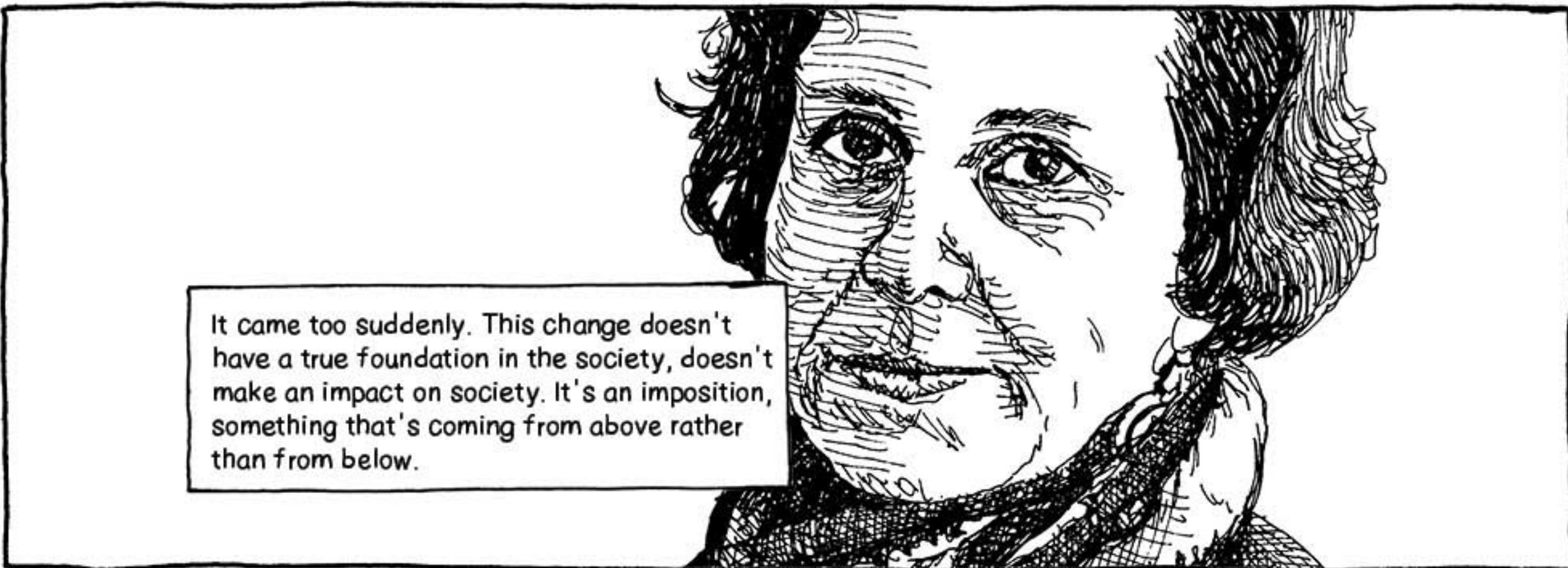
We're having wonderful activities, we're having wonderful philosophers, we have excellent artists, we have artists such as yourself coming on residency, but how much of this activity is building up the cultural atmosphere locally?



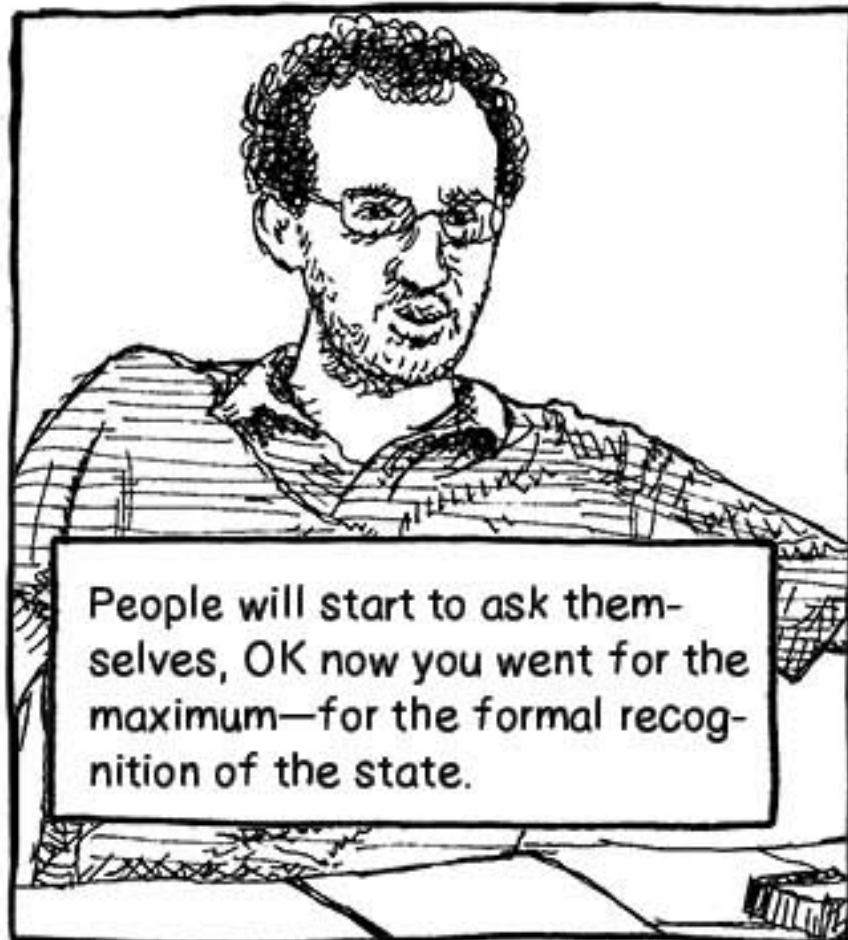
I don't know.



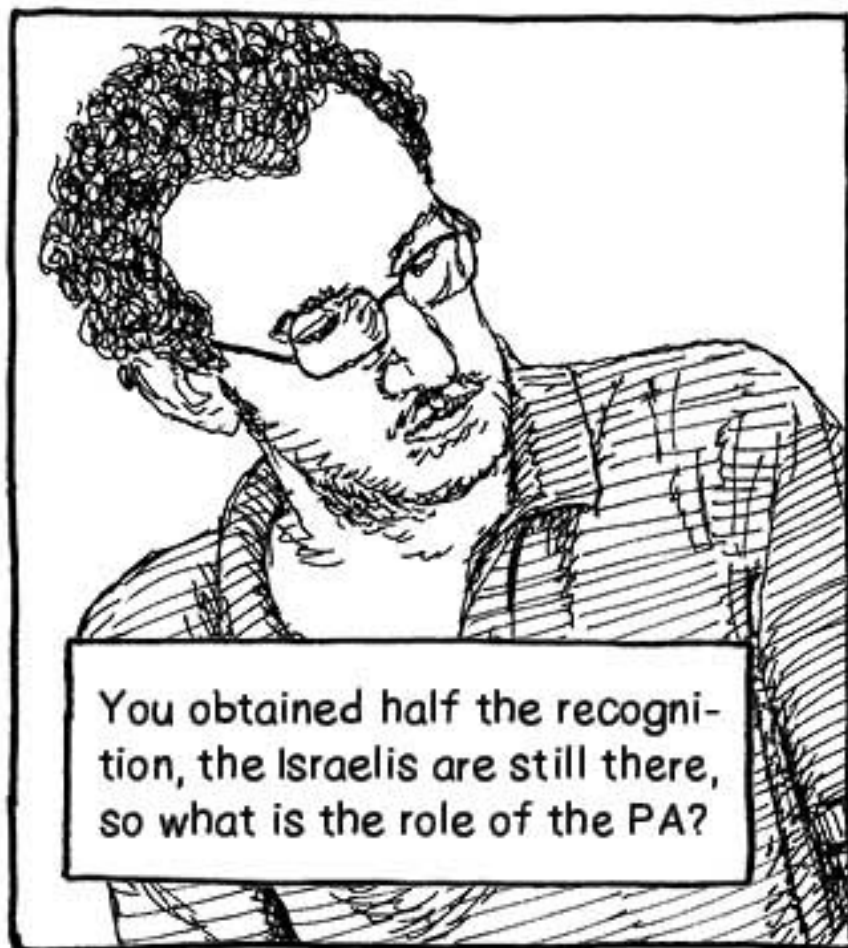
I'm questioning it.



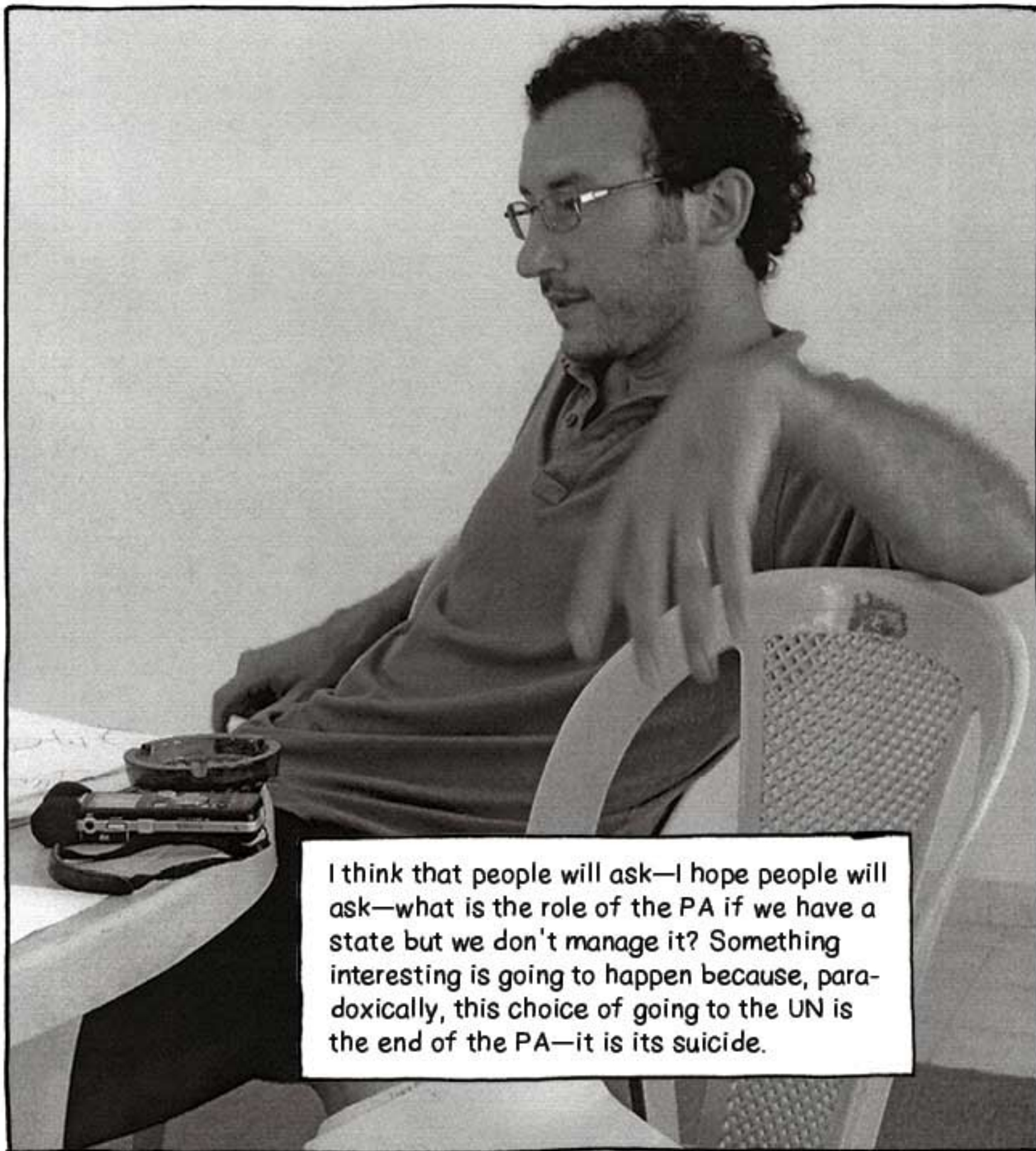
It came too suddenly. This change doesn't have a true foundation in the society, doesn't make an impact on society. It's an imposition, something that's coming from above rather than from below.



People will start to ask themselves, OK now you went for the maximum—for the formal recognition of the state.



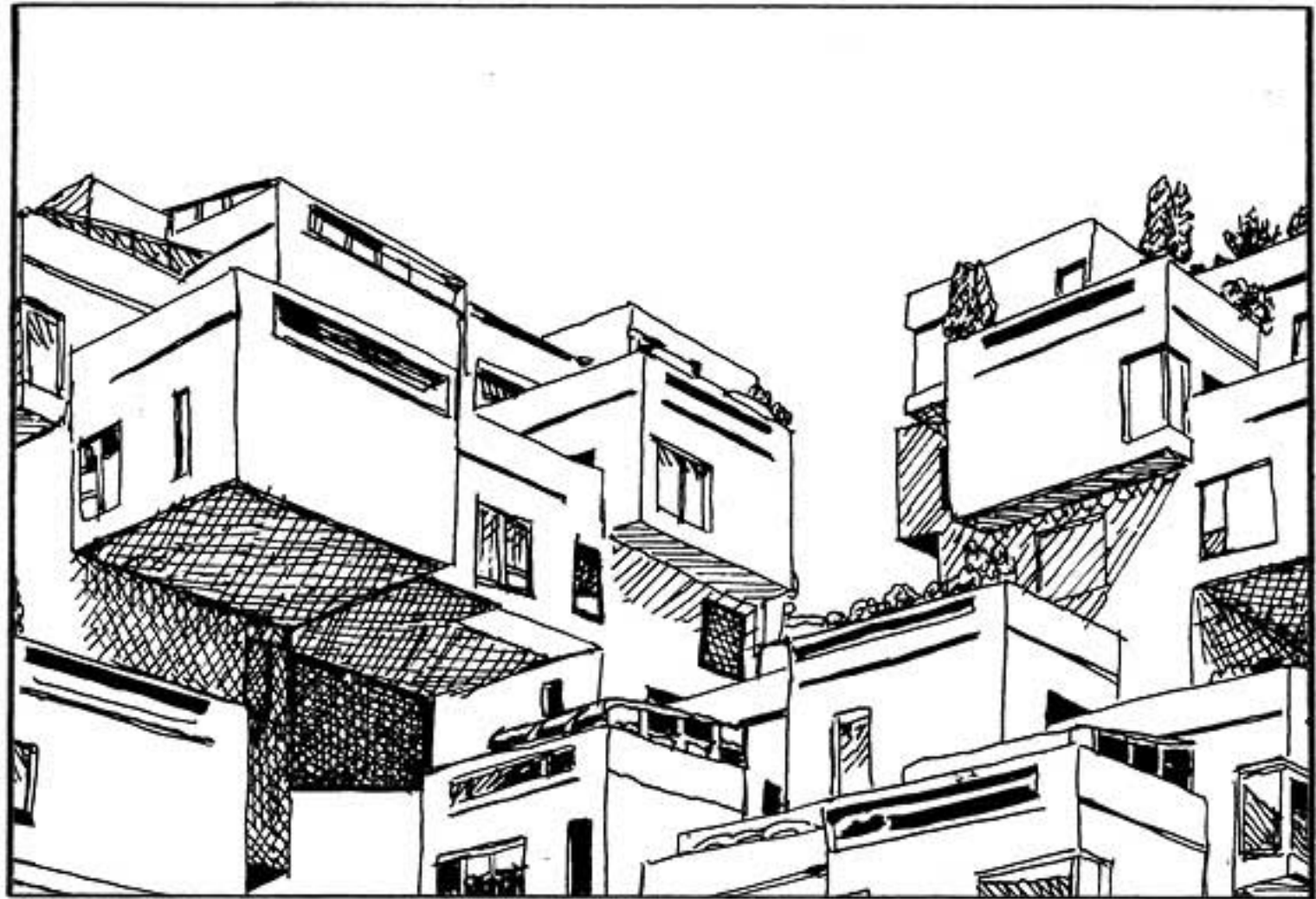
You obtained half the recognition, the Israelis are still there, so what is the role of the PA?



I think that people will ask—I hope people will ask—what is the role of the PA if we have a state but we don't manage it? Something interesting is going to happen because, paradoxically, this choice of going to the UN is the end of the PA—it is its suicide.

During my visit to the West Bank, I was talking one night with some friends. Inevitably, the conversation turned to my research. I told them that I had begun thinking about how the different established narratives of modernity concerned the relationship between the past, present, and future. In the artistic and architectural modernity—the urban modernity—there is a kind of teleology suggested, that it is possible to disenchant society, liberate it from superstition, from outmoded beliefs. The architectural project of modernity was explicitly linked to the emancipation of persons, to a positivist enlightenment notion of progress.

This sort of modernity suggests a forward movement in time. In modernist art, music and literature, perhaps the relation of past, present, and future is more complicated, but to some extent the argument holds, at least in its broader ideological outlines. But what happens when an artifact of modernity is inserted in another context like the West Bank, where time isn't such a linear affair and where notions of progress and rationality seem like a bad joke? There is another kind of relationship to the past at work.



ANOTHER COUNTRY HEARD FROM (PART 2)





MB: One of the more thorny topics is about institutional power in Ramallah. It's like this everywhere, maybe, but the question I want to ask is about...some people have criticized the project for being a promotion for the Academy, and by extension, promotion for Khaled, and then it reinforces a certain node of power within the organization of discourses and actors...

ALI 1: You can see the intersection of these different nodes of power, basically, and how these nodes of power are operating. And the opening very clearly situates the Academy as part of the larger institutional landscape, so you then have to think about what

they are doing. What are they producing? What kind of discourses are they reproducing through the Academy? It implicates the other people who are involved.

ALI 2: Let's take the other institutes that really work with art here in Ramallah and even in Jerusalem, and even Palestinian institutes inside Israel, maybe. Most of the people you've been talking with—like Samar, Yazid, blah, blah, blah—they're really against the whole project in a way. But when the event was there, everyone was deeply involved in the whole making of the scene. And that makes it clear that these institutions cannot really live without this umbrella of Salam Fayyad and the security apparatus, because it's all about relating all the institutions to the funding coming from outside.

MB: So, it's continuous. There's not an oppositional structure that exists here?

ALI 2: We've been discussing all of this with each other, but we cannot



really go public against this kind of event. It's not because we are really part of this scene, but the thing is...

ALI 1: ...The thing is, it's precisely about this intersection between the art scene and these institutions and the authorities. This is the point. This intersection existing at a time when you're talking about the development of a security regime is very problematic. And the fact is, there isn't a critical space here. There isn't a critical space culturally, and there isn't a critical space politically. Of course, the two are connected. The fact that you don't have it culturally is really because you don't have it politically. And I think if you had it politically, then a lot of people would be a lot more vocal. Many people are very critical

of this culture, but they're not willing to be vocal about it.

ALI 2: The thing is, I didn't see any articles critical of this whole project—in the local context as well.

MB: So, at the moment there's a kind of enforced cooperation, or enforced passivity to these broader political developments on the move?

ALI 1: It's a mixture of things. Sometimes there's a meeting of interests, sometimes there's a general apathy from certain people because there have been so many failures in the past 15 years politically. And then there are people who are just kind of reluctant to be vocal with their criticism.

MB: Tell me, how does self-censorship work here? What are the mechanisms? Is it a fear of a ramification that would affect someone personally? Is it a fear of professional censure?



ALI 3: I think it's a mixture of all of it, you know, political and... you have to remember, this is a very small place. And the art world is even smaller.

ALI 1: If we take one case as an example...there's a guy who is very critical of the PA— Professor Abdul-Sattar Qassem in Nablus. He's been shot at, jailed... but he also has a lot of support. So, when he lost his job recently, there was so much pressure he actually got reinstated. This is in Nablus. *Yanni*, if you're going to be serious about it, politically active and going against the current regime, you know that it comes at a serious risk, and most people are not willing to take that risk because, let's be

frank, there isn't a political movement. You end up being an individual acting alone. Which is kind of the depressing part. Although a lot of people share the same sentiment, people are not organized yet.

ALI 2: It's no longer that you are depending on other political parties as before, because you could have this kind of counter-hegemony during the '80s, maybe early '90s. But it's no longer the case—this is what Fayyad has brought us to, you know? To have turned people into individuals, let's say.

ALI 1: But it's also the transformation of a liberation movement into an authority. This is what happens! This is what has happened in most colonial contexts, except here we're still under colonialism. But this is what happened all over the Arab world.

ALI 2: We're interested in this: how these people have really been transforming into individuals that cannot do anything. So that's why people just close up.

ALI 1: Until something else emerges. You see it. There's always this moment of radical rupture when things cannot go back...

ALI 2: People are really waiting.

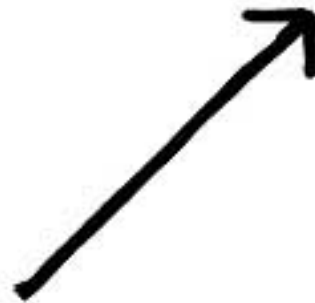
ALI 1: ...And you cannot predict when this moment comes, but it will come. This is how the intifadas erupted.

ALI 3: Exactly.

ALI 2: I think people now are waiting for the Authority to collapse. This is what people really are waiting for. The donors will stop giving money and the Authority will really collapse, and something else will come up. But what will come... this is more dangerous—that nothing is being planned. This is the most dangerous thing. There is not really a plan of what to do. So, people go with with this kind of... I don't know, there is an exhibition happening at the Academy so people participate and other things go on at other places.



PRE-MODERN, MODERN, POSTMODERN




In a theatrical sense, exhibiting the painting was a performance of the discourse of state power. What does a theatre consist of? A stage with a proscenium arch separating audience from performers. And then, an offstage space, the backstage area and the wings—stage right and stage left. The room with the Picasso and the guards seemed to utilize these elements in how the painting was staged. In doing so, it became a representation of embodied state authority and a reminder of its fragility, its possible collapse. The policemen themselves, having entered this theatrical complex, became actors co-starring alongside the *Buste de femme*.

Henri Lefebvre speaks of power (categorically subsumed, in his view, under existing relations of production) as having a frontal aspect—as expressed in buildings, monuments, even works of art. But alongside this frontal space is a hidden space,

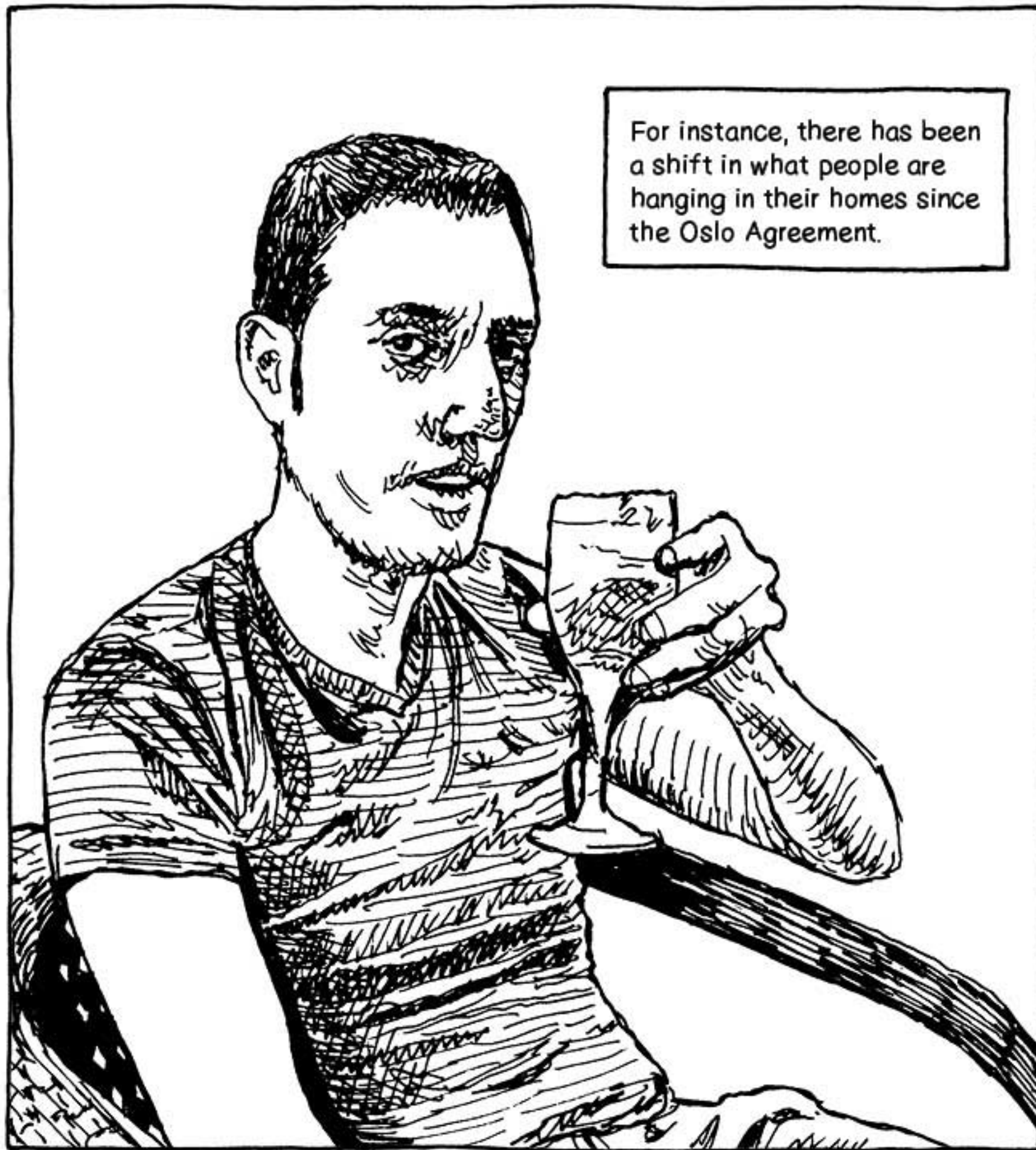


an obscene space where “everything that cannot or may not happen on the scene is relegated: whatever is inadmissible, be it malefic or forbidden, thus has its own hidden space on the near or far side of a frontier.” In every country that hasn't degenerated into anarchy or terror, state authority uses spaces in this fashion. It is infrequent that circumstances allow this fact to be illustrated so obviously.

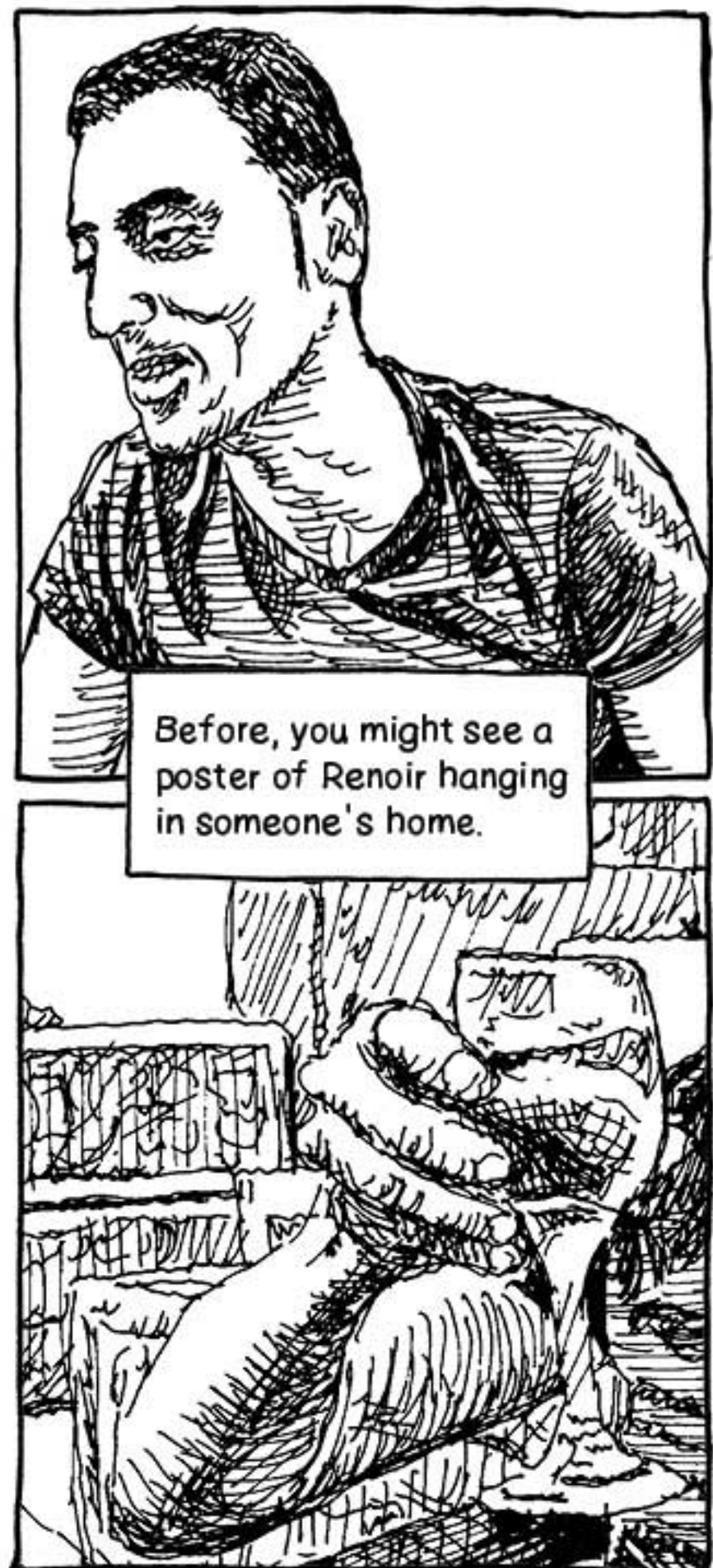




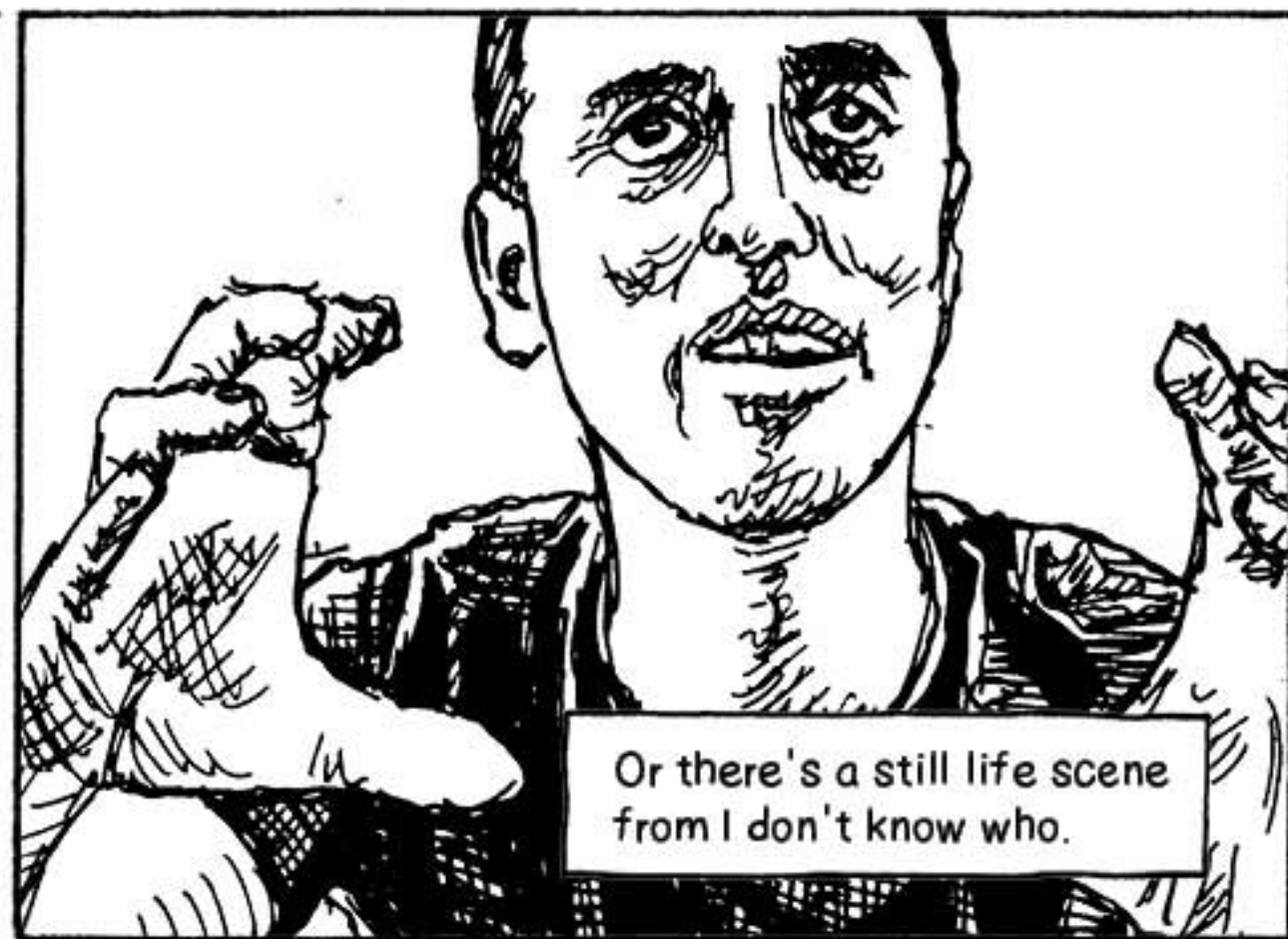
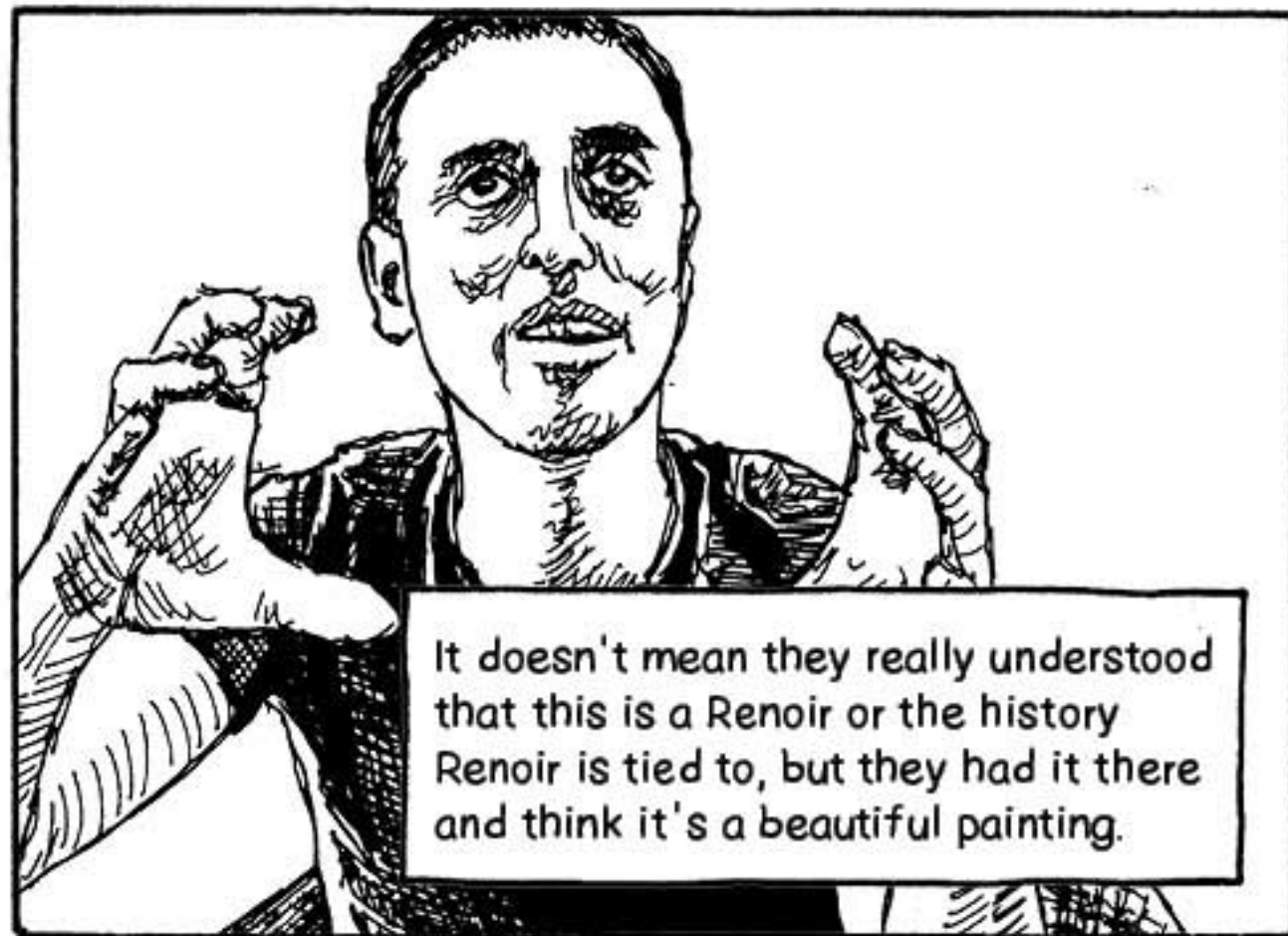
Has there been a regression in the level of cultural knowledge since Oslo? Yeah, absolutely. I never really thought about it, but yes there has.

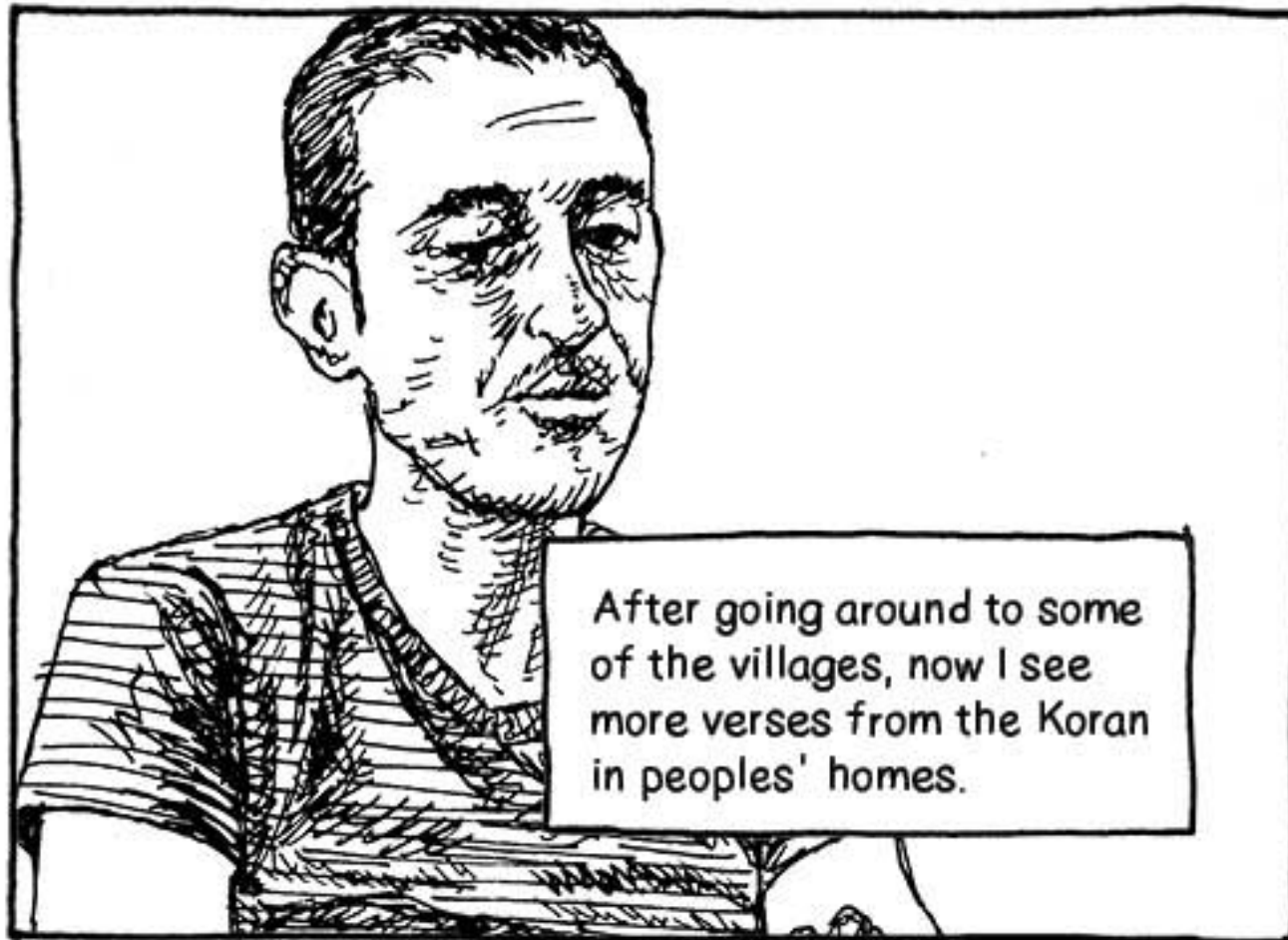


For instance, there has been a shift in what people are hanging in their homes since the Oslo Agreement.

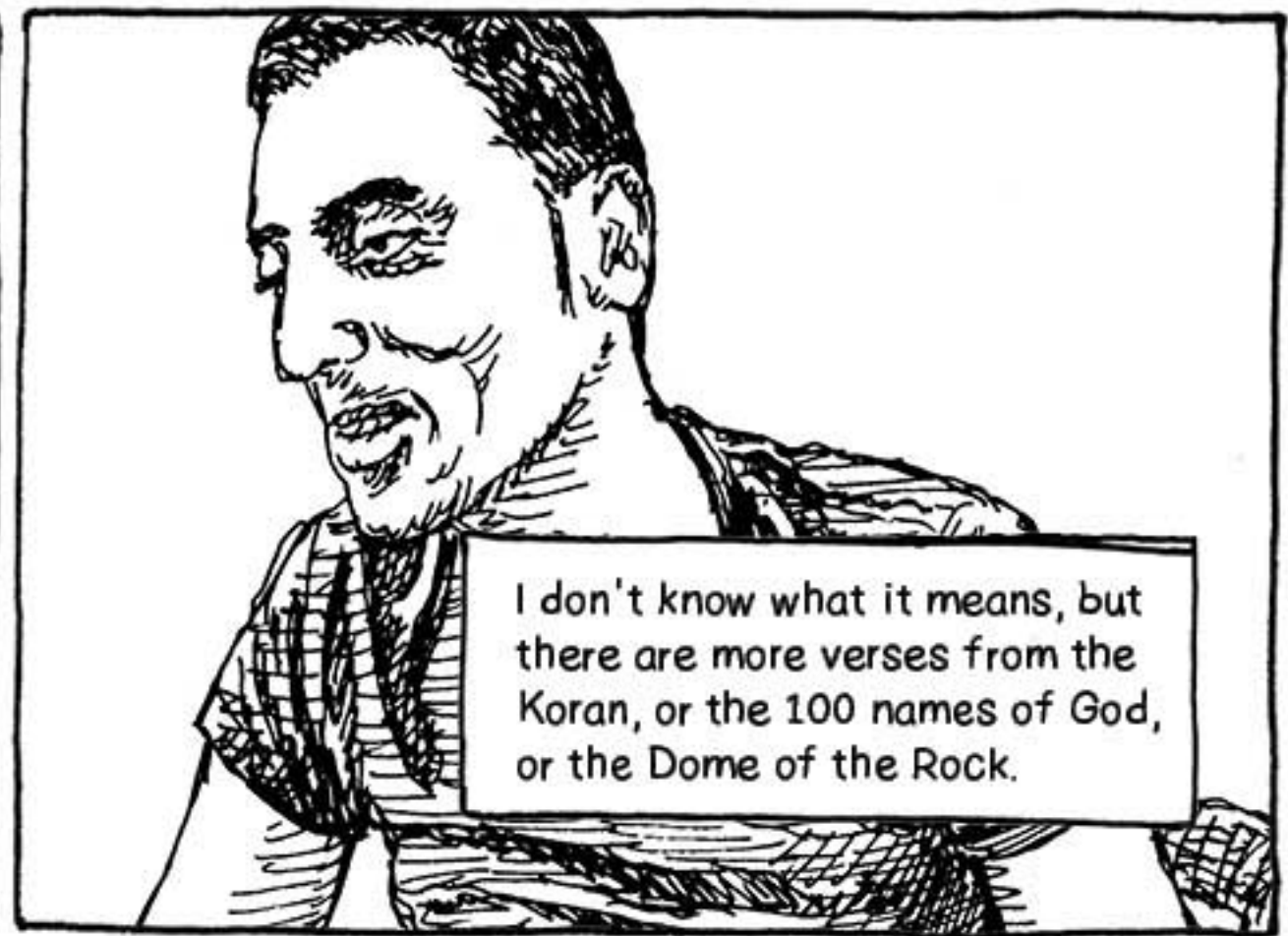


Before, you might see a poster of Renoir hanging in someone's home.

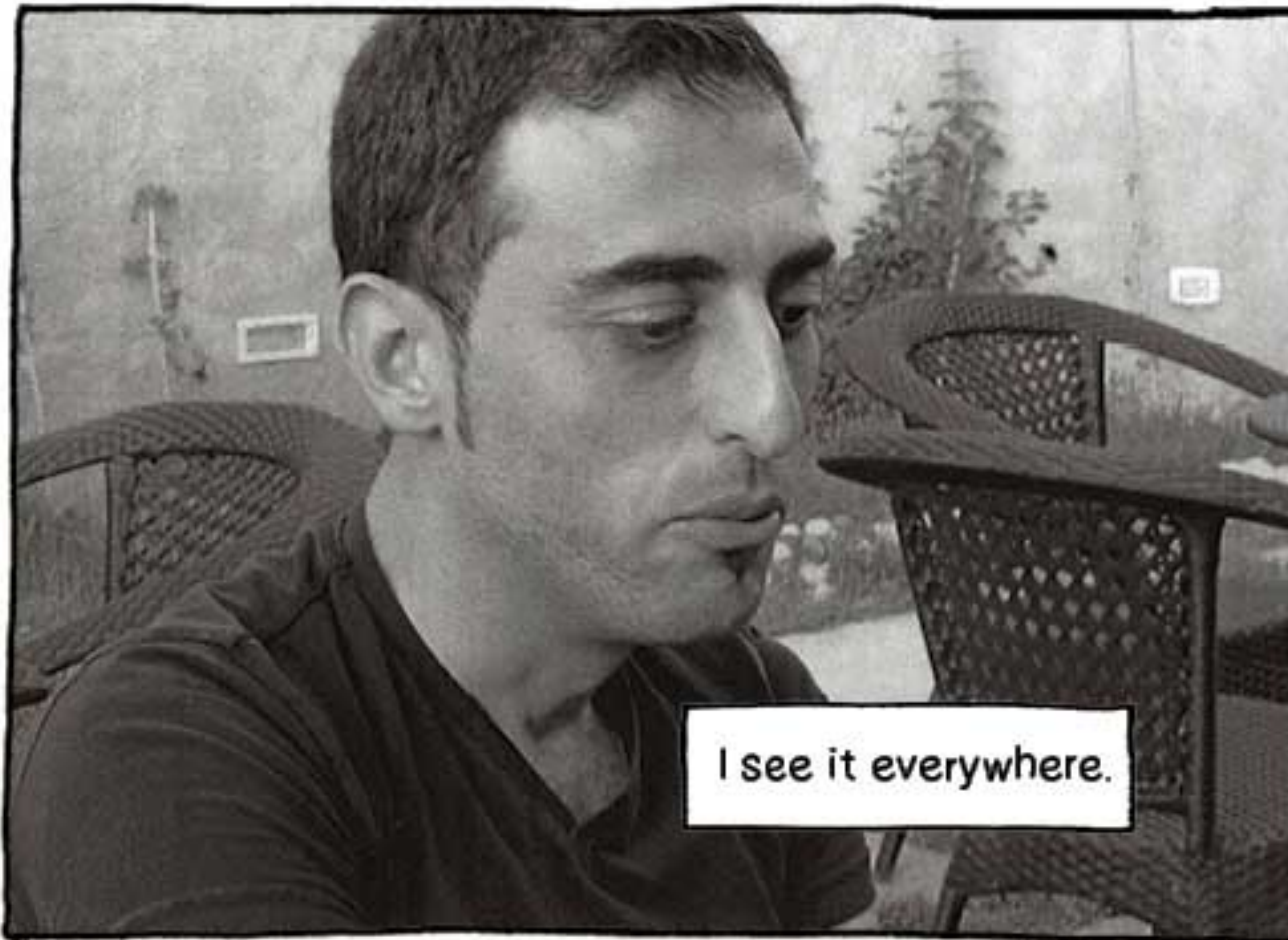




After going around to some of the villages, now I see more verses from the Koran in peoples' homes.



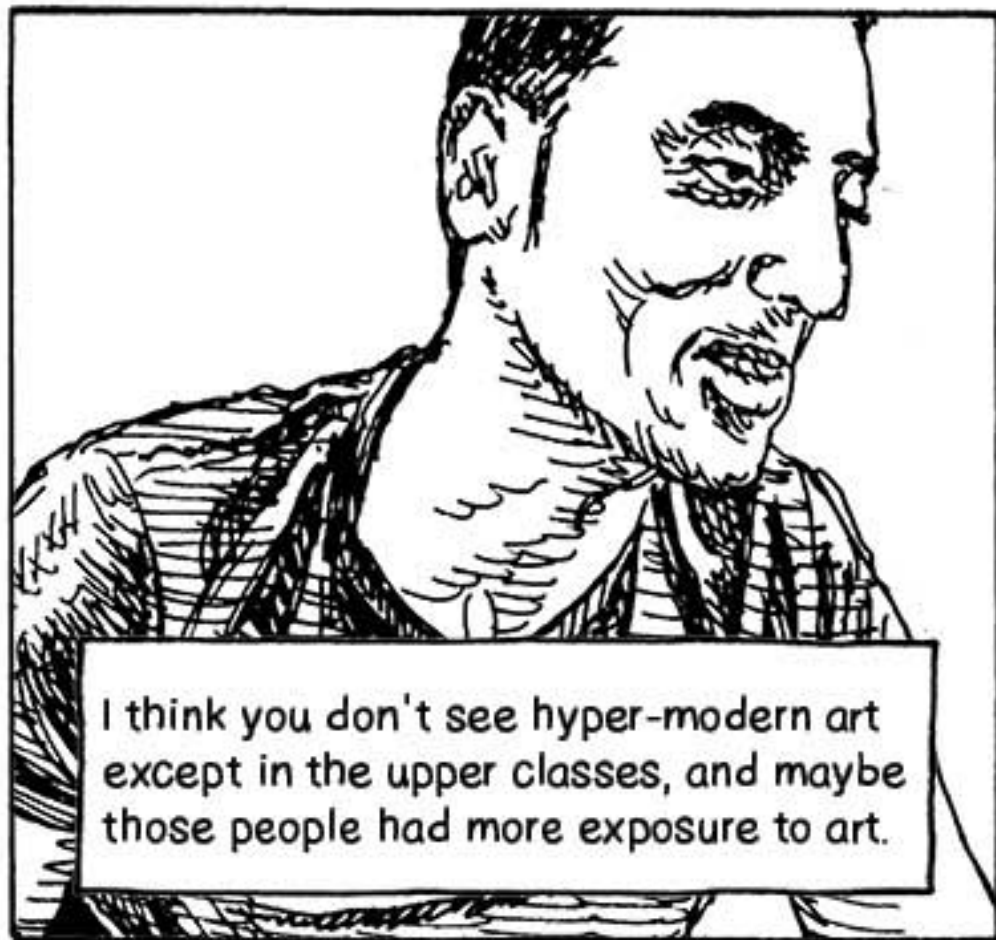
I don't know what it means, but there are more verses from the Koran, or the 100 names of God, or the Dome of the Rock.



