Fundamentalisms as Global Social Movements

INTRODUCTION

We ought to be grateful to Grahame Thompson (2006) for taking on the broad subject of the relationship between fundamentalisms and globalizations in this journal. He offers a definition of fundamentalism and then raises several controversial points that he hopes presents fundamentalists from their own perspective. In this article I will review Thompson’s arguments (2006; 2007a; 2007b), and particularly his controversial conclusion that we might need to re-territorialize the world system in order to protect liberal domestic and global orders from the threat of militant fundamentalists. This would be a particularly difficult and costly path, and before we entertain any such options we should be certain that this proposal rests upon solid foundations.

For Thompson, fundamentalism is defined by a militant piety that is ultimately founded on a literal interpretation of the divine word. From this perspective fundamentalisms are understood to be embedded in the structures of modernity, and are not simply responses against it. Most importantly for Thompson, this quest for purity is not a social movement: “…the ultimate cause of man’s undoing and rebellion throughout history is not his external environment and circumstances but his own inward sinful nature which rejects the rule of God and asserts self-rule. Thus, Christian fundamentalism and its Islamic counterpart are thoroughly ‘individualistic’ in their doctrines. They both involved practices of individual conversion and redemption. They are not ‘social’ movements” (Thompson 2007a:34). Thompson argues that if we are to understand the way in which fundamentalists see globalization, and pursue their destinies
as active and purposeful agents in the shaping of globalization, then we must accept what
they say about themselves (Thompson 2007a:20). From such a perspective, fundamentalisms must be accepted as individual-level phenomena.

Thompson notes that primary among the dynamics of fundamentalism is the desire to impose a radical sameness (in opposition to the toleration of significant difference) upon people. In pursuit of this sameness, personal suffering and aggressive violence are necessary strategies (Thompson 2007b:491). This drive to impose sameness, which constitutes fundamentalism’s core challenge to both local and global liberal orders, is not buffered by any desire to secure a specific homeland. Thompson argues that for the core of committed fundamentalists, there is no geographically local community. The most active operatives are practicing an “itinerant and de-territorialized ‘warrior politics’ aimed at establishing a religious ummah on a global scale” (Thompson 2007a:27). In this de-territorialized environment, there exist no boundaries of culture or practice apart from those demanded (or precluded) by the divine word. As anything consistent with the divine word is acceptable, fundamentalism is ‘de-cultured’ and in its own way, radically egalitarian and universal. Fundamentalists abhor boundaries that might slow the spread of their influence, and if ‘home’ exists anywhere, it is on the internet (Thompson 2007a:26).

Thompson is appropriately careful about his claims. He recognizes that fundamentalisms are diverse, and that threats to the liberal order may be overblown. But he wishes to add a third possible policy option to our dependence on the creation of a global cosmopolitanism (which he suggest is insufficient in the face of fundamentalism’s “spirited martial power”), or the unfortunate alternative of endless rounds of repression
To combat fundamentalism’s radical, violence-prone de-territorialization, the world might respond with a project of re-territorialization. The creation of national-states was the product of territorial engineering through the 17th century, liberal changes emerged as a result, and these were solidified (Thompson 2007b). The re-invigoration of the national-state, or ‘re-territorialization’, ought to be considered in response to this latest challenge.

*Globalizations* invited several responses to Thompson’s argument, and he was taken to task on a number of accounts (Hiley 2006; Khondker 2006; Weiss 2006; Reitan 2006). Thompson’s attempt to generalize among fundamentalisms, his vision of religious and secular fundamentalisms being essentially the same, his thoughts on the role of borders, the lack of diversity (especially in Islam), and the idea that fundamentalisms are not social movements, all garner critical comments. In the final entry, Ruth Reitan raises questions about Thompson’s conclusions regarding re-territorialization. This suggestion is of special concern. The idea that we might chose to roll back the increased interaction of global actors is generally thought to be so costly that even if it were possible, it would be untenable. No re-territorialization project should be taken seriously unless the logic that underpins it is solid.

