

Fundamentalism as a modern Jacobin anti-modern utopia and heterodoxy – the totalistic reconstruction of tradition

Introduction: the historical settings

I

Modern fundamentalist movements constitute one of the major social movements which developed in the framework of modern civilization and of modernity. The ideologies promulgated by the fundamentalist movements constitute a part of the continually changing discourse of modernity, especially as it developed from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. These movements continually interacted with other such movements often constituting mutual reference points to one another. These fundamentalist movements developed in a specific historic context (as did other social movements), one characterized by both a new historical phase which crystallized in the second half of the twentieth century in the confrontations between the Western European and Non-Western civilizations, and by the intensification within the Western countries of discourse concerning the internal antinomies of the cultural program of modernity – particularly those regarding the different conceptions of reason and rationality (as we shall see in greater detail in chapter 4).

Within the broad panorama of the multiple modern movements and discourses of modernity, the fundamentalist movements developed some particular characteristics that rendered them potentially one of the most extreme, yet distinctively Jacobin forms of social movements. These characteristics, which distinguish these movements from the proto-fundamentalist ones, existed in embryonic form in most of them and came to full fruition under specific historical conditions in the more “visible” and active movements.

II

The first modern movements which were called fundamentalist developed as we have seen in the United States during the last decades of the nine-

teenth, and in the beginning of the twentieth centuries, but their seeds went back to earlier periods – to the Protestant settlement in the colonies.

Appearing first in Europe, Protestantism itself and sectarian Protestantism in particular exhibited a potent mixture of strong proto-fundamentalism and fundamentalist tendencies which were manifest in many groups of the radical Reformation such as the Münster Anabaptists, and to some extent in Calvin's Geneva and among some Dutch Calvinist communities. Similar, even stronger tendencies were also manifest in some of the early colonies in the United States. These totalistic Jacobin fundamentalist orientations were transformed, and hemmed in, through their institutionalization in more pluralistic settings of which the United States provides the best example. But fundamentalist tendencies continued to be very strong in the United States, and the American Protestant fundamentalist movements constitute a continual component on the American political scene up to this very period. They crystallized against the background of a long history of evangelistic Protestant movements which developed in the colonies and have been present in the USA from its very inception.

The term "fundamentalism" came into common usage in the second decade of this century, with the publication of a series of pamphlets called *The Fundamentals*, which appeared between 1910 and 1915, and through a set of conferences of the World's Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919. Historians of American religion agree that fundamentalism's classic period followed in the 1920s.

The most helpful point of general departure is provided by George Marsden who both demonstrates that the fundamentalist movement of the 1920s went considerably beyond millenarian circles, and goes on to define "fundamentalism" in its heyday as "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism." "Militant opposition to modernism," he says, "was what most clearly set off fundamentalism from a number of closely related traditions, such as evangelicalism, revivalism, pietism, the holiness movements, millenarianism, Reformed confessionalism, Baptist traditionalism, and other denominational orthodoxies."¹

Revivalist evangelical and fundamentalist groups witnessed a revival in the middle of this century. Among the most important of such groups were the Christian Coalition, led by Ralph Reed; its predecessor, the Moral Majority, led by Rev. Jerry Falwell; and to some extent, the PTL, led by Pat Robertson – all of which aimed to promote the Christian agenda of morality and became politically active.²

In Europe there developed, albeit to a much smaller extent, different modern sects with strong fundamentalist tendencies, especially in the Scandinavian countries, as well as in Germany whose sects were closely related to the pietist traditions that were very prominent in the Lutheran tradition.

In a similar manner, these fundamentalist tendencies developed among the various Protestant groups, especially the evangelistic and pentecostal ones, that started to “infiltrate” Latin America around the turn of the century and gathered momentum in the period after the Second World War.³

III

In Jewish communities, fundamentalist tendencies and groups started to develop from the mid-nineteenth century on; in Islamic countries especially in the twentieth century. In modern Jewish history, and in the more contemporary scene in Israel and the various Jewish communities in the Diaspora, several major fundamentalist trends developed. The first, strong fundamentalist or at least highly intensified proto-fundamentalist tendency has developed in some sectors of Neo-Orthodoxy in Central and Eastern Europe, under the impact of the Enlightenment, the struggle for Jewish emancipation, the development of modern Reform trends in Judaism, and in continual confrontation with the latter. This trend was best epitomized perhaps in Hungary, especially in the personality of the Hatam Sofer and in his famous saying: “The new is forbidden from the Torah . . .”⁴

Given the objective socio-political situation of the Jewish communities – their living in alien, often hostile, environments – such fundamentalist tendencies were mostly oriented toward the regulation of the internal religious and communal life of their communities, and of their ritual and symbolic relation with the outside world. The situation has changed in the State of Israel, and to some extent in the Jewish communities in contemporary liberal societies – especially, but not exclusively, in the United States.

In Israel, from about the seventies on there developed two major trends – with many divisions within them – that demonstrated very strong, even if varying fundamentalist tendencies. Both constituted responses to the disintegration of the initial cultural and institutional Zionist, especially labor, mold which was predominant in Israel till the mid or late seventies. However, they developed from different vantage points with respect to this mold. The first are the ultra-nationalist Zionist groups epitomized in Gush Emunim (Block of the Faithful) – who constituted the spearhead of the settlement in the West Bank and Gaza. The second group which developed strong fundamentalist overtones has been the anti- or non-Zionist ultra-orthodox, which started in this period to move out of their self-imposed relative segregation into more active political directions evincing many

fundamentalist tendencies.⁵ Common to both are challenges in the name of some pristine, potentially fundamentalist vision to the basic symbolic premises of the central premises and the institutions of the State of Israel. Further, each group only partially accepts (often for opposite reasons) the legitimacy of the Israeli State's premises and institutions. In both cases, these tendencies were closely related to their attempts at the reconstruction of relations between the primordial, historical and religious components of Jewish collective identity – with each acting in different directions. In the case of Gush Emunim such partial acceptance has been rooted in the full acceptance of the Zionist vision, through the imbuing of that vision with a full Messianic legitimacy. This partial acceptance was evident in the emphasis on the supremacy of the higher law, in this case a law which they proclaimed stressed the sanctity of Eretz Israel, as against the law of the land – that is, against any political compromise with respect to the West Bank, Judea and Samaria, which would deny the sanctity of the contemporary era. Second among them is an emphasis, though in many ways a weaker one, on the sanctity of the Halakhah.

The developments in the Gush Emunim took place within the basic Zionist symbolic framework or repertoire, even if they gave rise to far-reaching changes in the relative importance and concrete definitions of many of the components of this repertoire. The situation was different with respect to the various anti-Zionist, or at least non-Zionist, religious orientations, as articulated by Agudat Israel and other extreme Orthodox groups. In the case of the non-Zionist Orthodox groups – originally concentrated around the Agudat Israel Party in what was increasingly called the “Haredi” sector – there developed, not from the beginning of the state, but from the beginning of the Zionist movement, the non-acceptance of the legitimacy of the Zionist vision and later the state and its institutions, including that of the chief rabbinate. They often portrayed their existence in Eretz Israel as existence in the “spiritual Galuth, Exile.” Most of them have accepted the existence of the state at most in a *de facto* manner. Their attitude to the state has been purely instrumental, attempting to receive as many resources from state agencies as possible without granting them any basic legitimacy.

Although they shared with Gush Emunim an emphasis on the primacy of the Holy Law, of Halakhah, their vision of this supremacy differs greatly from that of the Gush. It is devoid, with the exception of some Hasidic groups, of any Messianic political orientations and activism. Originally, they were in some sense apolitical – i.e. they did not attempt to engage in political activity beyond either trying to demand resources from the state, or to further and support demands for religious legislation made by the

Religious Zionists. The fundamentalist components of their vision have been inwardly directed, manifest above all, as Haim Soloveitchik and S. Heilman have shown,⁶ in a growing ideologization and rigidification of tradition, of emphasis on more totalistic conceptions and regulations on their members, and on constructing very rigid boundaries which would distinguish them from other sectors of society.

Yet even here there simultaneously took place a very interesting transformation of the original negative attitude of the ultra-Orthodox groups to the Zionist movement. Truly enough, the basic negative attitude to the “revolutionary” dimensions of Zionist ideology – those dimensions focused on the reconstruction of Jewish tradition – continued, and some of the more extreme among the ultra-Orthodox groups became even more intensified in rather strong sectarian, potentially fundamentalist directions.

These fundamentalist potentialities became gradually, yet continually, reinforced and brought out into the open due to the growing *active* participation of the ultra-Orthodox groups in the political life in Israel. At the same time, more and more of the ultra-Orthodox not only accepted *de facto* the State of Israel but to some extent started to legitimize it in terms of settlement in Eretz Israel, thus treating it as a viable, existing Jewish community which has to be guarded and protected. They increasingly participated in political life, making more demands not only for financial allocations for their institutions, but also for imposing their own conceptions on public life in Israel. Many of them tended to become close to more “rightist” groups that held “hawkish” tendencies with respect to relations with the Palestinians – and while they did develop some incipient fundamentalist overtones, they lacked the strong political Messianic activism of the Gush Emunim.

These fundamentalist tendencies became strengthened and intensified after the 1996 elections when the various religious parties, most of whom increased their membership in the Knesset, became important partners in the new government coalition. As a consequence they became much more militant than before, and started a series of strong campaigns to impose religious ways on many public spheres in Israel.

