Is the Candle Still Burning?
Weber and the Crisis of Democratic Transition in Bangladesh

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In Spain in recent years, the two great parties, in a conventionally fixed manner, took turns in office by means 'elections' fabricated from above, in order to provide their followers with offices. In the Spanish colonial territories, in the so-called 'elections', as well as in the so-called 'revolutions', what was at stake was always the state bread-basket from which the victors wished to be fed (Weber 1967: 87).

Introduction

Weber, Kaesler (1988) argues, did not develop any new sociological theory or even any theory at all. What he did, Kaesler correctly points out, a series of concepts that encapsulated the historically emergent social structures and the salience of human agency in perpetuating or changing it. In contemporary sociology there are two opposing responses to Weber's legacy-to continue to deploy him as a living legend in intellectual understanding of macro societal transformation or engage with him in an effort at hermeneutic understanding of his grand narratives as part of theoretical heritage in sociology. For the second view Weber has no relevance for a world that has changed enormously since his time. A third option may be to situate him in the fractured terrain of postmodern sociological theory and make use of some of his ideas and insights-make him selectively relevant.

Over a period of more than thirty years sociological theory has been in a state of grave crisis (Gouldner, 1972). It has hardly been successful in analyzing the societal trends and ills from poverty to delinquency. Its grand narratives have come under remorseless fire from postmodernism (Islam, 2003). Major sociologists like Jonathan Turner (1990) have feared the death of sociology. It is in this context that Weber has assumed renewed importance as a source of insight and intellectual roadmap. There are strong reasons for assuming that his ideas have more relevance for developing countries today than any other part of the world. Weber has relevance for developing countries because he was writing and commenting on the politics at a time when Germany was passing through a difficult period of transition to modernity and he was concerned with politics of his country and social transition of his time. Germany of his time provided him with the polarity of tradition and modernity and he was centrally concerned with the emergence of modernity in the West.

Thus it is no wonder that he provided the leitmotif for the paradigm of modernization that blossomed in 1950s and 1960s for the study of developing countries (Schwartz, 1972). The paradigm was short-lived. Its articulation of ideology was great, but its theoretical glitter little (Islam, 1985). Consequently there was a paradigm shift and decline of Weber's influence in the 1970s.

However, the influence of Weber began to build up from the same period in a more restricted albeit important area – the area of third world state-formation and its institutional forms. Since 1968 when Guenther Roth suggested that some third world states were not proper states, but patrimonial regimes, the term has remained in currency either in the form of patrimonialism or neo-patrimonialism and has been used in the context of failed states of Africa and also for several other countries. However, the concept has been mainly used as a descriptive or pejorative category.

In 1992 we undertook a study of the democratic transition in Bangladesh from a neo-Weberian perspective and predicted the current impasse of the transition process (Khan, Islam and Haque

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1996). It was mainly an empirical work on the relationship between political parties and democratic transition in the country informed by a meta theory partly grounded in Weber. The objective of this paper is to extend that analysis and two other brief expositions (Islam 2002, 2003) that I have made by drawing more on Weber's own work and moving beyond him.

Democratic transition in developing countries

There is a considerable literature on democratic transition in third world countries. Most of this literature is concerned with transition from authoritarian regimes. There are in general five paradigms that inform the current scholarly engagement in this area.

The first is the old-new paradigm that socio-economic modernization leads to the consolidation of democracy. Lipset (1959) argued that socio-economic development in general tended to propel countries towards democracy. He found that democracy was strongly associated with wealth, industrialization, urbanization and education. Huntington (1993) pointed out that among other things it was the growth of the middle class that was critical in the emergence of the waves of democracy. However, Weiner (1987) in an incisive analysis showed that an empirical theory of democracy had failed. There was no empirical theory that could satisfactorily identify the causes for the emergence of democracy. Recent works thus have been more modest. The landmark study titled *Democracy in Developing Countries* by Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1991) exemplifies this trend. The original work in three volumes undertook to understand democratic transition in 26 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, the work could not arrive at a theoretical framework and instead focused upon a set of discrete factors such as political culture, legitimacy, class structure, inequality, and political leadership as distilled from historical analysis of each country. It provides, instead of a general theoretical framework, country–specific dense narratives.

