



(L to R) A refugee family settled under a Banyan Tree in Krishnanagar Camp, 100 miles from Kolkata, near the border of Bangladesh, 1971; Freedom Fighters just after Jamalpur battle, Bangladesh, 1971; Making flags in haste in the streets of Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1971. Photos: Marc Riboud / Fonds Marc Riboud au MNAAG

MARC RIBOUD’S BANGLADESH 1971

MOURNING AND MORNING

"Other journalists had many problems getting into the country. This was about a month before the war started between India and Pakistan; everybody was trying to go into the liberated area of Bangladesh. I got there with a small group of Westerners, taken by three or four Bangladesh boys from Calcutta across the river tributary of the Ganges by boat. For one entire day, from early morning until late at night, we walked in the liberated area. We walked to the front line, which is where the Bengals really were fighting against the West Pakistani troops, and then back to the border and the river in the evening."

Marc Riboud
"The Concerned Photographer 2"
Published by Grossman and ICP,
New York, 1972

Marc Riboud (1923-2016), one of the first generation of Magnum photographers, was born in Lyon, France. He travelled and worked extensively in the Middle East, Afghanistan, India, China, Japan, Cambodia, North and South Vietnam, Former Soviet Union, Algeria, and Sub-Saharan Africa throughout the 60s and 70s. His picture of a "young woman holding a flower," taken in front of the Pentagon during a protest against the Vietnam War, became an international symbol of peace.

Bangladesh's independence struggle piqued his attention, and he arrived in Kolkata in late November 1971. He journeyed inside the refugee camps and liberated zones. His expedition began at Sherpur, and after crossing the mighty Brahmaputra river, he witnessed the decisive battle of Jamalpur, which he extensively documented. The majority of these photos are still unpublished to this day. When Pakistan declared war against India on December 3 to distract the world from the atrocities committed against the Bangladeshi population, he entered Bangladesh with an advancing Indian army backed up by Bangladeshi freedom fighters. He was one of the first photographers to enter Dhaka and capture the city's liberation with his camera.

Lorene Durret, Director of Les amis de Marc Riboud, has been working on Marc Riboud's photographic archive for quite a long time. She is currently co-curating an exhibition at Alliance Française de Dhaka, showcasing a selection of Marc Riboud's 50 photographs taken during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. In this conversation with art historian, curator and co-founder of Duniyadari Archive Amirul Rajiv, Lorene Durret talked about her association with the life and works of Master Photographer Marc Riboud.

historical, photography publisher in Paris run by Robert Delpire. He published 'The Americans' by Robert Frank and primary books of Henri Cartier-Bresson, among many others. He was an important figure in the photography world. I worked in his office for about a year and he used to organise Friday lunch with the photographers he was working with, his friends and colleagues. That's how I met Marc Riboud!

We talked about his work. He was already old but full of life. Then he asked me if I wanted to work with him. I told him that I would very much like to but I was about to go abroad for an internship.

When I came back, I contacted him again and after some months I started to work as his assistant. I think that was back in 2009. I worked with him every day on his exhibition projects, books, managing his archive, licensing, etc. So, I learned more about publishing, more about exhibitions and little by little I started to manage his office. After a few years, he became ill and I kept on working with his family to

photographs taken by Marc Riboud in Bangladesh. We could not consider all of them as some were not properly focused or composed as they had been taken in haste, during military action. So, we primarily selected 200 relevant photos and then reduced the number to 50. We wanted to show the different places that Marc Riboud had photographed with different kinds of pictures, and we organised it chronologically to match his journey for the Liberation War Museum exhibition in October 2021. For the exhibition here in La Galerie, Alliance Française de Dhaka, we took a different visual approach and tried to design the exhibition in harmony with the smaller gallery space and environment.

AR: Is there any possibility to see the whole collection of photographs of Marc Riboud in Bangladesh?

LD: Not right now because they are not all online and not all are digitised. When we started the project, very few negatives were digitised. So, we digitised some of them for the purposes of the exhibition. Soon more



Lorene Durret, Mofidul Hoque and Amirul Rajiv in conversation during the opening of the exhibition at Alliance Française de Dhaka, October 2022. Photo by Naim Ul Hasan/ Duniyadari Archive.

organise the archive. After he died in 2016, his photographic archive was donated to Guimet-National Asian Arts Museum. So, it's a journey that started with him and now continues with his photographs – some of which are still unpublished or unknown.

AR: How did this collaboration with the Liberation War Museum come about? And how did the show come to Bangladesh?

LD: It started back in February 2021. We were contacted by Mofidul Hoque, a trustee of the Liberation War Museum who knew that Marc Riboud covered the Liberation War of Bangladesh. But he didn't see the photographs and didn't know how many existed. With the help of Alliance Française de Dhaka and the Embassy of France in Dhaka, we shared the contact sheets and documents of the work with him.

Marc was in Bangladesh in November and December of 1971. After checking the contact sheets, Mofidul Haque was enthusiastic and wanted to set up an exhibition. So that's how we started to work on the selection for the exhibition of 50 photographs. We didn't have much time because we wanted to showcase them for the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence. That's also a reason why we limited ourselves to 50 photographs, which was not easy. We discussed the choice of photographs, contents, captions, etc.

The Liberation War Museum actually dug out a lot of information about Marc Riboud's journey in Bangladesh. We prepared the prints in Paris at our lab so they could be sent to Bangladesh for the first show at the Liberation War Museum.

AR: How many photos did you start with before reaching the final selection of 50?

LD: We estimated that there are about 900 to 1,000 black and white

photographs, along with all the contact sheets, should be available online. We are working on it with Guimet Museum. Because they are building a new website where you will be able to browse through their collection. As Marc Riboud's contact sheets have now all been digitised, we wish to add them to this new website. Maybe not for the public but for professionals, so they can have easy access.

