Introduction

Going beyond superficial consideration of wars, crises and conflicts, this book investigates whether the contemporary Islamic world is also the scene of appreciable political change. Can we discern a deeper political rationality behind the facade of radicalism, extremism and terrorism that is served up to us daily in the news? Or do we have to face the fact that a core region of the world, stretching from West Africa to Southeast Asia, from Southeastern Europe to the Sahara, will remain in a permanent state of political chaos?

There are grounds for hope, and they rest upon a very simple idea. The West's current state of prosperity, modernity and global power is due, not only to enlightenment, science and democracy, but just as much to wars of religion, revolutions and colonial exploitation. Radicalism and political violence were, strange though it may seem, constant accompaniments to the development of democracy in North America and Europe. In view of this in-built world historical paradox, it seems legitimate to ask whether, despite political radicalism and violence, positive political developments are possible in other parts of the world as well. Has the evolution of the West not shown that crises – even of epoch-making proportions – may usher in positive change?

The Islamic world, and especially North Africa and the Middle East, has for decades been replete with political contradictions. Islamic fundamentalists oppose the secular state, sometimes violently, and at the same time constitute the strongest opposition to authoritarian dictatorships in the region. Their relationship to democracy is anything but clear-cut, and yet they do very well in the rarely held free elections. Even beyond the Islamic fundamentalist parties, which call for the introduction of Islamic

states, Muslims are rebelling against the interpretive sovereignty of the modern clergy; at the same time, they often seek refuge in a new, intolerant Puritanism. Societies are being torn apart by the concurrent wish for change and for continuity with the past, for progress and tradition, while the neo-Islamic movements, which now exist in almost all Islamic countries, embody perfectly the kind of internal contradictions also inherent to radical Protestantism in the modern history of Europe and America, with religious revival and challenges to authoritarian power existing alongside religious fanaticism and intolerance.

RADICALISM AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN THE ISLAMIC AND WESTERN WORLDS

If we accept the parallels between the Western historical processes of the Reformation and contemporary conditions, it seems inevitable that the Islamic countries face a period of unbridled religious wars. And there is, in fact, much to suggest this: civil wars between different groups of Muslims such as Sunnites and Shiites in Iraq and between secular nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists in Palestine, which are occurring against the background of a 'holy war' declared on the West by a handful of globally active terrorists. Like the Turks at the gates of Vienna in the Reformation era, the Western military presence in the Middle East seems to fuel internal discord and encourage tendencies towards rebellion.

Yet it is by no means inevitable that the Islamic world will slide into an age of religious wars. Comparing political developments in different regions of the world helps to sensitize us intellectually – rather than foster a fatalistic worldview which assumes that history must endlessly repeat itself. Of course, the contemporary Islamic world and Reformation Europe are not identical, though some of the mechanisms of radical religious opposition are similar. Those who reject violence and dread the unpredictability of political radicalism may draw comfort from the thought that alongside numerous parallels with the era of Christian Reformation, the contemporary Islamic world also features markedly different tendencies. In Turkey, Indonesia and Bangladesh, a considerable swathe of Muslims already line their lives under democratic regimes. Alongside fundamentalism, there exists a reformist Islam that promotes the pluralist modernization of Islam through an Enlightenment-style critique of sources.

Despite its many problems, the Islamic world of today is in some respects more advanced than 'the Occident' was during the era of Reformation, partly because of the West, which has been viewed as a

model of modernization for the last two centuries. Yet the appeal of the West has waned in recent times. The political turn to Islam is *in part* the consequence of neo-imperialist Western policies, the self-inflicted injuries to human rights in Guantánamo and a 'war against terror', which is both hopeless and in breach of international law, that has claimed many thousands of victims. Can such policies still be viewed as exemplary? Is the West even aware of how violently its seemingly peaceful democracies have acted, especially against the oil-rich Middle East? Was the problem really just George W. Bush or is the hegemonic foreign policy that is characteristic of the United States and Europe systemic in nature? If we wish to improve our understanding of the Middle East, we must explicitly confront our own history, examining both domestic and foreign policy aspects. Martin Luther was no liberal but a fiery breaker with tradition, and the secular humanism that he despised has for centuries degraded people in the non-European world, making them objects of racist scholarship and colonial subjugation.

