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Framing Displacement: Migration, Ethics of Storytelling, Memory, and the Search for Self

DLA Dissertation

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Abstract

This thesis explores the intricate relationship between an artist's environment, socio-political realities, personal experiences, and technological advancements in shaping documentary filmmaking. Focusing on themes of migration, identity, and displacement, the research critically examines how filmmakers from different cultural backgrounds, particularly those from the Global South, navigate the challenges of representing marginalized communities while contending with Western-dominated narratives and the attention economy. The study argues that documentary filmmaking is inherently subjective, influenced by the filmmaker's perspective and external factors, rather than a neutral presentation of truth. Through a comparative analysis of films like The Border Within and Wandering: A Rohingya Story, the thesis highlights the ethical dilemmas and power dynamics involved in representing non-Western subjects, particularly in the context of the Rohingya crisis. It explores how filmmakers from the Global South can rebuild their narratives through creative technology and storytelling, while also questioning Eurocentric frameworks that typically reduce complexities to recognized cultural clichés for Western audiences. In contrast to the market-driven needs of the global media landscape, the study underlines the importance of documentaries that prioritize ethical representation, cultural authenticity, and the complexities of human experience. This thesis encourages a more comprehensive and complex approach to documentary filmmaking which highlights the voices and agency of underrepresented people by merging personal experiences with theoretical ideas from thinkers like Stuart Hall, Edward Said, and Bill Nichols.

Introduction

This thesis critically investigates ways through which an artist's environment, socio-political reality, personal experiences, and technological advancements critically affect documentary filmmaking. Migration, identity, and displacement have somehow become central concerns in my work not only due to personal experience as a Bangladeshi immigrant but also through reflection on the larger struggle for self-determination and belonging in a world shaped by borders and movement. It does not consider documentary filmmaking to be a method of presenting the truth; rather, it considers it to be a method of telling narratives that are influenced by the point of view of the filmmaker as well as other external circumstances. As Bill Nichols observes, “Documentary subjectivity functions…to strengthen the sense of human engagement within the historical world. Subjectivity lends a greater sense of ‘aura’ to the world around us, as if a spirit were hovering over, energizing and shaping our perceptions…” (Nichols, Representing Reality, p. 157). This approach highlights how a filmmaker’s subjective voice and vision often transcend mere factual exposition.

The primary argument that this thesis is trying to make is that there are issues that arise between cultural validity and global exposure. This is due to the fact that Western culture is so well understood, and the attention economy is becoming increasingly significant. The thesis asks how media technology—digital cameras, editing software, posting of narratives on social media platforms—is changing narrative structures and manipulating time to alter the perception of reality. Now, filmmakers have command over their stories through such technological benefits as imagining other universes that conflate artistic freedom with factual accuracy. As Davenport and Beck argue, *“The attention economy qualifies as an economy in spades. …In this world, attention is a highly perishable commodity. Once a moment’s attention is gone, it can never be brought back”* (Davenport & Beck, The Attention Economy, p. 10). This perishable nature of attention means that filmmakers face pressures to craft constantly novel, eye-catching content that can compete in an oversaturated media landscape.

Filmmakers from different cultural backgrounds approach how to depict the Rohingya problem differently. This is evident in the way, for example, the issue has been treated with Wandering: A Rohingya Story by Mélanie Carrier and Olivier Higgins, and with my own film, The Border Within. Filmmakers from the Global South, as in my case, provide accounts of more detail and texture, grounded in first-hand experience of the subject matter, while Western filmmakers, following more often than not politically correct narratives that align with dominant ideological frames, tend to level complex issues into

recognizable cultural characteristics. As Michael Renov states, *“Western metaphysics at its core produces nothing other than the reconstruction and redistribution of a pretended order of things; that difference becomes a tool of self-defense and conquest”* (Renov, The Subject of Documentary, p. 217). This tendency within Western frameworks shapes representation not as an inclusive act, but as a consolidative one that often reinforces recognizable narratives for Western audiences, framing marginalized subjects in ways that may simplify their experiences.

The research probes into the concessions non-Western filmmakers are forced into to make their products palatable to Western audiences and, in the process, dilute the cultural richness that these stories represent through my case study in several of my works, including The Border Within. Those very forces are at work in the digital realm: clickability and virality supplant narrative sophistication in social media algorithms, thus further influencing story spread and reception. This dynamic illustrates how the attention economy influences not just the process of making films but also the mental well-being and creative output of filmmakers who find themselves having to balance the need to remain visible in a media-saturated landscape with the imperative of ensuring cultural authenticity. As Davenport and Beck further note, *“The limiting factor in the economy of the future will be the number of eyeballs one can draw to an ad or a Web page, and the number of brain cells the mind is willing to devote to it”* (Davenport & Beck, The Attention Economy, p. 220), underscoring the notion that attention, rather than content, has become the real currency in this landscape.

The thesis further elaborates on Marshall McLuhan's concept that "The medium is the message," illustrating how the very mediums and tools that filmmakers have at their disposal enable them to create not simply what is a story but what people believe to be the truth—through the conscious use of falsity. It argues that the historical domination of Western technologies has influenced how documentary truth is perceived worldwide and how filmmakers from the South repossess their narrative to challenge these same technologies within the dominant representational frameworks. As Nichols points out, *“Ethical debate often becomes an arrested form of logic when arguments center solely around authenticity as a means of defining objective versus subjective knowledge in documentary. Documentary subjectivity has never been banished from the ranks”* (Nichols, Representing Reality, p. 103), emphasizing the ways in which subjective voices in documentary have long contributed to self-expression and the complexities of representation.

This is a departure from the traditional documentary analysis, in that it is based mostly on my own creative process, thus situated within the larger framework of artistic inquiry. The research allows for an interface between multidisciplinary theories and personal

filmmaking techniques in the evaluation to bring out the limits of objectivity in making documentaries. It argues that, fundamentally, documentaries are subjective and fraught with intentions, moral dilemmas, and socio-political fabric of the time and place in which they are created.

The thesis finally closes by arguing that the documentary form be reconsidered to host the complexities of human experience against the dictates of the market. Emphasis is placed on the way documentarians need to regain their authenticity, question Western hegemony, and, most importantly, when dealing with topics like identity and migration that are international in nature, give top priority to ethical representation. Through this documentaries operate as both an instrument of social change along with an art form, they can add to a more intricate and varied global discussion.

Chapter 1: My Artistic Journey – Migration, Cinema, and Identity

As a colony, Bangladesh's social and economic problems have their roots in the years it was ruled by Britain (1858–1977). While the area was under British rule, it changed a lot in terms of politics, the economy, and society. The attackers changed everything about the Indian region, which is now India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. They did this to make money. These governance, economic policy, and educational systems were reshaped with huge changes, all in benefit of British industries at the expense of the local economies.

The impact of these economic policies of de-industrialization by the British Empire has had lasting effects on the region. It was in the interests of the British East India Company to get raw products from the Indian subcontinent that it could then handle in Britain. This then led to the deliberate destruction of the region's own industries, with textile businesses being the most important ones. This is clear from how the Indian textile industry was systematically wiped out; it had been one of the biggest industries in India before British intervention, which suddenly took a different turn. Local textile manufacturing went down because of British imposition of policies that favored manufacturers in Britain, a lot of people were thrown out of work in India, and general economic distress resulted. *"From the early decades of the nineteenth century, the free traders' lobby in Britain had been gradually prising open the Indian market for their manufactured goods, especially cotton textiles, by systematically lowering the duties on imports into India and increasing the tariff on Indian cotton goods exported to Britain... India was systematically cast into the role of exporter of agricultural raw materials and consumer of British manufactures"* (Bose & Jalal, 2011, p. 82).

The British policies ruined the local industries and changed their economic focus into agriculture in raising cash crops—indigo, cotton, opium. There was nothing voluntary in this adaptation; the alteration had been imposed by the demands of the British market itself. Other implications ensued as well. *"Demand on foreign markets for Indian agricultural produce was an important stimulus to peasant commodity production and settled agriculture, which in turn was exploited by the colonial state through its land revenue policy. This often resulted in the large-scale cultivation of cash crops like indigo and cotton, with local food production suffering in the process"* (Bayly, 1988, p. 150). *"The spread of cash crops, of money use, and the growth of population eroded tied, patronal relations... The rural poverty and high revenue pressures by the colonial state*

led to the elimination of gains from the expansion of export cash cropping. The loss of by-incomes, famine, and price depressions worked to lock peasant communities in persistent poverty" (Bayly, 1988, p. 147)

If everything in the economic condition of a society can be controlled and if that control is done for the benefit of the ruling class, then inequality will naturally arise in that society and the unequal distribution of money will work behind this inequality. As a result, ordinary citizens and employees will naturally be deprived of the necessary vitamins, minerals and proteins. Which happened in India during the British rule. For this reason, not only has the physical condition of the common people deteriorated, but the nutrition needed for their mental thinking has also been hampered and they have gradually transformed into a fragile human workforce.

Naturally, Western society had solved the issues of food crisis long ago by taking the resources of different countries or through their own development. As a result, their focus was on how much nutritional value a person needs in a particular food, but if we identify these issues and analyze the social system in India, it may seem ridiculous or incomprehensible. Is this even possible? But the reality is that there is no alternative to a balanced diet for the physical and mental development of a person. No matter how talented or advanced a nation we debate, thinking requires human energy. The British had to come to that time much later with their attitude of occupying everything. Since that time, it only seems that India is a prisoner in the hands of the British, but a prime example of how captivity cripples the people of a country can be this occupation of agricultural crops and imposing it on themselves.

In this case, a personal observation can be mentioned. When I first came to Europe, one thing was very noticeable in lunch and dinner. The amount of rice in any of their menus was very low. Low means nothing compared to the food list of our country, but the amount of vegetables, curry or meat was more or equal to rice. The main thing was that I would finish eating rice before the curry or meat. Which was very surprising to me. At first, I thought it was a food habit. Later, after studying more, I realized that the reason behind such a habit was the British rule.

At that time, due to the economic inequality of the people, rice and bread were the main things to satisfy hunger, and the main goal of food was to satisfy hunger by eating as much rice as possible with little vegetables, meat, or curry. Hunger was a bigger issue than nutrition because of the inequality, and we have been practicing that issue till now. Although there is still a shortage in our society. Just as this little eating has put a huge pressure on physical development, it has also curbed human greed in a way. That is

why even now, due to the attitude of the farmers of our region to be happy with little, a group of people are taking advantage of British law, which is still being practiced.

Further, such a trend in agriculture also implied that economic well-being increasingly got subservient to global market movements, over which the local population had little influence. This dependence on agriculture, alongside the relatively underdeveloped industrialization, left the region in a permanently backward economic state. Policy formulations by the British colonial authority ensured that the natives were not substantially provided with better tools and machinery that could have increased modernization in manual labor to advance economically.

The British Empire constructed a significant amount of infrastructure in the Indian subcontinent. This includes vast networks of railways and roads. While these built-up lands ostensibly led to improvements in communications and connectivity, they were, in reality, the tool for extraction and conveyance of raw resources back to factories in Britain. "The famous Indian railways (67,000 km), often cited as a great modernizing achievement of colonialism, were planned and constructed to serve the strategic and economic needs of the metropolis. Nearly five thousand miles of railway lines were laid by the close of the nineteenth century. But they generally facilitated the movement of troops, the dispersal of British manufactured goods, and the extraction of raw materials from the hinterlands to the port cities" (Bose & Jalal, 2011, p. 85). Infrastructure projects that bore the promise of supporting the mining and extracting of resources, therefore became the priority of the colonial administration so that British economic exploitation could be maximized. Such infrastructure allowed the British Empire to control their own pricing and distribution of goods, frequently using market conditions to their advantage. The British were able to rapidly and cheaply supply the raw materials so that they then could quickly resupply their factories with finished products being dumped into the world market at bargain basement prices.

This is not to forget that this infrastructure was the backbone for retaining British political authority in the region. It was by instituting the centralized bureaucracy in place of this decentralized governance system of the Mughals that the British Empire entrenched power and made the administration of the colony more expedient. The new set-up in governance was meant to quash any local dissent and instill order so as to guarantee a smooth running of the colonial economy. This centralization at the helm weakened local self-governance and marginalized the local leadership further, hence solidifying British control.

Furthermore, the British colonial administration also introduced a Western education system, which had far-reaching consequences for the social fabric of the region. The kind of education given through the Western system aimed at making a segment of the population literate so that they became intermediaries between the British rulers and the local people. Very few people had access to this education, which only served the elite, thus perpetuating existing social inequalities (Nayar, 2015). This new class of educated Indians frequently felt alienated from the general Indian consciousness, having absorbed Western ideas and attitudes, not always at home in the indigenous sociocultural environment. The institution of Western education was a primary source for the creation of a new elite that came to represent the core leadership for the independence struggle.

Furthermore, the British colonial administration also introduced a Western education system, which had far-reaching consequences for the social fabric of the region. The kind of education given through the Western system aimed at making a segment of the population literate so that they became intermediaries between the British rulers and the local people. "The promotion of Western education through the medium of the English language by Indian urban elites and British colonial officials stemmed from very different motives... Macaulay, the British official, believed it was essential to ‘form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern,’ a role that would soon establish an English-speaking elite that was distanced from the rest of the population" (Bose & Jalal, 2011, p. 68). Very few people had access to this education, which only served the elite, thus perpetuating existing social inequalities. This new class of educated Indians frequently felt alienated from the general Indian consciousness, having absorbed Western ideas and attitudes, not always at home in the indigenous sociocultural environment.

However, this same elite frequently imposed Western values and education on the rest of the population, thus creating a cultural gap and further a sense of superiority based on Western education. This comes out very clearly, especially in the post-independence era when new nations of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh continued to struggle with the issues of identity and cultural integration. This was a scenario where policy and cultural limits were, in most cases, determined by the Western-educated elite, that had most of the political and social power, and many decisions violated the values and principles of the larger population. The unsatisfactory education of the general public of the Indian subcontinent by the British colonial administration later led to severe and long-term effects on the socio-economic development in the region. It undervalued and stigmatized agriculture, an occupation mainly associated with the lower economic classes, which naturally feeds a hierarchy that endures to this day.

This bias against agricultural work explains why farmers have continued to be poor, while a handful of educated businessmen have been able to use the agricultural produce to become rich. This disparity underlines the failure of British education policies in engaging with and comprehending the local context, and these influenced laws and social reforms that in turn were often superficial and cut off from the realities of the people. A Westernized education system was imposed that mostly had no relevance to the local way of life, thus creating a wide chasm in matters cultural and intellectual between the educated elite and the general populace. This is experienced in the material and immaterial gap between the content offered at educational institutions and the daily experiences of the majority of people. Curriculum developed under this system was aimed at producing clerks and administrators to serve the colonial masters, rather than providing the local population with relevant skills and knowledge.

Accordingly, the education system did not help in nurturing Indian nationalism but rather in bringing forward a divided social structure, hence the eventual fragmentation of the Indian subcontinent into multiple states.

This fragmentation was not only the result of political maneuvering; it reflected deep-seated socio-cultural divides that were pushed further by an education system that made most of the population feel alienated. The thoughts and views of the masses were out of touch with the Western-educated elites themselves, leading to enormous disgruntlement and a weak national identity. This lack of understanding was a big part of the independence movement; most people couldn't relate to the elites' view of independence, in which the elites ignored or pushed to the side the needs and wants of the common people.

The Partition of 1947: A History of Religious Conflict

The split of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, which made India and Pakistan, was a major event marked by widespread bloodshed and large-scale migration. This introduced a new paradigm of territorial division by religious affiliation in the region on an identity basis. *"The dismemberment of the union of India on 14-15 August 1947 was accompanied by the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of innocent Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as millions stumbled fearfully across the ‘shadow lines’ separating two post-colonial nation-states"* (Bose & Jalal, 2011, p. 157). What was the basis of the decision to divide the subcontinent on religious lines, rather than linguistically or culturally. An act in disdain of the complex social fabric of the region, partition resulted in one of the largest mass migrations in history, with millions of Hindus and Muslims being on the move across new borders in search of safety. The overwhelmingly traumatic experiences of partition included acts of violence, displacement, and loss which left

deep scars in the collective psyche of the people in the region. *"In 1947 the raj came to its end amidst political and social convulsions in which Hindu and Muslim as well as Muslim and Sikh engaged in an orgy of murder, rape and plunder on an unprecedented scale... The scars of partition have proven to be deeper than the healing touch of independence from colonial rule"* (Bose & Jalal, 2011, p. 158).

