DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL ISLAM IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT This article examines the deeply contested approaches of ‘political Islam’ towards modern democracy in Bangladesh, the third largest Muslim country in the world, where *shari’a* law is not the source of public law and where a democratic government is in place. Selecting the political manifestos and constitutions of three different influential Islamist parties, the *Jamat e Islami Bangladesh*, *Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh* and *Jamatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh*, the study examines through discourse analysis why Islamists take such a hostile approach towards democracy. At first sight Islamists desire the establishment of an alternative governing system, such as the Caliphate, to replace the present parliamentary system of governance in Bangladesh. Islamists also advocate a change of state philosophy from ‘People’s Republic of Bangladesh’ to an ‘Islamic State’, arguing that *shari’a* should be the legal framework of the country. The key finding of this research, however, is that Political Islam in Bangladesh is also perceived as a reaction to globalisation and that this global aspect, in theory and practice, may be more powerful as a reactive agent than local/national politics.

KEYWORDS: *Bangladesh, Caliphate, democracy, discourse analysis, freedom, globalisation, Islamisation, Muslims, Political Islam, secularism, sovereignty*

A Scenario of Contested Developments

Bangladesh emerged as an independent country on 16 December 1971, based on secular-socialist principles (Riaz, 2004: 5). It has remained one of the world's poorest nations. Among a population of about 140 million approximately 88% are Muslims and over 98% speak the national language, Bangla. The country has a parliamentary government led by a female Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of the nation. She also heads the 'secular party' of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL). Agents promoting modernisation and development, including the USA, the European Union and the United Nations, have been providing substantial support to strengthen a democratic government through aid, technology and trade assistance. According to various reports, the West wants to promote Bangladesh as a model of a Muslim country in which democracy and Islam work well together (Alamgir, 2007; Haass, 2002). Current events make this an issue of particular concern for the whole globe.

Globally unnoticed, on 17 August 2005 Bangladesh experienced its own 9/11 in a shockwave of terror when a relatively unknown Islamist group, *Jamaatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh* (JMB), detonated 500 bombs simultaneously across the country. Even less known is that pamphlets were left at every bombing spot with demands of establishing the 'law of Allah' in the country by abolishing the present democratic system, claiming that democracy and constitutions are sources of polytheism. As if this was not enough, the JMB then struck Bangladesh's judicial system by several suicide bomb attacks, on 3 and 18 October and 14 November 2005 respectively, murdering four judges to underscore the seriousness of their demand. Ongoing tensions between the Bangladeshi government and two moderate but influential Islamist parties, the *Jamat e Islami Bangladesh* (JIB) and *Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh* (HTB), open up interesting grounds to investigate the philosophy of 'Political Islam', its stance towards Bangladeshi democracy, and democracy and governance in general.

'Political Islam' as a contested concept denotes Muslim political movements which demand the establishment of *shari'a* law in a particular country (Esposito, 1997). Its activists, referred to here collectively as Islamists, routinely claim that western-style democracy is unacceptable. The present research was motivated by curiosity about the

source and extent of such claims, which in Bangladesh include that democracy is similar to polytheism. Are all Islamists refuting the concept of democracy? What are the main arguments and the main sources of Islamists? Do the various groups differ in terms of ideology and actions?

The article first offers a succinct explanation of the methodology and sampling process, followed by a brief historical outline of the relationship between Islam and democracy in Bangladesh. Theoretical discussion of the conceptual framework of democracy then explores what Islam and some Muslim political thinkers say about democracy. Applying discourse analysis, the article finally scrutinises to what extent 'Political Islam' in Bangladesh is more of an almost open rebellion to the project of globalisation than simply a negative reaction to local Bangladeshi patterns of governance.

Methodology and Sampling

Many definitions from various perspectives are given by academics regarding discourse analysis, and discourse is by now a well-known postmodern term. Gee (2005) argues that discourse analysis considers how spoken and written language enacts social and cultural perspectives. Deacon *et al.* (2007: 152) suggest that discourse conjoins language use as texts and practice to show systematic links between texts and socio-cultural practices. Schiffrin *et al.* (2003) examine ten types of definitions and assert that they mainly fall into three main categories. The third of these covers a broad range of social practices including non-linguistic and non-specific instances of language.

For the present project, language written in political manifestos, constitutions and pamphlets constitutes relevant discourse, following Römmele (2003), who argues that political parties communicate with citizens in various ways, using constitutions, posters and leaflets to campaign for their respective agenda and objectives. To understand the ideological positions recorded in texts of Political Islam in Bangladesh, discourse analysis of such publications is appropriate in linking Islamists' socio-cultural practices with attitudes towards democracy. Tonkiss (1998: 254) suggests that analyses of key words and themes from such discourses can be productive. In line with this

methodology, key words and themes closely related to democracy in the manifestos of Political Islam were analysed.

The selection process of samples involved two phases. The first phase singled out three Islamist parties from the 100 or so operating in Bangladesh, based on the categorical distinctions coined by Riaz (2008: 30), according to whom three types of Islamist parties operate in Bangladesh: Those who participate in the existing political system, those who work within the democratic political system despite reservations, and those who refuse to take part in constitutional politics and remain clandestine. Based on this categorisation, three parties were selected to conduct a study of their publications: (1) the *Jamat e Islami Bangladesh* (JIB), which participates in the existing political system; (2) the *Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh* (HTB), which operates within the political system, but does not participate in elections; and (3) the *Jamatul Mujahedeen Bangladesh* (JMB), which rejects constitutional politics and remains secretive and openly hostile.

