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Book Review: Apartheid in Palestine: Hard Laws and Harder Experiences by Ghada Ageel

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Ageel, Ghada, ed. *Apartheid in Palestine: Hard Laws and Harder Experiences*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2016. xiv + 268 pages. Paperback, \$59.95.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a complex political conundrum which leaves observers little or no room to objectively discuss the situation without blaming one party. An attempt to objectively provide any analysis on the conflict is considered subjective as there are two schools of thought: the right of Israel to exist as a state versus how Palestinians “were driven from their homes in 1948” (p. 4). Yet, as editor and political science professor Ghada Ageel (herself a childhood victim of cruel treatment in the Gaza strip) contends, no matter how thorough an analysis may be, the fact is that Palestinians are confined to an open-air prison guided by the Israeli military. In addition, despite the depiction of Palestinians as terrorists in literature, since 1948 Israelis have killed more Palestinians than vice versa and the trend is not changing

This three-part book presents different views through the lenses of many: academicians, politicians, activists, Israelis, and most importantly, the indigenous Palestinians. Parts One and Two of *Apartheid in Palestine: Hard Laws and Harder Experiences* reflect the hardship conditions under which Palestinians have lived since 1948, and continue to live under the Israeli occupation which has “crippled [Palestinians] by the constraints of segregation, the chains of occupation, and many discriminatory measures including...the wall of apartheid” (p.18). However, Part Three of the book presents both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian situation through a more objective lens, including analyses by academics and experts.

In Part One, “Indigenous Voices,” the book conspicuously portrays Israel not only as the occupier but as the oppressor. The hard laws and policies toward the Palestinians make the defenceless, oppressed people live in perpetual fear. While it could be argued that the emotional accounts captured in the book allowed Palestinians to tell their stories in their own words, it is possible that some of these stories have been exaggerated. However, these stories do conform to what other oppressed people such as the American Indians of North America, the indigenous people of Brazil, and enslaved Africans have told in the literature.¹

Part Two of the book, “Activist Views,” collectively trumpets the Palestinian story for international attention. Here, activists not only support the Palestinian cause, but also organize its resistance into a non-violent force for the international mainstream media. Interestingly, not all the activists are Palestinians. As Huwaida Arraf notes, there were other people who sympathized with the Palestinians and wanted better living conditions for the oppressed. For example, the International Solidarity Movement (ISM)

was co-founded by Arraf and others, including Israeli activist Neta Golan. The goal of the activist group “was to support and strengthen the Palestinian popular resistance by providing the Palestinian people with a resource, international protection, and a voice with which to resist, non-violently an over whelming military occupation force” (p.71).

Part Three, “Academic and Expert Insight,” provides both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of the Mile’s Law: *Where you stand depends on where you sit*. Interestingly, in their chapter called “Political Truth,” James Cairns and Susan Ferguson note that any study that tends to support the Palestinian cause is seen as ideological writing and not a rigorous scholarly work, hence such a study must be labelled as “purely subjective” (p.182).

The uniqueness and authenticity of the book is its adoption of various methodologies. Firstly, the qualitative approach is adopted by allowing the oppressed Palestinians to tell their stories in their own words. Descriptions of critical race and colonization theories as historical processes are also used, which gather support for Israel. Finally, it is the balancing act of the last five chapters that attempts to bring objectivity to the analysis of the conflict.

In conclusion, the well-written chapters of *Apartheid in Palestine: Hard Laws and Harder Experiences* depict either the harsh living conditions of Palestinians in the occupied territories under Israeli military atrocities, or the right of Israel as an independent state that should not be compared to the apartheid regime in South Africa. While Ageel notes that the “Israeli military forces systematically destroyed hundreds of Palestinian villages during and after the 1948 wars” (p. 4), Edward Corrigan, under a framework of legal analysis, argues that “calling Israel an apartheid state...holds Israel to a standard to which no other country is held, while also influencing anti-Semitic rhetoric in Western and Arabic media” (p. 213).

The book clearly not only establishes a case for both Palestine and Israel, but also discusses the attempts that have been made by world leaders to resolve the conflict. However, the vivid portrayal of the Israeli military atrocities against the Palestinians affirms the appropriateness of the title: *Apartheid in Palestine: Hard Laws and Harder Experiences*, and this book—read constructively and richly—will contribute to the crucial, on-going research and discussions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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NOTE

- ¹ Robert Krueger, “Brazilian Slaves Represented in Their Own Words, Slavery & Abolition,” *A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 23, no. 2 (2002): 169-186.