

BOOK REVIEW

Displacement Policies Affecting Bedouins in West Asia

Ending Impunity for International Law Violations: Palestinian Bedouins and the Risk of Forced Displacement. Edited by Alice Panepinto, Bana Abu Zuluf, Ahmad Amara, Brendan Ciarán Browne, Munir Nuseibeh & Triestino Mariniello. Oxford, England: Hart Publishing, 2025. 224 pp. Hardcover US\$115.00
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Bedouins, like other Palestinians, have been subjected to forced displacement since the beginning of the Israeli settler-colonial project in Palestine. Their deep and spiritual relationship with the land—based on constant mobility, agro-pastoral lifestyles, seasonal rhythms, raising livestock, and strong communal ties—has made them particularly vulnerable and easy targets within a colonial system organized around fixed borders and territorial sovereignty. In this light, a set of critical and pressing inquiries emerges: To what extent do international legal and humanitarian frameworks respond to this calculated and deliberate displacement? Do these frameworks play a role in sustaining and normalizing it? Also, as displacement intensifies, should it be viewed solely as a failure of humanitarian protection, or as a consequence of intentional Israeli laws and policies designed to uphold a settler-colonial system that aims to erase the presence of indigenous Palestinians, including Bedouins?

In *Ending Impunity for International Law Violations* (2025), Alice Panepinto et al., (2025) engage these urgent issues by examining the historical foundations and ongoing colonial policies that have systematically exposed Bedouin populations in the Jerusalem periphery and the West Bank to forced displacement. Right from the start, the book challenges the notion that such displacement is incidental, a form of collateral damage, or merely a humanitarian crisis. Rather, it contends that displacement is both a structural feature of settler-colonial governance, reproduced and sanctioned by legal mechanisms, colonial urban planning, discriminatory permit regimes, routine home demolitions, property seizures and foreign aid interventions. Crucially, the book also lays bare that it's not accountability that Israel's breaches of international humanitarian law & international human rights law against Bedouins are visited with routine and nearly complete impunity. Such ongoing impunity, the editors claim, actively increases Bedouin vulnerability and perpetuates further displacement.

What really distinguishes this book is its multi-authored and interdisciplinary approach across eight chapters. Bringing together scholars from law, urban planning, gender studies, political theory, spatial analysis, international affairs, case studies, and fieldwork, the volume offers a rich account of Bedouin communities' experiences of displacement. As the book shows, Palestinian Bedouins face multiple layers of marginalization. They are Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, and at the same time Bedouins whose mobility, cultural practices, and land-use traditions do not fit dominant state-defined models (Panepinto et al., 2025, p. 1). This double positionality leaves them especially vulnerable to repeated displacement, forced relocation into urban areas, and growing

restrictions on movement and access to land. Such circumstances are not incidental, but are shaped by long-standing Zionist stereotypes that depict Bedouins as “uncivilized,” rootless, and disconnected from place—narratives still shaping Israeli colonial policies and underpinning dispossession since the Nakba and even earlier (Panepinto et al., 2025, pp. 5–6).

The book later moves from discussing Israeli policies to covering the role that international legal and humanitarian frameworks play in perpetuating the dispossession of the Bedouins. These frameworks often treat Bedouin culture as fixed and unchanging, such that legal recognition is tied to narrow definitions of “tradition” and to specific patterns of permanent attachment to land. This rationale leads to a contradiction: while the conditions of displacement and colonial forces coerce Bedouins into changing their ways of life, these very transformations are later invoked as a pretext to question the authenticity of their culture and to undermine their political and rights-based claims (Panepinto et al., 2025, pp. 134–6). This does not stop there; these frameworks often view Bedouins primarily as a cultural group, characterized by their traditions and lifestyles, rather than as a population possessing political and territorial entitlements. As described in Chapter 6, “Despite the narrow understandings of the right to culture in relation to land in IHRL, as well as the longstanding contempt and disregard of the Israeli authorities for the Bedouin customary system of land law, the relationship between this indigenous group, the land they inhabit and use, their right to culture and their right to self-determination is clear” (Panepinto et al., 2025, p. 136). This quote explains a flaw in international legal and humanitarian frameworks, such as UNDRIP and IHRL, where cultural recognition is often given priority at the expense of political redress and territorial rights. In this way, they contribute to emptying displacement of its political substance and re-presenting it as a cultural issue rather than a political one. This idea resonates well with Mahmood Mamdani’s analysis in *Define and Rule* (2012), in which he elegantly shows how the transformation of groups from “peoples” to “cultures” allows colonial power to disregard demands for political rights, sovereignty, and land, and to reframe displacement as administrative or humanitarian matters managed through law and expert intervention rather than addressed as issues of colonial injustice (Mamdani, 2012, pp. 1–6). In other words, when Bedouin identity is presented or acknowledged as merely cultural symbols and not as a political identity, this strips it of its political meaning and its connection to the land, and makes the process of its erasure easier to justify and less present in legal and political discussions.