My argument is that Thompson’s analysis is flawed in fundamental ways. One of the most problematic elements is the suggestion that fundamentalisms are individual-level phenomena and not social movements. Thompson draws this conclusion in support of his desire to understand how fundamentalists confronts globalization. His search for the authentic voice of fundamentalists in this regard is to be applauded. Thompson rightly suggests that fundamentalists “…are not just the passive recipients of the globalization
process, but are active agents in shaping that process and its discourses…” and concludes that we ought to accept the definition of fundamentalism that fundamentalists themselves suggest (Thompson 2007a: 20). But reading Thompson’s own analysis might lead to a different conclusion. The interaction between fundamentalism and globalization, as he described it, is clearly co-constitutive, and neither fundamentalists nor the various processes associated with globalization can be considered to be pristine (Thompson 2007a:26). Granting definitional primacy to one is just as synthetic as granting definitional primacy to the other. While accepting self definitions may be useful from a number of perspectives, it cannot provide us with a sufficient sense of the overall processes involved and as a result provides an inadequate foundation upon which to build policy options.

One of the negative consequences in the treatment of fundamentalism as essentially individual is that from such a perspective it might be treated in a manner akin to disease. Individuals ‘get’ fundamentalism and are rendered problematic. The best way to deal with the infection is to keep the contagion at bay. Thompson’s desire for re-territorialization implies that with sufficient isolation the problem ‘cannot happen here’. If only we batten down the national hatches we might avoid the perils of fundamentalism at home.

But if fundamentalisms are understood instead to be social movements, capable of being energized by a variety of social forces, then re-territorialization might stop us from apprehending its nature or engaging relevant social processes. It might also provide a false sense of security to those in areas where such movements are not currently active.
There is little reason to be concerned with the social correlates of fundamentalism if it is a personal choice that only afflicts those in ‘other’ societies.

I contend that fundamentalisms are social in their genesis and nature, and offer a very different definition than the one suggested by Thompson. What we find is a rich history that pre-dates modernity and helps shed light on the variety of social processes that drive fundamentalist impulses. The picture that emerges provides a very different understanding of fundamentalisms, and suggests that any proposed response that is based on a non-social conceptualization might be inherently problematic.

**DEFINING FUNDAMENTALISM**

In contradistinction to Thompson’s efforts, I contend that fundamentalisms may be defined by the following five traits: 1) they are reactive; 2) they search for an authentic past, derived from a golden age, but proving in fact to be a fusion of past and present; 3) they are scriptural (but not literal) in orientation, seeking the elements of correct behavior and keys to the future from its sacred texts; 4) they establish a fundamentalist self-image that is often manifest as anger toward the outside and a sense of calm regarding ones’ place in an unfortunately sullied and imperfect world; and 5) they manifest a set of behaviors that are used to establish the boundaries of the community. These behaviors are often ordained by hierarchical authority and include various levels of engagement between the community of the faithful and outsiders.

*Reactive*

Fundamentalism’s primary definitional element is that it is essentially reactive. It should not be confused with piety, religiosity, orthodoxy or revivalism. It is not a set of pristine beliefs or behaviors, but an explicit response to change. The change in question is often
defined as a move to a more modern social order, though the term ‘modern’ denotes
nothing more than patterns of social interaction that are new. These ‘new’ patterns
include a turning away from old behavioral norms and beliefs, or to an inability to sustain
past practices given new circumstances. They often include the breakdown of traditional
community, and the loss of a sense of belonging that comes with such a breakdown.
They may also include the inability to sustain, or more importantly, pass along a set of
beliefs or norms to the next generation. Hence relations among family members:
generational and gender divisions, reproductive issues, educational norms or child-
rearing techniques are particularly sensitive subjects. Economic changes may encroach
here as well. Interactions that defy traditional forms, perhaps because they are done on
the basis of a logic that goes beyond the ethical or communal, may prove disaffecting.
The inability to preserve one’s status in the face of socio-economic change is one of the
earliest arguments about the rise of fundamentalism.

Contemporary treatments speak of fundamentalisms as responses to modernity,
but it is in no way a function of the contemporary social order and should not be assumed
to have started as a response to recent phenomena. The operant issue is one of
destabilizing change that elicits a desire for a return to a more just or righteous or
authentic community, and these desires are in no way new. McNeill (1993:559) suggests
that such explicitly reactive movements have been present “. . . since the dawn of
prophecy during the first millennium before the Christian era. . .” More specifically, “. .
. since about 7000 BCE, in urban and civilized societies, where inequitable social
relations were always present to offend tender consciences, energetic groups of reformers
have persistently and perpetually sought to remake the world along juster, religiously
sanctioned lines" (McNeill 1993:561). Eisenstadt (1999:260-3) agrees, drawing parallels between pre-Axial Age and Axial Age (500 BCE to 100 CE) fundamentalist movements.

