

Islam and Democracy

The Failure of Dialogue in Algeria

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1 Understanding Political Democratisation at the Beginning of the Twenty-first Century

ALGERIA AND THE 'THIRD WAVE' OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS

From the perspective of the political analyst, as much as from that of concerned citizens, the periods of political upheavals that completely redefine the social practices and institutional framework of a polity provide invaluable opportunities to question common assumptions about the logic of social change and the foundations of political order. The events that began to unfold in Algeria in 1988 and that, at the time of writing in 2002, are far from over, are one such instance of a contemporary upheaval that raises many questions. What might the significance be of this attempt at democratisation in a polity of the Muslim world, in a context where identity politics and cultural divides appear to be increasingly shaping world politics? Do the Algerian events tell us something specific about the future of democratisation, revolution or Islamisation in the Muslim world? If so, what are the mechanisms that produced such a dramatic sequence of events? How far can one analyse and understand these mechanisms with sufficient accuracy to help in resolving the actual Algerian conundrum, or to warn the polities that might unknowingly be following the Algerian path? Before addressing those issues it is important to understand the connections between the macro and the micro level of analysis, and to indicate how far one can extend locally cogent explanations to the international sphere (or the opposite). Political theorist John Dunn warns that one of the most pressing conceptual and practical problems that confronts both contemporary analysts and actors is precisely to identify stable categories for political causality and political agency.¹

In the present situation, the category 'Islam', in so far as it is a distinct political category, obviously means very different things to

very different people.² It is inherently difficult to define accurately and appropriately the contours and features of this category in such a way that the description satisfies both the conditions of a specific social context and the conceptual requirements of a grand historical and international narrative. From a theoretical perspective it is perfectly possible that the question, 'what are effective means of democratisation of a polity at the beginning of the twenty-first century?' requires a significantly different answer from the question 'what are effective means of democratisation in Algeria today?' When trying to answer the first question, one primarily endeavours to produce a coherent general analytical framework based on the statistically significant features of political causality at the global level. By contrast, when one seeks to explain what precisely happened in a country like Algeria during this last troubled decade, one must necessarily include many statistically marginal factors, which nonetheless had a local significance. If we err on the side of statistical approximations, we obtain the kind of sweeping generalisations that Samuel Huntington utilises to introduce his notion of a clash of civilisations.³ Conversely, if we err on the side of the anthropology of religion, the investigation may become so particularistic that it cannot be used in political analysis.

In the contemporary context, I fear that it is not the failings of an overelaborate account of political change that hinder our understanding of the situation in Algeria and in the rest of the Muslim world but, on the contrary, an oversimplification of the notion of political development. In the Western tradition, a dubious legacy of the Enlightenment is an idea of political progress-cum-a deterministic natural process of change passing from an old, obsolete political order to a new, better one.⁴ Up to the decolonisation period, the idea that swift revolutionary transformations could radically change people's lives (for the better) thrived, mostly thanks to the efforts and successes of communist movements. Unmistakably the success of the communist revolutionaries at mobilising people and at overthrowing regimes in Asia and Africa in the 1960s and 1970s helped to support the claims of Marxism regarding political change – though it cannot be said to have played a prominent role in retaining the adherence of the newly 'liberated' citizenry to the ideas and practice of socialism.⁵ In the late twentieth century, however, after the failure of the archetypal communist regime, the Soviet Union, and the comparative success of 'bourgeois' states, neither the association of revolutions with progressive changes nor that of

revolutionaries with well-informed political understanding is easily sustainable. Today, as liberalism has (temporarily?) gained the moral high ground, the revolutionary terminology has been downplayed to the benefit of a new liberal vocabulary based on democratisation. (The publication in the mid-1980s of Guillermo O'Donnell, Phillippe Schmitter and Lawrence Whitehead's *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* was the watershed for this vocabulary shift.)⁶ In this context, as John Esposito and John Voll indicated, even the proponents of political Islam have increasingly adopted this democratic vocabulary to voice their demands and present the process of Islamicisation.⁷

