



A

Q&A  
Fatima Bhutto

## STRAINED RELATIONS —New York

### Preface

Fatima Bhutto is part of Pakistan's great political dynasty. She has seen both her grandfather and aunt killed after they served as the country's prime minister.

Her uncle is the current president, but rather than support him, she is one of his most outspoken critics.

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For 40 years the Bhutto family has been at the centre of Pakistan's volatile, often violent, politics. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto founded the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and was prime minister twice in the 1970s before being executed by the military regime that ousted him. His daughter, Benazir, also became prime minister twice; she was assassinated in December 2007. Benazir's former husband, Asif Ali Zardari, is Pakistan's current president, while their son, 22-year-old Bilawal, is head of the PPP.

The Bhuttos are not united, however. Zardari's fiercest critic is Fatima Bhutto, Zulfikar's granddaughter and Benazir's niece. The 28-year-old poet and author has accused Zardari and Benazir of involvement in the murder of her father, Mir Murtaza Bhutto, who was killed by police in 1996. And since Zardari became president in 2008, Fatima has been a constant thorn in his side, criticising him for letting down Pakistan's poor and for his slow reaction to this year's floods.

While Fatima has, so far, refrained from standing for election, she has become an influential voice in Pakistan,

writing newspaper columns and three books, the latest of which, *Songs of Blood and Sword*, has sparked controversy. MONOCLE met her in New York.

**Monocle:** *Pakistani politics have been dominated by your family. Do you think political dynasties are a good thing?*

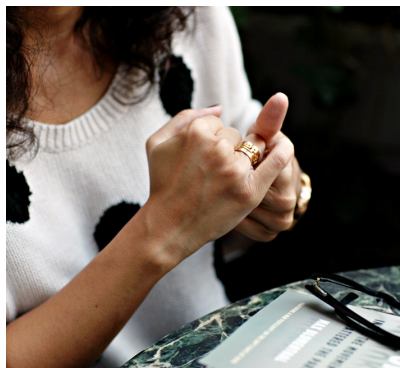
**Fatima Bhutto:** Dynasties negate participation. It closes the door to what should be an inclusive system and limits engagement on the basis of name or birth. You don't subscribe to participation and you don't subscribe to democracy. It's political inbreeding. It's a completely backward way of running one's affairs.

**M:** *Would you ever consider politics, then?*

**FB:** The idea that a name makes someone a good option is a dangerous one. I think one can be political and I am very political. I just choose to exercise my politics in a different way.

**M:** *You have made some dangerous enemies. Do you feel safe?*

**FB:** In a place like Pakistan it is far more

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dangerous to buy into silence because it allows free rein to injustice and corruption. That said, I take a lot of sustenance from the fact that I know there are many other people saying these same things who are far braver than me. When you are one voice out of many there's a comfort in that, I suppose.

**M:** *The recent floods have been Pakistan's worst natural disaster, yet international aid and media coverage have been poor. Why?*

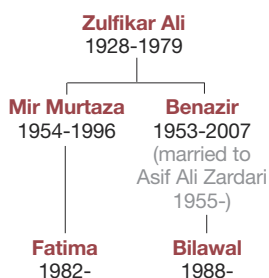
**FB:** There are several reasons. The fact that this is a country that isn't easily patronised like Haiti doesn't help. It's easy to say, "Oh what a sad unlucky little country. Let us come in and help you." Pakistan is a large, dangerous, strong, potentially powerful country. But this is a nuclear country that still has children dying of diarrhoea and it's a cause for great embarrassment and great action, which we just haven't seen.

Not to diminish any other disaster but we didn't have one flood and then it ended. We have had waters that have gone from the northernmost part to the southernmost part, that have submerged millions of acres of land, destroyed millions of homes, put millions of people in desperate hunger and it's a process that continues. It's not that the world doesn't know it's happening. Is it that it doesn't care? I don't know. I think it's embarrassing.

**M:** *You've criticised President Zardari for touring Europe while the floods raged. Why doesn't the public demand more accountability from him and his government?*

**FB:** I think there are two reasons. The first is, when your life on a daily basis con-

### The Bhutto dynasty



sists of bringing home your meagre wages to put food on the table, to keep a family afloat, you are illiterate, you have no support from any sort of state mechanism, you don't have time particularly to protest.

The second is fear. You have a government that's known worldwide for its quite enthusiastic and flexible use of violence. If we look at the murder cases that Zardari was standing trial for before he became president, they involved sitting bureaucrats, industrialists, politicians. When a man gets away with those kinds of murders it sends a very big kind of message to everyone else.

**M:** *Your father's alleged killers were not only acquitted but promoted. Yet you say you will continue to pursue justice. How do you pursue the most powerful men in the country?*

**FB:** The world at large, not just Pakistan, suffers from amnesia. The one power no one can take away from us is the power of memory. I was just reading on the plane over here about Oscar Romero. He was a priest in El Salvador and he was part of the Liberation Theology Movement.

Romero was killed 30 years ago while he was saying Mass because he spoke about corruption and violence. The first time El Salvador has held a remembrance ceremony on the anniversary of his death was last year. It took 30 years for the country to move to a point where the victims were in power and they could remember their own. To know that 30 years isn't that long when it comes to something like that gives me more strength.

**M:** *Do you see hope for Pakistan?*

**FB:** Always, because the Pakistani people are extraordinary survivors and they are extraordinarily hardworking and courageous. And it's a young country. When America was 60 years old they were in the middle of a civil war. What you shouldn't be hopeful about is this system of government. But for Pakistan we have so much ahead of us and we have so much potential. I know it sounds like a strange thing to say but it's an extraordinary country and an extraordinary people. There should always be hope for that. — (M)