

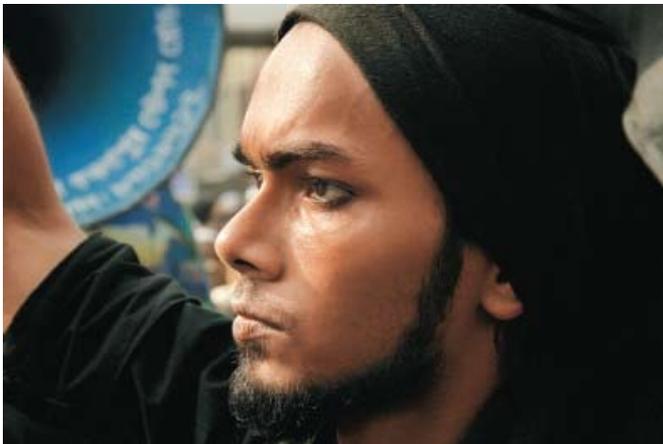
09 / NEW YORK

Naeem Mohaiemen's show, 'I Am Going to Live True Life Or Die Trying'

by Vijay Prashad

The 3 young men draw me in. They cannot be older than twenty-five. Looking straight into the camera, having told the photographer that they want a copy. I imagine the picture pasted onto the bedroom wall of one of them. He looks at it wistfully. It captures the full flavor of their youth, running backwards in time to their childhood in the same *para*, and then forward to their careers in shop keeping, clerking, perhaps the military. They look like decent men, in the full flavor of youth, wanting something that the world has not given them thus far, but not yet disillusioned fully with the capacity of human society.

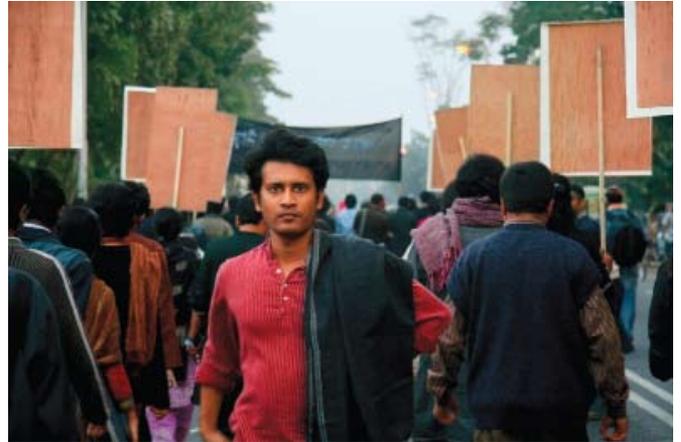
In a previous generation, their banners would have the hammer and sickle or at least a stencil of *Bangabandhu*. Today, they are green, with the crescent and star.



Black Scarf

These are men at the Islamist rally, whose photographs open Naeem Mohaiemen's vivid, colorful, smart show. Mohaiemen's pictures are from one day, which opens with an Islamist rally that spills out of the mosques and onto the streets. They have their own demands, equal parts anti-imperialist and pro-*Quranic*. As the afternoon moves in, and the sun provides the kind of languid afternoon well known in both West Bengal and Bangladesh, the leftists move to the streets, unfurling the

red flag, putting forward their own strong anti-imperialism and their fears about the rise of political Islam. Their faces are more dour, worried that the dynamic favors the Right. The inevitability of History has struck a road bump. In full flight, there is no guarantee that the car's transmission will take road when it comes again. The leftists have the advantage of the evening, as they set fire to an effigy that represents all that they dislike, and as the flames strike for the skies, foreboding or uplifting, only time will tell. A rickshaw puller navigates around it, the inconveniences to his long day.



Facing Camera

There are no women centrally in the pictures. At the leftist rally, they are on the margins of the frame, which is not to say that they are at the margins of the rally. Mohaiemen says that the classical way to photograph these rallies is to show how the Islamist rally is all male, whereas the leftist rally has women at the center of things. He wanted to avoid this simple juxtaposition. I agree that the fact that women are present at the leftist rally should not be sufficient as a critical (even dismissive) gesture toward the Islamists. But, on the other hands, it is a cardinal distinction between the ideology of the Right and the Left that one is more socially suffocating than the other. I want to will Mohaiemen's frame to shift, to center on one of the women at the leftist rally, I want to see her speak, or to see her stand with her friends from her *para*, telling us with their body language what they want for the world.

('I Am Going to Live True Life Or Die Trying' was curated by DJ Spooky at Cue Art Foundation, New York City.)



Police No English



After Fire