FILM, MEDIA, AND REPRESENTATION IN POSTCOLONIAL SOUTH ASIA

BEYOND PARTITION

Edited by
Nukhbah Taj Langah and Roshni Sengupta

Film, Media, and Representation in Postcolonial South Asia

This volume brings together new studies and interdisciplinary research on the changing mediascapes in South Asia. Focusing on India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, it explores the transformations in the sphere of cinema, television, performance arts, visual cultures, cyber space, and digital media, beyond the traumas of the partitions of 1947 and 1971.

Through wide-ranging essays on soft power, performance, film, and television; art and visual culture; and cyber space, social media, and digital texts, the book bridges the gap in the study of the postcolonial and post-Partition developments to reimagine South Asia through a critical understanding of popular culture and media. The volume includes scholars and practitioners from the subcontinent to foster dialogue across the borders, and presents diverse and in-depth studies on film, media and representation in the region.

This book will be useful to scholars and researchers of media and film studies, postcolonial studies, visual cultures, political studies, partition history, cultural studies, mass media, popular culture, history, sociology and South Asian studies, as well as to media practitioners, journalists, writers, and activists.

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Film, Media, and Representation in Postcolonial South Asia

Beyond Partition

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Contents

Illustrations

6 Post-71

Photographic ambivalences, archives, and the construction of a national identity of Bangladesh

Nubras Samayeen

'Those photographs are not an argument; they are simply a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye.'

Virginia Woolf (1938: 165)

'People like my grandmother, who have no home but in memory, learn to be very skilled in the art of recollection.'

Amitav Ghosh (2005: 214)

'It took the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did. The problem was that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes.'

Michel Herr (1977: 19)

A nation monumentalises and memorialises its past, especially if it has a deeply scarred history. The memorialisation process has become central to nation building and nationalism within the context of South Asia. Through structured ways, a definitive history is often presented to future generations. Such is the case with Bangladesh, which was born after an excruciating nine-month-long civil war and genocide in 1971. This country's national ethos, therefore, is formed distinctly on its association with wartime violation and brutality, subsequent rage, as well as its Bengali rootedness. The reminiscences of Bangladesh's traumatic past are passed on to the citizens through photographs and stories about the independence war of '71 through the processes of post-memory (Hirsch 1996) and post-amnesia (Kabir 2017). The processes of post-memory and post-amnesia are relational, exposing newer generations to the trauma of their forebears, which they cannot directly know or recall but are formed or likewise eliminated by objects that are mediated through different modes of presentations, and re-creations.

These processes are intrinsically implanted in exhibitions and built museums such as the *Muktijuddho Jadughar* (Liberation War Museum), *Shadhinota Jadughar* (Museum of Independence), and other galleries themselves, which perpetuate neo-nationalist feelings to the immediate and following generations

that have not experienced the war. Hence, there is a strict agenda of monumentalising the images and stories in a very specific framework. These museums and galleries exhibiting war images are essentially archives. With this, the principal role of the archive comes into question, which is to represent and give access to photographs that explicitly and implicitly spur nationalist feelings. As a result, many personal memories and memorabilia also become part of collective memory.

This chapter presents the case study of Lablu who remains as a personal memory as well as part of collective memory through his photograph(s). Lablu was a young man and my uncle. He is the central figure in the photograph below (See Figures 6.1 and 6.2) around which the chapter's argument circumambulates. This example is instrumentalised to establish the interrelation of photographs, archives, and nationalism that emerged from 1971. The questions that this chapter aims to address include: what happens to the generation born after 1971? How does photography play its role? How does nationalism perpetuate itself to post-71 generations and beyond who have not seen or experienced the atrocities of war, and hence are not accountable for their own history? How do feelings of nationalism and identity continue into the future?

The following is Lablu's (See Figures 6.1 and 6.2) story, a newspaper-cutting from 1971:

