

Uprising's Dialectic Pedagogy: Gramsci, Scott and Mandela against the 2013 Hefazat-e-Islam Movement in Bangladesh

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Helal Mohammed Khan, from Brahmanbaria (Bangladesh), shares wide-ranging interests in politics, anthropology and religion. Upon return to academia after stints of government service in Bangladesh, Helal graduated in Islamic & Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Edinburgh under Chevening scholarship and since then has been studying sociocultural anthropology at the University of Leuven. Previously he served in the Bangladesh Army (taught special warfare), attended Command & Staff College, and participated in peacekeeping duties with the United Nations in Congo. These experiences provoke Helal to explore the 'below politics' concerning contemporary people and societies; at the International Research Initiative Bangladesh (www.iri.bd.com), as a researcher and director, he also tries to bring some of them into perspectives.

Abstract

This essay revisits the 2013 Hefazat-e-Islam protests in Bangladesh, a religion-based social movement that infused activism in a people that were rather shying away from activist tendencies, and seeks lessons thereof. The first angle of inquiry looks into the Gramscian counter-elite that acts against the hegemony of the powerful as well as the powers-to-be in Bangladesh during that period and compares analytics with the autobiographical experiences of Nelson Mandela in South Africa. The wider lens developed helps to explain why despite initial success—evident in the speedy formation and flare-up of the movement among various social strata in Bangladesh—the Hefazat gave way to the traditional, and the demands for alternative cultures petered out. The second string recognizes the movement as social activism, observing how protests from mundane, Scottian, 'everyday resistance', turn into mass revival.

Keywords

Bangladesh; Hefazat-e-Islam; Hegemony; Mass Activism; Popular Resistance

Introduction

The language and the tone of the title will need clarifying first. They propose re-reading, if not redefining, the provocative term that ‘uprising’ is, and introduce to the anthropological readers newer narratives of a phenomenon which in itself remains confrontational. The scholastic references that the title bears, refer to two major contributions on popular resistance made in two separate halves of the twentieth century, by Antonio Gramsci (*Prison Notebooks*, 1948) and James Scott (*Weapons of the Weak*, 1985), respectively; and a third, which is an autobiographical piece from Nelson Mandela (*Long Walk to Freedom*, 1994), composed during Apartheid era. While Gramsci and Scott expound on the mass culture—and especially Scott on the ‘culture of resistance’—Mandela, arguably the most successful politician and resistance leader from that century, sees through the political and the very acts and styles of resistance. In considering them together, the paper attempts to link between sociology and anthropology in its political commentary of resistance (distinction between these social sciences being as much blurred in the previous century as they are today, and accordingly the lateral shifts come rather easy).

My ultimate object of inspection here, however, is the 2013 Hefazat-e-Islam protests in Bangladesh, whose formational as well as representational details, as I propose, can be unpacked through a combination of perspectives from these writings rather than considering them in isolation. Such an approach is important, since, as the discussion will also make evident, deploying entirely a neo-Marxist lens or resorting to simplistic narratives of class struggles in unmasking resistance paradigms of twenty-first century can be unhelpful. Thus, in the case of the Hefazat-e-Islam protesters (henceforth, HI, or simply Hefazat) this paper will trace their formation to a religious zeal that was previously unreported in Bangladesh, home to a people known more for their practice of moderate Islam rather than one of a revivalist kind (Lewis 2011; Riaz 2010 & 2016; Mohsin 2004); also, the local political parties will be understood as wavering between their ideologies and approaches to power, creating thus murky analytical grounds for their scholastic exploration. The behaviour by the ‘hegemon’ (relatedly, here, the ruling party and coalition in Bangladesh) will further complicate the analysis; for indeed, despite a spectacular start, the Hefazat movement was forced to an abrupt end through a ‘massacre’ act committed by the security forces deployed by the state, understandably launched against unarmed Hefazat protesters, under-aged madrasah students, and general supporters of the Islamic movement—in a brute intervention that may have allowed Sheikh Hasina (Bangladesh’s Prime Minister, then and until now) a rapid quelling of the uprising on the one hand and a clear run to the next parliament on the other (Desh Rights 2013; International Crisis Group 2015; Khan 2016a; The New York Times, 28 July 2017).

