1   Introduction

In a crowded hotel ballroom in the beach resort of Hammamet, hundreds of delegates from the Islamist al-Nahda movement gathered for their tenth congress. It was a moment not just to assess how they had fared since the fall of Tunisia's authoritarian regime five years earlier, but to agree a decisive new strategy for the future. After many hours of debate, the culmination of months of nationwide workshops and discussions, the delegates voted by a large majority to transform al-Nahda into a political party that would for the first time formally separate itself from religious, social, and cultural activism. Rachid Ghannouchi, al-Nahda's charismatic 74-year-old co-founder and leader, presented this decision to the outside world in bold terms. 'We are leaving political Islam to enter into Muslim democracy,' he said. 'We are Muslim democrats who no longer call for political Islam.'[1] At the congress in May 2016, Ghannouchi took to the stage beneath a vast Tunisian flag to defend this strategic reorientation before his supporters:

> The al-Nahda movement has not stopped evolving throughout its long journey ... The functional specialization between the political and other social fields is not a sudden decision or a submission to temporary pressures, but rather the culmination of an historical path in which the political work was distinct from the social, cultural, and preaching work in our movement.[2]

The 'functional specialization' that transformed a religious social movement into a political party was not merely a structural decision about how best to allocate resources or how to be seen to comply with electoral regulations in the new Tunisia. Instead, it was the product of a long, strategic, and intellectual debate driven by growing disquiet among many Nahdawis about the identity of their movement after decades of repression and political exclusion. Thirty-five years earlier, Ghannouchi and five of his colleagues had sat at a simple wooden table in a lawyer's office in Tunis for a press conference to propose an audacious new political project based on a 'comprehensive conception of Islam' (*al-taṣawwur al-shumūlī li-l-islām*), which combined the political and the religious in

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one vision.[3] Yet here in 2016 was a rare public admission that it was no longer possible to fuse political and religious ambitions as one, and that what the movement called political work (*al-ʿamal al-siyāsī*) should now be distinct from what it called preaching work (*al-ʿamal al-daʿwī*). What had happened to that first comprehensive vision? Why was there such internal disagreement about the true character of al-Nahda? What did it mean to be an Islamist movement in a nascent democracy? Who really spoke for the movement?

In all that is written about Islamists across the Arab world, fuelled by a security-led fascination with violent groups and the blossoming of jiha-dology as the new Kremlinology, movements like al-Nahda are often overlooked as merely peripheral. Yet this organization offers an intri-guing study into the way an Islamist movement transforms over time as it interacts with both authoritarian regimes and democratic political insti-tutions. Here was a movement that began with ideas and a model borrowed from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, but which soon branched out along a path so shaped by the Tunisian environment that the Nahdawis came to be regarded as a rather special case, as 'Islamists unlike any others'.[4] However, although al-Nahda has followed a particu-lar historical path, it is by no means unique. The movement has encoun-tered many challenges familiar to Islamists elsewhere. The recent claim to have departed from political Islam was Ghannouchi's own articulation of a debate under way within many such movements as they scramble to adapt to a rapidly changing political environment. Al-Nahda has played a central role in the modern history of a small nation that stands out for its pioneering uprising against the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2010–11 and, amid a region-wide descent into civil war and counter-revolution, for its hopeful transition away from authoritarianism in the years that followed. This transition is neither the unalloyed success that many observers imagine, nor is it an anomalous model that holds no value for comparative research.[5] Instead, Tunisia's political, social, and cultural forces deserve our sustained consideration and interrogation, and not only when Western tourists die on Tunisian beaches.[6] Islamist movements across the region have closely followed the historical experi-ence of al-Nahda and the writings of Ghannouchi when deciding their own strategies and intellectual positions. We would do well to pay similarly close attention.

There are many ways to examine the workings of an Islamist move-ment like al-Nahda, but one remark has stayed with me throughout my research. Two decades ago, the French scholar François Burgat made the case for 'involved empathy' in the often-fraught study of Islamism, even at the risk of appearing too sympathetic to those we observe.[7]

A reminder is unfortunately necessary: if there has been a methodological error, it has not been made by those who have taken the trouble to meet with Islamists before discussing Islamist issues, but by those who for so long thought that they could forego such an enterprise.[8]

This book draws on hundreds of hours of formal and informal discussions with current and former members of the al-Nahda movement during several months of fieldwork in Tunisia. While I am sensitive to the difficulties of perspective this approach entails, I draw on Burgat's reminder to present an immersive, fine-grained micro-study of the shifting trajectories of an Islamist movement in one Tunisian city.

