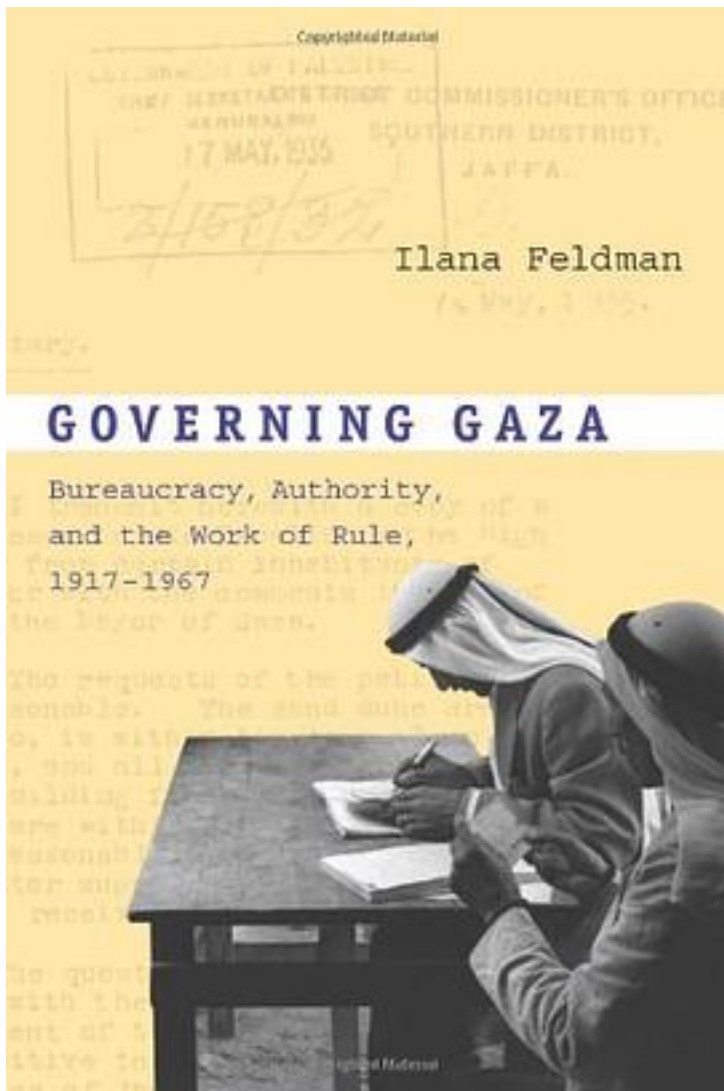


Governing Gaza



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Marred by political tumult and violent conflict since the early twentieth century, the Gaza Strip was occupied by outsiders until 2005. It is still not ruled by a sovereign state. Given these circumstances, Gaza would seem too exceptional to be a revealing site for a study of government. Ilana Feldman proves otherwise. She demonstrates that a focus on the Gaza Strip uncovers a great deal about how government actually works, not only in that small geographical space but more generally. Feldman analyzes civil service in Gaza under the British Mandate (1917-1948) and the Egyptian Administration (1948-1967). In the process, she sheds light on how governing authority is produced and reproduced; how government persists, even under conditions that seem untenable; and how government affects and is affected by the people and places it governs. Feldman draws on archival research in Gaza, Cairo, and Jerusalem and two years of ethnographic research in Gaza involving interviews with retired civil servants. She argues that the authority and tenacity of government in Gaza were derived from the minutiae of its daily practice: the repetitions of filing procedures, the accumulation of documents, and the habits of civil servants. The unstable governing conditions that almost always existed in Gaza, which provided so little foundation for ruling authority, illuminate with particular clarity the significance that bureaucratic practice has for government. Feldman explains that the difficulties endemic to Gaza were managed through "tactical government," a mode of rule that makes limited claims about governmental capacity, shifts in response to crisis, often works without long-term planning, and presumes little stability in governing conditions. Tactical governing enables government to carry on without claiming legitimacy, precisely by holding the question of legitimacy in abeyance.

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