

Courage My Friends Podcast Series XI – Episode 3 **Requiem for Gaza: A Conversation with Joe Sacco**

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.

Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

RESH: From genocide into exile, how do Palestinians grapple with unimaginable loss even after having made it out of Gaza? How does comics journalism convey the weight of the current moment and the imprint of history upon it? And from the killing of journalists over there to the chilling of journalism here, what of the obligation to truth, especially in a time of relentless and arrogant power?

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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: Welcome back to this podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute of Labour and Social Justice at George Brown Polytechnic.

In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

TOMMY (Actor): Courage my friends, 'tis not too late to build a better world

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the Courage My Friends Podcast.

RESH: Welcome to Episode Three, "Requiem for Gaza: A Conversation with Joe Sacco".

I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

In our third episode of the season, we feature award-winning cartoonist, author, and pioneer of comics journalism, Joe Sacco, and his newly released book, *Requiem for Gaza*, a profound work of graphic reportage co-authored with journalist Chris Hedges.

We discuss the experience of Palestinian families displaced by the ongoing genocide, the role of comics journalism in conveying the scale and dimensions of this moment and the imprint of history upon it, and the obligation to truth amid the sacrifices and silences of journalism in a time of arrogant power and radical change.

For our third episode, we're very pleased to welcome cartoonist, author, and pioneer of comics journalism, Joe Sacco.

Joe, welcome. Thanks for joining us.

JOE: It's a pleasure to be here.

RESH: Lovely. And congratulations on the release of your new book, *Requiem for Gaza*, that we are going to be talking about today.

JOE: Thank you.

RESH: So the book is based on interviews that you and co-author, writer and journalist Chris Hedges, along with translator Ruba Abu Zannad Jafar, conducted in Cairo in 2025 with 29 Palestinian families who made it out of Gaza.

Talk about why you decided to write this book and give us a bit of an overview of the book itself in terms of the story that you wanted to tell.

JOE: Well, I think we decided to write the book, I'm talking about Chris and I. We had to. We both felt there was a genocide going on, and we couldn't look away, and we both have a relationship to Palestine and in particular Gaza.

Chris was New York Times Bureau Chief for seven years in the Middle East, and he spent a lot of time in Gaza. And I also had started going to Gaza in the, let's say, the early 1990s. The subject was part of what became the book *Palestine*. And later on, I went to do a book called *Footnotes in Gaza*, which was wholly based in Gaza.

It was pretty much my longest book, about 350 pages, and that was about some things that happened in 1956 where Palestinian civilians were shot by the Israeli army during the Suez Canal crisis.

So I mean, Chris and I have both spent a lot of time there. I think we both have a great affection for the place.

I called him up pretty soon after October 7th. We both felt that things were heading toward a genocide, and we realized we had to do something about it.

My idea was to do a magazine piece. His was to do a book, and that's how it ended up. I mean, I wanted to do something shorter 'cause I've been trying to get away from journalism for a while.

But the book is, as you said, we went to Cairo in 2025 with Ruba, our translator, and we talked to 29 Palestinian families. And there were basically two groups of people we talked to. They'd all obviously come out of Gaza, Palestinians who got out of Gaza, but one group ... it was drawn from people who paid their way out.

There was a system called Hala where for a certain amount of money, you could get into Egypt. You'd have to be approved by the Egyptian and the Israeli authorities. But basically, the going rate was \$5,000 for an adult and \$2,500 for a child. So people with some means or family outside of Gaza that could help or people who managed to figure out how to get a GoFundMe campaign up and running, were able to get out.

So that's one group of people we talked to, people who paid to get out.

The other group was people who'd either been wounded or accompanying a wounded person. At that point, there were evacuations, and so that's the other group that got out.

And we did these interviews over a period of about three weeks and then compiled them.

Chris and I decided who was gonna do what. He did prose, and I did comics. And I chose only one story to do. I mean, I, I sort of had my pick of them. Chris is very generous in that regard. I chose only one story to do because basically I wasn't sure I could handle the whole thing- Mm ... or you know, too much of it, so concentrated on one particular story.

So that's an overview of the book. It's the stories of people who experienced the genocide on the ground. This is not a book about the abstraction of what a genocide is. Of course, it goes into things like legal definition, but that's not its heart. Its heart is the stories of people and what they endured, and what they endured was enormous amounts of trauma, so that no story seemed extraordinary 'cause they were all extraordinary, extraordinarily bad.

That's basically it. I mean, we wanted to write a book about what people experienced and what they felt and what they endured.

RESH: And it comes through brilliantly, and we'll get more into that. Now, where a common theme throughout your work is anti-imperialism, decolonization, justice, you've also spoken of a moral obligation when it comes to Palestine.

I think in another interview you said it's a type of penance as well. Could you say more about that?

JOE: Yeah. I mean, on some level I have no dog in this fight.

I grew up just listening to the news and not paying any particular attention to it. But just what sort of seeped into my brain, I grew up thinking Palestinians were terrorists.