These three parties were also chosen on the basis of availability of publications. JIB and HTB maintain their own websites in Bangla, making it fairly easy to access their publications, now addressing a potentially global readership. While the JMB remains clandestine, the pamphlets left at the bombing spots in 2005 serve as key evidence (Jamatul Mujahedeen, 2005).

The second phase of selecting samples involved choosing the publications for the discourse analysis. There was no option of selecting JMB publications other than their pamphlet calling for the establishment of Islamic law in Bangladesh (Jamatul Mujahedeen, 2005). The JIB website contains two relevant publications in Bangla, the party constitution and the election manifesto of 2008. To understand the ideological position of the JIB towards democracy, their Constitution was studied (Jamaat e Islami Bangladesh, 2008 [1980]). For the HTB, two publications were selected randomly (Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh, 2004 and 2007).

The Three Parties

A brief introduction to these three Islamist groups provides a broader context for discourse analysis. The JIB as the largest and most active Islam-based political party in

Bangladesh was earlier operating under the name of Jamaat-e-Islami East Pakistan, led by the eminent Muslim political thinker Maulana Mawdudi (Rahim, 2001). After the separation of Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1971, this party could not operate within the official political discourse, as communal politics were curtailed and secularism was officially decreed as one of the new state's principles. There are strong allegations that activists of this party were involved in helping the Pakistani army kill Bangladeshi freedom fighters to maintain the unity of a Muslim country. After the murder of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first president of Bangladesh, in 1975, a military regime seized power (1975-90) and allowed the JIB to operate in Bangladesh due to pressures from 'outside forces'. A close reading of the history of Bangladesh reveals that to create an aura of political legitimacy for military rule, and to win the approval of Middle Eastern countries, army regimes often collaborated with the JIB, since JIB leaders have strong connections in the Middle East (Rahim, 2001: 248). The military regime was overwhelmingly dependent on foreign aid, the bulk of which came from Middle Eastern, oil-rich Islamic countries (Alam, 1993).

According to the JIB website,¹ '[I]t aims to bring about changes in all phases and spheres of human activity on the basis of the guidance revealed by Allah and exemplified by His Prophet Muhammad'. It has strong institutional networks and support throughout the country. With many followers especially among students, the intelligentsia, civil servants and the military, the JIB has emerged as a force to be reckoned with in national politics (Hossain and Siddiquee, 2006). The JIB even held two ministerial posts from 2001 until 2006 when it became the main ally of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which formed the previous government before the present BAL regime came into power through elections in 2008. However, the JIB is now under serious pressure, since the BAL government has vowed to bring war criminals, a number of whom are involved with JIB politics, to face a war crimes trial. In this regard, the Bangladeshi government is closely working with the UN (*The Daily Star*, 8 April 2009). In response to this allegation, the JIB has lodged a countrywide political campaign and through its website states: 'We can firmly assert, in the circumstances, that no Jamaat leader was involved in any criminal activity of the nature

of plunder, rape, murder or arson during the liberation war'. Such contradictory evidence reflects the tense relations between the current government and the JIB.

The HTB emerged in 1953 as a global Islamist party. According to their website, HTB 'works at all levels of society to restore to Muslims a means of living an Islamic life under the shade of the Khilafah State (Caliphate)'.² The website also claims that HTB 'is active throughout the Middle East, Central Asia, South-East Asia, Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Europe, Australasia and the Americas'. Officially it is banned in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Pakistan, Tunisia, Libya, Turkey and the former Soviet states of Central Asia (Choudhury, 2008). According to *The Daily Star* of 19 September 2008, Golam Mowla, a lecturer of Management at Dhaka University, went to London in 1993 to conduct his PhD and was introduced to discussions on Hizb ut-Tahrir at Regent's Park Mosque in London. After return to Bangladesh in 2000, Mowla set up an office at a coaching centre in Dhaka for the organisation's Bangladesh chapter and launched the group's activities on 17 November 2001 as Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh (*The Daily Star*, 19 September 2008). According to this news report, the organisation has no committee or constitution and is now led by another academic, Mohiuddin Ahmed. Perhaps part of the global project of the Hizb ut-Tahrir, HTB does not believe in elections or democracy. It expands its support base through targeted peaceful invitation, known as *dawa* in Arabic, a popular method among Islamists across the world to recruit activists. Presently, HTB holds a strong support base among academics and students in various universities in Bangladesh. In the past two years, this organisation has come more into public view due to several confrontations with the police and the government, culminating in sedition charges by the government against this party on 12 March 2009 (SATP, 2009). Finally on 22 October 2009, HTB was banned in Bangladesh as according to the government, 'it has been carrying out anti-state, anti-government, anti-people and anti-democratic activities for long in the country' (*The Daily Star*, 23 October 2009) and it was a 'threat to peaceful life' (BBC News Website, 23 October, 2009). However, it is still operating covertly in the country.

It is not clear when the JMB launched its chapter in Bangladesh. However, since this group made its presence felt by detonating 500 bombs simultaneously throughout Bangladesh on 17 August 2005, they have claimed responsibility for further acts of

extreme violence, including suicide bombings in courts and throwing grenades at foreign diplomats. Following pressure from donors and diplomatic quarters, the BNP-JIB government banned the JMB on 23 February 2005. In 2007, seven members of this organisation were executed following a trial. It is reported that when the judge was reading the death sentence, one of the JMB members facing trial said in court that ‘it was a farcical trial on the basis of British laws and false witnesses’, adding: ‘I think you [judges] have shown that you are disloyal to Allah. It’s you who should be condemned to death’ (*The Daily Star*, 31 March 2007).

