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Fractured Nation, Fractured Identities: Quest for a National Reconciliation in Bangladesh

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Abstract

In Bangladesh, the two main political parties — the Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) — have held contested, opposing views on every significant national and international issue, and except for two years in 2007–2008, they have been in power in every consecutive term since 1991. This has led to the absence of even a minimal ideological consensus — an essential component for any smoothly functioning democracy. This ideological chasm is rooted in the failure of the nationalist elites to develop a unified discourse that is based on a shared identity and national imagery; this in turn has led to the development of two parallel nationalisms in both the elite and the subaltern domains which has fractured the entire nation and created dual identities. This study urges the construction of a space for reflexive, discursive, and deliberative local-level dialogues that could engage the government, opposition political activists, and civil society activists at the Zilla, Upazilla, and Union levels, in a much-needed public examination of Bangladesh's national identity. It would help to deconstruct these projects through dialogical and democratic means rather than forcing their totalizing claims upon each other.

1 Introduction

Once again, the Bangladesh Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) have taken an antagonistic position on the issue of the parliamentary election scheduled for 2014. The BNP stands for the restoration of the non-partisan, non-elected, "neutral" caretaker government; they have demanded, like before, that the caretaker government should replace the elected one during the time of the election.[1] Meanwhile, rejecting the idea of the caretaker system, the AL has proposed to form an "interim government" from the elected members of the leading parties in the parliament. It is interesting to note that they both shifted their preferences when their roles switched from the ruling to the opposition party — in the opposition, they supported the caretaker system, but then as the ruling party, they opposed it.[2] Even though the two parties have served (except in 2007 and 2008) as the ruling party and the main opposition in every consecutive term since 1991, they have not been able to establish even a minimal ideological consensus — an essential component for any smoothly functioning democracy. As a result, the AL and the BNP hold contested, opposing views not only on the issue of a caretaker system but on every significant national and international issue, including the basic concepts of national identity, the role of religion in the state, and the nature of their relationship with India.

This ideological chasm between the AL and the BNP has led to mutual distrust and disbelief; hence, they do not believe that they would be able to come back to power through a free and fair election if their opponent retained power during the time of the election. Therefore, despite the fact that the state faces no direct military intervention, the political parties have failed to institutionalize the democratic system through fair elections and a legitimate succession of power under the leadership of a political party.

The antagonistic position between these parties has caused numerous street confrontations that have claimed many lives, especially in 1996 and in 2006.[3] In addition, the enduring chasm between them has created an opening for the military for indirect intervention into the political system, which has further deteriorated the possibility of institutionalizing democracy in the body politic of Bangladesh. For example, confrontations between the AL and the BNP on the issue of a caretaker chief in 2006 encouraged the military to intervene in the state once again and the outcome of this was the Fakhruddin interregnum, which despite its civilian faade, was basically a military government in a civilian cloak.

The root of the ideological chasm between the AL and the BNP appears to be the failure of the nationalist elites to develop a unified discourse of nationalism that is based on a shared identity and national imagery; this has led to the development of two parallel nationalisms in both the elite and the subaltern domains — a unique phenomenon in South Asian history.[4] Further, this dual

"nation-building" process has fragmented the elites and the subalterns on the issues of identity, nation, and nationality and planted disbelief and distrust among the AL and the BNP leaders and activists, which has resulted in their inability to take a unified stand on the important issues. In the post (internal) colonial state of Bangladesh, "imagined" within the available set of colonial modules, the elites have reconstructed two parallel nations — the secular, linguistic-based Bengali (AL) and the territory and Islam-based Bangladeshi (BNP).[5] Both parties have endeavored to implement the totalizing claims of their own nationalist project while denying the multiple "fragments" within the nation; and both parties, when in opposition, have obstinately avoided attending sessions of parliament or engaging in any kind of dialogical deliberation, which has further exacerbated their failure to institutionalize democracy in the body politic of Bangladesh.[6] The failure to develop a unified nationalist discourse ultimately fractured the entire nation and created dual identities within the framework of the nation-state.

