Muslim Fundamentalism:

Something to be Understood or to be Explained Away?

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ABSTRACT: This article surveys various attempts to make sociological sense of the diverse Muslim movements often lumped together under the label of fundamentalism. Explanations of fundamentalism as a form of resistance to modernization or those reducing it to social and economic discontent may have some prima facie plausibility but fail to explain why this protest takes a religious form. Orientalist studies emphasizing the theological dimension, on the other hand, do not even attempt to explain why certain religious ideas rather than others can inspire social movements. Not all fundamentalist movements, in fact, are inspired by the same or even similar theological ideas; besides puritan fundamentalist movements we also find many that are strongly influenced by Sufism. Empirical studies of Islamic militants in several different countries indicate that they are not, as is often assumed, marginalized and alienated but relatively well-integrated and successful persons. Muslim fundamentalist movements have perhaps more in common with protestant sects in early modern European history than with present Christian fundamentalism. Like those sects, they may perform a stimulating role as critics in the margin and contribute to enriching the discourse of the mainstream; once they achieve power, their practical failures will gradually undermine the claims of fundamentalist ideologues.

The term "fundamentalism", used in a Muslim context, immediately evokes a number of associations, but as soon as we attempt to define what it stands for it appears to be very elusive. The term, as is well known, originates from a different cultural and religious context, where it had (and has) a more precise meaning. It implied a firm reassertion of belief in the literal truth of the Bible, upheld against the onslaught of secular science; most notably this took the form of the defense of belief in creation against Darwin's theory of evolution. Movements in the Muslim world that are called "fundamentalist" have different intellectual and political backgrounds, and use of the same term for them is not necessarily helpful towards a better understanding.

The term as it is used nowadays has commonly judgmental overtones. Although some Muslims apparently have come to denote themselves by it (as *al-usuliyya al-islamiyya*, for instance), it is more generally used to refer disapprovingly to others - not unlike the term "fanatical". The term tends to be reserved for people who think, speak, behave and dress differently from the majority, and it is therefore easier to say what "fundamentalists" are not than what they are. There is also an intimation that fundamentalists are against the existing political order. Oppositional Muslim groups are all likely to be labelled "fundamentalists", although they may be divided by profound doctrinal differences. Conversely, groups that are considered as fundamentalist for other reasons are also liable to be suspected as potential political subversives. In spite of serious reservations about the usefulness of the concept of fundamentalism, we are faced with the fact that the term has gained currency and for lack of a better term continue using it ourselves, at least in informal conversation. For the length of this paper I shall go on employing the term in as neutral a way as possible, to denote all movements and ideologies that place a literal interpretation of the Islamic revelation and norms believed to be directly derived from it (Islamic values, Islamic economics, the Islamic state) above all other possible sources of legitimacy (such as local tradition, mystical experience, humanism, rationalism, secular law, and international conventions).

How problematical the concept of Muslim fundamentalism is may be illustrated by the example of two Muslim countries, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Saudi regime is firmly committed to the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, which is often considered as fundamentalism par excellence. Nevertheless it was challenged, in the name of Islam, by radical Muslims who in 1979 occupied the Great Mosque of Mecca, and who would, by most counts, also be considered as fundamentalists.[1] Similarly, in post-revolutionary Iran the most significant organized opposition movement has been the Mujahidin-i

Khalq, who also claim to be fighting for a political order based on Islam. Both they and the ulama faction who are currently in power were militant opposition movements under the shah (the Mujahidin-i Khalq taking the greater risks and making the greater sacrifices), and both were at the time labelled "fundamentalist" in spite of enormous ideological differences among them.[2]

Similar political behaviour in the name of Islam may apparently still be based on widely varying interpretations of Islam, legitimized by quite different Islamic ideologies, all depending on the political context. The political demands of "fundamentalist" Islamic opposition groups vary so much from country to country that they appear to depend more on situational factors than on any clearcut set of "fundamentalist" ideas. Thus, in the words of one analyst, "while some of these groups in Egypt criticize Sadat's economic policies as favoring the rich, Islamic groups in Syria uphold the interests of the upper middle class against socialist, rural-oriented government policies. In Tunisia and Algeria, a prime concern of Islamic groups is teaching Arabic. Last, there are those in Saudi Arabia who think that the government has gone too far in the modernization process" (Dessouki 1982: 9). In some (most) contexts one would place them on the right or extreme right of the political spectrum, in others however on the left. It is obvious that little insight can be gained by lumping all these various movements together under the same label of "fundamentalism". One should never loose sight of the vast differences in ideology, organization and behaviour.

