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# BLOOD AND BHUTTO

**An explosive new documentary illuminates an iconic martyr and a dynasty more cursed than the Kennedys** BY BRIAN D. JOHNSON

film

Imagine what Shakespeare could have done with Benazir Bhutto. In his world, her story might go something like this. A beloved king breaks tradition and decides his eldest child, not his eldest son, can inherit his throne. She is brilliant and beautiful. The king is toppled by a cruel despot, and hanged. His daughter is imprisoned. Her younger brother is found dead, probably poisoned. She comes out of exile to win the hearts of her people and become their queen. The older brother rebels against her rule and is killed. His daughter accuses the queen and her husband of plotting his murder. The queen loses her throne. Her husband is jailed. And after eight years of exile in a desert kingdom, she comes home to vie for the throne, and is assassinated.

Replace “king” or “queen” with “Pakistan’s elected prime minister,” then fold in a dizzying scenario of holy war, terrorism, dictatorship and conspiracy, and you have the bare bones of *Bhutto*—an epic portrait of Pakistan’s former prime minister, who was assassinated on Dec. 27, 2007. This remarkable new documentary, featured at Toronto’s Hot Docs festival (April 29–May 9), is a shattering tale of political and personal tragedy. Benazir Bhutto’s martyrdom did not get the attention of, say, Princess Di, but its impact was more profound, and the conspiratorial intrigue ran deeper. The long lens of a documentary, which telescopes history, has a way of asserting perspective. And *Bhutto* frames its controversial subject as one of the most charismatic and courageous women ever to wade into the political fray.

**BENAZIR BHUTTO (left), 1986; with her husband on her wedding day (top left); with her older brother, Murtaza (middle right); with her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (centre, lower right); (this page) a nation in mourning, December 2007**

A child of privilege who fought military dictatorship, Islamic extremism and male supremacy, Bhutto endured imprisonment and exile to become the first woman elected to lead a Muslim state. She looked like a movie star and behaved like a prophet. And while the film does not actually say so, it leaves the impression that history has not produced a more iconic martyr since the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s.

The Bhutto dynasty has often been com-



pared to the Kennedys. The clan’s legendary patriarch, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was a wealthy, charismatic socialist landowner who founded the country’s dominant political party and was its most famous prime minister. He sent three of his four children to Harvard, the Kennedys’ alma mater, including Benazir. (Her brother Murtaza roomed with Bobby Kennedy Jr.) Like JFK, Benazir rose to power as a perfect storm of glamour and vision—a pop-star politician on a collision course with destiny. And like the Kennedys, the Bhutto clan was blessed and cursed with a fate that played out like Greek tragedy. In their case, however, the conspiracies behind the assassinations were all too real—and maybe even rooted within the family itself.

Benazir was slain leaving an election rally in a car. A young suicide bomber stepped from the crowd, opened fire, then blew himself up, killing Bhutto and 23 others. She was 54. The murder remains unsolved. Last week a UN inquiry reported that Pakistan’s government, then led by dictator Pervez Musharraf, neglected to provide Bhutto with adequate security, and that the police investigation of her murder was deeply flawed.

She was the fourth member of her family to die on the altar of politics. Two decades earlier, her father was hanged after being ousted by a military coup. And both her brothers perished in mysterious circumstances. In 1985, Shahnawaz was found dead in Nice at 27, most likely poisoned. In 1996, while Benazir was in power, Shahnawaz’s older brother, Murtaza, was gunned down by police along with six of his comrades—hours after holding a news conference to warn that police were plotting his death.

His 27-year-old daughter, Fatima—author of a riveting new memoir, *Songs of Blood and Sword*—maintains that Benazir and her husband, Asif Ali Zadari (now Pakistan’s president), conspired to have Murtaza killed. She also suggests they were behind her uncle’s death. The scars go deep. At 14, she heard the gunfire outside the house and later saw her dying father drenched in blood. Condemning the “cult” around her aunt, she portrays her as an opportunist who preached democracy yet unleashed brutal repression, allying herself with leaders of the regime that hanged her father. Even Benazir’s mother turned against her, calling her “a little dictator.”

So depending on who you believe, Bhutto was Mother Teresa or Lady Macbeth. But beyond the bitter intrigue, she died a tragic heroine on the world stage, poised at a historic crossroads between East and West. “She was the modern, tolerant face of Islam,” her close friend Mark Seigel, a producer of the film, told *Maclean’s* last week. “She was in a unique position to bridge cultures and societies and religions. No one has filled that void.”

Benazir’s father, a champion of women’s rights, passed over his eldest son to groom her as his political heir. Hitting Harvard at 16, Benazir received her political baptism in the anti-war and women’s movements of the early ’70s. Graduating to Oxford, and from hippie princess to wily politician, she was an anomaly: a Muslim feminist who submitted to an arranged marriage with a playboy businessman to make herself a worthy candidate (a key compromise on a slippery slope). Serving two terms as prime minister, she was the only

lected leader in modern history to give birth while in power. But even that was calculated. She timed a Caesarean delivery to coincide with a strike designed to force her from office.

Bhutto would address vast open-air crowds with a saintly aura of invincibility. Her friend Seigel constantly badgered her about security, and once bought her a bulletproof vest. Before she came out of exile for her last, fateful homecoming, he sent her photos of the Popemobile. But like a latter-day Joan of Arc, branded a heretic by the guardians of jihad, Bhutto kept repeating her fearless mantra: her fate lay in God's hands.

