

Part 2: Western academic terminologies that describe religious extremism in Islam

Extremism

The extremist is defined in dictionary terms as: *'i. one who advocates or resorts to measures beyond the norm, especially in politics.'*¹ The general meaning is not dissimilar to some of the categories of extremism described in the previous section; however, it is necessary to look at extremism and terms used synonymously in connection with terrorism or political violence in order to derive a more concise understanding of the interchangeability of terminology used in this instance.²

Radicalisation

In this vein the term *'radicalisation'* has been replaced with a more descriptive connotation – violent extremism – in an effort to encapsulate the precursory stage of terrorism. Some researchers attempt to pinpoint an exact period as to when radicalisation, on the scale witnessed today in the Muslim world, emerged. Boukhars points to 1967 as a definitive date upon which:

*"The basic ideology of radical Islam turned into a powerful extra-political force....on the seventh day of the Six Day War."*³

He charts the development of *'rigorous ideological indoctrination'* of mujahedeen over this period suggesting that the religious and military impetus further fuelled this process of radicalisation.⁴ Another clearer example of this term being used to denote extremism and/or terrorism can be seen in the 2007 NYPD report under the section entitled *'Radicalization: Western Style'*:

*"Terrorism is the ultimate consequence of the radicalization process...The progression of searching, finding, adopting, nurturing, and developing this extreme belief system to the point where it acts as a catalyst for a terrorist act defines the process of radicalization."*⁵

The report goes on to assert that radicalisation is largely driven by the *"Jihadi-Salafi"* ideology.⁶ Salafism as a possible precursor to violent extremism/terrorism shall be

¹ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 3rd edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston New York, 1996

² Seminar Report, Aberystwyth University, Department of Politics, Centre For The Study of 'Radicalisation' & Contemporary Political Violence: 'The Politics Of Radicalisation: Reclaiming The Debate And Reclaiming The Language' 18th October 2007.

³ Boukhars, A: 'The Challenge of Terrorism and Religious Extremism in Jordan' Strategic Insights, Volume V, Issue 4 (April 2006), pps1-2

⁴ Ibid

⁵ New York Police Department Intelligence Division: 'Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat', May 2007, p.16

⁶ Ibid, p.16

examined in more detail at a later stage of this book; however, it is important to highlight another common misuse of terminology and incorrect 'coupling' of phrases at this juncture that suggest a lack of academic rigour towards understanding Islam and related terminology/lexicology. Other terms such as 'Islamic Terrorism' and 'Muslim Terrorists/Fundamentalists', the latter being an obvious connotation to violent extremists, require 'de-coupling'. Terminologies such as 'terrorism' and 'radicalisation' could perhaps, when particular contexts dictate, be replaced by alternative references to 'politicisation' and 'realisation'.⁷ The requirement of reclassifying terminology that relates to violent extremism under the guise of the Islamic faith continues to gather momentum; however, this is progressing slowly against the tide of academic and political discourse that have since become influenced by a prevailing Islamophobic narrative facilitated by media. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), when acknowledging the challenges faced with the misapplication of terminology, observed that:

*"Policy discourses in many Western countries frequently describe the new problems of transnational political violence at least in part in terms of 'radicalisation' among Muslim groups in different parts of the world. 'Radicalisation' has become an important frame in the coverage of extremism and terrorism in many countries, in print and broadcast media, in mainstream and more specialised outlets. This initiative will focus on the real and pressing questions that the term is employed to address, while also interrogating these uses of the term 'radicalisation'."*⁸

An increasing number of conferences are also addressing the way in which existing terminologies are used to address these challenges on the basis of a 'one fits all' type of approach. Peter Neuman echoed this sentiment more than 10 years ago in his report on the First International Conference on Radicalisation and Political Violence, convened in London in January 2008:

"The idea of radicalisation is a relatively recent one. As late as the early 2000's, hardly any reference to radicalisation could be found in academic literature on terrorism and political violence. The term was used casually, but little was done to systematically develop it into a conceptual tool through which to understand the process that may lead individuals to support violent extremism. Even now, the term continues to lack definition.... Some critics have voiced their concern that the idea

⁷ Seminar Report, Aberystwyth University, Department of Politics, Centre For The Study of 'Radicalisation' & Contemporary Political Violence: 'The Politics Of Radicalisation: Reclaiming The Debate And Reclaiming The Language' 18th October 2007.