This had a traumatic effect on subsequent generations and became a central narrative in cultural and political discourse in the region. Not only did it divide the communities along religious lines, but it also sowed the seeds of distrust and animosity that continue to affect inter-community relations in the region (Pandey, 2001). The British approach to partition, preferring religious identity over linguistic and cultural similarities, has also been criticized for not being very effective and foresighted about the situation in this region.

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This was a precedent set by the partition of 1947 and has gone on to form more territorial partitions within the region, including that of Bangladesh separating from Pakistan in 1971. In the case of East and West Pakistan, the two separate lands that formed one nation had a unifying factor in religion but were divided along significant linguistic, cultural, and political lines. Over time, this led to increasing animosity in East Pakistan. At the same time, geographical separation and complete lack of any physical link between the two places made matters worse (Jahan, 1972). The language movement in East Pakistan had claimed the right to its mother tongue, Bengali, as its state language, underlining a cultural and linguistic divide that the political union could not accommodate (Riaz, 2016).

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formed one nation had a unifying factor in religion but were divided along significant linguistic, cultural, and political lines. *"The Bengalis formed just over 50 per cent of the population of undivided Pakistan, but were poorly represented in the two main non-elected institutions of the state — the military and the civil bureaucracy. Since these institutions rose to dominance within the state structure and democratic political processes were aborted in the 1950s, it is possible to see why regional dissidence in Pakistan cannot be understood without reference to the nature of the state. There was, of course, a cultural dimension to the alienation of the Bengalis. They deeply resented the early attempt to impose Urdu as the national language and the 1952 language movement had given the Bengali cause its first martyrs"* (Bose & Jalal, 2011, p. 182)

Severe repression of the Bengali population by the Pakistani military, during the 1971 Liberation War, has been noted as the root cause of widespread atrocities and a human crisis. *"By ordering a brutal military crackdown in March 1971, the central leadership in Pakistan exposed their colonial colours amidst hollow sounding appeals to Islam and national integrity... A common religious bond, abused and distorted to serve the interests of authoritarian rulers, snapped all too easily"* (Bose & Jalal, 2011, p. 183). About 10 million fled to India from the violence of Bangladesh. This finally resulted in the independence of Bangladesh, which was a significant change in the geopolitics of the region. The new nation had its hands full with the rebuilding of the economy, infrastructure, and governance structures. The legacy of the colonial British, having in their minds a strong emphasis on centralized bureaucracy and neglect of local governance, continued to influence the administrative structure of the newly formed state.

The second wave of emigration that Bangladesh had to face after independence was due more to economic compulsion than political upheaval. Many Bangladeshis sought opportunities beyond their borders in order to increase their financial viability and to be participants in the nation-building process of their recently created country. This migration was identified to parallel a historical pattern when British colonial rule had seen an expropriation of local resources and labor for the benefit of the British economy result in a flow of wealth and talent out of the region.

The partition of the Indian subcontinent comes as an antithesis to the linguistic-based divisions witnessed in Europe. The European nations have been historically demarcated with respect to languages, and hence they feel that national identity is linked to language and culture. This has by and large enabled more homogeneous national units since linguistic commonality forms the basis of social and political unity. In contrast, the religion-based partition in South Asia disturbed the previous cultural and linguistic

affinities; it also led to the creation of artificial boundaries that neglected the complex social tapestry of the region.

The British colonial government's little knowledge of social interaction mechanisms led to this inclination for religion over other indicators. Deep linguistic variety also brought with it great religious and cultural pluralism, so the European experience—where a language was so important in creating national boundaries—did not translate particularly well into the Indian setting. The failure to take all this into account in the partition process has had long-term repercussions, including recurring inter-state conflicts and internal social strife. The colonial British have everlastingly imprinted on the Indian subcontinent an overwhelming and far-reaching outcome on its socio-economic and political landscape. The imposition of a Westernized system combined with a total neglect of general education divided the elite from the masses, creating setbacks in reaching out toward a kind of national identity that is consolidated.

The partition of 1947 along religious lines heralded a new phase of trauma and displacement, complicating the socio-political fabric of the region. Later secession of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971 showed that a political union over religion had its limitations and cultural and lingual identities are far greater forces in determining boundaries of nations. The continued movements of the people from Bangladesh, either during the period of Liberation War or in the post-independence time, are reflected in continuous quests for better economic opportunity and stability. In these regions, movements have historically been traced to the elaboration of these complexly interwoven socio-economic challenges of the past into those of contemporary challenges. In this quest for the post-colonial of the region, it is crucial to understand the legacy of British rule for the resolution of deep-seated problems that continually shape its development.

Social recognition and economic independence have a lot of connections at the core, especially in societies where major changes in the socio-economic sphere are taking place. In a context such as that of Bangladesh, much of economic self-sufficiency has been considered a course to social recognition. Emphasis on economic self-reliance, because the colonial past of Bangladesh and the post-colonial economic suffering its people went through had defining roles in the identity and socio-economic system of this country. The legacy of colonialism had presented a sharp disparity in the wage structure that runs even at present. This economic gap has been an impetus for most of the people working out of their country, as their remittances have now become the main contribution to the national economy.

The Role of the Joint Family System

The financially or socially vulnerable families and individuals in Bangladesh have found refuge in the mixed family structure, that too in a developing country. They could thus easily tide over periods of financial crisis and an insufficient social help framework with the help of the joint family system in which the burden on the financial budgets of families is spread widely. Besides, it helps deal with dishonest judicial and political institutions that can be a real obstacle to obtaining the help needed by people.

People in the joint family system show resilience when anyone falls sick or faces legal problems. This network is widespread since the state's overall failure, in terms of healthcare provision and legal mechanisms, leads most households in Bangladesh to utilize informal networks to get services and to go around bureaucratic red tape. The joint family structure remains the base of Bangladeshi social and economic life; this is so because it is only through family networks that public institutions are identified as corrupt and ineffective. The joint family continues to play an important role in Bangladeshi society and industry, despite shifting social mores.

Bangladeshi culture has traditionally placed a premium on migration.Especially in the 1990s, around the turn of the century, when social status became more important than material success. Where you were used as a measure of how successful you were. The trend also fits with what's happening in the world. A lot of people quit their home countries to find better opportunities. Others do it to get away from political unrest or bad economic times.

Migration is more than simply a story for many families; it influences who they are. The good times and the bad, and everything in between, are passed down through the generations and used to inspire and motivate the next. Therefore, the prevalence of migration as a motif in art and entertainment comes as no surprise. If we read these stories, we might be able to better understand what we bring to the world, why we go away, and who we are.

Migration is something I've experienced firsthand. Growing up in a small flat with family about to move out gave the concept of "space" a broader meaning. What mattered most was the range of choices available to us. That viewpoint shaped my approach to making films. A common thread in my work is the concept of space, both geographical and conceptual. The restricted chances faced by migrants are symbolised in my films by the tiny conditions in which they often reside.

Consider one of my Dhaka documentary projects. Abdul, our main character, is juggling much more than just his housing issue; his little flat reflects his complete life. This

decision tries to help the viewers to understand his emotional and physical limitations. This greatly makes the story more relatable.

During the 1990s, our Dhaka home was like a transit station for relatives on their way to new lives abroad. Since we lived near the city's only international airport, it made sense for family members to stay with us before taking off. It wasn't easy; every migration story was a tough one, filled with struggles.

Family members often stayed with us while they worked with migration agents. These agents promised jobs abroad, but trust was an issue. Sadly, many people were taken advantage of because they were desperate. It's a pattern you see not just in Bangladesh, but in migrant communities all over the world.

Migration was expensive, and most people didn't have the money upfront. So, they'd borrow from relatives or friends—sometimes with interest. These loans created long-lasting financial burdens, not just for the migrant but for the entire family. This shows how deeply connected families are in Bangladesh, both emotionally and economically.

Saying goodbye was always emotional. We'd have special meals, like hilsa fish curry, and those gatherings became moments of both celebration and sorrow. The uncertainty about when—or if—we'd see each other again turned these farewells into rituals of mourning. The fleeting nature of these familial reunions masked a deeper feeling of permanency. Every time someone departed, the house seemed to undergo a transformation, as if they had departed permanently. Life itself is fleeting, and it served as a reminder of this. These personal experiences have shaped how I approach filming. When I think about time and space, I notice both visual and emotional dimensions. I use rhythms, such as a goodbye or the frantic energy of Dhaka's streets, to immerse the audience in the narrative. This way of thinking was inspired by André Bazin's ideas about reality and how films can show how life goes on without stopping.

Colonialism was the root cause of the hardships endured by my ancestors and other migrants. British colonisation made Bangladesh economically dependent on international trade, and this effect is still seen in the country's migratory patterns today. I intend to show, via my films, the impact that past events have on individuals and societies.

Chapter- 2 Theoretical Framework: The Role of Migration, Culture, and Cinema

Themes of migration and identity are central to my cinematic work, but it goes beyond the usual stories of relocation. Above that, it's extremely personal; I have no choice but to question what it is about these topics that speaks to me. The act of migrating is more than simply a method of getting from one place to another; it is also a process of metamorphosis that constantly changes us. Stuart Hall argues that *"cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation"* (Hall, 1990, p. 225). In this sense, migration becomes a never-ending negotiation of who we are in relation to the world around us. In my films, this is exactly what I try to capture. Characters like Abdul aren't just navigating the streets of Dhaka—they're trying to survive in a system that feels like it's working against them.

Stuart Hall's ideas really speak to me, especially when it comes to understanding how migration changes people. He says that identity is always a work in progress, and I see that reflected in the characters I write. They're constantly evolving, caught between where they came from and where they're trying to go. That's what makes migration such a rich subject for film—it's not just a physical journey but an emotional one. Every step they take is a step toward becoming someone new, even as they hold on to parts of who they were.

In my films, I aim to show that tension, the way people are shaped by the places they've left behind and the new environments they're thrown into. It's like Hall's idea that identity is always "becoming" rather than just "being" (Hall, 1990, p. 225). That's something I relate to, not just as a filmmaker, but as someone who's lived through migration myself.

Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities adds another layer to how I think about migration. Anderson describes nations as *"imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion"* (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). It is my own experience that lends credence to the theory that

nations are only social constructions, existing only in our minds. The idea of national belonging is more of a mirage for many migrants, including the ones I represent in my stories. Neither the location they left nor the place they've come to feels like home to them completely. This imagined sense of community often breaks down in the face of migration, and that's something I explore in my films. The characters are disconnected, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally, from the places they're supposed to belong to. This detachment provides the impression of being an outsider, of not quite fitting in, which is so important to the migratory experience.

Migration and identity are major themes in my films, but I approach them via personal life experiences and human viewpoint surrounds. Edward Said's concept of Orientalism substantially inspired the creation of these works. Said discussed how the West's perception of the East had reduced entire cultures to basic stereotypes: *"Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"* (Said, 1978, p. 3). As a Bangladeshi filmmaker, I am well aware of how Western media portrays Global South migrants, often as one-dimensional, degraded individuals. Instead of playing along with stereotypes, I want to question them in my movies by giving refugees real voices and stories that show what it's like to be human. I don't just want to talk about my own experiences; I also want to question the ideas that support the way power works now. I use my own experiences and the stories of people close to me to give a real and unbiased alternative story. It's a small act of pushback that calls into question how stereotypes are used to describe disadvantaged groups.

Cinematic Realism

My creative process has also been greatly influenced by André Bazin's realist ideals. Cinema, in Bazin's view, should portray reality without sugarcoating it. Bazin explains that, *"Photography and the cinema... satisfy, once and for all and in its very essence, our obsession with realism"* (Bazin, 1967, p. 12). This principle is one I adhere to while portraying the migrant experience. The authenticity of marginalized people's experiences is what I strive for in my films. Bazin further asserts that the cinematic image should be *"evaluated not according to what it adds to reality but what it reveals of it"* (Bazin, 1967, p. 24). For me, this means prioritizing emotional honesty to establish a genuine connection with the audience.

Migrants and other oppressed peoples are frequently the objects of gaze rather than protagonists in Hollywood films. I strive to change that perspective in my films by empowering the characters to write their own stories. It's about humanizing them, not turning them into objects of observation.

Bill Nichols' work on documentary filmmaking offers another layer to my approach. I often mix different styles in my films—sometimes just observing the lives of migrants, other times participating in their stories. Nichols discusses how "the participatory mode allows the filmmaker to engage directly with the subjects...creating a more intimate, co-created narrative" (Nichols, 1991, p. 44). This method lets me collaborate with the people whose stories I'm telling, ensuring that their voices are authentically heard and not just filtered through my own lens.

All of these theoretical frameworks—whether it's Hall's ideas about identity, Anderson's take on imagined communities, or Said's critique of Orientalism—help me frame my work in a way that connects personal experience with larger cultural and political dynamics. Cinema, to me, is not solely about narrative; it is about challenging our perceptions of the world and its inhabitants.

I believe that cinema is not merely a means of narrating stories; it is also a means of preserving personal and collective experiences. My films are a reflection of the socio-political realities I observe in my surroundings, particularly in Bangladesh, as well as my personal voyage. The economic and political structures in my country, combined with the themes of identity and survival, shape both my life and my work. Sullivan (2010) talks about how artistic research is rooted in the artist's environment, and that's exactly what I'm doing—using my films to explore the world around me while engaging with broader global discussions on migration and identity.

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[1] Greenwood, J. (2019, February 25). Arts-Based Research. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education. Retrieved 2 Nov. 2024, from https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264093-e-29.

world around me while engaging with broader global discussions on migration and identity.

Max Weber's concept of Verstehen, or empathetic understanding, is fundamental to interpretive sociology. It involves comprehending social actions by immersing oneself in the perspectives and motivations of individuals within their social contexts. Weber emphasized that to truly understand human behavior, one must grasp the subjective meanings individuals attach to their actions. This approach contrasts with positivist methodologies, focusing instead on the interpretive analysis of social phenomena. [2] Weber's concept of Verstehen, or empathetic understanding, is a major influence on my approach. I want my audience to feel what it's like to be a migrant by showing them the inside problems as well as the exterior ones. It's all about making the viewer connect with the travels on an emotional and psychological level. And that's why I first try to walk in their shoes. Although in reality this is not entirely possible because maybe at that time or a certain time I tried or did to live like my subject, but the way they perceive the present time through their past experiences is actually not possible, and that's why I try to understand the past of my subject. Although as a Bangladeshi artist, I go into such depth for research there are always challenges—limited resources, censorship, a lack of infrastructure. Because of these problems, my work has become simpler. Now I focus on telling human stories and the power of stories to change people. Filmmakers who use few words, like Abbas Kiarostami and Ken Loach, have influenced me. I try to find a balance like they do by making films that make people feel something and also bring up important political and social issues.

In my opinion, films may provide light on the complexities of the human experience. Not only is it about recording events as they happen, but it's also about conducting research—creative research—on intricate topics like migration, displacement, and identity. Every decision I make in my films is a reflection of my study into these larger sociopolitical themes; as *Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, Graeme Sullivan emphasizes that "creative research is a process in which the work itself is the principal source of information" (Sullivan, 2010, p. 99).

My film The Border Within is one example of this. On the surface, it's about Dr. Tawhid, a psychiatrist who is torn between his obligations to a young Rohingya refugee called Osman and the demands of his own family. However, this narrative is more complex than it appears. It goes into more depth about what humanitarianism is, how lines (real and imaginary) affect people, and how they make decisions. People get into moral problems when they want to help others but don't want to give up their own needs. This

[2] Simply Psychology. (n.d.). *Max Weber: Verstehen and interpretive sociology*. Retrieved from https://www.simplypsychology.org/verstehen.html

film looks at those problems. It's a small example of the bigger social and political problems that come up around aid work.