The primary question of this book is how best to explain the transformation of al-Nahda's Islamist project over time. One way to approach this problem is to consider the lived experience of Islamist activism: how individuals came to the movement, what meanings they gave to their actions, and how and why these meanings changed over time. I trace the genealogy of meaning-making within the movement from its origins to the present day to explain the contest and negotiation between political and preaching ambitions. My research operates in an explicit geography of the local and privileges the experiences of non-elite members of the movement. I explore how Islamist activism operates offstage, beyond the most visible, formal politics of movements and their leaders.

I make three arguments. First, the relationship between the political and the religious within the movement has been conflicting and ultimately irreconcilable, rather than interdependent and cohesive. For a movement that, like other Islamist groups in the region, proposed a 'comprehensive' vision of Islam, there was a striking historic tension at the heart of this project. Until 2011 this vision was an untested, utopian proposition, but its ambiguity and plasticity served a purpose as the movement grew. Second, at the local level we find the sources of the movement's resilience inside Tunisia during the decades of repression. The paradox of al-Nahda is that the movement re-emerged quickly following the popular uprising against Ben Ali, despite two decades of repression and without being able to call on those elements understood from research elsewhere to be so crucial to Islamist resilience, like a deep movement structure and grassroots social welfare activities. Instead, from 2011 al-Nahda rebuilt itself rapidly because of sources of resilience I identify here, including deep informal networks, an individual reimagining of the Islamist project, and activism on the movement's intellectual and structural periphery. Third, al-Nahda has undergone a series of strategic and intellectual adaptations to the changing political context of Tunisia. In 2016 al-Nahda underwent its most significant adaptation yet as it made an irrevocable strategic commitment to politicization and

sought an intellectual justification for its new approach. Movements like al-Nahda are highly adaptive to their environment, yet adaptation comes at a cost, both organizational and intellectual. Adapting the movement this time has brought fragmentation and demobilization.

Party and Movement

It might be tempting to take an Islamist leader at his word when he talks of the 'evolution' of his movement from 'social, cultural, and preaching work' towards an exclusive focus on 'political work'. But simply transcribing a linear narrative like this does nothing to explain what is being said or to uncover its sociopolitical location. Nor can the views of a leader expressed in a speech at a congress be taken as the uncontested view of all within the movement. These words were a careful act of framing, designed to legitimate a particular set of decisions and to inspire a certain course of action.

The greater danger, though, is that this stereotyped dichotomy, the political versus the religious, makes Islamist activism appear to be merely an instrumental politicization of religious ideas. Paying attention to the political nature of Islamist movements has done much to move the debate beyond older Orientalist notions of an essential, unchanging Islam as the primary explanatory factor for Muslim behaviour. The assumption, for example, that this religion produces exceptional politics because in the historic experience of Muslim societies there has been an indivisibility of religion and state, *dīn wa-dawla*, has by now been persuasively discredited.[9] However, in presenting a corrective, some scholars emphasize Islamism as highly politicized behaviour, as 'a religionized political agenda, not a spiritual one'.[10] This leaves little space for the mobilizing forces of faith and identity, of shared values, and new solidarities. And it focuses attention on formal politics at the state level. For Olivier Roy, Islamists are 'obsessed with the state' and seek 'to re-create a true Islamic society, not simply by imposing sharia, but by establishing first an Islamic state through political action'.[11] But in identifying the goal of this political action as state power, so capturing state power is made the sole criterion of success against which to judge Islamist activism. When Islamists fall short of this goal they fail to 'pass the test of power'.[12] As Frédéric Volpi reminds us, this focus on formal state institutions alone assumes a Western political science notion of 'politics' that is just as essential and unchanging as previous Orientalist notions of Islam.[13]