However, execution of top members of the JMB did not mean the end of this militant movement. Still operating in the country, it made further headlines on 20 February 2009 when a handcuffed JMB operative, whom the law enforcers paraded in a press conference in a town near Dhaka, threw an impoverished grenade, which had been recovered from him and was placed on the table in front to show the success of the law-enforcers to curb militancy before the media, on the conference attendees, injuring a dozen people (*The Daily Star*, 21 February 2009). Furthermore, the JMB issued a threatening letter to the Barisal district offices of various development agencies on 20 April 2009 (*The Financial Express*, 28 April 2009), which made these international organisations vacate their offices.

Islam and Democracy in Bangladesh

A brief historical description focusing on the relationship between Islam, Bangladesh and democracy serves to understand this multifaceted issue in more depth. What facilitates the growth of Political Islam, which is diverse and distinct in nature? Is it merely the result of a poor democratic system? Or is there more than meets the eye?

After nine months of bloody battle with Pakistan, Bangladesh became a separate country on 16 December 1971. Though Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country, secularism was introduced as one of its four state principles in the 1972 Constitution under the first president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (Ahmed and Nazneen, 1990; Hossain, 2006; Riaz, 2004, 2005 and 2008). Alam (1993) argues that secularism was conceptually based on strong critique of the colonial and post-colonial exploitations to which Bangladesh had been subjugated. However, after the killing of Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman in 1975, during two subsequent army regimes (1975-1990), several measures were taken to promote Islamic values in the state of Bangladesh.

In summary, those measures were: (1) Replacement of secularism with ‘absolute faith and trust in the Allah Almighty’ and introduction of *Bismillahirrahmanir rahim* (‘In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate’) into the Constitution; (2) Hanging of posters in government offices with quotations from the Qur’an, displays of Qur’anic verses and the Prophet’s advice in public places; (3) Flying of Eid-Mubarak festoons beside the national flags on Eid festivals, and issuance of messages by the head of state or government on various religious occasions; (4) Offerings of prayer (*munaajat*) on special occasions; (5) Practice of call to prayer (*azan*) five times a day; (6) Establishment of a new division of Religious Affairs, under a full-fledged minister; (7) Establishment of the Islamic Foundation with an extensive network of research facilities; (8) Set up of an Islamic University with an Islamic Research Centre attached to it; (9) Establishment of a Zakat Fund headed by the President; (10) Proposal of an education policy intended to introduce Arabic in schools, beginning with class 1; (11) Disbursement of huge funds for the construction of mosques and *madrassahs*; (12) Establishment of the Bangladesh Madrassah Education Board.

These various measures were indicative of the regime’s interest and in June 1988 Islam was controversially declared as the state religion (Ahmed and Nazneen, 1990; Hossain, 2006; Riaz, 2004, 2005 and 2008). However, Bangladesh’s legal and judicial system remains highly influenced by British colonial laws, which are widely perceived as secular. According to the government website, now the Constitution of Bangladesh lays down the basic framework of the Government of Bangladesh. This claim, that Bangladesh has created its own laws through rule of law principles, rings hollow not only for Islamists, since many laws of Bangladesh remain of course based on principles and rules established during the colonial period.

A major implication of Army intervention was the return of the JIB in the political discourse of Bangladesh, as well as emergence of other Islamist parties, after secularism was removed from the Constitution. Following the fall of the Army regime in 1990 after popular upsurge, a parliamentary democratic government was re-installed in Bangladesh and the Election Commission began to work independently. However,

democracy in Bangladesh is yet to work properly. Barkdull (2005) identifies six major problems related to Bangladeshi democracy: division between the parties; thwarting bipartisanship; a lack of internal democracy within these parties; weakness of political institutions; the unequal status of women; economic inequality; and corruption. To improve such a poor democratic system, many forces of modernisation like European Union countries, the USA and UN agencies operate alongside international and local NGOs throughout the country. While their main aim is to develop various sectors in Bangladesh, focused on women's empowerment and poverty alleviation, they also address governance issues. Such interventions cannot be seen as non-political.

Against this backdrop of poor democracy and simmering tensions, the number of Islamist parties operating in Bangladesh grew to 100 by 2006 (Riaz, 2008: 29). Out of these, only seven Islamist parties are registered with the Election Commission: the JIB, Jaker Party, Khelafot Andolon, Muslim League, Jomiate Ulamaye Islam Bangladesh, Islamic Front Bangladesh and Islami Oikko Jot (IOJ). Among these seven parties, in the 2001 elections only JIB and IOJ won seats in Parliament; JIB took 17 and IOJ captured two out of the 300 seats. During that time, these two parties became an influential coalition partner of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which had won 193 seats, helping it to form the central government. Two JIB MPs held ministerial posts in the BNP-led government until 2006. However, in the 2008 elections, JIB was the only Islamist party to win any seats, whereas the BAL, widely known as the 'secularist party', formed the present government under Sheikh Hasina after winning a huge majority of 230 out of 300 seats. On the face of it, it seems like 'Political Islam' has been defeated.

However, it is not possible to evaluate Political Islam in Bangladesh solely based on registration with the Election Commission and participation or success in elections. While HTB and JMB are not even registered with the Commission, they regularly feature in news headlines in Bangladesh and are by no mean less important actors of Political Islam in Bangladesh, demonstrating the fuzzy boundaries of political landscapes (Marsot, 1992).