> A young man named Syed Shamsul Alam (Lablu) went missing in Dhanmondi area while he was visiting a close relative. When he did not return home, all his relatives started looking for him everywhere and then later informed the local Lalbagh Police Station. The next day his dead body was found and recovered from Dhanmondi Lake. After his body was pulled out from the lake it showed that his hands had been tied with metal strings and his legs were tied using his own shirt. Also, there were multiple stabbing marks on his chest from using a bayonet from a Chinese-made rifle. Later, speaking to Shamsul Alam's friends and local witnesses, it was revealed that there were some hoodlums in white garb who hung out around the Dhanmondi Lake area. They were sanctioned by the West Pakistan (now Pakistan) regime and military. It was presumed that these hooligans kidnapped Alam and handed him over to the brutal execution squad. These facts were substantiated as it was found that two of Alam's fellow students who were members of the *Al-badar* (West Pakistan Sympathiser or *Razakaars*) group had played an active role in his kidnap and murder.[1] Syed Shamsul Alam was an undergraduate student at the Polytechnic Institute in Tejgoan. He was a brilliant student. He had passed his Matriculation Exam (equivalent to middle school) with top marks and completed his ISC Exam (equivalent to high school) with distinction. Alam is the eldest son of Syed Shamsul Huda from Khankandi, Faridpur.
>
> (*Daily Ittefaq* 1971)
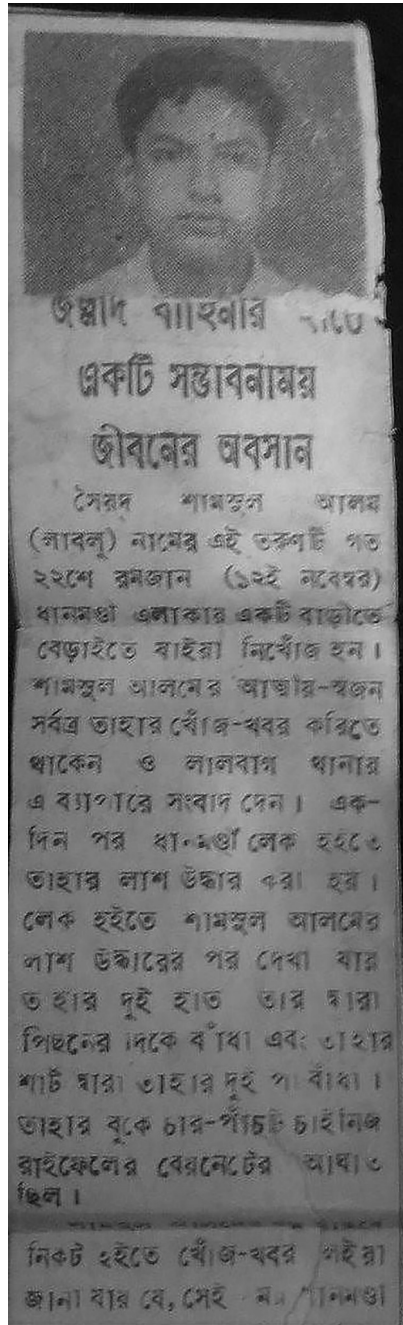
Figure 6.1a A Newspaper Clip on Lablu (*Daily Ittefaq* 1971).
Source: Nubras Samayeen (author) – newspaper clipping from author's personal collection
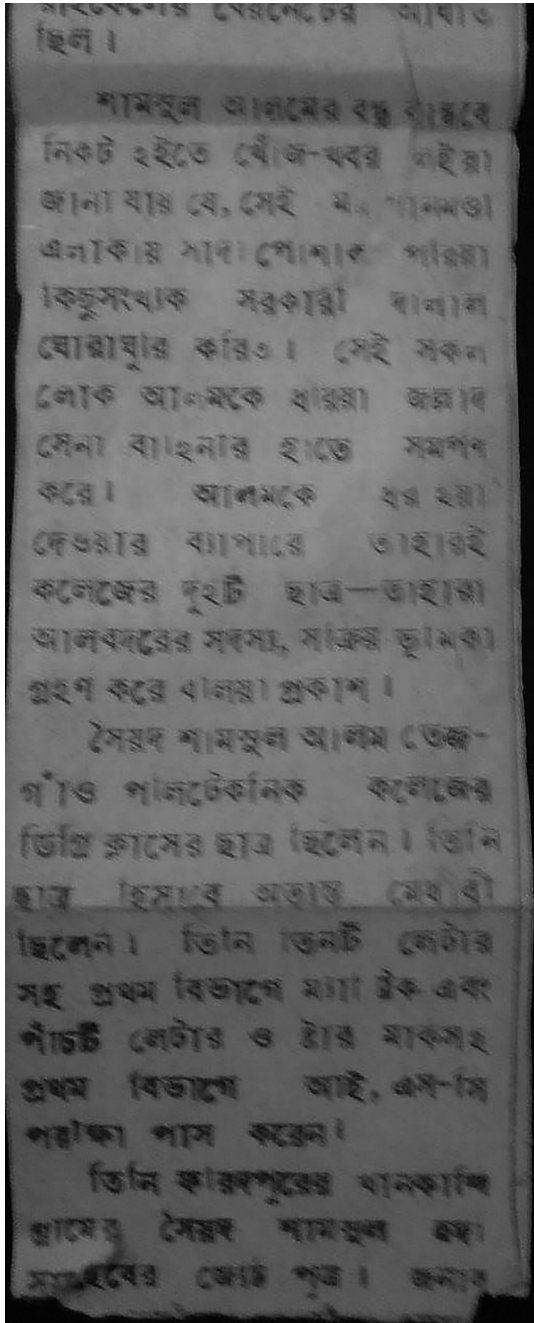
Figure 6.1b A Newspaper Clip on Lablu (*Daily Ittefaq* 1971).
Source: Nubras Samayeen (author) – newspaper clipping from author's personal collection

Figure 6.2 Unidentified body from mass killing during 1971 Civil War.
Source: Rashid Talukder, Drik Picture Library Ltd. Dhaka, Bangladesh

The above report indicates there were millions of people like Lablu, each being someone's dear one, who became victims of the genocide that coincided with the birth of Bangladesh. Many witnessed these atrocities, many lost loved ones, and many who actively fought to defend the country suffered the most. However, the discussion below aims to provide a brief context for the subsequent sections by historicising the events that led to the bloody war and the creation of Bangladesh.