That notion was challenged for the first time for me in 1982 when Israel invaded Lebanon and massacres were perpetrated against Palestinian refugees in Beirut at a camp called Sabra and Shatila, where Israeli allies, their Christian allies, Lebanese Christian allies, went in and killed people while the Israeli forces themselves surrounded the camp, making sure no one could get out.

I remember seeing the photographs of the dead Palestinians and something went off in my head. I thought, "Well, I thought these people were the terrorists, what's going on here?"

So slowly I began to educate myself, and the more I educated myself, the more, let's say, angry I got because I had just gotten a degree from the University of Oregon in journalism, and I always thought American-style journalism was the gold standard.

So I had to then sort of interrogate why I felt that Palestinians were terrorists, and I realized what I'd got from the media, the American media, Well, I mean, quite literally it seemed every single time I read the word "Palestinian" or heard the word "Palestinian" on a news broadcast, it was coupled with the word "terrorist". Again, I hadn't really been paying that much attention, but it was interesting that that is what seeped into my head. And so I began to question the whole notion of American objective-style journalism.

So two things were going on for me.

On the one hand, I wanted to educate myself about who the Palestinians were, what their history was.

And on the other hand, I was sort of in my own head pushing back against my own education, the way I was trained as a journalist.

Those things eventually sort of coalesced when I did the series of comics called *Palestine* that was later turned into a book. I mean, I was a cartoonist, so I never really found a job as a hard news writer, which was my initial idea.

So I put those things together and I made a trip there just to see for myself and to talk to Palestinians. This was in the early '90s, at the tail end of the First Intifada.

So in some ways, this was the defining subject for me, the Palestinians.

I've gone on to do other things, but I've always had my ear to the ground about what's going on there.

RESH: Right.

JOE: The place matters to me. The people were always very hospitable to me. And I've just poured a lot of my own time into it. So of course, when this is going on in Gaza now, there's no way for me except to approach it and deal with it.

And again, I, as mentioned, I've wanted to get away from journalism. I've wanted to get away from writing about violence.

I basically don't wanna do this anymore.

And I think even Chris feels the same way.

This was a hard book that we didn't really want to do but we had to do.

JOE: I mean, I think it's a hard book to write and draw, and it's, I think it's a hard book to read.

RESH: It is. I mean, the, I mean, it's so visceral. And there's so many images that still stick with me, and I've read it a while ago, a couple weeks ago now. You've also talked about how you were sort of drawing connections to your own family experience in Malta.

JOE: Yeah, both my parents lived... the whole family's from Malta, but both my parents were in Malta during World War II. And at a certain point, it was the most heavily bombed place on the planet. The Germans and the Italians were bombing basically for about two and a half years, and my parents endured a lot, seeing friends die, being in places that were very badly devastated, living in shelters.

My mother lived in a quarry. My mother was personally attacked by a German airplane. They were both... They lived through great hunger, too. So the experiences of people in war to me... I mean, I was a little boy who liked to play with soldiers and everything and used to like war films, but I also grew up with the stories of what it really means to people beyond the heroics. And it just seemed sort of squalid and terrible and, uh, scary.

So I think a lot of my work I think subconsciously, 'cause I wasn't really consciously trying to replicate stories of my parents had undergone. It's just that's what I heard around the table. And not just from them, but I grew up in Australia where there were a lot of European immigrants, a lot of migrants from Europe who had left after the war. And the common stories that Yugoslavs and Germans and Ukrainians and French and English people talked about, when they visited, was the war. So I heard a lot of those sorts of stories. I grew up with it.

So it was sort of easy to make that hop, skip, and jump to my own work and what the emphasis would be.

RESH: And that's interesting. I didn't realize that Malta was so bombarded during World War II. And it's not a large place- No ... so you can immediately see the parallels with what's happening in Gaza, also a small place under enormous bombardment.

Now, you are a pioneer of modern graphic or *comics journalism*. From short pieces to novels, your expansive and really award-winning catalog of graphic reportage has covered subjects such as Bosnia in *Safe Area Goražde*, and India with *The Once and Future Riot*. You've looked at America's "sacrifice zones" of impoverished communities in *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* that you also co-authored with Chris Hedges, to your coverage of the Dene peoples in Canada and their struggles against colonialism, cultural genocide and the climate crisis in *Paying the Land*.

All of this began with your, again, 1993 book *Palestine*. So what is *comics journalism*? What drew you into it? And could you say a bit more on how Palestine played such a pivotal role in that journey?

JOE: Well, I never really had a theory of what comics journalism was when I first started out.

RESH: You weren't actually trained in graphic, in graphic No

journal- right.

JOE: I, that wasn't where I thought I would end up. I mean, I'd been drawing since I was a child. Like, a lot of, a lot of kids draw, but a lot of kids sort of stop drawing around puberty it seems. I just kept drawing. I was always doing comics. But not in a million years did I think that was gonna be a career path for me.

