ARAŞTIRMA

IS "ISLAMİC FUNDAMENTALİSM" POSSİBLE?

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Abstract

Fundamentalism is the religious Protestant movement that developed upon the spreading of the "millennium" belief, which belongs to the Christian theology, in the USA towards the end of 19th century. Nowadays the word "fundamentalism" is used, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, to refer to Islam as an equivalent of intolerance, pro-violence and fanaticism. This propaganda is so great that recognition of Islam by a Muslim raises the risk for him to be qualified as fundamentalist. In this essay, we will interrogate whether it is possible or not to establish a relation between fundamentalism, which is a western phenomenon, and Islam by examining historical and cultural background of the both.

Keywords: Fundamentalism, Christianity, Islam, Fanaticism, Radicalism.

İslami Fundamentalizm Mümkün Müdür?
Öz

Fundamentalizm, Hıristiyan teolojisine ait "bin yıl" inanışının ABD'de 19. Yüzyıl sonlarında yaygınlaşmasıyla birlikte gelişen dini, Protestan hareketidir. Günümüzde fundamentalizm ifadesi, Batılı ve Batı yanlısı medya organlarında, bazen gizli bazen de açık çirkin, hoşgörüsüz, şiddet yanlısı ve fanatiklikle eş anlamlı olarak İslam'ı anlatmak için kullanılmaktadır. O kadar ki bir Müslümanın Müslüman olduğunu kabul etmesi fundamentalist diye nitelendirilme tehlikesini de beraberinde getirmektedir. Bu yazıda biz, tarihsel ve kültürel arka planına bakmak kaydıyla Batılı bir fenomen olan fundamentalizm ile İslam arasında bir münasebetin kurulup kurulamayacağını irdeleyeceğiz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Fundamentalizm, Hristiyanlık, İslam, Fanatizm, Radikalizm.

Ignoring the historical and cultural background while explaining any kind of "ism" (ideology), be it political, social or economic makes it impossible not only to have sufficient and correct information about it but also to adopt it to an environment completely different from the one where such an "ism" was born. In this essay, we will interrogate whether it is possible or not to establish a relation between *fundamentalism*, which is a western phenomenon and *Islam* by examining historical and cultural background of the both.

Fundamentalism is the religious *Protestant* movement that developed upon the spreading of the "*millennium*" belief, which belongs to the Christian theology, in the USA towards the end of 19th century. According to the book of Daniel of the "*Old Testament*" (chapter 2), the endless sovereignty of God would come after the four kingdoms symbolized by gold, silver, bronze, and iron-steel alloy. *Millennium* belief indicated the period between the four kingdoms and the sovereignty of God. According to the dream of *Johannes* told in the Book of Revelation of the *New Testament* (chapter 20), an angel descending from the sky would tie up the *Devil* and would keep him in the hell for *a thousand years*; those who died for the *Christianity* would come to revival and reign for *a thousand years* with *Jesus*..." According to another version of the story, when the evil reigned the world, *Jesus* would come to world for the second time and with his second coming, a period of truth of a thousand years would come to the world. Following this period of a thousand years, the dead would come to revival and the final verdict would be realized.[1]

Fundamentalism gained strength as a reaction to the modern tendencies in religious and non-religious culture at the beginning of the 20th century. When the general social dissatisfaction felt throughout the country as a result of *modernity* was added to the concerns of some Protestant leaders about the future of the *USA*, the "*millennium*" philosophy spread to large masses of the society. The partisans of the millennium belief laid the foundation of the platform upon which their movement would be based by establishing an organization called *World Christian Union* in *1919*. The principal thought that constituted the conceptual framework of this movement was to fight against *modernism* and all kinds of corruptions related to it.[2]

The public use of the term *fundamentalism* became widespread owing to a periodical called "*The Fundamentals*", which consisted of 90 articles written by

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[1] Encyclopedia Ana Britanica, V. 4, entry "bin yıl".
[2] Encyclopedia Ana Britanica, V. 9, entry "fundamentalizm".

Protestant theologians who refused all kinds of reconciliation with *modernism*. *"The Fundamentals"* was distributed free of charge to more than three million people. The basic principles of *fundamentalism*, which expresses both a reaction to the results of *modernity* and a refusal of the *Catholic* tradition, are: *1-* Absolute infallibleness of the *Bible* and the adoption of the self-evident meaning of it as it is. 2- The belief that *Jesus* will come to revival and return to the world (*millennium doctrine*). 3- The mission to communicate the religion to those who no more obey its rules because of the influence of *modernity* or those whose who have not been a part of the "*credo*" yet.