Political history

The political history of Bangladesh goes far back to the *Vanga* Kingdom (the word Bengal came from *Vanga*) which is said to have existed around 500 BC. The idea of nationalism among the people of the subcontinent first emerged much later, in the mid-nineteenth century, simultaneously with the global phenomenon of decolonisation. The basis of Bengali nationalism was the anti-

colonial sentiment during the British period. This nationalism evolved into a more specific 'Bengali' identity after the partition of Bengal in 1905. With the end of 200 years of British colonialism, at midnight of 14 August 1947, the subcontinent was partitioned to create the two nations of India and Pakistan.[2] This division was based on a random geographic line that created two countries based on religion, oblivious to cultural and social associations. Therefore, the Indian subcontinent was separated by apparent whim into Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan, fawning more insidious forms of nationalism in both the newly birthed nations. However, Pakistan also had two parts separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory – East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh) and West Pakistan. These two parts were geographically separated and had more differences than commonalities, but they were expected to live as one nation. The very name 'East Pakistan' suggests a disjuncture; it was in a step-relationship with West Pakistan. East Pakistan eventually became a Pakistani colony.

As Muslims, the people of East and West Pakistan had strong religious commonalities, yet friction developed between East Pakistan and West Pakistan due to racial, cultural, and, more importantly, linguistic differences. The Bengali language is the core of the Bengali identity. It has its roots in Sanskrit, making it different from Pakistan's national language, Urdu, which has Arabic and Persian roots. Pakistan's culture is also distinct from Bengal's pluralist culture. Bengal's cultural rituals clearly show Hindu-Buddhist influences. Bangladesh's deep-rooted pluralistic past was much influenced by other cultural elements like Hinduism, *baul* culture (a branch of Sufism), and Bengali and Brahma philosophy.[3] These characteristics pose a contrast to Pakistan's comparatively more orthodox Islamic culture. East Pakistan deviated from the mechanics of orthodox Islam. Therefore, despite religious parallels, the first public resistance began in 1952 (the language movement) based on variances.

The earliest assault on Bengali culture by the Pakistani regime was the establishment of Urdu as the state language. In 1952, the language movement against state-imposed Urdu was the preliminary but major episode of political unrest, resulting in mass killing in East Pakistan. Later, West Pakistan's cultural colonisation expanded, reaching the point when Tagore songs and dance practices were banned.[4] Thus, the new imposition of religious and cultural rules under one Islamic government created antagonism rather than the anticipated unity. Subversion, violation, and differences in ethnic values exacerbated the tension between East and West Pakistan, which prevailed for the next 24 years. In 1971, West Pakistan rejected the democratic election result by which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (today called the father of Bangladesh) won the majority of the combined Pakistani vote. When this election result was rejected, a government was formed from West Pakistan. That decision caused a massive uproar in East Pakistan. East Pakistan's 'Bengalis' sought freedom, and thus began the war for independence.

It was a bloody war. 'Kill three million of them,' said President Yahya Khan at the February conference of the generals, then adding, 'The rest will eat out

of our hand' (Payne 1973: 50–55). During this long, excruciating, nine-month liberation war, the Pakistani Army and local collaborators (*razakaars*) killed thousands of civilians including women and children. Millions of women were raped and violated; the number varies between from 3 and 9 million.[5] It was the worst genocide of the post-World War II era. The imprecision of numbers does not mean much. The West Pakistani regime would be guilty, and the impact of pain and loss would be the same, even if the number were a million more or a million less. It was an organised slaughter of people from all walks of life and the attempted annihilation of a culture.

Having lost the war, the Pakistani army in Bangladesh tried to obliterate the very core and soul of an emerging nation by killing its finest citizens. Many innocent civilians were blindfolded and taken to concentration camps. Some survived the agony, and some did not. On the 14 December, just two days before the independence of Bangladesh, teachers, professors, doctors, engineers, intellectuals, and other professionals were rounded up from their homes, taken to Rayer Bazaar area in Mirpur, a part of capital Dhaka, and abruptly executed (Nabī and Nabī 2010: 414). Historian Nurun Nabi writes, 'Pakistani soldiers continued firing like hunters taking potshots at birds in a cage.... Those who ran and jumped into the river were shot like fish in a barrel' (Nabī and Nabī 2010: 418). Eyewitnesses reported seeing 'bodies of lifeless children slung over the laps of their dead mothers, women who clung to the bodies of their beloved husbands before both being shot dead, and hopeless fathers who used their bodies to shield their daughters from inevitable fate' (Nabī and Nabī 2010: 429). A delegate from the World Bank, Hendric Van Der Heijden, says about a small town, 'It was like a morning after a nuclear bomb' (Nabī and Nabī 2010: 419). U.S. Senator Adlai Stevenson, a leader of the U.S. Democratic Party, visited the mass graves and stated in 1972, 'I was horrified at the brutality of the Pakistani forces. In the annals of history, there is nothing to parallel this genocide. Their inhumanity boggles the mind' (Nabī and Nabī 2010: 419). They planned it so systematically that they did not want any witnesses to the massacre, and therefore foreign journalists were sent back home (Rai 2013: 11). That reality has endowed the photographic evidences that exist today with greater weight. Moreover, rather than being an amicable resolution, the birth of Bangladesh was blood-stained, which was the core characteristic that eventually created nationalist feelings almost to the point of epigenetics.

Lablu was one of the millions of victims of this civil war. Today, only images and voices can provide us with imaginations of the war and therefore can re-establish the core of the Bangladeshi nation-state. Almost 48 years after the civil war, Bangladesh celebrates its Victory Day and Independence Day with images, songs, and shared anecdotes from the war. Therefore, this chapter argues that the photographs of '71 are artifacts that essentially germinated the post-71 nationalism of Bangladesh and developed a nationalist culture and ideology which by default is in a perpetual dynamic process of creating and re-creating the several forms of nationalism that are evident in the country today.

