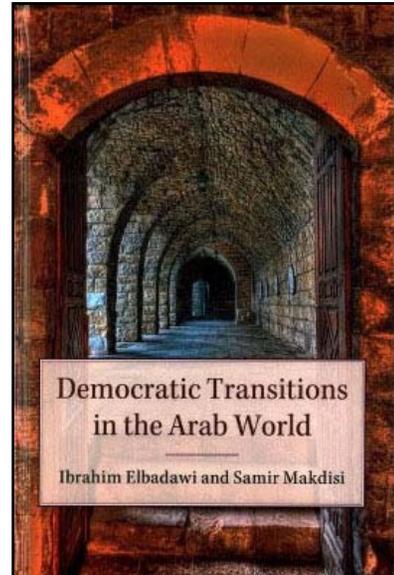


Brief Reviews, Fall 2017

Democratic Transitions in the Arab World. Edited by Ibrahim Elbadawi and Samir Makdisi. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2017. 339 pp. \$29.97, paper.

In their bid to understand why democracy seems unable to take hold in Arab countries, the editors of this collection of essays, Elbadawi of the Center for Global Development and Makdisi of the American University of Beirut, dismiss the impact of educational opportunities, income, and female integration into the economy as yardsticks for the success (or lack thereof) of a democratic transition. Instead, they advance the notion that democracy is impeded by rents from hydrocarbons, especially “when they are deployed to create jobs.” As a hypothesis, such a viewpoint may be worth arguing, but it is surprising that of the six country case studies included in the volume, only one focuses on an oil-producing state: Kuwait.

Although the editors ostensibly attempt to establish a conceptual framework for an analysis of the contributors’ case studies, they are unable to present a cogent case for their theory. They arrive at conclusions that are both at odds with the hydrocarbon thesis and self-evident: “conflicts are impediments to democratization in their own right regardless of whether natural resources exist.” In a chapter by Abdelwahab El-Effendi of the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, the author celebrates the “miracle of the Arab Spring” that he believes proved “Arab civil society was alive and well.” Considering the movement’s failure to effect lasting, democratic change in any but one of the affected states (i.e., Tunisia), this hardly seems



an example worth applauding as a “democratic transition.”

In discussing Egypt’s protracted—and still unfulfilled—transition to democracy, Noha El Mikawy, Mohamed Mohieddin and Sarah El Ashmaouy avoid criticizing the regime of Abdel Fattah Sisi and opt instead to list a line of imagined revolutionary transitions in 1919, 1952, 2011, and 2013, only one of which produced even a fleeting moment of semi-democracy. The authors blame Egypt’s democratic reversal on the neighborhood effect, mainly the Libyan and Syrian civil wars, ignoring the chaos engendered by the then-ruling Muslim Brotherhood’s undemocratic actions and the self-interest of Egypt’s military caste.

Other case studies present similarly dubious conclusions. Writing on the democratic impasse in Kuwait, Elbadawi and Atif Kubrusi blame the Arab region’s democratic deficit on the failure to find “a just and comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict,” an old chestnut one

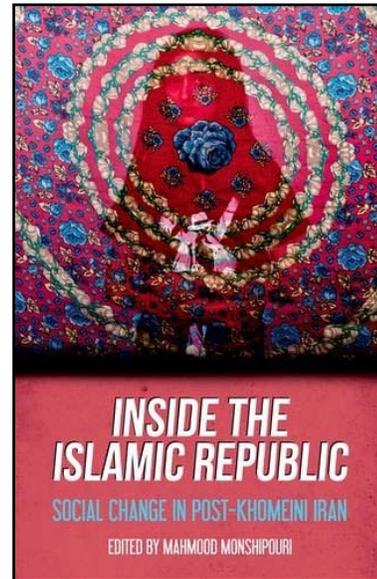
would hope long ago had been buried and abandoned.

Makdisi and Youssef El Khalil ponder the likelihood of Lebanon's consociational democracy developing into a full democracy. The authors seem to confuse accommodation and consociationalism. Lebanon does not satisfy the prerequisites for consociational democracy¹ because its segmented population is not politically mobilized. It is naïve to discuss Lebanon's transition into a full-fledged democracy as long as sectarian identity is both legitimate and institutionalized. The authors quickly dismiss the untoward consequence of Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict to conclude that the emergence of fundamentalist groups in Syria has created a Lebanese national consensus to deal with the emerging threat.

