



# Druze Studies Journal

## Book Review:

“Resisting Erasure: A Critical Review,” Review of Dajani, Muna, Fakher Eldin, Munir, and Mason, Michael. 2022, *The Untold Story of the Golan Heights: Occupation, Colonization, and Jawlani Resistance*,” I.B. Tauris, ISBN 978-0755644520

Mohamad al-Ashmar <sup>a</sup>  
*University of St Andrews*

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<sup>a</sup>Corresponding author: Mohamad al-Ashmar University of St Andrews, School of International Relations Centre for Syrian Studies (CSS) [ma308@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:ma308@st-andrews.ac.uk)  
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The Israeli-Arab conflict has been widely studied, yet *The Untold Story of the Golan Heights*, edited by Muna Dajani, Munir Fakher Eldin, and Michael Mason, offers a vital perspective on the often-overlooked Jawlani community. Examining the Druze experience under Israeli occupation, the book contributes to Middle East Studies, Druze studies, and settler colonialism by exploring colonial dispossession, cultural resilience, youth mobilization, and the role of art and ecology in resistance. Centered on the “politics of lifeworld colonization,” it highlights how settler colonialism shapes daily life and indigenous agency. By amplifying Jawlani voices, the editors construct an alternative historical narrative, making this work a significant addition to the field. This review critically assesses its strengths, limitations, and broader implications.

The book’s central thesis examines the experiences of the Jawlanis under Israeli occupation since the 1967 War, focusing on their resistance to Israeli policies, efforts to maintain their Syrian Arab identity, and resilience in preserving their cultural heritage. It explores the complex relationship between the Jawlanis and the Israeli state, which has sought to normalize its control over the Golan Heights while facing continuous resistance from its indigenous inhabitants. The editors aim to provide an “untold story” that challenges the dominant Israeli narrative, often marginalizing or erasing Jawlani perspectives. By presenting a collection of essays, reflections, and poems from Jawlani scholars, activists, and artists, the book offers a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of their lived experiences, compelling readers to reconsider mainstream discourse and the conflict’s human cost.

At the same time, the book is also a groundbreaking contribution to Arab Druze studies. The book shifts the focus from broad geopolitical analyses to the everyday realities of the Jawlani Druze, emphasizing their cultural identity, political agency, and resistance under occupation. The authors explore crucial themes such as cultural resilience, identity negotiation, and settler colonialism through an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach. The book is structured around key themes, including everyday colonization, artistic and cultural expression, and political ecology, providing a comprehensive examination of how the Druze navigate the pressures of Israeli annexation while maintaining their Syrian national identity. By foregrounding Jawlani voices, the editors effectively counter prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions, illustrating the intricate interplay of politics, faith, and identity. Including diverse perspectives through essays, reflections, and poetry enriches the book, offering a profound and humanized account of Jawlani Druze’s struggles, aspirations, and steadfast resistance.

The book employs a rigorous and innovative methodology that integrates Jawlani and Palestinian voices alongside international scholars within a decolonial research framework. This collaborative approach ensures that the narrative is deeply rooted in the lived experiences of the Jawlanis, countering dominant Israeli narratives while amplifying marginalized perspectives. Through qualitative methods—including oral histories, participant observations, and archival analysis—the book meticulously documents the socio-political and cultural dimensions of Jawlani resistance. The use of primary sources, such as the 1981 National Document and local artworks, adds authenticity and depth, while reflections, poetry, and personal narratives enhance accessibility for both academic and non-academic audiences. However, the study could have benefited from a more explicit engagement with quantitative data to complement its qualitative findings.

A key contribution of the book lies in its exploration of how the Jawlanis have forged political solidarity with Palestinian and Syrian national movements. The book does not merely document these connections but actively engages with them, narrating and analyzing the intricate ways in which the Jawlanis have positioned themselves within broader struggles for self-determination. By presenting different angles of Jawlani experiences over half a century of resource dispossession and economic de-development, the book sheds light on how their lived realities have been distorted or erased in mainstream histories and geographies of the region. It thereby contributes to the social history of the occupied Golan, seeking to transform the perception of the region, the people who have remained, those who have been displaced, and the broader politics of the governed.

The theoretical framework of the book draws on critical social theory, particularly Jürgen Habermas's concept of "lifeworld colonization,"<sup>1</sup> to analyze the intersections of settler colonialism and capitalist expansion. The authors skillfully apply this framework to examine how Israeli occupation infiltrates the everyday lives of the Jawlanis through mechanisms such as land confiscation, movement restrictions, and cultural suppression. At the same time, the editors are careful to adapt Western theoretical concepts to the specific historical and geopolitical context of the Golan Heights. The book also highlights Michael Mason's adaptation of critical social theory, which examines how settler colonialism is intertwined with broader state and capitalist development processes. This perspective situates the Golan Heights within a larger political-economic formation, emphasizing the role

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

of everyday colonization in shaping the lived experiences of the Jawlani people.