Fundamentalism became very popular by acquiring a controversial meaning with the historical "*Scoppes Trial*" at which a biology teacher in the state, *J. T. Scoppes* was judged on July, 1925 since he violated the law, by teaching the "*theory of revolution*", issued by *Tennessee State Assembly* of the *USA* on *March, 1925* which banned the teaching of any kind of thoughts contradicting the theory of creation cited in the *Bible*. The economic depression of *1929*, which spread all over the *USA*, increased the interest in *fundamentalism* to its pick. According to *fundamentalists*, "the great depression was a punishment given by God to America since it changed its religion; and also a sign marking the imminent return of *Jesus*. " The way to get rid of the depression was the return to the *Bible*.

After the *World War II*, *fundamentalism* has acquired a political identity. This identity was so remarkable that *fundamentalist*, who cooperated with extreme right, decided on politics during twenty years following the war. The most important reason for this was the replacement of the reaction to the *theory of revolution* of the *1920s* with the reaction to the danger of *communism*. Another important reason for the orientation towards the politics was the belief that the society could be Christianized more easily "*from the top to the bottom*".

Although *fundamentalism* acquired a political identity after the *World War II*, it is not correct to identify it with *radicalism*. That's because *fundamentalism* is, in fact, a religious phenomenon while *radicalism* is a political phenomenon that demands the radical change of the whole or a part of the social-political order, and that adopts violence rather than reformism for the change.[3] The description of *fundamentalism* by western and pro-western media organs through expressions such as ugly, intolerant, pro-violence, not recognizing right to life for the opposed etc. is because of confusing it erroneously with *radicalism*.

1970s and *1980s* are the years when *communism* is no more a danger for *fundamentalists*, and *secular humanism* is seen as the main danger. For them,

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[3] Encyclopedia Ana Britanica, V. 18. , entry "radikal".

the factor underlying the problems of humanity had been diagnosed, and this was **secular humanism**. In those years, **fundamentalists** were oriented to the field of education by quitting, although partially, the politics. According to them, fight must be made in the field where values are produced in order to ensure an orientation to religion to solve the problems, and that field was **education**.[4]

As it will be understood from what has already been said, **fundamentalism**, which has its source in the **Christian** theology, is in fact a movement of return to religion that came to being as a reaction to the results of a project proper to the western world,[5] that is- of modernism. Would it be a correct deduction to confine fundamentalism only to the western world and **Christian** theology by looking at its manifestations? Isn't it possible to attribute the same thing to the **Islamic** world and theology? In my opinion, there are two different aspects to answer this question. The first one is that the answer is related to the tendencies of modernization of non-western civilizations- that is of Islamic world, since it is the result of a project proper to the Western world. The second one is that the answer is related to whether fundamentalism may have its source in Islam (in the Koran), since it is a religious, theological element.

Before getting to answer the question, it would be convenient to say the basic qualities of **modernism**, which is the main reason of issue of **fundamentalism**, and constitutes the background of it. Modernism expresses the systematic form of organization consisting of **capitalist** production and **state-nation**, which was initiated by **Renaissance, Reform** and **Enlightenment** movements in Europe and which influenced the whole world. This social reality has three dimensions that are economic, social and cultural. Therefore it is necessary to refer to the explanation of these three dimensions in order to understand the results of modernism.

Capitalism is a kind of social formation containing *"rational capital accounting"*, *"freedom of market"*, *"rational technology"*, *"accountable law"*, *"free labor"*, *"commercialization of economic life"*, *"psychological estrangement"*, *"individualistic family system"*, and *"discovery of the magic of the world"*.[6] The framework needed for the ideology of the **capitalist** world was provided by the **philosophy of Enlightenment**. This philosophy was based on a mechanist, materialistic tradition having its basis as one-sided determinism. The most important quality of it was the belief that the progress in science and technology determined all fields of social life. Science of the **capitalist** society has never surpassed this rough materialism, since it is the basic pre-condition of the estranging production that lays the basis

4 Gilles Kepel, Tanrı'nın İntikamı, tr. S. Kırmız, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları. , 1992, pp. 133-164.
5 Anthony Giddens, Modernliğin Sonuçları, tr. E. Kuşdil, İstanbul, Ayrıntı Yay. , 1994, p. 156.
6 Alan Macfarlane, Kapitalizm Kültürü, tr. R. H. Kır, İstanbul, Ayrıntı Yay. , 1993, p. 264.

of capitalist exploitation. The obligatory result of this is the dominance of *material-value*.[7] The generalization of the *material-value* resulted in the homogenization of cultural values by becoming dependant on the *material-value* -that is in the homogenization of culture. Homogenization is the inevitable result of *capitalist* content, but not of the progress of forces of production. That's because capitalist life requires the dominance of uniformity.[8]