⁸ The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC): 'New Security Challenges: 'Radicalisation' and Violence – A Critical Reassessment' 2007, p.1

*of radicalisation could be used to criminalise protest, discredit any form of 'radical thinking' and label political dissent as potentially dangerous."*⁹

Perhaps Fraihi's¹⁰ categorisation of radicalisation is one that can be used as a starting platform to actually define it within the context of the Islamic faith. He discusses three 'forms' that have distinct connotations:

- i. **Radicalisation** as a process whereby an individual's conviction and pursuit of societal changes increases. He remarks about radicalism and radicalisation not necessarily being negative concepts.
- ii. **Radical Islamic Puritanism** is described by Fraihi as a return to a 'pure' Islam that is free from negative influences of society. Again, this should not be considered problematic unless or until the individual seeking this type of Islam becomes intolerant and disrespectful of others, irrespective of their religious or social backgrounds.
- iii. Fraihi describes this form, or category, of radicalisation as being:

*"...visible in the 'ethnicisation' of being a Muslim in the West. Islam as a religion is not of the essence in this case, but being a Muslim and showing solidarity with the Ummah is. 'Ethnicisation' indicates an increasing solidarity with an imaginary community...in which the group's identity is based especially on a negative interpretation of the Other, being the non-Muslim."*¹¹

The emerging theme surrounding debate on defining radicalisation so far as Islam is concerned is possible summed up by Audenart in his paper addressing 'Deradicalisation and the Role of Police Forces':

*"Terrorism is defined by law as a serious crime and subsequently treated as a clear and present danger... Radicalisation and subsequent expression of extreme opinions, on the other hand, are to be considered as an exercise of constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech and/or as an expression of the freedom of religion – and thus to be tolerated."*¹²

⁹ Neuman, P: 'Perspectives on Radicalisation and Political Violence' The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence; Papers from the First International Conference' (ICSR), London 17-18 January 2008, p.3

¹⁰ Fraihi, T: '(De-)Escalating Radicalisation: The Debate within Muslim Immigrant Communities', taken from 'Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe', Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2008, Chapter 11, pp. 135-136

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid, Chapter 12, p.138

Fundamentalism

Unfortunately, present usage of this terminology often overlooks its previous religious association and the connotations attached thereto. As it stands today, both literalism¹³ and/or extremism¹⁴ are often attached to its ultimate meaning. In fact, The Oxford English Dictionary defines fundamentalism as:

*“A religious movement, which originally became active among various Protestant bodies in the United States after the war of 1914-1918, based on strict adherence to certain tenets (e.g. the literal inerrancy of Scripture) held to be fundamental to the Christian faith.”*¹⁵

Lewis acknowledges the subsequent labeling of various Muslim groups as ‘fundamentalist’ or, as the intention appears behind such labeling, extremist. Lewis expounds upon the unfortunate use of the term, referring to its emergence historically in American Protestantism. It was used to designate Protestant churches that differed from mainstream churches.¹⁶ In fact, upon closer examination of the emergence and use of the word ‘fundamentalism’ it becomes clear that it was introduced in the early 20th century (1910 to be precise), with positive connotations by Milton and Lyman Stewart, two devout Christian brothers. They embarked upon a five year programme of sponsoring and distributing a series of pamphlets that addressed the ‘erosion’ of what they and their editors: ‘*considered to be the fundamentals of Protestant Christianity; the inerrancy of the Bible*’ etc.¹⁷ The ‘-ist’ suffix was, according to Ruthven, introduced in 1920 by Curtis Lee Laws, a conservative Baptist editor who declared that Fundamentalists, ‘*were those ready to do battle royal for The Fundamentals*’.¹⁸ Barr suggests there are nine prominent attributes of fundamentalist Christianity that define its ideology and practice, these being:

- i. Belief in the infallibility of the Bible’s Gospels (New Testament) and emphasis that they are unadulterated,
- ii. Literal interpretation of the Gospels and acceptance of them being divinely worded,
- iii. Everything in the Gospels being a foundation for the life of a Christian; It is from this premise that the name ‘fundamentalist’ is established,

¹³ Barr, J: ‘Fundamentalism’ London: SCM Press Ltd. 1981 cited in Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: ‘Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims’ translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, p.161

¹⁴ Roald A S: ‘New Muslims in the European context: The Experience of Scandinavian Converts’ Brill 2004, pps.141, 150-160.

¹⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary, Volume VI, p.267

¹⁶ Lewis, B: ‘The Revolt of Islam: When did the Conflict with the West begin, and how could it end?’ New Yorker, 19th November 2001, p.2

¹⁷ Ruthven, M: ‘Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction’, Oxford University Press, 2007 p.7

¹⁸ Ibid, p.8

- iv. Rejection of modern view points and theories relating to theological studies that are critical of the Gospels,
- v. Rejection of scientific discourse that contradicts the Gospels, such as the theory of evolution,
- vi. Rejection of separating religion and the State,
- vii. Belief in Millennialism; that the world is approaching an end and a war of Armageddon will take place after Jesus returns,
- viii. Acceptance of fundamentalism as the correct ideology and practice for Christianity,
- ix. Based on viii above, the true Christians are, therefore, fundamentalists.¹⁹

The attributes of Christian Fundamentalism mentioned above refer specifically to ideology. For the sake of brevity, a description of methodological approaches and practices that further define this branch of Christianity has been avoided.²⁰

Lexically, fundamentalism means 'the bases or foundations'.²¹ Shupe and Hadden define Fundamentalism by stating it:

*"...is a truly modern phenomenon; modern in the sense that the movement is always seeking original solutions to new, pressing problems. Leaders are not merely constructing more rigid orthodoxies in the name of defending old mythical orthodoxies. In the process of undertaking restoration within contemporary demographic/technological centres, new social orders are actually being promulgated."*²²

Ruthven cites the above as evidence to support his assertion of 'fundamentalisms' being a 'distinctly modern phenomena' and that they actually:

*"...feed on contemporary alienation or anomie by offering solutions to contemporary dilemmas, buttressing the loss of identities sustained by many people, (especially young people) at times of rapid social change."*²³

¹⁹ Barr, J: 'Fundamentalism' London: SCM Press Ltd. 1981 cited in Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: 'Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims' translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, p.161-2

²⁰ It is interesting to note a number of similarities between these tenets and those of Islam. (Refer to page 8 of Chapter 3: British Muslims and Religious Conversion for a description on the fundamental beliefs of Islam.)

²¹ Balabaki, M: Mausooah al-Maurid, vol.4, p.179, cited in Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: 'Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims' translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, p.161

²² Shupe, A and Hadden, J: 'Is There Such a Thing s Global Fundamentalism?' in Shupe, A and Hadden, J.K (eds), 'Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered', New York: Paragon House, 1989.

²³ Ruthven, M: 'Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction', Oxford University Press, 2007 p.125

Earlier in his paper he further supports this definition, in its most general sense, by stating fundamentalism can be described as a religious manifestation of a strategy applied by 'beleaguered believers' in their efforts to preserve their identities in the face of modernity and *secularisation*.²⁴ In attempting to define fundamentalism, Ruthven does, however, acknowledge the difficulties surrounding specific applications of the term. In fact, when shifting the focus of this term to other religions he realises the problems are actually compounded. Citing Jewish fundamentalism as an example, she highlights how the definition is compounded due to fundamentalists of Gush Emunim accepting modernity and its 'divergent' alternatives, as opposed to rejecting it.²⁵ Rejection would have been the expected course of action in line with the predominant definition and understanding of fundamentalism in this instance. Before proceeding on to the next section, it is interesting to note Ruthven's observation and acknowledgement of the fact that the term 'Fundamentalism' now encompasses many types of activity, not all of them religious. He refers to a wing of the Scottish National Party being described by its opponents in Parliament as fundamentalist.²⁶

