

IDENTITY AND FUNDAMENTALISM AS SECURITY CONCERNS IN THE WEST

Nazila Isgandarova

(Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada)

Introduction

Migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in the West are now accepted in terms of security threats to economy, culture, and society (Gibney, 2002). Therefore, minority and immigrant communities has become a target of heightened tension and come under constant scrutiny. The Muslim immigrants especially in France feel increasingly denied access to the society, which is why they risked their lives to escape the economic and political hardship of their countries in search of a better life for themselves and their children. Instead of improving the social and political climate for immigrants in order to reduce the tension, national governments are tightening security and the closing of borders or shrink the access to better jobs and education to immigrants and refugees. Or the US uses the recent use of anti-terrorist acts to detain foreign residents for an unlimited time without charging them with a crime. Right-wing parties very often use anti-immigration language in order to mobilize opinion in favour of their own policies.

According to Berger (1998), it is an attempt to “de-modernize” in order to seek “reversal of the modern trend that have left the individual ‘alienated’ and beset with the threats of meaninglessness” (p. 22). In a response, the attachment to community is an attempt to “going back to an imagined past by using reconstructed symbols” and to recreate a lost sense of security (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 744).

Theoretically, security is a question of perception of threats and risks; security issues are a function of the number and varieties of risks and the size of their impact. The traditional concept of security focuses on military threats to states, but today the concept has a broader meaning and has been expanded to include economic, political, social and environmental changes, not only to states, but also to societies and individuals. Therefore, security is a multidimensional and multilevel concept (Hyde-Price, 1996) and involves five main sectors, which are the military security sector, the environmental sector, the economic sector, the societal sector and the political sector.

Since the end of the Cold War, there have been many changes in the security concept. Today security is a central element of governance and includes quality of life issues. These issues also include welfare needs of the population. Such a view of security contrasts with the realist school of thinking or the traditional security agenda, which perceives security only from the military point of view. The contemporary school perceives security in terms from societal, identity, national, and religious issues as well. It also includes economic and environmental security (Isgandarova, 2006).

For Buzan, societal security involves situations where groups perceive a threat in identity terms. The minority and religious issues in the West show that societal security is a serious long-term problem. Economic security is part of the debate on the relationship between anarchy of the international system and the economic structure of the market, where capitalism meets political borders and constraints. Environmental security should be considered seriously, because the actors who suffer the consequences are often not the ones who cause the environmental problems, instead are the local population (Buzan, 1998). However, B. Shaffer suggests that an attempt to extend the definition of security to include a variety of issues as diverse as democratization, health care, education, and protection of the environment stretches the concept too much; all of these issues are important and worthy of analysis, but they are not security issues. According to B. Shaffer, security is often a pre-condition to the promotion of these goals in addition to other worthy activities.

The threats are concrete, specific, and grounded in material and non-material capabilities. They are also political-military issues such as power, prestige, alliances, and credibility. Many consider that the response to threats is to deploy the true elements of realpolitik – military action, coalition building, threats and promises, intervention overt and covert, however, the psychological side of threats to national security is also important (Mazzarr, 2004). Using the military means to fight terrorism might successfully weaken terrorists and their organization, but not necessarily fundamentalism. The war in Iraq and Afghanistan might replace governments, which have provided safe havens for terrorists, but it also increased fundamentalism in the world. Therefore, military intervention did not obviously help to reduce fundamentalism, though, as a virus of modern society, fundamentalism should be treated but not through accepting the problem as resulting from the confrontation of cultures with differing levels of modernity because it is a conflict within modern global society itself or “triumphant globalization battling against itself” (Baudrillard, 2002).