In the modern period, fundamentalisms have been framed as reactions to modernity. Hegel argued that modernity was characterized by four criteria: 1) individualism; 2) the right to be critical and take nothing for granted; 3) autonomy of action; and 4) the right to know oneself without having to rely on explanations grounded in religion (Oberoi 1995:102). A distinctly western project according to Giddens, modernity is a uniquely anti-religious mode of social organization (Oberoi 1995:113). Modern individuals are atomistic and individualistic. They are not defined by their membership in a community. Modernity raises the right of everyone to question all aspects of their environment to the level of a responsibility. It also provides the framework for that interrogation. Rationality and empiricism, not faith and obedience, are to rest at the center of such review. Individuals become responsible for their own actions, and are explicitly relieved of the need to define themselves in light of, as a reflection of, or in the shadow of, any religio-mythical framework. Moderns have no time for the fanciful stories of primitives. While religion may be tolerated as a private activity, its precepts ought no longer be used to structure public life.

Modernity has an ugly side as well. The destruction of community and the demand that existence be questioned leaves individuals without foundations or norms. Modernity is all about anomie. Rationality and planning lead to hubris and a variety of attempts to shape the community. Some planning may be humanely successful, but in the wrong hands there is no limit to the horrors humans will perpetuate on one another in the name of some allegedly superior system of social organization, be it racial, communal or
market-driven. The more we are subjected to self-conscious treatments of the ‘modern’ condition, the more we realize what has been lost. Hence “as post-modernists deconstruct modernism and leave nothing in its wake but anomie and nihilism, a space for fundamentalism is opened” (Eve and Harrold 1992:108).

Hegel’s final criteria, relief from definitions of humanity that place us in the shadow of some superior force, is a direct threat to the foundation of nearly every religious system. Religious practice is pushed into the home or to religious shrines or gathering places as it is delegitimized in public (Bruce 2000:33). But these beliefs and practices are not replaced in the public sphere by any more legitimate or comforting a philosophical base. The more ‘modern’ we become, the more likely we are to simultaneously suffer some sense of loss and search for some meaning or protection. At the same time, religious authorities are decrying their forced removal from the public sphere and blaming the rise in social problems on that absence. Religious authorities are uniquely positioned to offer a superior existence, legitimized by the past and sanctioned by deities, however defined. Thomas (1999:28) suggests that resurgent religious movements “... may represent many different ‘mansions’... but they are being built on the ruins of secular nationalism in the third world, materialistic capitalism in the developed world, and of communism in Europe.”

Re-creation of (the Relevant Elements of) an Authentic Past

Fundamentalists react against the present, but they are not backward looking. Their desires are specifically aimed at creating an acceptable present and future. They seek a more acceptable model of social interaction from their sense of the authentic past, a golden age of belief, community and compliance. This past is conceived of as a world
where the community of the faithful is fully intact, with its members unencumbered in their attempts to organize their lives free from the encroachments of a world of non-believers, and free as well to reproduce their lifestyles in the treatment, education and prospects of their children (Bruce 2000:65). This vision of the past is idealized, but a wholly authentic reproduction of the past is not in fact what fundamentalists seek. Instead fundamentalists want to selectively retrieve from the past that which allows them to recreate the lifestyle elements they believe are important. This stylized past provides a legitimacy to their vision. The ‘golden age’ was golden because we define it as such. It is usually the social outcomes as opposed to the explicit instrumentalities that are identified as important to achieve. Hence innovations are welcome, so long as they take us in the directions desired.

Antoun (2001:118) suggests that fundamentalist movements are “selectively modern” and seek to “control acculturation”. Many movements are happy to adopt contemporary technologies or organizational techniques. Hence the Christian fundamentalists of the US adopt slick television formats for their evangelizing and fundraising both in the US and the third world (Ammerman 1991:34; Randall 1999:54). Moslems side-step repression by disseminating religious sermons on audio tape (Randall 1999:55), and even in the repressive atmosphere of the former USSR they adopted organizational modes that they could argue promoted “... a conception of a “purified” Islam which was consonant with modern social and economic development and which encouraged loyal citizenship and participation in the Soviet Union” (Saroyan 1994:514). Catholics in Communist Poland and Pentecostals in Malawi adopt the popular “youth group” model given that state authorities control all other means of socialization (Mucha
and Zaba 1992:57-65 on Poland; Van Dijk 1999:180-1 on Malawi). In both cases groups are able to avoid further repression by representing themselves as essentially conservative and oriented toward fidelity to the state (Gorlach 1992:49). In Malawi, “... notions of morality, sin and redemption, obedience to leadership and so on...” made it impossible for the government to portray fundamentalists as “... a threat to the nation’s ‘peace, calm, law and order’” (Van Dijk 1999:179). In the realm of adopting technology we might also note the digitization of the 47,000 questions and answers about how one applies Jewish law in the Diaspora that have been cumulating for 1,500 years (Antoun 2001:122). Orthodox Jews who hesitate to interact outside their community take advanced degrees through special distance-learning or video based instructional systems (Antoun 2001:123).