Parallel intensive fundamentalist movements – very similar to the Haredi sectors in Israel, in fact very closely interwoven with them – developed in the Jewish communities in the USA and Europe, with their activities being often more oriented to the Israeli scene than to the countries in which they live.⁷

IV

In the Muslim world multiple and diverse fundamentalist movements developed from the late nineteenth century – gathering special momentum

in the latter part of the twentieth century. In the background of these movements was probably the prior pristine proto-fundamentalist renovative movements, the Wahabis, the founders of what was to become Saudi Arabia – and even further back to the Mahdi regime that crystallized in Sudan in the late nineteenth century. If the Wahabi movement can be seen as the last and most vivid case of “classical” Islamic, in our terms “proto-fundamentalist” movement, it is useful to consult Voll again (paraphrasing him a bit):

the case of Muhammad Ahmad, the Sudanese leader who proclaimed his mission as Mahdi and drove the Ottoman-Egyptian forces out of his country in the 1880s . . . is the most evocative model for today’s fundamentalist activities. His mission was to create a more purely Islamic society by eliminating the innovations introduced by outsiders, even though they called themselves Muslims. The Sudanese Mahdi rejected the corrupt practices of the Turko-Egyptian rulers and fought the British, but he did not reject modern military technology. Although he is frequently described as an opponent of foreign rule and an enemy of Western intrusions into the Islamic world, he also opposed certain local religious customs, engaged in *ijtihad*, and in other ways recalled the example of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Although he envisioned his mission in messianic terms, he stands well within the heritage of Sunni fundamentalism.

Although the Mahdi himself died in 1885, he created a state which lasted until British and Egyptian forces conquered the Sudan in 1898. The Mahdist movement remained an important force in Sudanese society throughout the twentieth century. In the 1940s, the Mahdist movement became the basis for one of the major Sudanese political parties, and a great grandson of the Mahdi, Sadiq al-Mahdi, served as prime minister of the independent Sudan in the 1960s and again in the 1980s. The political dynamism of the Mahdist movement, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has provided Muslim intellectuals throughout the Islamic world with an example of effective Islamic political activism.⁸

In the twentieth century there started to develop, against the background of the multiple reform movements, also strong fundamentalist movements in Sunni Islam.

All these movements constituted part of the continual confrontation between Islam and the West, and represented the multifaceted responses of various groups of Muslim intellectuals and leaders throughout the Muslim lands to the impact of the West.⁹

Among the most important of these movements were, to follow Mumtaz Ahmad’s list:

The Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab countries, Jamaat-i-Islami in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, Dar-ul-Islam in Indonesia, Islamic National Front in Sudan, Islamic Literary Society in Tunis, Parti Islam Se-Malaysia in Malaysia, and the Rafah party in Turkey.¹⁰

In the seventies such movements developed in Shi'i Islam especially in Iran, but also in Iraq. In this period it was above all Iran, Algeria, North Africa, and Sudan that became the center-stage of these movements – spreading in the eighties and nineties through the Muslim diasporas in Europe and beyond. One of the most important of such developments from about the late sixties on was in Turkey, the only (formerly?) Muslim country in which a militant secular regime crystallized.¹¹

One of the strongest of such movements developed in Afghanistan – there constituting a mixture of “classical” Islamic proto-fundamentalist movements based on tribes, with more modern organizational, but very limited mobilizational tendencies – the Taliban. Several such movements started to emerge after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, sometimes out of some of the more traditional ones in Central Asia – but there developed strong rifts between the leadership that had developed under the aegis of the former Soviet Union and that of the new leaders in the framework of the fundamentalist movements. As mentioned above, Muslim fundamentalist movements developed also in India and in Pakistan. In Pakistan, and to some extent Malaysia, these movements developed within the framework of an ideologically Islamic state – a state that, according to these movements, did not go far enough in imposing an Islamic vision and law.

In many African countries – in East and West Africa alike – radical Islamic movements with strong fundamentalist orientations continually developed within the broader framework of the expansion of Islam. They were in continual interaction – cooperative and contestational alike with the many other Muslim movements in these countries – gaining very high visibility in Kenya and Uganda in East Africa, in Guinea, Mali, Ivory Coast and Senegal in West Africa, and predominance in Sudan. All these movements were in one way or another much more closely interwoven than the Wahhabi – and even than the Mahdi one in Sudan – with anti-colonial struggles, with struggles against Western dominance in its various guises and hence also with national movements. Many of them also portrayed themselves as being such national movements.

Strong fundamentalist movements also developed in many parts of the Muslim diasporas – in Europe, especially in France, Germany and England, in the Caribbean, Canada and to some extent in the USA. Significantly enough it was within these groups that some of the most extreme conceptions of the Muslim ummah were promulgated.

At the same time, in the last three or four decades of the twentieth century, many communal-religious national movements developed or gathered strong momentum in many South and Southeast Asian countries after the first stages of decolonization and the establishment of independent states which

were initially presumably based on some modern secular premises. Among them were, in India, first the Area Samaj, later the contemporary BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and parallel movements in Sri Lanka which developed some seemingly fundamentalist-like, totalistic orientations and ideologies. These movements were often characterized, to follow Nikkie Keddie's nomenclature,¹² by strong religious–communal orientations. These communal-national movements share some very important characteristics with fundamentalist movements such as their attempt to construct a new religious communal identity, attempts to construct communal boundaries, their tendencies to ritualization of violence, and their promulgation of a strong anti-secular stance. As for the latter, these movements also denote a shift from the hegemony of some of the ideals or premises of the Enlightenment in the construction of modern nation states, their institutions, and in the collective consciousness or identity of modern societies. Yet, as we shall see in greater detail later, most of these movements differ in several very crucial ways from the “pristine” fundamentalist movements analyzed above.

Already the preceding illustrations indicate clearly, as has also been the case with proto-fundamentalist movements, that even within the same society and civilization, both in different periods of their histories and in the same period, there develop a great variety of and heterogeneity of fundamentalist movements. They also indicate that the “same” movements – as for instance some of the Haredim in Israel, or many Muslim groups in Central Asia or in Africa, may acquire at a certain period strong fundamentalist characteristics which they did not have before – and may perhaps shed them in other periods.¹³ Thus all these movements are in continual flux and in close continual interaction with many other religious, ethnic, and national movements that burgeoned in all these societies. Indeed, to reiterate, these movements cannot be understood except as part of the general, multifaceted dynamics of these societies, as interacting with the development and unfolding of multiple social and political movements, and not as isolated, self-enclosed entities.

All these facts notwithstanding, it is possible to point out some features which characterize – even if necessarily in an ideal-typical way – the fundamentalist movements or the fundamentalist tendencies in such movements.

The distinct sectarian utopian characteristics of modern fundamentalist movements

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The core characteristics of the modern fundamentalist movements constitute a radical transformation, in a distinct modern mode, of some of the

basic structural and ideological characteristics – especially the sectarian utopian – and orientations of the proto-fundamentalist movements that developed in the various Axial Civilizations which we have analyzed above. Similar to those of the proto-fundamentalist movements, the basic ontological conceptions promulgated by modern fundamentalist movements have been characterized by – to follow Emmanuel Sivan’s analysis¹⁴ – attempts at the appropriation and construction of space and time according to their respective utopian visions. These utopian visions have often been imbued with very strong eschatological components which place them at the end of history, with a message of messianic redemption often following an imminent catastrophe – an ontology which comes to full fruition in their specific “enclave” culture.

These movements also share with the proto-fundamentalist ones several of the basic characteristics of utopian sectarianism, namely the tendency to construct sharp boundaries between the “pure” inside and the “polluted” outside, as well as their self-perception as the “elect.” Concomitantly they continually promulgate images of an enemy or ontological enemy, one that is about to pollute them or against whom one should be on constant alert – as for instance the assimilationist Jews and the secular world for the Jewish, especially Haredi-fundamentalists; or the USA, Israel, and Zionism for the Muslim fundamentalists. Significantly enough, although in some cases it was particularistic groups such as the Jews or the USA that were/are designated as such enemies, it is usually their being the bearers of some bad, polluted, or satanic universalism that is singled out.¹⁵

Similar to many other sectarian-ideological movements as well as many authoritarian movements of both the left and the right, the fundamentalist movements also exhibit a very low threshold of tolerance for ambiguity on both personal and collective levels.

All of these characteristics, as well as their persistent emphasis on tradition – on what they proclaimed to be pristine traditions of their respective religions – and their basic sectarian utopian tendencies, make them seemingly very similar to proto-fundamentalist movements. And yet these characteristics which the fundamentalist movements share with the proto-fundamentalist ones have become radically transformed in the modern fundamentalist movements, making them a distinctly modern phenomenon. In some, even if in paradoxical ways, many of the fundamentalist groups can be seen (as we shall indicate later) as parallel to the most extreme “secular” Jacobin movements and regimes – namely the Communist ones.

Also, the composition of these movements (as we shall see in greater detail in chapter 4) greatly differs from that of the proto-fundamentalist

movements of earlier periods, and is very much in line with the composition of some of the more militant modern, especially Jacobin movements.