Sociological approaches

In social and political science writings, particularly those by authors of the modernization school, fundamentalist movements have generally been analysed as reactions against modernity. Thereby the complexity of these movements is reduced to a few sociologically relevant factors. This has the benefit of facilitating comparison with Christian fundamentalist movements and religio-political movements in other cultural contexts, such as the Khalistan movement among the Sikhs, or Hindu revivalism in India. Some relevant social factors may be discovered in this way - for instance the small-town background of many activists, their class backgrounds (activists' parents are frequently lower middle class, the activists socially rising but not as fast or as high as they had hoped), the role of migration to the large cities as a catalyst. The breakdown of the traditional family, caused by the transition to industrial society and increased mobility and the entrance of many women into the (non-domestic) labour force, is an important factor, resulting in nostalgic reminiscences about "family

values" and militant attempts to re-impose these, both in the Christian and in the Muslim world.[3]

In their most simple (and, unfortunately, quite common) form, such explanations may be little more than circular reasoning. First fundamentalism is implicitly defined as a reaction or resistance against modernization (so that movements without an element of such resistance are not considered as fundamentalist), and then those movements fitting the definition are explained as being ... reactions against modernity. The explanation is inherent in the definition and does not necessitate serious study of the movements in question. This is not the only difficulty that the modernization paradigm has with religious phenomena. The basic assumption has long been that secularization and rationalization are inherent in modernization and not only good, positive developments but also unavoidable. Religion enters into the equation only as an inhibiting factor that will ultimately whither away. The religious resurgence that may be observed all over the world has no place in this paradigm unless it can be explained away, as something not really religious but as a political or class phenomenon.

One of the problems with such one-dimensional sociological explanations is that most of the "fundamentalist" movements quite credibly claim to be the direct intellectual descendants of a long tradition of "fundamentalism" in Islam, with Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyya and Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab as their precursors. These intellectual roots obviously predate modernity and therefore cannot be simply interpreted as a reaction against modernization. Moreover, most fundamentalist groups have nothing against modernity as such and are quick to use the most up-to-date products of science and technology. Fundamentalism, if the term is to have any empirical validity, should not be equated with resistance to modernity.

Another influential strand of social analysis is Marxist in origin. It analyses religious movements as representing and defending in reality other, not primarily religious, interests. The movement's overt doctrines are considered as just ideology, a texture of justifications woven around the matters that are really at issue. The classical example of such analysis is Friedrich Engels' study of the German Peasant War, in which he explained a seemingly religious conflict as a case of class struggle of poor peasants against their oppressors. This type of analysis often has a high degree of plausibility and it has been adopted by many non-Marxist historians and social scientists. The celebrated studies of 19th-century millenarian movements in Java by Indonesian historian Sartono Kartodirdjo are a case in point. While

taking the religious dimension of the movements under study seriously (much more seriously than is common in the modernization school of thought), such analyses stress that underneath the religious there are other factors that play a more decisive role. To a dogmatic Marxist the only relevant causal factor is class conflict; most recent analyses however take account of a combination of economic and political factors.

One subtle analysis of a "fundamentalist" movement in this mould is Clive Kessler's study of the rise of PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia) in Kelantan (Kessler 1974, 1978). While giving due attention to the religious ideas and discussions, and without reducing the religious to simply a matter of material interests, the author attempts to show that PAS also represented the interest of a certain category of people whom one could almost describe as a class, and who would in another cultural context perhaps not have dressed their protest in religious terms. Staying with the case of Malaysia, the most convincing analysis to date of the "Islamic resurgence" in that country, which became increasingly conspicuous during the 1980s, is that by Chandra Muzaffar (1987). Muzaffar does not posit a class background to it but emphasizes the ethnic dimension. The precarious position of the Malays, who represent just over 50% of the population of the country of which they consider themselves as the rightful owners, and the identification commonly made between the Malay and Muslim identities, lead the Malays to express their fears of domination by others (notably Chinese, of course), or perhaps to sublimate feelings of inferiority, by calling for Islamic alternatives. This reasoning explains at least the difference with Indonesia, where the demographic balance is not at all so threatening for the pribumis ("indigenous" Indonesians), and where fundamentalism is a much more marginal phenomenon.

In other cases again, fundamentalist movements have been analysed as political protest movements, whose members consciously or unconsciously chose an Islamic discourse to voice a protest that was primarily political. (Many members of fundamentalist movements would probably reject the distinction made here between the religious and the political, and proclaim that Islam is eminently political, but they would take care to distinguish between the Islamic concept of social justice and that of rival movements, such as the socialists). Granted that many (but not all) fundamentalist movements are at least also (but not exclusively) political protest movements, the question that poses itself is, why and under what circumstances is political protest expressed in religious terms, and why has the religious expression of political disaffection increased so dramatically during the past few decades? I shall return to this question in the second half

of this paper.

Theological (doctrinal) parameters of Muslim fundamentalism

Is it possible to identify a specific fundamentalist theology? Analysts who are well versed in the history of Islamic thought prefer to reserve the term fundamentalism for puritan movements perpetuating the Ibn Taymiyya - Wahhabi intellectual tradition.[4] Sufism allegedly combines ill with the basic attitude of such movements, but in practice we see all sorts of combinations. In Indonesia, it is generally assumed that fundamentalists are reformist in theology and reject the *madhhab*. The most puritan movement of Indonesian Islam, Persis, is for that reason sometimes called fundamentalist, although it is emphatically non-political. And it is probably true that larger numbers of Muslim radicals in Indonesia come from reformist backgrounds than from traditionalist. In Malaysia it is the other way round. There are more conspicuous movements working for the establishment of an Islamic society in Malaysia than in Indonesia, but all these radicals are in matters of worship strongly traditionalist, and Sufi influences are very strong.

