URBAN UPDATE

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Cities and Fundamentalisms

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With the unanticipated resurgence of religious and ethnic loyalties across the world, communities are returning to, reinvigorating, and giving new meaning to religions and their common practices. Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism, among others, are experiencing new influxes of commitments and traditions. These changes have been coupled with the breakdown of order and of state power under the neo-liberal economic paradigm of civil society which have created vacuums in the provision of social services. Religious

Top Row, Left to Right: Salwa Ismail, Mrinalini Rajagopalan, Raka Ray, Blair Ruble, Renu Desai, Nezar AlSayyad. Bottom Row, Left to Right: Omri Elisha, Emily Gottreich, Mona Harb, Mejgan Massoumi.

groups in many countries around the world are increasingly providing those services left unattended to by state bureaucracies. The once sacred divide between church and

state or the confinement of religion to the private sphere is now being vigorously challenged as radical religious groups not only gain ground within sovereign nation-states but in fact forge enduring and powerful transnational connections by expanding their memberships with blind or obedient recruits. Meanwhile, the spread of global terrorism (and the equally brutal measures to contain it) have been inadequately explained either as a "clash of civilizations" or as an irreconcilable rift between Third World traditions and First World modernities. It would, of course, be a grave simplification to view religious orthodoxies or doctrines as the cause of terrorist violence or to deal with fundamentalisms as isolated phenomena, divorced from the various economic, political, and social vectors that shape the contemporary moment of globalization.

In partnership with the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) at the University of California at Berkeley, the Comparative Urban Studies Project hosted a two-day introductory workshop from June 15-16, 2007 titled "Cities

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and Fundamentalisms." This workshop juxtaposed and analyzed the cross-relations between two of important phenomena of our contemporary world: the first is the historic transition of the majority of the world's population from a rural to urban existence and the second is the robust, albeit unexpected, emergence of religious

fundamentalisms in several parts of the world. The systematic transformation of the urban landscape through various strategies of religious fundamentalism has led to the redefinition of minority space in many cities. In turn, urban environments have been seized as the new scale at which contemporary radical religious movements mobilize. Keeping this general context in mind, the "Cities and Fundamentalisms," workshop was arranged around the following key questions: When do certain religious rituals/customs turn into exclusionary practices that ultimately lead to fundamentalist positions? What are the contemporary expressions of these new forms of radical religiosity in the space of the city? In a global landscape increasingly fragmented by religious ideologies and frictions, who claims the right to the city?

In his book, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space,* Don Mitchell has argued that that exclusive cities erode our collective social repertoires and allow the rise of brittle, fearful, and unimaginative spaces, citizens, and societies. This project seeks to better understand the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within cities that are dominated by righteous groups. How are they altering the face of the urban landscape through their claims to the city? What follows are a few defining key points and questions raised throughout the introductory sessions.

The workshop started with an important discussion of the varying definitions of fundamentalism, and a revisiting of the popular uses of the term and dictionary definitions from sources such as the Oxford English Dictionary and the American Heritage Dictionary. Although neither of these is contemporary and also quite different from one another, they are in consensus that fundamentalism may simply be defined as the strict maintenance of orthodox traditional religious beliefs or doctrines. In terms of scholarly investigation, Martin

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E. Marty and Scott Appleby were among the first to recognize the growing interest in fundamentalism in the early 1990s. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences supported their "Fundamentalism Project" which lasted from 1993 to 1998 and involved many scholars and experts. The five-volume publication that resulted from this project argues that there is a family resemblance within fundamentalisms and to a certain extent unites movements within the religious traditions of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. Marty and Appleby also argue that even as fundamentalists react to certain tenets of modernity, they frequently employ modern tools in the technology and devices they use to achieve their goals and attract adherence. In other words, while fundamentalists reject the values that are grounded in modernization, they do so without rejecting the means of modernity itself. Indeed, it might be argued that the essential relation between fundamentalism and modernity is less antagonistic and more transactional. Critics of the Martin and Appleby project have also pressed the possibility that radical religious movements are further motivated by social, ethnic, or nationalistic grievances—elements that need careful study in any investigation of fundamentalisms.

Although fundamentalism is a categorization that has principally been based on religion and religious affiliation, the members of this workshop agreed that the term is very problematic. For instance, the complex nature of various forms of religious expression which often get labeled as 'fundamentalist,' even when active affiliates of the religious group reject the terms themselves. The term itself does not capture the array of meanings associated with it and moreover its usage in popular parlance tends to obfuscate its particular historical origins in nineteenth century Protestant movements in the United States. In sum, the participants found it difficult to ground a single definition of the term; however, there were a few agreements. The group referred to ideologies and movements being classified as fundamentalist not only because they are orthodox, but because they involve the active demonstration of resistance against modernity, secularism, the nation, or the state via the rhetoric of religious recovery. Members also agreed that as opposed to ultra-traditionalist movements which are prefaced on a retreat or disengagement from the public sphere (for example, as espoused by the Amish communities of North America); fundamentalism is accompanied by activist strategies, where the public sphere is used to showcase the engagement of that struggle. Second, fundamentalism has negative political connotations that are not always accurate to the frame of reference, and the traditional definition of the term does not account for the interplay of different forms of religious expression that are connected to issues of class, gender, historical trajectories, etc. The participants finally agreed that, fundamentalism is the hegemony of the majority and only when the majority recognizes that the rights of the minority must be equally attended to and claimed can democracy prevail. What then, does this have to do with cities?

