

Critical summary safe area gorazde



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Abandonment and Neglect in Gorazde. In his " Safe Area Gorazde" Joe Sacco describes his experience visiting a Muslim enclave during the Bosnian War of 1991-1995. Tragically, this work is based on testimonies of residents of Gorazde, allegedly a UN-protected area where Bosnian Muslims are able to take refuge to avoid the ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Serbian army. Gorazde is anything but protected which Sacco demonstrates throughout the book by ridiculing the UN and the US who are able to and responsible for protecting the residents of such enclaves, but instead turn a blind eye to what was going on. ...the U. N. extended safe area status to other Bosnian enclaves, including Gorazde. But the U. N. had yet to work out what the concept meant", Sacco says (Sacco, 148). These designated " safe" areas are completely abandoned by the authorities who promise to watch over them, despite being some of the most dangerous places on Earth. The entire world seems to ignore the brutalities going on there - the destruction of towns, massacre of men, raping of women, and the murder and neglect of children. The residents have nowhere to go, have no hope, and little or no access to basic necessities.

These conditions and the abandonment which leads to them is the central theme of this work. Sacco wants us to feel this situation and he succeeds. By the end of " Safe Area Gorazde" one is left seething. " Safe area", as Sacco's title suggests, was a new entry in the Orwellian lexicon during the Bosnian conflict. As Hitchens states in the introduction to the book, " the contempt is reserved for the temporizing, buck passing, butt covering " peacekeepers" who strove to find that swamp of low and " middle" ground into which the innocent are being shoveled by the aggressive" (Hitchens, Introduction).

This is a great, if brief, explanation of the evolution of the word “ safe”. The extreme nature of the situation in Gorazde immediately involves the reader’s emotions. Sacco’s brilliance is shown by the way he uses rhetorical techniques to make the situation feel more personal to the reader with consistent reminders and undertones of abandonment. The personal nature of the story is communicated through the author’s experiences and by the people of Gorazde themselves.

Taking abandonment as an example, we follow Sacco as he travels down the “ blue road” which Bosnian Muslims cannot escape their suffering, the very same road which the UN shares with Serbian ethnic cleansers. Here we have the international abandonment of the enclave. Relayed to us by the people of Gorazde, is their abandonment of one another based on ethnicity. Slightly more subtle is Sacco’s constant communication of the senselessness of the abandonment faced by Bosnian Muslims. In nearly every panel there is a sense of tragic absurdity to the whole situation.

We are invited by Sacco to feel as though we are abandoning the characters when Sacco waves his blue card and leaves the Gorazde for the first time. Sacco tersely and pointedly expresses the sentiment with, “...catch ya later!”(65). This is a phrase that may have come naturally to Sacco but also could have been designed with the majority of his reading audience in mind. The third level of abandonment, which is central and speaks to the Bosnian conflict itself, is the abandonment of community.

Throughout the first portion of the work, Sacco takes care to repeat and emphasize “ neighbors” as a motif. This motif hits its first shocking climax in

“ The First Attack”. Sacco depicts the first armed attack on the civilian population of Gorazde as described by several characters. In the frames one can feel the hopelessness and despair that has overcome the refugees. Many of the attackers are recognized by the Muslims as their former neighbors and friends. Their narrations are filled with perplexity, disappointment, and mourning.

It is even more painful that these people’s entire lives have been destroyed by other people whom they had trusted, used to live next to, and spent a lot of time with. When Edin finds out who burnt his house, he remembers, “ We used to play football together. We used to go out at night, and if we didn’t go out, we used to spend the evening together on our street” (87). The violent realization that the days of Serbs and Muslims living alongside one another are over is very sad and very difficult in these pages.

The classic formulation of one’s social interactions with the outside world was clearly formulated by Aristotle over twenty-four hundred years ago. Aristotle divided these interactions up into friendship, community or interactions with the polis, and politics which also involved the polis on a bigger scale. In “ Safe Area Gorazde”, it is heartening to see the loyalty and good will that Bosnian Muslims show to one another but one wonders if even friendship might have buckled in the face of ethnic strife.

One could argue that it clearly did because ultimately no Serb is able to stay in Gorazde. Further, although Sacco returned, the reader is able to have a slight taste of personal abandonment when Sacco left Gorazde. As for community, Gorazde as a whole is ripped apart. Serbian neighbor even goes

so far as to snipe Muslim neighbor from the hilltops. Finally, the political solution is ruinous on both national and international levels.

Milosevic intentionally fuels the fires of ethnic superstition and violence. The international community takes half measures to contain the situation from spreading and watched the suffering of Bosnian Muslims. Thus making a mockery of the phrase coined at the end of World War II, after the discovery of the Holocaust, " never again". Works cited: 1)Hitchens, Christopher. Introduction. Safe Area Gorazde. 2000. 2)Sacco, Joe. Safe Area Gorazde. The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-95. Fantagraphics. 2000. Print.