

Introduction

Only moments before the gunshot that would take his life, Mohamed Boudiaf was reflecting fatalistically on the brevity of life itself. The Algerian president perhaps was displaying exceptional prescience. But then, issues of life and death, of uncertainty and flux, of violence and chaos, were never far from the minds of ordinary Algerians in the summer of 1992. For by that time their country stood somewhere between Western-style democracy and Islamic fundamentalism, the while hesitating between military rule and civil war. The political and ideological divide that tore the nation apart and caused hundreds of casualties left few families intact. The divisions even affected individuals whose opposition to the government offered them nowhere but the Islamic Front to go yet whose everyday lifestyle and routines defied this commitment and challenged this faith. So that, initially received with a feeling of shock, the murder of the man who had returned after 28 years of exile to become president of his embattled country for 165 days ultimately was absorbed with a sense of the inevitable. As if somehow, in the midst of such intense doubt and radical transformation, he too was destined to pass.

Regardless of who pulled the trigger, or of who ordered it pulled, Boudiaf was one more casualty of the turmoil experienced by his nation. Directly or indirectly, he was thus a victim of the meteoric rise of the religious organization known by its French acronym, FIS (for Front Islamique du Salut), a group that has challenged the very foundations of the Algerian state. In January 1992 an attempt was made to interrupt its ascent by calling off the runoffs to Algeria's first open parliamentary

elections in the face of a seemingly inescapable FIS victory. By then, however, it was too late. The FIS, created in 1989, had several million members. It had triumphed in the 1990 local and municipal elections, attracting over 54 percent of the popular vote. Through a combination of civil disobedience and local control, it had undermined the authority of the state and offered an alternative source of power. Unavoidably, Algeria was nudging its way into the Western psyche, joining the ranks of Iran and Sudan in a category of the Orient — fundamentalism — with which the United States has become so thoroughly obsessed in recent times. Alongside Islamic movements in the occupied territories and in Egypt, Tunisia, and Afghanistan, it stood as confirmation of the authentic nature of Islam, its true face and real design. The FIS, in short, had changed Algeria's complexion.

Lost in this narrative was the fact that for so long, and for so many people, Algeria had embodied an idea very different but just as powerful. I call this *Third Worldism*, a term that I later shall define in some detail but that for now can be summed up, schematically, as the belief in the revolutionary aspirations of the Third World masses, in the inevitability of their fulfillment, and in the role of strong, centralized states in this undertaking. Third Worldism was more than political doctrine; it was all-encompassing ideology that permeated fields of intellectual knowledge and militant activism. It was authoritative, not in the sense of ever being the exclusive ideological referent, but in that it provided the instruments by which to legitimate and discredit, to measure success and decree failure. It was pervasive in that not only Third World statesmen but also Third World and Western sociologists, historians, economists, anthropologists, and political scientists drew inspiration from its outlook.

In the aftermath of World War II, as revolutionary thought and practice faced a dead end in the industrialized world, the underdeveloped nations became the new theater of politics, the new battleground of ideologies. Third Worldism took off where a legacy of left-wing, essentially European beliefs fell both geographically and politically short of explaining the past and forecasting the future. The result was, on the one hand, a radicalization of the national liberation struggle in countries remaining under direct colonial rule and, on the other, a renewal of the "national struggle" in what came to be known as the "formally independent" nations.

To a degree, then, Third Worldism restored a feeling of moral purity that had been shattered by Stalinism, rekindling confident representations of history as a positive and intelligible course, infusing politics

with a sense of excitement, as eyes turned in succession to Cuba, Guinea, Algeria, Indonesia, Vietnam, Tanzania, Libya, Mali, Madagascar, Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique, Yemen, or Nicaragua. For Americans, the reference points might have differed slightly from the Europeans'. Nonetheless, generations of political activists awakened in the West to the sound of Third World guerrilla fighters. Black militants in the United States identified with the exploited Third World, the ghetto becoming its symbolic equivalent. Eldridge Cleaver selected Algiers as his temporary haven; Carmichael chose Havana, Hanoi, Conakry.

