

Fundamentalism in Multicultural Societies - a Challenge for Political Education

Islamic fundamentalism is not only an international challenge (Marty /Appleby 1996), but has long since become reality within Europe and within Germany. But what does this mean for the development of multicultural societies? Is Huntington right to fear a clash of cultures, which he sees as a threat not only between large cultural circles, but which he fears first and foremost as civil war in multicultural America? Bassam Tibi (1996) goes along with Huntington's culturally pessimistic argument and warns of violent conflicts with fundamentalist Muslims within Europe. A new study by Wilhelm Heitmeyer and colleagues (1997) on the development of fundamentalist positions among young Turks in Germany seems to begin with to reinforce these fears.

My argument is divided into four steps:

1. A summary of important results from the study on fundamentalism in Germany.
2. A discussion of some of the reasons for this fundamentalism.
3. An explanation of possible consequences for multicultural society.
4. The development of a suggestion as to how political education can react to this challenge.

1. Fundamentalism among young Turks in Germany

Around 2.5 million Turks currently live in Germany, 455 000 of these are pupils attending German schools. In 1995 a research team led by Wilhelm Heitmeyer (1997) asked 1200 Turkish schoolchildren at different types of school in North Rhine-Westphalia about their attitude to Islam and to their life in Germany. Almost 80% of the schoolchildren questioned were born in Germany.

49.1% agreed with the statement: "You should organize your life according to the Koran. You should reject reforms and the modernization of belief and stand up for a divine order."(249)

50.2% agreed with the statement: "Even if you live here, you shouldn't adapt too strongly to the western way of life, but rather be guided by the teachings of Islam."(250)

55.9% were in agreement with the statement: "Every believer must know that other nation's religions are futile and false and that their adherents are non-believers. Islam is the only orthodox religion."(250)

"If it serves the Islamic community", 35.9% are "prepared to assert themselves (myself) with physical violence against non-believers."(276)

23.2% consider the statement appropriate that "If someone fights against Islam, they should be killed".(277)

It is more than a private rehabilitation of Islam which manifests itself in these answers. In them fundamentalist positions are expressed unambiguously. Religious reforms are rejected, those with differing beliefs become non-believers, and if need be the interests of Islam are to be asserted with violence.

More than two thirds of those questioned affirmed the statement: "We could never feel like Germans because we don't belong there" (178). Almost two thirds of the young people were in favour of "greater consideration of their own identity as a reaction to xenophobic events" (174). Just as many saw a direct link between the Solingen murders and reflection "on our national and religious traditions". More than two thirds acknowledged the need for self-protection and more than a third even spoke in favour of being armed (174).

In keeping with these positions, 65% favoured a "strong political hand" (273) and felt that they were represented by Islamic or Islamic-nationalist groups in the Federal Republic such as Milli Görüs or the Grauen Wölfen ('Grey Wolves') (276).

Finally, the fact that no less than 36.9% agreed with the view that "young people in Germany have too much freedom", underlines the difficulties which these young Turks have with the opportunities and risks of a modern society (274).

2. Where does fundamentalism come from?

What is it within German society which encourages the flight from modernity? What makes the flight from modernity so attractive to young Turks to whose parents and grandparents precisely the modern German society once seemed a possible refuge in the flight from premodern parts of Turkish society?

My thesis is that the immigrants have become subject to a particular integration stress and that they feel uprooted and less secure, so that for many fundamentalism can become an appealing means of identity. Life in a modern society demands a split in identity from young Turks. On the one hand they have still grown up in traditional family structures and for the most part still live within the family; on the other hand they are confronted by the possibilities and risks of a social environment in which the orientational forces of tradition and the cohesive force of the family have continued to lose validity. The balancing act between cultures creates a particular tension. With the concept of **integration stress** (Fritzsche 1998) I would like to emphasize that the susceptibility to fundamentalism is encouraged by the conjunction of two conditions: through the increasing social barriers of a receptive society on one side, and the decreasing power of subjective resources in coming to terms with an increasingly hostile environment on the other. Fundamentalism preaches to people what they are worth, where they belong, how they should behave, and what they can expect as a future salvation. In this sense fundamentalism proves to be an efficient resource for the reduction of integration stress.

A part of fundamentalism is thus a fundamentalism brought about by German society itself, a consequence of increasingly difficult integration. The barriers to integration have climbed on three levels:

- Competitive pressure in the labour market is becoming ever keener and Turks born in Germany without a German passport must now also compete with young evacuees, with a German passport, who have only been living in Germany for a short period of time. The increasing burdens in the labour market are reinforced by experience of discrimination.
- Efforts towards cultural integration are made more difficult or blocked by personal or collective experience of xenophobia.
- Civic political integration is hindered by the restricted allocation of German citizenship.