One thing that all these and other Muslim fundamentalist movements have in common, however, is their resolute rejection of secularism and secularization (that much they have in common with Christian fundamentalism). This observation may resemble that of sociologists who reduce all fundamentalism to a resistance to modernity, but I mean something quite different. I do not intend to explain fundamentalist movements as a reaction to processes of secularization, but mean that anti-secularism is a central ingredient of the movements' ideologies. This anti-secularism is not simply to be understood as a response to modern developments but as a countercurrent that has been present in Islam almost from the beginning. Secularism in varying degrees, like it or not, has been the rule throughout the history of Islam. The uneasy compromise between *shari`a* and *qanun* has been with Islam almost from the beginning, and there has long been a marginal fringe of thinkers opposed to this state of affairs, whom present-day fundamentalists can claim as their ancestors. The term "desecularization" may be new, but it strikes a responsive chord, and its proponents feel that they stand in a long and venerable tradition rather than being a rearguard fighting a last ditch battle against an inevitable process of modernization.[5]

Fundamentalists wish to place the *shari`a*, God's law, above human-made law. The striving for implementation of the *shari`a* constitutes

perhaps the most apt criterion for distinguishing fundamentalism, a minimum definition. As a criterion, it does not refer to the social characteristics of a movement but rather to its doctrinal aspects. It still includes a very wide range of Muslims, obviously, for there are not many Muslims who dare to proclaim that they do not want the *shari`a* implemented. In Indonesia, the Darul Islam movement fought against the (secular) Republic, hoping to establish a *shari`a*-based Indonesian state, but within the Republican fold both Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Masyumi, the two major Muslim political parties, also fought for official recognition of the *shari`a* in the form of the Jakarta Charter. This "Charter" was meant to be part of the Preamble to the Constitution and consisted of the declaration that Indonesia's Muslim citizens were obliged to live according to the *shari`a* (which in this case primarily referred to prayer, *zakat,* and marriage law).[6] Support for the Jakarta Charter came from a wide cross-section of the Indonesian *umma*, and it is probably true that at present an even higher percentage of Indonesian Muslims would, under ideal circumstances,[7] wish see at least important parts of the *shari`a* implemented here. Should all these people be labelled fundamentalist?

It is obvious that not all NU and Masyumi followers can be called fundamentalists if that word has to retain a definite meaning. Perhaps we should be more explicit and speak of implementation of the *shari`a* not only in personal life (*salat*, *sawm* and *zakat*) but also in social and political life, thus propagating an alternative to the established order. But even then we are still stuck with a wide range of attitudes, from Sufi-like utopian communities such as the Malaysian Darul Arqam, through *da`wa* organizations such as the Tablighi Jamaat and perhaps the Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, to disaffected dropouts from secular society such as the Warsidi group in Lampung[8] and ultimately to groups actively attempting to overthrow the political order by violent means, such as the group who assassinated Sadat. The former types work to prepare the majority in society for a change to a more "Islami" social order either by presenting themselves as a concrete example or by using verbal persuasion; the latter two types represent the patterns of *hijra* and *jihad*.

Besides the obvious differences in actual political behaviour between these types of groups, there are also vast ideological and theological differences among them. Certain recent studies have attempted to cover all intellectual and political movements in the Islamic world of the past century and a half under the label of fundamentalist, and then set out to create order in the complicated data by developing more or

less intricate taxonomies. Choueiri (1990) divides the movements up in revivalist, reformist and radical, the boundaries between which remain fuzzy. In fact, this study covers almost the same range of thought that another recent study (Binder 1988) denoted by the more appreciative term "Islamic liberalism" (which sounds incomparably more reassuring to a Western audience). Ibrahim (1980) suggests a classification along two dimensions that seem meaningful: the amount of change demanded (partial or total) and whether the change should primarily take place in the individual, in society, or in both. (Not surprisingly, most fundamentalist movements are placed in the cell representing total change of both individual and society). The most convoluted exercise in taxonomy is that by Dekmejian (1985), whose work clearly bears the mark of originally being written as a policy advice to the US government. The dimensions of his taxonomy are mostly not theological but behavioural, however, and it is therefore (briefly) discussed in a later section.

While reductionist sociological approaches may be criticized for missing what makes each "fundamentalist" movement distinctive, approaches emphasizing the theological dimension (as orientalist studies are likely to do) may help in locating each movement within the history of Islamic thought but do not even attempt to explain why certain ideas exert such an attraction to certain categories of people in certain circumstances. The taxonomic exercises just mentioned make one acutely aware that classifying, too, is not at all the same as explaining.

Fundamentalists and the West

At this point it is perhaps appropriate to draw attention to one important element in Muslim fundamentalism of almost all varieties that does not seem to have a parallel in the other major religions: the ambivalent relationship to the West, to imperialism, Christian missionary activities, Orientalism, and last but not least Zionism. The history of Islam's encounter with the West is unique, and so are the obsessions and emotionally charged mutual prejudices. Hindus and Buddhists too have been colonized by western powers, but this has never involved the same perceived threat to identity.

One reason of the tension between Islam and Christianity is that they have so much in common. They share much of their sacred history (the earlier Semitic prophets) as well as most of their religious concepts and are therefore in a more real sense theological rivals than Christianity and the Eastern religions. More importantly, they have also for over more than thousand years been neighbours and political

rivals. At one time, an important part of Europe, Spain, was actually Muslim, and Muslim armies only just failed in conquering a much larger part of southern Europe. Later the Muslim Ottomans occupied most of southeastern Europe and long remained the major threat to the Christian kingdoms to the west. The Christian Europeans, in turn, had their Crusades, military campaigns for the conquest of the Holy Land - which was sacred land to all three Semitic religions. Long before the establishment of the Zionist state, the major confrontation between Christendom and Islam concerned the status of Jerusalem.