I pause here to note an apparent ambiguity in the concept of Third Worldism. I refer to the tension between Third Worldism as an ideology *about* and as an ideology *of* the Third World. With Third Worldism, European left-wing activists and intellectuals projected their ideals onto the seemingly virgin lands of the less developed nations. This was not uncharacteristic behavior: the reader need not look very far back in history for illustration, as colonial expeditions were celebrated by European parties of the Left in the name of universalism and as prerequisite to the Third World's own development. In this respect, Third Worldism might be viewed as an outgrowth of the Orientalism that Edward Said so masterfully described, the West's enterprise of constructing the Orient. The intrusion, need it be said, was not always welcome. In Algeria the tension was epitomized in the half-tragic, half-farcical fate of the European revolutionaries who, having stood up against colonialism, felt entitled not only to judge but also to formulate national policy. As many ultimately were forced to leave the country, they were uncharitably dubbed *pieds rouges*—a cruel pun indeed, since *pieds noirs* was the term used to designate Frenchmen who lived in colonial Algeria, and who were its staunchest defenders.

That said, in contrast to Orientalism, Third Worldism also was an ideology rooted in the Third World, and in my view, the convergence between the two discourses outweighed their differences. My belief, which I will try to illustrate, is that the hopes invested by the European Left in the revolutionary Third World mirrored, to a remarkable extent, the Third World militants' justification of their own actions. In other words, Third Worldism was not a means by which the Third World was created by the West, but a shared representation of the world in which events, processes, and actors were endowed with specific significance. To borrow Said's metaphor, the emergence and consolidation of the ideology involved a two-way traffic between the exercise of power and the discourse on power. Third Worldism became a style of thought and a

means of coming to terms with the world that was appropriated by political leaders as a language of power, by activists as a vocabulary of dissent, and by historians, journalists, economists, and sociologists as an interpretive tool. The hopes of one were the hopes of all, as would be the case, in time, with their respective disenchantments.



I tell the story of Third Worldism from the perspective of Algeria but try, as much as is possible, to formulate questions and draw conclusions applicable to the system of thought as a whole and to the individuals who produced it, believed in it, or simply found themselves caught in its web. I begin with its rise and concentrate on questions of origins: What accounts for its success, for its ability to overcome disciplinary and geographic barriers, for its appeal both to holders and claimants of political power? What confluence of historical, economic, social, and ideological factors — Said speaks of “energies” — contributed to its ascension? How did pronouncements as varied as state propaganda, rebellious harangue, critical study, and detached sociology serve mutually to reinforce each other as well as the system of thought from which they all arose?

I explore, too, reasons for its gradual demise, its fading away, its replacement by other means of apprehending the world. So quickly and abruptly has this occurred that one is almost at pains to recall the atmosphere of Third Worldism in its heyday. With this difficulty comes the temptation to account for the fall by downplaying the ascent. Hence the recent resurgence of the notion of revolutionary Third Worldism as an alien graft imposed by the West, ill adapted to the unchanging “essence” of various underdeveloped countries. The tendency will be familiar to students of Orientalism, for it too depicts Islam as unchanging, describing “modernist” trends in the Islamic world as inimical to its authentic nature. Third Worldism, in this view, was merely an unwelcome, foreign, and short-lived parenthesis. In the case of Algeria, the *turn* to Islam thus becomes a *return* to authenticity.

