

### ORDINARY RESISTANCE

**Palestine, rien ne nous manque ici**, edited by Adila Laïdi-Hanieh. Paris: Editions Cercle d'Art, 2008. 374 pages. n.p.

*Reviewed by Sarah A. Rogers*

*Palestine, rien ne nous manque ici* is a collection of memoirs, poetry, short prose, interviews, and reproductions of photographs, art, and posters. Some contributions have been previously published; others are translated from Arabic and English into French; and many represent leading Palestinian writers, artists, and intellectuals working in the occupied territories and its diasporas with a select number of foreign authors in the mix. Together, the pieces document the vibrant steadfastness of Palestinian cultural production, one that significantly refrains from a tone of either uncritical celebration or victimization. Instead, the compilation presents a complex glimpse into the emotional, ethical, and sociopolitical issues at stake in the contemporary conditions of Palestinians and the ways in which these larger issues inflect individual experience.

Editor Adila Laïdi-Hanieh's opening essay draws on the work of Michel de Certeau to frame the publication as an act of

ordinary resistance. Accordingly, she proposes two paradigm shifts represented by the collection. The first challenges Frantz Fanon's theorization of a revolutionary national culture born out of the colonial struggle: the optimistic deployment of a Palestinian national iconography throughout the previous decades has failed to meet political independence. Yet, despite the recurring motifs of alienation, exile, and absence throughout *Palestine*, the voices gathered nonetheless exhibit strategies of defiance, hope, humor, and cosmopolitanism. For Laïdi-Hanieh this suggests a transition in terms of the conventional iconography of Palestinian resistance. She terms this paradigm shift pessoptimism (although one wonders how Emile Habibi's 1974 novel *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist* can, in fact, encapsulate a new paradigm of resistance).

The collection opens fittingly with Mahmud Darwish's poem, *Two Strangers*, as it introduces a central theme: the encounter with an other, either within oneself or the Israeli other. Elias Sanbar, for instance, explores the possibilities ironically presented by exile—a learned awareness of his ability to speak in multiple tongues and the belief that his Palestinian-ness is premised on roots still to come. Aïcha Odeh also reflects on an internal encounter in describing her return to the West Bank from Amman, a journey whose practical and emotional trials always disappoint the simplicity of the unfulfilled hope of return. In a different kind of encounter, Akram Haniyyeh narrates a town's establishment after an Israeli soldier refuses a pregnant woman passage and she, in turn, refuses to turn back, thus birthing both her son and a new home. Raja Shehadeh further recounts an inability to reconcile two opposed perspectives in his conversation with an Israeli soldier on the Israeli presence. The two conclude their encounter by sharing a marijuana cigarette and a mutual, yet ideologically distinct, appreciation of the landscape.

These poignant reflections are often registered in the land, and the city itself emerges as a character. In Soumayya Soussy's short piece, which opens a brief selection of works on Gaza, she contemplates a city without borders. The refugee camp serves as both an actual place and an allegory for a passage in between hope and despair in Fayçal Darraj's essay. In Tania Tamari-Nasir's piece, history unfolds in the

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domestic sphere as her living room is the setting for both her personal history and that of Birzeit University under the occupation. Yet cities outside of Palestine also figure prominently, as Emily Jacir humorously asks, “Quel Palestinien n’a pas une tante à Amman?” (Which Palestinian does not have an aunt in Amman?; p. 347).

The collection concludes with reproductions of art works by well-known Palestinian artists and photographers. This inclusion offers a glimpse into the convergence and divergence of contemporary visual and textual iconography. For example, there is the shared motif of an absent presence in Laïdi-Hanieh’s famous exhibition, *100 Witnesses-100 Lives* and Taysir Batniji’s *The Sky over Gaza #2, 2001-2004*. Alternatively, the encounter with the other is visually staged through violence—either inflicted on the canvas in Manar Zuabi’s 2003 installation photographs or literally exhibited in Vera Tamari’s installation *Going for a Ride?* in which the artist displays cars impacted by Israeli authorities. Unfortunately, the brevity of the selection renders the visual arts an apparent afterthought. Moreover, whereas a reader moves through a text, one photograph often fails to sufficiently convey a visual project’s potential meanings. The exception is the inclusion of numerous posters (and explanatory text) produced by the Zan Studio.

For scholars and students of Palestine, colonialism, and the diaspora, *Palestine* is of critical relevance, documenting an active and politically engaged contemporary cultural realm, and thereby affirming the title’s definitive pronouncement.