Thus, the paper is also an attempt to see through the structural and behavioral dynamics involving the agents and entities active surrounding the 2013 events and their decisionmaking. I follow qualitative reasoning, using both primary and secondary sources. The primary include policy papers, news reports and blogs (from Bangladesh as well as from outside) that explicate on the Hefazat incidents. The secondary literature, while geographically diverse, is mostly read comparatively, while aiming at drawing relevant (anthropological) lessons from the Bangladesh incidents. The discussion is offered in three sections. The first gives out briefly what happened in that volatile period in Bangladesh, starting roughly from the month of April 2013 and leading to the finale on May 5/6th that year, and explains why it is important to study them. The section also impresses upon the representational aspects of the Hefazat events, focusing on the pedagogic experience surrounding this popular Islamic movement that was, quite remarkably, ‘disowned’ by the international media (given the visible politicization of the media inside Bangladesh, I do not bring myself to question the national media in this paper). A historical reading of the secondary literature on Bangladesh is also briefly offered, before taking to analyzing the titular authors in the second section. The final section, still dealing with Bangladesh, recognizes the HI movement through its temporal and spatial characteristics, thus positing that uprising and resistances while will be investigated for their unique appeals, will need to be read in history.

1. Background: The 2013 incidents and their representation

A series of popular protests took place in Bangladesh in April and May 2013. Agitated by the incumbent Awami League’s questionable policies and arguably anti-Islam stances, several Islamic parties united to form an unprecedented coalition without allegiance to major parties—in Bangladesh which are the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami league (AL), who shared power in monochromatic consistency since the formal restoration of democracy in 1991—and declared non-cooperation. Mass gatherings were called in April under the banner of the HI at a number of districts across the country which left at least one dead. In the following days, the Islamic coalition came up with a 13-point demand list (Aamra24 2013), which the government declined to consider, and instead, when the coalition decided to convene a mass gathering at the capital on the 5th of May (from where further programs would be announced), the government decided to go the hard way. On the day of 5 May, there were sporadic clashes between the police and the protesters at various parts of Dhaka who gathered at Motijheel for address by Mufti Ahmed Shafi, the HI leader, eventually deciding for a night halt in and around the thoroughfare (Mustafa 2013). The brute intervention followed right after. At late night, at about 2am, the members of Bangladesh Police, Border Guards and Rapid Action Battalion were ordered to take on unarmed people—a thousands of them, in fact, who had toiled to the capital following marches from various parts of the country

(many of them elderly people or under-aged students without any political affiliation). There are differing accounts of what followed, and a good part of it cannot be traced back for confirmation. What can be confirmed, however, is that live ammunition were fired on civilian people, unknown numbers of people died (their bodies being allegedly ‘removed’ from the streets by ‘government forces’), and unspecified measures were taken by the state toward subsequent cover-up (Aamra24 2013; The Brethren of Black Lotus 2013; The Desh Rights 2013).

Happening largely in Dhaka, but concurrently also, to a lesser degree, in other districts of Bangladesh, the Hefazat incidents offer a classic case of conflict representation where government, political parties, protesters, and media outlets, all take part. While these representational details vary extensively, their triggers also come to be heterogeneous. For example, some cultural performers, in the spirit of championing secular values, may have targeted the madrasah community for humiliation in their plays, a concern that featured in the Hefazat’s 13-point demands (Aamra24 2013). Also, while the Hefazat objectives were peaceful and non-violent (which their central leaders spelt out time to time prior to the confrontations), their local leaders and protesters often expressed them aggressively—a part that was often highlighted by a section of the media. And such reportage continued not only before and during but also after the government clampdown on the protesters on the 5/6th of May (2013), undermining the widespread allegation of huge civilian casualties in the hands of the security forces (a few of these reports have been referred to in this essay).