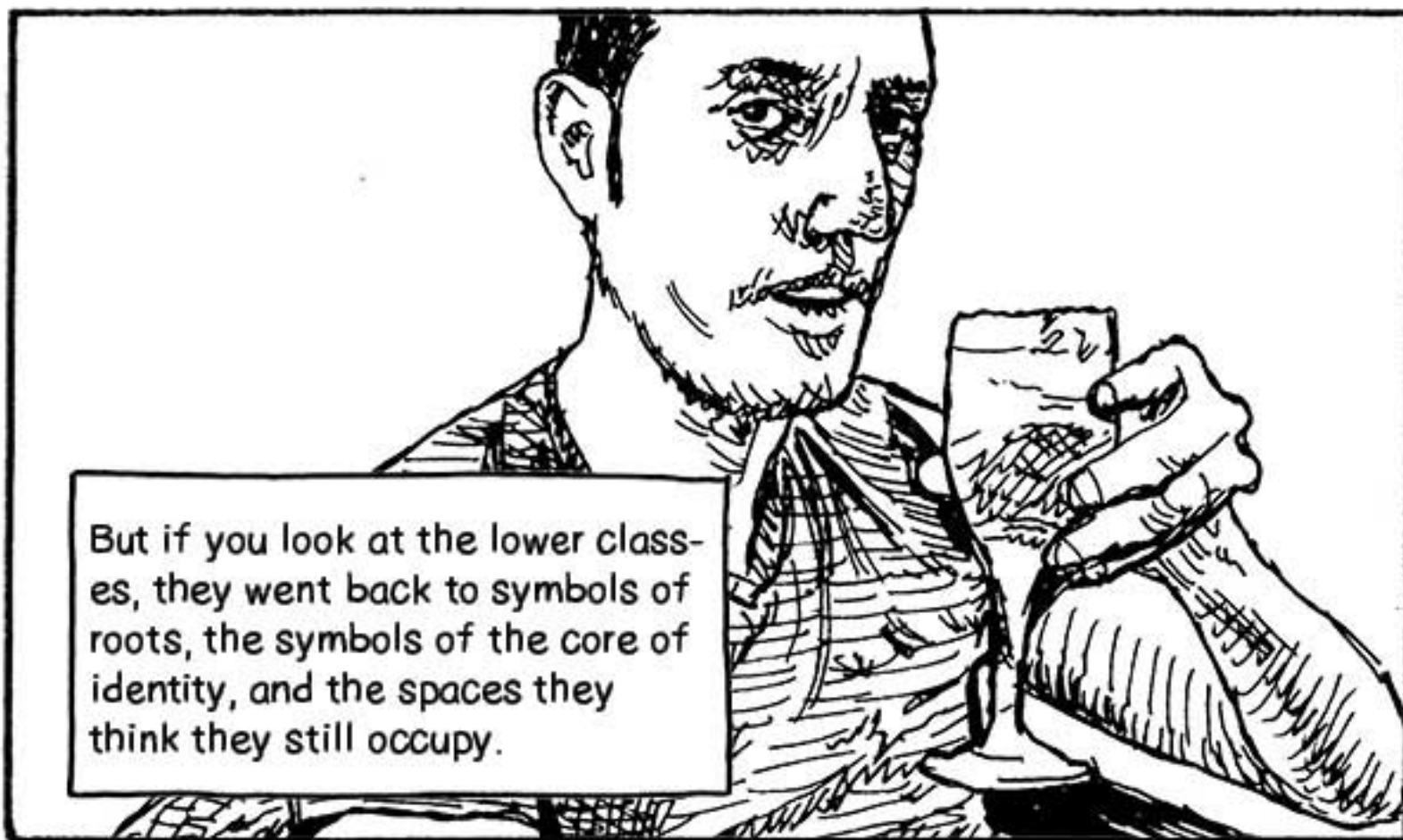
I see it everywhere.



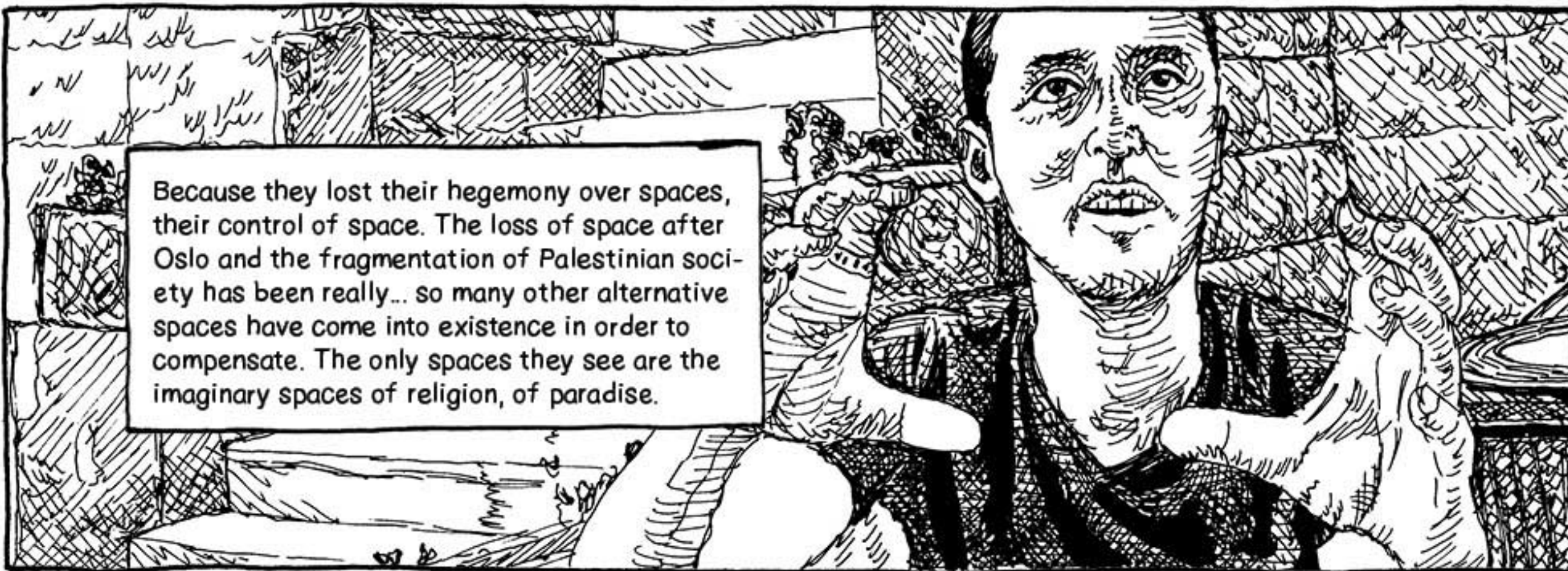
It really kills me.



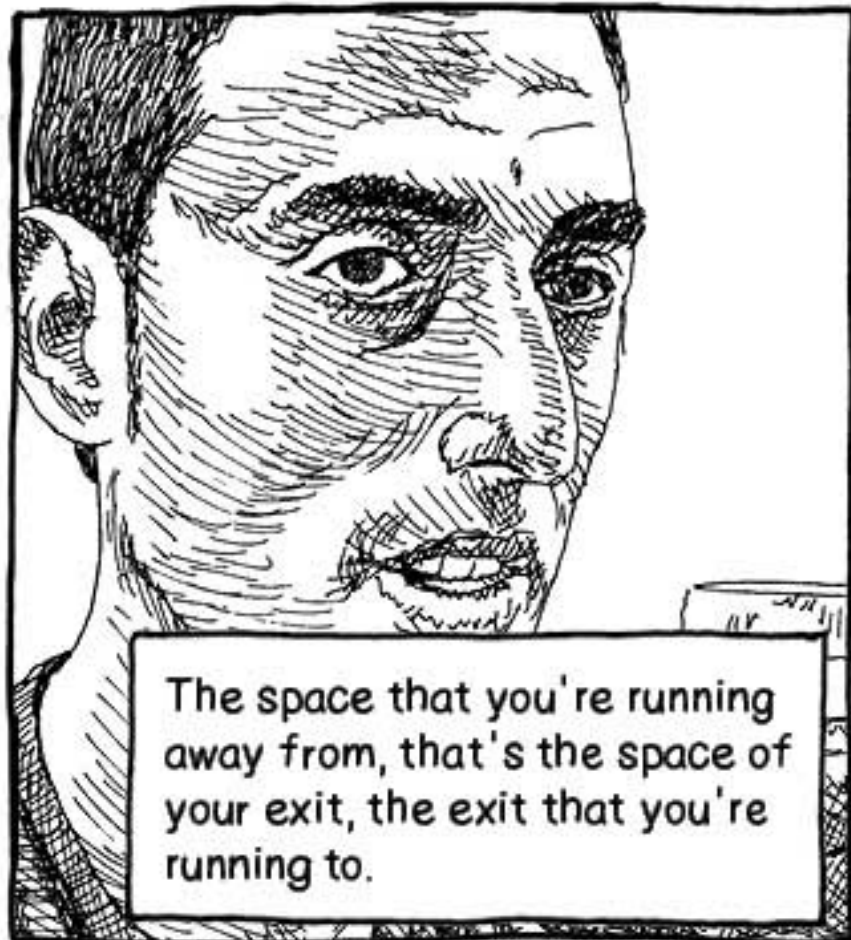
I think you don't see hyper-modern art except in the upper classes, and maybe those people had more exposure to art.



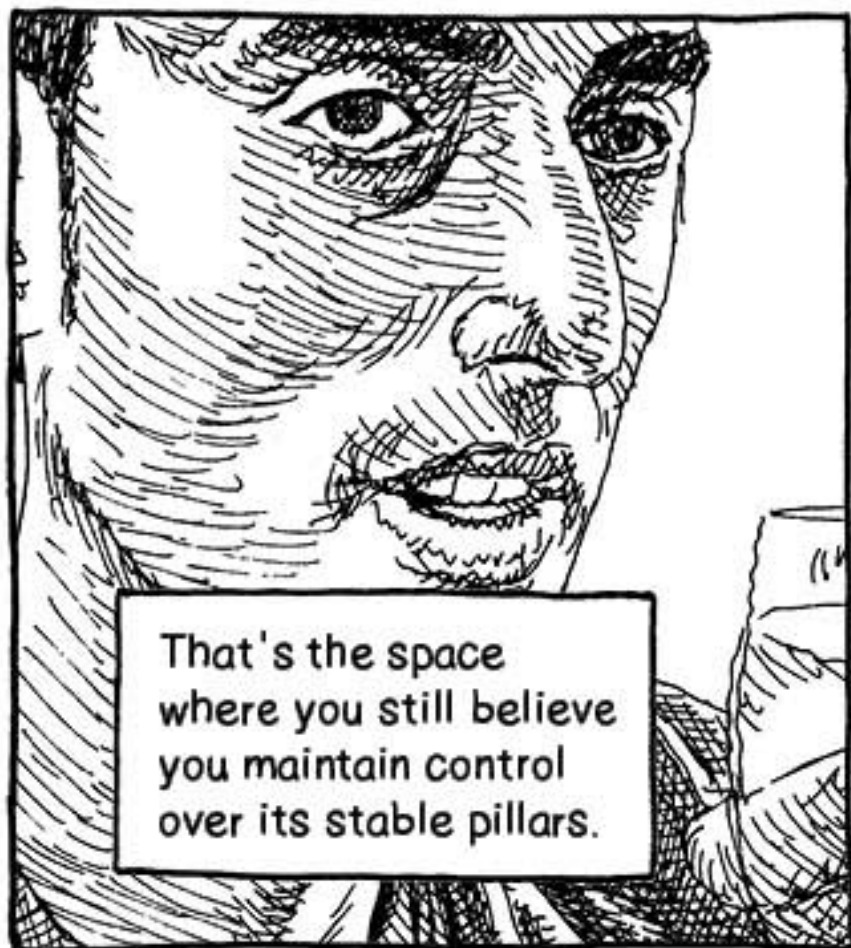
But if you look at the lower classes, they went back to symbols of roots, the symbols of the core of identity, and the spaces they think they still occupy.



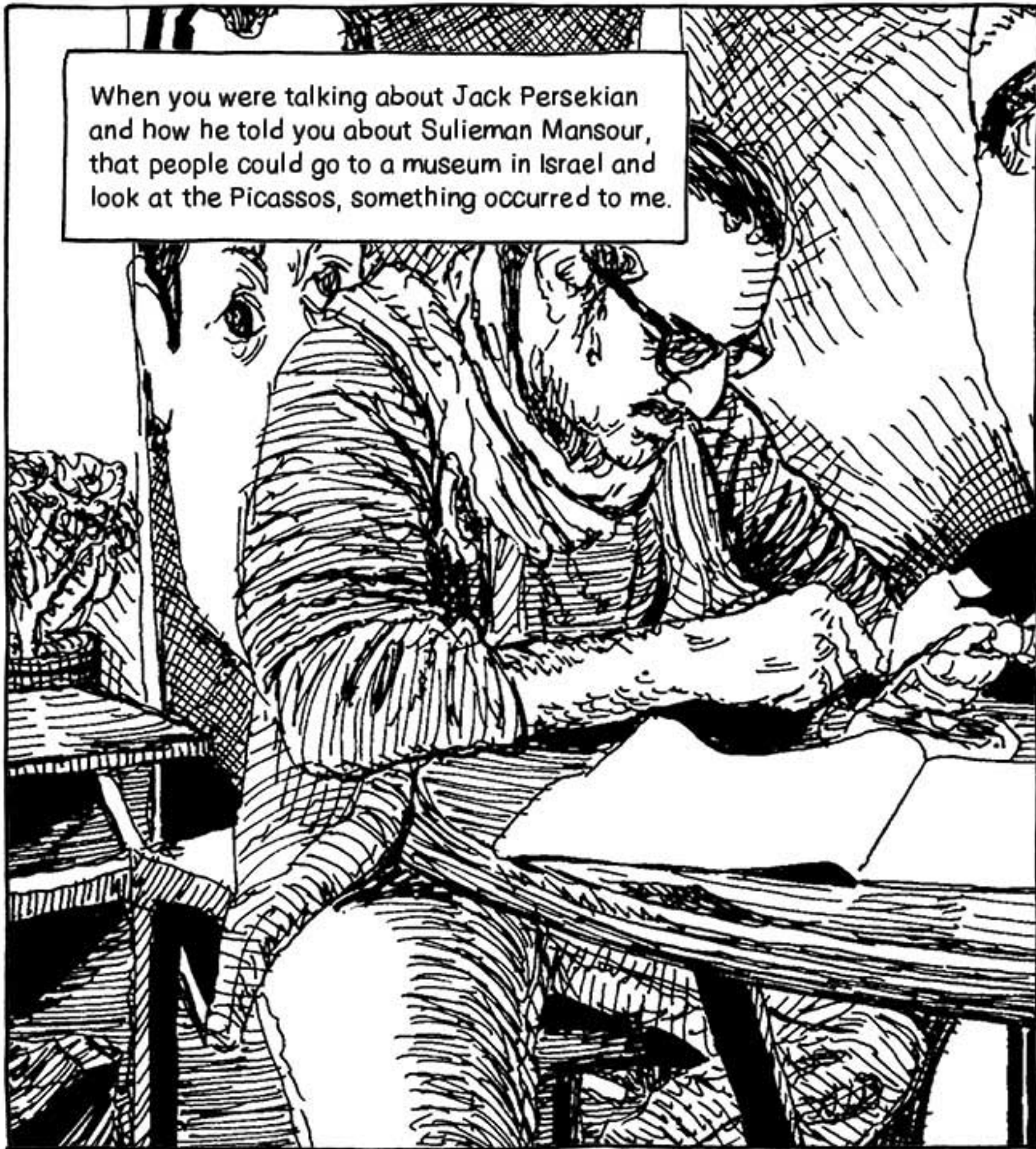
Because they lost their hegemony over spaces, their control of space. The loss of space after Oslo and the fragmentation of Palestinian society has been really... so many other alternative spaces have come into existence in order to compensate. The only spaces they see are the imaginary spaces of religion, of paradise.



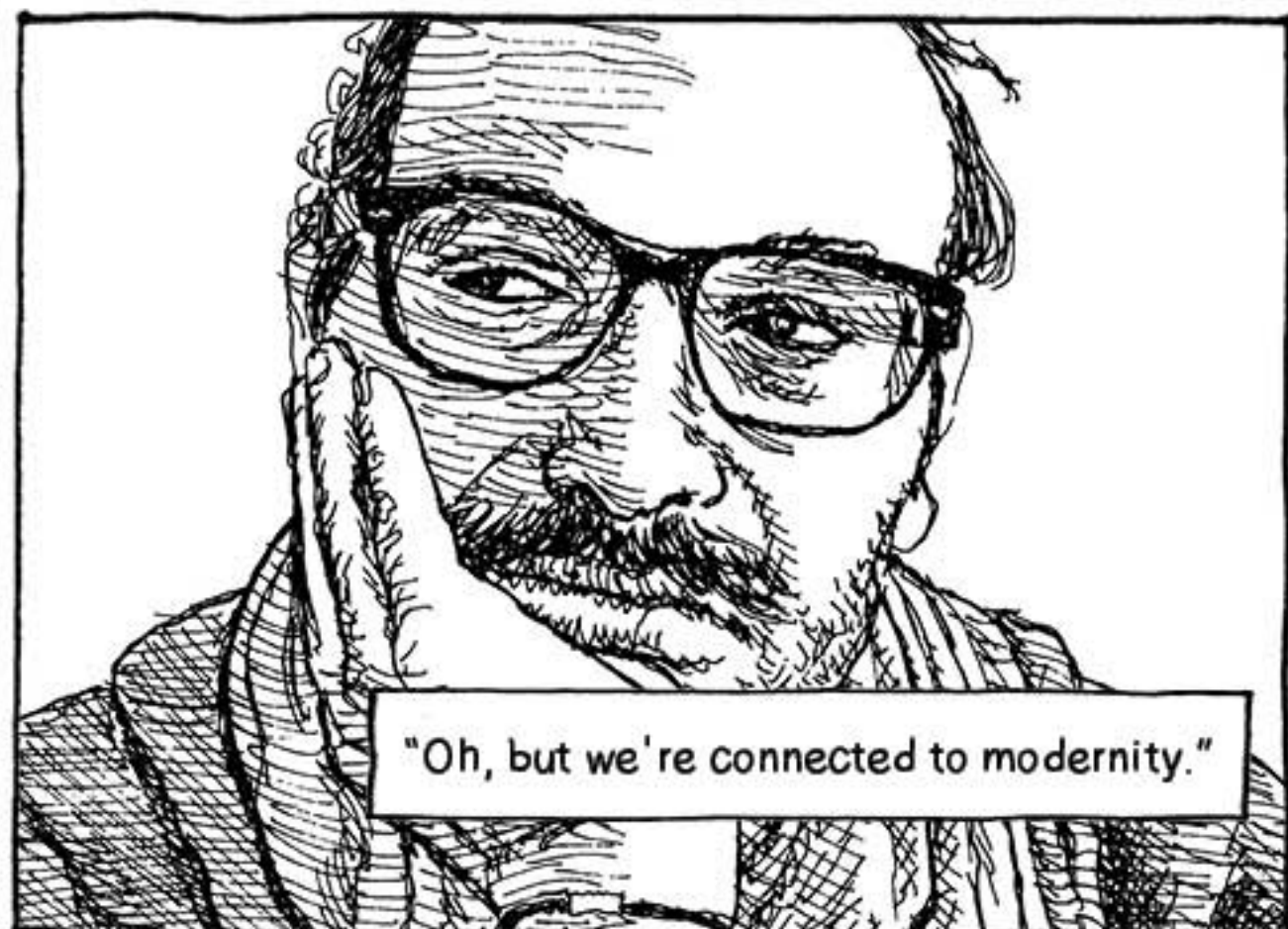
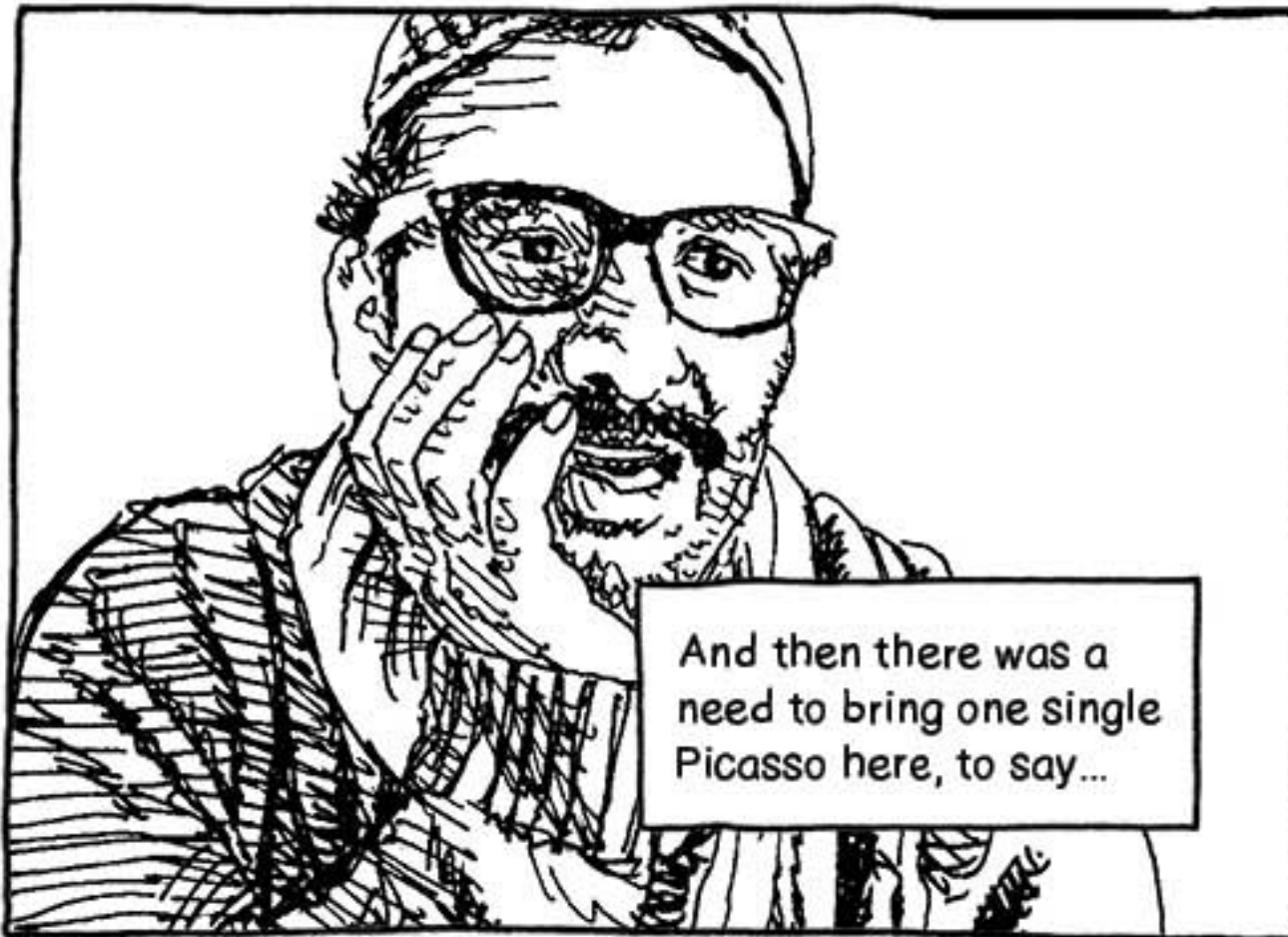
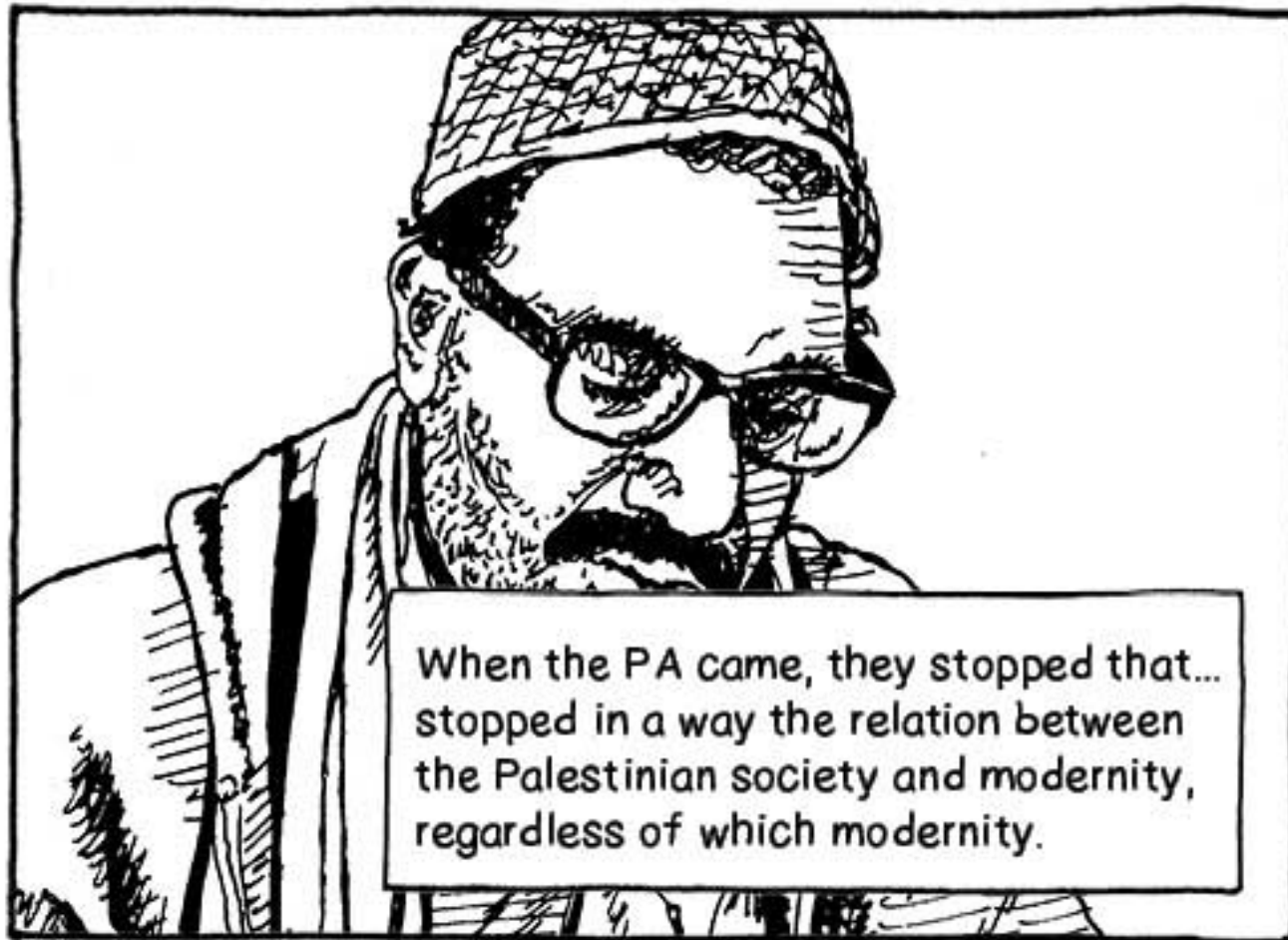
The space that you're running away from, that's the space of your exit, the exit that you're running to.

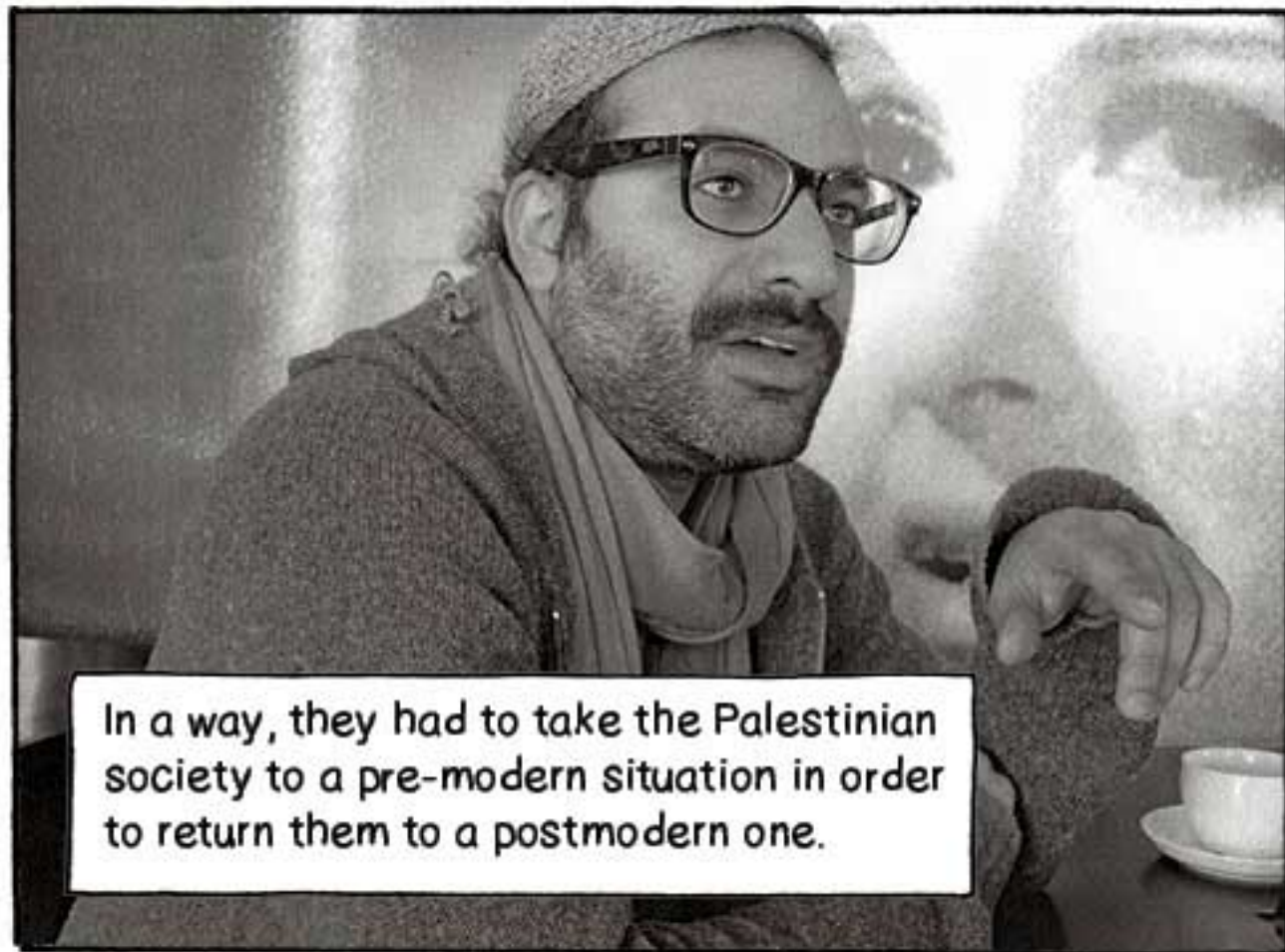


That's the space where you still believe you maintain control over its stable pillars.

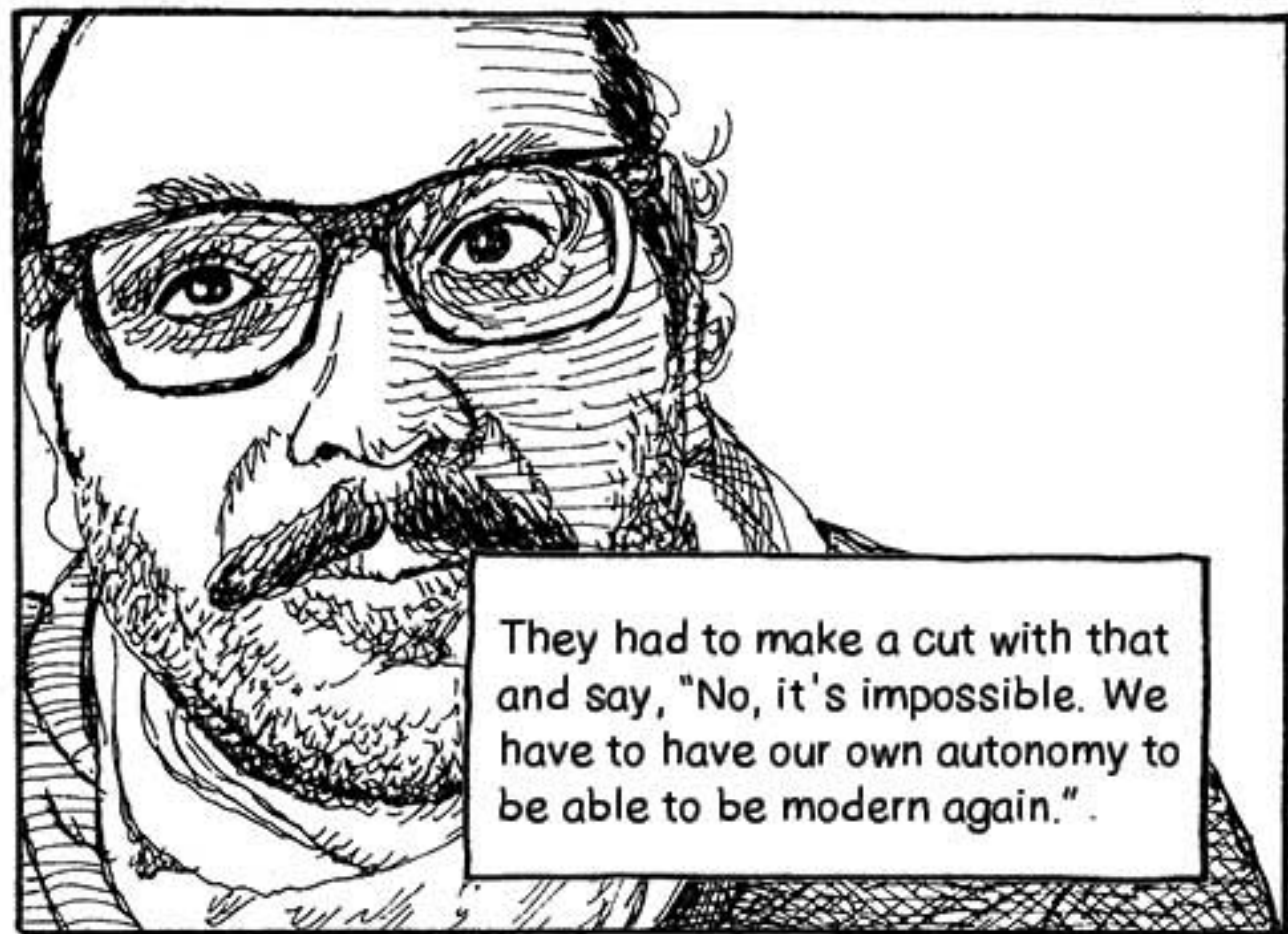


When you were talking about Jack Persekian and how he told you about Sulieman Mansour, that people could go to a museum in Israel and look at the Picassos, something occurred to me.





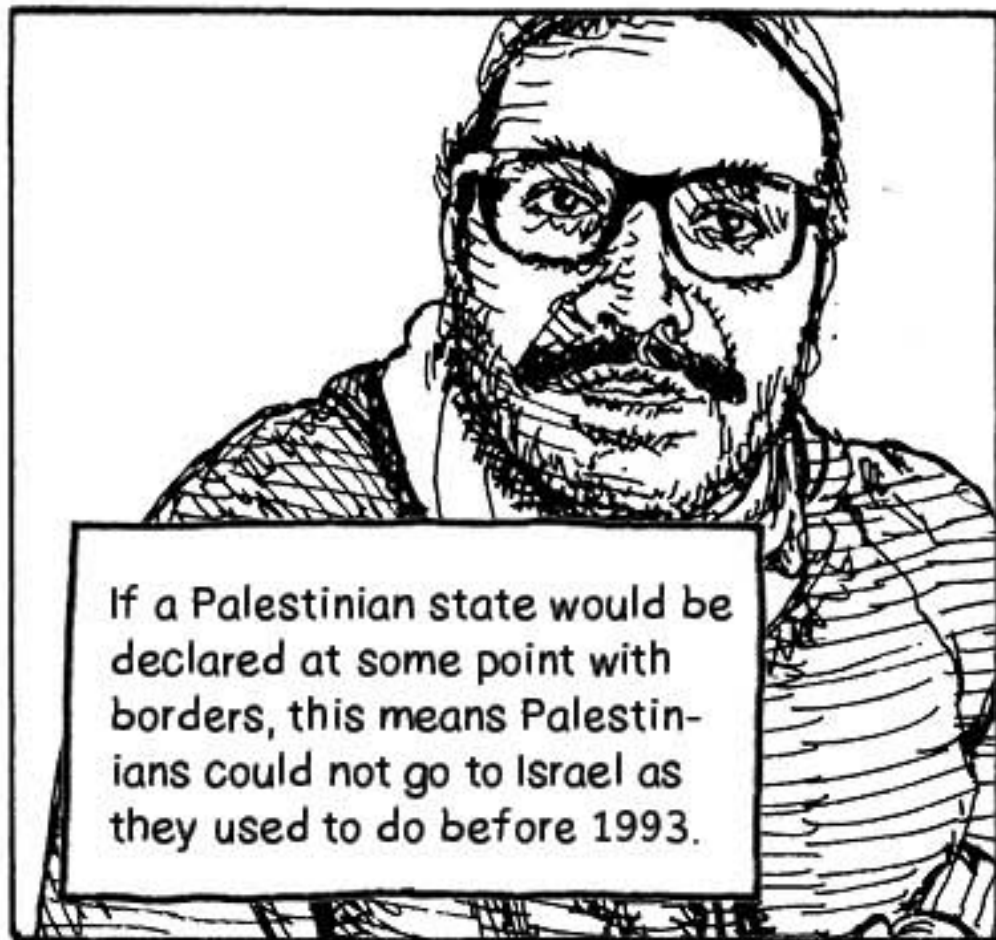
In a way, they had to take the Palestinian society to a pre-modern situation in order to return them to a postmodern one.



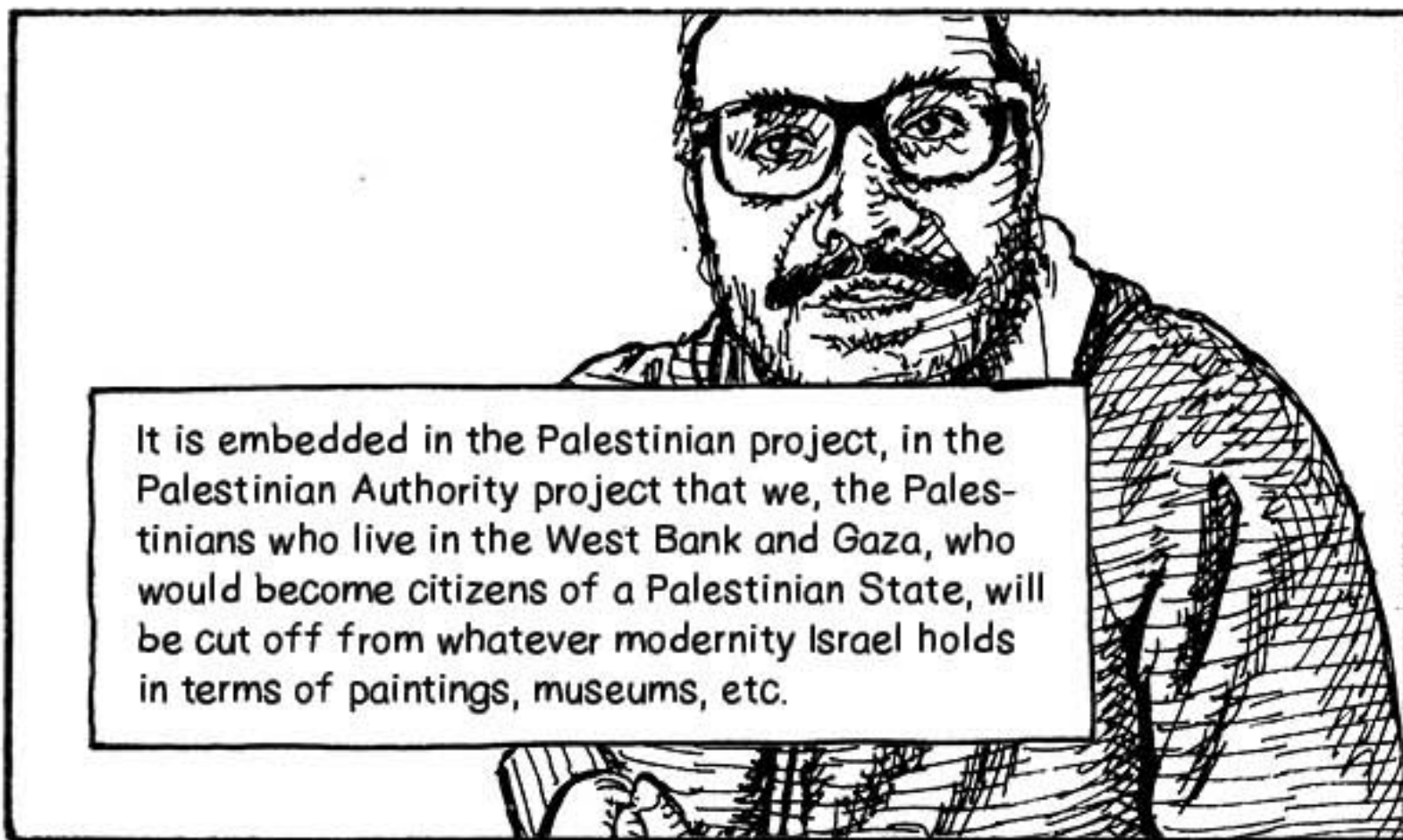
They had to make a cut with that and say, "No, it's impossible. We have to have our own autonomy to be able to be modern again."

Let's play with this: If the PA, as a project of modernity that looks toward making a state, OK, at some point it had to make a cut with the possibility of having a one-state solution... with the possibility for Israel to become a state for all its citizens, you know?





If a Palestinian state would be declared at some point with borders, this means Palestinians could not go to Israel as they used to do before 1993.

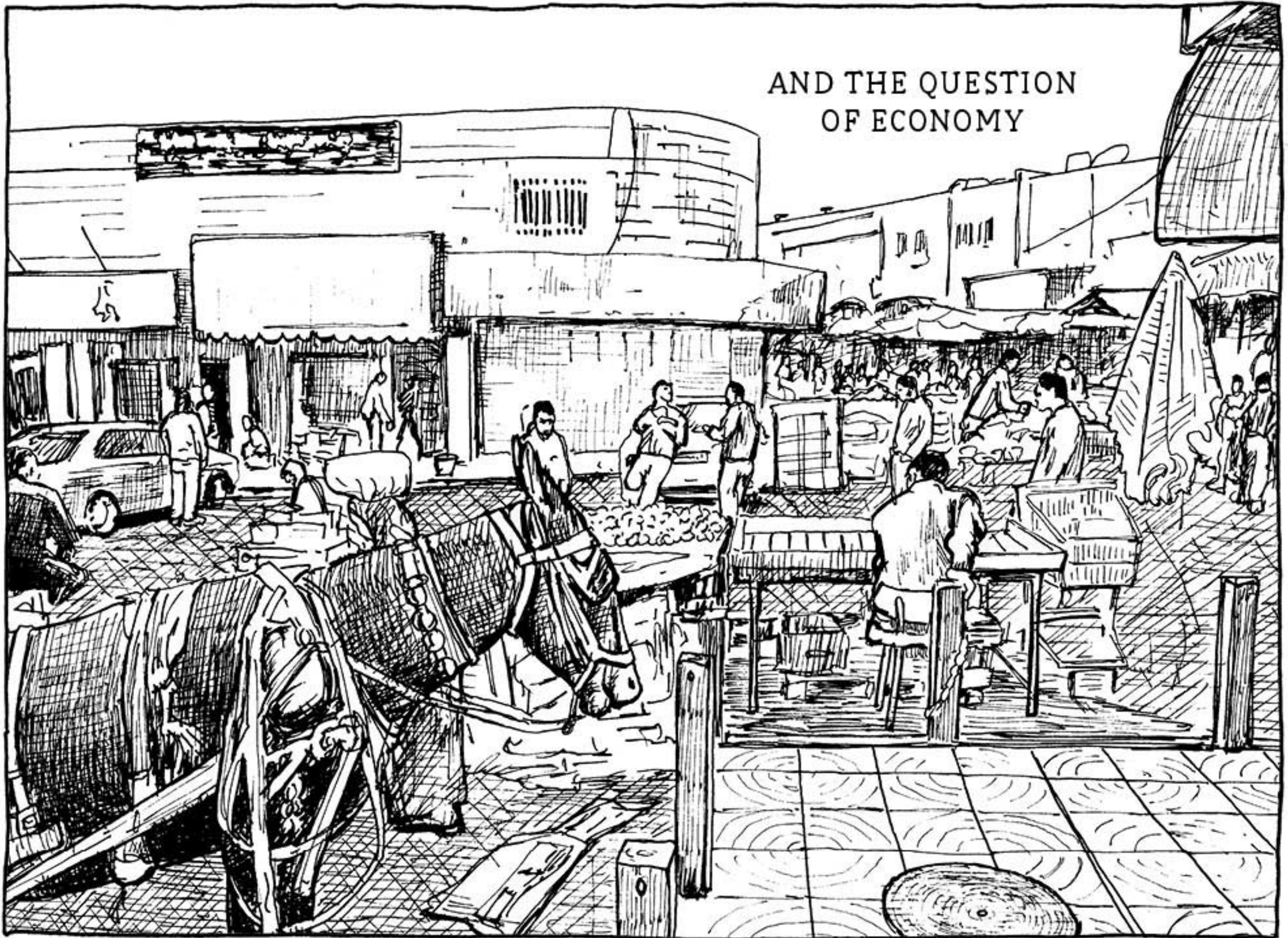


It is embedded in the Palestinian project, in the Palestinian Authority project that we, the Palestinians who live in the West Bank and Gaza, who would become citizens of a Palestinian State, will be cut off from whatever modernity Israel holds in terms of paintings, museums, etc.



But this means that for the PA to become a state, it has to provide that, too.

AND THE QUESTION
OF ECONOMY



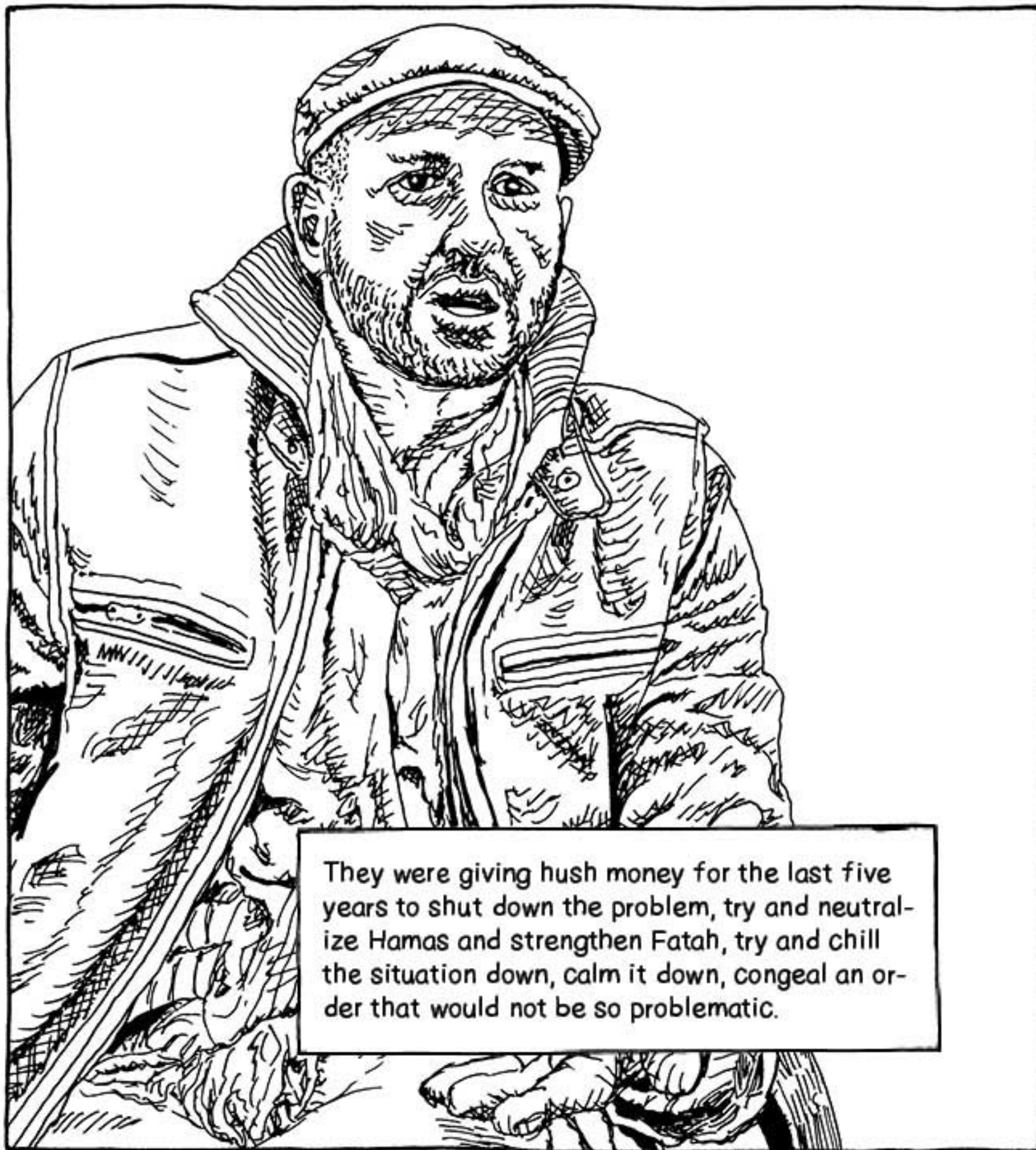


The day I met Nu'man Kanafani at his office at MAS, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad was holding a meeting there to discuss the reaction to his income tax measures, which would double the tax rate of higher earners and add many small businesses to the tax roles. Kanafani and I watched Fayyad exit his black Mercedes town car and stride purposefully into the lobby to meet with his economic advisors over the opposition to the recently announced tax hikes and other austerity measures.





