

The life and death of an ambitious politician

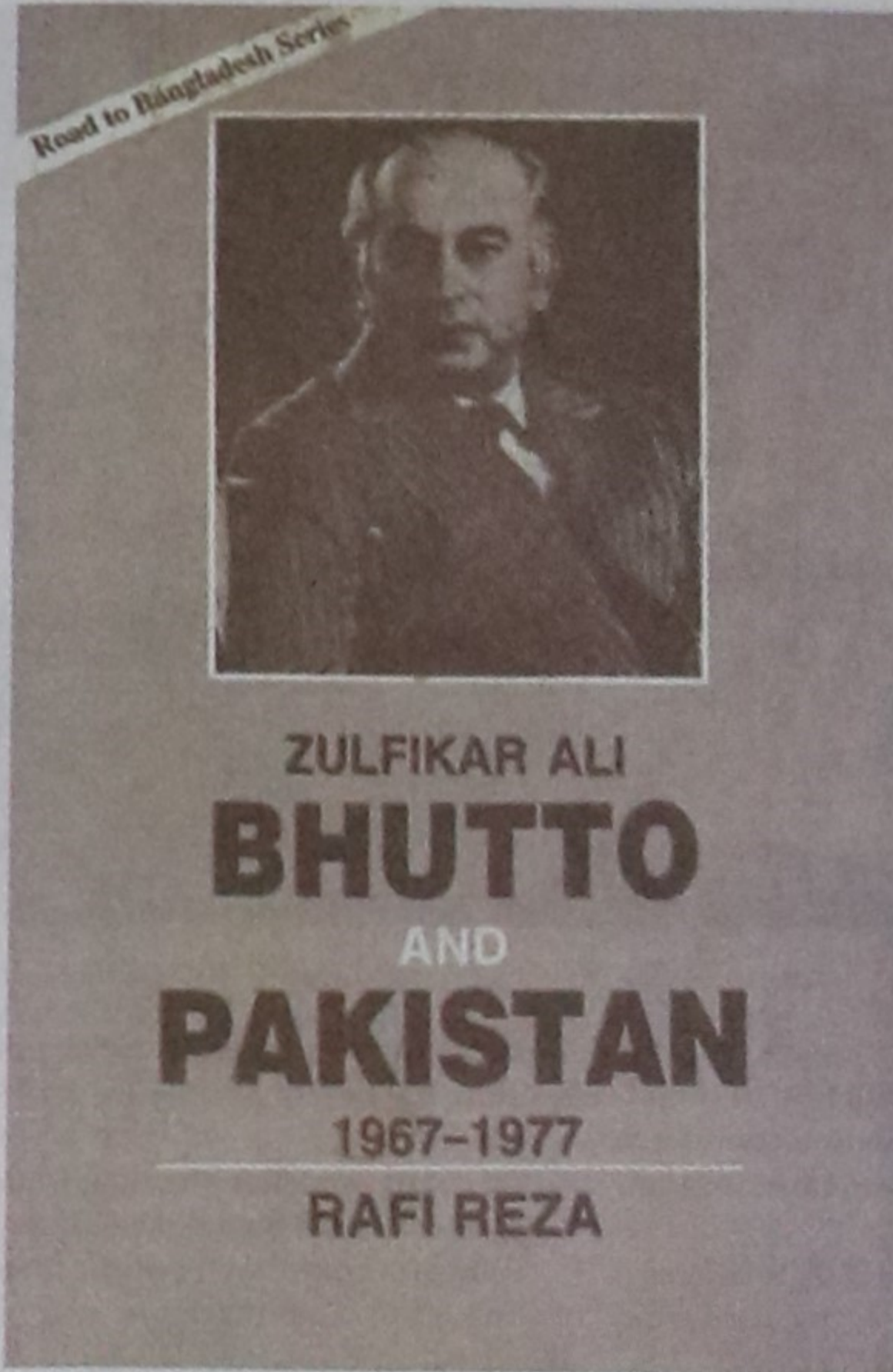
Three decades after Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged, Syed Badrul Ahsan rereads two books on him and one by him to recall his rise and fall

WHEN he lived, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was a complex figure for those who observed his rise and fall. Thirty years after his execution by a military regime, he remains that way. There are his fans, largely within Pakistan, who have consistently believed that he is a shaheed, a martyr, in the defence of democracy. And then there are those who remain convinced that having ridden to power on the slogan of democracy, he did everything he could to bury it under his civilian dictatorship.

