



Gaza under Hamas: From Islamic Democracy to Islamist Governance, by Björn Brenner. New York: I.B.Tauris, 2017. 256 pages. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY KHALED HROUB

Against heaps of reductionist literature and media portrayals that render Hamas as an extremist terrorist group, Björn Brenner provides in this book an authoritative and empirical study that debunks such Western, and mainly official, depictions of the movement. Disinterested in either vilifying or glorifying Hamas, this finely structured book is based on four years of direct field research, firsthand observations, and data collection. Brenner comes to this subject well equipped by deep academic and professional understanding of the Levant, with previous credible research on Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Israeli affairs, along

with interdisciplinary training that enables him to approach the particular case study of Hamas from combined historical and political perspectives. A central objective of his study on Hamas is to examine “how the ideological input of Islamist ideas is translated into output (political action) in the democratic arena in the Palestinian case” (p. 7). From a wider perspective, Brenner places Hamas’s experience within the broader field of Islamist parties and politics, particularly their conduct once they rise to power. Hamas is the first such party in the Arab region to win power via democratic means (in 2006). Thus, examining its conduct as a *ruling party* and gauging whether the movement has adhered to the principles of the democratic politics that sanctioned its electoral victory is indeed informative and allows, as the author argues, for drawing some general conclusions on the debate over Islamism and democracy.

That said, the main focus of the book is how Hamas has functioned as a ruling party in the Gaza Strip since 2007, and what kind of politics—democratic, authoritarian, or a mix of both—the movement has pursued. The author makes clear the goal of the book is to leave aside Hamas’s positions and practices relative to Israel. However, the context of the Israeli occupation and its de facto sea, land, and air control over the Gaza Strip is constantly interwoven in the analysis as a fundamental factor of how Hamas governs.

In his examination of Hamas’s politics in power, Brenner constructs a framework of analysis of quadripartite categorization of political modes of governance: religious authoritarianism, religious democratic, secular authoritarianism, and secular democratic. Against these categories Hamas’s political behavior is empirically examined over four years (2008/9–12). This examination is applied to three “key challenges” identified by the author as the most pressing obstacles that Hamas found itself facing when it assumed power, and these are “relating to the political system,” “countering violent radicalization,” and “reestablishing the social order.” Brenner scrutinizes Hamas’s dealing with each of these challenges in individual chapters. Based on numerous interviews and original material, he explores Hamas’s “perceptions” and “practices” that

correspond to each challenge, leading to the conclusion that most of the lazy representations of Hamas's politics as entirely religious or authoritarian are in fact out of touch with the reality of the situation. Instead, Hamas has exhibited a more sophisticated case of governance, amalgamating elements of the four categories provided by the author, thereby rendering any black-and-white classification of its mixed politics superfluous.

Oppositional parties that rise to and exercise power for the first time after years of politics on the other side of the fence offer multifaceted case studies. It is indeed difficult to identify what major obstacles should be recognized as the most salient here. Brenner's choice of the three "key challenges" could be problematic. There are other, significant topics that also deserve consideration, such as dealing with the various Palestinian political players in the Gaza Strip (not only the radical Salafi jihadist groups), and the maintenance of the internal unity of the movement in the face of tensions between its various views and factions. In fairness, it is hard to create criteria that would help in prioritizing one group of challenges over others, but in reference to Hamas's domestic politics, one must admit the list is indeed longer than three. Alas, Brenner's "key challenges" list proved to remain most important for Hamas. In the four years where the movement's politics were examined, Hamas retained the "political system" that led to its electoral victory. It adhered to the Palestinian Basic Law and kept the Legislative Council in session, albeit Fatah members and others refrained from participating. There was no attempt to change the system and install an Islamic structure of politics. Thus, in exploring whether Hamas "will change or be changed" once in power (p. 191), it is warranted to conclude with Brenner that as far as Western states and organizations are concerned, "Talking to Hamas would then be preferable as it would serve the overall democratization process in Palestine—that is, if Palestinian democratization is what the international community is seeking to achieve" (p. 6).

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Space and Mobility in Palestine, by Julie Peteet. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017. 252 pages. \$80.00 cloth, \$30.00 paperback, \$29.99 e-book.

REVIEWED BY KEITH P. FELDMAN

At the outset of this rigorous ethnography, Ahmad, one of anthropologist Julie Peteet's interviewees, offers a deceptively simple analysis of the managed chaos of contemporary Palestinian life in the West Bank: "This," Ahmad says, "is the third stage in our dispossession" (p. 1). The first stage of this history is marked by the Nakba of 1948, when more than four hundred Palestinian villages were destroyed, more than 750,000 people were forced from their ancestral lands, and those who remained were subject to harsh military rule. The second stage is marked by the aftermath of 1967's Six-Day War, when Israel occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem, and Israelis hastened their pace of building settlements throughout these occupied territories. Insofar as each stage