The call of an authentic era, before modern corruptions and free of sinful dealings, provides fundamentalist movements with great legitimacy. The point of gaining legitimacy and adherents, however, is future oriented. Elements of the present that can be of help in moving forward are selectively adopted in a controlled manner (Piscatori 1994:363-5). Fundamentalists can use the image of a golden past without having to surrender modern conveniences or forgo the adoption of useful innovations.

Scripturalism

Most definitions of fundamentalism assume that adherents adopt a scriptural focus that they believe is inerrant, divinely ordained, literally true and unquestionable. The term ‘fundamentalism’ is derived from a set of ‘fundamental principals’ published by Protestant leaders between 1910 and 1915 in the United States (Armstrong 2000:171). These fundamentals included a belief in the literal nature of biblical stories. While such
literalism often seems to rest at the heart of fundamentalisms, there exists a great deal of variation both between and among such movements. By 1923 ‘fundamentalist’ preachers in the US were already divided over the need for interpretation and metaphorical reasoning (Carpenter 1988).

Fundamentalisms are not defined by literality. Instead scripture plays three crucial roles in fundamentalist life. First, scriptures exist to inspire, comfort and transform their reader (Antoun 2001:39). Adherents come to realize that there are powerful forces in the universe that they may become a part of. Scripture explains life’s issues and provides solace to those facing adversity. Prayer is a calming and cleansing act. It is designed to put things in perspective in such a way that individual problems become part of a plan or cycle of existence. This makes individual problems more manageable.

Scripture is also a guide to action. It explains how to introduce preferred behaviors regarding various facets of life into one’s daily routine. Antoun (2001:41) suggests this “traditioning” plays several roles. Believers are urged to follow scriptural guidelines, and accept interpreters of scripture as their leaders. Just as scripture is relevant to daily life, daily life becomes relevant to scripture. Individual behavior matters. Faced with innumerable problems, the human desire for certainty in an uncertain world is reduced from the problems associated with (allegedly) unlimited choices to the much more specific question of how to translate scriptural injunctions into specific actions in any given situation.

Scripture is also a guide to the future. Fundamentalisms may be characterized as social movements that envision an end-state for individuals (as in Buddhism) or an end of days (as in messianic religious traditions). Scripture holds the key to understanding that
future. Ferocious debates over the nature of that end-state have caused major schisms among most religions, including most prominently Christianity and Islam. Along the road to that end-state are a series of signs that are by necessity open to interpretation. Their interpretation, or “proof-texting” is an important attribute of fundamentalisms. Hence World War I was important for North American fundamentalists who saw the Germans as evil not because of any expansionist interests or bellicosity, but because German scholars led the challenge against the divine nature of Christian scripture with their hermeneutic studies (Ammerman 1991:22). Afrikaners saw their ‘Great Trek’ across South Africa reflected in the book of Exodus, and defined themselves as a chosen people (Antoun 2001:64). Great defeats are also proof-texts. The decline of Communism was taken as an important sign for several faiths (Simpson 1992:22). Quranic references to the evils of political parties are used to explain the weakness of various Islamic states and extol the virtues of a very different kind of political system (Antoun 2001:56). As the Six-Day War meant one thing for Jews, it was taken to mean something else for Moslems. Fundamentalists conflate stories of their golden eras with the conditions of the here and now, providing proof of the relevance of their past, a guide to the challenges of their present, and assurances of the good to come in the future.

Fundamentalist Identity

Scripturalism is an orientation to the world that provides specific insights and duties. The result is a fundamentalist identity that takes two parts. First, fundamentalisms are oriented to this world. Marty and Appleby (1993:3) suggest that “Religious fundamentalism has appeared in the 20th century as a tendency, a habit of mind, found within religious communities and paradigmatically embodied in certain representative
individuals and movements. It manifests itself as a strategy, or set of strategies, by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group.” Antoun (2001:xii) adds a specific flavor to that “habit of mind” by defining fundamentalism as “... an orientation to the world, a particular worldview and ethos, and as a movement of protest and outrage...” Fundamentalisms are angry movements, and that anger serves to help define the individual, as well as the community from which that individual derives a sense of identity. Religion has long played a special role in discourses of resistance, and in the mobilization of resources with which to confront what are perceived to be an illegitimate and repressive status quo (Tétreault 2004).