A fairly large number of books on Bhutto's life and career have appeared across the years, with the promise of more to come in the times ahead. And especially since the assassination of his daughter Benazir in December 2007, the Bhutto myth has taken on a new and expanded dimension. And do remember that we are speaking of the man who almost behaved like a maniac when he spoke to the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci in the early 1970s. Megalomaniac he surely was before her, but the extent to which certain streaks of madness manifested themselves in him left even the shockproof journalist surprised. Bhutto's aspersions on Indira Gandhi, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and nearly everyone else were too outrageous for polite ears. And even he realized that, subsequently, which is when he sent Pakistan's diplomats in Italy scouring for Fallaci, to ask her to withdraw the interview or to 'admit' that she had made it all up!

What appears in the Fallaci interview is what the essential Bhutto was. And that is the point which comes through in Stanley Wolpert's *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan*. Wolpert, the American academic celebrated for such seminal works as those on Gandhi and Jinnah, was provided with all manner of facilities, including access to Bhutto's library and papers, by the Bhutto family. That being the basis of the study, it follows that Wolpert's analysis of the Bhutto character is by and large a sympathetic study of a man who could have done much better as a politician than what he actually did. The author traces the rise of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, essentially after his return to Pakistan following higher studies abroad, and the many factors that went into facilitating it. He was a bright young law professor in the early 1950s. By 1958, he was a cabinet minister, happy to be under the tutelage of General Iskandar Mirza, a man not too well-disposed to democracy. And yet, when only days later, Mirza was sent packing by General Ayub Khan, Bhutto swiftly transferred his loyalties to the new big man in town. It is a picture that you come by in the excellent biography of Mirza by his son Humayun Mirza a few years ago. Bhutto, recalls the young Mirza, earned General Mirza's admiration at the very first meeting he had with the president, so much so that Mirza briskly found a spot for the young lawyer in Pakistan's central cabinet.

And Bhutto was keen to demonstrate his gratitude to



Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Pakistan 1967-1977 Rafi Reza The University Press Limited

Reza's ultimate focus is on the years of the Bhutto government from late 1971 to mid 1977. He duly notes the achievements of the government despite the various constraints it operated under. He records as well the deep flaws in the Bhutto character, those that would take him to his doom. In Reza's words, 'If (the people) had short memories, so did ZAB who, within a few years of assuming office, forgot the power of the people which the PPP had helped to galvanize --- his only real source of power.'

ties that stared him in the face. One needed little persuasion to understand that he had been one of the principal elements responsible for the disaster that had befallen Pakistan, but it was one thought Bhutto was unwilling to accept. He blamed everyone else, including Mujib, for the country's break-up, but he would not bring himself to acknowledge his own guilt in the genocide that led to the Bengali armed struggle for freedom. But he did eat humble pie in the end. He freed the incarcerated Mujib and saw him off at Chaklala airport. As the Bengali leader flew off into the night sky, Bhutto murmured, to no one in particular, 'The nightingale has flown.'

Rafi Reza speaks of course of no nightingale. As a political ally of the eventually executed politician, Reza was witness to the eventual ten years that were to mark Bhutto's rise and fall. Naturally, therefore, the book begins with 1967, when Bhutto linked up with Reza, Mubashir Hasan, J.A. Rahim, Mairaj Mohammad Khan, Abdul Hafeez Pirzada and others to give shape to the Pakistan People's Party. The month was November; and Bhutto had been out of public office for over a year since he had been forced to quit by an irate Ayub Khan. Between July 1966 and November 1967, therefore, it was an apprehensive, almost fearful Bhutto who pondered his future. For all his criticism of the field marshal over the Tashkent Declaration --- Bhutto had been harping, without anything to show for it, on a secret clause in the declaration he said proved Ayub's treachery to Pakistan --- he had not expected to be given the sack. But he was. After July

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1966, he was a frightened man. Ayub yet wielded unchallenged authority and had over the years jailed political rivals relentlessly. He might do a similar thing in Bhutto's case.

