

To be or not to be funny



NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

#ResearchMesearch
So, there was a time when I wanted to be a comedian. But, I was told that I wasn't very funny. Have they been fake-laughing all this time? Well, this -- being a comedian -- was different from cracking jokes amongst friends, I was told by friends,

no less. But I was prepared; surely I deserve a shot!
I had the customary making fun of my own education joke (borrowed from long time acquaintance/friend Daniel Rahman and Arafat Kazi): "I only have a master's degree, I'm the black sheep of my family." The customary poverty joke: "Poor people are the hottest people in the world because they take the most heat in policy debates." And the vegan joke (borrowed from my sister): "How can you tell that a person is vegan? They will ***** tell you."

And then I had the non-customary ones:
In which country can you be a thief -- not a petty thief, but the real deal -- and still be considered an elite member of the society? That's easy: Bangladesh.

Why is free speech not free? Because we have to pay for it. In cash or kind. And kind often involves jail time.
Why did the chicken get fat? Because it wasn't allowed to cross streets anymore. (Instead it was put in a cage with a zillion other chickens, pumped with growth hormones, and fed corn-feed.)

Why don't I eat chicken? Refer to previous answer. Also applicable to cows, sheep, goats, and all other food products that are now merely food-like products. Unless you go organic. And only the rich can go organic. At least in the US.

I know this because, as a college student in the US, I dined in university dining halls in which we were served grade C produce, courtesy of Aramark. I gained 30 pounds, and I

was told that freshman 15 hit me hard. It wasn't freshman 15. It was grade C produce. So I stopped eating it. People don't get it, though; some even tell me that being vegetarian isn't sustainable. But I lost those 30 pounds since I stopped eating meat produce in America and I am pretty happy about that. I also enjoy not eating rubber for dinner. (There are a bunch of research studies to back my claim, but this is an op-ed, so you might as well take my word for it. Or not. Just write a snarky comment below.)

And here's one of my personal favorites:
What's the difference between big government and small government? The number of fraud businesses. (This is also the one that no one gets, and I hate -- knowing that it's a strong word -- explaining my jokes.)

And here's some more:
We all have friends who like their ganja. I always conceptualised it as a coping mechanism -- self-medication in a country where psychiatric help is largely unavailable and/or inaccessible. They had hard lives (whether they did or not is beside the point, what matters is that they thought they had hard lives) and needed a way out. So why should marijuana be legal? So that everyone can live in a better world. I wouldn't do it, no thanks, but I could do with a few more happy people in the world.

And we all know someone or the other who uses skin-whitening agents, don't we? Men and women who transform from being a regular Bengali brown person to a Disney prince/princess? And that brings up this question: What do you call someone who uses such skin-whitening products? Colonised. It's the fault of those colonisers that we think have left. Because they really haven't. They have left behind their legacy of petticoat, blouse, and white skin. Oh! And English-medium schools.

What do you call someone who is always on a diet? Normal. (Maybe I think so because I've been on so many diets in my life. The worst, the absolute worst, was perhaps the milk and banana diet. I don't remember if I did it for the recommended three days or not, but I know that I can't look at either milk or

banana the same way anymore.) But really, I feel like some people treat normal meals like a fad diet these days. I'm on a protein diet with carb on the side. Or, I'm on veggie diet with extra roughage. Might as well say, I am on a food diet. (But that too would make sense given the proliferation of easy-to-make non-foods in the world.)

Did you ever have those folks in your school who would study all the time? Really, all the time. I call them: forgetful. Why else would you have to study so much?

Unless you were memorising word for word. Which brings me to: what do you call a person who memorises everything? A memory bank. Or a wannabe parrot. You choose (not very funny).

But that joke emerged because I never understood the concept of memorising textbooks. It's a practice that encourages plagiarism, stymies your own creativity, and prevents you from developing critical thinking skills. It sets you up to look for the 'right' answer, in a world where every question can be responded to with 'it depends.' How're you doing? It depends. What are your plans for next week? It depends. Who would you like to marry? It depends. When will the world come to an end? It depends. (Or you can be committal and say "I'm good" as they do in some parts of the world, but we all know that it lacks content, that it's not a reflection of your actual state of mind.)

And here's the very last:
Who's the one who flew over the cuckoo's nest? The man with a cold. (Ok yes, this one's not great either, but in my defense: I've heard worse.)

At this point you're probably thinking: no wonder her career ended before it began.

But you can't bring me down. You see it comes with the territory of being a stand-up comedian. I keep standing up! Now, if you have a joke, let me know. One warning though: profanities, obscenities and slurs don't make for good jokes. But then, what do I know.

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UNTOLD AND UNHIDDEN FACT The sudden disappearance of my dear father

NAZMUNNESSA MAHTAB



EVERY year, when December comes close, I feel an urgency that I must recollect my memories and let the world know what we have lost in the war of independence. But from the very beginning, that is December 17th, 1971, the day we actually lost him, a question becomes very vivid in my mind. Will this write up bring him back to us? Every year when I take up my pen the same question haunts my mind and I can never proceed to do the work. The question may arise, why now? Yes, I feel and understand that though very late, it is better late than never.