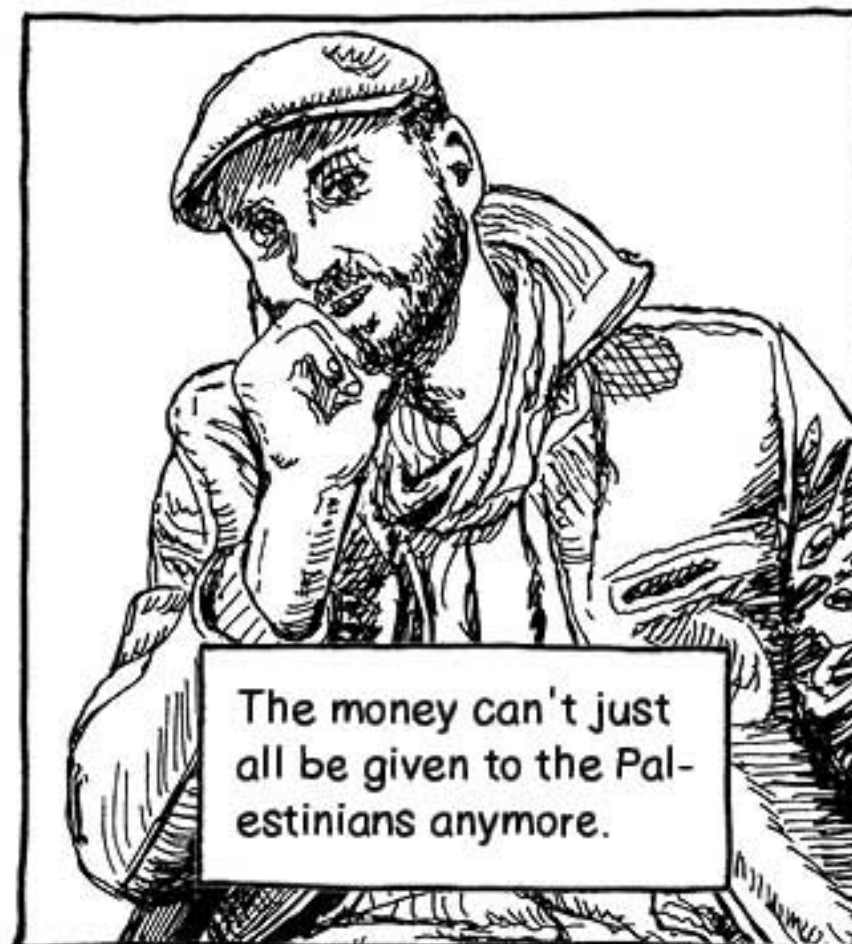
The irony is that you have this new situation, which is the fact that you have these Arab revolutions taking place. Palestine is no longer so important anymore.



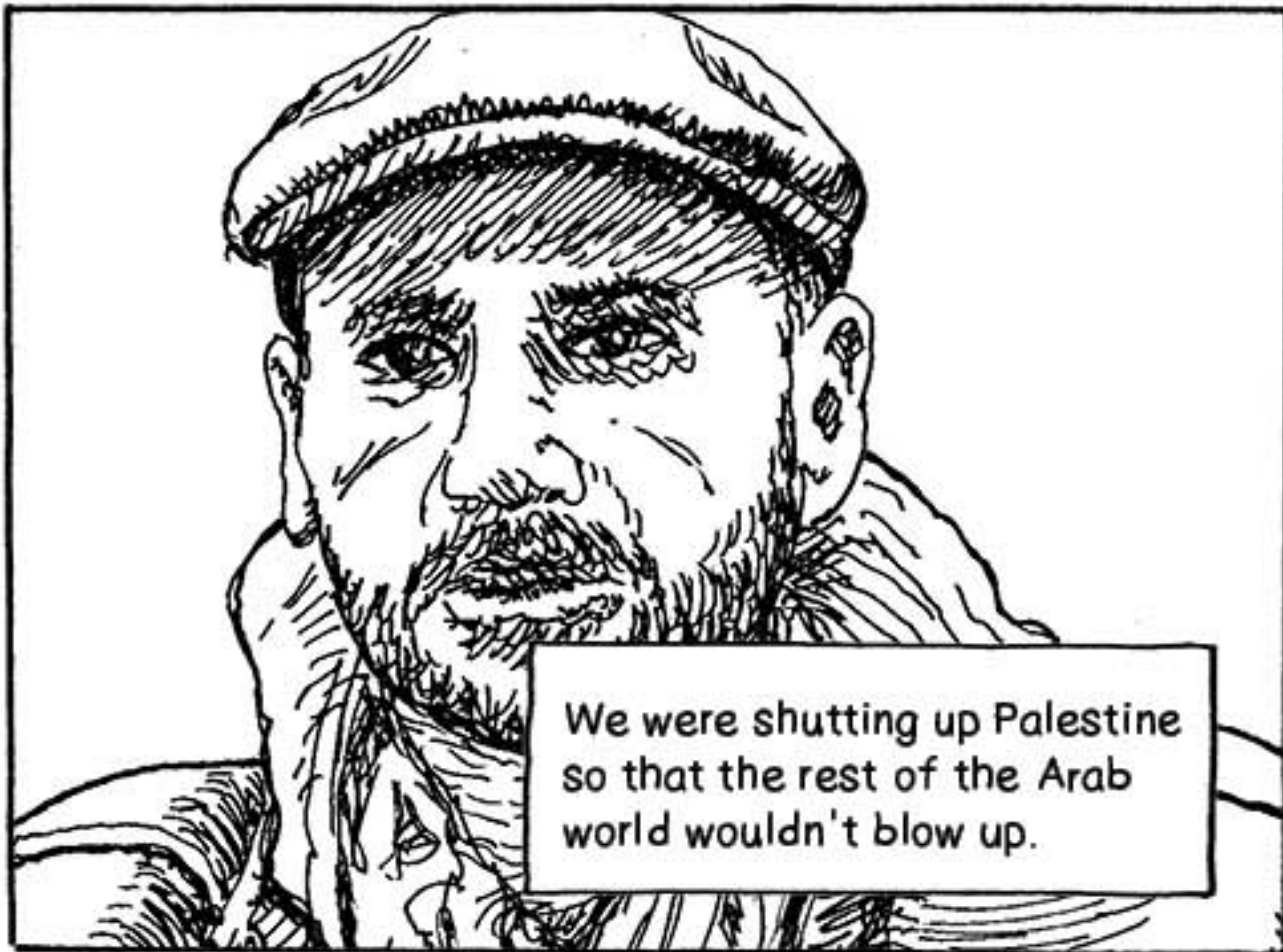
They were giving hush money for the last five years to shut down the problem, try and neutralize Hamas and strengthen Fatah, try and chill the situation down, calm it down, congeal an order that would not be so problematic.



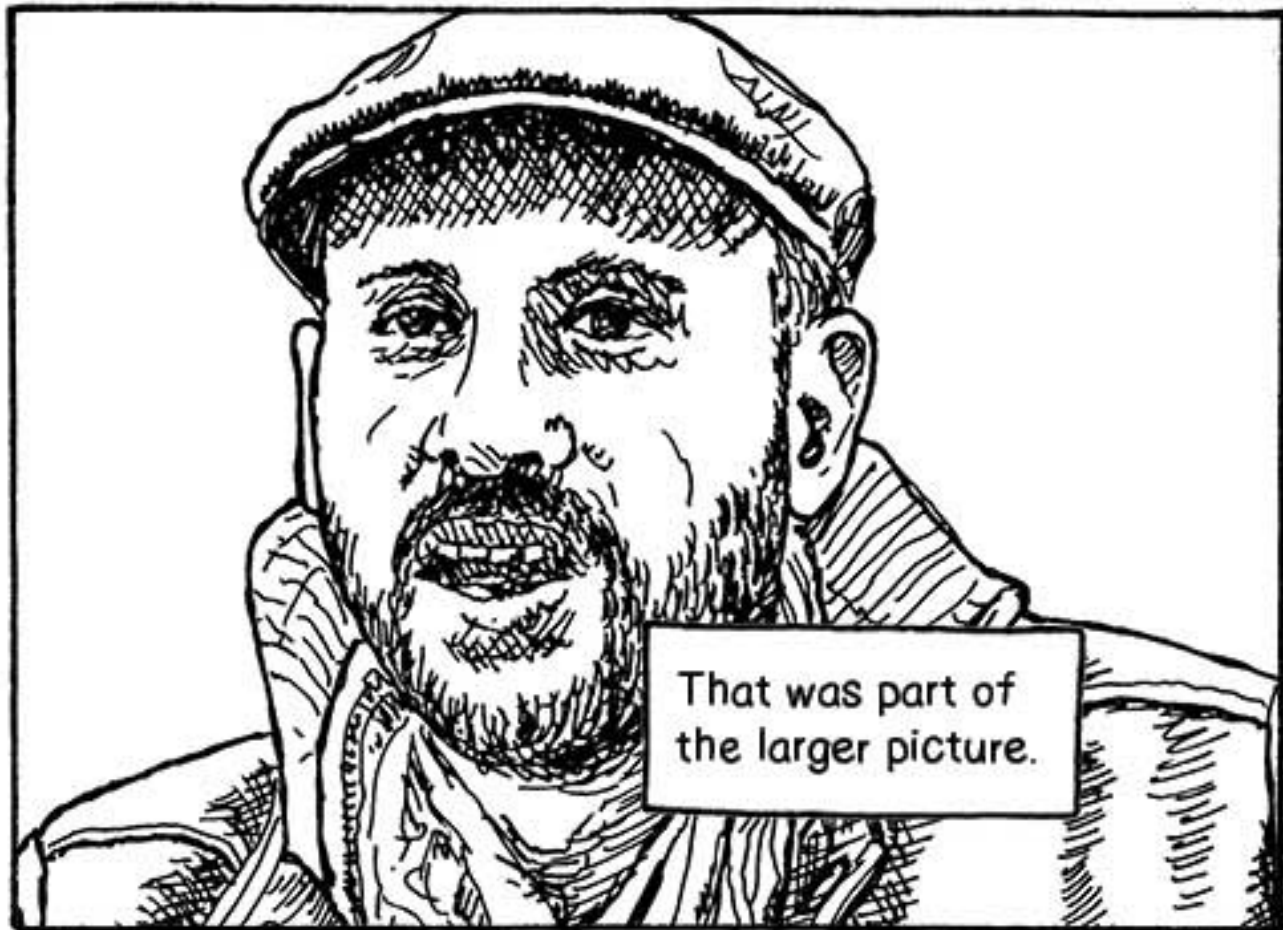
Now you have the whole region vomiting, puking, and in an uproar.



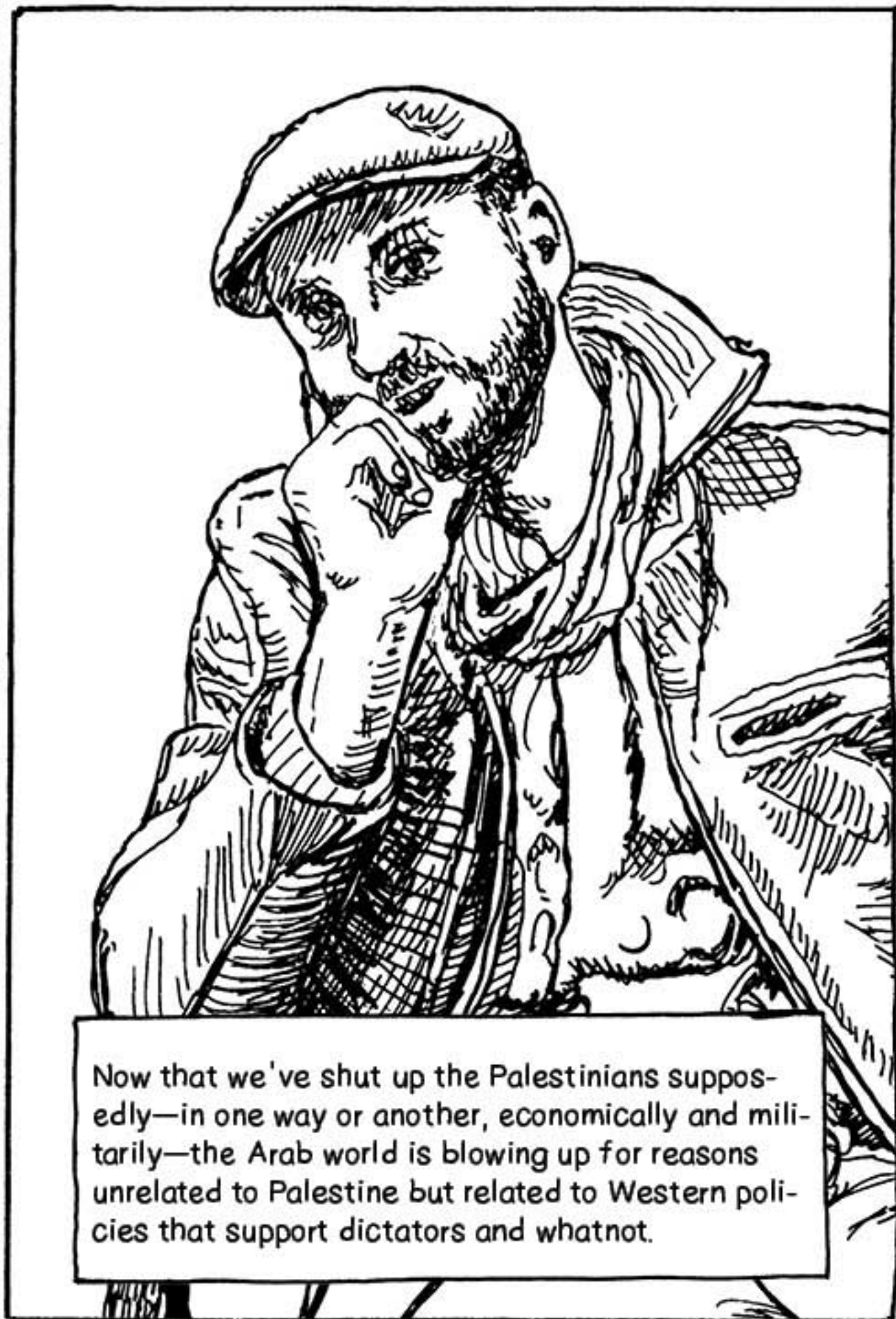
The money can't just all be given to the Palestinians anymore.



We were shutting up Palestine so that the rest of the Arab world wouldn't blow up.



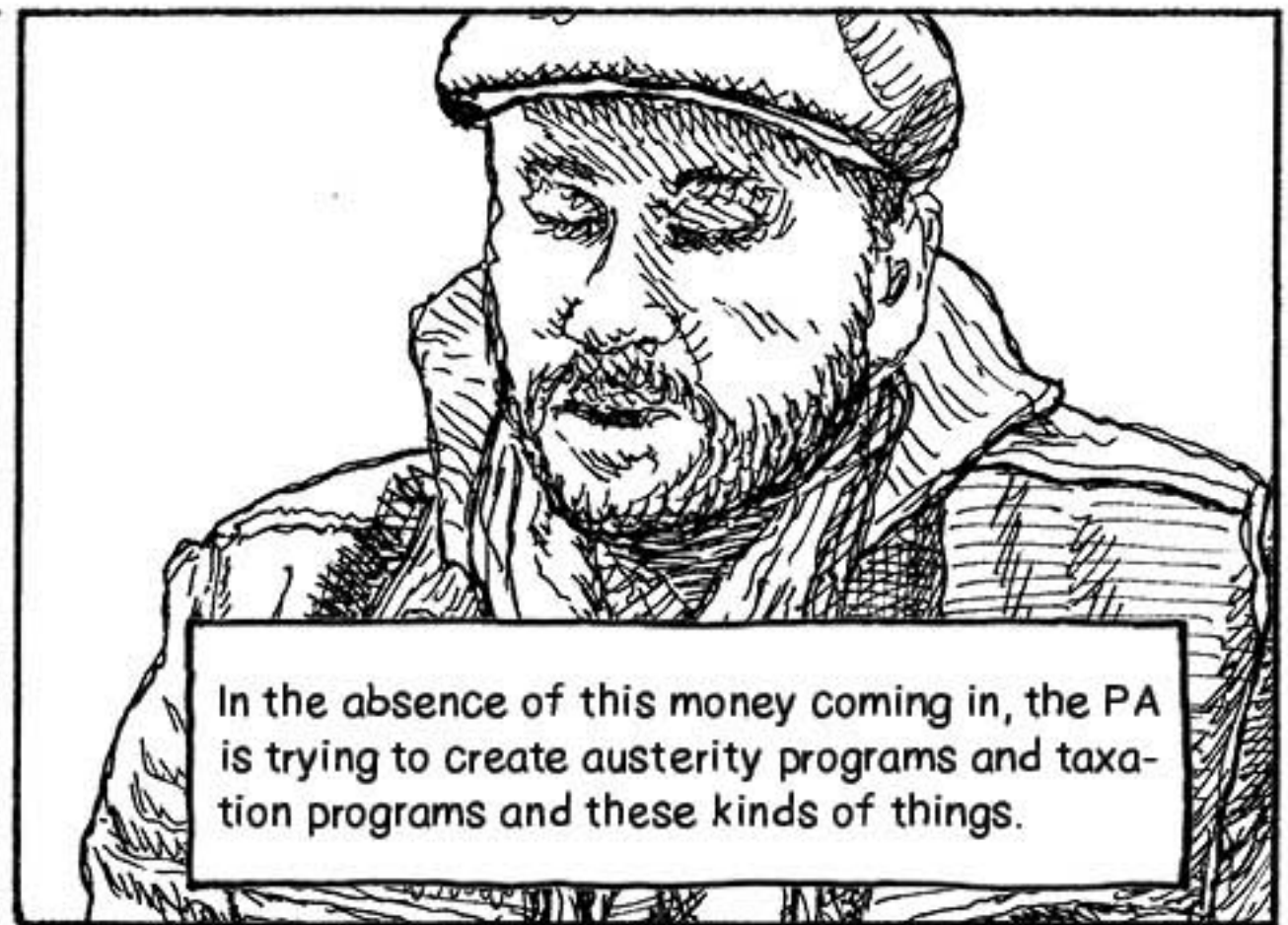
That was part of the larger picture.



Now that we've shut up the Palestinians supposedly—in one way or another, economically and militarily—the Arab world is blowing up for reasons unrelated to Palestine but related to Western policies that support dictators and whatnot.



Palestine is no longer a priority, so these rents are weakening.



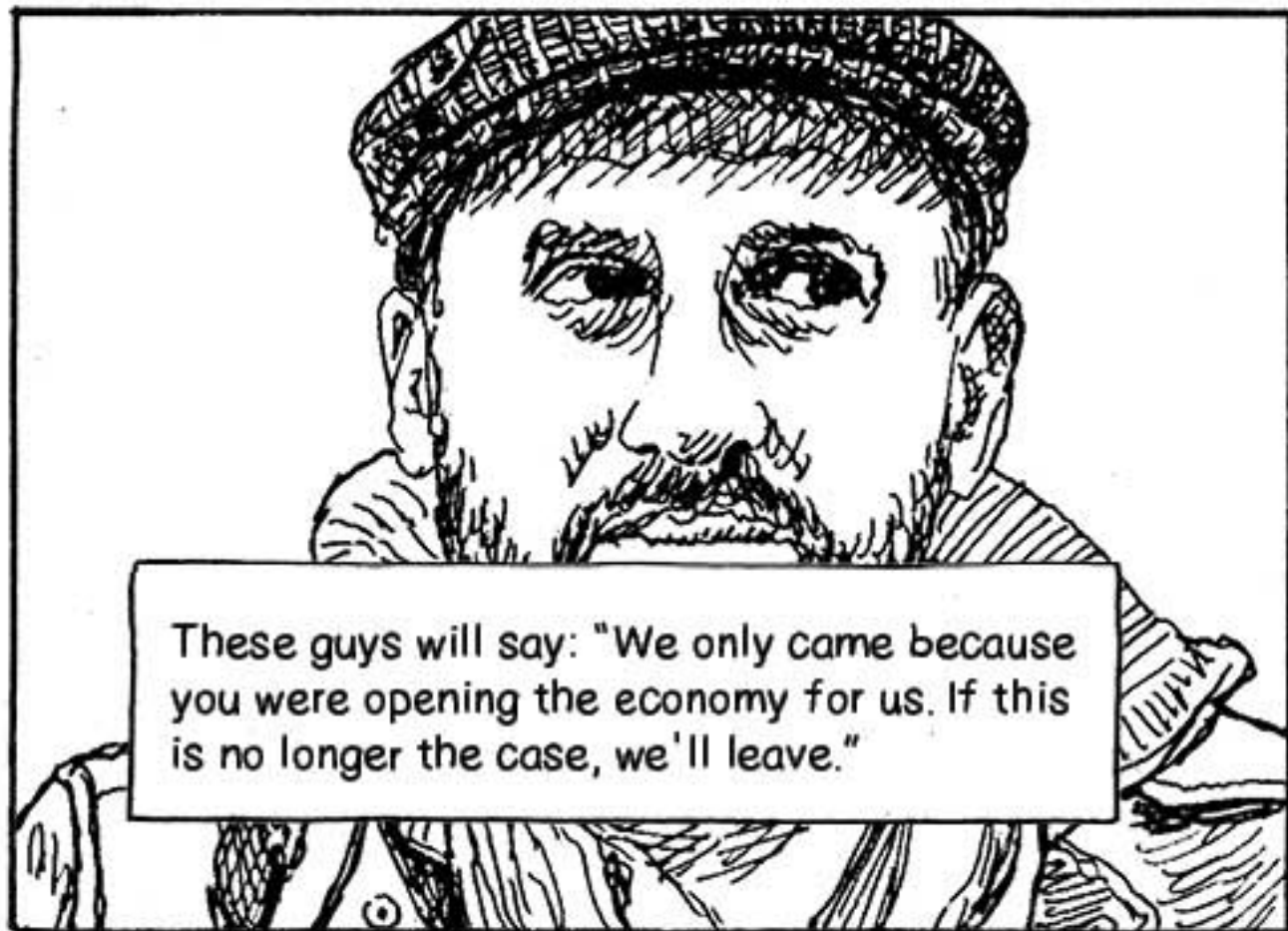
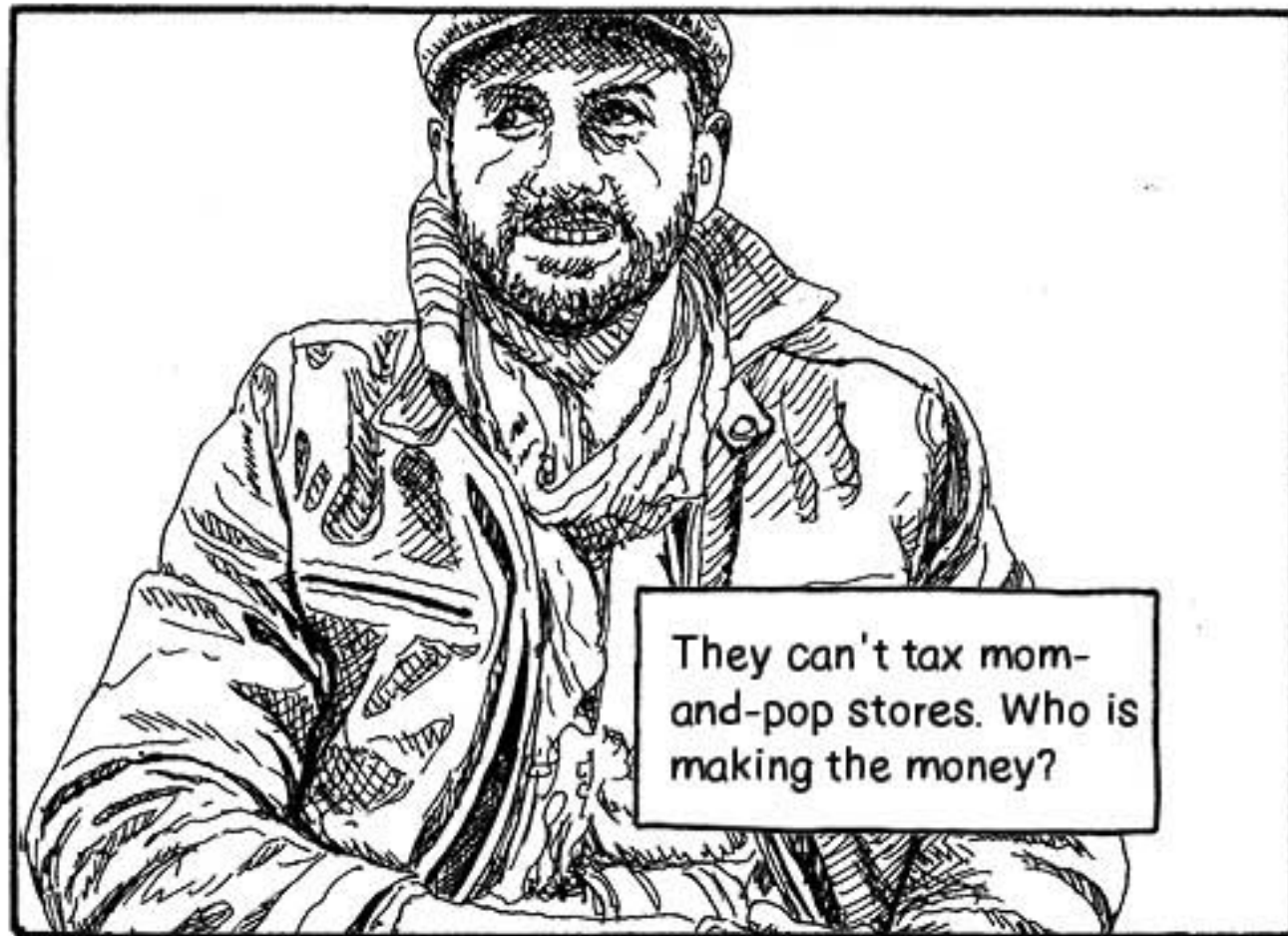
In the absence of this money coming in, the PA is trying to create austerity programs and taxation programs and these kinds of things.

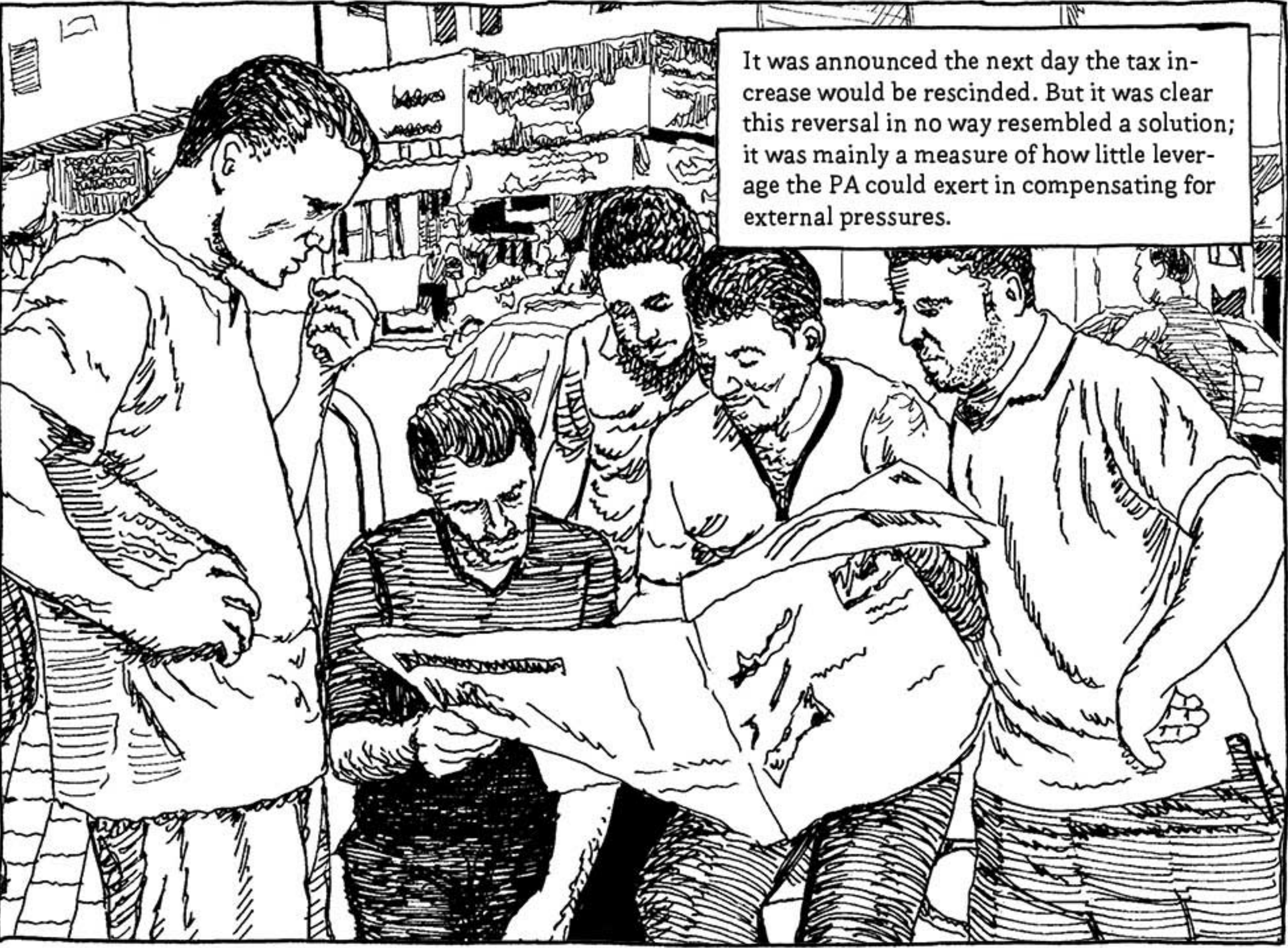


And now they're running into opposition, because in the end not even Fatah supports them.



I mean, who has money?





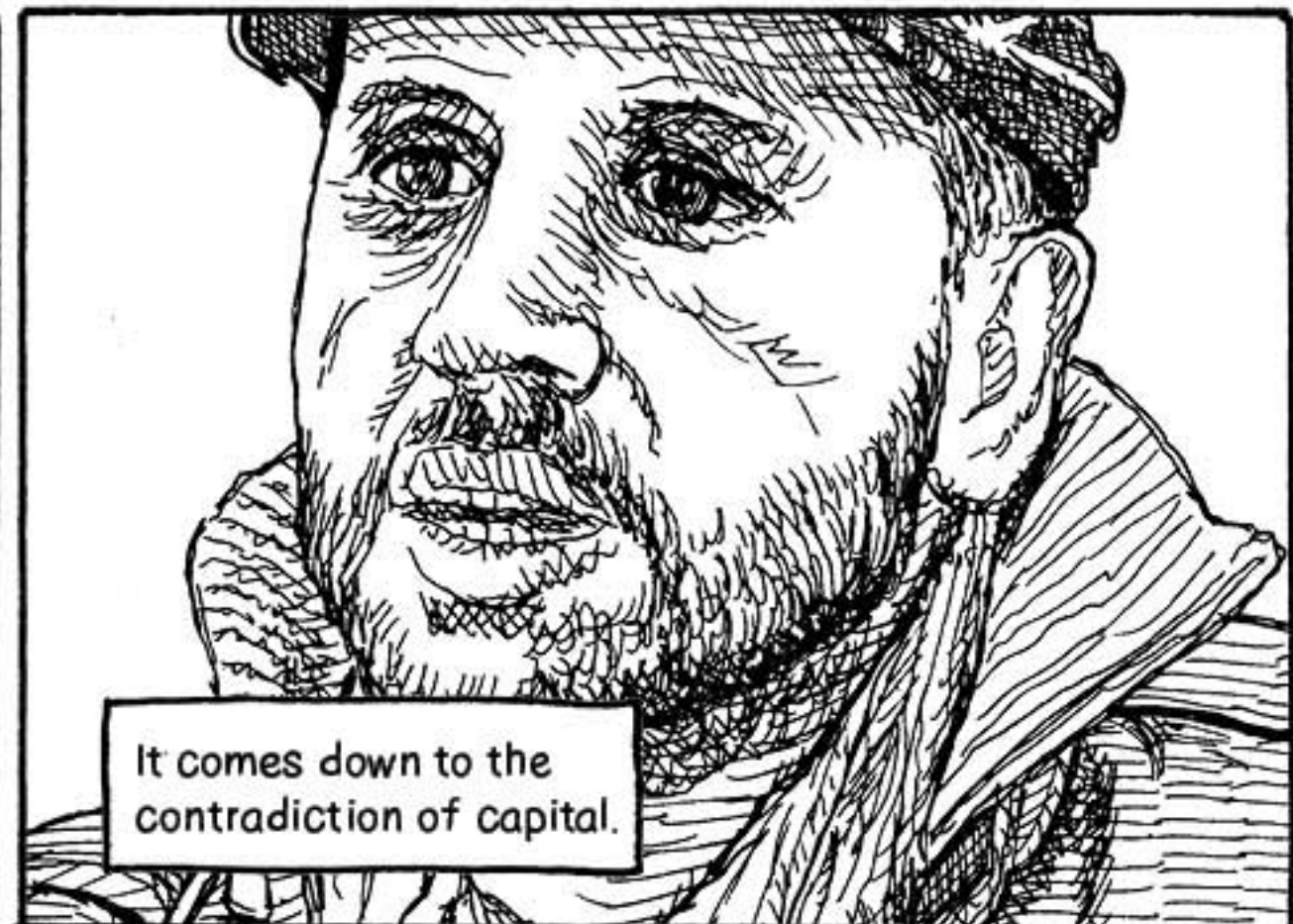
It was announced the next day the tax increase would be rescinded. But it was clear this reversal in no way resembled a solution; it was mainly a measure of how little leverage the PA could exert in compensating for external pressures.



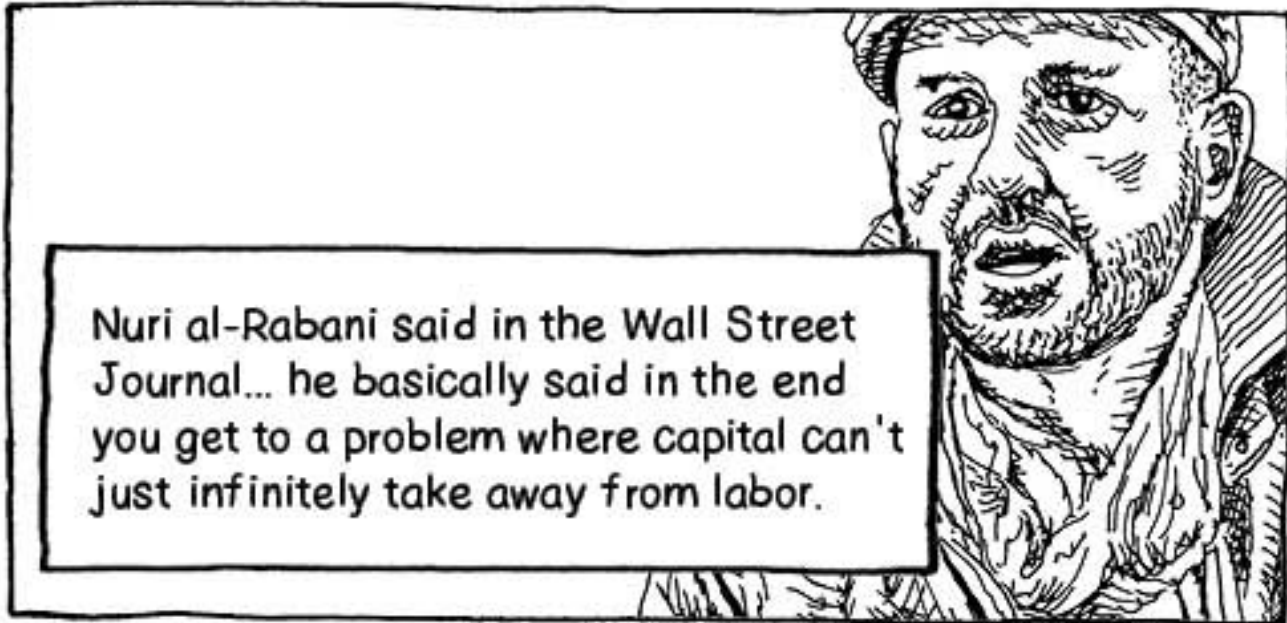
In the long term, there are no fundamental changes. I mean, economic policies are coordinated and there are tight regulations from the international community and this is what buys the legitimacy of the PA.



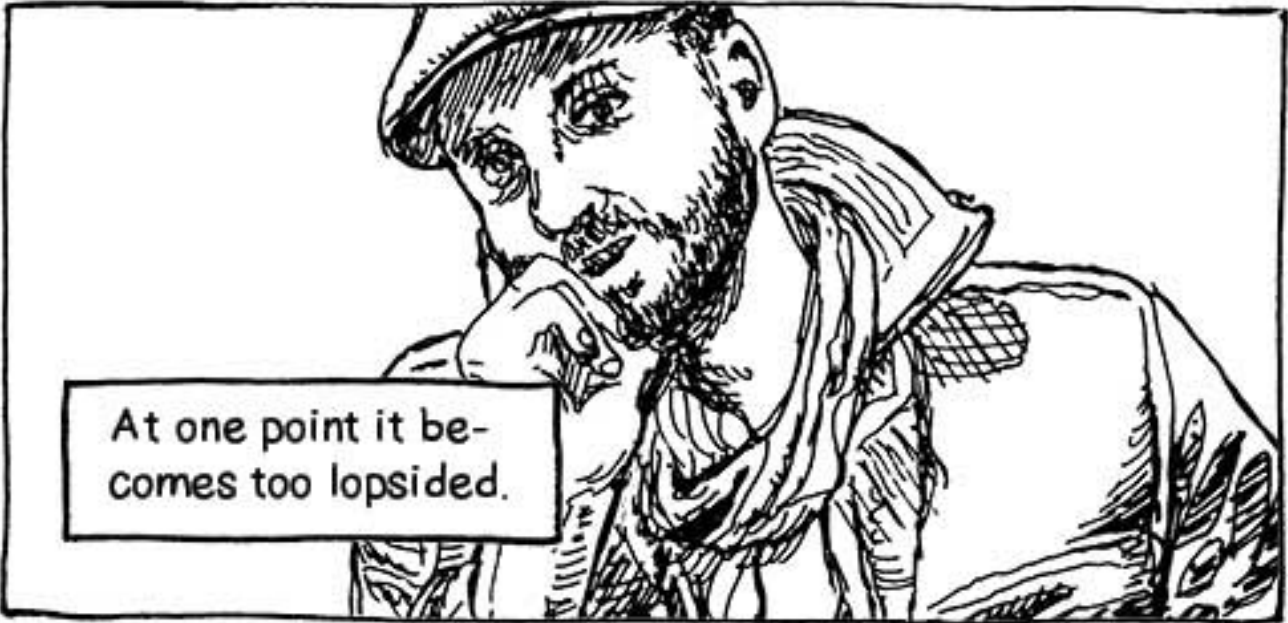
It's like they get the thumbs-up approval rating of the Quartet every quarter or half-year.



It comes down to the contradiction of capital.



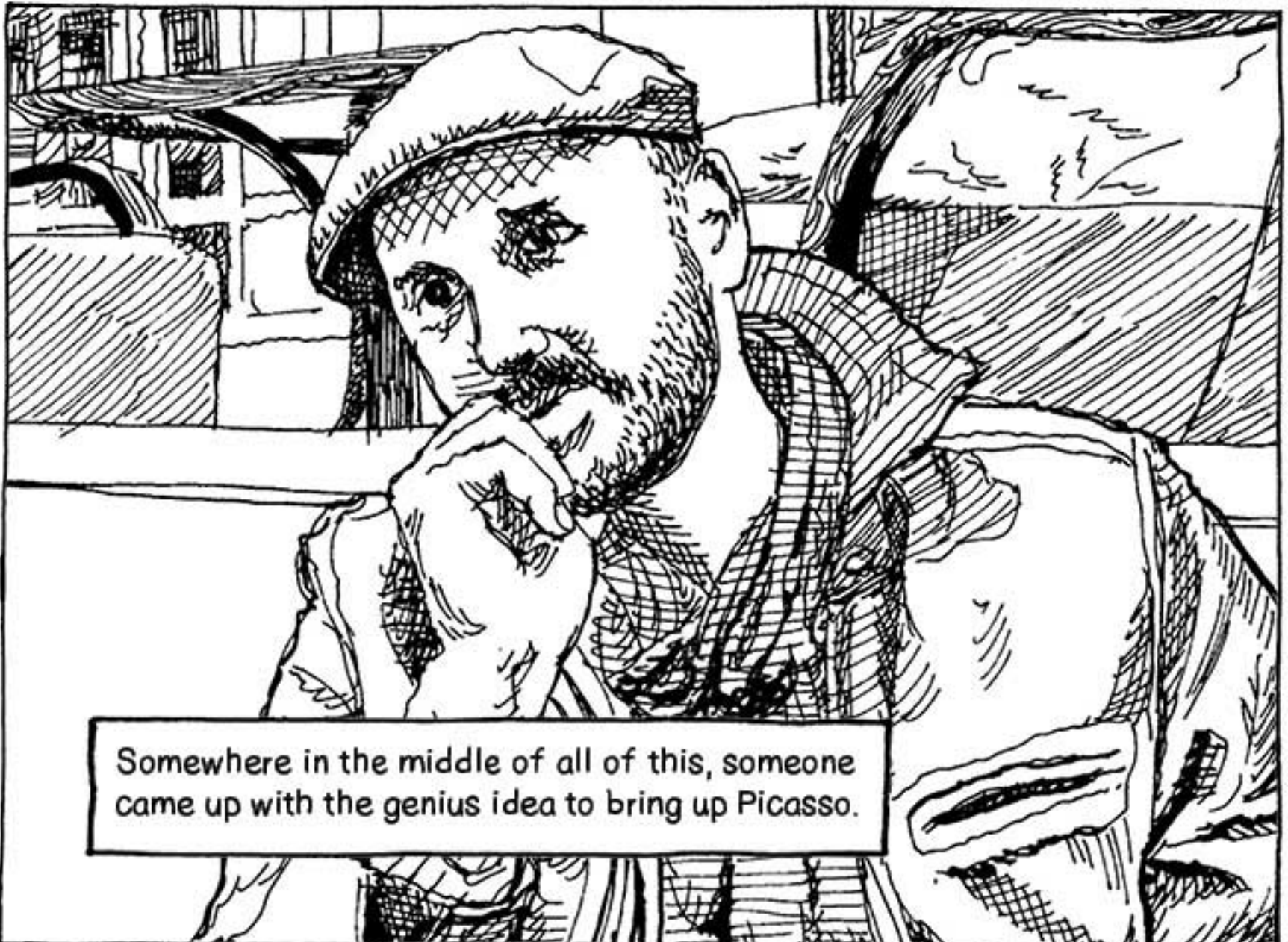
Nuri al-Rabani said in the Wall Street Journal... he basically said in the end you get to a problem where capital can't just infinitely take away from labor.



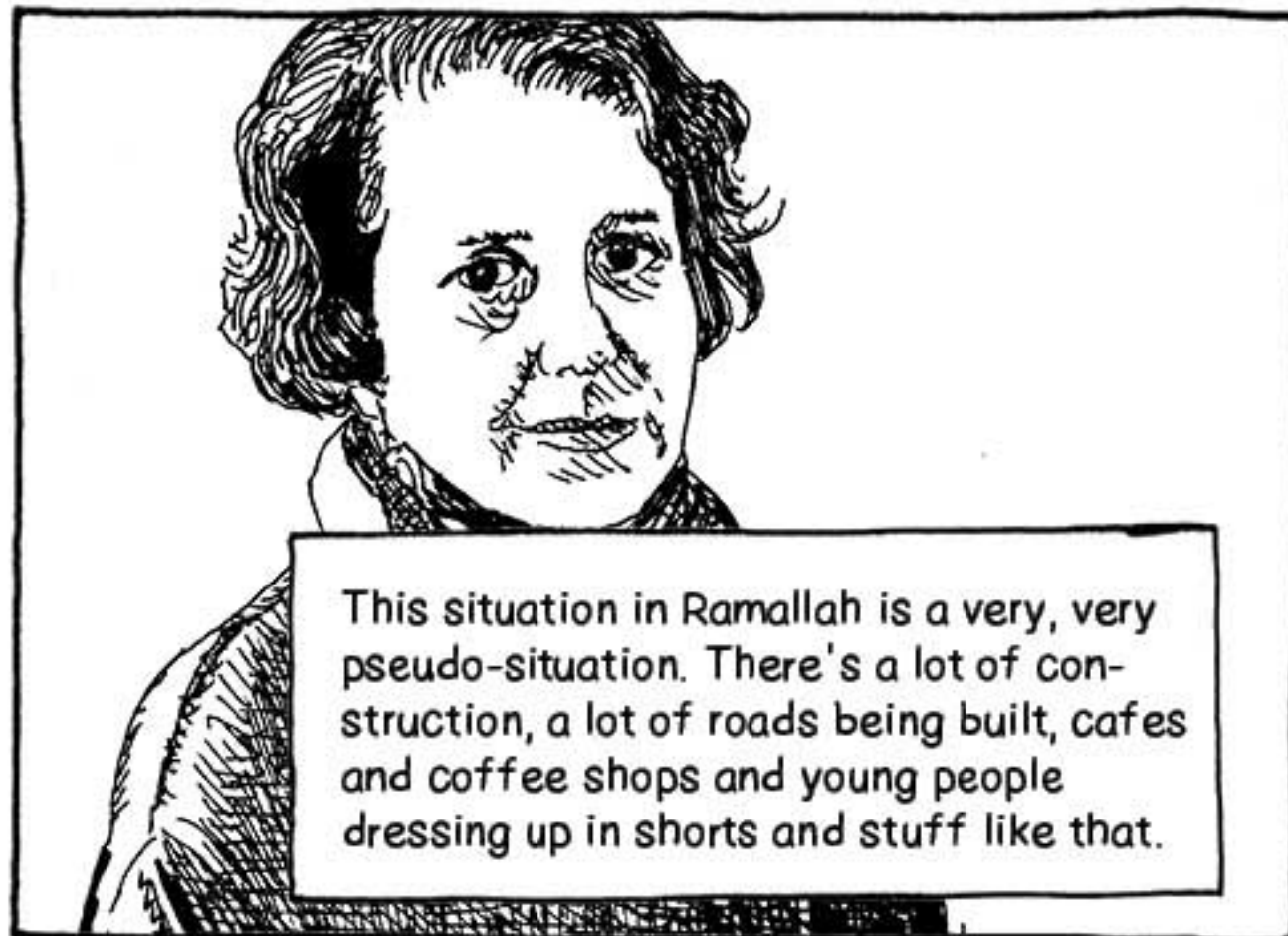
At one point it becomes too lopsided.



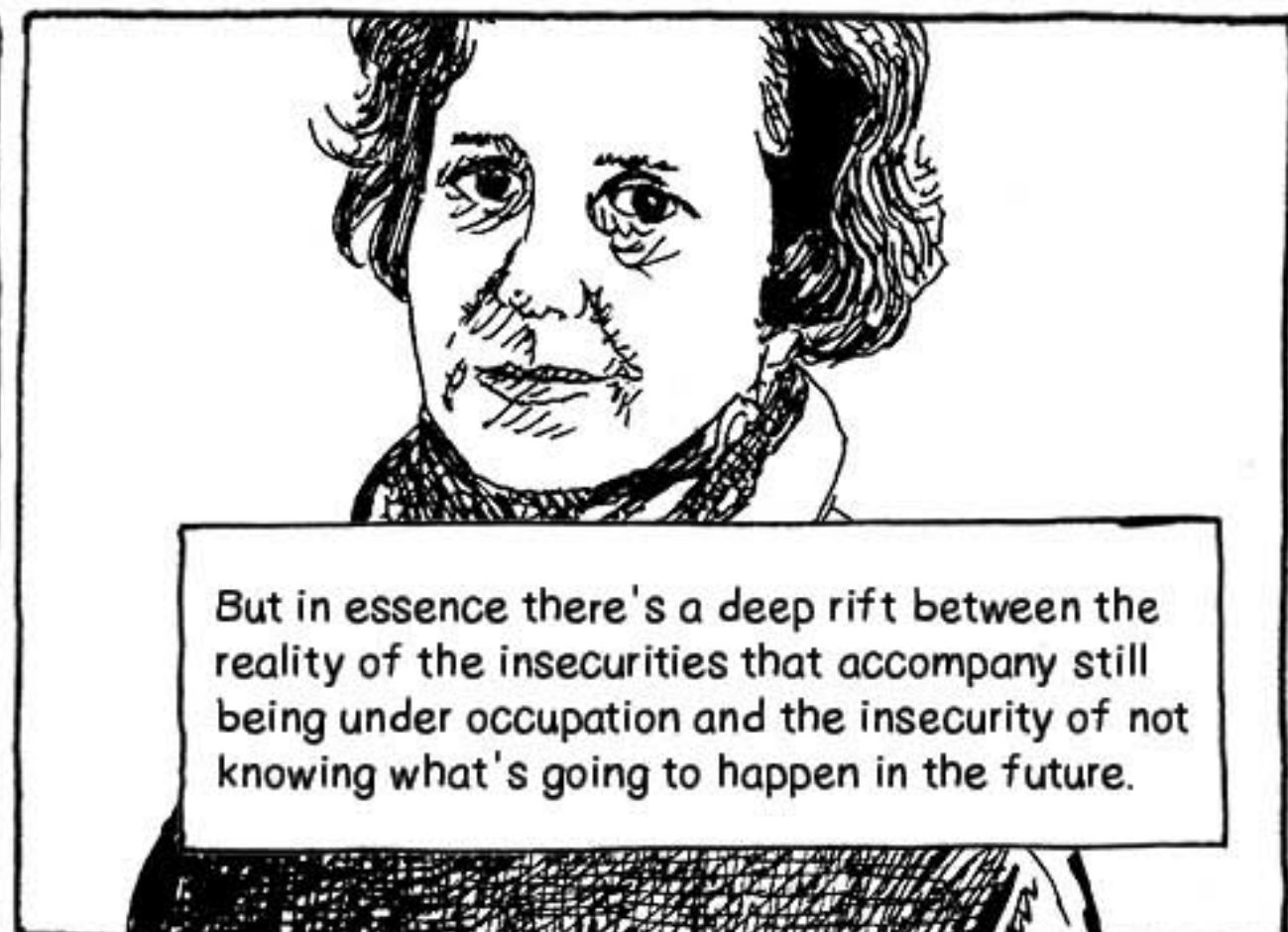
So, they're creating a mess.