Collective memory and questions of nationalism are not shaped in a vacuum. The common nationalist sentiments – i.e. the strong desire to retain Bengali cultural values, the struggle for sovereignty, resistance to violations and violence, and general anger – were at the core of pre-71 Bangladeshi nationalism. It was a case of racial, cultural, and national melancholia that was essentially the driving force for creating an autonomous national body. The strong collective angst was instrumental in the unification and building of a collective promise for a free Bangladesh and subsequently produced the core of the nationalism which led to the creation of the modern nation. Since then, Bangladesh's nationalist ethos has been built and perpetuated with higher intensity by dint of memorabilia, including photographs. The generations following '71 only see the country's history through images. As British-Czech philosopher and social anthropologist Ernest André Gellner states, 'Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by violation of the principle, of the feeling of satisfaction aroused by fulfilments' (Gellner 1983: 1). A nationalist movement is one that, actuated by this aggression and violation, consequently creates anger and arouses nationalist sentiment. Unequivocally, in this case, West Pakistan's violent acts gave rise to the collective sentiment, feeling, and melancholia. Deeply ingrained in that feeling is violence – directly, for those who witnessed it and suffered – and these feelings are carried through time by images. This political paradigm is comparable to the Armenian genocide (1915–1917), the Jewish Holocaust (1933–1945), and the more recent and ongoing Rohingya crisis, which are examples of ethnic cleansing. But, then again, there are now millions who belong to the post-71 generation or expatriate Bangladeshis who were not in East Pakistan during the war and could not experience this genocide and torture first-hand.

Like Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, people of the generations born after midnight of 16 December 1971 bear a burden of history, and they perhaps live on reminiscences and myths of war. The post-memory generation lives with narratives of experiences which are often traumatic despite having preceded their birth. For the post-71 generations, who have no direct contact with this horrific past, the history has been transmitted effectively, via stories, images, and other mediated forms of contact. In Ananya Kabir's words, it is 'the self-conscious telling of those stories, to the processes of re-memorialisation' (Kabir 2017). According to Kabir, this is also a pattern of strategic and extrapolated methods of remembering and forgetting, which is foundational for nation building. Kabir invoked the term *post-amnesia*, a strategic and selective method of forgetting based on Marianne Hirsch's influential concept of *post-memory*, founded on the transmission of collective trauma across several generations of Holocaust survivors. Similarly, the post-71 generations create their national identities by remembering and re-enacting the trauma of '71. Among the mediated forms, photography is probably the most effective one, carrying its power of visuality and also addressing the illiterate masses, freeing them from having to read.

The liberation war photographs bear the responsibility of retaining and epigenetically passing along the atrocious '71 moments. They have become the potent and didactic agency to carry the nationalist feelings and hence reconstruct collective memory to the new generations. This evades post-amnesia, which, as Kabir writes, 'conveys the transmission of trauma through inter-generational forgetting' (Kabir 2017). This constructed memory is variable and amorphous. In Rushdie's words, 'Memory is truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimises, glorifies, and vilifies also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own' (Rushdie 1981: 66). With that, photography emerges as the prime, if not the sole, carrier of history and, therefore, carrier of memory. It faces the risks and is responsible for what Rushdie mentions: selection, elimination, alteration, exaggeration, minimization, glorification, vilification, and creation of pseudo-reality.

Among the copious photographs that record the atrocities of '71, it is indiscernible which photograph(s) is uniquely playing the role in creating a neo-nationalist sentiment. Some photographs have become iconic and, therefore, symbolic of the period. Some remain as supportive material, indexical by their very genesis. Not much research exists on the war photographs of 1971. Many of the images remain unclaimed and the photographers remain unknown. Their qualities are yet to be specified to any precise genre or taxonomy. That also implies how this opens up opportunities for the falsity of images and hence of viewers' reception. Therefore, they have their part in creating and perpetuating nationalism.

Ambivalence in photography

Photographs are by their very essence an ambivalent, bipolar performative medium that bears the burden of transferring history. Photographs, like grand-parents, are conduits that make memory come alive. They draw affective associations between readers and a past they did not experience. Amid myriad ambivalences and oppositions – like truth and contrivance, past and present, death and life – a vivid depiction of the feeling and sentiment of war through emotionally intense photographs creates simulacra and recreates the memory of the liberation war. American writer Susan Sontag says, 'Photographs of atrocity may give rise to opposing responses. A call for peace. A cry for revenge. Or simple bemused awareness, continually restacked by photographic information, that terrible things happen' (Sontag 2003: 13).

