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The *Danse Macabre* of Bangladesh. Humayun Azad's Creative Interruptions in an Age of Anger

Abstract: Bangladesh has come a long way, since its constitution in 1972 and it is now considered on the 'right path' towards a future as shiny as the one of its immediate neighbor, 'Shining India'. In this scenario of rivalries and mimetic desires gone astray, Humayun Azad (1947-2004), a writer and a scholar, regularly spoke out against misogyny, Islamist threats, and the blatant racism poisoning a country born out of the ashes of communal conflicts and ethnic hatred. He was in the forefront in denouncing the matrix of violence that Bangladesh has been performing, with attacks on free thinkers and 'minorities' both by government agencies and religious extremists. This article is a homage to Azad's creative interruptions and literary interventions against fear, anger, and those resentful feelings even among his university students and colleagues, invoking the 'Talibanization' of Bangladesh (*Āmarā sabā'i hōbō Tālibān, Bānlā habē Āphagānistān*). Given the quixotic, dangerous politics of those who Mishra calls the "bland fanatics", now that the Taliban have seized power in Afghanistan and extremist forms of Islam dictate the country's destiny, it is even more relevant to remember Humayun Azad's writings that instill a culture of freedom in Bangladesh, based on the constitutional pillars, made increasingly fragile by political and environmental 'crises'.

Keywords: *Bangladesh*, *Bengali literature*, *existential anger*, *mimetic desire*, *negative solidarities*, *organic intellectuals*

1. The *Age of Anger* in Bangladesh. The Unfulfilled Quest for a Secular Democracy

The same summer that the grenades blasted in Dhaka, targeting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during one of her rallies on the 21st of August 2004, a seasonal monsoon created havoc, with heavy floods destroying much of the main annual rice crop just before it was harvested. An estimated 36 million people (25% of the total population at the time) were affected. That same year, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published a report which identified Bangladesh as the most vulnerable country in the world to tropical cyclones, in a world spinning towards a climate crisis.[1] It also happened to be the same year when the poet, novelist, and social critic, Humayun Azad survived an assassination attempt in February 2004 at the annual Dhaka Book Fair, only to be killed in Munich that August. According to a 2022 op-ed in *The Dhaka Tribune*, the 2004 assassination attempts targeting the Prime Minister and other secular critics reflect the crushing of the dream of a democratic and secular Bangladesh under the boots of army generals and Islamist militants. The threat of the establishment of "a pro-Pakistani, anti-India, and anti-secular government" had fueled resentment against many secularists in Bangladesh but it had also triggered what some call a 'crisis of secularism'.[2] In the rather gloomy scenario at the dawn of the millennium,

[1] UNDP – Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, *A Global Report. Reducing Disaster Risk: A Challenge for Development* (New York, 2004) See *www.undp.org*.

[2] The memory of the terrible attack on the Awami League party's leader Sheikh Hasina during one of her rallies is annually revived by the media. On the 21st of August 2022, on the anniversary of the tragic event, the *Dhaka Tribune* published an online editorial where an anonymous 'special correspondent' wrote: "assault of August 21 ... was a sequel to the BNP-Jamaat's master plan of consolidating power for an indefinite period by using the state machinery and harboring like-minded armed militant groups". The current PM Sheikh Hasina is one of the two daughters of the father of the nation who survived the massacre of her entire family on the 15th of August 1975. In 2018, Hasina's government and the War Tribunal sentenced

Islamists in Bangladesh began a witch-hunt to catch and kill some prominent writers whose works had irked the radicalized youth who were advocating or actively joining the various Islamist groups mushrooming in the country. Alongside these resentful pariahs, others were choosing the Arendtian life of the "conscious pariah"[3] to reclaim their intellectual independence.

Rejecting the vicious rivalries of politicians and voicing his condemnation of the violence unleashed by the fundamentalists, a Bangladeshi man – a writer, a scholar – stood out alone against the extremism and the misogyny of the hatemongers, wishing to align with no one and reclaiming his free voice through his writings. Daring to criticize the "negative solidarities" that Islamists in Bangladesh were fueling among the disenfranchised youth, Humayun Kabir (1947-2004) spoke against the political blabbering of local politicians who ruled with deception and viciousness in pursuit not of the public good, but of their own self-interest. With likewise intensity, he also set against the Islamists who were using the public sphere to invoke the 'Talibanization' of Bangladesh and the scrapping of the last remains of the secular sentiment of the country.[4] This conscious pariah, loved by his colleagues and students at the University of Dhaka and admired by many readers for his brave and sarcastic stance against the Islamic fundamentalists (who finally managed to condemn him to a premature death in 2004), had, at one point of his life, changed his name into Humayun Azad – Humayun 'the free one'.[5] Armed only with words and under the banner of a chosen name and fate,

to death a group of people accused of being involved in the 2004 attacks. Some belonged to the Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami of Bangladesh (Huji-B), the same group that targeted Humayun Azad and other independent thinkers, bloggers, and politicians. Senior officials of the BNP's Party and members of the security forces and the intelligence have also been accused to have helped the Huji-B leader Maulana Tajuddin to flee to Pakistan. See "August 21 Grenade Attack: The Day Democracy Almost Died", *Dhaka Tribune* (2022), *www.dhakatribune.com*.