The book avoids serious criticism of the Arab regimes with contributors equivocating between scientific objectivity and lackeyism, bombarding readers with every economic term they can think of and baffling them with long statistical tables instead of providing convincing arguments. This lack of focus muddies the issue of democratic transition. The editors summarize the book by predicting the triumph of Arab democracy because it "is the logic of history." If it is the logic of history, then this book is pointless. If it is not, then this book is also pointless.

Hilal Khashan
American University of Beirut

¹ A form of democracy seeking to regulate the sharing of power in a state that comprises diverse societies (distinct ethnic, religious, political, national or linguistic groups), by allocating these groups collective rights ([Reut Institute](#), Tel Aviv). The idea of Lebanese consociationalism was introduced in a 1969 essay by Arend Lijphart, at a time when the state was recognized as such. But Lijphart predicted the demise of Lebanon's consociationalism, as indeed happened.



Inside the Islamic Republic: Social Change in Post-Khomeini Iran. Edited by Mahmood Monshipouri. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 348 pp. \$34.95.

Monshipouri, an international relations professor at San Francisco State University, has assembled twelve essays to examine the social transformation in Iran over the past two decades and to counter "widely held but dubious assumptions about Iranian society, state, culture, and economy." While his own introduction provides a useful overview of some of the social, cultural, and political challenges Iran has faced most recently, the finished product is uneven.

Inside the Islamic Republic comprises four main sections, loosely grouped around political identity; women, family, and human rights; popular culture; and economics.

University of London's Arshin Adib-Moghaddam contributes a valuable chapter examining the evolution of the *velayat-e faqih* (the guardianship of the jurist), the theological and political concept which, in Iran, justifies clerical rule. University of Minnesota anthropologist William Beaman engages in straw man arguments (often citing

his own work to prove the unprovable) to argue that Iran is more of a democracy than a theocracy. University of Houston anthropologist Mohsen Mobasher begins his exploration of U.S.-Iranian tensions with an interesting focus on immigration and the Iranian diaspora community in the United States but undercuts his careful scholarship with a polemical attack on alleged discrimination against American-Iranians, an allegation challenged by the success of the community and by law enforcement statistics. University of Maryland sociologist Mansoor Moaddel analyzes the decline in religion as a framework for Iranian intellectuals in the period after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's 1989 death but buries this interesting subject in inaccessible jargon.

Arzoo Oslanloo of the University of Washington effectively explores how the Iranian judicial system treats women and girls. But the University of Virginia's Farzaneh Milani defies belief and logic claiming that the Islamic Revolution brought a literary renaissance among women writers and enabled them to attain the same standing as male writers and poets. Virginia Tech's Djavad Salehi-Isfahani looks at the transformation of the average Iranian family from primarily a rural life before 1979 to today's urban living, with an especially important look at the nexus between declining fertility and higher education. A survey on human rights stumbles over a failure to question whether so-called reformers, such as former president Mohammed Khatami, were sincere and stymied by hardliners, or whether they were engaged instead in an elaborate game of good cop-bad cop.

Analyses of Iranian art films by Hamid Naficy and Nahid Siamdoust are important for those who seek to understand cultural change in post-revolutionary Iran, but they omit any real exploration of more popular Iranian films, many of which are

propagandistic and which may better reflect the tastes of ordinary Iranians living under decades of theocratic indoctrination.

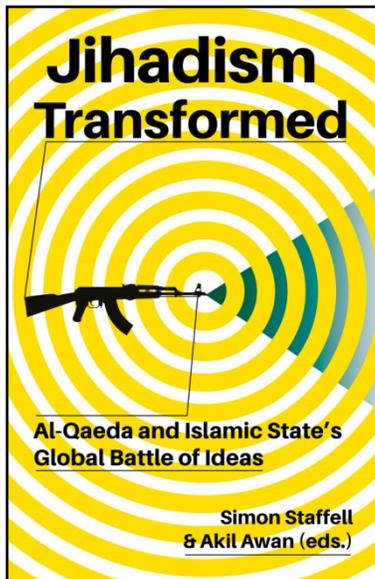
An unoriginal study of *bonyads* (post-revolutionary "foundations" that channel money to the mullahs) is matched by a chapter on "re-mapping the corporate landscape" by Bijad Khajepour, known for his involvement in a consulting company close to Iran's late president, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and to the National Iranian American Council, Tehran's de facto lobby. Unsurprisingly, he downplays the dominant role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran's economy, which reduces the value of his study.

While *Inside the Islamic Republic* includes some fresh material, readers may be hard-pressed to find it because the book often weighs itself down with unintelligible jargon and thick prose, ultimately limiting its audience to a small number of academics, and perhaps those students to whom the contributors assign it for reading.

