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Debating *shura* and democracy among British Muslim organizations

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Abstract

Shura as the system of representation of the Muslim's voice in, typically, the Islamic state is often confronted with the West representation system namely Democracy. Some Islamic scholars believe that *Shura* is still the best system for Muslims to vote for their need in the state. However, as Islam is not a monolithic doctrine, some other Muslim groups have another alternative view to represent their political opinion to the state by, surprisingly, practicing democracy. In brief, *Shura* is still placed God instructions as the reference of all decisions which are made in the council. Otherwise, democracy merely stands its policy on the people. Both systems have a long tradition processes to find their recent way in this global age. And the British Muslims have to realize that they live in a developed country like Britain and still have to be Muslim. Giving challenging condition, Hizbut Tahrir, Tablighi Jama'at, and Muslim Council of Britain, three prominent Muslim Organizations in England, have different attitude towards democratic Britain to voice their representation. On the one hand, Hizbut Tahrir strictly rejects the idea of democracy as its goal is to establish the Islamic Caliphate in the world. And on another hand, Tablighi Jama'at tends to stay away from the political issue, including its representation, as the core of this organization is only preaching in a peaceful way. Finally, Muslim Council of Britain as the umbrella of small-medium

Muslim organizations in England, in fact is involving in the system of British democracy.

Shura sebagai sistem perwakilan seringkali diperbandingkan dengan sistem perwakilan Barat, yaitu demokrasi. Beberapa tokoh umat Islam percaya bahwa *shura* masih merupakan sistem perwakilan yang terbaik untuk menyuarakan keinginan umat Islam terhadap negara. Namun demikian, karena Islam bukan merupakan doktrin yang kaku, ada beberapa kelompok Muslim lain yang memiliki pandangan berbeda di dalam mengemukakan aspirasi politiknya terhadap negara, yang justru menggunakan sistem demokrasi. Secara singkat, sistem *shura* masih menempatkan ajaran-ajaran Tuhan sebagai acuan untuk memutuskan segala persoalan dalam dewan. Sedangkan demokrasi membuat kebijakan semata-mata berdasarkan pada suara manusia. Kedua sistem ini memiliki proses tradisional yang panjang untuk mencapai bentuknya seperti sekarang ini. Sementara itu, Muslim Inggris harus menyadari bahwa mereka hidup di negara maju dan harus tetap ber-Islam. Menghadapi kondisi yang menantang ini, tiga organisasi Islam terkemuka di Inggris seperti Hizbut Tahrir, Tablighi Jama'ah, dan Muslim Council of Britain memiliki sikap berbeda untuk menyatakan suara mereka terhadap pemerintah Inggris yang demokratis. Satu sisi, Hizbut Tahrir dengan keras menolak ide demokrasi dikarenakan cita-cita mereka adalah mendirikan kekhalifahan Islam di dunia. Sementara di sisi yang lain, Tablighi Jama'ah cenderung menghindari isu politik, termasuk keterwakilan mereka. Terakhir, Muslim Council of Britain yang merupakan payung bagi organisasi-organisasi Islam kecil-menengah di Inggris pada kenyataannya ikut serta di dalam sistem demokrasi Inggris.

Keywords: *Shura; Democracy; Hizbut Tahrir; Tablighi Jama'at; Muslim Council of Britain*

Introduction

As a set of complete guidance of life, Islam has ruled the personal and social attitude of its followers. This regulation was ultimately derived from the basic sources of instruction of Muslims, namely the Quran (the sacred texts of the Divine) and hadith (statements and behaviors of the Prophet). Nevertheless, as Islam is not monolithic, these sources

need a proper interpretation of the Muslim scholars to be rightly applicable through the times. Included in this arrangement is on the authority and representation of the Muslim's voice as an individual and social member in the state. Though still as a contested system, some Muslim scholars believe that *Shura* (consultation) has been the best system to represent and to solve the Muslim's affairs. *Shura* is a representative council in Islamic political system where the members in it discuss all Muslim's affairs such as war, peace, trading, social welfare, and so forth under God instructions.¹ *Shura* system is often opposed to the democracy in the West as a non-Islamic representation system.

