

**The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis,
The Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan**

Quintan Wiktorowicz

State University of New York: Albany, 2001. 205 pages.

In his first book, *The Management of Islamic Activism*, Quintan Wiktorowicz examines the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis through the lens of social movement theory. Unlike some political scientists who dismiss Islamic movements because of their informal networks, Wiktorowicz contends that social movement theory is an apt framework through which Islamic movements can be examined and studied. In this regard, his work leads the field. Yet for all its promise, this book largely fails to deliver.

The book is divided into four primary sections, through which he tries to construct his conclusion: Jordanian political liberalization has occurred because of structural necessities, not because of its commitment to democratization. In addition, the state has been masterful in what he dubs the “management of collective action,” (p. 3) which has, for all practical purposes, stifled any real opposition. While his conclusion is certainly tenable, given his extensive fieldwork, the book is poorly organized and much of the evidence examined earlier in the work leaves many questions unanswered.

The first chapter focuses rather heavily on the advent of Jordanian charitable NGOs and the state bureaucracy’s ability to effectively manipulate

and control them. Although a key component of his argument is that the state bureaucracy has hampered and controlled the functionality of Islamic NGOs, he fails to explain what distinguishes Islamic NGOs from their counterparts. He clarifies: "The activities at most Islamic NGOs in Jordan do not differ substantially from those of secular and non-Islamic voluntary organizations" (p. 85). If this is correct, then what differentiates Islamic NGOs from non-Islamic NGOs? He explains: "What differentiates Islamic NGOs from their secular counterparts is ... the volunteers' beliefs that they are promoting Islam through their work. It is an insider belief in the mission, more than the activities themselves, that distinguishes them" (p. 85) It is quite remarkable that Wiktorowicz was privy to this "insider" belief. In a Muslim nation such as Jordan, it is hard to imagine that Islam is not a motivating factor in charitable work to some extent. The author argues that the state bureaucracy hampers Islamic NGOs, but is this indeed the case, or does the bureaucracy hamper all NGOs equally? This question remains unasked and unanswered. He would have us believe that the state bureaucracy has taken it upon itself to control Islamic NGOs, but does not thoroughly differentiate them from the non-Islamic NGOs.

The fundamental issue that the book examines is a religiously oriented state opposition in Jordan. As such, Wiktorowicz focuses on demonstrating the state's control of such opposition through various means and mechanisms. The second chapter masterfully shows the state's ability to control religion. The most important aspect of this control is the state's control of all Jordanian mosques, including privately funded ones. This, then, allows it to effectively control and monitor the bulk of religious space. Friday sermons (*khutbahs*) are heavily controlled, and preachers are screened to ensure that their sermons do not criticize the state. Preachers that disregard the "red lines" and preach against the state or state policy are punished. However, there are ways around this. For example, some preachers couch their implicit criticism in Qur'anic verses, thereby ensuring that if they are questioned by the secret police (*mukhabarat*), they can claim that they merely recited verses readily found in the Qur'an. In addition to mosques, the state also controls the collection and distribution of zakat through various neighborhood-based zakat committees, further maintaining state control of the religious space. Wiktorowicz astutely notes the importance of Ramadan in the Islamic calendar and the subsequent increase in state control during this month.

The heart of the work is the third chapter, where his argument comes to fruition. He effectively shows the historical ties that have been forged

between the Jordanian state and the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood enjoys great latitude, provided that it does not seek to radically alter the government and restricts its criticism to government policy. The greatest substance to this chapter lies not only in the Brotherhood's history and early ties to the Hashemite regime, but also in its clear demonstration of Brotherhood institutions and their dissemination of their understanding of Islamic norms and values.

Wiktorowicz again seeks to use Islamic NGOs, in this case NGOs run by Brotherhood members, and government-imposed restrictions to demonstrate the effective use of the state bureaucracy in controlling NGOs. His work would be better served if he either further clarified and defined Islamic NGOs and how they have been co-opted in bureaucratic measures or focused on the Brotherhood and the Salafis and how the state has controlled their organizations. Instead, he attempts to do both and misses out on the various complexities brought to light by his earlier evidence. The fourth chapter, while providing some interesting history of the Salafi movement, largely glosses over Salafis in Jordan. In addition, while comparing the Brotherhood and the Salafis, the author does not clarify their ultimate objectives. We learn that the two have different theological outlooks, but we learn nothing about their respective missions.

This work is certainly a step in the right direction and makes strides in demonstrating both the informal nature of Islamic activism and its management by the Jordanian state. Unfortunately, it also ignores many issues that require greater clarification. Such clarity would, in great likelihood, bolster the author's claims. One reason why the book fails to deliver is its length: It is a short work that does not allow much room for greater analytical depth. Even then, Wiktorowicz does not take full advantage of the pages. For example, instead of focusing on the necessary evidence to validate his argument, he pays considerable attention to such irrelevant issues as the nature of Ramadan and *bid'ah* (innovation). It seems that the book's target audience lies somewhere between Middle East specialists and political scientists. Ultimately, the book remains disjointed and does not effectively weave the various strands of his argument together in a way designed to reach his ultimate conclusion. This deficiency could have been overcome with greater length and clarification.

Faisal Ghori
BA, Middle Eastern Studies; BA, History
University of California, Berkeley, California