The political, economic and cultural decline of Islam coincided with the occupation of India and Indonesia, then Egypt; gunboats steaming up the Tigris in the 1820s; Ottoman losses of territory in the Crimea and the Balkans; the final dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire; and, as the culmination, the establishment of Israel on formerly Muslim-controlled Palestinian soil. Fundamentalists tend to blame the decline on two reasons simultaneously: the Muslim's own negligence of the *shari`a*, and evil plotting by the West, that is, by capitalism, communism, Orientalism and Zionism. The remedy proposed is equally simple: return to the *shari`a* and unrelenting struggle against those evil forces threatening Islam. It is a demonic worldview that most fundamentalists adhere to, leaving little room for appreciation of the complexities of the real world. It shows a remarkable similarity to the authoritarian populist ideologies of recent European history, fascism and nazism, which singled out the same enemies in their own explanation of the world, i.e., capitalism, communism, Jewry. In fact, direct influences from these European ideologies on later Arab fundamentalist thought can be traced. In their very rejection of "the West", Muslim fundamentalists were influenced by a different strand of western thought.

This is not, of course, to say that fundamentalists are entirely wrong in their almost paranoid perceptions of anti-Muslim conspiracies. Many westerners do perceive in Islam a major threat to their own values, to be subverted at any cost. Their views on Islam are just as unsophisticated and demonizing as the Muslim fundamentalists' views of the West. During the Iraq-Iran war, many saw Saddam Hussein as a heroic secular barrier against the threat of Iranian "fundamentalism" and preferred to remain ignorant of his human rights record. Upon his invasion of Kuwait he not only suddenly became the Devil incarnate, but all his crimes were somehow blamed on Islam as a whole. (It is surprising to see how for many Muslims, Saddam's image underwent a similar though reverse change, from "Little Satan" to *mujahid* par excellence). The foreign policies of western governments, and no doubt the operations of their intelligence agencies, are influenced by the prevailing anti-Muslim

views.

It is not only right-wing European ideologies that have indirectly left an impact on Muslim fundamentalist thought. Many of the political concepts adopted by fundamentalists who are up against authoritarian governments are derived from European Enlightenment thought although it has been possible to find Arabic names and to claim Islamic precedents for them. Slogans of justice and equality, demands for institutions such as parliaments and constitutions may be based on a reconstruction of Islamic thought; their inspiration is ultimately from liberal or left-wing European thought. These ideas, incidentally, are a central part of the European program of modernity; their adoption, in one form or another, by most Muslim fundamentalist movements shows again that these cannot simple be dismissed as reactionary movements of resistance against modernity.

Empirical studies

The term "fundamentalism", as said, has emotive and judgmental overtones. Western audiences, and governments in the Muslim world just as well, are wary of the threat posed by some radical groups to the established order. The Iranian revolution, the assassination of Sadat, or the popularity of the FIS in Algeria send shivers down the spines of many. Although most of those called fundamentalists are peaceful people, many observers are fascinated by the minority who accept the ultimate consequence and take up arms in the name of Islam. (And often it is implicitly assumed that all other fundamentalists are potentially violent too. They are considered guilty by association - the observers' thought association, that is).

The best empirical study of the subject that has been made to date concentrates on this violent fringe, but the researchers were in this case careful not to generalize their findings. I am referring to a fascinating piece of research by Saad Eddin Ibrahim and associates at the American University of Cairo (reported in Ibrahim 1980 and 1982). Instead of trying to understand the entire phenomenon of Islamic revival (or resurgence, or reflowering) or losing themselves in attempts to define fundamentalism, they decided to concentrate on the dimension of Islamically legitimated violence. The researchers defined "Islamic militancy" as "actual violent group behaviour committed collectively against the state or other actors in the name of Islam". This definition excludes individual violent behaviour as well as radical rhetoric that is not backed up by violent action. The term includes defensive as well as offensive violent behaviour. In the concrete cases that Ibrahim investigated, he and his colleagues took

as their respondents the members of two radical Muslim organizations who had been arrested because of violent incidents. These were by definition "Islamic militants".

Ibrahim cautions, incidentally, that not all those arrested by the government as Islamic radicals are "militants" in the sense of being actually involved in violent activities. Too often, a minor violent incident provides the pretext for arresting large numbers of non-violent radicals who are mainly embarrassing for the ideas and criticism that they express. This is true of Egypt, it is also true of quite a few other Muslim countries.