Cinema allowed me to explore challenging issues about identity, responsibility, and survival, so I wasn't only conveying a personal experience; I was conducting a sort of research. The Border Within is more than simply a film; it's an exploration of the intricacies of human existence through its conflicts, which reflect real-life difficulties that many people experience.

In my short film Before Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love, I exploit an apparently insignificant problem—a bed bug infestation—to examine deeper cultural conflicts in an interracial relationship. The film focuses on Me, Nuruzzaman and Akvile, whose different cultural origins influence how they manage conflict. What starts as a small issue in their Budapest dormitory becomes a lens to examine how culture affects the way we navigate problems. The bed bugs, in a way, serve as a metaphor for the cultural differences that lie beneath the surface.

I can show the minor ways that Western and Eastern points of view meet in everyday life in this small space. The way Akvile and Nuruzzaman dealt with the situation shows bigger problems of national identity, communication, and how to solve problems. As I worked on this film, I thought about how personal connections can show how bigger cultural issues are at play. This is how film became a way for me to study and analyse.
The connection among movement, recollection, and location is now trending in Dhaka. From his humble beginnings in a Bangladeshi hamlet, our protagonist Abdul travels to Dhaka and Paris. His journey makes it seem like being mobile can mess with one's identity and perception of one's own mental space. Every single place Abdul has ever been to has special sentimental value to him. As an unauthorized immigrant with legal status, he feels confined in both Dhaka and Paris, where the hustle and bustle of the city overwhelms him.

By using a 4:3 aspect ratio, I limit the spatial freedom of the frame, echoing Abdul’s feelings of restriction. This contrast between the crowded chaos of Dhaka and the static, confined shots of Paris illustrates how space affects the migrant experience—both physically and psychologically. My artistic research here focuses on how cinema can visually represent the emotional toll of migration, showing how spaces, both real and imagined, shape a person’s identity.

In my films, memory is central to the theme of migration. Even though Abdul is now in Paris, thoughts of Dhaka never leave him. A random person's comment about Dhaka near the Eiffel Tower brings back a slew of feelings that Abdul had tried to ignore. This

moment in the film serves as a reminder of how migrants carry their past with them, no matter how much they try to integrate into new environments.

Migration isn't just about physical movement—it's an emotional and psychological journey as well. In Dhaka, memory becomes a tool for exploring this inner conflict, where Abdul's past continues to haunt him, even as he tries to move forward. The city of Dhaka, both as a place and a memory, symbolizes the life he's left behind but can never fully escape. This exploration of memory and migration is deeply rooted in my own artistic research, reflecting on the complexities of identity for those who leave home but carry it with them wherever they go.

When I make a film, my artistic inquiry doesn't finish; it's a continuous process. The more I work on different projects, the more my knowledge of displacement, migration, and identity grows. My personal tale is intercut with larger sociopolitical themes in each film, drawing on lessons from my earlier work. This continuous cycle means my films are more than just stories; they are a form of inquiry into the human experience.

Blending my own stories with intellectual ideas from academics such as Stuart Hall, Benedict Anderson, and Edward Said allows me create work that interacts with the international migration debate. My works are adds to education as well as art. Whether it's a picture of a story, each choice I make shows more about my study of these challenging topics. Researching art in this way is not just a part of my process; it's what I do as a director.

Blending my own stories with intellectual ideas from academics such as Stuart Hall, Benedict Anderson, and Edward Said allows me to create work that interacts with the international migration debate. My works add to both education and art. Whether it's a picture or a story, each choice I make reveals more about my study of these challenging topics. Researching art in this way is not just part of my process; it's what I do as a director. Stuart Hall suggests that "identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process" (Hall, 1990, p. 222). This idea shapes my approach to identity in my films, which reflect the fluid and ongoing process of self-reinvention in the migrant experience.

Making comparisons to the work of filmmakers from the West and the Global South helps me to recognize how my work fits into a larger international conversation about migration. Abbas Kiarostami and other minimalist directors have influenced me. Similar to how Kiarostami uses setting in Taste of Cherry (1997) to highlight the inner struggles

of his characters, I utilize Abdul's social and economic issues to highlight the chaotic nature of Dhaka's streets.

At the same time, I look at Western directors such as Aki Kaurismäki and Ken Loach, who also look at social issues but from a different cultural point of view. My work is different because it focusses on traditional things that are unique. I write a very personal story about a Bangladeshi doctor and a Rohingya refugee in The Border Within. This story is about the refugee situation in Bangladesh. While Western migration films tend to focus on policies and borders rather than the real-life experiences of refugees, this is not the case. I hope that by showing this side of migration, my pictures help people understand it in a more human way.

At the same time, I look at Western directors such as Aki Kaurismäki and Ken Loach, who also examine social issues but from a different cultural perspective. My work differs because it focuses on traditional elements unique to my culture. For instance, in The Border Within, I tell a very personal story about a Bangladeshi doctor and a Rohingya refugee. While Western migration films tend to focus on policies and borders rather than the real-life experiences of refugees, my film seeks to reveal the human side of migration. Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined communities supports this approach, as he notes that nations are "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1983, p. 6). This reflects the sense of imagined belonging that many migrants experience, straddling two worlds without fully belonging to either.

My stories are very personal, but they also show bigger truths. In my films, migration isn't just about getting a stable job; it's also about finding a sense of who you are and where you fit. I think a lot about Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of liquid modernity—the idea that in a globalized world, people constantly shift their identities to adapt. That’s what migration feels like for many of my characters. It’s not a one-time event; it’s an ongoing negotiation of self.

My stories are deeply personal, but they also point to larger truths. In my films, migration isn't just about finding a stable job; it's also about discovering one’s sense of identity and place. I often reflect on Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of liquid modernity—the idea that in a globalized world, people constantly shift their identities to adapt. Bauman states, "Ours is, as a result, an individualized, privatized version of modernity, with the burden of pattern-weaving and the responsibility for failure falling primarily on the individual's shoulders" (Bauman, 2000, p. 8). For many of my characters, migration is

not a single event but a continuous negotiation of self. Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid modernity also informs my understanding of migration as a continuous process of self-reinvention. In Dhaka, Abdul's journey from rural Bangladesh to Paris illustrates how displacement follows him everywhere, continuously shaping his identity in new and challenging ways.

My own family's migration stories, like my uncle's attempts to settle in various countries before finally moving to France, feed into this narrative. Migration is not just about physical movement; it's about the emotional and psychological toll of displacement. My films invite viewers to consider their own positions within these global dynamics.

In Bangladesh, people move because they have to in order to make money, and families count on money sent back from relatives living abroad. In Dhaka, I explore the ripple effects of this economic migration, not just on individuals but on their families and communities.

Artists like Kiarostami and Loach provide both inspiration and contrast as I situate my work amid these global discourses. My films remain firmly grounded in the unique cultural setting of Bangladesh, even while exploring universal topics of social exclusion and reality. In doing so, I aim to present an alternative perspective on migration, one that goes beyond the policies and borders depicted in Hollywood films to humanize the migrant experience.

Comparative Analysis with Other Artists or Regions

When I think about my own work, I often see a lot of similarities with the works of Abbas Kiarostami, especially in how he shows how ordinary people deal with money and social issues. Like Kiarostami, I'm interested in the lives of people who are on the outside and how they deal with the stresses of their surroundings. His use of simple settings and natural conversation to show how strong people can be strikes a chord with the way I tell stories. For example, Kiarostami's 1997 film Taste of Cherry gave me ideas for my own film Winds of Change. In that film, the empty countryside shows how hopeless the main character is. Similarly, in Winds of Change, the barren rural areas of Bangladesh show how my main character's emotional and financial journey is shaped by poverty and the feeling of being alone and without hope that comes with it.

The way Kiarostami uses simple images to show how strong people can be has had a big impact on how I tell stories. The everyday becomes important in his works like Taste of Cherry and The Wind Will Carry Us (1999). His long takes and few lines of

conversation draw us into the minds of his characters. It's something I try to do in my work. In Dhaka, for example, the chaos of Dhaka and the loneliness of Paris bring out Abdul's silent struggles, which is similar to Kiarostami's focus on the inner environments inside people.

Kiarostami's pictures, on the other hand, are often existential, while mine deal with more direct social and political themes, such as migration and displacement. Abdul's journey isn't just about a personal crisis; it's about the broader economic and social forces affecting migrants from the Global South. One notable difference in our visual styles is how we frame space: Kiarostami often uses wide, open landscapes to signify isolation. while I confine my characters within tight, restrictive urban spaces. The 4:3 aspect ratio in Dhaka highlights Abdul's confinement, emphasizing the restrictions imposed by his status as an undocumented migrant.

Some of Ken Loach's works that I like to compare are I, Daniel Blake (2016) and Bread and Roses (2000). Loach's films criticise the flaws in the system that keep working-class people stuck in capitalism systems. I want to be like him in terms of social reality, especially in how I write about migration and economic suffering. In The Border Within, the ethical dilemmas faced by Dr. Tawhid mirror the systemic failures that Loach often explores in his films. Where Loach focuses on the bureaucratic failures in the UK, I broaden this lens to reflect the failures of post-colonial systems, corruption, and the impact of underdevelopment in the Global South.

What distinguishes my work from Loach's is the international reach of my stories. While Loach's films are based on British society, I investigate how migration dissolves national borders. In The Border Within, Dr. Tawhid and Osman's trip crosses national lines, highlighting the interconnection of global challenges such as displacement and migration. My films explore how these experiences play out on a global scale, while still being deeply rooted in local realities.

Aki Kaurismäki, the Finnish filmmaker, offers an interesting parallel to my work, especially in how he portrays migrants and the working class. In films like Le Havre (2011) and The Other Side of Hope (2017), Kaurismäki uses minimalist, dark humor to highlight the struggles of migrants navigating bureaucratic and social barriers. Like my characters, his are often people who have been moved around and are trying to find a place to fit in a world that doesn't seem to care about them.

However, Kaurismäki and I have distinct communication styles. He frequently utilizes comedy and absurdity to criticize European societies' indifference toward immigrants. In contrast, my art is more grounded in reality. In Dhaka, for example, the tone is much

more melancholy, reflecting the hard economic and social realities that Abdul faces as an unauthorized worker. Kaurismäki uses humour to soften the horrors his characters go through, but I focus on the emotional depth of my characters' problems and show how moving can hurt people's minds.

What our works have in common is that we both show refugees who are stuck between systems that treat them badly. In Dhaka, Abdul's survival is compounded by his lack of legal status, much like Kaurismäki's characters who face bureaucratic indifference. However, while Kaurismäki's films often end on a note of hope or with an absurd twist, my films tend to leave these issues unresolved. In fact, migrants face comparable issues, and there is seldom an easy solution to them.

One of the main distinctions between Western and Southern films about migration is focus. Western movies, including those helmedialized by Kaurismäki or Ken Loach, usually show migration from the standpoint of the host country. The core of the issues are migration and the ways in which it interacts with bureaucratic establishments. In contrast, I always begin my documentaries by delving into the root causes of people's departures. In Dhaka, I focus not only on Abdul's experience in Paris but also on the climate and economic pressures that pushed him to leave Bangladesh. This new point of view goes against the one-dimensional way that refugees are often shown in Western media.

In The Border Within, I write about the Rohingya refugee crisis, which is another story that isn't often told in Western migration stories because they focus on the human experience of migrants instead of the political factors that cause these crises. By making my films about these bigger structural problems, I hope to start a bigger conversation about migration and show how global and complicated it is.

My film style has evolved throughout time as a result of my interests and the scarcity of instruments in Bangladesh. I had to use natural light, authentic surroundings, and non-professional performers, much as neorealist directors such as De Sica had done.

One of the key things I leaned into was using natural settings and available light. This not only helped to save expenses but also went very nicely with the reasonable themes I aimed in investigating. For instance, I shot in actual urban settings rather than sets in Dhaka. Part of the fabric of the city, the packed streets, loud marketplaces, and cramped living quarters evolved into part of the narrative. This approach reminded me of the neorealist filmmakers like Vittorio De Sica, who used real locations and non-professional actors to bring out the raw realities of ordinary people's lives.

Using a 4:3 aspect ratio in Dhaka was another decision shaped by both aesthetics and practicality. The square frame limits what the audience can see, mirroring Abdul's feeling of being trapped, both physically and metaphorically. It also let me keep the focus on his personal journey. Since there weren't many wide-angle lenses or high-tech tools available, the smaller, more personal frame became a way to make the figure seem more real.

As I made more films, I thought more about how the technical parts could represent the bigger social and political problems my characters face. In The Border Within, the story revolves around just two characters—Dr. Tawhid and Osman—but it's really a way to tackle the much larger issue of the Rohingya refugee crisis. By focusing on this single relationship, I could make the story more personal and emotionally intense while still addressing the broader crisis. I didn't need a big budget to go deeply into the emotional core because to this basic narrative.

Due of resource constraints, I also tended towards a documentary-style approach. This decision gave my films a more realistic vibe and made the narratives seem more real and urgent. In The Border Within, the hand-held camera, natural performances, and real locations in the refugee camps of Cox's Bazar add a raw, unpolished feel, which fits the chaotic, uncertain lives of refugees. Over time, I've embraced realism not just as a theme but also in the way I shoot films. In Before Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love, I used natural light and still frame to show how the pair normally talked to each other. Instead of cutting to black or making big camera moves, the camera stays put and lets their discomfort and racial tensions play out naturally. Artists like Abbas Kiarostami influenced this style because they knew how to show the emotional side of their characters without showing too much action.

Even though it seems like a small problem, the bed bugs in this film are a metaphor for the bigger problems between Me and my girlfriend Akvile. The setting—a small dorm room—makes it feel even worse that you're stuck in a bad position. It wasn't just a matter of taste; it was also a matter of necessity, since they couldn't use fancy sets or expensive lights. But in the end, it made the story of their relationship more personal and focused, which fits with my general goal of studying cultural dynamics in a personal way.

Changing Visual Style and Political View

Along with my personal filmmaking, my awareness of how technical choices may perhaps constitute political commentary has evolved. The discontinuous editing style in Dhaka reflects Abdul's split life as he journeys between Bangladesh's rural and urban

worlds and subsequently from Dhaka to Paris. This disjointed narrative, where memories of Dhaka appear suddenly and sharply in quick cuts, mirrors the way migration disrupts a person's sense of time and place. It's like the past is always breaking through, never letting go, which is something many migrants experience.

The contrast between the dynamic shots of Dhaka and the static, restrained shots of Paris visually highlights the different kinds of confinement Abdul faces. In Paris, he has the freedom to move around, but he's trapped by his undocumented status, while in Dhaka, it was the crushing socio-economic conditions that held him back. This isn't just a choice of style; it's also a way to make a point about how people without advantages often don't really have the freedom to move around.

Another area where I've worked hard to make my pictures seem more real is sound design. In The Border Within, I used ambient sounds from the refugee camps—children's voices, the buzz of makeshift shelters—to immerse the viewer in the world of Dr. Tawhid and Osman. By focusing on diegetic sound (sound that comes from the world of the film itself), I aim to ground the audience in the reality of these characters' lives, making it impossible to forget the real-world context behind the story.

In Dhaka, for instance, the handheld camera work for the Paris scenes came out of a conversation with my cinematographer about how to best convey Abdul's sense of instability. That moment of collaboration led to something that enhanced both the film's technical style and its emotional depth.

As I negotiate the difficulties of working in a nation with limited resources, my filmmaking keeps changing. These limitations, however, have shaped my artistic expression and led me to choose realism and simplicity as my chosen forms and to focus on the basic features of character and emotion. Despite a little budget, my aim is to create movies that really appeal to people on both political and personal levels.

Movies may spark serious dialogues and inspire empathy in viewers, therefore influencing society. I strive to make migrants' and refugees' experiences more human in my films so that they could counter the often degrading treatment they are presented in the media. With characters like Osman, the young Rohingya refugee in The Border Within, I hope viewers would consider their part in world events like the refugee crisis and consider how they may help to bring about constructive change.