Fundamentalism as a Security Problem

There are some people in the Muslim and western world who believe in the so-called clash of civilizations. Osama bin Laden (2001) argues that this was a war between Islam and the West and used the main grievances of the Palestinians and the people of Iraq in order to mobilize the Muslims against the West. These Muslims apprehend that secularism would strip them of Islamic identity and submerge them in Christian domination. According to Esposito (1991), political Islam sees modernization “inexorable or progressive secularization and Westernization of society” (p. 24). For radical Muslims, “Western-style economic system brought poverty, Western-style political institutions brought tyranny, and even Western-style warfare brought defeat” (p. 24). These concerns enabled conservative elements to appeal frustrated masses, suggesting that reviving past

Islamic practices is the only way to salvation, urging to “throw aside the pagan innovations of the reformers and return to the True Path that God had prescribed for his people” (Lewis, 1990, pp. 47-60). Islam is invoked by critics of the secular state, for the incorporation of religion into the state, to legitimize their regime and also to define the limits of religious authority (Lapidus, 1998). Islamic scholars like Ghanuchi (2003) state that secular state has lost its legitimacy and supports international violence. Al-Attas (1985) elaborates this idea by stating that secularization is a world view set against Islam and Muslims must; therefore repulsive, elaborating that there is no equivalent to secular in the Islamic world view, “the term secularism is meant to denote not merely secular ideologies....but encompasses also all the expressions of the secular world view including ...secular historical relativism” (pp. 38-39, 45).

Some Muslims see the problem in the globalization, which weakened the sense of secular nation state, through the global reach of trans-national businesses and financial instruments, eroding a sense of national identity and unity through telecommunication revolution and unrivalled military power of the United States because it “supersedes the idea of a national social contract” merging the boundaries, asserting the need to define particular “people” and communities, making space for “religion and ethnicity” to redefine public communities (Juergensmeyer, 2004, p. 40).

Ethno-religious nationalism may also be considered a form of fundamentalism. This kind of nationalism rejects the intervention of Westerners and their ideologies, but “remains ambivalent about western modernity and globalisation” and “claims to be a response to the failure of western secular system yet have an international and supernational dimension to its own existence” (Rashid, 2006, p. 161). All these contribute to “the identity crisis and loss of a sense of belonging to one’s own roots leads to powerlessness and to reclaim power, religious and ethnic identities are reasserted” (Rashid, 2006, p. 162).

Modernization may lead to the eradication of poverty and illiteracy address some of the causes of religious and political extremism, but it would not fully respond to the deeper religio-cultural issues of identity, authenticity, culture and values that are of equal importance, thus, new theoretical and conceptual perspectives are required (Esposito, 1996). The radical Islamic movements present the problems of existentialism. Their main concern is that modern Western technologies and science drain their authenticity, will, and strength to live a fully realized life without identity (Mazarr, 2004, p.40). The response to this kind of threat is alienation, frustration, and anger. What they want is to think independently, live independently, and see the modernity without roots, traditions, genealogy, and place. Therefore, they prefer to alienate themselves from the modernity and stand against it even in the cradle of modernism in the West.

Antidote to Fundamentalism

The antidote to xenophobia, racism, and the marginalization of others is to recognize the foreigner within ourselves: “He is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 1). The fundamentalists historically maintained the other in their minds through imagination even when he or she is not physically present. For instance, the existence of anti-Semitism in Poland despite its relative lack of Jews is suggestive of this power of imagination (Murer, 1999). Anti-immigrant feelings are sometimes stronger in places with few or no immigrants than in places that have experienced large immigration (Kinnvall, 2004). The enemy-other is not only created by the self, but has been a previous part of the self and this unconscious self is neither an object nor a subject; it is an abject (Kinnval, 2004). Abject is something “rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Traumatic changes cause abject, disturb identity, system, or order, and recognize “stranger” as a threat. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 15). Thus, individual and collective identities are created not simply in the difference between self and other but in those moments of ambiguity where one is other to oneself, and in the recognition of the other as like (Norton, 1988, p. 7). Dangerous and unpleasant aspects of self are projected onto the other (Volkan, 1997).

This is what the Western and Muslim societies project the negative aspects of themselves on each other and differentiate the self from the other so that the other is systematically debased because without such debasement of the other in the memory of experiences the self feels “lost,” “indistinct,” “hazy” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 187). The Muslim world and the Western society’s debasement of the other capture the essential connection between fear and desire. By demonizing the other, the self becomes sufficiently sacralized (Kinnvall, 2004).

