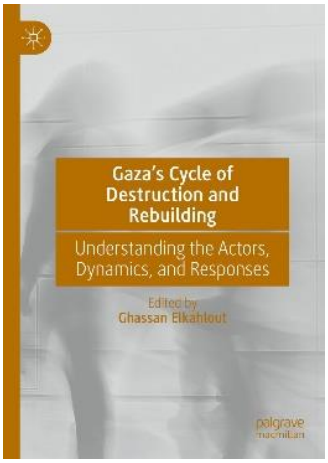


Ghassan Elkahlout (ed.).- *Gaza's Cycle of Destruction and Rebuilding: Understanding the Actors, Dynamics, and Responses* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 266p.

History repeats itself and often in dramatic ways, especially when wars and conflicts are at stake. Palestine in general, and Gaza in particular, are the most ostensible manifestations of this reality today. However, with the exception of humanitarian reports and commentaries as well as media headlines, which are at times one-sided and biased toward Western narratives, the persistent and recurring violence and incivility in Gaza have oftentimes been avoided in academic contexts. These contexts have lost their academic sovereignty, with decisions about what to debate and what to omit are often externally influenced in a way that showcases epistemic injustice toward Gaza. Interestingly, *Gaza's Cycle of Destruction and Rebuilding*, edited by Ghassan Elkahlout, grants Gaza some of the attention it deserves, and it manages to fill in a significant gap in scholarship. This book provides a platform for a number of voices to offer a kaleidoscope of perspectives that contextualize Gaza within the realities of settler colonialism, geopolitical contestation, and resistance. The central argument of the book is that the never-ending destruction that Gaza faces is the consequence of colonial discourses and practices of control, strategic isolation, and land dispossession.

Placed within the backdrop of the October 7th events and the massive destruction that came after, Elkahlout's opening chapter, "Sisyphus but the Boulder Gets a Little Heavier Every Time," sets out to contextualize the book as both a necessary and timely intervention into the conflict in Gaza. The title's metaphor is very revelatory, as it vividly reflects the tragedies caused by Israel's repeated assaults that frequently take place in Gaza. These are contributing factors to the ongoing destruction of the Strip. In this chapter, Elkahlout traces the history of the Palestinian question, beginning in the nineteenth century, moving through the Nakba of 1948, the War of 1967, and the Oslo Accords. As is the case with any occupation, Palestine's has taken many forms; not only military, but also structural, epistemological, and legal. The author also highlights how Israel has constantly acted against international law, which has yielded sundry forms of Palestinian resistance, both peaceful and armed. In doing so, he stresses that Palestinians have never surrendered, despite the tragic circumstances they endure and the dreadful experiences they go through on a regular basis. This demonstrates that Gaza, in particular, takes part in an "asymmetrical war."

In these prefatory remarks, Elkahlout also emphasizes the uniqueness of Gaza as a place stuck in humanitarian crisis, one that is endlessly worsened by Israel's frequent attacks. These not only result in the deaths of Palestinians but also devastate their infrastructure, while the international community often remains silent. The marginalization of Gaza is further ascribed to the hostility of many neighboring countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, which are all allergic to political Islam, a movement they deem Hamas represents. Hamas is demonized and regularly portrayed as a terrorist organization. Moreover, the unstable relationship between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority further complicates the situation, as this causes Gaza to live in a continuous crisis with multiple dimensions. Having outlined all this, Elkahlout underlines that the rationale of the book is both academic and political. He urges Palestinian intellectuals to write about their condition and both flip and dismantle Western-centric narratives produced about Palestine and Gaza.

In addition to the first introductory chapter which sets the context of the book, *Gaza's Cycle of Destruction and Rebuilding: Understanding the Actors, Dynamics, and Responses* contains twelve other chapters. These chapters are structured into three parts. The first places emphasis on "Hamas as the de facto authority in Gaza" and includes three chapters. In "Three in One: Hamas as an Islamist, Social, and Hyper-Nationalist Movement," Hani Awad taps into Hamas as both a complex and multidimensional entity: an Islamist movement, a social force, and finally a hyper-nationalist movement. Awad argues that this categorization is of cardinal significance when researching Hamas, to shun any parochial lens. In the main, Hamas should be conceived of as a being combining religious, social, and nationalistic leanings. In this same line of thought, Majd Abuamer and Yara Nassar choose to focus on the inscription of Hamas in international law. In "To Be or Not to Be—The Hamas Dilemma in International Law and Community," the authors dilate upon the ways in which Hamas poses challenges as to its status within international legal frameworks. In this vein, they also highlight the limitations of these frameworks, which do not acknowledge Hamas as a non-state actor. For this movement to gain wide international legitimacy, it should break with "violence." In the last chapter, "The Al-Qassam Brigades and the 'Sword of Jerusalem' Battle: Possibilities of Proportionate Deterrence in Asymmetric Warfare," Ahmed Qasem Hussein introduces the shift in the engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Focusing on Al-Qassam, Hussein spotlights the development of this armed group since the war of 2008. Despite the restrictions that this group faced, it managed to create its own means of resistance, including the use of tunnels to counter the technological superiority of Israel. Equally, the limitations of the capabilities of Israel are thus brought into the limelight.