It is above all, however, with respect to some of their ideological features that the relations between fundamentalist movements and modernity are revealed and the modern characteristics of these movements become most conspicuous; ideological features such as both the mode of construction of their ideologies of traditions – which constitute the core of their ideologies – and these ideologies’ institutional implications. The most important of these features is the appropriation by these movements of some central aspects of the political program of modernity, particularly of various – especially Jacobin – participatory, totalistic, and egalitarian orientations (even if this egalitarian component is in most of these situations confined to men). This crucial feature stands side by side with the anti-Enlightenment aspect of their ideology, and with the denial of claims of the sovereignty and autonomy of reason and of the perfectibility of man.

It is this vision that generates within these movements not only a strong predisposition to the development of a totalistic world view and organization which is characteristic of many “traditional” sectarian movements, including the proto-fundamentalist ones, but also overarching totalitarian all-encompassing ideologies. These ideologies emphasize a total reconstruction, organized basically by political action, of the social order. Many of these movements also, at least potentially, espouse a strong very often missionary zeal. Thus, it is not just the various components of their ontology listed above but rather the bringing together of these components in a distinct sectarian-utopian Jacobin vision that constitutes the distinctive features of these movements. Concomitantly, in at least partial contrast to most pre-modern historical sects and proto-fundamentalist movements, the enclave culture they construct exists in constant tension with their more expansionist tendencies which are closely related to their distinct modern characteristics.

This tension is indeed rooted in some of the distinctly modern characteristics of these movements. The first of these is, as Raymond Grew has strongly emphasized (private communication), the very strong emphasis on choice, on the freedom – and necessity – to make a conscious moral choice in joining and adhering to these movements – thus at least implicitly emphasizing the autonomy of human will. This emphasis on moral choice is conceived in terms of the necessity to combat the evils of the modern Western world – evils rooted in the weakness of human nature but reinforced when given a free rein in modernity with its presumed assumption of the perfectibility of man.

This emphasis on moral choice, on confronting the evils of the modern world, can be also found among seemingly traditionalistic enclaves – like many of the Haredim – once they are drawn into confrontations with the secular world and its institutions. Closely related is the tendency among members of many of these movements to present the joining of such movements and participation in them as the act or process of conversion.¹⁶ Thus the conception of the autonomy of human will acquires in the fundamentalist movements some distinct modern features rooted in the combination of their specific Jacobin orientations and anti-Enlightenment doctrines.

Second, this tension between the mentality of the beleaguered enclave and strong expansionist tendencies is rooted in the necessity of most such movements to mobilize continually new membership and to face the tension between the upholding of a pristine vision and the more mundane interests and behavior of large parts of such membership. It is this tension that, as Raymond Grew and Peter van der Veer have shown,¹⁷ gives rise in these movements to strong tendencies to engage in ritual violence that continually reemphasizes the exclusiveness of the movements and the closure of their boundaries against the polluted world, against the enemy. These two tendencies – the emphasis on the necessity of moral choice in the battle against the evils of the modern world and continual mobilization of wider sectors – are not of course limited to the fundamentalist movements. They are indeed characteristics of many modern movements – including the various communal-religious ones. They become however most fully articulated in a distinct mobilizatory and Jacobin way in the fundamentalist movements which promulgate, in the name of a moral-religious vision, the construction of a new collective and individual identity, not only through religious, but also through political processes and action.

VI

The strong, potentially totalitarian, Jacobin components or tendencies which can be identified – even if to varying degrees per movement and per historical period – are manifest first in the attempts to reconstruct their respective societies; and second, in the almost total conflation of center and periphery, negating the existence of intermediary institutions and association, thus conflating what can sometimes be called civil society with the overall community. Third, such potential Jacobin orientations can be found in the strong tendency to the sanctification of the reconstruction of the center as a continuous liminal arena, with this sanctification often connected with ritual violence and terror.

As in the case of the Great Revolutions and “leftist” totalitarian move-

ments, the pure pristine fundamentalist movements tend also to minimize, in principle at least, the importance of primordial components of collective identity – or at least to make them secondary in relation to the universalistic religious ones – as for instance the Islamic against the Iranian ones, or as in Sudan, the Islamic against the local and African ones. The emphasis on primordial components in these movements becomes strong only in special cases, as in Judaism, in which the primordial orientations constitute a basic component of the universal religion. The picture among the communal-religious nationalist movements, which developed especially from the sixties on in India and in Buddhist countries in South and Southeast Asia, has been rather different, as we shall see in greater detail later.

The roots of these distinctive modern characteristics of the fundamentalist movements, of the combination of utopian sectarianism with strong Jacobin political tendencies, are to be found in the close relation of these movements to the cultural and political program of modernity and to modern political processes as they developed in the Great Revolutions, especially in the post-revolutionary regimes. Just as the Great Revolutions were closely related to, indeed rooted in, some of the heterodoxies of their respective Axial Civilizations, so within the fundamentalist movements, especially those which developed in the monotheistic civilizations, the heterodox tendencies of the proto-fundamentalist groups have been transformed into potentially fully-fledged modern political programs with potentially missionary visions. Above all, many of the fundamentalist movements share with the Great Revolutions the belief in the primacy of politics, albeit in their case, religious politics – or at least of organized action – guided by a totalistic religious vision to reconstruct society, or sectors thereof. It is indeed, as we have indicated above, the ideological and political heritage of the Revolutions that epitomized the victory of gnostic heterodox tendencies to bring the Kingdom of God to Earth, as an attempt to recognize that the world constitutes the crucial link between the cultural and political program of modernity and fundamental movements.

Truly enough, such a totalistic orientation did not necessarily always entail the development of an active political stance beyond the fundamentalist movements' own confines. Thus indeed many of these fundamentalist movements, as for instance the "original" Protestant ones that developed in the USA, often espoused visions of withdrawal from the world, of internal reconstruction of the self and of the community, as against becoming involved in the polluted political world, and strongly emphasized that it is mainly, perhaps only, through such internal purification that the pollution of the external world can be overcome. Similarly some of the grass-roots fundamentalist movements in Pakistan or Malaysia – and the different

evangelistic movements above all in societies like in Latin America in which the dominant religion is not that espoused by these movements – do not develop distinct political activities and often promulgate a principled withdrawal from politics, and they also often emphasize the importance of internal reconstruction. Indeed most of these movements have put very strong emphasis on the development of schools and various social services. It was by virtue of these activities that they were able to attract large sectors of the population – and it was through these organizations that they were able to promulgate and propagate their specific religious orientations.

Within these fundamentalist groups very strong Jacobin-like tendencies were oriented above all to the reconstruction of at least their internal life. But these tendencies could also harbor some seeds of potentially expansive political activity, of a strong tendency to engage in some type of political activity rooted in attempts to construct a new identity based on a religious moral vision oriented to the broader society. Thus for instance the ideology of jihad, promulgated openly by some of the Muslim fundamentalist movements, very often found a strong resonance among many of those which have developed in Muslim societies.

The surge and intensity of such political activity depends on the concrete historical and institutional settings of the various fundamentalist movements and may develop in a variety of ways – for instance, as designated by Almond, Sivan and Appleby,¹⁸ those of World Conqueror, World Creator, World Transformer, and the extreme antipolitical mode – that of World Renouncer. While this last mode has been relatively strong in many of the earlier modern movements and can, of course, also be found in the contemporary scene – in the latter more political and active orientations have become more predominant.

The Jacobin components and characteristics of the modern fundamentalist movements

VII

Many of the components of the fundamentalist movements, such as the utopian, eschatological orientations, the emphasis on a strict interpretation of a holy script, sectarian attitudes and the like, can be found in many of the other modern-oriented movements as well as in the popular cultures that developed in their respective societies – with which the fundamentalist movements interacted continually, often in confrontational ways. But it is above all in fundamentalist movements that these components come together so as to define the very nature of these movements. Needless to say,

even in these movements the relative importance of these components may vary greatly, and these components may become interwoven in different ways with other themes which themselves may become, under appropriate historical circumstances, either more prominent or more diluted.

Because of all these facts there has developed in the literature on fundamentalism a continual far-ranging controversy as to the legitimacy of calling all these movements fundamentalist. On the most general level it has been claimed that it is inappropriate to apply a term coined in a specific setting – that of American fundamentalism – to movements in other religions or civilizations.¹⁹ On more concrete levels, it has been pointed out that many of the supposedly central characteristics of fundamentalism – such as emphasis on the literal interpretation of, and adherence to, a holy script – are either not fully applicable to all of these movements or can be found also in other ones. It would be beyond the scope of this book to go into all the details of these controversies. Suffice it to point out that, while many of these criticisms of the use of the term fundamentalism are indeed well taken, they do not face up to what are indeed the core characteristics of these movements which distinguish them from other, relatively similar ones. The common core of these movements, as was the case with respect to the proto-fundamentalist movements, lies not in the various details – such as adherence to a literal reading of a holy text which may indeed greatly vary – but in their specific type of sectarian-utopian Jacobin tendencies. Such tendencies may indeed allow for a great variation in details, and needless to say their strength also varies between such different movements and between different periods in the history of each such movement. Indeed, there may also be great differences in the extent to which any movement develops at any given point in time all the ideal typical “fundamentalist” characteristics or, on the contrary, the extent to which these may become blurred. But all these caveats notwithstanding, it is these specific Jacobin tendencies or characteristics that constitute the most important common characteristics of these movements and which justify, in our mind, the use of the term fundamentalism for all of them. At the same time, just because of this common core which can be found in most of these movements it seems to us, as we shall see yet in greater detail later on, that the application of the term fundamentalism to the numerous national communal religious movements which have developed lately is not appropriate.

