

Comment on *The Other Side of the Wall*:

A brave, poignant, and invaluable exposure to the daily suffering and dangers endured by the Palestinian people living under a cruel occupation that has lasted for fifty years with no end in sight.

Richard Hardigan is no spectator of this ordeal, writing as one who has for some months stood shoulder-to-shoulder in solidarity with the Palestinians, inspired by their extraordinary resolve, resilience, and above all by their loving hospitality. Every American should be forced to read this illuminating book!

—Professor Richard Falk, former UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine

Richard Hardigan . . . has written what we have been waiting for: a measured, you-are-there account . . . a vivid journal that takes us past slogans and ideologies.

—Philip Weiss, co-founder and editor of *Mondoweiss*

The Other Side of the Wall is a wrenching and revealing account that can only be conveyed by someone who has lived its exasperating and at times heart-breaking details. Richard Hardigan tells the story of the Israeli occupation of Palestine with utmost integrity. It is a powerful experience . . . dauntingly real and unapologetically honest. A strongly recommended read.

—Ramzy Baroud,
author *My Father was a Freedom Fighter* and *Searching Jenin*

. . . Richard Hardigan takes you onto the ground in occupied Palestine . . . He conveys the message that, for the sake of our own humanity, we must not avert our eyes and look away, but each in our own capacity must join in solidarity with the oppressed.

—Jeremy Hammond,
author *Obstacle to Peace: The US Role in the Israeli-Palestinian*

In this informative and disturbing book, Richard Hardigan brings the reader into the stark, brutal reality of Palestinian suffering. From personal accounts of the suffering of people who quickly became close friends, to the biased reporting in the western media, the reader is brought face-to-face with the harsh truths of the Israeli occupation. A must-read for anyone wanting to be fully informed about this timely issue.

—Robert Fantina, author

Empire, Racism and Genocide: A History of US Foreign Policy

A searing first-person account. Hardigan describes the murder, theft, desecration and destruction regularly visited on Palestinians by their Israeli tormentors . . . He also chronicles systemic injustices such as the Wall that swallows land, water, and hope. Any human who reads this account and is not furious enough to be spurred into action should check his or her pulse.

—Pamela Olson, author

Fast Times in Palestine

In the summer of 2014 Richard Hardigan volunteered with the International Solidarity Movement in Palestine. *The Other Side of the Wall* reveals his personal awakening to the realities of the apartheid wall, the deadly struggles in Palestinian villages, and the violence of Israeli forces and right wing settlers. Set against the backdrop of mounting pressures culminating in the devastating seven-week assault on Gaza, Hardigan's voice moves from innocence to a deep-seated rage as he bears witness to the brutality of Israeli policies, politicians, and soldiers. In the tradition of Rachel Corrie, this book joins a growing collection of voices calling out grief and loss—making it more difficult for anyone to say, “I didn't know.”

—Alice Rothchild, author

Condition Critical: Life and Death in Israel/Palestine

Cover: Palestinians standing in line at the Qalandiya checkpoint. July, 2013.
Photo by Richard Hardigan.

The Other Side of the Wall

**An Eyewitness Account of
the Occupation in Palestine**

Richard Hardigan

The Other Side of the Wall:
An Eyewitness Account of the Occupation in Palestine
by Richard Hardigan
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Foreword

Every year hundreds of Western activists make their way to Palestine in a show of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Their intent is to provide actual help on the ground to those who are under direct and indirect occupation in the West Bank, those who are besieged in the Gaza ghetto, or those who are subject to a regime of Apartheid and discrimination inside Israel. Richard Hardigan is one of these activists.

In recent years these visitors have been seen by official Israel as constituting an existential threat. What the authorities fear in reality is not entirely clear. One can think of the wish of the government and security services to hide the oppressive reality on the ground as one major motivation. But in the age of the internet, and the relative ease with which the foreign press can still travel from Jerusalem to anywhere in the occupied territories, is there still a serious attempt to block information?