Distinctions between political and religious activities have tended to shape the way different Islamist formations are defined. Some are considered 'vanguard' movements, which seek political power to effect

top-down reforms; others, by contrast, are 'grassroots' movements, which work to build a bottom-up, counter-hegemonic community.[14] Similarly, some, like groups based on the Muslim Brotherhood model, are seen as 'statist', participating in the politics of the nation-state; others, like quietist Salafis or transnational violent jihadis, are 'non-statist' and give primacy to their relationship to the community.[15] For Roy, the entire Islamist project has exhausted its revolutionary zeal and Islamist groups have split into nationalist political parties, which advocate democracy, elections, and coalitions but which have no model for a different society, and 'neofundamentalism' or morality-focused activism in the private domain.[16] Such analytical distinctions help explain the remarkable diversity within the spectrum of Islamist behaviour. However, a valuable insight is lost in the process. These rival tendencies can coexist within the same organization for many years, where they become the subject of negotiation and competition. Therefore, in this book I approach Islamism in an inclusive fashion, defining it as a project that seeks to be active in the political, social, and cultural spheres by drawing on the Islamic scriptural tradition and reinterpreting it for the present day.[17] I set out to explore the overlaps and ambiguities between ideas of political ambition and religious outreach. And I find debates, tensions, and meaning-making that complicate these analytical distinctions between political parties and religious movements, between top-down and grassroots projects.

There are two reasons why such overlaps and ambiguities should not be a surprise. First, the Islamist project which is today seen as so highly politicized actually has non-political intellectual origins. This was a project that favoured divine sovereignty over rule by the people, for fear that the people would pronounce against scripture or that a ruler would seek to control Islam.[18] It pushed back against the intrusions of the colonial and post-colonial state to privilege instead social self-management through the shariʿa under the guidance of religious experts. This is why there is so little detail in Sunni Islamist programmes about how political institutions should be fashioned, because it is not the institutions that must be virtuous or moral, but the individuals themselves. Hence the problem of circular logic identified by Roy: an Islamic state would promote virtue, but it could not exist without first a society of virtuous individuals.[19] There was, in other words, an intellectual ambiguity ingrained in the Islamist project from the beginning.

A second, connected reason for these overlaps is that 'politics' for Islamist movements constitutes more than the capture of state power. In the context of the intrusive colonial and post-colonial state, religious, social, and cultural activism become a political act in the endeavour to forge an ideal society. Such activism does not merely pay attention to

superficialities of style and dress, but challenges the state's regulation of quotidian practices which shape the public sphere.[20] Islamist movements are engaged in a dual effort to transform not just the state, but also their society, what has been called 'the politics of everyday practice'.[21] As Salwa Ismail argues, 'Islamist interventions raise questions about the basis of the frames of references of public morality, the boundaries of the private and public, and, ultimately, about who controls the public sphere.'[22] Where Islamists are indeed preoccupied with state power it is surely not only to produce a virtuous community, but because the modern state seeks to transform and control all aspects of life. Even in their social and cultural activism Islamists cannot ignore the state's pervasive reach. As Talal Asad puts it, social activity requires legal consent and therefore state approval: 'Because the modern nation-state seeks to regulate all aspects of individual life – even the most intimate, such as birth and death – no one, whether religious or otherwise, can avoid encountering its ambitious powers.'[23] That in turn, Asad argues, makes social spaces, and their definition, ordering, and regulation, 'political'. As a result, we see Islamists in competition with many actors including, but not limited to, the state 'over both the interpretation of symbols and the control of the institutions, both formal and informal, that produce and sustain them'.[24]

   Islamist movements like al-Nahda do target state power. Later in this book when I talk about politicization I refer specifically to the process of engaging with formal political institutions. This means adopting a set of behaviours focused on party structures, elections, appealing to new constituencies, and taking part in formal institutions.[25] But that is not all the political work these movements do. Al-Nahda's repertoire of political acts included religious, social, and cultural activism.

Making Islamist Meanings

Studies of Islamism are prone to a self-conscious fascination with the perspectives of leaders, as if they as individuals embody the thoughts and ambitions of monolithic movements. This produces a static reading of the 'language of the ideologues', which overlooks the possibility that Islamist organizations are more fragmented than they appear.[26] Scholars interview leaders, read their statements, and listen to their public performances, but they pay much less attention to considering how such words are received and understood by their own supporters and how these perceptions vary over time.[27] This tendency is pronounced with al-Nahda because of the enduring role of Ghannouchi as founder–leader and intellectual reference.[28] Historical accounts of the movement

concentrated on leadership debates; analyses of al-Nahda's activism after 2011 once again centred on the leadership's strategic choices. Scholars identified the importance of mutual ideological tolerance as explaining the success of the initial transition away from authoritarian rule, or they emphasized how the constraints of pluralist politics pushed the leadership to compromise in drafting the constitution and in negotiating with former regime elites.[29] This is often a broader problem. Studies of democratization since 2011 continued to focus largely on the role of the state, ruling elites, and the leadership of major political parties.[30] Perhaps such a tight focus on the elite-level politics of al-Nahda was inevitable given the remarkable political opportunities in the new Tunisia. But stressing the political behaviour of the leadership reinforces a historical view of al-Nahda, and one perpetuated by some of the leaders themselves, as a unified movement pursuing primarily a political project aimed at state power. It does not ask how this came to be the priority, whether that path to politicization was seamless, and whether ordinary members of the movement perceived it in the same way as their leaders. Obscuring these internal dynamics misses much about the complex trajectory of this Islamist movement, how it built informal networks and why it survived two decades of severe repression. The transmission of ideas from the leadership to the grassroots of the movement and the contest and negotiation over these ideas is easily occluded.