It was December 16th, the day of surrender of Pakistani army in the afternoon and the declaration of celebration, joy and happiness throughout the country. My father's house was at Road 50, Gulshan. It was about 7 p.m. in the evening when a group of young boys came to our house armed with machine guns. They demanded we give them the car. However, my father although a very strong man, politely and calmly requested them to come in the morning when he would give them the car as per their demand.

It was very early in the morning, just at the time of "Fazr prayers," when those young men came back. Once more, my father behaved very politely and requested them to have breakfast and then go. They enjoyed the breakfast prepared by my mother. When the time came to hand over the car, my father, whom we looked upon as a man of strict discipline and principles, made the greatest error of his life. He, instead of handing over the car to those criminals, went along with them in the car. He could not imagine what their motives were at that time. On their way, at his request, the car stopped at my house at Bijoynagar at about 7 am in the morning when my family members and I were walking on the footpath and viewing the celebration and enjoyment in our area. During the war he did not have the opportunity to see us. This brought him to my place and unfortunately that was the last time I saw him. I did see those boys with arms in their hands and my father sitting in the middle. The car stopped in front of our house; he just kissed my daughter and asked whether I would be visiting Gulshan.

At around 11 am, one person who had accompanied the others in my father's car came running and conveyed the news that "Shahab has been attacked by bullets." He then just fled from the spot and vanished.

At that moment there were no men in my father's house, and we women -- my grandmother, mother, my brother's wife, my younger sister, my daughter and myself -- were scared as to what unfortunate news and loss was awaiting us all.

Meanwhile my husband and his brothers returned and when they heard about the incident, they rushed out in search of my father. They returned at night with no news at all. It was a moment of great loss, unhappiness, and uncertainty.

The incident occurred on December 17, 1971. It was a Friday and my father's desire was to pray "Jumma prayers" in independent Bangladesh. Unfortunately, this could never happen. After four days, with the assistance of the Indian army, our family members reached Mohammadpur (an area known as the residence of the "Biharis"). They found the car totally shattered with bullet holes, and they were all convinced that it was not possible for anyone to be alive in such a condition. However, when some of the local people working in petty shops were asked about my father, they stated that the car had been caught in crossfire and that it was attacked by bullets from all around. During those days, corpses were collected, put in trucks and taken away. No one could say anything more than this.

One issue to mention here is that during the search for the dead body, some of our relatives found some clues of my father's possessions. These were: 1) a shoe of the particular pair of shoes he wore on that day; 2) his white tupi (cap) which he always wore on his head as he had performed Hajj several times and vowed to wear it at all times. One important aspect worth mentioning is that the tupi was easily identified because it was stitched and embroidered by my mother. The saddest part was that the tupi was stained with blood and his hair. And 3) his identity card, half torn. It is important to mention here that during the nine months of our Liberation War every citizen was obligated to carry his/her identity card as declaration and proof of belonging to the Muslim community.

Several guesses were made by persons known to my father as to why the car was found at that place. The only prediction that made sense was that he might have gone to visit the "Rai Bazaar" area where the intellectuals were tortured and beaten to death, among whom were his close friends, the late Professor Giasuddin Ahmed of Department of History, Dhaka University and our family physician, Dr Rob. It was natural to assume that he might have gone there to look for their grave.

It was a very pathetic, painful and tragic end that engulfed us all. It was the worst for my mother who till her death in March 1985 never accepted or believed that my father could be lost in this way. Since 1971, she tried everything to collect news of her lost husband. Unfortunately all her efforts were in vain.

Remembering and recollecting these incidents of destruction, harm and injustice during the nine months of our war of Liberation, we would like to offer our sincere gratitude and thanks to any government that will adopt measures and take necessary steps to punish and render judgment for any acts of brutality towards anyone in society.

My father was Abdur Rahim Khan. He was the first governor of Rotary International District 325 and treasurer of Dhaka University Old Boys Association. He was involved in shipping business.

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Ferguson and beyond

AHMAD IBRAHIM

IN a recent edition of The Colbert Report, the President Barack Obama, made an appearance in an effort to promote Obamacare. In an eventful seven minutes, the president went on to mock the Republican Party and indulge in carefully scripted self-deprecating humour. The skit was successful in appealing to its target demography of the youth. However, what really stood out in that instance of political plugging is the fact that Barack Obama referred to himself as 'the leader of the free world'. The epicentre of this 'free world', the USA, is no doubt the new world Jerusalem- if you are a white, heterosexual male. The fact is that the 'free world' remains one of the most racially segregated countries that still manages to call itself a First World country. The fact is that being black makes you 21 times more likely to be shot and killed by the police than if you were white. The fact is that unless you belong to the historically oppressive Caucasian ethnicity, this is by no means a 'free world'.

