Why Fundamentalism?

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Abstract

This article is intended to generate a discussion about religious fundamentalism. We begin by proposing a definition and arguing for the value of 'fundamentalism' as an analytical category that allows the understanding of common political discourses, interventions and practices across different religions and diverse contexts. We then delineate key components of fundamentalist movements, looking in particular at the construction of a neo-patriarchal political order as a key objective.

We then move to trying to understand why fundamentalism has emerged at this particular point in time. We argue that the weakening of a commitment to a secular politics has occurred through the convergence of several related factors. Firstly we see the crisis of both 'progressive' versions of nationalism as well as of the political Left (locally and internationally) as having provided a major opportunity for religious fundamentalism, which it has adeptly occupied. Secondly fundamentalists have interpolated the massively disruptive social changes caused by neoliberal globalisation taking place particularly but not exclusively in the developing world. Thirdly we see intellectual understanding of the fundamentalist threat to human rights and women's rights in particular has been significantly impeded by the rise of postmodernism and postcolonialism where the romanticisation of essentialised 'other-identity' claims has prevented the development of a critique of the fundamentalist agenda.

Keywords: Fundamentalism, Feminism, Secularism, Postcolonialism, Neoliberalism

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Introduction

In the state of Borno in North-Eastern Nigeria, an internally displaced person offered the following harrowing account of what took place when members of the group Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lida'awati wal Jihad (JAS), commonly known as Boko Haram, arrived at their village:

> In the town of Damaskin Bama LGA…all school age girls and boys were reportedly placed in a large compound where they received systematic and intensive religious instruction. Initially, parents were pleased that their children were being taught the Quran, but in December 2015, 300 children disappeared from the compound. Furthermore, though interviews with children who had received religious instruction demonstrated a continuity in the subject matter taught by previous Quranic teachers, there was one important difference: JAS's instruction included injunctions to use violence against anyone opposing the teachings that they received, including their own parents (Ladbury, S et al 2016:5).

In Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, UK in September 2016 a wedding ceremony took place: an interfaith marriage, between a Sikh bride and non-Sikh groom at the Warwick and Leamington Gurdwara. However the event was severely disrupted when 55 members of Sikh Youth UK arrived to stage a protest in opposition to actions of the Gurdwara committee who had allowed this ceremony to take place. As the protestors were wearing Sikh kirpans, a ceremonial dagger worn traditionally by Sikhs, the police were called and the protesters removed. According to Shamsher Singh, a member of the Sikh Youth group which organised the protest, their objection was not against inter-faith marriage as such, but the protestors 'justifiably objected to an interfaith marriage that was to be carried out as a Sikh religious ceremony.' He situated the protest in a context of 'more and more young people are becoming interested in the true interpretation of what it means to be Sikh…The elder generation arrived [in the UK] and fitted

their faith round the need to assimilate, survive and to get work…Now younger people want to reclaim Sikhism as a deeply spiritual peaceful and encompassing religion and this is why we are seeing these protests.' (Guardian, 12/11/16).

These are two events which have taken place in two entirely different contexts, in different countries, involving two entirely separate religions, involving people with no connection to each other. However the central point we want to make in this piece is that both of these events are significant signs of the times we are living in. Without arguing for any sort of moral equivalence between these two situations described, what connects these instances is the way they manifest the resurgent power of religious fundamentalism. Why is it that British Sikhs involved in protests like the one in Leamington are so preoccupied with interfaith marriages? Journalist Herpreet Kaur Grewal has expressed concern that in these protests the focus is always on Sikh girls marrying out while there is relative silence and inaction on caste discrimination and female foeticide (Independent 14/9/2016). Sukhwant Dhaliwal has noted similarly that 'throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, the prohibition on mixed relationships manifested itself in regular reprisals between Sikh and Muslim gangs for targeting 'their' women. The question is, why has this resurfaced now?' (Dhaliwal, 2016). This central issue is the focus of this discussion.

While the Islamic fundamentalism that characterises the first account is the most visible, our argument is that this is part of a development taking place within all major world religions. While much of the condemnation that takes place around this focuses on this question of violence, it is crucial to see fundamentalism as about more than violence, even if violence remains one of its most defining qualities. It is also important to see that the violence which characterises different forms of religious fundamentalism does not come out of the blue, but emerges over years as a consequence of the societal normalisation of fundamentalist thinking and teaching. Fundamentalism develops as process, and this sows the seeds of

what develops into horrific events such as those in Nigeria (Ladbury, S et al 2016). While religious fundamentalism feeds off localised problems and grievances, we want to argue here that religious fundamentalist movements are, in the words of the Algerian sociologist Marieme Helie-Lucas 'political movements of the extreme right, which, in a context of globalization, e.g. forceful international economic exploitation and free-for-all capitalism, manipulate religion, culture, or ethnicity, in order to achieve their political aims' (Helie-Lucas, 2004). In some instances this influence accumulates as fundamentalists have taken over the process of offering social support to working class and poor communities, particularly in a context of structural adjustment programmes and state withdrawal from social provision.[1] Helie-Lucas describes similarly the rise of Islamist politics in the impoverished suburbs of French cities, noting that:

> the big strength of the fundamentalist far-right is that they understood very early that the state abandonment of its duties towards specific categories of citizens, and the decline of the old Communist Parties' social activities in working-class areas of big cities, created a space for them, whether in [North Africa] or in Europe. "Political Islam" is a popular, and populist, movement. This…has been the fertile ground on which young men, and now young women too, become "radicalised", thanks to the social work done by the Muslim far-right: the youth camps and sports clubs; the after-school tutoring; the sermons; the free distribution of clothing (including, of course, distributing so-called "Islamic dress" in the process); and books (including, of course, fundamentalist literature); the material help brought to homes where the bread winner just died; etc. (Helie-Lucas, 2015)