President Ayub Khan eventually did send Bhutto to prison, but that was in November 1968, a full year after the PPP had been formed. And then, Bhutto was to be freed within three months as the regime began to totter in the face of growing popular disaffection in both East and West Pakistan. In terms of history, though, 1967 remains a defining moment for Pakistan obviously because of the arrival of the Pakistan People's Party. For the first time in the history of the largely feudal region that was West Pakistan, a party had come forth with patently populist slogans. Bhutto promised a curious blend of Islam, democracy and socialism to Pakistanis, not deigning, of course, to explain how he would go about achieving them. What mattered was how the people received his mantra. And they did receive it well. He was mobbed everywhere he went; huge crowds blocked railway stations and roads to see him pass and hear him speak. Never in the history of West Pakistan had a politician so swiftly transformed himself into a popular hero. And it was happening at the same time as the Bengalis of distant East Pakistan were finding their voice in one

their own, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Obviously, Rafi Reza's work is of an adulatory nature. And yet there are the instances where he cites his differences with Bhutto. For all that, though, it is a fact that Reza is one man who did not end up earning Bhutto's wrath (and Pakistan's first elected leader began to demonstrate the arrogance of power soon after taking over from a humiliated Yahya Khan in December 1971) as so many others did. Bhutto's goons would leave J.A. Rahim and Mairaj Mohammad Khan beaten black and blue for the audacity of questioning the wisdom of the leader. But that was in the days when Bhutto was first president and then prime minister. Prior to that, it was a team of idealistic men who saw as their mission a transformation of Pakistan's politics through the PPP vehicle. The dream would expand and would translate into electoral triumph for the party in West Pakistan in late 1970. There was a slight problem, however. Bhutto and his party soon realized that their moment of glory had been a nano second in the sun, for the Awami League of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had beaten everyone else to emerge as the majority party on an all-Pakistan basis.

The rest of the story is now part of the history of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Rafi Reza, in a manner typical of others in the PPP at the time, carefully glosses over his party's refusal to accept the results of the elections but does acknowledge the complications that arose over the subsequent weeks and months. Reza counts himself among the few moderates in the PPP when he states that at a meeting of party leaders on 23 March 1971 in Dhaka (and that was the day that Bengalis refused to celebrate as Pakistan Day and instead hoisted Bangladesh flags on rooftops all over the city), almost everyone present advocated military action against the Awami League by the Yahya Khan regime. J.A. Rahim, himself a Bengali, loudly denounced Mujib as a fascist who could only be countered by the army. And military action was not long in coming. When the army went into action late on 25 March, it was the state of Pakistan that lay grievously wounded.

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Clearly the part that grips your attention in *If I Am Assassinated* is the introduction by the Indian journalist Pran Chopra. Acknowledging the reality of the work being Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's own, he writes:

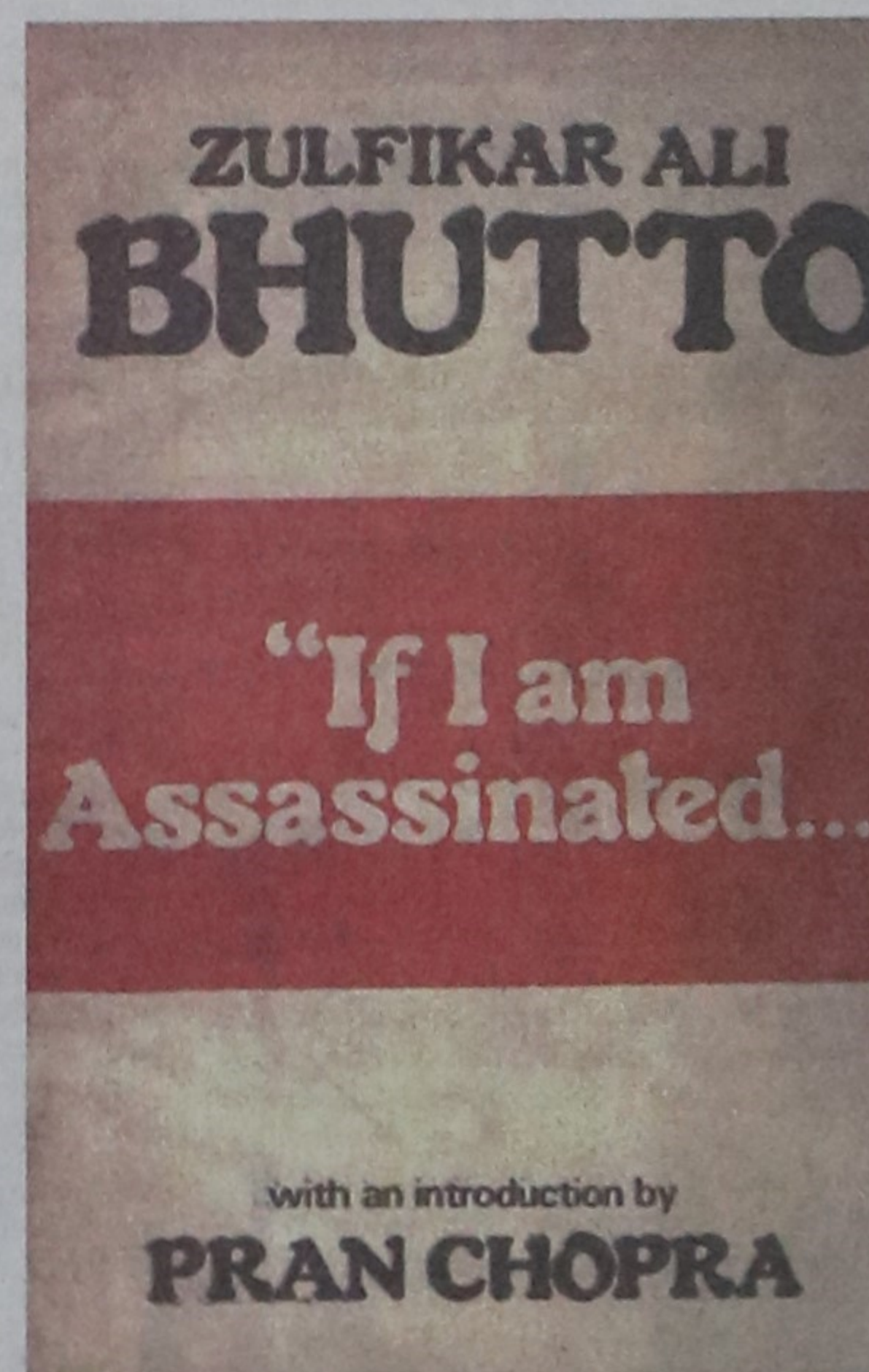
'He is speaking to history from the platform of his own brilliant mind and his unique experience of one of the most interesting countries of the developing world.'

It has been given out that Bhutto composed the work in his final days as a prisoner condemned to death over a disputed murder case. In a sense, it is a *mea culpa*, an enumeration of his thoughts over his role in Pakistan's modern history. Racy and brimming over with ideas, it is vintage Bhutto at his best. He examines the role of the army in Pakistan's politics, including the break-up of the country in 1971 (though he says nothing about his own contribution to the disaster). He dwells on the Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report. And he provides readers with his assessment of his own administration and the pressures, local as well as foreign, it worked under.

If I Am Assassinated will make you, all these decades after Bhutto penned it, appreciate the huge possibilities he symbolized for his country. In similar manner, it also gives you reason to understand why he fell so hard and so fast.

Bhutto's tragedy was and remains unique: it was the army that raised him to prominence --- and it was the army that destroyed him. Along the way, he showed promise but then declined into doing things Machiavellian. His shrewdness gave him glory. His cunning caused the death of millions in what would one day be Bangladesh.

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If I am Assassinated... Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto University Press Limited

AT A GLANCE

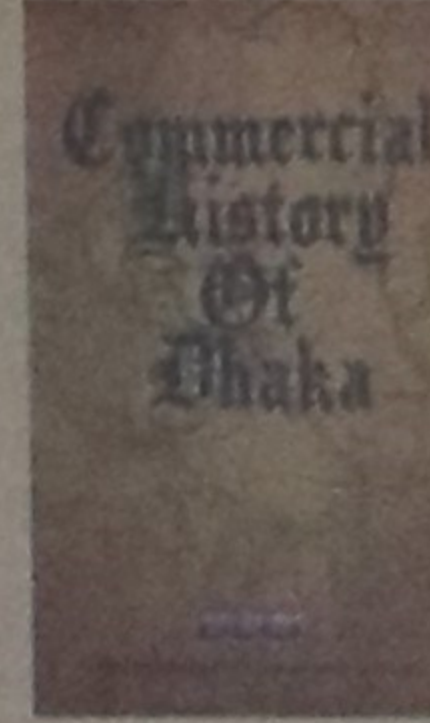


Civil Service Management in Bangladesh An Agenda for Policy Reform AMM Shaoukat Ali The University Press Limited

The author has just finished a stint as advisor to the caretaker government. His earlier and distinguished career in the civil service gave him insights into the many ways in which the bureaucratic machinery works, or does not; and that is a reason why his thoughts on the subject are encapsulated here. It is a work that makes you think.