Films like Ava DuVernay's 13th (2016) and Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004) have shown how cinema can shape public opinion and encourage activism. While my approach is subtler, focusing on personal, emotional stories, I also strive to spark

reflection and empathy. My goal is for audiences—both in Bangladesh and beyond—to engage deeply with the themes of migration, identity, and displacement that my films explore. Cinema isn't just about storytelling for me; it's about starting conversations that challenge dominant narratives and encourage audiences to think critically about social issues. Focussing on personal life helps me to remove the obstacles separating us from knowing the complicated reality of immigrants and underprivileged groups.

One constant throughout cinematic history is its ability to bring public attention to pressing social issues. Two filmmakers who have made films as a protest to make audiences confront unpleasant realities are Ava DuVernay and Michael Moore. Bowling for Columbine (2002) by Michael Moore began a national dialogue on gun control, while 13th by Ava DuVernay began a national dialogue about racism in America's penal system. I also consider writing to be a medium through which I may share stories about my life and the places I've gone.

But in my view, emotional impact is more important than direct conflict. The point of my work is to show that travelers and refugees are real people with their own dreams, problems, and stories. True stories from real people will help with this. This complex view goes against the simplistic images that are often used to describe these groups in popular media.

In Bangladesh, where migration touches a lot of families, my works have hit home on a human level. For example, Dhaka shows how people who move to cities and people who are looking for work abroad live their lives. It has started conversations about many things, like climate change, social inequality, and people being forced to move because of their jobs. People can think about their own lives in Dhaka because it shows the lives of many people or their loved ones.

My films have touched people because they are about identity, relationship, and having to move. It doesn't matter what country they are from. Several people have talked a lot about human rights and the suffering of refugees since the film The Border Within came out. The narrative of the film centers on the camaraderie between a Rohingya refugee and a doctor from Bangladesh. Although the film is set in Bangladesh, its ideas of love and relationships make it understandable to those outside of the nation.

Filmmakers like myself seek to inspire change, not only increase awareness. I want people to look at my films and think about how they play a part in the systems that keep inequality and displacement alive. The way I do that is by focusing on the human stories

of migrants and refugees, giving them a voice that's often missing in mainstream media. In The Border Within, for example, Osman isn't just a victim. He's a young boy with dreams and resilience. His connection with Dr. Tawhid shows how much one person's actions can mean, even when the larger system is failing. I hope this makes viewers reflect on how they can make a difference in their own communities.

Historical statistics indicate that human rights films have the potential to impact politicians and the general public. Ava DuVernay's 13th stirred debate on the American prison industrial complex and the importance of reevaluating justice after its release. Similarly, films like "The Border Within" may inspire people to care about refugees and encourage policymakers to do more to help them. By combining the personal and the political, I hope to make people want social justice by connecting with them on an emotional and intellectual level.

Most of my work centers on migration, but Before Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love is more about the personal dynamics of an intercultural relationship. The tension between me, Nuruzzaman and Akvile reflects the challenges that come with globalization and the complexity of belonging. Our story touches on themes of identity and migration, but in a more intimate, everyday setting. It's a reminder that these broader issues also play out in small, personal ways.

The ability of film to reach audiences of all backgrounds is one of the most profound lessons I've taken away from producing Before Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love. Themes of love, miscommunication, and overcoming cultural barriers are applicable to all viewers, regardless of whether they relate to the characters' experiences or not. At film festivals, people were very interested in these themes and talked about how patterns of connections can show up in bigger social problems like migration and trade between countries. Because the film focusses on small, daily events, it starts a talk about empathy and how to deal with cultural differences.

My commitment to researching the impact of film in motivating activism will only expand in the future. While it has always been my intention for my stories to move readers, I now see that they may also act as catalysts for genuine societal change. By forming partnerships with human rights organisations, activists, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), I can utilize my films to educate and bring attention to important issues such as climate change, refugee rights, and migration. I want screenings to be followed by conversations or workshops where viewers can discuss what they've seen and how they can make a difference.

Films such as Fahrenheit 9/11 and 13th have demonstrated the power of film to inspire and motivate audiences. My films, whether personal like Before Pandemic and War or political like The Border Within, want to add to that tradition by use storytelling to not only reflect on, but also act on, social issues.

Use of Visual Elements

The visual elements in my films play a key role in conveying the emotional and psychological states of the characters. In Dhaka, for example, the chaotic, handheld camera work and high-contrast lighting mirror the instability and uncertainty in Abdul's life. When he gets to Paris, though, the camera stays still more, which shows how mentally paralysed and useless he feels. The change in the way the images are shown helps the viewers feel what Abdul is feeling as he moves.

Color is another important way I show how my characters are struggling inside. In The Border Within, the warm tones of the refugee camp contrast with the cooler, clinical colors of Dhaka, highlighting the emotional distance between Dr. Tawhid's professional duties and his moral responsibility to Osman. The contrast between the two extremes graphically portrays the struggles he endures.

I utilize visual choices to convey deeper topics; one such example is the 4:3 aspect ratio in Dhaka. The smaller frame reflects Abdul's constrained options and space on his journey from Dhaka to Paris. While the city may be sprawling, his life feels boxed in—by socio-economic forces, by his undocumented status, and by the barriers that confine him wherever he goes. The narrow frame pulls viewers into this sense of confinement, enhancing the theme of displacement as a form of entrapment.

Many modern films use bigger aspect ratios to show space and freedom, but my choice to shoot in 4:3 makes the feeling of being confined stronger. This choice makes the watcher focus on how alone the characters are in busy cities. Abdul feels like he doesn't have enough personal room in Dhaka, both in a physical and a figurative sense. The city is very big and hard to handle. This backs up the idea that being moved isn't just a trip through time and space; it's also a mental trip that makes people feel stuck a lot of the time.

Color is an important part of how I use feeling to tell stories in my pictures. In The Border Within, for instance, the warmer tones in the refugee camp convey humanity and connection, even amidst suffering, while the cold tones of Dhaka highlight Dr. Tawhid's emotional disconnection. Similarly, in Dhaka, the shift in color from the gritty, warm tones of Dhaka to the cooler, more sterile hues of Paris reflects Abdul's feelings of

detachment and invisibility. These visual contrasts help deepen the audience's connection to the emotional journey of the characters.

Lighting is also quite important in how I capture the psychological and emotional state of my characters. In Before Pandemic and War, for example, I emphasise fragility by using soft, natural lighting in the moments of interactions. The bed bug incident takes place at night, with dim lighting that casts long shadows, emphasizing the discomfort and unease that underlie the couple's interactions. The lighting in these sequences acts as a visual metaphor for the two protagonists' cultural difficulties, emphasizing the shadows of misunderstanding that impair their connection.

In Dhaka, I employ high-contrast lighting to capture the emotional highs and lows of Abdul. Emphasising the starkness of life in the urban environment, the intense sunlight pouring down on the crowded Dhaka city streets creates obvious contrasts between light and shadow. The glare of the sun represents the relentless pressure Abdul faces to provide for his family, while the deep shadows reflect the emotional weight of his decision to leave for Paris. Once in Paris, the lighting becomes softer but more diffuse, creating an eerie, dreamlike quality that reflects Abdul's disorientation and sense of being out of place. Paris's soft, almost misty light emphasises his future's ambiguity in which nothing is definite or distinct.

Conveying the fluidity and fragmentation of migration depends critically on camera movement. In Dhaka, I deliberately use shaky, hand-held camera work during Abdul's time in Dhaka to reflect the instability of his life. The camera follows him as he travels through the disorder of the city, and it does so regularly in extended takes when the audience is given the opportunity to absorb the overwhelming nature of the urban environment. Through these long shots, which give a sense of immersion, the challenges that Abdul has in order to exist in a city that offers little escape from the limitations of daily life are portrayed.

In contrast, the camera work in Paris is much more static, reflecting Abdul's psychological paralysis in a foreign land. In Paris, he is not physically moving through space in the same way he does in Dhaka; rather, he is stuck, waiting for something to change in his situation. The static camera reinforces this feeling of inertia, emphasizing how migration is not always a journey toward progress or freedom, but can also be a process of waiting and uncertainty. By using different camera techniques to represent different stages of Abdul's journey, I aim to convey the emotional and psychological toll of migration, as well as the sense of fragmentation that often accompanies it.

Another visual tool I employ to investigate displacement and belonging is framing. In many of my movies, the characters are placed in ways that make it clear that they are cut off from their surroundings. In The Border Within, Dr. Tawhid is often shot from afar, even in Dhaka, which is a busy city. He is surrounded by huge, empty areas. This way of framing makes his mental distance from his surroundings and his rising disconnection from his job stand out. As Tawhid's desire to help Osman grows, the frame gets tighter. This shows how his world gets smaller as he moves his attention from his personal life to his moral duty to the young orphan.

Abdul is often shown in Dhaka against the huge background of the city, with its tall buildings and never-ending crowds of people. As a migrant, he is hard to see in both Dhaka and Paris, where he is just one of millions of people who have had to leave their homes. The use of shallow depth of field, which blurs the backdrop in order to maintain the emphasis on Abdul's face, gives the impression that he is even more isolated and prominent because the surrounding is blurred. As a result of the fact that Abdul is frequently depicted in area that is constrained and confined, it becomes even more apparent how restricted his freedom is and how emotionally taxing it is for him to live in Paris as an illegal immigrant.

My films are identified by their visual factors, such as aspect ratio, color palette, the lighting, movement of the camera, and composition. These components are of significant significance to my study of migration, movement, and citizenship. I carefully analyze each visual decision with the goal to properly convey the mental and emotional states of my characters, as well as the cultural influences which influence their lives. Among the other factors causing the migrants' discomfort are the 4:3 aspect ratio, the unsteady camerawork, and the use of color to suggest emotional distance. These visual tools help one to communicate the complexity of migration in ways beyond words and narrative. Visual storytelling therefore is a great opportunity to get understanding of the secret but essential realities of migration and relocation.

Chapter 3: Representation, Power, and the Ethics of Documentary Filmmaking

We can see how power affects the making of culture, especially in documentaries, which is why political and social processes are linked to art. One of the main issues I talked about in my argument and analysis of Manuel F. Contreras's thesis *Documentary Film, the Filmmaker, and Representation* is how social and political factors affect not only the filmmaker's point of view but also the stories they tell. I am choosing Manuel's thesis because we studied in the same program and we are both documentary filmmakers but our roots are different. I am from Bangladesh and Manuel is from Columbia. So I will try to rethink the position of Westerners with the reference, argument, and analysis through Manuel's lens.

According to Contreras (2021), "Documentary follows a pattern that validates and prolongs that same Eurocentrism through paternalistic, exoticizing, and redemptive narratives of the other, the observed and filmed" (p. 4). Eurocentric frames are too common in documentary films. He claims that Western directors often show things in ways that support existing power structures (Contreras, 2021, p. 4). In this chaper, I will reinforce about Contreras's ideas about power, but I also want to question the idea that the director's place is set in a power hierarchy. Instead, I think that the process of portrayal is affected by both the social and political situation and the personal experiences of the director. This allows for times of defiance and compromise that Contreras's structure doesn't take into account.

Moving and being on the outside, along with social and political structures, are things I often think about when I'm making art. This is why these businesses always affect people from underprivileged origins. Contreras is more interested in the filmmaker's point of view as a foreigner who usually agrees with and adds to the majority's opinion, even if filmmakers work in social and political circumstances. "The ethnographer, as the explorer, creates a representation of the filmed that inevitably follows the preconceptions of the ethnographer's society and education" (Contreras, 2021, p. 3). I say this reading doesn't look at how the filmmaker's position changes and is hard to understand, especially for people who are already on the outside. By arguing against what he says in a critical way, my work shows how the documentary form can be a place where power relationships are not only repeated but also changed, especially through artistic choices and the use of technology in new ways.

It is very important that Contreras looks at how representation can be an extension of dominating social and political beliefs. This is especially true when looking at the history of documentary films. "Power, truth, and redemption are critical elements in the study of documentary film practices, but they are also elements that are part of the conception and creation of documentary films" (Contreras, 2021, p. 4). Early ethnographic films like *Nanook of the North* (1922), which Manuel uses as a prime example of exoticizing and paternalistic filmmaking, are still a controversial space today, even in works that try to be more subtle (Contreras, 2021, p. 9). But my criticism goes beyond this framework. Contreras thinks that filmmakers are automatically part of these dominant systems. But I suggest that filmmakers, especially those from disadvantaged groups, can change these stories by using technologies that were once used to repress people. It is clear from films like *Black Girl* (1966) by Ousmane Sembène that technology power can be used to fight imperialist ideas. "Sembène's films challenge the persistent Eurocentric visions by providing a counter-narrative that speaks from the African perspective, challenging the dominant narratives of exoticism and paternalism" (Ukadike, 2002, p. 102).

Ousmane Sembène's films powerfully challenge Eurocentric views by telling stories from an African perspective, often focusing on the struggles and resilience of ordinary people. Take his film La Noire de... (1966), for example. It follows Diouana, a Senegalese woman who takes a job with a French family in France, hoping for a better life. Instead, she's treated as less than human, trapped in a cycle of exploitation and disrespect. Sembène uses her story to expose the hypocrisy of colonial attitudes—how the French family sees themselves as benevolent but ultimately perpetuates the same inequalities of the colonial system. One of the most striking moments is when Diouana gifts them a traditional African mask, which they proudly display as a decorative object, completely missing its cultural significance. This act symbolizes how African culture is often appropriated and stripped of its meaning. By giving Diouana a voice and showing her quiet but powerful resistance, Sembène flips the script on the usual stereotypes of Africans as passive or exotic. Instead, he portrays her as a fully realized person, grappling with real pain and injustice. Through films like this, Sembène doesn't just tell African stories—he demands that they be seen and understood on their own terms, challenging the world to rethink its assumptions about Africa and its people.

Not only does power shape the social and political structures that govern documentary filmmaking, but so do the economic facts that decide who gets to make films and what stories are considered important enough to be told. Contreras criticizes the way that pain is used as a commodity in many documentaries. He says that films about disadvantaged groups often try to appeal to Western audiences by portraying their subjects in a way that makes viewers feel morally better (Contreras, 2021, p. 18). The argument is fair; still it failed to think about the possibility for directors to challenge these

commercialized stories by playing with form and style. By trying with visual style, story structure, and participation from the audience, filmmakers might question stereotypes and prevent the commercialization of marginalized situations.

In my own work, I'm always interested in how sociopolitical systems and how films show people clash. I want to question and add to Contreras's points by talking about my own experiences with moving and being moved. The social and political structures that affect my works are not just outside factors; they are also connected to my daily life as an artist managing the shifting balance of power around the world. In this way, my criticism of Contreras is not an attack on his theory, but a plea for a deeper look at how power, image, and technology work together in a documentary.

When Contreras talks about documentary filmmaking, he makes a strong case that goes into problems of representation and the way that imperial power shapes it. His case shows how the Eurocentric film industry has made, supported, and kept up stereotypes for a long time by telling stories that put the filmmaker in charge of the subjects. He says that this uneven power over both the story and the technology has been a common theme in the history of documentary filmmaking. When we observe how artists from marginalized communities utilize technology and creative freedom to reimagine narratives and reveal new aspects of themselves, we may begin to challenge this perspective.

Media technology, according to Contreras, exacerbates the power dynamic between subjects and producers, leading to images that reinforce Eurocentric conceptions of "the other" (Contreras, 2021, p. 4). His worry about this technology dominance is important, but it also needs to be looked into more. Historically, especially in Hollywood, commercial and corporate interests have propelled technical advancement. Still, technology serves more than merely a control tool. Instead, it is a means of communication that individuals from many civilizations other than the dominant one may question and challenge hegemonic systems.