This paper takes a brief historical view to gauge how the making and remaking of identity and nationalism in the political discourse of the nation has resulted in this enduring chasm between the AL and the BNP, and has fragmented both the elites and the subalterns on the issue of identity, nation, and nationalism. One possible policy recommendation is that the civil society should take the initiative to create a space for a local-level reflexive, deliberative dialog in order to engage the leaders and activists of the AL and the BNP in frequent discursive deliberation. The goal would be to deconstruct their nationalist projects through dialogical and democratic means rather than forcing their totalizing claims upon each other. This deliberation should not be restricted to the top-brass leaders in the capital but should also include the civilians and party activists at the grassroots — e.g. the Zilla, Upazilla, and Union levels.

2 Genesis of the Present Cleavage

The elite historiographies, both the nationalist and the leftist, have construed the "Bangladesh revolution" (Maniruzzaman 1980) as a secular, elite nationalist project. This was the major point of contention between the emerging Bengali elites with their Pakistani counterpart, the state established in 1947 for the Muslims of colonial India on the basis of the "two-nation" theory, where the elites of the Pakistan movement, who mainly belonged to the Muslim League, imagined that the Muslims and the Hindus in British India were two antagonistic nations and hence, they would not be able to live together in an independent state.[7] Therefore, they thought it necessary to create a separate state for the Muslims of colonial India. The two-nation theory gained popularity with the Mus-

lim elites and the subaltern domains in Bengal, which was known as East Pakistan. Most of the Bengali Muslim elites imagined themselves as a nation and felt associated with the people living in the Western wing of Pakistan; they believed that the Hindus, the religious minorities, and the Adivasis were the "others," the outsiders of this nationalist project.

Unable to create their own independent political domain, the majority of the subalterns who came from Muslim backgrounds had no choice other than to accept the imagination of the elites as their own. In Bengal, as the "subaltern conscience [was] subject to the cathexis of the elites" (Spivak 1988, p. 11), independent of the elite domain, they were unable to develop a distinctive view of the nation, nationalism, and identity. Therefore, on the issue of imagining the nation, the subalterns accepted the religio-identity of the elites' as their own, despite its origination in a domain where they did not belong.

However, within a very short period after the creation of Pakistan, the "two-nation" theory lost its popularity in East Pakistan. The Muslim elites could not establish hegemony over the civil society of Bengal on the basis of this theory. In the meantime, their identities had already transformed to the Pakistani national identity from the Muslim national identity. Their failure to establish hegemony resulted in what Guha (1998) and Bates (1975) defined as "dominance without hegemony." Among the various possible reasons they could not succeed was their apathy toward establishing democratic norms and practices, which ultimately resulted in long-term military rule, the perception of economic exploitation by the Pakistani leading classes among the minds of both the Bengali elite and the subalterns, and the distinct cultural praxis between the West and the East wings of Pakistan.

The Muslim elites in Bengal found themselves highly circumscribed in the economic and political structures in Pakistan. Their sense of exclusion from the economic and political lives of Pakistan vis-à-vis the failure of the Pakistani nationalist elites to establish hegemony over the civil society of Bengal encouraged them to seek a counter ideology through which to assert their economic and political interests in a unified Pakistan. As a result, to counter religion-based nationalism, a section of the Bengali elites came out from the Muslim League and formed a different party, the Awami League (AL).[8] In this new reality, like the Muslim elites in British India, in their "cultural domain," they (re)imagined that all the inhabitants of Bengal regardless of their religious differences were a nation. They upheld secular Bengali nationalism in order to accommodate people from different religions in their nationalist project, which quickly gained popularity among the subalterns in East Pakistan.[9] The party was easily able to convince the economically exploited and politically sup-

pressed destitute masses that in order to be emancipated from their extreme cornered conditions in the state and society they needed to organize a freedom movement and create a nation of their own on the basis of secular nationalism.

