

Interview With History

Oriana Fallaci



Reproduced By
Sani H. Panhwar
Member Sindh Council PPP



INTERVIEW WITH HISTORY

Oriana Fallaci

Oriana Fallaci (29 June 1929 - 15 September 2006) was an Italian journalist, author, and political interviewer. A former partisan during World War II, she had a long and successful journalistic career.

She interviewed many internationally known leaders and celebrities such as the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Dalai Lama, Henry Kissinger, the Shah of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, Willy Brandt, Walter Cronkite, Muammar al-Gaddafi, Federico Fellini, Sammy Davis Jr, Nguyen Cao Ky, Yasir Arafat, Indira Gandhi, Alexandros Panagoulis, Archbishop Makarios III, Golda Meir, Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, Haile Selassie, Sean Connery and Lech Walesa.

Fallaci was born in Florence, Italy. During World War II, she joined the resistance despite her youth, in the democratic armed group "Giustizia e Libertà". Her father Edoardo Fallaci, a cabinet maker in Florence, was a political activist struggling to put an end to the dictatorship of Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini. It was during this period that Fallaci was first exposed to the atrocities of war. In a 1976 retrospective collection of her works, she remarked that:

Fallaci began her journalistic career in her teens, becoming a special correspondent for the Italian paper *Il mattino dell'Italia centrale* in 1946. Since 1967 she worked as a war correspondent, in Vietnam, for the Indo-Pakistani War, in the Middle East and in South America. For many years, Fallaci was a special correspondent for the political magazine *L'Europeo* and wrote for a number of leading newspapers and *Epoca* magazine. During the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, prior to the 1968 Summer Olympics, Fallaci was shot three times, dragged down stairs by her hair, and left for dead by Mexican forces.

She interviewed Z. A. Bhutto in April 1972. This is what she wrote about Bhutto:

He is undoubtedly one of the most complex leaders of our time and the only interesting one his country has so far produced. The only one, moreover, capable of saving it, at least for a while. Anyone will tell you there is no alternative to Bhutto. If Bhutto goes, Pakistan will be erased from the map.

The Interview

The invitation was disconcerting. It came from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and there seemed no way to account for it. It asked only that I leave for Rawalpindi as soon as possible. I wondered why. Every journalist dreams of being summoned at least once by those who, when you go looking for them, run away or say no. But illogic is the stuff of dreams and leads to suspicion. Why did Bhutto want to see me? To entrust me with a message for Indira Gandhi? To punish me for having portrayed her with esteem and sympathy? The first hypothesis was immediately discarded. Bhutto had no need of a courier to communicate with his enemy—for that there were Swiss and Russian diplomats. The second hypothesis was soon discarded. Bhutto has the reputation of being a civilized person, and civilized people don't usually kill their invited guests. The third hypothesis, that he intended to let me interview him, filled me with proper astonishment. And, instead, this was just what Bhutto had in mind, after reading my article on the president of Bangladesh, the unfortunate Mujibur "Mujib" Rahman. As I found out when my curiosity won out over my suspicion and I decided to accept the invitation. But in accepting it, I let him know that being his guest would not keep me from writing about him with the same independence of judgment that I applied to everyone without distinction and that no amount of courtesy or flattery would ever be able to buy me off. Bhutto answered: certainly, all right. And this gave me my first impression of the man.

The man is unpredictable, bizarre, carried away by whims, by strange decisions. And, let's face it, highly intelligent. Intelligence of an astute, foxy kind, born to charm, to confuse, while at the same time nourished by culture, memory, flair. As well as by a great urbanity. At the Rawalpindi airport I was met by two officials who announced to me with considerable emotion that the president would receive me in an hour. It was ten in the morning, and I had had no sleep for about forty-eight hours. Not in an hour, I protested; I needed a good bath and a good sleep. Well, to someone else that would have been arm insult. Not to him. He put off the meeting till seven-thirty in the evening, adding that he was expecting me for supper, and since intelligence combined with courtesy is the best instrument for seduction, it was inevitable that this meeting should be cordial.

Bhutto, wreath in smiles, greeted me with open arms. He was tall, stocky, a little stout for such thin legs and delicate feet, and he looked like a banker who wants to get you to open an account in his bank. He seemed older than his forty-four years. He was beginning to go bald; his remaining hair was gray. Under his thick eyebrows, his face looked heavy: heavy cheeks, heavy lips, and heavy eyelids. A mysterious sadness was locked in his eyes. There was something shy about his smile.

Like many powerful leaders, he too is weakened and crippled by shyness. He is also many other things and, as with Indira Gandhi, all of them in conflict among themselves. The more you study him, the more you remain uncertain, confused. Like a prism turning on a pivot, he is forever offering you a different face, and at the same moment that he gives in to your scrutiny, he withdraws. So you can define him in countless ways and all of them are true: liberal and authoritarian, fascist and communist,

sincere and a liar. He is undoubtedly one of the most complex leaders of our time and the only interesting one his country has so far produced. The only one, moreover, capable of saving it, at least for a while. Anyone will tell you there is no alternative to Bhutto. If Bhutto goes, Pakistan will be erased from the map.

In this sense, he reminds you less of Indira Gandhi than of King Hussein. Like Hussein, he is accused of leading a nation artificially born. Like Hussein he is in an earthenware pot squeezed among iron pots: the Soviet Union, India, China, and America. Like Hussein, he is determined not to yield, and resists with the courage of a trapeze artist with no net to protect him. But in another sense, he reminds you of John Kennedy. Like Kennedy, he grew up in the kind of wealth for which nothing is impossible, not even the conquest of political power, cost what it may. Like Kennedy, he had a comfortable, happy, privileged childhood. Like Kennedy, he began his rise to power very early.