As was argued in the first issue of *Feminist Dissent*, this is all part and parcel of the process whereby 'fundamentalism has spread its tentacles even deeper into our social and political lives and spaces' across the globe (Varma, Dhaliwal, and Nagarajan 2016: 4). Without even attempting an exhaustive list of the contemporary conquest of political power by religious

fundamentalists it is crucial to refer to Bhariyata Janata Party (BJP) leader Narendra Modi, now India's Prime Minister. For many years the questions about his involvement in massacres of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 (Human Rights Watch 2002) led to him being treated as a pariah by western governments. However as his regime now throws the India's doors open to global capital, these questions alongside his ongoing involvement with the far-right, Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), whose policies openly admire European Nazism's project of 'racial purification' (Bhatt, 2001), have become much less of a problem. In the US it is no secret that Evangelical Christians have played a significant role in the election of Donald Trump in November 2016. Trump himself is not an evangelical and anyone listening to the impious racist and misogynist demagogy during his campaign might have considered this might be off-putting to socially conservative religious people. However as Mugambe Jouet (2016) has argued, the authoritarian black-and-white message, a message which characterises the form of religious fundamentalist ideology everywhere, is deeply appealing to evangelical fundamentalists in a country in which 42% of the population consider themselves 'creationists' (Jouet, 2016). It is also crucial to note that while Trump is not religious, his Vice President Mike Pence has been a consistent supporter of 'America First militarism, the criminalising of abortion and state-sponsored conversion therapy for LGBT people' (Scahill, 2016). These same evangelical Christian movements are also now developing in Central and South America, where fundamentalists are making substantial inroads both within and without the Catholic Church (Allen, 2016). While the contexts are diverse, there is no mistaking the pervasive and powerful fundamentalist resurgence taking place across the globe.

When we think about this it is also crucial to ask where are the progressive and secular forces in the face of this tide of reactionary mobilisation. What has happened to the project of secular, social and in particular women's emancipation? Why is it that leading feminist and

socialist writers and intellectuals are so silent, so confused, or even supportive of the forces behind the fundamentalist grab for power? We also feel it is important to ask why it is that we see – in the face of all the evidence of what religious fundamentalists stand for and the means by which they aim to achieve their agenda – a continued apologetics within leftist, feminist and human rights circles for religious fundamentalists? For many on the left there is a reluctance to accept the legitimacy of the term 'fundamentalism' as a way of understanding contemporary politics, reflected for example in the way the actions of Islamist groups in the UK are explained away as a reaction to the 'Islamaphobia' of the state. The language of UK government policy is similarly nervous about the term fundamentalism and has hung their entire policy on the strangely ambiguous term 'radicalisation'. Counter-terrorism experts on the other hand focus on the distinction between 'violent' versus 'non-violent extremism'. If we have no language to talk about this issue, then we have no basis for analysis or action, and it is this silence that we hope to challenge in this discussion. Our argument is structured into two parts. We begin by seeking to define the category of 'religious fundamentalism' and argue for its centrality as a means of understanding the politics of the present. We then ask 'why now?' Why is it now when it had been assumed by so many for so long that religion globally was a force in terminal decline in the face of the onward march of modernity, that we are now seeing this global fundamentalist conquest of power? We conclude by offering some perspectives for the future.

What is Fundamentalism?

'God Almighty created men and women different, with differing needs and roles [and] scripture declares that God has called the Father to be the spiritual leader in his family…The hope of America today is strong Christian families. Determine to make your family a fortress of spiritual and moral strength against the shifting tides of moral change'

Reverend Jerry Falwell (in Marty & Appleby: 1993:131)

'Humanity today is living in a large brothel! One has only today to glance at its press, films, fashions shows, beauty contests, wine bars and broadcasting stations! Or observe the mad lust for naked flesh, provocative postures, and sick suggestive statements in literature, the arts and mass media!'

Sayid Qutb (in Ruthven, 2007:26)

In 1910 Lyman and Milton Stewart, after having made their fortune in oil, funded the production of a book entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth* and the conservative editors who put the book together presented a series of arguments about the critical importance of a return to Biblical fundamentals'. This was done through an assertion of the literal truth of the Bible, at the same time attacking Socialism, Modernism, Darwinian evolution, and the threat these posed to 'family life' (Various authors, 1910). The term 'religious fundamentalism' was born. In her book *The Battle for God* (2001) Karen Armstrong begins by asking whether a term originally developed within North American Protestantism in the early 20th century can be used to characterise the wide range of movements we now see within different faith and national contexts. Bruce Lawrence has argued in his 1987 book *Defenders of God: the Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age* that while these movements exist within Christian, Jewish and Islamic traditions, they can be collectively characterised as 'fundamentalist' on the basis of their common rejection of the legacy of Enlightenment reason and a corresponding belief in the 'morally corrosive' impact of modernity. He argues that the Enlightenment and modernity, rather than being a specifically Christian or Western experience, have impacted on Jews and Judaism within Europe and on Islam through the colonisation of Asia, Africa and the Middle East (Lawrence, 1987).