Ten Days in the Book World Robin Ahsan Shrabon

Ahsan writes about the Frankfurt book fair, which he has had cause to attend. His little book is thus a celebration of the fair, of the reality of books continuing to dominate thought and living in Europe. Along the way, the work serves as a travelogue through detailing the writer's journey from Bangladesh to Germany. Good reading.



Default Loan Culture M.S. Siddiqui Mridul Prokashon

The culture of loan default has by now become a household, though negative, term in Bangladesh. These past couple of years have convincingly demonstrated the pernicious hold individuals who take out loans and then do not think of paying them back have exercised on national politics. Siddiqui explains the culture in all its sinister dimensions.



White Mary Kira Salak Henry Holt, New York

The horror of it all

Charles R. Larson likes the repackaging of an old theme

IT takes a bold writer to tackle a hackneyed theme and repackaging it in fresh wrappings so that the most jaded reader finds the story imaginative. For the most part, Kira Salak is that writer, giving us a contemporary version of Joseph Conrad's classic *Heart of Darkness* (1903); engaging readers a hundred years after Conrad provoked his readers. Ironically, if Conrad's late Victorian readers didn't understand the attack on their own racist views, Salak's shouldn't miss the rebuke on their own narrow-minded ethnocentrism, assuming they read *The White Mary* to its bitter end.

Salak's Kurtz, called Lewis in her novel, explains to Marika Vecera, the novel's protagonist, who has followed her hero to the end of the world, "[Americans] never had anything really bad happen to them. They've never witnessed a massacre. They've never been raped or tortured or seen family members shot. You know how you can tell when you're with one of those people? Because they're obsessed with what's pointless, thinking it matters. Try telling them about a genocide in Rwanda or East Timor. They have no ... mechanism ... to grasp what you're talking about. They've grown up in a world where everything horrible has been turned into entertainment, made into some goddamn movie. The only thing that wakes them up is if something awful suddenly lands on their doorstep, throwing them into flames."

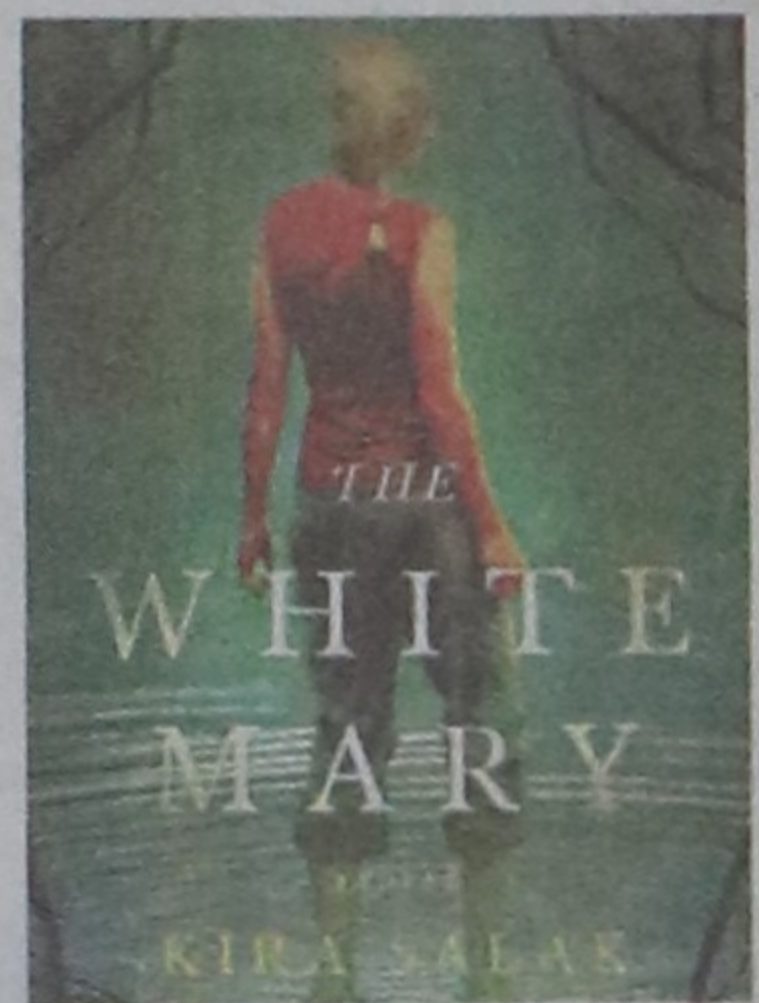
Unfortunately, the only thing that lands on their doorsteps is the morning newspaper, and it's not in flames --- though its contents may describe those fires. More likely, on the front page the headlines proclaim the results of the latest high school football or basketball game, with anything about the real world buried in a brief paragraph deep inside the paper. Which is only to say that most Americans keep their heads in the sand whenever the topic becomes unpleasant. How else does one explain Americans' proclivity for permitting their government to unleash the most unspeakable acts against others around the world? Repeatedly, I should add, not in an isolated incident.

