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Glimpses of Freedom, Glimpses of Peace

A Review of Maxine Kaufman•Lacusta's *Refusing to be Enemies: Palestinian and Israeli Nonviolent Resistance to the Israeli Occupation*

Maxine Kaufman•Lacusta is a Canadian Jewish Quaker activist with over twenty years of experience working with nonviolent anti•occupation activists in both Israel and occupied Palestine, including seven years living and working in Jerusalem. Her book, *Refusing to be Enemies*, is the culmination of these twenty odd years of experience.

The book has two underlying premises: the belief that Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, since 1967, is fundamentally wrong and illegal under international law, and that Israel must withdraw from these lands, and a belief that, in all likelihood, the only way to force Israel to withdraw is through massive nonviolent resistance in both Palestine, Israel and the international community.

The book revolves around a series of interviews with nonviolent activists, mostly in Palestine and Israel, who reflect on the issues of nonviolent resistance in this context from a variety of angles. The book opens with Maxine introducing us to several nonviolent activists who tell us why they chose nonviolence and why they got involved in activism against the occupation. Through the voices of Palestinian and Israeli nonviolent activists, the book then moves on to reflect on the last several decades of nonviolent activism in Israel/Palestine with its successes and failures, on the question of both the triumphs and challenges of nonviolent organizing, and on the activists' hopes and visions for the future.

The umbrella term, nonviolent activism, in this context, includes a range of people and organizations working in a variety of ways for a just peace by peaceful means. It ranges from the work of Israeli organizations like New Profile, which uses the power of the word to challenge the increasingly militaristic nature of Israeli society, to Israeli groups like the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition, which works in solidarity with Palestinians using direct nonviolent action to resist the bulldozing of Palestinian homes, to joint organizations like Combatants for Peace which consists of former combatants from both sides who have now committed themselves to peace•building, to Palestinian civil societies like the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement Between People which seeks to teach the skills of nonviolent resistance to the people of occupied Palestine.

One theme that recurs throughout the book is the idea that nonviolent resistance is popular resistance. Active nonviolence allows entire communities of an oppressed group to mobilize in various ways, whether through boycotts, strikes, blockades, peaceful demonstrations, trespassing, etc., and tends not to concentrate power in the hands of military or political elites.

Many of the activists look back favourably to the First Intifada, from 1987 to 1993, when a largely nonviolent grass roots uprising occurred in occupied Palestine, and the decision•making power was very much in the hands of the community. In 1994, the PLO leadership returned to

Occupied Palestine and imposed a very strong state structure on the West Bank and Gaza, in effect marginalizing the civil society that had emerged in the preceding years. The Second Intifada since the fall of 2000 has been a much more state-centred operation, with a more militarized focus. While a new wave of nonviolent resistance has emerged since 2000, its practitioners have often felt rather marginalized by the official channels of state-based Palestinian struggle. I use the term, state, in this paragraph rather loosely, since the Palestinian Authority might best be called a kind of quasi-state, with authoritarian institutions typical of a state, but without real autonomy or international recognition.

While the book celebrates the many people and groups dedicated to nonviolence, it is honest about the limits. In Chapter Five, you feel the warmth and the joy of Palestinians, Israelis and internationals gathered around a camp fire in the village of Bil'in, where grass roots Palestinians have maintained an ongoing nonviolent protest since 2005. In Chapter Six, you share the pain and frustration of activists who talk about how marginalized the path of nonviolent resistance often is, in both Palestinian and Israeli society. Then in Chapters Eight and Nine, you share the hopes and dreams that the anti-occupation activists have for the future of Palestine and Israel.

Four reflective essays by individual thinker-activists round out the book, and help ground the spiritual energy of the journey through which the book has taken you. A bibliography and a list of related websites then invite the reader to explore these topics further.

There is perhaps one major weakness in the book. There should have been a first chapter that set forth the chronological background to the current situation, saying what happened in 1947, in 1948-49, 1967, 1987, and so forth, explaining how and why the Israeli occupation is illegal under international law, and describing the general nature of the occupation. Just as many in the West are unaware of nonviolent activism in Palestine and Israel, many westerners are profoundly ignorant of the general historical facts. As it is, the reader pieces things together, chapter by chapter, or has to go elsewhere for this kind of general background. While it is not the intent of the book to deal with the general history, it could have been summarized adequately in ten to twenty pages at the beginning of the book, so the reader could have that basic description to refer to.

I agree with Ursula Franklin's opening words. This is an important book. Every open-minded westerner should read it, and more importantly, act upon it. Israel's increasingly militaristic and technological system of control over occupied Palestine, (and to some extent over dissenters within Israel itself), the apathy of most of the Israeli public, and the disempowerment of many Palestinians, can all be seen as a microcosm of the world as a whole. In North America, we are both oppressed and oppressors. The more we fail to act in response to one example of oppression, the more we potentially injure ourselves and all future generations. Israel is all of us. Occupied Palestine is all of us. Perhaps the nonviolent resistance movement, and its power to transform, can become all of us.

by Dave Greenfield (Saskatoon Monthly Meeting, and Associate Member of CFSC's Quaker Peace and Sustainable Communities Committee)

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