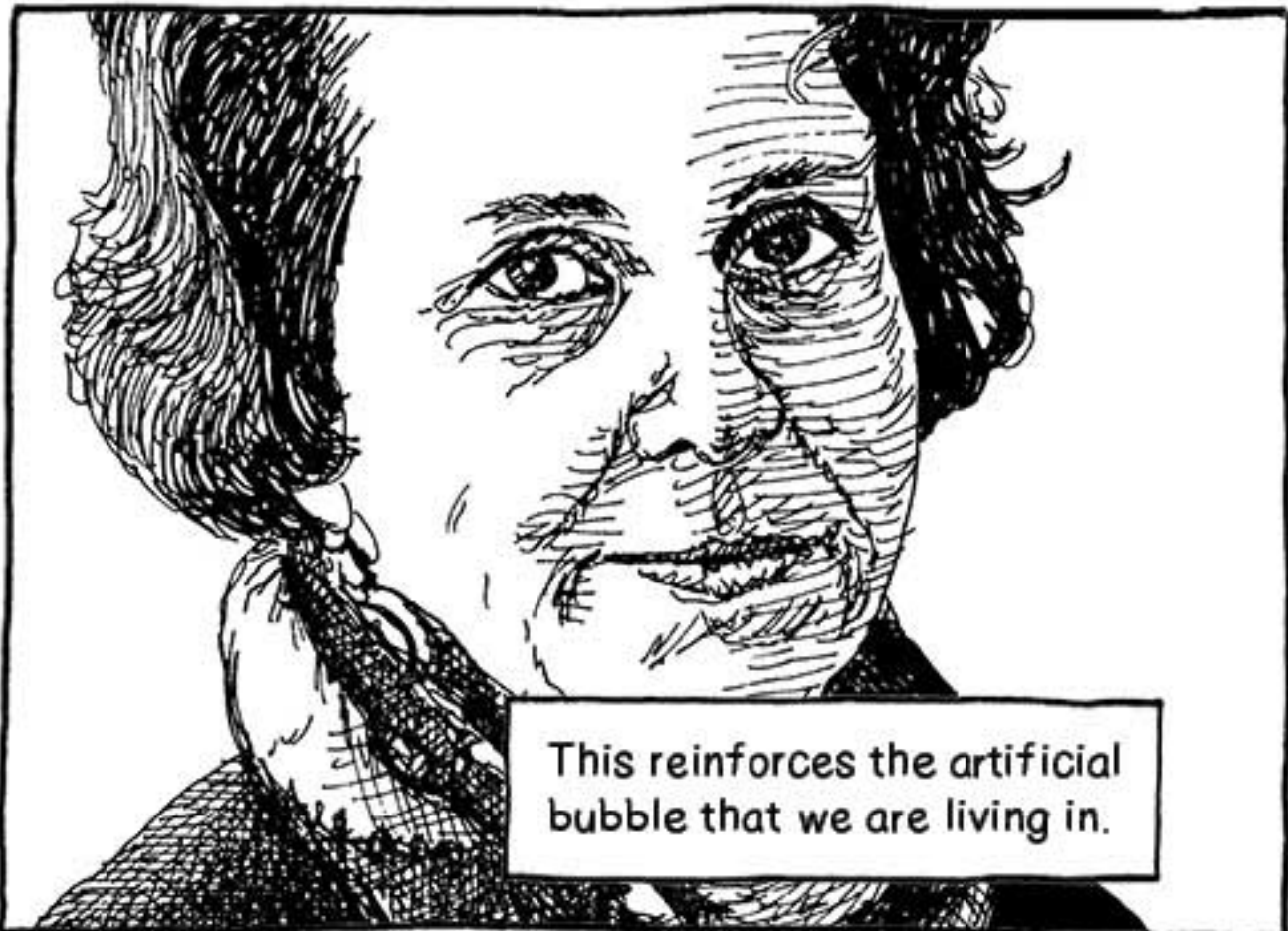
Somewhere in the middle of all of this, someone came up with the genius idea to bring up Picasso.



This situation in Ramallah is a very, very pseudo-situation. There's a lot of construction, a lot of roads being built, cafes and coffee shops and young people dressing up in shorts and stuff like that.



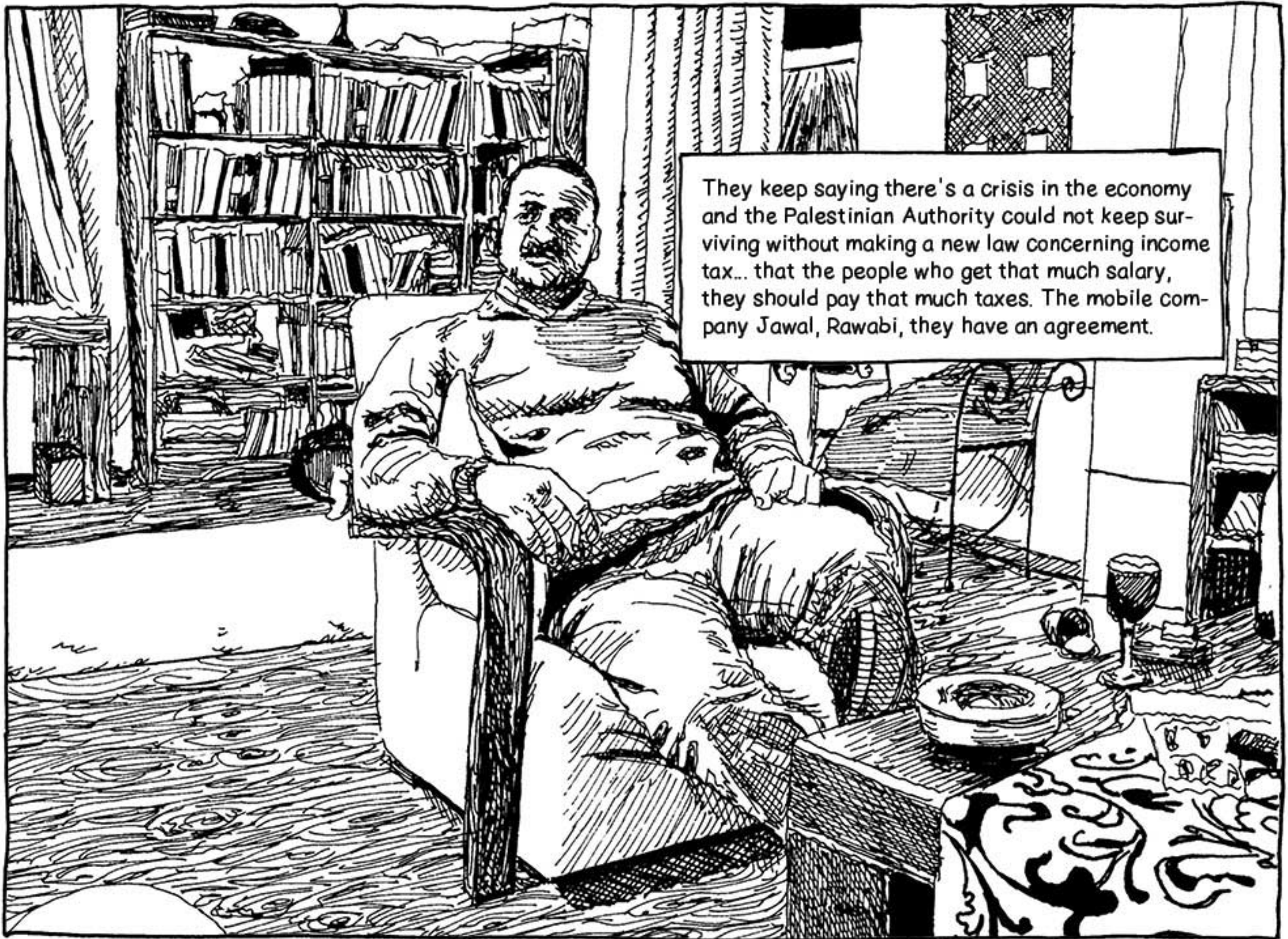
But in essence there's a deep rift between the reality of the insecurities that accompany still being under occupation and the insecurity of not knowing what's going to happen in the future.




This reinforces the artificial bubble that we are living in.



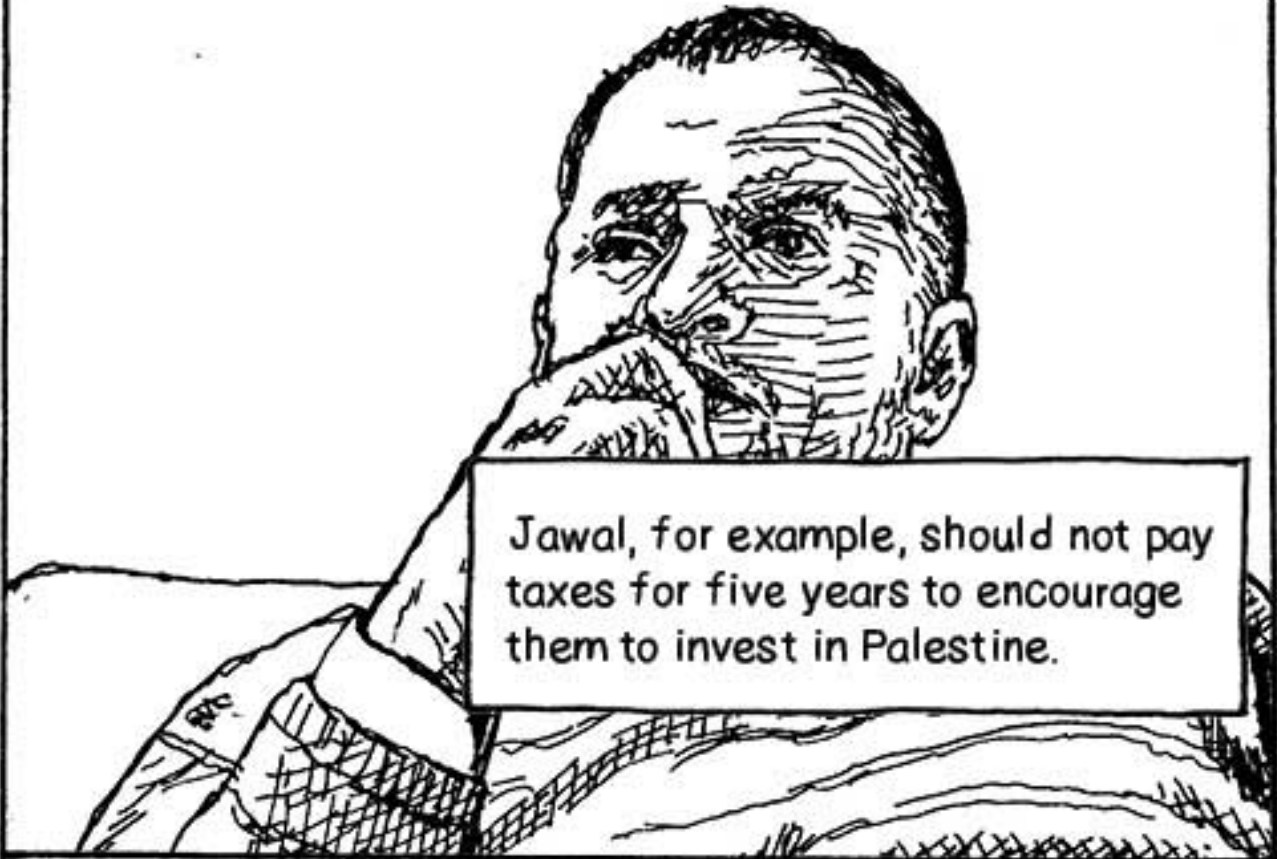
They're a national bourgeoisie and they want their little place in the sun, like any bourgeoisie.



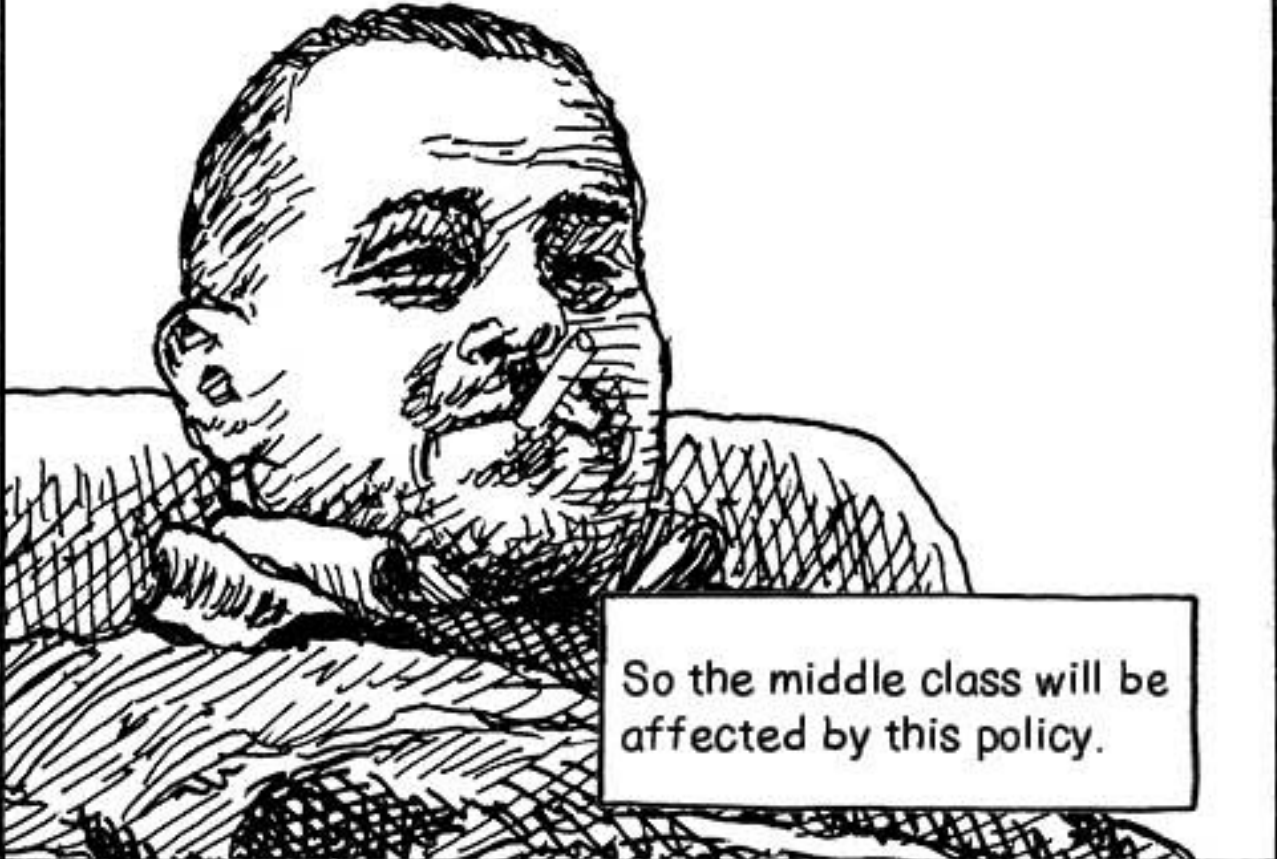
They keep saying there's a crisis in the economy and the Palestinian Authority could not keep surviving without making a new law concerning income tax... that the people who get that much salary, they should pay that much taxes. The mobile company Jawal, Rawabi, they have an agreement.



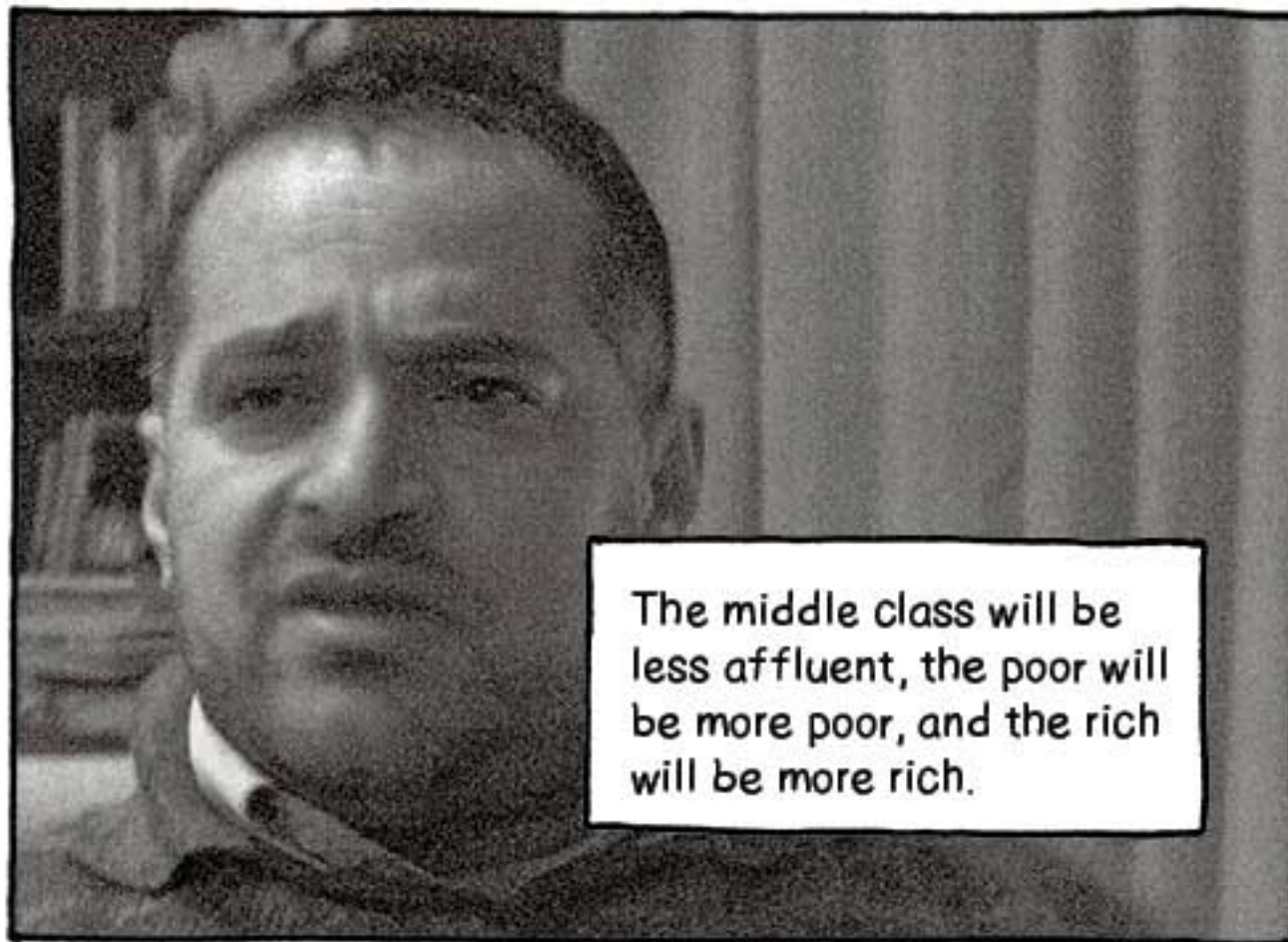
There's the law but the exception is there's an agreement with these big three, four, five companies that—this is to encourage investment—they should not pay income tax for five years.



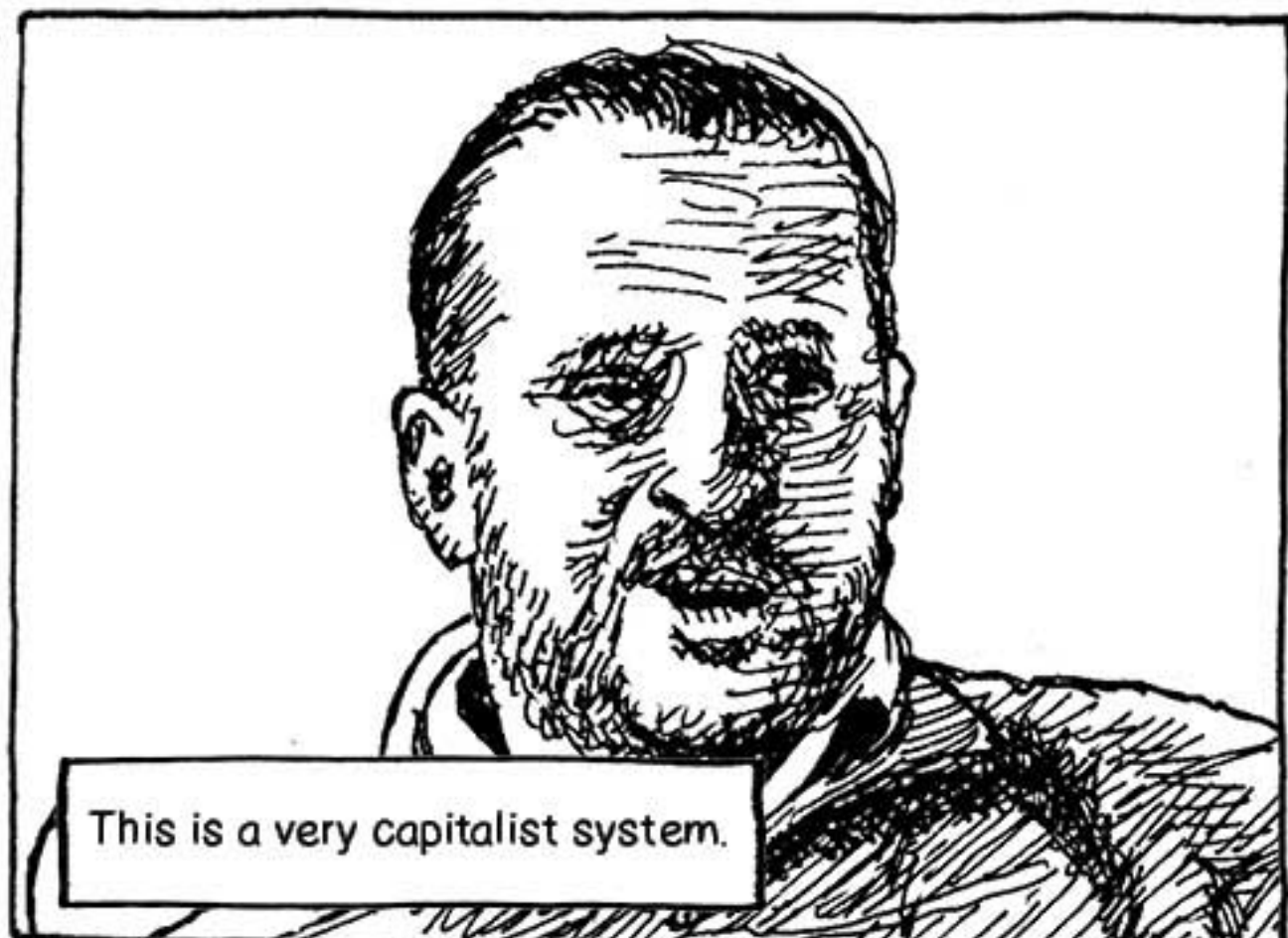
Jawal, for example, should not pay taxes for five years to encourage them to invest in Palestine.



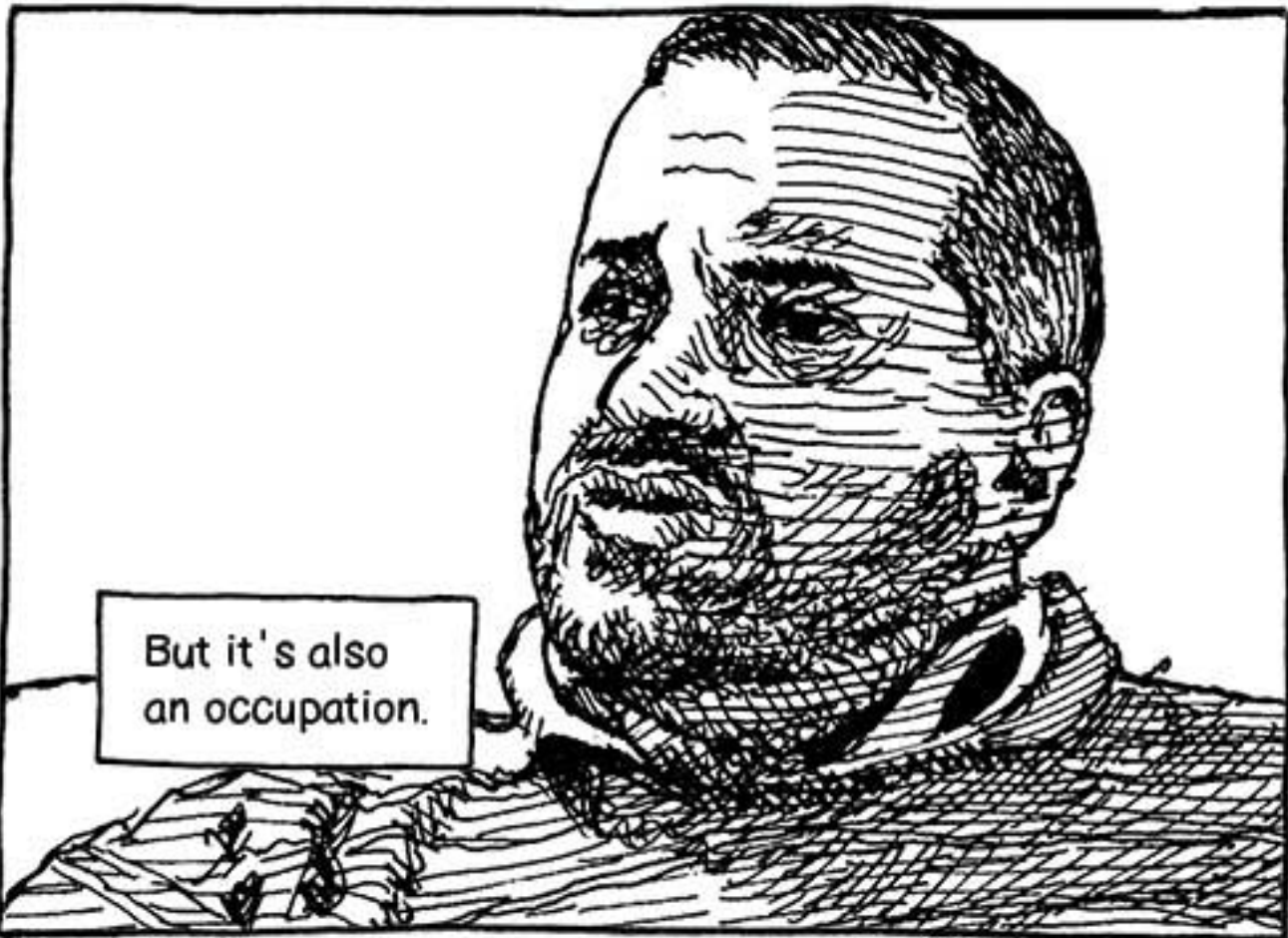
So the middle class will be affected by this policy.



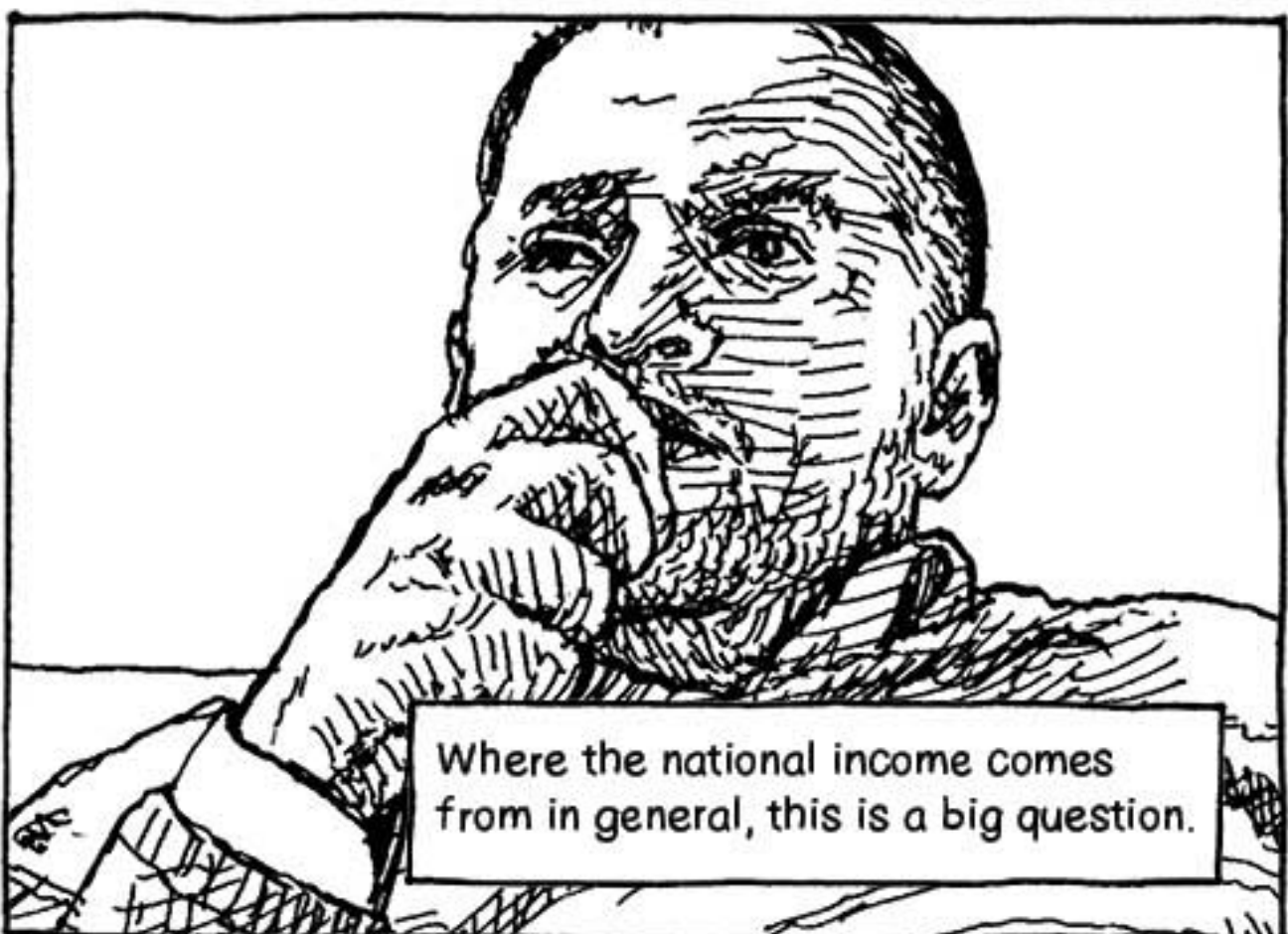
The middle class will be less affluent, the poor will be more poor, and the rich will be more rich.



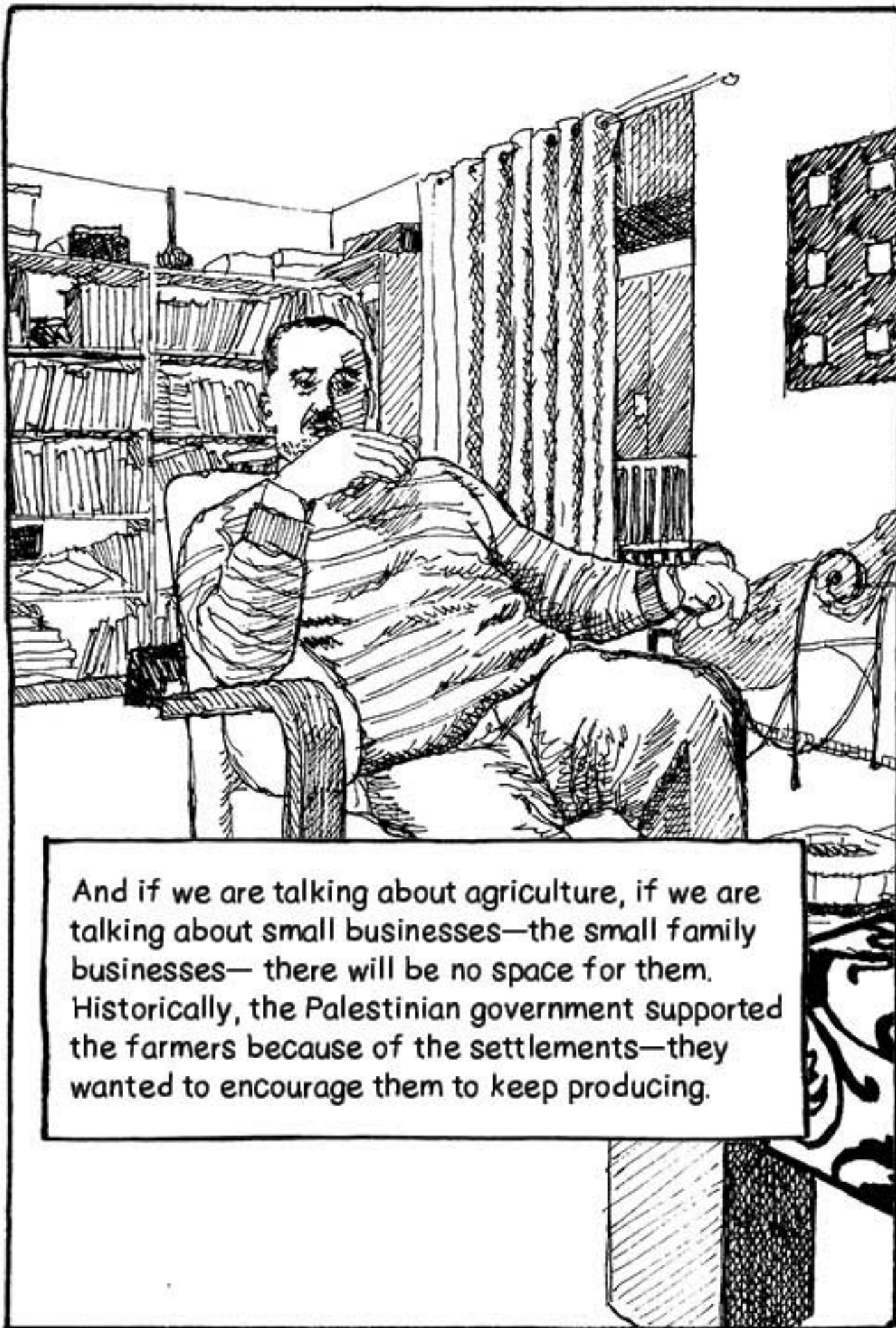
This is a very capitalist system.



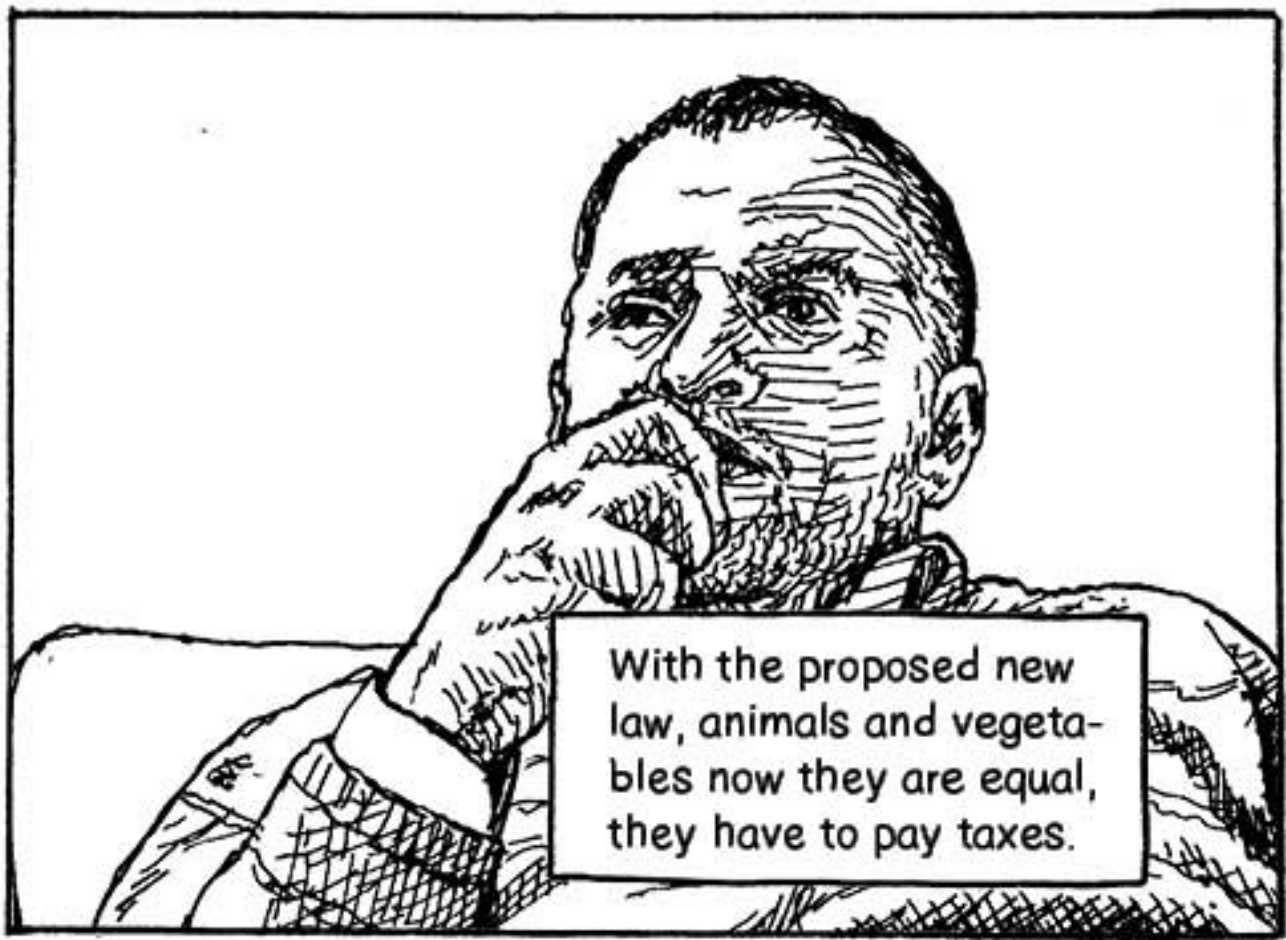
But it's also an occupation.



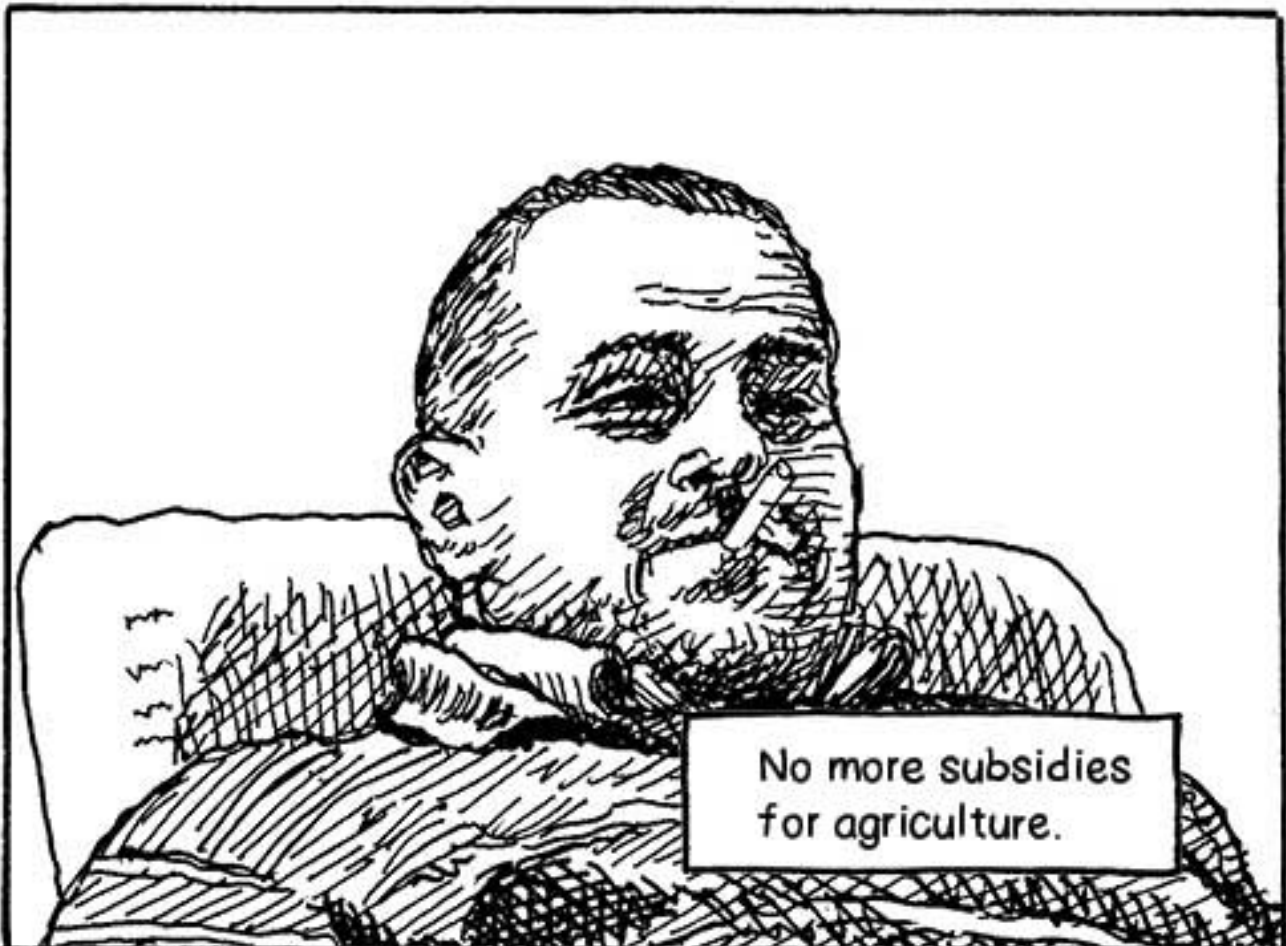
Where the national income comes from in general, this is a big question.



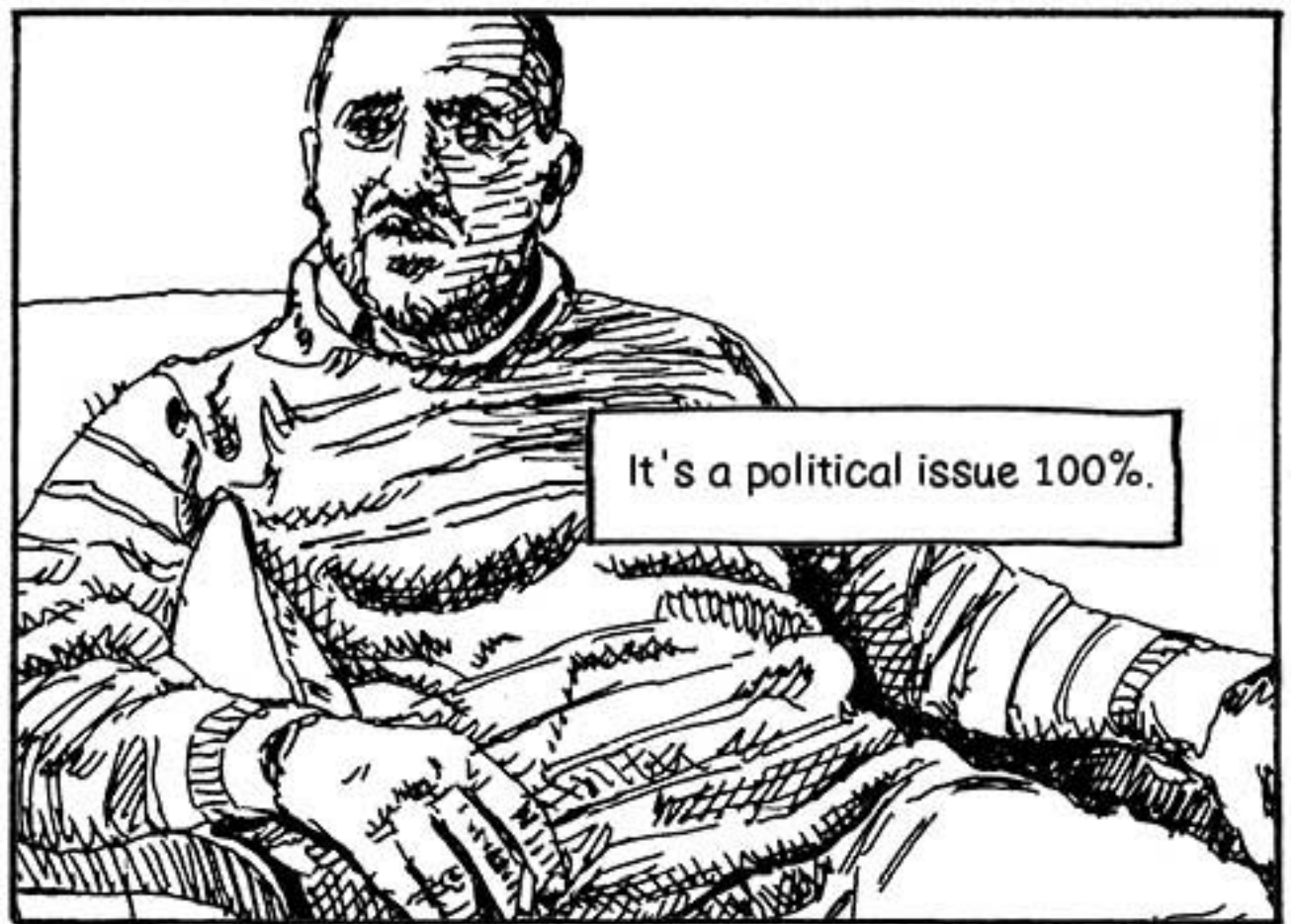
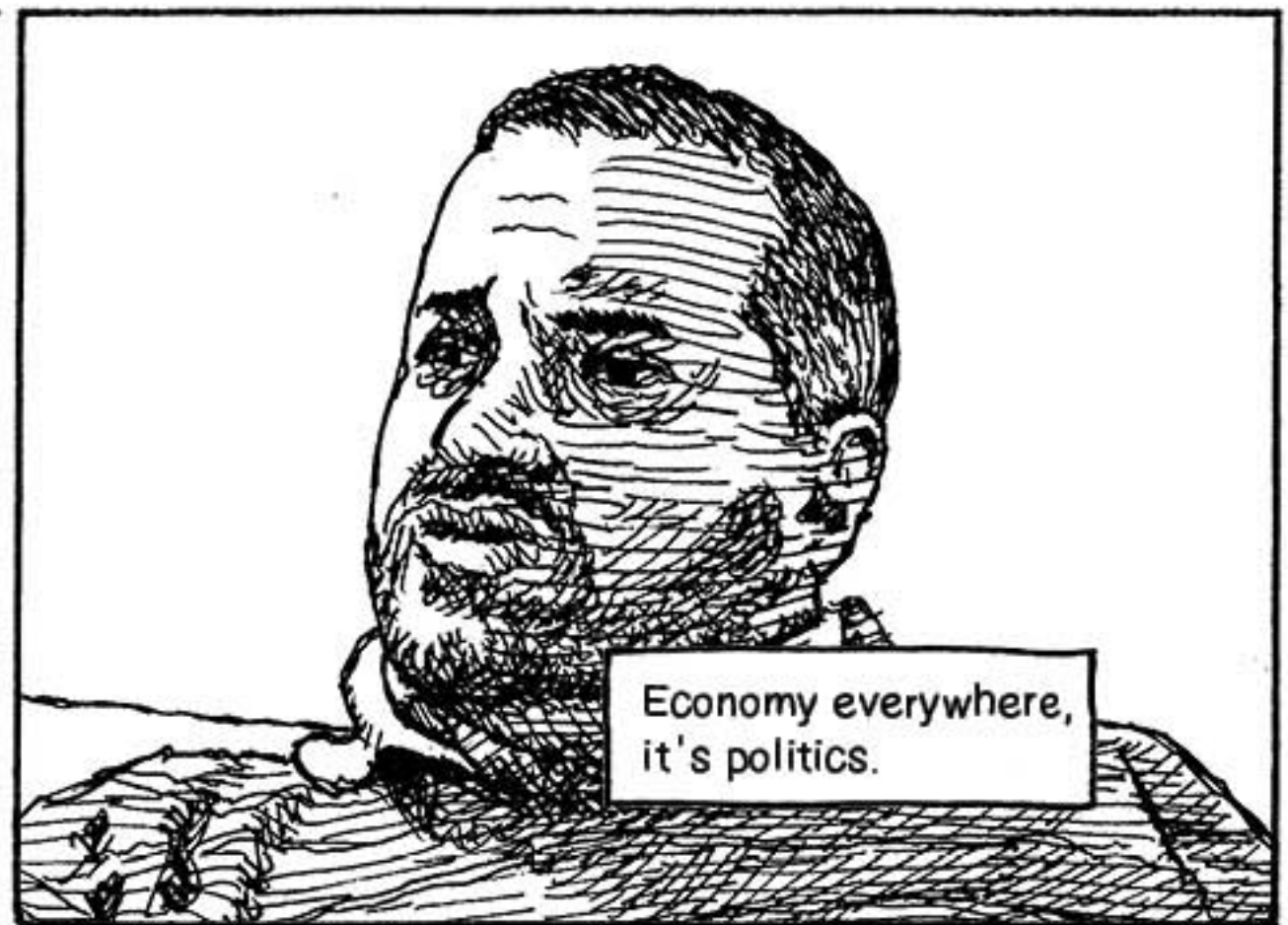
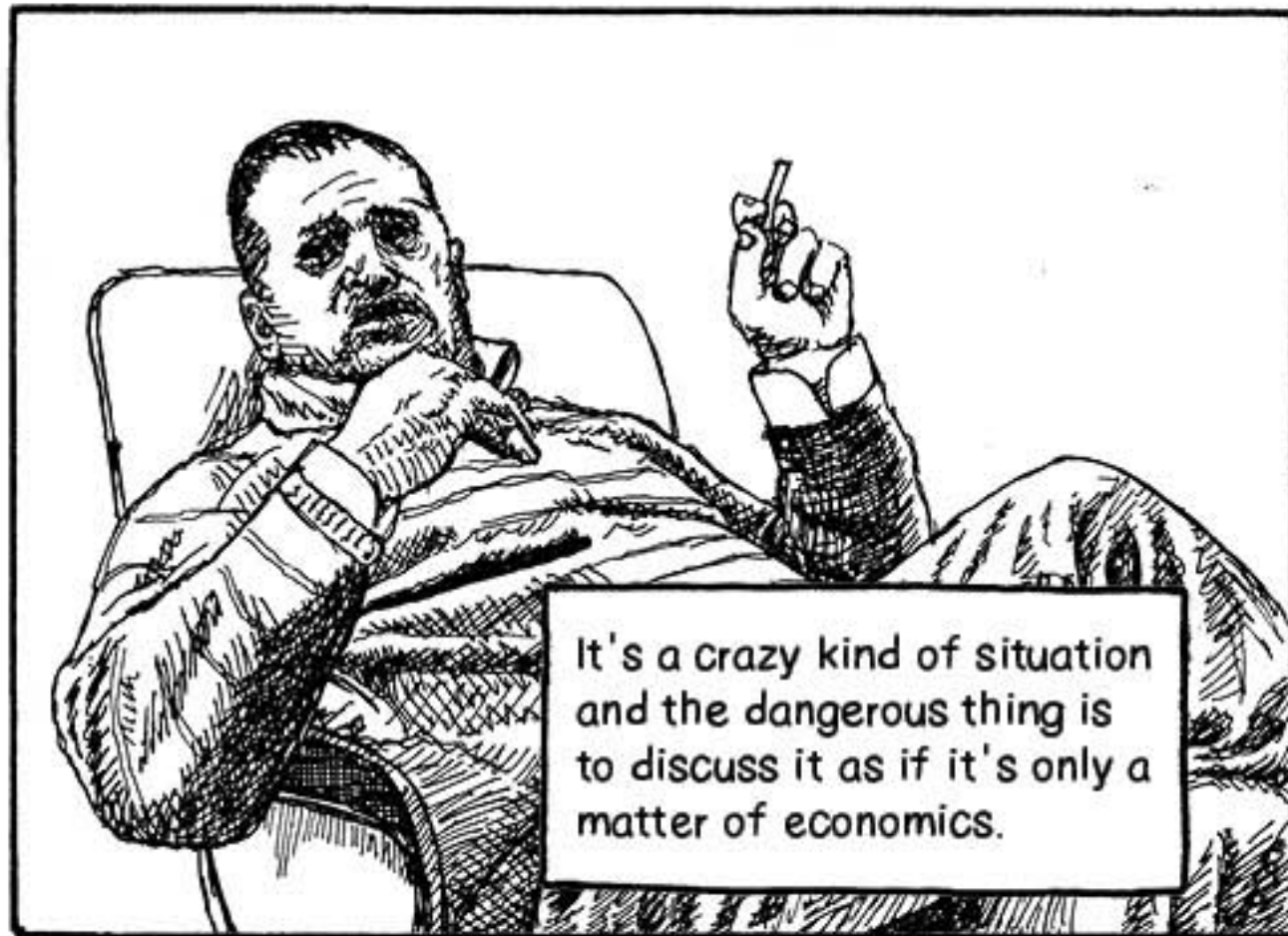
And if we are talking about agriculture, if we are talking about small businesses—the small family businesses— there will be no space for them. Historically, the Palestinian government supported the farmers because of the settlements—they wanted to encourage them to keep producing.