A reading of secondary literature of Bangladesh’s independence history also alludes to a great variety of perception regarding the country’s religio-secular fault lines. Ali Riaz (2016), for instance, holds that the current political impasse in Bangladesh may be a result of Islamic empowerment in the hands of the traditional political parties (a Brussels-based South Asia Democratic Forum (2017) also came up with similar views). According to this narrative, Bangladesh inherited secular ideals in its inception, which will also have been instrumental in its secession from Pakistan in 1971 (Riaz 2010, 10). Such a view, however, has been duly contested by an array of scholars. Mohammed Yunus, for one, holds that all accounts of Bangladesh’s independence are ‘agreed upon to the point that the reason for the split had nothing to do with religion’ or, for that matter, secularism (Yunus 2003, 244; cf. Hashmi 2010). Dealing with Bangladesh’s history of independence, Craig Baxter lists out linguistic and cultural divides (with current Pakistan, then West Pakistan) as the prime movers for its independence (Baxter 1997, 62). Willem van Schendel also points out to the language issue, and do not consider religion, as having created ‘a more general cultural and political divide within the fledgling state’ (Schendel 2013, 179). Rehman Sobhan (2013, 187) brings economy into the debate, putting blames to the economic inequalities in pre-1971 Pakistan for fueling mass discontent in its Eastern province. David Lewis, on the other hand, acknowledges a ‘longstanding tension’ between

the religious and the secular in Bangladesh, but believes that the country has remained a moderate, Muslim majority, and its people an important antidote to Samuel Huntington's civilizational clash theories (Lewis 2011, 2–6; Guhathakurta and Schendel 2013; Venkatachalam 2016; Huntington 1993, 22–23).

I recognize this variety in the scholastic conception of Bangladesh's socio-political contours to be playing out even outside the realms of academic imagination. It is likely that these interpretational frameworks would also affect the individual as well as group behaviour dynamics of the Bangladeshi citizens, whether or not they govern their social and political structures. In considering the 2013 uprising thus the pronounced mesh of the Islamic with the quasi-democratic political block in Bangladesh must be realized and revealed. The confrontations between the religious and the secular (in the guise of the political) indicate added layers of multiplicity within Bangladesh's political milieu, and the media representations of the uprising may only be its external manifestation.

Thus, the Hefazat incidents were widely covered in the media, but only for a brief span of time. The way both local and international media added to the pedagogic experience surrounding this popular Islamic movement, introduces a particular dimension to the study of the mass, which involves a curious—and convenient—broad-brushing of Islamic political events first as *Islamist actions*, and eventually *terrorism*. Bülent Kenes calls such misrepresentation as 'international injustice,' and Khalid Sultan, a 'negative signifier' (Sultan 2016); Javier Rivera sees this within a symbiotic relation where the mass media is keen to 'capitalize from the confusion and consternation caused by terrorist attacks to produce the kind of dramatic news that draws attention,' i.e. by convoluting terrorism with non-terrorism (Rivera 2016). Considering the various representations of the HI incidents would have to be an exercise without end, since the Hefazat events are still alive in Bangladesh in the popular talks, media and political debates. The varied representations of the Hefazat incidents are thus only a pointer to the complicated nexus between the political, the religious and the secular in the country. One would, however, do well not to ascribe to them similar weights; rather, as the forthcoming section will hold, the religious and the political in Bangladesh have for long coexisted; while the secular only saw itself enacted time to time by people either too close to the power block, or by parties too much on the political fringe (Khan 2016b, 19–24). The secular is, thus, largely non-representative of the majority Bangladeshi society.

2. Contextualizing resistance: A probe in Gramsci, Scott and Mandela

A comparative reading of Gramsci, Scott and Mandela may reveal certain sociopolitical dynamics relating to the Hefazat incidents. Scholastic attentions to Antonio Gramsci although often hovered over the latter's adoption of Marxian concepts, their relevance has not always remained

unchallenged. Donald Kurtz (1996), for instance, holds that the use of ‘working class lens’ in examining twentieth century struggles has often been unhelpful, and, at times, superficial. The topicality of Gramscian theories with regard to popular movements has also been questioned by John Gledhill, who found it ‘peculiarly difficult to understand Gramsci without paying any regard to the fact that he wrote as a political strategist who dedicated his life to the working class’s conquest of state power’ (Gledhill 1996; Gramsci and Buttigieg 2002). In analyzing the Hefazat movement in Bangladesh, therefore, it would be difficult to place its various demands within simplistic class narratives; throughout the movement’s buildup, the working class were as involved as the middle class (on-site news reports often showed protesters in the capital and in other major cities representing both social strata); more so, the movement was supported by a section of the elite as well (although, notably, only during the later stage when it rose to prominence already), who came mostly from the opposition political block (cf. Allchin 2013; Burke and Hammadi 2013; Molla 2013; Prio TV 2013).

