

Title: Our Way to Fight: Peace-Work Under Siege in Israel-Palestine

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Review:

In the opening pages of his book, Michael Riordon explains that the book offers no solutions to the situation in Israel/Palestine, nor does it aim to propagate a victim and an oppressor. Rather Riordon promises his audience a story, or many stories in fact; all of which have a recurring theme- the fight for justice and peace.

As Riordon introduces himself to his reader, one feels comfortable, almost as though you know him personally. Before he begins his stories of his time in Israel and Palestine, he speaks of a conference titled 'living on Indian land' where he gave a public talk on the indigenous resistance to the colonisation of the entity now called Canada- his birthplace and country of residence. As people questioned whether he was talking of Israel, Michael illustrates that the parallels of such a situation are not his own, but history's. This factual statement immediately makes sense. This is not the first time in history that such conflict for land in such a manner has taken place...you now understand why Britain, USA, Australia and Canada are so comfortable with the situation in the Middle East; once upon a time they were all once the occupier.

Chapter Two outlines the ten plagues that have inflicted east Jerusalem: impossibility of legally building a home, the separation fence which severs Palestinian neighbourhoods and villages from each other and from the city, confiscation of ID cards, prevention of family unification, escalating settler aggression against Palestinians, home demolitions, poverty, contemptuous and violent treatment by the border police, archaeological digging in disputed areas and the abysmal lack of municipal services. Sadly, each of these plagues is present in East Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine. As Riordon speaks to different organisations, each tackling a different plague, the pressure and hard work each individual endeavours can be seen; the results of such hard work are sometimes nothing. Their efforts constantly struck down and disregarded daily by the Israeli authorities. However, optimism remains high and the slightest achievement means that the plague is that slight bit weaker.

Each chapter and each individual tells a different story. The depth of Israel and Palestine is explored within the hearts and minds of those that live there, and reality doesn't hit home more than when it is being told by activists, Palestinian and Israeli, fighting for peace and justice everyday. Reading the book releases emotions of sorrow and frustration due to the factual statements, figures and statistics which all elucidate the illegality and injustice carried out by the Israeli

regime. However, Riordon lives up to his promise and lets the stories speak for themselves; he makes very little judgment, yet delivers his experience living in the shadow of each of his activists perfectly.

You can't help but admire each of the peace activists and those fighting everyday for a more democratic Israel and for equality for their Palestinian counterparts. There are people like Youssef Jabareen who works for the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) who read his Masters in the USA and has come back to work in Israel to fight for the basic Human Rights of Arabs; he is one of many. The personal sacrifice of each individual who is followed by Riordon is astounding. What is more astounding is their resourcefulness, constantly finding loopholes and contradictions and violations in Israeli law and constantly fighting in the Israeli Courts only to be given little or no recognition at all; and yet, they do not blame, they just live in hope and dream of a better future. As Mohammed Khatib says, "I dream, it gives me hope that I can do things."

Other activists such as Ran Yaron working for Physicians for Human Rights differentiate between their work and that of peace activists. He states he is the former, not the latter. Riordon questioning the difference between the two is informed that they do not intend to bring peace between Israelis and Palestinians; rather they intend to provide Palestinians with healthcare as a basic Human Right. By occupying the West Bank and Gaza, Israel is responsible for the healthcare of those under its occupation. Even so, the reader is able to come to their own conclusion. No bias is provided by Riordon. However, what does come across is that these Israelis and Palestinians want the same things, equality, justice, peace... so why can't it be? The reason it cannot work is simple - because Israel did not come into existence to become Palestine's neighbour, it came to replace Palestine.

This book is inspiring yet paradoxically saddening. You travel what may be politically correct to say, throughout Israel, yet I am inclined to say Palestine by the end of this book. This is not a denial of the State of Israel but rather a recognition of all the villages and land that is rightfully Palestinian and is in some way occupied, demolished or damaged by the Israeli authorities. The reader is left in awe of each peace activist, organisation, each community member, doctor and each building created for those suffering to overcome their problems and channel them into a form of art. Riordon articulately presents the stories of the people living in Israel and Palestine and thus he opens up a Pandora's Box of issues and the potential solutions.

Reading this book unfolds the landscape of the area dating back to pre-1948. Michael Riordon allows these activists to present their lives to the reader who may then form their own judgements. In the few pages dedicated to them, it is clear that they are courageous dedicated individuals, who have intervened for peace and justice for humanity; always shining a constant glimmer of hope through the darkness. Their resistance is really and truly their existence.

These stories of Israelis who refuse to see Palestinians as enemies and Palestinians who practice nonviolent resistance break all stereotypes. In the face of deepening conflict, this portrait of courageous grassroots action provides hope for a livable future and inspiration to peace activists in all nations.Â Michael Riordon teaches writing, and has written four books of oral history: *Our Way to Fight: Peace-Work Under Siege in Israel-Palestine*, *Eating Fire: Family Life on the Queer Side*, *An Unauthorized Biography of the World*, and *"Out Our Way: Gay and Lesbian Life in Rural Canada"*. He lives near Picton, Ontario.