In general, among other theories, democracy is a system of representation and government by, for and of the people to manage power relation and minimize domination between the state, society and the individual interest.² Recently, this is a dominant system which is applied broadly by countries as their basic nation ordinance. Moreover, democracy is a political representation system as a result of secularization in the West. Secularization is a movement to separate between the religions, say Christianity and the Church, as a private domain and the state and government as a public sphere in eighteenth century. Consequently, the Western countries are becoming a modern and developed civilization this time.³

Given this fact, Muslims who live in the West face a dilemma. On the one hand, they want to revive their Islamic values in a total way, including their system of involvement in governmental issues. On the

¹ Mishal Fahm al-Sulami, *The West and Islam, Western Liberal Democracy versus the System of Shura*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, 39.

² Ian Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003, 1-3.

³ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular, Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, California: Stanford University Press, 2003, 2.

other hand, they realize that the democratic political system in the West is non-Islamic. This situation also takes place in Muslims in Britain. As they have a significant numbers in the country, British Muslims gather in several organizations such as *Hizbut Tahrir*, *Tablighi Jama'at*, and Muslim Council of Britain. Generally, these organizations unite their members based on their different ideologies within democratic Britain. *Hizbut Tahrir* is a radical transnational organization whose aim is to establish an Islamic empire throughout the world, *Tablighi Jama'at* is a traditional transnational movement organization to proselytize peaceful Islam, and Muslim Council of Britain is an umbrella organization for huge numbers of Islamic local organizations in Britain.

This essay intends to discuss the understanding of the two contested political system, *Shura* and democracy, and their development and practice until this moment. It will also examine to what extent these systems have similarities and diversities rather than simply being perceived to be in opposition to one and another. Finally, this essay will look into the attitude of the British Muslims represented by the three organizations, *Hizbut Tahrir*, *Tablighi Jama'at*, and Muslim Council of Britain, in dealing with the democratic system of Britain and *Shura* system.

In so doing, this essay will begin with a brief exploration of Islamic authority and representation system, consisting of state and government concepts, discourses and practices among Muslims from the revelation onwards with the *Shura* as the cornerstone. In addition, it will also look into the discourse of the West's representation system in its relation to the Christianity, secularism, and modernity with the democracy as the core of the matter. Finally, this essay aims to find the nature of three British Muslims organizations in understanding the democratic Britain.

Authority and representation in Islam

Muslims have a long history in maintaining private and public affairs. They constructed political systems to accommodate individual and social needs. As the Prophet did not leave a certain Islamic government model, Muslims have established various prototypes of government such as Caliphates, Empires, Kingdoms and States to rule the authority and to represent Muslims affairs. These political institutions attribute themselves as part of Muslims endeavor to serve the people under the sovereignty of God.

Muslims, state and divinity

Islam, as understood by Muslims, has come to the humankind with comprehensive values of life. These values rule all concerns of human attitude as individual and social creatures. In addition, as Mawdudi argues, Islam does not recognize the role separation of human in religious and social systems as well as in political and cultural ideologies. The affairs of these worldly things understood to be part of worship to God. Consequently, Muslims have to establish a universal place to disseminate these values in an Islamic sense, such as Islamic states throughout the world.⁴ In line with Mawdudi's view, Filali-Ansari says that Islam did not recognize the distinction between the sacred and the profane, and between the spiritual and temporal: it is both *din* (religion) and *dawla* (state).⁵

In contrast, Sachedina implies that it is not Islamic state establishment that is the main goal of Islamic teachings; rather is the ability of

⁴ Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding Islam*, 5th edition, Birmingham, U.K.I.M. Dawah Centre, 2007, 86.

