Challenging the Gaze

The study of a Socially Conscious Photographic Initiative based in Dhaka, Bangladesh

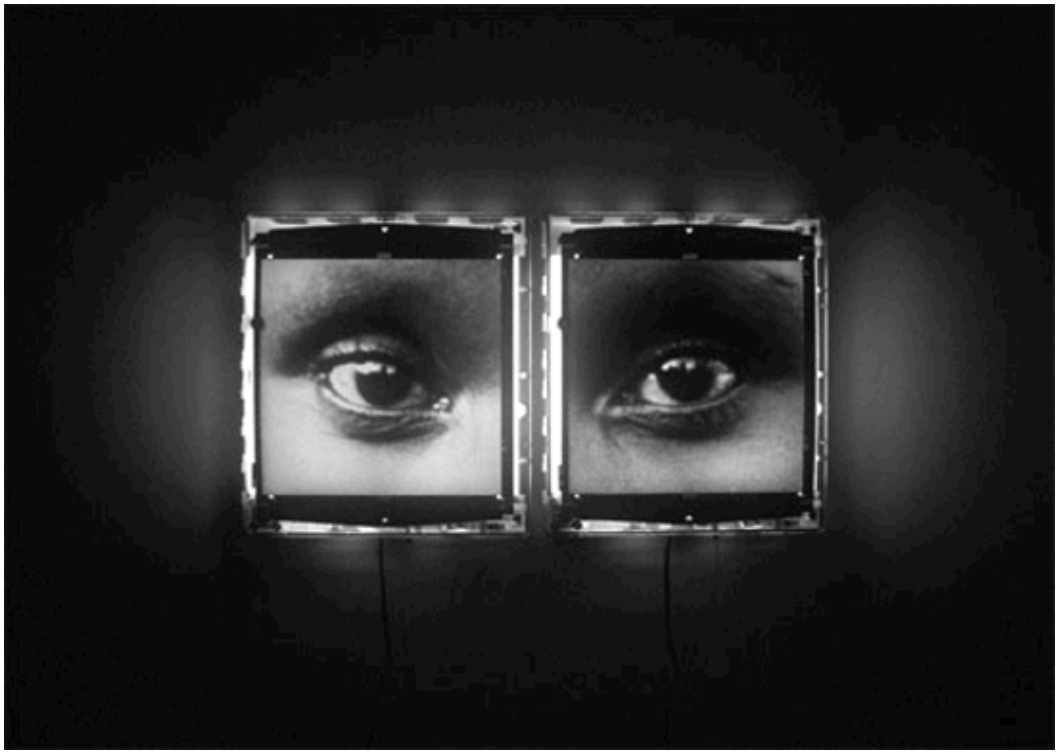

Photo: Alfredo Jaar

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The front-page photograph is taken by Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar and is called ‘the eyes of Guete Emerita’ (los ojos de Guete Emerita). It is printed with the photographer’s permission.

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Map over Bangladesh

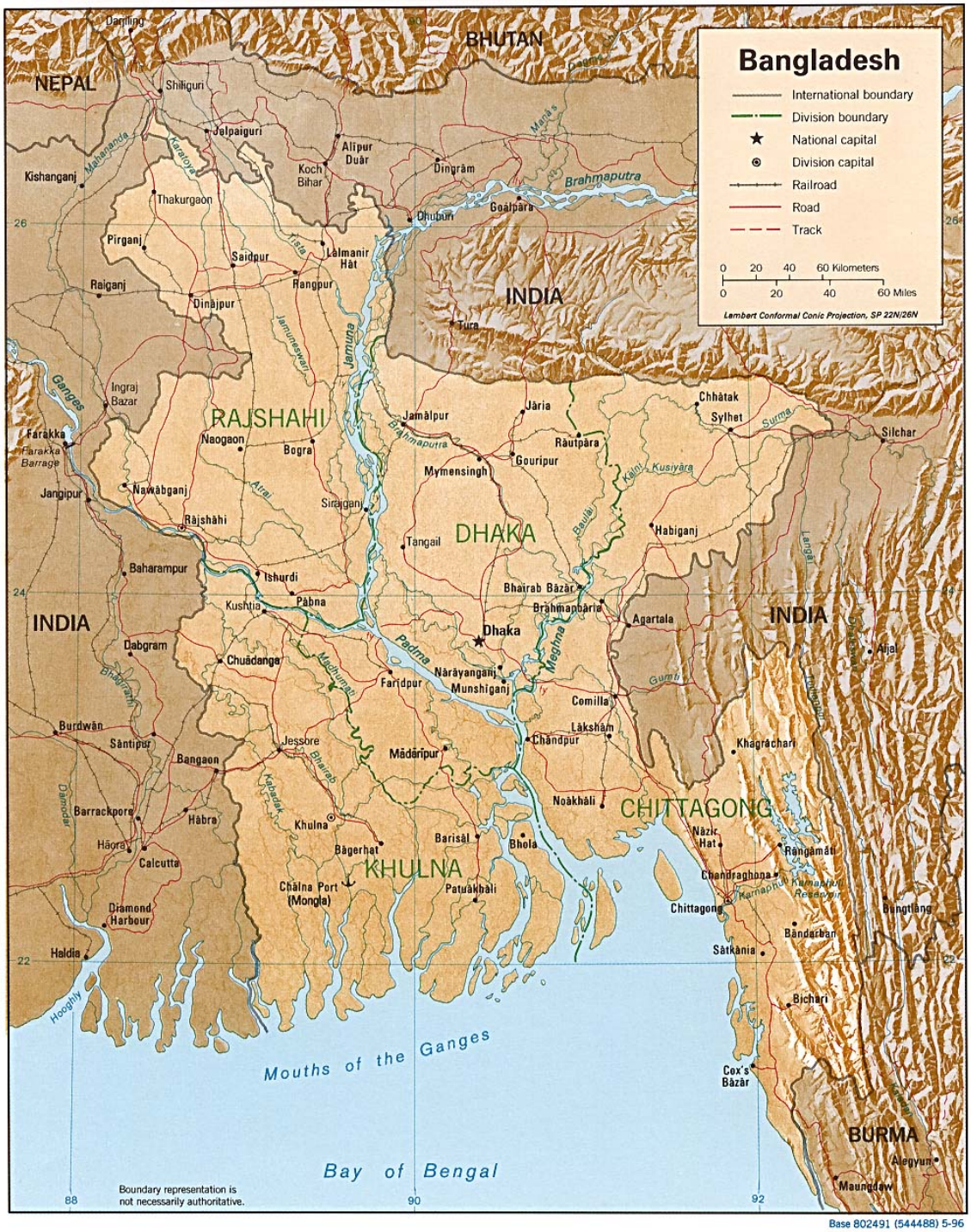

Figure 1: Map over Bangladesh

Prologue

A few years back my elder sister and I were chatting over coffee in the kitchen. Her youngest son who was around eight years old at the time had been watching television in the room next-door. He came into the kitchen and said that he wanted to raise money again for the children in Africa. (Some time back he had held a charity bazaar in the neighbourhood where they live). And, he added, "We have to send matches too". The Africans he had seen on TV apparently had difficulties lighting a fire.

I do not know what exactly that it was he had seen, I would guess a charity work campaign or something on the news. There was presumably some larger picture, which my nephew had picked up only fractions of. As charming as it is that he genuinely wanted to help (and let there be no doubt that I love my nephew to bits and pieces) I was left wandering how an eight year old could come to believe that he has the solutions to Africa's problems. It left me pondering on the question of how visual images have made, and continue to make categories – of us and them, givers and receivers, those in need and those with resources and neat solutions so self-evident, even for children.

Map over Dhaka

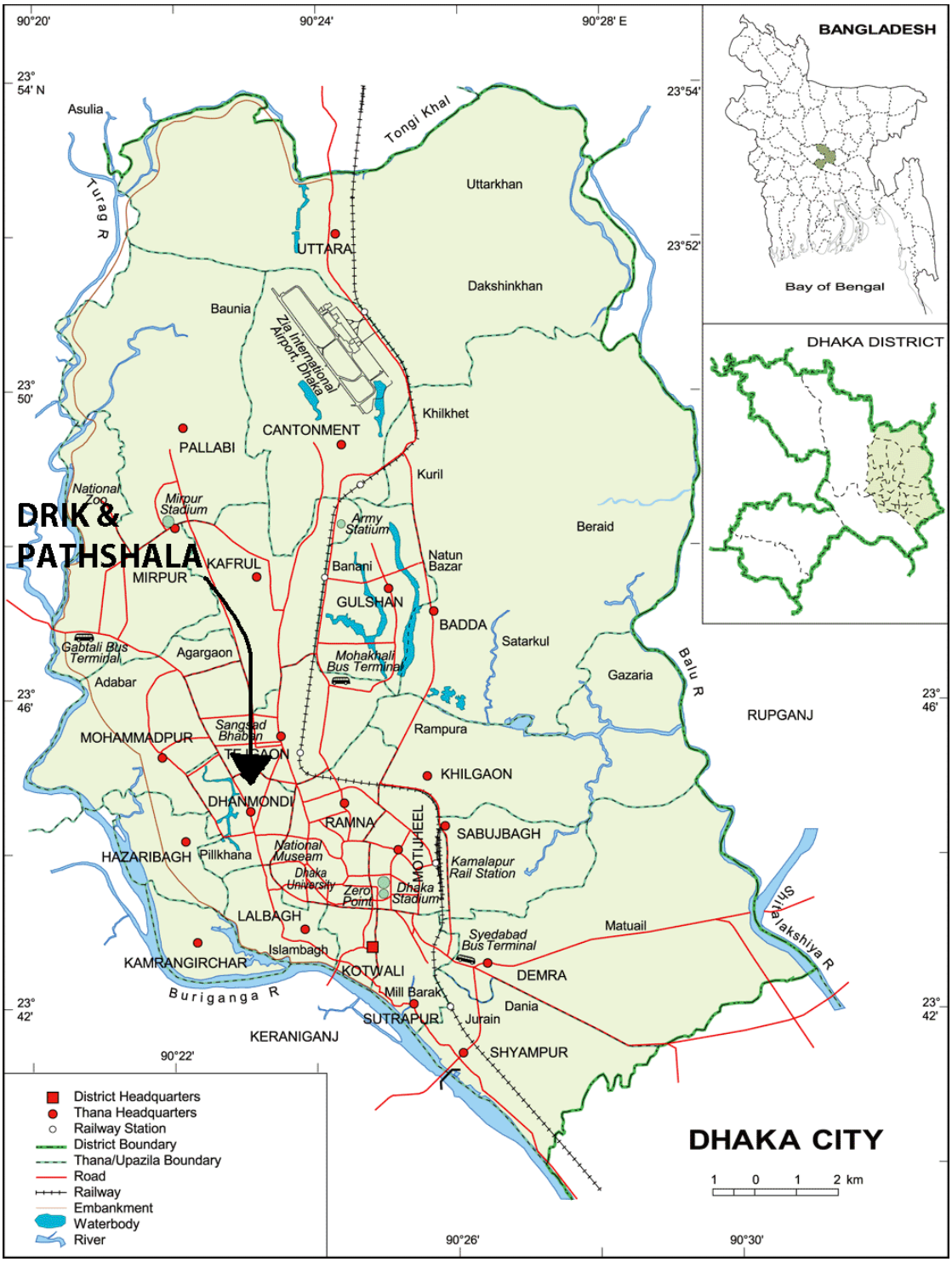

Figure 2 : Map over Dhaka

1

Introduction

Figure 3: Drik's entrance gates.

Vignette; A student presentation at Drik

Students and teachers are sitting on the floor in Drik's largest gallery. It is the third week of the workshop between students from Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Australia and Pathshala Institute of Photography, and the first day of the student presentation. We have just returned from a break with tea *(cha)* and sweets *(mishti)*, and the digital presentation is about to continue. Our shoes and sandals are left outside the door. The participants are mainly photography teachers and students, but also some ex Pathshala students, who are curious to see the work or just there to meet old friends. The atmosphere is cheerful and relaxed. The teacher who has the lead role in the presentation is wearing a cowboy style hat and is in a good mood. He calls up the students one at the time to introduce their work, projected onto a large screen on the back wall. Each of the students talk about their work, and some have included text to go along with their images. One of the Australian students begins by presenting his

work on ship breaking.[1] He talks about the hazardous working conditions and the extremely low pay the steel workers employed in the ship breaking business receive. A Slovakian girl from Cowan University presents her work on the Bangladeshi fashion industry, a story that is applauded and positively commented upon for its originality of subject matter. One of the Bangladeshi students presents his work, which is about the influence globalisation has on children, how childhood has been made into a commodity. Some of the Bangladeshi students give their presentation in Bangla and are assisted by one of the teachers with translation. Each presentation is followed by comments from the audience. Some of the photographic series lead into lively discussions, about ethics and politics of representation, subject matters and technical issues. A critique raised several times, against local and foreign students alike is how important it is that you research your story well. The whole session is filmed by members of Drik's audio visual crew.

Half way through the session the room is silenced. Sir Shahidul Alam, the founder of Drik and principal at Pathshala has stepped into the room, and is standing at the back. He has been away on one of his travels, and the Australian students are eager to meet him. One of the teachers calls him to the front. Shahidul has a thick beard and a friendly face. He is wearing a Bangladeshi shirt *(fatua)*, and has a bumbag around his waist. He is known for his inspiring speeches, and does not disappoint his audience today. He tells the attentive group of students that as photographers we are in a privileged position where we can actually really influence things. "To not take that responsibility seriously is a waste of profession". There is a cluster of interest towards certain topics that are photographed again and again, he says, and comments on the fact that there is always someone who wants to do their story on ship breaking during the international workshops. While he acknowledges that the story is important, and needs to be retold until we see some change, he tells the students to ask themselves the question "what am I doing in my own work to take it beyond what has already been done?" He encourages them to venture beyond the ordinary, to reflect, consider and question, and for each and every one to set out to change the world a little bit.

Main focus

This thesis is based on fieldwork in the photographic community surrounding Drik, a media initiative based in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. I have carried out my research among local photographers, in different ways affiliated to the agency Drik, and its educational

[1] Ship breaking involves the breaking of ships for scrap recycling. Today, most ship breaking yards are located in 'developing' countries due to low costs and few environmental regulations. The ship breaking yard in Chittagong; at the South Eastern shore of Bangladesh, is one of the largest in the world. It is known for hazardous working conditions with great health risks for the workers. It is also a "popular" destination for photographers.

wing Pathshala South Asian Institute of Photography. According to the Drik website the photographers share a common vision; "one that sees the majority world, not as fodder for disaster reporting, but as a vibrant source of human energy and a challenge to an exploitative global economic system" (Drik 1).[2] Set up by Shahidul Alam in 1989, Drik serves as a support network to local photographers and a bridge to make Western image markets accessible to Bangladeshi photographers. At the centre of Drik's vision lies the ambition to contest stereotypical representations from Bangladesh, as well as to challenge local hierarchies in a country that is deeply divided socially.

To what extent is it possible to carry out this vision in practice? What are the constraints the Dhaka based photographers need to battle with, and take into consideration in their photographic practices? In which ways do financial restrictions within the photographic field influence the ambition to break with stereotypical representations? The main focus in this thesis is on the real life interplay between ambitions and restrictions. More specifically, it centres on the tension between the photograph, on the one hand as a political tool and potential site for 'resistance', on the other hand as a commodity intertwined with the economic sphere. The photographic medium, as well as the photographic agency in Dhaka, lingers ambiguously between these outer poles. Can social and commercial interests correlate, and even reinforce one another, or do the two become a field of friction? And to what extent is it possible to challenge stereotypical representations through photographic means? "The problem of the opposition", as the Norwegian anthropologist Tord Larsen (1999:106) has expressed it, is how to 'resist' the dominant order without being captured by the language of their opponent. On the one hand, Drik and photographers affiliated to the agency have developed strategies to challenge external categorization and negative stereotyping, and thus, prevent being caught in the 'trap' Larsen warns against. On the other hand, the market forces and competitive logics that to a large extent governs the photographic field, and Drik being directed principally towards Western markets, pull many photographers in the opposite direction. I will argue that while there is a potential for self representation in the photograph, it can seem that there are limitations to the photograph's abilities to free itself entirely from existing representations. Among a number of underlying tensions, and potential research questions that could have been asked, I have chosen to centre my thesis on the daily tensions these two opposing forces cause for the agency and affiliated photographers alike. I argue that photographers are enforced to accept a certain amount of 'Orientalist' depictions, in order to

[2] The term 'Majority World' will be explained shortly.

create a space for alternative visions. Further, some of the photographs I discuss raise questions about the photographic medium itself.

Below I will provide a visual image of the photographic agency Drik and its educational wing Pathshala; the two main sites where my research took place.

Introducing Drik

The "Drik community" begins long before one enters the large gates and the main entrance to the buildings where the agency is situated. Already when I cross the street where Road 27 meets 15 A in Dhanmondi, making my way through a mixture of rickshaw bicycles and ringing bells, cars and honking, and people rushing from here to there in the clogged up traffic, I start recognizing familiar faces. Some of the staff working at Drik are standing by one of the many tea stalls on the street corner having a break, while others are setting off to or retuning from an assignment, with the camera bag around their shoulder. The entrance gates to Drik are decorated with large orange and yellow lanterns, and next to the gate a sign reads "Photographer Shahidul Alam". On the inside there is a little courtyard where motorcycles are parked on the side, occasionally also a car or two. There is always a guard on the inside of the gate by a wooden desk next to the entrance, where the permanent staff has to sign in and out in a book placed on the table. On the front of the building, there is a large poster that depicts a man, gazing into the mountain landscape he is leaving behind from the back of a boat. The poster is from the international photography festival *Chobi Mela* a few years back, when the theme was boundaries. Drik arranges the renowned photography festival approximately every second year.[3] The name of the festival is printed in Bengali as well as English. The residential area Dhanmondi where Drik is based used to be an upper-class neighbourhood. It is still considered a relatively posh neighbourhood, but is today home to a large number of Dhaka's growing middle class citizens.[4]

Shahidul Alam is the mastermind behind Drik. He funded the agency in 1989 in his old family home when he was in his early thirties, soon after he had returned from London with a doctoral (D.phil) degree in chemistry. In the agency's early days only three people were involved, the facilities were improvised and the small business survived by selling postcards from door to door. More than 20 years later, the agency fills up the entire building, and employs 46 people including guards and drivers. In addition, a number of photographers sell images through the picture library at Drik. The agency has seven departments in total, and

[3] *Chobi Mela* literally means Photo Festival. The previous years themes have been Differences (2000), Exclusion (2002) Resistance (2004) Boundaries (2006) Freedom (2009) and Dreams (2011).

[4] I derive the concept of 'class' from Bourdieu (1995:39-40). His perspective implies that class categories are fictitious theoretical distinctions, that do not exist in and of themselves. Class is further related to the accumulation of economic, social and cultural capital.

provides a range of media services, both within Bangladesh and internationally. Visitors, photographers and clients, as well as photography students, find their way to Drik and Dhaka from wide and afar, and thus, the "community" stretches way beyond its most apparent physicality.

When you enter the building, most commonly referred to as Drik galleries, the first person you meet is the busy, but always smiling Munna in the front office. Behind the many doors inside, photographs and films are uploaded and edited, retouched, discussed and reconsidered. Books and publications are printed; images are framed and nailed to the walls in the gallery spaces where exhibitions are hosted. There is always someone coming, leaving, or rushing from one room to another. On the ground floor there are several offices, as well as an audiovisual section and an Internet communications and technology department. There are also some areas suitable for having a break or read newspapers, and a presentation room, used for various purposes. The photographic studio is located in a room between the ground- and the first floor. I was introduced to the studio and its staff early in the first week of my stay, because I had to get my picture taken to register for a mobile subscription. I was brought through the curtains dividing the computer space and the photographic studio by one of the photographers, and asked to sit down on a chair in the middle of the room. I remember feeling slightly uneasy about the two, to me at that time unfamiliar photographers observing me from a distance, talking to each other in a language that I was unable to understand. The camera was placed on a tripod and the settings adjusted. I smiled, and the camera clicked. The day after I could pick up a small envelope with four passport-sized photographs of myself, looking shyly at the world I was just about to enter. The studio photographers, as I later found out, are involved in much more than studio work. In addition to studio portraiture and documentary projects, assignments for Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) form a substantial part of their workload.

The studio is connected to the first floor through a staircase at the back. The Drik Picture Library has its office here, consisting of Drik News and the Drik Picture Agency, including the online Majorityworld portal. The term "Majority World" was suggested by Shahidul Alam in the early nineties, as a replacement to arbitrary labelling of "third world", "development countries" or "least developed countries" (LDCs), used as collective terms to define the "global south", which is a term with its own implications. Shahidul argues that these terms carry negative connotations, and serve to represent financially poor communities as 'icons of poverty'. The term Majority World seeks to escape such negative connotations by defining the community "in terms of what it is, rather than what it lacks" (Alam 2010). The online image portal carries Majorityworld as its name, and seeks to provide photographers from underprivileged countries with an access to global image markets, and make clients

aware of the talent that exists locally within these countries.[5] Most of the library staff spends the main bulk of their working time in the office. This does not apply to the Drik News photographers, however, who set off with their cameras to shoot when something requires the attention of a photojournalist. They later return to their computers to edit the material and post it on the Drik News website. Meanwhile, the library staff select, manage and quality-control the stock of images available on the Majorityworld portal, and meet with Bangladeshi photographers interested in selling their images through Drik.

Next to the picture library is a gallery used for internal as well as external exhibitions. There is also a small library with photography books and publications, the general manager's office, a multimedia department, a printing unit and an open space where celebrations and speeches occasionally take place, and cake is served at staff's birthdays. Continuing up to the second floor, you will find the second and largest gallery, as well as a rooftop terrace, overlooking the gate and the road underneath. People come up here for a small break; some make their morning- or afternoon prayers, and the space is often turned in to a semi-indoor conference room during larger arrangements, or when several exhibitions are taking place at once. The agency as a whole is continuously evolving, and during the time I was there, solutions on how best to work within that space were rethought and altered several times, which illustrates the temporal practicality of a fieldwork such as mine.

A short walk away from Drik along the lakeside walkway, you reach an area called Panthapath, where Pathshala, the institute of Photography is situated. The school offers a three years bachelor course, one or two years diploma courses, as well as shorter introductory programs in photography. Approximately 20 photojournalists graduate from Pathshala every year. The school is renowned for providing its students with the opportunity to attend workshops with famous photographers from all over the world, and be part of collaborative programs with students and staff from abroad, as well as its vibrant and inspiring learning environment. Pathshala is equipped with photographic studios, teaching spaces and darkrooms; both traditional and digital ones. There is a large mango tree at the centre of the schoolyard, its branches spread over the rooftop terrace above. Here there is a space for film screenings, and in the yard exhibitions and training take place now and then. The courtyard is also used for playing cricket, and when workshops are taking place lunch is served in small cardboard boxes, picked up from a nearby restaurant by the school's assistant Arif. Many discussions take place under the mango tree between classes and during tea breaks, as well as in the smoking area at the back of the building.

[5] It could be argued that the term Majority World is as imprecise as the terms it intends to replace, as the counties the term includes and excludes is only arbitrarily defined. It is nevertheless an important step in the ideological struggle Drik carries out to rename, and thus, symbolically reclaim that space previously defined principally from outside.

Although not all my research took place within these walls, almost all the people whose experiences I include in my research are affiliated to Drik or Pathshala in one way or the other. Some have moved on to other jobs, but for many their ties to the Drik community remain strong. It makes sense therefore, to think of Drik as a *junction* in a larger photographic field, a point I will return to in chapter three, where Drik and Pathshala will be further narrated. I have yet to introduce the people who walk in and out of the doors at Drik and Pathshala, and without them the buildings appear as empty vessels. First however, I will provide a chapter outline for this thesis and mark my own demarcations.

Chapter outline

In chapter two I will situate my thesis theoretically, describing Drik's reason for being as well as my own motivation to study its operations in practice. I begin by outlining Edward Said's (1979) critique of Orientalism, and its contributions to anthropology and visual studies alike, as well as more recent contributions to questions regarding the politics of representations. I then move on to explore the photograph as a medium, where Roland Barthes (1984, 1999) offer valuable insights, before I ask whether a photographic Orientalism can be identified today. Here, Marianne Gullestad's (2007) findings from her study of missionary photographs provide parallels to my own. Finally I look at photographs from a commodity perspective and photography as a social field, where I have found Igor Kopytoff (1986) and Pierre Bourdieu (1998; Benson and Neveu 2005) respectively analytically useful. Finally I indicate a curious parallel to Michael Taussig's (1993) analysis of mimetic practices.

In chapter three I narrate the political and philosophical underpinnings of Drik, and locate the agency geographically, historically and socially. I then outline some of the agency's core activities. I also identify what type of organization Drik is including its financial constitution, which sets the stage for the subsequent chapters. Finally I discuss the methodological implications and ethical considerations behind this thesis.

In chapter four I describe some ways in which Drik and affiliated photographers work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), a part of the survival strategy for Drik as it is for many photographers who work independently in Dhaka. A central theme here will be how commercial and social interests correlate at Drik, sometimes smoothly, other times causing tensions. The accounts presented in this chapter show the ways that these tensions are expressed and dealt with at Drik and in the surrounding community, and also raise questions regarding the photographic medium itself.

In chapter five I deal with questions of representation in a broad sense. I present material where photographers have attempted to challenge stereotypical representations related to Islam, and show that there is a risk of "falling back" on stereotypical representations. Since photography is a medium without an agenda of its own, a representational struggle is largely about placing images in the right textual context, as I will illustrate here. Market forces and competition for assignments and recognition are key themes to be discussed in this chapter.

The theoretical perspectives that lay the groundwork for this thesis will be presented in the subsequent chapter. I have found it necessary to explore some of these rather thoroughly, in order to understand the key questions I have set out to invest. Consequently, this thesis is slightly more theoretically grounded than what is average for a masters thesis. Because of the complexity of the topic I am dealing with, other related and equally interesting topics have been marginalised. I have had to sideline a class and gender analysis, although both factors are essential backdrops in the South Asian context. In the chapter where I locate the field, I will position Drik and affiliated photographers within the complex social reality of Dhaka and explain some of the ways in which class politics take shape. Although not explored in full, these underlying dynamics are fundamental to the understanding of Drik and of relevance throughout the thesis. With more time and space, I would certainly have developed this part of the analysis further. A thorough case study of the Drik Picture Library was carried out by anthropologist Lotte Hoek in 2001, who was a Masters student at the time. Her thesis was finalised in 2003, and includes a careful class analysis. In the years that have passed since her study took place, Drik has grown substantially and undergone significant changes. Although Hoek's thesis could have allowed for a through analysis of continuities and changes at Drik, I have not been able to cover her research findings here because of the time- and space constraints to this study. However, I have referred to Hoek a few places where her arguments run parallel to my own contention.

Further, I was compelled to selectively focus on pockets within Drik during my time of research. Out of the seven departments in total, I primarily focused on activities talking place within the Drik Photography Agency and the studio department at Drik, as well as at the school, Pathshala. I have to a lesser extend been attentive to the Drik News' department, and I have largely ignored the activities taking place at the Internet and Communications, Print Productions and Audio-Visual Department. I do not in any way demean the importance of works taking place within these sections of Drik, but have had to be selective in my focus.

2

From Said to mimesis

What kind of analytical resources will prove useful to analyse the underlying tensions to Drik's work? In the first part of this theoretical chapter I will sketch a general outline of Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism* (1979), in which he critiqued Western appropriations of 'the other'. The book led to a turning point in Anthropology and has been influential in a number of disciplines, including visual studies. It can further be said to have sparked off postcolonial theory, in which this study is situated. I then attempt to provide a revision of Said's argument in the light of some critical remarks, such as his appropriation of Foucault's notion knowledge and power, before I apply his argument to a more contemporary South Asian context. As an agency with representational asymmetries and misrepresentations at the core of their motivation, this is an essential backdrop to the study of Drik. In the second part of the theoretical introduction I will explore the photograph as a medium, and in this respect take a detour into semiotics, fundamental to make sense of the strategic practices used by the agency and photographers in their representational struggle. I will then bring these two parts together and look at the relevance a critique of Orientalism can be said to have in studies of photographic representations today. This complex reality can only be understood in relation to market dynamics as a central global driving force, which hugely influence photographers' practices in Dhaka as it does elsewhere.

Orientalism and the politics of representation

While being aware of the problematic nature of concepts such as the "West", the "South" and "developing countries", I have nevertheless found it hard to abandon these terms altogether, because they characterize Drik's ideology and history to such an extent. Also, one might well find that there are few words to replace them. The concept "Majority World" is a rare exception. The difficulty of escaping such arbitrary, generalizing and negatively biased terms was shared by many of the photographers I met in Dhaka. Interlocutors often referred to Bangladesh as a developing-, or Third World country, some of them adding "we call it the

Majority World". Despite of my uneasiness with these terms, I will avoid repeating myself endlessly by keeping them in brackets throughout the thesis. For all the trouble caused by the limitations of language, and difficulties of avoiding problematic words, they are not least constant reminders that language is politically embedded.

For the anthropological community and Drik alike, the awareness of the political nature of language is indebted to the work of Edward Said. The Palestinian-American literature- and language scholar is the author of *Orientalism* (Said 1979 [1978]), which came to represent a milestone in academia and beyond. In his textual analysis Said identifies and seeks to deconstruct an Orientalist discourse, which he sees as pervasive in academic writings, travelogues, political reports and popular culture. He applies a Foucauldian notion of knowledge and power, and argues that Westerners (his focus is upon French, British and later North American narratives) have created an imaginary image of 'Orientals' as their own complementary opposite, which was given strength and authority through an era of colonialism and imperialism. Said argues that Orientalism must be understood as a slow process of Western appropriations of foreign lands, stretching from the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean in the 'near' (or 'Islamic') Orient of Egypt, Syria and Arabia, to the 'far' (or 'Asiatic') Orient of Persia, India, Malaysia and China in the East (Said 1979:41). Whether textual or visual, Said saw Western portrayals of 'the Orient' as pervasive of romanticized, sexualized and exotic beings, primitive and barbaric in their nature. The discourse of Orientalism exists in a number of different forms, often lingering ambiguously between a mysterious, yet at the same time threatening Orient (Said 1979:26). One example is the myth about the Oriental harem, where the women were portrayed as exotic, sensual and seducing, and at the same time as 'victims' subordinate to men. The Orientalist narrative had an Islamic component as well. Not only did depictions of the Oriental Others help to consolidate an image of the West as civilized and morally superior, but the Orientalist discourse in addition worked in favour of Western imperialistic interests and served to justify the need for Occidental intervention. Representations commonly conveyed a self-congratulatory attitude by Europeans, complemented by hostility expressed towards 'Others', Said posits (1979:325).