Particularly with regard to the use of political violence, the West and the Islamic world tend to stare at one another uncomprehendingly. While the internally pacified West rejects Oriental despotism and religious radicalism, scarcely noticing the authoritarian nature of its own foreign policies, large numbers of people in the Middle East now embrace any political movement that promises to change the political status quo, that implies resistance and new strength, even, we have reason to fear, if this means quasi-fascist Islamic regimes. Yet the notion of an eternal struggle between Orient and Occident is too simple. The Western model has lost some if its appeal but has left a deep impression. And though we must be aware of the risks to human rights arising from religious fundamentalism, we should also recognize its political potential far more clearly than is often the case.

Islamic fundamentalism is that political-religious movement which explicitly rejects all forms of secularization and which aspires to a social order whose 'fundament' is Islamic law. This is why I use the term 'fundamentalists' rather than simply 'Islamists', as they are very often called today – though, as we shall see, there are certain differences between the contemporary forms of Islamic fundamentalism and Christian fundamentalism.[1] Islamic fundamentalism, which has existed in organized form since the establishment of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers in the 1920s, began to develop into a mass movement in almost all Islamic countries

[1] For further explanation of the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' see Lawrence 1987, 1989.

in the wake of the Iranian Revolution of 1978–9. We must understand the political rationality of this movement on the basis of our own historical experiences and in light of its internal dynamics, without denying its contradictory aspects. The broad centre of this fundamentalism, rather than its extremist-terrorist edges, features a large number of processes running parallel to Western history, which are often difficult to decipher because their temporal development is not synchronous with that of the West. Who can really explain why a country like Egypt introduced female suffrage after the First World War, twenty years earlier than Italy and France and half a century before Switzerland did so? Not even the mass Islamic organizations contest these political rights. Even within the Islamic fundamentalist political spectrum as a whole, the Afghan Taliban were ultra-radical forces and not representative. Their Stone Age Islam was quite out of keeping with the mix of intolerance and progressivism that characterizes contemporary Islamic fundamentalism across much of the Islamic world. This movement blends and has always blended issues relating to reformation, the critique of authoritarianism and social justice, issues which were largely worked through consecutively in Europe. Reformist upheavals, the Peace of Westphalia, democratization and the labour movement – in the Middle East, many of these developments have already occurred in the last century, though they have often combined in an unstable way.

De facto secular politics also have a far longer history in the Middle East than is often assumed. The process of separating religion and politics began with the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632; it remains incomplete to this day. Two opposing trends can be discerned in the political culture of the contemporary Islamic world: a public desire for secularism, liberalism and pluralism is evident within the hugely popular new media, where the broadest range of views is frequently expressed. The countervailing trend, which also enjoys great momentum, is a process of morally strict, at times rigid, but inconsistent re-Islamization. The fact that fundamentalists are fighting once again against secularism has much to do with political tactics and the simple fact that secularism has been administered in authoritarian fashion in recent decades. For those opposed to dictatorship, religion becomes the ally of political and social transformation. What is happening here within the Islamic world is in principle no different than in Buddhist Tibet or other parts of Asia. Slogans opposing secularism become elements in political campaigns. But does this really mean that the political culture of the Islamic world is fundamentally a revivalist movement which seeks to restore traditional

forms of autocracy? Is it opposed to political change up to and including full-blown democracy of the kind that has taken hold in other parts of the world – not just in the West but in many countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia?