As I mentioned, I got a degree in journalism. I wanted to write hard news. I liked the idea of deadline pressure. It's something I, I sort of began to get a knack for in high school on the student newspaper. That's when the light bulb went off and I thought, "I like talking to people. I like reporting. I like getting people's stories." I loved that whole thing. But I couldn't get a job with a newspaper.

I tried. Any journalism job I did manage to get with a publication was sort of deadening. I was not writing news. So slowly but surely I fell out and thought, "Well, I'm never gonna make a career with this," and I began to lean on my drawing to see if I could make a living you know, along those lines.

And I was doing comics, trying very hard. It was quite difficult in those days, in the early '80s. I ended up in Berlin. I was doing rock and roll posters and album covers and T-shirt designs for bands. That's kind of how I was scraping by.

But while I was there still doing comics, like comic stories, I thought, "You know," ... at this point I'd been very politicized by what had gone on with the Palestinians. I'd been reading a lot. I read everything I could read. There wasn't as much available in those days. And I thought, "Well, I'm actually quite close geographically to the Middle East." I was in Berlin, as I mentioned. And I thought, "I should go there and do a series of comics like travelogue or just my own experiences."

Because at the time there were a lot of cartoonists, including myself, who were doing autobiographical comics. So why not do a comic about my experiences going to see something I'm interested in like this?

When I got there, all that journalism training kicked in. It wasn't as if I planned to do like a hard journalistic comic or series of comics.

I got there and I realized, oh, I'm talking to people, I'm interviewing them, I'm taking notes, I'm trying to be accurate in how I'm, you know, quoting them. And I'm beginning to think like a journalist. Like okay, I'm seeing people in the Occupation, what are the elements of the Occupation?

Okay, well, people are in jail. Speak to people who were in prison. People are tortured. People are having their homes demolished. People are having their olive trees cut down.

In fact, almost everything we're seeing today in the West Bank was going on when I was there.

So, everything began to coalesce as a journalistic project, though I didn't really initially think of it in such hard terms.

I was influenced by people like Hunter S. Thompson or Michael Herr, who wrote the book *Dispatches about Vietnam*, sort of this atmospheric journalism. All that sort of came together in the way I did my work.

And if you read *Palestine*, you can tell its charm is that I don't really know what I'm doing.

You know, I look back on it. Over time, I've begun to understand what I'm doing. I've theorized a little bit more about it, only because people like you ask me what it all means. Yeah. But that wasn't my initial ... my initial impulse was just to go do autobiographical comics about my experiences. And of course, it has me as a character in it.

And I'm still a character in my stories, and I realize that was sort of accidental. It was just autobiography, but it had... I realize it had its worth because it showed that whatever journalism I do, it's a subjective journalism. This is not pretending to be a fly on the wall where you don't influence what's going on and you don't interact really truly as a human being with people in your midst.

So it had its advantages, I realize. But all that was organic. And it was instinctual and not really thought through.

RESH: Now, just going into that, though, because again you've pioneered this form of modern graphic journalism. What does graphic reportage bring to the craft of journalism?

JOE: Well one thing is its ability to reconstruct the past.

I think if you ask visual questions, which I have to do, and if you do research, you can create something of the past. You can recreate a person's experiences.

For example, in *Requiem for Gaza*, the people I interviewed, Osama and Diana, it's a couple, they have four children. You know, they sent me photographs afterwards, after we did the interviews in Cairo. They sent me photographs. They sent me video of certain things that happened. So I could draw from a certain reality, let's say. And that's what I strive for is to draw from reality.

But through all that, through all that research, the photos, the videos, you can sort of recreate a person's story much like a film director would recreate.

Except my advantage is I have endless budget. I can draw all the buildings. I don't have to build them myself. I can draw thousands of people if I want. It's just a matter of time. It's not a question of paying, you know, paying for extras.

So I can sort of help reconstruct the past, which is what I do in a lot of books. I mean, in the book you mentioned about Canada, about the Dene people, using, archives and also, you know, maybe sending the drawings back to the people whose stories I was telling. They can help me adjust or tell me, "Yes, you're right on," or whatever it is. But I wanna recreate, for example, how people grew up in the bush. You can get close to that, I think. That's one of the advantages.

The other is... though I think every medium has great advantages including, let's say, photojournalism. But with photojournalism, I mean, the power of it is you take a single image and it's meant to stand in for something. It's meant to sort of hit you over the head as summing up an entire situation. I can think of, as I'm sure you can, many historical photographs that just give you a jolt. They sort of say everything in one go.

With comics, you have more time, let's say. You have more space. You can have a lot of panels And you can show a place sort of slowly. You can build up an atmosphere slowly. You can recreate what a city feels like over a number of panels. And it's journalistic in that the information can be in the background, but it's still seeping into the reader's consciousness, no matter what's going on in the foreground.

Sometimes it's just a dialogue between two people, but in the background, you see the cars and the streets, and that sort of follows you around panel by panel. So subconsciously, you're also getting a real feeling for being in a place. And that, I think, is the, the main thing I'd say. Is, like comics journalism can take you into a time and place. You just open the book, and you can be there.