Some classification were observed, however. The Madrasah students and teachers in Bangladesh, many of whom joined the HI protests, recognized themselves as different from those following the general education track—a ‘difference’ that was, in fact, forced upon them through non-recognition from past. Despite having developed for themselves a standard educational curriculum (which was although officially recognized by the state, often unrecognized by the employers or public universities), the graduates from madrasah and Islamic colleges (also known as Alia Madrasahs) would not be granted access to appropriate job market or to further education (some universities would use own statutes to disqualify their credentials). And yet—and I find this significant to note—throughout the months of April and May 2013, no claims of intra-party feud or inter-class conflicts were reported from within the HI platform. The movement did not forward demands for any change of power at state level either. In fact, the HI leadership had stated at some point that they would be satisfied if the current (AL) government agreed to sustain their 13-point propositions, to the apparent unease of the BNP, who would rather be happy to see them calling for an early election or resignation of government (Burke and Hammadi 2013; Molla 2013; cf. Riaz 2016).

The narratives of popular resistance and mass struggle, rather than class struggle, may unveil more important resistance paradigms concerning the Hefazat resistance; and in this James C. Scott would be helpful. In *Weapons of the weak* (1985), Scott makes an engaging commentary of popular resistance in alternative forms that is launched against hegemonic power in Malaysia. The peasant and ‘slave’ societies there use creative styles of resistance, channeling them through mundane and often unobserved—yet, effective—corridors of protest, as they strive to thwart domination by the

local rich. The men and women of Sedaka village (under Kedah state of Malaysia) is seen to sidestep direct confrontations with the powerful, using passive techniques like ‘combine harvesters’, petty theft, and killing of their oppressors’ animals. Scott describes these acts within the expressions of cultural resistance and as a ‘non-cooperation over a prolonged time-period’ (266-273; see also Yee 1994).

In Bangladesh also we witness efforts to achieve a symbolic balance of power by the underrepresented groups; however, different from those Malaysian examples, Bangladesh’s protesters—madrasah students, teachers and general participants of the HI movement—do not strive for economic or hard power; instead, they aim to salvage prestige, recognition and respect (take, for instance, the fact that at least 7 out of 13 points put forward by the HI leadership to the government related to various claims of soft power; see, Aamra24 2013). The scholars and students from the Madrasah (collectively known as the *ulama*), who represent the traditional in the country, indeed waited for decades for recognition by the state in education, social power and policy participation, and had sustained prolonged domination by the so-called ‘modern’ within a political and educational system that may not have left much for them ‘to flourish’. More so, post-2009, with a newfound secularism under the aegis of Shiekh Hasina and several other leaders of the ruling coalition, these people may have been pushed to feeling vulnerable and unsecured (Ahmed 2014; Baxter 1997; Burke and Hammadi 2013; Dutton 2014).

Uprising’s uniqueness may also be sought in its history as in undertones, both affecting their scholastic perception. In Scott’s Malaysia, the rich rationalize their exploitation by claiming to be poor themselves, while the poor justify their commitment of petty thefts against the rich (both thus showing interests in economic gains). In Bangladesh, the HI (as a campaigner of traditional Islamic values) places more concern with the issues of ‘free mixing’, or ‘equal share of property between men and women’, or simply on the question of ‘respect for the religious lot’ (Aamra24 2013; cf. Allchin 2013); despite drawing inspiration from religion, these demands fail to appeal to the people who may be keen on political or other claims. However, unlike in Malaysia, where the poor villagers blame their richer neighbours for what is happening, without laying claims of obligation to their Chinese landlords or to the Malaysian government (Yee 1985), in Bangladesh it is the government who must be held responsible and protested against (which has a lot to do with people’s historic lack of trust on their administrators), although, notably, its removal is not sought. The Hefazat protests, at least to begin with, shows ‘strategic non-violence’ (Stephen and Chinoweth 2008); and whether with the ‘hideous’ protesters in Malaysia, or with the ‘angry ones’ in Bangladesh, the so-called menacing face of revolution remains absent (the latter, however, draws more scholastic interest,

whose reasons Scott ascribes to ‘academic romance with wars of liberation’) (see also, Vinthagen 1995).

