

## Jihad in the City

Tawhid was a militant Islamist group which implemented Islamic law at gunpoint in the Lebanese city of Tripoli during the 1980s. In retrospect, some have called it “the first ISIS-style Emirate.” Drawing on 200 interviews with Islamist fighters and their mortal enemies, as well as on a trove of new archival material, Raphaël Lefèvre provides a comprehensive account of this Islamist group. He shows how they featured religious ideologues determined to turn Lebanon into an Islamic Republic, yet also included Tripolitan rebels of all stripes, neighbourhood strongmen with scores to settle, local subalterns seeking social revenge and profit-driven gangsters, who each tried to steer Tawhid’s exercise of violence to their advantage. Providing a detailed understanding of the multifaceted processes through which Tawhid emerged in 1982, implemented its “Emirate” and suddenly collapsed in 1985, this is a story that shows how militant Islamist groups are impacted by their grand ideology as much as by local contexts – with crucial lessons for understanding social movements, rebel groups and terrorist organizations elsewhere.

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# Jihad in the City

*Militant Islam and Contentious Politics in Tripoli*

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## Acknowledgments

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Writing this book was a long and arduous process. It took me seven years, half a dozen different drafts and many headaches to reach the stage when I would finally be satisfied sending my manuscript out for publication. Unquestionably, my determination to give my best throughout this drawn-out process stemmed from my passion for Tripoli, its people and history. I did not expect to develop such a passion for Tripoli. In fact, my first trip there in 2012 resulted from chance. Frustrated by my inability to return to Damascus to conduct the doctoral research I had just started on Syrian history and politics, I set my eyes on this Lebanese city: it not only used to be the coastal hub of Greater Syria but, up until today, remains organically linked to the country and still “feels” Syrian – from its architecture and its food to the family relations and cultural references of many Tripolitans. This book, therefore, is as much the product of the passion I then developed for Tripoli itself as of my older love for Syria, where I briefly lived before the 2011 revolution and underwent experiences which shaped my subsequent life journey as well as my intellectual interests. Before acknowledging the specific individuals who proved key in the elaboration of this book, then, I wanted to highlight the significance of my stays in both Syria and Lebanon’s Tripoli. My emotional connection to these two places has guided this book from beginning to end.

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Although this book takes my doctoral research as its backbone, the core literatures it addresses and the arguments it makes bear little resemblance to what my thesis looked like. After getting my PhD from Cambridge, I moved to Oxford University as the Rank-Manning Junior

Research Fellow in Social Sciences at New College and then as Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Politics and International Relations, a period during which I was fortunate enough to focus exclusively on engaging with theory and on writing this book. Throughout the slow and sometimes confusing process of revision which took place in Oxford, I was lucky to count on the presence of my colleagues and friends Kevin Mazur and Stathis Kalyvas, who each in their own way provided the mentoring and guidance I needed. The shape which this book took also owes a lot to a manuscript workshop I organized in May 2018 in Oxford. There, the additional comments I received and the discussions which took place helped me to turn my very empirical PhD thesis into a book more grounded in political science. I am incredibly grateful to the scholars who kindly accepted my invitation, took time off to read my draft and actively participated in the event, including Salwa Ismail, Louise Fawcett, Kevin Mazur, Stathis Kalyvas, Jeroen Gunning, Neil Ketchley and Chris Pickvance.

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## Glossary of Concepts

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**Champion of mobilization:** informal leader with such a large and dedicated following in his community that he becomes uniquely placed to activate local solidarities and to channel them into activism, thus drawing community members to the protests and movements he joins.

**Contentious Tripolitans:** this critical mass of Tripolitans across time who mobilize to express primarily local grievances and are buoyed by the ideal of the defense of the city.

**Cultural momentum** of an ideology: the set of transformations in culture (e.g. religious practice, clothing style, social views, artistic genres) which either underpins or helps pave the way for the growth of a political ideology, making it more widely available in society.

**Habitus of place:** the set of local historical, cultural and political narratives specific to a place which become so internalized by local actors that it pushes them to interpret the world through partially local lenses, shaping some of their concerns, beliefs and behavior.

**Ideological artifacts:** works of art meant to indoctrinate society by projecting ideas visually.

**Ideological entrepreneurs:** these highly dedicated figures at the extreme of a movement's "spectrum of ideological commitment" who are not only motivated by ideology but also go to lengths to mold the nature of activism and of the broader environment around their worldviews, typically by seeking to spread their beliefs to society and to movement members and by lobbying its leaders to make decisions consistent with or, indeed driven by, ideology.