The second paradigm emerged from the study of Latin American and South European authoritarianism pioneered by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986). It sought to understand how liberalization fueled conflicts among strategic political actors and paved the way for free play of political forces and overthrow of hardliners or pacts and compromises for regime transition (O'Donnell, Schmitter and Whitehead 1988; Tornquist 1999). This perspective has focused mainly upon pathways of transition from authoritarian regimes and not much upon democratic consolidation or blocked transition. Schmitter (1995), deploys both commonsense and essentialism in his recent observation on the consolidation of democracy that the fourth wave of democracy has left some countries high and dry on the beach and certain cultural areas such as Islamic Middle East and South-East Asia have remained protected from it.

Third, a variety of neo-Marxist perspectives have tried to examine the nature and dynamics of the peripheral state (Alavi 1972). In a powerful analysis Alavi explained the emergence of authoritarianism in Pakistan and Bangladesh in terms of his notion of "overdeveloped state" that mediated among conflicting class interests, nature of class alliance and social composition of the military.

The fourth paradigm has been known as patron-clientelism (see Eisenstadt and Lemarchand 1981). It refers to unequal exchange of resources and services among political and social agents related by moral bond as exemplified by machine politics of USA – a theme that Weber marginally touched upon. But this paradigm is more suitable for micro level analysis of specific aspects of blocked transition.

The fifth paradigm is grounded in Weber and revolves around the concept of patrimonialism or neo-patrimonialism. Van Leur (1937) seems to have been one of the earliest authors to use the concept to analyze the 14th century Javanese state. The paradigm, however, was sparked off by Guenther Roth in 1968. The term neo-patimonialism seems to have been first used by Eisenstadt

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(1973) in 1973. It refers to the co-existence in most third world countries patrimonialism and legal–rational domination.

This paradigm has recently generated a fruitful stream of research. But again most of these analyses have remained descriptive and sketchy. It does not effectively use Weber's insights on the dynamics of conflict both within patrimonialism and interaction among different types of domination as well as with the issues of agency.

Enter Weber

It is needless to repeat that Weber fleshed out the most comprehensive theory of domination mainly in the *Economy and Society* and also in his other works. It is an extremely complex analysis with several versions and has been interpreted in at least four different ways (see Schluchter 1985 for details). Weber introduced three ideal types of legitimacy upon which domination may be embedded – traditional, charismatic and legal-rational in terms of constellations of interest (utilitarian motives) and constellations of value (motives of duty). The basis of traditional domination is "the authority of 'eternal yesterday''(Weber 1967:78) "belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions"(Weber 1978:215). The charismatic domination is grounded in the "authority of the extraordinary and personal gift of grace (charisma), the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of leadership"(Weber 1967: 79).

The legal–rational domination lies in the " belief in the validity of legal statute and functional competence based on rationally created rules"(Weber 1978:79). His theory of domination links up different institutional realms and provides developmental trend (Schluchter 1985). But what is not often stressed and it is necessary to highlight that Weber saw domination as a process – as a dynamic and meaningful interrelationship between "those giving orders and those obeying"(Weber, 1978: 1378). The obedience resulted both from pecuniary motives and from normative considerations. Weber shows that concrete historical organizations rarely manifest any of the pure types of authority (Weber 1978: 262). Most often different forms of domination co-exist and occasionally lead to stagnation. He also discussed the issue of non-legitimate domination and the process through which legitimacy was constructed.

> The circular path of the Italian cities from a stage in which they were component parts of patrimonial or feudal structures, through a period of independence obtained by revolution with a government of local notables and then of the craft guilds, followed by the *signoria;* and finally again by a position as component parts of relatively rational patrimonial associations—this cycle has no exact counterpart in the Occident(Weber 1978:1322).

In Weber's view the social bases of any domination is always problematic and the creation of legitimacy is a process in which forces and counter forces work out in the historical terrain.

> It is most important, finally, to realize that historical reality involves a continuous, though for the most part latent, conflict between chiefs and their administrative staffs for appropriation and expropriation in relation to one another. For almost all of cultural development, it has been crucial in what way this struggle has worked out….(Weber1978:264).

This is also entailed in his notion of routinization of charisma. Charismatic domination is inherently unstable and is transformed either into traditional domination or legal-rational domination.

More centrally for Weber is the contrast between traditional domination and legal-rational domination. Patrimonialism is one variant of traditional domination that emerged with the acquisition of an administrative staff and military force and control over a territory.

