CHAPTER 1

# Creating an Object

*Elementary education is one of the pillars of national security.*
Husayn Kamal Baha' al-Din, Egyptian
minister of education, 1993[1]

## An Alexandria Quartet

In the early morning hours of Tuesday, 29 August 1989, agents of the Egyptian Bureau for National Security Investigation stormed four apartments in Alexandria, breaking down the doors to arrest twenty young men and take into custody eighty boys between the ages of four and ten. The men, among whom were two university and two law students, a private school teacher, a student of *da'wa* (Islamic outreach) at al-Azhar University, and an employee of the Helwan Fertilizer Company, were accused of "enticing the children with religious slogans and planting extremist ideas in their minds in preparation for transforming them into an extremist religious group."[2] After initial interrogations the arrestees were driven to bureau headquarters in their respective governorates to be questioned further and then remanded to the national security prosecutor, and the children were ordered by then Interior Minister Zaki Badr to be returned to their parents.

On 31 August the story was front-page news in the government press: *al-Akhbar* headlined the story, "Arrest of an Extremist Religious Organization Aimed at Luring in Children under the Guise of Religion." *Al-Jumhuriyya* ran a photograph of six of the accused, standing with eighteen of the boys sitting on the floor before them. Six of the boys had

their heads bowed and faces covered in shame, and the headline read, "Arrest of an Organization for Training Children in Extremism at Summer Camps in Alexandria." The next day *al-Akhbar* ran another photograph showing Colonel Muhammad Rashid, chief of the Bureau, returning two of the boys to their father and "warning him not to neglect his sons at this age."[3]

The incident had begun the previous week when children and parents in a number of governorates, particularly Minufiyya, Alexandria, and Giza, began to hear about free four-day trips being organized for children to see the sights of Alexandria starting on Saturday, 26 August. Parents outside Alexandria were approached in mosques and asked to contribute nominal subscription fees (of ten Egyptian pounds; about $4) for the trip. One boy from Alexandria itself heard about the opportunity from some boys he met at the beach; another from neighbor children he met near his local mosque; a third was invited by the principal of his elementary school. Some of the local children went along not knowing the duration of the trip, and began to worry when, at the end of the day, they were not returned home, but taken to one of the apartments instead.

After the arrests the children reported that during their stay in the Alexandria apartments they were awakened before the dawn prayer each day to learn lessons, then taken to the beach for a couple of hours before returning to one of the flats. There they would be fed, and the rest of the day would be divided between lessons, prayers, and sightseeing trips, including an excursion to the historic fort of Qaytbay. The lessons they learned included the principles of brotherhood and obedience, as well as more specific advice. One eleven-year-old boy reported to *al-Akhbar* that "the organizers of the trip accompanied him and the children to a number of mosques where they gave lectures to them along with other people, and they told them that watching television was forbidden [*haram*] and that men's socks have to reach to the knee, and he adds that he heard a lot of talk that he didn't understand."[4]

The tone of the newspaper articles was strident, *al-Ahram* reporting that the "extremist organization" intended "to establish a new generation bearing their beliefs" and that children who disagreed with the daily lessons were deprived of food; *al-Jumhuriyya*, on the other hand wrote that the organizers of the trip showered the children with food "in order to win them over, offering them [all] kinds of sweets and beverages." The latter paper claimed that the frequent prayer sessions were "all aimed at implanting blind obedience in their psyches, and they slipped the

extremist ideas inside of them until within a few short hours of their being given their instructions, the child victims (*al-atfal al-dahaya*) would carry them out with obedience." It pointed to leaders of an unnamed organization behind the accused, who allegedly put the young men up to the task of enticing the children's participation.[5]

