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## **Imaging Exploitation, Complexity, and Paradox in Subaltern Labor Photography**

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Imaging Exploitation, Complexity, and Paradox in Subaltern Labor Photography

By

Mahnure Janis

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Abstract

*Imaging Exploitation, Complexity, and Paradox in Subaltern Labor Photography* is an expanded cinema performance, roughly twenty minutes, which examines the high cost of cheap labor in the fast fashion industry as told through a self-reflexive diasporic lens. The images and live narration explores the garment factory industry in Bangladesh, along with women and children in the slums, outlining the structures of working conditions and economic dynamics that enable child labor. Within the live narration exists what I term ‘a photographer’s cognitive meta-data’. This includes the thoughts of the aesthetics behind the images seen along with ethical dilemmas and emotions pre, post, and concurrently as the lens record. The thesis is presented as a letter reading to my fictional future daughter, where I explain my journey from an obsessive consumer of fast fashion to a more conscious patron. Entwined in this journey are key questions about identity, exploitation, and capitalism.

## Introduction

Stuart Hall derives from postmodern and poststructuralist theory, three key terms: *difference*, *self-reflexivity*, and *contingency*.<sup>1</sup> All three of these concepts explain the politics of my own self.

Hall’s *difference* is a rejection of binaries. It outlines that identities are the ‘many’ within the ‘one’ and in particular, diasporic identities are between a ‘firm anchor’ and ‘free-floating’; ‘infinite semiosis’ and an ‘arbitrary full stop’<sup>2</sup>. Traditionally, I have always accepted a dual identity, existing at a midpoint between American and Bengali traditions and histories. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, Stuart. “When Was the ‘Post-Colonial’? Thinking at the Limit.” *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, by Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, Routledge, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, Stuart. *Cultural Identity and Diaspora: Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

through my progress in the journey of collecting footage for a potential documentary, I found this to contain more complexity. I traveled to Bangladesh, assuming that by knowing the language and being born there, I would have an understanding of the people. Upon taking the footage, I realized I retained a gaze that was inflected by Western notions of Bangladesh.

Going through the American education system meant I learned history through a Eurocentric lens, like lessons in the third grade of magnanimous Columbus dining with indigenous Americans as they teach him how to make pumpkin pie. I was also exposed to the nature of photojournalism, early in the fourth grade, when we discussed post-industrial New York with child labor gradually restricted after muckrakers exposed photos to the public. I took great pride in American food and the R&B music, but enjoyed the intricacies of Bengali poetry and attire. However, it is not a medley of both cultures, rather a constant flux of multiple systems of knowledge and language.

Initially, being of diasporic identity made me assume a lack of bias, however, Hall's term '*self-reflexivity*' indicated that we do not assume a natural, universal position. This prompted my questioning of bold statements with photojournalism and considering the assertions documentarists declare. Self-reflexivity dovetails with Hall's element of '*contingency*', where any identity or position will always be dependent on the progression of time. This contingency allows room for growth in ideologies, knowledge, and opinions.

I accept his proposal of the impossibility of 'identity' and not just the superficial stringing of plethoric and diasporic identity. With this in mind, the work is a mediation on my ethnic, social, and economic class conveyed by my carping lens of photography of "the other" and underpinned by double consciousness as coming from the hemisphere of the colonizer and the womb of the colonized, simultaneously the image-maker and the image.

Hall also places emphasis on action without closure, because

“discourse is endless . . . to say anything at all in particular, you do have to stop talking. Of course every full stop is provisional. The next sentence will take nearly all of it back. So what is this ‘ending’? It’s a kind of stake, a kind of wager. It says, I need to say something, something .. just now. It is not forever, not universally true. It is not underpinned by infinite guarantees. But just now, this is what I mean; this is who I am. At a certain point, in a certain discourse, we call these unfinished closures, the self.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, this discourse of identity, the global supply chain in fast fashion, ethics in photojournalism, and capitalism at large does not have a closure. However, this thesis should act as a provisional stop: mandating significant ethical considerations when purchasing clothing or taking a photo. It begs a process of deep thinking, finding solutions in the small steps, such as refusing to take part in fast fashion as a consumer, and questioning oneself as an image-maker. In addition, this project proposes a speculative design of expanding the meta-data of a photographic image to include the photographers cognitive imprint into the image making process. Using a fictive discussion between a mother and her future daughter, the narration posits the need for a recording of the mental activity of making an image in addition to the 'hard' data of ISO and f-stop. A place to record the dialog, hesitations, and questions of the photographer and photographed as a way to add nuance to the photographic moment, emphasizing the need for photos to be contextualized by the photographer.

### **Project Description**

The performance as a letter to a fictional future daughter enables an intimate connection to each element of the expanded cinema. The piece is broken by three fundamental physical objects but interweaved by a myriad of principles and questions covering topics mentioned in the abstract.

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<sup>3</sup> Hall, Stuart. “Minimal Selves.” *Black British Cultural Studies: a Reader*, by Houston A. Baker et al., University of Chicago Press, 1996.

### *First Object: Camera*

The entirety of the performance interrogates the ethics of photography, and in particular, photojournalism. These questions do not come to a conclusive answer, rather mediations of a ‘photographer’s cognitive meta-data’ offer a different breadth to the picture. There is no answer to the ethics: it is a series of questions to ask oneself when entering into a photographic moment. In effect, it is a pendulum with no gravitational force to stop it. We must take photos for there are important stories to be told through images, revisited and dispersed. Collaborative photography tames the conscious but in reality is not as effective and still has tinges of ‘otherized-gaze’ whereby there seems to be a distance and subtle hints of voyeurism. To feel comfortable simply by consent forms, compensation, and discussion, is evidence of an imperialist and capitalist framework. My research is interested in tactical ways to give back to participating communities and reflexive aesthetic strategies that do not erase or ignore the power dynamic of the camera.

### *Second Object: Sewing Machine*

One of the key stories within the performance is that of the narrator’s connection with fashion. There is a generational interconnection between mothers and daughters through the teaching of sewing, creating a shared embodied vocabulary. The hum of the sewing machine builds an aural layer between her childhood home and the experience in the garment factories.

The sewing machine also pushes a notion of sustainability and invites individuals to steer clear from fast fashion and fight for the rights of labor workers. The current global supply chain enables low wages and terrible working conditions no matter how many agreements are drafted. The shift to an export-oriented economy puts space between the producers and consumers, as

“clothing prices have been deflating compared to retail overall”<sup>4</sup> it’s easier to purchase fast fashion than to fix things. Sewing acts as a resistance against the hegemony of disposable merchandise in contemporary culture. Thus, this object acts as motif representing healing and mending.

### *Third Object: Black Abaya*

This object serves as an obvious connection to clothing and fashion but points to a teaching moment between mother and daughter, reflexive of the narrator’s life choices. This is culturally significant because many Bengali traditions incorporate a piece of clothing within generational stories and lessons. Usually, these items act as heirlooms to be reused or adapted. There are many stories of sarees being passed down, to be created into quilts, tapestries or subsequent outfits. The intention of the abaya is also to create another layer of visibility and invisibility, the connection of subject and photographer and the invisibility of photographer meta-data along with the visibility of subaltern but invisibility of their stories in first-person.