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The ruler or master has all the authority, which is his personal right/possession. The administrative staff and military force is purely his personal instrument. All offices are considered "part of the ruler's personal household and private property."(Weber 1978:1028-9). " The patrimonial state offers the whole realm of the ruler's discretion as the hunting ground for accumulation of wealth"(Weber 1978: 1099). The ruler uses his discretion in decision making, especially in recruiting his staff within the broad confines of tradition. The administration is based on a system of favorites. The patrimonial officials are related to the ruler through personal ties of subordination and loyalty as kinsmen, clients, dependants and so on. The administrative staff lives on benefices, taxes or fees or fiefs granted by the ruler. Administrative decision-making depends upon personal consideration and upon "purely personal connections, favors, promises and privileges"(Weber 1978:1041). There is a clear distinction between the ruler and his subjects. Although the ruler is bound by custom, he can show a high degree of discretion and arbitrariness in his use of resources, decision-making and dealings with his subjects. When this type of domination moves towards an extreme development of discretion, it is called "sultanism". But powerful groups in society often resist it. China is a classic example of a long–drawn conflict over two millennia between sultanism and the literati. As a consequence the patrimonial regime tends to collapse suddenly due to palace coups, elite conflicts and so on.

Weber upheld that patrimonialism was a serious institutional obstacle to the development of formal rationality, modernity and good governance. This type of regime creates fiscal arbitrariness of such magnitude that it allows growth only of capitalist trading, capitalist tax farming, lease and sale of offices, capitalist state enterprises and plantation economy. It thus gives rise to what Weber called capitalist or booty capitalism. Traditionalism and arbitrariness deeply affect development of capitalism because the ruler or his officials seize the opportunity for acquisition, discourages development of market forces. The ruler's arbitrariness does not allow development of procedural predictability (Weber 1978:1092-5). Its institutional rules are antithetical to the development of modern capitalism.

In his extremely insightful analysis in the *Religion of China*, Weber highlights some of the aspects of patrimonialism, which are possibly more useful in understanding rent seeking behaviour in many contemporary third world countries than the paradigm of new political economy of development (Cf.Toye 1993) Every official act had to be paid in gifts (Weber 1964:57). Each official in turn had to pay gifts to superiors who could influence his fate. In China trade and money economy reinforced traditional culture by providing " special profit opportunities for the dominant stratum" and "the rentier mentality." With advance of money economy, there was a simultaneous prebendalization of state income and as a consequence an ossification of social structure (Weber 1964:61).

In contrast the legal-rational domination as exemplified in modern bureaucracy is grounded in enacted laws. There is a complete separation between household and office. The recruitment to bureaucracy is based upon merit and technical competence. Each official has hierarchically arranged and legally defined range of power and delimited sphere of duties, responsibilities and action. The business of the bureaucracy is conducted impersonally in terms of official rules and procedures. There is a clear chain of command and each official has allegiance only to impersonal rules and procedures. All administrative decisions are made on the basis of written records. Thus rational bureaucracy does not leave any space for personal discretion or arbitrariness. It symbolizes the epitome of formal rationality (Weber 1978).

Patron-clientelism

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Weber also provided a wealth of examples of patron-clientelism from different societies of his time. He found that all struggles of political parties were struggles for patronage. It was the case for Germany, Spain, Switzerland and many other countries. In France the deputy controlled all patronage in his district and used it for his re-election. In USA unprincipled political parties were merely job hunters and opposed one another only for patronage. The President controlled 300,000 to 400,000 jobs down to the mailman for distribution among his favorites. Weber provided an interesting analysis of the machine politics in USA. The party boss was a critical figure for financing the election as he collected contributions, received bribes and tips in exchange for a variety of legal or illegal favors (Weber in Gerth and Mills1967).

The problems of democracy in the West

Weber initiated an interesting analysis of the development of democracy, and the growth of party leadership, party structure and interest groups that accompanied the process of democratization. His analysis was mainly concerned with the situation in Germany. But he also provided illustrations and data from other western countries. This analysis is insightful and is highly relevant for contemporary Bangladesh.

In his analysis of the crisis of democracy in Germany he was particularly concerned with the role of the parliament. He found that the German Parliament was impotent. It only represented what he called "negative politics." "The tendency towards merely negative politics of our parliament is reflected in the most minute details of the agenda and conventions of our Reichstag and the parties"(Weber 1978:1414).

Again " The whole structure of the German parliament has been oriented toward negative politics: critique and complaint, the deliberation, modification and passing of governmental bills"(Weber 1978:1416). No serious politician would enter it because he had little role to play there. (Weber in Gerth and Mills 1967).