Reaction to the arrests by Egypt's major Islamic opposition party was swift. Shortly afterward, Ma'mun al-Hudaybi, Mustafa al-Wardani, and Dr. 'Asam al-'Uryan, three leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, issued a statement accusing the security forces of brutality during the arrests and calling on President Mubarak to step in and halt the irresponsible persecution of the detainees. The Brotherhood regularly organized recreational trips for the nation's children, the report said, removing them from the suffocation and heat of inner cities to the healthful climate of the seashore, where they learn Islamic *adab* (manners, etiquette, comportment, culture). Furthermore, parents had consented to the trips and "clearly expressed their hopes that this activity would protect their children from the diseases of society, such as [drug] addiction and moral corruption." It accused the government press of merely reprinting a report distributed by the Ministry of the Interior the day after the arrests, and asked where in the entire episode was there any manifestation of extremism: "The trip to the sea, or visiting the sights in Alexandria? The diligence of prayer, or the continence of tongue and comportment? Or that these children constitute a danger to public security through their trip?"[6]

The arrests and subsequent publicity were intended to make a dramatic and frightening statement to Egyptians about the danger of parents entrusting their children to unregulated organizations and individuals, and to underscore the government's self-assumed role of protecting the spiritual and physical well-being of the nation's children. The dual weapons of state power—the deployment of force and the deployment of information—worked in tandem to frame the incident as a threat both to the family and to the government. Groups claiming independent authority to interpret Islamic scriptures and transmit Islamic culture undermine one of the basic foundations of the state's moral legitimacy: its protection of the Islamic heritage, including the responsibility to provide children and youths with trustworthy religious guidance. Islam, the official religion of the Egyptian state, is a matter of vital government interest.

These twin issues of religious legitimacy and political authority are at the heart of a dilemma faced today by Muslim states throughout the

world. As international political credibility comes more and more to be measured by the extension of public services and the trappings of electoral democracy, the tensions between mass sentiment and incumbent power structures become acute, as the government of Algeria learned in early 1992 when it was dissolved by its own military in the face of a threatened electoral victory by the Islamic Salvation Front. Egypt could very well be next in line to experience a political and military crisis on the same order. An unusually gloomy prognosis of this sort recently found its way into the policy-oriented *Middle East Journal*, penned by a U.S. government official who would only be identified with the frightening byline "Cassandra."[7] In the academic world, too, senior scholars are beginning to say publicly "that the future of the Muslim world lies with the Islamic political alternative."[8]

Our tendency in the face of such drama is to perceive a civilizational crisis arising from a fundamental conflict between democracy and theocracy, or between tradition and modernity. But such an analysis, specious in the case of Algiers, is useless even superficially in the case of Alexandria. For it is precisely Egypt's integration into the modern — or postmodern — world system of economy, politics, and culture that has secured for Islam an integral part in the governance of the nation. In Egypt as elsewhere in the Muslim world, the connections between religion and national security descend deep into the infrastructure of the modern state. The consequences of this fact for the limits of public policy choices and for the production and manipulation of religious culture are to be our central concern.

In a narrow sense, this book is about one aspect of Egyptian religious culture as it has developed since just before the turn of the century: the use of a modern public school system to teach children about Islam and introduce them to the official public persona of God. In documenting the role of the contemporary school in teaching Islam, I hope to show how the expansion and transfer of religious socialization from private to newly created public sector institutions over the last century has led to a comprehensive revision of the way Egyptians treat Islam as a religious tradition, and consequently of Islam's role in Egyptian society. In the light of this revision, I will argue that the increasing hegemony of religious discourse in Egyptian public life since the 1970s is a straightforward result of the country's institutional transformation rather than — as is usually argued — an accidental by-product of its current economic and political difficulties. As part of this institutional transformation, programs of mass public instruction conceived in the

nineteenth century as cost-efficient means of social control have instead helped generate the intellectual, political, and social challenges posed by the country's broad-based "Islamist" movement, the most significant political opposition to the current Egyptian government.