An example of this is the literary works produced by Ousmane Sembène. Rather of use the camera to reinforce Eurocentric perspectives, he analyzed and challenged colonial narratives. Through its portrayal of the daily experiences of a Senegalese domestic worker in France, the 1966 film *Black Girl* presents a striking juxtaposition to the romanticized depiction of African life in Western cinema. The camera's power changes here; it's no longer a tool of control; it's a tool of defiance. As Ukadike observes, "Sembène’s films challenge the persistent Eurocentric visions by providing a counter-narrative that speaks from the African perspective, challenging the dominant narratives of exoticism and paternalism" (Ukadike, 2002, p. 102). So, Contreras's points about how strong people control technology are true, but they miss the point that

filmmakers from oppressed groups have successfully used this technology to resist and show who they are.

Today, even filmmakers who don't have a lot of money can get high-quality cameras, editing tools, and sites for distributing their work. As rights have become more widespread, many films have been made that question dominant images. For example, Kirsten Johnson's 2016 film *Cameraperson* defies standard documentary filmmaking conventions by emphasizing the filmmaker's role, prejudices, and interventions. Traditional documentaries often aim to present a seemingly objective or authoritative perspective, with the filmmaker remaining hidden behind the camera. In Cameraperson, Johnson openly puts herself into the film, both literally and thematically. The film is structured as a memoir, weaving together footage from her decades-long career as a cinematographer. By doing so, she reveals her personal perspective, decisions, and emotional responses, making it clear that the film is shaped by her subjectivity.

The film includes scenes where Johnson intervenes in the situations she is filming, such as when she comforts a crying child or engages with her subjects. These moments disrupt the traditional documentary boundary between filmmaker and subject, raising ethical questions about the responsibilities and power dynamics inherent in documentary filmmaking. By including these interventions, Johnson invites viewers to reflect on the moral complexities of capturing real-life events.

When we question Contreras, we should ask him why he isn't allowed to make movies. What he means when he says "Power belongs to the one who grabs it" (Contreras, 2021, p. 22) is not clear. But that doesn't explain how directors and stars share power, especially when they make a movie together. Some people believe that persons in positions of control have more power than the people they supervise. However, as Nichols (2017) points out, Jean Rouch's 1961 *Chronicle of a Summer* demonstrates how the subject matter may change the story. "Chronique d'un été (Chronicle of a Summer) from 1961 is Rouch's most acclaimed work. Filmed in Paris, it starts by showing images of people coming out of a metro station, walking on their way to work in the morning. The film's voice over says: 'This film was made without actors, but lived by men and women who devoted some of their time to a novel experiment of cinéma vérité.'" (Renov, 1993, p. 46). The artist's relationship to the subject matter is very important.

Contreras uses "paternalistic, exoticizing, and redemptive narratives" to describe what big movie companies make (Contreras, 2021, p. 4). This brings up important questions about the director's duty. Focusing on the common look, on the other hand, doesn't take into account how new technologies allow for more complex and spread-out images. The killers of thousands of Indonesians get the opportunity to narrate their own narratives through reenactments in Joshua Oppenheimer's 2012 film, *The Act of Killing*.

In short, Contreras' dissertation makes a strong case for how technical power and artistic control can change how things are shown. Still, we need to take a closer look at how leaders of groups that don't get enough help use technology to question and cast doubt on often told stories. When the two are connected, it's not as clear that the director is strong and the subject is weak. This is especially true if the subject is involved in making the movie. It's important to keep an eye on technology, but that shouldn't be written into law. It could be discussed, bargained, and rethought in ways that Contreras' method doesn't cover.

For a long time, people have argued about what role the director plays in the process of portrayal, especially when it comes to making documentaries. In his writing, Manuel F. Contreras takes a critical look at how documentary directors use their power over their subjects by controlling the camera, the story, and the cutting the film. He says that this balance of power leads to an inevitable imbalance, where the photographer is in a better position because of their background, schooling, and access to technology, while the people who are being filmed often don't have a say and are passive. Manuel says this difference strengthens power relationships and often supports prevailing ideas of "otherness" and exclusion. This way of seeing the world is similar to the problems that come up when you try to represent people after colonization.

Because Manuel brings up important questions about the ethics of representation, I don't agree with his description of the director-subject link as being too fixed. Manuel says the director has a lot of power and that what they say always changes how things are shown. But this method doesn't take into account how complicated and moving video pictures really are. It doesn't look at the chances that the subject will do something or that the maker will always do the right thing. But this view says that power mostly moves from the subject to the head.

Making a film and being a subject: power as negotiation

Manuel thinks that the director is in charge of the subject since they decide what the story is about and how it is shown. But this idea is wrong because the director and the subject might be able to work together. This type of filmmaking challenges the usual order of things by letting the people being filmed have a say in how they are shown. The person being filmed isn't just something the director looks at; they become a part of the story. This method changes the balance of power, making the relationship between the producer and the subject more fair.

One important example of this is the work of directors like Jean Rouch, whose idea of "shared anthropology" meant that the people he filmed were actively involved in the making of the films. Rouch's films often didn't make a clear distinction between fiction and reality. He did this by making filming more collaborative and reflexive, giving his subjects the freedom to tell their own stories. For example, in Chronicle of a Summer,

he and co-director Edgar Morin asked people on the streets of Paris questions like, “Are you happy?” and then involved them in discussions about the footage. This collaborative approach breaks down the barrier between filmmaker and subject, giving the latter a voice in how they are represented. Rouch was trained as an anthropologist, and his early work involved studying West African cultures. Traditional ethnography at the time often objectified its subjects, presenting them as "others" to be studied from a detached, supposedly objective perspective. Rouch was critical of this approach, which he saw as rooted in colonialist attitudes.

This method is very different from Manuel's claim that the filmmaker's control always means that the subject's voice is silenced. It shows that directors can make a more accurate and fair portrayal of their subjects when they are willing to give up some power and let them be a part of the making of the film.

The Audience's Role in Shaping Representation

Manuel does not give any consideration to the manner in which the viewer alters the meaning of a report while he is arguing his position. According to Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" theory, individuals rely on their own personal experiences, social networks, and political perspectives in order to make sense of the writings that they encounter in the media. As Hall notes, "Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write - the positions of enunciation. What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say 'in our own name', of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place" (Hall, 1990, p. 222). So, while the director has the final say over the film's production, viewers may interpret it differently.

An act that, for example, criticizes poverty could provoke a range of responses from viewers. It could seem like an appropriate or beneficial thing to do from a Western point of view. It is possible, on the other hand, for those who live in countries with a lesser degree of development to interpret it as a cry for social revolution or a sorrow for justice. This underscores the fact that the filmmaker is not the major determinant of representation; rather, the audience also plays a key part in shaping this process when it comes to representation. This is an important point to keep in mind. As a result, the authority of the filmmaker in molding portrayal is not fully absolute, as the perceptions of the audience may differ greatly due to the fact that they come from different cultural backgrounds.

Manuel's criticism of documentary filmmaking focuses mostly on the frequently one-sided power dynamics that occur in the medium, in which the point of view of the filmmaker is essential to the interpretation of the story. Other criticisms of documentary filmmaking include the following. Reflexivity, on the other hand, has been welcomed by

contemporary documentary approaches in an effort to confront the power discrepancies that exist. A filmmaker is said to be reflexive when they are aware of their own subjectivity, preconceptions, and the boundaries of their own point of view.

Here I can talk about my film “Before the Pandemic and War, there were bed bugs and love!” where I was trying to hide myself with my camera because my character was more powerful than my appearance in the process of filming.

The Ethical Dilemma of Representation: Can Power Ever Be Equal?

As a filmmaker, I often find myself confronted with the same ethical challenge that Manuel raises: how can we present another person's experience without imposing our own prejudices on it? And how can we ensure that there are no power imbalances when we are the ones directing the tale? There is no doubt that the maker of the documentary has a lot of power over it. The choices we make about what goes into the final edit will always have an effect on how the story is told. This leads to an abusive connection, according to Manuel, but I think the truth is more complicated than that.

In my work, especially in films like *The Border Within* and *Dhaka*, I’m constantly aware of the weight of these stories—real people living through migration and economic hardship. But the question I ask myself is: am I using these narratives for artistic purposes, or am I offering a platform for their voices to be heard? Susan Sontag talked about "compassionate detachment," where the filmmaker becomes a passive observer of suffering, and Manuel echoes this when he argues that filmmakers reinforce a distance between themselves and their subjects. While that distance exists, it can also be bridged. I don’t see my subjects as passive participants. They bring their own agency into the filmmaking process.

Take Osman, the 14-year-old Rohingya refugee from *The Border Within*. He played an active role in shaping his story on screen. We worked together, ensuring that his perspective was represented in the film. This interactive method helps close some of the ethical gaps that Manuel points out because it lets people help make their own stories instead of being forced to read ones that have already been made.

Ethical problems that come up in my own work

I have struggled with these moral issues all my life, especially when I was speaking for groups that weren't getting enough attention. According to Manuel, being the head gives you some authority. Making a film should be a collaborative endeavour, not an individual one, and I feel it is the director's responsibility to transfer authority in this way. Once I begin writing the script for my film, I plan to incorporate my Lithuanian girlfriend. Everything is motivated by my affections for her. My words were muffled so they couldn't be overheard.

If one adopts this logic, the time between meeting someone and taking advantage of them is brief. In presenting stories of adversity, it is easy to slip into the category of "poverty porn," which is the act of making suffering seem terrible in order to encourage people to feel sorry for the sufferer. I was very aware of this risk when I was making the film *Dhaka*, which is about Abdul, a man who had to move because of climate change and had to move because of money problems. Despite my desire to show Abdul as a helpless victim, I also wanted to show him as tough and fighting for his honour. In light of Manuel's case, we are told that we need to constantly check ourselves and ask if we are treating this person's story with respect or if we are reducing them to a stereotype.

Reflexivity as an Ethical Tool

When I think about my work as a documentary filmmaker, the ethical dilemmas are always front and center. Reflexivity, to me, is a way of being honest—about my power, my perspective, and my influence. I know that every time I make a choice, whether it's the framing of a shot or how I edit the narrative, I'm shaping the way the audience perceives the story. And that's a big responsibility.

For me, reflexivity is about creating space for transparency. It's a way of saying, "I'm here in this process too, and my perspective is part of what you're seeing." This makes the work more honest, and I think it opens up a more ethical relationship with my subjects. I know I can never fully escape the power dynamics at play, but by being transparent, I can at least give the audience the tools to question the construction of the story.

Manuel's ideas on power and filmmaking push me to reflect on these issues constantly. It's not enough to just avoid exploitation; I have to actively engage with the complexities of representation. By doing so, I hope to create a more respectful, collaborative process where the stories I tell don't just mirror existing inequalities but challenge them. Even when I consider the audience, I know I have to accept that they bring their own perspectives to the film. They might interpret Abdul's story in ways I didn't intend, but that's part of the dialogue I want to create. My hope is to leave space for reflection, to disrupt any simple or reductive readings. That's why in films like *Before the Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love!*, I use techniques that push the audience to rethink their assumptions. Instead of just watching, I want them to participate. Ultimately, I am aware that these ethical dilemmas will not have a flawless resolution. I hope I'm heading in the right direction, though, by being self-aware and reflexive.

Conclusion

Ethical concerns are intrinsic to the process, something I came to realise as my career as a filmmaker developed. A careful balancing act takes place among power, representation, and the audience's engagement with a documentary; both Manuel's

dissertation and my own experiences emphasise this. Each film I create is more than just a technical endeavor; it's about making ethical decisions every step of the way—decisions that shape not just the narrative but the lives and perceptions of the subjects involved.

Manuel's work on Eurocentric perspectives in documentary filmmaking has deeply influenced how I approach my subjects. His criticism of how Western stories have dominated history has inspired me to question not only the structures that shape my own views but also the filmmaking practices that keep these patterns going. I fight in my work against the idea that filmmakers should own every word of the stories they produce, especially when those stories feature under-represented groups.

In films like *The Border Within* and *Before the Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love!*, I have strived to involve my subjects in the storytelling process. Manuel's thoughts on power dynamics have guided me to dismantle the traditional subject-filmmaker hierarchy, ensuring that my films are not just about representation but also about collaboration. By working together, we can do more than simply prevent exploitation; we can empower those who have been silenced for too long.

My interaction with the audience is also crucial. A documentary's success or failure depends on the reaction it receives from viewers, according to Manuel. My approach to filmmaking is informed by the knowledge that every viewer brings their unique set of experiences, prejudices, and worldview to the screen. My intention all along has been to have people think critically, to make them examine the power relations rather than just take in a well-structured narrative.

Learning, reflecting, and adjusting are the endgames of being an ethical filmmaker. Although Manuel's framework has helped me much, I still have a long way to go. Every film I make is a chance to challenge the status quo, to expose the limits of representation, and to make sure that my work does more than convey a narrative; it questions the mechanisms that form stories.

Chapter 4: Personal Truths and Cinematic Realities

In previous chapters, I discussed how the filmmaker's personal viewpoint inevitably shapes documentary filmmaking—how power structures, class relations, and cultural experiences impact the stories we portray, sometimes quietly and sometimes blatantly. Now, when I delve further, four themes emerge: the subjective nature of reality, the portrayal of cultural inequality, the importance of memory, and the ethical quandaries we confront.

"What is the position of an identity built on personal memory which diverges from the 'official' narratives of collective memory?" (Varga, 2022, p. 170). Varga discusses how personal memories, often diverging from official historical narratives, play a crucial role in shaping migrant identities. In my other documentary, "Before Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love!", I tried to work with my personal memories.

When I worked on *Before Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love!*, I experienced firsthand how subjective truth becomes when making a documentary. Bill Nichols (2017) reminds us that "documentaries are never a reproduction of reality; they are a representation, shaped by the filmmaker’s vision, choices, and biases" (p. 1). The intimate moments I filmed with my girlfriend weren’t just about the rawness of our cultural conflicts; they were colored by my background as a Bangladeshi living in Europe. Each decision, from framing to editing, reflected that subjectivity. Renov (1993) reinforces this idea, stating that "the documentary tradition has always been more about the personal than the objective, presenting perspectives that challenge conventional views of reality" (p. 21).

Cultural inequality became a prominent issue in the film, particularly in how my partner and I handled discomfort and disagreement. Our differing reactions to the bedbug infestation revealed much more than just annoyance; they reflected our profoundly varied cultural origins and coping strategies. Edward Said (1978) noted that "cultural exchange is rarely neutral; it is often laden with power dynamics that reflect historical inequities" (p. 7). My partner, who was reared in a more secure, resource-rich family, felt compelled to act right away when she felt uncomfortable. Growing up in Bangladesh prepared me to adapt. These difficulties impacted not just our relationship, but also how I wrote the story.

As I examine this chapter, I want to speak about how international power systems shape various cultural variations. The narrative became the struggle between two

distinct realities: mine, characterized by colonial consequence, and hers, by privilege, making it unclear what one can say and at what price. Frantz Fanon (1967) wrote that "cultural practices and behaviors are shaped by deeply entrenched historical and social structures, reflecting the inequalities embedded in society" (p. 18).

These issues are very sensitive because when two people's cultural practices from two periods meet in one place, it is necessary to consider every event, including the history of the two cultures, and at the same time, it is important to note how much they are actually sharing about themselves with each other. Along with that, how they are saying those things. Therefore, this is a kind of limitation in my research according to time and resources. So, the space that we have created around my film and since I have taken the events from my own thoughts, I will talk about the good and the bad about me and the film. This chapter explores the ethics of documentary filmmaking—who gets to tell the tale, and how we could do so responsibly—rather than only my experiences.

Memory and Narrative Construction

Memory is sometimes the invisible thread connecting individual narratives in documentary films, uniquely shaping the narrative structure by allowing filmmakers to reconstruct and reinterpret events through a personal lens. Unlike traditional documentary approaches that aim for linear or objective storytelling, memory introduces a fluidity where emotions, time, and subjective experience redefine how stories are told and understood. As soon as I started writing *Before Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love!*, I realised I wasn't just writing down events as they happened; I was putting together pieces of memories that had already been changed by feeling, time, and distance. Making the film helped me figure out not only what had happened but also how I felt about it and how I wanted other people to feel about it.

