



BOOK OF THE MONTH

Palestine Speaks: Narratives of Life Under Occupation

Cate Malek and Mateo Hoke, Editors
Voice of Witness, 2014, 320 pages,
\$24.00

*Reviewed by Mahmoud Muna, The
Educational Bookshop, Jerusalem*

Palestine Speaks is a beautifully edited book that includes personal stories from Palestinian men and women. Cate Malek and Mateo Hoke edited it jointly; they are both human rights journalists who have worked for years on other politically intertwined subjects, including Mexican immigration, the Amazon jungle, and the Seychelles. It is an important book that is published by Voice of Witness, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering a more nuanced, empathy-based understanding of contemporary human rights crises.

Several dozen books are written every year about Palestine and its people's struggle, however, two elements keep recurring in such writings. First, is the absence of the Palestinian voice in its most simple and genuine form, as most of the writers are not Palestinian themselves. And the second element is the tendency to overshadow the Palestinian story itself with a sophisticated political or historical analysis, which often distorts the focus of the story.

In *Palestine Speaks*, the narrators are Palestinians themselves, men and women and from all walks of life, and they all believe in the importance of not only telling their stories to the editors, but also publishing and sharing them with those around the world. On the other hand, the editors of this volume have done exceptional work in capturing the contrast between the somber realities

of the Occupation, and the love of life of those who live under it.

Based on more than ninety extensive interviews conducted between 2011 and 2014, sixteen stories were selected to offer a diverse and challenging look at the past and present of Palestinian life. Most of those stories are of life in occupied Palestine, in all its shades: stories of students, managers, mothers, workers, athletes, and political activists. In showing such a mosaic of narrators, the book is painting a realistic image of a diverse and contrasting Palestinian society.

Despite the hardships and the unavoidable bleakness of life under occupation, the book, and these accounts, expose the colorful lives of the people living here. In their own words, the editors hope that this book "serves to reflect some of that light back out into the world and offers our readers a new understanding of life under occupation." In each story, there are enough details to educate the reader about the context of the narrator's life, and to give the necessary historical background. But the historical details are balanced with flowing emotions that give the feeling that the narrator is talking to the reader directly.

This book is essential reading for those who want to understand how the Palestinians keep hoping for a better future, while coping with the tremendous challenges that the Occupation imposes on their mundane lives. Furthermore, through such a collection of oral history, the book challenges the dogmatic stereotype that Palestine is a violent, rough place, where hatred is the norm and history is too complicated for the normal person to understand.