I offer an alternative approach in this book by taking as my starting point the activists of the movement themselves, their offstage mobilizations, and the way they understood what it meant to be an Islamist. My intention is to reorient our understanding of an Islamist movement. I do not mean to imply that the informal activities of men and women are more important than those of their leaders, but instead I offer a corrective to the 'systematic overlooking of the role of nonelite actors' that others have already warned against.[31] A focus on top-down politics, which looks at Islamist rhetoric, publications, and organizational activities from above, tends to miss the solidarities that emerge from informal, value-centred, grassroots politics.[32] The challenge in explaining the transformations of Islamist movements is to capture the little-noticed collective actions at the local level and to map how they unfold over time.

I treat al-Nahda and its precursors as a social movement because it presents a collective challenge based on shared purpose and solidarities and is engaged in a sustained interaction with authorities, elites, and opponents.[33] The standard framework for researching such groups is social movement theory, which seeks explanations for how people mobilize support, create solidarities, and make collective challenges. In its classic articulation, this theory drew on concepts developed in studies

of social movements in the West: political opportunities, how shifting constraints and opportunities shape movements; mobilizing structures, the formal and informal 'collective vehicles' through which people mobilize; framing processes, the way a group makes conscious strategic efforts to create meanings of the world; and the idea of repertoires of contention, in which past actions are shown to shape the choice of future forms of mobilization.[34] But this approach is limited by what are often stretchable concepts, as well as a reliance on structural explanations, rational-actor assumptions, and Western contexts. I find more useful subsequent work, which argued for the creative role played by such factors as emotions, behaviour, meaning-making, and informal networks.[35]

A prominent Egyptian Islamist recently argued that the primary drivers of his movement's behaviour were 'moral and religious', and could not be explained away by theories of rational choice.[36] His movement, he said, privileged 'faith over utility'. How can we make sense of this? I am interested here in how an Islamist movement draws on a particular supply of religious resources. These might provide organizational opportunities, shared identities, motivations, and legitimacy, all of which can be found in other social movements. But religion also has what Christian Smith identifies as a 'disruptive, defiant, and unruly face' because it offers a sacred transcendence that acts to judge the mundane earthly reality.[37] It thereby provides 'the seeds of radical social criticism and disruption'.[38] This disruptive social criticism emerges through a series of social processes, which this book draws out in the context of one Islamist community in Tunisia. A combination of study groups, new spoken and written discourses, and a set of behaviours were used to construct new interests and values within the early preaching community. One behavioural element was the act of preaching or *daʿwa*, the call to Islam. This began with training to acquire an individual ethical conduct, but then reached out to the goal of an Islamic reform of the community and then society. This behaviour reflects Asef Bayat's concept of an 'imagined solidarity', which is 'forged spontaneously among different actors who come to a consensus by imagining, subjectively constructing, common interests and shared values between themselves'.[39] By building this imagined solidarity, so these activists created a new social action which in turn constructed informal networks and subcultural communities. These networks provided the resilience that later helped the movement survive two decades of intense repression.

Social movements, however, are not unified actors and might be better thought of as comprising 'sets of competing discourses'.[40] The meanings formed in these imagined solidarities are contested when they emerge and are subject to negotiation and change over time.[41] If a social

movement is not a unified actor at any one moment, then how diverse too might it look when considered from a historical perspective? Are the meanings and behaviours which demonstrate belonging to the movement in the 1970s the same as those relied on in the post-2011 era? A movement's collective identity is continually formed and reformed by people operating in different sites at different times.[42] These negotiations over meanings provide a framework through which to study how the sinews of political and religious orientations might pull in different directions within al-Nahda at different moments in its development. This book takes a historical approach to cover a period of more than forty years in the life of a movement in motion. It is a perspective that demonstrates, first, that bonds formed by early networks are remarkably resilient and flexible but, second, that the need to adapt a collective identity to changing contexts can prove profoundly disruptive.