Despite their conscious resistance to the internal colonial structure of Pakistan as a result of the absence of what Gramsci (2011, p. 196) called the "multiple elements of *'conscious leadership'*," the subalterns could not independently develop their own domain of politics; hence, they had to rely on the elite's imagination of nation as their own.[10] Despite their dependency, the subalterns had aspirations disparate from the elites about the creation of the new nation. Whereas for the subalterns the creation of the new nation-state would lay the groundwork for socio-economic equitability as well as increasing their political "capabilities," for the elites it was a struggle to secure their class interests.[11]

The "Bangladesh revolution" was thus not a unified project, and the participants in the revolution were not motivated by similar aspirations. Instead of a "collective consciousness" (Durkheim 1997, pp. 38–39), where both the elites and the subalterns were guided by the "subjective will," there were intragroup contestations in both the elite and the subaltern domains regarding the nature of the body politic of the new nation.[12] For example, they were fragmented not only on the role of religion in the state but also on whether the new nation should adopt the path of socialism or follow the path of capitalism.

Among the Bengali nationalists those who belonged to the AL camp believed that the body politic of the new nation should be secular and that capitalism and democracy should be the guiding principle of the state, although later because of the pressure from the leftists inside the party, they adopted socialism as their guiding principle. The leftists — both the "pro-Moscow" and the "pro-Peking" — wanted to establish a socialist and secular Bangladesh. Meanwhile another major political party, the National Awami Party (NAP, Vashani faction), believed that Islam should be an integral part of the identity formation of the Bengali nation, and also that Islam should play a central role in the new state, although they did not stand for the Sharia state, like the Islamists who believe that Sharia law should be the guiding principle of Pakistan. All the Islamists regardless of party affiliation have stood for a united Pakistan because they believe that secular nationalism is antithetical to the idea of religio-nationalism and hence, against the ideal of Islam.[13]

Despite its marginalization in East Pakistan civil society, religion-based identity and politics did not completely fade away. For the Islamists, the syncretistic cultural tradition of Bengal practiced in the cultural domain of the Bengali nationalists was associated with the cultural traditions of the Hindus — the "enemy," the "outsiders" of the Pakistani nationalist project. In their narratives, the movement for Bangladesh was a conspiracy by India with the aim of disintegrating Pakistan for the strategic advantage of India. The Hindus and the Communists were in the forefront of implementing this conspiracy theory. Hence, during the time of the Liberation War in 1971, all the Islamist parties actively opposed the separation of East Pakistan; they equated the identity of Pakistan with the identity of Islam. They believed that the state of Pakistan "was under constant threat and that the threat came from India" (Haqqani 2005, p. 14). They were afraid that in the secular new state, the people of Bengal could not retain their Islamic identity. Therefore, to protect the integration of Pakistan and their Islamic identity, they equated "Maulana Maududi's notion of the defense of Islam" (Haqqani 2005, p. 24) with that of Pakistan.

All of the Islamist parties, especially the Jammat-i-Islami, actively participated with the Pakistani army in brutally crushing the Bangladesh movement, committing heinous atrocities in the name of Islam in order to protect the integrity of the Pakistan and Islamic identity. However, all of their efforts were in vain, and the new state, Bangladesh, was born through a bloody civil war in 1971. The disintegration of Pakistan completely shattered the ideological foundation of the Islamists. It was beyond their imagination that linguistic, secular, ethno-nationalism could override religio-nationalism. They had been protgs of the (Islamic) state; now they were in the periphery of the (secular) state, which made them extremely frustrated about the future of Islamic identity and religion-based nationalism in Bangladesh.

3 One State: Two "Nations"

The creation of Bangladesh opened up an avenue for the secular nationalist elites to reconstruct the identity of the nation on the basis of secular nationalism. Like the Pakistani nationalists, under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, they also faced counter-hegemony during the course of implementing their project — mainly from the fragments of the ethnic minorities and Adivasis, who since the beginning of independence had refused to accept the Bengali nationalists' identity as their own. Further, the desperate Islamists did not want to renounce their Islamic identity and wanted to incorporate it into the identity of the new nation. In the changed situation, they deconstructed the two-nation theory in order to rebuild the identity of the Bengali nation by incorporating the elements of religion into the "nation-building" process.[14]

Being highly cornered in the body politic of the new state, it was initially difficult to carry out their deconstructed nationalist idea, which caused despair. In

this context, the NAP (Vashani) came forward to ease their abysmal crisis. They demanded the renaming of Bangladesh as Muslim Bengal. Regardless of the ideological differences, all the Islamists almost immediately supported the demand. This was the first serious counter-hegemonic challenge to the notion of secular nationalism and it was the embryo of the future Bangladeshi nationalism, which emerged within a very short period of time after the tragic assassination of the architect of the Bangladesh revolution, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It gained popularity among the subalterns and elites who believed that the new state should not completely abandon religion in their process of nation building.