### *Overarching Plot*

The narrator discusses her rite of passage with the introduction of social media and photography, threading a connection between her mother’s photos of her, and her own photos of herself. Attention is brought to her excessive shopping for cheap clothing and interrupted by the tragic, Rana Plaza collapse, where 1,134 people passed away and hundreds more were injured.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bain, Marc. "Can Cheap Fashion Ever Be Ethical?". *Quartz*, 2019, <https://qz.com/1570685/can-fashion-brands-like-hm-ever-be-ethical/amp/>.

<sup>5</sup> Tansy, Hopkins "Reliving the Rana Plaza factory collapse: A History Of Cities In 50 Buildings, Day 22". *The Observer*. 23 April 2015. London: The Guardian.

It is known as one of the largest industrial accidents in modern history, and its effects are ongoing.<sup>6</sup> Many of the injured victims are still going through multiple surgeries and poverty due to the inability of finding work without limbs.<sup>7</sup> Others, like the volunteers on site who rescued several victims, are suffering through post-traumatic stress disorder. One of the activists, Nowshad Hasan Himu, was at the Rana Plaza site for 17 consecutive days, rescuing garment workers who were stuck in the rubble. On April 26, 2019, near the sixth anniversary of Rana Plaza, he committed suicide, said to be suffering from the trauma of those days.<sup>8</sup>

NGO's pressured global companies to sign the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, a legally-binding agreement between global brands and retailers and IndustriALL Global Union & UNI Global Union and eight of their Bangladeshi affiliated unions to work towards a safe and healthy garment and textile industry in Bangladesh.<sup>9</sup> It guarantees (1) an independent inspection program supported by brands and public disclosure of all factories, inspection reports and corrective action plans (2) a commitment by signatory brands to ensure sufficient funds are available for remediation (3) democratically elected health and safety committees in all factories to identify and act on health and safety risks and (4) worker

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<sup>6</sup> "Bangladesh Building Collapse Death Toll Passes 500." *BBC News*, BBC, 3 May 2013, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22394094](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-22394094).

<sup>7</sup> Burke, Jason. "Bangladesh Factory Collapse Leaves Trail of Shattered Lives." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 6 June 2013, [www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/06/bangladesh-factory-building-collapse-community](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/06/bangladesh-factory-building-collapse-community).

<sup>8</sup> "Face Of Bangladesh Rana Plaza Rescue Operation Commits Suicide". News18, 2019, <https://www.news18.com/news/world/face-of-bangladesh-rana-plaza-rescue-operation-commits-suicide-2118261.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Greenhouse, Steven. "Major Retailers Join Bangladesh Safety Plan." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 13 May 2013, [www.nytimes.com/2013/05/14/business/global/hm-agrees-to-bangladesh-safety-plan.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/14/business/global/hm-agrees-to-bangladesh-safety-plan.html?_r=0).

empowerment through an extensive training program, complaints mechanism and right to refuse unsafe work.<sup>10</sup>

This event leads to internal conflict for the narrator who has continuously purchased fast fashion and eventually leads her to travel to Bangladesh. The tragedy resonated with her particularly because of her ethnic connection to Bangladesh, her motherland. In Bangladesh, the narrator attempts to visit multiple factories, some successfully permitted inside, others, she is barricaded and escorted out. She also uses this time to explore different places in Bangladesh and the slums near her uncle's home. She connects with the community around her uncle's home and learns the stories of many of the mothers and children of the slums.

On her last day in Bangladesh, she is able to see a very advanced factory where the work culture is very different and she witnesses state of the art machinery, childcare services and a medical office within the factory complex. She returns from her trip with newfound nuance regarding labor in Bangladesh, but also conflicting feelings regarding the images she captured and her attempts to share them.

## **Research Analysis**

In order to appropriately delineate my thesis within existing media and literature, I must distinguish between two aspects of my thesis: the formal aesthetic approach displaying this piece and the theoretical and structural content within it.

### *Form*

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<sup>10</sup> "The Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety." *The Bangladesh Accord*, [bangladeshaccord.org/about](http://bangladeshaccord.org/about).

The modern-day, live-cinema genre is inspired by the Japanese Benshi tradition and Sam Green's, *Utopia in Four Movements*, which combined film clips, music and live cinematic narration.<sup>11</sup>

However, expanded cinema is not an entirely new trajectory, as it plays upon the lack of audio when cinema first faced the public eye. Silent films were coupled with a live orchestra, that which can change from theatre to theatre, or that which is susceptible to mistakes at the hands of musicians.

Gene Youngblood's, *Expanded Cinema*, written in 1970, expressed how contemporary mass media entertainment is "closed", dulled, resorting only to the known audience triggers. He shows how a current entertainer "seeks only to gratify preconditioned needs for formula stimulus" however, "art is freedom from the conditions of memory".<sup>12</sup>

Youngblood terms artists as ecologists, affirming that "artists and scientists rearrange the environment to the advantage of society."<sup>13</sup> This was one of the main factors in the decision to use this form, because "intermedia environments turn the participant inward upon himself, providing a matrix for psychic exploration, perceptual, censorial, and intellectual awareness."<sup>14</sup>

Richard Schechner's, *Performance Theory*, also weighed in on the decision to create a performative piece rather than a single channel or even multi-channel media approach. He connected this to theatre, which is historically embedded into all cultures, as far back as archeologists have excavated. The Bengali culture is no different: the heart of excitement in

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<sup>11</sup> Indiewire. "The 'Live' Documentary: Sam Green on 'Utopia in Four Movements.'" *IndieWire*, 6 Oct. 2010, [www.indiewire.com/2010/10/the-live-documentary-sam-green-on-utopia-in-four-movements-244733/](http://www.indiewire.com/2010/10/the-live-documentary-sam-green-on-utopia-in-four-movements-244733/).

<sup>12</sup> Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*. Studio Vista, 1971.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 346

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 348

villages when a puppet show is in town or a play is written. “Industrial cultures separate and standardize functions and expressions; communal societies combine many functions and expressions in extended, complicated events.”<sup>15</sup> This was precisely the manifestation I wished for the thesis exhibition, one that is complicated in content, form, thought, time and expression.

Theoretical understanding of expanded cinema was influential in the decision to use it but the challenge was in creating a cohesiveness that maintained roots of my own memoir. The prominent inspiration came first from Cuco Fusco - a Cuban-American interdisciplinary artist, whose work explores gender, identity, race, and power through performance, video, and interactive installations. Her piece “Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West” was a critique of colonialism<sup>16</sup> but pervasively unique and profound. I know that my piece was a venture to critique capitalism, but I was perplexed at how to do this in the ingenious manner of her piece. The two people caged, repeating history, but not treating it as art, invoked participant reactions across the spectrum. I knew that my critique of capitalism, photography, or postcolonialism would be situated in a different context, but performance was definitively the direction to attempt to solicit audience reaction.