Putting the *capitalist* society upon material bases somewhat caused metaphysics to be driven out of the social life. In fact, capitalist ideology doesn't eliminate the *metaphysical* longing; -that is the religion- of man. But it adapts it to the new world. In other words, it excludes it from the field legitimized by the social order.[9] In that way, a *laic-secular* society is formed. It is not so much possible to claim that *laic-secular* society, formed by capitalist production relations, is the concretized form of happiness. The reduction of human relations to production relations has driven people to depression rather than make them happy, since the new society has become a society in which exploitation and repressions are legitimized through manipulations and, the individual has been left all alone without any support in the mass.

For the development of *capitalism*, it is obligatory not only to centralize political system but also to grant autonomy to economy. If economy remains in the hands of *patriarchal* power, capitalism cannot develop. It is as a result of this obligation that *mercantilism* was transformed into industrial capitalism and absolute monarchies into *state-nation*. In other words, *state-nation* came to being as a natural result of the increase of horizontal and vertical cooperation between the individuals in the framework of the development of the market mechanism.[10]

As a *state-nation* ideology, *nationalism* is a development caused by the industrial society organization and nations are a result of political adaptations of nationalist ideologies. It is nothing but a legend to define nations as ethnical entities determined by God. Nationalist ideology occasionally transforms the existing cultures into nation and it occasionally creates nation itself and usually eliminates the existing cultures. That is the reality."[11] The basic impasse of nationalist ideologies is that it imposes by force an upper-culture to the lives of the majority of people and, in some cases, of all of them in a society where sub-cultures dominate.[12] It is

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[7] Samir Amin, Avrupa Merkezcilik, tr. M. Sert, İstanbul, Ayrıntı Yay. , 1993, p. 91.
[8] Amin, ibid, p. 139.
[9] Amin, ibid, p. 39.
[10] Amin, ibid, p. 39.
[11] Ernest Gellner, Uluslar ve Ulusçuluk, tr. B. E. Behar – G. G. Özdoğan, İstanbul, İnsan Yay. , 1992, p. 94.
[12] Gellner, ibid, p. 107.

an incorrect thought that nationalism claims to base on folk-culture while forming an upper-culture -that is to protect folk-culture while building an anonymous mass culture.[13] **State-nation** is the protector of upper-culture and of capitalist economic system, which shows that it is not people-based but elite-based adopting a certain political economy.

The design of **modernism**, which recognized slogans of **liberty**, **equality**, and **fraternity** inherited from the **French Revolution of 1789**, followed an opposite way to that of hopes and ideals. Those who claimed that modernism is objective science-based hoped that sciences would enable not only to take nature under control but also to develop the world, the self and ethics, to create equitable constitutions, and even to bring happiness to man. However, with **modernism**, nearly all fields such as science, ethics, law, art, economics etc. were institutionalized and rationalized as autonomous fields; and all these structures were put under the control of special experts and were made far away from life.[14] The impersonal participation to institutional formalization caused corruption in every part of the society and a general dissatisfaction.

Externalization of the human will, which results from the nature of institutionalization and bureaucratization, is the most important feature of modernism. That's the reason why people were arranged in a way to create a mass society. Therefore, people produced by the mass constitute the foundation of permanency of modernism. In **modernity**, the criterion of the acceptability of the individual to the society is the adaptation to institutionalized roles. As a result of this imposition of **modernism**, which is the regulation of life by bureaucracy, people fell into the labyrinth of orders given by the anonymously existing authority.[15]

Under the light of all these considerations, it seems possible to summarize the results of modernism, a project proper to the West, as follows: **Modern** society, which opposes to tradition by nature, eliminated both the individual and the "holly", which protected him from being a singular phenomenon in the name of a new self-producing, self-controlling and self-regulating system.[16] As a requirement of the **capitalist** exploitation order, it put an end to differences by forming a homogenous mass culture; built a centralized, totalitarian political system to protect its acquisition, and it became the guarantor of **authoritarianism**, **elitism**, and **individualism** instead of liberty, equality, and fraternity. **Fundamentalism** came to being in this situation, which the "**millennium**" belief qualified as the period of evil on the

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[13] Gellner, ibid, p. 205.
[14] Madan Sarup. Post-Yapısalcılık ve Post-Modernite. tr. ,A. B. Güçlü, Ankara, Ark Yay. , 1995, p. 172.
[15] Madan Sarup. Post-Yapısalcılık ve Post-Modernite. tr. ,A. B. Güçlü, Ankara, Ark Yay. , 1995, p. 172.
[16] Alain Touraine. Modernliğin Eleştirisi, tr. , Hülya Tufan, İstanbul, Y. K. Y. , 1995,p. 44.

world, as a movement of return to religion for salvation.