With much that has been written and copious photographs that were shot capturing the atrocity as well as of the victorious moments of the war, Bangladesh dwells in the words and visions of that vicious time. Therefore, texts and photographs are the most efficient medium that vividly captured the moments of atrocity and, today, attest to the history of '71. They create a context spatially, temporally, spiritually, and sensually removed and alienated

from the audience. This recreated context vacillates between veracity and vilification, reality and myth. Thousands of photographs of '71 have their own words, and they speak. They give us a vivid image of wartime Bangladesh, put us in that horrifying context, and thus create simulacra. Etymologically, the word *context* comes from the Latin word *contextus* or 'joining together,' where *con* refers to 'together' and *texture* is 'to weave'.[6] The duality of image and text thus weaves East Pakistan's history. But, in accessibility, production, and reproduction, photographs transcend texts and words and say what words failed to say or perhaps have ceased to say. Hirsch writes, 'Postmemory seeks connection. It creates where it cannot recover. It imagines where it cannot recall' (Hirsch 1996: 664). For Hirsch, photographs are a key medium of postmemory. On the one hand, they hold both an indexical and iconic relationship with the object, place, or person they depict: viewers can 'see and touch the past' (Hirsch 2008: 115), are drawn bodily to the material via acts of looking, seeing, and understanding. Photographs 'open a window to the past … materialising the viewer's relationship to it' (Hirsch 2008: 117). Photographs have a 'shock' effect too, expressing more than the dialectic description of the text. Photographs in post-71 Bangladesh made visible documents that could be read or felt to a level that one could position oneself in that time. That established the role of feeling photography. After all, in Bangladesh, with its literacy rate of between 50–65 percent, barely half of the population can reach a level of literacy adequate to rely on written texts to evoke the nationalist core. In addition, compared to the loss and magnitude of the massacre, a very insignificant proportion of written material is available.

Photographic theorist Ariella Azoulay writes:

> Photography is much more than what is printed on photographic paper, turning any event into a picture. The photograph bears the seal of the photographic event itself, and reconstructing this event requires more than just identifying what is shown on paper. One should stop looking at the paper and start watching it. The verb 'to watch' is usually used for regarding phenomena or moving pictures. It entails dimensions of time and movement that need to be re-inscribed in the interpretation of the still photographic image.
>
> (Azoulay 2008: 14)

These powerful images of civil war – violence of the two Pakistans – are well equipped in conveying the nationalist sentiment on both sides. Consequently, they pass that nationalism along to present and future generations as an umbilical cord of the same mother nation. Susan Sontag eloquently says, 'Photography has the unappealing reputation of being the most realistic, therefore facile, of the mimetic arts' (Sontag 1990: 51). It is important to observe that photographs, as two-dimensional fragments and as incomplete texts, are limited by their frames. They authorise a room for 'narrative elaboration' and the work of the imaginative creation that allows individuals to

formulate an affective connection to the past that the pictures present. 'When the subject of the photograph is a person who has suffered some form of injury, a viewing of the photograph that reconstructed the photographic situation and allows a reading of the injury inflicted on others becomes a civic skill, not an exercise in aesthetic appreciation' (Azoulay 2008: 14).

Returning to my reference to Lablu's photograph, I would therefore argue that this photograph in conjunction with violent war images only makes us think and imagine Lablu to be a victim of gruesome aggression. Azoulay employs the term 'contract' in order to use terms such as 'empathy,' 'shame,' 'pity', or 'compassion' as organisers of gaze (Azoulay 2008: 15). These words express different feelings that Lablu's photograph perpetuates as well. Hence, photographs have the embedded quality of 'feeling' that defines and testifies the brutality of '71 and anchors nationalism with an offering of spectatorship to those who haven't been there and yet are not stopped from being there and imbibing the nationalist sentiment. This, therefore, reduces the likelihood and probable processes of 'forgetting' and, consequently, a drifting of nationalism. It, therefore, also creates a continuity of the nationalist culture. Sontag claims, 'Sentiment is more likely to crystallise around a photograph than a verbal slogan' (Sontag 2003: 85). In the same line, Barthes mentions, 'Photography is our contingency and can be nothing else, contrary to text, which by the sudden action of a single word, can shift a sentence from description to reflection – it immediately yields up those details which constitute the very raw material of ethnological knowledge' (Barthes and Howard 1987: 28).

Oppositions

Personal versus collective

Looking back at the story of Lablu, as his brother tells us, 'My eldest brother, Syed Shamsul Alam (Lablu). He stood first in East Pakistan Education board in his HSC exam.' These words and the mere passport-sized photograph of Lablu does not say much about the war. They bring forth a different, perhaps a commonplace, nonchalant spectatorship. This is simply a frontal image that can essentially attribute limited information intended for a wallet or a family album. In the context of '71, Lablu now stays inert in the frame. He is someone's son, someone's brother, and someone's beloved. His living photograph is essentially feelingless to us; it is demi-volition of polite interest. At this point, his image is more valuable to his family and loved ones than to any outside viewer. However, once we read the newspaper cutting, we immediately receive his identity as an interchangeable martyr from the '71 genre. We see the photograph as a symbol of *Muktijudhho* (Liberation War). He no longer belongs solely to his family but is beyond the threshold of private realm and private lives. The image and he (Lablu) become public.

At this juncture, Barthes's two elements, *studium* (the word *studium* in Latin means 'application to a thing', taste for someone and of general, without

specificity) and *punctum* (devises the effect of feeling), can be brought in for analogy (Barthes 1981: 26). Here, the war photographs of '71 represent *studium*, where photographer and spectator both spontaneously act within the realm. Barthes calls *studium* 'a kind of education. It is a kind of civility, politeness that allows discovery of the operator.' (Barthes 1981: 28) A *studium* is the element that generates curiosity in a photographic image. It shows the intention of the photographer, but we experience this photographic intention in reverse as spectators; the photographer thinks of the idea, then presents it photographically. The spectator, then, is expected to act in response in a reverse way. A photograph leaves it to the interpretation of the spectator to fathom the connotated ideas and intentions.