In terms of the pacing, there was significant inspiration from the 2018 Turner Nominee, Naeem Mohaiemen. His short film, *Rankin Street*, comments on the fate of photos and the process of extracting stories from them.<sup>17</sup> Mohaiemen cleverly creates a montage that shows an attempt to snip together his father’s negatives into a cohesive story, with particular attention on the women in the family. He doesn’t necessarily talk about each photo, nor atop them, but somehow just allows the photos space and provides context to keep them afloat. This was also a

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<sup>15</sup> Schechner, Richard..*Performance Theory.*, 1988. Print.

<sup>16</sup> Fusco, Coco, Paula Heredia, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Daisy Wright. *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinalui Odyssey.* Toronto, Ont: V tape, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Mohaiemen, Naeem. *Rankin Street.* 2014.

methodology I was hoping to mimic in the way I presented my photos.

## *Content*

### I. Gayatri Spivak

Perhaps the greatest influence on this thesis stems from Gayatri Spivak, a Bengal-born, literary theorist, feminist critic due to her works on the subaltern. In 2012, she was awarded the Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy for being “a critical theorist and educator speaking for the humanities against intellectual colonialism in relation to the globalized world.”<sup>18</sup>

During many of her lectures, she explicitly wishes she could lecture in Bengali, so as to share the full breadth of the content. She speaks against international feminism, by highlighting the severe need to consider history, geography, and class when discussing women, and she brings particular attention to develop ways of retrieving the subjectivity of the subject.

Although the term ‘subaltern’ is not coined by Spivak, she most certainly has propelled research and rhetoric regarding subaltern identities within post-colonial contexts. She has strong opinions as to whom should be regarded as the subaltern, however, in terms of the discipline of subaltern studies, it is a “radical rethinking of knowledge and social identities authored and authorized by colonialism and Western domination.”<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, I have appropriated the term within the thesis in order to outline the women and children of the slums, and not speak for them. Although I may disagree with the parameters Spivak placed around subaltern identities, I wholeheartedly agree that their voice is not heard, because even when it is heard in the translated English, the language of the colonizers, it loses

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<sup>18</sup> “Kyoto Prize USA.” *Kyoto Prize USA RSS*, [kyotoprize-us.org/columbia-university-professor-gayatri-spivak-selected-as-2012-kyoto-prize-laureate-in-arts-and-philosophy-2/](http://kyotoprize-us.org/columbia-university-professor-gayatri-spivak-selected-as-2012-kyoto-prize-laureate-in-arts-and-philosophy-2/).

<sup>19</sup> Prakash, Gyan. “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism.” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 99, no. 5, 1994, pp. 1475–1490. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/2168385](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2168385).

trueness because of the cultural and intellectual filters it must conform to. As such, I did not use the documentary to speak for them, nor use their words and have subtitles.

## II. Collaborative Art

I question photography ethics, and contemporary discourses that constantly promote the answer to these ethical concerns in collaborative art. I am not of those who are celebratory in contemporary collaborative efforts because there are still dire shortcomings. For example, if we consider *Born Into Brothels* by Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman, given the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 2005, we can see the intentional effort in changing the plane of documenting the subaltern. It is commendable, the overall approach: to teach the subaltern children born of prostitution about photography in hopes of bettering the future. Admirable that proceeds from auctioning the children's photos are returned to the children's community through the Kids with Camera's foundation set up by Briski along with developing an arts school on the area. But the images of the final project are framed in a voyeuristic way that makes the subaltern distant. Disjointing certain parts in the framing otherizes them. There are similar efforts started long before by Bengali journalists such as Shahidul Alam who trained hundreds of young children photography and in 2018, named one of the Persons of the Year, TIME Magazine.<sup>20</sup> The critique of not showing local efforts, the years of activism by sex workers themselves, and hailing this as a breakthrough film still begs the question of western gaze and Eurocentric thought. Briski and Kauffman invested dearly into the lives of these children, one of which went

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<sup>20</sup> Safi, Michael. "Photographer Charged as Police Crackdown in Bangladesh Intensifies." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 6 Aug. 2018, [www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/06/famed-bangladeshi-photographer-held-over-road-protest-comments](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/06/famed-bangladeshi-photographer-held-over-road-protest-comments).

on to be working in Hollywood.<sup>21</sup> However, the narrative trajectory doesn't open space for reflexivity or communal insight, it almost impels the white-savior narrative. I struggle with this same issue of imposed narrative trajectory.

There have been immense strides in the pathway to collaborative art. Laia Guillamet and David Roca in "The Double Face of Collaborative Art: The Exchange of Theory and Practice" shed light on practical steps and limitations. They explain the recess between intention and actual product and factor a lot of it due to general ignorance to the form, and monetization of art deciding which types of ventures receive grants and which do not.<sup>22</sup> A multidimensional approach proposes new insights on both the previous methods and the contemporary, to bridge or reveal gaps, finding affordances and constraints.

I found that although we can be hopeful of collaborative art, it will not be always plausible. Instead of focusing on such idealistic aspirations, using the material I do have to share a story while inquisitive of my own intentions, may open space for critique, which all art should always have.

### III. *The Burden of Representation & Photography*

Appropriating ideas from John Tagg's, *The Burden of Representation*, while reflexive of Susan Sontag's, *On Photography*, the thesis exists on a contemplative area touching other floating theories surrounding photography.

Tagg states that "The question of authorship cannot be closed by establishing who released the camera shutter" and "authorship does not determine meaning" since meaning is

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<sup>21</sup> Halder, Avijit, "How Growing up in a Calcutta Brothel Gave Photographer Avijit Halder a Unique Way of Seeing the World." *Huck Magazine*, 7 Dec. 2015, [www.huckmag.com/art-and-culture/photography-2/growing-calcutta-brothel-gave-photographer-avijit-halder-unique-way-seeing-world/](http://www.huckmag.com/art-and-culture/photography-2/growing-calcutta-brothel-gave-photographer-avijit-halder-unique-way-seeing-world/).

<sup>22</sup> Guillamet, Laia, and David Roca. "The Double Face of Collaborative Art: The Exchange of Theory and Practice". *Interartive*, [interartive.org/2013/10/collaborative-art](http://interartive.org/2013/10/collaborative-art).

constantly negotiated.<sup>23</sup> He proposes that the camera is never neutral, as my naive exploring self once presumed it to be. Similarly, he proposes that that which is

“behind the image is not reality - the referent - but reference: a subtle web of discourse through which realism is enmeshed in a complex fabric of notions, representations, images, attitudes, gestures and modes of action which function as every day know how, practical ideology, norms within and through which people live their relation to the world.”<sup>24</sup>

Through my discovery of taking the footage and assessing, sometimes sharing it, I’ve come to pleading position of trying to explain more than the still frame; trying to find the appropriate verbiage that this isn’t just a poor person with a poor story, but an entire system of structures that enable a life which can also feel happiness differently. Thus, trying to consolidate my non-neutral photography of seemingly prototypical photos to push anomalous stories.