Michael Rubin

Jihadism Transformed: Al-Qaeda and Islamic State's Global Battle of Ideas. Edited by Simon Staffell and Akil Awan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 296 pp. \$45.

Jihadism Transformed contains eleven essays of varying quality, mostly focusing on the two main competing global Sunni jihadist movements: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. The book examines, in particular, the narratives these groups have developed and exploited to attract recruits in different parts of the world, both in the Muslim-majority lands that represent epicenters of jihadism and in the West. The exception is an essay by Christopher Anzalone of McGill University that looks at Shiite militant mobilization in response to the perceived Sunni jihadist threat, especially in Syria.



Elisabeth Kendall of Oxford University, who has done extensive field work in Yemen, represents one of the better contributors, offering important insights into the contrasting narratives of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the Islamic State's Yemen "provinces." AQAP, she shows, is more attuned to the local environment, making use of poetry and other local cultural material to attract an audience. In contrast, the Islamic State's less successful Yemen provinces have been too monochromatic, simply trying to exploit the Sunni-Shiite sectarian dynamic embodied in the civil war roiling in Yemen.

In contrast, an essay by University of Pisa's Valentina Bartolucci is a poor attempt to compare the narratives of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Islamic State. Besides reaffirming the obvious (e.g., that jihadists frequently frame events in terms of good vs. evil), the Islamic State material she chooses to examine—images from its former English language magazine *Dabiq*—appears superficial at best.

Similarly unsatisfactory is the closing essay by Awan, one of the volume's editors, who attempts to provide a "more nuanced understanding" of the motivations of young Western Muslims to join jihadist groups. His

attempts at "myth-busting" are not original and downright misleading. For example, he restates the common fallacy that religious motives are not of prime importance because many jihadists display ignorance of the details of their religion.

Overall, *Jihadism Transformed* presents some examples of solid research that could serve as a helpful primer, but the book's unevenness may obscure its value for the general reader.

Aymenn al-Tamimi
Middle East Forum

Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life. By Farah Al-Nakib. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. 278 pp. \$24.95, paper.

Nakib's book assesses the influence of massive oil wealth on Kuwait's rapid urbanization and failing social cohesion. Urbanization, she maintains, has brought about "growing intolerance toward outsiders ... volatile tensions between social groups ... inertia of the average citizen, [and] the lack of concern for the public good."

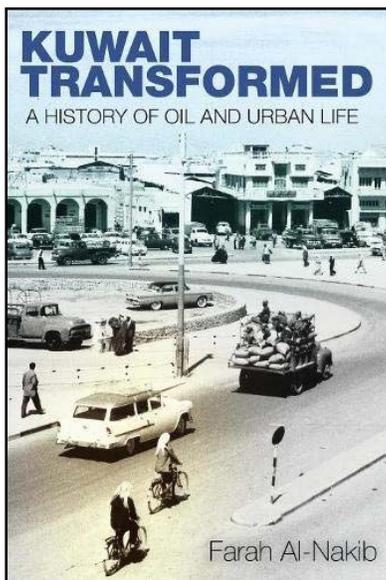
Kuwait City, founded in 1716, soon became the seat of power of the Sabah royal family, which rules the country to this day. Development was initially haphazard, motivated by the family's attempts to enrich itself although initially this was done through trade and boat building. Oil, discovered in 1938, extended the reach of the state, and this was reflected in the city's development where state and merchants cooperated in moving townspeople to the suburbs while the urban centers declined. Bedouin and foreigners were also kept separate.

According to the author, Kuwait City had once been a center of "hybrid, open, tolerant cosmopolitanism," but after the discovery of oil, the city became a hub of wealth and power, at the expense of those positive attributes. Instead, urban life was

decimated and became narrow-minded, divided, and insular.

The section on Kuwait's history is illuminating, full of rich detail and analysis, and makes it recommended reading. But then Nakib moves on to an idealized, utopian future that seems divorced from reality. True, Kuwait is more democratic than most Arab states—but only for the minority who are citizens. Nakib's conclusion that a revitalization of the urban center can "open up new opportunities for social becoming and belonging" that "transcend the barriers of formal citizenship" seems a fantasy. A truly empowered and participatory democracy involving non-citizens is highly unlikely, particularly with the drop in oil prices and the ensuing shrinking of resources for allocation and redistribution.

