

Interregional challenges of Islamic extremist movements in North Africa



Edited by Muna Abdalla

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Note

Although the majority of the chapters in this monograph were written in 2010, before the onset of the current events in North Africa, they provide fresh explanatory frames of reference to the factors that contributed to the uprisings.

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Introduction

MUNA ABDALLA

This monograph explores the spread of extremist Islamic religious movements and ideologies that advocate violence in the face of both moderates and secularism in North Africa, mainly in Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Sudan and Libya. Aiming to promote an understanding of the regional, national and international factors that have led to extremism and violence, the contributors to this monograph interrogate the ideological tools used by Islamic thinkers and the contextual factors that shape them, as well as the historical and political contexts in which extremism and violence take root. The authors also analyse the current measures adopted by states and regional actors to combat extremism. Furthermore, Islamic networks of extremist movements and transnational relationships are examined in order to gain a better understanding of the factors leading to the convergence and growing inter-connectivity among extremist groups.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Increasingly, North Africa has become a region infamous for hosting, breeding and exporting Islamic extremism to the rest of the world. This is attributed to several factors, not least to the fact that, although the North African region has vast natural resources as well as diverse and rich cultural and historical resources, since 1975 the economic development of the region has lagged far behind the average of the rest of the world's economic growth rates. Most countries have had major economic problems and many of them have been unsuccessful in consolidating the various forces that fought for independence. In common with the rest of Africa's post-post-colonial states, state institutions have become too exclusivist or predatory. Freedom of expression is often curbed; opposition bodies are banned or are prevented from organising themselves and hence have had no option but to go underground. Those denied freedom and the possibility

of power sharing have had little reason to form a formal opposition and hence potent and unhealthy conflicts have emerged. The economic crisis, which started during the 1970s and gathered momentum during the 1980s, generated a new type of dissent, articulated most vehemently by Islamist movements. These movements vary considerably in their approach, ideologies, modus operandi, origins, geographic and demographic popular support, internal cohesion and tendencies to splinter. Some of them have become overtly involved in the political process while holding on to their pragmatic approach with varying degrees of success, while others have remained orthodox or have taken extreme stands. The Palestinian–Israeli conflict, invasion of Iraq and what has become known as the ‘war on terror’ have all contributed to the revival and restructuring of extremist movements across the region. Although violent religious extremism represents a minority view, it is nevertheless a real threat within and outside its immediate communities.

Each country has adopted a different set of strategies to combat the threat posed by the destructive activities of the extremists, ranging from attempts to address their ideological underpinnings to coaxing, co-option and repression. With the 11 September 2001 attacks and the ‘war on terror’ launched by the West, the internal security of the North African communities has become only more complicated.

The contributors to this volume have provided fresh explanatory frames of reference to ‘political Islam’ and its extremist variances and tendencies in North Africa, in order to illustrate how local and global dynamisms impact on both ideologies and practices in a specific context and time.

The monograph starts by unpacking key terms and misunderstandings in our readings of political Islam. Dr Larbi Sidiki argues that there is a need to deconstruct the politics of language that surrounds the expression and organisation of Muslim politics. He also argues for the need to contextualise ‘political Islam’ and its nature as an ever-changing phenomenon and an open-ended project. He discusses different developments of Islamic thought and the driving temporal and spatial contexts. Colonisation, post-colonisation and calls for democracy and globalisation, as well as the war against Iraq, have all elicited their specific responses from Islamic thinkers and scholars, and a type of perceived appropriate action. He argues that radical approaches to reform often clash with the status quo, and that using illegal and non-constitutional means are not successful in delivering democracy.

In Chapter 2, Mohamed Salih provides a conceptual analysis of Islamic party politics from the perspective of the geopolitics of North Africa and as informed by the goal of creating a transnational Muslim *umma*, with synoptic case studies for illustration. He examines how major Islamist political organisations or parties in North Africa have evolved from nationalist political parties that employed Islam as an ideology of national liberation – against colonial rule or as a form of resistance against tyrannical regimes – to transnational networks. Essentially transnationalism is viewed as a key for a meaningful understanding of the differences between various forms of Islamist political organisations or parties and Western secular and confessional political parties. Salih views transnationalism as social, cultural, economic and political relations that take place between various levels beyond their primary site. He also examines features, objectives and sources of support of extremist Islamist political organisations or parties.

In Chapter 3, Amel Boubaker examines the ideological underpinnings and modes of action of Algerian Salafist movements, including questions of how and when they emerged, and to what extent they are tied to other transnational actors in the region. In particular Boubaker focuses on the Algerian *jihadi* Salafism relationship with the state, the jihadis' response to the external threat and their affiliation to the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). He also focuses on the process of transition from a discourse of negation regarding the state and society to a *jihadi* ideology, where visual media and violence become the main *raison d'être*. The author highlights the factors that led to the radicalisation of increasing numbers of Algerian youth in his analysis of the country's political history, and includes the lack of true political participation and the prevalence of violence as facts in Algerian history.

In Chapter 4, Sami Zemni examines Islamist political groups in Morocco, with a closer look at the Justice and Development Party (PJD) and the Association for Justice and Charity (*al-Adl wa Ihsan*). In particular Zemni focuses on the impact of national and international networks of various types of Islamism on political development in Morocco. He explores the 'brand' of Islamism that has been part and parcel of the logic of *alternance*, the type of Islamism that has been kept outside the realm of political reform and, finally, the way violent Islamism (jihadism) has been treated as a 'danger' to Moroccan reforms. The author also examines the issue of international networks influencing Moroccan citizens, which has become a matter of both national attention as well as international diplomatic squabbles.

In Chapter 5, Amr Elshobaki explores the history of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt since its establishment by Hassan El-Banna in 1928. He explains the reasons the movement survived in an extremely hostile environment and has become one of the main political forces in Egypt and the Arab world to date. Elshobaki analyses the political stance of the Muslim Brotherhood on various issues, including democracy, during three stages of Egyptian history. The first stage is that of the founding Brothers, from the inception of the movement to the end of the Royal Regime; the second is the period of self-isolation and *jihad*, from 1948 till the end of the Nasser era, when Sayed Qotb and others opened the way for condemning the regime and legitimising *jihad* to oust it; while the third stage emerged at the beginning of the 1980s and involved active participation in the political arena. In the second section of the chapter, the author examines the Muslim discourse towards democracy and studies the underlying reasons for the changes in that discourse under the influence of changing political situations.

Chapter 6 gives Stefano Bellucci's analysis of Islamism in Sudan, in which he looks at who the challenger is and what is at stake. His choice of Sudan is based on the fact that that country constitutes the only instance of an Islamic state in the Sunni contemporary world. The author explains the meanings of the term 'fundamentalist' and the reasons some Islamic movements changed their institutions into democratic ones and became political parties, or rejected the party structure as a way of pursuing political and social goals. He argues that, when one analyses certain brands of political Islam such as the Sudanese one, a central question is not democracy, but power and how this power is organised and exercised inside the institutional and geographical boundaries. The shift in the structure of power is what Islamism or political Islam, so-called 'fundamentalism', is really all about. The struggle for control of power in Sudan between the modernists (Al-Turabi) and the military (Al-Bashir) is very functional one, where they have used each other's power reciprocally. Bellucci uses the Islamic movement in Sudan to highlight this situation, discussing the ups and downs of this journey. He follows the approaches and tactics of the Islamic movement in Sudan, examines why and how alliances were forged, and why and how old allies were dropped and new directions followed.

Chapter 7 sees Muhammad Kabir Isa examine the impact of militant Islamic movements on the cohesion and stability of the Libyan state, as well as on the North African sub-region. Using the example of the Libyan Islamic

Fighting Group (LIFG), the author links the formation and development of militant Islamism to changes in socio-economic conditions coupled with, among others, economic mismanagement, falling oil prices and international sanctions. Central to the author's argument is the link between the rise of Islamic extremism and the political oppression of grassroots Islamist groups, as well as the Western cultural invasion. The extremist Islamist phenomenon in Libya needs to be understood in relation to the decline in Libyan state power and the humiliation of the Islamic sphere vis-a-vis Western hegemony.

In Chapter 8, Omayma Abdel-Latif highlights the prominent role that women play in shaping the politics of Islamist movements in Egypt. She argues that one of the most prominent features of Islamist politics today has to do with the role women play as political activists. In their attempt to broaden their participation and representation inside and outside the movements' political and organisational structures, women activists have carved themselves an important niche, offering perhaps what could evolve into an Islamic model for women's activism. Key themes discussed include women's perceptions of their roles as political actors inside and outside their movements, and the challenges they face as activists operating within repressive political and social settings. Abdel-Latif also discusses the struggle of women for recognition of their role in furthering political and social causes through their own movement and in society at large.

In Chapter 9, Hugh Roberts examines the ways in which general strategies of triangulation have been followed by North African governments since the late 1970s and how this has contributed to the development of militant Islamic activism in the region. Roberts analyses the behaviour of the Egyptian and Algerian governments in this regard, highlighting economic stagnation and deficiencies as providing the right environment for resentment. The author also notes the role played by North African governments as relay stations for Western powers in the 'global war on terror' and the implications of this on their internal relations with militant Islamists.

1 'Political Islam'

Theoretical underpinnings

LARBI SADIKI

INTRODUCTION

The analysis below attempts a twofold line of inquiry. Firstly, it seeks to navigate the vast terrain of political Islam, using a quasi-deconstructionist approach. This is vital for a firmer grasp of a semantically and discursively complex field stamped by the constructions of Orientalists and Occidentalists. In a nutshell, both are guilty of generalisation and reductionism. In the post-9/11 moment, East and West seem more than ever before to view each other through prisms of hubris and mutual exclusion.

Secondly, the essay tries to assess hidden discourses of renewal from within the abode of Islam. This exercise aims to capture the essence of the open-ended and indeterminate emerging trends of thought within Islam. This, to an extent, aims to display examples of the new dynamism and diversity within Islam at the turn of the third millennium, touching on questions regarding Islamic law, Islam and democracy, *jihad* (moral and combative struggle), and *ijtihad* (independent reasoning), among other issues. This exercise necessitates mapping out the intellectual terrain of political Islam, past and present. The aim is to contextualise Islamism within old and new discourses from al-Banna up to Khaled

About El Fadl. Only thus can a firm grasp be obtained of the polemics and the shifts surrounding and happening within political Islam, especially post-9/11. ¹

KEYWORDS

The terms 'Islamism' and 'political Islam' are generally used interchangeably. They are used throughout in preference to a number of other terms such as 'fundamentalism' and 'fundamentalist movements'. The terms are used here to denote a particular brand of thought and praxis aimed at 'Islamising' the polity, economy and society: a process referred to in Arabic as *ta'seel*, which opposes the privatisation of religion.

Islamism is not monolithic: the diversity and nuances within it must be accounted for. Islamists differ in terms of thought and praxis. Their political behaviour ranges from the most apolitical and peaceful (Tableegh teaching) to the most extremist (al-Qaeda). What is most noticeable about political Islam is the endeavour to undertake an inversion of the earlier 'disestablishment' of Islam from the political realm. If disestablishment refers to the separation of religion from politics, the inversion of disestablishment is generally about the blurring of the boundaries of the religious and the political. It can thus be said that the Western notion of 'rendering to God what is God's and rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's' has no resonance in Islamist thought. The disestablishment of religion was coterminous with the nation and state building that followed either decolonisation in most of the Muslim world or the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire when the caliphate was abolished in the mid-1920s.

Ijtihad refers to the operationalisation of the Islamic instrument to render a rational meaning to religious texts by the individual or believer. *Shari'ah* is associated with Islamic law. *Jihad* is spiritual struggle with non-violent connotations. Finally, *ummah* is the Islamic community that is bound by faith and whose membership is conferred upon adherents of Islam who uphold the notion of *tawheed* (unity of God).

The semantic and conceptual field is literally replete with attempts to understand political Islam, which some imprecisely refer to as 'fundamentalism', a misnomer that has receded in explanatory power and linguistic clarity. As Table 1 shows, scholars have all left their mark on the attempt to define 'political Islam'. The French school, through Roy and Kepel, suffers from a fetish for labels, which are often generalisations that all in some way or another highlight

Table 1 Key Islamicists and understandings of fundamentalism

Scholar	View of 'political Islam'	Critique/evaluation
Eric Davis, 1984 ²	Islamic radicalism: stresses revolutionary zeal	Not nuanced as if radical change is singular for all forces of political Islam, with stress put on militancy, i.e. negative
R. Hrair Dekmejian, 1985 ³	Fundamentalism used interchangeably with Arabic translation <i>usuliyah</i>	Distinction between passive and militant strands with stress on regenerative capacity
Emmanuel Sivan, 1985 ⁴	Fundamentalism is a continuum with two poles: conservative and extreme radicals	Continuum idea is innovative and captures nuances, but ignores overlap between conservative and extreme radicals
Olivier Roy, 1998 ⁵	Fundamentalism equated with Islamism as neo-fundamentalism: ever-changing zealous and revolutionary forces	Dynamism and difference are stressed; tends towards negative labelling: neo-fundamentalism is not any clearer than fundamentalism
Ervand Abrahamian, 1989 ⁶	Fundamentalism is made up of both liberal and radical forces	Boxes political Islam into neat groups of radicals: clerical, lay-religious, and secular. Clerical populism ignores historiography of Islam's learned scholars
Martin E Many and Scott Appleby, 1991 ⁷	Fundamentalism refers to anti-state politicisation	Dilutes spiritual or religious ethos of political Islam
Graham Fuller and Ian Lesser, 1995 ⁸	Fundamentalism denotes mutual siege	Lacks contextualisation; use of siege: generalisation and imprecise abstraction
Youssef Choueiri, 1997 ⁹	Fundamentalism denotes radicalised revivalism with totalitarian tendencies	Ideologises political Islam in a fixed way; stresses sequential linearity
John Esposito, 1999 ¹⁰	Fundamentalism is dynamic; subject to increased radicalisation: revivalism to neo-revivalism to neo-revivalism to extremism	Ignores parallel process of increased moderation, and the interplay between processes leading to extremism and moderation
Barry Rubin, 2002 ¹¹	Fundamentalism refers to oscillation between revolutionary militancy and outright terrorism	Apocalyptic view that leans towards a martial view of all things Islamic
Gilles Kepel, 2002 ¹²	Fundamentalism qua <i>jihad</i> -bent movement is dying: transition to post-Islamism	Captures idea of dynamism; but Kepel's work is yet to be deconstructed properly for its generalisation and Orientalism

the 'failing' nature of political Islam and its extremist tendencies. What is positive in the various understandings is the dynamic and diverse nature of the phenomenon. What is negative is the presence of a derogatory residue in the terms 'radical' and 'radicalism', perhaps from the days of communism. Radicals may want reform, but the bottom line is that they work against the centre of the establishment, deploy illegal and non-constitutional strategies, and even when they embrace democracy, they tend to fail or misuse it.

Islamists practise revisionism, and this is something that continues to elude observers and scholars of Islamist movements and groups. I find Bayat's notion of post-Islamism somewhat awkward.¹³ But more than any other concept it captures the essence of what I call the constructivist nature of political Islam. That is, it is an ever-changing phenomenon, an open-ended project. Emphasis must be placed on *open-endedness*. Islamists, peaceful and violent, anti-systemic or systemic, are forced by local and global dynamics to adjust thought and practice or risk extinction. Post-Islamism, as Bayat puts it, refers to 'the birth, out of the Islamist experience, of a qualitatively different discourse and politics'. He gives the example of how Islamists look for a synthesis of Islam and Western ideas in democracy. Fundamentally, however, while violent groups, such as al-Qaeda, tend to assume an exclusivist and singular view of religious truth, a majority of Islamists is renouncing such a practice. Again, Bayat has a point in observing that Islamists are increasingly tending to 'acknowledge ... ambiguity, multiplicity, inclusion, and compromise in principles and practice'.¹⁴ This quest for crystallising a centrist position, in accordance with what is termed in Islamist parlance *wasatiyyah* (moderate), can be noted in the less successful attempt by the Egypt Muslim Brotherhood to be legalised, to include Copts within its ranks, to form a political party, to field female candidates in the country's elections, and to develop a dialogue with Western diplomats.

ISLAM AND ISLAMISMS

The tragic events of 9/11 have reopened the proverbial gates of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) everywhere in the world. This trend is mostly manifest in the rich panoply of religious discourse and counter-discourse in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. What is most specific about the return of *ijtihad* is the phenomenon of Islam as a shared terrain for all discourses, top-down and bottom-up. All claimants of *ijtihad* deploy Islam to legitimate their thought and

their praxis and delegitimise opponents. Discursively, a variety of ‘islams’ (with a small ‘i’ to use Dale Eickelman’s anthropology of Islam) is at play. Elsewhere in the Muslim world contestation is most fierce between claimants of some form of modern (Muslim Brotherhood movements), radical (Salafi and Wahhabi), cultural-spiritual (Sufi brotherhoods), or missionary (Tableegh and Da’wah) brands of Islam against an Atatürkist-type of socio-political modernisation.

CONTEXTUALISATION OF POLITICAL ISLAM

The phenomenon of political Islam must be read within specific contexts. This is vital for avoiding the pitfalls of generalisation and reductionism – the flaws of Orientalists (Western discourses about the Orient) and Occidentalists (Eastern discourses of the Occident or West). Islam has thus far served as a legitimator of state building along secular-nationalist lines (all former and current liberation movements prior to state formation) or against the state (e.g. Somalia, Afghanistan and Yemen), as well as a legitimator of political reform at a level below the state. It must be pointed out that Islam is the shared ideological repository of political identity and value assignment in most Muslim states, including self-professed secular states. In Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, where religion in the form of the Salafi puritanical creed provides a *raison d’être*, the state has coached religion into ‘clientship’.

Yet in other states, religion was disestablished. But the state, despite declaratory policies in favour of secularisation, activates Islamic idioms and metaphors for the purpose of shoring support from the public at large, and the religious voices and institutions in particular. Bourguiba was a staunch secularist. He was one who meddled in religion. He publicly advocated an image of Tunisia in which women were unveiled rather than veiled, and of renouncing the fast during Ramadan (one of the five pillars of Islam). The Islamism that emerged in the former French colony reflected the local context: staunchly anti-secular politics that sought to efface religious and cultural identity. It went further, mostly via peaceful means, to argue the case for a place for religion in society as in the European Union where separation of the sacred and the political does not greatly curtail religious freedom or worship. However, the many veil sagas over the years in France have forced these very Islamists to re-evaluate what is called ‘secular fundamentalism’. As in Tunisia, non-establishment forces of Islam advance a different vision of polity, society and the economy, shaped

by the dream of the partial emulation of the Medinan city-state built by the Prophet Muhammad by reference to legality, communal solidarity, mutual compassion, and toleration and protection of difference.

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood, older than the state and steadfast in its quest for an Islamist state, has contested the non-Islamic nature of the state from the time of King Farouk up to the present. It has been involved with the state in processes of mutual inclusion and exclusion, which entailed resorting to violence from the 1950s until the 1970s. During Sadat's rule, and before the peace treaty with Israel, the Brotherhood welcomed the margin of existence given to it by the late Sadat. It used him to rebuild its disorganised and weakened institutions and its demobilised and largely oppressed membership. He used the Brotherhood to counter leftist forces that questioned and threatened his power in the immediate post-Nasser years. He, too, turned to Islam's idioms to shore up his legitimacy and popularity; and he bankrolled al-Azhar University to invest in another formidable ally, recruiting to his service a revered Islamic institution with a large bureaucracy and vital affective resources. His tax concessions to the resurging forces of Islam led to the proliferation of private mosques, eventual hotbeds of anti-systemic religious forces, including his very assassins in October 1981.

The anti-systemic forces of political Islam that thrived under Sadat have today all but gone. The notorious *al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah* (the Islamic Group) – along with Islamic Jihad, the *Takfeer wa al-Higra* (Excommunication and Emigration) – which up to the late 1990s fought the state and targeted state symbols, including tourism as a Westernising facet and activity, have gradually laid down their arms under a policy of *tawbah* (repentance). The hundreds and thousands of activists who committed themselves to the overthrow of the state in Mubarak's Egypt have been tamed. Moreover, many of their leaders have become 'defenders' of social peace, with the state benefiting a great deal from this unlikely source of favourable propaganda. This was one of the successes of Mubarak – taming anti-systemic and violent Islamists.

Islamism is often incubated in local matrices that must be understood. These matrices may condition the people to certain practices, both peaceful and violent. In Algeria, a unique case of a state and society that rose from the embers and the ravages of a brutal war of liberation, a quasi-praxis of violence (in the name of a spurious notion of *jihad* since Muslim killed Muslim) followed the cancellation of the second round of elections in early 1992, which

would have confirmed the Front Islamique du Salut's (FIS) parliamentary majority. The state chose violence – through a coup – and the Islamists followed suit. The rest is history.

In neighbouring Tunisia, despite limited use of violence in the late 1980s by the Nahdah Party with or without leadership endorsement, the Islamists tended to favour peaceful engagement, even emigration over anti-state armed tactics. Tunisia was more or less the most stable Arab state, and part of the credit was owed to the peaceful ways of its Islamists. In contrast to Algeria, its neighbour, Tunisia was largely spared the brutality of a liberation war. Why Islamists tend to be violent requires contextualisation. Violence, extremism or intransigence are not givens that are invariably and indiscriminately cemented to the forces of political Islam. They must not be treated as such. Therefore, the linguistic field deployed by the security apparatuses that today engage with Islamism calls for revision. Islamism and Islamists are socially, spatially and temporally constructed. There is no one Islamist size that fits all.

The US-led so-called 'war on terror' is itself not just a physical, logistical and material minefield. It is, above all else, a theoretical, paradigmatic and conceptual minefield. What a totalising concept! It smacks of generalisation and reductionism. War must be discriminating as well as guided by political and legal ethics ends. As in the case of Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser extent, Egypt, a 'war' of words, propaganda, and even dialogue and reconciliation are vital resources. The unfolding Pakistani miasma is a grim reminder of the excesses of the 'war against terror', especially by an indigenous state against its indigenous population – partly with outside weaponry and political agendas.

Talking to 'terrorists', many would agree, should be favoured over bombing civilian villages and cities to flush out a minority of extremists (e.g. FATA, Swat). Terror warriors must first learn the art of disaggregation. The use, for instance, of the Taliban, shorthand for Qaeda-affiliated Afghans, is an abstraction that ignores the political sociology of violence and resistance. The Taliban are not detached of language, society, culture, local technology, mythology, religion and indigeneity. They survive because they are embraced by all of these, and because they, too, in return, have mastered the art of how to use these local resources to their cause – whatever that is.

The abstractions of 'terror' and 'terrorists' under some lame policy or practice that ignores the surrounding milieu and history will continue to harvest failure, more violence and counter-violence, and the unnecessary deaths of

civilians and soldiers, Afghani and non-Afghani. Demonisation through abstraction has not worked. It will not work. In fact, both abstraction and violence beget demonisation. For instance, the image of the US today is one of a warring hegemon, conducting war on two continents, and both undertaken against forces that happen to be Muslim. This directly and indirectly helps fulfil the 'clash of civilisations' prophecy.

The bottom line is that the fallacy of one totalising war, one totalising terror and one totalising Islamism cries for urgent rethinking. Once new thinking along with new wording is sufficiently sensitised to the variability of contexts and the diversity of Islamist thought, practice, culture, geography, history and humanity, then more constructive and engaging mapping of the terrains of Islamisms and the global forces operating on them will unfold. Only then will intellectual, normative, conceptual and lexical worlds crystallise. Maybe only then may pen points play a balancing role to gunpoints in the defense against the types of illegal, religious and secular brutality and violence that demean humanity as a whole.

In this context, it must be pointed out that just as armies, Muslim and non-Muslim, seem to be endlessly misguided by the abstractions of violent Islamists, armies of scholars are scrambling for funds and grants in the quest for the holy grail of terrorism or radicalisation. Academic careerism and short-sightedness is driving research agendas in pursuit of more abstraction of peoples, cultures, religions and regions. In many cases this takes place with limited language, knowledge of local religion, terrain and history, and with much less integrity in the choice of subjects of inquiry. Especially in relation to the post-9/11 violence and wars, there has been an explosion of 'security studies', and interest in security and prophets of radicalisation theories have proliferated. The language of 'Islam in crisis' obfuscates, rather than demystifies. Rarely do we Western scholars, in particular, pause to ask questions about the moral cost of the so-called 'war against terror'.

Between political Islam and Muslim politics

Eickelman and Piscatori view 'Muslim politics' as involving 'the competition and contest over both the interpretation of religious symbols and the control of the institutions that produce and sustain them'.¹⁵ Consequently Muslim politics is a sophisticated analysis of the ever-changing correlation between the sacred

and the profane in the Muslim world. Eickelman and Piscatori advance the idea that the politics of language that embed the expression and organisation of Muslim politics must be deconstructed. The Muslim world has witnessed a process of 'objectification of consciousness', a process that has raised fundamental questions in the minds of large numbers of believers. This objectification has come about as a result of mass education and wider channels of communication in the Muslim world, rendering exegesis widespread, especially as religious authority has itself been subjected to fragmentation. The learned monopolies of the past are receding. Religious discourse is wide open and open ended.

As Eickelman and Piscatori put it, the levelling of the playing field has led to an element of danger owing to heightened contestation of the symbols and idioms of Islam. This contestation cultivates poly-centricity, and this poly-centricity, in return, spawns contestation. The two work in tandem, reifying a more plural community of inquisitive and active Muslims who do not leave the question of religious decision to religious elites. The resulting diversity produces and enriches the interpretation and understanding of the experience of being Muslim in the modern and post-modern movement. It is as though so-called 'sacred authority' has lost its sanctity. Sanctity of text is to be separated and differentiated from the sanctity of revelation and text. Context matters. Text is given meaning within temporal and spatial contexts. Meanings and symbols are deployed by radically different Muslim actors and agents for fundamentally different ends. Sacred authority has multiple uses. It has the potentiality for being used as the medium both for maintaining state power as well as challenging or winning it. The processes of protest and bargaining underscore the dynamics of internal struggles within Muslim communities everywhere for control of production and application of religious symbols. Fragmentation of religious authority has pluralised as well as opened discussion about how to be Muslim according to time and space, and the demands of both religious identity and modernity.

Muslim politics, aided by the dynamic of the objectification of Muslim consciousness, has produced a transnational Islam. In this newly carved space of globality and transnationalism, the voice of Islam rivals the traditionally printed Islam. It is within this space that the travel of the sacred idioms, symbols and metaphors of 'islams' (as interpreted and experienced locally not globally) opens vistas for both affinity with and hostility to the norms of globalism, modernism and internationalism, and the norms underpinning them.

This is how fundamentalism is produced – through the metaphors and symbols which temporal and spatial contexts produce in the attempt to wed the ideals of pristine, puritanical and textual Islam with the challenges and pressures of the daily lived 'islams' from Bali to Cairo. In the midst of multiple 'islams' (as Eickelman and Piscatori use this term) there exists a horizontal transnationalism forming a loose universal Muslim consciousness. This produces what has been described by some observers as 'an intercalation of civilizations in which debates become more at hand and more complex'. This intercalation of 'islams' and modernities is misinterpreted with telling effect, feeding the familiar bias and depiction of a global Islamic terror threat to world peace and civilisation. This, in turn, reproduces the implicit notion of more than one level of Muslim consciousness.

FROM AL-BANNA TO QUTB AND ISLAMIC REVIVAL

Sayyid Qutb – one of the most influential Muslim thinkers – has an over-selective view of what Islam is. For example, he overlooks that the Qur'an is accepting of other religions such as the People of the Book. For him, Islam is the correct path. Qutb, however, is not an isolationist. He stands for thought and action. He may come across as sitting astride Islam and the modern world. However, he understands both. His treatise on modernity's materialism reveals sharp insight. He was probably the first Muslim scholar to predict back in the early 1960s that communism and, to an extent, party democracy were doomed to failure and collapse. He develops a vision for an idealised Muslim state. To that end, he believes in a new paradigm along with a new praxis for the reification of the Muslim state. Living only under God's law and under the banner of an Islamic state would solve the Muslim community's problems of sovereignty, identity, religiosity, justice and godly rule (*hakimiyyah*).¹⁶

Qutb entreats the Muslims to work hard towards the objective of emulating a comprehensive form of Islam as practised in the time of the Prophet: 'Islam is an integrated and comprehensive system that in [the] tradition of the *salafiyah* should be understood exclusively from the Qur'an and the Sunnah.'¹⁷ In some tracts in *Milestones (Ma'alim fi al-Tariq)*, Qutb permits fighting against non-Muslims.¹⁸ On this account many would disagree with Qutb's belligerence against the People of the Book. This, however, is not the justification for Bin Laden and company declaring war against what they called in the 1990s 'the

Jews and crusaders'. Qutb's world and mindset were shaped by surrounding realities of colonialism, including the occupation of Palestine.

While this radical side of Qutb's discourse is what many Western critics focus on, interpreting *Milestones* as a handbook for fundamentalism and terrorism, the discourse he professes in his other seminal but overlooked work, *Social Justice*, is one of humanity and care. Like Hasan al-Banna, whose brand of Islam is one that 'cares for health and well being' (al-Banna), Qutb invokes the Qur'an, especially the godly commandments emphasising communal obligation and the need to sustain a good community, and to care and exercise compassion: 'Every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you will be held responsible for his flock – he who strives on behalf of the widows or the poor is like one who fights for the cause of Allah.'¹⁹

'Western civilization is unable to present any healthy values for the guidance of mankind ... In short, all man-made individual or collective theories have proved to be failures.'²⁰ Thus in *Milestones*, Qutb, like al-Banna, seems to engineer or construct a brand of reformist Muslim politics. The aim is to respond to what he considers to be a universal crisis of deficiency in the values of humanity and spirituality. Indeed, *Milestones*' point of departure is the premise that man-made laws have failed, necessitating a wider search for meaning, delivery and superior values that ultimately lead to God for guidance.

Another key premise, which Qutb shares with al-Banna, is the necessity to 'halt at the lines fixed by Allah and the limits fixed by the Holy Prophet'. For guidance, Qutb returns to the Qur'an and its basic teachings. He is aided by the empirical examples of the first Muslim community and Islamic order constructed by the Prophet and his companions. The aim is revival of the moral perfection of pristine Islam. Stress therefore is on the need for God's law to govern all aspects of human life – the sacred and profane. Unlike Qutb, al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, pragmatically prioritises the maximisation of public utility and, to this end, contends that 'Islam never avoids borrowing from any good system, provided it does not clash with its general principle and laws'. By contrast, in *Milestones* Qutb is adamant that all man-made systems and theories form a *jahiliyyah* (pagan order). For him, *jihad* against the pagan society is necessary. Only 'true Muslims', who abide by the law of God and the traditions of the Holy Prophet, are outside the realm of the decay and spiritual pollution of paganism. This is the pool of faith and piety Qutb endows with the potential to grow in numbers to eventually partake in his

quest for reform of Muslim societies, ridding it of all ungodly laws, knowledge and government. Qutb's *jahiliyyah* includes Muslim and non-Muslim states, as well as Western imperialists, reminding us of Qutb's anti-colonial prism.

Qutb places human nature (*fitrah*) in the centre of the quest for delivery in every sense – spiritually, politically and socially. It is this God-given capacity and disposition for enacting God's laws that render believers agents of positive transformation. But this agency and the praxis that goes with it are all instruments for self-discovery in a cosmos in which revelation must be people's main frame of reference. So there is a combination of predeterminism – the godly sanctions of what is acceptable and reprehensible set out in revelation – and determinism – the will to act in a Qur'anic fashion – enjoining the good and preventing wrongdoing. Thus the assignment of vicegerency (*khilafah*) on earth is truly enacted by the believers, while vicegerency is not possible without an Islamic state that implements and reflects God's sovereignty and authority (*hakimiyyah*). Mastery is God's, and is not divisible. God's sovereignty is an essential precondition for a socio-political order in which all humans are equal by virtue of equality in powerlessness before God and equality in submission to the one and only authority, God's laws. Qutb's world view, however, does not remove all power from humans. They are on earth to enact God's rule, a purpose for which they have been endowed with a positive disposition to enjoin the good and work for the good of man, as well as with God-given subservience only to God and not to fellow human beings. Hence – as elaborated in his seminal *Milestones* – the phrase 'God is greatest' is in a manifesto for reclaiming God-given ennoblement, humanity and dignity. No Caesars are greater than man; and no earthly kings.

Qutb remains misunderstood. Post-9/11 he is caricatured as though he plotted the mayhem heaped on New Yorkers in 2001, or as if he penned the plans for terror against Americans.²¹ Of course, the context of inequality, authoritarian secular nationalism, colonialism and Muslim disunity around him perhaps led Qutb to produce political treatises (especially *Milestones*), the chief aim of which was to unhinge what he saw as a state of moral decay and religious laxity. He was harsh in relegating fellow Muslims to a state of pagan existence (*jahiliyyah*), virtually anointing himself judge and arbitrator of right and wrong – exclusively God's role. Qutb's discourse declares unequivocal commitment to out-and-out renewal and reform of Islam and Muslims. While strongly endorsing the role of education, Qutb looked for and found a practical solution for the re-Islamisation of society for the purpose of instituting God's order. His

idea of the vanguard (*tala'i'*) embodies the agency and positive will by the believers to fight and sacrifice themselves in the cause of a godly just state. This script for reform of Muslim societies should not be read outside the temporal and spatial contexts within which Qutb lived, suffered brutality, imprisonment and censure, wrote and then died for his cause. That cause was primarily the reform of Islam. He was right in believing in reform and inventing a paradigm to that end. He perhaps was wrong in expecting reform to happen quickly or to be engineered by combative means.

REVISIONING ISLAMISM: AN INTELLECTUAL MAP

Questions in existing scholarship that pertain to Islam and politics in the modern period of the Arab Middle East have examined the emergence and nature of political movements that consciously espouse an Islamic agenda, that is the introduction of *Shari'ah* law, the restoration of Islam to its true cultural role in society and state, and so on. A number of words have been coined to describe these movements, 'fundamentalism' being until recently the most prominent. However, this vocabulary with its mistaken connotations has been replaced with the word 'Islamist'.²² Without dwelling on the etymology of this term for too long, its contemporary ascendancy is rooted in the name that those who espoused Islam as a primary political loyalty gave to themselves – *Islamiyyun*. In the last two decades it has acquired a respectable position among practitioners of Middle East Studies who examine such political movements as a working definition and concept.

Independent reasoning or *ijtihad* is probably the key concept that has allowed *Islamiyyun* – the Islamists – to expound a thoroughly modern conception of what it means to be a Muslim in the contemporary Muslim world through a more politically sensitive lens. As a legal tool it has traditionally been used to deduce Islamic law by those qualified to do so – *mujtahidun* – and by utilising it they managed to articulate a set of laws that responded to the historical needs of Islamic civilisation. *Ijtihad* was a widely contested object of the Islamic intellectual tradition, and the ability of the *mujtahid* to interpret the sources of Islam – the Qur'an and the hadith literature – for himself was premised upon mastering this legal tool. Thus, Islamic civilisation was equipped with a dynamic legal tradition that had a set of intellectual mechanisms which allowed it to shape and construct an Islamic way of life.

At a certain historical juncture, *ijtihad* and those who practised it were viewed with disdain or were at least seen to be deploying it unnecessarily as all possible questions were answered as a result of the build-up and solidification of Islamic rulings from *madhahib al-arba'ah* (the four rites of Islamic jurisprudence). The centring of Islamic law and, by extension, of who was authorised to use *ijtihad*, was severely constrained as a result of the further institutionalisation of these rites of Islamic jurisprudence. This signalled the closing of the *babu 'l-ijtihad* (gate of *ijtihad*) (see Wael Hallaq).²³ As it spread across the old world – primarily Africa and Asia – the Islamic intellectual tradition relied upon *ijtihad* for its lack of centredness to expound an Islam that was at once localised into the indigenous traditions of places such as the Nile Valley in Egypt and a universal holistic worldview.

Abul 'Ala al-Mawdudi

Revivalism emerged in the first part of the 20th century and was in part conditioned by the colonial context. It is important to recognise the interactions between Islamist ideologues and movements on the one hand, and Western colonialism on the other. This set of interactions was largely hostile, emphasising the destructive effects of colonialism on both a material and a cultural plane. Thus, the prism of foreign hegemony was a major object of critique by al-Banna and al-Mawdudi (both influential Islamic thinkers). The response of these thinkers to these problems was articulated in terms of Islam as a *way of life* – comprehensive and holistic in its world view regarding the human actor. Islam was construed to be constituted by the principal cornerstone of Muslim theology, the unity of God (*tawhid*). A corollary of this idea was the notion of *al-hakimiyya li-Allah*, the sovereignty of God. From this basis and with regard to the legislative capacity of the modern state and democracy's prerogative to rule, it was vehemently argued that, as God was the only legitimate legislator, the Qur'an and the Sunnah (the normative example) of the Prophet Muhammad were the only legitimate sources of law and, by extension, of all matters pertaining to human existence, including economics, culture and society. Democracy was seen to have usurped this divine right. Al-Banna and al-Mawdudi advocated a comprehensive and yet innovative conception of Islam through the exercise of *ijtihad*. This enabled them to open up and contest how Islam was to be understood in a society that was experiencing

an immense sense of change and the imposition of foreign ideologies such as secularism.

The context of the two ideologues explains how they moved in a parallel direction. Both colonial Egypt and an India ruled by the British Raj went through a period of substantial change to their societies and education systems. Another factor that propelled both these men to envision Islam as a contemporary – and superior – mode of living was in part permitted by the reformist efforts of Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Sayyid Ahmed Khan and Muhammad Iqbal, who opened up the interpretive space for non-*alim* (religious scholars) thinkers to redefine and reinterpret Islam. Greater emphasis was placed on authenticity (*asala*) in the face of foreign hegemony. The radical transformative effects of realising Islam in society and the state provided the Muslim community (*umma*) with the opportunity to enact renewal (*tajdid*) of itself at a time of decline. The opening up and decentring of traditional authoritative interpretations paved the way for expounding Islam as an ideology in a colonial context. The primacy of *tawhid* and membership of the *umma* in any social or political order impacted the thinking of both al-Banna and al-Mawdudi, with each stressing socio-political participation and living by the commands of *al-hakimiyya li-Allah* to varying degrees.

The quest for a centrist position or ‘middle way’: Islamic *wasatiyyah*

The Islamic *wasatiyyah* is a reformist and acculturationist movement led by the scholars Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Muhammad al-Ghazali, Kamal Abu el-Magd, Muhammad el-Awa and Ma'mun al-Hudaibi.

These thinkers represent an introverted meditation on the role of Islam in society in the shadow of Sayyid Qutb and have stoked the fires of a more reformist and socially receptive interpretation of Islam. They employ a *maqasid al-Shari 'ah* (objectives of *Shari 'ah*) approach to answer questions of politics and law within Muslim society. At the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, in a post-colonial environment, a convergence of seemingly mutually exclusive world views has appeared – that of Islam and democracy. The main proponents of this trend of thought, some of whom are grounded within Islamic traditional discourse, have conceived and imagined an ethical form of Muslim politics. This ethical dimension brings the question of democracy

closer to the discussion of the current state of politics in Muslim countries and the role that Muslim masses play in such polities.

Two major figures who have led the debate on these topics and on others of a more controversial character are the Azharites, the late Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali and his student Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi. These two scholars and intellectuals have mapped out a democratic dimension of Islamic political theory. This theory not only sees a moral value in democracy, but emphasises that it is compatible with *Shariah* and that it has an equivalent in *shura* (consultation).²⁴ Elections, political participation and limited periods of office for heads of state are included in this Islamic repertoire of policies that suggests a politics for the masses without jeopardising Islam, while actually fulfilling the mandate of the latter in its ethical dimensions.²⁵

This discussion has inevitably won many sympathisers as well as proponents in the Muslim world of its cause, prominent among them being Muhammad al-Awwa, Tariq Bishri and Fahmi Huweidi. They utilise many aspects of traditional Islamic discourse that serve the objective of an ethical vision of Islam in everyday politics, such as *maqasid al-Shari'ah*. The method of activism espoused by this trend is *dawah* or preaching, and so permeating society with the objectives of reform (*islah*) and renewal (*tajdid*).²⁶ The principles of *ijtihad* (intellectual reasoning) and *maslaha* (public interest), the vast juristic tradition, ethical values of *adl* (justice) and *shura* all provide Muslim intellectuals and scholars with a repertoire to construct a specifically Islamic discourse on democracy.

Constructing a discourse that is not only Islamic in inspiration, but also in content has pushed forward an agenda that seeks to redress contemporary problems in the Muslim world. This agenda acknowledges the existence of minorities as fellow citizens of an Islamic polity, where gender is not the prerequisite for leadership, and democratic participation is divinely sanctioned premised on the principle of *shura*.²⁷

Global rejectionists or neo-secessionists: Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden

This trend advocates a cosmological world order based upon a literalism that borrows from *wahabiyyah* and Sayyid Qutb, and can be understood as an instance of the deterritorialisation of Islam.²⁸ The removal of a sense of

territoriality in a narrative privileges a globalised *jihad*. It rejects the themes of state building or civil society building, as well as the interaction between the transcendental and the immediate context of the political protagonist. The main crux of the narrative expounded by the ideologues of this trend is a reductionism of the religious agency whereby the human subject is merely an instrument for the purposes of a cosmic clash.²⁹ In the *political* sphere this is especially evident in the concomitant rejection of democratic participation and castigation of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood by al-Zawahiri. The bone of contention with democracy is that it is viewed as an example of *shirk billah* (polytheism).

In addition, cyberspace provides the imaginative landscape to propound an interpretation of Islam that is no longer accountable to the traditional symbols or figures of authority, that is *fuqaha* (Islamic jurists) or the multifaceted corpus of the juristic tradition. The demotic element of this very (post)modern activism perceives borders or nations as impious fictions that are transcended by the global nature of the *ummah* and *dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam). A certain level of romanticism is interspersed with the noticeable lack of authoritative sources in terms of the cumulative tradition of Islam (i.e. *fiqh* [jurisprudence]) that is evoked. The Muslim world stands as the object of reference where the insidious ‘crusaders’ wreak violence and chaos as concrete manifestations of this *religious* conflict and these become subsumed within the, suggested, cosmological import of the Qur’an:

The best proof of this is their [the Americans’] eagerness to destroy Iraq, the strongest neighboring Arab state, and their endeavour to fragment all the states of the region such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Sudan into paper statelets and through their disunion and weakness to guarantee Israel’s survival and the continuation of the brutal crusade occupation of the [Arabian] Peninsula... On that basis, and in compliance with God’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims. The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim. This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God: ‘[F]ight

them until there is no tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God.³⁰

Within this trend, Islam represents the cosmological and cognitive endpoint of the human self, which is no longer an actor in the search for religious truths or participating in the interpretive space – this is amply provided by Islam. Rather the latter aspects are hindrances to the fulfilment of this *cosmological* 'islam' (if one can speak in those terms) that appeal to a global community.

Another dimension of this trend is its apparent Wahhabi or Salafi features. It does share the claim of an interpretive agency (although in the light of what has been mentioned this statement might seem contradictory) to the primary sources of Islam. However, its interpretation relies on an almost exclusive emphasis on the literal and the apparent precluding of a substantial exercise of reason in the attempt to interpret God's law. Interpretation of the sources is undertaken for the main purpose of effacing those exact elements that made the act of *ijtihad* possible – the ethos that one's explication of the meaning(s) of the Qur'an is *merely* a human act of trying to comprehend the ineffable or transcendental. An observation that is significant for us to acknowledge is that Zawahiri, in explicitly rejecting the legitimacy of democracy, has unwittingly entered a discursive space where democracy itself, although its meaning is contested, is a legitimate political idea and practice.

Juridico-rationalism: Soroush, El-Fadl and Abou Zaid

How do these three eminent Muslim scholars attempt to reconcile religion and the public sphere?

According to Khaled Abou El-Fadl, a proponent of the *rationalist* school of jurisprudence, the complex relationship that governs politics in Islam is undergirded by moral agency. Moral agency itself is to be found within the actual interpretive protagonist. Agents and actors are part of a process whereby the fashioning of authoritative texts is viewed as an act of creative thinking, with natural reason (*mutazilah*) guiding the interpreter as he or she delves within the Qur'an, the principal source of God's law. (This is a Qur'an-centric approach.) Human agency and cognition are part of the interplay of the interpretation of Islam from its proof texts, the Qur'an and the hadith. Human agency and cognition are thus charged with engaging in the search for God's law as a moral

agent capable of rationally discerning right and wrong, or judging the moral value of an act.

That is part of the sociology of human existence – that all of us achieve things within the limits of how far our consciousness and our hearts and minds have been able to absorb a particular time and a place. Within my context, I am going to try to preserve the sanctity of life.³¹

The text as a hermeneutical rule follows and is the object of interpretation by an agent whose ethos of morality is independent of the former (typical *mutazilah* position). The rationale, although separate from the text, is vital for the comprehension of the divine will as encompassed in the *Shari'ah*. *Huquq al-'ibad* (the rights of human beings) represents the rights that pertain to human beings, which, in the main, are constituted by the *maqasid al-Shari'ah*: the right to life, the right to property, the right to one's reputation, the right to lineage, and the right to intellect. The *huquq al-'ibad* are counterpoised to *huquq Allah* (the rights of God), whereby the former have a priority of fulfilment over the latter.

Having established this, it is now important to see who is entitled, or in other words, who is able to exercise the exacting of these rights as a legitimate political actor, and on what basis. The universality and particularity of Islam, as well as its extraterritoriality and territoriality, are issues that bring their focus upon human agency or social institutions as legitimate actors in the quest to fulfil the objectives of the *Shari'ah*. The universal nature of Islam frees it from any possibility of *fixing* or localising its ethical imperatives or moral rules onto a single entity, whether a sole rite of Islamic jurisprudence or a state structure.

If the duties of *Shari'ah*, figuratively speaking, accompany a Muslim wherever he/she may go, and if political boundaries are not the only means of discharging the obligations of the *Shari'ah*, this would seem to lend support to the conclusion that moral communities are more essential to the Islamic message than territorial boundaries. It is possible to comply with the Qur'anic command of living according to the dictates of *Shari'ah* without necessarily establishing a full-fledged state dedicated for that purpose. To avoid any misunderstandings, this statement does not mean that I am expressing opposition to the idea of a territorially bound state that enforces *Shari'ah* law, it only means that *territorially bound states are not the only possible mechanisms for the enforcement of Shari'ah*. *Shari'ah* may be enforced individually and personally, as well as collectively and communally. This would include, but need not be limited to, enforcement through formally organised states [emphasis added].³²

Euro-Islam: Tariq Ramadan; Zaki Badawi

Muslims in Europe have also participated in the rethinking of Islam and its redefinition in non-Muslim majority countries. Intellectual efforts in this regard have taken place primarily in the domain of jurisprudence. Islamic thinkers and scholars, who are in the most part based in Europe, have discussed the implications that stem from Muslims living in societies and states that do not apply Islamic law. Ranging from what forms of financial services are permissible for a Muslim to use (the question of interest rates) to voting in elections, many of these thinkers have attempted to articulate solutions to the *fact* of a Muslim presence in Europe. They have adopted a holistic approach that probes and investigates this reality. By deploying and appropriating the historical tradition of jurisprudential theory such as *maqasid al-Shari'ah*, they have opened a discursive space where interpretive protagonists participate in the contestation of symbolism and meanings pertaining to Islam. Primary among these discursive objects to be contested has been the traditional binary between *dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam) and *dar al-harb* or *kufr* (the abode of war or disbelief). This particular trend has reconceptualised how *fiqh* is used as a tool to guide and shape Muslim identity without the institutional reality of an Islamic state, and has shifted its focus onto civil society. The latter is the space where Muslim identity is not only delinked from the ideological nature of the state in which one is living (secularism in Great Britain; laicism in France), but is an active domain where Islamicity can be realised.

Reality or the actual situation (*al-waqi*) introduces to the practitioner of *ijtihad* the factor of context and the fact that Muslims form a permanent part of the fabric of societies in the West.³³ As a result this literature has emerged under the appellation of minority *fiqh*. Secularism, democracy, modernity and even Islam are concrete issues examined under critical scrutiny from the angle of the plural space of civil society. *Ijtihad* opens up the imaginative scope of Muslim identity to develop and find its place in non-Muslim majority society with a non-Muslim legal system as an ethical actor in a pluralist space. According to this logic, Muslims no longer occupy the territoriality of the conception of *dar* (abode).³⁴ Instead they exist within an open and porous reality in what is called *dar al-shahada* or *alam al-shahada* (area, or world, of testimony).³⁵ Minority *fiqh* embodies a new interpretive moment in the rethinking of Islam in an increasingly interconnected world, where even traditional state structures are

losing their salience in maintaining their sovereignty to supra-national and subnational forces. Minority *fiqh*, as a sub-discipline of Muslim jurisprudence, is subject to the tension between universality and particularity. The former impulse attempts to delink Muslim identity and legal conceptions from the majoritarian or state-based conception of Islam. The latter localises Muslim identity and Islamicity in the cultural context of Muslims wherever they find themselves.

In a paper published in 1981, I observed that Muslim theologians have produced a theology for the majority, but a systematic formulation of the status of being a minority remains to be developed... The scientific discoveries, the technical revolution in all its manifestations, the economic and social transformation that have engulfed the whole world must be accommodated in a new *ijtihad* and a creative approach to *fiqh*. The Qur'an and the Prophetic Tradition have to be read alongside the new developments in human knowledge and experience.³⁶

Two things must be constantly kept in mind. First, for a Muslim, the teaching of Islam – when it is well understood and well applied – is valid in every time and place, and this is the meaning of the idea of the *alamiyyat al-islam* (the universal dimension of the teaching of Islam). Second, the concepts of *dar al-islam*, *dar al-harb*, and *dar al-ahd* (abode of treaty) were not first described in the Qur'an or in the Sunna. In fact, they constituted a human attempt, at a moment in history, to describe the world and to provide the Muslim community with a geopolitical scheme that seemed appropriate to the reality of the time. This reality has completely changed: it is becoming necessary today to go back to the Qur'an and Sunna and, in the light of our environment, to deepen our analysis in order to develop a new vision appropriate to our new context in order to formulate suitable legal opinions. To reread, reconsider, and 'revisit' our understanding of the teachings of Islam therefore appears to be a necessity.³⁷

Sufism in the West

The West has provided the social and discursive space for Muslims to articulate their identities in a context of transnational appropriations. One significant trend in this phenomenon is the rise of the Sufi-oriented 'orthodox' movements. It will help the discussion to mention the role Sufism has had in the historical construction of orthodoxy within Sunni Islam. Through a process of redefinition and reconstituting itself in line with the more unitarian practitioners of

Shari 'ah, Sufism assimilated elements that constrained individual autonomy within the communal adherence to *Shari 'ah* law and ethics. Thus Sufism and *Shari 'ah*, often contrasted as polar opposites, became complementary religious objects of thought and practice, reinforcing the discursive identity of 'orthodoxy' in texts such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's *Deliverance from error (Munqidh min Dalal)*. Since its gradual crystallisation within the communal imagination of Sunni Islam, Sufism has acquired its own social ethic of thought and practice, and it is in the Sufi *tariqat* that this aspect is amply demonstrated. Their presence in the West has brought Islam into contact with countless millions of people in the form of Sufism. It has taken a societal position primarily as a pedagogical-spiritualist orientation as opposed to direct engagement with the realm of the *political*. Politics is largely eschewed in terms of religious political participation. Rather it reproduces Muslim identity within communal-educational forums utilising the traditional *tariqat* structure, for example the Zaytuna Institute in California founded by Shaykh Hamza Yusuf. *Taqlid* (imitation) and mystical instruction through an authoritative chain of Sufi practitioners are the hallmarks of this trend.

The Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, along with the early Muslim community, spent thirteen years purifying themselves in Mecca. These were years of oppression and thus forbearance, meekness and humility. They were then given permission to migrate and to defend themselves. At this point they were not a people out to get vengeance and they were certainly not filled with resentment because they saw everything coming from God... Love (*mahabba*) is the highest religious virtue in Islam. Imam al-Ghazali said that it is the highest *maqam* or spiritual station. It is so because trust, *zuhd* (doing without), fear and hope are stations of this world. So long as you are in this world these stations are relevant, but once you die they can no longer serve you. Love is eternal because love is the reason you were created.³⁸

Islam in the age of war against terror

To explain the relationship between Islam and terrorism, or the American-led 'war on terror', it is necessary to explore the concept of *jihad*, too often a source of political and cultural misunderstanding. Yusuf al-Qaradawi situates the question of *jihad* within the realm of moral and religious obligations (*ibadat*).³⁹ Since any form of worship is aimed at acquiring nearness to God, then any

effort exerted to eke out a living, care for the welfare of a community, advance the cause of spirituality or 'Islamicity', can be subsumed under the umbrella of humankind's struggle (*jihad*), giving it a wider humanist meaning that relates not at all to martial struggle. Al-Qaradawi adds that Islam also considers work a form of the acts or deeds aimed at serving God, that is, inherent forms of worship that go beyond the obligatory rituals such as the five prayers or fasting during the month of Ramadan.

Extending this non-conventional notion of worship to *jihad*, al-Qaradawi includes the pursuit of knowledge as a very good example of genuine commitment to the service of Allah. In this respect, excellence in any discipline is a collective obligation (*fard kifayah*).⁴⁰ This critical and sophisticated reading of *jihad* seems to have been retired from discussions of Islam and Western relations in the post-9/11 world. Such discussions now tend to 'securitise' the concept of *jihad*, reducing it to a martial or military praxis. This is contrary to the interpretations of the learned scholars and legal jurists of Islam, the Sunni and Shiite. Both the minority of Muslim practitioners of global extremism and many of the security-minded scholarly branches of Western academia are guilty of this reductionism.

'Abd Allah Ahmad Na'im, whose critical scholarly interventions such as on the question of human rights are based on the teachings of Mahmoud Mohamed Taha (founder of the Republican Brotherhood in the Sudan), offers a very interesting perspective. At the core of his perspective is a very good disaggregation of the notion of *jihad*. This exercise discloses a multifaceted conception of *jihad*. Like al-Qaradawi, among other Muslim scholars, his point of departure is the emphasis of the etymology of the term *jihad*. Literally, it means 'effort and exertion', thus rejecting any attempt to attach the concept to war making. Na'im adds that evidence for this argument can be marshalled from the Qur'an and Sunnah (prophetic tradition). Examples from the Qur'an (verses 2:18, 5:54 and 8:72) of the term *jihad* and its derivatives confirm the idea of self-exertion, mostly through and in peaceful efforts. Even against the unbelievers, verse 25:52 instructs the Prophet and Muslims to use the Qur'an in *jihad* against them. This obviously refers to using the force of argumentation and disputation in *jihad*, relying on Qur'anic textuality and not the force of arms. In the same vein, Na'im points out that in the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad to resort to and deploy force in combat is considered to be the minor *jihad*. By contrast, greater or superior *jihad* is attributed to acts of self-exertion in peaceful and

personal compliance with the godly commandments. This is, for instance, illustrated in the prophetic saying (*hadith*) that 'the best form of *jihad* is to speak the truth in the face of an oppressive ruler'. The key argument Na'im drives is that the noble book of Islam is clear when referring specifically to the use of force. As he puts it, at present within the Qur'an and Sunnah the use of the term for fighting (*qital*) and its derivatives refers to the use of force in international relations. The bottom line then is that there is differentiation in Islam between the concept and praxis of *jihad* and *qital* in the context of international law and relations. The emphasis on *jihad* in its practice as a peaceful means in relation to religiosity is more prevalent in Islam than reductionistic discussions care to grasp, much less appreciate.⁴¹

Mohammad Hashim Kamali's intervention is equally innovative, locating the whole notion within the broader realm of Muslim political theory. From this perspective, the concept of *jihad* is given a civic meaning and function. Specifically, Kamali's understanding links *jihad* to political and moral protest and struggle. This view places *jihad* within the space of struggle for political freedom, while the practice of citizenship complements Islam's moral and political *telos* that stresses social justice and equality.⁴² With regard to the question of political freedom, Kamali invokes one prophetic saying declaring that '[T]here is no obedience in sin. Obedience is enjoyed only in righteousness.'⁴³ This intervention goes a long way towards revising the medieval position that prioritises order and stability of the House of Islam at the expense of justice even under tyrannical Muslim rule. In line with this prophetic saying, Kamali argues that no obedience is owed to rulers who flout Islamic standards of justice, equality and propriety.⁴⁴ Kamali upholds the Muslim citizenry's right to rebellion against and disobedience of lawless and despotic rule. In this sense, the legal and juridical tradition in Islam has the potential for supporting and legitimising political behaviour – such as protest and rebellion – taken against misrule and usurpation of political freedom. Another hadith declares that '[T]he best form of *jihad* (struggle) is to tell a word of truth to an oppressive ruler.'⁴⁵

For Ziauddin Sardar, the notion of *jihad* has been caricatured, with commentators and scholars diluting its deeper and multifaceted meaning. In practice it is a daily reality all over Islam's vast global community. He argues, in agreement with Na'im and al-Qaradawi, that its meaning extends to the realm of knowledge and learning. Thus Sardar views it as one of the pillars

of the Muslim quest for morality, epistemology, and a holistic world view for the greater sake of a humane existence for Muslim and non-Muslim. The gist of Sardar's argument, then, restores the comprehensiveness of spiritual order and ideal on which a struggle for peace and justice is based. In this brand of struggle the 'goods' of peace – humanity, toleration, equality and mutuality for the greater sake of coexistence and shared knowledge – are for all peoples. In line with this humanist view, Sardar lampoons the single and fixed meaning of 'Holy War' attached to the notion of *jihad*. This understanding and translation, he argues, is perverse. Firstly, it strips away the spiritual, intellectual and social substance of *jihad*. Secondly, *jihad* becomes shorthand for all war, and war by any means, including terrorism. The crux of Sardar's criticism is directed at dismissing the ease with which *jihad* is either reduced (by Orientalists and journalists) or declared by Muslim extremists who are impervious to the legal and moral rhyme or reason embedded in the Qur'anic meaning of *jihad*. This reductionism, he adds, perverts and distances *jihad* from its godly and intended meanings, none of which support terrorism. Moreover, according to Sardar, the self-exertion and human experience of personal struggle, pursuit of knowledge, and social construction have all but 'evaporated' from the concept of *jihad*.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

There are no fixed or universal keys for reading the intellectual map of political Islam. Traversing the vast terrain of this phenomenon, across various and variable contexts of time and space, one unearths diversity, contingency and fluidity. There is no 'one fundamentalism fits all' formula for generalising about a complex current that is multi-vocal, and whose discourses speak to multiple 'islams' in the name of a single and universal Islam. What is certain about political Islam is that it is not about to retire from engaging modernity and all that it offers, positively and negatively. Likewise, modernity or those claiming to be its agents are not going to give up engaging with all matters Islamic, also either positively and negatively.

Two approaches are needed for mapping out the Islamist terrain. Policymakers must rethink the stress placed on hard power (i.e. guns) to solve a problem that warriors alone cannot defeat or eradicate. Total security in the modern world is an illusion. The security agenda looks weak and shaky after the shift of focus from Afghanistan to Yemen. The 'Pakistan-isation' of Yemen

will lead to new insecurities and not security. Reliance on dictatorial regimes to fight wars on behalf of or in partnership with Western powers will not work. The gurus of brands of so-called radicalisation oversimplify the conflicts and ignore soft power. The tendency to exaggerate securitisation of political Islam is part and parcel of the problem. By this I mean the tendency to engage in a process of 'Talibanising' political Islam. Not all those who take up arms against local or global systems are Taliban or al-Qaeda – even if these two fluid labels seems to have been converted into a franchise. Soft power must be deployed to tune into the nuances within political Islam, to finding interlocutors among adversaries, including al-Qaeda – unless the world is ready for morally, financially and humanly costly long 'wars'. This is true of North Africa, the Horn of Africa or other embattled Muslim geographies with their own brands of Islamists.

Islamists must turn their energies to establishing internal dialogues between and among themselves. There is no reason why pacifist Islamists of all colours cannot sponsor conflict resolution and mediation initiatives or put in place legal and religious mechanisms for enacting initiatives for the distribution of justice, reconciliation and rehabilitation. Here the onus is on these Islamists to modify, pacify and integrate combatant Muslims into their local and global societies. Here is a challenging area where pacifist, juridical and ethicist Islamists can make a contribution, especially if they genuinely believe in keeping in check the excessive Western interventionism in Muslim lands, as their rhetoric indicates. Where they fail in the endeavour to invent and negotiate ways of curbing violence in the name of religion, they fail Islam and Muslims who are in dire need of dialogism and coexistence with fellow Muslims and non-Muslims.

NOTES

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2 Blurring geopolitics

Party politics and Islamist political parties in North Africa

MOHAMED SALIH¹

ABSTRACT

Extremist Islamist political organisations or parties eschew two fundamental features of competitive party politics: a) unequivocal support of secular pluralism and unrepentant adherence to the freedom of choice between a multitude of different ideologies (non-Muslim confessional or secular), and b) the process, outcome and ultimate consequences of entry into competitive politics and its possibilities for organising or regulating human affairs.² For extremist Islamists, in both cases, the ultimate objective of state capture is the creation of an Islamic state hardly amenable to conventional geopolitics, which bestows sovereignty on God and not the state or people. Secular state or peoples' sovereignty, in the Islamists' view, decries the call for ensuring the divine authenticity of the scripture and the universality of the Muslim *ummah* (or community of believers).

In the particular case of North Africa, the divide between Africa north and south of the Sahara or North Africa and Europe has tried to implement identity politics and its divides. However, for extremist Islamist political parties, what lies beyond the immediate geopolitics of Islam, including a potential creation of an Islamic state, is not a void or a non-contestable space. It is not a void

because all Muslims are subjects of the Islamic creed and as such constitute an unalienable part of the *ummah* regardless of their domicile on planet earth. It is a contestable terrain because of the eternity of messages, meanings and the applicability of the timeless fundamentals of Islam invoked in Islamic political party politics. In this respect, extremist party politics is not national nor does it recognise the geopolitics created by secular states. It blurs geopolitics by its very existence as an advocate of a timeless and universal religious way of life.

The paper offers a conceptual analysis of Islamic party politics from the perspective of the geopolitics of North African Islamist political organisations or parties, informed by the contention of creating a transnational Muslim *ummah* with synoptic case studies for illustration.

INTRODUCTION

In secular competitive democratic politics, political parties are political organisations created by the elite with the deliberate aim to contest elections, acquire power and control government, resources and the personnel of government. These parties straddle the space between parliament and government and, as elected representatives, political parties that win the majority of parliamentary seats make (or unmake) government singly or in coalition with other political parties.

As political organisations, political parties are agents of interest aggregation whereby the party members are bound by an ideology and common values and beliefs no matter whether the party is religious (confessional) or secular. A party's survival or ability to compete in elections also depends on three other characteristics:

- Its financial and human resources capabilities
- Its internal organisation, including the relationship between party leadership and membership and the distribution of power within the political party
- Goodwill and voluntary support of those who share the ideology, values and beliefs of the party

Islamist political organisations or parties possess these general characteristics of political parties, although they differ, for example, from Western secular

and confessional political parties in that they aim not just to acquire power and control government, but include a religious objective and an aspiration to advance a Muslim way of life that seeps into all aspects of society.

Islamist political organisations or parties distinguish themselves from secular political parties by professing an Islamist political identity or a form of political Islam. In addition, they claim that they work towards advancing not only a Muslim way of life within the nation-state, but to expand an Islamic *ummah* (community of believers). Islamist political organisations or parties aim at advancing a religious cause with the view that sovereignty rests with God and not the people of the state, thus making the geopolitics of Islamist political parties borderless, universal and aimed at expanding an Islamic way of life wherever Muslims live. It espouses a worldwide transnational movement, echoing the notion that there is no distinction between ethics and law in Islam, as there is also no distinction between social, economic, political and religious functions of Islamist political parties beyond the political as well as socio-economic activities in which they are engaged. The message and meanings are all encompassing, yet pragmatically adjusted, depending on the socio-political context within which Islamist political organisations or parties operate.

However, there is no gain (beyond making an explanatory note) in stating that there are no stark differences between Islamic and Islamist political parties as far as their attempt to advance a Muslim way of life is concerned. The major difference between the two is found in the Islamist political organisations or parties' conception of the end result of the political process, which should be to win the majority of seats and control the government and the state apparatus. Political Islam is about politics because of the Islamist conception of Islam as an instrument to gain power and create an Islamic state, apply *Shari 'ah* and observe the duality of elected government, and a theocracy in the form of *maglis al shura* (consultative council consisting literally of learned men). According to Esposito, Islamist resurgence organisations consider themselves the bearers of the insignia of political Islam, which offers Islam as an alternative to their perception of the prevalence of a dominant Western-styled secular state. In the view of the Islamists and political Islam, they advocate the following:

- Islam is a total and comprehensive way of life. Religion is integral to politics, law and society.

- The failure of Muslim societies is due to their departure from the straight path of Islam and their following a Western secular path, with its secular, materialistic ideologies and values.
- The renewal of society requires a return to Islam, an Islamic religio-political and social reformation or revolution that draws its inspiration from the Quran and from the first great Islamic movement led by Prophet Muhammad.
- To restore God's rule and inaugurate a true Islamic social order, civil codes modelled on Western principles must be replaced by Islamic law, which is the only acceptable blueprint for Muslim society.
- Although the Westernisation of society is condemned, modernisation as such is not. Science and technology are accepted, but they are subordinated to Islamic belief and values in order to guard against the Westernisation and secularisation of Muslim society.³

In my view, Islamist political organisations or parties subscribe to Esposito's depiction of their common characteristics, which also distinguishes them from moderate or secular ones.

In their approach to internal party democracy or leadership elections, Islamist political organisations by and large subscribe to charisma and at times theocratic leadership may emerge. Elsewhere we argue that Islamist political parties have nothing in common with confessional Christian political parties. The latter recognise Roman law and not the Bible as a legal document. Most Islamist political parties aspire to create a society that adheres to, or is at least influenced by, Islamic teachings and values derived from the sources of Islamic legislation or, literally, law (*Shari'ah*).⁴

To be sure, a common denominator among political parties that call themselves Islamic (or are called Islamist in scholarly works), whether radical or moderate, is that their leadership and adherents profess an Islamic identity with a conscious and deliberate objective of advancing an Islamic way of life, as well as serving the interests of the Muslim *ummah*. Nevertheless, moderate and militant Islamic political parties differ in their responses to whether Muslim societies should be governed by secular laws and jurisdictions or adhere literally and strictly (applying fundamentalist principles or calling for a return to the fundamentals of Islam) to the Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

This is another major difference between the two with far-reaching implications for the nature of the state – whether it is strictly Islamic and ruled by an Islamic constitution with all its social, economic and political ramifications, or secular. It also has similar far-reaching implications for the position of women in society and for human rights issues (polygamy, stoning to death for adultery, inheriting equivalent to half of what a brother inherits from parents, and evidence brought to court by two women witnesses being equivalent to that of one man). The difference between moderate and militant Islamist political organisations or parties is their position vis-à-vis *hudud* (amputation of limbs for theft beyond a certain monetary value), which is not condoned by moderate Islamic political parties.

In the following section, I attempt to illustrate that, unlike Western political parties that operate within the domain of sovereign nation-states, Islamist political organisations or parties have developed from national movements to transnational networks of Muslim communities.⁵ This observation is very important for explaining the blurring of geopolitics, if one considers that the influence or potential influence of Islamic political parties goes beyond the states where they have been established to others states or wherever Muslims find themselves.

ISLAMIST POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS AND PARTIES IN NORTH AFRICA: FROM NATIONAL TO TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS OF THE MUSLIM *UMMAH*

In this section I examine the development of the major Islamist political organisations and parties in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia to explain their development from an agent of national liberation during decolonisation into transnational networks of what they perceive as a Muslim *umma*. From this perspective, at least six major issues have nurtured and contributed to the emergence and development of Islamist political organisations or parties in North Africa.

First, the majority of the population of North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia) is Muslim with Islam playing a pivotal role in people's lives. There is an upper class or religious elite and learned men (*ulamma*) in the realm of popular Islam, the religious sects, Sufi orders and *marabouts* being particularly prevalent in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.⁶

Second, historically Islam was called upon and used as an ideology of national liberation during the North African calls for independence and also as a system of belief and values that would safeguard against Westernisation. Little wonder that the emergence of Islamic social movements and liberation fronts coincided with the struggle for independence and self-rule.⁷

Third, in common with other Muslim societies, the states of North Africa were to a large extent secular, Westernised and to some extent authoritarian albeit not 'liberal democratic', at least from the period immediately following independence (1970s to the late 1980s) until the beginning of some semblance of political reforms during the 1990s.⁸ These political reforms were not engineered at the behest of benevolent states, but through popular struggles in which the Islamists played a pivotal role and mounting external pressures.⁹

Fourth, the 1970s and 1980s were dominated by the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Six-Day War in June 1967 and the October War in 1973), which led to a deep-seated anti-Western stance. Radical Islamist political organisations (as the formation of Islamic political parties was prohibited by law) at the time were spearheaded by the Muslim Brotherhood, which recruited soldiers to fight in Palestine and expanded its ideological and organisational reach outside Egypt to Palestine and Jordan.¹⁰

Fifth, within five years after the October War with Israel (1973), the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 followed. It provided a massive boost to radical Islamic movements in North Africa and particularly Egypt, Algeria and Morocco, which were alerted to the possibility of capturing power through revolutionary means.¹¹ Table 2 shows the emergence of the major Islamic political organisations or parties and their approximate dates of establishment in North Africa.

Sixth, without exception the North African states have experienced a serious economic slowdown, rampant unemployment and poverty among a large proportion of the population, with the exception of Tunisia, which was relatively better off than the others.¹² Economic decline and authoritarianism offered Islamic political parties and organisations a rallying cause. They mobilised support against the established secular order, that is, the one-party political systems in Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia or the non-democratic monarch's control over the levers of power in Morocco.¹³

Below I elaborate on how the above factors contributed to the emergence of Islamist political organisations and parties in four North African countries: Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia.

Table 2 Post-1990 Islamist political parties in North Africa

Country	Major Islamist political party or organisation	Date established
Algeria	Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)	1989
	Armed Islamic Group (GIA)	1991
	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and its successor al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).	1996
	Movement of National Reform (<i>el-Islah</i>)	Approx. 1990
	Movement of Society for Peace (<i>Harakat al Moujtama' As-Silm</i> , MSP, formerly called Hamas)	Approx. 1990
Egypt	Centrist Party (<i>Hizbul al Wasat</i>)	Mid-1990s
	<i>Sharia Hizb</i> (<i>Hizbul Sharia</i>)	1997
	Unity Party (<i>Hizbul Itihad</i>)	2007
	Islamic Social Party (<i>Al Hizbul Al Islami Al Igtimai</i>)	1999
Morocco	Justice and Charity (<i>Al 'Adl wal 'Ihsan</i>)	Established in 1981, outlawed in 1990, but re-emerged in 1999
	Justice and Development Party (<i>Hizbu Al-aadlati wa altanmia</i> PJD French acronym)	1998
	<i>al-Adala</i> and its sister organisation <i>al-Tawhid wal-Islah</i>	1993
	Salafiya Jihadiya	Early 1990s
Tunisia	<i>al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah</i> was renamed Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI)	1981
	Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) changed its name again to the Renaissance Party (<i>Hizbul An Nahdah</i>). Competed in the 1989 elections, but banned thereafter.	1988

Sources Mohamed Salih (ed), *Interpreting Islamic political parties*. New York: Macmillan, 2009.

Algeria

The emergence of modern political organisations and political parties in Algeria is recent. It dates back to the establishment of *Etoile Nord-Africaine* (ENA) or the Star of North Africa in 1926 by Messali Hadjin in Paris.¹⁴ It could be considered the first Algerian Islamic political party calling for the complete independence of Algeria from France. It was succeeded by *Parti du Peuple Algérien* (PPA) or the Algerian Peoples Party, also founded by Messali Hadjin with a clearer articulation of an Islamic populist egalitarian ideology. During the same period, home-grown political organisations and parties began to emerge either independently or in coalitions in order to pool their resources. For example, *Congrès Musulman Algérien* (CMA) or the Congress of Algerian Muslims, founded by Ferhat Abbas and Ben Badis, formed a coalition consisting of the *Fédération des Elus* or *Jam'iyat al-'Ulama* and the Algerian Communist Party. Although the coalition was short-lived owing to the stark ideological differences among its leaders, lasting only from 1936 to 1938, it fought bitterly for Algerians' rights to be equal with those of French citizens.¹⁵

There was no shortage of political organisations struggling for independence or equal rights for Muslims. *Jam'iyat al-'Ulama*, founded by Tawfik El Madani, took a prominent role in galvanising Muslim aspirations and resistance. As a result of this resistance, French citizenship was accorded to about 60 000 Muslims and all Muslim men over the age of 21 were given the right to vote. However, French and non-French citizens still belonged to two separate electoral colleges and citizens were rated in terms of rights, with the French and Europeans being given full citizenship rights.¹⁶

In 1947, the PPA created a clandestine paramilitary wing, the *Organisation Spéciale* (OS), which would prepare the ground for armed struggle. Several National Liberation Front leaders such as Hocine Ait Ahmed and Ahmed Ben Bella were put in charge of the OS. In 1946, Messali founded another political party, the *Mouvement de la Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques* (MTLD) or the Movement for the Triumph of Liberty and Democracy, which lasted until 1954. As the PPA was banned, the MTLD should be seen as its legal wing, which contested the elections and won five seats, giving the nationalist movement representation in Paris for the first time. The Islamo-Arabist tendencies of Messali antagonised the Berbers, and together with the uncovering and

subsequent disbanding of its military wing (*Organisation Spéciale*), the MTLD's demise was imminent.¹⁷

Although the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) or National Liberation Front, which led the war of Algerian independence, portrayed itself as a socialist political party, in reality, initially, it could be seen as an amalgamation of various political trends including some Islamist tendencies. Since its founding in 1954 up to the introduction of multiparty democracy, which heralded its exit from power in 1989, it established itself as the sole legitimate liberation army. It disbanded and then unified all other liberation fronts and so silenced its opponents. It also recruited almost all the members of the Algerian student association, the *Union Générale des Etudiants Musulmans Algériens* (UGEMA). The FLN also appealed to and represented the continuation of the Islamo-populism of the PPA-MTLD, with its exaltation of 'the people', references to Islam, intense nationalism and Arabism, and social conservatism. It conducted and won the war of independence (in 1962). Algeria became a one-party state and the FLN dominated political life until the constitutional reforms of 1989 were introduced and paved the way for a multiparty system.¹⁸

Immediately after the reforms in 1989, Algerian politics were dominated by the emergence of *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) or the Islamic Salvation Front, in the same year. Founded by Ali Belhadi and Abbasi al-Madani, FIS won the majority of the seats in the local elections in 1990 and most of the seats in the National Assembly in the first round of balloting in 1991.¹⁹ The military intervened, cancelled the election, waged a civil war in which an estimated 60 000 people died and ruled the country until its return to civilian rule in 1997.²⁰

The military coup propelled the founding of the *Groupe Islamique Armée* (GIA) or Armed Islamic Group in 1991. It launched its armed struggle (attacking government officials and installations, foreigners and civilians) after the aborting of the results of the legislative elections in 1991. The majority of its soldiers were *mujahidin* repatriated after the defeat of the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in 1992. By 1996, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and its successor, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb or *L'Organisation Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique* (AQIM), had been formed. The GSPC is an offshoot of the GIA established by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a radical jihadist who fought with the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan. It aimed to establish an Islamic state within Algeria, but later expanded its operations to the Sahelian states, mainly Mali, Niger and Mauritania. The AQIM is an offshoot of the GSPC and its main

objective is to create an Islamic state in Algeria and beyond. It carried out operations outside Algeria and is alleged to have sent squads of jihadists to Iraq and to have pledged allegiance to Osama Bin Laden in 2007.²¹

Post-civil war Algerian society could be divided into at least three main ideological blocs:

- A nationalist group consisting of officials, state workers and rural voters that reliably votes for the FLN or other government-endorsed parties
- The Berber nationalists
- An Islamist group (for example the Islamic-oriented Movement of National Reform [*el-Islah*])²²

Obviously, the Islamists must have realised that the civil war had turned the public against them, and they could have stayed the course under the contention that peace is subservient to justice. Political allegiances in the remainder of Algerian society were scattered among small groups of democrats, regionalists and independents. No single bloc had a majority, and none could easily govern without some support from at least one of the other blocs.²³

The evolution of Islamic political organisations and political parties in Algeria is a clear illustration of how they have developed from being Algeria-based and concerned with Algerian politics to becoming part of a global network of Islamist organisations. This conclusion has several far-reaching implications for what I call ‘blurring geopolitics’, which I will address in respect of other North African countries as well.

Egypt

Elsewhere I argue that, in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged as a nationalist Islamic movement vying to oust the colonial state and build an Islamic state or a state conscious of the role of Islam in society, and by doing so restoring the authenticity of the religious text.²⁴ The Brotherhood emerged as a reaction to or inspired by a subtle wave of modernisation and creeping Western values in Egyptian polity and society.²⁵ Hassan Al Banna established the Muslim Brotherhood (between 1927 and 1928) as a movement against British colonial rule, and together with other Egyptian intellectuals such as Sayyid Qutb perceived Western modernity as a threat to Egypt’s Islamic identity.²⁶

While the majority of the political parties espoused a secular liberal ideological orientation, the Muslim Brotherhood based its political creed and struggle on the promise of creating an Islamic state ruled by the teachings of Islam. Three factors contributed to the radicalisation of the Muslim Brotherhood:

- The rejection of the Muslim Brotherhood's application to register as a political party in conformity with Egypt's 1923 Constitution, which prohibited the registration of religious political parties.
- Its mobilisation capacity increased as it became known for its ability to hold large demonstrations, which were seen as a threat to the secular establishment.
- As a result, it was able to attract a considerable following and gain influence among the educated elite and university students, thus preparing the next generation of radical Islamists, including a sizeable number of the politically vocal urban population.²⁷

More importantly, the Muslim Brotherhood benefited from the fragmentation of other political parties and their degeneration into several splinter groups, including the Wafd and Young Egypt (*Misr al-Fatah*). This situation continued until the late 1940s when the Muslim Brotherhood grew in popularity, but remained banned from electoral politics. By the late 1950s, Sayyid Qutb abandoned liberal nationalism in favour of a militant struggle calling for the violent overthrow of the Egyptian state in order to create a state based on Islamic values, *shura* (consultation) and *Shari'ah*.²⁸

Externally, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood recruited soldiers to join the 1948 Palestinian-Israeli war in support of the Palestinian cause. One such external influence of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was the creation of the Muslim Brotherhoods of Sudan, Yemen, Kuwait, Jordan, Palestine, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and many others, which emerged during the same period.²⁹ Internally, the Muslim Brotherhood began clandestine operations to undermine government authority, including attacks on government buildings and installations. The climax of the Brotherhood's clandestine operations inside Egypt was the assassination of Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi in December 1948. In retaliation, the Egyptian secret service assassinated Hassan Al Bana in February 1949. However, the Egyptian government could no longer ignore the Muslim Brotherhood's strength and the dangers

of radicalising it even further. As part of an appeasement policy, the Muslim Brotherhood was tolerated and even legalised as a political organisation, but not a political party. This delimitation of the Muslim Brotherhood's activities relegated it to a political organisation not eligible to contest elections.³⁰ By extension, it also limited the Muslim Brotherhood's ability to control the personnel and resources of government.

In 1954, the Free Officers installed the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) as the sole constitutional political party in Egypt.³¹ The Muslim Brotherhood considered the secular ideology of the Arab Socialist Union, also known as Nasserism, confrontational, indeed a negation of its Islamic religious ideology aimed at creating a *Shari 'ah*-based constitution.

The Brotherhood's confrontation with Nasser's Arab Socialist regime culminated in several failed attempts to assassinate Gamal Abdel Nasser. The state's reprisal was swift. The Muslim Brotherhood was banned, large numbers of its followers imprisoned and thousands of others left the country seeking asylum in various Arab and non-Arab Islamic countries.

While in exile, the Muslim Brotherhood made the most of its presence in Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria, where it spread its ideology and created or strengthened already existing branches in these countries, without abandoning the struggle against the Egyptian secular state.³² The existence of the Muslim Brotherhood in these countries contributed to the transnationalisation of the movement, which in turn harboured ambitions greater than the mere overthrow of the Egyptian regime. In effect, the Muslim Brotherhood acquired regional appeal in the Middle East and further afield in Asia.³³

With regard to Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood had gone underground and continued its attempts to assassinate Gamal Abdel Nasser, exposing him to three unsuccessful assassination attempts. After his death in 1970, Gamal Abdel Nasser was succeeded by President Anwar as-Sadat, who was initially cordial to the Muslim Brotherhood, calling Egypt the state of 'science and faith' and allowing the teaching of Islam as part of the education curriculum.

In addition to the Muslim Brotherhood, other more radical jihadist groups such as Youth of Muhammad (*Chabab Muhammad*) and the Soldiers of God (*Junud al-rahman*) under the leadership of Mustapha Chur, leader of *At-takfir Aal-hijrah*, were also active.³⁴

However, Sadat turned his back on the Islamists when they opposed the signing of the 1978 Camp David Agreement, which led to the peace agreement

between Egypt and Israel in 1979.³⁵ Sadat was assassinated in 1981 by an army officer (Abdul Salam Abdul-Al), who belonged to a militant Islamic cell in the Egyptian army.³⁶

The tension between the Egyptian government and the Muslim Brotherhood continued well into Hussni Mubarak's rule (1983–2009), with the government using heavy-handed measures to quell the movement's capacity to be involved in political violence. Again, thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members have been prosecuted, imprisoned and some have been sentenced to death for bombing government and tourist installations, aimed particularly at harming Israeli and Western tourists.³⁷ The Muslim Brotherhood is still illegal under Article 86(bis) of Egypt's Penal Code, which criminalises membership of an organisation that 'impairs the national unity or social peace'.

As some conference participants will dwell on the current developments of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt with great depth, I prefer to confine my conclusion to my main focus – 'blurring geopolitics'.³⁸ The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is by far one of the most successful Islamic organisations in terms of its ability to become a worldwide transnational organisation capable of reinventing itself in different Muslim societies across the globe. The message of its founding fathers (Al-Banna and Qutb) has spread from Kuwait to Yemen and from Indonesia to Pakistan and beyond.

In sum, as I have tried to explain and in common with the Algerian Islamist political organisations, the Muslim Brotherhood has outgrown its original nationalist objective of establishing a Muslim state and has increasingly engaged in transnational networks of what its adherents perceive as the Muslim *ummah*. From this perspective, no Islamist political organisation has been able to export its ideology, messages and meaning the world over more effectively than the Muslim Brotherhood has done.

Morocco

In Morocco, the relationship between Islam and politics is both obvious and deep rooted. When King Mohammad V inherited the throne in 1955, he assumed the title of *Amir Al-Mouminin* (Commander of the Faithful), by which he became the supreme religious authority in Morocco.³⁹ He also assumed the function of 'supreme arbitrator' between competing political claims. This position was readily inherited by King Hassan II in 1961 after the death of

Mohamed V, and subsequently by the current King Mohammad VI, who succeeded Mohammad V in 1999. Islam is brought to bear not only in how people respond to the king's almost divine position, but also his expansive political role as a constitutional monarch with executive power that authorises him to dismiss the government and declare war. Externally, he chairs the Al-Qods Committee under the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).⁴⁰

Apparently, the position of the king as a constitutional monarch complicates the issue of sovereignty and where it lies: with the king; with the Islamists, which is where the Islamists think it should rest; or with the people, who confer sovereignty on the state through the democratic process and representative political institutions. This tension can be attested to in the Moroccan monarch's meagre allotment of any place for genuine democratic rule and human rights, if one judges from the large number of political prisoners released during the enthronement of the current king. However, since 1953 Morocco has managed a restricted multiparty system, which has engineered the formation of coalition government.

Istiqlal or the Independence Party was established during the colonial period around 1940. In 1959, the Socialist Popular Party was founded as an offshoot of the *Istiqlal* Party, and together they have dominated the political space under the watchful eye of the king and security apparatus. There is also the Constitutional Party (supporter of the monarch) and the Party of Progress and Socialism, which were founded during the 1970s. Most of the political parties, including the Islamists, belong to post-1999 when the king embarked on commendable measures of political reform.⁴¹

Morocco has an ambiguous form of 'democracy', where the constitutional monarch appoints the prime minister and four other ministers (defence, interior, foreign affairs and finance). The presence of the 'Commander of the Faithful' in the political life of the kingdom and how it is ruled is overwhelming, to say the least. The implications of the king's position in the Moroccan polity is that political parties that call themselves Islamic will not be tolerated because they implicitly challenge the legitimacy of the king as 'the Commander of the Faithful'.

Justice and Charity (PJD in French, *al 'Adl wal 'Ihsan*) was the largest and most influential Islamist political organisation or party that emerged during the political reforms of the 1990s. It was founded in 1987 by Sheik Abdessalam Yassine, who left teaching to travel abroad for almost ten years to educate

himself. (He visited the Arab world and also France and the US.) Upon his return he joined the Butshihyya Sufi order for seven years and then left it after the death of its leader, Sheikh Hajj Abbas, in 1972.⁴² He spent from 1972 until 1986 writing some of his early books, which earned him respect in the religiously inclined Moroccan society and abroad.⁴³

The official mission statement of the Justice and Charity movement (*al 'Adl wal 'Ihsan*) 'is to seek to be among those through whom God renews religion for the Ummah'.⁴⁴ This statement is seen as a direct challenge to the king, who is 'the Commander of the Faithful'. In 1989, King Hassan II imprisoned Sheik Abdessalam Yassine and the Justice and Charity movement was outlawed in January 1990. Sheik Abdessalam Yassine was released from prison 11 years later in 2000.⁴⁵

On the other hand, the Justice and Development Party (PJD) was initially founded by Abdelkarim al-Khatib, with a militant Islamic Youth organisation, and also became part of the Movement for Unity and Reform (MUR), as will be explained below. The PDJ does not question the foundations of the Moroccan state, which, according to Saad Eddine Othmani, rests with the Moroccan kingdom and Islam. In fact, the PJD aims at safeguarding the Islamic identity of Morocco and operates as a pressure group against devout secularists. Although it participates in elections and government, it has established a parallel religious association called the Movement for Unity and Reform (MUR), which is a federation of about 200 religious associations. According to Howe, the PJD supports democracy partially as a tactic, and considers Islamism an unreliable partner.⁴⁶ However, the party's electoral fortunes are less promising than many commentators had anticipated.⁴⁷

In common with the other transnational Islamic organisations such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front, the Justice and Charity movement has also developed an outward perspective, looking beyond Morocco to Europe and the US. For example, in 2006 it established a publishing house in Iowa City called Justice and Spirituality Publishing in order to spread Sheik Abdessalam Yassine's teachings, which the movement's supporters consider to be a worldwide message, and also in response to the spread of his followers across the world.

In sum, by seeking to extend Sheik Abdessalam Yassine's teachings beyond Morocco, the Justice and Charity movement illustrates the importance of the transnational element in Muslim organisations, even if they appear mainly

spiritual in their outlook, but are deeply political in their transformative Islamic programme.

Tunisia

Al-Nahda of Tunisia (whose development will be explained below) represents a rather peculiar case among Islamic political organisations and parties. It owes its emergence to the impressive accounts of the life and times of its ideologue and founder, Rachid Ghannouchi. The movement's transnational network can be attributed to Ghannouchi's early travels and life in several countries before he returned to Tunisia to establish *al-Nahda*. For example, Rachid Ghannouchi travelled to Egypt in 1964 and studied at the Faculty of Agriculture of Cairo University. He fled from Egypt to Syria when he found out that the Tunisian embassy was intent on arresting him and his colleagues. In Syria he was influenced by the *Ikhwan* or Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁸

In June 1965, Rachid Ghannouchi travelled to the West via Turkey and lived in Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. He ended up in France and obtained a Master's in Philosophy at the Sorbonne in 1968. Here he joined Al Tabligh and practised *da'wah* in the poor quarters of Paris where impoverished workers of North African origin were living.⁴⁹

Soon afterwards, in 1970, Ghannouchi became the leader of a 'clandestine' organisation known as *al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah* (the Islamic Group) whose founding members were drawn from the Tabligh, a Pakistani-originated organisation with branches throughout the world. *Al-Jama'ah* remained a secret organisation because of the ban on the activities of political organisations by Tunisia's single-party regime. Its members used a government-sponsored institution called the Qur'anic Preservation Society (QPS) as a platform that allowed them to perform their religious duties without being harassed by the government. Even in Tunisia, he and members of *al-Jama'ah* were regular visitors to Malik Bennabi in Algeria and attended the annual Islamic thought seminars held in 1970, 1971 and 1972. Ghannouchi and his colleagues, Sheikh Abdel Fattah Mouro, Fadhel Beldi, Salih bin Abdullah and Ahmida Enneifer, were anxious not to miss any of these functions.⁵⁰

In 1981, *al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah* was renamed the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI). However, on 17 July 1981, the leaders of MTI and 500 of its members were arrested when it openly declared its objectives, including

agitation for Islamic revival.⁵¹ Ghannouchi and some of his followers were released between 1981 and 1984 only to be arrested again on suspicion of forming a secret organisation. Some of them, including Ghannouchi, were imprisoned until 1987.⁵²

Tamimi sums up the rise and fall of *al-Nahda* (or Ennahda, as he spells it) as follows:

In an attempt to gain recognition under the new law, the MTI changed its name in December 1988 to Hizb Ennahdah (the Renaissance Party, dropping the reference to Islam from its title). Prior to the legislative election of April 1989, Ennahda submitted its application to be registered as a political party. By the time of the vote, it had not received the necessary recognition. Nevertheless, Ennahda supporters ran more or less openly as independents competing for 129 of the 141 available parliamentary seats. Ennahda-backed independents emerged as the largest opposition force, winning 14.5 percent of the national vote and as much as 30 percent in some urban centers, including Tunis. The combined total vote of all the opposition parties recognized under Law No. 88-32 amounted to less than 5 percent. Ennahda's emergence as the only credible electoral competitor ever to challenge the ruling party's monopoly of power gave the Tunisian government a self-interested motive for discouraging its free participation in the political process. On 6 June 1989 Ennahda's application to form a political party was rejected, leaving its supporters liable to prosecution on grounds of membership in an illegal organization, an offense punishable by up to five years' imprisonment. Despite Ennahda's impressive showing at the polls, none of its candidates were returned to parliament. In fact, all of the seats in parliament were awarded to candidates from the ruling RCD.⁵³

Commentaries about the democratic nature of *Al-Nahda* are often guided by nascent and competing perceptions as to whether the Ghannouchi teachings are genuinely democratic, thus echoing the ever-present question of whether Islamist political parties can be trusted.⁵⁴

With the banning of *al-Nahda* in Tunisia and its leaders, including Sheikh Yassine, exiled, adherents turned their attention to developing the movement into a transnational pan-Islamic movement. As will be explained below, Sheikh

Yassine, with the support of his energetic daughter Nadia, was able to engage French Muslims in the democratic processes in France, while providing a strong opposition to the king among the Moroccan diaspora.

MUSLIM TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE REALM OF ISLAMIC POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS AND PARTIES

In a paper titled 'Islam and transnationalism', Grillo succinctly defines transnationalism as social, cultural, economic and political relations which are between, above or beyond the nation-state, interconnecting, transcending, perhaps even superseding, what has been for the past 200 years their primary locus.⁵⁵

However, in the case of Muslims, Grillo distinguishes three types of Muslim transnationalism:

- Transnational Islam or Islam within transnational circuits
- Transnational Islam or Islam within a bi-national or plurinational framework
- Transnational Islam or the *ummah*

Although the relevance of this characterisation of the transnationalism of immigrant Muslims living in Europe is not in doubt, only the third category applies to Islamist political parties and their adherents. This could be attributed to the fact that Islam carries the insignia and identity markers referred to by Grillo (i.e. religious sect, ethnic or national origin, language, gender, class, etc.) within bi-national, plurinational and transnational circuit Islam. Competition between these various identities has historically characterised the divisions within national Muslim movements. It is also important to emphasise that Grillo does not deny the fact that Islamic transnationalism and European ideas intersect and are not necessarily confrontational in all respects.

Ironically, even Islamic political parties that espoused internal divisions in terms of the bi-national, plurinational and transnational circuits of Islam (such as the divisions in Algeria and Morocco between Arabist and Berbers, or between African Muslims and Arab Muslims in the Sudan, or the general differences between the socio-cultural elements of Arabian Muslims vis-à-vis African and Asian Muslims) remain focused on a real or perceived notion of a

transnational Muslim *ummah*, which could mean different things for Islamic parties that might differ on the classification given by Grillo.⁵⁶

As the political manifestation of political Islam with its various, even at times contradictory, strands of political Islam (from secular to moderate and radical), Islamist political parties are united by the notion that there is a Muslim *ummah* which ideally transcends the divisions expounded in the bi-national, plurinational and transnational circuit of Islam. Paradoxically, although Muslims can be divided by language, ethnicity, or nationality of origin when they migrate to Europe and elsewhere, the nature of political Islam and its ideological tenets as expressed in the orientation and practice of Islamic political parties portrays at least three major Islamic *ummah* or transnationalist tendencies.

First, the transnational Muslim *ummah* is an expansion of the national space, including the creation of transnational *da'awa*, philanthropic organisations and networks with links to and exchanges with Muslims living in other parts of the Muslim world, Muslims in non-Muslim societies and potential converts in the West, some parts of Africa and Asia.⁵⁷

Obviously, leaders of the major Islamic organisations or political parties that I have introduced in this paper have espoused a Muslim transnationalist tendency. For example, the transnationalism of the Muslim Brotherhood is clearly expressed in its expansion from Egypt to almost every country in the Middle East and to almost all continents of the world. Although short-lived, *Al-Nahda* portrays a special case of transnationalism through the migration and exile of the leader and the party's global network with Islamic movements, initially in Egypt and Syria and Europe (particularly the Tabligh in France), and during the late 1970s and 1980s in North Africa (Sudan Muslim Brotherhood, the Tabligh and other Islamist movements in Algeria), with the migration ending in London, where Ghannouchi lives.⁵⁸

At the end of the 1990s, Justice and Charity founder and spiritual leader Sheikh Yassine and a large number of his followers began to seek either refuge in Europe or the support of Muslims living in Europe as a place of exile and political expression.⁵⁹ Realising that the spread of their ideology was limited and even blocked by the Moroccan government, Justice and Charity proponents decided to 'export' their movement beyond national frontiers. This took place through the creation of an association whose subsidiaries are found in both Europe and the United States: Muslim Participation and Spirituality (MPS).⁶⁰ In 2006, another organisation that is also affiliated to Sheikh Yassine and known as the New European

Moroccan Friendship was established, and its founding conference on ‘Human rights flouted in Morocco’ was opened by Nadia, Sheikh Yassine’s daughter.⁶¹

Second, extremist Islamist political organisations and parties conceive of Islamic transnationalism in the form of universal networks or an embodiment of the expansion of *jihād* into *dar al harb* – the region of war or the West as perceived by extremist Islamist organisations or wherever Western interests could be targeted. Here extremist Islamist political parties seek external legitimacy by gaining the support of disfranchised Muslim communities. Transnationalism here means an increased ability of jihadists to recruit, train, move and nourish combatants across vast distances in time and space. These transnational networks are capable of utilising support networks that are mobile, flexible and ideologically fluid.⁶² Although the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (or FIS) began as an Islamist political organisation with the major aim of participating in the democratic process, its offshoot organisations such as Armed Islamic Group (GIA) have become part of the al-Qaeda transitional jihadist networks operating in North and West Africa, with links to jihadist networks that operate as far as Iraq and Afghanistan. Earlier I mentioned that in Algeria the majority of the fighters of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) were *mujahidin* and al-Qaeda affiliates repatriated from Afghanistan after the collapse of the Taliban regime. Al-Qaeda in the Muslim Maghreb Islamique (AQIM) – which succeeded the GIA offshoot the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) – was established by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a radical jihadist who fought with the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan. It was alleged that the AQIM sent squads of jihadists to Iraq and pledged allegiance to Bin Laden in 2007.⁶³

Third, being jihadist or a moderate Islamist organisation does not preclude the other in terms of expanding the transnational Muslim *ummah*. Amel Boubekeur is correct in lamenting that these radical Islamist movements belong to three types of Salafism:

- Political Salafism represented by FIS
- Jihad Salafism represented by GIA and GSPC and AQIM
- Scientific Salafism, which is a puritan form of Salafism devoted to Salfi scholarship, a form equivalent to Christian missionary work or evangelism⁶⁴

All three forms of Salafism have a transnational Muslim *ummah* appeal, supported by a myriad Saudi philanthropic organisations.⁶⁵

If one takes a broad view, the main difference between moderate and radical Islamist political organisations and parties is the methods they use to project a Muslim identity in the public sphere (violence, *hijab*, dress code e.g. burka and veil, beard etc.), their refraining from participating in elections or their criticising Western democracy in favour of *shura*.⁶⁶ It is obvious that Sheikh Yassine's exiled Justice and Charity movement is expanding and reaching out peacefully to the Muslim diaspora in Europe through organised political campaigns, while it operates within the democratic dispensations of the French Constitution. The same applies to the exiled *hizbul Islah* of Rachid Ghannouchi, which has also embarked on a similar path.

In short, as the synthesis of the cases of Islamic political organisations and parties in North Africa presented here illustrates, individuals or groups of Muslims or Muslims in the same political organisation or party may be divided in terms of Islam within transnational circuits or Islam within a bi-national or plurinational framework. This requires serious reconsideration when applied to transnational Islamist political parties and their conceptions of the Muslim *ummah*. However, this reconsideration does not preclude the fact that Muslims within the transnational circuit or Islam with a bi-national or plurinational framework could be severely divided.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to explore three intractable issues emanating from the development of a distinct type of political party that calls itself Islamic – or Islamist as it is characterised in the scholarship of political Islam.

First, this chapter provides a synoptic view of Islamist political organisations and parties and how they differ from Western secular and Christian confessional political parties. I argue that these differences pertain to the conflation by Islamist political parties of ethics and law, leading to the integration of the social, political and economic aspects of Muslim life. Differences exist between *shura* and the liberal democratic conceptions of democracy, *Shari'ah* and secular public law, seeing women's rights as human rights and relegating the inheritance and other rights of women to only half those of men. These contentions are more common among extreme than moderate Islamist political organisations and parties, the latter subscribing to a modicum of Western-styled democratic dispensation. However, these aspects have proved

to be more contentious in the realm of the transnational Islam *ummah* and the expansion of the *ummah* to non-Muslim societies, particularly in Europe and the United States.

Second, I have not really provided a detailed analysis of the current developments and political programmes of North African Islamist political organisations and parties. However, these have been addressed by large numbers of scholars of political Islam, hence I have refrained from rehashing them here. More broadly, this chapter is about the development of the major Islamist political organisations and parties in North Africa from nationalist political parties that used Islam as an ideology of national liberation against colonial rule or as a form of resistance against despotic regimes to transnational networks of what they perceive as a transnational Muslim *ummah*. These developments are pivotal for the conception of any meaningful understanding of one of the main differences between Islamist political organisations and parties, both moderate and radical, and Western secular and confessional political parties.

Third, Muslim transnationalism is a unifying aspect of the Islamist political organisations and parties introduced in this chapter, although they may differ in strategy and tactics for achieving this. Nevertheless, it is certain that while Islamist political parties could themselves be divided in terms of ethnicity, language, nationality and vernacular cultures, paradoxically, despite subscribing to different, and at times contradictory, strands of political Islam, ranging from the radical to the moderate, they are united in preserving the public good of the transnational Muslim *ummah*.

These three conclusions have far-reaching security implications for secular Muslim states and peoples and the Western world. They alert us to the fact that not all Islamist political organisations and parties are extremist and violent; that the question is not whether Islamist political organisations and parties can be trusted (i.e. both Islamist and democratic); that geopolitics is blurred by the tacit call of some of these organisations or parties to establish a transnational Muslim *ummah*, and that exposing them to the democratic process, under strict secularist surveillance, could or should yield greater dividends than banning them. Given the nature of Islamist political organisations and parties, the rationale they impose on current democratic development is serious since they do not speak only to or draw their support wholly from within the nation-state.

The outreach of Islamist political organisations and parties is beyond the nation-state and gauges the support and goodwill of an expansive network of

transnational Islamic *ummah*. This fact, in a sense, makes Islamist political organisations and parties more than simply a political organisation or political party, as I hinted in the introduction of this paper. The blurring of geopolitics suggests that this phenomenon signals the end not only of the divide between North Africa, sub-Saharan African or Europe, but the creation of a transnational Islamist network of political organisations and parties that operate on a global scale.

NOTES

- 1 Institute of Social Studies, Rotterdam University and Department of Political Science, University of Leiden, The Netherlands.
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- 44 Marvine Howe, *Morocco: the Islamist awakening and other challenges*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
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- 46 Howe, *Morocco: the Islamist awakening and other challenges*.
- 47 For more on PJD see Howe, *Morocco: the Islamist awakening and other challenges*.
- 48 Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A democrat within Islamism*, 14-20.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid., 3. According to Tamimi, from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s five main factors directly influenced Ghannouchi's thought and the development of his movement's political standing. These were: the liberal democratic current that emerged in Tunisia in the second half of the 1970s; the 1978 violent confrontation between the trade unions and the government; the clash and interaction on campus with the leftists; the Iranian Revolution; and the socio-political thought of the Islamic movement in Sudan.(He had visited the Sudan in 1979.) (Ibid., 46).
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3 Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Algerian Salafi networks

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INTRODUCTION

After the events of 11 September 2001, the United States largely abandoned its push for good governance in much of the Arab world and instead formed strategic partnerships with several key Arab governments in order to boost security and ensure regional stability in the fight against terrorism.¹ Algeria's extensive experience in fighting terrorism and violence enabled it to become a major player in the region, one of the US' 'expert' partners in the 'war on terror'. In spite of its strong security partnership with the US, however, the Algerian state struggled to maintain its legitimacy among the Algerian public. The government's failure to hold transparent elections, achieve multiparty political dialogue, or redistribute the country's oil and gas riches to civil society helped to pave the way for the resurgence of new radical and fundamentalist actors, especially popular among Algeria's youth. The persistence of years of civil conflict, extreme and visible violence, and clashes between opposition groups and the government gave way to an Islamist revival characterised by the emergence of various types of radical Salafi movements.

Whereas Algeria's major Islamist parties in the 1990s tended to embrace politics, participate in the system, and discuss the concept of democracy, the new anti-state Salafi actors do not believe in working within the political system.² We will here focus on two types of Salafi movements in Algeria: Jihadi Salafism and Wahhabi Salafism. Jihadi Salafism openly rejects and seeks to overthrow the state by violent means. It was primarily represented in the 1990s by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA from the acronym of the French *Groupes Islamiques Armes*) and its successor, the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC from the French *Groupe Salafi pour la Predication et le Combat*).³ In 2006, what remained of the GSPC formed a new group, the al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI). Wahhabi Salafism is now a mainstream movement and part of a non-violent but radical tradition of rejecting modernity and Westernisation. It has literally exploded in terms of followers over the past decade or so, appealing primarily to young Algerians between the ages of 15 and 35. It does not seek to overthrow the state, but focuses instead on re-Islamising the society through a fundamentalist ideology.