It should be clear from what I earlier have said that this is a perspective I reject. I have little doubt that the roots of Third Worldism can partially be traced to the developed world, not only intellectually but economically and culturally as well. However, rather than reflecting the imposition of Western models on a passive recipient, namely, the Third World, this indebtedness captures a dynamic process. More generally, international phenomena — chief among them fluctuating power relations, whether military, economic, or cultural — affect the credibility, le-

gitimacy, and overall effectiveness of discursive regimes at any given time, in any given place. Such regimes do not, in that process, become any more or less “authentic,” only more or less timely or, as it were, in tune. Stated quite simply, I thus would concede that recent international developments have modified the world balance of power, thereby indirectly devaluating the Third World’s revolutionary pronouncements. Indeed, the now fashionable labeling of these pronouncements as alien grafts is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this trend. But to say that the system of truths called Third Worldism no longer is adapted to the Third World is very different from saying that it never was.

Though by no means a “resurfacing” of a so-called authentic Third World, the apparent replacement of Third Worldism by different systems of representation is another subject of this book. Islam’s increasing role in Algeria has its likely counterparts in the strengthening of religious, ethnic, or communal identities and ties elsewhere in the Third World. I devote many pages to trying to come to terms with these phenomena, particularly in the case of Algeria’s FIS, and in so doing cast a critical eye on much of the Western media’s account — specifically as it concerns “Islamic fundamentalism.” For now, it suffices to emphasize that the turn to Islam is often deceptive. The first deception involves terminology, since the religious movements in the Arab world are far from being fundamentalist. The second involves causation: what happens, I argue, has less to do with an inherent appeal of religion than with the fact that religion becomes the most effective vehicle for the expression of social, economic, and political frustration. The most interesting questions raised by this evolution, in short, are the following: Why has protest borrowed religious (or national, ethnic, tribal, etc.) accents, and why now?



Three main themes underlie this book. The Third Worldist ideology of the Algerian revolution, its origins, evolution, and, in more recent times, the drift from Third Worldism to Islam (as expressed in the rise of the FIS) constitute the first. The reason for choosing Algeria might not appear to be self-evident to an American audience more familiar with the behavior — some would say antics — of a Gadhafi or an Ortega than with the actions of Ben Bella, Boumedienne, or Chadli Benjedid. But Third Worldism had its own measure of success and prestige. And to the extent that it became a dominant system of knowledge, Algeria was one of its principal surrogates.

Indeed, prior to the recent turn to Islam, Algeria enjoyed a privileged

status in the Third Worldist pantheon. The reasons are to be found at every stage of the history of Third Worldism — its origins, its pinnacle, its downfall. As I shall argue, Third Worldism to a large extent was born out of ideological and physical contact with the European colonial powers, principally France. Due to geographical proximity and colonial status, Algeria experienced an especially intense interaction with the metropolis; as a result, its thinkers were at the forefront of the Third Worldist movement.

A colony, Algeria had been militarily occupied by France since 1830; it was home to roughly a million Europeans, mainly of French but also of Spanish and Italian descent, who owned the richest, most productive lands. Considered a part of France, it was divided into three *départements*, enjoying a particular status, to be sure, but French all the same. “The Mediterranean,” the saying went, “cuts through France as the Seine cuts through Paris.” Simultaneously, relatively large numbers of Algerians moved to France, leading to a peculiar mix of ideological mimicry and resistance: migrant workers experienced both solidarity with their fellow proletarians and the obstinacy of condescending racist attitudes; foreign students were both drawn to the progressive thoughts of their French counterparts and repelled by their Eurocentric instincts.

An important figure at this crossroads was Messali Hadj, arguably the father of modern, revolutionary Algerian nationalism. His efforts as a worker in France are to be credited for much that later would occur to solidify and color the national movement, namely, the fusion of working-class populism, nationalist anticolonialism, and traditional Islam. But his impact extended far beyond. By playing a decisive role in the Union Intercoloniale, one of the first political expressions of Third World solidarity, and at *Le Pariah*, its journalistic equivalent, Messali lay the foundations of Third Worldism as an ideology that, in theory at least, transcended national boundaries.