For various reasons, however — such as rampant corruption, the 1974 famine, the deterioration of law and order, cronyism, and international isolation — the secular elites could not establish hegemony over civil society. In addition, they faced challenges from various fragments of the nation to their secular nationalist project. In this context, it is ironic that they took the same path of coercion to establish their domination over the new nation that the Muslim nationalists had taken in united Pakistan, against which they struggled throughout the period of united Pakistan. Failing to establish hegemony through democratic means, in order to maintain their rule, the Bengali elites resorted to coercive measures and established a one-party dictatorship, which eventually led to "domination without hegemony," the same scenario that Pakistani elites faced in East Pakistan.

In January 1975, in an unexpected move in the parliament, the AL passed a resolution establishing Soviet-style, one-party rule that banned all the political parties and groups. The AL renamed their party as the Bangladesh Krisok Sromik Awami League (BAKSAL, Bangladesh Peasants and Workers Awami League) whereby abolishing their previous organizations. The two relatively small parties, the "pro-Moscow" Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and the NAP (Mujaffar faction), joined with the new party.[15] Their excessive reliance on the state's apparatus and coercive measures to advance the reconstruction process isolated them further from the masses, which complicated their attempt to implement their nationalist agenda. This sharpened the contestation between the elites who supported the secularist project and those who opposed it. The disenfranchised subalterns simply fractured their own domain along the lines of their elite counterparts.

Instead of the masses, the secular elites now shifted their dependency to the civil-military bureaucrats in order to maintain their power-base. However, what they could not realize was that most of the civil-military bureaucrats they inherited from Pakistan were trained in various Pakistani academies, and nevertheless had a positive outlook towards secular Western democracy and followed Western lifestyles. Like Jinnah, they believed that the nation should not abandon Islam in the process of their identity formation. A good number of them however believed that although secular democracy was good for the Western states, it was not suitable for their own country. Many of the inherited bureaucrats (both civil and military) joined the cause with the secular nationalists, but a significant number also opposed the idea of disintegrating Pakistan for the sake of linguistic, secular nationalism and they worked with the Pakistani military junta to crush the freedom struggle of the Bengali nationalists. However, regardless of their orientation, the Mujib government incorporated them all into state structures. Therefore, like the elites and the subalterns of the nation, the bureaucrats were also fragmented on the issue of nationalism and identity; even their cohesive, hierarchical organizations could not subdue their internal contestation regarding the remaking of the nation.

The ideological contestation inside the military became bloody, especially when the junior Islamist officers decided to forcefully overthrow the rule of the secular nationalists, which resulted in the tragic demise of the Mujib regime. During 1975, a series of coups and counter-coups finally brought power to General Ziaur Rahman, the primus inter pares. He reinterpreted the national identity and categorically subverted the entrenched meaning of secular identity, nation, and nationalism in order to reintroduce the discourse of Islamism into the restructured body politic of the state. About the motives and the nature of Zia's reconstruction of both the identity and the state, Riaz (2004, p. 25) wrote that "it involved both the manipulation/modification of constitutional procedure and the construction of a new ideology that would undermine the ideology of the former regime and justify its takeover."

To counter this secular linguistic nationalist ideology, Zia effectively deconstructed the two-nation theory and successfully reinvented territorial nationality by incorporating Islamic components into the national identity — what he identified as Bangladeshi nationalism. As an exclusionist project, the religious "minorities" and the Adivasis were considered as "outsiders" and were excluded from the re-created nation as well as from the process of Islamizing the state and civil society. Zia's Bangladeshi nationalism officially disintegrated both the elites and the subalterns, and since then, the secularists have usually identified them as Bengalis while the Islamists call them Bangladeshis.