Today, Islamic politics itself consists of numerous currents, and much of it is a bewildering mix of religious intolerance and an incipient process of 'Christian democratization', which took off in the West only centuries after the Reformation. Not just in Turkey but also in many other countries of the Islamic world a debate is currently taking place along the fracture lines of modern politics. But this is an argument which cannot be resolved *before* the development of democracies, but only *within* the process of democratization, and this, too, should sound familiar to Europeans and Americans. Was Western democracy solely the product of 'cultural democrats', citizens engaged in civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) anchored in human rights, currently the most favoured partners of Western aid projects? Not at all. Ireland is only now undergoing a process that has occurred in many places in Europe since the Second World War. Rather than democracy being achieved by movements specifically dedicated to its attainment, it is formerly radical and militant forces that are bringing about a 'democracy without democrats' in which no political force achieves its ultimate aims while each attains its minimal ones. In Germany, 'democracy without democrats' rouses bad memories of the failure of the Weimar Republic, which too few people really wanted and which was destroyed jointly by reactionaries and undemocratic leftists, who helped the fascists gain power. But why are we so quick to forget the successes of democratization in the northern Mediterranean region, in Spain, Portugal, Greece and Turkey, where Falangists and communists, colonels, militarists and Islamic fundamentalists, none of them 'cultural democrats', managed to attain the radicals' democratic peace? For the most part, political radicalism is not democratically inclined. But neither is it inevitably violent. And its total determination to change the political system may help put an end to repressive regimes.

The scant regard for the Islamic world's potential for political development common in the West also has something to do with the evaluation of a political culture shaped by Islam. Fears of 'Islamofascism' are rooted at least in part in the assumption that Muslims are the leading anti-Semites of the present era. This observation is not entirely unfounded. Fundamentalism has often produced an ideology of hostility towards 'the Jews' out of its – at least partly – justified critique of the state of Israel. Yet Jews and Muslims have coexisted for so long, and the

recognition of Judaism as a religion is so well-established within Islam, that any comparison with German anti-Semitism is out of the question. Even where we might most expect them, in the revolutionary Iran of Khomeini and Ahmadinejad, there have as yet been no incidents even remotely comparable to the German Night of the Broken Glass, let alone the Holocaust.

Comparisons are useful, but this by no means implies that everything compared is identical. There can be no justification for identifying the Islamic world with the deformities of fascism and religious hatred found within one's own civilization while overlooking the complex realities of the modernization also taking place there. A country such as Iran, whose authoritarian character is easiest to discern, took social revenge on the Western-oriented middle classes, establishing (and this, too, is quite familiar from Western history) a dictatorship made up of the winners of the Revolution, a kind of caste of nouveau riche clergy. Resistance to this caste has been building up within Iranian society for years. President Ahmadinejad is a '20-percent president' favoured by electoral law. The rest of society, including Islamic circles, have long questioned the dominance of the clergy.

THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE TWO VELOCITIES

But there seems to be very little awareness of all these complexities in the West. Opinion polls indicate, for example, that 70 to 80 percent of Germans are afraid of Islam. Openly racist tracts such as the books by Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci sell millions of copies. Anti-Islamic populists like the American Daniel Pipes or the Netherlands' Geert Wilders are eagerly embraced by the established media. Islamophobia is socially acceptable. In the shape of the Swiss People's Party founded by Christoph Blocher, Switzerland has gone so far as to put in power a party that supports a general ban on minarets. Alexis de Tocqueville himself warned against the tyranny of the majority. Democracy demands, not only the procedures of an electoral system, but also a consensus on a culture of liberalism. Particularly in view of the Muslim immigration to Western states over the last few decades, this culture must consciously include Muslims. Today, it is no longer enough to foster a Christian-Jewish dialogue; the need is for a trialogue that incorporates Islam (Hafez and Steinbach 1999).

We must not underestimate the role of Western mass media in this regard. Coverage of Islam focuses on terrorist violence against the West

and violence against women, but there is no understanding of the – often seemingly paradoxical – trends and developments of neo-Islam (Deltombe 2005; Hafez 2000; Poole 2002). Many young Muslim women with headscarves are undoubtedly the victims of societal and familial repression, but they are just as often conservative educational and political activists or are simply characterized by the kind of 'healthy' double standards familiar for centuries to Catholic Christians. Just as in the West many people revere the Pope without obeying his strict commandments, in the Islamic world pre-marital sex – what is known as 'Islamic temporary marriage' – and the commercialization of the system of religious adjudication ('online fatwas') are now far from unusual. Individuals both opportunistically circumvent and openly break with tradition, part of a process of re-Islamization blending orthodoxy, community and individuality. Here, political fundamentalism often seems to function as a useful idiot. Protest voters lend it their support for the sake of political protest, but engage in everyday practices that make a mockery of its reactionary precepts.