Analysis of the recent history of Political Islam in Bangladesh indicates that its growth accelerated during the time of the BNP-led government (2001-2006), while the

violent standoff between the two major parties, the BNP and the BAL, reached its peak. A series of relevant events included several grenade attacks, prominently on a BAL rally in Dhaka which killed 23 people; murder of the former finance minister and BAL leader, Shah A.M.S. Kibria, and the attack on Anwar Chowdhury, the British High Commissioner to Bangladesh, a man of Bangladeshi origin. Rise of the JMB occurred while the BNP was held hostage by two of its three junior coalition partners, the JIB and the IOJ. A report in 2005 observed that the BNP turned a blind eye to violence by Islamic extremists and to all sorts of encroachments on Bangladesh's traditional tolerance (*The Economist*, 16 June 2005, see also US Embassy Dhaka, 2006). Conversely, the BAL did whatever it could not to support the BNP government, starting from boycotting Parliament for years to causing violence on the streets through strikes. The *Economist* also noted that these spectacular attacks are only the most visible symptoms of the disease of endemic political violence, in which both the main parties are implicated, with local heavies acting as their enforcers, in return for protection from politicians with influence in the police and judiciary. The report ended by saying: 'It is the bitterness and lack of trust between these two parties that has hijacked the democratic process' (*The Economist*, 16 June, 2005), encouraging the growth of Political Islam in Bangladesh.

Democracy: A Theoretical Approach

This section considers briefly the conceptual framework of democracy before exploring what Islam says about democracy in order to evaluate the nature of Political Islam and democracy in Bangladesh subsequently.

Derived from the Greek terms *demos* and *kratos*, democracy refers to rule by or the sovereignty of the people (Flanagan et al., 2005). The central theme of this concept is that leaders are elected by people to run a country for a specific time. Haass (2002) portrays democracy as a concept 'of the people, by the people, for the people', as it depends on an active role of the electorate. Winston Churchill famously referred to democracy in 1947 as 'the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time', and well before him Abraham Lincoln considered democracy as the 'last, best hope on earth' (quoted in Flanagan *et al.*, 2005).

According to Osman (2002: 86), there is ‘a belief that freedom and human dignity are the cornerstones of a democratic system where election, freedom of expression, dialogue, and assembly are essential for democratic flourishing’. Ideally, it is a pluralistic system which fosters social justice (Haass, 2002), because this system of governance encompasses matters related to equality, destroying monopolies, involving the creation of distributive justice, empowerment of the powerless and decentralisation of power (Drammeh, 2006: 17). Haass (2002) and Carothers (2009) respectively argue that transparency in government policy and institutions help spur economic growth and prosperity, and that transparency and accountability are two basic features of democratic governance.

Such arguments concentrate mainly on the conceptual merits of democracy and assume that three themes, namely sovereignty, freedom and social justice, are critical for its conceptual fulfillment. Sovereignty importantly refers to the source of absolute power of a state. In western political science, sovereignty is linked with the notion of the independence of a state, signifying the independence of the constitution, with people as the source of sovereignty (Berman, 1987). However, this is clearly a Western concept, perceived as secular, while there are other perspectives (Halim, 2007).

Secondly, freedom is treated as an important factor of democracy. This abstract concept is fluid, because in every society, whether democratic or non-democratic, various limits to freedom are imposed. Various freedoms indicate less governmental interference, since democracy as a concept promotes accountability and transparency. Again, this accountability is perceived as a secular form of authority.

Finally, establishing social justice through a legislative framework and constitution is widely seen as critical to democratic success. Cichowski (2006) argues that the rule of law and constitutional rights are vital for a healthy democracy, where the courts play a complementary role and a democratically elected government through its legislative framework ensures the rule of law and constitutional rights for all citizens. Again, critically relevant to the present analysis, these are all secular concepts, while reference to any form of higher authority is avoided or silently presumed in western secular political discourse.

Islam, Democracy and Muslim Political Thinkers' Views on Governance

Before proceeding to discourse analysis and examination of the findings, it is relevant to explore briefly what Islam says about democracy. Similarly, it is pertinent to explore what type of governance systems leading Muslim political thinkers advocate. The following four themes are raised here: (1) How does 'Political Islam' evaluate the theme of sovereignty in Bangladesh? (2) What is its opinion towards freedom? (3) For ensuring social justice, what type of system of governance and legislative framework does it advocate? (4) How does it evaluate the concept of democracy?

Starting with the last question, we see that in Islamic references, the word 'democracy' is of course not found, since the core sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Hadiths, were originally written in Arabic. However, Muslim scholars including Drammeh (2006), Osman (2002) and Safi (1999) as well as non-Muslim scholars (see Esposito and Voll, 2001; Kramer, 1996) have referred to the Qur'anic concept of *shura* as closest to the concept of democracy. In other words, *shura* is treated as the conceptual source of democratic values in Islam. In many Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia or Oman, a Council of Shura is installed, providing the government with strategic advice from a religious perspective.

Shura in general refers to mutual consultation. With reference to nine Qur'anic verses, Osman (2002: 89) argues that consultation is very significant in Islam and the Qur'an treats *shura* as participation with others in making decisions that concern them, subsequent to faith in God and next to prayer to God. Drammeh (2006) supports Osman (2002) and argues that since engaging in consultation and negotiations in decision making processes is embedded in the Qur'an itself, it is a practice that must be followed by Muslim governments. Furthermore, Drammeh (2006: 37) asserts: 'Shura is a social and political necessity in order to engage the people in the process of decision making and it shows the importance of the opinion of the mass and the relevance of decisions that governments make about the people of their aspiration'. Osman (2002) outlines *shura*'s usability in the context of elections, policy making, public referenda, voting and in choosing candidates. He further argues that *shura* can be used in technical and

professional fields, such as schools, hospitals, factories, companies or in any other business (Osman, 2002: 92).

