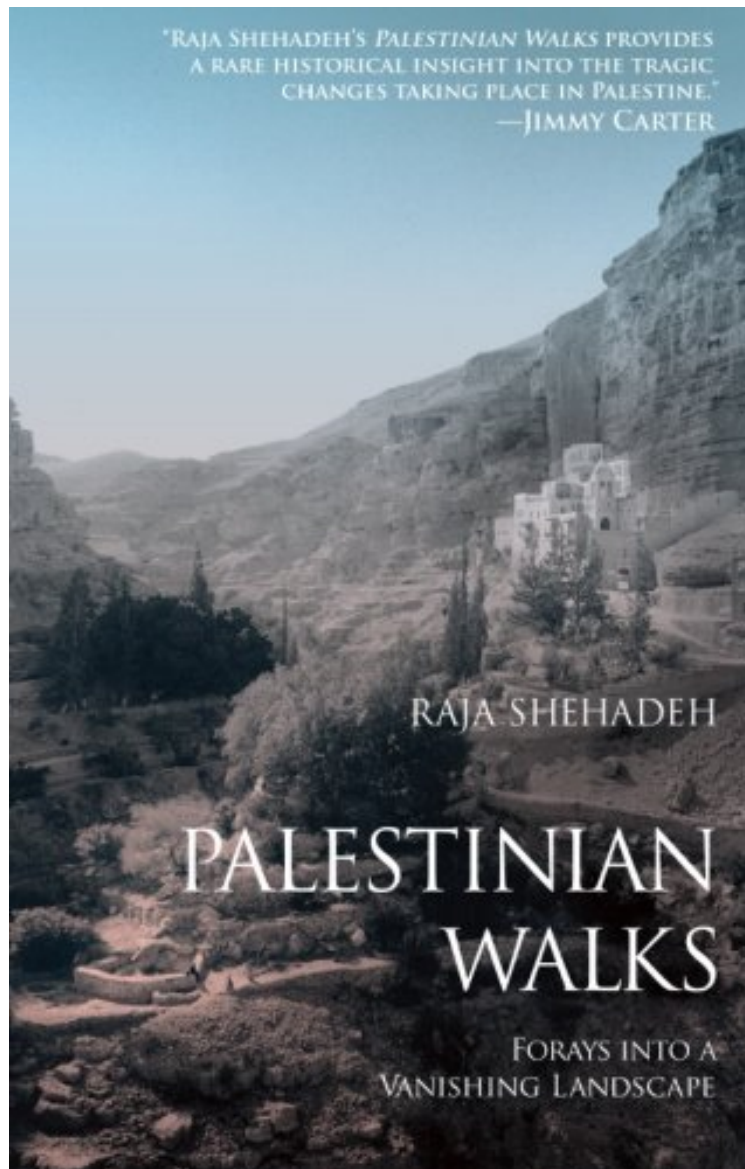


[Free] Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape

Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape

Raja Shehadeh

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Raja Shehadeh : Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape:

14 of 18 people found the following review helpful. "When everything else has gone from my brain...By John P. Jones III...what will be left, I believe, is topology: the dreaming memory of the land as it lay this way and that."So said

