



Dialogue in Palestine

by Nadia Naser-Najjab, Bloomsbury Publishing, 248 pp., \$80.5 (hardcover), ISBN: 9781838603847

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BOOK REVIEW

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Among the many books published on Israel/Palestine every year, *Dialogue in Palestine* seems to be just another retelling of the failed peace process, expanding the already saturated field of study spanning from Eduard Said's *Peace and its Discontents* to the very recent *Justice for Some* by Noura Erekat. A closer look, however, reveals that *Dialogue in Palestine* enters into almost uncharted territory—it studies the failure of the 'people to people programs' (P2PP) meetings between Palestinians and Israelis which imitated the peace negotiations and the origins of the anti-normalization movement and how it gave birth to the boycott movement: BDS.

This book is not intended to be another pleasant read offering catharsis to the readers. In fact, it exposes exactly how this catharsis has been turned by the Israeli authorities and by international donors into a tool for repression and protecting the status quo. The most powerful sentence in this book is precisely about the rejection of catharsis, as the author tells an Israeli P2PP organizer: 'you participate in these meetings to be able to sleep, but we participate so that you are unable to sleep.'


Indeed, the book is a resource, but not a source of entertainment. It is meticulous and comprehensive in presenting how the P2PP developed and how Palestinian perspectives towards these meetings changed in light of political events. Naser-Najjab makes use of settler-colonial theory, but there is a disconnect between the frustrated expectations of Palestinians from P2PP meetings and the settler-colonial theory which places those frustrations into the framework of colonizing strategies. In this context, theories of settler-colonialism do not help to predict Israeli colonial methods, nor to describe Palestinian agency.

I cannot help but read this book from the perspective of an Israeli, who moved from the P2PP meetings to supporting BDS. It was extremely difficult for me to understand, where is the harm in just meeting and talking? Why should dialogue make Palestinians uneasy? Eventually, I did understand, but I still find it very difficult to explain this to outsiders, to donors and international NGOs who involve themselves in the occupation and quickly adopt the Israeli narrative that 'it's the Palestinians who don't want to talk.' This book is a must-read for these donors and NGO workers—it unfurls the complex mechanism which fuels the so-called 'peace industry' and which reproduces the power inequality which enables the occupation. It shows how eventually, even the budgets granted to P2PP projects end up mostly funding Israeli NGOs. In light of this book, Trump's 'Deal of the Century' is exposed as nothing more than another act of punishment against Palestinians for 'refusing to engage in dialogue,' justifying further colonization of their lands.

For Israelis active in the 'peace camp,' there is a common misconception that Palestinians do not know about how many Israelis really just 'want peace' and are even willing to make compromises. Nadia Naser-Najjab proves to be a dedicated scholar of Israeli society, she understands the nuances between the Israeli groups better than most Israelis themselves. She comes to the conclusion that Israelis and Palestinians come to these meetings with completely different backgrounds and expectations, and the efforts of NGOs to create a 'level playing field' are doomed to failure.

And yet, despite the depressing reality described in the book, the book does end with a hopeful tone which is all the more convincing because of the book's brutal honesty. It is not

a call to end contact between Palestinians and Israelis, but rather an argument for the famous 'co-resistance instead of co-existence.' In Nadia Naser-Najjab's analysis there is not just a place for Israelis and Jews to join the Palestinian struggle for justice and equality, but there is also a clear reason for them to do so. I for one, am convinced.

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