Islamic militancy, thus defined, cannot be equated with, nor even considered as a subgroup of, what is commonly called fundamentalism. That becomes clear when we list the events in recent Indonesian history that constitute instances of Islamic militancy by this definition. These would include the Nahdlatul Ulama's adoption of a Resolution on Jihad in defense of the newly declared independent Republic in 1945 and the struggle for Surabaya led by Bung Tomo in November of that year;[9] the Darul Islam rebellions;[10] the mass killings of alleged communists in 1965-66 following a failed left-wing coup d'état; some of the activities of radical groups that were initially dubbed "Komando Jihad" and later "Kelompok Teror Warman" and "NII/TII" during the late 1970s and early 1980s;[11] the raid on a police post in Bandung and later the hijacking of a plane by followers of the radical preacher Imron bin Zein in the early 1980s; the Tanjung Priok riots of September 1984; [12] the mob attack on the offices of the popular magazine Monitor in October 1990.[13] Several of these cases are not commonly designated as fundamentalist, notably the revolutionary violence of 1945 and the killings of of 1965-66, both of which have been canonized as heroic and patriotic.

After the initial suspicions of both the militants and the Egyptian government had been overcome, 34 prisoners were interviewed over a considerable period of time, for altogether four hundred hours, yielding detailed information on the militants' ideology, their movements' internal organization, and the social backgrounds of the militants themselves.

The research findings concerning the groups members' ideology are not very surprising. Although the militants insisted on the need for an Islamic economic and political order, they had only the vaguest idea about what both should entail. No excessive poverty or wealth, for sure; fair wages, for hard an honest work; payment of zakat, and

generosity in general; no cheating, hoarding or lending at outrageous interest; and a state that guarded over the interests of the *ummah* (always thought of as a collective - no words about individual rights apart from property rights); justice (`*adalah*) and equity (*qistas*); abolition of injustice and oppression (*zulm*). The militants were strongly hostile to the ulama, whom they considered hypocrites and opportunists and commonly described as "pulpit parrots" (*babbaghawat al-manabir*).

More interesting are the findings concerning the militants' backgrounds. In this respect there were no differences between the two groups. All of them were men from the capital but two thirds of them had rural or small-town backgrounds. Most of them belonged to the middle and lower middle class, the "modern" rather than the "traditional" segments of it (i.e., they were employed in salaried clerical or professional jobs rather than trades and crafts). The fathers of two thirds of them were middle-ranking civil servants, and most of the others too belonged to the lower middle income groups. The militants were relatively highly educated, definitely more highly than their parents (29 out of 34 had university degrees, most of them in engineering, medicine or other technical disciplines), and none of them was unemployed. All were from "normal", well-integrated families (no "broken home kids"). In no way could they be considered as failures or victims of unfortunate circumstances. Ibrahim argues however that both their class backgrounds and life histories point to status incongruity: high qualifications, high motivation, but no economic or political opportunities to meet their expectations. The explanation Ibrahim proposes of these cases of Islamic militancy is a variety of the well-known relative deprivation thesis.

Ibrahim makes the interesting observation that the social profile of these Islamic militants is remarkably similar to that of those who joined radical leftist movements. Earlier, Ervand Abrahamian had made a similar observation on the backgrounds of the Islamic Mujahidin-i Khalq and the Marxist Fida'iyan-i Khalq guerrillas in Iran, on the basis of the obituaries of those who were killed (Abrahamian 1980; also 1989: 224-242).[14] The Turkish political scientist Dogu Ergil delivered a questionnaire to 300 left-wing and right-wing radicals serving prison sentences for political violence in Turkey in the late 1970s (Ergil 1980). He too found a remarkable similarity in social profile among both groups. The Turkish militants were marginally younger than those in the Iranian and Egyptian case studies, and about a quarter of the left-wing militants there were of working-class origins; but otherwise the profile was the same: predominantly middle and lower middle class backgrounds

(especially from the "new" middle classes: teachers, civil servants), relatively high education, virtually no unemployment.[15]

These findings contradict much of the established wisdom on Islamic radicalism. As Abrahamian observes, "Since the Iranian Revolution, much has been written in the West on how Islam as a political ideology appeals most readily to the 'uprooted': to 'dislocated' and 'marginalized' elements; to 'dispossessed' and 'déclassé' groups; to 'anomic' and 'alienated' individuals; to 'uprooted' peasants and 'small-town conservatives' thrown suddenly into the hustle and bustle of modern cities. Such generalizations may be true of other Middle Eastern organizations; they certainly are not true of the Iranian Mojahedin" (1989: 224). Nor are they true of the militants studied by Ibrahim and Ergil. These three studies, of course, deal with a very special subgroup of fundamentalists, people who have actually been engaged in violent political activities. There is no reason to assume that the average fundamentalist fits the same profile.[16]

Statistical correlations between a certain type of background and militancy, Islamic or otherwise, do by themselves not constitute an explanation. The above-mentioned data from three countries support, however, explanatory hypotheses of the relative deprivation type (concerning the gap between rising expectations and performance). The militants belonged to the best young people of their generation. Their educational success and initial social mobility (all of Ibrahim's respondents had higher-status jobs than their parents) gave them reason to believe that they were destined for leading positions in their society; the expected opportunities, however, never came. This, Ibrahim suggests, pushed them towards radical politics.

It is obvious that relative deprivation as such does not automatically lead to militancy; most people of the same social and educational backgrounds never become militants. The new middle classes are not the only social categories whose members experience relative deprivation; other classes may in fact feel it much more acutely, without turning to radicalism. I may perhaps refer here to my own research among poor rural-to-urban migrants in Bandung in 1983-84 (cf van Bruinessen 1988). Most of my neighbours in the slum where I lived experienced serious relative deprivation and belonged to the categories widely believed to be susceptible to radical politics; their response, however, was mostly passive and quietist. The only two persons whom I found to be inclined to fundamentalism were well-educated and had relatively prestigious technical jobs.