But the parliament was of vital importance for the protection of masses. Weber deplored the political immaturity of the country and tendency of German politicians for decorative speeches in the parliament. A steady and strenuous work in a parliamentary career was necessary for deepening of democracy. Democracy requires working parliament and close cooperation between politicians and civil servants and the political education of both leaders and the citizens (Weber 1978:1420).

 The political parties were a "guild of notables". There was an absence of real political leadership. The political parties were characterized by " soullessness of following"(Weber in Gerth and Mills 1967). In Germany there was demagoguery and the "pressure of the rabble without democracy, or rather because of the absence of an orderly democracy"(Weber 1978:1451). Political parties were mainly concerned with petty subaltern job patronage and they did it through veiled relationship with the bureaucracy. Political competition was a struggle for material and personal interests (Weber 1978:1447). But parliamentary patronage and other forms of patronage, which flowed from old boy network to the recommendations of the big business led to corruption.

Similarly, in France Weber found an atypical case and almost echoed Marx (1978) in suggesting that it was a product of "strong petty-bourgeois and especially rentier , character" of its population(Weber1978:1443).

Neo-patrimonialism

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In developing countries today most often three types of domination analyzed by Weber tend to co-exist. The charismatic phenomenon and two opposing institutional structures create a complex tension within society, which has hardly been analytically developed or empirically mapped by sociologists and political scientists since Weber's time.

One theoretical direction towards this end has been taken within the framework of neo-patrimonialism. Medard(1982) points out that in some African states the ruler tends to view public resources as his personal wealth from which his kinsmen could draw as they wished. Lemerchand (1995) found that most African states were neo-patrimonial and the hallmark of neo-patrimonial regimes was vertical dependency relationships between the ruler and his underlings' personal loyalty cemented by material rewards. The key structural feature of society was patron-clientelism. In this type of state the rent-seeking behavior was pervasive and public office was the main source of rent. But the literature on neo-patrimonialism is sketchy and descriptive. It has failed to achieve the analytical depth that Weber exemplified.

Enter Bangladesh

Political History

Bangladesh began its journey as a liberal democratic nation in 1971 through protracted mass movements against the internal colonialism of Pakistan and a War of Liberation that cost countless lives and massive economic losses. The nationalist movement was spearheaded by the Awami League and its charismatic leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. However, in the context of war ravages, ideological context of the time and other reasons – factors which have not been explored objectively and adequately, the charisma of Sheikh Mujibur Rahamn became routinized or transformed in the direction of patrimonialism – in the form of one-party rule of BKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League). But very soon the regime was overthrown by a military coup, which led to a period of military and civilian rule. The fall of Ershad regime in 1990 through a series of mass movements put an end to authoritarianism and the country was once again on the wave of formal democracy through the general election of 1991.The build up of the two-party system and the concept of care-taker government, regular holding of general elections and lawful transfer of government as well as public resilience have strengthened the process of consolidation of democracy. Yet this consolidation has been delayed due to the persistence of many of the features of patrimonialism and it has even created an impasse in the process of democratic transition.

The anatomy of the middle class

One critical factor that sustains blocked transition is the nature of middle class, which has been shaped more by political windfall than by performance in the market. During the colonial period Bengali Muslims suffered from uneven development and remained deprived. Anthropological research suggests the rise of a new rural elite after 1947. An educated middle class and trading groups also grew up from this period. These groups have flourished mainly through political connections and protection and can be broadly described as a rentier class. It has achieved windfall profit or rapid social mobility through its connection with the state or politics. Thus the dominant tendency of this class has remained rent seeking rather than performance in the market. This is not only true for the business and industrial groups, but also for the salaried categories and trade union leaders. The main structural feature of this class is that it is punctuated by extended family and kinship network; locality ties and political connections, which tend to create a maze of patron-client cartels (Shahidullah 1985).