The fundamentalists see the other as being dirty with contempt, so that, “one group insists that the other has a darker color, smells bad, or does dirty deeds, they are rejecting the other as if they were faeces” (Volkan, 1997, p. 113) and thus, justify the boundaries of self and other and turn stranger into an enemy who express the possibility of chaos within the existing order. Strangers are both inside and outside a society; they are insiders/outsiders. They articulate ambivalence and therefore challenge the (modern) ordering activity, which relies on reducing ambiguity and uncertainty by categorizing elements (Huysmans, 1998p. 241). On the other hand, structurally and psychologically, Muslim immigrants have been viewed as “bogus” asylum seekers and turned into an enemy because they are blamed to construct a discourse of exclusion and challenge a common belief system. That leads to exclusion of Muslims and therefore, strengthens “its walls against the enemy without and search for enemies within”, and “does not permit question and doubt” (Robins & Post, 1997, pp. 94-95). Muslims are seen as strangers who express the

possibility of chaos within the existing order. They articulate ambivalence and therefore challenge the (modern) ordering activity, which relies on reducing ambiguity and uncertainty by categorizing elements (Huysmans, 1998, p. 241).

Whatever the reason is that fundamentalism has become an issue affecting both Western and Muslim societies. If the West searches for models for the Islamic communities, communitarianism or integration as individual citizens/citoyens (Rubenstein, 2005), the Muslim societies argue for reconsideration of the role of religion in world politics, and the need to distinguish between movements inspired by religion and movements using religion to legitimise political agendas based on non-religious interests (Berger, 1999, pp. 7-8, 15). In this process, Islam has been demonized based on current crisis as it is going through a crisis of modernization (Todd, 2002, pp. 52–53) and the West demonized in the Muslim world.

Fundamentalism's discourse of exclusion increases separateness, limits access to each other and strict boundedness (Jabri, 1996, p. 130). According to An-Na'im (1994), Muslims responded to secularism and secular state in diverse ways: (1.) complete disengagement with any Islamic discourse; (2.) reform- embracing modernity with religious, spiritual and cultural identity intact; or (3.) revive- return to the early purity of Islam (p. 18-19)

The fundamentalism's response to Westernization is complete disagreement with the Western society and culture and aspire to purify Muslim society through the forceful implementation of Islamic law, however, as Rashid (2007) suggests, “modernization is embraced, the West is vilified, Western technology is utilized yet ideas originating in the West are out rightly rejected” (p. 166).

Majority of Muslims are in opposition of the fundamentalist attitude toward the problem. Samuel Huntington's essay, “*The Clash of Civilizations?*” and later book, Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, and Felipe Fernandez Armesto's “*Millennium*” are seen by Muslims as part of a global conspiracy against Islam, part of a bludgeon-Islam-out-of-existence school of thought by exaggerating the grievances of Europeans against the Muslims. The 2006 Pew Survey covering Germany, Spain, Great Britain and France found out that Muslims are less inclined to see a clash of civilizations and often associate positive attributes with Westerners – including tolerance, generosity, and respect for women. Positive opinions of Muslims usually decline sharply in Spain since 2005 (from 46 to 29 per cent), and more modestly in Great Britain (from 72 to 63 per cent), in France and Great Britain when terrorist attacks target the general population in EU (EUMC report, 2006). Fethullah Gulen, a well-known Turkish scholar also criticizes the religious bigotry in the form of religious extremism and favour modernism, nationalism, tolerance, and democracy without sacrificing religious precepts. He opposes politicized Islam imposed by the radical Muslims emphasizing the view that no individual or group has a monopoly on interpreting Islam to manipulate the emotions of Muslims. President Muhammad Khatami of Iran in the United

Nations (1998) introduced the idea of the “Dialogue of Civilizations”, and thus, joined the world figures like Pope John Paul II, the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Prince Charles of Great Britain, and Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, on one level, and many others who have been preaching the dialogue for many years. The Pope John and the Prince of Wales, and many other Western leaders also contributed to the mutual understanding between Muslims and the West.