Chetan Bhatt in his study of two of the twentieth century's classic fundamentalist movements within Hinduism and Islam – Hindutva and the Jamaat e Islami – has developed this argument further stating that it is

crucial 'not to separate historically the impact of modernity outside the West with the identified and claimed features of modernity in the West, but to consider both as a persisting and discontinuous set of global transformations' (1997:82). He takes the claim that Islam or Hinduism were 'pure formations, hermetically sealed from contamination from the West' as an instance of this interconnectedness, noting this claim is one made both by fundamentalists as well as by 'orientalist' conceptions of Western superiority. Bhatt argues that the very way these conceptions act as mirror images of each other – where an identical claim signifies positively in one conception but as sign of inferiority and backwardness in the latter - points to the way religious fundamentalism is itself a product of modernity (1997:79). Bhatt notes that while Hindutva and the Jamaat e Islami emerged from different faith traditions, both developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century and appealed in very similar ways to the 'fundamental truths' of the Vedas or the Qu'ran, rejecting secularism as 'Western'. Yet these claims have been constructed entirely through the thoroughly modern conceptions of 'race' and Nation. In 1938 Madhav Golwalker (1906-1973), second Supreme Leader of Hindutva paramilitary group the Rashatriya Swayansevek Sangh (RSS), published a document entitled '*We, or our Nationhood defined*'. In remarkably similar terms to German National Socialism of which he was a great admirer, Golwalker proclaimed 'We will not seek to prove this axiomatic truth, that the Race is the body of the Nation, and that with its fall, the Nation ceases to exist' (in Bhatt, 1997:204). This combination of the ancient Vedic truths with a fascination with Nazism, of a 'theocratic concept of politics and civil society' with a 'racial concept of the nation' (Bhatt, 1997:205) is deeply illustrative of way religious fundamentalism occupies this curious double relationship with modernity; at once entirely a product of it, but seeking to reject it, all at the same time. While the context of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth* was again different, all these developments are illustrations of what Malise Ruthven calls 'family resemblances' between the forms of religious

fundamentalism (Ruthven, 2007:6). In understanding the essentially reactionary fundamentalist project and the way it arises out of religion, it is equally important to understand the way this is distinct from and often highly destructive of more mainstream historic forms of religious practice and belief, and we offer many instances of the way this happens in this discussion.

What do fundamentalist movements mean when they talk of the need to return to 'fundamental truths'? It is crucial to grasp that this is not about a return to a 'lost tradition' in a straightforward sense, not least because religious traditions historically are localised and very heterogeneous. As Yuval-Davis and Saghal have noted 'there is no such thing as 'strict adherence to the text' [as] all great religious scriptures include internal contradictions' (1992:4). It is for this reason that religious fundamentalists construct 'tradition' in a way that is highly selective, at the same time as dogmatically insisting that their reconstructions of text are 'sacred' and so unable to be questioned. The accounts offered are deeply reductive and simplistic, and often patently absurd - Bhatt offers the example of Hindu nationalists who demand 'the restoration of an ancient Hindu empire that never actually existed' (1987:91) - however the power these groups exercise through this is very real. A crucial feature of fundamentalism's essential authoritarianism lies it in the way it makes a claim for the *absolute truth* of these highly selective religious discourses. In her outstanding account of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism *Your Fatwa Is Not Welcome Here* (2011), Karima Bennoune argues for the importance of the category of 'religious fundamentalism' precisely because of its capacity to describe a series of related developments 'across religious boundaries to contemporary movements within all the world's great religious traditions – not just Islam, but also Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism'. In similar terms to Bhatt, she characterises fundamentalist doctrine as operating by relentlessly denying 'the possibility of interpretation and reinterpretation even while its adherents engage in both' (2011:14-15).

In spite of the way fundamentalist movements claim to be recovering timeless sacred truths, both their ideology and methods are not atavistic, as demonstrated by the way religious dogma is promoted alongside an enthusiastic adoption of modern technologies in industry, communication or destructive weaponry. In 1989 Khurshid Ahmed of the Jammat-i-Islaami urged the 18th Islamic Foreign Minister's conference in Riyadh to 'project the true image of Islam through the latest technology available' (Bhatt, 1997:117). Shamsher Singh, one of the organisers of the 2016 Sikh protest in Leamington talks of a generation seeking a 'deeper spiritual essence of Sikhism', which one might think that to be concerned with a backward looking or other worldly mysticism. But as Sukhwant Dhaliwal has noted, the basis of the protest involved the group filming their actions and then sharing these on social media, using this material 'to publicly shame families already pushing against deeply conservative proscriptions. The film footage shows protestors referring to interfaith marriage…as 'messed up', stating that 'Leamington is finished when we've got elders saying it's alright to marry white people, black people'. (Dhaliwal, 2016). This again illustrates the way fundamentalists seek to rewrite the diverse and contested nature of particular religious traditions and practice, presenting their 'single version of collective identity as the only true, authentic and valid one, [using this] to impose their power and authority over 'their' constituency' (Imam, Morgan & Yuval-Davis, 2004: x).

In her discussion of Sikh fundamentalism Dhaliwal refers to the many lectures of Jagraj Singh on YouTube, where he asserts that 'relationships or dating are not part of Sikhi, marriage is part of Sikhi' (Dhaliwal, 2016); relationships outside marriage are thus presented as acts of uncontrolled lust, as opposed to 'authentic' marriages between two Sikhs. These sorts of arguments point to a central and defining feature of religious fundamentalism; the attempt to control women's bodies and sexuality within a patriarchal family order. Marieme Helie-Lucas argues that while there are:

many forms and varieties of fundamentalism...one key element of their politics is the control of women. This is true of all religious fundamentalisms: we can see it with the Christian Right in the US promoting their views of 'morality' by assassinating medical personnel who perform abortions; it is true of Muslim Fundamentalists promoting gender apartheid in Iran, Sudan, Algeria, and Afghanistan; it is true of the Hindu BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and RSS promoting sati (Lucas 2015).