[3] In one of her most debated articles titled "The Jew as Pariah" (1944), Hannah Arendt first discusses the work of Heinrich Heine and the idea of the 'liberated Jew'. She talks of Heine as the perfect *schlemil*, the foolish and naïve figure to be found in Yiddish literature, who can escape the hypocritical stance of a parvenu and reclaim 'real freedom' through great poetry and the mastering of the art of irony and mockery: "When one comes down to earth, one has to admit that laughter does not kill and that neither slaves nor tyrants are extinguished by mere amusement. From this standpoint, however, the pariah is always remote and unreal; whether as *schlemihl* or as "lord of dreams" he stands outside the real world and attacks it from without. Indeed, the Jewish tendency towards utopianism – a propensity most clearly in evidence in the very countries of emancipation – stems, in the last analysis, from just this lack of social roots. The only thing which saved Heine from succumbing to it, and which made him transform the political non-existence and unreality of the pariah into the effective basis of a world of art, was his creativity. (105) Moving from Heine's poetry to the definition of the concept of the 'conscious pariah', she delves into the political thoughts of Bernard Lazare and unpacks what it means to be conscious of such a pariah status in society. She claims that Lazare moves a step further from Heine's realizations of the necessity of being an 'emancipated' Jew. As someone who happens to live in France at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, she claims, "Lazare could appreciate at first hand the pariah quality of Jewish existence" (108). She also points out that Lazare is aware that it is not enough to accept his position as a pariah, as many Jew *parvenus* were doing, but it is necessary to embrace such status with a rebellious consciousness. As she puts it, Lazare knows that the Jew must "become a rebel ... the champion of an oppressed people" (108). From these considerations on the work of Heine and Lazare (and we can better imagine the reasons behind the interest that Humayun Azad developed towards Heine's poetry and his journey to Munich allegedly to study his work), Arendt elucidates the work of Chaplin and Kafka. In her days, social isolation was no longer possible: "You cannot stand aloof from society, whether as a *schlemihl* or as a lord of dreams. The old escape mechanisms have broken down, and a man can no longer come to terms with a world in which the Jew cannot be a human being either as a *parvenu* using his elbows or as a *pariah* voluntarily spurning its gifts. Both the realism of the one and the idealism of the other are today utopian". In the end, she concludes, the man of goodwill will die in isolation if he is not allowed to live and operate as a "man among men", because "only when a people lives and functions in consort with other peoples can it contribute to the establishment upon earth of a commonly conditioned and commonly controlled humanity". See Hannah Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition", *Jewish Social Studies*, 6.2 (1944), 99-122.

For some thoughts on the heritage of the concept of the 'conscious pariah' and the relationship between Jews and modernity, see Larry Ray and Maria Diemling, "Arendt's 'Conscious Pariah' and the Ambiguous Figure of the Subaltern", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 19.4 (2016), 503-520.

[4] Abdul Wohab, "'Secularism' or 'No-Secularism'? A Complex Case of Bangladesh", *Cogent Social Sciences*, 7.1 (2022).

[5] The term *āzād* comes from Farsi and means 'free'. In Bangla it is spelled as *ājād.*

he bravely confronted his enemies, who savagely attacked him during the Dhaka Book Fair in 2004.[6] Azad was repeatedly stabbed by a group of fundamentalists during the presentation of one of his more controversial novels at an annual Book Fair traditionally held on the premises of the Dhaka University Campus, during the month of February. On the 12 of August, barely a week after he had moved to Munich to conduct some research on the poet Heinrich Heine, some German officials in Dhaka called the family and told them that Humayun Azad had died in his sleep in his apartment in Munich. Family and friends, however, refused to believe that he suffered a heart attack and immediately called for a full investigation. His son, Ananya Azad, moved to Germany a few years ago, having been forced to leave Bangladesh after receiving death threats for following in his father's intellectual steps. Ananya shared some of his memories of Humayun Azad with this author, including that terrible day when he (barely a teenager) had to witness the ferocious attack against his father and began living in terror. Ananya applied for asylum in Germany after having spent many years locked in his house in Dhaka, afraid of going out and when he did donning a motorcycle helmet to feel protected from the blades of the fundamentalists. (Personal communication, Ferrara, October 2015). Humayun Azad continues to represent the image of the free thinker who dared to think. He proved with his own life what Hannah Arendt had written in one of her essays collected in *Men in Dark Times*: "thinking calls not only for intelligence and profundity but above all for courage".[7]

In 2005, thirty years since the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman[8] (one of the founders of the Awami League Party who successfully led the Bangladesh Liberation War[9] in 1971),[10] political scientist Ali Riaz[11] presciently claimed that the spiral of violence unleashed in the country and the "blame game" played by the two main political parties (Bangladesh National Party and Awami League) had steered Bangladesh towards a dramatic state of chaos and violence. Riaz's concerns on the worrisome developments in Bangladesh brought him to conclude that "[i]f the present trend continues, it will not be long before the nation's democracy becomes a casualty in the 'crossfire' of partisanship", at the same time soliciting the people of Bangladesh to remember how hard they had fought for democracy and that "they must now be vigilant to protect it".[12]

At an international level, the tragic events of 2004 had also raised a considerable amount of alarm, especially in the US, since the future of democracy in Bangladesh was considered crucial to assure a steady ally in the area, with Bangladesh often described as 'the moderate Muslim country'

[6] On the death of Humayun Azad, see "Top Bangladeshi Author Found Dead", *BBC News* (2004), *news.bbc.co.uk*.
[7] Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing", *Men in Dark Times* (New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 8.
[8] Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, known as Bongobhondu (*Baṅgabandhu*, 'friend of Bengal'), was the political leader who launched and led the Bangladesh Liberation War *Muktijuddho* [*mukti yud'dha*], also known as *Swadhinata Juddho* [*sbādhīnatā yud'dha*], that resulted in the secession from West Pakistan and the birth of the newly independent state of Bangladesh in 1971. Amartya Sen, "Bangabandhu and Visions of Bangladesh", *Innovations: Technology, Governance, Globalization*, 13.1-2 (2021), 22-26. On the figure and the political views of Bongobondhu see also: Arild Engelsen Ruud, "Bangabandhu as the Eternal Sovereign: On the Construction of a Civil Religion", *Religion*, 52.4 (2022), 532-549; Roksana Badruddoja, "Time, History and Memory: The Mythical Bongobondhu and the Birthing of Bangladeshi National Memories and Counter Memories", *South Asian Review*, 40.4 (2019), 290-304.
[9] See, among others, Wardatul Akmam, "Atrocities Against Humanity During the Liberation War in Bangladesh: A Case of Genocide", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 4.4 (2002), 543-59. On the War Museum and the controversy around the aestheticization of the conflict, see Nayanika Mookherjee, "'Never Again': Aesthetics of 'Genocidal' Cosmopolitanism and the Bangladesh Liberation War Museum", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 17.1 (2011), S71-S91. The Museum's website can be accessed at *www.liberationwarmuseumbd.org*.
[10] See Banglapedia, "Bangladesh Awami League", *en.banglapedia.org*.
[11] Ali Riaz, "Bangladesh in 2004: The Politics of Vengeance and the Erosion of Democracy", *Asian Survey*, 45.1 (2005), 112-18.
[12] Riaz, "Bangladesh in 2004", 118.

in the South Asian geopolitical region.[13] In 2010, Bruce Vaughn, writing his Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report addressing members of the U.S. Congress on the political and strategic developments between Bangladesh and the U.S., maintained:

> In the years since independence, Bangladesh has established a reputation as *a largely moderate and democratic majority Muslim country*. This status has been under threat from a combination of political violence, weak governance, poverty, corruption, and Islamist militancy. There has been concern in the past that should Bangladesh become a failed state,[14] or a state with increased influence by Islamist extremists, it could serve as a base of operations for terrorist activity. In more recent years, such concerns have abated somewhat as Islamist militants have been vigorously pursued by the government and Bangladesh has returned to democratic government.[15]

Vaughn's somehow optimistic views on the reputation of Bangladesh and its stability as a democracy capable of successfully tackling the rise of ideological extremisms of many sorts, not just the one represented by the Islamist parties and their growing number of accolades, does not take into account the opinions of Bangladeshi nationals, both scholars and writers, who have been monitoring the escalation of violence in independent Bangladesh since its inception and writing about the threats posed to the seeds of a democratic and secular country.

In *Age of Anger*, Pankaj Mishra, discusses the "Islam-centric accounts of terrorism" that have translated into a ceaseless global war on terror, with consequent "forceful – or quixotic – policies aimed at encouraging 'moderate' Muslims to 'prevent' 'extremist ideology', and 'reform' Islam".[16] Mishra denounces the incapacity of the Western political elites to fully understand different cultural climates and accuses them of overreacting to the "political challenge of terrorism". He criticizes the way they have tried to counterbalance their inadequacy – and the 'terror' of it – with an attitude of aggressive overreaction which frequently materializes in the launching of military campaigns meant to suppress the Islamic extremists but, more often than not, translating into other massacres and further frightening of innocent people, caught in between the fear of the Islamists and the frantic, equally 'unreasonable', violent actions of authoritarian rulers, at home and abroad. At the same time, Mishra aptly posits, "selfie-seeking young murderers everywhere confound the leaden stalkers of 'extremist ideology', retaliating to bombs from the air with choreographed slaughter on the ground". And he aptly asks: "How did we get trapped in this *danse macabre*?"[17]

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[13] Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, "Decoding the Rising Islamist Threat in Bangladesh", *Observer Research Foundation* (2021), *www.orfonline.org*.

[14] According to Robert I. Rotberg, Director of the Program on Intrastate Conflict at Harvard University's John F Kennedy School of Government and President of the World Peace Foundation: "The road to state failure is marked by several revealing signposts. On the economic side, living standards deteriorate rapidly.... Foreign-exchange shortages provoke food and fuel scarcities and curtail government spending on essential services and political goods.... Corruption flourishes.... On the political side, leaders and their associates subvert prevailing democratic norms, coerce legislatures and bureaucracies into subservience, strangle judicial independence, block civil society, and gain control over security and defense forces.... Security, the most important political good, vanishes". The description provided, with the helix of economic and political deterioration strangling Bangladesh, brought some analysts to see the country as a potentially 'failed state' and an ideal territory for the emerging of terrorism and Islamist fundamentalism. See Robert I. Rotberg, "Failed States in a World of Terror", *Foreign Affairs* (2002), 127-140.

[15] Bruce Vaughn, *Bangladesh: Political and Strategic Developments and U.S. Interests*, (CRS Report for Congress, Prepared for Members and Committees of Congress, 2010); emphasis added.

[16] Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*, Kindle Edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 16.

[17] The French expression 'danse macabre', familiar vocabulary in Europe, refers to the famous cycle painted in 1424-25 on the walls of a charnel house in the parish cemetery of Les Saints Innocents in Paris. According to some scholars, it is this (by now) illustrious French mural that lies at the origin of all later medieval and early modern representations, whose appeal has survived until the modern and contemporary times. The *Danse Macabre* is also known "as the Dance of Death, *danza de la muerte*, *dodendans*, *Totentanz*, *Dødedansen* or *Surmatants*" and it relies on the vernacular to be made accessible to everyone; see Sophie Oosterwijk and Stefanie Knöll, eds., *Mixed Metaphors: The* Danse Macabre *in Medieval and Early Modern*

This appears to be the same question that Bangladeshi scholars, writers, bloggers and artists have been trying to confront, if not to answer, since the beginning of the 2000s or, if we consider the historical trajectories of this young country, since its establishment in 1971.

In the beginning of the 2000s, the streets of Dhaka were sinisterly resonating with the chanting of slogans such as "We will all join Taliban, Bangladesh will turn into Afghanistan" (*Amra shobai hobo Taliban, Bangla hobe Afghanistan* [*Āmarā sabā'i hōbō Tālibān, Bānlā habē Āphagānistān*]). The slogan was coined by a group of Islamic extremists who had traveled from Bangladesh to Afghanistan in the mid-1980s and early 1990s to fight against the then-Soviet Union alongside their 'brothers', the Taliban. These men, upon returning home to Bangladesh, had created or joined various militant groups, among which the *Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami* (*Hārakāṭ-ul jihād āl-isalāmī*), known as Huji-B,[18] and the *Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh* (*Jāmā'atul mujāhidīn Bānlādēś*), simply called JMB,[19] with the aim to establish a regime where extreme forms of Islam were set to be in place, in a way similar to what the Talibans had been fighting to achieve in Afghanistan. Although we lack reliable and official statistics of the numbers, and there are no precise records of the identities of those who traveled to Afghanistan, Ali Riaz (2008) claims that at least 3000 Bangladeshi nationals might have fought in the Afghan-Soviet war.[20] He also warned about the future trajectories of Islamist militancy in Bangladesh, while identifying potential Islamist militant leaders and the JMB's repeated calls for the imposition of a stricter Islamic rule in the country.[21] He posed a very challenging question: "whether Bangladesh should already be considered a failed state".[22] In 2003, Riaz[23] had expressed similar concerns on the "nationalization of Islamism"[24] and the way such phenomenon was sustaining the ascent of the Islamist forces as increasingly legitimized actors on the Bangladeshi political stage.