## The Anthropology of Islam

These institutional transformations have implications far broader than the sociology of religious knowledge or political conflict in Egypt. The present study occupies a space where three distinct bodies of literature converge. Its conclusions reflect back into those literatures — that on the anthropology of Islam, that on cultural and social reproduction, and that on the intellectual history of the social sciences — in different directions. First, I hope to contribute to current discussions of the role of Islam as an organizing force in Muslim societies. Talal Asad, voicing his discontent with anthropological approaches that either essentialize or disintegrate "Islam" as an object of study, has held that scholars should treat Islam "neither [as] a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals," but as a tradition.[9] If anthropological studies of Islam are to avoid the pitfalls of treating religious phenomena either as wholly dependent (and therefore politically trivial) or entirely independent (and therefore incomprehensible) variables in the social life of Muslim nations, we need to recognize Islam as a discursive tradition that links past, present, and future in a variety of ways.[10] Seen in this light, the focus of study should be "the interplay between . . . everyday practices and discourses and the religious texts they invoke, the histories of which they are a part, and the political enterprises of which they partake."[11]

Introducing this sense of the term *tradition* to anthropological discussion does more than merely translate the Arabic term *al-turath*, which is used by Muslims to designate the complex heritage they have inherited from the past and are bound to pass on to the future. It points not to a body of literature, but to culturally and historically specific systems of interactions between people, texts, and institutions. Asad points out that social distributions of "correct" knowledge mirror distributions of power. Regardless of how a Muslim society is organized, the definition of what is and is not "Islamic" is likely not to be about how closely society mirrors a known textual blueprint, but about how and by whom

specific texts are used to underwrite specific practices and general notions of authority. Orthodoxy "is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship — a relationship of power. Wherever Muslims have the power to regulate, uphold, require or adjust *correct* practices, and to condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace *incorrect* ones, there is the domain of orthodoxy"[12]

Phrased in a different manner, its ear attuned specifically to the deep, pervading vibrations of power, this is basically the dialectic Clifford Geertz began to articulate a quarter-century ago in *Islam Observed*, between the content of religions and their careers, a dialectic that is currently becoming the focus of increasingly sophisticated anthropological analyses of the human mediation between images and institutions. From Morocco to Indonesia, anthropologists have documented the disputes that arise between Muslims who stand in different relationships to institutions of power and of formal socialization. Framed by recent anthropological research on religious education and politics in countries from Morocco to Oman and Iran, and on textual practices in Yemen, Indonesia, and the Philippines, this book seeks to advance our understanding of religious traditions in complex societies.[13] By focusing explicitly on state-supported mass education, one of the institutions that most powerfully shapes the interplay between written tradition and daily practice, the present research outlines some of the mechanisms by which Islam's universal message is consciously and strategically articulated to local social, political, and economic structures.

Similar social and political projects are underway across the Muslim world. Like Turkey, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia,[14] the Egyptian government has brought Islamic institutions increasingly under its control over the last century, a process that has accelerated during the last twenty years. All three of its twentieth-century constitutions have declared Islam Egypt's official religion, granting the state both the right and the duty to co-opt Islamic discourse for itself, a practice made particularly expedient in the face of mass movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, which has been a political force in the country since 1928, as well as the more recent Islamist guerrilla movements of the seventies, eighties, and nineties.

But just as wild plants have to undergo systematic genetic alterations to make them useful as cultivated foods, so "Islam" has to be altered to make it useful as a political instrument. Two interrelated processes have been operating throughout the Muslim world thus to domesticate the tradition of Islam. First, there is the process of "objectification," the

growing consciousness on the part of Muslims that Islam is a coherent system of practices and beliefs, rather than merely an unexamined and unexaminable way of life. This is a pervasive process throughout the Muslim world. In Oman, a rural schoolteacher observes that "People here do not know Islam; they pray and sacrifice, but they do not know why."[15] "Knowing" Islam means being able to articulate the religion as a defined set of beliefs such as those set down in textbook presentations.