To the extent that the correlations found here contribute to an

explanation, it is militancy that they explain, not fundamentalism. If left-wing and fundamentalist militants have the same social profile, it is obviously other factors than these social background variables that make them one or the other. The cultural and political context of the countries concerned appears to play a key role here. Certain circumstances are more likely to engender fundamentalist responses than others. Dekmejian surveys a whole array of factors in what he terms the "crisis environment" that may be playing a part, including the nature and performance of the existing political regime. As we could witness throughout the Muslim world, the very event of the Iranian revolution worked by its example as a stimulus to fundamentalism in other environments.

Selective political repression may also be an important factor, as the case of Turkey suggests. The 1970s here had seen a mushrooming of radical left and right-wing student and youth movements, which came to control most university campuses and many popular residential areas. After the military coup d'état of 1980, both left-wing and right-wing organizations were banned, but it was especially the left that bore the burden of military repression. University campuses that had been largely dominated by the left suddenly began to look different. The new generation of students grew neatly trimmed beards instead of shaggy moustaches and discussed Islamic economics rather than Marxism; women students began covering their heads and ever more of them donned full "Islamic" dress. Turkish society, notably the former bulwarks of secularism that the universities had been, appeared to be rapidly Islamicizing. The gradual liberalization of the political climate, beginning in the mid-1980s, allowed a modest reemergence of the left and an upsurge of new, less ideological, anti-establishment groups and movements, such as environmentalists and human rights activists. Islamic groups appeared to be losing some of their dominant positions again, although they remained much more prominent than they had been before 1980. In the early 1980s, there had been former leftists who became Islamists, but by the end of the decade there were actually a few Islamists who went over to the left.

Fundamentalism and the sociology of sectarianism

Is fundamentalism primarily a religious or a social and political phenomenon? Sociological analyses will of course tend to emphasize the second aspect, although no sophisticated analysis can afford to neglect the former. The discussion above, which drew attention to the similarities between fundamentalist and left-wing militants, strongly suggests that actual violent action in the name of Islam is not a direct consequence of radical religious doctrines but rather that social

factors may predispose certain people to militancy, and that such persons than may adopt or develop militant theories. How each individual became a fundamentalist rather than a left-wing radical is explained in an ad-hoc way, by the religious climate in the family of origin, the accessibility of certain literature, or contacts with recruiting activists.

One branch of social science that may yield some insight in fundamentalism as a religious as well as political phenomenon is the sociology of sectarianism. Now fundamentalism and sectarianism are certainly not to be identified, but most fundamentalist movements resemble, in important respects, the protestant sects that emerged in Europe in opposition to the dominant Catholic church. Bryan Wilson, who has devoted a lifetime to the study of sects, in the past and the present, suggests the following characteristics as most typical of sects:

(1) exclusivity - dual allegiances are not tolerated, one cannot simultaneously adhere to other teachings than those of the sect;
(2) a claim to a monopoly on religious truth;
(3) anti-sacerdotal attitude (rejection of a priestly class; all men are believed to have access to religious truth);
(4) no religious division of labour within the sect;
(5) voluntarist association (membership is an act of choice; prospective members are usually tested and have to prove themselves worthy; there may be initiation);
(6) strong social control within the sect;
(7) a demand for total allegiance;
(8) the sect is a protest group, against the Church, its teachings, and its priests (Wilson 1982: 91-95).

These eight traits were most marked in the pre-modern period, when European society was completely dominated by an all-powerful church closely allied with the state, and the clergy part of the ruling elite. They are now perhaps more accurately descriptive of Muslim fundamentalist movements than of present-day Christian sects, which is surprising. Most fundamentalist movements are lay movements and highly critical of the established ulama (the *babbaghawat al-manabir*) and their *fatwa*s.[17] (In Thai Buddhism, too, lay organizations critical of the *sangha* are in evidence, Chamlong Srimuang being a conspicuous representative of this brand of fundamentalism). This similarity is at first sight surprising because Sunni Islam lacks institutions similar to the Church, against which the European sects directed their protest. But the existence of a class of ulama who are closely allied with the state, who on the one hand legitimate the government and its policies and on the other are

backed up by the state in imposing their version of orthodoxy (such as is the case in several Muslim countries) is in fact not so different from the presence of a dominating state church. As a hypothesis one might suggest that, the closer the relations of establishment ulama with the government, the greater is the likelihood of fundamentalist movements emerging in protest, and the more sect-like will these movements be.

Sects in the Christian environment tend to follow a well-known course of development. In the initial phases they are frequently led by charismatic personalities and tend to militancy and confrontation with church and state. Those sects that survive beyond an initial period of enthusiasm tend to deradicalize, militancy giving way to quietism. Their internal structure also changes, charisma is gradually replaced by bureaucracy as the ordering principle, and role specialization takes place. In short, the sect loses some of its distinguishing traits and becomes more church-like, a denomination. Interestingly, something similar appears to be happening to Muslim fundamentalist movements. A crude statistical analysis of 91 different Islamist movements of varying ages indicates that the older ones are generally less radical and more quietist, and more bureaucratically organized, and that militancy and charismatic leadership are primarily found among young, recent movements (Dekmejian 1991).