She knew she was playing with fire. Surrounded by hostile India, war-torn Afghanistan, and theocratic Iran, Pakistan was a new, uncongealed nation, still seething from the volcanic event of its partition from India in 1947. A Muslim nation of 175 million, it had become a refuge for al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and a ragged frontier in the war on terror. If Benazir was a heroine in a Hollywood movie, inevitably someone would turn to her and say: "This is no place for a woman."

*Bhutto* is not a Hollywood movie, but it has all the elements, and the emotional impact, of a heart-rending biopic. The filmmakers are clearly devoted to their heroine, and on a mission to enshrine her legacy. Yet they go out of their way to give voice to some of her harshest critics—including the niece who accused her of murder, the *New York Times* journalist John Burns who exposed her family's alleged corruption, and Musharraf, who may have enabled her assassination. Duane Baughman, the film's producer and co-director, says he overrode fierce objections from the Bhutto family in putting her detractors on camera. "I didn't have anything to gain by making a puff piece," he told *Maclean's*. "The accusations made the story thicker, more interesting, and more like the Greek tragedy that it really is." Seigel expressed a more pragmatic motive: "I wanted it to be credible."

Baughman, who financed its US\$3-million budget from his own pocket, had never made a film. Nor had Seigel. Both men were Democratic party stalwarts connected to Bhutto. Seigel, who co-wrote her last book, *Reconciliation*, served as deputy assistant to president Jimmy Carter and as executive director of the Democratic National Committee. He says he first met Bhutto in 1984 when he and his wife were asked to throw a Washington dinner party for "a friend who had just got out of prison." They became "very close," he says. "Pakistanis treated her as a goddess and she loved having Western friends who would argue with her." Seigel, who is interviewed

on camera, may be the only producer to shed tears in his own film.

Baughman, his co-producer, never met Bhutto. A high-powered political consultant, he has masterminded direct-mail campaigns in election races for New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton. "I'm absolutely an outside-the-Hollywood-mould kind of guy," he says, explaining he got involved with Bhutto when an anonymous group of Americans asked him to help get her elected for a

## HER GHOSTLY VOICE FROM THE FOUND TAPES SOUNDS LIKE SHE'S NARRATING THE DOCUMENTARY FROM THE GRAVE



BHUTTO'S niece, Fatima Bhutto, author of the new memoir *Songs of Blood and Sword*

third term in 2007. Three weeks later she was dead. Three months after that, he was in Dubai, filming in her living room.

With screenwriter Johnny O'Hara serving as co-director, Baughman has assembled a freight-train narrative, not just of Bhutto and her family, but of Pakistan's turbulent history. He draws on poignant testimony from her family, including her three children, and on such commentators as Tariq Ali, Condoleezza Rice and Bhutto's Oxbridge pal Arianna Huffington. But the most eloquent voice is Bhutto's.

to's. She's brought vividly to life, not just in clips, but in audio salvaged from 50 hours of interviews that she did for her autobiography. Seigel tracked down the tapes, which had been rotting in a shoebox in a Long Island beachhouse, damaged by two decades of sea air. He had them restored with Hollywood wizardry, and her ghostly voice from those tapes sounds like she's narrating the documentary from the grave.

The film begins and ends with graphic footage of the two bomb attacks against her in 2007. The first occurs on Oct. 18, when she returns home in triumph after eight years in exile. As night falls, her caravan inches through a joyous and endless throng estimated at up to three million people. Bhutto waves to the crowd, refusing to stay behind a sheet of bulletproof glass. But with the approach of her truck, the street lights systematically go out, as if to provide cover for her assassins. Then two explosions shatter the night, leaving at least 140 dead. An observer remembers being showered with what felt like "heavy rose petals"—human flesh. Police immediately hose down the street, washing away the forensic evidence.

Bhutto survives and revisits Dubai for just two days. Her daughters tearfully recall how they begged her to stay. She left them gifts for upcoming birthdays and said God would decide whether she lived or died. Cut to the fatal Dec. 27 rally. Bhutto's voice from one of those early interviews eerily plays over footage of her leaving the podium: "I feel the love of the crowd come toward me and I feel completely protected... no bullet can hit me. In this crowd, in this rush, I feel the martyrs come with me. We're all walking together."

It's as if Bhutto had surrendered to the cult of personality that surrounded her. And in her extreme sacrifice, there's a tragic irony: Islam's extremists, her mortal enemies, also put their faith in martyrdom. In Bhutto's case it took a martyr to create one.

The family blood feud, like the political one, remains unresolved. Benazir's 21-year-old son, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, is now chairman of her party and plans to lead it once he finishes his Oxford education. Her beautiful and embittered niece still believes her aunt has Papa's blood on her hands. Fatima has chosen the safer road of journalism over politics, for now. But she is still young. **M**



### WE'RE STALKING... TOM JONES

Tom Jones can finally set foot in the Welsh village of Fochriw again. In 1963, a show he was playing there turned sour when a fight broke out and someone accused him of stealing a chicken. He was banned by the town, a prohibition only lifted now, 47 years later. "The rumour is that it was Tom Jones [who stole the chicken], but nobody really knows who took it," said Len Davies, 80, who was there. "People were having a few drinks."