Annie Dillard, at the beginning of her autobiography, "An American Childhood." Others have felt the same way, from Cezanne's obsession with Mont St. Victoire, to even myself, and the light on a certain mountain in Vietnam's Binh Dinh province, which I hoped to be able to recall clearly, 25 years after my first encounter with it. Shehadeh's sentiments are strongly similar; he has a deep attachment to the land of his birth, how it lays this way and that. In his first of six stories in this book, he introduces the concept of "sarha," an Arabic word that means to roam freely, at will, without restraint. Throughout his life he has enjoyed taking long hikes in his native hills; his prose reflects this profoundly moving and therapeutic pleasure. Unlike Pittsburgh, or Provence, or even south central Vietnam, the topography that has given Shehadeh so much pleasure is rapidly changing, the result of individuals who believe they have a higher priority right to the land, and reinforce their belief with endless concrete, leveling hilltops for their settlements, and paving roads straight through them, instead of following the contours. At the same time they are building walls, more walls, more barriers that restrict Shehadeh, and his fellow Palestinians' access to the land of their birth. Though he does not literally say it, the entire book echoes, with a slight paraphrase, the words of Ronald Reagan: "Mr. Netanyahu, tear down these walls." Each of the six stories is solid, and well-written, but my favorite is the second one, "The Albina Case." Shehadeh is a lawyer, and he has been at the forefront in the losing battle of attempting to use the law, Israeli law, to prevent the seizure of Palestinian land for settlement by Israeli colonists. Albina was one of the first cases, one of the strongest in the sense that much paperwork existed, including maps, that showed Albina was the rightful owner. But what can be done in the face of the law which might be dubbed "even if we are wrong, we are still really right." Article 5 of Military Order 58 says: "Any transaction carried out in good faith between the Custodian of Absentee Property and any other person, concerning property which the Custodian believed when he entered into the transaction to be abandoned property, will not be void and will continue to be valid even if it were proved that the property was not at that time abandoned property." (p. 81-82) Shehadeh even documents the case of the land of an individual Jew, living on the West Bank prior to 1967, being seized, for the Jewish people in general. Such is the logic, and inconsistencies of Zionism. The author provides convincing evidence that the actions of the Israeli government are all part of an overall plan for the settlement of the West Bank, reducing the Palestinians to isolated and easily managed enclaves. Bantustans? Shehadeh says: "Religious practice in the Land of the Bible tends to encourage exclusivity and discrimination rather than love and magnanimity. There is no place like the Holy Land to make one cynical about religion." (p 140). And thus it is ironically fortunate that his home town, Ramallah, was NOT mentioned in the Bible, "Unlike Jerusalem, Jericho, Nablus and Hebron...", and thus they are spared a "settlement" in their town. At one point in the book he meets "settlers" in their "settlement." They were not the "devils incarnate, fanatic, crazy people, starry-eyed and religiously inspired..." that he had expected, but as he concludes: "I doubt, if I had articulated to them my deeply held convictions and argument against the settlement project, that they would have even heard me, so full were they of their own sense of purpose." And so, as he says in the Introduction, "Beautiful wadis, springs, cliffs and ancient ruins were destroyed by those who claim a superior love of the land." My only quibble with Shehadeh is that as a writer, who should know that words matter, he adopts the language of the occupier, and uses the word "settler," which connotes occupying vacant land, as was purportedly done in the American West. The French use "colon," the same word they used for their own people who once occupied Indochina and Africa, and which properly translates as colonist, and so should not Shehadeh use the same, since that is his message? Overall though, a moving, evocative, and painful book; a paean to a landscape, people and way of life which are rapidly vanishing. He finishes strong, with the story, "An Imaged Sarha," recounting a meeting with a young "settler" on a walk, who espouses the "party line" justifying the colonies, and Shehadeh blurts out: "Can't you think for yourself"? I only wish that Shehadeh could have walked with a Jew who did, who also walked the land, and eventually understood the reality behind the stones he was stepping over, the destroyed villages, that belied the official propaganda, and wrote an excellent account of this transformation. He is Goran Rosenberg, who wrote "L'Utopie Perdue: Israel- Une Histoire Personnelle." Kudos to both for their courageous books. 17 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Palestinian Walks By Winchell M. Craig Jr. An extraordinary book describing the desecration of Palestine by the Israeli government. It is a poignant memoir of a time past, beautifully written and pregnant with emotion. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Raja writes beautifully. I am Zionist so I do not agree ... By N. Hurwitz Raja writes beautifully. I am Zionist so I do not agree with some of what he writes, the worst being that he says Israel is 'annihilating' Arabs on the West Bank AND in Israel... nonsense. BUT he is very right about the destruction of that environment, which is so sad. He is also Pal Christian married to a Brit --- Penny Johnson--- so that is interesting. The Israelis have been very hard and expansive in Judea and Samaria. I have never supported settlements beyond the Green Line. BUT we need to solve this all with UN 242 and I will not go into it all but the Arabs have blocked peace equal to the Israeli right wing... And everyone should read about FDR's meeting with Ibn Saud in 1945--- THE source of the problems... IMO. Anyway, this is a great book! Wonderful to read. Man is a poet. Thank you! Neal