The question of representation stands at the core of Said's critique of Orientalism. He firmly rejects the idea that research can be seen as value-neutral, and insists that politics and research must be seen as intrinsically inter-woven. Said questions the representational power dynamics and argues that ultimately, Orientalism says more about Westerners themselves than the 'orientals' they claim to represent (Said 1979:23). Said's analysis of the Orientalist discourse did not only receive much positive attention, but also a substantial amount of

critique. However, it is beyond doubt that it inspired new directions within academia, and can be said to have sparked off what came to be known as postcolonial theory (Fox 2004). *Orientalism* formed part of the larger critical conjuncture that led to a "reflexive turn" in anthropology in the 1980s (Marcus and Fischer 1999 et al). In this period the power relations behind the production of ethnographic material were brought to sharp attention, which led to an increased self-consciousness regarding questions of representation in the discipline. In this sense *Orientalism* had a transformative function. Said's critique has further become particularly important in the South Asian context, as well as in media- and photography related research.

Said has been criticised for his selective choice of historical facts in his analysis and for making crude exaggerations to suit his argument. Further, he has been accused of overlooking cross-cultural linkages and drawing too rigid lines between "the occident" and "the orient". Thus, it has been argued that the author has constructed a timeless and essentialised caricature of Europe, just as stereotypical in nature as that which he critiques upon (Fox 2004). Yet it should also be mentioned that he listed some of these shortcomings himself, and that these critical points did not undermine Said's main argument. For the founder of Drik and the representational struggle in Dhaka, Said's critique of Orientalism is as relevant today as it was in the 1970s.

Power, agency, and Orientalism revised

Much postcolonial theory, including Said's critique of Orientalism builds on discursive theory, as developed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (2002 [1969]). Foucault investigates the relation between language, structure and agency and argues that knowledge is constructed through *discourses*. Discourse in the Foucauldian sense can be described as "practices that systematically form the subjects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972:49 in Mills 2004:15). As professor in Cultural Studies Sara Mills posits, Foucault tried to come to terms with the various practices that can be summarized under the term 'power' (Mills 2004:17). Power, the way Foucault sees it, is exercised through language, including visual language, and thus, becomes an integrated part of 'reality' as we know it; it is made to seem invisible. However, power is not only seen as repressive, but rather as a productive force. As the scholar Jenny Pinkus has described it:

> Foucault's focus is upon questions of how some discourses have shaped and created meaning systems that have gained the status and currency of 'truth', and dominate

> how we define and organize both ourselves and our social world, whilst other alternative discourses are marginalized and subjugated, yet potentially 'offer' sites where hegemonic practices can be contested, challenged and 'resisted' (Pinkus 1996, online source).

A central point for Foucault is that discourses not only are used in order to dominate others, but simultaneously offer room for creativity and 'resistance'. To exemplify that discourses carry the potential for innovation and transformation, Foucault asserts in *The History of Sexuality* (1976) that the pedantic sexual moral of the Victorian era in Britain in the nineteenth century in fact served to bring about the hippie movement in the 1960s (in Meyer 2010:84-85). He claims that the repression of sexuality led to an *explosion* of discourses whereby former taboos where inverted into a youth movement of sexual liberation. When Said appropriated the concept of discourse in *Orientalism*, he did not fully take into account that power and 'resistance' in Foucault's view are inseparable, as art historian Siri Meyer has pointed out (Meyer 2010: 126-28). She argues that Foucault's conceptualization of power is complex, and cannot be reduced to a binary opposition between subordinator and subordinated.

French philosopher Michel Pêcheux (in Mills 2004:12) adds that ideological struggles lie at the heart of discourse, and points out that for individuals less privileged within the class system discourses are harder to access and contest. This class dimension is not taken into account by Foucault, but is manifest in my own field of study. In a similar vein, in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament* Breckenridge and Van der Veer (1993) argue that 'the colonial discourse entry to representational politics' can be deluding, because it overlooks other non-colonial and pre-colonial forms of difference (Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993:10-11). The authors ascribe agency both to colonizers and colonized, as well as the complex links between them when they apply the Orientalism critique to a contemporary Indian context. They posit that for Indians and outsiders alike, it is still extremely difficult to think about India freed from Orientalist discourses and categories (Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993:2). However, they emphasise that there are multiple levels of power relations and voices, and that Orientalist discourses have been created in interaction with local indigenous ones. In India, they argue, there was a linkage between the Orientalist scholarship and the dominant Brahmin upper caste society, while internal divisions within the Indian society again were solidified through the colonial encounter. Further, they posit that the politics of difference that marked the colonial era linger on in many postcolonial nations, taking the shape as a form of "Orientalism without colonialism". This paradox, they argue, lies at the

heart of the postcolonial predicament (Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993:10-11). In other words Breckenridge and Van der Veer argue for a continued relevance of the Orientalist critique, but posit that it is time to look beyond its limited scope. Orientalist discourses must be seen in relation to complex interconnections, multiple levels of power relations and voices. At least in the South Asian context Orientalist discourses cannot be understood regardless of local class relations. With these delimitations in mind, I situate my own work within a postcolonial analytical framework, where precisely the tensions described by Breckenridge and Van der Veer are visibly manifested.

It should be clarified, however, that the concept of 'resistance' is problematic theoretically. Brown (1996) argues that anthropologists' "obsession" with resistance can obscure other interesting analytical possibilities, and come in the way of more complex understandings. He shares anthropologist Sherry Ortner's concern that overemphasis on domination and conflict may conceal other aspects of social life (Ortner 1984:157 in Brown 1996:730-31). Brown emphasizes that the use of the concept should be limited to where it is really applicable, so that it does not wear out and loose its meaning (1996:730-31). It is important to recognize that "resistors are doing more than simply opposing domination, more than simply producing a mere re-'action'; they have their own politics" (Ortner 1995:176-77 in Brown 1996:731). Thus, one should be careful not to be blinded by an overemphasis on domination, sub-ordination and resistance.

Both Orientalist and counter Orientalist forces (and all the shades of grey in-between) are evident in the field where I have done my fieldwork. In this thesis I will look closer at the power relations at play in the field, which create substantial tensions in the project of photographic resistance. I believe it is important to study how power structures are managed by real people, who are working towards changing global narratives and simultaneously to assure their own, and their families' economic well-being. Since the struggle over perspective in this context takes the shape of photographs, I will introduce the photographic medium below, before I move on to look at photographs from a commodity perspective, thus laying the grounds for an analysis of the economic constraints to the project in Dhaka. In the final section I will ask whether a 'photographic Orientalism', or in other words if a continuity to Said's critique of Orientalism, can be identified in contemporary times.[6]

[6] Convinced that I had found the expression 'Photographic Orientalism' in Marianne Gullestad's monograph *Picturing Pity* (2007) I searched the volume relentlessly. I have been unable to find the expression, in Gullestad's texts and elsewhere, although 'Orientalist Photography' is a much used term. It is nevertheless Gullestad who has inspired me to apply the expression in this context, even if it possibly originated elsewhere.

Reality and Reality represented

What is a photograph? According to Oxford English dictionary a photograph is a picture made by a camera, in which an image is focused on to light-sensitive material and then made visible and permanent by chemical treatment, or alternatively stored digitally. But photographic imagery is much more than mechanical production. In semiotic terms a photograph is a representation of what has been photographed, which it has in common with all visual media. What separates the photographic medium is its ability to freeze a moment in time and "reproduce" it with an extreme detail of shadow and light, which results in a realism that cannot be matched by any other medium. The North American author and literary theorist Susan Sontag is well known within the photographic world. She has pointed out that a photograph's ability to arrest a moment in time is what makes it so powerful, because it allows the viewer to linger upon it for as long as one would like (Sontag 1978:81 in Edwards 1992:7). Ironically, its fixedness is at the same time part of what makes the photograph stand in a contradictory relationship to 'reality'; since a photograph in its nature can never be anything but a product of the past (Edwards 1992:7). The anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards further notes that the photograph's capacity to "appropriate and de-contextualize time and space and those who exist within it" and expose its content for historical scrutiny, "tempts the viewer to allow the specific to stand for generalities, becoming a symbol of wider truths, at the risk of stereotyping and misrepresentation" . For the renowned French literary critic Roland Barthes (1984) the photograph's temporal and spatial dislocation is part of the paradoxical nature of the photograph; what he calls its *real unreality*;

> Its unreality is that of the *here-now*, for the photograph is never experienced as an illusion […] Its reality is that of the *having been there*, for in every photograph there is always the stupefying evidence of this is how it was, giving us, by a precious miracle, a reality from which we are sheltered (Barthes 1984:44).

For Barthes, the paradox of the photograph is that it is a perfect analogy to reality; yet it is not, and cannot be 'real'. Further, he argues that the photographic trick is that the photograph *appears* to be an unmediated version of reality, to be 'natural', rather than socially and historically constructed, which it inevitably always will be. In Barthes' view the photographic medium conceals the message behind an 'objectifying mask' (Barthes 1984:21). To fully make sense of Barthes arguments, we need to make a brief detour into semiotics, which has been influential to much of his work. This will also enable me to introduce some of the concepts that, despite being somewhat out of fashion in anthropological theory today, provide

some useful analytical tools for understanding the way which Drik photographers relate to the photographs they produce.

Semiotics is a theory of the construction of meaning, which attempts to reveal the unconscious and conventional meanings embedded in all forms of communication (Heradstveit and Bjørgo 1992).[7] The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure is considered one of the founders of linguistic semiotics, which is a science that seeks to understand the sign and its role in social life. Semiotics is preoccupied with the interrelation between the expression-side and the content-side of the sign, conceptualized as the *signifier* and the *signified*, developed by the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev. The *signifier* refers to the physical expression of the sign, while the *signified* refer to the mental idea that the expression points back at (Heradstveit and Bjørgo 1992:24). Several have argued (for example Bal and Bryson 1991, Hodge and Kress 1988 in Rose 2001:77-78), and I tend to agree, that Saussure's conception of signs is rather static, because it does not consider the different modes signification at work takes. American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce's conception of signs and meaning construction provides a more useful approach. Pierce suggests three types of signs; *icon* based on resemblance, *index* based on causality (which implies that an image can receive meaning from elements excluded from the image itself), and *symbol*, based on convention. Signs, however, can function at several of these levels at once. The first, the *icon* is particularly important in relation to photographs (Rose 2001:78-79) and Barthes' point about the photographic paradox, because a photograph's strength lies in the resemblance between the photograph, and the person or object portrayed.

Hjelmslev introduced the conceptual distinction between *denotative* and *connotative* levels of signification, central to semiotics. The concepts are hard to pin down, but in simplified terms denotation refers to the basic, or the lexical meaning of the sign, while connotation can be understood as the recipient's additional associations, based on his or her values and cultural premises (Heradstveit and Bjørgo 1992:41). This resonates with Barthes' conception of the photograph, who distinguishes between a literal (denotative) level which he calls 'the analogue' and a symbolic (connoted) separate layer of meaning.[8] Barthes considered the *denotative* level of the photograph as un-coded, while he saw the *connotative* level of the photograph as coded, and thus, communicating what the society *thinks* of that which is

[7] Some, such as cognitive scientist Dan Sperber and psychologist Deirdre Wilson (1995:1-8) would protest that semiotics is not a theory, but a *hypothesis* and that precise signs and messages do not exist. I agree with this contention, but I also think Rose (2001) has a point when she raises the concern that to simply reject semiotics (she uses the term semiology), on the basis that signs are slippery and hold the potential for multiple meanings, can serve to obscure the very real power relations embedded in visual images.

[8] Barthes uses the term semiology rather than semiotics, because he follows the Saussurian tradition.

depicted (Barthes 1999:136-138). The paradox for Barthes lies in the coexistence of these two levels, and that the connoted, coded message of the photograph becomes hidden behind the denotative message (Barthes 1984:17-19). In other words the message gets hidden behind the *surface* of the photograph; where the photograph's reference to 'reality', as well as the layers of power relations embedded *in* the photograph are rendered invisible. Thus, photographs tend to be associated with a 'truth' they cannot possibly contain.

As several have argued, the distinction between denotative and connotative levels of the photograph is artificial, and it would be a mistake to view the denotative level of the sign as neutral, objective, and free of ideology (Heck 1977:57; Baudrillard 1972 in Heradstveit and Bjørgo 1992:43). As Heradstveit and Bjørgo argue, ideology is present both in denotative and connotative layers of semiotics, and the two levels of signification need to be understood as correlative, unfixed and inseparable (Heradstveit and Bjørgo 1992:43-44). Peirce, for example, argues that signs give meaning in relation to interpretative networks within a given cultural context, and that these contain elements that must be understood as normative (Heradstveit and Bjørgo 1992:49-50). His version of the semiotic approach opened up for a more dynamic relation between the signifier and the signified (the expression-side and the content-side of the sign) with room for multiple interpretations, creativity and cultural change (Heradstveit and Bjørgo 1992:30).

Semiotics continues to be influential as an analytical and theoretical framework to understand the making of meaning, not least within cultural studies and critical discourse analysis. However, it has changed much from its original form. Barthes himself moved from a structuralist viewpoint to a poststructuralist understanding during his life. Theorists have moved away from there being one single signifying system, but rather, as the English artist and theorist Victor Burgin asserts, a diverse complexity of codes and potential readings in each photograph (Burgin 2003:131). The construction of meaning must be seen as a dynamic process relative to the social and cultural context in which a photograph is appropriated. Today, it is widely recognized that meaning is created through viewers' active engagement with the photographic medium. A central point for Barthes (1984) is also that photographs are rarely seen alone, but must be understood in relation to the totality of the context they are placed; alongside textual framework, titles and caption, which inevitably influence how we view and interpret photographs. As we will se in the following chapters, this is something that Drik's founder is acutely aware of, and has incorporated into his photographic resistance. My analysis contributes to nuance Barthes' perspective further.

The toolbox that semiotics provide can be supplemented by insights of cognitive sciences of *cultural models* and *schemata*. Cognition refers to the act of knowing and perceiving, and cognitive sciences seek to understand processes of perception, mental representation and memory, and moreover, the *internalisation* of social and cultural aspects of society (Wassmann 2001:2080). This cognitive dimension of photographs implies that we pay attention only to that which is relevant to us (Sperber and Wilson 1995) and thus, that stereotypes for example operate in far more complex ways than a semiotic approach can account for. Because the amount of information that humans are capable of storing is limited, we have a tendency to create simplified, prototypical "models of the mind". These can take the shape as image *schema*; mental images that bridge the nonphysical with the physical world (Wassmann 2001:2084). Journalist and professor in media studies, Julianne Newton introduces the concept of 'vision instinct', and argues that media generated imagery operates on unconscious and at times involuntary levels, as much as dreams and meditation does (Newton 2001:113). Thus, photographs engage with cognitive processes in the mind of individuals, where they trigger, and are being triggered by mental patterns. As Susan Sontag (1973) has expressed it, photographs become powerful in their relation to "an appropriate context of feeling and attitude".

The photograph as a document has been questioned and challenged in contemporary art and the notion that one truth exists has been rejected, among others by post-modernists (Rosenau 1992). Although there is a broad awareness that images show only fractions of reality (if not fictional already), photographic representations nonetheless mediate *how* and *what* we see.

A photographic Orientalism

Can there be said to be a 'photographic Orientalism' in contemporary times? A dominating part of photographic representations of Bangladesh and South Asia in the West are related to poverty and natural disasters, or otherwise what Eide and Simonsen (2008) have called "exotic curiosities" (Eide and Simonsen 2008).

In her monograph *Picturing Pity* (2007), the Norwegian anthropologist Marianne Gullestad provides an in-depth analysis of Norwegian missionary photographs from Cameroon, from the early 1920s until publication. In her case material she traces what I have termed 'a photographic Orientalism' that extends into the present. Gullestad contends that the reliance on donor support for the continuation of the missionaries' activities abroad has led to

a particular form of representations and narrative structures. Such photographs typically depict the missionaries as active agents, and the Africans (in this case Cameroonians) as eagerly awaiting their services. Gullestad identifies some of the dilemmas that missionaries, and by extension development workers encounter. With reference to the sociologist Hannah Arendt, she argues that many of the missionary photographs that have been made to inspire compassion among the viewers, almost unavoidably evoke pity (Arendt 1990 [1963] in Gullestad 2007:xvi, 21-22). There is a clear analogy between the missionary rhetoric and development related narratives, which Gullestad also points out (Gullestad 2007, i.e:266). One of her key arguments in the book is that missionary visual rhetoric has been based on earlier depictions and over the course of time established conventions that have influenced other sectors; not only international development agencies and relief organizations, but also Norwegian national narratives. Gullestad introduces the term 'missionary propaganda' as an analytical concept, and contends that similar rhetorical strategies can be traced in the welfare state, development policies, peace negotiations and foreign policies in what she calls the Norwegian "goodness regime" (Gullestad 2007:xii). Gullestad's work is important in this context because she describes some of the discursive tendencies that have shaped, and continue to shape the photographic narratives that exist today. Drik is both positioned against the development narratives she describes, and simultaneously contributes to them. I will deal with these frictions in chapter three, with the topic 'development' photography. Gullestad also points out that there from the early 1980s has been an increased emphasis on female subordination and women as victims of male violence in the media, a point I will return to in chapter four.

For the purpose here, the main argument I want to draw from Gullestad's findings is that a historical continuity of photographic representations can be identified, and that these often allude to patronizing relationships, whether they have origins in colonial, missionary or "development" activities. Through repetition over time social categories, such as that of 'givers' and 'receivers', are currently regarded as self-evident in development narratives and beyond. What Europe receives in return; be it economic wealth, goods, ideas, and a positive self image is suppressed in these narratives (Gullestad 2007:xii-xiii). The visual discourse in cross-cultural communication which Gullestad traces out bears resemblance to the Orientalist narrative that Said critiqued in the late 1970s; these depictions say more about "us" than it does about "them". Gullestad locates her ethnographic account within postcolonial studies, and clearly shows how colonial imaginaries continue to impact peoples' lives and ideologies at home and abroad in contemporary times. The representational dynamics she describes are

applicable far beyond the borders of Cameroon and the African continent, certainly also in South Asia where I did my own fieldwork. Shahidul Alam, the founder of Drik, has raised a similar critique of representations of Bangladesh, which I will return to in the next chapter, where I present the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of Drik. The agency can be seen as one of the movements motivated by the representational resentment felt by many people in postcolonial countries. What becomes clear is that the debate on representations of "the other" still is of utmost importance, and that photographic narratives must be seen in relation to structures of power and dominance. However, power manifests itself on many different levels; globally, nationally, regionally and locally. One of Gullestad's points is also that the same visual discourses she identified in the missionary and NGO rhetoric are acted upon strategically on the *local* level in front of donor countries and NGOs (Gullestad 2007:xxi). And as Gullestad makes clear, not without its own problems;

> Technologies of objectification, such as photography and film, create new possibilities for understanding and *defending* oneself, at the same time as they pose new risks of essentializations, rigidity, alienation, divisions and exclusions (Gullestad 2007:264, emphasis added).

As Foucault has taught us discourses simultaneously offer sites for resistance, and it is the strategies by which resistance is carried out, as well as its practical constraints that will be the centre of attention in this thesis. While a Foucauldian perspective is useful to identify underlying power structures on a macro level, in contrast to Foucault (along with Meyer and Said), in my own study I have a stronger emphasis on agency and counter-strategies. For this context French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1998) study of social fields offers a more immediately useful analytical tool. I will now move on to look at his perspective, which in turn will enable me to say something about the possibilities and constraints with counter-Orientalism on a more structural level.

Photography in a commodity perspective and as a social field

In his exploration of French television, Bourdieu (1998) explores the journalistic view on the world as it appears in the news. He argues that "the journalistic field" is conditioned by a set of market principles, among them competitive logics between news channels and journalists. This has led to a form of expression where the 'spectacular' is given preference over common everyday matters, often conveyed in a dramatic and sensationalist manner. Floods, fires, accidents, crimes and sex are all topics that attract an audience. The result is an emphasis in

the news on current events, stripped from their political context and without a given explanation or solution. Additionally, Bourdieu argues, ethnocentric tendencies and racist contempt tend to characterize the news (Bourdieu 1998:124-125). According to Rodney Benson and Erik Neveu (2005:8), who are both sociologists and media researchers, the same commercializing tendencies can be identified elsewhere. It should be noted that Bourdieu has a structuralist perspective on power, and in my opinion he underestimates audiences' active engagement, personal interpretation and potential rejection of messages conveyed by visual media. However, what Bourdieu describes (somewhat pushed to its extreme perhaps), is the commercial logic that lies behind news media, and I believe also the photographic medium. The aspiration to reach the widest possible audience, he argues, drives television channels to study ratings as indicators of popularity, which hackneys the medium, as contents are shaped in accordance to the recipient's perception categories (Bourdieu 1998:61).

Paradoxically, a photograph cannot function as 'counter-Orientalism', without simultaneously being a commodity. Manifestly photographs have many other functions in society, not least personal, but the majority of the photographs that we see in a 'visual age', be it documentary, advertisements or photographs of other kinds, belong to the commercial sphere. This is especially so for the photographs from Bangladesh that are available to a Western audience. Thus, in this context, it is necessary to understand photographs from a commodity perspective. The anthropologist Igor Kopytoff (1986) provides a valuable perspective towards an understanding of photographs' social lives in his *biographical approach* to things. Kopytoff looks at commodities from a cultural perspective, and states that "in doing the biography of a thing, one would ask questions similar to those one asks about people: What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its "status" and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized?" (1986:66). In other words Kopytoff suggests to follow the life histories of things. As a medium without an agenda of its own, photographs rely almost entirely on the context in which they are utilized. Kopytoff's perspective is advantageous because it allows for a study of the *migration* of photographs; from their production to the various contexts and value-systems they are applied, and come to mean different things. Thus, a biographical approach pays attention to the processual dynamics of photographs, as well as the interaction between people and photographs; artefacts that from this perspective can be said to carry agency in their own right. Although economy is far from the only motivation behind the photographic works that are produced in Dhaka, the photographers I have befriended attempt to make a living out of their photography, and their practices must partially be understood from an economy perspective. The same is true for the

agency, Drik, which needs to assure its own financial viability, as well as to sustain its many initiatives. In other words, the agency and individual photographers alike need to understand, and in some way respond to the same market forces that Bourdieu (1998) identified in his critical essay on French television. What are the underlying ideologies and central driving forces behind Drik, and what kinds of strategies do photographers make use of to achieve their goals? And what are the tensions that the photographers encounter in their everyday lives and work? These questions will be addressed in the chapters to come.

I find Bourdieu's notion of social fields a useful conceptual tool to approach Drik. The model makes it possible to identify how power relations take shape within social fields, such as the journalistic field examined above. My study is centred on the photographic field, as seen from Dhaka. A field, in Bourdieu's sense, consists of a group of people, social agents or institutions that are kept together by certain shared interests, who at the same time battle over what they have in common (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Each field operates as a social micro cosmos according to its own, field-specific criteria and logics. Bourdieu uses the metaphor of a 'game' to elaborate on how fields function. It is through the participation that ascription to a field takes place, and rules and regularities valid within that field take an embodied function (they take shape as a persons' *habitus*, to use Bourdieu's term). The chances for each player of "winning" depend on the cards he or she has at hand. This relates to Bourdieu's concept of *capital* (economic, social and cultural); and which types of capital that are given value depends on the particularities of each field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98). In this thesis Dhaka based photographers can be seen as the key "players".

In addition to its internal logics, fields operate in relation to external factors such as surrounding social and economic conditions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:96-105). Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of understanding a given field's degree of autonomy as well as its relative strength vis-à-vis other actors within a field. In his study of the journalistic field, and in particular television, Bourdieu argues that while the journalistic field in itself is powerful, it has a distinctive quality in its direct dependence on commercial demand (Bourdieu 1998:74). In his view each field is structured around the opposition between 'the heteronymous pole'; driven by external forces such as economy, and 'the autonomous pole', which represents the unique capital that field possesses internally; such as artistic or scientific skills (Benson and Neveu 2005:4). The journalistic field, and I will argue also the photographic field, belong to a dominated form of cultural production which is only 'weakly autonomous'. It encompasses its own laws and ways of functioning, but these cannot be seen as isolated from external influences from other overlapping fields (Bourdieu in Benson and

Neveu 2005:5-33). Further Bourdieu argues that in France, the journalistic field has become increasingly commercialized (Bourdieu in Benson and Neveu 2005:41). The same is true for many other countries, including Bangladesh. The photographic field that Drik operates within is interwoven with the global journalistic field as well as the international development aid 'business', as we will see in the chapters that follow.

Benson and Neveu argue that the theory of the journalistic field together with the closely linked concepts of 'habitus' and 'capital' form a useful analytical model for media research. In relation to Habermas' spatial metaphor of the 'public sphere' and Manuel Castell's 'media space', the authors contend that Bourdieu's field theory offers a number of advantages. First, in emphasizing the dynamic nature of social fields the model helps to incorporate history into media analysis, and thus identify changes over time. Secondly, Bourdieu emphasises the relationship *between* fields and competition as a fundamental aspect to understand the journalistic field. Third, Benson and Neveu argue that the social field approach helps to situate media within its surrounding environment and, thus, safeguard from what they call 'media centrism'. Finally, the model is attentive to everyday practices of journalism, and thus, represents a highly empirical approach. Although not an analytical model without weaknesses, the authors maintain that Bourdieu's field theory offers the best conceptual tool available to understand the power that is at play both within fields and in their relation to one another (Benson and Neveu 2005:17-18).

Bourdieu's coherent model is useful in this context because it contributes towards an understanding of the relation between individual photographers, media organizations and larger systems of power. Particularly Bourdieu's assessment on the autonomy of the journalistic field is fundamental to understand the market reality Drik operates within, vis-à-vis other agents within the journalistic, or in this case photographic field. One of the aims at Drik is to challenge stereotypical forms of representation with an Orientalist bias. At the same time, the agency has to relate to the same market demands that other media agents do, and compete over the same clients as comparatively powerful photographic agencies such as Getty and Corbis for stock photography and Associate Press, European Press Agency, Agencé France presse & Reuters dominating the news. On the local level Drik has a comparative strength, but the agency also has to compete with other photographic agencies and photographers in Dhaka. Thus, a relational perspective is necessary to make sense of the economic constraints Drik and affiliated photographers encounter in practice. In a market driven media reality the news scene is largely driven by sensationalism (as Bourdieu's study *On Television* demonstrated), in the case of Bangladesh leading to an almost exclusive focus

on floods and other natural disasters, accidents, violence and poverty in international media. Simultaneously, numerous NGOs form part of the social scene in Bangladesh, where a variety of development projects are implemented. As Gullestad demonstrated in the case of Cameroon, a certain kind of depictions prevail as a consequence, often contrasting to that Drik photographers ideally would wish to convey.

Opening for further questions

These two opposing forces; market pressure on the one hand and Drik's ideology and need for financial viability on the other, lead the agency and individual photographers alike to be pulled in two directions at once. The anthropologist Fredrik Barth's (1981) concept of *compound pressure* can be useful in this regard. He explores the role conflicts experienced by young men in the Swat valley in North Pakistan, in managing the relationship to their wife alongside the relation to their father, where each require their own set of qualities, seemingly incompatible. Similarly, the business model that Drik entails makes breeding ground for frictions, because it lingers between financial interests on the one hand, and idealistic interests on the other.[9] This leads the agency and affiliated photographers in to a number of dilemmas, as will become evident in chapters three and four, which deal with the topics photography and development, and representation (Islam, gender and beyond) respectively.

To manoeuvre between political and ideological interests on the one hand and economic constraints on the other, Drik has adapted to a set of strategies that attempt to lock the interpretative space of the photograph as well as to take control of the relation between the agency and its clients. Could the counter-Orientalist measures taken by Drik be seen as a form of *mimesis* in Taussig's (1993) sense, whereby Drik and affiliated photographers imitate the strategies of their opponent, in order to attain the power possessed by Western media agents? It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore this parallel in full, but my ethnographic observations nevertheless suggest the potential for a Taussingian analysis to the study of the agency of the "represented" where Gullestad and Said left off. At the same time, my material indicates that Drik has to tolerate a certain amount of Orientalism, in order to enable, and indeed finance, the production of counter-Orientalist representations. The lines, however, are not always clearly distinguishable. Drik affiliated photographers' resistance is inevitably

[9] This classical dilemma is related to the conceptual pair 'børs og katedral' in Norwegian (stock exchange and cathedral). It refers to businesses with one foot in the commercial world, and the other in the spiritual world; translated as 'the financial and the spiritual' in English. (Source: Caplex, Cappelen's Online Encyclopedia). In this context the second pole can be more appropriately conceptualised as 'the idealistic', which is the term I will use here.

articulated through, and as we shall see to some degree trapped *by* the language of their opponent. This is what Larsen (1999:106) has referred to as "the problem of the opposition", which provides a fruitful analytical angle for my main contention in this thesis.

The conceptions presented here are useful to understand Drik's practices at present. Before I turn to these, however, I will look more closely at the vision and mission behind Drik, and in turn, sketch out the methodological conditions for this thesis.

3

Locating the field; positioning the researcher

What is the ideological foundation behind the socially committed photographic agency? Within which historical and political climate did Drik materialize, and in turn, need to be understood? In this chapter these questions will be answered, and I will further give a general outline of the contemporary media reality in Bangladesh. Some of the key photography-related initiatives will be introduced, continuing from where I left of in the introduction. I will also address some of the changes that have taken place at Drik over the times, and position the agency within the social reality of Dhaka. Finally, I will give a general idea about how the agency stays afloat financially. In the second part of this chapter I will discuss the ethical and methodological conditions to this study.

