

A new atlas for Palestine

Adri Nieuwhof 2007-10-07 13:11

Palestinian artists, photographers and designers have mapped their Palestine in the Subjective Atlas of Palestine, which is available on the internet. The atlas offers a picture of Palestine that differs from the images the public generally receives through the mass media.

Dutch designer Annelys de Vet, the International Academy of Arts in Palestine and ICCO, the Dutch interchurch organization for development cooperation, worked together with a group of almost thirty Palestinian artists to realize a moving, beautiful, poetic and at times heart breaking book.

In April 2007 most artists participated in a workshop held at the premises of the International Academy of Art Palestine in Ramallah. According to Khaled Hourani, Artistic Director of the academy, the project fitted in the framework of preparing for the educational and academic experimental contemporary arts programme that would start later in the year. The artists from Gaza were not allowed to travel to Ramallah, but were involved through internet and e-mail.

The atlas contains various views on the map of Palestine, colourful designs for a new flag, a plan for the fragmentation of the wall, cartoons, the photo serie "lifeline to my brother" about life in prison, photo's of children trying to play in Gaza, an instruction on how to smoke the waterpipe and twelve ways to prepare chick peas, designs for a new currency and new street signs for Palestine. Beautiful landscapes of Palestine are followed by photo's of Palestine under occupation. The contributions offer different views on a nation in occupied territory. While reading the atlas I could hear the sounds of the traffic, smell the fresh herbs on the market, smile about the humour, feel sad about the political prisoners and the children that grow up under occupation.

Hassan Khader, a writer born in Gaza and currently living in Germany, writes in the atlas, " There is a lot of melancholy hanging in the air, a sense of black humour and even boredom. The map is formed and deformed, joyfully or sarcastically; daily life activities are cherished as precious proofs of resilience. Normalcy can be achieved in different ways, by different means. No-one would stop for a moment to ask: "How can I normalize my life?" The question is: "How can I keep time-tested means of normalcy functioning and oiled?" Palestine as a metaphor is much more complicated and multi-layered than the one portrayed by political rhetoric. Behind every truth there is a much deeper one. The potential of Palestine as a metaphor has always been rich. The Palestinians are tired, they need a break. The energies they invest just to be like anyone else, their quest for a normal life and the hopes they nourish, are channelled into a tortured relationship with time and place."

Indeed, the Subjective Atlas of Palestine is an authentic reflection of this.

In an interview with the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad Annelys de Vet responses to the question if she will also produce a Subjective Atlas of Israel is, "This is exactly the problem. When I had made such an atlas of Israel, nobody would have asked if I were going to make one about Palestine".

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<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2007/10/383010.shtml>