Parliament and the streets

Although in 1991 Bangladesh started with a West Minister type democracy with the parliament as the heart of all political voice, it soon turned out that the ruling BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) and the major opposition party AL (Awami League) totally disagreed on some major political issues. Initially the AL played a very constructive and positive role in the parliament. But soon the differences began to surface. The AL found that the ruling party had introduced the dictatorship of the Prime Minister who did rarely attend the Parliament and most of the bills were introduced as ordinances rather than bills in the parliament (Hasanuzzaman, 1998). In AL's perception the ruling party was not interested in making the parliament focal point of political contest. So it resorted to more and more street agitation and mass mobilization for reforming the constitution, banning the fundamentalist politics, improving the law and order situation, the alleged riggings in bye-elections and for introducing the caretaker government. The BNP saw it as the usual negative politics of AL. The AL and its allies in their turn began to walk out frequently from the parliament, boycotted it for a total of 300 days and finally resigned on 28th December 1994. A general election was held without participation of the major opposition parties. The opposition mounted strong street agitations including *gheraos* and *hartal*s. In the process many civil servants publicly joined the cause of the opposition. In the face of it the BNP government had to leave power.

Soon after, the AL came to power through the general election held on12th June 1996. But from the beginning of the parliamentary session it was apparent that a partnership between the ruling party and the opposition for the parliamentary process could not be worked out. The BNP found that the AL was intolerant and oppressive and began to stage walkouts and boycott of the parliament. It resorted to street agitations and *hartal* to press for its demands. In the opposition BNP was playing the same role as AL had played while it was in the opposition. So the seventh parliament was largely ineffective due to the lack of participation by the opposition.

Later, in the general election of 1st October 2001 the AL suffered "an unprecedented debacle in its 53 – year history"(Daily Star, October3, 2001). The AL rejected the election as rigged and has continued to demand the resignation of the BNP government. Although it joined the parliament initially it has largely boycotted it and gone for *hartals* and agitations against the government. It has now stuck to one point programme for ousting the government. The BNP and the four-party alliance, on the other hand, have adopted oppressive measures against the AL and the opposition. A recent front-page commentary by the editor of the leading Bengali daily highlights the point.

> The kind of intolerant and revengeful attitude specially the policy of repression against the opposition groups and individuals of different opinions that the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her BNP-Jamat alliance government have adopted in the political arena recently is unprecedented. The shameless activities of this government in repressing the opposition parties and individuals of different opinions are worse than such activities of the autocratic regimes of the past…. We are also witnessing that not only the police forces, but also the student front, *gunda*s and terrorists are being deployed for such repression…. We have not seen examples of such malevolent activities before. And through all these activities a Fascist character of the government is being revealed. It is becoming increasingly clear that such intolerant attitude of the government is pushing the country towards restlessness and uncertainty….People are now witnessing that the government has totally failed in governance and enforcing law and order. ..The country has become a heaven for terrorists…there are many complaints that ministers and members of parliament themselves have plunged into corruption. ….On the other hand the parliament is totally ineffective. Not only the opposition members, but members of the ruling parties also do not attend it and in majority of sessions there is a lack of quorum. At the root of all these lie the one-sided policy of the government that ignores the opposition and behaves towards it in malevolent way. It is as if their main task is to repress the opposition parties and opposed opinion. …Such a policy of the government, lack of trust in democracy and malicious attitude towards the opposition parties are leading the country towards a destructive political situation. The state-terrorism is pushing the country towards a politics of revenge and counter revenge (Rahman, 2004).

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What is interesting about this commentary is both the ferocity of the attack on the leaders of the third force and scathing response that the daily mounted against the government. It is unlikely that a neo-patrimonial regime can be sustained upon such a tradition of political protest.

It is not the BNP alone, but the Awami League during its time in office also showed intolerant and malicious attitude towards the opposition. Thus the two of the largest political parties behave in the same way when they are in power as well as when they are out of power. They also fail to realize that their political strategies are in the end self-defeating.

Demand groups and politics of agitation

According to Weber, interest groups play a vital role in democracy. But in countries of South Asia politics gives rise to what Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) call demand groups in contrast to interest groups in institutionalized democracy. In a stable democracy demands are articulated by interest groups on the basis of professional expertise and lobbying skills within defined areas of public policy. Demand groups rely more on symbolic and agitational politics. Fed by indigenous political tradition such demand groups tend to operate in the political space outside the boundary of institutional politics. Demand groups tend to assume that there is no institutional mechanism for redress of grievances. So they must stage a great spectacle of protest to bring about regime or broad policy changes. Strikes in educational institutions, *hartals* and *bandhas* are major forms of protest by demand groups. Thus *hartal* has shown phenomenal growth from 1991 and become a part of political culture of Bangladesh. There were 216 hartals between 1991 and 1994. During the next three years the number of hartals went up to 279. The country entered the new millennium with a record number of hartals totalling 332 between 1999 and 2002. These hartals have telling effects on the economy and institutional discipline (Islam, forthcoming).