Barthes's second element, *punctum* is an element that would break and punctuate the *studium* (Barthes 1981: 26). *Punctum* points to and specifies. *Punctum* is associated with a personal sentiment and emotion. Even though the subject itself is sometimes absent, images often relate to the absence as well; absence becomes the presence. For example, any death in '71 would be a reminder of a loss to a family who lost someone. *Punctum* can and usually does exist together with *studium*. But *punctum* disturbs it; it creates an 'element' and perhaps a feeling that rises from the scene. It is involuntary. *Punctum* extemporaneously pokes us and fills the photograph with feeling. This is a variable feeling; it changes from person to person and differs from one cultural entity to the other. *Punctum* is the changeable factor that appeals to one. It is what entices one to an image. As Barthes further writes, 'I feel that its mere presence changes my reading, that I am looking at a new photograph, marked in my eyes with a higher value. This "detail" is the punctum' (Barthes 1977: 42).

Hence, a photograph becomes a unique visual text that is dependent on its reader. Photographs taken in wartime are powerful with embodied feelings, indexicality, and apparatus that trigger emotion in the viewer and go beyond the time of war. 'The photograph means nothing. It communicates only "that has been"; unless it becomes a mask, an abstraction greater than particular subject, a type divorced from an individual, a culturally translated symbol' (Barthes 1977: 43). Hence, the portraiture of Lablu no longer remains to the subject as it denoted in the beginning, a precious Lablu to his family and friends. His image is no longer retained only in the personal realm and the two-dimensional frame of the known. It becomes a symbol, a code, a message that now belongs to the genre of war images. His image would unswervingly stir emotion in his family, which established a *punctum*. It becomes a collective property, stirring common and public feelings, allowing individuals to understand and connect with the experience of the other. This brings relation and establishes the specificity of Barthes's *punctum* versus *national punctum*, where the national or collective *punctum* only signifies the pain of the brutality. In this way, a Lablu is both a singular and collective icon at the same time. This analogy also brings another scale of viewing criterion: inside and outside. For Bengali nationals, the importance of a Lablu would be much more than an outsider who is not of Bengali origin. Hence, there lies another form of

paradox: this national *punctum* is only for those who adhere to the Bengali identity, which might be different or more resonant for Bengalis and Bangladeshis, but also bears resemblances to other atrocities occurring elsewhere and of other hues of nationalism.

Past versus present

Somehow, in these omnipresent images, which are spaces of transference in themselves, there is another type of spatial duality. Firstly, they were taken in the past and hence are firmly rooted in the past. At the same time, by bridging past and present, they also give us a vivid understanding of the environment and landscape of '71. At the same time, these commonplace images have a shock value, particularly for the viewers today, those belonging to the post-71 generation who dwell in the present. Thus, the '71 photographs connect the past, the present, and eventually the future. Photographs often engage individuals in a forceful, experiential way through visceral, personal means that draw individuals in.

   With ambivalences, meanings, and feelings, images portray a genocide, but, with their enigmatic quality, they do not tell us anything about the identity of the dead, the process of their killing, or the killers. This polarity of muddy indexicality leaves the viewers, and in this case the post-71 generation, to mere speculation. Sontag writes, 'Image shock and image as cliché are two aspects of the same presence' (Sontag 2003: 23). The performance of these war images changes their value in accordance with the time and place at which they are seen. As we continue to look at the repetition of the massacre, our capacity for sensation dissolves and their shock effect diminishes. The images become just another death. Our bodies become impenetrable and shield themselves to the feeling, and the photographs fail at their purpose. Therefore, Barthes's *punctum* of the war images is variable, pertaining to a limit of time and value that may be difficult to define. A reproduction of the images carries the risk of making the viewer desensitised. Sometimes constant streaming and non-stop imagery devalue the deeper pain of the war. In Sontag's words, 'In an era of information overload, the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it' (Sontag 2003:18). Shock is reduced and novelty goes away; the photographs of death become a commodity, to which museums and galleries may contribute. Hence, as much as the photograph itself, the value of the archive wherein it is kept also becomes unsettled.

Pride versus melancholia

These war images are also bipolar in their very effect. In the post-war condition, these images denote an implicit victory and happiness as much as they have a melancholic aura. Therefore, the *punctum* effect works in time and space. Its meaning is not fixed but dependent on the time and sociocultural

position of the viewer. Hence, this connotation significantly transports its meaning from the time it was initially taken to the time it is seen. Essentially, this connects the past to the present.

The history of Bangladesh, like all histories, was born on an urgent basis, based on the trauma of 1971. Essentially, today's Bangladeshi nationalism relies heavily on the melancholia of 1971. Freud contends that melancholia is one of the most difficult of psychic conditions both to confront and to cure, as it is largely an unconscious process, 'that in a group every sentiment and act is contagious and contagious to such a degree that an individual readily sacrifices his personal interest to the collective interest' (Freud 1955: 33). Hence, the formation of today's melancholia and, therefore, nationalism and neo-patriotism is part of a collective melancholia wherein individual citizens sacrifice their personal sentiment and ego. This sentiment can be an affect as well as an effect of the visual culture, which is essentially carried by the photography of atrocities. Photographs allow mimicry in material space; therefore, they also construct a system of nationalistic mimicry. Therefore, melancholia passed through photographs becomes a consistent phenomenon of nationalism and the visual culture of Bangladesh.