Patricia Madigan in her study of Fundamentalism within Islam and Catholicism argues that while 'many studies of 'fundamentalism' have rightly diagnosed it as a reactive movement against the forces of modernity, few have recognised its essentially patriarchal character' (2011:2). Madigan argues for an understanding of the 'intrinsically patriarchal character of fundamentalism' in which 'by selectively retrieving doctrines, beliefs and practices' from the past seeks 'to shape a religious identity that will then become the basis of a recreated 'neo-patriarchal' social and political order' (2011:21). Both the quotes from Jerry Falwell and Sayid Qutb at the beginning of this section demonstrate the way it is the sexualised female body that acts as the central signifier of the morally debased and corrupt nature of modernity, and hence a central feature of religious fundamentalism lies in the assertion of control over women's sexual and reproductive potential: 'Woman, as an embodiment of sexuality, is to be owned and jealously controlled' (Madigan, 2011:52). Alongside this fundamentalist movements assert rigid boundaries between male and female behaviour in all areas through control of women's dress and public behaviour while promoting amongst men a culture of 'exaggerated masculinism, manifested by rituals of male bonding and by highlighting marks of male gender' (Madigan, 2011:52). It follows from this that fundamentalist movements are universally homophobic and hostile to LGBT sexuality and movements, as this is seen to transgress the rigid gender distinctions they obsessively police as part of their belief in a religiously

sanctified neo-patriarchalism. Examples of this abound but one of recent note was Jerusalem's Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar who described LGBT people as an 'abomination cult', claiming that the Torah obligates them to be 'put to death' (Jerusalem online 17/11/16).

We have already noted the distinction that must be made between religious fundamentalism and traditional forms of conservative religious piety. While traditional conservative religious values remain problematic from a gender perspective, they have been also protective of certain traditional spaces for women as well as being capable of reform and change. The kidnapping of children by JAS/Boko Haram described at the start of this piece is justified 'in the name of Islam'; however the religious sanctification of kidnap, murder, rape and parricide was never proclaimed within traditional religious conservatism.   The Iranian Koranic scholar and writer Navid Kermani has described the Saudi sponsorship of the puritanical ideology of Wahhabism that is behind so much contemporary Islamist politics as a travesty of the 'multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural Orient':

> Sponsored with billions from the oil industry [this is] a school of thought that has been promoted for decades in mosques, in books and on television that declares all people from all other religions heretics, and reviles, terrorises, disparages and insults them…That such a religious fascism even became conceivable, that IS finds so many fighters and even more sympathisers… - that is not the beginning, but rather the end point of a long decline…of religious thought (2015:80-81)

Wahhabism is just one instance of the ways fundamentalist movements assert their power though disciplining, repudiating and expelling those more tolerant, pluralist and hybrid elements within their own religious tradition, thereby seeking to 'purify' it. It is for this reason that religious fundamentalists are often engaged in destroying traditional forms of religious practice and culture. In Mali, a country with syncretic religious and musical traditions developed over centuries, it is now the case that, since a

fundamentalist takeover, many of its most popular musicians are unable to perform in public. Eyadou Ag Leche of the group *Tinariwen* has described a situation where, since the Islamists took power in the north of their country, 'young people have been stopped from listening to music and families have had their televisions smashed for watching music shows, but that music was still being played underground' (Guardian, 15/1/2013). The introduction of blasphemy laws has been another way religious fundamentalists have influenced state policy as a means of projecting their own sectarian view of religion and persecuting religious minorities that have lived alongside religious majorities for centuries. The Asia Bibi case in Pakistan in 2009 is an example of this, where blasphemy laws were used to arrest and put on trial a young Christian farm worker following a village argument in which she was alleged to have made comments criticising the prophet Mohammed. While the evidence presented against her in the legal case was extremely weak, fundamentalist mobilisations around her trial created an atmosphere in which public officials dared not to throw the case out, and in 2010 a Pakistani court sentenced her to death. Two government ministers who took a stance against the absence of a fair trial and the injustice of the sentence - the Governor of Punjab Salmaan Taseer and Minority Affairs minister Shahbaz Bhatti – were subsequently assassinated by fundamentalists. Asia Bibi herself has remained in prison for the last 6 years as the case continues to be heard (Guardian 11/10/2016).

Fundamentalist violence against other religions other versions of the same religion are another part of the way fundamentalists seek to 'purify' religion, in the process destroying syncretic religious traditions that have developed over centuries by imposing fundamentalist versions of religion that are often entirely foreign. Marieme Helie-Lucas has noted this in relation to the so-called Islamic practice of Female Genital Mutilation. This was 'historically limited to the sphere of influence of Ancient Egypt', but was exported by fundamentalists to Sri Lanka, to Tunisia, where it was 'previously unheard of' and thence into 'the Muslim enclave of Sanzak in Serbia' (Helie-Lucas, 2015).