Another more sinister possibility is that what Israel wants is to maintain a fine balance between oppression and resistance, which can be easily disrupted by the activists' work both inside and outside Palestine. Life under occupation and oppression must be bearable enough so as not to encourage another intifada, but ruthless enough for people to lose hope in their ability to change the reality, and perhaps even leave as a result, if they can afford it. The activist presence on the ground is the principal connection between the Palestinians and the humanity outside the borders of the Jewish state, the world that understands the reality of the occupation and oppression and wishes to show solidarity with those living under the impossible reality Israel has imposed on them for the last fifty years. So preventing such a human contact is part of a wish for consolidating control over the lives of the people who have been under occupation in a way that ensures their silence and maybe even encourages their transfer and expulsion.

This is why it is so important to continue the effort of visiting and reporting back to others what the reality on the ground is like and how best the people under occupation can be helped. The main body that visits and volunteers is the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), which Richard, the author of this book, has joined. Together with the pressure from the outside, mainly through the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) campaign, this kind of

activism is what the international community can offer best for the cause of peace and justice in Israel and Palestine.

Without such an effort the only remaining engagement in the West with the reality in occupied Palestine would be through the political elites and the governments of the day. However, they are not likely to change the course of action which they have adopted since the collapse of the Oslo accord. They have knowingly chosen indifference and inaction in the face of the continued criminal policies on the ground. The mainstream media and academia in the West follow suit. So it is only the active sections of the civil society who are engaged in BDS on the one hand, and the solidarity on the ground with the Palestinians on the other, that leave hope for a just and significant Western position toward peace and justice in the torn land of Palestine.

It is not only the occupied West Bank, or the besieged Gaza, that needs such solidarity and activism. The refugee camps in Lebanon, the ethnically cleansed Bedouins inside Israel and other Palestinians groups must be linked to this active solidarity as well.

This book is one individual story of such activism. The personal tale provides practical advice to others regarding what such activism entails. More importantly, this book presents a concise analysis of the issues at the heart of the Palestine problem. Activism of this kind requires both a clear understanding of what to face in Ben-Gurion airport, the Allenby Bridge or the Rafah crossing into Gaza, as well the possibilities of being active in the demonstrations and protests that take place daily in the West Bank.

As the book clearly shows, such activism demands a good knowledge of the history of the region and an open-minded analysis of the events of today and what people are fighting for in the future. This book has managed to do it all in one place and will be essential for both readers who are contemplating for the first time such activism and for those already deeply involved in it. Such activism, as this book illustrates so well, is more than anything else a refusal to remain silent in the face of the inhumanity and oppression which is now entering its second century.

—Ilan Pappé
 Professor of History and Director of the
 European Centre for Palestine Studies,
 University of Exeter.

Introduction

This book is neither balanced nor neutral. I do not believe this to be a flaw. When one observes a strong man beating a helpless child or an overwhelming military force crushing a defenseless civilian population, balance is not a virtue in a point of view. The only relevant aspect of these situations is that the strong are dominating the weak. I have taken that position in this book. Neutrality is not an option. Desmond Tutu once said that “if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel is the elephant and the Palestinians are the mouse. It has been that way since before 1948, when the Zionists expelled three quarters of a million Palestinians from the land of Palestine to create room for a Jewish homeland, and it is still that way now. Supported almost unconditionally by its superpower patron, the United States, Israel has maintained a brutal military occupation over the West Bank and Gaza since 1967. The state of Israel now comprises seventy-nine percent of Historic Palestine, and if you include Area C in the West Bank, where the illegal settlements are located, Israel has complete control of roughly ninety-one percent of Palestine.¹ The remaining territory is administered by the Palestinian Authority, which by many Palestinians is seen as a collaborationist entity.