Despite the repression of radical Islamist movements since 1992 and the promulgation of a National Reconciliation Law in 1999 aimed at encouraging the repentance of *jihadi* militants, the Algerian state has not won its battle against Islamism and the country is still subject to regular terrorist attacks.⁴ The government has, however, succeeded in destroying the more openly political manifestation of Salafism, the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut* [FIS], or *al-Jabha al-Islamiyya lil-Inqadh*), but it did not solve the issue of the political reintegration of its former leaders and followers. The new apolitical or anti-political Salafi trends reflect a growing de-politicisation among the new young Islamist generation. The government's inability to crush the Salafist trend and convince its members to lay down their arms, and the rising number of Algerian youth that are turning to Salafism, underscores the importance of a better understanding of the multifaceted dynamics of these movements, and the urgent need to reinvent pluralistic politics in a post-conflict Algeria.

Western policymakers, as well as African governments, are increasingly preoccupied with the rise of these new radical Salafi movements. Yet, while Western governments have begun to develop strategies for dealing with moderate Islamist movements, they have yet to devise models for national, regional and global responses to deal with Salafist actors. Moreover, despite the myriad articles in the Western press detailing the rise of al-Qaeda in Algeria, these

Salafi networks are not well understood.⁵ What are the ideological underpinnings and modes of action of Algerian Salafist movements? How and when did they emerge, and to what extent are they tied to other transnational actors in the region?

JIHADI SALAFISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE AL-QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB

The regionalisation of Jihadi Salafism and the rejuvenation of the *jihad*

11 September 2001 and the Iraq war were major turning points in the ideological redynamisation of the Jihadi Salafism, the most significant since the resurgence experienced by members of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and other Armed Islamic Groups (GIA) in the 1990s. A new generation had emerged within the GSPC. Their *jihad* was no longer inspired by the War of Independence (1954–1962) against France or to end illegitimate rule in the 1990s. Their new *jihad* was inspired by a regionalised Salafism. Indeed, all Muslims were ‘Binladenised’ against their American, Jewish and Western counterparts.

This new generation of *jihadis* also emerged in a national political climate in which power in Algeria was more disorganised than ever. With income from oil at its highest, the sacred union that had prevailed between the army and political power in the 1990s was becoming more and more fragile. These divergent interests at the core of the government put paid to any ideas of increased participation by or negotiation with the opposition, which might have helped to avoid violence.

Algerian Jihadi Salafism therefore turned from negotiations with the state in order to internationalise its demands and stem its loss of power through the ‘national concord’, a move which caused it to lose the support of many activists. In December 2006 this new strategy led to the official affiliation of the GSPC with Bin Laden’s organisation, al-Qaeda. The GSPC thus became the al-Qaeda organisation in the Islamic countries of the Maghreb (AQMI).

Even if the GSPC-AQMI was not currently active beyond Algeria’s borders, the attention commanded by al-Qaeda label enabled the GSPC to stage a reappearance on the international scene. To achieve greater efficiency and generate international interest (particularly from the US), AQMI tried to draw different

Magreb Salafi *jihadi* groups together under the same banner, but without their having any particular operational links with each other. By becoming AQMI, the GSPC was able to respond to the challenge of the global war on terror; this ideology being largely responsible for the evaporation of national and local differences and the unification of the *jihadis*.⁶ The GSPC-AQMI attempted to step up its recruitment and popularity among young Algerians by modelling itself on Iraqi operational methods (suicide attacks) and by reorganising its media propaganda. Already in 2005, the fact that the GSPC approved the kidnapping and assassination of two Algerian diplomats in Baghdad by the Iraqi faction of al-Qaeda allowed it to link its media message to focus on its ability to launch a war against the US and to draw from it a degree of prestige.

In the Maghreb, where young people who are politically and socially marginalised in their own countries are finding it increasingly difficult to become ‘*harraga*’ (those who burn [*hargue*] the frontiers, i.e. illegal immigrants) in the face of European vigilance, the option of a regionalisation of *jihad* in solidarity with Iraq, Chechnya and other such states became one of the rare opportunities for Jihadi Salafism to reinvent for itself another deterritorialised kind of *jihad*.

In this way, AQMI was able to seize upon the unfulfilled desires of young Algerians and increase its membership.⁷ Since becoming AQMI, the Algerian Jihadi Salafism has moved away from its opposition to the impious state and society to a more Messianic attempt to channel the frustrations of young people. In its propaganda videos we now see commentaries in Berber, whereas the use of Arabic had always been sacred. These videos also try to play on the existing social malaise by featuring images of riots between young people and the police or by ordering the *reconquista* (reconquest) of Al Andalus (Spain and Portugal).

Even if the great majority of young Algerians do not support AQMI, this ideology nevertheless finds a niche in the everyday gun culture of their world. Although they may not be members of AQMI, the mobile phones of some nevertheless carry footage of terrorist attacks in between pornographic videos downloaded from the Internet. Media propaganda had allowed AQMI the opportune moment to achieve a maximum impact. This media propaganda and choice of targets appear to correspond more and more with an international agenda of elections or commemorations of other attacks such as 9/11.

We are therefore witnessing the transition from a discourse of negation of the state and of society to a *jihadi* ideology where visual media violence becomes the main *raison d'être*. A new generation of young people fed on the

traumatising images of torture in Abu Ghraib is indifferent to the questions of national politics of the old Algerian National Liberation Front ruling party and is now swelling the ranks of the AQMI. It is essentially a *jihad* of images, with no leader or religious or political socialisation, that is seducing this generation. Often it is the *jihadi* chat rooms that radicalise them, much more than the experience of the war. Here, the process of *jihad* becomes more important than the project or the cause. Being a *jihadi* becomes the goal rather than building an Islamic state or accumulating wealth. Abdel Qahar, the son of Ali Benhadj⁸, migrated from the *minbar* (the chair from which the imam preaches in the mosque) to the bush, and is a good example of a person making the transition from voicing political demands, as the FIS did, to existing only for *jihad*, as the AQMI offers it. He is famous for having preached to a rapturous crowd in Algiers on the creation of an Islamic state at the age of 5, dressed in a white *qamiss*, pointing his finger and reciting the profession of the faith. In 2006, at the age of 19 he went underground only to reappear on Arabic Al Jazeera, in battledress and holding a Kalashnikov.

This fascination with the silver screen war drove a brilliant 15-year-old student, Nabil Belkacemi, to a suicide attack at the barracks in Dellys, a city near Algiers, in September 2007. He had given himself the warrior name of Abou Moussaab al-Zarqaoui after the highly media-visible leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq.⁹

It would seem that these young people are recruited in mosques on the basis of their desire to ‘do something’ and then sent to radicalising training camps for three to six months with the hope of fighting in Iraq. Without being sure of what they are getting themselves into, a few realise too late that they have been taken hostage and will be expected to launch suicide attacks in Algeria. It is troubling to learn that the trucks used in the AQMI suicide attacks since 2007 have been found with the windows welded shut, to prevent any last minute defection by the driver. These young people have never known about the political aims of Islamism or the FIS – only the violence of the GIA and the GSPC. Others may be the children of terrorists who have been killed or militants tortured by the army.

Besides this new generation of young people radicalised by their violent environment and who find in *jihad* the possibility of a political existence, Algerian jihadism was invigorated by the re-radicalisation of those who had renounced their political allegiances. Once pardoned or out of prison, they

went underground and joined the AQMI.¹⁰ After the declaration of the National Charter of Reconciliation in 2004, only those leaders of the GIA who had negotiated directly with the army were able to be reconciled. (They were often in business.) Many other AQMI members continue to be subjected to police control or to encounter the mistrust or hatred of their neighbours. The re-radicalisation of these former retractors possibly also resulted from the ideological and organisational failings of the Jihadi Salafism of the GSPC. With no guide or leader to channel their *jihadi* project, the attractive media presence of al-Qaeda provided them with directions for blowing themselves up.

The persistent violence in Algeria continues to shape the political life of that country. With no consensus on any new social project or mode of governance, the security concerns and the fight against terrorism continue to legitimise the regime which, since 1992, has been the only real actor in a dismal and lacklustre political field.

Violence as an internal and external regulating tool of the political field

For nearly two decades, extreme and visible violence has regulated all political exchanges between the opposition groups and the government. But the role of violence in the internal political life of Algeria goes back even further. Historically, it is mainly the use of violence that enabled the Algerian political elites to emerge. Faced with a colonial system of extreme violence, those who were able to strike back at France with violence were granted a political audience. The young high school students of the FLN who used violence to demand independence had, since 1954, become the political elite of their country, their principal legitimacy being the fact that they had waged a holy war that led to the independence of their country. They had even called themselves *mujahidin* (holy warriors).

In view of the omnipresence of the *jihad* issue, the capacity of the elites to come up with a viable political project is superseded by the all-important factor of belonging to the 'revolutionary family'. It is through the wish also to belong to this family that we need to view the violent stance of the FIS. When the members of the Islamist movement demanded a share of political power with the FLN, they did so by playing on their status as former *moudjahid* (religious fighter) (like Bouyaali of the *Mouvement Islamique Armé*, Nahnah from the *Mouvement pour la paix et la société* or Soltani from FIS) or as sons of

moudjahidin (like Ali Benhadj from the FIS). Even today, during social conflicts with the government, it is the fact of being a son of a *chahid* (martyr of the War of Liberation) that is highlighted in order to carry the argument. Conversely, the FLN tried to discredit the FIS in the 1990s by calling them a group of children of the *harki* (Algerians who served in the French army).

It is within this supremacist *jihadi* logic regarding political competencies that Jihadi Salafism comes to the fore. By inventing their own *jihad*, the members of the GIA and the GSPC also attempted to compete with the omnipresent *jihad* of their elders (the FLN and the leaders of the FIS). *Jihad* has come to represent an attempt to renew the generation of political elites by a glorious new episode in the use of violence.

Faced with a new *jihad* which challenged its own one, the powers within the FLN also attempted to revive the fading legitimacy of its *moudjahid* state through a renewed securitarian legitimacy in the fight against terrorism. We should not forget that since 1992 Algeria has been under a state of emergency. Decreed in order to prevent the FIS from coming to power after the legislative elections, the state of emergency allows the government continually to postpone any prospect of normalising or expanding the political field. According to the Algerian government, this state of emergency will be lifted only when the threat of terrorism in Algeria is removed.

This new securitarian legitimacy against the terrorist risk has allowed the government to limit the activities of numerous labour unions, to refuse licences to various opposition parties (such as the Islamist party *Wafa*, led by Ahmed Taleb Ibrahim; the Union for Democracy and the Republic, led by Amara Benyounes; or the Democratic Front led by Sid Ahmed Ghazali), and even to gag certain associations for victims of terrorism or human rights that were opposed to the political amnesty for war criminals and terrorists.¹¹ The basis for the legitimacy of President Bouteflika is thus largely linked to the fact that he is perceived by the population to be the man who ‘brought peace to Algeria’.

If this securitarian legitimacy allowed the upper echelons of government to consolidate their position at the beginning of the 2000s, it is being increasingly challenged by public opinion because terrorism persists. In the absence of transparent elections or pluralist political dialogue or, at the very least, a redistribution of the oil and gas riches to civil society, it would seem that the state is having difficulty inventing sources of legitimacy other than security, especially among the young.

The situation is different on the international level, thanks notably to the role of the US. Since 9/11, the US, an important partner for Algeria, has shelved the issue of good governance in the Arab states in order to focus on regional security and the fight against terrorism. Algeria's experience of violence has enabled it to take on the label of 'expert' partner for the US in the fight against terrorism and as a major player in the region. In a message to mark the inauguration of the new US embassy in Algiers in May 2008, Condoleezza Rice even qualified Algeria as 'a champion of regional and international security'.¹² Rather than build a political Maghreb (the Arab Maghreb Union [AMU] has never been effective in conflict resolution), the US prefers the consolidation of a security-oriented Maghreb, designed to facilitate its presence in the region. Algeria therefore tries to position itself as leader of this new Mediterranean security identity, in particular to challenge the privileged role played by Morocco in relation to the US.

It should be noted that, thanks to the merging of al-Qaeda with the GSPC, the appearance of al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb has played a key role in the partnership between Algeria and the US regarding the issue of terrorism, but also regarding the issue of investment and oil. For the US, the AQMI confirmed the need to pursue the fight against terror, in view of the expansion of al-Qaeda and its infiltration into new areas like the Maghreb. The AQMI has also presented Africom (United States Africa Command) with the opportunity to materialise.¹³ Africom is the military presence of the US in Africa, the main purpose being to prevent the redeployment of AQMI to the south of the Algerian desert and sub-Saharan Africa. In reality this presence would allow much more on-site control of the exploitation of Algerian oil, for the most part present in the south of the country, and check the growing competition of China in the region. Algiers had no problem accepting a partnership with the US in the fight against terror, and the Algerian army regularly benefits from US training. But the option of US control of oil – Algeria's main source of income – via Africom would seem to be a more complex matter. In fact, in 2007 Algeria refused to receive the Africom command on its soil.¹⁴ As a result the Africom project in Algeria has been temporarily abandoned by the US since April 2008.

Certain observers of Algerian political life interpret the episodic reappearance in the Sahel of groups more or less linked to the AQMI as indicating that certain members of the army want to have a good relationship with the US. They want to convince President Bouteflika to review his policy on the US

presence in southern Algeria, particularly with regard to agreements between the Algeria and the US in the oil sector.

In fact, the appearance of terrorism in the Sahel coincided with President Bouteflika's questioning of his partnership with the US in 2005.¹⁵ At that time, the president terminated a number of contracts that had been granted to US oil companies, and their taxes then increased considerably. American oil interests were further thrown into turmoil in July 2006, when the law on hydrocarbons adopted 18 months earlier was modified in order to cancel the oil field concessions made to foreign oil companies, a measure which had been meant to favour the setting up of US companies. Using the presence of the AQMI in the Sahel as a pretext, some members of the army began preparing for the return of the US to this region, the goal being that certain leaders would profit handsomely from the share of the US in these exploitations.

Relations between Algiers and Washington reflect the instability of the decision-making process in Algeria and are, for the most part, the result of a conflict of interests surrounding the issue of oil revenue. In the absence of strong and transparent leadership, the risk of terrorism and violence continues to regulate the credibility of policies conducted by Algeria. Whether it is a question of keeping real political and pluralist competition at bay on the national level, or of directing foreign policy with the US in particular, the presence of the AQMI continues to be a structural factor of the Algerian political landscape.

The Wahhabi Salafism influence

As-salafiyya ad-da'wa, or Wahhabi Salafism, is a network-based social movement rather than a political party. It has gained ground because of the disappointment with politics engendered among Algerians by the violence of the recent past and by the continuing domination of the political scene by the National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale* or *Jabhat al-Tahrir al-Watani* [FLN]), the party in power since 1962. Few Algerians believe in the country's election process – only 36 per cent bothered to vote in the May 2007 legislative elections. Many regard the legalised Islamist parties, such as the Movement of Society for Peace (*Mouvement de la Société pour la paix* or *Harakat al Moujtama' As-Silm* [MSP, also called Hamas]) and the Movement for National Reform (*Mouvement pour la Réforme Nationale* or *Harakat al-Islah al Watani* [MNR, also called Islah]), as *khobzistes* (from the Arab word

khobz, ‘bread’ – those who only want to earn their bread) and interested only in the *koursi* (the seat, which represents power).¹⁶ Young Algerians in particular have thus turned their backs on politics, and are rather investing their effort in the formation of a network of organisations that help their members lead a pure life based on the original precepts of Islam and at the same time find their place in society.

Wahhabi Salafism excludes all political activities. Its members consider the electoral system and the framework of the political party to be a Western import that makes no sense from an Islamic point of view. They consider those who engage in party politics as *hizb* (literally partisan, but with a strong negative connotation) and responsible for the *fitna* (discord) that divides Muslims.¹⁷ Their criticism has been even stronger since the bloody experience of Islamic politicisation of the 1990s. A famous adage of one of the main Salafi scholars, Nasir ad-Din Al-Albani, states that ‘nowadays, it is a good policy to abandon politics’. Rejecting politics, they have turned for guidance to religious scholars as keepers of a knowledge that is above partisan divisions. Since religious scholars are largely employed by the state in Islamic universities or mosques, the role they play ensures that Wahhabi Salafism remains neutral in practice vis-à-vis the state, even if it rejects the state’s legitimacy in theory. Like all Salafi trends in Algeria, Wahhabi Salafism has its roots in the Islamic revival movement that developed during the 1930s in reaction to colonial domination and the resulting loss of identity. Soon, however, the movement divided, with one part turning towards Algerian nationalism and eventually leading to the creation of the FIS. The other part of the movement, inspired by Saudi Wahhabism, focused instead on *da’wa*, the need to preach, purify and re-Islamise the society. The promotion of Salafism was strengthened during the 1980s by the numerous young Algerians returning to teach in their country after training in Saudi Arabia.¹⁸ Saudi-trained preachers such as Ali Ferkous, Azzedine Ramdani, Lazhar Sounayquirat and Abdelghani Aouissat were the main figures in this movement.¹⁹ They all maintained close ties with Saudi religious institutions – indeed, one of them, Abdelmalek Ramdani is an imam in a mosque in Saudi Arabia, having been forced into exile by the threats of radical Islamists opposed to his non-violent and pro-state views.²⁰

The influence of these preachers has been increased by their being authorised to teach Salafi dogma, the *idjaza*, by Saudi Wahhabi scholars. They teach lessons in Algerian mosques under Saudi influence and issue *fatawas*, legal

religious advice, on a whole series of issues concerning daily life. They often minister to young Algerians who contact them on their cellphones.

Exit the party – long live the network

Wahhabi Salafism has grown exponentially in terms of followers over the last decade or so and is now considered as a main issue of interest when talking about fundamentalist movements. Most of its adherents are young Algerians aged between 15 and 35 years, disappointed by the political Islam of their elders. Conditions for membership of Wahhabi Salafi groups are not complicated. There is no need to attain a high level of tertiary, religious or political education, and the required knowledge is easily acquired. Numerous Internet sites have ready-made *fatawas* offering advice on the proper ways to eat, dress, vote or not, enter into alliances with other Islamic organisations, and so on. The religious TV channels of the Gulf that can be captured by Algerian satellite dishes also allow young Algerians to familiarise themselves with the doctrine of Wahhabi Salafism. Salafi religious literature is easily available and, most importantly, very affordable. With about 20 000 religious books being imported every year from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya or Syria, Salafi literature is monopolising the market for religious material and spilling over beyond the immediate circle of its sympathisers, notably by offering free books in mosques.²¹

While the legalised Islamist parties like Hamas and Islah largely reject the membership of these youths, considering them both insufficiently educated and too visible with their *niqab* (full face veil worn by women) and *qamiss* (long shirt worn by men), Wahhabi groups not only welcome everybody, but also provide them with membership in a community. By going to the right mosque or visiting the right Internet sites, adherents gain friends, get married, and get help in finding an apartment or starting a business. The solidarity created by Wahhabi Salafism is not based only on a common political affiliation, like the FIS used to offer, but on membership in different small networks, notably of mosques and trades.

Membership of Wahhabi Salafi groups also allows the ‘terrorism generation’ (as they call themselves) of young Algerians to choose a ‘soft’ rejection of the Westernised aspects of the Algerian society without entering into violent conflict with their milieu. This generation is not ready to pay the price of new violence and sees attempts to rely on Islam for political purposes as an utter

failure. Its goal is simply to carve for itself a space where its members can live in the image of an ideal Islamic society.

In addition to providing a reference point and sense of belonging for disenfranchised young Algerians, Wahhabi Salafi groups have also attracted a number of former FIS activists seeking a new home after the outlawing of their party in 1992.²² Also, a number of Jihadi Salafis, disillusioned by the reconciliation policy, swapped their arms for business and the commercial networks offered by the Wahhabi Salafi groups, notably with the Gulf region. Finally, the movement has been strengthened by the arrival of numerous European Muslims and converts returning from the West and attracted by the possibility of a new Islamic way of life in a sort of community enclave, separated from the rest of society. The economic boom in the country and the presence of French-speaking Wahhabi Salafi scholars make Algeria more accessible than Saudi Arabia to young Western Muslims who do not speak Arabic. Algeria seems also more attractive to them than Morocco or Tunisia where Wahhabi Salafism has been severely repressed after the terrorist attacks of the last decade.

An apolitical Salafism?

The scale of this movement is not unduly worrying to the Algerian state. On the contrary, it represents the means of channelling the discontent of Algerian youth with their increasingly disastrous living conditions and the high level of unemployment. As they made it clear in many of the interviews I, the author, had with them, 'Da'wa Salafiyya people, above all, [desire] to be left alone to practise their religion and way of life in peace', with their own schools, commercial networks and style of dress. The movement is averse not only to violence but to politics in general, thus giving the state a chance to bury the spectre of radical political Islam. By authorising Wahhabi-inspired Salafist preachers to preach, the regime can ensure that the Islamic revival experienced by the Algerian youth will not be accompanied by dissenting political demands. Just as in the 1970s, when Algerian authorities encouraged the growth of Islamist groups in order to stifle the leftist opposition, the Algerian government now sees Wahhabi Salafism, with its massive presence in mosques and universities, as an antidote to the influence of political Islam and Jihadi Salafism.²³

Furthermore, this brand of Salafism also provides ready theological justification for the condemnation and repression of terrorism. Since 2007, the ideological struggle led by the Algerian government against AQMI-type

terrorism has relied heavily on the preaching in Wahabi-controlled mosques.²⁴ The minister for religious affairs, for example, organised nightly discussions led by Salafi imams on the topic 'Islam is tolerance' in mosques during the month of Ramadan in 2007. The Algerian government has also recently commissioned Abdelmalek Ramdani, mentioned above as the leading Algerian preacher living in Saudi Arabia, to issue counter-*fatawas* denouncing the *jihadi* ideology of the AQMI group. These *fatawas* were broadcast in the mountainous areas where *jihadis* operate. In January 2008, the government-controlled Radio Coran also broadcast statements by Ramdani and Aouisset denouncing suicide bombing and *takfir* (the practice of condemning moderate Muslim groups as infidels) as practices contrary to Islam.

The book *Fatawa l'Oulama al-kabir fima Oudhira min Dima fil-Jazair*, which is a collection of statements by Wahhabi Salafi theologians Albani, Ibn Baz, Al Otheimine and Rabi' Ibn Hadi, compiled by Abdelmalik Ramdani, epitomises their condemnation of both political Islam and Jihadi Salafism. The book denounces the origin of the FIS as an armed movement and also calls on Algerian *jihadis* to repent. On the other hand, it glorifies the Algerian revolution that led the country to independence and considers it to be Islamic – a political concession to the need to coexist with the Algerian state and accept the Algerian national identity. Through their acceptance of the Algerian state and the national identity they have promoted since independence, the Algerian Wahhabi Salafis are de facto positioning themselves to become a potential political force through their control of the process of social re-Islamisation among the young people of Algeria. Although the *Da'wa Salafiyya* is ostensibly apolitical, in the Algerian political climate where overt partisan activity is curtailed, the social networks of which the movement consists are in the end fundamentalist and political. The Algerian government is aware that it is a social force with enormous political potential, greater than the openly political parties Islam ever had. Thus, it tolerates the movement because it supports the reconciliation programme and is ideologically opposed to jihadism, but the government also keeps a close eye on the movement, questioning its national loyalty and the nature of its ties with Saudi Arabia. The ministry of religious affairs regularly bans certain works of Salafi literature (over 1 000 Salafi titles were banned from the 2007 and 2008 book fairs), forbids the imams from promoting the wearing of dress that is not Algerian (i.e. promoting Saudi types of dress), and occasionally accuses

Salafis of distorting the Qur'an. During Ramadan, it even accused them of breaking the fast ten minutes too early.

Even in its present, apolitical form, Wahhabi Salafism is an obstacle to President Bouteflika's own project of promoting state Islam. Since his re-election for a second and third term, Bouteflika has sought to reinvest in religion to promote state control. This can be seen, for example, in the use of religious arguments to denounce terrorism, the launching of projects such as the construction of the US\$3 billion Algiers Great Mosque, the promotion of Islamic morality, and the inclusion of Hamas alongside the FLN and the National Democratic Rally (*Rassemblement National Démocratique* or *at-Tajammu' al-Watani. ad-Dimuqrati* [RND]) in the presidential alliance.

CONCLUSION

The presence and increasing popularity of Jihadi and Wahhabi Salafi groups reveal a critical, underlying problem: the absence today in Algeria of any true political pluralism, obscured by the violence and struggle against terrorism since 1992. The failure of the Algerian government to politicise and institutionally and democratically to neutralise the radical Islamist voice of the 1990s has led both to a rejection of politics, as exemplified in *Da'wa* Salafism, and to the use of *jihadi* violence as a tool for political negotiation. Above all, the widespread appeal of Salafism highlights the failure of 'normal' party politics in the contemporary world in general, and in Algeria in particular. The secular parties and legal Islamist opposition are weak, and no longer resonate with the Algerian people. They are often rejected as being co-opted by the state.²⁵ In this context, Salafism primarily represents a reaction to the powerlessness of Algeria's non-violent democratic opposition. Using the appeal of fundamentalist or violent ideologies, Salafi groups that either oppose societal values (as is the case of Wahhabi Salafism) or use Messianic global violence (like Jihadi Salafism) allow Algerians to challenge, and escape from, the dualistic opposition of secular versus legalised Islamist parties, both of which have been incapable of challenging the forces of power.²⁶

Among the supporters of Wahhabi Salafism, the fear of the *fitna* (division between believers) and lack of interest in the hopeless prospect of political opposition leave no choice but submission to the state and acerbic criticism of the former FIS and *jihadis*. By allowing this movement to develop, the state

has found sizeable support for its politics of reconciliation and has timeously stemmed the tide of ultra-orthodox Islamic political radicalisation. However the religious radical element within *Da'wa* Salafism, along with its rejection of mainstream social values and any prospect of coexistence with the rest of the population, could prove problematic in the future, particularly if the living conditions of young people do not improve rapidly. Algerian policymakers should therefore try to promote a feeling of belonging and full citizenship among these Wahhabi Salafists by devising new ways of integrating them into representative and democratic institutions.

Algerian Salafi movements illustrate the pressing need for the international community, and particularly the US and the European Union (EU), to rethink the place of radical Islamist movements in the politics of the Arab world. The vast majority of international observers consider hard-line Islamists like the FIS and radical Islamist groups to be the catalyst that has dragged Algeria into the spiral of violence and conflict of recent decades. Programmes to promote Western democracy therefore focus largely on reinforcing a secular state by insisting that Islamist movements accept the democratic rules of the game, and by keeping radical and terrorist groups, and even legalised Islamist groups, away from elections. While Western policies are slowly accepting the idea that 'moderate' Islamist movements should be integrated into the legal political processes of their countries, virtually nobody has argued that radical movements, violent or not, should also be integrated in this way. Yet, the strategy of promoting moderate, depoliticised networks is the main reason behind the failure of promoting democracy and the growth of Salafism in the Arab world. It is precisely the marginalisation of radical actors from modern state institutions and the lack of politicisation among the base that has allowed the emergence and growth of the various forms of Algerian Salafism, and fostered the rise of violence.

Consequently, the international community, especially the US and the EU, must complement their current policies of engaging with 'moderate' Islamist movements with more comprehensive strategies that recognise and include radical Islamist movements. An important first step would be to become better informed regarding the dynamics of Salafism in Algeria. Western policymakers should educate themselves by obtaining the newest information on the latest trends and the current dynamics of both Jihadi and Wahhabi Salafi groups in Algeria.

Moreover, international support for Algeria's efforts to deal with radical groups cannot be restricted to security issues; Western policymakers must think 'politically' about these groups. In the fight against terrorism, keeping radicals away from politics will not avoid radicalisation. Renewing peaceful and non-violent forms of political participation is a major challenge for the EU. There is growing evidence of radical Islamist movements and individuals within these movements changing or abandoning their original ideologies as a result of their experiences of deradicalisation and repentance. Thus, political participation by all citizens should be a priority in international partnerships with Algeria. More generally, implementing a similar approach in other countries could help to reactivate the non-violent modes of political opposition that used to exist in the Arab world. Salafi adherents, and especially youth activists, should be included in the democracy promotion initiatives promoted by international actors.

The development of GIA and GSPC types of Jihadi Salafism into an organisation like AQIM has added an international dimension to the context of the war on terror. It has enabled the Algerian state to become more efficient militarily and to legitimise itself in the eyes of the US. The fight against radical Islamists has therefore allowed the Algerian government to continue the official state of emergency that persists in regulating and limiting the Algerian political arena. However, despite the strength of the Algerian state, it has failed to offer real security to citizens at the national level. Thus, cooperation with international partners on matters of security should be reinforced. However, the Algerian government should make sure that civil society groups are included in this process, are allowed to offer their own views on security and are not merely subjected to national and transnational security policies. The Algerian government's credibility has been strongly challenged by a civil society long held hostage by the conflict between the army on one side, and the Islamists and terrorist organisations on the other. This heightened security has failed to defeat terrorism, but has imposed a high cost on civil society.²⁷

In this environment, other forms of normalised violence with no particular ideological framework are appearing, such as the increasing riots throughout the country and in football stadiums, and an overall rise in criminality and widespread gangsterism. Thus, the Algerian government should bolster and empower civil society groups in the struggle against violence. It is noteworthy that very little public discourse is heard from victims and that civil society is

only just beginning to take a timid interest in the question of terrorism, notably through the taboo issue of compensation for victims.

Algerian forms of Salafism illustrate the deep need to develop new modes of participatory politics in the Arab world. Today the memory of the civil war is crystallised by the different strains of Salafism and the different approaches Salafi groups have adopted toward politics. This history must certainly be engraved in the history of Algeria in an attempt to promote dialogue and co-operation between all actors in Algerian society. For the past 20 years, it has been mainly the use of violence that has enabled Algerian political elites to emerge – from a colonial system of extreme violence, to the post-independence supremacy of the FLN ‘revolutionary family’, and finally to the *jihadi* logic of Salafism. Models of citizenship-based participation and political negotiation based on professional competencies far removed from any kind of *jihadi* or violent basis for legitimacy still need to be developed in today’s Algeria.

NOTES

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4 Moroccan Islamism

Between local participation and international Islamist networks of influence?¹

SAMI ZEMNI

ABSTRACT

Morocco has been directly confronted with the violence of radical Islamist groups since the Casablanca attacks of 16 May 2003 and the Madrid bombings of 11 March 2004. As these attacks were carried out by Moroccan citizens, the idea of a ‘Moroccan exception’ – that is, a politically moderate Arab country with ‘controlled Islamists’ and the absence of political violence – was shattered to pieces. Since then Morocco has implemented different policies trying to counter radicalisation and prevent violent terrorist attacks, while simultaneously trying to secure the pace of political reforms.

While there is a growing body of research on the ideological development and political behaviour of the two major Moroccan Islamist formations (the Justice and Development Party [PJD] and the Association for Justice and Charity [*al-Adl wa Ihsan*]), less attention is given to the impact of the national and international networks of other types of Islamism on political developments within the kingdom. The question of international networks influencing Moroccan citizens has become a matter of both national attention as well as international diplomatic squabbles. In this chapter I will therefore focus on

following issues: which ‘brand’ of Islamism has been part and parcel of the logic of *alternance*, which type of Islamism has been kept outside the realm of political reform and, finally, how violent Islamism (jihadism) has been treated as a ‘danger’ to Moroccan reforms. I will do this by focusing on how violent Islamism is influencing the role and place of Islam and Islamism within the kingdom.

The story of the Moroccan exception – a politically moderate Arab country with ‘controlled Islamists’ and without political violence while engaged in democratic reform (locally known as *alternance*) – was shattered on 16 May 2003 when suicide attacks in Casablanca killed 40 Moroccan citizens. As 14 of the 15 perpetrators of the 16 May 2003 suicide attacks came from the now infamous illegal housing settlements of Thomas and Douar Sekouila within the poor Casablancon suburb of Sidi Moumen, these hastily built shantytowns and their inhabitants became a sudden target for policy. The fact that these attacks were carried out by youngsters with no real local political affiliations begged the question of the importance of the transnational nature of a part of the Islamist opposition. What the attacks made clear is what the anthropologist Arjan Appadurai has dubbed ‘the implosion of the global and national conflicts into the urban world’.² Since then, the issue of Islamism, which was mainly treated as a local (i.e. national) challenge, also raised some domestically and internationally important questions. The implosion of global, transnational and national boundaries and security has led to numerous and multifarious policies that work through different power settings and scales. In other publications I have described how Morocco engaged in a ‘dialogue of civilizations’ through the EU-Mediterranean institutions, has set up a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) agreement with the US, has launched an ambitious National Initiative for Human Development that tries to tackle numerous social ills such as illiteracy and illegal housing or slums, which are seen as breeding grounds for extremism, or has formulated more classical security policies such as policing through law-making, controlling and information.³ However, in what follows, I will describe which ‘brand’ of Islamism has been part and parcel of the logic of *alternance*, which type of Islamism has been kept outside the realm of political reform and, finally, how violent Islamism (jihadism) has been treated as a danger to Moroccan democratisation.⁴

ISLAMIST KAMIKAZES AND NETWORKS: SALAFISM, TAKFIRISM AND JIHADISM?

With the exception of the killing of two Spanish tourists in Marrakech in 1994, the Casablanca kamikaze attacks were a sad first for Morocco. On the night of 16 May a total of 13 (or 14 in some accounts) suicide bombers targeted four different places that symbolised a foreign presence in the city. Almost simultaneously, the 13 bombers attacked a Spanish social club (Casa Espana), the Jewish Alliance (a community centre), the Hotel Farah and the Restaurant el Bozitano frequented by Israeli tourists. The choice of the targets and the method of suicide attacks – while new for Morocco – seemed in line with the radical agenda of local extremists influenced by the transnational agenda of groups like al-Qaeda. What became obvious was that Morocco, like other Arab countries, was now confronting loosely organised networks of militants with an unknown number of cells structured around a self-appointed imam and a handful of followers. With the Madrid attacks of 11 March 2004 that killed 191 people and wounded 1400, it became all the more clear that a significant number of the perpetrators were of Moroccan origin.

From these events several important questions emerged. How was it that a country, known and praised for its tolerant form of Islam, had become a producer of ‘terrorists’? And how did Morocco end up also being a target for violent attacks? Furthermore, and on a more political level, the question arose as to what kind of link or relationship there was between this violent nebula and the larger Islamist organisations.

Finding answers to these important questions is not always an easy task as most of the information on violent attacks and extremists is fragmentary and sometimes contradictory. Most important – and that which urges some prudence in the analysis – is the fact that most of the information emanates from security agencies and justice systems that are engaged in the ‘war on terror’ in which the fight over information is part and parcel of the logic of the propaganda war.

The reaction of the Moroccan government was complex and perhaps even deliberately ambiguous. Firstly, a new anti-terrorism law, rushed through parliament in ten days, was promulgated, granting more powers to the police and secret services in their dealings with violent forms of opposition. Secondly, the police and other security services launched several campaigns to arrest

suspects, so that by the end of 2004 thousands of people had been arrested. Thirdly, and most importantly, both the government and king engaged in political reforms. While the king rekindled his special position as the *amir-al-muminin*, a matter I will discuss further below, a 'specific reading' of the attacks gradually emerged: the Moroccan government saw the attacks as being influenced by the transnational ideology of *jihād* movements like al-Qaeda, but stressed the fact that local youngsters had been the perpetrators of the attack. Highlighting the international links and networks of influence as well as the problems of poverty and social anomy as a cause of this influence, the Moroccan government launched ambitious social programmes as a means to curb this type of violent *jihadi* mobilisation.⁵

Two weeks after the attacks, two people were arrested as the alleged leaders of the group: Abdelhak Bentassir (alias Moul Sebbat – 'he who owns shoes') and Robert Richard Antoine-Pierre (alias Abou Abderrahmane), a French convert to Islam.⁶ Bentassir was seen as the prime suspect and the person who was allegedly in contact with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (or Land of the Two Rivers, as they preferred to call it). This seemed to confirm the hypothesis of a global network stretching from the tribal areas in Pakistan (where the al-Qaeda leadership seems to be in hiding) across Iraq (al-Zarqawi) into Morocco. These networks are not necessarily well organised or thoroughly structured, but these links (perhaps a better term than 'networks') are largely built on personal histories of migration or occasional meetings and contacts. The links can receive their orders from outside or, quite to the contrary, follow their own very local agenda. Furthermore, they can also easily change from one type of activity to another.

Abdelhak Bentassir, however, was killed in dubious circumstances on the 28 May during his transfer from the prison at Fez to Casablanca. After that, the Moroccan government targeted another group for the bombings: the *Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain* (GICM). The Moroccan authorities, the political elite and public opinion reacted with astonishment when connections between *jihadi* combatants in Tangiers, Casablanca, Madrid, Paris and London were revealed. This gave greater credence to the idea that Moroccans were playing an increasingly significant role in the international *jihād* movement. The investigations of Moroccan and Spanish police agencies showed that the GICM served as a breeding ground for the interests of al-Qaeda on Moroccan territory. Established at the end of the 1990s, the GICM

was largely made up of ‘Afghan Moroccans’, Moroccans who had fought the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. One assumes that the GICM was first and foremost a logistics group, providing all kind of services for al-Qaeda militants in Morocco and Europe. When Morocco actively joined the US-led war on terror, it is thought that the group changed its strategy and included Morocco as a target for violent action. The GICM is seen as a franchise of al-Qaeda and is listed on the US state department’s list of foreign terrorist organisations. Presumably, the Franco-Moroccan Abdelkrim (sometimes just Karim) Mejatti, son of a rich Casablanca family and schooled in the prestigious and elite school of Lycée Lyautey, led the movement until he was killed in an ambush in Saudi Arabia.

The Madrid 2004 attacks were also attributed to the GICM. Investigations showed that it was not only Moroccan marginalised youth who were its main protagonists, but also Moroccans residing (legally and illegally) in European countries and who were well adapted to the European lifestyle. According to Mohammed Dharif, a specialist of Moroccan Islamism, this showed that the GICM was the last link in an al-Qaeda operational chain. He maintained that the GICM was responsible for carrying out attacks that were planned and decided on by the al-Qaeda leadership.⁷

The Moroccan government stressed the importance of these international connections as much as it stressed the local connections of the perpetrators of the attacks. The slums around Casablanca had become the recruiting ground of extremist Islamist splinter groups and organisations such as the *Sirat al-Mostaqim* (the Righteous Path), the *Salafiyya Jihadiyya* or the *Jama’at al-Takfir wa al-Hijra* (the Group of Anathema and Migration), and not of the nationally organised big Islamist parties and associations such as the *Parti de la Justice et de Développement* (PJD) or the *Jam’iyyat al-Adl wa al-Ihsan*. The splinter groups had grown strong in the city slums since the middle of the 1990s, but more so after 1999 when King Mohammed VI had come to power. From that time, the state had retreated from these areas both as a provider of services or of access to certain services and as a provider of security with the withdrawal of the old security apparatus, symbolised by the dismissal in 2000 of Driss Basri, Minister of Interior for nearly 25 years. This ‘opening up’ of the slums made it possible for radical groups to organise themselves into local armed groups, sometimes, but not necessarily, linked to international networks.

One of the groups that emerged in the slum of Sidi Moumen was the *Sirat al-Mostaqim* (the Righteous Path) led by Miloud Zakaria. At the same time, different news sources around the world blamed the *Salafiyya Jihadiyya* (SJ) for the attacks. This suggests that these names were nothing more than very general and vague labels for what seemed to be a loose association of a few individuals around a self-proclaimed 'emir'. It was not even clear whether the *Salafiyya Jihadiyya* was the name of a loosely organised network of radical clerics, individuals or local groups practising an extremist, radical and very conservative form of Islam, or whether it was nothing more than a generic term reflecting a state of mind. Today, however, it refers to different circles of violent and radical Islamism: from the rudimentary ideas of Miloud Zakaria to the historical Islamic opposition of members of the al-Kettani family, as well as of more self-educated new preachers like Abu Hafis.⁸ These individuals and groups are 'outside society' in more than one way. Having no real stake in it, they reject the Moroccan state as such and aim to live according to their own understanding of Islam, which, to a large degree, is nothing more than a strict code of what is allowed and what is prohibited, what is *halal* and *haram*.

The targeted form of extremism became labelled Jihadi Salafism or sometimes Takfiri Salafism, referring to the worldwide brand of fundamentalism that distinguishes itself from the larger Islamist movements that seek to participate in the political system. Takfiri Salafism ostracises other Muslims as being heretics and as such the group functions more as a sect. It appears that the very conservative ideas of takfirism have found a fertile ground in the slums around the big Moroccan cities. 'Kamikaze cities', as Moroccan newspapers have dubbed them, are seen as places or even non-places where there is a lack of social cohesion, lack of any infrastructure and no real connection with the rest of the city. Selma Belaala argues as follows:⁹

The breakdown of the culture of the derb, the traditional urban working-class district, is a major factor in the propagation of Takfiri Salafism in these areas. In the medina, the poorest can survive on petty trade and traditional solidarity. The situation is different in the shantytowns, where the absence of economic activity, the isolation of the inhabitants and their divorce from the rest of society encourage marginal behaviour. (...) Social life in the old city centres traditionally revolves around the mosque, the baker and the hammam. In the shantytowns the absence of

the communal life typical of the old working-class districts has prevented social bonding. Moroccan Salafism is a product of the disintegration of traditional Islam rather than its resurgence.

However, the idea of slums being places lacking social cohesion is also in part contradicted by the control of Jihadi Salafism over these neighbourhoods. Jihadi Salafism is in fact offering the youngsters and other slum-dwellers a new form of social cohesion and personal identification. Takfirism has resulted in the creation of violent local social orders. In a sense the youngsters that are using Salafi militantism not only turn into suicide bombers, but are also the purveyors of a local rigid social order that thrives on the Islamic creed of *an-nahi an al-munkar*, the prohibition of evil. The World Bank more or less admits this when it states:

Si les relations solidaires aux grandes occasions et si une certaine capacité de gérer l'environnement proche est toujours active, produisant des traces visibles sur le terrain, le contrôle social dans ce qu'il pouvait avoir de positif – instauration de « codes » de comportements, régulation des conflits...- paraît en recul et, surtout, semble n'avoir été remplacé par aucune forme plus élaborée, plus sociétale, de régulation, hormis celles qui émanent de nouveaux pouvoirs religieux.¹⁰

The violence of these groups had remained invisible to a large extent prior to the Casablanca 2003 attacks. It was only after the attacks that the many fights, beatings and even murders were reinterpreted as part of a type of political violence. This shows that it is not always possible or useful to distinguish between political violence on the one hand, and criminal (or social) violence on the other. The radical and violent groups gathered around the figure of an 'emir'. If more than one person swore allegiance to another person, that person then became an 'emir'. No other credentials were necessary. After that the group would implement an order based on *an-nahi an al-munkar*. This violence is part of the tradition of *taazir*, a violence that aims to purify the behaviour of people. The members of the group would then become a 'vice squad' that would combine surveillance and security of the neighbourhood by using or threatening to use violence.¹¹ The vice squad also became 'prosecutors' and 'judges' in simulacra of Islamic trials. If the accused repented and swore allegiance to the emir, then he

was granted pardon and given a ‘good beating’. If there was no repentance, the accused would be executed.

Since the incidents in Casablanca and Madrid, Morocco has not been the target of major attacks, but has been continuously involved in anti-terrorist actions. On 11 March 2007 Abdelfatah Raydi blew himself up in a cybercafé on Boulevard al-Adirissa of Sidi Momen in Casablanca. Within a day the Minister of Interior, Chakib Benmoussa, declared that there was no link between the bombing and al-Qaeda or the GICM. However, within a week more than 200 persons had been arrested. About 30 persons were charged as being part of the ‘Raydi-group’. Apparently, Raydi had started recruiting his own group of potential kamikazes in November 2006. It is not at all clear what Raydi and his group were really after. Police sources stated that 12 members were hoping to become martyrs. It seems that the detonation of the dynamite in the cybercafé was either a mistake or a momentary loss of self-control of the kamikaze. Besides those arrested for this incident, numerous Moroccans were also arrested for allegedly plotting against the Moroccan state or organising help for Moroccans who wished to fight the US army in Iraq.

INTEGRATING SOME ISLAMISTS AND EXCLUDING OTHERS

As I have shown above, the violent groups perpetrating the attacks are largely disconnected from the main politicised groups of Moroccan Islamism. In fact, radical preachers have criticised the mainstream Islamist movements on numerous accounts. For example, Mohammed Fizazi, one of the preachers sentenced to 30 years’ imprisonment for his ideological influence on the perpetrators of the Casablanca attacks, has been criticising the highly influential and successful Abdassalam Yacine, leader of *al-Adl wa al-Ihsan*, since the beginning of the 1990s.

Even though the mainstream Islamist movements are not connected to the violent groups and have on several fronts denounced the use of violence, nevertheless the question remains how these parties align themselves in relation to the violent groups. The question is politically important. With the attacks in Casablanca on 16 May 2003, the king and some of the (secular) political parties overtly and directly assessed the question of Islamism and its presence in the Moroccan polity. In order to understand these debates, which are still ongoing,

it is necessary to return briefly to the role and place of the major Islamist movements.

The Islamists did not play a direct role in the debates around the question of the *alternance*, although one group, mainly those supporting Abdellilah Benkirane, had been in favour of political participation since the second half of the 1980s.¹² The origins of this movement can be traced back to the radical *Chebiba Islamiyya* of Abdelkrim Mouti'i.¹³ Much influenced by Sayyid Qutb's writings, this movement embraced revolutionary action. It divided itself increasingly into smaller groups, leaving the way open for a number of people gradually to establish themselves within the system throughout the 1980s. They could not make their debut on the political stage until the late 1990s, however. In both 1989 and 1992 Benkirane saw his official requests for the formation of an Islamist party turned down. After the government refused to recognise the movement as a political party, Benkirane changed its name to *Al-Islah wa al-Tajdid* (Reform and Renewal). In 1996 the movement changed its name again to *Harakat al-Tawhid wa al-Islah* (Movement of Unity and for Reform). The name changes were brought about by internal discussions on the movement's new political strategies and ideology, and the incorporation of independent Islamic think tanks and Islamic cultural organisations into the movement.¹⁴ Knowing full well that this was still a movement and not an official political party, Benkirane developed a new strategy. An adept political strategist, he understood that integration into the newly forming political field depended on the existence of a political party and contesting the elections. He chose a political party that had been more or less inert since 1965, the *Mouvement Populaire Constitutionnel Démocratique* (MPCD, Popular Constitutional and Democratic Movement) of Dr Khatib, the ex-leader of the Moroccan Army of Liberation. Both Dr Khatib and Benkirane recognise that it was Benkirane who initiated the project. Dr Khatib posited two conditions for the Islamists to join his party: that they recognise the legitimacy of the monarchy and respect the constitution.

The Islamists won nine seats in the 1997 elections, but through partial elections and defections in other parties they ended up in the legislature with 14 members. They entered parliament and followed a course of critical parliamentary majority, meaning that they voted with the governmental majority while remaining outside the government itself. The MPCD changed its name to the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) and was able to gain 42 seats in the 2002 elections, becoming the third biggest party in parliament.

The entrance of the Islamists into electoral competition was a success for the monarchy's inclusive and consensual approach to the new political game. Not only did it bring a part of the oppositional voice into the realm of legitimate politics, but it also used the party as a stabilising force during a period of economic and social change. Thus, the PJD fulfilled a stabilising role within the process of *alternance*. One of the ideas behind the integration of the PJD into the legal political field, although it was not openly or officially endorsed, was to make sure that a movement close to large parts of the population would be able to speak openly and thus bar the way for more radical movements.¹⁵ The 1997 elections were a modest learning school for the PJD. Since then it has become more influential and several political parties have shown mounting frustration and nervousness regarding the PJD's influence. As stated above, in the 2002 legislative elections, the PJD became the third biggest party in the country. But, as Michael Willis states, the role of the PJD in those elections was a 'strange case of a party that did not want to win' as it was content to downplay its own success by running in a limited number of electoral districts.¹⁶ Even though the monarchy seemed willing to accept the presence of a strong Islamist party, it nevertheless refused to envisage the possibility of the PJD becoming the biggest party.

The Casablanca attacks have certainly had an impact on the position of the PJD within the Moroccan polity. The PJD had always found an equilibrium between the demands of its base and the demands of the monarchy, channelled through the office of the ministry of the interior. The leadership of the party, which was organised around Saad Eddin al-Othmani, Abdellilah Benkirane and Daoudi, clearly opted for a non-confrontational strategy towards the regime, while other members – supporters of the president of the parliamentary group, Mustapha Ramid – chose to denounce the interference of the ministry of the interior. The attacks in Casablanca gave certain elements in the security apparatus and political field the opportunity to attack the party. Many Moroccan newspapers and journals thought that some 'pact' had been formed between the PJD leadership and the ministry of the interior in the weeks prior to the local elections of September 2003. The PJD renounced any ideas of making massive strides in the local elections, while the ministry decided not to dismantle or ban the party. The PJD's decision to go along with the regime's dictates has put much pressure on the party and its ability to control its constituency. In September 2005, Mustapha Ramid resigned his position as president of the

party's parliamentary group, fearing that his presidency would lead to a dismantling of the party.

While the relationship with the *makhzen* – the political and administrative apparatus surrounding the monarchy and governing the country – seemed to have stabilised after 2005, several observers (national and international) thought that the 2007 legislative elections would bring about an Islamist electoral landslide victory.¹⁷ Both fears and hopes (depending on the stance of the observer) were disappointed as the PJD came in as the third biggest party. Even though the 2007 election did not meet that party's expectations, it is now obvious that the PJD is one of the major political actors in the country, firmly embedded in Moroccan political life. The 2007 elections signalled a new phase in the growth of the movement in that it has now to come to terms with the difficulties and dilemmas associated with participating in a semi-authoritarian political environment.¹⁸ Indeed, since 2007 the PJD has been constantly engaged in securing its position on the political field vis-à-vis the other political parties, but most of all vis-à-vis the government and monarchy. The government and monarchy have tried to curb the success of party on numerous fronts. In the last year, for example, several PJD mayors were deposed after allegations of corruption. The very popular mayor of Meknes, Ahmed Belkora, was one of the targeted mayors although the case against him appeared to be very thin. It is more likely that this was a clear message to the PJD not to change its electoral base and constituency by using the services of local notables outside the large urban centres. Curbing the ambitions of the PJD is a concern for the monarchy as it wants to keep a certain control of the movement at a distance (without resorting to direct repression).

Finally, while it remains in the opposition, the PJD is also able to capitalise on the popular discontent with the current government. This strengthens the party and shows that the influential and popular *al-Adl wa al-Ihsan* movement of Sheikh Yacine remains politically marginalised. 'Yet, even if the PJD's popularity grows in the coming years, the challenges posed by the concentration of power in royal hands, the electoral system, and state-sponsored gerrymandering are likely to persist and result in containing the PJD's political role.'¹⁹

Al-Adl wa al-Ihsan, the other popular movement of mainstream Islamism, is a different phenomenon. The charismatic leadership and political and religious activism of Sheikh Abdeslam Yacine has been popular since the 1970s.

In contrast to the PJD, Yacine has always refused to enter the official political field. The movement wants to distance itself clearly from what it calls the *politique politicienne*, and opts for social action. The movement, according to some observers, functions more as a sect or millenarian movement.²⁰ It is obvious that the movement's approach to society is reminiscent of a Sufi brotherhood in the sense that it is centred around the figure of the sheikh who sets out both the theological as well as strategic policies. *Al-Adl wa al-Ihsan* has a much more religious character than the PJD.