Fundamentalism is thus a modern political movement that develops out of religion, using it to gain or consolidate power, but which also represents a breach from many historic and mainstream forms of religion. It is found in all major religions throughout the world, sometimes holding state power, sometimes in opposition to it — and sometimes working within the confines of a secular state to control minority communities. Fundamentalism is not the same as religious observance, which must be seen a matter of individual choice, and it is crucial to understand the way fundamentalists gain power by attacking those universalist and pluralist conceptions of faith which also exist in all major religions. As we have

argued, control of women's minds and bodies is at the heart of the fundamentalist agenda and this is done through presenting them as upholders of the supposedly unchanging morals and traditions of the whole community. Women who refuse this role may risk being demonised, outcast from their community, subjected to physical violence or even killed. This paradigm also promotes authoritarian belief centring on rigidly defined gender roles where extreme rewards and punishments are meted out; rapture or houris in Paradise for the faithful or hellfire for transgressors and dissidents. These notions are not regarded as metaphors but as literal descriptions of the world, predictions of soon-to-happen events. But the faithful are enjoined to create an earthly utopia as well. In this sense we need to understand the rise of fundamentalist movements in the context of the collapse of secular utopias, particularly communism and the progressive nationalist movements that arose in the era of decolonisation.

Why Fundamentalism Now?

'We are that generation that has plucked the fruits of Reason's pretensions to sovereignty…Reason idolises man; forgetfulness of God is the root of all social evil'

Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger (in Ruthven, 1994)

In a recent discussion of the changing relationship between religion and politics the writer and academic Gilbert Achcar noted that as a young man growing up in Beirut in the 1960s he was 'fully convinced that the progress of science and education would wipe out religion in the twenty first century'. Reflecting back on this from the present he describes as 'a sign of ideological regression of historic proportions', the fact that one of the freedoms 'most wanting and most threatened in the major parts of the world today is the actually the freedom *not* to worship any deity'. (2013:10-11). Indeed Achcar's youthfully optimistic belief about the decline of religion was not unusual, but was widespread across the political spectrum - including amongst religious groupings themselves, many of which

reflected throughout the twentieth century on the nature of their contemporary role in the face of the onward march of reason and scientific rationality. In 1917 the classical sociologist Max Weber developed the term 'disenchantment' to describe the way modern industrialism, the logical methods of science and the depersonalised relationships fuelled by growing bureaucratisation of society had permanently destroyed the basis of a sense of the 'sacred' which had once permeated everyday life (Weber, 2005). However it is important to note that rather than celebrating this as a triumph of rational modernity, Weber noted that the very success of science in demonstrating that 'one can, in principle, master all things by calculation' (2005:322) created a concurrent yearning for meaning and purpose beyond rationality. Is it the case then, as we now see the resurgence of fundamentalist movements, that we are seeing a kind of 'disenchantment in reverse'? This is a key question that we need to address if we are to understand the rise of fundamentalism at this particular moment in history. Gilles Kepel in his book on the re-emergence of religious fundamentalism argued that within the thinking of many leading religious thinkers, that around the mid-1970s:

> . . . a new religious approach took shape, aimed no longer at adapting to secular values but by recovering a sacred foundation for the organization of society, by changing society if necessary. Expressed in a multitude of ways, this approach advocated moving on from a modern-ism that had failed, attributing its setbacks and dead ends to separation from God. The theme was no longer *aggorniomento* [accommodation] but a second evangelization of Europe; the aim was no longer to modernize Islam but to 'Islamize modernity'. (Kepel, 2004: 2)

Kepel argued that a key feature of these arguments was the sense of 'crisis' in society characterised as a consequence of the godless nature of modernity. The Catholic archbishop of Paris Jean-Marie Lustiger captures this in the quote above, expressing the view that the major cause of the

social ills and moral degradation of society is the setting free of reason from faith. However for religious fundamentalist the solution to this is not a return to pre-modernity and in this sense they are not interested so much in 're-enchanting' the world; they are rather 'anti-modernist forms of modernity' (Singh & Cowden, 2011) that have an affinity with white supremacist forms of fascism and extreme forms of ethnic nationalism. While they often emerge in relation to specific and localised grievances, their ascendancy needs to be understood against the backdrop of two much wider historical processes. The first of these is the power vacuum created through the decline and collapse of secular visions of a better world, be those socialist, communist or nationalist. Secondly they represent a response and reaction to one of the most significant changes within capitalist modernity itself which is caused by the incorporation of women into the global labour market.

Fundamentalism and the 'end of history'

When it came to religion, the revolutions in Russia and China in the early and mid twentieth century were based on a conception of communism which, following Marx's work, saw itself as essentially an extension and development of the ideas of the Enlightenment. In 1905 Lenin, while insisting on the right to religious belief as a private affair, equally wrote of the need to 'translate and widely disseminate the literature of the eighteenth-century French Enlighteners and atheists', arguing that communists must always 'preach the scientific world-outlook' (1981:10-11). Mao Zedong was more hostile still to religion, seeing this as a central plank of the oppressive social order in China. Mao wrote of the four authorities of 'political, family, religious and masculine' power which acted as 'the embodiment of the whole feudal-patriarchal ideology and system, and are the four thick ropes binding the Chinese people, particularly the peasants.' (Selected Works, 1927). This approach was reflected not just in the development of powerful mass based Communist Parties, but also the ideas of Nasserism in Turkey, and the Ba'th and Arab socialism in the Middle East.

Sami Zubaida has argued that in this period that 'religion played, for the most part, a subordinate role in the definition of identities and conflicts, though it may have been a more potent factor at a popular level' (2015). It is also important to note that while the leaders of these movements were politically secular in their approach, neither did they oppose religious identities as such. As Partha Chatterjee has noted, many of nationalist movements sought to harness or control religion, presenting it as a kind of cultural essence of 'the people' and in this way allowing it to act as both an alternative to, but also mimicry of, a western model of nationalism (Chatterjee, 1993).