> At its most basic, the style of intellectual technology introduced by modern schooling constitutes a significant break with the earlier emphasis upon the written word, mediated by an oral tradition and oriented toward a mastery of accepted religious texts acquired through study under religious scholars recognized by the wider community. At least in formal terms, a curriculum of specifically delineated subjects and prescribed texts is taught by a changing array of teachers, and competence is measured by examination. . . . An unintended consequence of making Islam a part of the curriculum is to make it a subject which must be "explained" and "understood."[16]

Since mass education has been available in Oman only since the 1970s, this change in the perception of Islam is striking, and matches changes that have been occurring in Egypt since the nineteenth century. In both countries official educational programs aimed at the general public purposely ignore differences among various sects and schools of legal interpretation in Islam, portraying the faith synoptically. A new plan for teaching religion in Egyptian universities, for example, stresses the application of dogma to life and to social conditions, "avoiding the legal school [*madhhab*] differences in the study of doctrine and Islamic law [*shari'a*]."[17] As Brinkley Messick has shown with respect to Yemen, the codification of Islamic law for application in Western-style court systems induces a comparable series of changes in the way that politicians, scholars, jurists, and citizens relate to different sorts of sacred and derivative texts. The result is monovocal, reified "Islamic Law" that lacks the flexibility characteristic of older styles of jurisprudence.[18]

The second process through which the Islamic tradition is passing operates on several levels, and serves to make the newly synoptic and systematized "Islam" practically useful. I call this process *functionalization*. In general, functionalization refers to processes of translation in which intellectual objects from one discourse come to serve the strategic or utilitarian ends of another discourse. This translation not only places intellectual objects in new fields of significance, but radically shifts the meaning of their initial context. In the Egyptian case, a whole series of

existing religious discourses have been reified, systematized in novel fashion, and set to work fulfilling the strategic and utilitarian ends of the modern and secular discourse of public policy. Traditions, customs, beliefs, institutions, and values that originally possessed their own evaluative criteria and their own rules of operation and mobilization become consciously subsumed by modern-educated elites to the evaluative criteria of social and political utility. On an institutional level, independent local religious study circles are brought under the control of central or district government bureaucracies to act as tools of mass socialization. On a logistical level, formal religious studies curricula are fashioned by educators, and formal testing patrols the borders of class mobility. On a philosophical level, ancient rituals and beliefs as well as the facts of history are reinterpreted to underscore political legitimacy, or are brought to bear on social concerns like public health, economic productivity, and crime. In all of these processes, existing discursive logics are altered and control is shifted to a central authority or entrusted to groups other than those who traditionally set the terms of religious discourse.

The functionalization of religion — putting it consciously to work for various types of social and political projects — appears to stand opposed to the modernization paradigm in which religion is viewed alternately as benignly irrational and as actively obstructionist. The ideals of Soviet-style state atheism and the American separation of church and state — as internally complex and unstable as both rhetorical complexes have been — are merely different expressions of the same philosophy of progress, the Comtean journey from Religion through Metaphysics to Science. But many Muslim states have followed a different course to modernity, insisting explicitly that progress requires a centrally administered emphasis upon moral as well as economic development.

## Cultural Production and Social Reproduction

What significance do these processes have for understanding broader anthropological questions? In writing about Islamic higher education in Morocco, Dale Eickelman has remarked that "the study of education can be to complex societies what the study of religion has been to societies variously characterized by anthropologists as 'simple,' 'cold' or 'elementary,' "particularly insofar as this study can reveal some

of the "culturally valued cognitive style[s]" implicit in these cultures.[19] But neither "cold" ritual nor "hot" education is merely a window onto thought and ideas. Summarizing one of Emile Durkheim's lesser-known works on education, Eickelman wrote that

> changes in ideas of knowledge in complex societies and the means by which such ideas are transmitted result from continual struggles among competing groups within society, each of which seeks domination or influence. . . . Thus the forms of knowledge shaped and conveyed in educational systems . . . must be considered in relation to the social distribution of power.[20]