At the heart of Drik[10]

The ways that Drik makes their struggle known to the world are many, but the most important and most accessible to the public outside of Bangladesh is their presence on the web through their websites, including Shahidul's regularly updated blog.[11] As explained on the Drik website;

> It was twenty years ago. A small group of people set up a picture agency in the unlikely location of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Named Drik, the Sanskrit word for vision, the agency set out to represent a group of media professionals that other agencies did not cater for, practitioners living and working in the majority world. In the years that have followed, many others from Asia, Africa and Latin America have joined the original group. All of them share a common vision; one that sees the majority world, not as fodder for disaster reporting, but as a vibrant source of human energy and a challenge to an exploitative global economic system (Drik 1).

[10] The name Drik is the Sanskrit word for vision; eye, sight, view, perception, wisdom (Platt's dictionary).
[11] The most important ones being www.drik.net, www.majorityworld.com, www.driknews.com, www.pathshala.net and Shahidul's blog www.shahidulnews.com.

Drik, in other words, was born out of unequal power structures, and the inaccessibility that local photographers experienced when trying to approach global image markets. Radical in its proposal from the beginning, the agency practices a form of 'media activism'. Initially, the most clearly defined objective was to counter stereotypical representations; to create an alternative envisioning and a new form of narratives, from a country whose portrayals are most commonly driven by a negative news agenda and the need to raise aid. Shahidul had been working in a London-based studio and had experienced that the only pictures from Bangladesh clients showed interest in were pictures related to disasters and poverty. Back in Dhaka he set out to contest stereotypes and redefine what is considered 'interesting'. The term Majority World can be seen as part of that symbolical reversal, parallel to the battle Drik has taken up with images. Written and spoken language is used as strategic and powerful tools in a number of ways, often involving visual metaphors, to combat stereotypical representations and contest the unequal power dynamics of language; particularly visual language.

Drik positions itself against "mainstream" international media, a concept used by my photographer friends in Dhaka. The lines between "alternative" media sources on the one hand and "mainstream" on the other are not clear-cut, but rather highly erratic, as the study of Drik in turn will demonstrate. However, it is a useful concept to talk about the tendencies that prevail in international media in general terms. According to English Oxford dictionary (OED), what the concept "mainstream" seeks to encompass is, "the principal stream of current"; or by extension, "the prevailing trend of opinion, fashion, society etc". Inherent in Drik's ideology lies a critique towards "development" narratives and practices. NGOs form a substantial part of the Bangladeshi landscape, and have taken over some of the state functions. It has also become "big business". Many of the photographers, including Shahidul, question where all the money that had been poured into the country to promote development have gone (the amount of 40 million was mentioned by several). NGOs' omnipresence in the Bangladeshi context and their reliance on photographs, make them take up the most prominent part of the photographic image market, also at Drik. I will deal with this topic separately in chapter four.

In addition to the global hierarchies, social inequalities within the borders of Bangladesh are pressing. While the ambition to challenge stereotypical representations remains at the core of Drik's objectives, the focus has become increasingly directed towards bringing attention to social causes within the country. On the first page of its most recent brochure, underneath a photograph depicting a mother kissing her child through a barbed wire fence (during a break at work, it is explained), it is stated that Drik produces "images for

change". Drik has made the ambition to challenge social inequality a central driving force of its organization, further described in the following:

> To challenge all forms of social inequalities and prejudice, whether based on class, gender, race, religion, sexuality, caste, or adherence to norms of physical or mental ability. Drik recognizes the need to counter corporate and Western controlled media, and questions Western stereotypes of majority world peoples. Its aim is to strengthen Majority World media, and provide a platform for media professionals so that they may challenge systems of oppression (Drik 6).

As made clear by the official statements, Drik's objective is twofold. First, it practices of a form of photographic counter-Orientalism, ensuring access to self-representation and challenging the ways in which Bangladesh is typically represented. At the same time, Drik uses the photographic medium to confront social hierarchies and discrimination within the Bangladeshi society. I will return to class position the agency later in this chapter, but there is a third objective at Drik, which is its participation in the struggle for democracy and freedom of speech in Bangladesh. To understand this aspect of the organization's aims, as well as the climate in which Drik was first initiated, it is necessary to take a historical step back.

Historical contextual framework

Seen from a Bangladeshi perspective the country has a long history of oppression and exploitation, first by the British colonial power, and later by Pakistan, when Bangladesh in the period from the partition of British India in 1947 until its own Independence in 1971 was part of the Pakistani state, under the name "East Pakistan". The period under Pakistan was hugely unprofitable for the majority of those on the East Pakistani side, for whom the "agreement" operated economically and culturally as a continued form of colonialism. As the anthropologist and historian Willem Van Schendel (2009) points out in a recent publication on the history of Bangladesh, there is also a parallel narrative, where political activism and resilience are the central driving forces. Financial neglect, as well as West Pakistan's decision to make Urdu the only national language, lead to an increased resentment on the East Pakistani side. The discontent gave rise to the Language movement *Bhasha Andolon* in 1952, whose main project was to demand Bengali as a national language (Schendel 2009:111-115). In the years that followed the opposition grew, and culminated when West Pakistan failed to react to the massive cyclone in 1970 which according to estimates killed up to half a million people in East Pakistan (Schendel 2009: xxi). The Bangladesh Liberation war started on the

25th of March 1971, ultimately leading to the country's birth as an Independent state on the 16th of December the same year. Student activism played a fundamental role in the Independence movement, and still has an immense impact on the contemporary political scene in Bangladesh.

To create a functional political system in the post-war period was not an easy task. The numbers of casualties are unknown and the validity of estimates debated, but the war had left somewhere between the Pakistani figure of 26.000 and the official Bangladeshi estimate of three million dead (Rummel, 1998 in Schendel 2009:174). Further, one calculation estimates a total loss of 40 % of the annual gross domestic product a consequence of the Independence war (Oliver, 1978 in Schendel 2009:173-174). West Pakistan's strategic attacks on the intelligentsia were particularly devastating for the new-born country. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to recite the whole complex, composite, and not least contested history of Bangladesh, but some historical "milestones" are fundamental to understand Drik. Following Independence, Mujibur Rahman was proclaimed the father of the nation. Leader of the political party Awami League (AL), strongly backed by India, his rule was of a highly personalized form. When Bangladesh held the first general elections in 1973, and it was declared that AL had won an astonishing 97 percent of the votes, the credibility of the party was seriously put into question. Those who opposed his regime returned to the streets (Schendel 2009:179); a form of political action that had proven to be effective in Bangladesh, as it had been in India. In 1974 Bangladesh was declared a state of emergency, which in effect suspended all rights for the country's citizens, introduced a single party system, and a top-down civilian autocracy (Schendel 2009:179-81). The political resentment grew and violent opposition escalated, both amongst guerrilla groups on the political left, and the army on the right. The army had grown strong during the Independence war, but been left to their own devices in post-war Bangladesh; one of the reasons being that a government aligned military force had been established, under the name *Rokkhi Bahini*. On 15th of August 1975 the army attacked Mujibur Rahman's regime and killed the political leader as well as more than 40 of his family-members (Schendel 2009:181-82). His assassination marked the beginning of a 15 year long period of military control, where Bangladesh went through several coups within short time. The two main political figures from these years were Ziaur Rahman, ruling the country with a firm hand from 1975 to 1981, and the no-less powerful dictator Hussain Mohammad Ershad as of 1982 (Schendel 2009:200). Despite strong military presence and severely restricted civil rights, the democracy movement was strong throughout the period. A

number of politically motivated photographers, artists, painters, political cartoonists and writers grew out of this movement.[12]

Drik's "birth" in 1989 coincided with the massive popular uprisings against general Ershad's repressive regime, which finally succeeded to overthrow the government and return to democratic rule in 1990 (Schendel 2009:195-97). Shahidul had returned to Bangladesh from England in the early 1980s. Critical of Ershad's regime, and concerned about the country's condition, he was out on the streets and "through curfew and tear gas, […] documenting these events in their entirety" (Drik 3). Because of the government's censorship of the national media at the time, these events were otherwise silenced in Bangladeshi media. Shahidul's documentation of Ershad's fall won the Mother Jones Award in 1992, and became the beginning of the photojournalistic practice that characterise Drik. The government's censorship in this period was also the motivation behind the construction of Drik's first gallery, since major galleries; whether state-owned or belonging to foreign embassies, were not prepared to show work that was 'political' (Drik 3). The gallery opened in August 1993. I will now move on from Drik's initial stages to describe what the general journalistic field in Bangladesh looks like today.

Contemporary Media Reality

Democratisation of the Bangladeshi state led to an increased press freedom, though with certain limitations. Siddiqui et al (2010:20) posit that Dhaka city has undergone a "mini-media explosion" during the last two decades, and that in total 415 newspapers and periodicals were published from the city in 2005. Among the largest daily newspapers in Bengali are *Prothom Alo*, *Jugantor and Jono Kontho*, whereas *Daily Star*, the *Independent* and *New Age* are the leading English dailies. In spite of a large number of newspapers, however, two rivalry political parties have dominated the political scene since general Ershad's fall, and these influence many civil institutions, the official media being no exception. Elites and rich companies further privately own most of the largest newspapers. As a consequence, financially strong companies and political leaders are rarely criticized in official media. There is additionally a relatively limited tradition for investigative journalism in Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshi press is free officially, but some topics are systematically silenced. A convenient example is the "crossfire killings" that have been carried out by the special police

[12] I am grateful to Hasib Zakaria, photographer and teacher at Pathshala for reciting Drik's history to me.

force Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) since it was set up in 2004. The special force was set up to bridle corruption, and consists of elite members of the national police, army, navy and air force. Thousands of extrajudicial killings have been linked to their actions since, widely known as "crossfire killings" and thus, implying that they have been carried out in self-defence. No RAB officers, however, have been killed since its inception (Alam 2010). The oppressive state practices have received much critique by local activists and a number of Human Rights organizations, but are largely denied by the government. Shahidul Alam set up an exhibition on RAB's Crossfire killings at Drik, which intended to open on the 22 of March 2010. However, from the morning hours the same day, national police officers surrounded the gates and denied visitors in attendance to enter. The exhibition consisted of a series of reflective photographs, newspaper collages and an interactive Google map where reported extrajudicial killings were pinned down by their exact location and provided with details. The show was launched symbolically on the pavement in front of Drik with Indian writer and activist Mahasweta Devi as a special guest. The Drik staff was prepared to improvise, as it was not the first time photographic exhibitions that provoked the government were forced to close.[13]

Figure 4: The police outside Drik's gates on the intended opening day of the Crossfire exhibition
Figure 5: Symbolical opening on the pavement outside Drik. Mahasweta Devi and Shahidul Alam interviewed by a journalist.

The Crossfire exhibition shows how the freedom of speech in Bangladeshi is still limited, and at the same time serves as an example of how political activism at Drik takes form. Bangladesh ranks number 126 out of a total of 178 countries on Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index 2010 (Reporters Without Borders). However, on the Freedom of Press

[13] The case was heard in court and the Crossfire exhibition was finally permitted to open on the 31st of March. Meanwhile Pathshala students had arranged a human chain outside Dhaka University to protest the closing of the exhibition and support Drik, as well as the freedom of speech cause.

2011 survey (Freedom House 2011) the country has climbed to rank 118, thus, showing steady improvement. Nevertheless, numerous violence attacks against journalists have been reported, and as several of the photographers in the Drik community can manifest to, being a photo-journalist in Bangladesh can be dangerous for those who attempt to challenge the system.[14] On the other hand, I was often told that the police was afraid of negative media coverage and, thus, that showing the police your camera could make them leave you alone.

I will now turn to look closer at the form that Drik's ideals take in practice, continuing from where I left off in the introduction.

Organisation and core activities

Shahidul Alam is the managing director of Drik, and the principal at its educational wing, Pathshala. In addition, each of the departments at the agency has a team leader. At the time when I did my research he had "taken a step back" and although he had an office at Drik, much of the time I was in Dhaka he was out of office. Shahidul's birthday celebration at Drik is illustrative in this regard. The members of staff were waiting in the open air space on the second floor of the building, ready to cut the cake. Shahidul arrived, had a few bites and some birthday hugs before he rushed off with whipped cream in his beard. Since its inception, the once small Drik *Bhasi* (Drik family) has grown substantially, and the staff juggles a number of different initiatives at once. Below I will present some of Drik's main photography-related initiatives.

Drik Picture Agency and News

The Drik Picture Agency is at the centre of the organization as a whole, and one of the largest departments. It operates relatively independently, with a team leader and at the time of my research five additional employees. As emphasized on the Drik's website, beyond offering a large stock of images, the library provides local photographers with a support structure, much like a trade union. This involves campaigning for the photographers' rights, negotiating terms- and conditions and consolidating respect for photographers' copyrights (Drik 2). Both the Drik Picture Library, the Majority World portal and Drik News are based underneath the "umbrella" of the Drik Picture Agency. As Majorityworld expresses it on their website, the portal offers "a unique collection representing the wealth of fresh imagery emerging from indigenous photographers from within the developing world and global South" (Drik 4).

[14] The local activist organisation Odikar states that 4 journalists were killed in 2010, and 231 in total injured, attached or threatened (Odikar 2011). Shahidul Alam himself has been in clashes with the police several times.

There are 60.000 photographs in total in stock, consisting of a combination of individual images and feature series. As stated on their website, "the Majority World library specialises in development and other issues: human rights, gender, education, micro-credit, migration, health, industry, politics, religion, culture, disasters and more" (Drik 5). The photographic stock is directed primarily towards the international market, although images are also sold locally.

The portal, www.majorityworld.com is the online extension of the Drik Picture Library. It was first established in 2002 in collaboration with a Norwegian company, but as their original partner went bankrupt the project was put on a halt. The portal was started again in 2006, this time in collaboration with the British based KijijiVision World Photography, which recently changed its name to Majorityworld.org to avoid unnecessary confusion. Up until recently, most of the photographers promoted by the portal have been of Bangladeshi origin, but staff members have worked actively towards countering this tendency and diversifying the collection. At the time of writing (November 2010), 132 Bangladeshi photographers are represented alongside 140 external ones, from countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, and a few from the Middle East (Drik 5). The photographs on the Majorityworld portal are promoted by, and sold through distributors based in Europe and the US.

The two permanent Drik News photographers were based in the same office as the library department until the end of my stay in Dhaka, when they moved to a separate office. In addition to the permanent staff, both Drik Picture Library and Drik News had a part time intern. The news department is described as an independent body of the picture library, attempting to fill the representational void in mainstream media, and their images are sold to national, as well as international newspapers. Drik News has its own daily updated website, and the photographers are expected to work on photo-features whenever they have extra time.

The studio department

Three photographers were working in the studio department during most of my research time. The number was reduced to two towards the end of my stay, because one of the employees decided to start working freelance. The studio based staff photographers took on all forms of commercial assignments, for NGOs, a variety of companies, newspapers and magazines. Some assignments were to be carried out in the studio, but most took place on sites either in Dhaka or out of town. Some assignments lasted for several days, and thus, the photographers alternated between being out of office on assignments, and returning to their desks for post-

production work. The photographers also took studio portraits, though I did not see this myself except from when I had my portrait taken.[15] Across the different initiatives and departments at Drik creativity, innovativeness and professionalism is highlighted.

Educational initiatives

Drik puts a strong emphasis on the value of education, and among its initiatives are several educational ones. The largest and most significant is the Drik affiliated Institute of photography called Pathshala, which means 'centre of learning' in Sanskrit. Established in 1998 the school places a particular focus on photo journalism. As Shahidul explains, it is about much more than teaching photography;

> Pathshala is about using the language of images to bring about social change. It is about nurturing minds and encouraging critical thinking. It is about responsible citizenship. In a land where textual literacy is low, it is about reaching out where words have failed. In a society where sleek advertising images construct our sense of values, studying at Pathshala is about challenging cultures of dominance (Alam in Levin 2009).

The name Pathshala implies a conceptual absence of classroom walls, and a place for critical reflection. In addition to practical courses in documentary photography, portraiture, and commercial photography, students at Pathshala receive courses in the anthropology of visuals, media and politics, and history of art and photography. Politics of representation and ethics are central and widely discussed topics. The students are also taught "survival skills" in courses on commercial photography and business. Pathshala was established with the support from World Press Photo (WPP).[16] Pathshala attempts to keep fees low to be accessible to low-income families, and consequently, the institute is heavily subsidized by Drik. The ambition is that Pathshala will be self sustained financially in the future. The academy is famous for having attracted some of the most renowned photographers worldwide to conduct lectures, workshops and seminars, through Shahidul's extensive contact network. Abbas Attar (Iran), Pedro Meyer (Mexico), Martin Parr (UK), Morten Krogvold (Norway), Raghu Rai (India) and

[15] One reason could be that Drik services are relatively highly priced for the Bangladeshi context, something that was pointed out to me several times. Four passport photographs cost 500 taka which equals about 50 NOK, where other photo studios could provide the same amount of photographs for less than a fifth of the price.

[16] World Press Photo is a widely acknowledged independent, non-for profit organisation based in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The collaboration between Drik and WPP started when Shahidul sent a letter to complain about the lack of diversity in the committee. Since all the workers, photographers and members of the jury were European, he argued that they should call themselves European Press Photo rather. WPP was quick to respond and the first Drik gallery was built with their support and hosted the first WWP exhibition in Bangladesh. They have been involved in a number of Drik's initiatives since.

Reza Deghati (Iran/France) are just some of the photographers that have visited, several of them a number of times. For anyone interested in photography this is an impressive list. Previous graduates from Pathshala and other local staff have long ago taken over the main bulk of the teaching. Pathshala students also get the opportunity to participate in workshops with students from universities abroad. During my stay there was one workshop with Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Australia, another with the Norwegian University College (Høyskolen i Oslo). The last workshop was divided in two, were one half were together with a photographers group based in Chittagong city, and the other with photographers in Kathmandu in Nepal. Although directed largely towards Western markets, and having Western partners both abroad and within Bangladesh, the importance of "South- South" collaboration is also emphasized at Drik, and has been increasingly prioritized in recent years. This is evident on the Majority World portal, but also in collaborative programs, workshops and occasionally in Drik's annually produced calendars.

During my fieldwork Drik was in the process of setting up a broadcasting and multimedia academy, and Pathshala Institute of photography has at the time of writing changed its name to 'Pathshala South Asian Media Academy' to gather the two branches under the same name. The media academy is but one example of the many ways in which Drik constantly evolves, and its branches sprout and grow in many directions.

Other educational projects involve the "Out of Focus" group, a group of working class children Shahidul started working with in 1994. Some of those who participated in the training group have since started working at Drik. Providing members of the working class means for self-representation, the initiative was related to Drik's objective to challenge social differences within Bangladesh. More recently, Drik has arranged workshops of much shorter duration in partnership with NGOs. For example, the workshop "Do you see my world" was arranged in 2009 for a selection of adolescent girls and boys in several rural villages in Bangladesh. The workshop was a collaborative project between Pathshala and Unicef. The workshop "Urban Jungle" was arranged in Barisal later the same year, again in collaboration with Unicef. However, neither of these took place during my fieldwork period.

Annually Drik produces its own calendars, presenting 'iconic images' produced by photographers connected to Drik's network or some of the most important events from the year that has passed. The "Do you see my world" workshop was chosen as the topic of the 2010 calendar.

Class positioning the agency

Class politics at Drik take a number of different forms. Already in the decision to locate Drik in Dhanmondi, there is a certain political stance. Dhanmondi is a place of many cultural activities, as several art galleries and cultural centres are based in the area, as well as restaurants, supermarkets, shops and universities. The comfort that Dhanmondi has to offer is extremely high compared to most areas in Dhaka, where large segments of the population live in crowded areas with poor sanitation.[17] On the other hand, the residential area is clearly distinct from upper class neighbourhoods such as Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara in the northeastern part of the city, where foreign embassies and a large number of NGOs are located. These are the areas where most of the Bangladeshi upper class and Western foreigners live, where there are big luxury houses, English medium schools and 'exclusive entry' clubs, where foreigners and westernized Bangladeshis can bathe in swimming suits and drink alcohol in venues closed off from the general public. Dhaka is certainly a place of contrasts, and locating Drik in Dhanmondi serves to distance the agency from immediate upper class associations.

Figure 6 : Street scene from Dhanmondi, a few blocks away from Drik (Road 27).

[17] Estimates of the population that live in poverty in Dhaka are, as Siddiqui et al (2010:14) have pointed out far from uniform. According to a study carried out by the Asian development Bank in 1996, 55 % are classified as "moderate poor" and 32 % as "hardcore poor", while other studies show significantly lower rates. Reliable statistics are, in other words hard to obtain. Bangladesh is a low-income country where large segments of the population struggle financially.

This class positioning is followed up in the way that Shahidul dresses. While his family is firmly established as part of the national upper class, Shahidul makes a point by wearing 'Fatuas', the Bangladeshi style shirt and sandals, even at formal occasions. He takes pride in growing his beard, and in riding a bicycle to get around, which is usually associated with the middle- and lower classes. In contrast, many men from upper middle classes and national elites would wear Western style shirts and suit trousers, and most would drive air-conditioned cars with private drivers. In other words, Shahidul has crafted a self-image correspondent with his ideals, rather than his class background, and with the use of symbolical capital he uses his body as a political instrument to express his ideology. Through his clothing he also effectively distances himself symbolically from Western influence. Many Drik affiliated photographers wear 'Fatuas', although Western shirts and t-shirts are also common. Women and girls usually wear the female dress 'Salwar Kameez'; consisting of a knee-long dress over baggy trousers and a shawl covering the chest. However, it is also common to wear a Kameez (Bangladeshi dress) in combination with jeans. Among the younger generations saris, once the national dress in Bangladesh and India, are used above all for special occasions because many consider the dress to be inconvenient. My own efforts to dress in local clothes were often commented positively, and I was applauded several times by students in Pathshala for wearing sandals.

In an interview Shahidul's niece, journalist Fariha Karim (2009), asks him what his politics are. Shahidul replies that his politics is class, and social differences more generally. He describes his activism by referring to a photograph he took of one of the domestic servants in his mother's house watching television from the room next-door.[18] The photograph was printed in the 1998 calendar, and after Shahidul showed it to his mother, the boy was allowed to watch television in the living room with the rest of the family (figure 5). This way, Shahidul exemplifies how photographs can be used as a tool in class politics to create social change.

[18] It is common to have servants helping out with tasks such as cleaning and cooking in the house, also for middle class families and students on a relatively low budget. Some families have several servants, and it is common to have servants living permanently in the home where they work.

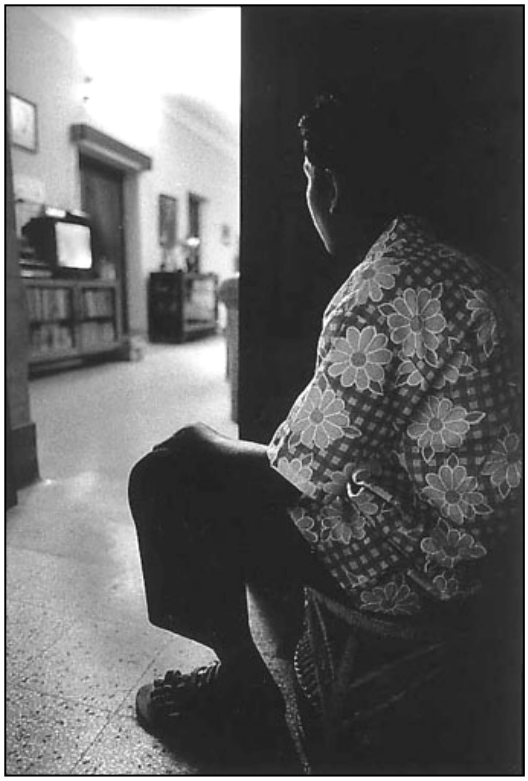

Figure 7 : Photo: Shahidul Alam, Drik's 1998 calendar

TV for domestics: He enters the room daily to dust it, sweep it, wipe it. He enters to move around the furniture. He enters as the eight o clock news begins, with plates and dishes of food - the family prefers to eat while watching television. But he can only enter to work. When it comes to watching television, his place is by door.

Shahidul acknowledges that he is one of the most privileged people in his country, a background he refers to as a source of motivation to keep working in difficult times (Alochona Magazine 2001). The fact that the agency, as well as the school and media institute under construction is funded upon his own, family ground further serves to illustrate Shahidul's dedication to his ideals and the media project in Dhaka. This is especially so considering that what distinguishes the "haves" from the "have-nots" in Bangladesh largely is the ownership of land and property. It should be mentioned that 'class' in the South Asian context is related to the old caste system, which also Muslim parts of the population formed a part of. Thus, in Bangladesh class is not just about economic and social capital.

The economic backgrounds of Drik photographers and Pathshala students vary to great extent. Though it is not exceptionally so, the majority of the involved photographers come from a 'middle class' economic background. There are also several highly privileged individuals involved, as well as a few coming from a working class background. Pathshala has defined a set of minimum requirements for the long-term courses, lasting from one to three years. To be accepted, in theory a student needs to have completed their A-levels (equivalent to upper secondary in the Norwegian school system). A number of students had

already completed a university education elsewhere, before they started studying in Pathshala. Many were also working considerable amounts outside of school to make a living, in some cases also to support their family financially. The gap between wealthy and well-equipped students on the one hand, and financially struggling alumni on the other is stark, and also evident among Drik staff. Similarly, a good level of English is highly priced as cultural capital, and often a necessity to be able to "make it" internationally in the photographic world. The English skills ranged from those who had studied in English medium schools or abroad whose English were fluent, and those who had a hard time following classes conducted in English, and all levels in between.

Several students asserted that the batch that completed their studies shortly after I left Dhaka was the last group where the majority of the students belonged to the middle class. This change could be seen visually, they argued, by looking at the number of students who were taken around in cars with private drivers or owned Apple products. It was explained to me that a reason could be that to study photography had now become a fashion, and one pointed out that a commercial on national television could have contributed in this direction. The commercial showed a photographer who had succeeded attracting a beautiful girlfriend, he explained. However, some of the students from privileged backgrounds did not have the moral and financial support from their parents because they did not back their decision to study photography. Thus, a wealthy family background did not necessarily work in the students' favour. Out of the less privileged students at Pathshala, each year a few were recipients of Drik supplied scholarships. However, not all those who were offered scholarships came from low-income background. One of the scholarships was reserved to female applicants, since there were few girls among the students.[19]

To run the variety of projects Drik does requires a strong financial underpinning, which prompts me to give a quick glace at how Drik makes its wheels go round. As the fast growing organisation it is, the agency is 'caught' between financial concerns on the one hand, and idealistic considerations on the other.

Balancing activism with business

Behind the vision and ambition of Drik lies a financial reality to which the agency is acutely aware. In the beginning of my first personal conversation with Shahidul, he acknowledges

[19] There were between two and three girls in each group of students, and a slightly higher number in the short term courses. There are generally relatively few female photographers and journalists in Bangladesh, but I was told there has been a steady increase, particularly the last decade.

that ironically, the first commissions he was preceding were in fact the very things that he was talking against. As Shahidul explains:

> I think the key decision was taken in 1989 when we chose not to be an NGO. Because most of the organizations that do the sort of work we do, are NGOs. Whether we regret that position ourselves is another issue, but certainly, the fact that we are a company which has to pay taxes, has to pay its own tea means it developed a certain work ethics, to an NGO structure where you expect the donations to arrive and those to pay for all your costs [….] What it has acquired us to do is to compromising, to the extent that we have worked with organizations that we would not perhaps full-heartedly support […].

While the language Drik takes use of bears some resemblance to that used by organizations registered as NGOs, Drik carries much pride in its economic independence, however relative or restricted it may be. This is what assures Drik their 'editorial integrity', highly priced by the agency and many of the photographers working independently. As stated in its brochure, "it is the balance between the need to be financially viable, and the compulsion to be socially responsible that has defined Drik's development" (Drik 6). This form of duality, balancing on the boarder between what is financially sustainable and socially responsibility is at the very core of Drik's work ethos. So, how does this model of combined activism and business work in practice? Primarily, Drik pays for the daily running of the agency through the income they receive from commercial assignments. Focusing particularly on the still photography branch, major clients range from International NGOs such as Care, Concern Worldwide and Save the Children, to major newspapers like The Guardian, Le Monde, Far Eastern Economic Review and New York Times. Drik also take up assignments from publications such as Encyclopedia Britannica and German Geo, and although to a lesser extent, from local Bangladeshi companies such as Bitopi Advertising (Drik 6).[20]

Instead of accumulating external funding, Drik has a range of working partners. The Majority World portal is one exception, as it has received substantial amounts of external funding, most recently from the DOEN foundation in the Netherlands. Working through partnerships is a method adapted by Drik to assure its editorial integrity under financial pressure. This implies that Drik defines its projects first, and look for partners to "come on board" afterwards. Through this strategy, the photographers get a maximum of independence in carrying out the projects, while still being paid for the work they do. In other words, the

[20] To get a through insight to Drik's economy was a challenging task that I gave up on, towards the end of my stay in Dhaka. Lotte Hoek (2003) experienced the same difficulty when she carried out her research at Drik in 2001.

photographers do not need to negotiate their opinion to the same extent as if the situation was the other way around, which is the usual scenario. I believe this is the kind of agreements referred to as "pairing up with NGOs" and an ideal situation, which I saw few examples of in practice during my time in Dhaka. The children's workshops carried out in the collaboration with Unicef, however, were of this kind. The more common situation, when working with an NGO and other commercial clients, is that the photographer is employed by the organization that gives him or her specific tasks. The amount of freedom the photographer is given on such assignments varies from case to case, as will be explored in the subsequent chapter. Other partners included cultural centres, such as the Goethe Institute and Alliance Francaise, the fine art faculty at Dhaka University and Shipakala Academy that provided venues during larger arrangements, foreign embassies including the Norwegian ministry of Foreign Affairs, and media partners including local newspapers and Canon.

As Shahidul also stated in the above, Drik is not always in agreement with its clients, and on occasions the agency has had to meet the client half-way, if not altogether. Thus, to sustain its many initiatives financially the agency has been obliged to compromise its ideals. On the other hand, it was explained to me that there are organizations that Drik has stopped working with, and others who would never come to an agency like Drik in the first place. Shahidul emphasizes that now, as the robust organization Drik is today, it can afford to be a bit selective in the assignments it takes on, as well as to negotiate terms and conditions in situations where there are disagreements between Drik and their clients.

In the chapters that follow, I will focus on the ways that Drik and affiliated works trickle down to practicalities, and the tensions that many of the photographers have to deal with on an everyday basis. But first, I will lay out the methodological and ethical implications for this thesis.

