

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST

BOOK REVIEWS

Single Reviews

Producing Spoilers: Peacemaking and the Production of Enmity in a Secular Age by Joyce Dalsheim.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 256 pp.

DOI: 10.1111/aman.12305

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Joyce Dalsheim's book on inclusive peacemaking has much to offer scholars who focus on issues such as identity politics and what she calls "the tyranny of nationalism." It has special relevance for "nonacademic" activist scholars like me. Because Dalsheim describes herself as a "peace activist" around the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and demonstrates a great familiarity with both grassroots Palestinian and Israeli actors, it is appropriate that an "engaged anthropologist" living in Israel–Palestine and immersed in that conflict evaluates not only the theoretical contributions of this work for peacemakers but also its usefulness as an applied approach for peacemakers as well.

Dalsheim locates her criticism of liberal peacemaking within its hegemonic assumptions: that peacemaking is based on rational "secular" dialogue and negotiations; that the accepted political order is that of sovereign nations with distinct cultures operating within distinct nation-states; that democracy is the most valued and accepted form of statehood, based on individual rights and behaviors dictated by the market yet tolerant of cultural differences and recognizing a common humanity—and intolerant, however, of those disrupting the social order or "extremists" sitting "outside of the glow of the collective campsite." She then surveys both the counterhegemonic worldviews of important actors in Israel–Palestine who are thereby categorized as "enemies" or "spoilers" of peace— Hamas, a variety

of Israeli Jewish settlers, the Palestinian intellectual Sari Nusseibeh, an American-Jewish peacemaker, Mizrahi intellectuals, and others—and liberal peacemakers who are unable to integrate their nonsecular cultures and views of peace arising from their local contexts into a liberal, consensual framework. Her basic point is that rather than "spoiling" peacemaking efforts, the very presence of such influential "spoilers" bespeaks a systemic malfunction in liberal peacemaking that must be addressed if truly inclusive, just, and workable solutions are to be achieved.

On the way to a more inclusive and peaceful social order, Dalsheim progresses through a carefully thought-out set of alternatives, evaluating each according to one or more useful concepts and illustrating each alternative with well-chosen examples from her fieldwork in Israel–Palestine and from the literature. After laying out why the liberal approach that seeks to somehow reconcile contradictory narratives and worldviews (even as it excludes "spoilers") won't work, she sets out to examine various possibilities of "thinking beyond the nation," with peoples in all their variations defined by relationships rather than closed narratives, reified cultures, sovereign national collectives, or discrete territories.

Dalsheim admits that no social order inclusive of all heterogeneity actually exists or can exist. It is possible, however, to acknowledge and empower grassroots heterogeneity through what she calls "local solutions" to the problem of people "living together." She then considers a number of steadily more localizing approaches: exploring post-national social forces such as popular sovereignty, alternative sovereignties, flexible citizenship, and scattered hegemonies, all expressed through the rule of international

humanitarian law and human rights covenants, as well as in other forms; bridging narratives and reframing; developing social movements that link issues of common concern for local communities (I would insert organizing a grassroots global infrastructure); and ultimately acknowledging and legitimizing all our many “stories.”

Here Dalsheim leaves us hanging a bit in midair, as if her search for a more inclusive world order trails off. While “paying attention” to our enemies’ stories might help us deconstruct them, she admits that “Israelis and Palestinians are not interested for the most part in deconstructing their national identities” without suggesting what to do about that.

As an anthropologist engaged “on the ground” in Israel–Palestine in grassroots efforts to achieve a just peace between the two peoples (I say with a dash of essentialism), I found Dalsheim’s book thought provoking and an important corrective to attempts to impose a narrative and political program—even a progressive one. As the “two-state solution” dies and an inclusive alternative has yet to

formulated, a localized approach is indeed being tried. Rather than proposing “solutions,” Palestinians and Israelis interested in resolving the conflict are stepping back and identifying their basic rights and needs (grievances being bracketed as the post-resolution stage of reconciliation). In this endeavor, Dalsheim’s views and cautions can certainly play a valuable role, especially as efforts are made to incorporate the positions of potential “spoilers.” At times her discussion of local solutions sounded a bit “anthropologizing”; it assumed a good faith in “living together” rather than addressing contradictory agendas and disproportionate power relations. But here, too, her approach of localized heterogeneity could prove useful. It offers a way of “backing into” what she calls “different sets of arrangements to accommodate different sets of needs” rather than the traditional “front-end” approach to peacemaking based on defining common interests, making instrumental peace with one’s “enemy,” negotiations and compromise, often accompanied by power politics.