Yacine, born in the 1920s and of Berber descent, received a traditional Islamic education but became an inspector of French-speaking education at the ministry of education. In his own words, during the 1960s he found himself in a spiritual crisis and sought refuge in Sufism. In 1974, he wrote his first open letter to Hassan II, his first major political act. In this letter, 'Islam or the deluge', a typical form of *nasiha* (warning) written in his characteristic acerbic but eloquent manner, he disputed the legitimacy of the Moroccan monarchy and positioned himself and his movement as an alternative.²¹ He wrote:

Le devoir de te donner conseil est une obligation qu'a imposée Dieu aux ulema de la umma. (...) Dieu t'a prévenu à deux fois, alors que tu désespérais de vivre, et cette lettre est un troisième avertissement (...) Deux rois et un président ont eu à affronter deux hommes de Dieu. Les Deux rois et le président ont tué le prédicateur. Les premiers ont reçu la malédiction et la déroute rapide, et les seconds ont été des martyres bénis²². Je suis le quatrième de ce siècle, Abd al-Hafid l'Alaouite, il te faut choisir ton camp.²³

In the letter he promotes Islam as the solution to all political problems the country is facing and urges the king to follow this route. In particular, Yacine and his movement dispute one of the central elements of the monarchy's legitimacy – the king's authority as the Commander of the Faithful.²⁴ From that moment on Yacine was considered politically antagonistic towards the regime. Initially, the king did not know what to do with a man who unashamedly criticised the royalty, but who stayed clear of the political stage. Therefore, he was incarcerated in a psychiatric institution ('because only the sick of mind can doubt the legitimacy of the monarch') and afterwards placed under house arrest for ten years, being freed only in 2000.

Yacine is a proponent of *ijtihad* or personal interpretation of the Holy Scripture. He maintains that numerous democratic principles are acceptable, but they must be embedded in an Islamic system. It is not always clear what such a system amounts to exactly, but Yacine emphasises that modernity should be Islamised. In practice this means that Yacine mainly discusses the ethical and moral questions concerning governance and hardly occupies himself with concrete political matters. Even if social justice remains a central aspect of the movement's actions, it never tries to influence the political agenda directly. For this reason the movement remains strongly represented in social areas (social services, religious instruction, etc.), but on the sidelines of political events. Thus, *Al-Adl wa al-Ihsan* remains a marginalised political actor, but a powerful and influential social one. Today, the movement is partly led by the daughter of the sheikh, the outspoken Nadia Yacine.

In short, *Al-Adl wa Ihsan* is a movement that has connections to its Sufi roots and is largely a local, that is Moroccan, phenomenon. Indeed, the movement is completely disconnected from other movements in the region or beyond, and does not necessarily share the pan-Islamic ambitions of other movements while their goals – establishing the caliphate – are nominally the same.

In concluding this section, one can say that the monarchy's inclusive and consensual approach to the new political game was successful in incorporating the former militants of the *Jama'a islamiyya* into the process of *alternance* by getting them to enter into electoral competition. Not only did it bring a portion of the oppositional voice into the realm of legitimate politics, but it also used the party as a stabilising force during a period of economic and social change. Indeed, one can argue that in times of rapid social and economic change in this age of reform and globalisation, the popularity of Islamism can be a channel and satisfy the need for integration and stability. Besides the fact that the popular – some observers would say more popular – movement of Sheikh Yacine *al-Adl wa al-Ihsan* (Justice and Spirituality) remained out of the formal political arena (and was kept there), the government's strategy seems to have been successful. The attacks in Casablanca, however, suggest that containing radicalism through the political process will not suffice to counter the growing political and social unrest. Since then the king has devised new policies towards Islamists *jihadi* groups and, more generally, the religious field itself.

ISLAM, ISLAMISM, JIHAD: THE MONARCHY LOOKING FOR SCAPEGOATS?²⁵

The Moroccan monarchy has always tried to control and organise the religious field. Although complete control has never been fully obtained; since independence the monarchy, the conservative wing of the Istiqlal Party and *'ulama* (Muslim scholars) have shared the same political culture. The king as the 'Commander of the Faithful' constitutes the summit of religious authority in the country, while the constitution refers several times to Islam.²⁶ The monarchy encouraged the development of associational religious movements that were based on its interpretation of Islam (a conservative Islam as a pillar of its legitimacy) while, at the same time, trying to neutralise politically the most important and popular religious figures. Others were 'bureaucratised' through their integration into a public function (education, administration, and so forth).²⁷ The monarchy also developed reinterpretations of Islam as the foundation of its power and legitimacy. The constitution, its implementation and gradualist political traditions make it clear that the monarchy had been the object of a process of sacredness. This veneration of the monarchy was kept alive through the amalgamation of the triad state-nation-Islam, thus putting the form of the regime in the register of sacredness. The person of the king is invested with a complete inviolability. Even if the *'ulama* were confined to the cultural sphere, from the 1970s onwards the late king, Hassan II, 'used' their services to counter the growing leftist movements and their arguments on the one hand, but also to counter the discourse of the first Islamist movements in the country. From 1984 the monarchy set out to restructure the religious field completely as the king (and his government) strengthened control over the *'ulama* by uniting them in a pyramid-hierarchical organisation (at the top of which resides the king). This was done through control of the building of mosques and the installation of places for prayer (closing of the mosques' doors between prayers, and so on); the uniformisation of the *khotba* (Friday sermon), and control over the training of religious personnel.²⁸

As we have seen before, the Moroccan king, the government and several opinion makers stressed that the terrorist attacks of Casablanca, like the 9/11 or other attacks, were not part of Islam. The image that the Moroccan government portrays of Islam is one of openness and tolerance. Morocco has reiterated on numerous occasions that Islam, just like the other great monotheistic religions, spreads a message of peace and tolerance. As the king has stated:

This terrorist aggression is against our tolerant and generous faith. Even more so, the commissioners and the executioners (of these acts) are wretched criminals who cannot claim to be part of Morocco or authentic Islam, because they ignore the tolerance which characterizes this religion.²⁹

Thus the ‘enemy’ and the subsequent threat do not come from Islam as such, but from fanaticism and extremism. The Moroccan government, which has faced the Islamist ideology since the 1970s, has used its older policies of reasserting the religious primacy of the monarchy, the restructuring of the religious field and the launch of ambitious educational and social programmes and projects to tackle the presumed ‘root causes’ of terrorism – poverty and social anomy. In Morocco the threat of *jihad*, its ideology and its violent acts seem to be enshrined in a logic of anti-democracy, which is seen as a threat to the ongoing process of *alternance*. Or, according to the Moroccan king:

The forces of evil and darkness wanted to attack the opening of Morocco and harm its democratic system and its age-old traditions of religious tolerance. Nevertheless, their criminal acts have not damaged at all your firm will to take up the challenges and to overcome the difficulties.³⁰

The Moroccan monarch has made it very clear how Islam is or should be organised in that country. It is appropriate to quote passages from the speeches of Mohammed VI at length because they sum up how the king sees the relationship between Islam and the state on the one hand, and because they show what kind of images are produced of the perpetrators of the attack. Besides the possible threat of the PJD, the king has also tried to re-establish his control over the religious sphere by announcing new reforms and changes, but most of all through a strong reminder to the Moroccan public that the king himself is the sole representative of Islam. In times of crisis, it has become a habit for the Moroccan monarchy to openly assert its hegemony over the religious field by stressing the fact that the King is also the *Amir al-Mu'minin*, the Commander of the Faithful:

The commander of the faithful being the unique religious reference of the Moroccan nation, no party or group can act as spokesman or tutor of

Islam: [i]ndeed, the religious function is the responsibility of the supreme Imamate of the Amir al-Mouminine, which is Our responsibility.³¹

Besides accentuating his central role in religious matters, the king also announced reforms in the religious field. While asserting his control of the religious field, the king stressed that these reforms were carried out to assure the tolerance of Moroccan Islam 'so as to uphold the values and tenets of the generous, tolerant Islamic faith and preserve the unity of the Maliki rite'. This is done, according to the King 'by adopting an open-minded form of *Ijtihad*, which is consistent with modern times, in order to protect our youth against foreign, destructive trends.'³²

On numerous occasions the king has reiterated that the threat is not inherently Moroccan but is imported. Therefore, he argues, Islam cannot be used for projects of hatred and war, as the Moroccan identity is distinctively tolerant. Throughout his speeches since 2003, King Mohammed VI has stressed the fact that Moroccan Islam is by definition tolerant and non-violent. Furthermore, the Moroccans, through their adoption of the Maliki rite, are flexible and open to the reality in which they live. According to the king, Moroccans have always stressed their Muslim identity through open negotiations with local cultures and even other civilisations by using the imaginative effort of *ijtihad* (the process of making a decision based on independent interpretation of the Islamic legal sources). Therefore, asks the king: 'Is it [. . .] necessary for the Moroccan people, empowered by the unity of its religious rite and the authenticity of its civilisation, to import foreign ritualistic rites to its own traditions?'³³ While the king did not elaborate on what exactly these 'foreign rites' are or who imports them, it was understood as a clear message to the Saudi-Arabian influence in the country and the growing influence of Wahhabism.

The vague description of something 'foreign' that threatens local national security and identity is a powerful heuristic device to create unanimity and a sense of national security. And if this was not enough, Mohammed VI further warns the Moroccan public:

We will not tolerate these, the more so as these doctrines are incompatible with the specific Moroccan identity. To those who think to make themselves mouthpieces of a rite foreign to Our people, We will oppose them with a vigour that is dictated by the task to preserve the uniqueness

of the rite of the Moroccans, reaffirming Our will to defend our choice of the Maliki rite, while at the same time respecting those of the others, each people having its specificities and made its own choices.³⁴

This passage makes it clear that the king has set out to strengthen his position as *amir al-mu'minin* through a refounding of the Maliki character of Moroccan Islam. Indeed, while he advocates respecting the other schools of Sunnism, he nevertheless makes it clear that these rites are 'foreign' to the country. Not only does he target the non-Maliki Sunni schools, but also Shiism. In March 2009 this warning became all the more real when the kingdom officially severed its diplomatic ties with Iran, suggesting there had been Shiite interference in the country. While the idea of a growing Shiite influence in Morocco seems exaggerated to numerous observers, the fact remains that the government has pursued a repressive policy: books were banished from libraries and DVDs and other audio-visual material were confiscated. It seems obvious that the message of this action was first and foremostly that the king wished to show his firm intention to reconstruct Morocco as a homogenous Sunni country of Maliki rite. Presumably also playing a role is the fact that after the 2006 victory of Hezbollah over the Israeli army, the spread of the movement across the whole of the Arab world prompted some people to join the Shiite belief.

Again, the proposed reforms create an image of a tolerant and modern Islam, in contrast to a dangerous and destructive foreign Islam. The Moroccan Islam is represented by the king and his assistants, the superior and regional councils of *ulama*, and bodies of Islamic learning that the king also wished to reform to make 'more dynamic their mode of functioning'. These announced reforms have also led to a rather new and original redefinition of the boundaries between politics and religion. Again, because of the centrality of the king in Islamic affairs, he clearly states that no discord or dissension in regard to the dogmas is possible:

It is, therefore, necessary to guard against any use of religion for political purposes. Under the Kingdom's constitutional monarchy, religion and politics come together only in the person of the King, Commander of the Faithful. In fulfilling the sacred mission with which I am entrusted, I am determined to ensure politics is practised by the relevant institutions and within the bounds set for it.³⁵

What the king tries to achieve is a political sphere in which politics are discussed and a religious sphere in which only strict religious matters are debated. It is clear, however, that the king remains powerfully in control of both spheres. He states:

Similarly, I shall see to it that religious matters are dealt with by the relevant councils and institutions, and that religion is practised in mosques and other appropriate places of worship, in strict compliance with freedom of worship, of which I am the guarantor.³⁶

RELIGIOUS REFORMS AGAINST *JIHAD*?

Besides the reconstruction of a specific Moroccan Maliki Islam that is tolerant and open – as opposed to ‘foreign rites’ – the king also set himself the task of regaining a more thorough control of the religious field. This is not an easy task. For a long time the Moroccan monarchy succeeded in securing its hegemony over the religious field as it positioned itself as the regulating centre of patronage networks linking to itself fragmented religious authorities – possibly antagonistic among themselves and towards the monarchy.³⁷ However, since the 1970s, the fragmentation of the religious field (a centralised ‘royal’ official Islam, several oppositional movements within or outside the system, transnational networks of influence, individualised opposition ‘*ulema*, etc.), combined with the growth of new centres of (mostly secular) knowledge, further fragmented the monarchy’s power of control. While religious reforms started in 2000 with the coming to power of the new king, it was only after the 2003 Casablanca attacks that Mohammed VI accelerated the reforms.

The king has tried to remonopolise his religious authority by claiming that he (along with his institutions) is the sole interpreter of Islam. Islamists and democrats both claim, ostensibly and for different reasons, the right to interpret Islam. Particularly the right to publish *fatawas* remains a major terrain of discontent. In November 2002, the king nominated Ahmed Taoufiq as the new minister of *habous* (religious endowments). After years of a more traditionalist approach with the authoritarian style of the *Dar al-Hadith*-educated Abdelkebir Alaoui Mdaghri, Taoufiq was a modern educated historian and not a classic ‘*alim*. With Taoufiq’s nomination, it became clear that a newer and more dynamic approach to the religious field was warranted. In December 2003, several important reforms were proclaimed illustrating the desire to

control the mosques and channels of traditional learning more thoroughly. Two new directorates under the direct control of the ministry now became responsible for the construction of mosques as well as the monitoring of their activities.

A few months later, the role of the regional councils of *'ulama* was amended. The regional councils were placed under the direct control of the king, their number increasing from 19 to 30 and comprising 256 members. A Superior Council was established to control the 30 regional councils. It consists of the minister of the *habous*, as well as *'ulama* personally chosen by the king (but not constituting more than half the members of the council), the presidents of the regional councils as well as a secretary. It is important to note that this Superior Council is the sole body that is authorised to deliver *fatawas*. This is clearly a measure taken to counter the production of *fatawas* by other authorities, whether self-proclaimed imams or highly educated *'ulama*. This measure is not without danger for the monarchy: as it tries to silence other centres of religious knowledge, it paves the way for critique of its own institution. Indeed, several *'ulama* and imams have already criticised the reforms as an attempt of the political to control too much of the religious.

Today it is impossible for the monarchy to remain the central religious authority based on politics of repression and control. Mohammed VI has understood that in terms of (democratic) transition and a de facto social pluralism under globalisation, what is needed is a religious policy that persuades the other actors of the monarchy's centrality.

SOME TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

It seems that the government and the monarchy's first concern remains the countering of possible violent actions and groups, while simultaneously re-establishing their combined central role in developing an official Maliki Sunni Islam. Therefore, currently they are pursuing different strategies. While allowing the PJD to participate in the political sphere, the government (and monarchy) is trying to contain PJD's popularity, and simultaneously keep Yacine's movement at bay. At the same time, the king is strongly reaffirming his control over the production of religious knowledge and is re-establishing direct control over its institutions. Fighting the radical forms of Islam and their violent offshoots (jihadism, Salafism, etc.) is a major concern but not the only one. The growing popularity of larger Islamist formations is still a source of concern for the monarchy.

NOTES

- 1 Paper prepared for Experts Roundtable Conference. Interregional challenges of Islamic fundamentalist movements in North Africa in relation to network support, 17–18 June 2009, Addis Ababa.
- 2 J Beal, *Cities, terrorism and urban wars of the 21st century*, Crisis States Working Paper No 9, Series No 2, 2007, London: Crisis States Research Centre, LSE (2007).
- 3 Sami Zemni, Islam between jihadi threats and Islamist insecurities? Evidence from Belgium and Morocco, *Mediterranean Politics*, 11(2), (July 2006) 231–253; Sami Zemni and Koen Bogaert, *Morocco and the mirages of democracy and good governance*, UNISCI discussion paper, No 12 (October 2006), 103–120.
- 4 I define Islamism as an ideology that endeavours to appropriate the political space through the mobilisation of religious (Islamic) resources and modes of social action ranging from the *daw'a* (predication) to the *jihad* (violence, terrorism) through which certain social groups manifest their desire to overthrow or oppose the state and to instal an order that is called 'Islamic'. This definition is based on several definitions and analyses of Islamism – for example, Fr Burgat, *L'islamisme en Face*, Paris: La De'ouverte, 1995; Fr Burgat, Face to face with political Islam, London: I.B. Tauris, 2003a; Fr Burgat, Veils and obscuring lenses, in J. Esposito & Fr. Burgat (eds), *Modernizing Islam. Religion in the public sphere in Europe and the Middle East*, London: Hurst & Co, 2003b; O Roy, *L'islam Mondialise (Globalised Islam)*, Paris: Le Seuil, 2002; L Boukra, *Terrorisme islamique et strate'gie de riposte antiterroriste en Alg'e'rie (Islamic terrorism and anti-terrorist counteracts in Algeria)*. Paper delivered at Advanced Nato Workshop, 'Security in the Mediterranean', Madrid, 22–24 June 2005.
- 5 Myriam Catusse, Les r'evolutions du social dans le Maroc 'ajust'e', *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la M'e'diterran'e'e*, No 105–106 (2005), 221–246.
- 6 Allegedly, the leader of the group was Abdelhak Bentassir, better known as Moul Sebbat ('the one who owns shoes'). The attack on the Casa Espana was perpetrated by Mohammed El Arbaoui, Khalid Benmoussa (a 21-year-old hairdresser and later grocer, then an ambulant seller of bleach water, schooled till the age of 6), Mohammed Laaroussi (26 years old, 4th year of college, professional training in tanning, jobless) and Mohammed Hassouna. The attack on the Bozitano was carried out by Said Abid (orphan), Adil Taii (23 years old), Youssef Kaoutari (or Korti), (29 years old, weightlifter and turner who worked in a factory before being sacked after a work-related injury. He had received no indemnities.). The attack on the Jewish community centre was carried out by Ahmed (Mohammed) Miehni (25 years old, left university without finishing, jobless), Khalid Ta'ib (22 years old, almost no schooling) and Rachid Jalil (28 years old, escaped before the attack, welder). The attack on the Hotel Farah was carried out by Abdelfattah Bouyaqdane (Boulakdiem) (28 years old, attended college, shoemaker. His wife had left him and taken their only child with her.), Hassan Taoussi (23 years old, 3rd year college student, nightwatchman, member of the *al-adl wa al-ihsane*, but left it to join the *Salafiyya Jihadiyya*, presumably a network of extremist radicals in 1998) and Mohammed El

- Ammari (or Omari) (23 years old, 2nd year college student, bicycle guard, member of the *al-Da'wa wa Tabligh* but left it for the *Sirat al-Mostaqim*, which he also left because he could not get married through a simple act by the emir. He survived the blast.)
- 7 Interview with Samy Ghorbal, *Jeune Afrique L'intelligent*, No 2258 (18 April 2004).
 - 8 Malika Zeghal, *Les islamistes Marocains. Le défi à la monarchie*, Casablanca: Ed. Le Fennec, 2005, 278–286..
 - 9 Selma Belaala, Morocco: slums breed jihad, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 2004, <http://mondediplo.com/2004/11/04moroccoislamists> (accessed 4 October 2010).
 - 10 Banque Mondiale, *Maroc. Programme Ville sans Bidonvilles. Analyse d'impact social et sur la pauvreté*. Rapport Final, Washington DC: World Bank (Juin 2006), 103.
 - 11 The emir of Takfir wa al-hijra is Youssef Fikri (arrested in the summer of 2002). The organisation was made up of six armed groups of five persons. Fikri admitted to four murders including that of his uncle Abdelkrim Fikri (because he had an extramarital affair), Omar Ferrak, the person from Nador with whom he shared an apartment (because he had Marxist ideas) and Abdelaziz Assadi (young notary from Casablanca). The emir of Sirat al-Mostaqim is Zakarias Miloudi. He ordered the stoning of Youssef Kardoudi at Douar Thomas on 24 February 2002.
 - 12 The next three subparagraphs are a revised version from Zemni and Bogaert, *Morocco and the mirages of democracy and good governance*, 108–110.
 - 13 With the help and support of the authorities, the Chebiba wanted to counterbalance the growing influence of the leftist movements and their secular ideologies on the campuses of the universities. However, this alliance between the authorities and Islamists turned sour. The Chebiba were accused of killing the union leader Omar Benjelloun in 1975. This was the beginning of the concerted repression of this movement.
 - 14 'Abd al-Allah Benkirane, *Al-haraka al-islamiyya wa ishkaliyat al-minhaj* (The Islamic movement and the problematics of the current), Casablanca: Mashourat al-Forqan, 1999.
 - 15 G Fuller, *The future of political Islam*, Houndmills: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2003.
 - 16 M Willis, Morocco's Islamists and the legislative elections of 2002: the strange case of the party that did not want to win, *Mediterranean Politics*, 9(1) (2004), 53–81.
 - 17 The 'makhzen' is a term to describe the central authority in Morocco. It dates back several centuries and was embodied in the Sultanate and the local power centres. Today it is more a pejorative term to describe the central power structures and elites that gather around the monarchy.
 - 18 Amr Hamzawi, *Party for Justice and Development in Morocco: Participation and its discontents*, Carnegie Papers, No 93, Carnegie Endowment (2008).
 - 19 *Ibid.*, 21
 - 20 Mohammed Chekroun, *Jeux et enjeux culturels au Maroc*, Rabat: Editions Okad, 1990.

- 21 Mohammed Tozy, Le prince, le clerc et l'Etat: la restructuration du champ religieux au Maroc, in Gilles Kepel and Richard Yann, *Intellectuels et militants de l'islam contemporain*, Paris: Seuil, 71–101.
- 22 Yacine refers respectively to King Farouk of Egypt who allowed Hassan al-Banna to be killed, President Nasser who hanged Sayyed Qutb and Sultan Abd al-Hafid (Morocco) who, in the beginning of the 20th century, fought against Abdelkebir al-Kettani, founder of the powerful brotherhood of the same name that was opposed to the French colonisation.
- 23 Yacine, Abdessalam, *Mémoire au Roi*, 1974, <http://www.yassine.net/mishkate/pages/YOChapterDetailPage.aspx?BookID=117&ChapterID=47&Lang=1256&CategoryID=1> (accessed June 2009).
- 24 Mohammed Al ayadi, Abdessalam Yassine ou le poids des paradigmes dans le parcours d'un nouveau clerc, *Naqd* 11 (1998), 6–40.
- 25 This paragraph is a revised version of a paragraph of Zemni (Zemni, Sami (2006), *Islam between Jihadi-threats and Islamist insecurities? Evidence from Belgium and Morocco. Mediterranean Politics*, Vol 11, No 2, 231–253
- 26 Mohammed Dharif, *Al-islam assiyasi fi-l-Maghrib. Moqaraba wathaiqiyya*, Rabat: Manshourat Al-majalla al-maghrabiyya li-i'lm al-ijtimai al-siyassi, 1992.
- 27 John Waterbury, *Les commandeur des croyants. La monarchie marocaine et son élite*, Paris: PUF, 1975; Remy Leveau, *Le fellah marocain. Défenseur du trône*, Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, [1979] 1985 A. Agnouche, Les Chorfa face à l'Etat de droit, in Jean-Claude Santucci (ed), *Le Maroc actuel. Une modernisation au miroir de la tradition?*, Paris: Ed. CNRS, 1992, 273–283.
- 28 M Tozy, *Monarchie et Islam Politique au Maroc*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1999.
- 29 Ministère de la Communication, Discours de S.M le Roi Mohammed VI suite aux attentats de Casablanca du 16 mai 2003, <http://www.maroc.ma/> (subheading 'French' and 'discours du roi') (accessed 23 May 2005).
- 30 Ministère de la Communication, Discours de SM le Roi a l'occasion de la Fête du Trône, 30 July 2004, <http://www.maroc.ina> (subheading 'French' and 'discours du roi') (accessed 30 July 2004).
- 31 Ministère de la Communication, 30 July 2004.
- 32 Ministère de la Communication, 2004.
- 33 Ministère de la Communication, 2003.
- 34 Ministère de la Communication, Discours du Trône, 30 July 2003, <http://www.maroc.ma/>. Subheading 'French' and 'discours du roi' (accessed 23 May 2005).
- 35 Ministère de la Communication, 2004.
- 36 Ministère de la Communication, 30 July 2004.
- 37 Malika Zeghal, *Les islamistes Marocains. Le défi à la monarchie*, Casablanca: Ed. Le Fennec, 2005.

5 How the Muslim Brothers formulate their political position

A reality-based conceptual review

AMR ELSHOBAKI

INTRODUCTION

Discussion on Islamist movements has always focused on the possibility of integrating these movements into the political process, and on how to transform them into political organisations that accept democratic rules and respect human rights. There has been wide-ranging debate around the possibility of transforming these movements, and whether they are amenable to democratisation; whether they represent a threat to democracy; to what extent they are responsible for the failure of democratic experiments and the extent of the responsibility of current regimes for this failure.

The importance of this study stems from the fact that it tries to develop an understanding, however partial or limited, of the mechanisms by which these movements review and determine their political and intellectual orientation, and not to stop at a generalised analysis of their position vis-à-vis democracy. Rather, the study goes further, attempting to understand the transformation mechanisms and the internal dynamics of these movements. The relationship of the Muslim Brotherhood to democracy thus assumes major and complex significance. On the one hand, the question of democracy is one of the central

aspects of the intellectual and political debate inside the Islamist movements in general, and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular. On the other hand, during the past three decades, issues of political reform have become a top priority for different political forces and a common theme in the discourse of the Egyptian political forces, including the opposition parties, the ruling party, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood.

Several questions still remain, however, regarding the intellectual position of the Brothers towards democracy: is their belief in democracy restricted only to accepting its means such as elections and independent parliaments, or does it include a belief in the cultural and political values attached to democracy? Is their belief in the means of democracy a step towards believing in its values, or at least in its principles, implying that, at the least, they will not denigrate democracy as a 'Western import', but embrace it as part of a universal value system open to contributions and inputs from all nations and cultures?

These questions have always recurred regarding the position of the Muslim Brothers on democracy, changing only as circumstances change. Under the leadership of the late Imam Hassan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood ignored the question of democracy, and was cool towards its principles. It rejected its political manifestations such as multipartism as 'Western imports', when the West was synonymous with British occupation, and regarded the Egyptian political parties as quarrelsome and splintered.

In reality, one can identify three stages in the development of the discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood on democracy. The first was that of the founding Brothers, who rejected democratic values and some of the democratic means. The second stage occurred when the Brotherhood abandoned the 'educational' mission that had characterised its approach for two decades (1928–1948). This stage followed the war in Palestine and the violent confrontation between the special forces of the Brotherhood and the government, a confrontation that increased under the subsequent republican regimes. This was followed by a new jihadist bent, which was led by Sheikh Sayed Qutb, and moved still further from the values and practices of democracy.

In the eighties, the Brotherhood changed its approach and interactions with democracy as a political concept and a practice. It slowly moved towards embracing democratic institutions and declared its adherence to multipartism and to democracy as a basis for rule by the people. Grey areas remained, however, where the Brotherhood did not have a clear-cut position, particularly with regard to the

status of women and of religious minorities, though it remained adamant in its opposition to Copts and women assuming the presidency of the republic.

However, the pivotal question of how the Brotherhood would review and define its position on democracy remained. Would such review and definition result from a conceptual reassessment by a pro-Brotherhood group of intellectuals, or would it emanate from interaction with the existing political realities that would force the Brotherhood to rethink its position on democracy?

Consequently, this study comprises three parts. The first provides an overview of the stages of development of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology. In this section, one can identify three phases regarding the Brotherhood's interaction with democracy. The first phase, which could be titled 'The founding Brothers', discusses the Brotherhood's position on various political issues, particularly democracy during the monarchy. The second, which started with the demise of the monarchy and lasted to the end of Nasser's rule and which was characterised by dogmatism and isolationism, could be titled, 'Dogmatism and isolationism: un-Brotherhood signs on the road'. During this phase some of the Brothers revolted against the ideology of Hassan Al-Banna, the founding imam. This was prompted mainly by the writings of Sayed Qutb, and opened the way to the demonisation (*takfir*) of the state by various jihadist groups. The third phase started at the beginning of the eighties and is titled 'The new Brothers', or 'Entry into the political arena' and follows the change in the Brotherhood's discourse or stance.

The second part of the study, entitled 'The Brotherhood's discourse and democracy: ideological and political dilemmas', discusses the change in the organisation's approach and whether it is an outcome of intellectual debate or of interaction with political realities. It examines various levels of the Brotherhood's stance on different political issues, especially the controversial ones of the status of women and the Copts.

The third section is the conclusion of the study.

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF BROTHERHOOD IDEOLOGY

The founding Brothers and democracy

The Muslim Brotherhood has lasted for more than 80 years and its history is rife with internal generational and ideological differences. It has, however,

followed a flexible ideological and political path that has enabled it to have a broad and comprehensive view of Islam that offers the Brothers the freedom to be politicians or to be dedicated preachers, if they so wish– to be sheikhs in the mosques’ pulpits or members of parliament; to be Sophists or revolutionaries; to have among their leaders conservative jurists like Hassan al-Hudaybi¹ or revolutionary activists like Sayed Qutb.

Imam Hassan Al-Banna established the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 in Ismailia City, and the organisation has lasted from that time up to today as one of the largest political organisations in Egypt and the Arab world. Al-Banna succeeded by using different tactics that alternated between forging ahead and retreating, between attack and defence, dialogue and confrontation, thus displaying organisational flexibility that enabled the Brotherhood to exist during both the monarchy and the subsequent republican regimes.

Many have been surprised that the Muslim Brotherhood has lasted so long as a united movement with its organisational structures intact. Many have also been surprised at the ability of the Brothers to coexist despite their ideological and generational differences. The Brotherhood, however, has maintained its structures for many reasons, the most important being the nature of the structure built by the Brothers under the leadership of Al-Banna in 1928 and which has remained solid for eight decades. In spite of the assassination of the founding sheikh 60 years ago, his absence did not lead to the disappearance of this religious and social group with a political agenda, which is a political party in the usual sense, but also a proselytising and fully Islamic organisation.

Parliamentary and party life: the difference between theory and reality

The approach of Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, to the parliamentary and constitutional system was generally broad-minded. He was of the opinion that ‘nothing of the principles of this system which we copied from Europe contradicts the principles laid down by Islam for the system of governance, and it is therefore not far from, or alien to, the Islamic system.’² For him, the characteristics of the parliamentary system were the following:

- It safeguarded all personal liberties
- It safeguarded *Shoura* and derived legitimacy from the nation

- It ensured the accountability of rulers to their people who held them accountable for their actions
- It defined the separation of powers³

Al-Banna considered these principles to be similar to the teachings and principles of Islamic governance, and argued accordingly to convince the Muslim Brothers to accept the constitutional order as the existing system closest to Islam. He argued further that 'we accept the basic principles of the constitutional system as they coincide, or rather, are derived from the Islamic system'.⁴ This vision was integral to the early thinking of the Brotherhood, and was part of a wider whole that called for a national revival and reform in all facets and not only in the political sphere. The Muslim Brotherhood favoured comprehensive reform that basically aimed at a return to Islamic tenets as the guide to all aspects of life. They envisaged building a nation from which all organisational and intellectual structures, including the government, would emanate and which would reflect its Islamic identity and ideals.⁵ In its early years, the basic ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood was not based on political action in a democratic or constitutional context, but rather on a holistic educational approach directed at transforming the individual, the family, the society and the state.⁶

In accordance with this approach, Al-Banna acknowledged the suitability of the constitutional system in general as one that is based on Islamic rules and principles. However, when he entered the political arena, he discovered that the reality was not conducive to achieving the objectives of the ideal parliamentary system of which he approved, and in fact detracted from achieving national unity and national aspirations.⁷ Therefore, he rejected the multiparty system and denounced the modus operandi of the Egyptian political parties and their feverish jockeying for power, to the extent that they even risked aligning themselves with the colonial powers. He felt that Islam did not advocate multipartism as it led to division, but that Islam rather called for unity. In his opinion, parties, particularly those in Egypt, did not differ with regard to reform and change, but for personal reasons. They had been established for specific reasons under specific circumstances that no longer existed, and he believed that they should be scrapped or unite into one party or block working in the national interest. He even asked the king to dissolve all the parties and absolve the nation of the parties' misdemeanours.⁸

He did not stop at his personal rejection of the multiparty system, but maintained that Islam itself did not approve of it. He stated: 'I think, gentlemen, that Islam, which is the religion of unity in everything, of the purity of heart and true fraternity and cooperation among men and nations, does not approve of, or accept, the multiparty system', and that 'salvation could only come through dissolving all parties and forming one national block to lead the nation to victory in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Quran'.⁹

The main feature of the Muslim Brotherhood activities between 1928 and the onset of the Palestine War in 1948 was certainly educational, and of a social and religious nature. The political aspect of the Brotherhood was barely apparent during that period, a fact that belies its size and popularity. The Brotherhood was absent from parliament during the semi-liberal period, and did not have a single member of parliament before the revolution of 1952.

The Brotherhood then moved into its second phase, that of violence and isolation practised by some of the members of its special force. This was enough to destroy what the founding Brothers had built up over two decades. The Brotherhood moved from armed struggle against the Zionist occupation of Palestine to fighting against the government and its symbols. Some of the young members of the special forces of the Brotherhood assassinated Prime Minister Nagrashi, and continued along this path until the attempted assassination of Nasser in 1954. That event ended the Brotherhood's legal existence and its educational mission and it was outlawed, although Nasser's regime tried to co-opt some of its members into the Alazhar, Alwqaf and other similar institutions of the July regime. Al Bagouri, the grand sheikh of Alazhar, was such a member, as well as many of the senior officials of Alwqaf who were affiliated with the Brotherhood, particularly the two eminent sheikhs Mohamed al-Ghazali and Sayed Sabiq.

The Sadat regime released the leaders of the Brotherhood, who avoided playing any political, social or religious role in Egyptian society throughout the seventies, except for being involved in student politics at Egyptian universities. Furthermore, the Brotherhood was not involved in politics at this time, but focused more on its own religious and ideological polemics, and refrained from social interaction and national political preoccupations until the signing of the Camp David Accord, which it rejected. This led Sadat to re-arrest many of the Brothers during the 1981 campaign.

Position on Copts: commitment to dogma and generalities

In general, the Muslim Brothers remained committed to granting all rights to religious minorities, and to safeguarding their religious and cultural rights, but did not refer to their political rights and the concept of citizenship. At the time, these latter issues did not form part of the Brotherhood's discourse and any references to these issues were generalised statements such as 'they have what we have and they are bound by what we are bound to', a rule of thumb that was the basis of Brotherhood opinion on this issue throughout its existence.

Al-Banna did not write much on this issue during his life. He said the following in one of his messages titled 'Islam protects minorities and safeguards liberties':

People think that commitment to Islam as a life-organizing philosophy contradicts the existence of religious minorities in the Muslim *Umma* (nation), and is against national unity, an important prerequisite to progress these days. The truth of the matter is totally different. Islam, which came from the All Knowing, All Wise Creator Who knows the past, the present and the future, was cognizant of this issue and had already resolved it. Its social Charter, the *Quran*, contains explicit texts on protection of minorities. It states clearly that Muslim should treat well and be fair to those Non-Muslims who do not fight them or chase them out of their homes. This text contains not only their protection, but also calls for their good treatment.¹⁰

Another time, when asked about *algizia* (religious tax), Al-Banna responded: 'This is a moot question now as all citizens defend the nation', meaning that non-Muslims are absolved from paying *gizia* since they participate in fighting in wars against the enemies of the nation.¹¹

Despite the overall open attitude of Al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood failed to adopt an approach that gave equal citizenship to Muslims and Copts. In their latest statement, they declared their opposition to the candidacy of Copts and women to the presidency.

Education before democracy

The Muslim Brotherhood never had a programme similar to that of other parties, but has had a 'special programme' in which the education of the

Muslim individual has occupied considerable space in its ideology and religious message, particularly during the formative years of the movement under the guidance of the late Al-Banna.

This approach has two dimensions: the first is total and absolute loyalty based on sacred religious texts that do not favour openly discussing political issues related to questions of democracy. The second attempts to fill the void that resulted from the Brothers' avoidance of detailed political action, by replacing it with discussion on the religious education of the members of the group. This was an attempt at the partial substitution of social action for a detailed political programme that dealt openly with questions of democracy and the nature of the desired political system in a more specified and direct fashion, and was consistent with the generalities of comprehensive Islam, which seems to have answers to all political, social or economic questions.

The Brotherhood succeeded in making the social and religious interaction contained in their 'educational programme', which replaced the political programme of a party, attractive to new members, although this proved problematic in actual practice.

Hassan Al-Banna welcomed the engagement of his followers in this

fruitful field of educating the nation, awakening the people, changing behavior, purifying the soul and propagating the principles of truth, *[j]ihad*, work and virtue among the people. He thought that they have largely [sic] succeeded, in this regard the Muslim Brotherhood had a centre in every town and neighbourhood, and more than 300 [u]nits promoting its ideals[.] Egypt was [inspired by] a strong Islamic sentiment that [was] bound to bear fruit.¹²

This loyalty to a general platform and a social educational programme crystallised in the discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood and accorded with its aim of expanding its membership and avoiding confrontation with the authorities. This led the Muslim Brotherhood to leave in abeyance the task of establishing a political party, and to avoid political confrontation with other parties on the basis of competing political programmes and ideals. The movement's holistic dogma became very attractive to a large number of people and encouraged them to join the Muslim Brotherhood on the basis of total obedience to its leaders. The absence

of a political programme was an attempt to avoid internal differences over details. This ensured that most new members joined on the basis of the broad 'educational' platform, which, even where it touched on details, was restricted to the social and moral domain rather than engaging with more controversial political issues.

Thus the Muslim Brotherhood tried to have its educational agenda replace a political programme, about which it was still vague. The Brotherhood devoted much attention to its educational programme, which, as already stated, attracted new members. This approach conformed to the vision of the founder, Al-Banna, who in his youth had advocated avoiding controversial issues and political parties, and called for the Brothers to concentrate on practical and productive activities rather than on publicity and propaganda.

The Brotherhood and the era of isolation and dogmatism: un-Brotherhood signs on the road

The second phase in the evolution of Muslim Brotherhood brought a total absence of any talk about democracy. Radical elements in the *Jamaa* (Brotherhood) turned into 'vanguards of believers' in order to bring down the 'pagan regime' in the political sphere. They, however, became isolated from the masses and the *Jamaa* lost its influence and ability to work and act.

The unilateral action taken by members of the special forces to assassinate President Jamal Abdel Nasser in 1954 marked the beginning of a vicious conflict between the new regime and the Brotherhood. This affected all the Brotherhood's active ranks and the period was dominated by Qutbi rhetoric (a reference to the scholar Sayed Qutb).

Sayed Qutb concentrated on Islamic doctrine and totally ignored issues like democracy and public liberties, instead focussing on issues related to the values of isolation, paganism, discrimination and differentiation in his teachings. It was, therefore, only natural that the movement became geared towards conflict with, and isolation from, society instead of being a force for development and advancement.¹³

Qutb borrowed the concept of the source of governance from Abulallaa Al Mawdudi and presented Islam as an all-encompassing approach. He emphasised God's governance, which is contrary to state governance and its supporters. He considered this 'the absolute principle' and that it had to be implemented. This differed from some of the concepts previously laid down by Hassan Al-Banna. Originally, Al-Banna's idea had been to reform the status quo, including the

government, to be more compatible with the tenets of Islam with regard to governance. However, according to Qutb, a coup was required to change the status quo and to install God's governance alone in its place.¹⁴

Qutb thinking passed through two major stages: the first stage, formulated before the 1952 July Revolution, was largely characterised by openness to social and political realities; the second stage, crystallised during the confrontation with the July Revolution regime, was characterised by isolation and extremism.

Qutb's view of Islam was that it was immutable. Its texts and rulings could not be altered with changing social and political circumstances. Therefore, despite the dictates of logic, no attempt was made to reinterpret texts in a way that would suit the modern context.

Qutb looked at the essence of Islamic thought in its entirety and not in parts. He felt that 'its beauty lies in its totality'.¹⁵ This made it impossible for Qutb and other members of the Brotherhood at that time to talk about democracy or to engage in political action. What was taking place, however, was a fierce conflict for power, with each faction using the same intellectual exclusionist weapons as the other, but with a different political content: one nationalist and the other Islamic. The group which used the power of the state institutions to its advantage would be victorious. In this context, Nasserism and Qutbism were, as stated by Mohamed Diab, mutually exclusive, which implies reciprocal negation, where the presence of one necessarily leads to the absence of the other, explicitly or implicitly.¹⁶

This conflict, based on reciprocal negation between the Nasserite and Qutbi approaches, had a direct effect on the content and priorities of Qutb's thinking. The extent of Qutb's anger towards Nasser's regime was clear, especially after his extended detention. At that time, his isolation and that of the Muslim Brotherhood from public life played a major role in the emergence of two basic aspects of his thought. Qutb misunderstood the nature of the Nasser regime. Consequently, he did not appreciate the popularity of that regime and its ability to isolate its opponents through various means besides detention.

The new Brotherhood, or the beginning of direct involvement in the political arena

The 'Qutb era' lasted for only two decades and ended with the release of the imprisoned Muslim Brothers in the seventies. At this juncture they sought to reactivate or rebuild the movement and represent Islam as covering all aspects

of life, including politics. Al-Banna's thinking was discussed and reinterpreted until the Brothers had settled on a single interpretation of the Brotherhood's principles and history.¹⁷ Members of the Muslim Brotherhood addressed Qutb's thoughts through the publication of a book, *Missionaries, not judges*, written by their then-leader, Counsellor Hassan al-Hudaybi. The book clearly differentiates between the *Jamaa's* principles and those of Qutb, which 'deviated from the general direction of the school of Muslim Brothers, going beyond it to establish the modern school of Islamic *Jihadist* thought'.¹⁸

The Muslim Brothers started to rewrite their own history and emphasised their adoption of democracy as a means and a system of rule, and not as a value system. They made no mention of the special forces in their literature, and viewed any violence or force used by the Brotherhood in the past only as part of the struggle against colonialism. They took a strategic decision totally to reject the use of violence and to adhere to peaceful political action. This decision raised much debate among many of the Islamist youth within and on the fringes of the *Jamaa* who had been raised on the ideas of Qutb, and who were oblivious of Al-Banna's reformist thinking. From these ranks came the founders of the Islamic jihadist groups that later became violent.¹⁹

The Brotherhood retained its organisational structure, which remained intact for over 80 years despite the assassination of its founder more than 60 years earlier. His absence, however, did not lead to the absence of the idea of a religious social group with a political dimension. The movement was not a political party as commonly defined, but it became a proselytising group or an Islamic institution. This concept continued to dominate the structure of the *Jamaa* in its early stages, but it diminished somewhat during its later years, and was replaced by the development of its political thinking, which did not abandon the missionary nature and culture of the *Jamaa*, but contributed to the formulation of its image in the modern era.

In time it became very difficult to find any event, big or small, in the Arab or Islamic arena that lacked the presence of the Brotherhood or escaped Brotherhood opinion or *fatwas*. It is also difficult to find any trade union, or political or student activities, which do not include Brotherhood participation. The Brothers also commented on many ethical issues such as films they considered licentious or books they considered disrespectful on religious grounds. However, of all the political parties, the Brotherhood was the one most subjected to harassment by security forces throughout its history, with persecution

of its members reaching a peak in the sixties, but constant harassment and military trials continued throughout the time that followed.

THE BROTHERHOOD'S DISCOURSE AND DEMOCRACY: IDEOLOGICAL OR POLITICAL DILEMMAS?

The Muslim Brotherhood's programme reflects the diversity of its organisational structure, especially with regard to democracy. This diversity and the levels of intellectual and religious instruction in return have clearly had a bearing on the forms and levels of political discourse.

The Brothers were intent on building their movement on a very precise and complex basis, which had three 'legs' and included various levels, each with its special programme of religious instruction. This clearly set the Brotherhood apart from other political and religious entities.

The first 'leg' is that of organisational level. The Brothers were keen to recruit new members at more than one level. This ideal is mentioned clearly in Al-Banna's memoirs where he calls on offices and institutions to undertake the educating of members psychologically in a way compatible with their beliefs.

To achieve this, Brothers were divided into three levels of membership:

- General membership: Every Muslim accepted by the leadership of the relevant local branch who declares his readiness for piety and signs the acquaintance form, is called an Assistant Brother.
- Brotherly membership: This is the right of any Muslim accepted by a local branch. His duties include the above as well as new duties like preserving the faith and pledging allegiance. He is called an Affiliated Brother.
- Working membership: In addition to the above, a Brother may be asked to provide comprehensive personal information, to study the Brotherhood faith, attend weekly Quran reciting and administration meetings, pledge to speak classical Arabic, educate himself on general social, but not political, issues and work hard to memorise 40 of the Prophet's *hadith*. At this level, he is called a Working Brother.

All these levels, which were developed in the era of the founding imam, have remained intact to date, with only slight changes. What has also remained intact is the group in charge of the multi-level programmes of education and cultural

upbringing. This has shaped the view of the Muslim Brotherhood towards many issues, particularly democracy, which in turn has also been characterised by various levels of communication as follows:

The first is the movement's formal communication issued in the name of the *Jamaa* and signed by the leader or circulated by the head office. It is considered the official discourse. In accordance with this communication, the *Jamaa* acts as one moral entity, and the content of this official communication is considered common ground shared by all members of the *Jamaa*, especially the leadership. No one can say anything less 'democratic' than what is contained in this communication, but a member may say more. The communication gives nearly the same amount of space to the sacred (missionary) and the temporal (political), especially on special occasions. It takes the form of a reform initiative or a specific electoral platform and does not include occasional press interviews of the leader on some controversial issues. It was, however, the more conciliatory statements that gained the approval of members of the *Jamaa*. They were viewed as similar to the earlier writings of Al-Banna.

The second type of communication is the personal statements issued by the leaders of the *Jamaa*. These usually contain pure political content, either on reform initiatives or on positions regarding specific events. These communications are more in line with current issues and political events. They are more flexible and easier to issue as they reflect the opinion of one or a number of the leaders without being binding on the other leaders or the *Jamaa* as a whole. Usually this type of communication is more advanced and democratic than the institutional discourse of the *Jamaa*. It is pronounced by the political leadership within the *Jamaa*, which is known as 'reformist' and more open to democracy and other players in the political arena, and whose members are more often seen in civic circles. Sometimes, this communication may shock other members and leaders of the *Jamaa* as it is not issued by consensus and is usually innovative, daring and dynamic. It uses modern political terms, and rarely proselytising or Islamic language. However, this does not mean it is 'un-Islamist' in nature, as loyalty to Islam is considered a foregone matter that does not necessarily have to be affirmed in all instances. This type of communication usually explains and gives details of ambiguities and generalities that occur in the institutional discourse and resolves all such contradictions.

This avenue is considered the 'free space' where opinions inside the *Jamaa* interact, and where opinions are openly expressed. However, the main

beneficiaries of this space are the leaders who are more open to democracy. Those leaders who avoid this 'openness' limit themselves to the internal arena of the movement.

The third level of communication is the mixed and unique one used by the youth in the *Jamaa*, who engage in electronic dialogue and discussion through their websites. This discourse is usually a mix of personal, religious and philosophical ideas, and the participants' observations and political experiences within and outside the *Jamaa*. This type of communication has been active and has dealt with many issues; inter alia, to a great extent, with self-criticism of the *Jamaa* and the improvement of its performance and discourse. Despite this, however, these youths led a noisy campaign defending the *Jamaa* during the detention campaigns and military trials of its members and leadership, thus providing clear evidence of their strong allegiance to the organisation, and at the same time systematically and methodically revising the thinking and performance of the *Jamaa*. This discourse is characterised by its high levels of comprehension and the ability of participants to differentiate between the proselytising and the political in the *Jamaa's* action. In this discourse religious and moral commitment are chosen over a humanistic and social one. On the political level, they engage in a modern and mature discourse, and are open to Western experiences while firmly adhering to their unshakable national and Islamic principles.

Most of the discussions bearing the stamp of the Muslim Brothers occur in this arena and, in many instances, are like the discussions of the youth in other political parties, although those of the Brothers are far more Islamic oriented. Like the 'free space' mentioned above, the 'youth space' gives the youth an important opportunity to express different and competing views. However, this 'youth space' is not restricted to political debate on principles and slogans only, but goes beyond this to discuss the political and civic values that should be propagated, and to examine political behaviour according to these values. These debates play a vital role in airing contradictions that could lead this dynamic movement away from the accepted ideology of the *Jamaa*. At the same time, these young people do not hesitate to criticise this ideology in the light of new practical developments as they are very open to society and all its diversity. Events and occurrences in Egypt and internationally, which are not necessarily Islamic, influence and shape the outlook of these young people.

These discussions cannot be described as static as they are new to the methods of the *Jamaa*. Participants agree that their views and opinions may

change with changing circumstances, and with the accumulation of experiences and the development of their vision. Thus one cannot overlook the possibility that this type of discourse will arouse reservations within the *Jamaa*.²⁰

The fourth type of communication is the reference type or Islamic intellectual umbrella, which comes from various thinkers and Islamic scholars not organisationally linked to the *Jamaa*. The importance of this type of communication is its potential for the *Jamaa* to adopt it at any time. The Brotherhood does not have to oppose the views expressed, and can implicitly accept them without declaring its acceptance. This material is a mix of the proselytising and the political, as it is mainly issued to give religious explanations and justifications for tactical moves either to ground them in tradition or to give them legitimacy. Despite the *Jamaa*'s lack of official recognition of this discourse, it constitutes a basic source of the Brothers' thoughts and opinions, which play a great part in their education, awareness raising and preparation for eventually accepting the leadership's decisions. Furthermore, this overarching type of discourse provides the basis for the discussions within the leadership in preparation for its official communication, a process that can take months or years to finalise. One can also say that this type of communication, while basically proselytising, often deals directly with political matters, if one assumes that the religious and the political cannot be separated, and that the Islamic awakening and missionary activities must have their own political manifestations. However, the most glaring shortcoming of this material is that it is based on the efforts of a few Islamic thinkers and scholars who discuss current issues. Their work is more of a scholarly reaction than independent thinking that paves the way of the *Jamaa*'s development.

Levels of the Muslim Brotherhood's discourse on democracy

The levels of discourse among the Muslim Brothers reflect their attitude towards various aspects of democracy. Official communication comes in the form of initiatives and election programmes issued on special occasions. The most important and most recent of these was the initiative of 2004, which set out the essence of the reform sought by the Muslim Brothers in the midst of the many initiatives and external pressures to which the Arab world, and particularly Egypt, were subjected. This initiative was comprehensive and laid down the general principles of the *Jamaa*'s reform. It dealt with shaping the Egyptian citizen, and the needed political, electoral, economic, social, cultural and judicial reforms, as well

as foreign policy and education matters, scientific research and reforming the Al Azhar Al Sharief university. It emphasised the democratic orientation and content adopted by the *Jamaa* during the nineties, affirming the Brothers' adherence to the state system as a presidential, parliamentary, constitutional and democratic system within the framework of Islamic principles. The *Jamaa* expressed its belief in the right of the individual to active political participation as a prerequisite to freedom of choice, both within and outside the movement.

The *Jamaa* issued this initiative as a national pact, and called on all parties and forces to agree to its components, some of which are listed below.