As for the relation between **fundamentalism** and **Islam,** nowadays the word "**fundamentalism**" is used, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, to refer to Islam as an equivalent of intolerance, pro-violence and fanaticism. This propaganda is so great that recognition of **Islam** by a Muslim raises the risk for him to be qualified as **fundamentalist**.[17] This is the real meaning attributed to fundamentalism while establishing a relation between **Islam** and **fundamentalism**, and also the real source of problem. Does this approach stem from an insidious hidden intention? The answer to this question is undoubtedly yes. Although **fundamentalism** may have had such an identity in the West, it is nothing but to reduce the phenomena to simple to talk about an "**Islamic fundamentalism**" by observing the events in the Islamic world from **New York**, or **Paris**, and without remembering that fundamentalism is a category born in the **Protestant** world.[18]

As already mentioned, there are two aspects from which one can try to find whether there may be a relation between **Islam** and **fundamentalism:** the first of them is from the aspect of modernization of **Islamic** societies as a cultural concept; the second one is from the aspect whether **fundamentalism** may have its source in Islam (in the **Koran**), since it is a religious phenomenon. It must be expressed in advance that **fundamentalism**, which came to being as a reaction to **modernism** in the form of a movement of return to religion and which defines itself as a movement having broken its relations with a certain tradition, is not a phenomenon specific to the **West**. The same things can be observed in the **Islamic** world as well. However, it would not be correct to identify the movements qualified as fundamentalist in the West with reactionary movements in the **Islamic** world. This is because the movements qualified as **fundamentalist** in the **Islamic** world are political reactions to local **pro-western** powers or to **Western** colonialism rather than protestations of religion. That's what **political Islam** is all about. Political Islam, which finds in **Islam** not only a religion but also an ideology, is both sociologically and philosophically a product of the **modern** world.[19] The most obvious evidence of this is that it is directly aimed at the "**state**". According to **political Islamists**, as a result of taking the control of the state it will be possible both to have science and technology –that is wealth, and to re-islamize the society corrupted by **western** values.

It is certain that a external (or a guided, internal) threat underlies the thought of **political Islam**. That is also the reason why this current came to being in the 19th

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[17] Akbar, S. Ahmed, Post-Modernizm ve İslam, tr, O. Ç. Deniztekin. İstanbul. Cep-Düşün, 1995, p. 28.
[18] Kepel, ibid, p. 9.
[19] Oliver Roy, Siyasal İslamın İflası, tr. C. Akalın, İstanbul, Metis Yay. , 1994, pp. 17-18.

century. The *Islamic* world felt the need to defend itself against a technical, con-queror *Europe* for the first time in the 19th century. This defense was accompanied by interrogation. Why did *Muslim* societies lag behind *Europe*? Among those who searched answer to this question leaded *Cemalettin Efgani, Muhammed Abduh* and *Reşid Rıza*, all of who were representatives of the *Selefiye* School. These rep-resentatives of the *Selefiye* movement are leaders of today's political Islamists. Since the *Selefiye* School attributed the reason of lagging behind *Europe* to the traditional religious understanding, it aimed at opposition to the religious tradition and at a return to religious fundaments (*Koran and Sunnah*), as with early *funda-mentalist* movements observed in the *USA*. But it differed from the movements in the *USA* in that it demanded the right to re-interpret (*ictihad*) the fundaments ra-ther than base on the obvious meaning of them. Another similarity between the early *fundamentalist* movements in the USA and the *Selefiye*School is that the former remained traditional on political area, and the latter did not emphasize on politics.

Today's thought of political Islam is based on the organization *İhvan-ı Müslüm in* founded by *Hasan el-Benna* in *Egypt* in *1928*, and on the organization *Cemaat-ı İs-lami* founded by *Ebu'l Ala el-Mevdudi* in *Pakistan* in *1941*. Basically, *political Islam-ists* adopt *Selefiye*. They demand a return to *Quran* and *Sunnah* as well. Their differ-ence from *Selefiye* is that they are directly opposed to the state. According to them, the islamization of the society would be the product of a social and political action.[20]

Although *political Islam* re-brings to the agenda the point of view of *Selefiye*, which claims that Islam is a universal system in no need to *modernize*, it adapts this model to the "*modern society*" –that is to the society where cultural, political and economic fields become different. This shows that political Islamists consider as a field of activity the modern society that produced them.[21] For example the fact that they express the elements of a modern constitutional law such as *execution, legislation, judiciary, election, convention, parliament* etc. by using terms such as *icra, ifta, kaza, beyat, akid, şu'ra* etc. show that they try to fill the modern forms with the Islamic content, as if these forms were universal.