The AL and the leftist parties in general aligned themselves with the secular Bengali camp whereas the BNP — the party Zia established to "quest for [his] legitimacy" (Riaz 2004, p. 24) through advancing his agenda of remaking the nation with Islamic fervor — and the

various factions of the Islamists identified themselves as Bangladeshis.[16] Zia showed a "softy attitude toward Pakistan" (Ahmed 1981, p. 137) and successfully eliminated and killed a good number of military officers who belonged mainly to the Bengali nationalist camp. Further, the political activists of the AL and the JASOD (National Socialist Party) faced severe persecution from the Zia regime. Then to advance his nationalist ideas and embolden his power-base, Zia took an "overtly pro-Islamic stance" (Ahmed 1994, p. 692) and established good ties with the Jammat-i-Islami. Bangladesh in fact began its "shift from the secular values [toward] the vulnerability to Islamism" (Milam 2009, p. 11) during the time of Zia's metapolitefsi when he reconstructed nationalism with an Islamic component and moved towards a faade of democracy.

Both parties, the AL and the BNP, have endeavored to implement the totalizing claims of their nationalist project and have considered each other as the major rivals of their project. When they were in power, they persecuted the other party's activists, which widened their mutual distrust and disbelief. Despite organizing a joint movement (from a different platform) against the last military dictator of the country, General Hussain Mohammad Ershad, they could not overcome their problem of mutual distrust. Since the overthrow of General Ershad in 1990, one of these two parties has been in power for all but 2 years. Instead of reconciling, they have both tried to advance their own totalizing claim of nationalism, which most of the time has resulted in confrontation instead of contestation. Their contentious relationship has not only hindered institutionalization of the democratic system but is also one of the major obstacles preventing economic development.

The nationalism debate thus originated in the elite domain, and their failure to speak for the nation as a whole fractured the identities of the nation and placed them in contentious relations. At the national level, the elites could not develop even a minimal value consensus on the important issues. As a policy recommendation, this paper therefore argues that it is time for the civil society to intervene in order to create an atmosphere of reflexive, discursive, deliberative discussion at the local level in order to engage the government and opposition political activists in a much-needed public examination of Bangladesh's national identity.

4   Grassroots Dialogues: Quest for a National Reconciliation

The notion of reflexivity embraces two meanings: organized inputs and "conscientious self-introspection" (Jun 2005, p. 12). It engages actors with contradictory values in an examination and reevaluation of existing systems,

rules, and paradigms (adapted from Grin and et al. 2004). In the course of engagement, power "struggles (among the different actors) may involve enacting reflexive" deliberation (Hendriks and Grin 2007, p. 333). The idea is to reach minimal consensus about some fundamental issues within the framework of reciprocal reflexivity while taking into account the divergent inputs from different actors positioned in contradictory locations. Informal organizations, such as civil society groups, local NGOs, and women's groups, and informal networking can play an important role in developing the networks of reflexivity between the contradictory actors.

According to Grin (2006), the concept of reflexivity also takes into account the conversion of the governance system itself. Reflexivity therefore infers that nothing is static — praxis, paradigms, or systems — all are subject to deliberation, altercation, and reconfiguration. Therefore, the role of civil society groups is to create a space for the confronting political actors (local-level AL and BNP activists) where they can engage in dialogical deliberation and move from confrontation to contestation in order to reach an agreement on basic values. This would eventually help institutionalize the democratic system without abandoning their antagonistic nationalist projects. Such reflexive networks emphasize "the right of participation, empowerment, process monitoring and conflict settlement" (Meer and et al. 2004).

The working definition of a reflexive network here is a strategy for creating a space to establish recursive responsive networks for the political actors who possess antagonistic political values. The goal of establishing the network is to engage in a dialogical process through open deliberation, creating an environment of democracy from below, or a grassroots democracy, which has been missing in the political culture of the state of Bangladesh since its establishment in 1971. The network of reflexivity would empower the grassroots party activists, those who were usually marginalized in the party structures of both the AL and BNP, and enhance their political capabilities.

Establishing grassroots democracy would work as a catalyst for bridging the chasm because it would open up an avenue for local-level leaders and activists at the Zilla, Upazilla, and Union levels to engage in frequent discursive deliberation. Discursive deliberation — argument and counter-argument — would help generate an environment of mutual respect and constructive interaction among the actors situated in contradictory, different locations.