- The Brotherhood is firmly convinced that people are the source of all powers, and that power must be shared through free and fair general elections.
- There must be respect for freedom of belief and freedom to practise all recognised monotheistic religions.
- Presidential powers must be defined so that the president is a symbol for all Egyptians. The president should not be the head of a political party and should not assume executive powers. His term of office should not exceed two consecutive terms.²¹

From the above, one can see that the Muslim Brothers' demands regarding the rule of law and democracy were no different from the demands of other Egyptian political parties and forces, except for the question of citizenship, which remained rather incomplete in the vision of the Brotherhood as far as Christians and women were concerned.

Abdel Moneim Abulfutuh, a renowned reformist in the *Jamaa*, states that,

a country with a majority of Muslims is an Islamic country, be it Egypt or Jordan. But this should not mean that we condone corruption of the State in the form of political despotism and economic and moral corruption. All these are departures from Islamic principles which must be corrected. But these departures do not deprive the State of its roots and essence as an Islamic State. Thus, I am against anyone who says that after the establishment of the Islamic State, we will do this and that, as the Islamic State already exists, and we cannot obliterate 14 centuries of the history of this State. We cannot start from nothing as if all the values and principles built by Islam and according to which Muslims live

are non-existent. We are against departure from Islamic principles and against political despotism in the Islamic world. We support people's free will and freedom. Though the Islamic State is civic and not religious, ruled by specialized civilians in all aspects of life, it is at the same time Islamic regarding economic and ideological aspects.²²

On the other hand, Dr Isam Elaryan thinks that democracy stands on firm bases that are respected by and consistent with Islam, such as

respect [for] diversity in thought, opinion and religion, the right to absolute freedom of expression, [the] right to independent association, periodical [and] free and fair elections, power sharing within the framework of a written constitution [that] determin[es] and separate[es] powers, the creation of legitimate independent [but] complementary institutions [that] play their recognised roles in formulating laws, ensuring respect [for] the constitution, issuing judicial rulings through an independent and protected judiciary, and an executive authority that serves the people, executes laws and respects the rule of law.²³

According to Dr Elaryan, when Muslim Brothers accept democracy and its principles totally, they consider

Islam as God's final message to man and *sharia* (law) suitable for all times and places. Islam is a civilisation interacting with other civilisations and benefiting from their achievements. It is steadfast in faith, believing in God's absolute oneness, and in *fiqh* (jurisprudence), which changes with the changes of time, place and persons. Islam, with its basic rules, principles and methodology, is compatible with the principles of democracy and works to establish a real consultative *shoura* system, which is more far-reaching than the European and American versions of democracy, and which is able to implement its independent Islamic version in more than one Islamic country in order to return the nation (*umma*) to its rightful status with regard to the government. Islam will ensure the status of justice, consultation and right in the face of injustice, corruption and despotism, and will give back to the people their right to choice and change through peaceful means not known in the history of Islamic countries.²⁴

Dr Mohamed Habib, deputy head of the *Jamaa*, believes that the Muslim Brothers have adopted political pluralism and the peaceful transfer of power. He also believes that the nation is the source of all power and that the people have the right to choose the leaders, representatives and programmes that meet their expectations. Despite this, the Muslim Brothers are constantly challenged to prove their seriousness in this regard. For Dr Habib the only guarantee would be, if the Brothers were to rule, that they do so only through fair, free and transparent elections, supervised by the judiciary and expressing the will of the people. Then the Brothers would have to commit themselves to implementing the programme on the grounds of which the people had chosen them. The people would then be able to hold them accountable. If they were negligent and failed to implement the programme for which they were elected, they would be dismissed.²⁵

The ‘umbrella discourse’ that exists within and outside the *Jamaa* and is presented by some thinkers and preachers that belong to the Brothers’ school, but not to their organisation, points directly to the mistake made by Al-Banna when he rejected political pluralism. This led to undesirable results such as the domination of a single opinion and single-party rule and orientation. Time has proved that pluralism is the best solution as it is compatible with the order of the universe.²⁶ While it is not permissible for the leaders of the *Jamaa* to criticise Al-Banna even if he had made a mistake, Islamic thinkers who do not belong to the *Jamaa* can do so without the same sensitivities.

Problems of citizenship with regard to women and Copts

If one looks at the principles contained in the initiative, it seems to give equal rights to women and men as citizens entitled to enjoy their political and civil rights. At the same time, the initiative (the official discourse) tries to specify the rights of both sexes while stating that women constitute half of the society and they are

responsible for the upbringing of all generations of men and women, are wise and competent, and are addressed both in the Quran and the Sunnah (deeds of the prophet) in equal terms. They are also recognised as having full civil and criminal responsibility, with full financial liability. Women have also the full right to exercise their financial obligations without seeking the consent of a husband, a father, a brother or

anyone else. With regard to the concept of men having ‘guardianship’ over women, that is limited to matrimonial relations that are governed by compassion, love and consultation in dealing with family responsibilities assumed by the husband.²⁷

Accordingly, women have the right to compete for membership of elected bodies and other similar entities ‘in conditions that respect their integrity, decency and respectability’. This is in addition to women’s right to assume public service positions, except for being an imam (that is, the dual function of being head of state and a religious leader). With this reservation, the official and institutional discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood places a ceiling on women assuming public office at the level of grand imam or head of state. Furthermore, statements made by leaders of the Brotherhood maintain this ceiling with regard to the position of Grand Imam or *Khalifa*, which is, however, considered irrelevant in modern times, although it is classified as a higher position than head of state.²⁸ The websites established by the youth raise questions about the actual role of women in public service and their limited participation in the *Jamaa*. In response to this criticism, one of these websites, while acknowledging these facts, goes on to give reasons for that limited role. In this communication, the role of women within the Muslim Brotherhood is believed to be below the expected level. This was attributed to men’s lack of confidence in women, rather than a lack of interest or incompetence on the part of women. This is seen as a problem that can be resolved, but a dedicated effort must be made towards its solution.²⁹

The discourse of the ‘Islamic umbrella’ stipulates that the function of women cannot be limited to their role in the home. Women who have no children and have extra energy, time and knowledge, or those who are in their fifties and whose children are no longer their responsibility, could dedicate their time to some form of public service, and could be elected to a representative body, if they met the conditions for candidates. Dr Yousif al Garadawi feels that some of these women are more qualified in politics and management than many male officials in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Women could become ministers, judges or even directors in public institutions. One such case in Muslim history is the appointment by the Khalif Omer ibn Elkhatab of a woman (Elshaffa bin Abdalla) as controller of the marketplace. It is also maintained that when a woman is appointed to a public office in modern societies (minister, senior manager, etc.), it does not mean that she undertakes

total or full responsibility on behalf of that society. In this instance, there is a common responsibility shared within a system of institutions, and the woman carries part of such a common responsibility. She would not be an absolute ruler, but she could be the leader of a political party that is opposed by others and she could run for elections and win or lose, as in the case of Indira Ghandi in India.

Not much effort has been made in Islamic thought to address the issue of Copt citizenship, while writings that discuss religion as a basis for Muslim citizenship have prevailed and continue to be a source of concern. In other words, the Muslim Brothers have not paid enough attention to this matter nor given it adequate or thoughtful consideration.³⁰ In most cases, the official communication of the Muslim Brotherhood refers to this issue in general terms by saying that the Copts 'should have what we have and give what we give' to the country. This phrase is indeed loaded with ambiguity and generalisations. Moreover, the official discourse tries to avoid references to specific and practical situations that lead to the consideration of actual coexistence and away from abstract or theoretical stipulations.

In addressing another important issue that is related to the building of churches, Dr Mahmud Ghazlan refers to a PhD thesis written by Abdelkareem Zaidan, the former Muslim Brotherhood leader in Iraq, which was discussed at the University of Cairo in 1962 and which recognised the right of the Copts to build churches anywhere, whether the church was new, being rebuilt or renovated.³¹ In fact, Dr Abdelmoniem Abulfotuh went further and said that the candidature for the president of the republic remains

a right [of] all citizens irrespective of the person's religion or political creed ... we stand by whoever is chosen by the voters and the majority should not oppress the minority, even if the former relinquishes some of its rights. The Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) said, 'He who does injustice to a non-Muslim will find me making the case against him in the day of reckoning.' And this is a natural stance, since minorities are always haunted by the fears of injustice and oppression. In fact, this notion was behind the firm stand adopted by the Khalif Omer ibn Elkhattab in dealing with the son of his appointed *Wali* (governor) of Egypt, Omer ibn Elas, who beat an Egyptian Copt. This was meant to exclude any notion of oppression of the minority by the majority.³²

Today the website debates call for an end to any discrimination towards the Copts with regard to citizenship. They also criticise those who combine questions of religious belief with jurisprudence when dealing with non-Muslims, as well as the stance that recognises only Muslims and *kafirs* (non-believers), or the jurisprudence that looks at citizens as Muslims, *Zimmis* (Christians and Jews) and *kafirs* (non-believers). According to these critics, this approach ignores any objective view of various Islamic disciplines in sociology, economics and politics.³³ Dr Yousif Al Garadawi, however, maintains that since the term *ahal elzimma* (the name given to Christians and Jews in a Muslim state) is injurious to the Copts, there is no justification for its use, and it should be replaced by the term 'citizen' in *Dar El Islam* (the land of Islam).³⁴ Another Islamic scholar, Fahmy Huwaidi, states that religious minorities have full citizenship rights and describes the term *ahal elzimma* as a historic term that arouses some fears and concerns, and necessitates an agreement on a revised version of the rights of non-Muslims in the Islamic state.

In spite of all the above, the question of full citizenship remains unclear in the discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood. The position the Brothers have expressed on many occasions denies Copts the right to assume the position of president of the republic. This stance stems from the religious and proselytising culture of the Brotherhood with regard to the president's position. For as long as there is no clear distinction between the religious and proselytizing, and the political, this and other issues will continue to be ambiguous in the stance of the Muslim Brotherhood.

CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

Since its inception in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood has remained hostage to the principles laid down by its founder, Imam Hassan Al-Banna, which have governed the activities of the movement. In spite of changes in methods and priorities, the movement remains trapped between advocacy and political work on the one hand and defending the faith and spreading Islamic proselytism on the other.

Over the 80 years of its existence, the Muslim Brotherhood has demonstrated organisational and ideological capabilities that have distinguished it from other political forces and helped guarantee its survival. Its open political discourse coupled with its administrative and organisational capabilities has enabled it to expand and consolidate its religious and political reach. The movement has also

provided social services to the general public, a matter which aroused much resentment among other political forces, both in government and the opposition.

The status of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt remains unclear and subject to debate and confusion. It has not been a legal organisation since 1954, yet has remained active in the political domain since the era of President Sadat. Ironically, this banned and illegal movement, as the government claims, won about 20% of the public vote in the last legislative elections, which is about ten times the support won by three opposition parties (6 seats for the Elwafd Party, 2 for the Tajamou, and one seat for Elghad).

The question, however, is, if the Muslim Brotherhood is able to achieve such results while it is an illegal organisation, will it be able to sweep to victory in any democratic elections if it is legalised? The answer may be simple and straightforward in the case of any other political movement, but in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood it is more complicated. Part of its organisational cohesion and ability to retain the loyalty of its membership is due to its nature as a proselytising political movement that uses its illegal status to maintain control over its diverse membership. Since it does not have the political and religious capability openly to confront the Egyptian state with its unlimited resources and capacity, the movement has resorted to hiding behind the claim of victimisation, a situation with which most of the members were brought up, and which has been used by the its leaders ever since their repression under the July Revolution regime. This has helped maintain the movement's unity, and though this approach contains many undemocratic elements, it has been useful and effective in a non-democratic environment.

In fact, it would have been unreasonable to expect the Muslim Brotherhood to undertake comprehensive ideological organisational and political reforms under a repressive, undemocratic regime. That would have led to the disintegration of the movement and would have prevented it from establishing a political party under normal democratic conditions and rules, as is the case today with the 24 parties that have been granted legality but remain weak and ineffective.

Beside reasons that relate to the ideological and organisational structures of the movement, it is mainly the prevailing undemocratic context that accounts for the Muslim Brotherhood's reluctance to establish a political party. To improve these structures, the movement needs to discuss and clarify the following:

Firstly, the Brotherhood needs to review the basic values on which the movement was established. These values are supposed to maintain its influence and

effectiveness, but this may not be true if it gains power or becomes a political party and tries to gain power. In that case, it would have to operate in public like other parties; it would be subject to media and public scrutiny and would have to open its membership to all citizens, Muslims and Christians alike. This would mean a different basis for recruitment and a different political and propaganda discourse from the religious nature of the movement and its members' rigid adherence to Islamic values and principles, which currently is the main factor behind its cohesiveness and effectiveness. The actions of members of the Brotherhood are motivated not only by the quest for political and democratic reform, but also to seek God's blessing. When a Brother goes to vote, he is also fulfilling the will of God. Any step he takes to support the Brotherhood candidates is an action to please God. All these values would be subject to change if the movement were to gain power under an undemocratic system or in the absence of democratic institutions that guarantee transparency and rotation of power. Such religious values may become the basis for religious infallibility where the movement becomes the guardian of an ideology that receives its authority directly from God.

Secondly, it is true that democratic systems are able to transform comprehensive ideological visions into partial visions characterised by relativity and mutation. This is, however, different from the nature of the ideology adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood, which is based on the comprehensive Islamic creed, at a time when the world has abandoned comprehensive ideologies in favour of partial and soft ideologies, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Great political ideologies aimed to reshape human characters and form revolutionary and socialist human beings by manipulating societies and individuals within rigid and prefabricated structures. Ultimately this did not work and the idea collapsed. Actually, much of the Muslim Brotherhood's thinking belongs to this type of totalitarian ideology. For quite some time, the Brothers wrongly perceived their ideology as being different from other ideologies owing to its origin in the holy Islamic faith, but which had been transformed into political thought and practice. To change this would entail reformulating the Brotherhood by its acknowledging that commitment to an ideology based on a comprehensive Islamic approach would not be suitable for establishing a modern political organisation, but would rather lead to producing 'good' persons.

The Muslim Brotherhood would have to understand the dynamics of the modern era in which democracies are being established – a situation which did not prevail during the time of the national liberation movements in the

1960s. This could give the movement a historic opportunity to be open to the so-called 'soft ideologies', which are concerned with the details of daily life and call for a realistic understanding of the international arena and its balances of power, without abandoning its ideological sensibility or its political moorings.

Thirdly, across the Arab world, the Muslim Brotherhood movements are merely opposition groups. This poses many challenges for the Muslim Brotherhood with regard to its very conservative origins in the teachings of Al-Banna. The movement could continue to propagate these as long as it remains in opposition. Should it move from the opposition to assume power, this conservative attitude would be affected by the temptations of power and its challenges, and ideological or ethical factors alone may be insufficient to guard against the corruption of its rulers. In this instance, the only safeguard would be to establish a democratic system capable of maintaining effective constitutional checks and balances in relation to the workings of the executive branch of government. Thus, it could be said that in this context the original values of the Brothers may remain effective as long as they are in opposition, but may not hold if they became rulers, because the religious deterrent may not work for those in power, especially in the absence of modern democratic safeguards. However, there is neither a structural nor a historical reason that prevents the Muslim Brothers from adopting democracy and subsequently joining the world order and making an Arabic contribution to humanity.

Fourthly it could be said that the stance of the Muslim Brotherhood does not relate to the experience of the Egyptian state, a state which has been only semi-democratic at certain times, particularly before the July Revolution of 1952. The Muslim Brothers, however, stayed away from the prevailing state principles for some time and they were under scrutiny by the state machinery. The latter held a negative and stereotypical image of the Brotherhood, an image developed and exaggerated by the security forces. Hence, any attempts to 'regularise' relations between the Brotherhood and any democratic system may not be an easy task. However, it would be essential to attempt to 'regularise' these relations to ensure the integration of the Brotherhood into public life. The heritage of the Brotherhood has its roots outside the political system, the state and the nationalist movement, and is sometimes in conflict with these. It is, however, time for the democratic system itself to become the guarantee for this integration.

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6 Islamism in the Sudan

Who was the challenger, what was at stake?

STEFANO BELLUCCI

INTRODUCTION

A reflection on the interregional challenges of Islamic fundamentalist movements in North Africa raises three analytical questions.

- What makes a challenge ‘interregional’?
- What are the political implications and meanings of the adjective ‘fundamentalist’?
- Why have some Islamic ‘movements’ become ‘parties’, that is, why have they decided to enter into the democratic game played within the boundaries of the nation-state, and vice-versa? Why have others decided to remain movements, that is, why have they rejected the party structure as a way of pursuing political and social transformations?

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse these three issues by focusing on the case of the Islamic movement in Sudan. What makes Sudan an interesting and a crucial case study with respect to Islamism in North Africa (and the entire Muslim world) is the fact that it constitutes the only instance of an Islamic

state in the Sunni contemporary world. Sudan was declared an Islamic republic in 1989 after a coup d'état led by the current president, General Omar Hassan al Bashir.

The Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) is one of the few purely Islamic movements in Sudan that has been able to organise itself politically into a legal political party. A first attempt was made by the Islamic Charter Front (ICF), which survived until President Jaafar an Nimeiri's ban and dissolution of political parties in 1969. Since its reconstitution in 1985, it has renamed itself the National Islamic Front (NIF). Former members of the Muslim Brotherhood continued to constitute the core element of the NIF, although the new party claimed to have an all-embracing character. Despite the fact that the call made by the NIF was one of national unity aimed at all Sudanese citizens and Muslims, the national element remained inseparable from the religious one. In other words, the Muslim Brotherhood refers to a generic religious attitude and political affiliation, and in this study the term 'Islamism' should be understood in its generic form and broad meaning: a synthesis between Islam and national politics – as well as international politics.

The name *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* was taken up by some of the Sudanese Islamic movements when the Sudanese cells of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood united with those movements already present in the country, known as *Harakat al-Tahrur al-Islami* (the Movement for Islamic Liberation). The *Ikhwan* was the result of the unification of these elements of Islam with political and social aspirations understood by its advocates in the sense of 'liberation'. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928 and, despite the strong historical and cultural ties between Egypt and Sudan, its message reached Sudanese towns at a relatively later stage, in the 1940s. This is because modern social, religious and political structures in Sudan were very different from those in Egypt.

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was born as a reaction to a wave of increasing secularism that translated itself into an increasing laicism of state institutions and politics as a consequence of the great influence that Western powers – especially Britain – had exercised over Cairo from the mid-19th century and until the beginning of the 20th century. In Sudan this was not the case. Here, the *Ikhwan* constituted a reaction to the division of the Muslim nation (or *ummah*) represented by the different Sufi orders around which Islam had been established and preached since the 16th century. As John Voll puts it,

the Sudanese movement was more of an ‘inter-Islamic’ phenomenon, sharing certain similarities with the Mahdist movement in the late 19th century (which, however, only lasted for a short period of time).¹

WHO IS THE ‘FUNDAMENTALIST’? CULTURAL SUBVERSION OR POLITICAL REVOLUTION

By 1955, the year before Sudanese independence, the *Ikhwan* had started promoting the idea of an Islamic constitution. Although it was not yet a political party in the so-called first democratic period, which lasted only between 1956 and 1958, the Muslim Brothers supported individual candidates who supported the creation of an Islamic constitution – that is that Islam would serve as the ideological foundation of the state. Their activity was limited to those constituencies in which such politicians could be found. When Brigadier Ibrahim Abboud took control of the country with the first military coup d’état in 1958, all political parties were banned. However, the *Ikhwan* was able to continue its activities because it was not, strictly speaking, a political party, and its message of unity did not threaten Abboud’s political agenda: the ideological difference between the two being Arabism for the military and Islamism for the *Ikhwan*. These were not clashing ideologies. Abboud’s main concern was the South and the risk of its secession and consequent national disintegration. Despite this apparent compatibility, the relationship between the military regime and the *Ikhwan* was not always smooth, and indeed the pro-*Ikhwan* newspaper, *al-Balâgh*, was ordered to close down after some criticism of the junta’s Arabisation policies, especially in the South.²

It is at this stage that the allure of militarism conquered the hearts and minds of some of the most prominent Muslim Brothers. While the critics of the military government retreated into religious preaching and practices of social welfare, prominent figures of the organisation, such as its leader, Rashid al-Tahir Bakr, were moving towards the idea of a closer link between the *Ikhwan* and the military forces. In the *arrière penser* of al-Tahir was the idea of creating a Muslim militia, officially to provide support for the government, in reality to protect the members of the Brotherhood from acts of persecution – such as those that took place in Nasser’s Egypt.³

Despite the fact that part of the *Ikhwan*’s leadership did not support al-Tahir’s plans, he sought to establish a link with some high-ranking army officers. The

move was interpreted as an attempt to overthrow the regime. The government took swift action and executed on charges of treason those in the military who had allegedly taken part in what was seen as political subversion, while Rashid al-Tahir was sentenced to five years in prison. In one fell swoop, not only had the Muslim Brotherhood lost its supporters in the army, but it had also lost its most prominent political figure and guiding light. The Khartoum University Student Union, whose allegiance was split between the *Ikhwan* and the Communists, was officially closed down. Nevertheless it continued to exist unofficially and students played an important role in the demonstrations, strikes and protests that accompanied the collapse of the first military regime in October 1964. The October Revolution opened the door to the so-called second democratic period in contemporary Sudanese history. By then, the Muslim Brothers had established themselves as a movement with, at its core, an ideological political stance which it claimed could provide a basis for the analysis of social issues, such as social inequality, as well as a solution to the many problems facing the young Sudanese nation – a solution which was to be found in the democratic and tolerant principles contained in the Quran.⁴

This was the political context to which the young Hassan al-Turabi returned in 1962 from his doctoral studies in Paris. He gained influence in the movement apparently as a result of his oratorical and political skills, although the fact that he came from a family of Islamic judges helped to increase his personal prestige and social connections.⁵ The first political move al-Turabi made was to establish an inner circle comprising young militants.⁶ He was one of the promoters of the Islamic Charter Front (ICF) created in 1964 in the aftermath of the October Revolution. This was the first political association made up solely of Muslim Brothers, allegedly to counter the Communists on the same ideological ground – universalism. Al-Turabi was made both secretary of the ICF and spiritual leader of the *Ikhwan*.

After the overthrow of Abboud, the provisional constitution, based on the Westminster model of government of 1956, was reinstated.⁷ Islamic law, or *Shari'a*, was never fully applied in Sudan, even during the Mahdist period. *Shari'a* was mainly invoked as a source of family law (marriage, divorce, treatment of minors, etc.). In most parts of the North, customary law was applied for criminal matters, land tenure and inheritance; while in various other regions of the country *Shari'a* was not applied to the vast majority of the people.

What changes were brought about by the ICF for Sudanese Muslims? Before the advent of this new Islamic movement, belonging to a *sufi tariqa* (Sufi order) was sufficient to attain Muslim identity. Now, for the Sudanese in the modern sector of society or for those with a Western education or inclination it became ever more important to enrich this Islamic identity with new intellectual and ideological elements. The Islamic constitution represented the birth of a new Islamic ideology.⁸ The Islamic Charter, issued in November 1964, contained the seeds of this new Islamic awakening.⁹

Nonetheless, the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, justice, and so on, all emphasised in the charter, had to be performed or granted ‘according to the natural order of Islamic society’. The problem lay in who was to be the arbiter of what was ‘the natural order of Islamic society’. Could non-Muslims be involved in decisions that involved Islamic society? These issues have never been clearly answered. The unresolved dilemma seriously affected the question of national unity. The ICF programme would create a divided nation: a majority of Muslims who would run the central government and the minorities who would be respected but not fully included in the central government’s decision-making process. That is to say, to use Mahmood Mamdani’s famous paradigm, there would be Muslim ‘citizens’ and non-Muslim ‘subjects’.¹⁰

The message of Islamic nationalism proposed by the ICF was not successful among Sudanese Muslims. The elitist nature of the ICF became evident during the elections after the demise of Abboud’s regime: the ICF obtained very few seats in parliament, mostly from the ‘graduate constituencies’, the capital Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman.¹¹ The two parties that emerged with mass appeal were the Umma Party and the National Unionist Party (NUP), both the political expression of sectarian Islam: the Umma of the Ansar (followers of Sadiq al-Mahdi, grandson of the Mahdi himself) and the NUP of the *Khatmiyya*’s Sufi order.¹²

According to Duran, the ICF ranks among those forces that paralysed political life during the so-called second democratic phase, from 1964 to 1969.¹³ This view, although quite widespread, does not seem to mirror the reality of Sudan. With only a handful of MPs, it is very unlikely that the Muslim Brothers could have had any effective impact on the political agenda of the country. Maybe the real ‘success’ enjoyed by the ICF was its attack on the Communists in 1966, its competitors among the educated elite, on the basis of their atheism.¹⁴ The constitution was changed to allow only confessional

parties, although the Supreme Court rejected this change.¹⁵ Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, leader of the Umma Party (and brother-in-law of al-Turabi) also liked the idea of an Islamic constitution, but obtaining parliamentary approval was disrupted by the coup d'état staged by the Free Officers led by Jafaar Nimeiri. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Ansar united in fierce opposition to the new regime. Initially their opposition was open, but subsequently, given the repression that followed, they became a secret force divided into clandestine political cells.¹⁶

The *Ikhwan* clearly straddled two contradictory ideologies. On the one hand, it claimed to be a force for modernity (urban, linked to modern jobs, educated according to global standards, with an idea of nation and respect for the individual very similar to those of the 'modern' world, etc.), and on the other hand, it projected a kind of society which would be ruled according to the *Shari'a* and the Sunna, which were religious products of societies and cultures belonging to a remote past. The reinterpretation of the Islamic tradition in the light of modernity was therefore necessary. According to al-Turabi, the spiritual guide of the 'modernisers' within the Islamist leadership, 'human thought, or the body of achievement of Islamic *ijtihad*, [must] be connected [...] to time and place'.¹⁷

However, if one looks at the praxis of the Islamic government led by the National Islamic Front from 1989 onwards, the picture that emerges is that of a leadership not committed to historicise Islam through a deep reasoning on the historical nature of Islam, its law and its believers. It is not even so much about how to achieve power, nor even a question of democracy, but rather it is about the way in which Islam can be a modernising element in a modern Sudan. However, there was also resistance to modernisation within the Islamist élite that took power, notably from those who espoused the more traditional views of Islam. In hindsight, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, the current president of Sudan, has always been at the head of this conservative or reactionary Islamic bloc. The worst enemy for modernising Islam was within the same political élite that took power, establishing the first Islamic state of contemporary Africa and the Sunni world.

The development of two trends within the Islamic movement has followed chronological steps: it started with the late Nimeiri's period (1977–1985); it developed in the so-called Sudanese 'third democratic phase' (1985–1989); and it became an overt split in 1999 that has not yet been resolved. The central issues are:

- Doctrine: what kind of nation-building approach and policies should be adopted
- Political strategy for gaining power and consolidation

The Muslims Brothers decided that following the Islamic religion was the only possible way to build unity among the nation during the late Nimeiri years, when Arabism or even ‘Sudanism’ declined in effect as a nation-building tool. One of the successes of the Nimeiri regime came in 1972 at the end of the civil war with the Southern guerrillas, who had been fighting for the recognition of their rights as non-Arabs. Sudanism was the policy that Nimeiri had advanced immediately after the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement (1972), which regionalised Sudanese politics and granted greater political autonomy to the different regions of Sudan. Sudanism created the counter-effect of making those who pursued an Arabisation agenda enemies of Nimeiri, especially in the powerful North and within the Sudan Socialist Union (SSU) government. Following the decision to regionalise Sudan, the Muslim Brothers suffered their first split, obviously between those in favour (al-Turabi and the majority) and those more sceptical of this arrangement. The decision to regionalise, however, was not of new provenance – the autonomy of the South had already been included in the Islamic Charter, the idea behind it being that the Islamic state could not be imposed by force on non-Muslim communities. Al-Turabi was one of the first prominent Sudanese figures to envisage a possible confederative form for the state of Sudan.

In Sudan, as in many other former British colonies, the state institutional structure had been inherited from London during the decolonisation process, but a Sudanese nation had not yet come into being. Marxist universalism, traditional Islam (Sufi order), Arabism, Africanism, together with Islamism, constituted the mutually exclusive ideals for nation building in Sudan.

As with many other African countries, independent Sudan has suffered the legacy of British late colonialism: the tribalisation of its political landscape, the decentralised despotism entrenched in indirect rule, the colonial administrative separation between the North and the South (which constitutes the origin of one of the longest civil wars in post-colonial Africa), different social policies applied to each administrative unit, and so on. In other words, independent Sudan suffered a lack of historical unity among its citizens, under a universal legal order and political apparatus.

Nation building was seen by many politicians and intellectuals as a *sine qua non* for political development. The problem lay in ascertaining under which ideological banner the Sudanese nation was to be built. Obviously, for the Islamic forces it was to be Islam.¹⁸

After Nimeiri's National Reconciliation (NR) of 1977, with which the SSU government granted limited political freedoms, members of the *Ikhwan* entered the SSU government. Al-Turabi himself held a post in the ministry of foreign affairs, in the provincial government of Darfur, and was Attorney-General. After all,

every self-avowed modernist political force in contemporary Sudan [...] was locked into the top-down putschist power grabbing strategy [...] Since the modern sector constituted a minority and the traditional sector a majority. [The] only chance [for the Islamists] was to usurp power through a conspiracy [...] looking for ways to execute it by building up alliances within the army.¹⁹

Accepting compromise in return for power was the strategic option chosen by the *Ikhwan*, until its definite accession to power in June 1989 through a military coup. In this respect, the relative advantage for the Islamist forces – compared with the Communists – was the fact that unlike the atheist, historical materialism professed in Marxism, the Islamic call was directed at the majority of the Sudanese population (the Muslim population). This emphasis on the majority in Islam constituted the democratic character of Islamic nation building. Where Muslims did not constitute the majority of the populace – in the South – other arrangements were possible, such as the 'extreme confederative option' envisaged by the Islamists during their support of Nimeiri's policies of regionalism and decentralisation.²⁰

The *Ikhwan* had worked intensively towards its Islamic national project since the mid-1970s. The success of this strategy was the proclamation of the so-called September laws in 1983 by the SSU regime, which introduced *Shari'a* as a first step in the establishment of the Islamic state. On the eve of the proclamation of the Islamic laws, in 1982, a split within the SSU-*Ikhwan* ruling class became evident between those who opposed the Islamisation of the state and those who favoured it. Another split took place within the Muslim Brotherhood itself as the opposition to al-Turabi's leadership assembled

around a ‘founders faction’, while his supporters were to be found within the ranks of the young and the educated involved in the *tajdid* – Islamic reform and renovation from above.²¹

The top-down strategy of Islamisation meant that since the late 1970s *Ikhwan* had sought to penetrate the higher ranks of the army and, in 1979, an ‘Islamic club’ was created within the officer ranks made up of those more assiduously present in the mosques where the Muslims Brothers were most active.²² The Muslim Brothers gained control of the Committee to Revise Islamic Law, which had been created following the agreements of the NR. The ‘revision’ meant controlling the existing system, and not creating an *ex novo* Islamic state. This was in line with the historicisation of the present Islam in al-Turabi’s political and religious philosophy. The committee found only 38 of the 286 laws examined to be contrary to Islam and/or the *Shari’a*.²³ The constitution was not yet under discussion and by 1985 Sudan had adjusted its legislation to espouse the *Shari’a* within the general framework of a secular constitution.

The Islamic orientation of the national legal system was defined by the Judgment Act of 1983 (sometimes referred to as the Basic Rule Act). According to its framework or principles, the Islamic laws and the Arabic language had to take the place of the British legal system and the English language as the foremost source and tool for the application of justice. Before every verdict, the prime responsibility of judges at all levels of the judiciary was to check the conformity of every verdict with the *Shari’a* and the Sunna, and they also had to apply customary law based on previous cases if necessary. However, the implementation of the *Shari’a*, based on current *ijtihad* (independent judgement made by every individual Muslim) would take into account current conditions in arriving at a verdict based upon the Quran and the Sunna. The reform implied a great deal of flexibility and separation between Islamic and non-Islamic laws. The ideological rationale behind the introduction of the Islamic laws of September 1983 was not only to establish a new system, but also a standardised legal system that would apply fairly and without discrimination to all Sudanese, according to their religion, under a ‘secular’ constitution that would guarantee every citizen justice regardless of race, culture, religion, economic status, family links and political power or affiliation, and so on.

In 1985, Nimeiri’s regime collapsed, and Sudan entered the so-called third democratic phase. *Ikhwan* entered the democratic competition and adopted the name of the NIF. The main reason for the collapse of the SSU regime has been

identified by many as the large-scale protests over food shortages and price increases because of the drought of the 1980s and the resumed civil war with the South.²⁴ However, it is not only a question of neo-Malthusianism, but, as documented by Mohamed Salih, also one of ecological degradation that contributes to conflict.²⁵ In any event, according to many scholars, the Islamisation campaign of 1983 constituted one of the causes for the Southern uprising.

Nimeiri's Islamic reforms placed an important issue on the agenda: the change of indirect rule (replacing traditional chiefs with a modern bureaucracy). In implementing this in 1983, the government in Khartoum reunified the civil and *Shari'a* courts, which had been separated during colonialism.²⁶ Although the reform enabled formal courts to consider *Shari'a* law, the contrary was also true: for non-Muslims the formal courts had to apply laws other than *Shari'a*. In the South, common law and customary rights were retained and continued to be applied for the non-Muslim population, creating what Ekeh calls 'two publics' in one state.²⁷

In the free elections of 1986, the NIF won 54 seats in the 301-seat parliament. By emerging as the third largest bloc, far ahead of the Communist Party and its allies, it could claim to be the only true representative of the modern sector in the new Sudan. However, 28 of those seats resulted from the restoration of the graduates' constituencies. With an Umma-DUP government, the NIF became the official opposition in parliament. During his tenure as prime minister, Sadiq al-Mahdi (Umma) did not abolish the Islamic laws passed in 1983. Once again, the sectarian parties, such as Umma and DUP, came first and second in the elections. The Muslim nation and majority was still to be built.

On 30 June 1989, the military coup took place, after democratic but sectarian politics once again failed to deliver political stability to the country. During the same period, significant oil reserves were discovered that were located precisely on the frontline between the North and the South. Some attached a political value to the oil question, which exaggerated the impact of oil in national politics. In fact, the issues between North and South had long predated the discovery of oil and thus, while probably exacerbating the North-South divide (potential economic opportunities probably lured some individuals towards the political élite), it was not the direct cause.

Although initially the military junta led by al-Bashir did not advance any Islamist argument, the regime started off in what seemed to be an alliance with

the *Ikhwan*. The NIF's social structure remained intact, but power enabled them to channel state resources in two directions:

- To undermine political competitors, this time mainly in the traditional religious camp (secularists having already been undermined) in order to create a modernist-oriented Islamic mass-movement free of the constraints of Sufi orders.
- To create a new socio-economic order to promote an economic basis for their national project.

The alliance with the military (including those who were closer to the *Ikhwan*) implied a series of 'dangerous' compromises on the part of civilian Muslim Brothers and their nation-building grand design:

- They had to accept a shift in power in favour of the North and the centre of the country as well as an Arab-Islamic ethos as the overriding character of the national leadership.
- They had to accommodate rejection by the new élite of the black African component of the nation and thereby compromise both their anti-racial position adopted in the name of a universalistic Islam and their rejection of the legacy of late colonialism which advantaged the Arab section of society.
- They had to consent to those policies that favoured the rich section of the nation and the consequent widening of the gap between the governing élites and the poor.

This was the price to be paid in order to acquire power. However, the modernist and institutional approach of al-Turabi was based on the simple assumption that things could be changed from within, and modernisation and unity could only be enforced when in power.

The army, together with some economic sectors, have been the two pillars of Islamic state power. Between 1989 and 1996, the army ranks underwent regular purges of those elements that did not sympathise with the Islamic project. The militarisation of politics and society in Sudan also resulted from the top-down policy of the post-1989 regime. The war with the South has been exploited by the Islamo-military discourse as a menace to Islam, and in order to buy time and build a military force made up of ideological elements. At the same time,

the war and militarisation unified society in the North around the movement of Islamic awakening launched by the government.

Since the 1970s, with the rise of Islamic banking and the flow of petrodollars from the Gulf, Islamists have gained important businessmen for their cause.²⁸ At the same time, there have been purges in the business world of those individuals who had strong links with previous regimes.²⁹ Privatisation programmes of national companies such as Sudan Textiles or White Nile Tannery have greatly benefited the government supporters who acquired their assets.³⁰

From studying cases in West Africa, William Reno came to the general conclusion that informal structures tend always to sustain institutional power.³¹ Yet the case of post-1989 Sudan shows a complexity that resulted from the two trends that informed the Islamic political élites. In Sudan, the Islamic regime managed to sustain itself by making use of formal and informal structures of power in state and society at the same time. It seems, in fact, that a deep change occurred in the attitude of al-Turabi vis-à-vis the establishment of an Islamic state through the systematic use of state power.

Since the mid-1990s, the 'progressive' trend of the movement, which has always had a tendency to promote social welfare and urban social structures, has developed another political approach that could be defined as 'from below'. Since its inception, part of the support for the movement has come from the informal networks of merchants in the urban areas (especially Khartoum and Omdurman). The regime's spirit of collaboration with merchant communities created not only what the regime's critics call 'clientelism' or 'patronage', but, in addition, it 'legitimised' the government in power. In other words, the social activity and the search for legitimisation in order to build national consensus has been achieved not only via Islamic action, but also by a search for consensus within and throughout non-Islamic sectors: the military and the economic ones.

The search for social consensus and legitimisation was carried out through the formation and expansion of national Islamic youth associations and associations comprising women, students, professionals, workers, and so on. In the South, a system of social welfare was established in the early 1990s. In the rural sector, the regime tried to redistribute power in favour of new social groups, for example to support young militants of *Shabab al-Watan* (Islamic Youth). Although the majority of the Sudanese population lives outside the capital and in the rural areas, the big political and social game was played out in Khartoum where the grip of the Muslim Brothers on society had never been as strong before. Urbanisation

– a phenomenon exacerbated by the war in the South and to a lesser extent in the Western regions – worked in favour of the Islamists who sought to use the city as a centre for the convergence of interests between different sections of the Sudanese nation. Masses of people from all over the country converged in the Khartoum-Omdurman urban area, and those masses have been taken good care of by the Islamic movement and have benefited from its efficient organisation: they give these new groups of society a political direction, obviously towards the Islamic ideology professed by and originated within the *Ikhwan*.

During the 1990s, it seemed that al-Bashir was a faithful and obedient ally of al-Turabi, and this is certainly the way their relationship was portrayed in the press. It is clear that by being the leader of the dominant political group, al-Turabi exerted great influence over the Sudanese government. However, it is difficult to calculate the exact extent of his influence. In reality, the relationship between the modernists (al-Turabi) and the military (al-Bashir) was a functional one, where they used each other reciprocally.³² Al-Bashir was considered by al-Turabi and his followers as a ‘temporary evil’ and vice-versa.³³ Within the military-Islamist regime, al-Turabi represented the modernist and progressive faction, the conservative faction being represented by pro-army factions led by Ali Osman Mohammad Taha and Osman Hassan Ahamed, whose support for al-Bashir was total. They advocated a reinforcement of the military junta, authoritarianism, and the state in general, all in the name of Islam.

Since 1997, attacks launched by guerrillas from the South have repeatedly threatened the Khartoum government. The illegal opposition, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), helped by Eritrea, joined forces with mainly Southern Christian and Animist rebels trying to topple the Islamic government. The relationship between al-Turabi and al-Bashir has increasingly come under pressure as a result of these hostilities, which have highlighted the differences between the two men.

THE CHALLENGE OF SUDANESE ISLAMISM TO REGIONAL STABILITY AND THE WEST

Since its inception as a political organisation separate from sectarian Islam, Sudanese political Islam (or Islamism) has found itself in a dilemma: whether to push for a cultural or a political revolution. Two currents formed within the movement that followed one or the other path. Al-Bashir aimed to bolster

the idea of Islam as a cultural matter. Al-Turabi was the leader of the current push for political revolution. The aim of this revolution was to challenge the foundation of the nation-state in Sudan, and ultimately in the entire region of North Africa and possibly the Middle East, where other Islamist groups might follow the same path of challenging the status quo by challenging the state. At a regional level, the danger posed by the Islamic political movement was keenly felt not only by those in power in Sudan and neighbouring countries (power always privileges the status quo over revolutionary changes), but also by the West and world powers, who prioritised stability in the Middle East and North Africa – a region of great importance for the global economic forces and capitalist equilibrium.

In the first week of December 1999, al-Turabi manoeuvred al-Bashir out of the top job at the National Congress (NC), the political movement created to provide ideological legitimisation, and took over himself.³⁴ Al-Turabi also increased the number of delegates in the legislative council from 30 to 60. However, this was his last official act before he was overthrown by al-Bashir. On 12 December 1999, al-Bashir stood up to his supposed mentor. After consultations with some neighbouring anti-Turabi leaders, such as Mubarak in Egypt and Khaddafi in Libya, al-Bashir moved his troops and tanks against parliament.³⁵ Al-Turabi's attempts to contain this action failed and al-Bashir took the reins of power, seeking to establish a military-led Republic based less on ideology and more on pragmatism including, of course, sound economics. Al-Turabi was dismissed from his position as speaker of the parliament, a three-month state of emergency was proclaimed, and parliament was dissolved.

Abroad, al-Turabi has always had many enemies. In general, he was accused of spreading 'Islamic fundamentalism' not only to Sudan's neighbouring countries, but also overseas generally. Furthermore, the US in particular, backed by its allies in the region, propagated an oversimplistic view of the Khartoum government and al-Turabi as being responsible for the dramatic situation in which Sudan found itself, for the civil war, the ongoing existence of slavery and female circumcision. The Sudanese government certainly shares the blame for some of these blights, but it is also important to recall that the war started in and spread from the South. Neither al-Turabi nor Nimeiri ever proclaimed any *jihad* (struggle) against the Animist-Christian South. It is also true, if equally lamentable, that slavery and female circumcision form part of an age-old tradition in Sudan and many other African

countries. Many human rights abuses occur on the war front between North and South or in areas where the central government of Khartoum has little or no control. (Needless to say, under the Criminal Law Act of 1991, all these abuses are formally prohibited in Sudan.)³⁶

Throughout most of the 1990s, Sudan faced diplomatic isolation from the West. This reached its peak when the US accused it of exporting terrorism abroad and bombed the pharmaceutical factory of Al-Shifa in August 1998, without considering that the Sudanese government had expelled Taliban supporter and US enemy number one, Osama Bin Laden, in 1996, and that the Sudanese government had collaborated with France's then Minister of the Interior, Charles Pasqua, in the capture of the internationally wanted terrorist 'Carlos'.³⁷ With his coup, many believed that al-Bashir was sending out a signal to the world that Sudan was ready to compromise its ideology in order to be accepted back into the fold.

After the split of 1999, al-Bashir seems to have aligned himself more with the pan-Arab movement, in contrast to al-Turabi who embodied the Islamic alternative. For many African leaders who fear having Islamism too close to home, al-Bashir is not seen as the real 'enemy' – he is more interested in power without any strong ideological support. Many Arab and Muslim countries feel threatened by the Islamic alternative – embodied in al-Turabi as leader of the Pan-Islamic Conference (PIC) – which is considered to be more destabilising than the pan-Arab option. Islamists believe in the unification of the *umma* and therefore the Western concept of nation-states is alien to them.³⁸ As a result, al-Bashir's pro-Arab position has allowed him to obtain, at least initially, direct support from Egypt, Libya, Qatar and Bahrain.

It is significant that al-Turabi was attempting to introduce constitutional reforms to increase the level of democracy – even in the Western sense of the term – when he was deposed by al-Bashir. Al-Turabi's reforms would have shrunk the extensive executive power of President al-Bashir. Regardless of whether al-Turabi's proposed reforms were inspired by a desire for greater personal power or not (the reforms would have increased the power of parliament and by extension of its speaker [al-Turabi]), they would still have been positive in creating a more accountable, accessible and democratic government. Al-Bashir's supporters could argue that his promise to call free and fair elections in the near future was proof of his democratic credentials. Certainly the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, which aimed to put an end to

the war with the South, favoured the regime. Paradoxically, even the indictment for the president's arrest issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in March 2009 played into the hands of the regime, which saw increased support from many Arab and African countries who did not agree with the mandate of the ICC. It is true that the promise, if kept, of new elections and of a referendum for the self-determination in the South will establish whether al-Bashir has the support of the people.

It is rather ironic that in their struggle for power, both al-Bashir and al-Turabi seemed to be staking their claims on the democratic issue. Al-Turabi aimed to establish democratic measures through constitutional reform, and, after the coup, al-Bashir promised and delivered on elections, which he won in 2000 with more than 85 per cent of the suffrage, and a majority in parliament of 355 seats out of 360. Since 2005, the interim government has been awaiting its democratic legitimisation.

Since the schism of 1999 within the Islamist élite, al-Bashir has seemed to be in control of power and the state, but notwithstanding his landslide electoral 'victory' he has not garnered support within Sudanese society. Rallies and protests are frequent and can hardly be stopped by the government. Although the South was brought into a relatively peaceful relationship with the North under the CPA, the regional insurgency resumed in Western Sudan, particularly in Darfur in 2003, and in the East in Kassala. The Islamist ideological stand of al-Bashir and the NC government is fading. The government has shown an inclination to return to a more 'traditional political way' of ruling, with big coalitions and Sufi-dominated parties being readmitted to power. Al-Bashir granted elections in 2010, but this may in fact simply be a bid to return to the pre-1989 situation when Sufi orders were politically powerful.

Al-Turabi, on the other hand, is still preaching deeper social and political reforms and argues that Sudan still needs its 'new awakening'.³⁹ Creating the Popular National Congress (PNC) has been al-Turabi's political answer in order to continue with the construction of an Islamic nation comprised of Muslim citizens with equal rights, as opposed to the pro-Arab tendency of the Islamic conservatives, who continue to see Sudan as a bundle of different cultures, albeit the majority of them Muslim.

The constitutional reforms that the al-Turabi faction within the Islamic state apparatus was about to pass when ousted by al-Bashir consist of three basic elements:

- The creation of the office of a prime minister (modelled on the French system) elected by majority vote and who would control the government
- Direct elections also for the 26 state governors (Under the 1998 administrative reform the president selected three candidates for each of the 26 states and referred them to local parliaments for approval)
- The introduction of changes to the constitution that would have made it possible for a two-thirds majority of parliament to vote the president out of office⁴⁰

Despite these practical measures proposed by al-Turabi to increase democracy in Sudan, al-Bashir's coup was not condemned by the so-called international community (i.e. the West) and indeed, apart from headlines with the news of the actual coup, the situation was largely ignored. The reasons for this are various.

First of all, the shift in power in Sudan into the hands of the existing president did not attract much attention. Furthermore, al-Turabi was not immediately arrested and there were no public demonstrations in protest of the coup. Would a bloodbath have changed the muted reaction in the West? Perhaps marginally.

Secondly, there is a sort of wary acceptance in the West when 'strong men' take power in Third World countries to oust 'fundamentalist terrorists'. This was already present before the declaration of the 'war on terror' by George W Bush after 9/11.

Thirdly, and most importantly, it was an Islamist who was ousted, and the knee-jerk reaction in the West was to categorise this event as positive. Likewise, the more amenable al-Bashir offered comfort to neighbouring countries that wanted a Sudan with a much watered-down radical ideology. This benefited al-Bashir in his personal capacity, as it assisted him in consolidating power.

In conclusion, even with al-Turabi out of the picture, the war and discontent continued in Sudan and moved to Darfur and other peripheral parts of the country, which are still waiting for democratic reforms to be introduced, by al-Bashir and his military allies.

ISLAMIC 'REVOLUTIONARY' REFORMS AND THE POWER OF STATUS QUO

At stake in the case of Islamic Sudan in relation to regional stability is the ultimate existence of the nation-state as it was introduced and developed by the

West from colonial times – especially during late colonialism. The central question, when talking about certain brands of political Islam such as the Sudanese one, is not democracy but power, and *how* this power is organised and exercised inside its institutional and geographical boundaries. The shift in the structure of power is what Islamism or political Islam, so-called ‘fundamentalism’, is really all about.

The Sudanese Islamic culture, as set out in this chapter, has a very complex history. The so-called fundamentalists, that is the former Muslim Brothers who voted for ICF, NIF and then took power through a coup d’état, have engaged in a cultural debate even within their ranks. There was al-Turabi’s faction on one side pushing for a deep political and social revolution, and al-Bashir’s military faction on the other side, happy with the control of state power through the utilisation of Islam as a means of political and social control (not for change or revolution). The second vision of Islamism, as a cultural phenomenon, triumphed over the political, revolutionary one.

However, if the challenge to the status quo (power) and the nation-state does not come from a political (i.e. universal) force, opposing, for example, the hegemonic, liberal or neoliberal, or free-market driven views of the world, Islamism is destined to be only a cultural phenomenon and a weak enemy of capitalism. As a cultural phenomenon, Islamism is destined to fail in politics, and to remain a cultural residue of the modern world.

Islamism as a ‘cultural phenomenon’ was precisely what al-Turabi tried to overcome, by aiming at the dismantling of the nation-state and the politics of division introduced to Africa with colonial rule. For al-Turabi’s faction the problem was the nation-state and the divisive form of administrative power that it entailed, based on ethnic and religious divisions within the citizenry. This system of power was inherited by Sudan from Anglo-Egyptian colonialism, in substance as a ‘Western system of power’.

Al-Turabi realised that the nation-state as a colonial legacy was still being followed as the model for contemporary politics. Furthermore, this model is complementary to the capitalist and market-driven organisation of the world system. Like almost every religion, Islam also became historically complementary to the mode of production and political power in the Sudan.

How to reconcile Islam and ‘revolutionary action’? This question presents perhaps the biggest challenge to both some Sudanese Islamists and to other political forces in the region, which fear the spread of a revolutionary version

of Islam. How to change the economic, political and social structure of society? Attempts to revolutionise society were made, with varying degrees of conviction, by al-Turabi more than al-Bashir, the NCP more than the NC, the Justice and Equality Movement more than other forces in Darfur, the PDF more than the military, and by some intellectual forces more than the economic ones.

However, can Islamism be a ‘modern’ force and a viable tool for social revolution? Does it contain the seeds of modernity, which are truly ‘revolutionary’, or is it only an act of conservative reaction or subversion? As stated by Mamdani, modernity in African politics has to do with ‘moving from exclusion to inclusion, from repression to incorporation’.⁴¹ By including those previously excluded, we give those previously alienated a stake in societal life. By doing so, we broaden the bounds of lived community, and of lived humanity. That perhaps is the real challenge today. It is the recognition that ‘the good life cannot be lived in isolation’.⁴² Al-Turabi’s faction came to the conclusion that all this could only be reached with the total dismantling of the power structure inherited from colonialism and still alive in today’s African nation-state.

Attempts at modernisation were made in Sudan particularly during the 1990s – the period during which al-Turabi enjoyed the maximum level of freedom to reform in two sectors: the legal and the administrative. The idea behind al-Turabi’s legal reforms was the unification of the *umma* under a unique legal and egalitarian system. The reforms included formal laws in different areas: criminal (Criminal Act of 1991 and Criminal Procedure Act of 1991), civil (Muslim Law Act of 1991), commercial (banking, investment encouragement, National Petroleum Commission, telecommunications, copyright) and public order (Khartoum Public Order Act and Labour Act of 1997).

Arbiters of disputes and administrators of formal and informal laws come in various guises throughout Sudan, depending on ethnic, religious and political factors. Both statute and customary law provide for judicial courts, while informal community practices also rely on local chiefs, known as sultans, to resolve disputes between community members. Indeed, ‘(t)he judiciary relies greatly on popular justice for solving disputes through methods of conciliation and the application of tradition’.⁴³ Customary laws generally consist of non-state dispute resolution systems that are usually based on local customary, traditional or tribal systems of justice, given that Sudan’s ethnic and religious plurality, customary laws and practice are diverse, differing from tribe to tribe and from community to community. Case reporting of decisions by the formal courts is

published in the *Sudan Law Journal and Reports*, while laws are published in the *Sudan Gazette*.