I thought about while filming my girlfriend and flatmate. This is the idea that being watched (or in this case, being watched through the lens of the camera) changes how we see ourselves. When I wrote down these exchanges, I wasn't just keeping track of reality; I was also changing how I saw it. The camera helped me connect with my past and present selves. It helped me make sense of the emotional weight of those memories and give them a story arc. It wasn’t objective truth I was after—it was something more personal and layered. To be more precise, when I was shooting the film, I wasn't thinking about making a film, capturing the events, but rather using the camera as a kind of shield to protect myself from conflict. I didn't think about making a film about my videos until I started thinking about them as a kind of memory.

It was like sorting through layers of feeling as I edited the video. I leaned on my memories to fill in the blanks and link scenes that didn't seem to go together or were left unresolved in the raw video. But by doing that, I changed the "truth" of what had

happened as well. The filmmaker is always present in the end result, so this balance is always important. I wasn't just taking pictures of moments; I was creating a story, a version of truth filtered through time, memory, and my own point of view.

Then there were the moral problems. When you make a film, especially one that's so personal, you have to deal with tough issues like trust and weakness. In their 1997 conversation, Ann-Louise Shapiro and Jill Godmilow discuss the ethical responsibilities of documentary filmmakers, especially when portraying private and personal moments. Godmilow critiques traditional documentaries for presenting material as unmediated truth, stating, “The essential claim that traditional documentary films make is that there’s unmediated truth here because this was not scripted—because the materials are ‘found in nature’—thus, the text built out of them is truthful as well” (Shapiro & Godmilow, 1997, p. 87). She advocates for filmmakers to acknowledge their interpretive role and to engage audiences critically, rather than presenting material as objective reality. Here, my personal opinion as a filmmaker is that even if I want to, the opportunity or freedom to present the complete truth cannot be achieved from society, industry and technology. For example, if we talk about narrative, we want to see in the movie what is happening and the change in our life mentality through this happening. Now the audience will not give me that time when I or my girlfriend actually did nothing. That is why we had to capture the events that happened in 2 years in 17 minutes. Because I could not show the events that happened in these two years, but I have highlighted the changes that happened in these two years.

Apart from the audience, the industry has also given me a time limit. They are also not ready to see it in a true or objective way and that is why if I have to reach the audience, I have to finish my film within the time limit they have set.

This time, if I think about technology, I have to work within my frame in a limited state. For example, my lens is 16mm, 32mm, 50mm, etc. Along with this, I have to think about my story keeping in mind the 160-degree angle. Although some cameras can be set up with 360 degrees, cinema halls or projections are not yet ready for it. From the history of cinema or cameras, it seems that whoever has this technology will take pictures of others because technical knowledge also plays an important role here.

For me, the moral tension wasn't just about how I acted around other people, like my flatmate or girlfriend; it was also about how I behaved around myself. To be honest, I was showing my weak spots and flaws, which in turn revealed the lives of those around me, often without them fully knowing what that would mean. This raised ethical concerns about consent and representation, as my vulnerability inadvertently exposed aspects of others’ lives they might not have agreed to share. Balancing this dynamic required a constant reflection on my responsibilities as a filmmaker, not only to myself

but to those whose lives intersected with my story. To put it more simply, I was aware of my living situation at that time, or maybe I was afraid to tell the administration about the bedbugs or the fact that there were bedbugs in my room, just as my Mongolian flatmate avoided them. The reason for this seemed to be that we were aliens. So we could be blamed for this problem, but when my girlfriend brought the matter up and tried to solve it officially, it seemed that only the camera could separate herself from this problem and maintain a safe distance.

Another one particularly difficult moment in the film was when my girlfriend confronted me about filming her without asking for permission that time of filming even though she agreed in the beginning. It was an uncomfortable moment of reflexivity—where the camera's gaze, and my role behind it, were called into question. This moment wasn't planned, but it forced me to confront the ethical limitations of my authority as a filmmaker. In showing that criticism on screen, I hoped to challenge the audience to question not just the story they were watching, but the power dynamics inherent in the act of filmmaking itself.

Memory, cultural disparity, and ethical challenges intersected powerfully in *Before Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love!* The personal conflicts—like my girlfriend's reaction to the bedbugs or my passive response—reflected deeper, structural realities. These weren't just isolated moments of discomfort; they were echoes of our cultural upbringings and the socio-political forces that shaped them. My girlfriend, raised in a European environment with higher standards of comfort, reacted swiftly and angrily to the bedbugs, insisting on immediate action. I learned to accept and adapt rather than fight during my formative years in Bangladesh, where there was a lot of unrest and uncertainty. Pierre Bourdieu said that this big difference brought out the idea of habitus, which he described as the deeply ingrained behaviors and attitudes that we have because of our life experiences (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 95).

"Culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described." (Geertz, 1973, p. 14). In this case, I feel the need to speak of two types of approaches: Bourdieu and Geertz. Geertz sees culture as a system of shared meanings and symbols that individuals use to explain their experiences and behavior. For example, my girlfriend's anger at bedbugs is not just about the insects; it is a reflection of cultural norms about comfort, hygiene, and control. Similarly, silence is not just about inaction; it is a reflection of a life of adaptation to larger external forces.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is that the influence of culture on the development of human thought operates largely unconsciously, while Geertz's approach is much less

subconscious and more about trying to understand the environment through one’s own personal perceptions.

Throughout the recording process, what struck me the most was how these seemingly little, personal interactions reflected much larger sociopolitical organisations. My girlfriend's anxiety was not just caused by the presence of bedbugs; rather, it was the result of her moving outside of her cultural bubble and encountering an atmosphere impacted by gender and global inequalities: such as living condition, hygiene, voices for rights and personal choices. This connection was worsened by the presence of my Mongolian flatmate, who also behaved passively to the situation. Our opposing reactions to the same event highlighted the extent to which our reactions to adversity and discomfort are heavily impacted by aspects of our cultural and social upbringing. For example, as mentioned earlier, we grow up in a culture where we subconsciously care about how others will take care of our personal needs, and as a result of living collectively, if any incident or accident happens, we tend to blame ourselves. Especially when we are in a new society or culture, we avoid our own problems as much as possible so that it seems that we are not actually creating any problems. Perhaps, due to the various stereotypes about us in the host society, we save ourselves from giving new dimensions to that narrative.

The Mongolian person who lived with me gave me a point of view that fit with what I had been through, though it came with its own unique details. When he was asked about the bedbugs, he tried to downplay how bad the situation was by saying that the bites were probably from mosquitos instead of bedbugs. I think what he said was more than just wrong; it showed how he had lived his whole life. His answer told me a lot about his past because it showed that he came from a less rich family than mine. We were both raised in environments that were often uncomfortable and unclear. Unlike my partner, we had learnt to deal with situations like these with acceptance rather than urgency. Our answers were not passive; rather, they were survival strategies developed as a result of the socioeconomic circumstances inherent in our upbringing.

After everything was said and done, the video became less about documenting "what happened" and more about exposing the complexities of these intersections. It was about how memory reconstructs reality, how culture and class influence our stories, and how ethical concerns force us to consider our role as storytellers. It was a process of continual contemplation and conversation, not just with the persons included in the video, but also with myself and the spectator.

This dynamic reveals a more complete pattern, mirroring the world's sociopolitical systems. People from poorer families, especially those from the Global South, are often taught to deal with hardships in ways that people from wealthier families may find hard

to understand. My girlfriend thought bedbugs were a disaster that needed to be fixed right away, but my flatmate and I just thought they were an annoyance that needed to be taken care of. The contrast between confrontation and adaptation, which became a significant motif in my film, highlights the immense cultural inequalities between persons used to demanding answers and others who have learnt to live with challenges. For instance, Her immediate resistance on the one hand and my passive response shaped by years of navigating uncertainties--this clash of reactions encapsulated the broader cultural and socioeconomic disparities embedded in our respective backgrounds. On the other hand, my passive response, shaped by years of navigating systemic uncertainties in Bangladesh, demonstrated a survival strategy of endurance rather than confrontation. This clash of reactions encapsulated the broader cultural and socioeconomic disparities embedded in our respective backgrounds.

The power relations among my girlfriend, roommate, and me also exposed the junction of cultural identity and authority. Successful negotiation of these several cultural settings—which included Bangladeshi, European, and Mongolian customs—needed constant exercise in identity balancing. Edward Said's work on Orientalism “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said, 1978, p. 1), explores the dynamic of my girlfriend, who perhaps displayed a kind of cultural superiority connected with Europeans, maybe without awareness. Her insistence on taking control by phoning authorities and her demands of comfort and cleanliness reflected a bigger story of Western domination over the Global South. It wasn’t about overt power—it was subtle, embedded in the everyday actions and expectations that seemed normal to her but carried a deeper meaning in the context of our relationship.

On the other hand, how I responded to the event showed that I accepted the societal order. Instead of fighting her requests, I chose to watch and take pictures of what was happening, using the camera to take my mind off of how uncomfortable things were at the moment. This mirrors Michel Foucault’s notion of panopticism—the idea that individuals internalize authority and regulate their own behavior. In this case, the camera became not just an instrument of observation but a way for me to conform to the expectations imposed upon me by my girlfriend’s cultural background.

The theme of adaptation runs throughout the film, both in terms of how my flatmate and I acclimated to the inconvenience of living in a dormitory and in terms of how we navigated the complexities of being outsiders in a completely other nation. In our globalised society, where national identities are always changing and crashing into each other, being able to adapt was more than just a way to deal with bedbugs. For me, adaptation was finding ways to reconcile my Bangladeshi heritage with the European

standards in which I was living. One vivid moment of this reconciliation occurred during the bedbug infestation. While my girlfriend sought immediate solutions through external authorities, reflecting her cultural framework of direct problem-solving, I found myself leaning on the patience and endurance I had cultivated in Bangladesh. This difference often led to tension, but it also illuminated how our cultural norms could coexist. Over time, I began to integrate her assertive approach into my own, particularly in instances where a direct resolution was necessary, while she grew to appreciate the value of resilience and resourcefulness—a subtle blending of our worlds that shaped both our relationship and my perspective on adaptation. On the other side, my flatmate was attempting to reconcile his Mongolian heritage with Hungarian culture. Keeping this continual balancing effort in mind raises basic questions about the loss of cultural identity and the ethical implications of adjusting to a culture that prioritises specific cultural norms. These questions significantly influenced my creative decisions during filming: I had to decide whether to highlight my passive adaptation to European norms or emphasize moments of resistance. Such choices shaped not only the narrative but also how I presented myself and my relationship on screen, always treading the fine line between cultural critique and personal storytelling.

Before the Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love! is a compilation of my personal experiences with my partner and flatmate with the goal of offering a summary, operate as a microcosm of the larger sociopolitical structures that impact how people respond to changing circumstances, discomfort, and disasters. I hope that by looking into these human interactions, I will be able to shed light on how class and culture are inextricably linked in creating not just the narratives we tell, but also the ethical dilemmas that arise from presenting them.

Chapter 5: The Border Within and Wandering: A Rohingya Story—A Comparative Analysis

I would like to start this chapter with a quote from Tünde Varga: "Although there is a difference between the status of the refugee or asylum-seeker, the migrant, and the nomad, all three have the status of the non-citizen" (Varga, 2022, p. 173). She warns against romanticizing migration, as it often involves significant deprivation and loss, particularly for those who are forced to leave their homes due to political or economic pressures. For the same reason, I can relate to this personally. Perhaps I was not a refugee or asylum-seeker, and perhaps my situation was much better than their living conditions, but ultimately, I too was a kind of stateless person in a foreign land, and I still am. For the same reason, I try to understand how different the lives of these non-citizens are from those of citizens.

In documentary filmmaking, technology plays a significant part in shaping the truth, particularly in the manner in which stories are captured, edited, and ultimately presented to the audience. In both Wandering: A Rohingya Story and The Border Within, the depiction of the Rohingya crisis was significantly impacted by the technological choices that were made and the resource availability that was available to the filmmakers. According to Bill Nichols (2017), "the process of making a documentary film is not an objective one; the tools and technologies that are utilised in the process invariably have an effect on the narrative" (Nichols, 2017, p. 45).

During the production of *Wandering: A Rohingya Story*, Western filmmakers Mélanie Carrier and Olivier Higgins were able to take advantage of cutting-edge film technology, which enabled them to achieve high production values. Elevated production values were demonstrated through aerial shots, intricate sound design, and seamless transitions between scenes. The employment of refined technology that is aesthetically pleasing and enhances production resulted in this effective representation of the Rohingya crisis, potentially reinforcing the passive victim narrative. Using drone footage, for instance, can make the filmmakers look like they are watching a humanitarian disaster from afar, while the Rohingya can look like they are far away from the situation. This can make it look like the people watching are far away or watching the people in

the picture. This use of technology aligns with Shohat and Stam's (1994) critique of Western narratives, which often rely on aesthetic techniques that can dilute the complexity of non-Western subjects, rendering them passive or "other" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 21).

From my own experience of making films, I feel that when I don't understand my character or when I think the character or subject of the film is important but I don't know how to decode it through my own experiences and life realities, that's when I try to shoot with a certain distance because I don't want to impose on my subject or character. This is exactly how I felt here. I am depicting the situation with very beautiful visuals, but I am quite far from the subject. Along with this, there are many types of criticisms in the history of Western cinema. portraying characters in one's own way or creating narratives of their lives from one's own perspective, but in reality, there is no resemblance to the actual truth. Perhaps this is why they might not reveal the character or subject fully, in order to remain politically correct.

For Western audiences, such visual strategies can create a compelling cinematic experience, but they also raise questions about how technology contributes to shaping the truth. Due to the orderly and immaculate presentation, individuals may prioritise appearances over the underlying severity of the situation. Although this may enhance the visual appeal of the tragedy, it fails to effectively communicate the profundity of the suffering experienced. A more stylised and controlled presentation of events is now feasible, which has the potential to conceal the chaotic and genuine reality of the Rohingya people's lives. It's now possible to show things in a more stylised and controlled way, which could hide how messy and real the Rohingya's lives are.

As artists, we almost always consciously prioritize craft, skill, and technology to express ourselves in ways that set us apart from others. However, many times, the realities of our subjects are not as beautifully polished as our art; rather, they are often chaotic. In such cases, we cannot always remain honest with ourselves and our subjects. Unintentionally, comparisons or influences from other artists' works creep into our own. if I were to simply document how Rohingyas use bathrooms in refugee camps, I could effectively portray a facet of their inhumane living conditions. But sometimes, I find myself questioning—or perhaps it's the difficulty of resisting the temptation—to showcase my craft or to hold back from depriving myself of using it. On top of that,

feature films require a variety of materials to move the narrative forward, adding another layer of complexity.

When I wrote *The Border Within,* I had to deal with a different set of technological problems and moral problems. Because I am a Bangladeshi filmmaker with a much smaller budget and not as much access to technology as Western filmmakers, I had to use more personal and grounded methods to tell stories. In contrast, I was able to exercise authority over the story through simulation.

Although reenactment is a valuable instrument to use in documentary films, it can also be immoral. I had to arrange particular circumstances in order to record instances that I was not able to film in real time. This helped me compose a story that fit my own understanding of the crisis. Reenacting moments in *The Border Within* gave me more control over how the Rohingya were represented, but it also raised questions about authenticity. As Nichols (2017) explains, "reenactments can blur the line between reality and fiction, and while they allow filmmakers to fill in gaps in the narrative, they can also manipulate the audience's perception of truth" (Nichols, 2017, p. 102).

In one scene, I replicated a dialogue between two Rohingya men regarding their prospects in the refugee camp. The choice to reenact this scene enabled me to highlight particular themes of agency and survival that are pivotal to the film's narrative. At that time, I couldn't capture good quality sound. The camera's sound could only be used as a reference but wasn't suitable for projection, and that's why I had to re-record proper sound using the location's reference audio.