⁵ Abdou Filali-Ansari, "Islam and Secularism", in Gema Martin Munoz, (ed.), *Islam, Modernism, and the West*, New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999, 126.

the believers to practice these noble teachings wherever they live. Moreover, he states that private side of Muslim is scrutinized indirectly through its manifestation in the public order.⁶ In other words, in terms of a state, as long as the rulers realize the Islamic teachings, it is obligatory for Muslims to endorse such government. It is similar to the Islamic jurisprudence that regulates religious practices with a view to maintain the individual's well-being through his or her social well-being. As the result, as suggested by Tariq Ramadhan, there is no real practice of religion without personal investment in the community.⁷

An-Naim also worries about Islamic state establishment. For him, it is better to separate religion from the state to enhance and to promote genuine religious observance, to affirm, nurture, and regulate the role of Islam in the public life of the community. Moreover, he argues, enforcing Islamic laws cannot be enacted by the state, because the outcome will necessarily be the political will of the state and not Islamic religious laws.⁸

Although the aforementioned matters are still in discussion among Muslims scholars, many Muslims believe that the *Shura* system is their Islamic government model and being practiced in some Muslim countries.

Shura as an Islamic representation system

Shura is one of the most important elements of the Islamic political system. It is defined as "seeking the advice and consultation of schol-

⁶ Abdul Aziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, 25.

⁷ Tariq Ramadhan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2004, 33.

⁸ Abdullahi Ahmed an-Naim, *Islam and the Secular State, Negotiating the future of Sharia*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008, 1.

ars and informed people in the affairs that concern the nation and its interests".⁹ *Shura* has also been defined as "decision-making in the light of the concerned parties in the country". Nevertheless, al-Sulami argues that *Shura* does not have a universally accepted definition and it has had very different interpretations in its long history. For him, *Shura* has two evolutionary interpretations. Firstly, *Shura* is a system of government which must be based on the free-will of the Muslim communities. It was in the Prophet and first-four Caliphates era in seventh century. Its main tools are free will in selecting the Caliph, consultation process with the people or member of the *Shura* council related to the public matters, and majority opinion in decision making. Secondly, in the Caliphates of the Islamic empire era in fifteenth until seventeenth century, *Shura* was treated as an advisement council, which was the ruler asking people particularly religious leaders, tribal leaders or influential people, merely for advice, though the decision is on the ruler's hand.¹⁰

The order to implement *Shura* in the Muslim life is believed to come directly from the God through His Prophet. The Quran stresses *Shura* as an essential principle in all Muslim affairs.¹¹ However, al-Sulami said that *The Quran* asserted the principle of *Shura* as a comprehensive concept without imposing a specific mould, leaving that to Muslim societies to determine according to its junctures and circumstances.¹² Notwithstanding, the sovereignty of God is the ultimate foundation for various *Shura* models.

⁹ Faishal ibn Misha'l al-Su'ud, *Islamic Political Development in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Majlis ash-Shura: Concept, Theory and Practice*, Washington: the National Association of Muslim American Women, Inc., 2002, 81.

¹⁰ Mishal Fahm al-Sulami, *The West and Islam*, 60.

¹¹ See QS. al-Shūrā: 38; Ālu 'Imrān: 159.

¹² Mishal Fahm al-Sulami, *The West and Islam*, 39.

In some Muslim countries such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Oman, *Shura*, as Mishal argues, represents the general framework within which the Islamic ruling authorities, legislative, and judiciary bodies must act. They believe that this system will exclude obstinacy and stubbornness, helps draw accurate conclusions, realize the unity of the nation, and harmonizes the hearts of its people, since the decision taken by the ruling authorities cannot be implemented unless they were gained at through this process.¹³ However, the ruler in Islam has an absolute power to make a decision as long as he observes the teachings of the Quran. Thus, *Shura* council members, who are not an elected body but rather a selected one, can only advise the ruler. In addition, the ruler is responsible only to God and not to the parliaments, as in the democratic political system.¹⁴

In contrast, Tariq Ramadhan argues that *Shura* could be practiced like democracy. For instance, the creation of *Shura* council members imposes itself and necessitates structuring the modes of people's consultation which allows for the election of members to this council. Moreover, for him, the ruler has to responsible not only to the God but also to the people.¹⁵ Hence, it is important to explore the concept of the type of authority and representation in the West in ruling the interests of its people.

Authority and representation in the West

Western people have experienced a period of hundreds years to establish their governmental institution as it is witnessed today. The struggle to obtain the authority and the representation of the people has re-

¹³ Faisal ibn Misha'al al-Su'ud, *Islamic Political Development*, 82.

