Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair

Jonathan Cook

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 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.

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