One part of fundamentalism may however also be interpreted as imported fundamentalism. What's meant here are the increased provision of Koran schools, Islamic organizations and altered political and cultural movements and conflicts in Turkey. All in all the influence of the "fundamentalism debate" being waged internationally and nationally has also reinforced the supply side considerably.

3. What effects can derive from these attitudes, valuations, and views of young Turks?

I would like to emphasize two possible dangers: The first danger consists in that the fundamentalism of Turkish schoolchildren is a permanent matter and not a passing problem. Of course it would be in some way reassuring if the observed fundamentalism could be interpreted as young people's extreme passage on the way to their identity. From this viewpoint fundamentalism would be caused less by societal barriers to integration than by young people's temporary yearning

for strong and clear source of identity. We don't (yet) know how the turn to fundamentalism is split between young people and adults, how it differs between those who were born here and those who have only been living here a few years, nor do we know what dynamics this fundamentalism has amongst young Turks. Heitmeyer et. al., however, warn even now against seeing a phenomenon amongst young people alone in these findings. It should be borne in mind that a politically serious result arises through the possible interplay between fundamentalist and nationalist propositions and organizations and the initial swing among young people, a result which then disproves the thesis of "fundamentalism as a youthful transgression".

I see another danger of this fundamentalist orientation in its ability to be instrumentalized. Not only, say, by Islamic organizations, but also by the opponents of multicultural society. The results of the study seem to confirm the fears of Huntington and Tibi and could easily serve to justify the perception of Islam as an enemy. They could lead to call for an end to multicultural society, and an end to its overstretched tolerance.

The scenario of a clash and battle between civilizations (Huntington) with Islam as the main danger for western culture offers, of course, a new political map in times of a great need for orientation. The construction of enemies is still functional for the construction of oneness and for the consolidation of a 'sense of belonging'. Following the self-destruction of communism as the perceived enemy it is obvious that a welcome substitute for the established, but lost perceived enemy should be seen in fundamentalism. Furthermore there are also ancient leftovers of a fear of Islam in western cultures which, by equating Islam with fundamentalism or Islam with violence, revived enemy images can pick up on, which are in turn to fulfil their function in both the international demarcation and xenophobic demarcation towards Muslim immigrants. The findings of the study are the stuff from which perceived enemies are made - here lies a greater danger than in the fundamentalist attitudes themselves.

Some western academics, however, go so far as to invert the argument and deduce from the constructions of the perceived 'Islam' enemy that fundamentalism in general is an invention of western politicians and journalists, or at least that criticism of fundamentalism in general creates the suspicion that they should be perceived as an enemy. What we need, however, is not a positive stereotype of Islam which shuts itself off from the Islam which really exists along with its fundamentalisms. As we must guard against perceiving Islam as an enemy, we should also equally avoid fumbling around in the trap of making an enemy of the image of Islam as an enemy, which prevents us seeing power strategies and human rights violations in fundamentalism.

The warning against the construction of perceived enemies does not result in an plea to give the all clear to the fundamentalist positions identified amongst young Turks. A reflected warning, however, directs itself against two fundamentalisms: against that of the xenophobes as well as against the fundamentalist enemies of modernity. In their structure both fundamentalisms are similar through and through. Common to both is a fear of the Other and the retreat to excessive and immunized collective identities. The danger lies in confrontation between them, which has a tendency to escalate. An ill-considered vote for uncontrolled acceptance can rapidly lead to an increase in defensive mechanisms. These xenophobic attitudes then encourage fundamentalist reactions, which once again become the trigger for reinforced xenophobia.

4. The education challenge of tolerance

The discussions inflamed by Huntington's conflict of cultures thesis and the reactions of the mass media to Heitmeyer's findings about the 'tempting fundamentalism' in Germany make clear the extent to which the disagreements with Islam touch upon our understanding of tolerance.

Islamic fundamentalism with its exclusions, excessive self-elevations and its criticism of human rights damage multicultural civil society just as do the western conceit of supposed superiority and xenophobia. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to talk of the failure of multicultural society in the face

of the current conflicts and to demand an end to tolerance. What has failed is not multicultural society, but an embellished, distorted image of conflict-free multicultural living together. But just as one doesn't sacrifice democracy simply because one must recognize that democracy is constantly challenged by enemies of democracy, multicultural society is not to be sacrificed simply because its enemies expose it to crossfire.