Joshua Teitelbaum
Bar-Ilan University

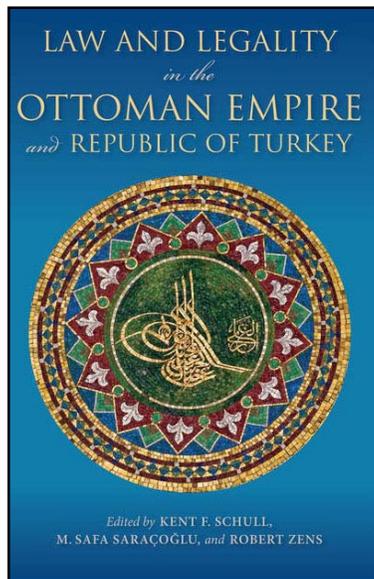


Law and Legality in the Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey. Edited by Kent Schull, M. Safa Saraçoğlu, and Robert Zens. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. 216 pp. \$25, paper.

Law and Legality ranges wide and deep, covering a broad range of topics in the socio-legal history of the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth to early twentieth centuries. Though its title is misleading as only one essay addresses topics pertaining to the modern Turkish Republic, the volume is full of important insights for any scholar interested in the legal issues and actual conduct of the peoples making up the multiethnic and polyglot polity that was the Ottoman Empire.

Overall, in the earlier periods, the Ottomans applied various reforms to their legal system in a unique mix to meet the administrative needs of their provinces. Toward the later years of the empire, the centralization of rule and policy reforms seem to be the result of addressing challenges from the European powers. This centralization tendency further spilled over into the Turkish Republic. Timothy Fitzgerald looks at what Ottoman law might have meant to the heterogeneous mix of ethnicities that populated the empire, how justice was formulated, and how Ottoman lawmakers responded to such a diverse citizenry. He assesses the importance of literacy studies for the study of law and how that affected mass engagement in politics and legal institutions. He addresses the challenges posed by transition from Mamluk to Ottoman rule in the Arab provinces as well as the evolution of Ottoman legal reforms that combined Mamluk, Ottoman, and Shari'a-based legal practices.

The impact of more frequent encounters with an ascendant West and its approach to legal matters as well as the homegrown needs of an increasingly consolidating administration permeate the work. The changing role of



Shari'a law as it came into greater contact with Western norms and a growing centralized empire is examined by Kenneth Cuno in his chapter on the reorganization of religious courts in nineteenth-century Egypt. Cuno demonstrates how this process paralleled a reorganization of the Shari'a court system throughout the empire, a reorganization that not only included the introduction of secular law but which essentially relegated religious courts to matters of family law alone.

Michael Nizri shows how, over time, drawing land boundaries increasingly served the interests of the empire. Samy Ayoub analyzes the first attempts to standardize legal and judicial reasoning in the empire through the *mecelle* system, an effort to respond to Western modernity while simultaneously embodying the norms and doctrines of the Islamic (and arguably more flexible) Hanafi school of jurisprudence. Similarly, Schull investigates the transformation of criminal law and practice in the later years of the empire and proves convincingly that the reforms introduced were not mere cosmetic changes aimed at satisfying the demands of European powers but were a unique blend of traditional Ottoman criminal justice with standards of the modern world.

In all, this collection of essays, while not for the lay reader, is a welcome scholarly

contribution to the study of law and legal affairs in the Ottoman Empire, with an emphasis on legal reforms, the politics of managing empire-citizen relationships, and institutional legal responses to challenges from Western powers. As such, this volume opens a new perspective for historians to develop and explore further.

Biröl A. Yesilada
Portland State University

Palestine Investigated: The Criminal Investigation Department of the Palestine Police Force, 1920-1948. By Eldad Harouvi. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2016. 321 pp. \$94.95.

Based on deep analysis of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) documents discovered in Israeli archives and his own interviews with CID personnel, Harouvi's examination shows how the CID of the Palestine police force evolved from an organization investigating crime to one designed to protect British rule and keep Jews and Arabs from each other's throats.

Answering to the chief secretary of the mandatory government and ultimately to the Colonial Office in London, the CID was originally a forensic investigation branch. But its focus shifted with changing political situations. Harouvi recounts that in the 1920s, the emphasis was equally on crime and communists, but after being caught completely off-guard by the Arab riots of 1929, CID became an intelligence and preventive security unit. Thereafter, it collected detailed information on Arabs and Jews—including through informers—produced political analyses and estimates, and supported security operations.

According to the author's research, the outbreak of Arab violence in late 1935, which escalated into the "Great Revolt" of 1936-39, saw the CID work ever more closely with the police and the growing

British military presence. By the end of this period, with the violent eruption exhausted and suppressed, the CID focused more on the Jewish sector.