VIII

One of the most interesting and paradoxical manifestations of this combination of the modern Jacobin mobilizatory dimension of modern

fundamentalist movements and regimes with an “anti-modern,” or at least anti-liberal ideology, can be found in their attitude to women. On one hand, most of these movements, as Martin Riesebrodt has shown in his incisive analysis,²⁰ promulgate a strong patriarchal, anti-feminist attitude which tends to segregate women and to impose far-reaching restrictions on them – seemingly, but only seemingly, of a type which can be found in many of the Arab regimes like Saudi Arabia, the roots of which were traditional proto-fundamentalist ones. On the other hand, in stark contrast to such traditionalistic regimes, the modern fundamentalist ones mobilize women – even if in segregation from men – into the public sphere, be it in demonstrations, paramilitary organizations, or the like.

Indeed the reshaping of the social and cultural construction of women, and the construction of a new public identity rooted in the Islamist vision, constituted a very important component in the fundamentalist programs in Iran and Turkey, and were very often promulgated by educated and professional women who felt alienated in the preceding secular public space. In the 1996 elections in Iran, women not only voted and stood as candidates to the parliament, some were elected – one of them (Ms Rafsanjani, the daughter of the then President) claiming that there is nothing in Islamic law which forbids women to take public office. Significantly enough, one of the first acts of the new government installed by the Afghan group of the Taliban – which evinced more proto-fundamentalist than modern fundamentalist Jacobin tendencies – in early October, 1996 was to force women from the public sphere, out of schools, and even from work.²¹ Additionally, in June 1997, the Taliban rulers in Kabul ordered the Iranian Ambassador to leave the country accusing Iran of attempts to undermine Taliban rule.

The strong modern components of many of the fundamentalist movements can also be seen in some aspects of their institutionalization as regimes. When the Islamic revolution triumphed in Iran, it did not abolish most of the modern institutions – those without any roots in Islam – such as the parliament, the majlis, and both elections to it and even to the Presidency of the Republic. The importance of these elections was demonstrated in May 1997 when, against the (even if implicit) advice or recommendation of the clerical establishment, a more “open-minded” candidate, Muhammad Khatami, was elected – seemingly by the vote of women and younger people. It even promulgated a new constitution – something which some of the earlier traditionalists opposed vehemently. Both the majlis and the mode of election to it were reconstructed – with some very strong

Jacobin elements, clothed in an Islamic garb. Interestingly enough, one of these garbs – the institutionalization of a special Islam court or chamber to supervise “secular” legislation – was not so far removed from the special place of juridical institution which is characteristic of modern constitutional regimes, even from the principle of judicial revision.²² Moreover, the basic mode of legitimation of this regime as promulgated in the constitution contained some very important modern components. It declared two different sources of sovereignty – God and the people – without attempting to reconcile the two.²³

Significantly enough, among many of the apolitical evangelical, especially Pentecostal movements in Latin America, the construction of new modes of life according to their visions of the Gospel entailed the growing autonomous participation of women and the weakening of the prevalent “machoist” culture.²⁴

Indeed, in more general terms, as M. E. Yapp has succinctly put it: “(Islamic) fundamentalists want a strong state as a major investment in education and modernity but everything to be done according to the shara. Most fundamentalists are unconcerned by the contradiction evident in this combination.”²⁵

IX

It is the combination of these different components of fundamentalist visions with very strong Jacobin orientations that also explains the very paradoxical attitude of these movements to tradition and to modernity. While in many ways the fundamentalist movements are reactive (as many scholars have pointed out),²⁶ yet this general designation can also be applied to other, especially various modern-reformist, movements. Hence, this distinction does not delineate the specific characteristics of the fundamentalist movements; the distinct ways in which such fundamentalist movements and groups reconstruct tradition and select – and reconstruct – different themes from the cultural and political repertoire of tropes available to them. The anti-modern, or to be yet again more precise, anti-Enlightenment attitude and the specific way of promulgating tradition that develop within the fundamentalist visions are not just a reaction of traditional groups to the encroachment of new ways of life, but a militant ideology which is basically couched in highly modern idiom and is oriented to the mobilization of wide masses. They are, as Frank J. Lechner and Martin Riesebrodt among others have pointed out,²⁷ very strongly oriented against the social and institutional differentiation of modern societies, promulgating a highly de-differentiated, monolithic, vision of the world.

The paradoxical attitude of modern fundamentalist movements to tradition; essentialized tradition as modern totalistic ideologies

X

Thus, although seemingly traditional, these movements are in fact in some paradoxical ways anti-traditional. They are anti-traditional in that they negate the living traditions, with their complexity and heterogeneity, of their respective societies or religions and instead uphold a highly ideological and essentialistic conception of tradition as an overarching principle of cognitive and social organization.

This attitude to tradition is manifest in two very closely connected facts. First, the often conservative existing religious establishment of their respective societies constitutes one of the major foci of criticism of these movements – up to the point where these establishments are even seen as one of those establishments' major enemies. Second, and closely related, is the fact that the younger sectors, especially within the cities, be it in Turkey or in the Muslim diasporas in the West, which are drawn to fundamentalist movements, distance themselves from their traditionalist parents. The traditionalist way of life of their parents or grandparents is seen by them as not pure enough and as a simple-minded compromise with the secular society.²⁸

Most fundamentalist groups tend to espouse a principled denial of the continued unfolding of tradition and of its interpretation – which does, of course, in itself constitute a very distinct, new, and innovative mode of interpretation. The fundamentalists are in principle oriented against any innovation or lenience within the existing traditions – even if such innovation has been a continuous component in such tradition. For instance, the Hatam Sofer's – a major figure, the promulgator of proto-fundamentalist orientations in modern Eastern European Jewish orthodoxy in the first half of the nineteenth century – famous injunction that “anything new is forbidden from Torah” to which we have referred above went against the great and continuous tradition of interpretation and innovation which characterized the classical (medieval and early modern) Jewish tradition. Such injunctions and attitudes were in fact themselves innovations – but innovations presented as representing simple, pristine “old” tradition.²⁹ It is also very significant that the nature of such innovations, of the exact interpretation of what is new and what is old varies greatly between various fundamentalist movements that develop within the same religion or civilization, and constitute a bone of contention between them.

Thus, fundamentalist traditionalism is not to be confused with a “simple” or “natural” upkeep of a given living tradition. Rather, it denotes an ideological mode and stance oriented not only against new develop-

ments, against different manifestations of modern life, but also against the continually changing and diversified tradition. Such attitude of these movements can be seen, as we have pointed out above, in their attitudes to both the more conservative religious leaders of their respective traditions, as well as to the more popular manifestations thereof. Thus while for instance the Jamaat-i-Islam in Pakistan does not differ in its concrete demands from the more conservative Ulema, yet the whole tenor of their demands when espoused by the Jamaat is radically different from that of the conservative Ulema. Thus, to follow Mumtaz Ahmad:

But fundamentalists do differ from the conservative ulama in their concept of Islam as a *deen*, which they interpret as a “way of life.” The Jamaat-i-Islami criticizes the conservative ulama for reducing Islam to the five pillars – profession of faith, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage. The Jamaat views Islam as a complete [. . .] and a comprehensive way of life which covers the entire spectrum of human activity, be it individual, social, economic, or political. For them, Islam means the total commitment and subordination of all aspects of human life to the will of God.

As a revitalized formalism, the Jamaat-i-Islami seeks to replace the folk and popular practices of Sufi Islam with the approved rituals of orthodox Islam. In line with Islamic modernism, fundamentalists militate against the fatalistic quietism of the sufi fraternities. They present Islam as a dynamic and activist political ideology which must acquire state power in order to implement its social, economic, and political agenda.

This brings us to one of the most important defining characteristics of the Jamaat-i-Islam and other Islamic fundamentalist movements: *unlike the conservative ulama and the modernists, the fundamentalist movements are primarily political rather than religious intellectual movements*. While both the ulama and the modernists seek influence in public policy-making structures, the fundamentalists aspire to *capture* political life . . .”

The Jamaat-i-Islami set as its objective ‘the establishment of the Islamic way (*Deen*) so as to achieve God’s pleasure and seek salvation in the Hereafter.’ In order to achieve this objective, the Jamaat set out the following five programs for itself:

1. To construct human thought in the light of the ideals, values, and principles derived from divine guidance.
2. To “reform and purify” individual members of society so as to enable them to develop a truly Islamic personality.
3. To organize these individuals under the leadership of the Jamaat and to prepare and train them to invite humanity to the path of Islam.
4. To take all possible steps to reform and reconstruct the society and all of its institutions in accordance with the teachings of Islam.
5. To bring about a revolution in the political leadership of society, reorganize political and socioeconomic life on Islamic lines, and finally, establish an Islamic state.³⁰

XI

It is not, however, just the selection and reconstruction of certain themes of tradition as the only legitimate symbols of the traditional order and their upholding of them against the existing situation, and against others, that is characteristic of the various fundamentalist movements. What is crucial here is the attempt to essentialize tradition in terms of these themes and symbols, and in name of a basic premise or pristine vision embodied in some text – whether in the form of a book or a message, an exemplary personality, or an event in an idealized period – and concomitantly to totalize this vision in a utopian mode.