Riaz also highlighted the necessity of re-signifying the words used in the debate around 'secularism' in Bangladesh, by revisiting Tazeen Murshid's analysis of the word 'secular' in the

Europe (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011). The expression is timeless, although it originally referred to a specific iconography that was meant to act as a *memento mori* in a time when diseases like plague, poverty, and war, made it necessary to remind everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, of the physical and spiritual death whose fear can be conquered only by faith in Christ and the hope derived from God. Its meaning, moving from one place to another, changed accordingly, but preserved its original message. However, Pankaj Mishra uses it in a more literal sense and without specific reference to the origins of the medieval imagery and its spiritual message. I am using the term in the same way Mishra adopts it in his book when he asks, "How did we get trapped in this *danse macabre*?" (see Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 16). For a better understanding of the origins of the medieval imagery and the way it traveled during time and across Europe, see Oosterwijk and Knöll, *Mixed Metaphors*.

[18] The Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC) at Stanford offers the following descriptions of this militant Islamist group: "Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HuJI) is a Deobandi militant group with branches in Pakistan and Bangladesh. HuJI demands Islamic rule in India and Bangladesh and supports Rohingya insurgents in the Rakhine province of Myanmar". The CISAC has created an archive for mapping and monitoring the activities of many militant groups; see *cisac.fsi.stanford.edu*.

[19] According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP): "The Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (Party of the Mujahideen) aims at establishing the rule of Islam in Bangladesh through an armed struggle. The outfit is opposed to the establishment of democracy and calls for the conduct of government under Islamic law". On August 17, 2005, while claiming responsibility for the serial blasts through leaflets, in Bangla and Arabic, left at the site of the explosions across the country, the JMB said: "We're the soldiers of Allah. We've taken up arms for the implementation of Allah's law the way Prophet, Sahabis and heroic Mujahideen have done for centuries.... It is time to implement Islamic law in Bangladesh. There is no future with man-made law". For more details, see SATP, "Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, *www.satp.org*.

[20] Ali Riaz, *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Complex Web* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

[21] Ibid. See also Ali Riaz's personal website, *www.aliriaz.online*.

[22] Riaz, "Bangladesh in 2004", 112.

[23] Ali Riaz, "'God Willing': The Politics and Ideology of Islamism in Bangladesh", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23.1/2 (2003), 301-20.

[24] Riaz refers to the work by Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1994).

frame of the Indian and Bangladeshi Constitutions,[25] and concluded that "the idea of religious tolerance was enshrined ... in the 1972 constitution of Bangladesh as *dharmanirapekshata*, meaning religious neutrality. It is the specific dynamics of domestic politics that allowed the preeminence of Islamic forces in the polity, and their successes in the electoral process".[26] He contended that the rise of the Islamists in Bangladesh, and the consequent erasure of secularism from the country's Constitution in 1977, was to be viewed as the manifestation of a "conservative Islamization process which Bangladesh has been undergoing over the last quarter of a century".[27] This process saw Islam becoming the state religion in 1988, along with the widespread use of Islamic idioms in political discourse, and then the forging of close connections between secularists and Islamists in the political domain. Ali Riaz did not subscribe to the idea that there was some sort of "dormant Muslim identity of the Bangladeshi population"[28] that was resurfacing. His evaluation of the rise of political Islam in Bangladesh was based on two main factors, which he described as "(a) the crises of hegemony of the ruling bloc; and (b) politics of expediency by the 'secularist' parties".[29] These factors acted as main catalysts and favored the rise of an Islamist language in political discourse, creating a space for the progressive Islamization of the public sphere.[30] In this scenario, the Islamists not just acted as a significant and growing force in the field of politics, but also staged their terroristic activities and tried to capitalize on it.

1.1 *Negative solidarities and the Bangladeshi* pariahs

In the tragic experience of modernity, as Hannah Arendt posited, everyone is living in a common present and "[e]very country has become the almost immediate neighbor of every other country, and every man feels the shock of events which take place at the other side of the globe".[31] This ethos was overwhelmingly felt by many Bangladeshis, especially among the youth. At the beginning of the 2000s, when India was trying to catch up with China's economic miracle and the then-ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) launched its optimistic slogan of 'Shining India' for the 2004 Indian general elections,[32] some Bangladeshis were steaming with resentment against the Asian giant

[25] Tazeen Murshid writes that in the context of India and Bangladesh, "'[s]ecular' came to be defined as the binary opposite of 'communal' implying a tolerance of other religious communities". See Tazeen Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1995), 5. Cit. in Riaz, "God Willing", 303.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Riaz, "God Willing", 301.
[28] Ibid., 302.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ali Riaz, "The New Islamist Public Sphere in Bangladesh", *Global Change, Peace & Security*, formerly *Pacifica Review: Peace, Security & Global Change*, (2013), 1-14.
[31] Hannah Arendt, "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?", *Men in Dark Times* (New York: A Harvest Book Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 83.
[32] In 2004, while the electoral frenzy was in full swing, the Hindu right-wing nationalist party of BJP (*Bhāratīya Janatā Pārṭī*) launched an estimated US$20 million campaign to advertise its 'India Shining' economic achievements and political program on all Indian TV channels. The campaign aimed at highlighting the successes of the Indian economy, especially those which had benefited the Indian middle class and the Non-Resident-Indians (NRI) alike. Many newspaper ads were published and glossy posters were pasted up all over to support the electoral campaign to keep India 'shining'. See Parwini Zora and Daniel Woreck, "Indian Election. The BJP's 'India Shining' Campaign: Myth and Reality", *World Socialist Web Site* (2004), *www.wsws.org*.
On the debate about India's development strategy and its alleged 'inclusive growth' hailed by the BJP, see, among others, Anurag Narayan Banerjee and Nilanjan Banik, "Is India Shining?", *Review of Development Economics*, 18.1 (2014), 59-72.
For a better understanding of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's political strategies and the rise of the BJP in India after the 'success' of the so-called Gujarat Model, see also John Harriss, "Hindu Nationalism in Action: The Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian Politics", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38.4 (2015), 712-718; Duncan McDonnell and Luis Cabrera, "The Right-wing Populism of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (and Why Comparativists Should Care)", *Democratization*, 26.3 (2019), 484-501.