It is also important to note that while the nationalist and anticolonial movements in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia which emerged in the middle decades of the twentieth century were not necessarily or exclusively anti-religious, it is crucial to note that these anti-colonial struggles were conceived by their participants as emancipatory struggles. This is significant when it comes to understanding women's demands both within and in the aftermath of anti-colonial struggles. Indian women fought against the Raj but also fought local government and state elections throughout the 1920s-30s, and with the achievement of independence there was universal suffrage for the first time. The key focus of women's political organisation at this time concerned the reform of personal laws; that is laws governing issues of marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, rights of widows and guardianship. While many important reforms were won through this activism, the implementation of these legal changes was constructed on a communal basis, hence the Hindu Code Bills passed in the 1950s meant that the Hindu majority were reformed, while for other religious groups this same process did not take place. This had the effect of reinforcing religious differences in a key area of law affecting women and as secular definitions of citizenship have weakened, this has been a key terrain in which fundamentalist groups have been able to argue for the reinforcement of the legal basis of religious distinctions.

Sami Zubaida has argued that with 'the collapse of Nasirism after the 1967 war with Israel and the evolution of the Ba'th in power into family dynasties in Iraq and Syria, as well as the weakening of the left, opened the field to ethnic and religious politics in the region. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 gave a powerful impetus to this sacralisation of politics' (2015). The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which had given significant economic support to a range of secular regimes in different parts of the world, was hugely significant in this process. Francis Fukayama proclaimed the 'end of history' as a wave of profoundly destabilizing economic globalization, neo-liberal economic policies and Structural Adjustment Programmes promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Bank swept the developing world (Westra, 2009). The combination of the collapse of communism and the destructive impact of globalisation was significant in developing world not just because of the collapse of a secular ideal, but also because for developing countries it massively reduced the capacity of national governments to manoeuvre between the two superpowers. It was this as much as anything that made it so much easier for the WTO, IMF and World Bank to gain so much control in this area.

Fundamentalists have been able to position themselves as the beneficiaries of the anger, disillusionment and 'anomie' caused by this, and part of the traction fundamentalism gained as a popular movement lies in the way it represents a protest against both 'Western ideas', which includes the imposition of neo-liberalism. Gilbert Achcar has argued that neo-liberal deregulation has brought about 'anomisation' in the developing world; an overwhelming level of change which has caused a 'retrenchment to basic identity markers' (Achcar, 2009) and fundamentalist movements have again positioned themselves to benefit from this. Madigan has made a similar point when she notes that in a world of constant change, fundamentalist religion satisfies a desire 'for moral certitude and belonging' (2011:42). It was in this way that political ideology has come to be re-shaped around

antagonistic cultural and civilizational perspectives – the 'atheist West' against the 'true faith' in Islamist and Hindutva forms of fundamentalism. This same process was mirrored within the West itself, exemplified by the huge influence of Samuel Huntingdon's writings on 'The Clash of Civilisations' (1992). This sense that conflict was now about culture and 'values' was only reinforced following 9/11, the disastrous war of aggression against Iraq by US and UK and the subsequent 'war on terror'.

As the politics of the Left were substantially weakened by neoliberal globalisation in the 1990s and the neo-conservative 'Project for A New American Century' was busily shaping George Bush's foreign policy, western academia fell into the fervent embrace of postmodernist and postcolonial repudiations of the Enlightenment. As a body of work Postcolonialism was inspired by Edward Said's hugely influential 'Orientalism', in which the knowledges by which the 'West' understood the 'Orient' were conceptualised as 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (1990:3). In place of Mao's attack on the feudal-capitalist-patriarchal-religious social order, post-colonial theory railed against its 'four thick ropes' of the modernist-rational-individual-secularist order and the resulting silencing of the subaltern subject. Secularism and universalism and other forms of 'western imposed' politics were denounced in seminar rooms across the Western academy [2]. One of the most influential critics of Enlightenment reason was Michel Foucault, and despite his huge popularity and influence, the problems with where this took him politically was demonstrated in a series of trips he undertook to Iran on the verge of the Khomeini's Islamic revolution in 1979. Writing in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in 1978 Foucault waxed eloquent about the 'political spirituality' of 'the movement that aims to give a permanent role in political life to the traditional structures of Islamic society' (Foucault, 1978). One can only say that it was fortunate for him that he visited prior to rather than after Khomeini's murderous institutionalisation of those 'traditional structures'. But rather than an isolated piece of poor judgement, this incident was

entirely of a piece with the way postmodernism and postcolonialism opened the gates to a wave of academic work by academics based in the West in which essentialised 'other-identity' claims were revered [3].

Saba Mahmood's 2004 book *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* on the Islamist women's movements in Egypt was emblematic of this shift. Mahmood began the book describing her journey from a feminist politics of the 'secular-left' to her 'realisation' that as 'the language of Islam has come to apprehend the aspirations of so many people around the Muslim world… [We] can no longer arrogantly assume that secular forms of life…necessarily exhaust ways of living meaningfully and richly in this world' (2004: xi). Judith Butler and Foucault offered her the theoretical materials for an argument in which Islamist women's movements were uncritically idealised. Mahmood wrote of the way in which the 'rationalist, self-authorising, transcendental subject presupposed by Enlightenment thought in general' (2004:13) had prevented her from realising that the women who joined Islamist movements were not acting out of a spirit of 'deplorable passivity and docility' but were rather exercising 'a form of agency', and that it would be wrong to 'treat as natural and inimitable only those desires that ensure the emergence of feminist politics' (2004:15). Indeed there was no doubt that these were women were exercising political agency, but to what end? What is entirely absent throughout this book was any discussion of the nature of the Islamist political agenda and the impact of these 'forms of agency' had in the wider polity. What were the values which informed this agency and what practices within the politics of gender resulted from that? Our objection is not to religious forms of agency as such, but surely the key question concerns the kind of political project being promoted here. Indeed as other commentators less entranced with Islamic feminism have noted, these political movements developed in close parallel with the highly patriarchal Islamist groupings run by men who had brought Wahhabi fundamentalism

to Egypt from the Gulf states where they had been working (Madigan, 2011:45).