¹⁴ Faisal ibn Misha'al al-Su'ud, *Islamic Political Development*, 90.

¹⁵ Tariq Ramadhan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges*, 84-5.

volved around the Monarch, the Churches and the People. Each of these parties plays a significant role in the development of the democratic West. This achievement also has a deep root in Christianity that bears secularism and modernity as the source of democracy.

Christianity, secularism and modernity

Huntington says that among the cores of Western civilization those paved the way to the modern West, and now is spreading widely as a universal civilization, are Christianity, with Catholicism and Protestantism as its main determinants, and secularism, that is, the separation of spiritual and temporal authority.¹⁶ For him, this argument is addressed to give the explanation of the different West civilization from the others.

Christianity, as well as monarchy, dominated the authority of the people in private and public life in the West in the eighteenth century. Churches became the only authoritative institution to interpret the Divine revelations of people's needs. In collaboration with the aristocrats in the kingdom, Churches ruled the power by constituting the laws almost in absolute manner.¹⁷ In addition, as argued by Ramadhan, churches in the West at that time founded the sphere of religion on authority and dogma and acted as if it retained not only agent of God but also property of the world and reality. It was also opposed science, rationality and free thought: the result was that the people were against this situation by introducing their power that led to the secularization of the church from the public domain, and the people control over the power.¹⁸

¹⁶ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, 69. See also Al-Sulami, *Islam and The West*, 81.

¹⁷ Al-Sulami, *Islam and the West*, 98.

¹⁸ Tariq Ramadhan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges*, 88.

Generally, in Western culture and politics, the secular idea tries to locate religion merely as a private life. It tends towards a negative characterization of anything religious as soon as it crosses the boundary from the private to public sphere.¹⁹ This aims to avoid religion from being misused by religious authorities to benefit themselves in the name of divinity as experienced in Christianity.²⁰ Secularization is also a very clear process by which the people claimed their rights after being long suppressed by the authority of the church.

To some extent, by practicing secularism Western people lead their way to the Enlightenment era where individual freedom was celebrated. Hence, authority has been shifted from religious leaders in the churches and from the small number of elite aristocrats to the people. Although secularism emerges from the West, as Arkoun states, all political regimes which have emerged in Islamic societies after their liberation from colonialism are in fact secular, adopted Western model, based on the classical theory of authority and on intellectual modernity.²¹ People's involvement in the government then becomes problematic in the authority of representation. It has emerged because it is impossible to accommodate a huge numbers of people's needs in a wide spread places at a time.

Together with the development of Western civilization from this time leading to modernization, the West then created an authority and representation system for the people to share and control the power of freedom in a democracy. Modernization, as Tariq Ramadhan defines, is liberation, the breaking of the claims of all dogmas, stilted traditions

¹⁹ Abdul Aziz Sachedina, *the Islamic Roots*, 3.

²⁰ Talal Asad, *Formation of the Secular*, 2.

²¹ Mohammed Arkoun, "The Concept of Authority in Islamic Thought", in Klaus Ferdinand and Mehdi Mozaffari (eds.), *Islam: State and Society*, London: Curzon Press, Ltd, 1988, 72.

and evolving societies to represent accession to progress with reason, where science and technology are set in motion.²²

Democracy as the West representation system

According to Ramadhan, the democratic principle is founded on the idea that nothing should be imposed upon people except the one that is decided by people themselves, by majority, only in the mirror of rationality. This means that democracy is against the absolute power which is unreal such as religious authority: God and the sacred are outside the world, thus the people are absolutely free as the proprietor.²³

Democracy thrives on the ability of citizens to value each other and respect each other's dignity and human rights. In spiritual terms, as Montville states, democracy succeeds where citizens accept that the individual is created in the image of God and that all religions share membership in a loving relationship with God.²⁴ In contrast, democracy as a system to manage the authority and representation of the people cannot be based on the divine sources; rather people are the real source of law and power.²⁵ The main principle of democracy then lays on people's sovereignty. It is a government by, for and from the people.