This pathway to interpreting my position strengthened what Susan Sontag mentions as photography becoming “one of the principal devices for experiencing something, for giving an appearance of participation”<sup>25</sup> as I may not have experienced Bangladesh the way I did without going in with the motive of taking film. Also, giving the footage a type of “immortality and importance” even if it is to my own journey, I say this, feeling acquisitive, opportunistic, uncouth and repellent. I do then, feel the perverse nature of being behind the camera, feeling that “To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability.”<sup>26</sup>

By bringing forward the notion of the ‘photographer’s cognitive metadata’, I hope to introduce the inception of an answer to Sontag’s observation that, “the particular qualities and intentions of photographs tend to be swallowed up in the generalized pathos of time past.

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<sup>23</sup> Tagg, John. *The Burden Of Representation: Essays On Photographies And Histories*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.1988. Print.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid 100

<sup>25</sup> Sontag, Susan, 1933-2004. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid 15

Aesthetic distance seems built into the very experience of looking at photographs, if not right away, then certainly with the passage of time.” Therefore, for even just these images, I wish to encapsulate the thoughts, before they are gone, even from my own self. Simultaneously, I accept that “in deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects.” and therefore, I am “appropriating the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge — and, therefore, like power.”<sup>27</sup>

Particular questions I wrestled with were developed and borrowed from Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. They addressed that there is an anxiety related to “the demand that Third World or minority filmmakers produce only positive images,” which enabled me to then push against that and be open to producing and sharing complicated images.

Their writing helped unearth why I was hesitant in showing poverty-images. It was because “Representations thus become allegorical; within hegemonic discourse, every subaltern performer/role is seen as synecdochally summing up a vast but putatively homogenous community. Representations of dominant groups, on the other hand, are seen not as allegorical but as ‘naturally’ diverse, examples of the ungeneralizable variety of life itself.”<sup>28</sup>

During the process of determining the images to use, I interrogated my decisions through Shohat and Stam’s questions:<sup>29</sup>

- “It is not enough to say that art is constructed. We have to ask: Constructed for whom? And in conjunction with which ideologies and discourses?”
- “Who is speaking through a film? Who is imagined as listening? Who is actually listening? Who is looking? And what social desires are mobilized by the film?”

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid 41

<sup>28</sup> Shohat, E., Stam, R. (2014). *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. London: Routledge.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 208

- “To speak of the “image” of a social group, we have to ask precise questions about images. How much space do they occupy in the shot? Are they seen in close-ups or only in distant long shots?”
- “Are they active, desiring characters or decorative props? Do the eyeline matches identify us with one gaze rather than another? [...] How do body language, posture, and facial expression communicate social hierarchies, arrogance, servility, resentment, pride?”

Some of the content sits as an adjunct to Edward Said’s, *Orientalism*, whereby the twist is that my approach to filming in Bangladesh is initially similar to an orientalist’s however, I am ethnically from the areas known as the Orient, and I acknowledge my own exploration as potentially exploitive. Thus, borrowing from Diana Sorenson’s, *Territories and Trajectories: Cultures in Circulation*, the implications of the hermeneutic of a homeland which “reveals the site of domestic affiliation to be a space of iterative and belated return, not a springboard of identitarian authenticity from which cultural narratives of selfhood and statehood must naturally begin”<sup>30</sup> I use this process to analyze what is my birth land and its significance within my thoughts. With a fragmented, hybrid, free-floating, identity, born in Bangladesh, living an entire life in America, and coalescing the Eurocentric savior-colonizer complex with the aboriginal colonized thoughts, I am, and I create, a space for much paradox and deliberation. The voice over’s interplay with the footage, reveals a nuance in both local Bangladeshi and a foreign Bangladeshi, but also a nuance in a photographers mind.

The thesis also briefly addresses contemporary issues of NGO photography in impoverished global areas colloquially referenced as “poverty porn” along with attempts of collaborative filmmaking within an ‘era of throwaway images.’<sup>31</sup> I am proposing a “multi-dimensional” approach to theoretical synthesis, such that it is not a “linear succession of truths,

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<sup>30</sup> Sorensen, Diana and Homi K. Bhabha. 2018. *Territories and Trajectories: Cultures in Circulation*. Duke University Press Books.

<sup>31</sup> Tagg 1988

paradigms or models, each displacing the previous one in some triumphal progress.”<sup>32</sup> It is not promotive or praising of participatory documentary going from *Nanook of the North* to *Born Into Brothels*, more of which was discussed in the subsection of collaborative art.

#### IV. Deconstruction

The decision to expose the paradox within me was also inspired by Michelle Citron’s, *Daughter Rite*. Through first-person voice-over, home movie sequences, and multiple interplays of different stories, this was a film within the space of hybridity. However, it was also a film that did not allow for dichotomizing. It created a labyrinth of mixed emotions. It deconstructed ‘cinema verite’, and frustrated traditional channels and expectations by not providing an ending. Citron did not render a solution but simply outlined a journey without an ending. It was as if the conclusion resided in the female audience of the piece itself: to examine one’s own rite of passage.

Conclusions were particularly difficult. In the arena of fast-fashion, its effects on the environment and low wages, the conclusion is complicated and almost utopian. Mark Anner, director of Penn State University’s Center for Global Workers’ Rights, in *Binding Power: The Sourcing Squeeze, Workers’ Rights, and Building Safety in Bangladesh Since Rana Plaza*, explains that “the problems that often characterize the global garment industry – low wages, long hours, union avoidance, and unsafe buildings – are as old as the industry itself [...] they are based on a model of outsourcing that has allowed upstream buyers to squeeze downstream suppliers and their workers.”<sup>33</sup> The research shows that since Rana Plaza, the changes have only increased

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<sup>32</sup> Krajina, Zlatan. 2011. *Negotiating the Mediated City: Everyday Encounters with Urban Screens*. Doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London. [Thesis]: Goldsmiths Research Online.

<sup>33</sup> Penn State. *Binding Power: The Sourcing Squeeze, Workers’ Rights, And Building Safety In Bangladesh Since Rana Plaza*. 2018, <https://ler.la.psu.edu/gwr/documents/CGWR2017ResearchReportBindingPower.pdf>.

global transparency of the issues, but not necessarily helped the workers or this process change. It seems that there needs to be an industry wide change. Multiple approaches and multiple pressure points, especially one that is consumer focused, “relying on the demands from ethical consumers who resolve to withhold their dollars from brands that don’t reform.”<sup>34</sup> I wanted to express this but I did not want it to be a solipsistic approach nor a conclusive end.

Thus, the thesis is a case study, an examining of my own self as someone behind the camera, and as someone from both the East and the West with dual nationality and multiple gazes that contain both passion and perspective.

### **Thesis Production Process**

I started with a naive approach, a traditional three-act documentary film: i. Opens with the filmmaker thinking that a Bengali documentarist would make better documentaries of the Bangladesh Garment Factories, ii. she travels to film, iii. she returns with progress. I was jolted out of this and shown my self-adulation.

