

The Fundamentalist City: Medieval Modernity
Nezar AlSayyad, *University of California, Berkeley*

Despite the rapid globalization of much of the world and the interconnectedness of peoples across the globe possibly giving rise to a global culture, religious allegiances have become much stronger than earlier stages of urbanization and modernization. Some scholars argue that these strengthened ties are an important means of resistance against the hegemonic forces of globalization, while others interpret the rise of fundamentalist practices as articulating alternative forms of non-Western modernity. Many observers believe that the most powerful cause of this religious resurgence was the social and economic modernization that swept across the world in the second half of the twentieth century, challenging deep-rooted understandings of modernity, tradition, and identity, and the ensuing inequalities that left entire social groups on the margin of society. Nowhere is this more evident than in the cities of the Global South. Religious groups, and more recently those affiliated with orthodox ideologies have also been increasingly involved in the provision of social services to these marginalized communities whose needs have often been left unattended to by state bureaucracies. And when traditional religious ideas do not meet these groups' needs, they frequently turn to more radical and reactionary ones leading to the rise of new urban movements that some consider fundamentalists.

Building on earlier work but using examples from the Middle East, and South Asia and the more recent urban uprisings of the Arab Spring, this talk will explore the urban processes by which religious movements transform into fundamentalist ones, possibly engaging in tactics of control that reshape the life and form of cities. After an overview of the territorial character of fundamentalism, I will venture a definition of "fundamentalist" urbanism and conclude by asking if we are returning to an era of a "medieval modernity"? This seemingly oxymoronic phrasing of 'medieval modernity' may illustrate the idea of the "Fundamentalist City" where the medieval lurks at the heart of the modern and where the feudal exists within the core of capitalism.