It is highly doubtful that the Islamic world and the West have much understanding of one another, ensconced as they are within 'information ghettos' still thriving in this media age (Pintak 2006, 72). It seems more appropriate to speak of the 'globalization of the two velocities'. The often Islamophobic popular and media cultures in the West contrast with active informational elites in academia, the media and social organizations, who have kept the dialogue between Islam and the West going for decades. The consequences of this bifurcation of globalization are as yet unclear. The coexistence of a popular culture with no understanding of Islam and an elite culture with enlightened views is an old phenomenon in the West familiar since Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan*, a work far ahead of its time.

That not all knowledge elites are also truly global elites is evident in the relationship between Islam and the West. In a now famous polemic, Edward Said criticized the widespread 'Orientalism' of Western scholarship (Said 1978). Much has happened since, and entire generations of students are aware of Said's critique. But the Western academic system continues to produce culturalist bestsellers such as Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Huntington 1993, 1996) in which the author works on the assumption that Islam and the West are irreconcilable, a perspective which seems diametrically opposed to cross-cultural comparison. Many leading Western scholars regularly pass judgement on an Islamic world whose thinkers they do

not know and whose realities they have, at best, observed while passing through. Hence, alongside the gulf between Islamophobic mass cultures and global informational elites, there is a rupture between ethnocentric and inter-culturally oriented scholars in the West. Edward Said has had an impact – but the key targets of his critique endure.

How have these different camps come about? Why was Huntington, a Harvard professor, an academic star for many while others regarded him with nothing short of intellectual loathing? One simple reason is that there are experts on either the Orient or the Occident, but rarely on both. Research on America, Europe and the rest of the world is often carried out in quite separate institutional worlds. The big Western-oriented disciplines contrast with their small 'Orientalist' counterparts. But because the theoretical work is done mainly within the large disciplines, it is unsurprising that we still lack a viable theoretical bridge capable of dealing with the comparative analysis of political developments in both the Islamic and Western worlds (see also Faath 1999, 238 f.). Theoretical vitality depends on empirical comparison, which too few scholars place at the centre of their work.

In response, some of the leading lights of international and intercultural comparison such as Fred Dallmayr, Bikhu Parekh, Hwa Yol Jung and Charles Taylor have called for a change of theoretical direction (Jung 2002; Parekh 2002; Parel and Keith 2003; Taylor 1992). Roxanne Euben observes that Western scholarship features a latent tension between the aspiration to produce a universal theory and a – still widespread – near-exclusive focus on Western texts (Euben 1999, XI). Fred Dallmayr would like to see a comparative political philosophy as a counterweight to the neo-imperialist mindset that has increasingly gained traction in the West since 11 September 2001 (Dallmayr 2004, 249 f.).

The case of Michel Foucault demonstrates the need for a shift towards a post-Orientalist comparative political analysis. In the late 1970s, this guiding intellectual figure of discourse analysis and the critique of power – who had long been part of the French intellectual establishment and was one of the most influential thinkers of the modern era – expressed enthusiasm for the Islamic Revolution in Iran, about which he wrote reports as correspondent for an Italian newspaper. Events there seemed to lend support to certain aspects of his critique of modernity. Foucault was almost unanimously criticized for this by Western intellectuals (Afary and Anderson 2005) – and quite rightly so. It is true that the vehemence of the reaction to Foucault's attempt to understand the revolutionary conditions in Iran rather than condemn them as an irrational religious

reflex, reveals the Eurocentric bias of Western scholarship. Yet Foucault was ill-prepared for this intellectual adventure beyond the European world, and his very naive ideas on Shia Islam, which he viewed as the avant-garde of a new liberation movement, were so open to attack that even Edward Said, otherwise a great admirer, distanced himself from Foucault's views. Foucault was punished for daring to consider the strengthening of religious resistance as an exemplary case of the critique of Western-style modernization. But he also came to grief because of his own political romanticism, which was a far cry from any systematic theoretical position.

