PREFACE

THIS BOOK IS A MODEST RESPONSE to a great anxiety of our time—the global march of "Muslim rage." It examines the contemporary struggles within and on behalf of Islam by exploring the relationship between religion and societal trends and movements. As a point of departure, I interrogate the infamous question of "whether Islam is compatible with democracy" by demonstrating that the realization of democratic ideals in Muslim societies has less to do with the "essence" of Islam than with the intellectual conviction and political capacity of Muslims. For it is individuals, groups, and movements who give meaning to "sacred" injunctions; the disposition of a faith, whether tolerant or repressive, democratic or authoritarian, is determined primarily by the attributes of the faithful. The question of democratic polity is then one of political struggle rather than religious scripture, even though religion is often deployed to legitimize or to resist political domination.

Focusing on the Muslim Middle East, the book explores the struggles of multiple movements, movements that construe religion to unleash social and political change, to legitimize authoritarian rule, or, in contrast, to construct an inclusive faith that embraces democratic polity. By contrasting histories of religious politics in Iran and Egypt over the past three decades, my goal is to demonstrate in detail how and under what conditions specific societal movements may, or may not, be able to render Islam to embrace a democratic ethos.

In 1979, Iran experienced the first "Islamic revolution" in modern times, spearheading a global movement currently described as the "age of Islam."

Yet it is also an Islamic republic entangled in a profound identity crisis and has been struggling to transcend its legacy in a bid for a "post-Islamist" order. Egypt, on the other hand, has been home not to an Islamic revolution, but to the oldest Islamic social movement in the Muslim world, one that, since the 1980s, has left an enduring imprint on society, polity, culture, and international relations. I examine these processes within the historical period between the late 1970s, when new Islamist movements rapidly proliferated, and 2005, when Iran's reformists lost the Parliament and the presidency to the conservative Islamists and when Egypt's "reform initiative" from above seemed to stagnate while a nascent democracy movement heralded a new turn in Egypt's political and religious landscape.

I have written this book with an odd sense of obligation to narrate the tale of two lands where I grew up, lived, and have worked, and whose cultures and peoples I deeply internalized. I was born in and studied in Iran through my early adult life in the late 1970s. As the revolution unfolded, I, like so many others, became deeply involved, not as an observer but primarily as a participant. The revolution had become an all-embracing obsession, the subject of unending discussions, arguments, and anguish; a source of profound happiness and enduring despair. In the turbulent years of the early 1980s, almost every Iranian was a participant, either for or against or somewhere in between. Few took the time to reflect, to place the events in scholarly perspective. It is not surprising, then, how few memoirs, diaries, or even simple descriptions of intimate moments, events, and moods are available from those early revolutionary years, other than some that have appeared very recently in the West. It is as though everyone was there to change things, with little time to interpret them. It wasn't until the 1990s that I consciously decided to merely observe—to record, narrate, and analyze rather than participate. Consequently when the dramatic social and discursive change of Iran's postwar years culminated in the reform government of 1997, I knew I wanted to write this book.

During the years when I followed Iran's postrevolutionary developments with great passion, I happened to reside in Egypt, a land of remarkable people, culture, and history, where I had moved in the late 1980s. My initial two-year appointment at the American University in Cairo entailed a long-term and profoundly rich experience of living, working and researching in contemporary Egypt, while traveling between Cairo and Tehran. Egypt, notwithstanding its enormous problems of poverty and pollution, captivated me. Like Iran, it became part of my intellectual and political conscience. Happy for its

achievements and worried by its misfortunes, I could not help caring about it. Thus what follows is more than a benign scholarly treatment. It reflects an intense association with these lands and their people. In writing this book, I have not forsaken my scholarly voice, but traces of sentiment—admiration as well as irritation—have been unavoidable.

As a social scientist, I favor scholarship that not only produces nuance as well as intimate and empirical knowledge about the geographical areas of our inquiry, but also contributes to the central domain of our profession, social theory. At the same time, I have taken seriously the observations of colleagues that many of us scholars "are accustomed to writing to one another" rather than to the general public. So, reacting to a great "anxiety of our time," I have tried to write in an idiom and a style that is accessible to educated lay readers and to the public at large. I do hope, however, that this book also says something worthwhile to professional colleagues, members of scholarly communities, and policy makers.

This book is a historical sociological text grounded in a *broad* comparative vision. I use comparison not for its own sake, but as a methodological enterprise necessary to address specific analytical questions. The logic of comparison follows the imperative of responding to our central research inquiry, which in turn determines which aspects of the comparable cases need or need not be considered. Because a tight, detailed, and integrated comparison would upset the integrity and flow of historical narratives and deprive the reader of the historical flow in each country, I have refrained from pairing every aspect of the countries under study in a detailed fashion. A more integrated comparison was possible for Chapter Two, but not for the subsequent three chapters, whose history has been written in much greater detail. In short, my aim is to examine Islamism and post-Islamism in Iran and Egypt within a broad comparative framework as a means of addressing the central questions of this book, while also maintaining the integrity and flow of the historical accounts unique to each experience. Tackling the relationship between Islam and democracy both demands and offers an opportunity to narrate histories of social movements and Islam in Iran and Egypt over the past three decades.

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Over the many years spent working on this book, I have gained significantly from the intellectual assistance and practical guidance of so many friends, colleagues, students, and institutions that I regretfully cannot acknowledge

them all within the limits of these pages. Yet I must mention some. I am grateful to my colleagues and to staff members in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the American University in Cairo (AUC) for providing a congenial work environment in which to conduct my research in Egypt, Iran, and neighboring countries. It was at AUC that I grew and matured in my professional life over some sixteen years. I hope that I also made some contribution to this institution and to Egypt at large. Numerous students and research assistants were a source of inspiration and knowledge. They are too many to name individually, but I wish to record my appreciation of their friendship and kindness.

Inspiration did not come only from within academia, but especially from outside, in the complex and colorful Egyptian society. Without the trust and intellectual exchange provided by numerous Egyptian NGOs, Islamists, women's groups, youth centers, and ordinary people in poor neighborhoods, this book could not have taken its present shape. I extend this acknowledgment equally to similar institutions and constituencies in Iran—colleges, neighborhoods, libraries, civil society institutions, researchers, young persons, and especially ordinary Iranians. I am thankful to them all.

I wrote much of the manuscript during a year at the Middle East Center of Oxford University's St. Antony's College. In addition, the University of California, Berkeley, has generously offered working space during summer terms. I wish to extend my gratitude to friends and colleagues Professors Sami Zubaida, Khaled Fahmi, Shahnaz Rouse, and Richard Bulliet, as well as to the anonymous reviewers for Stanford University Press who read the manuscript and provided very constructive comments. I owe a great deal to Kaveh Ehsani, an astute observer of contemporary Iran, for his critical reading and informed comments. Mohamed Waked, Annelies Moors, Joe Stork, Kamran Ali, Dennis Janssen, Shahrzad Mojab, Eric Denis, and Lee Gillette helped in different ways, by reading, lending, and editing. I thank them all. My new appointment has landed me in the Netherlands, at the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) and Leiden University. It was in Leiden that the book eventually came to a conclusion; I thank all my ISIM colleagues and the staff for their enthusiasm and support. I am grateful to the journal *Comparative Studies in Society and History* for allowing me to reprint "Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution" here; it appeared in that journal under the same title (vol. 40, no. 1 (1998): 136–69). In addition, a significant part of the section "Post-Islamist Women's Movement,"

in Chapter Three, draws on my article "A Women's Non-Movement: What It Means to Be a Woman Activist in an Islamic State," published in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2007).

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