

# Foreword

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*The Bitter Landscapes of Palestine* echoes voices of people who are seldom heard. Its photographs shed light on faces hidden from the mainstream media and who have names, dreams, and hope.

Their aspirations are basic: they want to live on the land of their ancestors; to have the freedom to lead their flock to areas where they find the minimum to survive on in a harsh environment. The Palestinian communities in the South Hebron Hills, like the larger Palestinian people, are facing a settler colonial state. The main feature that distinguishes settler colonialism from classical or neo-colonialism is the fact that settler colonialists come to settle in an occupied land permanently. They exercise state sovereignty and juridical control over the indigenous land, while ultimately aiming to eliminate the native people. To do so, settler colonialism developed different mechanisms, ideological constructs, and social narratives. The indigenous land is described as *terra nullius*, empty or barren land that is just waiting to be discovered, thus becoming the private property of the settlers. The native people are depicted with racist constructs as primitive, savage, and violent, while the settlers are portrayed as the civilized and brave pioneers. To defend the settled property from the savage, a police state is created and is granted extraordinary power over the native people, including power over their civil affairs.

The book reveals the nature of the settler colonial state that uses its military might to terrorize the native Palestinian people, implementing policies with the clear aim of occupying the bulk of the Palestinian geography with the minimum of the Palestinian demography. Historic Palestine looks therefore much like a piece of Swiss cheese, where Israel gets the cheese (the land with its resources) while pushing the Palestinians into holes, overpopulated areas with no resources.

However, this book is not only about Israeli settler colonialism but also about Palestinian *sumud*, Palestinian resilience, resistance, and hospitality. It is a story of a people that do not give up easily but keep clinging against all odds to their right to live on their land in dignity and freedom.

The area on the South Hebron Hills is indeed a bitter landscape, where the injustice cries to heaven. However, it is also a story of a people who do not give up hope but continue to be resilient, thus struggling for a better future. Besides the face of the Israeli soldiers and settlers, this book shows the face of a small segment of Jewish Israelis who do not agree with their government nor with the ideology and practice of the Jewish settler; they exercise their own form of activism and resistance to the occupation of Palestinian land and they believe in a different future characterized by justice, freedom, equality, and neighborly relations.

Yet, the authors are not naive to believe that this future is to be realized easily or soon. They hope, however, that by telling what they have seen with their own eyes and what they have heard with their own ears, they might raise awareness, challenging a numb Israeli and international consciousness, thus contributing to the end of Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and people.