1 Introduction: Social Movements in the Contemporary Near and Middle East

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The essays presented in this volume focus on the endogenous factors in the emergence and growth of social movements in the contemporary Near and Middle East. The broader context of the incorporation of the Middle East into the world economic system and, more recently, the increasing importance of the region in world politics are taken for granted and not subjected to analysis. Of the variety of contemporary social movements considered by the participants, those whose driving force was nationalism or Islam emerged as the most important and effective. Furthermore, a pattern of the declining significance of nationalism and the concomitant shift to Islam as the focus of the popular movements during the last two decades emerged with clarity. This shift from nationalism to revolutionary Islam thus appeared as the most appropriate thematic principle for the selection of the case-studies. However, no attempt was made to impose a single explanatory framework throughout the volume. The contributors, representing a variety of disciplines and theoretical and methodological orientations, have in fact followed differing approaches to the problem.

CULTURE, COLLECTIVE IDENTITY, IDEOLOGY AND ORGANISATION

National integration constitutes the socio-historical context of the movements studied in this volume. ‘The integrative revolution’, to use
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Geertz's felicitous phrase (Geertz, 1963), has deeply affected the Near and Middle East in the twentieth century as it has the rest of the world. Its period of inception, pace and continuity or disruptiveness have differed considerably from country to country but its varying impact is by now felt throughout the region. In the process of national integration, politics inevitably become public: urbanisation and the increasing integration of the rural periphery into a national economy, the spread of literacy and higher education results in the considerable enlargement, if not the creation, of a public sphere. There is a great increase in popular political awareness and the masses – especially the urban masses – are, in one form or another, integrated into political society. National integration intensifies the need for 'a cognitive and moral map of the universe' (Shils, 1972), and gives birth to modern political ideologies. More fundamentally, it necessitates drastic changes in the cultural context of all socio-political activity. Politico-cultural movements seeking to disseminate a sense of collective identity and a corresponding form of consciousness, and/or espousing political ideologies are thus set in motion.¹

The social movements studied in this volume, with one exception, fall into the category of 'general social movements' – movements, that is, which aim at arousing and disseminating a new consciousness (Blumer, 1939; Wilson, 1973, p. 12).² They are akin to the classical type of broad politico-cultural movements such as nationalism, liberalism, socialism, communism and fascism which are characteristic of the comparable stage of national integration in the West and which constitute the subject matter of Heberle's important early study, Social Movements: An Introduction to Political Sociology (1951). Although the more limited or 'specific' social movements of the variety currently under study by most American sociologists (Marx and Wood, 1975) are not entirely absent in the Middle East, they are relatively insignificant.³

It is not difficult to explain this fact. The differentiation of the social structure and the degree of institutional political pluralism is not such as to allow the mobilisation of a substantial segment of the population for a considerable length of time on the basis of a specific issue brought into relief against the background of a consensual normative order. The structural and organisational obstacles to the generation of concerted socio-political action are such that, as a rule, they can be overcome either by an appeal to the most general and broadest principles, or not at all.

An important feature of the social movements in the contemporary Middle East derives from the less differentiated social organisation of