Singular vs. collective, homogeneous vs. heterogeneous, visibility vs. invisibility

In line with the discussion of production of nationalism, images are removed from the moment and now presented to the post-71 generation with new meanings. While living, Lablu probably took the picture in some local studio. His death changed its meaning. Moreover, if we try to see even more deeply, this image doesn't give us any meaning till it is associated with the text and other atrocious images. Here the atrocious images of mass death are a crucial apparatus in explicitly and implicitly relating the death of the singular Lablu to a mass of corpses. Every dead civilian and every skeleton and skull of an unknown becomes a person who belongs as a part of the 'imagined community' of New Bangladesh. Viewing Lablu's photo, though he is absent from the atrocious pictures, we start presuming that he is one of them. However, this also situates the images in a shifting relationship of homogeneity with a heterogeneous mass. It almost dissolves the minor details and defines or indicates a specific nationality as 'one'. Here 'one' pertains to 'one' of East Bengal, that is, the deceased were pro-liberation East Pakistanis. A nationalistic conception spontaneously spurs with a collective solidarity. These images of dead civilians have a quickened feeling of hatred towards the foe, stereotyping the killers to be Pakistani. Consequently, it instantly develops an image of a demonic figure of a heavy man with a moustache and boots juxtaposed with an alternative imagery of victimised Bangladeshis, creating a stereotyping in-process. These feelings are propagated in different measures, depending on how and in what context the image is shown. With varying perception and imagination, the objects of photographs hence become perpetrators of feelings and sentiment. Hence, by default they become part of the two different 'imagined

communities' that Benedict Anderson articulates in his influential book *Imagined Communities*. As Anderson notes, 'Nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind' (Anderson 1983: 13). Therefore, photographs have the power to make the invisible visible and the unnoticed noticed. These give rise to the idea of visibility and invisibility. The photographs (Figures 6.3 and 6.4) of known-unknown people all become present as one. While photographs are very physical, they also have invisible agendas.

   Here, this homogeneity brings the danger of losing the value of individual images, but then again as a part of war photography they create a genre that impacts the collective acceptance which essentially carries another form of risk, one of generalisation. That is, these war images are also just another image of 'a' war. The importance of the liberation war that is of much significance to

Figure 6.3 Image of a dead body (unidentified) from 1971 Civil War of Pakistan.
Source: Rashid Talukder, Drik Picture Library Ltd. Dhaka, Bangladesh

Figure 6.4 Unidentified body from 1971 Civil War of Pakistan.
Source: Rashid Talukder, Drik Picture Library Ltd. Dhaka, Bangladesh

Bengalis or Bangladeshis dissolves to any generic war. A photograph's only hope relies on some signs – ethnic symbols like clothes or landscape that would only uniquely resemble Bangladesh. Hence, again comes the dichotomy of outsider and insider. An insider, by his or her intuitiveness and ethnic connection, would surely realise the significance of the event, which will remain foreign to an outsider.

Ambivalence and the role of photographic archives: how does a discussion based on one picture represent photographic archives at large?

Photographs and photographic archives have always been ambivalent. The history of war photography on the subcontinent goes back to 1857, with the images of India's uprising against the British that were shot by Felice Beato. Later, it was images from the partition of the subcontinent and the departure of the British in 1947. Nineteen seventy-one comes next in the trajectory. Today, after almost 45 years, there have been huge initiatives and sudden spurs to create large-scale museums to commemorate independence. There has been a tremendous interest in 'representing the past' through preservation and

Figure 6.5 Children at the Museum of Independence, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
Source: Farzana Mir (personal collection)

presentation of photographs and material artifacts – either in their original settings or in the museums and exhibitions that house them (Figures 6.5 and 6.6). It is undeniably problematic that, by being displayed in the recently built Museum of Independence, *Muktijuddho Jadughar* (The Liberation War Museum, Dhaka), galleries, and archives, the liberation war photographs are used as visual apparatuses of larger political propaganda. Yet, it is also unquestionable that the photos today act as the unification tool, inducing nationalistic sentiment rooted in the liberation war. In fact, the location of these archives is decisively on the historical sites and cultural corridors, which shows the deliberation of making permanent imprints on people's memories.

In the Museum of Independence, located on the historic *Swarwardi Uddyan* park, the gallery displays a wide range of photographs that include historical images, freedom fighters, independence movement leaders, and gruesome images of the dead as well as newspaper clippings. This affirms the deployment of political mechanisation to ensure, enroot, and establish the political lineage of the current government, the Awami League, through photographs. Hence, it is a framing of a nationalist view and subtle mechanisation against forgetting. These are destined and programmed to be national pilgrimage sites, particularly during Independence Day celebrations on 26 March and Victory Day, 16 December, invested with nationalist fervour and memory. These are the days

Figure 6.6 The exhibits inside the Museum of Independence, Dhaka.
Source: Farzana Mir (personal collection)

and venues of performing and expressing the Bangladeshi nationalist simula-
cra. However, this new imposition of a landscape of museums and galleries to
shape certain feelings is not isolated. The establishment of Holocaust museums
in Berlin, Washington D.C., and Auschwitz and the newly inaugurated Parti-
tion museum at Amritsar are also in line with a similar purpose and discourse,
though appearing at first glance as a mere curatorial work.