Such ideological stances also entail a denial of the unfolding of a historical process and instead promulgate an essentialist, non-historical conception of a religious civilization, and of tradition.

Aziz Al Azmeh, in his analysis of the Islamic movements, points out some of the most important aspects of this transformation, which in principle apply also to non-Islamic ones:

Eschatology and past example become utopia when they become activist, when they become a chiliasm, with a sense of total imminence. They become utopia when legalism and moralism give way to total political contestation. This occurs when the fundamentalist movement as distinct from historical Islam is ascendant among particular groups in society. Islamic political and social ideals based on primitivist models become utopian when these models are activated and valorized, when fundamentalism ceases to be a cliché and takes on programmatic specifications and, as a precondition of this specification, acquires a social and political constituency. Historically, this has taken two main forms. In the Islamic Middle Ages, radical fundamentalism was, as far as I know, invariably chiliastic, associated with the complex of ideas generically known as Mahdism. North African history is especially replete with Mahdism both Sunnite and Shi'ite: the Idrisids, the Fatimids, the Almohads, Sufi politics like that of Ibn Qasi (d. 1151), a thaumaturge who established a short-lived state in the Algarve, and countless others. These have already been mentioned briefly, and associated with Ibn Khaldun's theory of kinship.

The second form of activist utopianism is contemporary Islamic radicalism, for which there is no precedent in Islamic history. Like chiliasm, it relies on the specification of fundamentalism, that is to say, on the precise and imminent interpretation of the pristine model, be that divine pronouncement or utopian example. This is quite natural in all utopias, for by their very nature these have to establish a constituency by affirming the univocality of texts and examples which are, in themselves, naturally multivocal: Plato specified his Republic in the *Laws*, Rousseau his Contract with his projected Corsican constitution.

Similarly, Islamic radicalism, a very recent phenomenon indeed and the illegitimate offspring of Islamic reformism and Wahhabite-Mawdudian fundamentalism,

was born of a particular specification. It specified *jahiliyya*, the non-Islam that is to be converted into Islamic order, as an actual presence. Of course each movement in this fundamentalism provided particular specifications consonant with its social, political and cultural import. Wahhabite fundamentalism in Arabia, from the beginning until the definitive establishment of utopia by the Imam (later King) Abd al-Aziz (the foundation of Saudi Arabia) and the suppression of the Ikhwan Wahhabite militia in 1927, decreed all territory identified for absorption by the expanding Saudi polity as *jahiliyya* – and by territory I mean geographical territory to be subjugated, socio-political territory to be linked to the House of Saud in a tributary fashion, and of course religious territory defined by the diversity of local cults whose centralization and homogenization under the title of *shari'a* was a cultural precondition for political centralization. *Shari'a* here is of course in the main Hanbalite, characterized by a moralistic rigor which homogenizes public life on the one hand, and an economic liberalism on the other, much like some early Protestant politics.

The difference between Arabian and, say, Egyptian Muslim utopianism arises from distinct historical worlds to which they belong. Arabian utopianism imagines the chiliastic order in terms of miracle and without necessary political reference to the state; this is very much in keeping with medieval Islamic habits. Egyptian utopianism, on the other hand, regards its relation to the state as fundamental. It seeks immediately to take the state by force, as with the radicals professing notions like *takfir*. It also seeks, as with the Muslim Brothers in their fundamentalist mode, to work a rhetorical reconciliation of the notion of *shura* (a form of Medinan consultation) and of liberal political notions with the aim of gaining power.³¹

XII

Such essentialization and totalization of tradition – often in a utopian mode, which is characteristic of the modern fundamentalist movements – entails the concomitant arrangement – in a hierarchical, relatively undifferentiated way – of different aspects and layers of tradition according to the presumed implications of this single vision.

Accordingly fundamentalist movements are characterized by a *principled* – though not easily observed in practice – differentiation between layers of “tradition” in terms of their relation to the pristine vision, and by the ideological symbolization of many customs – such as pattern of dress, calendric observance, and the like – which can be used as markers of collective identity to demarcate the boundaries between internally pure and externally polluted spaces. In practice they may often waver between, on the one hand, a sharp segregation between “traditional” (ritual, religious) and non-traditional spheres of life, without developing any strong connective symbolic and organizational bonds between the two, on the one hand; and a strong predisposition or demand for some clear unifying principles which

would connect and unify both arenas, on the other. As a result, there develops within these movements a strong tendency toward “ritualization” of the symbols of traditional life on both the personal and collective levels alike. Increasing attempts to impose traditional symbols on the mundane, often secular world in relatively rigid, militant ways may then alternate with the total isolation of these traditional symbols from the impurities of that world.³²

The rather paradoxical attitude of these movements to tradition is shaped by their basic ideologies; especially by the nature of their criticism of modernity; their stand with respect to the basic antinomies of modernity; and the closely related characteristics of their attempts to appropriate modernity in their own terms according to their distinct sectarian and utopian vision with strong political orientations. It is these characteristics that give rise to these movements’ tendencies to construct, in a totalistic mode, an ideologized, essentialized conception of tradition.

XIII

This attitude to tradition prevalent in many of the fundamentalist movements is closely connected with yet another paradox which characterizes the modern fundamentalist movements – a paradox that could be found among the proto-fundamentalist movements but became more fully articulated in the modern setting. The essence of this paradox is that although these movements present themselves as the pure pristine orthodoxy of their respective religion, there are in fact, in any given situation, heterodoxies which are in sharp conflict with the existing religious establishment, with the prevailing ways of life, and with the preceding tradition. In many cases the leaders of the fundamentalist movements are intellectuals with strong antinomian tendencies – with their antinomianism being oriented not only toward the secular elites of their respective countries but also, as in countries like Pakistan or Malaysia or Morocco, against the prevalent modes of interpretation of tradition by the more orthodox Islamists.

The basically heterodox nature of the fundamentalist movements is evident also in the fact that within any religion or civilization there tend to develop, at any single point, not one but several fundamentalist movements, and among such movements there tend to develop continual sectarian quarrels and schisms – with such confrontations tending to generate even greater emphasis on degrees of choice and human will.

Truly enough, such variety may be due to different socio-political circumstances or to changing constellations of the relations between the various fundamentalist groups and the political rulers, and the closely con-

nected possible incorporation of some of the fundamentalist themes or symbols by the existing regimes.³³ But beyond such various contingent reasons, such variety is also inherent in the very nature of the religious sectarian dynamics of the fundamentalist movements. Despite the fact that each such movement claims to be the only representative of the original pristine vision of its religion, they are all in fact new constructions which may, and often do, differ with respect to which aspect or symbol of their religion they portray as the essence of the original pristine vision. Thus, as we have seen, the almost coterminous development of different fundamentalist movements in the fold of the same religion can be found in contemporary Israel, where both the anti-Zionist “Haredim” and the ultra-national Gush Emunim claim to present the pristine vision of Judaism.³⁴ Similarly, among the Protestant fundamentalist movements in the USA there developed continuous differences and conflicts with respect to sources of authority – over texts, and de facto which or whose interpretation of the text – and over whether or not the proclaimed vision was in fact the true representation of the pristine vision.

Such variety is even greater given the widespread geopolitical range of Islam in the Muslim countries where such variety could already be found in the many proto-fundamentalist or revivalist Islamic movements in the eighteenth century and prior.³⁵ It is not only that fundamentalist Muslim movements develop in different political regimes – including ones like Pakistan or Malaysia which define themselves as Muslim – but that, as the condemnations by Iran of the Taliban movements in Afghanistan attests to, there may develop strong contestations between different Muslim fundamentalist movements or regimes.³⁶ Significantly enough, in all these cases there also develop different interpretations of the literal understanding of texts, and different emphases on various parts of such texts.

These different interpretations are not confined to dissensions among the fundamentalist movements – they constitute a part of the wider discourses on tradition and modernity that take place in all these societies, be they Muslim, Jewish, or especially, but not only, Protestant-Christian or sectors thereof. This yet again attests to the continual interweaving of these movements with the broader settings in which they act and to the multiple intellectual and political movements and streams within them.

XIV

The upshot of all these tendencies is that these movements are not political in the instrumental or technical sense but rather in their attempts, albeit at times via political means, to implement an overall moral vision, to

construct a new collective identity, and to appropriate modernity in their own terms. Nilufer Göle presents a very incisive analysis of Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey in these terms.

A return to the original sources – comprising of references to the Quran itself and the Sunna and Hadith (sayings and traditions of the Prophet) and the “*asr-i saadet*” period (the age of the Prophet Muhammed and the four orthodox caliphs (622–661) – is a common feature of almost all islamist movements, calling for revivalism and struggling against the contamination of “pure” Islam by customary practices. The ways in which islamist movements situate themselves in relation to western modernity marks the main difference of the new generation of islamists from the nineteenth century modernist islamists. While the latter, as in the writings of Muhammed Abduh, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Rashid Rida, tried to accommodate islamic values with democratic and modern values, the contemporary radical islamists take a non-apologetic and an anti-modernist stand, in the name of an islamic alternative. The search for an alternative in Islam, especially endows muslim intellectuals with a very strong quest for an authentic identity and provides them with the emotional, moral and intellectual tools with which they direct a critique to permissiveness, consumerism, pollution, corruption and nationalism, all considered as sinful outcomes of western modernity and civilization.