Next, Algeria’s colonial situation, but mainly its harsh and long war of national liberation, magnified its prestige in Third Worldist eyes. As the French geographer Yves Lacoste once put it, the Algerian revolution “politicized thinking and discourse on the Third World.”¹ In the seven years from the beginning of the war, on November 1, 1954, to the declaration of independence, on July 5, 1962, a poorly armed, ill-trained group of maquisards evolved into a regular army that enjoyed the support of a large proportion of the population and frustrated one of the world’s major military powers. Before the war was over, hundreds of thousands had lost their lives, millions had been uprooted, eight thousand villages had

been destroyed, and millions of acres of land had burned. In the Third Worldist historiography, such sacrifices—as Gellner’s phrase has it—stood second only to Vietnam’s.² The North African country’s eminence continued long after it gained independence, for it took a leading part in challenging the industrialized world and in calling for a new world economic order.

I chose Algeria, finally, because of the extraordinary events of recent years: the collapse of the Third Worldist organization and justification of power and the fascinating rise of the Islamic FIS as its challenger. Again, as in every preceding stage, Algeria amplified trends that could be noticed elsewhere, so that it once again stands as an emblem, a condensed narrative into which observers can read their favored story: either “the Algeria of Frantz Fanon—guerrilla struggle, militant Third Worldism,”³ or the Algeria of Islam.⁴

Because sense cannot be made of Third Worldism’s remarkable fate without serious investigation of its relation to the colonial and anticolonial experience, or to the challenges that faced the independent nations, I begin with the ideologies of Algerian political parties before the war of independence and move to the discourse of the independent state and its detractors. In the end, a comprehensive system of representation took shape. It was aided along the way by a remarkable array of academic and journalistic contributions sharing similar assumptions, preconceptions, and attitudes. I end with the decline of Third Worldism, both as Algeria’s official discourse and as a dominant grid through which observers—the historians, economists, political scientists, and sociologists of which I earlier spoke—interpreted Algeria. I end, too, with the ascent of the FIS, a formidable foe of the progressive, quasi-socialist Third Worldist outlook. I ask how it is that Islamic radicalism has become the expression of social discontent and social despair, one that enjoys the appeal of a familiar, reassuring language of solidarity but also the attraction of effective protest and the promise of radical change. For, more than a religious party, the FIS is a loose conglomerate of the genuine believers, the socially excluded, and, most importantly, a vast section of the youth that have ceased to have faith in their future.

My second theme is more general; it relates to Third Worldism as a whole. The belief that conclusions applicable to Algeria can be extrapolated and applied to other, less developed nations is, of course, not uncontroversial. A convenient catchphrase, the term *Third World* also can be misleading. The Third World exists neither as a political union nor as a homogenous geographical ensemble, not even as a set of economically

comparable nations. Third Worldism itself, as the self-proclaimed practice of the several states, has its many subvariants, depending for the most part on the level of development, culture, traditions, and political heritage. Between nations that have experienced one or more military coups, such as Somalia, Madagascar, and Burkina-Faso, and nations born of long national liberation struggles, such as Algeria, Vietnam, and Mozambique, lie differences that affect not only their leaders' official discourse but also the appraisal of the Third Worldist intellectual community.

Still, when concessions are made to the uniqueness of historical processes and political characteristics, the fact remains that a belief in the Third World's commonality of aspirations and fate is central to Third Worldism. In this book I deal with Third Worldism, in other words, not with some objective entity called the Third World; indeed, debates about whether such an entity exists are largely irrelevant to this enterprise. Third Worldist activists and thinkers look to similar authoritative writings, exemplary heroes; they see in things analogous signs and meanings. I thus draw principally on the case of Algeria but move freely to other examples. Students of other regions of the Third World will, I hope, recognize in the Algerian experience familiar ways of acting, talking, and being.