And maybe to me the proof of it is in the book I did, *Footnotes in Gaza*, I already had done a book, the book *Palestine*. I brought that with me. And when I was talking to older people, to give them an idea of what I was trying to do, I would give them the book *Palestine*. They would open it up. They'd see images of the refugee camps in the 1990s, and they could see the authenticity, and they'd say they recognized it. They recognized themselves in it. It was easier in a way for them to understand why I was asking a lot of visual questions.

So there are, there are advantages like that.

RESH: Speaking of that, I mean, many of those in Gaza are refugees and primarily from the 1948 Nakba. *Requiem for Gaza* not only documents this current genocide but delves into that history behind it and a history that really is imprinted on the Palestinians themselves. And again, you know, that historical dimension is not

necessarily something that you get within sort of the straight journalism. It's just in the moment, on the ground, and let's forget about the historical context.

And this is very much something not just within your work on Palestine but really within your work on the sacrifice zones within the US, the Dene people. That's something I really noticed within your books, particularly this one, that it's saying, "Okay, but this, this didn't start 2023. This goes way back."

Now, in *Requiem for Gaza*, it captures the harrowing experiences of people who've escaped this horrific and ongoing genocide, and often by a hair's breath. What were those interviews like? You know, you're sitting with these families and hearing all of this in so many ways still very close to the genocide and then putting this to paper in images and words.

So what was that experience like?

JOE: Well, it's always difficult talking to people who are so clearly traumatized.

Sometimes the people broke down, and you always have to give them room to break down. And almost in every case, I mean, this is true throughout my entire career, when people have broken down, I've often given them the option to not go on.

But in every case, people rise to the occasion. They reach down into themselves 'cause they feel they have to tell the story. And so you see a lot of strength, but you see a lot of, obviously, a lot of pain in people's faces.

And the other thing is, almost everyone we talk to has people in Gaza still.

If they managed to pay their way out, they might not have paid for their extended family. So we talk to people whose parents are still there, who still have brothers and sisters still there. And so there's also this real sense of anxiety that pervaded the interviews.

People are obviously very concerned about their loved ones.

Sometimes there's survivor's guilt, some people saying, "I shouldn't have left. I should have stayed with so and so." So there's a lot going on.

And you know, for me it was, um... i'm quite professional when I'm doing these sorts of interviews, 'cause you have to be. You have to help people, maybe even guide them a little if they're straying off track.

So you, you sort of exhaust some mental energy talking to them. But when you're drawing, it's a quite a different thing. You really have to inhabit what they went through on some other level. You have to sort of bring some of their experience into

your drawing, and that makes you think more deeply about what they've gone through.

So sometimes for me, the, the harder part was the drawing than talking to people at the time.

RESH: Now for those families, it also doesn't end. I mean, they're carrying that trauma. They're carrying that loss with them. As you say, they have so many who are still left back in Gaza. And then they're in a new context where the hardship continues, and this is really captured within that chapter on *Exile*.

JOE: The person I, whose story I did named Osama, as he said, when they got to Egypt, it was another level of suffering. And it's just a new sort of war for them because Egypt has allowed a certain amount of Palestinians to come in.

There's tens of thousands of Palestinians now living in Egypt. But Egypt wants to be careful about it. They don't want to acknowledge that these are refugees, because refugees, basically means you have certain responsibilities toward them. So, the people we spoke to live with a great amount of uncertainty.

Their children aren't allowed to go to Egyptian schools. They cannot access most social services that Egyptians can access. They're not allowed to work.

So they're living on charity or getting involved in the underground economy, whatever that means, because people have to live, they have to feed their children. And often they're trying to send money back home or send money to people in Gaza, and things are very expensive there.

So they're living with a lot of uncertainty. It's real limbo for them. Like, what is to become of them?

And if you see Palestinian refugees in a place like Lebanon, where they've been living for decades and decades, there are certain professions that Palestinian refugees are not allowed to have. They're not allowed to be certain things and integrate into the Lebanese economy. Professional services like doctors, lawyers, things like that. They can do it for Palestinians, you know, for Palestinian refugees, but there are certain professions where they're not allowed to work in the framework of the Lebanese context.

But that's sort of true of refugees almost everywhere. They're trying to create new lives ... which is obviously difficult just emotionally, but then they have great just pragmatic difficulties too.

RESH: Now Palestinians have been undergoing displacement, occupation, and brutality for well over 70 years under Israel. Before that, it was under the British. Again, all this to say this did not begin October 2023. But since 2023, this has taken a decidedly brutal, a genocidal turn. How does the scale and the dimensions of

destruction in Gaza now compare to what you were reporting on earlier in your work?

JOE: Well, some people might have objected to the title *Requiem*.

I've heard a couple of people push back because you know, they wanna say, "Well, maybe we'll rebuild."

I think for Chris and I, who spent some time there, I think whatever existed in the past now is gone.

Perhaps they will rebuild.

To me, I have my doubts, because the devastation is really total. Everything we knew...