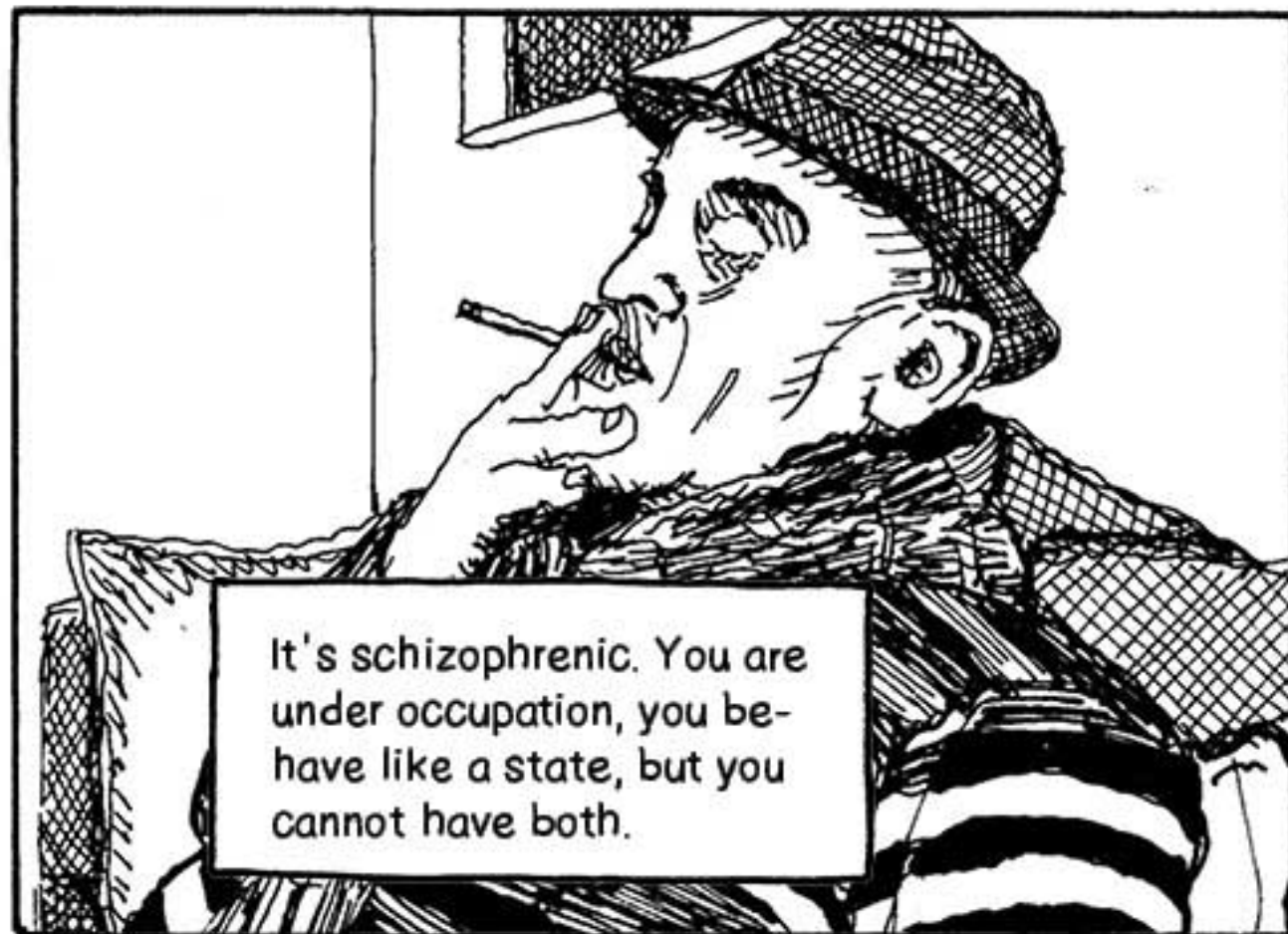


With the proposed new law, animals and vegetables now they are equal, they have to pay taxes.

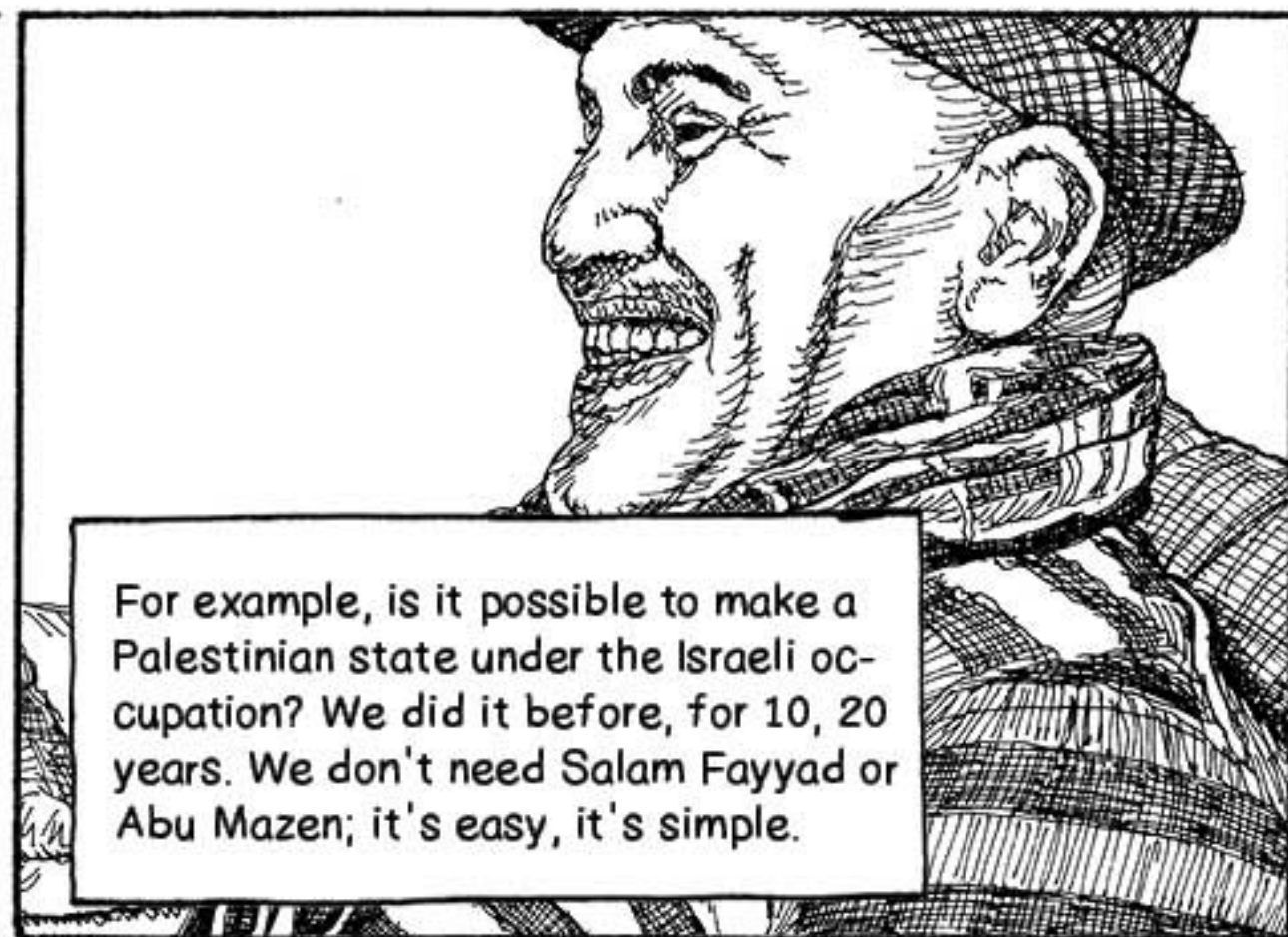


No more subsidies for agriculture.

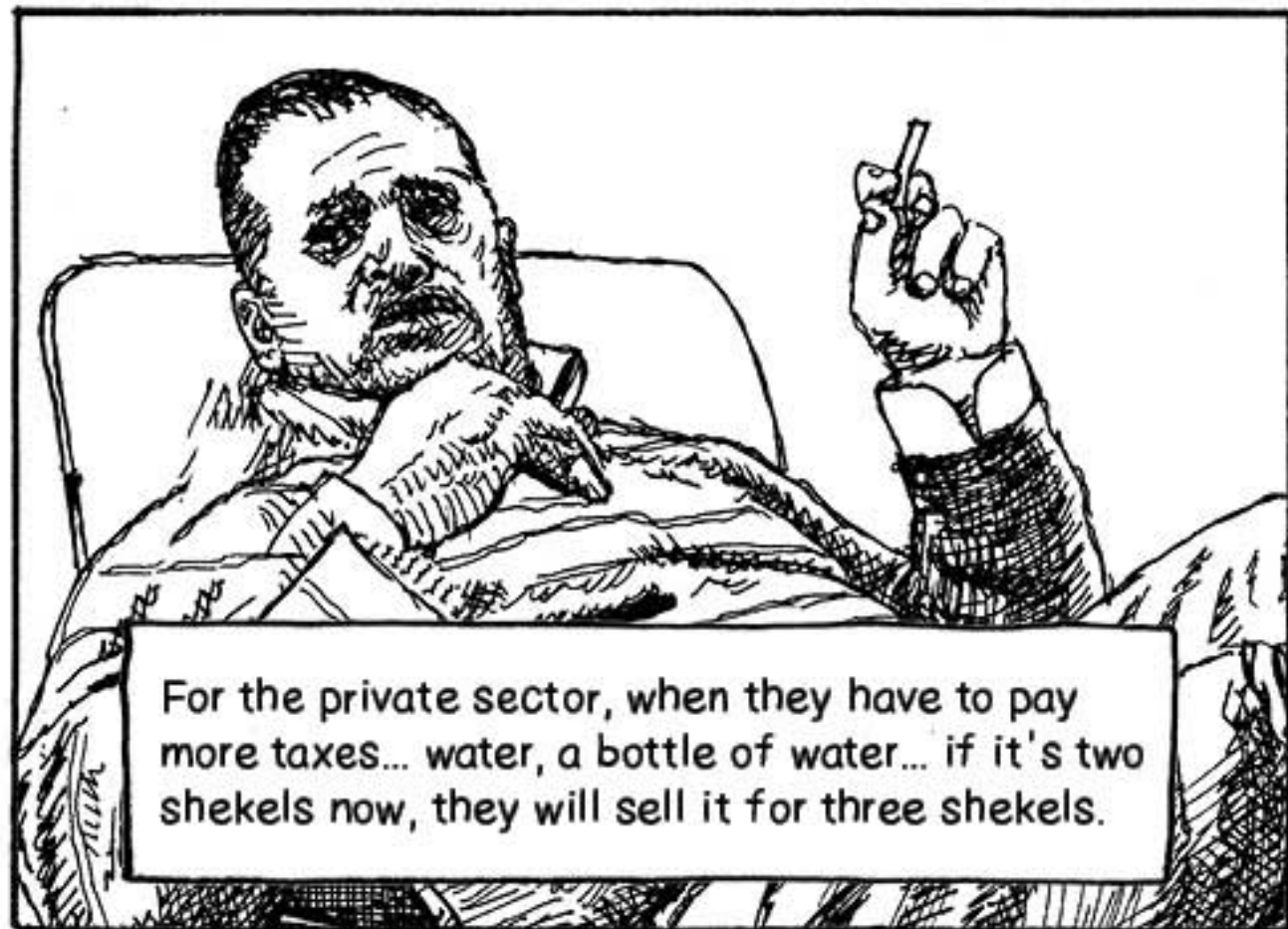




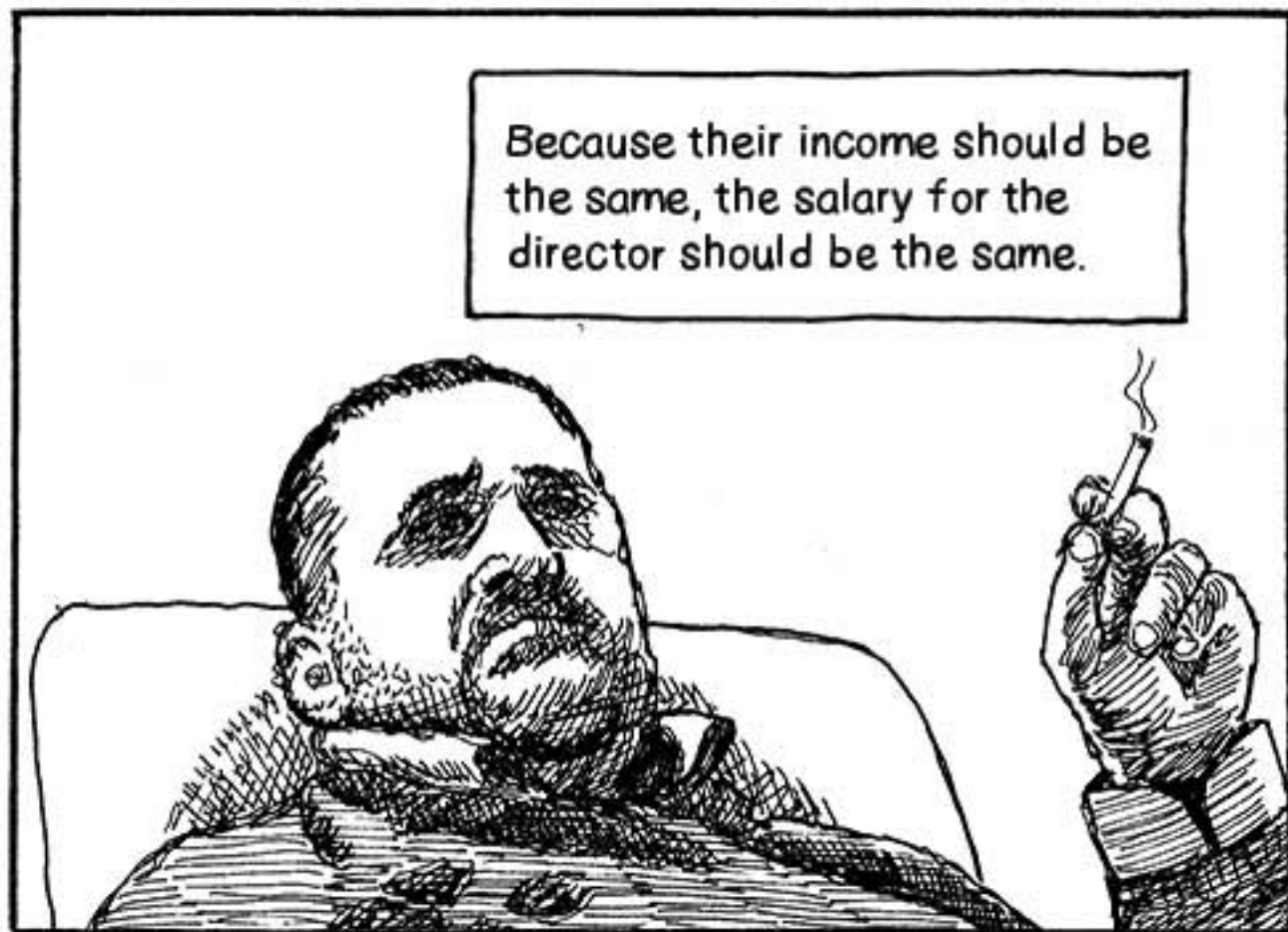
It's schizophrenic. You are under occupation, you behave like a state, but you cannot have both.



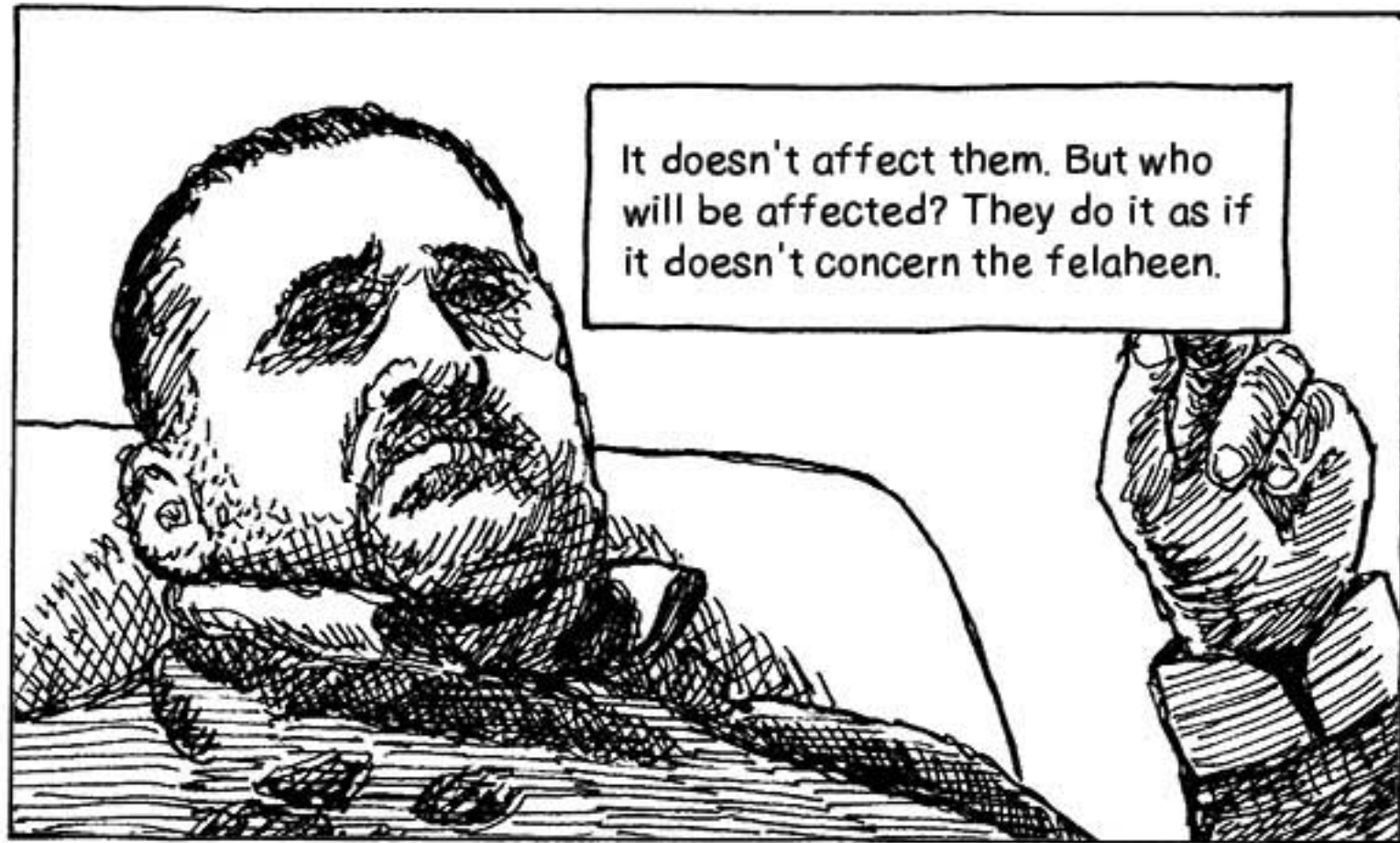
For example, is it possible to make a Palestinian state under the Israeli occupation? We did it before, for 10, 20 years. We don't need Salam Fayyad or Abu Mazen; it's easy, it's simple.



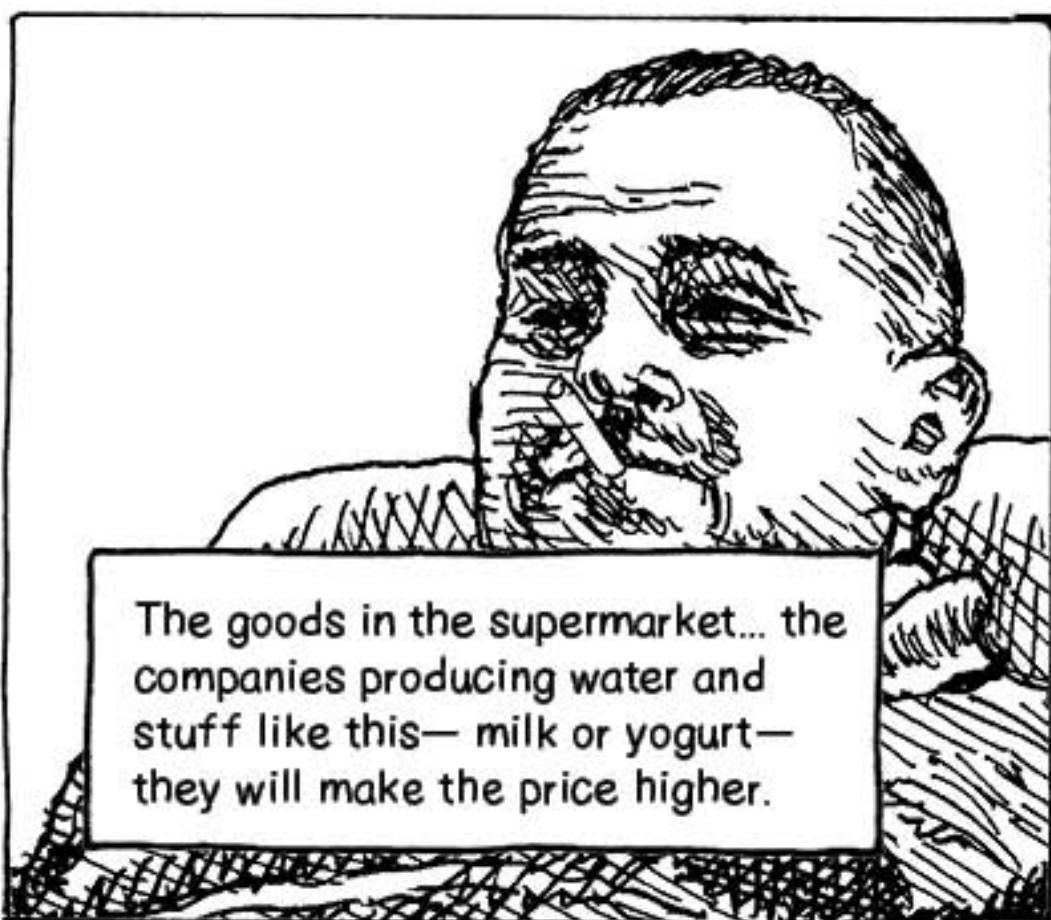
For the private sector, when they have to pay more taxes... water, a bottle of water... if it's two shekels now, they will sell it for three shekels.



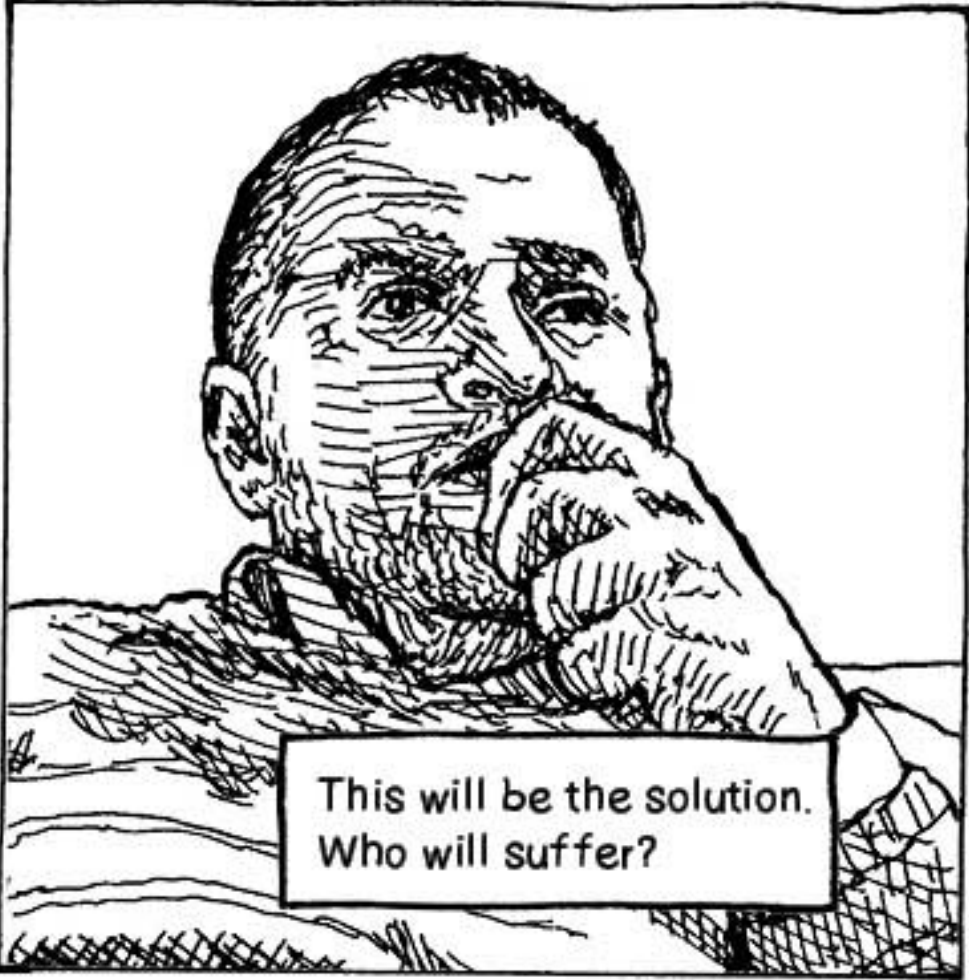
Because their income should be the same, the salary for the director should be the same.



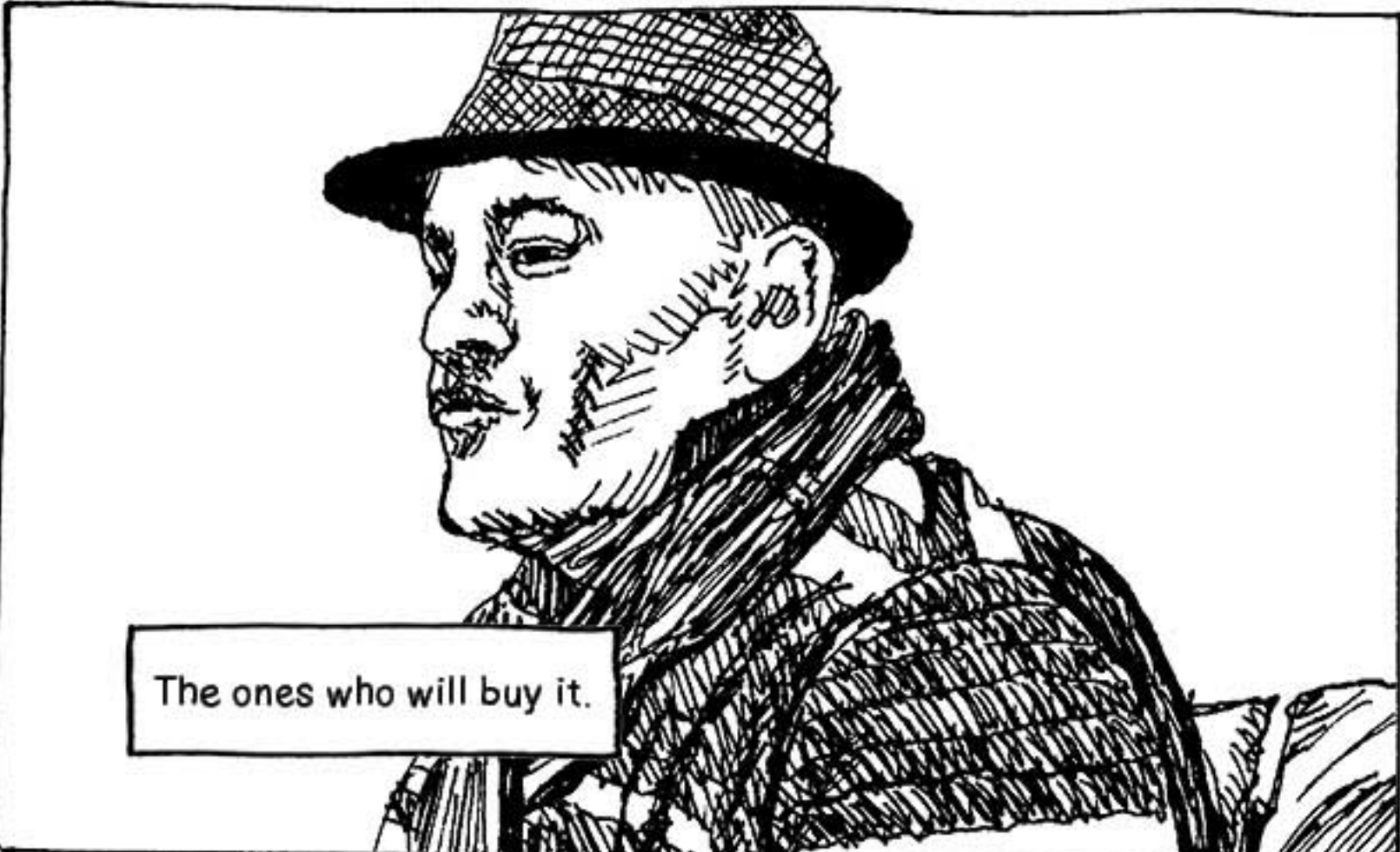
It doesn't affect them. But who will be affected? They do it as if it doesn't concern the felaheen.



The goods in the supermarket... the companies producing water and stuff like this— milk or yogurt— they will make the price higher.



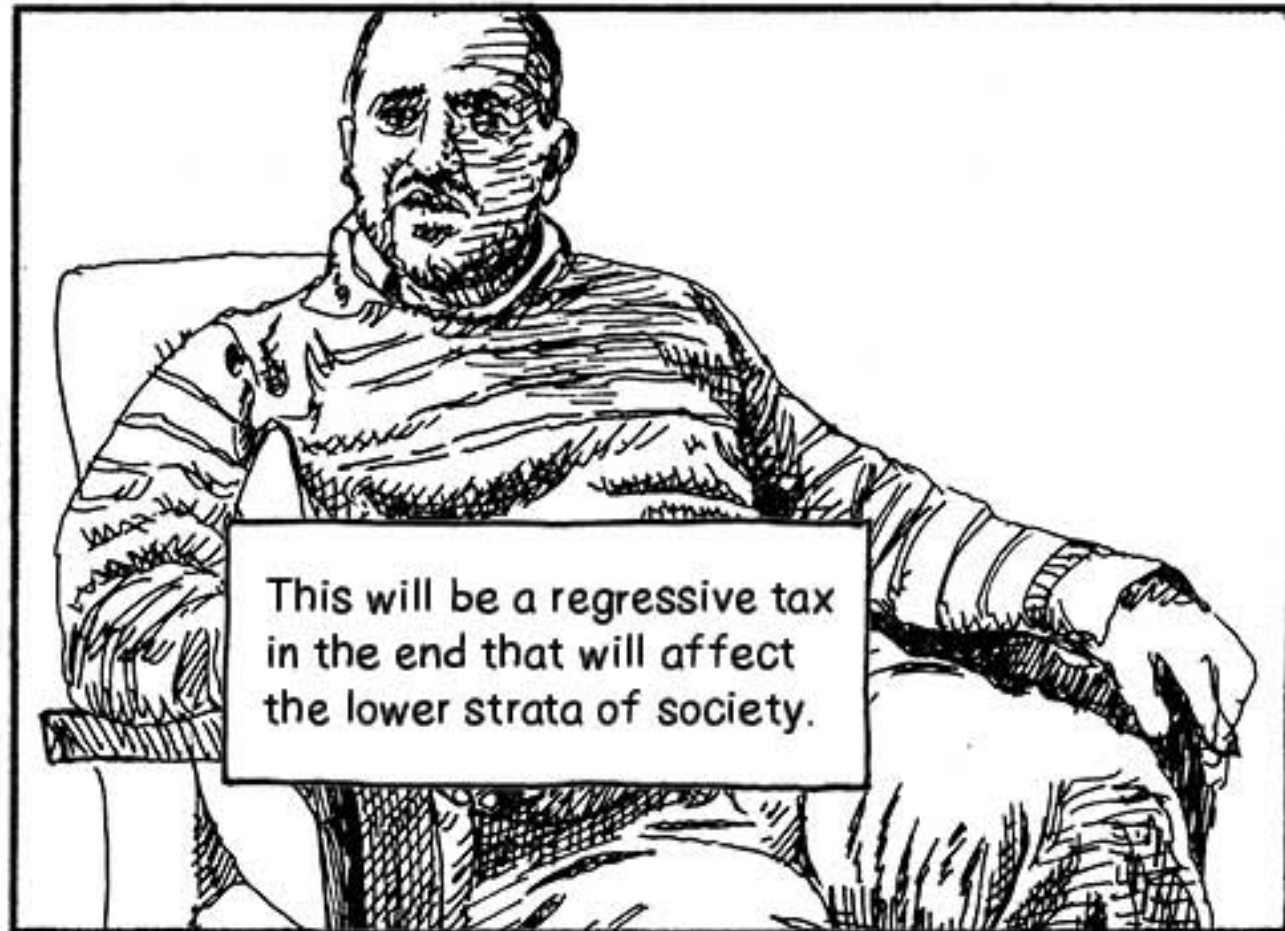
This will be the solution. Who will suffer?



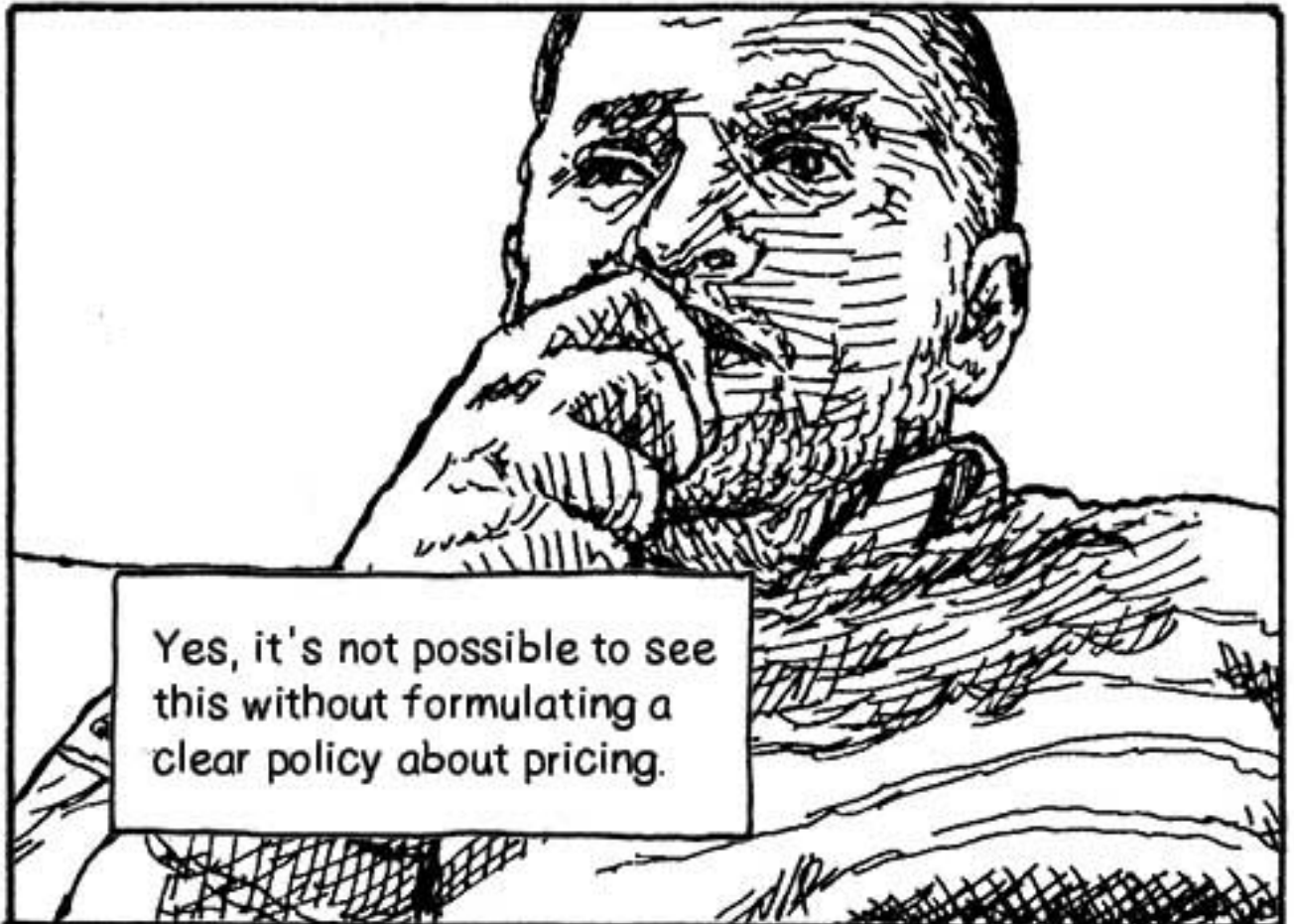
The ones who will buy it.



The ones who will buy it, this is for sure.



This will be a regressive tax in the end that will affect the lower strata of society.

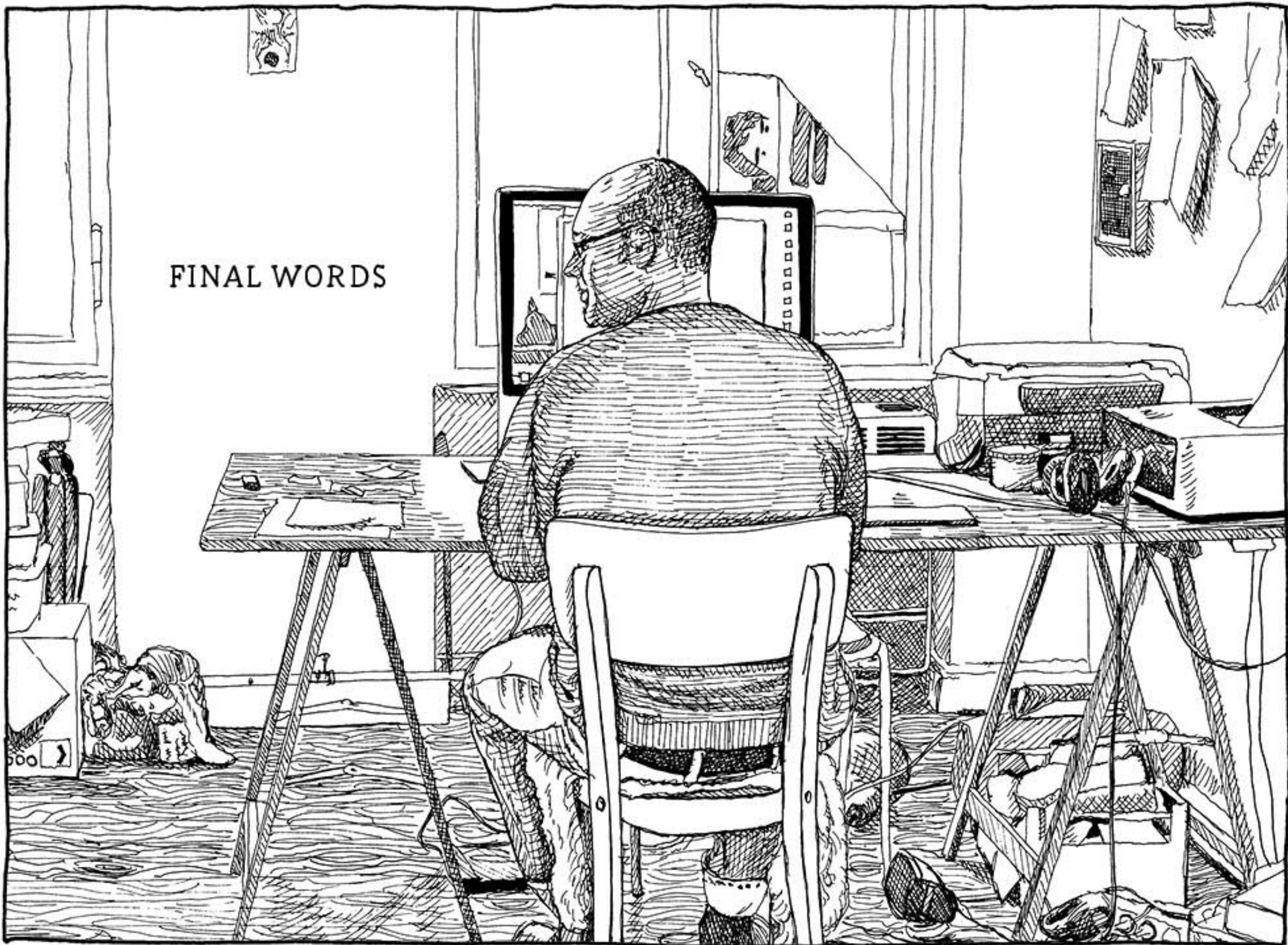


Yes, it's not possible to see this without formulating a clear policy about pricing.

Ramallah is one of most the expensive cities in the region. It's more expensive than Tel Aviv. But why is the income only 25% if you compare it to the average income in Tel Aviv? How come? This is the situation.



FINAL WORDS





No less that 4,000 people visited the exhibition, but not much more. I don't have an exact number.



This is big for Palestinian society, for Palestinian art. People from all over Palestine came.



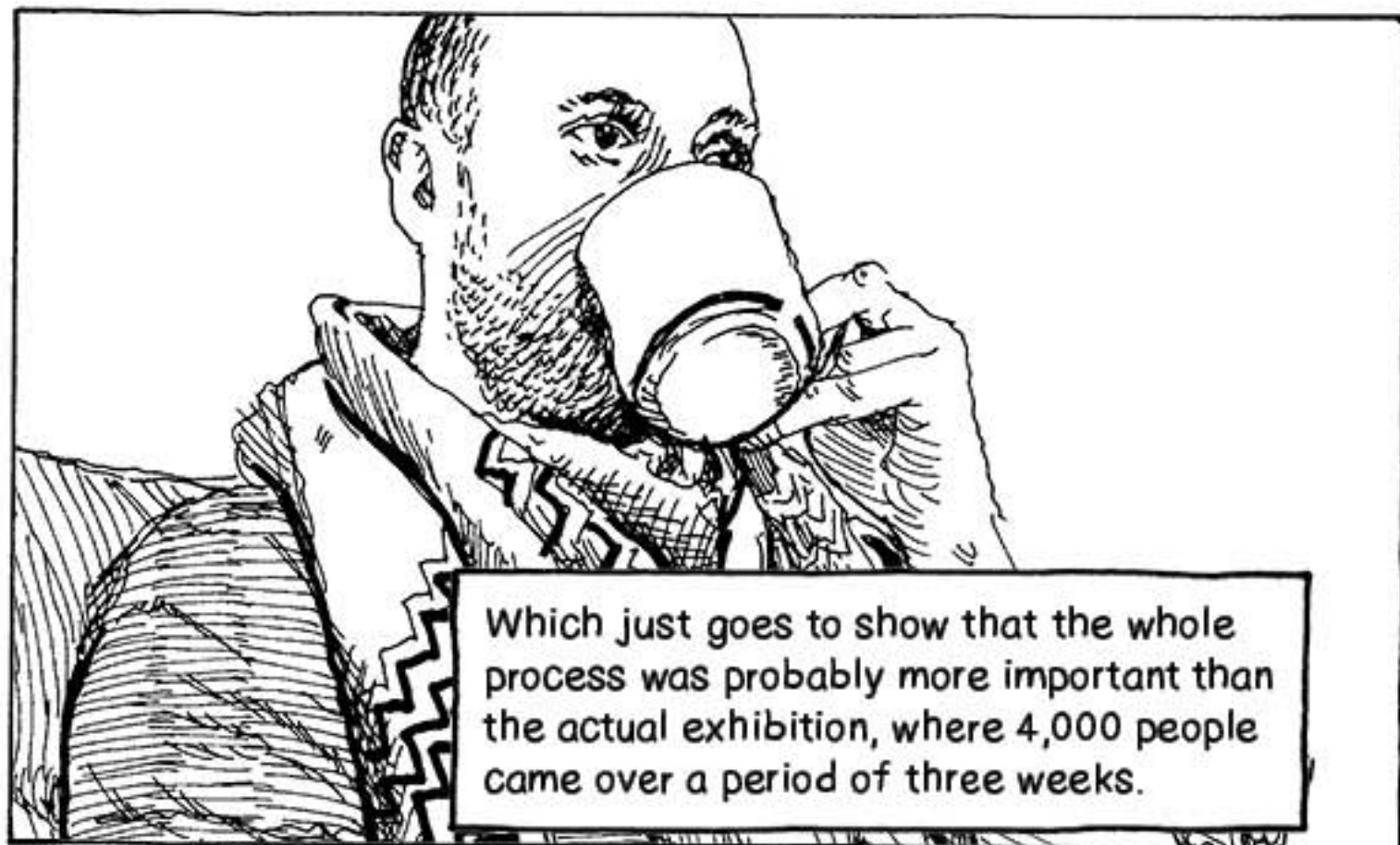
They came from Haifa, from Nazareth, from Jericho, from Jenin.



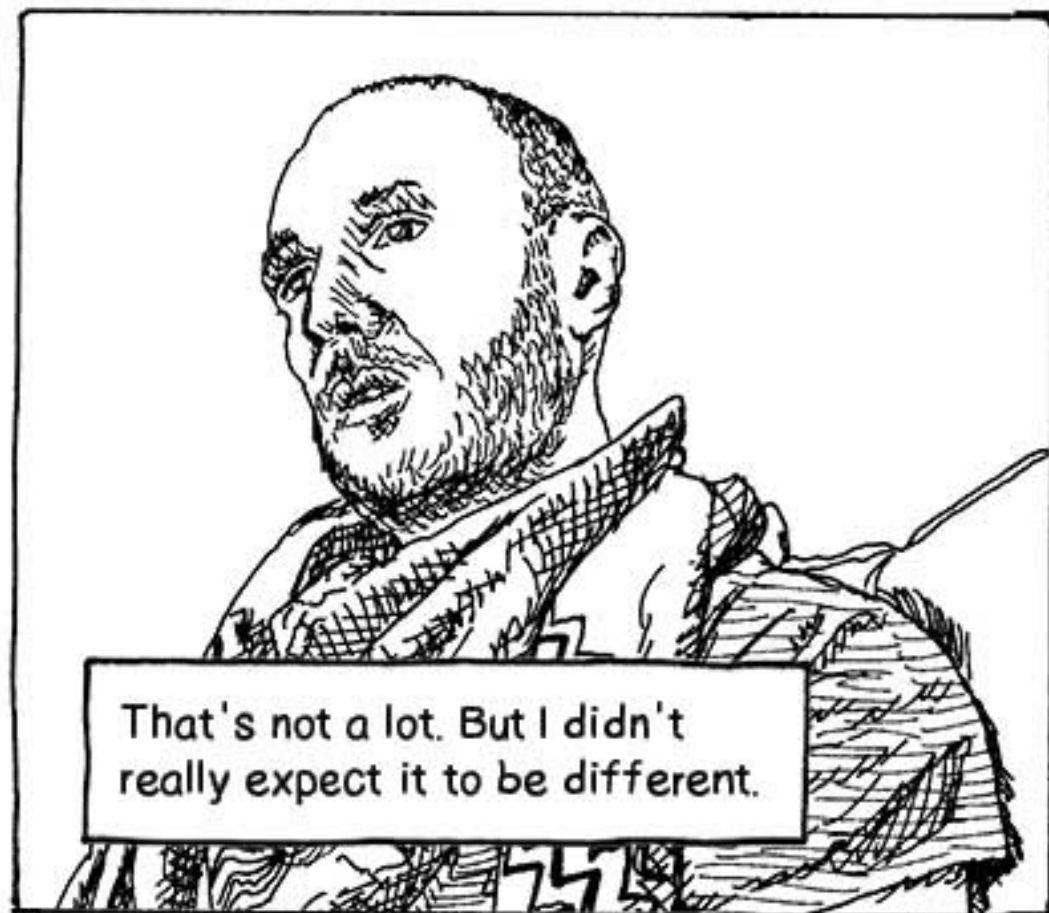
I've been in the room with Picasso and visitors whose eyes welled up with tears when they saw it.