The fact is he comes from a family of aristocrats and landowners. He studied at Berkeley and then at Oxford, taking his degree in international law. At slightly more than thirty, he was one of Ayub Khan's ministers, though he detested him. At slightly less than forty, he was one of Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan's ministers, though he despised him. He arrived at the presidency with painful patience, without letting himself be bothered by the bad odor of certain associates.

Power is a more overwhelming passion than love. And those who love power have strong stomachs, and even stronger noses. They don't mind bad odors. Bhutto didn't mind them ever. He loves power. It is difficult to guess the nature of this power. His own response to it is ambiguous, he warns you against politicians who tell the truth or exhibit a boy-scout morality. Listening to him, you are almost led to believe that his ambition is a noble one, that he really intends to build a sincere and disinterested socialism. But then you visit his splendid library in Karachi, and discover that in the place of honor are sumptuous volumes on Mussolini and Hitler, bound in silver. From the tenderness with which they are kept, you conclude that their presence is not due to a book collector's idle curiosity. Doubt and anger arise in you. You ask him, and learn that his true friends were Sukarno and Nasser: two individuals perhaps moved by good intentions but certainly not two liberals. You're left perplexed. Is it his secret dream to become dictator, to be exalted one day by sumptuous volumes bound in silver? Mind you, this is the kind of question asked by Westerners ignorant of the tragedy of a country where freedom, democracy, and political opposition have never had any meaning and have always been replaced by hunger, injustice, and humiliation. But it is still a valid question, as ominous as the expression that fires up his gaze when something displeases him.

The following interview was conducted in five sessions, during the six days that I remained his guest and followed him on a trip through a few provinces. While strictly adhering to his words as recorded on tape, it is thus a mosaic of five different conversations. The first in Rawalpindi, the evening of my arrival. The second on the plane that took us to Lahore. The third in Hala, a city in Sindh. The fourth and fifth in Karachi. I was always at his side, whether at the table or en route, and if I wanted to, I could do a portrait of him from my diary of those days. Bhutto, dressed in Pakistani

fashion, in gray-green pajamas and sandals, who harangues the crowd in Sanghar where several years ago he escaped an assassination attempt, and the crowd is sullen; he shouts hoarsely into the microphone in Urdu, then in Sindhi, throws out his arms, offers himself with audacious insolence to other possible gunshots. And this is Bhutto the demagogue, avid for applause and authority. Or else Bhutto making people wait for hours in a courtyard in Hala; the city notables are there but he lingers in his room—he is writing. It is night when he finally arrives, advancing like a prince on the beautiful carpets, and like a prince he sits down and has me sit beside him—the only woman among so many mustachioed men, almost a well-calculated provocation. Thus seated, he receives in audience members of his party, governors, separatists, one by one, with a haughty signal of his finger; at the end he receives a poor man with a goat covered with tassels to be sacrificed in his honor.

And this is the aristocratic Bhutto, the Muslim Bhutto that no amount of Western culture will ever basically change—it is no accident that he has two wives. Or else Bhutto flying in a military helicopter, uncomfortable, wearing on his head a cap given him by Chou En-lai—his talisman. During the flight he gazes with tears in his eyes at the dry uncultivated fields, the mud huts where the peasants live a prehistoric existence. All of a sudden he clenches his fists and murmurs, “I must succeed, I must succeed.” And this is the Marxist Bhutto, submerged up to his neck in the mirage of making Pakistan less unhappy and less hunger-stricken. Finally, the Bhutto who receives me in his houses in Karachi and Rawalpindi; explaining himself, pleading his cause, ruthlessly attacking Indira Gandhi, Mujib Rahman, Yahya Khan. His houses are furnished with exquisite taste, old Persian rugs and precious enamels, air conditioning, and photographs with inscriptions by his most powerful world colleagues, beginning with Mao Tse-tung. At dinner we drink wine, perhaps eat caviar; also present is his second wife, Nusrat, a beautiful woman with pleasant manners, and later his son comes in, a lively little boy with long hair. And this is the modern, refined, European Bhutto. Bhutto the brilliant speaker, author of books, who knows the English language better than Urdu and evokes the sympathy of any Westerner. A rash conclusion. As Walter Cronkite said when I asked him about Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, Dwight Eisenhower, about the leaders he had interviewed in his long career as a television reporter: You cannot judge a head of state by seeing in him only the man. You shouldn’t. Because the moment you discover that he too is only a man, with the virtues and defects and inconsistencies of a man, you inevitably like him and forget the rest.

This interview with Bhutto also unleashed a pandemonium. Not a journalistic one as in the case of Kissinger, but a diplomatic and even international one. For just as Bhutto had been offended to read that Indira called him an unbalanced man, so Indira was offended to read that Bhutto called her a mediocre woman with a mediocre intelligence, a creature devoid of initiative and imagination, a drudge without even half her father’s talent, and said that the idea of meeting her, of shaking her hand, filled him with acute disgust. Needless to say, Indira had every reason to be offended. In judging her, Bhutto had been heavy-handed and too guided by hatred. I myself was actually embarrassed by it, and in my embarrassment had tried repeatedly to restrain him. “Aren’t you being a little excessive, a little unjust?” But Bhutto had not taken my suggestion, and indeed had

insisted on adding other perfidious remarks that I had not published, and my censorship had not done much good. The result was the dramatic, or rather ridiculous, consequences that I involuntarily caused.

Bhutto and Indira were supposed to meet at that time, to sign the peace agreement between India and Pakistan. Alerted by certain sentences reported in the New Delhi newspapers, Indira requested the complete text of the interview and had it transmitted by cable from Rome. Then she read it and announced that the meeting between herself and the prime minister of Pakistan would not take place. Bhutto lost his head and, not knowing where on earth to turn, turned to me. He sought me out again, through his ambassador to Italy. He traced me to Addis Ababa, where I had gone to see Haile Selassie. And here he made the most extravagant request of me.

