

Fragmentation and survival

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Palestine in Pieces: Graphic Perspectives on the Israeli Occupation

Kathleen and Bill Christison

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The key word in the subtitle of this book is “graphic”, for the great strength of “Palestine in Pieces” is its clarity of language and illustrations. In describing the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the authors pull no punches; they are not aiming to please this or that party, but simply to tell the truth. The reality of Palestinian life under occupation is further documented in over 50 photos, all starkly black-and-white, as if to match the sombreness of the subject. Detailed maps reveal the geopolitical implications of Israel’s major reengineering of the West Bank so as to fragment and box in Palestinian society, and rule out the possibility of a viable Palestinian state.

In addition to the authors’ obvious commitment to principles of justice and human rights, they seem to follow the maxim that “Seeing is believing”. In their words, “With this book we hope to make the occupation of Palestine an urgent and intense concrete reality for those who never hear the stories or see the pictures or see the real maps.” (p. 9)

Kathleen and Bill Christison worked as political analysts for the CIA until 1979. They describe their awakening to the oppressive reality of the occupation as gradual. “Although the years at the CIA stripped away the halo around Israel, we did not - in the rush of analysing urgent day-to-day political developments around the world and in the realpolitik focus on what were believed to be US national interests - gain an adequate understanding of Zionism’s true meaning or its inevitable impact on the Palestinians.” (p. xii) Later, after leaving the CIA, they began to reflect more on the issue and made multiple visits to Palestine/Israel. To judge from what they have written, each visit was a fact-finding mission.

In engaging text and photos, the Christisons take the reader on a tour of the 1967 occupied territories from Gaza to Jerusalem. By highlighting particular areas, whether major cities like Nablus, Jenin and Hebron, or villages such as Numan, Artas, Bil’in and Ni’lin, the authors zoom in on the Israeli policies that have been most detrimental to Palestinian lives - land and water confiscation, settlement-building, closures, roadblocks, the Wall, home demolitions, slow ethnic cleansing, etc. Relying on their own first-hand observations, further substantiated by reference to Israeli, Palestinian and international experts, the authors provide clear evidence of “Israel’s intention never to let go, never willingly to relinquish Jewish control, never to allow the Palestinians real independence

and sovereignty.” (p. 166)

The Christisons are refreshingly honest when it comes to the results of the supposed peace process that began in the early 1990’s. Besides showing how Palestinians’ lives and future have become bleaker in myriad ways, the authors write why this is so. “Indeed, it is ironic - although, in light of Israel’s long-term intentions, not surprising - that Israel has stepped up its oppressive actions in direct relation to the perceived likelihood that it might be forced, by US pressure or the pressure of Palestinian concessions, to relinquish territory.” (p. 168)

The Christisons also recount personal stories of the Palestinians whom they encountered, showing them not only as victims, but as people who continue to resist despite the odds and with almost no outside help. “Zionism can shatter Palestine into pieces, and has, but the land will survive. There is little likelihood that Zionism can shatter the Palestinian people by scattering them again.” (p. 177) However, in view of the occupied territories’ fragmentation which virtually rules out a two-state solution, the Christisons note the recent reorientation of Palestinian strategic thinking towards a unitary democratic state, as another example of resilience.

The authors are highly critical of the US’ role in perpetuating the occupation, right up to and including the Obama administration. While Israeli leaders, settlers and soldiers “treat Palestinians not as a collective of human beings, but as trapped animals whose fate is of little or no concern”, American policy and most European governments’ indifference give this oppression free reign, raising the spectre of what Richard Faulk has called a “holocaust-in-the-making”, which is already looming in Gaza. (p. 137) Hopefully, in view of the Christisons’ thorough research and noteworthy credentials, this book will be taken seriously in the United States by ordinary citizens and policy makers. This book can be obtained at the Bustan Bookstore.

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