Thus, at a first glance, the protests in Malaysia or Bangladesh may not look like posing a significant threat to the hegemon (whether directed against the rich and exploitative social agents in Malaysia, or an arrogant, oppressive, state in Bangladesh); however, as the resistance consolidates—which happened in Bangladesh, as it did in other global examples, with Mandela and the ANC in South Africa, for instance, that we shall read subsequently—the threat assessment changes. The spectacle that gets created by the arrival of thousands of oppressed from village (often who are poor, peasants, and rugged in their appearance), alongside the ‘disgruntled lot’ from the city, makes that threat appear not only real, but also ‘menacing’. This unnerves and unsettles the hegemon, and produces unimagined reactions (which explains Sheikh Hasina’s remorseless response to the Hefazat protesters, and the excesses by the security forces during their night assault on the 5th of May, 2013).

In Nelson Mandela’s (1994) reflections from South Africa one locates further dichotomies, since they involve not only ‘the rebel against the state’, but also ‘the rebel as state’. Mandela’s reading of resistance and that of the hegemony of the state and international order and how they may interact within a single platform is, to encapsulate in one phrase, history-driven:

The idea that history progresses through struggle and that change occurs in revolutionary jumps was similarly appealing [to the ANC]... Our problems, while distinctive and special, were not unique, and a philosophy that placed those problems in an international and historical context of the greater world and the course of history was valuable (Mandela 1994, 138).

Despite this visible insistence for resistance’s historical reading—which Mandela identified as essential for ANC’s policy making during the apartheid—the media and political commentaries on the Hefazat incidents in Bangladesh may have hurried into their analysis. Thus, the stick-wielding and pebble-throwing protesters who were visibly defending themselves from a viciously-engaging and intimidating police and border guards on May 5 were dubbed as ‘terrorists’ and ‘radicals’ (Bouissou 2013; Mahmud 2017; cf. Mustafa 2013). Following from actions and retaliatory actions involving both sides during day hours, when the protesters had announced night halt in Motijheel, things were visibly calm and no immediate threats to law and order could be discerned. And yet, with most of the protesters asleep at night, the security forces were ordered to launch their *Operation Flush Out*—whose nomenclature is particularly revealing of the hegemonic intention, which was, to remove the protesters from the capital using brute force (BBC 2013; Bdnews.com 2013).

Returning to the South African example, the MK (*uMkibonto we Sizwe*), ANC’s armed wing co-founded by Mandela following the Sharpeville massacre, engaged in a number of subversive acts, one of which included a car bombing in Pretoria in May 1983 that left nineteen people dead and more than two hundred injured. Interestingly however, this evidently terror action received certain

endorsement from Mandela in his memoir, described simplistically as an act of ‘selective foray’ intended to ‘scare away foreign capital’, and, to ‘frighten’ National Party supporters (336):

Our strategy was to make selective forays against [...] targets that not only would hamper the military effectiveness of the state, but frighten National Party supporters, scare away foreign capital, and weaken the economy. [...] The killing of civilians was a tragic accident, and I felt a profound horror at the death toll. But as disturbed as I was by the casualties, I knew that such accidents were the inevitable consequence of the decision to embark on a military struggle. Human fallibility is always a part of war, and the price for it always high (617-18).

When considered the possibility that Mandela may have authorized the MK for using ‘any means necessary’ in order to ‘speed up the erasure of human prejudice and the end of chauvinistic and violent nationalism’ (138), the analysis complicates. Surely, in apartheid South Africa Mandela and the ANC were representing a people that had their democratic and civil rights in the balance, one that they had no choice but to defend; however, continuing with the current analysis, and using a different—and hopefully meaningful—twist here, let me make a second proposition: let us look at Mandela not as one only representing ‘resistance’, but also as one who, at least on that occasion, was valourizing the ‘acts of terror’ over the ‘acts of war’, and, in the process, confounding both. This is significant, since Mandela’s explanations of ANC actions in Pretoria resonate more as a technique that a hegemon or oppressor would usually employ, trying to justify coercion or violence not a-priori, but post-priori (Mandela’s memoirs were published only after he had risen to power, and thus at least some of his comments may represent a statesman than a rebel).