Methodological implications

As numerous ethnographic units of study nowadays, Drik and its many related activities are highly visible on the Internet. This is how I got to hear of the agency in the first place, several years ago. I contacted the agency early in September 2010, when I had just started my Masters program, asking if there was a possibility of locating my fieldwork at Drik. It was followed by a long wait on my tiptoes. Meanwhile I had time to research, and learned much about how busy those working at the agency were. A children-training course had been taking place somewhere in the countryside; the photographs posted on Shahidul's blog made me

more excited. I watched an online symposium on documentary photography launched from Australia, with photographers participating from Bangladesh. Some of the staff sent me links to updates on the web to apologize for the delay. A Tibet exhibition hosted at Drik had been pressured to close down by the Chinese embassy in Dhaka and the Bangladeshi government. Photographs posted on the website showed police officers inside one of the Drik galleries and Shahidul Alam quarrelling with ministers. After a good amount of messaging back and forth and a few reminders, it was finally settled on the 22 of November that I could carry out my research in Dhaka. My arrival in the beginning of January 2010 would coincide with three student photography workshops, one in Kathmandu, one in Chittagong and the third in Dhaka. My "field", in other words, can only be understood as all embracing of the immense possibilities that technology and global inter-connectedness have to offer. As a site for fieldwork, this involves both advantages and inconveniences. On the one hand, it was useful to be able to familiarize myself with the research site beforehand, and in retrospect, to be able to contact photographer friends any time. On the other hand, it has been a challenge to limit my correspondence with informants and stop trying to stay updated on field related events. In other words, it has been hard to leave the field precisely because it was so accessible.

The fieldwork was carried out from January to July 2010. I also returned for the *Chobi Mela* festival for ten days in mid-January 2011. I was based in Dhaka most of the time, above all in the community surrounding Drik. Almost all the people I befriended and spent time with were photographers. Some were working in the studio department or the photographic library department at Drik, others were students or teachers at Pathshala. Some were also former students who were working either as freelancers or for other picture agencies, national newspapers or NGOs during the time of my research. For many their workload consisted of a combination of these. It makes most sense therefore to say that my interlocutors are *loosely* organized around Drik as a form of junction; which a number of activities spring out from, yet by no means limited to the agency. In other words, this is not a study of Drik per se, but a paper that explores the experiences of individual, Dhaka-based photographers in some way affiliated to the *network* the photographic agency offers. The paper focuses specifically on their struggle to carry out counter-Orientalist photography in practice, in a larger social field of photography.

The photographic community that springs out from Drik is rather scattered, and in addition located in a "megacity" with above 12 million inhabitants.[21] The combination of these two factors made my "field" rather diffuse; it was difficult to know where it was to begin and end. A lot of the time I spent in Dhaka I was overwhelmed by all the things that took place at once, and confused about where to centre my focus. Other times were seemingly quiet, yet equally confusing. The fieldwork I conducted was not only urban, but also 'contemporary', and 'modern'. Many students of anthropology find that there is an expectation that they focus on classical anthropological topics and bring out characteristics that are "typical" for the region when they carry out research in countries that are spatially far away. The US based anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997) argue that topics are ranked according to their 'anthropological-ness', and that the suitability for anthropological study depends on how radically different or *exotic* a culture is; in other words its degree of 'otherness'. The term "field" carries connotations to a place that is usually set off from the urban, and moreover, can be limited to a space defined within a 'locality' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:8,15). The authors argue that the anthropological discipline struggle to keep up with the 'realities' it seeks to represent. In this sense, my own fieldwork can be seen as a "counter Orientalist" endeavour in its own right.

Having studied photography and being a 'semi professional' photographer myself, my own background in photography was of great importance to gain entry in the Drik network and be able to keep up with what my photographer friends were talking about. The fact that I was familiar with the photographic medium conceptually and technically, as well as many of the photographers and debates that were referred to in class or conversation was fundamental to carry out this type of fieldwork. In that sense we spoke the same "language". Also, many in the Drik community had a general idea about anthropology. Shahidul's partner is an anthropologist, who had been involved at Drik since the beginning. Students at Pathshala were also taught visual anthropology, in their first year. Not least, my own concerns regarding representation were shared by many of the photographers. Several of the photographers brought up that to represent a person from the upper or upper middle class is much harder than to photograph a person who is 'poor'. The same issue has been discussed in anthropology (for example by Sheehan 1996). For photographers and anthropologists alike to

[21] The last Bangladesh census was carried out in 2001, and listed 9.672.763 inhabitants in Dhaka city. The 2008 estimate was 12.797.394. At the time of writing, the results of the 2011 census were not yet released. Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

represent someone else is a scary task, because it is impossible to 'capture' a 'subject' from all angles, and one's point of view is inevitably selective.

Clifford Geertz (1988:5) reminds us of the highly situated nature of ethnographic description; "this ethnographer, in this time, in this place, with these informants, and these experiences". Any type of fieldwork is in other words subjective and highly situated (the same can be said to be true in terms of photography). With the rapid changes that take place at Drik, already when I write these words the photographic community springing out from Drik will look different.

Research methods and material

Although I took course in Bengali during my first month in Dhaka my language skills were limited to an elementary level. This meant that I was more reliant on using loosely structured or semi-structured conversations and interviews than what is considered ideal in anthropological research. A consequence was also that I got in contact mainly with those among the photographers who spoke English, which implies that there is a potential class bias to my work. The courses in Pathshala were also taught in Bengali except from at times when foreigners were visiting, and I had limited access to what photographers and friends said between them. Occasionally fragments were translated to me, but generally I felt that the advantages of not using a translator outnumbered the benefits from using one. The informal conversations I had were the most useful, and the few times I tried using a translator it was at the expense of the intimacy I had with the photographers otherwise. While I do recognize that a translator could have been useful in some situations, these were usually highly unpredictable. Most of the photographers spoke English, although some had to make more of an effort than others. However, this was not always the case for students in Pathshala, and there are students I wish I could have talked more to. This marks a clear delimitation to my work.

Interviews are combined with informal conversations and the method of participant observation. I have had the privilege of being free to walk in and out of the gates at Drik and Pathshala whenever I wished, and have been invited to events and cared for throughout my time in Dhaka. On most weekdays I would pass by both the agency and the school.[22] I was present during seminars and workshops in Pathshala, occasionally also regular classes. I also attended exhibitions and opening nights at Drik as well as in other venues, and generally

[22] In Bangladesh the week lasts from Saturday to Thursday, whereas Friday usually is 'day off'. This was also the practice at Drik, which was closed on Fridays.

tagged along to events and happenings when I had the chance. Bangladesh is an incredibly hospitable country, and a thankful research context. I was often invited to peoples homes, both by photographers in the Drik community and people I met elsewhere, also randomly on the streets. I quickly learned the phrase *abar asben*; which means come again. Though not always directly research related, these encounters taught me a lot about the Bangladeshi society.

Semi-structured interviews and informal conversations took place either at the rooftop of Pathshala or Drik, on benches within the school campus, at tea-stalls outside Pathshala or Drik, or when moving from one place to another; by rickshaw, car or on foot. More in-depth interviews were often conducted in offices, at the photographer's work station or in their homes, as well as in nearby cafés or restaurants. These were usually recorded, often combined with some note taking and transcribed shortly after. The interviews usually consisted of a combination of structured and unstructured elements, with space for free associations, follow-up questions and discussion. I socialized with a number of the photographers many times in different settings, and our meetings naturally became more spontaneous over the time. Other meetings were extremely hard to arrange because of the photographers' time pressure. These were consequently more formally structured when they finally took place. This was the case for my interviews with Shahidul Alam. In our second and last interview I also provided him with the key questions beforehand.

Some interviews and conversations included photographic material. Usually these were of the photographers' own choice, but occasionally I also asked about series I had heard about. Other times pictures we were both familiar with were brought up in the discussion. The alteration between talking and looking at photographs gave a relaxed and rewarding form to the interviews. Most of the time I got the impression that the photographers enjoyed that I showed interest in their photographs and interviewed them, although many of the photographers were extremely busy in their work and everyday lives, and interviews had to be squeezed in to the little time they had available. However, photographers commonly used the journalistic expression "off record" and I often found that the most valuable information was given to me when the recorder was switched off. A few times I experienced that photographers were reluctant to answer my questions. In one instance I experienced a "shuffle-game" between Pathshala students, where my question was passed on to other photographers, with the assumption that others would be able to provide me with better answers. For this reason, some queries were left unresolved at the end of the fieldwork. This was the case for concepts commonly used by local photographers, in my attempts to

understand what they meant personally to the photographers. In spite of my background in photography, there is no guarantee that I always understood photographers' statements thoroughly on their own terms.

Several times it was demonstrated to me that what people say and do is not always corresponding, which illustrates a restriction to conversational techniques. At times the information I was given by different interlocutors was contradictory. For example, few photographers would openly admit to have staged news photographs. A photographer who according to several was "well known" for staging news photographs told me during a conversation that he considered it unacceptable. I also observed a photographer who had claimed he did not stage arrange a scene and photograph it a few days later. Thus, there is a 'front stage' – 'back stage' dynamic at play that can be seen as examples of what Erving Goffman (1959) has referred to as 'impression management'.[23] At the same time these instances illustrate a limitation to the method of interviewing as an anthropological technique.

My own language limitations can only partially explain the necessity to rely to a certain extent on interviews. The Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (2004) carried out a fieldwork amongst above all European and North American foreign news correspondents from 1995 to 2000. His interlocutors were based in Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Tokyo, and the United States. Hannerz problematises "contemporary ethnography", and argues that in modern settings anthropologists are often more reliant on material collected through the method of interviewing, than the more "traditional" anthropological method of participant observation (Hannerz 2003). During the fieldwork I often felt I occupied peoples' valuable time. Often, I did not know what to do while my interlocutors spent time on their computers writing emails or performing other office related tasks. Hannerz encountered the same problem during his fieldwork. Contrary to my study his fieldwork was *multisited*; it took place in a number of different locations, and I believe my own fieldwork allowed for more intimate and less fragmented relationships than those Hannerz describe. However, he introduces the term *trans-local* (2003), which I see as relevant in relation to my own field. Much like foreign news correspondents, Drik and affiliated photographers can only be

[23] The practice of staging is quite common in the Bangladeshi context, and local photographers had been criticised by foreigners for having staged; particularly news photographs. One reason that photographers were careful to talk about practices of staging could be that they expected me to be critical about it too. But also, the rules and norms that dominate the larger photographic field influence the photographers' practices and what is openly talked about. There have been episodes where photographers working for North American and European newspapers have been fired because they have been caught staging photographs (and also for significantly altering pictures in Photoshop). Thus, a photographer might fear to risk his or her job by admitting to have staged photographs.

understood through their inter-relation to international markets, and as part of a larger network of media politics; cross-cultural and trans-national in their scope.

As already mentioned, my own fieldwork included participant observation. Part of my initial plan had been to accompany photographers on assignments. This turned out to be harder than I expected, but I did have the opportunity to observe a handful of photographers "in action" and follow some photographers closer in their work. On a few occasions, I was denied access by the NGOs that photographers were doing assignments for. Other times the restrictions had to do with practical matters, such as change in plans, and perhaps more often than I realized at the time; photographers concern about my safety in what they considered dangerous working conditions. This may also have been for good reasons. When I did have the chance to join photographers on their assignments, there were other challenges. One particular day's shoot is quite telling in this regard.

> I joined a photographer for a shoot on city dwellers, part of a larger body of work and a long-term assignment he had been doing for some time. The shoot took place in 20 meters long tunnel with a staircase on the side, used for crossing a busy road in the daytime. During the night homeless people take shelter here. We arrived in the early morning hours, when the tunnel was packed with people. Many of the city dwellers were just about to wake up, some were still asleep, while others were walking through the tunnel or standing at the edges to get away from the heavy monsoon rain. The photographer, who was used to working in this environment, had no problem moving around quickly as he was working. Several of the people he photographed were familiar with him from before. I was there primarily to observe, and I did my best to pay attention to what he was doing, without stumbling in any of the legs or arms, or being in his way. There were many distracting elements, in addition to the space being extremely tight. Not surprisingly, many of the people were curious about what I was doing there. One woman was yelling at us.[24] Soon after we arrived, a mother was beating her child brutally, right in front of our eyes. At the same time I had to watch out for a monkey, who was tied to his owner from the neck, and whose mood was shifting from being cuddly and cute to aggressive all the time; trying to pinch people's legs as they were walking by. Many times, I would loose track of what the photographer was up to because it was so emotionally dreading to be there, and so many things I had to be attentive to at the same time. This made "observation" an extremely difficult task.

[24] I was later told that she had been yelling about the photographer and camera; about what the images would be used for and how it would help her. Many of the photographers told me about similar experiences, where "subjects" questioned how the photographs would be useful to them.

The population density in Dhaka, together with the fact that photographers often work in challenging conditions made it difficult to observe photographers in action. When I followed photographers to work it also meant that I was introduced to new people who had very little time to get used to my presence. Generally, foreigners also get a good amount of attention in Bangladesh, because they are relatively few in numbers, and it is common to be surrounded by a crowd within short time in public places.

In terms of editing, an ideal situation for an anthropologist would be to follow the whole process from the original shoot to the final selection and publication. This was rarely possible in practice. The processes in themselves are usually of long duration, and in this regard I had limited access. There is an "unwritten rule" in photography, which was referred to several times during my fieldwork. It states that photographers should not show their contact-sheets to anyone, or else they would "ruin the magic" of their craft.[25] One of the Pathshala teachers explained it this way; "If you are a magician you will not allow anyone to stand behind you, that is the same thing. It would kill your magic". Many photographers are reluctant to show their work in its original form, before it has been edited and retouched. When I did get the insight to the photographs on an early stage, I could never know for certain if I was offered an unedited version. I was also told off once for looking at Shahidul's contact sheets by one of the staff, while I was helping out in the picture library. Initially I offered to volunteer part time in the library, but this episode made me change my mind, because I feared the two roles would come into conflict. I found that to assist people in more informal ways was a better option.

Ethical considerations

Even though I decided not to volunteer I experienced the fieldwork as a delicate balancing act between closeness and distance. Many of my 'interlocutors' also became my friends; and it was (as it continues to be) hard to draw a line between my role as a researcher, and as a friend. It was particularly challenging to draw this line in my relationship to one of the key staff members at Drik, who I lived with, and who became very dear to me. I have decided to leave accounts out in their entirely for this reason.

A major difficulty has been to find a way to include photographs in the text. After many attempts of combining empirical data with selections from the rich photographic

[25] A contact sheet is a sheet of small sample images, printed in the order they were taken. From analogue photography this would mean that the 24 or 36 picture frames from a film were converted into positives to give you an overview of its content. The same concept exists in the digital world.

material I collected, I realized that to show the photographs without revealing the identity of my interlocutors and friends was impossible. I found the obligation (and wish) to credit photographers on the one hand, and the responsibility to assure those involved anonymity as Norwegian research ethics demands on the other as irreconcilable. I eventually settled on not using photographs, albeit not without disappointment. Because who writes about photography, without using photographs? And how can I justify not revealing the material I discuss to my readers? With the polysemous nature of photographs I cannot; a interpretative problem is inevitable, as it already is on all stages of anthropological research. Neither of these responsibilities could be negotiated, however, and I found in-between solutions hard to justify. More than anything I fear to disappoint my photographer friends in Dhaka, with above 100 pages of dull words almost without photographs.

I have made a few exceptions to this general rule. To anonymise Drik as a whole was impossible, considering the attention the agency, and the founder Shahidul Alam has received, also in Norway. I have included two of his photographs, since his name in any case is made explicit. I have also included a few personal photographs from the field, but I have been careful not to include photographs where interlocutors can be identified. All names, except from Shahidul's have been anonymised. This includes the names of non-governmental organizations. The latter has been done with the respect of photographers' confidentiality towards their clients, as well as to avoid compromising NGOs' international reputation. It is precisely the ways that Drik and individual photographers work for, and in collaboration with NGOs that will be explored in the subsequent chapter.

4

Seeing like a development photographer[26]

"You know, after a while you learn the NGO style"

-Drik staff photographer

Part of Drik's aim has been to contest dominating power structures and stereotypical delimitations, and inherent in Drik's ideology lies a critique towards development practices and photographic narratives. At the same time Drik works under the pressure of the same market reality as other photographic institutions, and NGO- related assignments form a substantial part of the their work load. These assignments are among the most profitable, and the agency relies on them financially to carry out their wide-reaching initiatives.

Can social and commercial interests correlate, and even reinforce one another, or do the two become a field of friction? In this chapter I will draw on examples where photographers at Drik and in the surrounding community in different ways are working for, or in collaboration with NGOs. Through these I will demonstrate some ways that social and commercial interests come together at Drik, and how the agency manoeuvres between their social goals and business interests. I begin by exploring photography in relation to development on a more general level, before I move on to discuss the concept of 'advocacy' photography; to photograph for a cause. First, I will present a case where social goals and business interests were combined without major complications. This will lead to a discussion of contracts and "packaging"; strategies applied by Drik to make such collaborations possible. These strategies suggest a link to Taussig's (1993) analysis of mimetic practices, applied in order to flip the power relationship between photographers and clients around. As we shall see these strategies are harder to apply to more strictly commercial projects, illustrated by two examples from Drik, and another from an external, though not altogether unrelated context. Through these examples the often-mentioned "NGO style" will be discussed, as well as

[26] The title of this chapter is inspired by the political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott's publication *Seeing like a state* (1998).

concerns related to development embedded photography. They will set the stage for discussions regarding the photographic medium's ambiguous position between subjectivity and objectivity, art and documentation. I will engage the last example in a semiological approach to photographs, suggested by Barthes (1984, 1999), supplied with a processual approach proposed by Kopytoff (1986) and Newton (2001).

I will then broaden the focus to look at photographic assignments that linger ambiguously between the outer points of the *autonomous* pole on the one hand, and *heteronomous* pole on the other, as outlined by Bourdieu (1998), in other words between commodity and resistance. I will discuss factors that influence to what extent photographers' are successful in sticking to their ideals. Finally I argue that aspects of Drik's ideology also inspire affiliated photographers to frame their practices in particular ways.

Drik and photography in a development context

The photographic medium is an effective way for non governmental organizations (NGOs) to communicate with the general public and potential donors, to illustrate that there is a need to raise money in fundraising campaigns, as well as to document a project's results in retrospect. More than statistics and written words, photographs provide a human face to a situation, and thus, photographs have become particularly important in development work. A photograph's ability to "bridge" social realities that are wide apart can explain why it has been so successfully implemented in news, missionary and development narratives. Drik's founder Shahidul Alam (1994) has pointed out that one of the problems with the "development business" and the "photography business" being interlinked is that in development narratives the focus typically is on the foreign organizations as the active part of the relationship, while local initiatives and individual agency tend to be overlooked. We are all familiar with strongly contrasted photographs of children with large begging eyes, often dressed with torn and dirty clothes. Equally iconic is the image of a large (usually white) hand; in one version with a child's hand in his palm, most likely darker in colour and evidently weak from malnutrition. In the second version a bag of goods (food, blankets, or whatever form aid takes) is handed over to an awaiting crowd. Such images often have a distortion that makes the eyes or hand appear proportionally larger than in real life.[27] In the latter example the image is taken from

[27] The effect is achieved in photography when using a professional full frame camera, as well as a wide-angle lens. One of the photographers explained it this way; "See this image? (Referring to the image described, in which food, blankets or other forms of aid are handed out to an awaiting crowd). You can see this image in almost any publication, and most of the photographers are taking it with a wide angle to distort the hands and make it look more dramatic".

the perspective of the 'giver', and the distortion makes the hand look enormous, whereas the 'receivers' at the other end appear to be small, powerless and an insignificant part of the transaction.

It is these photographic narratives that Shahidul, and Gullestad in the case of Cameroon have criticized. As Barthes have pointed out, photographic images 'speak' beyond their visuals, intricately linked as they are to development theories and agendas, dominant visual languages and a spiral of power relations. Neither of these are static sizes; development strategies are continuously reworked and reconsidered, the photographs that are considered to be the most effective at a given time is similarly prone to change. However, the 'images' I have sketched above are still circulating in various forms, on private blogs as well as in professional advertisements. One of the powers of photographic images is also that they are likely to leave a lasting impression after they are out of sight. On the other hand, 'positive' portrayals and success stories are common in the documentation of development work. These photographs may be less problematic in terms of representation, but positive stories have also become a form of stereotype. Both show crude simplification of a given situation, with little room for the nuances in-between. Many NGOs wish to escape such oversimplifications of complex realities. The dilemma for NGOs and individual photographers alike is that dramatized and contrasted stereotype photographs tend to serve their purpose. As one of my classmates in Bergen sarcastically commented "Who wants to give money to someone who looks like they are fine on their own?"

Advocacy photography; to photograph for a cause

I was introduced to the term 'advocacy photography' at an online symposium, presented by the Centre for Documentary practice in Australia, with the overall theme "Seeking Justice, Social Activism through Journalism and Documentary practice". A number of countries were participating in the symposium, where photographic projects were projected and discussed in an interactive online conference room. One of the seminar sessions was called 'Advocacy through photography' and was launched from Bangladesh. Advocacy photography means to photograph for a cause, and in this context refers to collaborative works between NGOs and photographers. In the seminar one of Drik's photographers presented one of his photographic stories. The series of photographs showed the lives and living conditions of some of Dhaka's many city dwellers; people who live on the streets. Strongly contrasted, black and white photographs depicted their harsh reality, but also the loving care the city dwellers showed for one another. The photographer had called the project *Amrao Manush*, a Bangla phrase that

means "We are people too". The name had been suggested to the photographer by some of the city dwellers themselves. The photographs had been taken during an NGO assignment and used for fundraising. A few years later four day-care centres had been set up by the organization to cater for some of the city dwellers, as a response to the campaign. Thus, the photographs had effectively documented a need, and in terms of generating money the fundraising has been successful.

On the one hand, there is an immense potential using the photographic medium for advocacy purposes. Simultaneously a set of concerns arises when photographers work for or in collaboration with NGOs. The ideal situation as it has been described by Drik staff, is one in which the interests of the agency and the interests of the NGO they are working for coincide sufficiently to find a middle ground where Drik's editorial integrity and social goals are maintained. The agency has adapted several strategies to assure that their interests are adhered to in their encounters with clients. In this sense, they are trying to change "the system" from within. However, this critical position is not necessarily compatible with the agency's financial interests, and finances are a necessity to keep Drik's many initiatives alive and pulsating. As a consequence the agency and its staff are often pulled in two directions at the same time. In the pages that follow I examine how idealist and economist concerns influence photographic alignments for development agencies, beginning with a case where they coincide quite well.

Fair Fabrics

The best example that I came across of the type of partnership where an NGO, Drik and the individual photographer assigned all pulled in the same direction politically was a project that photographer and activist Aneela had carried out for the organization Fair Fabrics (FF). She had worked for a political organization dedicated to improve the garment workers' rights for a long time.

The garment industry in Bangladesh comprises nearly 80 % of the country's export values and employs 2.2 million workers, the majority of them women. For importing countries Bangladesh can offer one of the lowest labour costs in the world. The deal that the garment workers themselves get is less luxurious; the minimum wages at the time of my research was 1662 taka (Muhammad 2009), which equals just above 22 USD per month.[28] For

[28] In July 2010 the official monthly wage was raised to the amount 3000 taka (40.5 USD). Because of the steady rise of food and living costs, however, workers and workers' unions have argued the rise does not change

this pay the women work approximately 12 hours a day, six to seven days a week. The working conditions in the garment factories are often dangerous, and deadly fires are common. The garment workers' rights have long been fought for, but have involved few real changes in the lives of the workers. Among their demands are increased wages and improved working conditions, including organizational rights, sick pay and maternity leave. The struggle escalated and took a violent form in May 2006, and the situation has been tense since. During my fieldwork the political turmoil related to the garment sector intensified once again with numerous revolts.

Aneela is a woman in her mid-thirties, committed to the garment workers cause through her work for a supporting political organization based in Dhaka. She is one of the relatively few female photographers in the photographic community. At the time of my research she was a third and final year Pathshala student. She had already completed a degree from Dhaka University. Her family was a firmly established part of the Bangladeshi upper class, and thus, Aneela came from a privileged financial background compared to most of the students. She had chosen a different path in her own life, however, and as both Aneela and her spouse carried out unpaid work for a leftist, feminist organization they lived on a relatively tight budget. Aneela had been engaged in the garments cause since before she began her studies in photography, and her intention was from the start to use her camera as a political tool to benefit her organizational work. Initially she was not planning to study photography for the full three years, but since 'the care taker government' that ruled the country from 2007 until 2009 prohibited political organization, she decided to take advantage of the quiet period this resulted in for her organization.[29] She completed her photography degree in the autumn 2010.

Fair Fabrics (FF) is an alliance of organizations in 15 European countries that offer solidarity support to workers demanding improved working conditions. They have partner networks with more than 200 organizations and unions in garment producing countries worldwide. The Drik Picture Library received the assignment from FF in August 2009. Aneela was not employed by the agency, but she was offered the job due to her long political

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workers' lives significantly. The demand is that factory owners increase the wages to 5000 taka monthly, and thus, Bangladeshi garment workers struggle continue.

[29] The non-partisan Caretaker Government was installed on the 11th of January 2007, as a reaction to fraud in the national election in Bangladesh. It was backed by armed forces as the international donor community with the main objective to assure free, fair and credible elections. However, it turned into what the sociologists Siddiqui et al has called a "witch hunt" of massive human rights violations (2010: 359-360).

engagement with the workers in the garments sector; because the team leader believed she was the best person to do the job.[30]

I met Aneela one of my first days in Dhaka, during the collaborative workshop between Australian and Bangladeshi students. She was outspoken and friendly and a person I instantly connected with. Busy as she was with her political work as well as school assignments, she was not the easiest person to get a hold of. As the Fair Fabrics assignment was mentioned several times, I asked her if she could share some of the details with me. We met some days later for lunch in the café at Bengal Art gallery. The spacious and air-conditioned restaurant is located close to Drik. Set back a little from the street, it offers a relative calm from the almost constant traffic jams on Road 27.

> We order rice, vegetable curry and *dhal*; a dish made of lentils. Aneela tells me that she decided to take the assignment for Fair Fabrics because she had a good dialogue with the organization and because they supported the garment workers' cause. While she did not know that much about the work the NGO actually carried out, she hoped that FF could inspire Western consumers to put pressure on the corporations that are buying the clothes, produced under unacceptable conditions in Bangladesh. It was also a good opportunity for her to get her images "out there". According to her accounts Aneela had been given a list of what to photograph prior to the assignment. The NGO also showed a considerable amount of flexibility within their requirements. Part of the agreement with FF was that they could only use the images "in accordance with her cause". It was particularly important for her that FF respected that she did not believe the solution was to close down the factories, which in her opinion would only serve to further marginalize the workers. The titles accompanying her images should further be kept in their original form, and the real names of those photographed should not be mentioned for the protection of the "subjects". In other words, the NGO was not permitted to add any elements without the photographer's approval. FF accepted these requirements. Finally, they agreed that the photographer and the organization should have a shared copyright ownership to the images.
>
> Aneela explains that she was assigned for two days only, but spent a full four days including some nights photographing, even though the remaining time was unpaid. "In any case I did not do it for the money, and it was important for me to do it well" she comments.

[30] There was some controversy on this. Several photographers argued that Aneela was offered the assignment because she was a woman, and one of the few 'female photographers' in the community, although no other photographers in the community could match the experience she had from working for the garment cause. Aneela and several others (above all women, but also some men) in the Drik network found the assessment unfair; they were unhappy about the term 'female photographer' to start with, because they did not think their gender had anything to do with whether they were good photographers or not. A senior 'female photographer' told me that she as a woman had had to work harder than most of the men, but at the same time she recognised that being a woman had been a comparative advantage in her career.

> The assignment from FF required her to focus more on the workers' living conditions than she had done during earlier photo-shoots, but in other respects she continued to work in the way she usually did, only with a much more limited time span. She carried out the assignment photographing primarily the women she had already established a trusting relationship with through her earlier work with garment workers. Initially FF had asked her to photograph a demonstration or political speech, but since no such event took place during the days that she was shooting, she would have been forced to arrange it, which she was not willing to do. FF did not have a problem understanding this, she explains, and on completion they sent an email to Drik where they said they were very happy with her work.

Aneela had been careful to keep her personal and commissioned work apart, but the FF assignment was closely related to the project she has been working on throughout her three years at Pathshala. The selection of photographs that was made available on the NGOs website was her own edit, published in colour as the pictures were originally shot. The photographs were accompanied by the texts Aneela wrote with assistance from Drik Library staff, with fictive names for the garment workers' protection. The photos show cramped and unhygienic living spaces, particularly for cooking and sleeping. There are also close-up portraits of some of the workers. The indoor images have a dark feel to them both in terms of content and their visual appearance. However, the women are generally portrayed in a 'dignified' manner that emphasise their courage and strength.[31] For example, some of the photographs show a children's nursery and a small school group initiated by women in the neighbourhood, and thus, focus on how the women are doing their best to cope with the difficult situation they are in. In the text Aneela explains that the spaces available for children to play in are unsafe and that some suffer from malnutrition. Some images also show children playing and having fun.

In this case the NGO and the photographer both worked to achieve improved working conditions for the garment workers, and used this as an establishing point for a productive working relationship. Although Aneela was unsure what the international NGO could achieve,

[31] Aneela gave me the most elaborate account out of all the photographers on what she considered a dignified representation. First, it fundamental that a photographer takes the time to establish a relationship to his or her "subjects", and secondly, reflects on his/her personal engagement with the topic. Finally it means to focus on a person's inner strength, rather than weaknesses. She described; for example, if a person is disabled, instead of focusing on that he has no arm, which would evoke pity for the 'subject', rather show that persons inner strength. The latter was pointed out as the most challenging, also by Aneela. To portray someone with dignity implies "to photograph them with full recognition of their being", in other words. Several times during presentations in Pathshala it was voiced by one of the teachers that to photograph a person from a slightly lower angle would make him or her look more powerful. I also heard Adeine, the team leader in the Drik Library office, ask a photographer who showed her his portfolio if he could not bother to get down on the level of the children he had been photographing.

she was willing to use it as a platform to get attention to the cause. In this, it serves as a good example for what Drik has put forth as an ideal working situation. The assignment was referred to several times by staff as one of the most successful examples where a photographer and an NGO "paired up" and worked together for the same cause.