For a better appreciation of the system of laws that al-Turabi had in mind in order to move his society forward, it is necessary to understand the insistence on the issue of *ijtihad* which, according to him, is open to every Muslim, irrespective of social status, gender, age, cultural belonging, kinship, and so on. The idea is that everyone can exercise *ijtihad* and it is 'not the prerogative of a small select group but a dynamic of the whole community [...] *ijtihad* and knowledge are a collective social function'.⁴⁴ The *ijtihad* frees Muslim thinking from traditional and superstitious restrictions, because it assumes the need for reasoning based on analysis in any given situation of cause and effect. It is the *ijtihad* based on rational, empirical thinking that was behind the judicial reforms led by al-Turabi in his various governmental, judicial and parliamentary posts before his ousting from power in 1999.

Since then, according to Y Sherif,

[Northern] judiciary structures are more developed but the independence of the judiciary seems to have been compromised – as evidenced by the arbitrary dismissal of qualified judges, attorneys-general and law officers. Existing legislation fails to guarantee the full spectrum of human rights and fundamental freedoms, while military decrees and emergency laws undermine those rights currently protected by statutory law.⁴⁵

Indeed, though the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, the latter is largely subservient to the president or the security forces, particularly in cases of crimes against the state.

Questions of independence reach beyond the judiciary to practising lawyers. Lawyers throughout Sudan must belong to the National Bar Association, which is based in Khartoum. Outside of Khartoum, the association is viewed as being overly urban in both composition and its substantive focus, and therefore removed from the daily needs and challenges of people living outside the capital. The association has itself been the subject of a clampdown: in 1992,

the government amended the Advocate Act of 1983 in such a drastic way as to totally abrogate the Association's independence. For the first

time in its history, the SBA has been reduced to another trade union. The Association has now been registered with the Registrar of Trade Unions.⁴⁶

What would make the judiciary more independent and accountable would be its separation from the central political power by democratic means: in other words, an elected judiciary or popular tribunals. Al-Turabi's idea, which has been behind these reforms, was a form of 'popular justice', not dissimilar in some ways to that in force in Mozambique in the late 1970s and early 1980s, although any such similarities would not be admitted. This was a progressive issue in as much as justice was a matter of consultation, and rules and laws were to be based on democracy, albeit in its Islamic form, that is *Shura*.

Besides the legal system, the Islamic revolution implied a 'comprehensive national strategy', which led to a series of reforms between 1992 and 1995, as well as the constitutional reform of 1998, all of which were passed in order to change the administrative system (decentralisation) of Sudan and introduce a new form of citizenship and 'popular democracy' (or participatory democracy). The idea behind this was the autonomy of the masses from the state, this latter having always been considered a necessary evil.

Between 1993 and 1994, the programme of decentralisation (referred to by one commentator as federal reform) produced three levels of federative administration:

- The *wilaya* (ex-region or federate state) with its own judicial organ, a legislative branch (the Wilayal Council) and an executive arm (*wali* and wilayal government)
- The province, with a governor and a provincial council
- The municipality, the functioning of which is crucial for popular participation

Local government was seen as a way to augment the independence of society from central political power. Local democracy functioned through municipal and rural councils.

Between 1991 and 1994, Sudan was divided into 9 and then 26 federate states. The official reason for the territorial administrative division and subdivision was 'popular democracy' and the need to facilitate more direct contact

between power and the people. However, the reform consisted of a pseudo devolution (therefore it was not true federalism) because the governments of the *wilaya* were appointed from the central government.

‘Popular democracy’ worked in a context in which political parties and classic democratic freedoms were not allowed. The rationale behind the abolition of party politics was that the struggle for power had to be replaced by everybody’s struggle to fight underdevelopment. People could express their concerns to the Popular Committee, which had a political role of decision making. These committees were open to everybody and represented the interests of villages, neighbourhoods, nomadic camps, and other groupings. The system of representation was rather complex and, according to some observers such as Marc Lavergne, it was too elitist and designed by intellectuals far away from the illiterate masses of Sudan.⁴⁷ The experiment failed as demonstrated by the low turnout at the local elections in 1995.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the system was designed to give a voice to the voiceless and to the people who, until that point, had depended on a patron-client relationship of power mediated by sultans (local chiefs), Sufi orders and family ties, and other such institutions.

The year 1998 saw a return to a type of partial multipartyism in the form of political association (*attawali assiyasi*) that implied reforms to the ‘federal’ structure. A third level of local government, as established by the Local Government Act, stipulated that a Locality Assembly was to be directly elected by the people and not be representatives of the Popular Committees, the latter being established by approval of the local government. The idea behind the system designed by the al-Turabi faction was to enhance the freedom of the individual to choose representatives for the Local Assembly away from the restrictions of old influences and loyalties.

The grand design of Hassan al-Turabi was in place: the separation of the people from the state and from central government in the name of Islam, and Islamic democracy based on popular consensus. Al-Bashir and other reactionary members of the national government, such as Ali Osman Taha (a former Muslim Brother) and army generals who believed in the centrality of the state essentially to keep a grip on power, were threatened by the political statements of al-Turabi and simply ousted him from institutional positions – taking care not to create a martyr.

Three concomitant factors contributed to the weakness of al-Turabi’s modernising plan:

- Mobilisation at a local level never had the desired effect of transforming an Islamic awakening into an ideology of the masses. Furthermore, social mobilisation was not possible in view of a government incapable of forging a political or even religious legitimisation of its power.
- The disengagement of the state from all social, economic and cultural affairs – until it possibly disappeared altogether – created a deep mistrust between al-Turabi's faction and all those who sought to use the state to gain political and economic power.
- Decentralisation, popular democracy, and the legal system allowed for the return of the 'indigenous power', previously abolished by Nimeiri in 1969. Local chiefs (sultans), old vestiges of the British system of 'indirect rule', regained their positions in the management of local power and justice.

FINAL REMARKS

With the victory of al-Bashir's vision of Islamism and the Islamic state over al-Turabi's, the threat to the status quo and to the state posed by Sudan in the region became only cultural – that is religious and based on the opposition of cultural identities (Muslim, Christian, African and so on) within a state that, albeit formally 'Islamic', possesses all the characteristics of the nation-state of colonial times. Al-Turabi's faction, while in power, tried to change the organisation of power – how power functions in society – substantially. It failed. Since 1999, Sudan no longer represents a threat and its relations with almost every neighbouring country have been improving. Besides the ICC indictment of al-Bashir and other humanitarian initiatives, including the Save Darfur Coalition and similar organisations, which are pushing governments for military intervention in Sudan, post-Turabi Islamic Sudan has ceased to represent an overriding threat in the region.

Some final remarks should be made regarding the democratic credentials of Islamism in the Sudan. Democracy is not about the government of the people by the people, but rather concerns the question of how to govern and how to exercise power. The Sudanese Islamism of the 1990s posed a challenge in this sense, because it tried to subvert the status quo by looking for a new kind of 'state' in which power would be in the hands of the people. This was the real threat to regional stability posed by a section of Islamists who took power in the Sudan. It has little to do with terrorism as a cultural residue of the modern world.

However, the limits of Islamism are plainly evident, as shown by the following:

- The difficulty of a religion-based movement to become revolutionary, given the fact that its Messianic message makes it an exclusive rather than inclusive element in politics and society
- The consequent failure of al-Turabi's revolutionary vision vis-à-vis the conservative vision of other Islamists in the Sudan, who are content to relegate religion to a cultural sphere and avoid any revolutionary discourse
- Religion can be 'universal' only for those who believe in it

In other words, Islam is not socialism or communism, which challenged the bourgeois state universally on the basis of a society divided along social classes, based on social status and the productive role in the economy, and not on the basis of the acceptance of religious dogmas. It was an impossible task to overcome the fact that in a state driven by religious laws religion makes the non-believers inevitably 'outsiders' or lesser citizens. Al-Turabi's solution was to dismantle the nation-state in order to avoid the political impasse between inclusion and exclusion, but the challenge went beyond any other previous experiments in the world history of revolution.⁴⁹ Finally, al-Turabi and his followers represented a challenge in the region not because they were 'terrorists outside history', but because they were attempting the systematic destruction of the one thing that the West and the African political élite still consider to be most sacred: the nation-state as it was created in Africa by colonial powers.

NOTES

- 1 See John Voll, The Sudanese Mahdi: frontier fundamentalist, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10(2) (1979), 145–166. See also John Voll and Sarah Potts-Voll, *The Sudan: unity and diversity in a multicultural state*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1985.
- 2 Ahmad H. Makki, *Harakat al-Ikhwan al Muslimin fi al-Sudan 1944-1969 (The Movement of the Muslim Brothers in Sudan 1944-1969)*, Khartoum: Institute of African and Asian Studies, 1982, 58. On the contrary, Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, *Islamic law and society in the Sudan*, London: Frank Cass, 1987, wrote that *al-Ikhwan* very actively participated in Abboud's campaign of the Islamisation of the South.
- 3 US/Foreign Broadcasting Information Service, Near-East Asia Report, Washington DC, 1958, 63.

- 4 Yusuf F. Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan from the seventh to the early sixteenth centuries*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967, 500.
- 5 Al-Turabi had already been active at the top levels of *Ikhwan* for ten years. It was, however, because of his travelling in Europe that he did not succeed in becoming as influential as he could have been when he returned from Europe with his doctorate in law.
- 6 See Abdelwahab Al-Affendi, *Turabi's revolution: Islam and power in Sudan*, London: Grey Seal, 1991.
- 7 The Umma Party also believed in the Islamic constitution, as did the *Kathmiyyia* although to a lesser extent and with reservations. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader, Muhammad Ahmad Mahjub, was also one of the major proponents of a Western-style government and of a liberal democracy.
- 8 J Voll, *Islam and Stateness in the Modern Sudan*, CDAS Discussion Papers, Montreal: McGill University, 1983, 133.
- 9 A summary of the major points set out in the Islamic Charter is as follows:
 - For a Muslim person Islam must be a system of life, but as such it implies a rational attitude on what is good and bad for a nation.
 - The constitutional structure and the organisation of power (*hukum*) must depend on the Holy Quran and the Sunna as primary sources of government. However, the will of the community must be taken into account as an ordinary source of government.
 - *Shari'a* is the supreme source of law and constitutional principle. The constitution should enforce the presidential system with the president of the republic and prime minister represented by the same person. The judicial power must be independent. Minorities have the same rights as the majority and non-Muslims are not subject to Islamic laws.
 - Peace, politics and decentralisation should be the principles to be followed to govern the relations between the North and the South.
 - The Charter takes into account the position of the individual in society, which should be based on equality, freedom of religion and expression.
 - The economic structure must be based on moral principles. Some rules should be enforced by the state: taxation based on Islamic *zakat*; family inheritance must be ruled by Islamic *mirath*; interest rates should be abolished and Islamic finance should be enforced; exaggerated accumulation of money should not be allowed (*iktinaz*); provision of basic services and exchange of primary goods should not be ruled by the market.
 - Social interaction should be ruled by a culture of education and respect. Therefore practices such as drinking alcohol, prostitution, gambling, etc. should be made illegal.
 - Finally, some policies are suggested regarding the foreign policy of the Sudan that should be guided by pro-Arab and pro-African attitudes. The government shall promote Islam internationally.
- 10 Mamdani's dichotomy between 'citizens', who live under a more democratic and less repressive set of laws and political structure, and 'subjects', who are dominated by despotism and undemocratic rule based on the division between ethnic groups, as the worst and most

intriguing political heritage left by European colonialism in Africa, is very well discussed in his book *Citizen and subject*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

- 11 Graduate constituencies (Self-Government Act 1953) were designed to give more political weight to the educated section of the Sudanese society.

Graduate constituencies results: 1965 elections			
Communists	63 662 votes	34,7 %	11 seats
Islamic Charter Front	49 790 votes	27,1 %	2 seats
NUP	45 854 votes	25,0 %	2 seats
Others	24 092 votes	13,3 %	0 seat
Graduate constituencies results: 1986 elections			
NIF	79 336 votes	38,2 %	23 seats
Communists	39 799 votes	19,2 %	1 seat
Umma	32 967 votes	15,9 %	0 seat
DUP	19 997 votes	9,6 %	0 seat
Independents (South)	14 561 votes	7,0 %	4 seats

Source Atta al-Battahani, *Multi-party elections and the predicament of northern hegemony in the Sudan*, in Michael Cowan and Liisa Laakso, *Multi-party elections in Africa*, Oxford: James Currey, 2002, 264.

- 12 In the 1965 elections, the ICF obtained 5 seats – 3 in territorial constituencies and 2 in graduate constituencies – while the Communists obtained 11 seats, all from the graduate constituencies. The Umma obtained 76 seats and the NUP 54 (out of a total of 173). In the 1968 elections, the Communists collapsed from 11 to 2 seats, the reason being the elimination of graduate constituencies. The ICF also performed very poorly, acquiring only 3 seats out of a total of 218. The Umma and the NUP obtained 101 and 72 seats respectively. Cfr. Al-Battahani *Multi-party elections and the predicament of northern hegemony in the Sudan*, 2002, 257–258.
- 13 Khalid Duran, *Islam und politischer extremismus (Islam and Political Extremism)*, Hamburg: Einführung und Dokumentation, 1985, 96.
- 14 Hassan Al-Turabi, We have eliminated secularism, *The Middle East* 59 (1979), 36.
- 15 Gabriel Warburg and Uri Kupferschmid, *Islam, nationalism and radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan*, New York: Praeger, 1983, 116ff. Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, who took over from Muhammad Ahmad Mahjub in August 1966, supported the idea of an Islamic constitution and created a constitutional committee in which the ICF had 3 representatives out of 44 members. The Islamic constitution was not adopted under these circumstances.
- 16 See different issues of *African Contemporary Record*, issued between 1970 and 1971; Duran, *Islam und politischer extremismus*, 143. In the massacre of Aba Island in March 1970, the cells had been almost disbanded by the military. Important Islamic leaders such as Imam Hadi al-Mahdi and Muhammad Salih Omar were killed and many others fled the country to neighbouring Ethiopia and Libya. However, the clandestine movement continued to be active,

- especially its Islamic branch made up mainly of Muslim Brothers. In 1973, the so-called Revolution of Shacaban started from the Khartoum University Student Union and spread into the streets of the capital. Many members of the *Ikhwan* were arrested. Many more Muslim Brothers were arrested after the attempted coup d'état against Nimeiri in 1975.
- 17 Mohamed E Hamdi, *The making of an Islamic leader: conversations with Hassan al-Turabi*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1998, 13.
 - 18 Of all the political movements, *al-Ikhwan* and the Umma Party were the strongest proponents of Islam as the fundamental nation-building element for Sudan. The universality of Marxist ideology was not an option anymore, since the rank and file of the Communist Party had been dissolved by the Arab-Islamist anti-Communist bloc – and also by the Communists' own hands, thanks to their initial support of Nimeiri's coup d'état, which cost them a significant portion of students' and graduates' support and sympathy. Mention should also be made of the short-lived and elitist Republican Brothers, who proposed a nation of citizens based on democracy and separation between state and religion, state and culture.
 - 19 Mahmood Mamdani, *Saviors and survivors*, New York: Pantheon 2009, 186.
 - 20 Bona Malwal, *People and power in Sudan*, Reading: Ithaca Press, 1981, 196.
 - 21 Among the anti-Turabi faction were al-Sadiq Abd al-Majid, Mahmud Burrat e Malik Badri and the already mentioned Youssif. Apart from Youssif, they were all teachers at the University of Khartoum and had broken with Hassan al-Turabi already in 1977. For their political organisation they chose the old name *al-Hizb al-akhwan al-Muslimin*, and forged an alliance with a conservative subgroup of the *Ansar al-sunna*, while al-Turabi formed *Jebha al-qaoumiya al islamiya* (National Islamic Front) in April 1985. See also John L Esposito, Sudan, in Shireen Hunter, *The politics of Islamic revivalism. diversity and unity*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980, 190.
 - 22 Roland Marchal, Le Soudan entre islamisme et dictature militaire *Maghreb-Machrek : monde arabe*, 137 (July–Sept 1992), 64.
 - 23 Peter N Kok, Conflict over laws in the Sudan, in Hervé Bleuchot, Christian Delmet and Derek Hopwood (eds), *Sudan: history, identity, ideology*, Reading: Ithaca Press, 1991, 242. Included in the 'black list' were the following: the Bankruptcy Act; the Banking Act, because it allowed for interest rates to be collected; the Penal Code which did not include *Hudud*; the Unregistered Land Act (1970), which declared that non-registered land was state owned; the Southern Provinces Self-Government Act (1972). The overall problem was secularism.
 - 24 Tesfaye Teklu, Joachim Von Braun and Elsayed Zaki, *Drought and famine relationships in Sudan* 88 (1991), International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), at <http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/abstract/88/rr88.pdf> (accessed May 2009).
 - 25 Mohamed A Salih, *Environmental politics and liberation in contemporary Africa*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999.
 - 26 For the implications of Islamisation on the judicial system, see: Akolda M Tier, Islamisation of the Sudan laws and constitution: its allure and its impracticability, *Verfassung und Recht in Übersee*, 25 (1992), 199–219.

- 27 See Peter P Ekeh, Colonialism and the two publics in Africa: a theoretical statement, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17(1) (1975), 91–112.
- 28 Some of the most prominent of these businessmen include Ismail al-Bieli, Shaykh Abdel Basri, Tayeb al-Nus, Abdel Rahim Hamdi, Mohamed Yusuf Mohamed, Osman Khaled etc. See. T A Maliqalim Simone, *In whose image? Political Islam and urban practices in Sudan*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 38, 55, 65, 112.
- 29 It was the case, for example, of Hasan al-Banna, a prominent member of the Ansar and the Umma Party who held important positions in the state apparatus. He was condemned to 40 years in prison for economic crimes.
- 30 Maliqalim Simone, *In whose image? Political Islam and urban practices in Sudan*, 38, 65.
- 31 William Reno, *Corruption and the state in Sierra Leone*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- 32 Gianluca Pastori, Il Sudan in cerca di nuovi equilibri, *Politica Internazionale* 1(2) (January-April 1996), 20.
- 33 See in particular a speech by Hassan al-Turabi, Friday Sermon, reported in *Africa Confidential*, 9 November 1990.
- 34 Within al-Bashir's power structure, al-Turabi was the first one to realise that Sudan could not be governed by a minority group lacking any democratic standing. He also obviously did not want the old traditional brotherhoods to come into power again. He therefore decided to create an organisation called the National Congress (NC) to which many political groups were admitted on the sole condition that they would not oppose the creation of a modern Islamic society. This move was made in the name of the unity of the *umma* and the principles of the *shura* – the process of consultation upon which the Islamic concept of democracy is based. The Christian Sudanese were also invited by al-Turabi to participate with the Islamic government and a few ministers in the NC-led government in Khartoum were Christians. For example, in the pre-1999 government, the vice president was a Christian, as well as the secretary of state of foreign affairs, the minister for transport, the minister of public affairs, dozens of members of parliament, diplomats, local governors, and high ranking military and civil servants. In this manner, al-Turabi managed to transfer power from the executive to the legislative, thereby concentrating a great deal of power in his own hands, and initiating a latent power struggle with al-Bashir.
- 35 Talks were reported to have taken place between General al-Bashir and some exiled opposition leaders such as al-Mahdi (Umma Party) and al-Mirghani (DUP).
- 36 More importantly, the United States notoriously supported various Southern Christian and non-Christian warlords – such as the US-educated Garang and his former fellows-in-arms, Akol and Machar, who are now at odds with each other – in an effort to weaken the Northern government. This strategy also includes the forging of alliances between the US and Sudan's mainly Christian neighbouring countries (Uganda, Kenya, Eritrea), who are far from the

- democratic ideals they claim to profess. Britain and Israel also provide arms to the Southern factions, through the conduits of Uganda and Kenya. See Patrick Brunot, *La menace soudanaise*, *Défence Nationale*, 55(2) (1999), 123.
- 37 The Clinton administration decided to bomb the Al-Shifa chemical plant ... despite [the fact that] ... there was insufficient evidence linking it to either Osama Bin Laden or the manufacture of chemical weapons. Under pressure from international protest and media inquiries, administration sources have backpedalled substantially on both claims ... The administration needed to make some kind of gesture in response to the embassy bombings [in Kenya and Tanzania] ... [says Time UN correspondent William Dowell] ... they [the Clinton administration] were experimenting with cruise missiles as a low-risk way of dealing with these issues. *Time Magazine*, 27 October 1999.
- 38 See Hassan al-Turabi, *The Islamic state*, in John L Esposito (ed), *Voices of resurgent Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, 241–251.
- 39 The democratic reforms for which the *Shura* aims are discussed in Hassan al-Turabi, *Al-Shura and democracy: problems of definition and concept*, Beirut: Centre of Arab Unity Studies, 1985.
- 40 Simon Apiku, Bashir consolidates his grip on Sudan, *Middle East Times*, 52 (1999).
- 41 Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim and Bad Muslim: An African Perspective*, (n.d) at <http://essays.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/mamdani.htm> (accessed July 2009)
- 42 Mamdani, 1st ED, *Good Muslim and Bad Muslim: An African Perspective*, New York: Pantheon, 2004.
- 43 Republic of the Sudan, *The Judiciary*, n.d., at <http://www.sudanjudiciary.org/golded/en/spadmin.htm> (accessed April 2010).
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7 Militant Islamist movements in Libya

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)

MUHAMMAD KABIR ISA

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the impact of militant Islamic movements on the cohesion and stability of the Libyan state and the North African sub-region. Using as an example the activities of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, the chapter discusses the influence of the endemic socio-economic crisis – occasioned by economic mismanagement, falling oil prices, international sanctions and a list of other conditions – in developing a popular following for militant Islamism. We argue here that the militant Islamic movement is an offshoot of violent Islamism, the ideological banner of fundamentalism. Our aim is to advance appropriate policy options relevant for developing a state system capable of reconciling conflicting interests within the framework of a sustainable democratic polity.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the impact of Islamic fundamentalism on the state and society in Libya, using the example of the Libyan Islamic

Fighting Group (LIFG). The central issue in this chapter is to determine the impact of militant Islamic groups on the state and society in Libya. How do we account for the resurgence of the militant Islamic movement in Libya? How effective have militant Islamic movements been in influencing and challenging the state and its legitimacy? What is the relationship of the Islamist-social reformer to the state, if any? What are the intended and unintended consequences of militant Islamism on state–society relations? What are the national and international responses to Islamic militancy in Libya; either to affirm or deny its attempts at the delegitimisation of the state?

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE LIBYAN ISLAMIC FIGHTING GROUP (LIFG)

Since 1969, when Colonel Mu’ammar Al-Qadhafi (‘the Brother Leader and Guide of the Revolution’) led a military coup that overthrew the monarch, King Idris I, Libya has been under the rule and dominance of the Arab nationalist regime of the Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. After the coming to power of the Arab Jamahiriya government, Qadhafi created a political system that he claims rejects democracy and political parties, but he purports to have established a ‘third way’, which is superior to capitalism and communism. The governing principles of the Libyan government are predominantly derived from and enshrined in Qadhafi’s ‘Green Book’, which later became the general will and constitution of the Libyan people.¹

Qadhafi claimed that the revolution had established popular democracy through ‘Islamic socialism’. Nonetheless, by the early 1970s, the regime began to face strong internal opposition and dissidence from various groups. The most vociferous of the dissidents came from among those who questioned his true commitment to Islam and compassion for or towards the Libyan people. The primary ideological foundation of Qadhafi’s regime in its early stage began to lose essence and was wavering by the 1970s and 1980s. Increasing opposition from conservative Muslim circles in Libya to Qadhafi’s regime thrived, because of his unorthodox mixture of Islam and socialism that contradicted established Islamic tenets and principles. The Islamic fundamentalist movements of Libya were encouraged by events in neighbouring Egypt, where hard-line jihadist cells had succeeded in assassinating President Anwar Sadat in revenge for his diplomacy with Israel and the West.²

By the 1990s, Islamism had gained a very strong foothold through its popular following in Libyan society and became the basis of strong opposition to the Qadhafi regime. It provided the ideological principles for rallying support for Islamic fundamentalism in Libyan society against the elite-dominated state. In spite of its oil wealth, by the 1990s Libya suffered chronic socio-economic problems, accompanied by a combination of state economic mismanagement, dwindling global oil prices, the emergence of a parallel 'black market' and the impact of the international sanctions placed on Libya in 1992. All of these combined to create a strong feeling of public or popular resentment against the government, thus providing an environment conducive to a political alternative evolving.

The radical brand of political Islam that was sweeping across the entire North African region influenced the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist groups or movements such as the Muslim Brothers, who began to gain greater support. Other new groups that gained ground included the Islamic Gathering (*Harakat Al-Tajammu' Al-Islam*), founded by Mustapha Ali al-Jihani. It was almost entirely based in the eastern part of the country because of the support it enjoyed there and because its ideology was very similar to that of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the western part of the country, another group, the Tabligh (*Jama'at al-Da'wah wal-Tabligh*), evolved successfully and enjoyed an important following in that area. However, the Tabligh grew into a missionary movement that advocated non-violence, and as such it chose to distance itself from politics, especially with the arrest of some of its members in the 1980s. It was later co-opted by the regime and some of its members were given positions as imams, clerics or preachers of Friday sermons.³

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG): history, ideology, organisation and network of affiliations

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) was officially established in October 1995, although it had been in existence long before this formal declaration, hence there are speculations about the precise duration of its existence and operations.⁴ A clandestine jihadist organisation in its early formation, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group was established in Libya in 1982, and was later led by Awatha al-Zuwawi, who is linked to the historical origin of the LIFG. This small jihadist organisation had close links to and networked with other militant

Islamic or fundamentalist movements outside Libya, particularly those based in Afghanistan.

There is also evidence that members of the jihadist group visited and were based in Afghanistan for a certain period. In 1986, Zuwawi spent some weeks in Afghanistan before returning to Libya. It seems that the jihadist group was attracted to Afghanistan because of the opportunities it offered to network with other global jihadist groups, as well as to refine and sharpen their fighting skills in guerrilla warfare at the training camps created by the Afghani jihadist organisations. While networking with the Afghanistan jihadists, the Libyan jihadists were exposed to the Islamist scholar Abdallah 'Azzam, whose writings often appeared on the group's website. Furthermore, the early contacts the Libyan jihadists had with their Afghani counterparts exposed them to fighting side by side with these Afghanis against the Soviet-led invasion, and this motivated and inspired the Libyan fighters in Afghanistan to establish the LIFG in 1992.⁵

However, the LIFG did not officially announce its formation until 1995, and is the same movement that declared jihad and fought against Qadhafi and his regime. By the 1990s, the LIFG had formed its basic infrastructure in Libya from which it began to run its operations and activities against the Qadhafi regime in a renewed and rejuvenated effort.

The ideological roots of the LIFG, which are published on its website, called upon Muslims in and outside Libya to join in the fight against the enemies of Islam. The LIFG believes it is fighting to defend the Islamic faith from domination by the laws of heretics. One of the LIFG religious scholars, Abu al-Mundhir Sami al-Sa'idi, has published a book that explains the legitimisation of the LIFG. He posits, by citing other radical Muslim religious scholars such as the Saudi Shaikh Safar al-Hawali, that the lay ruler (Qadhafi) is a *jahili* ruler, not an Islamic one, and therefore must be considered a heretic. Al-Sa'idi also cites Shaikh Omar al-Ashqar, who believes that every Muslim is duty bound to fight against the *jahili* rulers who have forcibly imposed heretic rules and suppressed the attempt to implement the Islamic *Shari'ah* in their society. These rules have impeded the implementation of *Shari'ah*, and nothing connects them to Islam. LIFG radical scholars are major proponents of the thinking of Abdallah Azzam (co-founder of al-Qaeda) and Sayyid Qutb, especially of their views that those rulers who imported the ideas of nationalism from the West (Sadat and Qadhafi) and rejected a lifestyle in accordance with *Shari'ah* laws are heretics and must be opposed.⁶ The existence and legitimisation of the LIFG is based on the radical

teachings of al-Qaeda religious scholars and Sayyid Qutb – an obvious fact given that LIFG activities took root in Afghanistan, which is largely influenced by Azzam and other al-Qaeda orientations. In addition, the LIFG sought to free the Libyan population from the ‘slavery’ of Qadhafi’s regime.⁷

The founding members of LIFG were initially members of Zuwawi’s movement, the Libyan Mujahedeen (Holy Warriors), who suffered early setbacks in disagreements, internal squabbles and rivalries, and their few confrontations with the state led to further misfortunes – arrests, detentions and death sentences for some members. Despite these disheartening failures, the Libyan Mujahedeen, a copy of the Afghanistan Mujahedeen and now the LIFG, remained resolute in their quest to root out what they regarded as the apostate Qadhafi and his regime. In the course of the development of the LIFG, other Libyan fighters began to rally around and recognise Awatha al-Zuwawi as ‘Commander of the Fighters’ (*amir*). Zuwawi himself had been an Islamic law student in Tripoli and, by 1985–1986, many sophisticated and university-educated individuals gathered around him, especially Abu Munther al-Saadi, who later emerged as the LIFG spiritual leader. In the process of the 1980 transformation of the LIFG into an underground movement, Zuwawi established an advisory council, the *Shura*, and a clandestine organisation of which most of the founders and cadres of the initial fighting group were members.⁸

From April 1994, the LIFG was led by Abu Abdallah al-Sadeq, a Libyan citizen born in Tripoli and an engineering graduate from Tripoli University. He was also an alumnus of the Afghanistan training camps and had fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s, where he sustained a permanent injury. Upon his return to Libya, he settled in the eastern part of the country where he coordinated and supervised the organisation of LIFG. It was from that same base that he planned, coordinated and executed the failed assassination attempt on Qadhafi in Derna in 1994.

Al-Sadeq is the head of the political bureau (*al-Maktab al-Siyasi*) of the LIFG, thus making him the de facto political leader of LIFG. The political bureau supervises the political activity of the group, which includes the planning and execution of its operations. At the same time, according to the LIFG charter, it is also ruled by a *majlis* (or *Shura*, consultative council), with the *Shura* council needing a quorum of only seven members for its decisions to be binding on all its members. Another significant structure of the LIFG is the judicial committee (*al-Lajnah al-Shar’iyya*). It is responsible for all judicial issues and the education

of the LIFG and is involved with the training of propagandists and Islamic scholars. The committee also concerns itself with wider issues in Libyan society, issuing messages and articles that criticise tendencies in the society that negate Islamic principles and tenets. The judicial committee has three arms, namely: research and study (*Far' al-Dirasat wal-Buhuth*); propaganda and guidance (*Far' al-Da'awah wal-Irshad*); and judicial matters (*Far' al-Ifta' wal-Qadha*).

Finally, the information bureau of the LIFG is the third most important body of the group. It is engaged in publishing letters, articles and other information directed at the Libyan people. The information bureau is used to call upon the Libyan people to devote themselves to strict adherence to the Islamic faith, principles and tenets. It updates the Libyan populace on the current status of the guerilla struggle between the Islamic fundamentalist group and the Qadhafi regime.⁹

The process of integration or transformation of the LIFG into a global network and organisation began with the arrest of Zuwawi, its leader, in 1989. Following the forceful quelling of Islamic fundamentalist demonstrations in Benghazi and the mass arrest of LIFG members and their sympathisers (those Libyans who were drawn to the jihadist way of thinking), LIFG members were forced to migrate en masse to Afghanistan. There they joined their Arab companions under the banner of the Afghani Mujahedeen movement in fierce battles against the central communist government in Kabul.¹⁰ By 1992 the LIFG (*Muqatilah*) had changed into an established organisation in Afghanistan and was committed to the overthrow of the Qadhafi regime in Libya and the imposition of an Islamic state based on the *Shari'ah*.

The dangerous and tense situation created by the Soviet invasion and the fierce battles in Afghanistan created a breeding ground for a relentless army of guerrillas that succeeded in resisting the Soviet presence. The Afghan situation therefore provided unprecedented opportunities for a disparate transnational Muslim network of dissident groups to unite in terms of thought, purpose and infrastructure, which the LIFG effectively tapped and fed into.

The LIFG that emerged in Afghanistan acquired fighting skills in readiness for the final onslaught in Libya to rout the 'heretic' leader and the regime. By 1986, the Libyan fighters, or LIFG as they were referred to, were being trained in the Salman al-Farisi camp in the area of Ghindaw, located in the Pakistani tribal zone along the border with Afghanistan and owned by the al-Qaeda leadership and *Shura* council. Thus an intricate network of links was established between the LIFG and the al-Qaeda Islamic fundamentalist movements. The

Al-Qaeda movement and network had also been established in Afghanistan in 1988 by the Saudi exile Osama bin Laden, alongside the Mujahedeen movement. The LIFG later became an affiliate of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, but maintained its own identity, leadership and corporate infrastructures. It only shared training camps, as did other al-Qaeda affiliates in Afghanistan, and was called upon from time to time to provide material resources that championed the al-Qaeda cause.¹¹ In other words, the LIFG played a key role in serving as an al-Qaeda affiliate in Afghanistan from the late 1980s to early 1990s. The LIFG also found affiliate kinship with other regional Islamic militant and fundamentalist movements such as the Egyptian organisation *Al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya*, the most prominent and forceful movement among the Afghan-trained Islamic militants and fundamentalists of extreme orientation in North Africa. In the mid-1990s, the supporters of *Al-Gama'at* in Europe and North America organised and distributed news updates of this organisation within the global network for the LIFG. Thus the LIFG also helped to propagate and distribute the ideals of another Islamic militant and fundamentalist movement, thereby, in turn, assisting the other's cause in line with their affiliate agreement.¹²

Between 1992 and 1993, many of the LIFG fighters in the Arab-Afghan movement (Mujahedeen) were forced to relocate to Sudan, like their militant Arab fellows who were forced to move to other conflict flashpoints, such as Algeria and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The massive exodus of LIFG fighters from the zone was caused by the response of the Pakistani authorities to the activities of the foreign fighters in the border zone, which made life difficult for the fighters. The LIFG and al-Qaeda *Shura* leaders and other leading associates of the global network of militant Islamists relocated and were accommodated by the Sudanese Islamist leader, Hassan al-Turabi, in Sudan. There the LIFG intensified its military theory and training, intelligence, study of security matters, tactics, guerrilla warfare and instructions along with other Arab compatriots in special villa complexes. At the same time, the LIFG found the means to retain contact with the remnant elements of the LIFG in Libya.¹³

The impact of LIFG operations and state–society responses in Libya

A number of internal and external factors led to the formation of the LIFG, chief among them being the problem of interpretation and propagation of a

unique brand of Islamic faith by Mu'ammar Qadhafi through his 'Green Book'. Libya is a country where the strict and orthodox interpretation of the Quran is based on known jurists and is considered sacrosanct. It is taboo to introduce innovations or deviations, which Qadhafi's Green Book sought to do, thus committing heresy.

Secondly, there was deep-seated resentment on the part of the educated Libyan Islamic elites over the regime's heterodox religious orientation, conspicuous corruption and economic mismanagement. This was especially acute in view of the reduced global oil prices in the 1980s, and the deteriorating economic conditions of average Libyans. Thirdly, and consequent to the above, the Libyan society experienced soaring unemployment, food and goods shortages, and overall economic malaise arising from the imposition of the UN sanctions placed on Libya in 1992.¹⁴

All these socio-economic factors constituted the internal crisis factors that heightened opposition to the regime, thereby increasing and encouraging confrontation with the regime. The sophisticated and highly trained security apparatus of the regime drove all forms of opposition (political and religious) underground. Most fled in self-exile to Egypt, Afghanistan, Sudan, parts of the Middle East, Europe and North America. This occurred especially in the 1980s after the massive arrests of allies of the former ruling monarch for alleged coup conspiracies and the leaders of Islamic fundamentalist movements that sought to challenge the very ideological, spiritual and legal basis of the state. These internal conditions compelled the Libyan jihadists to migrate to Afghanistan, where they trained and joined forces with the Mujahedeen to fight the Soviets. The experience acquired in military training and the organisation of guerrilla movements influenced the development of the Libyan Mujahedeen, which later became the LIFG. The Libyan jihadists were also influenced by the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Algeria, especially by the assassination of President Anwar Sadat.

In June 1995, the LIFG unleashed its militants in an operation in which its members, disguised as members of Qadhafi's Revolutionary Committee, freed a fellow comrade who was being held in a hospital. A week later, they attacked a prison in Benghazi, where they released more of their detained comrades. In September 1995, the LIFG had a fierce encounter with state security forces in Benghazi, which left scores dead on both sides. After weeks of intense fighting with the state security forces, the LIFG officially declared its objectives as

if to show that the encounter was a litmus test of its capacity and capabilities to contain the state security apparatus. The conflict situation escalated and intensified, and in March 1996 several dozen Islamic fundamentalists escaped from the al-Kuwaifiyyah prison near Benghazi and fled into the mountains of the north-eastern part of the country. In hot pursuit of the escaped prisoners, the security forces came under serious attack from the militant Islamic fundamentalist group, whose members were using the mountains as cover to pursue their agenda.¹⁵

In another instance in June 1996, the LIFG militants killed eight police officers at one of their guerrilla training centres in the mountains near the town of Derna, east of Benghazi. In July of the same year, government forces embarked on massive arrests and swept the country for militant Islamic or fundamentalist elements using ground and air assault tactics on LIFG mountain bases and operational infrastructures. This assault further encouraged the Islamic militants to make another attempt to kill Qadhafi. In spite of several setbacks and heavy casualties in its confrontations with the Libyan state forces, the LIFG made at least two notable assassination attempts on Qadhafi in 1996. In the second attempt, an LIFG operative and Islamic militant hurled a grenade at Qadhafi in November 1996, during his visit to the desert town of Brak. Qadhafi was very lucky to escape unhurt.

However, the LIFG suffered a major setback that weakened its resolve with the demise of its founder, leader and commander, Salah fathi bin Suleiman (a.k.a. Abu Abdelrahman al-Khattab), in September 1997 in a battle with Libyan soldiers near Derna.¹⁶

The LIFG persisted, at an intermittent rate over the years, to launch attacks on military and police installations and outposts in the pursuit of its goals of destabilising the regime. However, the government forces subsequently began to gain the upper hand in the contest against the Islamic fighters. The government used intimidation against citizens wherever they thought LIFG fighters were hiding in their vicinity. The LIFG suffered further persecution when, in the summer of 1998, government forces embarked on mop-up operations in the areas of its influence and strongholds to flush out and rid the country of the vestiges of the Islamic militants and fundamentalist jihadists. Scores of its sympathisers were pursued, arrested and detained throughout the country.¹⁷

True to the aggressive pattern of the Libyan authority's responses to the operations of the LIFG, such as the Derna confrontation, 30 000 soldiers were

mobilised, heavy tanks employed, and RPG launchers and other heavy weapons were deployed to contain the LIFG operations. The response of the Libyan authorities in Derna and other parts of Libya ultimately dislocated and weakened the LIFG's infrastructures and operations in the country. Despite all of its sacrifices, there never seemed to be any mass sympathy for the LIFG in the Libyan society, and little public sentiment in its favour as an Islamic militant group.¹⁸ This compelled the LIFG to temporarily abandon its Libyan cause in the late 1990s and to pursue its activities in exile.

Another aspect of the Libyan state's response to the militants and also to the aggressive nature and increasing number of LIFG activities and the threat these posed to the stability of the Libyan state was that in mid-1995, Qadhafi increased pressure on the Sudanese leader, Hassan al-Turabi, and his Khartoum government to expel the influential LIFG contingent and its al-Qaeda network of militant Islamists based in Khartoum in Sudan. In spite of the initial refusal of the Sudanese leadership in Khartoum, it ultimately succumbed to the pressure by demanding that bin Laden disengage himself from the Libyan Afghan veteran fighters, the LIFG, and their network of affiliates based in Sudan at that time. This action created a rift in the affiliate relationship between LIFG and al-Qaeda.

In the period that followed the Libyan leader's pressure and the subsequent expulsion of the Libyan Afghan veterans of LIFG from Sudan, many of them returned home between 1996 and 1998, but could not stay for long. Upon their arrival, they were faced with a major internal crackdown on their membership by Libyan security services. To retain what was left of its structures and leadership, the LIFG therefore ordered its leaders to leave the country. An important al-Qaeda associate, Abu Anas al-Liby, relocated to the United Kingdom where he was given political asylum. In the United Kingdom, al-Liby established a robust underground support for the LIFG network.¹⁹

The Afghani nation once again gained prominence from 1998 to 2001 with the rise of the Taliban regime as the preferred centre for intense global Islamic fundamentalist activities for recruiting, training and militarily indoctrinating Islamic extremists, radicals and jihadists, who now flocked to the centre. The LIFG and al-Qaeda resolved their differences, which arose from the Sudan expulsion, to share more and more human and material resources during the second phase of their engagement in Afghanistan between 1997 and 2001.

AN EVALUATION OF THE ROLE OF REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES TO COMBATING ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN LIBYA AND NORTH AFRICA

A discredited former British MI-5 operative once claimed that the British intelligence service financed and facilitated the first assassination attempt by the LIFG on Qadhafi in 1996. Despite its denial of such links, subsequent events following the development of the LIFG increasingly lent credence to such claims. Libyan Afghan veterans were granted political asylum in Britain from where they began to issue LIFG communiqués, using the rising anti-Qadhafi sentiments stemming from the 1988 bombing of Pan AM Flight 103 over Lockerbie that was linked to Qadhafi security operatives. The involvement of the British government in the operations, and especially the campaign against Qadhafi, remains a controversial issue.²⁰

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attack on the US, the US government launched a campaign to root out all Islamic fundamentalist fighters of all nationalities from Afghanistan and to end Afghanistan's further relevance as a base and launch pad for Islamic fundamentalist activities on a global scale. In this respect, the US government named the al-Qaeda leadership and its affiliates such as LIFG 'specially designated global terrorists' (SDGT). Late in 2001, the US government deployed military operations to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban government and its affiliated network of Islamic militant or fundamentalist associates and networks, such as al-Qaeda, the LIFG, and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM).

Also consequent to 9/11, under a global framework to combat terrorism, a team of US intelligence officers met Libyan intelligence officers, especially one, Musa Kusa, face to face for the first time. They exchanged intelligence on the activities of the global operations of the LIFG, the names of LIFG operatives and other Libyan Islamic militants or fundamentalists of extreme orientation who had had previous training in Afghanistan, as well as dossiers on LIFG leaders living in the United Kingdom. The British government is yet to designate LIFG a terrorist organisation, perhaps surprisingly in view of the fact that a significant number of its leaders live and carry out activities in London and Manchester.²¹

In 2002, the US forces captured the manager of the Khalden training camp, Abu Zubaydah, at a residence in Faisalabad in Pakistan, along with three LIFG

operatives and several individuals known to be affiliated to the LIFG. Likewise, several LIFG members were captured by the US forces on the battlefields in Afghanistan and were subsequently transferred to the US prisoner camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. LIFG activist Omar Deghayes, a Libyan who fled to the United Kingdom in exile and to study law, was also captured in Afghanistan where he had received military training at the Khalden camp. He was accused by the US government forces of being an al-Qaeda and LIFG operative, and as such was taken to the US prison in Guantanamo Bay as an enemy combatant. The US government, through its immigration laws, also designated LIFG as a 'foreign terrorist organisation' (FTO). It noted the involvement of LIFG members in a number of 'terrorist' activities in North Africa and elsewhere and concluded that the LIFG constituted one of the most serious threats to US interests and personnel in Libya and elsewhere.²²

In May 2003, the LIFG leaders based in Europe conspired with their Moroccan GICM affiliates to plan and execute a wave of suicide bombing attacks on targets in the Moroccan city of Casablanca, where over 40 people were killed and more than 100 injured and maimed. The flashpoints of the attacks included Western and Jewish interests and community centres, a restaurant and a hotel. In response to the attack, the Rabat Criminal Court of Appeals in Morocco convicted in absentia the British-based LIFG *Shura* council member Abdel Rahman al-Faqih, especially for his historical link with the GICM and the liaison role he has played between the LIFG and the GICM.

In 2003, the LIFG shifted its base of operations from Afghanistan to Iraq in response to the US-led invasion of Iraq and the 'war against terror'. In response, the top *Shura* council leadership of the LIFG called on Muslims throughout the world to resist the US in Iraq. Several prominent LIFG commanders took over very high-ranking al-Qaeda leadership positions in answer to the resistance call against US activities in Iraq. Most notable among the LIFG leaders are Abu al-Laith al-Liby and Abu Yahya al-Liby. They are considered some of the top commanders of al-Qaeda in recent times, with LIFG origins and several years of guerrilla experience in Afghanistan and Libya.²³

In February 2006, the US Treasury Department initiated measures to restrict the LIFG's operational base in the United Kingdom by marking five individuals, three companies, and one 'charity' as terrorist groups and networks. It labelled the Birmingham, UK resident Abdel Rahman al-Faqih as a top senior LIFG leader; similarly Midlands resident Mohammed

Benhammedi was identified as a key financier for the LIFG and a member of the LIFG economic committee, and is believed to provide funds for the LIFG through Sara Properties Limited, Meadowbrook Investments Limited and Ozlam Properties Limited. The US government also tagged a charity group, the Sanabel Relief Agency (SRA), as a front for LIFG activities, placing it on its list of specially designated global terrorist entities (SDGT), allegedly for supporting the LIFG's jihadist activities.²⁴

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To sum up the discussion generally, Islam does not distinguish between social, political, economic and religious issues; all are intrinsically connected and linked together. Islamism is also not limited to the idea of an Islamic government and Islamic law alone, but all Muslims are expected to uphold this perception. Militant Islamism in Libya is a direct consequence of the political repression and oppression of Islamist movements, an alleged outcome of a deteriorating society led by heretics. Militant Islamism is an offshoot of violent Islamism, the ideological banner of fundamentalism.

The rise of global Islamic militancy can be attributed to the failure of political economic reforms across Africa, high unemployment among the youth, overdependence on the West, and the absence of national identity nationalism. We argue further that political Islam is not opposed to militant Islamism in terms of its worldview of integrating modernity with Islamism. Neither is militant Islamism simply a call for a return to an ontological form of Islam that rejects modernity. Islamism or political Islam laid the foundation, principles and ideological underpinning for the emergence of militant Islamic movements across North Africa.

The Libyan state is in crisis owing largely to the shortcomings of the regime's so-called ideology of Arab nationalist-cum-Islamist and socialist programmes that have failed to 'revolutionise' Libyan society and unify the Arab people. The legitimacy of the regime and its ruling class has been weakened and threatened; thus militant Islamism has become the ideological platform for mobilising, recruiting and resisting the state, as illustrated in the activities of the LIFG. The Libyan government has responded to Islamism and Islamic militancy in Libya with high-handedness as well as indiscriminate repression and suppression. The regime does not tolerate any form of opposition, and nor are democratic practices or institutions, structures and values allowed to take root. Civil society, political

parties and other forms of opposition have been stifled out of existence and into exile. The absence of democratic projects, values and institutions in Libyan society is another urgent and cogent factor behind the radicalisation, extremism and militancy of Islamic movements such as the LIFG in Libya.

The Libyan state still perceives Islamism as a major threat to its stability. This is obvious from the manner in which the Qadhafi foundation in Libya is currently negotiating with most of the imprisoned top leaders of the LIFG in Libyan BuSalim prisons, such as the popular Shura council member, commander and leader, Abdallah al-Sadiq, and his assistant, Abu-Hazim. They were arrested through the cooperation of a global and international interstate security network with the Libyan authorities following the 9/11 attack, and have been asked to renounce violence against the state in exchange for some form of negotiated state pardon and integration into the state structures.

The Libyan government can do as some governments (Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Turkey, and to some extent Egypt and Tunisia) have done regarding a political solution to the problems of political Islam. These states have tentatively opened up their political systems to allow Islamic parties to participate in elections and emerge as the leading opposition. Islamic parties can also join in as part of a ruling coalition as they have done in Jordan, Pakistan, Malaysia and Turkey. Or they can form alliances with other political parties or professional bodies with whom they share common ideals.

However, the electoral success of Islamic movements in North Africa and other parts of the Muslim world (Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey, to some extent) has caused the governments and establishment to reassess their strategy and course of action. Some of these states are now experiencing a return to political repression, the restriction of the Islamic political representation or its outright banning (especially in Algeria and Egypt).

Therefore, as part of this study, we suggest that, in spite of their Islamist fundamentalist ideologies, Islamist fundamentalist movements be permitted to participate in a democratic process where they possess the capacity to mobilise voters, and to negotiate with other competing interests either to form the government or go into opposition. The transformation of the Libyan society from what it is today to a true democratic institution is the only answer to the emerging, cyclical resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism.

As a matter of urgency the Libyan government should give priority to disbanding armed and militant Islamist movements in the country as well as

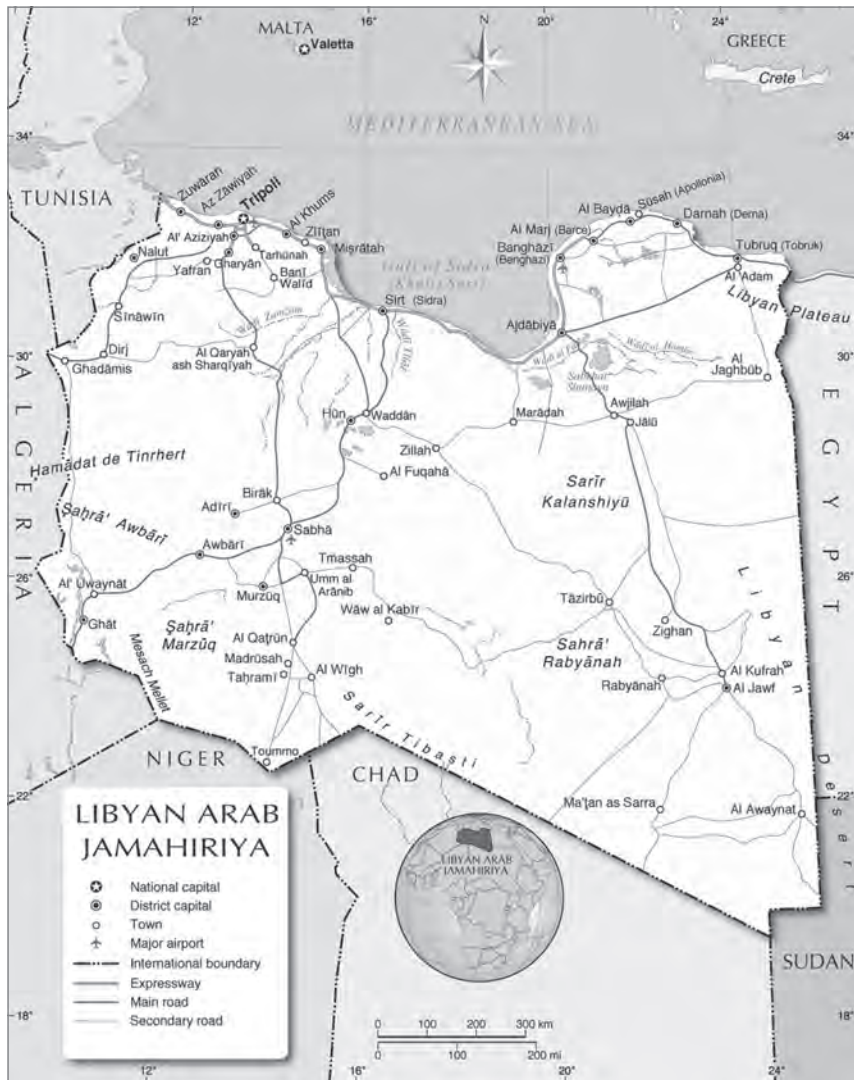
Figure 1 Libyan administrative and political map



Source <http://www.mapsofworld.com/libya/libya-political-map.html>

finding a way to make militant Islamism unappealing to its citizens. In the past Libya has provided a readily available and regular supply of militants for insurgencies in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Turning this tendency around can be achieved through political, security, legal and diplomatic means. In particular, the Libyan regime should place less emphasis on military solutions to bring

Figure 2 Libyan political map



Source <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/libya-administrative-map.htm>

an end to militant Islamist movements. The strong links of the LIFG movement to al-Qaeda should not limit nor impede the capacity of the Libyan government to negotiate an end to their campaigns.