I must write, he said, a second article and say that the interview with him, Bhutto, had never taken place because I had dreamed it up. I was to say that the opinions about Indira were not opinions uttered by him, but rather those that, in my imagination, I had thought he might utter. At first I didn't think I had understood. "What did you say, Mr. Ambassador?" "I said you should write that you invented everything, and particularly the part about Mrs. Gandhi." "But are you crazy, Mr. Ambassador? Has your prime minister gone crazy too?" "Miss Fallaci, you must understand, the lives of six hundred million people depend on you, and they're in your hands." I cursed and told him to go to hell. But Bhutto did not give up and went on looking for me. Wherever I went I was pursued by an important Pakistani who begged me to disavow the interview, then reminded me that the lives of six hundred million people were in my hands. Vainly I replied that my hands were too small to contain six hundred million human beings, vainly I shouted that their demand was absurd and insulting. The nightmare ended only when Indira magnanimously decided to act as though Bhutto's error had never happened. And the two of them met to sign the peace accord.

It was amusing to watch them on television while they shook hands and exchanged smiles. Indira's smile was triumphant and ironical. Bhutto's displayed such discomfort that, even on the black-and-white screen, you seemed to see him blushing to the roots of his hair.

ZULFIKAR ALL BHUTTO: I must tell you why I was so eager to meet you. First of all, because you're the only journalist who has written the truth about Mujib Rahman. I enjoyed your article very much. And then because . . . look, it was much less enjoyable to read that I had something to do with the March suppression in Dacca.

ORIANA FALLACI: Something to do with? Mr. President, in Dacca they come right out and say it was you who wanted the massacre. You who wanted the arrest of Mujib. And that for this reason you stayed in the city until the morning of March 26.

Z.A.B.: To enjoy the spectacle from the windows of my suite on the top floor of the Hotel Intercontinental, drinking whisky and perhaps playing the lyre like Nero. But how dare they try to discredit me by an incident so barbarous and stupid? The whole

business was conducted in such a stupid way. They let all the leaders escape to India and then they took it out on the poor wretches who counted for nothing. Only Mujib was arrested. Let's be logical. I would have done it with more intelligence, more scientifically, less brutally. Tear gas, rubber bullets, and I would have arrested all the leaders. Oh, only a disgusting drunkard like ex-President Yahya Khan could have sullied himself with an operation carried out so badly and bloodily.

Anyway, what interest would I have had in wanting such madness? Do you know that Yahya Khan's first victim was not to have been Mujib but myself? Many people in my party were in prison, and at the end of 1970, November 5, 1970, to be exact, he had said to Mujib, "Should I arrest Bhutto or not?" Look, the only reason why he reversed his schedule was that in West Pakistan he couldn't control the situation as in East Pakistan. Besides Mujib has never been intelligent—he let himself be backed into a corner.

But to conclude, the tragedy of March 25 caught me by surprise. Yahya Khan fooled even me. He had given me an appointment for the following day. And, days later, General Mohd Umar revealed to me that he'd resorted to this stratagem so that I'd stay in Dacca and "see the efficiency of the army." I give you my word of honor that all this is true.

O. F.: All right, Mr. President. But I wonder if history will ever have the exact version of what happened that terrible night and in the months that followed. Mujib Rahman.....

Z.A.B.: Mujib, as you've seen, is a congenital liar. He can't help telling lies—it's something stronger than he. Mujib talks at random, depending on his mood and the disorders of his sick mind. For instance, he says there were three million dead. He's mad, mad! And they're all mad, the press included, who repeat after him, "Three million dead, three million dead!" The Indians had let out the figure of one million. He came along and doubled it. Then tripled it. It's a characteristic of the man—he'd done the same for the hurricane. Look, according to Indian journalists, the dead that night were between sixty and seventy thousand. According to certain missionaries, there were thirty thousand. According to what I've been able to find out so far, there must have been something like fifty thousand. Mind you, too many. Even if the action was morally justified. I'm not trying to minimize things; I'm trying to bring them back to reality—there's quite a difference between fifty thousand and three million.

The same goes for the refugees. Mrs. Gandhi says ten million. It's obvious she started with that figure in order to legalize her offensive and invade East Pakistan. But when we invited the United Nations to check, the Indians were opposed. Why were they opposed? If the figure were exact, they shouldn't have been afraid of its being verified. The fact is it's not a question of ten million but of two. On the number of dead I may even be wrong, but not on the number of refugees. We know who left the country. And many were Bengalis from West Bengal, sent from Calcutta. It was she who sent them—Mrs. Gandhi. Since the Bengalis all look alike, who was to know?

And now let's talk about the other story: the women raped and killed. I don't believe it. Certainly there was no lack of excesses, but General Tikka Khan says that in those months he often invited the population to report abuses to him directly. He made his appeal with loudspeakers, and still he came to know of only four cases. Shall we multiply by ten and make it forty? We're still far from the senseless figures spread around by Mujib and Indra Gandhi.

O. F.: No, Mr. President. Go ahead and multiply by a thousand and even by ten thousand, and you'll come closer. If Mujib is talking at random when he says three million dead, Tikka Khan is joking when he says four cases. Mass atrocities took place, and how! I'm speaking as one who saw the corpses in Dacca. And by the way, you just used an awful expression, Mr. President. You said "Morally justifiable." Or rather, "justified." Did I understand you? Did you really mean to say that this massacre was morally justified?

Z.A.B.: Every government, every country, has the right to exercise force when necessary. For instance, in the name of unity. You can't build without destroying. To build a country, Stalin was obliged to use force and kill. Mao Tse-tung was obliged to use force and kill. To mention only two recent cases, without raking over the whole history of the world. Yes, there are circumstances where a bloody suppression is justifiable and justified. In March the unity of Pakistan depended on the suppression of the secessionists. But to carry it out with such brutality on the people instead of on those responsible wasn't necessary. That's not the way to convince poor people who've been told that with the Six Points there'll be no more hurricanes, no more floods, no more hunger. I spoke out against such methods more emphatically than anyone else, and when no one dared do so.

