Challenging the Gaze. The Study of a Socially Conscious Photographic Initiative based in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract
The aim of this thesis is 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 in Western mainstream media. To what extent it is possible to rebel against stigmatizing categories and gain control of one’s own image through photographic means? In which ways do financial restrictions within the photographic field influence the ambition to break with stereotypical representations, and what are the constraints attached to the photographic medium itself? I carried out six months of fieldwork in the photographic community in Dhaka where I, with a combination of observational and conversational methods, investigated these questions. In contrast to much of the existing material on photography and politics of representation, this study shows how stereotypical representations and dominant discourses are negotiated and re-appropriated by ‘Others’, in the past depicted principally by Western photographers. As such it contributes to the understanding of representation, visual culture, resistance and development. The material presented shed light on the contradictory forces that influence Bangladeshi photographers affiliated to the agency in their daily practices. On the one hand, local photographers are inspired to create a new envisioning of Bangladesh, by emphasizing different topics and storylines than the well-known portrayals of a materially poor, catastrophe-hit and aid dependant country. In this sense photographs are used as an act of resistance and a vehicle for change. At the same time photographers in Dhaka are reliant upon the same image markets as photographers worldwide, and non-governmental organisations and other ‘development’ agents form a substantial part of the available image market. Driven by a negative news agenda and the need to raise aid, market forces have a tendency to push photographers in the opposite direction. Thus, a number of tensions arise whereby the photographic agency and individual photographers are pulled between idealistic considerations and financial concerns, resistance and resignation. The material explored indicates that while there is a potential for self-representation in the photograph, there are limitations to the photograph’s ability to free itself entirely from existing representations. There is a risk, as Larsen (1999) has termed it, of being captured by the language of ones’ opponent when attempting to ‘resist’ the dominant order. I argue that the photographic community in Dhaka needs to accept a certain amount of stereotypical, or ‘Orientalist’ depictions in order to create a space for alternative visions. This is not only due to the restrictions caused by market demands and the limited freedom photographers face, but also because of the boundaries of the
Bangladesh will continue to meet the challenges of creating a favourable social, economic and envi-ronmental condition that will support the overall sustainability of the nation. Since independence, Bangladesh has taken multiple initiatives to ensure economic progress and social development. With a per capita GDP of US$848, Bangladesh is close to and moving fast towards achieving the status of a middle income country. Last but not the least, I wish to express our thankfulness to UNDP Dhaka, in particular Mr. Neal Walker, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Bangladesh and Mr. Stefan Priesner, UNDP Country Director in Bangladesh for the strong support provided by UNDP to the process of preparation of this Report. Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action. Benjamin Libet. Department of Physiology. In the present study we rely on the subject's ability to associate his introspective awareness (of the urge or decision to move) with the (later reported) position of a visually observed revolving spot, the "clock time." The crucial experimen-tal question thus becomes: Is there any convincing way of estimating what might be the discrepancy between actual and reported times (for the subject's introspective experi-ence of the urge to move)? Undertaking socially responsible initiatives is truly a win-win situation. Not only will your company appeal to socially conscious consumers and employees, but you'll also make a real difference in the world. Cooney stated that in CSR, transparency and honesty about what you're doing are paramount to earning the public's trust. "If decisions [about social responsibility] are made behind closed doors, people will wonder if there are strings attached, and if the donations are really going where they say," Cooney said. "Engage your employees [and consumers] in giving