Although the recent democracy is widely adopted by most countries, Asad criticizes its ability to represent people in the parliament. It is because the ordinary people do not participate in the process of formulating policy options as the elites do. Instead, the influence of strong pressure groups, mass media, and opinion polls often replaces the

²² Tariq Ramadhan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges*, 3.

²³ Tariq Ramadhan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges*, 89.

²⁴ Joseph V. Montville, "Foreword", in Abdul Aziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots*.

²⁵ Mishal Fahm al-Sulami, *The West and Islam*, 94.

voice of the electorate.²⁶ They use direct access to the government to influence the making of a policy.

Britain, as part of the West, constituted its state as a representative democracy where the people representation in the governmental system is represented by particular persons. This democracy enables the representatives to be commonly chosen through an election. In addition, democracy in Britain emphasizes individual liberties that respect all citizens' votes in the election. Thus, British democracy could be categorized as a liberal democracy.²⁷

Besides some similarities between *Shura* and democracy such as the aims of these systems to struggle for prosperity, freedom, justice and equal representation of the people, obviously there are two big differences between the two. Firstly, according to an-Nabhani, *Shura* is different to democracy in terms of its authority. For him, *Shura* is for seeking opinions, and a decision is in the ruler's hand, while democracy is for ruling which is managed by the parliament whose members are chosen in the election.²⁸ Secondly, al-Sulami argues, the sovereignty in *Shura* and democracy is also different. *Shura's* sovereignty is in God; conversely democracy's sovereignty is in the people.²⁹

The British Muslims, who live directly in the heart of a democratic country, require a proper attitude to face such a condition. On the one hand, they have to deal with the political system in the country, and on the other hand they have to adhere to the instructions of Islam with its own political system.

²⁶ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 4.

²⁷ Mishal Fahm al-Sulami, *Islam and the West*, 190.

²⁸ Taqiuddin an-Nabahani, *The System of Islam*, London: al-Khilafah Publications, 2002, 61.

²⁹ Mishal Fahm al-Sulami, *Islam and the West*, 196.

British Muslims among the West

Based on the latest British Census in 2001, Muslim population in Britain was the second largest religious communities after Christian. The third largest community was Hindu, followed by Sikh, Jewish, and Buddhist. Muslims made up 3 per cent of the total of nearly 57 million the British population. In 2001 alone, there were 1.7 million Muslims living in Britain, comprising over 50% of the non-Christian religions populations.³⁰ Nevertheless, Ansari explains various data on the total number of the Muslim population in Britain which is up to 2 million.³¹ It would be a good idea to refer to the official data released by the British government as this was the first census in the United Kingdom which asked the people about their religious faith. The figure of the Muslim population in Britain may make them one of the significant groups that should be put into consideration by other British communities and British government.

Based on this fact, Muslims in Britain pave a way to establish various Islamic organizations to represent their needs in social, religious and politics. Basically, the establishment of these organizations is based on ethnicity whereby the South Asia Muslims such as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, as the Muslim majority in Britain, dominate the issues.

Muslim in Britain and their representation need

Some Muslims believe that engagement with the British political system is the effective and the only way of getting their problems addressed. In addition, Ansari argues, when they convince that Islam highly appreciates the values of equality and justice it will be better to introduce them to the wider society in Britain by means of democratic strate-

³⁰ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=954> last accessed 1st June 2009

³¹ Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within, Muslims in Britain since 1800*, London: Hurst & Company, 2004, 169-172.

gies.³² Consequently, this condition leads them involved in both local and national government as a means of representation.