Since *shura* is certainly an Islamic concept, there is little chance that a *shura* decision will go in favour of what is forbidden in Islam. Therefore, Kramer (1996) argues that even though theologically and theoretically Islam embraces the view of pluralism, in practice it becomes very stiff. This raises the critical issue of fuzzy boundaries and diversity of opinions within Islam (Coulson, 1969). According to Kramer (1996), plurality in an Islamic state develops under the condition that particular groups or persons do not represent any opinion against Islamic references. Kramer (1996: 78) asserts that '[t]here is great reluctance to allow for unlimited freedom of speech and organization of those different opinions'. Good examples are Saudi Arabia and Iran, where strong state control is imposed over issues such as homosexuality and women's rights. This debate is clearly of critical relevance, and will never end.

Looking briefly at what type of governance and state system Muslim political thinkers are advocating, it is important to understand those ideologues in a global context, apart from noting that global 'Political Islam' is in turn hugely influenced by these thinkers. Such thinkers include firstly Maulana Mawdudi from South Asia, who initiated the political movement of Jamaat e Islami in Pakistan which later spread all over South Asia including Bangladesh. Further, Hassan al Turabi, leader of the National Islamic Front of Sudan, is seen as one of the most influential personalities in the discourse of global Political Islam, and Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt.

Mawdudi, Turabi and Qutb all argue that Muslims should live in an 'Islamic state' which will be embedded in the philosophy of *tawhid* or oneness of Allah entailing the freedom, equality and unity of believers where absolute sovereignty of that state will go to Allah (Adams, 1983: 115; Haddad, 1983: 70; Turabi, 1983: 241). Of course this is an ideal statement; reality is much more plural. Qutb advocates the establishment of an Islamic bloc in the world, an amalgam of different nation states because he sees 'no necessity for having a single Islamic nation' (Haddad, 1983: 71). Significantly, Turabi argues that, unlike a democratic state, an Islamic state is not a nationalistic state,

because 'its ultimate allegiance is owed to God' (Turabi, 1983: 242). This statement comes closest to the main points at issue here.

There is further consensus among these thinkers that an Islamic state must be ruled by the law of *shari'a* and will by no means be a secular one. Qutb does not offer any specifics about the form of government in an Islamic state (Haddad, 1983: 91), whereas Turabi and Mawdudi argue that a system of Caliphate should govern an Islamic state (Adams, 1983: 117; Turabi, 1983: 243). Again, these are just general, idealising statements. Such assertions of the requirement of a Caliphate system by these thinkers have naturally a close connection with Muslim history. In Muslim history, after Prophet Muhammad's death, the Muslim territory expanded under the first four Caliphs, considered as 'rightly guided' because they all knew Muhammad personally and used to be companions (*sahaba*) of the Prophet, thus they knew *sunna* as directly as possible. The period of the rightly guided Caliphs ended in 661 through the assassination of Caliph Ali (Jackson, 1997: 20). Thereafter, various Muslim dynasties, the Umayyads (661-750), the Abbasids (750-1258) and the Ottomans (1299-1924), expanded Muslim rule to Europe, Africa and Asia. During this period the Caliphate system was installed. Sadiq (1991) asserts that 'the inception of the Caliphate system through the Umayyads in the seventh century inaugurated a movement for a new civilization and for a dynamic, forward looking culture which was destined to create a composite, corporate human identity, viz., the Islamic identity'. Langman (2005) argues that this was a Golden Age for Islam. Again, one detects idealistic positioning here.

Abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 by Kemal Atatürk formally marked the end of this civilisational model. Sadiq (1991) argues that, after the fall of the Ottomans, the classical form of Islam which provided a composite identity to Muslims, gave way to a narrow, territorial, national identity. For Muslim political thinkers, the notion of Caliphate has always remained an inspiration, direct or otherwise, to many revivalist movements. Indeed, Jackson (1997: 20) argues that this memory of Muslim history, featured through the writings of Muslim political thinkers, is a memory determined by authority. For the influential Muslim political thinkers mentioned above, the memory of Muslim political authority in the Golden Age is above all a conceptual inspiration. There is no directly transplantable practical template other than the unique model of the

Prophet. To support retention of Muslim authority in a global political discourse, then, Muslim political thinkers simply assert the idea of an Islamic state where a Caliphate government will somehow make sure that the state is ruled by *Sharia* Law. How this is to be done in practice is quite a different matter.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the discourse analysis in relation to the four key themes identified above, namely attitudes towards sovereignty, freedom, systems of governance and the concept of democracy among the three different groups of Islamists in Bangladesh.

On sovereignty, all groups concur that God alone holds sovereign power, for which the Bangla term *sharbovoumotto* is used. The JIB in article 3 of its constitution states that it will try to protect the sovereignty of Bangladesh from national and foreign threats by fostering an Islamic moral ethos and uniting the nation. It explains: 'Here the term sovereignty is applied in terms of territorial boundary. In Islam, God is the owner of sovereign power'. Having identified that there are two concepts, article 2(5) states clearly: 'No one but God is the owner of a state and sovereignty'.

HTB on page 3 of its Islamic Manifesto states: 'The main theme of the Islamic governing system is that God is the owner of sovereign power. That means he is the only law giver'. The JMB does not directly address the term 'sovereignty'. However, it refers to Bangladesh as 'the land of God', a familiar phrase which means that the land of Bangladesh and its people are ultimately owned by and subject to God. Furthermore, it states that JMB is committed to obliterate polytheism and immoral activities from the country and wants to receive satisfaction by the establishment of *tawhid* (the Oneness of God).

