

Book Review

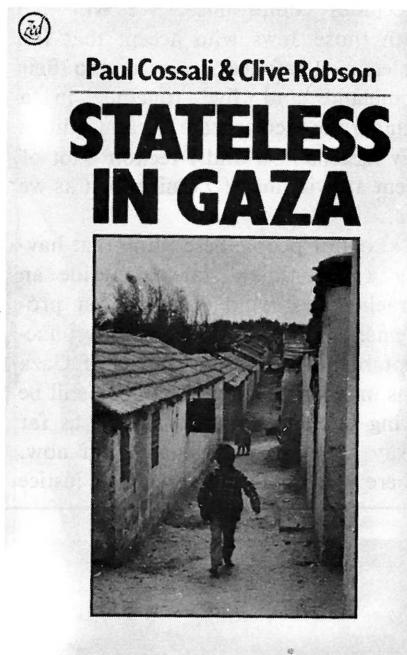
Stateless in Gaza

Stateless in Gaza is part of a modest but meaningful trend that began a few years ago to focus on the occupied Gaza Strip, after years of this area's being neglected, even in literature on Palestine. Other contributions to this trend are the excellent film «Gaza Ghetto» and the spate of media coverage generated by the report on the Strip published by Meron Benvenisti's West Bank Data Base Project.

While painting a picture of socioeconomic conditions no less grim than those revealed in Benvenisti's statistics, *Stateless in Gaza* puts flesh and blood on dry facts. The reality of life under occupation is portrayed in vivid human and political terms, via interviews with the Palestinians themselves. The authors' contribution is in letting the people speak, injecting only brief explanatory passages and arranging the narratives into main topics: Dispossession, Society, Occupation, Resistance. Cossali and Robson lived in the Strip for a time, and interviewed Gazans of varying ages, educational levels, backgrounds, vocations and political views. The result is a lively composite not only of Gazans, but of the Palestinians as such, both as refugees and as a people striving to assert their identity.

Stateless in Gaza is highly relevant as a background for understanding the causes of the current uprising and the forms it has taken. It chronicles the devastating extent to which the occupation has disrupted people's lives, victimizing them in countless ways, big and small. As one Palestinian says: «Unlike most governments which give protection and support to enterprises operating under their jurisdiction, Israel is only interested in bleeding us slowly to death.» Another notes: «Socially, Gaza is unique: surrounded and occupied, with a real sense of helplessness and isolation. All sectors of the community feel the need for change, from the communists to the Muslim Brotherhood.» Though the Strip is de facto absorbed by the Zionist state and half its labor force works there, an older Palestinian reports:

Stateless in Gaza, by Paul Cossali and Clive Robson, was published by Zed Press, 57 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DN, in 1986. It is 160 pages, illustrated with photographs of life in the Gaza Strip, and costs £5.95 for the soft cover edition.



«I've never met a settler... I only ever see them in their cars. They seem to be mostly European and American... It was bad enough being surrounded prior to 1967; now they are building little fortresses actually among us - in our little crowded corner of Palestine.»

The difficulties experienced by the Palestinian revolution at the time are also addressed by some of those interviewed: «I think that the situation is becoming so desperate now in Gaza that we can't afford to wait for unity outside, just as we can't expect to be delivered by waiting for revolution in the Arab world or some kind of diplomatic initiative.»

These factors combined go a long way towards explaining the sense of nothing to lose which we have seen in the children confronting Israeli tanks

with stones, and the persistence of the uprising despite the great sacrifices exacted.

PROPHESY OF THE UPRIISING

The book also gives an impression of the difficulties encountered in any kind of organizing work, since the armed resistance in Gaza was brutally suppressed by the occupation army in the early seventies. At the same time, the interviews reflect the persistence of people's will to struggle, and the critical thinking to which political activists subject their past experience. Many of those interviewed, while expressing loyalty to the PLO, leveled hard criticism at the leadership for failure to promote strong grassroots organization - something which has since been created by the dynamics of the uprising.

Some expressed ideas which in retrospect seem prophetic of current developments. For example, a young political activist says, «To succeed, we need three things: the elimination of collaborators, strong grassroots organization and a gradual shift away from our economic dependence on Israel... We must learn to refuse to do things which it would be impossible for the authorities to force us to do.» A young boy's description of confrontations with the Israeli occupation forces in Jabalia camp in the spring 1982 uprising stands out as a rehearsal for the current uprising, and clearly shows the continuity between earlier struggle and today's.

Despite presenting a broad range of opinion, the book fails to present an integrated view of some essential questions. This is especially apparent concerning the role of armed struggle and the relationship between the revolution inside and outside of Palestine. Some of those interviewed reject armed struggle as such in the process of critically reviewing past experience, instead of discussing how armed struggle can be an integrated part of the mass-based struggle they advocate. It is also generally overlooked that the revolutionary Palestinian organizations, ►