neighbors which were perceived – especially India – as constant bullies rather than regional allies, and with some of the Western countries – in particular the U.S. – which had become 'the enemy' par excellence in the imaginary of millions of Muslims around the world who were feeling increasingly outraged by the absurdity of the so-called 'war on terror' and the humiliation inflicted on their Muslim brothers in places like Guantanamo. While the BJP in India was busy popularizing its political mantra of 'Shining India' on the global stage, promoting Bengaluru (Bangalore, Karnataka) as the 'Silicon Valley of India' for its crucial role in developing the IT sector and exporting IT's related goods, Bangladesh was still far from dreaming of its own 'Digital Bangladesh' and was (perhaps unwillingly) raising a generation of angry men, similar to the Nietzschean 'men of ressentiment' recalled by Mishra in *Age of Anger*. The vision for a 'Digital Bangladesh' took root in 2008, when current PM Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League Party returned to power under the manifesto of 'A Charter for Change', the political program of the Bangladesh Awami League (allegedly inspired by Barack Obama's presidential campaign). One of the main goals, at that time, and today a slight disappointment for many Bangladeshis who truly believed in it, was the establishment of the so-called 'Digital Bangladesh' (DB) by 2021. Projects aimed at ushering in the DB vision and translating it into reality have faced uncountable difficulties in a country where electricity cuts are a daily occurrence and natural disasters a threatening reality. Turning Bangladesh into a digitally developed nation by 2021 has remained one of the main slogans of the present AL government. However, Digital Bangladesh is also turning into a dangerous system of surveillance, especially the government's 2018 the Digital Information Act (DIA 2018), a law which clearly curtails freedom of expression and heavily cracks down on the right to access information under the 'pretense' of preventing the escalation of cybercrimes. The DIA 2018 further restricts the space of independent journalism, affecting not only journalists and bloggers, but also lawyers, activists, scholars and representatives of the civil society. It is a development of a previous law – the Information and Communications Technology Act (ICT ACT 2006) – and increasingly raises high barriers to the way of independent research and investigative journalism.[33] When Mishra writes that "Grisly images and sounds continuously assault us in this age of anger" and that "the threshold of atrocity has been steadily lowered since the first televised beheading (in 2004, just as broadband internet began to arrive in middle-class homes) in Iraq of a Western hostage dressed in Guantanamo's orange jumpsuit", one needs to imagine what this atrocious performance of terror signified in Bangladesh, where what Mishra describes as "a sentiment of pervasive panic generated by the news media and amplified by social media" was indeed more pervasively amplified and constantly exacerbated by "the reality of climate change, which makes the planet itself seem under siege from ourselves".[34]

2. Humayun Azad, a Namesake

> A pine is standing lonely
> In the North on a bare plateau.
> He sleeps; a bright white blanket
> Enshrouds him in ice and snow.

[33] See Md Aliur Rahman and Harun-Or Rashid, "Digital Security Act and Investigative Journalism in Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis", *CenRaPS Journal of Social Sciences*, 2.2 (2020), 216-236; Md Abu Bakar Siddik and Saida Talukder Rahi, "Cybercrime in Social Media and Analysis of Existing Legal Framework: Bangladesh in Context", *BiLD Law Journal*, 5.1 (2020), 68-92. On a recent assessment of the Digital Bangladesh 'vision', see Anupam Mazumdar and Husam Helmi Alharahsheh, "Digital Bangladesh-vision 2021: What is the Digital Bangladesh Concept?", *South Asian Research Journal of Engineering and Technology*, 2.1 (2020), 6-9; Kristen Waughen et al., "The Digital Divide: A Digital Bangladesh by 2021", *International Journal of Education and Human Developments*, 1.3 (2015), 1-8.

[34] Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 21.

He's dreaming of a palm tree
Far away in the Eastern land
Lonely and silently mourning
On a sunburnt rocky strand.[35]

Born in Bangladesh in 1947, Humayun Azad was a writer, a poet, a prominent scholar of linguistics, and a prolific author of books and articles on Bengali language and literature. He is considered as one of the most renowned contemporary intellectuals of Bangladesh, a country he deeply loved and felt rooted into. However, Azad passed away far from the green and lush of his own country: he was found dead in a hotel room in Munich, the city of his alleged 'exile'.[36] There are many unsolved questions surrounding his death, and much awaited answers that perhaps would never materialize. His family and many among his colleagues and friends believe that his premature death was a direct consequence of the brutal attack he faced in Dhaka during the annual Book Fair held on the campus of Dhaka University every February. After the February 2004 vicious assault that had left him almost dead, the government of Bangladesh decided to send him to Germany in August 2004, apparently for guaranteeing him the safety and protection that they could not grant him in his own land. Azad was not the first one to meet such fate: in 1975, the poet Daud Haider had fallen into disgrace after the publication of some poems that allegedly 'offended the religious sentiments' of a radical few.[37] The government decided to send him in exile: after many years in India awaiting to be repatriated to Bangladesh, Haider made his way to Germany, never to return. Humayun Azad would not be the last either, as many young writers and bloggers are finding shelter in Europe and elsewhere after attacks (or threats of death) against them by some fanatic Islamists.

What do these writers have in common in sharing such an uneventful fate? Why has 'exile' been the only answer to their plight, despite their commitment to Bangladesh, a self-proclaimed secular republic where Bengali language and culture 'should' dictate the ethos of the new state? The answer may lie in one of the poems of the German author Heinrich Heine, born in Düsseldorf in 1797, but deceased in Paris in 1856, where he was expatriated after the German authorities had repeatedly banned some of his poetry. In Heine's work *Ideen: Das Buch Le Grand* (1827), translated in English as *Ideas: The Book of Le Grand* (2006),[38] is a poem whose form and content strike us for its modernity. Heine simply wrote:

[35] Heinrich Heine, "Lyrical Intermezzo" [1822-23], *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine. A Modern English Version*, trans. by Hal Draper (Oxford: Suhrkamp/Insel, 1982), 62. The original song, titled "Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam", is the number 33 of the Lyrical Intermezzo: "Ein Fichtenbaum steht einsam / Im Norden auf kahler Höh. / Ihn schläfert; mit weißer Decke / Umhüllen ihn Eis und Schnee. / Er träumt von einer Palme, / Die, fern im Morgenland, / Einsam und schweigend trauert / Auf brennender Felsenwand".

[36] Officially, Azad went to Munich to conduct research on the poetry of Heinrich Heine. However, many in Bangladesh told this author that the Bangladeshi government did not know how to protect him and found it more convenient to 'exile' him, allegedly for his own safety. The outcome of this plan, if it was indeed carried out with these purposes, was truly disastrous as Azad died just after one week from his arrival in Munich.