It is those unspeakable acts that Kira Salak writes about in *The White Mary*, though her focus is not on what America has done overseas but what traditional societies and governments inflict on their own people --- simply another source of mayhem. Sierra Leone, Chechnya, Sir Lanka, Bangladesh, Uganda --- these are the areas that the author of this horrific narrative describes for her readers. It's not everyone's cup of tea; I'll certainly admit to that.

To get to Lewis's diatribe above, Salak, an award-winning journalist who has reported about the major trouble spots in the world during the past eight years, drags the reader through atrocities in the

Congo, East Timor and in Papua New Guinea, the setting for most of her riveting novel. No one escapes the lash of her venom, including United Nations peacekeepers who stand aside and watch mankind's inhumanity, as long as their own lives are not threatened.

The real question behind Kira Salak's story, however, is what it is that keeps the journalist who reports on the worst atrocities

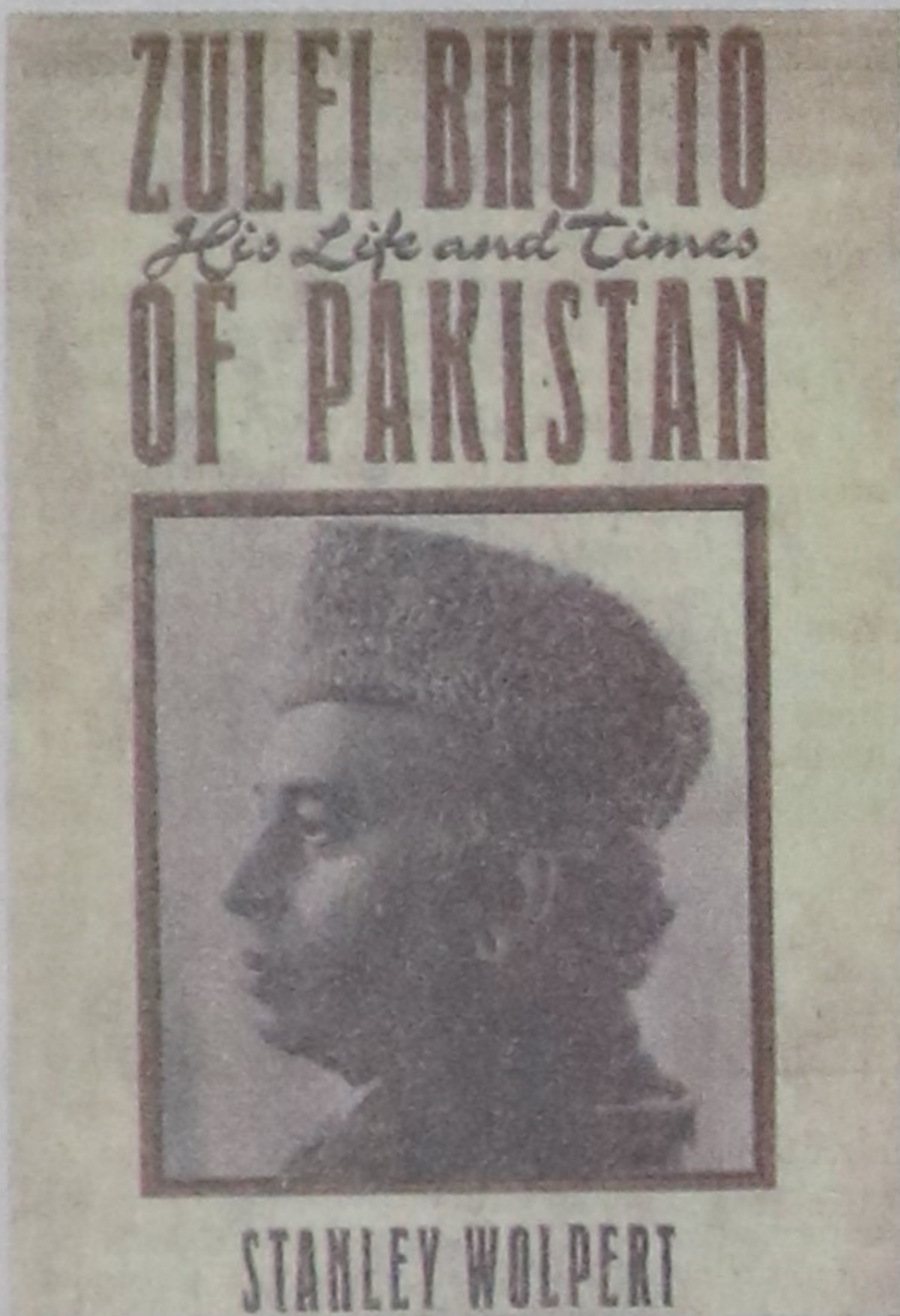


mankind inflicts on its fellow citizens returning home from such unbearable carnage and then, months later, moving on to the next trouble spot in the world where the violence --- the total lack of respect for another person's body --- may even be worse? Danger? Perversity? Sadism? Witnessing? A simple love of blood and gore? Of Marika, the author remarks, "What Marika hated to admit to herself was that she felt at home in such places. The danger gave her an increased sense of purpose."

And much later, almost at the end of the story, Salak adds, "Real courage isn't about visiting the world's hells and returning alive to tell about it --- it's easy to risk her life, and even easier to get herself killed. What takes real courage is choosing to live, choosing to save herself at all costs. Which means looking into her darkness and pain, and figuring out how she got there, and how she can get out."

The White Mary --- a term that Papua New Guineans use for white women during the time of their monthly cycle --- is an ambitious but flawed novel. The questions that Kira Salak asks, she answers convincingly; the plotting is fast-paced and full of imaginative twists and turns; but some of the writing (and too often the dialogue) is stilted. Salak creates real people, places them in extreme situations, and then has them speak in unbelievable voices.