The fundamentalists also see themselves as a ‘select few’, ‘righteous’, ‘chosen’, ‘on the path’, ‘enlightened’, ‘saved’ or ‘born again’. This self image, in contradistinction to that of protest and outrage, is a particularly edifying one. Fundamentalists “...no longer perceive themselves as reeling under the corrosive effects of secular life. On the contrary, they perceive themselves as fighting back, and doing so rather successfully” (Marty and Appleby 1991:ix, citing Heilman and Friedman 1991). This efficacy tempers anger and provides a fundamentalist self-image filled with a sense of purpose and ability which is an excellent palliative for anomie. This identity also proves highly volatile, as is evidenced by the range of behavioral traits manifest by fundamentalists. That behavioral ‘separation’ from the rest of society is the final definitional element to be discussed.

Fundamentalist Behavior Set

Fundamentalists manifest behaviors that separate them from the majority of the population. For the fundamentalist, the world is a place of good and evil, not shades of gray. Their community practices constitute what is good. Boundaries must be built
between their community and the majority (Ammerman 1991:55). Behavioral differentiation may appear in four different contexts, and it must be noted that movements adopt multiple positions over time, and sometimes even simultaneously (Almond, Sivan and Appleby 1995b:425-9; Heilman 1994:175, 192-3). Fundamentalists may simply desire to retreat, renouncing the world as sinful or sullied, and seek their own haven. Even at this level there is engagement. Ultra-Orthodox Jews living in enclaves in the US or Israel guard their communities proactively, warning those who are not members to stay away, and taking direct action against those who break their traditions when traversing what they believe to be their territory (Heilman and Friedman 1991:234-42). But their withdrawal is never complete, as enclaves are often found in the midst of population centers or contested areas. Hence even a strategy of separation entails some degree of engagement.

Fundamentalists who more readily and actively engage the world may seek to compete by creating their own quasi-autonomous enclaves, attracting and converting others by virtue of the power of their example. These would include the religious communes that are established in remote locations (like Jim Jones’ ‘Peoples Temple’ in Jonestown Guyana, all of whose 900 members committed suicide in 1978), or behind serious fortifications (like the ‘Branch Davidians’ who were involved in a month-long standoff with US federal agents in Waco Texas in 1993). Others might seek to transform existing society by altering its laws and orientations to define themselves in. Once done, traditional fundamentalist views regarding issues like gender divisions, education and institutional recognition of the relevant deity and texts can take place. Such movements are usually oriented toward the imposition of a theocratic state apparatus (as in Iran or
Algeria), or with the redefinition of the nature and purpose of the state (as sought by groups like India’s Hindu-centric Bharatiya Janata Party, or various Sinhalese political parties in Sri Lanka) (Biswas 2004; Denemark 1996; Dilman 2004).

Finally we have those who would conquer their opponents, eliminate them by controlling their social structure and define them out of existence. Thompson’s description of the evolution of Bin Laden’s strategy of engagement, as it moved away from a local orientation and toward a global campaign aimed specifically at the US and its allies, is an excellent example of this phenomenon (Thompson 2007a). Regardless of what path is chosen, there is always some degree of engagement. Fundamentalisms intersect the community at large along a range of issues and with a variety of strategies.

Group strategies are reflected in individual behavioral manifestations. Such differences may be quite subtle. Perhaps minor variations in the nature of dress or speech, of free-time activities or charitable practices. In some societies, the behavioral differences are major, and include a renunciation of most forms of interaction with members outside their community. Extremes abound. Fundamentalists may choose to accentuate exactly those passages of scripture and exactly those behavioral traits that are most likely to offend. Whipping or cutting off the appendages of criminals, self-emolation, loud proclamations regarding literal interpretations of biblical stories, like the sun standing still or the virgin birth, or full-page ads celebrating the imminent coming of the messiah, are used specifically to shock the secular population and draw a boundary around the faithful (Antoun 2001:46).