[37] Mubashar Hasan and Arild Engelsen Ruud have written a paper where they recollect five cases where the Blasphemy Law was used to prosecute writers, bloggers and cartoonists in Bangladesh. Daud Haider "was independent Bangladesh's first (in)famous 'blasphemer'". He wrote a poem in 1974 that created outrage among the public. Arrested, he was kept in jail under a false name to protect him from other inmates. When he was finally released on the home minister's order, he was forced to leave the country. "The following day, he was put on a plane to Kolkata, just him and two minders – an extraordinary undertaking in those days. He has never been able to return to his country in spite of having requested to do so". See Mubashar Hasan and Arild Engelsen Ruud, "The State and the Construction of the 'Blasphemer' in Bangladesh", in Anne Stensvold, ed., *Blasphemies Compared*: *Transgressive Speech in a Globalised World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 175-91.

[38] Heinrich Heine, *Ideas: The Le Grand Book (Das Buch Le Grand) and Memoirs*, trans. by Richard Hollick (Kindle Edition, 2015).

The German Censors —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
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—— —— —— —— —— Idiots —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— ——.[39]

Arguably Azad moved to Munich in 2004 for researching the life and the works of the controversial poet Heinrich Heine because he found a resonance in these verses. Heine's uncompromising stance on the use of poetry and literature as tools of rebellion against the political authorities of those times might have appeared extremely appealing to him, much as Heine's use of irony. His temperament, as shown in his life and his work, resonated with the defiant spirit of this Bangladeshi critical scholar and unbending writer, whose name combined the greatness of the Mughal emperor Humayun with the idealistic aspirations of a given name like *Āzād* ('free'). Such a 'namesake' should have been a harbinger of a great future ahead, but we are left only with his powerful writings, his controversial verses, and his adamant denouncement of fundamentalisms of any sort, religious as much as political. As we have seen, these two positions dangerously coalesced in the aftermath of the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, and far from building a nation free from the poisonous mix of politics and religion, political Islam became a force that could not be ignored and, obviously, not even mocked at. Like the German censors of Heine's poem, they were perhaps fools, but likewise dangerous and capable of using the resentful youth to kill whoever posed a threat to their growing regime of terror in Bangladesh.

3. Humayun Azad, an 'Organic Intellectual' and an 'Absurd Hero'

In 1986, when the serial killings of writers and bloggers in Bangladesh were less predictable, Humayun Azad wrote a poem provocatively titled "Ad. Bangladesh, 1986", published in Bengali on the *Bichitra Eid Issue* (Dhaka 1986):

Yes, you are the talented man we are looking for
If you have muscles only, not brain
If you have hammer alone and no poetry
If you have an axe only, and no music within you
If you have but a gun to fire, and no dance within you
If you have the heel alone, and no dreams within you
You are the talented man we are looking for
If you can walk to the Pub
Leaving a time bomb under your father's bed
You will be appointed our chief executive
In charge of our society
Of our state
Of our civilization.[40]

[39] Ibid.

The poem depicts an individual who is void of any humanity, incapable of feelings and emotions, but perfectly capable of leaving a bomb even under his father's bed. These were the required characteristics of the most suitable candidate to the position of 'chief executive' of the heartless factory that Bangladesh had become in just fifteen years since its independence in 1971. This was the time of the autocratic regime of General Husain Mohammed Ershad (President from 1983 until 1991). Under Ershad's military dictatorship, Bangladesh saw a radical 'Islamization' of Bangladeshi society. Islam was declared as the state religion in 1988 and dissidents began to be systematically persecuted. Humayun Azad was among those who criticized the regime, following a tradition of intellectuals that, as Rashid Askari has stated, "had unswerving faith in the spirit of the Liberation War, and unflagging support for the cause of social progressivism".[41] Scholars Nazrul Islam and S. Aminul Islam have argued that the poem "Ad. Bangladesh 1986," represents the "symbolic reflection" of the situation faced by the intellectuals in Bangladesh.[42] In an article published in a widely read Bangladeshi newspaper, *The Daily Star*, Professor Ashraf Hossain Khondakar (in 2012), a leading poet and influential literary critic, highlighted the fact that "[n]owhere has literature been so much entangled with the political history of a land as it has been in Bangladesh".[43] Khondakar, whilst affirming that the majority of the people of Bangladesh are far from being fundamentalists, also warned against "a hydra-headed monster with multifarious tentacles, the worst of which were religious fanaticism and communal hatred".[44] He concluded his article by stating:

> The writers of Bangladesh have to work under such constraints that there is always a kind of edginess in their literary expressions. Bangladeshi poetry has been overtly political, as the poets had to grapple with such monsters as political autocracy, religious fanaticism and communal hatred. They have been tireless and vociferous in their protest against these ills. Judged from pure aesthetic viewpoints, Bangladeshi literature might appear to be too loudly political, but it could hardly be otherwise. Nowhere has politics been more oppressively real as it has been in Bangladesh. The writers of Bangladesh have never found an ivory tower of aesthetic disengagement to contemplate their navels in total oblivion of the harsh realities around them.[45]

Azad's poetry was, indeed, prone to edginess and overtly political, often bravely sarcastic and full of ambiguity. In one of his much quoted poems, "Time To Stay Quiet",[46] Azad had cautioned his readers that sometimes it is necessary to stay "quiet". This call to stay quiet, however, did not imply a form of passive quiescence verging on political apathy. Azad meant a kind of meditating silence where the "organic intellectual" consciously 'takes time' and ponders the best course of action to be taken in order to free his mind, first, and then awaken the nation. In *The Prison Notebooks* (1971), Antonio Gramsci elaborated a model of an "organic intellectual" capable of liberating himself from

[40] Humayun Azad, "Ad. Bangladesh, 1986", *Bichitra Eid Issue* (Dhaka 1986).
[41] Rashid Askari, *The Wounded Land: Peoples, Politics, Culture, War Crimes Liberation War and Literature in Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: Pathak Shamabesh, 2013), 59.
[42] Nazrul Islam and Aminul S. Islam, "Crisis of Intellectuals in a Peripheral Society: the Case of Bangladesh – 1947 to 1981", in B. K. Jahangir, ed., *Social Science Perspective* (Dhaka: University of Dhaka, 1988), 8.
[43] Ashraf Hossain Khondakar, "Bangladesh's Writers: Battling Terror, Ethnic Conflict and Fundamentalism", *The Daily Star* 2012), *www.archive.thedailystar.net*.
[44] Khondakar speaks also of Azad's case and the reasons behind the assault in February 2004: "Humayun Azad created a lot of dissatisfaction among the fundamentalists by writing *Naari*, a Bengali version of Simone du Beauvoir's *Second Sex*. In response to their protests, the then government of Bangladesh banned the book. But the more immediate cause of the assassination attempt was the publication of a devastating novel named, *Pak Saar Zamin Saad Baad* [*Pāk sār jamin sād bād*], in which he satirized with extreme vehemence the activities of the collaborators of the Pakistani army during the liberation war in 1971". See Khondakar, "Bangladesh's Writers".
[45] Ibid.
[46] Humayun Azad, *Humayun Azad: Selected Poems*, trans. by Hassanal Abdullah (Dhaka: Ramshkar Debnath, 2013).