The practice of discursive deliberation in the reflexive networks would ensure multiple inputs from divergent actors, achieving what Sen (2005, p. 163) mentions as important for obtaining the political capabilities of individuals, what he refers to as "public discus-

sion — between persons and across borders." Discursive deliberation would engage the antagonistic actors in what Bohman (1997, p. 90) describes as "argument and counter-argument" in an environment of mutual respect among the different party members who are holding contrasting views about the fundamental issues of the state. Despite incongruity and aversion for the others, a "virtuous deliberator respects other group members" (Crocker 2006, p. 6). Moreover, it helps to generate "a favorable attitude toward, and constructive interaction with the persons with whom one disagrees" (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, p. 79). Therefore, creating a space for frequent discursive deliberation for the AL and BNP activists would assist them in interacting with each other through dialogical and democratic means rather than trying to implement their political agendas through street battles.

The major challenge of creating space for reflexive, discursive deliberation lies in the profound mutual distrust between the party activists which originates from different imaginations of the nation. Further, the lack of democratic practices inside both party structures has resulted in a patron-client relationship, where the activists are "politically poor" (Crocker 2006, p. 6) and are relegated to party henchmen, where instead of being an active catalyst their role is to simply carry out the orders of their leaders. However, if local civil society activists can successfully create an avenue for frequent deliberation between the party activists and local leaders, their newfound skills of dialogical deliberation would ultimately enhance their political capabilities. If minimal consensus about the major national issues were established at the grassroots level, the enhanced political capabilities of the local-level activists would help them to shape the policies at the national level through exerting their influence on the national elites. This would ultimately establish minimal consensus on the fundamental issues without abandoning their vision of remaking the nation in accordance with their own narratives of nationalism.

5   Concluding Remarks

The antagonistic chasm between the AL and the BNP is rooted in differing nationalistic "imaginings." The subalterns, who have been unable to establish their own independent political domain, have largely subscribed to the same imaginations. The elites in the two parties have tried to impose their own imagined process upon each other, sometimes by undemocratic means, which several times has led to mutual persecution or street battles. Both camps of elites (Bengali and Bangladeshi) have used the state apparatus to subdue the other in order to carry out their imagination process. As a result, two parallel, antagonistic nations have emerged within the structure of the same

nation-state. This ultimately divides the entire nation on the major issues and fractures their identities.

As the national elites have failed to speak for the nation as a whole, a reflexive, discursive, deliberative local-level dialog is required that would engage the government, opposition political activists, and civil society activists in a much-needed public examination of Bangladesh's national identity. However, the root cause of the problem, which originates from the parallel nation-building project, would not be resolved through this dialogue, although it would help to deconstruct these projects through dialogical and democratic means rather than forcing their totalizing claims upon each other.

Endnotes

1. After the overthrow of the military dictator General Ershad in 1990, a nonpartisan caretaker government was installed to fill the vacuum and to conduct a parliamentary election. Later, in 1996, this system became constitutionalized by the sixth, BNP-dominated parliament. For details about the caretaker government, see Chapter II A, "Non-Party Care Taker Government, Articles 58 (B), (C), (D), and (E)," in The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (as modified up to May 17, 2004). Since 1991, all parliamentary elections in Bangladesh have been held under the supervision of a caretaker government. The AL-dominated parliament abolished the caretaker system in 2011 by amending the constitution (the 15th amendment), but ironically, for the two terms (in 1996 and 2008) when the AL came to power, after the tragic bloody overthrow of the Awami League government in 1975, caretaker governments were in charge of conducting the elections.

2. Except in 2001, when despite being the ruling party the AL did not advocate for conducting the election under the current, elected government. However, unlike the AL, as the ruling party in 1996 and 2006 the BNP insisted on conducting the election under the partisan government.

3. At least 70 people died in various street fights, just in 2006, related to the issue of the caretaker government. These data were compiled from various Bangladeshi newspapers published from October 29, 2006 to December 21, 2006.