This recent change of terminology means that it is today far more difficult for political analysts to discern the normative bias in the new analyses of democratisation and Islamicisation than it was to pinpoint the practical and conceptual flaws in a well-explored concept and practice, such as revolution. The immediacy of the problem, the limited historical insights and the normative preferences of the analysts, ensure that it is particularly arduous to separate the concrete mechanisms of change from the rhetorical tropes and the ideological gloss. Despite the current optimism concerning the spread of democracy, it is by no means certain that the contemporary liberal understanding of the mechanisms of democratic transitions reflects a less hasty judgement than Marx's presentation of revolutions as the 'locomotives of history'. Indeed, considering the explanation proposed only recently by Francis Fukuyama, who interprets political changes using an Enlightenment-like notion of progress and who emphasises the abstract aspects of democracy and liberalism at the expense of their down-to-earth consequences, it is difficult not to remark how easily the advocates of these views may replicate the mistakes of the utopian socialists.⁸ Increasingly, today, substantive accounts of democratisation and democratic consolidation – the analysis of how democratisation leads to the formation of liberal democracies – present the democratic process not just as the initiation of a rule by the demos but as the rule of a knowledgeable and polite civil society guided by a general concern for human rights and political fairness.⁹ In this context, it is not surprising that an experienced analyst of democratic transition like Guillermo O'Donnell should criticise the proponents of this new literature on democratic consolidation on the grounds that their analyses only indicate that new democracies are 'institutionalised in ways that one expects and of which one approves'.¹⁰

In the contemporary 'New World Order' as much as in the Cold War context, the greatest danger for political analysts and actors is to confuse their own normative preferences with what it may be 'rational' to do, or to mistake contingent political arrangements for the outcomes of the 'rational' choices of political players. Avoiding substantive arguments, Adam Przeworski suggested that, using a 'minimalist' conception of politics, one could determine which institutional outcomes could be obtained with quasi-mechanical regularity – i.e. those that even marginally rational political actors had to recognise were the best possible solutions available in the circumstances. Thus, vis-à-vis the recent democratic transitions in Eastern Europe and Latin America, Przeworski concluded that the democratic arrangements obtained were not the preferred outcomes for many actors, considering their ideological inclinations, but simply the end result of a political stalemate.¹¹ While this analysis is highly pertinent, it must be noted that some of the assumptions about the actors' interests, wants and systems of valuation that could (safely?) remain implicit in Europe or Latin America may turn out to be more problematic in the Middle East, Asia or Africa. More importantly, however, it must be pointed out that, whether one is dealing specifically with the Muslim world or not, only a solid faith in rationalism permits one to conclude that transitions from authoritarianism produce liberal and democratic solutions *because* these arrangements constitute 'objectively' a better state of affairs. As Michael Taylor indicated, the limitations of rational choice theory are immense when it comes to analysing complex series of collective choices, particularly in contexts where one does not fully understand the agents' 'ultimate ends'.¹²

The difficulty of correctly apprehending democratisation from definitional and logical premises is illustrated by Phillippe Schmitter's carefully worded definition of democratic consolidation as

the process of transforming the accidental arrangements, prudential norms, and contingent solutions that have emerged during the transition into relations of co-operation and competition that are reliably known, regularly practised, and voluntarily accepted by those persons or collectivities (i.e. politicians and citizens) that participate in democratic governance.¹³

In practice, it is evident that such a description of the process of consolidation can only apply to a community that shares many, if not

most, of the analyst's (or reader's) liberal and democratic preferences. Severed from these normative underpinnings, the same terminology and logic could be used to describe the entrenchment of a situation of violent and anarchic political order, just like the one that became established in Algeria in the 1990s. From a definitional point of view, the fact that some political practices may be particularly brutal does not make them less democratic, cooperative, or voluntarily accepted. One of the main difficulties in dealing with a polity of the developing world is that it may be particularly inappropriate to infer causally from what we (liberals and democrats) identify as rational political behaviour – principally because the citizenry of these polities does not habitually share the same normative habits and social skills as the demos of well-established Western democracies.