Mahmood's book additionally fails to even consider the impact of the 'politics of piety' on secular feminism in Egypt. Writing of parallel developments within Pakistani feminism Afiya Sherbano Zia noted the way Islamic feminists there gained credibility by claiming to be 'reinterpreting religious texts in a modern, indigenous, culturally relevant way rather than an 'imposed' western feminist discourse (2009:38). However the result of this was that:

> …by accommodating the faith-based approach that attempted to look for 'moderate' alternatives within Islam and insisting on situating the debate on the women's question within Islamic tradition and history, such reclamation projects squeezed out and delegitimised the secular feminist approach to redefine women's rights outside the religious framework' (2009:35)

Islamic feminist discourse based its credibility on the claim that is was 'empowering' women within religious institutions. While they may well have achieved this objective, the result was a form of politics which rejected any 'political confrontation with men, money, mullahs or the military state' (2009:44). The terrain on which central questions of women's rights and equality were being fought had effectively been theocratized with secular voices effectively de-legitimised. The romance of western based academics like Saba Mahmood with 'Islamic tradition' thus played a vital role in the eclipse of secular feminism, further entrenching fundamentalist religious identity and discourse, and failing to grasp what Bhatt has described as:

. . . the concealment of political interests, groups and parties through discourses of authenticity, discrimination and victimhood which normalise what are otherwise quite mendacious political ambitions. (2006: 102)

The Family, Fundamentalism and the global labour market

Fundamentalism promises to restore the family, to put the nation on course that aligns it with a divine purpose, and to establish a social order in which life can be lived morally, meaningfully and in accord with divine will.

Helen Hardacre (in Madigan, 2011:39)

Evangelical Demonstration in Columbia, 2016.
Source: http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-37560320

When discussing the emergence of religious fundamentalism above we noted an obsessive focus on questions of 'honour' and 'personal morality' with regard to women, demonstrating the way women's deportment, dress and behaviour had become in effect a communal symbol which needed to be rigidly policed. In this section we want to consider why this terrain of establishing of moral order around 'the family' is so important to fundamentalist movements. This discussion builds on the points we have already made about the significance of neoliberal economics in destroying forms of life which existed in a state of relative stability for generations through the imposition of new capitalist social relations. In research looking at the impact of this for women in developing countries undertaken by the International Labour Organisation, Sher Verick has noted that this kind of economic development:

…has involved two related transitions: the movement of workers from agriculture to manufacturing (and more recently services) and the migration of people from rural to urban areas. These transitions were associated with rising levels of education, declining fertility rates, and shifts in other socio-economic drivers of labour force participation, with specific implications for the role of women, especially in the labour market. Female labour supply is, therefore, both a driver and an outcome of development (Verick, 2014).

As neoliberal globalisation has massively expanded the amount of workers involved in production for the global market, proletarianisation of traditional peasantries has taken place on a huge scale across the developing world. As Verick notes, this is accompanied by increasing involvement of women in wage labour outside the home. While this pattern varies hugely across different regions, we want to argue that these general trends are crucial for understanding the terrain on which fundamentalist movements are operating, the emotional resonance their arguments have, as well as their pre-occupation with circumscribing women's emergent personal freedoms. The movement from the country to the city described in the report above one is of profound and hugely destabilising social change. While large numbers of women previously undertook wage labour within the home, as they are drawn into the global labour market in urban settings the forms of power exercised in traditional rural patriarchal family structures are changed. Social constraints weaken in the new setting, and this enables women to work outside the home and thereby gain access to wages and higher levels of personal finances. As both women and men leave the home to work for wages, the nature of the difference between male and female roles is diminished and opportunities for women to gain greater autonomy emerge. While men in the family may desire their female partners to work in order to increase family income and opportunities for their children, they also lose the traditional forms of power they previously possessed through that process.[4] Fundamentalists interpolate these

experiences of change and loss through their call for a return to a divinely sanctioned moral order in which men have power and authority in the home. Helen Hardacre has characterised the fundamentalist focus on gender with the family at the centre is the basis of the fundamentalist programme of 'radical patriarchalism' (in Madigan, 48-49), but it is crucial to understand the way this operates not just ideologically, but through real relations at the level of class and gender. While the fundamentalist appeal to men is obvious here, it is important to understand, particularly apropos Saba Mahmood's work, the way this also appeals to women. Hardacre notes that the loss of kinship networks is a key part of huge experiences of change experienced, and the loss for women can be greater for women than men. She notes that women are 'powerfully attracted by fundamentalist interpersonal networks that invoke the language of kinship and in which religion itself is portrayed as 'a family'' (in Madigan, 2011:41). While this understanding is valuable, it is important not to invoke the power of fundamentalist religion as inevitable here, as there different responses which are possible faced with these difficulties. Fundamentalism, unlike trade unionism, socialism or communism, is not concerned with improving working conditions, job security or indeed challenging class relations at any level for these new members of the global dispossessed. Its appeal resides within the poverty of existing structures, where what is required is a 'sacredly ordained' order where men enforce women's subjugation. Daniel Bensaid has been one of few Marxists to grasp that it was the Left's failure to thoroughly understand the changing nature of class relations that gave fundamentalists the opportunity to occupy territory which had once belonged to the Left. As he noted 'the hasty 'farewells to the proletariat' are not just the expression of a risky sociological analysis. They also contribute to a political and moral debacle. On the ruins of class solidarity what flourish are identitarian panics, the herd instinct, myths of origins, sects and tribes' (2015:207). Fundamentalist neo-patriarchy in this sense is the price paid for the absence of a politics of class solidarity.