Many of the people that I met in the West Bank—both Palestinian and international—believe that the primary purpose of the Israeli government’s harsh policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians is to make their lives as miserable as possible, thereby encouraging them to leave, whereupon it can exert even greater authority over the land. Palestinians in the West Bank face—on a regular basis—violence meted out by both soldiers and settlers, long waits at checkpoints, travel restrictions, home demolitions, theft of natural resources, unfair economic practices, arbitrary detention and arrest, long prison sentences, and countless other forms of humiliation.

The conditions in Gaza are even worse. While Israel pulled out of Gaza in 2005, it maintains *de facto* control over the Strip, as it enforces an inhuman and illegal blockade that keeps the population in a constant state of abject poverty. When there is resistance to Israel’s policies, it punishes not just the

offenders but all residents by subjecting them to massive aerial and sometimes ground campaigns that result in enormous human cost and suffering.

I have spent almost my entire career as a professor in the United States, but in the spring of 2008 I spent a sabbatical teaching at a university in Cairo. From 2010-2012 I took a two-year hiatus from my work in the US and accepted a position at another university in Egypt. I fell in love with the country and its warm and welcoming people, and I still count many Egyptians among my close friends. I returned to my university position in the US for the academic year 2012-2013. When the summer of 2013 arrived, however, I was back in the region, this time to improve my Arabic language skills. I enrolled in classes at Birzeit University near Ramallah in Palestine. I had previously visited Jerusalem, but this was my first extended stay in the West Bank. I had read extensively about the conflict, but it was another thing altogether to see it with my own eyes. I was shocked by the injustice that I witnessed. I visited the divided city of Hebron, where a few hundred settlers—and the 3,000 soldiers assigned to protect them—conspire to make life miserable for the local population. I traveled up to Qalqilya, a city that is almost completely surrounded by the Apartheid Wall and has consequently seen its economy devastated. I saw in Bethlehem, a tourist destination famous for its Christian sites but also a victim of the Occupation, the Wall decorated with beautiful graffiti cutting through its heart. I stood in line for hours in the sweltering heat in a long, narrow metal cage at the Qalandiya checkpoint, waiting to have an Israeli soldier issue judgment on me, deciding whether I would be allowed to pass or not.

Despite the poverty, unemployment, misery, and dejection, I found that the people maintained the Palestinian tradition of warmth and hospitality towards strangers and travelers. I also found hope. And I found resistance. I attended demonstrations in the villages of Nabi Saleh and Bil'in, where the locals were protesting against the Occupation.

By the end of the summer, I knew I had not learned as much as I wanted to about Palestine. My weekdays had been taken up with my Arabic studies, and only on weekends had I had the opportunity to travel and see what I could of the country. It had not been enough, and I knew I had to return.

Back in the US I saw an announcement for the meeting of an international but Palestinian-led organization: the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). As its name suggests, ISM is devoted to standing in solidarity

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with the Palestinians in their struggle against the Occupation. I had heard of ISM because of the connection with Rachel Corrie, the twenty-three-year-old activist who was killed in Gaza in 2003 while working for the organization. I had also run into a few of their members at the demonstration in Nabi Saleh, but beyond that I knew little. At that meeting, and at a few subsequent ones, I learned about some of the work that ISMers performed in Palestine. A quote in the Israeli daily newspaper *Ha'aretz* about the group, which I found in a book by scholar Norman Finkelstein,² made a particularly strong impression on me:

The ISM is an international pacifist movement that draws its inspiration from a quote by Albert Einstein. “The world is a dangerous place to live; not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don’t do anything about it.”

Since the start of the intifada, hundreds of the[se] foreigners, mostly students, have taken a rigorous course in nonviolent theory and practice and then been placed in Palestinian towns and villages, where they report on events at checkpoints, villages under curfew and house demolitions, help move humanitarian aid into besieged areas, and accompany ailing Palestinians to hospitals.³

I decided to join them in Palestine for the summer of 2014. This book is about my experiences during that time.

