

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda by Anne Wolf

Review by: Yusuf Evirgen

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## Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda

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By Anne Wolf

London: C. Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd., 2017, 256 Pages, \$38.09, ISBN: 9781849048262

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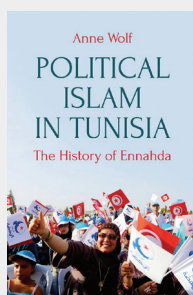
Reviewed by Yusuf Evirgen, Işık University

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The Middle East is a region of far-reaching importance due to past and current events in global politics. Of the many different dynamics and factors that affect the situation of the Middle East, Islam is especially crucial. Many scholars have recently focused on Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and how they affect the Middle East and beyond. Other movements, arguably of equal importance, have received less academic attention. In *Political Islam in Tunisia*, Anne Wolf, a doctoral student at Oxford University, brings timely critical attention to the history of Tunisia's primary Islamist movement, al-Nahda.

*Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* is a valuable asset to anyone studying political Islam, North Africa and Islamist movements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In this ambitious study, Anne Wolf shows the fluctuations of the al-Nahda movement, which has played a significant political and socio-cultural role in Tunisia and in the regional leadership of the Middle East.

One strength of this study is its use of multi-method data collection. Wolf conducted around 400 interviews and informal meetings with three different groups of people: (i) current and former members of al-Nahda and other religious groups, with whom about half of the interviews took place; (ii) civil society activists, bloggers, and journalists; and



(iii) current and former politicians of more secular trends, including many adversaries of the Islamist movement. Wolf also conducted archival research in the Tunisian National Archives and Zaytouna University, and studied the British Foreign Office files available at the National Archives and the Confidential Print at the Library of the University of Cambridge. Secondary academic materials, Tunisian and international media sources, as well as Wikileaks documents from March 1973 to February 2010 were also used.

*Political Islam in Tunisia* offers some helpful explanatory tools as appendixes, such as the al-Nahda Electoral Programme of 2011; the Statute of the al-Nahda Movement, July 2012; the Final Declaration of the Eight Congress of al-Nahda, May 2007; the Final Declaration of the Seventh Congress of al-Nahda, April 3, 2001; an Account of an al-Nahda Campaign Event in the Electoral District of Tunis 1; and Selected Interviews. All of these appendixes provide deep information about how al-Nahda works, and what their purpose is in elections.

The section entitled, "Who's Who? in al-Nahda" brings ease to understanding the al-Nahda movement by highlighting its key leaders and the Salafi landscape in which al-Nahda functions. Wolf provides biographies for these key leaders and explains their role in the al-Nahda

movement. This section prevents ambiguity in other chapters, as the al-Nahda movement is driven by certain key leaders who shape the movement in ideological and political ways.

One shortcoming of *Political Islam in Tunisia* is its lack of depth in discussing the al-Nahda movement in Tunisia. However, it is the first study to delve into the history of the al-Nahda movement; therefore, it is a significant contribution to the literature on Islamist movements and Tunisian politics. It gives introductory-level information about al-Nahda, and it also draws attention to general information about the history of Tunisia, such as the role of secularism. *Political Islam in Tunisia* offers insights about how secularism affects Islamist movements in Tunisia, how secular leaders shape Islamist movements in Tunisia, and how the al-Nahda movement responds to these secular leaders in Tunisia.

The book can be read easily; the explanations and language are very clear. At the beginning, Wolf offers some explanations about transliteration, because of the fact that there are some difficulties transliterating Arabic into English. However, the author addresses this situation perfectly and brings clear English to understand the al-Nahda movement easily.