O. F.: Nevertheless you've now put Tikka Khan, the general who directed the massacre, at the head of the army. Right?

Z.A.B.: Tikka Khan was a soldier doing a soldier's job. He went to East Pakistan with precise orders and came back by precise orders. He did what he was ordered to do, though he wasn't always in agreement, and I picked him because I know he'll follow my orders with the same discipline. And he won't try to stick his nose in politics. I can't destroy the whole army, and anyway his bad reputation for the events in Dacca is exaggerated. There's only one man really responsible for those events—Yahya Khan. Both he and his advisers were so drunk with power and corruption they'd even forgotten the honor of the army. They thought of nothing but acquiring beautiful cars, building beautiful homes, making friends with bankers, and sending money abroad. Yahya Khan wasn't interested in the government of the country, he was interested in power for its own sake and nothing else. What can you say of a leader who starts drinking as soon as he wakes up and doesn't stop until he goes to bed? You've no idea how painful it was to deal with him. He was really Jack the Ripper.

O. F.: Where is he now, Yahya Khan? What do you intend to do with him?

Z.A.B.: He's under house arrest in a bungalow near Rawalpindi, a bungalow that belongs to the government. Yes, I have a big problem on my hands with him. I've set up a war commission to study the responsibilities inherent in the recent conflict. I'm waiting to see the results, and that'll help me to decide. If the Commission finds him guilty, I think there'll be a trial. The defeat we suffered is his—Mrs. Gandhi can rightly boast of having won a war, but if she won it, she should first of all thank Yahya Khan and his gang of illiterate psychopaths. Even to get him to reason was an impossible task—it only made you lose your temper.

In April, after that fine business in Dacca, he sent for me. He looked satisfied, sure of himself, by now convinced he had the situation in hand. He offered me a drink. “Well, you politicians are really finished,” he said. Then he said that not only Mujib but I too was considered an agitator, I too was preaching against the unity of Pakistan. “I'm always under pressure to arrest you, Bhutto” I got so angry I lost all control. I answered that I would not let myself be intimidated by him, that his methods had led us to disaster; I threw away the glass of whisky and left the room. There I was stopped by General Pirzada, who took me by the arm, “No, come on, calm down, have a seat, go back in.” I calmed down and went back. I tried to explain to him that there was a great difference between me and Mujib: he was a secessionist and I wasn't. A useless task. Instead of listening to me, he went on drinking, drinking. Then he got nasty and.....

O. F.: Mr. President, can we go back a moment and try to understand how you arrived at that terrible March, morally justifiable or not?

Z.A.B.: Look here. On January 27 I had gone to Dacca to confer with Mujib. If you wanted to discuss matters with him, you had to make a pilgrimage to Dacca—he never condescended to come to Rawalpindi. I went even though it was just that day that my sister's husband had died; he was to be buried in the ancestral tomb in Larkana. And my sister was offended. In the elections, Mujib had obtained a majority in East Pakistan and I had obtained one in West Pakistan. But now he was insisting on the Six Points and we had to come to an agreement—Yahya Kahn was demanding that within four months we work out the Constitution, otherwise the Assembly would be dissolved and new elections called. To make Mujib understand this was a desperate undertaking—you can't expect brains from someone who doesn't have them. I argued, I explained, and he kept repeating dully and monotonously: “The Six Points. Do you accept the Six Points?” Good Lord, on the first, on the second, on the third I was even ready to negotiate. But the fourth anticipated that each province would make its own foreign trade and foreign aid arrangements any way it liked. What would happen to the sovereignty of the state, the unity of the country? Besides that, it was known that Mujib wanted to separate East Pakistan from West Pakistan and that he'd been keeping up connections with the Indians since 1966. So in January our talks had been interrupted and we come to March.

In the middle of March, Yahya Khan came to Karachi and told me he was going to Dacca—did I want to go too? Yes, I answered, if Mujib were ready to talk to me. The telegram in forming me that Mujib was ready to talk to me was sent from Dacca by Yahya Khan himself. I left on March 19. On the twentieth I met Yahya and on the

twenty-first I met Mujib, together with Yahya. A surprise: Mujib was all sweetness and light with Yahya. “I’ve come to reach an agreement with you, Mr. President, and I want nothing to do with Mr. Bhutto. I’ll tell the press that I have met with the president and that Mr. Bhutto was there by chance,” he said in a ceremonious tone. And Yahya: “No, no, Mujib. You must speak for yourself.” And Mujib: “So many people are dead in the hurricane, so many people are dead.” That’s the way he is. All of a sudden a sentence engraves itself on his sick mind, even a sentence that has nothing to do with what you’re talking about, and he goes on repeating it like an obsession. At a certain point I lost patience. How was I responsible for the hurricane? Had I been the one to send the hurricane? Mujib’s answer was to get up and say that he had to leave to go to a funeral. And . . . oh, it’s not worth the trouble.

O. F.: Yes, it is, Please, Mr. President, go on.

Z.A.B.: The fact is that when you talk about Mujib, everything seems so incredible. I don’t understand how the world can take him seriously. Well, I got up too, to escort him to the anteroom, though he didn’t want me to. In the anteroom there were three people: Yahya’s aide-de-camp, his military secretary, and his political butcher, General Umar. Mujib began screaming, “Go away, everybody go away! I have to talk to Mr. Bhutto!” The three of them went out. He sat down and then: “Brother, brother! We must come to an agreement, brother! For the love of God, I implore you!” Astonished, I took him outside so no one would hear him. Outside, and in a particularly excited tone, he declared that I must take West Pakistan for myself, he East Pakistan, and that he had set up everything for a secret meeting. After dark he would send for me. I told him I didn’t like this business. I hadn’t come to Dacca to meet him like a thief under a banana tree and in the dark, I didn’t intend to dismember Pakistan, and if he wanted secession, he had only to propose it to the Assembly, counting on his absolute majority. But it was like talking to a wall. I had to accept the compromise of resuming talks through our spokesmen. Which is what happened without leading to anything, of course. In those days he was more deranged than ever—he lost his head over nothing. And so we arrived at the twenty-fifth.