Structuralist-minded analyses in the vein of Theda Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions* and (neo-)institutionalist explanations in the vein of Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* offer a handy solution to those who are daunted by the prospect of a political causality sensitive to re-interpretations of rationality.¹⁴ By analysing the long-term organisational and socio-economic trends inside and outside a polity, these scholars propose to narrow down the number of relevant actors and practices in a specific socio-historical context and to explain the collapse and reconstruction of political order (relatively) independently of most historical agents' views on the situation. Although such analyses of institutional and socio-economic regularities have yielded many interesting insights, it is unfortunately not always the case that a retrospective analysis of regimes which were, in Lenin's phrase, 'unable to live on in the old way', provides useful information on the dynamics and rationale of changes to come. The most thorough understanding of the mechanisms of past transformations can never constitute an exhaustive catalogue of political causality.¹⁵

Furthermore, it is dubious how far one can really weigh 'objectively' these institutional or socio-economic trends *a priori*. In the contemporary context, Forrest Colburn points out that it would be a hopeless task to compare the socio-economic and political situation of the countries of the Third World in order to detect where the situation is ripe for change, because most of these polities face extremely tense situations or are already on the brink of disaster.¹⁶ This observation is directly relevant to the analysis of the Algerian situation, as no knowledgeable political commentator of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa had identified Algeria

as the most likely focal point for democratising and Islamicising efforts in the region before 1988. At that time, all the political, religious and socio-economic indicators showed that Algeria was a very *unremarkable* polity indeed.¹⁷

Obviously, with the benefit of historical insight, one may now be in a position to re-assess these socio-economic and institutional trends and argue that the conditions were in fact ripe for revolt in Algeria in 1988; just as one might explain that the 1979 Iranian revolution or the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 were predictable.¹⁸ In a prospective analysis, however, such structuralist and institutionalist approaches can be more debilitating than helpful, especially for policy-makers, as they confine one's perspectives only to historically tested conditions for change. Furthermore, because they emphasise the preconditions for change, these approaches underestimate the extent to which social and political transformations are affected by what the actors want to achieve, how skilful (or fortunate) they can be, and how imaginatively they can interpret their achievements. Unsurprisingly, the role of ideology and culture is particularly badly handled by these explanations. From this perspective the analyst is not in a position to offer a description of ideology or culture other than that of a deviation from the 'objective' pattern of socio-economic or institutional development.

However, we have learnt from the mistakes of Marxist thinkers, from Gramsci to Althusser, that it is extremely difficult to measure the potential of ideology as a relatively independent causal variable in the 'objective' structure of events without reaching the conclusion that this ideological input always distorts people's choices, and alone shapes the course of events.¹⁹ In this respect, the culturalist twist that Huntington proposed in *The Clash of Civilisations* as an addendum to the institutionalist approach that he had developed earlier must be credited at least with internal consistency. But how far should this ideological or cultural analysis intervene in the explanations of the Algerian events? And how meaningful a notion can it be for a generic explanation of political change?

In the present situation, it would be over-hasty to affirm that the failure (so far) of democratic transition in Algeria, as elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa, is attributable to the agents' lack of cognitive and normative affinities with the rest of the liberal-democratic world. Furthermore, I believe that a theoretical debate aiming at determining the historical possibility or impossibility of having a liberal democratic political order in an Islamic society

should not precede and pre-empt the actual analysis of Algerian political events or the inquiry into the behaviour of the Muslim populations concerned. It is particularly unhelpful to start by saying that these communities have no practical experience or conceptual affinity with liberal democracy and, therefore, cannot reach it on their own – be it because of an absence of civil society (according to Gellner) or because of the authoritarian logic of this religious creed (according to Huntington).²⁰ Conversely, it would be equally unwise to assume that it is just a matter of time before these polities endorse liberal and democratic ideals as people eventually realise that this is what they need for their individual and collective self-fulfilment. (In this respect, one may regret that so many contributions to debate on the future of civil society in the Muslim World have a tendency to recycle the Third-Worldist arguments that developing societies only have to overcome contingent dilemmas and externally imposed fetters in order to flourish.)²¹ Vis-à-vis the democratic transitions in Latin America, O'Donnell and Schmitter showed convincingly that one could not have spelt out *ex ante* the likely outcomes of these events, because part of the process of transition was precisely the collective learning of an appropriately democratic way of solving the polities' predicaments.²² The main characteristic of those democratic transitions was the exploration in real time of the very possibility of democratic political change. To my mind, this observation strongly suggests that it is probably best to investigate the role of culture and ideology in the Algerian and Muslim context in the light of this agent-centred, open-ended practical endeavour to resolve one's political predicament.