Now people have called Gaza a open air prison. And I understand some of that. But what it doesn't really tell you is that there was actually despite, despite all the great hardships, the pressure, the periodic Israeli bombings, the lack of anything coming in 'cause it has to pass through Israeli hands and with their approval, there was a society that was vibrant there.

I mean, very, very high - literacy rate. I think it's like 98%.

The streets were teeming with life. There was poverty, but people managed to create something for themselves and for their families.

All that is gone now.

I think the number is over 90% of all buildings are either destroyed or damaged.

Everyone we spoke to had lost their home. Their homes were destroyed. And everyone we spoke to had had to move from one place to another because subsequently the places they moved to were destroyed.

So residential housing is basically gone.

All the universities have been wiped out.

Almost every single hospital is gone, more than 30 hospitals destroyed. I think there's one or two who are still functioning on a very, very basic level.

Agricultural land also destroyed.

Pretty much anything you could say that has to do with what people consider civil society or just normal living has been wiped away, and what's replaced it is millions of tons of rubble that's toxic. And people are living in tents or in whatever badly damaged structures are still around.

So I'd say the devastation is total.

It's hard to imagine people rebuilding in that.

And anyone who has the power to give them sort of a, a horizon to tell them they could rebuild is not saying that. I mean, Trump's Board of Peace, whatever that is, we don't know their agenda at all.

Israel, I mean, you hear Israeli politicians, people in the Cabinet, these are not fringe politicians, saying, and Netanyahu saying, "You leave. You're gonna leave."

So no one who has the power to influence them is giving them any sliver of hope that they can rebuild. "Okay, now it's time to rebuild. Let's start again."

They're not getting that.

So where does this leave them? I mean, I can't say for sure, but I do know that I'd say a lot of people in Gaza would leave if they could, because ultimately you think of your children.

RESH: And this has been a war on children.

JOE: Ultimately, I mean, I think about 20,000 have been killed.

RESH: Yeah.

JOE: 20,000 children have been killed. That's a staggering amount.

RESH: Yeah.

JOE: I mean, any child who dies is a great tragedy, including the Israeli children who were killed on October 7th, 2023. I mean, I think there were 37 of them. But we're talking about 20,000.

RESH: And, I just remember in the first, I think it was just in the first couple of months, we were seeing parents of these children who were writing their names and their birth dates on the limbs of those children, knowing full well that these kids could be blown apart, and so you would only have their limbs to identify them by.

Osama, who is a psychologist specializing in trauma, also speaks of a shift within Palestinian consciousness that where there was once solidarity and shared suffering

under previous Israeli bombardments, he says, "This has changed too. The severity of the suffering deformed the suffering's meaning."

Say more about this.

JOE: Well, he said that when Israel committed its other attacks, when it perpetrated its other attacks, what they used to call "mowing the grass", you know, maybe hundreds were killed, maybe 1,000 were killed in a certain specific area.

The Israelis would bomb, then Palestinians from other parts of the community would come and tend to those wounded, would bring them into their homes.

And so that one community would have suffered greatly, or one family would have suffered greatly. And he said you could talk about individual trauma, but you couldn't talk about this collective trauma across all the people of Gaza.

But he said in this particular genocide, it wasn't that one community was hit. Every community was hit. So if the people next to you were hit, you were gonna be hit too.

There's less of a collective response to aid each other when you're all suffering under that sort of strain. And you're all under that sort of danger.

And of course, people, they did take in refugees into their own homes when those homes were still standing. But you're talking about you know, sometimes 30, 40, 50 people in a home sharing all the facilities, the bathroom, whatever there is. And this is when people are deprived of things like water and food. So you can imagine that sort of close living. It breeds tension.

So now will this be repaired over time? I think perhaps, and even he thought perhaps it could be. But now people are struggling for their own survival and for the survival of their immediate families.

RESH: Now amid this genocide, which is happening in full view of everyone, Osama goes on to say, "The world has no problem at all if the Palestinians do not exist." Now for Israel, this seems to be the aim. But for those on the other side, have the Palestinians become sort of an acceptable sacrifice for what many are seeing as a new world?

JOE: I think historically there are many acceptable sacrifices, unfortunately. There have been. In this particular case, what makes it let's say special for Westerners is that we're implicated. We're part of this process.

I live in the United States. Bombs were being sent there by the planeload, as many as could possibly fly were going over and bringing 2,000-pound bombs to fall on the people of Gaza.

That was during the Biden administration, so it was under the Democrats. And of course, Trump has continued this, too. And the US has given Israel a lot of diplomatic cover, as has Canada and some countries in Europe. Germany provides a lot of weapons to Israel also. The UK was helping with reconnaissance flights, among other things.

You know, going over, giving reconnaissance information to the Israelis. And every now and then there's some tepid, you know, this is maybe sort of not the way to go. But they have trade relations with Israel. They could do something positive. They're not. They're providing diplomatic cover.

So we're all involved and I think we're all implicated, whether we want to be or not.

RESH: Yeah.

JOE: Interestingly, I think if you look at the populations, even in the United States, this was a surprise to me. If you look at US, people's minds have shifted about this issue. I never thought I'd see it.