However, in doing so, I also exercised control over the representation of the Rohingya's experience, shaping it to fit the message I wanted to convey. This raised ethical concerns: Was I giving a truthful representation of their lives, or was I imposing my own interpretation of their reality? In using reenactment, I had to grapple with the inherent tension between storytelling and truth-telling.

During the editing process, this tension got even worse. As a filmmaker, I had the most control over how the story went when I was editing. The editing choices I made for *The Border Within* were very important in creating the story's emotional arc. That being said, these choices also affected how people saw the Rohingya crisis. by focusing on some emotional moments and leaving out others, I was able to craft a story that emphasised

strength and choice, but it may have come at the cost of fully exploring how complicated the refugees' pain was. Not only is editing a technical process, Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991) claims it's also an ethical one; it means choosing whose voice is heard and whose is not (Nichols, 2017, p. 90).

So, the way I used technology and editing to control the story in *The Border Within* was similar to the ethical questions I had when writing about the Rohingya crisis. While I sought to give a voice to a marginalized community, I was also aware that my own biases and background shaped the film's portrayal of the crisis. The limitations of technology further compounded this challenge, as I had to rely on reenactment and editing to fill in gaps, which inevitably affected the authenticity of the narrative.

For a long time, documentaries had been praised for giving voice to those who don't have one, especially during times of crisis like the Rohingya people's constant moving around. What makes films powerful is that they show the hardships, strength, and humanity of people who are often overlooked. Still, the global documentary film business is heavily influenced by difficult power relations, even though the form can be used to support causes. When there are power gaps, it's hard to make choices about art. These differences affect how people around the world write stories, understand them, and enjoy them in the end. One group that really feels this is directors from non-Western countries, like me.

I will look into these problems in more detail in this chapter by comparing two films that deal with the Rohingya refugee problem. *Wandering: A Rohingya Story* (Carrier & Higgins, 2019) is a film that was directed by Mélanie Carrier and Olivier Higgins. The title of a film that I was the director of is "Border Within." The portrayal of Rohingya Muslims is handled differently in both of these films. The Rohingya are depicted in both of these images. As a result of ongoing attacks in Myanmar, this stateless tribe has sought refuge in Bangladesh. When combined, they illustrate the same concept. But they're doing it from culturally and geographically distinct locations, which is a huge difference. This study aims to demonstrate how non-Western narratives, like the Rohingya tragedy, may be shaped by factors like national identity, representation, and global contexts like film festivals.

In this chapter, we will go deeper into the moral dilemmas that have been discussed thus far. The consequences of bigotry and the ethical dilemmas presented by depictions of diverse characters in media are examples of such issues. How much the creators' cultural origins impact their storylines is going to be investigated. True or false? That depends on the documentary maker; as I said in Chapter 3, their personal experiences, prejudices, and ethical frameworks colour their perceptions of events. Bill Nichols states, "The filmmaker’s desire to make a compelling film and the individual’s desire to have his or her social rights and personal dignity respected often conflict, influencing how marginalized communities are represented" (Nichols, 2017, p. 40). When dealing with marginalised communities, objectivity is crucial since the director's perspective might overpowerd the individuals being filmed. Many have voiced the opinion that directors may find it more challenging to realise their vision due to changes in technology, editing, and plot. *The Border Within* and *Wandering: A Rohingya Story* both have their flaws. To better understand these issues, let's take a closer look and analyse them critically.

This section will also investigate the ways in which global events, such as film festivals, influence the way in which individuals from different parts of the world see and interpret narratives that originate from non-Western regions. Part 2 of this study discussed how Gramsci's 1971 theory of cultural power transformed documentary production. Gramsci describes cultural hegemony as "the moment of hegemony and consent as a necessary form of the concrete historical bloc" (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 201-202). Shohat and Stam argue that "Eurocentrism acts as an interlocking network of embedded narratives, buried premises, and submerged metaphors that have cumulatively shaped a broadly shared 'common sense'" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 21).

In a few words, this chapter wants to look at how the two movies deal with moral representation, story consistency, and how global platforms affect how documentaries are made. How can makers from non-Western countries, especially those from different cultures, be successful when they have to meet the needs of film events and people all over the world while also doing what's right by the people they film? It's this question that makes everything else possible. This chapter's main idea is that non-Western people need a bigger stage to tell their stories in their own unique ways, and that the

most important skill to have is understanding how power works in the global documentary business.

Cultural Hegemony and Representation in Documentary Filmmaking

Antonio Gramsci created the concept of cultural hegemony, which may be employed to analyse the depiction of non-Western subjects in worldwide media, particularly in the realm of documentary filmmaking. In 1971, Gramsci defined cultural hegemony as the phenomenon in which the dominant class's perspective on the world becomes the prevailing cultural norm adopted by society at large. This pushes other points of view to the edges of society. The hegemonic control is not just achieved through open force; it is also achieved through the hidden manipulation of society, philosophy, and the media. In documentary films, this dynamic often means that stories from non-Western cultures are told through a Western lens. This supports Western ideas and makes the power systems that are already in place stronger. I also want to specific with Edward Said. Said's analysis reveals how the dominant class maintained cultural hegemony through Orientalism. By controlling the narrative about the East, Western powers could shape public opinion and maintain their perceived superiority. (*Orientalism Introduction Summary & Analysis from LitCharts*, 2025) This hegemonic discourse permeated various aspects of Western culture, including academia, literature, and art.

Culture has a significant role in the making, sharing, and understanding of stories from cultures other than Western ones. This is also relevant to the current refugee crisis among the Rohingya people. Western filmmakers often enjoy more success, fame, and financial backing than their non-Western counterparts due to the greater number of international film festivals that showcase their works. Though they cover non-Western themes, their narratives usually follow Western standards. This circumstance amply illustrates the "Eurocentric" perspective of view Shohat and Stam (1994) outlined. Shohat and Stam argue that "Eurocentrism acts as an interlocking network of embedded narratives, buried premises, and submerged metaphors that have cumulatively shaped a broadly shared 'common sense'" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 21). Non-Westerners are considered as spectators in their own narrative, Western points of view are given more weight.

A film like *Wandering: A Rohingya Stor*y (Carrier & Higgins, 2019) shows how Western narratives may change non-Western stories, even when the makers mean well. The film follows the plight of the Rohingya people as they escape persecution in Myanmar and find refuge in Bangladesh. Melody Carrier and Olivier Higgins, both from Canada, were successful. Because it showed the humanitarian disaster in a sympathetic perspective, the film did well at Western film festivals. It is important to view this compliment with caution, though, because Western narratives often drive the portrayal of non-Western issues.

Shohat and Stam claim that Western filmmakers often unintentionally change their films in order to comply with Western aesthetic standards. This happens with the goal of conforming to rules popular in Western nations. To improve the visual appeal of the artwork, multiple strategies are taken, reflecting Western views. The purpose of this action is to conform to Western culture, and it is carried out with the intention of having that objective in mind. It is essential to keep in mind that the practice of incorporating characters from non-Western cultures into your own narrative is distinct from the one that is being discussed in this article regarding the practice. As a result of this, people who come from non-Western backgrounds are frequently associated with the stereotype of being helpless victims of various forms of violence. This is because of the fact that they are more likely to be victims of violence. Within the narrative of *Wandering: A Rohingya Story,* the Rohingya minority is portrayed as being victims of political pressures over which they have very little control. Due to the fact that the Rohingya are both stateless and the targets of attacks, this statement is correct to some extent. On the other hand, making them look like helpless victims could weaken their strong and complex autonomy. All of this happens when we see filmmakers trying to portray their current situation in a broader context. An example will make this clearer. Myanmar claims a connection between the Rohingya community and Bangladesh, particularly citing similarities in the spoken language of people near the border and the Islamic religion as evidence. However, The Rohingya trace their ancestry to a mix of indigenous tribes and Muslim settlers, including Arabs, Moors, Pathans, and Bengalis, who arrived in Arakan as early as the 7th century CE. Their presence became more prominent during the 15th century when the Arakan Kingdom maintained close ties with Bengal. Over time, they developed a distinct culture, language, and identity in the region. The term “Rohingya” itself is believed to derive from “Rohang,” the historical name for

Arakan, combined with “gya,” meaning “from” in their dialect. However, this term gained prominence only in the mid-20th century as a collective political identity.

Now, if their history and how they fled overnight to another country to save their lives are ignored, and only their current situation is shown, then in many cases, the audience will not understand the pivotal moment of change in their lives, and they will be portrayed as helpless. However, they are actually exhausted from the mental and physical struggles they have endured to reach this point. “*Wandering: A Rohingya Story*” primarily depicts their life in the Rohingya camps. If I were to describe it, it would be more like a video showing what a refugee camp looks like.

This might make them feel less independent. People in the West usually watch charity films that highlight stories of suffering, and this one does not disappoint. A significant part of such films often revolves around how people from the West are helping to solve problems in other parts of the world. the experience of living in Rohingya refugee camps has led them to assume, in a way, that white people will be their saviors. Here, there is no reason to blame them for this mindset. All kinds of food supplies and rations are coming from Western countries, and they are constantly hearing about it. Now, when directors are filming here and there according to their own preferences, the Rohingya refugees are under the impression that filming by white people will solve all their problems, and in a way, they are presenting themselves as the directors want them to. This is something I am saying based on my experience of spending day after day working on my film, and similarly, watching *Wandering: A Rohingya Story* gives a sense of this dynamic as well.

On the other hand, these representations could be used to further deepen existing inequality in power. Without a full understanding of the Rohingya individual history, customs, and culture, Westerners stand into the risk of misunderstanding them.The reason is that in this film, we are trying to measure everyone with the same scale through a kind of massacre. most people fled with just the clothes on their backs to save their lives. After arriving in Bangladesh, their current circumstances bear no resemblance to the lives they left behind. Teachers, students, intellectuals, and smugglers—whether they like it or not—are now forced to live together in the same kind of housing and environment. If we portray them in a broad, generalized way, it might seem as though they are all uneducated or involved in drug smuggling. the film does not

show that they are people with divergent social and educational background, farmers, nurses, doctors, teachers.

Justice would be delivered based on Western standards, and assistance to other countries would continue. By "standards," I mean that we perceive things based on what we see. My own experience of life tells me that no matter how much we claim that all human beings have equal rights, in reality, we have created different social hierarchies. We never view an uneducated person with the same dignity as an educated one. For the same reason, when we depict all refugees in the same way, the justice they require is also considered in alignment with their social position rather than their individual realities.

In 1971, Gramsci hypothesised that the phenomenon he referred to as "cultural dominance" might again emerge. It's called "cultural dominance," and it occurs when problems in other nations are dealt with by looking at themselves through the lens of Western concepts and traditions. A great number of people might find it challenging to maintain a mind open and observe topics from another person's point of view at the moment. In the case of *Wandering: A Rohingya Story*, we see the director's one-sided perspective, as the film focuses solely on depicting the entire refugee camp. While many people in the camp share similar living conditions, the film does not question or explore the possibility that their ways of life and philosophies might differ. Instead, through the lens of these Western filmmakers, the emphasis remains on the idea that, due to genocide, they are now forced to live identical lives—without acknowledging the complexities and variations in their individual experiences.

On the other hand, *The Border Within* shows the Rohingya issue in a way that makes it look more complicated than it really is. My close personal, familial, and political ties to Bangladesh made it easy for me to portray the film as taking place in that country. They have shown that they can choose for themselves and come up with new ideas. This has helped them stay strong even though they've been attacked badly and had to move. A lot of people think that the Rohingya are just helpless victims. I attempted to address this question using my own experiences and knowledge of their civilization. It was crucial to me that they seemed to be genuine people dealing with real-world issues in politics and public life. First and foremost, rather than speaking about the entire Rohingya refugee population, I have focused on the relationship between a 14-year-old

Rohingya boy and a Bangladeshi doctor, using their dynamic as a lens to understand their living conditions. While they may be helpless in this moment, I have deliberately avoided reducing their past and present lives to mere victimhood. Instead, I have tried to show that although they have arrived in a society without war, political instability still affects them. The very doctor helping the boy is himself struggling with his own life—despite being a doctor, he cannot secure a good hospital cabin for his wife, nor does he have the means to properly care for his mother.

Because Westerners have a tendency to dismiss problems with non-Western roots, this viewpoint calls into question Western paradigm dominance. My intention, as someone who has spent a lot of time in this region, was to depict the Rohingya people's daily life in a way that highlighted both their strength and fragility. Through the lives of the 14-year-old Rohingya boy and the Bangladeshi doctor, I have attempted to illustrate their socio-political realities. One of the key reasons why the West often dismisses the complexities of non-Western struggles is its lack of understanding of non-Western societies. The Rohingya crisis, along with the political dynamics of Bangladesh and Myanmar, serves as a significant example of this.

A major factor behind this misunderstanding is that Bangladesh does not operate according to Western norms. Political and economic instability creates significant barriers, making it difficult for the West to comprehend the intricacies of such societies. This is precisely why, through the daily struggles of my doctor character, I have sought to show the kind of society in which the Rohingya are now living.

Wandering: A Rohingya Story depicts the Rohingya people from a Western perspective. they have tried to show whole community. A group of people has been forcibly displaced from their homeland and taken refuge in another country with its own flawed and struggling social system. While their living conditions may appear similar, their mental and emotional states are not. The real challenge lies in the fact that people from diverse backgrounds and ways of life are now forced to adapt to the same circumstances.

In Wandering: A Rohingya Story, however, we only see fragmented glimpses of the Rohingya’s survival and their immediate surroundings. The film feels as if the camera never rests, as if capturing as many faces and moments as possible is the only goal.

Yet, it does not delve into the depth of any specific character or their lived experiences, leaving the portrayal of their existence broad and surface-level rather than personal and immersive.

As a result, we just get an idea of living but no individual perspective. It takes away the detailing of their crisis.

Within the pages of *The Border Within*, the Rohingya are revealed to be more than just a group of people who are harmed by politics. After all this time, the reasons behind their displacement go beyond religion and nationality; they also include arable land, natural resources, and military bases. A 14-year-old boy and his family, forced to flee their homeland due to the atrocities of the Myanmar Army, are now living as refugees. My film's narrative revolves around how they are navigating their relationships and understanding in this new place.

One of the primary goals of every documentary film is to raise awareness, and one of the most effective ways to raise awareness is through film festivals. As film festivals are very important to the global documentary business because they bring together people from different cultures. This is how they choose which stories to show and change the ones that people around the world see. Regarding which movies are "important" or "relevant," these cinematic events have great influence. Film events such as IDFA, Cannes, and Sundance allow one to discuss documentaries in many different ways. Many of the films displayed at these film festivals feature Western themes or style.

Here, when I refer to Western themes or styles, I mean how an artist is inspired by their environment. Unconsciously, they absorb the essence of their surroundings. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is a chaotic city of 28 million people. When I was filming my doctor character there, I noticed the myriad of events happening around—cars racing against each other, uncontrolled traffic, the clamor of people, street children either begging or scavenging for food—all contributing to an exhausting, disordered state. Now, if I want to bring my documentary closer to the truth, I must portray how these surrounding elements are mentally affecting me, while also highlighting how my character is uniquely sustaining themselves to cope. Editing this would naturally create a chaotic visual sequence, where the main character might end up feeling secondary. Perhaps in the next scene, we might see them sitting listlessly, with the camera also

remaining still. Such extreme conditions might be good for experimenting in a film, but the Western narrative structure, where editing follows a rhythm and pace aligned with the character's inner psyche, is different. For a filmmaker like me, whose only distribution platform is film festivals, going against this current is risky. On the other hand, if the issues I've been discussing aren't seen with one's own eyes, it's impossible to align them with the cinematic screen.

This is why European cinema often has a static and prolonged language—because, in some way, their way of life mirrors the language of their films.