Political parties

Political parties in Bangladesh are far from rational organizations. They are mainly coalitions of factions embedded in kinship ties, localities and personal loyalties and often are unstable due to internecine conflicts. These factions can be held together only by charismatic leadership. The relative stability of both Awami League and BNP is due to the fact that they have been headed by routinized charisma. Routinized charisma entails deep emotional commitment and often moves in the direction of patrimonialism. In the above cases the charisma has been partly routinized in the direction of patrimonialism. This and other factors make political parties leader-centered. The leaders often resort to discretionary and arbitrary decision-making.

In one survey (Khan, Islam and Haque 1996) of political leaders of 11 major political parties of the country more than 55 percent of the respondents thought that there was an absence of political leaders with high ideals – which was the key point for Weber in his analysis of the problems of democracy in Germany. About 42 percent of them found that leaders had a low level of loyalty to their parties. About 47 percent of them indicated that party activities were highly dominated by top leaders. About 80 percent of leaders interviewed held that regionalism and nepotism were either widespread or widespread in political parties. Nearly 90 percent admitted that there were *mastans* in political parties (Khan, Islam and Haque 1996). Even a former law minister told a seminar that now- a - days *mastans,* robbers and people without ideals join politics. One who becomes a member of parliament by spending three crores of taka remain busy with *tadbir* (lobbying*)* for his business (Hannan 2000: 921) than going to the parliament.

Bureaucracy

For Weber the pre-colonial Indian society was predominantly patrimonial. It also exemplified sultanism-an extreme form of discretionary rule. But colonialism had introduced bureaucratic administration in the country (Weber, 1978).
The British rule, observes the noted Indian political scientist Kothari (1999) created a modern and efficient bureaucracy in India based on unified structure, merit and competition. But it was partly modeled upon the Mughal administration (Kothari, 1999). It represented in Macaulay's word a " firm and impartial despotism"(cited in Worsley 1967:58). The white authority was both paternal and divine (Worsley 1967). "It was a despotism", writes Philip Woodruff (1964:15), "tempered by …liberalism." But in practice the young district magistrate was the "monarch of all he surveyed" (Woodruff 1964:15).

This 'invisible monster' remained in place during the Pakistan period (Rahman 1991:51). Between 1947 and 1964 there were 28 major reports for bureaucratic reform none of which were implemented (Khan 1980).

One commentator has pointed out the bureaucracy in Bangladesh is much more degraded and ethically vacuous than the colonial times and is marked by unlimited greed (Dasgupta 1991). It represents a politically guided, anachronistic, discretionary regulatory regime centered on spoils system. The recruitment and promotion has been largely guided by consideration of loyalty and patronage rather than technical competence (World Bank 1996; GOB 2000). One author, who is himself a civil servant, talks of seven types of factionalism in the civil service (Siddiqui 1996) which has corroded much of whatever rationality it had in the past. After independence of the country the freedom fighters in the civil service gained special rewards and privileges and it led to a major conflict between freedom fighters and non-freedom fighters. A more important division among civil servants now is between pro-BNP and pro-Awami League supporters, which has destroyed the loyalty of the bureaucrats towards an impartial legal order. In fact the bureaucratic behavior is guided more by "numerous, complex and unpredictable aggregation of informal relations" created as a consequences of intense factionalism in the service (Siddiqui 1996:18). But the most important form of these relationships is the nexus between major political parties and the bureaucracy. The party rewards the loyal civil servant by quicker promotion, profitable postings and important positions in the party or party think tank or cabinet positions after his retirement. He plays a key role as the party spokesman or in policy making. Through all these processes the bureaucracy has increasingly moved towards the direction of patrimonialism, which has undermined its rational basis and efficiency. Its rigidity, lack of innovation and responsiveness, corruption and conflict among different groups are only creation of the past, but also a construction of the political forces of the present.

Enemy discourse

A key area of Weber's concern was the basis of domination – the issue of legitimacy. However, he did not explore the process of how legitimacy was generated. Recent developments in discourse analysis have made it possible to extend Weber's analysis in an old- new direction – explore the complex terrain of politics and culture, which lay at the heart of Weber's project.