NOTES

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8 Women in Islamist movements

OMAYMA ABDEL-LATIF

INTRODUCTION

Women in Islamist movements are increasingly playing an active role in shaping the politics of these movements. One of the most prominent features of Islamist politics today has to do with the role women play as political activists. In their attempt to broaden their participation and representation both inside and outside the movements' political and organisational structures, women activists have carved an important niche for themselves, offering perhaps what could develop into an Islamic model for women activists.

This chapter has been inspired by the interesting debates that have been taking place and continue to unfold among women activists in Islamist movements. It addresses key themes, including women's questioning of their roles as political actors inside and outside their movements; the challenges they face as women activists operating within repressive political and social settings; and their struggle for recognition of the significance of their roles in furthering political and social causes through their own movements and in society at large.

The role of women in Islamist movements has gained added significance owing to two facts. Firstly, in many Arab countries women are becoming a

voting power that can no longer be ignored. While it is difficult to give exact statistics since figures vary from one country to another, in Egypt official figures show that women voters constitute approximately 35 to 37 per cent of the total voting population. Involving women in essential political processes such as the electoral process has been at the heart of the strategic efforts of several movements, which have hoped to capitalise on the increasing voting power of women.

Secondly, the increasing number of women activists involved in different forms of protest politics such as street politics, online activism and, most importantly, playing an essential role in the electoral politics of the different Islamist movements, defies the long-held views of women in Islamist movements as being passive and subservient, and locked into that situation. Evidence suggests that more and more Islamist women are gaining greater visibility in the public sphere as significant political activists. Nevertheless, they have become restless with their subordinate status and are seeking ways to accommodate their demands for power sharing within their movements and through greater participation in politics. An important development is that of a young generation of Islamist women activists who are critical of their marginal status and believe that women activists have outgrown their subordinate position in their movements. This young generation constitutes a dynamic force that has been pushing for change.

There is a dearth of information regarding Islamist women activists as most of the research and studies on Islamist movements and politics have focused mainly on the male organisations, while little or nothing has been written about the 'other half' of the movements. There are, however, the writings of an early generation of women activists themselves, which provide insight into the key challenges that generation had to face. These writings also show that the organisational structure was much more advanced than it is currently. The work of a legendary figure like Zaynab al-Ghazali still remains significant in the overall understanding of activism among Islamist women. Access to the writings of women activists and their public visibility has helped to guide researchers with regard to who has been leading the change in Islamist movements. For example, the activist Jihan al-Halfawi of the Muslim Brotherhood, who was the first woman candidate for parliamentary elections in 2000, emerged to become the female face of the Muslim Brotherhood in the subsequent years. Al-Halfawi, a strong proponent of women activism within the Islamic frame of reference,

encouraged women activists to voice their concerns and their aspirations of advancing their status inside the movement.

Another fact to consider is that the role of women inside the various movements has never been as publicly visible as now. Therefore, this chapter relies heavily on the discussions and writings of women activists, be they in the form of articles, seminars or even private blogs. Most important, however, is the fact that the main source of information has been lengthy interviews with groups of women activists themselves, who represent different social, educational and generational sectors within the Islamist movement.

The methodology used in this chapter has been a combination of different approaches, including one-on-one in-depth interviews with women activists who belong to different rankings within the groups. Some have been with the movements for 40 years, while others are new arrivals. In these interviews, the researcher was keen to talk to activists representing different educational and social backgrounds. Some represented a rather conservative view, others were more liberal. The researcher also monitored the public activities of women activists and therefore attended a number of protests and sit-ins organised by the women themselves. Research also included following closely the women's work in the movements' election machine. Activists' writings online, particularly those of the younger generation, offered a wealth of information on the attitudes and ways of thinking of this generation. At times, the researcher held small discussion groups with the activists regarding the matter at hand. While the outcome of such debates and questioning remains unpredictable, the rise of activism among Islamic women is a phenomenon that deserves close attention and study.

There is still much we do not know about the status of women in today's Islamist politics. For instance, to what degree do women participate in the various activities of the movements, such as organising protests or elections, recruiting new members, raising funds, or socialising the young politically?

Other questions which this chapter seeks to answer concerns the structures of women's organisations in the Islamist movements, their nature and the degree to which they are institutionalised, and the place they occupy within the movements' hierarchies. Moreover, what are the tasks and activities assigned to these organisations? Still further questions address the perceptions of women activists of their roles in the movements – whether or not they are introducing change to the movements' standing vis-a-vis women issues from within an

Islamist framework, and the type of discourse they embrace regarding women's roles and rights. In other words, what do women activists make of the notion of Islamic feminism? Do they feel marginalised within the movements and do they themselves feel able to assume bigger roles politically? Are discussions regarding women's issues being suppressed or delayed by being labelled as secondary?

One of the significant conclusions of this research is that there is much pervasive ferment and discussion among Islamist women. The outcome of these debates and agitation is, however, still unpredictable, and it is doubtful that, at this point, the participants themselves know how far their ideas will develop and evolve.

Another conclusion is that rigorous research and study of the issue are lacking, but is most necessary since political activism by women in Islamist movements is a growing phenomenon that will remain significant for some time.

However, most importantly, there are other pressing questions that need to be addressed in future research. These include investigating the seriousness of structural obstacles to progress towards broader representation in the higher echelons of Islamist movements. What are the prospects for improving the status of women in each movement? To what extent are women succeeding in developing a coherent, compelling Islamic model of women's rights? Can their ideas affect the position of women in the Arab world?

One must also note that it is premature at this point to conclude that a fully-fledged Islamist paradigm for addressing women's issues and concerns has emerged, but there has certainly been an attempt to develop one. If such a paradigm became widely accepted, it could be enormously influential in the Arab and, more broadly, the Muslim world, much more so than the efforts to promote women's rights by Western and Western-supported feminist organisations. So far, Islamist women remain divided on many issues. However, it is clear that there are strong and powerful women among Islamist activists, and that they are extremely unlikely to accommodate themselves meekly in an interpretation of Islam that relegates women to a subordinate social and political condition.

The section that follows gives an overview of activism among Islamist women. In this overview, the chapter considers the implications of including and excluding women in Islamic politics, specifically in Egypt. It also investigates whether Islam and women's rights are reconcilable and how radical organisations have responded to reformist movements. Thus the chapter touches on the conflict between the reformist and conservative movements; and the

roles, concerns and rights of women from within an Islamist frame of reference, using, for example, the organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood. Finally, the paper considers what the future holds for women within the system of the Muslim Brotherhood.

INCLUSION VERSUS EXCLUSION

One of the most significant consequences of participation by women in Islamist politics is their having a niche in the public sphere. Women activists would be in a position where they could participate in the ongoing debate about the meaning of being politically active. Exclusion, on the other hand, forces women activists not only to question their roles inside the movement, but also to seek reformation from within an Islamic frame of reference.

Increasing numbers of women from across the social spectrum have joined Islamist movements. In doing so, they are searching for a public space in which they can press ahead with their demands for a better status without the risk of being stigmatised as Western 'stooges' or being rendered social outcasts. However, it should be said that it is not just because of the wish to advance a women's agenda that these women join Islamist movements. Some genuinely wish to engage in public domain activities and these organisations are the only places that offer them a dignified space. To boot, women activists have proved themselves capable of meeting the challenges imposed on them as a result of their new public roles. Being involved in various political roles – from mobilisation to campaigning and fundraising, and falling short only of fighting (as in the case of resistance movements such as Hezbollah) – has placed women in a position where they can participate in the ongoing debate about the meaning of being politically active. Such efforts prove that the role of women in politics can no longer be ignored.

However, social and cultural norms as well as the dominant interpretations of Islam – and not Islam itself – have often been cited as obstacles to full political participation by women. While acknowledging the role played by women in furthering the various movements' political and social agendas, some movements remain reluctant or unwilling to put women in leadership positions. Such stances have led women activists sometimes to question their roles in those movements, leading some of them to seek reformation from within an Islamic reference regarding the place of women in the movements and in the public sphere in general. This conclusion is drawn mainly from lengthy interviews

with several women activists of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, which will be at the core of this paper.¹

It is worth mentioning that such attempts at questioning the role of women in Islamist politics have not yet been translated into an organised and conscious effort on the part of the women activists. However, this issue has aroused a sense of resentment or criticism among many of the women activists in the Muslim Brotherhood. Here the women acknowledge injustices such as not being fairly represented in leadership positions as a fact, and seek to change this without challenging the party line or agenda. Stated differently, there is no desire or attempt to challenge the party agenda or priorities.

What most activists fail to mention, however, is that excluding women from positions of power is also a Brotherhood survival tactic. Having a women's division operating away from the gaze of the security apparatus guarantees the continuity of the movement in spite of the severe security strikes that aim to eliminate it. The 'Sisters' then become 'the shadow [B]rother', or a second line of defence, that ensures the movement will survive times of crisis.

This questioning of their role suggests that we might be witnessing the women activists' adoption of a discourse that addresses women's roles, concerns and rights from within an Islamist frame of reference. In other words, their stance suggests working from within the Islamic tradition to tackle questions important to Muslim women. Although it is still too early to suggest that such efforts are organised and conscious, it is worth pursuing a closer examination of the emerging new posture of women activists.

Interviews with women activists in two Islamist movements – the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and Hezbollah, the Lebanese Resistance Movement – pointed to a common practice among Islamist women activists to use the argument that defending women's rights is part of defending Islam itself against the corruption of its own ideals, and hence placing feminist demands in the wider context of a religious discussion or reform, and countering criticism of a narrow 'womanist' bias.²

In Egypt, a country that has universal suffrage, Islamist organisations reach women as well as men, and they need women activists. From of its lengthy experience of electoral politics, the Muslim Brotherhood realised that, in election-based political systems where women are allowed to vote, female candidates could help them win votes. It was thus the first Islamist movement to field a female candidate in the 2000 and 2005 parliamentary elections.

ISLAM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS: CAN THEY BE RECONCILED?

Western commentators have generally projected a negative view of the relationship between Islamism (and often times Islam itself) and women. Although some commentaries take into consideration the variations and shades of differences between Islamist groups, others treat Islamism's relationship with women as monolithic.³

The general view, however, depicts women as suffering under an oppressive patriarchal society, chained by a long list of cultural and religious taboos. Advocates of this view hold Islamism responsible for the reversal process that has eroded many of the socio-political gains women's movements achieved in many Arab countries. According to this view, Islamism – and among extreme voices in this reductionist approach, Islam itself – and women's rights cannot be reconciled because they are inherently in conflict.

This discourse points out that Islamists make 'use of religion to subordinate women and perpetuate discriminatory laws and practices'. Such groups, which include both Muslim women living in the West as well as champions of feminist movements in the Arab world, fixate on social customs, which are often depicted as a symbol of the inherent oppression of women. In this reductionist discourse of women's rights groups, issues such as the *hijab* (head covering), crimes of honour, domestic violence, and inheritance and marriage laws are constantly referred to as symbols of the deeper oppression of women.⁴

Western-oriented groups maintain that Islamist movements have sought to create an Islamic consciousness among women that has been meant only to strengthen the movement, rather than liberate or empower women. According to them, women cadres in Islamist movements are, in the best cases, passive actors hardly assigned any significant roles in shaping the movements' politics.

There is, however, another approach to Islamism's relationship with women. It basically acknowledges the diversity within Islamist movements regarding their position on women, and holds that most likely blame should be ascribed to Islamist groups rather than Islam when it comes to injustices to women.

The holders of this view, particularly regarding women's issues, contend that women in these movements are far from passive and subservient. Nor is the status of women static. While they do not take a hostile stand against all things Islamic, they do still hold Islamism responsible for the failure of women to claim their rights. However, these voices remain far and few between. The most

dominant view still is a stereotypical one of women in Islamist movements. This type of approach, however, contradicts some of the realities on the ground as more and more evidence emerges to suggest that women are seeking to see their demands of an expanded role in politics and in the movement itself being addressed within an Islamic frame of reference.

Women activists blame the obstacles in the way of broadening the political participation of women on the prevalent social norms rather than on the party structure or leadership. Nevertheless, there is some evidence from women's discourses that the movement could offer women a space from which they could critique and perhaps deconstruct some of the most unjust social norms from a solid basis and without being deemed social outcasts. An example of this type of occurrence is the case of Hezbollah, which had a woman candidate on its list for municipal elections in defiance of social norms and even family traditions.⁵

The concerns of the Islamist women regarding their roles have emerged in many a discussion and interview. The debate has been dominated by questions which have to do with the women's structures in those movements, their nature and the degree to which they are institutionalised, their place in a movement's hierarchy, as well as the tasks and activities assigned to them. Other questions address the perceptions of women activists of their roles in the movements – whether or not they are introducing change to the movement's stance vis-a-vis women's issues from within an Islamist framework, and what type of discourse they embrace regarding women's roles and rights.

Some key questions pertaining to their perceptions of Islamic activism remain. The most important question, however, is about the factors that shape the debate on women's roles, and to what extent these debates are suppressed by internal factors such as the relationship between the key components of the movement.

Undoubtedly, this debate is shaped by one very important factor – the ongoing conflict between the reformists and the conservative elements within each movement's rank and file. The Muslim Brotherhood is a very interesting case in this respect, with the conflict being defined by two important sets of factors: the internal and the external.

As this chapter suggests, the sharp divide between the conservative and reformist trends has largely influenced much of the movement's vision and stance regarding the permissible extent of women's activism, the development of women's structures and the right of women to power sharing in the movement's

decision-making bodies. The socialisation patterns of the male cadres of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, for example, lead them to believe that women can best serve the cause when they fulfil their duties as mothers and wives. Most of the women activists interviewed strongly criticised this pattern of thinking, but the movement's leading figures remain reluctant to address these concerns.

From an external perspective, the discourse on women's rights and Western efforts on that score forced Islamist movements to create a parallel debate from within an Islamic frame of reference. In other words, pressure has been placed on the Muslim Brotherhood by various political and social forces to clarify its stance vis-à-vis activism by women.

In August 2007, the deputy supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammed Habib, was asked about the movement's stance on women's rights with regard to the possibility of nominating a woman for the post of president. His answer was a categorical 'no'. However, a few days later another senior member of the movement, Abdel-Monem Abul Futuh, offered a counter view, suggesting that women could be allowed to run for president. The Brotherhood has subsequently issued a draft of its political platform in which it denies both Copts and women the right to run for president. It states: 'Duties and responsibilities assumed by the head of state such as army commanding are in contradiction with the socially acceptable roles for women.'⁶

What the incident might have revealed is the division within the movement regarding the issue. The conservative wing claimed victory when the movement decided to stick to its position of denying women the right of presidential candidacy. One of the most significant voices absent from the debate on the movement's platform has been that of its female branch. Although female activist members were keen not to be seen as party to the heated debate over a woman's right to be a presidential candidate, nonetheless many stressed that they were working slowly but steadily to create a niche for women activists and to advance their agenda from within the movement.⁷ However, they do concede that one of the main obstacles that frustrate their efforts at times is the culture that dominates the Muslim Brotherhood.

The culture of the Muslim Brotherhood

The dominating culture of the Muslim Brotherhood is also an obstacle to changing the position of women. The culture of the rank and file is conservative

– at times almost Salafist – and, as a result, expanding the role of the Sister activists within the movement’s structures and political activities faces tough resistance, particularly from members residing outside the capital.

In a telling incident, in May 2008, a Brotherhood male blogger posted a commentary questioning the absence of Muslim Sisters from positions of power and asking why they were always represented by a Brother at meetings. The response to his direct question, ‘Should Muslim Sisters occupy positions within the movement hierarchy?’, was negative from the majority of respondents, women as well as men. This answer reflects the culture of the organisation and its view that women can best serve the cause through their traditional roles as mothers and wives, but not as political actors or peers in the movement.⁸

This conservative culture is being challenged to some extent by the younger generation of Brothers in the cities, but this group is a minority, and although they receive some encouragement from the reformist wing of the Brotherhood, they are a frustrated group. The majority of the rank and file continues to hold a very conservative view of women’s roles in the public sphere. Some even consider the women’s movement to be ‘a burden’.⁹

Women’s concerns, rights and demands

The Muslim Brotherhood has a hierarchical structure. To understand where the Sisters’ division is positioned in this hierarchy, a brief review of its structure is necessary.

The Brotherhood is governed by an internal statute that was last modified in the mid-1980s. It identifies the main administrative units, sets the mechanisms for the election and selection of the members of both the guidance bureau and *Shura* council, and explains the tasks assigned to each of the units. The Muslim Brotherhood’s hierarchy consists of:

- The supreme guide, the Brotherhood’s highest authority with many powers.
- *Maktab al-Irshaad* (the guidance bureau), a 16-member executive body elected by the movement’s *Majlis al-Shura* (*Shura* council).
- The *Shura* council, the legislative body which outlines general policies. It consists of 75 to 90 members representing Muslim Brotherhood members in the 22 governorates of Egypt.
- The administrative bureaus (*al-maktab al-Edari*), the executive bodies at the governorate level. Each bureau outlines the plan of action in its respective

area and liaises with the guidance bureau. In each of the administrative bureaus, one male member is in charge of women's activities (*al-Nashaat al-Nisaaee*) and liaises between the Sisters' division in each governorate and district and the movement in Cairo.

There are no women representatives in any of these structures. In other words, there are no women members of any of the aforementioned governing bodies. Article 56 of the internal statute issued in 1951 stipulates that the Muslim Sisters' division – along with nine other units – falls under the supervision of the guidance bureau.

Thus it is not surprising that all activists interviewed by the author concurred that two structural changes are needed to allow the movement to evolve: first, the Sisters' division must be integrated in the main movement; and second, women must be represented in all decision-making bodies. In other words, women's divisions should be represented in the different power structures of the movement.

Integration of the Sisters' division in the main movement

Structurally, there is complete separation between the main movement and the women's division. There is no direct exchange between the two bodies and communication is conducted through 'middlemen'. They are two parallel bodies with one head.

A relatively large segment of women activists view integration as crucial in ending the marginal status of the women's movement inside the Muslim Brotherhood. These women view separation as 'a form of segregation' that no longer suits the conditions of the Muslim Sisters today. One activist argued:

We work now in different places and it is very awkward that I meet my male comrade [in the Muslim Brotherhood] in the hospital or at the university and we sit and discuss issues, but we are not allowed to mingle during Brotherhood meetings because of the heritage of the past. One advantage to integration is that it will put an end to the duplication of work and will allow us a shortcut to the leadership. It is no more than providing us with a mechanism.¹⁰

For these activists, integrating with the main body means maintaining an independent hierarchal entity, but that this entity should have representation in the different decision-making bodies of the movement.

The more conservative element among the Muslim Sisters disagrees. They argue that separation between the two structures should remain; otherwise it will be considered unchaste and un-Islamic. This view is a result of what one pro-integration activist described as ‘the Salafist influence’ dominating the Brotherhood’s rank and file.¹¹

According to the conservative view, the absence of a specific structure and a hierarchy in the women’s division is ‘a deliberate policy’ to protect the Sisters from repressive policies and security harassment.¹² One Sister activist described the state of the women’s movement as ‘an organized entity’, but not ‘an organizational structure’. In other words, work and responsibilities are divided among the women members, but there is no particular mechanism through which this is done. The Muslim Sisters’ activities are channelled through a number of committees, each focusing on a specific domain. There is, for example, the educational committee, the social committee, the media committee and the political committee.

Even the moderates in the Muslim Brotherhood believe that integrating the Sisters into the main body is still ‘a premature move’. Islamist movements in Tunisia and Morocco that have tried integration are rethinking their decisions, they argue. Essam al-Irayan, a member of the Brotherhood’s politburo and one of the moderates, argues that the jurisprudential, cultural and intellectual basis for the Islamist movement says that

the role of women is complementary to that of the men in those movements, that men and women are complementing one another and not identical to one another. For this reason, separation between the two divisions is important. The separation here is because of function, not of discrimination. Each has his role and function.¹³

There is, nonetheless, a strong conviction among many activists that, despite the resistance to integration, change is happening on this front, albeit very slowly.

Women representation in decision-making bodies

The debate about the conspicuous absence of Muslim Sisters from all Brotherhood structures has also been influenced by the reformist–conservative divide. One group of activists supports women’s representation in power positions, on the grounds that women play crucial roles in maintaining the support, mobilisation

and continuity of the movement. A second group believes that having women in top positions would not give the Sisters a bigger role and more influence. The popular base, they argue, sometimes exercises more pressure and has a bigger impact on the movement's decisions than that of some of those at the helm. A third group still does not seem to have made up its mind concerning the issue. While these activists downplay the absence of the Sisters from power structures, they nonetheless still believe in the importance of having women occupy positions of power, particularly those that are related to women activism. Their reason is that 'they will be more gender sensitive'. Amany Abul Fadl, English literature professor at Ain Shams University and a senior Sisters activist, believes that

[b]eing in the hierarchy will not give us more authority or expand our roles. We work full time for our cause and our society. [But] being there may give us some freedom of action. I would like to see some of us in powerful positions within the movement; I will feel more comfortable because she will be gender sensitive. She will understand our needs and our enthusiasm towards certain issues more than the Brothers. She will be more responsive to us. We need to be represented, but [even] if we stay as we are, we are in good condition.¹⁴

The nomination of the first woman candidate in the 2000 parliamentary elections, Jihan al-Halafawi, generated a forceful debate regarding the future of the Sisters' movement in the light of the absence of an independent structure. Halafawi described her nomination as 'a big leap for women activism'. The move encouraged the women activists to question their roles and seek a presence in the Muslim Brotherhood structures. Anecdotal evidence suggests that more and more women are growing restless about their marginal status. Their initial demand was to allow women to occupy positions related to the Sisters' division and activities. Other more ambitious demands include membership in the *Shura* council as well as the guidance bureau. Halafawi conveyed the Sisters' views directly to the supreme guide. He then requested a list of suggested names for positions in the *Shura* council. Halafawi's demands were supported by a proposal put forward by members of the Brotherhood to include women in the *Shura* council.

It should also be pointed out that the debate should not be seen as outside the overall political context. A more democratic political environment will

no doubt boost pro-women activism. As long as repressive policies continue against the movement, the balance will remain in favour of the more conservative elements, which want to restrict women's activism and roles because of the security risks.

The Muslim Brotherhood leaders insist that the state's 'ruthless war' against the Brotherhood is the primary reason for the exclusion of women members from positions of power. This issue should, however, be viewed within the larger context of the state-Brotherhood relationship. Simply stated, the Brotherhood does not want to subject its women to arrests and maltreatment by the police. Those concerns are legitimate. There have been instances when the regime has made clear its discontent with the increasing visibility of women activists, particularly in street politics. A telling instance took place when several Brotherhood MPs from the Menoufyia governorate were rounded up in the summer of 2007. One of the key charges laid against them was 'giving instructions to women and using them in political activities'. It was this perception that the movement is 'using' women – as opposed to women being genuine political actors of their own free will – that has coloured the ways in which the security apparatus understands women's activism in the Muslim Brotherhood. In another incident that confirms this view, a senior security officer sent a stern warning to the Brotherhood's supreme guide for what he said was 'the movement's deliberate policy of placing women in street protests'. The officer demanded that women 'be taken out of the street', otherwise the movement would have to face the consequences.¹⁵

One activist who was interviewed told of receiving a series of warnings that women would no longer be outside the reach of the police should they continue to show strong visibility in the streets. Several women activists were summoned to police stations in a move that clearly sent a message to the Brotherhood.

Subsequently, both the Brotherhood and the state have made an implicit agreement to shield women activists from the repressive policies of detention and police harassment. Nonetheless, there are serious concerns in the Brotherhood ranks that this policy might end soon. One activist explained:

The leadership explains the reason why women are not in leadership positions because people who are there are being chased day and night by police forces, while women are dignified. We tell them that the value system of the enemy (the state and the security apparatuses) does not

have any moral ceiling when it comes to political activists be they men or women.¹⁶

Women activists also cite the movement's cautious – and at times overprotective – policy towards engaging them in politics to refute the view that Islamist movements 'use' their women activists for social and political gain. The Brotherhood leadership insists that arresting women is a red line that the movement will not allow to be crossed under any circumstances. A revealing incident took place during the *Shura* council election in June 2007. The Muslim Brotherhood fielded 19 candidates – some of them women – to compete for 77 seats. When three women activists were arrested by the state security in one of the Delta governorates, demonstrations demanding their immediate release continued uninterrupted for three days.

There are, however, other women activists who are not fully convinced that the Brotherhood–security confrontation is the reason they are not allowed to engage fully in the movement's structures and in politics.

Several activists have gone public with their criticism of the status quo. Rasha Ahmed (35), who holds a teaching position in the medical faculty of one of Egypt's universities, is a case in point. She wrote an online open letter to the Muslim Brotherhood's supreme guide in 2007, taking issue with the status of women inside the movement. In her letter, she questioned the way in which the movement dealt with the women's section.

If the [S]isters were undertaking difficult roles just like the Brothers[,] my question is why are not women treated like men inside the movement? Why are they deprived of the right to select and elect movement senior[s]? Why ha[ve] the internal elections been confined to the [B] rothers? Women have played a crucial role in the elections and in serving the cause. This is why we have to empower women inside our movement and enable them to have their rights fully] to select and elect so we can present a model to the rest of the Islamist movements. I do not demand that women should occupy top positions but I'm only asking for their simple right to select the person who leads the *Dawaa* (proselytise).¹⁷

In conclusion, Ahmed pointed out that she had sent previous messages to the Muslim Brotherhood leadership, but had received no response. She had decided

then to post her letter online as part of the self-criticism process being undertaken by a number of Muslim Brotherhood activists. Ahmed was not alone. Her open letter created a stir among *Ikhwan* supporters. Some wrote in support, while others criticised the medium through which she chose to address 'sensitive and internal issues'.

A supporting response came from one of the Brothers, Dr Ibrahim al-Zaafarani of the Alexandria chapter. He proposed to the supreme guide that three women activists be appointed to the Muslim Brotherhood's *Shura* council as a first step towards acknowledging the role of women in the movement. Zaafarani gave three names: Wafaa Mashhour from Upper Egypt, Makarem Al-Deeri to represent Cairo and Jihan al-Halafawi to represent the north. These specific women were selected to rule out any objections from the more conservative elements claiming a security risk. At the time of writing, Zaafarani had not received any response yet.

Before delving into what the future holds for women activists in the Muslim Brotherhood, one should refer to a number of promising developments that suggest that women's activism is on the rise despite the many obstacles and challenges.

The rise of a new generation of young women activists is forcing a debate on the type of training and socialisation received by women activists. While the movement is not immune to the influence of the debates on women's rights and empowerment taking place in the broader society or even internationally, it is the internal pressure that will be crucial to changing the attitudes and perceptions towards women's activism. Although some women believe that women's role and weight cannot be measured by the size of their representation in the movement's hierarchy, other strong voices contend that representation is an important reflection of the roles women activists play in the movement. The new generation of women activists has been most visible in two domains: street politics and cyber dissent.

Street politics

While electoral politics has been one domain in which Brotherhood women activists have played a central role, despite their meagre representation as candidates, street politics is another front where they have demonstrated a strong presence. In 2005, Egypt experienced an opening up of the political space. This manifested itself in the rise of protest movements such as the Egyptian

Movement for Change (*Kifaya*), which served as an umbrella organisation for a number of political forces, including the Brotherhood. *Kifaya* organised a series of sit-ins and demonstrations protesting Mubarak's sixth term in office. *Kifaya's* most significant political act has been its breach of the state ban on street protests.

It was in this context that the Brotherhood Sisters began to be increasingly visible in the street. Encouraged by *Kifaya's* bold move, the Muslim Brotherhood organised a series of street protests in different towns across the country. Women activists constituted almost half the demonstrators. It was the first time the movement had encouraged its women to be at the forefront of the political struggle. This activity was accompanied by an equal degree of visibility of the Sisters in campus protests and sit-ins marking different occasions, be they in solidarity with the Palestinians or against the US occupation of Iraq. In 2006, when the state security forces intervened to prevent Brotherhood candidates from participating in student elections at Cairo University, both men and women students belonging to the Brotherhood organised a series of demonstrations. They then formed a parallel structure called the Free Students Union by way of defying the security ban on their candidates. The first elected head of this organisation was a young woman from the Sisters' ranks.

With the mass arrest of 22 senior Brotherhood figures in December 2006, a new movement comprising the wives and daughters of the detained Brothers launched a campaign against the military tribunals and the court rulings. One important element was the organising of a series of sit-ins in front of the interior ministry to protest the trials. Veiled women and young girls – all members of the Brotherhood – raised anti-regime banners in support of the detained Brothers.

This growing street visibility of the Sisters raises questions regarding the validity of the argument about keeping women from positions of power for fear of security strikes. Put another way, if women activists are able to participate and become very active in one of the most visible and dangerous political acts, street politics – the activity that is most likely to bring women face to face with the brutal security machine – then the argument proffered by most male leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, which suggests that placing women at the forefront of the political struggle would expose them to humiliating police practices, is hardly convincing.

In all of these overt political activities, women activists have shown themselves to be masters of organisation, mobilisation and public engagement.

Cyber dissent

Strict political and social conditions; repressive state policies, which close all space for the expression of political dissent, and a lack of mechanisms with which to communicate with their peers, have all played a crucial role in unleashing Brotherhood online activism in full force. This has been part of an online wave of political activism. Numerous bloggers from across the political spectrum have sought to expose state misconduct against the opposition. Yet its strongest manifestations have come from Brotherhood members. This explains the Brotherhood blog phenomenon – 150 blogs – that became what one observer described as ‘an information clearinghouse’ regarding the thoughts and activities of the young Brothers and Sisters. Such a blogging phenomenon has developed during the past couple of years into a significant form of expression.

These young men and women voice their criticism of the status quo and discuss the most sensitive of issues. This process of introspection, however, does not reflect ‘a rebellion’ within the Brotherhood, because these activists have an institutional loyalty that is indicated in the way they choose to identify themselves. Almost all of them take pride in belonging to the Brotherhood, and the blogs provide them with the tools to voice their criticism of what they consider to be some of the policy failings of their movement. They have tackled issues ranging from the political party platform to the subordinate status of Muslim Sisters, the repressive regime policies and solidarity with the detained Brotherhood members, as well as their personal thoughts.

These blogs are proving to be a successful method of networking among what one observer described as the ‘urban fourth generation’ of the Brotherhood. In real life there are no structural mechanisms for young men and women to discuss issues and exchange ideas; they cannot do so in the organisation, nor in the wider society.¹⁸

However, the virtual space remains open, providing an alternative to the strict discipline of the movement, which denies its members the right to assemble or hold meetings. Blogs give rank and file members, or at least those who feel at home in cyberspace, usually the younger ones, the means to make their voices heard about current and vital issues in the absence of institutional mechanisms to communicate with their seniors.

Muslim Sisters also blog. The first blog created by a Sister appeared in March 2006, with the blogger identifying herself as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Another woman who joined in the discussion identified herself

as ‘a girl from the *Ikhwan*’. In the blog discussions, participants focus mostly on experiences in their own lives, as well as their experiences as Muslim Sisters. Some discuss what it means to be a member of the Brotherhood today. Some write about their imprisoned fathers, posting videos of the trials and pictures of family members. One example is the campaign launched by Zahara al-Shater, daughter of Deputy Supreme Guide, Khayrat al-Shatter, who is serving a seven-year sentence, in support of both her detained father and as well as her husband, who is also imprisoned. One activist who has been involved in cyber activism said that it is the venue that sheds light on the work and activities of the Muslim Sisters.¹⁹ It provides activists with a space to escape from the strictly controlled political and social environment, and they are able to express their thoughts and ideas without having to filter them.

While these blogger activists still represent a minority within the Brotherhood, their influence in the ongoing internal debates cannot be ignored. The blogger trend is also a challenge to the Brotherhood leaders who, after decades of working underground, still find it difficult to accept that members go public with their discussions and criticisms of what they, the leaders, believe are internal issues. In an attempt to co-opt the *Ikhwan* bloggers, a series of meetings were organised with mid-level Brotherhood leaders to discuss the impact of blogging activism. This does not mean that the movement discourages its members from using cyberspace as a medium for expression. In fact, there are Brotherhood-supervised courses for members on what it describes as ‘the resistant popular media’. These courses are meant to train members to use cyberspace to spread the word about the Brotherhood’s vision and activities. It is, however, still premature to assess the overall impact independent blogging will have on the Brotherhood’s handling of many of the thorny issues raised by cyber activists. However, one important conclusion is that this mechanism is bringing into the open much of the internal debate that used to take place behind closed doors, thus exposing the movement increasingly to outside influences.

CONCLUSION

The status of women activists in the Muslim Brotherhood movement is neither static nor unchanging. Their struggle to carve a niche inside the movement’s power structures reflects a close interaction between structure and agency, in

as much as structural changes are closely associated with gender consciousness. As an increasing number of women activists become aware of their contribution to the movement and the centrality of their roles as political actors, more demands are being put forward for the recognition of this role in terms of hierarchy and structure.

Islamist women activists hold the view that Islam is a religion that has done women justice. They insist that the injustices inflicted upon them have to do with the cultural, political and social realities in which women activists function. A review of the generally accepted cultural values that govern the movement's outlook regarding the political role of women confirms this view. The conservative culture coupled with an oppressive socio-political context is the main reason that women have been denied representation that reflects their actual contribution to the political struggle. Women activists, therefore, chose to engage in mass politics to make up for their absence from the elitist politics of representation inside the movement.

One final and important conclusion to emerge from hours of discussion and interviews with many women activists is that, despite being aware of the significance of their contribution to the movement's survival and political influence, and despite making several demands for a greater role and access to positions of power, these women are still not willing to sacrifice the unity of the movement and its cohesion, or go any further in challenging the leadership. This point was stressed by many of the activists interviewed and is also evident in their writings.

Nonetheless, the question remains whether the emergence of a young generation of activists will ultimately generate a new political force, which could prove crucial to the women's movement in the Muslim Brotherhood.

Unlike their older peers, these activists are extremely dynamic participants, they enjoy a high visibility, are assertive about their rights as political actors and as partners in power structures inside the movement, have family ties to senior leadership and, above all, are frustrated by their subordinate status.

However, there are some key challenges that they are likely to confront:

- A leadership that lacks an overarching vision regarding women's activism and which does not want to give up its traditional vision of restricting women to their traditionally acceptable roles
- A regime that continues to suppress dissent and opposition forces

- A conservative base that poses obstacles to developing women's structures and incorporating them into the existing structure, and allowing women activists a broader role in politics

Ultimately, it is the opinion of this author, that the development of women's structures into a well-organised entity will primarily depend on two key factors: the end result of the conflict between the movement's reformists and conservatives, and the emergence of strong women leaders who can take on the challenge of making gains inside the movement.

NOTES

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- 9 S. al-Eryan, personal communication, May 2007.
- 10 Amany Abul Ffadl, Personal communication, December 2007.
- 11 Jihan al-Halfawi, personal communication, May 2008.
- 12 Amany Abul Fadl, personal communication, December 2007.
- 13 Essam al-Eryan, personal communication, May 2008.
- 14 Amany Abul Fadl, personal communication, December 2007
- 15 Based on several interviews with women activists between 2007–2008.

- 16 Amany Abul Fadl, personal communication, December 2007.
- 17 Rasha Ahmed, *In the shadow of the Brothers. The women of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood*, 2008, Carnegie Papers, Carnegie Middle East Center, at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/women_egypt_muslim_brotherhood.pdf (accessed May 2009).
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9 Triangulating on shifting sands

Aspects and effects of regime responses to Islamist movements in North Africa¹

HUGH ROBERTS

INTRODUCTION

Islamist movements of one kind or another have been a feature of the political landscape of North African states for the last 40–50 years or more (for over 80 years in Egypt), but it remains the case that these states have displayed an impressive structural stability throughout this period. A corollary of this structural stability has been the absence of substantive political and constitutional reform, in the sense of genuine movement from undemocratic towards more democratic forms of government, an absence that has been thrown into relief over the last 20 years by the inclination of Western governments to make an issue of this. This absence has coincided with and is often identified with the observable loss of dynamism of North African governments in respect of their notional domestic agendas and the general syndrome of stagnation that has become a striking feature of public life in Egypt and Algeria, but is also, if less obviously, a feature of political life in Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. A question which accordingly arises is whether or not – and, if so, how – Islamic activism has contributed to this state of affairs. A secondary question is how the policies of North African governments have conditioned the impact of Islamic activism in this regard.

FEATURES OF NORTH AFRICAN STATES

Stability

Since the fact that North African states have proved fundamentally stable until very recently has often been obscured in the alarmist analyses that have characterised so much of contemporary Western commentary on the region, it is worth insisting on this. We should also note that Islamist movements have not been primarily responsible for the instability that has recently been occurring.

In Algeria, the independent state as constituted in 1962 by the wartime National Liberation Front (*Front de Libération Nationale*, FLN) survived without serious difficulty to 1989. The post-FLN state that has been in existence since the Chadli regime's voluntary introduction of formal pluralism with the constitutional change of February 1989 has clearly survived the extreme turbulence and violence of the 1990s and, notwithstanding its widely remarked shortcomings, looks set to survive for the foreseeable future, taking the turbulence of the 'Arab spring' in its stride. In Egypt, the *fons et origo* of the most influential current of Islamist political activism (the Muslim Brothers) as well as of the extremist *takfiri jihadi* current, the state constituted by the Free Officers in 1952, is still there.² The massive demonstrations in January–February 2011 demanding the departure of President Hosni Mubarak did not express opposition to the state and the intervention of the armed forces, by securing Mubarak's exit and permitting overdue reforms, has given the state a new lease on life. In Libya it has been a different story. The monarchy established in 1951 enjoyed a predominantly placid existence until King Idris was abruptly overthrown by the army coup in 1969. Thereafter the regime established by Mu'ammār Qadhafi and his followers proved able to maintain itself for the next 41 years, despite international sanctions in the 1990s and internal opposition from mainly Islamist groups, until the uprising of mid-February 2011. The widespread expectation that it would be quickly swept away by the revolt proved mistaken and civil war has occurred instead. This the regime would undoubtedly have won quite quickly had the international military intervention launched on 17 March 2011 not taken place and at this writing the regime still controls much of the country. Tunisia meanwhile witnessed until this year the uninterrupted rule of the party which, under Habib Bourguiba's leadership, achieved independence from France in 1956. Whether it called itself the Neo-Destour, the Destourian Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste*

Destourien, PSD) or the Democratic Constitutional Rally (*Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique*, RCD), it was the same party that held a monopoly of political power throughout the entire period.³ With the dramatic popular revolt, however, and the subsequent fall of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali followed by the dissolution of the RCD, this entire period of Tunisian history has clearly come to an end and it remains to be seen whether the revolution that has been taking place can refound the state effectively and secure a new and more democratic formula for stable government. Finally we can note that, over exactly the same period, 1956 to present, the Alawite monarchy has reigned over and ruled Morocco and there is no sign of its days being numbered.

Character as national security states

There is arguably, if not self-evidently, a connection of some kind between the degree of political stagnation that has been observable in North African states and the fact that they are national security states. The extent to which they fit into this category varies. That Egypt and Algeria are manifestly national security states is beyond question. Egypt has been under a continuous state of emergency since 1981, that is, throughout the entire presidency of Hosni Mubarak and into the post-Mubarak era. In fact, apart from an 18-month period in 1980–1981, it had been under a state of emergency since June 1967, when the earlier Emergency Law of 1958 was re-imposed during the Six-Day War. Algeria was briefly under a state of siege during the nation-wide rioting in October 1988 and again from 4 June to 29 September 1991, and from 1992 onwards was under a continuous state of emergency (which one legal authority argued had by 2001 become a *de facto* state of siege)⁴ for the next 19 years. In both countries, the state of emergency law, with all the constraints it places on peaceful, constitutional political activity, has nonetheless been renewed each year without debate. The deputies in the national assembly have routinely passed it on the nod, despite the fact that neither state has been seriously threatened in recent years by a genuine security emergency: the Islamist insurgency waged by Egypt's *jihadi* movements ended in 1997–1998 and the violence in Algeria has been reduced to a low level since 2000. With the recent rise of popular protest movements across the region, however, both the Egyptian and Algerian authorities have finally announced the actual or imminent lifting of their emergency laws, but this formal concession to democratic pressure is unlikely to reduce significantly the militarist 'national security' aspect of these states.

Libya, Morocco and Tunisia have all qualified or come close to qualifying as national security states also. This is perhaps clearest in the case of Libya, where the state originated, as in Egypt, in an army coup; where the tightest restrictions on domestic political life have always been in place and where the long period of isolation under the international sanctions constituted a protracted emergency. But it is also true in some measure of Morocco, where the unresolved Western Saharan question has functioned for more than three decades as a virtual or quasi-emergency and has constituted an important limitation on freedom of speech, political opinion and the press in the kingdom, and where the political weight of the armed forces was arguably enhanced rather than reduced following the succession of King Mohamed VI in 1999. Finally, while Tunisia between 1956 and 2010 suffered neither the animosity of the Western powers nor significant internal rebellion nor protracted confrontations with any of its neighbours, it is worth noting that the succession of Ben Ali in place of Habib Bourguiba in 1987 represented an incipient militarisation of the regime, since Ben Ali did not rise through the ranks of the party, but came from the army via the police and the interior ministry. His takeover thus reflected, within the formal continuity of the ruling party's monopoly, the emerging hegemony of the security forces over the civilian wing of the Tunisian governing elite and the transition to a form of authoritarianism that, lacking the historic legitimacy, charisma and political resourcefulness that were such prominent features of Bourguiba's formula, relied all the more on coercive administrative and police measures to cow opposition and sustain itself. It was this debased formula that eventually proved intolerable to the Tunisian people. The prominence of civilian political forces and the comparatively modest role of the army in the revolutionary process that has since been unfolding has held out the possibility that Tunisia will become the first North African country to break decisively with the 'national security state' model. This hope now risks falling victim to the security repercussions of the Libyan catastrophe, but it may yet be vindicated.

Failed nation-states? Post-nationalism, autocracy and the vanishing republics

None of the states of North Africa are 'failed states' in the sense in which this term is used in contemporary Western discourse. But, in so far as Western – and especially French – conceptions of political modernity animated the forms of

anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist politics that constituted them and thereby insinuated into these forms of politics the ambition to constitute the former British, French and Italian protectorates and colonies of the region into nation-states on standard European and primarily French lines, they show many signs at present of being failures. There are two main aspects to this.

The first is that the regimes which govern these states have all, in varying degrees, abandoned their original nationalist perspectives. They are all post-nationalist in outlook, which is to say that their outlook has become hollow, since it is far from clear that anything positive has replaced the old nationalist project and agenda. Specifically, they have all abandoned the original nation-building developmentalist project that oriented them in the first decade or two of independence, and have largely ceased to be 'developmental states'. At the same time, they have all bowed to the logic and power of globalisation and have ceased to defend national sovereignty except in secondary matters and in a ritual manner for show. In bending the knee to the Western powers, they have accepted the humbler status and role of client states. And in agreeing since 9/11 to act as relays for the Western powers in the 'global war on terrorism' (or whatever this 'war' is now officially called), they have, among other things, made themselves obvious targets for the *ihadis*.

The second aspect is that not one of them is a republic in reality. Morocco, of course, does not pretend to be, although, in so far as party-political pluralism has acquired a little more substance there than anywhere else in North Africa, there are grounds for saying that it is no less republican – in that the populace has at least some say in the business of government – than its neighbours. In reality, of course, government in Morocco is pre-eminently the business of the monarchy and a small clientelised political elite, elections change little and the people get scarcely a look-in. But they have until recently got even less of a look-in in Egypt, which calls itself a republic, as do Algeria, Libya and Tunisia. In none of these states has government really been *res publica* – the affair of the people. In reality it has been the private preserve of an oligarchy. These states have been republics only in the negative sense that they are not formal monarchies and have succeeded in not being monarchies mainly, if not solely, in the additional negative sense that succession has not been hereditary and in recent years even this has apparently been ceasing to be the case. The very un-republican – although scarcely un-Egyptian – prospect of what Egyptians called *tawrih al-Sulta* (inheritance of power), that is, of Gamal Mubarak succeeding his father as Egypt's president,

dominated political discussion from 2002 onwards and undoubtedly contributed to the Mubarak regime's loss of legitimacy. Similarly, the perception that Ben Ali had effectively privatised the Tunisian state to the benefit of his (and his wife's) families had a similar impact in Tunisia.

In Libya, meanwhile, Saif el-Islam has appeared for some time to be being groomed to succeed his father, a possibility that is yet to disappear entirely despite the onset of the civil war. And, while the Algerian oligarchy to date has robustly rejected the idea of dynastic succession, the Algerian grapevine has over the past two years been intermittently buzzing with rumours that the formula now established in Syria and at least envisaged in Egypt and Libya – and also demonstrated, let us bear in mind, in Cuba – may be on the cards in Algiers as well, with President Bouteflika's younger brother Saïd audibly limbering up in the wings of the political stage,⁵⁶ although this scenario has probably been a casualty of the events in Tunisia and Egypt. In this way, a perceptible process of convergence has, at least for a time, been eroding the former *differantia specifica* of the various forms of autocratic rule that have actually existed across the region. While this process of convergence has now been emphatically reversed in both Tunisia and Egypt, to the benefit of these states' republican credentials, the outcome elsewhere is less certain.

Muslim (or should we say Islamic?) character

All North African states are Muslim states. None of them are or ever have been secular states in the sense in which this concept has historically been understood and realised in, for example, France or the US. The notion that they are, or at least have been, secular states – a notion often encountered in Western academic discourse as well as media commentary – is a myth and has always been a myth.

This myth had a slender basis in the Egyptian case in the Nasser period (1952–1970), in so far as the pan-Arabist vision that Nasser championed in his foreign policy was a secular, not a religious, idea. But it was always a mistake to infer the character of the Egyptian state from a single aspect, however prominent, of the regime's official discourse. Even under Nasser, Islam had the official status as the religion of the state and the 'secular state' notion had even less warrant in the rest of North Africa.⁷⁸ That this is the truth of the matter does not mean that these states were invulnerable to Islamist criticism, but it means that the extreme variant of the Islamist critique, that of the *takfiri* current,

which went so far as to denounce these states as impious and un-Islamic or even anti-Islamic and thus as licit targets of *jihad*, was exaggerated and ill-founded and, among other things, gravely underestimated the Muslim credentials of these states and the degree of legitimacy they were correspondingly able to derive from them.

Once it is acknowledged that they have been Muslim states since their inception, it becomes apposite to ask whether we should not go further and recognise their *Islamic* character. The thesis that they are not and never have been Islamic states owed a good deal not only to the perception of secular aspects of official discourses and policies in the days of Nasser, Bourguiba, Ben Bella and Boumediène, but also to the canvassing by Islamists movements of an 'Islamic state' – *dawla islamiyya* – in explicit opposition to the states that existed. The thesis (which I myself once defended) that, while clearly Muslim and clearly not secular, North African states were equally clearly not *Islamic* states, presupposed a very definite idea of what an Islamic state is and is not. That presupposition has become difficult if not impossible to sustain in recent years, as many Islamist movements have themselves come to acknowledge, in explicitly admitting that they no longer believe that there is and can be only one kind of Islamic state and that Islamic states may take a variety of forms. All those Islamist movements that are derived from the founding tradition of the Muslim Brothers have ended up taking this view. The Muslim Brothers in Egypt, far from denouncing the Egyptian state as *kufri*, have actually acknowledged that it is an Islamic state and moreover, one that has an Islamic government – *hukuma islamiyya* – in principle (while criticising the actual government for the ways in which it fails to conform to Islamic principles in practice). Those Algerian Islamist movements that are derivatives of the Muslim Brothers take the same view today of the Algerian state: its constitution and its Islamic credentials are not disputed and surviving veterans of the leadership of the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut*, FIS), which made denunciations of 'l'état impie' and calls for *dawla islamiyya* its stock in trade in its heyday in 1989–1991, have come round to the same view.

Thus, while stagnation has certainly been a feature of North African political life, it is necessary to recognise that a significant change has taken place, in a mainly evolutionary manner, in the way in which the confrontation between the state and the mainstream of political Islamism (the fringe *jihadi* movements are another matter) is actually conceived on both sides and this change calls

for a corresponding updating in the perspectives of outside observers. The old perspective, opposing supposedly secular states to more or less revolutionary movements calling for Islamic states, is clearly obsolete. Rather, the antithesis in question is more accurately conceived as being between the pragmatic governments of Muslim states and their idealistic and demanding critics, between those responsible for governing or misgoverning the actually existing Muslim states and those inclined to take them to task either in the name of an unrealistic platonic ideal – or, increasingly, a variety of far vaguer notions – of what a Muslim state ought to be or in the name of particular principles and values which the governments in question are as hard put to dispute as to honour.

TRIANGULATION IN NORTH AFRICAN POLITICS

Triangulation is a technical term that has precise meanings in several disciplines. Over the last 20 years, the term has entered the looser vocabulary of politics in the Western democracies, first in the US and subsequently, as is so often the case, the United Kingdom, where it assumed what may well be its definitive expression in Tony Blair's talk of 'the Third Way'. The idea was that the 'New Labour' vision was neither capitalist nor socialist, but something equidistant between the two. This appeared to differ from the usage in the US, where the term referred to the tactic employed by Bill Clinton, when running for the presidency in 1992 and especially in 1996, of staking out policy positions that, instead of basing themselves on the time-honoured principles associated with the Democratic Party, actually took their bearings from Republican positions and amounted to variations on the latter the better to neutralise and pre-empt the arguments of his Republican rival. This tactic was used so systematically that it amounted to a strategy. But the difference between the British and American instances of this was more apparent than real. Blair's 'Third Way' had a merely rhetorical existence, as he himself made clear when he invited a brains-trust of pro-'New Labour' intellectuals to tell him what it should signify. In practice, Blair's 'Third Way' was an empty phrase that masked the fact that his 'New Labour' government took its main policy bearings from the right – the City of London, the press baron Rupert Murdoch and above all the legacy of Thatcherism – and, if anything, outdid the Clinton administration in the extent to which (and the zeal with which) it did this.

What has all this to do with Islamism in North Africa? The answer is that precisely the same general strategies of triangulation have been followed

by North African governments since the late 1970s (if not earlier), and that this fact has been a central, if not foundational element of the political syndrome which has had militant Islamic activism as its most conspicuous and alarming symptom.

The resort to strategies of triangulation is characteristic of forms of politics that have emerged out of earlier political movements, but have abandoned the principles that not only guided but were actually constitutive of their predecessors. The principles incarnated in the Democratic Party as reconstituted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt during the New Deal were perceived to have become electoral liabilities by the 1990s (following the disastrous defeats of George McGovern in 1972, Jimmy Carter in 1980, Walter Mondale in 1984 and Michael Dukakis in 1988) and, in the absence of any movement of intellectual and political renewal within the party, Clinton's recourse to triangulation was a pragmatic adjustment to this state of affairs. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same logic accounts for Blair's version of the strategy (which was simply a more sophisticated and effective form of the strategy initiated by Neil Kinnock) once the two historic purposes of the Labour Party – providing political representation for the trade union interest and promoting socialist policies – were abandoned. But this logic also informed the strategies of the Egyptian and Algerian governments in the 1970s and 1980s respectively. The same hollowness that has characterised the post-New Dealer Democratic Party and the post-Labourist New Labour Party also characterised the Free Officers regime in Cairo and the FLN regime in Algiers once these entered their post-nationalist phases following the deaths of Nasser in 1970 and Boumediène in 1978. There is a significant contrast between the Egyptian and Algerian cases, however.