the mental shackles imposed by society and ideology: "The first step in emancipating oneself from political and social slavery is that of freeing the mind", Gramsci advised.[47] Humayun Azad chose the role of an organic intellectual, deeply involved in the life and politics of his country, whose responsibility towards society was based on a deep appraisal of what constituted the 'rights and wrongs' of the social and political order. Gramsci had elaborated on the figure of such intellectual, stating that "[b]y intellectual, must be meant not only those strata commonly understood by this denomination, but in general the whole social stratum that exercises organizational functions in the broad sense, both in the field of production, and in the cultural one, and in the politico-administrative one".[48] Humayun Azad appeared to be following this Gramscian model of being an active and engaged intellectual who, in order to produce a positive and progressive change in society, must first be aware of the way the oppressive system works. Hence, Azad advocated for the necessity of a time of 'observational dissent', a "time to stay quiet", although with an alertness tinged of irony:

> It's time to stay quiet.
> Silently, we have to observe
> The killer's artwork.
>
> We have to be the mere speechless audience
> In this festival of blood, knives, and madness.
> And we will see friends forever disappearing.
> And we will pass our time hearing
> The footsteps of the organized gangs
> Desperately burying birds' chirpings.
>
> We have learned how to tolerate the shameful
> And bitter act of undressing our daughters
> In the streets of the nation's capital.
> We have learned not to ask
> Question about the murdered bodies of our sons.
>
> We will observe how the killers'
> Graceless, mad, and blind axes
> Torment even the faraway sky.
> Quietly, we will try to imagine
> How cold the edges of those axes are![49]

Nicholas Birns, commenting on the ambiguous message of the poem, suggests that Azad is ironically complaining about the roughness of the vicious attacks of the killers, pointing to their "graceless, mad, and blind axes" as if it could have been more acceptable to be killed in a sort of graceful manner. Birns interprets Azad's poem as denouncing – mockingly, we may add – even the lack of any 'aesthetic quality' in the cruel acts of the murderers. For Birns, Azad is pointing out "that killing is not just a matter of force but of bad art that demands we pretend it is good art".[50] I would contend that Azad is also advocating a powerful act of counter-hegemonic gaze, a critical observation that consists of a conscious observance of the 'bad art' of those traditional intellectuals who, as Gramsci

[47] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. and ed. by Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 97.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Azad, *Humayun Azad*.
[50] Nicholas Birns, "Vigilant Skepticism: The Poetry of Humayun Azad. A Review of: Humayun Azad, Selected Poems", *Shabdaguchha. A Journal of Bilingual Poetry*, 16.3-4 (June 2014).

denounced, are at the service of regimes of violence and oppression. In order to unveil the mechanism of such panoptic systems,[51] where organic intellectuals feel trapped by the awareness of being completely exposed, and thus vulnerable, to the Foucauldian 'discipline and punish' structures of power, Azad advises to keep quiet and "observe the killer's artwork". It is a Sisyphean act of defiance, where the mindful insight conquered by the conscious pariah silently and quietly breaks the univocal gaze typical of the Bentham's Panopticon and courageously gazes back, thus defeating the system and revealing its artwork as tasteless craftwork, as 'bad art'.

This simple act of refusing to be tamed, however, might be enough to shake the oppressive system at its roots, to scare the oppressor and trigger a reaction that could result in the annihilation of the free-spirit that unleashed such fear. "Quietly" – says Azad – "we will try to imagine/How cold the edges of those axes are!" The irreverence of his words and the caustic humor tainted by disillusionment indicate the sensibility of an artist who laments the descent of its beloved Bangladesh from hope into chaos. And yet, refusing to silence the "birds' chirping" despite the "blood, knives and madness", the poet quietly but defiantly observes and denounces the killings, the enforced disappearances, and the "graceless" and "blind axes", 'as if' it were acceptable to die at the hands of murderers who would be 'at least' capable of inflicting beautiful strikes. An aesthetic of death, we might say, that smears the faces of the rough and obtuse killers with shame and contempt. A scorn and a disdain born out of the deep self-realization of the conscious pariah, an absurd hero.

4. Conclusion

On 13 April 2022, various newspapers in Bangladesh and abroad reported that a Dhaka Court, after 18 years, had finally sentenced to death four members of the Islamist militant group JMB for the 'assault to kill' of Professor Humayun Azad.[52] Bangladesh News 24 also reported:

> The case documents reveal that Azad's sudden demise in Munich was due to stress, anxiety and underlying injuries which resulted from the attack. Issued by a Munich morgue, the autopsy report also said Azad's treatment after the attack may not have been able to cure him properly and the fear and anxiety resulting from the attack, which is clinically known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), may have exacerbated his already worsening condition before he finally died.[53]

Whatever the real causes of his sudden and tragic demise, Humayun Azad and his writings have not been forgotten or forsaken by Bangladesh. Especially among the youth, he has been praised as the undaunted hero who taught them to think, not just with intelligence but, as Arendt had advocated, with courage. In a recently published interview to his son Ananya Azad, Asmaul Husna wrote:

[51] In 1785, the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), founder of the doctrine of utilitarianism, began working on his ideas of a model prison system, which has become extremely famous and debated. The 'Panopticon' project was developed by Bentham for almost twenty years and his theory of fictions, according to which non-existent fictitious entities can have real effects and truly impact the lives of people, remains as one of the most thought-provoking philosophical controversies. The Panopticon is not merely, in Michel Foucault's words, "a cruel, ingenious cage" where convicted subjects are made to collaborate in their own subjection and annihilation. It is a terrible machine of surveillance, inhabited by a human ghost, whose power is completely relinquished by the system and crushed to the point of turning him/her into a living ghost. See Jeremy Bentham, *Jeremy Bentham: The Panopticon Writings* (London: Verso, 1995); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: *The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 2012).