I have argued elsewhere (Islam 2002) that In Bangladesh the neo-patrimonial politics has led to a parochial and bifurcated political culture best exemplified by the enemy discourse that govern the behaviour of two major political parties of the country. This antagonism and enemy discourse has

developed historically. The Awami League, which championed the cause of Bengali nationalism and was instrumental in achieving its independence, grounded its claim for legitimacy in the "foundational" discourse. Its key elements were the Liberation War, formation of the nation state, the central role-played by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League in it and a host of signifiers associated with it. For Awami League the BNP is the other – the enemy that has disrupted its identity and interests and its legitimate right to rule. Born in the cantonment and initially led by a military official, it is an authoritarian party sympathetic to fundamentalism and Pakistan. When in power it plunders the country, establishes a family rule and represses the agents of freedom. In the opposition it creates chaos and violence in the country through *hartals* and agitations.

In contrast the BNP has constructed the "savior" discourse. It claims its legitimacy for saving the nation from an autocratic regime and loss of sovereignty to the powerful neighbor – India through the instrumentality of its charismatic leader Ziaur Rahman who, it is claimed, announced the War of Liberation. Thus it articulates an alternative image of nationalism—Bangladeshi nationalism tinged with Islam. It seems to regard the Awami League as the satanical other. According to the BNP, the AL is a fascist party and a stooge of India. It is poised to establish a dynastic rule. Its main target is the plunder of the nation. Thus the Awami League cannot essentially be a democratic force for the country.

In enemy discourse the essentializing of the other persists. But its stereotyping of the other continues, changes and gains density through multiple signifiers. The list can be increased or shortened, but the clash of visions and conflict of ideologies persist which has created political deadlock in the country over a decade.

The enemy discourse has intensified neo-patrimonialism. In enemy discourse the other is devil incarnate and has to be tamed or destroyed. The ruling party can do it by using the law enforcing agencies for its partisan purpose. This strategy undermines the foundation of legal-rational bureaucracy. It can also do it by deploying party cadres, which require *mastans* and money. The ruling party in Bangladesh uses both these strategies for containing the other.
But more importantly the ruling party uses public media to highlight its performance and malign the opposition. In the symbolic sphere the ruling party turns the state into what Clifford Geertz (1980) calls "theater state". The public media become an instrument of propaganda for the ruling party. It tries to influence the private media through its control over advertisement. Patronage is used to contain the opposition. The opposition retaliates by mobilization politics. It tries to undermine the legitimacy of the ruling party by political movements –by *hartals*, processions and *oborodh*. They brave repression of the police, court arrests and persecution by activists of the ruling party. Thus the party activists earn future political capital – a moral obligation on the part of the leaders for future patronage. The party becomes a moral community through common suffering in the hand of the enemy. The idea of this moral community is upheld and has to be rewarded through patronage when the party achieves political victory. This, in turn, reinforces patrimonialism.

The Blocked Transition

Bangladesh is now trapped in a blocked political transition. The neo-patrimonial system has become self-perpetuating for the time being. There are two possible courses of political change of the country. One is towards consolidation of democracy and performance regime. The other course is ossification of the neo-patrimonial regime. Weber as I have indicated had stressed upon the role of human agency in political transformation. In Bangladesh one redeeming feature is the resilience of common people. The citizens are becoming increasingly conscious about their political rights and entitlements. Throughout the political history of Bangladesh the electorate have always punished the coercive and low performing regime. Once the democratic system is in place it will be increasingly difficult to sustain the current tempo of negative politics – both neo-patrimonial and mobilization politics and enemy discourse. Only the leaders believe that they can

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win election through demagogy and coercion. Once they become conscious of people's aspirations and power, they will be forced to change their dysfunctional behavior sooner or later. They will learn how to live for politics.

Consequences

The contentious politics, which has persisted since 1991, has serious negative consequences for the country. It has perpetuated booty capitalism and rent seeking behaviour, which has dictated a slow economic growth for the country. It has led to a grave crisis of governance. A nearly continuous stream of *hartals* and agitations has been disrupting the economy. Extortion by political cadres has been widespread. Corruption has been pervasive. Violence is escalating. There is lack of security for business and common people. More ominously the neo-patrimonial regimes in its search for loyal followers are causing an erosion of other institutional spheres of society. The creation of loyal followers involves support through patronage, which destroys any institutional arrangement and rules of the game based on merit, rationality and performance. The political regime tends to infiltrate institutions from schools to trade unions in search of resources of patronage and clients. Unless this trend is reversed the institutional fabric of society is bound to disintegrate.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that sociological theory faces an extraordinary assault from postmodern epistemology. One way out from this crisis is the more efficient use of sociological classics for mapping out a new direction in theory construction instead of searching for their hermeneutically correct reading. Here I have examined Weber's theory of domination and extended it in a new direction for understanding the crisis of democratic transition in Bangladesh. I have shown that Weber's theory of domination and his analysis of Western democracy of his time are particularly relevant for a country like Bangladesh. No other theoretical perspective is able to illuminate the political crisis of the country today better than Weber. But Weberian analysis in itself is not adequate. It has to be integrated with other analytical frames. These analytical frames are implicit in this paper as it focuses mainly on Weber.