The city has been very important to the formulation of fundamentalism as an ideological framework. Whether fundamentalism is essentially rural or urban does in fact change from place to place.

This project is very specifically called "Cities and Fundamentalisms" and addresses both the urban component and radical religious movements in the plural in order to stress, that cities and fundamentalisms are not monolithic, and that they range in a wide spectrum. The group agreed that there are increasingly different types of cities and different types of fundamentalisms which can help identify urban trends around fundamentalism and vice versa. For example, one modality of investigation that was suggested was the association of each type of fundamentalism with an iconic city based on historical, cultural, or religious importance. A closer examination of the history of fundamentalist movements reveals that events in small towns and sometimes even villages found their most violent repercussions in major cities. For instance, the Gujarat riots that started in 2002 in India, may have originated in the towns of Ayodhya and Godhra, but quickly found their way to larger cities such as Bombay and Ahmedabad. In the case of Kabul, the Taliban and Al Qaeda found their most violent repercussions by strategically targeting cities across the world. A closer examination of these cities as nodes of violent spectacle might help identify particular types of urbanity or an urban imaginary that underlies contemporary fundamentalisms. Furthermore, fundamentalism has always been linked to authority, whether embodied in a single person or manifested in a particular text. Religious texts are often appropriated as historical sources by those who subscribe to the fundamentalism and these documents become the basis of their claims. There is a crucial component of space (urban as well as national), because often times the imposition of fundamentalism on the landscape requires creative articulations that the religious text cannot justify as these are often ambiguous about essentially modern constructions such as the nation-state or the city. Furthermore, the group agreed that

radical religious movements are seeking aggressively to redefine the terms of citizenship in the city and problematize its moral and cultural facets. In essence, fundamentalist religiosity seeks to recalibrate the individual's relationship to the nation, the state, or the city. An underlying concern within the discussions was the variety of ways in which dominant religious groups use exclusionary mechanisms through their claims to righteousness to guard their right to the city and in the process, shape the current landscape of cities. In the process of trying to distinguish themselves, they engage in the practice of including and excluding large portions of the population and controlling access and mobility within urban space.

Other issues that the group discussed had to do with the growing fear of demographically small numbers within societies that have a large religious constituency—a theoretical framework

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that has been advanced by Arjun Appadurai in his book, *Fear of Small Numbers*. For example, in India majority Hindu religious groups view Muslim minorities as a threat to society. Similarly, Shi'a majority groups in Iraq perceive the minority Sunni's as a hazard to peace and security. In societies where the majority is increasingly popular, how can the fear of the minority be explained? Indeed, fundamentalist actions are often justified as a response to a real, perceived, or imagined threat. At some point, all fundamentalisms become defined against one another and are often in response to each other. In the effort to homogenize society

under one radical religious umbrella, resistance, no matter how small, is a threat and difference is unacceptable. The idea that individuals should be uniformly subjugated to one overarching community leaves little room for choice and a lot of room for the surrendering of urban citizenship rights.

The workshop ended with an understanding that fundamentalism is a concept that is much contested and the remaining challenge of this project will be to articulate the precise connections and interface between fundamentalisms and the urban condition. The group and organizers of this project also aim to extend this discussion to the historical intricacies of religious fundamentalism that has been complicated by the current moment. Globalization, religious and ethnic racism, and the "war on terror," have highlighted an interest into the study of radical religious groups but are often pursued under tainted assumptions, misconceptions, and one-dimensional views about them. These complexities demand a richer

analysis and this project hopes to expand the discussion to illuminate the disjunctures within the larger urban condition.

Our second gathering will take shape as an interdisciplinary public symposium at the University of California, Berkeley in November of 2007, with local faculty to engage in discussions and enrich our debates. Our third gathering to be held in Europe or the Middle East in 2008 will engage select core group members to present their final research findings and participate as keynote speakers as part of a larger conference supported by a future affiliate. Finally, a concluding publication will distill the research findings, drawing conclusions as policy recommendations. In addition to its uniquely urban perspective, the project will take an interdisciplinary and comparative approach to highlight various case studies. The goal is to make empirical evidence and the latest in scholarship accessible to a broad audience of academics, policymakers, and practitioners. •

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For more information about the Comparative Urban Studies Project, please go to the CUSP website: www.wilsoncenter.org/cusp.

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