[52] Faisal Mahmud, "Bangladesh Sentences Four to Death for Prominent Writer's Murder", *Al Jazeera* (2022), *www.aljazeera.com*; "Four JMB Men to Die for Killing Humayun Azad", *TBS News* (2022), *www.tbsnews.net*.

[53] Dhaka Court Correspondent, "Four Sentenced to Death in Humayun Azad Murder Case", *Bangladesh News 24* (2022). *bdnews24.com*.

> Because of his strong commitment to a search for truth and for fearlessly expressing his convictions through his words, Humayun Azad (1947-2004), a revolutionary writer from Bangladesh was an inspirational figure to many even if he has been treated as disposable by the Bangladeshi establishment.
>
> For many young people in Bangladesh, Azad's charged words and expressions were a crash course in learning how to argue effectively to defend one's convictions. There has also been criticism that he was too rigid in the way he sought dialogue on everything and anything. Both of these things are not new. What is new is the problem facing Bangladesh today that the act of writing is no longer safe as it once was. If you dare to speak with conviction, you may face insurmountable 'dangers'. Humayun Azad chose to accept these hazards and write candidly in the midst of all of these perils.[54]

Humayun Azad's fearless consciousness, his courage and undefeated will even when acting in the midst of dangerous conditions, especially for someone who had been a freedom fighter during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and could not accept the regime of terror and the frustrated anger of the youth in his 'beloved Bengal',[55] makes us read his poetry with fresh eyes and endless admiration. Was he an existential hero, someone who also, like Camus' Sisyphus, "negates the gods and raises rocks"? A hero who, like a warrior, has chosen action after contemplation, for whom that line "observe the killer's artwork" is not a condescension to the power of the oppressors, but rather a scornful look that exposes their mediocrity? His son Ananya says of his father's poetry:

> If one looked at the repertoire of his poems, they speak about history and tradition, offer religious and political critiques, oppose capitalistic exploitation and explore nuances of love and despair. He was candid and wrote with a deep sense of realism that can be called modernist. His poetry went beyond the aesthetics of beauty and offered a critique of the society and the state that he was part of. He sought a deep transformation and stirred radical (if varied) sensibilities among his readers. The rhythm of his poetry resonated well, especially with the young readers seeking their own truths.[56]

Humayun Azad never abdicated his role as a public intellectual and freedom fighter. The 'truths' that the young readers are looking for in his writings – regarding history, politics, poetry and courage to think – are always generously offered in his poems and novels alike. He was a sincere scholar, an honest pursuer of truths, even when this meant irritating sensibilities and facing the terrible consequences of resentful men in an age of anger and radicalizing desperation. One of his most famous and much quoted poems, "I probably will die for a little thing" expresses all the delicate tenderness of a fighter's soul:

> I probably will die for a little thing,
> For a little leaf of grass,
> And for a little drop of dew.

[54] Asmaul Husna, "Humayun Azad and the Contemporary Relevance of His Writings for the Bangladeshi Youth", *Society and Culture in South Asia*, 8.2 (2022), 274.

[55] The national anthem of Bangladesh, *Āmār sōnār bānglā* (*My Golden Bengal*) was originally written by the Bengali writer and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore in 1906 to protest the first partition of the Great Bengal into West and East Bengal by the Governor Lord Curzon. Rabindranath Tagore's poem, aimed at celebrating the beauty of the Bengali land and the unity of its people, beyond ethnicity and religious affiliations, was adopted by the independent Bangladesh as its national anthem in 1972. It remains as a little paradoxical that one of Tagore's most famous poems, originally written to celebrate unity during a colonial period of agitation against the first partition of Bengal (then abolished in 1911) has become a national anthem of only one part of Bengal. It is even sadder that some Islamists today complain about this song as not appropriate for a 'Muslim nation' and campaign to substitute it with a more respectable one. For a detailed study of such controversies, see Caf Dowlah, *The Bangladesh Liberation War, the Sheikh Mujib Regime, and Contemporary Controversies* (London: Lexington Books, 2016).

[56] Husna, "Humayun Azad", 275.

I probably will die for a petal of flower
Suddenly fly away in summer's breeze.
I will die for a bit of rain.[57]

Humayun Azad had deep faith in the people of Bangladesh. His scornful attitude was never directed toward the angry youth. He was concerned about the tragic twist of fate that had seen his country emerge victorious from a war that was always meant to be more than a secession conflict born out of economic and political exploitation. He believed that Bangladesh could get rid of what Hannah Arendt had called "articles of superstition", that is, "Progress and Doom".[58] Like Arendt, he believed that it was necessary to exercise caution in the face of "reckless optimism and reckless despair".[59] He had seen the birth of his country, he had fought for it. But he never agreed to subscribe to the efforts put forward by politicians, on one side, and Islamic extremists, on the other, to force Bangladeshi people into a performance of outrageous and violent conflict for power. He embraced the necessity of "examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight".[60]

Humayun Azad bore this burden as a conscious pariah, refusing to be doomed even when facing the most ferocious attacks to his work and to his own persona. He proved once again that superstition and fate can be surmounted by scorn and the courage to think. Throughout his writings, we can hear him laughing with pleasure, that same pleasure that Arendt defined as "the intensified awareness of reality" which "springs from a passionate openness to the world and love of it".[61] As she had insightfully concluded: "Not even the knowledge that man may be destroyed by the world detracts from the 'tragic pleasure'".[62] This was possibly also the way Humayun Azad lived his life and faced his death: with the 'tragic pleasure' of a Sisyphean hero, who loved his world even when aware he could be destroyed by it. We must keep imagining Azad as 'happy'. This would be the legacy of resistance against those who fuel the 'Age of Anger'.

[57] Humayun Azad, "I Probably Will Die for a Little Thing", trans. by Hassanal Abdullah, *Shabdaguchha. A Journal of Bilingual Poetry*, 39 (January-March 2008).
[58] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), vi. The citation comes from the "Preface" to the 1950's edition of the book, first published in 1948 and reproduced in the following editions. Arendt constantly produced new prefaces to her work, adding comments and updating her introductory remarks.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., vii.
[61] Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 6.
[62] Ibid.