Conclusion: Reclaiming Secular Space

'My dream is to be able to live in a country where I can say everything in public without people trying to kill me'

Atheist Blogger – Bangladesh ('Islam's Non-Believers' 2016)

What we have sought to delineate in this discussion is the crucial importance of the term 'religious fundamentalism' as an analytical category which allows us to link together a series of related developments taking place across and within major world religions. Women in particular are in the firing line when it comes the introduction of these measures as control of women's minds and bodies are central to the neo-patriarchal order that fundamentalists group seek to construct. We have sought to outline the way fundamentalist movements are entirely a product of modernity and that their appeal is not simply to people's ignorance or backwardness but rather operates on a concrete material level. This concerns a range of related factors; the destabilising impact of neoliberal globalisation and the destruction of social bonds which results from that, the retrenchment of state based social provision, and the decline of socialist, social democratic and communist political parties who had historically fought for the interests and rights of the working class and poor. Now occupying a significant degree of this terrain, fundamentalists groups and parties have demonstrated their capacity to operate both within the state, as an adjunct to the state, but also in opposition to the state, whether in the form of institutionalised opposition parties and movements, as well as in paramilitary organisations.

In seeking to understand and characterise the conquest of secular space by religious fundamentalism, our intention is not to imply that this is unable to be resisted. Indeed the work of writers like Karima Bennoune (2013) demonstrates the global nature of resistance which is taking place to religious fundamentalism.   Despite the enormous growth of the various forms of fundamentalism since the 1980s in particular, it is essential to

envisage and articulate a different life from the non-future offered by neoliberal capitalism on one hand and fundamentalism on the other. The basely punitive nature of fundamentalism puritanism and the hateful violence of its authoritarianism mean that these movements inherently generate resistance. But this is a resistance that has to be built in different ways. At the level of ideas we have argued it is absolutely essential that people pull themselves out of the quagmire of postmodernist cultural relativism that has been so helpful in legitimising fundamentalism and preventing the articulation of that alternative future. But first and foremost this alternative will be built at the directly practical and organisational level, as part of anti-fundamentalist initiatives in support of women's rights, the rights of religious and sexual minorities, as well as the right of people to exit religion altogether.

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Notes

[1] We want to distinguish here between religious institutions offering support to poor communities as an aspect of charitable work and this same process as part of a concerted strategy used by fundamentalists. Whilst in some cases these activities can be clearly distinguished, in others this can be a difficult line to draw, such as where religious charitable involvement requires adherence to regressive mores which can slide over into fundamentalism. At the same time it is crucial to acknowledge that in many crisis zones in the world, religious institutions do provide goods and services that are much needed, and in the absence of functioning state support, this can be the only thing on offer.

[2] It is important to note views on the Left at this time were not uncritically supportive of the Enlightenment. Indeed one of the most important works which sought to address these came from the Frankfurt School marxists Adorno and Horkheimer. Their work 'Dialectic of Enlightenment', originally published in 1944, argues that while 'social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought' (1997:xiii) equally it is wrong to assume that Enlightenment reason would unequivocally and inevtiably usher in social progress and emancipation. The rise of Nazi antisemitism is central to their analysis and showed that virulent forms of hatred of 'the other' could co-exist with versions of Reason. They particularly saw the dangers of an omnipotent view of 'science' whose truth ame to be seen as entirely disconnected from society. Unfortunately these powerfully insightful understandings of the Enlightenment from the within the Left have been almost entirely passed over within postmodern and postcolonial writings, which have rejected the Enlightenment *tout court.*

[3] Indeed as the work of Afary and Anderson has demonstrated, Foucault himself was challenged on exactly this issue by 'Atoussa H, an Iranian feminist living in France. In a letter published in *Le Novel Observateur* on 6/11/78 she wrote 'I am profoundly upset by the untroubled attitude of French leftists toward the possibility of an 'Islamic government' that might replace the bloody tyranny of the Shah…After twenty five years of silence and oppression, do the Iranian people have no other choice between Savak and religious fanaticism?...Today, unveiled women are often insulted and young men do not hide the fact that, in the regime they wish for, women should behave or else be punished' (in Afary and Anderson, 2010:209). Foucault responded suggesting that Atoussia H's approach was 'intolerable', attacking her for 'merging together all the respects, all the forms, and all the potentialities of Islam within a single expression of contempt, for the sake of rejecting them entirely under the thousand year old reproach of 'fanaticism'' (Afary & Anderson:210). One can only comment how prophetic this exchange was, both in terms of the arrogance of Foucault's refusal to listen to the concerns raised by Atoussia H., which have been entirely vindicated, but also what has happened subsequently in terms of way women criticising Islamic fundamentalism are so frequently dismissed as 'Islamaphobic' (see Bennoune 2013)

[4] The research of Ekeoba et al (2016) offers evidence in the Nigerian context men of men being generally positive about their wives and female partners working outside the home, but only as long as this does not alter power relations in the home.

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