



Both Eastern and Western

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, many observers of Iran have seen the country caught between its “Eastern” or Islamic history and “Western” modernity, between religion and secularity. As a result, intellectual histories of modern Iran have become subsumed by this narrative. Here, Afshin Matin-Asgari proposes a revisionist work of intellectual history, challenging many of the dominant paradigms in Iranian and Middle Eastern historiography and offering a new narration. In charting the intellectual construction of Iranian modernity during the twentieth century, Matin-Asgari focuses on broad patterns of influential ideas and their relation to each other. More than all previous studies, he analyses these intellectual trends in their global context, showing how Iranian modernity has been shaped by at least a century of intense interaction with global ideologies. Turning many prevailing narratives on their heads, the author concludes that modern Iran can be seen, culturally and intellectually, as both Eastern and Western.

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Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-42853-8 — Both Eastern and Western
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Frontmatter
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An Intellectual History of Iranian Modernity

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CAMBRIDGE
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108428538

DOI: 10.1017/9781108552844

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First published 2018

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Names: Matin-Asgari, Afshin, 1955– author.

Title: Both Eastern and Western : an intellectual history of Iranian modernity / Afshin Matin-Asgari.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom : Cambridge University Press, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017061803 | ISBN 9781108428538 (alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Iran – Intellectual life – 20th century. | Iran – Intellectual life – 21st century. | Political science – Iran – Philosophy. | Islam and politics – Iran. | Iran – History – 1979–1997. | Iran – History – 1997– | Iran – History – Historiography. | East and West.

Classification: LCC DS266 .M378 2018 | DDC 955.05/4–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017061803>

ISBN 978-1-108-42853-8 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-44997-7 Paperback

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To Jasi and Sofi

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Acknowledgments

My acknowledgments must begin with remembering the book's inspiration, twentieth-century Iranian intellectuals, particularly those dedicated or "committed" to social justice and the public good. The book's cover image thus remembers one such individual, Bizhan Jazani. Titled "Siahkal," it is the most famous of his prison paintings, depicting the launch of Marxist guerrilla armed struggle in the Siahkal forests of northern Iran. While the painting shows cubist and surrealist influences, the right arm and its glaring eye obviously nod to the traditional imagery of Shi'i Islam. Jazani's painting thus captures the book's theme of modernist intellectual eclecticism in artistic production.

This book took many years to finish, mostly because I work at a public university with heavy teaching responsibilities and little support for research and writing. Its genesis is owed to Hamid Dabashi, who first encouraged me to expand a paper on the intellectual impact of French Orientalist Henry Corbin on Iran into a short book. Writing that small book turned into a long and laborious project leading to a larger and very different manuscript, which was eventually submitted to Cambridge University Press at the suggestion of its Middle East and Africa editor, Maria Marsh. My second debt of gratitude therefore is owed to Maria, whose unassuming professionalism and keen understanding of global intellectual history guided this book to completion. I am also indebted to the Cambridge University Press production team, particularly Julie Hrischeva, Abigail Walkington and Allan Alphonse, as well as to the anonymous readers whose comments and criticism improved my manuscript significantly. My good friends and academic colleagues, Mehrdad Amanat, Maziar Behrooz, Hourii Berberian, Shahrokh Haghighi, Mojtava Mahdavi, Rudi Matthee and Peyman Vahabzadeh, read and commented on different chapters. I thank them all, as well as the following colleagues, friends and family members with whom I discussed my

Acknowledgments

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book's topics and/or who helped me find and collect source material in Los Angeles, Toronto and Tehran: Choi Chatterjee, Sasan Fayazmanesh, Afsaneh Matin, Kamran Matin, Mani Matin-Asgari, Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi, Mehrdad Samadzadeh, Vida Samian and Scott Wells. Last but not least, Shahrouz Khalifian also belongs to the above list, but I owe him special thanks for his painstaking indexing of the book.

I dedicate this book to Jasi and Sofi, whose invaluable support made its writing possible, with the regretful acknowledgment of how much it took away from our time together.

Note on Translation and Transliteration

Unless a translator is cited, all translations from Persian sources are mine. My text mostly follows a modified version of Persian transliteration systems in *Iranian Studies* and the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. However, I have simplified their common rules, while striving for closer proximity of actual Persian pronunciations using the English alphabet. As much as possible, I have dropped diacritical marks and rendered the Persian *ezafeh* as *e* or *ye* sound attached at the end of words. For example, I use Al-Ahmad, rather than Al-e Ahmad, and Shariati, rather than Shari'ati.