In Egypt, one set of principles and policies – economic nationalism, statist socialism, agrarian reform and paternalistic welfarism at home; pan-Arabism, militant hostility towards Israel, anti-imperialism and close relations with the Soviet Union abroad – was abandoned and the opposite policies – *infitah* (opening up the economy to foreign as well as domestic private enterprise), rapprochement with the US, breaking with the USSR, peace with Israel and its corollary, the fracturing of Arab unity – adopted fairly swiftly in a clearly autocratic manner by a regime which had made up its mind to bow to external pressure to change course in this manner and was not disposed to take much account of public opinion in the process.

In Algeria, the turn away from the socialism and anti-imperialism of the Ben Bella-Boumediène years (1962–1978) was initially a less stark and so less abrasive affair, in part because, thanks to high oil and gas prices, Algeria's economic situation in 1979–1980 was far less dire than Egypt's in 1970 (so that the regime was able to buy a measure of social peace at precisely the moment it was abandoning the socialist economic policy) and in part because the rapprochement with the historic external adversary – France – was not so evidently a capitulation as Egypt's rapprochement with Israel; Algerian nationalism had, after all, won its war with France, not lost it.⁹ But the relatively smoother fashion in which the Chadli regime in Algiers executed substantially the same historic U-turn as the Sadat regime in Cairo before it owed a lot to two more fundamental features of the Algerian case that were absent from the Egyptian one.

The first is a general feature, namely the fact that the revolution which constituted the Algerian state took the form of a protracted war of national liberation in the course of which the FLN mobilised virtually the whole of Algeria's Muslim society and, in the process, learned everything there was to learn about the techniques and tactics of political mobilisation and demobilisation, whereas the Egyptian revolution was a highly elitist affair, a mere military coup executed by a very small and exclusive group of conspirators. As a result, the two regimes that emerged from these revolutions have possessed very different political repertoires: the Algerian regime has had an unusually extensive repertoire of techniques of co-optation and manipulation of the diverse elements of Algerian public opinion, whereas the Free Officers' regime has had a much more limited repertoire and has accordingly been far less willing to allow dissident currents of opinion any space or room for manoeuvre, except for very brief periods.

The second feature has to do with the relationship of the revolution that constituted the state to the pre-existing tradition of Islamic activism. In Egypt, the Free Officers' regime was unable to accommodate and incorporate the Muslim Brothers; within two years of the overthrow of the monarchy in July 1952, talks between the two sides had broken down, the Brothers had been brutally suppressed and several of their leaders had been executed. Matters were very different in Algeria. In its concern to mobilise the whole of the Muslim population in the liberation war, the FLN had deliberately courted the main current of Islamic activism, the Association of the 'ulama (*Association des Oulémas musulmans algériens*, AOMA), within which an explicitly nationalist tendency had come

to the fore by 1955, and in 1956 the Association formally rallied to the FLN and was integrated into its structures. This relationship persisted, notwithstanding a few early hiccoughs, after independence in 1962, with the FLN-state explicitly legitimating itself in terms of, among other things, the austere reformist Islam championed by the Association since the 1930s, while incorporating the leading personnel of the Association in the regime in a variety of roles and positions.¹⁰ Thus the predominantly congruent relationship between the FLN-state and the mainstream of Islamic activism in Algeria in the Boumediène period stood in marked contrast to the bitter antagonism that characterised relations between Nasser's regime and the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, and this difference had consequences for the two regimes' respective handling of the Islamists in the post-nationalist era.

In both cases, however, a key – one might well say, a strategic – ingredient of the new political formula adopted by the post-nationalist regimes was the systematic encouragement of identity politics.¹¹ As economic policy and, even more broadly, social policy were taken out of the realm of political debate, because the choice of capitalism was not up for discussion and the policy questions that subsequently arose in respect of the conduct of this policy were henceforth to be the preserve of the technocracy, the regimes found a surrogate in identity issues. If a kind of cultural nationalism was initially emphasised to compensate for (as well as mask) the retreat from economic nationalism, it soon emerged that public unanimity in respect of cultural and identity issues could not be taken for granted in either country. In reality, there was never any chance of this, as both regimes must have known. The politicisation of cultural questions quickly prompted a polarisation of public opinion between competing identity conceptions, with Islamists, secular pan-Arabists, a small but vocal Marxist current as well as liberal-democratic secularists, not to mention Coptic Christians in Egypt and Berberists in Algeria, quickly becoming sensitive to the fact that both their respective identities and their conceptions of the (notionally shared) national identity were under pressure from the bearers of rival identities and competing conceptions.¹²

This polarisation was undoubtedly connived at by the government in Algeria as the centrepiece of a strategy of divide and rule that, by dividing public opinion along the identity fault lines, disabled it as a force capable of mobilising effectively against the new course of economic and social policy. It is less obvious that it was, at the outset, consciously connived at by the Egyptian

government and it may well have arisen through the government deciding to make a virtue of necessity.

TRIANGULATING EGYPTIANS

The necessity, from Sadat's point of view, was that of orchestrating a reconfiguration of alliances in order to secure support for his new course in both domestic and foreign policy and to cut the ground from under those opposed to this course. A central element of this reconfiguration was his decision to mend fences with the Muslim Brothers, allowing them (although formally still illegal) an important amount of space for at least some of their activities (essentially the religious mission – *al-da'wa* – and the publishing activity associated with this), while at the same time actively encouraging the new wave of younger generation Islamic activists to organise as 'Islamic groups' – *jama'ât islamiyya* – on university campuses and to secure control of the national student union. Thus both the Brothers and the *jama'ât* were enlisted by Sadat to provide support and ideological endorsement for his retreat from socialism and the new economic *infitah*, the break with the Soviet Union and the rapprochement with the US, and to defeat what was left of the diehard Nasserists and the Egyptian Left in the student milieu in particular and in Egyptian associational life in general.

Sadat engaged in an element of triangulation very deliberately when he split the former 'ruling party' – the Arab Socialist Union – into three so-called 'platforms' (left, right and centre) and identified his own position with that of the centre platform, a move that was both a soft purge – freeing him from the need to cater for ideological critics inside his own support group – and a kind of Egyptian anticipation of Blair's 'Third Way', in that Sadat's 'centre' defined itself as pragmatically equidistant from the ideologically defined 'platforms' on its flanks. This development was later extended to the formal hiving off of the left and right 'platforms' into legally recognised political parties (*Tagammu'* on the left and *Al-Ahrar*, 'the Liberals', on the right), which remained very stunted and confined to the sidelines, while the centre platform was renamed the National Democratic Party and continued to enjoy a monopoly of power while posing as a kind of 'Third Way' brand of politics.¹³

But this was an essay in triangulation *intra muros*, so to speak, *within* the ruling elite and its power structure. It was a less easy matter to engage in effective triangulation in respect of wider public opinion for lack of a serious

counterweight to the Islamist trend. The emphatically secularist wing of the Egyptian intelligentsia counted for little in terms of its social base and its political weight across the country, and the main element of public opinion collectively hostile to the Muslim Brothers' project of re-Islamisation of Egyptian society, the Copts, amounted to no more than 10 per cent of the population and were politically disadvantaged to the point that one might well say they suffered *de facto* disenfranchisement. This state of affairs was in marked contrast to the situation that prevailed from the 1920s up until the Free Officers' coup in 1952, for a major player in Egyptian political life during this period, the *Wafd*, the party of modernist nationalism and liberal constitutionalism, had provided a real avenue for effective political participation by Copts. But the *Wafd* was dissolved along with other parties following the Free Officers' coup. When Mubarak finally allowed this to be reconstituted in 1983 as a legal party, the 'New *Wafd*' (as the authorities insisted it call itself) initially showed considerable dynamism and the capacity to attract large audiences and recruit enthusiastic members. But, instead of welcoming this display of vigour as a useful counterweight to the Islamists, the government took alarm and deployed a variety of measures and tactics to prevent the New *Wafd* from building on its initial success and these measures proved all too effective.

Thereafter the authorities licensed a plethora of so-called political parties (while subjecting them to intrusive state oversight) and maintained the ban on the Muslim Brothers as an illegal organisation. The legal parties – handicapped by all sorts of factors (the emergency law, state interference and harassment, not to mention their own flimsy agendas) – have been unable to grow, while the Brothers, despite the formal ban, have been tacitly allowed space to maintain and even develop their religious, social and cultural activity, and have accordingly been able to occupy most of the social space left vacant by the retreat of the state and have thereby pre-empted the possibility that the legal parties might acquire substantial constituencies. As a result, the legal parties continue to count for very little, while the main independent social force, the Brothers, have been prevented by their illegal status from capitalising politically on their substantial social presence. At the same time, the regime's strategy, by preventing the emergence of a serious secular opposition, obliged it to engage, directly or indirectly, in more specific forms of triangulation *within* the Islamist movement as a whole, that is, between different Islamist actors and agendas, playing one off against another, as distinct from between Islamists and non-Islamists.

For instance, the state under Sadat, in encouraging the *jama'ât* on the campuses, was also tacitly diverting the younger generation of Islamists away from the Brothers and hampering the latter's efforts to recruit fresh blood. But, when the state's subsequent suppression of the *jama'ât* radicalised some of their activists to the point that they opted for a violent *jihadi* strategy, the authorities then enlisted the Brothers to condemn the recourse to violent rebellion as wrong and criminal, as *fitna* rather than *jihad*.¹⁴ The Brothers obliged by disputing and disqualifying the resort to *takfir* as a bogus – that is, doctrinally unwarranted and spurious – attempt to legitimate the rebellion and even visited captured members of the *jihadi* group (known as *al-Gama'a al-islamiyya* or simply 'the *Gama'a*') in prison to reclaim them from their mistaken path, an endeavour which may be said to have belatedly borne fruit when the imprisoned leaders of the *Gama'a* eventually published an elaborate self-criticism recanting their former beliefs.¹⁵ At the same time, the state kept its own leverage over the religious field as whole through its control of the Al-Azhar mosque and university, the intellectual pinnacles of official Islam in Egypt, and even sponsored and organised its own *da'wa* (Islamic missionary activity), thus denying the Brothers a monopoly even in this sphere.

Nonetheless, the lack of symmetry in the basic triangle which the state has sought to sustain and exploit (by standing above and manipulating the Islamist/non-Islamist dichotomy in Egyptian public life), given the weakness of the non-Islamist outlook as an organised trend independent of the state and its façade party (the NDP), has had two long-term consequences of great importance.

First, it has meant that since the 1970s the state has continuously conceded ground in practice to the pressure of the Islamist trend to allow, indeed promote, the re-Islamisation of Egyptian society and public life, a process that has had enormous impact in various spheres, notably law and publishing (and cultural and even economic life more generally), while aggravating, among other things, the sentiment of Egypt's Copts that they are a distinct and almost besieged community which, lacking the option of serious participation in political life, depends to a dangerous extent on the state itself to protect them, a dependence which many Copts have come to mistrust.

Second, it has meant that the latter-day Free Officers' regime in the post-Sadat period under Mubarak's presidency effectively deprived itself of the option of serious political reform and committed itself in reality to a profoundly

conservative perspective. By acting to ensure that the only serious force independent of the regime was that represented by the Muslim Brothers and by insisting on maintaining its ban on the Brothers, the state was in effect saying to all and sundry: 'After us, the deluge; it is us or them.' By freezing itself in this attitude, the regime obliged the other actors, legal and illegal, equally to remain frozen in old attitudes, and thus the stagnation of Egyptian politics, and also, as a consequence, of Egyptian public (including intellectual) life as a whole was the result, which it took the upsurge of anti-Mubarak feeling in January–February 2011, inspired by the Tunisian example, to end.

TRIANGLES WITHIN TRIANGLES IN ALGERIA

When the Chadli regime decided to abandon the strategy followed during Boumediène's presidency (1965–1978), it had no clear alternative to replace it with, beyond a temporary stress on cultural nationalism expressed in the controversial decision to accelerate the Arabisation policy. It accordingly adopted a 'listening posture' towards the society, an attitude that invited the organised currents of expectant, frustrated or resentful opinion in Algeria to express themselves.¹⁶ The Islamists were among the first off the mark and were soon harnessed by the regime in its drive to purge the party, mass organisations and especially the student union of leftists and Boumedienists, almost exactly as Sadat had used Islamists as cat's paws in his purge of leftists and Nasserists some years earlier. An important difference in the Algerian situation, however, was that, unlike Egypt's Copts, the main element of the society disposed both to resist the Islamist message and to conceive of itself as an underprivileged minority, the Berbers of Kabylia, were Muslims and had played a major role in the independence struggle and were accordingly inclined to participate very actively, indeed vigorously, in national political life and had long done so. As a result, two interlocking triangles very quickly came into existence, with the state standing over and mediating the divide between advocates and opponents of rapid Arabisation (which the Islamists generally supported and the Francophone middle classes and the Kabyles generally opposed), while simultaneously standing over and mediating the division between the Islamists and secular modernists (among whom the Kabyle Berberists were especially prominent). In reality, leaving aside the Arabist current, which was effectively organised only *within* the party of the FLN, the state found itself standing over

and mediating – or, rather, manipulating – a triangle consisting of the Islamists on the one hand and the Berberist movement on the other, since these were the two movements of opinion in the wider society that showed real dynamism and capacity for organisation.

This basic schema, established between 1979 and 1982, was reproduced with calamitous consequences following the introduction of the pluralist constitution in February 1989, when the first two parties to announce their existence and their intention to seek official legalisation were Dr Said Sadi's Kabyle-based Rally for Culture and Democracy (*Rassemblement pour la Culture et la Démocratie*, RCD), an emanation of the Berber Cultural Movement (*Mouvement Culturel Berbère*, MCB) founded in 1980, and the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut*, FIS), which federated most of the previously fragmented 'Islamic groups' of the 1980s under the leadership of the Islamic-nationalist veteran Abassi Madani (b. 1931) and his young firebrand deputy, Sheikh Ali Ben Hadj (b. 1956). By legalising both parties in September 1989, the regime sought to ensure its own survival and nullify the democratic potential of introducing formal political pluralism by arranging for public opinion in the new supposedly democratic era of political pluralism to be completely disabled from the outset because it was polarised between militantly secularist and militantly Islamist viewpoints and canvassed by parties that, moreover, had no other policies or programmes to speak of and were accordingly implausible alternatives to the regime in power.

I have already explained in detail elsewhere that the Chadli regime was engaged in a vast manipulation of the FIS in 1989–1990.¹⁷ A key feature of this was the way the regime arranged for a variety of secular parties to be legalised – notably Hocine Ait Ahmed's Kabyle-based Socialist Forces Front (*Front des Forces Socialistes*, FFS) and the Socialist Vanguard Party (*Parti de l'Avant-Garde Socialiste*, PAGS, a development of the old Algerian Communist Party), both of which had long existed underground, but also numerous other parties of the right, left and centre that had never been heard of before – while ensuring from September 1989 to late 1990 that the FIS had a complete monopoly of the Islamist vote. Thus the secular point of the triangle was an alphabet's soup of competing 'parties', while the Islamists were united and dynamic and correspondingly convincing at first. It was only after the FIS's landslide victory in the local and regional elections in June 1990 that the regime began to authorise other Islamist groupings to form political parties with a view to moving

against the FIS via these proxies and cutting it down to size again. When the FIS's second landslide victory, in the first round of the legislative elections in December 1991, demonstrated that this ploy had not yet begun to work, the army leaders decided to suppress the FIS entirely, which was what happened in January–March 1992, precipitating a countrywide Islamist rebellion and violence on a scale and intensity that had been unimaginable until it happened.

Since 1992, the regime has continued to resort to numerous forms of triangulation ploys and these have become extremely elaborate. A characteristic feature is what we may call 'triangulation within triangulation'. The regime has engaged in this on all sides of the politico-ideological ballpark.

Take the 'secular-democrat' side of the political spectrum. This has been divided ideologically, on other (mainly socio-economic) issues, along standard 'liberal' versus 'left' lines. But throughout the 1992–2004 period, the left was also divided between those supporting the hard liners in the army high command committed to the policy of 'eradicating' the Islamists and those opposed to this policy and supporting rather the opposed tendency within the regime that favoured a negotiated political solution. Thus the 'left' was internally polarised between 'left eradicators' and 'left conciliators' (to use the Algerian political slang). The emergence of this division split and destroyed the PAGS early on and only its eradicator wing survived as an organised party, known as *Ettahaddi* (Defiance) and later as the Social and Democratic Movement (*Mouvement Démocratique et Social*, MDS). This then allied itself with other 'eradicator' parties, notably Saïd Sadi's Kabyle-based RCD and ex-prime minister Redha Malek's Republican National Alliance (*Alliance Nationale Républicaine*, ANR), while the dissident Trotskyist current within Algerian Marxism, reorganised as the Workers' Party (*Parti des Travailleurs*, PT) linked up with Aït Ahmed's vaguely social-democratic FFS, but also with the so-called 'moderate', that is, constitutional, Islamist parties, such as Mahfoud Nahnah's Movement for an Islamic Society (*Haraka li-Mujtama' Islami*, HAMAS) and Abdallah Djaballah's Movement for an Islamic Renaissance (*Harakat el-Nahda el-Islamiyya*, MNI) on the 'conciliator' side of this division.

Thus the regime contrived to inject its own internal division between 'eradicators' and 'conciliators' into the party-political arena it had brought into existence outside itself in such a way as to ensure that the liberals, the left and, for that matter, the Kabyles were all *at odds with one another* over this policy issue to the extent that their own respective agendas went entirely by the board

for the duration of the violence, and not the slightest further progress towards democracy occurred – if anything, there was a serious net regression. By the time the ‘eradicator’ versus ‘conciliator’ divide within the regime was finally transcended under President Bouteflika, the damage done to the secular parties had become irreparable.

Similarly, the regime has engaged in the most elaborate forms of triangulation within the Islamist movement. I have already noted how, by (belatedly) licensing Islamist rivals to the FIS, the regime began to play off the different Islamist parties against one another. When the regime finally returned to the electoral process with the presidential elections in 1995, it relied on the constitutional Islamists of Mahfoud Nahnah’s party, now called the Movement of Society for Peace (*Mouvement de la Société pour la Paix*, MSP; *Harakat el-Mujtama’ el-Silm*, HMS), to provide a safe electoral and political home for the former FIS vote. Thus Nahnah was authorised to run for president and won a handsome three million votes and over 25 per cent of the total poll.¹⁸ In the 1997 legislative, regional and municipal elections, on the other hand, the regime acted to ensure that the MSP did not get or stay too big, and these elections accordingly witnessed a remarkable decline in the MSP’s vote and a remarkable increase in the vote for Abdallah Djaballah’s party, now known as the Nahda Movement (*Mouvement de la Nahda*, MN or simply *Ennahda*). In the national assembly elected in June 1997, the MSP won 14,8 per cent of the vote and 69 seats, while the MN obtained 8,72 per cent of the vote and 34 seats. Thus the MSP, which was part of the ‘majority’ coalition supporting the government, had clearly lost much of its vote share since 1995, but equally clearly had the advantage over the oppositional MN. In 2002, on the other hand, the positions were reversed, with Djaballah’s party, now called the National Reform Movement (*Mouvement de la Reforme Nationale*, MRN; *Harakat el-Islah el-Watani*) overtaking the MSP and winning 10,38 per cent of the vote and 43 seats to the MSP’s 7,05 per cent of the vote and 38 seats. Thus, from 1997 onwards, the regime relied on the various Islamist parties to neutralise one other, thereby ensuring that no one Islamist party could emerge that was capable of mobilising the entire Islamist constituency and seriously challenging the regime and the political and constitutional status quo.

While the regime was engaging in triangulation within the constitutional wing of the Islamist movement in this way, it was also, of course, operating both a higher level of triangulation – playing off the constitutional Islamists against

the armed Islamist rebellion – and other, lower level, triangulation strategies within the Islamist rebellion itself. For the armed Islamist movements were never united at any stage and this both owed a lot to the efforts of the Algerian intelligence services (which infiltrated its agents into the rebellion and undoubtedly worked to keep it divided) and was relentlessly exploited by the regime in various ways.

Although the subjective outlook of the armed movements was not at all definite at first, by 1993–1994 divisions had crystallised and the movements fell broadly into two camps: the conditional rebels and the doctrinaire *jihadis*. The clearest expression of the former was the Islamic Salvation Army (*Armée Islamique du Salut*, AIS) which emerged in 1994 out of the earlier and less ideologically clear-cut Armed Islamic Movement (*Mouvement Islamique Armée*, MIA) and Movement for an Islamic State (*Mouvement pour un État Islamique*, MEI). The AIS made it clear at the outset that it accepted the authority of the imprisoned FIS leaders and it was equally clear that it was fighting to induce the state to mend its ways in its treatment of the Islamists in general and the FIS in particular, but not to overthrow the state out of some doctrinaire objection to it. The other wing of the rebellion was embodied above all in the Armed Islamic Group (*Groupe Islamique Armé*, GIA) which was dominated by doctrinaire *jihadis*, many of them veterans of the Afghanistan war, and which was not in the least concerned about the regime's treatment of the FIS and refused all idea of negotiation. The GIA leaders were dogmatic takfiris who considered the state to be impious and a licit object of *jihad*. Their rhetoric spoke only of overthrowing it and replacing it with a properly Islamic state or caliphate.

The regime did not merely passively benefit from this division and incoherence in the armed rebellion, it actively encouraged and aggravated the situation, not merely by playing one wing off against the other, but also by acting in ways that furnished arguments to one wing at one moment and arguments to the other wing at another moment. Thus, when the regime made moves towards opening talks with the imprisoned FIS leaders, it naturally tended to give the AIS the advantage, since it appeared to vindicate the AIS perspective. But, when mooted talks fell short of a deal or were aborted, it gave arguments to the doctrinaire *jihadis* in support of their refusal to consider negotiation. In this manner, the 'eradicator' versus 'conciliator' division within the regime dovetailed with, confirmed and aggravated the 'conditional' versus 'doctrinaire' division within the armed rebellion.

That triangulation had become a virtually indispensable if not instinctive or compulsive element of the regime's repertoire is suggested by the fact that, once a deal was eventually struck with the AIS in 1997, leading quickly to a complete ceasefire by the AIS units and thus their departure from the field, important divisions promptly began to emerge *within* the previously uniformly and unanimously doctrinaire GIA. These divisions were between those who adhered to the traditional concept of *takfir*, limiting the application of this to the state and its agents, and those who decided to extend it to the entire society – *takfir el-mujtama'* – which was henceforth considered to have 'left Islam' and was thus conceived to be both guilty of apostasy (for which the traditional penalty is death) and a licit object of *jihad*. This division, which had been simmering behind the scenes for the previous year or more, finally came into the open in September 1998, when the commander of what the GIA called its 'Zone 2' (the Boumerdès-western Kabylia region to the east of Algiers), Hassan Hattab, explicitly broke away to form the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (*El-Jama'a el-Salafiyya li'l-Da'wa wa'l-Qital; Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat*, GSPC).

This development set up a new polarisation within the doctrinaire *jihadi* camp, between adepts of *takfir el-mujtama'* and their critics, who confined *takfir* to the state and their attacks to state personnel while sparing civilians. Over the next few years the latter, regrouped primarily in the GSPC, displayed considerable dynamism and extended its presence to several parts of the country, while the extremist GIA dwindled to a small rump in the hinterland of Algiers.¹⁹ However, following the dissolution of the AIS and other associated movements in 2000 in the context of President Bouteflika's offer of a kind of amnesty, it emerged that the regime was considering the idea of opening some kind of negotiation with the GSPC with a view to concluding a similar amnesty-in-exchange-for-dissolution deal. It also transpired that discreet contacts had been established with Hattab himself, who favoured this scenario.

The result was a fresh polarisation, this time within the GSPC, between supporters of a deal that would enable them to end the by now evidently futile armed struggle and opponents of this inclined rather to try to keep going indefinitely by linking up with Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda. The latter won the ensuing struggle for control of the GSPC and eventually renamed the group al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (*Al-Qa'eda au Maghreb Islamique*, AQMI), which is the main and apparently the sole armed group still operating in Algeria. But it should be noted here that the faction within the Algerian regime

that was strongly opposed to the idea of a deal with the GSPC was stressing the GSPC's 'links' to al-Qaeda – as its main argument for opposing any negotiation – for years before the diehard wing of the organisation eventually seemed to vindicate this assessment by changing the group's name as it did. No doubt at some point in the future AQMI too will suffer an internal split of some kind and the game will continue, if (thankfully) at a lower level of intensity compared with the horrors of the 1990s.

CONCLUSION

I have in this chapter done no more than sketch in necessarily summary and schematic fashion the main aspects of the ways in which the strategies and tactics of the Egyptian and Algerian governments have impacted directly on the behaviour of the Islamist movements with which they have been dealing. This is a subject that arguably warrants far fuller treatment than is possible here. Such a treatment would also need to explore in equal depth the ways in which the behaviour of secular political forces at home and the policies of external powers – and in the first place, Western governments – have influenced the behaviour of these regimes and these Islamist movements. But it should already be apparent that analyses of Islamist movements that consider their behaviour in isolation from that of the other political actors – and accordingly rely very largely if not exclusively on the ideology (or, to be precise, the formally stated doctrines) of Islamist movements as the source and explanation of their behaviour – are bound to be inadequate in their understanding of the relation of causes and effects. To arrive at a reliable understanding of these matters requires us to consider and appreciate in full the contexts in which these movements operate and this requires us to take account of the roles of the other principal actors.

NOTES

- 1 Paper presented to a conference on Inter-regional challenges of Islamic Fundamentalist movements in North Africa in relation to network support, organised by the Institute for Security Studies, Addis Ababa, 17–18 June 2009. Some amendments were made in March 2011 to reflect the recent events.
- 2 *Takfir* is the act of condemning something or someone as impious or infidel (from *kufir*: infidel, unbeliever).

- 3 As the constant reference in its name to the Tunisian constitutionalist tradition – *al-dustur* is the Arabic for constitution – clearly testifies.
- 4 Professor Mohand Issad, of the University of Algiers, who chaired the national commission of inquiry into the events in Kabylia in 2001. See M Issad, *Dernier rapport de la Commission nationale d'enquête sur les événements de Kabylie, Le Jeune Indépendant* (Algiers), 30 December 2001.
- 5 Cuba has long been very popular with Algerians and has served as a source of political models.
- 6 Madjed Makhedi, Rachid Grim (politologue et auteur): La constitution révisée a réussi à faire accepter l'idée d'une relève en famille, *El Watan*, 12 November 2009.
- 7 For Nasser's religious policy, see Malika Zeghal, Religion and politics in Egypt: the ulema of Al-Azhar, radical Islam and the state (1952-1994), *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 31 (1999), 371-399.
- 8 For further discussion of this point, see on Algeria: Bernard Cubertafond, *La République algérienne démocratique et populaire* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1979); on Egypt, Malika Zeghal, *Gardiens de l'Islam: les oulémas d'Al-Azhar dans l'Égypte contemporaine* (Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1996); on Libya, François Burgat, 'Qadhafi's ideological framework', in Dirk Vandewalle (ed.), *Qadhafi's Libya 1969 to 1994* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1995), 47-63; Ann Elizabeth Mayer, 'In search of sacred law: the meandering course of Qadhafi's legal policy' in Vandewalle, *op. cit.*, 113-37, and George Joffé, 'Qadhafi's Islam in local historical perspective', in Vandewalle (ed.) *op. cit.*, 139-54; on Morocco, Henry Munson, *Religion and power in Morocco* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993); Mohamed Tozy, *Monarchie et islam politique au Maroc* (Paris, Presse de Sciences Po, 1999), especially chapter 3; on Tunisia: Michel Camau et al., *La Tunisie au présent: une modernité au-dessus de tout soupçon* (Paris, CNRS, 1987); Kenneth J. Perkins, *A history of modern Tunisia* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 9 This rapprochement, which was especially important in Algeria's trading relations, was consecrated diplomatically by President Chadli's visit to France in November 1983, during which he went so far as to pay homage at the tomb of the unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe, a gesture which would have been unimaginable on the part of his predecessor President Boumediène and was angrily criticised as shameful in nationalist circles in Algeria
- 10 For a detailed discussion of this point, see Hugh Roberts, *North African Islamism in the blinding light of 9-11*, Crisis States Programme Working Paper (1st series), No 27, London: London School of Economics, Development Research Centre, 2003, 33, 25-27.
- 11 President Sadat's personal endorsement of and investment in this new agenda is evident from the title he gave his autobiography: A Sadat, *In search of identity*, London: Collins, 1978.
- 12 For more discussion of this point in the Algerian case, see my essay H Roberts, Historical and unhistorical approaches to the problem of identity in Algeria, *Bulletin of Francophone Africa*, 4 (Autumn 1993), 79-92, republished in Hugh Roberts, *The Battlefield: Algeria 1988-2002. Studies in a broken polity*, London and New York: Verso, 2003, Chapter 7.

- 13 The NDP was a member of the Socialist International and officially recognised as a fraternal party by the New Labour Party in the UK. NDP delegations have attended New Labour Party annual conferences as guests with observer status.
- 14 In orthodox Sunni doctrine, rebellion against a Muslim ruler is *fitna* (sedition, division or dissolution of the community of believers) and wrong by definition, whereas *jihad* is right by definition. The function of *takfir* in this context was to enable those taking up arms to claim they were waging *jihad* not *fitna* by branding the rulers as non-Muslims. This is the key point on which the Brothers came to the rescue of the Egyptian state by affirming its Muslim character and so refuting the claim of the takfiris.
- 15 The letter ‘j’ (known as *jīm* in Arabic) is pronounced as a hard ‘g’ in most parts of Egypt; thus *gama’a* is the Egyptian form of *jama’a*. Following the suppression of the mostly non-violent ‘Islamic groups’, former members of these *jama’at* either dropped out or joined the Muslim Brothers, with only a minority opting for violent rebellion. In this way the plethora of *jama’at islamiyya* of the 1970s gave way in the 1980s to one and only one ‘Islamic Group’, the *jihadi Gama’a*.
- 16 I discussed this moment in Algerian political history in some depth in my article, The embattled Arians of Algiers: radical Islamism and the dilemma of Algerian nationalism, first published under a slightly different title and in substantially edited form in *Third World Quarterly* X(2) (April 1988), 556–589, and republished in its original form in Roberts, *North African Islamism in the blinding light of 9-11*, Chapter 1.
- 17 See Hugh Roberts, From radical mission to equivocal ambition: the expansion and manipulation of Algerian Islamism, 1979–1992, in Martin E Marty and R Scott Appleby (eds), *Accounting for fundamentalisms: the dynamic character of movements*, The Fundamentalism Project, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 428–489.
- 18 The revision of the constitution in November 1996 prohibited the political exploitation of Islam. This provision was interpreted not to imply the banning of Islamist parties but to mean that they were obliged to drop explicit references to Islam in their names.
- 19 Another, smaller group that split from the GIA at around the same time and for the same reasons was known as *Houmat el-Da’wa el-Salafiyya* (Guardians of the Salafi Call); this was confined to western Algeria.

10 Conclusion

MUNA ABDALLA

The contributors to this monograph illustrate that Islamist movements in their different forms and shapes have been influenced by various temporal and spatial contexts. Colonisation, post-colonisation and calls for democracy have provided fertile ground for the inception of Islamist movements. In North Africa, where the majority of the population is Muslim, Islam was used as an ideology of national liberation during colonisation. Social movements that emerged called for independence and self-rule, as well as a return to the origins of Islam as a guiding principle in the face of Western values and culture. Islam has been employed as a system of belief and values to shield Muslims against Western ideologies and intrusions. Some movements also advocate a Muslim way of life not only within the nation-state but also beyond it, calling for an Islamic *ummah* (or community of believers).

During post-independence, there is room for manoeuvring and a willingness to reform the goals and objectives of Islamist movements in order to respond to the new challenges. Globalisation has opened the door to diverse and critical interpretations and explications of Islam that challenge the conventional religious authority, and can lead to significant changes in Muslim societies and the practice of Islam. There has been a renewed interest in *ijtihad*

(independent reasoning) around the world, which is evident in the rich religious discourse in the Muslim and non-Muslim world. In the Muslim world, there is also clear disagreement between those who adopt different forms of Islam – modern, radical and cultural-spiritual.

Some Islamist thinkers have tried to establish a link between the role and relevance of the Muslim masses in current political affairs in Muslim countries. Islamic *wasatiyyah* is an example of such an attempt. It represented the approach of reformists who mapped out the democratic dimensions of Islamic political theory that accepted the moral value of democracy and highlighted its compatibility with *Shariah*. *Dawah* (preaching) was to be used to penetrate society with the objectives of this reform (*islah*) and renewal (*tajdid*). The outcome was a revision of the traditional Islamic discourse that provides an ethical vision of Islam for everyday use. There was great potential for moderate Islamists to effectively shape the political terrain of the Muslim world by promoting a pluralistic and tolerant reading of Islam. However, this did not occur, despite the Islamic movements' continued endorsement of reforms in response to both external and internal stimuli.

SURVIVAL AND CHANGE

Some Islamic movements in North Africa have been able to adapt to various circumstances and to survive under extreme hardships. The Muslim Brotherhood is a very good example of such adaptation. The movement has survived and remained at the forefront of the political arena for more than 60 years since the assassination of its founder, Imam El Banna, despite the great ideological conflict within the movement itself as well as adverse external circumstances. Shobaki attributes this to the movement's flexibility and adaptability to both exogenous and endogenous changes. The movement adheres to a broad conception of Islam that has enabled it to attract a wide spectrum of followers, from religious reformers to members of parliament, from Sufis to revolutionary jihadists. Such flexibility is also reflected in its leadership. The founder of the movement, El-Banna, advocated Islam as a comprehensive and holistic way of life, and promoted *al-hakimiyya li-Allah* (the sovereignty of God).

For Larbi, this very conception has opened a door for interpreting the way Islam should be viewed in societies experiencing substantial cultural and spiritual changes. Over the past three decades the focus of change has been

democratisation and the acceptance of the main tenets of democracy as universal human values. While there has been some progress and much debate regarding change, negotiations between existing movements and the state have taken different forms, including resorting to violence.

The Muslim Brotherhood, however, in its relations and strategies with the state has also kept changing in response to various circumstances. It has alternated between aggression and passive withdrawal, opting to avoid outright conflict and rather employ pragmatic defensive strategies. Such flexibility has allowed the movement to survive under repressive regimes, from the monarchy to the republic.

ISLAM AS A MEANS OF POLITICAL CONTROL

Islam has served as a vehicle for state building and political reform, as well as for political control. Despite declaring secularisation, many North African states have used Islamic idioms and metaphors to rally internal support or to guarantee absolute control. Zemin shows that the Moroccan monarchy has always assumed complete control of the religious field. Since independence, the monarchy, the conservative wing of the Istiqlal party and *'ulama* (Muslim scholars) have shared the same political culture. The king has been the supreme religious authority in the country and the constitution has supported this position, depicting the monarchy as a sacred power. While the monarchy's interpretation of Islam is encouraged, continuous attempts have been made to neutralise popular religious figures politically. Some Islamic movements have been integrated into public functions, or 'bureaucratized', for example in education.

At the same time and to keep up with the changes taking place in the environment, including the denouncing of terrorism, the Moroccan monarchy has attempted to portray an image of a tolerant and open Islam. It strongly condemned the Casablanca attacks, as well as 9/11 and other attacks. The government's policy towards perceived opposing Islamist ideology and fanaticism is to reassert the religious primacy of the monarchy, a restructuring of the religious field.

Unlike other North African countries, the governance of Sudan is undertaken by Islamic movement(s), with various twists and turns. This has made the Islamic movements of Sudan the sole deciders on the issue of building a modern state and society on Islamic principles.

The use of the military as an extension of civilian rule became apparent when a government and military partnership in Sudan resulted in the military coup of 1989. This coup was led by General Omar al-Bashir and Hasan al-Turabi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest Islamic movement in the country. The honeymoon was short-lived and the partnership did not last long. Stefano Bellucci posits that the issue of democracy in Sudan is not about the governing of the people by the people, but rather concerns the question of how to govern and how to exercise power. Sudanese Islamism of the 1990s posed a challenge in this sense, because it tried to subvert the status quo by looking for a new kind of 'state'. For Bellucci this was the real threat to regional stability posed by a section of Islamists who took power in the Sudan. Islamism as a 'cultural phenomenon' was precisely what al-Turabi tried to overcome, by aiming at dismantling the nation-state and the politics of division introduced in Africa by colonial rule. For al-Turabi's faction the problem was the nation-state and the divisive form of administrative power that it entailed, based on ethnic and religious divisions within the citizenry. The conflict between al-Turabi's and al-Bashir's factions has never been resolved, but the ultimate political power and authority remains with Bashir and his National Congress Party (NCP), which continues to claim Islamic legitimacy.

In Algeria, Amel argues, the state used the Salafi groups as a means to tame other Islamic groups, including *jihadi* Salafism. But the Salafi groups became a potent political force through their control of the process of social re-Islamisation among the young people of Algeria. The movement is averse not only to violence, but also to any matters to do with politics or political demands. Therefore it remains in the good books of the government, and, unlike other Islamic movements in the country, it is allowed to undertake its activities freely and without harassment. On the other hand, since 2007, the ideological struggle led by the Algerian government against AQMI has relied heavily on the preaching in Wahhabi-controlled mosques. Intimidated and hard-pressed by the government, these mosques issued a counter-*fatwa* (edict) denouncing the *jihad* ideology of the AQMI group. The strong presence of the Wahhabi group signifies the absence of any true political pluralism in the country.

The relationship between the state and Islamic movements has always been a complex one, whether one is attempting to integrate the Islamic movements into the political process as in Morocco, or keeping them at arm's length and limiting their influence as in Algeria. The experiences of the three countries

cited above indicate that even when Islamic movements are given a space in the political arena or are brought into the power sphere, they have never exercised authority themselves, and ultimately the interests and priorities of the state and the Islamic movements do not dovetail. It is intellectual flexibility that has allowed the movements to survive.

TURNING POINTS FOR EXTREMISM AND *JIHAD*

In essence, the notion of *jihad* is not concerned exclusively with war-making and the use of force or arms. Larbi shows that *jihad* initially emphasised the exercise of peaceful means, or the effort and exertion involved in any form of worship that aims to get closer to God, foster the pursuit of knowledge and livelihood, the caring for others, or to boost the cause of Islam. For Qotb, one of the most influential Muslim thinkers, the solution to the problems of the Muslim community of sovereignty, identity, religiosity, justice and Godly rule could only occur when the community lived under the Qur'an and the Sunnah – God's law and an Islamic state that resembles the time of the Prophet and the tradition of the *salafyyah*. Qotb believed in reform and expected it to happen quickly. He agreed on fighting non-Muslims in some situations to rid them of all ungodly laws, a stance influenced by the occupation of Palestine. His notion of the vanguard (*tala'i*), or those who will guide other Muslims to a truly Islamic state at great cost to themselves, did not cancel the role of the vanguards in their quest for the godly and just state. The notion of *jihad* then became confined to the military, which is contrary to the interpretation of Islamic scholars and thinkers. Qotb's stance was interpreted by some Islamic scholars as a call for extremism and terrorism, though the rest of his work or his brand of reformist Muslim politics is about humanity and care, communal obligation, the need to sustain a good community, and to exercise compassion. However, such a sophisticated understanding of *jihad* has undergone considerable changes at different junctures of Muslim world history. The contributors to this monograph agree that the escalation of the Arab–Israeli conflict (during the 1970s and 1980s), the war against terror, and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have all deepened the anti-Western stance and accentuated the ideological directions of *jihad* and Salafism, causing a major setback for reform.

For Islamic movements and their armed wings, the 1950–1960s war against colonialism or the war against illegitimate states is no longer the major cause for

jihād. All Muslims – *umma* – are now called to a new *jihād* against Americans, Jews, ‘crusaders’, the West and all that is Western. Islamic movements have extended their reach beyond the borders of the nation-state and sent their warriors to fight in Palestine and elsewhere. The Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 gave an enormous boost to radical Islamic movements in North Africa and particularly in Egypt, Algeria and Morocco. It served as an example for other Islamic movements and they too began to entertain the possibility of seizing power through revolution.

Armed groups emerged with the aim of defending the Muslim *umma* and establishing an Islamic state in many of the North African countries. In Algeria, Amel argues that the message of *jihād* supersedes that of building an Islamic nation or the original motives for *jihād*. This represents a change in the old message of the GSPC–AQMI from struggling to remove an un-Islamic government or voicing political demands to existing only for *jihād*. The anti-state Salafi completely reject working within the political system and this is what differentiates them from most large Islamist political parties. A fertile ground for the revival of radical Islamism, Salafi movements were being created as the violence prevailed. Young jihadists were radicalised by their violent environment and knew very little of the political objectives of Islamism. For them the idea of *jihād* has proved its credentials historically. It was this idea that enabled the Algerian political elites to emerge during the struggle for independence. That war was known as a holy war and warriors were *mujahidin*. Based on *jihād* logic, former *mujahidin* were idolised and seen as ideal examples of sacrifice and devotion. This encouraged the younger generation, who were also pushed by other circumstances, including economic factors, to compete for the same privilege. The media played a very active role in polarising the disenfranchised youth.

Thus far, most North African governments have shown an inclination to at least limit the Islamist movements’ freedom. Pressure and control applied by these states have driven Islamist movements either underground or abroad, and forced them to use more potent means to respond to internal challenges.

For extremist Islamists, globalisation poses a real threat in that Western culture and values may overwhelm or thwart Islamic values. Islamic movements thus reject absolute submission to the West and its hegemony, and attempt to construct an all-encompassing universal religious principle. New Islamic movements were formed or old movements reformulated their pro-

grammes and struggle aims as early responses to the new world order in order to protect Islamic values.

In Libya the formation of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) was a direct consequence of these concerns. Kabir argues that the problem of interpretation and propagation of a unique brand of Islamic faith by Mu'ammarr Qadhafi, through his 'Green Book', was among the important reasons that led to the formation of the LIFG. The deep-seated resentment felt by the educated Libyan Islamic elites over the regime's heterodox religious orientation, conspicuous corruption and economic mismanagement have all fed into the trend towards extremism.

Turning to extremism and violence did not happen out of the blue. Several factors at both the local and global levels contributed to these developments. Therefore, one should be very cautious about overlooking or ignoring the context of the violent expression of Islam.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INSTABILITY

Internal factors have played a pivotal role in the recruitment of members for and the formation and adoption of *jihad* as a means of resistance. Authoritarian control, political instability and uncertainty, lack of pluralism, diversity and toleration have provided a strong impetus for the movement's popularity and its tactics. In Algeria the presence and increasing popularity of *jihadi* and Wahhabi Salafi groups are seen as a direct result of the internal factors, namely the absence of any true political pluralism. Amel Boubaker argues that the Algerian state attempts to control and limit the activities of Islamic groups, and that the terrorist risk has led to greater extremism among these groups. Lack of pluralist political dialogue or of an equitable wealth and power-sharing formula has made security control the only means of legitimacy. In the fight against terror post-9/11, Algeria has become the partner of the US and a 'champion of regional and international security'. This role has given Algeria a leading position in the new sphere of Mediterranean security, a more privileged role than that played by Morocco in relation to the US.

The contributors to this monograph argue that failed political and economic reforms across Africa are evident in widespread unemployment among the youth, and overdependence on the West. These conditions have also provided fertile ground for Islamic extremist groups to mobilise support against the

established secular order as well as against real or perceived external threats. For example, in Morocco, argues Zemni, poor neighbourhoods have provided a good entry point for Jihadi Salafism to the community. The misconception that slums lack social cohesion is being tested by the control Jihadi Salafism exercises over these places. Jihadi Salafism offers slum dwellers, particularly the youth, a new form of social cohesion and personal identification. In Libya, Kabir considers the soaring unemployment, food and goods shortages, and overall economic depression arising from the imposition of the UN sanctions placed on Libya in 1992 as among the chief factors that led to the formation of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). In Algeria, the GSPC–AQMI found fertile grounds among the youth and disenfranchised Algerians, ready to participate in suicide attacks, kidnappings and assassinations.

The sophisticated security apparatus of the North African regimes has driven many political and religious movements underground. However, the majority have fled in self-exile to various Muslim countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, Europe and North America. This has led to a vicious cycle of violence and counter-violence.

By networking, Islamic groups seek external legitimacy by gaining the support of disfranchised Muslim communities. Their basic message is that sovereignty is the domain of God and not of the people of the state, thus making their geopolitics global with the aim of spreading the Islamic way of life wherever Muslims live. However, their message is pragmatically adapted to the socio-political context within which they operate.

The nature of political Islam as expressed in the orientation and practices of Islamic political parties exhibits transnationalist tendencies, argues Salih. Unlike Western political parties, which operate within the domain of sovereign nation-states, Islamist political organisations or parties are not bound by geographical national boundaries. They develop from national movements to transnational networks that attempt to reach Muslim communities wherever these exist. The transnational Muslim *umma* (community of believers) becomes an extension of the national space, including forming transnational *da'awa*, philanthropic organisations and networks with links to and exchanges with Muslims living in other parts of the Muslim world, Muslims in non-Muslim societies and potential converts in the West, parts of Africa and Asia.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is a case in point. The movement is by far one of the most successful Islamic organisations in terms of its ability to become

a worldwide transnational organisation capable of reinventing itself in different Muslim societies across the globe. Originally the movement emerged as a nationalist Islamic movement in the struggle against colonialism and Western values, with the goal of establishing an Islamic state. Soon, however, it outgrew its original nationalist objective, expanding from Egypt to other continents and to almost every country in the Middle East. Muslim Brotherhood organisations started to emerge in countries such as Sudan, Yemen, Kuwait, Jordan, Palestine and Pakistan, among others, and continue to function to date. In Libya, the internal pressure applied by the state gave the Islamic movement additional reasons to launch a *jihad* campaign against the regime. But the movement could not continue its activities inside Libya and so it fled the country to Afghanistan, where it formed new alliances and had a major shift in its goals and objectives. The local perception of what constitutes a crisis also underwent significant change – from a localised view of a problem concerning Muslim people within a nation-state to the problems of the Muslim *umma* in the world at large. With the training and support the movement had, its members joined forces with the *mujahidin* to fight the Soviets. The experiences acquired in military training and the organisation of guerrilla movements influenced the evolution of the Libyan *mujahidin* that later became the LIFG. They were also influenced by the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Algeria, especially the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. By 1992 the LIFG had become an established organisation in Afghanistan, committed to overthrowing the Qadhafi regime in Libya and implementing an Islamic state based on the *Shari'ah*. The LIFG also found links with other regional Islamic militant and fundamentalist movements, such as the most prominent and forceful movement among the Afghan-trained Islamic militant and fundamentalist movements of extreme orientation in North Africa, the Egyptian *Al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya*. In Sudan, the LIFG intensified its training in military theory and training, intelligence, security matters, tactics, guerrilla warfare and instruction alongside other Arab compatriots in special villa complexes.

For extreme Islamist groups, Islamic transnationalism is seen as a universal network that expands *jihad* into *dar al harb* (the region of war or the West) or wherever such Western interests can be targeted. These networks use support networks that are mobile, flexible and ideologically fluid organisations. In Algeria, the jihadist groups that emerged post-9/11 adopted a new strategy that focused on national concord and attempts to unify the *mujahidin* across the

globe in order to internationalise its call. One of the manifestations of such a strategy is the official affiliation of the GSPC to al-Qaeda. The GSPC thus became the Organisation of al-Qaeda in the Islamic countries of the Maghreb (AQMI). Carrying the al-Qaeda label afforded the GSPC a reappearance in the international arena and a better response to the global war on terror. The AQMI also draws different Maghreb Jihadi Salafi groups to its cause. The GSPC–AQMI has tried, with less success, to regionalise *jihad* in the Maghreb in solidarity with Iraq, Chechnya and other such states.

Islamist groups have thus been able to adapt to various circumstances and to find ways to regenerate themselves in different and more resilient forms.

In short, the contributors to this monograph have pointed out clearly that the best way to understand political Islam is within its temporal and spatial contexts. Political Islam is not monolithic and the manner in which it is manifested and practised varies greatly across North Africa.

Various schools of thought have emerged, each a product of the specific political and social realities of the last century. These schools of thought have also remained dynamic; they have kept changing, reshaping and reforming in response to various internal and external factors. However, they differ substantially regarding a suitable relationship between Islam and the governance of society. Therefore, Islamic groups remain scattered along the spectrum between moderation and extremism. Despite the extreme and exclusivist stances assumed by some groups such as al-Qaeda, the majority of Islamists renounce such practices. Therefore, one should differentiate between the various schools of political Islam and its extremist tendencies. It has been made abundantly clear that not all Islamic movements and groups are violent. One should also consider the factors that generate extremism: both the local and global milieu influence peaceful or violent behaviour. Extremism and terrorism in North Africa are not only security concerns. They involve many aspects and are often interwoven with social and economic concerns. Deteriorating economic conditions, unemployment and poverty, lack of genuine political participation or representation, the absence of constitutional liberties, and weaknesses in the state system have all been shown to be catalysts for extremism and violence.

Extremism and violence in North Africa are likely to remain as long they are addressed by myopic strategies that further isolate religious Islamic actors and Muslims. Using coercive measures have not proved effective in resolving

the problem of extremism and terrorism. Furthermore, coercive measures have often led to a deep feeling of collective grievance and humiliation among communities. Thus, extremism and acts of terrorism are bound to meet contradictory responses: sympathy and a degree of support from affected communities, setting in motion a vicious cycle of violence and counter-violence, or a backlash from secularist groups immersed in an expanding global secularist material culture. The contributors to this monograph have demonstrated that there is a need for critical alternatives and comprehensive strategies to engage the conditions that have bred extremism. These alternatives should start from the standpoint of acknowledging and appreciating the diversity within the Muslim society. Furthermore, they should nurture a better understanding of the fundamental social problems and struggles specific to the diverse manifestations of political Islam. These observations are mindful that Islam once played a profound role in uniting nations against colonialism; it has the same potential to be a unifying force against extremism and violence, and to support peace and stability.

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La région de l'Afrique du Nord a pendant longtemps vécu un semblant de stabilité politique. La réalité de ce simulacre a été récemment dévoilée par les événements survenus en Tunisie, en Egypte et en Libye. Si l'on regarde de plus près ces soulèvements populaires on se rend compte que ces pays étaient en ébullition pendant une très longue période. Cette monographie examine la manière par laquelle plusieurs facteurs, au nombre desquels la pauvreté, le chômage et le déni de participation politique, se sont combinés pour susciter la colère et la frustration au sein de divers groupes, notamment les jeunes, les poussant à adopter une position extrême en utilisant des idéologies islamiques. Elle démontre que les divergences extrémistes et les tendances d'un Islam politique ne devraient pas être séparées des facteurs qui les produisent à la base.

For a long time the region of North Africa enjoyed what seemed like political stability. The reality behind this false image has been unveiled lately by the events that have taken place in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. A closer look at these uprisings shows that they have been simmering for a very long time. This monograph examines the way in which a range of factors, including poverty, unemployment and denial of political participation, collaborated to generate anger and frustration among various groups, particularly the youth, pushing them to adopt extreme stands using Islamic ideologies. It demonstrates that the extremist variances and tendencies of political Islam should not be separated from the factors that generate them in the first place.

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