Explorations of the institutional intersections between knowledge and power have long motivated European social theory, from Marx's discussion of "ruling ideas" to Althusser on the ideological state apparatus, Gramsci on hegemony, Foucault on disciplinary formation, and Raymond Williams on the politics of culture. With respect to formal education, it is undoubtedly true that different interests are served — and created — by particular curricula and by different definitions and technologies of useful knowledge. But class-based models are inadequate to deal fully with the political and ideological implications of modern educational systems, because these systems continuously erase and redraw the boundaries between social groups and disrupt the association between them and the "ideas about knowledge" they seek to promote.[21] New modes of thought emerging from nascent classes and social institutions not only express new modes of consciousness, but contribute in turn to the formation of new structures of interest and conflict, perpetuating the struggles that gave them birth and subverting subsequent attempts unilaterally to control the course of debate. One of the central conclusions of this book is that elites can profit from the manipulation of power/knowledge only insofar as they create competitors possessing the tools of opposition. (Such problems are increasingly familiar, for example, to the U.S. military, whose development of computer and communications systems — intended to create strategic superiority over its superpower rivals — now puts it at risk from bright teenagers with home computers and Internet connections.) Educational systems thus have a direct political role in creating the intellectual and institutional technologies that generate distinctly new social groups, not just an indirect role diagnostic of a standing distribution of power. In Egypt, religious education is only one of the school-related issues around which political conflict has crystallized. But unlike debates over the institution of lit-

eracy programs, vocational training, or examination reform, controversies surrounding religious instruction have the unique power—as we saw in Alexandria—to provoke the activity of the state's security apparatus.

So if our starting point—the anthropology of Islam—is perhaps tangential to the main body of contemporary anthropological concerns, studying the role of educational institutions in cultural production and social reproduction is near the center. With the ever-growing oeuvre of Pierre Bourdieu, and the diffusion of Paul Willis's 1977 *Learning to Labour* outside the relatively small circle of educational sociology, questions of cultural production and social reproduction have moved toward the forefront of anthropological theory. Willis's study of the reproduction of class stratification among British working-class youth has been built on by many others, most recently Douglas Foley in *Learning Capitalist Culture*, an analysis of the reproduction of ethnicity and class in south Texas, and Dorothy Holland and Margaret Eisenhart in *Educated in Romance*, a devastating portrait of the reproduction of gender inequality among U.S. university women. Each of these works demonstrates that, contrary to top-down models of the imposition of unequal social relations, educational institutions are one of many social sites within which specific populations actively reproduce their own subordinate status. Status negotiations within and between peer groups, conscious and unconscious strategies of resistance to institutional authority, and the realistic perception of often limited employment opportunities after leaving school life, together channel the creative interactions of students themselves toward the reproduction of standing relations of power.

The trinity of ethnicity, class, and gender inequalities has consumed nearly all the attention of critical theorists of education. Systematic critical treatments of the reproduction of religious traditions are conspicuously absent.[22] This is partly, of course, because of the immediate and overriding gravity of ethnic, class, and gender inequalities in the U.S. and Western Europe, where most educational sociologists have worked. But it is also because the sense in which there is an intriguing "inequality" at stake in religious socialization—one that cannot entirely be subsumed under the rubric of socioeconomic class or gender—is less immediately clear.[23] Despite our growing interest in how they are invented and transformed,[24] anthropologists still tend to treat "traditions" (religious or otherwise) as bounded capsules of observed behavior and recorded belief, rather than as segments of larger-scale social relationships that are constantly in the process of being created, renewed and dis-

solved. But — to refine Asad's use of the word *tradition* — it is those unequal relationships of authority and compliance that are constructed around and through specific discourses that constitute the social core of religious traditions. How these relations are transformed in the process of their reproduction, and the ways they interact with other dimensions of social inequality are important questions. But relations of orthodoxy are a peculiar kind of property relation — a relation between people with regard to texts and intellectual technologies — that are potentially more fluid than other sorts of class relations. One interesting feature of the Alexandria police raids is precisely that they were *not* held against striking workers, marching peasants, or armed terrorists, but against individuals quietly and privately using the social and intellectual technologies of the modern state to create an alternative to it. Their other interesting feature is that the majority of individuals caught up in the raids themselves were children, actors we hardly ever consider politically significant. So it is precisely the *processes* of creating relationships of orthodoxy that are at stake here, rather than the finished product.