At the same time, the book makes clear that displacement is neither experienced uniformly within Bedouin communities nor gender-neutral in its effects. Chapter 4, in particular, shows how women are affected in compounded and intersecting ways. Though the colonial policies affected the whole Bedouin community, women in fact tend to bear the brunt of that. They take on more household work, have more difficulty moving freely or getting healthcare, and lose important economic roles they once had in Bedouin farming and herding life. All of this strengthens male dominance and puts more pressure on women (Panepinto et al., 2025, pp. 89–103).

The book’s geographic focus also stands out. Rather than focusing on the *Naqab* in southern historic Palestine, where the majority of scholarship has been concentrated, it shifts its attention to Bedouins in the West Bank and the eastern Jerusalem periphery, namely the E1 area adjacent to the *Ma’ale Adumim* settlement bloc (Panepinto et al., 2025, pp. 5–6). This focus covers a notable deficiency in the literature, as Bedouins in the West Bank have predominantly been analysed through NGO and international publications rather than through comprehensive academic inquiry (Panepinto et al., 2025, pp. 6, 9). At the same time, the analysis concurrently refrains from isolating these communities, placing their experiences within a wider context by linking them to Bedouin communities

in other regions of the West Bank and within Israel, thereby uncovering both similarities and disparities in the experiences of Palestinian Bedouins across the Green Line (Panepinto et al., 2025, p. xi).

Reading this book today inevitably leads us to think about Bedouin communities in Gaza as well. While the book focuses on the West Bank and the Jerusalem periphery, the themes it traces are also applicable to and unfolding in Gaza in far more devastating and violent ways, especially since 7 October 2023, as Palestinian people endure a genocide and an imposed, systematic “skin and bone” starvation broadcast live to the world (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024). As has long been the case, this Israeli colonial violence is repeatedly obscured by Zionist discourses that hide behind misleading language such as “collateral damage” or “unintended casualties” to deflect responsibility and justify mass killing and bombardment (Al-Jazeera, 2023). In this moment, it becomes clear how important it is to expand the book’s scope to include a focused study of Gaza’s Bedouin communities, both to better understand their historical and present conditions and to examine how legal frameworks, UN bodies, and international organizations engage with them. As the book states in its introduction, “the extent of killing and devastation in Gaza cannot be compared to other contemporary situations, yet there is an evident ideological continuum with what happens in the West Bank, revealing the State of Israel’s disregard for the lives and rights of all Palestinians between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea” (Panepinto et al., 2025, p. vi). These words affirm that the colonial violence in Gaza is not separate from what takes place in the West Bank, but part of the same political structure that governs Palestinian life across space.

During the ongoing acts of genocide in Gaza, as concluded by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other international human rights organizations such as B’Tselem and a UN Commission of Inquiry, the Israeli forces have not distinguished between Bedouin and non-Bedouins (Amnesty International, 2025; B’Tselem, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2024; United Nations Commission of Inquiry, 2025). Lifestyle, age, gender, and social status made no difference. Children, women, men, and the elderly were all subjected to the same machinery of death, with the only common denominator being that they were Palestinian. Yet even though it is difficult to determine the exact population of Gaza’s Bedouins, particularly since some no longer follow nomadic lifestyles and their numbers are small (Hammad, 2017), the need to document what has happened to them remains urgent. Their anguish may become obscured behind overarching loss figures, and in the absence of recording, their familial connections, social environments, and lifestyles could vanish without a remnant. Recounting their experiences is not intended to isolate them from other Palestinians or establish hierarchies of suffering but rather to create a layered and nuanced understanding of the many ways in which genocide is experienced and navigated across communities that are all under Israeli colonial targeting. Ultimately, the Bedouins of Gaza are an inseparable part of the broader social fabric, and they are living through the same catastrophe, sharing the same grief, and bearing the consequences of bombardment, forced displacement, and loss that spare no one.

All told, this book makes a timely and important intervention in the areas of international law and Palestine studies. It deserves to be read, cited, and deeply engaged with. Its value lies not only in illuminating the plight of Palestinian Bedouins but also in exposing the limitations of international legal frameworks that separate them from their political and colonial reality. When the displacement of Bedouins is reduced to only a humanitarian issue, and its political facets related to land looting and denial of rights are ignored, the law proves insufficient as a mechanism for achieving justice. Instead, it transforms into a mechanism for perpetuating injustice through ostensibly neutral humanitarian rhetoric that ultimately supports the logic of settler colonialism. Thus, demanding justice for Palestinians, especially Bedouin communities, necessitates first an

examination of the legal terminology that sometimes legitimizes this injustice. This is not solely an academic endeavour, but an ethical and political need.

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