4. I have adopted the following concept of the subaltern for this study: "In the context of Bangladesh, the term 'subaltern' refers to various marginalized groups and underclasses, workers, day laborers, middle and small peasants, the rural proletariat, women, various native and 'tribal' peoples, and

'minority' religious groups and communities. The position of subalternity is relational and relative; therefore in some local or regional situations or under certain circumstances any of them could act as or for the 'elite.' Like the elites, there are fragments within the various subaltern groups. The relationships between and within the various subaltern groups and fragments are both contentious and harmonious, depending upon the context, locality, and situation. In the questions of nation, nationality, identity, secularism, and religion, the subalterns are also divided, like their elite counterparts. Subaltern cultural practices in the Bengal region are generally syncretic; that is, in their everyday lives, Hindu and Muslim and other minority and local religions and practices are all intermingled. Subalterns are also divided on the role of religion in the state and civil society and there is no apparent homogenous or monolithic subaltern culture in Bangladesh" (Ahmed 2006, pp. 159–160).

The term elite signifies powerful groups, classes, or persons. In Bangladesh, the capitalist class, high-ranking government officials, political leaders, lawyers, doctors, bureaucrats, and technocrats are known as elites. Most of the political leaders from the major political parties are from elite backgrounds. Despite similar class/group affiliations, they do not agree on nation, nationality, or identity. They are also divided on the role of secularism and Islam in the state. This division clearly reflects that like their subaltern counterparts, instead of being guided by "collective consciousness" as a class or a group, they are also motivated by the "subjective consciousness." As a result of the failure of the elites to speak for the nation as a whole, the nation of Bangladesh remains fragmented.

5. For the concept of internal colony, see Gonzalez-Casanova (1965).

6. For the fragments of the nation, see Chatterjee (1993).

7. Anderson (1991) described nation as the "imagined community."

8. The Muslim elites who came out from the Muslim League established the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League on June, 23, 1949, but later, on December 4, 1955, they dropped the name "Muslim." The party was renamed the Bangladesh Awami League after Bangladesh gained independence. See Bangladesh Awami League, *http://www.albd.org/*.

9. The syncretistic culture that the elites and the subalterns practiced throughout the time of united Pakistan clearly reflects the reimagining process in their cultural domains. One of the examples was the practicing of Tagore's song. The Pakistani Muslim elites believed that Rabindranath Tagore's song was antithetical to their nationalist project and hence against the very notion of the state of Pakistan itself, because the essence of his song is against the exclusive nature of Muslim nationalism. In addition, Tagore's Hindu background made them believe that he was an outsider to their nationalist project. Defying this hegemonic notion of the Pakistani nationalist elites, as a part of their counter-hegemonic, national reimagining process, especially the emerging Bengali nationalist elites practiced the Tagore songs or arranged festivities around Tagore about the time of internal colonial domination.

10. For the economic, administrative, and political inequalities between East and West Pakistan, see Jahan (1972).

11. For various human capabilities, see Nussbaum (2000, pp. 78–80).

12. Durkheim (1997, pp. 38–39) defined collective consciousness as "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average members of the same society ... it is an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can only be realized through them."

13. Like their secular counterparts, who co-opted the political discourse of modernity with the syncretistic tradition of Bengal, the Islamists co-opted the religiosity of Islam with the discourse of modernity. Hence, they juxtaposed concepts like Sharia and state or Islam and nationalism (Islamic nationalism) in order to justify their politics within the framework of the postcolonial state, which was set up on the principle of Western modernity, which they considered as contradictory with the teachings of Islam.

14. In this study, I used the modernist concept of nation-building. In the context of postcolonial states, they interpreted the nation, nationalism, and nation-building in accordance with the colonial modules that the postcolonial states inherited from their colonial masters. For a modernist understanding of the nation, see Emerson (1960).

15. In a move to curtail the freedom of the press, the BAKSAL government banned all independent newspapers and nationalized the most popular one, The Daily Ittefaq. Including this one, only four government newspapers were published during the time of one-party rule by the secular elites.

16. During the Zia regime, the BAKSAL was revived as the Awami League, which later renamed itself the Bangladesh Awami League (AL).

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