

Muslim world. Chapter 6 traces a discernable shift in attitudes towards translation in Egypt. The absence of a clear center of religious authority made translation all the more important, with advocates from British India to Indonesia positioning the endeavor as a tool to defend Islam. Wilson shows how Egypt ultimately emerged as the Muslim state that would mediate debates on translation.

In chapter 7 the book returns to the Turkish translation and commentary project commissioned by parliament, focusing on Mehmet Akif's translation, which was never submitted to the appropriate ministry and for decades was presumed destroyed. The history of Akif's missing manuscript is interesting, and there is a small body of Turkish-language scholarship devoted to determining its whereabouts. The author notes that it came to light only recently, and even then not in its entirety. Its impact on Turkish Qur'an translation was therefore negligible. Arguably, Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır's Qur'an translation, which was commissioned from him after Akif refused to submit his translation, was the most important Turkish Qur'an translation in the pre-1960 republican period. Rather than engage with this translation, which attained a semi-official status, the author treats it as an example of conventional Islamic scholarship.

Overall, Wilson's book represents a valuable contribution to our understanding of Qur'an translation, addressing key questions about the authority of religious texts in the modern period. One of the book's main strengths is its clear presentation of Qur'an debates from the late Ottoman era to the Turkish republic, as well as in leading centers of the Muslim world. This topic has been neglected in English-language scholarship, and this book is an important and welcome study that will be of interest to scholars of Islam in the modern period and historians of the late Ottoman Empire. ✨

DOI:[10.1017/rms.2016.127](https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2016.127)

Susan Gunasti
Ohio Wesleyan University

BOSMAT YEFET. *The Politics of Human Rights in Egypt and Jordan.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2015. ix + 289 pages, notes, acronyms, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$65.00 ISBN 978-1-62637-190-3.

The call for dignity was widespread in the demonstrations that constituted the first waves of what was once called the Arab spring. Reactions to long-standing police and security force abuses as well as harassment or

repression for expressions of various forms of opposition to regime policy, whether political, economic, or culture, underpinned much of the anti-regime activism that overturned several long-standing regimes.

In *The Politics of Human Rights in Egypt and Jordan*, Bosmat Yefet portrays these recent episodes as part of a continuing struggle for greater recognition and protection of human rights in the region. Three basic questions drive her investigation: “First, how were human rights concepts and institutions produced and incorporated into the political and social dynamic under authoritarian rule? Second, how have human rights shaped and affected debates and actions? Third, what were the challenges for the propagation and implementation of human rights norms in the local arena and why was the impact of human rights claims on the authoritarian status quo so limited” (3)?

As the title indicates, the book is a comparison of the Egyptian and Jordanian cases, and it draws on a large number of secondary works in English as well as a significant number of books, articles, reports and other documents in Arabic. It begins with a short chapter introducing the argument as well as the topic of human rights in the context of Egypt and Jordan, and then moves on to a chapter of more than sixty pages which discusses in detail the evolution, largely post-1970s, of the evocation and treatment of human rights in the two countries. In making the argument for her case selection, the author argues that Egypt and Jordan are both autocracies that experienced controlled political and economic liberalization processes. Even if these processes did not result in more significant political openings, they still “released public and personal energies that turned human rights” into a domestic frame of reference and “created a potential space for empowering the repressed populations” (4). However, Yefet notes significant differences in the unfolding of the struggle for human rights in the two countries, and hence part of her argument is that a more nuanced understanding of the differing nature of the two authoritarian regimes and of state–society relations in each is necessary in order to account for variations in outcomes.

To explore her cases in depth, she focuses on three different actors or forces: the national government, secular activists, and Islamists. She then identifies four issue areas—freedom of expression, apostasy, the rights of minorities, and women’s rights—and devotes a carefully detailed chapter to each, drawing on a particular episode or a series of struggles that reveals the variation in national political and societal context that she argues explains the difference in outcomes in Jordan and Egypt.