I aim at a third audience in this work. To all who are interested in the ways in which a style of thought or discourse is constituted, maintained, and ultimately challenged, Third Worldism offers fruitful material. We can see the dynamic interaction of ideas (socialism, nationalism, etc.), historical events (colonialism and the struggles for independence) and social structures (economic polarization, dependence, underdevelopment) that makes it possible for a discourse to achieve prominence. We can see, too, that such discourse cannot be reduced to a mere rhetorical device for legitimating one group's authority. Third Worldism simultaneously provided tools of domination *and* of resistance, a vocabulary of power *and* of dissent. We can see, finally, how a dominant system of thought can be undermined by inherent as well as extraneous factors. The dismantling comes in ways overt and subtle, involving economic changes on a grand scale as well as minute shifts in the intellectual environment.



I set out to write a book about Algeria, intent on scouting the path from ersatz socialism to self-proclaimed Islam, from almost-Cuba to maybe-Iran. Along the way, however, I stumbled across another story, the story of Third Worldism. It manifested itself time and again, for the transformations I saw in Algeria mirrored those that had occurred in more than

a handful of Third World countries; they too had followed the same road toward intellectual self-doubt, conversion to economic liberalism, and apparent embrace of multiparty democracy, the turn to Islam simply taking the guise of an ethnic “revival” here, a tribal “awakening” there. It soon became clear to me that understanding Algerian politics required taking a step back to contemplate what was happening around it and that by coming to terms with Algeria one could make far more sense of what was occurring in other Third World lands. The interaction of these twin narratives has had certain implications for the organization of this book, which I think it best to discuss at this point.

The book is divided into three parts, each dealing with a phase in the history of Third Worldism, particularly as it played out in Algeria: its gestation (part 1), its apogee (part 2), and its demise (part 3). The structure is thus roughly chronological, and I hope this semblance of order will provide the reader with a general historical sense. Some might question the pertinence of this approach to an ideological movement that has been pronounced dead, buried, and quickly forgotten. I cannot agree.

We live at a time when ideological belief systems of yore such as socialism and Third Worldism are being disregarded as arbitrary political verbiage and unsalutary dogma, while, in the same breath, the current articles of universal faith — economic liberalism, structural readjustment, privatization, coupled with a dose of political pluralism — are being celebrated as pragmatic, and nonideological to boot. Such cavalier dismissal of yesterday’s creed and self-congratulatory adherence to today’s are terribly costly, and seriously misleading. The retrospective dimension of this book is of particular interest to me precisely to the extent that it can broaden this depressingly confining vision, showing us the past for what it was worth and the present for what it is not.

I wrote the individual parts with an eye to conveying some of the interplay between Third Worldism and Algeria. Chronology breaks down here, and within each part the book proceeds along parallel tracks. The parts each begin with a chapter devoted to Third Worldism in general. In these opening chapters I attempt to provide a broad outline of the historical period and set out the main themes of Third Worldism as an intellectual current at the time. They are followed by chapters dealing with Algeria in which I explore these themes in far greater depth and test some of my stated claims, for example, on the origins of Third Worldism in part 1; on the role and meaning of the single party, personalization of power, or demonization of dissidents in part 2; and on the rise of reductionist, exclusionary ideologies and tribal politics in part 3.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. By linking the fate of Third

Worldism to the evolution of the Algerian polity I do not intend to suggest a mechanical causal relationship between the two. Causal pulls have existed, to be sure, and they have worked in both directions. For instance, the rise of the nationalist movement throughout the Third World helped loosen the colonial grip and inject a new sense of what was possible, thereby contributing to the effective mobilization of Algerian militants. Too, the success of the Algerian revolutionary struggle radicalized political ideology, chiefly in Africa and the Arab world, but in other parts of the Third World as well, not to mention in France itself. In more recent years, the international debt crisis, the collapse of Soviet-style communism, and the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran likewise have had an unmistakable impact on Algeria. But that is about as far as I am willing to go, and it should be apparent that the precise extent to which the Third Worldist movement shaped the Algerian polity is not the principal focus of this effort.