You see people here now not looking at Israel favorably. You see people all over Europe, even in those places where they're cracking down very hard on free speech, like the UK, Germany, France, you see the populations have shifted there, too.

So this is what's interesting also, I mean, you have to really wonder about our democratic governments. They're not really paying attention to what people want. Our politicians are being paid for. They're just going along the same old line.

I mean, at some point people are gonna make a connection that the average citizen does not wanna be associated with a genocide.

Yeah. It's as simple as that.

RESH: Well, you know, it's interesting because this is having an impact on global politics, but as you're saying, domestic politics as well. And I think it was Amy Goodman who said that the electoral issues are now Gaza, groceries, and gas. Right?

And, we really saw that with, Zohran Mamdani in that now famous debate, when he was polling at 1%. And then the question was, "Where would you go visit?" And everybody's, "Oh, I'd go to Israel. I'd go to the Holy Land." He's like, "No, I, I think I'll stay here in New York."

And suddenly it was, "Oh, he's interesting," right? And that was the moment, that was the moment when he sort of accelerated in the polls.

So the US midterms are coming up. Do you see this playing out now in the next couple of weeks?

JOE: I think it'll play out where it has room to play out. Let's say in Michigan it'll play out. In other places where you don't have candidates that are making this an issue, it'll play out the same way it always plays out.

I mean, a lot of Democratic voters, and I understand this, their main issue is just to stop Trump somehow. So whoever is blue and a Democrat, they're gonna vote for that person.

But the establishment itself, the Democratic establishment itself is going one way, and the people are sort of going another way. And the Democratic establishment does not particularly want people like Zohran Mamdani to be representing them. In fact, no one in... I mean, I can't think of who endorsed him, or they might have endorsed him very late when he was gonna win.

But Democratic establishment does not want people like this there. The Democratic establishment is on the take with AIPAC. It's as simple as that, just like the Republicans.

So, I personally, , I would like to stymie Trump as much as possible. Yes, I am all for that.

But the only candidates that are interesting me are those who are taking a moral stance on the genocide.

Kamala Harris does not interest me 'cause she never took a moral stand on the genocide. In fact, she was probably punished for it.

At some point, perhaps some of these people will wake up. Whether they will have a genuine moral change or just realize which way the wind's blowing, that's another matter.

RESH: Right. And we certainly see it with the DSA, right? So the Democratic Socialists of America.

Now ... Going back to *Requiem*, there are so many searing moments in that book, and for me, one of them... There, there are many for me, but one of them that just sticks is the image of Osama and his brother having to walk away from his elderly parents as they sit in the sand.

Is there a particular moment that really sticks with you?

JOE: I think it's the same one.

Imagine a close-knit family. Imagine being driven to sort of that existential breaking point where you have to make a decision like that, where you even have to think about making a decision like that.

Palestinian families are very tight-knit. I mean, like many Palestinian families, you know, the grandparents live on one floor, and the whole house, each brother has a floor with his family. So they live together. They eat together. They, they do a lot of things together.

So this to me was a very sad moment. Really a hard one to even think about. A hard one to draw.

And in fact, that's what attracted me to Osama, because he had the ability to be self-reflective. He had the ability to be very honest about how far he could be pushed before he broke.

You know, there were many, many, many stories that I could tell you.

There's one story of an older woman with her daughters and their children, and by chance meets a guy who lets them stay in sort of a chicken coop for a while, but then he says, "No, you can have my house. I'll go to my parents' house."

Later she finds out he didn't go to his parents' house. Now, this guy has a pregnant wife and two daughters. He went to live in a tent so that she and a larger group of women and children could live in his house. I mean, there are moments like that. Moments of, like, solidarity that are not trying to be rewarded. He didn't want her to even know that.

So, those moments still exist.

And I'm not saying that to sort of put the gauze of hope over a genocide. I'm just saying, some people still retain a moral core.

RESH: Yeah. I mean, there are those, that grace, you know? I just think of grace at that moment.

Now, the book is dedicated to Palestinian journalists, over 240 of whom, in many cases along with their families, have been killed over the last three years.

A journalist interviewed in this book, Sanaa, says, "We move from death to death." Talk about those journalists and the importance of that dedication of the book to them.

JOE: I can't think of journalists with more integrity and more courage. You could say that.

Obviously, there's limits, but these journalists were working under horrifying conditions, just in a war zone.

Everything that was happening to the people they were reporting on was happening to them. They also had targets on their back, quite literally. Israel was assassinating journalists and often killing the journalists along with their families 'cause they would bomb their homes at night. Israel knows where people live.

So this sort of dedication, despite the costs and under the incredible strain of knowing not just you could be killed, but your family could be killed, we could not but, dedicate the book to them.

And, and I've gotta say something too is, um, I think a lot of the media has not stood behind, a lot of the Western press has not stood behind these journalists that are undergoing things that we couldn't, no journalist really could imagine in the West.

Oftentimes even the deaths of journalists were reported through the prism of the Israeli lens. They were reported through the Israeli lens.