O. F.: You didn’t notice anything Suspicious on March 25?

Z.A.B.: Yes. I felt certain uneasiness, a strange sensation, which had come to a head. Every evening I went to Yahya to report that Mujib and I weren’t making any progress, and Yahya showed no interest. He looked away or complained about the television or grumbled because he couldn’t listen to his favorite songs—his records hadn’t arrived from Rawalpindi. Then the morning of the twenty-fifth he said something that left me disconcerted: “There’s no need to meet Mujib today. We’ll see him tomorrow, you and I.” Still I said, “All right,” and at eight in the evening I reported everything to Mujib’s envoy.

And he exclaimed, “That son of a bitch has already left.” I didn’t believe it. I telephoned the presidential residence and asked to speak with Yahya. They told me he couldn’t be disturbed; he was at supper with General Tikka Khan. I telephoned Tikka

Khan. They told me he couldn't be disturbed; he was at supper with Yahya Khan. Only then did I begin to worry, and suspecting a trick, I went to supper, then to sleep. I was awakened by gunfire and by friends running in from other rooms. I ran to the window, and as God is my witness, I wept. I wept and said, "My country is finished."

O. F.: Why? What did you see from that window?

Z.A.B.: I didn't see any indiscriminate killing, but the soldiers were trying to demolish the offices of the People, an opposition newspaper that had its offices right in front of the Intercontinental. With their loudspeakers they were ordering people to leave. Those who came out were put to one side under the threat of machine guns. Other groups, on the sidewalk, were being kept at bay with machine guns and the hotel was surrounded by tanks. Anyone who tried to take shelter in it fell into the hands of the soldiers. That's all. That Mujib had been arrested I found out at eight in the morning, when I left. How did I take it? I was glad he was alive and I thought they might have maltreated him a little. Then I thought that his arrest might help to reach a compromise. They wouldn't keep him in prison more than a month or two, and in the meantime we'd be able to bring back law and order.

O. F.: Mr. President, Mujib told you, "You take West Pakistan and I'll take East Pakistan." That's just how it's turned out. Do you hate him for this?

Z.A.B.: Not at all. And I don't say it in the Indian fashion that is hypocritically. I say it sincerely because, instead of hatred, I feel great compassion for him. He's so incapable, conceited, lacking in culture, common sense, everything. He's in no position to resolve any problem: either politically, or socially, or economically, or internationally. He only knows how to shout and put on a lot of airs. I've known him since 1954 and I've never taken him seriously—I understood from the very first moment that there was no depth to him, no preparation, that he was an agitator breathing a lot of fire and with an absolute lack of ideas. The only idea he's ever had in his head is the idea of secession. Toward someone like that, how can you feel anything except pity?

In 1961, during a trip to Dacca, I saw him again. He was in the lobby of my hotel; I went up to him and said, "Hello, Mujib, let's have a cup of tea." He was just out of prison, he seemed full of bitterness, and this time we were almost able to talk quietly. He said how East Pakistan was exploited by West Pakistan, treated like a colony, sucked of its blood—and it was very true; I'd even written the same thing in a book. But he didn't draw any conclusions, he didn't explain that the fault was in the economic system and in the regime; he didn't speak of socialism and struggle. On the contrary, he declared that the people weren't prepared for struggle, that no one could oppose the military, that it was the military that had to resolve the injustices. He had no courage. He never has had. Does he really call himself, to journalists, "the tiger of Bengal"?

O. F.: He even says that at his trial he refused to defend himself and that his behavior after his arrest was heroic. He was in a cell where there wasn't even a mattress to sleep on.

Z.A.B.: Come on now! He wasn't in a cell, he was in an apartment that's put at the disposal of important political detainees. In Lyallpur, near Mianwali, the Punjab prison. True, he wasn't allowed to read the newspapers and listen to the radio, but he had the entire library of the governor of Punjab at his disposal and he lived quite well indeed. At a certain point they even gave him a Bengali cook because he wanted to eat Bengali dishes. At his trial he defended himself, and how! He asked for the services of two eminent lawyers: Kamal Hussain and A. K. Brohi, his legal adviser and friend. Kamal Hussain was in prison but not Brohi, and to have Brohi means to have the best of the best. I'll tell you something else. At first Brohi didn't want to accept but Yahya Khan forced him, and he then presented himself at the trial with four assistants, four other lawyers. Paid for by the state, naturally. It cost a fortune, that trial. Well, Brohi has only one fault: he's a bit of a chatterbox. So every time he came back to Karachi from Lyallpur, he told about the conversations he'd had with Mujib and said it would be difficult to find him guilty—Mujib had put things those of Mrs. Gandhi. Also she came to power by her own talent. Mrs. Bandaranaike, instead, got there by the simple fact of being Bandaranaike's widow, and Mrs. Gandhi by the simple fact of being Nehru's daughter. Without having Nehru's light. With all her saris, the red spot on her forehead, her little smile, she'll never succeed in impressing me.

She's never impressed me, ever since the day I met her in London. We were both attending a lecture, and she was taking notes so insistently and pedantically that I said to her, "Are you taking notes or writing a thesis?" And speaking of theses, you know I can't believe she succeeded in getting that degree in history at Oxford. I completed the three-year course at Oxford in two years. And in three years she wasn't able to finish the course.

O.F.: Aren't you being a little excessive, a little unjust? Do you really think she could last so long if she wasn't worth something? Or are you obliged to think she's worth nothing because she's a woman?