ISLAM AND THE 'WEST': A CLASH OF IDEOLOGIES IN ALGERIA

To understand better the Algerian situation and its global implications, it is important to dissect the mechanisms and the logic of the 'social contracts' that different groups of agents endorsed at different stages of the process of political transition. What did they hope to achieve, normatively and descriptively? How did they determine what was a reasonable price to pay to achieve those objectives? And so on. One ought to be able to judge these strategies without having recourse to the facile argument that the actors who shape these events abide by a completely different concept of 'rationality' and without implying that there is something radically different about

the Islamic fundamentalists or the Algerians which makes them incomprehensible to other human beings. If Algeria failed to be the brilliant illustration of a smooth transition to democracy, it is not simply because 'evil' political, religious or military actors ensured that this would not happen, or because the conditions were not 'ripe' for democracy.²³ Undoubtedly, the collective choices of the population, particularly in favour of political Islam, constrained the type of institutional arrangements and practices that could be introduced consensually in the polity. However, a state of affairs in which political reforms are more or less possible or successful due to the presence (or the formation) of a particular popular consensus on political order in a polity is nothing exceptional. The degree to which social and political practices and institutions are representative, democratic or Islamic always depends on the active participation of the people concerned. For all those involved (but obviously more so for the local participants than for external observers), it is therefore essential to identify correctly the causal mechanisms that permit strategically placed players, at home and abroad, to utilise the existing institutional, economic and military resources to impose their preferred political solutions. Equally, it is crucial to understand how the semantic configuration of the political arena ensures that some solutions are better accepted or repeatedly challenged by a majority of people in the polity.

For political analysts as much as for the individuals directly involved in a process that one may call democratisation, Islamicisation, revolution or, less exaltedly, a muddled descent into a violent state of anarchy, the definition of success and of failure is always necessarily an exercise in semantic organisation – it can be more than this but it cannot be less. Today, Islamic fundamentalist ideologues are eager to propose a notion of Islam *qua* Natural Law that parallels the Western theorists' utilisation of democratic governance *qua* rational politics. On both sides of the debate, in explaining global social transformations the actors do not hesitate to present conflicts not as a practical opposition between different social groups but as instances of a battle between 'good' and 'evil' or between 'progress' and 'obscurantism' (an eschatologically construed opposition that was stigmatised by the American President's talks of a 'crusade' and the Islamic fundamentalists' calls to '*jihad*' after the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in September 2001). Even if the eschatological dimension of this battle is exaggerated, it remains nonetheless true that what agents do and say is rarely simply a

response to immediate practical difficulties, individual or collective. It is also a strategic response involving those ideological representations which are constitutive of the identity of the agents or communities. Such identity-driven confrontations have been at the heart of some of the most important conflicts of the twentieth century and the odds are that they will be with us for quite some time yet. It would not be incongruous to present the clashes occurring today in Algeria and in other parts of the Muslim world as a replay of the struggle between democrats, fascists and communists that shook Europe some time ago (a struggle that in the present case would oppose liberal democrats, secular autocrats (of various affiliations) and Islamic fundamentalists). More than Huntington's clash of civilisations, then, it is perhaps Carl Schmitt's concept of the political – the affirmation of the political community in its opposition to a mythically construed enemy – that best captures from an actor's perspective the rationale of this opposition.²⁴

In Schmitt's scheme these mythical referents and the arbitrariness of the political ensure that there can be no process of 'enlightenment' which eventually brings together different political communities. As old myths and old enmities lose their relevance, new myths and new enemies are imagined – the 'Green Peril' replaces the 'Evil Empire'. From this perspective anything like Fukuyama's liberal end to world history, or the idea of an end to Islamism advanced in French circles by Gilles Kepel, is wishful thinking.²⁵ Regardless of whether one subscribes to Schmitt's notion of a total war between friends and foes, however, it is still crucial to note the practical relevance of political myths in the shaping of everyday attitudes between the members of different political communities. In domestic politics as much as in foreign policy, what constitutes a legitimate political action is never solely defined by reference to a technical and legal framework, nor is it simply derived from a specific doctrine. It is also based on ill-specified fears, hopes and expectations – be they of a 'Great Satan' or of a 'New World Order'.²⁶ To understand better the strategies of the Algerian Islamic fundamentalists as much as to comprehend the attitude of Western governments toward Algeria and toward the Muslim world, one has to be aware not only of the logic of their political arguments but also of the more ambiguous political myths and normative and aesthetic preferences that form the background of their definitions of friends and foes.