I believe Aneela's garment work embodies qualities that Drik values also on other levels. A long-term engagement and dedication to political cause is aspired, as well as a relative closeness to one's photographic "subjects", in spite of the large distance between the photographer and workers in terms of socio-economic realities. Further, respectful portrayals that emphasise strength, courage and individual agency are preferred. The photographer is also an activist, radical in her ideals, sympathizing with the working class in her work and aspiring to change the status quo. Finally I will argue that Aneela strives to show a *balanced* view, a point that will be elaborated later on.

Fair Fabrics was fortunate that Drik could put the organisation in contact with a suitable local photographer, dedicated to the cause and experienced working with the garment workers. However, if Aneela did not already have a network of contacts and an established relationship with some of the workers, the task of carrying out the assignment in two days would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible. Still, it is the most common context for photographers to work during commercial assignments. It is also common that photographers who are not familiar with the particular cause, or even local context are commissioned for similar assignments. Even with the amount of experience Aneela had, she felt the need to dedicate more time than she had been assigned for to complete the job. This requires both a strong dedication to the cause, and a steady personal economic situation that allows the photographer to do so.

Drik adapted strategies

The assignment Aneela carried out for FF brings me to the issue of "packaging" material; a strategy Drik have devised in order to assure that their social goals are maintained. Michel de Certeau (1980:7) draws a distinction between strategies and tactics. He argues that power is a precondition for the performance of strategies, whereas tactics are determined by the absence of power.[32]

[32] De Certeu's perspective conditions that 'subjects' are seen as practical, conscious and active agents, who act freely within the constraints power enforces on them. The concept of 'agency' derives from Anthony Giddens, and is nearly identical to the concepts Ortner and Bourdieu refer to as practice/praxis (Eriksen and Nielsen 2002:196-197).

One of the strategies Drik has developed involves providing photographs and texts packaged together, and that way better control the final product. In the FF assignment Aneela, and Drik on her behalf, were firm in their demands towards the client, and all three parties agreed on the terms and conditions. The strategy of packaging photographs and text, as well as Drik's contracts are key to understand the negotiations between the agency and the client.

Shahidul explained in one of our conversations that in the past it was common for clients to select individual photos and use them out of context. Consequently, today Drik provides more work through packaged feature stories where photographs and texts are combined; a strategy adapted to protect the rights of the photographers and the social goals of the agency. The assignment Aneela carried out for FF serves as an example. The NGO had to agree to publish all the images the photographer herself had selected, and only alongside the text she had written with the assistance of the Drik Library staff. This way Drik reassures that the agency will not loose editorial control over the content after it has been sent to the client, in other words that no elements the agency disagree with are added on a later stage. The NGO committed itself to the terms and conditions defined by the agency through signing the contract. Shahidul explains:

> In our contracts we mention that the images can only be used if they are being used in a particular ethical way. For instance, we've had a term built into the contract stating that the client is not allowed to use the pictures in a way that goes against the social goals of justice, freedom and fair play, that this organization believes in.

The question of contracts was revisited when we talked about the World Bank (WB), an organization Drik according to Shahidul's accounts had been highly critical of. Drik had to terminate their work for the World Bank because the agency opposed Bill Clinton's visit to Bangladesh in August 2000, which was not well received by the WB. How the controversy had been resolved is not to my knowledge, but when I did my fieldwork Drik was back working with the World Bank. Shahidul stressed that Drik would only work with the organization in areas they were in agreement with. To return to the issue of contracts, however, Shahidul remarked; "I think it is the first time that an organization like the World Bank has been required to sign something of that sort, to a supplier […]. Here is a reversal of roles in a sense".

This is where Taussig and "the peculiar powers of mimetic faculty" (1993:2) provide a curious parallel. Taussig builds on ethnography from Latin America; particularly among the Cuna on the San Blas Islands of Panama, as well as the ideas of Walter Benjamin and colonial

history. Taussig writes that "the power of mimesis lies in the copy drawing of the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power" (1993:xiii). Through making the clients sign a contract, Drik copies the opponents strategies, in order to flip the power balance in their relationship. In Taussig's terms; it inverts its masters voice, in order to gain his capacity and remain the same (1993:19, 131, 253). Thus, to control the situation when working with powerful organizations such as the World Bank, Drik practices the art of the possible to make the client dance according to its own tune.

In the assignment Aneela carried out for FF her specific requirements regarding the accompanying text, contextual framework where the images could be used and copyright issues were adhered to by Fair Fabrics. The fact that the NGO, the photographer and Drik agreed on the importance of the garments cause probably worked in favour of a satisfying working relationship for all parties, but Shahidul also emphasizes that Drik's careful re-visiting of contracts has created some of the groundwork for that to happen. The "packaging" of material and formalized contracts exemplify how Drik attempts to find a form of middle ground in its' every day practices, more in keeping with its social goals. In the FF assignment, Drik's social and commercial interests went fairly smoothly hand in hand. My impression from conversations with staff, however, was that the assignment was not a representative case of how Drik's NGO commissions usually take shape. I will now turn to look at some of the instances where idealist and economic concerns were more divergent.

Food For Thought; a commercial NGO assignment

Most NGO assignments fall under the category of commercial work, where the main purpose is to generate income. Most commonly the photographer is hired by NGOs to photograph in a specified location; often in specific households, schools or other sites depending on what types of development projects and tasks each organization is dedicated to. At Drik, usually NGO assignments are passed on to the studio staff, which receives a large amount of commercial assignments from national and international organizations during the year. I had the chance to join one of the in-house photographers for an NGO assignment approximately a three-hour's drive from Dhaka. The photographer, Tarun, is an ex-student from Pathshala in his mid-twenties. It was the first year that he was working at Drik as a permanent staff member employed in the studio department. Most days he could be found in front of his computer, and he always had the time for a chat when I came by the office.

Tarun is a tall man, who tends to have a serious look on his face. He also appreciates a good laugh, however, and talks openly about his craft. Tarun refers to himself as a lower middle class citizen, and he was one of two students to receive a stipend for under-privileged students when he was a student in Pathshala. He received honourable mention for his work in the last year of his studies, and a selection of his photographs was exhibited at the photographic festival Chobi Mela. The job at Drik meant that he received a steady monthly pay regardless of the variations in workload, which provided him with a financial security he would not have had if he had been working freelance. While it was early in his career as a photographer, he already had a considerable amount of experience with NGO assignments. However, like most of the other photographers I talked to, it was his personal work that he was passionate about, and he considered the two as separate types of work. The assignment that I had the opportunity to come along to as an observer was a two-day shoot for a US based NGO called Food For Thought (FFT), which was to take place in a village north-east of Dhaka. We were picked up by one of the main staff members and his driver. The journey took about three hours, and on the way I took the opportunity to ask the Food For Thought representative about the NGO.

Food For Thought is a non-profit organisation whose main focus is on literacy and gender equality. The organization works to improve the quality of education and study environment for children from first to fifth grade, through providing reading material to public schools in nine countries. The main objective is to ensure that the students have access to "enjoyable supplementary reading" to be used in the classroom and for the students to bring home. In each country the FFT has employed local staff, responsible for implementing the programs in the various regions. In Bangladesh it has been active for two years, and the local team consists of nine employees. In some countries the organization provides suitable spaces for the children to read, but the attendant explained that this was not yet the case in Bangladesh. Since FFT work through public schools these facilities were already available. However, it had provided some Bangladeshi schools with equipment such as fans and blackboards, in addition to the library books, which were mainly in Bengali.

The photographs Tarun was assigned to take were to be used in Food For Thought's annual report and on its website, to document the use of the FFT provided "libraries" in ten schools. He was briefed about the details of the assignment in the car, and provided with a sheet with instructions for the shooting. The following photos were listed as mandatory: 1. Children in action using project, 2. Close-up of one child, 3. Dedication plaque, 4. Photo of building where project is located, 5. Photo of project room with all desks, chairs and furniture

set up, 6. Photo of material provided (shelves with books on them). The rest were listed as "great to have (but not mandatory) photos" Children with dedication plaque 1. The surrounding area, 2. Artwork of children, 3. Teacher in action, 4. Opening ceremony, 5. Other uses of project (i.e. teacher reading books). When we arrived in the area where the first school was located, we parked the car where the road ended, and walked the last kilometre by foot. One of the schoolteachers and a local Food For Thought representative came to meet us and take us to the school building.

> It is clear that the children have been expecting us, and that they are excited about the visit. Being photographed is a big event, and seeing a foreigner is an additional thrill. For the children to get some time to calm down, I am asked to wait at a kiosk around the corner. Some of the kids peek around the corner and giggle amongst them. Twenty minutes later I am allowed to enter the school.
>
> I find the photographer in one of the classrooms. Three girls around the age of seven are posing in front of the bookshelf, with some of the books Food For Thought have provided the school with in their hands. I settle on an empty desk in the back of the classroom, to avoid being in the way. The photographer instructs the children to hold up some of the books, smile and to look at the camera. The girls, seemingly proud to have been selected for the shoot, also appear to be intimidated by the presence of the photographer. The teacher, a middle-aged woman dressed in a green sari is standing on the side, tries to assist the photographer when the children are not cooperating. The local FFT representative is also present. The remaining children are curiously watching the events from their desks. Many have put on what appears to be their best clothes, and have carefully combed their hair into neat hairstyles. A few of the girls are wearing makeup for the occasion, and the children have their schoolbooks arranged in a pile in front of them. The photographer tells the girls he has photographed to return to their desks and selects a few of the other pupils; a boy and two girls, slightly older this time. They are posing in front of the shelf with books, first smiling, and then reading out loud, all three at the same time. The shooting continues in much the same way. Each time some of the kids are excited to have been chosen, while others are left disappointed and eagerly awaiting, hoping to be the next pick. Smaller children and adults have gathered outside the windows to observe the event taking place inside the classroom.

While the schools we visited varied in size, location and such things as clothing (some pupils wearing school uniforms, others individual dress), the task that the photographer carried out was much the same in each of them. The appreciation of the project however, as well as how successfully it was implemented seemed to vary. Most of the teachers said they were happy

with the material their classrooms had been provided with, when they were asked by the Food For Thought representatives. Not all the teachers appeared to be comfortable about the staff's presence though, and some seamed eager to continue the class. Also, it could be of relevance that all the NGO staff and the photographer were male, whereas the majority of teachers were women. Not all the teachers were equally excited about the libraries that had been provided. One of the teachers showed me a compulsory schoolbook and said; "look, there are pictures on all the pages". The comment was a respond to the Food For Thought attendant's assertion that the schoolbooks did not have illustrations, and the teacher took the opportunity to tell me that the schoolbooks did indeed have pictures in a moment when neither of the staff from Food For Thought were around. The teacher expressed that the library books provided by the NGO took the attention away from the curriculum-related teaching. Not all the libraries were well maintained, and in one instance the Dhaka-based representative scolded the local attendant for not having done his job properly, and demonstratively told him in English how sad this made him. In some schools the books were well used, according to the library cards inside, whereas in other schools the books seemed like they had hardly been touched. In some classrooms the selections of books appeared to be remarkably random; i.e. in having a large number of copies of a book evidently unpopular amongst the school children.

In many of the classrooms the children's ages varied greatly. During the editing the photographer commented that they were not necessarily in the same grade. Several of the schools did not actually have classes on the day that we visited, but came to school for the photographic shoot. In one of the schools I opened some of the smaller children's notebooks. I was impressed by the level of English, but when I tried talking to the kids I realized that they knew very little. Puzzled by this I later asked their teacher, and she explained that the girls had borrowed the notebooks from their older sisters. I do not know what would be the reason for this. It could be that the children just brought all the books they had access to for the photo shoot, to have as many books as possible, or, it could also be that some of the children who were present were not enrolled in school or usually attending.

A few days after the shoot I joined Tarun as he went through the photographs back in the Drik office. Among several thousand pictures he had been requested to select 400.

> I ask Tarun how he chooses whom to photograph. He explains that first of all he looks at what looks photogenic; "Clothes that are suitable and go well together, aesthetical background and so on". "A little like a painting?" I ask. "He-he. Yes, a little like a painting". "You know, after a while you learn the NGO style", he continues. I have heard photographers refer to the term

'NGO style' several times, and ask him what he means by the phrase. "Beyond smiling children and all that, it means no critical images". He also explains that to use flash is a necessity in NGO assignments, because it results in colourful and bright photographs, also from indoors shooting.

He begins the editing by going through all the images; checking the sharpness of portraits by zooming in on the eyes, deleting photographs that are redundant or aesthetically unsatisfactory. On some of the photographs he makes some changes in the exposure in Photoshop (the editing programme he is using) before he decides whether to keep an image or not.[33]

The second time Tarun returns to the pictures some days later, he begins to make his selection. In addition to visually pleasing photographs, he is careful to give the organization a broad variety of images. He selects a photograph of some older girls who were students in a secondary school nearby who just passed by as he was photographing in the primary school. I ask Tarun about this, and he replies that he is aware that they are not pupils in a beneficiary school, but that the organization needs more pictures of kids walking to and from school. "I have given them tons of pictures of children reading books", he explains. I comment on the fact that he took more images of girls than boys, and that his selection is also uneven – although this is also relative to the ratio of boys and girls in the school. Tarun explains that because of their gender focus the organization gives preference to pictures of girls. As he goes through photos he adjusts the exposure, contrast and light temperature; which defines the colour tones of the images. One of the images shows a group of girls walking across a flowery meadow. As I was not present when that exact image was taken, I ask Tarun if the image is staged. "Of course" he says. "Everything is 100 % staged". I ask him how that relates to assignments he has done in the past, for other NGOs. "It is always like this. But it happens too; the books exists, and they are being used in the classrooms".

I believe that what the photographer means to say is that although the common practice in NGO assignments is to stage events for the sake of photographing them, it does not mean that they are any less 'true' in terms of what they represent. He sets up, or stages situations likely to happen, that simulate what he believes is 'real life' events. I will return to the question of staging photographs later on. In this context to stage might also be necessary for the

[33] To take a slight side trip here, the debate regarding to what degree "photoshopping" is legitimate certainly exists in the generally critical environment at Drik as it does elsewhere. Several times I heard heavy Photoshop experimentation (such as colour layering, or moving objects within the frame) in documentary photographic series negatively commented upon in class presentations. One such critique was voiced with regards to one of the many 'Global Warming' projects, where a student had added a blue layer to his photographs. One of the younger teachers in Pathshala objected that the blue colour only served to distract the images, which did not bring awareness to global warming to begin with. He saw the student's photoshopping as a stunt, and asked where the lines were to be drawn for which stunts which were to be accepted.

photographer to be able to complete the job time-efficiently.[34] Tarun may push the visuals, in choosing a photogenic 'subject' and colours that go well together, but to him, this does not mean that the photo is any less 'authentic'. Whether the girls in the photographs were the same as the ones who benefitted from Food For Thought's projects was less important than providing the NGO with the photos they had requested. The photographer was also acutely aware that there is no room for 'critical images' within such an assignment, and regardless of his own experience he has to portray the NGO in a positive light. The editing was left up to the photographer, but as an experienced NGO photographer he knew how to satisfy his client according to the criteria he had been given.

This case study serves as an example of a commercial assignment carried out by Drik, and also the type of assignment the photographer was most accustomed to. From numerous of conversations with photographers about their experiences, this commercial type of NGO assignment is what they were most familiar with.

"The NGO style"

It is not my intention to evaluate the work Food For Thought, or any other organization carries out in Bangladesh. It is hard to claim that this one assignment represents a typical case, illustrative for all commercial NGO assignments. Certain factors are largely reoccurring, however, and have often been referred to in my conversations with photographers. Generally NGO photographs are produced with the purpose of selling a product, concept or message; similar to other commercial photographs. In fundraising photography, the photographs will often document the need for particular forms of assistance, whereas other NGO photographs will serve to document the particular projects and their outcome. The photos Tarun took for Food For Thought are of the second kind, to be used as documentation.

In this type of assignment the photographer is usually brought to a location picked out by the NGO; a children's centre, school, or other sites, and also specific benefitting households. Usually the visit has been arranged beforehand. Typically the photographer is given a sheet of instructions defining the organization's requirements, often down to extreme details. In one document that was shown to me even the 'wardrobe' (what the "subjects" should wear) was prescribed; the visual expression was, thus, to a large extent predetermined. Several times

[34] The issue of time pressure in NGO assignments was a reoccurring theme among the photographers in Dhaka, where long-term assignments were considered the ideal. In the Food for Thought commission the photographer was expected to cover ten schools in two days. Not only was this to include the three hours drive, but also the distances between the schools, where roads were often rough and bumpy. In fact, we only succeeded to reach eight of the schools within the given time, and the photographer had to agree to return to photograph the remaining two. As he argued, he could not compromise quality for quantity.

during my fieldwork I experienced photographs being dubbed as "NGO style", a term most seemed familiar with. For many of the photographers it carried negative connotations. In the Drik library several photos were rejected by staff because they were considered "too NGO style". These were photographs of happy, smiling children. Another time a client had requested the library for photographs of homosexuals. Adeine, the dedicated team leader, contacted a photographer she knew worked on the topic. His photographs were black and white, documentary style. "Lets wait and see. Maybe what they want is more NGO style", she said. I also heard the expression 'NGO loop' mentioned once in the library, indicating that the typical NGO narrative and style was hard to escape, at least from within NGO assignments. One photographer summed up what he considered the NGO style to be in the following way; "Subjects have to be pretty and smile; show happiness, success and dedication to project". A young photographer called Zahir explained that in an assignment he had carried out for an NGO working on water issues he had encountered a problem. The NGO had provided clay pots and filters for villagers affected by cyclone Aila, so that they could collect rainwater.[35] However, it had not rained in eight months, and the villages were still waiting for the benefits from the project. As a photographer you still have to tell a positive story, make people smile and look grateful; even if the people are extremely poor, have nothing to drink and have yet to benefit from the project. In this case the photographer had told the NGO that he would photograph the best that he could, but made clear what he believed was 'the real' situation and that he could not manipulate it. He still managed to get some shots the organization could use; including portraits of smiling people who looked grateful. After showing me the photographs, he concluded:

> This is my craft. I know how to take portraits. I know how to talk to this old lady, nicely, and I know how to get this expression. But if I was doing this work for myself, I would never work like this. I will go there, visit them, see how they are. I will not pretend. I will not have a preconceived idea, preconceived story. I will visit the place, see the people, talk to them. *Then* I will take photographs.

The photographer's comment sums up what he considers the major difference between assigned and personal works, and clearly indicates a preference to the latter. Just as Drik would redistribute their earnings from commercial work to finance personal projects, many

[35] The Cyclone Aila hit Bangladesh on the 21st of May 2009. More than 200 people were killed and half a million left homeless after the storm, which was particularly devastating for the lowland Sundarbans in the South (Source: BBC News).

photographers expressed that there was a similar duality to their work. The accounts on the "NGO style" remind us that photographs cannot possibly be 'value-neutral', but as Barthes' (1984:21) has pointed out, consists of socially and historically constructed layers, hidden behind an 'objectifying mask'. As art critic David Levi Strauss states; "The first question must always be: Who is using this photograph, and to what end?" (Strauss and Berger 2003:74).

Development embedded photography

At Drik commercial NGO assignments are referred to as 'bread earners'. They do not necessarily have an idealistic component, but are necessary to keep the wheels at Drik spinning. The income is then redistributed to other initiatives and personal projects. The case of photographic representations related to micro credit exemplifies the financial extremity of photographic assignments at Drik, and at the same time the problematic aspects with photographs created from within the development sector.

Micro credit was initiated in Bangladesh in the 1970s, to begin with as small scale projects by Muhammad Yunus, based on earlier experiments by Pakistani social scientist Akthar Hamid Khan (Bateman 2010:7). It soon spread to become an internationally renowned strategy applied to combat poverty. Dr Yunus was also recipient of the 2006 Nobel Peace Price, and represented a longed for positive portrayal from Bangladesh, that emphasized possibility. In a more critical vein, Milford Bateman describes how microcredit changed in the process, towards a privatized and commercialised form towards the end of the 1980s, implemented by large NGOs and companies worldwide. The photographs we tend to see in relation to microcredit are the success stories, of a young woman smiling with a cow by her side, another with her hands full of chickens. Or a family photographed in front of their new house, which a microcredit loan enabled them to buy. Also at Drik, a search through the Majorityworld picture portal results in a collection showing the success stories of microcredit exclusively, including images of Dr Yunus when he won the Nobel price and visited Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg. Microcredit is also on the list of Drik's specialized fields. I asked Shahidul to comment on this:

> To be fair, a lot of the work that has been done has been out of commission. And therefore it is the people who are commissioning who decide what will be done. […] But I think where we succeed is not so much in the assignments. Because even when we produce something which is much more open-ended, we don't always have control over how the work is used.

He refers in the last phrase to an assignment he did for a newspaper or magazine, where he added a critical note that he explained was edited out of the overall story before publication; hence the need to package material. However, it is understandable that critical comments are not well received by clients who have paid Drik (or an individual photographer directly) to carry out an assignment. Critical remarks would be likely to scare clients away, and, thus, come in the way for future projects. There is a parallel to a point Shahidul made in another context, during a Pathshala class, where he commented on the Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Salgado's famous work on ship breaking.[36] The problem with this work, he explained, is that Salgado received funds from the owners of the ship breaking, and, consequently was not likely to be critical. Shahidul argued that the most problematic aspect was that the link between the photographer and the corporate world was not made explicit. The same I will argue is the case for the photographic collection related to Microcredit available on the Majorityworld portal, where the photographs' origin is left implicit. There might be good reasons for this, of course. Shahidul is acutely aware of the limitations within commercial assignments. As he noted in relation to Salgado's work; "you don't bite of the hands that feed you".

Success photographs have certainly worked in favour of the worldwide appeal to the microcredit concept, which illustrates photographs' power in a developmental context. In contrast to the development narrative consisting exclusively of success stories, the recently released documentary film 'Caught in Micro debt' by the Danish filmmaker Tom Heinemann reveals the flipside of the coin. The documentary was screened in Scandinavia in November 2010.[37] The documentary portrays the less fortunate loan-takers, who have been unable to repay their debts. Many have had to flee from their villages and are much worse off than they were before they were offered to take up 'micro' loans. Heinemann's film shows only the cases where microcredit has failed, and is arguably 'biased' in the opposite direction. However, Heinemann attempts to fill that void of stories that usually go uncovered, precisely because so much of the material that exists is produced from researchers or photographers working *within* the development sector. This opposing narrative has only recently reached the

[36] Part of the critique against Salgado's piece was that the workers had been "reduced to ants on a giant ant steel hill" as it was expressed by Andy Levin in 100 Eyes Magazine in their feature of Bangladeshi photography (Levin 2009). I heard the same critique voiced several times by photographers in Dhaka.

[37] In Norway the documentary was screened as a part of the program "Brennpunkt" with the name Fanget i mikrogjeld. http://www.nrk.no/nett-tv/klipp/688333/. It was at the same time a critique to Yunus' mismanagement of funds from the Norwegian government, and the Norwegian government for having smoothed over concerns that arose in relation to Yunus and Grameen Bank at a much earlier stage.

mainstream media.[38] The main point is that there are always different sides to a story, and as the funding going into investigative journalism is shrinking (in Bangladesh it is largely non-existent), narratives that are not produced from within the frame of development circles are rarely being told.

The microcredit case above illustrates how Drik has to respond to market forces, in offering the photos that are requested and aspired by the development 'business'. As Shahidul described, he did raise some critical questions regarding microcredit, but they had been edited out in the final piece. As several photographers have indicated (and common 'business' sense implies) there is little room for being critical within commercial assignments, again a reminder of the political nature of photographs. Along with Bourdieu's (1998) contention that journalistic field has a limited autonomy, one photographer described that "unfortunately, as photographers are not independent. We do not have that luxury". In the commercial context, strategies of packaging material described cannot be applied as easily. Thus, Drik's editorial integrity seems harder to maintain on the commercial arena. In contrast to the assignment Aneela carried out for the NGO Fair Fabrics, in the commercial assignments above the terms and conditions are mainly defined by the client. In this context it is the photographer who has to sign a contract, rather than the other way around. One of Bourdieu's points in relation to the journalistic field is that the wider audience you wish to reach, the less sharp-edged you can be (1998:61). If Drik does not provide clients with what they need, there will be plenty of other photographic agencies and photographers available on the market. Following Bourdieu's argument, the fact that Drik has to compete with other actors on the market can further have 'conservative' effects, in that it makes photographers contribute to "a simple reproduction of the field" (in Benson and Neveu 2005:6). Also individual photographers have to compete for attention and clients with one another. Paradoxically then, as Bourdieu points out, an increased number of actors and competition within a field can serve to create a stronger 'conservativism', rather than to have diversifying effects.

[38] It should be mentioned that the Danish documentary filmmaker not is the fist one who has attempted to nuance the picture related to microcredit, as has been voiced by several Bangladeshi critics; among them activists in the Drik network. In a post on Shahidul's blog media activist and filmmaker Naeem Mohainmen argued that local academics have long tried to brig attention to the problematic aspects of microcredit. He points out that the Grameen Bank, as well as international media have largely ignored the critics. He recites the local researcher Afsan Chowdhury, who has a parallel background in development and media, and who once commented: "it is when the western/white narrator comes that the issues finally become 'important'". Mohaiemen lists Lamia Karim, Anu Muhammed and Omar Tareq Chowdhury as the most well known Bangladesh critics on microcredit among several (Mohaiemen 2010).

So far in this chapter I have shown examples of some development related assignments carried out by Drik. These can be placed at opposite ends of Bourdieu's *pole*, as outlined in the introduction. The assignment Aneela carried out for Fair Fabrics represents a case close to the *autonomous* pole, where the unique capital in the photographic field is put into effect. Here Drik's ideals on the one hand, and economic requirements on the other go well hand in hand, and the assignment has been referred to as a successful example of advocacy photography. Tarun's assignment for Food For Thought, as well as the variety of microcredit related photographs available through the Majorityworld portal are examples of assignments that are more 'purely' commercial and closer to the *heteronomous* pole. These are driven by external and largely economic forces, which are not necessarily conflicting to Drik's ideals, but certainly further removed from them.

I will return to nuance the picture of commercialism and idealism as rather opposing poles and further problematise how successfully the commercial aspect and political vision are combined at Drik and in the surrounding community. However, first, I will turn to look at a fundraising sequence, where the 'truth' has been severely compromised for the sake of commercialism. Photographs used for fundraising have a different visual logic than the 'NGO style' described above, but if we shall believe numerous photographers' statements, it is *as* predictable. Both 'styles' rely on strong visuals (photographs is generally known to 'beautify'). Rather than to illustrate a projects' success as we have seen above, however, in photographs to be used to raise funds one is expected to emphasise suffering. This has been pointed out to me by several photographers in the Drik community. As one photographer explained; "when it comes to fundraising a photographer's job is to show that people need help, in which case they are not suppose to look powerful". This argument resonates with one of Gullestad's findings in her investigation of missionary photographs. One of the Pathshala teachers sarcastically dubbed the fundraising genre 'poverty poetry'. This term came to mind when I visited the exhibition I will describe below. The case represents an extreme example, and must be understood as such. However, the account that follows creates a foundation on which to discuss of the status of 'truth' in photography, as well as the practice of staging, common in NGO assignments.[39] I want to emphasize that the photographers and remaining team involved are not affiliated to Drik.

[39] Opinions on staging are highly subjective, but to give a general idea about the views expressed about the practice of staging in the Drik community there seemed to be a certain agreement that while staging is accepted in portraiture and NGO photography, it is regarded unethical in documentary photography and particularly in news-photography. In contemporary photography it is again accepted. I heard several draw a distinction regarding whether the photographer openly admitted to have constructed the scene or not; if he or she was open

Poverty poetry; reflections on a fund raising exhibition

During one of my first weeks in Dhaka I more or less accidentally came over an exhibition, organized by Five Aid Bangladesh (FAB); the national branch of a large and well-known NGO. It consisted of photographs with accompanying text, and additionally mixed media artworks, children's paintings and embroideries that had been created in an art workshop organized by Five Aid. The exhibition was part of an awareness campaign against child marriages and adolescent childbirth, with the aim to make the problems of the area better understood, as well as to raise funds for the continuation of their projects.[40] It was hosted under open air in a venue close to Dhaka University, and had attracted a large audience.

> One digital artwork shows a beautiful young girl merged with the photograph of a tree without leafs. The story underneath explains that the girl became pregnant at an early age, and that it was decided in the village that she and her boyfriend should get married. As the girl was walking joyously next to her boyfriend by the river, some of his male friends came by, and together her boyfriend and his friends raped her brutally. Nobody was present to hear her screams, and afterwards the boyfriend hit her in the face with a brick and they threw her "dead meat" in the river.
>
> In another photograph, a middle-aged woman receives a pregnancy check-up by a local midwife. The midwife feels her pulse and looks concerned. The room is dark and lid only by an oil lamp on a table by her side. The text tells us that the woman was married off at fifteen. She conceived five children in a period of three to four years, without vaccines or medical check-ups. During her fifth (and presumably current) pregnancy some problems occurred. Her husband was working at the time when she died. Six months later he had married again, and as the text explains; "only her children took the time to remember her".
>
> In a third photograph, a mother and her child stare at the photographer (and the viewer) from a dark room. The mother looks wary, the child seemingly caught by surprise. The text reads […] "Don't such burdened eyes concern us, make us see?" Another photograph depicts young girls watching the boys playing, sad faces. A young woman covered in shawls except from a tiny chink for the eyes harassed by a man. As a consequence of 'eve teasing', we are explained, she was taken out of school and married at the age of eleven to an aged labourer.[41] Another piece

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about it having staged the photograph (for example in accompanying text) it was not considered a problem. As indicated in the methodology section, however, theory did not necessarily correspond with practice on this point.

[40] The first objective was made explicit on a dedication billboard and in the hand out brochure, where a selection of the photographs and artworks were printed. This brochure was to be sent to Five Aid's main donors in the US, I was later explained by one of the artists involved. I was also asked to make a personal donation by one of the representatives from the NGO during the exhibition.