Contemporary islamism is situated at the crossroads of the critique of traditional interpretations of Islam on the one hand and of modernism on the other. Hence, islamism is neither a direct outcome of religious and cultural traditions, nor a straightforward representation of muslim identity. On the contrary, it stems from the problematization of muslim traditions and identity. Islamism is a cultural and political deconstruction of the category of “muslim”; consequently one “becomes” an islamist when one engages in a critique and refuses to be a muslim the way one is naturally “born” into it. Islamism implies therefore, a critique and even a discontinuity with the given categories of muslim identity; it is an endeavour to rename, to reconstruct muslim identity, by freeing it from traditional interpretations and by challenging modernism. It is “radical” both in its critique of traditions, considered as responsible for the passivity and the “enslavement” of muslim people, and in its desire to instaure a radically different civilization, that is a revolutionary change comprising the islamization of spheres of life ranging from conceptions of self, to organizations of life-world and politics of government.

Islamism, both in its ideological formulations and sociological practices posits new hybridations between tradition and modernity, religion and secularism, community and religion. The new actors of islamism, both in their sociological profiles and social practices incarnate the paradoxical, ambivalent nature of contemporary islamism. Especially the new intellectual and professional elites owing their identity and social visibility on the one hand to modern education that they have acquired recently, and on the other, to islamist movements in which they have been taking part in the last twenty years, is of particular interest.

Hence, I am arguing that it is in this realm of habitus, cultural-codes and life-styles, that the stakes of power struggle between the republican elites and the others are rooted. In other words, the question of life-styles is not a trivial matter of fashion, trends, individual choices but reveals relations of intersubjectivity, relations of stratification, relations of power linked to the domain of habitus. One can argue that upper middle-class kemalist women in particular but also kemalist men, who acquire education and a professional career and who cultivate their body-language and way of life in a “secular,” that is non-muslim manner, obtain prestige, social recognition, therefore “symbolic capital” and form, a distinct social status group. Hence such a definition of social distinction and social status, rooted in the exclusion of the islamic life-world, forms the main social and political discord between the secularists and the islamists. In other words, in order to become part of the elite, one has to master the western code of conduct, discourse and living. Ways of education and ways of living distinguish the republican elites as “civilized” and as “progressist” in counter-distinction to parochial elites who are attached to traditional, local and religious manners and customs . . .³⁷

The power of the Jacobin component of the fundamentalist movements

XV

It is these movements’ attitudes to tradition and their attempts to implement by political means a moral-religious vision that explain what may seem as a paradox of our analysis – namely that these religious movements, with their strong emphasis on tradition, have yet acquired characteristics which have been associated with one of the most extreme, modern, secular visions – namely the Jacobin.

On the phenomenological level, the answer to this paradox lies in the fact that it is not the secular dimension of the Jacobin or the “religious” dimensions of the fundamentalists that are crucially important. Rather, it is their totalizing, absolutizing tendencies which they share that explains this paradox. These tendencies are rooted in the basic antinomies of the Axial Civilizations as they were promulgated above all by some heterodox – especially the proto-fundamentalist – movements with strong gnostic orientations. In the Great Revolutions these heterodoxies became thoroughly politicized and moved from peripheries into the center. It was such politicization and movement into the center that constituted the core of the Jacobin movement or orientation and greatly influenced the modern political agendas of the many social movements including the fundamentalist ones.

What explains the Jacobin tendencies that distinguish the modern fundamentalist movements from the proto-fundamentalist ones are the

former's development within the framework of modern political agendas; both their promulgation of a distinct stand with respect to the modern cultural and political program and the ways in which they attempted to reconstruct tradition in terms of such attitudes to modernity; and their appropriation of the modern political frameworks on their own terms.

The fundamentalist and the Communist regimes – a comparison of two modern Jacobin movements and regimes

XVI

Given these very distinctive Jacobin characteristics and tendencies of the modern fundamentalist movements, it will be worthwhile to compare them to other distinctive Jacobin movements or regimes to develop a more nuanced understanding of them. First, it will benefit us to compare them to Communist ones with which they share some paradoxical and some mirror-like characteristics, and secondly, we shall compare them to the major types of nationalistic movements or regimes, especially fascist and national-social ones, that developed in modern societies.

Communist and fundamentalist movements and regimes share the tendency to promulgate a very strong salvationist vision or gospel. The visions promulgated by both these types of regimes contained a strong tendency to combine different themes of protest with the construction of a new ontological definition of reality, with a total world view rooted in the respective salvationist vision. Although the content of this vision varied greatly between them – they promulgated opposite and to a large extent mutually exclusive visions – they did share the view that the implementation of this vision was to take place in this world, in the present. Instead of the – basically unfathomable – future, the implementation of this vision was, as that of all the Great Revolutions, to be achieved in the present, and thus, present and future became in many ways conflated.

These visions entailed the transformation both of man and of society, and of construction of new, personal and collective identities. It was in the name of salvation that these movements and regimes demanded total submergence of the individual in the general totalistic community, the total reconstruction of personality and of individual and collective identity. It was in the name of such vision that they developed their Jacobin features, above all the view that many aspects of the social and political orders can be continuously reconstructed by conscious human, above all political, action. Both the Communist and the fundamentalist regimes emphasized the active construction, by political action, of a new social and cultural

order, the active participation of most sectors of society in such order, as well as a high level of commitment to it.

In both cases, the institutionalization of such visions gave rise to regimes characterized by strong mobilizational orientations and policies aiming at transforming the structure of society in general, and of center–periphery relations in particular. Both types of movements and regimes aimed such efforts at transformation and mobilization, with the sanctification of violence and terror against internal and external evil forces and enemies – especially those rooted in the internal dynamics of modern Western “bourgeois” society.

Both types of regimes aimed at the total transformation of the symbols of collective – and personal – identity, of the institutional structure of the society, and at the establishment of a new social order, rooted in the revolutionary universalistic ideological tenets, in principle transcending any primordial, national, or ethnic units – even if not denying these units’ partial legitimacy, and even if in fact being very closely related to national concerns, and even if in fact many of them developed as part of national reactions to Western imperialism and expansion in its different forms. At the same time these ideologies defined new socio-political collectivities with broad, yet relatively definitive, boundaries. In the case of the Communist regimes, these new collectivities, the collectivities of “workers” and “intellectuals,” embraced all mankind, or at least those parts of mankind willing to both accept the basic premises of the “gospel” and to define themselves in terms of the vision presented in this gospel. In the case of the Islamic fundamentalist regimes, the whole realm of Islam is seen as their arena. Indeed a new conception of the *ummah* beyond any specific place was often promulgated in sectors of these movements with strong appeal, especially to the Islamic diaspora communities in Europe and Asia. Given the unusual combination of primordial and universalistic components in the construction of Jewish collective consciousness in Jewish fundamentalist movements, there developed a continual tension and oscillation between these two components. However, contrary to, for instance, the contemporary communal national movements in South Asia, there did not develop within most communist and fundamentalist movements a total negation of universalistic orientations. In this context it is important to note that both the communist and the fundamentalist movements – mostly but not only the Muslim ones – were international, transnational movements, activated by very intensive, continually reconstructed networks, be it of various socialist and communist movements or of Muslim, Jewish and Protestant networks, and of scholars, pilgrims, or the like. These networks were composed of many different elements among which the fundamentalist Jacobin characteristics were only one part. But the very existence of such networks

facilitated the expansion of these groups' social and cultural visions as well as their universalistic messages, while at the same time continually confronting them with other competing visions.

It was the salvationist visions promulgated by these movements and regimes that constituted the ultimate legitimization of the regimes, and their respective elites were seen as the bearers of the salvationist mission. In this sense both regimes were based, as Martin Malia³⁸ has put it with respect to the Communist regimes, on legitimization from the top – i.e. on legitimization which seemingly was in no need of popular approbation, not unlike that of the bearers of many transcendental religions. And yet the legitimization of both the Soviet regime and the fundamentalist movements differed in several crucial respects from that of either traditional religious salvationist groups, or from that of historical absolutist regimes – the pre-revolutionary *ancien régimes*. In contrast to these regimes, the legitimation of the Communist and fundamentalist regimes alike contained very strong, far-reaching revolutionary and participatory components, combined with strong mobilizational policies, and hence implied a new type of accountability of rulers. In principle it was the entire community that was not only the object but also the bearer of the salvationist vision or mission. The elite “only” represented it – possibly instituting it – while promulgating the “real” will of the society,³⁹ or the holy vision of the community even if the proper interpretation of the vision could be vested in one person or group. In the Soviet case the elite seemingly represented the universal revolutionary vision and were accountable to the people to carry it out. In the Iranian case – probably the clearest hitherto illustration of a fully institutionalized fundamentalist regime – the constitution promulgated by Khomeini, itself a great innovation in the realm of “traditional” Islam, declared in 1982 two different sources of sovereignty – God and the people.⁴⁰ The interpretation of this sovereignty and its institutional repercussions certainly entailed a different mode of legitimation than the traditional one. It entailed a much higher degree of participation of the different groups of clerics in interaction with broader sectors of the population, and continual struggles between different groups of clerics about the correctness of their respective interpretations of the salvationist vision.