Islamic Fundamentalism

Usage of this term, especially in its connection with Islam, has risen sharply following the events of September 11th. According to Lawrence, the coining of this particular term originated from H. A. R. Gibb, a prominent Orientalist, in his book initially entitled 'Mohammedanism' (later to be retitled 'Islam').²⁷ Ruthven illustrates the semantic shift in focus of the term 'fundamentalism' as it relates to extremism, sectarianism, doctrinarism and ideological purism today.²⁸ In view of the ambit of this subject, focus is invariably upon 'Islamic' Fundamentalism. Oliveti, while acknowledging the usage of the term in its generality, also observes the other, more specific, connotation applied when referring to Islam:

*"The term 'fundamentalism' as applied to politicized, militant and iconoclastic religion is a misnomer, because Islam as such, and in fact all authentic religions, are fundamentalist in that they pertain to the fundamentals of life and of existence...Nevertheless, the current meaning of the term is clear enough, as are its connotations of militancy, of being highly politicized and of its being something new and antithetical to the orthodox religion."*²⁹

He goes on to describe the root of Islamic fundamentalism stemming from the twentieth century amongst three distinctive movements; two being Sunni and one Shi'a (Wahhabism/Salafism, the Muslim Brotherhood [Ikhwan al Muslimeen] and

²⁴ Ibid, pps.5-6

²⁵ Ibid, p.20

²⁶ Ibid, p.21

²⁷ Lawrence, B: 'Defenders of God', San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 22

²⁹ Oliveti, V: 'Terror's Source: The Ideology of Wahhabi-Salafism and its Consequences', Amadeus Books, 2001, pps. 14,15

'Revolutionary Shi'ism').³⁰ Unfortunately, as is the case with a few literary works that have apparent biases from the outset, Oliveti's observations throughout are either inadequately researched and/or contradictory. The reason for this can be witnessed in the above reference to 'Wahhabism/Salafism' emerging as an Islamic Fundamentalist movement in the twentieth century whilst, discussing 'The Rise of Wahhabism' in the eighteenth century two pages later. Either Islamic Fundamentalism or, more specifically 'Wahabbism', emanated with its alleged founder, Muhammad Abdul Wahhab in the eighteenth century or the twentieth century; it cannot be both. Oliveti, in his attempt to depict Salafism as an extremist movement, then endeavours to show it to be both an old and new phenomena at the same time.³¹ Connotations between fundamentalism and extremism relating to Islam can further be seen in Boukhars' observations about the type of military training received by mujahedeen following the Six Day War of 1967. He refers to such training '*in its most fundamentalist and reactionary manifestations*,'³² suggesting the resultant effect to be one of extremism.³³

Dr. Dekmejian, in his study of extremist tendencies among Muslims, provides 'Indices of Islamic Fundamentalism' in which he provides verbal and behavioral descriptors of individuals who, according to his analysis, move towards fundamentalism. In his description of '*passive*' and '*activist*' fundamentalism he refers to characteristics that are actually common to the vast majority of practicing Muslims today. For example, he refers to regular Mosque attendance, observance of the five obligatory prayers and, specifically for women, the wearing of 'distinctive' clothing as amongst the characteristics of Islamic fundamentalism. The indices list a number of other normative practices that typify the Muslim character; however, the same extreme/fundamentalist inferences are applied.³⁴ Al-Mutairi critiques Dekmejian's study, expounding upon the commonality of the characteristics described and the context in which they are practicable.³⁵ He goes on to identify what he observes as Western perceptions of 'Islamic fundamentalism / extremism' by referring to Pipes' categorisation of Muslims into three distinctive groups; i. Secularists, ii. Reformists and iii. Fundamentalists.³⁶ Pipes' analysis of the third group is that they believe in the obligation of completely applying the Shari'ah when, in reality, all Muslims believe this and endeavour to apply as much of it as is practicable in their daily lives. Interestingly, Pipes' categorisation could possibly accord with the bipolar spectrum of extremism (figure 2) provided at the beginning of