I originally developed this treatment in Professor Veronique Bernard’s class, where I focused on the content of the documentary itself. I was so energized to discuss the fast fashion industry and its exploitation of outsourced labor in developing countries while also presenting the nuances I learned about factory workers from my trip. I was determined to show the multiple levels in the system, and the capability of Bangladesh having state-of-the-art facilities. I was resolute in publically holding companies accountable to physically visiting the factories they use and ensuring safety, not simply signing off to a third-party auditing system that shows they are being proactive and concerned. While zealously fleshing out the treatment, Professor Veronique questioned me about documentary ethics. She asked if I was doing the same thing I was setting

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<sup>34</sup> Bain, Marc. 2018.

out to dispel, was I exploiting. This made me very uncomfortable, and I decided to not confront the mixed emotions, and place the documentary on a back-burner.

Upon participating in multiple classes and discussions regarding ethics, and particularly during the non-linear narrative course taught by Rachel Stevens, I understood that I could create this in a meditative manner. Although I was apprehensive about the images, I felt that I wanted to bring forward the discussion on photography ethics to layer the discussion on consumer ethics. Outside of the classroom, it seemed that the discussion on photography ethics was iconoclastic. Even within our readings, there were contradictions as to how to approach things in collaborative art. I wanted to bring the discussion outside of the integrated media arts classrooms, and to the general public, in a less enigmatic and pretentious manner, committed to being more clear.

I knew that I wanted these multiple layers to work together seamlessly. However, I felt a bit lost in the beginning when researching the theory. Upon weeding through the theories around ethics, I found the “answers” regarding photography ethics were insufficient for me. At the same time, I did not feel I was equipped to provide an answer.

Working with photography-theory and American-Bengali identity politics, along with trying to discuss ethical consuming, capitalism, and the garment factory industry as a whole was complicated. I could not find a way to strike a balance between the topics and the subjects. I was baffled by how much material I wanted to share but every time I created a series of sequences for my advisor, it seemed too heavy handed on one subject.

We worked together to break through thematically, and shuffle the material. Professor Andrew Demirjian aided me to see that there are points where I was organically incorporating the themes I wanted to discuss.

The next challenge was deciding on the aesthetic elements to use.

Although I treasured much of the footage, there was a substantial argument to reducing footage into photos. This process has taught me to be more open to uncomfortable zones because one can serendipitously discover more.

I was hesitant to put my own family photos or even much information regarding myself, however, Professor Demirjian suggested that the piece necessitated this information. I remember telling him that it felt narcissistic to talk about myself in the beginning when I will already talk so much about my own thoughts. He stated that the beginning was integral, as it built a foundation, a jumping off point, so viewers can understand the journey and not just be berated by my own conclusions.

In one iteration, the entire voice over rhymed and had the cadence of spoken word poetry but this iteration was quickly dismissed by myself and the advisor due to the quasi gimmicky nature of the language. It wasn't natural to portray this in constant rhyme, and it took on another cultural tone that we both felt was unnecessary. However, I had not previously written an entire rhyming piece, and the discussion on poetry led me to flesh out the book: *Motherland*. This book was an actualized attempt at sharing the stories from the slums without being exploitive. It was written a month before the thesis defense and published just a few days before.

*Motherland* is a collection of poems, some of which were written by a friend of mine, reflecting on the temporary and finite nature of life, and living between two lands and two tongues. The book closes with a chapter, *Chitro*, Vignettes, which shows some of the photos of the children in the poor villages and what they told me in the video footage. The proceeds to the book will go to these families, as my uncle lives on a plot of land nearby and will purchase barrels of rice and flour to distribute to these families. I found this to appease my inner conflicts

because I was not using them for personal gain, rather developing a platform where stories are shared, and being able to give back to them.

I was cognizant and chose not to make the entire book their stories, but share the emotional labor involved in the final product with many poems about my relationship with my mother. One particular poem shows the tension between language and identity as an immigrant child who is asked to speak English, and nurtured this way academically, to the point where all her thoughts are English, and it is difficult to find the correct counterpart words in her native Bengali tongue. This leads to another set of poems where I apologize to my mother with Bengali terms I have recently learned. Some excerpts of these poems can be found in the appendix.

This topic of Instagram appeared in one of the middle iterations of the thesis, and I created a “filter” atop a photo to show the true cost of some of the items on an environmental level. It wasn’t until two weeks before defending when my advisor prodded me to share some old photos. For this, I was extremely self-conscious about. I had deleted my Instagram a year or so back, and deleted this phase out, not for anyone to have access to again. But here I was, nudged to reveal a little more, and I dug up the old Instagram data and replaced them into the old Instagram viewport. However, I understood how showing this attached the audience to realize this story is deeply connected to the creator.

Questions arose regarding the audience because my narration seemed assumptive and accusatory. I spoke in second-person, supposing that it would connect the audience directly to me, but after feedback from the advisors, I found that to be the total opposite. The advisors felt they could not relate because they did not purchase from the companies I referred to, nor as often as I reckoned.

I decided that addressing my sister might be a good form to move forward. Soon enough, this form felt exploitive in its nature, with my sister being merely 9 years old. Although I originally wanted her to be a part of the performance due to the added layer of “child labor”, Professor Reiko Tahara noted that I may have to change some of the content to fit the language of speaking to a young sister.

I opted to frame the performance as a letter to my future daughter, in order to weave a thread of memoir. This also enabled me to explore the relationship between my mother and I, and share that exploration to a generation further, thereby a visceral platform on identity. My future daughter would not be an immigrant with a homeland, and as my mother attempted to connect me to the land, I now attempt to retain this tradition.

Writing this to the future implemented a layer of transience that I wanted the performance piece to have inherently. It synthesized past, present, and future, with constant change, just as thoughts and actions incorporate our known and unknown past, present and future. This was perhaps the most challenging and rewarding aspect of the thesis: performance. The decision to make this performance required courage and immense contemplation. I didn't even know there was such a possibility of developing a performance piece that incorporated multiple mediums. The Integrated Media Arts department truly equipped me and inspired me to see how multiple mediums can create something perhaps more powerful than a single-channel piece.

### **Audience & Exhibition**

We are all consumers in some context, therefore, I find this piece open to all audiences. It opens a space to contemplate over how we directly play a role in the system where labor is exported and exploited.

In regards to the subject of photography, my intended audience is not actually filmmakers or artists who may already grapple with these questions regarding photography, but more of the generation that speaks through photography on social media.

The current age range from high school towards young adult that are avid instagram users are those who wish to maintain a certain lifestyle aesthetic. Their instagram mirrors picture-perfect experiences, prime outfits, immaculate meals and being in social gatherings. I want to promote a different perspective of life as a whole. I want young audiences to examine their use of photography in their social media accounts.