Both Christian sects and Muslim fundamentalist movements may have an important function as correctives to established and routinized religion, as a bee's sting in the flesh of a lethargic *ummah*, a direct appeal to the religious conscience, a renewed taste of the religion's original impulse. It is probably incorrect to interpret them as symptoms of a deep crisis, they are more likely a sign of society's health. It would, in my opinion, precisely be the lack of response on the part of the major body of the *umma* that would point to a deep malaise. A positive appreciation of the fundamentalists' role as critics does not, of course, imply that they offer desirable alternatives. The analysis of the world in most fundamentalist writings, though not always without stimulating insights, is painfully inadequate, and so are the solutions proposed.

The wider impact of fundamentalism

The focus of my attention in this paper has been on fundamentalist movements, not on fundamentalist thought. But it is worth noting that a number of issues that were central concerns of fundamentalist movements have entered the mainstream of Muslim thought. Islamic ("interest-free") banking is perhaps the most conspicuous example.

The concept is directly derived from efforts to implement the shari`a literally. Before the first experiments with Islamic banks, the concept was widely believed to be part and parcel of a specifically Islamic economics, an alternative to and incompatible with capitalist and socialist economics. The concept has, however, proved quite workable in combination with an otherwise capitalist economy,[18] and as the Indonesian example shows, it is no longer fundamentalists alone who act as the champions of Islamic banking.

One of the hallmarks of Christian sects and Islamist movements alike is their religious intensity. Over the past two decades all Muslim societies have seen a conspicuous increase of religiosity. This cannot, of course, simply be attributed to the influence of fundamentalist propaganda, but the heightened religiosity does make them more susceptible to ideas that first arose in fundamentalist contexts. There is an extensive new literature, fundamentalist in inspiration but aiming at the wider public, and it is read.

The appeal of fundamentalism, of Islam as an ideology, is at least in part due to the political conjuncture. Some Muslim countries have experimented with liberal capitalism, others with various forms of socialism, and both have left large sections of the population disappointed and alienated. Most Muslim countries have gone through a phase of intense political and economic nationalism, without seeing their problems solved. The Islamist argument that all these ideologies are foreign imports and therefore due to fail, began to sound ever more convincing by the early 1970s. The oil crisis of 1973 and the rise of OPEC seemed to show that it could be profitable for Muslim countries - at least those that were sitting on substantial oil reserves - to confront the West. Hopes of a new Islamic renaissance were kindled.

In three large Muslim countries, Pakistan, Sudan and Iran, fundamentalists came to power and set about Islamicizing their polities. This further stimulated the debate on Islam as an ideology and a system, political, economic, moral, as well as intellectual. (Saudi Arabia of course had been implementing its interpretation of the *shari`a* for over a half century, but its economic interests were driving it ever closer to the United States, and it had never been a very inspiring example anyway). Islamization in Pakistan and Sudan were not exactly immediate successes, and the impact on the rest of the world was relatively small. Iran was a quite different case. Not only did it courageously take up the torch of uncompromising struggle against both American and Soviet imperialism, its ideologues of the Islamic revolution, Shari`ati, Mutahhari, Khomeiny himself and the Iraqi Shi`i Muhammad al-Baqir Sadr, whose works

soon were translated into various other Muslim languages, made the Sunni world with a shock aware of the rich intellectual heritage preserved there. During the past decade, the Shi`i authors have been fruitfully fertilizing fundamentalist thought in the Sunni world as well; theirs have been easily the most interesting new contributions to radical Muslim discourse - and probably also the most influential.

The existence of Islamic states is on the one hand a prop for fundamentalism elsewhere in the Muslim world, but on the other hand it may in the long run be the undoing of fundamentalist claims. The experience of the Soviet Union and its role in the decline of socialism as a credible alternative is a sobering example. As long as fundamentalism was simply a critic in the margin, its apologetic claims about, say, the rights of religious minorities may have been given the benefit of the doubt. But now the treatment of the Baha'is in Iran (and secondarily the Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews), the Ahmadiyah in Pakistan (as well as the Isma`ilis and the few remaining Hindus) or of the Christian and pagan tribes of southern Sudan are posing questions that cannot be ignored. By condoning these practices, fundamentalist Islam would deliberately opt out of the community of civilized nations. But a rejection of them would necessitate a revision of the very fundamentals of fundamentalism. [19]

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Notes

[1] These rebels were, like the regime itself, Sunni Muslims. The situation becomes even more complicated when we take also the protest movements of Saudi Arabia's native Shi`a Muslims into account. See for this aspect: Goldberg 1986.

[2] The shah reserved the term "black-red reaction" for the Mujahidin-i Khalq, indicating how hard it was to locate these socialist Muslim militants (inspired by Shari`ati) in a conventional left-right dichotomy. The Khomeini faction was simply "black reaction" in the official terminology. A good history of the Mujahidin movement and of its ideology is Abrahamian 1989.

[3] Sivan gives in the first chapter of his 1985 book a fascinating anthology of anti-modernist lamentations from the Arab fundamentalist press. Most could just as well have been quotations of American twice-born Christians.