**Ideological entrepreneurship:** the mobilization of worldviews with the aim of translating ideology into action in order to mold movement behavior and society around these beliefs.

**Islamogangsterism:** the involvement by some Islamist movements in those criminal activities and networks which prioritize economic gain over ideological consistency.

**Neighborhood Islamism:** an Islamist mobilization so rooted in the neighborhood's fabric that it may be shaped by local solidarities, concerns and antagonisms more than by ideology.

**Protest ideology:** a corpus of symbols, discourse, practices and infrastructure associated with a specific ideology but which are embraced instrumentally to express dissent because of the contentious potential they are associated with, more than because of their intrinsic appeal.

**Sites of transcendence:** those sites whose location, shape and history have such salient meanings in society that they hold the potential to enhance mobilizations; both by politically transcending older cleavages to enable short-term but potentially transformative coalitions across class, space and ideology and by emotionally transcending activists who rally there.

**Social jihad:** involvement in a type of political violence which takes the form of militant Islamism but, at core, remains more shaped by preexisting social tensions than by ideology.

**Spatial barriers:** those features through which space can hinder broad-based collective action because of physical properties like distance or the built-in environment, but even more importantly because of the socially and symbolically consequential local rivalries, conflicting priorities and different traditions or identities of geographically proximate spaces.

**Spatial repression:** a calculated attempt by the target of contention to deactivate the resources provided by space for activists, whether through physical infrastructures of support or the social and symbolic local solidarities, identities and emotions that enable mobilization, aiming at turning a "safe space" for activism into a "repressed space" where it is made harder.

**Spatially oriented movements:** those social movements which are not just based in a space but also oriented toward it, engaging explicitly with local grievances and identities and striving to achieve some local social change – "the local" is what they are primarily about.

**Spectrum of ideological commitment:** the disaggregated analysis of the strength of commitment of the main factions and figures to their movement's professed ideology, with implications on whether they will try to steer the movement toward or away from ideology.

**Stronghold of contention:** a space characterized by its propensity to nurture frequent and sustained episodes of collective action across time.

**Subaltern Islamism:** the readiness and ability of some Islamist movements to court a subaltern base by providing the dominated sections of society with a conduit for their revolt against power structures and by ushering in a new social order in which they grow dominant.

**Sufi jihadism:** a politically revolutionary and socially conservative breed of Sufism whose millenarian religious prophecies can pave the way for the spread of militant Sufi movements.

**Sunni Khomeinism:** a current within Sunni Islamism which advocates for the embrace of the Iranian model; that is, supports the overthrow of secular regimes and their replacements by Islamic Republics featuring clerical guidance over politics and backs Iran's post-1979 anti-imperialist foreign policy and bid for regional leadership (e.g. Palestinian Islamic Jihad).

**Tales of contention:** narratives putting forward a history of shared struggles and associating a community with a glorified tradition of rebellion which, when revived, help movements signal rootedness, activate local identities and cast activism as a duty in line with local culture.

**Vernacular ideology:** the transmission of a grand beliefs system in the local language of the grievances, identities or cultural and historical narratives which are all specific to a place.