Ideology, in a neutral sense, is a body of more or less coherent concepts, symbols and discursive practices that people deploy to understand and act upon their world. The term does not imply a cognitive or normative judgement on the validity of the views proposed.²⁷ A political ideology is a polysemic 'text' rendered meaningful in practice in a specific context by a sustained interpretative effort.²⁸ In this interpretation, political ideas and ideals are defined and articulated in specific frameworks with a view to casting a certain light upon one's material situation and moral position. In practice a political ideology provides rules and principles for prejudging the suitability of political actors and for evaluating the appropriateness of their actions. As sociologists, from Max Weber to Pierre Bourdieu, have indicated, because of the division of labour inherent in all complex political systems, a small number of interpreters can accumulate a political authority that allow them to foist upon the community an artificial unity of interest using the authority invested in their discourse.²⁹ This political authority is not only the capacity to decide *on* political issues but also the ability to define *what* is (or ought to be) a matter for politics. In the present context this definition of the boundaries of politics is a central feature of the opposition between Liberal and Islamic world views. In its everyday expression a political ideology is infused with a specific teleology by, and is indissociable from, a specific group of interpreters within society. Analytically, however, because the success of political actors may not be directly related to the coherence or usefulness of the views that they advocate, it is important to be able to distinguish between the causally relevant relationships that their conceptual schemes reveal and the unintended consequences of the actions of their ideologues (or their followers). In a Muslim context, in particular, it is crucial to make a distinction between Islamic fundamentalism as the set of political insights and ethical precepts which may (or may not) help people to organise their social world better, and Islamic fundamentalism as a name attributed to the activities of a group of political actors who have had some success in claiming to represent Islamic orthodoxy.

In any political context, the political players who are best able to utilise the prevailing myths about political order and to present attractive theories about social unity can gain an important tactical advantage over their competitors, regardless of how accurate their political understanding actually is. In the democratic transitions in

Latin America, O'Donnell and Schmitter indicated that during these hectic periods of change

unexpected events (*fortuna*), insufficient information, hurried and audacious choices, confusion about motives and interests, plasticity and even indefiniteness of political identities, as well as the talents of specific individuals (*virtù*) are frequently decisive in determining outcomes.³⁰

In Algeria, the rapid transformations that took place from 1988 onward provided propitious conditions for the diffusion and entrenchment of new and unorthodox political views. If, at first, the skilful propaganda of the Islamic fundamentalists allowed them to score extremely well against their liberal and nationalist opponents, it is doubtful, from a causal perspective, that this capacity to manipulate Islamic symbolism alone explains the expansion and resilience of the fundamentalist movement. It is true that during the 1979 Iranian revolution Ayatollah Khomeini successfully induced many Iranian citizens to change their attitude towards the monarchy, by skilfully exploiting Shi'ite myths and symbols.³¹ However, as Algerian Islamic revolutionaries discovered to their cost, likening the military regime to the *taghout* (false god) and invoking the myths of martyrdom provide no guarantee for the success of a revolution, even if a significant number of citizens believed them – in fact, it could even become slightly debilitating after a while. More than the ability of the fundamentalists to manipulate Islamic symbols very precisely, what is crucial for understanding the causal significance of the Islamic movement in the long term is how it generates a lasting popular consensus on Islamicisation. What may be said from even the most casual observation of the situation in Algeria, and throughout the Muslim world, is that Islamic themes appear to be sufficiently compatible with the demos' expectations to be able to produce a recurrent demand for an Islamicised form of democratic governance.³² This constant pressure is unlikely to be simply the result of the superiority of Islamic concepts of governance – or we may expect that secular leaders would have endorsed these ideas by now. Nor can it be simply attributable to the constant manipulation of unenlightened masses – fundamentalists are not that cunning and people are not that blind.