Non-Western filmmakers often have to figure out how to appeal to an international audience, where most of the people watching are Western, while still staying true to their own culture. As gatekeepers, they have to deal with this problem. As Bill Nichols notes, "Documentary filmmakers share a common, self-chosen mandate to represent the historical world rather than to imaginatively invent alternative ones. They gather at specialized film festivals such as the Yamagata Documentary Film Festival (Japan), Hot Docs (Canada), or IDFA, the Amsterdam International Documentary Film Festival (the Netherlands)" (Nichols, 2017, p. 14). One of the main reasons for doing this is to remain relevant to time and society. Otherwise, it cannot truly be claimed as a documentary. The world that evolves with history and time, which people primarily recognize, must somehow be made relevant to the audience; otherwise, the essence of truth cannot be conveyed. This is why I had to tell the story of a 14-year-old boy against the backdrop of the Rohingya crisis. Personally, even though I strive to break free, I lack the resources to fundamentally challenge such a vast industry.

When trying to win awards at these film festivals, different things are usually taken into account besides the film's artistic quality. In order to be successful at this, you need to have a strategic understanding of what people generally expect in terms of culture and art. In my view, every social event generates multiple questions, and the impact of these questions largely depends on how much attention the event has managed to attract. This attention is primarily shaped by news agencies. Filmmakers then take the next step by attempting to reveal the world beyond the news.

When making my film about the Rohingya, selecting a 14-year-old boy as the central character required me to consider the cultural context in which I was presenting this

story to film festivals. I also had to think about how I was framing it artistically to engage with that audience.

I do not blame these audiences, though. Most general viewers prefer to see news narratives expanded into documentary films, and over time, they start accepting news coverage as their own knowledge. Any alternative narrative is often dismissed as artificial or melodramatic. But in a country of 168 million people, where almost nothing functions as it should, I don't know how people would even dream of survival without a touch of melodrama.

It is nearly impossible to explain a culture like this to the Western, almost all-knowing citizen because these struggles do not exist in their reality. By the time they encounter such a story, they have already absorbed information shaped by their mainstream media, reinforcing their own worldview.

Elsaesser (2005) says that the circuit of film festivals is like a global market, where Western ways of telling stories are often given more weight than other kinds of stories. As a result, non-Western narratives must conform to established structures that are compatible with these standards (p. 82). This can lead non-Western filmmakers to suffer from an "identity crisis," where they have to balance portraying stories that are true to their culture with the need to change those stories to have them seen and appreciated internationally. This aligns with the struggles faced by non-Western filmmakers to fit within established Western structures.

This identity crisis becomes especially acute for filmmakers working within the documentary genre, where the expectation of presenting "truth" is complicated by the realities of cultural representation. This kind of filmmaker faces a particularly difficult situation. I have discussed the role that personal bias and ethical responsibility play in the representation of marginalised communities in previously that Why Did I Choose a 14-Year-Old Rohingya Boy and a Bangladeshi Doctor?

I chose these two characters because I am deeply familiar with these realities, and I felt it was necessary to speak about the Rohingyas' future. However, I deliberately avoided focusing on drug-related issues or Rohingya mafia figures in the refugee camps.

This tendency to highlight only certain aspects of a community is especially visible when the filmmaker is an outsider to the culture being portrayed. At film festivals, filmmakers often have to compromise authentic cultural representation to align with Western audience expectations.

I believe Western cinema education has shaped a specific pattern of thinking, which influences how we judge films—what we consider good, what we find engaging, and what we dismiss. Over time, this conditioning influences festival selection committees, as they choose films based on their own viewing experiences.

Furthermore, filmmakers attending festivals develop an understanding of what kind of films particular programmers prefer. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle, a maze in which we are all continuously moving in circles. Occasionally, once or twice in a decade, a few films break through and disrupt the pattern—but otherwise, everything remains the same.

Bill Nichols notes, "The concept of representation is what compels us to ask the question, 'Why are ethical issues central to documentary filmmaking?' This question could also be phrased as, 'What do we do with people when we make a documentary?' How do we treat the people we film, and what do we owe them as well as our audience?" (Nichols, 2017, p. 31). Things are getting worse now. Because I know a lot about the cultures of the people I film, it is hard for me to find a way to show them without breaking any rules. At the same time, I need to make career for surviving.

Wandering: A Rohingya Story Western movie festivals rated a Rohingya Story rather good. This demonstrates how crucial it is to fit in with various art and cultural conventions in order to be well-liked worldwide. It won a lot of respect at major film festivals for how sensitively it showed the situation of the Rohingya refugees. The success of the film, on the other hand, can be attributed not only to the subject matter of the film but also to the fact that it adheres to the standards of Western cinema. The story, style, and pace of the film are all in line with what viewers and critics in the West have come to expect from documentaries that deal with humanitarian issues.

In the West, cultural funding plays a significant role, functioning much like a snowball effect. Once a filmmaker secures national or state funding, it often serves as an unwritten ticket to that country’s national film festivals. Many festivals have dedicated

sections for domestically funded films, creating an internal ecosystem that supports local productions.

For instance, *Wandering: A Rohingya Story* was funded by a Canadian cinema grant. This gave it an entry point into Canadian festivals, and once it had circulated within that circuit, other festival programmers often selected it based on that exposure. Film festivals frequently share catalogs, and once a film gains traction in one region, it increases its chances of being picked up elsewhere.

Beyond funding, another crucial factor is the strength of the film's producer. If the producer has strong industry connections, they can send the film to programmers and even receive feedback before an official submission. This pre-selection advantage allows well-connected films to enter festivals with a higher probability of acceptance, reinforcing the cycle of visibility and institutional support.

Wandering: A Rohingya Story, might help bring global awareness to the plight of the Rohingya refugees. There have been severe violations of human rights committed against Rohingya migrants, which are brought to light in this film especially the way they are living their lives the refugee camps, a little monologue Rohingya migrant from their past.

It has been pointed out by Nichols (2017) that "filmmakers who are too close to their subjects run the risk of losing objectivity. This can happen either by romanticising their struggle or by assuming that their shared cultural context gives them full access to the truth of the situation" (Nichols, 2017, p. 78). In my case, being close to the story brought up some tough questions, like how I could keep my own biases from changing the story. How could I be sure that the Rohingya people's voices were heard correctly without having my own ideas about what they've been through added to them? I think this answer is very difficult to formulate because sometimes people understand the film as a craft and they take the feeling of the character but not the actual problem and sometimes audience can relate with their own experiences but in general, if the film travels a lot of festival then the name could be a reference to point out the crisis.

Filmmakers have a lot of power over the story with these tools, which let them change the order, timing, and focus of events to create a certain reality. As Nichols states, "Documentaries stand for or represent the views of individuals, groups, and

institutions... The concept of representation is what compels us to ask the question, 'What do we do with people when we make a documentary?' How do we treat the people we film, and what do we owe them as well as our audience?" (Nichols, 2017, p. 31).

Audience Reactions and Personal Experiences

In my personal experiences, I experienced these differences in how audiences respond firsthand. Some people who observed The Border Within in Bangladesh said they were tired of dealing with the Rohingya crisis. This demonstrates how complex the relationship is between the host country and the refugees. For these audiences, the film's sympathetic portrayal of the Rohingya was decoded in a more oppositional way, with viewers bringing their own lived experiences of the crisis into their interpretation of the film. Stuart Hall identifies different types of audience readings, including dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. The concept of oppositional readings fits well with how audiences in Bangladesh interpreted The Border Within in contrast to Western audiences who largely accepted its narrative. Oppositional readings occur when viewers reject the intended meaning and instead bring their own interpretation to the text (Hall, 1980, p. 136). In contrast, during screenings in Europe, audiences responded with a dominant reading, largely accepting the film's narrative as presented and expressing sympathy for the Rohingya without necessarily engaging with the deeper political implications.

Bangladesh has never accepted refugees in this way before. In the beginning, they welcomed everyone with open arms for the sake of humanity and hoped that the issue would soon be resolved through international intervention. However, over time, with limited resources and a large population, Bangladesh has come to see the Rohingya issue as a long-term problem. On top of that, it is not even possible to integrate the Rohingyas with Bangladesh, which means Myanmar will be able to escape its responsibility forever. On the other hand, the West has been familiar with refugees and migrants since its inception. Therefore, the same film will have different impacts on two different societies, influencing their thoughts in distinct ways.

These different responses show how cultural background can affect how people react. As a director, I was very aware of these possible differences while the film was being

made. I knew that people in the West, who aren't as close to the Rohingya crisis, would understand the film differently than people in Bangladesh. This knowledge affected the choices I made when I was making the film, especially how I framed some scenes and how much background information I gave. I knew that people from other countries might not know much about the crisis, so I chose to include more information about the Rohingya's political history in my film for those audiences. Hall's encoding/decoding model offers a framework to understand how different audiences may interpret the same content based on their social and cultural background. According to Hall, encoding involves the creation of messages by media producers, while decoding is how audiences interpret those messages, which may vary significantly depending on their contexts (Hall, 1980, p. 136).

This process of encoding the film with different audiences in mind made the whole process of making a film more difficult. I had to find a way to make the film accessible to people all over the world while still staying true to my cultural background. Hall (1980) says that when you encode something, you always have to guess how different people will decode it, and this guess always affects the final product (p. 132).

When you make a documentary, you should really think about how people will react to it, especially if it's about something touchy like the Rohingya crisis. Hall's encoding/decoding model tells us more about how filmgoers from different cultures see the same film. This model shows how biases, relationships, and how close someone is to the film's subject matter can change how they see it.

This chapter's comparison of The Border Within and Wandering: A Rohingya Story has shown how personal experience, cultural dominance, and technology all work together in documentary filmmaking in a very complex way. Even though both films try to show the same humanitarian crisis, they are very different in how they show it and how they tell the story. These differences show bigger problems between cultural authenticity and how non-Western films are received around the world, especially for filmmakers from different backgrounds who are trying to work in the mostly Western film industry.

One of the most important things I've learnt from this chapter is how personal experience affects how documentary filmmakers control the story. Based on what we've talked about so far, I was able to write The Border Within from a more complex and

expert point of view because I was culturally close to the Rohingya situation. But living close to another culture came with its own problems and biases, especially in how I decided to show the refugees' power and freedom. Wandering: A Rohingya Story, on the other hand, shows how Western directors can help control culture by using Western ideas and standards of beauty, even if they don't mean to. This event has something to do with Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, which we looked at earlier in this chapter. In 1971, Gramsci said that the world market likes stories that are easy to fit into Western models, even if the stories don't come from Western countries.

The comparisons in this chapter show how hard it is for me to make documentary films when personal experience, cultural dominance, and technology all come together. But it also gives us a chance to think about ourselves and grow as people. My research on documentary reality will continually center on the power relations between technology and narrative authority, the cultural hurdles to recording in many global locations, and the ethical considerations surrounding representation. In the next sections, I will expand on subjects such as attention currency, identity crises, and ethical filmmaking. My work and documentary work in general are impacted by all of these factors.

By discussing these issues, I hope to provide people with a more complete and nuanced picture of how documentary filmmakers, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds, deal with the difficult issues of cultural authenticity and how their work is perceived around the world. The journey hasn't ended yet. In the following chapter, I'll discuss how these interconnected ideas continue to influence how I tell stories and make films in a globalised world.

In the end, the difficulties I experienced in trying to find a balance between my desire to be known all over the world and my goal of staying true to my culture are typical of the difficulties that non-Western documentary filmmakers face when they attempt to work in the global documentary scene. The identity crisis that this process causes is not just a personal one; it's also a reflection of how the film industry is still shaped by cultural dominance. Stories from outside of the West are often put through Western lenses so that they are seen as "relevant" or "valuable" by people all over the world. I was able to resist this pressure by remaining true to my cultural roots in The Border Within; however, I also had to face the consequences of working against the grain of established norms.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the complex relationship between migration, identity, displacement, and the ethics of storytelling through the lens of my own creative documentary filmmaking career and life experiences. By examining my artistic journey, theoretical frameworks, and the socio-political realities that shape my work, I have tried to clarify the complexities of addressing marginalized communities, particularly in the Rohingya crisis, my own love relationship and the blending of my imagination and reality. The research underscores the subjective nature of documentary filmmaking, emphasizing that it is not a neutral presentation of truth but a narrative shaped by the filmmaker's perspective, cultural background, and the socio-political context in which the film is created.

The main argument of this thesis is that the tension between cultural authenticity and global exposure inherently influenced creative documentary filmmaking. Western-dominated narratives and the attention economy often force non-Western filmmakers to make concessions, reducing the cultural diversity of their stories to make them palatable to Western audiences. Through a comparative analysis of films like *The Border Within* and *Wandering: A Rohingya Story*, I have illustrated how filmmakers from the Global South can reclaim their narratives by using creative technology and storytelling to challenge Eurocentric frameworks. These frameworks often reduce complex realities to recognizable cultural stereotypes, simplifying the experiences of marginalized individuals for Western consumption.

The comparative analysis of *The Border Within* and *Wandering: A Rohingya Story* reveals the various approaches employed by filmmakers from the Global South and the West. While Western filmmakers often rely on high production values and aesthetic techniques that may distance the audience from the subject, filmmakers from the Global South, like myself, tend to offer more nuanced and textured accounts grounded in firsthand experience. This contrast underscores the importance of cultural authenticity and the need for a more inclusive approach to documentary filmmaking that prioritizes ethical representation and the complexity of human experience.

The dissertation also examines the ethical dilemmas of presenting non-Western subjects, particularly in the context of the Rohingya crisis. It argues that filmmakers must navigate the power of storytelling, ensuring that the voices of the marginalized are not only heard, but also respected. Reflexivity, as an ethical tool, allows filmmakers to acknowledge their biases and perspective limitations, fostering a more collaborative and respectful relationship with their subjects.

Furthermore, the research demonstrates the importance of memory in shaping narratives, particularly in the context of migration and displacement. Memory is not a static record of events, but a fluid, subjective reconstruction based on emotions, time, and personal experiences. This fluidity is essential to the documentary format, allowing filmmakers to explore the complexities of identity and belonging in a world characterized by borders and movement. For example, *Before the Pandemic and War, There Were Bed Bugs and Love!* It explores the intimate nature of an intercultural relationship, using a seemingly trivial issue—a bedbug infestation—to explore deeper cultural conflicts and the ways in which personal histories shape our responses to adversity. The film highlights the tension between adaptation and confrontation, highlighting the broader socio-political realities that influence how individuals navigate cultural disparities. But the idea of the film came from archive footage like a memory.

Similarly, *Dhaka* captures the emotional and psychological toll of migration through the story of Abdul, a man who moves from rural Bangladesh to Paris in search of a better life. The film uses visual elements like the 4:3 aspect ratio and contrasting lighting to convey migrants' sense of confinement and dislocation. By focusing on Abdul's personal journey, *Dhaka* focuses on the broader narrative of economic migration, revealing how individuals carry their past with them, even as they strive to integrate into new environments.

These films, along with *The Border Within* and *Wandering: A Rohingya Story*, collectively underscore the importance of personal storytelling in documentary filmmaking. They demonstrate how personal experiences, and cultural backgrounds shape the narratives we create, and how these narratives can challenge dominant discourses and foster a deeper understanding of the human condition.

In conclusion, this dissertation calls for a rethinking of the documentary format, one that challenges the market-driven demands of the global media landscape and instead prioritizes the voices and agency of underrepresented individuals. By merging personal experiences with theoretical insights from philosophers such as Stuart Hall, Edward Said, and Bill Nichols, I have tried to provide a more comprehensive and comprehensive understanding of migration, identity, and displacement. Documentary filmmaking, as both an art form and a tool for social change, has the potential to foster a more intricate and varied global discussion, one that respects the complexities of human experience and challenges the dominant narratives that often simplify and distort these realities.

The journey of a documentary filmmaker is one of continuous reflection and growth. Each film is not just a story but a survey of the human condition, shaped by the environment, experiences, and the socio-political realities of the time. As I continue to explore these themes in my work, I remain committed to ethical representation, cultural authenticity, and the belief that cinema can be a powerful force for social change, challenging dominant narratives and fostering empathy and understanding across cultural divides. Throughout films such as Before the Pandemic and War, *Bed Bugs and Love!* And Dhaka, I aim to continue this exploration, using personal stories to shed light on broader social and political issues and contribute to a more inclusive and empathetic global discourse.

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