This way of a representation may be understood as retro-justification of violence (Goodin, Pettit and Pogge 2007, 268), although, in this case, employed by none other than Nelson Mandela. In Bangladesh, while the protesters flouted law by carrying sticks, hurling stones and setting fires on tyres in the middle of a capital thoroughfare; the state took over the role of the ‘valourized terrorist’—the role-reversal here should be noted, compared to the South African case—and launched a night assault on unarmed, sleeping, protesters, and killing and injuring them en masse. The hegemon here (the government, or rather the ruling party in Bangladesh) went on to abuse its clout over the media and international partners and made efforts to establish an alternative version of ‘truth’ as well as engaging in ‘selective execution of the oppressed’ (Appadurai 1998)—detailed in several reports concerning the state of extrajudicial killings, tortures and judicial excess in Bangladesh since 2013 (Amnesty International 2013; Odhikar 2016; cf. Khan and Eqbal 2014).

3. Through time and space: The shifting dynamics of Resistance

The temporal or spatial boundaries that uprisings tend to cross necessitate their appropriate regional and local inspection. And at any rate, any analysis of Islamic political events in Bangladesh

would need to grapple with varied local realities, and consider popular characteristics that impact not only the political parties' planning and agenda, but also animate their followers' imaginative spheres (Khan 2016b). Geographically also, Bangladesh's location outside the traditional Middle East or its physical separation from other Muslim majority nations may at times keep its citizen Muslims physically apart—if not ideologically removed—from some of the direct effects of global Islamic politics (Khan 2016b; Ullah 2014; Ahmed and Nazneen 1990). Despite the pervading effects of global terrorism (of which the IS-motivated attacks at a restaurant in Dhaka in July 2016 would be a grim reminder), the Islamic politics in Bangladesh mostly continued along a moderate and compromising track for greater part of the last two decades (cf. Venkatachalam 2016; Islam 2016). Swiveling between traditional and revivalist ideas while playing second fiddles to stronger and quasi-democratic political parties, Bangladesh's Islamic politics learned to adapt to the country's institutional structures rather than trying to oppose them (notably, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), the largest Islamic party was known for long for its intra-party democratic practices, in contrast to the traditional pro-democratic parties, which were often beset by authoritarian practices; see Islam 2015; cf. Ahmed 2005).

Despite this atmosphere of conformance, it may be said that the political activism that the Bangladeshi citizens displayed under the banner of the HI was long coming. The movement itself may have grown as a consequence of the ruling party's (AL) anti-Islam stances, evident from its questionable or non-participatory decision making on Islamic issues (despite having existed since 2006, the HI was only able to organize sizeable protests starting 2010 or 2011, having gathered momentum during the AL's second mandate that commenced from 2009). The Sheikh Hasina government's decision of the removal of the Islamic phrase *Bismillah* (meaning, 'I start by the name of God') from Bangladesh's constitution and political promotion of secularists within the AL-led coalition also point toward the possibility that the religious status quo in the country was abruptly tipping to the favour of a smaller number of people brandishing secular slogans (cf. Jahan 2014). This understandably unnerved the more pious section of the general mass as well as the Islamic revivalists, from where the Hefazat leaders only needed to steer the people toward making specific claims, whether treading religion, or politics. That they failed to chart a sustainable political agenda or display inclusive ideological stances in order to bag greater (national or international) support will be blamed to their indecisiveness and lack of political insight, while the major guilt for the security and humanitarian situation can possibly be ascribed to the rogue measures employed by the state in trying to wipe out the protesters altogether (cf. Gellner 2010).