In a Muslim context there is a real conceptual difficulty in knowing how far a notion such as Islamic democracy may be just an

oxymoron and how far contemporary liberals and democrats are blinded by their own normative and aesthetic preferences. However, the immediate cause of the difficulties of democratisation in Muslim polities is simply the fact that the official institutions of the state participate only minimally in the formation of the political judgements of the citizenry. This impasse over democratisation is the result not of the political cunningness and rhetorical subtlety of the Islamic fundamentalists' discourse, but of the crude understanding and practices of the secular regimes that preside over the destinies of most countries of the Muslim world.³³ Where the state fails to teach its citizens how to formulate coherent political projects, how to debate meaningfully and how to rule through consensus, the citizenry is unlikely to learn any more about democracy than it already knows – and it may even forget that much. To date, despite the setting up of new formal political structures and procedures (parliaments, parties, elections, etc.), the lack of a consensus about what is a legitimate rule still undermines the institutional framework of these polities. In Algeria, as elsewhere in the region, because the institutional system is not designed to provide accurate information to (and about) the population, the powers-that-be are unable to know at all precisely what the population might devise by itself and for itself as an appropriate form of government. The lack of genuine social and political dialogue ensures that both rulers and ruled lack the political skills and practice necessary to seize the democratic opportunity and implement these reforms successfully when they can. What is crucial for the establishment of a functioning political order (of the democratic kind) in Algeria and throughout the Muslim world is the emergence of the kind of social capital that Robert Putnam places at the heart of the workings of Western liberal democracies.³⁴ It is the formation and evolution of such political and social understanding that constitutes the storyline of the failed Algerian transition to democracy and of the new form of state authoritarianism and Islamic radicalism that was produced.

NEW POLITICAL ACTORS FOR A NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER

After the Cold War the international political debate has focused increasingly on the role of identity politics in world affairs. In the Muslim world the emerging problem for foreign policy analysis and for security studies is the role of transnational Islamic movements.³⁵

Transnational organisations structured around religious or secular ideologies are not a new phenomenon in international politics. However, an understanding of the workings of these Islamic movements and of their relations with nation-states in this age of globalisation has been particularly difficult to obtain, particularly by modification of the typical state-centred models of international relations. 'Realist' accounts such as Huntington's *The Third Wave* or Armstrong's *Revolution and World Order*, which depict the domino effects of regime change, are increasingly losing their relevance for analysing current international developments.³⁶ It is not surprising that Huntington himself should try to reorient his analysis in *The Clash of Civilisations* by suggesting that, although nation-states remain crucial in the post-Cold War period, cultural affinities now dictate the shape of the international system. (Though Huntington's own account of 'culture' and 'civilisation' is not always particularly helpful for understanding the relations between the 'old' *Realpolitik* views of nation-states and the 'new' transnational outcomes of identity politics.) With the benefit of historical insight, we now realise that an event like the 1979 Iranian revolution constituted a watershed for the internationalisation of political Islam not because the new Islamic republic directly engineered a wave of revolutions throughout the Muslim world but because the revolution justified and legitimised the Islamic fundamentalist discourse as a coherent political discourse. The causal consequences of this discourse when it is put into practice at the transnational level by sub-state players, and how these factors can affect the international community, have been major questions and concerns for the international community from the Gulf War onwards.³⁷

Unquestionably contemporary transnational Islamic activism is not organised like the Third Worldist, Arab Socialist or Pan-Arab movements that flourished during the period of decolonisation. Regional players like Iran, Egypt or Saudi Arabia continue to be involved in these internationalist networks, but these countries are following these changes rather than directing them. From a security perspective the relationships of these new Islamic movements with their sponsors are far more ambiguous. It is now theoretically *and* practically more difficult to apprehend how the state institutions of specific countries are responsible for the contemporary development of Islamic radicalism on a world scale. Unlike the situation in the 1980s, when regimes like Iran, Libya or Syria could be identified as the direct sponsors of international terrorism, today the ruling elites