During the late 1930s, CID's scope also expanded to include Nazi and Fascist threats, a task made more pressing by the war and the complex alliances of local Arabs and Jews (the latter mostly aided the British), and by a plethora of competing British intelligence services. But after 1943, as the war moved decisively to Europe, the threat posed by Jewish organizations became paramount. Forever understaffed, from 1945 on, the CID produced astute analyses of pre-1948 Jewish community politics, but as the solutions were increasingly political and not tactical, its contribution was limited.

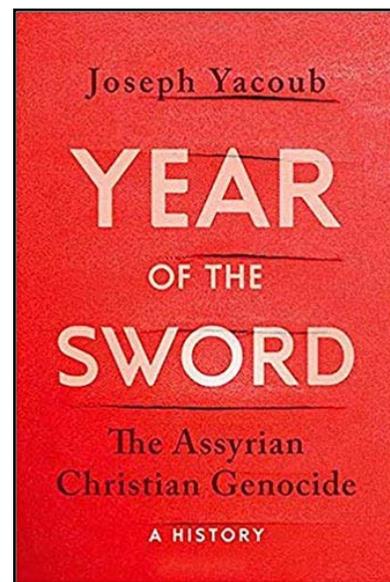
Harouvi's recitation sometimes moves too slowly. More troubling is his inattention to new publications regarding British military, paramilitary, and intelligence establishments in Mandatory Palestine by scholars such as Matthew Hughes,² and how these organizations and the police were penetrated by Zionist organizations and French intelligence, as discussed by Hillel Cohen³ and Meir Zamir.⁴

More comparative context would also have been welcome, for example, regarding

British political intelligence in Iraq, Egypt, Ireland, India, Malaya, Rhodesia, and elsewhere, places where CID personnel were often assigned.

These shortcomings aside, Harouvi's book shows how policing in hostile environments responds to political needs and how post-colonial states, including Israel, built their security infrastructures on imperial foundations.

Alexander Joffe
Middle East Forum



Year of the Sword: The Assyrian Christian Genocide, a History. By Joseph Yacoub. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. \$29.95.

This important contribution to genocide studies documents how the world's oldest Christian communities—variously referred to as Chaldeans, Syriacs, and Arameans, but best known as Assyrians—were, along with the Armenians, “the victims of the [Ottoman] plan for exterminating Christianity, root and branch.” In fact, as half of the Assyrian population was massacred—

2 Matthew Hughes, “The banality of brutality: British armed forces and the repression of the Arab revolt in Palestine, 1936-39,” *The English Historical Review*, 124 (2009), pp. 313-54; “A history of violence: The shooting of British Assistant Police Superintendent Alan Sigrist, 12 June 1936,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45 (2011), pp. 725-43; “Terror in Galilee: British-Jewish Collaboration and the Special Night Squads in Palestine during the Arab Revolt, 1938–39,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43 (2015), pp. 590-610.

3 Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917–1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2009).

4 Meir Zamir, *The Secret Anglo-French War in the Middle East: Intelligence and Decolonization, 1940-1948* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

going from 600,000 to 300,000 in 1915-18—relative to their numbers, no other Christian group, including the Armenians, suffered as much under the Ottomans.

Yacoub, emeritus professor at the Catholic University of Lyon, offers copious documentation and reports from reliable eyewitnesses, state actors, and relief agencies that recount atrocities against the Assyrians, including massacres, rapes, death marches, and the destruction of some 250 churches. The eyewitness accounts are especially blood-curdling in their details.

According to Yacoub, Assyrians were not only “annihilated by the murderous madness of Ottoman power, driven by a hideous form of unbridled nationalism” but became victims due to a “policy of ethnic cleansing ... stirred up by pan-Islamism and religious fanaticism. ... The call to Jihad, decreed on 29 November 1914 and instigated and orchestrated for political ends, was part of the plan.” As a result, unexpected actors such as the Kurds, who had their own reasons to oppose anything decreed by

Turks, became accomplices in the massacres for religious-ideological reasons.

While focusing on the mass murders that began in 1915—“the year of the sword” to the Assyrians—Yacoub makes clear that such events were not aberrant. Instead, they are part of a continuum that stretches back to the seventh-century Muslim conquest of Mesopotamia and that continues to this day under the guise of the Islamic State (ISIS) and other Middle East actors.

Indeed, many of the Assyrian Christians who have been and continue to be persecuted by ISIS are the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those massacred by the Ottomans and their minions. As Yacoub—whose own family suffered massacres and deportations—puts it, perhaps the greatest lesson is that “there is no shortage of similarities between 1915 and 2015.”

Raymond Ibrahim
Middle East Forum

