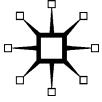


GOVERNMENTALITY AND
COUNTER-HEGEMONY
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S. M. Shamsul Alam

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*For Anjali,
who, I hope, will soon join the struggle to
make this world a better place*

CONTENTS

<i>Preface and Acknowledgments</i>	ix
1 Introduction	1
2 <i>Gorob O Asha</i> : Language as Counter-Governmentality	13
3 Conscious Spontaneity: The Antiauthoritarian Revolt of 1968–69	31
4 Nationalism as (Re)Governmentalization	53
5 Military Authoritarian Governmentality and Its Displacement	77
6 Islamic Governmentality? The Taslima Nasrin Case	97
7 Ethnicization and (Counter)Governmentality in the Chittagong Hill Tracts	127
8 On Rape and Revolt	157
9 Global (Counter)Governmentality	173
10 Coda: Governance <i>without</i> Governmentality	193
<i>Bibliography</i>	197
<i>Index</i>	217
<i>About the Author</i>	

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing history in Bangladesh, if it is the history of Bangladesh, is always fraught with contestation, suspicion, and danger. However, this does not center on “correct history” or “wrong history” or even writing “authentic history”; it concerns political use or rather political abuse of history. For example, A. K. Khondokar (2014) recently wrote about his memories of the 1971 Bangladesh war of liberation. Khondokar was an Air Force officer and deputy commander of the liberation army. He was an Awami League stalwart, having served as a minister of planning in the Awami League government. In his text, Khondokar opines that during the early phase of the liberation war, the political leadership at that time, that is, the Awami League, was not prepared for an armed campaign as they feared a prolonged military intervention. Furthermore, he argues, perhaps more damagingly, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman concluded his fiery speech at Dhaka’s Race Course ground on March 7, 1971, with the slogan “*joy* Pakistan” (victory to Pakistan) after “*joy* Bangla” (victory to Bengal). The Awami League and other nationalists consider this speech to be the Bangladeshi declaration of independence and any reference to it is an official point of nationalism. However, Khondokar shows that Sheikh Mujib was thinking of the transfer of power to the Awami League from the military junta that he leads, within the framework of united Pakistan. Response to Khondokar’s book was immediate, predictable, and vicious. Showing great fury, the ruling Awami League denounced his work, calling him a traitor and an enemy of Bengali nationalism and of Bangladesh. Some politicians affiliated with the ruling party even argued that Khondokar’s book was sponsored by Pakistan’s Inter-Service-Intelligence (ISI), the country’s dreaded intelligence organization. On the other hand, the main opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), on the lookout for an issue to humiliate the government, praised the book and argued that Khondokar was stating facts. Incidentally, the Awami League considers the BNP to be an enemy of Bengali nationalism. How does the postcolonial nation-state of Bangladesh get into such a bind? The answer to such a complicated

question is quite simple and could be located in the *history* of postcolonial Bangladesh, where the practice of how to *correct* and *authenticate history* and making it “politically correct” serves partisan political interests.

The current book is a modest attempt to debunk such attempts at writing history in Bangladesh. Put differently, it is a theoretical reading of few important historical events of colonial and postcolonial Bangladesh. At first glance, all the chapters might appear disjointed; however, there is a common thread that binds the entire book together—counter-hegemonic strivings that attempt to renegotiate power and power relations and dream of a better society in Bangladesh.

I started working on this book while I was on a sabbatical (2007–09) from Southern Oregon University, Ashland, Oregon, United States. During that period, I was a visiting scholar at the Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB). While at IUB, I was fortunate enough to come across one remarkable human being, Prof. Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury (1941–2010), the vice chancellor of the university. I remember his kind support and friendship. Prof. Nazrul Islam, then dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences of the university, created a wonderful work environment for me. My brother Prof. S. M. Nurul Alam was very helpful with his incisive comments on the book. Melissa Michaels spent countless hours going through the earlier version of the manuscript. My friend Saad Quasem, in spite of his heavy schedule, read through the entire manuscript, and his effort has led to the book being more polished and accessible. Since I joined the Department of Economics and Social Sciences of BRAC University in 2014, I came to know Prof. S. M. Hashemi, head of the department, who views research as an integral part of teaching. He also secured a small grant from BRAC University to prepare the final version of the manuscript. I am grateful for his kind support. My student Syed Ibtesham Yameen has been of considerable help as he checked and rechecked the Bibliography, thus making the reference list accessible.

At Palgrave Macmillan, Farideh Kooli-Kamali and Veronica Goldstein handled the entire publication process with great care and speed. Their professionalism has made the entire experience rather enjoyable.

My partner, Samantha, bears my long obsession with this book with humor and understanding. Finally, my daughter Anjali. While I was working on this book, she would come up to me and ask why I read so much; this gave me much needed respite. I dedicate this book to her.