I also feel that the conversation of this relationship between mother and daughter, along with the lens in which she views herself, is integral to immigrant communities as other challenges come into play. I may perform this piece in small local areas, tweaking the language at times to relate to the community of that local area. For example, I'd like to share this at a Bengali Mosque, to encourage high schoolers to think differently about the way in which they purchase clothing. I'd also like to share it at various Bangladeshi festivities that occur all throughout New York City and elsewhere. I'd also like to collaborate with Bangladesh Institute of Performing Arts (BIPA) at their various events and during their annual "Boishakhi: Bengali New Year" showcase. I'm currently building a collaboration with the Clean Clothes Campaign and in communication with Bangladesh ACCORD.

In terms of third-party content, there are a few photos from the disaster of Rana Plaza along with the protests of 2019 for which I have contacted the photographers and am awaiting their reply. Some of the photos are licensed via creative commons. I obtained permission from the Clean Clothes Campaign to use any of their research and marketing material. All of the

Lewis Hine images are part of Lewis Hine National Child Labor Committee Collection now belonging to the public domain.

As for the headlines, I would argue fair use on the following bases:

1. Purpose & Character: The use of textual quotations of cultural material for purposes of commentary, or discussion constitutes fair use and this piece directly incorporates said titles for commentary. Transformative: the original intent is news, here it is transformative in nature because it is incorporated into a performance. The clipping retains that it is a fact, but it is a memoir, it is a component of the artist's memory.
2. Nature of the copyrighted work: News Clips and Headlines
3. Amount and substantiality: Only headlines and simple quotations were used, therefore, only the sufficient amount needed to verify the voice-over narration facts.
4. Effect upon work's value: None, the performance does not harm the original newspapers.

For the H&M documents and advertising, I would argue fair use on the basis that the purpose was for critique, however, I see that more research on the legal frontier of using advertising material may need to be sought.

## **Conclusion**

I could not fathom how the conglomeration of my emotions and thoughts, all of which seemed tangential and vaguely related, would be cohesively visible outside of my mind. I owe a great deal to my advisors who patiently guided me through this process.

Professor Andrew Demirjian allowed me freedom, at times it felt too open for me to mobilize, and he would encourage me and introduce me to exercises to nudge me forward. One particular exercise was the 'why' exercise where I kept asking 'why' to every answer, in order to

discover deeper motivations. At another instance, he developed a list of twelve different aesthetic attempts to test sequences: one sequence in where the colors of each photo match the next, another where things loop and rewind, another where a still frame suddenly becomes a moving image, and another where I place an instagram filter atop a photo. He unapologetically gave me long lists of theorists and artists to consider and prompted me to be thorough in my research.

Professor Reiko Tahara was incredibly helpful in presenting to me the advantages and disadvantages to certain structural approaches while reassuring me that I have the right to make decisions and much of the effect relies on execution. She astutely distinguished the images and sections of the performance that were somewhat unconnected to me and urged me to be more in tune with every single portion so that the audience may equally be as attached.

Professor Martin Lucas certainly gave me a reservoir of research to review and the bulk of my initial thoughts were from the readings assigned during the seminar from Nicholas Mirzoeff's, *The Visual Culture Reader*.

The goal of the performance was to arrive at a metaphysical destination where identity is something constantly examined within transnational, historical and socio-economical context, and something constantly malleable by one's own decisions, transitive and metamorphosing. I'd like to thank my advisors and fellow IMA classmates who have helped me throughout the years in developing and executing this goal.

## Appendix A: Performance Text

	<b>Narration</b>
<i>(Performance, show three pedestals with three gifts covered in a table cloth)</i>	<p>Dear Future Daughter It is 2019. I am packing 3 gifts for you.</p> <p>The first gift is this camera: a DSLR, Photos have metadata, the iso, f stop, shutter speed, the camera model.</p> <p>But what they don't retain is the psyche of the photographer - during the photo, and after. I want to remember. So I will keep telling this story, and perhaps it will change, but this is the metadata.</p> <p>Cameras will always remind you of me, just as they remind me of my mother, your grandmother.</p>
<i>Start Slides Birthday</i>	I came to New York at the age of 2, always wearing dresses. Every birthday meant my mother would sew me a new dress. The tiara and decor would still be the same. Your early birthdays also had the same tiara, because I didn't want to waste <i>plastic for some pictures</i> .
<i>Old Photos (Topic of Photography)</i>	Your grandma would always take photos of me but in 35mm-film cameras you cannot edit the photo, nor delete it, you took it to a shop so someone else could see your photo after developing it in a dark room, and hand it back to you with negatives. We'd wait two weeks before finding out if my eyes were open or closed. My mother was the photo album generation.
Instagram Photos	I am of the earlier batch of social media users. Xanga, myspace, facebook, tumblr, instagram, snapchat, I had it all. There was a trend, called OOTD - outfit of the day. I had a different outfit every ---- single ---- day.
Instagram Photos	I worked odd jobs to buy clothes.  I didn't care for the quality or if I could wear it again. I just needed it cheap and new. I just needed it for the picture.
	Instagram kept proof of every outfit.
	But then it happened. I was 19.

[Headlines Slide]	We stared at our TV screen: Rana Plaza Garments collapsed in Bangladesh April 2013. Death Toll: 1,334.
[Creative Commons-BW Rana Plaza]	A day before the accident, the workers evacuated but were forced to come to work again, threatened with loss of a months pay.  They died. Crushed under the weight of a few thousand sewing machines. Punctured with pipes. Painted with dyes.
[A Final Embrace]	The news kept replaying. Images, images. Taslima Akther took a photo called “A Final Embrace.” I know these images are hard to see, but as your mother, I want you to know, to feel.
Blank Slide	I did not sleep those nights. I could hear voices: screaming relatives outside the wreckage, aching mothers waiting to hear news of their daughters, the tale of the women buried under having to drink their own urine because of dehydration, in the immense heat under 8 stories of rubble. A woman tells reporters how her colleague said to kill her because she couldn’t take the stench of burning plastic and burning skin as fire broke out. The rescue workers helpless, constantly inching closer to victims, attempting to pull someone out, and running when a pipe explodes.
[Holding Photos]	People brought photos of their loved ones to ask, has anyone seen this person. Have you seen my daughter. Have you seen my mother.
[Man searching w Photo] [DNA Headline] [Artificial Limb] [Protest - war on want Image]	It went on for days. The search for more bodies, the wages they weren’t given, the next of kin coming to pick up corpses and beg for outstanding wages. Unclaimed bodies.  DNA proof for wages.  The people in those factories, they were making the clothes that I wear. The survivors undergoing multiple surgeries for lost limbs.  Protests exploded. NGO’s made companies sign agreements, guaranteeing safe working conditions, inspection programs, and transparency.
[Headlines & Roadmap]	Abercrombie & Fitch, Adidas, American Eagle, Fruit of the Loom, Hugo Boss, Primark, PUMA, and H&M had signed these agreements. H&M even announced they will have fair wages by 2018. <b>A beautiful roadmap.</b>