Z.A.B.: No, no. I have nothing against women as heads of state, though I don't think women make better heads of state than men. My opinion of Mrs. Gandhi is impersonal and objective. It's not even influenced by the fact that she behaves so deplorably by not returning our war prisoners and not respecting the Geneva Convention. That's how I've always seen her: a diligent drudge of a schoolgirl, a woman devoid of initiative and imagination. All right, she's better today than when she was studying at Oxford or taking notes in London. Power has given her self-confidence and nothing succeeds like success. But it's a question of success out of proportion to her merits; if India and Pakistan were to become confederated countries, I'd have no trouble in carrying off the post from Mrs. Gandhi. I'm not afraid of intellectual confrontations with her. Having said that, I'm ready to meet her when and where she likes. Even in New Delhi. Yes, I'm even ready to go to New Delhi, like Talleyrand after the Congress of Vienna. The only idea that bothers me is that of being escorted by an honor guard from the Indian army and physical contact with the lady herself. It irritates me. God! Don't make me think of it. Tell me instead: what did Mrs. Gandhi say about me?

O. F.: She told me you're an unbalanced man, that today you say one thing and tomorrow another, that one never understands what's on your mind.

Z.A.B.: Ah, yes? I'll answer that right away. The only thing I accept from the philosopher John Locke is this statement: "Consistency is a virtue of small minds."¹ In other words, I think a basic concept should remain firm but, within that basic concept, one should be able to move back and forth. Now to one pole, now to the other. An intellectual should never cling to a single and precise idea—he should be elastic. Otherwise he sinks into a monologue, into fanaticism. A politician, the same. Politics is movement per se—a politician should be mobile. He should sway now to right and now to left; he should come up with contradictions, doubts. He should change continually, test things, attack from every side so as to single out his opponent's weak point and strike at it. Woe to him if he focuses immediately on his basic concept, woe if he reveals and crystallizes it. Woe if he blocks the maneuver by which to throw his opponent on the carpet. Apparent inconsistency is the prime virtue of the intelligent man and astute politician. If Mrs. Gandhi doesn't understand that, she doesn't understand the beauty of her profession. Now her father understood it.

O. F.: Indra Gandhi says her father wasn't a politician, he was a saint.

Z.A.B. Oh, Mrs. Gandhi is wrong about her father! Nehru instead was a great politician—she should have half her father's talent! Look, even though he was against the principle of Pakistan, I've always admired that man. When I was young I was actually enthralled by him. Only later did I understand that he was a spellbinder with many faults, vain, ruthless, and that he didn't have the class of a Stalin or a Churchill or a Mao Tse-tung. And what else, what else did Mrs. Gandhi say?

O. F.: She said it was you Pakistanis who started the war.

Z.A.B.: Ridiculous. Everyone knows they were the ones to attack us. November 26, on the eastern front. East Pakistan was perhaps not Pakistan? Let's be serious. If someone invades Palermo, don't you conclude that Italy has been attacked? If someone invades Marseilles, don't you conclude that France has been attacked? Mrs. Gandhi pretends to forget that our counter attack in Kashmir, disputed territory, took place only on December 3. I remember seeing Yahya on November 29 and reproaching him for our failure to counterattack. "You're behaving as though nothing has happened in the east. By delaying action, you're playing India's game, you're making people believe that East Pakistan and West Pakistan aren't the same country," I told him. But he didn't listen to me. Four times he changed his orders for a counterattack. The fourth time our officers and soldiers were beating their heads against the tanks in desperation. And Dacca? Let's withdraw into Dacca, I said; we'll make a fortress out of it and hold out for ten months, a year—the whole world will be on our side. But he was only concerned that the Indians not conquer a little territory and plant the flag of Bangladesh. And when he ordered Niazi to surrender God! I could have died a thousand times and felt better. I was in New

¹ Actually it was Emerson who said it: "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." (Translator's note.)

York, I remember. He'd sent me there as a tourist and I'd found myself at that incredible session of the UN.....

O. F.: And you'd made that scene.

Z.A.B.: A real scene, I admit. But I was convulsed with rage, with disgust. The arrogance of the Indians. The fear shown by the great powers, who wanted only to placate India. I wasn't able to control my passion, and I made that speech in which I told them all to go to hell. I wept too. Yes, I often weep I always weep when I discover something disgraceful, unjust. I'm very emotional.

O. F.: Emotional, unpredictable, complicated, and much talked about. It seems to me the moment has come to take up your personality, Mr. President. Let's talk a little about this man who is very rich and yet a socialist, lives like a Westerner and yet has two wives.

Z.A.B.: There are many conflicts in me—I'm aware of that. I try to reconcile them, overcome them, but I don't succeed and I remain this strange mixture of Asia and Europe. I have a layman's education and a Muslim's upbringing. My mind is Western and my soul Eastern. As for my two wives, what can I do about it? They married me off at thirteen, to my cousin. I was thirteen and she was twenty-three. I didn't even know what it meant to have a wife, and when they tried to explain it to me, I went out of my mind with rage. With fury. I didn't want a wife, I wanted to play cricket. I was very fond of cricket. To calm me down, they had to give me two new cricket bags. When the ceremony was over, I ran off to play cricket. There are so many things I must change in my country! And I was fortunate. They married my playmate off at the age of eleven to a woman of thirty-two. He always said to me, "Lucky you!"

When I fell in love with my second wife, I was twenty-three. She was also studying in England, and though she was an Iranian, that is, from a country where polygamy is the custom, it was hard for me to persuade her to marry me. I didn't have many arguments except for the two words, "So what, dammit!" No, the idea of divorcing my first wife never went through my head. Not only because she's my cousin, but because I have a responsibility toward her. Her whole life has been ruined by this absurd marriage to a boy, by the absurd custom in which we've been raised. She lives in my house in Larkana; we see each other every so often. She's almost always alone. She hasn't even had children—my four children are born of my second marriage. I've spent little time with her—as soon as I was an adolescent I went to the West to study. A story of injustice. I'll do everything I can to discourage polygamy—besides it causes no small economic problem. Often the wives are separated in different houses or cities, as in my case. And not everyone can afford it as I can. Though I'm not so rich as you say.