On the issue of freedom, all three groups, each in their own way, argue that because God is in charge of everything, freedom is subject to divine authority. This follows from the responses to the first issue.

The JIB through articles 2(1) and 2(2) of its constitution addresses basic beliefs and asserts that: 'Humans will abandon free will, freedom, evil will and live life as a slave of God. Humans will never think that their body is under their own control; rather, they

will think their mental and physical power and limbs are owned by God and these belong to God'. HTB through article 9.5.1 of its publication (Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh, 2004) states that: 'No Muslims are free due to the Islamic faith. Muslims are not free in terms of expressing opinions because the opinion of Islam is the opinion of a Muslim'. JMB does not address the word 'freedom' directly but states: 'God created us in this world as ambassadors for him and only to worship him'. It is plausible to argue from this statement that JMB believes that people's freedom has a limit, as they have to act as ambassadors of God, which eventually restricts their freedom on religious grounds.

On legal and governing systems, in the same way, there is no doubt for the three groups that God's law is in principle higher than man's law.

The JIB in its introduction to the constitution states that Allah gave humans the responsibility of establishing the Caliphate. Through article 4(1), it asserts that 'JIB will consult the Quran and Sunnah before taking any decision'. Moreover, article 6(4) states that in order to establish Islam fully in Bangladesh, JIB will replace the government in a systematic and lawful way with honest and religious leaders in every sector of society. HTB also lists as one among five points of its political agenda the establishment of a Caliphate system. Referring to this, on page 3 of its Islamic manifesto (Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh, 2007), it asserts that 'God has provided humans with the governing system of the Caliphate'. HTB further states that it will adopt a peaceful way to establish its goal in Bangladesh. JMB, through the demand in its pamphlet for the establishment of God's order (Jamatul Mujahedeen, 2005), openly rejects the present legal system: 'JMB calls for the adoption of the order of God and the practices of the Prophet by abandoning the constitution and election system, as both of these are contradictory to God's law'. The pamphlet further states: 'JMB is adamant about using the process of killing provided by God to establish the rule of God in the land of God...our call to the Bangladesh government is: We do not want power, you establish the law of God, we will assist you'.

Lastly, on the issue of democracy, the responses are quite detailed and disclose a serious concern with regard to development issues for the JIB,³ while the other two groups focus more on Islamic perspectives.

JIB states in article 3(3) of its constitution that it will work to heighten democracy and to establish social justice. It will ensure the freedom and human rights of people irrespective of their religion, colour or community and will also make sure that they can access basic citizen rights, including food, clothing, housing, education, medical treatment and the security of assets and life. It will ensure equal distribution of assets and national income to develop the standard of living. Thus, it will be possible to establish a developed Bangladesh by eradicating oppression, violence and corruption.

HTB, in article 9.5.1 of its publication (Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh, 2004), states that it is forbidden (*haram*) for Muslims to participate in elections and the democratic process. Furthermore, it states: ‘This system of democracy is an outcome of polytheism (*kufuri*) as it is formulated by humans not by the *shari’a* of Islam. Therefore, a democratic system is against the *Shari’a*’. JMB advocates total opposition in its aggressive pamphlet (Jamatul Mujahedeen, 2005):

This country is ruled by a power which is against Allah because the way the head of the state and its aides were elected is completely non-Islamic. In general, the system of democracy is framed by non-believers and is not acknowledged in Quran and Hadith. This system is contradictory to the system outlined by God. In addition, this system is the brainchild of non-believers and Jews with a view to destroying the Muslim faith. Therefore, this is the time for the Muslim population of Bangladesh to think.

Finally, it is important to mention that HTB provides a framework of a Shura Council within the proposed framework of the Caliphate government at article 2.3.5 in its Islamic Manifesto, stating that ‘the major activities of the Shura Council would be to question the Caliph’. Similarly, the JMB publication notes: ‘If politicians fail to establish Islamic doctrine in Bangladesh, they should resign and religiously learned persons alongside with religious intellectuals will take over the place of politicians to run the country as per the process of shura’. Finally, the JIB actually has a central Shura Council which provides important advice to its leaders. It is apparent from its history that this party adapted itself to the democratic parliamentary system of the country.

Analysis

These three samples clearly reflect differentiated approaches to the concept of democracy and its essential elements. Typically, all three discourses are clear about the theme of sovereignty. JIB uses the word to indicate that it will work to protect the territorial sovereign boundaries, but is quick to point out that God is the owner of sovereignty. HTB uses this theme in favour of its own argument about establishing *sharia* law under a Caliphate, whereas JMB does not use this word directly, but sees Bangladesh as a land of God, meaning that it is adamant about establishing the oneness of God. All three parties argue that God is the source of absolute power and sovereignty over the land and people, while they address sovereignty with different intentions.

For the present article, sovereignty is used to refer to ‘absolute power and authority of a state’. It is apparent from the theory of democracy that this refers primarily to the rule by or absolute sovereignty of the people. The Constitution of Bangladesh in Article 1 provides in this regard: ‘Bangladesh is a unitary, independent, sovereign Republic to be known as the People's Republic of Bangladesh’. Article 7(1) states: ‘All powers in the Republic belong to the people, and their exercise on behalf of the people shall be effected only under, and by the authority of, this Constitution’. It is apparent that Bangladesh’s sovereign power lies in the Constitution, notwithstanding absolute faith in Allah. As a result, we can see that ‘Political Islam’ clearly differs over the theme of secular democratic constitution of Bangladesh in matters of sovereignty and absolute power.