According to *political Islamists*, the Islamic society is possible only through the politics, but political institutions can operate well only through the virtue of people. As for the virtue, it can exist only when there exists an *Islamic society*.[22] As it is seen, this situation is a vicious circle. How should this circle be overcome? *Islamic state* cannot exist without virtuous people; virtuous people cannot exist without Is-

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[20] Roy, ibid, pp. 55-56.
[21] Roy, ibid, p. 58.
[22] Roy, ibid, p. 89.

lamic state. This problem is an impasse of the political Islam.

When it was understood that the approaches in the **Islamic** world aiming at the State did not give rise to desired results (although the control of state was taken in **Shiite Iran**, no alternative to the **West** has, at least for now, been formed yet), political Islamism was oriented towards a new form in the years **1980**, like fundamentalism, which acquired a political identity in the **USA** after **World War II.** and became far away from politics in the years **1970** and **1980**. Those who made efforts for an islamization **from the top to the bottom** were, from that time on, oriented towards an islamization **from the bottom to the top**. This new approach aims at transforming the society without discussing the state. According to the political Islamism charmed by **modernism**, this new form seems to be farther from **modern** values. In this approach, the target to take the control of the administration has not been given up, but the from-the-top project, which doesn't let discussion of the components of the political, economic and cultural fabric except for oral criticism, was replaced by the program of purification of the future. What was of principal value was, now, purification and moralization of the daily life.

This last point reached by **political Islam** thought do fundamentalist movements in the West reach the same as the one. However, it must be pointed out that political **Islam** has never acquired an ugly, intolerant, pro-violent, and recognizing no right to life to its opponent identity, as it is perceived today in the **USA**. On the contrary, it came to being as a movement of return to Islam and independence in reaction to colonialist **Western** world of the above-mentioned identity and to pro-western local powers. This is undoubtedly both a result and a product of the cultural-political practice created by **modernism**.

As for the relation between **fundamentalism** and **Islam** as a religion, it cannot be provided with an Islamic (**Koranic**) support. There is neither a **Koran**-based "**millennium**" belief nor an understanding that the **Prophet Muhammad** will return similarly to **Jesus Christ**. What's more, it is by no means possible to find a **Koranic** support for a pro-violent, intolerant, not recognizing right to life for the opponent **fundamentalism** with its current meaning.

"You are the most blessed people for the whole world. You order goodness and forbid badness and believe in God"[23] *"There is no compelling in the religion"*[24] *"God doesn't forbid you to do goodness and to treat equitably those who don't fight with you for about religion and who don't displace you, since God appreciates the justice enforcers."*[25] *"Do not attack unjustly, since God doesn't appreciate*

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[23] The holy Quran, 3/110.
[24] The holy Quran,2/256.
[25] The holy Quran, 60/8.

those who attack unjustly."[26]*"We drew a way and a route for each of you. Had he desired, God would have made all of you from the same people..."*[27] *"Had your God desired, all humans on the earth would believe. So will you compel them to be-lieve?"*[28] *"Combat with the believers of the books of revelation, except for the op-pressors, in the best way and tell them: We believed both in our book and in your book."*[29] *" If they turn away from it, you must only warn them; you are not sent as a guardian on them."*[30] *"As long as a nation doesn't change its situation, God doesn't change its situation."*[31] If we are to evaluate the matter in the framework of verses exemplified from the ***Koran***, it will undoubtedly be understood that it is impossible to deduct a pro-violent, intolerant, extremist and not recognizing right to life for the others understanding.

In conclusion, if we go back to the question "***Is Islamic fundamentalism possi-ble***?" we think that it would be correct to express this observation: It is possible to talk about the existence of a fundamentalism in the ***Islamic*** world as in the ***West-ern*** world, which came to being as a result of ***modernism*** and as a movement of return to religion in reaction to ***modernism*** and which looks, little or much like the ***fundamentalism*** in the ***West***. But this is only a ***reaction***, not an ***action*** that is pro-violent, intolerant, not recognizing right to life to its opponent and extremist, as it is mentioned nowadays in the ***Western*** world and by pro-western media organs. As for ***fundamentalism*** both with the above-mentioned meaning and with its other meaning resulting from ***theology***, it doesn't seem possible to find a support for it in the ***Koranic*** meaning.

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[26] The holy Quran, 60/8.
[27] The holy Quran, 5/48.
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