Fundamentalism is the mirror for the backwardness of the Muslim world which is not only a Western production but also is a result of the internal dynamics. Backwardness of the Muslim world was a result in pressure for centuries from both within and outside and under restrictions put on feelings, thoughts, culture, and education of Muslims, it was impossible for a person to remain with human faculties, let alone realize a renewal and development. The backwardness of the Muslim countries is due to the continuation of feudal and tribal systems and lack of education, and values like democracy, human rights, spread of education across society, economic prosperity, equality in production, the institutionalization of consumption and income in a way that prevents class formation, the supremacy of law and justice have never been fully realized in Islamic societies (Gulen, 2004. p.240).

Therefore, the problems the Muslim societies face today are much more numerous. These problems include: (1).economic backwardness; (2.) agrarian, unmechanized economies; (4).peasant poverty; (5).bad roads and insufficient railway track; (6).lack of a middle class; (7). lack of adequate numbers of trained bureaucrats; (8).widespread illiteracy; (9). lack of experience, or restricted experience with parliamentary politics and participation in any kind of government; (10). lack of investment capital. Moreover, Muslim states have either multi-ethnic/national populations or/and significant ethnic/national minorities whose loyalties belong to, or lean toward other national states. This state of affairs deepens the general feeling of insecurity of Muslims. The above mentioned fears were intensified by the general, international insecurity, especially since 9/11, which makes these problems more threatening than they would have been otherwise.

The fundamentalist approach is not solution to these problems in Muslim states and Muslim citizens of the West. First of all, fundamentalism is not a true choice simply because Muslim cannot act out of ideological or political partisanship (Gulen, 2000. p.5). The Qur'an inspires the dialogue and forbids killing by stating that killing a single innocent individual is like killing all of humanity (Sura *Al-Ma'ida*, 32). It comes from extremism which is an unwillingness to accept any viewpoint but one's own. The Prophet Muhammad specifically stated, "Do not go to the extreme in your religion." Extreme ideas are not violent in themselves but they do on occasion lead to violent acts. The Qur'an also encourages humans to live in harmony and diversity because it is a part of His creation of the difference of languages and colors (Sura *Al-Rum*, verse 22).

Conclusion

Security is a question about the threats and risks. The traditional concept of security once focused on military threats to states, but now it has a broader meaning and include economic, political, social and environmental changes, not only to states, but also to societies and individuals. Security as a multidimensional and multilevel concept involves five main sectors, which are the military security sector, the environmental sector, the economic sector, the societal sector and the political sector.

Thus, the question of fundamentalism and how to solve the causes which are manipulated become one of the important security problems in the West. From this perspective, Muslim population of the West are now accepted in terms of security threats to economy, culture, and society; therefore, has become a target of tension and come under constant scrutiny. The Muslim immigrants do not have an adequate access to the society. Instead of improving the social and political climate for immigrants in order to reduce the tension, national governments are tightening security and the closing of borders or shrink the access to better jobs and education to immigrants and refugees.

The Western and Muslim societies project the negative aspects of themselves on each other. Instead of raising the differences and increasing the similarities, both sides differentiate the self from the other so that the other is systematically debased because without such debasement of the other in the memory of experiences the self identifies itself, otherwise, the self feels “lost,” “indistinct,” “hazy” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 187). This kind of debasement of the other is explained with fear and desire. By demonizing the other, the self becomes sufficiently sacralized (Kinnvall, 2004).

Demonizing the other not solution to this dimension of security issue in the West. It comes from extremism which is an unwillingness to accept any viewpoint but one's own. The Western civilization as a global civilization must be functional and familiar at the local level but at the same time, dynamically engage, foster other identities and allow Muslims to put down deep roots and make lasting contributions. That requires to treat prejudice and bias against Islam and Muslims first and a state-controlled secularist fear of religion. This will create a mutual trust and respect and will lead to harmony in diversity.