³⁰ Ibid, p.15

³¹ Ibid, pp.14-20

³² Boukhars, A: 'The Challenge of Terrorism and Religious Extremism in Jordan' Strategic Insights, Volume V, Issue 4 (April 2006), pps1-2

³³ It is important to note that the extremism alluded to by Boukhars here, i.e. actual military engagement with a perceived enemy is not, in every instance, to be considered as terrorism; indeed, military excursions are to be viewed on an individual basis to establish if they can be warranted as Jihad by renowned scholars.

³⁴ Dekmejian, H. R: 'Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World', Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1985, pps.54-55

³⁵ Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: 'Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims' translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, pps. 177-182

³⁶ Pipes, D cited in 'Islam and Congress', Al-Mujtama, no. 942, p.41

this chapter with Secularists, occupying the position of the Liberal extreme, Reformists reflecting the *'moderate perspective'* and Fundamentalists, if applying the extremist connotations, adopting the *'fanatical extreme'* position.

Connotations and direct inferences referring to 'Islamic' fundamentalism as equating to extremism or terrorism can, perhaps, be accurately countered in Esposito's observation that:

*"This phenomenon which we call Islamic fundamentalism must not be understood in terms of terrorism. It is far from that."*³⁷

Al Mutairi highlights the important fact that Western reference to 'Islamic fundamentalism' emanates from a preconceived notion related to earlier Christian fundamentalism *'whose adherents are described as being irrational and bigoted.'*³⁸ His conclusion points to the negative attribution of fundamentalism and, by extension, extremism on 'practicing' Muslims and the fact that this has emanated from an altogether different religion and indeed, period in history.³⁹ In support of this, Cable also asserts that the term used, i.e. fundamentalism, was transferred to the Muslim world as "intellectual tools" and was previously formulated to explain phenomena specific to Catholic and Protestant history. His conclusion of this discussion is definitive in that he and his research team did *'not find any justification for this type of transfer'* (i.e. from its usage and negative connotations in Christianity to Islam.)⁴⁰ That said, Ruthven suggests that the *"F-word"* as he refers to it, has long since been removed from its original, Protestant coupling and concludes it can no longer be confined to its original context.⁴¹ He asserts that, if restricted to its original meaning or, coupling (i.e. Christian fundamentalism), the same should be done to terms like 'nationalism' and 'secularization' which also appeared around the same time, prior to their prefixing to political movements or processes in the post-Enlightenment era.⁴² In his conclusions on this far reaching subject, he reflects upon the paradox which currently exists between fundamentalism and postmodernism. He observes the relationship as being paradoxical, *'because far from rejecting absolute ways of speaking truth, fundamentalisms exemplify them.'*⁴³ Postmodernism, on the other hand, as a concept, represents ambiguity that *'reflects the confusion and uncertainty inherent in contemporary life.'*⁴⁴ Ruthven observes the resultant *'compliment'* afforded to religion as a result of postmodernism is

³⁷ Esposito, J cited in 'Islam and Congress', Al-Mujtama, no. 919, p.44

³⁸ Al- Mutairi, Dr. A R M L: 'Religious Extremism in the Lives of Contemporary Muslims' translated by Zarabozo, J M M, Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001, pps. 171-182.

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Cable, G:'Al-Nabi wa al-Firoon', pp.231-232

⁴¹ Ruthven, M: 'Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction', Oxford University Press, 2007 p.5

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid, p.122

⁴⁴ Haynes, J: 'Religion, Secularization, and Politics: A Postmodern Conspectus', Third World Quarterly, 18(4), 1997

'back-handed and treacherous' due to the conflicting ideals.⁴⁵ His observation necessitates a more detailed and insightful view of Islamic history insofar as it relates to the origins of extremism and this is what shall be examined in the next section.

⁴⁵ Ruthven, M: 'Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction', Oxford University Press, 2007 p.122