

In Your Eyes a Sandstorm: Ways of Being Palestinian

Arthur Neslen

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Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish's eloquent poem "I Come From There" can evoke emotions ranging from sympathy to rage. Arthur Neslen's latest book is certain to do the same.

A British journalist, Neslen "grew up the child of left-wing and anti-Zionist Jewish parents in London" and has worked for the BBC, *Haaretz*, and Al Jazeera. In his previous book, *Occupied Minds: A Journey through the Israeli Psyche*, he interviewed fifty Israelis from various walks of life. In this book he travels to the "other side" and interviews a diverse cross section of Palestinians. The result is clear and focused snapshots of who and where some Palestinians are, what they're thinking, and their experiences in relationship to their identity. The book includes condensed bits of history and is organized in reverse chronological order from the present to just prior to the inception of the state of Israel. Placing interviews according to the subject's relationships to historical events, and political movements, Neslen provides the context for a better understanding of his subjects. One will certainly encounter some expected and familiar Palestinian voices (doctors, lawyers, and politicians), but it is the less anticipated ones (a rapper living inside Israel, a young tunnel engineer in Gaza, and a ninety-four-year-old retired farmer) that especially intrigue, as they are a needed reminder that Palestinians are not the monolithic group often portrayed in the Western media.

Neslen rightfully acknowledges numerous barriers and obstacles posed by him undertaking this complex work. Certainly the author's own identity seeps onto the pages of this text by means of his thoughts and comments. However, given that this book is more journalism than ethnography, it never impedes the overwhelming merit of this work, and perhaps is even a necessary "elephant in the room."

In Your Eyes a Sandstorm will captivate its readers and is sure to shock and surprise even the most knowledgeable and/or radical (at either end of the spectrum) followers of these issues. Anyone willing to accept the layers, intricacies, and vastness of Palestinian identities will appreciate hearing these voices; voices as rooted in the land of Palestine as its ancient olive trees.

ELISSA MUGIANIS (Winter 2012)

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