

Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair

Jonathan Cook
Zed Books, 2008

Campaigners for one state in the land of historic Palestine are often accused of being dreamers. In *Disappearing Palestine* Jonathan Cook eloquently defends his argument that on the contrary, a two-state solution is even less likely. Examining both the overarching Israeli system of control and the way it is experienced in everyday life by Palestinians, Cook explains what not only politicians, but many human rights and peace activists fail to see: that it is Zionism which perpetuates injustice in the historic land of Palestine.

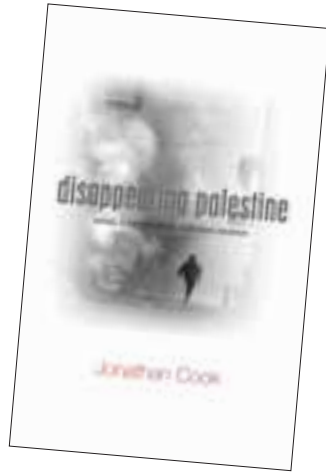
Zionism is the ideology of ethnic supremacy on which the existence and policies of a state defined as Jewish depends. This book gives Cook the space to elaborate on the underlying thesis of his journalistic work: "As long as Israel is a Zionist state, its leaders will allow neither one state nor two real states. There can be no hope of a solution until the question of how to defeat Zionism is addressed."

The first half provides a systematic introduction to the conflict as seen through this lens, covering a broad history from the development of Zionist ideology in the pre-state period to Israel's current "experiments to encourage Palestinian despair" in the "laboratories" of the West Bank and Gaza. The second part of the book is a selection of Cook's journalistic work from the past six years, reinforcing the more theoretical first part with specific examples of the ongoing destruction of Palestine.

In both sections, *Disappearing Palestine* addresses a whole range of topics, from the history of internal Zionist debate to Israel's success in convincing the world that there is such a thing as a 'benign occupation', and the role of the Jewish National Fund in erasing Palestinian history on both sides of the Green Line. The propaganda of 'withdrawal' from Gaza — i.e. unilateral Israeli separation — is seen as part of the ongoing plan to annihilate any concept of Palestine, rather than to end the occupation and control of Palestinian lives. Israel has not strayed from its objective of destroying both the Palestinian public and private sphere, attempting to create a situation in which effective leadership and organisation is impossible — as the post-'withdrawal' situation in Gaza has shown.

The text of *Disappearing Palestine* is both readable and challenging to someone unfamiliar with the fate of the Palestinians. The book will also serve those wanting to put the daily outrages in the West Bank and Gaza into a wider historical and analytical framework — or find sharp answers for that argumentative work colleague. Even for someone who has long since identified Zionism as the fundamental problem, there are insights into issues such as the current misuse of the term "anti-Semitism" and the increasingly public discussion of "transfer", in the Israeli political arena.

You may ask, if the situation really is as dire as Cook suggests, why do we not read clear analyses such as his in the mainstream press? The book opens with an account of his difficulty in getting a piece published in the *International Herald Tribune* and the apparently orchestrated Zionist letter-writing campaign that ensued. In the chapter *Our Embedded Media*, Cook examines how Israel has succeeded in influencing the shape of Western media, from banning certain prominent journalists to refusing visas to the all-



important freelance writers. Moreover, Israel has made sure foreign journalists are aware that it is not only Palestinians who can end up as casualties — as the killing of British filmmaker James Miller demonstrated. Cook also examines the manipulation of language: how even professional journalists end up not questioning that an Israeli soldier is "kidnapped" but a Palestinian politician is "arrested".

In eight years of living in Palestine/Israel, all the journalists I met were based in West Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, with a few attempting to brave it in Ramallah. As his website demonstrates (www.jkcook.net), Cook is quite different: he is a freelance professional journalist not tied to one editorial line and based permanently in Nazareth, a Palestinian town occupied in 1948. From Nazareth, Cook sees the programme of displacement as far older and broader than the occupation of 1967 — an ongoing history unknown to most foreign journalists. Israel doesn't want the world to link contemporary stories of individual suffering with a deeper understanding of the ultimate roots of the conflict. Which is precisely why you should read this book.

Isabelle Humphries is completing doctoral research on Palestinian internal refugees in the Galilee.

“Israel is attempting to create a situation in which effective Palestinian leadership and organisation is impossible”

Palestinian Costume

Shelagh Weir
Arris Books, 2008

At last — Shelagh Weir's magnificent book has been published in paperback, making it, at £20, accessible to most pockets. Lavishly illustrated with 200 colour photographs and many archival pictures, it shows the extraordinary diversity of the styles of dress and embroidery motifs and techniques, that varied from region to region, sometimes from village to village. Tellingly, the first two-page illustration is a large map of pre-1948 Palestine, showing every town and village, including the hundreds that have been razed to the ground.

As an anthropologist, Shelagh Weir looks beyond the surface beauty of the costumes she describes; she sets them in their social, cultural and historical context. The most sumptuous fabrics, embroidery and jewelry are reserved for wedding clothes and the bride's trousseau, but some of the old photographs show that even everyday clothes were often beautifully adorned.

The function of much of the work has changed, as many women now embroider to help provide for their families. But the techniques are passed on, and the home village remembered in the patterns reproduced in the refugee camps and beyond.

If anyone needs to be reminded, or persuaded (a poorly informed Zionist friend, perhaps?) that Palestine had, and still preserves, a unique art form — this is the ideal gift.

Hilary Wise