O. F.: No?

Z.A.B.: No. To you, to be rich means to be a duPont or a Rockefeller. To us, it means much less. Here anyone who's rich owns a lot of land, but actually he's no richer

than those European barons who own splendid crumbling villas and play the gigolo in order to live. Our land is dry and produces little. So let's say that instead of rich, I'm relatively rich, that I live well, that my sister lives well, that my brother lived well, that we've been to good schools but have never wasted a penny. I've never been a playboy. When I was a student in America and at Oxford, I never bought a car. I've always handled money wisely, for instance in order to go to Europe to meet interesting people and buy books. If you take a look at my library, you'll see where I put a good part of my money: in books. I have thousands of them, many of them old and beautiful—I've always immensely enjoyed reading. Like sports. Some people accuse me of being well dressed. It's true. But not because I squander my money on clothes—because I'm clean. I love to bathe and change my clothes; I've never been able to stand Indian and Pakistani princes who are dirty and stink. I own beautiful and comfortable houses. That's true too. But for a long time I didn't even have air conditioning. I like to entertain, but never silly or stupid people. I know how to dance, but only because I like music and because I hate to be a wall flower when others are dancing. Finally....

O. F.: Finally you have the reputation of being a lady-killer, a Don Juan. Is it true, Mr. President?

Z.A.B.: That's also very exaggerated. I'm a romantic—I don't think you can be a politician without being romantic—and as a romantic I think there's nothing so inspiring as a love affair. There's nothing wrong with falling in love and conquering a woman's heart—woe to men who don't fall in love. You can even fall in love a hundred times, and I do fall in love. But I'm a very, very moral man. And I respect women. People think that Muslims don't respect women. What a mistake. To respect and protect them is one of the first teachings of the prophet Mohammed. I, who don't call myself a champion of physical violence, once whipped a man. I whipped him ferociously, till the blood came. Do you know why? Because he had raped a little girl. And I was blind with rage this morning, when I read that some hundred students had attacked and stripped some girl students on the beach in Karachi. Scoundrels! I'll make them subject to martial law. And I say some thing else. If I were to ascertain that our soldiers really used violence on the women of Bangladesh, I'd insist on being the one to try them and punish them.

O. F.: Let's go on to something else, Mr. President. Let's go on to your Marxism and to how you can reconcile it with your privileges, even with your Muslim faith.

Z.A.B.: I call myself a Marxist in the economic sense; that is, I confine myself to accepting Marxist doctrine so far as it concerns economics. What I reject in Marxism are its dialectical interpretation of history, its theories of life, the question whether God exists or not. As a good Muslim, I believe in God. Rightly or wrongly, I believe—faith is something that either exists or doesn't. If it does, it's useless to discuss it. It's in me, and I'm not ready to renounce it in the name of the ecclesiastical or philosophical aspects of Marxism. At the same time I'm convinced that to call oneself a Marxist and call oneself a Muslim are two things that can go together—especially in an underdeveloped country like Pakistan where I don't see any solution except scientific socialism.

I said Pakistan—I'm not raising any banners for international crusades; I'm not sticking my nose in the affairs of others. I concentrate on the reality of my country and that's all. No, not by a process of revolution—I recognize that. I would like to, since I can look you in the eye and swear to you I'm a revolutionary. But I can't afford sudden and bloody revolutions. Pakistan wouldn't be able to stand it; it would be a disaster. So I must proceed with patience, by reforms, measures that will gradually lead to socialism—nationalizing when possible, refraining from it when necessary, respecting the foreign capital of which we have need. I must take my time, be a surgeon who doesn't plunge his knife too deeply into the fabric of society. This is a very sick society, and if it's not to die under the knife, you have to operate with caution, waiting slowly for a wound to heal, for a reform to be consolidated. We've been asleep for so many centuries, we can't violently wake ourselves tip with an earthquake. Besides, even Lenin, in the beginning, stooped to compromises.

O. F.: Mr. President, many people don't believe you. They say you're a demagogue seeking power and nothing else, that you'll do anything to hold on to your power, that you'll never give up your possessions.

Z.A.B.: No? By the agrarian reforms I've made in these three months, my family has lost forty-five thousand acres of land. I personally have lost six to seven thousand. And I'll lose still more, my children will lose still more. God is my witness that I'm not playing with socialism, that I don't proceed slowly out of selfishness. I've felt no fear of giving up what I own ever since the day I read Marx. I can even tell you the time and place: Bombay, 1945. As for the accusation that I'm only out for power, well, this would be a good time to understand what we mean by the word power. By power I don't mean the kind Yahya Khan had. By power I mean the kind you exercise to level mountains, make deserts bloom, build a society where people don't die of hunger and humiliation. I have no evil platforms. I don't want to become a dictator. But so far I can say that I'll have to be very tough, even authoritarian. The broken windows I'm setting out to mend are often in splinters. I'll have to throw away the splinters. And if I throw them away too carelessly, I won't have a country, I'll have a bazaar.

Anyway look, you don't go into politics just for the fun of it. You go into it to take power in your hands and keep it. Any one who says the opposite is a liar. Politicians are always trying to make you believe that they're good, moral, and consistent. Don't ever fall in their trap. There's no such thing as a good, moral, consistent politician. Politics is give-and-take, as my father taught me when he said, "Never hit a man unless you're ready to be hit twice by him." The rest is boy-scout stuff, and I've forgotten the boy-scout virtues ever since I went to school.