[41] The term 'eve teasing' is used to describe sexual harassment of girls in public spaces in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries, ranging from verbal assaults to pinching and pulling of girls *dupatta* (shawl worn across the chest). The term refers to the 'seductive nature' of Eve, and has been criticised by local feminists for placing

> of digital artwork depicts a group of young women playing volleyball. They have tied their shawls around their upper bodies and their heads are, unlike those of many women in the other photographs uncovered. The image is bathed in sunshine and bright, warm colours and the text concludes; "We can nourish their dreams, it is really us who can do it".

The fact that female suppression is a problem in Bangladesh is certainly true but beyond the point. Villages in the North are also among the poorest in the country. However, I found it hard to take the exhibition seriously. From the very beginning when I started to look around something seemed wrong about the display of images and accompanying texts, to which the above section is only a taster. Overall, the 'tales' from the village were focused on girls and women's experiences of early marriages, violence, oppression and birth related health problems. My impression was that the most brutal cases of violence had been stripped of context and presented as something general, often in extreme detail. Women were portrayed as powerless "reproductive machines", whereas men hardly were present beyond their portrayals as violent and inconsiderate of they're wifes' and daughters' well being. The material was further packaged in an overly dramatized, rather than informative way (as it claimed). The parallel to Gullestad's (2007) research findings when investigating missionary material is palpable. Summed up the exhibition portrayed women and young girls crying and awaiting help from outside, and Five Aid, together with potential donors, clearly represented the solution to their problems. What precisely the NGO did for the people portrayed was much vaguer. It is not to my knowledge whom the fundraising exhibition was directed at, but since the texts were written in English I assume it aimed at reaching the international donor community in Dhaka. The brochure was to be distributed amongst potential donors in the West.

"Faking it"; stories from behind the scenes

The above reflections are based on my own observations and personal experience from visiting the exhibition. At an earlier stage I had been introduced briefly to one of the involved photographers. A few days later I got the chance to meet him and other members of the "team". I knew that they had been embarrassed to attend the exhibition, and had some issues with the production. The stories in this section are based on the verbal accounts of one of several contributing photographers, an artist and the team's writer. The boys were all young and idealistic, and willingly shared their experiences with me. All three were employed by a

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the responsibility for sexual harassment on women themselves. 'Eve teasing' is a common problem in the region and has been termed "little rapes" by feminist writers.

small company specialized in arts. I also met their manager who confirmed their at times shocking accounts in broad strokes. Together these accounts represent an extreme point that serves to illustrate just how dubious photographs' reference to 'reality' can be. I will revisit the truth discourse that prevails in photography and return to the question of staging photographs; in the below case indeed "faking it".

The job that the company had been assigned for had two components. Initially the assignment was limited to the art workshop for children that Komol, the artist, had the main responsibility for. The company was assigned for the second part of the job; to document Five Aid's projects in order to assure future funds because the time for the project was "about to run out". Tripon (the photographer) and Jahid (the writer) played central roles in this part of the assignment. In the exhibition, however, there was no clear distinction between the various media. Komol had also created digital artworks where he used photographs as starting points, often juxtaposed with drawings, creating an interesting combination of materials. My main emphasis here is nevertheless on the photographs, and inseparable textual material attached to them. The 'facts' that provided the point of departure for the texts developed further by the writer had been provided by Five Aid.

The art workshop had started off well; the children were given the freedom to draw, paint and embroider the artworks they wanted, Komol was free to define the workshop the way he thought was most suitable. After a few months the NGO asked them to focus on discrimination, and the project started to change. The artists involved experienced a constant push towards more dramatized visuals, and they had to inspire the children in the same direction. All the involved that I came in contact with told me about projects Five Aid claimed to be running that had been 'invented' in front of their eyes. For example, one of the initiatives the organisation wanted to document was a boat, which intended to bring local children to school. When the photographer and writer arrived to the site they found the boat lying upside-down off shore. They had to buy books and games for the children to read on their way home from school in the boat cabin from the market, while the NGO staff set up the boat. The photograph showed the boat full of material and happy children on their way to school. In another photograph several girls were standing by a desk with piles of storybooks. One of them exclaimed; "See the girls here? The text claims the oldest one wants to become a teacher, and is admitted to a university, with the support of an NGO. Truth is she can't even read. The whole thing is arranged". They could give me numerous of similar examples. The team had also done some investigation by themselves. Tripon, the photographer had been asked to take pictures of an ambulance, provided by Five Aid to bring pregnant women to the

hospital. He noticed that it was dirty on the outside but looked brand new inside, so he made a point about asking everybody in the village about it. He told me that none of the villagers he talked to had ever seen the ambulance being used. As he flipped through the photographs that had been used in the brochure, he arrived at the photograph of a pregnant woman during a midwife check-up, who died according to the accompanying text (only her children cared to remember her). The photographer explained that he had had a difficult time finding a pregnant woman who could illustrate the story. He eventually met the woman who appeared in the photograph, who agreed to let him photograph her. Several members of the team were involved in setting up the scene of the woman and the midwife. They spent a long time covering up the window to get the dim lightning that the organization was after. Some also met them with anger and hostility when they said which NGO they were working for. Some locals claimed that the organization had done nothing to help them, and was only exploiting their situation.

Evoking Pity

The stories from behind the scenes of the photographs displayed in the exhibition brings Barthes argument that photographs cannot possibly be unmediated versions of 'reality' to its extreme limits. More than staging the photographs, as we have seen a common practice in NGO photography whereby activities are set up for the shot, in the Five Aid case some projects are made up altogether for the sake of "photographic documentation". Thus, the organization exploits the power of the photographic medium for its personal gains. In addition to the tension between the subjectivity and 'objectivity' of the photograph, as Sontag (2003) has pointed out, a peculiar characteristic about the photograph is that it lingers ambiguously between art and documentation. This is particularly obvious in the above case, in its crafty combination of media and careful construction of messages that suits the NGOs agenda. Indeed, the accounts from "behind the scenes" suggest the shortcomings of a semiological approach to photographs, which take signs and a 'surface level' truth for granted. In this context Newton's (2001) processual approach is more useful. She lists five stages in which photographic meaning is formed, beginning with the people who are photographed and act, the photographer who looks and photographs, the editors who make selections, the societal institutions who seek to control image contents and finally audiences; who view, absorb, act, or potentially ignore or reject photographs (Newton 2001:102). Her approach resonates with Kopytoff's (1986) suggestion to study the social life histories of things, but is more detail-specific and adapted particularly to the construction of photographic meaning. At which stage

did the economic pole enter in the above case? In the examples of assignments close to Bourdieu's economic pole the photographs were commodities from the outset. Pushed to the extreme in the latter case, I will suggest that the 'commoditisation' process was further intensified throughout the assignment where those involved were asked to focus on specific things that Five Aid thought would succeed to raise funds.

When I first got in contact with the group, Komol (the artist) was making what he called a 'docu-fiction' (fictional documentary) for the same NGO.[42] He showed me some of the video clips and pointed out that all the "subjects" who talked warmly about the Five Aid projects had been told what to say beforehand, and were all affiliated with the NGO. A few days into the shooting he had a breakdown, where he told the local Five Aid staff that he could not go on with the shooting because he found it all to be so fake. The staff had responded by telling him not to worry, that everything would be "arranged". "They have to arrange it, because it doesn't really exist", he said and sighed. Photographs always imply a degree of reality distortion, which Barthes reminds us. To stage the 'reality' additionally implies a second order distortion. In Five Aid's exhibition 'reality' has been manipulated at all the stages Newton sketched. With the use of the photographic medium, the NGO (and others involved) attempt to label the messages, with itself placed at the centre as an agent for change, precisely as truthful. Additionally, by bringing in children's artworks to the fundraising campaign, in my view the NGO claims a 'local voice' to that message, and further seeks to depoliticise, or render innocent, a message that has been highly mediated on all stages.[43]

More than staging photographs on the foundation of textual facts they had been provided beforehand, they had got the texts and photographs in return several times with the request to make them more dramatic, show more suffering and emphasize the need for help from outside. In addition, Five Aid had expressed particular interest in one of the digital

[42] In other words, the film was made to appear as a documentary, but the content of the film was largely fictional, creating a make-believe world suitable to Five Aid's agenda. Thus, it can be seen as a form of 'mockumentary' or mock documentary, albeit the 'docu-fiction' pretends to take the documentary genre seriously.

[43] To communicate through children's voices is a current development trend that also involves training children to take pictures. Potentially rewarding for all those involved and an effective means of communication, I have some ethical concerns about NGO's using children's photographs (or as in this case paintings, drawings and embroidered images) in fundraising campaigns, which were shared by some of the Drik affiliated photographers. There are many variations of such workshops, but I have seen several, including the above, where the messages expressed through children's paintings and pictures seem almost identical to the NGO's development agenda. Perhaps, with a child's signature a photographic account is seen as more truthful, and thus, more powerful? It would have been interesting to analyse the various stages in which meaning is created, as listed by Newton (2001), in such art, or photography workshops. It should be noted that not all such workshops are equally problematic, but it is common that a workshop last for little more than a week and that cameras are withdrawn on completion.

artworks that showed authoritarian men with beards and women with their hair covered. Komol had created several artworks where Islamic connotations were made more explicit on their request, a topic I will return to in the subsequent chapter. The artist, photographer and writer provided me with numerous such examples. Sometimes I wondered if all of it could be true, but I saw no reason why they would tell me the stories otherwise. I also met them separately and their accounts related to the various photographs were always consistent. They also took great risks in being so openly critical about an NGO they were still working for, and financially reliant upon. Five Aid's perspective is lacking in this context. All three admitted that the NGO did *some* things, such as arranging awareness campaigns, forum theatres and providing some material to schools. However, they argued that the NGO's accomplishments had been exaggerated to absurdity, and that local achievements were edited out for the purpose of their own branding.[44] Although the above represents an extreme example, many photographers in Dhaka raised similar critiques to jobs they had carried out for other NGOs.

The fundraising genre of dramatized, often simultaneously romanticized photographs, or 'heaven and hell logic' (also alluded to by Gullestad) was referred to as 'poverty poetry' by one of the teachers in Pathshala. He explained that the balance between the positive idea, and the negative vibe was crucial in fundraising photographs. It was important that the viewer was not left without any hope, with a feeling that there was nothing he or she could do. He argued that many of his students and photographers in the Drik network were well adapted to this style. What Bourdieu (1998:124, my translation) identified as "endless processions of destitute people, rows of accidents that occur with no explanation […]" in French television is not too far-fetched in relation to the fundraising narrative described above. The difference in this context is that unlike in the news, to leave the viewer with some hope and offer a solution is fundamental for a campaign's success.

Unfortunately, the NGOs' perspective is largely lacking in this analysis. It is not hard to imagine, however, that competition for the attention of an increasingly media accustomed audience leads to a constant press on NGOs to express themselves in stronger ways; scream louder and louder so to speak, much like television channels, newspapers and not least photographers do. Also serious and well meaning NGOs and photographers can be forced to comply to this logic. Part of Gullestad's (2007:281) argument in her study of missionary

[44] One example mentioned by Komol was from a school that was covered in the 'docu-fiction' he made for Five Aid. The NGO had provided the school with some materials, among them sports uniforms. Komol pointed out that the school was known for being exceptional when it came to sports, because the principal had trained his pupils enthusiastically since the early 1970s. Komol had interviewed the principal for the video, and later found that Five Aid had "edited out his achievement" and used it to promote their own brand.

photographs is that the resentment and failure the missionary workers at times experienced could not be communicated, in fear that the aid might "dry up". The argument can easily be extended to a development context.

In the photographic narrative analysed above there is a strong sense of 'othering', not unlike the representational pattern Said critiqued in *Orientalism* (1979). In the exhibition both a male, urban and Western bias can be identified, supported by the text. I will discuss the relation between photographs and texts in the next chapter. The Five Aid fundraising exhibition shows that, as Gullestad (2007:xxi) argued in case of Cameroon, the same visual discourses are acted upon by local photographers and NGO staff, and are even replicated by children with NGO biased guidance. As a whole, the narrative intends to inspire compassion, and thus, make viewers act against the injustices by donating funds. As Sontag eloquently states; "Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers (2003:101). As Hannah Arent has argued, such photographs almost inevitably end up inviting the viewer to take pity on the "subjects", and thus, widen the distance between viewer and portrayed (1990 [1963] in Gullestad 2007:xvi).

My three interlocutors described the situation as if there was little they could do to influence the outcome of the work, but they arguably also played along with the 'bandit' NGO. I firmly believe that they were not in a financial situation where they could afford to give up well-paid work because it turned out to be conflicting to their personal ideals. In the above case, according to their own accounts it can sound as if the photographers and remaining team are caught in their counterparts' logic, with few abilities to fight back.[45] In other words, they were not in a privileged position from which it was possible to perform mimetic practices in order to be more powerful. On the other hand, such commercial assignments allowed those involved to redistribute the financial gains into work they were passionate about. Certainly this duality exists at Drik and amongst affiliated photographers, to whom I will now return. While the above cases represent ideal types of idealism an advocacy photography on the one hand and commercialism on the other, most assignments at Drik linger ambiguously in-between these two poles. Below I will return to the techniques photographers use to stay close to personal ideals, and explore factors that I believe influence how successful photographers are in that endeavour.

[45] At the same time, the fact that they did some investigation on their own during the assignment, and took the risk to tell me about their experiences because they disagreed so strongly with the fraud practices of the NGO can also be seen as acts of 'resistance', although to call these practices tactics in De Certeau's (1980) sense perhaps would be to push his argument too far.

Bargaining strength; negotiating terms and conditions

If we return to the first case presented in this chapter, in the assignment Aneela carried out for Fair Fabrics idealism and commercialism coincided rather successfully. With the help from Drik the photographer bargained the terms and conditions to suit her personal beliefs, in a way it is likely that she would not have been able to arrive at on her own. In the commercial assignments presented here, there appeared to be less negotiation between photographer and client. The Five Aid assignment above represents the extreme case, where the photographers and remaining staff do as they are told, even if the jobs collide with their personal ideals on many levels. I will argue that economic background, personal life circumstances, as well as experience in the business and available networks all are influential factors as to how "picky" photographers can be when choosing assignments in the first place, and how demanding they can be when negotiating terms and conditions. Aneela was still a student at Pathshala when she carried out the Fear Fabrics assignment. Thus, it was early in her career as a photographer, but her work had been recognized as promising. She was also renowned for her activist work, and additionally had the financial privilege to be fairly selective in her assignments. By comparison the photographers involved in the Five Aid assignment were relatively young (in their mid-twenties) and did not have a lot of experience. Their names were not yet "recognized" as those of established and well-known photographers. They also lived on relatively tight budget, and although they did not have any children, all had financial responsibilities for other family members. Thus, they had to take what they got offered and do their best to satisfy the client to assure future work, as well as to finance other self-assigned projects. I will return to this aspect of 'personal redistribution' in a moment.

Photographers in the Drik community, including those employed directly by the agency, also expressed that satisfying the client was their top priority during assignments. Not all could afford to be equally idealistic. Many had responsibilities beyond their immediate families, and some had children to take care of. To challenge stereotypical representations was, understandably, often not their first priority. Students were often talked about as being "less biased by the market" because not all had to make a living out of their photography yet (though some also did). Thus, they had more time on their hands for photographic projects that were not income generating. On the other hand, it was common for students to be taken advantage of by clients early in their careers. One ex-student in Pathshala described that often students had to do "the dirty work". He explained that he had done large amounts of work for low pay, involving minimum creative freedom and no copyright, and also experienced being treated disrespectfully. Years later he could be far more demanding towards clients, because

he had more experience and a network of contacts. Shahidul, on the other hand, had taken on much work from the same NGO, with much more freedom and better terms and conditions. In fact, Shahidul had managed to convince the client about the work that in his opinion needed to be done. It resulted in a book where, although the topic was a natural disaster that had killed many people and the work was intended for fundraising, Shahidul's emphasis was on processes of reconstruction and people's strength. In other words he convinced the NGO to show the situation from a more positive angle that was true to Drik's spirit. My point in this regard is that because of his well-known name, established career and not least his witty personality, Shahidul has a strong bargaining strength that it is hard for many other photographers in the community to match. Bourdieu (in Benson and Neveu 2005:6) supports this argument when he posits that individuals that have a large amount of economic and cultural capital are most likely to have the motivation and capacity to change a social field.

To a certain extent, Shahidul's strong bargaining position within the photographic field trickles down on photographers affiliated to Drik. Not only because of the agency's reputed name and wide network of contacts, but also as a support structure for local photographers. For example, Drik has long fought to assure photographers' copyright and that they are credited for their work. By comparison, the young photographer, writer and artist assigned by Five Aid were not credited for their photographs.[46] Drik carried out work for the same organisation, but I believe, had a stronger foundation on which to bargain the terms and conditions. It was indicated that the controversy between Drik and the World Bank, as well as other major quarrels had been principally over copyright issues, rather than larger political disagreements. Hoek (2003) argues the same, with regards to the disagreement between Unicef and Drik that had taken place prior to her fieldwork. During my time in Dhaka some of the photographers also indicated that Drik carried out work that was close to the outer extreme of the commercial pole, and that at present there are few assignments the agency would say no to if they are offered enough money. These changes can be seen as related to the massive growth that the agency has undergone, and the many projects Drik financially has to sustain. Pathshala is one example, financed largely by Drik, as well as the Chobi Mela festival and personal projects, such as the Crossfire exhibition that took place during my own

[46] In other words, their names were not revealed when photographs and artworks were exhibited or published by the NGO. Copyright infringements are common in the Bangladeshi context. Shahidul set out, and have made major achievements to change this. However, in the Five Aid assignment only one of those involved saw the lack of credit as a negative thing. The remaining two preferred it that way, because they did not consider the photographs and the rest of the material "their own work" in any case, but rather the NGOs propaganda. (Keep in mind they were embarrassed to attend the fundraising exhibition). Thus, an alternative perspective on the question of copyright from the photographers' point of view can also be imagined.

fieldwork. I do not know what Drik's specific agreement with Five Aid was, but I do know that all agreements made through Drik assured the photographers copyright credit. However, young and less experienced Pathshala students would not necessarily benefit from that support structure.

I will now turn to look at some ways in which photographers redistribute financial gains from commercial projects, as well as the underlying ideology that I see as influencing Drik and the surrounding community.

Idealistic 'purity' versus 'dirty' commercialism

Having dealt with a few of the ways that Drik work with NGOs, there are other examples where the photographers have more time on their hands and freedom in carrying out NGO assignments. The work that one photographer did on city dwellers, presented at the Advocacy photography symposium that I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter is one example. The photographer, Nahid, was one of those who had struggled his way from a working class background and did really well as a photographer. He had worked in the studio department at Drik for several years, but then moved on to work freelance. His story on city dwellers was among the most debated during the time I spent in Dhaka. Some of the controversy was related to whether the images really had made a difference for those portrayed, whether the photographer was taking advantage of people's marginality for his own "fame". Some argued that he was selling poverty. According to the photographer the NGO had given him the freedom to carry out the assignment and edit the images as he wished. Others meant that there had been disagreements on the editing. Yet others argued that it didn't really matter, because he had long ago adapted to the NGO style so effective for raising funds in any case, which was the reason for the organization to choose him for the assignment in the first place.[47] The photographer acknowledged that he got some grants, awards and exhibitions from the work, but was still glad that some money went to the project. Even if it was only 10 %, he appreciated that such a mechanism existed.

The example illustrates several things. First, it shows that one assignment is interpreted in very different ways by different people, and gives an insight to the critical (and also competitive) environment that prevails in the Drik- and Pathshala community. Most

[47] Interesting in this regard, towards the end of my stay in Dhaka Nahid had received several international grants to continue his work. He had also won some photography awards that had helped him set up a new work station. He was in his late thirties and his career was about to take off. When I was back for Chobi Mela he showed me some of his new work. He emphasised (and I tend to agree) that with his financial independence he had developed a 'style' that was much more intimate, with much more humanity and dignity in his portrayals. He was working much slower and his pictures were less contrasted and grainy.

importantly for the purpose here, it shows that there is a strong discourse among the Drik affiliated photographers in which idealistic 'purity' is prioritized over 'dirty' commercialism. Also, the strive towards 'editorial integrity' is strong at Drik and in the surrounding community, and as we have seen that ideal can be hard to attain to in commercial assignments, also at Drik. Many photographers are additionally, as already mentioned, highly critical to "development". From my second day in Dhaka and throughout my stay I was reminded that all the money that had been poured into the country in the name of development in fact had made little difference in the lives of those people it had been directed towards. This was also a position maintained by Shahidul, who during our first meeting told me that he does not think NGO's are in the business of development, but rather in the business of "survival"; I believe he means the business of financing their own survival. Many also claim, in the Drik community and beyond, that there is a new "class" in Bangladesh who has grown rich with the help of NGO money (i.e. Van Schendel 2009:221). Finally, it was stated to me several times that NGOs were merely "fund-hunting", and that photographs were crucial to that process. Thus, both business and development carried negative connotations in the community. Since most photographers were reliant on commercial, and particularly NGO assignments, this led many into moral ambiguity, or as several photographers articulated it; a "love-hate relationship" with NGOs. For photographers having been taught to question and be critical, many felt that it was conflicting to take on NGO assignments where they had to comply with the organization's agenda. Nevertheless, for many of the photographers NGO assignments take up the lion share of their income, which is also true for Drik as a whole. This paradox was hard to manage for many. At the same time, the critical stand towards NGOs tended to be strongest amongst those who were not dependent on NGO assignments for their own well-being.

Some photographers also experienced a considerable amount of freedom within NGO assignments, and thus, commercial and idealistic interests could coincide less problematically. For some, NGO assignments that had started as short-term commissions turned into long term projects with financial support from the organisation. In other words there are a broad variety of experiences with NGO assignments, and the line between personal and commercial work is not necessarily clear-cut, but rather in many cases overlapping. As indicated earlier there is also a sense of duality at play. Some photographers explained that they shoot one set of photographs for the NGO and another set for themselves during the same assignment. The most interesting example I heard was from a photographer from Chittagong who is loosely affiliated to Drik. The assignment was not NGO-related, but illustrates well the potential to

change something from within a commercial assignment, and thus, 'resist'. The photographer had been commissioned by the owners of a ship breaking yard to take positive pictures to counter the bad reputation the industry had received (partially because of photographs, including those by already mentioned Sebastiao Salgado, as well as local Bangladeshi photographers and a number of others). The pictures were set up with fancy equipment the workers would not usually have access to; he presented the corporate point of view and satisfied the client. At the same time, the access he had from being on good terms with the owner allowed him to take critical "behind the scene photographs", including night-time shots that he considered the 'real' situation. He planned to publish this series when he had enough material. His account represents a creative solution to how the gains from commercial work can be redistributed into personal projects to achieve idealistic goals. However, the photographers who succeeded in that endeavour seemed to be those with high economic or cultural capital in Bourdieu's sense, and an established position within the photographic field and the Drik community. Because of the purity ideal and aspired editorial integrity, it also seemed hard for photographers to talk about their work in other terms, which led Drik and individual photographers alike to under communicate the commercial aspect of photography and reliance on NGO funds. I also never heard voiced that many of Drik's concerns overlap with the concerns of many NGOs. Some NGOs also try to avoid representing people in stereotypical ways, and many are equally concerned about representing people respectfully and in a dignified manner. In several of the contracts that I have seen it is in fact the NGO demanding the signing photographer to show careful consideration towards their "subjects". There is a broad variety of NGOs, ranging from giant companies to small grassroots initiatives, and although there are politics involved in "development" and certain practices can be critiqued, NGOs cannot be reduced to an easily definable unified enemy for Drik to be positioned against.

Lastly it should be mentioned that not all were as sceptical towards commercial NGO assignments. Some photographers also expressed they were happy that their photographs had contributed in positive ways, even if at times it was through somewhat stereotypical photographs. Either way, most stated that they did not consider it their job to control that the money arrived at the right people or was well spent.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have shed light on the ways that commercial interests and social responsibility correlate and conflict at Drik and for photographers in the surrounding community. In the assignment Aneela carried out for the organization Fair Fabrics the two forces were at work at the same time, without major complications. Drik's adapted strategies, including the use of contracts in order to flip the power relationship, which I have suggested can be seen as a form of mimetic faculty. More commonly however, commercial NGO assignments are prescribed by the client organization, and there is a limited space for radical ideals and resistance within them. I have used Tarun's assignment for the organization Food For Thought, as well the more general example of microcredit as examples of projects closer to what Bourdieu has termed the commercial pole (in Benson and Neveu 2005). Here, Drik adapted strategies have proven to be less effective, and social goals as well as editorial integrity harder attainable. As both Barthes (1999) and Bourdieu (1998), along with Strauss (2003) remind us, photographs are not 'innocent' or neutral, but must be understood in relation to the context they have been created. Content and visuals can be selectively chosen, or altogether manufactured, as Five Aid's photographic exhibition reminds us. The example serves to unsettle the 'truth discourse' in photography and suggests the shortcomings of a semiological approach to photographic images. I have argued that a processual approach, in which the many stages of meaning-production can be identified, is more productive.

When a substantial part of all the images we see are produced from within the "development industry", there might be little room for more nuanced portrayals that goes beyond the singularly positive or negative stereotypes. In spite of Drik's carefully adapted strategies, sticking to one's ideals in everyday life can be a though task, especially in a competitive environment and under financial pressure. This affects Drik and individual photographers alike. As we have seen here the photographic field spills into the economic- and development field and is likely to become biased in that direction, also with local photographers behind the camera. Some photographers have found ways to reinvest commercially earned income in projects closer in keeping with their ideals or developed a form of duality to their work. I have argued that in addition to dedication, economic and social factors also influence to what extent photographers succeed as photographic idealists. I also indicated that because of the high-held ideals of editorial integrity and idealistic 'purity' in the community it might be hard for photographers to frame their photographic activities in less idealistic ways.

As indicated by Shahidul, however, Drik's success does not lie in the commercial assignments, but rather in personal projects. In the subsequent chapter I will draw on two examples of self-assigned work, defined more independently by the photographer, and published in retrospect. Only lightly touched on in this chapter, "development" narratives often have a gendered dimension, and in the Five Aid exhibition, a religious component was also evident. These issues will be explored in the next chapter.

5

Representation; Islam, gender and beyond

> "You can say that a winning story of a photographer means negative story of people".
>
> -Freelance photographer

Photographic images hold strong power for mediating notions of identity and representation and have been used for competing ends as a tool to strengthen an Orientalist discourse as well as for creating alternative imaginaries that challenge stereotypical representations. To what extent is it possible to challenge stereotypical representations through photographic means? I have already touched on this question in the previous chapter but it will be developed further here.

Negative stereotyping of Muslims, particularly Muslim men is a common trend in international mainstream media. As we saw in the previous chapter, there is often a gender dimension inherent in development projects and, as Five Aid's fundraising exhibition illustrated, the negative stereotype of Muslim men is also used to strengthen the need for intervention in the form of development. The two topics can, thus, be seen as interrelated. I will initiate this chapter by exploring the representational discourse of Islam and Muslims that prevails in international mainstream media, which the photographers I will present next are positioned against. I look at two empirical examples where photographers attempt to challenge stereotypical representations related to Islam. The first is a portrait series by photographer Shahidul Alam of the Pakistani humanitarian Abdul Sattar Edhi, and the second is a photo-reportage by another photographer in the community from a *madrassa* (religious school). Both were mentioned by photographers in the community as photographic series in which stereotypical representations were countered. These examples set the stage for a discussion of the market implications many photographers encounter in that endeavour.

Along with Kopytoff (1986) and Newton (2001), I argue that photographs need to be understood from a processual perspective, according to the context they are placed in. I

further explore the relationship between photographs and texts. Many Drik photographers use text in order to limit the interpretative space of the photograph, since as Barthes (1999) has pointed out, texts are less ambiguous than photographs in conveying meaning. From here, I will pick up the topic of strategies that the photographic agency has developed. These examples also illustrates that in addition to textual measures, some photographers take visual measures to avoid that their photographs are used in ways that they are in disagreement with. However, as we shall see, in spite of these measures there is still a risk of falling back on the stereotypical, being 'captured' by predefined discourses. The restricted autonomy of photographers in their reliance on Western image markets, and the struggle for recognition in a competitive social field, pushes photographers in the Drik community in the opposite direction. The question then, as Larsen (1999:106) has articulated it, is how to 'resist' the dominant order without being captured by the language of their opponent. In this chapter I also seek to identify some of the shortcomings of Drik's representational struggle.

Islam and Muslims in international mainstream media

As lightly touched upon in the establishing chapter, the Orientalist discourse that Said analysed had an Islamic component. In the book *Covering Islam* (1997) Said explores Western appropriations of Islam in the media and develops this argument further. Said argues that Islam and Muslims in Western media are reduced to largely monolithic exaggerated stereotypes, with little room for diversity. Islam and fundamentalism are further portrayed as essentially the same thing, associated with "gun-toting, bearded, fanatic terrorists […]" (1997:xvi, xxvi). He argues that the polarity between the Western and Islamic world has widened, and that dialogue between cultures has been further postponed since he wrote Orientalism in 1978. Much like Bourdieu in his study of French television, in my view Said tends to underestimate media audiences' abilities to critically question and reject essentialist caricatures. Nevertheless, I tend to agree with his main contention.

In her analysis of Norwegian missionary narratives, Gullestad (2007) argues that Muslim men are portrayed as both exotic villains and rivals that have to be fought. She adds that the narrative has a gendered dimension. More recent missionary material from Cameroon, she argues, has had an increased focus on women as victims of male violence (Gullestad 2007:xvii). She sees this change in relation to the initiation of Norwegian government sponsored aid in the 1960s. The missionary narrative then sought to reach a wider audience, also outside of religious circles in Norway, and the gender focus was an effective means to do

so. Among a range of different material Gullestad analyses a fictional film, produced by Norwegian missionaries in 1960. Briefly explained, the plot is about a little girl the mission attempted to "save". Gullestad shows how the viewers are invited to take the side of the mother, who cares about the girl, as oppose to the father who wants to take her out of school and marry her off early. Thus, much like the fundraising exhibition I analysed in the previous chapter the film takes the side of the women against the fathers and husbands (Gullestad 2007:219-227), and portray Muslim men in an unfavourable light. As Gullestad argues, the film was used to underline the need to rescue non-white women and, thus, justify religious and technological intervention in Cameroon.