of countries like Saudi Arabia or Pakistan are displaying what could be called 'multiple personality disorder'. In practice, if we consider that someone like Osama bin Laden and an organisation like al-Qaida illustrate the threat posed by international Islamic terrorism at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is clear that international diplomacy is ill-equipped to deal with this form of political activism. Supporting the al-Qaida organisation are not only identifiable 'rogue' states but also a decentralised financial empire with ramifications in tax havens in Western democracies, as well as family and political networks throughout the Muslim world. The list of radical Islamic groups linked to the al-Qaida network published by the Bush administration after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon mentions organisations that come from every corner of the Muslim world – from Algeria to the Philippines, and from Somalia to Uzbekistan.³⁸ Furthermore, a cursory glance at the nationalities of the hijackers of the planes on 11 September 2001 reveals that these groups were composed mostly of Saudi and Egyptian nationals – two countries which are long-standing allies of the United States in the Muslim world. At this level of analysis it is crucial to separate the particular structure of an organisation such as bin Laden's al-Qaida or the Algerian GIA from the general patterns that characterise contemporary, transnational, radical Islamic movements. It is important to realise that an answer to the question 'how can such transnational organisations function and prosper?' cannot simply be a detailed account of how the personal wealth or organisational skills of particular individuals were crucial for constructing such a network.

In a book published only a year before the terrorist attacks in the United States, Gilles Kepel predicted the decline of the radical form of Islamic fundamentalism embodied by the GIA and al-Qaida, and a democratisation and liberalisation of these Islamic fundamentalist movements.³⁹ In two brief chapters entitled 'The botched war against the West' and 'Osama bin Laden and America: between terrorism and showbiz', Kepel dismissed the relevance of these recent embodiments of international terrorism as self-defeating and unsustainable. In his opinion the downfall of these organisations was a logical consequence of their failure to topple their domestic enemies and of the need to re-create a popular consensus on their activities. Without doubt, the timing of Kepel's analysis was not the most felicitous, and his critics were often merciless.⁴⁰ However, this mistiming does not mean that in the longer term his analysis will

not prove accurate and that this type of international Islamic activism will not subside for exactly the reasons indicated. (In the very short term the multinational efforts directed against the al-Qaida network after the attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, like the efforts mustered against the GIA after their bombing campaign in France in 1995, will also weaken these organisations' capabilities and force them to reduce their activities.) Yet, in the medium term this kind of radical internationalist Islamic activism could present a major problem to the international community, one that has two distinct but equally important embodiments: direct security threats against Western democracies and indirect impediments to the process of democratisation and liberalisation in the polities of the Muslim world.

By their spectacular activities, radical Islamic actors are providing some easily marketable, media-friendly material that people – Muslims and non-Muslims – will utilise to reflect on what are the pressing political and religious questions of the day. In the Muslim community it is often not the actions of these actors themselves that directly convince people to change their views on what constitutes an appropriate political and religious engagement but rather the reaction of those who are the victims of these attacks. In this respect it cannot be said that the security clampdowns that formed the core of the response of Western democracies and of the authoritarian regimes of the Muslim world to the attacks of these terrorist organisations always provide the best refutation of the arguments and activities of the radical Islamic fundamentalists. The contradiction between the short-term security objectives of Western democracies and their long-term global developmental goals ensures that what is being done today to prevent another attack in the United States by the al-Qaida network or another GIA-sponsored bombing campaign in France is partially responsible for the political dilemmas that confront the unfortunate citizenry and the ruling elite of Algeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. These security clampdowns ensure that each time a potential terrorist threat is being removed, these regimes' authoritarian legacy is being reaffirmed. It is not just the subversive activities of the Islamic fundamentalists but also the liberties taken in violation of international conventions, individual liberties and liberal ethics by the states and international institutions fighting 'terrorism' that are at the heart of the problem. These authoritarian synergies operate not only at the state level to form the 'anarchic' society of nation-states that 'realist' analysts of international

relations presented as the predicament of the twentieth century, but also at the level of a global civil society, whose migrant communities, religious factions and other lobby groups shape both national politics and the response of international institutions.⁴¹ At the societal level we may perhaps expect that in well-established Western democracies the encroachment of an arbitrary rule over personal and civil liberties during a period of emergency will be kept in check by a vigilant political and civil society. In less well-established democracies and in non-democratic countries, however, this predicament is far more serious. Already in the Muslim world people cannot formulate coherent political projects and cannot make themselves heard because of the lack of political structures designed to allow them to do this. In the context of an increased 'securitarian' rule, the citizens of these polities are unlikely to learn more about democracy, and they may even forget what they do know.⁴²