On the 24th of November, a St. Louis grand jury decided to not indict Officer Darren Wilson for the shooting of unarmed black teenager Mike Brown. On the 3rd of December a Staten Island grand jury decided to not indict Officer Daniel Pantaleo for choking unarmed black man Eric Garner to death in broad daylight, with video footage to back it up. At this moment, protests have been spreading across the country like wildfire, demanding justice for the way in which black people have been treated in this country for centuries -- demanding an end to both the institutions that function as instruments of exclusion and the imperialism that has projected this white-centric, black-phobic culture to the entire world. For many people in the USA, it has been difficult to grasp the depth of the protests- this is not a protest against particular incidences of law enforcement or judiciary malfunction. This is a protest against the very institutions of law enforcement and judiciary bodies. Many have come to realise that this country was built on a foundation of oppression and white supremacy (read: the systematic cleansing of Native Americans and hundreds of years of slavery). The collective conscious of America is slowly waking up to the fact that the system in its entirety is guilty of oppression. The United States accounts for 5% of the world's population and 25% of the world's prison population (58% of which is African-American and Hispanic). The amount of facts is too great for any sane person to actually say this country does not discriminate based on race.

This, of course, is part of a bigger problem that has to do with how the USA portrays itself and projects that self-righteous image in a bombardment (pun intended) of imperialism. Contemporary US culture and the corporate media are steeped in racist rhetoric. By association it gives black males the image of intimidating, violent 'thugs' and black women the image of 'loudmouthed sassy'. The most pervasive kind of oppression is the one we do not recognise and that is the case for most unassumingly racist people of USA. And that is also the case for USA itself in its dealings in the diplomatic corridor. The by-product of a culture of oppression that legitimises itself through subconscious practice is the 'God complex' that is afforded to the people in positions



of privilege (i.e. rich, white men) whereby each of their decisions and interactions is validated by others in the same demography, creating for them a bubble in which it is inconceivable to be wrong. As a result, the moral of this lopsided story becomes: if Uncle Sam comes calling with the promise of democracy, you better want it and thank them for it, too.

The US needs to start acknowledging the fact that they are no longer in a position of economic privilege that will allow them to run amok with the lives of minorities in the country and people all over the world. They need to realise that no longer can they function with the white supremacist modus operandi; that their rampant neo-liberal exploitations have placed the world and themselves at the precipice of disaster. The protests that kicked off from the events in Ferguson do not, thus, target one instance of injustice. They are attempting to target the rotten skeleton of this capitalist machine that thrives on slavery and subjugation and attempts to concentrate power by consecrating wealth. The protests are against the way in which the USA has disseminated racist and sexist thoughts both inside and outside the country, against the way in which the 'wealthy whites' have exploited people of colour and have driven them to sweat blood and tears and gotten rich off that money, against the way in which they have polluted the air we breathe in. The time when citizens of the 'Third World' would sit and pray for the 'God of Democracy' to deliver them from evil is long gone.

Ferguson may have been the epicentre of the movement but it has spread across the country, in the hopes that it will soon spread across the globe and shut down corporate and imperial profiteering for good. There needs to be a greater awakening of our collective conscious for that to happen. Let the tragic deaths of Mike Brown, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice and countless others be the sparks that finally ignite a global movement against the oppression of the powers that be.

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CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

QUOTABLE Quote

Always seek out the seed of triumph in every adversity.

Og Mandino

ACROSS

1 Baby's bed
5 Scour
10 Zhivago's love
11 High-protein grain
13 Freshener target
14 In need of immediate attention
15 Sheriff's badge
17 Toward the stern
18 Study of events
19 Bind
20 Have debts
21 Small seabird
22 Boarded, as a train
25 Sharpened
26 Film unit
27 Scary shout
28 Poem of praise
29 Geography class prop
33 Humor
34 Montgomery's state
35 Morphine, for one
37 Miles off
38 Uniform marking
39 Increase
40 Prophetic ones
41 Pert talk

DOWN

1 Dress material
2 Circle spokes
3 Some golf clubs
4 Saloon seat
5 Cube side
6 Indian dish
7 Equip
8 Left on the plate
9 Outdoor blaze
12 Be present at
16 Hamlet
21 Rows of clickable buttons
22 Become more acceptable to
23 Antigone's father
24 When to start a round
25 Spanish greeting
27 Farm machines
29 Lake makeup
30 "The God-father" group
31 Stockpile
32 Trims
36 Justice Fortas

CRYPTOQUOTE

L QFLCS QFB MDBOQBNQ QOGUUN LC OHBDLPO ODB KOLQF OCX KOLVEDB.

- HLPFOBV HOVUCB

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

WHEN A MAN IS DENIED THE RIGHT TO LIVE THE LIFE HE BELIEVES IN, HE HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO BECOME AN OUTLAW.

- NELSON MANDELA

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



HENRY by Don Trachte