**Vernacular Islamism:** an Islamist discourse cast in and shaped by a local cultural backdrop.



## Note on Transliteration

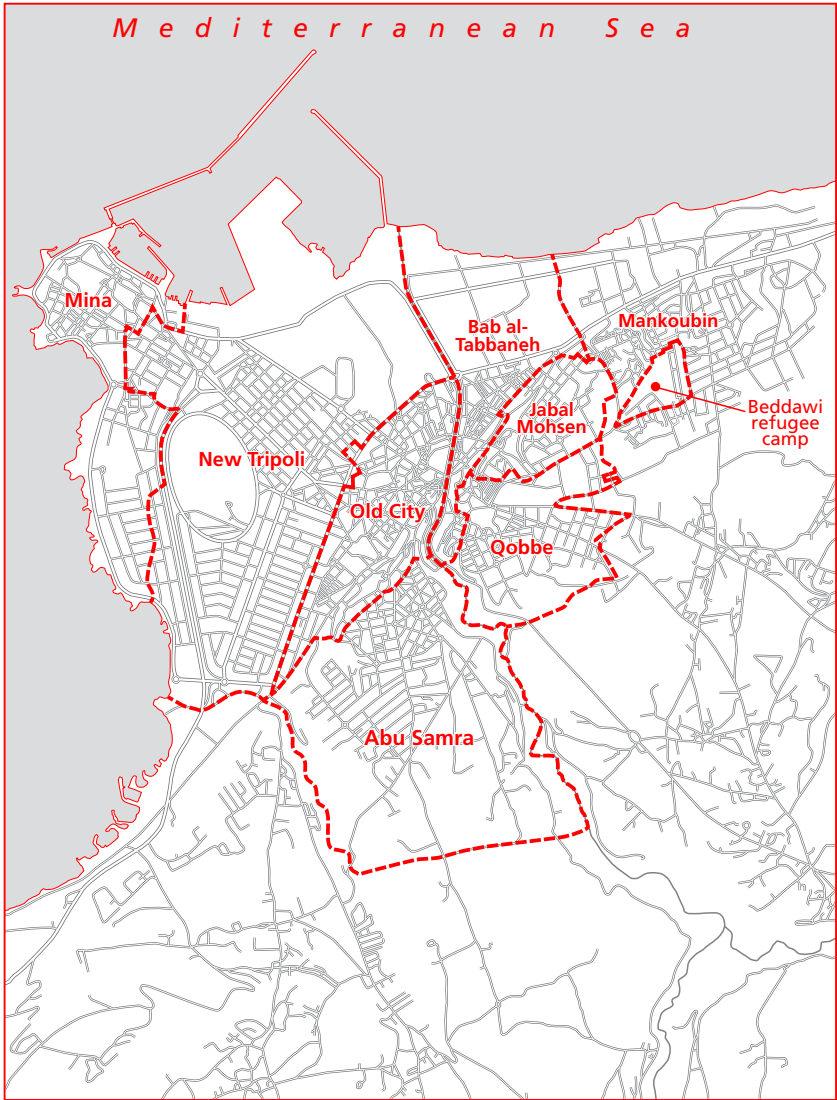
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I have used an extremely simplified system of transliteration from the Arabic. I base my transliteration on the guidelines of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, for instance using the diacritic ' for the glottal stop *hamza* and ʿ for the consonant *ayn*. But, to facilitate reading, I have not transliterated the *ayn* when it features at the beginning of a word (e.g. I write Ali Eid instead of ʿAli ʿEid or Akkawi instead of ʿAkkawi); I have foregone bars and dots above and below the letters and I have kept the spelling of words which have long been transliterated into English in a certain way and have therefore acquired wide recognition that way, even if their spelling is not fully accurate (e.g. Rashid Karame instead of Rashid Karami, Hezbollah instead of Hizbullah, or the Beqaa Valley instead of the Biqʿa).

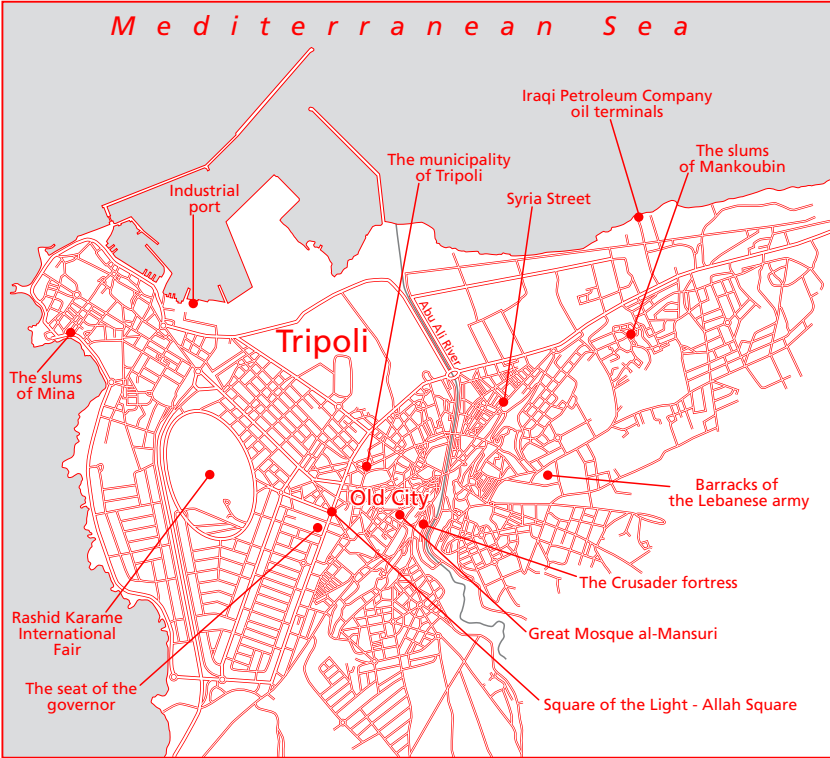
## Maps



1 Map of Lebanon and Syria.



2 Neighborhoods of Tripoli.



3 Main sites of Tripoli.