 It is important to point out that we were able to predict the coming crisis of democracy in the country in 1992 by using a reconstructed Weberian framework. In this paper I have tried to develop Weber's analysis in a new direction by combining structures, activities and discourses. It shows the political structure of the country is an ensemble of contradictory elements of charisma, patrimonialism and legal-rational bureaucracy held in place by a rentier class. Its political culture is pierced through and bifurcated by an ideological fault line created historically, which, instead of encouraging bargaining and negotiation among elites, has given rise to contentious politics. The two dominant political parties have been locked into this contentious politics. There have emerged demand groups instead of interest groups. Thus it is possible to map out two different forms of politics in the country – neo-patrimonialism and mobilization politics. Neo-patrimonialism refers to the co-existence of patrimonial and legal-rational forms of domination. Mobilization politics (see Andrain 1988 for details) means a form of politics that challenges the legitimacy of the existing political institutions through movements; agitations and violent protests. Patrimonialism or neo-patrimonialism cannot be sustained in a society upon which modernities begin to impact. The political regime or the political party, which exercises neo-patrimonial domination, is opposed by other political agents in the country.

In Bangladesh two dominant political parties – AL and BNP have shown common structural and agency characteristics since 1991 or earlier. The ruling party whether it is BNP or AL exercises neo-patrimonial domination. It distributes state patronage to the party members, kinsmen, and loyal supporters by subverting the legal-rational rules and procedures. As neo-patrimonialism cannot create legitimacy to an adequate level because people have already overthrown the

authoritarian regimes in the past and are sufficiently active and conscious political agents. So the ruling party tries to overcome the legitimacy deficit by using public media for enhancing the charisma of its party leader and amplify the performance of the regime. The state combines within it the apparatus of coercion – legal and extra-legal to contain the opposition and the instrumentality of theatre to amplify its claim for legitimacy. Against it the opposition party deploys mobilization politics – strikes, processions, seize, *hartals* and other instruments of protest to destroy the legitimacy of the ruling party. This pattern of politics has persisted in the country since 1991 because political leaders having their social origin in the rentier class believe that they can cling to power by a shrewd combination of patronage, coercion and media-based publicity. In the political history of Bangladesh this strategy of domination has never worked. But many political leaders of major political parties strongly cherish this antiquated belief. Thus the existence of neo-patrimonialism justifies the launching of mobilization politics. One presupposes the other and one reinforces the other. Thus it creates a vicious circle. Mobilization politics opens up space for various demand groups to articulate their actual or perceived grievances. It reinforces the process further. It has grave consequences for the country. It erodes the institutional framework of the society by undermining the normative order of merit, open competition, rationality and efficiency and thus good governance. Corruption and lawlessness becomes widespread.

The overthrow of autocracy in 1990 raised popular expectations to a great height. But by now democracy has failed to deliver the goods. It may eventually lead to the loss of people's faith in democracy. It may fail to work. But there is also a possibility that the leaders would learn from their mistakes and change the existing rules of the game. It is mainly because people have more information today through different media and they will demand better services from the state. The increasing vigor of the civil society and expansion of mass media will generate internal pressure for change. The popular resilience in the country is so strong that leaders at one stage or another will have to take account of the voice of the people. The tempo of globalization will force the local structures to follow global norms. The sooner it happens better it is for the good of the country.

Towards the end of his fascinating lecture 'Politics as a Vocation', Weber apprehended what lay before the country was "a polar night of icy darkness"(Weber 1967:128). But he was also hopeful. Human agents are capable of achieving the unattainable. It requires "a trained relentlessness" – a kind of heroism in facing the realities of life with an inward ethic of calling to live for politics and not to live off it (Weber 1967:126). The same holds true for Bangladesh.

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