O. F.: They say, Mr. President, you're a great reader of books about Mussolini, Hitler, Napoleon.

Z.A.B.: Of course. And also books about De Gaulle, Churchill, Stalin. Do you want to make me confess I'm a fascist? I'm not. A fascist is first of all an enemy of culture, and I'm an intellectual enamored of culture. A fascist is a man of the right, and

I'm a man of the left. A fascist is a *petit bourgeois*, and I come from the aristocracy. To read about a person doesn't mean to make him your hero. I've had some heroes, yes, but when I was a student. Heroes, you know, are like chewing gum—they get chewed, spit out, changed, and you like them especially when you're young. Anyway, if you care to know whom I've chewed the longest, here they are: Genghis Khan, Alexander, Hannibal, Napoleon. Napoleon most of all. But I've also chewed a little of Mazzini, a little of Cavour, a little of Garibaldi. And a lot of Rousseau. You see how many contradictions there are in me?

O. F.: I see. And so, to try to understand you a little better, let me ask you who are the figures of our time to whom you've felt or feel close: those you've liked or who liked you the most.

Z.A.B.: One is Sukarno. He said I was cut from the same cloth. He worshiped me. And I worshiped him. He was an exceptional man despite his weaknesses—for instance his vulgarity with women. It's neither necessary nor dignified continually to show your own virility, but he didn't understand that. Further more he didn't even understand economics. The other is Nasser. Nasser too was a first-rate man, with Nasser too I got along very well. He loved me and I loved him. In 1966, when I was forced to leave the government, Nasser invited me to Egypt and received me with the honors of a head of state, then he said I could stay there as long as I needed.

Then, let's see Stalin. Yes, Stalin. My respect for Stalin has always been deep, a gut feeling I'd say, just as much as my antipathy for Khrushchev. You may understand me better when I say I never liked Khrushchev, that I always thought him a braggart. Always swaggering, yelling, pointing his finger at ambassadors, drinking And always ready to give in to the Americans. He did a lot of harm to Asia, Khrushchev. And finally I know, you're waiting for me to say some thing about Mao Tse-tung. But what do you want me to say about a giant like Mao Tse-tung? It's easier for me to talk about Chou En-lai. He's the one I know better, the one I've talked and discussed things with longer. Endless discussions, from dawn to dusk, for days, at least once a year. It's since 1962 that I've been going to China and meeting Chou En-lai. And him, simply, I admire him.

O. F.: Mr. President, all these men have had to struggle a lot to gain power. But not you.

Z.A.B.: You're wrong. It hasn't been easy for me to get here. I've been put in prison, I've risked my life plenty of times. With Ayub Khan, with Yahya Khan. They tried to kill me by poisoning my food, by shooting at me. Twice in 1968, once in 1970. In Sanghar, two years ago, I was kept for an hour under the cross fire of assassins sent by Yahya Khan. One man died while shielding me, others were seriously wounded And let's not forget moral suffering; when you're born rich and become a socialist, no one believes you. Neither friends in your own circle, who in fact make fun of you, nor the poor, who aren't enlightened enough to believe in your sincerity. The hardest thing for me hasn't been to escape the bullets and the poison, it's been to get myself taken

seriously by those who didn't believe me. The privileges in which I was born didn't put me on Aladdin's flying carpet. And if I hadn't had this vocation for politics

O. F.: And how did this vocation start, how was it manifested?

Z.A.B.: I've always had it, ever since I was a boy. But if we want to play at being psychoanalysts, we must say I owe it to my parents. My father was a brilliant politician—a pity he retired so very early, after having lost certain elections. He had a very high conception of politics, that of an aristocrat who's aristocratic to his finger tips, and he talked to me in such an inspired way. He took me around Larkana, he showed me the ancient temples, the splendid houses, the vestiges of our civilization, and he said to me: "Look, politics is like building a temple, a house, Or else he said it was like writing music, or poetry. And he mentioned Brahms, Michelangelo My mother was different. She came from a poor family and was haunted by other people's poverty. She did nothing but repeat to me: "We must take care of the poor, we must help the poor, the poor shall inherit the earth," and so forth.

When I went to America, her message had so sunk into my ears that I became a radical. I went to America to study at the University of California, where a great jurist of international law was teaching. I wanted to take my degree in international law. And that was the period of McCarthyism, of the communist witch-hunts—my choices were laid out. To get away from Sunset Boulevard, from the girls with red nail polish, I ran off to Maxwell Street and lived among the Negroes. A week, a month. I felt good with them—they were real, they knew how to laugh. And the day in San Diego when I wasn't able to get a hotel room because I have olive skin and looked like a Mexican well, that helped. Then, from America, I went to England. And those were the years of Algeria, so I immediately took the side of the Algerians. But not by shouting slogans in front of Number 10 Downing Street. Maybe because I'm secretly a little shy, I've never liked to mix in the crowd and participate in turmoil. I've always preferred a discussion by writing, a struggle by the game of politics. It's more intelligent, more subtle, more refined.

O. F.: One last question, Mr. President, and excuse the brutality of it. Do you think you can last?

Z.A.B.: Let's put it this way. I could be finished tomorrow, but I think I'll last longer than anyone else who's governed Pakistan. First of all because I'm healthy and full of energy—I can work, as I do, even eighteen hours a day. Then because I'm young—I'm barely forty-four, ten years younger than Mrs. Gandhi. Finally because I know what I want. I'm the only leader in the Third World who has gone back into politics despite the opposition of two great powers—in 1966 the United States and the Soviet Union were both very happy to see me in trouble. And the reason I've been able to overcome that trouble is that I know the fundamental rule of this profession. What is the rule? Well, in politics you sometimes have to pretend to be stupid and make others believe they're the only intelligent ones. But to do this you have to have light and flexible fingers, and ... Have you ever seen a bird sitting on its eggs in the nest? Well, a politician

must have fairly light, fairly flexible fingers, to insinuate them under the bird and take away the eggs. One by one. Without the bird realizing it.

Karachi, April 1972