Maintenance of the boundary that is created around the fundamentalist faithful might garner equally extreme positions. Ravitzky (1994:303) recounts the position of the
Rabbi praying that Russia would repel Bonaparte, as the egalitarian French would not tolerate the same scale of anti-Semitic laws and would allow Jews to assimilate. This would weaken the community. Such extreme positions illustrate the degree to which authoritarian leadership in relatively tight hierarchical organizational forms can take hold. Schisms and independent spin-offs spring up across movements, though all appear to hold to what they see as a divinely inspired leadership. Once the battles against outsiders (or worse yet, misguided insiders) end, the result is usually an organization with a strict hierarchy.

Fundamentalist behavior opens a series of contradictions as well. As fundamentalists approach the world, they alter their strategies in order to advance. Williams (1994:823) suggests that “Fundamentalism is formed by, even as it attempts to reform, the modern world.” Marty and Appleby (1994:5) suggest that there is something ironic about the fluidity with which movements fight in the name of timelessness.

Religion in general appears to be growing in the wake of the post-modern deconstruction of modernity, and rightly so. The promises of modernity have been cruelly false, and its various meta-narratives appear less valid by the day. Modernity strips lives of meaning, creating anomie and normlessness in its wake. But the post-modern opening of a space for beliefs that do not fit modernity’s rational mode also open a political space for the most totalizing of all meta-narratives, and may justify the attempt of various groups to impose the rules of what they see as a divine will upon all of us.

**FUNDAMENTALISMS AND RE-TERRITORIALIZATION**

This enhanced definition of fundamentalism introduces several elements that are missing in Thompson’s formulation. The phenomenon is older than generally considered, and is
not bounded by modernity. Any set of social changes that emerge quickly, that create hardship that is difficult to justify from a traditional perspective, and that alters key family-relevant relationships may give rise to such a response. Fundamentalisms are dependent on the creation of historical models toward which we can move, and so long as the tools used to advance that project do not contravene the divine word, they are acceptable regardless of their age or lineage. The model derives its legitimacy from faith and is manifested in the attention paid to scripture. Literalism is not central to this element of fundamentalism. Instead, scripture plays a role as a blueprint for individual behavior and a guide to understanding broader events. Membership provides a level of individual calm with regard to one’s place in the universe, even in the midst of profound anger toward much of the current world. Finally, behaviors consistent with attaining security, separation, controlled interaction, or even dominance over the non-believers, emerge. These behaviors are fluid in nature, altering with the movement, its tactical situation, its strategic position, and the nature of the environment in which it is embedded. Fundamentalisms show themselves to be essentially social in nature.

The differences between Thompson’s definition and the one offered here is of little more than academic interest until we enter into the realm of policy proposals. Thompson offers re-territorialization as a possible solution to the hazards posed by fundamentalists. Such a project would be costly, if it is possible at all. And in light of this augmented definition, I suggest it is an error.

If fundamentalisms are social movements as opposed to individual behaviors, then re-territorialization may be of little help in facing the challenges posed. The core of fundamentalism emerges in a social context where we find serious changes that create
hardship and alter key elements of personal and family relations. Neither the territorial state, the liberal state, nor the liberal social order has been uniquely successful in dealing with such changes. States face internally generated as well as externally generated changes, and liberal governments do not always follow policies that would protect various elements of society from forces that lead to rapid and destabilizing changes. The (domestic) liberal advantage may well rest with the ability to redistribute income so that the winners are able to sustain their gains in the context of relative social peace, but even liberal states have not always followed wise policies in this regard. And liberal states are not the only ones that would engage in any proposed re-territorialization.

A different set of processes exist at the global level, though re-territorialization may be just as ineffective at staving off a rise in fundamentalism in response to processes that exist at this level. States may re-territorialize, but they are unlikely to halt all significant trans-border interactions and that means the form and nature of those interactions will still require design and will still be vulnerable to inequality and contention. Colonialism and predatory political and economic policies were hardly unknown at the height of power of the territorial nation-state, nor was fundamentalism.

CONCLUSION

Grahame Thompson has offered us a unique view of fundamentalisms and their interactions with globalizations. His conclusions suggest that we have ignored an important potential response to the threat that may be posed to the liberal order. That response, re-territorialization, promises to insulate ‘us’ from fundamentalists and allow us to salvage the liberal order that ‘they’ threaten. But the idea that re-territorialization may be effective in this regard rests on a flawed understanding of fundamentalisms.
Fundamentalisms are social movements that respond to the type of social processes that drive, and emerge in the context of globalization. Addressing those processes, not seeking to roll them back, will allow us greater leverage in support of a humane global future.

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