I mean, a journalist who had worked for Reuters was killed, by the Israelis and Reuters themselves, their headline is something like, "Israel says they killed," you know, " Hamas journalist," or whatever.

They're not even sort of questioning it. They're putting that in a headline. They're muddying the waters. Their own colleagues are getting killed.

The other thing that sort of bothers both Chris and I is this whole notion that if a foreign journalist gets into Gaza, suddenly we're gonna get the truth.

The truth has been coming out.

I mean, the Western media has not covered itself in glory here you know.

The US population and Europeans and Canadians, I think their view of Israel shifted, not because the media helped to shift it, but because they could see unadulterated images on their phones.

Whether they knew about the issue or not. Whether they had been following it or not. You see pictures of babies blown up or starving children and people. I think viscerally they thought, "This is wrong."

That's not what the media was telling them. The media was just giving them the same old thing.

So we dedicate this thing to the journalists of Gaza. They've done amazing reporting. I doubt the foreign press coming in is gonna do as good a job.

RESH: Yeah.

JOE: Chris and I felt we have to do what we have to do. What we can do, given the fact that we can't get in. We probably would have wanted to get in, but not to replace or to, to speak over Palestinian journalists.

That's the last thing we would imagine doing.

RESH: And as you said, being a journalist normally means some degree of added protection, but for those in Palestine, also South Lebanon, the press helmet and the press jacket has itself become a target. I mean, I remember watching, it was in the first year, a Palestinian journalist who was reporting on the death of a colleague, and he was distraught and he was crying, and he was taking off the helmet, and he was taking off the jacket, and he said, "This, this does not protect us anymore." This doesn't do that," right?

So we see the killing of journalists over there. We also see the chilling of journalism over here in these parts of the world.

JOE: Well, just to clarify something, we actually spoke to that journalist you talked about, the one who took off his helmet, took off his vest. He's one of the people we interviewed.

I think the signal from the government is you have to be careful what you say.

It's not just the press, it's also in the academy, students. It's freedom of speech itself is under assault. And that of course has implications not for, just for journalists, but for anyone who wants to speak his or her or their mind.

So there is a chilling effect, but I would say that, as I sort of mentioned before, I think the media sort of had, had chilled itself out anyway.

Their reporting of the Middle East or, West Asia or what's going on with the Palestinians has always been really subpar. That's why I started doing things, and ultimately that's why I wanted to do things a different way, 'cause I realized that I wasn't getting the full story from the media.

This was in the early '80s. We're still not getting the full story from the media.

RESH: Yeah.

JOE: You know, when, of course, attention begins to shift. The genocide as we saw it a year ago has turned in to sort of like genocide on the installment plan, just little bits here and there. It's still a genocide. It's just slowed enough, even though we're talking about 5, 10, 15 people being killed a day during a ceasefire in Gaza. So we're

still seeing a genocide unfolding, but that's convenient for the media. Now they don't have to think about this anymore. It's, it's, it's not on the front pages-

RESH: It's become normalized in a way.

JOE: It's normalized.

RESH: Yeah. Yeah.

JOE: It's absolutely normalized.

RESH: Have you faced criticism or retaliation for your work on Gaza and Palestine?

JOE: I wouldn't say I've faced criticism. Or, I haven't faced it to that point that I feel threatened, I'll tell you that.

I've always gone with independent or stronger publishers that have allowed me to write what I wanted to write.

I'm not working for a news agency who answers to someone, who answers to someone who's putting the word down that we don't talk about this sort of thing. In other words, I don't work for CBS News. Yeah. That's what I'm trying to get at. Because they were told, "You work in a hierarchy, and this is what the boss, bosses, the new owners want, and so we can only do things a certain way."

Which is not to say that CBS was a a paragon of great journalism before, but it had a reputation.

For me personally, I mean, I've heard that sometimes my books aren't stocked. That some bookstores don't want it. I mean, that's up to them, actually. That's individual decision. That's their right, of course, too.

But I haven't felt a great pushback. But partly I've kind of operated under the radar on a certain level. I'm not working for the mainstream. If you worked in the mainstream, you would probably feel it a lot more.

RESH: Yeah. And it's interesting, though, how the mainstream is sort of being pushed to the outside. I heard somebody saying they're not really mainstream media anymore, they're corporate media. What's becoming mainstream is what used to be the fringe media, and, and through them, we've really found out about the truth of what's happening in Palestine.

Would you agree with that?

JOE: I would agree.

You know, it's funny. I think there are good reporters in the mainstream. They're often not allowed to report what they want to report, and perhaps they don't have the courage to, let's just say, resign.

But yeah, I, I'd say that's true. I think a lot of people are getting... Well, first of all, they were getting their news unfiltered, or they were getting images, let's say, unfiltered.

Doesn't mean they were getting news unfiltered, but they were getting images unfiltered from platforms like TikTok, others, that were, of course, bought up so those images can't get to you.

There's a lot of good alternative press now. I imagine your program is also part of that, that, you know, trying to probe beyond corporate interests. Independent journalism is the way to do that.