The Palestinian-American anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) similarly shows how that same colonial and missionary narrative, and the idea of saving subordinate women from Muslim men was used to mobilize support for the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. She also argues that the *burqa*, with its complex and misunderstood meanings has come to symbolise the oppressed Muslim woman to many people in the West, and the "unveiling" of women its symbolical (but largely unsuccessful) reversal. As these three accounts show, the stereotype of violent Muslim men, mirrored by the equally stereotyped image of the oppressed woman, widely penetrate mainstream international media, to some extent also Bangladeshi media. I will return to discuss how stereotypical images function below, but first I will present one of Shahidul Alam's photographic series, created in an attempt to contest the negative stereotyping of Muslim men, as well as the lack of portrayals of agency generated from within the majority world in Western mainstream media.

Sinners and saints

Shahidul's portrait of the Pakistani humanitarian Abdul Sattar Edhi was printed in the *20 years of Drik* brochure (2009), alongside other 'cherished snippets' of past years' work. The series portraying Edhi's life achievements had been published in the magazine Saudi Aramco World in 2004, under the headline "Humanitarian to a Nation". Saudi Aramco World is a magazine that seeks to increase cross-cultural understanding, and broaden the knowledge of Arab and Muslim cultures and their connections to the Western world (Saudi Aramco World).[48] In the cover story Shahidul's photos are printed alongside a text authored by Richard Covington, which begins as follows:

[48] It should be noted that Saudi Aramco World published in Houston, Texas by Aramco Services Company, which is a subsidiary of the Saudi Arabian oil company Saudi Aramco.

> He may be the most widely admired man in Pakistan, yet he remains little known abroad: starting in 1951 with a free pharmacy in a poor neighbourhood of Karachi, Abdul Sattar Edhi has inspired - by deeds more than words – the growth of a vast, nationwide charitable organization of ambulances, clinics, asylums, shelters, mortuaries, hospitals, schools and kitchens, staffed today by more than 7000 volunteers and funded entirely by private donations (Covington 2004).

The story is one of a man with an admirable devotion to his work, and to humankind. It is explained that Edhi has refused to accept funding from the governmental and formal religious organizations alike. The social network of services has been made possible through donations from Pakistanis, within Pakistan as well as from Pakistanis living abroad. Further, Edhi has often taken to the streets himself and begged for money to make ends meet during difficult times. Most of his family members are also dedicated social workers involved in various ways in the extensive network of social services, collectively referred to as the "Edhi Village" (Covington 2004). Edhi is portrayed as a loving and caring man, in several of the photographs he has been photographed together with children benefitting from some of the social services he has set up.

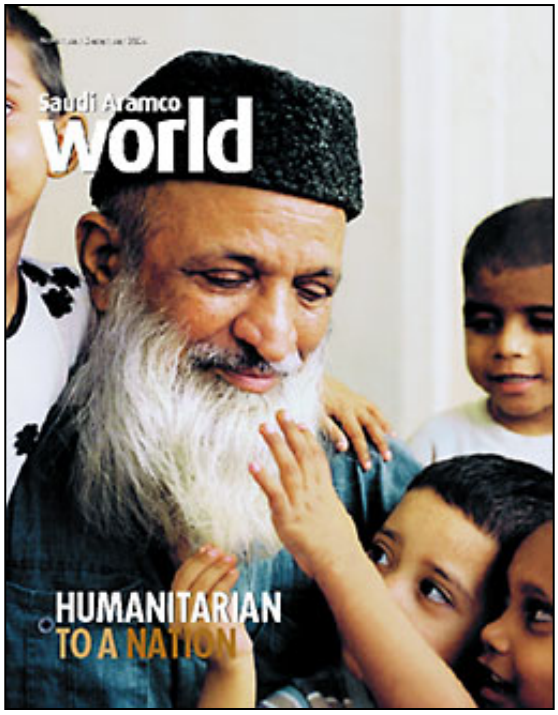

Figure 8 : Photo by Shahidul Alam, portraying Edhi.

During an interview I asked Shahidul to contextualize the Edhi series. He had first heard of Edhi during a trip to Pakistan in 1993, when he realized how much he meant to the people in Pakistan. He wondered how it was possible that a person who had made such a huge contribution to humankind was so little known. Mother Theresa on the other hand, had won the Nobel Price regardless of her right-wing connections and problematic position with

regards to abortion, Shahidul pointed out. Edhi on the other hand, who to him came across as the epitome of humanitarianism, was virtually unknown outside of Pakistan. He was non-judgemental, and did not worry about people being "illegitimate", or what their "social ills" were. Outside every Edhi centre there was a cradle with the words "do not kill" where he took in unwanted babies, Shahidul explained.

One of the critiques that Shahidul has raised, and in the photographic series of Edhi attempts to counter, is that the focus on foreign aid assistance and international development initiatives in international mainstream media has rendered local initiatives largely invisible. More than undermining formal institutions such as the network set up by Edhi, individual and collective agency generated from within and the whole social fabric that exists internally in *all* societies tends to be overlooked in the narrative. In a UCLA presentation, summed up by freelance writer Ajay Singh (2007), Shahidul adds another dimension to the Edhi piece. He questions *how* the world has come to know Mother Teresa and not Edhi. "Because", he replies, "the stories about Pakistan in the Western media will always be about terrorism. Edhi's work flies against the bearded, head-line image of Pakistani Islamists that the Western media propagates". Shahidul's argument resonates with Said's, and although somewhat exaggerated, both have valid points. The hostile images of Muslims (particularly that of Muslim men) have only been further intensified after the September 11th attacks and following "war on terror". Having shown an example that runs counter to that image, I will now turn to look at how stereotypical forms of representation come into being and function.

The mythical "Other"

In *Myth today,* Barthes (1999) revisits the concepts of 'sign', 'signifier' and 'signified' outlined in the introduction of this thesis.[49] He describes 'myth' as a mode of signification. When language has been "caught" by myth it's meaning is reduced to a pure, signifying function (Barthes 1999:55). Barthes' explains;

> In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically; it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves (Barthes 1999:58).

[49] The essay is an extract from Barthes' original Mythologies published in 1973.

Barthes' point is that objects do not mean anything on their own, but through their social use layers of meaning are added and social stereotypes created. If we apply Barthes theory to the Islamic stereotypes explored in this chapter, the veiled woman serves as a perfect example. As appropriated by Western mainstream media her signifying function has been reduced to the visualization of Islamic fundamentalism and female subordination. At the other end you have complimentary figure of a violent and unsympathetic male Muslim figure; suppressive towards women, and likely to be a terrorist according to his (mythical) image. Mythical speech, as Barthes argues, gives a naturalized and depoliticized image of reality (1999:57-58), which attempts to conceal the political climate, cultural value system and the unequal power relationship that created them. Social and cultural stereotypes are further likely to be internalized as prototypical "models of the mind", as cognitive studies reminds us, and thus operate on unconscious levels (Newton 2001:112). In my view, however, there is always a potential to challenge even long established and deeply felt stereotypes. Nevertheless, the mythical image of the veiled woman has been used to justify various forms of intervention, whether development initiatives, missionary projects or military interventions. Through *Orientalism* Said (1995) shows that these representational patterns date back to colonial times.

While idealized white saviours are commonly portrayed, Pakistani Humanitarians are certainly a rare sight. Shahidul's portrait of Edhi stands in stark contrast to that unsympathetic male figure. A small digression here can add an interesting dimension. Another success story from the Drik brochure is a portrait of Muhammad Yunus, also by Shahidul Alam under the headline "Micro-credit's hot!" from year 2000. As the first person from Bangladesh to receive the Nobel Piece price, Doctor Yunus and microcredit brought a rare positive attention to Bangladesh, covered in the news worldwide. In this context it is interesting that Yunus is so smooth-shaven. His portrayal did perhaps not sway that long established notion propagated by Western media of evil, Muslim, women suppressive bearded men?

In accordance with the hostile image of Muslims, *madrassa* schools are typically portrayed as "fertile ground for terrorism". That is one of the findings in a report on US newspaper coverage of Pakistan by the International centre for media and the Public agenda (Moeller 2007). The report shows that while women are commonly depicted as innocent victims or as peace agents (both marginal and central, as Gullestad contends), certain children are to be feared, particularly boys indoctrinated in *madrassa* schools. The photographer, to whom I will now turn, attempted to portray a *madrassa* in a more positive light. Here, I will focus above all on the photographer's experiences in relation to how the series was published. Through this example I want to show that there is a risk of "falling back" on stereotypical

representations, but also that a more nuanced view can be expressed *through* a stereotypical photograph. The relationship between photographs and text is crucial in this regard. In turn I will revisit the textual as well as visual strategies adapted to by Drik affiliated photographers to safeguard from such incidents.

The risk of falling back on the stereotypical

Mahin is a male photographer in his early thirties. He graduated from Pathshala a few years back, and had completed a degree in social anthropology before he began his studies in photography. Mahin is currently working as a freelance photographer. He refers to himself as a "whore-photographer" who does anything to make a living out of it, including a good amount of NGO assignments and weddings. It, thus, seems that he has embodied the 'purity ideal' that I argued prevails in the Drik community in the previous chapter. As a freelance photographer Mahin has lots of work during the wedding season (from January to February), whereas other parts of the year work can be scarce. The workload throughout the year, in other words, may be extremely uneven. The *madrassa* series was from a project Mahin did in a Pathshala class a few years back where the students had been asked to look for something "outside the ordinary image". It had been referred to in a lecture some days earlier and I got curious about it. I asked him if he could tell me about the project and how it was published.

I met with Mahin in Nandoos', which is a Western style air-conditioned restaurant just around the corner from Drik, where we had cold drinks. He was wearing a Bangladeshi style shirt (*fatua*) over a pair of jeans, and had tied his hair in a pony-tale at the back.

> Mahin shows me the whole series of black and white pictures portraying the young boys in the *madrassa*. In one of the photographs five of the boys are walking across a grass field, smiling and laughing. In the next, a boy looks joyously into the camera. Other pictures are from inside the school. Some show the boys studying and one shows them in class with their teacher. There are piles of books, and Mahin explains that they are science and mathematics books. Another picture shows three of the boys sleeping, close to one another with their *tupis* (embroidered caps) on the shelf behind them.
>
> Mahin tells me that he wanted to show the *madrassa* from a positive perspective, because we have seen the negative narrative so many times. He wanted to nuance that picture and show what he saw as lacking. He wanted to show that in addition to religious schooling the kids also learn to read and write, and are taught science and mathematics. "It might not be the best education, but for many it is the only schooling they have access to", he says. The *madrassa* piece had been presented as a feature story on the Majority World website, where

the Nepalese magazine Himal SouthAsian had found the photographs and showed their interest in publishing the story.[50] Since the magazine could not afford to buy the photographs for the full price, the team leader contacted him and asked if he was willing to publish the story for a more reasonable price.[51] He agreed to let Himal SouthAsian pay according to its ability, but requested that the magazine published an interview alongside the photo feature in which he explained his motivation for carrying out the project and some of his views on *madrassa* schools. The photo feature was published in the October issue in 2007, where the main topic was religious fundamentalisms in South Asia.

One of Mahin's photographs from the *madrassa* series had been used for the cover of the magazine. The picture has a different mood than the remaining photographs. It is a darkly lit and strongly contrasted close-up portrait of a boy. He could be ten-twelve years old and carries a pile of books. His head is turned down, slightly to the side, and the boy looks away from the camera. The expression on his face is unsettling, he looks wary, frightened perhaps. The text that runs across the picture reads "FUTURE FUNDAMENTALISMS", and underneath in smaller letters "SouthAsia under Islamist, Hindutva, Buddhist extremisms". Mahin explained that he had not been aware that his *madrassa* series would be published as part of a feature story on fundamentalism before the magazine came out. The front page took him by surprise, and he had contacted the editor. However, although he lamented the way the photographs had been published, he also understood that an editor at times had to make unpopular choices to attract people to buy the magazine. Also it comforted him that the cover feature was not only about Islamic fundamentalism, but covered fundamentalisms in plural, and that the boy in the photograph did not have any religious symbols indicating that he was a Muslim, or student of a *madrassa*.

Maria: Did you know that this specific photograph would be on the cover?

Mahin: I didn't know. It is not we photographers who choose the cover; it is the editor's choice. -And in a way… I don't know, it's an interesting choice of front cover.

Maria: Why do you think they chose this one specifically?

Mahin: Well, every magazine has their political view, and their own editing policy. One reason could be that all the other portraits are positive. In this photo there is a kind of… shake… I mean, look at his eyes! This is somehow…what's the word?

(Silence)

[50] Himal SouthAsian is a monthly review magazine that covers regional issues from the South Asian subcontinent.

[51] The agency is known for being expensive for the country and South Asian region, and when photographs are sold within Bangladesh it is usually at half price.

Maria: He looks a bit suspicious.

Mahin: Yeah, suspicious. And he doesn't know what his future is, that could be their reason for choosing this image.

Maria: Maybe they would argue that it is portrait format, so it fits the cover?

Mahin: Yeah of course. But then again there is also this picture, which would have given a complete different impression (he points to a photograph, also a portrait but with a more curious and open facial impression, nicely lit). And also this one, I like this one very much. (the photographs is of a boy running towards the camera. He is dressed in white clothes, skies above) Also here, he doesn't know where to go. If they had asked me, I would have chosen this photo. To me this represents the whole story.

Later I asked Mahin if he did not find it ironic that when he tried to give a more nuanced view on the *madrassa* it was published in this context. "Of course!", he replied. "But the thing is I can show my work with this picture, with the suspicious looking boy on the front page. Otherwise there is nobody to publish it". He added that "at least I can say my words in those photographs, and through the captions and other things". The fact that his story was printed alongside a text of his choice inside the magazine mattered more to him than the fact that it was published in relation to an article about fundamentalism. Even if the photograph on the front page had been taken out of context and printed with a title that conveyed a message counter to what he had intended. Because *inside* the magazine, the photographer had the chance to show pictures also of smiling kids, playing and studying not only the teachings of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith,* but also Bengali, English, science and mathematics.[52] Thus, in the photographic series published inside the magazine he emphasized not only difference but also similarity, though under the headline of "future fundamentalisms". It could seem that the photographer considered a potentially misleading opening picture worthwhile, at least better than not getting the photographs published at all. Through the "stereotypical" photograph on the front page he gets the possibility to show the *madrassa* from a positive and more nuanced view that he sees as representational gaps in the common narrative. In a later conversation, Mahin expressed that he believed that if he had had a negative focus there would have been numerous opportunities to publish it. For the angle of this story, however, few were interested. He therefore had to be flexible and willing to compromise with the editors, and accept that in spite of his intentions the photograph selected for the front page fed into the well-established stereotype of Muslim men as fundamentalist fanatics, as analysed by Said

[52] The term *Hadith* refers to statements or actions of Muhammad, and considered an important tool in understanding the Qur'an.

(1979, 1997), Gullestad (2007) and Moeller (2007). It should be taken into account here that most of the photographers would be cautious not to critique magazine editors or other clients; without them they would not be able to make a living as photographers. It is possible therefore that Mahin defended the magazines where his photographs were published, and respected the editor's point of view so that he would not miss out on assignments in the future. Of course, it is also likely that some viewers actually did not see the cover story inside the magazine or read the accompanying text. Photo-editors face the same dilemma as many photographers do; in a competitive and complex media reality they have to attract attention to their magazine to make a number of people pick it up. The best way to achieve that attention is by placing a catchy photograph and title that awakens attention on the magazine-cover. The photograph which was used for the front page gives the viewer a 'negative vibe', perhaps better suited for the journalistic market, which as Bourdieu has pointed is driven by sensationalism and negative news (1998). The ways in which market constraints influence Drik affiliated photographers will be elaborated later on. First I will discuss the relation between photographs and text, as well as photographers and editors, which will lead me back to Drik adapted strategies of resistance and a further analysis of the above cases.

The importance of *(con)*text

In both the series sketched above, text plays a fundamental role in conveying meaning. The overall context also influence how viewers interpret photographs, hence the conceptual double meaning indicated above. When Shahidul's Edhi series was published, it was under the headline "Humanitarian to a Nation". The text supported what the photographer wished to communicate about the Pakistani humanitarian, and the story was published much in correspondence with the idea that the photographer had in mind.[53] Conversely, in the latter case the photographer attempted to challenge a one-sided view of *madrassa*, but ended up unwittingly conforming to it. The text, "Future Fundamentalisms" as well as the overall context the series was presented in are essential in this regard. The last example reminds us once again that the independence of photographers is limited. A photographer has not "succeeded" with his or her storytelling until he finds an appropriate arena for the work to be published, and his photographs reach a wider audience. Photography must be seen as context

[53] It should be mentioned that Saudi Aramco World has a similar mission to Drik and Shahidul. The magazine's key objective is to broaden the knowledge of Arab and Muslim countries and serve as a "bridge" between Muslim majority world countries and cultures in the West. As a long time visitor and friend the Saudi Aramco World editor and Shahidul's representational concerns were, at least to a certain extent concurrent.

specific; as a medium without a specific agenda of its own, a photograph can come to mean a number of things depending on the context it is applied to. Thus, photographs can best be understood according to how they 'migrate', to use Kopytoff's term (1986). The NGO photographs in the previous chapter were commodities already from the outset. The photographs here became commodities on a much later stage, particularly in the *madrassa* case, since this project was self-assigned by the photographer. Of course, photographic projects created outside of official assignments can well be produced with a sense of market logic in mind, as I will discuss in the next subchapter. In Mahin's madrassa series, however, I believe the market "kicked in" at the stage when the magazines proposed to publish the photographs, made available through the Majority World portal's image stock. With his biographical approach to things, Kopytoff asks to what extent the possibilities inherent in a photograph are 'realized'. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore how photographs are perceived by individual viewers, but it can seem that Shahidul's portrait of Edhi, because of the context it was published in better realised its potential to contest a stereotypical representation than Mahin's *madrassa* series did.

Which implications do this have for Barthes' perspective on the photograph, which I summarised in chapter two? Barthes (1984) notes that photographs have to be understood within the entirety of information in a given context. He argues that all images in themselves are 'polysemous'; they are open spaces for interpretation that invite viewers to focus on some aspects and ignore others. Text communicates more directly and serves to direct our attention to certain elements within the image; it serves as a 'anchorage' to potential meanings (Barthes 1999:117-118). For Barthes text, particularly titles and captions, has a "parasitic function" on the photograph; "The text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination" (Barthes 1984:25-26). If we return to Mahin's front page photograph, through the title the reader is directed towards an interpretation where the boy in the photograph is somehow related to fundamentalism, which is followed up throughout the feature printed on top of each page. The text temporarily 'locks' the image to a particular meaning or frame in which to make sense of the photograph. Barthes argues that the caption is particularly powerful because it is printed across the photographic surface, and thus, almost becomes included in the *denotative* (the "descriptive" part) of the photograph. The text thus serves to rationalize or naturalize the cultural, or the *connotative* aspects of the image, and "quicken" the process of interpretation (Barthes 1984:25-27). If we recall Five Aid's exhibition narrated in the previous chapter, titles were printed alongside the images to give viewers a direction for how to interpret the photographs. The textual space was used to provide the viewer with

background stories where photographic accounts alone were inadequate, to provide the reader with a guidance to the 'right', or aspired meaning to each photograph.

The ambition to challenge stereotypical representations then, seems to be largely about placing images in the right textual context, since it to such an extent influence how photographs are interpreted. Drik and affiliated photographers are well aware of this. Many of the photographs that are for sale through the Drik Library and the Majority World portal are heavily loaded with text. Contrary to the photographs in the Five Aid exhibition, where text was utilized to inform the viewer of the "subjects" helplessness, where the local achievements were "edited out", at Drik the textual space is in many cases used as a way to emphasize the photographic "subjects" individuality, humanity and dignity. In addition to serve as an anchorage, the emphasis put on text is also in some cases due to the limitations of the visual. One photographer told me that to show a poor man is easy because it is visual. Conversely, to show pride or inner strength; mentioned by several as indicatives for a dignified portrayal, is much harder to visualise. The text, in other words, is also used as a space for photographers to provide additional information that it is harder to express in visual terms. It is also used to provide a counter-balance to the visual account. A conversation with Shahidul can illustrate how important he considers *(con)*text to be;

> Shahidul tells me about a photograph from Bangladesh taken by a British photographer, published in The Observer some years back. The photograph showed a child chained to the foot of a table. Shahidul points out that to begin with that is not a usual situation. He further found the photograph problematic because it had been used out of context. He explains; "it was not mentioned that the mother probably had to get on with her difficult life, and that her reason for fastening the child to the table probably was to protect the child from injury because there was nobody to look after it while she was at work".[54] Shahidul quickly adds that since the photographer did not know Bangla she was possibly unable to contextualize what she saw, and thus, prone to misinterpret the situation.

Shahidul's narration was one out of many where the benefits from using a local photographer were pointed out to me. I had just visited Chittagong photo-club, where a local photographer showed me some of his photographs. Among them was a photograph from a mental hospital of a young boy chained to a thick wooden plank from his feet. This photograph came to mind in the above conversation, and I mentioned it to Shahidul. He knew the photograph well; the

[54] It has been far from unusual to have children tied with a rope to a pole in the yard on European, including Norwegian farms. British journalists, however, are presumably far removed from such farm life.

picture had won several prices. "The interesting thing about this photograph", he said, "is that the text that accompanies the photograph presents a very different story". When the Chittagong based photographer showed me the picture, it was in a book of photographs awarded in an annual competition.[55] The text was not included in this context, which it usually isn't in photographic contests, but the photographer explained that he had worked on the project from the mental hospital for a long period, and that the young man in the picture had got much better with the help of herbal medicine and methods that seemed to be brutal. Much like Shahidul said about the photograph of the younger child chained to the table, the Chittagong-based photographer expressed that it was unfortunate that the full story had not been included in the publication. An added textual contextualization, in other words, could have helped to humanise, and balance these photographic accounts.

I have previously showed how Drik uses text as a strategy to pin pictures down to textual frameworks in keeping with their aspired meaning. As Mahin's *madrassa* series illustrated, such textual measures were not always entirely successful. The library staff at Drik could inform me that although the photographs available for sale in the web portal were supplied with text, customers could also purchase photographs individually. Thus, it was not always possible to combine photographs and text in neat packages. In our conversation about the Edhi piece Shahidul explained another precautionary measure he had adapted to avoid 'misinterpretation' of his photographs. In the Edhi series he had a portrait that he considered very effective in conveying the humanitarian's strong character. But, as he described;

> I did not use that picture, because he (Edhi) has a long bearded face, it is a strongly lit and stark image, and I could see that this image taken out of context would feed into the terrorist Pakistani and things like that. And I deliberately used a much softer, and I think photographically weaker image, which was much less open to…sabotage, if you would like.

Shahidul indicates that he is likely to edit out photographs that he believes could be used in the wrong way, because Drik in most instances do not have the full editorial control over their photographs. In this case the strategic measure is visual, rather than textual. Mahin similarly stated that he had left out some photographs from the *madrassa* series that he suspected could be used in the wrong context. Perhaps, if he had more experience he could have foreseen the

[55] Three of his photographs had been rewarded and published in that same book in 2006. One of them was of an 'exotic' picture of an indigenous woman from Banderbhan; bare breasted, the second of the picture of the mental patient and the third a picture from a *madrassa* entitled "education" (*madrassa* is one out of many different schools in Bangladesh, but arguably the most 'photogenic'. I found the three photographs fairly descriptive for "Bangladesh represented in a nutshell".

situation and excluded the photograph that ended up on the front page? On the other hand, it is possible that the editor of Himal SouthAsian would have been less interested in the series if he did not have that particular photograph.

Mahin's photograph from the front page of Himal SouthAsian was brought up during a seminar on copyright held by a lawyer who is specialised on the issue and was visiting from abroad. Mahin was not present at the time, but a photographer friend brought up his "case". He wanted to know whether the 'editors choice' could be seen as an example of copyright infringement; a violation of the photographer's rights. The lawyer's answer was that unless Mahin (represented by Drik in the above case) and Himal SouthAsian had agreed on a *restricted* licence that specified the exact way in which the photographs could be used, there was nothing a lawyer could do to help him in retrospect. Had the photographer made a more specific agreement, in other words, he would have been in a more powerful position towards the client. The example illustrates that copyright and licence agreements, in addition to consolidate photographers' rights, can be seen as strategies in their own right, that with careful attention can protect Drik's social agenda and safeguard from misappropriations and, thus, help to resist market forces that tend to push in the opposite direction. In the above case, however, that mechanism was not sufficient.

In the above section I have shown efforts to use photographs to reverse stereotypical representations. The first example was rather successful in that endeavour, whereas the latter case illustrates the fragile nature of visuals and photographers' restricted autonomy. I have revisited the strategies that Drik and affiliated photographers have adapted to in order to protect their images from misuse. I will now turn to look at the market forces at play, and the ways in which they influence Dhaka based photographers in an opposite direction, not immediately compatible with the ambition to challenge stereotypical forms of representation.

Market constraints and the problem of the opposition

The preferred way of working for many of the photographers is to complete their stories upfront or outside of any official assignment, as it provides them with the maximum independence possible in their work. They would then try to get their work published. Both Shahidul's portrait series on Edhi and Mahin's *madrassa* project were initiated by the photographer's own interest. However, the ability to choose to structure one's work in this manner is dependent upon the freedom that a photographer's financial situation allows, and for most this was not a possibility.

Many of the photographers pointed out to me how difficult it was to get their stories published or sold when they focused on something positive. As Bourdieu (1998) reminds us it is a common press problem that only the most dramatic or spectacular receives media attention. "News" additionally implies that there is a sudden rupture to everyday life. To photograph a flood or other disasters is, as many photographers have pointed out to me easy, because they are of a visual nature. In contrast to the sensationalist tradition, or supplementary rather, Drik's ambition is to also show "business as usual" types of pictures. To focus on slower processes, such as reconstruction in the aftermath of a flood demands more of the photographer; because it is less visual and hence, more time consuming. Consequently, it was pointed out to me that foreign "para-shoot" photographers flown in to cover an accident or event in a few days or maximum a few weeks, were less likely to focus on such dynamics.

However, when ambitions trickle down to practicalities, many photographers expressed a frustration with the limitations of the market. One of the photographers told me what he considered to be the most important requirements for a photograph or a photographic series to have saleability;

> The topic has to have a global relevance, or be something "newsy". Or it has to show people dying, there has to be at least 500 people dying. Then floods sell of course, or anything that has to do with fundamentalism.[56]

Another photographer similarly stated that to earn money or to win competitions you need to have a negative focus in one way or the other. Refugees, prostitutes, or environmental hazard are all particularly "successful" stories. He added; "you can say that a winning story of a photographer means negative story of people". There is a sense of sarcasm in these statements, but to find the space for ones' story to get published is an essential question to any photographer, and often a challenging task; ever the more for photographers who attempt to work outside the mainstream. To have a name that is established in the photographic world can be helpful, but it is not necessarily sufficient to get a story published. To return to Shahidul's story on Edhi, the first time he photographed him was in 1993. It was only much later that the Saudi Aramco World magazine agreed to publish a story on him. The piece was finally published in the November/December issue in 2005. In other words, twelve full years

[56] The Norwegian Journalist Per Egil Hegge wrote a comment in Aftenposten in the late 1990s called "Ten thousand killed, and it made only a notice" (*Ti tusen omkom, og det ble en notis,* Aftenposten 13.07.98). The comment was a response to a hurricane in the Northern India where more than 10.000 people had been killed, which according to Hegge was hardly commented on in Western media. Maybe floods and other natural disasters have become more saleable since then?

had passed during the time in-between, and according to Shahidul's account it was the only time the story had been published in its entirety. Even for a well-established and internationally renowned senior photographer with an extensive network of contacts then, it was a real challenge to get a positively oriented story published. Because, as one of the Pathshala students described it; "stories that are hopeful, positive and unrelated to poverty, like Shahidul would say, are just not sexy enough".

As I have already indicated, more experienced photographers can be more picky about choosing assignments, or have a better foundation for negotiating terms and conditions. On the other hand, senior photographers would usually have larger financial responsibilities. One thing is to produce photographs that do not sell during the time when you are a student (although many had to make a living already *whilst* they were students). When the students complete their degree from Pathshala, however, they have to make a living as photographers among a large number of Dhaka-based photographers. At any one time a few photographers are in the international "spotlight". And as a young photographer pointed out to me; "everyone wants to be that person". A senior teacher explained that his students were experts in studying the market, and that many could anticipate what types of work that had potential to become successful. He described that many of the photographers, including some of the students, had adapted an art of balancing between positive and negative images. To exemplify his point he referred to a photographic series from an old people's home by a senior photographer in the community. He described that in one sense the series is very positive, because you see the love and the intimate relationships between people. At the same time, it is black and white, strongly contrasted work and the text tells you (and the pictures also show) that the living conditions are very hard. That way you tell a story that is somewhat positive, but still gives the market a negative vibe. "And at Pathshala we really mastered it" he remarked. His comment implies that self-assigned, "personal" projects are not necessarily unbiased by the market, but can also to some extent be inspired by its logic.

The teacher went on explaining that the students are taught to stand against stereotypical images, but then, when they complete their studies and start working as photographers or photojournalists, they face the market and realize that these images do not sell. "So what do you do?" he asks. "You start taking stereotypical images and that becomes your habit. And now when I ask my previous students if they feel any difference between the non stereotypical and the stereotypical, most of them, including me have a big question mark". The teacher's statement unsettles Foucault's argument about the possibility of creating counter discursive spaces. While one of the goals at Drik is to textually anchorage the

interpretative space in its visual material, the Drik affiliated photographers' resistance is inevitably articulated through, and in some degree trapped *by* the language of their opponent. This is what Tord Larsen (1999:106) has referred to as "the problem of the opposition". He explains:

> It is Indians and indigenous groups who have to trade in their cultural repertoire to the convertible currency the Canadian and Australian (majority) populations possess, and never the other way around. This leads to an asymmetry between those who speak first (and lay the premises for comparability), and those who talk back (and articulate resistance in the medium delivered by their counterpart) (Larsen 1999:104).[57]

In Larsen's view, an objectifying gaze from outside leads to a cultural 'self-objectivation' it is difficult to escape for those who aspire to express difference (1999:105-106), which limits Orientalised 'Others' ability to speak back. Drik has had to develop carefully considered strategies to protect their photographic material from undesirable appropriations and 'misinterpretation' of their photographs. But because photographs, as Barthes (1999:117) reminds us are polysemous; they imply "a floating chain of signifieds", this is hard to achieve. Interesting in this regard, I was in the library once while staff members looked through the photographs from the online library portal that they were unsure whether to keep or not. A controversy arrived over a photograph by a photographer from Indonesia, depicting two fully covered (burqa wearing) women walking down a lane. Some of the staff loved the photograph, while others disliked it. One of the female staff members was particularly against keeping the photograph because she thought the women were represented as suppressed and without identity. Most of the staff disagreed, however, and the photograph was eventually kept in the library collection. For the heavily burdened 'sign' of the *burqa*, which in Barthes' terms has been caught by myth and in that reduced to a pure signifying function, it is perhaps hard to show pictures of *burqas* altogether without the concern that it might connote female oppression?