Freedom is a celebrated concept within the framework of democracy; however, an obscure limit for freedom exists in every society, whether religious or not. We saw that there are different types of freedom, such as freedom of expression and of religion. Bangladesh’s Constitution through Article 39(1) states widely that ‘freedom of thought and conscience is guaranteed’. By contrast, the three samples provided here indicate a limit of freedom for Muslims, who are required to abide by the law of Allah. Further, none of these parties indicate in detail what would be the limit of freedom for non-Muslims living in Bangladesh. This is an important factor, given that their political ambition is to take over the ruling system. JIB and HTB state that they will ensure the rights and freedom of religion for non-Muslims living in the country. However, they

fall short of explaining their plan, at least in the samples examined here. In practice, the JIB's record is not impressive in ensuring freedom and rights for non-Muslims. For example, when they came to power in 2001, many Hindu Bangladeshis were forced to cross the border into India when faced with attacks, harassment, bullying and murder. Hossain (2006) reports that between May and October 2002 alone, an estimated 20,000 people fled across the border. Riaz (2004: 71) asserts in this regard that 'these attacks against Hindus were well planned, carried out by identifiable groups including JIB and backed and encouraged by state machineries which were controlled by the BNP, an ally of the JIB'.

Regarding the governing system, HTB explicitly mentions that it is a duty of Muslims to establish a Caliphate and provides details of such a system. However for the JIB, it remains ambiguous what type of government they want to establish in Bangladesh. Even though one of its core beliefs is that 'humankind has a responsibility to establish the Caliphate in the world', it also prints in its constitution that it will work to heighten national democracy. So the question arises what precisely is their position? In practice, the JIB takes part in democratic elections. The JMB seems perplexed, as it states on the one hand that it is going to assist the government with the establishment of the law of Allah, whereas on the other it indicates that it will adopt the theory of killing (*jihad*) until *Shari'a* law is established in the land of Allah. This party in fact employed the killing process in favour of their demand.

One important point to note about these three parties is that the word *shura* features in their publications. Interestingly, the militant Islamists of the JMB also use this word, though their political activity by no means reflects the ethos of *shura*. While the HTB contours the activity of a Shura Council, in the Manifesto, it is yet to disclose its party structure, which is not a transparent practice. On the other hand, JIB is an interesting case because internally it provides importance to the Shura Council to take decisions about Bangladeshi politics, but it does not assert its importance explicitly in the national political discourse. Therefore, it may be plausible to argue that, of these three Islamist groups, HTB vividly coins the idea of establishing a Caliphate in Bangladesh as an alternative to the present democratic system, whereas JMB rejects it violently and the JIB position remains obscure.

Finally, both HTB and JMB vigorously criticise the concept of democracy as they use terms such as ‘the sin of sharing the oneness of Allah’, and ‘a production of non-believers’ in relation to democracy. Criticism by these parties revolves around two main categories. Firstly, democracy does not apply to *Sharia* law in general and is declared a sin, given the duty of human beings to apply God’s law in practice, as the sovereign entity of the state and human beings and this earth are all owned by God. Secondly, democracy is simply treated as a brainchild of the West, thus of non-believers.

It is apparent from these criticisms that one of the fundamental problems for these parties in rejecting the system of democracy is because this concept is connected to and implemented by the West. For example, HTB asserts explicitly in article 9.5 of its publication (Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh, 2004: 39) that ‘this idea of democracy has its roots in the West and the USA and it is based on the separation of religion from the state and life’. JMB, in support of boycotting democracy, asserts that:

President Bush is attacking innocent Muslims through terror and is forcefully imposing a polytheistic constitution in every Muslim country. He wants to establish the *kufuri* democratic system through the new world order and thus he wants to rule the whole world. It is like the desire of a neo-Feraun.

This may be political rhetoric, but also indicates deeper conceptual disagreements. In practice, democracy is everywhere an evolving process and an ongoing global challenge of human life. There was a time when religion was a dominant part of Western society and it still is prominent in many ways, though ‘the West’ is now collectively perceived as secular. In Bangladeshi democracy, Islam remains part of both the public and private spheres. For example, the public holiday is on Friday for weekly prayer, loud announcements of the call to prayer five times a day from the mosques and annual holidays for the two Eids are given, and it is mandatory that key statesmen, Prime Minister or President, will say *Bismillahir rahmanir rahim* in public speeches. It is apparent from their comments that HTB and JMB showcase global connections and ambitions within the framework of a local political agenda. Therefore, it is plausible to argue that while these parties agree in principle in many cases, in practice they differ

sharply, and they appear to react to uniformising globalisation agendas in different ways.

Concluding Analysis

A dichotomous relationship between Political Islam and the Bangladeshi Constitution which legitimises the democratic system of Bangladesh is clearly apparent from the textual samples. Following discourse analysis, it becomes evident that HTB and JMB explicitly criticise the West and its democratic and secular values. At a time when Bangladesh requires assistance from all over the world, western and non-western countries, to accelerate its economy, assertions of such specific rejections of the west by ‘Political Islam’ can thus be seen as a negative reaction to western-driven globalisation patterns.