I always want independent journalists to also be very professional and be very careful about what they report and how they report it. And I think there's a lot of great independent press, but sometimes if you're on YouTube, you just hear people going off. And that's the other part of the story too, is there's a lot out there. And so now how do you discriminate between what's just someone talking without really knowing, and what's someone who really knows the issue well? I think hopefully the, the cream rises.

RESH: Now, American writer Ta-Nehisi Coates spoke about the painful familiarity he felt in Gaza as a Black man from America. South Africans say we know apartheid, this is apartheid. Indigenous peoples and the world's majority see histories of colonization and genocide in this moment. Histories that we vowed to never repeat are being replicated for all the world to see with relentless military force and audacity by the powers that be, who seem to be saying, "Yeah, you know this, you see this, but so what?"

What are your thoughts and feelings on this arrogance of power? Which is also in the political climate in many places, including very much where you are in the US with this rise of fascism. What we're seeing in Israel and its connections to this sort of unleashed power, an unapologetic power in places like the US.

JOE: Yeah, it's incredibly cruel.

It is arrogant. It is unapologetic. And I think what it's signaling to the American people, to people in the West, and to the Global South that there are no more rules, that power will do whatever it wants.

I mean, it's really unfortunate when you think about it. The whole concept of the rule of law. I mean, sometimes I have my issues with that statement. But there was something called "international law", despite many faults and despite its own prejudices, that was built up painstakingly after World War II with the idea really

because of the Holocaust. Because of what happened to Jews in Europe, the idea was this can never happen again. How do we establish laws so this cannot happen?

Never again meaning never again for anyone.

All that has been removed.

Never again now means something else. It means for one particular people living in the country of Israel.

So we've seen international law and order, which I think was quite aspirational, it's basically gone now.

And the West always lecturing about human rights and this and that. You know, all that stuff has just fizzled out.

Europe can talk about itself being a garden, but I think the Global South is looking and thinking, "We're tired of that."

Our power is waning in the West. I mean literally our power. This is exactly the point when the thrashing begins and the West becomes the most dangerous really. They wanna protect what they have.

So, I actually really think that everything even I sort of thought about the West in, in my sort of fondest moments about the West, my fondest thoughts about the West, it's all evaporated.

I think we have to build a new West 'cause I think the old one is finished.

RESH: And we're seeing this echo throughout the world. We've seen it within a galvanized global resistance and solidarity with the Palestinian people. To quote from *Requiem*, "Gaza presages a new world order."

JOE: Well, it's a new world order sort of based on some of the things we're talking about. It's a world order where power is all that matters. That there are no restraints. And that's a very scary concept because how far will that go?

It seems like there are no restraints for the Americans. I mean, with Israel, they attacked Iran with specious excuses or justifications. I think everyone is seeing through this, and everyone is also seeing through the fact that despite all this, despite the arrogance of power, that America and the West can no longer protect whoever is allied with itself in the Global South.

You're seeing that with the Gulf States now. They must be really wondering. You know, they've sort of put all their stock and bought all their weapons from the United

States, and where does that leave them? And I think a lot of countries now, if we're talking geopolitically, are wondering the same thing.

They're seeing the shift in power. So just as we are acting as arrogantly as we are and throwing our weight around, there's a lot less of that weight now.

RESH: Finally, Joe, what do you want readers to take from *Requiem for Gaza*?

JOE: Something very basic. I want people to have some idea of what Palestinians have undergone in this genocide. But also realize that this has been going on for a long time for the Palestinians.

As someone said to me in the early 2000s when I was researching what happened in 1956, he said, "Events are continuous."

The Palestinians can never digest what they've already undergone because it's continuing. Their story is continuing. We're not talking about something that happened to them and now slowly they're trying to rebuild. It's been going on since really before 1948, but you could say, let's just say from 1948 till now.

This is continual, and unfortunately, this is the culmination.

When Israel can act with impunity, and it can act with impunity 'cause of the West, the United States and the rest of the West have allowed it to act with impunity, you have impunity, impunity, impunity, genocide.

That's the ladder that we've gone up, and it's shameful. It's shameful.

But these stories I hope will help people appreciate, I hate to say this, but what's been done in basically in their name.

RESH: *Requiem for Gaza* by Joe Sacco and Chris Hedges, released earlier this month by Fantagraphics, is a powerful, visceral, and erudite work of graphic journalism on genocide, Palestine, its people, and its broader implications for a dramatically changing world.

Joe, thank you so much. It has been a fantastic conversation and a really long-awaited pleasure, so thank you again.

JOE: Thank you, Resh. I really enjoyed this. I mean in some ways I enjoyed this let's say.

RESH: That was award-winning pioneer of comics journalism, Joe Sacco on his newly released work, *Requiem for Gaza*, co-authored with Chris Hedges.

You can find the link to *Requiem for Gaza*, published by Fantagraphics, in the show notes to this episode.

And this is the *Courage, My Friends* podcast.

I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

Thanks for listening.

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