On the negative side, the book does not go into great depth, so it is not adequate for advanced research. Rather, it provides introductory information about al-Nahda and its background. For instance, although Wolf calls attention to Tunisia's secular history and its relation to al-Nahda movement and other Islamist movements, the relationship is not explained in detail, despite this being a crucial factor with many different implications for Tunisia. The author searches for historical ties between al-Nahda and the Muslim Brotherhood, but this focus causes her to overlook some of the al-

Nahda movement's traditional ties. Moreover, we know that the Arab Spring affected the al-Nahda movement's structure in different ways. However, the book does not give adequate information about how the Arab Spring affected al-Nahda's structure and its political vision for shaping Tunisia. The Arab Spring pervasively affected Islamist movements in the MENA with radicalization as ISIS or other organizations; however, al-Nahda did not and does not choose radicalization in Tunisia. Rather, the movement supports democratization in Tunisia. In other words, the Arab Spring and its effects need more analysis, as the Arab Spring was arguably a key turn for shaping al-Nahda's unique Islamist ideology.

Another drawback is that *Political Islam in Tunisia* is unable to exceed history telling; there are a few significant political and sociological analyses, but not enough to provide new information. A historical account is not enough to understand the al-Nahda movement completely. Also, some eras are not explained by Wolf very well. Although the author does provide some information at the beginning of the book about al-Nahda's key leaders, there is no deep information about how these leaders have affected the al-Nahda movement, and some leaders are given inadequate attention. Rachid Ghannouchi, for example, has made a significant impact on al-Nahda's political actions. However, Wolf does not adequately describe how Ghannouchi's actions have shaped al-Nahda's politics. This is a serious omission, as Ghannouchi's political views have deeply influenced Tunisia's democratization process, and it is his ideas about Islam that have prevented the radicalization of the al-Nahda movement in Tunisia.

Understanding how Islamist movements are structured is crucial, because each movement's structure reflects its political views or Islamic

ideas. For instance, a consultation culture can lead to more democratic actions within an Islamist movement. However, *Political Islam in Tunisia* does not give information about the structure of the al-Nahda movement, leaving a significant gap in understanding al-Nahda's history and its structural evolution. This evolution is significant, as it reveals why the al-Nahda movement eschews radicalization, and helps to explain the dynamics driving this movement to choose "moderate Islam."

All in all, Anne Wolf's *Political Islam in Tunisia: The History of Ennahda* offers a very clear understanding of the al-Nahda movement's history at an introductory level. As the first comprehensive study of the al-Nahda movement, it fills a gap in the literature. Its shortcomings can be forgiven, due to its being the first attempt of its kind. Finally, *Political Islam in Tunisia* offers a helpful introduction to readers interested in political Islam, Islamism, Tunisia, and the al-Nahda movement.

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## The New Political Islam: Human Rights, Democracy and Justice

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By Emmanuel Karagiannis

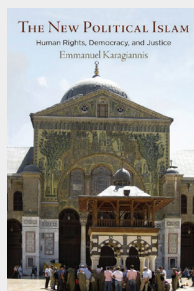
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018, 258 pages, \$65.00, ISBN: 9780812249729

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Reviewed by Fatma Sümer, Marmara University

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After September 11, Islamophobic approaches in society have become more widespread, and have been observed to appear more regularly. However, Western intellectuals have worked to maintain objectivity in their studies, which may contribute to eradicating this unfair perception. *The New Political Islam*, a study that introduces and models such an approach to a certain extent, is predicated upon the basic idea that Islamists have localized and transferred certain global norms into their societies today, and therefore function as 'glocalizers.' the author considers that following such developments as September 11, the social media revolution and the Arab Spring, norms such as human rights, democracy, and justice have become 'glocalized,' which are thought to be adopted from the global lexicon and contingencies of the local environments where they are being implemented.



The book is composed of three main parts, along with an Introduction and Conclusion. In each part, Karagiannis addresses a concept adopted by the Political Islamists as 'glocalizers,' along with the group that supports the concept.

In the Introduction, Karagiannis describes the phenomenon of glocalization. In Part I, he introduces and explains the master frame of the concept of human rights. In the first chapter, "The Activism of European Converts," he reveals that Islamist activists utilize the master frame of human rights with a view to receiving support and disseminating their messages. Karagiannis analyses Hizb-ut-Tahrir as an example of this process in chapter two.

Expounding upon the content and significance of democracy in Part two, the author