REFERENCES AND NOTES:

- Ahmed, A.S. & Donnon, H. (1994) *Islam, Globalisation and Identity*, London: Routledge.
Ahmed, A. (2002). Ibn Khaldun. *Middle East Journal*. 56 (1), pp. 20-45
Al-Qaradawi, A. Y. (n.d). Secularism” From Al-Hulul al Mustawradah wa Kayfa Jaat `alaa Ummatina (“How the Imported Solutions Disastrously Affected Our Ummah”).
Retrieved from <http://www.islaam.com/Article.aspx?id=117>

- Al-Qaradawi, A. Y. (1981). "The Awakening of Muslim Youth Is a Salutary Phenomenon to be Guided, Not Resisted," in *al-Ummah Magazine*
- Al-Qaradawi, A. Y. (1992). *Economic Security in Islam*, New Delhi: Islamic Book Service.
- Al-Na'im, A.A. (1994). Towards an Islamic Reformation: Islamic Law in History and Society Today. In N.Othman (Ed.) *Shari'a Law and the Modern Nation-State: A Malaysian Symposium*. Kuala Lumpur.
- Al-Na'im, A.A. (1999). Political Islam in National Politics and International Relations. In Berger, Peter L. (Ed.) *The Desecularization of the World*. Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Centre.
- Armstrong , K. (2001). *The Battle for God*. New York
- Bin-Ladin, U. (2002). Jihad against Jews and crusaders. Cited in J. Prados (Ed.). *America confronts terrorism. Understanding the danger and how to think about it*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 176-178
- Buzan, B. *Discussion of Buzan on security issues*, Retrieved from http://www.dfaid-maeci.gc.ca/cip-pic/current_discussions/buzan-en.asp;
- Buzan, B. (2005). The security dynamics of a 1 + 4 world. In Aydinli, E. & Rosenau, J.N (Eds.) *Paradigms in transition: globalization, security and the nation state*. SUNY Press, pp. 177-197.
- Ghanuchi, S. R.(2003). "Islamic Movements: Self-Criticism and Reconsideration", available at: www.muslimaat.com
- Huysmans, J. (1998). "Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier." *European Journal of International Relations*, (Vol. 4, No. 2), pp. 226-255.
- Hyde-Price, A. (1996). *The International Politics of East Central Europe*, Manchester University Press
- Isgandarova, N. (2006). *The Search for Security in the South Caucasus: NATO's Role in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline*, Insitute of European and Russian Studies, MA Thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa
- Juergensmeyer, M. (1992). Sacrifice and cosmic war, in: Mark Juergensmeyer (ed.), *Violence and the Sacred in the World*, London: Frank Cass, pp. 101-117
- Kinnvall, C. (2004). Globalization and religious nationalism: Self, identity, and the search for ontological security. *Political Psychology*, 25, 741–767.
- Kristeva, J., (1991). *Strangers to Ourselves*, (transl. by L.S.Roudiez), New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lapidus, I. M. (1998). "Islam, Gender, and Social Change", *ORBIS*, (Fall, Vol. 4, No.4), pp.619-623.
- Lawrence, B. (1998). *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Lewis, B. (1990). The Roots of Muslim Rage. *The Atlantic Monthly*; 266 (3), 47-60.
- Mazarr, M.J. (2004, June and July). The Psychological Sources of Islamic Terrorism: Alienation and Identity in the Arab World. *Policy Review*, pp. 39-60
- Murer, J.S. (1999). Challenging Expectations: A Comparative Study of the Communist Successor Parties of Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. In Ishiyama, J. (Ed.). *Communist Successor Parties in Post-Communist Politics*, Nova Science Publishers, 179-221.
- Norton, A. (1988). *Reflections on Political Identity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press
- Rashid, T. (2007). Secular State, Citizenship and the Matrix of Globalized Religious Identity. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 6 (1&2), 157-173
- Rubenstein, R. L. (2005). Religion and the Clash of Civilizations. *World and I*, 20 (2).
- Volkman, V.D. (1997). *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism*. New York

*Summary***IDENTITY AND FUNDAMENTALISM AS SECURITY CONCERNS
IN THE WEST***Nazila Isgandarova**(Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada)*

The author argues that the Western countries choose to fight fundamentalism using the military tools, which may seem successfully in terms of weakening terrorists and their organization, but not necessarily fundamentalism. The military intervention does not help to reduce fundamentalism. It should be treated but not through accepting the problem as resulting from the confrontation of cultures but building mutual trust and respect.