

***Palestine in Pieces: Graphic Perspectives on the Israeli Occupation,*
by Kathleen and Bill Christison, London: Pluto Press, 2009.**

**A comment by Khalil Nakhleh
Ramallah, 7.10.2009, 18:00 hours**

My comments on Kathy and Bill's book aim to highlight some aspects of the contents, as much as those of the authors. This is not the first, nor will it be the last, book to be written about the Zionist Colonial Occupation of Palestinian areas of 1967, or some aspects of it, and what it does to the Palestinians living under it who have to endure it. Of course, many books and articles have been written and initiated by persons in the enemy camp, those colonial Zionists who consider occupation and the dismemberment and dehumanization of the unwanted indigenous population an imperative part of their colonial enterprise, and should not be questioned. But many more books, articles, films, etc, are being generated and produced by individuals and groups who consciously placed themselves, to our fortune, on the side of the dehumanized Palestinians; who find the continuing occupation abhorrent, and must end, and, unable to ending it, focus on exposing and documenting the reality of its dehumanizing impact, and utilizing as a tool in advocacy towards that end. Kathy and Bill's "*Palestine in Pieces*" fits here.

My wife and I were first introduced to Kathy and Bill, not in person, but through their critical and honest articles about certain hegemonic and oppressive aspects of the American Empire, after more than three decades of working with the CIA, or, in effect, being "embedded" in the deepest den of that Empire, through providing analyses to help sustain it. We wondered then: is it possible for such Empire people to transform their thinking after having been a part of the system? If so, why only some do so? The more we read of what they wrote, the more we became convinced that it is possible only for select persons whose proclivity draws them to all what is human; to all what is honest; to all those whose struggle is for freedom. This is the Kathy and Bill we came to know in person. This is the Kathy and Bill who authored this wonderfully honest and human book about how Zionist Colonial Occupation presses, at every step of the way, and with every action and turn it takes, to strip people—my people—of their humanity.

Reading this book, carefully and contemplatively, as I did almost immediately after receiving a copy, one discovers a genuine, fresh and humble humility that characterizes the path of their adventure of writing, documenting, exploring, analyzing, concluding, etc; a humility and candor that are sorely missed in most other writings of this sort. Not one sentence or instance transpire of any attempt to "pontificate" to the Palestinians what they ought to do; how to resist; and how to live their lives, etc.; their burning desire is to learn, and how to use this

learning in advocating for Palestinian rights and defending them in their milieu, at the heart of the Empire.

Here are some illustrative quotes from the book: “some of the stories here are personal tales of our experiences with the occupation, but we have been mere voyeurs. The real story is not ours, but the Palestinians.”(3); “This book is a small attempt to show the truth of the Israeli occupation ... an attempt to break the silence”(6); “With this book, we hope to make the occupation of Palestine an urgent and intense concrete reality ...”(9); “Our pictures ... show the oppressive measures of Israel’s occupation, but they cannot explicitly show the Palestinian will to resist”(19); “We are embarrassed at watching other people’s discomfort and misery without being able to do anything about it .. Depression silences us, and we are unable to talk, even to each other, about the reality that as Americans we bear at least partial responsibility for this situation ...”(80-81); “we have only touched the surface of Palestinian suffering...”(165).

Before I end, I like to present some constructive and specific comments, as headlines, to our friends Kathy and Bill for their future writings and advocacy, and to help orient our thinking for the future:

- It is time to transform critically our language of discourse regarding this situation: it is critical now to start “calling a spade a spade”—“occupation” should be addressed and labeled as it really is: a “Zionist Colonial Occupation”.
- We should resist using names and references that support the entire colonial enterprise of stealing Palestinian collective memory—consistency in insisting that indigenous names of towns, regions, and space in general, not to be replaced by “Hebraized” names, but to be coupled with them, as a push for our desire for collective living. For example, the map you used in the book carried the vernacular for the city of “Safad”, but the Hebraized “Beersheva” and “Negev”, for “Bir al-Sabe” and “al-Naqab”, respectively.
- In referring to the “ethnic cleansing” of 1948, you used the Zionist narrative term the “flight of over 700,000 ...” which, in reality, should have been “the forced expulsion of over 700,000 ...”. It is our task to redress the distorted discourse.
- The richness and anchoring in real people that characterize most of the chapters in the book, resulting from visits to real places, and talking to real people, are missing in the chapter on Gaza (Ch.6, p. 156), which in itself is the shortest and framed based on secondary sources. Inadvertently, this reminds the reader of the effect of the siege on Gaza, where Gaza ends up being relegated to a second place, far from the instantaneous memory ... almost an afterthought!
- As it is now, I see a degree of dissonance between the fragmentation and the “shredding” of the 1967 Palestinian areas under occupation, hence the title of the book “Palestine in Pieces”, and the positive and hopeful conclusion that the authors end up with, which states “more and more Palestinians ... are unwilling to settle for whatever coins Israel and the United States might give them and are demanding to live as free, equal citizens in the entirety of their own land.” (182). The title embodies the current deteriorating and enraging situation of frustration, seething rage, no confidence and trust in the corrupt people who claim to lead,

absence of immediate horizons for getting rid of the occupation, etc, but the conclusion is telescoped into the next 50 some years! To remove this dissonance, I would connect and extend both title and conclusion to Palestine in its entirety, i.e. the 1948 areas and the 1967 areas, and to the involvement of the entire Palestinian people, with all its components, i.e. the 1.3 million in the 1948 areas, the 3.8 million in the 1967 areas, and the nearly 6.7 million dispersed in the world in a state of refuge, while side-stepping completely the so-called Palestinian Authority.

- The connection with the rest of the Palestinians, especially the Palestinians in Israel, has to be real and strategic. I cannot share the authors' hope if this connection is only rhetorical and demagoguery! On the 1st of October, nearly 50 thousand Palestinians inside Israel, commemorated the "October uprising" of 2000, where 13 Palestinians were killed by Israeli police and army, when they demonstrated in Galilee and the Triangle in support of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which in itself is an affirmation of their unified Palestinian identity and struggle. Nine years later, Palestinian flags were raised, and a general strike dominated the entire area. No interest was observed here; no coverage ..., as if these people are not a part of the Palestinian body! This is the dissonance to which I am referring between your title and your conclusion. Re-instituting the strategic connection and expanding it would rectify this dissonance, and it would make me hopeful if we start by posing the question "Why is Palestine in Pieces, and what should we do about it?".

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