Part two, "Persistent Factors Fuelling Confrontation in the Gaza Strip," shows how constant confrontations are always possible to take place because of sundry reasons. For example, Ibrahim Fraihat and Mona Hedya, in "Understanding the October 7th Hamas Attack on Israel and the War on Gaza," demonstrate how October 7th is a natural consequence of the ongoing predicament that the Palestinians have been undergoing because of such factors as Israeli colonialism, the failure of peace treaties, as well as the impact of U.S. foreign policies. The attack is therefore an unavoidable result of the injustice, dehumanization, and marginalization of people in Gaza. The delay and even rejection of the two-state solution further complicates the situation. Other factors also include the secret and declared alliance between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which made the latter a tool of subordination rather than of resistance. This is the argument that Tariq Dana further develops. In his chapter, "Suffocating the West Bank: The PA as Israel's Strategic Asset," he dwells on various forms of collaboration between Israel and the Palestinian Authority at the political, security, and economic levels. To him, this is enough evidence of how the PA incarnates the enemy of itself because it weakens resistance and exacerbates the inequality and injustice situation. In the main, the PA is a tool in the hands of the Israelis and is instrumentalized against the interests of the Palestinians. Likewise, Malath Alaga and Nabil Hussein's "The Political Economy of Israeli Economic Warfare on the Gaza Strip" pivots on the Israeli economic war in Gaza and its humanitarian consequences. The emphasis is laid on the different restrictive policies adopted by Israel, which have deteriorated Gaza's economy and largely forced it to depend on Israel.

In "Al Aqsa Mosque and Jerusalem: A New Flashpoint for Tensions in the Gaza Strip," Wadee Alarabeed studies the ways in which the frequent assaults on Al-Aqsa Mosque makes Jerusalem both a symbolic and strategic site or flashpoint of conflict. This is because it links the resistance in Gaza to events in the West Bank. It is this link, both geographic and symbolic, that fuels the provocations of Israel and intensifies pan-Palestinianism. In the context of this relationship between Palestinians and Israelis, Ibrahim Khatib, in "Stuck Between Palestinian Identity and Israeli Citizenship, Learning from Palestinians in Israel," deals with Palestinians who live in Israel, especially after the Palestinian uprising in May 2021. In doing so, he examines the conflict between the Palestinian identity and the Israeli citizenship. He avers that the exclusionary state policies have made this population more unified but with a complex sense of identity. As for Mohammad Alhamawi, in his chapter "The Philosophy of (De)development and its Dichotomy in Palestine," he studies the concept of (de)development in Palestine. In doing so, he seeks to demystify centralized narratives around development. Here, he underlines that the Palestinian underdevelopment is the outcome of

political and structural reasons. His study paves the way for further research on Gaza's underdevelopment issues. The second part of the book closes with "War on Gaza: An Unceasing Humanitarian Tragedy" by Ghassan El Kahlout. The latter exposes the humanitarian conditions in Gaza brought about by Israeli violations. The author uses interviews and document analysis to show that NGOs are not granted a safe space to function and also how many Palestinians consider emigration as a way out.

The last part, "Strategic Considerations for Gaza's Future," includes two chapters that focus more on recommendations for the future of Gaza. In "Rethinking the 'Day After' in the Gaza Strip: Learning from Previous Rounds of Reconstruction," Sansom Milton provides an evaluation of the prospective reconstruction of Gaza after the 2023-2024 war. Here, he starts with some of the shortcomings of the previous rebuilding efforts and gives a number of recommendations in order to stop this cycle of destruction as well as aid that is inefficacious. In his chapter, he makes clear that this process of reconstruction requires political clarity, sustainable governance, as well as political coordination. The second and last chapter in this book is by Ghassan Elkahlout. His "Conclusion: This Is Not a War, It Is Annihilation: Time to End Israeli Exceptionalism and Impunity" is a strong call and plea to put an end to Israel's "impunity." In synthesizing the previous chapters, he emphasizes that real peace, justice, and equality will never be achieved in Gaza if we do not manage to dismantle the Western and international double standards by also holding Israel accountable for its violations of all types of rights, including human and territorial ones.

Gaza's Cycle of Destruction and Rebuilding: Understanding the Actors, Dynamics, and Responses remains both an important and audacious intervention into a timely issue concerning Gaza and Palestine. The latter has long been a subject of double standards which deny it attention. Strikingly, the latest events of October 7th have unveiled the hypocrisy of the international community, the bias in international law, the two-facedness of the Western democratic world, the deception of the Arab and Muslim world, as well as the silence of academics who have often been referred to as voices that stand with noble causes. Another merit of this book lies in its interdisciplinary approach that considers the political, economic, and humanitarian aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This way, the book is recommended not only to researchers in Middle Eastern affairs but also to readers interested in decolonial theory, humanitarian studies, and conflict resolution, as Palestine could be taken as a reference in this regard. Likewise, the book challenges hegemonic discourses that exclude subaltern epistemologies by centering scholars of/from the Middle East who provide alternative political narratives, hence serve as a form of intellectual resistance.

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