Raja Shehadeh is a passionate hill walker. He enjoys nothing more than heading out into the countryside that surrounds his home. But in recent years, his hikes have become less than bucolic and sometimes downright dangerous. That is because his home is Ramallah, on the Palestinian West Bank, and the landscape he traverses is now the site of

a tense standoff between his fellow Palestinians and settlers newly arrived from Israel. In this original and evocative book, we accompany Raja on six walks taken between 1978 and 2006. The earlier forays are peaceful affairs, allowing our guide to meditate at length on the character of his native land, a terrain of olive trees on terraced hillsides, luxuriant valleys carved by sacred springs, carpets of wild iris and hyacinth and ancient monasteries built more than a thousand years ago. Shehadeh's love for this magical place saturates his renderings of its history and topography. But latterly, as seemingly endless concrete is poured to build settlements and their surrounding walls, he finds the old trails are now impassable and the countryside he once traversed freely has become contested ground. He is harassed by Israeli border patrols, watches in terror as a young hiking companion picks up an unexploded missile and even, on one occasion when accompanied by his wife, comes under prolonged gunfire. Amid the many and varied tragedies of the Middle East, the loss of a simple pleasure such as the ability to roam the countryside at will may seem a minor matter. But in *Palestinian Walks*, Raja Shehadeh's elegy for his lost footpaths becomes a heartbreaking metaphor for the deprivations of an entire people estranged from their land.

From Publishers Weekly Starred . In 60 years of fighting, Israelis and Palestinians often seem to ignore the pernicious impact that decades of warfare have had on the contested land itself. Not so Palestinian human rights lawyer and avid walker Shehadeh (*Strangers in the House*), who has spent most of his adult life watching the West Bank territory recognized internationally as part of a future Palestinian state carved up by Israeli roads and settlements. The region's vistas have been a distant second consideration to the needs of Israeli nationalism and security concerns, perceived and real. Shehadeh's memoir is profoundly pained, his anguish over Israeli occupation policies palpable, as he lovingly sketches a landscape that is rapidly disappearing. Our land was being transformed before our eyes, he writes, and a new map was being drawn.... We had become temporary residents of Greater Israel. The son of Aziz Shehadeh, the first Palestinian to call publicly for a two-state solution, Shehadeh's anger isn't reserved only for Israeli occupation policies he also rails against Palestinian negotiators he believes favor political expediency over territorial integrity or environmental concerns and he searches genuinely for common ground with Israelis. Ultimately, though, Shehadeh is too honest to offer much hope, comforting himself only with the understanding that human realities come and go, but the land remains. (June) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *The New Yorker* A work of passionate polemic, journeying, history, and autobiography, this highly original consideration of the Palestinian-Israeli issue is structured around a series of vigorous, attentive hikes through the occupied territories. Shehadeh, a lawyer and human-rights activist who lives in the West Bank city of Ramallah, gives the reader, accustomed to the point-counterpoint of daily journalism, a personal sense of one man's attachment to his land and of a people's feelings of loss and uncertainty as more settlements are constructed and reconciliation drifts farther from view. Shehadeh is firm in his views of Israeli policy, but he is also an open soul, and his final walk in the book is with an Israeli moving encounter in a volume that, in the Palestinian literature of hope and fortitude, ranks with Sari Nusseibeh's memoir, "Once Upon a Country." Copyright 2008 Click here to subscribe to *The New Yorker* From Booklist Shehadeh a Palestinian lawyer, human-rights advocate, and highly praised author writes from Ramallah about the disappearing landscape of his childhood. In a series of hikes around the surrounding hills, an area he is intimately familiar with, Shehadeh explains how the relentless construction of Israeli settlements and roads is not only eradicating the possibility for Palestine to possess enough contiguous land to ever develop a state but also destroying the countryside for Arab and Jew alike. Having argued numerous land-claims suits, Shehadeh removes the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from political terror headlines and recasts it as a battle that encompasses countless environmental issues. The very nature of community is challenged here, as are the most basic questions of land ownership. He laments the Oslo Accords and expresses acute disappointment with the PLO leadership's acquiescence to settlement development in exchange for political power. In all, a stirring and eye-opening work by a man motivated by a deep love for the ground he walks, and despair for its vanishing future. A final exchange between Shehadeh and a Jewish settler is particularly riveting. --Colleen Mondor