Early political attitudes of the British Muslims, say Pakistani, were to remain involved in the country of origin by establishing Pakistani political parties branches in Bradford. As soon as they settled in the country with their families, the need for local social and educational issues emerged. According to Ansari, in these early years around 1960s, religious issues were not the main concern; rather they asked for the recognition of their ethnicity and culture to provide them with a framework to engage in public sphere.³³

In 1980s, the British Muslims' agenda widened to religious needs issue such as building mosques, *halal* (permitted) meat, more 'Islamic' school environment, and so forth. In this term, the British Muslims benefitted from at least two conditions. Firstly, influence of the Church of England in keeping secularism from controlling public space. Conversely from France that totally separates religion from public life by implementing *laicite* laws, the British government remain strong with the influence of religious values as part of the decision making consideration by listening to the Church of England opinion.³⁴ Thus, the British Muslims voices, as part of the world religion and of British citizens, were considered by the government as well. Secondly, the intention of the British government to promote a multicultural and plural Britain made the British Muslims easier to find their needs and representation from 1980s onward.³⁵

Recently, the British Muslims have correctly seen that they must forge collaborations with non-Muslim political leaders if they are to de-

³² Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within*, 234.

³³ Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within*, 235.

³⁴ John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State and Public Space*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 329.

velop workable Islamic social and religious matters such as Islamic school financial aid, Islamic chaplains to prisoners and soldiers who require state certification and so on. Moreover, Bowen said that the creative efforts to adapt religious practices to their social conditions are needed by the British Muslims including distinct political cultures such as laws regarding who may form what sort of association, policies about the state recognition of and aid to religious groups, and norms about where and when one may publicly express religious beliefs.³⁶ Although the relationships between Muslims public intellectuals and political leaders may be uneasy and unstable, they shape the direction of Muslims in social, political, religious, and intellectual life in the country. However, as the British Muslims affiliate in various organizations, they have different attitudes in engaging with the British political system. For instance, to face the *Shura* and democratic system, Muslim organizations in Britain have various attitudes to deal with.

The Attitude of British Muslims organizations to the state

The attitude of Muslims to face the modern, democratic and secular country, as suggested by Rippin, is divided into three general typologies. They are isolated traditionalist, radical rejectionist and involved reformist.³⁷ These typologies are similar to the pattern of the British Muslims organizations towards the democratic system of the country. Initially, isolated traditionalist British Muslims is a group that tries to cover themselves from the wider political engagement in Britain. The instance for this organization is *Tablighi Jama'at*. Secondly, radical rejectionist is an organization that refuses modernity with all of its

³⁵ Humayun Ansari, *The Infidel Within*, 235.

³⁶ John R. Bowen, *Why the French*, 328.

³⁷ Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 3rd Edition, London: Routledge, 2005, 181-188.

consequence products like democracy and secularism. In Britain, such an organization were probably be well represented by *Hizbut Tahrir*. Finally is the organization of the British Muslims which tries to be involved in modern Britain with the dynamics of its government for their representation. They invoke themselves in the democratic systems of the West while retain their Islamic values. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) is a proper British Muslims organization for this attitude.

Tablighi Jama'at

Tablighi Jama'at organization is a movement that began in India in the late 1920s and is devoted to the propagation (*tabligh*) of Islam. As said by Eickelman and Piscatori, this organization is principally directed toward fellow Muslims whose faith seems to have been corrupted and lapsed. Appealing originally to illiterate or semiliterate peasants but gradually attracting followers in the professions and among the well-educated, *Tablighi Jama'at* expanded as a transnational Muslims organization, at first, from the region of Mewat to most of the Indian sub continent, and, then, from South Asia to the Arab world, Africa, South-east Asia, Europe and North America.³⁸

Metcalf says that the center of the *Tablighi Jama'at* in Britain is in Dewsbury West Yorkshire. By 2007, their members spread all over Britain through 600 of Britain's 1350 mosques and are well organized.³⁹ In addition, Metcalf says that the members of this organization are polite, courteous and well behaved, and can be easily spotted in the streets. They wear caps, beard, long shirts which go below the ankle.

³⁸ Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996, 148.

³⁹ Barbara D. Metcalf, "New Medinas, the Tablighi Jama'at in America and Europe", in Barbara D. Metcalf, (ed.), *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, California: University of California Press, 1996, 110.