Meeting Islamists

One hot day in June I rode in a *louage*, a shared minibus, from Tunis down the highway for two hours to the coastal city of Sousse, Tunisia's third largest city. There I met a former political prisoner from al-Nahda. Abdedayem was fifty-five years old and married with three children. He volunteered with a small prisoner support association and had begun compiling a list of the hundreds of Nahdawi former prisoners from Sousse, with details of their convictions and the length of time they had spent in jail, 'before they are forgotten', he said. Over lunch on his patio he described how he had first become involved with the Islamist movement as a schoolboy, when he led religious study groups. He told me about his eight hard years in prison in the 1990s, during which the regime forced his wife to divorce him, and then how after jail he had come home, remarried his wife, and worked discreetly to support other prisoners and their families. Now he was employed in the local administration under an amnesty issued after 2011, and spent his free time visiting former prisoners compiling details for his list.

Abdedayem found me a small apartment to rent in a block not far from his home off the Street of the Date Palms, in al-Khezama al-Sharqiyya, a lower middle-class area of the city. On my first night in Sousse, he took me to a local al-Nahda meeting, where activists were discussing how to train their supporters and where I was asked to give an impromptu talk on the relative merits of the British educational system over the French. From then on, Abdedayem introduced me to his friends within the movement and so I began my research by meeting older activists who, like him, had been present in the founding years. Each of them directed

me to others and I gradually found my way into the community through suggestions and connections.

Until 2011 it was difficult and dangerous for both researcher and activist to ask detailed questions about Islamism in the semi-authoritarian police state that was Tunisia, which explains the relative dearth of recent detailed studies of al-Nahda.[43] The French scholar Béatrice Hibou, who visited Tunisia during the 2000s, described how her interviewees were often harassed and how she too was systematically intimidated by 'police men in civvies, straight out of bad cop films, with leather jackets, dark glasses and faces like gangsters, hurrying to keep up with me'.[44] But after January 2011 such intimidation, at least as far as foreign researchers were concerned, became no more than a bad memory. The uprising threw open the door to scholars and presented a wealth of new opportunities for immersive study.[45]

This book is a political ethnography of the al-Nahda movement in Sousse which explores the texture of lived experiences and how individuals made sense of their world. I use ethnographic techniques in my research, but I also adopt ethnography as a way of understanding my work, as a 'way of seeing' what I found.[46] After several visits to Tunisia from 2011 onwards, I spent fourteen months living in Sousse from late 2013. I interviewed eight-five current or former members of al-Nahda asking about their life histories and their involvement in the movement, often going back to see people several times to finish half-told stories or to clarify earlier comments. I met as many members as possible from the dozen or so who had been elected to al-Nahda's Sousse regional bureau, and from those who led the sixteen local bureaux, which operated in each of the governorate's administrative districts. I met the senior Sousse activists who had been elected to the movement's national Consultative Council (*majlis al-shūrā*), a 150-member body which meets every three months and functions as an internal parliament, and I interviewed dozens of other non-Islamist politicians, human rights activists, and academics.

Our discussions were nearly always in Arabic and I recorded our conversations when people agreed, as well as making notes during and after discussions and observations. I translated and transcribed these words, which became the primary sources for this book. I offered all of those I interviewed the right to anonymity and have respected that throughout the text, except when individuals explicitly asked to be named or when referring to senior public figures. For those anonymous participants, I use a single pseudonym to represent their identities and I denote their position in the movement in broad terms: local al-Nahda member, meaning an ordinary low-level member; local leader, meaning one of the dozen or so individuals elected to a local bureau; regional leader, meaning

one of the dozen or so individuals elected to the Sousse regional bureau, some of whom may also have been elected to the Consultative Council; and senior leader, meaning a high-ranking member of the movement usually based in Tunis and often not represented in their home regional bureau, but perhaps holding an administrative office within the movement or sitting in the Consultative Council or the smaller and more senior Executive Bureau (*al-maktab al-tanfīdhī*). I also spent my time observing at al-Nahda offices, and wherever possible attending rallies, celebrations, meetings, and family weddings, as well as watching the October 2014 legislative election campaign, when I followed door-to-door campaign efforts and small-scale political events. To put these discussions into context I call on written archival sources, including historic al-Nahda documents, published memoirs, court transcripts, reports by human rights associations, and newspaper articles, including from the Islamist journals *Al-Maʿrifa* (The Knowledge) and *Al-Fajr* (The Dawn).