	It was comforting, you know. So I just .. I kept buying.
	But the guilt festered, volcanic inside me, every time I saw a “Made in Bangladesh” tag, it was back to those screams and the images of dead workers.
[Factory Screenshot]	H&M had a list of the factories for transparency. Done so not voluntarily, but pressured by the press since Rana Plaza.  I printed the list, and here I was in Bangladesh with a list and a camera and my uncle. I was on a mission. I was going to fake my way inside, find the truth, see the progress, bought a pair of undercover camera glasses too.
[Darkness]	I get off the plane, this man helps me drag my luggage off the carousel and demands a tip - I gave him \$3.  A factory worker works 14 hours a day to make \$3,
[Darkness]	None of the H&M listed factories would let me in far enough to take footage with the undercover glasses.  Ushered into dark rooms, or escorted outside with batons. If I told you their harshness, if I could show you the laughs of the gatekeepers.
[Spinning Mill Walkway]	We go into one spinning cotton mill factory not on the list. It’s so hot inside, you could feel the bead of sweat travel from the nape of your neck down your spine.
(SLOW - Act it out: Use the camera: shoot the audience. Crouch down)	I walk around, half scared someone will approach me and break my camera. A part of me feels like a predator, hunting for the right shot.  A part of me feels like prey, Scanning the room, hoping not to be noticed
<i>Men spinning mill</i> <i>Girl arm inside the machine</i> <i>(Topic of Photography)</i>	I am not good at this kind of improv, semi undercover journalism. You have to take the photos quickly before any managers see. But you have to see if the lighting is okay, or the photo is in focus, and also, if the person you are taking the photo of is okay with it.
[Darkness]	I didn’t really ask them. I should have asked, right?

<i>(Topic of Photography)</i>	<p>But then I wonder, what is undercover journalism but being quick. If we made everyone sign consent forms, would we have the knowledge we have about certain things?</p> <p>Pulitzer Prize Winning Photos, Napalm Girl, how much consent was given by subjects, is it exploitation if it's important news?</p> <p>But would I accept the world seeing my naked body after a bombing? But what if that saves other bodies from bombings? What if it makes a nation say no to war?</p>
<p>[Spinning - 5]</p> <p>[Spinning -12]</p>	<p>And what would I have asked them? I wasn't from a news company. I couldn't explain photojournalism in a few seconds. We had to be fast.</p> <p>But just because we had to be fast, doesn't mean what I did was okay. Was it okay?</p> <p>Where is the line between exploitation and telling someone's story? The mainstream media is not paying attention to these people, and I had access, I spoke the language.</p> <p>we do need photos to highlight untold stories or show multiple perspectives</p>
[Spinning- 10]	I wonder if someone who wasn't Bengali would have captured smiles, or would they have waited for the face of labor, the miserable dark look.
[Women-Spinning Mill]	<p>I meet this one woman that reminded me of your grandmother. She comes to me and asks "want to film an old lady like me?" I ask her what she likes about her job and she says "The paycheck. Mmmmm"</p> <p>And we laugh because that's what I liked about my job too.</p>
	In these factories, I thought there would be men hurling insults to make workers keep working. That is what I saw in the documentaries.
[Young boys]	It was different. They told me they were a little tired on some days and that management is okay. It is just that, a job. It was spacious. There were women and men, and two young boys.
[Outside Pic & Monde Fabrics]	We stood in front of H&M listed factories, not permitted inside.

	You could see the collapsible gates & the barricaded windows that make it look like a prison.
	Perhaps if your factory is burning, the last thing you want is survivors -- asking for the months pay.
[Jeans] [2 Clicks]  [Women-Sewing Machines] [Magenta Scarf Staring Right At Camera]	We go to tertiary factories - they're subcontracted. The large factories take in the order, and sub-contract them to multiple small factories because no one company can fulfill the demands and deadlines of the global retailers.  Retailers don't build relationships with their suppliers: they want it fast, they want it cheap.  Subcontracted factories become the <b>subaltern</b> , in the margins. Outside the colonies .. um, companies control No one to protect them, of another class, unnoticed.
	We climbed up a fire escape to enter, sewing machines everywhere, Your second gift is this <b>sewing machine</b> . The hum of a sewing machine that reminded me of your grandmother, how she would sew to make ends meet in our brooklyn apartment. (MAKE THE SOUND)  But this factory was different. It was an aggressive sound of multiple machines trying to the days deadline.  The factory is tightly packed with women working.  Working without unions, infrastructure or maternity leave.  I didn't feel safe with the weight of the machines. There were no children here.
[Gif of B/w Lewis Hine Photo changing to my photo]	Was a part of me looking for children?  Looking for that perfect photo of child labor?
[Blue dye child]	Children do work in the factories. They stay hidden.  Factories can be a source of stability, a pathway giving freed hours, instead of becoming a twenty-four-hour domestic worker, or a prostitute or beggar because these are the options when a child is the main earner.
[Photo of the beggars? ]	I tell you what my mother told me:

	The difference between them and you is fate.
[Dog Pics] First Click Click Click Click Click Click	There was a dog on the road howling, it was a mother. She just lost her two puppies on a road accident. It's a hit and run.  A man took the dead pups to put them on the curb and out of traffic. Passerbys look. The mother wails.
[Conscious campaign/ Clean clothes campaign ]  [Go green Wear Blue]	Rights. Who has them? Who gives them? I accept the extravagant fashion shows, marketing claims, clap my hands when the rare plus size, person of color model appears as a token of diversity, but what about the woman behind all of that. The woman behind the model, the marketing, the moving image.  Are campaigns worth more than hands, than safety?
[Denim- Factory Woman]	Do you think I simply value a woman's life differently when they are living on the other side of the world? What about a child?
Lewis Hine Gif again	A little girl sewing clothes, she gets a few cents for the shirt that I paid \$20 for. The rest of the \$19 something will go to marketing campaigns and actual pockets of the top executives.
[Blank]	Cheap labor. Why is it only cheap because someone in another country does it? Are we accustomed to seeing their poverty?  Since when were the lives of people cheap. Since when were the hands of people cheap.
(Screenshot H&M)	H&M did promise fair wages, but the roadmap was deleted, NGO data shows none of the promises were met, but H&M says they're on their way.
[Photos from News - Protests 2019]	In February 2019. Bangladesh streets flooded with garment workers demanding \$6 dollars a day, to just afford to live and have a morsel of food.  Rubber bullets, tear gas, the women who started mobilizing were beaten, and then fired.  Shot inside their own homes. Blacklisted. Hiding. Incognito.