This is something I didn't look into but took Khaled's word for: in the end he said it would have been quite easy to borrow a piece from the Israel Museum and bring it to the West Bank.

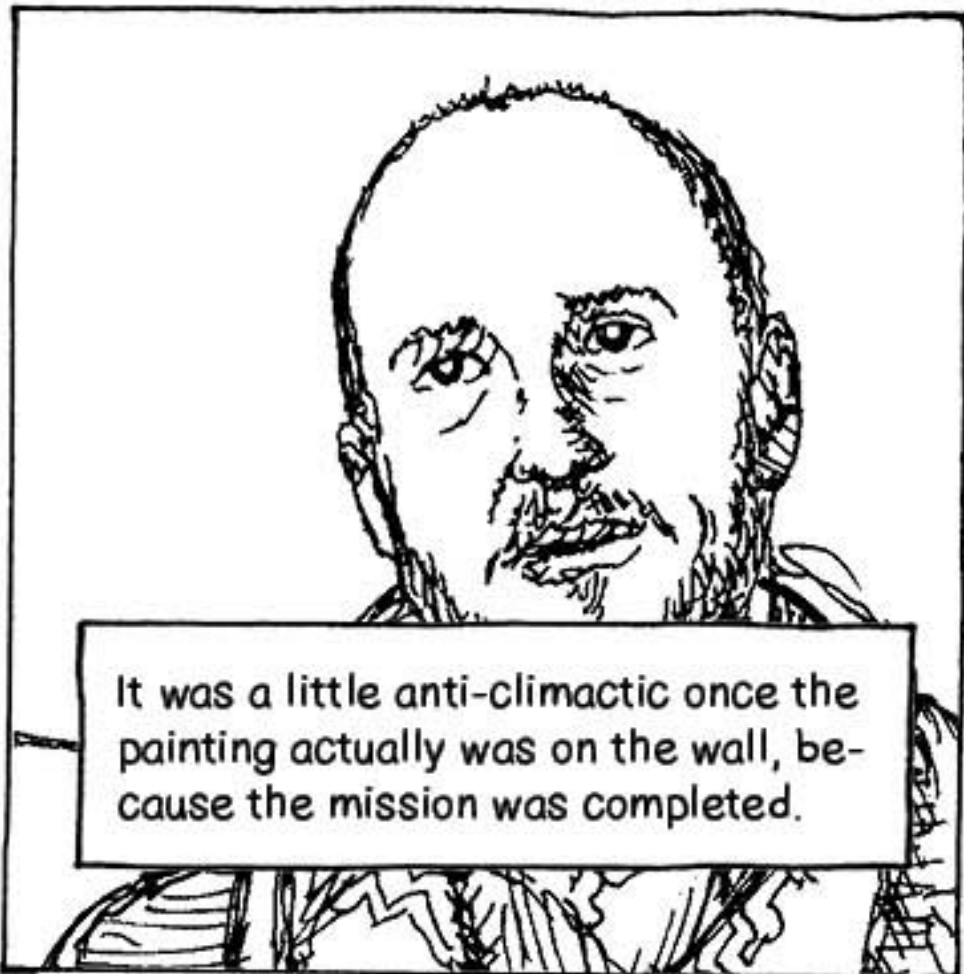




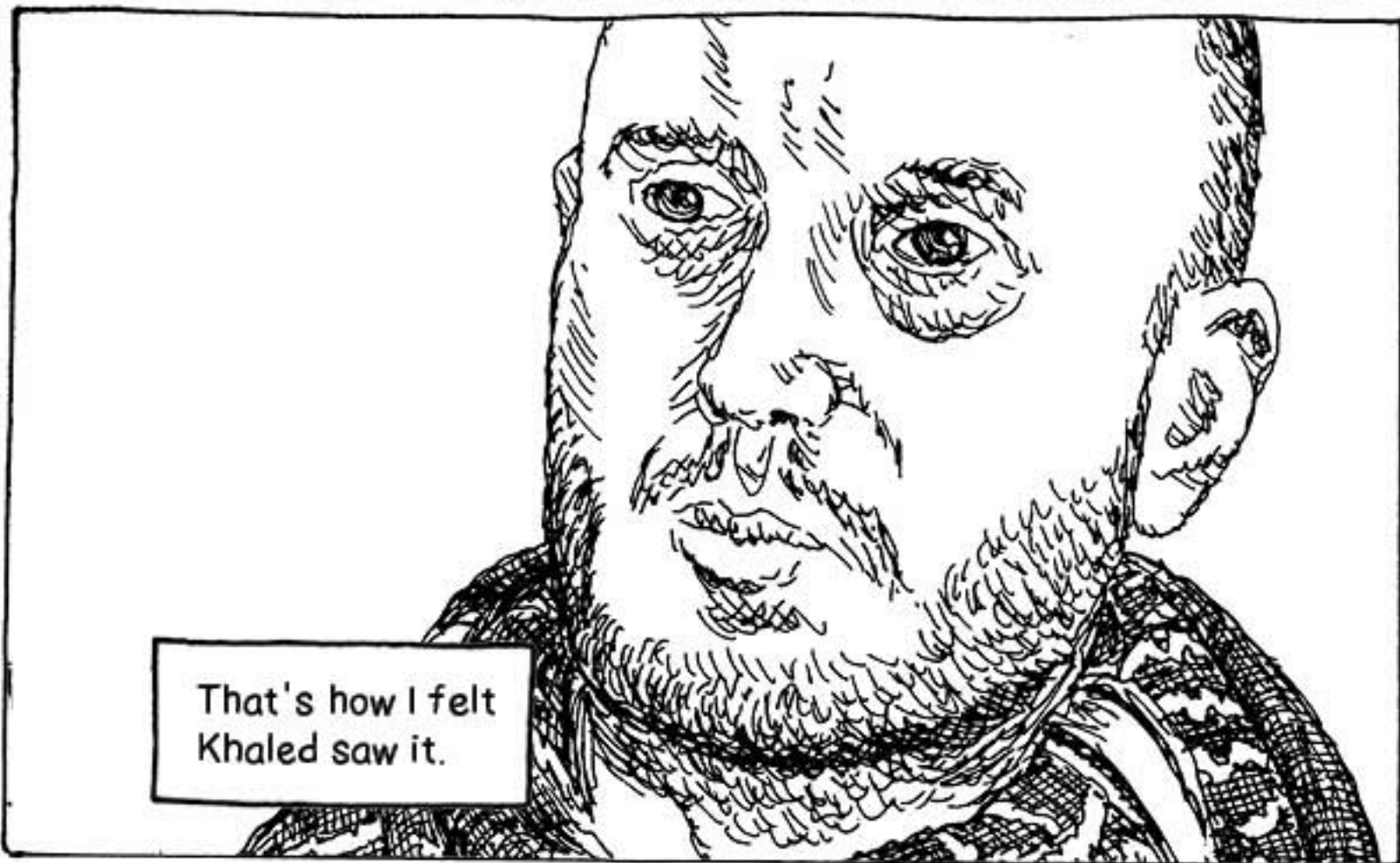
Which just goes to show that the whole process was probably more important than the actual exhibition, where 4,000 people came over a period of three weeks.



That's not a lot. But I didn't really expect it to be different.



It was a little anti-climactic once the painting actually was on the wall, because the mission was completed.



That's how I felt Khaled saw it.



In a way we are trying to be normal people, but we recognize what is abnormal in our context.



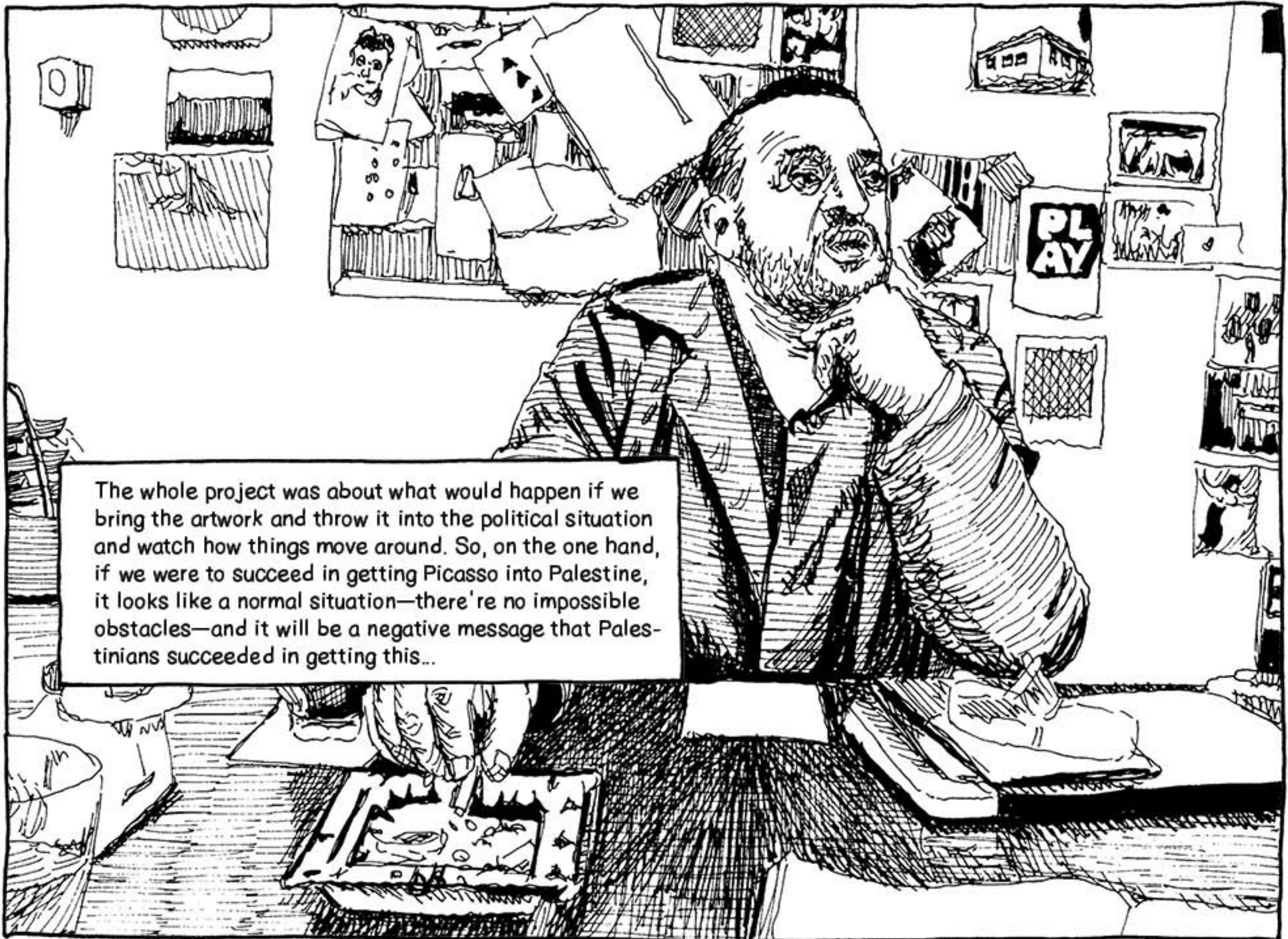
In a way we are testing what is not visible.



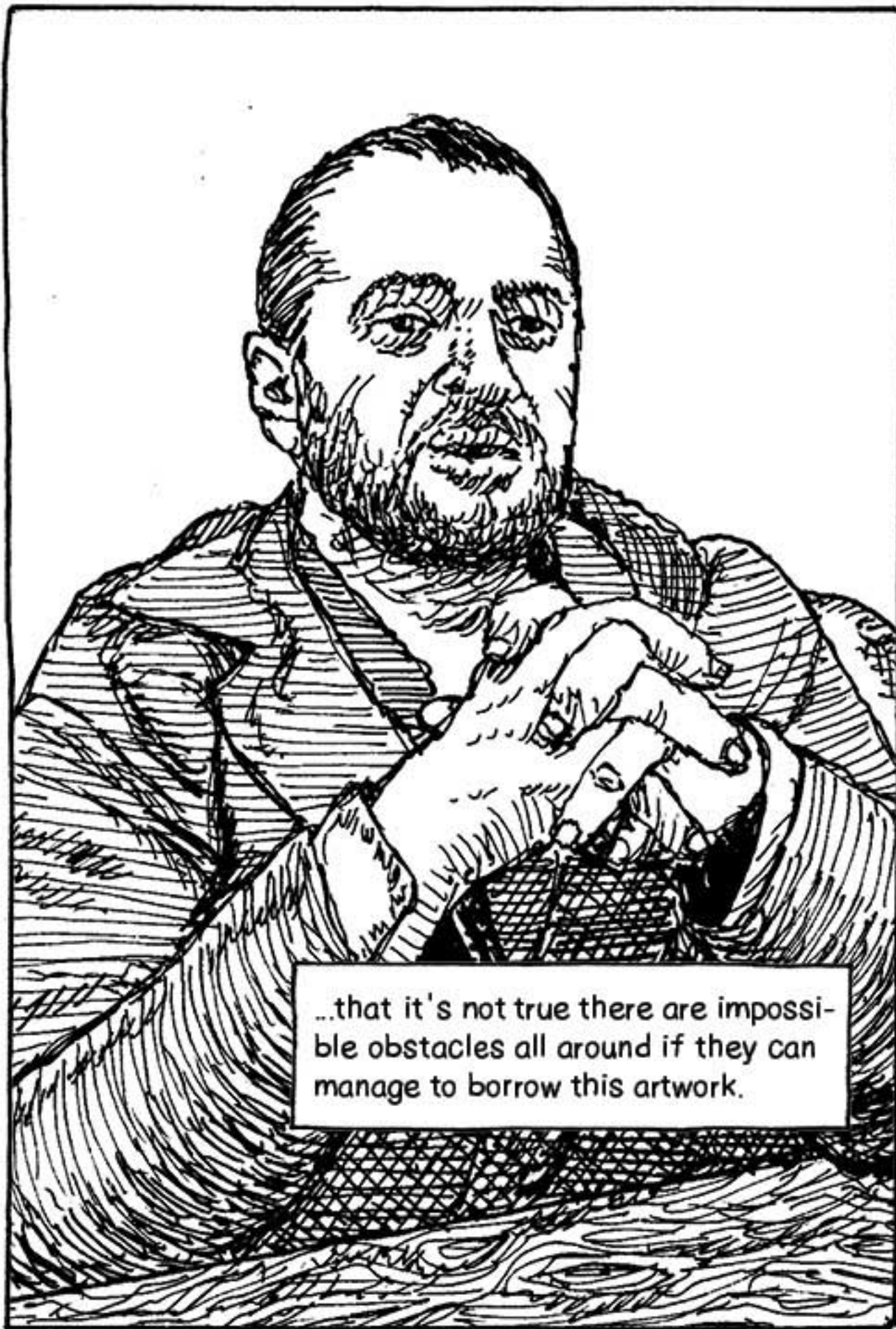
It has brought up a lot of invisible politics and a lot of invisible tactics.



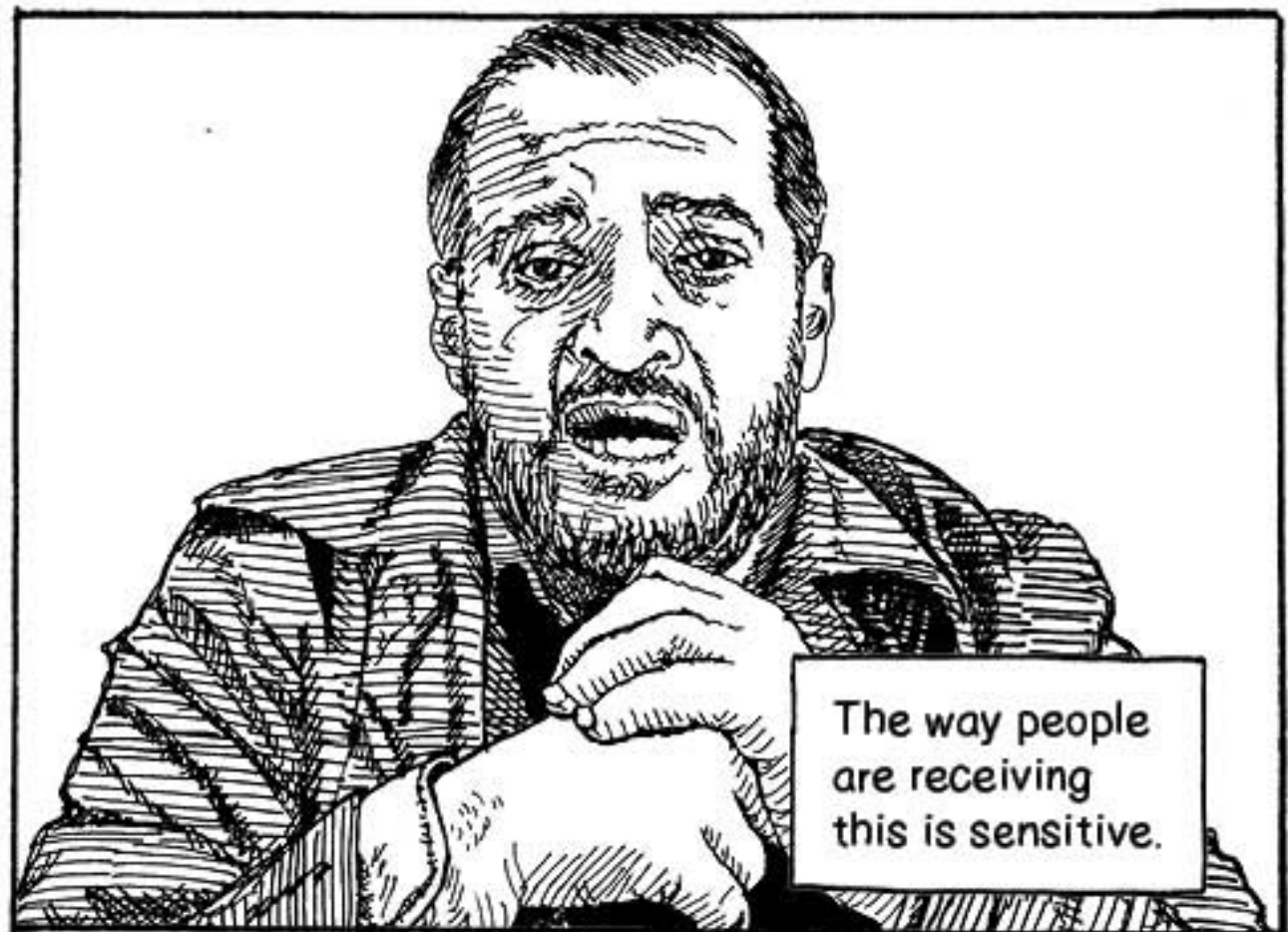
There is a saying here: "To put your finger in the wound." That is, I think, what Khaled did.



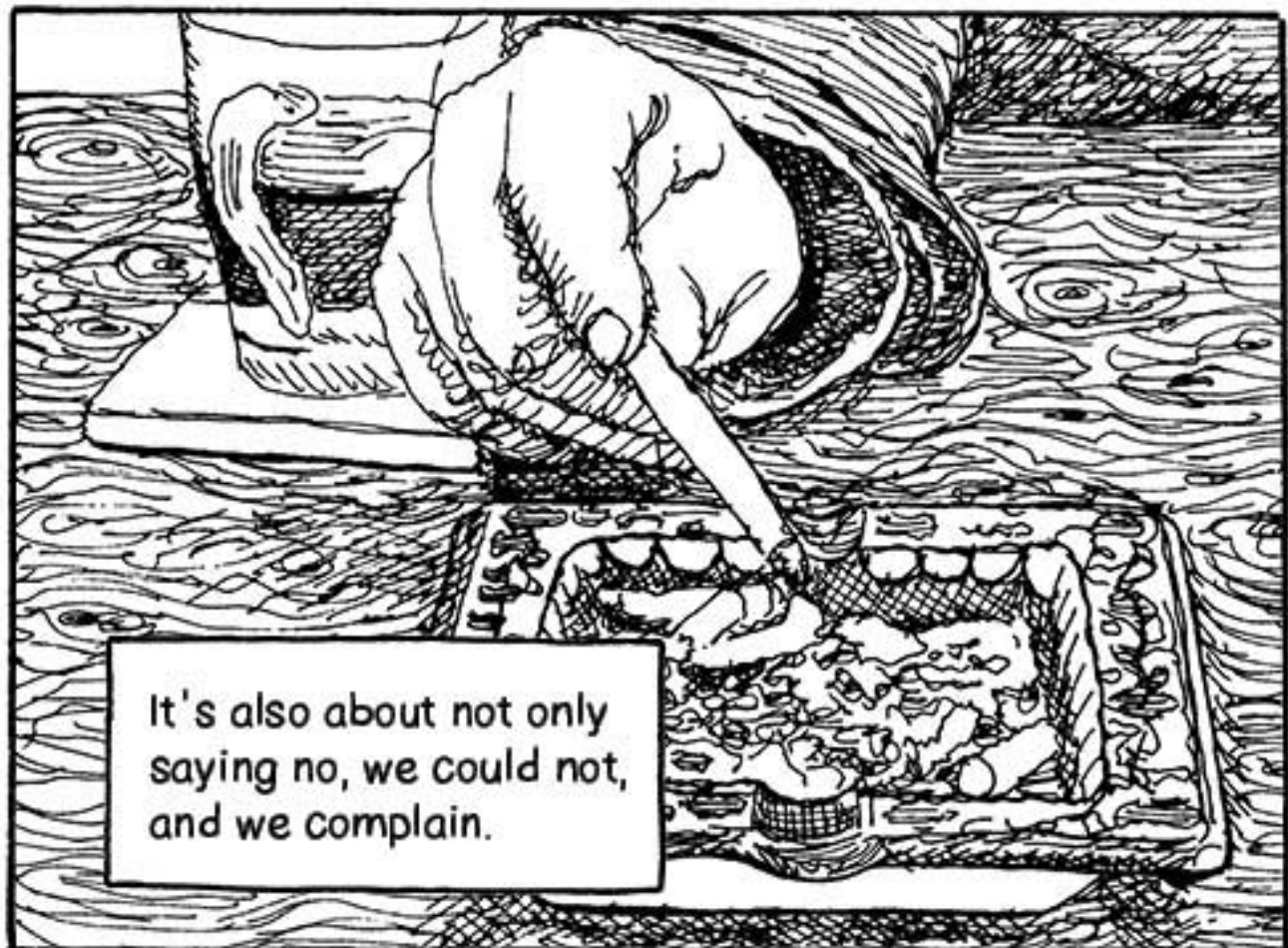
The whole project was about what would happen if we bring the artwork and throw it into the political situation and watch how things move around. So, on the one hand, if we were to succeed in getting Picasso into Palestine, it looks like a normal situation—there're no impossible obstacles—and it will be a negative message that Palestinians succeeded in getting this...



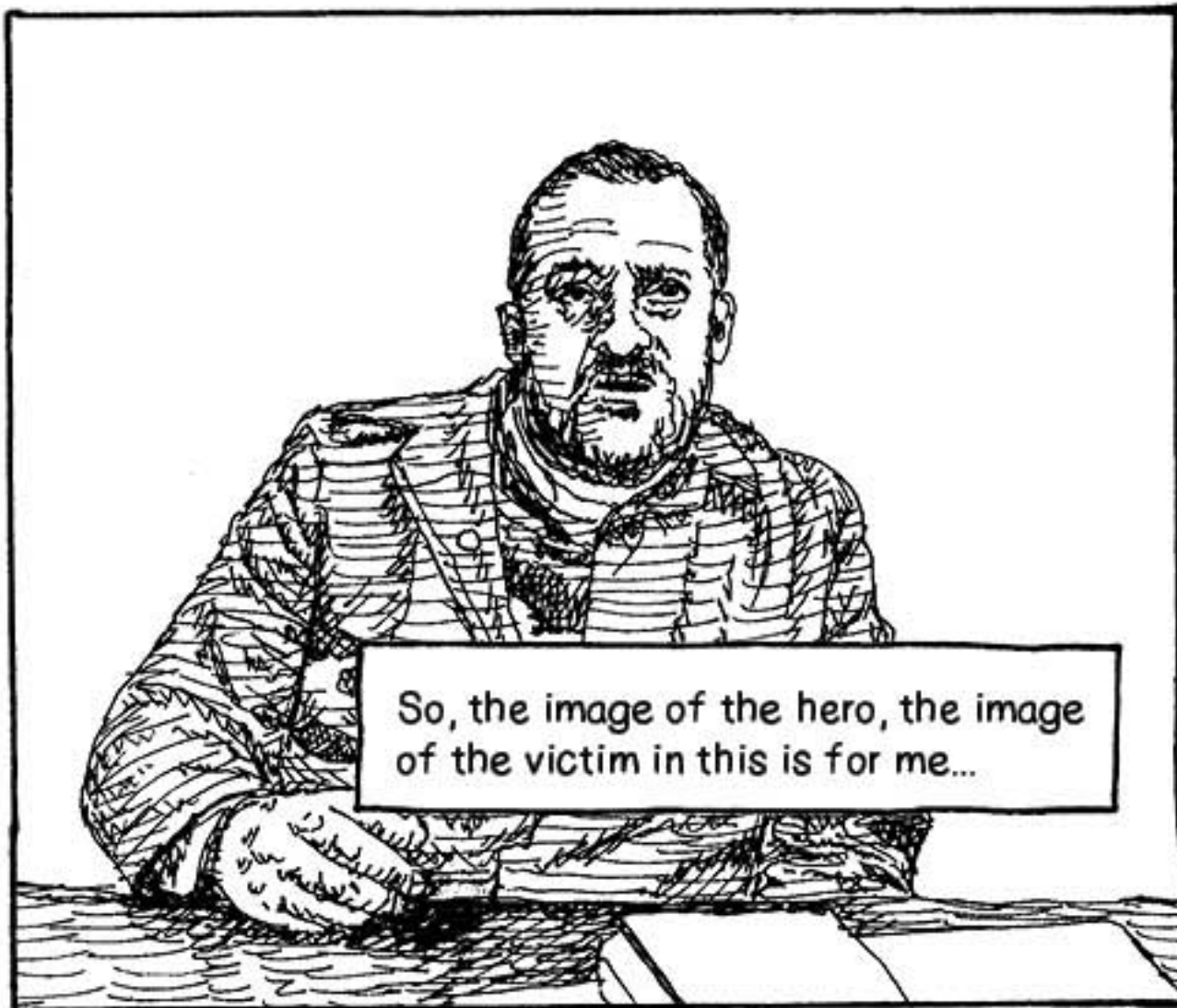
...that it's not true there are impossible obstacles all around if they can manage to borrow this artwork.



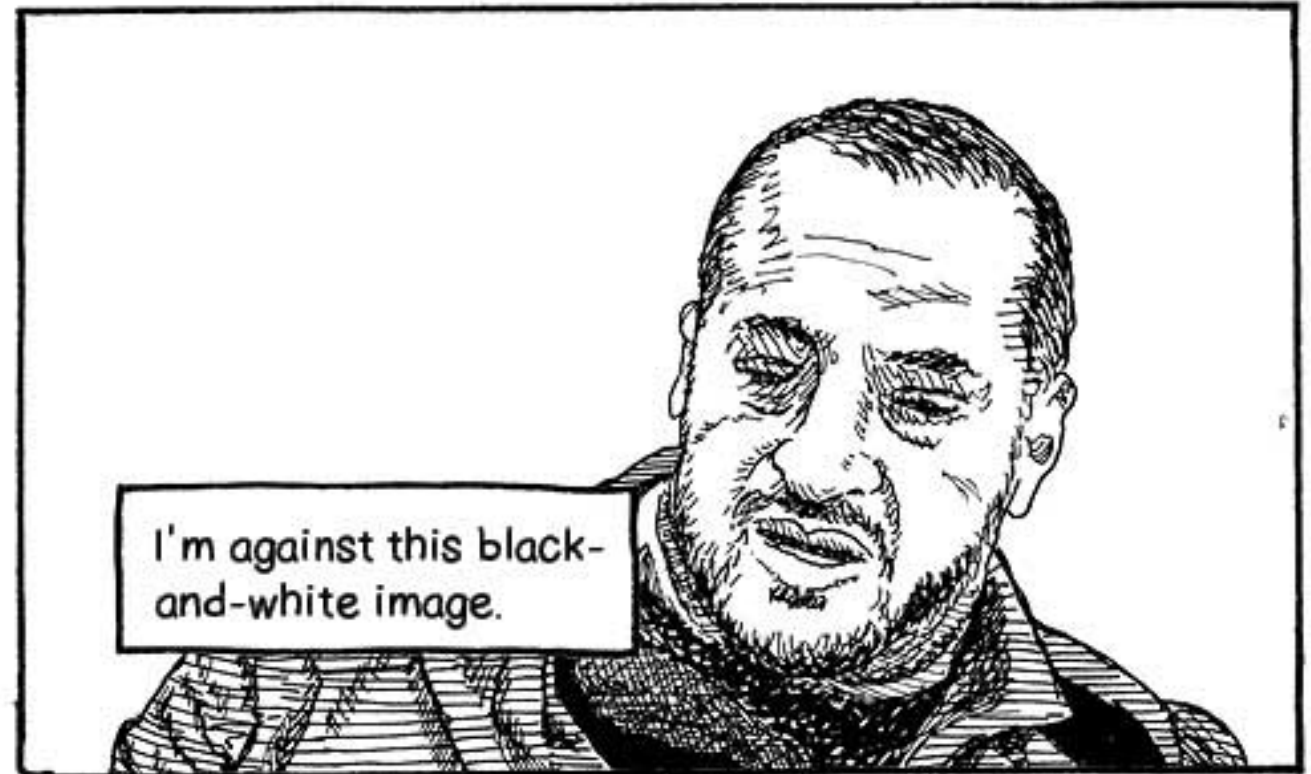
The way people are receiving this is sensitive.



It's also about not only saying no, we could not, and we complain.



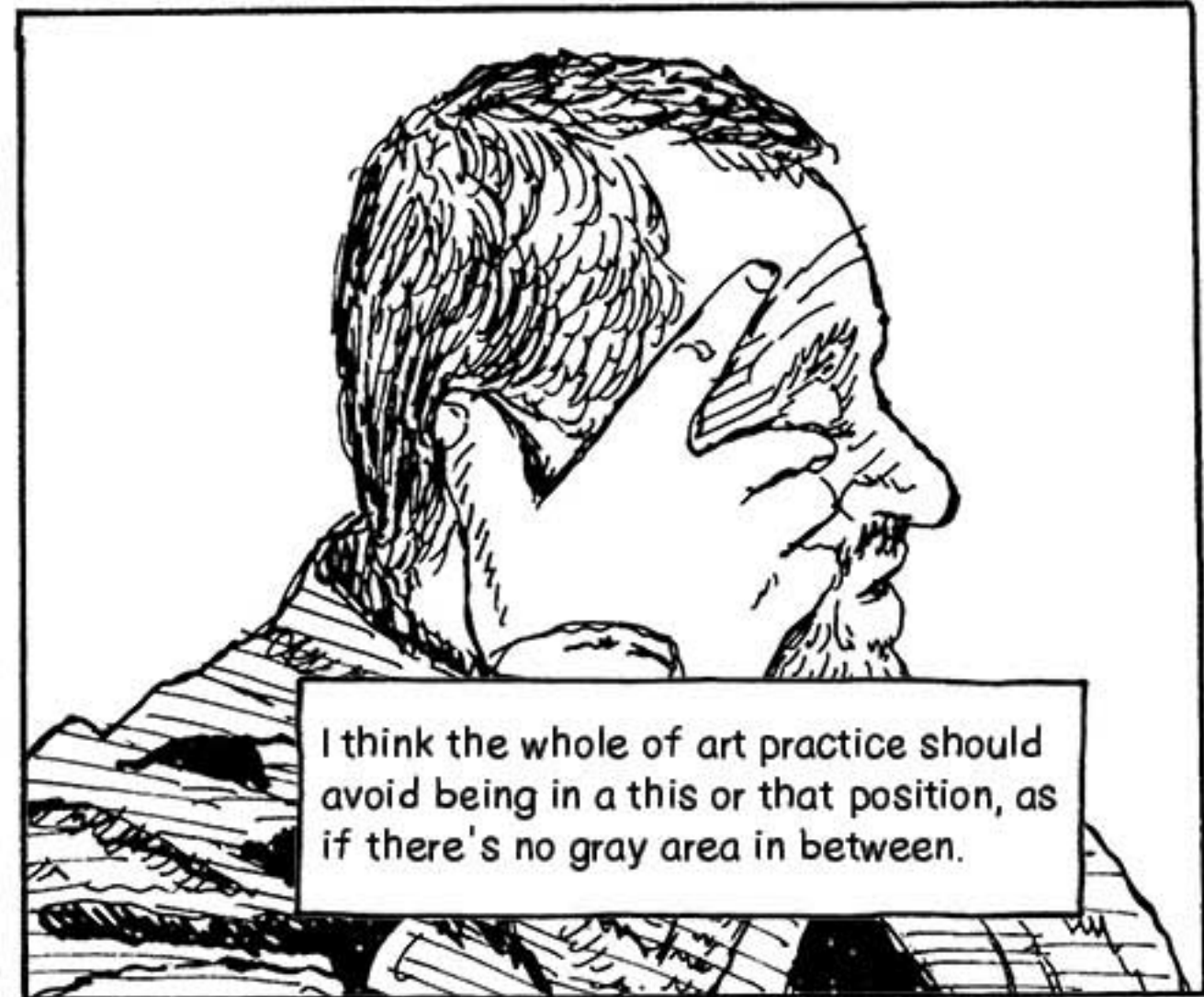
So, the image of the hero, the image of the victim in this is for me...



I'm against this black-and-white image.



I don't want to be categorized as an artist, as a human being.



I think the whole of art practice should avoid being in a this or that position, as if there's no gray area in between.



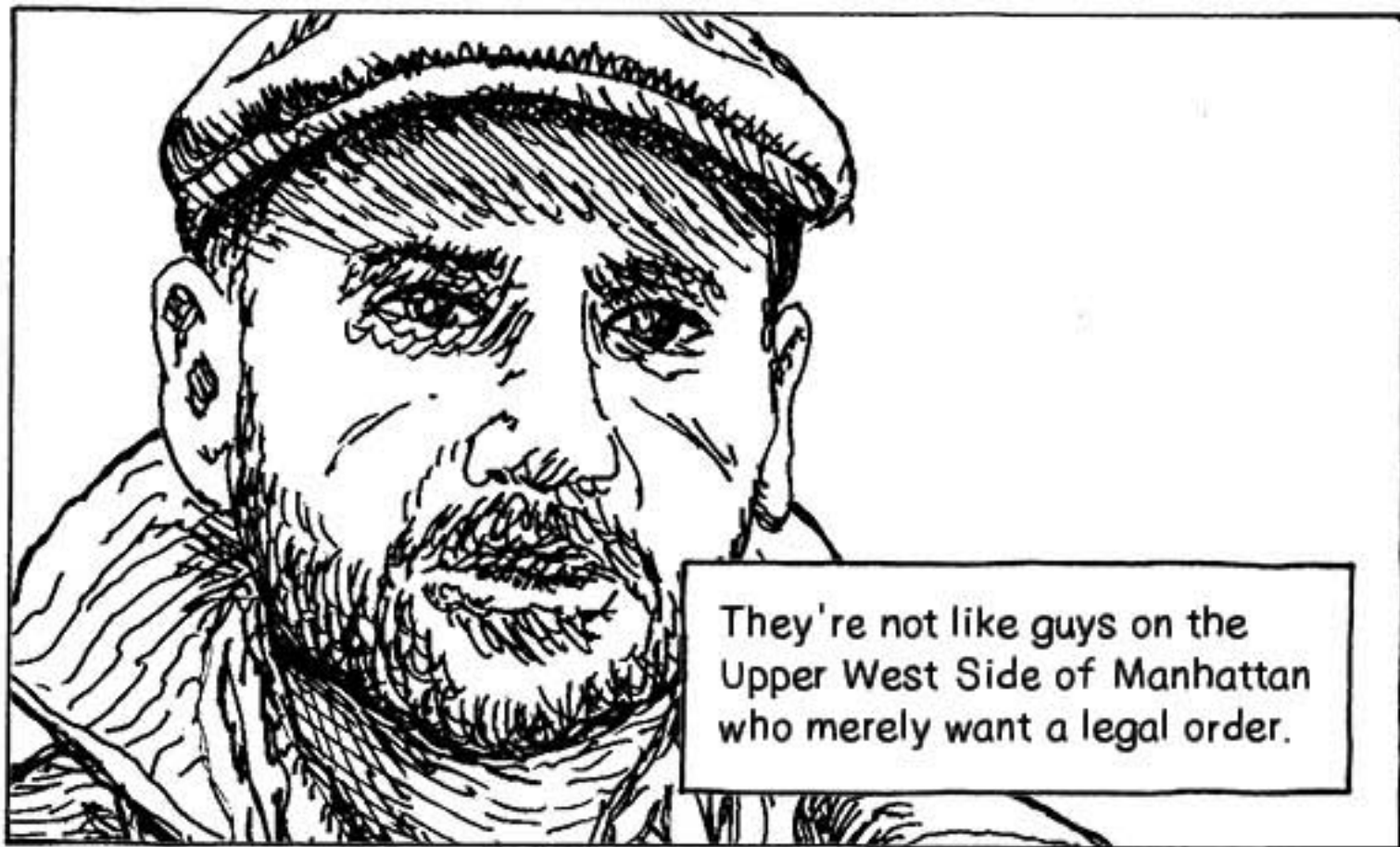
The fact of the matter is the West Bank upper class are not bourgeoisie in the Western sense, because it's not a natural bourgeoisie.



It's a product of unnatural circumstances...



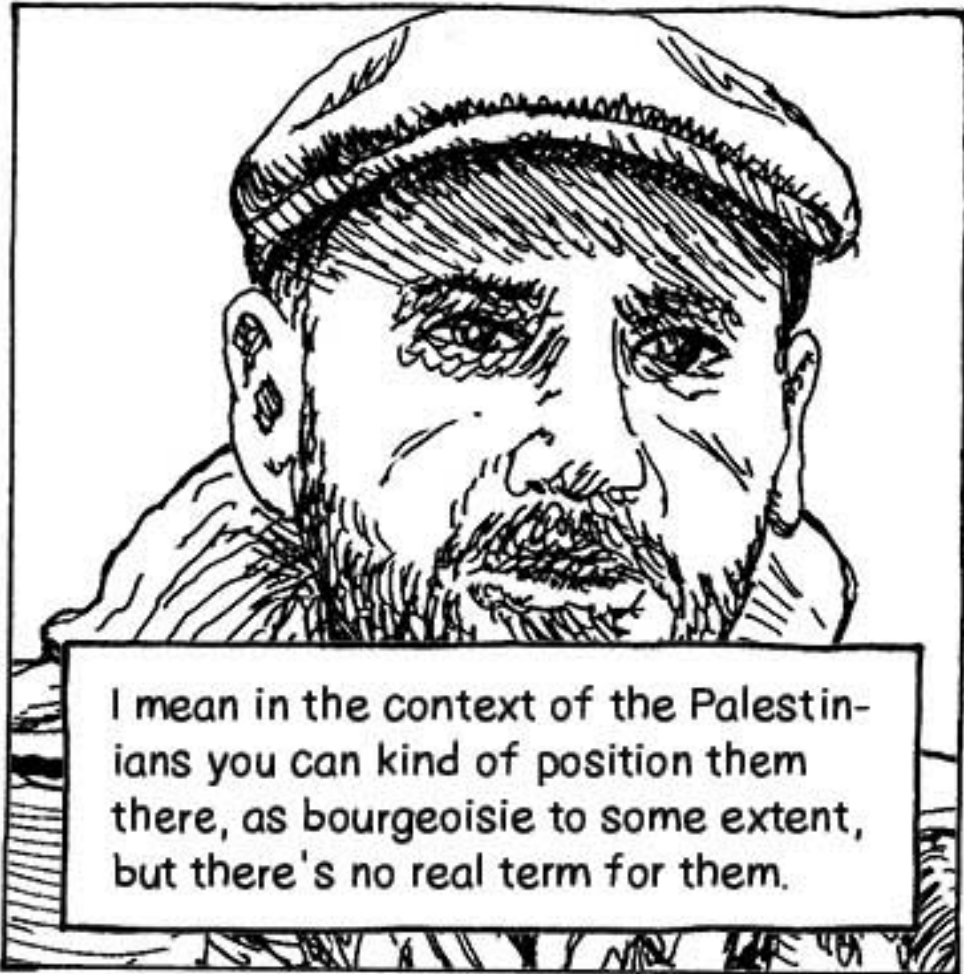
I mean, they're refugees, the Houranis!



They're not like guys on the Upper West Side of Manhattan who merely want a legal order.



I don't mean it in that sense.

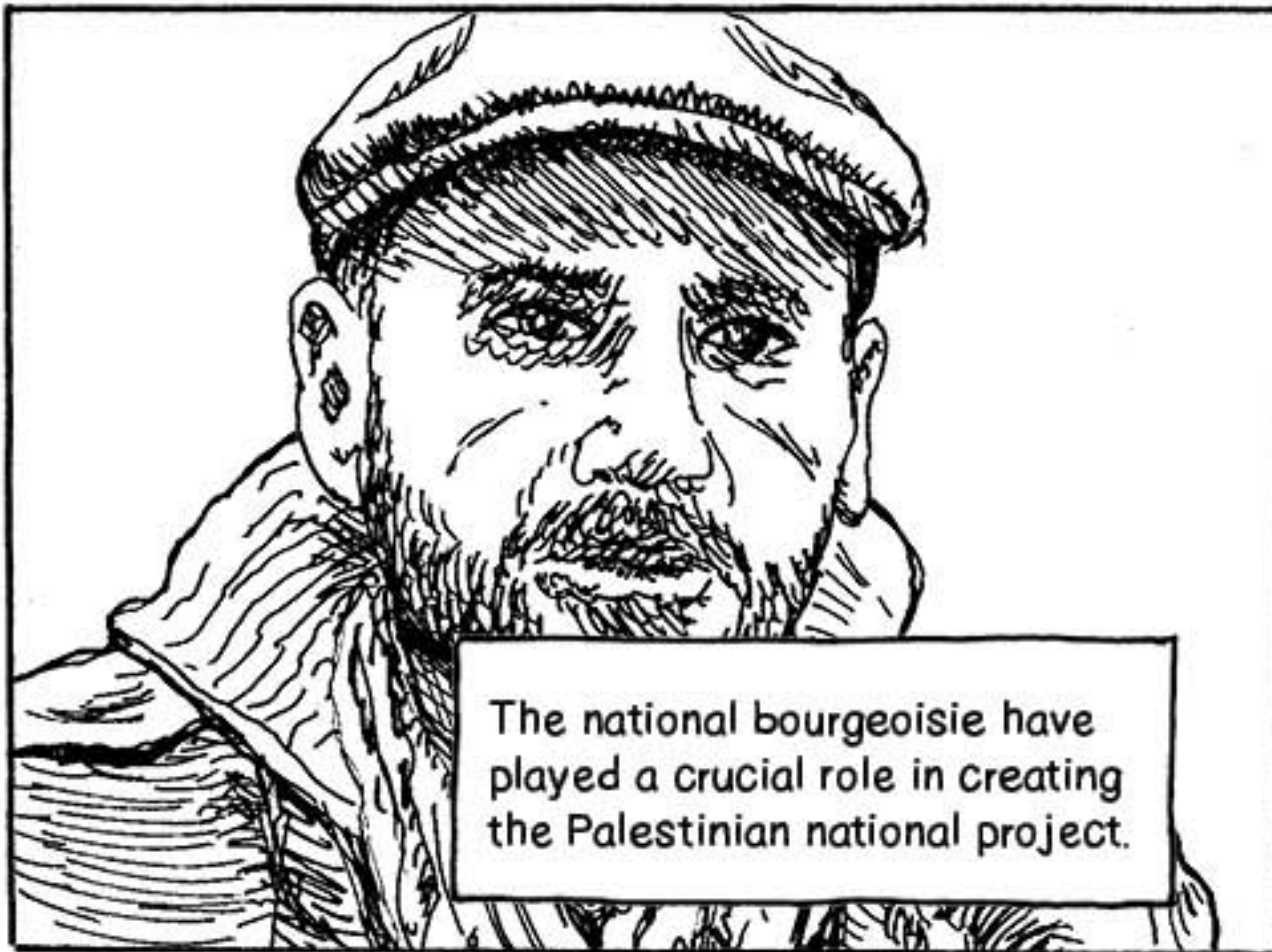


I mean in the context of the Palestinians you can kind of position them there, as bourgeoisie to some extent, but there's no real term for them.



What are they? A deformed middle class.

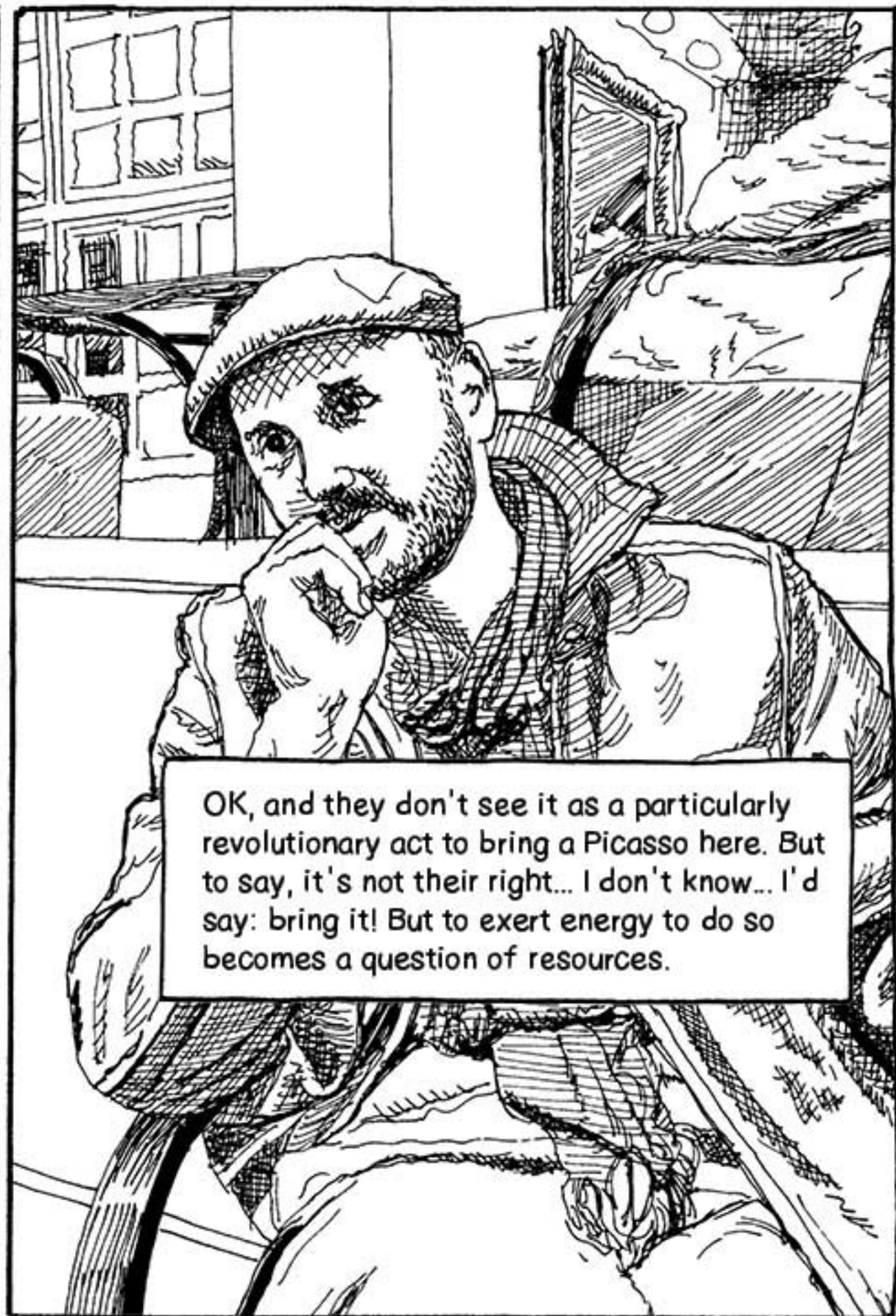




The national bourgeoisie have played a crucial role in creating the Palestinian national project.



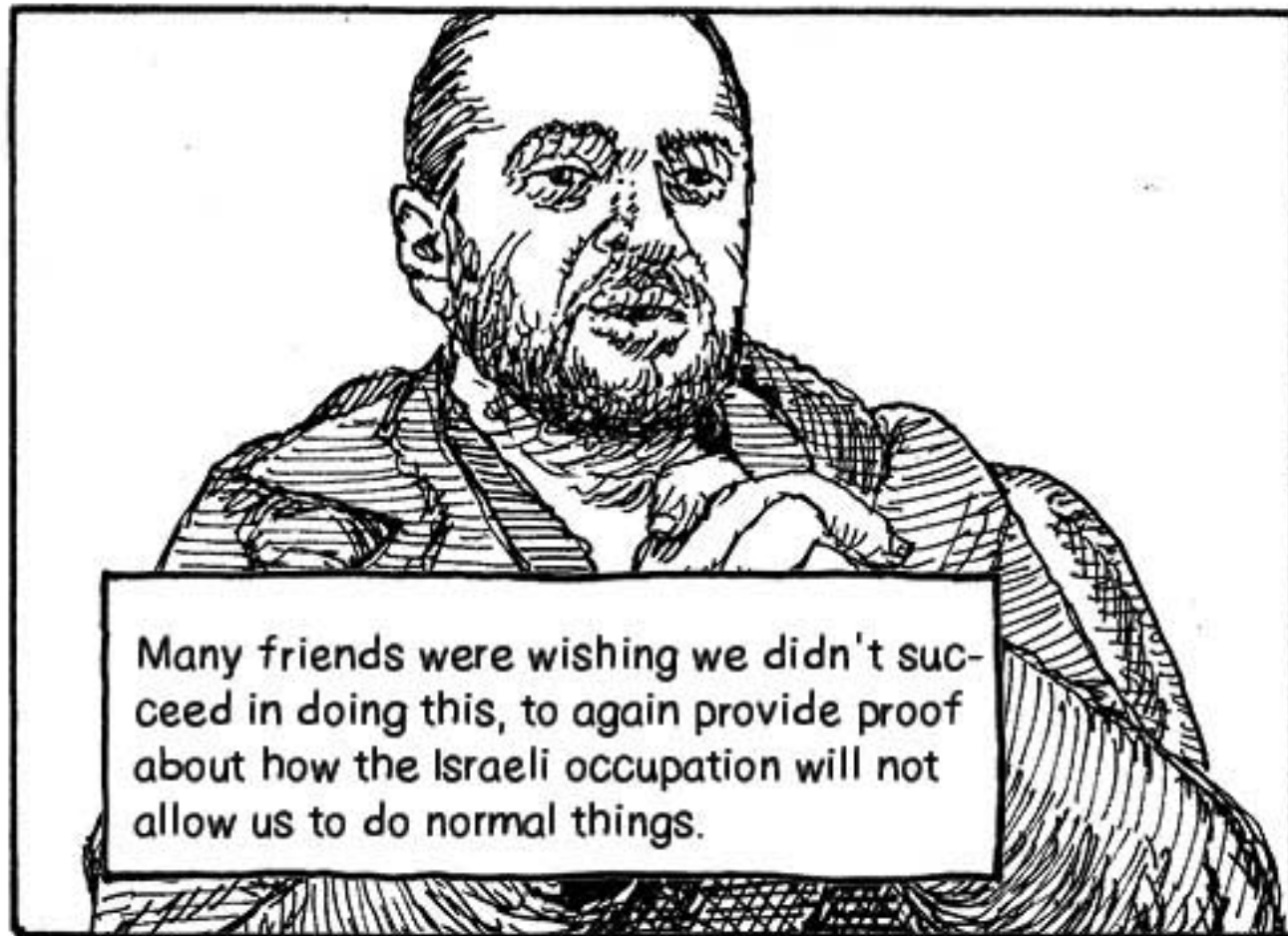
It's not just a profiteering class by any means. No! It's not homogenous, either!