Also will be notable how in the gradual shaping up of the political scene in Bangladesh, the 2013 uprising found its inspiration. The 'war crimes trial' that was launched in 2011 by the ruling

AL-government came to be testing the JI's top echelon through mass imprisonment, and threatened several of its top leaders for life sentences or even execution. In fact, the execution process of some six JI leaders had already begun by 2013 (the first taking place in February that year, only three months prior to the May incidents with Hefazat). These measures had the JI's political performance greatly hampered, to the extent that the party members were hardly visible in the street, creating an Islamic political vacuum in the country. In such a backdrop Hefazat-e-Islam's rise to prominence by championing popular (religious) demands does not come as much surprise (Dutton 2014; cf. Progress Bangladesh 2015). As the literature review of Bangladesh's post-independence history in Section 1 will have implied, recovering from a religion-based divide from the British India in the 1940s and a culture and language-based further divide from Pakistan in the 1970s, the political thoughts of the Bengali people came to be shaped by the discourses of democracy, equal rights, and social justice (Baxter 1997, 62). Islam's perceived role in this formation may be a mixed, but undeniable, one. It is with these practicalities in mind that the Hefazat movement's appeal to popular imagination will need perceiving.

Conclusion

Who sings the people-song? Possibly none. And yet people's voices may be found through studying their acts of resistance, whether silent or tumultuous. It is in this backdrop that this essay delved into exploring the 2013 Hefazat-e-Islam (HI) movement, and considered academic expositions that may be helpful in unveiling the state-people nexus in political anthropology. Thematically it did not embark on any exploration of 'facts' surrounding the 2013 HI movement; the goal was not to determine *what exactly happened* in Bangladesh in the months of April and May 2013 centering those protests (or in what ways the state-sponsored atrocities were delivered), but rather their *representation* and how representation itself had a cognizable role in shaping discourses before and after. Specifically I looked for, on the state's side, the probable key reasons for handling the uprising with an iron-fist, one indeed of a rather preposterous, brutal, kind; and on the protesters' side, their likely political, religious, and social triggers.

My principal argument was that the 2013 uprising in Bangladesh under the banner of the Hefazat-e-Islam has multiple narratives, and they call for multiple theoretical viewpoints. While resistance elsewhere—for example, the 2011 Tahrir movement at Cairo or the Occupy Movement at Ljubljana—may bear similarities with those protests at Dhaka (in terms of popular passion or motivation, if not in the aim or media coverage, which, for the Bangladesh events was rather paltry), the analytics ought to be different. Theoretically, a comparative reading of Gramsci, Scott and Mandela may meaningfully engage with the Bangladesh incidents, although any broad analysis

without epistemological caution may be misleading (for instance, a normative adoption of Gramsci or Marx to explain the Dhaka events will likely miss out on the futility of the working class lens in a situation where pressing ideological issues make people to sidestep class differences). While class differences have indeed been the hallmark of the Bangladeshi societies since independence (Mondal 2014, 343), they came to be overcome by the state's oppressive measures to the HI movement, bringing the protesters, organizers and funders at the same interacting platform. This also proved to be crucial for the Hefazat movement's initial success, although, eventually, came short when meted with further repression.

The study also sketched out the possibility of alternative political acts by the leaders within Islamic communities. The madrasah-based ulama in Bangladesh, facing repressive governments, display a struggle for assertiveness in predominantly Muslim societies through their alternative practices—which, with the HI in picture, came to assume a pseudo-political form in Bangladesh in 2013. This may explain why or how the orthodox finds a due place in the Muslim imagination and in their religious aspirations in twenty first century. With regard to the individual Hefazat members or protesters in Bangladesh, again, they may have fallen also victim to the HI leaders' naiveties (which resulted from the latter's lack in political experience and the movement's ideological mismatches compared to traditional political currents in Bangladesh). Considering how such a lack may have been key to the movement's tragic end, this will be of interest in further scholarly studies.

The Hefazat experiences may also be a poignant reminder to the fact that secularism as a trend never had easy sailing in Bangladesh before or after its independence—a status that may not have radically altered in the new century. The story of Bangladesh has apparently been one *with* religion, than *without*. This may also be reason why, despite their apparent removal from the political scene in 2013, the HI has shown signs of return lately (Prothom Alo 2017). At these backdrops, the enthusiasm by the international media or political commentators to brand Bangladesh's Islamic as 'Islamist' (which is often used derogatively with terrorism-inclined activism) will be questioned. In fact, if this essay will be any lesson, a truer representation of the rise and fall of a political movement like that of the Hefazat-e-Islam may be traced beyond their official or readily found narratives: through historical interrogations, or by taking into fold their in-house, and often informal, background tales.

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