

David Groulx. *From Turtle Island to Gaza*. Athabasca University Press, 2019. 70 pp. ISBN: 9781771992626.

<https://www.aupress.ca/books/120284-from-turtle-island-to-gaza/>

When I look at a map of the Gaza, she, the land, resembles the body of a woman lying on her side, facing the Mediterranean Sea. Her head has long ago been buried in the sand as if someone is trying to snuff out her memories of an open, borderless sky.

Writing this book review has caused me to search through my memories and photographs of my first visit to Gaza in December 1992. The weather was unseasonably cold. Most days, Gaza's 25-mile-long coastline moderates the temperatures, but today it's bitter cold. I'd traveled 100 miles by bus from Amman, Jordan to Gaza on the coast. In the uplands, snow blanketed the earth and was in danger of freezing the region's fruit trees.



LeAnne Howe (on the right, in purple) walks with Palestinian children on a neighborhood street in a refugee camp in Gaza, 1992.

In the picture above, I'm wearing two coats, a purple raincoat, two pairs of socks to keep my feet warm, and a wool cap covered with a Palestinian keffiyeh. Yet, many of the Gaza children are wearing only a light jacket, no socks. I came to the region in 1992 on a Middle East study tour two weeks before Christmas. I loved everything about the trip to Gaza except riding on the bus with American Christians who would frequently break out into songs, such as "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "Blessed Redeemer." (At the time, I wrote in my journal, "I want to strangle them all especially the man in the Yankees' ballcap. These are the same people, cut from the same cloth, that build churches and highways over the sacred sights of Native peoples in the United States.")

While on that tour, I didn't know if I would ever return to the Middle East region, but the next year, my husband, who had lived in Lebanon and Syria for nine years and was fluent in Arabic, received a Fulbright-Hays Scholarship. We moved to Amman for a year in 1993-94. In 2011, I would receive a Fulbright to Jordan and live in Amman for another year. In 2013, we returned again to the region.

What I learned while on that first 1992 tour was that Gaza has been held captive since 1967 by the Israelis, but her history of abuse is much longer. Her earliest settlements were at Tell El Sakan and Tall al-Ajjul, two Bronze Age sites. The Philistines occupied Gaza territories until she was captured by Alexander the Great in 332 BCE. The history of Gaza reads like a Biblical account of begetting, one war begat another war. During the seventh century she, Gaza, the land, was passed back and forth between the Byzantine Empire and the Persians like a gang rape victim.

Gaza today is a vast refugee camp of nearly 800,000 people on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. She borders Egypt on the southwest and Israel on the east and north along a 51km border. It is through this lens of bordering colonizers, war and reprisals, and the broken bodies of men and bird wings that David Groulx (Ojibwe Indian and French Canadian) drew inspiration from in his collection of 54 poems, *From Turtle Island to Gaza*. He wrote the book some years after meeting an unnamed Palestinian man at a poetry reading in Harborfront, Toronto.

"We both knew we shared that long execution – that distance, religion, education could not break what we shared, said Groulx in his introduction for *From Turtle Island to Gaza*. Some years later, he decided to write poems about Gaza, but not exactly Gaza; rather, the poems are about contested lands, the places Indigenous people recognize, bordered, and meant for keeping Native people out and keeping invading settlers in.

Groulx takes us on an embodied journey in his poems about Ojibwe and Palestinians, often comparing, and contrasting landscapes; yet he resists the impulse to imply these two places and their histories, Native and Palestinian, are the same. Rather he braids his poems with the powerful imagery of oppression and mercy:

I know not
To cry
while the rockets
bluster
and the snow
gruff and deep.
This fine white garment
clothes the earth. (2.2)

Some of the poems are in the voice of an indifferent tour-guide. Even as matter-of-fact as a real estate developer:

This place was called
Ayn Hawad
Now it is Ein Hod
the settlers
live there now
painting pictures
writing stories
our lives are
silent (5.2)

"Only in Israel do they celebrate the building of a concentration camp, writes Gideon Levy of *Haaretz*, an Israeli news organization. "Only the skies of the ghetto are somehow still open, and that is in a limited fashion too. Coming soon, the next devilish invention of the defense establishment: A dome of iron, a huge ceiling over the skies of Gaza. The head of the 'border and seamline' administration is already working on it" (2021).

I taught *From Turtle Island to Gaza* in a graduate course this past year at the University of Georgia, and I will teach it again. The class talked about Groulx's poems in the collection as wreaking havoc on our ability to speak casually about Gaza and Gazans. I am grateful to Groulx for reminding me that we must re-train our eyes to see the continual dirty work of removal and erasure by the colonizers amongst us.

Groulx leaves us with an enduring lesson:

Where should we go?

You and I

Where can we go?

We. Refuge

Refuge *refuse*

From the occupied (6.2)

David Groulx is the author of nine poetry books and his work appears in over 160 publications in 16 countries. After receiving his BA from Lakehead University, where he won the Munro Poetry Prize, he studied Creative Writing at the En'owkin Centre in Penticton, B.C., where he won the Simon J Lucas Jr. Memorial Award for poetry. His book *From Turtle Island to Gaza* is not a celebration but an elegy. I highly recommend it, but not as bedtime reading.

LeAnne Howe, University of Georgia

Work Cited

Levy, Gideon. "Opinion | Two Million People Are Imprisoned for 15 Years. The New Barrier Will Remain There Forever." *Haaretz*, Haaretz Daily Newspaper Ltd., 9 Dec. 2021, https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-congratulations-the-gaza-ghetto-now-has-a-fence-around-it-1.10451441?fbclid=IwAR1iTIgHeiW0kCNySQKkQ6U_1WnfaAd8PSQaF0dbBP6q-sJAHL69I5E6U7A.