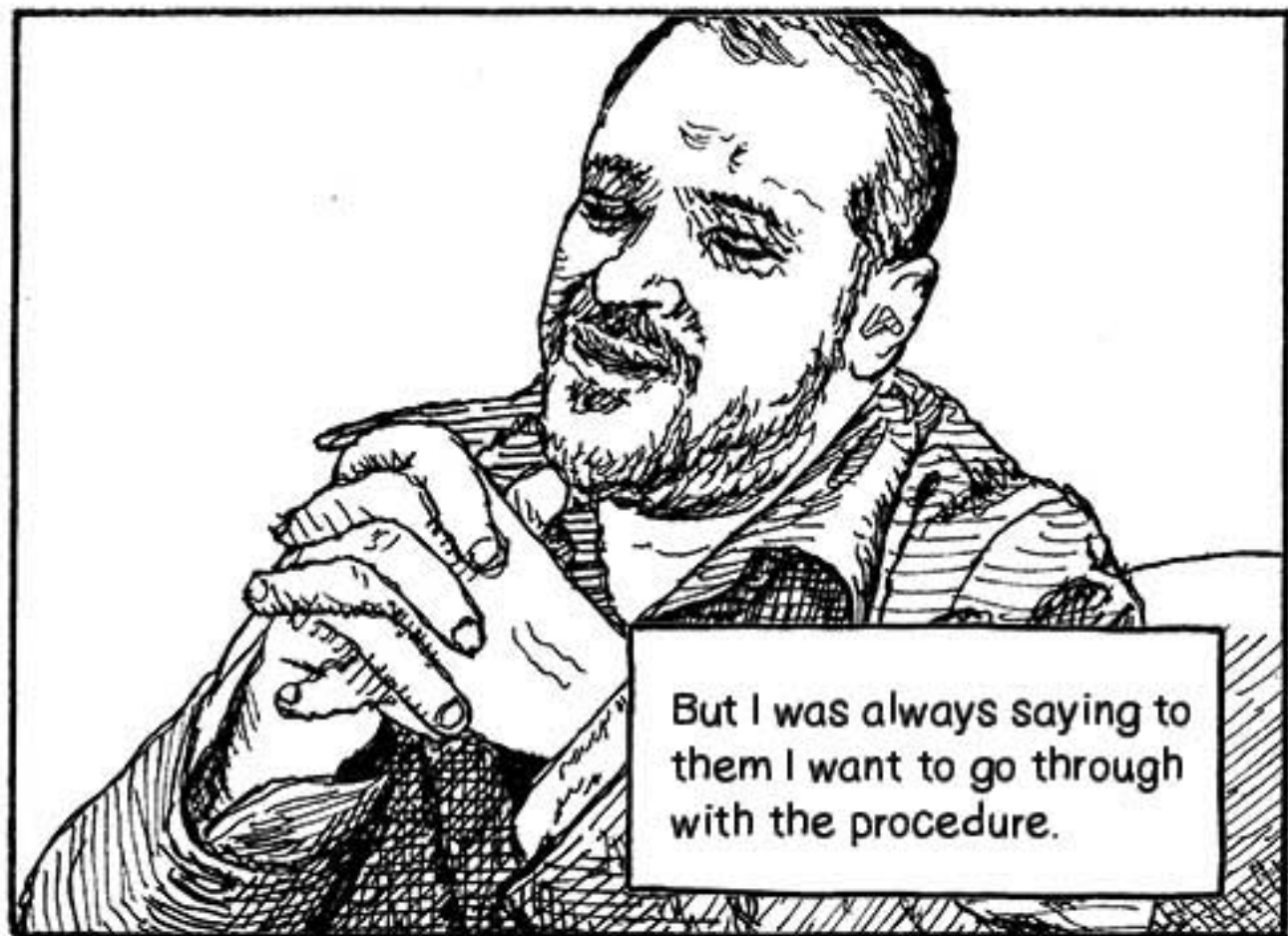
OK, and they don't see it as a particularly revolutionary act to bring a Picasso here. But to say, it's not their right... I don't know... I'd say: bring it! But to exert energy to do so becomes a question of resources.

There's an ambivalence in this project which I like a lot, that I think is certainly present, you know? It has ambivalent undertones.

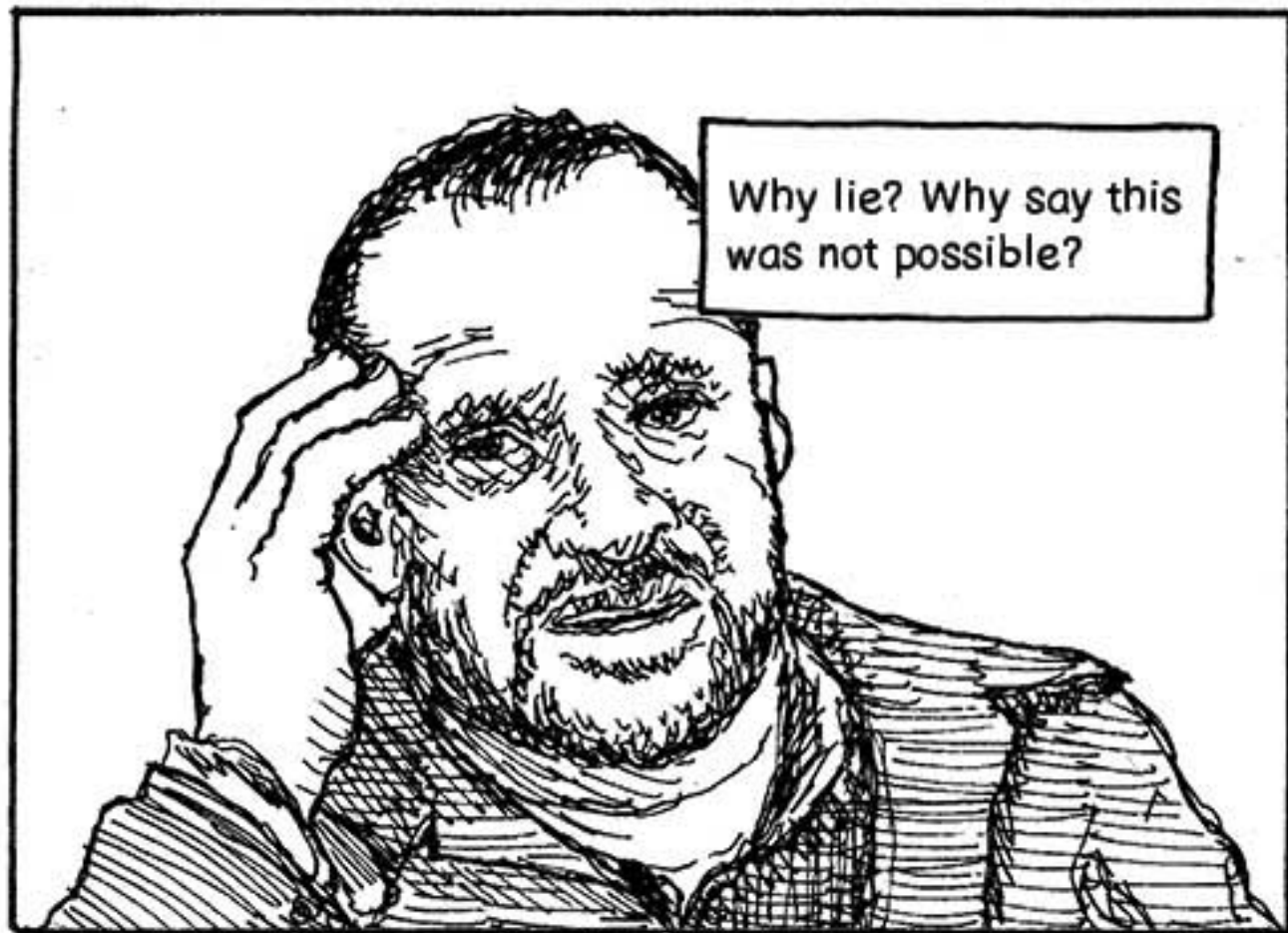




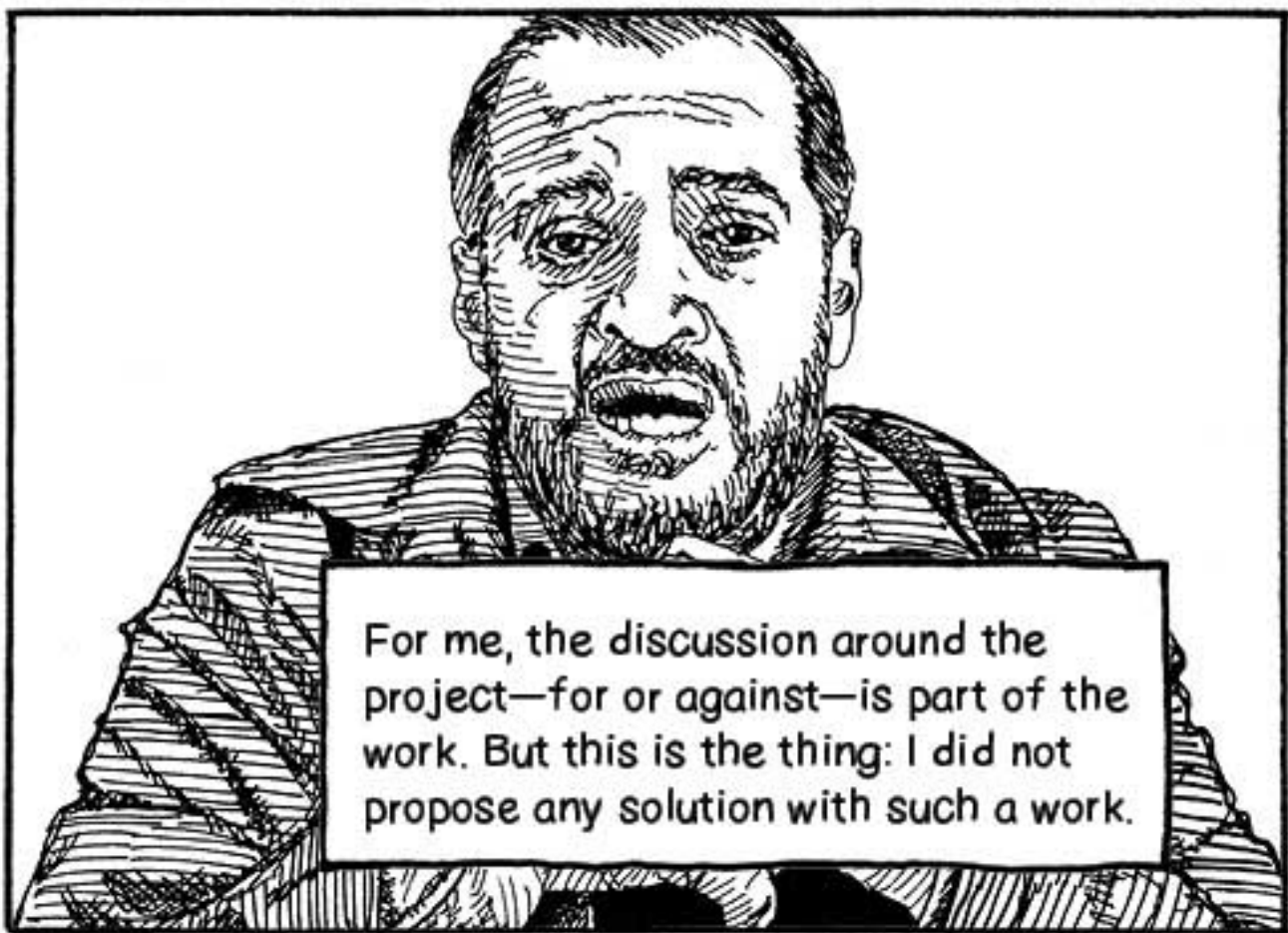
Many friends were wishing we didn't succeed in doing this, to again provide proof about how the Israeli occupation will not allow us to do normal things.



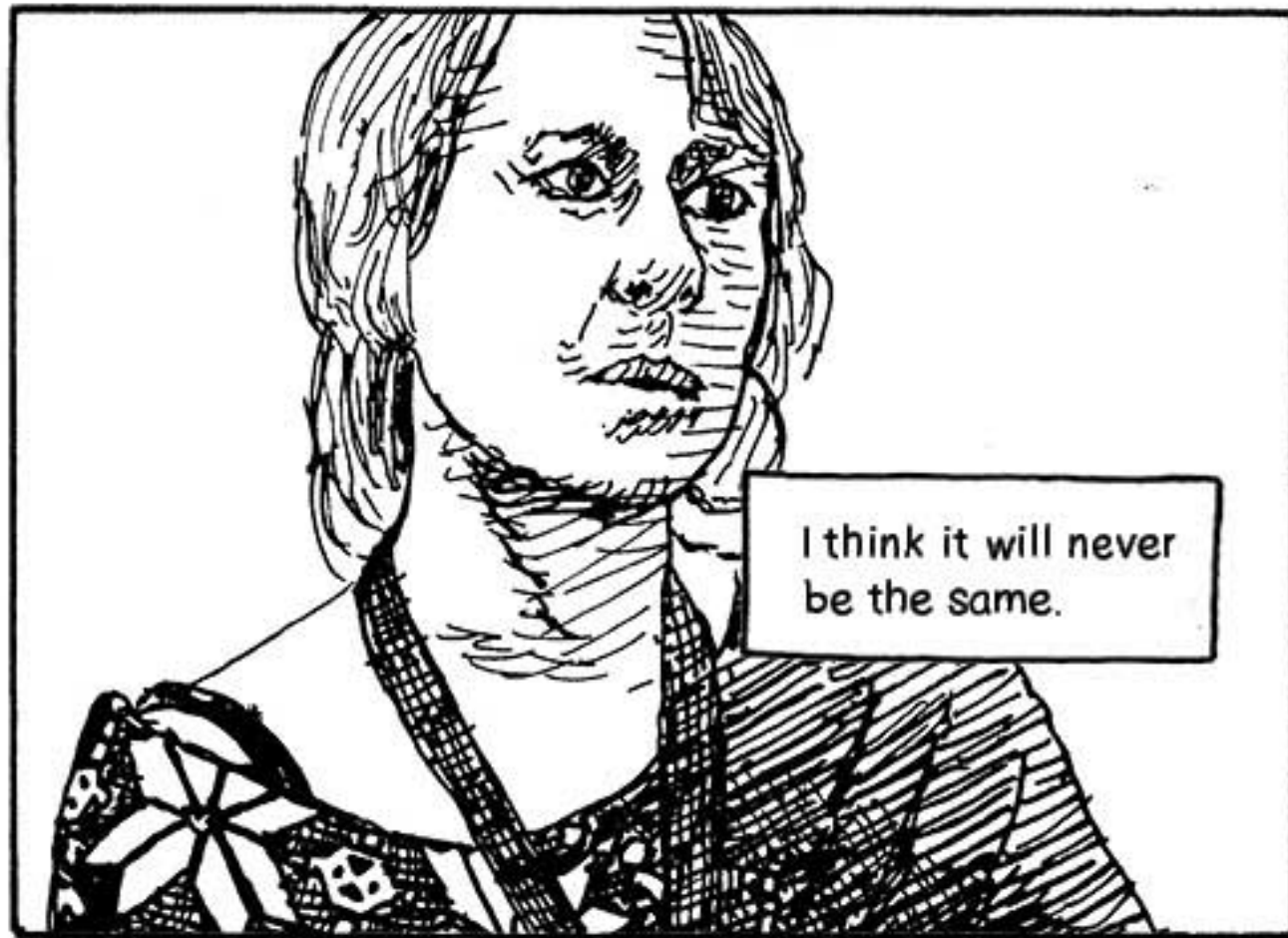
But I was always saying to them I want to go through with the procedure.



Why lie? Why say this was not possible?



For me, the discussion around the project—for or against—is part of the work. But this is the thing: I did not propose any solution with such a work.



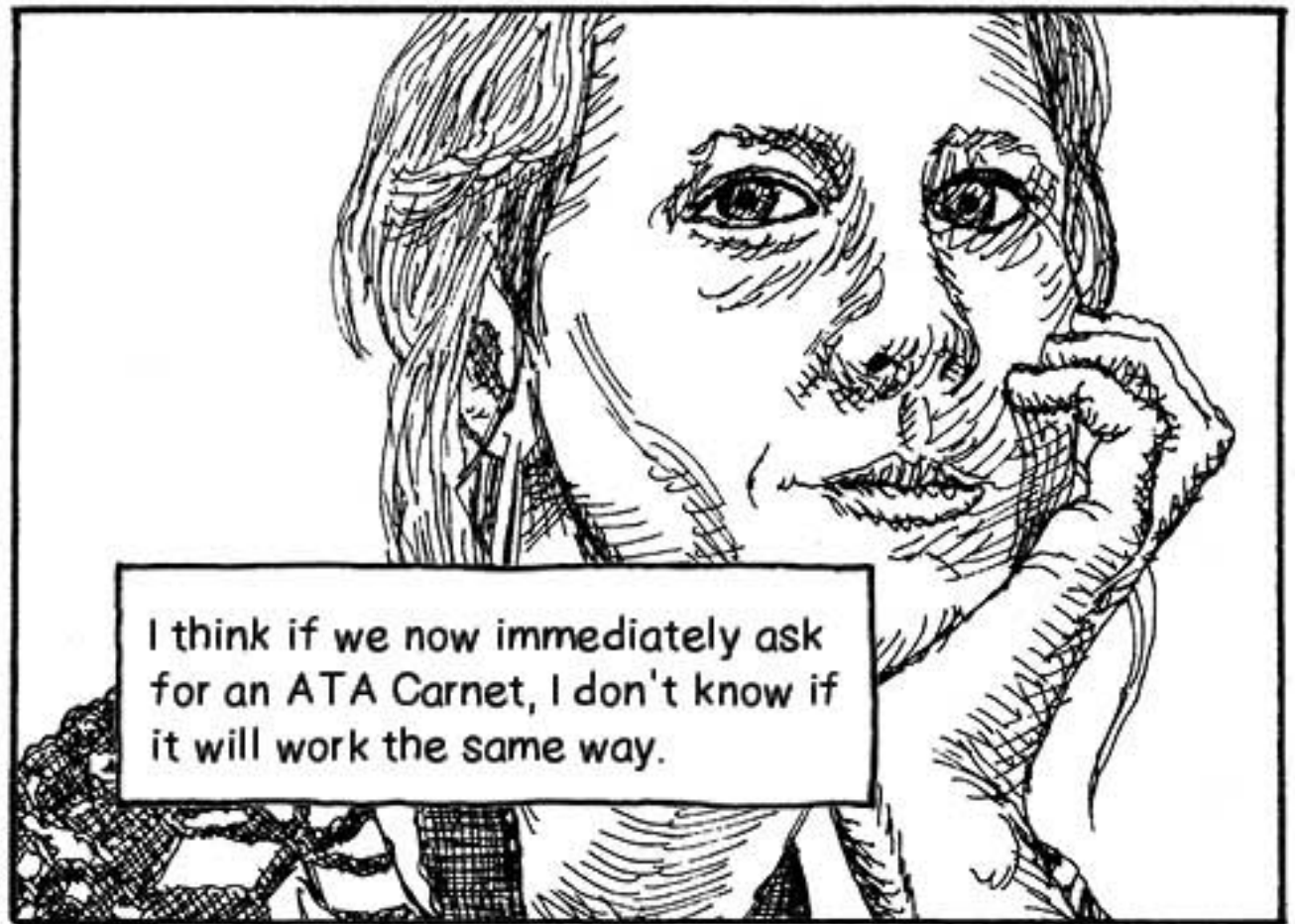
I think it will never be the same.



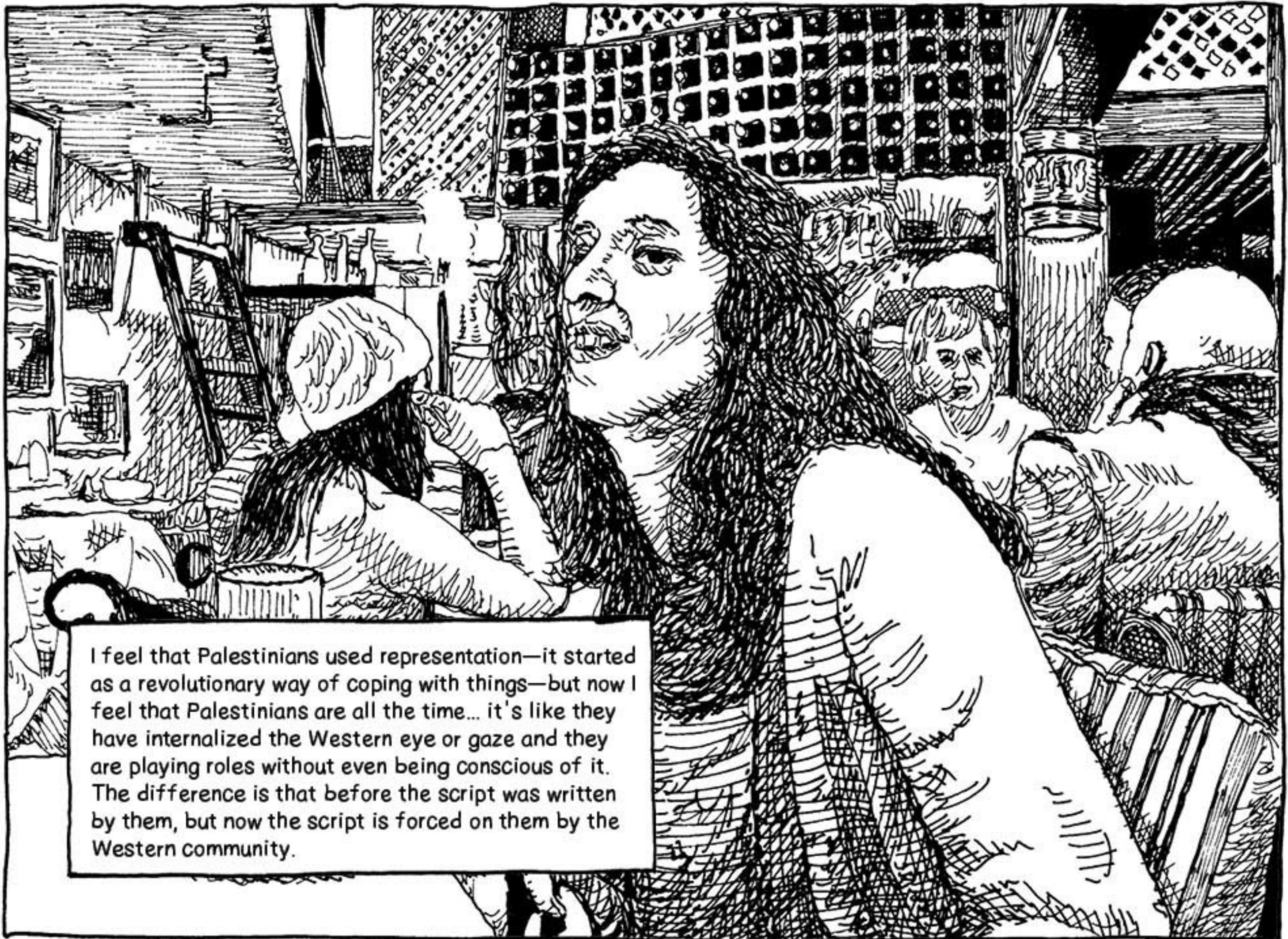
I think the next time will be different.



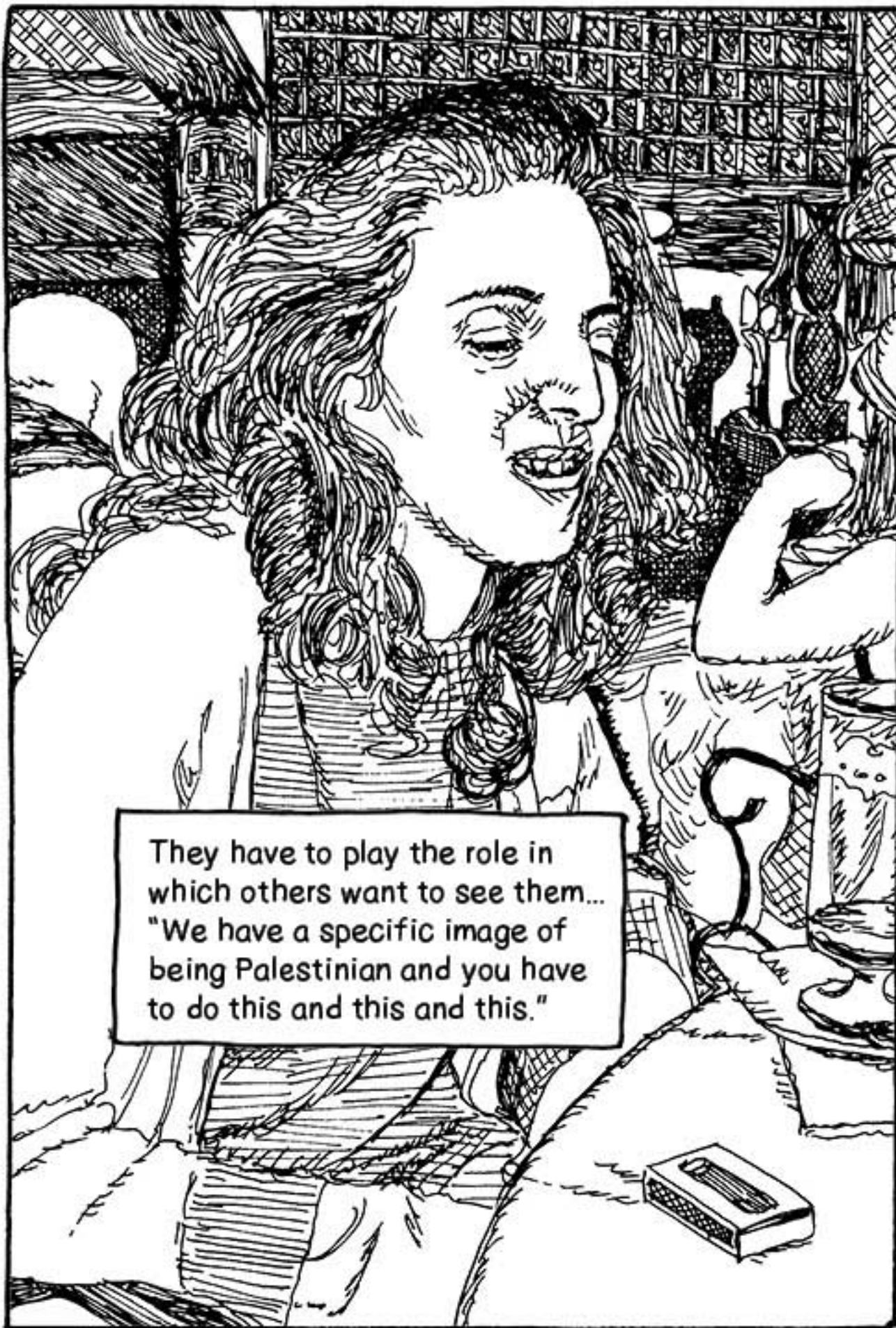
I can't explain.



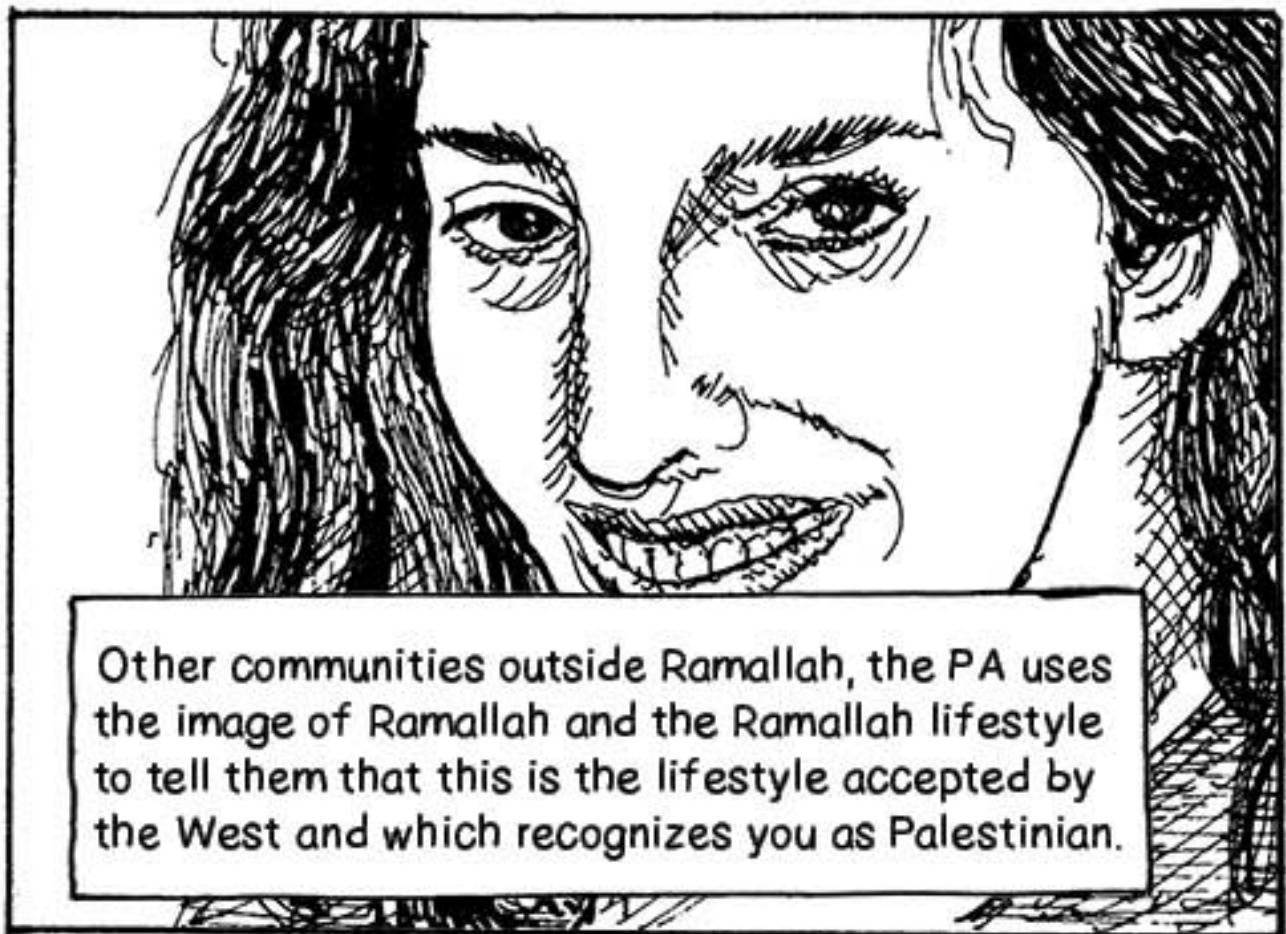
I think if we now immediately ask for an ATA Carnet, I don't know if it will work the same way.



I feel that Palestinians used representation—it started as a revolutionary way of coping with things—but now I feel that Palestinians are all the time... it's like they have internalized the Western eye or gaze and they are playing roles without even being conscious of it. The difference is that before the script was written by them, but now the script is forced on them by the Western community.



They have to play the role in which others want to see them... "We have a specific image of being Palestinian and you have to do this and this and this."



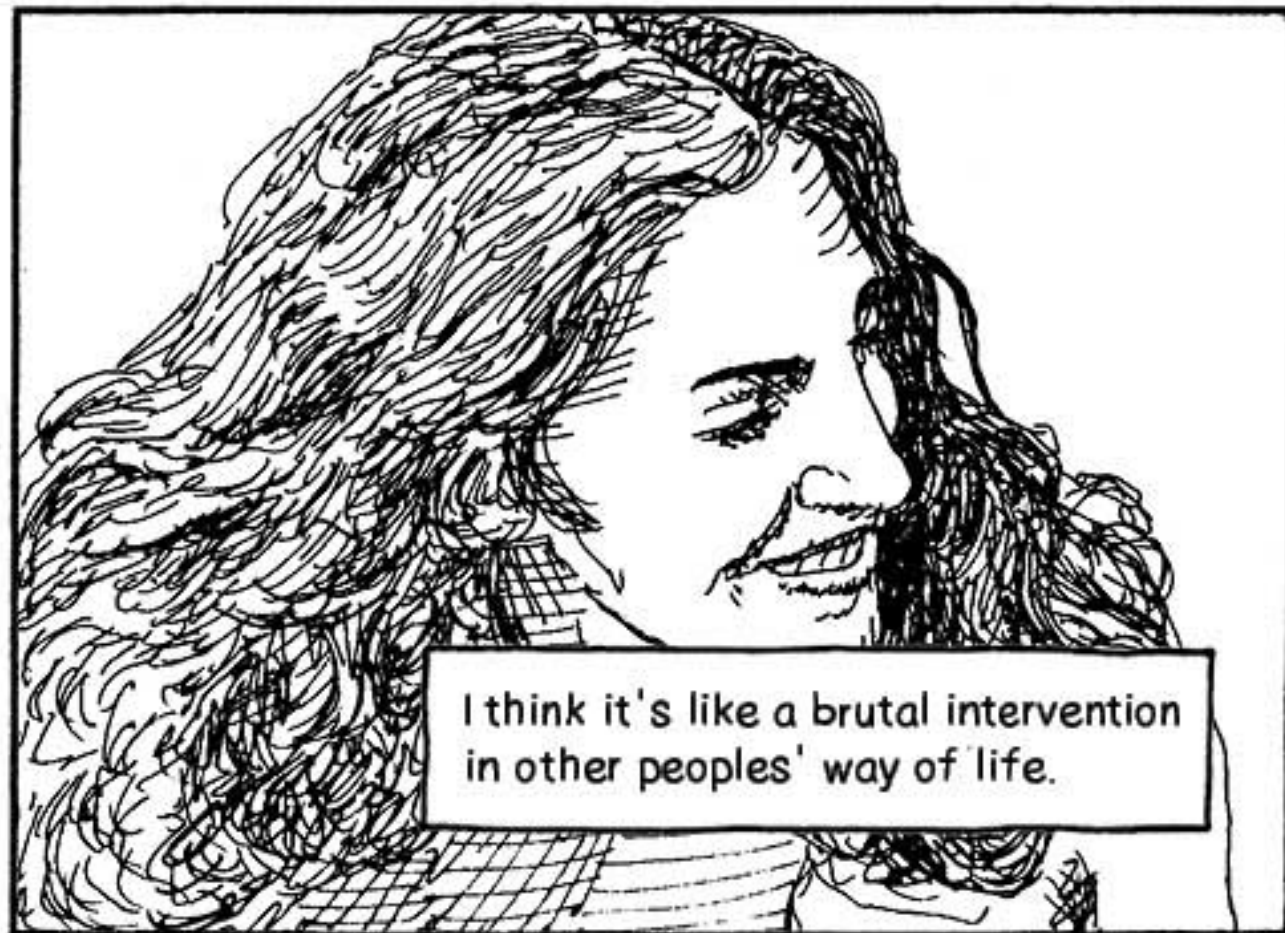
Other communities outside Ramallah, the PA uses the image of Ramallah and the Ramallah lifestyle to tell them that this is the lifestyle accepted by the West and which recognizes you as Palestinian.



So, if you want to be accepted as well, you have to live like this, you know?



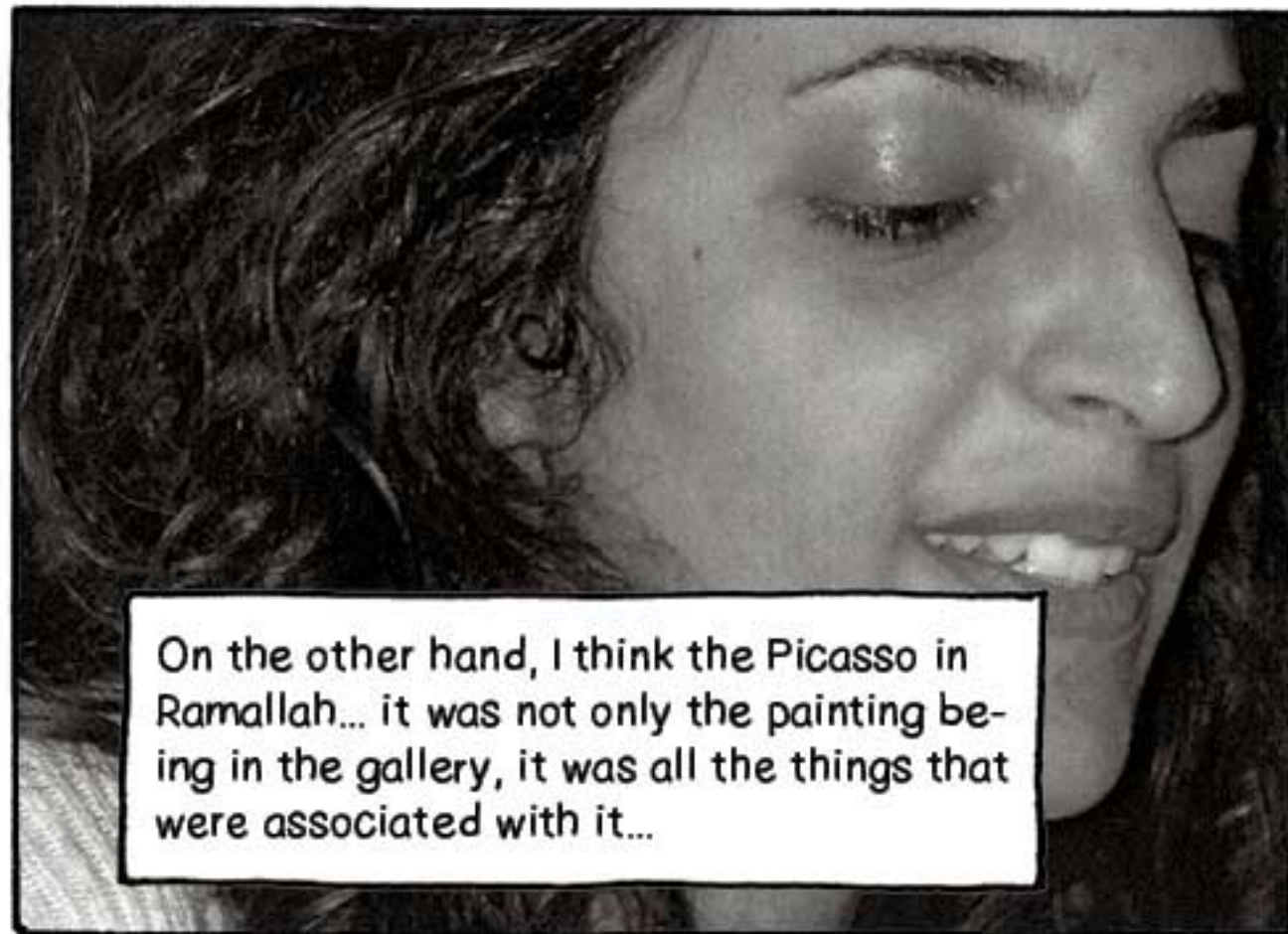
So, this is the hidden meaning under all the ways the Ramallah lifestyle is used. And the Picasso project used it in the same way.



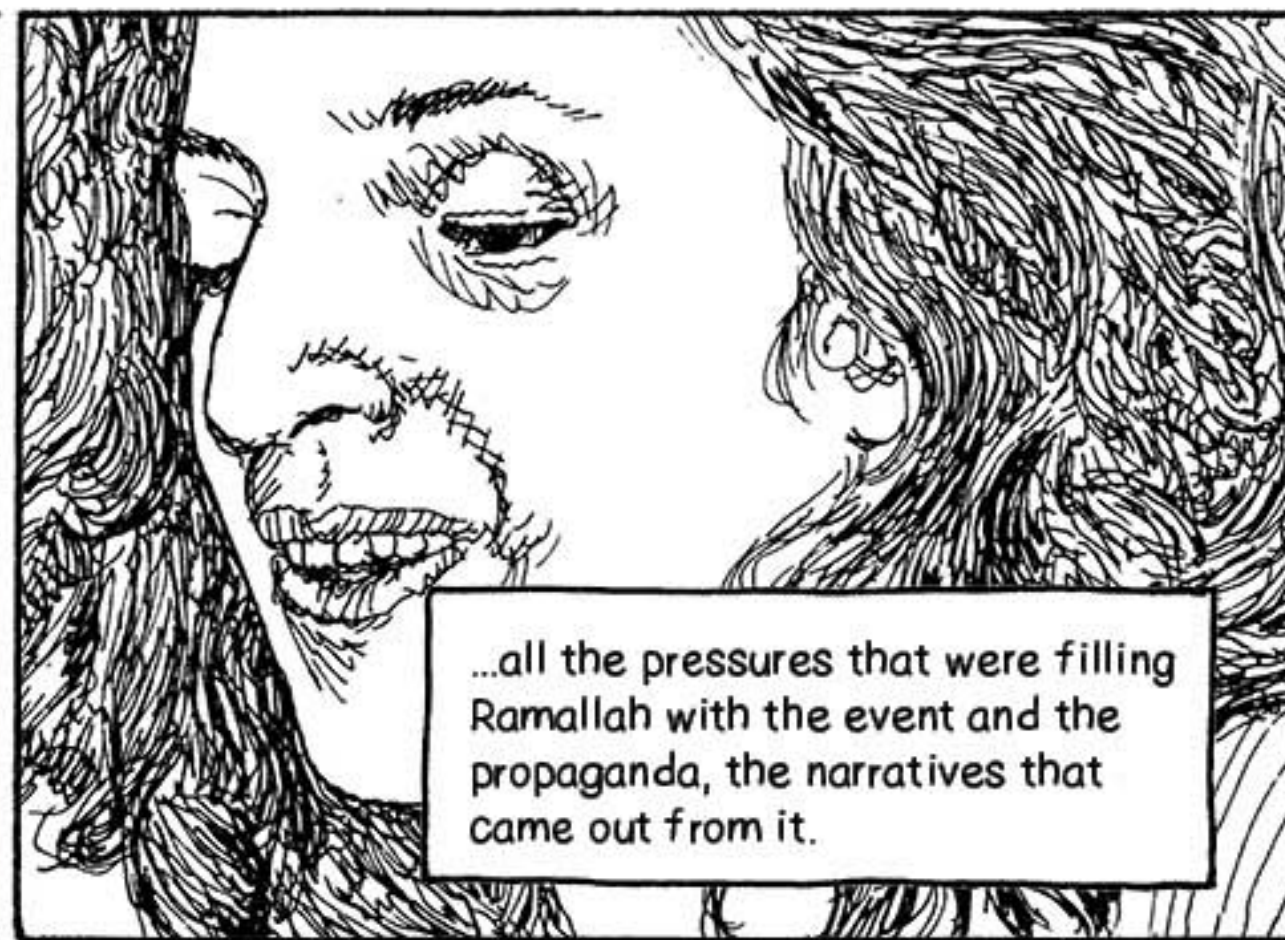
I think it's like a brutal intervention in other peoples' way of life.



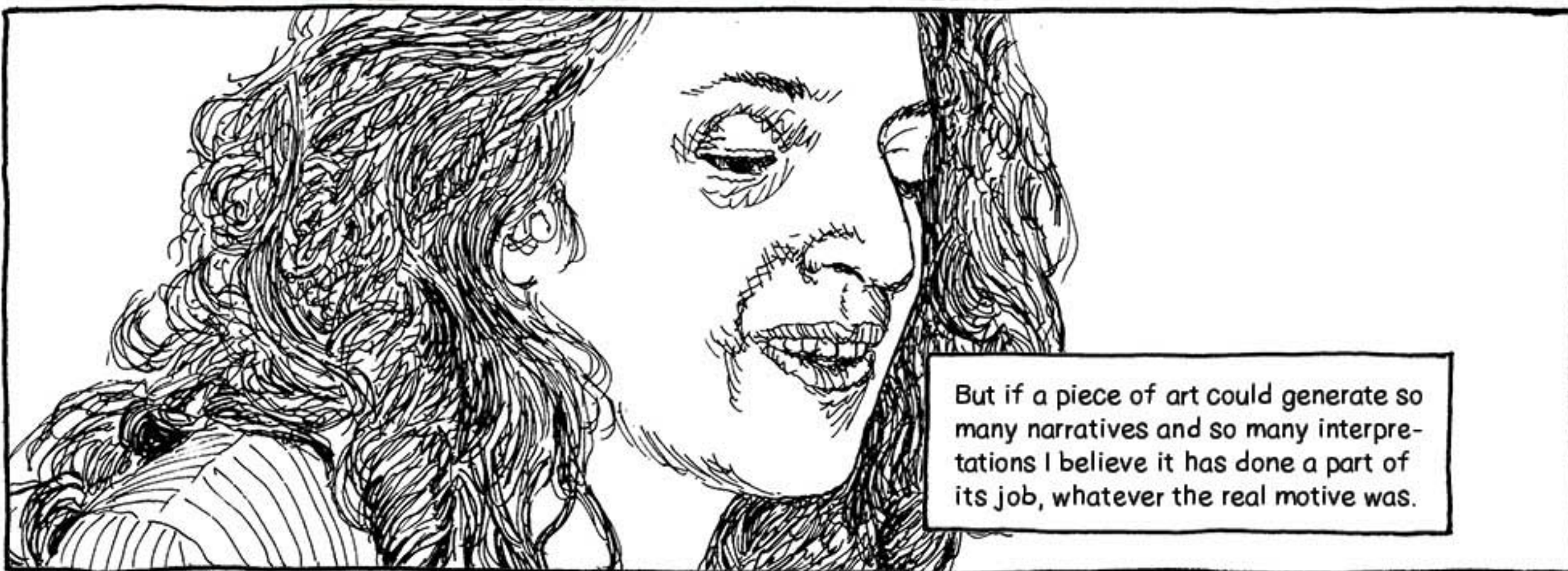
Otherwise, they will stay invisible.



On the other hand, I think the Picasso in Ramallah... it was not only the painting being in the gallery, it was all the things that were associated with it...



...all the pressures that were filling Ramallah with the event and the propaganda, the narratives that came out from it.



But if a piece of art could generate so many narratives and so many interpretations I believe it has done a part of its job, whatever the real motive was.




In an interview with a French journalist published in Ha'aretz, I said the reason why I love Picasso in Palestine is because it is also a projection of what Palestinian art would be without the occupation.




What if we wake up one day and there's no occupation?




What would Palestinian art be? That's a general question everybody asks.




This work is also about questioning Picasso, revisiting the meaning of modernity, revisiting Picasso and the role of the artist at his time and the differences in art practice in the contemporary time. It is also about revisiting the history of art.



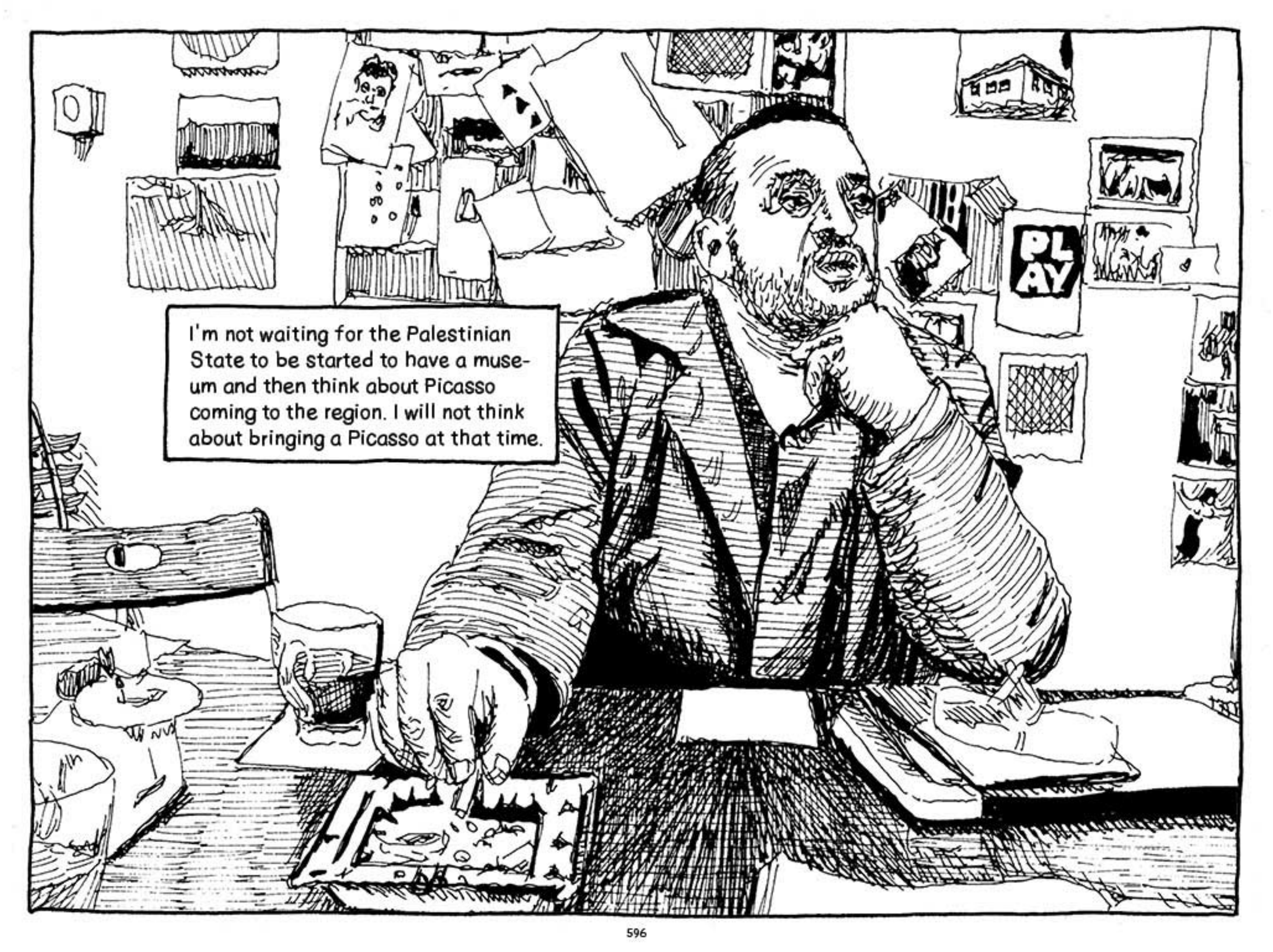
We are not only bringing a Picasso from Europe to the Middle East, from a museum in the Netherlands to our zone: we are bringing a Picasso from the time of modernity to a different history, to contemporary time.