Globalisation refers to a central discourse of ‘global’, comprising mainly economics, society, culture and politics. In this ‘global’ discourse, people from various countries with different cultural backgrounds are connected with each other in various ways to become globalised. Wunderlich and Warrier (2007: 92) suggest that historically, it has been perceived that globalisation originated primarily from the economic and political domination of the USA, spreading modernity and consumerist values to distant local cultures. However, the concept itself has Japanese roots (Robertson, 1995: 28). Generally speaking, in globalisation, the restrictions of national boundaries are attenuated and communication flows are instant. Giddens (1990: 64) states that ‘globalization is about the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’. Simultaneously, however, globalisation shows a tendency of fragmentation within itself. Clark (1997: 1) asserts:

Globalization denotes movements in both the intensity and the extent of international interactions; in the former sense, globalisation overlaps to some degree with related ideas of integration, interdependence, multilateralism, openness and interpenetration; in the latter, it points to the geographical spread of these tendencies and is cognate with globalism, spatial compression, universalization, and homogeneity.

Clark's theory suggests that this process of intensification has tensions of disintegration or fragmentation within itself. Bauman (1998: 12) explains that globalisation tends towards disaggregation, autarchy and isolation, as well as ethnic or nationalistic separatism and regional integration. Therefore, theoretically as well as practically, as is increasingly recognised now, it is globalisation's nature that it will create an alternative discourse to its homogenising tendencies. According to Hall *et al.* (1992: 217), this alternative discourse has no fixed political inscription; it can be either progressive or regressive and even fundamentalist.

It is evident that within this alternative discourse of globalisation, 'Political Islam' expands its polity worldwide and reacts in various ways to mainly western-driven efforts at uniformisation and modernisation with secularising tendencies. From that perspective, democracy is ultimately perceived as a Western ideal-type and is seen as a threat by Muslims. By implication, it is assumed that globalisation alone can provide the prerequisites for building a universal civilisation in which democratic polities can thrive and realise the promise of liberal enlightenment (Pasha, 2002).

According to such claims, some cultures are obviously incompatible with democratic sentiment; their destiny is glued to particularistic political expression and lurking fears of religious *diktat*. In this context 'Political Islam' becomes an open rebel to uniformising globalisation and global democratisation, even though growing awareness of the internally plural processes of globalisation should make it easier for all actors to acknowledge pluralism. What seems to have been created instead is a scenario of competition of various globalisations (Pieterse, 1995: 45) that are going on. Hence, 'Political Islam' now broadcasts its counter-hegemonic messages through

the web, using digital media backed with the transportation of people and transfers of money across borders. Resistance to and hatred of the West, particularly to the USA, development agencies and to democracy, documented here especially by the discourses of the HTB and the JMB, do provide a ground for claims that Islamic methods of governance are different, are simply more Islamic than the dominant models, and are thus superior and 'right'.

The findings of this article indicate that 'Political Islam' in Bangladesh offers a differentiated but generally reserved, if not actually hostile, approach towards the concept of democracy at a global level of discourse. The concepts asserted by Mawdudi, Turabi and Qutb are apparent within the various strands of ideology and beliefs of political Islam in Bangladesh. It is clear that various parties believe in establishing an Islamic state, the Caliphate and *Sharia* law, whether they explicitly state this in text samples or hold those notions as implicit concepts.

Though these parties are acting in the name of Islam, reflection of Islamic democratic values is not strongly apparent within the main ethos of these parties. The existing discourses portrayed here simply take a broadly idealistic and antagonistic approach. They often contradict the Constitution and the constitutional rights system of Bangladesh. Officially, Islam is yet to become a popular choice for politics in Bangladesh, however the groundswell of Islamist support appears to be strong. The inauguration dates of the HTB (2001) and JMB (2005) in Bangladesh confirm that these are fairly new phenomena in Bangladesh. Evidence of their increasing vigour must be analysed against the backdrop of the Bush doctrine of 'War on Terror'. With HTB's global linkage and JMB's al-Qaida style *modus operandi*, it will not be an

exaggeration to assume that global Islamists are using Bangladesh to engage in a proxy war between the west and Islam. As a fairly poor nation, Bangladesh has developed good friendship with supportive western countries and its development agencies which annually provide billions of dollars worth of aid and trade assistance. It is obvious that such interventions are not only seen as economic factors by Islamists. The differentiated negative approach of the different Islamist groups is thus highly significant, with some groups engaging in virtual armed conflict to counteract neo-colonial hegemony. JIB seems to take a more cautious approach in promoting their agenda, which is still ultimately to establish an Islamic state. It is clear that this, too, can ultimately compromise the ethos of democracy, since JIB also does not seem to believe in the fundamental elements of the Bangladeshi democratic concept.

Overall, the approach of Political Islam in Bangladesh can be seen as a multi-faceted reaction to the project of globalisation. 'Political Islam' in Bangladesh is far from monolithic. As a discursive force it has created various responses and adheres to diverse action plans. The growth of Political Islam is fostered not only by the poor democratic practices of the main parties, and thus by local and national agenda, but is also driven by the wider scenario and tensions of globalisation. What the discourse remains quiet about, however, is how to develop and implement a system of governance in Bangladesh that can combine democracy and Islam along Islamic lines. Idealising Islam is one thing, running a country in the twenty-first century is quite another. Islamists need to prove, therefore, that they can move beyond idealistic discourse and can tackle practical challenges in accordance with the competing

expectations of Islamic and modern international ethics and value systems. That, for all concerned, remains the main challenge.

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Notes

¹ See Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami- <http://jamaat-e-islami.org/>.

² See Hizbut Tahrir Bangladesh- <http://www.khilafat.org/index.php>. On the Khilafat Movement see Tejani (2007).

³ For interesting comparative evidence from Malaysia, see Hassan (2010).