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Book Review: When the Rain Returns: Toward Justice and Reconciliation in Palestine and Israel

This is a good book. If you want to inform yourself about Israel/Palestine, it is an excellent place to start. It is now several years old, but nothing much has changed – not for the better, at any rate.

The book is the report of personal observations during a visit to the region of a delegation of Quakers, and is informed by Quaker principles, one of which is that in crafting a settlement, all interested parties must be consulted. They note that this does *not* include diaspora Jews, since they are able, if they wish, to immigrate to Israel and be given Israeli citizenship, which many of them have done. Diaspora Palestinians, of course, cannot return to their homes or their land.

When the Rain Returns covers the history of Palestine, including things I did not know. For instance, that the AFSC took care of refugees after the 1948 war for eighteen months, until the UN took over. Another lacuna in my knowledge is the history of non-violent resistance before and during British colonial rule. Non-violent resistance continues today, although little of it appears in the western media.

They spoke with Jewish Israelis, one of whom, a psychology professor, saw Israelis becoming “more paranoid, more fearful... Israelis become so vociferous against any criticism precisely because they are so uneasy in their conscience. This self-image is crucial; there are many decent, thoughtful Israelis who are living in complete denial of what their government is doing on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip.” (p.41)

Regarding the oft-stated claim that Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and elsewhere could simply be resettled where they are, they make it clear that “countries that host conflict-driven inflows of refugees are under no international obligation whatsoever to absorb them permanently. If that were the case, governments would be far more reluctant to offer even temporary refuge to those fleeing violence elsewhere.” (p.128) And they point out that the diaspora Palestinians have been made powerless by Israel, by the U.S., even by the Palestinian Authority, and that it is quite unconscionable for large groups of people to be kept stateless.

There is a perceptive discussion of the value of violence, a subject which Quakers usually shy away from. As one of the group wrote, “We must address respectfully the perspective of a humiliated and almost helpless people who turn to or support violence as a means of regaining their self-respect and self-determination; as an attempt to protect their families and friends; as a protest and a refusal to go on passively accepting the endless bludgeoning without letting their oppressors know that they cannot continue without suffering consequences” (p.223).

I hope that Quakers who need to know more about what is going on in Israel/Palestine will read this book, perhaps together with Susan Nathan's *The Other Side of Israel*, which is also the fruit of personal observation, mostly about the "Israeli Arabs," Israel's non-Jewish citizens.

By Elizabeth Block (Toronto Monthly Meeting, CFSC's Quaker Peace and Sustainable Communities Committee)

The book was prepared by an International Quaker Working Party on Israel and Palestine, and published by American Friends Service Committee, 2004, and may be ordered from the Quaker Book Service (<http://www.quaker.ca/Publications/qbs/qbs.html>). Rick McCutcheon, a Canadian, was a member of the working party, and has contributed a chapter.