They might also wear jackets and sneakers, and keep very much to themselves.⁴⁰

As Maulana Muhammad Ilyas, the founder of this organization, focused, *Tablighi Jama'at* is an organization that gives no room to national boundaries or to nationalism. It pays no attention to the nation-state and no concern for worldly progress.⁴¹ It means that *Tablighi Jama'at* is not intended to deal with the political system in a certain place. In other words, *Tablighi Jama'at* tolerates and obeys the local government, but not involve in its political system, in order to give them a space for their movement. As stated by Eickelman and Piscatori, *Tablighi Jama'at* contributes toward the concretization of a religious and social identity that is not based on the political culture of the nation-state.⁴² Thus, the members of this organization seem to be able to deal with the problems of cultural, religious pluralism and political issues. In addition, *Tablighi Jama'at* brings Islam along with them in an extroverted manner and non-political.

Tablighi Jama'at in Britain also implements this doctrine. In the opinion of this organization, as Metcalf argues, ideally, British government and wider non-Muslim societies in Britain are not constituted as an 'other' but, ultimately, rendered invisible, although, a Tablighi would insist, and be treated with respect.⁴³ The end result, focusing one's own and one's community's religious life and avoiding religion in public life converges with a secular approach to politics and religion. To conclude, for *Tablighi Jama'at*, democratic or *Shura* system may not be an essential matter in representing their aspirations as long as they are

⁴⁰ Barbara D. Metcalf, "New Medinas, the Tablighi Jama'at in America and Europe", 110.

⁴¹ Barbara D. Metcalf, "New Medinas, the Tablighi Jama'at in America and Europe", 119.

⁴² Dale F. Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, 148.

⁴³ Barbara D. Metcalf, "New Medinas, the Tablighi Jama'at in America and Europe", 124.

allowed to preach Islam in a peaceful way. In contrast with Tablighi Jama'at, some British Muslims also founded *Hizbut Tahrir*. This organization has a strong opposition to the political system of the host country.

Hizbut Tahrir

Hizbut Tahrir (HT, means Liberation Party) is a transnational organization. Founded in Palestine by Taqiuddin al-Nabhany in 1952, this organization has been established in Britain for more than twenty years, and had spread throughout the country from London in 1990s.⁴⁴ Since then, *Hizbut Tahrir* has been considered as the most active radical Muslim organization in Britain. This stigmatization happens because HT emphasizes the importance of the British Muslim's loyalty to their religion above their loyalty to the British government and the state. Moreover, *Hizbut Tahrir* opposes any Western values that influence in the Muslim world. Included in this opposition is the rejection of democracy system.⁴⁵

Mostly around thousands of HT members are young British Muslims who were born and grew up in the country. As Wiktorowicz states, most of them are young British Muslim students of universities who lack of guidance and have apathy to face modern Britain as well as to keep Islamic traditions. *Hizbut Tahrir* came to them and offered Islam as the only solution to the whole problem.⁴⁶ It is in line with HT statement that Islam is a comprehensive way of life including managing the affairs of the state and society alike.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Y. Birth, "Locating the British Imam: the Deobandi Ulama between Contested Authority and Public Policy Post-9/11", in Jocelyn Cesari and Sean Mc. Loughlin, (eds.), *European Muslims and the Secular State*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, 185.

⁴⁵ Jorgen S. Nielsen, *Muslims in Western Europe*, 3rd edition, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004, 51.

The members of *Hizbut Tahrir* recognize that democracy is as Western and un-Islamic. In their opinion, democracy is the rule of people, by people and for people. The basic of a democratic system is that people possess the right of sovereignty, choice and implementation. In addition, the sources of democratic system are from the people, not from *The Quran* and Hadith.⁴⁸ Consequently, democracy is known by them as illicit. It is similar to Taqiuddin An-Nabhany's condemnation on democracy as a system of unbelief that is incompatible with Islamic law. Furthermore, he said that there was a big distinction between democratic and *Shura* system.⁴⁹ This argumentation stressed the rejection of this organization to the British governmental system. As a result, Muslims in Britain should choose whether to be British or Muslims.

The aim of this organization is to promote the Caliphate of Islam or an Islamic state throughout the world. As reported by the British Muslim magazine, *Q-News*, cited by Ansari, according *Hizbut Tahrir*, since the democratic system is 'a system of *Kufr* (unbelief), based on the creed of separating religion from life', a system which enacts the laws is un-Islamic. Hence, voting and political participation in a democratic and non-Islamic state should be forbidden to Muslims.⁵⁰ In cooperative manner to the democratic system in Britain, Muslim Council of Britain is of the Islamic organization which is tolerating this system.