Foucault's Iranian excursion is representative of the scholarly mistakes that may ensue when one compares cultures. Attempts to establish a dialogue tend to presuppose that the poles on either end of the dialogue are ontological givens. Another example of this is the well-known communitarian Amitai Etzioni. His attempts to achieve the ethical renewal of the 'world community' entail the revival of old cultural stereotypes of the individualist West and community-oriented Islam (Etzioni 2004). While such approaches are geared towards achieving peace, they do as little justice to the diversity of cultural phenomena and the growing trend towards individuation within Islam (Roy 2006) as Huntington's notion of a clash of civilizations. Post-Orientalist comparative scholarship is conceptually open. It closes its mind to neither the specific nor the universal. It seeks to transfer theoretical knowledge of the West to the East while at the same instant distrusting its own simplicity. It remains open to new theoretical approaches (Somjee 2002, 122; see also Benhabib 2002). The developmental elements of the non-European world may appear quite familiar to the West individually, but their temporal sequence, combination and interactions convey the *specificity within the generalizable* of the non-European world.

For the observer, this state of affairs is neither entirely sealed off and comprehensible only in its own terms nor simply a re-run of Western history, which in any case presents no uniform picture. Like the West, the Islamic world features quite different developmental models. The West has seen revolutions, both successful and unsuccessful, and reforms from above and below. In the Muslim world, monarchies, revolutionary regimes and democracies exist side by side. Hence, in contrasting the West and the Islamic world, geopolitical and religious entities respectively, we are not attempting to pin down eternal dissimilarities. Such comparison is a vehicle for intellectual rapprochement and a concession to the – present – major significance of religion to political and social

change within the Islamic world, though it carries very different weight in different countries. It is therefore essential that comparisons of world regions be accompanied by comparisons within those regions.

A good example of the relationship between universalism and particularism in Islamic-Western relations is the question of democracy. Is it legitimate to declare democracy the point of departure for any analysis, assuming it to be the common political goal of both hemispheres? We quickly find ourselves in a catch-22 situation here. To answer 'no' means that we consider the Islamic world incapable of producing democratic conditions, recalling Huntington's culturalism. 'Yes', on the other hand, tallies with old-school modernization theory, which represented another kind of Eurocentrism, in line with the motto: 'The barbarian is capable of development if he models himself on us'. But neither of these is relevant to us here. To observe the Islamic world from the vantage point of Western modernization and democracy does not mean tying it once and for all to these developments. But from a logical point of view, democracy would have to be introduced in the Islamic world, at least briefly, in order to furnish proof of its lack of fit with Islamic culture. Only in this way can people express themselves as bearers of culture, either professing their belief in democracy or correcting its mechanisms, or even abolishing it. Observations on the incompatibility of Islam and democracy made *before* any process of democratic opening are irrelevant in that they merely represent individual opinions. By considering the actual state of existing dictatorships in most of the Middle East, alongside already existing democracies in Muslim Asia and shifts towards future democracy in many other countries, this book takes into account the possibility that democracy may not take hold in many Islamic countries for a long time to come. Are these regimes simply authoritarian or are they fascist? This question is more relevant than ever to the present era.

Michel Foucault's oeuvre is crucial to the work of the modern-day cross-cultural political researcher in several respects. While his remarks on China or Iran underline the dangers of thinking without theory, his trademark combination of discourse analysis and (post-)structuralism shows us much of the way forward. The critique of discourse helps us come to grips with what the ideas and ideologies of the Islamic world and the West have in common and where they differ. But discourse alone does not constitute a reliable scientific basis. Foucault, quite rightly, always took account of the unspoken, of that not contained within discourse (Foucault 1981, 41 f.). Without returning to Karl Marx and his ideas of the primacy of the economy over consciousness, we can acknowledge that there is a