[4] Fazlur Rahman, in his survey of recent Muslim movements (1981), prefers the term "neo-fundamentalism" for the present movements of this kind (the original "fundamentalists" in his scheme were the Wahhabis).

[5] Sivan's study (1985) emphasizes more clearly than most others the extent to which contemporary Arab fundamentalist thought is rooted in that of medieval Islamic thinkers like Ibn Taymiyya.

[6] The Jakarta Charter was finally rejected in the Constituant Assembly by a clear majority of delegates. Clearly Indonesia's nominal Muslims (who in the fifties certainly outnumbered the stricter, "*santri*", Muslims) felt little enthusiasm for the idea that the state should force them to carry out their religious obligations. On

these debates see Boland 1982: 25-27, 90-101; Maarif 1985.

[7] "Under ideal circumstances" is the famous escape clause allowing the indefinite postponement of the embarrassing implementation of many of the *hudud* punishments. As long as there may be simple economic reasons for theft, in other words as long as complete social and economic justice has not been achieved, a well-known reasoning goes, the circumstances are far from ideal and make the literal application of the *shari`a* in this respect inappropriate.

[8] Warsidi was the leader of a small group of Muslims who refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Pancasila-based government of Indonesia and withdrew to an isolated village in the Lampung region of southern Sumatra, apparently expecting an Islamic revolution. Warsidi's radical preaching drew the attention of the military authorities, and when in February 1989 the group resisted Warsidi's arrest, killing a policeman, the army wiped them out. See AsiaWeek, 24 February 1989.

[9] The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is Indonesia's largest organization of traditionalist Muslims. It had always been very accommodating towards the Dutch colonial authorities, but after the Second World War an entirely new situation existed. The Japanese had expelled the Dutch and were themselves defeated by the Allies, Indonesian nationalist leaders declared independence on August 17, 1945. Attempts by the Dutch (more precisely, the British on behalf of the Dutch) to restore their rule were then seen as aggression against independent Muslim territory, and the NU therefore declared jihad. Within weeks after British troops occupied Surabaya in October 1945, they were faced with a fierce resistance movement of radical youth coordinated by Bung Tomo, a young nationalist with NU contacts.

[10] In the physical struggle for independence, 1945-1949, Indonesia's secular nationalists came out on top. In several regions there were Islamic nationalists who refused to recognize the new government (or later withdrew their recognition out of disappointment) and continued to fight for an Islamic state. These Darul Islam movements, strongest in West Java, Acheh and South Sulawesi, remained a serious political factor until the early 1960s.

[11] These various labels refer to small groups of radicals with links to the former Darul Islam (but also to the security forces) to whom a number of bombings and other acts of violence were attributed. The members were genuinely committed to the idea of an Islamic state and fiercely anti-communist, and it is widely believed that they were manipulated by the intelligence community.

[12] The bloodily repressed riots in Tanjung Priok, the harbour district of Jakarta, were triggered by a policeman's desecrating a mosque known as a centre of political dissent. The incident occurred at a time of great tension over the government's attempts to impose

the state ideology Pancasila on all associations as the single permissible foundation - to the exclusion, that is, of Islam.

[13] This magazine and its (Catholic) editor, Arswendo Atmowiloto, aroused the anger of many Indonesian Muslims by what was perceived as a deliberate insult of the Prophet. The magazine asked its readers to send in the name of the person whom they most admired. The results of this "poll", as published in the magazine, placed the Prophet as number 12, even below the editor of the magazine.

[14] In his later book on the Mujahidin, Abrahamian gives some statistics on 101 prominent and 8968 rank-and-file Mujahidin who were killed. Three quarters of the latter were under 25 when killed; most of the former between 26 and 30 years old. 87 out of the 101 prominent members belonged to the modern middle classes (teachers, engineer, civil servants, doctors, lawyers, military officers, etc). Of the rank-and-file members, 40 per cent belonged to the modern middle classes and another 45 per cent were high-school students or graduates. The traditional middle classes accounted for 8 percent of the prominent and only 2.5 percent of the rank-and-file members; the working class for 2 and 7.5 percent, respectively (Abrahamian 1989: 224-5).

[15] To these cases we may add the observation of certain unnamed French anthropologists and political scientists quoted by Kepel that "in Tunisia and Morocco, many young Islamicist preachers, disciples or emulators of [the Egyptian radical preacher] Kishk, are ex-Marxist-Leninists who studied at universities in France." (Kepel 1985: 231).

[16] A study of Malaysian women students indicates that those who perceived their families' economic situation to be declining or stagnating were more likely to join the da`wah movements than those who felt better off (Narli 1991: 117-120).

[17] The Shi`i followers of Khomeiny are an exception, although they too were critical of the other ulama who collaborated with the Shah. The Mujahidin-i Khalq are more critical of ulama in general but nevertheless hesitatingly accepted the principle of taqlid. The shadowy Furqan organization, on the other hand, were so opposed to the ulama that they carried out a series of assassinations of leading ulama, including Beheshti and Motahhari.

[18] In fact, the model on which the existing Islamic banks appear to be based is investment banking, a variety of banking that already existed within capitalist economies.

[19] Radical ideas for such a revision are proposed in a stimulating book by the Sudanese legal scholar and Muslim thinker an-Na`im (1990).