

PREFACE

This book is the product of a long and winding journey. I first began thinking and writing about regime guardianship in Iran and Turkey in late 2009. I had just started my PhD studies at the London School of Economics. In Turkey, the power struggle between the ‘Kemalist establishment’ (i.e. the secular nationalist military and senior bureaucracy) and the AKP government had taken a critical turn following the launch of the Ergenekon court case. The investigation and the trial divided observers and scholars of Turkey, as well as the wider public, on whether they represented a watershed moment in the country’s struggle for democracy and fight against ‘the deep state’ or a judicial coup and power grab by the ruling Islamists and their allies, a divide that would only deepen in the following years. That was the same year when Iran’s own century-long struggle for democracy, and the more recent fight between the supporters and opponents of reform, had reached a bloody turning point. I first visited Iran in the summer of 2009 and was struck by the palpable atmosphere of anxiety, frustration and paranoia that seemed to have pervaded its urban middle class in the immediate aftermath of the bloody crackdown of mass protests against election manipulation and the suppression of the Green Movement by the guardians of the Islamic Republic.

I was also struck by the prominence of the themes of tutelage (*vesayet* in Turkish and *velayat* in Persian), the deep state, democracy and reform in the public discourses and debates, as well as private conversations, in both

countries. Few seemed to have noticed this similarity and even fewer made an effort to make sense of it in a scholarly fashion. As I discovered, there was limited contact between scholars of modern Turkey and modern Iran, both within these countries and in English-speaking academia. In the field of comparative politics, the political systems of Turkey and the Islamic Republic were considered simply too different or inimical to merit serious comparison. I thought that the secular versus Islamic or the Sunni versus Shi'a binaries were not only overly simplistic, but that they also concealed an underlying similarity, namely the ideas and institutions of guardianship, around which much of politics in Iran and Turkey revolved at the time. Furthermore, I saw in the emerging literature on hybrid regimes a conceptual framework to ground the comparison, and in turn an opportunity to contribute to that growing literature.

An immediate obstacle I faced as I set out for research was access to resources. Few researchers, myself included, worked with both Turkish and Persian-language sources. To this end, I took Persian courses at SOAS and spent part of 2010 studying the language at the University of Isfahan. I returned to Iran periodically afterwards for research and travel. Although my Persian never reached the level of my English or native Turkish, I was surprised by how quickly I became proficient in it, both in conversation and in reading newspapers and following the news, thanks in large part to the shared cultural and linguistic heritage between Turkish and Persian.

History seems to have accelerated in the 2010s, when transformative events that shook the world and the region also shaped my personal and intellectual trajectory. The 'Arab Spring' uprisings and their bloody aftermath, and in particular the Gezi movement of 2013, which I was actively and enthusiastically engaged in, were the genesis of this personal transformation. After finishing my PhD in 2014, like many young academics and activists involved in Turkey's democratic struggles, I committed myself almost exclusively to making sense of, resisting and contending with the country's deep dive into conflict, violence and authoritarianism. This was a time when, to paraphrase novelist Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Turkey truly did not allow its children to be occupied with anything other than itself. My academic production during my post-doctoral fellowship in Modern Turkey Studies at the University of Graz reflected this focus and urgency. I postponed turning

the dissertation into a book and gradually drifted away from Iran academically, although never losing sight of it personally or politically.

I picked up the book project again only in late 2018. By then I was married, living in Brazil, and had just started a two-year visiting fellowship at the Institute of International Relations, University of São Paulo, still doing research on democratisation, autocratisation and tutelage, with a growing focus on Latin America, particularly Brazil. The revision of the text took place in fits and starts – periods of productivity punctured by other professional commitments and major life events, namely the birth of our daughter Yasmin, the Covid-19 pandemic and the decision to move back to the United Kingdom in 2021. Every time I returned to the manuscript, I saw it in a different and more critical light against the backdrop of fast-paced global and personal transformation, which led to moments of self-doubt and hesitation. I could not have overcome these without the patience of my editors at Edinburgh University Press and their confidence in this project, the encouragement and guidance of many a close friend and colleague and the unwavering support of my partner, Izabela, and parents, Pınar and Ali Cevat, all of whom I owe an enormous debt of gratitude.

The present monograph contains traces of every step taken on this winding path since 2009. It also draws from my more recent publications, from conversations with colleagues and students, and from the courses I taught in Graz, São Paulo and London on the history of modern Turkey, the politics of the Middle East, international development, comparative politics and social science research. I believe that the final product, albeit far from perfect, is a balanced synthesis of these different insights and experiences. As I write this in my office at SOAS, fourteen years after sitting in my first Persian class in the same institution, there is still a dearth of comparative research on the politics of modern Iran and Turkey, and as far as I am aware, no comprehensive study of their tutelary politics. Let us hope, then, that this book serves as a beginning and inspiration for further conversation and deeper research on the subject.

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For Yasmin and Izabela