[Go Girl Shirt]	So when your friends say they are a feminist, and wear female empowerment shirts, ask them where they bought the shirt and if that company allows their women labor union rights.
[More Protest Photos]	Photos speak
	But with a camera there's a degree of ethics. Things I want you to be aware of.
[Getty]	There's an entire genre of poverty images. Photographers might need to make a living by selling the photos to companies like Getty. I could sell them to Getty.
Click	Getty is like a store, full of photos. But they're also like a middle-man. They don't take the photos, they use photographers like H&M uses factories.
Click	And then, other companies pay Getty, around 500\$ for the right to use the photo in books or ads.
Click	This is an actual screenshot, tagged-a poor asian girl smiling. The photographer gets a small amount. But what about the people in the photo?
	Was there labor involved in the photo capturing that exists outside the photographers fingertips?
	Does housing photos in a database justify the profitable pay-wall?
[Girl Smiling Henna]	Is being in an image which is then placed into a textbook, labor of the subject of the image as well?
	Is being in an image on a billboard only considered labor for models and not for the poor or laymen?
	And what kind of metadata, or keywords should be used to search and categorize these photos? What do you title them?
[Children's Photos]	And what do I do with these photos?
	How do I tell their story that they want to share without being exploitive?
	Without gaining anything from it?
[Touch the Book]	I wanted to do things differently and made a book of poems. I wanted to share their stories poetically, so I put some of the photos

	<p>and some of the stories in the last chapter. Proceeds from the book go to their families. But do you think I did it justice, like this wasn't exploitive. Or was it?</p> <p>I didn't want the whole book to be their stories. I didn't want them to do the emotional labor of engaging the reader. I wanted the final book to take effort from me. So I wrote, instead, about your grandma. About struggling to learn English, and then learning it so well that I've forgotten words in Bengali that ma had taught me. About how I never learned to read in Bengali, so I could never really translate your grandmas journal of poems. And also about these memories, of entering their homes.</p>
[Inside Home]	I kept reliving entering the homes, and how families salvage from scraps.
[Sack Pic with Fire & Women Cooking]	Landfills filled with garments, incinerated. Hours of labor, just goes cremated, Ironic that fire is the last consumer, in accidents like Rana Plaza, and when we are done with our clothes.
	I came back with the decision that I won't be wasteful.
	<p>There is a concept in consumer psychology called "The Power of Enough."</p> <p>Choosing restriction. Saying enough. Because life is finite. A bank of accrued wealth, and a large expansive house, did not mean I lived.</p>
[Friday prayer Man w Chickens]	<p>I met this man who was selling chickens after Friday prayer. and asked him if he could have anything in the world, what would he want. He said nothing.</p> <p>He said: I have no sadness and no desires. My children are all educated. My life is complete.</p> <p>He was free from the shackles of debt and content with simplicity and education.</p>
[Mom inside the home with daughter]	I asked a women what she wanted. She said nothing except for her children to have an education.
[Same Mom touching sons hair gif]	<p>My mother always said the same to me -- strange, to almost live in a parallel world, how alike we were to them.</p> <p>But to say we are the same would erase the fact that I live in the safety of NYC and comfort of a queen sized bed not concerned of</p>

	when my next meal would be but unsure what food to order, what craving to satisfy.
[Darkness] <i>(Topic of Photography)</i>	This framework, the instagram, the snapchat, the constant bombardment of me staring at other peoples lives, staring right at what they are eating and what they are wearing and how they are living. It subconsciously made me compare my image to theirs. It made me feel insufficient, it made me want.
[Darkness]	I felt like I was living for the image of living. Trying to make life look like images on a vlog. Insta-worthy.
[Darkness]	Our bodies degrade in the earth when we are done living. But my clothes will live so much longer, burdening the earth.
Uncover Sewing Machine	This sewing machine is to ask you to not throw things away and buy something new.  Hem things, fix them, treat clothing as you would your body. Mending it. Salvaging it from scraps. Making it more than once in a photo.  The global supply chain - the fact that almost everything we buy is imported from other places - put space between producers and consumers. Between us and the place and people who make our clothes. This machine is to make make that distance short, to make it visible.
	Let it remind you that there are lives out there doing this labor - the one who made your clothes probably works harder than you do every day.  Please don't just buy another polyester shirt that will not degrade for 200 years. And strive for labor rights.
[Landscape of Factory]  [Masks, Machinery, Childcare, Medical Care]	On my last day in Bangladesh, we were actually allowed inside a closed garment industry complex, not H&M, but a Denmark company supplier.  Bangladesh has corrupt police and a corrupt government and people who take bribes and greedy rich people - so I expected the same old images.  -- but the last factory had men in masks and beautiful state of the art machinery and a janitor to clean everywhere, a childcare center, and a medical office, a break room, exits marked, and so much more.

	<p>There is a proposal to fix the issue of low wages: collective action. The consumer refusing, and pressuring global companies, global companies joining together to reduce price competition and treating factories as long-term partners and not contractual, jumping to another at any point. Allowing labor unions.</p>
Uncover Abaya on Dress Form	My last gift: <b>this abaya.</b>
[Darkness]  [The rest of the narration is in the performance without images]	You've grown up seeing me wear clothes like this.
	I always emphasized that I chose this. My body, My choice. Your body. Your choice.
	It sounds paradoxical, how can something from the past, something labeled as oppressive, be progressive, feel like freedom.
	For me, this is my personal minute way of battling my own desires of wanting a different outfit everyday.
	<p>This is my way of battling the blend of capitalism and materialism that has seeped inside me. I refuse to fit the mold, fit the standard, any standards. I refuse to add to the pockets of those who think labor outside is cheap.</p> <p>And I refuse to be about my looks.</p>
	That I am more than what I wear and what I weigh; I am thoughts and words.
	<p>I choose to live life simply, embody simplicity. To be visible and invisible.</p> <p>So my outfit of the day money can go to causes, water wells, orphanages.</p>
	<p>I want to give you this not to ask you to wear it.</p> <p>But to ask you to think differently.</p> <p>To be open to different ways of living.</p> <p>I am still unlearning about the subaltern.</p>

	<p>I am constantly sewing together pieces of my mother's story, her land, and my tongue.  I am making thread from the ink of books I've read.  I am trying to take off blankets I wore in my materialistic framework and concept of luxuries as necessities.  I am unstitching the biased perceptions I had about it all.</p> <p>I am scared of my faults.  What I add to the earth.  What I leave behind</p> <p>I am a loose thread  On this piece of cloth, a system I am complicit in.</p>
	And I want to give you these gifts to become aware.
	That you impact the world, so impact it well.

Appendix B: Excerpt of Poems from *Motherland*

**What Her Milk Didn't Give Me**

Motherland is Bangladesh  
I entered the world in that land  
My first breath took in the air of that land  
Fed the breastmilk of a mother from that land  
Learned to walk on the soil of that land  
Made in Bangladesh  
Born in Bangladesh  
So why isn't my tongue Bangla enough.

I walked into Kindergarten in that states  
With a tongue that only knew some yes and no  
I graduated with multiple masters degrees and  
a plethora, profuse, abundant, quota of vocabulary,  
colloquial and esoteric vernacular,  
erudite enough to distinguish and employ  
But I cannot write in Bangla.

I do not know the letters  
I do not know the words  
So these are odes  
To my lack of a mother tongue

Not English enough  
Not Bangla enough  
Stuck on an immortal pendulum  
With no external forces, not even gravity.

**Sojourn**

Were we meant to live in high rise apartments  
Walking outside only to travel to work or school  
Or get a gallon of milk and come back home  
To closed walls, open windows, and busyness  
Vacations to be with the earth, with the water,  
Are always timed, requested, planned  
Not always completed.

But a long vacation awaits us  
Where we will feel at one with the earth  
And plenty of time to  
Rest  
In  
Peace.

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