To understand these processes without assuming a simple mechanical reproduction of class relations, we need to address the cultural significance of the choices people make in creating their own social worlds. According to Paul Willis,

> We might think of this process of reproduction [of the social group, its relation to other classes and the productive process] as having two basic "moments". In the first place, outside structures and basic class relationships are taken in as symbolic and conceptual relations at the specifically cultural level. . . . Structural determinations act, not by direct mechanical effect, but by mediation through the cultural level where their own relationships become subject to forms of exposure and explanation. In the second "moment" of the process, structures which have now become sources of meaning, definition and identity provide the framework and basis for decisions and choices in life . . . which taken systematically and in the aggregate over large numbers actually helps to reproduce the main structures and functions of society.[25]

Granting some autonomy to the realm of culture, through which larger structural determinants have to pass in order to reproduce themselves, he points out nevertheless that this model, by "ignoring important forms and forces such as the state, ideology, and various institutions," is an oversimplification.[26]

In order to recomplicate the picture, I would like to take a step back — at the risk of losing some of the fine resolution — to reincorpor-

ate the state, ideology, and social institutions into this model of reproduction. Doing so points us in two directions somewhat different from that taken by Willis and others, who question how and why subordinate populations aid in the reproduction of their own inequality. First, as outlined in the discussion of objectification and functionalization in the last section, we can ask what changes have occurred in the cultural level itself as it has mediated the creation and reproduction of social relationships. How has cultural production changed over the last century to accomodate new technologies as well as new economic and political forces?

And second, we can reverse the question of subordination, and ask why the political and educational strategies chosen by Egypt's ruling elites over the last century have resulted in the diminution rather than the augmentation of their ability to control the public discourse on Islam. How have socialization practices established explicitly in order to provide every citizen with a uniform appreciation for the state's legitimate religious authority resulted instead in the fragmentation of that authority and the proliferation of groups challenging the moral judgment and legitimacy of official religious institutions? Why, as we saw in Alexandria, is the state forced to resort to physical violence to retain its monopoly on religious socialization?

These are the issues we will be concerned with: changes in the cultural mediation of Islamic knowledge, and the problematic results of implementing mass education as a mechanism of social control. If it seems odd to us that the powerless act in ways that reinforce their subordination (even as they seek to resist it), it should seem equally odd that the powerful act in ways that diminish their dominance (even as they seek to increase it). Willis stresses "that there are deep disjunctions and desperate tensions within social and cultural reproduction. Social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation, and partial penetration of those structures."[27] In his own case study, he finds that the working-class student's choice of manual labor as a means of making a living is experienced not as a surrender to social subordination, but as "an assertion of . . . freedom and of a specific kind of power in the world";[28] it "is felt, subjectively, as a profound process of learning: it is the organisation of the self in relation to the future."[29]

This structuring of experience and perception operates on the social and cultural elites who frame policy and produce school curricula and educational materials, as well as on the working classes and students

who are their targets. The concept of hegemony, it is too often forgotten, refers to structures of thought, feeling, and practice that are as commonsensical to cultural elites as they are to subordinates.[30] Egypt's incorporation into the modern European imperial system was one of the experiential sources of a new hegemony that relied on the modern school for its force.[31] As we will see in chapters 2 and 3, European political and cultural domination during the latter half of the nineteenth century presented both British and Egyptian elites with ambiguous and often contradictory conceptual models of social structure, change, and hierarchy. The deep tensions within the imperial project resulted, on the cultural level, in conflicting experiences of cultural process that were rationalized as being a choice between the twin dichotomies of "religious" versus "secular" government, and "traditional" versus "modern" society. Choosing the secular and modern meant, among other things, embracing the notion that mass schooling would provide an inexpensive mechanism of centralized and nearly total control over the inner lives of Egyptians. The choice to provide the nation with schooling was experienced by elites and the nascent middle classes as a drive toward national emancipation that would take place through a new means of reinforcing their own position. That this project has resulted instead in new modes of political opposition, a renewed public attachment to religious values, and finally the forced resort to the tactics of the police state indicate that the culturally mediated choice between tradition and modernity rested on false premises.