The book's historical scope is another of its strengths. It traces Jawlani resistance from the annexation of the Golan Heights in 1981 through the Syrian Uprising in 2011 and into the 2020s. The discussion encompasses the story of Palestinian solidarity and mobilization with the Jawlani community after 1967, emphasizing how their struggle has evolved over time. Notably, the book explores the nuanced ways in which the Jawlanis have defended their Syrian Arab identity while simultaneously working to improve their daily lives under Israeli rule. This includes an analysis of their shifting positions on the Assad regime and the Syrian uprising of 2011, illustrating how historical contingencies have shaped their strategies of resistance and survival.

From a Druze studies perspective, the book provides valuable insights into how Druze identity—historically characterized by adaptability and pragmatism—manifests under occupation. The authors employ qualitative methodologies to examine how the Druze in the Golan Heights maintain their cultural and political agency despite decades of dispossession. The analysis of “lifeworld colonization” proves particularly relevant here, capturing the tension between cultural preservation and external pressures to conform to state-imposed narratives. The book also explores the evolving role of Druze religious leadership in mediating community responses to occupation, shedding light on internal debates concerning loyalty, identity, and resistance. While it offers rich discussions on communal solidarity (*ta'awun*), the role of sheikhs, and cultural heritage preservation through art and literature, a deeper engagement with Druze esoteric traditions and their potential influence on political behavior would have further enriched the discussion.

The book also reflects on the complexity of Jawlani identity across political, cultural, and ecological practices. It examines this identity's relational and hybrid nature, shaped by place attachment, Syrian nationality, Druze religious traditions, and secular ideologies while resisting its othering by political Zionism. More than just a scholarly study, the book immerses the reader in the lived experiences of the Jawlani people, allowing them to feel the impact of everyday colonization and the broader politics of the governed. By documenting their struggles, strategies of resistance, and evolving identities, the book contributes to the study of settler colonialism, national identity, and political agency in the occupied Golan Heights.

The book's strength lies in its interdisciplinary approach, amplifying marginalized Jawlani and Druze voices through scholarly analysis, reflections, poetry, and artwork. It offers fresh perspectives on resistance, particularly through *su-*

*mud* (steadfastness), youth mobilization, and cultural expression, while countering dominant Israeli narratives. Its innovative format ensures an engaging and multifaceted exploration of identity under occupation. However, while using Habermas's theory is insightful, it may not fully capture the localized spiritual and cultural dimensions of Jawlani identity. A comparative analysis of Druze communities in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel would have provided a broader contextual framework. Despite this originality, the book has limitations. While it critiques Israeli policies of ethnic manipulation, deeper engagement with their impact on internal Druze divisions would be valuable. Similarly, a more thorough analysis of the Syrian civil war's effects on Jawlani identity and political solidarity would enhance its scope. Greater integration of quantitative data could also strengthen its findings. Nonetheless, the book contributes significantly to Druze studies and Middle East scholarship, offering a nuanced account of resilience, identity, and resistance under settler colonialism.

The book's interdisciplinary approach enhances its analysis, integrating insights from political science, sociology, history, cultural studies, and environmental studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Jawlani Druze experience. It challenges dominant narratives by situating their resistance within broader discourses on settler colonialism and indigenous struggles. It highlights the community's rejection of Israeli citizenship in favor of maintaining strong Syrian ties. This contrasts with the integration of Druze communities in Israel through military conscription and separate educational policies, offering a critical counter-narrative to portrayals of the Druze as politically passive. The book also examines how the Jawlani Druze uses art, literature, and collective memory to resist cultural erasure while emphasizing agroecology as both a means of sustenance and political struggle. Additionally, it engages with international law, United Nations interventions, and the role of environmental resistance, making it a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and activists advocating for justice. Its reflections on youth activism further illuminate the tensions between tradition and modernity, offering a nuanced perspective on intergenerational identity and resilience.

In conclusion, *The Untold Story of the Golan Heights* is a vital contribution to Middle Eastern and Druze studies, offering a nuanced analysis of Jawlani resistance under Israeli occupation. Its interdisciplinary approach and inclusion of marginalized voices make it essential for scholars, students, and policymakers. While its analysis is strong, expanding on the early occupation period (1967–1981), comparing Druze communities in Lebanon and Syria, and incorporating postcolonial

perspectives would enhance its depth. Visual materials like maps and photographs could also strengthen engagement. The book contributes significantly to the Arab-Israeli conflict and Druze studies, offering original arguments, thorough research, and fresh insights into Jawlani experiences under Israeli occupation. While a deeper discussion of the early occupation period would add context, its strengths far outweigh its limitations. Highly recommended for those seeking a deeper, nuanced, and multifaceted understanding of the Druze community's challenges, aspirations, and resilience, as well as the Arab-Israeli conflict and its ongoing implications.

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