Democracy and multicultural society are, however, dependent on a supporting political culture of tolerance for their existence, a culture which must also constantly find new support through the efforts of political education. It's precisely now that enabling tolerance is assuming increased importance in intercultural learning. Faced by the present conflicts two outlets in the fostering of tolerance should be avoided in equal measure: On the one hand it's important to avoid 'overstretched tolerance' (Bassam Tibi) - this would be tolerance of a type which ignores that fact that the intolerant often only complain of their own toleration so as to be able to do away with general tolerance more easily. On the other hand, it is also important to avoid an 'overstretched intolerance' - this would be an intolerance which stigmatized the intolerant as immutable enemies with the dictum 'the intolerant are not to be tolerated'. So what kind of tolerance do we need? Multiperspective tolerance is a form of tolerance which can help to manage the conflicts in a multicultural society in a civil manner.

I will sum up in six points what multiperspectivity can achieve in the contact with immigrant Muslim minorities:

1. An adoption of the perspective of Muslim minorities can make it clear, which particular orientational function and what power as a source of identity Islam can have in a foreign society. Such an adoption of perspective prerequisites, however, that the citizens in the societal majority have sufficient identity and a secured sense of self-esteem to be able to develop the readiness to get involved with foreign perspectives. Accepting others and allowing differences demands self-assurance first of all so as to bear the insecurity which things foreign and strange cause to begin with.
2. A multiperspective contact with Islam has to make clear the difference of perspectives within Islam. Part of this means explaining that fundamentalism is not identical with Islam, but just one of its movements, and also that fundamentalism cannot be equated with extremism. This perspective belongs to 'looking at the other side' just as does the perception of the intolerance of fundamentalism. A multiperspective contact with Islam thus includes both a critique of its perception as an enemy and a critique of 'politically correct' and palliative images of friendship.
3. A further part of the adoption of a perspective is that one also understands the behaviour of the other side as being a reaction to one's own behaviour. The development of and the trends within Islam - above all within a western, multicultural society - are also the result of the confrontation of the migrants' religion and way of life with the recipient society. In this is founded a susceptibility to fundamentalism, which elects for the escape from insecurity through the exclusion of others and the construction of its own superiority. The dictum 'the intolerant are not to be tolerated' should therefore be differentiated. For it is important to examine the extent to which fundamentalist intolerance is a reaction to a society in which many forces and tendencies are far more intolerant and exclusive of migrants than the claim to be a tolerant society promises.
4. Part of the adoption of a perspective is then perceiving the other side's intolerance as not being something static, but as something changeable, and attempting to support this change through one's own modes of behaviour. Avoiding demarcations of the sort that encourage susceptibility to fundamentalism should at least be attempted.
5. The task of multiperspective education would be to enable the adoption of reciprocal perspectives:
 - a. The importance of Islam to Muslim immigrants should become understandable to non-Muslims.

b. It should become understandable to non-Muslims that fundamentalist positions are also to be apprehended as a possible reaction to denied chances of integration. It is improvements in integration which will first open up the prospect that modernity and Islam need not be interpreted as irreconcilable opposites.

c. In the same way, however, an adoption of perspective must be demanded from Muslim immigrants. Although xenophobia is not only dependent on the behaviour of migrants, the conduct of Muslim migrants can nonetheless influence the extent and dynamics of the xenophobia from which Muslims want to protect themselves.

6. The ability to adopt perspectives cannot, however, be made the responsibility of the individual alone. It must still be born in mind that the constellation of xenophobes and fundamentalists, which is prone to escalation, is embedded in the political and cultural context of a recipient society. The way in which reciprocal perception takes place is always also influenced by, and open to the influence of understandings and interpretations on offer in public circulation. In many cases social stress is a stress produced by an opinion-leader, and fears of excessive foreignness thrive only in a climate of public reinforcement. The perception of a reciprocal threat thus depends on the interpretations which are brought into public circulation, and which are amplified by the mass media. The careers of multiethnic conflicts will therefore also depend on the way we talk publicly about the chances and dangers of multicultural society.

Tolerance is not only a consequence of individual competence, but also a result of societal moulding: of the political, social and religious culture of a society. How tolerant the individual can be is also a consequence of the culture of tolerance in the society in which he lives. A consequence of shared and publicly stated ideas and models of orientation within a society, which provide information as to how we want to deal with the multitude and alterity of cultures.

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