## History and Typology

The dichotomies of religion/secularism and tradition/modernity are cultural concepts derived initially from social philosophy and its offspring, the professionalized social sciences. Johannes Fabian has argued, in his celebrated essay on "How Anthropology Makes Its Object,"[32] that the discipline of anthropology (and Western science in general) systematically distorts its relationship to the cultures it studies by constructing cultural typologies — hot and cold, primitive and modern, developed and developing, peasant and industrial, rural and urban — that present cultural differences as differences of *time*. Historical sequence, in becoming the basis of a system of analytical categories, retains its chronological connotations, so that the "traditional" and the "mod-

ern" seem separated not only by spatial but by temporal distance. And in the process of implicitly denying the "coevalness" of anthropology and its "Other," such typologies also deny the close relationships of influence, domination, and, in fact, the mutual constitution of contemporaneous societies. "When modern anthropology began to construct its Other," Fabian writes, "in terms of topoi implying distance, difference, and opposition, its intent was above all . . . to construct ordered Space and time — a cosmos — for Western society to inhabit, rather than 'understanding other cultures,' its ostensible vocation."[33]

While he omits them from his own enumeration of false typological opposites, Fabian might well have mentioned *religious* and *secular*, a pair of terms that runs through the scholarly literature on Egypt from the very beginning of the modern European presence there. When a correspondent for Public Television's *McNeil-Lehrer News Hour* reported, shortly after the World Trade Center bombings in 1993, that Islamic radicals were attacking the government of Husni Mubarak because he was "trying to drive Egypt further down the secular road"; or when newspapers in the U.S. claim that radical Islamic movements are threatening to topple "Egypt's secular government," they are not only engaging in a complex strategy of distancing (the secular West versus the religious East; the (necessarily) secular allied government versus the (fanatically) religious internal threat). They are also — as we will see throughout this book — constructing an astounding fiction: that Egypt's government is a secular one. Although this fiction is useful for purposes of political convenience and Western self-definition, it makes understanding of the current political tensions in Egypt impossible.

Just as typology is always part of a larger narrative that explains its form and origin, so theories of education are always derived not merely from theories of human psychology, but from theories of history. As I will argue in the conclusion, the ideas indigenous and foreign elites hold concerning Islam and education in modern society have been central elements in contemporary public policy formation, and the state's halting and ineffective strategies for counteracting its Islamic political opposition are built partially upon a central flaw in its conception of the social effects of the school. During the 1950s and 1960s intellectuals both in the West and in the Middle East were confident that "in the contemporary Arab world Islam has simply been bypassed . . . the relaxing of Islam's grip on Arab society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. . . . resulted in an inner collapse and a withering away of its position and effective power in social and political life."[34] With respect to

education, this confidence was founded upon the political marginalization of the traditional religious hierarchy, which "by the end of the First World War . . . had not only lost its position as the defender and interpreter of the Law in society, but also its function as the upholder and transmitter of Islamic learning and tradition. . . . "[35] Even the phenomenal growth of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1930s and 1940s served as the exception that proved the rule of modernization in Egyptian society:

> The tremendous appeal which the movement exercised served to show the extent to which Islam could still move the masses of the people. But it came too late to stem the tide of secularism, and its fate was sealed with the triumph of Abdul Nasser's secular revolution. The Muslim Brothers may well be the last serious effort of traditional Islam to regain its position in Arab society.[36]

This passage encapsulates two fallacies of modernization theory that have found their way into more recent attempts to account for the rise of Islamism — or, the term I prefer, the Islamic Trend — in Egypt. First, there is the false assumption that movements like the Muslim Brothers or the radical Jihad and al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya groups represent "traditional Islam" reasserting itself. And second, there is the false assumption that, in the case of Egypt as in the case of historical development generally, secularism will replace religion in a global and irreversible evolutionary process. On such an assumption, scholarly concern with religious education in the public school would be a misplaced effort, since the role of the nation was assumed to have eclipsed that of God as the focal point of public veneration.[37]