AR: Was he a freelance photographer during 1971?

LD: Yes, he was a freelance photographer but also a member of Magnum Photos. He was a member from 1953 to 1979. Then he stayed as sort of a contributor. But he always chose his assignments himself.

AR: Did he share any memories of Bangladesh with you? Or did he leave any writings on the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971?

LD: There are a few earlier writings. Some of his photographs were published in a book called 'The Concerned Photographer 2' (edited by Cornell Capa, brother of Robert Capa) back in 1972. That was an important publication which included 11 photographs by him. Among these two were taken in Bangladesh about which he had written short texts. We also have a paragraph in the introductory text in the 'Photo Poche 37: Marc Riboud' publication, 1989, where he spoke about one photograph but that's about it. He didn't speak much about it and I never worked on this particular subject with him. Since we were not preparing an exhibition or a book, these photographs were forgotten.

AR: How important is it to have a co-curator who is more accustomed to the history and culture of the land while dealing with historical imagery of Bangladesh?

LD: It was very important as we both



Freedom Fighters at prayer, inside the liberated zone, Bangladesh, 1971. Photo: Marc Riboud / Fonds Marc Riboud au MNAAG

brought different things to the table. He had the historical knowledge that we didn't have. We had on our side a few documents left by Marc Riboud to locate and caption the photographs. Mofidul Hoque and his team from Liberation War Museum located the images, the moments, the exact date and researched what was going on, which would have been much harder for us because we are not specialised in the history or geography of Bangladesh. That is why, when we do this kind of project, we always try to build the exhibition together.

AR: Did working on this project open up a new window for you as you had to look into the works of other photographers of 1971?

LD: Yes. While working on this exhibition, I tried to find books and writings on the war of 1971 in French and I found very little. But I saw so many images and I think it would be interesting to present them in France, in a different way. Because it is a history that people don't know about. With that in mind, we started a collaboration with the Asian Arts Museum in Toulon and also the House of Photography in Toulon, in the south of France. They will probably host an exhibition there. Now I am working with their director to find a narrative that would be relevant for French museums.

AR: Will it solely be on the photographs of 1971?

LD: It will not only be about 1971 but the main focus will be that time period. Because there are so many great photographers who came at that time. However, I want to extend the subject to newer works by younger photographers and artists. This is what I am working on right now.

AR: What would you suggest to the photographers, curators and archivists working in Bangladesh?

LD: To keep on with their work! We often think of archiving with museum standards but not all structures have this capacity. I always think it's interesting to consider the way you preserve an archive by how you started it. For example, some archives which are preserved in families are not well-protected. You can start by taking the first step of going through them and taking the first measures of protection. Then take a second step with better equipment and all. But it's also about common sense, about finding the materials you need or trying to create them. It's not always ideal. And it's not always perfect in French museums as well. We also have problems, of space, old buildings. But it is interesting to evaluate what you are doing and try to improve as much as you can, given the situation such as climate, environment etc.

AR: We already travelled to Sherpur, Jamalpur and Dhaka as well as the Liberation War Museum in the last few days. Do you think the findings will add value to the archive that you're building?

LD: Absolutely! We also met Jahurul Huq Munshi, the freedom fighter in one of the photographs, who shared interesting memories, and checked the information we found from the three other photographers who accompanied Marc Riboud and the Indian troops. This is important information about how Marc Riboud used to work. 1971 was an important era for the press and magazines. Marc Riboud was making his living from his press publications. So, it is important for us to learn about his working process.

AR: Did visiting the places where Marc himself travelled during his journey and coming across the characters of his photographs leave any impact on you?

LD: Well, it was moving. I was trying to imagine what happened, what he witnessed. The places have changed so much, some of them more than others. In Sherpur, we saw places which could be identified quite easily, but with other places in Dhaka we had more trouble imagining what they looked like 50 years back. But I think it is important to see how places evolve and how history leaves its trace, or not. To know these things happened in these places, and to locate them exactly, was moving.

AR: The torture of Biharis that took place in front of the media got global attention while the atrocities committed by the Pakistani army have still not been officially recognised. How do you balance these narratives while curating the show?

LD: In our modern history, when you don't have photographs of some events, it makes them more difficult to be acknowledged. The killings you mentioned took place in the presence of many photographers. Some of them got awards for their photographs. For the killings of the Bangladeshi population, prior to 1971, there were probably less photographers and less stories published. So, these killings were less documented photographically. But there are oral histories and testimonies. The image has a role but it's not the only source of information. We still see it in the news today. When there's a story to sell, the press publishes it. They don't always think of the consequences. And then, they move on to something else a few days after. So surely, there are many other kinds of recordings and documentation that are important to be presented as evidence.

AR: The atrocities committed in 1971 have not yet been recognised as genocide. Recently, a bill was raised in the US Congress which sought to acknowledge the 1971 atrocities committed by the Pakistani army as genocide. Do you think visual documentation can play a role in this regard?

LD: Of course, photographs are used as a source of evidence, but they are not the only source. As for considering these atrocities as genocide or not, it's not for me to say because it involves so many political reasons and pressures. But I understand why this classification is important, for history to move on.

AR: Having studied newspaper documents, books, resolutions, archives and the photographs of Marc Riboud, do you think what happened with Bangladesh has been recognised in the international arena?

LD: No, I don't think so! I think the question should be, why, even after 50 years, it has not been recognised as genocide.



Marc Riboud in Dhaka, December, 1971. Photo Courtesy of Fonds Marc Riboud au MNAAG

Amirul Rajiv: When did you meet Marc Riboud and begin working with him?

Lorene Durret: I met Marc Riboud about 16 years ago while I was working at Delpire which is a major