I'm not sure if art has to give a solution for this complicated situation all around us.

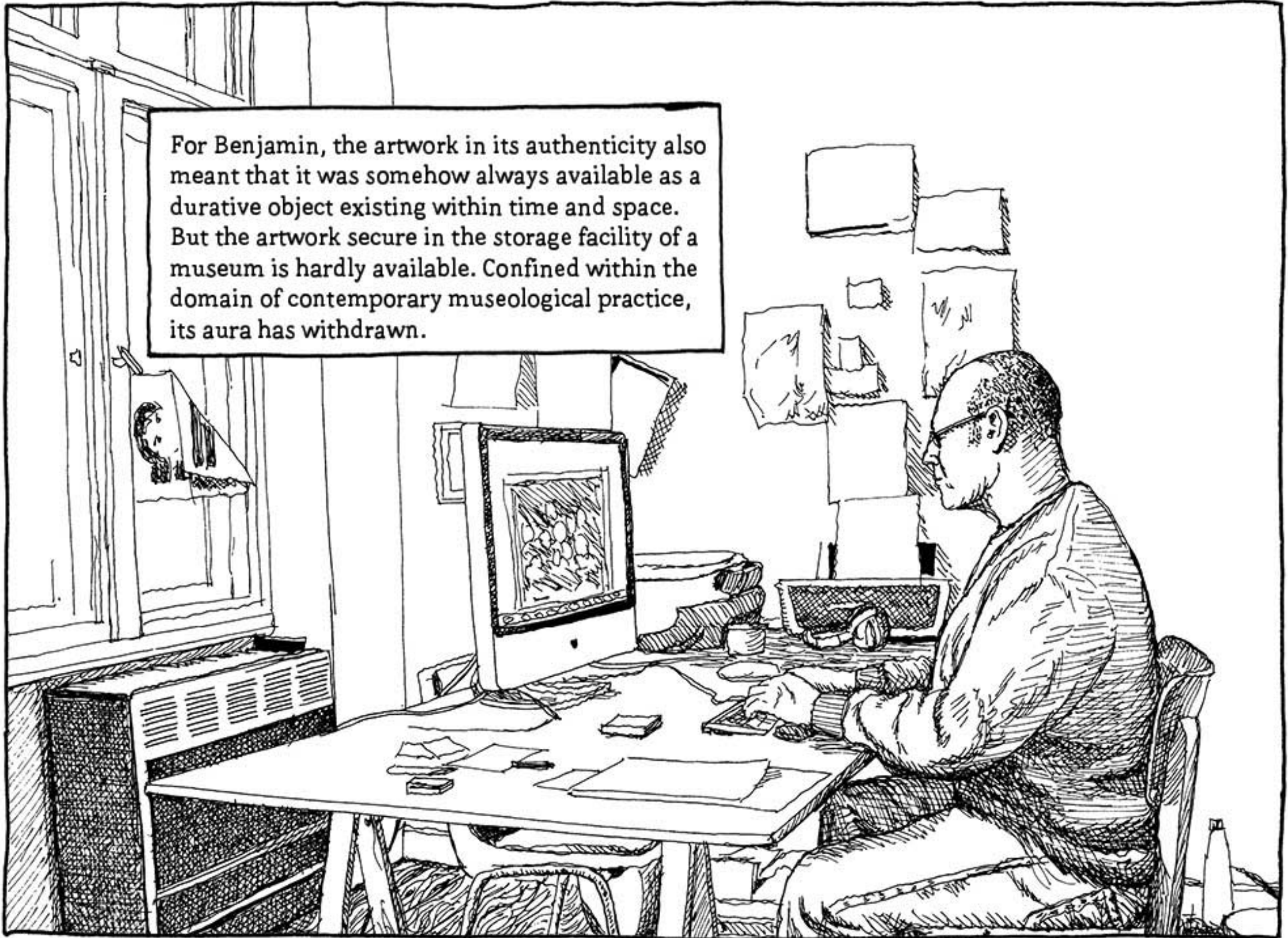


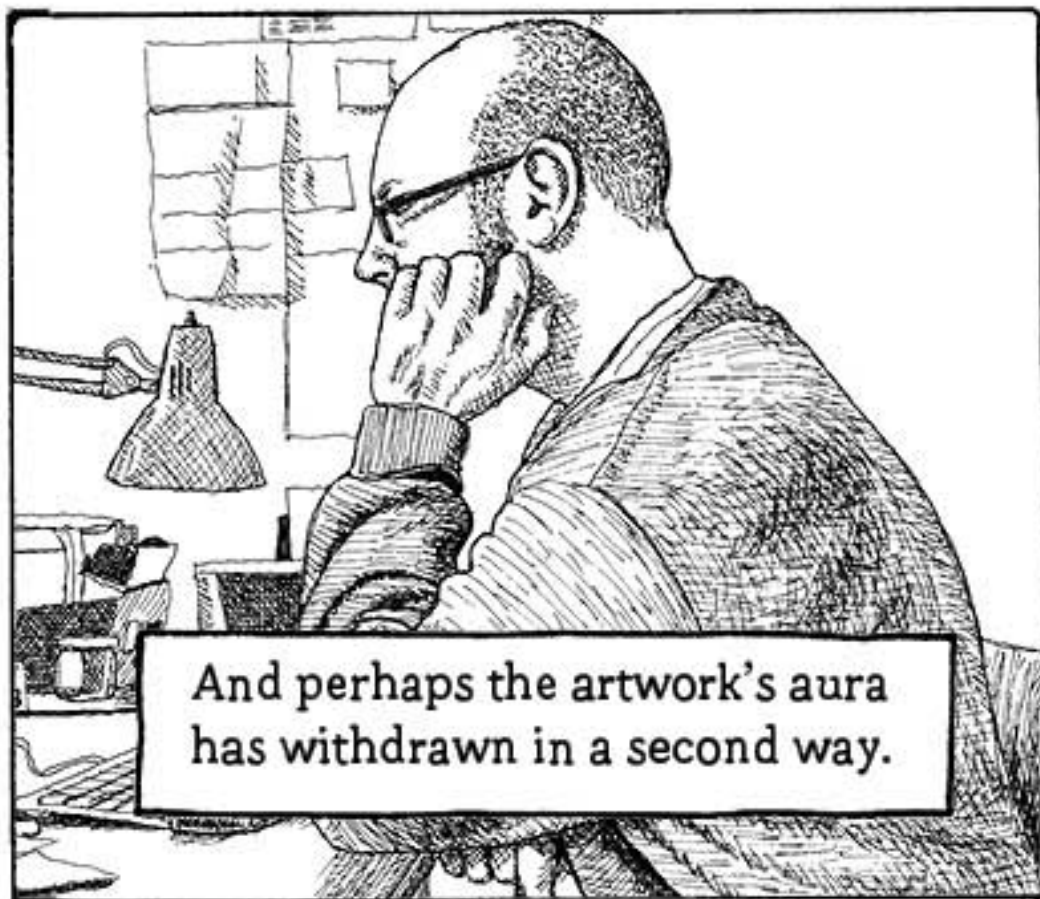
It might shed some light, frame things in one way or another, make our situation clearer.



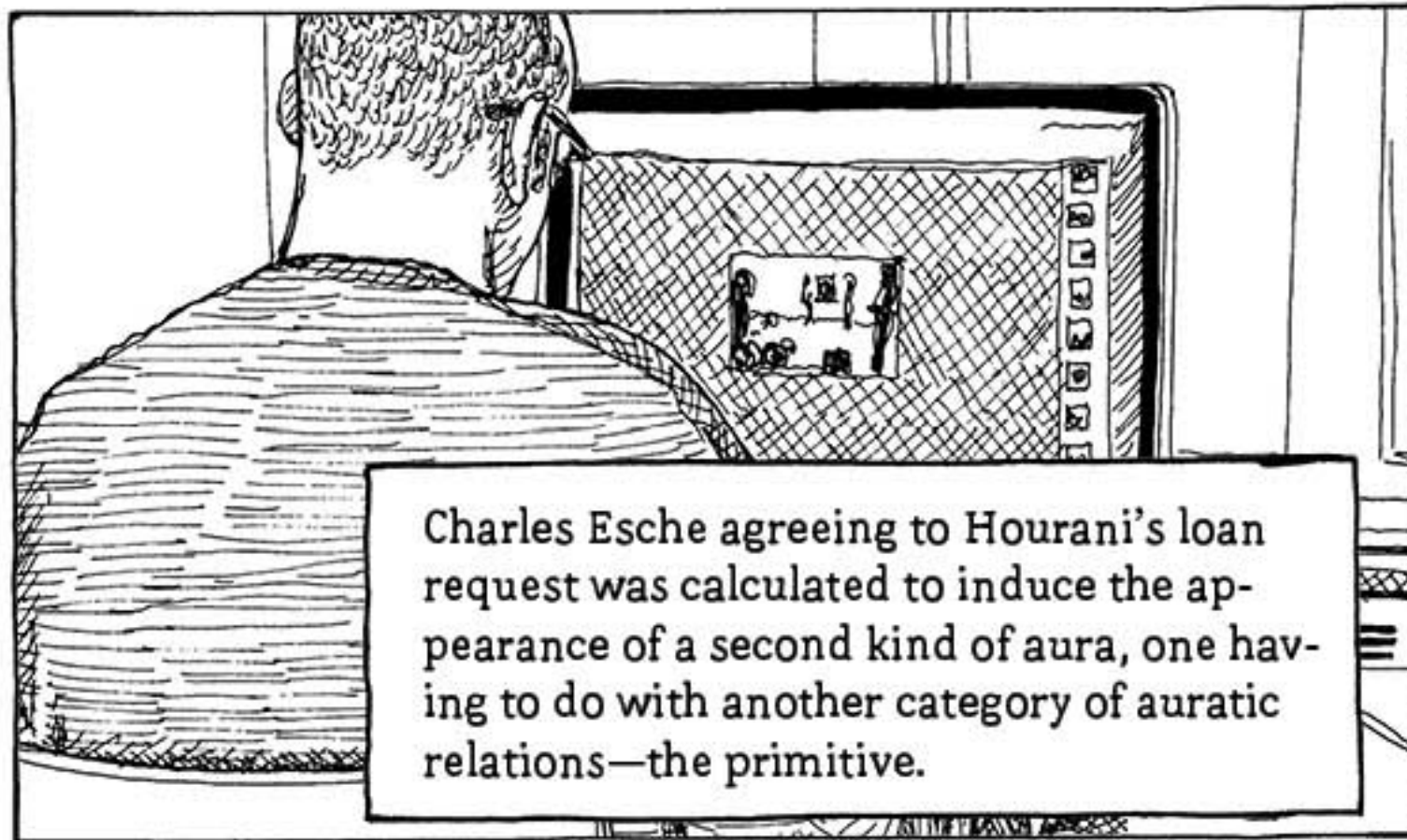
I'm not waiting for the Palestinian State to be started to have a museum and then think about Picasso coming to the region. I will not think about bringing a Picasso at that time.

For Benjamin, the artwork in its authenticity also meant that it was somehow always available as a durative object existing within time and space. But the artwork secure in the storage facility of a museum is hardly available. Confined within the domain of contemporary museological practice, its aura has withdrawn.

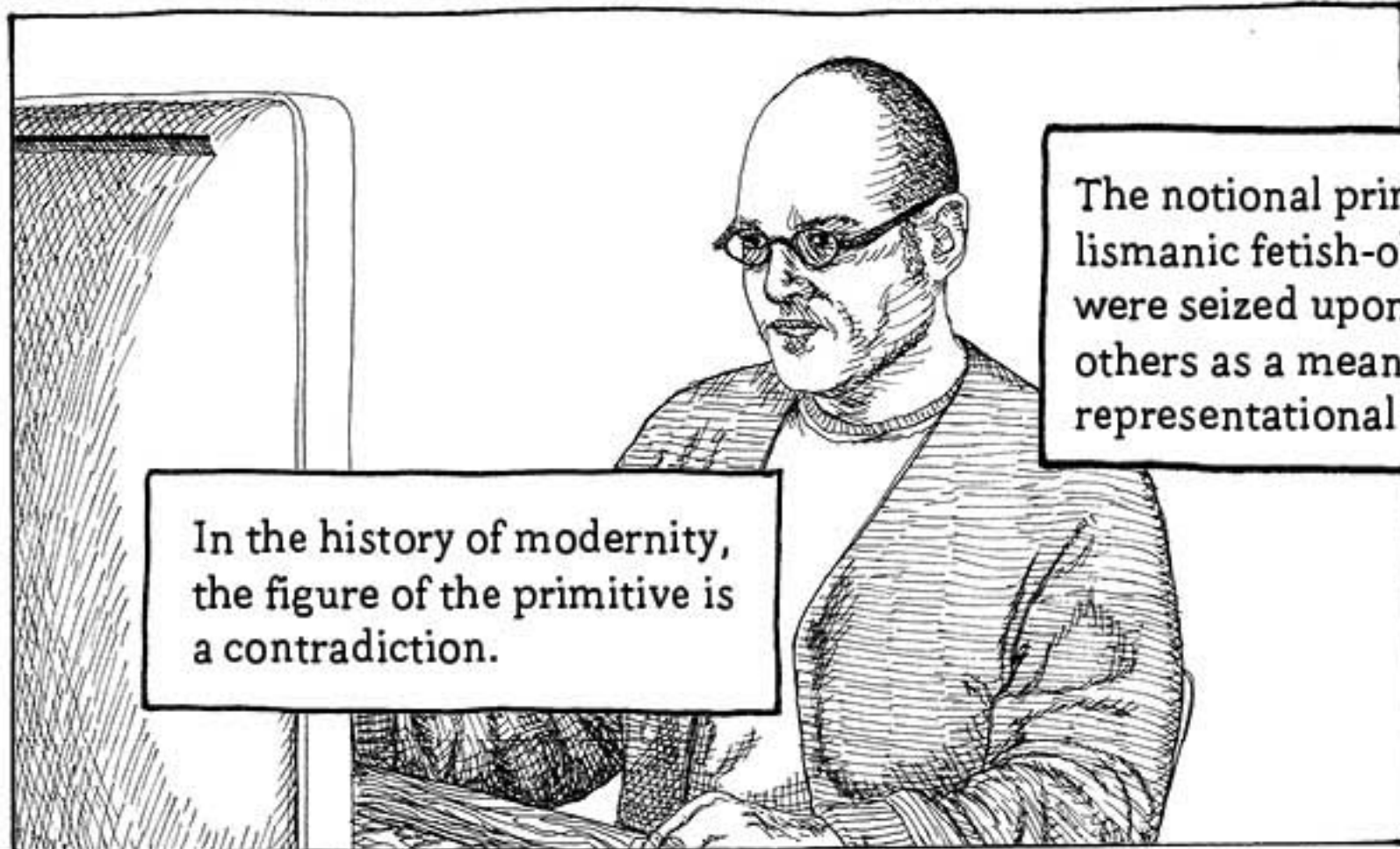




And perhaps the artwork's aura has withdrawn in a second way.

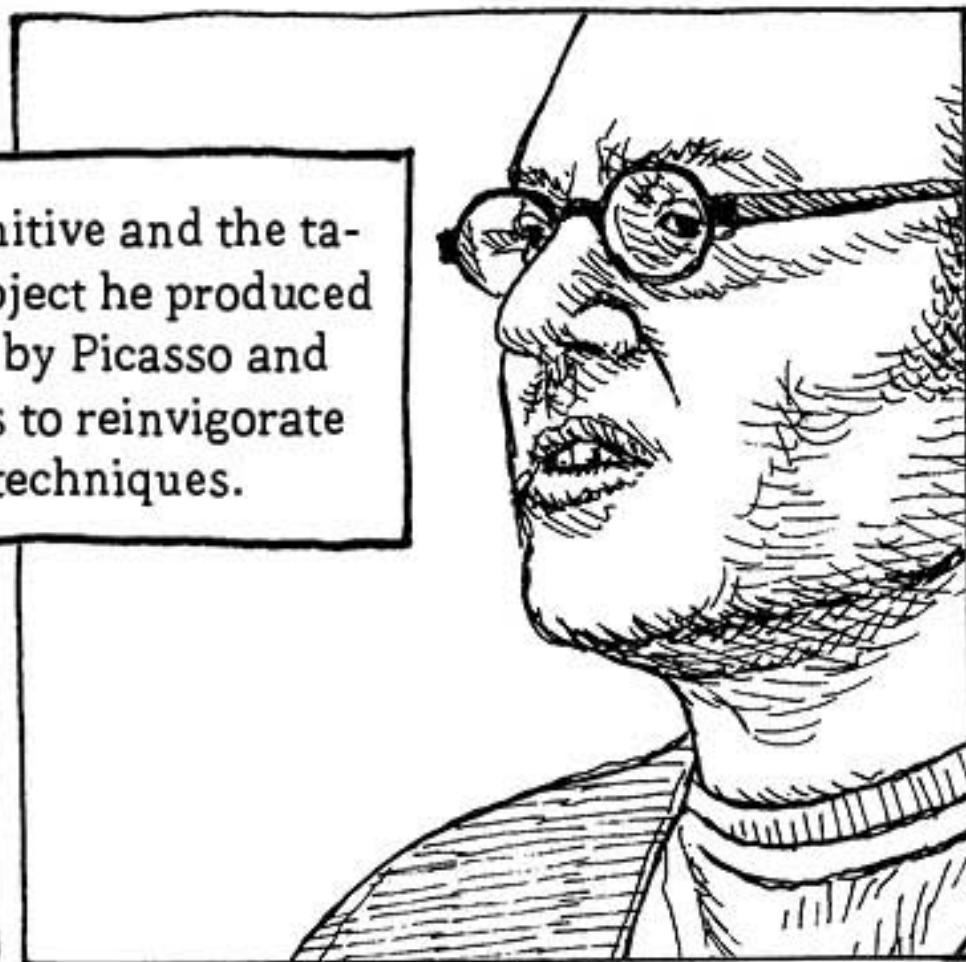


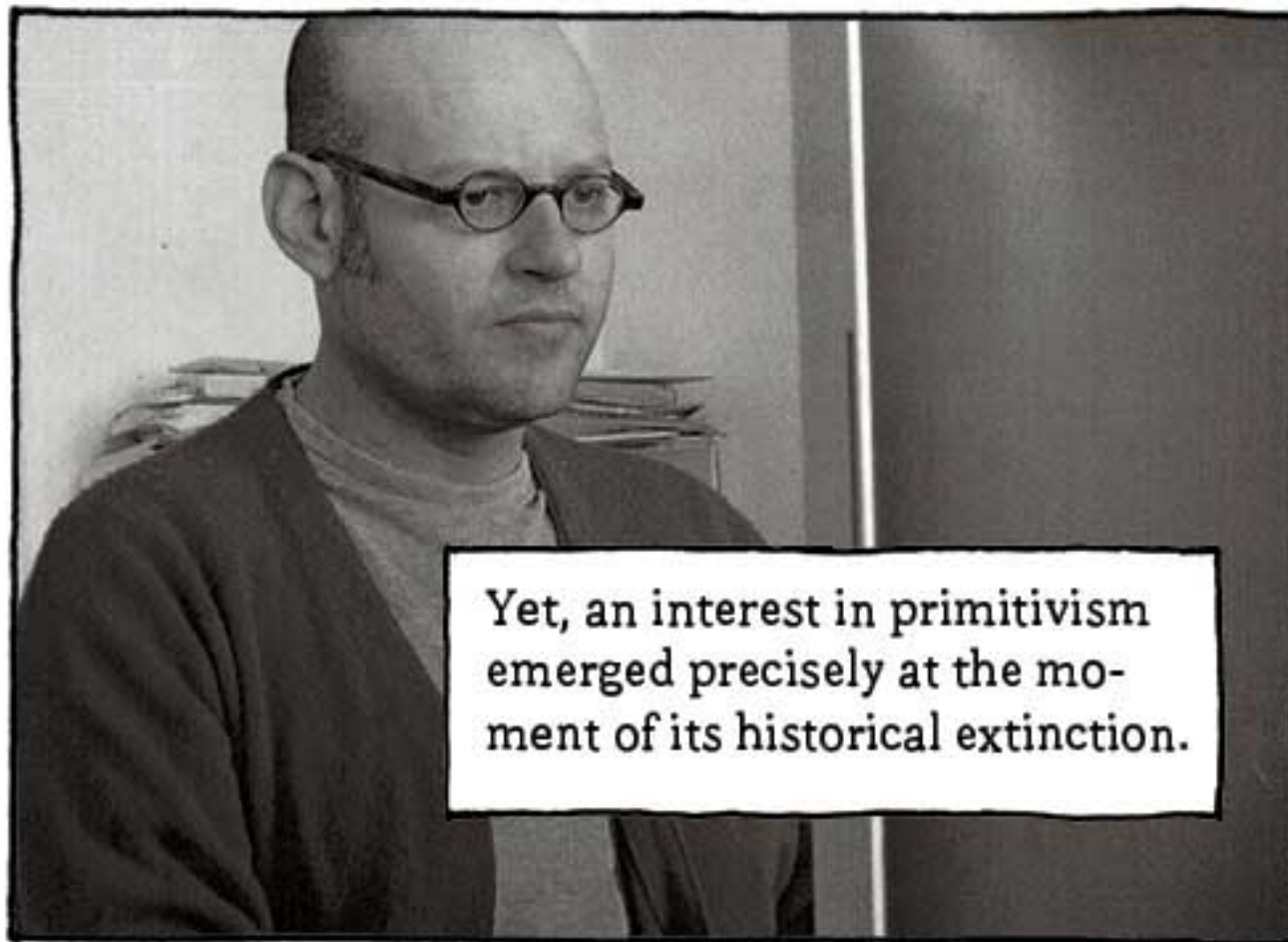
Charles Esche agreeing to Hourani's loan request was calculated to induce the appearance of a second kind of aura, one having to do with another category of auratic relations—the primitive.



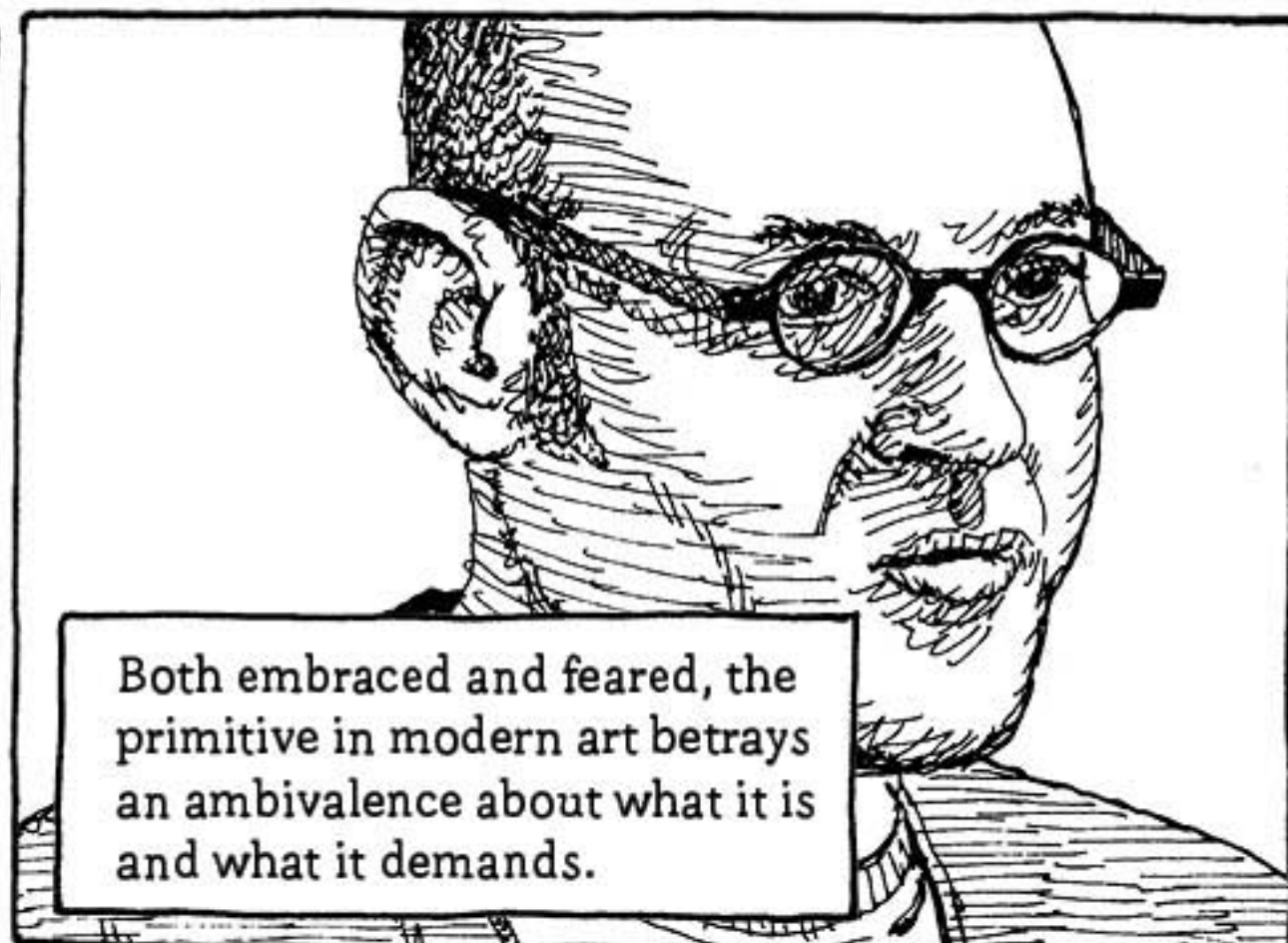
In the history of modernity, the figure of the primitive is a contradiction.

The notional primitive and the talismanic fetish-object he produced were seized upon by Picasso and others as a means to reinvigorate representational techniques.

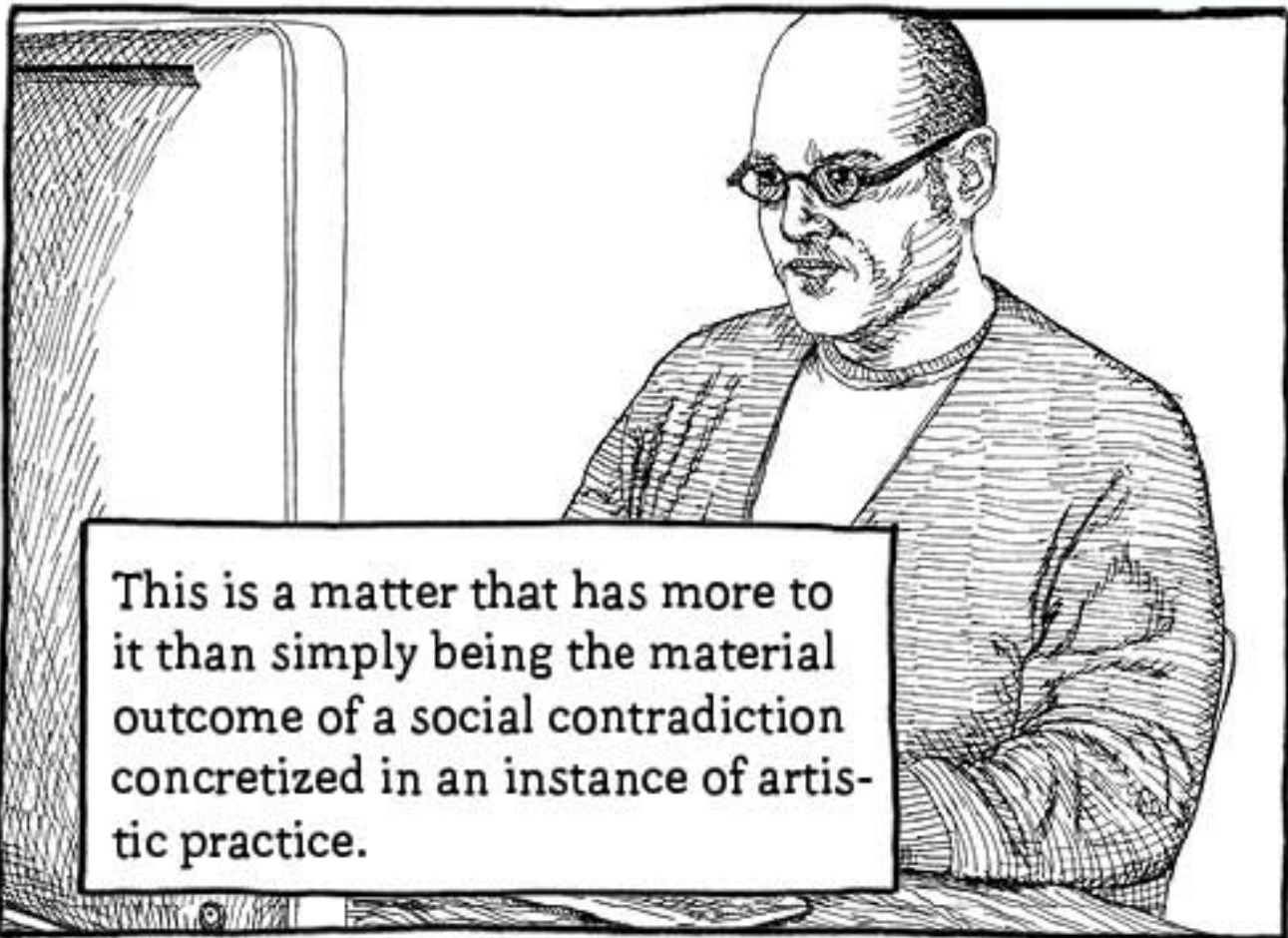




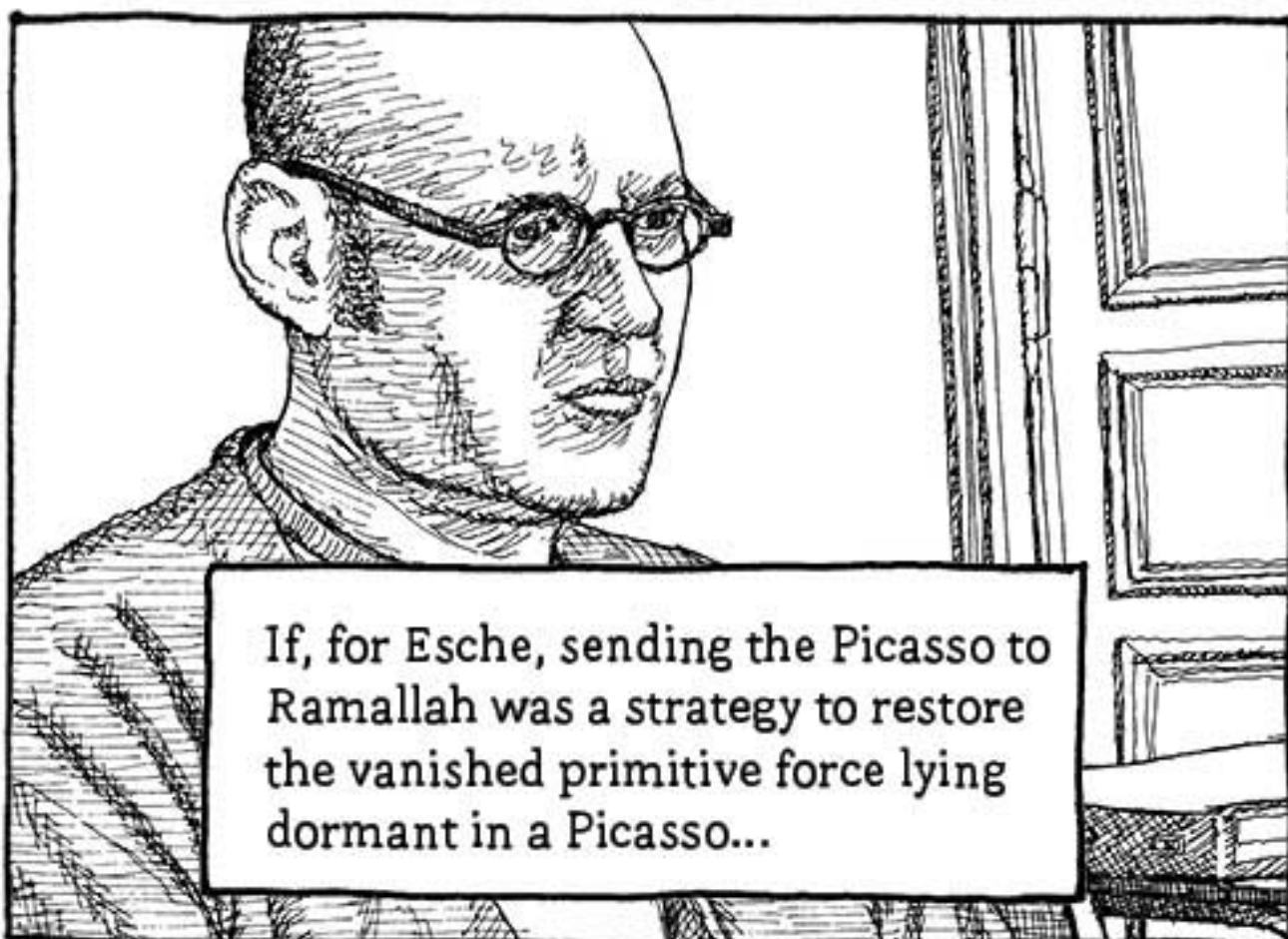
Yet, an interest in primitivism emerged precisely at the moment of its historical extinction.



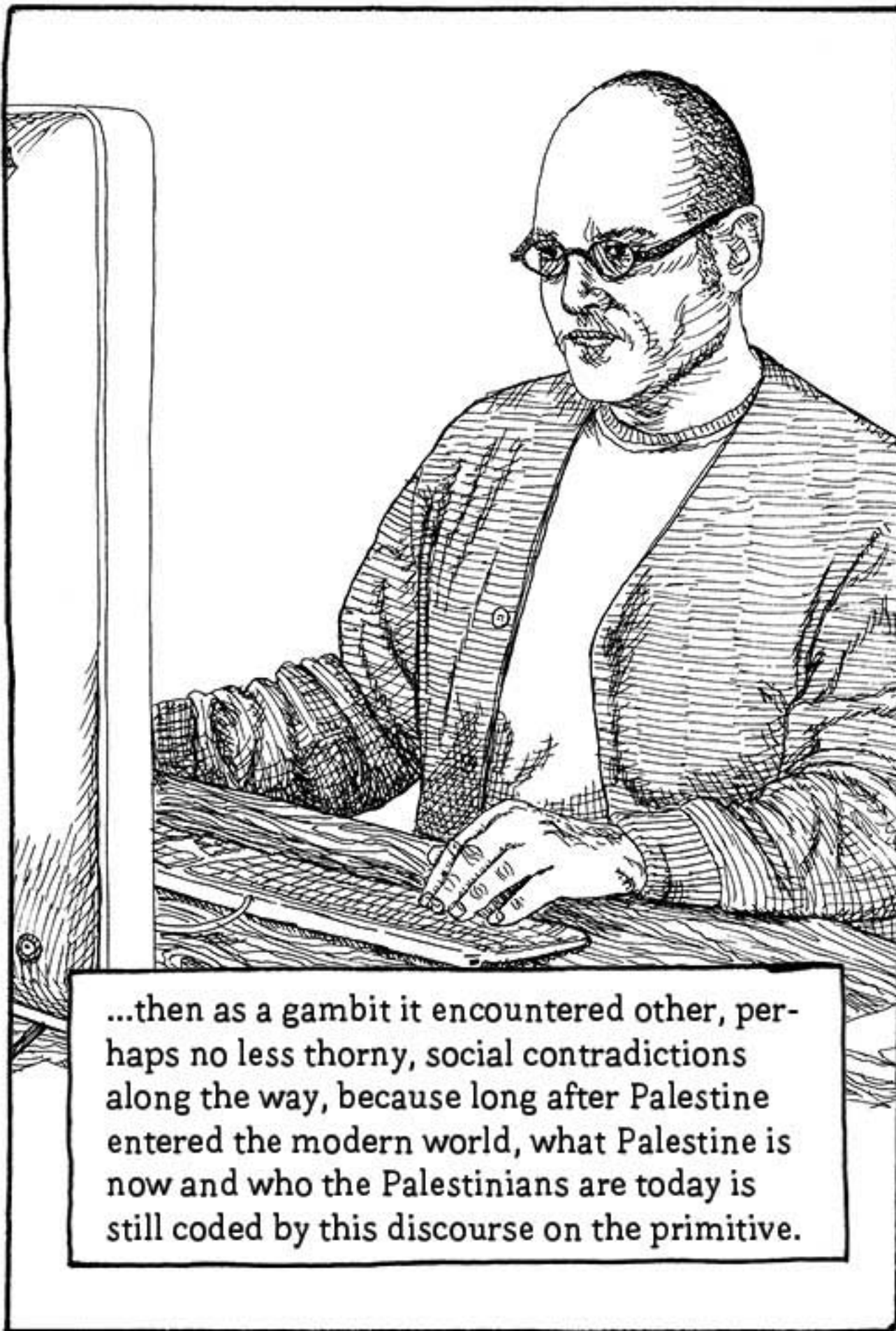
Both embraced and feared, the primitive in modern art betrays an ambivalence about what it is and what it demands.



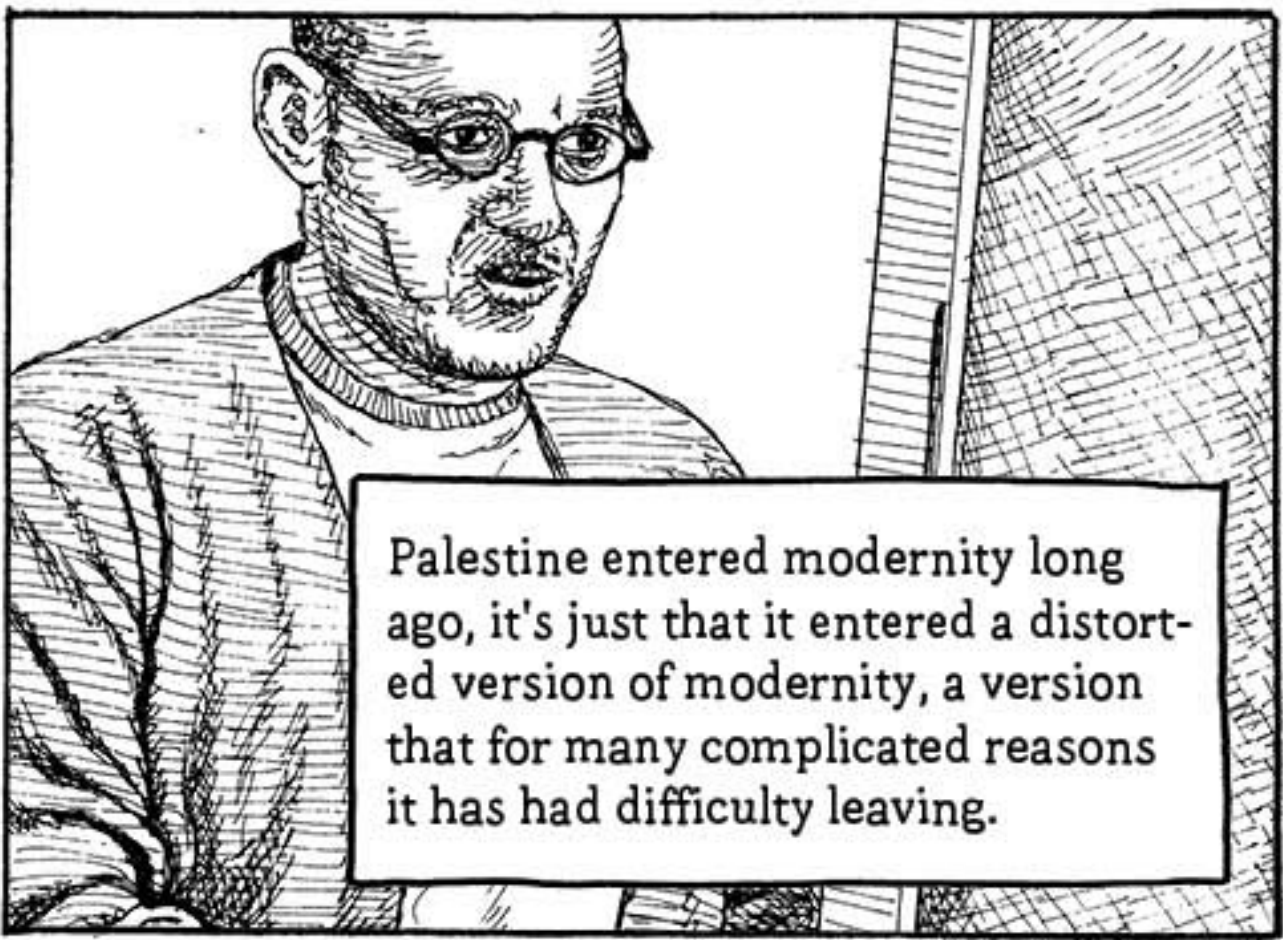
This is a matter that has more to it than simply being the material outcome of a social contradiction concretized in an instance of artistic practice.



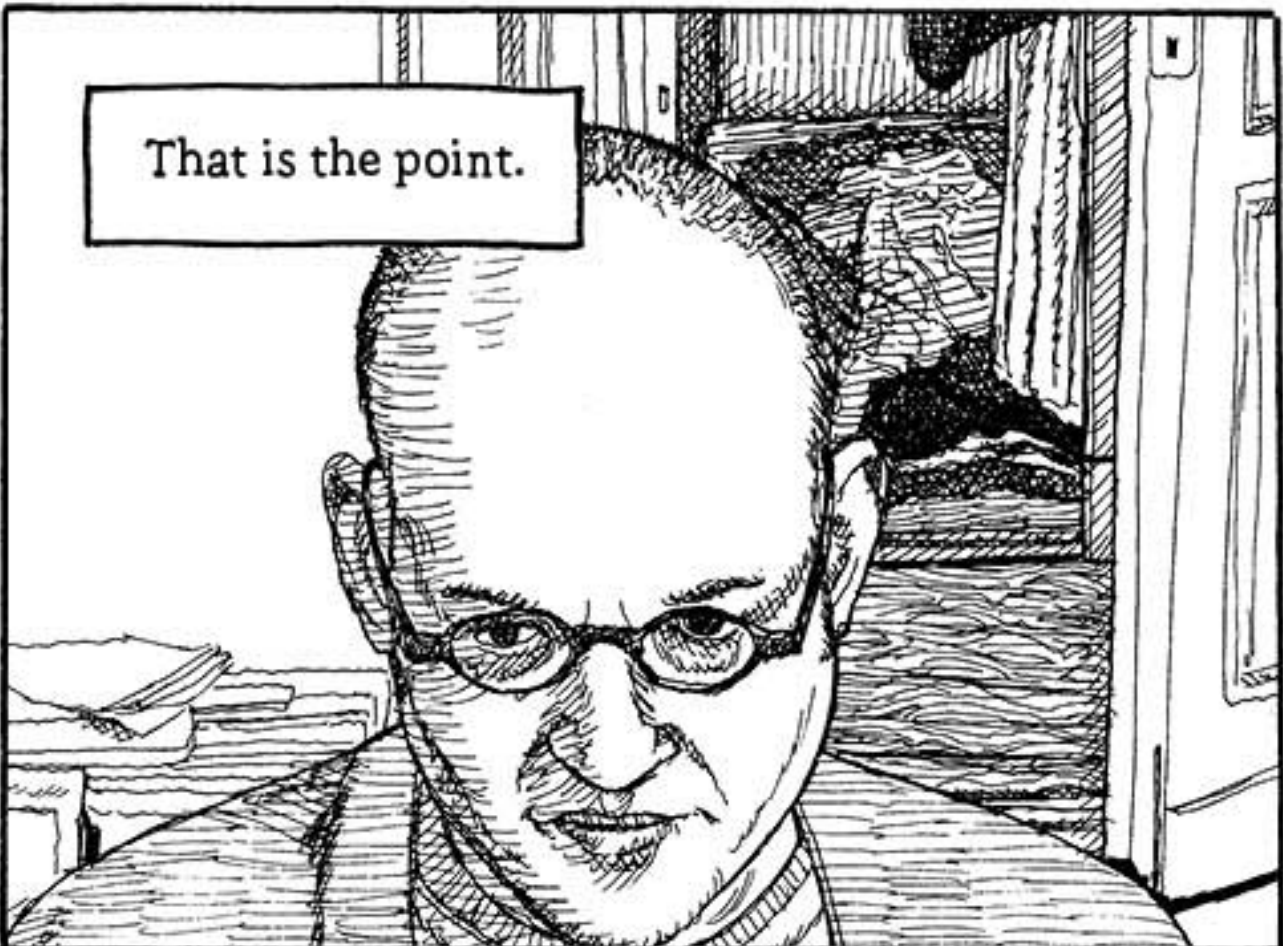
If, for Esche, sending the Picasso to Ramallah was a strategy to restore the vanished primitive force lying dormant in a Picasso...



...then as a gambit it encountered other, perhaps no less thorny, social contradictions along the way, because long after Palestine entered the modern world, what Palestine is now and who the Palestinians are today is still coded by this discourse on the primitive.



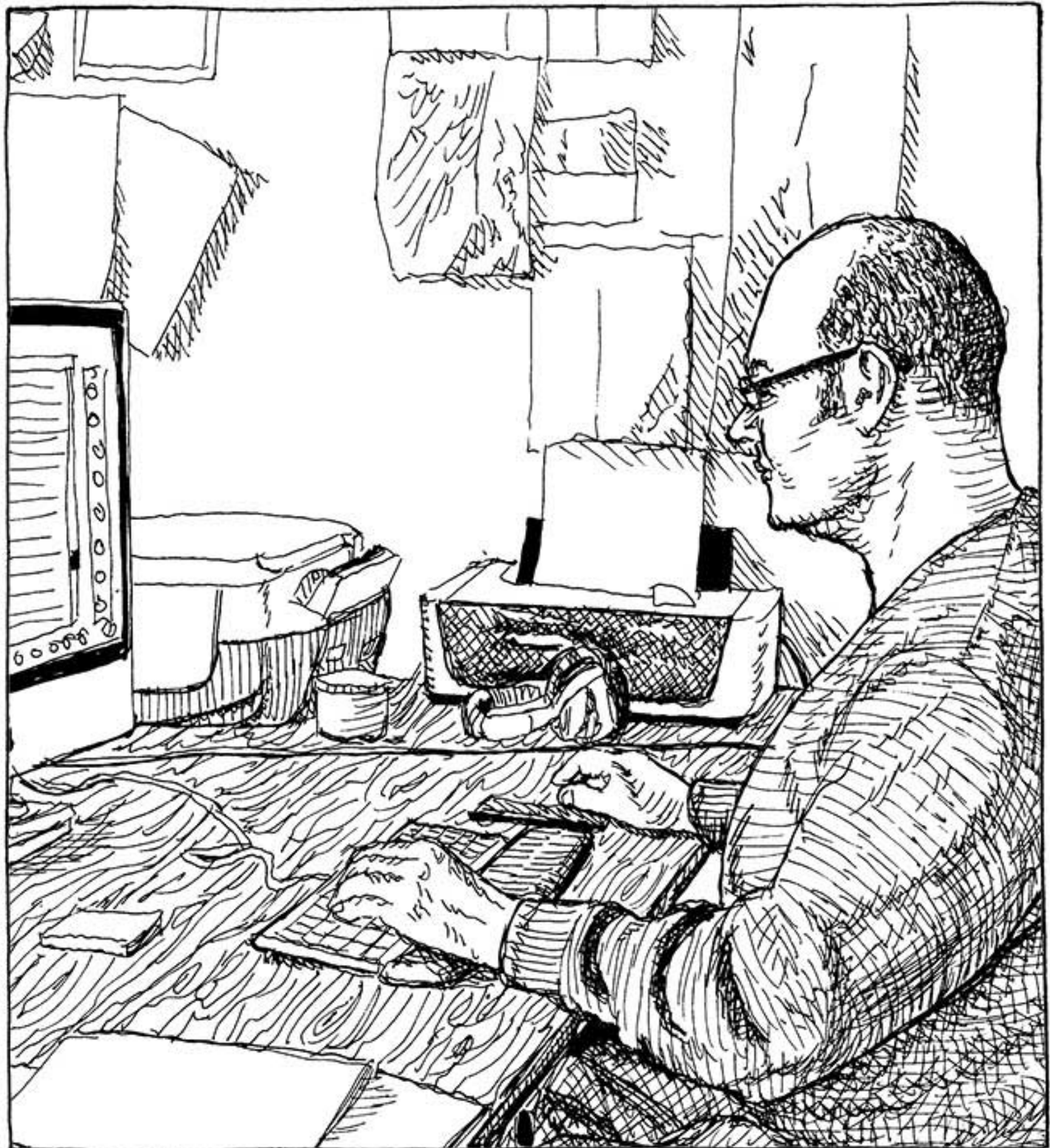
Palestine entered modernity long ago, it's just that it entered a distorted version of modernity, a version that for many complicated reasons it has had difficulty leaving.



That is the point.

We construct our understanding of the world from our home, from our travels, and also from the bits and pieces of the written record, of the material history we encounter, bricoleurs of the historical record composing a world in tatters, a world of tatters. Out of this, what sort of modernity should we make for ourselves? Which of the many different modernities should we arrogate for understanding the past? Each contradictory, each betraying, in the minutiae behind the public myth, its own specificity. We use the past, and when we do this we construct an argument about the present saturated in a mythic past. Against this, the rude facts of the present appear like a refutation of that myth.

If we understand how the Van Abbemuseum produced aura in the *Buste de femme* by sending it to Ramallah, then we can understand how to tell this story in a way appropriate to our digital era.



KHALAS



IMPRINT

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