Muslim Council of Britain

⁴⁶ Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, 96-99.

⁴⁷ See www.hizb.org.uk last accessed 5 June 2009.

⁴⁸ Suha Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest: Hizb al-Tahrir and the Search for the Islamic Caliphate*, London: Grey Seal, 1996, 69.

⁴⁹ Suha Taji-Farouki, *A Fundamental Quest*, 69.

⁵⁰ Humayun Ansari, *the Infidel Within*, 246.

Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) is a national British Muslims that accommodates over 200 local Muslims organizations such as Muslim Cultural Heritage Center, Federation of Students Islamic Societies, Association of Muslim Schools, Young Muslim UK, Muslim Women's Association, and so forth.⁵¹ The MCB was established in 1997 aimed to promote cooperation, consensus and unity on Muslim affairs in the UK. In addition, MCB aims to make a mutual relationship between British Muslims and the wider societies in Britain through the governmental rules.

Iqbal Sacranie, the Secretary General of MCB from 1997 to 2006, has shown that this organization has a close relationship with the British societies. He was awarded with a knighthood in the 2005 Queen's Birthday Honors List for his long standing service to the community and interfaith dialogue. Using this award as a fact of the British society's recognition on him, he stressed, in terms of political matters, that he would criticize the cabinet to serve all of the British communities in an equal and just manners including British Muslims.⁵²

The MCB printed half a million copies of a pocketbook entitled "Know Your Rights & Responsibilities" in 2004 which were distributed to Muslims across Britain. According to Iqbal Sacranie, this book sought to "reassure Muslims about their rights and remind them of the responsibilities we all share to help build a more just and cohesive society". Moreover, it also encouraged the British Muslims to "participate in the mainstream political parties with a view to seeking the common good".⁵³

In viewing its involvement in British democratic system, besides instituted democratic model in its committee board like a number of checks and balances to preserve the representation of its members,⁵⁴

⁵¹ See http://www.mcb.org.uk/downloads/MCB_acheivments.pdf last accessed 5 June 2009.

⁵² See http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4085322.stm last accessed 5 June 2009.

⁵³ See http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=112 last accessed 5 June 2009.

MCB also pushed its interest to the parliament. For instance, in February 2006, the MCB urged the Members of Parliament to vote for the Lords Amendment to the Terrorism Act 2006, which removed 'glorification of terrorism' clause from the bill. MCB stated that the bill was perceived as "unfairly targeting Muslims and stifling legitimate debate".⁵⁵

MCB is recognized as moderate and is represented most British Muslims by many in the British political establishment. In addition, they knew that MCB encouraged the British Muslims that they had a duty to vote. In its advice for British Muslims, MCB suggested that Muslims should not opt out of the political life of the country and voluntarily give up their social and political rights. Neither should they surrender their duty to make their opinions and their advice known on matters of concern to themselves and wider society.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Combination between *Shura* and democracy systems which are practiced by *Tablighi Jama'at* and MCB in Britain are continuation of political authority and representation searching in Islam, which was practiced earlier in the past. Although they have a different way to deal with the democratic Britain, they have the same message to acknowledge Islamic political system as a compatible system to the West. In this manner, British government may cooperate with them.

Furthermore, British government has to be careful to treat an organization such as *Hizbut Tahrir* in practicing its radical politics view within democratic Britain. It is because multicultural Britain, as a valuable result of long process of British civilization, will be in jeopardy to accom-

⁵⁴ See <http://www.mcb.org.uk/faq/faq.php#3> last accessed 5 June 2009.

⁵⁵ See http://www.mcb.org.uk/media/presstext.php?ann_id=190 last accessed 5 June 2009.

⁵⁶ Humayun Ansari, *the Infidel Within*, 247.

moderate a system like which is practiced by *Hizbut Tahrir*. In addition, as a transnational organization, *Hizbut Tahrir* will call for support from outside Britain to emphasize its goal.

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