Late in my fieldwork one of the photographers who sells images through the Majorityworld portal told me that the Drik Library has received complaints for not offering more pictures of women wearing veil in their Bangladeshi collection (after a quick search I can confirm to the fact that there are few, at least photographs marked with the keywords 'veil' or 'burqa'). Several photographers also pointed out to me that in Bangladesh you can

[57] My translation of Larsen's explanation of "opposisjonens problem". Original quote: "Det er indianere og urbefolkninger som må veksle inn sitt kulturelle repertoar i den konvertible valuta kanadiere og australiere sitter på og aldri omvendt. Igjen har vi asymmetrien mellom den som snakker først (og legger premissene for sammenliknbarhet) og den som snakker tilbake (og artikulerer motstand i det medium motparten har levert)."

usually not distinguish if a person is Muslim or not from what he or she wears. One photographer proclaimed that; "Pakistani Islam definitely sells better, because it is more visual".[58] I do not know where the complaint to Drik Library came from, but it indicates that there is a push for more obvious rhetoric. As Drik is directed principally directed towards Western markets, it also needs to be a visual rhetoric that the viewers can identify with and that make sense then, to a largely Western audience. Hoek (2003:101) makes a similar argument in her study of Drik. In a portfolio review with a British workshop holder during her fieldwork one of the Pathshala students showed one of his photo stories. The workshop leader exclaimed; "you are telling me that these people are Muslims, but everything looks Hindu! I can't see the difference". He argued that for the pictures to make sense to the Time Magazine's readers, they had to be constructed more explicitly. Hoek posits that one of the challenges the photographers face is to assure legibility, without falling into totalisations. The photographer who told me about the representational gap in the library portal had already by demand begun by taking pictures of women wearing *burqa*, that he would hand in to the Drik library staff and upload on the Majorityworld portal. These episodes show that it is easy to be trapped in stereotypical representations that characterize Western news markets and captured by predefined discourses, when attempting to create change through photographs.

The objective to challenge stereotypical representations is not always easily compatible with photographers' need to make a living. On the one hand, Drik has adapted strategies in keeping with its social goals. Photographers strive to provide balanced accounts could perhaps be seen as an additional strategy, where stereotypical representations are nuanced in more subtle, and saleable ways? However, an opposing tendency can also be identified. As Bourdieu (1998) has pointed out, the journalistic, and by extension photographic field has a limited degree of autonomy because it relies so directly on commercial demand. Market constraints seem to push photographers towards more dramatized expressions and more explicit rhetoric, that makes sense to a Western audience. The fact that Drik has to compete with other actors in the photographic field, and photographers affiliated to Drik to some extent also with one another, makes such forces hard to stand against. I will now turn to a related paradox; the Drik community's reliance on photographic competitions.

[58] The traditional dress in Bangladesh is saris and *salwar kameez.* The Islamic veil is a relatively new arrival, although some, particularly in some parts of the country and capital, uses it. Though many wear a variety of scarves and veils, the full burqa is a relatively rare in most parts of Dhaka.

Competing for a space

Towards the completion of the Chobi Mela, in January 2011, a magazine editor from the USA had initiated a rounding up discussion centred around the question "is there another way of seeing?". He initiated the discussion by telling the audience that he was impressed with much of the work he had seen in Dhaka the previous week. "There are definitely stories that I want to hear", he added, "and the visual rhetoric is increasingly eloquent and relatively self deciding. At the same time, the visual rhetoric is pretty much Western, and what we have seen is very much influenced from the outside". Some foreign visitors, in other words, did not find the work different enough, and there was an expectance that it should be. One of the photography students present pointed out that local Bangladeshi photographers nevertheless are reliant upon Western markets, funds and awards. In an almost desperate tone he added; "so how can we get past this?" In addition to the influence of market forces, the impact of photographic competitions on the photography community in Dhaka is substantial, and hence deserves some attention on its own.

During my fieldwork many photographers pointed to the fact that the photographic community in Dhaka is so strongly driven by international competitions and awards. As one photographer expressed it; "Bangladeshi photography is very dependent on this so-called success. If you think about it, who would even care about Pathshala if it wasn't for the numerous awards we have achieved?". On the one hand, photographic awards are a way for photographers to receive recognition for their work, and also one of the ways that the success of Pathshala and the photographic community in Dhaka is measured and publically announced. Awards provide photographers not only with a name that is recognized in the "photographic world", but also a sum of money or photographic equipment that can help them accomplish their goals. On the other hand, the "hunt" for photographic awards has some less desirable outcomes. Many photographers expressed that it pushed photographers to search for the most dramatic or tragic events, and visuals that comply to the dominant visual language. Again, this goes to show that there is a risk of being captivated by the logic of ones' counter-part. Market forces influence photographers in many ways, and photographic competitions, I believe, serve as their extension.

Interestingly, one of the photographers told me that "a trick" to succeed as a photographer was to produce photographic stories that could fit into many categories, such as poverty, globalisation and so on with a slight change in the titles. That way the pictures could be used in a number of different contexts, he explained, and fit into a variety of competition categories. Contrary to the strategy of locking photographs to text as described earlier, this

photographer takes advantage of the polysemous nature of photographs and uses it to his own advantage. Ironically perhaps, considering Drik's social goals, the agency and the school have been accused of "selling poverty". Newton argues that "although the press may base its operations on a concept of social responsibility, in practice the press often operates differently, producing content that reflects the economic interests of those in power. So, 'economic interests' truth is information that best results in profits" (Newton 2001:101). I find her argument rather pessimistic and want to emphasise that far from everything is done with profit in mind, in Dhaka and elsewhere, in the photographic field and beyond. There is also a unique passion for the photographic medium, as well as for humankind in the Drik community. Nonetheless market forces are clearly influential in a number of different ways, regardless of whether a project is commercially assigned or not to begin with. It should also be mentioned that many photographers deliberately refrained from collecting trophies in the form of awards, just like some rejected NGO assignments; fearing it would influence their photographic style. While awards could give a friendly pat on the back and for some a much needed recognition, some also considered 'the award hunting game' full of self-importance. At Pathshala, there was also a clear counter-tendency to the "suffering genre" that had been critiqued, which I will return to.

There is another dimension to the gaining of recognition through photographic awards. Shahidul has made major achievements in identifying the need for a more diverse jury in order to evaluate entries fairly in major international competitions. Today he is a jury member in several international awards including the World Press Photo, and also on the advisory board for National Geographic society's All Roads programme.[59] This gives him the right to nominate Bangladeshi candidates as potential recipients of awards, which is a major achievement and a symbolical turn in an unequal media reality. On the other hand, several photographers indicated that Shahidul's strong international appearance creates a local hierarchy that is particularly disadvantageous to photographers without connections to the Drik network. One photographer expressed that Bangladeshi photography was divided into two camps; those with a foot inside the community, and those outside. While far from all the photographers in the Drik community are equally dedicated to the social goals of the organization, what the network has to offer is considered valuable to all.

[59] World Press Photo is renowned for organising the "largest and most prestigious press award" annually (World Press Photo). National Geographic's All Roads Photography award is awarded to photographers from an indigenous or minority culture within their own countries, documenting their changing cultures and communities (National Geographic All Roads).

When I asked a photographer about his motivation to carry out a project he was working on, he instantly replied; "To have a go in Chobi Mela". With 20 graduating photographers each year there are many photographers competing for a space within the photographic community in Dhaka. Thus, it can seem as if the disparities within the international media field shifts to become a power disparity within the Bangladeshi photographic field, and that photographers who are not affiliated with Drik or do not conform to the agency's ideology have a marginal place within that space.

Potential representational pitfalls

Following Gullestad (2007:264), technologies of objectivation, such as photography, do not only carry new possibilities, but also pose new risks of essentializations, rigidity, alienation, divisions and exclusions. The focus on global disparities in "the 'colonial discourse' entry into the Politics of Otherness", as Breckenridge and Van der Veer (1993) has expressed it, is that it tends to disguise heterogeneity, and downplay locally manifested disparities within postcolonial countries. In its attempt to turn a position of relative marginality on the global arena into tactical strength, Drik strategically distances itself from the West, proclaiming an ethnically enclosed position of radical alterity, to use Taussig's term.

The power relation between photographer and "subject" has been marginally dealt with in this thesis. Professor of visual arts Terrence Wright (2004:174) looks at the social structures in relation to photographic representation and argues that photography "tends to reflect the power relations of Western society. White people photograph/look at black people. Men photograph/look at women. Those who have photograph/look at those who have not". Students in Pathshala are encouraged to reflect on such questions, but while local Bangladeshi photographers are now behind the camera, large social, cultural, and at times also linguistic disparities characterise most photographic encounters also in the Bangladeshi context. Thus, the first "link" in Wright's chain of power relations may to some extent have been removed, but similar power hierarchies are reproduced on a local level.[60] Social anthropologist Simon

[60] One example is the photographic representations of indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region in South Eastern Bangladesh. As Van Schendel (2002) points out in relation to one group called Mru, since the very first photographs from the region exoticness, difference and nudity have been emphasized. The Hill Tracts is a popular destination for photographers, and the Majorityworld portal offers a wide selection of photographs from the region. Most focus on indigenous people's beauty and different ways of life. Most of the pictures are of women and children, taken by male photographers, and many express a clear distance between photographer and subject, which illustrates that internal forms of othering are taking place. For urban, middle class Bangladeshis indigenous peoples lifestyles can be as 'exotic' as they are to foreign photographers. Van Schendel (2002:343) argues, along with anthropologist Christopher Pinney (1997) that photographic representations continue to rely on urban professional photography and national frames of reference.

Harrison (2003:345) offers an interesting perspective in this regard. He argues that groups who have a close relationship to begin with are more likely to feel the need to differentiate themselves, and participate in processes of ethnic 'othering' than distant ones. In Harrison's own words; "for actors to imagine themselves different, they have to imagine resemblances-and may have to work to reproduce resemblances-against which they can make differences continue to appear" (Harrison 2003:358). In the process of replacing random and uncoordinated heterogeneities with stable relationships of difference, the trick is to make those differences visible without revealing the mimetic practices behind (Harrison 2003:354-355).

In an advert by Image Work (figure 9), the North American distributor of photographs from the Majorityworld portal, 'indigenous' photographers are promoted as more likely to understand the lives and cultures of their subjects, and to capture a true, authentic image. While on one level local photographers have a comparative strength, the statement ignores the representational hierarchies that exist on a local level. It also attempts to re-establish the dubious truth discourse in photography and re-authenticate the photographic medium.

Figure 9: Advertisement, Copyright : Katherine van Acker/The Image Works

At the round-up discussion at Chobi Mela, as a response to the question "is there another way of seeing?", Shahidul stood up, and pointed out that the question tends to overlook that there were photographers in Bangladesh already in 1840, at a time when there was no internet. Thus, it is not true that photography developed exclusively in the West. Shahidul went on, reminding the audience that nothing is homogeneous; "there is no one type of white man, or black man, and while there might be differences there are also strong overlaps. He concluded

his comment by referring to a quote by cultural theorist Stuart Hall; "A black man, with a black camera does not necessarily take black pictures". As Shahidul point to, the world does not consist of black and white, but rather many shades of grey. There is no *one* indigenous way of seeing. The unifying public image that Drik relies on, fails to account for the diversity of perspectives that exist within it. Perhaps the counter-discourse Drik (and by extension Pathshala) operates within becomes captivating in its own sense, because of the strategic essentialisms ethnic identity movements implies?

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have dealt with the question of representation, in a relatively broad sense. I began by narrating some tendencies of how Islam and Muslims are represented in mainstream international media, which largely resonates with Said's contention in *Orientalism*, more than 30 years after its publication. I then discussed two photographic series produced by local photographers in attempts to challenge a unilateral and negatively biased representation. Mahin's *madrassa* piece shows that, in spite of his attempt to contest a well-established stereotype, following Larsen (1999), there is a danger of being captivated by the logic of ones' counterpart, and thus, 'consumed' by predefined discourses. At the same time the example illustrates that a photographs function is relative to the context they appear in. I have shown examples of how Drik and affiliated photographers have applied creative visual and textual strategies, as well as legal measures such as copyright considerations to protect photographs from "sabotage". On the other hand, competitive logics and market forces inspire many photographers in another direction. While photographers in Pathshala are encouraged to produce work which runs counter to the stereotypical, and applauded for positively oriented stories, many experience that there is a limited market for those projects, and that those photographs are not the ones to win competitions. Since most photographers depend on their cameras for their survival or financial wellbeing, they cannot possibly behave as photographic idealists at all times. With the growth that Drik has undergone over the times, and the many initiatives it sustains, that is also true for the agency as a whole.

In-between these two outer ends of the argument, of 'the economic' on the one hand and 'the idealistic' on the other, stereotypes are challenged in more subtle ways. By providing *balanced* accounts, where negatives and positives are combined, photographers can produce images that are suitable for Western media markets, and still in accordance with Drik's ideology. In other words, photographers accept a degree of 'Orientalism', in order to be able

to nuance the overall image, step by step. While sticking to ones ideals might be easier for those with a strong economic background, all do not agree with the ideological backbone to start with. I have also argued that new hierarchies have arisen in Drik's shadow, and along with Gullestad (2007), Breckenridge and Van der Veer (1993), that global disparities are reproduced within postcolonial localities. The paradoxical nature of photographs remains, with complex social realities and a spiral of power relations underneath their surface.

6

Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to consider the real life interplay between ambitions and restrictions to a Dhaka based photographic initiative, with the core objective to contest stereotypical representations of Bangladesh, and by extension the Majority World. I have shed light on the contradictory forces that influence local photographers in their daily practices, with Drik's ideology and the potential to use photographs as an act of resistance on the one hand, and simultaneously, market forces pushing and pulling photographers in the opposite direction. The tension between financial concerns and idealistic considerations, and Drik's ideological underpinning leaning towards the latter, lead to a compound pressure that cause daily tensions and moral ambivalence to Drik and individual photographers alike.

I have showed how dominant discourses and stereotypical representations are negotiated and re-appropriated by those 'Others' depicted, in the past, principally by Western photographers. Drik, and photographers affiliated to the photographic agency, have adapted strategies that strengthen their abilities to challenge external categorization in their counter-Orientalist narratives. I have suggested that that these strategies can be seen as a form of mimetic practices in Taussig's (1993) sense, whereby Drik and related photographers consciously copy their counterpart to invert the voice of their powerful opponents and free themselves from the capture of others' imaginings. This can be seen as a form of what the authors of *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Ella Shohat Robert Stam call "artistic jujitsu" against domination (1994:328).[61] At the same time, a conflicting tendency is evident. As an agency directed primarily towards Western markets, and in a community where for many photographers to be successful means to gain recognition in the West, it can seem as if the 'Oriental' vision at times is all-encompassing. As one of the Pathshala teachers explained, for many photographers it is hard to distinguish what is stereotypical and what is not, which supports Breckenridge and Van der Veer's contention that it is difficult to free India, and thus,

[61] *Jujitsu* is a Japanese martial art that can be trained for self defence. The Brazilian version promotes the principle that a smaller, weaker person can successfully defend themselves against bigger.

also Bangladesh, from Orientalist discourses and categories (Breckenridge and Van der Veer 1993:2). Larsen (1999) points in a similar direction when he identifies "the problem of the opposition", as how one potentially can 'resist' the dominant order without being captured by the language of its opponent. His question points directly to the tensions at the core of this investigation. On the one hand, Drik and affiliated photographers are alert to this representational pitfall, and have developed strategies to avoid being caught in the Orientalist trap Larsen warns against. One of their strategies is to apply text, in order to pin down the polysemous nature of their photographs to meanings that are less ambiguous. On the other hand, such measures do not necessarily correspond with market demands, which, following Bourdieu (in Benson and Neveu 2005), to a considerable extent governs within the journalistic, and by extension photographic field.

In this perspective, photographs need to comply with the dominant logic both in terms of their content and visual language. In their reliance on visuals, photographs can hardly escape 'signs' that have been "caught by myth", to use Barthes' (1999) terminology. This suggests that dominant discourses, as Foucault has argued, "systematically form the subjects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972:49 in Mills 2004), while alternative discourses are subjugated. Larsen's perspective on "the problem of the opposition" implies that there is an asymmetry between those who speak first, and those who talk back. Drik affiliated photographers need to trade their cultural repertoire to the convertible currency also in a literal sense, since to be successful within the international photographic field to a large extent relies on their ability to articulate themselves in the English language. This is just one example of a form of cultural capital that is unevenly divided within the photographic community in Dhaka. I have argued that photographers' ability to practice counter-Orientalist strategies depend on a number of factors, including their social and economic backgrounds. While Foucault contends that there is room for resistance within discourses, Pêcheux (in Mills 2004:12-14) points out that he fails to acknowledge that people from less privileged backgrounds may have limited access to discourses and to participate in ideological struggles. I believe this is a crucial point in relation to the photographic community surrounding Drik.

Foucault's poststructuralist perspective can be illuminating to identify dominant discourses on a grand scale, but it does not have eye for individual experiences on the ground, and thus, is less useful for an actor-oriented study. I have applied Bourdieu's notion of social fields (1998; Benson and Neveu 2005) to understand the power relations at play in the photographic field, as well as within the community surrounding Drik. Bourdieu sees each social field as a micro cosmos that operates according to its own internal logic. Characteristic

for the photographic field is that it is only weakly autonomous; in other words it is deeply commoditised. Photographers are, as we have seen, pushed and pulled between the two poles Bourdieu has sketched. 'The heteronymous pole'; driven by external forces such as economy, on the one hand, and 'the autonomous pole', which represents the unique capital that specific field possesses internally, such as artistic or scientific skills on the other. Photographers in Dhaka often expressed a frustration that there was not much room for the latter within commercial assignments.

The photographic field is further interwoven with other fields, such as the journalistic field and the field of international development aid. Social fields in Bourdieu's perspective must been seen as relational. It considers the other agents that Drik operates alongside on the international photographic arena, and thus, the competition between different actors. He contends that each player's chances of "winning", depend on the cards he or she has at hand (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98). The most powerful card Drik has at hand is its position of relative marginality, which the agency's managers skilfully use for what it is worth. In that sense Drik possesses a solid amount of symbolical capital, to use Bourdieu's term. In emphasising difference, however, the problem arises when audiences, as voiced in the most recent Chobi Mela festival, object that the photographs produced in Dhaka are not as different as expected. I have argued here, along with Larsen (1999) that oppositional movements may have difficulties escaping cultural 'self-objectivation'. As we have seen 'indigenous' photographers rely on the same media markets, and have to work within the frames of the same medium, which has some clear delimitations. The photographic movement in Dhaka has further developed in relation to, rather than isolation from, Western, as well as other global connections. As I indicated earlier, the cards that individual photographers within the field have at hand varies, and influence to what extent photographers succeed in carving out a space for themselves on the global arena.

Bourdieu's structural perspective only takes us thus far. While he includes a time dimension to his analysis, and recognize individuals as active agents, some argue that Bourdieu's theories offers a limited room for change. The photographers I have introduced are certainly not passive pawns in a game governed by market forces, but active agents creatively shaping their own realities. They question and reflect upon, and try to find the cracks within, the practical constraints that they encounter. While some photographs can be seen as commodities from its initial stages, this is surely not always the case. For some, commercially earned money is also reinvested in more personal and idealistically motivated photographic series, which might, or might not reach the market on later stages. In this regard,

Kopytoff's (1986) perspective on the social lives of things, which emphasises the importance of following the migration of photographs, offers a supplementary and advantageous approach. Seen from this perspective, photographs can be seen to have agency in their own right. The value of objects is further disputed, and not merely driven by supply and demand, as it may sound in Bourdieu's *On Television and Journalism* (1998).

I have argued that Bourdieu underestimates the power of audiences, a view supported by Newton's (2001) approach to photographs. In identifying (at least) five stages in which photographic meaning is formed, her model provides a tool that, although she does not mention Kopytoff's 'social lives of things' model, complements it well. Combined the two allow us to identify at what exact stage a photograph was turned into a commodity, or its degree of commodification, and to what extent the biographical possibilities inherent in a photograph is realized. In the madrassa series I analysed earlier, the photographs did not reach their full potential to contest a stereotypical view, which illustrates how reliant photographs are on the context in which they are presented, as Barthes' has emphasized (1999). Newton's approach also allows us to identify the different stages of negotiation, or even manipulation, beginning with the negotiation between photographer and "subject". These stories are most often concealed in the actual photograph. In the development chapter I showed examples of different levels of staging and careful image construction. In the most extreme case I presented photographs were altogether manufactured, and I argued that these accounts leaves a semiological approach to photographs inadequate, because it takes a 'surface level' truth for granted. Nevertheless, what all the theorists I have included here, and most of the photographers I met in Dhaka agree on, is that photographs inevitably are subjectively mediated, value-laden versions of reality. The paradox of the photograph, thus, remains.

I have described a field that has grown substantially over the years, and that is continuously evolving and expanding. In the process the agency has become increasingly commercialised, in order to financially sustain its wide spanning activities. It is hard for Drik's public image to keep up with, and accommodate for, the rapid changes that have taken place. I have argued that ideals of editorial integrity and idealistic 'purity', high-held in the Drik community are harder to maintain than they were when the agency was smaller. For some photographers it is difficult to accept that Drik is no longer as 'radical' as it once was. For example, this was voiced in relation to the 2010 Drik calendar, which was produced in the collaboration with Unicef. Some photographers claimed that Drik had 'gone corporate', and saw this as a loss. The calendars are one of the sites where Drik has the full editorial control, which perhaps was the reason that there were strong reactions. One of the aspects of Drik's

work that I have not been able to cover here is Shahidul's blog (shahidulnews.com), where he has the full editorial control, and regularly uploads photographs and political commentaries of his own wish. Here, local activists and journalists critique national and international politics, at times also activists in other countries dedicated to the same causes. The blog compliments and contrasts the commercial work that Drik undertakes, and illustrates the potential in online publishing. On the site photographic exhibitions and awards are also announced, and the public is informed if photojournalists or activists are in clashes with the police. While not all photographers welcomed the changes Drik had undergone, the gains the international attention brought to the photographic community in Dhaka, and the contact and safety network Drik provides, was undisputed among the photographers who benefitted from it. It would be a mistake to view the photographic practices in Dhaka simply from a dominance and resistance perspective. As Ortner has argued (1995:176-77 in Brown 1996:731) "resistors are doing more than simply opposing domination, more than simply producing a mere re-'action'; they have their own politics". This is certainly true for the photographic community in Dhaka. However, I have argued that it might be difficult for Drik and individual photographers alike to communicate less altruistic intentions behind their work because of the high-held idealistic purity ideal, which it is hard to live up to in practice for photographers who attempt to make a living through their photography. In a similar manner, Drik's reliance on Western institutions seemed to be systematically under communicated.

Thus the question remains, to what extent is it possible to rebel against stigmatizing categories and gain control of one's own image through photographic means? The study of Drik shows that there is a potential for self-representation in the photograph, although it can seem like there are limitations to the photographs' ability to free itself entirely from existing representations. This is not only due to the restrictions caused by market demands and the limited freedom photographers (indeed all over the world) face, but also perhaps, to a certain extent because of the boundaries of the photograph itself. One reason is that photographic meaning is highly subjective and lies in the eyes of the beholder, and as Drik photographers have experienced it can hardly be controlled, even with careful measures. Photographs reliance on visuals in that sense makes them fragile. It can also be questioned to what extent photographs can really reflect the complex 'realities' that have breathed life to them to begin with, but this question has to be left lingering in this context. To solve the paradox that positively oriented stories are less attractive on photographic image markets, Drik affiliated photographers have found ways to challenge stereotypical representations in more subtle ways. I have argued that the Drik community needs to accept a certain amount of Orientalist

depictions in order to create a space for alternative visions, and be able to show aspects that are more rarely communicated in mainstream narratives.

On the other hand, I have argued that continuity can be traced, between the global disparities in the international media field and those that characterize the Bangladeshi photography-field. Financially underprivileged sections of the Bangladeshi society are likely to be less concerned with grand-scale representational issues, and more preoccupied with their own survival, as a few comments in this thesis has pointed to. Although they have been marginal also here, these voices indicate that internal 'Othering' is also taking place. Both Orientalist and counter-Orientalist forces are at play within the photographic field in Dhaka. As Breckenridge and Veer (1993) pointed out in their revision of Said's critique of Orientalism; "there is neither a monolithic imperial project nor a monolithic subaltern reaction, but rather that there are different historical trajectories of contest and change with lags and disjunctures along the way".

At the time when I was in Dhaka, I was told that Pathshala was going through a "revolution". This implied that students were encouraged to create more personal autobiographical work, and strive towards a 'contemporary documentary' style, rather than black and white "suffering" photographs, as had been a tendency in the past. Simultaneously, Holga cameras had become the new hype, and Pathshala students had started receiving classes in art photography.[62] The conversion was articulated during a student presentation in Chobi Mela, called 'in transition'. The presentation received mixed reactions. Many of those in the audience expressed that they were impressed with deep-felt passion the photographs evoked. A unique aspect about the Chobi Mela is that, as Shahidul expressed it, "young and hopeful students rub shoulders with the masters". Robert Pledge, president of Contact Press Images who has been involved as a teacher at Pathshala through many years, commented that he did not like that most of the presentations were accompanied by music. He also had a problem with the cropping of some of the photographs, as many of the photographs were shot on 35-millimeter film and cropped to square format. The question of photo-manipulation was a reoccurring theme at Chobi Mela. There were several objections from the audience that every time you take a picture you crop out parts of the world in any case. Media format equipment

[62] The Holga is a Lomography camera, with the slogan "The world through a plastic lens". The camera is relatively inexpensive and looks like a toy. It was invented in Hong Kong in 1982, and is loved by photographers (armatures and professionals) across the world for its artistic and highly unpredictable results (Source: Holga). Most Holga cameras take medium format film, but since media format films are hard to get in Bangladesh, most of the photographers into this trend in the Pathshala community had a 35 mm version or used the Holga application on their iPhones .

is further hard to obtain in Bangladesh. One of the Pathshala teachers stood up and answered to Pledge:

> You are like God in Pathshala, with us from the beginning. But a lot of people claim that we are always doing the same, like poverty issues. This has been one of the barriers in Pathshala, and in the last two years we have intentionally decided to explore beyond the classical documentary, and strive towards a more contemporary style.

The critique had been raised at a workshop in Cambodia. As another teacher pointed out, Pathshala has its own stereotypes to battle with. The same discussion was brought up in the closing session of the festival. Shahidul raised a concern about personal work, which he said had become like a "buzz word" in Pathshala. He did not have a problem with that to begin with, but feared that the personal would be all that the work was about, that it would "become some sort of intellectual wanking process". There was in other words a great diversity of opinions as to what Bangladeshi photography, or photography more generally should be. The community surrounding Drik and Pathshala is alive and pulsating, constantly evolving with creativity and friction, where old stereotypes linger on but also are rethought and potentially breathe life to new beginnings.

At the time of writing, Pathshala just celebrated its 12th anniversary (May 2011). The grand plan at the time I left was that Drik would be made into a 14-storage building encompassing all initiatives including a museum. When I was back in Dhaka in January 2011 there were 50 new employees in a newly set up Internet and Technology Department, and a lively open-air café next-door to Drik. Several photographers and Pathshala teachers have taken up PHD courses, focusing on Bangladeshi photography and representational issues. Many of the photographers within the Drik community are working for international wire agencies, and many to me familiar Bangladeshi names are reoccurring underneath photographs published in Norwegian newspapers as well as in Scanpix's photo-archives. At Chobi Mela, photographers from China, Iran and Georgia expressed that they admired and envied the incredible network Drik provides local photographers with, and wished to start up initiatives in their own countries. While global disparities are still evident, and movements based on technology certainly are not equally accessible for all, the digital world offers a whole new set of possibilities because it easily transcends geographical boundaries.

At the closing of Chobi Mela members in the audience were invited to suggest themes for the next photo festival, to be arranged in 2013. A man in the audience proposed the name 'Roots and Wings'. He explained; "because it is the link between where your groundedness is,

and what your ambitions are; between past and future, which seems very crucial at this particular moment in time". Indeed, I think he has a good point.

Epilogue

A Saturday early in May I am working at a Children's cultural house in Bergen. The performance "Fly Habibi" is just about to begin. The act takes place inside the sultan's palace, and the stage is decorated in beautiful glittering cloths in purple reds and yellow. The floor is covered with a Persian carpet. The sultan himself is dressed in a bright blue silk robe, harem trousers, and golden pointy shoes with sequins. On his head he has a massive, white turban. He serves tea from a bronze teapot in glass cups on a small wooden table, and has yet to reveal what is hidden underneath the silk covered cylinder shaped tower that takes up most of the stage. When he uncovers it we find that there is a big birds-cage inside, but because somebody had left the door open, we are told, the beautiful birds have flown away. Left is only an egg, which the sultan guards carefully throughout the play until it finally cracks and a yellow bird is born.

The sultan is a kind, though rather silly character with a broken Norwegian accent. During the play he receives puppet visitors through the curved windows at the back wall of the stage, manoeuvred by a second actor who is behind the scenes during most of the play. Amongst the visitors is a camel shepherd, an egg thief and two "Oriental" ladies playing with a string ball. Finally a live size belly dancer enters the stage, with three heads, each covered with a facial cloth from the nose and down. She is dressed in blue and with gigantic balloon-boobs in a small top that only barely covers them, which she uses to seduce the sultan. Some of the children seem a little scared by this scene, while others are laughing. As for me I am fascinated by the resemblance between the play and the Oriental harem that Said, and by extension Drik set out to criticize. This scene serves as a reminder of the importance of the work Drik and affiliated photographers carry out. The Orient "orientalised" is still alive and pulsating, and it is taught to our children too.

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