I hasten to add that since this book is not an intellectual history of Third Worldism, much less a political history of the Third World, I do not pretend to cover exhaustively all that has happened to the underdeveloped world in the relevant time frame. My overriding purpose is to help the reader make some sense of the dramatic move from Third Worldism to the odd potpourri of economic liberalism, multiparty-ism, and the morass of ethnic, tribal, and religious impulses, all of which has been experienced — with what speed, with what intensity, and with what violence — by Algeria. This goal, along with limitations in my own knowledge, has informed my decisions concerning what needed to be discussed and what could be left out.

This point is particularly salient with regard to the chapters that deal with Third Worldism *per se*. I have written a book about the life cycle of Third Worldism in the case of Algeria, and therefore what I am after in those chapters is more mood than minutiae. I want to set the historical and thematic stage for what was happening in Algeria, to show that it was part and parcel of broader political and intellectual trends, and to suggest that understanding Algeria's contemporary history is one way — a fairly good way, in fact — to understand what has been happening throughout much of the formerly progressive Third World. If my assumptions about the relevance of Algeria's fate to the experience of Third Worldism as a whole hold up, other country studies should confirm my conclusions. By acquainting readers with Third Worldism as it existed beyond Algeria's boundaries, by jumping, as it were, between the generally Third Worldist and the specifically Algerian, I hope to have made this clear.

For one interested in the history of Third Worldism, then, this work presents significant gaps, and I apologize for these in advance. Third Worldism, I will argue, was born at the confluence of the imperial ideology of assimilation (according to which backward, colonized people needed to conform to the standards set by the higher civilizations of Europe), the pull of tradition, and the appeal of the system of thought bequeathed by Marx and Engels. Needless to say, a detailed analysis of assimilationism, traditionalism, and Marxism will have to be found elsewhere. Likewise, the rise of nationalist feeling in colonial territories and the Third World's role in international relations are both critically important subjects, and it is hardly possible to leave either unmentioned. But I take of them only what I deem necessary, and their study is consequently cursory. Other authors have chosen these themes as their focus, and I refer the reader to them.⁵

Additional limitations are also fairly straightforward. Nkrumah and Cabral are counted by many as being among the intellectual giants of Third Worldism, yet I do not assess their individual contributions at any length. This is no intellectual history, as I have said, and therefore I do not consider such detailed discussion essential, advisable, or, frankly, within my means. Instead, I have chosen to summarize the main tenets of Third Worldism as they emerge from these leaders' writings and those of several others.

Finally, I have relied heavily on the Third Worldist connection to France. This has meant ignoring other important linkages, such as to Britain or Portugal. I did this for two reasons. The first has to do with France's relationship to Algeria, and it hardly needs expounding. The second is that France, and its left-wing intellectuals in particular, appears to have taken a far greater interest than others in dispensing political advice (as opposed to charitable aid) to the Third World. There is something deliberate and organized about French attitudes toward Third World politics and also something quite impassioned, which would seem to have much to do with the need for forgiveness after the colonial mess and for absolution after the Stalinist debacle.



In the story of Algerian Third Worldism — from heroic anticolonial militancy to the pinnacle of power and prestige, followed by bleak degeneration into civil war, social dissolution, and economic wasteland — can be read the sorry fate of the contemporary Third World. How we got from there to here, what exactly was the “there” and what is the “here” —

these are the kinds of questions I ask in this book, and to which I try to respond.

But beyond all this a central fact remains. Third Worldism was not simply academic exercise. People throughout the world invested their entire capital of energy, enthusiasm, hope even, in the effort. They had faith in this impassioned but ultimately comforting way of scrutinizing the Third World, a certain way of talking about it; these were the gaze and the prose of Nasser, of Castro, of Boumedienne, of Cabral, and of Fanon. In the name of this idea sacrifices were made, lives shattered, lives lost. Looking back, it is good to remember that ideologies sometimes can do such things.