This system of chain referral, or snowball sampling, as a way to find people to talk to can be problematic because it risks producing biased samples: individuals might only introduce me to others who think like they do.[47] And it can limit generalizable conclusions because this is not a randomized control sample but one selected in what may seem at times a haphazard manner. However, al-Nahda was an organization emerging from two decades as a repressed underground movement into a polarized public sphere, where Islamists were routinely vilified in the national media. It was difficult to convince people to talk to me without first demonstrating who else I had met in the movement, and Nahdawis I met for the first time would usually consult with fellow activists first. In these circumstances, a snowball approach is often the only way to make access into the community.[48] There was always the danger, too, that their narratives slipped into retrospective rationalizations of an idealized past or that individuals only told me what they wanted me to hear. My answer to this problem was to ask many people about the same events, themes, and processes over many months, until I gathered multiple, overlapping accounts from different perspectives. It is harder for people to put on an act for you the more time you spend among them. Surviving party documents and other written sources allowed me to compare oral narratives with historical accounts. In the end, these spoken histories were imperfect, as written sources can be too. Yet they have significant value as evidence, given that so many of the movement's own documents from the early years of activism were destroyed by the Tunisian intelligence agencies and police.

As much as I have tried to be comprehensive in my ambition, this project is bound by the idiosyncrasies of ethnographic research. But a

close study like this can bring to light problems and variations that get
missed in broader research. This means studying a movement at a
smaller scale to understand what it meant to individuals to be an
Islamist. The informal workings of power relations capture micro-
mechanisms of change and resistance operating outside institutional
political life.[49] A focus on insider meanings and perspectives offers many
benefits. It gives agency to social and political actors by asking how they
view political situations, rather than relying on overly structural explan-
ations. It offers insights into self-perception and identity politics, show-
ing how collective meanings are formed, how they influence political
processes, and how individuals understand them.[50] It demonstrates the
powerful role of informal networks in producing meanings, shaping
mobilization, and providing organizational resilience. Insider perspec-
tives also reveal the process of adaptation, which is often uneven and
improvised. I decipher fragments of history and memory, because those
habits formed in an individual's early experience of activism provided a
repertoire from which to craft ways of acting, thinking, and feeling in
the years that followed. And this was a movement in constant motion.
This book, therefore, considers the movement from its origins as a
preaching circle, which in the mid-1970s became al-Jamaʿa
al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Group), through the period of 1981–88 when
it operated under the name Harakat al-Ittijah al-Islami (the Islamic
Tendency Movement, MTI), and then its subsequent development as
Harakat al-Nahda (the Movement of the Renaissance). The period
under study begins in the early 1970s, when the preaching circle first
emerged, and reaches until 2016, when al-Nahda responded to an
election defeat by opting for a deep, hard-to-reverse commitment to
politicization. I hope not to generalize about the al-Nahda movement
as a whole, and even less about 'Islamism' as a unified concept.
Instead, this book engages with scholars who have used different tech-
niques to study similar movements elsewhere in a dialogue about
diverse, changing Islamisms.

I did not always agree with the views of those I met, but this book is
not about making yet another moral judgement as to whether al-Nahda
or any other Islamist group meets some definition of 'democratic' or
'liberal'. Instead, it is my effort to understand what this movement
meant for those within it, and how they transformed their project over
time. These were people who suffered years in prison and in social
exclusion for their political beliefs and yet willingly told me their stories
in often painful detail. I could not have pursued this project without
their remarkable generosity, and the rare gift of their memories, experi-
ences, and narratives.

The book is structured chronologically. Chapter 2 introduces the city of Sousse and addresses the origins of the movement to ask why it first emerged in the city and what mechanisms of mobilization it employed. Chapter 3 rethinks the politicization of the movement in the 1980s to challenge those previous assumptions that suggest the movement grew more distant from its preaching origins during this period. The effect of two decades of repression is considered in Chapter 4, which excavates the prison experience, with its intellectual evaluations and physical acts of resistance, and in Chapter 5, which argues that social exclusion disaggregated the movement into its constituent parts. Chapter 6 asks why the movement so quickly began to fragment and demobilize after 2011, even as activists rebuilt and redefined their project. In conclusion, Chapter 7 asks what lessons similar Islamist experiences in the region might offer al-Nahda and then assesses the tension between politics and preaching within the movement, explains al-Nahda's resilience under repression, and interrogates the politicization of the movement.