The displayed photographs are not a mono-logic framework. With multi-
plicity, they create dialogue between the newer generation and the history and
space depicted in the confined frame of the photographs. These are often silent
and silenced spaces, memorialised and mummified to what once was. They
show traces of the absent past that persist, speak, and can still be accessed in a
language and imagination of the present viewers. Photographs make memory
come alive. They draw effective connections between readers and a past they
did not experience. In this way, this lost past – and the lost kin are so inte-
grally a part of this past – is rediscovered and actively remembered, these
memories re-embodied by readers, so that they can become incorporated into,
but also expand and complicate, contemporary cultural and collective memory
and national identity.

Through these strategic means a person is compelled to feel a profound
connection to an event that, though transferred through some kind of mediated

representation, becomes a part of him or her. Individuals assume memories of a past not their own, their very selves reshaped and transformed. Such memories can, therefore, have important ethical and political repercussions as they work across time and space, across the boundaries of group identities. This allows individuals to understand and connect with the experience of the other, therefore, converging in the formation of 'imagined communities'. From the construction of a collective memory, conceptions of national identity are reintegrated, are reincorporated, and regain visibility.

This systematisation confirms Michel Foucault's definition of archives as both the system and organising law that counters the endless and meaningless accumulation of material remains as well as governs the appearance. It is a way of monumentalising individual political parties using the liberation war as a tool and the images as political apparatus. In another way, using images of war to instigate neo-nationalist feelings also has the potential to instigate the fear of resistance. Hence, the recent museums come to be controversial and potent as tools of political publicity. This essentially defines and expands the landscape of nationalism as well. Looking from the other side of the glass, this tool of affirmation and establishment, to our fear, also hints on the fragility and temporality of photographs, which really need these institutions to sustain them. This affirms the dependent nature of photographs.

Just like most of the recent large-scale monuments such as the 9/11 monument in New York, the Vietnam memorial in Washington D.C., and the Jewish Cemetery as well as the Jewish Museum in Berlin, these museums that are forms of memorialisation and monumentalisation are clearly also forms of visual and memory prosthetics with perpetual ambivalence. A passive photo of Lablu and his body as well as the images of massacre all become part of an archive, framed and focused under spotlights, unmistakably directing our vision. With this form of exhibition, these photographs create a relationship with viewers, particularly with those who have not seen or experienced the '71 war first hand. This also emblematises the photographic transformation of private subjects into public objects, personal archive to public archive. A Lablu is no longer a private individual, but a public symbol of national loss, in fact becoming a national asset.

Conclusion

All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's 'relentless melt' (Sontag 1990: 15).

Nation building often relies for its meaning on making forms and symbolic practices (Boswell and Evans 1999: 2). The body and image of Lablu, here, essentially becomes a cultural body, an element embodying visual signs and hidden narratives of the Bangladeshi nationalistic landscape. It becomes a national object if not an artifact. The war photographs and their archival

paradoxes with recurrent usage become a ritual and a commodity. The absent generation cannot be a first-hand witness but relies upon a generation that had the immediate experience and consequently passes this personal memory to the collective: future generations. Hence, photographs essentially become a nation-building tool, passed on to the future generations like genetic transmission. The war photographs create an artificial memory for the post-71 generations and beyond. In Marx's words, 'The forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present' (Marx 1844).

The proliferated use of war images becomes part of the visual culture that perpetuated a nationalist movement. This movement is neither isolated nor generic. It is semi-spontaneous and semi-political. The value and meaning of war live through the photographs. With the millions of dead souls, Bangladeshi nationalism relies on the ghostly spirit that dwells in the frames of the war of '71. However, the past of Bangladesh is much more complex than binaries of Pakistan and Bangladesh, the framed demon versus the good. Perhaps a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multidirectional positioning and orientation might help in getting a holistic image of East Pakistan and the formation of Bangladesh. Lablu, here, is my father's younger brother, who left our home after lunch and never returned.

Notes

1 In Bengali/Bangla, Razakaar is local dialect for 'traitors'.
2 Bengali and Brahma philosophy: a part of the eastern region of India and Bangladesh together is called Bengal. The people in Bengal speak a common language, Bangla/Bengali, formed from Sanskrit roots. Bengali also means the people who speak Bangla. Prior to Bengal's division in 1905, it was one region of the Indian sub-continent sharing a common language and culture. After this division, East Bengal became Bangladesh and part of the region was called West Bengal, which today falls in India.
3 Brahma Dharma is a book on Bengali philosophy written and instigated By Rabindranath Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore, in 1848.
4 Rabindranath Tagore was the first Nobel Laureate from South Asia. He is considered one of the leaders of the nationalist movement, and since the nineteenth century Tagore's work (music, dance, literature, and spirit) has been an inherent part of Bengali Culture. His ideology, also called 'Tagorism', is akin to universalism and far from any orthodox belief.
5 The number differs in different sources. Anusheh Hossain, '1971 Rapes: Bangladesh Cannot Hide History', *The Daily Star*, 15 November 2013. https://www.thedailystar.net/freedom-in-the-air/stories/58445.
6 http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=text.

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