Consequently, the richest evocations of religious education in the contemporary Muslim world confine their attention to the socialization of religious elites,[38] and their implications cannot fruitfully be extended to popular education. There has been a good deal of research on the traditional Qur'anic school (*kuttab*), particularly in Morocco,[39] and some very recent work on education in postrevolutionary Iran.[40] But aside from important historical work on Czarist Central Asia[41] and a single content analysis of religious textbooks used during the Nasser period,[42] scholars have remained relatively silent about the interaction of religion and mass instruction. As preparation for our entry into the case study, let us remind ourselves again why this is important. As intellectual technologies and political institutions from the West have penetrated the Islamic world, they have helped to create new ways of con-

ceiving of, practicing, and passing on the Islamic tradition. This sort of outcome is a common feature of colonial and postcolonial life. In East Africa, the system of "customary law" itself was a creation of British colonialism.[43] In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century India, the British Asiatic society "initiated the integration of the vast collection of myths, beliefs, rituals, and laws into a coherent religion, and shaped an amorphous heritage into the faith now known as Hinduism,"[44] and in Morocco, French understandings of tribalism became the de facto basis for tribal organization, making "[the French] view of Moroccan society a significant component of social reality."[45] In the same way, contemporary Islam in Egypt is as much the result of the European-style school as it is of "traditional" texts and intellectual institutions. In this as in so much else — and in a sense even more direct than Fabian's critique of categories — western scholarship has quite literally made the object it now purports to study.

The rest of the book falls into three parts. The next two chapters show how educational goals and philosophies invented in Europe to quell the social unrest of the Industrial Revolution were transplanted at an increasing pace into Egypt by the British after 1882. In appropriating the indigenous Qur'anic schools as the basis for a cheap system of mass instruction, the imperial administration altered the aims and methods of religious teaching to resemble those of Christian Britain. With the subsequent professionalization of teachers and the declining role of the traditional religious elite in formal socialization, religious instruction gained by the 1930s its current function as an explicit tool for social planning.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 describe the content and context of Islamic education in contemporary Egyptian primary and secondary schools. This will not take the form of a traditional school ethnography, but will instead focus on the way schooling is viewed by different populations as an Islamizing influence in conjunction with other social institutions. Based on interviews, classroom observation, and analysis of religious studies textbooks, it will explore the way that school-based religious education is thought to fulfill national goals, including the attempt of the national government to counteract the appeal of *al-tatarruf*, religious "extremism" among the country's youth. I will argue that, far from counteracting the appeal of private-sector religious forces like the Muslim Brotherhood and the smaller Islamic splinter groups that call for revolt against the state, the religious studies curriculum in schools (and other programs for children and youth) both lays the government open

to radical criticism and increases the hunger for religious resources that cannot be met solely by the public sector.

The resulting political challenge to the ruling party has evoked a range of responses ably summarized by the interior minister, who is in charge of domestic security. In a July 1993 speech to the official national union of journalists, he explained that "the newspapers defend democracy and the police work to secure that democracy . . . and because of this the relationship between the police and the newspapers is strong and profound."[46] This dual strategy combining cultural and police operations informs chapters 7 and 8, which examine the complex ways in which the Islamic Trend has penetrated the public space created by the school, the media, and the market. On the one hand, a violent fringe of religious terrorists is used as a foil for representations of popular virtue and the masses' rejection of underground Islamist organizations. On the other hand, institutions as varied as the media themselves and the court system are turned to the service of the Islamist political opposition as civil society is penetrated by the discourses of religion. As the government simultaneously increases its investment in Islamic symbols and represses competing groups that deploy them as well, clear alternatives disappear, and the country is moved ever closer to political crisis. In the end, I bring together these tangled historical, textual, and ethnographic threads to show why educational idioms have become part of the language in which political conflict is expressed. Public discourse on the origin of the Islamic Trend is coming more and more to resemble the debates that took place during the British Occupation concerning the pernicious effects of educating the new Egyptian elites. I will argue that flawed applications of social and educational theory — by both Egyptian policymakers and Western scholars — have contributed to the consistent misunderstanding of contemporary political developments, dooming the state to weaken its own position in every attempt it makes to enhance it.