These two types of movements and regimes also shared several of the basic characteristics of utopian sectarian groups to which we have referred above – namely the tendency to constitute sharp boundaries between the “pure” inside and the polluted outside and the continual constitution of an image of ontological enemy. The enemy is often the same, or very similar, for both types of movements – world capitalism in the West, above all the United States, and even Zionists, usually other “universalisms” – as epitom-

mes of evils of modernity. But the grounding for such enmity differed greatly between these two movements or regimes. In the Soviet case it is the non-completion or perversion of the original vision of modernity, of the Enlightenment, while for the fundamentalists it is the basic premises of the Enlightenment that constitute the major characteristics of the enemy. Additionally, these two movements, many other such sectarian-ideological movements, many authoritarian movements of the right and left alike, and fundamentalist ones, all exhibit a very low threshold of tolerance for ambiguity on both the personal and collective levels. This low tolerance of ambiguity was closely connected, in both these types of movement (as well as in the fascist-national socialist one) with the denial of the pluralistic components of modern political institutions.

XVII

These two types of movements and regimes also faced at least some rather parallel problems attendant on their institutionalization – among them the growing contradictions between the salvational vision and the exigencies of maintaining some type of orderly political and modern economic regime; between their tendencies of totalization and the necessity to face, even to some degree promote, the processes of structural differentiation against which they were oriented; the problems attendant on the potential corruption of their elites and the general even if partial “regression” from the universalistic-missionary vision to the primacy of concrete demands of statehood. But above all, in distinction from pre-modern regimes which developed from sectarian groups, these two regimes also faced the tensions inherent in the relations between their Jacobin tendencies and their acceptance and adoption of some of the basic institutional frameworks of modern constitutional regimes – for instance, constitutions; elections, if even highly regulated or controlled ones; and parliamentary and juridical institutions. Needless to say, there also developed far-reaching differences between these two regimes with respect to the problems attendant on their institutionalization, some of which were rooted in their different ideologies. As Ernest Gellner has very succinctly pointed out,⁴¹ the Achilles heel of the Soviet regime was the fact that its salvationist mission was oriented only in this world, to be tested in society by economic performance, while in the Iranian case the more “other-worldly” components of the vision provided a rather strong, even if certainly not absolute, safety net for the regime.

Thus, all these movements continually face problems stemming from their interweaving with the broader settings in which they develop – while on the one hand they continually attempt to appropriate for themselves

these broader frameworks and set their agendas, on the other they must continually accommodate themselves to these settings. Indeed their very attempt to appropriate these modern settings continually confronts them with the demands and premises of many of these settings. Thus within these regimes and movements there develops continual tension between the more modern – economic, institutional, potentially secular orientations, often borne by professional groups who were among the active participants in the formative stages of these movements or the newly mobile social groups which their own policies generate, and the more radical religious and/or political Jacobin leadership.

XVII

But there were, of course, radical differences in their respective visions. As Raymond Grew has put it (private communication), the phenomenological starting point of the fundamentalist vision is the individual recognition of and devotion to religious truth.

The outline of such a society, in turn, puts it in competition and conflict with the larger society, which produces a series of demands: first, that the larger society at least not inhibit the fulfillment of the new spiritual enclave. Then it demands that the benefits enjoyed by the larger society must also be available to the fundamentalist one, then comes to see itself as a program for reform of the dominant society and an alternative to it. Possession of fundamentalist truth becomes a basis for challenging established ways on every front (although in practice this is attempted very selectively). This insertion into the larger society furthermore creates the need to define boundaries, lest the fundamentalist community be dissipated or undermined by the corrupting influences around it.

In the Communist case it is the recognition of the social evils of the larger society, the quest to reconstruct it in the name of a secular vision, and the social political organization devoted to the implementation of such a vision that constitute such a starting point – even for the individual quest. For the Communist, salvation lies in society; for the fundamentalist it basically remains individual, even if its attainment is regulated by the movement or by the regime. Moreover, while the Communist vision was oriented to the implementation of social-historical change, of “progress,” the fundamentalist aim was at an outcome that will stop change. Of crucial importance is that the fundamentalists do not accept, indeed strongly deny the perfectibility of man which stands in sharp contrast to the original Jacobin, indeed to the very premises of the Enlightenment and the subsequent socialist and Communist, and to some extent the extreme Fascist and National-Social regimes (I owe this observation to Bjorn Wittrock).

XVIII

The differences between the two types of Jacobin – the Communist and the Iranian Fundamentalist – regimes are manifest above all in their attitudes to modernity, in their criticism of it, in their attitudes to its basic antinomies, and in their appropriation, rejection, and interpretation of this program's cultural and political components.

The salvationist vision promulgated in the Communist revolutions and regimes – especially of the Soviet regime, and to a smaller extent in China – was rooted in the basic premises of the cultural program of modernity, above all in its Enlightenment component with strong emphasis on the perfectibility of man. It followed the criticism of modernity of the existing order as it was promulgated by the socialist movements, which did not entail the negation of the original project of modernity but criticized its non-completion by bourgeois society and was oriented toward its fuller implementation. The Communist movement and regimes did not deny the primacy of instrumental rationality and technology. Rather, they appropriated these themes for themselves and presented their regimes as the sole bearer of the pristine vision of such instrumental vision, of progress, of technology, of mastery of nature, and of the rational, emancipatory restructuring of society. This criticism of modernity also entailed the construction of a specific pattern of cultural collective identity attendant on the encounter of non-Western European societies with the West and with modernity. This pattern of collective identity entailed a far-reaching denial of the claims made, for instance, by the Slavophiles – or of their parallels in various Eastern European and Asian countries – which promulgated total opposition to the Enlightenment and to instrumental reason, technology and mastery of the environment, as these elements stood against the authentic spirit or tradition of their respective societies.

As against this ideological stance the basic ideologies of the fundamentalist movements entailed the negation of some of the basic tenets of modernity as a civilizational form. These movements are indeed fully oriented against some of the basic premises of the Enlightenment, especially against the change of the place of God (or some metaphysical principles) in the construction of the cosmos and of man; especially against the premise of individual autonomy and freedom, and of the perfectibility of man; against the concomitant emphasis on the sovereignty of reason and of the legitimation of social and political order in such terms; and against the emphasis on change, on progress.

But at the same time the utopian sectarian criticisms of modernity and the anti-modern – or rather anti-Enlightenment – stance of the

fundamentalist movements, are closely connected with a highly selective appropriation, transformation, and reinterpretation of various aspects or dimensions of modernity in very distinct ways which differ greatly from those of the other major types of modern social movements. The core of this selectivity is the appropriation of the mobilizational and participatory dimensions of the modern political program and some of their basic institutional formations – like parliaments, elections, and constitutions – while at the same denying their legitimation in “secular” terms, above all in terms of the sovereignty of autonomous individuals. Moreover, the very emphasis on these participatory dimensions entails also the paradoxical and perhaps inadvertent acceptance of the autonomy of human will and choice.

Fundamentalist, fascist and national-socialist, and contemporary communal national movements

XIX

The basic attitudes of the fundamentalist movements to modernity can be compared not only to those of the socialist or communist ones, but also, even if briefly, to those of Fascist or National-Socialist character, which also aimed at the construction of new collective identities, new collective boundaries, as well as to implement a new vision via political action. The Fascist and National Socialist movements differed however in their basic attitudes to modernity both from the socialist and communist movements which they actually confronted as well as from the later fundamentalist ones. These national or nationalistic movements, especially the extreme fascist or national-socialist ones, aimed above all at the reconstruction of the boundaries of modern collectivities, which entailed the confrontation between universalistic and more particularistic or ascriptive components of construction of collective identity of the modern regimes. Their criticism of the existing modern order entailed an extreme negation of the universalistic components of the cultural program of modernity, especially in its Enlightenment version – hence they also showed less missionary zeal over transcending national boundaries. Yet significantly enough, the universalistic components of the cultural and political program of modernity – which they negated – constituted such an important reference point to them that in some ways they attempted to transpose them into their particularistic visions, often attempting to present these visions in some semi-universalistic terms of which, paradoxically enough, race could be one.⁴²

A rather similar picture developed with respect to the attitudes of fascist and national socialist movements to technology. In their acceptance of the

technological or instrumental aspects of modernity, together with the denial of any sovereignty or autonomy of reason and of the individual, they were seemingly similar to the fundamentalist ones. However, the fascist and national-socialist movements strongly emphasized the primacy and autonomy of human will – even if not of reason, indeed standing in many ways against abstract reason – thus sharing a basic Enlightenment component of the cultural program of modernity. As against this, the fundamentalist movements criticized this program from the outside by emphasizing, in principle, the submission of human will to divine commandments – even if at the same time emphasizing, paradoxically enough in a very strong modern mode, the importance of moral choice.

XX

Here it might be worthwhile to compare the fundamentalist movements with some of the more extreme, seemingly fundamentalist-like, nationalist movements designated by Nikkie Keddie as communal religious movements which have become very prominent recently – even though having earlier historical roots – in many Asian countries, especially in India and in Buddhist countries in South and South East Asia, which have been often lumped together with the fundamentalist ones.