The approach of exploring the implications for human rights of regime differences beyond the more general category of authoritarianism is laudable. Within that, narrowing the range of actors examined and focusing on a limited set of issue areas is also reasonable in terms of methodology. There are problems, however, in how the actors are identified and the issue areas selected.

In the first place, Yefet's choice of actors or forces implies that these are discrete categories. Yet depending upon country and period, one can certainly find, for example, members of these governments who had religiously conservative tendencies. Perhaps that is not what Yefet means by "Islamists," but it is not just Islamists (a category in need of differentiation) who have opposed what some activists demand as progress on human rights in the issue areas she examines. Similarly, the term "secular activists" is problematic, as many activists in the region seeking greater respect for human rights are not secularists, at least not in the way the term is used in the U.S. and some other Western countries.

Perhaps even more important is the choice of issue areas. While Yefet makes clear in her introduction that the focus on human rights is not new, her discussion of state or NGO involvement with the language and foci of human rights really begins with the 1970s or 1980s, depending upon country and issue area. What she ignores or misses through such a chronological and issue area focus are the socio-economic rights that were championed early on by many post-independence regimes. Post-1952 Egypt was certainly a military authoritarian regime, with all that that meant for political repression. However, one should not overlook the commitment of that regime to universal education, employment and subsidized basic commodities, among other policies, which raised the standard of living for large numbers of its citizens. In the time frame Yefet covers, on the other hand, the emphasis on *political* human rights has often (deliberately) obscured the increasing suffering caused by the implementation of neoliberal economic "reforms" which have gutted much of what had been an important part of the initial social contract. Indeed, many in the region now find themselves enjoying neither the highly touted but rarely respected political face of human rights, nor the basic socioeconomic rights also stipulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but rarely evoked by Western governments or their NGOs.

Thus, whether by design or not, Yefet's choices of issue areas implicitly reinforce a neoliberal framework which misses the critical socioeconomic side of human rights and human dignity.

A final concern relates to the fact that, although the introduction and conclusion briefly mention post-2011 developments, there are no sources dating later than 2009. Given the dreadful developments on the human rights front not only in countries like Syria and Libya, but also in one of her two primary case studies—Egypt—in the last several years, the absence in a book published in 2015 of a critical engagement with recent developments is a serious shortcoming. ✂

DOI:[10.1017/rms.2016.128](https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2016.128)

Laurie A. Brand
University of Southern California

BERNARD HAYKEL, THOMAS HEGGHAMMER, and STÉPHANE LACROIX. *Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political, Economic and Religious Change*, 2015. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. vii + 351 pages, figures, tables, acknowledgements, index. Paper US\$30.00. ISBN 978-0-521-18509-7.

Saudi Arabia in Transition provides a welcome overview of Saudi politics in the twenty-first century. The anthology combines contributions from leading authorities with insights from new Saudi and Western voices. In the introduction, Bernard Haykel states that the book provides a fresh view of Saudi Arabia's present and future, one that avoids the mistakes of past texts that drew on dated and flawed Western conceptions of the kingdom, many of which overemphasized the weaknesses of the kingdom's government (1–2). In contrast, *Saudi Arabia in Transition* draws on the work of scholars with an “intimate understanding of Saudi Arabia, many of whom have conducted extensive fieldwork on the ground” (3).

An intimate understanding of Saudi Arabia is especially needed today, since many recent popular and scholarly texts on Saudi politics have drawn on a popular narrative that is highly critical of the government's foreign and domestic policies, and pessimistic about the kingdom's future and ability to reconcile modernity and tradition. Indeed, widespread pessimism about the Saudi monarchy is nothing new, for William Quandt wrote in *Foreign Affairs* in 1995 that “there is a cottage industry forming to predict the impending fall of the House of Saud” (“The Rise, Corruption, and Coming Fall of the House of Saud”, Capsule Review, September/October 1995).

By contrast, in *Saudi Arabia in Transition*, the authors assert that Saudi politics is an evolving dualistic dynamic between state and society. The state has the upper hand thanks to its wealth, its control of the media and security infrastructure, and the symbolic power of Islam and the Saudi national myth.