Today in the Muslim world – which includes the Islamic communities established in Western democracies – no Friday prayer would be complete without the mention of one of the many conflicts in which Muslim populations are currently the victims. In this context the lacklustre response of Western democracies to an event like the Algerian democratic transition and civil conflict is presented by Islamic fundamentalists as another proof of the evil Western ambition to maintain the Muslim world in a state of dependency. That Western democracies should remain passive while a democratically elected Islamic party is unceremoniously dismissed by the Algerian military is but one more indication that Western powers collude with the autocratic forces of the Muslim world to deny Muslim citizens their rights. Besides a new set of justifications, however, this confrontation between Islamic fundamentalists and the military apparatus in a country like Algeria also brings to international radical political Islam additional skills and personnel. Domestically and internationally it provides both a latent incentive to engage in the path of the armed *jihad* and a practical know-how in terrorism and guerrilla warfare. From this global perspective it is not altogether surprising that French citizens of Algerian descent should be involved both in the GIA bombing campaign in France in 1995 and in the support networks of the 2001 attacks in the United States.⁴³ For the international community the real challenge is, therefore, not to counter specific terrorist groups but to conceive dependably effective measures of prevention against those individuals who could engage in a terror campaign because of an imagined

connection with other peoples' struggles and suffering. As the French Interior Ministry realised in 1995, if it was relatively easy to monitor Algerian political refugees, it was impossible to monitor equally effectively the French population of Algerian descent or French citizens who converted to Islam.⁴⁴ No Western democracy today can keep an eye on all the citizens who could potentially decide to pursue violent political activism because of their real or imagined links with an Arab or Islamic community.

These 'emotional' connections constitute one elusive but real and enduring legacy of events such as the Algerian civil conflict, the Palestinian struggle, the Gulf War, the Afghan tragedy, etc. They add to the difficulty of drawing clear causal connections between specific political and socio-economic developments in the Muslim world and the development of this new type of international activism. In practice, all we can say is that the recent foreign policy choices of Western democracies towards the Muslim world have not been particularly helpful for preventing the radical political interpretation of such symbolic identifications. From the Iranian revolution to the Afghan war, from the Gulf crisis to the Chechen war, and from the failed Algerian democratic transition to the (so far) successful Indonesian transition, the international community has had an unfortunate tendency to create powerful loci of anti-Western opposition where there had been none before. At the time of writing, it is particularly hazardous to predict with precision what might be the medium term consequences of the 2001 'anti-terrorist' foreign policy consensus generated by the attacks on the United States. Is the current support of the Bush administration for the Pakistani military (to undermine the Taliban regime) a repeat of the ill-fated tactical playing of Iraq against Iran in the 1980s? Similarly, is French complacency towards the Algerian military allowing the civil conflict to drag on, thus permanently destabilising the southern flank of the European Union? For immediate security purposes it may make sense for France or the United States to support the Algerian or Pakistani military and to remain lax in their condemnation of these regimes' human rights abuses and democratic deficit. For longer-term democratic and developmental purposes, however, it is certain that such international choices do not help in promoting a more democratic domestic political context or a tolerant international ethos. On the contrary, they facilitate the diffusion and entrenchment of authoritarian political views and practices.⁴⁵

Today the Algerian military may be keeping the situation under control in that country, but this is at the cost of radicalising the political opposition at home and abroad, thereby displacing the security risk geographically and perhaps aggravating it over time. (And it is extremely disquieting that only a year before General Musharaf became the United States' most important regional ally, Larry Diamond should suggest that the military coup that had permitted Musharaf to take power in Pakistan could herald a swing away from democracy.)⁴⁶

Historically it has always been far more difficult to reduce international security risks by facilitating the formation and diffusion of more democratic and tolerant political discourse and practices than by having recourse to gunboat diplomacy. Over a century and a half ago Alexis de Tocqueville remarked in *Democracy in America* that 'unlimited freedom of association is of all forms of liberty the last which a people can sustain. If it does not topple them over to anarchy, it brings them continually to the brink thereof.'⁴⁷ Today the transnational dialogue between the Muslim world and Western democracies is no less fraught with danger than the challenges that our emerging democratic system faced in the nineteenth century. To be able to address these issues more effectively at the beginning of the twenty-first century and to avoid some of the current pitfalls of the North–South and East–West dialogue, it is crucial to improve our understanding of the limited successes and the dramatic failures of the Algerian democratic transition, both at the nation-state level and in the context of our emerging global society.