These communal-national movements share with the fundamentalist movements some very important characteristics, especially the attempts to construct new religious communal identity, communal boundaries, tendencies to ritualization of violence, and a strong anti-secular stance. They constitute, together with fundamentalist movements and with many movements in the West, a shift from the hegemony of some of the ideals of the Enlightenment in the construction of modern nation states, its institutions and in the collective consciousness or identity of modern societies. Yet, most of these movements differ in several very crucial ways from the “pristine” fundamentalist movements analyzed above – as well as from the European fascist and national-socialist movements. First, their major orientations are particularistic and primordial. Indeed, they are consciously anti-universalistic, emphasizing the distinctiveness of their community from other such communities, and also, to no small extent, from the secular order of modernity, which constitute their major “others.” However, unlike the European fascist or national-socialist movements, the universalistic components of the cultural and political program of modernity do not for these communal national movements constitute an *internal* reference point, or a component of the constitution of their internal cultural face – they are in a way “negated” as external components.

Second, they do not espouse strong conceptions of the reconstruction of the social order according to a vision rooted in an ontological perspective. In the case of these communal-national religious movements, the construction of strong communal boundaries and the promulgation of many sectarian tendencies, symbols, and rituals – especially those which emphasize the distinctiveness of and purity of its own collectivity as against the pollution of the others – do not necessarily entail a totalitarian reconstruction of society. Most of them harbor strong particularistic visions of exclusion, but only very few develop into a fully totalistic-Jacobin direction; thus they do not develop strong Jacobin tendencies to the reconstruction of society by a politically active center.

Truly enough, some of these seemingly fundamentalist movements attempted to develop new doctrinal moral contents or canons – in ways contrary to whatever was seen as the center of “classical” Hinduism. Such inventions entailed attempts at a soteriological revaluation of the political arena far beyond what was prevalent in the historical tradition of these civilizations. The Hindu movements, which attempted to construct such a totalistic view, tended usually to invent some of the religious elements like the holy scripts which are central in the fundamentalist movements. But the promulgation of such religious overtones and themes was not on the whole very successful or, as in the case of the reconstruction of Vedic rituals, limited to only some sectors of the population.

The same is true to a smaller extent of Buddhist countries – even given the stronger political implications of Theravada Buddhism – especially of Sri Lanka, even if (as G. Obeyeskeyere has shown) there may in these circumstances develop other apolitical fundamentalist orientations, groups or movements.⁴³ It is only insofar as such national components are closely interwoven with strong universalistic orientations based, as is the case, on scriptural exegesis, that such movements, most notably the Jacobin ones, develop such strong Jacobin orientations and organizational characteristics.

XXI

Thus, the major difference between the various nationalist, Fascist and National-Socialist, and more recent communal religious national movements on the one hand, and the fundamentalist movements on the other, lies in the fact that the latter espoused very strong universalistic orientations. In this espousal they were similar to the Socialist and Communist movements and ideologies. Additionally, just as these latter movements, the fundamentalist movements espoused universalistic orientations and

attempted to ground their legitimation in such universalist “transcendental,” religious, or “secular” bases and to construct some universalistic communities – be they the new “ummah” as espoused by some Islamic fundamentalist, the modern universalistic community of the workers, or proletarians espoused by the Communists. But the bases of their respective universalisms differed greatly between those of the socialist or communist and the fundamentalist movements. The socialist and communist movements were fully set within the framework of the cultural program of modernity, above all of the Enlightenment and of the Revolutions, and their criticism of this program was made in terms of its incompleteness. As against this the universalistic orientations of the fundamentalist movements were seemingly outside that program, ideologically opposed to it, denying some of its major premises – such as, for instance, the insistence on progress and on the march of history.

But at the same time the utopian sectarian criticisms of modernity and the anti-modern stance of the fundamentalist movements is combined paradoxically with the adoption of very strong Jacobin orientations, with their strong emphasis on the reconstruction of society through political action and through political participation of wider strata, thus at the same time appropriating many of the participatory and constructivist components of the cultural program of modernity and, implicitly at least, the emphasis on the autonomous exercise of moral choice. Because of this specific type of Jacobin tendency or predisposition, these movements face continuous tensions – tensions which are inherent in most sectarian movements, but which are exacerbated in the modern fundamentalist ones – between the strong participatory orientations rooted very much in the modern conceptions of center-periphery relations which develop within them, and the authoritarian ones inherent in their basic sectarian ideologies. Concomitantly there developed in these movements a continual tension between the more instrumental and pragmatic, potentially secular orientations and the more radical Jacobin religious-political ones.

A brief analytical-typological summary: proto-fundamentalist, fundamentalist, and communal-national movements

XXII

It might be worthwhile at this point to bring out fully the major analytical characteristics of the various movements which constituted the focus of our analysis – above all the proto-fundamentalist, the (modern) fundamentalist, and the communal-national ones.

The proto-fundamentalist movements which developed in the premodern period in the Axial, above all monotheistic civilizations, shared with the modern fundamentalist movements the strong sectarian-utopian elements oriented to the implementation of a vision of the pristine features of their respective religions.

It is these orientations that distinguished the proto-fundamentalist movements from other sectarian movements that developed in their respective civilizations as well as the fundamentalist movements from other modern social movements.

The crucial difference between the proto-fundamentalist and modern fundamentalist movements has been in the strong – even if in some cases potentially strong – political Jacobin orientations and characteristics of the latter. The most important of these orientations was the strong emphasis on the reconstruction, through political means and action, of state, society, and the individual alike. The roots of those Jacobin tendencies of the fundamentalist movements are to be found in the Great Revolutions – the Puritan, American, and above all the French, and in the later Russian and Chinese revolutions. In strong contrast to the proto-fundamentalist movements, the fundamentalist ones moved in the wake of the Great Revolutions into the very center, into the central political arena linking them with the quest to bring the Kingdom of God to Earth.

The fundamentalist movements shared their Jacobin tendencies with other leftist, above all Communist, movements and regimes, and to some extent with the rightist fascist and national-socialist movements. They differed however from these movements, as we have shown in the preceding section, in their basic premises, and above all in their attitudes to the premises and antinomies of the cultural and political program of modernity.

Of special interest from the point of view of our analysis is the difference between these “pristine” fundamentalist movements and the communal-national ones which have burgeoned above all in South Asia and are often compared to the fundamentalist ones. As we have seen, the major difference of these religious communal movements from the fundamentalist view was that their major orientations are particularistic and primordial. Indeed, they are consciously anti-universalistic, emphasizing the distinctiveness of their community from other such communities – and to no small extent also from the secular order of modernity – which constitute their major “others.” For these movements, unlike however the European fascist or national-socialist movements, the universalistic components of the cultural and political program of modernity do not constitute an *internal* reference point, or a component of their constitution of their internal cultural face – they are in a way “negated” as external ones.

Second, these communal-national-religious movements do not espouse strong conceptions of the reconstruction of the social order according to a vision rooted in ontological conception. The construction of very strong communal boundaries and the promulgation of many sectarian tendencies, symbols and rituals that take place in these movements – especially those which emphasize the distinctiveness of and purity of its own collectivity as against the pollution of the others – do not necessarily entail a totalitarian reconstruction of society. Most of them harbor a strong particularistic vision of exclusion, but only very few develop into fully totalistic-Jacobin direction; they do not develop strong Jacobin tendencies to the reconstruction of society by a politically active center.

XXIII

The different movements referred to above which developed under specific historical conditions in the overall development and expansion of modern civilization, varied greatly with respect to their basic attitudes and different components of the cultural program of modernity, its tension and antinomies, and criticisms thereof, but at the same time they shared a common reference to this program.

They varied with respect to their universalistic as opposed to communal or particularistic primordial components of this program; with respect to the premises of autonomy of man, of human will, reason, with respect to sources of authority. All these variations entailed different attitudes of the basic antinomies of this program and criticism thereof – but at the same time they shared the emphasis on participation and equality and, paradoxically, on certain issues of free will and choice inherent in the autonomous conceptions of man.

These variations were not fixed in their contents. Rather, for all of these movements there developed in all these dimensions a continuous reconstruction and renovation of concrete new themes and tropes, attesting to the continual dynamics of modernity – and at the same time added to this fact is that the cultural program of modernity constituted a common positive or negative reference point for all of them.

These various movements developed under different historical conditions. The socialist and the national or nationalistic movements, as well as, of course, many others, arose and crystallized in Europe under specific structural conditions such as the basic contradictions in the institutionalization and development of the post-revolutionary regimes and capitalist industrial political economies. The socialist movements arose under the conditions which brought out the contradiction between on the one hand

the democratization of modern regimes, and on the other the expansion of capitalism – that is, the slow, and to some extent intermittent expansion of the new economic capitalist system along with the continuous struggle for equality of access to the center and for the possible reconstitution of the center according to more egalitarian premises. The national-fascist movements built on those components of the revolutionary heritage which emphasized the right to self-determination of a collectivity – above all in highly particularistic primordial terms. As against this the fundamentalist movements develop either in the context of the full institutionalization of this program, as in the USA; or, as in the case of Muslim, Jewish, and other Axial Civilizations, in connection with the expansion of Western modernity and the global confrontation between it, in its original Western version, and non-Western European (or American) civilizations. This brings us to a more detailed analysis of the broader historical contexts in which these movements develop.