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Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan His Life and Times Stanley Wolpert Oxford University Press

Mirza in return. He fired off a fawning missive to the president, informing him in unabashed fashion that history would record that Iskandar Mirza was the greatest man Pakistan had produced, greater than the founder of the state, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. By late October 1958, with Mirza and his wife Naheed on their way to painful exile in Britain, Bhutto made sure that Ayub Khan kept him on. For the subsequent eight years, he was never to look back. He was minister for commerce, for industries and natural resources. In 1960, he worked out a deal on energy with the Soviet Union, impressing almost everyone in Pakistan and outside. By early 1963, upon the death of Mohammad Ali Bogra, he was foreign minister in the Ayub regime. Added to that position was the job of general secretary of the Convention Muslim League, the clutch of pro-Ayub politicians propping up the dictatorship. It was Bhutto's finest hour, from the point of view of genuflection. He proposed that Ayub Khan, already in occupancy of the presidency, remain in power for the rest of his life. It was thus also a moment that made others mock him.

And yet, as the Wolpert book makes clear, a moment would come when Bhutto, grown ambitious and decidedly hubristic, would begin to mock Ayub himself. Informed by foreign secretary Aziz Ahmed late on a January 1966 night in Tashkent that 'the bastard is dead', Bhutto asked, 'Which one?' For him, both Ayub and Lal Bahadur Shastri were villains. That query was one of the many indications of the disdain, even hate, in which he viewed not just his mentor but Indian politicians as well. But Wolpert notes too the confidence Bhutto brought back to a post-1971 Pakistan, a time when the emergence of Bangladesh and the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani soldiers in Dhaka had left his people traumatized. He understood the grave nature of the situation, of the reali-